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## Diachronical hypotheses accounting for synchronic variation: the case of the Basque particle *ote*

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RECEPTION: 30/07/2019 | PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE: 24/09/2019 | DEFINITIVE ACCEPTANCE: 05/12/2019

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I am grateful to Prof. Coniglio (University of Göttingen) for the discussion on this topic and also the reviewers for their comments. This study has been made possible thanks to the research project PGC2018-100686-B-I00 from the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. All errors are mine.

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#### ABSTRACT

Two modal particles in Basque display separate syntactic statuses in eastern dialects, namely the evidential *omen* and the epistemic *ote*. Despite works on their syntax, no attempt to explain the relation (and development) between the two statuses has been put forward. After concluding that analyses on German and Italian MPs (Grosz, 2005; Coniglio, 2007; Cardinaletti, 2011) are not appropriate for *omen/ote*, I demonstrate that the recent proposal of Lakarra (2019), who postulates that MPs derive from verbs, accounts not only for the canonical behaviour of those particles, but also for their behaviour close to weak adverbs.

**Keywords:** modal particles; syntactic status; microvariation; diachronical development; Basque.

## 1. Introduction

Basque has a range of modal particles (henceforth MPs) like other European languages such as German or Italian. They are mainly related to evidentiality and epistemicity, such as evid. *ei* and *omen* or epist. *ahal*, *bide* and *ote*. Although they have not received much attention in the literature of Basque linguistics compared to Germanic linguistics, recently, some works have looked exclusively into MPs from the semantic-pragmatic field (Zubeldia, 2010; Garmendia, 2014; Korta & Zubeldia, 2014), the syntactic field (Etxepare, 2010; Etxepare & Uria, 2016; Monforte, 2018b; Trotzke & Monforte, 2019) and also the historical perspective (Monforte, 2018a; Lakarra, 2019). Additionally, Basque is known for its high degree of fragmentation. This results in a rich microvariation in the grammar, making Basque of great value for researchers examining not only typological or syntactic variation, but also semantic and historical change. Accordingly, it is not surprising that MPs in Basque show microvariation concerning their syntactic properties and also their semantic-pragmatics. Two MPs stand out because of their syntactic microvariation: *omen/ote*. These particles display separate behaviours in eastern dialects; observe the following examples:

- Canonical behaviour

- (1) a. *Lur berriak egin omen dira Iparraldean.*  
land new.ABS.PL make PART AUX northern.LOC  
'Reportedly, new lands have been made in the north Basque Country'. (Erdozaintzi-Etxart, 1982)

- b. *Non utzi ote dut egunkaria?*  
where leave PART AUX newspaper.ABS  
'I wonder where I left the newspaper'.

- Noncanonical behaviour

- (2) a. *Omen, bere osaba presondegian da.*  
PART her/his uncle.ABS prison.LOC be  
'Apparently, her/his uncle is in prison'. (Uria & Etxepare, 2017, p. 35)
- b. *Eztakit ardi horrek bildotxa ukhain dienez othe gaur.*  
not.know sheep that.ERG lamb have.FUT AUX.COMP PART today  
'I don't know if that sheep may have the lamb today'. (Camino, 2016, p. 501)

This syntactic variation has been recently analysed, as works such as Etxepare (2010), Etxepare & Uria (2016), Monforte (2019a), Trotzke & Monforte (2019) prove. Monforte (2019a) relates those distinctive syntactic patterns to the cross linguistic debate on the syntactic status of MPs. This discussion centres around two hypotheses regarding their status: on the one hand, those defending the idea that MPs are heads (Meibauer, 1994; Bayer & Obenauer, 2011; Bayer, Dasgupta, Mukhopadhyay & Ghosh, 2014; Struckmeier, 2014) based mostly on their syntactic restrictions in comparison to the word-classes they are diachronically related to and, on the other hand, those postulating that they have a phrasal nature (Thurmair, 1989; Zimmermann, 2004; Grosz, 2005; Coniglio, 2007; Cardinaletti, 2011) based on the fact that their semantic, phonological and syntactic properties are closer to full words than to clitic-heads. The microvariation found in *omen/ote* seems to illustrate both proposals (Etxepare & Uria, 2016; Monforte, 2019a). Although this situation has received attention as regards their syntactic implication, nobody has attempted to account how the two statuses have developed historically. Note that, as stated above, the historical development of MPs has also been examined only recently (Monforte, 2018, 2019b; Lakarra, 2019), claiming that some MPs derive from verbs. This advance in the field improves our understanding of MPs and their current microvariation, as I attempt to demonstrate in this article.

