

Palatalization Phenomena in Basque ⁽¹⁾

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The various Basque dialects exhibit two types of palatalization rules in their phonological components. The first type, which I will refer to as *automatic palatalization*, occurs, as the name indicates, automatically, in a given environment. This environment, in which the rule operates predictably, and invariably, can be stated in terms of phonetic features. I will return to a more detailed account of the rule of automatic palatalization below.

The second type of palatalization that occurs in Basque will be referred to as *expressive palatalization*, following the tradition of Michelena (see Michelena 1969). Expressive palatalization differs from automatic palatalization not so much in the result, the actual phonetic specification, but in the motivation, the environment, and the description of the rule involved. I will deal briefly with the rule of automatic palatalization and then investigate the various properties of expressive palatalization. The focus of the present work is not so much on the data itself (2), but on the problems it presents to the linguist subscribing to a theory of transformational grammar.

(1) The interest in this topic stemmed out of a seminar sponsored by the Basque Studies Program of the University of Nevada during the summer of 1972. I am very grateful to the Program for providing me with the financial aid necessary to attend the seminar. Many thanks go to Prof. Rudolf de Rijk for his enlightening lectures and encouragement.

(2) I am not in possession of sufficient data to provide more than the barest sketch of how automatic palatalization works. The differing dialects of Basque confound the analysis. A more thorough investigation would be valuable.

AUTOMATIC PALATALIZATION

Automatic palatalization can be divided into two subtypes:

(i) The velar consonants *k*, *g*, and *x*, undergo fronting before the vowel *i*, resulting in a softening or palatalization. This softening is productive in many languages other than Basque, in particular in the Gaelic dialects. The Slavic languages exhibit the change of velars to full palatals when they are followed by a front vowel. The rule for such a softening process in Basque could be simply stated as (I will use the feature notation as prescribed in generative phonology. For an explanation of these features I refer the reader to Chomsky and Halle 1968.):

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} -\text{anterior} \\ +\text{high} \\ +\text{back} \end{array} \right] \longrightarrow [-\text{back}] / \left[\begin{array}{l} -\text{consonantal} \\ -\text{back} \\ +\text{high} \end{array} \right]$$

(ii) The second rule of automatic palatalization is more complicated. The consonants *t* and *n* undergo palatalization to become *t'* and *n'* respectively, while *l* and *r* both become *l'* when palatalized. This rule operates automatically when the consonant *follows* the vowel *i*, and is followed by another vowel. Some examples: *sorgina* [sor-gin'a], *egina* [egin'a], or *maitea* [mait'ea].

For *r* and *l* the rule must be stated in two parts:

$$\text{[a.]} \left[\begin{array}{l} +\text{vocalic} \\ +\text{consonantal} \end{array} \right] \longrightarrow [+coronal] / \left[\begin{array}{l} -\text{cons} \\ -\text{back} \\ +\text{high} \end{array} \right] \text{---} [-\text{cons}]$$

$$\text{[b.]} \left[\begin{array}{l} +\text{voc} \\ +\text{cons} \\ +\text{cor} \end{array} \right] \longrightarrow [+high] / \left[\begin{array}{l} -\text{cons} \\ -\text{back} \\ +\text{high} \end{array} \right] \text{---} [-\text{cons}]$$

For *t* and *n* only one rule is necessary to introduce the feature [+high] that will indicate palatalization:

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} +\text{anterior} \\ +\text{coronal} \\ -\text{continuant} \\ -\text{high} \end{array} \right] \longrightarrow [+high] / \left[\begin{array}{l} -\text{cons} \\ -\text{back} \\ +\text{high} \end{array} \right] \text{---} [-\text{cons}]$$

While a more detailed analysis of the role of automatic palatalization in Basque may be of interest to the phonologist, our purpose here is to examine more closely the process of palatalization that is not automatic, but *expressive*.

EXPRESSIVE PALATALIZATION

Expressive palatalization is highly productive in Basque. The various dialects differ in the degree to which they employ the process, as well as differing in the phonetic realization of the process. By way of definition, expressive palatalization is the palatalization (softening) of certain consonants to indicate affection, or to create a diminutive. Basque likewise has a well-developed system of diminutivizing suffixes that differ from one dialect to another but function in a similar role as expressive palatalization (3).

Differing from automatic palatalization, which is strictly conditioned by the environment, expressive palatalization occurs freely in any environment. The phonetic aspects of expressive palatalization are discussed in Michelena (1961), where he notes that this softening occurs unrelated to the surrounding environment (pg. 185). Expressive palatalization is a device the speaker of Basque employs to express his feelings towards the topic. Examples of such palatalization: the use of [neška] for [neska] 'girl', or [eškalduna] for [eskalduna] 'Basque person', or [eškera] for [eskera] 'Basque language'.

Employing a phonological rule that is not otherwise present in the language of the speaker is a common means of expressing emotion or feelings. Baby-talk as spoken by mother to child is an example of using certain phonological devices to express affection. If carried out systematically, this qualifies as *code-switching* by which the speaker employs forms not otherwise present in the language to express feelings. Palatalization is perhaps the most commonly employed phonetic feature of expressive language. In Huichol, an American Indian language, *t'*, *c'* and *n'* are used in place of *t*, *c*, and *n*, in affectionate speech, and when addressing children. Stankiewicz discusses examples of this as well as some Basque examples (Stankiewicz 1964). Besides palatalization, other phonetic features include glottalization and aspiration to indicate emotive language. In Chinook glottalizing stops serves to express emotion.

