

## Unergatives that Assign Ergative, Unaccusatives that Assign Accusative\*

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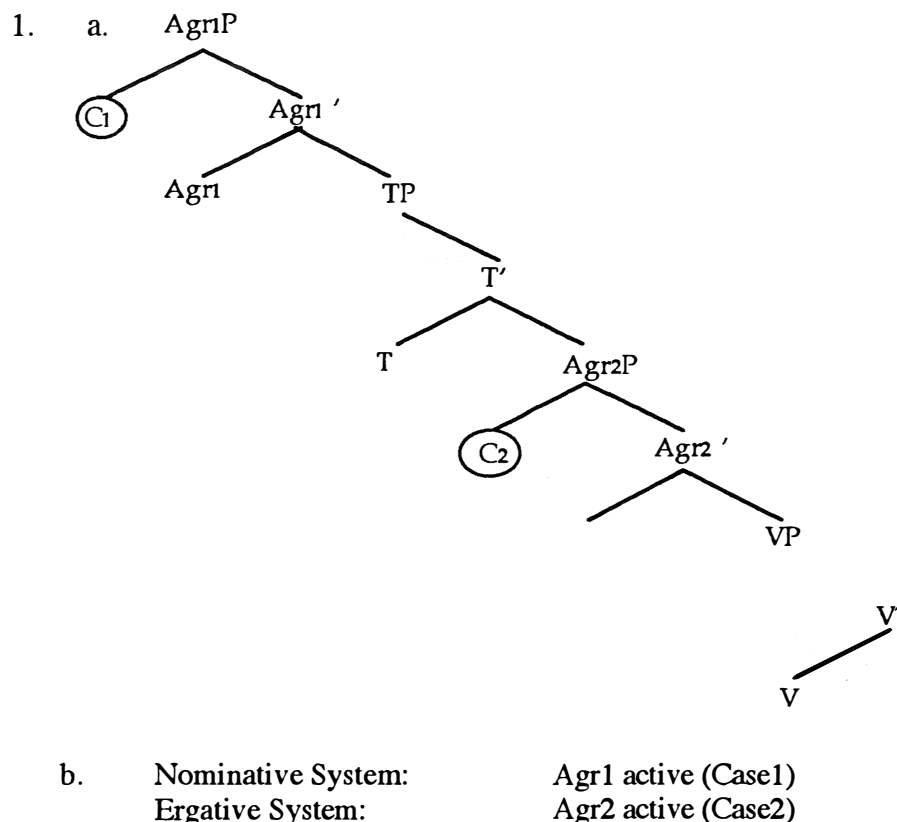
**Abstract.** This paper discusses a Case paradigm that differs from standard Ergative systems in that Unergative predicates (Perlmutter 1978) assign Ergative Case, which only surfaces in transitive predicates in standard Ergative systems. The Case system under discussion is shown to be Ergative in the sense of Bobaljik (1992) and Chomsky (1992). The discrepancy is due to an independent parameter: the internal argument of the unergative predicates (Hale & Keyser 1991), does not undergo Incorporation. The idiosyncratic properties of these arguments are discussed next. It is argued that they are NPs. It is then claimed that DP constituents must move out of VP to [Spec,Agr] where they check D features. NPs must remain inside VP and receive Case without involvement of Agr. A modification of Bobaljik's (1992) *Obligatory Case Parameter*, and Chomsky's (1992) Case Theory, is presented, where it is the activation of Case features which underlies the Parameter in Case Theory. Either  $C_T$  or  $C_V$  are activated. Structural Accusative Case and Inherent Partitive case (Belletti 1988) are argued to be two instantiations of the V Case feature ( $C_V$ ). Structural Case is [ $C_V$ , Agr] as in Chomsky (1992), Inherent Partitive Case is bare  $C_V$ . DPs must receive Structural Case; NPs must receive Inherent Case. NPs bearing  $C_V$  display Specificity effects (Enç 1991, Mahajan 1992). It is argued however that Specificity is not the feature determining syntactic placement. Rather, it is a syntactic-morphological requirement that determines which arguments remain VP-internal: DPs must be VP external and NPs cannot sit in [Spec, Agr]. The Case Theory proposed derives Burzio's Generalization, and shows it to be a generalization about the Nominative parameter, not about ergative grammars (as suggested by Levin 1983 for Basque).

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Ergativity as a Case Parameter

Bobaljik (1992) and Chomsky (1992) argue that ergative and nominative case systems are the result of a parameter in Case Theory: given the two projections available in UG for assignment of Structural Case (1a), if only one Case is required (i.e. when the predicate contains only one argument), only one of the Agr projections is active. If Agr1 is the active projection, the resulting Case system is Nominative; if it is Agr2, the resulting Case system is Ergative (1b).



This approach shares with Dixon (1979), Levin & Massam (1985) and Marantz (1991), the assumption that 'nominative' corresponds to 'ergative', while 'absolutive' corresponds to 'accusative'; under the approach sketched above, 'ergative' and 'nominative' are two different names for the Case assigned in the SPEC of Agr1 (henceforth C1), and 'absolutive'/'accusative' both refer to the Case assigned in the SPEC of Agr2 (henceforth C2)<sup>1</sup>. The parameter in (1) is binary; it can only yield (2) and (3):

<sup>1</sup> Bittner (1990), Johns (1992) and Murasugi (1992) take a different approach, correlating nominative with absolutive. The present work follows Bobaljik's (1992) approach.

- |    |                    |    |                    |
|----|--------------------|----|--------------------|
| 2. | <i>Active Agr1</i> | 3. | <i>Active Agr2</i> |
| a. | V (C1, C2)         | a. | V (C1, C2)         |
| b. | V (C1)             | b. | V (C2)             |

Under this view of Case Theory, Case marking in transitive clauses is not subject to parameterization: the external argument is universally assigned C1 while the internal argument is assigned C2. Parameterization arises in monoargumental clauses, where either (2b) or (3b) obtain, depending on which Agr is active. The pattern in (2) is instantiated in the data in (4), from English and Latin, where the external argument of the transitive clause is assigned C1 (nominative), and the same case is assigned to the argument of the intransitive predicates:

- |    |    |   |    |   |
|----|----|---|----|---|
| 4. | a. | she <sub>C1</sub> saw her <sub>C2</sub> | d. | mullier <sub>C1</sub> mulierem <sub>C2</sub> vide |
|    | b. | she <sub>C1</sub> fell                  | e. | mullier <sub>C1</sub> cade                        |
|    | c. | she <sub>C1</sub> laughed               | f. | mullier <sub>C1</sub> ride                        |

Note, in particular, that all intransitive predicates pattern alike: in (4b) and (4e) it is the argument of the unaccusative predicate *fall/cadere* that receives C1; in (4c) and (4f) it is the argument of the unergative predicate *laugh/ridere* that receives C1.

Consider now an ergative language like Inuit (from Bobaljik 1992,1993): (5a) is a transitive sentence, where the external argument is assigned C1 and the internal argument is assigned C2. The intransitive sentences (5b) and (5c) assign C2 to the subject, in contrast with the paradigm in (4):

5. a. Jaani-up<sub>C1</sub> natsiq<sub>C2</sub> kapi-jarja  
 Jaani-erg seal stab-trans  
 'Jaani stabbed a seal.'
- b. inuk<sub>C2</sub> tikit-tuq  
 person arrived  
 'The person arrived.'
- c. ilinniaqtitsiji<sub>C2</sub> uqaq-tuq  
 teacher spoke  
 'The teacher spoke.'

