

# On hypocoristic formation in Basque

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The aim of this paper is to explain the main procedures used in the formation of hypocoristics in Basque, since the Middle Ages to our days. There are also some data that belong to the inscriptions found in Aquitaine (I-III centuries) which have been studied by Mitxelena (1954), Lafon (1966) and J. Gorrotxategi (1984, 1995), among others. At the same time we have investigated about the means that modern Basque uses in hypocoristic formation, and the main conclusion that we have drawn is that present-day Basque and historical Basque use almost the same methods for making hypocoristics, even though there are some differences, specially in the suffix field.

The three main procedures are the following:

- a) Palatalization (phonetic symbolism).
- b) Use of suffixes (amplification).
- c) Name shortening and “condensation”.

These three procedures often appear combined as in *Maria* → *Txariako* (palatalization + suffix), *Domingo* → *Txomin* (palatalization + name shortening), *Josefina* → *Finatxo* (name shortening + suffix).

Now we'll see all this more thoroughly:

## PALATALIZATION OR PHONETIC SYMBOLISM

This is a usual procedure in Basque, in normal speech, and, for instance, when a *zezena* ‘(the) bull’ is small we say it is a *xexena*, if a *gizona* ‘(the) man’ is small we can say he is a *gixona*, which can be a scornful way to treat someone as well. Also if something or somebody is *polita* ‘beautiful, pretty, handsome’ we can say she, he or it is *politta*, *pollita* or *pollitta*. We may say, therefore, according to Mitxelena (1995 [1957]: 104) that here there is a «contrast

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between the normal form of a word, not affectively marked, its positive grade, so to speak, and its diminutive or hypocoristic form».

Palatalization is a customary matter in child speech—that is to say, in speech used by adults when talking to children—. Here are some examples taken from Salaburu (1984: 119) and Zubiri (2002: 19-20): *adarra* ‘horn’, ‘branch’ → *addarra*, *arrautza* ‘egg’ → *arrautxa*, *bota zara* ‘you have fallen’ → *botta xara*, *burua* ‘(the) head’ → *bullua*, *esku* ‘hand’ → *exku*, *isats* ‘tail’ → *ixatx*, *izutu* ‘frighten, to be frightened’ → *ixutu*, *lo* ‘sleep’, ‘asleep’ → *llo*, *niñi* ‘baby’ → *ñiñi*, *zato* ‘come’ → *xatto*, *ttatto*,... etc.

This use is old in Basque, as we can see studying names: *Auri(a)* (a woman’s name related in the last analysis to latin *aurum* ‘gold’) → *Aulli* (1576); *Ernaut*, *Enaut* (Arnold) → *Eñaut* (1787); *Ferran* (Ferdinand) → *Txerran* (1496); *Gabon* (Christmas, Christmas day) → *Txabon* (1547); *Garzea* (apparently meaning ‘young’, *gaztea* nowadays) → *Gartxea* (1378); *Gaspar* (Gaspard, Jasper) → *Gaxpar* (1514); *Grazi(a)* (Grace) → *Txaxi* (1475); *Joane*, *Juane* (John) → *Xoane*, *Xuane* (1490, 1537); *Lope* (similar to *Otxoa*, Basque form coming from *otsoa* ‘wolf’) → *Txope* (1474); *Madalen(a)* (Magdalene, Madeleine) → *Txadalen* (1548); *Mari(a)* (Mary) → *Txaria* (1481), *Malli* (1552); *Martiko*, *Martiku* (little Martin) → *Matxiko* (1366), *Matxiku* (1366); *Peru* (Peter) → *Txeru* (1511); *Simon* → *Ximon* (1366)... At least in the 15th and 16th centuries the palatalization of the name could consist of putting a “protetic” affricate sound in the word-initial position: *Ana* (Ann) → *Txana* (1411); *Andres* (Andrew) → *Txandres* (1547), *Urdin* (‘grey-haired’) → *Txurdin* (1489),... and so on.

