

## A note on Focalization in Basque

1.1. The aim of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to examine and interrelate three points of Basque grammar, viz.: word order, the value of the so-called assertive particle *ba*, and the use of the verb *egin* “do” as a marker of the focalization of the main verb. It must be acknowledged that this is not the first time somebody tries to give an integrated account of these matters: Altube’s *Erderismos* (1929) for instance is a beautiful, if not formalized, attempt at building such a synthesis. Unfortunately, his work essentially described the Biscayan subdialect spoken round Guernica; subsequent studies such as de Rijk’s (1969 and 1978) or Wilbur’s (1981) were also dedicated to specific varieties of Basque: the Guipuzcoan and Navarro-Labourdin dialects respectively. In other words, whatever results have been obtained up to now have only been partial results. As a consequence, our overall knowledge of these grammatical questions is at best incomplete, if not plainly inconsistent.

1.2. In such a situation, any linguist convinced that Basque is really *one* language in spite of its dialectal diversity —and I am convinced that most people who know Basque share my opinion on the fundamental unity of the language— will have to look for what has recently come to be known as *parameters* in order to account for the apparently contradictory conclusions reached in the works mentioned above. And it is my belief that what is really fundamental here has to do with a precise definition of the word “verb” or of the symbol “V” as they are employed in the following statements:

- (1a) “Basque is basically an SOV language”.
- (1b) “[In Basque] whatever constituent is focus must immediately precede the verb”.<sup>2</sup>

2.1. Whether the foregoing judgments are contradictory or not will be discussed in section 2.3. For the time being, let us call the SOV (subject, object, verb) hypothesis “theory A” and illustrate it. As many people have noted (e.g. Lafitte

(1) This essay develops some of the ideas contained in Rebuschi 1983. Most of the linguistic data examined here was collected from, or checked with, native speakers in April 1983, thanks to the financial help of the “Laboratoire Propre 3.121” of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, based at Ivry, France.

(2) (1b) is a direct quotation from de Rijk (1978).

1962 and, after him, Greenberg 1966 or Goenaga 1978), the unmarked order of constituents is the one exemplified by (2a) below; although the other five sentences (2b-f) are acceptable in some contexts, (2a) is both statistically the most usual (de Rijk 1969) and the one which native informants will produce the most readily if asked to translate "Peter (had) hit Mary" out of context:

- (2a) [SOV] *Pellok Miren jo zuen*  
 Pello-erg. Miren-abs. hit he-had-her  
 (2b) [OSV] *Miren Pellok jo zuen* (2e) [VSO] *Jo zuen Pellok Miren*  
 (2c) [SVO] *Pellok jo zuen Miren* (2f) [VOS] *Jo zuen Miren Pellok*  
 (2d) [OVS] *Miren jo zuen Pellok*

(erg. = ergative case ending; abs. = absolutive case ending.)

I will of course return to the different communicative values of those examples. For the moment, let us note that the main verb (*jo*: here a perfective participle) and the finite auxiliary (*zuen*, in the past tense) form a block, called "verb complex" (VC) by Wilbur 1979; therefore, none of the following sequences is acceptable, whatever the context:<sup>3</sup>

- (3a) \**Pellok jo Miren zuen* (3b) \**jo Pellok zuen Miren*  
 etc.

Before considering theory B (summarized by (1b)), I would like to modify theory A so as to encompass syntactic structures other than simple transitive constructions. For instance, (4a) is also unmarked, the remaining examples (4b) through (4f) being marked in the same way as (2b-f) are:

- (4a) *Jon etxera joan zen* (4d) *etxera joan zen Jon*  
 Jon-abs. house-to gone he-was (4e) *joan zen Jon etxera*  
 "John went home" (4f) *Joan zen etxera Jon*  
 (4b) *etxera Jon joan zen*  
 (4c) *Jon joan zen etxera*

It thus seems natural to reformulate (1a) as follows:

- (1c) "Basque is basically an S C V language."

(with C for "complement"; note that I will not discuss the theoretical status of S, O or C here: an intuitive understanding of what they refer to should be sufficient).<sup>4</sup>

(3) However, a few morphemes such as *al* (an interrogative particle, mainly Guipuzcoan), *ei* (Biscayan) or *omen* (all other dialects), indicating hear-say, must appear just between the participle and the auxiliary; but they are clearly not sentence constituents; see Wilbur (1981) for a study of the syntax of those "modal" particles.

