

Dative Overmarking in Basque: Evidence of Spanish-Basque Convergence

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Abstract

This paper investigates a recent change in the grammar of spoken Basque which results in the substitution of dative case and agreement for absolutive case and agreement in marking animate, specific direct objects. I argue that this pattern of use is due to convergence between the feature matrix of the functional category AGR in Spanish and Basque. In contrast to previous studies which point to interface areas as the locus of syntactic convergence, I argue that this is a change affecting the core grammar of Basque. Furthermore, I suggest that the appearance of this case marking pattern in spoken Basque is probably attributable to recent changes in the demographics of Basque speakers and that its use is related to the degree of proficiency in each language of adult bilingual speakers.

Laburpena

Lan honetan euskara mintzatuaren gramatika gertatu berri den aldaketa bat ikertzen da, hain zuzen ere, kasu datiboa eta aditz komuntaduraren ordezkapena kasu absolutiboa eta aditz komuntaduraren ordezkari objektu zuzenak --animatuak eta zehatzak—markatzen direnean. Nire iritziz, erabilera hori gazteleraz eta euskaraz dagoen AGR delako kategori funtzionalaren ezaugarri taulen bateratzeari zor zaio. Aurreko ikerketa batzuetan hizkuntza arteko ukipen eremuak bateratze sintaktikoaren gunetzat jotzen badira ere, nire iritziz aldaketa horrek euskararen gramatika oinarritzkoari eragiten dio. Areago, esango nuke kasu marka erabilera hori, ziurrenik, euskal hiztunen artean gertatu berri diren aldaketa demografikoen ondorioz agertzen dela euskara mintzatuan eta hiztun elebidun helduek hizkuntza bakoitzean daukaten gaitasun mailari lotuta dagoela.

Keywords: Bilingualism, syntactic convergence, language contact.

Hitz gakoak: elebitasuna, bateratze sintaktikoa, hizkuntz ukipena..

1. Introduction

Several recent studies have analyzed the syntactic changes that result from contact between Spanish and other languages. Most of this research has concentrated on multilingualism in the Americas and contact between Spanish and Quechua (Klee and Ocampo 1995, Ocampo and Klee 1995, Sánchez 2003) or Spanish and English (Silva-Corvalán 1994, 1997, Zentella 1997, Montrul 2004, Toribio 2004) as well as other languages spoken on these continents (Godenzzi 1995, Brody 1995, Choi 2000). Some of these researchers argue that peripheral areas of grammar which form interfaces between the syntax proper and other interpretive domains are particularly vulnerable to syntactic convergence when languages are in contact (Montrul, Sánchez 2003, 2004, Toribio 2004). These studies support cross-linguistic findings of convergence in syntactic-pragmatic domains in first language attrition (Sorace 2000), bilingual first language acquisition (Müller and Hulk (2001, Paradis and Navarro 2003) as well as adult second language acquisition (Sorace 2003).

To date less research has been done on the outcome of contact between Spanish and the languages of the Iberian Peninsula. In the case of Basque, several studies have focused on lexical and phonological transfer from Spanish to Basque (e.g. Hualde 1993, Mitxelena 1995, Hammond 1995) but there is very little on syntactic

interference between these languages. Landa (1995) considers but ultimately rejects syntactic transfer from Basque as a possible explanation of null direct objects in Basque Spanish¹. Instead, Landa suggests that influence from Basque may allow for different semantic and pragmatic constraints to operate in this dialect of Spanish as opposed to other varieties.

This paper investigates a recent change in the grammar of spoken Basque which I will call dative overmarking, namely the use of dative case and agreement for marking animate, specific direct objects. My data come from natural speech samples of bilingual Spanish/ Basque speakers collected in the Spanish Basque Country. I argue that this change is due to convergence between the feature matrix of the functional category AGR in Spanish and Basque, following Sánchez's (2003, 2004) Functional Convergence Hypothesis. In contrast to aforementioned studies which point to interface areas as the locus of syntactic convergence, I argue that this is a change affecting the core grammar of Basque. Furthermore, I suggest that the appearance of this case marking pattern in spoken Basque is probably attributable to recent changes in the demographics of Basque speakers and that its use is related to the degree of proficiency in each language of adult bilingual speakers. Before describing presenting my data and analyses, I will begin with some background on

Spanish-Basque contact as well as a description of *leísmo* in Spanish and dative overmarking in Basque.

