Connecting the dots: phonologization of redundant tenseness across Welsh dialects

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Phonologization of redundant tenseness across Welsh dialects

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**Argument**

I propose a reconstruction of the following phonological processes in Welsh:

- North Welsh shows a familiar connection between vowel length and tenseness: [eː oː] vs [e o]
- South-West Welsh phonologizes tenseness due to a historical height dissimilation which creates [eː oː]
- South-East Welsh identifies [tense] with [spread glottis] found in consonants, due to phonological interactions between [eː oː] and stops

**South-West Welsh**

In SW Welsh (Awbery 1986, C. Jones & Thorne 1992) long mid vowels can be tense or lax: tense before [±high] vowels, lax before [±high] vowels:

(a) [ˈkʰɔːd̥i] ‘to rise’
(b) [ˈɡwɛːd̥ɔð] ‘(he) rose’

Preliminary analysis indicates that the alternation is unlikely to be (only) phonetic implementation:

- [eː oː] cannot just result from undershoot: this is the realization in monosyllables
- [eː oː] in penults seem to be targets

**South-East Welsh**

Carlosd (“provection”) (Greene 1967): “devoicing” of stops after a stressed vowel:

(a) [ɡwɛˈɡəsa] ‘belts’ ~ [ˈɡwrekɪʃ] ‘belt’
(b) [ˈkənɪɡ] ‘offer’ ~ [ˈɡwrekɪʃ] ‘offers’

However, Carlosd does not neutralize laryngeal contrast:

- Underlying forts stops yield [VTːV]: [tʊkːo] ‘tuck’
- Provected stops yield [VːTV]: [keːkɪn] ‘kitchen’
- Fortis stops are aspirated, provected stops are not (S. E. Thomas 1983)

**Reconstruction**

Provection is a possible counterexample to the generalization that “tense”/[ATR] in vowels correlates with voicing in consonants (e.g. Vaux 1996):

- I suggest that provection is a phonological change, not a phonologization of some phonetic change
- No recorded dialect with regular provection, always lexically specific and socially constrained

If [tense] is phonological, its distribution is restricted:

- [eː oː] are found before all consonants
  - From /cː oː/ in closed syllables
  - From /cː oː/ in open syllables
- [e o] are only found in long contexts, which for stops means
  - Before [b d ɡ]
  - Not before [pʰ tʰ kʰ]
- In other words, the phonology allowed [ed̥ ed̥ ɛtʰ]
- Carlosd fills the gap by identifying [tense] with [SG] and creating doubly linked structures as in [ˈɡwrekɪʃ]
- The lack of aspiration follows from the rules of phonetic interpretation in the language, as attested in [st ɬt]-type clusters
- SE Wales does not have the [eː oː] ~ [eː oː] alternations of SW dialects: presumably the phonologization of tenseness was independent of the SW pattern

**References**


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