

BASQUE PALINDROMES

DAN TILQUE
Portland, Oregon

Recently, I've been looking through foreign language dictionaries in search of additions to Jeff Grant's The Palindromicon (Word Ways Monograph Series 3). I've found an unusual set of them in the Basque-English Dictionary by Gorky Aulestin which I would like to share with Word Ways readers.

First, the palindromes found without modification:

EDADE age
ELE-MELE chatter, gossip
EZ EZE except, but
EZTITZE act of sweetening
ISUSI place where furze grows (also used as a surname)
ITZEZTI sweet talk
IXI be quiet
OKERREKO wrong, mistaken
TURRUT joke
UJUJU aha
USTETSU ingenious
UXU cry of happiness

There were also two notable near-misses:

TTIPITTO tiny
TXEPETX wren

Not being satisfied with this list, I sought inflected forms within the language. The dictionary had a section in the front that described the grammar of Basque.

Basque, as most of you know, is the only non-Indo-European language spoken in western Europe. As you might expect, its grammar is much different from that of English, French or Spanish. For example, the definite article is the suffix "-a", the indefinite article is the word "bat", and it follows the noun as do adjectives. Also, if a noun is modified, the definite article is usually added to the adjective but not to the noun.

These palindromes are a combination of articles with nouns and adjectives:

AOKOA the hit on the mouth
AUTATUA the elected (adjective)
AUTUA the conversation
TABU BAT a tabu

Like Indo-European languages, Basque inflects nouns to indicate

case. There the similarity seems to end. It has 13 cases, some of which, to my knowledge, no Indo-European language has. Furthermore, instead of distinguishing between masculine, feminine and neuter nouns, declensions are determined by whether the noun is animate or inanimate, has a definite or indefinite article, and whether it ends in a vowel or a consonant. Which nouns are animate and which are not is not always apparent; parts of a body are considered inanimate, but a table is animate.

Unless indicated otherwise, a word below ending in "-k" is in the Subject Agent case and one ending in "-z" is in the Instrumental case. For animate nouns, the "-z" indicates the indefinite article; for inanimate nouns, the definite article.

ARASARA to the shelf (-ra = Allative case)
 IRAARI to the fern (-ari = Dative case, definite article)
 IRAKARI to a weed (-ri = Dative case, indefinite article)
 IRALARI to a fern field (Dative, indefinite)
 IRARI to a fern (Dative, indefinite)
 IRUZURI to a fraud or trick (Dative, indefinite)
 KAXAK box, chest
 KIKIRIKIK cockle-doodle-do, crow of a young rooster
 KILIK-KILIK tickling
 KIRARIK age or season (-rik = Partative)
 KIRRIK sound or sensation of grinding teeth
 KITARRATIK guitar (-tik = Ablative)
 KORROK sound of a belch
 KUKURRUKUK cockle-doodle-doo, crow of a rooster
 OKAKO surfeit, satiety (-ko = Locative)
 ZAMAZ load or burden
 ZANAZ vein or artery
 ZAPA-ZAPAZ sound indicating abundance or continuous movement
 ZARRA-MARRAZ residue, trash
 ZARRAPARRAZ ruckus or clamor
 ZATAZ crudely made sandal
 ZEDEZ limit or boundary marker
 ZEHEZ palm or hand
 ZIRIZ chock, dowel or cotter pin
 ZOKOZ corner or secret place
 ZIRRIZ petting (sexual touching)
 ZOKOZ corner or secret place
 ZOROZ craziness (or a crazy person)
 ZOZOZ blackbird
 ZUKUZ soup
 ZURRUBURRUZ murmuring
 ZURRUMURRUZ rumor
 ZURRUZ snoring

These are not the only Basque palindromes; rather, they are ones that are additions to the Palindromicon. I did not record a number of palindromes for which there was already an entry with the same spelling. I also did not look at verbal inflections; they will have to wait for later research or perhaps a researcher with greater fortitude.