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A TRIANGULATION STUDY ON GENDER AGREEMENT IN SPANISH BY NATIVE BASQUE SPEAKERS

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Abstract

The Spanish spoken in the Basque Country contains some features due to its contact with Basque, one of those being the production of non-standard gender agreement (N-SGA) (Etxebarria Arostegui, 2007, 2008; Fernández Ulloa, 1997, 2006; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006), since, unlike in Spanish (RAE, 2016), there is no such category in Basque (Zubiri & Zubiri, 2012). This characteristic is typically attributed to elder Basque native speakers without a high level of education (Fernández Ulloa, 1997), but this affirmation is not based on empirical studies. To investigate this gap, this study triangulates data from three sources: conversations, a grammaticality test, and a metalinguistic questionnaire taking education level and participants' gender as independent variables. Twelve young adult (between 21 and 29 years) native speakers of Basque have been recruited. The results suggest that the scope of the population that produces N-SGA is broader than what scholars (Fernández Ulloa, 1997) believed: participants produced N-SGA in speech, despite their grammar knowledge being evident. Finally, these participants believe that N-SGA forms part of the variety of Spanish in the Basque Country and their own idiolect.

Keywords: Basque Country; Spanish; Basque; gender agreement; language contact.

UNA TRIANGULACIÓN SOBRE LA CONCORDANCIA DE GÉNERO EN EL ESPAÑOL DE HABLANTES NATIVOS EN VASCO

Resumen

El español en el País Vasco contiene características particulares debido a su contacto con el vasco, como la concordancia no estándar de género (Etxebarria Arostegui, 2007,

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2008; Fernández Ulloa, 1997, 2006; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006), ya que, a diferencia del español (RAE, 2016), dicha categoría no existe en el vasco (Zubiri y Zubiri, 2012). Esta característica es atribuida a hablantes nativos mayores del vasco sin un alto nivel de educación (Fernández Ulloa, 1997), pero no está basada en estudios empíricos. Por eso, se realizó una triangulación: conversaciones, un test de gramaticalidad, y un cuestionario metalingüístico, tomando el nivel de educación y el género de los participantes como variables independientes. Se reclutó a doce hablantes adultos jóvenes (entre 21 y 29 años) nativos del vasco. Los resultados indican que la población que produce concordancias no estándar de género es más amplia que lo que los académicos (Fernández Ulloa, 1997) creían: los participantes produjeron en el habla casos de concordancia no estándar, a pesar de ser evidente su conocimiento de la gramática. Finalmente, estos participantes identifican la concordancia no estándar como parte del español en el País Vasco y de su idiolecto.

Palabras clave: País Vasco; español; vasco; concordancia de género; contacto de lenguas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Spanish and Basque are two languages that have been in constant contact and have mutually influenced each other linguistically over time, and they continue to do so (Camus Bergarehe and Gómez Seibane, 2012b; Echenique Elizondo, 1997, 2004; Escobar, 2010; Etxebarria, 2004; Ezeizabarrena, 2009; Klee and Lynch, 2009; Montrul, 2013; Moreno-Fernández, 2020; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006). This means that the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country[2] contains some particular and distinct characteristics that have arisen through its contact with Basque (Echenique Elizondo, 1997; Etxebarria-Arostegui, 2007; Moreno-Fernández, 2020). An example that illustrates this phenomenon is the production of non-standard gender agreement (N-SGA) in Spanish by Basque speakers (Etxebarria Arostegui, 2007, 2008; Fernández Ulloa, 1997, 2006; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006). This is so because while Spanish realizes grammatical gender (RAE, 2016), Basque does not, meaning that the same form is used for masculine and feminine (Euskaltzaindia, 1991, 2002; Laka, 1996; Trask, 2003; Zubiri and Zubiri, 2012). Particularly, and despite the fact that the majority of works do not mention it (e.g., Etxebarria, 2004; Escobar,

2. Basque Country refers here to the three historical territories of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba, leaving apart other territories in which Basque is also spoken, such as Nafarroa and the French Basque Country.

2010; Klee and Lynch, 2009; Moreno-Fernández, 2020; Moreno Fernández and Otero Roth, 2016; Urrutia Cárdenas, 1995), this feature is typically attributed to elder *euskaldun zaharrak*[3] who do not have a high level of education (Fernández Ulloa, 1997), and is based on generalizations instead of empirical investigations. However, after some personal observations of the Spanish that is produced in the Basque Country, it could be the case that the particular feature that has been introduced here does not exclusively form part of the speech of the population mentioned by the previous publications but might rather be a general and prominent characteristic of the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country, regardless of age and education. In fact, N-SGA production is believed to be common in language contact situations (e.g., Spanish in contact with Palenquero, Lipski, 2015; Tepehuán, Torres Sánchez, 2021; Papiamentu, Valdés Kroff et al, 2019; and English, Liceras et al., 2008) where the L1 does not produce grammatical gender (Cruz Rico et al., 2021; Husein, 2021), and in this case, in places where Spanish is the minority language (e.g., Anderson, 1999). This does not mean that those who may produce N-SGA have language learning difficulties (Anderson, 1999), or that they do not know about standard gender agreement (GA) rules in Spanish, but simply that they would not use it in speech. These are the reasons why it is necessary to conduct a study that analyzes GA in this variety of Spanish. The present paper proposes a triangulation study to determine whether there are any differences between (i) what young adult native speakers of Basque who have received formal education on Spanish grammar actually do in speech and (ii) what they think they would say in an imaginary conversation regarding GA, together with (iii) if they can identify this linguistic feature as part of the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country.