At present the palatalization procedure is still alive and kicking, specially the one that consists in the use of the prepalatal fricative sound ([j], written <x>, similar to French *ch* in *cheval* or English *sh* in *fish*), but not only that, since the affricate palatal is rather habitual too: *A(g)ustin* (Augustin) and its feminine form *A(g)ustina* → *Auxtin*, *A(g)uxtina*, *Auxtiña*; *Aitziber* (a hermitage consecrated to the Virgin; as a name it was used for the first time by Sastrustegi, 1972: 25; see also Euskaltzaindia, 2001: 176) → *Aitziber*, *Basilio* (Basil), *Basilia* → *Baxilio*, *Baxilia*; *Egoitz* → *Egoitx* (a new name), *Haritz* → *Haritx* (it comes from *haritz* ‘oak tree’ and could appear in the Aquitanian inscription *Arixo deo*; Mitxelena, 1954: 417 and Gorrotxategi, 1984: 306-307); *Olatz* → *Olatx* (a place name first, a hermitage consecrated to the Virgin then and finally a girl name); *Zumar* → *Xumar* (another of the “ecological” names common in Basque; it means ‘elm tree’)... and so on.

The palatalization of the voiceless coronal plosive is customary as well, and becomes a voiceless palatal plosive ([t̟]): *Antonio*, *Anton* (Antony, Anthony), *Antonia* (the feminine) → *Anttonio*, *Antton*, *Anttoni*; *Bartolo(meo)* (Bartholomew) → *Barttolo*; *Beti*, *Betiri* (Peter) → *Betti*, *Bettiri*; *Jose* (Joseph) → *Kotte*, *Ttotte*, *Martin* → *Mattin*... etc.

Mainly in the eastern dialects the voiced coronal plosive can be palatalized too, and the result is a voiced palatal plosive ([d̟]): *Domingo* (Dominic) → *Ddomingo*, *Fernando* (Ferdinand) → *Ferranddo*, *Madalen(a)* → *Maddalen*, *Mari* → *Maddi*. Sometimes the two consonants get palatalized: *Andres* → *Anddex*.

The nasal plosive *n* ([n]) can be palatalized as well and be transformed into an *ñ* ([ɲ]), principally in the eastern dialects too: *Ana* → *Aña*; *Bernardo*,

*Berna(r)t* (Bernard) → *Beñardo, Beñat; Joanes, Johane, Manes, Manez* (John)  
 → *Ñañes, Johañe, Mañes, Mañez; Manuel* (Emmanuel), *Manu(e)la, Manoli*  
 → *Mañuel, Mañu(e)la, Mañoli...*

The lateral plosive ([l]) can also be palatalized and is changed into *ll* ([ʎ]), but it is not habitual: (*A*)*polonia* (it derives ultimately from *Apolo*) → *Polloñi; Dolores* → *Dollores* (we have *Dolorex* as well).

## USE OF SUFFIXES OR AMPLIFICATION

The second procedure used in Basque to form hypocoristics is, as we have said, the use of suffixes or amplification (Seeman, 1983: 241). This procedure was already alive in the Aquitanian inscriptions (*-ko, -so / -(t)xo, -(t)o*, and perhaps *-kin, -se, -te, -(t)xe* as well; see Mitxelena, 1954; J. Gorrotxategi, 1984), and was a customary matter in the Middle Ages. It is still alive, but we can say that the abundance that it showed at one time has been reduced a great deal, although some suffixes are quite productive these days.

