

# REMARKS ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE BASQUE WORD FOR ‘SWALLOW’ AND ITS POTENTIAL RELATION TO CELTIC

ANDER EGURTZEGI and BORJA ARIZTIMUÑO\*

*University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU*

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to respond to an etymology of the Basque word for ‘swallow’ first proposed by Michelena (1977), later related to Celtic by McCone (2005) and then further developed by Stifter (2010). Being aware of the need for careful attention to phonological detail in linguistic reconstruction, and profiting from the latest developments in the study of the syllable- and root-structure of Proto-Basque, we aim to propose a more accurate etymology for the *enara / elai* ‘swallow’ doublet as well as to give an account of its general dialectal distribution. In order to do so, we prefer to rely on the phonological context inferred from attested dialectal variants rather than on hypothetical reconstructions. In addition, the potential relation between the Basque and Common Celtic words for ‘swallow’ is taken into account and proposals made by previous scholars are reviewed.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to respond to a paper by Stifter (2010) on the etymology of the Proto-Basque (PB) word for ‘swallow’ *\*eNala / \*eLana*, forms which survive in the modern Basque standard variants *enara / elai*. McCone (2005, 409) proposed the reconstructed form *\*(w)aiNala* and discussed its potential relation to the insular Celtic *\*waNālā* or *\*weNālā*, also proposed by him (2005, 408). Stifter (2010, 153) proposes a third language as the ultimate source of the borrowing in both Basque and Celtic, pointing to the

\*This work is funded by the Basque Government [BFI 2010–385 and BFI 2009–236] as well as its consolidated research group ‘Lingüística histórica e historia de la lengua vasca’ [GIC10/83, IT486–10]; MINECO’s project ‘Monumenta Linguae Vasconum (IV): Textos Arcaicos Vascos y Euskera Antiguo’ [FFI2012–37696]; and the UPV/EHU’s UFI-11/14. Thanks are due to G. Elordieta, R. Gómez, J.I. Hualde, I. Igartua, J.A. Lakarra, B. Leferman and E. Santazilia for their useful comments and suggestions, which have undoubtedly improved our work. We are grateful to the editors of *Ériu* and to the anonymous reviewer for their invaluable feedback. It goes without saying that any mistakes that remain in this work are entirely ours. Correspondence addresses: Ander Egurtzegi, Laboratorio de fonética, Facultad de Letras, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Paseo de la Universidad, 5, 01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz (Araba), Spain, e-mail: [ander.egurtzegi@ehu.es](mailto:ander.egurtzegi@ehu.es); and Borja Ariztimuño, Hizkuntzalaritza eta Euskal Ikasketak Saila, Letren Fakultatea, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Paseo de la Universidad, 5, 01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz (Araba), Spain, e-mail: [borja.ariztimuno@ehu.es](mailto:borja.ariztimuno@ehu.es).

exceptional phonotactic structure of the word when compared with most of the inherited vocabulary of these languages. In this paper we try to point out the difficulties regarding the PB reconstruction *\*wai/eNaLa* or *\*waNai/eLa* proposed by McCone and modified by Stifter (2010, 156), and ultimately based on that of Michelena (*\*eNala* / *\*eLana*; 1977, 326) through Trask (1997, 139), who suggested *\*aiNala* / *\*aiLana* instead. We also propose possible sources for the word from the Basque standpoint, which do not correspond to the ‘invisible third’ proposed by Stifter (2010).

## 1

Etymologies do not last forever. Like many other things in life, they provide us with a means to advance but when they have become outdated they should be revisited and ‘sharpened’ (cf. Watkins 1991). As Luis Michelena pointed out: ‘From my point of view, there are two ways in which older results can be improved today: 1) using the available witnesses in a more exhaustive way and 2) applying the comparative method more consistently’ (Michelena 1977, 13).<sup>1</sup> So, allegedly good etymologies can be discarded as better ones become available or, as in our particular case, etymologies can be improved or corrected in the wake of advances in linguistic investigation.

