

Ergative marking in Basque-Spanish and Basque-French code-switching

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Summary: The paper presents the case of ergative marking in code-switching (CS) in the spontaneous speech of Basque bilinguals from either side of the French-Spanish border. Here the focus will be on intrasentential CS. Basque is an ergative-absolutive language while French and Spanish are nominative-accusative languages. According to the naturalistic data collected in the Basque Country, Basque speakers, when switching intrasententially during a conversation, show some clear patterns in the use of the ergative in CS: they use the determiner as the main trigger in ergative marking, as can be clearly observed when the determiner is a French/Spanish one. When it appears on the left of the noun following the French/Spanish pattern, the subject winds up with no ergative marker and the CS is acceptable in any case.

Keywords: language contact, bilingual speech, code-switching, Basque-Spanish, Basque-French, ergative marking ■

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■ 1 Introduction

It has not been too long that Basque linguists have started to look into code-switching. Hitherto, and, to some extent, even today many Basque linguists have deemed such utterances to be the result of unstable and ungrammatical usage. Research on this topic is scarce in number and limited in scope, especially regarding research on the grammatical aspects.

Nevertheless, anyone who has ever been around Basques knows well that this language behaviour figures largely in conversations among Basque-speakers who are all bilingual or multilingual today. This does not seem to be a novel situation. Moreover, the sociolinguistic situation and social milieu in the Basque Country that triggers code-switching dates way back. Basically, we can attest to such a practice in Basque literary output. Nevertheless, in the Basque Country, as in other places, mixing languages has been seen as a literary device, as evidenced by Lazarraga's 16th century verses (Gómez López, 2011) or, in folk literary production, in songs



(Urkizu, 1991; Agirre, 2013), in pastoral plays (Padilla, 2015), or in verses (e.g. Etxeberria Ayesta, 2009).

In studies on code-switching (CS) that have been conducted in the Basque Country as well as in other places, there are two types of analysis that may be distinguished. On the one hand, those which have a sociolinguistic perspective taking into account what CS is, in what context it takes place, and what conditions trigger it (e.g. Ibarra, 2011; Lantto, 2014). On the other hand, there are those that approach the question of how two languages are used within a clause from a grammatical point of view, how CS takes place. There are those who analyse it in language acquisition (Ezeizabarrena, 2009 and 2015; Ezeizabarrena & Aéby, 2010) or who analyse it in adults' speech (Epelde & Oyharçabal, 2010a, 2010b and 2019; Ezeizabarrena & Munarriz, 2012; Ibarra, 2013; Parafita Couto *et al.*, 2015). The research presented here focuses on the latter approach.

Over the last few years, research into intrasentential CS has been flourishing in linguistics research papers, and a rapidly growing number of language pairs has been taken into consideration, including pairs of languages with different language typologies (Chan, 2009; Muysken, 2014). However, as far as we are aware, in research work carried out on CS, there has been little research done on ergative marking, with the sole exception of research conducted in some mixed Australian languages (McConvell, 2002 and 2007; Meakins, 2009 and 2013; O'Shannessy & Meakins, 2012).

Indeed, with Basque being an ergative-absolutive language, while French and Spanish are nominative-accusative languages, it seems to us that this is an interesting research topic, especially with the supposition that such research might offer some interesting data that could provide some insight into when and how Basques make use of the ergative. Nonetheless, as this research presents only a preliminary approach, we shall only attempt to lay the groundwork for the basic data at this stage, since not much has been said that might provide any insight into how Basque speakers deal with ergativity when switching languages.

First of all, we shall provide some details about the sources of the field research data (§2). In the next step, we shall analyse the CS that took place in the DP subject with a lexical head (§3). We will then specifically study data corresponding to personal pronouns (§4). After bringing together the data from the previous sections, we shall summarize how cases of code-switching which take place in subjects of Basque transitive verbs come about (§5). To conclude, based on the data presented, we shall reflect on the main conclusions (§6).

