

# The Control Basis for Obviation in Basque\*

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## 1 Introduction

This paper explores the phenomenon of Obviation in Basque, a genetically isolated language spoken in the western parts of the Pyrenees between France and Spain. I argue that data on Basque infinitival clauses suggest two main claims: first, that Obviation is a phenomenon closely related to Control. Second, unlike a Government and Binding Theory approach, the basic facts about Control in Basque infinitival clauses are clarified by following the Minimalist spirit.

Obviation could be described as the anti-Control phenomenon. The subject of a lower infinitival clause must be disjoint in reference to the subject of the matrix clause. In Basque both subjunctive and infinitival complements to the verb *nahi* 'want' display such effects. Consider (1) and (2):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Hark<sub>i</sub> [Ø<sub>\*i/k</sub> /hura<sub>\*i/k</sub> joan dadin] nahi du.<sup>2</sup>  
3psig-erg 3psg-abs go aux-subjunc want aux  
'He/she<sub>i</sub> wants him/her<sub>k</sub> to go.'
- (2) Hark<sub>i</sub> [Ø<sub>\*i/k</sub> /hura<sub>\*i/k</sub> joate]-A nahi du.  
3psg-erg 3psg-abs go-inf-Nomin-def-abs want aux  
'He/she<sub>i</sub> wants him/her<sub>k</sub> to go''

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\* This research was funded by a grant from the Government of Education, Universities and Research from the Government of the Basque Country. Thanks to David Lightfoot, Norbert Hornstein and Juan Uriagereka for their help in directing the study. I am grateful to the audiences in various presentations in Maryland, especially to Aitziber Atutxa, Juan Carlos Castillo, John Drury, Kleanthes Grohmann, Nancy Lyon, Leticia Pablos, Acrisio Pires and Cilene Rodrigues. Thanks to the audiences in the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and University of Pennsylvania. Finally, I would like to remind the reader about the importance of engaging in the defense of minority languages, Basque being one of them. All errors remain mine.

<sup>1</sup> These are the relevant abbreviations I will use henceforth in the text: E = Ergative, A = Absolutive, D = Dative, Det = Determiner, Nom = Nominalizer and Subj = Subjunctive.

<sup>2</sup> Basque is a morphologically Ergative language, i.e. the subject of transitive and unergative verbs is marked Ergative, distinct from the subject of unaccusative verbs and object of transitive verbs, which are marked Absolutive.

In both (1) and (2) the subject of the lower clause can not be coreferential to the matrix subject. (3), on the other hand, is an OC structure and it shows the opposite effect: the matrix and embedded subject must be coreferential:

- (3) Nik<sub>i</sub> [ e<sub>i</sub>/<sub>k</sub>/\*John<sub>joan</sub>] nahi dut.  
 I-E                    go    want 3A-1E  
 'I want to go.'

A further immediate difference between the Obviative (1–2) and Control (3) instances is that in the former, but not in the latter, lexical subjects are allowed in subject position of the lower clauses, as well as phonetically null subjects. Several puzzling facts that need explaining should be noted at this point:

- (i) Basque displays systematic pro-drop with the three main arguments (subject, direct object and indirect object). This seems to correlate with the fact that Basque displays very rich agreement morphology in the auxiliary. This would explain the fact that we can get small pro in subjunctive clauses like (1). However, infinitival clauses do not show any agreement and we would not expect to find small pro in instances like (2).
- (ii) DPs are licensed in certain infinitival clauses, as in (2). Infinitival clauses are not usually environments where lexical subjects are licensed internal to them. Moreover, the non-complementary distribution between gaps and DPs constitutes a serious counterfact to the central GB ideology.
- (iii) Binding facts need explaining. In particular, why does Obviation arise in cases like (2)?

