

Converging and diverging grammars

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Belauinaldi arteko ikerketa linguistiko bonetan erakusten dugu Euskal Herriko gaztelaniaren hainbat ezaugarriren artean, bala nola aditz aurreko ezeztapen bikoitzak, subjektu lexikoak infinitiboetako perpausetan, izenekiko komunztadura falta, klitikoetako bikoizketa, objektu isilak eta hitz ordenari dagozkion zenbait, bakar batzuk bakarrik iraun duten, beste batzuk galdu diren bitartean. Egoera hau hipotesi bonen bitartez esplikatzen dugu, alegia fenomeno sintaktikoak ez direla beren gisan bizi baina euren biziraupena sistema gramatikal oso baten baitakoa dela.

Giltz-Hitzak: Ukimen linguistiko. Euskal Herriko gaztelania. Aldaera sintaktikoa. Perpaus infinitiboen subjektu lexikoak. Aditz aurreko ezeztapen bikoitzak. Izenekiko komunztadura falta. Klitikoetako bikoizketa. Hitz ordena. Erreferentziadun objektu isilak.

En este estudio intergeneracional de la evolución del castellano del País Vasco en relación al orden de palabras y construcciones con dobles negativos preverbiales, sujetos léxicos con infinitivos, ausencia de concordancia nominal, duplicamiento de clíticos y objetos nulos, mostramos que algunos de estos rasgos han desaparecido en el transcurso de una generación de hablantes mientras otros aún permanecen. Esta situación la explicamos en función de nuestra hipótesis de que un fenómeno sintáctico no sobrevive aislado sino que su futuro depende de un sistema de propiedades sintácticas.

Palabras Clave: Contacto lingüístico. Castellano del País Vasco. Variación sintáctica. Sujetos léxicos con infinitivos. Negativos dobles preverbiales. Ausencia de concordancia nominal. Duplicamiento de clíticos. Orden de palabras. Objetos nulos referenciales.

Le sujet de cet article est l'évolution de plusieurs traits grammaticaux de l'espagnol du Pays basque, à savoir, notamment, les sujets lexicaux des phrases infinitives, les négations doubles préverbiales, l'absence d'accord nominal, le redoublement des clitiques, l'ordre des mots et les objets nuls. Nous montrons que quelques uns de ces propriétés ont disparu au bout d'une génération, tandis que d'autres se sont maintenues. Nous expliquons cette évolution à partir de l'hypothèse que les phénomènes syntaxiques ne peuvent pas être abordés d'une manière isolée, mais dépendent de tout un système grammatical.

Mots Clés: Contact linguistique. Espagnol du Pays basque. Variation syntaxique. Sujets lexicaux des phrases infinitives. Négations doubles préverbiales. Absence d'accord nominal. Redoublement des clitiques. Ordre des mots. Objets nuls référentiels.

1. Introduction*

Minority dialects are in danger of extinction as education in the standard variety is highly encouraged, the media that reach the most remote towns broadcast in the mainstream variety, and there is a trend on the speakers' part that aims at linguistic uniformity in business-driven linguistic communities.

Interestingly, whereas most of these agonizing varieties are still recognizable by some specific features from the peripheral areas of grammar, namely, the lexical and phonological components, which are mildly targeted in these blendings, the syntax of these minority dialects seem to face an uncertain fate. Relevantly, this highly contrasts with the linguistic facts from languages in a contact situation which exhibit a converging lexicon and phonology, but singularly, preserve their own syntactic properties independently despite their mutual influence. In this investigation, we carry out a cross-generational study of the evolution of Basque Spanish and show how some syntactic characteristics of Basque Spanish have disappeared over a generation of speakers, whereas some others are still present in younger generations. Specifically, we have focused our analysis on lexical subjects in infinitival constructions, double negatives in preverbal position, nominal disagreement, clitic doubling, inflectional morphology, word order, possessive determiners and referential null objects. Bearing these data in mind, the goal of this investigation has been to determine why some syntactic properties stay and others are more vulnerable. In this regard it is claimed here that (i) the pre-existence of a certain degree of structural similarities between the standard variety and the dialect in question is required for a characteristic to remain in the latter (adapted from Prince 1992), and (ii) a syntactic phenomenon does not survive in isolation, but its future is linked to that of a cluster of syntactic properties.