This paper is organized as follows: first, I describe some aspects of Basque grammar dealt with below; in Section 3 I provide evidence concerning the separate syntactic statuses of *omen/ote*; Section 4 discusses the microvariation related to *omen/ote*, and after having argued that analyses for German and Italian MPs do not explain it successfully, I demonstrate that a verbal origin accounts for it; finally, I present some conclusions in Section 5.

## 2. Some remarks on Basque grammar

Basque is an isolated pre-Indo-European language spoken in Western Europe. It is mostly classified as a head-final language, i.e. an SOV language; however, information structure changes this canonical order giving rise to other as SVO, VSO, OVS, etc. (de Rijk, 1969; Villasante, 1980; Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003):

- (3) a. *Ameliak erratz bat hartu du.*  
 Amelia.ERG broom one.ABS take AUX  
 ‘Amelia grabbed a broom’.
- b. *AMELIAK hartu du erratz bat.*  
 Amelia.ERG take AUX broom one.ABS  
 ‘It is Amelia who grabbed a broom’.
- c. *ERRATZ BAT hartu du Ameliak.*  
 broom one.ABS take AUX Amelia.ERG  
 ‘It is a broom what Amelia grabbed’.

Finite verbs are for the most part periphrastic, i.e. composed of a morphologically independent lexical verb carrying aspectual information (*eskain(i)-tzen*) and an auxiliary form bearing tense, mood and agreement with the arguments (*digute*):

- (4) *Urtero osasun-azterketa eskaintzen digute.*  
 year.every health-exam.ABS offer.IPFV 3SG.ABS.PRES.IND.1PL.DAT.3PL.ERG  
 ‘They offer us a health-exam every year’.

Lexical and finite verbs are usually adjacent; hence, other constituents like adverbs cannot intervene between them:

- (5) \**Osasun-azterketa eskaintzen urtero digute.*  
 health-exam.ABS offer.IPFV year.every AUX

Nevertheless, in the case of negative (main) clauses this adjacency is broken since finite verbs are fronted, whereas lexical verbs stay *in situ*:

- (6) *Ez naiz Urbasara joan ez-naiz*  
 not AUX Urbasa.ADL go  
 ‘I didn’t go to Urbasa’.

Moreover, the non-adjacency of these elements is attested in predicates containing MPs since the canonical position of MPs in positive declarative sentences is between lexical and auxiliary verbs:

- (7) *Ikasle guztiak liburua irakurri omen dute.*  
 student all.ERG book.ABS read PART AUX  
 ‘All students apparently read the book’.

MPs form a morphonological-word with finite verbs (Arregi & Nevins, 2012; Monforte, 2018b) based on, for instance, their movement along with the finite verb in certain contexts:

- (8) *Ez omen du liburua irakurri ez omen du.*  
 not PART AUX book.ABS read  
 ‘Reportedly, s/he didn’t read the book’.

After having introduced those aspects of Basque grammar, I proceed to present the separate behaviour of MPs in the next section.

### 3. Microvariation of MPs in Eastern Basque

In Section 1 I stated that *omen/ote* have separate syntactic statuses in Eastern Basque. I argue that those particles behave differently based on the following properties.

- a. **Their sentential distribution.** Apart from appearing attached to the inflected verb in the canonical pattern (7), *omen/ote* can also occur in other positions (9 & 10):

- (9) *Non ote utzi dut kazeta?*  
 where PART leave AUX newspaper.ABS  
 ‘Where did I leave the newspaper? (I’m wondering)’.
- (10) *Euskaldüna zen lehenago omen popülü ez ikasia.*  
 Basque.ABS be earlier PART folk not educated  
 ‘The Basque people were reportedly an uneducated folk earlier’. (Etxepare & Uria, 2016, p. 281)

b. **Their behaviour as phonological clitics** (Condoravdi & Kiparsky, 2002). Note that it is a general rule that Basque MPs move along with the inflected verb in contexts where the latter is fronted such as negative (main) clauses and focal structures (ex. 8); nevertheless, *omen/ote* in Eastern Basque can also stay *in situ* without attaching to the verb or blocking its rising (cfr. Coniglio, 2008):