If (1), which is an informal statement of Bobaljik's (1992) *Obligatory Case Parameter* is the only parameter of variation in Case Theory, as argued in Bobaljik (1992) and Chomsky (1992), then Case patterns that diverge from either (2) or (3) must be accounted for independently of Case Theory. As discussed by Levin (1983), Basque displays a Case marking system that does not conform to either (2) or (3). Consider (6):

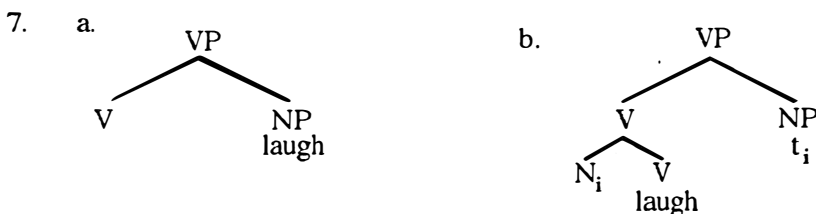
6. a. emakumeak<sub>C1</sub> emakumea<sub>C2</sub> ikusi du  
 woman-the-E woman-the-A seen has  
 'The woman saw the woman.'

- b. emakumea<sub>C2</sub> erori da  
 woman-the-A fallen is  
 'The woman has fallen.'
- c. emakumeak<sub>C1</sub> barre egin du  
 woman-the-E laugh done has  
 'The woman has laughed.'

In a transitive predicate (6a), the external argument of *ikusi* 'see', is assigned C1 case (marked with the morpheme *-k*), and the internal argument is assigned C2 (marked zero). In the realm of intransitive predicates, however, there is no single Case assigned to the subject: as shown in (6b), unaccusative predicates assign C2 to their argument, which under (1b) means that Agr2 is active, yielding a pattern like (3). Yet in unergative predicates like (6c), the external argument is assigned C1, which conforms to (2). The paradigm illustrated above is not particular to Basque: it is also found in Georgian (Harris 1981, Marantz 1991), and to some degree in Hindi (Mahajan 1990, Bobaljik 1993).

### 1.2 Unergatives as transitive predicates: incorporation parametrized

The paradigm in (6) can be accounted for without any reformulation of Case Theory once we consider the structure of unergative predicates. Hale & Keyser (1991) argue that, universally, unergative predicates are transitive in their Lexical Relational Structure, a representational level prior to D-Structure; this is illustrated in (7a). In the mapping onto D-Structure, the N heading the complement of V incorporates into V, as shown in (7b).



Hale & Keyser note that unergative predicates in Basque provide evidence for (7a): they do not involve incorporation, and thus, they do actually involve a 'light' verb and an action noun, as the examples in (8) illustrate<sup>2</sup>:

8. a. Nik *lan* egin dut      c. Nik *eztul* egin dut  
 I-Erg work done have-me      I-Erg cough done have-me  
 'I worked.' (I did work)      'I have coughed.'

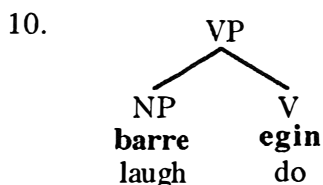
<sup>2</sup> The following are a few more examples of unergative predicates involving a Noun and the light verb: from *agur* 'greeting', *agur egin* 'to greet'; from *dehadar* 'shout', *dehadar egin* 'to shout'; from *hitz* 'word', *hitz egin* 'to speak'; from *ihes* 'escape', *ihes egin* 'to escape'; from *keinu* 'wink', *keinu egin* 'to wink'; from *lo* 'sleep', *lo egin* 'to sleep'; from *amets* 'dream', *amets egin* 'to dream'.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| b.    Nik <i>negar egin</i> dut<br>I-Erg cry   done have-me<br>'I have cried.' | d.    Nik <i>oihu egin</i> dut<br>I-Erg scream done have-me<br>'I have screamed.' |
|--|---|

Uribe-Etxebarria (1989) provides detailed syntactic evidence demonstrating that the unincorporated Noun and the light Verb *egin* 'do' are not part of a lexical compound, and that they are independent constituents in the overt syntax. The paradigm in (9) summarizes some of Uribe-Etxebarria's evidence: (9a,b) show that the Noun and the Verb can be separated in cases of Wh-movement, (9c) shows that they can also be separated in focalization structures, and in (9d) the Noun surfaces with a type of polar determiner traditionally referred to as 'partitive', which can never be assigned to nominal pieces of compounds.

9. a.    Nork   *egin* behar du   *lan*?  
       who-Erg done must   have work  
       'Who must work?' (Who must do work?)
- b.    Nork   *egin* du   *lan*?  
       who-Erg done have work  
       'Who has worked?' (Who has done work?)
- c.    Oso   ondo *egin* duzu   *lan*.  
       very well done have-you work  
       'You have worked *very well*.'
- d.    Ez   dut   *lan-ik egin*.  
       not have work-any   done  
       'I haven't worked.'

Traditional descriptive grammars of Basque consider these predicates fully transitives (Laffite 1944); even within the generative literature, authors like Ortiz de Urbina (1986), and Uribe-Etxebarria (1989), have regarded them as transitive verbs involving two nominal arguments<sup>3</sup>. Following Hale & Keyser (1991), I will assume, with Bobaljik (1993), that the lack of incorporation accounts for the syntactic transitivity of unergatives in Basque (10):



<sup>3</sup> Mahajan (1990) also suggests that unergatives in Hindi are syntactically transitive. Marantz (1991) notes that: "A slight conceptual jump is required to see why Georgian, Hindi and Basque can get ERG case on the subject of an intransitive verb when the subject is not raised from object position [...] Apparently Georgian and Basque obligatorily count such and *unfilled* positions as visible..." (The unfilled position is complement of V.)

Under this approach, the only true monoargumental predicates in Basque are the unaccusatives, which display an active Agr2, as shown in (6b). In the case of unergative predicates, the unincorporated internal argument receives the case assigned by Agr2, and thus Agr1 must be activated in order to license the external argument, the agent of the unergative predicate. Therefore, no revision in Case Theory is required, and the deviance of the case marking pattern in (6) is explained by an independent source of parametric variation, involving the mapping between Lexical Relational Structures and D-Structure<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.3 Basque and friends: the unincorporated ergative choice.

Grammars showing patterns similar to (6) involve the interaction of two independent parameters:

- a. the Case Parameter, where the setting involves an active Agr2;
- b. a parametric variation in predicate conflation: N incorporation into V in unergative predicates does not take place.