■ 2 Source of data

In research papers on grammar, it has not always been easy to collect and lay the groundwork for code-switching data. It is undoubtedly even more difficult than collecting research data involving a single language. Speakers often consider intrasentential CS to be wrong and there is no tradition judging the grammaticality of those kinds of items. This is the reason why, up to now, data especially from casual conversations have been used in CS research which many believe could be improved upon (Mahootian, 1993; Gardner-Chloros, 2009). However, as studies on CS from a grammatical angle have progressed, it has been demonstrated that, however difficult it might be, different data are also necessary, especially when it comes to judgments regarding unacceptable structures (MacSwan, 1997; González-Vilbazo *et al.*, 2013; Koronkiewicz, 2014), for which experimental elicitation has also been used at times (Gullberg *et al.*, 2009; Parafita Couto *et al.*, 2015).

In recent years, in the Basque Country, a special corpus called ACOBA has been set up with data on intrasentential CS and collected from recorded casual conversations. The research in this paper is mainly based on data from that database.¹ The corpus, in which Basque-French and Basque-Spanish language pairs were taken into consideration, was recorded and transcribed between 2011 and 2013. All together, the corpus is comprised of two thousand audio recordings, and each one of the examples comes with a corresponding transcription in the file as well.

All of the examples in the database have been taken from random conversations. Nearly 200 hours were recorded for the project, with about 120 speakers from all over the Basque Country taking part. Six age groups were taken into account when selecting the informants to be interviewed: those over 55 (both in France and in Spain), those between 18 and 35, and those under 18. Nearly all of the informants we interviewed were fully proficient to communicate in Basque and almost all of the conversations were in Basque. In a small number of cases, the language being inserted into a

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Spanish or French sentence might have been Basque, but in most cases Basque was the main language being spoken and French/Spanish was inserted into it.

As was mentioned above, some two thousand clauses which involved intrasentential CS have been stored, with searches being classified according to the morpheme or clause where CS occurred. In accordance with the classification of the database, there are around one hundred examples with the CS item as the subject, and we found some twenty examples among them which take place in a clause where the CS item is marked for ergative. Though it might not be a large number, in light of what kind of examples we have found, it is, in our opinion, sufficient to carry out preliminary studies on the topic. In presenting the data, we shall take into consideration the kind of subject clause in which CS takes place: to begin with, we look into determiner phrases (DP) as subjects with a lexical head, first taking place at the DP level (§3.1), and then those occurring at the head noun level (§3.2). Next, we shall go over some rather different cases, which, in our view, although they appear rather seldom in the database, are worth mentioning, especially those regarding personal pronouns (§4.1). In our paper, furthermore, even with the presence of data from recorded casual conversations in the database which the researcher may listen to directly, we shall also delve into written texts in order to see whether we can ascertain a means of finding confirmation for our. We shall also make use of our own intuition as Basque native speakers.

■ 3 Treatment of ergativity in subjects with lexical heads

Since Basque is an ergative language, the ergative marker does not appear in all subject clauses except in those with transitive verbs, both in the subject and, by means of verbal concordance, in conjugated verbs. On the other hand, sometimes such a marking system is also used in verbs that are, most of the time, semantically non-ergative. With the number of examples being quite low in the database, all of the examples appear with transitive verbs, either in cases when it is a Basque verb, or in cases with a French/Spanish one.² That is why no mention is made of cases in which

2 In the database, only one example was collected in which the ergative was used with a French/Spanish intransitive verb that might require the absolutive. Bearing in mind that the clauses in the database have been collected in informal conversations, they have been considered to be a common misconception that occurs in such conversations, so that they are not linked to CS. Here is an example (the references given after the exam-

there are non-ergative verbs with an ergative subject in Basque. Furthermore, in our data, there will be no analysis of agreement marking that does not trigger CS.

■ 3.1 CS in subjects at determiner phrase (DP) level

In order to differentiate the two types of situation here we will first group together subjects in Basque and then those in French/Spanish.

■ 3.1.1 Subjects in Basque

There are four examples with verbs in French/Spanish which clearly bear the ergative suffix ending *-k* for Basque. In all four, the subject phrase is entirely given in Basque; in all four, the subject is to the left of the verb while the rest of the elements are in French/Spanish.

