

Non-Canonical Uses of the Article in Basque¹

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0. Introduction

As it is shown in (1), the Basque article is a suffix taking the phonetic forms *-a* and *-ak* for singular and plural, respectively.

- (1) a. Irakasle-**a** etorri da.
teacher-**DET**come aux
'The teacher has come.'
b. Irakasle-**a-k** hemen daude.
teacher-**DET-PL** here are
'The teachers are here.'

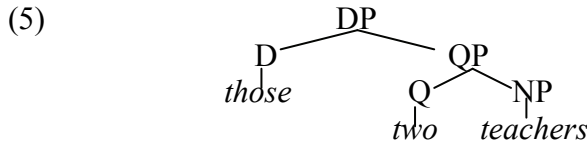
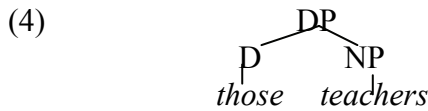
In this paper we deal with Basque data of the sort illustrated in (2) and (3). As the English glosses indicate, such sentences are ambiguous. On the one hand, the nominals in (2) may have a specific reading and can also convey an existentially quantified meaning; the sentences in (3), on the other hand, can be interpreted either as identifying or as predicative statements.

- (2) a. Ardo-**a** edan dut.
wine-**SUF** drink AUX
'I have drunk (the) wine.'
b. Sagarr-**a-k** jan ditut.
apple-**SUF-PL** eat AUX
'I have eaten (the) apples.'
- (3) a. Jon irakasle-**a** da.
Jon teacher-**SUF** is
'Jon is {the/a} teacher.'
b. Jon eta Miren txiki-**a-k** dira.
Jon and Miren small-**SUF-PL** are
'Jon and Miren are {the small ones/small}.'

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In both the specific nominals in (2) and the identifying copulative sentences in (3) the suffix *-a* corresponds to the Basque (definite) article. However, this certainly cannot be the case in existentially quantified nominals and predicative statements. How can this homophonous suffix be characterized then? This is the question we will try to answer.

In what follows we will assume the so called “Split-DP Hypothesis”, represented in (5), which assigns a different projection to strong and weak determiners within an extended Determiner Phrase.²

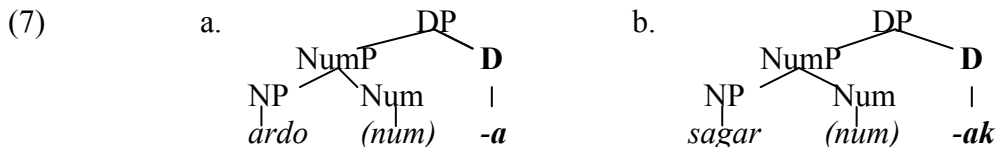


1. The Basque Suffix *-a* as an Existential Quantifier

As just mentioned, the nominals in (2) (repeated here for convenience) may have a specific interpretation and can also convey a quantificational meaning.

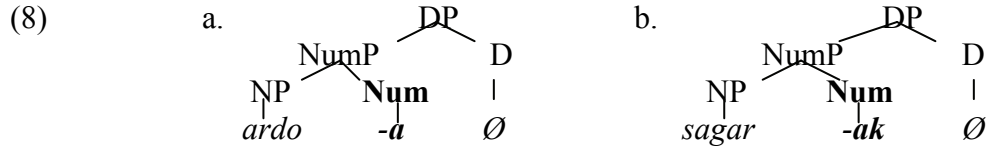
- (6)
- a. Ardo-**a** edan dut.
 wine-SUF drink AUX
 ‘I have drunk (the) wine.’
 - b. Sagarr-**a-k** jan ditut.
 apple-SUF-PL eat AUX
 ‘I have eaten (the) apples.’

In order to account for this ambiguity, Artiagoitia (2002, 2004) puts forward two different analyses for the suffix *-a(k)* that goes with nominals with a specific reading and for the homophonous morpheme that obligatorily appears in existentially quantified bare nouns. His proposal is depicted in the trees in (7) and (8).



² On the (Split) DP Hypothesis see, e.g., Bernstein (2001), Borer (2005), Longobardi (2001), Vangsnes (2001) and Zamparelli (2000). On the DP Hypothesis in Basque see Artiagoitia (1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004).

