

Japanese and Basque Language Similarities

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Japanese and Basque Language Similarities

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Introduction

This paper augments an earlier paper, 'Japanese, Basque and the Languages of Eurasia: The Question of Genetic Affiliation' (Thornton 2011, 33-42). It adds to that paper more contextual background and presents some newer, related research and corrections. In that earlier paper I pointed out eleven grammatical and five phonological similarities between Basque and Japanese, arguing that these similarities, or parallels, may be taken as evidence of an ancient genetic connection between the two languages. The paper undertakes to show that between Pre- and modern Basque and Old and modern Japanese there are evident a number of striking grammatical and phonological similarities the presence of which cannot be attributed simply to coincidence.

That paper and the present one are indebted to Joseph H. Greenberg's concept of the grammatical formative, as exploited in his *Indo-European and its Closest Relatives* (vol. 1, 2000). Greenberg, late Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics at Stanford University (California), hypothesizes in his book a Eurasiatic family of languages extending west to east across the Eurasian continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond, to the islands of the northwest Pacific, including Kyūshū and Honshū (Japanese), Hokkaidō and Sakhalin (Ainu), the Kamchatka Peninsula (Chukotian), and the Aleutians and northwestern North America (Eskimo-Aleut). The hypothesis encompasses Indo-European, Uralic, Altaic, Gilyak, Korean-Japanese-Ainu, Chukotian, and Eskimo-Aleut. My grammatical evidence for a genetic link between Japanese with Basque cites nine of Joseph H. Greenberg's seventy-two grammatical formatives that comprise his grammatical evidence for Euroasiatic (Greenberg 2000, 3-5 and 17-21).

As in my earlier paper, in addition to Greenberg's nine grammatical formatives I hypothesize two additional ones, namely Perfective Participle I and 'Mysterious' Prefix I.

Greenberg based his evidence for Eurasiatic on a method called "mass comparison" of languages. The validity and accuracy of this heretofore unorthodox method of language comparison has been widely challenged by many linguists as the researcher must by necessity extend the scope of the comparisons to include languages outside of his immediate expertise or familiarity, thereby increasing chances of error or misinterpretation. Nevertheless, the method is defended by others in the field, including, notably, Greenberg's disciple at Stanford University Merrit Ruhlen. It seems to me defensible on the grounds that mass

comparison can identify a broader horizon of possible genetic relatedness within which particularities are open to correction or refinement by the various respective specialists. Prior to arriving at his Eurasiatic through mass comparison Greenberg had applied the method to researching the language families of Africa, and then to the indigenous language families of the Americas. His mapping of the African continent into four language families is now accepted by virtually everyone. His charting of the bulk of the indigenous language families of North and South America into just one family, the extensive Amerindian, while more controversial than the African classification, has gained adherents. The remaining, much smaller Na-Dene grouping, found only in western North America, is much less controversial than the Amerindian. However, proposals by some linguists to include Na-Dene within a much larger Dene-Caucasian grouping (into which they also assign Basque, as will be seen below), is quite controversial.

As in my earlier paper I am indebted as well to the Spanish-Basque scholar of Basque José Ignacio Hualde (Hualde 2002) for his discovery of striking similarities between three Basque and three Japanese accentual features. These features are found respectively in the Biscayan dialect of Basque, the most conservative, and in Tokyo Japanese, also a conservative dialect. A fourth phonological similarity of Japanese and Basque is sequential voicing or *rendaku*. An example of this phenomenon will be seen below.

One must agree with Hualde that the three accentual features are “surprisingly similar” (Hualde 2002, 4). Despite this observation, Hualde rejects the possibility of a genetic link between Basque and Japanese.

In the earlier paper it was argued that the grammatical and phonological similarities between modern Basque and Japanese must be ascribed to Basque and Japanese each having preserved remarkably intact a number of ancient features due to relative geographic and cultural isolation. This argument is based on the observed fact that monocultures change and evolve more slowly than cultures that are a product of interaction or mixing with other cultures.

Background

The ancestral form of the Japanese language, introduced into the archipelago from the Korean peninsula, was surely long isolated, having subdued and replaced the language of the indigenous less-advanced Jōmon culture shortly before the start of the Yayoi culture, about 300 BCE (Hudson 1994). Old Japanese remained relatively isolated until its first contacts with the Chinese language about 700 ACE.

