

## FOCUS AND OUASIFOCUS IN BASQUE NEGATIVE STATEMENTS\*

### I. Introduction

Focus and its role in Basque word order has been the topic of a fair amount of work over the past hundred years. Actually, of course, the concern with the significance of word order among Basque literati reaches considerably farther back. As A. Irigoyen has aptly reminded us, the Biscayan philosopher P. P. Astarloa (1752-1806) truly deserves recognition as an early devotee of such studies, but neither his *Apología de la lengua bascongada* (1803) nor his posthumously published *Discursos filosóficos sobre la lengua primitiva* (1883) are perused much these days, least of all by linguists —whether this be fortunate or unfortunate is not for me to ascertain.<sup>1</sup>

Undeniably the classic and, in the main, still authoritative treatment of focus is that found in two publications by the Biscayan scholar S. Altube (1879-1963): his *De sintaxis euskérica* of 1920 and his much better known *Erderismo* of 1929.

Incidentally, it should be noted here that the term “elemento inquirido”, used so much by Altube and through him established in Spanish parlance as the equivalent of English “focus”, was actually coined by another Biscayan scholar, R. M. de Azkue, as appears from page 341 of the latter’s *Euskal-izkíndea (Gramática euskara)* dating from 1891. Strangely enough, however, Azkue misplaced the phrase he had thus labelled, for he assigned it initial instead of preverbal position.

Another fact of historical interest, less widely known, is that the crucial observation commonly referred to as “Altube’s Law” had already been made by the erudite priest and scholar M. Lekuona in note 1 of his inaugural lecture entitled “Métrica Vasca” of September 1918: “La palabra principal de una oración es la inmediata anterior al verbo, ...”.

In the wake of Altube’s pioneering study, several generations of scholars have offered more or less detailed accounts of Basque focus. The first author known to

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding P. P. Astarloa and his scholarly works, one may consult X. Altzibar, *Bizkaierazko idazle klasikoak*, pp. 211-226. A fascinating miscellany of Astarloa’s linguistic conceptions can be found in A. Tovar, *Mitología e ideología sobre la lengua vasca*, pp. 110-129.

me to have added something to Altube's description was P. Lafitte (1901-1985).<sup>2</sup> Chapter VI of his *Grammaire basque*—first published in 1944—contains a short but influential exposition of constituent order in the northern dialects, based on the concept "mot de valeur" or, alternatively, "terme requis". Furthermore, for negative clauses a distinction is introduced between "mot de première valeur" (the negation *ez*), "second terme requis" (the main verb of the clause) and "troisième terme requis" (virtually identical to what is generally considered focus).

A quarter of a century later, with R. de Rijk (1969) as a modest start, a host of articles and other publications begins to appear, among which we mention F. Donzeaud (1972), R. de Rijk (1978), A. Arejita (1978, 1980), P. Goenaga (1980), K. Mitxelena (1981), G. Rebuschi (1983), B. Oihartzabal (1984, 1985), S. Tamura (1985), P. Salaburu (1989) and, as a culmination point, E. Osa's impressive dissertation defended in 1988 and published in 1990.

In most of these works, however, only cursory attention at best is devoted to negative clauses and their behavior in regard to focus.<sup>3</sup> There are, nonetheless, two outstanding exceptions: Oihartzabal (1985) and Osa (1990). I have benefitted from the work of these two authors to no small extent, but my approach, both in terminology and in spirit, will be found to be sufficiently different from theirs for the present contribution to be other than a mere rehashing of their essays.

My discussion will be geared to the southern variant of Euskara Batua; in other words, I want to deal with the system common in outline to Guipuzcoan and Biscayan. This treatment cannot claim to be in any way exhaustive. No mention will be made of such interesting details as object incorporation and other cases of reanalysis, despite their potential effects on the location of the focus site.

Without much discussion, we will take for granted the basic correctness of Altube's perceptions concerning focus in positive sentences. It is true that Altube's position has been repeatedly criticized by native speakers. They have pointed out that, strictly speaking, the validity of his observations is restricted to one use of language, namely, conversation. In other—and, one might say, less central—uses of language, such as story-telling and similar activities, quite often special effects of style are achieved by breaking Altube's rules.