Question in (iii) will find a natural answer after analyzing the Control cases first. In turn, the Control instances find a plausible explanation when we follow the Minimalist attitude of acknowledging the distinction between OC and NOC structures thoroughly. (Hornstein 1999, Manzini and Roussou 1998, Martin 1996). The core idea of the Minimalist proposals is that OC structures involve a transparent domain of the infinitival clause and NOC structures include an opaque domain. I claim that this is the key to explain certain syntactic and interpretative asymmetries that appear in Basque infinitival clauses. I will assume a Movement theory of Control (Hornstein 1999) and will argue that the gap in the OC structures is the result of Movement of the copy from the embedded to the infinitival clause. Subjects (lexi-

cal or null) in NOC structures are the result of the copy not having been able to move and when null they will be identified as *pro*.

Finally, I will show how an extension of Hornstein's theory of Movement allows for a natural account to the puzzle of Obviation.

## 2 Basque Control – Data and some Generalizations<sup>3</sup>

Control phenomena are mainly found in infinitival constructions across languages. In Basque we find two types of Infinitival clauses: 'tze Nominalizations' and 'Participial structures'. Adding the Nominalizing suffix *tze* to the verbal base forms the former. These Nominals occur with any case ending (Ergative, Absolutive, Dative, Ablative and so forth). Clausal Infinitivals bear case markings too, sometimes chosen according to the function of the infinitival in the matrix clause. For instance in (4) the infinitival is marked with Ergative case.

- (4) [ Semeak atzerrian ibil-tze-AK] kezkatzen du ama.  
 Son-pl-A abroad-Loc walk-Nom-Def-E worry 3.A-3.E mother-A  
 'It worries her mother that her sons/sons are abroad.'

In infinitival structures of the Participial construction type the verb takes no suffix *tze*. We find that some Infinitival clauses of this sort bear case (5) and others do not (6,7):

- (5) Ni<sub>i</sub> [aitak/Ø<sub>ilk</sub> semea lepoan eramán-AK] poztu nau.  
 I-A father-E son-A back-Loc carry-Det-E gladden 1.A-3.E  
 'I'm glad of carrying/somebody carrying the son on his shoulder.'
- (6) Guk<sub>i</sub> ez dakigu [Ø<sub>i</sub>/\*Jon nora joan].  
 We-E Neg know where go  
 'We do not know (\*Jon) where to go.'
- (7) Peruk<sub>i</sub> [\*bera/\*John/Ø<sub>i</sub> etxera joan] nahi du.  
 Peru-E house-all go want 3.A-3.E  
 'Peru wants to go home.'

Note two immediate aspects of the two types infinitival clauses given above: Some bear case (4,5) and others do not (6,7). Also, some infinitival clauses license DPs in their subject position (4,5), whereas others do not (6,7). Although at first sight the correlation seems to be that infinitival

<sup>3</sup> I will not discuss Control into adjuncts in this paper.

clauses bearing case license DPs in their subject positions, this seems too hasty a conclusion to draw. Consider (8,9):<sup>4</sup>

- (8) John<sub>i</sub> [\*Maria/Ø<sub>i</sub> hori egite]-RA ausartu da.  
 John-A that do-ALL dare 3.A  
 'John has dared to do that.'
- (9) Jonek Mariari<sub>i</sub> [\*Pepe/Ø<sub>i</sub> hori egite]-N lagundu dio.  
 John-E Mary-D that do-LOC help 3.A-3.D-3.E  
 'John has helped Mary to do that.'

Infinitival clauses in (8) and (9) bear case but do not license overt subjects. This suggests that DP licensing depends on the type of Case that the infinitival clause takes, if it bears any at all. Specifically, there is a direct correlation between Infinitival clauses taking Structural case and the licensing of DP in their subject positions. This distinction is not sensitive to the type of Infinitival clause that is being employed, (*tzē* Nominalization or Participial construction).