As a consequence, unergative predicates diverge from unaccusatives in the syntax; Ergativity cannot be detected in the former, because both Cases must be activated to license the two arguments in the clause. If the paradigm in (6) involves the interaction of two independent sources of parametric variation, then we should be able to find grammatical systems that have the same setting as Basque regarding Noun Incorporation, but which diverge from Basque in making a Nominative (Active Agr1) choice in the Case Parameter. However, a grammatical system where the Case Parameter is set for an active Agr1 and where unergatives do not incorporate their nouns, does not yield a Case paradigm detectably different from (4): the subject is invariably assigned C1<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> There are predicates that look like unergatives in English but do not involve a light verb in Basque. Examples in (i):

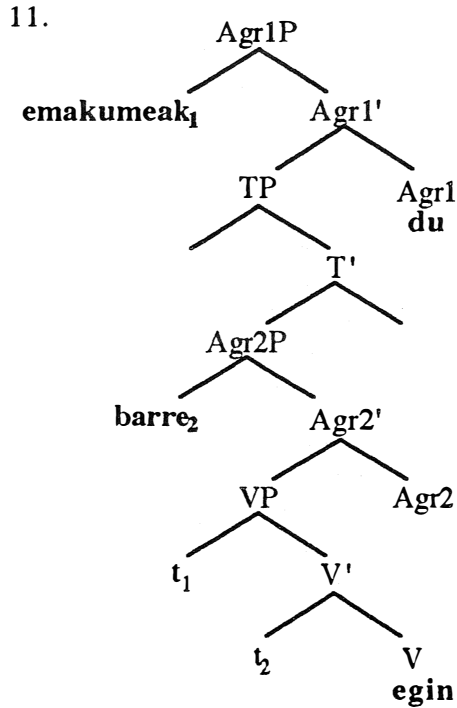
- |    |    |                         |             |    |                         |            |
|----|----|-------------------------|-------------|----|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. | a. | emakumeak               | dantzatu du | b. | emakumeak               | kantatu du |
|    |    | woman-dt-Erg            | danced has  |    | woman-dt-Erg            | sung has   |
|    |    | 'The woman has danced.' |             |    | 'The woman has danced.' |            |

These predicates also assign C1 to their external argument. I will not discuss them in detail here. I assume that they are transitive predicates involving *pro* in the object position (*pro* is licensed in subject, object and dative objects in Basque (Laka & Uriagereka 1986). A strong piece of evidence in support of this view is presented by Uribe-Etxebarria (1989): the predicates in (i) allow overt objects while the predicates under discussion in the text do not permit any type of object (ii):

- |     |    |                                  |            |               |
|-----|----|----------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| 11. | a. | emakumeak                        | dantza hau | dantzatu du   |
|     |    | woman-dt-Erg                     | dance this | danced has    |
|     |    | 'The woman danced this dance.'   |            |               |
|     | b. | *emakumeak                       | amets hau  | amets egin du |
|     |    | woman-dt-Erg                     | dream this | dreamt has    |
|     |    | ('The woman dreamt this dream.') |            |               |

<sup>5</sup> English light verbs seem likely candidates for this configuration of choices: a Nominative Case assignment system and unincorporated predicates. For extensive

The syntactic representation of a sentence involving an unergative predicate like (6c) is, in the null hypothesis, identical to a standard transitive predicate (6a). This structure is outlined in (11)<sup>6</sup>.



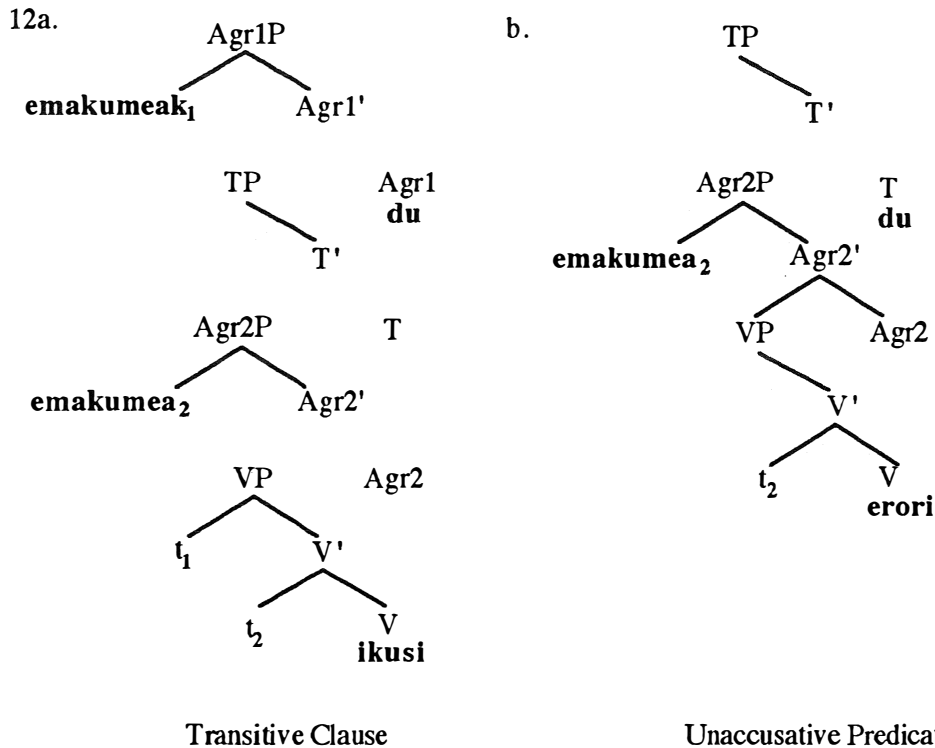
The external argument *emakumea* 'the woman', generated in [Spec,V] (Kitagawa 1986), moves to [Spec,Agr1] to receive C1. The internal argument of *egin* 'do', which is the NP *barre* 'laughter' is generated in the complement position of V, and it moves to [Spec, Agr2] where it receives C2<sup>7</sup>. The representation in (11) entails that the internal arguments of unergative predicates have the same

discussion on their properties see, Kearns (1988) Grimshaw & Mester (1988), Hale & Keyser (1991)

<sup>6</sup> I adopt here the clause structure in Chomsky (1989), although nothing in the argument depends on the relative position of the highest AgrP with respect to Tense, and other issues in this architecture where other proposals depart from this one. The relevant feature is that the clause structure contain two positions where structural Case is assigned, distinct from the projections where the bearers of the case features (Tns, V) are generated. In this respect, the structures in Mahajan (1990), Pollock (1989) are also compatible with the present proposal.

<sup>7</sup> C2 is assigned in conjunction with V, hence V must raise to Agr2, before or after Spell-Out (Chomsky 1992). As argued in Laka (1990), there is evidence that V raising does not take place before Spell-Out in Basque. According to Chomsky (1992), 'strong' morphology requires V-movement to take place before Spell-Out; we would have to assume, then, that some aspects of morphology in Basque are 'weak'. This is not problematic as long as 'strong' and 'weak' morphology does not correlate with 'overtly rich' and 'almost non-overt' morphology respectively. I will not pursue this issue here.

syntactic derivation as objects of transitive clauses (12a) and subjects of unaccusative predicates (12b):



In what follows, I discuss some crucial differences between internal arguments of unergatives and other D-Structure objects that question the parallelism inherent to the representations in (11) and (12). I argue that unergative predicates do in fact not involve a derivation like (11), and that the internal argument does not undergo movement from VP to [Spec, Agr2].

## 2. On Internal Arguments of Unergatives: The Missing Determiner Problem

Standard arguments in Basque must be headed by a Determiner or by a Quantifier, and can never be bare NPs, even in generic or existential contexts. Objects of unergative predicates diverge sharply from this requirement: they cannot be headed by either Quantifiers, or Determiners. I argue that the former are DP projections (Abney 1987) and move to [Spec, Agr] positions where Agr checks their D features. The latter are NP projections and stay within the VP where they receive case directly from V, with no mediating Agr, and thus with no D features intervening in the licensing mechanism.

