

Mood and Modality in the Basque Auxiliary: Semantic Redundancy, Divergent Change, Fossilization

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Abstract. Concerning tense, mood and modality, Basque predicates are inflected for four categories, arranged in four successive slots: possibility, tense, mood, and reality. In theory, the terms of all four categories would combine in every possible way. In practice however, the occurrence of combinations is determined by several factors, such as the diachronic stage, regional variation, semantic change of individual exponents or their combinations, or the obsolescence vs. conventionalization of specific combinations, culminating in their fossilization. I will present different examples to illustrate how these factors work together to produce the variation that we find in Basque. What is particularly interesting for our purposes is the semantic change, as exponents can vary between temporal and modal meanings. On the other hand, a specific semantic content is expressed by different exponents over time, as sequences are reanalysed and fossilized. The fact that diachronic change leads to different results in different regional varieties shows that such change is predictable only to a limited extent.

Keywords: Basque, pluricentric language, modality, morphology, semantics, historical linguistics

1. The language

Basque is a pre-Indo-European isolate with about 700,000 speakers along the Atlantic coast on each side of the French-Spanish border. The Basque-speaking area is thus divided into a Northern part (the French Basque Country, with the provinces Lapurdi, Low Navarre, Zuberoa) and a Southern part. The latter consists of the Basque Autonomous Community (with the provinces Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba), and Navarre (*Nafarroa* in Basque).



Figure 1. The Basque provinces¹

Partly as a result of the administrative division, Basque has developed differently on both sides of the border, and this linguistic division persists despite standardization efforts. While the standardization of Basque has facilitated interregional contact, the standard varieties used in the South (the Spanish part) and the North (the French part) are quite distinct and the origin of a speaker or text is easy to recognize. Teaching materials are usually adapted to the regional standard, even if they claim to teach *euskara batua* ‘Unified Basque’. We can therefore include Basque among the pluricentric languages (cf. Clyne 1992). Data in this paper have been collected from classical texts, newspapers, the internet, as well as reference grammars and other linguistic descriptions of Basque. The source of an example is indicated below it, the diachronic or diatopic language variety above it.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mapa_provincias_Euskal_Herria.svg (accessed 1 February 2010)

2. Internal structure of Basque predicates

2.1. *Synthetic vs. periphrastic inflection*

Basque inflection can roughly be divided into two types, synthetic vs. periphrastic inflection. Synthetic inflection is the old system (1), which is being gradually replaced by periphrastic inflection (2).

Classical Basque

- (1) *Gure gogo-a ezin dago-ke gogoeta gabe;*
 POSS.1PL spirit-DET NPOT be:PRS.3SG-POT thought without
ezin gaute-ke zerbait-etan pensa-tu gabe.
 NPOT be:PRS.1PL-POT something-LOC think-PTCP without
 ‘Our spirit cannot exist without thought; we cannot exist without thinking of anything.’
 (Axular 1643, *Gero*)

Standard Basque

- (2) *Atzo inor ez zen eraso-a-ren erantzule egin,*
 yesterday nobody NEG PRT.3SG attack-DET-GEN responsible do
baina, Janin herri-ko iturri-en arabera, Hamas
 but Jenin village-MR source-GEN.PL according Hamas
talde-a egon daiteke eraso-a-ren atze-an.
 group-DET be PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG attack-DET-GEN behind-LOC
 ‘Yesterday, nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, but according to sources from Jenin village, the Hamas group could be behind the attack.’
 (Euskaldunon Egunkaria, 30/11/2001)

In (1), the verb *egon* ‘to be’; ‘to exist’ is inflected without the use of an auxiliary: tense, mood, and agreement marking are expressed on the lexical verb. Comparing the forms *egon* (which is both the citation form and aspectually neutral form), *dagoke* (present potential 3rd singular of the same verb), and *gauteke* (present potential 1st plural), we see that synthetic inflection is morphologically irregular, i.e. fusional. In (2), the same verb is accompanied by the auxiliary form *daiteke*

PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG, which takes over most of the inflectional marking, while the lexical verb is only marked for aspect. In modern Basque, there are only a few verbs left with some synthetic forms, such as *dakit* ‘I know’, from the verb *jakin* ‘to know’. The forms *dagoke* ‘it can be’ and *gauteke* ‘we can be’ however are clearly archaic. Semantically, the synthetic form *dagoke* ‘be:PRS.3SG-POT’ and the periphrastic form *egon daiteke* ‘be PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG’ are equivalent; the only difference is diachronic.

2.2. *Internal structure of periphrastic predicates*

Before I illustrate the different categories expressed in the predicate, it is useful to start with an overview of the structure of the (periphrastically inflected) predicate in Basque. In the first position, we find a non-finite form of the lexical verb, marked only for aspect. Tense, mood, and the distinction between realis and irrealis (an alternative label for which is “potential”) are expressed by an auxiliary following the lexical verb. For the sake of simplicity, we ignore the person-marking on the auxiliary; it is sufficient to point out that subject, direct and indirect object are cross-referenced. The inflected part of the predicate, i.e. the auxiliary in periphrastic inflection, may be preceded by a particle. Allomorphs in the aspect slot are morphologically determined by the verb class (such complementary distribution is signalled by ~), whereas different morphemes in the category “mood” express different valencies (see §2.6).

The reader should be aware that the overview in Table 1 is a simplification: The elements do not always occur in that order and are not always as easily segmentable. However, the goal of this paper is not an exhaustive description of all inflectional possibilities, but a look at some specific changes that have occurred in Basque over the last centuries. The example in the last row shows that there can be more than one way to express the same situation: *ikusten ahal du* and *ikus dezake* both translate as ‘(s/he) can see (it)’ and are thus synonymous, but while the former is typical of Northern Basque, the latter is more common in the South.

Lexical verb		Particle	Auxiliary		
Stem	Aspect	Modality	Tense	Mood	Reality
	Perfective <i>-tu~i~n</i>	Possibility <i>ahal</i>	Present <i>d-</i>	Indicative <i>-a-, -u-</i>	Realis <i>-∅</i>
	Imperfective <i>-t(z)en</i>	Impossibility <i>ezin</i>	Past <i>z-</i>	Subjunctive <i>-adi-, -eza-</i>	Irrealis <i>-ke</i>
	Prospective <i>-tuko~iko~ngo</i> <i>-turen~iren~nen</i>		Hypothetical <i>l-</i>		
	Neutral <i>(-∅)</i>				
Example					
<i>ikus</i>	<i>-ten</i>	<i>ahal</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>-u</i>	<i>-∅</i>
<i>ikus</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>∅</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>-eza</i>	<i>-ke</i>
‘s/he can see’					

Table 1. Predicate structure (simplified)

2.3. Aspect

In periphrastic inflection, the lexical verb appears as a participle inflected only for aspect: perfective (*tu~i~n*), imperfective (*ten~tzen*), and prospective; the latter is made up of the perfective participle followed by the suffix *-ko* or *-(r)en* (the two suffixes are allomorphs in diatopic distribution). The three terms of the aspectual system combine, in theory at least, with the three terms of the tense-mood system, present, past, and hypothetical. In modern Basque, however, the combinations perfective hypothetical and imperfective hypothetical are considered archaic, and their functions have been taken over by other aspect-tense constellations. Table 2 illustrates the possible combinations and gives approximate English translations. The auxiliaries in the examples all have third person singular subject and direct object referents. Third person pronouns (he, him, she, her, it) are omitted from the translations.

