

## **Ergative Displacement in Basque and the division of labor between Morphology and Syntax\***

Beatriz Fernández and Pablo Albizu

University of the Basque Country-LEHIA

### **1 Introduction**

Our aim in this paper is to develop a minimalist syntactic analysis for so-called Ergative Displacement in Basque (henceforth ED), an instance of ‘deviated’ agreement previously used in the literature as evidence in favor of the existence of an autonomous Morphological Component (Laka 1993, Albizu 1995, Eguren 1995, Albizu and Eguren 2000). By doing so, we then argue in favor of broadening the limits of syntax, to the detriment of morphology.

The phenomenon of ED consists in the reduction, under certain conditions, of the agreement morphology of Basque transitive verbs: in particular, the ergative agreement marker is eliminated from transitive verbs because of the exceptional coindexation of the ERG argument by an ABS agreement marker.

To account for ED, in this paper we draw a direct correlation between syntactic configuration and agreement marking in a language, so that the canonical agreement pattern of a language will be viewed as reflecting a syntactic derivation in which the checking of a head’s [case]- and [ $\phi$ ]-features takes place in one single operation; otherwise, a split checking of the two feature-bundles will give rise to ED-type instances of ‘deviated’ agreement marking.

Our analysis will rest on three basic proposals on the syntax of Basque. First, as an extension of the *Obligatory Case Parameter* (Chomsky 1993, Bobaljik 1993) we will argue that in the ergative languages, [ $\phi$ ]-features are primarily encoded by the verbal heads (V in Basque), and not by T. Hence, the checking of the [ $\phi$ ]-features of V (henceforth  $\phi_2$ -features) becomes mandatory in these languages. [ $\phi_2$ ]-features will most often be checked off against absolutive arguments; however, they may occasionally be eliminated against ergative arguments (as a Last Resort operation). Second, we will also postulate that DPs differ as to their specification for [person]; in particular, 3rd person DPs, unlike the others, lack any specification for this feature. Accordingly, the satisfaction of the [ $\phi_2$ ]-checking requirement will be contingent upon arguments’ person. Finally, we will also claim that under particular circumstances the [ $\phi_2$ ]-checking requirement may also be met by an alternative Last Resort operation that inserts expletive verbal prefixes into the derivation. This Last Resort operation will mainly apply whenever neither the ABS nor the ERG argument satisfies the  $\phi$ -

checking requirement of V; however, on occasions it may also enter into competition with the strategy of ED.

The present paper is organized as follows. We begin in section 2 with a very sketchy introduction of the relevant features of the Basque verbal morphology, which will include a more precise characterization of the phenomenon of ED and which will also identify the three main agreement-patterns in the language —namely, canonical, ED- and expletive-patterns. The bulk of the paper in sections 3 to 6 will be devoted to the presentation of our syntactic analysis for these three agreement-patterns: the canonical agreement-pattern will be accounted for in section 3; the ED-pattern, along with some remarks on number agreement, in sections 4 and 5; and the so-called expletive-pattern in section 6. Finally, we will wrap up this paper by briefly summarizing our conclusions.

## 2 The verbal agreement system of Basque

### 2.1 Basic characterization of the agreement system of Basque

Basque is an ergative language. Transitive subjects are thus marked for Ergative (ERG) case, whereas unaccusative subjects and transitive objects are marked for Absolutive (ABS) case, as shown in (1):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. Ni Chicagora etorri n-a-iz  
I.ABS Chicago.ADL come.ASP 1SA-VOW-be  
*'I have come to Chicago'*
- b. Hi-k ni aurkitu n-a-u-k  
You(FAM)-ERG I.ABS find.ASP 1SA-VOW-have-2S/MASCE(FAM)  
*'You (familiar) have found me'*
- c. Ni-k hi aurkitu h-a-u-t  
I-ERG you(FAM).ABS find.ASP 2SA(FAM)-VOW-have-1SE  
*'I have found you (familiar)'*

Basque is also a language with a rich verb inflectional morphology. Indeed, Basque inflected verbs may carry up to four different agreement markers on a single verbal form which will coindex ABS, ERG and DAT arguments as well as the addressee in the communication —namely, *allocutive* agreement. This verbal agreement system follows an ergative-pattern in the language, so that, omitting DAT and ALLO agreement for simplicity's sake, Basque exhibits a set of prefixal markers to coindex ABS arguments and another independent set of suffixes for ERG arguments. The two sets are introduced in (2):<sup>2</sup>

