

Three levels of root insertion in Basque intransitive verbs

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Abstract

Intransitive verbs in Basque vary depending on their subject case and auxiliary selection: (i) some of them (considered unaccusatives and inchoatives) always have an absolutive subject and an intransitive auxiliary; (ii) others (prototypical unergatives) show diachronic and dialectal variation (absolutive subject and intransitive auxiliary vs. ergative subject and transitive auxiliary); and (iii) other unergative verbs with which an ergative subject and a transitive auxiliary prevail cross-dialectally. We propose a sublexical structure (Ramchand 2004, 2008) where verbs can be decomposed in three subevents. Unaccusative verbs in Basque are Path predicates, selecting a V of process (V_{PROC}) that, in the case of telic verbs, takes an adpositional phrase (PP) as complement. Atelic unaccusative verbs and unergative verbs having intransitive morphology are similarly Path predicates, but instead of a result PP, they can select a Rheme of process. In unergative verbs with transitive morphology no V of process is projected, but a little v of initiation (v_{INIT} or v_{DO}). Verbal roots may be inserted at three levels in Basque: vP, VP or PP. The last two are below an AspectualP involved in absolutive case assignment and intransitive auxiliary selection. Thus, depending on where the root is inserted has an effect on the alignment.

Keywords

Subject case, auxiliary, Path predicates, root insertion, intransitive verbs

1. Introduction

In Basque, subjects can be marked with ergative or absolutive case depending on the predicate in which they occur: when the verb is bivalent transitive¹, as in (1), the subject is marked with ergative case (-*k*), and the object is marked absolutive (- \emptyset). When it is monovalent, the subject can be paralleled to either the object of the transitive verb and get absolutive case – following an ergative case system –, as in (2), or to the subject of a transitive verb and get ergative case (3).

- (1) Jone.k Irati. \emptyset ikusi du
 Jone.ERG Irati.ABS see.PRF EXPL.have.(3SG.ERG)
 ‘Jone has seen Irati’
- (2) Irati. \emptyset etorri da
 Irati.ABS come.PRF EXPL.(3SG.ABS).be
 ‘Irati has come’
- (3) Irati.k borroka egin du
 Irati.ERG fight do EXPL.have.(3SG.ERG)
 ‘Irati has fought’

In an inflected clause with an analytical verb form, the ergative subject always occurs with a transitive auxiliary (**edun* or **ezan* HAVE) (3), whereas the absolutive subject always goes together with an intransitive auxiliary (*izan* or **edin* BE) (2).

The subject case and auxiliary selection in monovalent verbs have usually been considered a manifestation of different underlying argument structures: those taking ergative subjects are unergative verbs, while those selecting absolutive subjects are unaccusatives (Levin 1983, Salaburu 1992, Oyharçabal 1992, among others). In this paper, we focus on this kind of alignment variation, especially on dialectal data which shows that subject case and auxiliary alternation do not always match the distinction made between unaccusatives and unergatives.

Unergative verbs can be of two types in Basque: (i) complex unergative, consisting of a bare noun, an adverb or a PP, plus a light verb ‘do’ (3); and (ii) simplex unergative, formed by a single verbal word (4). Many simplex unergative verbs have a complex counterpart (3-4). The complex variant is preferred in southwestern varieties although simplex verbs are also commonly used in central varieties.

¹ We use Etxepare’s (2003) terminology.

Among simplex unergative verbs two different alignments are attested, which vary diachronically and dialectally: (i) ergative subject and transitive auxiliary (4a); and (ii) absolutive subject and intransitive auxiliary (4b).

- (4) a. Irati.k borrokatu du
 Irati.ERG fight.PRF EXPL.have.(3SG.ERG)
 ‘Irati has fought’
 b. Irati.∅ borrokatu da
 Irati.ABS fight.PRF EXPL.(3SG.ABS).be
 ‘Irati has fought’