## 2

Although the relationship between the two Basque dialectal variants of ‘swallow’ may seem evident, the etymological link between them was established by Michelena (1977, 326). He derived the proto-forms of both *enara* and *elai* (namely *\*eNala* and *\*eLana*) from a single reconstructed item, arguing that only a double metathesis separated both variants:

... there should not be any problem in accepting *\*eLana* and *\*eNala* as variants of a single form. A [mere] double metathesis would have had to occur: not only would the nasal and the lateral exchange place, but they would also exchange their quality, the lenis becoming fortis and vice versa. (Michelena 1977, 326)

Nevertheless, it must be stated that those two metatheses are of very different natures. One of them is a transposition between the /l/ and the /n/ located in the onsets of the second and the third syllables, a metathesis

<sup>1</sup> All translations of quotations throughout this paper are our own. Although he does not list them, Michelena also mentions three additional reasons for revising a reconstruction: the discovery of a new, related language; the discovery of new data; and the development of new methods or the improvement of the available ones (Michelena 1964, 196; 1988, 73). We will follow the first reason for proposing a new etymology listed by Haas (1969, 46–51), namely ‘a new interpretation of the material at hand’.

more than once paralleled in the history of the Basque language (cf. among others *labana* < *nabala* ‘knife’ and *inulabar* < *ilunabar* ‘dusk’, see Egurtzegi 2011). The second process, however, is a feature metathesis which affects the strength of the sonorant, and is otherwise unattested within Basque.<sup>2</sup> This second metathesis ‘softens’ an etymologically strong segment while simultaneously making another lenis segment fortis.

Thus, Michelena proposes a double metathesis in order to link the different variants of the Basque word for this bird of the genus *hirundo*. In his hypothesis, Michelena relies on four different sound changes arising in intervocalic position: /N/ > /n/, /n/ > /h/ (> Ø), /L/ > /l/ and /l/ > /r/ (Michelena 1977, §15 and §16). His proposal is as follows:

- (1) *enara* : *elai* < \**eNala* : \**eLana*  
 (a) (\**eNala* > \**enaLa* >) \**eLana* > \**eLaha* > \**elaa* > *elae* > *elai*<sup>3</sup>  
 (b) (\**eLana* > \**elaNa* >) \**eNala* > \**eNara* > *enara*

In order to obtain the reconstructed forms, he needs one of the pairs of metatheses in parenthesis in any chronological order. Metatheses such as the one between /l/ and /n/ depicted above are common in Basque (cf. Egurtzegi 2011, 17); however, we are not aware of any other instance of a feature metathesis involving the fortis nature of a consonant anywhere in the history of the language.<sup>4</sup>

## 3

In our view, the need for this second metathesis can be removed by looking at this process from a different angle. It is worth mentioning, that, as stated above, all the sound changes reconstructed by Michelena apply to sonorant segments located in intervocalic position, and thus are conditioned by the phonological context. Likewise, all qualitative changes (i.e. those which affect the place/manner of articulation and not just the length or ‘strength’

<sup>2</sup> Michelena (1977, 200–1) mentions palatalisation metathesis as a parallel (cf. Sp. *llano* > Bsq. *laño* ‘plain, unpretentious’), although he links fortis consonants to geminates or long segments, and not to palatalised ones. Hualde (pers. comm.) reminds us that there is indeed a certain degree of relation between geminates and palatals, at least in the neighbouring Romance languages, where palatal segments resulted from geminates (cf. Lat. *capanna* > Sp. *cabaña* ‘shed’). Interestingly, this process can also result from etymological clusters as in Sp. *comerlo* > *comel.lo* > *comello* /komeʎo/ ‘to eat it’. However, this link is far from obvious within Basque.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that no such variant as \*\**helai* is found (the initial *h-* being the result of the displacement of the intervocalic glottal fricative to the onset of the first syllable, e.g. Bsq. *harea* < \**areha* < Lat. *arena* ‘sand’; see Lakarra 2009a; Egurtzegi 2013a, 164), but the reader should note that variants with the etymological order of the lateral in the second syllable and the nasal in the third are only found in western varieties, which lack /h/.