(2) Absolutive and Ergative person agreement markers in Basque:

	<b>ABS-set</b>	<b>ERG-set</b>
<b>I</b>	n-	-t/-da-
<b>you (familiar)</b>	h-	(masc.) -k/-a-, (fem.) -n/-na-
<b>we</b>	g-	-gu
<b>you (nonfam)/(plural)</b>	z-	-zu

As shown in (2), the language systematically exhibits overt person morphology to mark 1st and 2nd person agreement; as for 3rd person, for the time being we can initially assume the standard position that 3rd person marking is always zero in both the ABS and ERG sets (Trask 1977, Euskaltzaindia 1987, Laka 1988, Albizu and Eguren 2000), although we should point out that this last position is controversial to some extent in the literature on Basque (Heath 1976, Ortiz de Urbina 1989).

Apart from person agreement markers, Basque inflected verbs may also carry independent plural morphemes. The “fission” of person and number agreement morphology will take place when the plural arguments are ABS (plural markers /-it-, -z-, -tza-, -zki-, (-te-)/) and 2nd or 3rd person ERG (plural markers /-e/ and /-te-/), respectively), as shown in the table in (3). (Plural markers are between brackets.) Sentence (4) provides an example of independent plural marking in Basque:<sup>3</sup>

(3) Split between person and number markers:

	<b>Absolutive</b>	<b>Ergative</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Plural</b>	g-...(-it-, -z-,...)	-gu
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> sg. Formal</b>	z-...(-it-, -z-,...)	-zu
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Plural</b>	z-...(-it-, -z-,... + -te)	-zu (-e)
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Plural</b>	(-it-, -z-,...)	(-te-)

- (4) Zuek gu aurkitu g-a-it-u-zu-e  
 You.P.ERG us.ABS find.ASP 1PA-VOW-PA-have-2PE-PE  
 ‘You guys have found us’

It is worth noting that, as argued by Laka (1988, 1993) the linear disposition of Basque agreement markers with respect to the verb root complies with Baker’s (1985) Mirror Principle—at least to a large extent—, as the morphological sequence ABS-root-DAT-ERG mirrors the unmarked S<sub>ERG</sub>-IO<sub>DAT</sub>-DO<sub>ABS</sub>-V ordering of constituents in the language (see however section 2.2):

- (5) Nik zuei liburuak salduko di-zki-zue-t  
 I.ERG you.p.DAT books.ABS sell.ASP PREFIX.have-PA-2PD.PD-1SE  
*'I sold books to you guys'*

To conclude with this initial characterization, Basque exhibits two different auxiliary-types that are defined by the feature [ $\pm$ ERG] (' $\pm$  ergative agreement'): on the one hand, [+ERG] auxiliaries such as *\*edun/\*ezan* 'to have and', on the other, [-ERG] auxiliaries such as *izan/\*edin* 'to be'. The positive/negative value of the feature is most often, but not always, linked to ERG case-assignment and therefore to transitivity, as shown in our initial examples in (1).

## 2.2 The phenomenon of Ergative Displacement in Basque

Let us proceed now to describe the phenomenon of Ergative Displacement in more detail. ED can be briefly described as follows. Under certain conditions, agreement with ergative DPs is marked on the verb by means of an absolutive affix, instead of by the regular ERG suffix. As a result, the phenomenon conveys the elimination of the expected ERG suffix. An example of ED is presented in (6), where the ERG argument *nik* 'I' is coindexed by the ABS prefix /n-/ instead of by the ERG suffix /-t/, contrary to expectations:

- (6) Nik hura aurkitu **n-u-en**  
 I-ERG she/he.ABS find.ASP **1SA<sub>E</sub>**-have-PAST  
*'I found her/him'*

For completeness, notice that the omission of the ERG marker is not accompanied by the selection of the [-ERG] auxiliary *izan* 'to be'.<sup>4</sup> Also, note that, as pointed out by Laka (1988, 1993), the phenomenon seemingly falls out of Baker's Mirror Principle, as the morphological deviation has no syntactic correspondence in the relative linear disposition of the two sentential arguments.

ED shows up only when the following three conditions are met in a sentence: first, the absolutive DP has to be third person; second, the ergative DP must be first or second person; and third, tense has to be either past or irrealis — two tenses that could morphologically be defined as [-present].

