

## THE BEGINNING OF GERMANIC PROSODY

Anatoly Liberman

The University of Minnesota, U.S.A.

Early Germanic was a mora counting language; even after stress was fixed on the root, it could fall on either mora of a bimoric complex. In the northern dialects, two boundary signals also existed, the prototypes of *stǫd* (correction) and its opposite.

Very little progress has been made in the study of Germanic prosody since 1877, the year Verner published his article. All we know for certain about Germanic stress is still only Verner's Law. My attempt to eliminate word stress and reconstruct sentence stress at that period was misunderstood by my critics as an attack on Verner's Law itself [1]. To go beyond Verner, we can resort to facts of two types - accents in old manuscripts and prosodic phenomena in modern languages and dialects. The data obtained from even such conscientious spellers as Orm and Notker are hard to interpret. Modern accents also pose numerous difficulties, but at least they can be observed in the pronunciation of native speakers, and they display sufficient variety to justify an attempt at a reconstruction. I have spent the time between the appearance of my earlier works on this subject [2] and the present studying West Germanic (WG) accentology. Below I will state my conclusions in dogmatic form; detailed arguments and references

will be given elsewhere.

Prosodic units that go back to so-called syllable accents have been attested only in North Germanic: in Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and in the Rhein-Limburg area. If we agree to view the glottal stop and preaspiration as analogues of *stǫd*, our map will include English, Icelandic, Faroese, and several additional dialects of Dutch and German, but its borders will not move more to the south. All other accents can be reconstructed only from the traces they left on vowels and consonants. However, if the place of ancient stress is partly deducible from the reflexes of diphthongs and triphthongs on the vast territory from Friesland to Lustenau, the type of old stress and the number of the once relevant accents remain a matter of speculation. Combining the data supplied by Verner's Law and *Akzentumsprung* (a process responsible for the variation of the *éa-éá* type), we can state that stress in Early Germanic remained movable within a bimoric complex long after it became fixed on the root. Some accent-like units most probably existed in North Germanic about two millennia ago, but it does not follow that they were present in the languages of the Germanic tribes south of Cologne.

To the extent one can judge by the situation in the Rhein-Limburg area, accents delimited certain types of bimoric bases

and performed the function of boundary signals. The prosodies of the Swedish-Norwegian type (accents 1 and 2), governed as they are at present solely by the number of syllables rule, could not be the prototypes of such accents. Accents 1 and 2 (with the exception of a few dialectal occurrences) do not depend on the phonetic basis, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that this independence is late. In Danish, *stǫd* and *no-stǫd* are connected with the basis and with the (actual) number of syllables in a word. In German and Dutch dialects, the appearance of correction and its opposite is also subject to the phonematic basis and the (original) number of syllables: apocoped words are accented differently from nonapocoped ones. In both areas, the basis is the older distributional factor, the only one that existed prior to apocope. Danish dialectologists regard *stǫd* as a late prosodeme. One of the implications of their theory is that Danish *stǫd* and WG correction are unrelated, which alone makes their views on the chronology of *stǫd* untenable.

The WG analogue of *stǫd* distinguishes between open and close vowels. According to the main Riparian pattern, correction occurs on the reflexes of the old open vowels /a: e: o:/ and of the old diphthongs, insofar as they were smoothed. Words of this group are said to have spontaneous correction. The reflexes of old /i: u:/ and nonmonothongized diphthongs are corrected when the word is disyllabic or apocoped and when the postvocalic consonant is voiced. In disyllabic and apocoped words whose root consists of a short vowel followed by a resonant and an obstruent, i.e., in words with diphthongal groups, correction is also possible only before a voiced obstruent, so in *Hunde* but not in *Kante*.

The vowels /i: u:/ do not belong with /a: e: o:/ because in WG they were treated as diphthongal groups, namely, as /ij uw/, on a par with /an el or/, and so forth. Correction marked the end of the bimoric sonorous basis. All the early Germanic languages were mora counting, and stress, as evidenced by *Akzentumsprung*, could fall on either mora of a bimoric complex; correction separated the part of the word that served as the locus of shifting stress. In words with diphthongal groups, correction occurred only before a voiced obstruent because a voiceless obstruent marked the end of the prosodically active string by its voicelessness. Diphthongs were accented like diphthongal groups: when smoothed, they did not differ from the other long open vowels, and when preserved as units with two distinct elements, they joined /ij uw el ar/, etc.

In our classification of phonemes, we often try to discover whether Early Germanic obstruents were phonologically voiced/voiceless or strong/weak. It may well be that a distinctive feature is a more complex phenomenon than we think. If we treat distinctive features pragmatically ("What do they do in the system?"), rather than as mere classificatory labels, /p t k/, to give one example, can be strong from the point of view of syllable contact and voiceless in being able to delimit a certain type of basis. Later one of the functions can disappear and then voicelessness or strength will remain the only feature of /p t k/. Still later even this feature can become detrimental to the performance of the consonants' next role, and then aspiration (reinforced by the new circumstances) will assert itself, and so forth.

