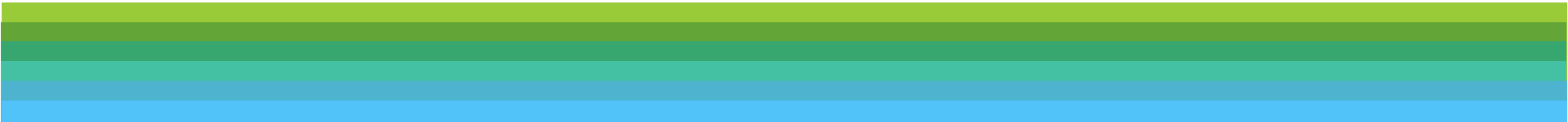# The syntactic structure of the Basque pronoun *bera*:
Evidence from code-switching

Bryan Koronkiewicz
The University of Alabama
bjkoronkiewicz@ua.edu

Daniel Vergara
Auburn University
dzv0013@auburn.edu

UIC BILINGUALISM FORUM

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Basque pronouns

Set of personal pronouns for first and second person (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)

- First person singular: *ni*
- First person plural: *gu*
- Second person singular (intimate): *hi*
- Second person singular (unmarked): *zu*
- Second person plural: *zuek*

Basque pronouns

Basque assumed to lack true third-person pronoun (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)

Demonstrative *hura* 'that (one)' used when pronoun would be required for thematic purposes

Western varieties also developed quasi-pronoun *bera*
  - Morpheme *ber-* 'self' and the article *-a* 'that' (de Rijk, 2008)

(1) a. **Nik** hanburgesak jaten ditut.
I.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.1SG
'I eat hamburgers.'

b. **Haiek** hanburgesak jaten dituzte.
Those.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.3PL
'They eat hamburgers.' (Literally: 'Those ones…')

c. **Berak** hanburgesak jaten zituen.
He.ERG hamburgers eat AUX.3SG
'He eats hamburgers.' (Literally: 'That self…')

Goal

Present preliminary Spanish-Basque code-switching (CS) data

Results suggest *bera* behaves similarly to other pronouns when switched finite Spanish verb (and dissimilarly from lexical Determiner Phrase (DP) switches)

- Suggests *bera* is in fact a true pronoun, not a quasi-pronoun
- Should categorize *bera* syntactically as a weak pronoun

Pronoun categorization

Typology by Cardinaletti and Starke (1999)
- Strong pronouns
- Weak pronouns
- Clitics
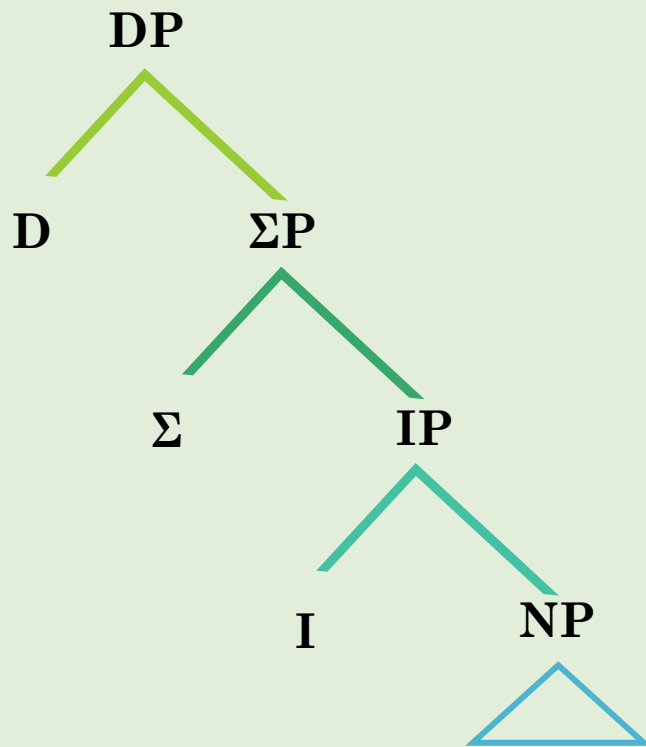
Unique syntactic structure for each type
- Based on distributional evidence from syntax and prosody
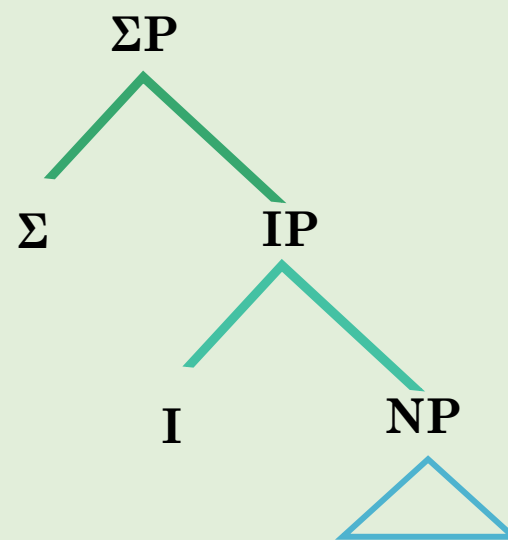
Key difference for today's talk:
- Strong pronouns project a maximal DP
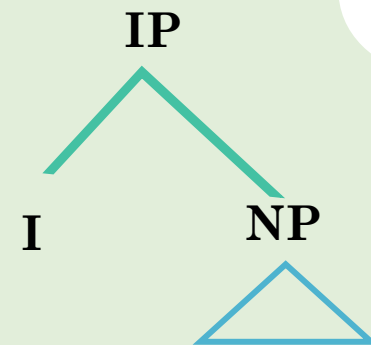- Weak pronouns do not

