

# Nominative - Ergative Syncretism in Basque <sup>(1)</sup>

William H. Jacobsen, Jr.

1. Like many other languages Basque has a pattern of inflection by suffixation of nouns, and other noun-like words such as adjectives, pronouns, and demonstratives, for a number of categories of case. The two cases that will primarily concern us in this paper are the nominative and the ergative (2). Using the terms *subject* and *object* in their traditional semantically defined ways, we may say that the nominative case is used for the subject of an intransitive verb and for the object of a transitive verb, while the ergative case is used for the subject of a transitive verb (3).

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(2) The ergative is usually called the *active* case in Basque grammars; other names are *agent* and *transitive* case. The nominative has also been called the *inactive*, *passive*, *patient*, *intransitive*, and *absolute* case.

(3) There has been much discussion of the appropriate definition of the terms *subject* and *object*. From the point of view of the internally motivated study of Basque syntax I am of the opinion that the subject is best said to be expressed by the word in the nominative case (and by the corresponding verb affix). The terms *agent* and *patient* (or *goal*) are sometimes introduced to label semantic or deep-level relationships to the verb, as opposed to the surface-level units of subject and object; one could then say that in Basque the subject of a transitive verb expresses its patient. I have discussed some of these matters in my paper "The Analog of the Passive Transformation in Ergative-Type Languages" presented to the 44th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America on December 29, 1969.

A surprising thing about the shapes of the endings for these cases in many dialects is that at least the nominative plural and some number categories of ergative cases are not always differentiated in form, and furthermore the number categories within the ergative are not always distinguished formally from each other. This would seem at first blush to cause some uncertainties, especially as to whether a given noun is the subject or the object of a transitive verb, but it is the task of this paper to elucidate firstly the historical reasons for these patterns of syncretism among the several case-number categories, and secondly some syntactic factors which permit the language to function in spite of them. In what follows I will be hewing resolutely to surface phenomena and asking what the evidence is for distinguishing among these surface-structure cases, rather than looking much into deeper level structures that they may manifest. Our discussion will therefore lead us, on the one hand, into a consideration of phonological matters of vowel contraction, vowel harmony, and the thorny question of the Basque accent, and on the other hand, into syntactic matters such as focus and aspects of word order.

This Basque syncretism of nominative and ergative forms might be compared to the identity of nominative and accusative forms of neuter gender nouns found in the older Indo-European languages, but differs from this by lacking the semantic correlation of inanimateness that makes these neuter nouns unlikely candidates for being subjects of transitive verbs.

2. The presumed pattern of endings for the nominative and ergative forms in an earlier Pre-Basque, or perhaps Proto-Basque, stage is exemplified by the following forms (4):

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	*mendi	*mendia	*mendiak	'mountain'
Erg.	*mendik	*mendiak	*mendiagek	
Nom.	*gizon	*gizona	*gizonak	'man'
Erg.	*gizonek	*gizonak	*gizonagek	

(4) Cf. René Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 55 (1960), pp. 196-198; H. Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, Bayonne, 1929, pp. 53-54. There are also plausible theories of a much more archaic system of noun inflection, which would have lacked contrasts of definiteness and number: Gavel, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-47, sec. 62; Lafon, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-195.

The two nouns cited, *mendi* 'mountain' and *gizon* 'man', exemplify respectively nouns whose stems end in vowels and in consonants. There are three categories for each of the cases. On the left are shown the indeterminate forms, which tend to be used in syntactically restricted environments, are indefinite, and are not marked for number. There is no ending for the nominative here, and the ending for the ergative is just *-k*, with automatic insertion of an *-e* when the stem ends in a consonant, a phenomenon occurring also with other case endings. The other columns show the numerically differentiated singular and plural categories. These are definite categories, so marked by the definite suffix *-a*. This is followed by a *-k* to mark the ergative, and by a different *-k* to give the homophonous nominative plural forms (insofar as there was no accentual difference between these).

The ergative plural ending was constructed by adding the *-k* of the ergative after the nominative plural ending, again with automatic insertion of the buffer vowel *-e*. This ending shows us that the *-k* of the nominative plural comes from an older *\*-g* by a regular process of word-final unvoicing of stops; the same is likely to be true of the ergative *-k*, but since this is never followed by another suffix, this cannot be established. At this stage the consonant of the nominative plural ending would have been morphophonemically still a *\*-g*; this would have occurred before yet other case endings as a plural marker, as in the dative plural ending *\*-agi*. It is in fact probable that the nominative plural ending was once *\*-aga* and is to be equated with the *-aga* of numerous place names in the originally Basque-speaking area (5). It will be seen that whereas today *-k* is a mark specifically of the nominative plural, in this original system the corresponding ending was a marker of plural number, not of case, and the nominative case was marked throughout by a zero ending.

As the discussion proceeds, square diagrams will be presented to summarize the several patterns of syncretism of what we may call the K-endings: the nominative plural and the three ergative numbers. These will be arranged as shown by the abbreviations in the

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(5) Cf. Luis Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, San Sebastián, 1961, p. 238, sec. 12.10 end and fn. 28; Luis Michelena, *Apellidos vascos*, San Sebastián, 1953, pp. 34-35, no. 10; Lafon, *op. cit.*, p. 197 (also mentioning other possible explanations for the place-name suffix); H. Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", *Revista Internacional de los Estudios Vascos* 12 (1921), p. 339.

following square: ergative singular and nominative plural above, and ergative indeterminate and ergative plural below.

ES	NP
EI	EP

This Pre-Basque system can hence be diagrammed as follows:

*-ak	
*-(e)k	*-agek

For dialects where there is no difference between consonant-stems and vowel-stems in the distinctions made, later diagrams will continue to combine in the same square the two forms of the ergative indeterminate ending. However, after stems ending in vowels other than *a* (and in certain regions *e*), the ergative indeterminate form will always be overtly different from the rest, which gives these vowel-stems a more differentiated paradigm than that of the consonant-stems in certain areas; such cases will be separately diagrammed. Stems ending in *a* will be separately treated (sec. 10).

3. An important sound change that has given a less differentiated pattern of endings than that of Pre-Basque applies to the ergative

plural ending. Here as elsewhere an intervocalic \*g has been lost (6), but the two vowels thus brought together have contracted with different results in two large geographical areas, as is also true of certain other phonologically parallel forms (7). The resulting vowel is *a* in the Western area, but *e* in the Eastern area. Thus \*-agek gave Western -ak, Eastern -ek (8). The paradigm of consonant-stem nouns in the Western dialects is the following:

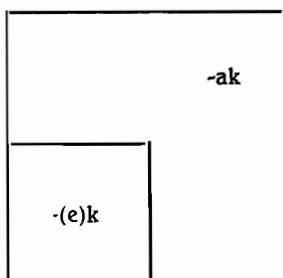
	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	gizon	gizona	gizonak	'man'
Erg.	gizonek	gizonak	gizonak	

(6) Cf. Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", pp. 338-341, sec. 157; Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 226-227, sec. 12.3. On the final unvoicing of this \*g, Gavel, op. cit., p. 362, sec. 166; Michelena, op. cit., pp. 235-238, sec. 12.10. A very comparable alternation of final *k* with non-final zero is seen in forms containing the second person singular masculine suffix, such as *dik* < \**diga* 'he has it for you (masc.)' vs. *diat* < \**digada* 'I have it for you (masc.)' or *duk* < \**duga* 'you (masc.) have it' vs. the relative *duan* < \**dugan* 'which you (masc.) have'; cf. also Gavel, op. cit., pp. 341-343. Some older scholars, including Azkue and Campión, assumed an intervocalic \*-k- in the ergative plural ending, thus \*-akek; cf. C. C. Uhlenbeck, "Contribution à une phonétique comparative des dialectes basques", *Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques* 4 (1910), pp. 105-107, sec. 18eps. In this they were undoubtedly influenced by the northern High Navarrese plural case forms with -k- (sec. 5). On the plausibility of \*-g-, cf. also Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", p. 196. It is interesting to note that in a recent synchronic treatment of aspects of noun inflection, Karmele Rotaecbe Amusatategui and Jean Léonce Doneux, "Sur un point de morphologie nominale du basque", *Fontes Linguae Vasconum* 9 (1971), pp. 269-290, the authors, after toying with <sup>o</sup>k, turn to <sup>o</sup>g as the basic form of the plural morpheme, because of clear evidence that there is no general rule of loss of <sup>o</sup>k between vowels; see p. 283, sec. 7 and p. 286, sec. 9, rule 5.

(7) Such as *dan/den* < \**daen* 'which is', *zan/zen* < \**zaen* '(which) was'. Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 117, sec. 5.6; Uhlenbeck, "Contribution à une phonétique comparative des dialectes basques", *Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques* 3 (1909), p. 501, sec. 8β. A problem is the lack of -a- in the Western area for the genitive plural suffix, which when contracted is -en < \*-agen everywhere; perhaps, as de Rijk points out, the avoidance of syncretism with the locative singular -an is a factor. Lafon, though, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", p. 199, thinks of the change \*-agek > \*-agak in the ergative plural, the lowering of the vowel being conditioned by the surrounding velars.

(8) For the geographical distribution of the two reflexes, see, e.g., René Lafon, "Sur la place de l'aézcoan, du salazarais et du roncalais dans la classification des dialectes basques", *Pirineos* 11 (1955), pp. 109-133, esp. pp. 119, 121, 128; Luis Michelena, *Sobre el pasado de la lengua vasca*, San Sebastián, 1964, p. 34, sec. 1.12.

