

The reconstruction of Basque demonstratives: problems and solutions

1. Introduction

The reconstruction of demonstratives may be tackled from a variety of perspectives. Recent works (Heine *et al.* 2020) have pointed to the possibility that, in some languages, a lexical origin may be established for demonstratives, in contrast with other more traditional views (Diessel 1999: 150). Some other works focus on the evolution of the number of deictic degrees that a particular demonstrative system exhibits (Guillot & Carlier 2015). Finally, other investigations address the issue of the morphological rearrangement of demonstrative forms, e.g. Lat *ille* ‘that’ → **accu ille* → Sp *aquel* ‘that’ (Piel 2005: 109-125).

Research on Basque demonstratives has produced a series of hypothesis concerning the potential lexical origin of demonstrative forms (Lakarra 2008: 484), and the debate on the number of degrees reconstructable for Proto-Basque has an even longer tradition (see Azkue 1923-1925: §650). This paper, however, offers concrete heuristics for the reconstruction of the morphological shape of demonstratives in Proto-Basque.

2. Stem alternations in demonstratives: The problems

A series of stem alternations are usually mentioned when studying Basque demonstratives:

- (a) Dialects differ in the form of the singular distal demonstrative: Western dialects have *a* ‘that’, while Central-Eastern dialects *hura* ‘that’. The latter form is usually considered as an innovation, since the pan-dialectal form of the definite article is *-a*, a direct continuator of the demonstrative *a*.
- (b) Forms like ergative *hark* ‘that’, genitive *haren* ‘to that’ and dative *hari* ‘to that’ have been adduced in favor of a protoform **har*, rather than *ha*. However, the status of the final *-r* has never been established, and Mitxelena (1961: 335) suggested that it may be an old inflectional morpheme.
- (c) In the plural paradigm, Western-Central forms like *haen* (> *haien*) ‘of those’ and *haetan* ‘in those’ have been considered to be diachronically primary when compared to Eastern *hen*, *hetan*, etc., their relationship being explained by a vocalic reduction (Azkarate & Altuna 2001:18).
- (d) Western dialects have proximal demonstratives like *honek* ‘these’, while the rest of dialects have *hauek* ‘these’. No clear claim regarding their diachronic preeminence has been made.

3. The definite inflection of nouns and the reconstruction of demonstratives: The solutions

The method proposed herein for the reconstruction of demonstrative protoforms is that the logic applied in (a) needs to be extended. The assumption is that the definite inflection, common to all dialects, reflects the older stage of demonstratives.

- There is no trace of a final *-r* in the definite inflection. This renders difficult the reconstruction of **har*, as opposed to a more straightforward *ha*.
- Definite phrases like *mendi-en* ‘of the mountains’ and *mendi-etan* ‘in the mountains’ are general. Assuming that they are the continuators of demonstrative phrases like *mendi hen* ‘of those mountains’ and *mendi hetan* ‘in those mountains’, it may be concluded that *hen* and *hetan* display a more archaic form of the demonstrative than *haen* and *haetan*.
- The proximal definite phrase *mendi-ok* ‘the mountains here’ is general. Its more plausible derivation is *mendi hauek* ‘these mountains’ > *mendi ho(e)k* > *mendiok*, with no trace of a nasal in the affix. Therefore, demonstrative forms like *hauek* need to be more archaic than Western *honek*.

4. Conclusion

This paper has offered a plausible reconstruction of Basque demonstratives. These basic morphological insights are more urgent and feasible than other more speculative endeavors such as establishing the number of degrees of the original demonstrative system or the possible lexical origin of demonstrative forms, and they need to be addressed prior to any other considerations.

5. References

- Azkarate, Miren. & Altuna, Patxi. 2001. *Euskal morfologiaren historia*. Donostia: Elkarlanean.
- Diessel, Holger. 1999. *Demonstratives: Form, function, and grammaticalization*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Guillot, Céline & Anne Carlier. 2015. Evolution des démonstratifs du latin au français: le passage d'un système ternaire à un système binaire. In Anne Carlier, Michèle Goyens & Béatrice Lamiroy (eds.), *Le français en diachronie. Nouveaux objets et méthodes*, 337–371. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Heine, Bernd, Tania Kuteva, Haiping Long, Heiko Narrog & Fang Wu. 2020. Where do demonstratives come from? *STUF - Language Typology and Universals* 73(3), 403–434.
- Lakarra, Joseba Andoni. 2008. Aitzineuskararen gramatikanantz (malkar eta osinetan zehar). In *Gramatika Jaietan. Patxi Goenagaren omenez* (Supplements of ASJU 51), 451–490. Bilbo: UPV-EHU.
- Mitxelena, Koldo. 1961. *Fonética Histórica Vasca*. Donostia: Gipuzkoa Provincial Council.
- Piel, Amélie Anne. 2005. *Les déictiques déclinables et indéclinables de l'espagnol médiéval: étude synchronique*. Lille: ANRT.