Obliteration vs. Impoverishment in the Basque g-/z- constraint

In this paper we examine the “*you-us” and “*we-you” agreement restriction (grouped together here under the label “the g-/z- constraint” here, due to its morphological exponents), a Person-Case effect that is found throughout Bizkaian Basque. The “you-us restriction shows a great deal of microvariation in its exact environmental sensitivity and in the repair it triggers; we examine three representative dialects. These phenomena provide support for the following hypotheses: (A) A frequentist/functionalist explanation (e.g. Haspelmath 2003, Rosen 1990) cannot explain the basis for this Person-Case combination, as 1 and 2 make for frequent and canonical agents and recipients, (B) The basis for the Basque g-/z- constraint is pure morphosyntactic markedness.

### Obliteration of 1pl

The first set of “unexpected” surface forms are exemplified below:

(1) (Hik Guri emon) d- o- sku- na → d- o- na
   (You us gave) 3sg.abs- aux.trans- 1pl.dat- 2sgf.erg → 3sg.abs- aux.trans- 2sg.erg
   “You (f.sg) [gave] it to us” (Bermeo Occidental, Yrizar (1992, vol.1: 486))

(2) (Suek Guri emon) d- o- sku- sue → d- o- sue
   (Y’all us gave) 3sg.abs- aux.trans- 1pl.dat- 2pl.erg → 3sg.abs- aux.trans- 2pl.erg
   “You (pl) [gave] it to us” (Plencia Nororiental, Yrizar (1992, vol.1: 656))

In these examples, the node “sku”, corresponding to a 1pl.dat is deleted, as the result of the following rule:

(3) Delete the Dative Agr Node containing [+1,+pl] in the environment of [2]

We turn to the following slightly different cases:

(4) (Guk hiri emon) d- u- a- gu → d- xa- k
   (We you gave) 3sg.abs- aux.trans.- 2sg.masc.dat- 1pl.erg → 3sg.abs- aux.applic.- 2sgmasc.dat
   “We [gave] it to you (m.sg)” (Bermeo Occidental, Yrizar (1992, vol.1: 485))

(5) (Guk suek ikusi) s- aittu- e- gu → s- ari- e
   (We you saw) 2abs.- aux.trans.- abs.pl- 1pl.erg → 2abs.- aux.intrans.- abs.pl
   “We [saw] you” (Orozco, Yrizar (1992, vol.2: 127))

In these examples, the node “gu”, corresponding to a 1pl. erg is deleted. In addition, the valence of the auxiliary is reduced from an ERG-DAT-ABS auxiliary to a DAT-ABS auxiliary in (4) and from an ERG-ABS auxiliary to an ABS auxiliary in (5) as a result of the following rule:

(6) Delete the Ergative Agr Node containing [+1,+pl] in the environment of [2]

Given the feature [+Participant] grouping 1st and 2nd person (Halle 1997), and [+Motion] grouping Ergative and Dative (Calabrese 2004)), the rules in (3) and (6) can be collapsed into the results of the following obliteration rule (where obliteration is distinct from impoverishment, as it deletes a whole node):

(7) Obliterate the Node containing [+Motion, +Participant, +Author, +Pl] in the environment [+Participant]

Crucially, obliteration operates on the auxiliary’s Agr node, as the ergative/dATIVE pronoun may still occur overtly.

### Impoverishment of 2sg

The next set of “unexpected forms” are exemplified below:

(8) (Suek gu ikusi) g- aittu- su → ga- ittu
   (You us saw) 1pl.abs- aux.trans- 2sg.erg → 1pl.abs- aux.trans

In these examples, the node “su”, corresponding to a 2sg.erg is deleted, but with no corresponding change in the valence of the auxiliary; rather, the feature node constituting 2erg is modified to yield a form identical to the 3erg (phonologically ∅), as the result of impoverishment, resulting in a less marked feature-value (Noyer 1998):

(9) Delete the feature [+Participant] in the Node containing [+Motion, -Peripheral, +Participant, -Author] in the environment [+Motion, +Participant, +Author, +Pl]

Crucially, both (7) and (9) share the same structural description: two adjacent instances of [+Motion, +Participant], constituting an instance of featural “dissimilation”. The severity of the structural change differs depending on the markedness of the target: when the more marked [+Author, +Pl] is affected, it undergoes complete obliteration, while the less marked [-Auth] undergoes only impoverishment.

### Implications

Adopting (A) & (B) above, these phenomena provide support that (C) 1st and 2nd person share an identical marked feature-value, [+Participant] and (D) Obliteration and Impoverishment are formally distinct operations.