From a linguistic point of view, this critical annotation, often adduced as invalidating to some extent Altube's analysis, can in fact be seen to support it. Obviously, if special effects can be gained from breaking Altube's rules, of necessity, the rules in question first have to be part and parcel of the linguistic competence of the native speaker. For, while it is easy enough to break nonexistent rules, it is quite hard to see how one can achieve any particular effects by doing so.

In this paper, I will consider only statements. In particular, negative statements assumed to be part of a conversational interchange. The question as to whether or

<sup>2</sup> As B. Oihartzabal has aptly shown in his admirable essay "Behako bat ezezko esaldieri" (*Euskera* XXX (1985), 103-115), not all of Lafitte's additions can be accepted at face value. (Cf. section III below.)

<sup>3</sup> De Rijk (1969, 1978) are quite typical in this respect. In the latter publication, negative clauses are ignored altogether, and in the former, Lafitte's position as to a post-auxiliary focus site is espoused on the tottery basis of a few inconclusive examples (p. 344).

not the results obtained carry over to other speech acts, such as requests or commands, will be left open.

## II. Focus in negative clauses

To settle the matter of focus in negative clauses, we need a precise definition of what we are investigating. In positive clauses focus has often been defined as the most prominent part of the comment or rheme; when dealing with negative clauses, however, this definition is by far too vague to be of any use. Rather, in both positive and negative statements, focus must be defined as being that particular constituent of the sentence which matches the *wh*-item in the pragmatically pertinent question. Where no such question exists, neither does focus. No doubt, further refinements will be required eventually, but for the purposes of this exploratory article, this tentatively phrased definition will suffice.

Once this basis has been agreed on, there can be no uncertainty as to the focus site in negative clauses: The focus immediately precedes the first member of the finite verb complex, just as it does in positive clauses.

By way of illustration I will present some question-answer pairs, where the b) sentence is assumed to be an answer to the a) question, which may or may not have been explicitly asked.

- (1)a. Nor ez da etorri? "Who hasn't come?"  
 (1)b. Miren ez da etorri.<sup>4</sup> "Mary hasn't come."  
 (2)a. Zuretzat zer ez da arazoa? "What isn't the problem for you?"  
 (2)b. Zuretzat hori ez da arazoa. (J. Atutxa, *Arrosa ximeldua*, 62)  
 "For you, that isn't the problem."  
 (3)a. Zergatik ez doaz gaur ahizpak elizara?  
 "Why aren't the sisters going to church today?"  
 (3)b. Elurrarengatik ez doaz gaur ahizpak elizara.  
 "The sisters aren't going to church today because of the snow."  
 (4)a. Noiz ez dute lanik egiten lantegi honetan?  
 "When don't they work in this workshop?"  
 (4)b. Igandeetan ez dute lanik egiten lantegi honetan.  
 "They don't work in this workshop on Sundays."

All these sentences bear focus: the interrogative *nor* "who", *zer* "what", *zergatik* "why", *noiz* "when" in the a) examples, and in the b) examples: *Miren* "Mary", *hori* "that", *elurrarengatik* "because of the snow", *igandeetan* "on Sundays".

<sup>4</sup> As Lafitte and later Oihartzabal have pointed out, the northern dialects have an additional option here, not open to the southern ones: *Nor da ez etorri?* — *Miren da ez etorri*. The exact derivation of such clauses is unclear to me. It seems as if Auxiliary Attraction has been forgone in favor of a movement of the Focus + Auxiliary complex across the negation marker *ez*.

The restriction to finite verb complexes is essential. Some non-finite clause types show no evidence at all of a preverbal focus site, since even interrogative pronouns can occur separated from the verb:

- (5)a. Zergatik ez gaur itsasora jaits? (or *jaitxi* in spoken Batua)  
 “Why not go down to the sea today?”
- (5)b. Noiz ez emaztearen esanetara makur, hori da arazoa (*makurtu* in spoken Batua)  
 “When not to bend to one’s wife’s orders, that is the problem.”

