

# Preverbal N-Words and Anti-Agreement Effects

Jon Franco and Alazne Landa

University of Deusto-Bilbao and University of the Basque Country

## 1. Introduction: The problem

Romance languages can be divided into two major groups with respect to the behavior of preverbal negative words. Thus, in languages like French, Catalan or Rumanian for instance, these words are followed by a negative clitic particle on the verb.

- (1) a. *Rien ne fait sens* (French)  
Nothing NEG makes sense
- b. *Ningú no va venir* (Catalan)  
Nobody NEG came
- c. *Nimeni n-a venit* (Rumanian)  
Nobody NEG-has come

On the other hand, European Portuguese, Spanish and Italian preverbal negative elements do not allow to be doubled with a negative clitic on the verb. However, the negative clitic head is obligatory when the negative word is postverbal across Romance dialects. This means that this second group of Romance languages exhibits an interesting asymmetry between preverbal and postverbal negative elements. This is illustrated in the paradigm in (2) for Standard Spanish:

- (2) a. *Nadie (\*no) ha venido*  
Nobody Neg. has come
- b. *\*(No) ha venido nadie*  
Neg. has come nobody  
'Nobody has come'
- c. *Nadie (\*no) sabe eso*  
Nobody Neg. knows that
- d. *Eso \*(no) sabe nadie*  
That Neg. knows nobody  
'Nobody knows that'

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- e. *\*(No) conozco a nadie*  
Neg. knows.1sg to nobody  
'I don't know anybody'
- f. *Nunca (\*no) llegó la carta*  
Never Neg. arrive the letter  
'The letter never arrived'
- g. *La carta \*(no) llegó nunca*  
The letter Neg. arrived never

Interestingly, in some forms of Basque Spanish, not only negative words in postverbal positions are licensed by a negative clitic particle attached to the verb like in the Standard variety, but also all preverbal n-words including subjects, preposed objects and adverbs can take the NEG particle, as shown in (3)-(5):

- (3) *Nunca no nos ha faltado de comer* Basque Spanish  
Never Neg. CL.1PI has lacked to eat  
'We never have run short of food'
- (4) *Aquí nadie no sabe sobre eso* Basque Spanish  
Here nobody Neg. knows about that  
'Here nobody knows about that'
- (5) *Con este alcalde nada no tiene sentido* Basque Spanish  
With this mayor nothing Neg. has sense  
'With this mayor, nothing makes sense'

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First we provide a syntactic analysis for the distribution of N-words in preverbal position in Basque Spanish and account for the ban on pre-verbal negative concord in Standard Spanish. Second, we attempt to discriminate what is exactly transferred from Basque, if anything, and what is kept as a part of the syntax of Romance languages. For this purpose we are going to approach the phenomenon from three angles by discussing: (i) the syntactic properties of N-words in Basque, (ii) the syntactic properties of Spanish N-words and (iii) the syntactic properties of N words in other Romance systems.

## 2. The data context

In Landa (1990, 1995), Basque Spanish is defined as the Spanish spoken by Basque bilinguals and monolinguals who have lived most of their lives in the Basque Country and whose main Spanish input has always come from persons with characteristics similar to those just mentioned. In Landa's (1990) corpus, only the older generations of speakers of Basque Spanish produced double negatives in preverbal position. This led us to claim in Landa and Franco (1999) that this characteristic of Basque Spanish was bound to disappear in a few years time. However, recent fieldwork carried out in this investigation has revealed that there are areas in the Basque Country in which speakers of all ages use the structures exemplified in (3) to (5).

Nevertheless, if we assume that Basque Spanish had its historical (but not present) primary source in the speech of Basque bilinguals it might have been the case that the original speakers of Basque Spanish kept the Basque licensing strategy of n-words which is similar to the one in (3)-(5), as example (6) shows:

- (6) *Inork ez daki*  
Nobody.ERG Neg. knows  
'Nobody knows it'

Once (3), (4) and (5) became the default forms in Basque Spanish, these forms would have been passed

onto the next generations regardless of whether they were bilingual or monolingual speakers of Basque Spanish.

