When Basque and Spanish met: a micro- and macrocomparative approach to DOM

Under certain conditions, some nonstandard varieties of Basque display so-called quirky dative objects, a phenomenon that belongs to the broader family of constructions studied in the typological literature as Differential Object Marking (DOM) (Bossong 1991, Aissen 2003).

In Standard Basque the structure of a sentence with a bivalent predicate as ikusi ‘see’ is (1). In (1), the subject and the object are marked by ergative case and by absolutive case, respectively. Moreover, the transitive auxiliary selected cross-references the ergative and absolutive arguments by means of ergative and absolutive agreement markers.

Compared to the canonical construction in (1), (2) presents two main differences: (i) the object is marked by dative case, not by absolutive case; (ii) the ditransitive auxiliary selected agrees with the dative object and includes a dative flag (DF) which precedes the dative agreement suffix. This auxiliary form is identical to that seen with trivalent predicates of the give-type as in (3), where the indirect object bears dative case and agreement.

On the other hand, DOM is also found in Spanish, in those instances where animate and specific objects are preceded by the preposition a (4) (Torrego 1998). Apart from this a-marking construction, leísmo, a well-known DOM phenomenon is also attested in Spanish and particularly in the Spanish variety spoken in the Basque Country (Fernández-Ordoñez 1999, Ormazabal & Romero 2007). In this variety, the dative clitic le(s) appears instead of the accusative masculine lo(s) and the accusative feminine la(s) as a pronoun to refer to animate direct objects (5). This le(s) is canonically attested as a pronoun referring to the indirect object of a trivalent predicate (6), and can double the a-marked DP (7). It is worth noting that the doubling of the a-marked DP seems to be obligatory in the Spanish variety spoken in the Basque Country, showing a clear preference for the construction in (7) over (4). Crucially, Basque patterns similar to Spanish in this respect, since certain DOM varieties require the presence of the dative agreement marker when DOM is attested in the object (8).

As we will see, despite their morphological similarities to indirect objects, Basque and Spanish DOM/leísmo objects seem to be direct objects and show similar properties and restrictions. First, direct objects must be animate to exhibit DOM (9b,10b), whereas, indirect objects can be inanimate (9a,10a). Second, in both Basque and Spanish, DOM objects control secondary predicates (11), contrary to indirect objects, where secondary predication is ruled out. Moreover, similar strategies and restrictions are attested in avoiding double dative constructions. When another dative argument—the indirect object—is present in the construction, Basque DOM varieties mark the DOM object with canonical absolutive case (12). Interestingly, a similar pattern is attested in the Spanish leísmo variety of the Basque Country (13). In this talk, we will focus on some of these striking similarities between Basque and Spanish DOM facts, although we will not conclude that Basque DOM facts are necessarily due to language contact.
Examples

(1) Ni-k zu ikusi za-it-u-t
I-ERG you.ABS see 2-ABS-pLABS-root-1sGERG
‘I saw you.’

(2) Ni-k zu-ri ikusi d-i-zu-t
I-ERG you-DAT see expl-(root)-DFS-2-DAT-1sGERG
‘I saw you.’

(3) Ni-k zu-ri liburua eman d-i-zu-t
I-ERG you-DAT book-ABS give expl(3ABS)-(root)-DFS-2-DAT-1sGERG
‘I gave you a book.’

(4) He visto a Juan
have.3sg see Juan
‘I saw Juan.’

(5) Le di un libro (a Juan / a María),
cl-DAT have.3sg see Juan / p María
‘I introduced him/her to Juan/to María’

(6) Le di un libro (a Juan / a María),
cl-DAT give.1sg a book Juan / p María
‘I gave a book to him/her (to Juan/to María ).’

(7) Le he visto a Juan,
cl-DAT have.3sg see Juan
‘I saw Juan.’

(8) a. *Jon zu-ri ikusten egon *da/jatzu
Jon.ABS you-DAT see stay aux (3sgABS/aux (3sgABS/2DAT)
‘Jo n has been seeing you.’

b. *Ez dio t er osio raindik (liburua-ri)  [instead of canonical lo/la]
I-ERG give.1sg a book, inanimate direct object
‘I did not buy it yet (the book).’

(9) a. Mahai x a-ri ostikadia eman
I-ERG table-DAT kick-ABS give aux (3sgDAT/1sGERG)
‘I gave a kick to the table.’

b. *Ez di o t or aisio raindik (liburua-ri)
I-ERG give.1sg a book, inanimate direct object
‘I did not buy it yet (the book).’

(10) a. Le di una patada a la mesa
I-ERG give.1sg a the table
‘I gave a kick to the table.’

b. *No le he comprado todavía (al libro)
I-ERG have.3sg buy yet the book
‘I did not buy it yet (the book).’

(11) a. Ni-k zu-ri mozkortuta,
I-ERG you-DAT drunk see
‘I saw you drunk.’

b. Juan lei encontró borracha a María
Juan cl-DAT find drunk María
‘Juan n found her drunk.’

(12) a. *Ni-k umia-ri amama-ri eruan
d-i-o-o-t
I-ERG child-DAT grandmother-DAT carry
‘I carried the child to the grandmother.’

b. Ni-k umia-ri amama-ri eruan
d-i-o-o-t
I-ERG child.ABS grandmother-DAT carry
‘I carried the child to the grandmother.’

(13) a. Juan le presentó (*a) la enfermera al doctor
Juan cl-DAT introduce (*a) the nurse
‘Juan n introduced the nurse to the doctor.’

b. Te *lefo presenté
cl-DAT *cl-DAT/cl.ACC
‘I introduced him to you’