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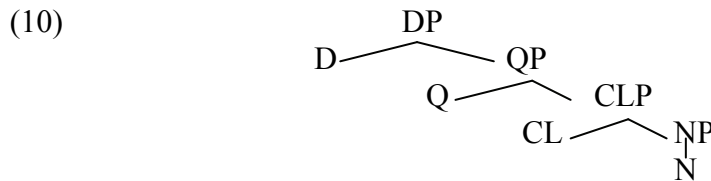


In Artiagoitia’s view, in nominals with a specific interpretation the suffix is a strong determiner heading the uppermost DP projection (cf. (7)). However, in nominals with a quantificational meaning, the suffix *-a(k)* is not a true determiner, so this linguist argues, and it is inserted in the intermediate NumP layer as a last resort device to mark number in DPs with no overt determiner (cf. (8)), given the fact that nouns do not inflect for number in Basque (cf. (9)).

- (9)
- a. hiru gizon
three man
‘three men’
 - a. gizon hori-ek
man that-PL
‘those men’

Artiagoitia’s insight unfortunately results in the number paradigm of Basque being oversized; besides the canonical number markers *-∅(sg.)/-k(pl.)*, the suffixes *-a(sg.)/-ak(pl.)* would also signal the distinction between singular and plural in particular contexts. Therefore, an alternative analysis for the suffix *-a(k)* that surfaces in existentially quantified nominals will now be developed, which limits the Basque number paradigm to its canonical forms.

In our proposal a more articulated structure for split DPs will be adopted. As represented in (10), Borer (2005) argues for the existence of an extra functional projection between the Quantifier Phrase (QP) and the Noun Phrase (NP), a so called Classifier Phrase (CLP), in which the affixes and lexical items that express the count/mass distinction across languages are generated.

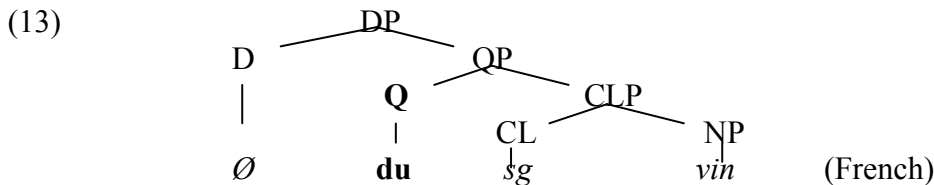
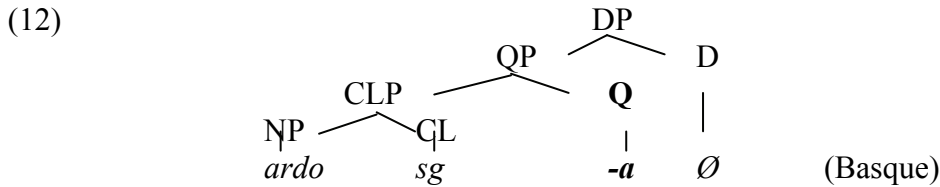


The Classifier Phrase is the structural locus, so Borer says, not only for classifier morphemes in languages with a classifier system, but also for number markers. As the Armenian data in (11) show, evidence for this idea comes from the fact that plural morphology and classifier morphology do not co-occur in languages that make use of both devices to assign nouns to the count class.

- (11) a. Yergu **had** hovanoc uni-m.
 two CL umbrella have-1SG
 ‘I have two umbrellas.’
 b. Yergu hovanoc-**ner** uni-m.
 two umbrella-**PL** have-1SG
 ‘I have two umbrellas.’
 c. *Yergu **had** hovanoc-**ner** uni-m.
 two CL umbrella-**PL** have-1SG
 ‘I have two umbrellas.’ (Armenian)

Notice that within Borer’s architecture for DPs number morphology and weak determiners are generated in two different structural positions. We will extend this idea to the Basque DP.

Our proposal then goes as follows. As shown in (12), in our view, the number morpheme (singular \emptyset , plural $-k$) is generated within the CLP. The suffix $-a$ that attaches to existentially quantified nominals is, on its part, a true (indefinite) determiner—an existential quantifier to be more precise, that corresponds to the so called French partitive article *du*,³ and heads the QP projection.⁴



The analysis of the suffix $-a$ that surfaces in existentially quantified nominals

³ Most significantly, existentially quantified bare nominals take the partitive case marker $-(r)ik$ (instead of the suffix $-a$) in negative and interrogative sentences in Basque.

