

On the Origin of Preaspiration in North Germanic

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Preaspiration (PA) is maybe most solidly described for the IE languages Icelandic, Faroese, Scottish Gaelic and the contacting Uralic language Saami. Outside this NW-European language area PA is attested in some native languages of the Americas and Siberia.

In my paper I will argue for the non-Indo European origin of PA in North Germanic. First form, function, and geographical distribution of PA in North Germanic as well as in the contacting IE and non-IE languages will be sketched. Second, problems of the hitherto proposed theories of the origin of PA will be discussed. According to these theories PA is either regarded as areal feature of unknown origin or as an originally Germanic feature borrowed into Saami. I will show that both theories are little convincing. Third, I will argue for the hitherto unconsidered Saami influence on North Germanic.

The occurrence of PA in the contacting but not closely related languages of NW-Europe has attracted the interest of some scholars. The conclusion about a common source of PA in Scottish Gaelic, Icelandic and Saami has for example been drawn by Wagner (1964). However, what this common source could have been is not clear at all. Explanations in terms of areal diffusion (cf. Salmons 1992, Hansson 2001 and others) can at best be seen as statements about the results of contact induced changes, the origin and mechanisms of which we know nothing about.

PA in Scottish Gaelic has convincingly been attributed to language contact with North Germanic during the Viking period at least since the work of Marstrander (1932). PA remained as interference feature in the Gaelic language of the formerly Old Norse-speaking settlers in Scotland.

PA in Scandinavian cannot be younger than Common Scandinavian. However, no traces of PA are found in other Germanic languages. Because of this PA has often been regarded to be a North Germanic innovation (cf. Liberman 1982, Page 1992). Another theory explains PA, West Jutlandic *stød*, and glottalization in British English as reflexes of PIE glottalic stops (Kortlandt 1987).

On the other hand, most scholars in Uralistics trace PA convincingly back to Proto-Saami, thus implicating the impossibility of influence from North Germanic. The contradiction in the respective argumentation have mostly been ignored and the borrowing of North Germanic PA into Saami seems to have been an axiom, at least since Posti's (1954) article "On the origin of the voiceless vowel in Lapp".

But, Posti himself gives good arguments against North Germanic influence on Saami. The reason for him to neglect the possibility of Saami influence on North Germanic is the occurrence of PA mainly in West Scandinavian dialects, i.e. far away from the traditionally assumed Saami-Scandinavian contact area.

However, as the results of archaeological research prove, the contact area between North Germanic and Uralic stretched much further to South Scandinavia than has been assumed until now. The sociolinguistics conditions during the time of cultural and linguistic scandinavization of the southern Saami were rather favourable for the spreading of interference features into North Germanic dialects.

PA could then have its origin in the Norwegian and Swedish dialects of the Saami-Scandinavian contact area in Middle Scandinavia. The actual geographical spreading of the feature supports this assumption. Later PA spread to the western dialects and even to the Norse settlements outside Mainland Scandinavia.

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