

## Some arguments against equi as a test for subject-of in basque

*This is a preliminary version of a paper read at the winter meeting of the Linguistic Society of America on December 28, 1975<sup>1</sup>*

I wish to consider sentences of Guipuzcoan Basque of the form:

1.a Jonek nai du aye ekarri.

1.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)

1.c John+ergative want-to 3rd-absolutive+'have' (+3rd-erg.) (aux.)  
aye (+∅) ekarri  
he/she/it(+abs.) bring

1.d John wants to bring him/her/it.

The morphology for sentence 1 is indicated in lines 1.b and c. In what follows, I will refer to case-inflection and pronominal agreement at the beginning and end of the auxiliary.

I wish to discuss an analysis of sentences like 1, with what corresponds to a for-to complement. Stephen Anderson, in «On the notion of subject in ergative languages» (Anderson, 1975) and Jeffrey Heath, in «Some related transformations in Basque» (Heath, 1974) analyse for-to complement sentences such as 1 as being the result of the transformation of Equi-NP-Deletion. Based on this analysis, both Heath and Anderson claim that the notion of subject as defined in (Chomsky, 1965, pp. 69-71) is the «same» in Basque as it is in English. The Heath/Anderson claim may be divided into two claims, of differing levels:

Section 1.0.—They present an analysis of for-to complementation in Basque that includes a transformational rule of Equi-NP-Deletion with the

1 *Argitaratzaileen oharra*.—Artikulu hontan egileak hain ederki agertzen dituen iritziak zor zaien begiramenez hartu ditugu. Orobat egin dugu iritzi horien oinarri diren euskal adibideekin. Uste dugu, halaz guztiz, ez dituztela beti euskaldun guztiek, ezta gipuztek ere, ontzat hartuko.

Egileak izan dituen informatzaileek ez dirudite maiz aski behar bezain fidagarri.

target of deletion described as the subject, an accusatively defined syntactic notion.

Section 2.0.—Using this analysis as evidence, they claim that Basque is underlyingly (or typologically) accusative; and ergative morphology is merely a surface NP counting process.

I wish to challenge the Heath/Anderson claim on both levels. First, I will attempt to demonstrate that Equi is not a productive *syntactic* rule in Basque; and then I will give evidence to show that, in Basque, ergative morphology reflects ergative typology.

Therefore, I give hypothesis I as an alternative to the Heath/Anderson claim.

I. Morphology is not independent of typology, as morphologically ergative constructions are underlyingly or typologically ergative.

#### 1.0 EQUI-NP-DELETION IN BASQUE

Anderson, Heath and others have claimed that morphologically ergative languages are underlyingly or typologically accusativa. The claim is based on the fact that generative descriptions of such languages contain cyclic rules which have the effect of deleting or moving the accusative notion of subject of a sentence as opposed to the alternative ergative notion, commonly called the absolutive. Examples of such cyclic rules are Equi-NP-Deletion, Raising, and Conjunction Reduction.

Basque is morphologically ergative. The language exhibits accusative morphology, as well. The occurrence of ergative or accusative morphology, in a Basque sentence, depends upon the choice for lexical verb to serve as the main verb of the sentence. Consider, for example, the verbs 'iduri' ('appear'), 'ekarri' ('bring') and ,nai' ('want(to)'). The verb 'iduri' controls accusative morphology; it appears with an accusative auxiliary and with an object containing an accusative affix, as in 2:

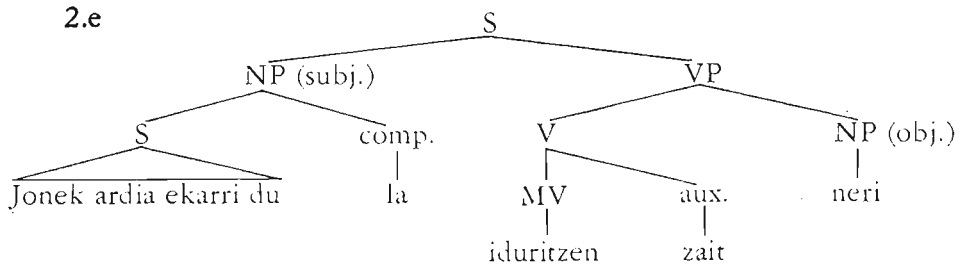
2.a Neri iduritzen zait Jonek ardia ekarri dula.