The degree of isolation of Pre-Basque appears to have been less than that of Old Japanese. Roman coins with inscriptions such as place-names and other kinds of evidence show that speakers of a language very close to Basque called Aquitanian were present in Gaul, the area north and east of the Pyrenees in France and to its east before and into the Roman era. Present-day Basque, of course, is spoken in northern Spain and southwestern France, both north and south of the Pyrenees Mountains. It is clear the Aquitanian-Basques migrated

from the east. According to evidence such as the presence in the Basque country of non-Basque – often Indo-European – place-names there is reason to believe that Aquitanian-Basque speakers in the centuries preceding the arrival of the Romans were already in contact with Indo-European speakers (Celts and others) and speakers of other languages, such as the mysterious Iberian language, which we can read but not decipher. The comparative grammatical evidence from Basque and Japanese bears this out. For if we assume that the ancestral Basque and Japanese languages were once much more alike than the modern languages, Basque clearly has developed in a sense a greater grammatical specification than Japanese. I base this assumption on presumed innovations in modern Basque that have no counterparts in modern Japanese. These include the presence of a plural number in the noun as well as the fact that Basque, unlike Japanese, is able to depart from its basic, and no doubt originally fixed, subject-object-verb (SOV) word order for purposes of emphasis and expression, and that the modified precedes the modifier (adjective follows noun) as in the Romance languages, evident in French and Spanish (Trask 1997, 38). Nevertheless, the fact that Basque is a very conservative language (as affirmed by Trask and others) leads me to believe that Pre-Basque was relatively isolated or withdrawn into itself. Moreover, to support this view there are strong regional and dialectal differences within spoken Basque even though the contiguous territories of the Spanish Basque country and the French Basque country together are not as large as one might expect considering their dialectal diversity. The opposite is observed for Japanese (Hudson 1994, 241–242).

The Basque self-designation for a Basque person is *euskaldun* and the Basque language is *euskara*. Written Basque employs the Roman alphabet and is orthographically similar to Spanish with a few exceptions. The name “Basque” is thought to come from the ethnic name of the Vasconians, a people who inhabited the region or nearby and whose language has not survived.

The standard, or default, view of the status of Euskara is as a linguistic isolate, that is, a language not scientifically demonstrated to be related genetically to any other known language. The traditional argument for regarding Basque as a linguistic isolate is that Basque supposedly exhibits no linguistic features or traits which match or correspond to any features of any other known language, whether living or extinct (but are known to us from fragments such as ancient inscriptions).

The many attempts to connect Basque genetically to another language, including one or more of the languages spoken in the northern Caucasus, have been challenged by numerous linguists. One of the strongest proponents of classifying Basque as an isolate, the authoritative scholar of Basque R. L. Trask states: ‘Basque is a genetically isolated language: there is not the slightest shred of evidence that it is related to any other living language, and the frequent assertions to the contrary in the literature may be safely disregarded. On the other hand, the fragmentary remains of the ancient Aquitanian language of southwestern Gaul are so transparently Basque that we may safely regard Aquitanian as an ancestral form of Basque. Consequently, Basque is beyond dispute the sole surviving pre-Indo-European language of western Europe’ (Trask 1977, 35).

As a part of the support for his assertion is Trask's dismissal of the possibility of a genetic connection between Basque and Iberian, written fragments of which are preserved in an indigenous script which indicate that this extinct language was spoken over much of the east and south of the Iberian Peninsula. He observes that Basque arrived at its present-day location from the east, arriving first in Gaul (southeastern France) and that the language is very ancient ('ancient' in the sense of preserving ancient features relatively unchanged). 'Basque in the last thousand years appears to have been an astonishingly conservative language ...' (Trask 1977, 47). He contends that Basque 'indisputably represents the last survival of the pre-Indo-European languages of Europe' (1977, 34)

Trask points out that many place names in the Basque country are not of Basque origin and that of these many appear to be Indo-European, supporting the belief that 'much of the modern Basque Country was not Basque-speaking, or least not predominantly Basque-speaking, in the Roman era ...' (Trask 1997, 38).

In the view of some Russian and American linguists and others, including John Bengtson in the United States, modern Basque is related to the languages of the northern Caucasus and other languages as a part of Dene-Caucasian, a hypothesized linguistic superfamily or mega-superfamily (Bengtson 2009). The general consensus is it consists of six families: North Caucasian (consisting of a northwestern group, including Abkhaz, and a central and north-eastern group, including Chechen and Dagestanian, Basque, Na-Dene, Sino-Tibetan (Tibetan and the Chinese family of languages), Burushaski (a small isolated language in northern Pakistan), and the Ket family of languages, in Siberia. It does not include Japanese; therefore any genetic link between Japanese and Basque must be considered indeed a very distant one in time and distance. Still, we are left with the reality of the striking similarities between the Basque and Japanese grammatical formatives—similarities that it is impossible, in my view, to dismiss as chance occurrences. Na-Dene is found in a large area of north-western Canada, where it is represented by Haida and other languages, and in small areas of the southwestern United States, represented chiefly by Apache and Navajo.

