The ergative subject in Basque: its relation to the predicate and the subeventive structure

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0. INTRODUCTION

• Basque: an ergative language. Ergative marked arguments can have various theta roles:
  - (1) Eurrak egurra honatua du "The rain has damaged the wood" → CAUSER
  - (2) Jonek dantzi egina du "John has danced" → ACTOR
  - (3) Jonek jainoa argerrarri du "John believes in God" → EXPERIENCER
  - (4) Etxea 20 milioi baion du "The house costs 20 millions" → HOLDER

MAIN AIM: assuming that the ergative argument is always introduced by the same head, to derive the different interpretations associated to this argument.

1. “External” argument in First Phase Syntax

• In First Phase Syntax (Ramchand 2008), two primitive types over subevents:
  - processes, and
  - states.
• Composition Rule: implication (Hale & Keyser 1993).
• States get a more specific interpretation depending on their position with respect to process.

2. Eventive/static alternations and the interpretation of the ergative argument

2.1. Bare analytic predicates

• Many stative predicates in Basque are lexicalized in Basque in the form of nouns, adjectives and adpositional phrases:
  - Psychological predicates: maite iron (have love) ‘to love’
  - Modal: behar iron (have necessity) ‘must, need’
  - Nahi iron (have wish) ‘want’
  - Predicates expressing worth/value: merrei iron (have merit) ‘to deserve’
  - Ezaguna iron (have in mind) ‘to remember’
  - Etxeak & Uribe-Etxebarria (2012) analyze behar iron ‘must’ like a transitive predication structure (see also Berro forthcoming):

2.2. Stative → Eventive

• Some eventive predicates derive from bare analytic predicates, e.g. amets egina/amestu ‘to dream’ and behar ‘to force’.

2.3. Eventive → Stative: Participial transitive predication

• -tu-a resultatives as another type of transitive predication. In this configuration, the predicate is headed by a stative head, and the interpretation of the ergative argument is ambiguous (INITIATOR/HOLDER).

3. CONCLUSIONS

- EA: same case marking and but different theta roles.
- The different theta roles are accounted for deriving the INITIATOR interpretation from the relation established between the head introducing the EA (state) and propC.
- If the state selects for propC, the state is interpreted as an initiation subevent (Ramchand 2008).
- If propC is not projected (as in bare analytic predicates) or if the state does not select for propC directly (as in one meaning of the -tu-a participial), the state is not interpreted as initiation.

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