

Week 7

Basic morphosyntax of the verbal system

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1 Synthetic vs. analytic verbs

Most Basque verbs are *analytic*, that is, they consist of a combination of a non-finite form of a lexical verb plus an auxiliary with the appropriate inflection for tense, mood, and agreement.

- (1) a. Ikus-i d-u-t
see.PERF 1ERG.RAD.3ABS
“I have seen it”
b. Ikus-iko ba-gin-tu-zue
see.FUT COND.1PL-ABS.RAD.2PL-ERG
“If you {saw/would see} us”

However, there is a small set of verbs that carry verbal inflection attached directly to the lexical root. These are the *synthetic* verbs (in Basque, they are known as *trinko* verbs). Modern grammars recognize around 25 of these verbs, though only about a dozen are commonly used (the exact number might depend on factors like dialect, age of the speaker, or level of education of the speaker).

- (2) a. D-arama-t
1ERG.carry.3ABS
“I carry it”
b. D-aniz(u)-zki-gu
3ABS.hear.PL-ABS.1PL-ERG
“We hear them”

Note that all synthetic verbs also have analytic forms. Thus, on top of (2), we also find:

- (3) a. Erama-ten d-u-t
carry.IMPERF 3ABS.RAD.1ERG
“I carry it”
b. Entzu-ten d-i-tu-gu
hear.IMPERF 3ABS.RAD.ABS-PL.1PL-ERG
“We hear them”

The difference between the two forms is subtle: synthetic forms denote an *habitual* action, whereas the corresponding analytic form denotes a *punctual* (or non-habitual) action. Verbs without a synthetic/analytic dichotomy are ambiguous between these forms.

2 Non-finite verb forms

2.1 Basic forms

There are four non-finite verb forms.

1. The perfective
2. The radical
3. The imperfective
4. The future

The perfective The perfective consists of the radical form plus, occasionally some perfectivizing suffix. It is usually given as the first form because, in many dialects, including Standard Basque, it is the citation form of the verb (e.g., Q: *How do you say [verb] in Basque?* A: [radical + perfective]).

- The most common perfectivizing suffix is *-tu*, which has the allomorph *-du* after /n/ or /l/. This is the only productive one (i.e., the only one that can be affixed to new verbs).
- Another common suffix is *-i*, though this one is not productive, and it is mostly found in native Basque verbs.
- Some verbs do not take a perfectivizing suffix at all (or, depending on your theory, you might want to say that they take a phonologically null affix). Typically, these are verbs whose radical ends in *-o*.

The radical Quite obviously, the radical consists of the root of the verb without any suffixes. It is used only in a limited number of contexts, such as imperatives.

(4) Kompon ezazu
fix.RAD IMP
"Fix it!"

The imperfective The imperfective is formed by adding the suffix *-ten* or *-tzen* to the radical. Specifically,

- *-ten* is used with
 1. verbs whose radical ends in *-n*,
 2. verbs with a *-tu* or *-i* perfective whose radical ends in a sibilant.
- *-tzen* is used otherwise.

The future The future is formed by adding the suffix *-ko* to the radical, or *-go* if the radical ends in /n/ or /l/.

2.2 Nominalizations

Any Basque verb can be nominalized by appending the definite article *-a* to the imperfective form, minus its final *-n*. Once we do this, the verb (actually, the whole verb phrase) functions as a noun.

- (5) Irakurri ‘to read’ → irakurtzen ‘to read (imperf.)’ → irakurtzea ‘the reading’
(6) Liburuak irakurtzea interesgarria da
books.ABS read.IMPERF.DEF interesting.DEF AUX
“Reading books (or “the reading of books”) is interesting”

The imperfective might also be inflected for ergative or dative case, if the syntax of the clause so demands.

- (7) a. Liburuak irakurtzeak buru mina ematen dit
books.ABS read.IMPERF.DET.ERG head pain.ABS give.IMPERF AUX
“Reading books gives me a head ache”
b. Liburuak irakurtzeari ezetz esan nion
books.ABS read.IMPERF.DET.DAT no say AUX
“I said ‘no’ to the reading of books” (=I refused to read books)”

As we will see below, some periphrases also require a nominalized verb to be inflected for the locative or directional cases.

3 Verbal periphrases

3.1 The progressive

Progressive tenses are formed by combining the imperfective form of the verb with the particle *ari* and an intransitive form of the auxiliary. Note that one needs to use an intransitive auxiliary even if the verb is not intransitive. This means that we lose inflectional information about the person and number of the object. This can be remedied by context or (more typically) by including an overt object.