To begin with, compare the example in (6) above to those in (7a-b):

- (7) a. Hik ni aurkitu **n-ind-u-a-n**  
 You(FAM).ERG I.ABS find.ASP 1SA-VOW-have-2S/MASCE(FAM)-PAST  
*'You (fam.) have found me'*  
 b. Nik hi aurkitu **h-ind-u-da-n**  
 I.ERG you(FAM).ABS find.ASP 2SA(FAM)-VOW-have-1SE-PAST  
*'I have found you (fam.)'*

In (6), there is crucially a person-opposition between ERG and ABS arguments that licenses the application of ED: the ERG argument is local (1st or 2nd person) while the ABS argument is nonlocal, that is, 3rd person. In (7a-b), on the contrary, the relevant person-opposition between the two arguments is neutralized, as the two arguments are local. Once the person-opposition is lost, the application of ED is cancelled, so that in (7a) and (7b) the ERG arguments *hik* 'you (fam)' and *nik* 'I' are cross-referenced by the ERG person markers /-a/ and /-da-/ respectively.

The same cancellation of the ED-effects can be observed when the two arguments of a transitive predicate are nonlocal. Consider the sentence in (8):

- (8) Umeek Miren aurkitu **d-u-te** vs. **z-u-te-n**  
 children.ERG Miren.ABS find.ASP prefix-have-PE prefix-have-PE-PAST  
*'The children have found Miren'* vs. *'The children found Miren'*

As indicated by Ortiz de Urbina (1989), in the absence of overt 3rd person ERG and ABS agreement markers, the cancellation of the ED-effects in (8) is given away indirectly by the ERG allomorphy (i.e., /-te-/) of the plural marker coindexing the 3rd person ERG argument (cf. endnote 3).

In (8), the two verb forms *dute* and *zuten* display two prefixes /d-/ and /z-/ that occupy the same position as absolutive markers in the leftmost edge of the finite verbal form. As a matter of fact, there are five such prefixes in Basque, as illustrated in (9): the prefix /d-/ shows up in the present forms, /z-/ in the past forms, /l-/ in the irrealis forms, and finally /b-/ and /Ø/ in the imperative forms.

- (9) a. Jon etorri **d-a-Ø** vs. **z-e-Ø -n**  
 Jon.ABS come.ASP PREFIX-VOW-(be) PREFIX-VOW-(be)-PAST  
*'Jon have come vs. Jon came'*  
 b. Jon etorriko **l-i-tza-te-ke**  
 come.ASP PREFIX-VOW-be-MOOD-MOOD  
*'Jon would come'*  
 c. Etor **b-e-di** Jon!  
 come PREFIX-VOW-be  
*'Let Jon come!'*  
 d. Ikus **Ø-e-za-zu** Jon!  
 see PREFIX-VOW-have-2SE(NONFAM) John.ABS  
*'Look at Jon!'*

The status of these prefixes is a matter of controversy among scholars. Because of their linear disposition a number of researchers (Heath 1976, Ortiz de Urbina 1989, Albizu 1995, among others) have treated all such prefixes as real absolutive markers for 3rd person —in any event, never as 'displaced ergatives'. In a different line of analysis, however, most researchers sustain that 3rd person agreement is always morphologically marked as /Ø/ in Basque (Trask 1977,

Euskaltzaindia 1987, Laka 1988), ascribing a temporo-modal morphological value to the prefixes just considered. However, here we will defend a more radical hypothesis, whereby the absence of overt agreement morphology for 3rd person is simply the result of the lack of 3rd person morphology altogether (Albizu and Eguren 2000, Fernández 1997 1999). Under our approach, the prefixes /*d-*, /*z-*, /*l-*, /*b-*/ and / $\emptyset$ -/ will then be reinterpreted as some sort of expletive marker (Albizu and Eguren 2000, Fernández 1999), a position that we will justify later in section 6.

Let us finally take a quick look at the role of Tense in the activation of ED in Basque. Compare the past tense sentence in (6), now repeated as (10a), to the corresponding present tense sentence in (10b):

- (10) a. Nik hura aurkitu **n-u-en**  
 I-ERG she/he.ABS find.ASP **1SA<sub>E</sub>**-have-PAST  
*'I found her/him'*
- b. Nik hura aurkitu d-u-t  
 I-ERG she/he.ABS find.ASP PREFIX-have-**1SE**  
*'I have found her/him'*

The basic difference between the two examples lies in the different ways the ERG argument is coindexed on the inflected verb: in the past form *nuen* in (10a), whose tense is morphologically marked by the /-*n*/ suffix, the ERG argument is cross-referenced by the ABS prefix /*n-*/, that is, a clear instance of ED; on the contrary, in the present form *dut* in (10b), the unmarked one, the ERG argument is cross-referenced by the ERG suffix, as is canonical in the language.