At this stage we want to highlight that the origin of some of the suffixes used in Basque has to be found in one of the neighbouring Romances spoken close to the Basque area. However, the fact that they appeared together with Basque names, had a great frequency and were combined with some other Basque suffixes demonstrates that in spite of being loan morphemes they have been completely accepted in our language. The best example of what we have said is the historical suffix *-et, -eta, -ete* (*Alfontset, Alfontxet < Alfontso, Alfontxo; Andredauneta < Andredaune; Andregaieta < Andregaila; Arramonet, Erramonet < Arramon, Erramon; Bertranet < Bertran; Garzet < Garze; Nabarret, Nabarreta < Nabar, Nabarra; Otxet, Otxoeta < Otxo(a); Semeret < Semero...*), which also appears combined with the Aquitanian *-ko* in *-etako* (*Joanetako*) and in *-ket* (*Martiket*). Two other Romance originated suffixes are *-in, -ino, -ina*, present in *Nabarrina (< Nabarra), Santzin(o), Santzin (< Santz), Txopino (< Txope, palatalized variant of Lope equivalent to Basque Otxoa, Otxoa)* and *-ot(e), -ota* (*Antxot, Antxote < Antxo < Antso < Santso < Santzo; Beraskot < Berasko < Belasko, from Vigila in the last analysis, Eneko < Eneko, although it can be interpreted as Eneko + -t...*). Nowadays the Spanish suffix *-ito* is rather common among us, often combined with Basque palatalized bases: *Joxepita, Oxepita (< Joxepa < Josefà); Laxarito (< Laxaro < Lazaro); Lorentxito (< Lorentxo),...*

Another point which we would like to emphasize is the fact that frequently, in the Middle Ages and in the following centuries, we find plenty of compound suffixes, that is to say, many of the suffixes that appear in the documentation are made of two –most times– or three –sometimes– other suffixes:

*-(a)ndako (< (a)nda + ko): Otxandako.*

*-(o)teko (< (o)te + ko): Otxoteko.*

*-gote (< go + ot(e) or go + te. This is a variant of -kot(e) after sonorant): Juangote.*

*-goto (< go + to): Juangoto.*

*-go(t)xo (< go + (t)xo): Juangotxo, Juangoxo.*

*-goxe(a) (< go + xe(a)): Juangoxea, Martingoxea.*

*-goxoto (< go + xo + to): Joangoxoto.*

- ikon (< -iko + on): *Joanikon, Perikon*.  
 -ikoni (< iko + on + i): *Joanikoni*.  
 -ikot(e) (< iko + ot(e) / t(e)): *Joanikot, Joanikote*.  
 -ikoti (< iko + (ot / t) + ti / i): *Joanikoti*.  
 -ikotxea (< iko(t) + (t)xe + a): *Joanikotxea*.  
 -ikox (< iko + x): *Joanikox*.  
 -kot(e) (< ko + ot(e) / t(e)): *Itxuskot - Utxuskot, Joankot, Martikot, Matxi-kote, Pedrokote, Perukot*.  
 -koti (< ko + ti): *Martikoti*.  
 -koto (< ko + to): *Joankoto, Xoankoto*.  
 -koxe(a) (< ko + xe + (a)): *Joankoxe(a), Mitxelkoxe, Totakoxe*.  
 -liko (< l + -iko): *Santxoliko*.  
 -oni (< -on + i): *Peironi, Peroni*. Cf. *Joanikoni*.  
 -otiko (ot + iko): *Joanotiko*.  
 -otin (< -ot + in): *Joanotin, Peirotin*.  
 -oton (< ot + on): *Peiroton*.  
 -otxe(a) (< ot + (t)xe(a)): *Joanotxe(a)*.  
 -otxo (< ot + txo): *Juanotxo, Martinotxo*.  
 -ski (< s + ki): *Peruski*.  
 -skito (< s + ki + to): *Peruskito*.  
 -skitxo (< s + ki + txo): *Peruskitxo*.  
 -ska, xka (< s, (t)x + ka), -sko, -xko (< s + (t)x + ko): *Bernardeska, Enesko, Erlandeska, Fortanesko, Marixko, Martinoxko, Martisko, Perisko, Perixko; Perosko, Perusko; Petrisko, Petriska, Betriska, Sabasko...*  
 -skot (< s, (t)x + ko + ot(e) / t): *Sabaskot*.  
 -sot (< so + ot / t): *Semesot*.  
 -ste (< s + te): *Antsoste, Peruste*.  
 -sto (< s + to): *Maristo, Martisto, Mikelesto*.  
 -tiko (< ti + ko / iko): *Joantiko*.  
 -til (< ti + l): *Paskotil*.  
 -tilko (< ti + l + ko): *Otxotilko*.  
 -tillo (< ti + l + o / ti + illo): *Juantillo*.  
 -toko (< to + ko): *Joantoko, Xoantoko*.  
 -ton (< to + on): *Garzaton, Garziaton, Juanton, Mariton, Peireton, Pereton*.  
 -tonko (< ton + ko): *Maritonko*.  
 -toxe (< to + xe): *Monautoxe*.  
 -txeko (< (t)xe + ko): *Joantxeko*.  
 -txen (< (t)xe + en): *Juantxen, Katalintxen*.  
 -txeto (< txe + to): *Joantxeto, Juantxeto*.  
 -txis (< txi + s): *Peritxis*.  
 -txot(e, a) (< txo + ot(e, a) / txo + te): *Joantxot, Maritxot, Martitxot, Perutxote...*  
 -txto (< tx + to): *Perotxto*.  
 -xto (< x + to): *Perixto*.