### 2.1 Arguments that are Determiner Phrases.

From a descriptive standpoint, nominal arguments in Basque are peculiar in that they must always be headed by a Determiner, or a Quantifier, regardless of their

status with respect Definiteness or Specificity. I claim that this is due to their DP status. Consider the data in (13):

13. a. emakume-a-k arto-a erein du  
 woman-dt-Erg corn-dt planted has  
 'The woman has planted (the) corn.'
- b. \* emakume-a-k arto erein du  
 woman-dt-Erg corn planted has
- c. emakume-a-k arto hau erein du  
 woman-dt-Erg corn this planted has  
 'The woman has planted this corn.'

The example in (13a) illustrates a transitive sentence; the object is headed by the Determiner *a*. As the translations make clear, the sentence in (13a) is ambiguous between a definite interpretation of the object ('the corn') or an indefinite, non specific interpretation ('corn'). This choice in interpretation suffices to conclude that the Determiner *a* is not a definite determiner<sup>8</sup>. As the ungrammaticality of (13b) illustrates, a Noun Phrase not headed by a determiner is not a well-formed argument. In (13c) we see that the Determiner heading the NP need not be *a* but can also be a Demonstrative<sup>9</sup>. Consider now (14):

14. a. emakume-a-k gizon-a ikusi du  
 woman-dt-Erg man-dt seen has  
 'The woman has seen the man.'
- b. emakume-a-k lau gizon ikusi ditu  
 woman-dt-Erg four men seen has  
 'The woman has seen four men.'

As shown in (14), a well formed argument need not be headed by a determiner if it is quantified (14c). I assume that Quantifiers sit in [Spec, D], and that an overt [Spec, D] can license an empty D head. The requirement on 'determined' nominal arguments in Basque carries over to environments such as existentials and generics, as illustrated in (15):

15. a. Bada ogi-a mahai gainean  
 there-is bread-dt table top-on  
 'There is bread on the table.'
- b. \* Bada ogi mahai gainean  
 there-is bread table top-on

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the morpheme *a* is customarily described as the definite article in most descriptive grammars and dictionaries (see, for instance, Laffite 1944, Michelena 1987).

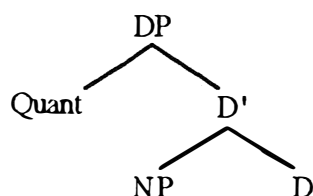
<sup>9</sup> For a detailed description of Determiners, Quantifiers and other categories belonging in the DP system, see Laka & Sarasola (in progress).

- c. Bada oġi-rik mahai ganean  
there-is bread-any table top-on  
'There is bread on top of the table.'
- d. Elurr-a zuri-a da  
snow-dt white-dt is  
'Snow is white.'

In (15a) an existential sentence is illustrated<sup>10</sup>, where the nominal argument *ogia* 'bread-dt' is non-specific (Enç 1991), and yet the determiner *a* must head the Noun Phrase, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (15b), where the determiner is absent. Although it is not illustrated in the examples, any other choice of determiner yields ungrammaticality, except for what is referred to as the 'partitive' case, (15c)<sup>11</sup>. In generic sentences (15d), the subject of the predicate must be headed by the determiner *a*; moreover, the predicate is also headed by the determiner *a*<sup>12</sup>.

These facts can be accounted for if we assume that all these cases involve Determiner Phrases headed by a D that must be overt except if a Quantifier occupies [Spec, D], in which case D can be empty, as shown in (14b)<sup>13</sup>. The structure of all the well formed arguments in examples (13) to (15) is illustrated in (16):

16.



<sup>10</sup> There is another reading of this sentence (corresponding to a different intonational contour), which is the equivalent of English 'The bread is indeed on the table' (for this emphatic construction see Laka 1990). This reading does not concern us now.

<sup>11</sup> What is referred to as 'partitive case' in Basque is a polar determiner, much like English *any*, and not an overt realization of Belletti's inherent partitive Case. See Levin (1983) for a discussion of its distribution.

<sup>12</sup> Not all varieties of Basque require the predicate to be headed by the determiner. Oriental dialects typically allow examples like (i):

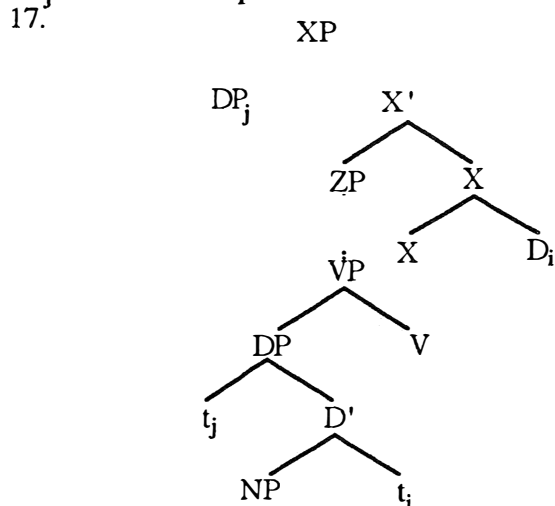
i. Elurr-a zuri da

In this paper I will not discuss the status of these predicates or the reason for why this dialectal variation obtains.

<sup>13</sup> It need not be empty, however, as shown in (i) and (ii):

- i. Emakumeak lau gizon-ak ikusi ditu  
woman-dt-Erg four men-dt seen has  
'The woman has seen the four men.'
- ii. Emakumeak lau gizon horiek ikusi ditu  
woman-dt-Erg four men those seen has  
'The woman has seen those four men.'

Following a proposal in Torrego (1988), Uriagereka (1992) argues that Inflectional Agreement in Basque necessarily involves a DP constituent. Torrego (1988) argues that certain dative clitic-doubling constructions in Spanish involve a DP headed by a pronominal clitic, whose Specifier contains the DP argument it agrees with. Uriagereka (1992) argues that the same structure underlies the relation between agreement morphemes and the arguments they agree with in Basque. The pronominal clitic heading the DP incorporates onto Infl and thus agreement with the DP argument in the Specifier results. The structure is outlined in (17), where the derivation of one argument is illustrated:  $DP_i$  is headed by  $D_i$ . Its Specifier contains  $DP_j$  (indexes mine, intended to facilitate reading the derivation solely).  $D_i$  moves to an inflectional head, and  $DP_j$  moves to the Specifier of that head:



Assume Torrego's (1988) and Uriagereka's (1992) insight that arguments that move out of the VP projection to receive Case and trigger Agreement must be DPs. A crucial aspect of the claim I want to put forward here is that this is a syntactic requirement: only categories headed by a D element may occupy [Spec, Agr]. It is clearly not a semantic requirement, in that these DP constituents need not be [+/- specific], as shown in the examples discussed. The Basque data indicate that the crucial requirement determining what types of elements must move to [Spec, Agr] is morphological (presence or absence of the determiner), much in the spirit of the general program outlined in Chomsky (1992).

## 2.2 Arguments that are bare Noun Phrases.

When we consider the unincorporated internal arguments of unergative predicates, neither Determiners nor Quantifiers are required to license the argument. Consider (18a) and (18b): the internal argument of the unergative predicate is not headed by either of the elements that nominal arguments in (13) to (15) required. In particular, compare those examples with the ungrammatical (13b) and (15b).