- (1) [*Fallo horre-k*] te ha recocado. (A24-4)
'That mistake-ERG.SG (on and on) drives me crazy mad'
- (2) [*Nere ama-k*] me decía: "ala, con el tenedor, y ala, ¡venga! Jan!". (A29-2)
'My mother-ERG.SG used to tell me: "ala, con el tenedor, y ala, ¡venga! Eat!"'
- (3) [*Nere koinatua-k*], [*Salamancakoa-k*], me dice: "tú, ¿qué?, ¿haciendo la rosca a la amona?". (A35-24)
'My brother-in-law-ERG.SG, the one from Salamanca-ERG.SG, tells me: "tú, ¿qué?, ¿haciendo la rosca a la amona?"'
- (4) Porque [*nere ama-k*], o sea, me decía: "no hay que tocar nada". (B21-19)
'Because my mother-ERG.SG used to tell me: "no hay que tocar nada"'

In addition to these, we have another example in the database with a configuration akin to examples in (1–4) in which, however, the subject phrase has a Basque absolutive plural ending (*-ak*) which coincides with the ergative marker:

- (5) [*Donostiarra-k*], [*giputxa-k*], le llaman *erla*. (A30-16)
'The people from Donostia-ERG.PL, the gipuzkoan-ERG.PL, call it *erla*'

ples correspond to those used in the corpus: the letters and numbers correspond to the formatting, with the number after the line, which corresponds to the informant):

- (i) *Bai, ni-k hor...* estuve en una comunión, creo, hace muchos años. (B21-7)
'Yes, I-ERG there... was in a communion, I think, many years ago'

- (8) Eta hemen, Frantzian, [auzapez-ek] eta notab...[*les notables*] beti frantsesez egiten zuten. (A2-4)
 ‘Here, in France, the majors and *the dignitaries* used to speak in French’
- (9) Eta beharbada da, badakizu, ohetik erori da, eta beraz [*le chirurgien*] edo [inferniera-k] hartu dit eta... (C23-4)
 ‘Maybe, you know, he has fallen from bed, thus *the surgeon* or the nurse told me...’
- (10) *El vikingo* deituzentso Anttonek. Zer diño [*el vikingo*], ba? ... *El vikingo*... rubioa da. (A26-36)
 ‘Antton calls him *El vikingo*. What does *el vikingo* say?... *El vikingo*... he is blond’

It is worth noting that in both cases (8–9) the subject is part of a joint structure, one of the conjuncts being Basque while the other, due to CS, is French. It is clear that these two examples, as far as the ergative marker is concerned, mark a clear contrast between the ergative subject in Basque and a lack of ergative marking in French and Spanish (see §6). As for the third example, it is not clear whether the “el” morpheme is a determiner in that context, or a complete noun phrase that is treated as a proper noun. In any case, as we can see, an ergative marker is not present in that example either.

The fourth example is also special because it contains a proper noun and it lacks a determiner. In this case, an ergative suffix appears:

- (11) Eta beraz gaixoa, [*chanoine Lafittek*] erraten: “oraiko eskuara, ikastoletako eskuara, ba, zer manerak!” (A6-10)
 ‘I remember *chanoine Lafitte* saying: the current Basque, the Basque used in schools, is not proper Basque!’

The data we collected in written texts are similar to (8–10); that is, with a French/Spanish determiner with no ergative markers. The following, for example, is from a verse in a bilingual song from 1836 (Urkizu, 1991: 1–256, 369):

scripts of CS examples. Note, therefore, that spelling in French is not always related to pronunciation, and especially the word-final *-e* ending which is not pronounced (for example, in (15) *cure-ak* is pronounced /kyRak/ and in (16) *bross-ak* is pronounced /bRosak/).

- (12a) (*Comme<n>t sans boire de vin* egon behar dugu)
 [Nos malheureuses gorges] behar dute idortu.
 ‘Since we have to live without drinking wine, our unfortunate throats
 will get dry’

As in the case of Basque subjects, the verbs in all examples have verbal agreement markers as if there were no CS items at all, that is to say, the Basque verb that governs ergativity clearly has agreement with a French/Spanish subject with no ergative marker.