2. LANGUAGE CONTACT

The phenomenon being analyzed here is a case of language contact. Within this framework, the production of N-SGA in Spanish by Basque speakers could be considered a «linguistic interference», a term originally introduced by Sandfeld (1938) and later categorized by Weinreich (1966, p. 1) as «instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a

3. This is the typical terminology used to refer to Basque native speakers, while *euskaldun berriak* refers to the people whose first language is not Basque (Fernández Ulloa, 1997, 2006; Klee and Lynch, 2009; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006). *Euskaldun* means speaker of Basque (Etxebarria, 2004; Laka, 1996), *zaharra* means 'old', and *berria* 'new'.

result of their familiarity with more than one language». The linguistic interference between two languages is extended to every part of a language, among which syntax, morphology, phonology, and vocabulary are included (Thomason, 2001; Weinreich, 1966). Following the introduction of the original term, other nouns have been introduced to replace the ungrammatical connotation that the term interference contains (López Morales, 1993), one of them being «transference» (Clyne, 1967). As Gutiérrez and Silva Corvalán (1993) explain, one of the possible types of transferences is defined as «negative transference», meaning that the absence of a grammatical phenomenon in a language is transferred to the other language. An example that illustrates this case, and following Fernández Ulloa (2006), is the exact phenomenon being investigated in this paper, since, as it was introduced above, Basque does not produce grammatical gender as Spanish does. Transference is understood sometimes (e.g. Silva-Corvalán, 1994) as something common in bilinguals who use two linguistic systems. Another difference between «linguistic interference» and «transference» is that the first implies that language variation is produced due to a language's contact with another one, while the latter implies the consumption of a linguistic change or at least a linguistic change in progress (Ramírez Cruz, 2009). Moreover, there is even a third term: «linguistic convergence», which leaves behind the notion of ungrammaticality, and it can be understood as a «calque» or «pattern transfer» (Matras, 2009), or the merging of structures between languages (Moreno-Fernández, 2020). One of the features of convergence is the so-called «perceived similarity», according to which «a convergence process based on perceived similarity can be compatible with copying from A to B» (Palacios and Pfänder, 2014, p. 222). However, some features can be lost through language contact, e.g., gender in some dialects of Yiddish (Matras, 2009), which might be similar to what is being investigated here in the Spanish produced in the Basque Country.

3. GENDER AGREEMENT IN THE SPANISH IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The variety of Spanish spoken in the Basque Country has been widely investigated (e.g. Calleja Azpiazu, 2004; Camus Bergareche, 2011; Camus Bergareche and Gómez Seibane, 2010, 2012a; Echaide, 1968; Elordieta, 2003; Gómez Seibane, 2012; Landa, 1993; Landa and Franco, 1996; Oñederra, 2002, 2004; Paasch-Kaiser, 2015) but this in no way means that the description of this dialect is complete. To give an example, a characteristic that needs further investigation is the production of

N-SGA in this dialect (Badiola and Sande, 2018), as in *la tierra era más tranquilo*, while the expected standard agreement would be *tranquila*; 'the earth [fem.] was calmer [fem.]' (Fernández Ulloa, 1997, p. 202). This characteristic has been previously mentioned (e.g., Etxebarria Arostegui, 2007, 2008; Fernández Ulloa, 1997, 2006; Urrutia Cárdenas, 2006) but not many studies have been conducted on this region from a sociolinguistic point of view. The only experimental studies that have analyzed this phenomenon in the contact between Basque and Spanish are Parafita Couto et al. (2015) and Badiola and Sande (2018), in this case, in mixed (Basque and Spanish) DPs and not only in the Spanish that is produced in the Basque Country. Apart from these works, some other investigators have studied it from the perspective of language acquisition (e.g., Barreña, 1997; Larrañaga and Guijarro-Fuentes, 2012) or agreement in L3 English by Basque-Spanish bilinguals (e.g., Imaz Agirre and García Mayo, 2013). However, to date, no GA production study (e.g., spontaneous speech) has been carried in the variety of Spanish in the Basque Country, thus, we still do not know if the general population speaking this variety produces N-SGA since, according to Fernández Ulloa (1997), it is only a characteristic of elder *euskaldun zaharrak* without a high level of education (not based on an empirical study). This, in any case, is not a recent phenomenon as Etxague Burgos (2012) and Gómez Seibane (2008) also mentioned this feature as one of the characteristics that defined the written Spanish produced particularly in the province of Bizkaia during the 15th and 16th centuries, despite making it clear that it is not exclusive to this province since some examples were found in the Spanish produced in Nafarroa in the 18th century. However, we do not have any information on this regard in the current written Spanish in the Basque Country: do native Basque speakers produce N-SGA when writing in Spanish?

The production of N-SGA might be caused by the fact that while Spanish produces grammatical gender (RAE, 2016), Basque does not[4] (Euskaltzaindia, 1991, 2002; Laka, 1996; Trask, 2003; Zubiri and Zubiri, 2012), except for the familiar second person singular pronoun *hi*.[5] Regarding Spanish, traditionally two genders are described: masculine and feminine. The majority of nouns in Spanish have phonological characteristics that indicate their gender: the majority

4. Basque does not officially contain a grammatical gender, but some publications mention that some of the oral modern varieties of Basque make gender distinctions in some words (Euskaltzaindia, 1991, 2002; Laka, 1996; Trask, 2003; Zubiri and Zubiri, 2012). Euskaltzaindia (2002) and Laka (1996) characterize it as a marginal phenomenon.

5. This is the only element in Basque that distinguishes agreement morphemes depending on if the addressee is male or female (Alberdi, 1995; Euskaltzaindia, 1991, 2002; Hualde, 2003; Laka, 1996).

(99,9%) of nouns ending in *-o* are masculine, while the majority (96,3%) ending in *-a* are feminine (Goebel-Mahrle and Shin, 2020; Roca, 1989; Teschner and Russell, 1984). These are nouns with canonical endings but there are also nouns with non-canonical endings: nouns that do not end with their expected gender vowel or those that end with consonants (Cruz Rico, 2021; Goebel-Mahrle and Shin, 2020; Roca, 1989). Nevertheless, it is also notable that it is common to have «difficulties» with the acquisition of gender on the L2 (Anderson, 1999; Cruz Rico et al, 2021; Husein, 2021), regardless of whether the L1 produces grammatical gender or not (Bruhn de Garavito and White, 2002).