<sup>4</sup> Metatheses involving length, despite being uncommon, have been proposed for the history of some languages, although they usually involve consecutive vowels (cf. vowel quantitative metathesis in Attic and Ionic Greek, as in *ηο, ηα* > *εω, εᾶ*). There is no other instance of metathesis involving length within Basque, but feature metatheses involving palatalisation or nasality are attested (cf. Egurtzegi 2011, 56).

of the segments) apply to the second consonant, placed in the onset of the third syllable, while the first consonant in the onset of the second syllable only shows a change regarding its length or ‘strength’:

- (2) \**eNala* / \**eLana*  
 (a) \**eNala* > *enara*  
 (b) \**eLana* > \**elaha* > *elai*

In fact, we only need the consonant in the onset of the second syllable to maintain its nature after the adaptation to the new system, which consists of an opposition between voiced and voiceless consonants instead of an opposition between fortis and lenis consonants. This is achieved according to Michelena by means of an intervocalic simplification of a fortis segment, but we could get the same result by changing the intervocalic context, i.e., reconstructing a vowel and a consonant around the first sonorant instead of a pair of vowels, as in the second. Consonant clusters were, in fact, one of the possible sources of fortis consonants proposed by Michelena (1977, 229 and §18, specifically §18.11). This contextual change will remove the need for the hypothetical fortis–lenis metathesis otherwise unattested in the language, since the first consonant would not change in this new context, regardless of its nature. So, we propose the insertion of an additional segment in the coda of the first syllable (or in the onset of the second, if it were a glottal fricative; see Egurtzegi 2013a). This segment will only be dropped after the metathesis of /l/ and /n/ and after the processes affecting intervocalic segments have run their course. In order for the metathesis to occur, we need to reconstruct the hypothesised segment in the coda of the first syllable so that both sonorants are in the same syllabic position (i.e. both in the onset, see Egurtzegi 2011):<sup>5</sup>

- (3) \**eC.nala* / \**eC.lana*  
 (a) (\**eCnala* >) \**eClana* > \**eClaha* > \**eClaa* > \**eClae* > \**eClai* > *elai*  
 (b) (\**eClana* >) \**eCnala* > \**eCnara* > *enara*

In this way we only need to propose a metathesis that transforms \**eC.nala* to \**eC.lana* (or the reverse, \**eC.lana* in \**eC.nala*) and a late elision of the element inserted at (3), once it has prevented the intervocalic developments that would otherwise take place. This leaves us with very few choices

<sup>5</sup> If we reconstruct a segment in the onset of the second syllable we would relegate the sonorant to the coda of the first syllable, given that the glottal fricative may only be found in the onset of the first two syllables in modern Basque and does not form tautosyllabic clusters (cf. Egurtzegi 2013, 151). As a consequence, the context necessary for metathesis to take place would be lost, given that the segments undergoing the process would not be in the same syllabic position, a necessary precondition of this process in Basque (cf. Egurtzegi 2011, 71). For this reason, the glottal fricative cannot be reconstructed in the oldest form of this particular etymology.

regarding which segment we should propose, since Basque phonotactics and its syllabic structure will only allow sibilant fricatives and (coronal) sonorants in this position (Hualde 2003, 33–4). Presonorant sibilants being as scarce (and, incidentally, modern) as they are (Egurtzegi 2013, 163), it seems obvious that we should give preference to a sonorant. Among sonorants, the rhotic seems preferable, given that the clusters that consecutive /n/ and /l/ could form (i.e., /n.l/ and /l.n/) are also rather ‘ill-formed’ in Basque (Hualde 2003, 36), and thus unlikely to be maintained for such a long period. However, /r.l/ and /r.n/ are much more widespread clusters. So, we propose the following reconstruction:

- (4) \**ernala* / \**erlana* (instead of \**eNala* / \**eLana*)  
 (a) (\**ernala* >) \**erlana* > \**erlaha* > \**erlaa* > \**erlae* > *erlai* > *elai*  
 (b) (\**erlana* >) \**ernala* > *ernara* > *enara*

A search of the General Basque Dictionary (Michelena 1987) reveals that, though not common, the variants *ernara* and *erlai*<sup>6</sup> are found in the Biscayan dialect even today. This evidence not only supports our preference for the rhotic /r/ in the reconstruction suggested above, but it also allows us to remove the asterisk from these ‘reconstructed’ variants—as we have already done in (4)—a step earlier than could be predicted structurally in (3).