- (8) a. Ikusi dut
see AUX.TR
“I have seen it”
b. * Ikusi naiz
see AUX.INTR
“I have seen it”
(9) a. Ikus-ten ari naiz
see.IMPERF PROG AUX.INTR
“I am watching (it)”
b. * Ikus-ten ari dut
see.IMPERF PROG AUX.TR
“I am watching (it)”

Ari is clearly related to the verb *aritu* ‘to be engaged in an activity’. *Aritu* takes a nominal complement inflected for the locative case.

- (10) Haurra nintzen-ean, saskibaloian aritu nintzen
 child.DEF AUX-PAST.WHEN basketball.LOC engage.PERF AUX
 “When I was a child, I used to play basketball (lit., “I was engaged in playing basket-
 ball”)

3.2 Periphrases with *joan* ‘to go’

The most obvious one is a future periphrasis, equivalent to English “going to”. In this case, we need an imperfective form with the directional case ending *-ra* attached (note that, due to a phonological rule, the final /-n/ of the imperfective is deleted). The verb *joan* can only be in one of the synthetic forms.

- (11) Jonek partidua ikustera doa
 Jon.ERG game.ABS watch.IMPERF.TO goes
 “Jon is going to watch the game”

If we use an analytic form, the reading of the sentence is one of physically going somewhere to perform an action in that place.

- (12) Jonek partidua ikustera joaten da
 Jon.ERG game.ABS watch.IMPERF go.IMPERF AUX
 “Jon goes somewhere, and he watches the game there”

If we use a bare imperfective (instead of imperfective + locative), we get instead a progressive/gradual change of state meaning.

- (13) Egunetik egunera zahartzen doa
 day.from day.to old.IMPERF goes
 “He’s getting older every day”

4 The verb *egin* ‘to do’

4.1 *Egin* as a focal marker

In one of its major uses, *egin* takes a verb in the radical form, and its inflected for the appropriate non-finite form and auxiliary. The result is a focalized version of the *egin*-less sentence.

- (14) a. Jonek liburua irakurriko du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read.FUT AUX
 “Jon will read the book”
 b. Jonek liburua irakurri egingo du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read do.FUT AUX
 “Jon will certainly read the book”

4.2 *Egin* as a verbalizer

In its other major use, *egin* takes a noun or an adjective and turns them into the corresponding verb.

- (15) a. Jonek negar egin zuen
 Jon.ERG cry.ABS do AUX
 “Jon has cried”

- b. Jonek lo egin zuen
 Jon.ERG sleep.ABS do AUX
 "Jon has slept"
- c. Jonek farre egin zuen
 Jon.ERG laugh.ABS do AUX
 "Jon has laughed"

4.3 Is it the same *egin* in both cases?

Arguably yes, because we cannot stack one on top of the other.

- (16) * Jonek negar egin egin zuen
 Jon.ERG cry.ABS do do AUX
 "Jon did certainly cry"

5 Modal verbs

In addition to lexical verbs and auxiliaries, Basque also has a few modal verbs and modal particles that appear sandwiched between the verb and the auxiliary. The main modal verbs are.

- *behar* which is used to convey necessity ('need/must').

- (17) Jonek liburua irakurri behar du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read need AUX
 "Jon {needs to/must} read the book"

- *nahi* which is used to convey desire ('want').

- (18) Jonek liburua irakurri nahi du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read want AUX
 "Jon wants to read the book"

- (19) *ahal* which is used to convey possibility or ability ('can').

- (18) Jonek liburua irakurri ahal du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read can AUX
 "Jon can read the book"

Note that both *behar* and *nahi* can also be used as main verbs. For this reason, some authors refer to them a *semi-auxiliaries*.

- (19) a. Jonek liburua behar du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS need AUX
 "Jon needs the book"
- b. Jonek liburua nahi du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS want AUX
 "Jon wants the book"

The modal particles, on the other hand appear sandwiched between the auxiliary and either the lexical verb or (if any) the modal verb. The main ones are:

- *omen* which is used to convey hearsay ('apparently').
- (20) Jonek liburua irakurri behar omen du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read need apparently AUX
 "Apparently, Jon {needs to/must} read the book"

- *ohi* which is used to convey habituality ('usually').
- (21) Jonek liburua irakurri behar ohi du
 Jon.ERG book.ABS read need usually AUX
 "Usually, Jon {needs to/must} read the book"

6 Auxiliaries

Auxiliaries are complicated, for various reasons.

