

MOOD AND MODALITY IN THE BASQUE AUXILIARY: SEMANTIC REDUNDANCY, DIVERGENT CHANGE, FOSSILIZATION

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Concerning tense, mood and modality, Basque verbs, or rather the auxiliaries that carry the inflectional markers in contemporary Basque, are inflected for four categories, arranged in four successive slots. Following Kabak & Plank 2006, the actual morphemes are called ‘exponents’ (e.g. *-eza*), representing a ‘term’ (subjunctive), which is a member of a ‘category’ (mood).

1. Possibility, with two or three terms: possibility and impossibility (these are in fact part of a larger paradigm, but the other terms are irrelevant for our purpose; since none of the exponents is obligatory, we might add ‘zero’);
2. ‘tense’, with three terms: present, past, and hypothetical.
3. mood: indicative and subjunctive (with varying exponents depending on valency);
4. ‘reality’: realis and potential (which we might as well call ‘irrealis’);

One first observation is the inadequacy of the category labels. What should we call a category that opposes ‘hypothetical’ to ‘past’ and ‘present’? If indicative and subjunctive are ‘moods’, why aren’t realis vs. ‘potential’ moods as well?

In theory, the terms of all four categories would combine in every possible way, and we obtain e.g. *ahal du* ‘he/she can’ (possibility present indicative realis) vs. *ezin lezake* ‘he/she couldn’t’ (impossibility hypothetical subjunctive potential). In practice however, the occurrence of combinations is determined by several factors:

1. the diachronic stage: classical vs. present-day Basque;
2. regional variation: southern vs. northern, eastern vs. western Basque;
3. semantic change of individual exponents or their combinations;
4. 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. I will show that the different constructions used to express possibility in Northern and Southern Basque are the result of hyperanalysis and hypoanalysis (terms adopted from Croft 2000: 121-130).

Croft, William 2000, *Explaining language change: An evolutionary approach*. London: Longman.

Kabak, B. & F. Plank 2006, ‘Where flexion encroaches on agglutination in Turkish and Korean’. Yong-Kun Ko et al. (eds.), *Whither Morphology in the New Millennium?*, Morphology Monograph Series 1; 123-152. Seoul, Korea: Pagijong Press.

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