- (i) a. Ez dut ardo-**rik** edan.
 NEG AUX wine-**PART** drink
 ‘I have not drunk wine’.
 b. Sagar-**rik** jan duzu?
 apple-**PART** eat AUX
 ‘Have you eaten apples?’

⁴ Notice that the uppermost DP is also projected in the existentially quantified nominals in (12) and (13) in order to capture the fact that these nominals are arguments (see, e.g., Zamparelli 2000). A rule of the post-syntactic Morphological Component (see Halle and Marantz 1993) would finally rearrange the terminal nodes CL and Q in the structure in (12), so that the correct linear order N+Q+Num is obtained: *sagarr-a-k*.

as an indefinite determiner, and not as a number marker, clearly simplifies the Basque number paradigm. But it also agrees with a most relevant fact which has not been mentioned so far: the Basque article *-a* does not always have a definite or specific interpretation. As illustrated in (14a), this suffix is also present in non-specific nominals, corresponding to the English or Spanish indefinite article in these cases. And, as can be seen in (14b), the same affix *-a* can also occur in stereotype characterizing predicates, which contain an indefinite article in English and have no article at all in Spanish (e.g., *I have a girlfriend/Tengo Ø novia, Have you got a car?/¿Tienes Ø coche?*).⁵

- (14) a. Zigarro-**a** nahi dut.
cigarette-**DET** want AUX
'I want a cigarette.'
b. Emazte-**a** daukat.
wife-**DET** have
'I have a wife.'

In conclusion, when the data in (14) are put up for discussion, the occurrence of the suffix *-a* in existentially quantified nominals could then be seen as just one of the various uses the Basque article can have.⁶ We will now look into the homophonous suffix *-a(k)* that shows up in predicative statements.

2. The Basque Suffix *-a* as a Pronominal Copula

As mentioned in the introduction, the Basque sentences in (15) are ambiguous, i.e., they can be interpreted either as identifying or predicative statements.

- (15) a. Jon irakasle-**a** da.
Jon teacher-**SUF** is
'Jon is {the/a} teacher.'
b. Jon eta Miren txiki-**a-k** dira.
Jon and Miren small-**SUF-PL** are
'Jon and Miren are {the small ones/small}.'

⁵ On the different meanings and roles of the Basque article see Euskaltzaindia (1985), Trask (2003) and Txillardegi (1978). As an influence from Spanish and French, the affix *-a* in nominals such as those in (14a,b) is increasingly being replaced by the numeral *bat* 'one' in spoken Basque: *Zigarro bat nahi dut*.

⁶ After this paper had already been presented at BLS 32, I discovered that an analysis of the suffix *-a(k)* in existentially quantified nominals very similar in spirit to the one I develop here is independently proposed in Etxeberria's (2005) dissertation on quantification in Basque. Etxeberria holds that mass terms are number neutral. If mass terms do not bear number morphology, there is no need to postulate the NumP in mass terms, and Artiagoitia's analysis is therefore untenable. Etxeberria argues then that the problem of existential quantification can be solved assuming "that the Basque article is always definite, and always base-generated in [Head, DP], but it is very flexible in its ability to type-shift."

Notice, however, and this is a most relevant fact, that not all nominal predicates in Basque combine with the suffix $-a(k)$. As the contrasts in (16) and (17) show, the presence or absence of this suffix in nominal predicates is closely related to the individual/stage-level distinction, so that the suffix only occurs in individual-level predicates (cf. (16a, 17a)), but is excluded in stage-level predicates (cf. (16b, 17b)).⁷

- (16) a. Miren irakasle*(-a) da.
 Miren teacher(-SUF) is.izan
 ‘Miren is a teacher.’
 b. Miren irakasle(*-a) dago.
 Miren teacher(-SUF) is.egon
 ‘Miren is working as a teacher.’
- (17) a. Garazi lasai*(-a) da.
 Garazi serene(-SUF) is.izan
 ‘Garazi is serene.’
 b. Garazi lasai(*-a) dago.
 Garazi calm(-SUF) is.egon
 ‘Garazi is calm.’

In this paper we will hold that the suffix $-a(k)$ that adjoins to individual-level nominal predicates in Basque is a pronominal-like predicative particle. But prior to unfolding this idea, we will first critically examine two previous proposals on this issue: the analyses by Zabala (1993) and Artiagoitia (1997).