2.b ne+ri iduri +tz +en z +ai +t

2.c me+object appear+present+durative 3rd-subject+'have'+1st-obj.  
Jonek-ardia-ekarri-du+la  
complement + complementizer

2.d It appears to me that John brought a sheep.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A TEST FOR SUBJECT-OF IN BASQUE



The accusative auxiliary in 2 is 'zait', as it has an initial pronominal copy that agrees with the subject in person and number, and an aux final copy that agrees with the object. Consider 3 now, the main verb is 'ekarri', which controls ergative morphology. The accusative object, containing the object affix, '-ri', is 'neri'. Ekarri appears with an ergative auxiliary, 'du'. The ergative in 3, which has the ergative affix, '-ek', is 'Jonek'.

3.a Jonek ardia ekartzen du.

3.b Jon +(e)k ardia (+∅) ekar(ri)+tz +en

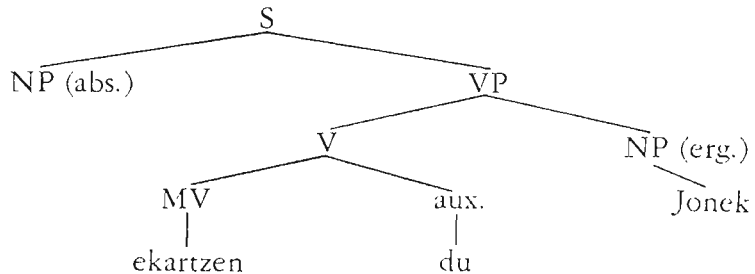
3.c John+erg. sheep(+abs.) bring +pres+dur.

d +u (+∅)

3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)

3.d John brings a sheep.

3.e



In sentence 3 the aux initial copy agrees with the absolutive and the aux final copy with the ergative.

Both Heath and Anderson claim that the grammaticality of the following kinds of for-to complement sentences, controlled by 'nai', support a Rule of Equi-NP-Deletion in a grammar of Basque. 'Nai' controls ergative morphology, but it has several atypical characteristics discussed below.

4.a Jonek nai du aye joan.

4.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)

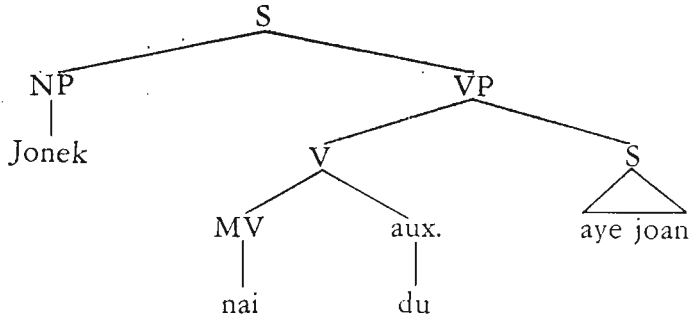
4.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)

aye (+∅) joan

he/she/it(+abs./subj.) go

4.d John wants her to go.

4.e



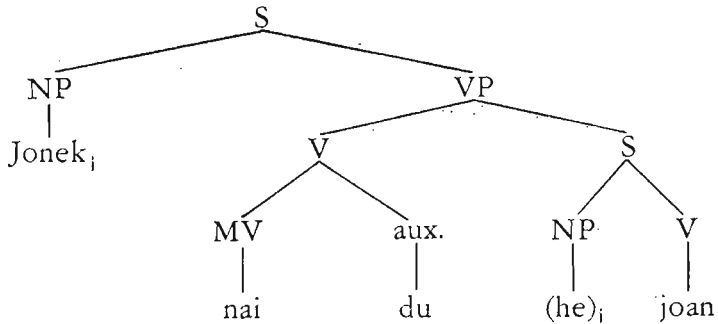
5.a Jonek nai du joan.

5.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅) joan

5.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.) go

5.d John wants to go.

5.e



6.a Jonek nai du ayek ardia ekarri.

6.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)

6.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)

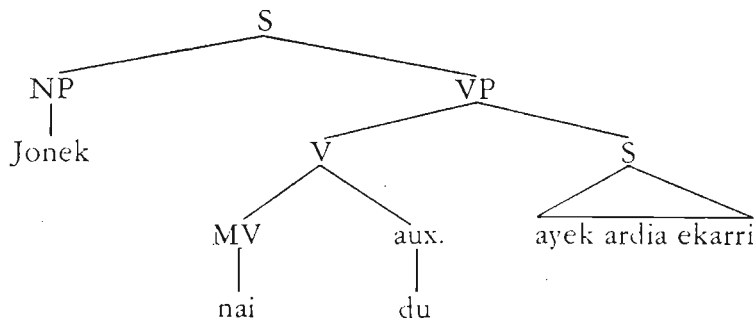
aye +k ardia (+∅) ekarri

he/she/it+erg. sheep(+abs.) bring

6.d John wants him to bring a sheep.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A TEST FOR SUBJECT-OF IN BASQUE

