The syntactic structure of the Basque pronoun *bera*: Evidence from code-switching

Bryan Koronkiewicz  
_The University of Alabama_  
bjkoronkiewicz@ua.edu

Daniel Vergara  
_Auburn University_  
dzv0013@auburn.edu

UIC BILINGUALISM FORUM  

OCTOBER 12, 2018
Basque pronouns

Set of personal pronouns for first and second person (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)

• First person singular: *ni*
• First person plural: *gu*
• Second person singular (intimate): *hi*
• Second person singular (unmarked): *zu*
• Second person plural: *zuek*
Basque pronouns

Basque assumed to lack true third-person pronoun (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)

Demonstrative hura ‘that (one)’ used when pronoun would be required for thematic purposes

Western varieties also developed quasi-pronoun bera
  • Morpheme ber- ‘self’ and the article -a ‘that’ (de Rijk, 2008)
(1) a. **Nik** hanburgesak jaten ditut.
   I.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.1SG
   ‘I eat hamburgers.’

b. **Haiek** hanburgesak jaten dituzte.
   Those.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.3PL
   ‘They eat hamburgers.’ (Literally: ‘Those ones...’)

c. **Berak** hanburgesak jaten zituen.
   He.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.3SG
   ‘He eats hamburgers.’ (Literally: ‘That self...’)

introduction
Goal

Present preliminary Spanish-Basque code-switching (CS) data

Results suggest *bera* behaves similarly to other pronouns when switched finite Spanish verb (and dissimilarly from lexical Determiner Phrase (DP) switches)

- Suggests *bera* is in fact a true pronoun, not a quasi-pronoun
- Should categorize *bera* syntactically as a weak pronoun
Pronoun categorization

Typology by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999)
- Strong pronouns
- Weak pronouns
- Clitics

Unique syntactic structure for each type
- Based on distributional evidence from syntax and prosody

Key difference for today’s talk:
- Strong pronouns project a maximal DP
- Weak pronouns do not
(2)

a. Strong pronoun  b. Weak pronoun  c. Clitic pronoun

Diagram:

- Strong pronoun:
  - DP
  - Σ
  - I
  - NP

- Weak pronoun:
  - ΣP
  - IP
  - I
  - NP

- Clitic pronoun:
  - IP
  - I
  - NP
Pronouns in code-switching

Restriction against pronouns switched with a finite verb known for quite some time (Gumperz, 1977; Lipski, 1978; Timm, 1975; among others)

Minimalist approach to CS (MacSwan, 1999, 2004; Vergara-González & López, 2017; among others)
• No third grammar

(Un)acceptability of switching a pronoun aligns with syntactic structure (González-Vilbazo & Koronkiewicz, 2016; Koronkiewicz, 2014)
• Weak pronouns lack full DP; unable to be switched
• Strong pronouns have full DP; acceptably switched like lexical DPs
(3)  a.  *  Él works too much.
   he
   ‘He works too much.’

   b.  Juan y él work too much.
   Juan and he/him
   ‘Juan and he/him work too much.’

   c.  Ese hombre works too much.
   that man
   ‘That guy works too much.’
Pronouns in code-switching

Predictions for Basque:
• Non-bera personal pronouns assumed to be weak pronouns (based on structural and distributional constraints)
  • Would predict unacceptability in CS
• Lexical DPs have distinct syntactic structure
  • Should be acceptable in CS
What is the syntactic nature of *bera*?

Using CS as a lens...

**Option A:** It behaves syntactically like a Basque first- and second-person pronouns (i.e., weak pronoun).

**Option B:** It is DP-like in nature (i.e., strong pronoun), as in literally *that self*. 
Task

Written Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT)
- 7-point Likert scale (1 lowest)
- Completed online via Qualtrics
- Procedure: Training > CS Judgments > Background Questionnaire

Two versions of the task
- Each participant saw half the total stimuli set
- Randomly assigned
- Balanced for switch direction
  - For each lexicalization, half saw the Spanish-to-Basque version and the other half saw the Basque-to-Spanish version
Stimuli

Target stimuli (n = 12)
- Third-person singular Basque pronoun switches, i.e. *bera*
- First-person singular Basque pronoun switches, i.e. *ni*
- Third-person singular Basque lexical DP switches

Also collected, but set aside for today’s talk (n = 36)
- Plural forms
- Equivalent Spanish pronoun and lexical DP switches

Distractor/filler stimuli (n = 84)
(4) a.  * Pasa den astean bera viajó a París.
    pass PST week he traveled.3SG to Paris
    ‘Last week he traveled to Paris.’

