Drift revisited
Phonological convergence in north-western Europe

Pavel Iosad

THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Preaspiration cross-linguistically…

Preaspiration of |fortis| stops /p t k/ is commonly said to be cross-linguistically rare. The reason given is that it is perceptually weak and so diachronically unstable (Silverman 2003; Blevins 2017). Specifically, it is said to either disappear or take an 'exit route' such as oralization

… and in Europe

Preaspiration clusters in unrelated languages in northern Europe (Gunnar Ólafur Hansson 2001)

- North Germanic (Pétur Helgason 2002)
- Scottish Gaelic (Nance & Stuart-Smith 2013)
- Most Sámi languages (Sammallahti 1998)

Contact explanations

Why does an unusual feature appear in unrelated varieties?

- Contact through Viking conquest and settlement (Marstrander 1932; Borgstrøm 1974; Posti 1954; Gunnar Ólafur Hansson 2001)
- Contact through Sámi substrate in Germanic (Rießler 2008; Kusmenko 2008)
- Contact through Gaelic substrate in Germanic (McKenna 2013)
- Independent developments (Ó Baoill 1980; Ní Chasaide 1986)

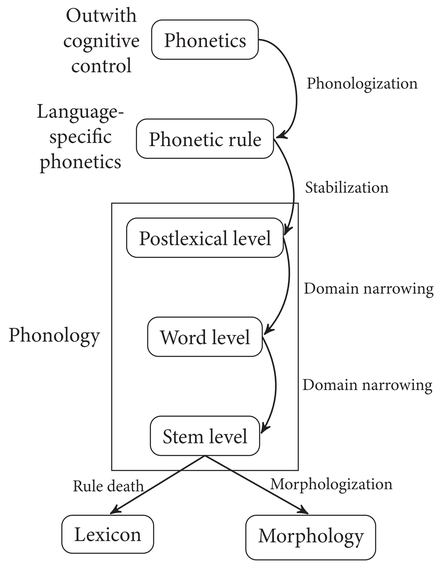
Problems with contact

- Preaspiration is more diachronically stable than given credit for (Clayton 2010)
- The 'rarity' of preaspiration is overstated
  - Found more widely than previously thought
    - Welsh (Morris & Hejná 2019)
    - Irish (Ní Chasaide 1999)
    - English (e. g. Docherty & Foulkes 1999; Hejná & Scanlon 2015; Fiasson 2016)
  - Likely under- and misreported elsewhere (Iosad 2019)
- The historical evidence does not always fit a contact scenario
  - Sociohistorical context
  - Dating
- 'Preaspiration' is not a unitary phenomenon

☞ Phonetics vs. phonology?

Preaspiration and the life cycle

Preaspiration should follow the life cycle of phonological processes (Bermúdez-Otero 2007; 2015)



Preaspiration in North Germanic

- Pétur Helgason (2002) distinguishes 'non-normative' and 'normative' preaspiration
- Gunnar Ólafur Hansson (2001); Pétur Helgason (2002): preaspiration develops from 'non-normative' to 'normative'

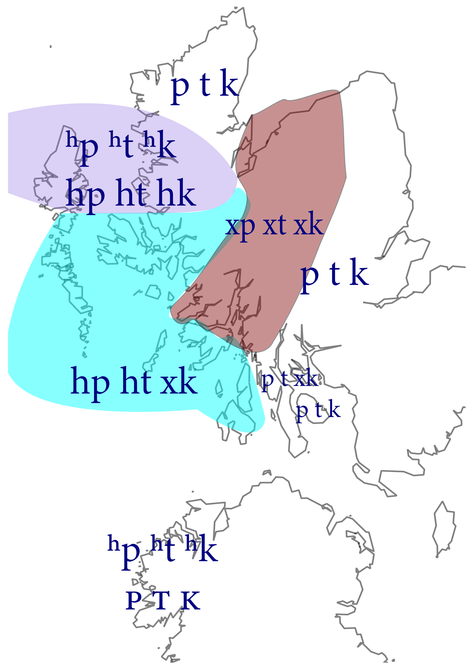
☞ This is exactly the life cycle

- 'Non-normative' preaspiration (Northern Norwegian): phonetic rule
- 'Normative', under phonological control but not segmental (Faroese): phonetic rule?
- Icelandic: stem-level (Kristján Árnason 2011)

(1) ['sjuhk-lɪŋk-ʏr̥] *sjúklingur* 'patient' (class 1)

(2) ['sju:k-lɛɣ-ʏr̥] *sjúklegur* 'sickly' (class 2)

Preaspiration in the Gaelic languages



The development of preaspiration in the Gaelic languages follows the life cycle *Räumliche Projection zeitlicher Unterschiede* shows the progression on the map

- Irish: possibly pre-phonologization
- Ulster Irish, Lewis Gaelic: phonetic rule
- Most of Gaelic: stabilization + oralization [hp ht xk]
- 'Central' Gaelic: rule generalization [xp xt xk]
- East Perthshire: rule death, lexicalization

Preaspiration in the Sámi languages

- The Sámi languages that have preaspiration appear to have undergone stabilization
- Possible evidence for diachronic development: Gällivare Lule Sámi (Collinder 1938) has [xp xt xk] like 'Central' Gaelic: oralization + rule generalization?

Common outcomes are drift

The similarities between (at least) Gaelic, North Germanic and Sámi are due to

- Similar laryngeal phonology, notably |glottal width| marking of |fortis| stops (Avery & Idsardi 2001)
- Not-dissimilar metrical (moraic) structure, with preaspiration used to implement it
- The fact of having undergone the life cycle

This is reminiscent of Sapirean drift, except the languages are unrelated

The life cycle as key to drift

Fundamentally, the life cycle envisages a progression from a more gradient (or 'variable') phonetic pattern to discrete, categorical rules. There is thus a narrowing of variation.

☞ This is almost exactly Joseph's (2013) account of drift in related languages as due to narrowing of inherited variation

In phonology, drift can be understood as driven by the life cycle

Convergence in northern Europe

The apparent convergent developments in north-western Europe flow from two factors:

- Similar starting positions in terms of laryngeal phonology and metrical patterns

☞ This may be coincidental, but see Salmons (1992) on contact and convergence of metrical systems

- Similar paths of development

☞ The life cycle is a general theory of this

Contact is not necessary, if hard to exclude

Other possible cases

- Preocclusion of long sonorants: *nn > dn &c.
- Rise of tonal accents
- Epenthesis in sonorant-consonant clusters (Iosad & Maguire 2018)

Selected references

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