It has been noted that Fernández Ulloa (1997) attributes this N-SGA production to elder *euskaldun zaharrak* with a low education level despite this being a generalization that has not been confirmed with an empirical study. Thus, this confirms the need for further investigation. After some personal observations for being part of the population who speaks this variety of Spanish, it could be the case that this phenomenon is present among many speakers of Spanish in the Basque Country. This makes it particularly interesting to investigate this phenomenon among young adult native speakers of Basque who do not usually speak Spanish in their daily lives but have been educated on Spanish grammar during primary and secondary school. This is the perfect population to determine if they have the knowledge about GA rules in Spanish and whether they produce it in speech or not.

According to what has been described above and to analyze the production of GA in this variety of Spanish, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. To what extent do Basque native speakers who use Spanish infrequently and are formally educated produce N-SGA in speech production?
2. To what extent does the same group produce N-SGA when asked what they would say in a conversation (multiple-choice test)?
3. Does the population in question believe that the production of N-SGA is central to the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country?

Based on previous literature, the following hypotheses are considered:

1. Speakers will produce a considerable number of instances of N-SGA in Spanish compared to the instances that follow standard Spanish GA rules.

2. Participants will follow standard GA rules since they are not in a spontaneous conversation, and they are given time to think their answer.
3. They will not think that N-SGA is central to the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country. Instead, accent or intonation and the use of Basque words will be the principal characteristics that they will mention (Ciriza, 2009).

The methodology that has been employed in this paper will be described below. Then, the results will be analyzed to provide answers for the research questions. This will lead to the final part of the paper in which the discussion will be developed together with the conclusions and main implications of the investigation.

4. METHODOLOGY

A total of 12 participants (six females and six males) were recruited in late 2019 and early 2020 following the judgment sampling method (Hoffman, 2014; Schilling, 2013; Silva-Corvalán and Enrique-Arias, 2017). These are young adult (age range: 21-29; age median: 24.91) native speakers of Basque who have learned Spanish in the elementary and high school in Model D.[6] With the aim of having participants who are native speakers of Basque and do not usually use Spanish in their daily lives (self-reported percentage of use of Basque and Spanish included in Table 1), these participants were recruited in Ondarroa (Bizkaia), a town where 98.8% of the young population mainly uses Basque (Albizu Lizaso and Arana Arexolaleiba, 2018). Regarding participants' level of education, six of them had completed (or were finishing) an undergraduate or a professional training degree (lower education level for analysis), the other six had a Master's or a PhD (higher education level). The information related to the linguistic background of participants was gathered through a language background questionnaire that was specifically prepared for the present study and that they completed at the end of their participation.

6. Since 1982 Basque and Spanish are obligatory subjects in the Basque Country and its public education is divided into three bilingual systems: A, B and D (there is no letter C in Basque). In Model A, students learn all the subjects in Spanish and Basque is taught as a subject with two to four hours per week. In Model B, 50% of the subjects are taught in Basque and the other 50% of the subjects are taught in Spanish. Finally, in Model D, Basque is the language of instruction and Spanish is taught as a subject with two to four hours of instruction per week (Cenoz and Perales, 2007; Cid Abasolo, 2009; Etxebarria-Arostegui, 2007; Hezkuntza Saila, 2020).

Participants	Most-used language	Family language		Friends language		Work/university language	
		Basque	Spanish	Basque	Spanish	Basque	Spanish
a_FH[7]	Basque	100%	-	100%	-	40%	60%
b_FL	Basque	90%	10%	90%	10%	70%	30%
c_FH	Basque	100%	-	80%	20%	100%	-
d_FH	Basque	100%	-	100%	-	75%	25%
e_FL	Basque	100%	-	100%	-	90%	10%
f_FL	Basque	80%	20%	100%	-	70%	30%
g_ML	Basque	100%	-	90%	10%	90%	10%
h_MH	Basque	100%	-	100%	-	85%	15%
i_ML	Basque	95%	5%	100%	-	50%	50%
j_ML	Basque	80%	20%	100%	-	90%	10%
k_MH	Basque	100%	-	100%	-	100%	-
l_MH	Basque	100%	-	95%	5%	90%	10%

Table 1. Self-reported percentage of use of Basque and Spanish

In order to be able to answer the research questions introduced above, a quasi-experimental triangulation study has been designed. Triangulation is understood here as the use of three different methods so as to develop an ample perspective on GA (not gender assignment) in the variety of Spanish produced in the Basque Country and thus obtain a more robust understanding of the analyzed linguistic phenomenon (Jaffe, 2014). Consequently, the data gathered for this study is threefold: spontaneous conversations in pairs, a multiple-choice test, and a metalinguistic questionnaire. The order in which participants completed each part was such that they were not aware of the linguistic aspect being studied: first the conversation, then the multiple-choice test and, finally, the questionnaire.

The spontaneous paired conversations with no researcher present (Schilling, 2013) consisted of a completely free 45-minute conversations between two participants of the same sex that were close friends or close family members so as to collect the most natural data possible. Some scholars (e.g., Hoffman, 2014; Schilling, 2013;

7. In order to identify each of the participants in this study, the low letter makes reference to the random letter that they were assigned to anonymize their information, the second letter makes reference to their self-reported gender (F = feminine, M = masculine), and the second letter is their level of education (H = higher, L = lower).

Silva-Corvalán and Enrique-Arias, 2017) comment on the ideal duration of the recording being between an hour and a half to two hours but it is believed that GA is a frequent phenomenon, thus, 45 minutes should be sufficient, also considering that after the first 10 minutes «the level of engagement should be high and the equipment will be forgotten or peripheral» (Hoffman, 2014: 35). With the aim of avoiding the Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972), the investigator was not present in the conversations (only two participants at a time) and they were recorded with a cellphone with the hope that at some point participants would not feel its presence. The coding of GA was operationalized through accuracy measurements –accurate understood here as instances of standard agreement rules– of every instance of GA that arose in each conversation. For precision, each recording was listened to three times with the coding process repeated. The total number of cases that follow standard Spanish rules was counted. Then, ratios of GA instances were calculated following the suggestion by Guy (2014) and similar to previous studies (e.g., Anderson, 1999). This is due to the conversations not having any prerequisites or guidelines: the amount of GA instances that each speaker produced was variable (similar to Anderson, 1999).

