Week 5
More on the Basque noun phrase

November 17, 2009

1 Basics

Last week we saw that the Basque definite article can appear in the following environments:

- Definite DPs
- Generic nouns.
- Non-specific and existential nouns.
- Predicative adjectives in copular clauses
- Abstract nouns.

To understand this distribution, first we need to look at some quantification data. Etxeberria (2005) noticed that Basque quantifiers can be divided into two classes.

- Quantifiers that always require the definite article.
- Quantifiers that never allow the definite article.

(1) *Quantifiers that require -a*
   a. *guzti* 'all'
   b. *den* 'all'
   c. *gehien* 'most'
   d. *bakoitz* 'each'

(1) * Mutil { guzti- / den- / gehien- / bakoitz- } etorri dira.

(2) ✓ Mutil { guzti-ak / den-ak / gehien-ak / bakoitz-a } etorri dira.

(3) *Quantifiers that don't allow*
   a. *batzu(e)k* 'some'

b. *zenbait* 'some'

c. *hainbat* 'some'

d. *asko* 'many'

e. *gutxi* 'few'

f. *ugari* 'a lot (of)'

g. numerals

h. *n baino gehiago* 'more than *n*'

i. *n baino gutxiago* 'less than *n*'

(4) * Mutil { batzu-ak / asko-ak / gutxi-ak / ugari-ak } etorri dira.

(5) ✓ Mutil { batzuk / asko / gutxi / ugari } etorri dira.

This distribution is not random –Etxeberria proposes that we can capture it through the following generalization.

- Quantifiers that require *-a* are strong quantifiers.
- Quantifiers that don't allow *-a* are weak quantifiers.

2 Strong vs. weak Qs

The standard definition of weak vs. strong quantifier is the one given in Barwise and Cooper (1981), which is somewhat complicated.

(6) *Weak vs. strong quantifiers*
A quantifier Q is strong if for every model $M = \langle E, |\ \ | \rangle$ and every $A \subseteq E$, if the quantifier $|\ Q\ |\ (A)$ is defined, then either $A \in |\ Q\ |\ (A)$ or $A \notin |\ Q\ |\ (A)$. Otherwise, Q is weak.

Fortunately for us, Milsark (1974) had already provided an easier diagnostic.

(7) *A diagnostic for weak and strong quantifiers*
A quantifier is strong if it cannot appear in the existential *there* construction, and weak otherwise.

(8) * There are { all / most } boys in the garden.

(9) * There is { every / each } boy in the garden.

(10) There are { some / many / few / a lot of / five / less than five / more than five } boys in the garden.

(11) * Ba dira mutil { guztiak / denak / gehienak / bakoitza } lorategian.

(12) Ba dira mutil { batzuk / asko / gutxi / ugari } lorategian.

(13) Ba dira { zenbait / hainbat } mutil lorategian.

(14) Ba dira bost mutil { baino gehiago / baino gutxiago } lorategian.

What's some difference between weak and strong quantifiers that can explain the distribution of *-a*? Etxeberria proposes that:

- Strong quantifiers are contextually restricted.
- Weak quantifiers are not contextually restricted.
- Therefore *-a* is a quantifier domain restrictor.

(15) The children ate every cookie

This sentence does *not* mean:

- the children ate every existing cookie in the world.

Rather, it means

- given a contextually salient set of cookies, the children ate all of them.

A property of contextually restricted quantifiers is that they presuppose a non-empty domain of quantification.

(16) Liburu { guztiak / gehienak } irakurri behar dituzu
book all most read must AUX
"You have to read all/most of the books"

This sentence is weird if there are no books in the relevant contextual domain. In contrast, weak quantifiers do not trigger this presupposition. This sentence is good even if there are no books in the contextual domain.

(17) Liburu { asko / gutxi } irakurri behar dituzu
book many few read must AUX
"You have to read many/few books"

3 Partitivity

There are contexts, however, where weak quantifiers come with a domain restriction.

(18) When we arrived in the village, several houses were abandoned.

(19) My office is a mess. Many papers are piled on the desk.

(20) I came into the room. At least three students were sleeping.

The relevant reading can be highlighted through the partitive construction

(21) When we arrived in the village, several of the houses were abandoned.

(22) My office is a mess. Many of the papers are piled on the desk.

(23) I came into the room. At least three of the students were sleeping.

Basque shows the same alternation.

(24) Ikasle batzuk garagardoa edan zuten
student some beer drink AUX
"Some students drank beer"

(25) Ikasle-etatik batzuk garagardoa edan zuten
students.ALL some beer drink AUX
"Some of the students drank beer"

This alternation is possible only with weak quantifiers

(26) Ikasle guztiek garagardoa edan zuten
student all beer drink AUX
"Every student drank beer"

(27) * Ikasle-etatik guztiek garagardoa edan zuten
students.ALL all beer drink AUX
"Every student drank beer"

Summary so far...

- ✓ noun + strong quantifier + *-a*
- ✓ noun + weak quantifier.
- ✓ noun + partitive + weak quantifier.
- * noun + weak quantifier + *-a*
- * noun + partitive + strong quantifier + *-a*

The partitive construction is a way of obtaining a strong (proportional) reading of a weak quantifier. This amounts to saying that there are two ways of doing contextual restriction.

- *-a* is a case of Q-restriction, and it affects only strong quantifiers.

- the partitive is a case of N-restriction, and it affects the noun that appear with weak quantifiers.

(28) * Ikasle gutxi a etorri dira
student few come AUX
"Few students have come"

This is ungrammatical because *-a* cannot combine with weak quantifiers.

(29) * Ikasle-*etatik* guzti ak etorri dira
student every come AUX
"Every student has come"

This is ungrammatical because contextual restriction can only apply once per noun phrase.

(30) Ikasle guzti ak etorri dira
student many come AUX
"Every student has come"

(31) Ikasle etatik gutxi etorri dira
student few come AUX
"Few of the students have come"

These are grammatical because we are applying contextual restriction only once per noun phrase, and in the correct places.