In Search of Lost Telicity: Evidence of Basque Causatives

The paper addresses the issue of telicity in Gipuzkoan dialect of Basque[1]. I am arguing that Basque telicity is strongly interconnected with verbal argument structure and can be accounted for only in reference to internal syntactic process.

1. Basic rules of Basque argument structure: In Basque, the verb agrees with all its core arguments: subject, direct object and indirect/dative object; agreement is manifested in the auxiliary verb. The core arguments also bear case marking: subject is marked by NOM or ERG, direct object is marked by NOM, indirect object is marked by DAT, see (1). Case marking can always be predicted from verbal agreement, and vice versa: intransitive auxiliary is possible only with nominative subject, transitive auxiliary is possible only with ergative subject.

The subject of one-argument verbs is either logically marked by NOM (2), or, in fewer cases, by ERG (3-4). In the latter case a 'dummy' object can usually (see (4)), though not always (see (3)), be there, but it still does not behave like a real direct object (cf. discussion in [Laka 1993]).

(1) Iker-ek   Bilbo   ikusi   du.   *Iker has seen Bilbao.*
     Iker-ERG   Bilbao.NOM see.PVF   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

(2) Koldo   etorri   da.   *Koldo has come.*
     Koldo.NOM   come.PFV   AUX.NOM3SG

(3) Txakurr-a-k   zaunka-tu   du.   *The dog barked.*
     dog-DET-ERG   bark-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

(4) Koldo-k   hitz   egin   du.   *Koldo spoke.*
     Koldo-ERG   word   make   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

Even though the agreement is transitive in sentences like (3-4), these verbs are syntactically intransitive. Indeed, a normal direct object can never be inserted there, while a simply omitted 'small pro' can always be restored in Basque:

(5) Ikusi   ditu.   *He has seen them.*
     see.PFV   AUX.NOM3PL.ERG.3SG

Verbs using intransitive auxiliary will be called 'Intr-Aux verbs' (cf. *etorri* 'come' in (2)), verbs using transitive auxiliary will be called 'Tr-Aux verbs'. It was already shown that syntactically intransitive verbs can take transitive auxiliary: these verbs will be called 'Tr-Aux1 verbs' (cf. *zaunkatu* 'bark' in (3)), while standard transitive verbs will be called 'Tr-Aux2 verbs' (cf. *ikusi* 'see' in (1)).

2. Inchoative-causative alternation in Basque: Majority of Intr-Aux verbs are inchoative in the sense of [Haspelmath 1993] and they easily form a causative pair, i.e. add external ergative argument and thus take a transitive auxiliary and become Tr-Aux2 verbs[2] (cf. (6-7)). Intransitive Tr-Aux1 verbs however do not allow adding any external causer without further suffixal derivation, see (8)[3].

(6) Izotz-a   ur-tu   da. *The ice has melted.*
     Ice-DET.NOM   melt-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG

(7) Koldo-k   izotz-a   ur-tu   du. *Koldo has melted the ice.*
     Koldo-ERG   ice-DET.NOM   melt-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

(8) *Koldo-k   txakurr-a   zaunka-tu   du. *Koldo made the dog bark.*
     Koldo-ERG   dog-DET.NOM   bark-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

Such syntactic behavior suggests that Intr-Aux verbs can be considered unaccusatives in the sense of [Perlmutter 1978]: they have only internal argument and easily add an external

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[2] A question apart is whether inchoative and causative uses represent two uses of one lexeme or two different lexemes.
[3] Interestingly, few Tr-Aux1 verbs allow adding *internal* argument (*xuxurlatu* 'whisper', *ohikatu* 'cry' and some other speech verbs).

argument. Similarly, Tr-Aux1 verbs can be considered unergatives: they cannot take an external argument (see further syntactic evidence for this distinction in [Laka 1993]).

3. Telicity in Basque: It has generally been noted that *internal* argument is a trigger of telicity (cf. references in [Alexiadou et al. 2004]). My paper will show that this hypothesis is smartly proved by the Basque evidence. While intransitives with *external* argument, i.e. Tr-Aux1 verbs, are always atelic, intransitives with *internal* argument, i.e. Intr-Aux verbs, are mostly telic, even though few are atelic (see (9-10)).

(9)   Bost   mintu-z   zaunka-tu   du.   *'He barked for five minutes.'*
        five   minute-INSTR   bark-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG3SG

(10)   Izotz-a   bost   minutu-ta-n   ur-tu   da.
        Ice-DET.NOM   five   minute-PL-LOC   melt-PFV   AUX.NOM3SG

'The ice melted in five minutes.'

Moreover, underived causative pair was shown to be possible only in the case of intransitives with *internal* argument (see (6-7)). At the same time, atelic Intr-Aux verbs never have underived causative pair, proving thus that these verbs have no internal argument.

As for transitives, they are usually telic: this is also logical due to the presence of internal argument in their structure. It can be assumed then that telicity in Basque is defined by the plain presence of the internal argument: only the verbs that have internal argument can be telic.

4. Derived causatives in Basque: Additional evidence comes from derived causatives (cf. *ibili da* 'he walked' – *ibili-razi du* 'he has caused him to walk'). In Basque, most of them have two sub-events: a caused event and a causing one. The *causing* event is always telic, due to inherent transitivity of causatives, see (11)

(11)   Zaunka-razi   dio   bost   minutu-ta-n.
        bark-CAUS   AUX.NOM3SG.DAT3SG.ERG3SG   five   minute-PL-LOC

'It took him five minutes to make him bark.'

As for the *caused* sub-event, if the verb was atelic before the causative derivation, then it is also atelic, see (12). Otherwise, if the verb was telic, the caused event has two interpretations: both telic and atelic, i.e. it is a subevent with unspecified telicity (or 'weak' telicity), see (13).

(12)   Ni-k   zaunka-razi   dut   bost   minutuz.
        I-ERG   bark-CAUS   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG1SG   five   minute-INSTR

'I made him bark for five minutes.'

(13)   Bost   minutu-z   //minutu-ta-n   ur-arazi   dut.
        five   minute-INSTR   minute-PL-LOC   melt-CAUS   AUX.NOM3SG.ERG1SG

'I melt it for five minutes // in five minutes.'

5. Conclusion: Examples like (13) suggest that originally the telicity of verb was not a real lexical telicity: otherwise it would remain after the causative derivation. Thus, the telicity in Basque is not originated in the lexicon, but is generated by some further syntactic rules.

My paper will be devoted to the exposition of this analysis supported by some further language evidence. The interconnectedness of argument structure and telicity in Basque is particularly intriguing: while the former has been discussed in the literature, the latter is only starting being studied.

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