Regarding the multiple-choice test, it was composed of 96 sentences with a blank space that participants had to fill in by choosing one of the two given options: there was a correct possibility and an incorrect one. From the 96 sentences of the test, only 24 are of interest to the current research (included in Appendix A) since the other 72 were distractors (related to features that form part of the analyzed variety of Spanish: the use of conditional where the subjunctive would be expected, absence of article before a noun, and *leísmo*) so that participants would not identify the feature being investigated. In these 24 sentences, three variables were controlled: nouns such as *el nuevo* 'the new', pronouns at the end of verbs such as in *recogerlo* 'gather it', and adjectives such as *complicado* 'complicated'. Each of these three variables had four sentences for each gender: two sentences in which the antecedent (always inanimate nouns) ended in the canonical vowel for its gender –for the feminine, *-a*, and *-o* for the masculine– and two sentences in which the antecedent had a non-canonical ending since these words are frequent in Spanish as well (Anderson, 1999). It is believed that canonical nouns give sufficient clues to determine gender due to their phonological characteristics, different from the non-canonical nouns that do not end with their expected vowel (Cruz Rico et al., 2021). The antecedents with which participants had to make the agreement are nouns that are among the 500 most frequent words in Spanish according to the

list of frequencies in the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA, 2008) by the RAE. For consistency purposes, all the antecedents were accompanied by a determiner and words such as *agua* 'water' and *alma* 'soul' were excluded; despite being high frequency words according to the aforementioned dictionary, they are feminine nouns that in their singular form are accompanied by a masculine determiner for starting with an unstressed /a/ (Clegg, 2011). Also, for consistency, the antecedent and the blank space where the participants had to make their choice were distanced by a minimum of three and a maximum of five words (it is believed that the distance between nouns and adjectives increases the production of N-SGA, e.g., Goebel-Mahrle and Shin, 2020; Lipski, 2015; Ramírez Cruz, 2009). The results were coded by accuracy measurements, calculating the total number of instances that follow standard Spanish rules on GA.

In the metalinguistic interview, participants answered both general questions about the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country (e.g., characteristics that form part of it, what they think about them) as well as specific questions about GA (e.g., they were asked if they believed that N-SGA is a characteristic of the variety of Spanish spoken in the Basque Country and whether they think they produce it or not). This is the qualitative part of the paper from which general trends have been extracted.

In order to gauge GA –the dependent variable– two categorical independent variables have been considered: gender (female or male) and highest education level (undergraduate/professional training or Master/PhD)[8]. Participants' gender has been included in previous studies to characterize language varieties (e.g., Falcón Ccenta et al., 2012). Level of education has also been mentioned (e.g., Palacios, 2006) as a key factor for N-SGA production in different language contact situations. According to the standards by Silva-Corvalán and Enrique-Arias (2017), at least five participants are necessary per external variable, and this has been respected for the two social independent variables in this research. Standard multiple linear regressions with random effects have been conducted to analyze the data from the conversation and the multiple-choice test by including both social and linguistic predictor. For this, the package lme4 has been employed (Bates and Maechler, 2010). Finally, no test has been used for the third research question since it will be analyzed qualitatively.

8. In the results section, those who have an undergraduate or a professional training will be referred to as «lower education», and those with a Master or a PhD will be grouped under «higher education».

5. RESULTS

The number of N-SGA production rates per participant in both spontaneous conversations as well as the multiple-choice test are presented in Table 2. These results are illustrated by the plots in Figure 1.

Participants	Conversation		Multiple-Choice Test	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
a_FH	3/18	5,4%	3/24	12,5%
b_FL	0/4	0%	3/24	12,5%
c_FH	4/12	33,33%	4/24	16,66%
d_FH	1/5	20%	0/24	0%
e_FL	4/13	30,76%	1/24	4,16%
f_FL	0/7	0%	12/24	50%
g_ML	1/6	16,66%	11/24	45,83%
h_MH	1/14	7,14%	4/24	16,66%
i_ML	2/9	22,22%	10/24	41,66%
j_ML	2/10	20%	5/24	20,83%
k_MH	3/7	42,85%	4/24	16,66%
l_MH	3/12	25%	1/24	4,16%

