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Basque among the world's languages: a typological approach

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ABSTRACT

The central aim of this article is to characterize the Basque language from a typological point of view taking into account the results of latest research. Specific information regarding the phonological and grammatical structure of (mainly) Standard Basque is presented. At the same time, some of its typologically most salient properties are dealt with, such as the phonemic opposition between dorsal and apical sibilants, the active-inactive alignment of case marking, the pluripersonal agreement basis of its verbal system, the presence of allocutive paradigms in verbs, and the ways of expressing reflexivity. All these features are discussed based on our present knowledge of typological diversity and the extent to which languages may differ structurally.

Keywords: Basque; typology; case alignment; verbal agreement; reflexivity.

1. Introduction: delineating the typological profile of Basque

The Basque language is usually described as being an ergative, morphologically agglutinative language with group inflection, no grammatical gender, a pluripersonal verb conjugation, and a basic SOV word order. For instance, about twenty years ago Trask (1998, p. 313) referred to Basque as «a rather well-behaved SOV language with almost all of the textbook characteristics of such languages: pre-verbal word order, preposed modifiers, a rich case system, a highly regular agglutinating morphology with few alternations, an absence of prefixes, and so on». This image is generally agreed on, sometimes with minor—if any—nuances. In a very recent grammatical sketch of Basque (Arkhipov & Nuždin, 2020), this is also the overall characterization given to the modern language, even though the authors, quite insightfully, also point to some of the cumulative elements that can be encountered in Basque inflection, despite its predominantly agglutinative (separative) nature.

The present paper aims to describe the Basque language (mainly its standard variety) from a typological perspective, on the basis of recent advances in linguistic typology and our knowledge of the phonological and grammatical systems attested worldwide. This way, I want to define—much like Trask (1998) but relying on primarily synchronic criteria—the typological position of Basque among the world's languages. To that end, a brief characterization of the language according to each level of linguistic analysis will be provided, structured as follows: Section 2 is devoted to the analysis of Basque phonology; Section 3 deals with morphological constructions; Section 4 centers around some syntactic constructions, with an eye, as in the previous sections, to highlighting the typologically most salient properties of Basque; Section 5 briefly points to some possible sources of the Basque lexicon; and, lastly, Section 6 contains the main conclusions.

2. Phonology

It is generally acknowledged that Basque phonology is not particularly complex: phonological inventories are not large and there are virtually no uncommon consonants (though see below). There exist slight differences across dialects, both in vocalism and consonantism, although the former tends to be more uniform, with just the Souletin dialect (and some neighbouring varieties) displaying a different vowel system, consisting of six phonemic vowels instead of the five that are found in the rest of Basque varieties.

2.1. Vowels

As already mentioned, the vowel system in Standard Basque consists of 5 vowels (or vowel qualities), whereas the Souletin dialect includes one more unit, namely the front rounded unit /y/. These systems are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Basque vowels

Standard Basque		Souletin Basque			
i		u	i	y	u
	e	o		e	o
		a			a

The system of 5 cardinal vowels is the most widespread in the globe: it is represented by 24% of languages, according to Hagège (1982, pp. 19-20), who bases his statistics in a sample of 754 languages. It is found in otherwise very different languages, like, for instance, Modern Greek, Japanese, Hebrew, Ainu, Tagalog, Zulu, Georgian and Spanish, to which Standard Basque is particularly close in this respect (both phonologically and phonetically). Vowel inventories consisting of 6 units are attested in 14% of the languages in this sample. Other systems have the following presence: 3-vowel systems represent 11.25%, 4-vowel systems 10.65%, and 7-vowel systems 12%. The rest are not so common: at the extremes we can find 2-phoneme vocalisms like that of Yimas (Papua New Guinea), on the one hand, and 13 or 14 vowel qualities, as in German, British English and Bété (Kru, Niger-Congo; see Maddieson [2013]), on the other. In addition to its core vocalic system, Basque has a few diphthongs (typically falling).

2.2. Consonants

In contrast to vocalism, Basque consonantism can be claimed to have a certain degree of complexity especially within the fricative and affricate subsystems. Standard Basque phonemic consonants are given in Table 2 (after Hualde, 2003, p. 15; Egurtzegi, 2018).

The phonological opposition existing in Standard Basque and in some dialects between an apical /s̺/ (orthographically *s*) and a laminal /s̠/ (orthographically *z*), reflected also in their affricate counterparts /t̺s̺/ and /t̠s̠/, is unusual cross-linguistically (Trask, 1998, p. 317), and this difference singles out Basque among European languages. Both types of sibilant are unvoiced. The rareness of this contrast has prompted several diachronic proposals (of differing quality) for its origin. One of the most recent hypotheses (Blevins, 2018, pp. 70-78, 287) considers *z* (/s̠/) to be the continuant of an unattested *st^[h]- cluster (e.g. *izar* 'star', allegedly from **istar*).

