

**A single sibilant in Proto-Basque:
*s, *Rs, *sT and the phonetic basis of the sibilant split**

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Blevins (to appear) presents a new reconstruction of Proto-Basque, the mother of Basque and Aquitanian, based on standard methods in historical linguistics: the comparative method and the method of internal reconstruction. Where all previous reconstructions of Proto-Basque assume a contrast between two sibilants, *s, a voiceless apical sibilant, and *z a voiceless laminal sibilant (Martinet 1955; Michelena 1977; Lakarra 1995; Trask 1997), this proposal is unique in positing only a single sibilant *s. Under this account, all instances of Common Basque /z/ are derived from *s. More specifically, in syllable coda, *Rs > *Rz (R a sonorant) while in the syllable onset, *sT > *zT (T an oral stop). The true split of *s into /s/ vs. /z/ occurs when clusters like *Rz or *zT are further simplified to /z/. In this talk, internal evidence for a single sibilant, *s, in Proto-Basque is presented, and sound changes underlying the sibilant split are examined within the context of Evolutionary Phonology (Blevins 2004, 2006, 2015, 2017). Similar sound changes are identified in other languages with similar cluster types (e.g. Kümmel 2007:232), and the phonetic basis of the sibilant split is informed by recent studies of sibilant retraction (e.g. Stevens and Harrington 2016; Stuart-Smith et al. 2018)

Selected References

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