

Juliette Blevins (CUNY)

Advances in Proto-Basque Reconstruction and The Proto-Indo-European-Euskara Hypothesis

This talk presents central features of a new reconstruction of Proto-Basque, the mother language of modern Basque varieties, historical Basque, and Aquitanian (Martínez-Areta 2013). Proto-Basque is reconstructed on the basis of the method of internal reconstruction, with a focus on previously unappreciated alternations and asymmetries in sound distribution. The reconstructions and sound changes proposed are, at the same time, informed by studies of the phonetic bases of sound change, and typological characteristics of sound inventories, phonotactics, and alternation types (Blevins 2004, 2014). The reconstruction of Proto-Basque builds on the monumental work of Michelena (1961), and the more recent CVC root theory of Lakarra (1995, 2013), but differs from both of these in significant ways. Labials *m and *p^h are reconstructed, where both are absent in Michelena's reconstruction. A single fricative *s is proposed, in contrast to the Michelena's proposal with *s and *z. A single *r is proposed, in contrast to Michelena's *r vs. *R, and a limited number of root-initial consonant clusters are reconstructed, including initial *sC clusters. Proto-Basque reconstructions based on these methods have a surprising property: many of them resemble Proto-Indo-European roots. A careful assessment of these superficial similarities using the comparative method reveals regular sound correspondences for all consonants and vowels in a wide range of roots, stems, and words, including basic vocabulary, providing preliminary evidence that Proto-Basque and Proto-Indo-European are related. However, conservative features of Proto-Basque suggest that it does not descend from Proto-Indo-European. Rather, the Proto-Indo-European-Euskara hypothesis proposes that these two ancient languages both descend from the same, more ancient, mother tongue.

Selected References

- Blevins, Juliette. 2004. *Evolutionary phonology: the emergence of sound patterns*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Blevins, Juliette. 2014. *Evolutionary Phonology: a holistic approach to sound change typology*, in P. Honeybone & J. Salmons (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Phonology*, Oxford: OUP.
- Egurtzegi, Ander. 2013. *Phonetics and Phonology*, in Martínez-Areta, M. (ed.), 119-172.
- Lakarra, Joseba. 1995. *Reconstructing the pre-Proto-Basque root*, in J.I. Hualde, J.A. Lakarra & R.L. Trask (eds.), *Towards a history of the Basque language*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 189- 206.
- Lakarra, Joseba. 2013. *Root Structure*, in Martínez-Areta (ed.), 173-221.
- Martínez-Areta, M. (ed.). 2013. *Basque and Proto-Basque. Language-Internal and Typological Approaches to Linguistic Reconstruction [Mikroglottika 5]*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Michelena, Luis. 1961. *Fonética histórica vasca*. Donostia-San Sebastian: Diputación Foral de Guipuzcoa [2nd ed. 1977].
- Trask, R. Larry. 1997. *The history of Basque*. London: Routledge.