2. Basque and Spanish in contact

Euskara (Basque) is a non Indo-European language isolate spoken by about 800,000 people in a small area of the Pyrenees in Northern Spain and Southwestern France. Bilingualism in the Spanish Basque Country has a long history; Basque and Spanish have been in contact for hundreds of years, leaving many traces of mutual influence. Roman inscriptions suggest that Basque was originally spoken in a much wider area¹. Since the Middle Ages, Basque has continually ceded ground to Spanish and French, and found a stronghold primarily in rural, agricultural areas. For centuries, there was a diglossia-like pattern of language use without widespread bilingualism, with Basque spoken by a rural population and Spanish in a privileged status as the language of commerce and the Basque upper classes. In the twentieth century, waves of immigrants seeking jobs in industrialized urban areas of Basque Country nearly quadrupled the population of the Spanish Basque Country. Because most of these immigrants and their children did not learn Basque, the percentage of the population which spoke Basque declined considerably, even though the number of speakers remained roughly constant. Combined with the linguistic repression of Francoist Spain, which damaged the parent-child transmission of Basque, this influx of non-Basque speakers had the effect of turning Basque into a minority language spoken by a quarter of the population.

Since the death of Franco, Basque has made a significant recovery in the Basque Autonomous Community, thanks largely to language planning policy and bilingual education. Table 1 shows the most encouraging sign of recovery, the fact that the aging of the population of Basque speakers was reversed during the years 1981-1986, a trend which continues today (II Encuesta Sociolingüística de Euskal Herria, cited in Aranguren 1997).

Census Year Age	Basque Speakers	Quasi-Basque Speakers	Spanish Speakers
1981 2-24 years	18.73%	20.46%	60.81%
1986 2-24 years	25.09%	29.36%	45.55%
1981 25-59 years	21%	11.41%	67.59%
1986 25-59 years	22.1%	11.59%	66.31%
1981 60+ years	31.85%	6.71%	61.44%
1986 60+ years	31.04%	6.06%	62.9%

Table 1: Basque speakers by age (Tejerina, 1992: 149,160)

This recovery has been accompanied by important changes in the demographic characteristics of Basque speakers since the turn of the twentieth century. First, while the raw number of Basque speakers has increased slightly, they comprise a much smaller percentage of the population, due to massive immigration of non-Basque speakers, as seen in Table 2. In addition, all speakers of Basque, except for the very young and a few very old speakers are bilingual in either French or Spanish.

	1900	1975	1981	1991
Population	600,000	2,072,000	2,134,000	2,100,000
Basque Speakers	500,000	500,000	700,000	750,000
Percentage	83%	24%	32%	36%

Table 2: Percentage of Basque speakers from 1900-1991 (Etxeberria, 1997: 143)

In recent years, the recovery of Basque has been helped greatly by the declaration of the Basque Country as officially bilingual in 1978. Additionally, in 1982 a law mandated that all government services be provided in Basque, as well as access to bilingual education for all public school students. These measures represent significant progress towards the survival of Basque because they have introduced the languages into prestigious spheres of use which had previously been restricted to Spanish (Haddican 2005). Another important step in the preservation of Basque has been its standardization through the creation of Euskara Batua (Unified Basque) (Haddican 2005, Amorrortu 2000).

¹ Zuazo 1995, p. 6.

As Silva-Corvalan (1997) notes, the typological systems of Basque and Spanish have remained quite different despite many centuries of contact, most notably the case marking and head direction patterns in each language. While Spanish is a nominative/accusative language and is head initial, Basque has an ergative/absolutive case marking pattern and is head final. Nevertheless, the fact that Basque and Spanish have been in contact for well over a thousand years is evident in both languages. The Basque lexicon shows many signs of contact with Spanish (as well as Latin and French) in the form of loanwords and calques. By one estimate, up to 40 percent of the modern Basque lexicon is made up of borrowings from Romance languages².