(4) Some —unorthodox— discussion of whether Basque really has subjects in the usual sense can be found in Rebuschi (1982, chapter V).

2.2. According to theory B, word order in Basque is not linked with grammatical relations—or semantic roles—at all. It is more than half a century ago that Altube expounded the first (and hitherto most complete) version of this view in *Erderismos*. What (1b) really means is that a particular “focus position” (or F position) is defined immediately to the left of the verb and that if the sentence contains a focussed element, then this element must occupy that position; in other words, (1b) does *not* imply that a sentence need contain any focus at all (de Rijk 1969). For instance, (2a) and (4a) can function as answers to a question like:

- (5) *eta gero zer gertatu zen?*  
 and then what-as. happened it-was  
 “what happened next?”

In such a context, it is obvious that no particular item is singled out or focussed. This, in its turn, means that the noun “focus”—as long as it is to be operative in Basque—does not describe just any rhematic material or new information: for an item to constitute the focus of a Basque utterance, it has to be either the unique piece of new information conveyed, or to be considered as more important than other rhematic constituents. Now, obviously, this is a highly subjective notion: if several constituents are rhematic, it is up to the speaker to choose which one of them (if any) ought to be given any particular emphasis. In other words, the selection of focus in Basque is automatic (contextually determined) in some cases (when there is only one rhematic element), but is not always so.

2.3. Lack of space prevents me from discussing all the implications of this second approach here, but a few words should be said concerning the apparent opposition between theory A (modified or not) and theory B: they are not necessarily contradictory. Thus, S C V could be taken to represent some sort of basic word order when no constituent is chosen as *the* focus. Movement rules would of course have to be provided; for instance, the C constituent could be moved out of the F position it occupies “naturally” either to the beginning of the sentence (marked topicalization) or to the right of the verb complex, so as to enable the S constituent to be adjacent to the V: an S standing immediately to the left of the verb (under normal prosodic conditions)<sup>5</sup> is always interpreted as focus; hence, *Pello(k)* is the focus of sentences (2b) and (2c), and *Jon* is that of the sentences (4b) and (4c).

This is, in fact, the position implicitly adopted by Lafitte (*op. cit.*, written in a traditional format), and explicitly developed (in a slightly different way, admittedly) by de Rijk 1978. Even though I believe quite a different approach might be preferred (along the lines of the model proposed by Kiss 1981 to describe word order in Hungarian), the one sketched here seems at least descriptively adequate, and will be taken for granted for the sake of brevity.

(5) B. Oyharçabal (personal communication) insists that the focus can also be found to the right of the verb complex, but recognizes at the same time that all purists and teachers denounce this as a barbarism; in any case, there has to be a strong pause preceding the focalized constituent in that construction, something which may indicate that all the other constituents are in fact topicalized.

3.1. Let us now turn to the central topic of this paper: What is the nature of the “V” in the formulae [S C V] of theory A and [(Topic) (Focus) V] of theory B?

In the examples used so far, the conjugation was compound or periphrastic, i.e. the main verb appeared as a (perfective) participle, and was followed by a finite auxiliary. Now, if all main verbs can be conjugated in this way, a handful of them also have a simple or synthetic conjugation; the semantic difference between the two conjugations is one of aspect, and need not be investigated here. Let us however consider two forms of *joan* “go” (the tense is present):

- (6a) *joaten da* “he goes”  
going he-is
- (6b) *(ba) doa* “he is going”  
(assertive particle) he-goes

Note that although *doa* is all right morphologically, this word cannot be the sole constituent of a well-formed sentence: hence the presence of *ba* (a variant of *bai* “yes”) to its left if (6b) is to be understood as a sentence—rather than an item in a paradigm. In fact, except in imperative sentences, the finite form of a verb must never be the first constituent of a sentence.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the examples (7a-b-c) are acceptable, but (7d) is not:

- (7a) *Jon doa etxera* “John is going home”
- (7b) *etxera doa Jon* (i) “John is going home”  
(ii) “John is going home”
- (7c) *ba doa Jon etxera* (i) “John is going home”  
(ii) “Jon is going home”
- (7d) \**doa Jon etxera*

In the English translations, the rhematic constituents are underlined. (7b) has interpretation (i) in case *etxera* is marked prosodically (if it has a heavier stress than *doa*), and has interpretation (ii) otherwise; (7c) in its turn is to be considered as totally rhematic—interpretation (i)—if *ba* is not particularly stressed, but if *ba* is strongly stressed, the sentence has interpretation (ii), according to which it is the positive character of the assertion which is focused on (cf. the abstract ACC element in pre-standard generative grammar)—in which case no other element is rhematic. We shall return below to examples where some material precedes *ba*.

