Icelandic Basque pidgin

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Abstract

In this paper I present an analysis of what remains of a trade language born in the seventeenth century as a consequence of Basque fishing trips in the North Atlantic.

Since the data that we have show a linguistic system in an early stage of development and the languages in contact are easily identifiable, whichever characteristics are present in the contact language will be traceable to one of the initial languages or to universal tendencies[1]. For this purpose, an analysis of the main typological features of both Basque and Icelandic is also provided.*

1. Introduction

The only remaining vestige that we have of what appears to have been used as a means of communication between Basque whale hunters and Icelandic traders in the seventeenth century is constituted by a few sentences, together with a word list. The existence of this pidgin seems to have gone virtually unnoticed. Hancock (1977) does not mention it in his "Repertoire of Pidgin and Creole Languages" although he mentions an extinct Icelandic French Pidgin.

My source of information is Nicolaas Deen's *Glossaria duo Vasco-Islandica* (Amsterdam 1937, reprinted in this volume), which is a commentary and translation of two manuscripts written in Iceland in the seventeenth century. Since the contact situation was interrupted in the first part of the eighteenth century and was of intermittent nature, the contact pidgin probably never developed much further than the stage recorded in the manuscripts. The first manuscript lacks interest for our purposes since it is just a list of lexical items seemingly elicited from the Basque sailors by pointing at different objects and vaguely organized according to semantic fields.

Most of the second manuscript contains similar information. Only at the end of the second manuscript do we find something of a different nature. Here the listed

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(1) One must keep in mind, however, that at least some Basque sailors may have had a certain familiarity with Gascon, French and Spanish. The presence in the pidgin of lexical items from other languages, such as English, does not imply, on the other hand, any knowledge of the structure of these languages on the part of the users of the pidgin. It is possible that a greater influence can be imputed to Icelandic French Pidgin, in case this developed earlier, which I have not been able to confirm, as well as to other pidgins.

items include conjunctions and other parts of speech hardly obtainable by direct elicitation. Now we find not only Basque words or French and Spanish words possibly borrowed into the language of the Basque seamen, but also words from other origins, like *clinke*, translated as 'little', possibly from some Germanic language; *morta*, from Spanish, translated as 'to kill' and certainly never incorporated into Basque; even what seems to be an Icelandic word with a Basque article, *kichera* (from *kyker+a*, according to Deen)[2]. More interestingly, some sentences are included which certainly are not Basque. What we have at the end of the second manuscript is a sample of a real "mixed language". It is to the study of this contact language that this paper will be dedicated.

The fact that the materials from the trade pidgin are not separated from what seems to be a pure Basque vocabulary list may indicate that in the mind of the Icelandic scribe everything was Basque. This is in accordance with what Hall (1966: 12) reports from Russenorsk:

> Each side was firmly convinced it was speaking the other's language and so the slogan sentence of Russonorsk [sic] was /moja pɔ tvoja/ "I [will speak] in your [language]."

Even if the lexicon of our pidgin is mostly Basque, the structure of the sentences does not resemble that of Basque. This is hardly surprising. It has been noticed that the grammar of a pidgin or a creole lexically based on a language A may be quite similar to that of another pidgin or creole spoken in a different part of the world, but diverge widely from that of language A. DeCamp (1977) points out that French based creoles spoken in the Indian Ocean as well as in the Caribbean are mutually intelligible but unintelligible with French.

Certain surprising similarities among pidgins and creoles spoken in places distant from each other and with different linguistic components in their formation have led some linguistic to formulate a monogenetic theory that would trace many pidgins and creoles to a common ancestor: A Portuguese based pidgin or even to the Lingua Franca or Sabir spoken in the Mediterranean Basin from the Middle Ages (Whinnom, 1977).

An opposite view would see the structure of a pidgin as a result of simplification strategies that would lead the participants to reduce the grammar of a language to a rudimentary manner (Ferguson and DeBose, 1977). Those points in which the basic grammar of the languages in contact clearly diverged would be decided by borrowing the rule from either language or rather by relying on Universal Grammar, in the opinion of Givón (1979).

