The Origin of Double-Peaked Accent in North Germanic: Towards a Spatially Integrated Approach to Language, Culture and History in Central Scandinavia

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Abstract:
Most varieties of Norwegian and Swedish distinguish two lexical accents (Accent 1 and Accent 2), whose realization varies geographically. Scholars have long drawn a distinction between two main types: (1) dialects in which Accent 2 is realized with a single high tone peak, (2) dialects in which Accent 2 is realized with a double high tone peak. As historical phonologists we are interested in finding out whether it the single- or the double-peaked realization that is the innovation. But because the accents have never been represented in writing, we must turn to other sources of evidence to choose between these alternatives. On the phonetic/phonological side, it is possible to develop plausible reconstructions respectively positing the single- and double-peaked realization as the original state of affairs. Here I will argue contra Riad (1998,2003) that the single-peaked realization is a legacy of Common North Germanic, while the double-peaked realization is a Central Scandinavian (inland) innovation. While the areal distributions of each type suggest this much, they are not conclusive considered alone. Using a database of approximately 50 linguistic and cultural innovations in the North Germanic-speaking area, I show how Geographical InformationSystems (GIS) can be used to compare the distribution of the double-peaked realization to those of other known datable Central Scandinavian innovations, both linguistic and cultural. The comaprison strongly favours the interpretation that the double-peaked realization too is an innovation with an origin in time and place comparable to that of, say, retroflexion or resultative 'ha'. The last part of the talk discusses the mechanisms underlying the emergence of a Central Scandinavian linguistic and cultural province, as revealed by findings in archaeology, ethnology and history.