For ease of exposition, here is a schema of the generalization<sup>5</sup> made above:

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<sup>4</sup> I am assuming that the EPP requirement holds in Infinitival clauses too. (Chomsky 1995, 1998). For a proposal to derive the EPP from other properties, see Castillo et al. 1999.

<sup>5</sup> The generalization holds for all predicates that I have checked, except for the following: on the one hand, predicates *ahaztu* 'forget' and *kostatu* 'have hard time in doing something'. They take infinitival complements marked with Absolute case. As such, I would expect them to allow for alternating DP and Gaps. However, they seem to be regular OC predicates, i.e. they only allow for a controlled gap in the lower subject position.

- (i) Niri [erosketak egitea] ahaztu zait  
 1.D shopping-pl do-Nom-Det-A forget 3.A-1.D  
 'I forgot to do the shopping.'

There are two issues that are worth mentioning: first, these predicates only allow for Quirky subjects in dative case. Second, these predicates also select for complements marked with innesive case, but the meaning is different to the one stated for (i).

- (ii) Niri [erostekan egite]-n ahaztu zait  
 1.D shopping do-Nom-Inn forget 3.A-1.D  
 'I forgot how to do the shopping.'

Regardless of the type of Infinitival clause:

- (a) Infinitival clauses with Structural case [DP<sub>i</sub>...[Ø<sub>i/k</sub>/DP<sub>i/k</sub>...]]<sup>6</sup>  
 (b) Inf. cl. with Inherent Case/No case [DP<sub>i</sub>...[Ø<sub>i/\*k</sub>...]]

An immediate question arises about the (a) cases. What licenses DPs in subject position of Infinitival clauses? In other words, where do they get case from? I will follow Ortiz de Urbina (1989), who argues that this is an instance of Percolation of the ability to assign case from the higher inflection to the lower tenseless Agreement. Agreement is expanded regardless of the particular value +/- Tense, allowing for Inflected Tenseless clauses.<sup>7</sup>

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The second set of data come from predicates that are highly aspectually marked *ekin* 'start in the task of', *eutsi* 'continue the task of' and *utzi* 'stop the task of'. These predicates take Dative case in the infinitival clause but surprisingly enough, do not allow for lexical DPs in their subject position.

- (iii) Nik [ porruak batze-ari] ekin diot.  
 1.E leek.pl harvest-Det-D start 3.A-3.D-1.E  
 'I have started harvesting the leeks.'

Notice, however, that there are other three predicates in Basque that work perfectly for the generalization given above: *hasi* 'start', *segitu/jardunlari* 'continue', *amaitu* 'finish'. The difference between the former and the latter group seems to be merely aspectual as the corresponding translations indicate, but it is hard to determine the exact difference.

Also, the subject in the matrix clause is in Quirky dative case in these instances. I suspect this last issue is related to the fact that they fall out of the generalization proposed.

<sup>6</sup> Note that Structural case is directly related to the appearance of a Determiner, which suggests that the maximal projection of these structures is ultimately a DP as noted by Odriozola & Zabala (1995).

<sup>7</sup> Raposo argues for a similar proposal for European Portuguese (1987). EP displays overt person/number agreement inflection on some infinitives, giving rise to 'inflected infinitives.' Inflected infinitives can appear only in those contexts where the infinitival clause is assigned case by an external case assigner (Tensed INFL or matrix factive verbs). Only in these cases are lexical DPs licensed in the subject position of the lower clause. The parallelism between Basque nominalizations and sentences was already noted in Ortiz de Urbina 1989, Goenaga 1994, Zabala & Odriozola 1995 and Elordieta 1998. The striking similarities between Portuguese, English and Basque were noted in Ortiz de Urbina 1989, Pires 2000 and Pires & San Martin (in progress). See Reuland 1983 for a similar proposal for English *-ing* constructions.