Table 2. The Standard Basque phonemic inventory of consonants

		Labial		Apical		Laminal	Predorsal		Postdorsal	
		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Apico-dental	Apico-alveolar		Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	
Stop	Voiceless		p		t				c	k
	Voiced		b		d				ɟ	g
Fricative			f		ɬ	ʃ				x
Affricate					tɬ	tʃ				
Tap					r					
Trill					r					
Glides									j	w

In the Souletin dialect, as well as in some neighbouring varieties, the consonant phonetic inventory includes a glottal fricative (the aspiration /h/) and the aspirated stops /p^h, t^h, k^h/. Remnants of aspiration are still found in the other dialectal varieties of the French area (Low Navarrese and Labourdin). Additionally, voiced sibilants and nasal vowels are phonemically distinguished in Souletin. Some authors (Hualde, 2003, p. 25; Egurtzegi, 2018) contend that this dialect (as well as Mixean Lower Navarrese) may even have a phonemic contrast between a plain aspiration /h/ and a nasalized one /h̃/, which constitutes a really exceptional phenomenon, inasmuch as only a handful of such (or similar) systems have been found to date among the world's languages (see some examples in 1)¹:

- (1) *ehe* 'wash water' *ēhe* 'no! (emphatic)' (Souletin Basque)
bihi 'grain' *mihi* 'tongue'

Judging from this set of examples, one may well wonder if the nasalization of /h/ is not just the contextual consequence of the presence of nasal vowels ([ēh̃ē], [mihĩi]) and, as such, the allophonic—not phonemic—result of a rather trivial assimilative process. In these circumstances, the discussion may revolve around the relative primacy of either vowel or glottal nasalization, with mainly diachronic arguments (e.g. some analogical processes), but one serious problem for the proposal of a synchronically active phonemic contrast between the plain and the nasalized aspiration is the virtual impossibility of separating /h̃/ from vowel nasalization contextually, i.e. there is no aspirated nasalization outside of the environments where nasal vowels are found (Hualde, 2003, p. 25).

¹ The languages in question are Kwangali, a Bantu language spoken in Namibia and Angola, Seimat, an Austronesian language (Papua New Guinea), Aguaruna, a Jivaroan language (Peru), and Arabela, a Zaparoan language (Peru). To be fair, some of these examples are described as showing an allophonic contrast between a plain and a nasalized aspiration (see Egurtzegi, 2018, p. 1354 with references).

This situation is reminiscent, *mutatis mutandis*, of the period in the evolution of Late Common Slavic in which the palatalization of velar stops could not be isolated from the front vowels that caused it (whereas non-palatalized velar stops were only possible in the position before back vowels). It was only the dissociation of these two features (palatalization and vowel frontness) that led to the phonologization of palatal velars (when these emancipated from the specific phonetic environment in which they arose). To explain the characteristics of the previous period, some scholars used to refer to the notion of ‘syllabophoneme’ (see e.g. Erhart, 1982, p. 22), a term employed in other traditions as well (among Caucasologists, for example).

In any event, the Souletin phonemic consonantism can be represented as in Table 3 (after Hualde, 2003, p. 18):

Table 3. The consonant phonemic inventory of Souletin

		Labial		Apical		Laminal	Predorsal		Postdorsal
		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Apico-dental	Apico-alveolar		Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar / Glottal
Stop	Voiceless	p / p ^h		t / t ^h				c	k / k ^h
	Voiced	b		d				ɟ	g
Fricative	Voiceless		f		ɬ	ʃ			
	Voiced				z	ʒ	ʒ		
Affricate					tʃ	tʃ			
Nasal		m			n			ɲ	
Lateral					l			ʎ	
Tap					r				
Trill					r				
Glides								j	w
Aspiration									h / h̃ (?)

Although the presence of aspiration is not an uncommon trait of Basque phonology (/h/ is widely attested in different regions of the world), one of its sources can indeed be characterized as quite rare: in intervocalic position, and provided the right conditions are met, the aspiration usually comes from an old alveolar nasal (see some examples in 2):

- (2) Lat. *anate(m)* ‘duck’ > Ba. *ahate* (Soul. *ãh̃âte*)
 Lat. *(h)onore(m)* ‘honor’ > Ba. *ohore* (Soul. *ũh̃ũ(r)e*)
 Aq. *SENI-* ‘child’ > Ba. *sehi* ‘boy, servant’

This is, no doubt, a typologically marked phonological development², even if not unique, as other languages may have undergone such a change (among them, Scottish Gaelic or the Owerri dialect of Igbo, see Igartua [2015a] with references). This perceptually conditioned change is said to be due to a special affinity between glottality and nasality (both in terms of articulatory movements and, most importantly, acoustic effects) termed ‘rhinoglottophilia’ by Matisoff (1975).

Standard Basque has a phonemic contrast between a flap /ɾ/ and a trill /r/ (*cfr. ur-a* ‘the water’ vs *hurr-a* ‘the hazelnut’), as is the case in Spanish. But unlike in Spanish, neither of them could historically be at the beginning of a word (see 3)³:

- (3) Lat. *rege(m)* ‘king’ > Ba. *errege* ‘king’
 Lat. *ripa(m)* ‘shore’ > Ba. *erripa* ‘slope’
 Lat. *rota* ‘wheel’ > Ba. *errota* ‘mill’
 Sp. *razón* ‘reason’ > Ba. *arrazoi* ‘reason, motive’

Analogous constraints operate in Gascon (Lat. *rota* > Ga. *arròda* ‘wheel’) as well as in other, geographically distant languages (such as Armenian).

