

Apparent unaccusative unergatives in Basque (and Romance)

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Introduction. The foci of this presentation are Voice alternations that lie behind apparently very striking differences in the configuration of a number of intransitive verbs within Basque dialects. As will be shown, similar differences within Romance languages will actually prove crucial to account for Basque dialectal variation, establishing a clearly distinction between western and central dialects of Basque, in contact with Spanish, and eastern dialects of Basque, in contact with French.

Assumptions. As is well known, Voice alternations have to do with the particular grammatical function of a given semantic argument: in particular, the variation we are concerned with regards the structural position of the single argument of intransitive verbs (unergative vs. unaccusative configuration). We assume, on the one hand, the view according to which the encyclopedic knowledge that a speaker has of roots determines their ability to appear in a particular syntactic structure (Borer 2005a,b, Schäfer 2008, 2012). In addition, for the particular cases we are interested in, the different structures in which a given root can appear are basically distinguished by the make-up of the Voice head, which gives rise to different syntactic configurations and morphological realizations. In this sense, we follow Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer's (2015) proposal that the morphological realization of the Voice head, either thematic (i.e. Agent/Causer) or with no semantic feature (expletive Voice), depends on its syntactic properties (whether the Voice head is present or not, and whether it projects a specifier or not).

Data. In Basque, a subset of (*a priori*) unergative verbs (1) shows dialectal variation. Whereas in western and central dialects (2) their subject bears ergative case marking and the auxiliary is HAVE, in eastern dialects (3) they occur with absolutive subjects and BE auxiliary, just like unaccusatives:

(1) Volitional verbs expressing speech (*mintzatu* 'speak', *solastatu* 'chat'), manner of motion (*promenatu* 'stroll', *jauzi* 'jump'), dining (*bazkaldu* 'have lunch', *afaldu* 'have dinner'), and animative activities (*borrokatu* 'fight', *jokatu* 'play, act', *jolastu* 'play').

(2) **Western & Central Basque dialects**

- a. Antton-ek promenatu du
Antton-ERG strolled has
'Antton has strolled'
b. Aduna-k bazkaldu du
Aduna-ERG had.lunch had
'Aduna has had lunch'

(3) **Eastern Basque dialects**

- a. Antton promenatu da
Antton.ABS strolled is
'Antton has strolled'
b. Aduna bazkaldu da
Aduna.ABS had.lunch is
'Aduna has had lunch'

To account for this behavior of eastern dialects, Aldai (2008) suggests that the dialectal divide within Basque corresponds to the divide between two case-marking systems: one based on the ergative alignment of case, represented by eastern dialects, and a semantically aligned one, represented by western and central dialects. However, Berro & Etxepare (in press) have questioned Aldai's characterization of the eastern case-alignment, crucially showing that not all unergative verbs are aligned in the unaccusative fashion in eastern dialects:

- (4) a. Ur-a-k kurritu du b. Izarr-a-k distiratu du
water-the-ERG flown has star-the-ERG shine has
'The water has flown' 'The star has shined'

Proposal. We propose a new type of explanation for these dialectal differences. We argue that the verbs in (2) and (3) are just associated to different syntactic-eventive configurations in each group of dialects, the difference being crucially related to the Voice head. It is a well-known fact that verbs having very close meaning can correspond to different event configurations across and even within languages: e.g. 'blush' is a change of state in Italian (*arrossire* with BE auxiliary) and it is a verb of internal causation in Dutch (*bloezen* with HAVE auxiliary) (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995),

and in French both meanings are differentiated (the internally caused verb *rougir* takes HAVE auxiliary, whereas the change-of-state verb *se rougir* takes BE) (Labelle 1992, Labelle & Doron 2010). In a similar way, we argue that the events described by the verbs in (1) can be conceptualized differently. In other words, (2) and (3) are externalizations of two different eventive configurations. And language contact has a say in these differences. Eastern dialects, where these *a priori* unergative verbs behave as unaccusative (3), are in contact with French, whereas western and central dialects (2) are in contact with Spanish. Crucially, the two different conceptualizations of the events described by the verbs in (1) can also be traced back in Romance. In Spanish, they are conceived as internally caused events, thus explaining that unergative behavior (2) in western and central dialects of Basque. But they are conceptualized as change-of-states in French, or have been so in Middle French, as we will show, thus accounting for the unaccusative behavior (3) of the corresponding verbs in Basque eastern dialects.