Finally, consider the Obviation cases. There are a few predicates (volitional predicates) in Basque that take the following two types of infinitival clauses: *ize* Nominalizations marked with structural case and Participial constructions with no case marking on the infinitival clause. A very striking property of the Nominalized complements, is that the subject of the lower clause must be disjoint in reference to any argument in the main clause. Consider (10):<sup>8</sup>

- (10) Nik<sub>i</sub> [ e<sub>i</sub>/i<sub>k</sub>/John joatea]                    nahi dut.  
 I-E                    go-Nom-Det-A    want    3A-1E  
 'I want him/her/you/they/John to go.'

In (10) there is an asymmetry. On the one hand the infinitival clause is marked with Structural case and therefore DPs are allowed. However, and this is the novel requirement, the subject position is a position of Obviation with respect to the matrix subject.

### 3 Control as Movement and Basque

Hornstein raises Williams' (1980) observation that gaps in OC structures display opposite effects compared those found in NOC structures with respect to certain tests (requirements on the controller/controlled: the controller must be overt, c-commanding and local to the bindee gaps, OC structures do not allow split antecedents, etc). Hornstein argues that OC structures can be better accounted for in the Minimalist spirit, by assuming that relevant gaps are the consequence of a copy that actually moved from the PRO position to the controller position. Of course, this move can only be done by assuming that chains can have more than one theta role and that the theta requirements of DPs can be satisfied through movement and not simply by merge. In other words, theta roles are features, not satisfied in a configuration as in Hale & Keyser 1993. On the contrary, NOC gaps are the result of the copy not having been able to move. They are small *pros* found in various Romance languages. The anaphoric status of OC gaps (literally traces) and the pronominal status of NOC gaps (literally *pros*) is therefore explained.

By adopting the Hornstein 1999 approach the following predictions are born out for the core cases of the Basque data. First, the interpretive differences outlined by Williams should serve as diagnostics for determining whether the structure at hand is an OC or NOC structures and hence, whether

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<sup>8</sup> The Obviation facts are not attested in all Basque dialects, but in some Gipuzkoan dialects they seem to get Obviation effects in this environment.

movement could or could not have taken place. In other words, we should be able to predict whether the lower clause is an island or not by considering the interpretive effects that the sentence displays. For instance, if split antecedents are not allowed the gap in the infinitival clause will be a gap resulting from movement, hence, a gap in an OC structure. Second, those gaps that are predicted to be gaps in OC structures will involve a greedy type of movement driven by case checking purposes. Third, in NOC structures, where presumably no movement took place, gaps must be identified as *pro*. Basque exhibits systematic *pro*-drop and it would not be surprising to find them also in NOC structures.

The predictions are born out. Consider (11), which looks like a NOC structure.

- (11) [ $\emptyset_{i/k}$ /anaia kartetan ibiltzeari] ondo deritsot.  
 brother-A cards play-Nom-Det-D well I.-consider  
 'I think that it is OK to play cards/that my brother plays cards.'
- (12) Nik<sub>i</sub> Peperi<sub>k</sub> [ $\emptyset_{i+k}$  kartetan batera jolasteari] ondo deritsodala esan diot.  
 I-E Pepe-D cards together play-Nom-Det-D] OK think-Cp say  
 3A-3D-1E  
 'I said to Pepe that I think that it is OK that we play cards together.'

(12) shows that split antecedents are allowed in this environment. The prediction for Hornstein is that the lower infinitival clause is an island and that movement could not have taken place. Thus, the gap in the subject position is a *pro*. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that *pro* usually gets regular case. In fact in (11) the lower subject position may be occupied by an overt DP, suggesting that it is a case position. An interesting aspect of the Basque cases is that movement does not take place for two reasons: on the one hand, because the structure the copy appears in is an island and on the other, because there is no motivation for movement.<sup>9</sup> The subject position is already a case position, so further movement is prohibited.

If (11) is a NOC structure the lower clause should constitute an island. (18) below bears out the prediction. Moreover, note that where extraction of the *wh* is prohibited pied piping of the whole *wh*-phrase is allowed (14), which correctly suggests that it is islandhood that is at stake.