3. Direct object agreement and *leísmo* in Spanish

Like other Romance languages, Spanish has pronominal clitics which are also known as “weak” pronouns, because they must be adjacent to the verb phrase. In all dialects of Spanish, accusative clitics obligatorily double a pronominal NP, as seen in (1a), and some dialects such as Porteño Spanish (Suñer 1988) and Basque Spanish (Franco 1993) also allow clitic doubling with definite direct object pronouns, as in (1b). For all dialects of Spanish, dative clitics may double indirect objects, as seen in (1c)³

- (1) a. *Lo* *veo* *a* *él*
 him-ACCclitic I see a.p. him-ACC
 ‘I see him’
- b. *Lo* *veo* *a* *Koldo*
 him-ACCclitic I see a.p. ‘Koldo-ACC
 ‘I see Koldo’
- c. *Le* *di* *un helado* *a* *Koldo*
 him-DATclitic I gave an ice cream a.p. him-DAT
 ‘I gave Koldo an ice cream’

Following Franco (1993), I will assume that in Basque Spanish clitics are verbal agreement morphemes.

In Spanish, there is no inflectional morphology which distinguishes between accusative and dative case in DPs which are strong (non-clitic) pronouns or non-pronominal nouns. For example, ‘gato’ (cat) and ‘a ella’ (to/for her) could be dative or accusative arguments. Consequently, the distribution of clitics is where we need to look for alternations between accusative and dative case in Spanish. However, Spanish does distinguish between nouns and non-clitic pronouns that are animate and specific and those that are not via the marker *a* (a

phenomenon called ‘personal *a*’)³. For example, ‘personal *a*’ is obligatory in (2a), since the direct object is specific and animate:

- (2) a. [+ animate, + specific direct object (‘personal *a*’ needed)]
He visto a Julieta
 (I) have seen (to) Julieta
 ‘I have seen Juliet’

However, the marker is not obligatory in (3a), since the direct object is not specific, or in (3b), which has a non-human complement:

- (3) a. [+ animate, - specific direct object (no ‘personal *a*’)]
Se buscan secretarias
 looked for secretaries
 ‘Secretaries are needed’
- b. [-animate, + specific direct object (no ‘personal *a*’)]
Cortan los árboles
 (they)cut the trees
 ‘They cut trees’

As is true in much of Spain, the Spanish dialect spoken in the Basque Country is *leísta*. Traditionally, the term *leísmo* refers to the use of the singular dative clitic *le* instead of the singular masculine accusative clitic *lo* for marking singular direct objects that are masculine and animate, as shown in example (4a). In contrast, non-*leísta* dialects of Spanish use the accusative clitic for all direct objects, as in (4 b).

- (4) a. *Leísmo: Le he visto (a tu padre).*
 DAT-3sg have seen-
 S1sg your father/mother/dog
 ‘I have seen him (your father)’
- b. Standard *Lo he visto (a tu padre)*
 ACC3sgMASC/DAT3sg have-
 S1sg seen your father
 ‘I have seen him (your father)’

However, studies by Klein- Andreu (1981, 1999) and Fernández-Ordoñez (1994, 1999) make it clear that *leísmo* in spoken Spanish cannot be described adequately by this simple generalization. Taking a sociolinguistic approach to the distribution of *leísmo*, these researchers have found that there is considerable variation in Peninsular Spanish as to the use of *leísmo* in different dialects.

² Bakker 1989 p. 117.

³ This is an over-simplification, as Torrego (1998) demonstrates; the distribution of dative-marked accusative arguments also depends on the semantics of the verb and the agentiveness of the subject.

In addition to *leísta* dialects which substitute dative for accusative clitics, there are *loísta* and *laísta* dialects of Spanish which substitute accusative for dative clitics. Some dialects combine *leísmo* and *laísmo* in different parts of the clitic paradigm (Fernández-Ordoñez (1999) Speakers of *loísta dialects* use the accusative clitic 'lo' for masculine singular indirect objects rather than the dative 'le', while in *laísta* dialects the accusative 'la' is used for feminine indirect objects instead of 'le', as seen in examples (5a,b):

- (5) a. *Loísmo:* *Lo di un regalo a mi padre.*
 him-ACCclitic (I)gave a gift to my father
 'I gave my father a gift'
 b. *Laísmo:* *La di un regalo a mi madre.*
 her-ACCclitic (I)gave a gift to my mother
 'I gave my father/mother a gift'
 c. Standard. *Le di un regalo a mi padre/madre.*
 him-DATclitic (I)gave a gift to my father/mother
 'I gave my father/mother a gift'

