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A SINGLE ACCENT RULE FOR *CYNGHANEDD*

Toby D. Griffen

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

1. Stress and Pitch Accents in Welsh

Welsh maintains two separate systems of accent in words of more than one syllable: stress and pitch. The main stress accent (the heaviest “beat”) usually occurs in the penult — the next-to-last syllable; while the main pitch accent (the highest tone) always occurs in the ultima — the last syllable.¹ Thus, in a word such as *darganfod* [dar gan vod] ‘discovery’ the next-to-last syllable [gan] is pronounced with the stress accent (it is the heaviest), while the last syllable [vod] is pronounced with the pitch accent (it is the highest). To the English ear, the word may sound as though it were uttered as a question. Of course, in monosyllables and in words with the stress accent in the ultima the stress and pitch accents coincide.

In the phonological system of Welsh, the stress accent motivates certain rules while the pitch accent motivates others. For example, in some words the aspirant [h] occurs in the stress-accented syllable and not elsewhere, as in the alternation between *brenin* [bren in] ‘king’ and *brenhines* [bren hin es] ‘queen’. On the other hand, the vowel *y* [ī] (or in some dialects [i]) in the pitch-accented syllable alternates with schwa [ə] in other syllables, as in *mynydd* [mə nɪð] ‘mountain’ and its plural *mynyddoedd* [mə nəð oið].²

2. The Four Stress-based Accent Rules of Consonant Correspondence

In *cynghanedd* (‘correspondence’) poetry, consonants correspond in complex

¹ Compare especially John Morris Jones, *A Welsh Grammar: Historical and Comparative, Phonology and Accidence* (Oxford, 1913); D.M. Jones, “The Accent in Modern Welsh,” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 13 (1949) 63-64; T. Arwyn Watkins, *Jeithyddiaeth: Agweddu ar Astudio Iaith* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961); Toby D. Griffen, “On Phonological Stress in Welsh,” *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 28 (1979) 106-12; Briony J. Williams, *Stress in Modern Welsh* (Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1989).

² On the interaction of the two accent systems and on the importance of the pitch accent, see Toby D. Griffen, “Pitch and Vowel Reduction/Centralization.” Paper presented at the 22nd Forum of the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States (San Antonio, August 1995). To appear in *The 22nd LACUS Forum 1995*, ed. by Bates Hoffer.

patterns of alliteration from one part of the line to another. For example, in the following line the consonants in the first half-line correspond consecutively with the consonants in the second half-line:³

bradwyr a droes brwydr a drwg
br d r dr´ s | br dr dr´ g
(p. xxix)

The traditional view of consonant correspondence in *cynghanedd* poetry follows rules of stress accent. Rowlands describes the rules as follows:

Emphasis and consonantal correspondence: the line is divided into two parts, each ending in an emphasized word (and it should be noted that words not normally stressed, such as prepositions, can be emphasized for this metrical purpose at the end of the first part of the line). Consonants correspond absolutely, in order, in each of the two parts of the line, before the accented vowel of the emphasized word. If the word has more than one syllable, and is accented on the penultimate syllable, the consonant(s) between the accented penult and the unaccented last vowel must be taken into account. Words in Welsh are either (1) monosyllables or polysyllables with the last syllable accented or (2) polysyllables with the penultimate syllable accented. It follows, therefore, that there are four possible classes of consonant correspondence: with both emphasized words similarly accented (*cytbwys*) or differently accented (*anghytbwys*), and the last emphasized word in the line ending in an accented syllable (*acennog*) or in an unaccented syllable (*diacen*).

1. *cytbwys acennog* ´ ´
2. *cytbwys diacen* ´´ ´´
3. *anghytbwys acennog* ´ ´´
4. *anghytbwys diacen* ´´ ´

³Examples throughout are given from Eurys I. Rowlands, *Poems of the Cywyddwyr: A Selection of Cywyddau c. 1375-1525* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976). The page numbers cited are all from the introduction to this book.