(2)

a. Strong pronoun   b. Weak pronoun   c. Clitic pronoun

Pronouns in code-switching

Restriction against pronouns switched with a finite verb known for quite some time (Gumperz, 1977; Lipski, 1978; Timm, 1975; among others)

Minimalist approach to CS (MacSwan, 1999, 2004; Vergara-González & López, 2017; among others)
- No third grammar

(Un)acceptability of switching a pronoun aligns with syntactic structure (González-Vilbazo & Koronkiewicz, 2016; Koronkiewicz, 2014)
- Weak pronouns lack full DP; unable to be switched
- Strong pronouns have full DP; acceptably switched like lexical DPs

(3)   a.   *   ***Él*** works too much.
          he
          'He works too much.'

      b.   *Juan y* ***él***   work too much.
          Juan   and he/him
          'Juan and he/him work too much.'

      c.   ***Ese hombre*** works too much.
          that   man
          'That guy works too much.'

Pronouns in code-switching

Predictions for Basque:

- Non-*bera* personal pronouns assumed to be weak pronouns (based on structural and distributional constraints)
  - Would predict unacceptability in CS
- Lexical DPs have distinct syntactic structure
  - Should be acceptable in CS

What is the syntactic nature of *bera*?

Using CS as a lens…

Option A: It behaves syntactically like a Basque first- and second-person pronouns (i.e., weak pronoun).

Option B: It is DP-like in nature (i.e., strong pronoun), as in literally *that self*.

Task

Written Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT)
- 7-point Likert scale (1 lowest)
- Completed online via Qualtrics
- Procedure: Training > CS Judgments > Background Questionnaire

Two versions of the task
- Each participant saw half the total stimuli set
- Randomly assigned
- Balanced for switch direction
  - For each lexicalization, half saw the Spanish-to-Basque version and the other half saw the Basque-to-Spanish version

Stimuli

Target stimuli ($n = 12$)
- Third-person singular Basque pronoun switches, i.e. *bera*
- First-person singular Basque pronoun switches, i.e. *ni*
- Third-person singular Basque lexical DP switches

Also collected, but set aside for today's talk ($n = 36$)
- Plural forms
- Equivalent Spanish pronoun and lexical DP switches

Distractor/filler stimuli ($n = 84$)

(4) a. * Pasa den astean **bera** *viajó* *a* *París.*
pass PST week he traveled.3SG to Paris
'Last week he traveled to Paris.'

b. * Pasa den hiabetean **ni** *viajé* *a Estocolmo.*
pass PST month I traveled.1SG to Stockholm
'Last month I traveled to Stockholm.'

c. Pasa den urtean **gizon hau** *viajó* *a Bruselas.*
pass PST year man that traveled.3SG to Brussels
'Last year that guy traveled to Brussels.'