The problem here is to specify whether all the members of a compound suffix are added to the base at the same time or the last one—or the last ones when the members of the compound are three—is or are added to a basic name having already a suffix.

Many other suffixes are single, and some of them very used in the past, at present, or both:

-go (-ko's variant mainly after a nasal): *Beltrango, Fortungo - Urtungo, Joanesgo, Joango, Juanbeltrango, Marijoango, Martingo, Matxingo, Txaringo, Urdingo...*

-iko (occasionally -iku and -ika, this with gender motion): *Antxiko, Bertrandiko, Ferrandiko, Giliko, Joanika - Joaniko, Martiniko - Martiniku, Matxinko, Migeliko, Santxiko...* Nowadays -ico, -ica is very used in some Spanish dialects.

-illo: *Joanillo, Madalenilla...* In Basque this wasn't very frequent.

-ki(a): *Eneki, Joangi - Juangi - Joanki, Mariki(a), Martiki, Matxingi, Mixxelki...*

-kin (< ki + in?): *Andrekin, Janekin, Marikin...*

-ko: *Adamako, Anako, Aniko, Andereko, Antoko, Antsoko, Auriko, Axeariko, Belako, Bernadeko, Berradeko, Betriko - Petriko - Petiriko, Bitako, Elbirako, Eneko, Erramuko, Estebeko, Ferrandeko, Ganesko, Gasteako, Itxusko, Lopeko - Lopako, Mariko - Mariako - Malliko, Musako, Nabarko, Otsoko - Otxoko, Txartiko...* This has been, historically, one of the most common suffixes in Basque, and, as we have mentioned beforehand, it appears already in the Aquitanian inscriptions. It survives in every day speech in words like *mutiko* 'boy' (< *mutil* 'young man'), *zezenko, xexenko* 'little bull' (< *zezen* 'bull'), *neskatiko* 'little girl' (< *neskatil* < *neska* 'girl' + *til*)... etc. In the documentation, it is added even to nicknames based on place names: *Berrioko* (*Berrio*), *Ermuko* (*Ermua*), *Olaetako* (*Olaeta*), *Plazako* (*Plaza*), *Salinasgo* (*Salinas*), *Zugastiko* (*Zugasti*)...

-l: *Baskol, Enekol...*

-lo: *Markolo, Otxalo, Zurilo...*

-no: *Juanno, Ortino, Semeno.*

-ño: *Betiriño, Joanaño, Juanesño, Mariaño, Pelloño, Pelomartiño...* It is still alive and almost unique in some eastern dialects, outside the anthroponymy field as well, and it is habitual in standardized Basque speech, in words like *andereño* 'first school female teacher'.