- |        |   |    |  |
|--------|---|----|--|
| 18. a. | Nik lan egin dut<br>I-Erg work done have-me<br>'I have worked.' | b. | Nik eztul egin dut<br>I-Erg cough done have<br>'I have coughed.' |
|--------|---|----|--|

Moreover, if the internal argument of the unergative predicate is headed by a determiner, a definite reading obtains necessarily. Consider (19):

19. Nik lan-a egin dut  
 I-Erg work-dt done have-me  
 'I have done the work.'

There is no indefinite (and thus no non-specific) interpretation available for the internal argument in (19). This contrasts sharply with the facts in (13a) and (15b), where arguments headed by *a* could be interpreted either as [+specific] or [-specific]. Summarizing, whereas in transitive predicates the presence of the Det *a* does not entail specificity, in that not all arguments headed by *a* are [+specific], when we turn to unergative predicates we find that the presence of *a* does determine specificity: whereas a bare NP as *lan* 'work' in (18a) is necessarily [-specific], the same NP headed by *a* is necessarily interpreted as [+specific].

The question that arises at this point is: what makes the unergative internal arguments different from all other arguments? We cannot reply that the internal arguments of predicates like (18) require no determiner because they are non specific. Although it is true that the determinerless internal arguments of unergative predicates are necessarily non specific, it is possible to have non specific arguments headed by the Determiner *a*, as shown (13b) and (15b). Recall the ambiguity of (13a) and (15a), both of which have readings where the object is non specific, despite the fact that they are headed by *a*. We cannot appeal directly to specificity to account for the lack of determiners in (18) type predicates. However, it is a fact that all determinerless arguments are interpreted necessarily as [-specific].

Consider the hypothesis that these arguments are bare NPs involving no DP projection. This accounts for the lack of determination straightforwardly, and under the hypothesis that only DPs can occupy [Spec, Agr], these arguments must remain internal to VP throughout the derivation. From this we can derive the fact that they are interpreted as non specific at LF (Enç 1991, Mahajan 1992, Diesing 1992), while we do not link specificity directly to the presence versus absence of the Determiner. In short, the generalization is that all bare NPs are non specific, that is, all arguments that remain VP internal are interpreted as non specific. This does not entail that all VP-external arguments must be specific.

### 2.3 Specificity Effects and syntactic configurations.

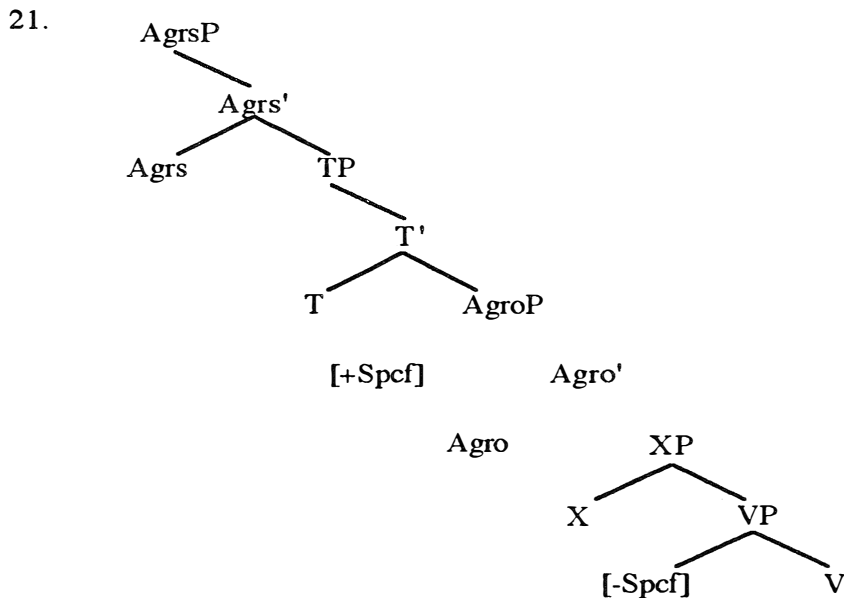
Despite the fact that the distribution of the determiner *a* is not governed by a semantic condition like specificity, this notion is configurationally constrained in Basque. Non-specific readings of arguments headed by *a* are possible only in those configurations where the argument is linked to a trace in the complement position of V, as shown in (20):

20. a. Zuek sagarr-ak jan dituzue  
 you-Erg apple-dt<sub>pl</sub> eaten have  
 'You have eaten (the) apples.'

- b. Kamioi-ak etorri dira  
truck-dt<sub>pl</sub> arrived are  
'(The) trucks have arrived.'
- c. Gizonek negar egin dute  
men-dt<sub>pl</sub>-Erg cry made have  
'\*(The) men cried.'

In (20a) and (20b), the D-Structure complement of V can be interpreted either as a definite (hence [+specific]) or as a non specific. However, the argument in (20c) cannot receive a non specific interpretation. Specificity is not contained in the Determiner morphology in Basque, but syntactic configurations nevertheless constrain specificity effects. What is important to note is that specificity in Basque is not unambiguously reflected in whether the argument is a DP or an NP. All bare NP arguments are [-specific], but not all DP arguments are [+specific].

There is a large and fast growing body of literature, which argues for a strong correlation between specificity and syntactic configuration. Koopman (1989) argues that in Dutch, only [-specific] objects remain inside the VP projection after D-Structure. Objects that are [+specific] move outside the VP to receive case. Enç (1991) discusses Turkish, where Specificity correlates with what objects receive overt accusative case morphology: only [+specific] objects do. Mahajan (1992) discusses a similar pattern in Hindi, where only specific arguments trigger Inflectional Agreement. Much in the spirit of Koopman's proposal, Mahajan argues that [+specific] complements of V move to [Spec, Agr-O]: [-specific] complements of V remain in the VP and are assigned Case under government by V. The representation in (21) outlines Mahajan's proposal:



In this proposal, [+Specific] arguments receive Structural Case from Agr, either via Spec-Head agreement or via government from Agr to Spec of XP (in order to account for Specific objects that do not trigger agreement). Objects that are [-specific] receive Case from V under government.

If the previous discussion on the syntactic types of arguments in Basque is on the right track, we must conclude that it is not Specificity per se what forces some arguments to be VP external while others must be VP internal. A syntactic pattern very much like the one proposed by Mahajan (1992) is found in Basque too; I will argue that the crucial factor behind it is not a semantic notion like Specificity, but a morphological one: the presence or absence of a DP layer in the syntactic structure of the argument.

### 3. VP-Internal and VP-External Arguments: NP versus DP

In what follows, I would like to argue that Basque is rather like Dutch, Turkish, Hindi and presumably all other grammars in distinguishing internal arguments that remain inside the VP projection and internal arguments that move to the lower structural case assigning [Spec, Agr]. Given the nature of the data presented in this paper, I argue that the factor determining what arguments remain VP-internal and which ones move out to the functional layers of the clause structure is not directly the semantic notion of Specificity, but rather the syntactic type of the argument (DP versus NP). In some grammars, the semantic content of the Determiner is precisely [+specific], and this results in a one-to-one mapping between DPs, external to VP, being interpreted as Specific, whereas NPs, internal to VP are interpreted as non specific. Basque shows that in grammars where the content of the D head is not [+/- specific], the same operations take place, triggered by the same syntactic conditions (DP is VP external versus NP is VP internal), but the syntactic representations do not yield semantic representations differing with respect to Specificity<sup>14</sup>.