Finally, a typologically interesting process in Basque is semantic or expressive palatalization (Iverson & Oñederra, 1985), by means of which some dental and alveolar consonants become palatalized to convey diminutiveness (and, secondarily, affectiveness), as in the words *zezen* [ʃeʃen] ‘bull’ vs *xexen* [ʃeʃen] ‘little bull’, *tanta* [tanta] ‘drop (of a liquid)’ vs *ttantta* [tãtã] ‘little drop’. This is a case of phonic symbolism, mostly unknown in the surrounding languages and that has lexicalized in some words like *txori* ‘bird’, from *zori* ‘fate’ (see Lakarra, Manterola & Seguro, 2019). This ‘hypochoresis’ palatalization can even have morphological and grammatical repercussions: in Eastern Low Navarrese, for instance, palatalized verbal forms have been assigned grammatical function (Rebuschi, 2003, p. 860) within an addressing politeness scale according to which speakers differentiate between familiar (*joanen hiz* ‘yo will go’), polite (*joanen zira*) and intermediate forms (*joanen xira*); note the contrast between the last two forms (on familiar verbal addressing and its relation to allocutivity, see Section 3.2 below).

2.3. Prosody

Stress in Standard Basque (as well as in central dialects) is non-contrastive, with a tendency to fall on the second syllable, but there is a great deal of variation across dialects. Some Basque varieties have stress systems that are, for the most part, fixed: for instance, Souletin typically places the stress on the penultimate syllable (like Polish). Other varieties have pitch systems (many Western varieties in Biscay and Gipuzkoa) that distinguish between H (high tone) and a default L (low tone). Rather similar systems are found in languages of the pitch-accent type such as Tokyo Japanese (Hualde, 1988), which distinguishes pitch-accented from unaccented words.

² In Hurch’s (1988) survey on aspiration, Basque alone is cited as instantiating this kind of evolution.

³ Forms like *radarra* ‘the radar’ and *rola* ‘role’ suggest that this constraint is no longer phonemically active.

Besides this fundamental difference between Western tone-based systems and Eastern or stress-based ones, there exists a particular variety, that of Goizueta Basque (Western Navarrese), which has both contrastive stress and contrastive tone, according to Hualde, Lujanbio & Torreira (2008). Prosodic distinctions, therefore, depend not only on the position of stress (first or second syllable), but also on the tonal features of the accent (with two values). In this fashion the Goizueta accentual system is more like that of Swedish or Serbo-Croat: in all of them «stressed syllables are lexically associated with one of two melodies» (Hualde *et al.*, 2008, p. 22).

3. Morphology

The morphological technique mainly used in Basque nominal and verbal inflection is separation (formatives and meanings are readily segmentable, according to a one-to-one form-meaning matching scheme), as is typical of agglutinative constructions. Nonetheless, elements of morphological cumulation can be found in some paradigms (for instance, in the set of older nominal cases, segmentation of number and case values in the absolutive and the genitive plural is not as clear-cut as in other forms of the paradigm, see Plank [1986, p. 36]; Rebuschi [2003, p. 840]; Igartua [2015b, p. 687]).

Basically, Basque makes use of suffixes, although some old and now fossilized prefixes may still be identified in some verbal constructions, as in causatives (*cfr.* *joan* ‘to go’ vs *eroan* ‘to carry’, *ekarri* ‘to bring’ vs *erakarri* ‘to attract’, *ikasi* ‘to learn’ vs *irakatsi* ‘to teach’). The majority of lexical prefixes represent a recent development in the language, most probably due to the Romance influence (some of them are indeed loans from Romance languages: *desegin* ‘to undo, to destroy’ vs *egin* ‘to do’, *cfr.* Sp. *deshacer* ‘to undo’ vs *hacer* ‘to do’).

3.1. Nominal inflection

Declension in Basque consists of up to fourteen or fifteen forms (depending on analyses), considered cases by some people and cases + postpositions by others. If only simple suffixes are taken into account, a paradigm of eight fundamental cases obtains: the absolutive (in the determinate singular, *mendia* ‘the mountain’, in which the affix *-a* marks definiteness), the ergative (*mendia-k*), the dative (*mendia-ri*), the genitive (*mendia-ren*), the instrumental (*mendia-z*), the locative or inessive (*mendia-n*), the ablative (*mendi-tik*), and the allative (*mendi-ra*); see Table 4 below, which contains both the inanimate and the animate paradigms (the latter differ from the former just in five (local) cases, characterized by the presence of a special suffix *-gan-*).

The rest of case forms are secondarily built upon the genitive case (see Santazilia, 2013, p. 269ff.), like the comitative (*mendia-re(n)-kin* ‘with the mountain’) and the benefactive (*mendia-ren-tzat* ‘for the mountain’), and on the allative form, like the terminative (*mendi-ra-ino* ‘up to the mountain’). According to some descriptions, only the absolutive, the ergative and the dative forms (i.e. those indexed on finite verbs, see 3.2 below) would qualify as true grammatical cases. To these core cases others add at least the genitive and the instrumental (see Santazilia, 2013, p. 239).

