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Transitivity prominence in typological perspective: the case of Basque

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Abstract

This article contributes to the typological profile of Basque by discussing its status with respect to the parameter of transitivity prominence, i.e. the extent to which it makes use of transitive coding to encode events that are not prototypically transitive. The article is based on a questionnaire of 30 verb meanings specially designed to investigate the cross-linguistic variation in transitivity prominence. The main conclusion is that the relatively low degree of transitivity prominence found in Basque sharply contrasts with the situation of its Romance neighbors. However, in a typological perspective, the situation of Basque in this respect is similar to that observed in some Indo-European languages such as Russian, and cannot be compared to the extremely low degree of transitivity prominence observed in some Caucasian languages.

Keywords: *Basque, transitivity, transitivity prominence, valency, coding frames, argument coding.*

1. Introduction

This article is intended to contribute to the typological profile of Basque by examining the status of this language with respect to a typological parameter to which attention has recently been drawn: transitivity prominence.

The notion of transitivity prominence accounts for cross-linguistic variation in the extent to which languages make use of transitive coding. For example, like English or French, Wolof (Atlantic) extends the transitive coding typically found with verbs such as 'break' to a verb like 'forget' (whose arguments cannot be described as an agent and a patient), whereas in Mandinka (Mande), 'forget' has an *extended intransitive construction* in which one of the arguments is an oblique argument, i.e. an argument whose coding is not different from that of adjuncts in the construction of monovalent verbs.

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(1) Wolof (Atlantic – pers.doc.)

(1a) **Xale bi toj na weer bi.**
child CLb.D break PRF.3SG Glass CLb.D
'The child has broken the glass.'

(1b) **Xale bi fàtte na sama sant.**
child CLb.D forget PRF.3SG my name
'The child has forgotten my name.'

(2) Mandinka (Mande – pers.doc.)

(2a) **Díndíŋò yè wéeróo tèyí.**
child.D CPL.TR glass.D break
'The child has broken the glass.'

(2b) **Díndíŋó ñìná-tà ŋ́ kòntóŋò lá.**
child.D forget-CPL.INTR 1SG name.D POSTP
'The child has forgotten my name.'

It has long been known that English or French have a much stronger tendency to employ transitive verbs than for example Russian. Say (2014) provides a precise picture of the variation in transitive prominence across European languages. As regards the languages of the world, some precise data are now available due to the Leipzig Valency Classes Project, whose database contains data from 36 languages worldwide. Haspelmath (2015) discusses the classification of the 36 languages according to their degree of transitivity prominence on the basis of the sample of 80 verb meanings whose equivalents were systematically collected for all the languages of the project. For example, in this classification, Mandinka (illustrated in Ex. (2) above) ranks 20th on 36, immediately after Italian, which means that its moderate degree of transitivity prominence is comparable to that also found in some West European languages. More generally, the data analyzed by Haspelmath (2015) suggest that, in the languages of the world, the low degree of transitivity prominence that characterizes the languages of Eastern Europe and of the Caucasus is exceptional, whereas languages with a degree of transitive prominence higher than that found in West European languages are common.

In this article, after sketching the theoretical background of this study (Section 2), I present the questionnaire I use to investigate the cross-linguistic variation in the extension of <A, P> coding to the arguments of bivalent verbs that are not prototypically transitive (Section 3). Section 4 compares the coding of the arguments of the verbs expressing the 30 verb meanings of the questionnaire in Basque and in its immediate Romance neighbors (French, Occitan, and Spanish). Section 5 discusses the Basque data, and Section 6 summarizes the main conclusions.

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2. The theoretical background

2.1. Transitivity

The notion of transitivity encompasses semantic transitivity and syntactic transitivity. There is a relationship between semantic and syntactic transitivity, since logically, syntactic transitivity can only be defined with reference to semantic transitivity. However, it is crucial to distinguish them carefully, since they do not necessarily coincide: transitive constructions do not necessarily refer to transitive events (cf. *The child saw a dog*), and transitive events are not necessarily encoded by transitive constructions (cf. *The glass was broken by the child*).