As for Japanese, proto-Japanese arrived on Kyūshū from the Korean peninsula, having traversed the peninsula from north to south from the northernmost of the three Korean kingdoms, Koguryō. It is believed that the Koguryō speech, of which we know little, was more distantly related to the dialects of the two other kingdoms. The question of how it seems to have retained its distinctness as its speakers migrated southward along the Korean peninsula to its southern tip remains unsettled.

Thus the Basque and Japanese grammatical and phonological features which we find to be so similar to each other appear to have been preserved relatively unchanged in their respective environments over the span of at least a few thousand years. Therefore the argument for a probable ancient genetic connection rests on the assumption that there once existed a common ancestor spoken somewhere medially between the eastern and western geographical extremes of Eurasia, no doubt somewhat south-centrally on the continent, perhaps in the area of the southern Caucasus, between the Caspian and the Black Seas.

To be sure, the claim that modern Basque and Japanese, located at the western and

eastern extremities of the Eurasian continent respectively and separated by thousands of kilometers and thousands of years, strains the credibility of any argument for a genetic connection. As for Basque, the prevalent view among the majority of linguists remains today that Basque is a linguistic isolate.

As for the origins of Japanese, the situation is a little different, though the question of whether Japanese is related to Korean or Ainu still is debated among some linguists. Greenberg is one of those who link Japanese to Korean and Ainu, and more distantly to Altaic and other languages on the Eurasian continent, as we have noted. His book places the case for an Altaic connection, as put forward in R. A. Miller's *Japanese and the Other Altaic Languages* (Miller 1971), into a more accurate perspective.

Modern Basque is spoken in northern Spain and southwestern France, in the territories on either side of the Pyrenees Mountains, but unfortunately it is in a struggle for long-term survival. There are strong regional and dialectal differences within spoken Basque even though the contiguous territories of the French and Spanish Basque country together are not as large as one might expect considering the richness of its dialectical diversity. According to Trask, '[M]ost specialists are satisfied that the Basque language was introduced into much of the Basque country in post-Roman times, most likely during the Visigothic period Consequently, the traditional view that Basque is a language of Spain which has extended itself to the north of the Pyrenees has had to be revised; we now see Basque as a language of Gaul which has spread south and west' (Trask 1997, 38).

Many attempts to connect Basque genetically with other languages, living or dead, including the ancient languages still spoken in the northern Caucasus, have all been questioned or contested by most historical linguists. Trask, one of the foremost proponents of this isolationist position, aggressively presents the traditional view: 'Basque is a genetically isolated language: there is not the slightest shred of evidence that it is related to any other living language, and the frequent assertions to the contrary in the literature may be safely disregarded. On the other hand, the fragmentary remains of the ancient Aquitanian language of southwestern Gaul are so transparently Basque that we may safely regard Aquitanian as an ancestral form of Basque. Consequently, Basque is beyond dispute the sole surviving pre-Indo-European languages of western Europe' (Trask 1997, 35).

Elsewhere Trask likewise dismisses possibilities of a genetic connection between Basque and any known ancient language other than Aquitanian, including Iberian, written fragments of which are preserved in an indigenous script which indicates that the language occupied much of the east and south of the Iberian Peninsula. Trask notes that Basque arrived at its present-day location from the east, arriving first in Gaul (southeastern France). He confirms that the language is very ancient, encompassing 'ancient' in the linguistic sense that it is very conservative, having changed very little going back to the earliest recorded written evidence of it, dating from the time of the arrival of the Romans in Gaul. Thus Basque has preserved many ancient linguistic features: 'Basque in the last thousand years appears to have been an astonishingly conservative language ...' (Trask 1997, 47).

I think we must consider that Basque is most probably related to the languages of the

northern Caucasus (e.g. Abkhaz, in the western group, and Chechen, in the eastern) and agree with Trask that Basque ‘indisputably represents the last survival of the pre-Indo-European languages of Europe’ (Trask 1997, 34).

Phonological evidence for a genetic link

1. Accentuation: Tokyo Japanese and Bizkayan Basque

José Ignacio Hualde has demonstrated that the accentuation of northwestern Bizkayan Basque (Gernika dialect) is virtually identical to that of Tokyo Japanese (Hualde 2002).

As Hualde observes, the accentual system of Basque found in the northern Bizkaian area of the Basque country, a very conservative system, is ‘surprisingly similar’ to the Tokyo accent. Following is a brief sketch of a few of his points and contrast. He identifies “at least three prosodic properties” that the two dialects share:

- a. ‘a lexical contrast between accented and unaccented words’, with most words unaccented;
- b. ‘a phrase-initial tonal rise (LH), which produces a high plateau from the second syllable up to the accented syllable’;
- c. ‘accents are always falling contours (HL)’.