Auxiliary →	Present	Past	Hypothetical
Participle ↓			
Perfective	<i>ikusi du</i> 'has seen'	<i>ikusi zuen</i> 'saw'	<i>(ikusi luke)</i> 'would have seen' (archaic)
Imperfective	<i>ikusten du</i> 'see'	<i>ikusten zuen</i> 'used to see'	<i>(ikusten luke)</i> 'would see (now)' (archaic)
Prospective	<i>ikusiko du</i> 'will see'	<i>ikusiko zuen</i> 'would have seen' 'was about to see'	<i>ikusiko luke</i> 'would see'

Table 2. The tense-aspect system

In addition to these three participles, there is an aspectually neutral form consisting of the verb stem, which for the verb 'to see' is *ikus*. Verbs taking the perfective aspect allomorph *-n* keep it in the neutral form, as illustrated by *egon* 'to be' in (2). The aspectually neutral form is used with auxiliaries in subjunctive mood (cf. §2.6), where aspectual distinctions are neutralized, (3).

Standard Basque

- (3) *etor daiteke, har dezake*
 come PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG take PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG < 3SG
 'he/she can come, he/she can take it'
 (Zubiri 1994:248)

Note that the citation form of Basque verbs is the perfective participle.

2.4. Possibility

Basque has about ten particles expressing aspectual, root-modal, epistemic and discursive information. In this paper, we will only be concerned with two of them, listed in Table 3 and illustrated by (4) from Lapurdian and (5) from Southern Basque.

Form	Function
<i>ahal</i>	possibility, ability
<i>ezin</i>	impossibility, inability

Table 3. Modal particles

Lapurdian (North, Coastal)

- (4) *Oraidanik eros-te-n ahal dira sar-tze-a-k.*
 henceforth buy-NR-LOC POT PRS.3PL enter-NR-DET-PL
 ‘Entrance tickets can be bought from now on.’
 (www.herriak.info/lapurdi)

Southern Basque

- (5) [...] « ezin dut informazio-rik eskura-tu » gainera-tu
 NPOT PRS.3SG < 1SG information-PRTV obtain-PTCP add-PTCP
zuen, « eta beraz, ezin dut lan-ik egin ».
 PRT.3SG < 1SG and thus NPOT PRS.3SG < 1SG work-PRTV do
 ‘‘I can’t obtain any information’’ he added, ‘‘so I can’t do any work’’.’
 (www.egunero.info)

These particles immediately precede the inflected verb, i.e. the auxiliary in periphrastic inflection.

2.5. Tense

If not exclusively cross-referencing one of the arguments, the first segment of the auxiliary indicates tense: *d-* for present, *z-* for past, and *l-* for hypothetical. The latter is roughly comparable to a conditional in English. In Table 4, the intransitive and transitive auxiliaries are exemplified with 3rd person singular cross-reference for all their arguments. In this paradigm, the hypothetical forms are fossilized with a conditional marker *ba-* preceding the auxiliary.

	Present		Past		Hypothetical	
	Intr.	Tr.	Intr.	Tr.	Intr.	Tr.
Indicative	<i>da</i>	<i>du</i>	<i>zen</i>	<i>zuen</i>	<i>balitz</i>	<i>balu</i>

Table 4. Tense distinctions as marked on the auxiliary

2.6. *Mood and reality*

The auxiliaries can also be inflected for mood (indicative vs. subjunctive) and realis vs. irrealis. Irrealis forms contain the potential marker *-ke*. The forms with cross-reference to 3rd person singular arguments are listed in Table 5.

		Realis		Irrealis	
		Indicative	Subjunctive	Indicative	Subjunctive
Present	Intr.	<i>da</i>	<i>dadin</i>	<i>dateke</i>	<i>daiteke</i>
	Tr.	<i>du</i>	<i>dezan</i>	<i>duke</i>	<i>dezake</i>
Past	Intr.	<i>zen</i>	<i>zedin</i>	<i>zatekeen</i>	<i>zitekeen</i>
	Tr.	<i>zuen</i>	<i>zezan</i>	<i>zukeen</i>	<i>zezakeen</i>
Hypothetical	Intr.	<i>balitz</i>	<i>baledi</i>	<i>litzateke</i>	<i>liteke</i>
	Tr.	<i>balu</i>	<i>baleza</i>	<i>luke</i>	<i>lezake</i>