Bickerton (1983) on the other hand, concludes from the study of Hawaiian English Pidgin and Creole that pidgins do not have a stable grammar; this being accommodated to those of the native languages of different speakers. In those circums-

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(2) Deen does not offer a translation for the supposedly Icelandic word *kyker*. The closest in Standard Icelandic seems to be *kikir* 'telescope.' Since IPB *kichera* is translated as *syndu mier* 'show me,' Deen's interpretation is possibly erroneous. This is not a noun with a Basque article but an IPB verb, which, like the other IPB verbs, ends also in -*a* (cf: *presenta*, 'to give,' *travala* 'to do,' *trucka* 'to buy'). It is very likely that *kichera* is related to Icelandic *kikja* 'look through the glass,' and Dutch *kijken* 'to look.'

tances, the first generation of creole speakers must fix the structure of the language according to their innate grammar. This is what produces great grammatical similarities among creoles. In Bickerton's view the innate human grammar would be creole grammar and this is what children will produce in the absence of a unified input that forces them to adapt their innate grammar to that of the community in which they were born.

In any case, in spite of Bickerton's observation, a certain amount of grammatical coherence is to be expected in any pidgin. At the very least, the syntax or the morphology has to provide certain ways to determine basic semantic relations like those of agent and patient. In some way (including intonation) statements, questions and commands need also to be distinguished in the linguistic signal to make possible the simplest linguistic interaction.

It has been argued that for a truly viable pidgin to develop, at least three groups of people speaking mutually unintelligible languages are needed. In the case that concerns us here, there are only two groups: Basque and Icelandic speakers. The data that we have show indeed a contact language of the most rudimentary kind, adequate only for a basic commercial interaction.

The sociolinguistic aspects of the contact situation may lead us to seek for the closest parallel in Russenorsk. In both cases we have two groups of Europeans without a common language which temporarily but repeatedly enter into contact for commercial reasons.

In our case one of the two languages, Basque, does not belong to the Indoeuropean family of languages.

In the rest of this paper I will examine the structural characteristics of what I will baptize Icelandic Basque Pidgin in relation to Basque, Icelandic and other pidgins. For this purpose, I first need to outline the main typological characteristics of Basque and Icelandic.

2. Basque

2.1. Word order and case marking.

The order of constituents in the Basque sentence seems to be quite free. In fact, the main constituents are ordered in terms of pragmatic functions in a way similar to Hungarian. Whichever constituent immediately precedes the verb is understood as the focus of the sentence:

(1) a. Mikel-ek   txori-a ikusi du   c. txori-a Mikel-ek ikusi du
            FOC   FOC
        Mikel-ERG bird-Det seen has   d. Mikel-ek ikusi du txori-a
    b. txori-a ikusi du Mikel-ek   FOC
        FOC   'Mikel saw the bird.'

(1a, b) are answers to the question 'what did Mikel see?' whereas (1c, d) answer to 'who saw the bird?'. Moreover, *Mikel* would be the topic in (1a) and *txoria* 'the bird' would be the topic in (1c).

If we want to focalize the verb, we can do so by inserting *egin* 'to do, to make' between the verb and the auxiliary. (1e) would be an answer to 'what did Mikel do about the bird?':

(1) e. Mikel-ek txori-a ikusi egin du
                     FOC

Other constructions are used with synthetic verbs[3].

This flexibility of word order in terms of grammatical relations can be explained by the fact that every noun phrase is marked for case and, in addition, there is a rich system of verb agreement.

Case marking in Basque is rather straightforward if we compare it with the complexities that different declensions present in some Indoeuropean languages. In Basque there is only one allomorph per case, which is perfectly segmentable from the root (although case and number coalesce in some cases). There is no gender distinction and NP's can be singular, plural or unmarked[4].

Basque is morphologically an ergative language: The subject of a transitive verb (A, following Comrie 1978, 1981)' receives one case (ergative), and both the object of a transitive verb (O) and the subject of an intransitive verb (S) receive another case (absolutive, morphologically $\emptyset$).

