

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

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This work presents evidence for a genetic relationship between Proto-Basque, mother language of Euskara, and Proto-Indo-European. The argument is based on a new reconstruction of Proto-Basque that differs significantly from previous proposals.

Part I presents a new reconstruction of Proto-Basque, the mother language of modern Basque varieties, historical Basque, and Aquitanian. Proto-Basque is reconstructed on the basis of internal reconstruction, with a focus on 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. The reconstruction of Proto-Basque builds on the monumental work of Michelena (1957, 1961; 1977), and the more recent CVC root theory of Lakarra (1995, 2013), but differs from both of these in significant ways. Labials *m and *ph are reconstructed, where both are absent in Michelena's reconstruction. A single fricative *s is proposed, in contrast to the Michelena's proposal of Proto-Basque *s and *z. A single *r is proposed, in contrast to Michelena's *r vs. *R. A limited number of root-initial consonant clusters are reconstructed, including initial *sC clusters and *{b,d,g}h clusters. While many roots have the form (C)VC, other root shapes occur as well, including CCVC, (C)VCV, and (C)VCCV. Proto-Basque reconstructions based on these methods have a surprising property: many of them closely resemble Proto-Indo-European roots.

In Part II superficial similarities between this new Proto-Basque and Proto-Indo-European are examined by use of the comparative method. Regular sound correspondences are found 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 descended from the same, older, mother tongue. The radical nature of this hypothesis demands that chance be ruled out as a factor in the sound correspondences and lexical correspondences observed. An attempt to identify individual identifying evidence in the sense of Nichols (1996) is successful.

In Part III, several problems in Proto-Indo-European phonology and morphology are briefly addressed making use of the Proto-Basque evidence. These include the Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirate series, *bh, *dh, *gh and its typological status; the potential origins of certain root-extensions; and the origins of *s-mobile.