### 3. An analysis of N-words in Spanish

Laka (1990) claims that all Spanish negative elements are Negative Polarity Items (henceforth NPIs), i.e. existential quantifiers, which are licensed either by an overt Neg head in the case of postverbal n-words or by a Spec-head relation in the Neg phrase or Sigma phrase in the case of preverbal n-words. There are two main problems with Laka's analysis: (i) Spanish N-words do not pass the standard tests for NPIs, and (ii) her analysis does not explain why the negative particle has to be covert when the N-word is preverbal.

There are several diagnostic tests in the generative grammar literature that allow us to distinguish NPIs from negative concord items, which according to Watanabe (2004) have inherently negative meaning. Thus, Zanuttini (1991) shows that as opposed to NPIs, negative concord items can be modified by the particle 'almost' and can appear as an elliptical answer with a negative meaning. This is shown in (7ab) below, which further contrasts with the English glosses:

- (7) a. *No se lo hemos dicho a casi nadie*  
 \*We didn't tell it to almost anybody
- b. *¿Quién ha venido?*  
 Who came?  
*Nadie*  
 Nobody/\*Anybody

Furthermore, Vallduví (1994) points out that unlike NPIs, negative concord elements can be in subject position, but cannot appear in non-negative contexts, as the examples in (8) illustrate:

- (8) a. *Nadie trajo las invitaciones*  
 Nobody (\*anybody) brought the invitations
- b. *\*¿Viene nadie?*  
 Is anybody coming?

Bearing the distribution of data above in mind, we can safely assume that words such as *nadie*, *nada*, *ninguno*, *nunca*, are negative concord elements and not NPIs. Still, the preverbal versus postverbal asymmetry among negative elements in Spanish remains unaccounted for.

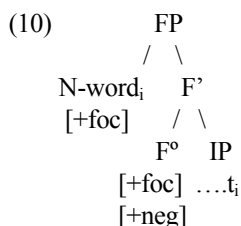
It is worthy of note that preverbal negative elements in Spanish and most Romance languages are contrastively focused. This translates into: (i) having the preverbal negative element bear the main stress of the sentence, and (ii) the inability of these elements to appear in left dislocated/topic-like positions, as exemplified in (9):

- (9) a. *NÁDA le devolvió el gobierno*  
 NOTHING him returned the government  
 The government did not return anything to him
- b. *\*Nada el gobierno le devolvió*  
 Nothing the government him returned

Thus, along the lines of Zubizarreta (1998), preverbal focused elements, such as the N-words in (9), have to appear adjacent to the verb.

Going back to the focus status of preverbal negative elements, it might well be the case that negative feature and contrastive focus feature are checked in the same syntactic projection. In this regard, Frascarelli (2000) explains the absence of a negative particle on the verb with preverbal N-words in Italian (or Spanish for that matter) by claiming that Focus Phrase hosts both [+foc] features and [+neg] features (under her

assumption that [neg] is a weak feature). Therefore, preverbal N-word licensing is derived from the movement of the N-word to Spec of FP and the checking of both the [+neg] and [+foc] features in one single operation (see also Isaac 2002):



Still, the puzzle of the asymmetry between preverbal and postverbal N-words has not been solved yet. We have only shifted the focus of the problem to the absence of the negative particle. However, the presence of the negative NEG head in the verb amalgam in constructions with post verbal negative words remains unexplained. Let us assume that N-words are what we claim they are, that is, negative concord elements. In other words, the N-word and the NEG head agree overtly by the operation AGREE put forward in Chomsky (2002). It is also the case that when a negative element moves overtly to the left from its canonical position to Spec of NegP or Spec of FP, as in (10), it acquires quantificational force over the constituents of the sentence that are left behind. That is, negative elements quantify over the constituents they c-command. Thus, all preverbal N-words have two characteristics in Spanish, that is, they are contrastively focused and have quantifier-like properties.