Stimuli

Basque is an ergative-absolutive language
- Subject of an unaccusative verb or object of a transitive verb is in the absolutive case (unmarked)
- Subject of a transitive or unergative verb is in the ergative case (*-k*)

Stimuli set balanced for case
- Half unaccusative verbs
- Half transitive verbs

(5) a.   *   Duela minutu bat **bera** *ha   venido a la   reunión.*
                      ago   minute one he   AUX.3SG come   to the meeting
                      'A minute ago he came to the meeting.'

      b.   */?   Pasa den astean **berak** *conoció a   tu   abuela.*
                      pass   PST week   he.ERG   met.3SG DOM your grandmother
                      'Last week he met your grandmother.'
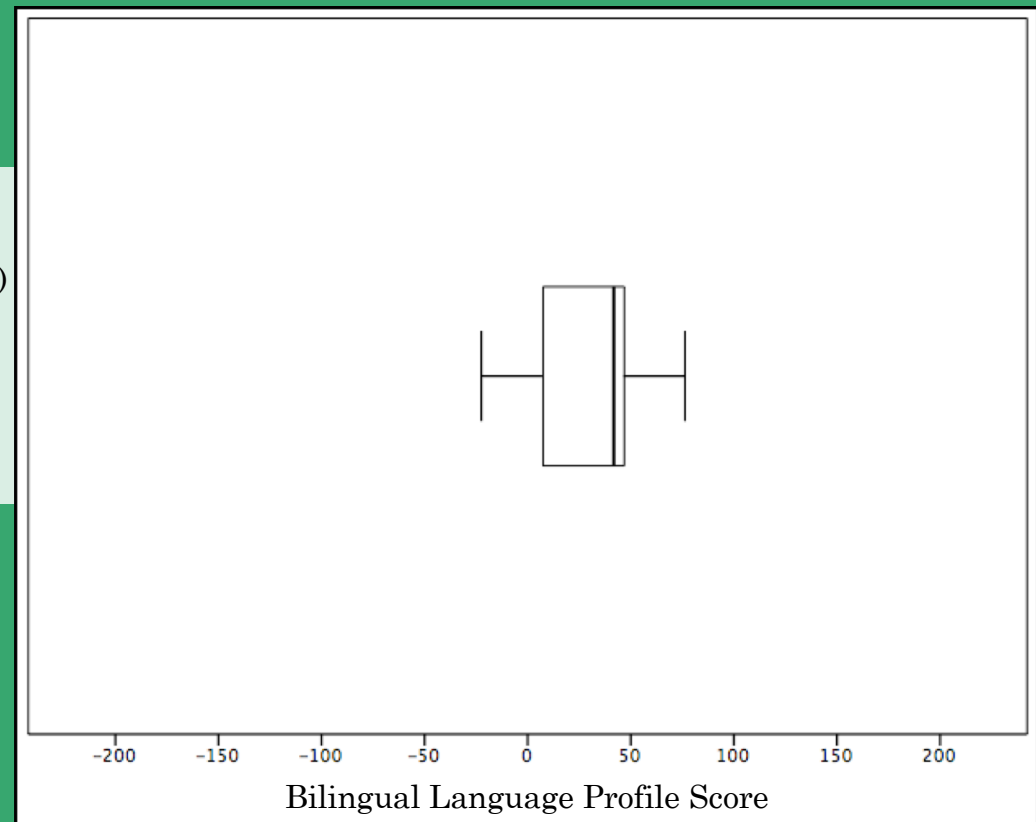
Participants