As indicated by the category labels in the structures in (18), Zabala (1993) argues that temporal or episodic adjectival predicates must project an Aspect Phrase for their eventive argument to be realized syntactically. Furthermore, she takes the suffix $-a(k)$ that goes with permanent adjectival predicates to be a number morpheme that heads a Number Phrase.

- (18) a. Ane_i [t_i [t_i haurdun]_{AspP}]_{AspP} dago.
 ‘Ann is pregnant.’
 b. Jon_i [t_i [t_i baxuegi]_{AP} -a]_{NumP} da.
 ‘Jon is too short.’

This proposal has two main drawbacks. On the one hand, it again complicates the Basque number paradigm, and on the other hand, as Artiagoitia (1997) correctly points out, it can not explain in a principled way why stage-level nominal

⁷ On this generalization see Zabala (1993, 2003), Artiagoitia (1997), and the references there in. The correlation between the presence or absence of the suffix $-a(k)$ and the individual/stage-level distinction does not only hold in copulative sentences with the individual-level verb *izan* or the stage-level verb *egon*, as in (16) and (17) in the text. It extends to all nominal predicates, e.g., predicates selected by raising verbs, nominal predicates in small clauses and secondary predicates (see Zabala 2003, Artiagoitia 1997).

predicates do not inflect for number in Basque (considering that in many other languages, such as Spanish for instance, both individual-level and stage-level nominal predicates bear number markers).

Artiagoitia (1997) develops a different analysis. He holds that the Basque affix $-a(k)$ that occurs in individual-level nominal predicates is a non-referential article that heads a predicative DP. As shown in (19), this determiner will select either a Noun Phrase (cf. (19a)), or an Adjectival Phrase (cf. (19b)), whereas nominal predicates without the affix are just bare NPs or APs (cf. (19c,d)).⁸

- (19) a. [[Irakasle]_{NP}-a_D]_{DP} da.
‘She is a teacher.’
b. [[Lasai]_{AP}-a_D]_{DP} da.
‘She is serene.’
c. [Irakasle]_{NP} dago.
‘She works as a teacher.’
d. [Lasai]_{AP} dago.
‘She is calm.’

Moreover, in order to account for the observed correlation between the presence or absence of the affix and the individual/stage-level distinction, Artiagoitia posits that the grammar of Basque contains an interpretative principle along the lines in (20).

- (20) a. Interpret DP predicates as individual-level predicates.
b. Interpret NP and AP predicates as stage-level predicates.

Artiagoitia’s proposal also faces two main problems. The first problem has to do with the interpretative principle in (20). Resorting to such a principle is an *ad hoc* solution, as it only applies for Basque. For example, English individual-level nominal predicates with the verb *to be* are DPs (cf. (21a)); whereas the corresponding Spanish nominal predicates are NPs (cf. 21b). On the other hand, in both English and Spanish individual-level adjectival predicates are not DPs, and always belong to the AP category (cf. (21c,d)).

- (21) a. John is [a doctor]_{DP}
b. Juan es [médico]_{NP}
c. John is [tall]_{AP}
d. Juan es [alto]_{AP}

⁸ Both the article $-a$ and demonstratives inflect for number in Basque, while nouns and adjectives do not (see section 1). Artiagoitia argues that the occurrence of the number markers $-Ø/-k$ in individual-level nominal predicates is just a side effect of the presence of the article in these kinds of predicates. Stage-level nominal predicates, in contrast, will not bear number markers because they lack articles.

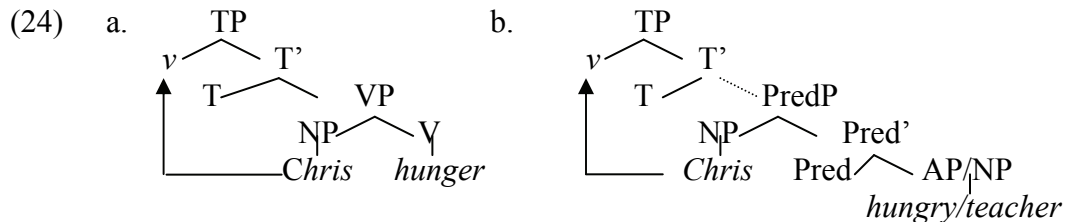
The second problem is even more serious. Artiagiotia’s analysis for the suffix *-a(k)* that occurs in Basque nominal predicates as an article forces him to assume, as mentioned above, that this non-referential determiner not only selects NPs, but also APs (cf. (19b)). However, as the Spanish and English examples in (22) illustrate, determiners universally select nouns, and never select adjectives.