The alternative analysis that we are going to defend here is that the absence of the negative particle on the verb in occurrences with preverbal N-words is the result of anti-agreement effects (see Ouhalla 1993 and subsequent work). Anti-agreement effect phenomena in Spanish with quantifier-like elements have been attested in the literature on Spanish DO clitic doubling (cf. Suárez 1988, Franco 1993, among others). Thus, it is usually the case that a DO *wh*-word or quantifier cannot be doubled by a clitic, as shown in (11):

- (11) a. *¿A quién<sub>i</sub> (\*lo<sub>i</sub>) viste?*  
 To whom CL saw-2  
 Who did you see?
- b. *Juan (\*lo<sub>i</sub>) quiere a todo el mundo<sub>i</sub>*  
 Juan CL love-3 to everybody  
 Juan loves everybody
- c. *A NADIE<sub>i</sub> (\*lo<sub>i</sub>) pudimos ver*  
 To nobody CL could-1PL see  
 \*To nobody we could see

However, when the *wh*-word is D-linked, that is, more referential, the anti-agreement effects ameliorate, as seen in (12):

- (12) a. *¿A quiénes (de nosotros) nos/los vieron?*  
 To whom of us CL-1/CL-3 saw.3pl  
 Which of us did they see?
- b. *¿A ninguno nos han podido ver?*  
 To none CL-1 have-3 can see  
 \*To none of us they could have seen

In contrast to left dislocated elements, which have topic-like properties, preverbal focalized elements in Italian, due to their quantification force, cannot be clitic-doubled either (cf. Cinque 1990 and Rizzi 1997):

- (13) a. *Il tuo libro, lo ho comprato*  
 your book, I bought it
- b. *IL TUO LIBRO (\*lo) ho comprato (non il suo)*  
 YOUR BOOK, I bought it (not his)

A traditional explanation for the incompatibility in (11) and (13) between clitic doubling and operator-like elements –namely, *wh*-words, quantifiers and focus elements— has been offered in terms of vacuous quantification due to variable identification by the clitic (see Jaeggli 1986 and Franco 1993, 2001).

- (14) \*¿A *quién<sub>i</sub>* [<sub>TP</sub>[<sub>AGROp</sub> **t<sub>i</sub>** + **Phi** [*lo<sub>i</sub> viste* [... t<sub>i</sub> ]]]]?

Thus, the clitic assigns pronominal Phi features to the variable trace left by the quantifier in spec of AGRoP and the resulting output becomes a violation of the Principle of Full Interpretation, under which quantifiers must bind true syntactic variables (cf. Cinque 1990:180). On the contrary, referential *wh*-words or referential quantifiers in general can be doubled by a clitic, as shown in (12), since they lack quantificational force and no operator-variable relation is required anymore.

Going back to the distribution of NEG heads in Spanish, we can assume that negative concord has the same effects as clitic doubling. In the case under study, we claim that the doubling of the negative preverbal element by the clitic *no* in (2a) neutralizes the quantificational relation of the preverbal existential negative quantifier *nadie* by identifying its trace in Spec of NEG as an element with negative features. In sum, (pronominal and negative) clitic doubling of elements with quantificational force is prohibited.

#### 4. Basque Spanish versus Standard Spanish

Basque Spanish and Standard Spanish behave similarly with respect to negation with the exception of the asymmetry between preverbal negative elements illustrated in (2) on the one hand and (3) to (5) on the other. That is, negative elements in this variety are not NPIs, which means that they pattern like those of Standard Spanish with respect to the tests of particle modification, elliptical answer, occurrence in subject position and impossibility to appear in non-negative contexts, as illustrated in (7ab) and (8ab) above.

Also, when occurring preverbally, these negative elements are contrastively focused in this variety too. Thus, they will take main clause stress and appear immediately before the verb amalgam, as in (9a). However, in contrast with the Standard Spanish example in (9a), in Basque Spanish the N-word would be doubled by the negative clitic *no*, as exemplified in (15):

- (15) *NÁDA no le devolvió el gobierno*  
 Nothing Neg. CL returned the government  
 \*Nothing the government returned to him

Crucially, the distribution of Basque Spanish N-words poses a great problem for the analysis just proposed for Standard Spanish N-words, which was based on the clash between quantification and agreement, unless there is some aspect of the syntax of Basque Spanish that is still unveiled.