Furthermore, there are other dialects with patterns of clitic selection which do not fit within the the *leísta/loísta/laísta* distinction presented in (5)⁴. For instance, in Asturian Spanish mass nouns such as 'la leche' in (6a) are replaced by the neutral clitic 'lo', whereas clitics replacing count nouns like 'la manzana' are distinguished by gender and number, as in (6b):

- (6) a. *La leche lo traen de las montañas para venderlo.*
 The milk ACCcliticNeuSg bring-3Pl from the mountains to sell- ACCcliticNeuSg
 'They bring milk from the mountains to sell it'
 b. *Coge esa manzana y cómetela.*
 Grab that apple and eat- ACCcliticFemSg
 'Grab that apple and eat it'
 (Fernández-Ordoñez 1999)

In the dialect of Spanish spoken in the Basque Country, clitics which refer to all animate objects, regardless of case or gender, are marked with dative case (Fernández-Ordoñez 1999). A further complication in the selection of clitics in this dialect is that Basque Spanish speakers often substitute a null pronoun for an inanimate accusative clitic, a pattern which can be seen in Table 3.

Accusative	Animates	Inanimates		
	<i>le(s)</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>	<i>Neuter</i>
		\emptyset / <i>lo(s)</i>	\emptyset / <i>la(s)</i>	\emptyset / <i>lo</i>
Dative	<i>le(s)</i>	<i>le (s)</i>		<i>le</i>

Table 3: Clitic use in Basque Spanish (from Fernández-Ordóñez 1999)

Some examples from Spanish Basque are provided in (7a-c):

- (7) a. *Se suelta el cerdo, el carnicero le agarra de así.*
 Release-Refl. the pig, the butcher
 DATclitic3Sg
 grabs like this
 'They let the pig go, the butcher grabs it like this'
 b. *Cogemos las vainas en la huerta, \emptyset llevamos a casa.*
 We collect the beans in the garden, take home
 'We collect beans in the garden, we take (them) home'
 (Fernández-Ordóñez 1999)
 c. *El carrito, ¿Cuándo \emptyset perdiste?*
 The cart, when you lost?
 'The cart, when did you lose (it)?'
 (Landa 1995)

Speakers of Basque Spanish are *leísta* to varying degrees depending on sociolinguistic factors such as degree of bilingualism and socio-cultural level (Urrutia Cárdenas 1996).

4. Direct object agreement and dative overmarking in Basque⁵

Basque is a triple agreement language which morphologically encodes the subject, indirect object and direct object person and number on the verb⁶. Thus, it allows for up to three arguments per clause to be null, as in example (8). Most Basque verbs, like the verb in (8) are periphrastic, composed of a participle and an inflected aux⁷.

⁵ In this paper, I will be looking at the variety of Standard Basque spoken in Spanish Basque Country

⁶ When there is triple agreement on the auxiliary, the absolutive (direct object) argument can only be inflected for 3rd person.

⁷ Basque is considered a morphologically ergative language. In the gloss in example in (8), ABS= absolutive case, DAT=Dative and ERG=Ergative.

⁴ For an account of the distribution of Spanish clitics using Optimality Theory, see Camacho and Sánchez (2002).

- (8) *Jarriko diogu, Ø Ø Ø bale?*
 put-FUT ABS3s- DAT-3s-ERG-1p *pro*-ABS *pro*-
 DAT *pro*-ERG ok
 ‘(We)ll put (it) (on him), ok?’

In Basque, what I will call dative overmarking can be seen in example (9a), in which dative verbal and nominal agreement are used for a direct object, rather than the standard absolutive agreement marker⁸.