These dialects are all in Spain, and include Vizcayan, Guipúzcoan, and northern High Navarrese. We will see shortly that most of these dialects have additional accentually stigmatized distinctions in their spoken forms; here we are concerned either with their written forms or with those spoken Western dialects that may lack these accentual differences. Here the K-endings for the three definite categories, ergative singular, nominative plural, and ergative plural, are the same; thus the difference of vowel in these endings corresponds to the definite/indeterminate distinction:



4. The following is the complementary Eastern type paradigm:

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	gizon	gizona	gizonak	'man'
Erg.	gizonek	gizonak	gizonek	

This belongs to southern High Navarrese and other, primarily French, dialects: Labourdin (including the Baztán Valley of Spain), Low Navarrese (including the Aezcoa and Salazar Valleys of Spain), and Souletin (including the Roncal Valley of Spain). Here the ergative plural has come to sound like the ergative indeterminate on consonant stems. Within the plural, nominative is still distinguished from ergative, as it was in Pre-Basque. This is the pattern of endings that has been advocated by the Basque Academy for use in a standard written language (9). Most of these dialects seem not to have accentual

(9) S. Garmendia, "Deklinazio", *Euskera* 13 (1968), pp. 151-161; Luis Villasanté, *La declinación del vasco literario común*, Oñate, n.d., esp. pp. 97, 102.

differences making further discriminations among these categories (10); for those that do (described in sec. 6), this pattern would apply only to their written forms. It may be thus diagrammed:

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(10) Schuchardt, in his study of the accent in the Labourdin dialect of Sare, found no semantic correlation with placement of the accent: Hugo Schuchardt, "Zur Kenntnis des Baskischen von Sara (Labourd)" (Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse), Berlin, 1922, pp. 1-39, see especially p. 6. See also the collection of words with variable accents from Schuchardt's texts in E. Lewy, "Zur Betonung des Labourdinischen", *Studi Etruschi* 12 (1938), pp. 351-356; this concludes (p. 355) that placement of accent is primarily due to sentence rhythm. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 382, fn. 6, refers to these works, but gives a misleading impression by saying that Lewy, following Schuchardt, admits that other factors, such as the opposition ergative singular *gisonák*/nominative plural *gisonak* also come into account (this refers to Lewy, p. 355 end). Lewy has perhaps failed to make clear that such forms do not occur either in these texts or in Schuchardt's discussion of this dialect, and in the passage in question (p. 8) Schuchardt is actually citing words from Larramendi's grammar of 1729, pointing out, quite appropriately, the congruence with the accentual situation described by Azkue. These forms are thus Guipúzcoan (or Vizcayan), not Labourdin. Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", p. 112 of sec. 53, mentions the lack of accent in Labourdin and Low Navarrese, as contrasted with Souletin, and raises the question of whether this is original or secondary (mentioning the importance of Leizarraga's accented texts for this question). There is also no evidence of features of stress or other accent correlated with individual words in the "Bakersfield Basque" dialect described by Wilbur, which is clearly of this general type; see Terence H. Wilbur, "The Phonemes of the Basque of Bakersfield, California", *Anthropological Linguistics* 3:8 (1961), pp. 1-12, esp. pp. 10-11, sec. 3. A recent study of the accents in texts in Labourdin of Saint-Jean-de-Luz written around 1700 by Pierre d'Urte, while it seems to leave open the possibility of accent being phonologically distinctive, fails to show any accentual stigmatization of the plural-number category such as we find in the Western accented type (sec. 7) and certainly does not exhibit the Souletin-type stressing of the ergative plural ending (sec. 6): Pierre Lafitte, "L'accentuation labourdine au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle selon l'*Etorkia* de Pierre d'Urte", *Gure Herria* 39 (1967), pp. 232-234. No mention is made of any phonologically distinctive accent in the dialect of Maya of the Baztán Valley in Geneviève N'Diaye, *Structure du dialecte basque de Maya* (Janua Linguarum, Series Practica, 86), The Hague-Paris, 1970. A morphologically distinctive accent was also found to be lacking farther east in the Salazar Valley, according to Luis Michelena, "Notas fonológicas sobre el salacenco", *Anuario del Seminario de Filología Vasca "Julio de Urquijo"* 1 (1967), pp. 163-177; see p. 165, sec. 2 end; Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 398-399, sec. 20.14. Thus it seems that Holmer has extrapolated beyond his evidence in suggesting that his Type 2 or Guipúzcoan type accentuation probably belongs also to most French dialects, including Souletin and others. Although he did have information about Souletin, which does indeed have an accent, our further discussion will make clear that this can hardly be grouped with the Western type accent; cf. Nils M. Holmer, *El idioma vasco hablado*, San Sebastián, 1964, p. 1, fn. 2 and 3; pp. 20-21, sec. 15.

-ak
-ek

The vowel-stems, however, continue the distinctions of Pre-Basque:

-ak	
-k	-ek

5. There exists also a geographically limited dialect area within the northern High Navarrese area which has created analogically a new ergative plural ending *-akek*, thus recovering the three-way distinction among the K-endings that was present in Pre-Basque (11):

-ak	
-(e) k	-akek

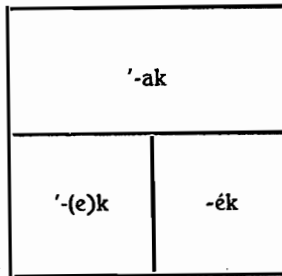
(11) Cf. Resurrección María de Azkue, *Morfología vasca*, Bilbao, 1925, pp. 326-327, sec. 497, and, p. 328, sec. 398C; Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", pp. 340-341; Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", p. 196.



6. The following is the pattern in spoken Souletin, the easternmost dialect:

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	gízun	gizúna	gizúnak	'man'
Erg.	gizúnek	gizúnak	gizunék	

Here there has developed a strong stress accent, which falls on the vowel that continues the penult of Pre-Basque. Thus the ergative plural form is distinguished by having stress on its final syllable, so that this variety also maintains in its spoken form the category distinctions of Pre-Basque (12).



Essentially the same principle, with minor differences of detail,

Other plural cases also show this *-k-*, such as dative plural *-aki*. These endings must have arisen by replacement of the *\*-g-* by *-k-* on the analogy of <sup>1</sup>the nominative plural. There are comparable analogical reformations with intervocalic *-k-* for the second person singular masculine suffix (cf. fn. 6), such as Low Navarrese *dukan*, Guipúzcoan *dekan* 'which you (masc.) have'.

(12) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 392-394, 396-397, secs. 20.10-11, 20.13; pp. 214-215, 216-218, secs. 10-11, 13 of Luis Michelena, "A propos de l'accent basque", *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 53 (1957-58), pp. 204-233; Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", pp. 108-109, fn. 1; Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", pp. 196, 198; pp. 77, 79 of René Lafon, "Contribution à l'étude phonologique du parler basque de Larrau (Haute-Soule)", pp. 77-106 in Diego Catalán, ed., "Estructuralismo e historia", *Miscelánea homenaje a André Martinet*, vol. 2, Madrid, 1958. Basically the same system in the aspects that concern us is attested earlier from farther west in the 1571 Bible translation of Leizarraga, a native of Briscous in northern Labourd; cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 399-402, secs. 20.15-17; Michelena, "A propos de l'accent basque", pp. 219-222, secs. 15-17.

applies to the neighboring moribund Roncalese dialect to the south in Spain (13).

7. Many spoken dialects within the Western area have accentual distinctions setting off primarily the plural forms from the others, thus introducing additional distinctions into the paradigm when spoken among those sharing a sufficiently similar dialect. Although this fact has been described many times, there have been differences of notations and analysis and indeed of opinions as to the distinctiveness of the Basque accent in this region (14). Part of

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(13) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 394-397, secs. 20.12-13: "A propos de l'accent basque", pp. 215-218, secs. 12-13; *Sobre el pasado de la lengua vasca*, p. 47. The accent of this dialect tends to slip back from the penult to the antepenult; thus for 'man' it has ergative singular and nominative plural *gizonak* vs. ergative plural *gizonék*. On the accentuation of the common ancestor of Souletin and Roncalese, see Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 402-403, sec. 20.17; "A propos de l'accent basque", p. 222, sec. 17.

(14) For a bemused survey of the older literature on the Basque accent, see Schuchardt, "Zur Kenntnis des Baskischen von Sara (Labourd)", pp. 4-10. An excellent survey of descriptive facts about the accentual systems of various dialects is found in Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, chap. 20, pp. 379-403, and a theory of the occurrence of stress in older stages of the language, based primarily on the distribution of *h*, is presented in chap. 21, pp. 405-424. A more concise version of this same material was published in Michelena, "A propos de l'accent basque" (cf. fn. 12). A yet more abridged version of some of these ideas is contained in Luis Michelena's response, pp. 36-44, to N. Ormaetxea, "Leitza'ko Mintza-Doiñua", pp. 29-36, both published under the heading "Euskaltzaindian sarterakoan Ormaetxea jaunak egindako itzaldia eta Mitxelena jaunaren erantzuna (Euskal azentuaz)", *Euskera* 3 (1958). In his writings Altube has been concerned to minimize the importance of accentuation as a property of individual words, trying to set forth, in an elaborate scheme, its connection with syntactic facts such as presupposition and focus. See Seber Altube, "El acento vasco (en la prosa y en el verso)", *Euskera* 13 (1932), pp. 1-329; also published separately, Bermeo, 1932. See especially chap. 2, pp. 24-36, and sec. 83, pp. 85-86, on plural accentuation of demonstratives and nouns; note also the comparative chart of the phonetic accentuation of ergative singular vs. nominative-ergative plural of *gizonak* as described by Zamarripa, Ormaechea, and Larramendi, doubtless intended to convey an impression of inconsistency among these authorities, p. 189, sec. 202 end. For a more concise exposition of these views, see Seber Altube, "Observaciones al tratado de 'Morfología vasca' de don R. M.<sup>a</sup> de Azkue", *Euskera* 15 (1934), sec. 90, "El acento prosódico", pp. 186-213; also published separately, Bermeo, 1934. Doubtless this author's rejection of some of the findings of authors such as Azkue concerning the accent was due to genuine differences between their respective dialects; Azkue was from Lequeitio, Altube from Mondragón (perhaps the observations given below from Placencia de las Armas might be suggestive here). Holmer, in his studies of Basque dialects, has given especial importance to the accent, and has classified dialects into two types, Navarrese and Guipúzcoan, according to their accent patterns. Cf. Nils M. Holmer, *El idioma*

what has puzzled some observers has been the necessity of reconciling a fairly large amount of phonetic free variation in accentuation with the contrasts that are clearly present (15). It may thus be worthwhile to digress somewhat to consider the phonological analysis of this phenomenon, which apparently has not been studied or thought about as much as it deserves. There is little in the way of critical discussion of the appropriate units that should be set up to handle this, and no explicit account has been given of how the accent correlates with the various morphemes present in a word or sentence (16). We also lack detailed descriptions, even of the raw phonetics, for different dialects, among which there is clearly a considerable amount of variation in the accentuation patterns. I am far from being in a position to analyze the entire accentual system, and have only rather scattered, randomly encountered, and mostly hastily gathered personal observations to offer, but there may be some value to at least raising some questions and suggesting tentative analyses for the kinds of words under consideration.

There seem to have been at least two flaws in theoretical orientation that have inhibited many earlier investigators from acquiring an adequate perspective on this phenomenon. One, as would be ex-

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vasco hablado. Un estudio de dialectología euskérica, San Sebastián, 1964, pp. 1-2; pp. 20-21, sec. 15; pp. 26-28, sec. 24; pp. 36-41, sec. 40-49. For a brief statement in English, see Nils M. Holmer, "A Historic-Comparative Analysis of the Structure of the Basque Language", *Fontes Linguae Vasconum* 4 (1970), pp. 5-40, sec. 2, "The System of Stress", pp. 9-11. I find his assumption much too facile that his Navarrese, or Type 1, pattern is more archaic than the other type.