Counterexamples in (12b–c) are considered to be incorrect by the speakers, whether they be Spanish-speaking or French-speaking:

- (12b) *Zer esango luke [el constructor-ek]?
 ‘What would the builder-ERG.SG say?’
 (12c) *Zer erran du [le directeur-ek]?
 ‘What did the director-ERG.SG say?’

■ 3.2 CS taking place within the head noun of a subject

There are seven examples in the corpus in which the noun of the DP subject of a transitive verb is French. In all of them, except for the head noun, all other morphemes are in Basque.

The subject phrases in the seven sentences mark ergativity and there is no exception to be found in this regard:

- (13) Eta erran gintuen [hango inspecteur batek]: «hobe duzue hiru-lau urte gelditu, zeren eta la dénonciation atxikia da». (A15-18)
 ‘And one of the inspectors there told us: “better if you stop for three or four years, because the report is still active”’
- (14) [Entrepreneur batek] erosi ziin etxe hura, eta [entrepreneur horrek berak] errana, lau urteren buruan, banintuila lau urte han egoiteko. (A1-6)
 ‘A builder bought that house, and he told me that I could stay there four years longer’
- (15) Mais asteartean baizik ez dut jakinen zonbat denbora iraunen dautan [ene cure-ak]. (A7-27)
 ‘But I will not know until Tuesday how long my treatment will take’
- (16) [Brosse-ak] eiten tu, diseinüak. (A7-45)
 ‘She is a hairbrush maker, a designer’

- (17) Eta hori da preseski [*agence-ek*] egiten ahal dutena. (A7-51)
 ‘That is exactly what *agencies* can do’
- (18) Bai, hamabi urte eukitzen eben [*linier-ak*]. (B11-5)
 ‘Yes, *the judges* used to be twelve years old’
- (19) [*Présentateur* horiek] behar tzien jakin gaiza frango. (A40-6)
 ‘Those *presenters* had to know so many things’

In these examples, the CS item occurs in the same head noun. We have not collected any examples in which an adjective appears.⁵

How can one decide when a word is a borrowing, when it is a case of CS? This was a very controversial topic even before in the literature on CS (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Treffers-Daller, 1994; Poplack & Meechan, 1995; Poplack, 2018), and no consensus has been reached as to whether there should be a differentiation of concepts and, if there can be one, how it could be achieved (Wei, 2009). When collecting data for the corpus, a pragmatic approach was used by taking into account dictionaries, above all the (Basque-Basque) *Orotariko Euskal Hiztegia* (General Basque Dictionary), as well as, whenever possible, pronunciation.⁶

In research such as ours, structure is what counts, however, and not necessarily which words are involved.

■ 3.2.1 Subject phrases with a head noun in Basque

Taking into account, on the one hand, the method used to compile the corpus (in which conversations were mainly in Basque), and, on the other hand, the tendency of how Basque speakers produce CS, there have been collected far fewer determiner phrases with head nouns in Basque which are of the same type (13–19). We have not found a single case in the instances that we have analyzed, i.e. there are no Basque head nouns that could be inserted in a subject phrase of a French/Spanish transitive verb in the corpus. Even in written texts, there are few such cases, that can be

5 There is no doubt that there are limitations to corpus studies. Besides the head noun, there are other areas to check such as how other cases of CS can take place in adnominal constituents, adjectives, or other modifiers.

6 In French words, phonology has been particularly looked into. The words that appear using non-Basque phonemes have been included in CS. This criterion is less easy to use with Spanish (Oñederra, 2009). It is clear, however, that cultural terms raise a problem, as in example (18) names (*linier*). For this topic, see Wei (2009).

found in almost every kind of humorous songs and verses imaginable. One such case, for instance, is the folk song *Asto Gaxua* which we can see below:

- (20a) Y agora te hace dos años / Juxtu-juxtuak ayer cumplió / Que [las
tripako miñas] / Al pobre burro le agarró (*Eibarko kantua*)⁷
‘About two years ago the poor donkey started feeling *pain in the*
stomach’

The examples in (20a) take no ergative marker. The CS item *tripako min(a)*⁸ has been placed in the DP, surely because it is a single compound noun.