-on(a): *Andraon, Arnalton - Arnauton, Bernadon, Bertranon, Elbirona, Garsion, Joanon, Martinon, Nabarron, Semeron...*

-s, -x, -tx(a): *Matxis, Perus, Eneko tx, Joanetx, Marix - Maritx, Martix, Perix - Peritx, Perox - Perotx, Perux - Perutx - Perutxa, Romirotx...*

-so: *Argiso - Argixo, Garbiso - Garbixo, Ilunso, Jaunso, Nunuso - Nonuso - Unuso, Semenso, Urdinso...*

-t: *Adant, Graxit, Joant, Lobat, Xement...*

-te: *Anderete, Domikute, Itxute, Itsuste - Itxuste, Matxite, Perute - Txerute...*

-ti: *Arriti, Jaundi - Jaunti - Jonti...*

-to(a), -tto(a): *Alabato, Anato, Arremonto, Domekato, Dotxato, Elbirato, Garziato, Graxito - Garaxito - Graziato, Gixonto, Itxuskotoa, Jaunto, Joanes-to, Lopeto, Maiorto, Malliato, Matxinto, Mikeleto, Otxoto, Petritoa...* It is alive, usually as -tto.

-txe(a), -xe(a), -(t)xa: *Amorexea, Anto(t)xe, Arnautxea, Betixa, Domikuxa, Errandexa, Errandotxa, Gaztexe, Jauntxe, Joanxe - Joantxe - Juantxe, Katalintxe, Marintxe, Onsaluxe, Ortixa, Petrixa - Petrixa, Zurixe...*

-txi: *Juantxi, Martitxi*.  
 -txo(a), -txu: *Arritxu, Austintxo, Estebetxo, Fermintxo, Gastetxo, Joakintxo, Joantxu – Juantxu, Joxepatxo(a), Lopetxo, Malentxo, Mariatxo, Marinatxo, Martietxo, Mileletxo, Petritxo, Txatxutxo, Txurdintxo – Urdintxo,...* This is very frequent in southern Basque dialects and is still productive.

## NAME SHORTENING AND “CONDENSATION”

The third way used in order to form hypocoristics in Basque is the shortening and condensation (Seeman, 1983: 241) of names. At this point we can distinguish more than one procedure for making hypocoristics:

c.1.- “Aferesis”, that is to say, the supression of the first syllable or syllables of the name, sometimes together with the change of one or more sounds: *Anastasito* → *Tasito* / *Anastaxio* → *Taxio*, *Bonifaxio* → *Faxio*, *Ildefontxito* / *Patxito* → *Atxito*, *Inaxio* → *Axio*, *Isidro* → *Xidro*, *Luxia* → *Axia*...

c.2.- Syncopation or removal of one or more sounds from the interior of a name: *Florentxio* → *Prontxio*, *Pontxio*; *Frantziska*, *Frantzisko* → *Fraxka* → *Fraxke*, *Praiska*, *Praxka*, *Fraisko*, *Fraxko*, *Fraxku*, *Praisko*, *Praxku*; *Lorentxa*, *Lorentxo* → *Lontxa*, *Lontxo*; *Migeliko* → *Miliko* → *Miko*; *Modexto* → *Moxtto*; *Prudentxio* → *Pontxio*...

c.3.- Apocope or the elimination of the last syllable(s) of a name: *Anunziazion* → *Anuntxi*; *Arantzazu* → *Arantxa*; *Arritokieta* → *Arritxu*; *Bixenta*, *Bixente* → *Bixen*; *Estanislao* → *Ixtanix*; *Patrizia* → *Pattri*; *Paxkual* → *Paxku*; *Seberiana* → *Xebe*; *Sorkunde* → *Xorkun*...

c.4.- «Redoublement» (Dauzat, 1988 [1949]: 115) or reduplication: *Iñaki* → *Kaki*; *Joxe* → *Ttote* → *Tote*; *Juana Mari* → *Mamai*...

c.5.- Condensation (Seeman, 1983: 241): *Joxe Anton* → *Joxton*, *Koxtor*; *Maria Azentzi(on)* → *Mazintzi*; *Maria Dolores* → *Maloles*; *Maria Jexux* → *Maxexux*, *Maxux*; *Maria Joxepa* → *Maxepa*...