In the next sections we are going to discuss a number of morpho-syntactic traits typical of Basque Spanish that were productive eight years ago (cf. Landa 1990, 1995) and attempt to give an account of their present status, that is, to explain why they have survived or disappeared.

2. Basque Spanish (1990)

In Landa (1990, 1995), Basque Spanish is defined as the Spanish spoken by Basque bilinguals and monolinguals who have lived most of their lives in the Basque Country and whose main Spanish input has always come from persons with characteristics similar to those just mentioned. Thus, two main types of varieties were left out of previous studies: (a) varieties spoken by subjects who have come to the Basque

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Country after the age of 11 (age at which, most grammar patterns seem to get fixed in a person's speech; cf. Lenneberg 1967, Pueyo 1986), and (b) varieties spoken by subjects whose main Spanish input (family, peers, in-group relationships) has come from speakers characterized as in (a). In the corpus of data analyzed in those previous investigations (Landa 1990, 1995), one could find in the Spanish spoken by the Basques a number of characteristics that will be discussed next.

2.1. Lexical subjects in infinitival constructions

This is not an intrinsic feature of Basque Spanish, but the distribution of these overt subjects in Basque Spanish seems to be wider than in Castilian Spanish or most Spanish varieties, as shown in (1)-(3):

- (1) *Yo ir a pedirle los libros no lo haría ni loco!*
 I go to ask him the books not it do-cond. not crazy
 'To go to ask him for the books, I wouldn't do it even if I was crazy.'
- (2) *Aquí está tu padre así que tú ni mover!*
 Here is your father so you not move
 'Here comes your father so do not even move!'
- (3) *Para Josu sacar eso ha tenido que tener iluminación divina.*
 For Josu to get that has had to have illumination divine
 'For Josu to get that he must have had divine inspiration.'

Usually, Peninsular Spanish lexical subjects with infinitivals are postverbal, and they also improve their status when the verb is preceded by a preposition (cf. Elordieta 1993). Therefore, the sentences in (1)-(3) are odd to the average Spanish speaker if not deviant.

2.2. Referential null objects

This is perhaps the most typical characteristic of the syntax of Basque Spanish. The direct object clitics *lo/s* and *la/s* which normally take a definite NP as their antecedent are dropped when they refer to an inanimate entity. This is exemplified in (4):

- (4) *Te he traído el coche; porque hace un ruido pero*
 2CL have brought the car because makes a noise, but
 'I brought you the car because it makes a noise, but
si no puedes mirar e; hoy miras e; mañana.
 if not can look today look tomorrow
 if you can't take a look at it today, look at it tomorrow.'

Basque Spanish shares this feature with other varieties of Spanish in contact with Quechua and also with Brazilian Portuguese to a certain degree. French and Italian only allow arbitrary null objects whereas mainstream Spanish allows arbitrary and referential null objects whose antecedent is a bare NP, as in the dialogue in (5):

(5) SPEAKER A: ¿Has comprado aceite?
 Have bought-Part oil
 'Have you bought oil?'

SPEAKER B: No, no he podido comprar e.
 No, no have can-Part buy
 'No I couldn't buy (it).'

In Landa (1995) it is argued that null objects in Basque Spanish entail the loss of the bare NP restriction that operates in Standard Spanish. As a sociolinguistic remark, this phenomenon (typical of Basque Spanish) has been attested in the speech of bilinguals and monolinguals regardless of their educational background.

2.3. Dropping of (inherent) reflexive clitics

This feature, which appears illustrated in (6) and (7) below, is somehow related to the phenomenon of null objects since it also involves the dropping of a clitic:

(6) Parecía que (se) estaba riendo de nosotros como un actor o algo
 Seemed that Refl.CL was laughing at us like an actor or something
así.
 like that
 'It seemed that he was laughing at us like an actor or something like that.'

(7) Y (se) puso ropas viejas como si sería pobre.
 And Refl.CL put.Pret. clothes old.Pl like if be-Cond. poor
 'And she put on old clothes as if she was poor.'

