

## **Modal particles in Basque:**

### **two cases of interaction between *ote* and IS<sup>1</sup>**

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The interaction between modal particles (also known as *discourse particles*)<sup>2</sup> and information structure has received no attention within Basque linguistics. Although the standard behaviour of modal particles in Basque shows no connection with information structure, in this article I present two dialectal uses only found in Eastern Basque where the discourse particle *ote* interacts with focus: on the one hand, *ote*, which can behave as a weak adverb in these varieties, is only licensed when there is narrow focus occupying the Focus Phrase. On the other hand, the particle can attach *wh*-words creating a configuration also found in languages such as German or Japanese as will be discussed throughout the article; this combination seems to attract emphasis for intensity cross-linguistically.

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<sup>2</sup> I consider that both terms can be used indistinctly in this paper. However, I favour *modal particle* since it is the term traditionally used in the literature on the Basque language.

## 1. Introduction

The cross-linguistic analysis of modal particles has tried to present some properties which may help identifying words considered as such (Coniglio 2007; Bayer 2009; Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Biberauer and Sheehan 2011; Cardinaletti 2011; Struckmeier 2014). Although the category of modal particles is controversial and yet not well defined for many linguists,<sup>3</sup> I will use such term following the Germanic tradition, i.e. referring to those syntactically impoverished elements related to illocutionary force, be them syntactic heads or phrases (also labeled as maximal projections in terms of Coniglio (2007; 2008) or weak adverbs following Cardinaletti's (2011) terminology). Among those properties we find one which is repeated in the literature about modal particles: they are related to the Illocutionary Force, they modify it. There are further properties not relevant for this article which are more focused on clarifying their syntactic status based on phonological and morphosyntactic features. However, very little has been said about their

<sup>3</sup> Recent publications on the category modal particles belong to such as (Degand, Cornillie, and Pietrandrea 2013; Bayer and Struckmeier 2016) whether they belong to the adverbial category or whether they own a category distinct from discourse markers demonstrate that this is still an active debate.

interaction with Information Structure (henceforth IS) in those works mentioned above. Abraham (1991) represents an early exception to this: he does not only examine modal particles and their counterparts, but also the relation of modal particles to the structural rhematic and thematic positions. Additionally, some works on German modal particles have recently described their function as marking the boundary between theme and rheme (Coniglio 2007) or distinct kinds of foci (Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Egg and Zimmermann 2011). In this respect, modal particles which modify the illocutionary force seem to have no interaction with IS considering the attention this topic has received in the literature on modal particles. Only recent works (Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Bayer and Trotzke 2015; Egg and Mursell 2017) have deeply looked into the interaction between modal particles and the IS.<sup>4</sup> Let us briefly exemplify this by using the following relevant works on that topic.

On the one hand Egg and Mursell (2017) claim that some modal particles are not focus particles proper, but focus sensitive particles; these authors base their analysis on the particle *wohl* and state that this particle interacts with focus in a way that its contribution is limited to the focal constituent (Egg and Mursell 2017):

<sup>4</sup> Other hypotheses which have examined particles from the point of view of Information Structure have usually aimed at the identification of those as focus (marker) particles or topic (marker) particles (Göksel and Özsoy; Kuwabara 2013; Badan and Del Gobbo 2015).

- (1) (dass) [*PETER*]<sub>F</sub> **wohl** den Wein trinkt.  
 that Peter P the wine drinks  
 ‘(that) someone is drinking the wine, and I think it’s Peter.’ (Egg and Mursell 2017: 39)
- (2) (dass) Peter **wohl** [*den Wein*]<sub>F</sub> trinkt.  
 ‘(that) Peter is drinking something, and I think it’s the wine.’ (ibidem)
- (3) (dass) Peter **wohl** [*den Wein trinkt*]<sub>F</sub>.  
 (that) Peter is doing something, and I think it’s drinking the wine.’  
 (ibidem)

On the other hand, Bayer and Obenauer (2011) and Bayer and Trotzke (2015) present a novel analysis of a structure combining *wh*-words and modal particles:

- (4) [*Wie nur*] habe ich den Schlüssel verlieren können?  
 how P have I the key lose could  
 ‘How on earth could I lose the key?’ (Bayer and Trotzke 2015: 14)
- (5) [*Warum denn nur*] hätte er das sagen sollen?  
 why P P had he that say should  
 ‘Why on earth should he have said that (I am wondering)?’ (Bayer and Obenauer 2011: 415)

Trotzke and Turco (2015) examine the configuration in (4-5) in terms of mirativity and conclude that it causes an extra emphatic effect, i.e. “emphasis for intensity” following their terminology. They claim that this kind of emphasis differs from information structure emphasis since it conveys an

evaluation of the proposition by the speaker, as shown in the following examples:

(6) Was hast du heute Nacht gemacht?

what have you today night done

‘What did you do last night?’

a. Ich habe geSCHLAFen.

