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On the status of the "so-called" Basque partitive case: Evidence from Basque/Spanish code-switching

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On the status of the "so-called" Basque partitive case: Evidence from Basque/Spanish code-switching

The status of the Basque suffix *-(r)ik* has been the subject of much debate. Some claim that this suffix is a polar indefinite determiner (de Rjik, 1996; Adger & Quer, 2001) independent of case assignment, while others claim that it is an instantiation of partitive case (i.e., a subvariety of the absolutive case) (Belletti, 1988; Bok-Bennema, 2001). Lastly, Laka (1996) argues that *-(r)ik* is a hybrid between a polar indefinite determiner and an absolutive case marker. I claim that bilinguals' (N = 20) acceptability judgments on negative sentences in Spanish/Basque code-switching (CS) support Laka's hybrid characterization of this suffix. Two crucial findings support my claim: (i) the suffix's incompatibility with a Spanish determiner in CS contexts; and (ii) its inability to be licensed by a Spanish verb. Unlike Basque verbs, which assign absolutive case to its internal arguments, Spanish verbs can only assign accusative case, which blocks the insertion of this suffix in these CS contexts. This finding also contributes to the discussion on whether absolutive case assignment in Basque is inherent (theta-marked) or structural (head-assigned), favoring a structural analysis. This study operationalizes the bilingual advantage to inform linguistic theory. By understanding CS as the overt realization of bilingual co-activation, and participant judgments as indicators of their implicit metalinguistic awareness we can provide insights into specific feature interactions and mechanisms that may not be apparent in monolingual analyses.

Keywords: Basque, Spanish, code-switching, partitive, case