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<sup>9</sup> I am assuming Greed as stated by Lasnik (1995), "Enlightened Self Interest: items move either to satisfy their own requirements or those of the position they move to."

- (13) \*Nork [\_\_\_ kartetan jolaste]-ari ondo deritsot nik?  
 Who-E cards play-Nom-Det-D OK consider 1.-E?  
 \*'Who do I agree to the fact that play cards?'
- (14) Kartetan nork jokatzeari deitsot nik ondo?  
 Cards who-E play-Nom-Det-D consider 1-E OK?  
 \*'Who do I agree to the fact that play cards?'

We find the contrary effects in cases of OC; consider (15). (16) shows that split antecedents are not allowed, suggesting that movement did take place. Since the infinitival clause is not an island, *wh* movement out of it is permitted, as shown in (17). Notice that the pied-piping strategy for the *wh* movement is not available where movement of the bare *wh* word was an option (18).

- (15) Guk<sub>i</sub> ez dakigu [\*gu/\*Pepe/Ø; nora joan].  
 We-E neg know-1.pl where go  
 'We do not know where to go.'
- (16) \*Nik<sub>i</sub>Marari<sub>k</sub> [Ø<sub>i+k</sub> batera joateko esan diot.  
 I-E Mary-D together go-Nom-to say 3A-3D-1E  
 'I told Mary to go together.'
- (17) Nork ez daki [nora joan]?  
 Who-E Neg know-3 where go  
 'Who does not know where to go?'
- (18) \* [Nork nora joan] ez daki?  
 Who-E where go Neg know-3?  
 'Who does not know what to do?'

Movement out of the infinitival clause is both permitted (by the fact that it is not located in an island) and motivated. OC structures in Basque do not take structural case marking on infinitival clauses and therefore, do not license lexical DPs in their subject position. Copies in the lower clause will have to move to the matrix [Spec, TP] in order to be case marked.

#### 4 The Obviation Cases

Predicates that display Obviation effects in Basque may take infinitival complements of the two types described above: (i) Infinitival clauses that are not marked with structural case, where, as expected, the matrix subject must be coreferential to the gap in the lower clause, as in (19); (ii) Infinitival clauses marked with Structural case. Following the logic stated so far, we see that the former are regular OC structures, but for the latter we find an inconsis-



tency: since it looks like a NOC structure, the lower subject position should be free in reference, but instead it Obviates with respect to the matrix subject, as in (20). This is the 'Obviation Problem'.

- (19) Nik<sub>i</sub> [ Ø<sub>i/\*k</sub>/\*John joan] nahi dut.  
 I-E go want 3A-1E  
 'I want to go.'
- (20) Nik<sub>i</sub> [ Ø<sub>\*i/k</sub>/John joatea] nahi dut.  
 I-E go-Nom-Det-A want 3A-1E  
 'I want somebody else to go.'

This section deals with cases like the latter type, the Obviation cases. The Minimalist approaches outlined above do not provide a straightforward account of (20). How does Obviation arise? Why should this requirement exist in what otherwise looks like a regular NOC structure?

As a first approximation, note that it seems to be crucial that predicates that display Obviation are predicates that allow for both OC and NOC structures. I will argue we find the key aspect to the solution of the puzzle in Basque: sentences that display Obviation are hybrid between OC and NOC structures: they are NOC-like in shape, take Structural case marking on the lower clause). However, surprisingly enough, they behave like OC structures, they are not islands. (21), (22) and (23) show that extraction of objects and subjects is possible out of infinitival clauses that display Obviation effects:

- (21) Zer nahi dut nik [ Mariak \_\_\_ jatea]?  
 What want 3A-1E I.E Mary-E eat-Nom-Det-A?  
 'What do I want for Mary to eat?'
- (22) Nor nahi dut nik [ \_\_\_ joatea]?  
 Who-A want 3A-1E I.E go-Nom-Det-A?  
 '\*Who do I want that goes.'
- (23) Zer nahi dut nik<sub>i</sub> [ Ø<sub>k</sub> \_\_\_ erosteā]?  
 What want 3A-1E I.E buy-Nom-Det-A  
 'What do I want (for somebody else) to buy?'