- (9) a. Dative overmarking
Nik zuri entzun di-zu-t
 ERG1sg DAT2sg hear ABS3sg-
 DAT2sg-ERG1sg
 ‘I have heard you-DAT’
 b. Standard
Nik zu entzun zaitu-t
 ERG1sg ABS2sg hear ABS2sg-
 ERG1sg
 ‘I have heard you-ABS’

A corpus of adult spoken Basque collected by Hualde, Elordieta and Elordieta (1994) contains examples of dative overmarking. Such examples have also been found in natural speech corpora of children acquiring Basque by Barreña (1995), Ezeizabarrena (1996) and Austin (2001). The subjects of these studies used the dative case for human direct objects with verbs such as *jo* ‘to hit’, *lotu* ‘to tie up’, and *harrapatu* ‘to catch’. Barreña mentions that similar examples of dative overmarking may be present in the speech of adults, and Ezeizabarrena notes that Basque teachers and parents tend to correct dative overmarking in children’s speech. She remarks that exchanges such as the one in example (10) are common between parents and children:

- (10) Child: *Ikusi dotset aitari*
 see ABS3sg-DAT3sg-ERG1sg father-
 DAT3sg
 ‘*Se lo he visto a papá*’
 ‘I have seen (it) on Dad’
 Mother: *Zer ikus dotsek bada? Belarrixe, ala?*
 What see ABS3sg-DAT3sg-ERG2sg
 huh ear or what
 ‘¿*Qué le has visto, la oreja o qué?*’
 ‘What have you seen on him? His ear, or
 what?’

Despite their use in natural speech, examples like (11) are judged ungrammatical by Zubiri (1991) in a prescriptivist grammar of Basque.

- (11) **Ez ikutu ume-ari*
 NEG touch child-DAT

‘Don’t touch the child’ (Zubiri 1991)

Earlier examples such those in (12), taken from early 20th century texts, indicate that at least in written Basque the verb *jo* ‘to hit’ was used with transitive and not ditransitive agreement with human direct objects.

- (12) a. *Nik ez zaitut geroztik begiz*
jo
 I-ERG neg ABS2sg-ERG1sg since eye-INS
 hit
 ‘I haven’t laid eyes on you since then’
 (Echaide 1912: 122)
 b. *Argiak begitan jo naanean..*
 Light-ERG eye-LOC hit ABS1sg-ERG3sg-when
 ‘When the light hit me in the eye..’
 (Ormaetxea, in Onaindia 1976: 935)

In Basque there are also dialects with dative undermarking, where direct object agreement is used to mark indirect objects. This agreement pattern, shown in Table 4, is comparable to the one found in Spanish *loista* dialects.

Auxiliary Agreement Pattern	Standard	‘Leista’ (Dative Overmarking)	‘Loista’ (Dative Undermarking)
Direct Object +animate 'I see you' -animate 'I see it'	<i>Ikusi zaitut</i> (transitive aux) <i>Ikusi dut</i> (transitive aux)	<i>Ikusi dizut</i> (ditrans. aux) <i>Ikusi dut</i> (transitive aux)	<i>Ikusi zaitut</i> (transitive aux) <i>Ikusi dut</i> (transitive aux)
Direct + Indirect Object 'I give it to you'	<i>Eman dizut</i> (ditrans. aux)	<i>Eman dizut</i> (ditrans. aux)	<i>Eman zaitut</i> (transitive aux)

Table 4 Basque dative over/undermarking

Dative undermarking is common in some dialects of French Basque, as attested in the following excerpt from the French Basque grammarian Lafitte (1962: 296), speaking about Labourdin Basque:

Les Labourdins de la côte confondent souvent *nau* et *dauk*, *hau* et *dauk*, *gaitu* et *dauku*, c’est-à-dire qu’ils prennent le complément d’objet direct au sens de complément datif. C’est une grosse erreur.

Translation:

The Labourdins of the coast often confuse *nau* and *dauk*, *hau* and *dauk*, *gaitu* and *dauku*, that is to say, they interpret the direct object (agreement) in the sense of the dative object. It’s a dreadful mistake.

(Lafitte 1962: 296)

The same phenomenon was reported by Larramendi in the 18th century in the prelude to his dictionary in reference to Spanish Basque speakers, in which he says:

⁸ Sentence 11 a is grammatically acceptable if there is an understood direct object, meaning something like “I heard it from you”.

En San Sebastián se ha introducido el abuso de confundir dos relaciones transitivas del verbo activo, y por decir *esango didazu* dicen ridiculamente *esango nazu*, dirasme, como si el *me* del castellano fuera acusativo como en *matarasme*. Bien se rien desto los demás provincianos, como de su *primeracoa* y otros castellanos, que sin necesidad alguna, y por parecer cultos, introducen en el Basque.