The verb itself may be focus in negative clauses, in which event a dummy verb *egin* appears, again just like in positive clauses:

- (6)a. Egia lehendakariak badaki, baina esan ez diot egin.  
 “The president knows the truth, but I didn’t exactly tell him.”
- (6)b. Uretara erori ziren guztiak, baina ito ez zen egin inor.  
 “All fell into the water, but nobody actually drowned.”

The final clause in (6)a answers the question *Zer ez dut egin?* “What didn’t I do?”, so that *esan* “tell” is focus. Likewise, the final clause in (6)b answers the inquiry *Zer ez zen gertatu?* “What didn’t happen?”, so that *ito* “drown” is focus. The verbal foci *esan* and *ito* are parked in preverbal focus position while a dummy verb *egin* “to do” appears farther along in the clause, thus completing the verbal complex.

### III. Focus and quasifocus

In sharp contradiction to the outcome of the previous section, the position *following* the finite verb is commonly held to be the focus site in negative clauses —so e.g. Saltarelli, *Basque*, 67. This position is easily shown to be untenable, since it would wrongly deny focus to *elurrarengatik* “because of the snow” and attribute it to the adverb *gaur* “today” in example (3)b, and, similarly, deny focus to *igandetan* “on Sundays” and attribute it to the noun phrase *lanik* “any work” in (4)b.

The claim, nonetheless, appears to have some justification. In negative clauses there is indeed an unmistakable prominence to a postverbal position.

This paradox readily resolves itself as soon as we delve a little deeper into the pragmatics of negation. Given the definition adopted in section II, the notion of focus is applicable to certain negative clauses only —those, namely, that are appropriately thought of as replies to pertinent questions already negative in form. This is just the type of sentence where the negation, in Oihartzabal’s terms, is preconstructed within the predicate: “... erlazio predikatiboan aitzin eraikia” (Oihartzabal, “Behako bat ezeko esaldietan”, 111).

Sentences of this type, however, are rather in the minority in actual language use. Most negative clauses in daily occurrence are not linked up in the mind with questions at all. They are quite simply denials of positive statements. As Oihartzabal has put it, the negation they contain belongs to the assertion itself: “asertzioari berari dagokion ezetza” (Op. cit. 108). In a similar vein, E. Osa set up a somewhat

misleadingly phrased dichotomy between two kinds of negation: "asertzioaren ezetza" "a denial of the assertion" versus "asertzioari ez dagokion ezetza" "a denial not belonging to the assertion" (*Euskararen bitzordena*, 212).<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that Altube himself was already well aware of the distinction we are trying to analyse here. This is clear from the paragraph that introduces his discussion of negative clauses bearing nominal focus—an exceptional occurrence in his view—where he proclaims the negation marker *ez* to be focus in nearly all negative clauses: "Las oraciones en cuya flexión verbal va prefijado el negativo *ez*, presentan casi siempre como elemento inquirido, ese morfema *ez* o sea la cualidad negativa del verbo." (*Erderismos*, 48).<sup>6</sup>

What in this predominant type of sentence may be perceived as focus because of its informational prominence, is not, in fact, the focus of the negative clause. It is the focus of the positive statement denied by the speaker in the utterance he is making. This distinction, the importance of which will be made clear shortly, calls for a terminological innovation. Rather than availing myself of the designation "secondary focus", I prefer to introduce the term "quasifocus"—in Basque, *sasigaldegaita*—by which I mean to underscore that we are not dealing with a lesser degree of focus, but with something quite different, albeit related to it in a certain manner.

The language itself provides ample proof that we are not dabbling in hair-splitting finalities. Basque distinguishes indeed quite clearly between focus and quasifocus, not merely in assigning preverbal position to the former and postverbal position to the latter, but also in other ways.