(2) Mikel   dator
     S
     Mikel-ABS comes

(3) Jon-ek   Mikel   ikusi du
     A   O
     Jon-ERG Mikel-ABS seen has
     'Jon has seen Mikel.'

However, in spite of the morphology, the test of coordinate structures shows that syntactically, there is a subject/object distinction similar to that of languages with nominative morphology: S and A are grouped together. Both A and S are the subjects of their respective sentences. A, and not O, is interpreted as coreferential with the missing S of a coordinate intransitive clause:

(4) Jon-ek   Mikel   ikusi du eta joan da
     Jon-ERG Mikel-ABS seen has and gone has
     'Jon$_i$ saw Mikel and (he$_i$) left.'

The verb agrees with subject, object and indirect object. This allows for deletion of pronominal noun phrases that would be marked for ergative, absolutive and dative cases. (5a and 5b) are equivalent:

(5) a. Ni-k   zu-ri   hura   dakarkizut
      I-ERG you-DAT that-ABS bring-PRES.
      'I bring it to you.'
   b. d-a-kar-kizu-t

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(3) A study of the role of pragmatic functions in the organization of the Basque sentence can be found in Mitxelena (1981).

(4) For a study of the Basque declension, see, for instance, Lafitte (1962: 54-63) or Alvarez Enparantza (1978).

a= -past kar= root 'bring' kizu= 2p. DAT t = 1p. ERG
d=3p. ABS
'I bring it to you.'

In spite of the fact that, as we said before, the order of constituents depends on pragmatic functions, it is possible to establish a basic order for subject and object. For this, it is not enough to suppress a context for the sentence. Due to the case marking, it is difficult to take a given order as neutral. However, there are certain constructions where a transitive verb takes an absolutive subject. This occurs with the progressive construction. The first NP is the subject of the sentence and the second is the object. Only a marked intonation and a clear context could reverse the interpretation:

(6) gizon-a   emakume-a   jotzen ari   da makil-a-z
    man-the-ABS woman-the-ABS hitting PROG is stick-the-INST
    'The man is hitting the woman with a stick.'

As for the position of the verb, reasons of pattern congruity point to an SOV order, and this is clearly the order in embedded clauses, the complementizer being attached to the verb as a suffix. In main clauses, however, the most frequent order seems to be SVO (Rotaetxe 1978: 334-48)[5].

2.2. Noun phrase.
    The order of elements within the NP is fixed: N-Adj-Det-Case marker. Case is marked, as we see, only once:

(7) liburu-a-ri   (8) liburu berri-a-ri   (9) liburu berri gorri hon-i
    book Det-DAT   book new Det. DAT   book new red this-DAT
    'to the book'   'to this new red book'

2.3. Other constructions.
    The order of constituents in other constructions leads us to classify Basque as a head final language, with no hesitation.

Gen-Noun: NP-Postpos.:

(10) Mikel-en   liburu-a   (12) gizon-a-rekin
     Mikel-GEN   book-Det.   man Det. with
     'Mikel's book.'   'with the man'

Rel. C-head NP: Standard of comparison-Adjective:

(11) datorr-en   gizon-a   (13) Mikel   baino   handi-ago-a
     comes-REL   man-Det   Mikel-ABS than   big more Det
     'the man who is coming'   'bigger than Mikel'

Only in the relative position of noun and adjective within the NP does Basque,

(5) Rotaetxe's corpus does not consist of free conversation data, but of oral translations given by bilingual speakers to isolated Spanish sentences (in questionnaire form). The order that she obtained most frequently could be explained in pragmatic terms: In transitive sentences, a new subject tends to be the essential new information. As such, it will be the focus and will appear preverbally. In the absence of a context, of a 'topic,' the rest of the information will follow the verb. Another factor to consider will be the possible influence of the Spanish model.

therefore, deviate from being consistently head-final[6].

This typological characterization of Basque suffices for our purposes. Let us examine Icelandic now.

3. Icelandic

3.1. Word order and case marking.

Icelandic has four cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive), two numbers, and three genders. The most frequent word order is SVO as in (14a), but other orders are also possible (14b, c)[7]:

(14) a.	Ari las Njálu	b. las Ari Njálu
	Ari-NOM read Niala-ACC	c. Njálu las Ari.