Table 5. Mood and reality distinctions

3. The situation in classical Basque

The label “Classical Basque” applies to the first Basque texts, beginning in the 16th century. The period of Classical Basque really never ended, as changes were and are gradual, and classical forms can still be found in conservative style. The difference is that many forms which were common in Classical Basque are now rare. Therefore, Classical Basque is just a handy label for “before the change under discussion”, contrasting with terms such as “modern”, “contemporary” or “present-day Basque”, meaning “after the change under discussion”.

3.1. *Future*

The major function of *-ke* (consistently glossed as POT in this paper) was the expression of future time reference (Lafon 1972/1999:515). Therefore, these constructions are sometimes called “archaic future” (Zubiri & Zubiri 2000:440). In (6), the forms *draukezue*, *zaituzkete*, and *dukeite* refer to hypothetical events in the future.

Classical Basque

- (6) *Dohatsu izan-en zarete nehor-k injuria*
 blessed AUX.INTR-PRO PRS.2PL anyone-ERG insult
- erran draukezue-n-ean, eta persekuta-tu*
 say PRS.POT.IO.2PL.3SG < 3SG-REL-LOC and persecute-PTCP
- zaitukezte-n-ean, eta hitz gaixto guzi-a erran*
 PRS.POT.2PL < 3SG-REL-LOC and word bad all-DET say
- dukeite-n-ean zuen kontra,*
 PRS.POT.3SG < 3PL-REL-LOC POSS.2PL against
- gezurr-ez ene kausa-z.*
 lie-INSTR POSS.1SG cause-INSTR

‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.’

(Leizarraga 1571, *Testamentu Berria*)

This construction still indicates future in Zuberoan (also known as Souletin, the most Eastern dialect).

Zuberoan (North, Interior)

- (7) *Dagün abentüa-ren 5-ean dateke*
 next December-GEN five-LOC PRS.POT.3SG
- erabaki-a har-tü-rik.*
 decision-DET take-PTCP-PRTV
- ‘The decision will be made on the 5th of December.’
 (www.herriak.info/zuberoa/aurrekoak4.html, 26 October 2001)

3.2. *Double future*

In (6), the auxiliary forms combined with perfective participles, but they could also combine with the aspectual prospective suffix *-(r)en*, producing what Lafon (1972/1999:517) called a “double future”. This construction, exemplified in (8), is not found in contemporary Basque.

Classical Basque

- (8) *Orduan justo-ek argi-tu-ren dukeite*
then just-ERG.PL shine-PTCP-PRO PRS.POT.3SG < 3PL
iguzki-a-k bezala, bere Aita-ren resuma-n.
sun-DET-ERG like POSS.3SG father-GEN kingdom-LOC
'Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'
(Leizarraga 1571, *Testamentu Berria*)

3.3. Future imperative

The existence in some classical varieties of an aspectual-temporal distinction between a "present imperative" (9) and a "future imperative" (10) is further evidence that the main function of *-ke* was to express future (Trask 1997:225).

Classical Basque

- (9) *begira zazu*
look IMP.3SG < 2SG
'look (now)!'</p><p>(10) *begira zakezu*
look IMP.POT.3SG < 2SG
'look (later)!'</p></div>
<div data-bbox="138 591 316 609" data-label="Section-Header>
<h3>3.4. Epistemic use</h3>
</div>
<div data-bbox="138 613 836 675" data-label="Text>
<p>Three or four centuries later, the indicative forms with the *-ke*-morpheme do not express future any more (except in Zuberoan/Souletin), but turn a statement into an assumption.</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="138 693 228 711" data-label="Text">
<p>Lapurdian</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="138 715 786 849" data-label="List-Group">
<p>(11) *Ikerketa-ren lehen uste-etan gaizki hil zigarreta bat-ek*
research-GEN first belief-LOC.PL bad kill cigarette one-ERG
du-ke su-a zabal-du.
PRS.3SG < 3SG-POT fire-DET spread-PTCP
'According to the initial enquiry, a badly extinguished cigarette might have caused the fire.' (www.herriak.info/lapurdi)</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox="461 890 511 904" data-label="Page-Footer">
<p>- 10 -</p>
</div>