Focus and quasifocus behave differently with respect to the following three phenomena:

(i). The intensifying suffix *-xe* frequently occurs with focus constituents, but, for many speakers at least, never with quasifocus:

- (7)a. Karmen ez dago hemen (\*hementxe), alboko etxean baizik.  
"Carmen is not here, but in the house next-door."
- (7)b. Ez dizut orain (\*oraintxe) ekarriko, bihar baizik.  
"I won't bring it to you right now, but tomorrow."
- (7)c. Alkatea ez zen orduan (\*orduantxe) etorri, apur bat geroago baizik.  
"The mayor didn't come right then, but a little later."

(ii). In negative sentences, just as in positive ones, emphatic personal pronouns can occur either as topic or as focus, but, there again, for many speakers, never as quasifocus:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Actually, a more elaborate version of the same distinction is offered on page 204 of Osa's study with due reference to Oihartzabal's work.

<sup>6</sup> As to the merits of Altube's formulation here, I could not agree more with Oihartzabal's comment: "I don't believe that saying that the negation itself is focus clarifies matters at all." (My translation from "Behako bat ezezko esaldieri", p. 106)

<sup>7</sup> *EGLU*'s claim that emphatic pronouns tend not to occur in negative clauses at all must be rejected on the basis of examples such as (8)a. Cf. *EGLU* I, p. 84.

For a justifiable criticism of *EGLU*'s choice of examples, see E. Osa, *Euskararen bitzordena*, p. 46.

- (8)a. Nork ez du entzun berri hori? —Neuk ez dut entzun. (Osa, *Eusk. Hitz.* 212)  
 “Who hasn’t heard that piece of news? —I haven’t heard it.”
- (8)b. Bihar ez naiz ni (\*neu, \*neroni, \*nihaur) Bilbora joango (, Pello baizik).  
 “Tomorrow I myself won’t go to Bilbao (, but Pete will).”

Example (8)a shows an emphatic pronoun as focus in a negative sentence, while example (8)b demonstrates that such pronouns cannot be quasifocus.

(iii). Unlike focus, quasifocus can function as sentence topic.

Whereas topic and focus are clearly mutually exclusive notions, a speaker may very well decide to make the focus of an assertion into the topic of his denial of that assertion. Thus the statement *ardoa edaten du* “he drinks wine” with *ardoa* “wine” as focus, can be negated as (9)a with the subject pronoun as topic, but also as (9)b, where *ardorik* “any wine” has been made topic. In both (9)a and (9)b *ardorik* is quasifocus by our stated definition.<sup>8</sup>

- (9)a. Ez du ardorik edaten. “He doesn’t drink wine.”  
 (9)b. Ardorik ez du edaten. “Wine, he doesn’t drink.”

The same type of explanation applies to an example discussed by Osa (*Eusk. hitz.* 212), which presents, in our terms, an instance of verbal quasifocus. The straightforward negation of the assertion *gastatu egin dut* “I have spent it” with *gastatu* “spent” as focus is given by (10)a, but (10)b with topicalization of the quasifocus *gastatu* is also fine:

- (10)a. Ez dut gastatu egin. “I didn’t spend it.”  
 (10)b. Gastatu ez dut egin. “I didn’t spend it.”

Since, as we have seen, focus and quasifocus act differently with respect to at least four criteria, we find the distinction between the two concepts fully sanctioned by the very grammar of Basque itself.

#### IV. Site of quasifocus

This section will establish that Basque syntax need contain no separate rules for the positioning of quasifocus. Its place within the sentence will turn out to be directly predictable from its focus position in the underlying positive clause prior to the application of a movement rule induced by the presence of the negation operator.

As I. Laka has shown,<sup>9</sup> the syntax of negative clauses can be fully accounted for by starting out from a structure  $\bar{E}\bar{z}$  - S(entence), which subsequently undergoes a rule

<sup>8</sup> In (9)b, of course, it is also possible for *ardorik* to be focus: *Zer ez du edaten? —Ardorik ez du edaten.* “What doesn’t he drink?” “—He doesn’t drink wine”.