According to the intuition of the speakers, such a French/Spanish determiner phrase may not take an ergative marker, as evidenced in the following example:

- (20b) *Qué hizo [la *neska-ε*]?
girl-ERG.SG
- (20c) *Qu’*en* pensent [les *pilotari-εk*]?
pelota player-ERG.PL

■ 4 Ergative markers in subjects without a lexical head

We have found very few examples in the corpus in which a subject determiner phrase with CS does not have a lexical head. However, it seems useful to comment on certain such special instances. We shall first discuss personal pronouns and then certain special phrases without a head.

■ 4.1 CS in personal pronoun subjects

Several linguists have brought to light a contrast in the following examples when analyzing CS with Spanish and English (MacSwan, 2014: 1–2):

- (21) [*Mi hermano*] bought some ice cream.

7 The song has different versions. The corresponding text quotation has been taken from <http://egoibarra.eus/en/argitalments/support-support/cibar-kantuz-kantu/kantuz_kantu.pdf>.

8 In consonant-ending Basque words, Spanish speakers add an *-a* when using or borrowing such words. It should be clear, therefore, that the *-a* at the end of the phrase is not the Basque determiner.

(22) *[*EA*] bought some ice cream.⁹

As we can see above, example (22) is ungrammatical. Personal pronouns show a special pattern in CS cases, which is a debated topic in the literature. In the examples below we can see the verb phrases in Spanish while the pronoun subject is in Basque. In both examples, the ergative has been marked. In the second example (24), though, it is used as a syncretic form, and therefore is ambiguous.

(23) Es que... [*nik*] odiaba. (B1-15)

‘Because... I-ERG.SG used to hate it’

(24) *Eta, udaran*, ¿cuántas mujeres llevan al crío a la ikastola, *gero* [*berak*] en la cafetería, guardan el tipo, toman un café, no gastan calefacción ni nada? (A29-19)

‘And during the summer, how many women leave their kids at school, then they stay in the cafe, keep themselves fit, and do not spend money on heating?’

However, we have found no counterexamples, and subjects such as those in (25–26) would be ungrammatical according to our own intuition (whether one binds the ergative marker to the pronoun or not):¹⁰

(25) *[*Nous(k)*] egin dugu.

‘We have done it’

(26) *[*Yo(k)*] egingo dut.

‘I will do it’

■ 4.2 CS in subject position DPs with omitted heads

When the verb is in French or Spanish, there is no instance in the corpus of a Basque subject without a head noun which can take the ergative. The

9 There is a great deal of agreement in examples (21–22). However, it seems that Spanish-English CS can take place in pronouns (see Koronkiewicz [2014] for more details).

10 It seems that, when using personal pronouns in other syntactic contexts, things may change. In the following example, for instance, some Spanish-Basque speakers accept them (without ergative markers, however):

(i) [*Nosotros* también] hitz egin nahi genuke.
‘We also would like to talk’

only reliable example that we have found appears with intransitive verbs such as in the following example:

- (27) A mi me parece un armatoste [*egin dutena*] *bori bor*. (A35-31)
 ‘I think *what they have built there* is terrible’

However, in our opinion it is a gap related to the limitations of the corpus, as we consider such examples to be grammatical when using the ergative marker. See the following examples:

- (28) [*Ikusi zuen batek*] le había denunciado.
 ‘Someone saw him and reported him’
 (29) [*Zozoenak ere*] te diría lo mismo.
 ‘Everybody would tell you the same thing, *including the most stupid one*’

Likewise, we have not collected any data with French/Spanish subjects of such a type used in Basque transitive verbs:

- (30a) Han ere [*el que paga*(*k)] agintzen du.
 ‘The one who pays is the boss, as everywhere’
 (30b) [*Celui qui perdra* (*k)] afora pagatuko du.
 ‘The loser pays for dinner’

■ 5 Conditions for the ergative to appear

From the data presented in the previous section, we can clearly see the nature of the ergative marker that has determiner phrase subjects with a transitive verb. The following four patterns may be noted according to what we have seen in the examples:

- 1) CS at subject head noun level do not condition usage of the ergative.¹¹
- 2) If the transitive verb is Basque and is consequently a verb that requires an ergative (= +ERG), or if the transitive verb is French/Spanish and thus requires the accusative (+ACCUS), the subject marks for ergativity.¹²

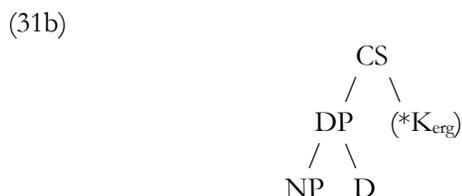
11 Given that we have collected few examples in the corpus, it could be the case, for example, that the speakers are eluding these conflicts.