Semantic transitivity refers to the type of interaction between participants in two-participant events. As a semantic notion, it is gradient rather than categorical: two-participant events should not be characterized as transitive *vs.* non-transitive, but rather as more or less transitive. Prototypical transitive events (or events characterized by the highest possible degree of transitivity) involve a change of state or position undergone by one of the two participants (the patient) and triggered by the action of the other participant (the agent); moreover, prototypical transitivity implies that the action of the agent is conscious and voluntary, and aims at changing the state of the patient or controlling its position.

For example, the lexical meaning of *break* is compatible with the highest possible degree of semantic transitivity, but this is not the case for *hit* or *eat*. Hitting events are not prototypically transitive events, because the affected (or non-agentive) participant in a hitting event does not undergo a change of state or position, and consequently is not a typical patient. As regards eating events, the point is that the primary motivation of the action performed by the active participant in an eating event is not to change the state of the other participant or control its position, but rather to satisfy a physiological need, and consequently, the active participant in an eating event is not a typical agent.

2.2. Core transitive verbs

In this article, verbs encoding events involving one, two, or three essential participants are designated as *monovalent*, *bivalent*, and *trivalent*. *Transitive* and *intransitive* do not refer to the number of essential participants in the events denoted by verbs, but to the fact that they select a coding frame identical or not to that of verbs encoding a particular type of event. The delimitation of the set of transitive verbs is language-specific and relies on formal criteria, but the sets of transitive verbs of the individual languages are universally defined as including a particular semantic class of verbs, the *core transitive verbs*, defined as bivalent verbs that can head clauses encoding events characterized by a maximum degree of semantic transitivity as defined in Section 2.1 above.

In other words, a core transitive verb is a bivalent verb that has the ability to refer to two-participant events involving two well-individuated participants, a typical agent (i.e. a human participant consciously and willingly controlling an activity oriented towards the other participant), and a typical patient (i.e. a participant undergoing a change of state or position triggered by the activity of an agent). *Break* is

a good example of a core transitive verb. By contrast, as already commented in Section 2.1, *hit* is not a core transitive verb (and in many languages, hittees are coded differently from typical patients), and *eat* is not a core transitive verb either (which explains why many languages have two totally different translational equivalents of English *eat*, one of them transitive and the other intransitive, a situation that seems to never occur with core transitive verbs).

It is commonly assumed that, in the languages of the world, the set of the verbs recognizable as core transitive verbs according to the restrictive definition posited above shows a high degree of formal homogeneity, in the sense that, in each individual language, all core transitive verbs, or almost all, assign the same coding characteristics to their agents and patients. By contrast, cross-linguistically, as discussed among others by Tsunoda (1985) and Lazard (1994) and confirmed by Hartmann et al. (2013), no other class of verbs defined in terms of semantic role assignment shows a comparable propensity to group together into the same valency class. This suggests a cognitive prominence of this semantic class of verbs, and justifies giving it a central status in a typology of argument coding and in a typology of the interface between argument structure and morphosyntax.

2.3. Syntactically transitive verbs

In all languages, many verbs that are not core transitive verbs according to the definition put forward above select a type of argument coding identical to that selected by core transitive verbs. In this article, the term *transitive verb* without further specification refers to verbs whose construction includes two terms coded like the two arguments of core transitive verbs, whatever their semantic roles. For example, English *see* is not a core transitive verb, but the coding it assigns to its arguments identifies it as transitive, since verbs such as *break* or *fix* assign the same coding to their arguments. Basque *ikusi* 'see' is also a transitive verb, since its coding frame <ERG, ABS> is the same as that of *puskatu* 'break' – Ex. (3). By contrast, in the East Caucasian language Akhvakh, *harigurula* 'see' is not transitive, since its coding frame <DAT, ABS> is different from the coding frame <ERG, ABS> selected in Akhvakh by *biq'ōrula* 'break' – Ex. (4).

(3) Basque (pers.doc.)

(3a) **Haurr-ek** **ispilu-a** **puskatu** **dute.**
child-PL.ERG mirror-SG break.CPL PRS.A.3PL.P.3SG
'The children have broken the mirror.'

(3b) **Haurr-ek** **ispilu-a** **ikusi** **dute.**
child-PL.ERG mirror-SG see.CPL prs.A.3PL.P.3SG
'The children have seen the mirror.'

(4) Akhvakh (pers.doc.)

(4a) **Mik'i-de** **istaka** **biq'^{w}āri.**
child-ERG glass break.CPL
'The child broke the glass.'