Table 4. The Basque nominal paradigm (singular only)

Cases	Inanimate ‘mountain’	Animate ‘friend’
Absolutive	<i>mendi-a</i>	<i>lagun-a</i>
Ergative	<i>mendi-a-k</i>	<i>lagun-a-k</i>
Dative	<i>mendi-a-ri</i>	<i>lagun-a-ri</i>
Genitive	<i>mendi-a-ren</i>	<i>lagun-a-ren</i>
Instrumental	<i>mendi-a-z</i>	<i>lagun-a-z</i>
Comitative	<i>mendi-a-rekin</i>	<i>lagun-a-rekin</i>
Benefactive	<i>mendi-a-rentzat</i>	<i>lagun-a-rentzat</i>
Locative/inessive	<i>mendi-a-n</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gan</i>
Ablative	<i>mendi-tik</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gan-dik</i>
Allative	<i>mendi-ra</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gan-a</i>
Terminative	<i>mendi-raino</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gan-aino</i>
Directional	<i>mendi-rantz</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gan-antz</i>
Motivative	<i>mendi-a-(ren)-gatik</i>	<i>lagun-a-(ren)-gatik</i>
Essive	<i>mendi-tzat</i>	<i>lagun-tzat</i>

The partitive suffix, usually included in the nominal paradigm, indicates negation in the absolutive (*ez dago mendirik* ‘there are no mountains’) and has several other uses (as in superlative and interrogative constructions, see, for instance, Ariztimuño, 2014). It is limited to the indeterminate numeral paradigm and should not be considered a full part of the case system, but rather a determiner (de Rijk, 1998 [1996]; Trask, 1997). Another pseudo-case, following Trask (1997, p. 94), is the locative genitive or adnominal locative (*mendiko* ‘of/from the mountain’), whose suffix is a general relational marker that can be attached to any kind of adverbial phrase or to other cases (Trask, 1997, pp. 101-102; Rebuschi, 2003, p. 840): *cfr.* *atzo* ‘yesterday’, *atzoko egunkaria* ‘yesterday’s newspaper’; *hemen* ‘here’, *hemengo jendea* ‘the people here’ (in this second case with secondary—progressive—voicing after the nasal); *mendira* ‘to the mountain’, *mendirako bidea* ‘the road to the mountain’ (here with *-ko* attached to the allative form in *-ra*). Other objections may be raised to the alleged paradigmatic status of forms like the essive or translative in *-tzat* (*cfr.* *menditzat* ‘as a mountain’ in Table 4 above), a suffix that cannot be added to full noun phrases with a determiner⁴.

⁴ Alternative terms for this case include *functive* (see Creissels, 2014) and *role phrase marker* (Haspelmath & Buchholz, 1998).

Nominal forms express case (or syntactic function), number, animacy⁵ and determinacy or definiteness by means of dedicated affixes. Table 5 illustrates the morphological opposition existing between the indeterminate paradigm (which is number-indifferent), the determinate singular paradigm and the plural paradigm, in which the absolutive form atypically cumulates case, number and even definiteness:

Table 5. Indeterminate, singular and plural noun paradigms (partial)

‘mountain’	Indeterminate	Singular	Plural
Absolutive	<i>mendi</i>	<i>mendi-a</i>	<i>mendi-ak</i>
Ergative	<i>mendi-k</i>	<i>mendi-a-k</i>	<i>mendi-e-k</i>
Dative	<i>mendi-ri</i>	<i>mendi-a-ri</i>	<i>mendi-e-i</i>

Gender (beyond animacy) is only expressed lexically and partly derivationally (*cfr.* *zezen* ‘bull’ vs *behi* ‘cow’, *jainko* ‘god’ vs *jainkosa* ‘goddess’), with the exception of a few adjectives (mostly loanwords) that marginally replicate the gender motion of Spanish: *majol/maja* ‘nice.M/F’, *tonto/tonta* ‘foolish.M/F’, *gixajo/gixaja* ‘poor (fellow).M/F’ (see Trask, 2003, pp. 117, 137; Igartua, 2019, p. 206).

An interesting morphological (or morphophonological) device used in Basque is expressive reduplication, which gives rise to forms like those illustrated in (4):

- (4) *nahas-mahas* ‘confusion’
duda-muda ‘doubt, uncertainty’
ika-mika ‘dispute, quarrel’
zehatz-mehatz ‘precisely, accurately’

In all these examples the reduplicant modifies the base either replacing its first consonant by *m-* or inserting the bilabial nasal before the initial vowel of the base⁶. This mechanism of complex reduplication is identical to the Turkish *mühleme*, a reduplication device employed in other languages as well (for further details, see Igartua, 2013, p. 14ff.).

3.2. Verbal inflection

The Basque verb is highly synthetic in the auxiliary and in some finite forms of lexical verbs. Besides the features of tense, aspect, mood, number and person, the verbal paradigm can also include a morphological contrast between analytical and synthetic forms: *cfr.* *ekartzen dut* ‘I bring’ (habitual) vs *dakart* ‘I am bringing’ (progressive), from the same verb *ekarri* ‘to bring’.

⁵ Animacy can be expressed in other parts of the grammar too, especially in certain varieties (for its influence on case marking and verbal agreement, see Odria [2014] and Igartua & Santazilia [2018]).

⁶ There exist other types of reduplication in Basque. Some of them enter into the category of ideophones (on which see Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2017).