(15) Cf., for example, Gavel's reaction that it is contradictory of Ormaechea to describe a contrast of accentuation for *aria* correlating with meanings of 'thread' vs. 'sheep' and also to say that in Basque the words do not have a fixed accent so that the same word can be accented sometimes on one syllable and sometimes on another: "Eléments de phonétique basque", pp. 113-114, fn. 1, referring to Nicolás Ormaechea, "Acento vasco", *Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques* 9 (1918), pp. 1-15.

(16) Thus Rotaèche and Doneux, "Sur un point de morphologie nominale du Basque" (cf. fn. 6), which purports to describe part of the noun morphology of the spoken Vizcayan dialect of Ondárroa in a version of the generative phonology framework, avoids any mention of accentuation, even while considering the basic shape of the 'plural' morpheme. The fullest account of facts concerning how accentuation correlates with various morphological formations that I have encountered is still Resurrección María de Azkue, "Del acento tónico vasco en algunos de sus dialectos", *Euskera* 11 (1930), pp. 282-297, 12 (1931), pp. 3-50; also published separately, Bilbao, 1931. A very useful description also is found in Nils M. Holmer and Vania Abrahamson de Holmer, "Apuntes vizcainos (I)", *Anuario del Seminario de Filología Vasca "Julio de Urquijo"* 2 (1968), sec. 9.1-9.23, "Sobre el acento", pp. 106-118.

pected, was the lack of a phonological orientation, of a criterion of distinctiveness or relevance to be used in guiding phonetic investigations or in avoiding superfluous notations (17). The other, seemingly, was the assumption that, if Basque had an accent, it would be comparable to that of Castilian Spanish, in that most words of two or more syllables would bear an accent on one of them, and words of equal numbers of syllables could differ accentually only by this being placed on one versus another syllable.

Works making this latter assumption have transcribed the distinction that primarily concerns us in several different ways, responding in part to dialectal differences. For the opposition ergative singular/nominative-ergative plural we thus find, using the word for 'man', *gizonák/gizónak* (18), *gizónak/gizonak* (19), and even *gizonák/gizonak* (20).

(17) Note, for example, that T. Navarro Tomás, "Observaciones fonéticas sobre el vascuence de Guernica", pp. 48-56 in Tercer Congreso de Estudios Vascos, San Sebastián, 1923, in an admittedly preliminary phonetic study of tonal patterns, p. 56, measured the pitch on each syllable for five words, four of them bisyllabic. In all cases the pitch rises on successive syllables. However, all of these words are what I will be calling unmarked (or unaccented), so he has failed to register the presumed differences that would show up if a genuinely accented word were contrasted with them. Cf. also the proliferation of types of accents and symbols therefor suggested by Ormaetxea in his "Leitza'ko Mintza-Doiñua", contrasted with the advocacy of the necessity of a phonological orientation and the sparse notation employed by Michelena in his response (cf. fn. 14).

(18) Manuel de Larramendi, *El imposible vencido. Arte de la Lengua Bascongada*, Salamanca, 1729, pp. 6, 350-353. (For summary and discussion of Larramendi's system of accents, see Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 386-388, sec. 20.5-6; "A propos de l'accent basque", pp. 209-211, secs. 5-6.) Arturo Campión, *Gramática de los cuatro dialectos literarios de la lengua euskara*, Tolosa, 1884, p. 197. This pattern also occurs in a printed religious text of 1862 in the Vizcayan dialect of Salinas de Léniz, as seen in the passage reproduced in Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 384, fn. 10.

(19) Holmer, *El idioma vasco hablado*, pp. 37-38, sec. 41 (this applies to his "Type 2" dialect); Holmer and Holmer, "Apuntes vizcainos (I)", pp. 110-114, sec. 9.9-9.14. Basically the same pattern seems to turn up in Dorita Lochak, "Basque Phonemics", *Anthropological Linguistics* 2:3 (1960), pp. 12-31. Although this source does not discuss the correlation of accent with morphology, words such as the following seem to attest to the "unmarked" or singular type of accentuation: *gisóna* 'the man', *ixakúrra* 'the dog', *egúna* 'the day', *mutilla* 'the boy', also *neská* 'the girl', *urá* 'that one', *tellatúwa* 'the roof', *kankallúwa* 'the tramp'. Clearly marked, or plural, forms are not numerous, but these probably include *múttikwak* 'children', *óyek* 'those', *xéndiya* 'the people', *tókira* '[to] a place'. This source recognizes both primary and secondary stresses (cf. p. 18, sec. 4.0), but gives no examples of contrast between them; certain instances of interchange make it seem unlikely that they should be distinguished: *motósikletá* ~ *motósikletà* 'the motorcycle', *bastèrriyàn* ~ *bastèrriyàn* ~ *bastèrriyan* 'in a corner', *báñogayó* ~ *báñogayò* 'more than' (cf. the similar conclusion of Schuchardt, "Zur Kenntnis des Baskischen von

In order to discuss the problem more adequately, let us consider at first one particular dialect, the Vizcayan one of the older generation at Guernica (21). This is clearly of the type that is represented by the second pair of accented words just given. When one listens to the total pitch pattern more attentively —and differential pitch, rather than stress, is the primary phonetic manifestation of this accent, as has been widely maintained (22)—, one notes that the two accent marks do not really stand for the same thing. That of the plural, *gisonak*, correlates with a high pitch on the indicated syllable, followed by an immediate fall to a noticeably lower one on the remaining syllables of the word. However, that of the singular, *gisónak*, usually rising from the pitch of the first syllable, remains high on the following one. This suggests, as a first approximation, recognizing two kinds of accents, a sustained as opposed to a falling one, that might be indicated as: *gisónak/gisonak* (23).

Going a step further, comparison of forms with the sustained accent reveals a certain amount of free variation. For example, depending in part on what precedes, the first syllable of such a word may already be as high in pitch as the next one. Although the rise in pitch tends to set in on the second syllable, on longer words this may be delayed until later in the word. On two-syllable words, the rise is usually onto the second syllable. On some noun phrases

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Sara (Labourd)", p. 6). In other ways this analysis gives the impression of setting up units that may not really be linguistically distinctive: whereas the four phonemic pitch lines, correlating with intonation contours (p. 16, sec. 3.0), seem plausible enough, the distinction among three kinds of juncture based on duration of pause (p. 12, sec. 1) fails to convince.

(20) Isaac Lopez Mendizabal, *La lengua vasca*, 2nd ed., Buenos Aires, 1949, p. 13.

(21) I am indebted to José Basterrechea for cooperation in observations on his speech during July and August, 1972. I have also profited from teaching materials distributed by him during the 1972 Summer Session, which describe in considerable detail the intonational patterns of words and sentences, displaying them by a graphic notation in terms of four tone levels.

(22) For example, by Ormaechea, "Acento vasco", especially pp. 3-8. Cf. the discussion in Schuchardt, "Zur Kenntnis des Baskischen von Sara (Labourd)", pp. 8-10.

(23) The transcription of the forms cited for spoken dialects (except where explicitly showing the orthography of other sources) is intended to be a phonemic one, but expressing the phonemes by means of the conventions of usual Basque orthography, including several digraphs. This will occasionally give rise to non-standard spellings. In writing *gisonak* with an *-s-* I am noting the fact that most Vizcayan and some Guipúzcoan dialects lack the contrast *s/z* of more easterly dialects, the merged sibilant sounding usually more like the *s* of other dialects. (Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 282-283, sec. 14.2.)

consisting of more than one word, such as noun followed by demonstrative, the pitch pattern seems often to be the same as on single words of the same length. Thus the exact location of this sustained pitch is somewhat hard to determine; it depends partly on the length of the word, but its exact point of onset also seems not to be significant, and the differences in pitch in question are after all fairly small (24). On the other hand, the location in the word of the falling pitch is clearly localized and does not vary. Such facts lead one to the conclusion that the words with sustained pitch actually have no accent on them at all, that what is heard is a result of general rules of pronunciation, controlled in part by the syntactic relationships present, rather than being a property of the individual word. Thus we will have what we may well call both *unmarked* and *marked* words—some words with no distinctive accent at all on them, and others with a distinctive (falling) accent on one of their syllables (25).

Although this conclusion was somewhat laboriously attained, I have been encouraged at noting that several writers on the language, all of them native speakers, have followed essentially this practice, that is, of marking one syllable of words containing the falling accent, and leaving other words unmarked. Zamarripa and Omaechevarría put an accent mark on the first syllable: *gizonak*, whereas Azkue printed the final syllable lower than the rest or, as a typographical

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(24) Thus T. Navarro Tomás, "Sobre la entonación y el acento vascos", *Revue Internationale des Etudes Basques* 17 (1926), pp. 404-406, says on p. 405 that his studies of a Guipúzcoan speaker did not confirm the existence of a tonal accent, as the differences in pitch between the syllables of a word were minuscule (but cf. fn. 17). This is in reply to a review by Ormaechea, pp. 260-268 of the same journal volume, of T. Navarro Tomás, "Pronunciación guipuzcoana", pp. 593-653 in *Homenaje a Menéndez Pidal III*, Madrid, 1925 (not available to me).

(25) This analysis is not the same thing as Holmer's distinction between 'key' syllables and other secondarily accented syllables, later referred to as 'basic accent' vs. 'rhythmic accent'. See Holmer, *El idioma vasco hablado*, pp. 20-21, sec. 15; pp. 26-28, sec. 24; pp. 36-41, secs. 40-49; Holmer and Holmer, "Apuntes vizcainos (I)", pp. 106-118, sec. 9, but especially pp. 117-118, sec. 9.22. Although some of the secondary accents will indeed fall on unmarked words, these would also commonly bear his basic accents. I find it quite impossible to reconcile the facts as I see them with Holmer's theory that the basic syllable in the Western dialects (of his Type 2) is the penult, either descriptively or historically (although, as we have seen, this does seem appropriate for the Souletin-Roncales type). In Holmer's published texts the secondary or rhythmic accents are proportionately of relatively infrequent occurrence, and are entirely lacking from some texts. (For accented texts, see *El idioma vasco hablado*, pp. 109-165; Nils M. Holmer and Vania Abrahamson de Holmer, "Apuntes vizcainos II", *Anuario del Seminario de Filología Vasca "Julio de Urquijo"* 3 (1969), pp. 171-228.)

substitute, put a grave accent on this syllable: *gizonàk* (26). There are also sources (also by native speakers) that use two kinds of accent marks, acute and grave, but put them only on the final syllable of the word, the types of *gizonák/gizonàk*; clearly one of these marks could be zeroed out (27).