Table 2. N-SGA production by speaker and experimental condition

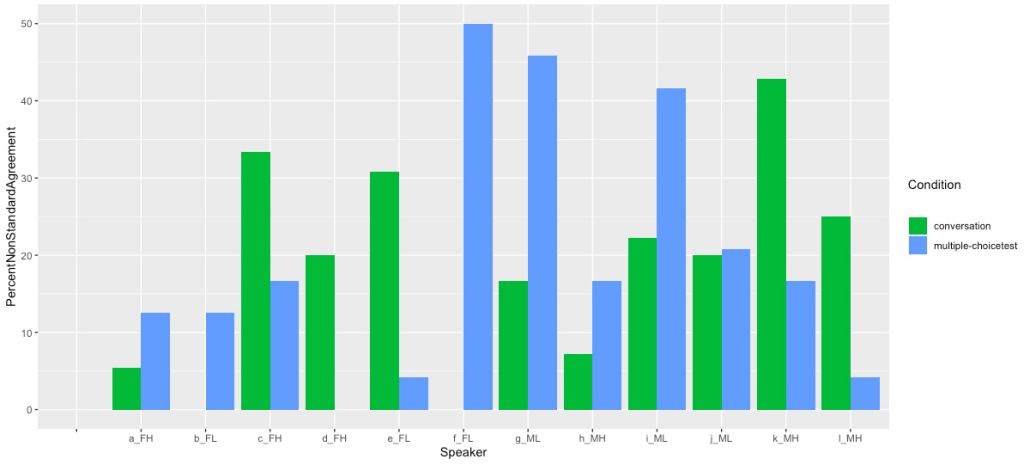

Figure 1. N-SGA production by speaker and experimental condition

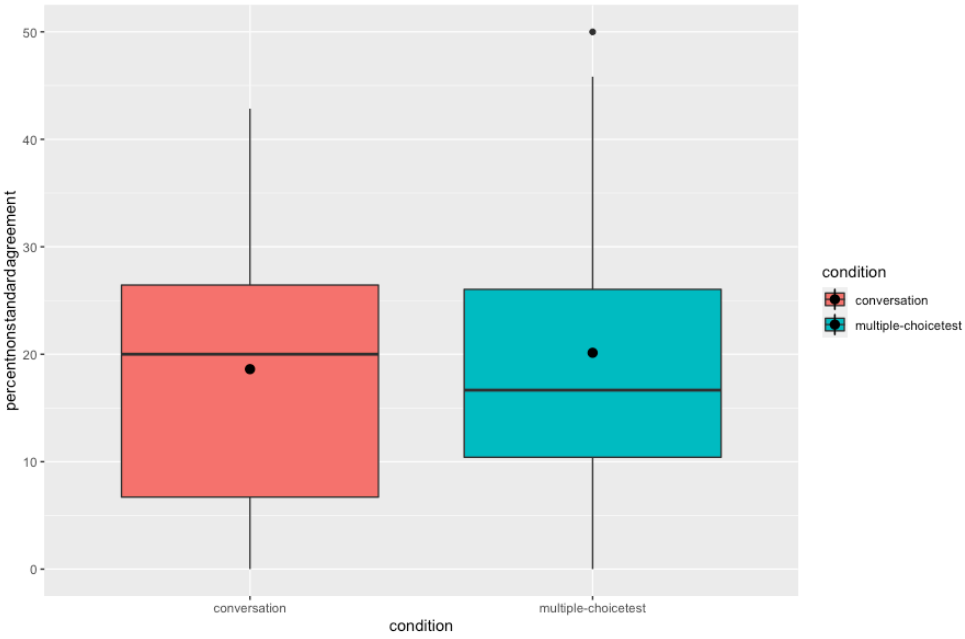

Figure 2. N-SGA Production by Experimental Condition

In Figure 2, the overall mean scores of N-SGA productions in each of the two conditions are presented. Specifically, there are more instances of N-SGA in Spanish in this study in the data gathered through the multiple-choice test (mean = 20.13, SD = 16.75, *N* = 12), when compared to the rates obtained in the results gathered through the conversations that participants maintained in pairs among them (mean = 18.61, SD = 13.52, *N* = 12). This might be due to the fact that the number of GA instances that each participant produced in the conversation was variable since the conversations were free and, thus, did not follow any specific guideline as in the multiple-choice test.

The results of the first research question show that, overall, participants produced many more instances in which they followed the standard rules for GA in Spanish in their speech, regardless of participants' gender and their level of education. This can be visualized in Figure 3 below since the scores of the conversations make reference to the ratios of those cases in which the standard GA rules were followed. This figure also indicates that, interestingly, those with a higher level of education had more instances of N-SGA compared to those participants with a lower level of education. With regards to participants' gender, Figure 3

demonstrates that female participants in the lower education group produced more cases of GA following the standard Spanish rules compared to male participants of both levels of education.

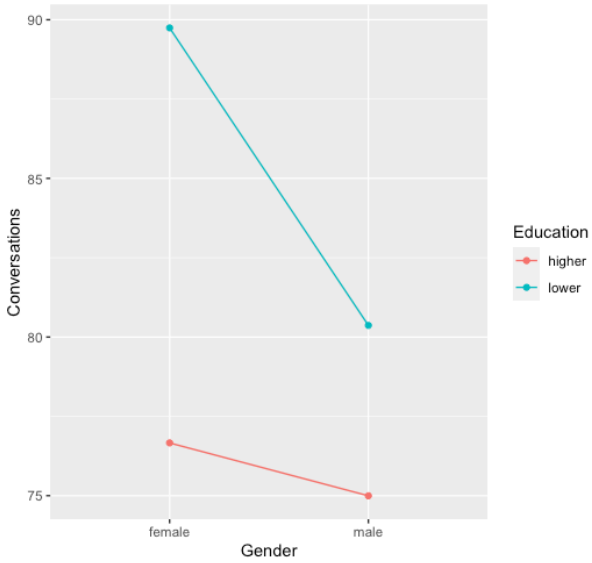

Figure 3. Participants' gender and education interaction on standard agreement scores in conversations

Regarding the results of the second research question, Figure 4 visualizes that in the test too, the number of instances –from a total of 24 points– in which participants chose the option that followed the standard Spanish rules for GA are much higher than the N-SGA cases. The same figure also indicates that overall, those with a higher education level chose more instances of what standard grammar rules expect for gender, in front of those with a lower level of education, regardless of participants' gender. Indeed, the females with a higher level of education are the ones with the highest scores. However, females with a lower education are quite close to the males with a higher education. Finally, the males who belong to the lower education level have the lowest number of cases of standard GA and they appear to be quite distanced from the rest of the participants. Nevertheless, the multiple linear regression will delimit if these differences and variables are significant.

The results of the multiple linear regression with random effects that has been conducted including three independent variables (participants' gender, their level of education, and type of experiment) reveal in Table 3 that none of the introduced

predictors has been found to be significant (participants' gender $p = 0.216$; education $p = 0.395$; type of experiment $p = 807$). Considering the adjusted $R^2 = 0.024$, this model explains only 2.4% of the variation, which is very low. The result of this model is $F_{(3,20)} = 0.815$, $p = 0.5$, which together with the t-values (participants' gender $t = 1.276$; education $t = -0.869$; type of experiment $t = 0.247$), indicate that the null hypothesis is accepted. Consequently, the multiple linear regression with random effects shows that variances are equal in this case.