3.2. From a surface-syntactic and morphological point of view, there is no difficulty in handling the two conjugations. The following rules are a modified version of Goenaga’s (1978):

- (8a) VC → V + AUX
- (8b) AUX → (ASP) INFL
- (8c) ASP →  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{Perfective} \\ \text{Imperfective} \\ \text{Prospective} \end{array} \right\}$

(6) A few counter-examples have been noted (see Villard 1982); unfortunately, no explanation seems available in any framework at the moment.

(AUX = auxiliary; ASP = aspect; INFL = inflexion: tense and persons markers; as has already been acknowledged, VC is a borrowing from Wilbur 1979; Goenaga does not use this node, and I am not sure it can be given any theoretical status; it is however a convenient category, to be used for practical (purely descriptive) purposes; hence its adoption here.)

Synthetic forms are obtained when ASP is not selected, i.e. when no affix separates V, the main verb here, from INFL: it can then be directly conjugated. But if ASP is selected, INFL cannot be attached to it,<sup>7</sup> and an auxiliary has to be introduced as a tense (etc.) carrier (it is a form of “be” if there is no argument in the ergative case, and a form of “have” otherwise —i.e. the selection of either auxiliary vs. that of the other has nothing to do with aspect, contrary to the situation in English— cp. *have* (+EN) and *be* (+ING).

3.3. On the other hand, from a syntactic point of view, the situation is more delicate: whatever the relations which hold between the various NP's and the verb may be, the ungrammaticality of (7d), and the symmetrical grammaticality of (4e), must both be explained. At first sight, it seems obvious that what makes the difference between (4e) and (7d) is that the latter sentence begins with the finite form of a verb (henceforth FFV), whereas the former does not.

This seems to imply that the FFV of any sentence plays an important syntactic role, whether it is the main verb or the auxiliary. This is confirmed, for example, by the fact that in both the periphrastic and the synthetic conjugations, the negation morpheme *ez* has to precede it (*ez* is spelled as a separate word, but it is, in fact, a prefix here: see Alvarez 1981 on this topic):

(9a) *ez doa* “he is not going” (9b) *ez da joaten* “he does not go”<sup>8</sup>

But is this sufficient to conclude that the “verb” referred to in either (1a) or (1b) is in fact the finite verb form, i.e. the auxiliary when the conjugation is periphrastic, and the main verb when it is synthetic? The data are unfortunately too complex to be accounted for in such a straightforward manner, because, as a closer look at dialectal variation will show, the answer to that question may well be positive for one group of dialects, and negative for another.

4.1. Let us first consider the data in the Navarro-Labourdin (NL) dialect, spoken in France. The use of *ba* in this dialect is as follows: contrary to what may have been assumed according to the examples (7a-b-c), *ba* is almost always present before the main verb in the synthetic conjugation, even when there is some rhematic material preceding the verb in the sentence: *ba* disappears only if this material

(7) In fact, it is quite possible that instead of the material under INFL being adjoined to V, the opposite transformation takes place: V could be moved under INFL if there is no aspectual affix between V and INFL. I will not discuss this issue here, because it is too technical, and because it is not certain that it has any direct bearing on the subject of this article.

(8) For want of space, I will not dwell on the movement rule which has to be postulated to account for (9b); but it is obvious that a more thorough treatment of the questions sketchily examined here should include such a discussion.

has contrastive value, and is thus the focus of the sentence. Consequently, a sentence like “the man had two sons” would normally be translated by (10a), (10b) being reserved for a case of contrast between, say, two boys and two girls:

- (10a) *gizonak bi seme bazituen*  
 man-the-erg. two son-abs. *ba*-he-had-them  
 (10b) *gizonak bi seme zituen*

Therefore, in this dialect, the focus position must be defined as the position immediately to the left of the FFV. More evidence in confirmation of this statement is provided by the following facts:

(a) When the conjugation is periphrastic, all the elements to the left of the auxiliary and not cut off from it by a pause are to be interpreted as rhematic (new information); if there is a pause immediately to the left of the participle, then the main verb is automatically interpreted as focus: compare (2a) with (11a-b-c) where the rhematic constituents are underlined, and the pause allowing to distinguish topicalized items is marked by a comma.