<sup>9</sup> See I. Laka, “Sentence negation in Basque”, published in: J. A. Lakarra and I. Ruiz Arzalluz, *Memoriae L. Mitxelena Magistri Sacrum*, II, 899-926, and also I. Laka, *Negation in Syntax: On the Nature of Functional Categories and Projections* (Ph. D. Dissertation, MIT, 1990).

of Auxiliary Attraction in which the finite verb is moved to the initial *ez*. As a result of this process, the finite verb —prefixed by *ez*— will end up in initial, or if topicalization has applied, post-topic position in its clause.<sup>10</sup>

Accordingly, unless it has been topicalized (cf. section III), a quasifocus constituent will necessarily be located after the finite verb of its clause. It can be concluded, furthermore, that a negative clause built on a periphrastic verb has a precise quasifocus site: the preparticiple slot. This follows because this slot, which houses the focus of the underlying positive clause, clearly remains unaffected by the operation of Auxiliary Attraction. It should perhaps be pointed out that a constituent found in this slot is not ipso facto quasifocus. Indeed, a neutral element may appear there just in case the underlying positive clause lacks focus. If, however, there is a quasifocus present in the clause at all, it must be in the preparticiple slot —again, unless topicalized.

Turning now to factual evidence, our a priori deduction as to the location of quasifocus seems to be neatly confirmed; witness the acceptability of (11)a and (11)c as against (11)b:

- (11)a. Amona ez da gaur Bilbora joango, Gasteizera baizik.  
 “Grandmother won’t go today to Bilbao, but to Vitoria.”
- (11)b. \*Amona ez da gaur Bilbora joango, bihar baizik.  
 “Grandmother won’t go today to Bilbao, but tomorrow.”
- (11)c. “Amona ez da gaur joango Bilbora, bihar baizik.  
 Grandmother won’t go to Bilbao today, but tomorrow.”

<sup>10</sup> Oihartzabal (“Behako bat ezezko esaldieri, p. 107) reports with evident approval Altube’s opinion to the effect that in an older period of the language the auxiliary must have followed the participle in negative clauses just as much as in negative ones. Despite the arguments adduced by Altube and, in part, repeated by Oihartzabal, I fail to see how Basque, as we know it, provides any solid evidence for this claim, which, I may add, is categorically rejected by Mitxelena, when he wrote: “... *ez dute ikusiko* que es, y *siempre parece haber sido* (emphasis mine, R. de R.), la forma corriente de expresar la negation.» (“Miscelánea Filológica Vasca I”, *FLV* X-29 (1978), p. 224, reprinted in *P y T*, p. 381).

To my mind, it is highly significant that in Leizarraga’s writings, so archaic from many points of view, I have not been able to find a single instance of the type *ikusiko ez dute* in main clauses. In Etxeberri’s *Manual Devotionezkoa*, only half a century later, sure enough, such examples do occur. Yet, in the 3814 lines comprising the first part, only 13 instances appear, a rather small amount in a text all in verse, where the word order is clearly subservient to metrical and rhythmic considerations.

For these and similar reasons, I wish to replace Altube’s hypothesis with a different one giving a better account of the diachronic data. The apparently anomalous word order *ikusiko ez dute* is —or was— indeed fully grammatical, but not as a predecessor of the allegedly more recent *ez dute ikusiko*. Rather, it represents a marked option —almost comparable to the English *See it, they won’t*— connoting strong rhetorical emphasis and brought about by a stylistic rule of VP-Fronting, which is part of the grammar of Basque.

Such rhetorical emphasis was a recurrent feature of the oral delivery style of sermons as practised in Roman Catholic churches —and remains so in the Basque Country to this day. It is therefore no accident that the authors most mentioned in connection with this anomalous word order were all famous preachers: Larramendi, Cardaberaz, Ubillos, Lardizabal. They and their followers so used and overused this rhetorical device that it ended up losing its expressive connotation, and hence, its *raison d’être*. And, as we are dealing with a highly marked syntactic structure, the principle of least effort then saw to it that this construction gradually dropped out of use altogether, particularly in those areas where it had been most abused. In books, however, it can still be encountered up to recent times, e.g. in J. A. Irastza’s novel *Bizia garratza da*, dating from 1950: *Zergatik ezkondu ez zinan?* “Why didn’t you marry?”