Translation:

In San Sebastián, the abuse of two transitive relations of the active verb has been introduced, and instead of saying *esango didazu* they ridiculously say *esango nazu*, you will tell me, as if the “me” were accusative as in *matarasme* “you will kill me”. The other people of the province laugh at them for this, as they laugh at their saying *primeracoa* and other Spanish words that without any need whatsoever, and in order to appear educated, they introduce into Basque.

(Larramendi1745: xxx)

5. Experimental design and results

In this study I examined the extent to which dative overmarking in spoken Basque was used in the same contexts as *leísmo* in Basque Spanish, i.e. with animate, specific direct objects. I also investigated the relationship between the use of dative overmarking in the speech of four Spanish/Basque bilinguals and these subjects’ proficiency in Basque. Several studies of language contact suggest that proficiency in each language is an important predictor of the degree to which a bilingual speaker will use a contact-induced variable in an L2. Silva-Corvalan (1994, 1997), for example, found that Spanish/English bilinguals whose dominant language was English introduced significantly more anglicisms into their spoken Spanish than Spanish dominant or balanced bilinguals.

To see if there was a correlation between my subjects’ proficiency in each language and their production of dative overmarking, I assessed their degree of proficiency in Basque according to the subjects’ age of acquisition of the language, as well as informal perceptions of their own language dominance. All of the subjects use Basque for professional and/or academic purposes. The subjects, whose profiles are provided in Table 5, are all bilingual university students from middle-class backgrounds, and they are all women. Natural speech transcripts totaling from 2-5.5 hours for each subject were examined and coded for instances of dative overmarking. The other interlocutors in these conversations were children between 2 and 3.5 years of age.

Subjects	Age	City of Residence	Gender	Language spoken at home	Language used in school
TA	22	San Sebastian	F	Basque	Basque
BI	20	San Sebastian	F	Basque	Basque
RS	23	San Sebastian	F	Spanish	Basque (learned Basque at age 3)
GF	25	Bilbao	F	Spanish	Spanish (learned Basque as an adult)

Table 5: Subject information

The results are shown in Table 6. Overall, there was an average 16.9% production of dative overmarking with human objects.

Subjects	Hours of transcribed natural speech	all possible dative over-marking contexts (transitive verbs, human and non-human direct objects)	contexts with human direct objects (transitive verbs)	number of dative over-marking examples found	% of dative over-marking in contexts with human direct objects	% of dative over-marking in all possible contexts (human and non-human direct objects)
TA	5	243	31	3	9.7%	1.2%
BI	4	234	10	2	20%	0.8%
RS	5.5	397	24	6	25 %	1.5%
GF	2	59	6	2	30 %	3.4%
Totals	16.5	933	71	13	18.3 %	1.4%

Table 6: Percentage of dative overmarking in possible contexts

The verbs that were used with dative overmarking included: *entzun* ‘to hear’, *jo* ‘to hit’, *jarri* ‘to put’, *utzi* ‘to allow’ and *molestatu* ‘to bother’. Some examples are provided in (13 a-c).

- (13)
- a. *Eh, ez di-zu-t entzun.*
 Hey NEG ABS3sg-DAT2sg-ERG1sg hear-PER
 ‘I didn’t hear you-DAT’ [TA]
- b. *Ez dizut jarriko gainean.*
 NEG ABS3sg-DAT2sg-ERG1sg put-FUT
 on top
 ‘I won’t put you-DAT on top of it’ [BI]
- c. *Zergatik jotzen di-da-zu neri?*
 Why hit-IMP ABS3s-DAT-1s-ERG-2s me-DAT
 ‘Why are you hitting me-DAT?’ [RS]

Table 7 shows the number of times each verb appeared with a direct object in the dative case.

Verbs used with dative overmarking	number of examples
<i>jarr</i> ‘to put’	4
<i>entzun</i> ‘to hear’	4
<i>jo</i> ‘to hit’	2
<i>utzi</i> ‘to allow’	2
<i>molestatu</i> ‘to bother’	1

Table 7: Verbs and dative overmarking

Table 8 shows the person and number and +/- human features of the dative overmarking utterances I found in my subjects. There were no examples of dative overmarking with non-human direct objects, suggesting a correlation with human objects, and systematicity.