I have slept

b. GESCHLAFEN hab ich!

slept have I (Frey apud Trotzke and Turco 2015: 41)

The use of emphasis for intensity in example (6b) aims to mark that the answer to that question is too obvious since to sleep at night is common practice. Hence, emphasis for intensity, unlike information structure emphasis, expresses the speaker's attitude towards the proposition, rather than contrasting a constituent with the corresponding one of another sentence. Furthermore, whereas IS emphasis can be cancelled (ex. 7b), the effect created by emphasis for intensity is not cancellable (ex. 7a):

(7) a. FLEISCH hat Otto heute gekauft, und 3 Pfund BaNAnen.

meat has Otto today bought and 3 pounds of.bananas

‘Today, Otto bought meat, and 3 pounds of bananas.’

(# Aber dass er Fleisch gekauft hat, ist ja nicht weiter erwähnenswert.)

‘However, the fact that he bought meat is not worth further mentioning.’

(Frey apud Trotzke and Turco 2015: 40)

b. Otto hat heute FLEISCH gekauft, und 3 Pfund BaNAnen. (ibidem)

Based on this usage and its singular pragmatic properties which make it different from information structure emphasis, they propose that the landing site of this structure is on Emphatic Phrase located above FocP but below ForceP.

All in all, modal particles play a role in the IS as two patterns have been identified, i.e. by interacting with the focal element and by arising a reading related to emphasis for intensity in *wh*-questions. Along these lines, I will examine some dialectal uses of the Basque modal particle *ote* and how they interact with the IS by providing empirical data which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been discussed before in the literature. These data manifest that the distinctive behaviour *ote* displays in those varieties has a connection to the IS unlike *ote* in its canonical use. The aim of this article is to describe those syntactic patterns and account for their interaction with the IS considering the hypotheses presented above. Nevertheless, first I need to introduce some basic concepts dealing with this particle in order to understand the specific usages found in some varieties of Eastern dialects. I will proceed as follows: in section 2 I will describe the common behaviour of modal particles in Basque focusing on the particle *ote* and conclude that they behave as clitic-heads attached to finite verbs and that they have no interaction with focal constituents in spite of their adjacency; section 3 will be dedicated to a concrete usage of the modal particle *ote* found in some varieties of Eastern dialects; in this usage, *ote* does not function as a head but as a phrasal element conditioned to the presence of a lexicalised Focus Phrase,

i.e. if no constituent triggers movement to FocP, this instance of *ote* cannot arise; in section 4 I will provide evidence of the configuration ‘*wh*-word *ote*’, recently found in Eastern Basque, precisely, in north-eastern dialects, which will be analysed as a combination of *wh*-word and the particle *ote* ; in the terms of (Bayer and Trotzke 2015), *ote* receives emphasis for intensity; the final section will present the conclusions.

## 2. Modal particles in Basque: a brief analysis of common<sup>5</sup> *ote*

As it is generally acknowledged, Basque has SOV order in out-of-the-blue or neutral contexts. Let us consider the next example:

- (8) Xabierrek Erandion ogia erosten du.  
Xabier.ERG Erandio.IN bread.ABS buy.IPFV AUX

‘Xabier buys bread in Erandio.’

We see that subject, marked by the ergative case, and object, marked by the absolutive case, precede the verb in this neutral clause. Other orders are also allowed; however, these cannot be considered neutral since they are related to specific IS strategies such as focalisation:

<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘common *ote*’ to distinguish the syntactic and pragmatic use found in all dialects and standard Basque from those usages typical from eastern dialects.

(9) [XABIERREK<sub>i</sub>]<sub>F</sub> erosten du<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> Erandion ogia t<sub>j</sub>.

Xabier.ERG buy.IPFV AUX Erandio.IN bread.ABS

‘Xabier is the one who buys the bread in Erandio.’

