

What is the nasal infix in basque *genuen, zenuen,* etc.?

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The extremely complicated Basque conjugation system comprises some or all of the following basic formative elements: (1) a person-indicating prefix (*n-*, *d-*, *g-*, *z-*, etc.); (2) a prefix vowel (*-a-*, *-e-*, *-i-*); (3) a dative-causative element (*-ra-*); (4) the verbal stem (usually monosyllabic and of simple structure); (5) a dative element (*-i-*, *-ki-*, etc.); (6) a person-indicating suffix (originally an independent personal pronoun); (7) a pluralizing formative (*-e-*, *-z-*, *-te-*, *-de-*); and, finally, (8) a temporal-modal element (*-n*, *-en*, *-an*, for past time; *-ke*, for future-potential). The meaning and function of all these grammatical elements is generally quite clear. This is, however, not the case of the element with which we shall deal in this paper—the infixed *-n-* in verbal forms of the type *genuen*, *zenuen*, *nintzan*, *intzan*, *ginan* (*gindan*), *zinan* (*zindan*), etc.¹

The only characteristic feature of this nasal element is that it occurs in the first and second person (singular or plural) only and is sometimes distinctive: *zeunden* 'you' (plural) were' as against *zeuden* 'they were', *zentorren* 'you came' beside *zetorren* 'he, she, came', *zinan* beside *ziran* (cf. above, Note 1)². The fact that this element, although occurring in past forms, is restricted to the first and second persons makes it unlikely that the nasal infix is primarily the sign of a past tense³. On the other hand, the occurrence in the first and second persons only makes one think of languages (like Basque, also of our Type I) having a common form for the first and second persons in the conjugation of the verb (although not of the independent personal pronoun). As a matter of fact, this is a characteristic of many of the New Guinea languages, which consequently have two persons only: a first and a second person, expressing respectively the speaker and any other person. Actually two types exist: in the one, the «first person», refers to the speaker *only*, while in the other, the same

1. Basque *ginan*, *zinan* would be from **ginran*, **zinran*, as *ona* ('hither') is from **on-ra* (stem **on-* 'this, here').

2. Hence *ninteke* 'I should be', but *liteke* 'he, she, it would be'. Compare further: Pedro de Yrizar, *Sobre las formas verbales vizcaínas con objeto indirecto de segunda persona* (Seminario «Julio de Urquijo», vol. 14. San Sebastián 1980), p. 67, 45.

3. Past tense is expressed unambiguously by a suffix *-an*, *-en*, *-n*, in Basque.

»first person» refers both to the speaker and the person spoken to, whereas the «second person» is reserved for any other person. The latter system is found in certain Fly river languages, briefly studied by the present writer a few years ago⁴.

The use of two persons only brings to mind an interesting article by V.I. Abaev, in which a consciousness in primitive societies prevails of a dual opposition of «us» and «not-us» (respectively «our(s)» and «not-our(s)»⁵. In languages of Type I, the «first person» is often characterized by a formative *-n-* (Amerindian, New Guinea, etc.), occasionally with offshoots far afield. (Arabic *'ana*, *'anta*, *'anti*, *nabnu*, etc.; Latin *nos*, *noster*).

If we should venture to assume such a state of things in primitive Basque, forms such as **nu-* (the basis of *nuen* 'I had it') or **niz* (the basis of *nintzan* 'I was', etc.), **nira-* (the basis of *ginan*, *zinan*), would not only have reference to our first person ('I', etc.), but also to our second person ('thou', etc.), although not to our third person ('others'); only in the course of time a distinction of three persons would have evolved, starting in the personal pronoun (*gu*, *zu*, in verbal forms *-gu*, *-zu*).

The original **nu-*, **niz-*, **nira-* would then gradually have evolved new forms: *genu-*, *zenu-* (via *gendu-*, *zendu-*, of which the *-d-* is probably carried over from such forms as *dut*, *du*, etc.), *gina-*, *zina-* (for which see further on and in Note 7). In reference to others, no formative was used (except in special cases, where *d-*, *b-*, *l-*, *z-* occur at different epochs); compare Biscayan *neban* 'I had', and *eban* 'he, she had'. In the building up of the actually used conjugation system in Basque the forms of the transitive and intransitive auxiliaries (*izan*, *ukan*) have evidently played an important part: *-d-* in *gendun*, *gindun*, etc. (from *dut*, *du*); *z-* in *zuen*, *zen*, *zan* (from *izan*, of which the «root» is alternatively **iz-* as in *na-iz*, French Basque *n-iz*,⁶ **z-*, as in Biscayan *na-z*, or **za-*, as in *zait*, *izan*, etc.). The absence of a personal formative is consequently seen in the common Basque preterit forms *zan* (*zen*) 'was'. The lack of every trace of an infix *-n-* in present indicative forms is remarkable, however, and the infix is further occasionally missing in past forms as well (Biscayan *nekusan* for Guipuzcoan *nenkusan* 'I saw', etc.)—all tending to prove the gradual formation of the actually used conjugation system in Basque⁷.

(Resumen en español)

¿Qué es el infijo nasal en euskera genuen, zenuen, etc.? Mientras que los elementos formativos del complicado sistema de conjugación euskérica tienen en general una función claramente determinable (indicando per-

4. Hence, on Murray Island (Torres Strait), *nali* means either 'I am' or 'you are' ('thou art'), while *dali* means 'he, she is'. Cf. the Sumerian (our Type I?) present tense paradigm of the verb (*i)m(e)-* ('to be'): (sg.) *men*, *men*, *ime*; (pl.) *menden*, *menzen*, *imes*.

5. V.I. Abaev, *Otraženiye raboty soznaniya v leksiko-semantičeskoj sistema jazyka (in Leninizm i teoreticeskije problemy jazykoznanija*. URSS Academy of Sciences. Moscow 1970).

6. That is without any prefix vowel, as also in *n-oa* 'I go'.

7. Virtually, the nasal infix in verbal forms is evolved from the nasality of a preceding vowel in cases of the loss of an intervocalic *-n-* (Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, ed. 1977, pp. 299 sqq.); **ni-niz-* would give **niiz-* and then *nintz-*, etc. Regarding *genduen*, *ginan*, etc., cf. Michelena, *op. cit.*, ed. 1961, p. 359-60; ed. 1977, p. 308.

sona, número, tiempo, relación modal y hasta «versión», para hablar en términos de gramática georgiana), esto no parece valer para el infijo nasal en formas como *genuen*, *genduen*, *zen(d)uen*, *nintzan*, etc., que a veces aparecen junto con formativos personales. El único principio que se puede percibir es que dicho elemento sólo ocurre en las primera y segunda personas (tanto en el singular como en el plural). Este hecho singular recuerda lenguas en que antiguamente (o hasta en la época actual) no conocen más que dos personas: la del que habla (o a veces las de los que conversan) y la de que se habla (o sea el resto del mundo). (Para referencias, véase en el correspondiente lugar en el texto inglés de este artículo).

Más adelante, perfeccionándose el sistema de conjugación, el infijo nasal *-n-* se habrá combinado de varios modos con otros elementos gramaticales (*n-*, *g-*, *z-*), relacionados con los pronombres independientes (*ni*, *gu*, *zu*), etc. Compárense también las referencias en la nota 7 al pie de la página en el texto inglés.