Here, the future marker has become a marker of epistemic modality – a semantic extension found not only in Basque but also in Spanish and many other languages (cf. Palmer 1986:216). However, these forms are not attested in contemporary Southern Basque, and have become rare in Northern Basque. This example already shows us two important things: First, important semantic and morphological changes have occurred during the transition from classical to present-day Basque. Second, the changes are not the same in the different regional varieties. As a result, the grammar of Northern Basque is different from that of Southern Basque. This is particularly visible in the expression of possibility. In §4, we will now have a look at more cases of diachronic and synchronic variation.

4. Diachronic changes

4.1. *Loss of present indicative potential*

As present indicative forms with *-ke* (transitive *duke* PRS-POT.3SG < 3SG; intransitive *dateke* PRS.POT.3SG) are lost, we might say that their functional domain has become vacant. This has led to confusion between the indicative and the subjunctive potential forms. It seems that subjunctive forms (*dezake* PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG < 3SG / *daiteke* PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG) were preferred for non-epistemic possibility (e.g. physical ability), as long as the corresponding indicative forms (*duke* PRS-POT.3SG < 3SG / *dateke* PRS.POT.3SG) expressed epistemic modality (Lafitte 1944/2001:369). In modern Basque, the subjunctive forms have taken over epistemic modality. As a result, the semantic distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic has been lost. In (12), the form *daitezke* PRS.SUBJ.POT.3PL expresses an assumption.

Standard Basque

(12) *Su-hiltzaile-en iturri-ek adieraz-i*
fire-killer-GEN.PL source-ERG.PL declare-PTCP

zuten-ez,

PRT.3PL > 3SG(REL)-INSTR

10.000 hildako inguru egon daitezke
10,000 dead around be PRS.SUBJ.POT.3PL

World Trade Center-reko hondakin-en artean.

World Trade Center-MR ruin-GEN.PL between

‘According to statements by the fire brigade, about 10,000 dead could be under the ruins of the World Trade Center.’

(Euskaldunon Egunkaria 13/09/2001)

The epistemic use of subjunctive potential forms is frequent in the media, even though the style guide (*Estilo Liburua* in Basque) for the newspaper from which (12) was taken disapproves of such usage. We further read there that (13) cannot have an epistemic interpretation.

Standard Basque

(13) *Senide eta lagun-ek kezka ager-tu dute*
relative and friend-ERG.PL worry express-PTCP PRS.3SG < 3PL

atxilo-tu-ek jasan ditzakete-n tratu
arrest-PTCP-ERG.PL undergo PRS.SUBJ.POT.3PL < 3PL-REL treatment

txarr-a-k dir-ela eta.
bad-DET-PL PRS.3PL-SR and

‘The relatives and friends have expressed concerns about the mistreatment the arrested could face.’

(Egunkaria 2001:71)

According to that style manual, the potential in (13) would express that the arrested **are capable** of facing mistreatment, which would be a so-called root modality interpretation, that is, physical ability. Such an interpretation of course does not make

much sense, and in reality, only the context can indicate whether a radical (i.e. ability), alethic (logical possibility), or epistemic (assumption) reading is most appropriate. And later on, the style guide admits that (14) can have an epistemic interpretation.

Standard Basque

- (14) *Bihar euri-a egin dezake.*
 tomorrow rain-DET do PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG < 3SG
 ‘It might rain tomorrow.’
 (Egunkaria 2001:72)

Therefore, the recommendations only reflect the stylistic desire to avoid ambiguities by choosing exclusively epistemic constructions, such as adverbs or conventionalized expressions. However, this ambiguity is clearly not a problem for speakers, considering the frequency with which potential forms are used to express epistemic possibility.