Verbal quasifocus is characterized by the presence of the dummy verb *egin* “to do”, inherited from the underlying positive assertion. We have already encountered an instance of it in Osa’s example (10)a. More interesting examples can be discovered in contemporary Basque literature:

- (12)a. Oraindik ez naiz Balantzategiko ikuilluan sartu ere egin! (B. Atxaga, *Bebi* 60)  
 “I have not even gone yet into the cowshed of Balantzategui!”
- (12)b. ...zokoetan benenoa jartzea ez zaizu burutik pasa ere egiten. (B. Atx. *Obab* 148)  
 “...it doesn’t even occur to you to put poison in the corners.”
- (12)c. Niri ez zait burutik pasa ere egiten zu baino geroago hil nintekeenik. (Ib. 165)  
 “It doesn’t even occur to me that I could die after you.”

Note the presence of *ere* meaning “even” between the quasifocus and the following participle in all these examples. In positive sentences, however, *ere* meaning “also” always blocks focushood: *Amona ere badator* “Grandmother too is coming” and not \**Amona ere dator*. Now, while the problems around *ere* may indicate that at least some negative sentences have a more complicated history of derivation than Laka’s analysis seems to allow for, I can see no reason to doubt the quasifocus status of *sartu* and *burutik pasa* in the examples above. Moreover, it would appear that also nominal quasifocus can be directly followed by *ere*:

- (13)a. Ez dituzte eskolara ere bidaltzen. (B. Atx. *Obab*. 134)  
 “They don’t even send them to school.”
- (13)b. Baina Julianek ez zion jaramonik ere egin. (B. Atx. *Obab*. 155)  
 “But Julian didn’t even take notice.”

If this is correct, then, under the assumption that there is basically only one morpheme *ere*, we have now discovered another important difference between focus and quasifocus:

- (iv) Focus, but not quasifocus, is blocked by a directly following *ere*.

Returning after this slight digression to our concern with the location of quasifocus, we must now grant some attention to the words of a grammatical scholar of great eminence: P. Lafitte. In his immensely influential *Grammaire basque* dealing with the literary usage more or less common to Labourdin and Low-Navarrese authors, Lafitte made a statement utterly at variance with our findings: “S’il y a plusieurs éléments entre l’auxiliaire et le verbe significatif, c’est le plus rapproché de l’auxiliaire qui domine les autres.” (*Grammaire basque*, § 118.2, p. 49).

The implication in our terms of this statement would be that the northern varieties of Basque differ from the southern ones in having a post-auxiliary instead of a preparticiple quasifocus site.

However, as B. Oihartzabal —himself a user of the literary Navarro-Labourdin dialect— has already pointed out, there is little or no reason to accept this claim. To



convince the reader of this, the following examples, all belonging to the variety described in Lafitte's grammar, should be sufficient:

- (14)a. Ez dut liburutto haur, letratu handientzat eguiten. (Ax. Gero, 19)<sup>11</sup>  
 "I am not writing this booklet for the great scholars."

Here the quasifocus is obviously *letratu handientzat* "for the great scholars", not *liburutto haur* "this booklet", which is clearly topic.

- (14)b. Etxarete alabainan zuek mintzatzen, bainan Izpiritu saindua. (Mk. 13.11; Dv)  
 "It is not, however, you who speak, but the Holy Spirit."

Here the subject *zuek* "you" is evidently quasifocus and is to be linked to the following participle *mintzatzen* "speaking" rather than to the preceding auxiliary form *etxarete* "you are not", from which it is separated by the intervening sentence adverb *alabainan* "however".

- (14)c. Altubek, egia erran, ez zien ezezko esaldieri toki handirik eskaini.  
 (Oihartzabal, *Behako bat ezezko esaldieri*, 103)  
 "Altube, to tell the truth, did not devote much space to negative sentences."

The context in Oihartzabal's article makes it clear that *toki handirik* "much space" is quasifocus in this sentence; not, pace Lafitte, *ezezko esaldieri* "to negative sentences".