The orthography of these sources suggests the question of whether the location of the falling accent on a particular syllable of a word is phonologically distinctive, or alternatively whether this is a property of the word as a whole, its location being automatically determined by the shape of the word. My own observations indicate that for several dialects the falling tone may occur distinctively on more than one syllable of words of a given shape (although not on the last syllable), so that the accent mark in forms given below will be associated with a particular vowel in a word (and the acute accent mark will be used for this where there is only one kind of accent in a dialect) (28).

(26) Pablo de Zamarripa, "Temas gramaticales. Palabras vascas con acento, homónimas de otras sin él", *Euskal-Esnalea* 19 (1929), pp. 110-113; Pablo de Zamarripa y Uruga, *Manual del Vascófilo. Libro de modismos, onomatopeyas, elipsis, uso distinto de la s y la z, y otras cosas que conviene saber para hablar y escribir bien en vascuence vizcaíno*, Bilbao, 1913, "Del acento", pp. 254-258. In the latter the actual accent marks are used only on p. 258; elsewhere the phonetic differences are described. Note his statement, p. 256, that a singular like *orrek* 'that' bears the prosodic accent on the second, or last, syllable, or does not bear it on any syllable, just like *gizonak* 'the man', whereas the plural *orrek* 'those' bears it on the first syllable, like *gizonak* 'the men'. Ignacio Ormaechevarría, "Declinación vasca", *Euskera* 7 (1962), pp. 29-42, accents shown on pp. 36, 39. Aside from p. 13 (cf. fn. 20), this seems to be the approach also of Lopez Mendizabal, *La lengua vasca*, 2nd ed., pp. 14, 52, 150. Azkue, "Del acento tónico vasco en algunos de sus dialectos", especially vol. 11, pp. 284-286, secs. 3-4; pp. 287-288, sec. 5,5°; vol. 12, p. 50, sec. 27; Azkue, *Morfología vasca*, pp. 24-26, secs. 17-19; pp. 326-327, sec. 497. This author speaks of *monotonal* vs. *dítonal* words.

(27) Ormaechea, "Acento vasco", pp. 6-7; Michelena, "Euskaltzaindian sartzerakoan... Mitxelena jaunaren erantzuna (Euskal azentuaz)" (cf. fn. 14), pp. 40-41. In *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 385-392, Michelena writes in addition, considering only three- and four-syllable words, an acute accent on the antepenult. This being common to all the words, it could also be zeroed out. My practice adopted below, however, amounts in effect to zeroing out all but such an accent on those words that this source writes with a final grave accent.

(28) The main alternative analysis that I have seriously considered is that what I have called unmarked words, instead of being unaccented, would have the falling accent on their last syllables. The pitch commonly falls in passing from such a word to the next. However, this is typically at a point of deep syntactic division in the sentence, such as in passing from the subject to the predicate. It thus seems preferable to assume that there are one or more kinds of junctures present at various points between words, which cause the pitch to fall, or else perhaps that the syntactic rules place a falling accent on the last syllable of such words as they are combined into constructions.

A typical paradigm in the Guernica dialect, then, would be the following:

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	gison	gisona	gísonak	'man'
Erg.	gisonek	gisonak	gísonak	

As compared to the unaccented or written Western type (sec. 3), the accent makes the ergative singular different from the plural forms, thus giving a new pattern:

-ak	'-ak
-(e)k	

This dialect also has some stems which are inherently accented on their first syllables, such as the name *Pátxi*. Other pairs of words showing this accentual contrast for this dialect: 'dog' *txakurrek/txá-kurrek*, 'boy' *mutillek/mútillek*, 'fish' *arrañek/árrañek*, 'son' *semiek/sémiek*, 'girl' *neskiek/néskak*, 'woman' *emakumiek/emáku-miek*. Accentuation sets off the plural demonstratives from their corresponding singulars: ergative singular *onek, orrek, arek*, nominative-ergative plural *ónek, órrek, árek*. If the demonstrative follows the noun, only the demonstrative is accented in the plural: *gison árek* 'those men', but if it precedes, both words are accented: *árek gísonak* 'those men'. Note also plurals *bížek* 'the two', *gisom bátsuk* 'some men'.

Such Vizcayan dialects as this show fairly frequently a plural ending *-ok* in the nominative and ergative. This implies inclusion of either the speaker or the hearer in the group referred to. This may occur when a noun is preceded by either of the two nearer demonstratives: *ónek gísonok* 'these men', *órrek gísonok* 'those men'. The distinctive vocalism *-o-* (which may also be followed by other



case endings) thus gives the same paradigmatic information as does the plural accentuation, leaving us still with the pattern of the diagram (29).

A dialect that differs in some features of its accentuation system has been observed for a younger speaker representing this same area (30). Here the placement of the accentuation marking plurality typically comes on the second syllable in words of three syllables, instead of on the first: nominative-ergative plural *gisónak* 'men' *txakúrrek* 'dogs'. On longer words this also comes on the second syllable, which seems to be true also of the other dialect: *katilluek* 'cups'. For monosyllabic stems or bisyllabic stems ending in *-a*, whose nominative-ergative plurals will contain just two syllables, the plural-number accent is still on the first syllable: *ámak* 'mothers', *úrek* 'waters', *lúrrek* 'grounds', *óiek* 'beds'. The demonstratives are just as for the other Guernica speakers, accented in the plural on the first syllable. Other plural words are *súek* 'you (pl.)', *sértsuk* 'what (pl.)'. Adjectives following nouns take on the plural accentuation: *txakur gustízek* 'all the dogs', *sugats txikízek* 'small trees'. There is considerable apparent free variation in the phonetic accentuation of unmarked words; for three-syllable words, most often prominence seems to be given to the first and third syllables, but sometimes to the second syllable, or the last, or the last two syllables. Some stems are inherently accented on their first or second syllables; this excludes any distinctive accentuation to mark the plural category. Although my evidence is not always clear, these seem to include *béste* 'other', *gánie* 'top of', *kámpoa* 'outside of' (cf. derivatives *kámpokoak*, *kámpotarrak* 'strangers'), *básoa* 'glass', *txístue* 'flute; saliva', *lákue* 'lake', *atsámarra* 'finger', *bekókiže* 'forehead', *belárriže* 'ear', *mantíllie* 'mantilla', *gusánoa* 'worm' (some of these are, of course, relatively recent loan words).

The paradigm for the word for 'man' in this type of Guernica

(29) Gavel, Grammaire basque, p. 160 of sec. 108; Pablo de Zamarripa y Uruga, Gramática vasca, 4th ed., Bermeo, 1931, pp. 54-55, 208; Villasante, La declinación del vasco literario común, pp. 105-106. This last source emphasizes that in the older language endings with *-o-* were not necessarily plural, but rather expressed immediacy or proximity with respect to the interlocutor.

(30) I am indebted to Arantza Apodaka for cooperation in observation of her speech, in connection with a class in Linguistic Field Methods at the University of Nevada, Reno, from September 1967 to January 1968. Prof. Basterrechea informs me that, according to his observations in Guernica in 1972, the plural accentuation of trisyllabic words is now mostly of this *gisónak* type; people from the surrounding mountains, especially those older than fifty, still accent these plurals on the first syllable.

dialect will thus differ from the last-given one only in the nominative and ergative plural forms: *gisónak* instead of *gisonak*. But the square diagram given will still subsume this type —the plural forms are the accented ones, and the exact syllable accented becomes unimportant.

A very similar pattern to the more conservative Guernica dialect has been noted in brief observation of the Guipúzcoan dialect of Ormaíztegui (31). Plural nouns again take an accent on the penult of their stems: *gizonak* 'men', *zákurra* 'dogs', *gurásoak* 'parents'; similarly for *gizom bätzuek* 'some men'. There occur nouns whose stem is inherently accented, thus neutralizing any indication of plurality by accent: *sémeak* 'son(s)' is both ergative singular and nominative-ergative plural. Unaccented nouns receive the most prominence on the second syllable; the pitch starts out fairly high, and may lower somewhat on syllables after the second one. Demonstratives, which have distinctive stems for singular vs. plural, are not accented in the plural: ergative singular *onek*, *orrek*, *arek*, nominative-ergative plural *auiek*, *oiek*, *aiek*.

An apparently somewhat different variation on this type of accent system, which may in fact necessitate the recognition of two different kinds of accents, was noted for the northern High Navarrese dialect of Oyarzun, in a limited amount of observation (32). The plural cases are again accentually set off from the others: nominative-ergative *gizónak* 'men', *txakùrrak* 'dogs'. The kind of accent that is here marked is manifested by a lowering of the pitch, which rises up again to a normal level on the following syllable. There is also stress on the accented syllable. The unaccented singulars to which these words are opposed, ergatives *gizonak*, *txakurra*, are also pronounced with stress on their second syllables, but here the pitch rises from the first to the second syllable and remains high thereafter. Thus both kinds of words give the impression of being stressed on the second syllable, but the pitches of these syllables differ, high in the singular, low in the plural. A two-syllable word takes the plural accent on the first syllable: ergative singular *neskak* 'girl', nominative-ergative plural *nèskak* 'girls'. Both these words show a rise in pitch from the first to the second syllable, but the whole level of pitch is lower for the latter word than for the former.

(31) I am indebted to Arantzazu Garmendia ta Lasa for cooperation in observation of her speech during July 1972.

(32) I am indebted to Jon Oñatibia for cooperation in observation of his speech in August 1972.

Demonstratives also take this plural accentuation, in addition to having distinctively plural stems: ergative singular *onek*, *orrek*, *arek* vs. nominative-ergative plural *ànek*, *òiek*, *àiek*. This is equally true when they occur modifying nouns: *gizon arek* 'that man' (ergative) vs. *gizon àiek* 'those men' (nominative-ergative). Another accent seems to be needed to account for the high pitch of the first syllable of a word like *sémea* 'son', ergative singular *sémeak*. Unlike the situation in other dialects we have discussed, this special marking of a singular stem does not inhibit a plural accentuation, which shows the low pitch on this same first syllable: *sèmeak* 'sons' (33).