The synthetic forms and the auxiliary of any periphrastic construction contain formal markers for subject, direct object and indirect dative (commonly referred to as pluripersonal or polypersonal verbal agreement): *ekarri d-i-zu-t* ‘I brought (something) to you’, *ekarri d-i-zki-zu-t* ‘I brought several things to you’, *ekarri d-i-zki-e-zu* ‘you brought some things to them’ (see the detailed morphological segmentation and grammatical glosses in 5a-c):

- (5) a. *d-i-zu-t*
 PRES-APPL-2SG.IO-1SG.A
 ‘I (do something) to you’.
- b. *d-i-zki-zu-t*
 PRES-APPL-PL(DO)-2SG.IO-1SG.A
 ‘I (do something plural) to you’.
- c. *d-i-zki-e-zu*
 PRES-APPL-PL(DO)-3SG.IO-2SG.A
 ‘you (do something plural) to them’.

Thus, verbal agreement reflects the core grammatical relations signalled by the absolutive, the ergative and the dative case in noun phrases. Although other cases are involved, similar constructions are encountered in Georgian (see 6a-c), which also displays polypersonal agreement (Boeder, 2005, p. 27):

- (6) a. *g-khedav* (Georgian)
 2SG.DO-see.1SG.A
 ‘I see you’.
- b. *gv-khedav-t*
 1PL.DO-see-2PL.A
 ‘you (pl.) see us’.
- c. *v-s-c’er*
 1SG.A-3SG.IO-write
 ‘I write it to him/her’.

From the syntactic standpoint, this double marking of grammatical relations in Basque (employed in Georgian too) has precise typological implications (which are discussed in Section 4 below).

In the contexts where familiar address is appropriate, a special allocutive verbal system, deemed *exotic* by some authors (Adaskina, 2008), may be used. Allocutivity specifically refers to non-argumental addressees (i.e. addressees that do not perform any function within the clause): different personal affixes are attached to the verb form depending on the sex/gender of the listener, as illustrated in (7):

- (7) a. *Liburua irakurri dut*
 book.DEF.ABS read AUX.1SG
 ‘I have read the book [neutral]’.

- b. *Liburua irakurri diat*
 book.DEF.ABS read AUX.1SG.ALLOC.M
 ‘I have read the book [said to a man]’.
- c. *Liburua irakurri dinat*
 book.DEF.ABS read AUX.1SG.ALLOC.F
 ‘I have read the book [said to a woman]’

This kind of contrast can be found in at least four other languages: Pumé (Venezuela), Nambikwara (Brazil), Mandan (North America) and Beja (Cushitic, Northeast Africa), the first three of which are, curiously, language isolates (Antonov, 2015). Two examples from Pumé are given in (8a-b):

- (8) a. (*kɔdɛ*) *bagura=rekodé* (Pumé)
 1SG run.PRES=1SG.ALLOC.M
 ‘I am running [said to a man]’.
- b. (*kɔdɛ*) *bagura=kɛ*
 1SG run.PRES=1SG.ALLOC.F
 ‘I am running [said to a woman]’.

The same morphological contrast can be used in Basque to refer to a second person in a familiar or informal way (*hi* ‘you’ vs *zu* ‘you’): *hau ekarri diat* ‘I brought this (*hau*) to you (who are a man)’ vs *hau ekarri dinat* ‘I brought this (*hau*) to you (who are a woman)’ (compare with 7b-c). This coincidence in the formal machinery employed to convey allocutivity, on the one hand, and second person familiar addressing, on the other, is typologically marked (even within the reduced set of *allocutive* languages): the few languages that have allocutive markers tend to formally differentiate these functions (see Antonov, 2015, p. 79 and Table 6).

Table 6. Co-occurrence of allocutive forms with grammatical persons
 (after Antonov, 2015, p. 79)

	Basque	Pumé	Nambikwara	Mandan	Beja
1	yes	yes	yes	yes	no?
2	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
3	yes	yes	yes	yes	no?
1 > 2	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
2 > 1	no	yes	yes	yes	no?

Table 6 reflects the fact that Basque blocks allocutivity in the case of an argumental addressee: *cfr. hik duk* ‘you have’ vs *hor duk* ‘here it is [said to a man]’, *ekarri diat* ‘I brought (it)’ or ‘I brought (it) to you’. In the other *allocutive* languages the forms concerned can co-occur with all grammatical persons since functions are formally distin-

guished (with the possible exception of Beja, which presents, nevertheless, problems of attestation). Only in some dialects of Basque can a rare morphological distinction between familiar addressing and allocutive forms be drawn.