(4b) **Mik'i-ɪa istaka harigʷari.**
child-DAT glass see.CPL
'The child saw the glass.'

Ex. (5) shows that, contrary to their English of French equivalents, the Mandinka verbs *làfí* 'want' and *ñìná* 'forget' are not transitive, since constituent order in Mandinka clauses is absolutely rigid, and the verbs in question select a coding frame NP1 V NP2 Postp different from the coding frame NP1 NP2 V typical for transitive clauses.

(5) Mandinka (pers.doc.)

(5a) **Kèwôo yè fòolèesúwòo dádâa.**
man.D CPL bicycle.D repair
'The man repaired the bicycle.'

(5b) **Kèwôo làfí-tà kód-òo lá.**
man.D want-CPL money.D POSTP
'The man wants money.'

(5c) **Kèwôo ñìná-tà ŋ́ kòntóŋò lá.**
man.D want-CPL 1SG name.D POSTP
'The man has forgotten my name.'

Similarly, French *regarder* 'look at' is transitive, but its English equivalent *look at* is not transitive. Its coding frame can be designated as *extended intransitive*, and its second argument can be characterized as an *oblique argument*.

As illustrated by such examples, there is cross-linguistic variation in the extension of the set of bivalent verbs selecting coding frames different from that typical for core transitive verbs, although transitive coding is universally the default type of coding for bivalent verbs.

2.4. Basic transitive coding

The notion of *basic transitive coding* is central in the typological study of transitivity. The basic transitive coding is a construction involving a verb and two NP's designated as A and P, whose coding is identical to that of the agent and the patient in the construction of core transitive verbs.

The question that arises here is that the coding of agents and patients in the construction of core transitive verbs may show different types of variation which do not have the same consequences for the identification of a particular construction as the basic transitive construction in a given language. For example, in many languages, the coding of the arguments of core transitive verbs shows a variation that can be analyzed in terms of choice between the basic transitive construction and detransitivized variants thereof (either passive or antipassive, depending on the languages). It is not possible to develop a detailed discussion of this complex question within the limits of this paper, but suffice it to say that, in the particular case of Basque, there is no difficulty in defining basic transitive coding as a construction involving a ergative-marked NP and an absolutive-marked NP (or an ergative-marked NP and an NP

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showing an absolutive/dative alternation, in the Basque varieties that have developed a system of differential object marking), and in which the participants represented by these two NPs are cross-referenced by the corresponding indexes (the so-called *nor-nork* agreement pattern).

3. Transitivity prominence and the coding frames of semantically bivalent verbs

Transitivity prominence broadly defined as the tendency to use basic transitive coding with reference to situations other than prototypical actions involving an agent and a patient encompasses various aspects. For example, many languages (including Basque) have an important class of semantically monovalent predicates lexicalized as light verb compounds, with their unique argument encoded like the agent of prototypical transitive verbs, and the non-verbal element of the compound encoded like the patient of prototypical transitive verbs (although it may not share all behavioral properties typical for NP's referring to patients), as Basque *negar egin* 'cry', lit. 'do tear'.

In this article, I concentrate on a particularly important aspect of transitivity prominence, namely the assignment of A coding and P coding to the arguments of bivalent verbs other than prototypical transitive verbs.

In order to be able to compare this particular aspect of the transitivity system of languages, building on my experience of working on languages belonging to various families and spoken in various parts of the world, I designed a questionnaire consisting of 30 verb meanings involving two participants. The verb meanings I selected are neither among those expressed by verbs that assign A coding and P coding to their arguments in (almost) all the languages for which I have been able to check the relevant data, nor among those that, according to my observations, have a marked tendency to be expressed by verbs assigning other types of coding to their arguments.

The 30 verb meanings I selected are listed in Table 1. They are quoted by means of English verbs in capitals. Since most of the English verbs used to quote the meanings selected for the questionnaire are polysemous verbs that may be found in various coding frames depending on the precise meaning they encode, the reader is invited to keep in mind that the only relevant meaning is that illustrated by the English sentence that accompanies each of the entries.

The relevance of this questionnaire for the cross-linguistic investigation of transitivity prominence is illustrated by Table 2, which compares the usual constructions expressing the 30 verb meanings in the following languages:

— Fooñi (Atlantic), a language with an extremely high degree of transitivity prominence;
— French, a language with a relatively high degree of transitivity prominence;
— Mandinka (Mande), a language with a moderate degree of transitivity prominence;
— Russian, a language with a relatively low degree of transitivity prominence;
— Akhvakh (East Caucasian), a language with an extremely low level of transitivity prominence.

