

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

Juliette Blevins  
The Graduate Center, CUNY

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**

- Blevins, J. 2004. *Evolutionary phonology: the emergence of sound patterns*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blevins, J. 2015. Evolutionary Phonology: a holistic approach to sound change typology. In P. Honeybone and J. Salmons (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Historical Phonology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 485-500.
- Blevins, J. To appear. *Advances in Proto-Basque Reconstruction with evidence for the Proto-Indo-European-Euskarian Hypothesis*. New York: Routledge.
- Lakarra, J.A. 1995. Reconstructing the pre-Proto-Basque root, in J.I. Hualde, J. Lakarra & R.L. Trask (eds.), *Towards a history of the Basque language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 189-206.
- Martinet, A. 1955. *Économie des changements phonétiques*. Francke: Berne.
- Michelena, L. 1977 [2011]. *Fonética histórica vasca (Luis Michelena. Obras Completas VI. Supplements of ASJU 59)*. Donostia-San Sebastián.
- Kümmel, M. J. 2007. *Konsonantenwandel: Bausteine zu einer Typologie des Lautwandels und ihre Konsequenzen*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.
- Stevens, M. and J. Harrington. 2016. The phonetic origins of /s/-retraction: Acoustic and perceptual origins from Australian English. *Journal of Phonetics* 58: 118-134.
- Stuart-Smith, J., M. Sonderegger, R. Macdonald, and M. McAuliffe. 2018. A cross-dialectal study of /s/-retraction in English. Paper presented at BAAP (British Academic Association of Phoneticians) 2018, University of Kent, Canterbury, England.
- Trask, R.L. 1997. *The history of Basque*. London: Routledge.