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## LABURPENA

Lan honetan hipokoristikoak euskaraz eratzeko, sortzeko izan diren eta diren bideak aipatzen ditugu. Hiru dira: bustikuntza (hots simbolismoa), atzizkien erabilera (luzatzea) eta izen laburtzea edo trinkotzea. Zernahi gisaz hiru prozedura hauek komunzki konbinaturik agertzen dira; erraterako *Maria* → *Txariako* aldaketan bustikuntza eta atzizkia ditugu, *Domingo* → *Txomin* pausoan berriz bustikuntza eta izen laburtzea eta *Josefina* → *Finatxo*-n izen laburtzea eta atzizkia. Palatalizazioaren erabilera zaharra da gure hizkuntzan, Erdi Aroko eta geoztikako lekukotasunetan ikus daitekeenez; atzizkiak ere orobat, orain bizirik dauden batzuk Akitaniako idazkuneetan azaltzeak adierazten duen moduan. Izen laburtzearen lekuko gehienak, aldiz, gure egunotakoak dira.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo tratamos de los diferentes procedimientos de formación de hipocorísticos que han existido y todavía existen en euskera. Son tres: la palatalización (simbolismo fonético), el empleo de sufijos (amplificación) y la reducción o condesación. De todos modos estos tres procedimientos aparecen normalmente combinados; así por ejemplo, en el cambio *Maria* → *Txariako* se ha producido palatalización y encontramos también un sufijo. En el paso *Domingo* → *Txomin* hay palatalización y reducción, y en *Josefina* → *Finatxo* reducción y sufijo. El empleo de la palatalización como recurso expresivo es antiguo en nuestra lengua, tal como se puede observar en los testimonios medievales y posteriores. También la utilización de sufijos es antiguo, pues algunos de los que todavía están en uso aparecen ya en las inscripciones aquitanas. Sin embargo los testimonios de reducción de nombres, en su mayor parte, son modernos.

## RÉSUMÉ

Nous traitons dans cet article, les différents processus de formation des hypocoristiques qui ont existé et qui existent encore en euskera. Ils sont au nombre de trois: la palatalisation (symbolisme phonétique), l'emploi de suffixes (amplification) et la réduction ou condensation. Parmi tous les modèles, ces trois processus apparaissent normalement combinés; ainsi, par exemple, dans le changement *Maria* → *Txariako* s'est produit une palatalisation et nous trouvons aussi un suffixe. Dans le passage *Domingo* → *Txomin*, existe une palatalisation et une réduction et dans *Josefina* → *Finatxo*, une réduction et un suffixe. L'emploi de la palatalisation comme recours expressif est ancien dans notre langue, comme il peut être observé dans les témoignages médiévaux et postérieurs. L'utilisation de suffixes est aussi ancienne, car certains d'entre eux qui sont encore utilisés apparaissent déjà dans les inscriptions aquitaines. Cependant, les témoignages de réduction de noms, dans la plupart des cas, sont modernes.

## ABSTRACT

This article deals with the different procedures for hypocoristic formation which have existed and still exist in the Basque language. There are three: palatalisation (phonetic symbolism), the use of suffixes (amplification) and reduction or condensation. These procedures, however, are normally combined. For example, the shift *Maria* → *Txariako* reveals palatalisation and also contains a suffix; in the shift *Domingo* → *Txomin*, both palatalisation and reduction are used; and *Josefina* → *Finatxo* is a product of both reduction and a suffix. The use of palatalisation as an expressive resource is an old phenome-

non, as can be observed from evidence dating from the Middle Ages onwards. Neither is the use of suffixes a modern resource. Some of the suffixes still used today appear in the Aquitaine inscriptions. However, proof of name reduction is, for the most part, modern.