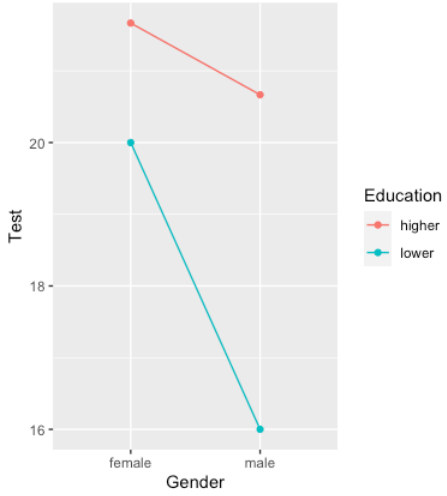

Figure 4. Participants' gender and education interaction on standard agreement scores in tests

	Estimate	Std. error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	22.714	10.670	2.129	0.0459
Participants' Gender	7.863	6.16	1.276	0.2164
Education	-5.355	6.16	-0.869	0.395
Experiment Type	1.522	6.16	0.247	0.807

Table 3. N-SGA by participants' gender, level of education and type of experiment

Since the multiple linear regression conducted in this study has shown a low effect of participants' gender, their highest level of education, and type of experiment conducted when explaining the rates of N-SGA, purely linguistic factors need to be considered now. Starting with the instances of N-SGA found in the pair

conversations, all cases of N-SGA are long distance agreement cases, as in (1)[9], (2), (3), and (4), and no N-SGA has been found within the NP as in *el pared* 'the wall [masc.]' when the standard agreement would be *la pared* 'the wall [fem.]'.

(1) *Es super pequeño* (referring to *la casa*) [*pequeña*]
be.PRS.3SG very small-M (referring to *the house*-F) [small-F]
'It's very small'.

(2) *La mayoría que no sabemos hacerlo* (referring to *mascarilla*) [*hacerla*]
the majority that not know.PRS.1PL do-it-M (referring to *mask*-F) [do-it-F]
'The majority of us who don't know to make it'.

(3) *Es negro* (referring to *la camiseta*) [*negra*]
be.PRS.3SG black-M (referring to the *T-shirt*-F) [black-F]
'It's black'.

(4) *Está todo el día pegado a la televisión* (referring to *la madre*) [*pegada*]
be.PRS.3SG all the day stuck-M to the television (referring to the mother-F) [pegada-F]
'She's watching TV the whole day'.

In addition, the antecedent which the elements of the sentence had to agree with were all inanimate, as in (1), (2), (3), (5), and (6), except for two cases, as shown in (4).

(5) Un montón de caseríos estaban quedándose viejas [viejos]
a lot of farms-M be.IMP.3PL stay. CONT.REFL old-F [old-M]
'A lot of farms were becoming old'.

(6) *La cara te despertabas lleno de picaduras* [*llena*]
the face-F you wake-up.IMP.2SG full-M of bites [full-F]
'You woke up with the face full of bites'.

The majority of the N-SGA instances found in the conversations are singular in terms of number as in (1), (2), (3), (4), and (6), except for a few of them (7 out of 24), as in (5). Finally, these results would suggest that young adult native speakers of Basque follow the masculine default strategy when producing GA in Spanish as in the majority of cases (19 out of 24), they produced masculine GA when the

9. For space limitations, one example has been taken from each conversation. The word that represents the N-SGA case is underlined. The option that follows Spanish rules is presented between brackets.

standard rules indicated feminine agreement. This was the case even if the antecedent's ending was canonical (*-a* for feminine words, RAE, 2016): 14 out of 19 cases as in (1), (2), (3), and (6).

	Estimate	Std. error	*t*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	0.833	0.076	10.855	<2e-16
Antecedentfem_noncan	-0.208	0.108	-1.919	0.056
Antecedentmasc_can	0.166	0.108	1.535	0.125
Antecedentmasc_noncan	0.166	0.108	1.535	0.125
Agreeing_elementnoun	-0.125	0.108	-1.151	0.250
Agreeing_elementpro	0.083	0.108	0.768	0.443
Antecedentfem_noncan * agreeing_elementnoun	0.291	0.153	1.900	0.058
Antecedentmasc_can * agreeing_elementnoun	-0.083	0.153	-0.543	0.587
Antecedentmasc_noncan * agreein_elementnoun	-0.166	0.153	-1.085	0.278
Antecedentfem_noncan * agreeing_elementpro	0.041	0.153	0.271	0.786
Antecedentmasc_can * agreeing_elementpro	-0.125	0.153	-0.814	0.416
Antecedentmasc_noncan * agreeing_elementpro	-0.375	0.153	-2.442	0.015

Table 4. Interaction between gender and canonicity of the antecedent and agreeing element upon N-SGA in the multiple-choice test

Then, by analyzing the linguistic predictors (gender and canonicity of the antecedent and type of agreeing element [noun, pronoun, or adjective]) in the N-SGA instances found in the multiple-choice test, a multiple linear regression has been conducted to analyze the impact of their interaction in the dependent variable. The results in Table 4 suggest that there is a significant interaction only between the antecedent elements that are masculine and that end with their non-canonical vowel [every ending except *-o*, RAE, 2016] (Masculine non-canonical antecedents agreeing with pronouns $p = 0.015$) as in sentence (7) and (8) in Appendix A. This suggests that there is a higher tendency to produce N-SGA when the antecedent is masculine and non-canonical and the agreeing element is a pronoun attached to a noun. Considering the adjusted $R^2 = 0.061$, this model explains only 6.1% of the variation, which is very low. The result of this model is $F_{(3,11)} = 2.702$, $p = 0.002$, which indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently, the multiple linear regression with random effects shows that variances are not equal.