The same SVO order is observed in subordinate clauses as well:

(15) þeir sogdu ad Gísli vaeri veikur
'They said that Gisli was sick.'

In certain syntactic constructions the verb precedes its subject: yes-no questions, commands, main clauses following the subordinate clause, certain coordinated sentences, and conditional clauses when *ef* 'if' is omitted. Verb-subject inversion can take place for stylistic purposes as well.

The verb agrees with its subject NP in person and number.

There are certain verbs which may take two accusative NP's or one accusative and one dative NP, but no nominative NP. In these cases the verb is marked for third person singular agreement. Here also the NP which could be identified as "logical subject" precedes the verb in the most normal order:

(16) mig	vantar	skó	(17) mig	þyrstir
I-ACC	need	shoes-ACC	I-ACC	get thirsty

3.2. Noun phrase.

Within the NP the adjective precedes the noun. The article can be free and in initial position, like in (18a) or, more commonly suffixed to the noun like in (18b):

(18) a.	hinn gódi madur	b. gódi madur-inn
	the good man	good man-the

Basque and Icelandic share the feature of having suffixed articles, obligatorily in Basque, and optionally but preferably in Icelandic. Unlike Basque, in Icelandic an adjective must agree in gender, case and number with its noun. There is a strong and a weak declension for adjectives.

3.3. Other constructions.

Noun-Gen:

(19) hús	Jóns	or	(20) Hús-id	hans Jóns
	house John-GEN			house -the his John-GEN[8]

(6) Greenberg's type 24.

(7) All Icelandic data are from Einarson (1949).

(8) In Icelandic, a possessive pronoun may precede a bare noun or follow a noun with a suffixed article: *mitt hus=husid mitt* 'my house.' (20) is, therefore, 'his house John's.'

N-Rel C: Prep-NP:

(21) madur-inn sem sá   mig   (22) lömb með mömmum sinum
     man-the   who saw me   'Lambs with their mothers.'

Comparative Adj-Standard:

(23) Jón var eldri og reyndari en ég
     'John was older and more experienced than I.'

Icelandic is, therefore, consistently head-initial, the only exception being that adjectives precede nouns[9].

4. Basque vs. Icelandic

If we compare Basque and Icelandic, we see that their respective orders of constituents are the mirror image of each other:

Basque: OV, NA, Gen N, Rel N, N Postp, Compar Standar.
Icelandic: VO, AN, N Gen, N Rel, Prep N, Standar Compar.

In the relative position of noun and adjective both Basque and Icelandic are inconsistent with respect to their general pattern.

5. Icelandic Basque pidgin

5.1. Data.

In this section I present the relevant data from Deen (1937), including the Icelandic glosses from the original manuscript, but providing a translation in English instead of the German and Spanish translations that Deen includes. The numbers in parentheses are those that the examples have in Deen's second (II) glossary:

(24) presenta for mi (II, 193)   (25) bocata for mi attora (II, 196)
     giefdu mier   þvodu fyrer mig skyrtu
     'give me'   'wash the shirt for me'

(26) presenta for mi locaria (II, 216)   (27) ser ju presenta for mi (II, 217)
     giefdu mier socka bònd   hvad gefur þu mier
     'give me garters'   'what do you give me?'

(28) for mi presenta for ju biskusa eta sagarduna (II, 218)
     eg skal gefa þier braudkòku og syrdryck
     'I will give you a cake and cider'

(29) trucka cammisola (II, 219)   (30) sumbatt galsardia for (II, 220)
     kaufftu peisu   fyrer hvad marga socka
     'buy a jacket'   'for how many stockings?'

(31) hamar bÿ galsardia (II, 221)   (32) seÿ galsardia esta vÿra (II, 222)
     12 pór socka   6 pór socka, ecke meira
     'twelve (pairs of) stockings'   'six (pairs of) stockings, no more'

(9) Greenberg's type 10.