An interesting borderline case was observed for an informant from the eastern Vizcayan dialect of Placencia de las Armas (34). Here the expected Western-type accent differentiates the singular from the plural demonstratives: ergative singular *onek*, *orrek*, *arek*, nominative-ergative plural *ónek*, *órrek*, *árek*, and also ergative singular *berak* 'he, she, it' vs. nominative-ergative plural *bérak* 'they'. A plural-type accent is also found on *básuek* 'some'. But there is no such difference of accent on nouns, so that words such as *gisonak*, *txakurrak* will express indifferently the categories of ergative singular, nominative plural, and ergative plural. Interestingly enough, the accentual differences for demonstratives seem to be neutralized when they occur as part of noun phrases modifying a preceding noun: phrases like *txakur onek* 'this dog, these dogs' and *gison arek* 'that man, those men' belong to the same three categories. Thus nouns and such noun phrases fit into the diagram for the Western unaccented type, whereas the demonstratives are of the Western accented type (but lacking an indeterminate form). The situation is thus approximately the opposite of what we saw for Ormaiztegui, where the differential accentuation patterns applied to nouns but not to

(33) Although this dialect is presumably of Holmer's "Guipúzcoan" type, or Type 2, rather than his "Navarrese" type, or Type 1, which occurs nearby along the lower reaches of the Bidasoa (Fuenterrabía, Irún, etc.), one notes a kind of similarity to this other type in that phonetic stress stays on the second syllable of a word, in spite of the contrast present. In the Type 1 dialects the accent is said to be typically on the second syllable of polysyllabic stems, and not to vary its position from one category to another of the nominal declension. See Holmer, *El idioma vasco hablado*, p. 1, for identification of localities pertaining to these dialects, and pp. 36-37, sec. 40, for description of accent placement in the declension. These findings for Type 1 dialects are summarized in Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 389-390, sec. 20.8, and "A propos de l'accent basque", pp. 211-212, sec. 8.

(34) I am indebted to Ramón Bereicua for cooperation in observation of his speech in August 1972.

demonstratives (and again not to noun phrases ending in demonstratives). There seems to be a stem-final accent occurring on nouns focused on (cf. sec. 19):

txakúrra ikusten dau gisonak 'it's the dog that the man sees'  
gisónak ikusten dau txakurra 'it's the man that sees the dog'

A variant type of accented dialect, which puts the accent on the ergative singular rather than on the plural forms was rather explicitly, although briefly, described for part of northern High Navarrese some years ago by Ormaechea (35). This shows, for 'man', ergative singular *gizonak*, nominative and ergative plural *gizonak*. No information was given about the indeterminate forms, which might well be accented, but in any case will have a distinctive ending for most nouns. This dialect thus shows the same pattern of overtly distinct categories as the preceding Western accented ones, even though the distribution of accents among the categories is different:

'-ak	-ak
-(e)k	

Although we have been considering the two plural cases with the suffixes *-k*, it is important to realize that the plural accentuation occurs with all cases in the plural. Thus, from Guernica, dative singular *amari* 'to the mother', dative plural *ámari* 'to the mothers', or demonstratives, genitive singular *onen*, *orren*, *aren*, genitive plural *ónen*, *órren*, *áren*. Thus the accent is by itself an allomorph of the plural-indicating morpheme, which only in the nominative will be signalled in addition by the *-k*. An explicit account of the morphophonemics of accentuation of words would be moderately complicated. Besides expressing the plural, an accent may be an inherent

(35) Ormaechea, "Acento vasco", pp. 6-7. In his notation the two words are respectively *gizonàk* and *gisonák*.

feature of a stem, as we have seen for several dialects. According to Azkue and others, an accent may also be required by certain suffixes, such as case suffixes *-tik*, ablative, or *-kin*, *-gaz*, sociative (*etxetik* 'from the house', *gizonagaz* 'with the man'), or the second person familiar feminine ergative verbal suffix *-na* (*dakiñà* 'you [fem.] know it'). On the other hand, it may also be required by certain verbal prefixes, such as conditional *ba-* (*badatòr* 'if he comes') or the (zero) second person familiar prefix. In the dialect described by Azkue, the fall of pitch is always localized on the last syllable, so that adding a suffix to a word that is plural or inherently accented will cause the accent to move one or more syllables to the right; e.g., names *Markòs*, genitive *Markosèn*; *Perù*, dative *Perurì* (in our notation *Márkosen*, *Markósen*; *Péru*, *Perúri*). Thus the effect of a suffix like *-tik* would be neutralized on such stems. This accent movement does not take place in the younger Guernica dialect, but here also the presence of a plural accentuation in a word will inhibit any further effect of such a suffix (*mendízetatik* 'from the mountains', *katílluetatik* 'from the cups') (36).

8. There is a kind of vowel harmony that occurs in more than one dialect area. A vowel *a* in an inflectional ending following a high vowel *i* or *u* in the final syllable of a stem changes to *e*, thus erasing for consonant-stems a distinction of vocalism that served to distinguish certain pairs of endings in all the preceding patterns. Within the Western area, this is found in the greater part of the Vizcayan dialect area, with the exception of a sizable eastern and northeastern segment (37). It is also attested from the Guipúzcoan

(36) Cf. Azkue, "Del acento tónico vasco en algunos de sus dialectos", especially vol. 11, pp. 287-288, sec. 5,5°; p. 290, sec. 5,13°; pp. 291-292, sec. 6,1°; pp. 293-295, sec. 7; pp. 296-297, sec. 8,3°-4°; and vol. 12, p. 3, sec. 8;5°.

(37) Cf. Rudolf P. G. de Rijk, "Vowel Interaction in Bizcayan Basque", *Fontes Linguae Vasconum* 5 (1970), pp. 149-167, especially pp. 157 ff. (rule *Ruú*); Holmer and Holmer, "Apuntes vizcaínos (I)", p. 101, sec. 7.2; Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 63-64, sec. 2.4; Gavel, "Eléments de phonétique basque", p. 17, fn. 2; Resurrección María de Azkue, "Fonética vasca", pp. 456-480 in *Primer Congreso de Estudios Vascos*, Bilbao, 1919, p. 475, sec. 13C and E; Azkue, *Morfología vasca*, p. 452, sec. 665A. I present a paper "Rule Ordering in Vizcayan Basque Vowel Harmony" to the First Annual California Linguistics Conference, at the University of California, Berkeley, on May 1, 1971; this was based primarily on data from Guernica. As Michelena, loc. cit., points out, this type of vowel harmony turns up already in a Vizcayan text of the 17th century: L[uis] M[ichelena], "Un catecismo vizcaíno del siglo XVII", *Boletín de la Real Sociedad Vascongada de los Amigos del País* 10 (1954), pp. 85-95. In the version of vowel harmony found at Ondárroa, only *a*'s in absolute final position are

dialect of Azpeitia and from the northern High Navarrese dialects of Leiza and the Ulzama Valley (38). Most of these dialects doubtless exhibit the Western pattern of accent setting off the plural forms from the others. The pattern may be exemplified by the following paradigm from Guernica (cf. sec. 7):

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	egun	egune	egúnek	'day'
Erg.	egunek	egunek	egúnek	

For consonant-final words that trigger this change, the overt contrasts are thus limited to one of singular vs. plural:

-ek	'ek
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The vowel-final stems that condition vowel harmony are fairly numerous. In about half of the area in question these include not only stems ending in *i* and *u*, but also stems ending in *e*, which is raised to *i* before suffixes beginning with basic *a*, and in a smaller area stem-final *o* is similarly raised to *u* (39). Thus, from Guernica, not only:

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affected; a following consonant inhibits this change, so that no additional syncretism of the K-endings is introduced; thus for 'dog', nominative singular *txakurre* but nominative plural *txakurrak*: Rotaèche and Doneux, "Sur un point de morphologie nominale du basque", pp. 276, 277, sec. 3, 1<sup>o</sup> and 3<sup>o</sup>, Rule 2.

(38) De Rijk, "Vowel Interaction in Bizcayan Basque", p. 158; Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 64.

(39) Cf. De Rijk, "Vowel Interaction in Bizcayan Basque", pp. 156-157, 160-163 (rules *Rea*, *Roa*); Azkue, "Fonética vasca", p. 475, sec. 13B and D.

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	mendi	mendiže	mendižek	'mountain'
Erg.	mendik	mendižek	mendižek	

but also:

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	seme	semie	semiek	'son'
Erg.	semek	semiek	semiek	

Nevertheless, these vowel-final stems show as many categorial distinctions as do the other non-harmonizing vowel and consonant stems in these dialects:

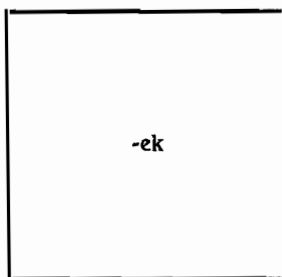
-ek	-ek
-k	

9. This type of vowel harmony is found also in the Eastern-type dialect of Maya (Baztán Valley) (cf. sec. 4) (40):

(40) N'Diaye, *Structure du dialecte basque de Maya*, pp. 116, 118-119. Strangely enough, there is no mention of this as a general phonological process in either the treatment of archiphonemes and neutralization in chap. 2, pp. 20-23, or in that of sandhi in chap. 5, pp. 37-39. The noun paradigms given, pp. 117 ff., all lack the ergative and dative cases of the indeterminate, although most of them show the other cases. This is probably due to a gap in elicitation rather than a real lacuna in the system; certainly the ergative case as shown herein follows from the pattern of the other indeterminate cases; note the statement, p. 109, that the informants have difficulty with the definite/indeterminate opposition in cases other than the nominative. On p. 29 are given figures on the relative frequency of vowels in a text sample of ten thousand phonemes. The vowels *i* and *u* together make up about 28.5% of vowel occurrences; if we can assume that vowels in the final syllables of noun stems are distributed in the same proportion, then about this percentage of noun stems in a text would belong in this dialect to the type under consideration.

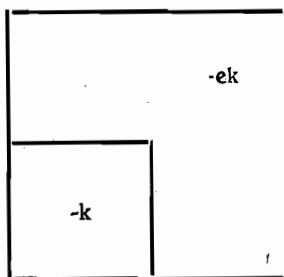
	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.
Nom.	egun	egune	egunek
Erg.	egunek	egunek	egunek

This dialect, apparently lacking accentual differences, thus shows but a single K-ending, *-ek*, in this class of consonant-final words:



The same would be true of Western high-vowel harmonizing dialects (sec. 8) that might lack accentual differences or that might be written showing these vowel changes.

For vowel-final words, here as elsewhere the ergative indeterminate remains distinct. We find in them the same pattern of distinctions as in the Western written or unaccented dialects:



10. Stems ending in the vowel *a* exhibit some additional patterns of syncretism in certain dialects. In many cases the *-a* of the definite

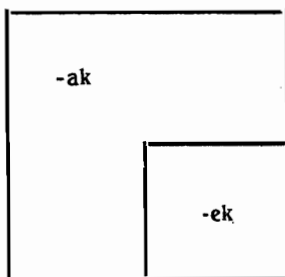


endings contracts with this stem-final vowel, so as to neutralize the definite/indeterminate distinction (41).