However, ‘[o]ne aspect in which Northern Bizkaian Basque differs from Japanese is in the assignment of phrase-final accents to lexically unaccented words in certain cases’ (Hualde 2002, 4).

In addition, he points out that ‘Northern Bizkaian Basque also appears to share with Tokyo Japanese the property of not using duration as a correlate of accent. As in Japanese ..., accent in these Basque dialects seems to be mostly a tonal phenomenon, without durational correlates ...’. (Hualde, 5).

He concludes: ‘On balance, the extent to which the Northern Bizkaian Basque and the Tokyo Japanese accentual system resemble each other is surprising, given the lack of genetic relationship or geographical contact between these two languages. But perhaps even more surprising is the fact that these two languages appear to have arrived at very similar endpoints starting from quite different beginnings’ (5).

Rei Fukui in a typological comparison of the Hamgyeongdo accent system of Korean, the system showing ‘closer correspondences to the Middle Korean accent system than any other dialects’, states: ‘From the synchronic and typological points of view, it is also striking that this system is quite similar to that of the Tokyo dialect of Japanese’ (Fukui 2002). One of the similarities Fukui points out is that ‘the distinctions between unaccented and final-accented nouns can be made only when an enclitic particle is attached. Otherwise they have identical pitch shapes such as LH, LLH, LLLH, and so on, and this is another similarity to the Tokyo dialect of Japanese’ (Fukui, 2).

One common point of the Northern Bizkaian Basque, Korean Hamgyeongdo and Tokyo

Japanese dialects is the presence of both lexically accented and unaccented words. It is significant that these are the notably conservative dialects in Basque and Korean, with the Kanto dialect being among the most conservative of the Japanese dialects.

2. Vowels and selected consonants

Phonologically Basque and Japanese have much in common. One difference is that Basque distinguishes *l* and *r* phonemically; that is, the two make a difference in meaning whereas in Japanese the two occur phonetically but do not distinguish a difference in meaning. However, in Basque *r* and *l* may be reversed dialectally. It is interesting that in both Basque and Japanese the articulations of *r* and *d* are extremely close to each other, yet have remained distinct and apparently over thousands of years have never fallen together into one single phoneme.

The vowel inventory of the two languages is virtually identical, though there are slight phonetic differences (of course many languages as well have the same inventory; Spanish and Italian are just two of them).

Japanese:	i u	Basque:	i u
	e o		e o
	a		a

As for the consonants, there are numerous differences (see Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina 2003, 16 for a chart of Basque consonants). Of significance for our comparison is the absence in Basque and Japanese of the voiced labiodental fricative *v*, the voiced palatal fricative *j*, and of voiced bi-labial *w* – the latter due to the absence of lip rounding. In contrast to Japanese is the presence in all the modern Basque dialects of the voiceless labio-dental fricative [f] (Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina 2003, 25). (In Japanese the consonant usually identified in romanized Japanese as *f* is actually a bi-labial fricative, an allophone of *h* occurring before *u*.) Another difference is Japanese does not have sounds corresponding to the pronunciation of the Basque sibilants *s* and *z*.

3. Lexicons

As for lexical cognates the following pairings are highly speculative. Most or many of these lexical similarities may be merely superficial; a few are quite promising:

- (1) Bq *bai* ‘yes’
 Jp *hai* ‘yes’.

If *bai* and *hai* are considered cognate (by no means certain), we can speak of some kind of alternation of [h] and [b]; it is safer merely to take notice of the alternation in Japanese of [h]~[b] in the place names Sagamihara (‘Sagami field’), Hunabara (‘sea field’) and Asiuara (‘reed field’). These are examples of progressive voicing in Japanese, in this case all involving an original [h]. For comparison, we note that Basque *k* voices to *g* after *n* and *l*.

- (2) Bq. *ba* 'yes; well, yes'
 Jp. *maa* 'well, yes, but ...'

This lexical comparison may be on particularly shaky ground.

(Another use of *maa* is as an interjection of intensification 'very', as in *maa kirei!* 've-ery pretty!') As for the similarity of articulation in *ba* (bilabial plosive *b*) and *ma* (bilabial nasal *m*) it may be relevant to recall that Pre-Basque shows no evidence of the presence of *m* (Trask 1997, 126, 133–135).

- (3) Bq. *neska* 'little girl, girl'
 Jp. *ne-san* 'older sister; Miss, girl (familiar form of address)'

Compare *ne* with Jp. *mesu* 'female': again, there is no evidence of *m* in Pre-Basque.

- (4) Bq. *bide* 'road'
 Jp. *miti* 'road'

Again perhaps a case of the absence of *m* in Pre-Basque?

- (5) Bq. *anai* 'brother'
 Jp. *ani* 'elder brother'

This resemblance may be merely coincidence.