(b) Furthermore, this dialect allows an inversion of the participle and the auxiliary; when this inversion takes place, the constituent to the left of the auxiliary (the FFV) is necessarily the focus of the sentence —see (11d) and (11e):

- |       |                               |                           |
|-------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (11a) | <i>Pellok Miren jo zuen</i>   | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (11b) | <i>Pellok, Miren jo zuen</i>  | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (11c) | <i>Pellok, Miren, jo zuen</i> | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (11d) | <i>Pellok, Miren zuen jo</i>  | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (11e) | <i>Miren, Pellok zuen jo</i>  | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |

4.2. The situation in the two most widely spoken dialects of the Spanish Basque country, Guipuzcoan (G) and Biscayan (B), is altogether different:

(a) They do not permit the main verb - auxiliary inversion just illustrated (although the inversion triggered by *ez* as shown by (9b) is just as compulsory in these dialects as it is in NL).

(b) The use of *ba* is different, in the sense that (10b) is the unmarked option now, (10a) being rather the marked one: if there is no real focus, either (10a) or (10b) can be used — although, of course, only (10b) can be, if *bi seme* is contrastive.

(c) The topic-comment structure of (2a) is also different, because, as the examples below indicate, the main verb need never be interpreted as rhematic, and cannot function as focus in the way it did in NL in (11c):

- |       |                                 |                           |
|-------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (12a) | <i>Pellok Miren jo zuen</i>     | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (12b) | <i>Pellok Miren jo zuen</i>     | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (12c) | <i>Pellok, Miren jo zuen</i>    | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (12d) | <i>Pellok, Miren jo zuen</i>    | “ <i>Peter hit Mary</i> ” |
| (12e) | * <i>Pellok, Miren, jo zuen</i> |                           |

(12a) can be understood as an answer to “What happened?”, (12b) as an answer to “Who hit who(m)?”, (12c) as an answer to “What did Peter do?” and (12d) as an answer to “Who did Peter hit?”. But what is most significant here is that (12e) is not acceptable in B & G (as they are colloquially spoken today at least), whereas (11c), the same construction, was all right in NL. How can this be? Before answering the question, we must examine the way the main verb can be focussed upon in these dialects.

4.3. Keeping in mind that focus is defined as the only rhematic constituent in a given context, let us examine some possible answers to the question (13a):

- |       |  |                     |
|-------|--|---------------------|
| (13a) | <i>zer egin zuen Mirenek?</i><br>what-abs. done she-had-it M.-erg. <sup>9</sup><br>“What did Mary do?” |                     |
| (13b) | <i>*joan zen</i>   |                     |
| (13c) | <i>joan egin zen</i>   | “she went/left”     |
| (13d) | <i>etxera joan zen</i>   | “she went home”     |
| (13e) | <i>*etxera joan egin zen</i>   |                     |
| (13f) | <i>ogia jan zuen</i><br>bread-abs. eaten she-had-it  | “she ate the bread” |
| (13g) | <i>*ogia jan egin zuen</i>   |                     |
| (13h) | <i>*jan zuen</i>   |                     |
| (13i) | <i>jan egin zuen</i>   | “she ate”           |

A close examination of the answers (13b) through (13i) reveals that if the only piece of new information provided is the verb, as in (13b-c) or (13h-i), then this verb must be followed by a participle of *egin* “do, done”. Furthermore, *egin* can only appear if the verb is the unique rhematic element of the sentence: when the answer contains two such elements, as in (13d-e) or (13f-g), the presence of *egin* renders the sentence unacceptable, and even ungrammatical, since, as we saw when discussing (12e), there is no possible context for such a construction in B and G.

