

A history of the Basque prosodic systems

Ander Egurtzegi (CNRS-IKER UMR 5478) & Gorka Elordieta (UPV/EHU)

Abstract:

The diversity of prosodic systems is wide in Basque. According to the most exhaustive description (Hualde 1997), there are at least three very different prosodic systems in the modern dialects: Western, Central, and Eastern. In the Western system, only some words are accented lexically, and the accent falls on a non-final syllable. Other words are unaccented, if they do not contain accented roots or pre-accenting affixes. Unaccented words only get a post-lexical accent in their final syllable when pronounced in isolation or immediately preceding the verb, and the accent is realized as a H*+L. In the Central system, stress-accent falls on the peninitial syllable of the word (*emákume* ‘woman’), with the exception of marked words (i.e., words that are lexically marked; *liburu* ‘book’). In the East, stress-accent falls in the penultimate syllable in the unmarked pattern (*emakúme*), its base being the word or the stem. In addition, the Goizueta system described by Hualde et al. (2008) needs to be added to these, which shows two different pitch accents that can fall in either of the first two syllables (*ári* ‘ram’, *eskòla* ‘school’...).

This paper presents new reconstructions of Basque prosody that go back to Old Proto-Basque, including a proposal for the Common Basque stage (cf. Michelena 1981 [2011]), as well as a complete diachronic account of both marked and unmarked patterns of the major prosodic systems of the modern language. Alongside the newly reconstructed proto-systems, we present a detailed account of the evolution of each modern prosodic system, adding up for a thorough reconstruction of their history.

We suggest that Old Proto-Basque had prosodic prominence in the root, i.e. [(C)V.'CVC]. This system evolved into phrase-level prominence in Modern Proto-Basque, giving rise to unaccentedness in non-phrase-final positions, with marked accentuation only introduced later, through Latin loanwords (2nd-3rd century CE). This would be the common system, a form of it still found in the west. Not long after the dialectification, word-level systems developed in central-eastern areas, first as peninitial and then as penultimate stress in the east. Finally, we propose that the Goizueta prosodic system can be derived from the Central system by means of an anticipation of the pitch contour that would result in two contrasting pitch accents, an alternative view to Hualde (in press).

In short, this is the first attempt to reconstruct Basque accentuation from a pre-Roman stage to the dialectification, and it provides the first account for the development of the complex pitch-accent system from Goizueta that only involves a single process.

Keywords:

Historical Phonology; Basque; Reconstruction of the accentuation; Sound change; Relative chronology.

References:

- Hualde, José I. 1997. *Euskararen azentuerak* (*Supplements of the International Journal of Basque Linguistics and Philology* [ASJU] 42). San Sebastián, Bilbao: Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia, University of the Basque Country.
- Hualde, José I. In press. Accent shift and the reconstruction of Old Common Basque accentuation. In H. Kubozono, J. Ito & A. Mester (eds.), *Prosody and prosodic interfaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hualde, José I., Oihana Lujanbio & Francisco Torreira. 2008. Lexical tone and stress in Goizueta Basque. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 38. 1-24.
- Michelena, Luis. 1981. Lengua común y dialectos vascos. *International Journal of Basque Linguistics and Philology* [ASJU] 15. 291-313 [reissued in J.A. Lakarra & Í. Ruiz Arzalluz (eds.). 2011. *Obras completas (VII)*, 517-542].