Recapitulating, so far we have underlined three main descriptive features of the agreement morphology of Basque. To begin with, the language has a rich inflectional system that follows an ergative pattern and complies to Baker's Mirror Principle, except for the cases of ED. Secondly, Basque systematically exhibits overt person morphology to mark 1st and 2nd person agreement while lacking person morphology altogether for 3rd person. Finally, we have singled out three main agreement/sentential patterns for transitive sentences which are contingent upon tense and upon the person of the two arguments involved.

(i) The canonical pattern in (11a), which is found when the two arguments are local—that is, 1st or 2nd person—and which is characterized for displaying a double agreement-marking on verbs.

(ii) The phenomenon of ED in (11b), which arises in the past and irrealis tenses whenever the ABS argument is 3rd person and the ERG argument is 1st/2nd. In these cases, the ERG argument is coindexed by an ABS prefix, blocking the appearance of any agreement marker from the ERG set. The ED-pattern in Basque most likely reveals a more general phenomenon of Case-Agreement configurations, as it might be connected to instances of 'eccentric agreement' in other unrelated languages such as Chuckchi and K'ichee' (Hale

1996 1998 2000) and perhaps also in Karitiana (Storto 1999) and Itelmen (Bobaljik and Wurmbrand 1997, Bobaljik 1998).

(iii) Two expletive patterns (11c-d) which surface whenever the two arguments are 3<sup>rd</sup> person or in the present tense when the ABS argument is 3rd person and the ERG argument is 1st or 2nd person.

(11) Agreement/Sentence-patterns with transitive predicates:<sup>5</sup>

Case	Agreement	Sentence pattern	Examples
a. 1/2 ERG vs. 1/2 ABS	A E	Canonical	<i>n-indu-a-n</i> (7)
b. 1/2 ERG vs. 3 ABS	A <sub>E</sub> (1/2) NoE	ED	<i>n-uen</i> (6)/(10a)
c. 3 ERG vs. 3 ABS	Expletive NoE	Expletive	<i>d-u-te/z-uten</i> (8) <sup>6</sup>
d. 1/2 ERG vs. 3 ABS	Expletive E	Expletive	<i>d-u-t</i> (10b)

### 3 Strategies for agreement checking (I): the canonical pattern

From now on, we will just focus on developing our syntactic analysis for the sentence-patterns just presented, which is largely based on the previous work by Fernández (1997, 1999). We begin by tackling the simplest case, namely the canonical pattern in (11a), whose illustrative example in (7a) is now repeated as (12) for convenience: (See also examples (1b-c), (4) and (7b).)

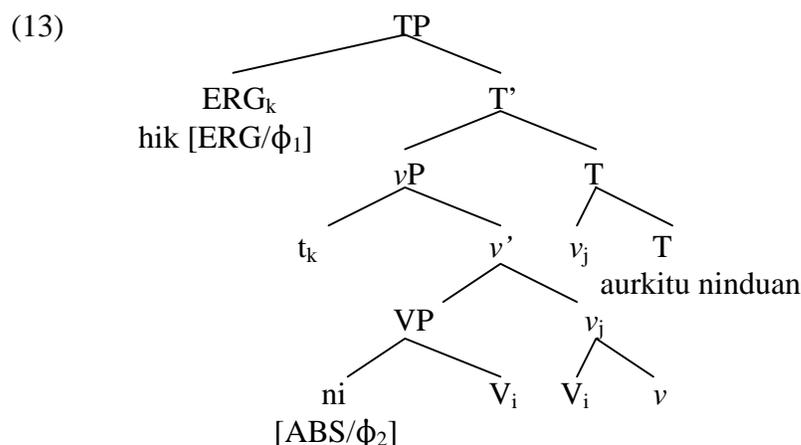
(12) Hik            ni        aurkitu    n-ind-u-a-n  
 You(FAM).ERG I.ABS find.ASP 1SA-VOW-have-2S/MASCE(FAM)-PAST  
 'You (fam.) have found me'