4. Syntax

4.1. Word order

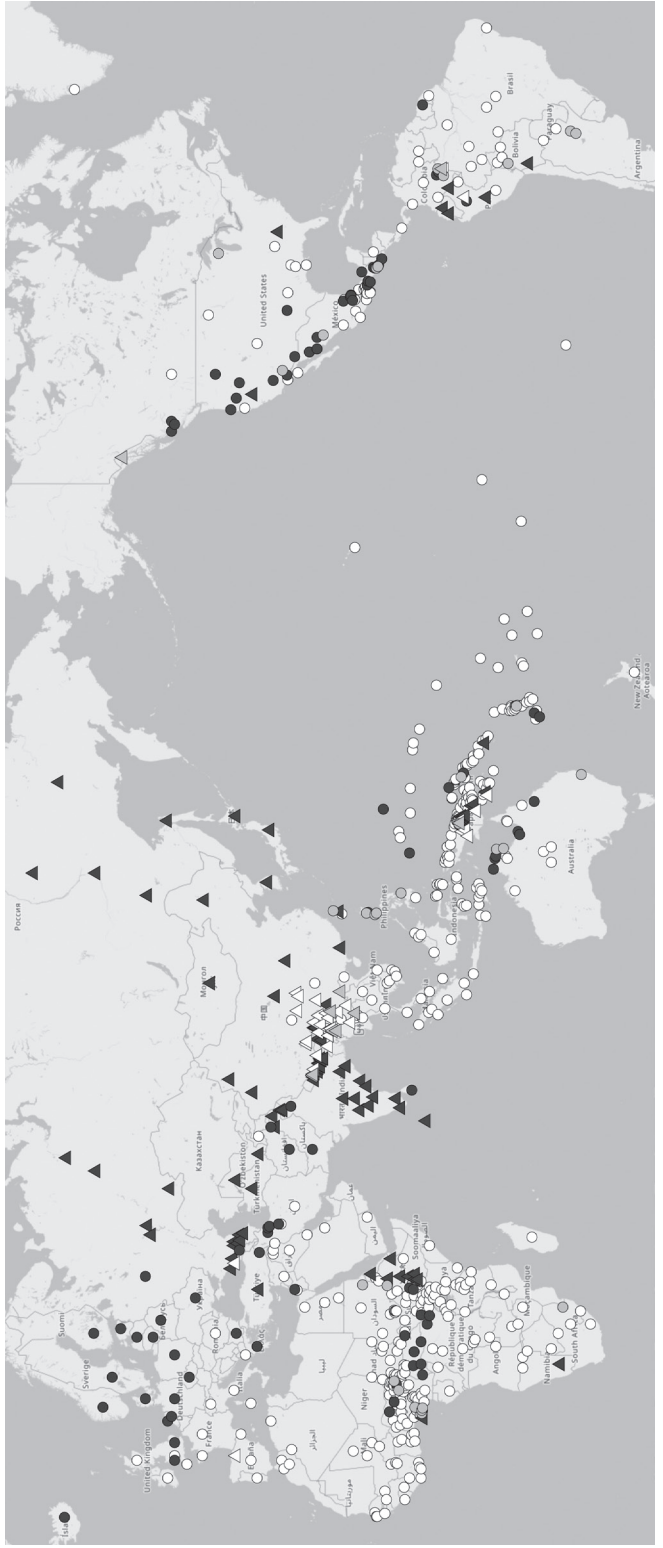
Basic word order in Basque is generally of the SOV type (Subject-Object-Verb), although it is also true that Basque enjoys substantial syntactic flexibility. The most typical order in clauses—*Maitek_(S) auto berria_(O) erosi du_(V)* ‘Maite has bought a new car’—reflects a sequential relationship between heads (the verb in this clause) and dependents (the objects) that also holds, for instance, between nouns and postpositions (there are no prepositions): *aulkiaren atzean* ‘behind the chair’, *iritzi horren aurka* ‘against that opinion’. Even prepositions which Basque has borrowed from Spanish behave, once embraced, like postpositions: *iritzi horren kontra* ‘against that opinion’ (from Spanish *contra* ‘against’, *cfr. contra esa opinión* ‘against that opinion’). The relative order of the core of the noun phrase and its genitive complement (*aitaren etxea* ‘the/my father’s house’), as well as that which characterizes comparative structures, where the second term of the comparison precedes the adjective in the corresponding level (*zu_x baino_y gazteagoa_z* ‘younger_z than_y you_x’), are consistent with the basic SOV word order.

Subordinate relative clauses usually precede the noun they modify (a RelN order that is also harmonic with the general SOV order found in the language): *erosi berri dudan_(Rel) liburua* ‘the book I have just bought’. At the same time, Basque has Noun-Adjective order, which may seem to be inharmonic with pronominal relative clauses (see Figure 1 on the next page).

According to this map and the data it contains, the combination of RelN with NAdj is not particularly widespread (33 languages), as opposed to the corresponding harmonic combinations (RelN with AdjN, 96 languages; NRel with NAdj, 426 languages), and even to the other *inharmonic* order (NRel with AdjN, which is represented by 92 languages)⁷.

However, the pronominal strategy is not the only means of constructing a relative clause in Basque. In some varieties, the pronoun *zein(a)* ‘that, which’ is used in a structure very similar to that of Romance languages, with the relative pronoun placed after the noun. In older constructions which barely survive to this day the relative also occurs after the referent, as in the example *monument ageri eztiradenak_(Rel) bezala zarete* (Leizarraga, 1571, Luke XI, 44) ‘ye are as graves which appear not’ (a structure that might be compared to the current *ageri ez diren_(Rel) monumentuak bezala(koak) zarete*). This is in a way reminiscent of internally-headed relative clauses, so that Basque can be

⁷ In any case, it has long been shown that adjectives do not regularly correlate with other word order traits (see Dryer, 1988, 1992).