The alignment in the example (4b) parallels that found in typical unaccusative verbs, like the one in (2). In this paper, we analyze subject case and auxiliary alternation with intransitive verbs and suggest that it is derived because the root lexicalizing the verb has been inserted in different decomposed verbal projections: (i) in $v_{\text{INIT}}\text{P}$ or $v_{\text{DO}}\text{P}$; (ii) in $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$ or $V_{\text{GO}}\text{P}$; or (iii) in $\text{P}_{\text{C}}\text{P}$. We claim that an Aspectual phrase is sandwiched between $v\text{P}$ and VP (Albizu 2001, Ritter & Rosen 2005, Travis 2005, MacDonald 2010 and also in the form of T_0 in Pesetsky & Torrego 2004) and that it is involved in the intransitive alignment of verbs. Therefore, we assume a sublexical syntactic structure, similar to Ramchand’s (2004, 2008) *First Phase Syntax* and also compatible with an account of different flavors of v as in Cuervo (2003) and Folli & Harley (2005). Intransitive predicates whose root is inserted in $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$ and $\text{P}_{\text{C}}\text{P}$ will have an absolutive subject and BE auxiliary, because Asp necessarily subcategorizes for V_{PROC} . Those intransitive verbs whose root is inserted in $v\text{P}$ will surface with transitive morphology, since no AspP is available for them.

2. Intransitive eventive verbs of Basque²

Intransitive verb types (mostly taken from Albizu 2009) can be classified in three groups depending on their subject case and auxiliary selection pattern.

2.1. Group A: always absolutive and *izan* ‘be’

The verbs belonging to this group are the ones which are typically considered unaccusative and inchoative. Among them, there are verbs denoting telic change of state (*apurtu* ‘break’, *hil* ‘die’), ambiguous telic/atelic change of state (*zabaldu* ‘open’, *ilundu* ‘darken’, *gogortu* ‘harden’), telic change of posture (*altxatu* ‘stand up or get up’, *eseri* ‘sit

² As it is mentioned in section 5, this proposal only concerns eventive intransitive verbs. The analysis of stative verbs is left for further research.

down', *jausi* 'fall'), telic directed motion (*joan*₁ 'go',³ *etorri* 'come', *iritsi* 'arrive', *etxeratu* 'get home') and ambiguous telic/atelic directed motion (*joan*₂ 'go', *jeitsi* 'go down', *urrundu* 'move away/go far'). Some of them are deadjectival (*ilun*_{A-du}), deadverbial (*urrun*_{Adv-du}) or derived from postposition allative phrases (*etxe-ra*_{posr-tu}).⁴

2.2. Group B: variation in subject case and auxiliary selection

In this group of verbs, absolutive/ergative case variation is mainly dialectal (and diachronic). Broadly speaking, in southwestern varieties speakers usually select an ergative subject and a transitive auxiliary, whereas in northeastern varieties an absolutive subject and an intransitive auxiliary are generally preferred (Aldai 2006). These verbs (except for *igo/igon* 'go up' and *urten/irten* 'go out') are prototypical unergatives and they mostly have nominal base, such as in *dantza*_{N-tu} 'dance', or postpositional/adverbial like base (*X + ta/ka*), like in *eles-ta-tu* 'chat' and *igeri-ka-tu* 'swim'.⁵ These are speech verbs⁶ (*mintzatu* 'talk', *solastatu* 'chat', *elekatu/elestatu* 'chat'), meal related verbs (*bazkaldu* 'have lunch', *afaldu* 'have dinner'), manner of motion verbs (for example, *dantzatu* 'dance', *igerikatu* 'swim' and *airatu* 'fly'), animate activity verbs (*borrokatu* 'fight', *jolastu* 'play, have fun', *jostatu* 'have fun') and two verbs of directed motion (*urten/irten* 'go out, leave', *igo/igon* 'go up').

According to the *General Basque Dictionary (OEH)* – a historical corpus –, absolutive subjects were general for these verbs in all varieties prior

³ The verb *joan* 'go' has two meanings which determine its telicity: (i) leave a place; the beginning of the trajectory is expressed and the transition occurs at the beginning (*be here* > *be gone*); and (ii) go somewhere, where the goal of the trajectory is expressed and the verb can be either telic or atelic depending on its use with an atelic postposition *-runtz* 'towards' (approaching allative) or a telic one *-ra* 'to' (allative).

⁴ As an anonymous reviewer notes, the verbs which are derived from adjectives (and also deadverbial verbs and those derived from postpositions) are interestingly often used bivalently, in contrast, in some of the cases, to those which are not derived this way. Because of space reasons, we leave this issue for further research.