- (11) *Nor deitzen du ba ote Peiok egun guziz hain goizik?*  
 who call.IPFV AUX PART PART Peter.ERG day all.INS so soon  
 ‘Who may Peter phone every morning so early?’

c. **Their occurrence in non-inflected predicates.** MPs in their canonical use are sensitive to the presence of finite verbs since they cannot occur if the inflected verb is elided. However, there is evidence that *omen/ote* in Eastern Basque do not pattern after this canonical property:

- (12) *Euskal Herrian ere gazte batek omen gauza bera eginik, amanda eta presondegia ukan zituen.*  
 Basque Country.LOC too young one.ERG PART thing same  
 done.PRTT, fine.ABS and prison.ABS had AUX  
 ‘A young person, having reportedly done the same thing, got a fine and prison in the Basque Country’. (Etxepare, 2010, p. 91)
- (13) *Pentsatzen dizü bihamonin oano harri hoi nola elkhiko ote.*  
 think.IPFV AUX following.day.LOC still stone that.ABS how leave  
 PART  
 ‘You keep thinking the following day how they will remove that stone’. (Moreno, 2018, p. 326)

These separate behaviours suggest that *omen/ote* in eastern varieties can function not only as a syntactic head but also as a phrase (Monforte, 2019a). Considering this, are we dealing with the same particle? How can they behave in such a distinctive manner? I will address these questions in the following sections.

#### 4. Hypotheses on the derivation of both statuses in MPs

The two syntactic statuses proposed for MPs can be found in Eastern Basque; although that piece of microvariation has been examined syntactically, nobody has attempted to

account for the diachronical relation between both statuses. If we apply analyses proposed for German and Romance MPs, they do not provide a satisfactory answer.

If we follow Cardinaletti's (2011) analyses for German and Italian MPs, i.e. that they are phonologically, semantically and syntactically reduced adverbs, it could be postulated that *ote* always occupies the same syntactic position no matter whether it behaves as a weak adverb or as a clitic head. In fact, if we adopt the idea that at least some German MPs derive from adverbs and occupy the same position as those adverbs do (Abraham, 1991; Grosz, 2005; Cardinaletti, 2011), the same diachronical development could be proposed for Basque MPs and, hence, the weak adverb *ote* in eastern dialects would be a previous stage of the general clitic *ote*; I will prove that this approach is not appropriate along the following lines.

First, such a situation would be similar to the one described for the standard German particle *denn* and the Viennese German *dn* (Grosz, 2005, 2007; Cardinaletti, 2011); nevertheless, eastern dialects display both clitic head and phrasal statuses. This co-existence poses a problem since we should explain why *ote* attaches to the finite verb or stays *in situ* in the same syntactic environments. There is no syntactic movement or mechanism which could account for the optionality of both statuses. In addition to this, the position of MPs in neutral sentences presents a problem for that hypothesis because we need to accept that the particle, which occupies a position in CP<sup>1</sup>, cliticises to the finite verb moving downwards and preceding it. Otherwise, I would expect to find a pattern similar to that described for Swedish by Scherf (2016), i.e. particles only attach to the verb if the latter moves to the CP-domain, namely by head-to-head movement. However, it is an acknowledged fact that canonical MPs in Basque never occur on their own and always attach to the finite verb no matter whether the latter moves or not. Moreover, accounts postulating that they attach to the contiguous head cannot be held for Basque MPs, since, otherwise, we would expect it to attach to different heads, as can be observed in Viennese German (Grosz, 2005). It may be claimed that MPs have a [<sub>T</sub> T<sup>0</sup>] feature in those cases in which they are attached to the inflected verb. Nevertheless, this seems an *ad hoc* solution to a problem created when trying to account unsuccessfully for the microvariation on the syntactic status of *omen/ote* in eastern varieties following the analyses argued for Germanic languages (Abraham, 1991; Grosz, 2005, 2007; Coniglio, 2007, 2008).

An approach claiming that the noncanonical behaviour of *omen/ote* derives from the clitic headed MPs does not explain this variation either. In fact, it is difficult to figure out a mechanism which triggers the change of a proclitic head into an independent but fairly syntactically restricted word.