(3) When asked, informants only gave diminutive forms using these diminutive suffixes. The expressive forms employing palatalized variants of the consonants were only heard indirectly. Informants were not aware that they used such forms.

While it is interesting to observe how Basque employs expressive palatalization to express emotion, the linguist, whether structuralist or generativist, cannot ignore the problems presented by this process. Emotive language in general has been both purposely ignored as well as overly endowed with importance (4).

For the structuralist whose concern is with levels, the question arises as to which level, phonological or morphological, belong the expressive features. Stankiewicz is aware of this problem when he notes: «The single significant fact about the expressive phonemes or substitution features is their semantic content: they are not merely discriminatory units, but they serve to convey emotive, endearing or pejorative attitudes. In this sense the distinction between phonemes and morphemes is partly cancelled in emotive language, ... The expressive sound-features could, in fact, be viewed as morphophonemic in the broad sense of the word. If they are, nevertheless, treated as phonological, it is because morphophonemic alternations involve phonemes (or features) endowed with grammatical functions, equivalent to those of derivational or grammatical affixes. The 'expressive phonemes' are neither distinctive, nor do they carry or support grammatical distinctions» (Stankiewicz 1964, pg. 253).

Emotive language that employs rules not present in the rest of the grammar, whether they are phonological, morphological, or syntactic, forces the generative grammarian to focus on the problem of where semantic information goes in the grammar (5). In agreement with Stankiewicz, that such expressive features do indeed carry semantic information, there arises the problem of relating the phonetic manifestation of this semantic information to the representation of that information.

The current argument among generative grammarians focuses on this problem. The view of *generative semantics* is that all semantic information is carried in the base or logical structure of the sentence. The *interpretivists* hold that surface rules of semantic interpretation scan the output of the syntactic component and fill-in, or interpret, the semantics of the derivation. For the latter theory of semantic interpretation the problems posed by expressive palatalization are

(4) See the first part of the article by Stankiewicz.

(5) For the reader unfamiliar with generative grammar, I suggest the following: John Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge University Press, 1969); Roderick Jacobs and Peter Rosenbaum, *English Transformational Grammar* (Blaisdell; Waltham, Mass., 1968); or the section on linguistics in Danny D. Steinberg and Leon A. Jakobovits, eds., *Semantics: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1971).

not so great. A rule of semantic interpretation could simply 'mark' the output of the syntactic component with a feature [+expressive]. This feature would then be carried along into the phonological component where it would trigger the necessary palatalization.

The theoretical position taken here however is not compatible with the interpretivist views. Marking constituents with such features as [+expressive] is merely an ad hoc and unnatural device used to avoid the problems rather than solve them. In lieu of this, however, the generative semantics position cannot offer a solution that would be feasible within the theory as it stands. This is in itself interesting and while a 'solution' per se would be a desirable outcome, adding yet another problem for generative semantics serves to widen our understanding of the grammar as well as more finely define what goes on in a derivation. Expressive palatalization in Basque shows that the speaker's feelings do play a significant role in his speech pattern. Assuming the position of generative semantics we want to represent all semantic information, including that of speaker's feelings, in the logical structure of a derivation. The problem intensifies if we consider *how* the semantic information is to be represented at all. While questions dealing with the semantic representation of implied meanings have been discussed (6), the present writer has no knowledge of any discussion of the semantic representation of speaker's feelings. Suppose, however, that we were able to arrive at a satisfactory representation of speaker's feelings in the logical structure of a sentence. Generative semantics allows reference back to the semantic structure from various levels of derivation by means of global constraints defined over the levels in question. That is, a rule may 'look back' to the semantic structure for information.

Global constraints have generally only dealt with rules applying prior to the phonological component. Some works have dealt with stress rules that require semantic information, but offer no conclusion as to how to relate the necessary semantic information to a late rule of stress assignment. The question arises as to whether a rule of palatalization may 'look back' to the semantic structure to see if indeed the constituent is one expressing speaker's feelings. While this increases the power of global constraints when most emphasis is on limiting their power and more finely defining their range of

(6) See Gordon and Lakoff "Conversational Postulates" in *Papers from the Seventh Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, Chicago Linguistic Society, Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago, 1971 (p. 63-84); Jerrold M. Sadock, *Towards a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*, to be published by Seminar Press, summer 1974.

application within a grammar, it appears the only workable 'solution' available.

Expressive palatalization in Basque thus presents a theory of generative semantics with three distinct problems: one, *how* to represent the speaker's feelings in a theory that seeks to provide a full semantic representation of the meaning of a sentence in the base; two, *where* to specify this information, either in the semantic structure, or at some other stage of derivation; and three, *how* to incorporate this semantic information in a late rule of palatalization that will render the required phonetic output for expressive palatalization.

For the linguist interested in data, the system of expressive language in Basque is a rich one. For those interested in seeking out the generalizations that underlie such data and in incorporating them into a theory of grammar, the phenomenon of expressive palatalization in Basque is both challenging and enlightening.

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