In 1, 2, 3, 4, the consonants correspond in front of the accent. In 2, 3, 4, the consonants also correspond after the accent. In 1 the consonants to not correspond after the accent, as this would mean that the two emphasized words would end in identical consonants. This might not be wrong in all cases, but rhyme (*odl*) must be avoided as must *proest* (half-rhyme, where the consonants are identical and the vocalic elements belong to the same class). It is a general rule that *odl* and *proest* must be avoided between the emphasized words in a line of *cynghanedd*. (pp. xxviii-xxix)⁴

The traditional rules basing the distribution of consonant correspondence on stress create a very complex situation, yielding up to four sets of variants for each type of line that can occur in *cynghanedd* poetry. Moreover, rule 1 is treated differently from rules 2, 3, and 4. To make matters even more complicated, there is a “fault” in *cynghanedd* called *crych a llyfn* which occurs “when a consonant is misplaced in relation to the accent of one of the emphasized words:

<u>calon</u>	engylion	Englont 2.7
	ngl̃n	˘ngl̃nt”
		(p. xlvi)

3. The Single Pitch-Based Accent Rule

If, however, we were to base the consonant correspondence not upon the stress accent of the penult, but upon the pitch accent of the ultima, the entire complex system could be accounted for quite simply as follows:

Consonants correspond absolutely, in order, in each of the two parts of the line, before the pitch-accented vowel of the emphasized word.

⁴For further information on the rules of *cynghanedd*, see J. Loth, *La métrique galloise: Depuis les plus anciens textes jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Thorin et Fils, 1900); John Morris Jones, *Cerdd Dafod* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925); T.H. Parry-Williams, *Elfennau Barddoniaeth* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1936); J.J. Evans, *Llawlyfr y Cynganeddion*, 2nd ed (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951); and Allan Ll. Roberts, *Anghenion y Gynghanedd* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973).

Through this single pitch-based rule, we can eliminate all of the complexities involved with the four traditional rules, treat all lines and all types of words the same, account for prepositions (and other normally unemphasized words) at or before the position of emphasis, require no part of the rule to contradict another part, and obviate the very notion that *crych a llyfn* is a “fault” at all.

Of course, the single pitch-based rule must logically apply in all instances in which the complicated stressed-based rules apply. Let us examine four representative lines each corresponding to one of the four rules noted above:

1. *cytbwys acennog*

i olau'r cwyr i lawr Caint
l r c' r l r c' nt

(p. xxix)

2. *cytbwys diacen*

gŵr bellach a grybwyllir
g r b' ll̃ ch | gr b' ll̃ r

(p. xxx)

3. *anghytbwys acennog*

di-brid y daw i brydydd
d br' d | d br' d̃ dd

(p. xxx)

4. *anghytbwys diacen*⁵rhyswr cwncwerwr can caer

c n c' r' r | c n c' r

(p. xxxviii)

As Rowlands points out (as cited above) for the old rules, “In 1,2,3,4, the consonants correspond in front of the accent.” As stress accent precedes pitch accent, this would necessarily lead to correspondence before the pitch accent as well. Moreover, it would also predict the correspondence before the pitch accent in 2,3,4 as a natural consequence — something the traditional rules must handle explicitly: “In 2,3,4, the consonants also correspond after the accent.” Finally, the traditional approach requires one more rule stating “In 1 the consonants do not correspond after the accent, as this would mean that the two emphasized words would end in identical consonants.” There is no logical reason even to point this out in the pitch-based rules, since we are dealing only with the correspondences before the final syllable, anyway. The added complexity in the traditional rules arises from the fact that, in effect, an exception has already been made that requires another rule to block the exception’s rule — a rather complicated situation indeed.

In addition to applying far more elegantly to all the lines covered by the traditional rules, the new single rule applies in at least one type of “fault” in the traditional rules. As in the example of *crych a llyfn* cited above, the traditional rules fail to account for the pattern because a correspondence occurs between a consonant

⁵Rowlands notes that this rare form does have an apparent variant in which “a consonant occurring after the accent need not be answered:

yr hydd a gynnydd ei gym 19.21
g' n' dd | g' m"

While this might at first glance appear to present a complication even to the new single pitch-based accent rule, it actually provides some considerable insight. In the traditional terminology, the consonant in the later part of the line “answers” the corresponding consonant in the earlier part. **Here we see that for the** rule to work consistently, the earlier part is anticipating the later part. Given the fact that the accent in Welsh (as in most languages) is determined backwards from the end of the word, the idea that the correspondence should do likewise stands to reason and shows the *cynghanedd* poetry to be far more reflective of the natural workings of the language than we had heretofore supposed.

before the stress accent (subject to the rules) and a consonant after the stress accent (not subject to the rules). Since both consonants occur before the pitch accent, they are naturally covered by the new rule.