The syntactic analysis we defend in this paper is couched within the Minimalist framework (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 1998) and follows some standard minimalist assumptions on sentential structure. Thus, we first take for granted that ERG arguments are base-generated in the specifier position of vP, whereas ABS arguments are inserted as complements of VP into the derivation. In addition, adapting from Chomsky (1995, 1998), we also assume that in Basque both [ $\phi_2$ ]-features and [ABS] case are checked *in situ* by the ABS argument in unaccusative as well as transitive sentences; as for the sets of [ $\phi_1$ ]- and [ERG]-features, in the transitive sentences these are checked in Spec-TP by the ERG argument

We will round both standard assumptions out with two basic proposals of our own on the syntactic structure of Basque. First of all, as an extension of the *Obligatory Case Parameter* (Chomsky 1993, Bobaljik 1993) to [ $\phi$ ]-features, we will postulate the existence of a parametric distinction between primary and secondary ‘carriers’ of [ $\phi$ ]-features that will be subject to parametric variation across languages: while in the accusative languages [ $\phi$ ]-features are primarily encoded by T, ergative languages have verbal heads (V in Basque), not T, as their primary locus for [ $\phi$ ]-features. As a result, in the ergative languages the insertion and elimination of [ $\phi_2$ ]-features in the derivation will necessarily precede that of [ $\phi_1$ ]-features, so that the checking of [ $\phi_2$ ]-features of V becomes mandatory.

As a second proposal, in this paper we will also sustain that DPs differ as to their specification for [person]: unlike the others, 3rd person DPs lack any specification for this feature and, as a result, they are only able to check [number]-features. It follows then that the satisfaction of ergative languages'  $\phi_2$ -checking requirement (to be more specific, [person<sub>2</sub>]-checking requirement) will be contingent upon the arguments' person: contrary to local arguments, 3rd person arguments will fail to do so, for they lack the relevant syntactic specification.

Bearing all these premises in mind, consider now the syntactic representation in (13) for the example in (12):

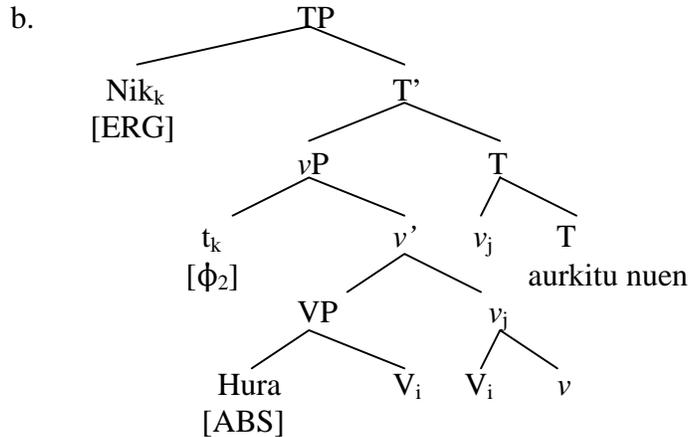


In the derivation in (13), both the  $[\phi_2]$ - and [case]-features of V are checked *in situ* by the ABS argument, whereas the  $[\phi_1]$ - and [case]-features of T are licensed by the ERG argument raised to Spec-TP. Crucially, the [case]- and [person]-features of V and T, along with their [number]-features, are checked in single checking operations by the local ABS and ERG arguments, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Taking advantage of this observation, in this paper we would like to postulate that it is precisely this aspect —namely the number of checking-operations whereby the set of features of a head are eliminated— that determines the agreement-pattern of a language: while single checking-operations trigger canonical agreement-patterns, multiple partial checking-operations give rise to ED-type instances of ‘deviated’ agreement morphology.

#### 4 Strategies for agreement checking (II): the ED-pattern

Take now the ED agreement-pattern in (11b). Recall that the phenomenon of ED in Basque is defined by the fact that the ERG argument is atypically coindexed by an ABS prefix, blocking the appearance of any agreement marker from the ERG set. We once again illustrate the phenomenon with the example in (6), now reproduced in (14a). Likewise, the proposed syntactic representation is introduced in (14b):

- (14) a. Nik hura aurkitu n-u-en  
 I-ERG she/he.ABS find.ASP **ISA<sub>E</sub>**-have-PAST  
 'I found her/him'



As anticipated earlier, our analysis for the ED constructions postulates a split-checking of the [case]- and  $[\phi_2]$ -features of the verbal head by both the ABS and the ERG arguments, unlike in the derivation in (13). Thus, while the [case]-feature of V is checked against the ABS argument, its [person]-feature is so against the ERG one. Indeed, in (14b) the 3rd person ABS argument checks the [case]-feature of V *in situ*. Unlike (13), however, this operation leaves the [person]-feature of V unchecked because of 3rd person arguments' intrinsic defectiveness as to this specification. As a result, that feature will exceptionally be licensed by the 1st/2nd person ERG argument in Spec-*vP* once the head V raises and adjoins to *v*. Needless to say, the ERG argument will check its [case]-feature (along with its [number]-feature) in a subsequent movement to Spec-TP.