⁵ In the case of meal related verbs it is not clear which is the derivation (in isolation the noun 'lunch' is lexicalized *bazkari*). It is difficult to see which is, if any, the categorial status of *bazkal* in *bazkaldu* 'have lunch'. Whether the root is lexicalized first with a categorial status, or whether it is directly inserted as complement of V is an important question. For the time being, I assume that there is first an NP, AdvP or AP complement of V_{PROC}, but this has to be analyzed in further research.

⁶ The use of speech verbs as simplex unergative verbs is restricted to northeastern varieties and because of that, we do not find significant dialectal alternation in the alignment; the absolutive subject is general. However, the few examples with ergative subjects found in the *General Basque Dictionary (OEH)* and the *Ethnolinguistic Atlas of the Basque Country* (1983) are attested in central and southeastern varieties.

to the 18th and 19th centuries (except for *igo/igon* ‘go up’ and *urten/lirten* ‘go out’⁷). Looking at modern data in the *Contemporary Reference Prose* (2000-2006), we can see that the ergative marking is the most common in southern texts (although absolutive marking is also accepted and used with some verbs), while the absolutive subject is general in northern texts. The questionnaires that we have conducted confirm this fact, but they interestingly show that ergative subjects are used in meal related verbs and some verbs of manner of motion among young speakers of northeastern varieties.

2.3. Group C: always ergative and **edun* ‘have’

Finally, there is a set of verbs whose subjects are always marked ergative in all varieties and times. Among the simplex verbs, some of them are denominal, like *distira_N-tu* ‘glitter’, but others are loan words whose root does not exist independently in the language, such as *funtziona-tu* ‘work’. Among them we find non volitional emission verbs (for example, *izarniatu* ‘twinkle’, *distiratu* ‘glitter’, *usaindu* ‘smell’), non animate activity verbs⁸ (*funtzionatu* ‘work’, *zirkulatu* ‘circulate’), *irakin* ‘boil’ and complex unergative verbs (*X + egin* ‘do’) which belong to different semantic classes.

3. Path predicates

In those verbs belonging to Group A, a salient semantic feature is Path. Talmy (2000) considers Path as another element of a motion event: “The basic motion event consists of one object (the Figure) moving or located with respect to another object (the reference Ground) [...]. The Path is the path followed or site occupied by the Figure object with respect to the Ground object” (Talmy 2000: 26). We suggest that Path can also be understood as the transition of a state towards another, as well as the trajectory traversed from a given position towards another.

- (5) Irati.Ø eseri da
 Irati.ABS sit.PRF EXPL.(3SG.ABS).be
 ‘Irati has sat’

⁷ According to the *General Basque Dictionary* (OEH), these verbs seem to follow a different evolutionary pattern in their alignment. The ergative use is general in Biscayan (western dialect) from the oldest texts until the 19th century, as opposed to the rest of the verbs of this group in which ergative subjects emerged after the 18th and 19th centuries.

⁸ These are Romance loan words and are mainly used (80-90%) in standard Basque (according to the *Statistical Corpus of the Basque language of 20th century*). Speakers of Basque varieties have clear intuitions about them, though.

- (6) Irati.ø etorri da
 Irati.ABS come.PRF EXPL.(3SG.ABS).be
 ‘Irati has come’

In (5), before the eventuality has taken place, the Figure, *Irati*, was standing up. She has undergone a transition and she is then seated. Consequently, the Figure has reached the Ground, which is the new posture of being seated. In (6), *Irati* was not at the same place as the speaker before the eventuality took place. After that, it has reached the reference Ground, which is the deictic place occupied by the speaker.

Not all verbs from Group A denote a completed transition; some of them can have an atelic interpretation such as gradable adjectival verbs (Ramchand 2008: 27) like *ilundu* ‘darken’ (7). These verbs can combine with a durative adverbial.

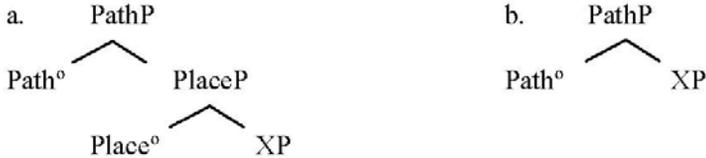
- (7) Zerua.ø bost minutuz ilundu zen
 sky.ABS five minutes.for darken.PRF EXPL.(3SG.ABS). be.PAST
 (eguzkia berriz agertu zen arte)
 (until the sun appeared again)
 ‘The sky darkened for five minutes (until the sun appeared again)’

The interpretation of this kind of verbs can vary: it is possible to understand that the Figure is undergoing the transition of becoming darker (but not totally dark) (7), or otherwise, that it has finally reached the state of being dark, for which case the transition would be completed. In the former interpretation, the one in (7), *ilundu* is a predicate of progressive change. We consider both interpretations, the telic and the atelic one, realizations of Path predicates.

