

ON THE SO-CALLED VERBAL NOUN IN BASQUE

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The morphological make-up of the verbal noun in the standard dialect of Basque can be readily described provided we avail ourselves of two phonological rules clearly acting in the phonology of Basque. While also functioning as morpheme structure conditions, the processes involved are most noticeable at morpheme boundaries. They can accordingly be thought of as straightforward sandhi rules.

The first rule needed is one that turns affricates into plain homorganic plosives when directly following a sibilant or affricate. This rule accounts for the total absence in Basque of the phonetic sequences ...*sts...*, ...*stz...*, ...*tsts...*, ...*tstz...*, ...*tzts...*, ...*tztz...*, ...*zts...*, and ...*tz...* The same rule can be shown to have played some role in diachronic development. To explain how the forms *beste*, *bost*, *osti* arose out of the older *bertze*, *bortz*, *ortzi*, we only have to postulate a conditioned change of *r* to *s*, such as happened in central Basque *oso* from older *oro*, or in Parisian French *chaïse*, *besicles* from older *chaïre*, *bericles*. An automatic consequence of this change will then be the substitution of a plosive *t* for the original affricate *tz* in virtue of the rule we have stated.¹

* A handwritten draft of this article was found among Rudolf's papers after his death. I cannot ascertain when he wrote this and whether he planned to elaborate further on what he had written. From a marginal note I see that he was from plan to rewrite the first footnote. I have incorporated at the end of this footnote some comments regarding Baztanese which were on a separate sheet attached to the manuscript (V. de Rijk-Chan).

¹ I must confess that I find this way of accounting for the change in question somewhat more plausible than the one that was offered by Michelena in *FHV*. This author postulates a development *rtz* > *rzt* > *rst* > *st*, the first step of which he describes as "inversion", a process he assumes to have initiated in compound formation. The newer *st*-forms are considered to have arisen as first members of compounds, and later generalized to replace the original *-rtz* forms.

In this vein, Michelena remarks: "En ese supuesto el paso por interversión de *rtz* a *st* nada tiene de extraño, pues de *ikatz* 'carbon' y *obi* 'hojo' p. ej. resulta *ikaztobi* 'carbonera'" (*FHV* § 18.14, p. 364). We hardly need to point out, however, that a change of *rtz* to *rzt* by no means represents a simple inversion or metathesis of consonants, given that the Basque affricate written *tz* is monophonemic and not to be analyzed as a sequence of *t* and *z*, as every phonologist, including Michelena, would agree. Furthermore, the invocation of compound formation seems quite unnecessary, especially as the *t* in *ikaztobi* 'charcoal kiln', more likely than not, has nothing to do with the affricate of *ikatz* 'charcoal', but may go back to the same origin as the *t* in *sutondo* or *ortuts*, compounds of *su* and *ondo* or *oin* and *huts*, respectively.

The second rule required will turn an affricate into the corresponding *sibilant* when immediately followed by a plosive.² This rules out phonetic sequences such as ...*tst*..., ...*tzt*..., ...*tsk*..., ...*tzk*..., etc.

Granted the existence of these two rules in Basque phonology, the shape of the verbal noun can be specified in a very simple fashion: The verbal noun results from adding the nominalizer *-tze* to the radical of the verb, for all verbs, except those ending in *-n*. These receive as nominalizer the suffix *-te*, eliding their nasal in the process. A small number of verbs borrowed into Batua from the northern dialects take *-ite* instead of *-te*: *igan*, *igaran*, *iragan*, *ukan*.³ Hence, the verbal nouns of *egon*, *erori*, *hil*, *ibili*, *igan*, *igo* and *jaiki* are *egote*, *erortze*, *hiltze*, *ibiltze*, *igaite*, *igotze* and *jaikitze*, respectively.

With radicals ending in a sibilant or affricate, our first sandhi rule will operate, causing the initial affricate of *-tze* to change into *-t*. Moreover, according to our second sandhi rule, an affricate immediately preceding this plosive will simplify to the corresponding sibilant. Therefore, the verbal nouns of *hasi*, *hazi*, *jaitsi* and *utzi* come out as *haste*, *hazte*, *jaiste* and *uzte*, respectively.