- (6) Bq. *eta* 'and'
 Japanese *to* 'and', *ia* 'and']

Is Japanese *ia* possibly cognate with *e* of Basque *eta* and Japanese *to* cognate with Basque *ta*? This is pure speculation on my part.

- (7) Bq. *ur* 'water': Old Jp *uru-p* 'be wet, clouded, moist', Modern Jp *urum-* 'be wet', 'soak'; Jp. *ura* 'bay, inlet, creek, gulf' (Greenberg 135). Cf. Proto-Indo-European **uer*, **wēr-* 'water, flow, river'; also note Proto-Altaic **ur* 'flow').

- (8) Bq. *Hori bakarrik da* 'There are only those.'
 Jp. *So e bakari da*: 'There is only that.'

- (9) Bq. *azari ezkontza* 'fox's (or vixen's) wedding' = 'sunshower'
 Jp. *kitune no yomeiri* 'fox's wedding' = 'sunshower'

In Bulgarian 'bear's wedding' denotes 'sunshower'; in Puerto Rican Spanish the related

expression on the occurrence of a sunshower is *se casó una bruja* ‘a witch has just wed’. Native speakers of Spanish from Spain, Colombia and other Spanish-speaking countries reported to me they had never heard this expression. Of significance to our argument here is that the idea of ‘wedding’ is a common element shared by all four of the languages investigated and the preliminary impression that possibly only in Basque and Japanese among the languages of Eurasia do we find the agent of sunshower to be the fox. The fox-as-agent version would seem to be the best candidate for the original or most ancient version because of a mental association of the sunshower as unexpected and ‘deceptive’ with the fox, the animal most characterized by cleverness and the ability to deceive. Of course many more of the languages of Eurasia must be subjected to this test of the sunshower-fox-wedding triad before conclusions can be drawn. It merits additional research.

4. Typological similarities

The languages of the world are seen to conform to a few basic types. Typological similarities or correspondences among languages therefore are not proof of genetic relatedness. However, a comparison of some typological features of Basque and Japanese is relevant to the argument for a genetic link put forward in this paper.

Typologically, Basque is similar to Japanese in that both Basque and Japanese have SOV word order (subject+object+verb); however, they differ in that in Basque the standard word order can be violated. Japanese is a typologically perfect example of an SOV-language; Basque, also SOV, is not rigidly verb-final. In Basque more than one word order can be possible, with each variant expressing a difference emphasis or nuance.

First, an example of the canonical word order:

Hau Bilboko tren a da. (*tren* = ‘train’, *a* = determiner ‘a/the’)
 this Bilbo-for train-the is-COPULA
 this for-Bilbo the-train is-COPULA (the basic word order)
 ‘This is the train for Bilbo (the city of Bilbo)’

Permissible variants are:

Bilboko tren a hau.
Hau da Bilboko tren.
Bilboko tren hau da.

Note that only one out of the three variants is verb-final.

Basque and Japanese are alike in lacking relative pronouns. Of course, many other languages are similar in this respect.

There is no comparative degree grammatical formant in Japanese or Basque, such as, for example, English *-er*). In Japanese the comparative is expressed by ‘from’ (*iori*). The Basque comparative is *baino*; it apparently carries no connotation of the concept of ‘from’.

In Japanese modifiers precede nouns whereas in Basque the modifier follows the modified word:

neska ederra
girl-DET beautiful
'a beautiful girl'

Japanese has postpositions whereas Basque has noun-phrase suffixes (eg. *Bilbo-n* 'in Bilbo' in contrast to Japanese *Bilbo ni*). Note, however, that in both languages *n* is the formant for locative expressions.

Basque has a definite/indefinite article: *-a* 'a/the', unlike Japanese.

Japanese is an agglutinative language. For example, in the following example *wa* attaches in a fixed order:

hito + tati + wa

whereas Basque suffixes sometimes are fusional.

Basque has singular and plural number:

euskaldun 'a Basque person', *euskaldunak* 'Basque persons'
(*euskaldun* + fill-vowel *-a-* + plural formant *-k*):

Basque verbal endings show person and number:

Ni hemen bizi naiz 'I live here'
Jon hemen bizi da 'Jon lives here'

Basque is an ergative-type language whereas Japanese is typologically accusative:

Ni hemen bizi naiz. 'I live here'. (Intransitive)
I-NOM here live am

The Basque transitive marker *-k* is suffixed to the subject:

Nik kafea nahi dut. 'I want a-coffee'. (Transitive)
I-ERG a-coffee want is-COP

The base form of the Basque verb is in *-u* except when the stem terminates in *l*, *s*, or *n*. When it terminates in *l* or *s* the ending *-u* is replaced by *-i*. A class of verbs in *-n* were shown by Trask to have evolved out of *-u* in under a specific set of conditions (Trask 1990, 111–128).