(33) cavinit trucka for mi (II, 223)   (34) for ju mala gissuna (II, 226)
      eckert kaupe eg   þu ert vondur madur
      'I don't buy anything'   'you are a bad man'

(35) Christ Maria presenta for mi balia, for mi, presenta for ju bustana (II, 224)
      gefe Christur og Maria mier hval, skal jeg gefa þier spordenn
      'If Christ and Mary give me a whale, I will give you the tail'

(36) presenta for mi berrua usnia eta berria bura (II, 227)
      gefdu mier heita miölk og nyt smiòr
      'give me hot milk and new butter'

(37) ser travala for ju (II, 228)
      hvad giòrer þu
      'what are you doing?'

5.2. Analysis of the data.

With the obvious cautions that such an exiguous representation of a linguistic system forces us to take, we can make some observations.

Verbs have a unique form not inflected for tense or aspect and with no agreement features. The verb *presenta* is rendered as an imperative in (24), (26) and (36), present indicative in (27), future in (28) and (35) and present subjunctive (?) in (35), in the corresponding Icelandic translations.

Nouns are not marked for case. All nouns and adjectives end in -*a*, the Basque determiner. This even in cases where it would not appear in Basque, like after a numeral (30, 31, 32) or when a noun is followed by an adjective.

Without case marking or verb agreement, the interpretation of grammatical functions has to rely solely upon word order. The order appears to be Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object. The subject precedes the object in accordance with Greenberg's (1963) first universal and what we have seen is the normal order in Icelandic and the order in Basque when case marking is neutralized. In the medial position of the verb Icelandic Basque Pidgin (IBP henceforth) takes side with Icelandic but does not clash with what is acceptable in Basque.

If no NP precedes the verb the sentence is interpreted as an imperative (24, 25, 26, 29). As we can see from the Icelandic glosses, in this language the second person pronoun is suffixed to the verb in commands[10]. In Basque, commands are formed with the radical of the verb plus an auxiliary carrying aspect and agreement affixes. However, this auxiliary can be omitted. (38a) and (38b) are equivalent in most contexts:

(38) a. eman   eza-ida-zu   liburu-a   b. eman liburu-a
         give   ASP-DAT-ERG   book-the   'give me the book'
                1s   2s

As a matter of fact, the IBP sentence (29) could be an acceptable Basque sentence.

For the rest, the order of constituents is generally the same in IBP and in the Icelandic glosses. One exception is (34), in which the verb precedes its subject in the

(10) The subject pronoun can be omitted in literary Icelandic.

main clause in the Icelandic translation but not in IBP. This does not indicate any clear divergence in word order between IBP and Icelandic, however, since, presumably the same Icelandic sentence could have been produced with the conjunction *ef-* 'if' and without inversion.

There are two IBP sentences, (33) and (37) where the subject appears postverbally. In (33) the verb is preceded by *cavinit*, of dubious interpretation and glossed as *eckert* 'nothing,' and in (37) by *ser* 'what' (Basque). In both cases there is subject inversion in the Icelandic glosses as well. Presumably (33) could be interpreted not only as 'I don't buy anything' but also ambiguously as 'do not buy anything for me.'

The inversion of the subject and fronting of the question word in (37) is explainable not only from the side of Icelandic that requires this transformation, but also from the side of Basque, in which question words are necessarily the focus of the sentence and must precede the verb immediately. Therefore the order in (37) would be acceptable for speakers of both Icelandic and Basque. However, sentences involving more than one human NP would be difficult to interpret in IBP if the subject is not encoded before the verb. A sentence like (39) would presumably be ambiguous:

(39) *bustana presenta for mi for ju
     tail   give   I   you

The possible interpretations would be 'I give you the tail' and 'you give me the tail.'

Equally ambiguous would be a sentence like (27b):

(27) a. *ser presenta for ju for me
     'what do I/you give you/me?'

In (27b) the question word has been fronted immediately before the verb following Icelandic and Basque rules, but lack of case marking and agreement gives an ambiguous result in IBP.