It thus appears that in these dialects, it is the verb complex as a whole (rather than the main verb as such) which helps point out the focus position; this is why *Miren* is focus in (12d), and why (12e), (13b) and (13h) are impossible sentences: to be focalized, the (main) verb has to be moved out of the verb complex, so as to occupy the F position thus defined.<sup>10</sup>

4.4. Verb focalization is only possible in Guipuzcoan when the conjugation is periphrastic, i.e. when ASP of (8b) is present in the syntactic structure. But the reader must not be misled by the examples above: when the verb occupies the focus position, it does not carry any aspectual suffix the perfective participle only happens to be the unmarked and dictionary form of the verb. This means that the

(9) Gender cannot be indicated for 3rd (and 1st) persons, so *zuen* must really be interpreted as: “3rd p sg erg, 3rd p sg abs, “have”, past”.

(10) The “correct” Guipuzcoan version of (12e) would of course be: *Pellok, Miren, jo egin zuen*.

selected aspect is now indicated by a form of *egin*, i.e. that the aspect suffix remains inside the verb complex, as is shown by the following examples (the auxiliary is in the present tense here, to facilitate the translations):

- (14a) *Pellok Miren jo egin du* "Peter has *hit* Mary" [Perfective]  
 (14b) *Pellok Miren jo egiten du* "Peter *hits* Mary" [iterative]  
 (14c) *Pellok Miren jo egingo du* "Peter will *hit* M." [prospective]

As a consequence, the focalization of the verb in this dialect could be described as a transformation moving the V out of the VC, with a subsequent introduction of *egin* as a prop word to carry the aspectual suffix:

- (15) [ ] [ [ V ] [ ASP INFL ] ]  
           F   VC V    AUX  
 (F is the focus position defined to the left of the VC.)

There are, however, two facts which make me think that another hypothesis might be preferred. The first one, in fact, merely hints at a possible alternative solution. It is the fact that *egin*, which also functions as a normal lexical item with the meaning of "do, make", functions yet in a third way, as a pro-verb, in both the B and the G dialects. For instance *egin* may, but need not compulsorily, replace the second occurrence of *hil* "die, died" in such contexts as are illustrated by the following pair of examples:

- (16a) *Bilbon jaio zen eta hil ere hantxe hil/egin zen*  
 Bilbao-loc. born he-was and die too there died/done he-was  
 "he was born in Bilbao and as for dying, he died/did in the self-same place"  
 (16b) *Bilbon jaio zen baina hil berriz Baionan hil/egin zen*  
                                   but           as-for  
 "he was born in Bilbao but as for dying, he died/did in Bayonne"

It must be noted that the auxiliary is intransitive because the verb *hil* is, too; a variant with *zuen* (... *egin zuen*) would also be possible (and would indeed even be the only acceptable one in Navarro-Labourdin), but it would have to be analyzed differently, since *egin* followed by a transitive auxiliary in such a context is a fair equivalent, both syntactically and semantically, of the chunk *do it* which everybody knows functions as a pro-VP rather than a pro-V in English.

More interesting here is that the verb in the second clause being topicalized (fronted and followed by *ere* or *berriz*), it may be replaced by *egin* in the verb complex. It thus becomes possible to imagine that instead of a movement of V into F as in (15), one might describe the whole process by a double operation consisting (a) in *copying* the main verb in the focus position, and (b) in replacing (now obligatorily) the original V in the VC by the pro-element *egin*.



4.5. The second argument in favor of the latter hypothesis is more compelling; it is provided by those varieties of Biscayan which were first described by Altube (*op. cit.*) and to which I will refer here as “Biscayan” to simplify the exposition. In B then, in contradistinction to G, it is also possible to focalize the main verb when the conjugation is synthetic. This can be exemplified by (17c) below, which contrasts with (17a), the unmarked version, and (17b), in which example it is the positive character of the assertion which is focussed on:

- |       |                |                |                     |                                     |
|-------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (17a) | <i>aitak</i>   | <i>zakua</i>   | <i>dakar</i>        | “father is carrying the bag”        |
|       | father-erg.    | bag-abs.       | he-carries-it       |                                     |
| (17b) | <i>aitak</i>   | <i>zakua</i>   | <i>badakar</i>      | “father is carrying the bag”        |
| (17c) | <i>aitak</i> , | <i>zakua</i> , | <i>ekarri dakar</i> | “father is <i>carrying</i> the bag” |

The striking element here is, of course, that the verb *ekarri* appears twice: first in the focus position, and then, tensed or finite, in the verb complex. Now, it would be extremely surprising indeed if the rules postulated to generate (17c) consisted first in moving *ekarri* into F position and second in filling up the empty main verb slot left behind in the VC with a copy of the same verb!

