

Bipositionality and Place Licensing in Getxo Basque Palatalization

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1. The phenomenon and previous treatment

Hualde & Bilbao (HB) (1992) report a fascinating case of palatalization found in Getxo Basque. The alternations happen both inside the prosodic word: *ojn* ‘foot’ → *oj̃n*-e ‘the foot.ABS-SG’, *mutil* ‘boy’ → *mutiɬ*-e ‘the boy.ABS-SG’ (cf. HB’s analysis of *troju* ‘knot’ and *akuɬu* ‘stable’ as /troinu/ and /akuilu/, respectively) and, without loss of a triggering glide, across the phrase boundary: *ojn*-*andi* ‘big foot’, *mutiɬ*-*andi* ‘big boy’.

HB note that the process creates something of a paradox, since it seems to both apply and not apply at the phrasal level. This is because the palatalization rule is sensitive to both the leftward phonological context within the word level *and* the rightward phonological context of the phrase level. The trigger and the target of palatalization need to belong to the same ‘word’ /in##V/ and /il##V/: *mutil* + *andi* → *mutiɬ*-*andi* ‘big boy’ vs. *mendi* ‘mountain’ + *luse* ‘long’ → *mendi*-*luse* **mendi*-ɬuse ‘long mountain’, but still, the rule will only apply if the phrasal juncture is vowel-initial: *mutil* + *bet* → *mutil*-β*et* **mutiɬ*-β*et* ‘a boy’.

HB’s solution is to claim that the rule is lexical and has many exceptions in loanwords and at least one in a native root: *arruina* ‘ruin’, *isilik* ‘quiet’. HB’s rule changes all /n/ and /l/ after /i, j/, even those in closed syllables (not surface true): /agin/ ‘tooth’ → **agiɲ* and *agin* + *bari* → **agiɲ*-*bari*. These are then corrected in a Duke-of-York derivation by post-lexical neutralization rules: /agin/ → *agiɲ* → *agin* ‘tooth’ and nasal place assimilation: *agiɲ* + *bari* → *agim*-*bari* ‘new tooth’.

2. Problems with the account

In addition to being relatively complicated, with numerous stipulations and orderings that are not independently attested, this account misses two observations: (a) The rule is actually exceptionless (loanwords included) *iff* its application is exclusively at morpheme boundaries. (b) The rule can be related to the positional distribution of place features of nasals and laterals, as well as the process of nasal place assimilation across word boundaries.

3. Alternative account

An alternative account is possible based on positional underspecification of nasals and laterals, and the spreading of place into derived onsets created by the bipositional spreading of word-final codas into rightward vowel-initial morphemes. This will be related to Getxo Basque’s general rules of nasal place assimilation. The analysis is formalized in the framework of Strict CV (Scheer 2004).

The advantage of this analysis is that it can fully unify the so called ‘lexical exceptions’, as well as avoiding HB’s Duke-of-York derivation and HB’s necessary ordering stipulations between palatalization and nasal place assimilation. Moreover, on this account, this process of Getxo palatalization does not require a division between word and phrase-level phonology, instead it exploits other general phonological facts about the language.

3.1. Observations

- ❖ Closed syllables are defined by phonetically silent, phonologically empty V-slots, either final or medial. Consonants before them are positionally weak. In Strict CV terms, they are not Licensed (±Lic).
- ❖ In (Getxo) Basque in general (with the exception of affixal -k), all consonants before empty V-slots must be coronal (HB). We take this to be the default specification of place. As codas, laterals and nasals show strong place of articulation agreement effects with ensuing consonants: *asal* > *asaɬ*-*jana* ‘eaten peel’, *gison* > *gisom*-*barri* ‘new man’.

- ❖ Accidental gaps aside, laterals and nasals are contrastive before filled V-slots: **ama** ‘mother’, **sana** ‘vein’, **troju** ‘knot’. Palatal nasals are not taken as underlyingly contrastive in HB, they are derived from /in/ and /il/, but this makes very many loanwords and some native roots exceptional: **makina** ‘machinist’, **isilik** ‘silent’. Word finally, however, there are no exceptions. All in+V, il+V contexts alternate: **makina** ‘machine’, **fusil** / **fusila**-e ‘the rifle-ABS.SG’.
- ❖ [j] in diphthongs is derived from UR /i/, it alternates with zero within ‘word’ but not across ‘words’: **oin** > **ojn**-e ‘the foot-ABS.SG’ > **ojn**-andi ‘big foot’.

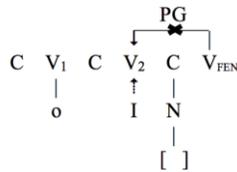
3.2. Propositions

- ❖ Nasal/lateral cannot host a place feature contrast in a -Lic position.
- ❖ Coronal is the default place of articulation. Final placeless nasal/lateral will surface as coronal: **fusil** ‘rifle’, **ojn** ‘foot’.
- ❖ Placeless nasal/laterals become +Lic by vowel suffixation: **fusila**-e, **ojn**-e ‘ABS-SG’.
- ❖ Nasal/lateral will agree with the closest available place feature, e.g. in an adjacent consonant (**gisom-barri** ‘new man’).
- ❖ Placeless nasal/lateral will become bipositional before V-initial words but without a place feature to take from an ensuing consonant (since its onset is empty). Once bipositional, the placeless nasal/lateral will be +Lic, so requires a place feature. It obtains it by assimilation with [l] of /i/.
- ❖ The /i/ of diphthongs deletes or not before palatalization according to the distribution of Government, which is standard to Strict CV.

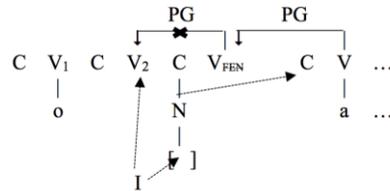
3.3. Representations

(1) Word edges (Sandhi)

[ojn] ‘foot’

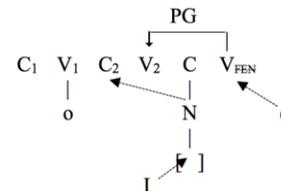


[ojnandi] ‘big foot’



(2) Suffixation

[ojne] ‘the foot-ABS.SG’



References

- Hualde, J. I. & X. Bilbao. 1992. *A Phonological Study of the Basque Dialect of Getxo*. Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa.
- Scheer, T. 2004. *A Lateral Theory of Phonology. Vol 1: What is CVCV, and why should it be?* Mouton de Gruyter.