

# International Linguistic Association

## *Monthly Lecture Series*

**Saturday, May 6, 2023. 11 AM - 12 PM (EST)**

**Dr. Juliette Blevins**  
*CUNY, Graduate Center*

### **Proto-Basque and the Single Sibilant Hypothesis: Evidence, reassessment, and implications**

**Abstract:**

Blevins (2018) presents a new reconstruction of Proto-Basque, the mother language of modern Basque varieties, historical Basque, and Aquitanian, grounded in traditional methods of historical linguistics. Building on a long tradition of Basque scholarship, the comparative method and internal reconstruction, informed by the phonetic bases of sound change and phonological typology, are used to explain previously underappreciated alternations and asymmetries in Basque sound patterns, resulting in a radically new view of the proto-language, and regular sound correspondences between Proto-Basque and Proto-Indo-European suggestive of a distant genetic relationship (Blevins & Sproat 2021). One notable feature of this Proto-Basque reconstruction is a simplification of the phoneme inventory: where earlier proposals (e.g. Michelena 1977), as well as the recent EHHE-200 (Lakarra et al. 2019) posit two sibilants, \*s and \*z, Blevins (2018) argues that Proto-Basque had only a single sibilant \*s. A corollary of this hypothesis is a more complex view of Proto-Basque phonotactics: where earlier proposals allow only single consonants in the syllable onset, Blevins (2018, 2020) argues for morpheme-initial \*sC clusters. Under this account, Common Basque /z/ in inherited vocabulary has one of two sources: it arises from laminalization in syllable-initial \*sC clusters where \*sC > \*zC (>z); and it arises from laminalization in syllable-final \*Cs clusters where \*Cs > Cz (>z). The reconstruction of initial \*sC clusters in Proto-Basque roots and stems allows for over 40 lexical comparisons between Proto-Basque and Proto-Indo-European which would otherwise not be possible. Given the important role of initial \*sC clusters in supporting a possible relationship between these two proto-languages, all current evidence for the single-sibilant hypothesis is presented and reassessed in light of recent critiques (Bakker 2020, Gorrochategui 2020, Hualde 2021).

**Date & Time: May 6, 2023 at 11:00 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)**

**ZOOM LINK:** <https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/83219251181>

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## Juliette Blevins

*Presidential Professor of Linguistics, CUNY, Graduate Center*



Blevins is prolific, with over 100 publications covering descriptive, synchronic and diachronic studies. Her first book, *Nhanda, an Aboriginal Language of Western Australia*, was based on fieldwork with the last speakers of the language, which has now become dormant. Blevins' second book, *Evolutionary Phonology: The Emergence of Sound Patterns*, explored the nature of sound patterns and sound change in human language and presented a new theory synthesizing results in historical linguistics, phonetics, and phonological theory. In her most recent book, *Advances in Proto-Basque Reconstruction with Evidence for the Proto-European-Euskarian Hypothesis*, Blevins provides evidence that the Basque language, once thought to be an isolate, is distantly related to Proto-Indo-European, the widely accepted ancestor of all Indo-European languages.

Before coming to The Graduate Center, Blevins taught at the University of Texas, Austin, the University of Western Australia, Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Leipzig. She is currently Presidential Professor in Linguistics and Director of the Endangered Language Initiative at The Graduate Center.

For more information about our speaker, click on the link below:

<https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Faculty/Core-Bios/Juliette-Blevins>