The Eastern unaccented type of dialect keeps here as elsewhere the vowel *-e-* in the ergative plural (42):

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom	eliza	eliza	elizak	'church'
Erg.	elizak	elizak	elizek	

This gives a unique pattern of syncretism for the K-endings:



Souletin shows the same vocalism, but distinguishes the definite from the indeterminate forms by its stress accent. This falls on the final syllable for the definite forms, since this continues the penult of Pre-Basque (cf. sec. 6) (43):

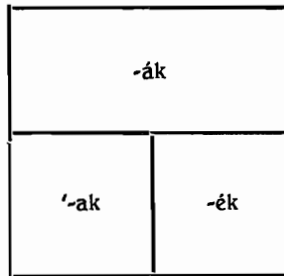
(41) Certain dialects, especially eastern Vizcayan ones, and no doubt more widely at an earlier date, do not completely contract such vowels, but retain distinctive long or geminate vowels here (Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 111-114, secs. 5.2d, 5.3). Such dialects will presumably show the same pattern for *a*-stems as for vowel-stems in general.

(42) Cf. Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, pp. 64-67, sec. 68; Pierre Lafitte, *Grammaire basque (Navarro-Labourdin littéraire)*, revised ed., Bayonne, 1962, p. 59, sec. 135b; N'Diaye, *Structure du dialecte basque de Maya*, p. 117.

(43) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 110, sec. 5.2a, and p. 394, sec. 20.11 end; "A propos de l'accent basque", p. 215, sec. 11; Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, p. 66 of sec. 68. Holmer, *El idioma vasco hablado*, p. 49, fn. 94, indicates that there is an analogous accentual distinction in certain Western dialects. Similarly Azkue, "Fonética vasca", p. 475, sec. 13A and fn. 1, for some Guipúzcoan and High Navarrese, who limits this to the singular only. These fragmentary indications are hard to interpret within the system of the Western accent; if reliable, such dialects, like those mentioned in fn. 41, may show for these words the same pattern as for other vowel-stems.

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	alhába	alhabá	alhabák	'daughter'
Erg.	alhabák	alhabák	alhabék	

The same distinctions are made in Roncalese (44). Thus these *a*-stems show the same overt distinctions as do other words in these dialects (45):



Yet another distinctive pattern emerges for *a*-stems in the Salazar Valley (46). In the singular, an *-r-* is inserted between the stem-vowel and the *-a* of the suffix, thus avoiding coalescence and setting this category off from both the indeterminate and the plural (*eliza* 'church': *elizara* 'the church'). The pattern emerging in the diagram is the only one found wherein a pair of forms in opposite corners are identical, to the exclusion of the other forms:

(44) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 110, sec. 5.2a, and p. 395, sec. 20.12; "A propos de l'accent basque", p. 216, sec. 12. This dialect, lacking an *h*, shows for 'daughter' nominative indeterminate *alába*, vs. nominative singular *alabá*. Leizarraga seems to exhibit this same pattern of accent on *a*-stems (cf. fn. 12).

(45) I note that in the description of Souletin of Tardets in Fenaille Mispiratzeguy, *Dictionnaire français-basque* [including *Grammaire basque*], Paris, n.d., p. 115, an ergative indeterminate form in *-ek* rather than *-ak* is shown for such a stem, *ama* 'mother': *amek*, ergative indeterminate and plural, *amak*, ergative singular and nominative plural. As written this is the same as the Eastern unaccented type for consonant-stems (sec. 4). With the stress differences, which this source also mentions (p. 114), the distinctions are the same as shown here, except that the ergative indeterminate becomes *'-ek*. This is like the general Souletin pattern that we saw in sec. 6, except that the accent is on the ending *-ák*.

(46) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, p. 131 of sec. 6.4; Luis Michelena, *Textos arcaicos vascos*, Madrid, 1964, p. 50; Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, p. 65 of sec. 68; Azkue, "Fonética vasca", p. 475, sec. 13A; Azkue, *Morfología vasca*, p. 451, sec. 661, adición 1<sup>a</sup>.

-arak	-ak
-ak	-ek

Western varieties of course lack the distinctive vocalism of the ergative plural. Aside from Vizcayan, which makes an idiosyncratic distinction in these *a*-stems, the Western unaccented dialects hence are limited to the single shape *-ak* for all K-endings (reminiscent of the single ending *-ek* due to high-vowel harmony that we met in sec. 9):

-ak
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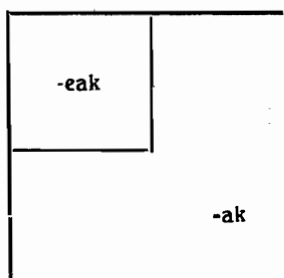
Western accented varieties introduce a singular/plural distinction, thus showing for *a*-stems the same pattern as for vowel-harmony words (sec. 8):

-ak	'-ak
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Vizcayan and adjacent western Guipúzcoan dialects, however, have shown since the earliest records a characteristic trait of raising the stem-final *a* to *e* before the *-a* of the definite singular (but not plural) endings, hence avoiding a contraction of these two adjacent vowels (47). As a consequence, the ergative singular ending in *-eak* stands apart in written or unaccented varieties from the other K-endings, which are *-ak*:

	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	alaba	alabea	alabak	'daughter'
Erg.	alabak	alabeak	alabak	

This is another unique pattern of syncretism:

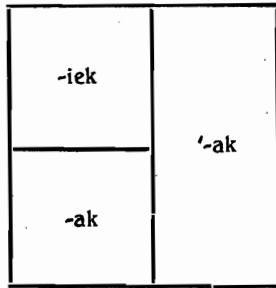


In spoken accented Vizcayan the singular/plural distinction is additionally present. The following paradigm is from the younger-generation Guernica dialect, which embodies vowel harmony. Note that here the *e* is further raised to *i*, making the singular endings the same as for *seme* 'son' (sec. 8):

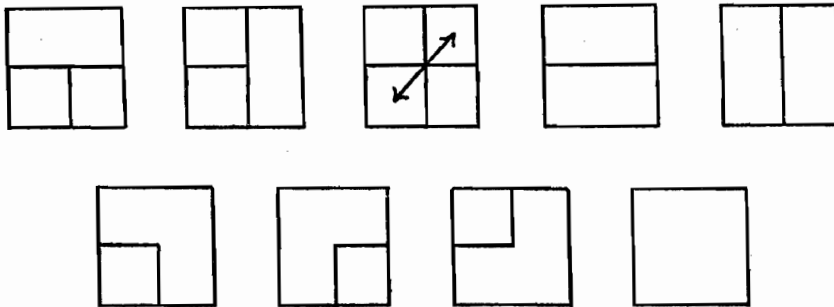
	Ind.	Sg.	Pl.	
Nom.	alaba	alabie	alábak	'daughter'
Erg.	alabak	alabiek	alábak	

(47) Cf. Michelena, *Fonética histórica vasca*, pp. 114-115, sec. 5.4; De Rijk, "Vowel Interaction in Bizcayan Basque", pp. 150-154, 158 (rule *Raa*); Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, p. 65 of sec. 68; Azkue, "Fonética vasca", p. 475, sec. 13A.

Such words have the same pattern of overtly distinct categories that nouns in general do in this dialect (48):



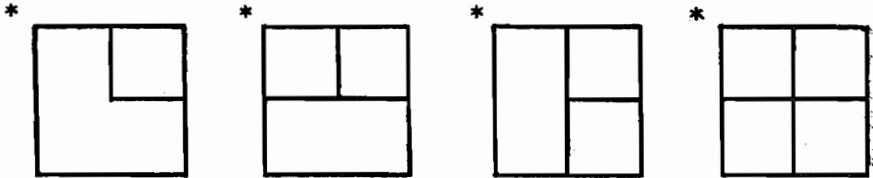
11. From a survey of the different square diagrams it can be seen that we have been able to isolate nine different patterns of syncretism among these four declensional endings of nouns, although some of them will apply to only part of the noun lexicon in a given dialect. The corresponding diagrams have the following topologies:



This is out of a mathematically possible fifteen different patterns. The format of diagram adopted is able to overtly distinguish twelve

(48) Although this is the overwhelmingly predominant pattern at Guernica for *a*-stems, a few words, doubtless due to the informant's extensive familiarity with other dialects, have been found to occur without this vowel raising in the singular, thus in the pattern of non-Vizcayan Western dialects: these include *ama* 'mother', *arriba* 'sister of male', and *arbola* 'tree' for Miss Apodaka.

of these merely by different combinations of the horizontal and vertical dividing lines; in the one case found wherein a pair of forms in opposite corners are identical to the exclusion of other forms (Salazar Valley *a*-stems), a double-headed arrow connecting these corners has been added. The arrangement of the diagrams takes advantage of the fact that such exclusive syncretism between the ergative indeterminate and the nominative plural is uncommon, and also the opposite case, syncretism between the ergative singular and the ergative plural without this involving other forms as well, has not been found. Another negative fact is that the nominative plural never has a form of its own which is not shared by at least one other of these categories. This accounts for the non-occurring patterns:



We thus do not find a system wherein all four forms are different. One could easily imagine this occurring, if there would be a dialect which combined the Eastern-type distinctive ergative plural vocalism with the Western-type accentual differences for number. But such a dialect seems not to be attested, which I find a noteworthy fact and one which may have implications for explaining the origin of the Western accent (49).

12. So far we have been considering the declensional patterns of common nouns. Other classes of words share these case, definiteness, and number categories to a greater or lesser extent: adjectives, participles, demonstratives, and various kinds of pronouns. Many of these allow, however, a lesser roster of categories, thus reducing

(49) Exactly such a system is in fact attributed to Labourdin and Souletin in Arturo Campión, *Gramática de los cuatro dialectos literarios de la lengua euskara*, Tolosa, 1884, p. 197. It seems clear that, for lack of better information at that date, the author has merely extrapolated from the Western type accentuation, a version of which he accurately characterizes and attributes to Guipúzcoan and Vizcayan.

the possibilities for syncretism of K-endings. Proper nouns, names of persons or places, occur only in the indeterminate category, so that a K-ending on them necessarily indicates the ergative case. Pronouns in general lack the definite/indeterminate distinction, and many lack the singular/plural distinction as well. For personal pronouns, the stem gives an indication of number, so here also the *-k* will indicate the ergative, as in *nik* 'I', *guk* 'we' (opposed to nominatives *ni*, *gu*). The exception is secondarily formed *zuek* 'you (pl.)', which apparently in all dialects is ambiguous as between nominative and ergative plural (unlike *zuk* 'you (polite sg.)', ergative as contrasted with nominative *zu*) (50). Other pronouns lacking plurals are such as the indefinite *norbait* 'someone' (ergative *norbaitek*) and (except in Vizcayan) the interrogatives *nor* 'who', *zer* 'what', and *zein* 'which' (ergatives *nork/nok*, *zerk/zek*, *zeinek*). Some plural pronouns have distinctive formations, such as the Vizcayan plurals of those just mentioned, *nortzuk*, *zertzuk*, *zeintzuk*, or the plural *batzuk/batzuek* 'some', formed from *bat* 'one' (which itself may take plural case endings); this thus avoids homonymy between the singular and plural forms with K-endings. Demonstratives generally have distinctive plural forms; in the Western accented dialects these differ from the singulars by being accented on the first syllable, and also in some of these same dialects as well as everywhere else there are distinctive singular vs. plural stem forms. An exception here is constituted by the intensive demonstrative *bera* 'he, she, it', which declines like an *a*-stem noun. In eastern Vizcayan we have seen (sec. 7) that the accent distinguishes the ergative singular *berak* from the nominative-ergative plural *bérak*; in unaccented or written dialects the forms are the same, except that the ergative plural may take the Eastern *e*-vocalism (and not all dialects use this in the plural) (51).