Table 1

The 30 verb meanings selected to test the extension of <A, P> coding to the arguments of bivalent predicates that depart from the transitive prototype

1	ATTACK	as in: During the night enemy aircraft attacked several towns.
2	BE AFRAID OF	as in: This child is afraid of dogs.
3	BELIEVE	as in: Don't believe him, he is lying.
4	BETRAY	as in: He betrayed his best friend.
5	BITE	as in: Do you know what to do if your dog bites you?
6	CALL	as in: Feel free to call me if you need any help.
7	CLIMB	as in: The monkey climbed the tree, or Do you know who was the first person to climb Everest?
8	CROSS	as in: Don't cross the road without looking in both directions!
9	DESPISE	as in: She despises him for failing his exam.
10	ESCAPE FROM	as in: The mouse escaped from the cat.
11	FIND	as in: I found a set of keys in the street yesterday.
12	FOLLOW	as in: A dog followed me home.
13	FORGET	as in: I'll never forget you.
14	HATE	as in: Why does he hate me so much?
15	HEAR	as in: We heard a noise that resembled a bomb.
16	HELP	as in: I don't think he is willing to help us.
17	HIT	as in: Parents hit children because they were hit as children.
18	KNOW	as in: Do you know the man who greeted us?
19	LAUGH AT	as in: Don't laugh at me!
20	LIKE	as in: I don't like people who think they're better than other people.
21	LISTEN TO	as in: Listen to me when I am talking to you!
22	LOOK AT	as in: He looked at me with a strange look on his face.
23	NEED	as in: Don't leave me alone, I need you.
24	PITY	as in: She wasn't sure whether she loved or pity him.
25	SCOLD	as in: She scolded the child for picking the neighbor's flowers.
26	SEARCH FOR	as in: I searched for him but I didn't find him.
27	SEE	as in: I saw him on TV.
28	TOUCH	as in: She touched his hand reassuringly.
29	WAIT FOR	as in: I waited for him but he never came.
30	WANT	as in: I don't want more money, just less work to do.

In this table and in the following ones, the verbs that assign <A, P> coding to their arguments when expressing the relevant meaning are tagged with (+), those assigning other types of coding are tagged with (–), and those with two possible constructions both expressing the relevant meaning are tagged with (±).