An interesting observation can be raised at this point: there is some kind of relevant relationship between Obviation and OC structures. They both allow extraction out of them. In this sense we could argue that they are essentially the same structures. By following the Movement theory to Control, the logic is that Movement is preferred when anaphoric relations are established. This was the case in OC structures. The anaphoricity between the

matrix subject and the embedded gap was the result of the copy having moved to the matrix controller position, since movement was a preferred option where it was possible. In cases where Obviation arises Movement is also possible, but did not take place. The proposal is that Obviation is a logical consequence of violating 'Move First' when attempting to have an anaphoric relation without Movement. The intuition is that this violation implies that the use of a bound pronoun to establish an anaphoric relation is costly where movement was possible, and this is the source where Obviation arises.

The idea above suggests that OC and OBV structures are essentially the same, they allow movement out of the lower clauses. However, unlike OC structures, OBV structures involve a case marking on the lower clause. Recall that the role of the structural case marking on the Infinitival clause is to license lexical subjects internal to the lower clause (Percolation).

Certain technical assumptions will do the job. In particular if we assume that arrays do not contain morphological material, derivations that are morphologically distinct will be allowed to compete. The OC structures and the Obviative ones, the non- case marked and the heavily case marked respectively, form part of the same comparison class for purposes of evaluating derivational economy. In sum, we assume that the grammars make sure to add as much morphological case marking as needed and prefers Move over Construal. Derivations compete and failure to move where possible will yield an anti-control effect, namely Obviation. In other words, Obviation arises as a result of violating Move first. The pronoun that emerges as a result is not a deictic pronoun (which is assumed to be part of the Numeration for construing the Derivation), but a formative that the grammar uses when violations of preferred options take place. In other words, it is not deictic and does not form part of the Numeration, but emerges as a species of do-support strategy in English.

The idea that the grammar will add as much morphological material as needed will allow the element that did not move in Obviative structures to stay internal to the lower clause. This is the reason why Obviative structures take structural case marking on the lower clause, and as a consequence this will license subject DP or small pros in them.

The idea implemented above suggests an economy framework which favors derivations exploiting Move to those requiring Construal. Hornstein & San Martin (2000) argue that the idea that Obviation is a consequence of violating Move First finds strong crosslinguistic empirical support.

First, in particular, if the competition of derivations between OC and OBV is the key ingredient for Obviation to emerge then it is a necessary condition that OC structures be convergent too. In Spanish, predicates *querer* 'want', *esperar* 'hope' and *preferir* 'prefer' allow for both OC and OBV

instances, but as expected *dudar* does not show Obviation effects because it does not allow OC structures either.

Second, crosslinguistically, languages that lack OC structures (which mostly come in the shape of infinitival clauses) do not display Obviation effects either. This is the case of Rumanian and Salentino.

Third, diachronically, Old French did not show Obviation effects, but it did not license Infinitival clauses either. It was not until the Middle French period that Obviation arose together with the existence of Infinitival clauses.

## 5 Conclusion

Two relevant claims have been made in this paper. First, control data in Basque infinitival clauses can be best approached from a Minimalist viewpoint. The distribution of null and lexical subjects urges for a serious distinction between OC and NOC structures, where the former involve a transparent domain for movement. The latter involve a more opaque domain where arguments are licensed within the lower clause. The second claim is that phenomena that have been considered as totally separate (Control and Obviation) are actually two sides of the same coin: OC involves movement and Obviation is the anti-bound pronoun effect, failure to move first where movement was an option.

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