Basque-Spanish bilinguals ($N = 7$)
- Learned both from a young age (≤ 5 years)
- 25-30 years old ($M = 27.9$)
- Northwest region of the Basque Country, Spain
- Current residents of Spain ($n = 3$) and the US ($n = 4$)
  - All some years outside of Spain in either the US, UK or Germany ($M = 4.0$)
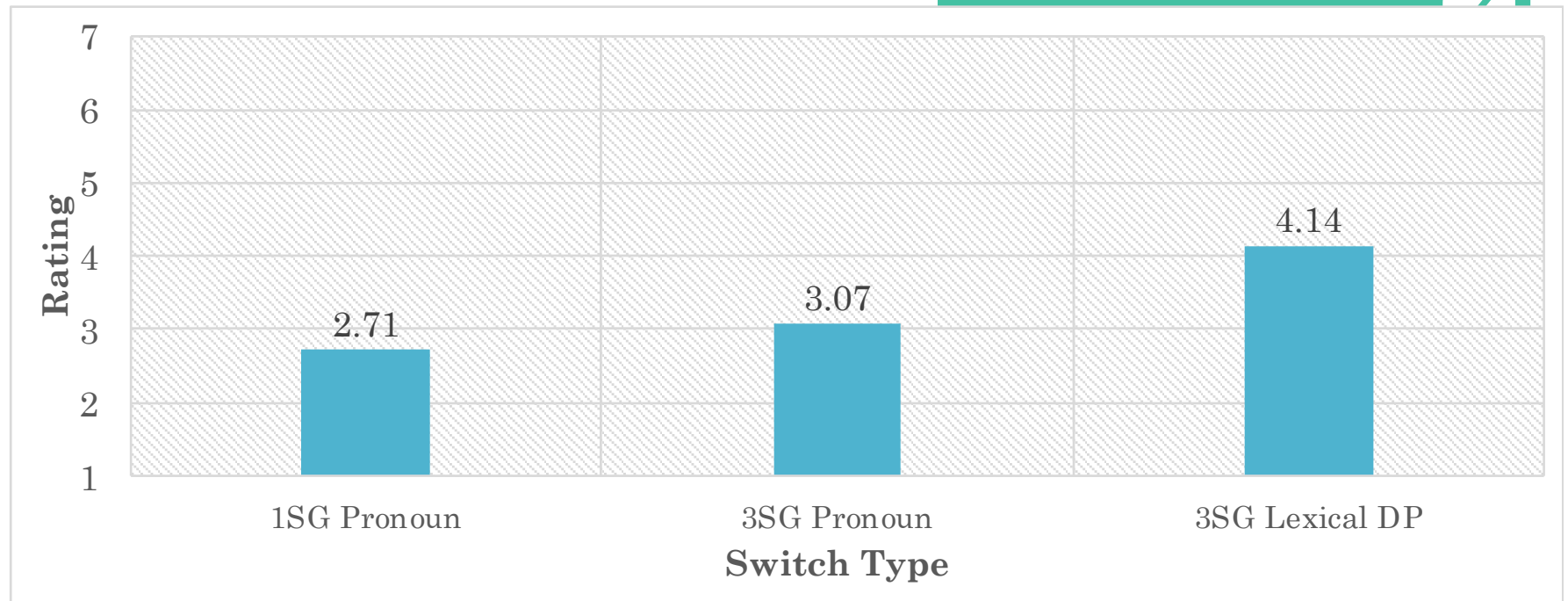
Data collection ongoing