Finally, both Basque and Japanese are focus-prominent languages.

Obviously, Basque and Japanese as we know them today appear quite distinct from each other, not least in their lexicons. Indeed, attempts to identify more than a small number of possible Japanese-Basque lexical cognates seem to bear no fruit. Take, for example, the parallel between Japanese and Basque Derivational K (realized in either language as *ko*) and crucial to my argument for genetic connectivity. Whereas Japanese *ko-* derives diminutives (e.g. *koneko* ‘kitten’) and Basque *-ko* likewise derives diminutives (e.g. *mandako* ‘mule’)¹, only in Japanese do we find a corresponding independent lexeme *ko* with semantic content (‘child’).

Grammatical evidence for a genetic link

Evidence based on Greenberg’s Eurasiatic grammatical formatives

For Trask the similarity of Basque *-ko* to Proto-Indo-European *-ko* cannot be fully explained given the present state of our knowledge. Though he recognizes ‘something approaching a convergence’ between the behavior of PIE **ko* and Basque ‘derivational’ *-ko*, the absence of any convergence between PIE **ko* and Basque ‘relational’ *-ko*, the primary or ‘cardinal’ function of *ko*, forces him to dismiss the idea of a common origin as a possibility, such as A. Tovar’s research into whether there may have taken place an extended period of close contact between Pre-Basque and PIE may suggest (Trask 1991, 373–376).

Joseph H. Greenberg’s work on grammatical formatives as evidence for a Eurasiatic family of languages has enabled me to identify, in Japanese especially, grammatical structures which are morphologically and syntactically parallel not only to Basque derivational *-ko* but to Basque relational *-ko* as well, thus fulfilling (if one accepts Greenberg’s Eurasiatic hypothesis) Trask’s conditional requirement for a convergence of PIE **-ko* with Basque relational *ko*.

1. Diminutive K: Basque *ko* and Japanese *ko*

1a. Basque ‘relational’ suffix *-ko* and Japanese ‘relational’ suffix *-ko*

The Old Japanese Noun-*ga*-Noun compound displays morphological and syntactic parallels to the Basque Noun-*ko*-Noun compound, e.g. Japanese Yui-*ga*-hama (‘Yui Beach’—the Old Japanese examples are mostly place names), a close parallel to Basque *burukomin* ‘headache’ (*buru* ‘head’, *min* ‘pain’). Basque Noun-*ko*-Noun compounds are of limited distribution, as are Japanese Noun-*ga*-Noun compounds—in Japanese these are limited to place names. There is abundant evidence that Japanese *ga* comes from *ko*: the alternation *o~a* is frequent in Old Japanese, and the voicing of stops in noun compounds, due to sequential voicing, remains productive today. (In all the other instances of Japanese *ko* in the present study it retains its original phonemic shape.)

The most common use of Basque relational *-ko* is illustrated by the example *Bilboko tren* ‘the train for Bilbo’ or *guarko eguraldi* ‘today’s weather’ (*guar* ‘today’, *eguraldi*

'weather'). These are not noun compounds in Basque. As for Japanese no parallel to this Basque usage of *ko* is evident.

Basque relational *-ko* can be added to the instrumental suffix *-z* 'with' (e.g. *tren* 'train', *trenez* 'by train') to form a compound suffix *-zko*, yielding in turn adjectival expressions such as *euskarazko liburua* 'a book in Basque' (*euskara* 'Basque language', *euskaraz* 'with Basque'). To this compound I wish to compare the Slavic compound adjectival endings *-ski*, *-ska*, *-sko* and the Germanic palatalized form derived from an adjectival **i* + adjectival **-sk* (e.g. English *pinkish*). A similar comparison has been proposed by the Spanish linguist Antonio Tovar but Trask is quite doubtful. He suggests that Basque *-zko* and its palatalized variant *-xko* 'probably represent reinforced versions of diminutive *-ko*' (Trask, 376). I want to propose that Basque *-z* equals Basque *z* 'with' and thus probably is cognate with Indo-European *-s* in the adjectival compound *-ski* etc., suggesting that *-ko* in the Basque compound *-zko* might not be diminutive *-ko* but rather relational *-ko*. (This is one example of the widespread use of 'relational' *ko* in Indo-European and Eurasiatic. Greenberg identifies the use of Diminutive K also in Finno-Ugric, Old Turkish, Ainu, Korean, Gilyak, Kamachadal, and Eskimo [Greenberg, 164–166]).