Finally, if Lafitte were right in linking quasifocus to the post-auxiliary position, one would naturally expect it to directly follow also any synthetically conjugated verb, since those tend to share in most of the syntactic behavior of auxiliaries. This, however, is not, in general, the case:

- (15)a. Aita ez dator, ordea, oinez, autobusez baizik.  
 "Father is not coming, however, on foot, but by bus."  
 (15)b. Aita ez dator etxera gaur oinez, autobusez baizik.  
 "Father is not coming home today on foot, but by bus."

As a matter of fact, there is no well-defined quasifocus position with respect to a synthetically conjugated verb. The reason for this is easy to grasp. According to Laka's analysis, Auxiliary Attraction—which applies to any conjugated verb, not just to auxiliaries—forces the verb to move forward to join the negation marker *ez*. But in doing so, the verb can leap over any number of sentence constituents, thereby causing the original preverbal focus site to become undetectable.

For the purpose of illustrating that any number of constituents—and therefore any number of words—can be intercalated between a negated auxiliary and its

<sup>11</sup> The telltale comma after *haur* is found in the original text, although it is lacking in Villasante's edition.

corresponding participle, we now quote a sentence spontaneously uttered by K. Mitxelena in his address to the ninth congress of Eusko Ikaskuntza held in 1983. In it, no less than 24 words separate the auxiliary *ez ote zuten* "whether they weren't" from the participle *idazten* "writing" occurring at the very end:

- (16)a. Nik neronek ezagutu dut gaztetan gure artean nabari zen halako susmo txarra ez ote zuten azken finean hangoek guk, hain garbiak ginelarik ere (eta batzuek, noski, bestea baino garbiago), idazten genuen baino hobeki, modu jatorragoan, ez hain modu "dorphean", idazten (*MEIG VI*, 58).  
 "I myself in my youth have recognized a certain suspicion which was manifest amongst us as to whether those over there weren't after all writing better, in a purer fashion, not in such a "heavy" fashion, than we ourselves were writing, we being so puristic (some, of course, more so than others)".

This already respectable number of intercalated words is easily doubled as soon as one agrees to leave the domain of actually attested examples for the realm of merely constructed ones. Sentence (16)b, inspired by a wellknown children's song, may be a real monstrosity in its length and complexity, but is yet fully grammatical, despite its 48 words intervening between the auxiliary *ez ditu* "has not" and the matching participle *hilko* "(will) kill".

- (16)b. Inork ez ditu gure baratzeko arto goxoa etengabe jaten duen aker txito gaiztoa zorrozki jotzen duen makila lodia erretzen duen su handia itzaltzen duen ur hotza edaten duen idi gorria tinko lotzen duen soka luzea maiz eteten duten sagu beltzak harrapatzen dituzten katu zahar bezain itsusiak, nire uste apalez behintzat, inoiz hilko.  
 "Nobody, at least in my humble opinion, will ever kill the as old as they are ugly cats that catch the black mice that often cut the long rope that firmly ties up the red ox who drinks the cold water that quenches the big fire that burns the thick stick that sharply beats the greatly evil billy-goat who constantly eats the delicious corn in our garden".

At this point in our investigation we should perhaps take into account the basic word order typology of Basque, generally assumed to be verb-final. And indeed, if Basque sentence structure were consistently verb-final at the level where Auxiliary Attraction operates, the existing preverbal focus would necessarily entail a clause-final quasifocus at that level. If there is such a level, however, it is not surface structure, as is shown by the fully grammatical examples (17)a and (17)b:

- (17)a. Aita ez dator oinez gaur etxera, autobusez baizik.  
 "Father is not coming home today on foot, but by bus."  
 (17)b. Nik ez daukat dirurik orain zuretzat, bai, ordea, maitasuna.  
 "I do not have money for you now, but I do have love."

In (17)a, *oinetz* "on foot" is quasifocus, and in (17)b, *dirurik* "any money", none of which is clause-final.

This negative result is not altogether surprising. The verb-final character of Basque, after all, is a matter of D-structure mainly. No such verb-final constraint applies to S-structure, although it is true that a slight statistical predominance of verb-final sentences has been detected.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, there may likewise be a statistical trend towards clause-final quasifocus in clauses with a synthetic verb, but this fact will hardly help us in analysing individual sentences.