Table 2

The 30 verb meanings in Fooñi, French, Mandinka, Russian, and Akhvakh

	Fooñi	French	Mandinka	Russian	Akhvakh
1	lóúm (+)	attaquer (+)	bòyí + kâŋ (–) bòyìŋkâŋ (+)	napast' na (–)	ʟ'ado abažuruʟa (–)
2	kólí (+)	avoir peur de (–)	sílà + lá (–)	bojat'sja + gén. (–)	ʟūruʟa (–)
3	fium (+)	croire (+)	lâa + lá (–)	verit' + dat. (–)	bužuruʟa (–)
4	bunt (+)	trahir (+)	jàmfâa (+)	izmenit' + dat. (–)	χijanałilōruʟa (–)
5	rum (+)	mordre (+)	kîŋ (+)	kusat' (+)	q̄'eleč'uruʟa (–)
6	wonk (+)	appeler (+)	kílì (+)	zvat' (+)	žōruʟa (+)
7	ñito(–)	escalader (+) grimper à/sur (–)	sélè (+ lá) (±)	vlezt' na (–), podnjat'sja na (–)	χ̄eruruʟa (–)
8	típ (+)	traverser (+)	tèyí (+ lá) (±)	perexodit' (+)	goč'uruʟa (+)
9	jútú (+)	mépriser (+)	jùtú + lá (–)	prezirat' (+)	maɬuq̄'eɬuruʟa (–)
10	pak (+)	échapper à (–)	kàná + má (–)	sbežat' ot (–)	χ̄ʷasārilōruʟa (–)
11	took (+)	trouver (+)	tàrá (+)	naxodit' (+)	mičunuʟa (–)
12	riiben (+)	suivre (+)	báyíndì (+)	sledovat' za (–)	q'edoīuruʟa (–)
13	loŋ (+)	oublier (+)	ñìná + lá (–)	zabyvat' o (–)	hidičuruʟa (–)
14	lat (+)	détester (+)	kôŋ (+)	nenavidet' (+)	kit'ałuruʟa (–)
15	jam (+)	entendre (+)	móyì (+)	slyšat' (+)	āʟ'unuʟa (–)
16	ramben (+)	aider (+)	dèemá (+)	pomoč' + dat. (–)	komoki gūruʟa (–)
17	tek (+)	frapper (+)	búsà (+)	udarit' (+)	l̄'ʷaruruʟa (–)
18	manj (+)	connaître (+)	lôŋ (+)	znat' (+)	beq'uruʟa (–)
19	lúu (+)	se moquer de (–)	jélè (+)	izdevat'sja nad (–)	ʟ'ado badaʟuruʟa (–)
20	maŋ (+)	aimer (+)	kànú (+)	ljubit' (+)	kʷīɬunuʟa (–)
21	janten (+)	écouter (+)	lámóyì (+)	slušat' (+)	hādax̄uruʟa (–)
22	jikeer (+)	regarder (+)	jùubêe (+)	smotret' na (–)	eq̄uruʟa (–)
23	soola (+)	avoir besoin de (–)	sùulá + lá (–)	nuždat'sja v (–)	q̄'ʷāraʕunuʟa (–)
24	bóténí (+)	avoir pitié de (–)	báláfâa + yé (–)	žal' + dat., gén. (–)	guħilōruʟa (–)
25	ñuumul (+)	réprimander (+)	dóoyâa (+)	rugat' (+)	naɬuruʟa (–)
26	ñes (+)	chercher (+)	ñínì (+)	iskat' (+)	eq̄edōruʟa (+)
27	juk (+)	voir (+)	jé (+)	videt' (+)	hariguruʟa (–)
28	gor (+)	toucher (+)	mǎa (+)	dotronut'sja do (–)	q'ūnuʟa (–)
29	kob (+)	attendre (+)	bàtú (+)	ždat' (+ gén.)	čani biχ̄uruʟa
30	maŋ (+)	vouloir (+)	làfí + lá (–)	xotet' (+)	kʷīɬunuʟa (–)
	29/1	24,5/5,5	20,5/9,5	15,5/14,5	3/27

Within the limits of this sample, the ratio of <A, P> coding and other types of coding is 29/1 for Fooñi, 24,5/5,5 for French, 20,5/9,5 for Mandinka, 15.5/14.5 for Russian, and 3/27 for Akhvakh.[1]

Note that, in Haspelmath's (2015) evaluation of the degree of transitive prominence in the 36 languages of the world-wide sample of the Leipzig Valency Classes Project, Mandinka occupies the 19th rank (just after Italian), Russian occupies the 32nd rank (surrounded by Armenian in the 31st rank and Icelandic in the 33rd rank), and the last rank is occupied by a language (Bezhta) belonging to the same East Caucasian language family as Akhvakh.

[1] In this evaluation, cells including two verbs with different constructions, or a single verb with two possible constructions both expressing the relevant meaning, have been counted for 0.5.

4. Argument coding for the verbs expressing the 30 meanings of the sample in Basque and its immediate Romance neighbors

Table 3 lists Basque verbs typically used to express the 30 meaning selected in the questionnaire, with the same conventions as in Table 2: verbs expressing the relevant meaning in a construction in which the two participants are encoded as an absolutive-marked NP and an ergative-marked NP, and the verb follows the *nor-nork* agreement pattern, are tagged with (+); those selecting another type of coding frame in the relevant meaning are tagged with (–), and those with two possible coding frames are tagged with (±). The data have been compiled from recent dictionaries of Standard Basque.