Diphthongal groups (including /ij/ and /uw/), as well as old monosyllables with a combinatory

basis, had no correction before voiceless consonants, and it is not known how these words were pronounced. Two situations can be imagined. In some cases, noncorrected words probably had "nothing." The opposite of Danish stød, no-stød, is the negation of stød, and foreigners do not regard it as a special prosodeme. The intuitive impression is that stød is "marked" and no-stød "unmarked" and that the opposition is privative. But it is also probable that the opposite of correction was itself an independent boundary signal within the framework of an equipollent opposition. If correction presupposed increased energy of articulation and shortening of the vowel, its opposite could have been associated with the general relaxation of the vocal tract and lengthening of the phonetic basis. It, too, could have been realized as a short break, but smooth and breathed, rather than abrupt, when the vocal chords are constricted or compressed. Given two full-blown boundary signals, we can perhaps explain the origin of Scandinavian preaspiration. The distribution of preaspiration in Icelandic and Faroese is almost the same as that of the glottal stop in Cockney and the West Jutland stød. It is tempting to suggest that preaspiration is related to stød as sleeptoon is to stoptoon and that at one time preaspiration was the "lazy" opposite of stød. A difficult problem confronts us in areas in which correction and "extension" are distributed according to the "mirror rule," as compared to the Riparian one: words with the reflexes of /a: e: o:/ and of smoothed diphthongs do not have correction, and in the other words it occurs before voiceless, not before voiced, obstruents. In most of these vernaculars, correction is phonetically weak, whereas the

extending accent is prominent. The riddle of the "mirror rule" will remain insoluble if we keep looking on correction as the only thinkable marker of old bimoric bases. If, however, we accept the possibility of choice by old systems - [MM'] (two morae and correction) or [MM~] (two morae and a pause) - the Riparian rule and the rule of the peripheral dialects from northern Limburg to Arzbach will emerge as equally probable. The unmarked signal has a blurred realization everywhere: in Riparian, the opposite of correction is "nothing," in Kleve, Arzbach, etc., the opposite of "extension" is a weak shadow of forceful correction.

It cannot be stated whether the two ancient boundary signals always or at least sometimes formed an equipollent opposition. In Danish, no-stød is never marked; yet as a theoretical possibility an opposition in which ['] and [~] were equal partners should not be dismissed offhand. In the Rhein-Limburg area, accents occur only in conjunction with apocope, and apocope can be marked by either "extension" or correction. In the Scandinavian languages, stød (correction) never marks apocope, but in Low Franconian it regularly does so. Frings was wrong in denying a close tie between correction and circumflex. In old monosyllables with spontaneous bases, correction, indeed, has nothing to do with circumflex, but in apocoped words it is an analogue of a two-peaked accent.

Apocope endowed one boundary signal with a new role, and its yield increased. Our ideas of phonological relevance are still crude. When in certain dialects stød occurs only in monosyllables, and no-stød only in disyllables or when stød is allowed before voiced consonants and no-stød before voiceless ones, we conclude that the units

under consideration are redundant or that they belong to usage rather than the system. Complementary distribution is interpreted as redundancy. This is an unacceptable approach in phonemics [3] and even more evidently so in prosody. The two boundary signals would not have emerged if they had had no use, but becoming a marker of apocope enhanced the unit's visibility. From an acoustic point of view only "extension" resembles the circumflex of northern Saxon dialects, but any signal of apocope comes close to or merges with the circumflex of general phonetics, and it is no wonder that both "extension" and correction are often perceived as two-peaked: the boundary signal that became the marker of apocope changed its realization under the influence of its new function. Even if the original opposition ['] - [~] was equipollent, the loss of endings turned it into privative: one boundary signal was chosen as the accent of apocope and became the opposition's marked member and the most easily discernible prosodic shibboleth of the entire prosodic system. Frings carried his point too far when he insisted on the equal importance of correction and "extension" in Low Franconian, but even less convincing is the thesis of Dutch dialectologists that "extension" is marked in Limburg because Dutch pronunciation is in general smoother than German. Markedness is a functional concept and cannot be derived from the articulatory base.

In Danish, spontaneous and combinatory accentuation are seldom distinguished. Only in East Jutland does one come across elg with stød and høns without stød (diphthongal groups before a voiced and a voiceless obstruent respectively). It is more probable that Danish dialects simplified ancient diversity than that WG developed the

juxtaposition of two spheres, but there could always have coexisted more and less complex systems. It seems that in the epoch following the fixing of stress on the root the Germanic languages of the North made use of two boundary signals (abrupt and smooth) dependent on the type of phonematic basis. These signals acquired greater importance when they came to be associated with apocope and when the number of syllables rules arose. No extant evidence points to the existence of correction (stød) and extension in all the Early Germanic dialects, and there is no bridge from them to the accents registered in Old Indian, Ancient Greek, and Balto-Slavic. Especially unproductive is the discussion about dynamic stress versus musical stress, for these concepts have no foundation in either phonetics or phonology. Akzentumsprung as the principle of ancient sentence stress and two boundary signals in a restricted area are all that we have.

[1] LIBERMAN, ANATOLY (1990). "The Phonetic Organization of Early Germanic." American Journal of Germanic Languages and Literatures 2, 1-22, and see the polemic in the subsequent issues of this journal.

[2] LIBERMAN, ANATOLY (1983). "Germanic Accentology. Volume 1. The Scandinavian Languages." Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, and (1984) "Scandinavian Accentology from a Germanic Perspective." In: The Nordic Languages and Modern Linguistics 5. Arhus, 93-115.

[3] LIBERMAN, ANATOLY (1987). "Complementary Distribution as a Tool of Phonological Analysis. With a Note on the g Sounds in Old High German." General Linguistics 27, 173-88.