4.2. *Loss of hypothetical indicative potential*

In Classical Basque, indicative and subjunctive potential were in opposition in hypothetical tense as well. Here too, Northern and Southern Basque have taken different paths. In Northern Basque, a conditional apodosis is expressed with a potential form in subjunctive mood, that is the indicative form was replaced by the corresponding subjunctive form

Northern Basque

- (15) *Aberats-a (iza-te-n) ba-nintz,*
 rich-DET be-NR-LOC COND-HYP.1SG
etxe handi bat eros nezake.
 house big one buy HYP.SUBJ.POT.1SG > 3SG
 North: ‘If I were rich, I **would** buy a big house.’
 (South: ‘... I **could** buy ...’)
 (King 1994:261)

Note that the form *nezake* means ‘I could’ in Southern Basque, whereas it corresponds to ‘I would’ in Northern Basque. Southern Basque has preserved the old construction with the hypothetical indicative, but syntagmatic variation has been reduced, as the lexical verb is systematically in the prospective (16); cf. Table 2.

Southern Basque

- (16) *Bat aurki-tu ba-nu,*
 one find-PTCP COND-HYP.1SG > 3SG
eros-i-ko nuke.
 buy-PTCP-PRO HYP.POT.1SG > 3SG
 ‘If I found one, I’d buy it.’
 (King 1994:261)

4.3. Simplification of ‘can’

In Classical Basque, the modal particle *ahal* triggered a subjunctive form of the auxiliary. The combination of the two expressed ‘can/could’; see (17), quoted in Oyharçabal (2003:277).

Classical Basque

- (17) *Nor-k erran ahal lezake zendako?*
 who-ERG say POT HYP.SUBJ.POT.3SG > 3SG why
 ‘Who could say why?’
 (Etchepare, Jean 1910, *Buruchkak*)

Again, different regional varieties of Basque have evolved differently. Southern Basque simply leaves out the modal particle *ahal*, so that the form *lezake* by itself means ‘he/she could’, see (18).

Southern Basque

- (18) *esan lezake*
 say HYP.SUBJ.POT.3SG > 3SG
 ‘he/she could say’

In Northern Basque, *ahal* has been preserved, but does not trigger the subjunctive any longer. Instead of the subjunctive form *lezake* used in Classical Basque and

preserved with the meaning ‘could’ in Southern Basque (as seen in §4.2, it would mean ‘he/she would’ in Northern Basque), we have the indicative form *lukete* in the Lapurdian example (19).

Lapurdian

- (19) [...] *jauregi hori eros-te-n ahal lukete* [...]

palace D2 buy-NR-LOC POT HYP.POT.3SG < 3PL

‘they could buy that palace’

(www.herriak.info/lapurdi)

4.4. *Simplification of ‘cannot’*

Here too, Classical Basque combined a particle with a subjunctive form of the auxiliary, (20). The particle *ezin* is a cumulative morpheme expressing both negation and possibility.

Classical Basque

- (20) *ezin paga dezakegu*

NPOT pay PRS.SUBJ.POT.3SG < 1PL

‘we cannot pay’

(adapted from Axular 1643, *Gero*)

Northern Basque has lost the particle *ezin*, and instead expresses negation and possibility separately, (21). This is an analogy to “normal” negation. It is therefore a case of **analogical levelling**.

Northern Basque

- (21) *ez lukete eros-te-n ahal-ko*

NEG HYP.POT.3SG < 3PL buy-NR-LOC POT-PRO

‘they could not buy it’

Southern Basque (22), repeated from (5), has preserved the particle *ezin*, but combines it with an indicative realis form, the morphologically most simple inflection.