12 By saying that the subject in Basque requires an ergative marker, we believe that we are combining the grammar of the speakers with a regular use of ergative. However, among regular users, we also know that, in certain contexts in particular, some minor problems weaken the opposition between the absolutive and ergative (Brettschneider, 1981).

- 3) In any configuration of a verb phrase or noun phrase, the language/position of the determiner and the ergative marker are interconnected.
- 4) Agreement takes place as if there were no CS in agreement with the subject, and thus corresponds to the way the verb is conjugated in the language.

The two-way relationship between the case marker and determiner is especially remarkable with a French/Spanish verb (+ACCUS) or a Basque one (+ERG). Nevertheless, when the determiner is on the left, an ergative suffix is unacceptable, and when the determiner is on the right, the ergative suffix is required.

In (31), these results have been expressed: with the determiner head on the left in (31a), while the opposite is the case with the determiner on the right (31b).



We saw no difference between the French-Basque and Spanish-Basque pairs when looking at the data in the corpus. There is, at first glance, an obvious difference in subjects governed by transitive verbs: all of the examples with a Basque subject come with Spanish verbs (1–6), while those with Spanish/French subject, except for (10), come with French verbs. As the data are yet to be confirmed because there are few examples in the corpus that have been collected with such a configuration (around 10), and also, if we use speaker’s intuition, such a division is not confirmed. That is because, as we have seen in clauses with a French verb, a Basque subject may be used, but the ergative must be marked.

Likewise, for a Basque verb, using a Spanish subject (12b) is practically the same as using a French one (12c). Our data on concordance show the same results in both language pairs.

This clearly shows that rule-governed grammar is valid for making distinctions and, on the other hand, speakers use rules when producing CS. With a corpus compiled from using recorded casual conversations, conditions for collecting data take on great importance both as far as the situation and as far as the speakers are concerned, not to forget, of course, the syntactic features of the languages involved in CS.

■ 6 Starting point for an analysis of the ergative in intrasentential CS

According to the data presented, Basque speakers, when switching between languages intrasententially during a conversation, unless there is some kind of a constraint, use the French/Spanish determiner as the subject and thus it usually appears on the right side. Therefore, when the determiner is a French/Spanish one, if it appears on the left, the subject winds up with no ergative marker and the CS is acceptable in any case. Furthermore, the clause is grammatical since the verb is a Basque one, and because ergative agreement appears in the usage (ex. 8, 9, 12). On the other hand, if the determiner is Basque and thus appears on the right, or if it is a proper noun or a pronoun, the ergative is used, even though the verb is French/Spanish (17). For all intents and purposes, neither the verb nor the concordance features corresponding thereto condition the use of the ergative marker in CS instances in these data. Otherwise, it is impossible to account for Basque subjects governed by a verb conjugated in French/Spanish taking the ergative marker. Likewise, the possible nature of conjugated Basque transitive verbs remains unexplained, most of which are without any ergative marking (8–10), while in some other cases (11), they are marked for ergativity, according to the determiner.