## 4

In view of the fact that McCone’s (2005) proposal and that of Stifter (2010) are based on the original reconstruction by Michelena (1977) via Trask (1997), all the discussion in the previous sections also applies to their proposed reconstruction. Accordingly, the proposal of an (attested) preceding rhotic is preferable, in our opinion, to the reconstruction of a fortis segment and an unattested metathesis. The fortis dissimilation hypothesised by Stifter (2010, 153) is similar to the fortis–lenis metathesis proposed by Michelena, since it would allow the reconstructed variants \**eNaLa* and \**eLaNa*, but it is, nevertheless, otherwise unattested.

There are, furthermore, some other details that should be addressed regarding the first syllable of the form \*(w)*aiNala*, as reconstructed by McCone (2005, 209).

PB is believed to have had a very simple phonological inventory, which did not include a *wau* or a *yod* in any context (i.e., there were no diphthongs; see Lakarra 2011 and Egurtzegi 2013, 136–7). This issue has been pointed out by Stifter (2010, 153–4), who speaks of an early loss of

<sup>6</sup> This second variant is not listed by Stifter (2010, 152, footnote 12), presumably due to its not being found in the list of variants provided by Trask (2008, 170). It is nevertheless among the variants provided by the General Basque Dictionary (Michelena 1987) and the EHTA (Euskaltzaindia 2008).

*wau* either in the adaptation of his proposed borrowing or in a very early stage of the language,<sup>7</sup> but his suggestion about a third language as a donor for Basque and Celtic requires some problematic assumptions as well: such as that *w-* was lost early, while the hypothesised original diphthong *-ai-* (in the forms *\*(w)aiNala*, as reconstructed by McCone (2005, 209) and *\*uai/eNaLa* or *\*uaNai/eLa* as proposed by Stifter 2010, 154) remained unchanged, at least until the beginning of the ‘modern’ dialectal fragmentation (which is thought—since Michelena (1981)—to have come about by the seventh or eighth century, i.e., almost a millennium after a plausible and suitable contact between Basque and any ‘invisible third’, or even Celtic). This diphthong is present even today in dialectal forms such as *ain(h)ara*, *ainada*, *ain(h)era*, etc.

As for the first phoneme, it is true that Michelena himself proposed a quasi-regular loss of the PB word-initial labial voiced stop before round vowels (1977, 531–2). This proposal was suggested by the rarity (almost total lack) of Basque words with *bo-* or *bu-* initials, but there are certain native words which show these sequences, such as *bortz* ‘five’, *borobil* ‘round’, *buru* ‘head’, *buztan* ‘tail’, or old loanwords like *borondate* ‘will’ < Lat. *voluntāte(m)*, *bortitz* ‘hard, violent’ < Lat. *fortis*, *bultzatu* ‘pushed, impelled’ < Lat. *pulsātu(m)*. There are some etymological proposals (see Michelena 1977; Lakarra 2011) which require the loss of the labial consonant (such as *otu* ‘request’ < Lat. *votu(m)*), even before an unrounded vowel—as in the etymology by Lakarra (2011, 74) *\*berna-zur* lit. ‘leg-log’ > *\*enazur* > *\*ehazur* > *\*heazur* > *hezur/azur* ‘bone’; but cf. *berna* < Lat. *perna(m)*, where the initial voiced stop is maintained—and also in the onset of the second syllable (e.g. *alu* ‘vulva’ < Lat. *alvu(m)*, see Lakarra 2011, 104). This seems to be a sporadic loss, however, bearing closer resemblance to a dissimilation triggered by the following labial/rounded segments.

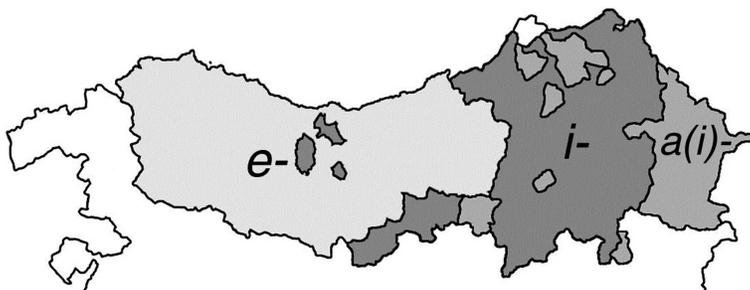
As for the diphthong of the alleged PB *\*(w)aiNala*, we have already pointed out that it does not fit the phonotactics reconstructed for that particular stage of the language. This would require either immediate adaptation in the process of borrowing the word (cf. *w-*), or, in the unlikely event of the phonotactically unusual sequence being accepted, that the diphthong would not have changed for at least several centuries (and much more than a millennium in the easternmost dialects where it would have remained unaltered until the present day; see Map 1 in (5) below). It is worth recalling that, in fact, a sporadic change from *ai* (probably through *ei*) to *e* is attested only dialectally (*bai(n)a* : *beina* : *bena* ‘but’), but precisely in those above-mentioned easternmost varieties where we find the diphthong (cf. *ain(h)ara* ‘swallow’), considered old by McCone (2005) and Stifter (2010), even today.