Let us take as a case in point the intransitive verb ‘stroll’. In Spanish (4) the corresponding root is conceived as compatible with an unergative structure, where an Agent is mapped in the specifier position of the Voice head. And the same holds for western and central Basque dialects (2), in contact with Spanish. In turn, in French (5) the relevant root is conceptualized as compatible with a change-of-state event, where (following Schäffer 2008 and AAS 2015) the Voice layer is present but semantically inert (expletive Voice) and projects a specifier realized by the “reflexive” clitic *se*. The same holds for the Basque eastern dialects (3), in contact with French.

(4) Antton ha paseado → Thematic Voice [_{VoiceP} AGENT Voice [_{vP} ...]]
Antton has strolled

(5) Antton s'est promené → Expletive Voice: [_{VoiceP} REFL Voice [_{vP} ... DP...]]
Antton SE is strolled

In short, the difference between Spanish (and western/central Basque dialects) and (Middle) French (and eastern Basque dialects) regarding the intransitive verbs in (1) seems to be grounded in an abstract difference in conceptualization: as internally caused events (unergatives) or as change-of-state events (unaccusatives), something which actually boils down to difference regarding the Voice head: in (4) the DP merged in the Spec,VoiceP is integrated semantically into the verbal event, following the thematic instruction (here, Agent) determined by the Voice head, whereas in (5) the expletive Voice head does not provide any thematic role for the element in its specifier, therefore only an element that does not need to be semantically integrated (i.e., a *se*-reflexive) can be merged in this position (Schäfer 2008, AAS 2015).

Although for reasons of space we cannot deal here by one by one with all the verbs included in (1), let us briefly mention the case of verbs of dining. Both ‘have lunch’ and ‘have dinner’, which are conceived as internally caused in Spanish and western/central dialects of Basque, can also be conceived as change-of-state unaccusatives, as is the case for eastern Basque dialects and, arguably, for (Middle) French. Actually, the morphological shape of the verb *dé(s)jeuner*, with the prefix *de(s)-*, seems to clearly point out to the semantics of a change of state (changing the state of *jeûne* ‘fasting’). In fact, in Middle Fr. *se desjeuner* ‘have breakfast/lunch’ (and *se disner* ‘have dinner’) existed (*Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*) and, even if in Modern French. the pronominal pattern has not survived, the possibility of conceiving these verbs as change-of-state unaccusatives remains, since they cannot take a direct object (DO) (whereas most unergatives can, under the appropriate conditions: *dance (a polka); speak (a language)*). Instead, what is eaten is introduced by *de* ‘of’ or *avec* ‘with’ (*déjeuner, dîner d’un sandwich*). On the contrary, in Spanish the internally caused (unergative) conception of dining verbs prevails and they actually can take a hyponym DO (*desayunar, cenar un sandwich*). Another test for the change-of-state conceptualization of (Middle) French dining verbs is the possibility of entering the causative alternation (*dejeuner un animal* ‘make an animal have breakfast/lunch’), thus supporting our analysis of pronominal verbs in (5) along the lines of anticausative change-of-state verbs (Schäfer 2008, AAS 2015).

Selected references: **Aldai 2008.** From ergative case marking to semantic case marking: The case of historical Basque. *The Typology of semantic alignment*, 197-218. Oxford: OUP. **Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou & Schäfer 2015.** *External Arguments in Transitivity Alternations*. Oxford: OUP. **Schäfer 2008.** The Syntax of (Anti-)Causatives. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins. **Berro & Etxepare in press.** Ergativity in Basque. *The Oxford Handbook of Ergativity*. Oxford: OUP.