Table 3

The 30 verb meanings in Basque

		Basque
1	ATTACK	eraso, esetsi (–)
2	BE AFRAID OF	beldur izan (–)
3	BELIEVE	sinetsi (±)
4	BETRAY	saldu (+)
5	BITE	kosk egin (–), ausiki (+)
6	CALL	deitu (±)
7	CLIMB	igo (±)
8	CROSS	zeharkatu (+)
9	DESPISE	gutxietsi (+)
10	ESCAPE FROM	ihes egin, itzuri (–)
11	FIND	aurkitu (+)
12	FOLLOW	jarraitu, segitu (–)
13	FORGET	ahaztu (±)
14	HATE	gorrotatu, gorroto izan (+)
15	HEAR	entzun (±)
16	HELP	lagundu (±)
17	HIT	jo (+)
18	KNOW	jakin (+)
19	LAUGH AT	burlatu, barre egin (–)
20	LIKE	maite izan (+)
21	LISTEN TO	entzun (±)
22	LOOK AT	begiratu (–)
23	NEED	behar izan (+)
24	PITY	errukitu (–)
25	SCOLD	gogor egin, errieta egin (–)
26	SEARCH FOR	bilatu (+)
27	SEE	ikusi (+)
28	TOUCH	ukitu (+)
29	WAIT FOR	itxaron (–)
30	WANT	nahi izan (+)
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Within the limits of this sample, the ratio of <A, P> coding and other types of coding in Basque is 17/13, slightly higher than that of Russian in Table 1 (15.5/14.5). According to this evaluation, Basque can consequently be characterized as a language with a relatively low degree of transitivity prominence.

Table 4 shows the corresponding data in the three Romance languages that have been in close contact with Basque during the last centuries: French, Occitan, and Spanish.

Table 4

		French	Occitan	Spanish
1	ATTACK	attaquer (+)	atacar (+)	atacar (+)
2	BE AFRAID OF	avoir peur de (–)	aver paur de (–)	tener miedo a/de (–)
3	BELIEVE	croire (+)	creire (+)	creer (+)
4	BETRAY	trahir (+)	traïr (+)	traicionar (+)
5	BITE	mordre (+)	mòrdre (+)	morder (+)
6	CALL	appeler (+)	cridar, sonar (+)	llamar (+)
7	CLIMB	escalader (+) grimper à/sur (–)	escalar (a) (±)	trepar a (–) escalar (+)
8	CROSS	traverser (+)	traversar (+)	atravesar, cruzar (+)
9	DESPISE	mépriser (+)	mespresar (+)	menospreciar (+)
10	ESCAPE FROM	échapper à (–)	escapar a (–)	escapar a/de (–)
11	FIND	trouver (+)	trobar (+)	encontrar (+)
12	FOLLOW	suivre (+)	seguir (+)	seguir (+)
13	FORGET	oublier (+)	oblidar (+)	olvidar (+) olvidarse de (–)
14	HATE	détester (+)	detestar (+)	odiar (+)
15	HEAR	entendre (+)	ausir (+)	oir (+)
16	HELP	aider (+)	ajudar a (–)	ayudar (+)
17	HIT	frapper (+)	batre, tustar (+)	golpear (+)
18	KNOW	connaître (+)	conéisser (+)	conocer (+)
19	LAUGH AT	se moquer de (–)	se trufar de (–)	burlarse de, reírse de (–)
20	LIKE	aimer (+)	aimar (+)	querer, amar (+)
21	LISTEN TO	écouter (+)	escotar (+)	escuchar (+)
22	LOOK AT	regarder (+)	agachar (+)	mirar (+)
23	NEED	avoir besoin de (–)	aver bezonh de (–)	necesitar (+)
24	PITY	avoir pitié de (–)	aver pietat de (–)	sentir lástima por (–)
25	SCOLD	réprimander (+)	reprimandar (+)	reñir (+)
26	SEARCH FOR	chercher (+)	cercar (+)	buscar (+)
27	SEE	voir (+)	veire (+)	ver (+)
28	TOUCH	toucher (+)	tocar (+)	tocar (+)
29	WAIT FOR	attendre (+)	esperar (+)	esperar (+)
30	WANT	vouloir (+)	voler (+)	querer (+)
		24,5/5,5	23,5/6,5	25/5

The data from these three Romance languages are quite homogeneous, allowing to characterize the three of them as languages with a relatively high degree of transitivity prominence, in sharp contrast with the relatively low degree of transitivity

prominence of Basque. The only discrepancies between French, Occitan, and Spanish, concern FORGET (<A, P> coding in French and Occitan, possibility of an extended intransitive coding in Spanish), HELP (<A, P> coding in French and Spanish, extended intransitive coding in Occitan), and NEED (<A, P> coding in Spanish, extended intransitive coding in French and Occitan).