Person features of direct object	singular	plural	total
1st	2	0	2
2nd	6	0	6
3rd human object	5	0	5
3rd nonhuman object	0	0	0

Table 8: Features of dative overmarking examples

The majority of utterances with transitive verbs that take human objects did not trigger dative overmarking; some of the verbs consistently used with standard transitive agreement included *ikusi* ‘to see’, *ezagutu* ‘to know’, *maite* ‘to love’, *harrapatu* ‘to catch’ and *salbatu* ‘to rescue’. It seems that Basque dative overmarking, like Spanish *leísmo*, is triggered by an animate direct object, rather than reflecting a purely lexical subcategorization for a quirky object. The two subjects who learned Basque as a first language at home produced less

utterances with dative overmarking that the two who had learned Basque as a second language, as seen in table 6.

6. Basque dative overmarking as convergence between Spanish and Basque

There are several factors which I think favor an analysis of dative overmarking as Spanish-Basque convergence rather than a purely language-internal change. Dative overmarking in Basque seems to be a recent phenomenon, based on the fact that it sounds ungrammatical even to speakers who produce it, and because it has not been mentioned in traditional grammars. Its non-mention could be significant because Basque *loista* dialects are mentioned in the literature⁹, and because *leísmo* in Spanish has been attested since the 16th century¹⁰, for example, in Cervantes.

The appearance of dative overmarking in spoken Basque coincides with important changes in the demography of Basque speakers, in particular, with the fact that all of the adult speakers of Spanish Basque are now bilingual. Furthermore, after Basque became an official language in the Basque Country, for the first time there were many native Spanish speakers who had to learn Basque as a second language, either in school or as adults, in order to qualify for many government jobs. The dramatic increase in the number of native Spanish speakers learning Basque as a second language would presumably favor Spanish-Basque convergence.

Regarding the nature of this convergence, I propose that the feature +animate in the matrix of the functional category Agreement in Spanish has been added to the Agreement matrix of Basque in bilingual speakers. As outlined in Table 9, I assume that Spanish and Basque share most but not all of their functional features of Agreement. The +animate feature of Agr is spelled out as a dative clitic in Spanish and dative case and agreement in Basque.

Basque Agreement	Spanish Agreement
+case	+case
+person	+person
+number	+number
	+gender
	+animate

Table 9: Features of Agreement in Basque and Spanish

⁹ Its absence from older Basque grammars should be viewed with caution, however, due to the tendency of prescriptivist linguists in the past to ignore or eradicate anything they viewed as evidence of influence from Spanish (p.c., Estibaliz Amorrortu).

¹⁰ Real Academia Española (1983: 204).

According to Sánchez's Functional Convergence Hypothesis (2003, 2004), this partial overlap is characteristic of syntactic environments where convergence occurs:

Convergence, the common specification for equivalent functional features in the two languages spoken by the bilingual in a language contact situation, takes place when the languages have partially similar matrices of features associated with the same functional category. Frequent activation of the two matrices triggers convergence in features. (Sánchez 2004: 150).

It would follow from Sánchez's analysis that the partial overlap between Basque and Spanish functional features, as well as increased Spanish-Basque bilingualism would favor convergence.

In contrast to many of the previous studies of language convergence cited earlier which found evidence of contact-induced convergence in + interpretable features or peripheral areas of grammar such as the syntactic-pragmatic interface, dative overmarking is a change which affects functional features of the core syntax which are assumed to be non-interpretable (Chomsky 1995). I suggest that there are several language-internal factors which could be working in conjunction with interference from Spanish to permit change to occur in this area of Basque grammar.

The first is a gradual tendency to replace absolutive with dative agreement in Spanish Basque¹¹. There are several grammatically acceptable instances where transitive verbs may take dative marked human direct objects. For example, verbs such as *deitu* 'to call' may be used with either absolutive or dative direct objects¹². In addition, for many speakers of Standard Spanish Basque, causatives may take either an absolutive (14a) or dative (14b) marked complement.

