

What microvariation can show about the syntax of Discourse Particles: the case of Basque

The literature on the syntax of discourse particles has focused on two topics: their position, whether they are base generated in the TP-domain or CP-domain, and their syntactic status, whether they are heads or phrasals (Coniglio 2007; 2008; Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Cardinaletti 2011; Struckmeier 2014). In what follows I will present dialectal data from the Basque language relevant to both topics. Basque conveys epistemicity, evidentiality and, in some dialects, marks the proposition as a question by using some particles (*-a*, *al*, *ahal*, *bide*, *ei*, *omen*, *ote*). These clearly behave as syntactic heads and occur in the TP-domain since a) they appear between the lexical and inflected verb in neutral positive clauses (ex. 1); and b) they are clitic heads which attach to the inflected verb as can be observed from the fact that they move along together in negative and some focal contexts in which the lexical verb stays in-situ (ex. 2 & 3); c) they depend on the occurrence of TP (ex. 4):

- 1 Elurra botako ahal du!
snow.ABS throw.FUT P AUX
'I wish it snows!'
- 2 Ez al duzu egunkaria erosi ez al duzu?
not P AUX newspaper.ABS buy
'Didn't you buy the newspaper?'
- 3 Jonek ote dia Jonek hori erran ote du?
Jon.ERG P AUX.P Jon.ERG that.ABS say P AUX
'Was it Jon who said that? (I'm wondering)'
- 4 Hori erosi (*al) eta bestea bota al duen galdetu dut.
this.ABS buy P and other.ABS throw P AUX.C ask AUX
'I asked whether s/he bought this one and threw away the other one.'

Nevertheless, a close look into them reveals that a) particles *omen* and *ote* can be considered to be phrasals in eastern dialects and b) evidence of particles, which share similar functions such as question-particles, occurring in distinguished domains is also found in eastern dialects.

On the one hand, the epistemic *ote* (and the evidential *omen* too, see (Etxepare and Uria 2016)) shows a distinct behaviour concerning its syntactic status based on the following facts: a) it does not appear to the left of the inflected verb, but after it (ex.4); b) it is not attached to the verb, since other constituents can occur between them (ex. 4); c) it depends on the lexicalization of FocP (ex. 5 & 6) (see Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Egg and Mursell 2017; Biezma, Butt, and Jabeen 2018)

- 5 Nor deitzen du bada ote Peiok egun guziz hain goizik?
who call.IPFV AUX P P Peter.ERG day all.INS so soon
'Who does Peter phone every morning so early? (I'm wondering)'
- 6 Eztakit ardi horrek [FocP bildotxa [Foc0 ukhain dienez]] othe gaur.
not.know sheep that.ERG lamb.ABS have.FUT AUX.C P today
'I don't know whether that sheep might give birth today.'
- 7 Ez dakit (*ote) ardi horrek bildotxa ukhain duen.
not know P sheep that.ERG lamb.ABS have.FUT AUX.C

Based on this data I conclude that *ote* can behave not only as a head but also as a weak adverb in eastern dialects (Coniglio 2007; Cardinaletti 2011).

On the other hand, whereas standard Basque and western dialects only show discourse particles base-generated in the TP-domain, some particles in eastern dialects (*-a* and *ote*) are also base-

generated in the CP-domain. If we compare the central Q-particle *al* and the one used in eastern dialects *-a*, we see that they behave differently since: a) the ellipsis of TP does not affect *-a*, unlike *al* (ex. 7 & 8); b) *-a* occupies the same position as complementizers, behaving as suffixes attached to the inflected verb, unlike *al* which functions as a prefix (ex.9 & 10); c) *-a* can occur with other particles, unlike *al* and the rest of particles which are in complementary distribution (ex. 11):

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|---|--|
| <p>8 Baia? // *Bai al?
yes.P / yes P
'Really?'</p> | <p>9 Nika? // *Nik al?
I.ERG.P / I.ERG P
'Me?'</p> |
| <p>10 Egin duzua? (cf. Egin duzula dio)
do AUX.P do AUX.C say
'Have you done it?'</p> | <p>11 Egin al duzu?
do P AUX
'Have you done it?'</p> |
| <p>12 Egin ote duzia? // *Egin [ote al / al ote] duzu?
do P AUX.P do P P P P AUX
'Have you done it? (I doubt it)'</p> | |

Indeed, the same pattern is also found on the particle *ote* behaving as a weak adverb in eastern dialects: a) *ote*, which must occur in clauses containing a lexicalised FocP, can appear in clauses with an elided TP (ex. 12 a & b); b) *ote* can co-occur with other particles such as *ahal* (ex. 13):

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| <p>13 a. Non ote?
where P
'Where?!'</p> | <p>b. Célinek ote?
Céline.ERG P
'Céline?!'</p> |
| <p>14 Ez ahal duzu ote zuk horren berri ukan? [<i>ahal</i>=head, <i>ote</i>=weak adverb]
not P AUX P you.ERG this.GEN new have
'Didn't you know about this?'</p> | |

Based on this data I conclude that *-a* and *ote* occupy a position in the CP-domain: the former occupies the head of FinP and the latter the specifier of ModP (Rizzi 2004) This use of *ote* also gives rise to other constructions found cross-linguistically as (13a) and (15); I propose that (15), only used in North-Eastern Basque, is the result of the reanalysis of (13a):

- 15 Non ote utzi dut kazeta?
where P leave aux newspaper.ABS
'Where did I leave the newspaper? (I'm wondering)'

This construction has been analysed in different ways for other languages (Munaro and Poletto 2002; Trotzke and Turco 2015; Endo 2018); I propose that this configuration is formed by the wh-word and the particle resulting in a single constituent, since it must have in mind that Basque displays a V2 effect in contexts such as wh-questions.

In conclusion, the microvariation of Basque discourse particles provide evidence of patterns found cross-linguistically in different languages and which may improve the understanding of their syntax.

Main references: **Bayer, J. & H-G. Obenauer.** 2011. "Discourse Particles, Clause Structure, and Question Types." *Linguistic Review* 28 (4): 449-491. **Coniglio, M.** 2007. "German Modal Particles in the IP-Domain." *Rivista Di Grammatica Generativa, Vol.32 (2007), P.3-37.* **Egg, M. & J. Mursell.** 2017. "The Syntax and Semantics of Discourse Particles." *Discourse Particles: Formal Approaches to their Syntax and Semantics:* 15-48. **Ettxepare, R. & L. Uria.** 2016. "Microsyntactic Variation in the Basque Hearsay Evidential." *Microparameters in the Grammar of Basque* 13: 265.