- (22) a. *Juan es un (muy) inteligente.
 b. *John is a (very) intelligent.

Therefore, we must come to the conclusion that the suffix *-a(k)* that adjoins to individual-level nominal predicates in Basque can not be an article. In what follows an alternative analysis for this phenomenon will be offered in which we will specifically propose that this affix is a predication marker. But let us first see what predication markers are and how they project syntactically.

In his recent book on lexical categories, Baker (2003) defines verbs as inherent predicates that license a specifier (cf. (24a)) and suggests that predicate nouns and adjectives, unlike verbs, must be supported by a functional head, Pred, in order for the clause to have a subject (cf. (24b)).

- (23) a. Chris hungers.
 b. Chris is {hungry/a teacher}.



Prima-facie evidence for this idea, so Baker says, comes from the fact that overt Preds (taking the form of copular particles) do appear in predicate nouns and adjectives, but not verbs, in quite a few languages of the world. This happens, for instance, in Edo and Chichewa, as the sentences in (25) and (26) illustrate.

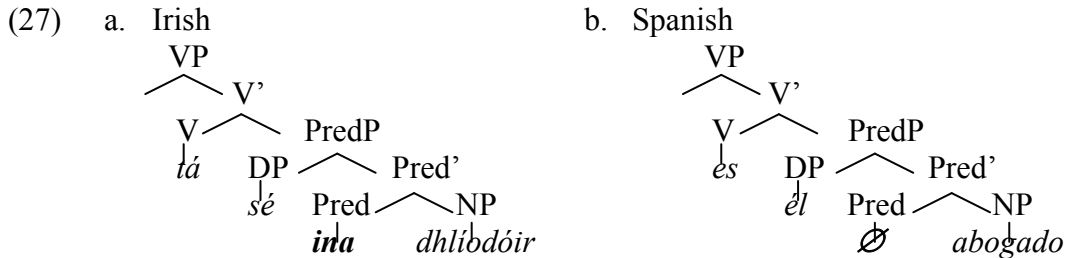
- (25) a. Èmèrí yé mòsèmòsè.
 Mary **PRED** beautiful_A
 ‘Mary is beautiful.’ (Edo)
 b. M-kango ndì m-lenje.
 3-lion **PRED** I-hunter
 ‘The lion is a hunter.’ (Chichewa)

These copular particles (or non-verbal copulas) are non-verbal predication markers that merely act as a link between the subject and the predicate in nominal sentences. Predication markers may be overt, as in Edo or Chichewa, or covert, as

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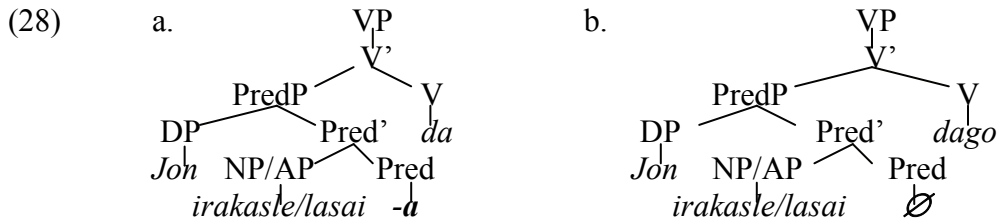
in Spanish or English (cf. (24b), (27b)), and they sometimes co-occur with a verbal copula, as in Irish (cf. (26), (27a)). This combination is to be expected, given the fact that predication markers and verbal copulas are distinct elements that head two different syntactic projections.

- (26) Tá sé **(ina)* dhlíodóir.
 be (PRES) he **PRED** lawyer
 ‘He is a lawyer.’ (Irish)



Two classes of non verbal copulas have been distinguished in the literature: particles and pronominal copulas.⁹ Pronominal copulas are so named because they historically derive from person pronouns or demonstratives and usually retain the person and number categories associated with them. Our proposal fits well with this characterization of pronominal copulas; we consider the suffix *-a(k)* that surfaces in Basque nominal predicates to be a pronominal copula, and this idea matches with the fact that this affix shares its phonetic form with the Basque article, the latter being a lexical item that originates in a distal demonstrative and retains the number morphology demonstratives have in Basque.