Within the plural the demonstratives and other pronouns tend to show a parallelism with the noun, that is, in the Western area the nominative and ergative plurals are not distinguished, but in much of the Eastern area this distinction is made. Here the ergative plural of demonstratives often has an additional syllable, ending in *-ek* as opposed to a *-k* of the nominative plural; thus Labourdin nominative

(50) Cf. Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", p. 199; Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, pp. 175-176, sec. 114, which mentions, however, p. 180, sec. 118, that certain authors, notably Harriet, make a distinction between nominative *zui* and ergative *zuek*.

(51) For a helpful summary of number and definiteness oppositions as applied to different classes of substantives, see René Lafon, "Le nombre dans la déclinaison basque", *Via Domitia* 1 (1954), pp. 112-121, especially the summary chart on p. 119.

plurals *hauk*, *hoik*, *hek* vs. ergative plurals *hauiek*, *hoiek*, *heiek* (52). In recent recommendations for a standard written language, such a distinction is not recognized for these demonstratives, but is found for *berak* vs. *berek* 'they' and *batzuk* vs. *batzuek* 'some' (53). Yet another pattern is that of numerals higher than 'one'—these have indeterminate and plural forms, but no singulars. These defective patterns offer no new combinations of syncretism that we have not already encountered in common nouns; they would all fit into portions of the above diagrams.

13. These varying patterns of conflation of the ergative and the nominative plural endings might be expected to cause considerable uncertainty as to syntactic function of words bearing one of them, but this is not so often the case as one might a priori expect. Various contextual devices serve to reduce the possibilities of number and case, and prime among these is the pattern of agreement with pronominal affixes of the finite verb in the same clause.

In the first place, the verb very clearly indicates by its affixes, as well as usually by its class membership, whether it is intransitive or transitive. If it is the former, this means of course that a K-ending must represent the nominative plural, since intransitive verbs do not occur with ergative-case arguments. Additionally, the intransitive verb indicates the number of a third-person subject, which in such a case would have to be plural. Two such clauses are the following:

*gizonak* (NP) *etorri dira* 'the men came'  
*alabak* (NP) *an daude* 'the daughters are there'

In parentheses after each noun I give an abbreviation for its case and number categories; here I will be following the convention of indicating only the possibilities left open by the total context that is exhibited, to the exclusion of additional categories that might belong to the noun if cited in isolation.

14. If, on the other hand, the verb is transitive, then associated

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(52) Cf. Pierre Lafitte, *Grammaire basque* (Navarro-Labourdin littéraire), revised ed., p. 82, sec. 181; Gavel, *Grammaire basque*, pp. 162-169, secs. 110-112. More archaic forms for the ergative plurals are *haukiek*, *hoiek*, *heiek*; on the loss of the *-k-* here, cf. Gavel, "Éléments de phonétique basque", pp. 344-345.

(53) Cf. Villasante, *La declinación del vasco literario común*, pp. 75-80, 82, 91. In the older language the latter actually took the indeterminate endings, hence nominative plural *batzu*, ergative plural *batzuk*; cf. Lafon, op. cit., p. 117.



nouns can occur in both the nominative and the ergative cases. Here the reduction of ambiguities is aided by the fact that the finite transitive verb always contains pronominal affixes referring to both subject and object, whether or not these are additionally expressed by nouns or noun substitutes. Here also the affixes of the verb show the number, singular vs. plural, of third person subjects and objects, which limits possibilities insofar as a given shape of noun ending might potentially express both singular and plural categories (54). (In discussing agreement in number, I will leave out of account the relatively infrequent indeterminate forms. A verbal reference to such a form may be either singular or plural, depending on its implied meaning. Aside from vowel harmony and *a*-stems, the only instance of syncretism involving the ergative indeterminate is in Eastern (not including Souletin stressed) varieties, where it falls together with the ergative plural on consonant-stems; here, of course, the noun ending still unambiguously indicates the ergative case.)

Let us consider first the case where a transitive verb is accompanied by a single noun. If this verb indicates its nominative-case object as being singular, there will be no ambiguity as to the function of this noun, as the presence or absence of a K-ending will indicate whether it is nominative or ergative, once the possibility of a nominative plural category is excluded, and furthermore, the number of the ergative category will be indicated by the verb form. After each finite transitive verb in the following examples are given abbreviations for the combination of numbers in ergative and nominative cases that is indicated by its affixes. In these first two examples the verb shows that both subject and object are singular, so the K-ending on *gizonak* indicates it is the subject in the ergative case, whereas the lack of a *-k* on *gizona* shows it is the object in the nominative case:

*gizonak* (ES) *ikusi du* (ES+NS) 'the man saw it'  
*gizona* (NS) *ikusi du* (ES+NS) 'he saw the man'

These next two examples are very similar, but here the verb form indicates that the ergative-case subject noun is plural, thus resolving also a potential ambiguity between ergative singular and plural forms in the Western written or accentless spoken and the Eastern vowel-harmony noun forms:

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(54) On the relevance of the indication by the verb of the number of its subject, cf. Azkue, *Morfología vasca*, p. 272, sec. 440.

gizonak (EP) ikusi dute (EP+NS) 'the men saw it'  
 gizona (NS) ikusi dute (EP+NS) 'they saw the man'

15. If, however, the verb indicates the plural number of the nominative case object, then an ambiguity as to whether a single noun with a K-ending is subject or object will exist, unless the form of the noun itself gives more than the minimum possible amount of information as to its case-number category. Let us consider first examples wherein the transitive verb indicates a combination of ergative plural and nominative singular arguments —the two nominal categories whose inflectional endings, it will be remembered, were probably identical in Pre-Basque (sec. 2). In all written or accentless spoken varieties of Basque, including the Souletin stressed type, these two forms are still identical, so that there exists such an ambiguity as this:

gizonak (ES/NP) ikusi ditu (ES+NP) 'the man saw them/he  
 saw the men'

Since the verb indicates that its two arguments differ in number, the subject or object indicated only by the verb form must be taken to be opposite in number from the noun. Thus singular 'the man', subject, with plural 'them' as object, or else, plural 'the men', object, with singular 'he' as subject. In those varieties where differences of accent correlate with the singular vs. plural number in the noun, this additional information suffices to resolve this ambiguity, as illustrated by these two sentences from the Vizcayan dialect of Guernica:

gisonak (ES) ikusi deus (ES+NP) 'the man saw them'  
 gisonak (NP) ikusi deus (ES+NP) 'he saw the men'

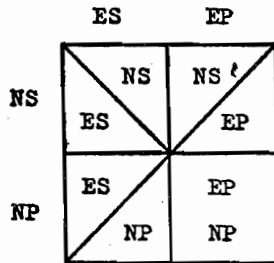
16. The final possible number combination of subject and object is for both of them to be plural. In this situation there is again ambiguity for a single noun as between subjective and objective functions, but this time it occurs in those varieties wherein the ergative plural and the nominative plural forms are the same, which is to say in the Western varieties and also in words undergoing high-vowel harmony in Eastern varieties. An example of the former variety:

gizonak (EP/NP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'the men saw them/  
 they saw the men'

There is resolution of this ambiguity in Eastern varieties (including Souletin) which distinguish between ergative plural and nominative plural noun forms by the vocalism of the ending:

- gizonek (EP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'the men saw them'
- gizonak (NP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'they saw the men'

17. Four diagrams will now be given in an attempt to summarize the patterns of ambiguity we have just surveyed in sections 14-16, where a transitive verb is accompanied by a single noun. Each of the four squares within a diagram represents that combination of numbers of ergative and nominative pronominal categories in the verb which belongs to the intersecting row and column. A slanting line separating the two case-number categories within one of these squares indicates that they will be unambiguously distinguishable for the noun; hence the absence of such a line is indicative that the noun may ambiguously represent either of the two categories in question. The top half of all four diagrams is the same, and shows that there is no ambiguity when the nominative category is singular, as was shown by the examples of sec. 13. Our first diagram pertains to Western accented varieties, including all stem types (secs. 7, 8 and 10), and indicates that there is ambiguity here only with plural subject and object, since in these varieties the noun shows its number:



The next diagram applies to the Eastern area, including the Souletin-Roncalesse stressed variety (secs. 4, 6), but excluding high-vowel harmony words (sec. 9), and also to the restricted northern High Navarrese type (sec. 5), and presumably to Pre-Basque (sec. 2). It tells us that an ambiguity obtains only for the combination of

ergative singular and nominative plural; these are varieties where the noun does not show a general singular/plural distinction, but the ergative plural is distinguished from the other definite forms by its vocalism or by an extra syllable:

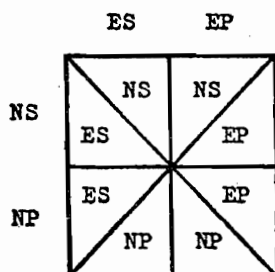
	ES	EP
NS	NS ES	NS EP
NP	ES NP	EP NP

Our third diagram shows that these two possibilities for ambiguity both occur in Western written and unaccented spoken varieties (sec. 3), as well as in the high-vowel harmony words of Eastern (stressless) varieties (sec. 9), these being varieties in which the noun does not show any distinction among the three definite categories taking K-endings (nominative plural, ergative singular and plural):

	ES	EP
NS	NS ES	NS EP
NP	ES NP	EP NP

Our last diagram applies, as far as known, only to the unusual case of the Salazar Valley *a*-stems, where the four categories in question are overtly different. If there should exist a dialect which combines the Western number-differentiating accent with the Eastern

distinctive form for ergative plural (cf. sec. 11), this also would not show any ambiguity in this circumstance, for nouns of all stem-types:



Most varieties of spoken Basque belong to the types of the first two diagrams, which seems to indicate that there is a natural tendency toward tolerating an intermediate degree of ambiguity, neither too much nor unnecessarily little.