We suggest that these two interpretations are the consequence of having two different event structures, which are syntactically realized. In the verbs denoting a completed transition, the interrelation introduced by an adposition is a basic component. According to Hale & Keyser (1993: 71) adpositions denote interrelations where some entity comes to be involved in a relation (the Figure) with another entity (the Ground). In the same way as in the verb *etxeratu* ‘go home’, which is visibly derived from an allative phrase (*etxe_N-ra_{ALL}*, literally ‘house-to’), as suggested by Oyharçabal 2003, we claim that the telic interpretation of these verbs is constructed from an adpositional phrase. Following Van Riemsdijk & Huybregts (2002), Svenonius (2008) and Ramchand (2008), adpositions can be decomposed into PathP and PlaceP. The Place/Path distinction parallels the contrast between interrelations of central coincidence and of non-central coincidence (Hale 1985, Hale & Keyser 2002, Demirdache & Uribe-Etxebarria 2004). Place denotes central coincidence, so that the Figure is within the reference landmark of the

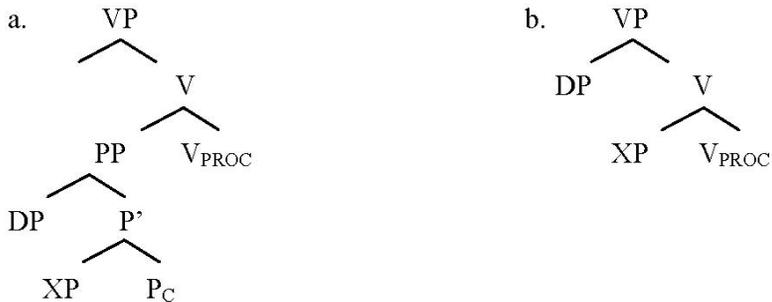
Ground. Path, on the other hand, denotes non-central coincidence; it gives information about the trajectory of the Figure which is undergoing a change, whose end point (or starting point, depending on the type of Path^o) can be the Ground introduced by Place^o (Svenonius 2008).

(8)



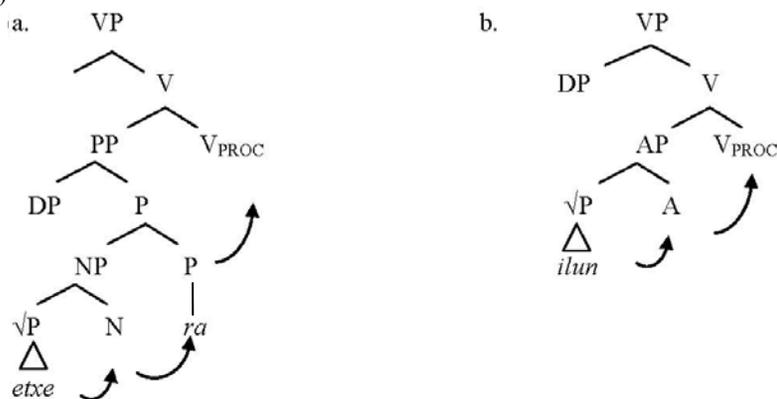
Different interpretations regarding telicity in the eventive domain can be explained in similar terms: verbs denoting a completed transition project a verbal head (V^o) of progression or process (paralleling the meaning of an adposition of terminal coincidence – Path^o – but in an eventive relation) which subcategorizes for an adpositional phrase of central coincidence (PlaceP or P_C) (9a). On the other hand, when the verbs only denote progression, they only project V_{PROC}P (9b).

(9)



In (9a) the adposition (which could be null, as in telic deadjectival verbs) is incorporated to the verbal head, in a similar way as suggested for denominal location verbs in Hale & Keyser (1993). In the case of telic verbs like *etxeratu* ‘go home’ (10a), both the N and the adposition are incorporated onto the verb through cyclic incorporation. In the atelic interpretation of *ilundu* ‘darken’ (10b), the A is incorporated directly to V_{PROC}.