As can be observed, when a constituent is focalised it is fronted and triggers movement of the verbal complex to the left periphery, so that both are adjacent (Ortiz de Urbina 1999a; cf. Etxepare 1997; Elordieta, A. 2001). It can be also noticed in the glosses that verbs in Basque are mainly<sup>6</sup> analytic, i.e. they are formed by a lexical verb carrying aspectual markers, (ex. 10a), and an auxiliary verb providing information about the arguments of the predicate by agreement with them, mode and tense, (ex. 10b):

(10) a. Eros(i)-ten

b. du

buy. IPFV

AUX.3SG.ABS.3SG.ERG.IND.PRS.<sup>7</sup>

Modal particles appear attached to the auxiliary or finite verb:<sup>8</sup>

(11) Xabierrek Erandion ogia erosten omen du.

Xabier.ERG Erandio.IN bread.ABS buy.IPFV P AUX

‘Xabier is said to buy the bread in Erandio.’

<sup>6</sup> This is true for the vast majority of verbs and in most of the tenses/ aspects with the exception of a dozen verbs which have synthetic forms amalgamating V and T but only when the aspect is punctual.

<sup>7</sup> For the sake of simplicity I will gloss inflected verbs by using *AUX* without providing a deep analysis of their composition.

<sup>8</sup> I will refer to auxiliary verbs as finite verbs to include also those few verbs which can function as synthetic and shows similar syntactic behaviour and restriction as auxiliary verbs. On the other hand, the term ‘verbal complex’ will be employed referring to the combination of lexical and auxiliary verbs.



Example (11) highlights the position of modal particles relative to both kind of verbs. Modal particles precede the finite verb and, therefore, they occur between the lexical and finite verbs. Modal particles are claimed to behave as clitics affixed to finite verbs since they move along together when the verb is, for instance, fronted in negative matrix clauses:

- (12) Ez omen du Xabierrek Erandion ogia erosten.  
 not P AUX Xabier.ERG Erandio.IN bread.ABS buy.IPFV  
 ‘Xabier is said not to buy the bread in Erandio.’

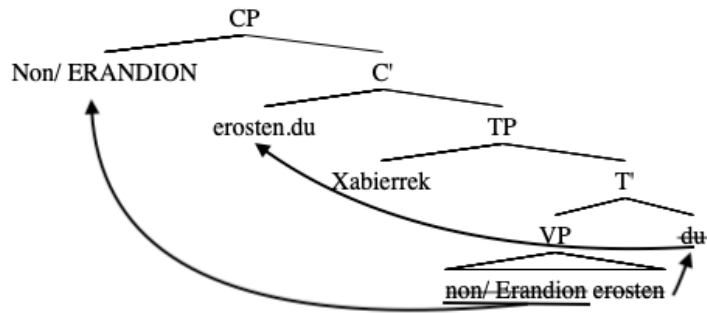
Based on this and further data, modal particles have been considered to function as clitic-heads occupying a position in the TP-domain (Elordieta, G. 1997; Elordieta 2001).

Concerning the modal particle *ote* (also written *othe* in north-eastern varieties), it is mainly used in questions. Root questions in Basque, whether they contain modal/questions particles or not, are marked in syntactic terms by movement of the verbal complex to the CP-domain and, if there is a focal constituent such as a *wh*-word, those are also fronted to the CP-domain:

- (13) a. Non<sub>i</sub> [erosten du]<sub>j</sub> Xabierrek ~~te~~ ogia ~~te~~?  
 where buy.IPFV AUX Xabier.ERG bread.ABS  
 ‘Where does Xabier buy the bread?’  
 b. ERANDION<sub>i</sub> [erosten du]<sub>j</sub> Xabierrek ~~te~~ ogia ~~te~~?  
 Erandio.IN buy.IPFV AUX Xabier.ERG bread.ABS  
 ‘Is it Erandio where Xabier buys the bread?’

Let us also exemplify this by using the following diagram:

(14)



The presence of a modal particle, even of a question particle, does not alter the word order arrangement in questions, i.e. the organization of the information structure in questions seems not to be altered by the use of *ote*:

- (15) a. Non<sub>i</sub> [erosten ote du]<sub>j</sub> Xabierrek ‡ ogia ‡?  
 where buy.IPFV P AUX Xabier.ERG bread.ABS  
 ‘Where does Xabier buy the bread? (I’m wondering)’
- b. ERANDION<sub>i</sub> [erosten ote du]<sub>j</sub> Xabierrek ‡ ogia ‡?  
 Erandio. IN buy.IPFV P AUX Xabier.ERG bread.ABS  
 ‘Is it Erandio where Xabier buys the bread? (I’m wondering)’