All in all, as I will argue below, the recent approach that MPs had a verbal origin improves the analysis of their syntax. In what follows, I will briefly introduce this new

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<sup>1</sup> Monforte (2019a) argues that the noncanonical *ote* occupies a position in the left periphery since it always follows the verb fronted to FocP and precedes the subject located in TP. Additionally, it survives the ellipsis of TP. Furthermore, Etxepare and Uria (2016) propose that the noncanonical *omen* in eastern dialects occupy a functional position in CP.



hypothesis on the origin of these MPs, *omen/ote*, assuming that knowing their historical development will shed light on the current variation.

#### 4.1. Lakarra's (2019) reconstruction of MPs *omen/ote*

If we observe hypotheses on the origin of MPs, we notice that several word-classes have been identified as their potential source: adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions and verbs (Thurmair, 1989; Abraham, 1991; Haegeman, 2014; Struckmeier, 2014; Cardinaletti, 2015; Kresić, Angster & Diewald, 2017). Among those, I would highlight the analyses postulating a verbal origin for MPs; in fact, this has been proposed for some Basque MPs, namely (Lakarra, 2019; Monforte, 2019b):

- (14) a.  $ahal_{MV} > ahal_{MP}$   
 b.  $**enin_V > ei_{MP}$   
 c.  $**bo(c)-te_V > ote_{MP}$   
 d.  $emon_V > omen_{MP}$   
      $> emon_{\nu}, eman_V$

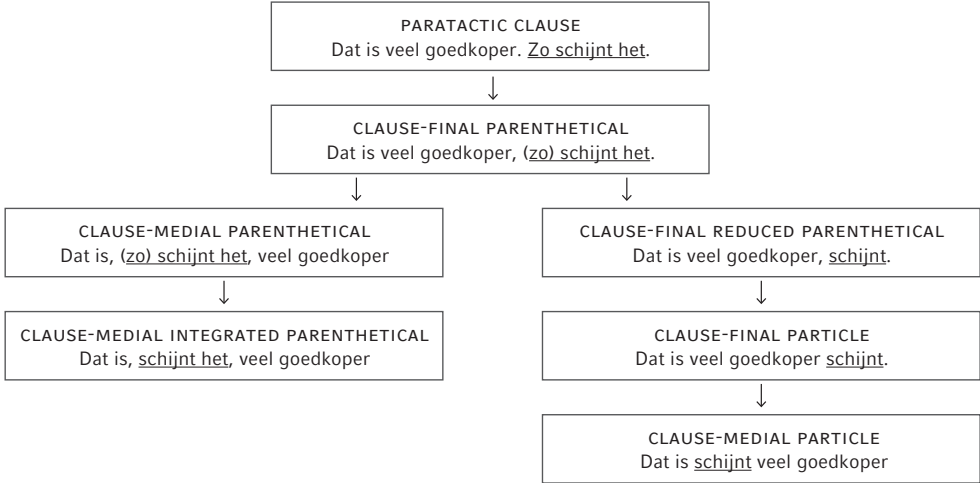
In what concerns us, Lakarra (2019) identifies a verbal nature for *omen/ote*. Firstly, he relates *omen* to the current verb *eman/emon* based on their morphological and semantic similitude. Although the particle mainly has the form *omen* in current Basque, and *emen* in the several varieties. Is also attested with the form *emon* in Roncalese (*cfr.* the verb *eman/emon* ['to give']). This results in the same form for both verb and MP in that area. As for their interpretation, the verb *eman/emon* conveys not only 'to give', but also 'to seem', 'to be of one's opinion/judgement'. Those interpretations are closer to the evidentiality expressed by the MP *omen*, as similar correspondences have been claimed in other languages such as Dutch or German (Schoonjans, 2012; Van Bogaert & Leuschner, 2015; Cruschina & Remberger, 2017).

Secondly, Lakarra (2019) contrasts the MP *ote* to the noun *ote* ('gorse') and, furthermore, to the noun *mote* ('sprout of a tree or plant'). Looking into the morphology of those variants, he identifies the verbal noun/plural/iterative morpheme *-te*; hence, *ote* and *mote* should be analysed as *o-te* and *mo-te*. As for their semantic relation, he compares them to the nouns *emai* ('gift, flow') < *eman* ('to give') and *ihi(n)* ('rush') <  $**enin$  ('to give'). He concludes that the word related to *ote* and *mote* is a verb conveying 'to give', 'to seem', 'to believe' (*cfr.* Schoonjans, 2012; Van Bogaert & Leuschner, 2015; Cruschina & Remberger, 2017). This gives rise to the interpretation of the nouns *ote* and *mote* (the action of giving > fruit > plant, small branch) and also the interpretation of the modal particle (the action of giving, seeming, believing > apparently, it seems to somebody that, probably > perhaps, doubt)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that *omen/ote* may have a similar origin, namely the verb 'to give', posits no problem if we consider that those elements may have specialised to avoid occupying the same semantic domain, turning *omen* into an evidential particle and *ote* into an epistemic particle.

