

Basque is (still) an aspiration language

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Laryngeal Realism (Honeybone 2005; etc.) differentiates two language types: (true) voice, with voiced-voiceless; and aspiration, with aspirated-unaspirated (fortis-lenis). In Element Theory, |L| marks nasality in sonorants and lenis/voiced in obstruents in voice languages; in aspiration systems, fortis/aspirated is marked by |H|. Tenuis obstruents are underspecified.

Basque is often considered an originally fortis-lenis system, which switched to voice in all but its northeasternmost dialects (Martinet 1950; Michelena 1977; Trask 1997; Egurtzegi 2014, 2019). An alternative approach (e.g., Hualde 2018) regards northeastern aspiration as an innovation. The present paper supports the former view, but also argues that *all* present-day varieties of Basque *phonologically* belong to the aspiration type.

The argument and data come from Standard Basque and western varieties (Getxo, Gernika, etc.) (to contrast the eastern dialect area):

(i) “Post-nasal voicing” (widely attested; data (from Standard Basque) in (1)): we regard |H| as floating in the suffixes/clitics; whenever it links, they surface voiceless; or else it deletes, which produces a laryngeally unmarked consonant, phonetically interpreted as voiced. “Voicing” happens in place-sharing, partial geminates (e.g., *irun-go*), where |H| cannot link since that would be incompatible with the nasal in the structure. In heterorganic sequences (e.g., *hil-ko*), nothing prevents |H| from linking.

(ii) “s-voicing” (e.g., Getxo; data in (2)): /s/ has a floating |H|, linked only in licensed positions, i.e., before a filled V-slot or a final empty nucleus (parametrically a licensor – e.g., *burue[s]*), or spread from C2 (e.g., *burue[s] pentsa*). “s-voicing” happens when |H| cannot link in an unlicensed position.

(iii) Coalescence across a word-boundary (e.g., Getxo; data in (3)): since fortis are |H|-marked but lenes are not, when they fuse across a word-boundary they will produce a voiceless outcome. The lenis stop’s empty Lar node inherits the |H| of the deleted consonant. (In *bat naiko* > *ba[n]aiko*, |H| cannot link since that would be incompatible with the nasal.)

(1) <i>irun-[g]o</i> ‘of Irún’	<i>irun-[d]ik</i> ‘from I.’	cf. <i>bilbo-[t]ik</i> ‘from B.’	<i>hil-[k]o</i> ‘will kill’
(2) <i>e[z]ne</i> ‘milk’		cf. <i>burue[s]</i> ‘with a head’	
	<i>arna[z] luse</i> ‘long breath’	<i>burue[s] pentsa</i> ‘to think with the head’	
(3) <i>bat bakarik</i>	<i>ba[p]akarik</i> ‘only one’	<i>suk dusti</i>	<i>su[t]usti</i> ‘you-ERG everything’
cf. <i>bat plasan</i>	<i>ba[p]lasan</i> ‘one in the square’	<i>bat naiko</i>	<i>ba[n]aiko</i> ‘one (is) enough’

All three analyses heavily rely on |H| being the laryngeal prime and on underspecified obstruents interpreted by the *phonetics* as voiced, indicating that Basque is (still) an |H|-system *phonologically*, therefore it is (still) an aspiration language.

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