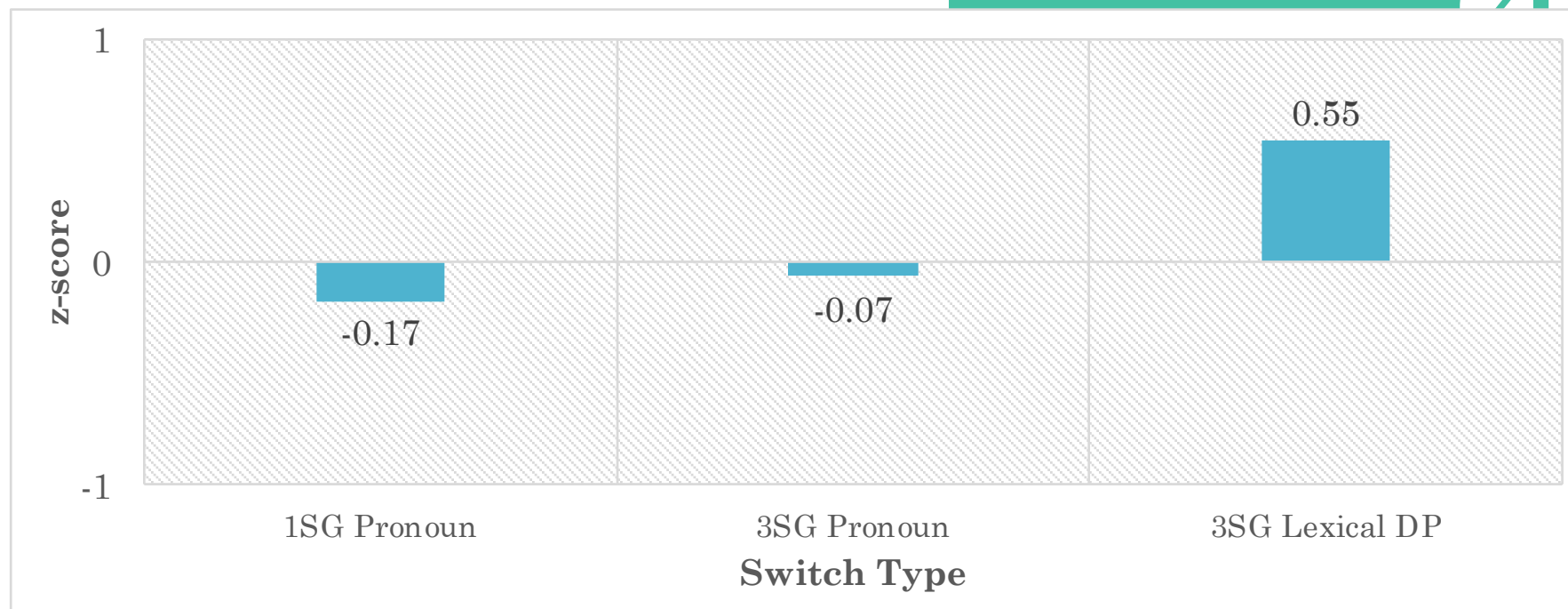Language dominance
(Birdsong, Gertken & Amengual, 2012)
- + Spanish dominant
- – Basque dominant
- Closer to zero: "balanced"