In (6) and (7), the dropping of the reflexive clitic *se* correlates to the idea put forward in Landa & Franco (1996) that Basque speakers assume that the information encoded by DO reflexive clitics is already present in the inflected verbal chunk. Incidentally, the dropping of reflexive clitics is more stigmatized than the occurrence of null objects.

2.4. *Leísmo*

This feature refers to the substitution of etymological DO accusative clitic forms *lo/s* and *la/s* by etymologically dative *le/les* forms, but still keeping an accusative function. The *leísmo* found in Basque Spanish is half-way between the *leísmo* of educated speech that replaces the *lo* forms that refer to animate masculine entities by *le* and the "radical" *leísmo* that substitutes all the etymological accusative clitics by the etymological dative *le*. In other words, in Basque Spanish, only IO and DO clitics that refer to animate entities are rendered by the clitic *le*, as exemplified in (8):

(8) SPEAKER A: ¿Sabes dónde está Aintzane?
 know.2 where is Aintzane
 'Do you know where Aintzane is?'

SPEAKER B: Creo que le he visto en la biblioteca.
 think.1 that him.CL have.1 seen in the library
 'I think I have seen him in the library.'

2.5. Direct Object Clitic Doubling

This phenomenon is the mirror image of null objects, and in Basque Spanish it is also related to the *leísmo* phenomenon. In this variety, DO arguments can only be clitic-doubled by the clitic *le*; therefore, only animate nominals, like *Pedro* in (9), can be doubled. Recall that, with very few exceptions, null object constructions are usually employed when the antecedent of the empty DO has inanimate reference.

- (9) ¿*Le_i has visto a Pedro_i?*
 him.CL have.2 seen to Pedro
 Have you seen Pedro?

In (9), the clitic *le* is coreferential with the canonical DO *a Pedro*. This phenomenon has been claimed to be an instance of object-verb agreement in several works such as Silva-Corvalán (1981, 1984), Borer (1984), Suñer (1988), and Franco (1993) *inter alia*. As for the syntactic representation of clitics, especially, in clitic doubling constructions, Fernández-Soriano (1989) and Franco (1991) have argued for a mapping of Spanish clitics as functional AGRO heads.

2.6. Double negatives in preverbal position

Strikingly, unlike in standard Spanish, in some varieties of Basque Spanish not only negative words in postverbal positions need to be licensed by a negative particle attached to the verb, but also preverbal subjects and adverbs. So both postverbal and preverbal N-words seem to function as NPIs for some speakers of Basque Spanish, as shown in (10)-(12):

- (10) *Nunca no nos ha faltado de comer.* vs. *Nunca nos ha faltado de comer.*
 Never no CL.1Pl has lacked to eat
 'We never have run short of food.'
- (11) *Aquí nadie no sabe sobre eso.* vs. *Aquí nadie sabe sobre eso.*
 Here nobody not knows about that
 'Here nobody knows about that.'
- (12) *Con este alcalde nada no tiene sentido.* vs. *Con este alcalde nada tiene sentido*
 With this mayor nothing no has sense
 'With this mayor, nothing makes sense.'

2.7. Verb final sentences

This feature refers to the finding, among a wide range of all possible word orders, of a great number of examples of sentences with the verb in final position and usually entailing the relaxation of some sort of semantic or pragmatic constraint operating on verb final constructions in most Spanish varieties. This particular order illustrated in (13), or at least its high frequency, contrasts with the attested SVO, VOS, VSO orders in other varieties of Spanish (cf. Arnaiz 1991):

- (13) SPEAKER A: ¿Y hoy qué hacéis?
and today what do.2PL
And what are you doing today?' ('What are your plans for today?')
- SPEAKER B: A la playa vamos, a aprovechar...
to the beach go.1Pl, to take advantage
We are going to the beach to take advantage (of the weather).'

2.8. Nominal phi-feature agreement

This refers to the specification of the features <number> and <gender> in some lexical items which differs from that of standard Spanish. Plural marking is found instead of singular, as in (14ab), or feminine nouns co-occur with masculine determiners as in (14b) and (15):

- (14) a. *Celebramos mis cumpleaños el domingo.*
Celebrate.Pret my birthdays the Sunday
'We celebrated my birthday last Sunday.'
- b. ¿Tienes un tiritas (SS. una tiritita)?
Have a.Masc.sg bandaid.Fem.pl
'Do you have a bandaid?'
- (15) *Entonces traje el radio y escuchamos el partido mientras veíamos en la tele.*
Then brought the.Masc radio and listened the game while
watched on the TV
'Then he brought the radio and listened to the game while we watched it on TV.'