    pass PST month I traveled.1SG to Stockholm
    ‘Last month I traveled to Stockholm.’

   c.  Pasa den urtean gizon hau viajó a Bruselas.
    pass PST year man that traveled.3SG to Brussels
    ‘Last year that guy traveled to Brussels.’
Stimuli

Basque is an ergative-absolutive language
• Subject of an unaccusative verb or object of a transitive verb is in the absolutive case (unmarked)
• Subject of a transitive or unergative verb is in the ergative case (-k)

Stimuli set balanced for case
• Half unaccusative verbs
• Half transitive verbs
(5) a. * Duela minutu bat bera ha venido a la reunión.
   ago minute one he AUX.3SG come to the meeting
   ‘A minute ago he came to the meeting.’

   b. */? Pasa den astean berak conoció a tu abuela.
   pass PST week he.ERG met.3SG DOM your grandmother
   ‘Last week he met your grandmother.’
Participants

Basque-Spanish bilinguals (N = 7)
• Learned both from a young age (≤ 5 years)
• 25-30 years old (M = 27.9)
• Northwest region of the Basque Country, Spain
• Current residents of Spain (n = 3) and the US (n = 4)
  • All some years outside of Spain in either the US, UK or Germany (M = 4.0)

Data collection ongoing
Language dominance
(Birdsong, Gertken & Amengual, 2012)
- + Spanish dominant
- – Basque dominant
- Closer to zero: “balanced”
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Switch Type</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG Pronoun</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG Pronoun</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG Lexical DP</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

- 1SG Pronoun: -0.17
- 3SG Pronoun: -0.07
- 3SG Lexical DP: 0.55
Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Switch Type</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1SG Pronoun</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG Pronoun</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG Lexical DP</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram illustrates the results for different pronoun and lexical DP switch types with ratings for ABS and ERG conditions.
Results

1SG Pronoun
-0.41

3SG Pronoun
-0.19

Switch Type

3SG Lexical DP
0.22

0.88

z-score

ABS
ERG
What is the syntactic nature of *bera*?

Using CS as a lens...

**Option A:** It behaves syntactically like a Basque first- and second-person pronouns (i.e., weak pronoun).

**Option B:** It is DP-like in nature (i.e., strong pronoun), as in literally *that self*. 
Discussion

Preliminary results suggest that *bera* is not as distinct as assumed

- Although it originated as *ber-* ‘self’ plus the article -*a* ‘that’, it seems the syntactic structure is no longer fully DP-like
- Mirrors pronouns in Spanish, such as *usted* ‘you (formal)’ which originated as the lexical DP *vuestra merced* ‘your grace’, but is now a weak pronoun that is unacceptably code-switched (Koronkiewicz, 2014)

Some variation with regard to individual participants

- All but two treated *bera* identically to the weak pronoun
- Unclear as of now why they differ
- Further data collection will help
Discussion

What’s up with case?

• Case-marking a first-person pronoun seems to make it more acceptable, matching the behavior of *bera* and lexical DPs

• Debate on Basque ergative case (ERG):
  • Inherent $\rightarrow$ theta-marked, licensed by little-*v* (Legate, 2008; Woolford, 1997, 2006)
  • Structural $\rightarrow$ T assigns ERG to the External Argument (EA), V assigns ABS to the Internal Argument (IA) (Rezac, Albizu & Etxepare, 2014)
Discussion

(5b) *? Pasa den astean berak conoció a tu abuela.
pass PST week he.ERG met.3SG DOM your grandmother
‘Last week he met your grandmother.’

• Data like (5b) suggest an inherent analysis of ergative case in Basque
  • Takes place before structural case at the vP phase
  • Theta-role correspondence
  • Spanish T should assign NOM to the EA
Discussion

Possible analysis for structure in (5b):

- Transitive $v$ licenses inherent ERG on EA in its Spec
- The EPP feature on $T$ attracts the Basque KP $berak$ to its Spec
- $T$ fails to assign NOM to $berak$ because it already bears ERG
Conclusions

Preliminary CS data on pronouns in Basque/Spanish code switching suggests:

• Bera is not a quasi-pronoun (cf. Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)
  • Behaves syntactically like a weak pronoun

• Case-marking pronouns and lexical-DPs results in higher acceptability
  • Suggest an inherent treatment of ERG (cf. Rezac, Albizu & Etxepare, 2014)

• Further data collection is needed to clarify individual nuances