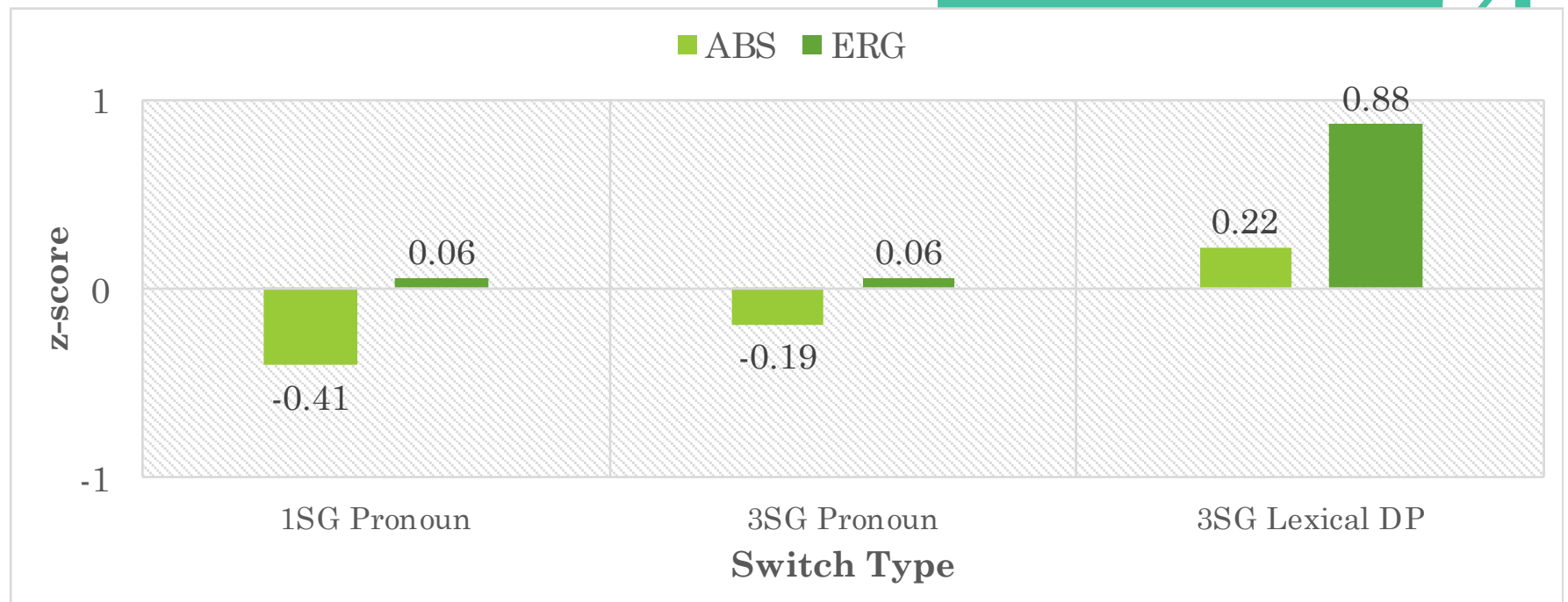Bilingual Language Profile Score

Results

Results

Results

Results

Legend: ABS, ERG

Switch Type	ABS	ERG
1SG Pronoun	-0.41	0.06
3SG Pronoun	-0.19	0.06
3SG Lexical DP	0.22	0.88

What is the syntactic nature of *bera*?

Using CS as a lens…

👍 **Option A:** It behaves syntactically like a Basque first- and second-person pronouns (i.e., weak pronoun).

Option B: It is DP-like in nature (i.e., strong pronoun), as in literally *that self*.

Discussion

Preliminary results suggest that *bera* is not as distinct as assumed
- Although it originated as *ber-* 'self' plus the article *-a* 'that', it seems the syntactic structure is no longer fully DP-like
- Mirrors pronouns in Spanish, such as *usted* 'you (formal)' which originated as the lexical DP *vuestra merced* 'your grace', but is now a weak pronoun that is unacceptably code-switched (Koronkiewicz, 2014)

Some variation with regard to individual participants
- All but two treated *bera* identically to the weak pronoun
- Unclear as of now why they differ
- Further data collection will help

Discussion

What's up with case?

- Case-marking a first-person pronoun seems to make it more acceptable, matching the behavior of *bera* and lexical DPs

- Debate on Basque ergative case (ERG):
  - Inherent → theta-marked, licensed by little-v (Legate, 2008; Woolford, 1997, 2006)
  - Structural → T assigns ERG to the External Argument (EA), V assigns ABS to the Internal Argument (IA) (Rezac, Albizu & Etxepare, 2014)

Discussion

(5b)   */?   Pasa den astean **berak** *conoció a   tu   abuela.*
                         pass PST week   he.ERG   met.3SG DOM your grandmother
                         'Last week he met your grandmother.'

- Data like (5b) suggest an **inherent** analysis of ergative case in Basque
  - Takes place before structural case at the vP phase
  - Theta-role correspondence
  - Spanish T should assign NOM to the EA

Discussion

Possible analysis for structure in (5b):
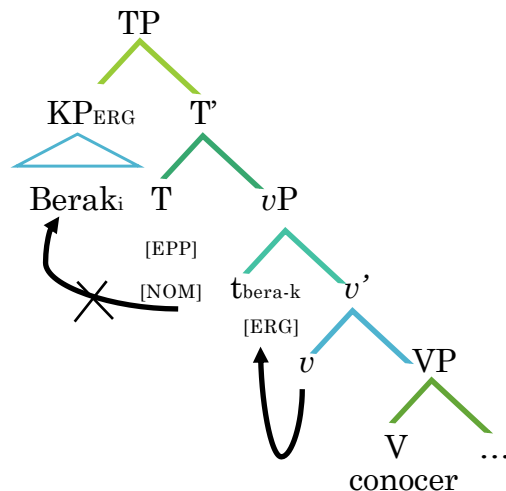
- Transitive v licenses inherent ERG on EA in its Spec

- The EPP feature on T attracts the Basque KP *berak* to its Spec

- T fails to assign NOM to berak because it already bears ERG

Conclusions

Preliminary CS data on pronouns in Basque/Spanish code switching suggests:

- Bera is not a quasi-pronoun (cf. Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2011)
  - Behaves syntactically like a weak pronoun

- Case-marking pronouns and lexical-DPs results in higher acceptability
  - Suggest an inherent treatment of ERG (cf. Rezac, Albizu & Etxepare, 2014)

- Further data collection is needed to clarify individual nuances

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eskerrik asko!