6.e



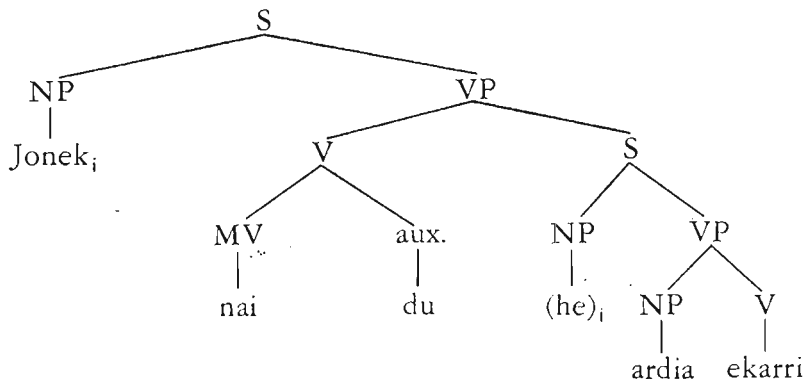
7.a Jonek nai du ardia ekarri.

7.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅) ardia (+∅)

7.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.) sheep(+abs.)  
ekarri  
bring

7.d John wants to bring a sheep.

7.e



'Nai' and a few other verbs like it are always tenseless in surface structure; they have no simple intransitive form; they fall within the semantic class of intensional verbs. Both the set of verbs and the characteristics of the set vary between dialects—and even idiolects. However, 'nai' ('want(to)') and 'uste' ('believe') are usually members of the set. Verbs like 'nai' are the only non-accusative verbs controlling the process analysed by Heath and Anderson as Equi. Since the main verb type determines the sentence type, the only evidence that ergative sentences have underlying accusative relations must come from the set of verbs like 'nai'. Therefore, I shall restrict my attention wherever possible to sentences with for-to complements of 'nai'.

In Guipuzcoan, these verbs have two types of usage; they occur as ergatives, as in sentence 8, below, and in for-to constructions, as in sentences 4 through 7 above.

- 8.a Jonek ardia nai du.  
 8.b Jon +(e)k ardia (+∅) nai d +u (+∅)  
 8.c John+erg. sheep(+abs.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
 8.d John wants a sheep.

Sentence 8 is a straightforward example of an ergative construction; however, the sentence pairs 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 are not so straightforward.

In the Heath/Anderson analysis, the rule of Equi-NP-Deletion relates sentence pairs like 4 through 7, above. The Equi rule is said to delete the subject of the for-to complement, which is co-referential with the matrix subject. In other words, Heath and Anderson are claiming that the above facts of sentential embedding in Basque parallel the facts of for-to complement embedding in English. However, a more thorough examination of the Basque facts calls into question their Equi analysis. Look again at the complement of sentence 7. According to the assumptions implicit in an Equi analysis, we would predict that sentence 9, the simple declarative surface structure form of the complement in 7, would be ungrammatical.

- 9.a Ardia ekartzen da. (\*Bring a sheep.)  
 9.b ardia (+∅) ekar(ri)+tz +en d +a  
 9.c sheep(+abs./subj) bring +pres.+dur. 3rd-abs./subj.+ 'be'  
 9.d A sheep is being brought. (Literally:Bring a sheep.)

But, 9 is not ungrammatical.

The ungrammaticality of sentences like 9 would be a basic piece of evidence for the existence of an underlying grammatical subject in the complement of 7. The fact that 9 is grammatical in Basque suggests that Equi is not a rule of grammar for Basque, a rule which deletes an underlying NP in the paraphrase of the embedded clause in sentence 9.

Another piece of evidence against an Equi analysis for sentences like 7 comes from the morphology of pronominalization. There are two 3rd-person pronoun roots in Basque: 'bera' and 'aye'. In some Guipuzcoan dialects, 'bera' is the object root, and 'aye' is the subject.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A TEST FOR SUBJECT-OF IN BASQUE

- 10.a Aye joaten da.  
 10.b aye (+∅) joa(n)+t +en d +a  
 10.c he/she/it(+abs./subj.) go +pres.+dur. 3rd-abs./subj.+ 'be'  
 10.d She goes.

- 11.a Aye joaten da berari.  
 11.b aye (+∅) joa(n)+t +en d +a  
 11.c he/she/it(+subj.) go +pres.+dur. 3rd-subj.+ 'be'  
     bera +ri  
     him/her/it+obj.  
 11.d He goes.

