

Danish stød is tone deaf

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Danish stød recently received a novel interpretation as the phonetic manifestation of a HL tone compressed within one syllable. The stød/non-stød distinction would then be a special case of the more general tonal word accent distinction in standard Swedish and Norwegian. What speaks in favour of such a proposal? (1) It is justifiable on physiological grounds, given what is known about the larynx and the vocal folds in F_0 lowering. (2) In several South East Asian tone languages low tone is often accompanied by laryngealization. (3) There is an undisputed diachronic relation between stød/non-stød and Accent I/Accent II; and in theories of stødgenesis it is commonly assumed that stød developed from tone. (4) Add to that a certain synchronic similarity in the distribution of Accent I/II and stød/non-stød. (5) As an underlying tone, stød and word accents would be unified in a common Scandinavian prosodic framework. – What are the obstacles then? (1) A tonal representation of stød is contradicted by the phonetic reality. (2) Stød is distributed in words according to roughly the same principles across regional varieties of Danish, but regional tonal patterns vary considerably. (3) Word accents in Swedish and Norwegian are associated with stressed syllables, whereas stød occurs also in less than fully stressed syllables, devoid of autonomous pitch movements. (4) A Swedish and Norwegian word can have one pitch accent only, but Danish words may have more than one stød.