Cues of Change in the *Wh*-parameter: Evidence from Basque

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In this talk, we analyze the nature and origin of some new *Wh*-question constructions found in the speech of young adults speakers of Basque in Labourd (Iparralde, France). We argue that unlike the standard constructions which involve *Wh*-movement, followed by [V+Aux] to C movement, (cf. 1a, 1b), this new strategy does not show any *Wh*-movement, but rather, *wh-in-situ,* with no movement of the verbal complex, *cf.* (1c). Besides, we argue that the origin of this new construction is to be linked to a reanalysis of the E-Language patterns which is triggered by the diglossic situation of Basque with respect to French. Specifically, its appearance would be due to the conjunction of two factors:

(i) The lack of unambiguous cues in the *Primary Linguistic Data* (PLD): Based on ideas of Lightfoot (2006) and others, we argue that an important number of very common *Wh*-constructions in the PLD lack any specific cue as to whether the language is a *wh*-movement or a *Wh-in situ* language (*i.e.*, the E-Language to be parsed by the learners is critically underspecified). On the one hand, Basque is an SOV and multiple pro-drop language that allows for *wh*-constructions where only the *Wh*-phrase and the verb are pronounced, *cf.* (2). We will provide an analysis of 'child directed speech' by investigating the complete "Luque Basque Corpus" available at CHILDES(Luque (2004)), and we will show that alongside some *wh*-questions that require a *wh*-movement analysis, there is a high number of *wh*-question constructions which are structurally ambiguous and that the language learners might analyze these constructions as derived from a *wh-in-situ* strategy. Specifically, we will argue that the number of structurally ambiguous *Wh*-questions outranks significantly the number of unambiguous ones in the PLD. For a total of 4007 *Wh*-questions of child directed speech, we found that 2520 tokens were ambiguous whereas only 1487 were unambiguous (63% and 37%, respectively, where both Pearson's chi-squared and binomial tests show statistically significant differences), *cf.* (3). Besides this big amount of ambiguous input data, we will argue that the estimates for the amount of ambiguous *wh*-constructions in the PLD of these young speakers are higher. In fact, in Basque, unergative predicates show an underlying transitive '*egin* + NP' structure (*i.e.*, *do* + NP). However, we will show that there is variability regarding these data because unergatives in the target dialect behave as complex [NP+V]s, whereas in the Southern varieties, unergatives are less fusioned, and the NP and V appear separated in *wh*-questions ((4), (5)). Thus, the number of tokens that could be parsed as involving *wh*-in-situ should be even higher in Labourdin than in the dialect attested in the Luque corpus.

Therefore, the hypothesis that we will present is that even if the older generations conceived these constructions as the unambiguous product of *Wh*-movement, the younger generations might have reanalysed them as *Wh-in situ* and then extended the *in-situ* analysis to generate new data like (1). This reanalysis would be due to the second factor triggering the syntactic change:

(ii) The diglossic situation of Basque: We will suggest that the outset of the change resides in the change on the sociolinguistic panorama of the target dialect, for the learners that are the catalysts of the change are the first generation of bilingual speakers for whom French is the most prominent language, as opposed to the previous generations, for whom Basque was the only L1 (*cf.* Coyos (2006)). Thus, we will argue that underlying the change is the 'parameter transfer' from their main language, French, which, crucially, is a language that allows both *Wh*-movement and *Wh-in-situ* strategies (with a clear preference for the usage of the *in situ* strategy). A situation analogous to that of learning in L2 situations (*cf.* Schwartz & Sprouse (1996)).

Therefore, the appearance of the *in situ* strategy conforms partially to the description made by Bach (1971) that OV languages tend to have *Wh-in situ.* However, contrary to the P&P theory, we will argue that the very nature of this change argues in favor of an underspecified view of the "Wh-parameter" where in contact situations, and on the face of learnability conflicts, speakers might not adopt the 'subset principle' (*cf.* Berwick (1985), Fodor (2009)) but go for a less restrictive hypothesis (which in this case is *Wh*-movement + *Wh-in-situ*, as in French).

(1a) Nork jan ditu gereziak?   *Standard*
      who eat AUX   cherries
      "Who ate (the) cherries?"

(1b) Zer jan du Peiok?   *Standard*
      what eat AUX Peio
      "What did Peio eat?"

(1c) Nork gereziak jan ditu?   *New strategy*
      who cherries   eat AUX
      "Who ate (the) cherries?"

(2)   Noiz emango dizkiozu?
      why give.FUT AUX(2sgERG, 3plABS, 3sgDAT)
      "When will you bring them to him/her?"

(3)

Percentage of Structural Ambiguity in Wh-questions

n = 4007
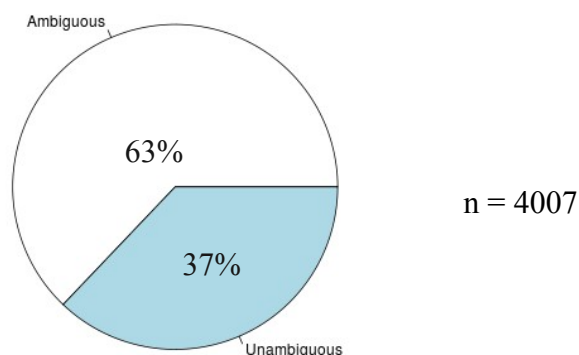
Input data for Basque learners

(4)   Nork egin du   barre?   *Southern*
      who do   AUX laugh
      "Who laughed?"

(5)   Nork barre egin du?   *Labourdin*
      who   laugh do AUX
      "Who laughed?"

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