- △ Relative clause-Noun / Noun-Adjective 33
- ▲ Relative clause-Noun / No dominant order 9
- ▲ Relative clause-Noun / Adjective-Noun 96
- Noun-Relative clause / Noun-Adjective 426
- Noun-Relative clause / No dominant order 30
- Noun-Relative clause / Adjective-Noun 92

Figure 1. Distribution of NRel/ReIN and NAdj/AdjN combined orders in a sample of the world's languages (based on *WALS – The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*).

claimed to use (or have used) almost every possible typological option to make relative subordinate clauses (see Krajewska, 2017).

4.2. Coding of grammatical relations

Core grammatical relations in (mono)transitive clauses (A-Agent, P-Patient) are assigned ergative marking, which contrasts with the absolutive marking of intransitive clauses (S-Subject), as illustrated in (9a-b):

- (9) a. *Neska etxe-ra doa*
 girl.DEF home-ALL goes
 ‘The girl is going home’.
- b. *Neska-k liburua ekarri du*
 girl-ERG book.DEF bring AUX
 ‘The girl has brought the book’.

The morpheme *-k* marks the agent of the transitive, whereas both S and P receive no overt marking (absolutive case), that is, are grammatically treated in the same way. Ergativity in Basque is consistent all through the system: no tense/aspect or animacy-based split is attested, in sharp contrast to ergative languages like Hindi, Georgian or Dyrirbal, to name just a few. But, on the other hand, in certain intransitive clauses S is assigned ergative case in the majority of varieties⁸, as can be seen in (10a-b):

- (10) a. *Ura-k irakin du*
 water-ERG boil AUX
 ‘The water has boiled’.
- b. *Neska-k ondo dantzatzen du*
 girl-ERG well dance AUX
 ‘The girl dances well’.

This kind of construction is typical of active-inactive (or simply active) languages, which mark differently stative or inactive intransitive clauses (with S), on one side, and active ones (with A), on the other. Languages like Drehu (Oceanic, New Caledonia), Imonda (Papua New Guinea) and Georgian show active alignment of case marking (Comrie, 2013). In the light of examples like (10a-b), Standard Basque also seems to belong to this class of *split-S* languages (Dixon, 1994, 2012). Incidentally, a really close parallel to (10a) can be found in the Georgian intransitive construction (Tuite, 1996, p. 259) given in (11):

- (11) *cʰqʰal-ma iduɣa* (Georgian)
 water-ERG boil.AOR.3SG
 ‘The water boiled’.

⁸ In some eastern varieties, these constructions show, in contrast, absolutive marking (e.g. *irakin da* ‘has boiled’).

Grammatical relations within clauses can be marked by different means depending on languages. Following a distinction introduced by Nichols (1986), head-marking languages make explicit these relations in verbs, while dependent-marking languages provide the grammatical information needed by attaching affixes to nominal arguments in the clause. An example of the first type is Abkhaz (Northwestern Caucasian), where grammatical relations are expressed exclusively by verbal affixes (see 12a). A language instantiating the second type is Russian (represented in 12b), which marks grammatical relations on noun phrases (case marking). But there are also languages that can employ neither of these strategies (e.g. Thai and Chinese, which display zero marking) as well as languages that make use of both of them simultaneously. The latter is the case of Basque, which can therefore be defined as a double-marking language (as anticipated in Section 3.2 above), since both noun phrases and verbs (through case agreement) carry grammatical information about syntactic functions (Zúñiga & Fernandez, 2019, p. 185ff.). See an example of this in (12c), where the object plural is marked twice (by case marking on the noun *liburuak* and by verbal agreement in *daramazkiot*), and so is the beneficiary of the action (dative marking on the noun *lagunari* and dative agreement together with an applicative marker in *daramazkiot*):

- (12) a. *A-xà-c'a* *a-ph^oæs* *a-š^oq^oæ* *Ø-læ-y-te-yt'* (Abkhaz)
 the-man the-woman the-book it-to.her-he-gave-FIN
 ‘The man gave the woman the book’.
- b. *Ona* *podarila* *knigu* *mal'čiku* (Russian)
 she gave book.ACC boy.DAT
 ‘She gave a/the book to the boy / She gave the boy a book’.
- c. *Lagun-a-ri* *liburu-ak* (Basque)
 friend-DEF-DAT.SG book-DEF.ABS.PL
 darama-z-ki-o-t
 bring.PRES-OBJ.PL-APPL-3SG.IO-1SG.A
 ‘I am bringing the books to my friend’.

4.3. Group inflection

Basque has *Gruppenflexion*, i.e. function (or case) is marked only on the rightmost member of the phrase (not word-marking, but phrase-marking), as illustrated in (13):

- (13) a. *katu-a-ren_i* ‘of the cat_i’
 b. *katu beltz-a-ren_i* ‘of the black_i cat’
 c. *katu beltz hon-en_i* ‘of this_i black cat’

This property is commonly found in languages referred to as agglutinative (as in other cases, here Georgian also offers a rather close parallel).

4.4. Reflexivity

Another typologically outstanding feature of Basque is the way it can convey reflexivity. It usually does it by means of a noun meaning ‘head’ (*buru*), which in such constructions has grammaticalized into a functional (reflexive) marker; see the contrast between (14a) and (14b):

- (14) a. *Jonek buru handia du*
John.ERG head big have.PRES.3SG.A
‘John has a big head’.
- b. *Jonek bere burua ikusi du ispiluan*
John.ERG his head see AUX.PRES.3SG.A mirror.LOC
‘John has seen himself in the mirror’.