Examples like (14a) normally go unnoticed, however, examples such as those in (14b) and (15) used to be perhaps one of the most prototypical traits of this variety, and were used in the 70's by comedians to mock the speech of the Basques.¹ Normally, this was a feature that was present in the speech of those who were more proficient in Basque than in Spanish. It is worthy of note that Basque nouns do not have grammatical gender, so the nominal feature specification in Spanish has to be learned from scratch by those native speakers of Basque.

2.9. Possessive Definite Determiners

Even though Basque has possessive pronouns, this language makes use of an unmarked strategy to express inherent possession at the sentence level. That is, the definite determiner on a salient family nominal can function the same as a possessive pronoun. This strategy has a straightforward replica in Basque Spanish too. These constructions are illustrated in (16) and (17) for both languages:

(1) In relation to some of these prototypical features of Basque Spanish, Lapesa (1986: 477) refers to '[...] las confusiones de género, el peculiar orden de palabras y otros contagios sintácticos del eusquera (sic) en los aldeanos vascos', as typical traits of the speech of Spanish-Basque bilinguals.

- (16) a. *Anai -a dator.*
 brother-Abs come.3s.pres.prog
 My brother is coming.
- b. *Ama-k ezetz esa-n dio.*
 mother-Erg no say-perf aux-3sDat.3sErg
 His mother has told him "no".
- (17) a. *Viene el hermano.*
 Comes the-masc brother
 My brother is coming.
- b. *Le ha dicho la madre que no.*
 him.CL have.3 said the-fem mother that no
 His mother told him "no".

In (17ab) the definite articles *el* and *la* occur in lieu of the possessive pronouns *mi* 'my' and *su* 'his/her', which would be the expected Spanish forms under the meaning given in the glosses. In (17a), the article takes the speaker as its antecedent, whereas in (17b), the possessor antecedent of the article is the indirect object clitic. The same applies to the nominal definite suffix article *-a(k)* in the Basque examples in (16).

3. The evolution of Basque Spanish (August 1998)

Let us explore now why in present-day Basque Spanish, some of the features mentioned in the previous section have become residual whereas other have remained steady.² Without doubt, the feature most immune to change is that of referential null objects. As for all the other features, we have witnessed a demise in their occurrence, although to different extents. In our analysis we are going to claim that many of those features hold a relation to each other.

3.1. Disappearing characteristics in Basque Spanish

Let us begin by those features that have least import in nowadays Basque Spanish. Nominal disagreement is practically extinct since gender specification is naturally acquired and polished at school and the majority of today Basques acquire Spanish as a native language. Still, some relic of it can be found in the speech of country people, but this stigmatization per se makes it bound to disappear.

Double negatives and verb final word order seem to follow a parallel fate. Double negatives in preverbal position are rarely found nowadays and this construction is restricted to the isolated speech of individuals of 60 years of age onwards. Sentences with verbs in final position have become less frequent too. We believe that the

(2) There are other features, such as the use of the conditional in lieu of the subjunctive, that are not exclusive of Basque Spanish and, consequently, cannot be regarded, at least by themselves, as differentiating traits with respect to other Peninsular varieties. For this reason, those features will not be discussed here.

correlation between the two phenomena has to do with the head parameter and focus position in Basque. The head parameter with verbs is easily transferable as far as the VS vs. SV and SVO vs. SOV orders are concerned, especially in languages like Spanish and Basque that allow a relatively free ordering of their major constituents. A simultaneous command of different focus positions across languages, on the other hand, is hard to internalize, as shown in Sarrionandia (1998). Relevantly, whereas the default new information focus position in Basque is pre-verbal, the focus position in Spanish is postverbal. Thus, we find Basque speakers producing unnatural orders in Spanish such as (18) with a preverbal focused constituent, and Spanish speakers producing the awkward Basque sentence in (19) with an unaccusative verb and a post-verbal focused constituent (cf. Jevenois 1997):