Needless to say, our analysis overcomes the difficulties posed by ED to Baker's Mirror Principle. In (14b), the absence of a direct correspondence between 'deviated' agreement marking and canonical ordering is due to the split between the [case] and  $[\phi]$ -features of the ERG argument. So, while the morphological effects of the phenomenon are visible as a result of the anomalous  $[\phi_2]$ -checking relation, its syntactic effects —mainly, linear ordering alternations— are neutralized because of the subject's subsequent raising to Spec-TP.

Moving to a different aspect of the phenomenon, as we mentioned when we defined the conditions for it, ED is restricted to past/irrealis tenses. To this respect, we will just note that the system points out to the existence of an inverse correlation between the markedness/unmarkedness of T, on the one hand, and the richness/poorness of the morphological content of T, on the other hand. In particular, present, the unmarked tense, would seem to require a heavy tense which would include  $[\phi_2]$ -features; in their turn, past/irrealis tenses, the marked ones, would favor a light tense deprived of  $[\phi_2]$ -features.

The theoretical consequences of our proposal are significant. First, we provide additional support for the independence of case and agreement, allowing so for a greater flexibility as to the checking-relations established in syntax between arguments and heads. Second, we postulate the existence of an Obligatory  $\phi$ -Parameter that determines the locus for the insertion of primary  $\phi$ -features in the derivation: in the ergative languages, no  $[\phi_1]$ -features will be included in the derivation without prior insertion of  $[\phi_2]$ -features. Finally, we argue for a quite strong correlation between syntactic configuration and verbal agreement morphology.

### 5 Number agreement and Ergative Displacement

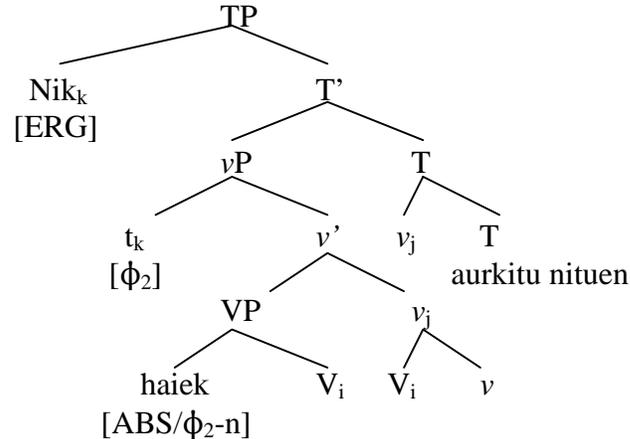
For the sake of simplicity, so far we have intentionally ignored some little difficulties introduced by number agreement in the description and analysis of ED in Basque. Compare the examples in (15a) and (15b). The two sentences in (15) involve ED and simply differ as to the number of the 3rd person ABS argument. The difference is morphologically reflected on the verb by the presence/absence of the absolutive plural marker */-it-/*: the singular ABS argument gives the verbal form *nuen* in (15a), while the plural ABS argument gives the verbal form *nituen* in (15b).

- (15) a. Nik hura aurkitu **n-u-en**  
 I.ERG she/heABS find.ASP **1SA<sub>E</sub>-have-PAST**  
*'I found her/him'*
- b. Nik haiek aurkitu **n-it-u-en**  
 I.ERG they.ABS find.ASP **1SA<sub>E</sub>-PA-have-PAST**  
*'I found them'*

The relevant example is that in (b). Very interestingly, the ED-form *nituen* in (15b) shows ABS agreement with both the ERG argument and the ABS argument: the former triggers ABS person-agreement (marked by the prefix */n-/*), while the latter activates ABS number-agreement (marked by the plural marker */-it-/*). In other words, in the instances of ED the marking of plural agreement with ABS arguments yields a split insofar as the verbal ABS agreement morphology will coindex the ABS argument as well as the ERG argument.