Finally, the qualitative data of the third research question suggest that, on the one hand, «accent» is the most repeated characteristic by the participants (though none of them mentioned «intonation») when they are asked to name some of the

characteristics that form part of the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country; it is actually mentioned by all the participants except two of them. Nevertheless, only two of the participants mentioned the «use of Basque words». Other characteristics that were mentioned were, for example, *pronunciar y enfatizar la 's'* 'to pronounce and emphasize the «s»', *cambiar la estructura de la frase* 'to change the structure of the sentence', and *palabras al final de la frase como 'pues'* 'words like «so» at the end of the sentence'. On the other hand, the most interesting result is related to the linguistic feature being analyzed in this paper. When they were asked to name some of the characteristics of the variety of Spanish spoken in the Basque Country, only six of them named it. Nevertheless, when they were asked directly if they believe that N-SGA is a characteristic of the aforementioned variety, 10 of them agreed. Indeed, some of them declared that it is *uno de los errores principales* 'one of the principal mistakes', *suele pasar a menudo* 'it happens often', and *es una característica del español hablado por gente cuya lengua materna es el euskera, ya que en euskera los nombres no tienen género* 'it's a characteristic of the Spanish spoken by people whose first language is Basque, since in Basque nouns don't have gender'. Moreover, 11 of them revealed that they believe they commit N-SGA (for instance, one participant declared that *me suele entrar duda de qué es lo correcto* 'I doubt what the correct form is') and only two of them feel as though this is an important mistake for communication. The others think things like *pienso que se puede comunicar bien a pesar de esos errores* 'I think that you can communicate appropriately despite those mistakes', and *no causa problemas de comunicación, aunque a veces produce cierta gracia en la otra persona y de vez en cuando pausa la conversación* 'it doesn't cause communication problems, although sometimes it's kind of funny for the other person and it sometimes stops the conversation'. That might also be the reason why when they were asked if they feel they need to improve any aspect of their own Spanish, only four of the total participants declared that GA might be something they need to improve. However, none of the participants remembers if this is a characteristic that Spanish grammar teachers in primary and secondary school insisted on correcting.

6. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to analyze N-SGA by young adult Basque native speakers who do not usually speak Spanish in their daily lives but who have received classes on Spanish grammar. In terms of the first research question,

it was predicted that speakers would commit a considerable number of N-SGA in Spanish. However, the results of the first research question that have been presented above suggest that the initial hypothesis cannot be completely confirmed since participants had greater ratios of instances in which they followed standard Spanish grammar rules than those in which they committed N-SGA (similar to e.g., Torres Sánchez, 2021). One of the reasons that may explain this result is that fewer and uneven instances (similar to Anderson, 1999) of GA were found in the pair conversations, contrary to what was expected before conducting the study. This is due to the initial decision that aimed to achieve as natural conversations as possible, bearing in mind that this way the context is less controlled (Schilling, 2013): it is believed that this objective was achieved due to the personal and deep conversations participants had with each other. It is also interesting that despite the fact that the conducted analysis showed that the differences between the independent variables (participants' gender, education level, and type of experiment) were not statistical, further research is necessary to justify why those who have a higher education level had higher ratios of N-SGA when logic would predict the opposite.[10] Although some studies defend that the level of education has no effect in N-SGA (e.g., Balam et al., 2021), the result in this study contradicts previous studies that mention that those with lower education levels are the ones that produce more N-SGA (e.g., Díaz Barajas and Orozco, 2019; Palacios, 2006; Torres Sánchez, 2021). Again, the previously mentioned fact about the different amount of speech produced by each participant in the conversations might be the best explanation.

Regarding the purely linguistic factors that were included in the analysis of the conversations, one of the facts that has been tested with the conversation data is that the distance between agreeing elements is a factor that probably favors the production of N-SGA in the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country, as it is the case in other language contact situations (e.g., Goebel-Mahrle and Shin, 2020; Lipski, 2015; Ramírez Cruz, 2009). In addition, the antecedent's animacy has also been shown to be a good indicator for N-SGA as the majority were inanimate nouns: the origin of the gender of inanimate nouns is random when compared to that of animate nouns as it is later acquired both by L1 and L2 speakers (Andersen,

10. Apart from logic, this was an unexpected result also based on other previous studies (e.g., Etxebarria-Arostegui, 2007, 2008; Paasch-Kaiser, 2015; Urrutia Cárdenas, 1991, 1995) that indicate that, for example, in the same variety of Spanish analyzed here, the use of the conditional in *if*-clauses, and not the subjunctive –as expected by standard grammars– is more common among those with a lower level of education and culture.

1984; Cuza and Pérez-Tattam, 2016; Fernández-García, 1999; Hernández-Pina, 1984). Then, previous studies also found more N-SGA with inanimate nouns (Fernández-García, 1999; Finnemann, 1992). Another important factor to explain the production of N-SGA in this study is the use of the masculine default gender, an important variable in other previous studies (e.g., Balam et al., 2021). However, it was interesting to note that, contrary to other studies analyzing N-SGA in other language contact situations (e.g., Alarcón, 2011; Bianchi, 2012; Boers et al., 2020; Goebel-Mahrle and Shin, 2020; Ramírez Cruz, 2009), the majority of the antecedents with which speakers produced N-SGA ended with their corresponding canonical vowel.

With reference to the linguistic factors that may explain the production of N-SGA in the multiple-choice test, results suggest that there is no significant interaction between the variables introduced regarding the antecedent and the agreeing elements, except when the antecedent is a non-canonical masculine noun and the agreeing element is a pronoun attached to a noun. Apparently, more N-SGA is produced with sentences including this condition.

With respect to the second research question, the hypothesis that participants would follow GA rules in the test due to it not being a spontaneous conversation is only partially confirmed. The previous section showed that the results of the grammatically expected answers were very high; the majority of participants had very few instances of N-SGA. Moreover, the results showed that the difference between variables was not statistical. However, in this case, unlike the results of the previous research question, those with a higher education level had higher ratios of expected agreement. This confirms the results found for N-SGA in other language contact situations (e.g., Díaz-Barajas and Orozco, 2019; Palacios, 2006, 2021). These results imply that the participants have a knowledge of what the Spanish grammar rules dictate for GA.

In general, it is in a way understandable not to have obtained statistically significant differences and results from the analyzed data since this is the first empirical research on this subject matter on this variety of Spanish. In fact, as Larson-Hall (2016, p. 144) explains by citing Cohen (1988), «effect sizes are likely to be small when one is undertaking research in an area that has been little studied, as researchers may not yet know what kinds of variables they need to control for». Another reason, as defended by Drager (2018) may be the limited number of participants.