The allomorphic distribution of *-te* versus *-tze* in the Batua variety reflects the situation in the central dialects, which seem to have generalized the use of *-tze* at the expense of *-te*. The more conservative Souletin dialect has maintained *-te* in many instances where Guipuzcoan and Labourdin use *-tze*, as in *ebilte*, *erorte*, *ixurte*, *joite*. The Biscayan dialect appears to be the most conservative of all, limiting the use of *-tze* to verbs ending in *-tu* or *-du*. Thus, it still offers us the forms *ilte*, *ipinte*, *itote*, already evolved to *hiltze*, *ibentze*, *ithotze* in Souletin.

Historically, I would assume that the nominalizer was initially identical to the suffix *-te* denoting a period, found in derivations such as *berote* 'heat wave', *elurte* 'snow spell', *gosete* 'famine', *lehortte* 'drought'.⁴

As the facts clearly show, this suffix was originally added to the past participle of the verb, and not to its radical, as in present Batua. We note this in Biscayan, where past participles carrying the suffix *-tu* / *-du* behave differently from all other verbs in that they alone select the allomorph *-tze*; in Souletin, where *hil* and *ebili* take different allomorphs (*hiltze* versus *ebilte*) despite their similar radicals; and, finally, even in Batua, where radicals ending in *-n* are treated differently according to whether or not they are identical to their past participles: *egite* from *egin*, but *agintze* from *agindu*.

The fact that in the Baztanese dialect certain derived forms display the change while the simple forms do not, e.g. *bosgarren*, but *bortz* (see Echenique: *Apoc.* 6.9, 9.1, 16.10, 21.20; and 9.5, 9.10, 17.10), merely shows that the environment for antirhotacism in Baztanese includes a following sibilant but not an affricate.

² A special case of this general rule was formulated already by N'Diaye: "Lorsque *-tz* final se trouverait en presence de *t*-initial, il se réalise dans la chaîne comme la fricative correspondante: *z*..." (*Structure du dialecte basque de Maya*, § 5.3.4, p. 39).

³ Historically, of course, such a suffix never existed. The *i* of forms as *egoite*, *emaite*, *izaite*, etc. clearly belongs to the verb itself, and not to the suffix, as shown by such forms as *edate*, *jate*, *etzate* that never show *i* in any variety of Basque.

⁴ This possibility was already mentioned by Schuchardt, who, however, seems to hesitate between this suffix and the collective suffix *-tze* of *jendetze* 'crowd'. Cf. H. Schuchardt, *Primitiae Linguae Vasconum* § 16, p. 9.

To accommodate these facts, we only need to invoke the well-known apocope rule operating in Basque derivational morphology that allows a final high vowel to elide before a certain type of morpheme boundary, as in *hasberri* and *burgaitz* from *hasi* + *berri* and *buru* + *gaitz*. Such a rule explains *ikuste* from underlying *ikuste* + *te*, and also yields *aginTe* from underlying *agindu* + *te*, where T represents a strengthened dental, phonetically realized as an affricate *-tz*, a development⁵ also seen elsewhere, e.g. in the High German consonant shift.

Assuming this account to be essentially correct, we are faced here with one more example of a situation not uncommon in diachronic linguistics, to wit, a clear discrepancy between the most economic synchronic description and the actual historical process.

The main issue I want to take up in this brief essay, however, is not morphological. Rather, my concern lies with the syntactic status of the forms discussed. To put it plainly, the question I would like to address is: Why are these forms called verbal nouns?⁶

⁵ For a general treatment of phonological strengthening and its realizations, see J. Foley, *Foundations of Theoretical Phonology*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

The claim that the nominalizer *-tze* goes back to an earlier —or perhaps merely underlying— form *-tute* does not originate with the present writer. It can be traced back to that remarkable grammarian R. M. Azkue. (See his *Morfología Vasca* II, § 754, p. 522.) For reasons unknown to me, Michelena rejected this hypothesis. He provided, however, no refutation, merely stating apodictically: “No debe pensarse, sin embargo, que *tz* sea el resultado de *t* + *t*: se trata probablemente de sufijos de distinto origen” (*FHV* § 18.2, p. 346).