(10)



Thus, the $V_{\text{PROC}}P$ would be the minimal projection shared by all verbs of Group A.

4. Root insertion in three levels

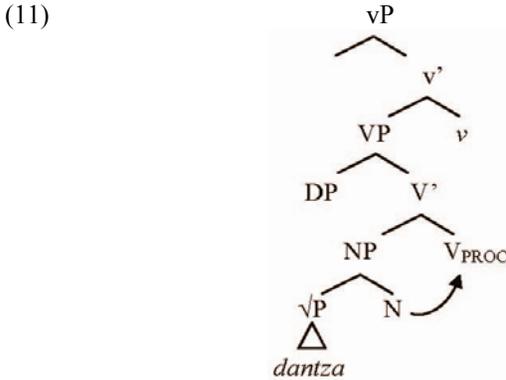
We suggest that intransitive verbs can have their roots inserted in three levels of the event structure (three subevents in Ramchand 2004, 2008): (i) in complement position of a little v (v_{DO} or v_{INIT}); (ii) in complement position of a verb of process (V_{GO} or V_{PROC}); and (iii) in complement position of an adposition of central coincidence (P_C) (or *res* in Ramchand's terms).

In the previous section we have argued in favor of the presence of a Path predicate, represented in V_{PROC} , in the verbs of Group A (those which always select an absolutive subject), and we have claimed that the root is incorporated to V_{PROC} from its complement position in atelic verbs – the second level of insertion outlined above – and from the complement position of a $P_C P$, through cyclic incorporation onto the verbal head in telic verbs – the third level of insertion.

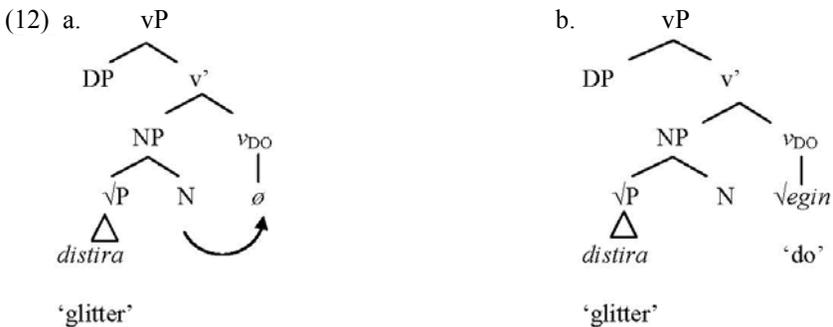
In this section, we further propose that in those dialects where the verbs of Group B are realized in the intransitive alignment (absolutive subject and BE auxiliary) the root is also incorporated from complement position onto the verbal head of process (just like in atelic verbs of Group A). Instead of denoting a progressive change, they denote manner of progression (the difference of meaning is given by the categorial status of the complement and the encyclopedic meaning of the roots).

In the formation of these unergative verbs (those of Group B with absolutive subjects and BE auxiliary), an incremental object is incorporated onto the verb. This object can be paralleled to the Rheme of process analyzed in Ramchand (2004, 2008). According to Ramchand, Rhemes of process are the complements of the process subevent and they unify with the topological

properties of the event, giving rise, in some cases, to bounded events. We propose that in the case of Group B unergative verbs of Basque, the predicate is derived by means of the incorporation of these complements onto the verbal head (11). This would be the underlying derivation for the verbs of Group B selecting an absolutive subject and an intransitive auxiliary.



Nevertheless, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, this kind of incorporation is not the only process by which an unergative verb can be formed. The verbal root can also be inserted in a higher level, in a complement position of a v of initiation. This is the case of the intransitive verbs of Group C like *distiratu* ‘glitter’ or *borroka egin* ‘fight’. In the simplex verb *distiratu*, the complement root *distira* is incorporated onto a null v_{DO} (12a). As for complex verbs like *borroka egin* or *distira egin*, v_{DO} has its own root inserted and doesn’t need its complement to be incorporated (12b).