Additionally, cross linguistically verbs have been identified as the departure point of MPs; two separate developments can be distinguished: on the one hand, the case of Japanese and, on the other, the case of Dutch and German. Let us briefly consider them. In Japanese the verb *kasiran* (‘whether know not’) was reanalysed as the question particle *ka* and the MP *sira* conveying a nuance which can be paraphrased as ‘I wonder’<sup>3</sup>.

In Dutch the expression *schijnt* (‘it seems’) has suffered a high degree of grammaticalization, namely *particulization*; since it does not only show bleached semantics and impoverished phonology, but also syntactic constraints. Based on that evidence, Van Bogaert & Leuschner (2015) conclude that this expression has become a particle in some varieties. These authors consider two separate sources for the particle, i.e. a discourse marker and a paratactic clause. Let us exemplify the latter in the Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The grammaticalization of *schijnt* following the parataxis hypothesis (Van Bogaert & Leuschner, 2015, p. 103).

In what follows, I will turn back to the topic of this article and look into the microvariation related to *omen/ote* considering the reanalysis presented above and its consequences in the syntax of those MPs.

**4.2. An account for the microvariation of *omen/ote***

Below I will demonstrate that the idea that MPs were originally verbs explains their general properties and also the distinctive behaviour found in eastern varieties. First, their sentential distribution resembles that of verbs since the canonical position for lexical verbs is preceding the auxiliary verb, as it is also for MPs too.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Nasu for providing me with a detailed analysis of the verbal form and its historical development into a QP and MP.

- (15) a. *Liburua irakurri du.*  
 book.ABS read AUX  
 ‘S/he read the book’.
- b. *Liburua irakurri omen du.*  
 book.ABS read PART AUX  
 ‘Reportedly, s/he read the book’.

However, the constrained behaviour of MPs means that they have to attach to the inflected verb and move along together in contexts where movement is obligatory for finite verbs. To exemplify this, let us consider negative contexts: whereas lexical verbs stay *in situ*, inflected verbs are fronted in negative (main) sentences. As can be observed in (16b), the movement also affects MPs, unlike lexical verbs:

- (16) a. *Ez du liburua irakurri ez du.*  
 not AUX book.ABS read  
 ‘S/he didn’t read the book’.
- b. *Ez omen du liburua irakurri ez—omen—du.*  
 not PART AUX book.ABS read  
 ‘Reportedly, s/he didn’t read the book’.

Hence, this distribution and movement are expected for syntactically impoverished verbs.

Additionally, they display other properties expected for grammaticalised elements, i.e. minimized phonology and bleached semantics<sup>4</sup>. Note that they behave phonologically more similarly to clitics than to full words and, therefore, they can never occur alone; on the contrary, only the presence of the inflected verb legitimates their use.

Interestingly, this proposal for the origin of MPs also accounts for the noncanonical uses found in eastern dialects. Some particles in Dutch and German similar to weak adverbs (following Cardinaletti’s [2011] terminology) have been related to verbs. Nevertheless, they would not have developed by reanalysing a  $V^0$  into a  $Part^0$  as in the case of Basque canonical particles or the Japanese *sira*, but they would have derived from complete phrases as in Dutch (*zo*) *schijnt het* (‘it seems so’). Van Bogaert and Leuschner (2015) claim that such paratactic clauses were integrated in the clause they evaluate as parentheticals and further reduction in their phonological, syntactic and semantic properties turned them into particle-like elements.

Bearing this in mind, I propose that *omen/ote* behaviour as weak adverbs may have derived from paratactic clauses after those became parentheticals; in fact, similar patterns can be found in current Basque such as *antza denez* (‘as it seems so’) > *antza*

<sup>4</sup> Their interpretation can hardly be translated by using a single word; instead, they need to be paraphrased, as is common for MPs. Furthermore, the context they are inserted into may vary their contribution to the proposition, unlike the interpretation of verbs which is unalterable. This is easily observed in the case of the MP *ahal*. This particle, claimed to be related to the modal verb *ahal* ‘to be able, can’, can barely be replaced by the same phrase in different contexts; furthermore, its usual counterparts like *seguru asko* (‘certainly’), *oxala* (‘I wish’), *beharbada* (‘perhaps’) display distinct contributions.