5. Discussion

In the previous sections, it has been established that, in comparison with other languages, Basque has a relatively weak tendency to extend <A, P> coding to the arguments of bivalent verbs that are not prototypical transitive verbs. It is however striking that, in a not insignificant number of cases (7 out of 30), the Basque verbs of the sample have two possible ways of coding their arguments. Moreover, as indicated above, the data presented here have been compiled from recent dictionaries of Standard Basque, and the number of such alternations would be higher if data from all varieties of Basque were systematically included. To take just one example, the dictionaries of Standard Basque give *gorroto izan* 'hate' as a transitive verb assigning ergative marking and absolutive marking to the NP's representing its arguments, but the case frame <ERG, DAT> is signaled as possible in Bizcayan.

This particularity of Basque in the selection of coding frames for bivalent verbs that are not prototypical transitive verbs must be viewed in relation to the changes that have affected the valency properties of some classes of Basque verbs during the last centuries. As discussed by Creissels & Mounole (2017) on the basis of the data provided by Mounole (2011), the changes in the valency properties of Basque verbs must sometimes be viewed as isolated accidents in the evolution of individual verbs, but at least some of them can be analyzed as more or less regular:

— "... the variation observed in the coding frames of simplex verbs cognate with the non-verbal element of an *egin*-compound can be viewed as the result of the interaction between two conflicting tendencies: a tendency to align the encoding of arguments of the simplex verbs with the encoding of the same arguments in the light verb construction, and a tendency to fill the absolutive slot that would be left empty in a construction fully aligned with that of the light verb compound." (Creissels & Mounole 2017: 161)

— "In the most ancient Basque texts, aiming verbs (i.e., verbs referring to two participant events in which one of the participants exerts a volitional activity directed toward the other participant, without however triggering a change of state affecting the second participant: 'help', 'follow', 'beg', 'attack', etc.) are typically found with the coding frame <ABS, DAT>, but no modern dialect has maintained this situation ... In all dialects, the aimer tends to show the same ergative coding as the agent of typical transitive verbs, but variation can be observed in the treatment of the second participant: Western dialects have maintained the ancient dative coding, resulting in a non-canonical pattern <ERG, DAT> ... whereas in Eastern dialects, the original <ABS, DAT> pattern has been replaced by the canonical pattern <ERG, ABS>." (Creissels & Mounole 2017: 166)

Consequently, the relatively low degree of transitivity prominence observed in Basque (in comparison with its Romance neighbors) lends itself at least partially to a diachronic explanation:

— in the case of the bivalent verbs cognate with the non-verbal element of an *egin*-compound, the non-agentive participant is consistently dative-marked in the construction of the *egin*-compound, and the tendency to replace dative marking by absolutive marking in the construction of the corresponding simplex verb is relatively weak, resulting in the creation of bivalent verbs with an <ERG, DAT> coding frame that departs from basic transitive coding;
— in the case of aiming verbs, whose coding frame was mostly different from basic transitive coding in Old Basque, the tendency to eliminate the old <ABS, DAT> coding frame did not systematically result in its replacement by basic transitive coding, since in this respect, there is important variation across Basque varieties.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to complete the typological profile of Basque by introducing the typological parameter of transitivity prominence, which to the best of my knowledge was not considered as such in previous typological characterizations of Basque. The study of a sample of bivalent verbs that are not prototypically transitive shows that, in this respect as in many others, Basque sharply contrasts with its Romance neighbors, although its relatively low degree of transitive prominence is closer to that observed in a 'conservative' Indo-European language such as Russian than to the extremely low degree of transitivity prominence observed in East-Caucasian languages. In Section 5, I have tried to elaborate a diachronic explanation of this situation. An interesting aspect of this question, which I was unfortunately not in a position to develop here, is that the data analyzed in this paper, based on the indications provided by recent dictionaries of Standard Basque, do not fully reflect the variation across Basque varieties. A finer-grained study of this question would probably show a significant contrast between Bizcayan and Eastern dialects as regards the proportion of bivalent verbs that do not assign <A, P> coding to the NP's representing their arguments.

Abbreviations

A: agent, ABS: absolutive, CL: noun class, CPL: completive, D: definite, DAT: dative, ERG: ergative, INTR: intransitive, NP: noun phrase, P: patient, PL: plural, POSTP: postposition, PRF: perfective, PRS: present, SG: singular, TR: transitive, V: verb.

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