With respect to the third research question, the hypothesis has been confirmed only in part. In accordance with previous studies (e.g., Ciriza, 2009), «accent» was the most frequently mentioned characteristic. However, following Ciriza's (2009) results, and Thomason's (2001, p. 10) claim that «the most common specific type of influence [between languages] is the borrowing of words», it was hypothesized that participants would mention the use of Basque words as part of the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country: the results show that this part of the hypothesis is not confirmed. This might be explained by the fact that these participants do not regularly speak Spanish in their daily lives, and consequently, they might not be very aware of introducing Basque words when speaking in Spanish. Regardless of this fact, the results in this study suggest that the population under study shows a tendency to believe that the production of N-SGA is a possibility that is present among them and, therefore, not only among elder *euskaldun zaharrak* with a low education level, contrary to Fernández Ulloa's (1997) affirmation.

These results, in any case, are sufficient to prove the original aims of this study: (i) to contradict the previously existing view of this linguistic feature as one characteristic only of elder *euskaldun zaharrak* without a high level of education (Fernández Ulloa, 1997) (despite participants' considerable knowledge of what Spanish grammar rules demand in speech), (ii) to amplify its attribution to include a broader and more accurate set of speakers, and (iii) to support the idea that N-SGA production is common among many bilinguals (Anderson, 1999; Bruhn de Garavito and White, 2002; Cruz Rico et al., 2021; Husein, 2021). This is an example of the linguistic convergence between Basque and Spanish among speakers with this profile (Matras, 2009; Moreno-Fernández, 2020), suggesting that the production of N-SGA in the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country may contradict the results of those scholars who have analyzed N-SGA in language contact situations. Overall, the results collected through the three methods demonstrate a tendency to believe that these bilinguals, despite having a high knowledge of standard Spanish GA rules, they still produce some N-SGA, and that they are quite aware of the presence of this linguistic feature in the variety of Spanish in the Basque Country in general, and in their idiolect in particular. However, more research is needed to discuss whether this linguistic phenomenon is a case of linguistic transfer or interference, as suggested by Palacios (2021) and Ramírez Cruz (2009).

7. CONCLUSION

The objective of the present study was to start a line of investigation on the N-SGA production by speakers of Spanish in the Basque Country from a sociolinguistic point of view (and not in mixed DPs). This study serves to demonstrate that young adult native speakers of Basque who do not typically speak Spanish and have different education degrees produce some instances of N-SGA, contrary to what scholars might have believed until now. Hence, this feature is not exclusive of elder *euskaldun zaharrak* with a low education level. The data in this paper shows that the population in question has a tendency to produce some instances of N-SGA in their speech (although apparently quite a small amount), that they know the rules of Spanish regarding GA, and that they are aware of the N-SGA production despite they do not believe that it is an important impediment to communication. Then, this feature might be a case of linguistic transfer and a community-wide established linguistic variety of the Spanish spoken in the Basque Country, although more studies should be conducted to confirm this hypothesis.

In future research, it would be convenient to gather more participants and to collect oral data through sociolinguistic interviews since, as encouraged by scholars (e.g., Palacios, 2021), natural data should be used to analyze language contact phenomena. Apart from the number of participants, future research also needs to include more diverse population in the Basque Country: speakers with different language backgrounds and education, as well as citizens from different generations, to name a few. The language in which participants received their education should be considered. Finally, by combining production and language attitudes in the future will help us obtain a more robust understanding of the linguistic phenomena arising from language contact situations. In any case, this paper should be taken as a positive and solid starting point for the analysis of GA in the spontaneous Spanish spoken in the Basque Country.

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Appendix A: Gender Agreement Items in The Multiple-Choice Test

No me gusta el gobierno actual. Espero que _____ sea mejor.
el nuevo
la nueva
No sé

No me ha gustado este año. Espero cambiar para _____.
el próximo
la próxima
No sé

Este papel no sirve. Pásame _____ de allí.
el blanco
la blanca
No sé

Hay que actualizar ese valor. Necesitamos que sea _____.
el moderno
la moderna
No sé

Hay que cuidar del mundo. No se puede _____.
abandonarlo
abandonarla
No sé

El tiempo es crucial. Siempre hay que _____ en cuenta.
tenerlo
tenerla
No sé

No me gusta ese nombre. Creo que me gustaría _____.
cambiarlo
cambiarla
No sé

Ese sector se hunde. Hay que _____.
reestructurarlo
reestructurarla
No sé

No quepo por ese paso. Para mí es _____.
estrecho
estrecha
No sé

Llevamos mucho tiempo con el proyecto. Igual es muy _____.
largo
larga
No sé

No puedo más con este mes. Espero que el siguiente sea _____.
distinto
distinta
No sé

Ese es el lugar. Creo que ya estaba _____ desde ayer.
reservado
reservada
No sé

No te gusta esta música. Seguro que prefieres _____.
el antiguo
la antigua
No sé

Esa empresa no es recomendable. Necesitamos _____.
el apropiado
la apropiada
No sé

Escucha esa voz. Tienes que decirme si es _____.
el adecuado
la adecuada
No sé

Me encanta esa capital. Pero no tanto como _____.
el primero
la primera
No sé

La vida es así. Es importante _____ a diario.
disfrutarlo
disfrutarla
No sé

La casa tiene muchos años. Debo _____.
renovarlo
renovarla
No sé

Hay que afrontar la realidad. Pero puede ser difícil _____.
superarlo
superarla
No sé

No se puede pasar por esa calle. Primero tienen que _____.
renovarlo
renovarla
No sé

No me gusta la política. Me parece muy _____.
aburrido
aburrida
No sé

Me encanta esa ciudad al sur. Es mi _____.

favorito

favorita

No sé

Hoy en la noche no veo nada. Está más _____ de lo normal.

oscuro

oscura

No sé

Me horrorizó la situación de ayer. Me pareció _____.

incómodo

incómoda

No sé

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