On the contrary, it seems more reasonable or natural to posit that *ekarri* is copied in the focus position, and that its subsequent replacement by *egin* inside the VC is just blocked by the fact that this verb cannot be conjugated synthetically (more technically, because *egin* is subcategorized to appear only before ASP in any VC). In other words, a unitary treatment of the facts illustrated by (14) and (17c) is now possible along the lines sketched above: a copying process would first be involved, and a “pro-verbalization” operation would follow — either obligatorily (for a majority of Basque speakers: those who reject (17c) and who then probably do so because the second occurrence of *ekarri* cannot be substituted for) — or optionally: the restricted use of structures like (17c) could thus be traced back to the syntax of pro-elements in Basque.

5.1. What little has been uncovered in this paper amounts to this: in Navarro-Labourdin, the focus position is defined as the position immediately to the left of the finite verb form. Hence the availability of the participle - auxiliary inversion (an operation which allows the focalization of any non verbal constituent), and the absence of any specific mechanism such as the introduction of *egin* in the verb complex to focalize the main verb: it “naturally” occupies the focus position.

On the other hand, in Guipuzcoan and in Biscayan, it is the verb complex as a whole which plays the role of the tensed verb in Navarro-Labourdin: it is now the “complement” (the object or any constituent other than the subject which is naturally associated with the verb) which occupies the focus position in unmarked structures, so that no main verb - auxiliary inversion is functionally necessary to assignate it as the focus of the sentence. Furthermore, verb focalization now requires a specific operation, which makes use of the pro-verb *egin*, because now the main verb does not “naturally” occupy the F position.

5.2. The differences in the syntax and semantics of *ba* point to another, perhaps finer, parametric variation in the overall grammar of the two groups of dialects. In fact, it does seem that the provision made in 2.2 concerning the fact that if the focus must be in focus position, there need not be any focus at all if the sentence is still valid, but only insofar as it is applied to the southern dialects (B and G): as we saw, *bi seme* in (10b) may be rhematic, *sans plus*. On the contrary, in the northern dialects (NL), it seems that an item *must* be interpreted as focus, *unless* some other rhematic element is present; so in (10b) —where *gizonak* would normally be understood as a topicalized element— *bi seme* is necessarily felt to be the focus of the sentence; the introduction of the empty (?) morpheme *ba* as in (10a) then allows the NP to be interpreted as a non focalized piece of new information.

5.3. It would certainly be unwise to think that the preceding remarks exhaust all the problems posed by word order and related phenomena in Basque. In particular, the relation between word order and the scope of negation in negative sentences seems to have been only very poorly studied so far, and I guess a thorough analysis of this question would reveal a far more complex relationship between the main verb and the finite auxiliary than has been suggested here.

What is more, it appears that one dialect of Basque uses freely both the main verb - auxiliary inversion, and the verb *egin* to focalize the main verb. This dialect is Higher Navarrese, and it is spoken in an area which lies between Guipuzcoan speaking and Navarro-Labourdian speaking zones. So the phenomenon may just be due to the influence of, say, G on a variety of Basque which is fundamentally NL with respect to the questions studied here (or *vice versa*), but a careful examination of the structure of this dialect may just as well lead one to very different results from the ones obtained here.

Anyway, by way of conclusion, I cannot resist quoting a short passage in this dialect illustrating both constructions (inversion and verb focussing); it is an excerpt from F. & R. Artola Sagarzazu (1982: 12):

- (18) *Gure aitari sarritan NION ENTZUN: neskatxik*  
 our father-dative often I-had-it-to-him heard: girl-partitive  
*oberenak, edo mutxurdiñ edo moja. Orrela bide da. Zergatik ote?*  
 best-plural-abs. or spinster or nun. thus probably it-is. why inter.  
*Ez dut erantzunik emanen. GALDETU EGITEN dut.*  
 neg. I-have-it answer-partitive give-prospective. ask do-imperfective  
 I-have-it

“I often used to hear my father say: the best girls become either spinsters or nuns. It must be so. But why? I won’t give any answer: I’m only asking.”

## 6. References

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