⁶ To my knowledge, the first grammarian to apply this term to exactly these forms was canon Inchauspe in his imposing treatise *Le verbe basque* printed in 1858. Right near the beginning there is a substantial section headed “Des noms verbaux” where the terms “substantif verbal” and “adjectif verbal” are introduced for the verbal noun and the past participle respectively. Following the definition, a host of example sentences are provided in order to show that these “noms verbaux” admit all kinds of case endings just like ordinary nouns and adjectives do. Inchauspe’s awareness of the innovative character of his terminology is clearly brought out by the following quotation: “Ces termes, qui rendent en basque les idées exprimées par des verbes dans les autres langues, ne sauraient donc avec justesse être appelés *verbes* dans la langue basque, puisqu’ils ne se conjuguent pas. On voit que bien plutôt il faut les considérer comme de vrais substantifs et adjectifs, puisqu’ils se déclinent et qu’ils suivent toutes les règles des substantifs et adjectifs ordinaires... Cependant, quoique nous croyions plus juste de classer ces termes parmi les adjectifs et les substantifs, nous devons leur reconnaître des caractères particuliers qui les en distinguent, et nous les appelons *noms verbaux*, parce qu’ils sont particulièrement destinés à être unis au verbe, et parce qu’ils expriment l’idée d’une action ou d’un état.” (p. 11).

Inchauspe’s work has wielded a truly momentous influence on the treatment of Basque grammar. Although the indebtedness was seldom acknowledged, his terminology and the main ideas connected with it were taken over by many scholars, beginning with Bonaparte and van Eys. Thus, in the latter’s *Essai de grammaire de la langue basque* of 1865, the term “substantif verbal” is simply taken for granted: “Le substantif verbal est formé du radical en y ajoutant *-te* ou *-tze*...” (p. 63; likewise in the expanded 1867 edition, p. 58). And from his English booklet *Outlines of Basque Grammar* of 1883 we may quote: “*Galtzea* corresponds to, but is not an infinitive; it is plainly a verbal substantive with the article *a*” (p. 47).

The appellation “substantif verbal” remains current among later grammarians up to the present day, sometimes with the meaning in question (so, e.g. Lafon, *Le système du verbe basque au XVI^e siècle*, II, pp. 29-30), sometimes with a much wider sense: Lafitte e.g. uses the term for any deverbal noun (*Grammaire basque*, § 442b).

Finally, Euskaltzindia’s handbook *EGLU* makes use of the compound *aditz izen*, precisely the idiomatic translation of “verbal noun” (*EGLU*-II, chapter 5).

There is a traditional answer to this question, and although I do not recall having seen it in print,⁷ it would run something like this: On the one hand, verbal nouns are nouns in that they behave like nominals do. They combine with adjectives, e.g. *begiratze hutsak ikaratzzen zuen* ‘mere looking frightened (the people)’ (Lardizabal, *TZI*, p. 125); demonstrative pronouns; the definite article *-a*; a preceding genitive phrase; and, most important of all, nearly all of the case endings found with inanimate nouns. The two exceptions pointed out in *EGLU-II* (p. 98): *-rentzat* ‘for’ (benefactive) and *-rantz* ‘toward’ are easily accounted for on semantic grounds.

To illustrate all this with an example using the form *ibiltze*, related to the verb *ibili* ‘to walk’, we will get: *ibiltze hau* ‘this walking’; *ibiltzea onuragarria da* ‘walking is healthy’; *zure ibiltzea* ‘your walking’; *ibiltzeari ekin* ‘to take up walking’; *ibiltzeagatik* ‘because of walking’; *ibiltzeaz* ‘about walking’; *ibiltzean* ‘in walking’; *mina ibiltzetik dator* ‘the pain comes from walking’, *ibiltzera behartu* ‘to force to walk’; *ibiltzeraino makurtu* ‘to stoop down to walking’; etc. Adnominals are also possible: *ibiltzeko poz handia* ‘the great enjoyment in walking’.