Therefore, our investigation in this section has led to the following conclusion: In contrast to the situation in sentences with a periphrastically conjugated verb, where the preparticiple slot definitely acts as the quasifocus site, there is no definable quasifocus position in clauses where the verb is synthetic.

## V. Consulting Mitxelena

In the introduction we already had occasion to bemoan the scant attention Basque grammarians have given to the matter of focus in negative sentences, the intricacies of which they may have found hard to come to terms with.

Even Mitxelena was no exception in this respect. In a lengthy paper about topic and focus in Basque, published in *Euskal linguistika eta literatura: bide berriak* (1981, also in *MEIG* VI 167 and *SHLV* II 656), only a short final paragraph is devoted to negative sentences. Still, short as it is, what Mitxelena did say was entirely to the point and contains in a nutshell much of what we have been discussing above.

Taking a negative statement like *Aita ez da etorri* "Father hasn't come", he observes that this sentence can serve as an answer to either *Aita etorri al da?* "Has father come?" or *Nor ez da etorri?* "Who hasn't come?" In my approach, this amounts to the correct observation that *aita* "father" can be either topic or focus in this sentence.

Moreover, Mitxelena adds that for the subject *aita* to stand between the auxiliary and the participle, emphasis on it is required: *Ez da aita etorri, ama baiizik* "Father hasn't come, but mother" This, of course, is tantamount to my claim that *aita*, when placed directly in front of the participle *etorri*, is—or can be—quasifocus, entailing the presence of a contrast of sorts, either overtly expressed or merely understood.

In his somewhat casual formulation, Mitxelena, unlike Lafitte, does not discriminate between preparticiple and post-auxiliary position. From the evidence of his own writing practice, however, it appears that what is involved must be the former and not the latter.

One way of showing this is by observing the behavior of sentence adverbs, most of which, by the very nature of things, are unable to bear focus or quasifocus. Such adverbs are never found in preparticiple position, although they do occur immediately after the auxiliary:

- (18)a. Ez du, dirudienez, hauts gehiegi eraiki Euskalerrian. (*MEIG* III 155 = *MEIG* VIII 25)

"It hasn't, apparently, kicked up too much dust in the Basque Country."

<sup>12</sup> For some, although rather limited, statistical data in support of verb final surface structures, see R. de Rijk, "Is Basque an SOV language?" (*FLV* I-3 (1969) p. 323. [Included in this volume].

- (18)b. ...baina ez da noski guzien belarrietara iritxiko. (*MEIG* IV 26 = *MIH* 38)  
 "...but it won't, of course, reach everybody's ears."  
 (18)c. Ez zuten, horratik, behinere menderatu. (*MEIG* VIII 81 = *MIH* 46)  
 "They, nonetheless, never dominated him."  
 (18)d. Ez da, azkenik, elizgizona. (*MEIG* V 36 = *MIH* 234)  
 "He is not, in the end, a cleric."

See also example (16)a above, which contains the adverbial phrase *azken finean* "after all" placed in the post-auxiliary position.

## VI. Conclusions

(i). Focus must be defined as that constituent which corresponds to the *wh*-element in the —usually tacit— question pragmatically pertinent to the statement we are dealing with, and not simply as the most prominent part of the comment or rheme.

(ii). In negative sentences, focus must be sharply distinguished from quasifocus, the latter being the focus of the positive statement actually denied by the speaker.

(iii). The location of focus in negative sentences coincides with that in positive sentences: immediately in front of the first member of the finite verbal complex —hence directly in front of the negated auxiliary in sentences that contain the negation marker *ez*.

(iv). The quasifocus site is located immediately in front of the participle in sentences whose verb is periphrastically conjugated (i.e. consists of auxiliary plus participle), and anywhere after the verb in sentences whose verb is synthetically conjugated (i.e. consists of one word only).

(v). Quasifocus can be topicalized, in which event it appears before the verb.

A final quotation from B. Oihartzabal, as true of this essay as it was of his: "Anitz errateko gelditzen da oraino." ("There still remains a lot to be told".)

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