#### 3.0 Distributional Evidence: Locative Phrases

There is distributional evidence that points to a different placement for standard arguments and arguments of unergatives, which parallels evidence found in other systems such as Dutch (Koopman 1989), and German (Kratzer 1989). The evidence is distributional, involving internal arguments and locative arguments. Consider the paradigm provided in (22), where the object and the locative argument have been highlighted: in cases of standard transitive clauses that contain determined internal arguments, the neutral word order (a word order where there is no emphasis placed in any of the arguments) is that where the object *liburua* 'the book' precedes the locative argument (22a). The order where the locative precedes the object (22b) is not ungrammatical, but it differs from (22a) in two probably related aspects: a) the intonational pattern of (22b) involves a

<sup>14</sup> I will not address the issue of what the semantic content of the Determiner *a* might be. I believe that the conclusion that it is not a Specific Determiner is granted given the data discussed, but it is unclear to me at this point what the 'meaning' of *a* is.

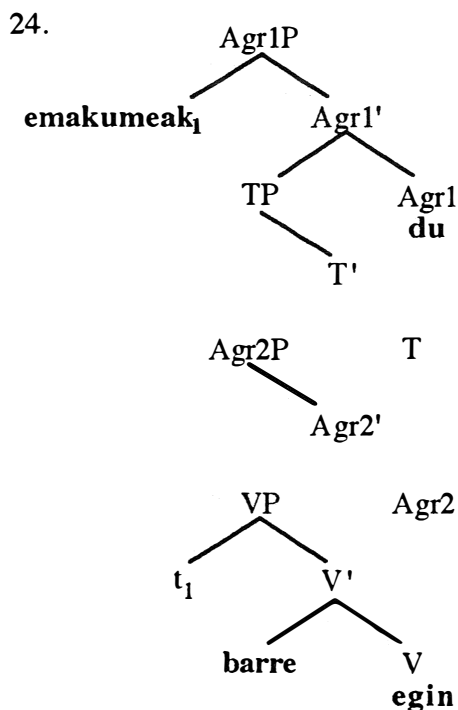
pause after the locative argument; the object and the verbal complex must belong in the same phonological phrase, and within that phrase it is the object that receives the heaviest stress; b) the sentence must be interpreted as having the locative argument as a topic (information already present in the discourse), while the preverbal object must be interpreted as focus. (22b) is a case of preverbal focus (*galdeagaia* in the Basque grammatical tradition), a topic that has received a lot of attention in the generative literature on Basque (Ortiz de Urbina 1986, Laka & Uriagereka 1986, Uriagereka 1992). I will assume, following the thrust of most accounts of preverbal focus in Basque, that A-bar movement is involved in (22b). The same word order effects obtain when subjects of unaccusative predicates are considered, as shown in (13c,d) which replicate the pattern in (22a,b).

22. a.     **gizon-a etxean utzi dut**  
           man-the home-at left have  
           'I have left the man at home.'
- b.     **etxean gizon-a utzi dut**  
           home-at man-the left have  
           'At home, I have left the man.'
- c.     **gizon-a etxean dago**  
           man-the home-at is  
           'The man is at home.'
- d.     **etxean gizon-a dago**  
           home-at man-the is  
           'At home, there is the man.'

Unergative predicates, however, display a rather different behavior in their interaction with locative phrases: consider the contrast between (23a) and (23b). Cases where the object of the unergative precedes the locative phrase have a marginal status, and the only interpretation available for them is one where the locative phrase is focalized and the preceding object is interpreted as old information; regarding their intonational contour, in (23a) there must be a heavy pause after *lan* and the locative phrase must belong in the same phonological phrase as the verbal complex. In short, (23a) can only receive a representation involving preverbal focus of the locative phrase (the locative phrase must be the *galdeagaia* of the sentence). I take this to be evidence that A-bar movement is involved. In sharp contrast, (23b) where the locative precedes the internal object, need not involve focalization; it is the neutral order for unergative predicates involving locative objects: the locative must precede the internal argument of the light verb *egin* 'do'.

23. a. \*? **lan etxean egiten dut**     b.     **etxean lan egiten dut**  
       work home-at do have-I     home-at work do have-I  
       'Work, I do at home.'     'I work at home.'

This distributional evidence indicates that determined arguments and undetermined arguments occupy different positions in the syntactic representation: under the assumption that the locative belongs in the VP but is not the complement of V, the relative orders in (22) versus (23) can be accounted for in the spirit of the proposals in Koopman (1989), and Mahajan (1991): the arguments in (22) occupy positions outside the VP, in particular, the arguments receiving C2 (absolutive) sit in [Spec, Agr2]. The internal arguments of unergatives (23) are not externalized from the VP and do not occupy the [Spec, Agr2] position. Thus, the syntactic representation of a clause headed by an unergative predicate is not (11), but rather (24):

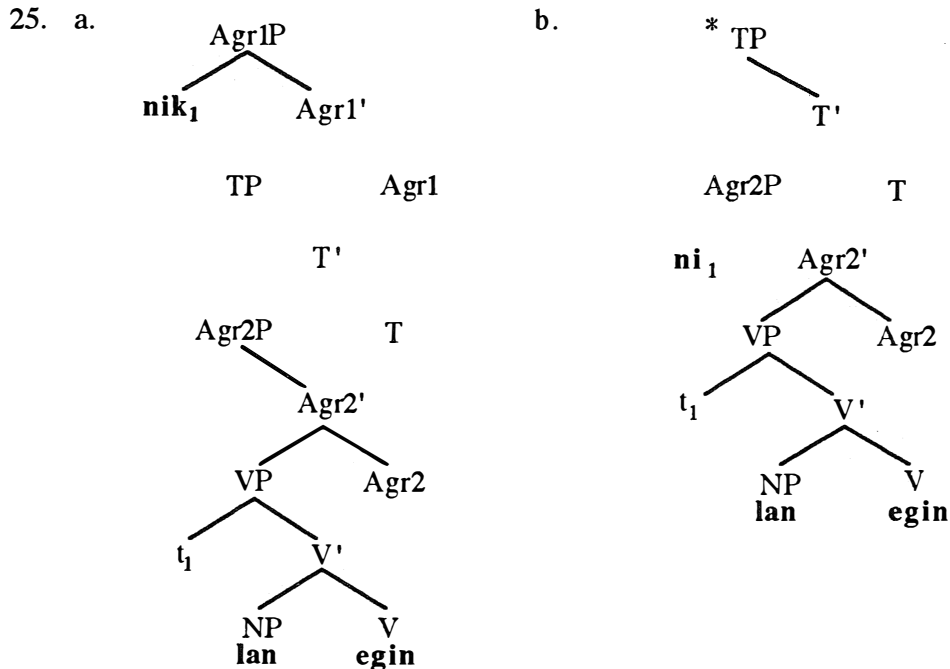


Basque is a language where overt agreement involves not only [Spec, Agr1] but also [Spec Agr2]; there is overt agreement with subject and object (and also with dative, an issue I will not address here) (Ortiz de Urbina 1986, Laka 1988). Given the proposal above, we might expect to find some overt morphological differences between complements of V that have been externalized [DP, Agr2], and bare NPs that remain VP internal [V,NP]. As argued in Laka (1988) and Laka (1993), however, third person arguments do not display overt agreement; the marker appearing in the object agreement slot is not a pronominal agreement but a marker assigned by Tense. Therefore, there is no overt morphological distinction between the VP internal NP and the VP external DP whenever they are third person. Neither triggers over agreement<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> First and second person arguments are pronominals: They project a DP and must be externalized necessarily.