Our syntactic representation for the example in (15b) is presented in (16). Our analysis gives a straightforward explanation for this split. In (16) the [person]- and [number]-features of the verbal head are eliminated independently by two different arguments in separate checking-operations: while the [number]-feature of V is checked off in *situ*, along with its [case]-feature, by the ABS argument, its [person]-feature will be eliminated by the ERG argument in the specifier of *vP* once the verb adjoins to this head. Once again, the ERG argument will in its turn check its [case]- and [number]-features against T in Spec-TP.<sup>8</sup>

(16)



### 6 Strategies for agreement checking (III): a tentative proposal for the expletive agreement-pattern

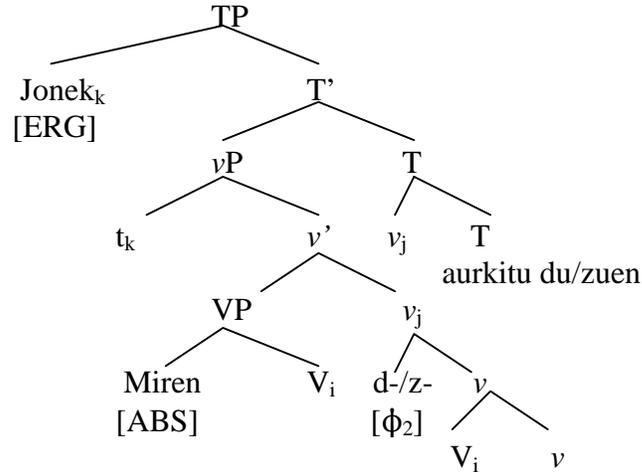
As argued earlier, the mandatory encoding of  $[\phi]$ -features by V activates different syntactic strategies to dispense with them in syntax. Although this operation is generally carry out by checking the  $[\phi]$ -features of V against the ABS or the ERG argument —namely, the canonical pattern and the ED-pattern, respectively—, there is nonetheless a third strategy that resorts to the insertion of an expletive prefix in the derivation, that is, the expletive-patterns in (11c-d).

The two expletive-patterns surface in two different syntactic environments: the first pattern, in constructions with nonlocal ABS and ERG arguments, as in the *du/zuen* forms of the example in (17a); the second pattern, in constructions with a 3rd person ABS argument and a 1st/2nd ERG argument, as in the *dut* form of (17b):

- (17) a. Jonek Miren aurkitu **d-u** vs. **z-u-en**  
Jon.ERG Miren.ABS find.ASP PREFIX-have PREFIX-have-PAST  
'Jon has found Miren' vs. 'Jon found Miren'
- b. Nik hura aurkitu **d-u-t**  
I.ERG she/he.ABS find.ASP PREFIX-have-1SE  
'I have found her/him'

Let us first consider the pattern in (17a), for which we suggest the syntactic derivation in (18) below. The same as in the previous representations, in (18) the ABS case of V is checked *in situ* by the ABS argument; this time, however, the  $\phi_2$ -person feature of V will remain unchecked because of the defectiveness of both the 3rd person ABS and ERG arguments. In order to save the derivation from crashing, an expletive prefix /d-/ or /z-/ will be inserted in the derivation as an adjunction to  $v$ , so that the  $\phi_2$ -person feature of V will be eliminated once this head raises to  $v$ .

(18)



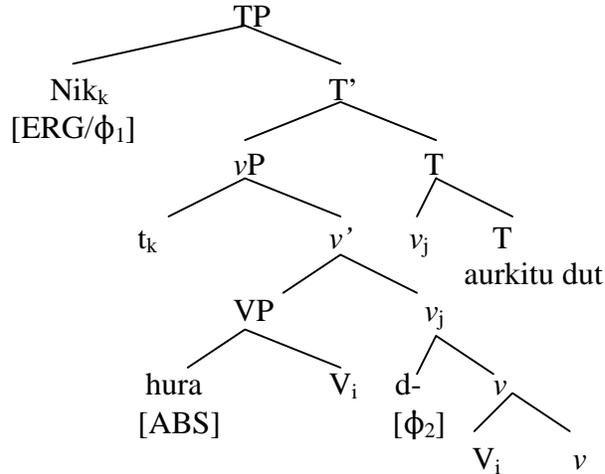
Take now the second expletive-pattern illustrated in (17b) and compare it to the nonexistent present tense form *nu* in (19) —that is, an imaginary instance of ED in present tense forms:

- (19) \*Nik hura aurkitu n-u  
I.ERG (s)he.ABS find.ASP 1sA<sub>E</sub> -have  
*'I have found her/him'*

As shown in (19), the ED-strategy is blocked in present tense constructions, a fact that, to the best of our knowledge, is systematic across all the dialects of Basque. At this point of our investigation we are not certain yet as to why the phenomenon of ED is restricted to past and irrealis forms, an unexpected fact provided that the 1st person ERG argument in (19) clearly qualifies as a valid  $\phi$ -feature checker for V. For lack of a better solution, here we will simply note the descriptive fact that in Basque the head T tends to be morphologically heavy, and therefore, to include  $\phi$ -features in the numeration when specified for present tense, namely the unmarked tense.