On the other hand, verbal nouns are not merely deverbal—that is, nouns derived from verbs—but indeed verbal in that they maintain essential characteristics of verbs. Thus, verbal nouns admit grammatical subjects, direct and indirect objects, as well as adverbial modifiers: *Zu hemen ibiltzea ona da* ‘It is good that you walk here’. This behavior is to be contrasted with that of the deverbal noun *ibilera*, also derived from *ibili*, but lacking genuinely verbal characteristics: *Zure hemengo ibilera ona da* ‘Your walking here is good’, with the genitive *zure* ‘your’ instead of *zu* ‘you’ and the adnominal *hemengo* instead of *hemen* ‘here’.

So far the traditional answer. The further question as to how to reconcile the nominal and the verbal properties of these forms is never addressed, let alone properly answered. Even as far as it goes, this traditional account is rather too superficial and hence misleading. As a matter of fact, the appellation “verbal noun” is a serious misnomer; for one thing, it is not the verb that is being nominalized but rather the entire subordinate clause.

While it is quite true that *ibiltze* functions as a noun in the phrase *zure ibiltzea*, in the more interesting phrase *zu hemen ibiltzea*, *ibiltze* is not a noun; in fact, it is not even a constituent. What we are dealing with here is the following constituent structure:

[_{NP} [_S zu hemen ibil]-tze]-a

As this structure makes clear, the locus of the verbal properties is the verb radical *ibil*, whereas the nominal characteristics are a feature of the entire phrase *zu hemen ibiltze(a)*.

The fact that the so-called verbal noun in this type of construction does not figure as a constituent has important repercussions in syntax. Given that in the syntactic relocation processes subsumed under “Move x”, x has to be a constituent;

⁷ As is apparent from footnote 6, Inchauspe’s explanations come remarkably close to providing just the answer that we have in mind.

the verbal noun is immobile. No rule can shift it to any other position in the sentence. What can be shifted, of course, is the nominalized clause as a whole, as well as any nominal constituent dominated by it, but not the verbal noun as such.

As an illustration, consider the following sentences, all meaning roughly ‘We want the cat to eat the mouse’:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (1) Katuak sagua jatea nahi dugu. | (3) Sagua jatea nahi dugu katuak. |
| (2) Nahi dugu katuak sagua jatea. | (4) Katuak sagua nahi dugu jatea. |

I will assume that these sentences have a common deep structure, and that the basic word order corresponds to that shown in sentence (1). Under this assumption, sentence (2) is the result of extraposing the nominalized clause *katuak sagua jatea* to the end of the main clause. Sentence (3) demonstrates the existence in Basque of a backing rule able to lift a noun phrase out of its own clause and adjoin it to the right of the next higher clause. Sentence (4) is the one we are especially concerned with. It seems we could derive it from a deep structure like (1) in just one step: apply the backing rule to move the verbal noun *jatea* to the end of the main clause, just like *katuak* in sentence (3). However, this option is not open to us since *jatea* here, unlike *katuak*, is not a noun phrase. Rather, sentence (4) must be derived in several stages: once (1) has been turned into (2) by extraposition, (4) can be obtained out of (2) by two successive applications of NP Fronting: first Focus Movement of the noun phrase *sagua*, then Topic Movement of the noun phrase *katuak*.

Two final remarks are in order. It is not my intention here to criticize or discourage in any way the use of the term “verbal noun”. This term is much too firmly established and convenient to be abandoned. What I would like to recommend, however, is a great deal of caution in handling the concept, keeping in mind that in reality we are dealing with a nominalized clause, not a nominalized verb.

Finally, the nature of this contribution is avowedly pedagogical. Addressed to students of Basque grammar, it tries to clarify a matter where misunderstandings might occur due to thought habits perhaps better suited to other languages. This essay, however, is not meant to be polemical. I most definitely do not wish to imply that present-day Basque grammarians, such as the erudite members of the industrious Gramatika Batzordea of the Basque Academy, are less than fully aware of the conceptual dangers lurking in their adoption of the traditional term *aditz izena*.

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