(‘apparently’), *nik uste dut* (‘I think so’) > *nik uste* (‘I think’), *irudi du* (‘it seems so’) > *irudi* (‘apparently’). Therefore, this would be the hypothetical development of the weak adverbs *omen/ote*:

- (17) a. {PARATACTIC CLAUSE CONTAINING MPs}, [CLAUSE]  
 b. [{parenthetical containing MPs} clause]  
 c. [MPs integrated in the clause]

In a first stage, phrases containing the verbs *omen/ote* in independent clauses would have behaved like paratactic clauses. As they were integrating in the clause, they would have functioned first as parentheticals and further, while they were being grammatically reduced and specialized in certain syntactic positions, they became particle-like phrases. It would have been during this last step when the verbs were constrained, resulting in their bare form, that of particles in current Basque. This process can be observed in German *glaub*: as it was integrating in the clause, the parenthetical clause ‘glaube ich’ (‘I believe’) lost inflections, i.e. *glaube ich* > *glaub*, and its position along the clause became restricted to the middle field. In fact, a similar process can also be found in historical Basque: the reduction such parentheticals underwent caused clauses like *antza denez* were shortened into adverb-like elements as *antza*.

Once *omen/ote* acquired the adverbial status, this opened up the possibility to accept suffixes and postpositions following the usual behaviour of adverbs:

- (18) *Omenka mintzo da.*  
 PART.SUF speak AUX  
 ‘S/he speaks by hearsay’. (Etxepare & Uria, 2016)
- (19) *Eztüta nik othian egün boniur handia?*  
 not.AUX.PART I.ERG PART.LOC today happiness big.ABS  
 ‘Don’t I have perhaps today great joy?’ (Oihenarte, 1971)

Moreover, *ote* also shows a behaviour similar to nouns:

- (20) *Ez, eta otherik gabe oraino. Zu hunen irakurtzen ari ziren bezen segur.*  
 not and PART.PRTT without still you this.GEN read.IPFV PROG  
 AUX.COM so sure  
 ‘No, and even with no doubt. As sure as you’re reading this’. (Hiriart-Urruty, 1972)

This is not surprising since some adverbs also behave that way:

- (21) *Negar egingo zenuke [...] biharrik ez balego.*  
 cry do.FUT AUX tomorrow.PRTT not if.AUX  
 ‘You would cry if there were no tomorrow’. (Oñederra, 1999)

Finally, accepting the idea that the proto-verbs *emon* and *\*\*bo(C)-te* developed a distinct behaviour like adverbs before becoming clitic MPs sheds light onto some previously mentioned topics. First, having a phrasal nature allows a less restricted behaviour in comparison to clitic MPs. Hence, *omen/ote* do not need to occur adjacent to the finite verb and display different positions along the sentence. They can even appear in non-

inflected sentences as shown in (12-13), unlike their canonical counterparts. Additionally, they do not block the verb's movement to the left periphery since they do not occupy a head position, but a specifier one. This confirms what Coniglio (2007) expects for MPs behaving like maximal projections. Finally, *ote* can occur combined with a *wh*-word in eastern dialects; this combination would be unexpected for a clitic word which needs to be attached to a finite verb. Nevertheless, the compound formed by a *wh*-word and the phrasal particle *ote* poses no such problem, since it displays a freer syntactic behaviour similar to adverbs or nouns, as argued above. In fact, nouns such as *demonstre* 'dam, hell' or *debru* 'devil' combine in a similar way to *wh*-words in all dialects and even the particle *ba(da)* behaves in a similar way in eastern dialects:

- (22) *Nondik bada zetozen eskatu zien.*  
 where. PART come.COM ask AUX  
 'S/he asked them where they were coming then from'. (Borda, 2005)

Note that the particle *ba(da)* does not behave like canonical MPs, but rather like the weak adverbs *omen/ote*.

## 5. Conclusions

Lakarra's (2019) claim that *omen/ote* originated from verbs improves our understanding of MPs. Adopting this hypothesis we can account for canonical properties such as their clausal position preceding the finite verb and their behaviour as grammaticalised constituents. In addition to this, its grammaticalisation process gives us a way to explain how *omen/ote* developed a weak adverb status in eastern dialects. I propose that *omen/ote* underwent this development while they had not got yet fully grammaticalised, giving rise to the microvariation attested in Eastern Basque.