We believe that the structure generated in these derivations (12) cannot be paralleled to transitive constructions, even though the subject ends up getting ergative case in both cases. The reason to believe it is mainly the following: it is still not clear to us whether what is incorporated or just stands in

complement position is a \sqrt{P} (*funtziona-tu* ‘work’), an NP (*disdira_{NP} egin* ‘glitter’), an AdvP (*hagin-ka_{AdvP} egin* ‘bite’) or a PP (*hega-n_{PP} egin* ‘fly’). In our opinion, this element cannot constitute an argument by itself; it is not a DP. According to Pesetsky & Torrego (2004), case is an uninterpretable T_S/T_O feature on D. If this would be true, this element would not be able to get absolutive case, like direct objects do in transitive structures.⁹

In order to account for the dialectal variation found in verbs of Group B, we suggest that these intransitive verbs have been reanalyzed by some speakers of southwestern varieties in the way of the verbs of Group C. Instead of inserting the root in complement position of V_{PROC} , they introduce it in the complement of v_{DO} . We claim that the use of these two different mechanisms gives rise to the different alignment patterns attested in Group B intransitive verbs. We suggest that the absolutive case assignment and BE auxiliary is mediated by an Aspectual phrase sandwiched between vP and VP. Consequently, the level where the root is inserted (in $v_{DO}P$ or $V_{PROC}P$) will have an effect on the alignment (see section 5).

The reanalysis of these verbs could have been motivated by a bigger presence of complex unergative verbs in southwestern varieties of Basque, which would be reinforcing the mechanism of root insertion in complement of v_{DO} in intransitive verbs of manner of progression.¹⁰ Verbs of Group C, on the other hand, do not show diachronic or dialectal alignment variation, because, under our view, incorporation into a verb of process is not available for them.

5. Cognate, hyponymous and target objects

Certain unergative verbs are able to license cognate or hyponymous objects while others cannot. This observation has been previously made in works such as Fernández (1997) and Etxepare (2003). In addition to this, there is an interesting relation between this behaviour and the alignment variation (Etxepare 2003, Berro 2010): the unergative verbs which can take Rhemes of process are those which show diachronic and dialectal subject case and auxiliary variation. Only verbs of Group B can take cognate or hyponymous objects (13) or target objects (14).

⁹ It could be that the fact that these verbs cannot take V_{PROC} as a complement is the reason for their impossibility to have direct objects, but this is an issue that needs further research.

¹⁰ The influence of Spanish on southern speakers is also another factor that needs further investigation, particularly the difference made in this language between SE and SE-less intransitives (this tendency is also presented in Alberdi 2003 regarding loan verbs).

freer to be analyzed in one way or another.¹¹ Verbs in Group C do not offer this possibility, since they are necessarily inserted in $v_{\text{DO}}\text{P}$ and not in $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$.

The detailed derivation of cognate or hyponymous constructions is hard to understand (16). We can think that both the root which is going to be incorporated onto the V_{PROC} ($\sqrt{\text{dantza}}$ ‘dance’) and the cognate object (*dantza bat* ‘a dance’) are generated in complement position of the verb, within the root phrase ($\sqrt{\text{P}}$) (like in Marantz 1997, Cuervo 2003 and Harley 2005, where roots can introduce complements) but this is an issue that needs to be studied in future.

6. Case and auxiliary variation

We suggest that the intransitive alignment of eventive intransitive verbs is mediated by an Aspectual Phrase (AspP) that is sandwiched between $v\text{P}$ and VP (a similar AspP position is defended in Albizu 2001, Travis 2005, Ritter & Rosen 2005, MacDonald 2010, and also in the form of T_{O} in Pesetsky & Torrego 2004). The subevents represented by V_{PROC} and $\text{P}_{\text{C}}\text{P}$ (or *resP*) are below AspP and are aspectually active (MacDonald 2010).¹² Without having in the structure at least V_{PROC} , AspP is not going to be present and an intransitive alignment is not going to be obtained. Case and agreement features are going to be checked higher in the functional tree, presumably in TP, so that the ergative case and HAVE auxiliary surfaces. Therefore, depending on where the root is inserted, the predicate can be aligned with

¹¹ Actually, some unaccusative verbs are starting to be used in the transitive alignment among some southwestern speakers.

