Reconstructing the age of accent types in North Germanic

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There is broad agreement that a tonal lexical contrast (often referred to as accents 1 and 2) is in place in North Germanic varieties around 1000–1200 CE. Today, the contrast is manifested as different tonal types in different regions (Gårding 1977, Riad 2018). We here address the question of which tonal accent type it is that is the oldest. The issue has implications for the understanding of tonogenesis in North Germanic and for the subsequent development of a tonal dialectology (and stød). There are two contenders for the position as oldest type, often characterized as 'single-peaked' or 'double-peaked' accent 2 (Gårding & Lindblad 1973, Riad 1998, Lorentz 2002, Bye 2004b, Riad 2006).[1] It is uncontested that the tonal dialects form a coherent typology, so the one type has to develop from the other in the time that follows tonogenesis.

The hypothesis that *single-peaked=oldest type* in part relies on the phonetic notion of 'peak delay' and in part on an interpretation of the geographic spread of types. The map of the Scandinavian peninsula indicates single-peak dialects in a peripheral pattern (except in centrally placed Dalarna), interpretable as a relic pattern, following a spread of double-peaked accent in the central area (Bye 2004b).

The hypothesis that *double-peaked=oldest type* relies on a diachronic argument where accent 2 is taken to develop from the context of adjacent stresses each with a H tone, with attendant clash reduction and phonologization of a lexical tone (Riad 1998a). Single-peaked types are taken to be due to later developments, in part due to Danish influence in regions of Norway (Riad 2000).

Arguments for the merits and drawbacks of the hypotheses for the origin of accents can be sought in the time *after* the origin of a lexical tone, by understanding the relative age of single-peaked and double-peaked accent types. We show that double-peaked accent 2 yields a better reconstruction for the early days.

The proposed reconstruction relies on a correlation between double-peaked accent 2 and some phenomena that target light stems (CV.CV): so-called level accent 2, strengthening, and vowel harmony (Neuman 1918, Geijer 1921, Bergfors 1961, Riad 1998b, Bye 2004a, Riad 2006).[2] The dependence relations between these phenomena are as follows. Level accent 2 is a prerequisite for strengthening which is a prerequisite for vowel harmony. Strengthening (*vik**a**>vik**o*** 'week, nom.') and vowel harmony (*v**i**ku>v**u**ku*, obl.) are both in evidence in orthography, strengthening already in texts from the 14th century.

The correlation between, on the one hand, strengthening and vowel harmony and, on the other hand, double-peaked accent 2 (as opposed to single-peaked accent 2) is visible in two geographic distributions: 1) strengthening *a>o* in early texts from different parts of Sweden, and in dialects that still exhibit light stems, 2) vowel harmony in dialects that still exhibit light stems, or where harmonic vowels remain after the quantity shift, when light stems are lost (*vu**k**u>vu**kk**u*). These geographic distributions overlap in a striking way with that of double-peaked accent 2.

If this analysis is right, we can reconstruct the double-peaked accent 2 type back to the 1300's (Riad 2006). This shortens the distance in time between tonogenesis and double-peaked accent 2 type, and strengthens the case for a direct connection between tonogenesis and double-peaked accent 2. Proposals that start from a single-peaked accent 2 are left with a time window that is too narrow to realistically comprise all the changes that are required to account for the patterns found.

Notes:

1. Accent 1 is always single-peaked and unmarked.
2. In heavy stems (CVX.CV) the poststress syllable reduces.

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