

Gascon u-perfects and the analogical foregrounding of inflectional class

This paper combines historical corpus data and comparative reconstruction to elucidate the origin and spread of the thematic vowel /u/ found today throughout preterite and imperfect subjunctive forms (i.e. reflexes of Latin *perfectum* forms; morphomic distribution ‘PYTA’, Maiden 2018) of third-conjugation verb lexemes in Gascon (Gallo-Romance) varieties.

Modern Gascon verb inflection (Grosclaude & Nariò 1998, Romieu & Bianchi 2005, Massourre 2012) is typified by a three-way conjugational class distinction in most tense-aspect-mood categories, expressed principally via theme vowels. *Perfectum* reflexes are characterised by thematic /ɛ/ in the first conjugation, e.g. *cantè* [kan'tɛ] ‘sing.PRET.3SG’, *cantèsse* [kan'tese] ‘sing.IPF.SBJV.3SG’, continuing Latin -DEDĪ perfects; thematic /i/ in the fourth conjugation, e.g. *bastí* [bas'ti] ‘build.PRET.3SG’, *bastísse* [bas'tise] ‘sing.IPF.SBJV.3SG’, continuing Latin -IUĪ perfects; and thematic /u/ in the third conjugation, e.g. *venó* [be'nu] ‘sell.PRET.3SG’, *venósse* [be'nuse] ‘sell.IPF.SBJV.3SG’. While the early historical development of the first- and fourth-conjugation forms shows continuity with other Occitan varieties (Ronjat 1937, Skårup 1997, Wheeler 2012), thematic /u/ is unique to Gascon within southern Gallo-Romance.

Traditional accounts (Zauner 1896:444-446, Allières 1988:177, Massourre 2012:214) ascribe Gascon u-perfects to the analogical influence of the single item ‘be’, and historical reconstruction supports this view. Sound change only yields theme vowel /u/ in *perfectum* reflexes of ‘be’ (e.g. FUIT > *fo* /fo/ > modern *hó* /hu/ ‘be.PRET.3SG’), and there is no potential source of /u/ elsewhere in the paradigm: in Gascon, the past participle in -/yt/ < -ŪTUM remains distinct from the *perfectum* reflexes, whereas in northern Gallo-Romance, reflexes of Latin past participles in -ŪTUM exert analogical influence on *perfectum* reflexes (Pope 1952:370, 381).

While the initial emergence of u-perfects occurs at the pre-literary period and is not directly visible in textual evidence (Bourciez 1927), the chronology and direction of their subsequent geographical and lexical spread can be traced in data from the Linguistic Corpus of Old Gascon (LCOG; Field 2012, 2013) and the *Atlas linguistique de la Gascogne* (ALG; Allières 1971). The progressive lexical extension of u-perfects is associated with the levelling of root and stress alternations in former ‘strong’ perfects (those with root-stressed forms in a subset of persons), e.g. analogical *metó* [me'tu] ‘put.PRET.3SG’ replaces etymological *mes* [mes] < MĪSIT, a process largely complete by the late thirteenth century; and later, with reduction in distinctive root allomorphy characterising morphomic distribution patterns. In some varieties, u-perfects spread beyond the third conjugation and into all fourth conjugation lexemes; this development is visible in northern dialects from the thirteenth century onwards, and is associated with the introduction of a thematic ‘augment’ (Maiden 2004, Esher 2016), e.g. analogical *bastissó* [basti'su] ‘build.PRET.3SG’ replaces etymological *bastí* [bas'ti].

The Gascon developments are significant for theories of inflectional analogy since they provide evidence for analogical remodelling of multiple items on the model of a single, idiosyncratic item of high token frequency, a phenomenon rarely reported in existing literature (see e.g. Cowgill 1959:11, Fulk 2018:189, 209, 307–308 for possible examples in Germanic). A further noteworthy aspect is the historical tendency of Gascon inflectional systems to retain and reinforce conjugational class distinctions and morphomic stem contrasts based on thematic vowels, contrary to the tendency observed across other Occitan varieties, in which contrasts based on distinctive root allomorphy take precedence (compare Esher 2021a,b,2022).

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