1b. Basque 'derivational' suffix *-ko* and Japanese 'derivational' prefix *ko-* (the terminology is Trask's and Greenberg's alike)

As for Basque and Japanese derivational *ko*, both derive diminutives (Basque a small number of augmentatives as well). Both Basque derivational *-ko* and Japanese derivational *ko-* derive diminutives of nouns, but colloquially in Modern Japanese *ko-* derives diminutives of adjectives as well. Basque *ko* is suffixed to the noun whereas the Japanese is prefixed. A Basque example is *mandoko* 'small mule'; a Japanese example is *koinu* 'puppy'. Examples are plentiful in both languages.

1c. Japanese 'locative' suffix *-ko* and the question of the Basque verb *egon*

In Japanese locative pronouns are derived by suffixing *-ko* to the interrogative stem *do-* 'wh-' and the deictic stems *ko-* 'here' (proximal), *so-* 'there' (mesial) and *aso-* 'there' (distal). In Basque also there may be evidence of *ko* having a special affinity for the locative, but it is problematical in that the hypothesis involves not locative pronouns but the conjugation of a single verb: the first- and third- person singular forms of the verb *egon* 'to be, to be located' (= Spanish *estar*) are *nago* and *dago* respectively. Is *-go* in these forms possibly a reflex of locative *ko* (with voicing)? I am unaware of any other Basque verb in *-ko/-go*.

Basque relational *-ko* can be added to the instrumental suffix *-z* (e.g. *tren* 'train', *trenez* 'by train') to form a compound suffix *-zko* to yield adjectival expressions such as *euskarazko liburua* 'a book in Basque' (*euskara* 'Basque language', *euskaraz* 'with Basque'). To this we compare the Slavic adjectival endings *-ski*, *-ska*, *-sko* and the Germanic palatalized form derived from an adjectival **i* + adjectival **-sk* (e.g. English *pinkish*). Greenberg identifies the use of 'diminutive' K also in Finno-Ugric, Old Turkish, Ainu, Korean, Gilyak, Kamachadal, and Eskimo [Greenberg, 164–166]).

It seems evident that Basque ‘relational’ *ko* (the terminology is Trask’s) and Japanese ‘relational’ *ko* (to borrow from Trask), Basque ‘derivational’ *ko* and Japanese ‘derivational’ *ko*, and Japanese ‘locative’ *-ko* (my terminology) all derive from an original meaning of ‘small’. With derivational *ko*, a reduction in size is signaled; with relational *-ko*, a relationship is reduced to two entities; with locative *-ko*, the designation of a location narrows down the expanse, focusing in on a spot.

2. Passive Participle T: Basque *te ari*; Japanese *te ari*, *te iru*

Basque and Japanese alike form gerunds and progressives with *te*: Basque *te ari*, Japanese *te iru*.

Gerunds: Bq *ikus-te* ‘looking, seeing, watching’
 Jp *mi-te* ‘looking, seeing, watching’

Progressives: Bq *ikus-te-n ari da* ‘he/she is looking’
 Jp *mi-te iru-n(o) da* ‘am/is/are looking’ (Old Jp *mi-te ari*)

It is to be noted that there is a fundamental difference between the two languages in their respective progressive forms: on the one hand in Basque the *-n* of *-te-n ari da* must be locative *-n*, as is typologically expected for progressive forms, whereas in the Modern Japanese *-te iru-n(o) da* construction the *-n* is said to be a contracted form of the genitive particle *no* not locative *-n*. Consequently in Japanese *-te* follows rather than precedes the existential *iru*. Japanese *te* as a noun means ‘hand’.

3. Participle NT

Greenberg states: ‘The common active participle of Indo-European is *-nt-*, with preceding thematic vowel or weak grade of *n* (i.e. *-nt-*), e.g. Sanscrit *bhárant-* “carrying”, which is associated with a thematic verb stem *bhara-* (cf. Latin *ferent-* “carrying”)’ (Greenberg 182). He cites Brugmann’s (1892–1900) suggestion that this ancient *-nt-* is also the source of the *-nt-* third-person plural marker of the present aorist system of the [Indo-European] verb (Greenberg 183), e.g. Latin *sunt* ‘they are’.

Of course in Korean and Japanese there is no person number. Is it possible that the Korean declarative stem *-nda-* may be a reflex of this *-nt-* (e.g. Korean *kanda* ‘go, goes’), analogous to Brugmann’s observation that ‘it “is a credible hypothesis that the [Indo-European] third-person of the verb is simply a predicative use of this participle”’ (Greenberg 183). It is tempting to contrast Korean *-nda* to the Korean honorific ending *-da*. Is it possible that Japanese declarative *da* may belong here as well? Supposing the participle *-nt-* to be the source of the Japanese copula *da* might explain why *n* in *-te iru-n da* (cf. 1.2 above) is not the typologically expected locative form associated with progressive constructions in many languages.

