

Non-canonical uses of the article in Basque

In this paper we deal with the Basque data illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. Sagarr-**a-k** jan ditut
 apple-**DET-PL** eat AUX
 ‘I have eaten (the) apples.’
 b. Jon txiki-**a** da
 John small-**DET** is
 ‘John is {the small one/small}.’

As the English glosses indicate, the sentences in (1) are ambiguous: the nominal in (1a) may have a specific reading, and it can also convey an existentially quantified meaning; the sentence in (1b), in its turn, can be interpreted either as an identifying or a predicative statement.

With regard to the (obligatory) use of the article in existentially quantified nominals in Basque, we propose that the suffix *-a(k)* is a proper determiner in these cases, i.e., an existential quantifier that corresponds to the so called French “partitive article” *du/des*. This idea simplifies the paradigm of morphological number in Basque (which was complicated by proposals that take this affix to be a number marker, such as Artiagoitia’s 2002, 2004), and is coherent with the fact that the Basque article shows up in a variety of contexts that go far beyond its use in specific nominals (cf. Euskaltzaindia 1985; Trask 2003; Txillardegi 1978):

- (2) a. Zigarro-**a** nahi dut
 cigarette-**DET** want AUX
 ‘I want a cigarette.’
 b. Emazte-**a** dauka-t
 wife-**DET** have-1ESG
 ‘I have a wife.’

In the case of predicative copulative sentences, we critically review previous proposals by Zabala (1993) and Artiagoitia (1997), who analyze the affix *-a(k)* as either a number marker or a (non-referential) determiner, and argue that the affix that is attached to adjectives (and nouns) in copulative sentences of this sort is just a predication marker (see Baker 2003), or a “pronominal copula” in Hengeveld’s (1992) and Stassen’s (1997) terms. This proposal has, so we believe, a major advantage: it helps explain why the Basque suffix *-a(k)* only appears within individual-level nominal predicates (3a), and is excluded in stage-level predicates (3b).

- (3) a. Jon lasai*(-**a**) da
 John quiet(-**DET**) is.izan
 ‘John is quiet.’ (permanently)
 b. Jon lasai*(-**a**) dago
 John quiet(-**DET**) is.egon
 ‘John is quiet.’ (temporarily)

It has often been noticed that the presence or absence of pronominal copulae in nominal predicates is closely related to the notion of “temporal stability” (see Hengeveld 1992 for an overview, and Greenberg 1994, 1998 for Hebrew). If this generalization is correct, the distribution of the affix *-a(k)* in Basque nominal predicates turns out to be just a particular case of a general tendency amongst the languages of the world that contain pronominal copulae to draw a distinction between stable and transitory properties or notions by means of the presence or absence of these markers of predication.

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