### 3.1 The Obligatory Case Parameter as V-Case versus Tns-Case.

Under the hypothesis that (23) is the syntactic representation for unergative predicates, we have now lost the account for the Case facts discussed in the introductory section, illustrated in the paradigm in (6). The question we must now address is how a configuration like (23) forces the activation of both Agr2 and Agr1. Somehow, the internal argument inside VP activates Agr2, thus forcing the activation of Agr1 in order to license the external argument (23a). We must account for why occupying [Spec, Agr2] is not a possibility for the external argument, despite the fact that the internal argument never occupies that place. That is, we must account for the ungrammaticality of (24b), where the external argument is assigned Case2, as it is in Inuit (cf. (5c)):



Mahajan (1991,1992) argues that only specific objects receive Case from Agr2 (Agr-O in Mahajan's notation). Non specific objects receive case directly from V<sup>16</sup>. This mechanism can also provide an account for the distributions of the *a* determiner in Basque, which does not 'translate' unambiguously into Specificity Effects but follows the same syntactic pattern: arguments headed by a D (DPs) are external to VP, whereas arguments lacking a D (NPs) remain internal to VP. However, note that if the internal argument *lan* can receive inherent Case directly

<sup>16</sup> In Mahajan's proposal, there are two ways in which Agr-O can assign Accusative Case: a) via Agr, assigning Accusative to the argument sitting in its Specifier; b) via government, where Agr-O governs the specifier position of the XP complement of Agr-O.

from V inside VP, then Agr-O could be activated to assign Structural Case to the only argument that would get out of the VP, following the ergative choice in the Obligatory Case Parameter. This would allow the ungrammatical (23b), where the external argument of the unergative predicates receives absolutive case.

I want to argue that both the general proposal in Mahajan (1992) and Bobaljik's *Obligatory Case Parameter* are at work in the derivation of unergative predicates in Basque, and that the question posed by the ungrammaticality of (24b) can be answered when we consider in detail the spirit of the Case Theory in Chomsky (1992), to which I turn now.

Consider the relation between Agr and V as Case assigners. Chomsky (1992) argues that both Structural Cases are parallel in that they involve the mediation of Agr, and the difference between nominative-ergative (Case1) and accusative-absolutive (Case2) is that the former involves Tense adjoined to Agr1, whereas the latter involves V adjoined to Agr2. Chomsky (1992) claims that Structural Case uniformly involves a [Spec, X] relation; therefore, Structural Case can never be assigned under government, unlike in Mahajan (1992). Chomsky also argues that the Case features that are checked in the process of Case assignment belong to Tns and V respectively, not to Agr. According to Chomsky (1992), then, there are two Case features: the Tns Case feature and the V Case feature. If this is the case, it is natural to assume that a Parameter in Case Theory must involve those two features, rather than the Agreement elements they pair with. Within this general view of what Case is, consider the reformulation of Bobaljik's (1992) *Obligatory Case Parameter* in (26).

- |        |                  |                        |
|--------|------------------|------------------------|
| 26. a. | Activate $C_V$ : | Ergative Case System   |
| b.     | Activate $C_T$ : | Nominative Case System |

The only difference between Bobaljik's (1992) and Chomsky's (1992) approach to the Case Parameter involved in Ergativity and the one in (26) involves what part of the Structural Case assigning process is made responsible for the Parameter: given that both Agr1 and Tense and Agr2 and V are involved in Case assignment, assume that the categories that have the capacity to be active or inert are not Agr1 and Agr2, but rather the Case features borne by the true Case assigners: Tns and V. As the notation in (26) indicates, I refer to these two features as  $C_T$  for the Case feature borne by Tns and  $C_V$  for the Case feature borne by V.

This minor modification, which does not affect the results in Bobaljik (1992), and Chomsky (1992) can account straightforwardly for the Basque data, and as I will briefly argue, it may provide an insight into the true nature of Burzio's Generalization and the relationship between Structural and Inherent Case (Chomsky 1986, Belletti 1988).

Let us consider (24a) and (24b) under the parameter in (26): all arguments must be licensed by Case, as demanded by the Case Filter (Chomsky 1981). In (24a), the argument in VP receives  $C_V$ . Once  $C_V$  has been checked, any other argument will have to be licensed by activating  $C_T$ . The derivation in (24b) is

therefore impossible because once V has assigned its Case feature, there is no Case feature left to be assigned in Agr, even if V raises to it. Any argument occupying [Spec, Agr2] will necessarily remain Caseless.

### 3.2 Belletti's Inherent Partitive Case as the 'bare' C<sub>V</sub>

A crucial assumption throughout the previous discussion is that V has only one Case feature to assign: C<sub>V</sub>. This Case feature can be assigned directly in the VP or involving an Agr projection, but since there is only one C<sub>V</sub>, one option necessarily rules out the other one.

Belletti (1988) argues that there are two different Cases associated with V: Accusative, which is structural and subject to Burzio's generalization, and Partitive, which is inherent and not subject to Burzio's generalization. All verbs can assign Partitive case under government, but only Vs that have external arguments can assign Accusative. Belletti (1988) convincingly shows that unaccusative predicates in Nominative languages, previously thought to be unable of assigning Case to their complements (Perlmutter 1978, Burzio 1986), can in fact do so. As discussed by Belletti, the Case assigned by unaccusative verbs triggers Specificity Effects (this being Enç (1991) assessment of what Belletti refers to as the 'Definiteness Effect').

Under the proposal put forward in this paper, Belletti's Inherent Partitive Case turns out to be direct assignment of C<sub>V</sub> in the VP projection, without a mediating Agr projection. Structural Case, as in Chomsky (1992), is assignment of C<sub>V</sub> to [Spec, Agr] after raising of V to Agr. More generally, the claim is that there are two ways in which a Case bearing category can discharge its Case feature: a) Structurally, which involves adjunction to a pronominal head (Agr) and assigning the Case feature to the Specifier of that head's projection; b) Inherently, which does not involve a pronominal category. Structural and Inherent Case result from the intervention or not of a pronominal element in Case assignment. Regarding C<sub>V</sub>, the first strategy yields what is referred to as Accusative or Absolutive (depending of the choice in the Case Parameter), and the second strategy yields partitive Case in the sense of Belletti (1988)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Belletti argues that Partitive Case is not subject to Burzio's generalization because it is assigned in environments where Accusative Case is not available, as in (i) and (ii).

- i. There are unicorns in the garden.
- ii. Hay unicornios en el jardín.

In Laka (in progress) I argue that the expletive 'there', a locative argument that receives C<sub>T</sub> thus allowing discharge of C<sub>V</sub> to the argument in the VP projection. This analysis of existential 'there' sentences treats them as cases of Locative Inversion, much in the spirit of Bresnan & Kanerva (1989) and Torrego (1989). The locative-temporal argument moves out of VP, activates C<sub>T</sub>, and thus activation of C<sub>V</sub> is possible.