I am calling 'bera-' the object root as it is used for the 3rd person pronoun root with accusative, genitive and oblique affixes. There are some dialects in which the distinction between the third person pronoun roots is a distinction in number. This fact is part of a more general syncretous phenomenon discussed by William Jacobsen (Jacobsen, 1972) and does not affect this argument. It is sufficient that there are well attested dialects, including ones in the state of Guipuzcoa, that use 'aye-' for 3rd person subjects and 'bera-' for objects.

If Equi is a productive rule in Basque, then one would expect the NP in an embedded transitive sentence that has undergone Equi to take only the object root 'bera-'—and not the subject root 'aye-'. However, this is not what happens, as both 12 and 1 are equally acceptable.

- 12.a Jonek nai du bera ekarri.  
 12.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)  
 12.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
     bera (+∅) ekarri  
     him/her/it(+abs.) bring  
 12.d John wants to bring her.

- 1.a Jonek nai du aye ekarri.  
 1.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)  
 1.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
     aye (+∅) ekarri  
     he/she/it(+abs.) bring  
 1.d John wants to bring her.

The fact that the absolutive, 'her', can have both subject and object roots, in these sentences, suggests that the complement has not lost a subject.

Native speakers can use both the subject and object roots with an absolutive pronoun in embedded ergative sentences that are claimed to be a product of Equi. This fact is evidence that the speakers do not distinguish «subject» absolutives from «object» ones, and so it is evidence against the claim that the pronouns are objects. Therefore, it is evidence against the existence of a productive syntactic rule of Equi-NP-Deletion which deletes the subject of complements in sentences with the verb 'nai'. There is no doubt of co-referentiality in 13 and 1. The sentences can have only the co-referential interpretation. However, the semantical co-referential relation, between the clauses, does not mean that a syntactic Equi rule has applied within one or the other clause.

**2.0 I TURN NOW TO ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A DETERMINANT OF TYPOLOGY IN BASQUE**

There are also strong arguments against the Heath/Anderson claim that Basque is typologically accusative. The Heath/Anderson claim is that Basque has a single underlying transitive sentence type, with accusative relational structure; whereas the morphology indicates the existence of two types of structures: ergative and accusative. In addition, Anderson develops a hypothesis of «morphological independence», claiming: 1) that morphology is independent of underlying grammatical relations, and 2) that ergativity is only a surface NP counting process.

**2.1 The first argument against underlying accusativity comes from the fact that subjecthood is not relevant to pronoun shape in embedded clauses, as noted above**

Based on the data examined so far, the two hypotheses of Anderson's must stand or fall together. This interdependence comes from the pronoun lexicalization facts just discussed.

- 13.a Jonek nai du bera ekarri.
- 13.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)
- 13.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
       bera (+∅) ekarri  
       him/her/it(+abs.) bring
- 13.d John wants to bring her.



SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A TEST FOR SUBJECT-OF IN BASQUE

- 1.a Jonek nai du aye ekarri.  
 1.b Jon +(e)k nai d +u (+∅)  
 1.c. John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
     aye (+∅) ekarri  
     he/she/it(+abs.) bring  
 1.d John wants to bring her.

Either the failure of Basque speakers to notice the objecthood of absolutes which supposedly remain in the target clauses of the putative Equi rule is evidence against an underlying accusative structure for the embedded target clauses; or we must suppose that morphology, including accusative pronoun root morphology, is necessarily stupid—ignorant of grammatical relations.

**2.2 The second argument against the Heath/Anderson claim comes from the pattern of systematic case-marking errors.**

As Anderson points out, this so-called stupid rule of case-inflection predicts that a particular pattern of errors with the ergative inflection would be found. If ergativity functions only to keep count of NP's, then ergative case-marking errors should be counting errors, only. Errors in assigning ergative case should occur when movement or deletion processes obscure the count. And there should be no systematic difference between the pattern of errors that occur with the movement or deletion sentences and the pattern that occurs with other sentence which differ only by some underlying accusative or ergative relation.

Conversely, if morphology and typology are related; then one would expect errors in ergative inflection only in those constructions where there is a conflict between an interpretation of the construction as being underlyingly ergative or accusative.

So, let us return again to sentences with for-to complements and look at the kind of case-marking errors which occur. Each of the putative Equi sentences controlled by 'nai', such as 4 and 7 above, has a raised variant where the lower absolute has been raised into the matrix. For example, the raised variant of sentence 7 is sentence 14:

- 7.a Jonek nai du ardia ekarri.  
 7.b Jon +(ek) nai d +u (+∅)  
 7.c John+erg. want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
     ardia (+∅) ekarri  
     sheep(+abs.) bring  
 7.d John wants to bring a sheep.