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (18) # <i>Alfredo soy.</i> | (19) # <i>Heldu da tren-a.</i> |
| Alfredo am | arrive has train-det |
| ‘This is Alfredo’ | ‘The train has arrived.’ |

If we assume that Basque Spanish had its original primary source in the speech of Basque bilinguals it might have been the case that many of the old speakers of Basque Spanish kept the Basque head last parameter for clauses. Nowadays since Basque Spanish has been spread by Spanish-speaking monolinguals who do not have any feeding source of head final syntax available, and faced with overwhelming evidence for head initial order, the head last parameter in main clauses has begun to lose ground among the speakers of Basque Spanish.

Now, negative polarity items need to be licensed by a *m/c*-commanding head in Basque (cf. Laka 1990, Uribe-Etxeberria 1994). Thus, in the Basque sentence in (20), the negative particle *ez* would be the head of a functional projection in whose specifier sits the NPI, *inork*:

- (20) *Inor-k ez daki.*
 Nobody-ERG not knows
 ‘Nobody knows.’

Contrastively, *nadie* in the Spanish sentence in (11) works like *nobody* in English, that is why it can occur in subject position without a licensing negative particle. Moreover, it can also mean ‘anybody’ in postverbal position. In Basque, the ergative marked subject *inork* in (20) only functions as the English *anybody*; hence, any negative item in subject position has to be licensed as an NPI, and this is precisely the interpretation that Basques get of Spanish *nadie* in (11). Consequently, *nadie* would be licensed by the negative particle *no*. Now, how do we relate subject NPIs in Basque Spanish to the head final parameter? We can conjecture that the distinction between preverbal *n*-words and postverbal *n*-words is obliterated by the verb head final parameter,³ thus, in Basque all *n*-words are licensed as if they were NPIs. As the verb head final parameter ceases to be operative in Basque Spanish, the speakers have to

(3) Incidentally, Hungarian, which is a head final language in many respects, also requires that all *n*-words be licensed as NPIs.

recast the distribution of *nadie* with its corresponding two meanings, and the presence of the particle *no* becomes unmotivated with preverbal *n*-words. This process is already completed in present-day Basque Spanish.

3.2. Word order, infinitivals and lexical subjects

The remaining present higher index of frequency of verb final sentences in Basque Spanish in comparison with other Spanish varieties is not, however, a trait of great significance since it is somehow disguised in the relatively free ordering of words found in Spanish. Yet, it is of a more conspicuous nature that infinitival clauses are used in contexts in which the imperative form or the subjunctive form of the verb would be expected, at least in mainstream varieties, as in (21):

- (21) *¡Mikel, eso poner ahí pasar por debajo y sacar de la misma!*
 Mikel that put there pass underneath and get out at once
 'Mikel, put that there, pass it under, and take it out immediately'

It would be at the very least questionable to attribute the high occurrence of infinitivals in Basque Spanish to Basque influence since Basque has an inflected subjunctive and imperative. This avoidance of finite forms rather seems to be a universal tendency in languages whether they be in contact situations or not. Often speakers sacrifice the inflected imperative for a bare form of the verb as in (22a), or the subjunctive/conditional for a clausal nominalization, as in (22b). These are two competing alternatives in Basque, or English for that matter (see 22b):

- (22) a. *Deitu Mikel* vs. *Dei iezaiozu Mikel*
 Call Mikel.Dat Call aux-3sDat.2sErg Mikel.Dat
 'Call Mikel!'
 b. *Mikelek exigitu zuen (bere) Hawaii-ra joa-tea*
 Mikel.Erg demand Aux.Pret. his Hawaii to go-Nominalizer
 'Mike demanded that he go to Hawaii/his going to Hawaii.'

Thus, it might well be the case that the occurrence of infinitival forms in Basque Spanish is somehow spurred, though not motivated, by Basque nominalizations and bare verbal forms, but again its origin comes straight from core Universal Grammar.