Thus, the single pitch-based accent rule is superior to the traditional stress-based rules not simply because it satisfies the criterion of Occam's Razor and works more simply and directly. Of crucial importance here is the *crych a llyfn*, in which the traditional rules do not in fact work at all and in which the new rule does work — and with no added complexity. The single pitch-based rule is thus not only more elegant than the traditional rules, but it is more efficacious as well.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Significance. The significance of the pitch-based accent rule for Welsh literature is obvious. What had been viewed as a highly complex set of rules burdened by exceptions and inconsistencies can now be treated as elegant, simple, straightforward, and above all consistent. By removing the complexity and inconsistency from this aspect of *cynghanedd*, we can now concentrate upon the many complexities that really do exist in this form of poetry, which has maintained its prevalence in Welsh metrical verse for centuries.

Furthermore, it should be fairly obvious that for at least those who devised the system, the accent rule must have been based upon pitch. Certainly, they would not have devised a complicated system in which a “fault” would be recognized as acceptable. A more credible explanation is that they were following a pitch-based rule, in which the matter would not even arise as any sort of problem or fault at all.

For poets today, on the other hand, it may well be that the complicated stress-based rules are being followed explicitly. Given the discrepancy between the artificial and complex stress-based rules and the natural and simple pitch-based rule, we can only wonder how much more natural this poetry might be if these poets thought in terms of the pitch accent. Certainly, there would be few inhibitions against committing *crych a llyfn*.

In the study of the Welsh language and Welsh linguistics, the single pitch-based rule for *cynghanedd* is also quite significant. The tension between the stress accent system and the pitch accent system has by-and-large been viewed with stress as the dominant system and pitch as the ancillary system.⁶ There has even been some attempt to subsume pitch accent under stress accent.⁷ Recent findings by this researcher, however, have shown that pitch is far more important than heretofore

⁶For example, Jones, “The Accent in Modern Welsh;” Watkins, *Ieithyddiaeth*, pp. 26-31. Pitch is not even mentioned in Gareth King, *Modern Welsh: A Comprehensive Grammar* (London: Routledge, 1993) or in David A. Thorne, *A Comprehensive Welsh Grammar: Gramadeg Cymraeg cynhwysfawr* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

⁷Compare Williams, *Stress in Modern Welsh*, pp. 228-33.

supposed.⁸

5.2. *The Notional Basis.* Of course, we may well wonder why if the pitch-based accent rule is so simple and straightforward, bardic grammarians have always assumed that *cynghanedd* be based upon rules of stress accent. Indeed, some of the grammarians themselves have been accomplished poets, and the thought that they would overlook the simple rule that must originally have formed the basis for their own approach to the poetry and that they would proclaim rather the complex and inconsistent rules of stress accent in their approach to the grammar is rather startling.

Evidently, the grammarians have been following a traditional concept of grammar which is now discredited, at least among descriptive linguists. This is the concept of “notional grammar” — that there exists a set of grammatical categories and relationships that are applied to all languages universally.⁹ By coincidence, these supposedly universal grammatical categories and relationships happen to be most salient in the classical languages. Thus, for example, we are taught that we are to never split an infinitive in English, because in Latin it was impossible; and we are taught that a preposition is something we cannot end a sentence or clause with, because the classical concept of a preposition is something that must be (by its very Latin name) “pre-posed,” as it is in Latin, Greek, and many other non-Germanic languages.

With the influence of Latin poetry, in which stress accent determines metrical patterns, it is little wonder that it has been especially the well educated Welsh grammarians who have taken the poetry composed with the pitch accent in mind (or more precisely, in voice) and who have made it conform to the classical concept of a meter. Doubtless, there has also been some further notional support for assuming stress to be the primary accent from English, the poetry of which heavily relies upon the stress accent of beat.

Thus, the development of the complex and inconsistent accent rules of *cynghanedd* would be quite in keeping with the history of misperceptions found in many languages as a result of notional grammar. Perhaps the more modern descriptive approach of linguistics, with its long-standing opposition to notionalism, can overcome the grammarian’s propensity to think in terms of stress accent without regard to the role of pitch accent. Indeed, such a contribution by the dry and analytical linguist may even help lead to more natural and resonant poetry.

⁸Once again, see Griffen, “Pitch and Vowel Reduction/Centralization”.

⁹The distinction between “formal” grammars based upon analysis and “notional” grammars based upon logic (or extralinguistic factors) was made by Otto Jespersen in *The Philosophy of Grammar* (New York: Holt, 1924). Those engaged in creating general or philosophical grammars were seen by Jespersen as being “too often under the delusion that Latin grammar was the perfect model of logical consistency, and they therefore laboured to find in every language the distinctions recognized in Latin” (p. 47). The matter has been treated more recently in John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1968).