- (14)
- a. *Jonek Mikel ibilerazi du*
Jon-ERG Mikel-ABS walk-CAUSE ABS3sg-ERG-1pl
'Jon made Mikel-ABS walk'
- b. *Amak Mikeli etxera joanerazi dio*
Mother-ERG Mikel-DAT home-to go-CAUSE ABS3s-DAT-3sg-ERG-3sg
'Mother made Mikel-DAT go home'
- (Deustoko Hizkuntzalaritza Mintegia 1989: 101)

¹¹ It is possible that this tendency is contact-induced in origin as well.

¹² Etxepare (2003) notes that there are aspectual differences when these verbs are used with transitive and ditransitive auxiliaries.

There are other verbs which exclusively take dative direct object complements in Spanish Basque, such as *itxaron* 'to wait' and *eraso* 'to attack' (Etxepare 2003).

A second factor which may favor dative overmarking in Basque is that it is a language that permits null indirect and direct objects. Triple pro-drop could leave open the possibility of reanalysis of ambiguous verbal agreement when both of the objects of a ditransitive verb are null. In addition to allowing up to three null arguments, in Basque absolutive agreement is obligatory on the auxiliary when other agreement markers are present, even with dummy arguments. This may lead to confusion on the part of learners as to whether the dative agreement morpheme corresponds to the direct or the indirect object. For example, a learner could hypothesize that in sentences such as (15) the dative agreement is marking the direct object, and the absolutive agreement is default. This type of confusion is particularly likely in cases like (15), where the indirect and direct objects have the same (3rd sg) person and number features.

- (15) *Lagundu egingo di-o-t*
help do-FUT ABS3s-DAT-3sg-ERG-1sg
'I will help him/her (to do it)' > 'I will help him/her'

A further consideration favoring dative overmarking is the typologically common tendency to differentiate human and non-human direct objects. Some well-known examples of this phenomenon in other languages include the 'personal a' marker that Spanish requires with specific direct objects that are animate, as seen in (16a,b). Similarly, in Hindi the postposition "ko" must be used with human and specific objects, as seen in (16 c, d).

- (16) Spanish:
- a. *He visto a mi profesora.*
have-1sg seen 'personal a' my professor
'I have seen my professor'
- b. *?He visto mi profesora.*
- Hindi:
- c. *Aurat bacce ko bula rahi hai.*
Woman child-oblique.sg. ACC/DAT call-PROG is
'The woman is calling the child'
- d. *?Aurat bacce bula rahi hai.*
Woman child-pl call-PROG is
- (Comrie 1989)

Finally, Basque dative overmarking may be a reflection of a language-internal tendency towards syncretism or agreement simplification. The fact that there are *loista* Basque dialects indicates that Basque grammar is susceptible to this type of diachronic change. Thus, it may be the combination of pressure exerted by Spanish/Basque bilingualism with language internal

factors such as the susceptibility to agreement reduction which is permitting *leísmo* to spread in Basque.

7. Conclusions

My findings indicate that my bilingual subjects used the dative case in the same context that *leísmo* is used in Spanish, namely with human specific direct objects. I interpret this to be evidence of the convergence of functional features of Agreement between Spanish and Basque. Although previous research has found that peripheral areas of grammar are particularly vulnerable to cross-linguistic convergence, if my analysis is correct then my results show that components of the core syntax and are also susceptible to this type of contact-induced change. While all of my bilingual subjects used dative overmarking in their Basque speech, they did so to varying degrees. I found that this variation is related to their proficiency in Basque, and that speakers of Basque who are fluent but are less proficient produce this variant more than fluent speakers who are more proficient in Basque.

The spread of dative overmarking has interesting implications for the primary language input for children acquiring Basque. Inconsistency in adult speech in the use of dative overmarking with verbs such as *ulertu* "to understand" may lead children to adopt a strategy of agreement simplification, such as using dative agreement with all human direct objects. For example, the children studied by Ezeizabarrena (1996) used dative overmarking with one of the same verbs *jo* (to hit) as the adult subjects in my study, but the children extended its use to other verbs, such as *harrapatu* "to catch". Her results are corroborated by results from Austin (2001), who found bilingual and monolingual children to produce dative overmarking with additional verbs. Thus it is possible that child learners as well as adult students of Basque as a second language may play an important role in promoting dative overmarking.

8. References

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