### 3.3 On Burzio's Generalization: unaccusatives that assign accusative

There are two Case features,  $C_T$  and  $C_V$  (Chomsky 1992)<sup>18</sup>. Following the discussion in the previous section, Inherent Partitive and Structural Accusative are in complementary distribution. Inherent Partitive is CV, whereas Structural Accusative is [ $C_V$ , Agr]. As argued by Bobaljik (1992) and Chomsky (1992), only the minimally required Case features are activated, and no Case feature can be activated unless the default choice in the Case Parameter has been made use of. Whenever there is only one argument to license, only one Case feature is activated. The parametric choice in Case Theory allows for the two logical possibilities: either  $C_T$  is active, yielding what is descriptively labelled a Nominative system, or the  $C_V$  is active, yielding what is descriptively referred to as an ergative system (see (27)).

Given these assumptions, Burzio's Generalization (Burzio 1986) follows necessarily: in languages where  $C_T$  is active,  $C_V$  must be inert whenever there is only one argument to license. Therefore, it necessarily follows that clauses with only one argument will be unable to assign Accusative, since this Case involves  $C_V$  (27a). The correlation between capability of assigning an external argument and capability of assigning Accusative Case, which has been thought of as peculiar, must in fact hold because only the number of Case features required will be active in a given derivation, and activation of 'unnecessary' Cases is ruled out on grounds of Economy. Consider a Nominative Case system: the active Case feature is the one belonging to Tense. Consider a clause with a single argument. One Case is required for licensing, and this Case must be the Tense Case, given the choice in the Case Parameter. Passive is a particular instance of Burzio's Generalization: in a dyadic predicate, if one argument is demoted, it will necessarily be the case that the remaining argument receives  $C_T$  in a Nominative system.

<sup>18</sup> Presumably, P also bears a Case feature, since it can assign Case to its complements. See Torrego (1992) for a proposal relating the Case assigning properties of P to the case licensing of dative arguments. Interestingly, Torrego argues on independent grounds that dative arguments always involve a P category for Case reasons, and that some datives also involve a pronominal clitic as well as the P Case assigner.

27.
  1. Economy: 1 Argument → 1 Case
  2. Case Parameter:
    - a. activate  $C_T$
    - b. activate  $C_V$
  - a. (1, 2a) = if 1 NP then only  $C_T$   
 Burzio's Generalization follows  
 Passive
  - b. (1, 2b) = if 1 NP then only  $C_V$   
 Burzio's Generalization does not hold  
 Lack of Passives  
 Antipassives

Moreover, as shown in (27b), it also follows that Burzio's Generalization holds only of Nominative systems, not of Ergative ones. Consider now an Ergative Case system: the active Case feature is  $C_V$ . Consider a clause with a single argument. It will be assigned  $C_V$ , and this assignment can be done involving a pronominal element (Agr). This assignment mode ( $[C_V, \text{Agr}]$ ) is precisely Structural Accusative Case. Activation of  $C_T$  violates Economy. It therefore follows that grammars with active  $C_V$  do not fall under Burzio's Generalization, a claim that was made by Levin (1983) for the case of Basque.

Levin first argued that absolutive case is assigned in Basque always in the same configuration, regardless of whether the absolutive argument was the object of a transitive clause or the subject of an unaccusative predicate<sup>19</sup>; moreover, Levin argued that this Case configuration is the complement of V, the same configuration involved in accusative Case assignment under Levin's theoretical assumptions. This claim entailed that Burzio's generalization does not hold for Basque, in that the assignment of accusative Case takes place both in objects of transitive verbs and in subjects of unaccusatives. Levin's claim, often thought of as a shortcoming in the subsequent literature, turns out to be a necessary corollary of Case Theory, and moreover it must hold not only of Basque but of all Ergative Systems: unaccusative predicates assign accusative case in ergative languages. Accusative and absolutive are different names of the same phenomenon: the case assigned by V in conjunction with Agr2 to the Specifier of Agr2. It is a result of the Case Parameter that Nominative languages cannot assign accusative in unaccusative predicates (Cf. footnote 15).

Another well known generalization follows from the combination of Economy and the Case Parameter as discussed here: Ergative systems assign 'object case' ( $C_V + \text{Agr}$ ) to the internal argument of a predicate where the external argument has been demoted. However, a detectable change in Case marking will arise if

<sup>19</sup> Ortiz de Urbina (1986) argues that absolutive is assigned in different configurations depending on whether the argument is an object of a transitive clause or the subject of an unaccusative predicate. Oyharçabal (1990) argues that the former case is accusative and the second is nominative. Levin's idea is followed by Laka (1988), Cheng & Demirdache (1990) and Uriagereka (1992).

the internal argument is demoted, since now the external argument will be forced to receive 'object case'. This phenomenon is precisely what is known as the 'antipassive', which is found in ergative languages but has been claimed not to exist in Nominative systems (Dixon 1979).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Unergative predicates in Basque (and in the null hypothesis also in other grammars with similar case patterns) must assign ergative to their external argument because they are transitive in the overt syntax: the internal argument present universally in the Lexical Relational Structure (Hale & Keyser 1991) does not undergo incorporation onto V. The result is that two arguments require to be licensed by Case. Therefore, both Case features must be activated (Bobaljik 1992, Chomsky 1992), resulting in the activation of ergative case.

The internal arguments of unergative predicates remain internal to VP throughout the derivation: they are bare NPs. To move outside VP, an argument must be a DP, and in that case, movement to a [Spec, Agr] position is required. Agr is a pronominal element and thus it contains D features that must be checked by a DP category. NPs are headed by a lexical category and must receive case within the projection of V, also a lexical category<sup>20</sup>.

A case feature can be assigned in two ways: 1. Involving an Agr head in the case assignment [Agr, C] (where C stands for the Case assigner that has moved to Agr. This type of assignment yields structural cases such as nominative, ergative, absolutive and accusative. 2. Not involving any Agr head, assigning directly the Case feature in the projection of the Case assigner. This type of assignment, I argued, is the correlate of Inherent Partitive Case (Belletti 1991).

The parameterization in Case Theory responsible for ergative versus accusative systems argued for in this paper does not reduce the parameter to the activation of Agreement (Bobaljik 1992, Chomsky 1992). Rather, the parameter argued for involves activation of the Case feature in V ( $C_V$ ), versus activation of the Case feature in Tns ( $C_T$ ).

In an ergative grammar, activation of  $C_V$ , whether structurally (via Agr) or whether directly (inherent Case assignment) will force activation of  $C_T$  only if some other argument requires Case. It follows as a corollary then, that in ergative grammars unaccusative predicates can assign accusative case ([Spec, [Agr+V]]).

<sup>20</sup> By 'lexical' I understand here the set of categories that can be characterized by [+/- N] and [+/- V] features. In Laka (in progress) I discuss in more detail the case of English: I argue that the 'weak' properties of Agr in this grammar allow for externalization of bare NPs outside VP. Here 'weak' Agr means an Agr that lacks D features.

In a nominative grammar, C<sub>V</sub> can only be activated if C<sub>T</sub> has been checked and another argument requires licensing. Both structural accusative and inherent partitive in the sense of Belletti (1988) are argued to involve Burzio's generalization follows from the Case Parameter, and C<sub>V</sub> can only be assigned in unaccusatives if some other argument (a locative temporal argument, for instance) has been licensed by means of C<sub>T</sub>.

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