4. First-Person N: Basque first-person singular *ni*

The first-person singular pronoun ('I'):

Basque: *ni*, Korean: *na*

Japanese: not based on *n*.

Ainu *en*, 'a first-person singular object pronoun, may perhaps be compared with the Korean first-person pronoun *na*' (Greenberg, 70).

5. Genitive N: Basque suffix *-en* / *-ren*; Japanese postposition *no*.

6. Locative N: Basque suffix *-n*; Japanese postposition *ni*

7. Ablative T: Basque suffix *-tik*, *-dik*; Old Japanese *tu*

Greenberg cites the archaic Japanese formula *ama-tu-k[a]mi* 'the god of heaven' (Greenberg, 159).

8. Adverbial Participle P: Basque prefix *ba-*; Japanese conjunctive particle *-ba*

Basque prefixes *ba-* to the auxiliary or, in its absence, to the main verb to form 'if' clauses; Japanese suffixes the conjunctive particle *-ba* to the main verb to form hypotheticals or conditionals, e.g. *ikeba* 'if one goes'.

9. Interrogative N: Basque *non*; Japanese *nan*

Basque *non* 'where?' consists of the stem *no-* (Trask 1997, 97) plus the locative suffix *-n*. The Japanese interrogative 'what' consists, in my opinion, of the stem *na-* + attributive *-n* + (adjectival?) morph *-i* (see 2.2, Perfective Particle I, below). ('Where?' in Japanese is *doko*; it is formed from the indefinite interrogative stem *do-*, to which is suffixed the locative pronoun *-ko* [cf. the final paragraph of section 1, 'Locative K', above]).

Examples and additional discussion regarding the above items (except Participle NT) may be found in Thornton 2011, Thornton 2002 and Thornton 2005.

Possible Additional Grammatical Parallels

1. Perfective Participle *-I*

Basque shows traces of an ancient adjective-forming suffix *-i*. The clearest case is *gatz* 'salt', *gatz* 'salty'. 'Since perfective participles are conspicuously adjectival in nature, it may be that an ancient adjective-forming suffix was pressed into service to derive participles both from ordinary nouns and from verbal nouns, but here I confess I am stretching the evidence to the limit' (Trask: 212).

The Japanese adjective-forming suffix *-i* may be of the same origin. An example is *utukusi-i* 'beautiful'; it contrasts to the adjective-deriving attributive particle *na*, which derives adjective phrases such as *kirei na* 'pretty, clean, clean-cut'. The suffix *-i* appears (to me) to be the more ancient of the two.

For examples and details not included here, refer to my earlier papers.

2. “Mysterious” Prefix I-

Both Basque and Old Japanese exhibit a verbal prefix *i-* whose origin or function is ‘mysterious’ (Trask 1997, 211; Murayama 1976, 422 respectively).

Basque: ‘Virtually all ancient verbs show a prefix **e-* in all their non-finite forms; this appears today variously as *e-*, *i-*, *j-* or zero ... The function of this prefix is not known... [Elsewhere] I argue that it originally derived a verbal noun from a verbal root’ (Trask 1997, 211).

Japanese: Old Japanese had a ‘somewhat mysterious and unclear prefixed *i-* that appears in a variety of Old Japanese verbs’. Example: *i-tu-k-u* ‘build’ alongside the more usual *tu-k-u* ‘build’ (Murayama 1976, 423).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Japanese, like Basque, appears to be a very conservative language, indeed even more so than Basque. Mark Hudson (Hudson 1994) notes that there is relatively little dialectical divergence in Japanese over a territory as large as Japan that moreover is an island archipelago. This suggests, he says, that the Japanese language replaced the indigenous language of the Jōmon inhabitants relatively recently in historical terms, probably shortly before the Yayoi began (about 300 BCE), and that the language came from Asia via the Korean peninsula. Could Japanese and Basque share some very ancient genetic link with Basque, as Greenberg has demonstrated that Japanese shares with the Eurasiatic languages?

In this paper I do not hold that Basque and Japanese are closely related languages, nor do I campaign for a complete abandonment of the view that, in the traditional sense or in practical usage, Basque is an isolate; rather I take the position that there must be an ancient common origin for all the world’s languages, and that because Basque and Japanese alike are extraordinarily conservative languages, they are useful sources of some evidence of that connection.

My comparison of Japanese and Basque in this and the earlier paper suggests that if one accepts the view that the two languages are genetically related and were more similar to each other at some time in the deep past than now, one can say that Basque has advanced in grammatical complexity to a greater extent than Japanese for their earlier forms, and that this higher degree of grammatical specification, such as the development of a singular-plural contrast for example, is consistent with Basque having experienced less isolated conditions and having experienced a greater amount of contact with other languages than Japanese. Therefore it can be said that Japanese appears to be a significantly more conservative language than Basque.

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