In effect, Basque Spanish operator-like elements can have a dual interpretation between a referential reading and a quantificational reading. That is, in contrast to the Standard Spanish examples in (11), these elements can be doubled by a pronominal clitic in Basque Spanish, as (16) illustrates:

- (16) a. *¿A *quién<sub>i</sub>* *le<sub>i</sub> viste*?*  
 To whom CL saw-2  
 Who did you see?
- b. *No *le<sub>i</sub>* *he visto a *nadie<sub>i</sub>* en el partido**  
 NEG CL.3s I.have seen to nobody in the game  
 I didn't see no one at the game

- c. *Juan les<sub>i</sub> quiere a todos<sub>i</sub>.*  
 Juan CL love-3 to everybody  
 Juan loves them all

The quantifier-like elements in the sentences in (16) obtain a presuppositional reading which is favored by their being doubled by a clitic. Thus, *quién* means ‘who of those people you and I know’, *nadie* can be interpreted as ‘none of those people you and I know’ and *todos* can be ‘all of of them/us’.

In this way, by making the negative operator referential, Basque Spanish does not exhibit anti-agreement effects. Therefore, negative concord with preverbal negative elements that leave a trace in Spec of Neg should be allowed, which is indeed the case, as shown in the examples in (3) above.

## 5. Basque versus Basque Spanish

The syntactic licensing of negative elements in Basque is totally different from that of Basque Spanish since Basque N-words are Negative Polarity Items (cf. Laka 1990). The relevant data that abide by the tests on polarity are the following:

- (17) a. *\*Inor etorri da*  
 Nobody come has  
 Nobody has come

- b. *Ez da inor etorri*  
 Neg-has nobody come  
 Nobody has come

- (18) Q: *Nor etorri da?*  
 Who come has  
 Who has come?

- A: *\*Inor*  
*\*Anybody*

- (19) *Ezer jan nahi al duzu?*  
 Anything eat want COND. you  
 Would you want anything to eat?

In (17a) the negative item cannot occur in a subject position that is not c-commanded by a negative particle. In (18), the elliptical answer with the negative element is ruled out. In (19) the negative element is licensed in a non negative context by the question operator. Relevantly the Basque Spanish (or Spanish for that matter) equivalents of these sentences have opposite grammatical judgments.

- (20) a. *Nadie (no) ha venido*  
 Nobody (not) has come

- b. Q: *¿Quién ha venido?*  
 Who has come?

- A: *Nadie*  
 Nobody

- c. *\*¿Querías comer nada?*  
 Want.Cond-2 eat nothing  
 Would you want anything to eat?

On the other hand, the Basque example in (6) and the Basque Spanish example in (3) are almost identical

and cluster together in opposition to the Standard Spanish examples in (2). Our contention in this paper is that the absence of anti-agreement effects in both, Basque Spanish and Basque, makes it possible to have an N-word or its trace in a Spec-head relation with a NEG particle, that is, a negative concord relation. Relevantly, Basque does not have anti-agreement effects either:

- (21) a. *Nor ikusi duzu?*  
 Who see 3-have-2  
 Who have you seen?
- b. *Nortzuk ikusi dituzu?*  
 Who-PI see 3PI-have-2  
 Who have you seen?

In (21) above, the *wh*-word agrees with the Basque auxiliary in person and number, which greatly contrasts with the Standard Spanish example in (11a).

## 6. Basque influence.

At this point, the discussion begs the question as to whether the Basque Spanish preverbal negative concord construction in (3) is the result of Basque influence. In fact, there is evidence in favor and against this possibility, which suggests that although there has not been any transfer from Basque, language contact with Basque could have acted as a trigger for the construction under study to occur.

Independent cross-dialectal evidence from Paraguayan Spanish, a Spanish variety in contact with Guaraní, lends support to the Basque influence hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> Paraguayan Spanish does also allow preverbal negative elements to be doubled by a NEG clitic head in the syntactic construction under study (cf. Granda 1994). Incidentally, Guaraní follows the pattern N-word + NEG-Verb, as shown below:

- (22) a. *Mba' eve ndarekoi*  
 nothing Neg-have  
 I have nothing
- b. *Arakaeve ndohoi che rógape*  
 never Neg-go to my house  
 He never goes to my house

In (22ab), the Guaraní negative particle *nd* is attached to the verb as a prefix and co-occurs with preverbal negative words. The parallelism between the case of Basque Spanish and that of Paraguayan Spanish for N-words is too strong to be attributed to a mere coincidence. Consequently, the effects of language contact situations on the doubling of the preverbal negative element by a NEG clitic particle cannot be ignored, at least at the grammatical reinterpretation level on the part of the bilingual speakers.

