

Magne Oftedal

Nordic Accent Patterns in Scottish Gaelic

Most Scottish Gaelic dialects have two types of word accents (the term accent is here used loosely). There is a phonological distinction between, on one side, /<sup>1</sup>fiəx/ 'raven' and /<sup>1</sup>aran/ 'bread' and, on the other hand, /<sup>2</sup>fiəx/ 'debt' and /<sup>2</sup>aram/ 'on me'. The difference is, in some dialects, a difference of stress. The main stress is on the first vowel in both kinds of words, but the second vowel has more prominence in type 2 than in type 1. In other dialects it may be a difference of quantity: the second vowel is longer in type 2 than in type 1. Other dialects again may be analysed as having a distinction of syllabicity: words of type 1 are dissyllabic, while words of type 2 are monosyllabic. This latter distinction is also in conformity with the historical origin of the distinction: /<sup>1</sup>fi-əx/ was a dissyllable with hiatus, /<sup>1</sup>aran/ was an ordinary dissyllable, while /<sup>2</sup>fiəx/ was a monosyllable with a diphthong and /<sup>2</sup>aram/ had developed from orm, with a secondary or svara-bhakti vowel.

Some dialects, however, and precisely those dialects which have been influenced most by Norse, have a tonal distinction between the two types of words. Moreover, the actual pitch movement is strikingly similar to that of southwest Norwegian. We may, if we wish, describe these dialects as having word tones of a Scandinavian type (although other descriptive techniques may also be used).

The probability (and possibility) of Norse influence in the accentual development of these dialects will be discussed, with reference also to some phonetically similar features of Modern Welsh (where it is much less likely that there has been Norse influence).