(i) Asko hobetu duzu matematiketan
 a-lot improve.PRF EXPL.have.2SG.ERG maths-in
 ‘You have improved a lot in maths’

(i) Kremlera hon-ek ez du ondo ixten
 zipper this.ERG no EXPL.have.(3SG.ERG) well close.IMPRF
 ‘This zipper does not close properly’

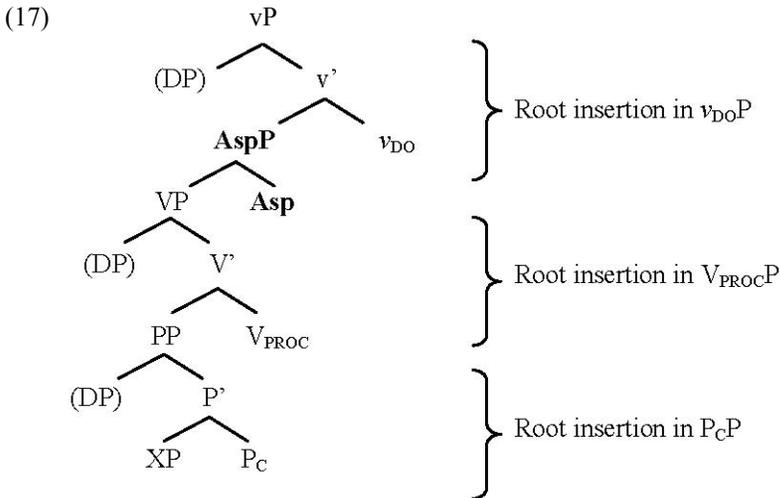
¹² This claim would be nicely related to the aspectual contrast presented in Etxepare (2003: 405) between the complex and the simplex form of the verb ‘throw stones’. In the complex variant of the predicate, the stones don’t need to have reached the pedestrians, contrary to (ii) where they necessarily have.

(i) Zoro bat-ek oinezko bi-ri harrika egin zien
 fool one.ERG pedestrian two.DAT stone.ADV do.PRF EXPL.have.3PL.DAT.(3SG.ERG)
 ‘A fool threw stones at two pedestrians’

(ii) Zoro bat-ek oinezko bi-ø harrikatu zituen
 fool one.ERG pedestrian two.ABS stone.ADV.PRF EXPL.have.3PL.ABS.(3SG.ERG)
 ‘A fool stoned two pedestrians’

This contrast can be explained considering that the simplex form *harrikatu* has been generated below AspP, in $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$ or $\text{P}_{\text{C}}\text{P}$, whereas the complex *harrika egin* would be generated in $v_{\text{DO}}\text{P}$.

transitive (ergative subject and HAVE auxiliary) or intransitive morphology (absolutive subject and BE auxiliary).



The predicates that select V_{PROC} or both V_{PROC} and $P_C P$ are going to be aligned in the intransitive way, because they are located below $AspP$. On the other hand, the intransitive predicates that only project v_{DO} are going to receive transitive morphology from TP, since no $AspP$ is present in the syntax.

Nevertheless, and as an anonymous reviewer notes, intransitive morphology is used in many contexts in Basque, such as in some stative verbs (like *izan* ‘be’, *egon* ‘stage level BE’ or *bizi izan* ‘live’), impersonal constructions and the progressive. There must be other way to obtain the intransitive alignment (that might include $AspP$ and (i) the use of a V_{BE} parallel in position to V_{PROC} , or/and (ii) a less specified variant of the abstract morpheme in T) but it is still unclear for us. However, since the result is the same in all these contexts, a unitary explanation of case and auxiliary selection would be the most desirable solution. It needs further research.

7. Conclusion

We have given a unified account of the intransitive verbs selecting absolutive subject and intransitive auxiliary, by claiming that they are all Path predicates and that they are all in a syntactic structure involving a verb of process or progression (V_{PROC}). We have claimed that in eventive intransitive verbs lexical roots can be inserted in three different subverbal levels: in $v_{DO}P$, in $V_{PROC}P$ and in $P_C P$. For this aim, we assume a subeventual structure similar to that proposed in Ramchand (2004, 2008). An Aspectual phrase ($AspP$)

would be present between $v_{\text{DO}}\text{P}$ and $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$, and it would be involved in the intransitive alignment of the predicates. In addition, the location of this aspectual phrase explains the aspectual properties of intransitive verbs: (i) verbs whose root is inserted in $\text{P}_\text{C}\text{P}$ are telic verbs; (ii) those inserted in $V_{\text{PROC}}\text{P}$ are telic or atelic (and have, in the case of progressive verbs, the ability of becoming telic through the use of Rheme of process); and finally, (iii) those in $v_{\text{DO}}\text{P}$ are atelic.

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