Our data have shown that nominal morphology and verbal morphology can go their way when languages are switched, which is not something totally unknown since such divisions have been mentioned in research work on mixed languages. McConvell (2002), for example, studied CS between the Gurindji language and Australian Creole, since this is what Gurindji was later called from where it had arisen. In that language, two languages have come together as far as vocabulary, nouns, and verbs are concerned. In morphology, however, things appear differently: the nominal morphology is based on the Gurindji language (including the mor-

pHEME corresponding to ergativity), while the source of the verbal morphology is Creole. McConvell also mentions verse-like data from other places.¹³

In French-Basque and Spanish-Basque pairs, although they behave the same regarding the point that we have been researching, we have noticed in the collected sentences that when the subject is changed entirely, some (Southern) speakers tend to render it in Basque, while others (speakers of the French-Basque pairs) tend to render it in French when the verb is in Basque. If that is the case, they would show that there are two ways how CS is dealt with grammatically. There are two grammatical systems being used, but speakers prioritize one way over the other during conversation. According to our analysis, this seems to be due to other factors. It goes without saying that it is a topic that should be further delved into, especially by collecting more data. Overall, there is no hindrance, in principle, for such a phenomenon to happen when the grammars of two languages come together.

As for the ergative itself, in examples (8–9, 12) it is not clear whether the lack of marking means no marking for the ergative case, or a manifestation of case that constrains it for morphological reasons, thereby giving rise to a syncretic form with the absolutive. In some languages with split ergativity, the use of the ergative marker is subject to a scale of animacy of the determiner phrase, or at least there is such a tendency (Silverstein, 1976). In most cases, determiner phrases at the low end of the scale (i.e. inanimate) take the ergative, while those on the higher end of the scale (personal pronouns) do not. In the literature, reasons based on syntax and morphology have been given to account for such data: there are those who defend the proposition that there is a case shift by using explanations involving syntax, and those who propose that there is a case of syncretism in explanations involving morphology. Among the latter, Legate (2014) provides very strong evidence after having studied such languages and, even though the CS item is hardly specially marked in those determiner

13 McConvell (2007) gives a predominantly diachronic perspective and suggests that verb / noun substitution is the result of hyperlinked typologies: «the VN split relates to the grammatical typology of the ‘old’ source language —where it is dependent—. Marking like Gurindji, then a split in which nominal grammar is retained from the old language is predicted; and where it is head-marking, then retention of verbal grammar from the old language is predicted». This typographical distinction does not fit well in Basque, in which case it both marks the head and its subordinate. This might just explain the two types that appear in our data.

phrases, he has shown that there is no change of case, and he has thus paved the way for an explanation in favour of case syncretism. It goes without saying that the data that we have analysed here (8–9, 12) are not on par with split ergative nominal bases, and have nothing to do with any animacy scale. However, it remains to be seen whether we have syncretic forms involving CS within a special context in the subjects in examples (8–9, 12) as far as case is concerned. Reasons in favour of this may be given by coordination structures in examples (8–9). Legate makes use of such structures to show case syncretism in pronouns unmarked for ergativity.¹⁴

By applying such a method for analysis to the data given here, we would indeed have an example of case syncretism in subjects unmarked for ergativity.

We have not analysed how these data could account for different methods of analysis that have been put forward regarding ergativity, e.g. analytical methods that account for ergativity by means of (macro)parameters (Bobaljik, 1993; Laka, 2000; Bittner & Hale, 1996a and 1996b; Baker, 2001; Rezac *et al.*, 2014, among others), or those that have inherent case (Oyharçabal, 1992; Woolford, 1997 and 2006; Laka, 2006; Legate, 2008 and 2012).

Stabler and MacSwan (2014) highlight the fact that the interaction between grammars involved in CS is problematic for theories that fix language variability to parameters which force them to make parametric choices that are at variance with the speakers. The lexically-based method of analysis that supports it, at least at first glance, is not completely supported by the data. Nevertheless, ergativity corresponds to a feature carried by lexical elements. It is difficult to explain how the verbs in French/Spanish, which require the accusative, need an ergative subject in utterances produced by Basques in CS. As we can see, this is an area still wide open for research. ■

14 An example in Marathi is provided, among other things. Only nouns with cases in this language may be combined (Dhongde & Wali, 2009: 233). However, when combining a first person singular pronoun with an ergative noun, the ergative suffix drops, as in the following example:

(i) liki-ne ai mi kei kha-ll-i (Legate, 2014: ex. 23)
 Liki-ERG and I.NOM banana.Npl.NOM eat-PERF-Npl (N = neutral gender)
 'Liki and I have eaten bananas'

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