Our proposal on the nature of the affix that adjoins to nominal predicates in Basque is represented in (28).



In these representations, Baker’s insights on nominal predicates are adopted, so that nominal and adjectival predicates are dominated by a PredP also in Basque. As shown in (28), the head Pred takes the phonetic form *-a* in individual-level predicates in Basque (cf. (28a)) and is null (\emptyset) in stage-level nominal predicates (cf. (28b)).

⁹ Hengeveld (1992) and Stassen (1997) offer a detailed cross-linguistic description of non-verbal copulas.

Our analysis has some major advantages over previous proposals, so we believe. On the one hand, it straightforwardly accounts for the fact that Basque number morphology shows up in individual-level predicates and is absent in stage-level nominal predicates. And this is so just because only the former include a (quasi)pronominal lexical item that can serve as a supporter for number in a language such as Basque, in which nouns and adjectives are invariable categories. Therefore, this analysis helps us solve the main problem Zabala's (1993) proposal had to face. Recall that this linguist took the suffix $-a(k)$ to be simply a number marker, and, therefore, could not explain on any well-founded basis why this affix does not occur in stage-level nominal predicates.

On the other hand, and in contrast with Artiagoitia's (1997) proposal, we do not have to assume that the article selects adjectives in Basque. In our view, the suffix $-a(k)$ that goes with individual-level nominal predicates in Basque is not an article. As argued above, we consider it to be a predication marker that heads a PredP. If we are on the right track, the fact that the suffix $-a(k)$ combines with adjectives (in addition to nouns) in individual-level predicates is not an oddity of Basque grammar any longer; as we saw in our review of Baker's (2003) ideas, the head Pred selects, universally and by definition, predicative adjectives (and/or nouns).

Most meaningfully, our proposal can also cast light on the peculiar distribution of the affix $-a(k)$ in Basque nominal predicates. In languages with pronominal copulas, overt copulas usually alternate with covert copulas. Stassen (1997) points out that such an alternation is often associated with the notion of 'temporal stability.' This is the case of Hebrew, for instance, as argued by Greenberg (1994, 1998). In Hebrew, as the sentences in (29) illustrate, overt pronominal copulas only occur in general or permanent statements (cf. (29a,c)), whereas episodic or temporal statements must have covert copulas (cf. (29b,d)).

- (29) a. ha-kli ha-ze *(**hu**) patis.
 the-tool the-this **3MSG** hammer
 'This tool is a hammer.'
- b. Rina (***hi**) yafa ha boker.
 Rina **3FSG** pretty this morning
 'Rina is pretty this morning.'
- c. Dani **hu** xole (amush).
 Dani **3MSG** sick (terminal)
 'Dani is sick (permanently).'
- d. Dani xole.
 Dani sick
 'Dani is sick (temporarily).' (Hebrew)

If this generalization is correct, the distribution of the affix $-a(k)$ in Basque nominal predicates turns out to be just a particular case of a general tendency amongst languages with pronominal copulas to draw a distinction between stable

and transitory properties by means of the use of overt or covert markers of predication.

3. Conclusion

In this paper we have dealt with two unexpected uses of the Basque suffix $-a(k)$. We have first argued that the affix $-a(k)$ that obligatorily occurs in existentially quantified nominals is an indefinite determiner, i.e. an existential quantifier that plays the same role in Basque the partitive article *du* plays in the corresponding nominals in French. This idea keeps the Basque number paradigm to a minimum and fits with the fact that this affix is not only used as a specificity marker, but also appears in nominals with either a non-specific or a characterizing interpretation. Secondly, we have analyzed the suffix $-a(k)$ that adjoins to Basque individual-level nominal and adjectival predicates as a predication marker, or pronominal copula. This proposal is exempt from the problems previous proposals had to cope with, i.e. it can easily account for the fact that Basque number morphology does not show up in stage-level nominal predicates, and there is now no need to assume that the article can select adjectives in this language. It also has another major advantage: it helps explain why the Basque suffix $-a(k)$ combines with individual-level nominal predicates and is excluded in stage-level nominal predicates. As it is often the case across languages with pronominal copulas, in Basque these markers of predication are overt in individual-level predicates only.

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