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LUIS MARI ZALDUA

**Izenburua/Título:**

Fontes Linguae Vasconum 50 urte. Ekarpen berriak euskararen ikerketari/Nuevas aportaciones al estudio de la lengua vasca

**© Argitaratzaileak/Editores:**

Ekaitz Santazilia, Dorota Krajewska, Eneko Zuloaga, Borja Ariztimuño

**© Egileak/Autores:**

Itziar Aduriz, Jose Mari Arriola, Luzia Alberro, K. Josu Bijuesca, Estibaliz Amorrortu, Ane Ortega, Jone Goirigolzarri, Alexander Artzelus Muxika, Mikel Ayerbe Sudupe, Goio Bañales, Mikel Gorrotxategi, Iñigo Beitia, Garbiñe Bereziartua Etxeberria, Beñat Muguruza Aseginolaza, Lyle Richard Campbell, Bruno Camus Bergareche, Sara Gómez Seibane, Denis Creissels, Céline Mounole, Leire Diaz de Gereñu Lasaga, Itziar Idiazabal Gorrotxategi, Luis Mari Larringan Aranzabal, Amaia Elizalde Estenaga, Arantzazu Elordieta, Ainara Estarrona, Izaskun Etxeberria, Ricardo Etxepare, Manuel Padilla-Moyano, Ander Soraluze, Ainhoa Ezeiza, Javier Encina, Ines M. Garcia-Azkoaga, Olatz Bengoetxea, Josune Zabala, Roberto González de Viñaspre, Joaquín Gorrochategui, Miren Ibarluzea Santisteban, Iván Igartua, Paula Kasares, Beñat Lascano, Itziar Madina, Elizabete Manterola Agirrezabalaga, Ibon Manterola, Mikel Martínez Areta, Sergio Monforte, Aroa Murciano Eizaguirre, Arantza Ozaeta Elortza, Mari Jose Olaziregi, Argia Olçomendy, Javier Ormazabal, Luis Pastor, Iker Salaberri, Hisao Tokizaki, Oxel Uribe-Etxebarria, Laura Vela-Plo, Luis Mari Zaldua

**© Argitaratzailea/Edita:**

Nafarroako Gobernua/Gobierno de Navarra

Kultura eta Kirol Departamentua/Departamento de Cultura y Deporte

Vianako Printzea Erakundea-Kultura Zuzendaritza Nagusia/Dirección General de Cultura-Institución Príncipe de Viana

Lanak adituek berrikusi dituzte, itsu bikoitzeko sistemaren bidez/Los trabajos han sido revisados por pares doble ciego.

**Diseinua eta maketazioa/Diseño y maquetación:**

Kö estudio

**Imprimaketa/Impresión:**

Linegrafic

ISBN: 978-84-235-3561-3

LG/DL: NA 1438-2020

**Sustapena eta banaketa/Promoción y distribución:**

Nafarroako Gobernuaren Argitalpen Funtsa/Fondo de Publicaciones del Gobierno de Navarra

Navas de Tolosa, 21

31002 Iruña/Pamplona

Tel.: 848 427 121

fondo.publicaciones@navarra.es

<https://publicaciones.navarra.es>

# Fontes Linguae Vasconum 50 urte.

2019an 50 urte egin zituen Nafarroako Gobernuaren Vianako Printzea Erakundeak argitaratzen duen *Fontes Linguae Vasconum: studia et documenta* euskal hizkuntzalaritzako aldizkariak.

Horren gorazarre, liburu honek gaur egungo euskal hizkuntzalaritza- eta literatura-ikerketan zertan den erakutsi nahi du. Eskarmentu handiko ikertzaileek eta belaunaldi berriek bat egin dute argitalpen honetan, besteak beste, dialektologia, hizkuntzaren didaktika, filologia, gramatika teorikoa, hizkuntz tipologia, hizkuntzalaritza historikoa, itzulpengintza, literatura, onomastika eta soziolinguistika hizpide dituztela.

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La revista de lingüística vasca *Fontes Linguae Vasconum: studia et documenta*, publicada por la Institución Príncipe de Viana del Gobierno de Navarra, cumplió 50 años en 2019.

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.

ISBN: 978-84-235-3561-3



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