<sup>7</sup> He proposes either to place the loss of the glide prior to Roman times, when it becomes *b-*, or that the segment was replaced by zero in its adaptation instead; cf. Lat. *vēscor* ‘to make use of, have’ > *eska(tu)* ‘to ask for’ (Lakarra 2011, 74).

## 5

At this point we have dealt with the consonants and discussed the complexity of the vocalism of the word. Regarding the first, we must make clear that Michelena favoured the nasal-lateral sequence for the proto-form (as we do), although he did not make his reasons for holding this position clear. Presumably the distribution of the different variants led him to that decision, as he would have known that the reflexes of proto-variant *\*eLana* are limited to a part of the western dialect (so that the only metathesis which we accept would be quite restricted geographically): ‘What recommends **the second reconstruction** [i.e. *\*eNala*] **for *elae*** is the fact that there should not be any problem in accepting *\*eLana* and *\*eNala* as variants of a single stem’ (Michelena 1977, 326; emphasis added).

Leaving aside the consonants, the diversity that the vocalism shows is remarkable, although Michelena (without further argumentation) preferred the structure *\*eCaCa* for the proto-form. If we take the most distinctive characteristics of the variants (the first vowel, whether it shows *-rC-* or not, and *\*nVl* or *\*IVn*), and examine the combinations of these features throughout the Basque territory, the resulting isoglosses could be mapped as follows:<sup>8</sup>

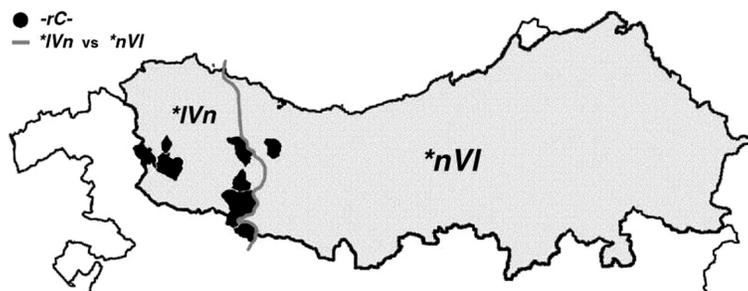
(5) (i) First vowel:<sup>9</sup>

MAP 1—Dialectal distribution of word-initial vowels

<sup>8</sup> These maps have been built based on the data provided by the *General Basque Dictionary* (Michelena 1987) and the *EHHA* (Euskaltzaindia 2008) under the headwords *enara*, *elai* and *txenara* ‘swallow’. In some regions the same word is used for ‘swift’ as well. The complete list of variants that can be found in the aforementioned sources (as well as in Trask 2008, 170) includes the following items, alphabetically ordered: *ainada*, *ainara*, *ainera*, *ainhara*, *ainhea*, *ainhera*, *aiñara*, *aiñari*, *alae*, *alai*, *alñari*, *anhara*, *añai*, *añar*, *añari*, *añera*, *añha*, *añhara*, *añhe*, *añhea*, *añhera*, *ean*, *eena*, *eihara*, *einhara*, *eiñera*, *elaa*, *elae*, *elai*, *elea*, *elei*, *eloi*, *ena*, *enaa*, *enae*, *enaba*, *enabera*, *enada*, *enara*, *enare*, *enere*, *eñada*, *erla*, *erladi*, *erlai*, *erlara*, *erlei*, *erloi*, *ernani*, *ernara*, *ihara*, *inada*, *inade*, *inara*, *inare*, *inera*, *inere*, *inhade*, *inhar*, *inhara*, *iñada*, *iñar*, *iñara*, *iñare*, *iñera*, *iñhala*, *iñhara*, *kinuri*, *kiñuri*, *mañari*, *txanara*, *txenara*, *txinara*, *txinare*.