- Basque shows three-way agreement: with subjects, with direct objects, and with indirect objects. Therefore, most auxiliaries carry multiple agreement morphemes.
- In some cases, number and person agreement with the same argument can be expressed through independent morphemes, and in some other cases not.
- There is also the phenomenon of *absolutive displacement* (sometimes also called *eccentric agreement*), in which a specific morpheme agrees either with the absolutive or the ergative argument, depending on what their number features are.

However, the situation is to some extent simplified by the fact that the same set of morphemes are used all around. For instance:

Table 1: case inflection for 1st and 2nd person pronouns

CASE	I	you	we	you.PL
ABS	ni	zu	gu	zuek
ERG	ni-k	zu-k	gu-k	zuek
DAT	ni-ri	zu-ri	gu-ri	zue-i
COM	ni-reking	zu-rekin	gu-reking	zue-kin
		...etc...		

Table 2: 1st and 2nd person absolutive agreement

	1	2
SG	n-V	z-V
PL	g-V	z-V-e

We will look at this in much more detail next week.

7 Ordering restrictions

If we combine the elements we have discussed so far, we end up with relatively long verbal clusters.

- (22) Jonék ogia erosi nahi du.
Jon.ERG bread.ABS want AUX
“Jon wants to buy the bread”

Since Basque has a certain degree of word order freedom, we can mess around with the relative ordering of these elements. Ignore the subject, so that we start with an [object-verb-modal-auxiliary] string. On top of this, we may also have the following variants.

- (23) a. Ogia erosi nahi du.
b. Erosi nahi du ogia.
c. Nahi du ogia erosi.
d. Nahi du erosi ogia.
e. Ogia nahi du erosi.

Out of the 24 logically possible orders, these five are the only grammatical ones (though some of them require special intonation). The generalization that covers this paradigm is:

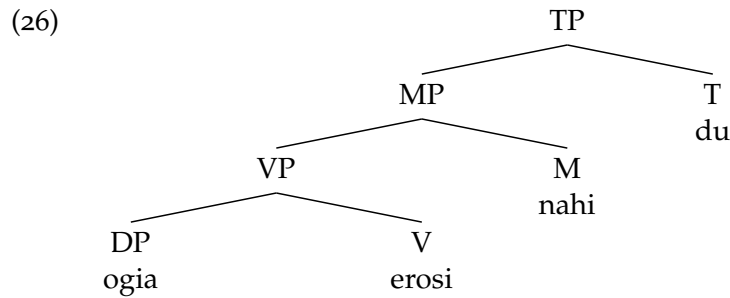
- (24) *The T adjacency condition (TAC)*
The inflected auxiliary (which is assumed to be in T^0) needs to be immediately right-adjacent to the head of its complement.

The only order that obeys the TAC and is ungrammatical is the following.

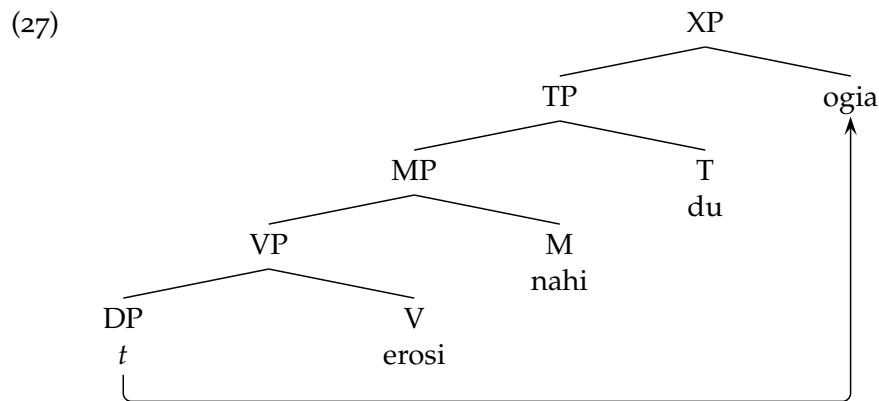
- (25) * Erosi ogia nahi du.

8 Homework

Suppose that we have a structure like this (ignore subjects for the purpose of this exercise).



This would give us the default order *ogia erosi nahi du*. The alternative *erosi nahi du ogia* can then be derived by moving the object towards the right. For the purposes of this exercise, we are not going to worry about the identity of the landing site.



Assuming that (26) is the basic structure in all cases:

1. Figure out which movement (or combinations of movements) are necessary to derive the three other grammatical orders in (24).
2. Figure out which condition we need to invoke, on top of the TAC, to exclude the ungrammatical order in (25)
3. Compare the possible orders in Basque to the possible orders in a comparable German sentence, such as *... dass er das Buch lesen können muss* (note that your answer may vary depending on which particular dialect of German you speak).