A compromise solution was found and is illustrated in (27). Both question word and subject needing to precede the verb, the subject appears in a reduced form: *ju* (as compared with *for ju* in the rest of the examples). In this way, the distance between question word and verb is somewhat reduced and the subject is also successfully encoded. Presumably (27c) would have given an acceptable result as well; although it deviates more sharply from the Icelandic model:

(27) c. for ju ser presenta for mi[11]

Turning now to other examples, from (34) we see that the condition precedes the conclusion, in accordance with Greenberg's 14th universal. Otherwise, there is no morphological or syntactical marking. The juxtaposition of the two clauses and the irreality of the first proposition allow us to derive the implicature that this is a conditional construction.

(35) presents zero copula, against both Icelandic and Basque, but in accordance with one of the processes identified by Ferguson (1971) for simplified codes. Zero

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(11) I indicate with an asterisk (*) hypothetical ungrammatical sentences and with an arrow (↑) hypothetical grammatical sentences.

copula is common in many languages, like Russian, Arabic and Hungarian, and interestingly, in many creoles.

The order of elements within the NP can be observed in (35) and (36). The ordering of adjective and noun follows the Icelandic model. In addition, we can observe in these examples that the determiner -*a*, which in Basque can occur only at the end of the NP, is interpreted as part of the noun or adjective and, therefore, all nouns and adjectives end in -*a*, as we said above:

(36) a. IBP: berrua usnia eta berria bura
                  hot   milk and new   butter
      b. Basque: esne bero-a   eta gurin berri-a
                  milk hot-the and butter new-the

We have not included in our sample other phrases or sentences that appear in the text and that, when and if used by Icelandic speakers, were obviously unanalyzed chunks, like *caca hiarinsat*, literally in Basque 'shit for thee' and glossed as *et þu skÿt ur rasse*, whose Spanish and German translations not daring to provide, Deen translates as *ede excrementum ani*.

In summary, this sample gives us the impression of a very rudimentary pidgin. Sentences can have the basic functions of expressing a statement, asking a question or giving a command. Special questions are identified by wh fronting and commands by subject deletion. No temporal or aspectual notions can be expressed (probably they would be expressed by means of adverbs when required). The notions of subject and object are encoded by word order. The lexicon is drawn mainly from Basque and, in a smaller proportion, from Spanish and French. A few lexical items are from other origins. Curiously the first and second person singular pronouns seem to be taken from English.

The order of constituents seems to follow the Icelandic model: SVO, Adjective Noun, prepositions *(for)*. Of these, though, only the order of Adjective and Noun could be argued to be taken from Icelandic. The order SVO is also frequent in Basque and, moreover, has been characterized as the perceptually preferable order (Givón 1979). The status of *for* as a preposition is not transparent from the data. *For ju* and *for mi* perhaps were taken as monomorphemic. The only occurrence of *for* not in pronominals is (30), in which *for* could be interpreted as a stranded preposition or as a postposition.

In commands, the omission of the subject is in accordance with the facts of Basque (and the other possibly relevant languages, Spanish and French). Subject inversion as in Icelandic would render sentences difficult to interpret in IBP. The omission of the copula, which cannot be traced to either language, seems to be dictated by a principle of maximum simplicity.

Unlike other pidgins, IBP does not present a morphological marker to distinguish verbs from nouns (cf. Russenorsk -*om*, attached to the verb)[12] or nouns from adjectives (cf. Tok Pisin -*pela*, attached to the adjective).

(12) Slobin (1979: 43-46), basing his argument on the evidence of Russenorsk, claims that in the absence of other means to establish grammatical relations than word order, some morphological means to distinguish verbs from nouns is necessary. This marking, however, is absent in many other pidgins. Some other particles that can serve this function of singling out the verb in the sentence are the verbal prefix *i*- in Tok Pisin (Although not all verbs are preceded by *i*); the suffix -*im* attached to transitive verbs, also in Tok Pisin, and tense/aspect markers such as *taba/ta/lo* in Papiamento.

The data do not show us how genitive constructions were formed. More complex constructions, like relative clauses, perhaps did not develop. Yes-no questions are not illustrated either; possibly they were distinguished by means of intonation only, as seems to be general for creoles (Bickerton 1983).

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