On the other hand, the idea that Basque Spanish is exploiting syntactic variation with respect to the licensing of preverbal negative elements in Romance languages or even rescuing the negative construction in Medieval Spanish comes to mind as a logical possibility given the evidence provided by these languages:

- (23) *Nimeni n-a venit* (Rumanian)  
 Nobody NEG-has come
- (24) *Nada decir non pueden* (Medieval Spanish, *Mio Cid*, 2784)  
 Nothing say NEG can  
 They cannot say anything

<sup>1</sup> An anonymous reviewer and Liliana Sánchez pointed out to us that Andean Spanish exhibits overt negative concord with preverbal negative elements as well.

Even though the syntax of present day Basque Spanish has nothing to do with that of Medieval Spanish (cf. Camus 1988) and differs greatly from the syntax of Rumanian, the essence of the comparison still holds. That is, the co-occurrence of negative words in preverbal position with a negative head is a property of Romance syntax (cf. Catalan and French). Moreover, Rumanian and Basque Spanish negative XP elements are inherently negative N-words and not NPIs. Hence we conclude that the NEG doubling construction in preverbal position is the result of negative concord. Relevantly, Rumanian focus elements can be clitic doubled too (cf. Isaac 2002), which indicates that the correlation between lack of anti-agreement effects and the NEG doubling construction carries across languages.

Basque N-elements are NPIs, but are contrastively stressed and in default contexts always appear before the verb, which is the focus position for all XPs. Being NPIs, their licensing is completely different and so is the motivation to co-occur with a NEG head. Whereas in Basque the NEG endows the polarity item with a negative meaning, in Basque Spanish the NEG head only agrees with the negative word. The similarity in word order between Basque negative constructions and preverbal negative elements in Basque Spanish breaks down when analyzed in detail. Whereas preverbal position hosts new information (informational focus) in Basque, that preverbal position is the locus for contrastive focus in Spanish or Basque Spanish. In fact the new information focus position in Basque Spanish and Southwestern Romance is postverbal, thus there is a contrast between (25a), in which the negative XP is contrastively focused and receives clause main stress, and (25b), in which the negative XP is interpreted as focus by default, this being the most embedded element (cf. Cinque 1993):

(25) a. *NÁDIE (no) vino*  
 Nobody Neg came

b. *No vino nadie.*  
 Neg came nobody

## 7. Final Remarks

The role of Basque influence in the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country always comes in the same format, at least at the syntactic level. That is, whereas Basque and Basque Spanish share a number of specific constructions, such as null objects, object agreement, and external possession via topic binding that set them apart from Standard Spanish, their syntactic distribution is very different in these two languages (see Landa and Franco 1999). On the other hand, it is the language contact situation that initially triggers these constructions, perhaps due to an original reanalysis by bilingual Spanish-Basque speakers of the Spanish data. In effect, this is the strongest claim about Basque influence we can make here since the hypothesis of direct syntactic transfer cannot be validated given the different behavior of the apparent parallel structures in each language. Moreover, the preverbal negative construction in Basque Spanish was only made possible because, parametrically, it already existed in the syntax of Romance.

In principle, negative constructions in Basque Spanish preserve the syntax of Spanish, that is, negative XPs are not NPIs; however, seemingly parallel word order, co-occurrence of preverbal negative XPs with NEG heads and absence of anti-agreement effects conspired to induce the speaker to interpret the doubling NEG head as an agreement marker and develop a negative concord relation in this variety. In this regard, Basque Spanish has further developed a morpho-syntactic property of its own. Thus, presuppositional indefinite direct objects are doubled by overt object clitic morphology (see Franco and Mejías 1998, and examples in (16) above) and similarly referential preverbal negative elements are doubled by a negative particle on the verb amalgam (cf. examples in (3) here). This is indeed a robust characteristic of Basque Spanish syntax, which is neither shared by Basque nor by Castilian Spanish, which leads us to claim that varieties in contexts of language contact exhibit syntactic systems autonomous of the two original source languages.



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