Southern Basque

(22) [...] « *ezin dut informazio-rik eskura-tu* » *gainera-tu*
 NPOT PRS.3SG < 1SG information-PRTV obtain-PTCP add-PTCP
zuen, « *eta beraz, ezin dut lan-ik egin* ».
 PRT.3SG < 3SG and thus NPOT PRS.3SG < 1SG work-PRTV do
 “I can’t obtain any information” he added, “so I can’t do any work”.
 (www.egunero.info)

5. Semantic motivations of change

5.1. Hyperanalysis

Some of the changes here can be subsumed under the labels “hyperanalysis” and “hypoanalysis”, adopted from Croft (2000:121-130). In hyperanalysis, the semantically dominant element acquires the function of the semantically subordinate element. This can be illustrated in four steps:

1. *ahal* (dominant) triggers *dezake* (subordinate)

(23) *ahal dezake*
 POT PRS.SUBJ.POT
 ‘can V’

2. The combination of the two elements expresses the semantic value of the whole construction.
3. That semantic value is attributed to the particle alone.
4. The subjunctive potential form is semantically redundant and can be replaced by a morphologically simpler indicative form.

(24) *ahal dezake* > *ahal du* (North)
 POT PRS.SUBJ.POT POT PRS
 ‘can V’

(25) *ezin dezake* > *ezin du* (South)
 NPOT PRS.SUBJ.POT NPOT PRS
 ‘cannot V’

5.2. *Hypoanalysis*

In hypoanalysis, a (semantically vague) element acquires the semantics of a context in which it typically appears. This can again be illustrated in four steps:

1. A form like *dezake* typically appears with *ahal* in a context of possibility.
2. *dezake* adopts this function, semantically assimilating to the particle.
3. The particle becomes optional and is lost.
4. The form *dezake* becomes morphologically and functionally fossilized.

(26) *ahal dezake* > *dezake* (South)
 POT PRS.SUBJ.POT
 ‘can V’

6. Conclusions

The paper has shown the extent of diachronic and synchronic variation in Basque concerning the expression of modality in the predicate. We have seen that in Classical Basque the potential suffix *-ke* characteristic of irrealis forms was found in forms expressing future tense, but that function was lost except in one dialect. As a consequence of semantic change, these forms have come to express epistemic possibility. When the indicative forms were lost, the subjunctive forms took over their epistemic function and developed the same polysemy as the ‘can’-verbs of many European languages. Conditional forms have developed differently in Northern and Southern Basque, so that morphologically identical forms mean different things. Another interesting observation is that in Northern Basque, it is the expression of possibility which has undergone hyperanalysis, whereas in Southern Basque, it is **im**possibility. The diachronic change leading to the loss of *ahal* in the expression of possibility in Southern Basque is a case of hypoanalysis. Finally, the loss of *ezin* in Northern Basque is a case of analogical levelling modelled on the default pattern of negation with *ez*. These four scenarios of diachronic change are listed in Table 6.

	Possibility	Impossibility
North	Hyperanalysis	Analogical levelling
South	Hypoanalysis	Hyperanalysis

Table 6. Scenarios of diachronic change

The cases of historical divergence described in this paper are too important – and too emblematic of different regional varieties – to be reversed by the standardization efforts of the 20th century. The findings thus illustrate and confirm that present-day Basque is best described as a pluricentric language, where the different standard varieties continue to exhibit important grammatical differences.

Abbreviations

1: speaker – 2: addressee – 3: non-speech act participant – AUX: Auxiliary – COND: conditional – D: deictic – DET: determiner – ERG: ergative – GEN: genitive – HYP: hypothetical – IMP: imperative – INSTR: instrumental – INTR: intransitive – IO: indirect object – LOC: locative – MR: modifier – NEG: negation – NPOT: nonpotential – NR: nominalizer – PL: plural – POSS: possessive – POT: potential – PRO: prospective – PRS: present – PRT: preterit – PRTV: partitive – PTCP: participle – REL: relativizer – SG: singular – SUBJ: subjunctive

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