The implications of the fact just mentioned are not totally clear to us; yet, it clearly points out to the existence of a division of labor between ERG arguments and expletive prefixes with respect to the checking of the  $[\phi]$ -features of V and T, so that instances multiple  $\phi$ -checking relations by a single argument—the ERG argument—are avoided. This is shown in (20) below. In (20), the insertion of the expletive prefix in the derivation takes precedence over the merging of the ERG argument, neutralizing so the potential ED-pattern. This ‘frees’ the ERG argument that will raise to Spec-TP to check the [case] and  $[\phi]$ -features of T.

(20)



## 7 Conclusions

In this paper, we have tackled the issue of the division of labor between morphology and syntax by studying the phenomenon of Ergative Displacement (ED), a seeming instance of syntax-morphology mismatch observed in Basque. Contrary to the prevalent position in the linguistic literature on the topic, here we have argued in favor of a fully syntactic analysis of the phenomenon, therefore showing that empirical facts initially presented as evidence for the existence of an autonomous Morphological Component can also be handled syntactically.

## Notes

\*This research has been partly supported with funds from two research projects granted by the University of the Basque Country (UPV 027.130-HA039/98) and by the Department of Education, Universities and Research of the Basque Government (PI-1998-127).

<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations will be used in the text: A/ABS, absolutive agreement; A<sub>E</sub>, absolutive agreement with ergative arguments; ABS, absolutive case; ADL, adlative; ALLO, allocutive; ASP, aspect; DAT, dative case; D/DAT, dative agreement; E/ERG, ergative agreement; ED, Ergative Displacement; ERG, ergative case; FAM, familiar; FEM, feminine; MASC, masculine; N, number; NONFAM, nonfamiliar; P, plural; S, singular; VOW, thematic vowel. The term ‘thematic vowel’ is acknowledgely a misnomer, for it also comprises pluriphonemic sequences such as */-en-/*, */-ind-/* and so on. We just use it for lack of a better term.

<sup>2</sup> Though syntactically singular, the nonfamiliar 2nd person marker is morphologically plural in all respects in Basque; hence its full isomorphy with the real plural 2nd person marker. The two are morphologically distinguished in the language by an extra plural marker that accompanies the latter. See (3) and endnote 3.

<sup>3</sup> The ABS plural marker */-te-/* is specific to the plural 2nd person and is used to differentiate real plural 2nd persons from nonfamiliar 2nd persons. See endnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> This fact indicates that in the ED-cases the ABS allomorphy of subject agreement and the omission of the ERG marker do not convey the absence of an [ERG]-feature in the morphological complex. See also Albizu and Eguren (2000).

<sup>5</sup> Unaccusative sentences only exhibit patterns parallel to those in (11a) and (11c).

<sup>6</sup> The two forms *dute* and *zuten* in (8) display number-agreement with the ERG argument, but not person-agreement. Needless to say, this classification of patterns just concerns the latter aspect.

<sup>7</sup> In varieties of Basque, the ERG argument may enter into double [ $\phi$ ]-checking relations with *v* and T, so that subject agreement is marked twice on the finite verb, as shown in (i):

- i. **G-en-e-rama-gu-n**  
**1PA<sub>E</sub>-PA<sub>E</sub>-VOW-bring-1PE-PAST**  
 ‘We were bringing it’

<sup>8</sup> Our analysis receives additional support from the fact that the plural allomorphy triggered by ‘displaced’ ergative arguments is not ABS, but a especial plural marker */-en-/* whose use is restricted to this particular environment. Compare (15b) in the text to example (i) next:

- i. Guk haiek aurkitu **g-en-it-u-en**  
 we.ERG they.ABS find.ASP 1PA<sub>E</sub>-PA<sub>E</sub>-PA-have-PAST  
 ‘We found them’

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