In the spirit of our initial claim that syntactic phenomena are linked to one another, we can conjecture that multiple occurrence of infinitival clauses relax the licensing conditions for lexical subjects with non-finite verbs. To round it up, even though lexical subjects of infinitival clauses have been attested in several varieties of Spanish, Caribbean Spanish being one of the most prominent ones in this respect, Basque verbal nominalizations may indirectly reinforce, through their infinitival Spanish counterparts, the occurrence of lexical subjects with non-finite verbs in the Spanish variety in contact, that is, Basque Spanish.

3.3. Clitic doubling, *léismo* and null objects

To the best of our knowledge, the clitic system is the area of syntax in Spanish most permeable to change (cf. Landa 1995). We have recently observed that speakers

can change their clitic system three or four times in the course of their lives, according to the place where they live, their work, or a significant change in their social network(s). Thus, some of the speakers from Landa's (1990) corpus have become partially *laísta* over this relatively short period of time. From a theoretical point of view, this permeability of the clitic system is easily accounted for if we assume the Agreement Hypothesis for Spanish object clitics put forward in section 2 above (and in the references cited there). The rationale has the flavor of Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist Program, that is, the feature permeability of the clitic paradigms would be a property of AGR heads having [non-interpretable] features.

In any event, the object clitic scenario in 1990 was the following: all animate objects regardless of their function, that is, direct objects or indirect objects co-occurred with the clitic *le* or were referred to by the clitic *le*. That yielded a high degree of clitic doubling since *le* forms and animate entities favor clitic doubling constructions. Inanimate direct objects were seldom rendered by the etymological accusative forms *lo/s*, *la/s*; on the contrary, these direct objects do not have a corresponding clitic form in general, but a zero realization. In effect, these cases constitute the bulk of the so-called null object phenomenon in Basque Spanish.

Incidentally, for a number of sociolinguistic reasons which will not be discussed here, the value [-feminine] of the feature <gender> has nowadays acquired a new relevance giving rise to the occurrence of the etymological accusative feminine *la* forms throughout many varieties of Peninsular Spanish. In fact, the *la* forms have even spread taking over the dative *le* forms when the referent is feminine; this is known as *laísmo*.

How does this change affect the clitic system and null object construction in Basque Spanish? In Franco & Landa (1991), it was proposed that Basque Spanish has a full-fledged object-verb agreement system which was realized through clitic doubling by *le* and by a zero clitic for inanimate direct objects. Evidence for this zero clitic was brought from the distribution of null objects which in Franco & Landa (1991) were shown to be *pros*, and not variables. Crucially, these null object *pros* are licensed by this zero agreement clitic morpheme.

Interestingly, null object constructions seem to be unaffected by this change via the diffusion of *la* forms in the clitic system. In contrast, the introduction of the feature <feminine gender> takes a toll on direct object clitic doubling in Basque Spanish. The up-dated distribution is the following: (i) masculine animate objects are rendered by the *le* forms; (ii) clitics that have feminine animate object referents coexist with the old system, that is, they are rendered by *le*, and by the incoming fashionable *la* forms. Since the *la* forms have the additional feature <gender> they have more content and their agreement morpheme status weakens somehow, that is, clitic doubling is more difficult with *la* forms. Therefore, DO clitic doubling is relegated to the coexisting form *le*. It is even the case that those speakers that have exclusively adopted the *la* forms for animate feminine DOs only clitic double with masculine objects.

Going back to the phenomenon of null objects, at this stage, we are ready to provide an answer to their robust occurrence in present day Basque Spanish. Bearing the facts above in mind, we notice that the context of distribution of null objects is left untouched. In other words, the change in progress with the emerging *la* forms only

affects feminine *animate* entities and, crucially, null objects are restricted to inanimate entities. From a morphological perspective it could be said that the paradigm slot for null objects has been preserved, as shown in (23):

(23) Distribution of DO clitics in Basque Spanish (1998)

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1st p.	<i>me</i>	<i>nos</i>
2nd p.	<i>te</i>	<i>os</i>
3rd p. [+anim. masc.]	<i>le</i>	<i>les</i>
3rd.p [+anim. fem.]	<i>lella</i>	<i>les</i>
3rd.p [-inanim.]	\emptyset	\emptyset

The crucial point is that the feature <feminine> in the clitic system has only become active for natural gender, but not for grammatical gender. As long as this distribution remains we predict that null objects in Basque Spanish are here to stay.