This kind of construction is not particularly common cross-linguistically (it can be found in Georgian and other Kartvelian languages, though). But recent research (Evseeva & Salaberri, 2018) has revealed that it is not completely rare either: at least 76 languages—a number of them being creoles—have developed such reflexive markers out of nouns meaning ‘head’ (and other languages employ other terms referring to body parts for similar purposes).

5. A note on Basque lexicon

The lexicon of Basque has been thus far one of the least known dimensions of the language and, for that very reason, has given rise to all kinds of etymological conjecture of varying degrees of quality (although, unfortunately, mainly poor throughout history; see nonetheless below in this section). We know for sure that the Basque language has drawn generously from Latin and Romance words. Some of these are clearly recognizable: *bake* ‘peace’ < Lat. *pace(m)*, *ohore* ‘honour’ < Lat. *(h)onore(m)*, *liburu* ‘book’ < Lat. *libru(m)*, *herren* ‘limp’, *herrenka* ‘limping’ < Sp. *renco*, *rengo*. Others are somewhat less obvious: *aizkora* ‘axe’ < Lat. *asciola*, *begiratu* ‘to look at’ < Lat. *vigilare*, perhaps *biao* ‘nap’ < Lat. *meridianum*, *aitortu* ‘acknowledge’ < Old Aragonese *aytorgar* (see Igartua & Zabaltza, 2012, p. 25).

Some vocabulary, although not much, may have been borrowed from ancient Celtic languages: *mando* ‘mule’, *gori* ‘red-hot’ or ‘incandescent’, *maitte* ‘beloved’, perhaps *izokin* ‘salmon’, although the latter may be directly traced back to the Vulgar Latin word *esocina*, probably reflected in the Asturian term *esguín* ‘young salmon’; a similar limited number of words may come from ancient Germanic languages, such as *urki* ‘birch tree’. There are also words of Arabic origin—*alkandora* ‘shirt’, *azoka* ‘market’, and *gutun* ‘letter’ from the Arabic *kutub*—which would have arrived via the filter of Romance.

In the native lexicon we can find a variety of syllabic patterns (from monosyllables to polysyllabic words, perhaps with a stronger tendency to disyllabic structures), but the historical analysis (Lakarra, 1995) had led in some cases to the hypothesis of an original root monosyllabism which was then replaced by other patterns by means of mechanisms

like partial reduplication (*zezen* ‘bull’, from **ze(n)-zen*, *gogor* ‘hard’ < **go(r)-gor*). This kind of evolution, however, cannot be claimed for the most part of the lexicon. The recently published historico-etymological dictionary of Basque (Lakarra, Manterola & Seguro, 2019), meant to overcome previous attempts such as those by Manuel Agud and Larry Trask, is a major lexicological work and must represent a truly significant advance in our knowledge of the diachronic sources of the core part of Basque lexicon.

6. Conclusions

The preceding discussion allows us to draw a few conclusions about the typological position of Basque (its standard variety) among the world’s languages:

1. Basque has a relatively simple phonological system (which contains, nevertheless, some peculiarities, the most salient of which being the phonemic contrast between the apical and the dorsal sibilants in some varieties).
2. Basque morphology is predominantly agglutinative, but it shows traces of *split morphology* (cumulative elements in inflection).
3. Basque alignment can be best defined as active-inactive.
4. Verbs in Basque display polypersonal agreement.
5. Allocutivity is expressed in Basque in quite an *exotic* way (specifically allocutive forms and familiar verbal addressing untypically share morphological markers).
6. Basque is a double-marking language at the clause level (it has both head-marking and dependent-marking).
7. Basque has N-Adj order combined with (mainly) Rel-N order.
8. In Basque, the noun ‘head’ has evolved into a reflexive marker.

Other traits could of course be added, but these are certainly among the elements that best characterize the core structural features of Basque in an overall typological perspective. A few of these properties (polypersonal verbal agreement, double-marking, active alignment, ‘head’ as a reflexive marker) tend to accumulate in the Kartvelian languages as well (the structural proximity with Georgian is fascinating in several respects), but some of them are structurally interrelated and speak about the deep internal connections of some typological characteristics. Taken together, all the relevant features examined in the previous sections can still fairly easily motivate Trask’s (1998, p. 323) conclusion that «Basque remains today the most typologically distinct language west of the Caucasus».

Abbreviations

A	agent	DAT	dative	M	masculine
ABS	absolute	DEF	definite	OBJ	object
ACC	accusative	DO	direct object	PL	plural
ALL	allative	ERG	ergative	PRES	present
ALLOC	allocutive (form)	F	feminine	SG	singular
APPL	applicative	FIN	finite		
AOR	aorist	IO	indirect object		
AUX	auxiliary	LOC	locative		

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En homenaje de la efemérides, este libro pretende dar cuenta del estado actual de la investigación en lingüística y literatura vascas. Investigadores de gran trayectoria y nuevas generaciones se reúnen en esta publicación para tratar, entre otros temas, sobre dialectología, didáctica de la lengua, filología, gramática teórica, tipología lingüística, lingüística histórica, traducción, literatura, onomástica y sociolingüística.

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