18. In addition to number, the affixes on both intransitive and transitive verbs also indicate the person of both subject and object. If either the subject or the object of a transitive verb is other than third person, this will resolve all ambiguities about the case and number of a single accompanying noun. This is illustrated by the following examples, all of them with a first person singular pronominal affix in the verb (numerals 1 and 2 in the parentheses indicate first and second persons):

gizonak (ES) ikusi nau (ES+N1S) 'the man saw me'  
 gizonak (EP) ikusi naute (EP+N1S) 'the men saw me'  
 gizonak (NP) ikusi ditut (E1S+NP) 'I saw the men'  
 gizona (NS) ikusi det (E1S+NS) 'I saw the man'

Verbal indication of person also comes into account in resolving the ambiguity of the second person plural pronoun *zuek*, which is both nominative and ergative (sec. 12). An associated verb will inevitably indicate whether its reference to second person plural is as subject or object. In sentences such as the following, the independent pronoun adds emphasis but does not change the meaning:

zuek (E2P) ikusi dezute (E2P+NS) 'you (pl.) saw it'  
 zuek (N2P) ikusi zaituzte (ES+N2P) 'he saw you (pl.)'

19. Let us now consider the case where two nouns are present in a clause, expressing respectively the subject and the object of a transitive verb. Here the possibility of word order as a factor in reducing ambiguity suggests itself. We may first examine the same unambiguous combinations with a nominative singular object that we saw in sec. 14, so that some word order possibilities can be clearly observed. The normal unemphatic word order is subject-object-verb, that is, with the noun in the ergative case preceding that in the nominative, as in:

gizonak (ES) txakurra (NS) ikusi du (ES+NS) 'the man saw  
the dog'

But it is possible to depart from this order so as to put focus on one of the nouns, by causing it to appear immediately before the verb. The following example, maintaining the same case relationships as in the preceding, puts the focus on the subject *gizonak* by postponing the object noun until after the verb:

gizonak (ES) ikusi du (ES+NS) txakurra (NS) 'it's the man  
who saw the dog'

Our next example shows this same pattern of focus applied to the object *txakurra* instead of to the subject:

txakurra (NS) ikusi du (ES+NS) gizonak (ES) 'it's the dog  
that the man saw'

And the following shows that the subject *gizonak* can also be focused on by ordering it after the object noun so that in this way it appears before the verb:

txakurra (NS) gizonak (ES) ikusi du (ES+NS) 'it's the man  
who saw the dog'

Finally, we may illustrate the normal word order when the subject noun is also in the ergative plural form:

gizonak (EP) txakurra (NS) ikusi dute (EP+NS) 'the men saw  
the dog'

20. Now we may observe the same combination of ergative singular and nominative plural that we saw in sec. 15. The ambiguity in written or spoken accentless dialects that is present for one noun is not entirely resolved when two are present. A sentence with two nouns before the verb can be construed alternatively as embodying the neutral subject-object order, or else as putting focus on the subject with a reversal of the case relationships:

gizonak (ES/NP) txakurrak (NP/ES) ikusi ditu (ES+NP) 'the man saw the dogs/it's the dog that saw the men'

If one noun occurs after the verb, this clearly puts focus on the first noun, but this might still be either a nominative plural object or an ergative singular subject, with the opposite case-number combination being assigned to the final noun:

txakurrak (NP/ES) ikusi ditu (ES+NP) gizonak (ES/NP) 'it's the dogs that the man saw/it's the dog that saw the men'

Here again, in dialects marking the singular/plural distinction by accent placement, these ambiguities are avoided by the form of the noun itself, as illustrated by these contrasting sentences in the Guernica dialect:

gizonak (ES) txakúrrek (NP) ikusi deus (ES+NP) 'the man saw the dogs'

gisónak (NP) txakurrek (ES) ikusi deus (ES+NP) 'it's the dog that saw the men'

(Here, incidentally, the noun ending *-ek* on the word for 'dog' or 'dogs' is not a mark of the ergative plural, but merely shows the harmonizing influence of the preceding *u* [cf. sec. 8].)

21. It is a parallel situation with the sort of ambiguity when plural subject and object are combined that was exhibited by sec. 16. The word order of this Western example allows the same alternative interpretations of case and focus as did the first example of the preceding section:

gizonak (EP/NP) txakurrak (NP/EP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'the men saw the dogs/it's the dogs that saw the men'

Again this ambiguity is avoided in the Eastern dialects where the endings for these two plural cases are different:

gizonek (EP) txakurrak (NP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'the men saw the dogs'

gizonak (NP) txakurrek (EP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'it's the dogs that saw the men' (55).

22. The following Western written example shows a different situation, wherein a non-finite verb form, the participle *bialduak* 'sent', occurs as subjective complement. Both the participle and the verb indicate plurality. The first word, *gizonak*, can be taken either as the subject of the sentence in the nominative plural, the sentence then meaning 'the men were sent', or else as the subject of the predication underlying the participle, in the ergative, either singular or plural, the sentence in this case meaning 'they were sent by the man' or '... by the men':

gizonak (NP/ES/EP) bialduak (NP) izan dira 'the men were sent/they were sent by the man/they were sent by the men'

A dialect with numerically differentiated stress patterns will reduce

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(55) Lafon, "Expression de l'auteur de l'action en basque", pp. 198-199, asserts at first that it is semantic plausibility more than expected word order that tells us, for example, that *gatuak saguiak jan ditu* means 'the cat ate the mice' rather than 'the mouse ate the cats', which is grammatically possible. He also states, though, that there is a rule that the agent noun is mentioned first, so that 'the cats saw the mice' would be apt to be expressed as *gatuak saguak ikusi dituzte* or *gatuak ikusi dituzte saguak*. On the predominance of the subject - object - verb order, see the figures in Rudolf P. G. de Rijk, "Is Basque an S. O. V. Language?", *Fontes Linguae Vasconum* 3 (1969), pp. 319-351, especially pp. 321-325. Discussions such as the present one of the ambiguity of isolated sentences are, of course, rather artificial in that, as Lafon also points out, the general context and situation usually makes clear which possible interpretation is the plausible one. Furthermore, if I am right about the relevance of focus in permuting word order (all my informants seem to agree that the situation is as I describe it), it should be realized that the preceding discourse will usually make clear also which word it is appropriate to focus on, as by what question a sentence is in answer to. The idea that the position of focus is that directly before the verb phrase (in affirmative sentences) is a commonplace of Basque grammatical literature; cf. the useful summary in De Rijk, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-349. There may also be accentual marking of words in focus in some dialects.



the number of ambiguous possibilities here, as shown by these examples from the Vizcayan dialect of Guernica:

gísonak (NP) bíalduek (NP) isen dire 'the men were sent'  
 gisonak (ES) bialduek (NP) isen dire 'they were sent by the  
 man'  
 gísonak (EP) bialduek (NP) isen dire 'they were sent by the  
 men'

When the participle stands alone as the complement, it retains its plural accentuation (first example); when it is part of the same phrase with the preceding noun, it loses this accent (last two examples). Another set of examples of the same type (where the shorter participle, *jának* 'eaten', makes the distinctions easier to hear):

árraiñek (NP) jának (NP) isen dire 'the fish (pl.) were eaten'  
 arraiñek (ES) janak (NP) isen dire 'they were eaten by the fish  
 (sg.)'  
 árraiñek (EP) janak (NP) isen dire 'they were eaten by the fish  
 (pl.)'

An Eastern dialect with a distinctive ending for the ergative plural would overtly distinguish the last members of these sets from the other two.

23. In some of the cases we have looked at, ambiguity was reduced or eliminated by an indication coming from the transitive verb of the same clause as to the number of its subject or object. The number of a noun may, of course, be indicated in a variety of other ways by its occurrence in a broader context, including other preceding clauses, such as by its occurrence with a numeral or with an intransitive verb, where its own ending as well as the verb would have shown its number (cf. sec. 13). The following Western written examples belong to one such case:

etorri dan gizonak (ES) ikusi ditu (ES+NP) 'the man who came  
 saw them'  
 etorri diran gizonak (NP) ikusi ditu (ES+NP) 'he saw the men  
 who came'

As we saw in sec. 15, the last three words, *gizonak ikusi ditu*, would by themselves constitute an ambiguous clause, but here there is an

introductory relative clause with an intransitive verb, which removes the ambiguity by indicating the number of the noun that it modifies. A similar reduction of ambiguity would operate between a transitive subordinate clause and an intransitive main clause, distinguishing, for example, between the following:

ikusi ditun (ES+NP) gizona (NS) etorri da 'the man who saw them came'

ikusi ditun (ES+NP) gizonak (NP) etorri dira 'the men whom he saw came'

(where the relative clause has been formed with deletion of ambiguous \**gizonak*). As we have seen (sec. 16), such an indication of number does not always resolve ambiguities:

etorri diran gizonak (EP/NP) ikusi dituzte (EP+NP) 'the men who came saw them/they saw the men who came'

24. The choice between nominative and ergative, unlike that between singular and plural, is limited to a single clause, and does not show agreement to a wider context. The following Western written example represents a different class of ambiguity, wherein the context makes clear that a noun must represent a certain case, but does not delimit its number. The conjoined nouns must be in the ergative case, since the noun phrase as a whole is ergative plural, which the verb indicates by allowing for a plural subject but not a plural object, but the number of each individual noun is left unspecified:

gizonak (ES/EP) eta txakurrak (ES/EP) ikusi dute (EP+NS)  
'the man/men and the dog/dogs saw it'

Our next examples show the resolution of this ambiguity for the first of the two nouns by the number agreement of the possessive pronoun, *bere* 'his' vs. *beren* 'their', which indicates the number of its antecedent:

gizonak (ES) eta bere txakurrak (ES/EP) ikusi dute (EP+NS)  
'the man and his dog/dogs saw it'

gizonak (EP) eta beren txakurrak (ES/EP) ikusi dute (EP+NS)  
'the men and their dog/dogs saw it'

In Eastern dialects the number of a noun in the ergative is, of course, shown by its ending, as suggested by the following example:

gizonek (EP) eta txakurrak (ES) ikusi dute (EP+NS) 'the men  
and the dog saw it'

25. We have been sampling aspects of a delicately balanced system, as so often in languages, wherein a moderate amount of syncretism between potentially important case endings is kept tolerable because of evidence provided by the total context, with indications as to number coming from the agreement of verb affixes and of other classes of words such as possessive pronouns, plus evidence from earlier occurrences of the same noun in contexts where modifying words or its own ending would unambiguously show number, and indications as to case coming from the choice between intransitive and transitive verbs and from the person and number possibilities left open for subject and object by the endings on the finite transitive verb. There is no reason to assume that the system is either insufficient or unstable. This seems to be one more reminder that a language is an integrated system in which each part finds its appropriate place.