<sup>9</sup> The region under *<e->* includes some etymologically unrelated lexemes, especially in the Upper Navarrese area. The instances of *<i->* in Gipuzkoa are due to variants beginning with *txi-* (there are *txe-* variants around them as well).

(ii) *-rC-* yes/no + *\*IVn* vs *\*nVI*:<sup>10</sup>



MAP 2—Dialectal distribution of consonantal sequences

All possible combinations of the vowels of the other two syllables, in turn, can be derived through a couple of simple assimilations and metatheses.<sup>11</sup> We could posit that the actual and sole alternation for the beginning of the word is *e- : i-*, the *a-* of the eastern variants being the trace of another lexical/morphological element (for example, the result of a reanalysis of compounds like *\*ga(u)-i/enara*, lit. ‘night swallow’—cf. *kiñuri*—, or *\*basa-i/enara*, lit. ‘wild swallow’), although we are not able to clarify this issue now. Another explanation for the late emergence of the palatal semivowel in *ain(h)ara* would involve a depalatalisation process (cf. Sp. *botella* /boteʎa/ > Bsq. *boteila* ‘bottle’, for instance) after a hypocoristic palatalisation (cf. Hualde 2003, 39) of the *-rn-* cluster (cf. the personal name *Bernat* > *Beñat*), which conveniently occurs in the same geographical area where we find *ainara* (Santazilia, pers.comm.). Thus, a modern dialectal development such as *\*ernala* > *ernara* > *\*eñara* > *añera* > *ainera* > *ainara* may be proposed in order to account for this diphthong.

## 6

In view of the above, we propose the proto-form in (6) as the source for the modern Basque variants (*enara*, *elai*, *ain(h)ara*, etc.):

(6) *\*ernala*

<sup>10</sup> That is to say, whether it is of the *ernara/erlai* type (black spots), and whether it corresponds to the *\*eLana* or to the *\*eNala* proto-forms proposed by Michelena.

<sup>11</sup> We have not taken into account the Salazarese *kiñuri*, but it is worth recalling here what Michelena said about the initial consonant: ‘It is not clear, for example, whether the Salazarese *kiñuri* “swift, swallow” is conservative or innovative regarding *ainhara*, *enara*, etc. of other dialects, although the second option seems to be more probable’ (Michelena 1977, 252). But he then adds that ‘the Salazarese variant *kiñuri* (in Azkue) is but a very poor sign of an ancient initial occlusive which has not left any other trace’ (Michelena 1977, 326). The initial velar stop can, however, also be the result of the normalisation of hypocoristic variants (*tx-* → *k-*) such as the above-mentioned *txiñare*, given that the hypocoristic variant of an initial stop has historically been *tx-* (e.g. *txibi(s)ta* < *gibi(z)ta* ‘bow’, *Txatalin* < *Katalin* ‘Katherine’; Michelena 1977, 188–9; see also Egurtzegi 2013, 156).

According to this proposal, the diphthong in the first syllable would be secondary, derived either from the addition of a non-identified initial morpheme or by depalatalisation (see §5 above). Interestingly, all variants with a glottal fricative in the second syllable show a diphthong in the first syllable (or a trace of having had it, such as an initial /i-/ (< *ai-*) or a palatal nasal).

It may be worth listing some of the obstacles to positing this form as a genuine Basque word, i.e., if we take it as a simple PB-root (Lakarra 1995; 2009; 2011):

(7) Obstacles to proposing PB *\*ernala*:

(i) A consonant cluster (*-rn-*).

(ii) A word-initial vowel (*e-*) and a word-final vowel (*-a*).

(iii) Three syllables.

Taking into account the CVC structure of the PB-root, we would have to assume that this is either a compound/derivation or a loanword. Following the first option we could reconstruct something like *\*Cer-nal-a*, but there is no reconstructed root of the shape *\*Cer* or *\*nal* with a suitable meaning, nor any proto-suffix *\*a* (which cannot be the definite article, given that that would appear only centuries later, cf. *elai-a*). In addition, we would have to assume that the cluster *-rn-* has remained unaltered since PB. For all these reasons, it seems this word must be a loanword.

