

## Contact-induced shifts in the encoding of Motive in Basque

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Also termed as Reason, Motive is a type of volitional factor that makes the Agent act, i.e. *moves* them to act; control and intentionality are therefore its definitory elements (cf. translations of examples 2 and 5–7). Motive “constitutes an area of overlap of Cause with Purpose” [Luraghi 2010: 61]. Many Indo-European languages seem not to grammatically distinguish Cause and Motive, and neither does standard Basque. However, the distinction between these semantic roles is relevant, insofar as they can be differently encoded by Basque dialects.

Basque has a CAUSAL marker *-gatik* devoted to the expression of both Cause (ex. 1) and Motive (2). Moreover, all Basque dialects have also a BENEFACTIVE case which consistently conveys the Beneficiary (3, 4).

- (1) *Eta zuek nere izen-a-gatik [...] gorrota-tu-ak izan-go zerate.* [Guipuscoan, 1858]  
and 2PL POSS.1SG name-DET-CAUS hate-PFV-RES.PL be-FUT AUX.PRS.ABS2PL  
‘And you will be hated [...] because of my name.’ [Mark 13,13]
- (2) *Haur da ene odol-a [...], anhitz-en-gatik isur-ten den-a.* [Labourdin, 1571]  
this be.3SG POSS.1SG blood-DET many-GEN.PL-CAUS pour-IPFV AUX.PRS.3SG.SUBRD-DET  
‘This is my blood [...], which is poured out for many.’ [Mark 14,24]  
French source: *Ceci est mon sang [...], qui est expandue pour plusieurs.* (1562)
- (3) *Berze-ren-zat geldi-tzen da ene zuzenbidia.* [Low Navarrese, 1545]  
other-GEN-BEN remain-IPFV AUX.PRS.3SG POSS.1SG right.DET  
‘My right remains for someone else.’
- (4) *Zer-gatik ez egin hiru etxola: bat-a zu-re-tako, beste-a Moises-en-tako eta bestea Elias-en-tako?* [Souletin, 2004]  
what-CAUS NEG do.PFV three shelter one-DET 2SG-GEN-BEN other-DET Moses-GEN-BEN and other-DET Elijah-GEN-BEN  
‘Why not to put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?’ [Mark 9,5]

Going into dialectal variation, Western Basque texts show traces of an ancient marker *-rren* which expresses Motive (5); in nominal constructions, however, historical and modern western dialects systematically encode Motive by means of the causal marker *-gatik*. Furthermore, in Northern Basque — French side — the encoding of Motive has, during the last centuries, shifted from causal to benefactive markers (6, 7). As a result, in present-day northern dialects the causal marker *-gatik* often appears restricted to narrow causal meanings.

- (5) *Baia beste-rren as-tu sengia ni-gas-ko oneretxi-a.* [Biscayan, 1653]  
but other-MOT forget-PFV PST.ERG2SG.ABS3SG 1SG-COM-REL love-DET  
‘But for someone else’s sake you forgot your love for me.’
- (6) *Hau nere odol-a da [...], guzi-en-tzat ixuri-a.* [Labourdin, 2004]  
this POSS.1SG blood-DET be.PRS.3SG all- GEN.PL-BEN pour.PFV-RES  
‘This is my blood [...], which is poured out for all.’ (Mark 14,24)
- (7) *Eman-en du-t ene bizi-a zu-re-tako.* [Souletin, 1873]  
give-FUT AUX.ABS3SG-ERG1SG POSS.1SG life-DET 2SG-GEN-BEN  
‘I will lay down my life for you.’ (John 13,37)

I will argue that the changes in the encoding of Motive in Basque are due to the influence of neighboring Romance languages. As shown in Table 1, French conveys both Motive and Beneficiary by means of the same preposition, whereas Spanish and Gascon use different prepositions. The shift in the encoding of Motive in Northern Basque corresponds to the different semantic distributions found in Gascon and French — until the spread of French in

the region, Gascon was the main language in contact with Northern Basque. In other words, this shift can be explained as an instance of transfer of case function, in which Northern Basque replicates the French model.

Table 1. The encoding of Cause, Motive, and Beneficiary:  
Western Basque, Northern Basque and neighboring Romance languages

	Archaic WB	Spanish	Modern WB	Modern NB	French	Archaic NB	Gascon
Beneficiary	-(r)entzat	para	-(r)entzat	-(r)entzat	pour	-(r)entzat	tà
Motive	-rren /-gatic	por	-gatic			-gatic	-gatic
Cause	-gatic						



In the West, the shift of Motive to the causal case marker took place before the first texts were written, probably in the Late Middle Ages. In Labourdin dialect (North), the shift of Motive from the causal to the benefactive is first documented around the seventeenth century [Pikabea 1993], and our study reveals a spread to the Souletin dialect (North-East) during the next two centuries. This is coherent with the chronology of the diffusion of French in the Basque Provinces of the Kingdom of France, and also with its direction.

Based on philological work and internal comparison, this paper aims to illustrate the importance of language contact as one of the main factors that determined the evolution of Basque. In line with contact-induced changes in case systems [Krishnamurti 2003: 230–243; Johanson 2009; Belyaev 2010; Luraghi, De Smit & Igartua 2020], it also wants to stress the need of looking at the different Romance languages in historical contact with different Basque varieties.

### Glossing

BEN benefactive  
CAUS causal  
MOT motivative  
REL relational

### References

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