- 14.a Ardia nai du Jonek ekartzia.  
 14.b ardia (+∅) nai d +u (+∅) Jon +(e)k  
 14.c sheep(+abs.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.) John+erg.  
 ekar(ri)+tz +ia  
 bring +pres.+determiner  
 14.d John wants a sheep to bring (but Joe wants a bull).

Speakers of Guipuzcoan Basque freely accept another variant of sentence 7 with the ergative marker omitted, as in 15:

- 15.a Jon nai du ardia ekarri.  
 15.b Jon (+∅) nai d +u (+∅)  
 15.c John(+subj.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)  
 ardia (+∅) ekarri  
 sheep(+abs.) bring  
 15.d John wants to bring a sheep.

In fact, I first overheard one of my informants use 15 in conversation. It was not an elicited datum. This sentence is interesting, because it provides a way to test the pattern of errors. Although 15 is acceptable, the corresponding variant of the «raised» sentence 14 is not:

- 16.a \*Ardia nai du Jon ekartzia.  
 16.b ardia (+∅) nai d +u (+∅) Jon (+∅)  
 16.c sheep(+abs.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.) John(+subj.)  
 ekar(ri)+tz +ia  
 bring +pres.+determiner  
 16.d John wants a sheep to bring.

If the case marking error in 15 is due to a «stupid» counting error, then the pattern of errors should extend either: 1) to all of the Equi sentences; or 2) only to the non-raised Equi cases; as either of these two cases would involve miscounting the absolutive. However, if ergative sentences have an underlying ergative relational structure, then the case marking errors should extend to all the sentences where an ergative verb like 'nai' has no absolutive. That is, the errors should occur wherever 'nai' takes a for-to complement, but the absolutive remains unraised from the complement.

## SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST EQUI AS A TEST FOR SUBJECT-OF IN BASQUE

This second pattern is what one finds. The pattern of errors is independent of the putative Equi process. Both sentences 4 and 6 are acceptable with the ergative marker omitted.

4.a Jon(ek) nai du aye joan.

4.b Jon (+ (e)k) nai d +u (+∅)

4.c John(+erg.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)

aye (+∅) joan

he/she/it(+abs./subj.) go

4.d John wants her to go.

6.a Jon(ek) nai du aye k ardia ekarri.

6.b Jon (+ (e)k) nai d +u (+∅)

6.c John(+erg.) want 3rd-abs.+ 'have'(+3rd-erg.)

aye +k ardia (+∅) ekarri

he/she/it+erg. sheep(+abs.) bring

6.d John wants him to bring a sheep.

Case-marking errors occur only where there is a conflict between interpreting a construction as being ergative or accusative. Therefore, I conclude that errors in ergative inflection provide evidence against Anderson's claim that morphology is independent of typology. The paradigm of errors is also evidence against ergative constructions being underlyingly accusative.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

I have argued on the basis of pronoun root morphology that Equi is not a productive rule. I have also argued that embedded ergative clauses are not underlyingly accusative, and I have supported the latter argument with evidence from systematic case marking errors.

What I have been discussing is a classic problem in typology: whether the two types of transitive sentences, ergative and accusative, can be reduced to one model type, the accusative; or whether they remain independent types. Joseph Greenberg, in his recent book, *Language Typology: A Historical and Analytical Overview*, claims that one can always use a transformational grammar, with its notion of a cycle, to do a typology of a language. However, he points out that in doing so, one must give up the assumption of a single base, the universal base hypothesis. Otherwise, one is assuming the language

THOMAS R. HESTER

to have a single sentence type. Such an assumption leads to the least interesting typology possible. Put another way, one is assuming at least part of what one is trying to prove. I think that Heath and Anderson might have profitted from Greenberg's advice.

Thomas R. HESTER

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANDERSON, Stephen R., 1975, *On the notion of subject in ergative languages*, Reproduction of paper delivered to the Symposium on Subject and Topic at University of California-Santa Barbara, March 8, 1975, Harvard University.
- CHOMSKY, Noam, 1965, *Aspects of the theory of syntax*, the M. I. T. Press.
- HEATH, Jeffrey, 1974, *Some related transformations in Basque*, Proceedings of the Tenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society, University of Chicago.
- HESTER, Thomas R., to be completed. *Theory, like mist on eye-glasses, often obscure facts*, dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin.
- JACOBSEN, William H., 1972, Nominative-Ergative syncretism in Basque, *Anuario del seminario de filología Vasca "Julio de Urquijo"*, tomo VI (1972).
- LAFON, René, 1972, *Basque* in vol. 9, "Linguistics in Western Europe", of "Current Trends in Linguistics", Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., Mouton, the Hague.