## 7

We have already fulfilled our initial aim, namely to give context the importance it deserves within phonological reconstruction, by means of reinterpreting the etymology of the Basque word for ‘swallow’ suggested by Michelena and avoiding the otherwise unknown fortition metathesis he proposed. Now, we will cautiously attempt to go further in our etymological exploration.

If we are to accept the borrowed origin of the Basque word for ‘swallow’, then we need to look at the languages with which Basque has come into contact over the years. To this end, we can refer to the well-known etymological dictionaries of the likewise well-known Catalan linguist J. Corominas (Corominas and Pascual 1980–91; Corominas 1980–91) for the following information: Sp. *golondrina* comes from Lat. *hirundo* (*erundo* already in the sixth–seventh century) through a hypothetical *\*eróndene*; Mozarab. *gondorina* from *\*endorina* (and this < *\*erondina*; cf. the attested *erundina*), and Arag. *engolondrina* would be a mixture between the Spanish and the reconstructed Mozarabic word; Occ. *ironda* (and *arendola* < *\*arondela*); the Fr. word was *aronde(lle)*, but since the Renaissance it has been spelled *hirondelle* (with the apparent intent of bringing it closer to the Latin spelling); and in Alavese Sp. we have *arandela* (Corominas and

Pascual 1980–91, vol. 3, 165–6). Lastly, in Catalan we find the words *oreneta* (< \**eroneta* < \**hirunditta*), *oronella* (< \**eronella* < \**hirundëlla*), and other variants such as *orenola* (< \**hiründüla*) (Corominas 1980–91, vol. 3, 105–9). Hence:

(8) Lat. *hirūndo* + diminutive suffix > Romance *erundina*, *arandela*, *arendola*, *ironda*, *aronde(lle)*, *oreneta*, *oronella*, *orenola* ...

This involves *i/-e-* at the beginning (since the *a-* would come from an *e-* before a rhotic, as Corominas and Pascual 1980–91 say in connection with the old French word); the consonantism *VrVn(d)VIV* (the final consonant can also be *t* or *n* depending on the diminutive suffix); and the vocalism *-i/eCa* at the end of the word if it bears a diminutive suffix. Now, if we compare the proposal in (6) above with the Romance forms (taking the diminutive *-ella* for our purpose),

(9) \**ernala* : \**erVn(d)ela*

we get a very striking similarity. If the above mentioned consonant cluster *-rn-* is ‘modern’, that is, if it resulted from a syncope, we can justify its preservation until relatively late and roll back our proto-form to \**erVnala*. In this way, we solve the problem of the consonant cluster. Although we get a longer form and an old intervocalic *-r-*, both of which put the word farther from a canonical PB root, the proto-form is now closer to the possible loanword.

Therefore, we posit an Old Romance borrowing for the Basque word for ‘swallow’, assuming few processes: assimilation or reduction of the consonant cluster (\**erVndéla* > \**erVn(n)éla*), syncope of the second vowel (> \**ernéla*) due to its pre-tonic position and the observed dialectal variation of the vowels (\**ernela* / \**ernala*). The first probably happened within the source language, while the second may well be due to developments within the Basque language, cf. *andre* < *andere* ‘lady’, or *esne* < *esene* ‘milk’, for instance.

#### CONCLUSION

In this paper we aimed to show (1) that a morphological (in the widest sense of the word) and phonological analysis of Basque words can reveal their native or foreign nature; and (2) the crucial importance of phonological context in reconstruction and, generally, for the explanation of phonological processes.

Although we have agreed with Stifter (2010, 153) with respect to the borrowed nature of the Basque word for ‘swallow’, the additional rhotic segment we have reconstructed in \**ernala* (the oldest form we can get by mere cross-dialectal reconstruction), moves the Basque proto-form further

away from the Celtic variants and seemingly closer to those of the Romance languages. Be that as it may, this rhotic is attested in the two patterns—cf. *ernara* and *erlai*—that gave rise to the diverse variants present in the modern language, and it is thus preferable to any appealing (as yet unattested) construct proposed for the proto-form. A Basque borrowing from Romance languages would, naturally, be much more modern and thus would make Basque an unsuitable donor for the Common Celtic proto-form.

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