3.4. The possessive definite determiner

Interestingly, the relation of possession expressed by the definite article head of the DP and illustrated in (17) is one of the least noticed and the least stigmatized features in Basque Spanish. From the point of view of language contact, the survival of this construction falls under the same rationale used in this investigation, that is, the existence of parallel structures in the standard Spanish variety, though more restricted in the latter. Indeed, Spanish does not require the presence of the possessive pronouns with definite nominals as strongly as other languages do. Let us compare Spanish and English:

- (24) a. *Tengo el dinero en el/mi bolsillo.*
 b. *I have the money in my pocket.*

- (25) a. *¡No te subas a la chepa! *a mi chepa!*
 b. *Get off my back!*

In (24a) both the possessive and the article are possible in Spanish with the intended meaning of the English example in (24b) which is only acceptable with the possessive pronoun. Example (25) illustrates similar idioms in English and Spanish, however, the possessive pronoun accompanying the nominal is only allowed in English. In any event, the fact that (24a) and (25a) occur in Standard Spanish makes it possible for the Basque Spanish constructions in (17) to go through by a mere extension of their domain of application.

At the syntactic level, we claim that the most descriptively accurate hypothesis would be to posit the existence of a sentence or discourse topic in the structure of the left periphery of the sentence that binds the definite article long distance. This seems to correlate with the facts in (16) and (17), in which it is the speaker or the person we are commenting on that serves as the antecedent of the possessive article. In addition, there is an alternative analysis under which the possession relation is rendered via agreement morphology, either in the form of an object agreement clitic or a regu-

lar semi-fusional subject verb agreement morph. Thus, the latter hypothesis accounts without further stipulation for the sentences in (26):

- (26) a. *Me viene el hermano.*
 CL-1sg come-3sg. the brother
 'My brother is coming.'
- b. *Queremos que la madre se ponga bien.*
 want-1pl. that the mother CL-Reflx. get-3sg. well
 'We want (our) Mother to get well.'

In (26a) the clitic *me* 'I' identifies the possessor as the speaker,⁴ whereas in (26b) it is the verbal inflection *-mos* '1pl' that indicates who the possessor is.

Both strategies, that is, that of topic binder and that of possessor agreement might be part of the same process of licensing possession relationships, especially if we contemplate inflectional morphology as an intermediate link between the topic and the DP headed by a definite article. However, the possessor agreement strategy by itself comes short to account for sentences like the ones exemplified in (17) or (27):

- (27) *La madre está enferma.*
 The mother is sick
 'Our mother is sick.'

Notice that in (27) there is no person agreement morphology that indicates that the possessor is first person. Only a topic that binds 'the mother' could yield the correct interpretation.

4. Summary and final remarks

Although, the fate of a dialect is contingent upon its speakers' attitude towards that dialect or the sociological context in general, its survival is also linked to its particular syntactic properties that, while bearing some structural similarity to the syntax of the standard variety, also constitute a differentiating factor. This explains why verb final clauses survive and preverbal double negatives are on the verge of disappearing in Basque Spanish. Furthermore, since syntactic characteristics do not occur by themselves but in association with other syntactic traits —not so consciously perceived by the speakers sometimes— the erosion or merging of a syntactic property entails the thorough modification of a whole cluster of properties. This in turn means a lengthy and costly process for the syntactic change to be completed. Whence, we conclude that a syntactically distinctive variety withstands best the current trends of merging into the standard variety. Thus, although this needs further research we would like to advance the working hypothesis that when comparing Basque Spanish with other Peninsular minority dialects, it is crucially a specific syntax and inflec-

(4) Again, in the line of thought of this paper and works cited here, this is only possible because the encoding of possession relations via agreement clitics is already part of the grammar of Spanish:

(i) *El editor les entregó los trabajos a los autores.*
 The editor CL-3Pl gave the works to the authors
 'The editor gave the papers to their authors.'

tional morphology that keeps this dialect alive. In this way, other Peninsular dialects of Spanish such as Aragonese and Southern Leonese are almost extinct —or at least they are in terms of distinctive grammars since their differentiating features have long been limited to the phonological and lexical realms.

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