The statement that the particle *ote* does not affect IS can be extended to the rest of modal particles; for instance, the evidential particle *omen* ‘I heard that, it has been said’ appears adjacent to the focal constituent after the verb has moved to the FocP; however, we find the same pattern in a clause with no modal particle, that is, the verb and the focal element are adjacent. Therefore, the occurrence of modal particles does not modify the way focus or topic are marked in Basque. In fact, although the particle can be found in the head of FocP after the verb has moved to such phrase, the scope of the particle does

not vary, it still has the whole clause in its scope, not only the focal constituent (Egg and Mursell 2017; cf. Biezma, Butt, and Jabeen 2018).

As can be noted in the glosses of (15), the use of *ote* does have an impact in the interpretation of the clause. Although the contribution of this particle is still on debate, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>9</sup> For the sake of brevity, I accept the hypothesis that *ote* marks the so-called ‘I wonder’ effect (De Rijk 2008) in root questions, at least, pragmatically<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> I address the interested reader to general grammars (De Rijk 2008; Hualde and Ortiz de Urbina 2003) and previous and on-going works on this particle (Garmendia 2014; Alcázar 2017; Monforte 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Note that *ote* can also occur in non-interrogative contexts such as embedded under the verb ‘to seem to sb’:

- (i) Begitandu        zait    urlia    ote    den.  
       seem    AUX    John-Doe    P        is.C

‘It seems to me that he might be John Doe.’ (Ormaetxea 2005)

The interpretation of *ote* as ‘I wonder’ does not fit in such contexts; following the Royal Academy of the Basque Language (1987) *ote* may indicate that the speaker has gone through an evaluation of the proposition concluding that they are not fully committed to the proposition. That it turns an information seeking question into a conjectural one is not surprising considering that this phenomenon is also found in languages such as Salish (Littell, Matthewson, and Peterson 2010), Vietnamese (Nguyen 2018) and Quechua (Faller 2002) by using an evidential/ epistemic particle:

- (ii) y’e-mín-s=**nke**                    e=Meagan    e=ti  
       good-REL-3.SUB=INFER    DET=Meagan    DET=tea

‘Meagan must like the tea. / Apparently, Meagan likes tea.’

- (iii) kéʔ=ws=**nke**                    k=s-y’e-mín-s                    e=Meagan  
       e=ti

whether=SBJN=INFER    IRL=NOM-good-REL-3.SUB=INFER    DET=Meagan  
       DET=tea

‘I wonder whether Meagan likes the tea.’ (Littell, Matthewson, and Peterson 2010)

Coming back to the syntactic analysis of questions, embedded questions show a different pattern: whereas embedded *wh*-questions behave as root ones (16a), i.e. the *wh*-word and verb are fronted in the CP-domain, in embedded polar questions the verbs stay *in situ* (16b), i.e. at the end of the clause, unless there is a focal constituent (16c); in that case, focal constituent and verb move along to FocP in the CP-domain.<sup>11</sup> Concerning the position of the complementizer, *-(e)n*, it appears attached to the finite verb at the end of the clause (Ortiz de Urbina 1999b); accordingly, if the finite verb is fronted, the complementizer also triggers movement, as can be observed in the following examples:

- (16) a. Non<sub>i</sub> [erosten duen]<sub>j</sub> Xabierrek t<sub>i</sub> ogia t<sub>j</sub> galdetu dut.  
 where buy.IPFV AUX.C Xabier.ERG bread.ABS ask AUX  
 ‘I asked where Xabier buys the bread.’
- b. Xabierrek han ogia erosten duen galdetu dut.  
 Xabier.ERG there bread.ABS buy.IPFV AUX.C ask AUX  
 ‘I asked whether Xabier buys the bread there.’
- c. XABIERREK erosten duen han ogia galdetu dut.  
 Xabier.ERG buy.IPFV AUX.C there bread.ABS ask AUX  
 ‘I asked whether Xabier is who buys the bread there.’

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed analysis of questions see (Ortiz de Urbina 1999).

The modal particle *ote* is not excluded from embedded contexts,<sup>12</sup> for instance:

- (17) a. Non erosten ote duen ogia galdetu dut.  
 where buy.IPFV P AUX.C bread.ABS ask AUX  
 ‘I wondered where s\he buys the bread.’
- b. Erandion ogia erosten ote duen galdetu dut.  
 Erandio.IN bread.ABS buy.IPFV P AUX.C ask AUX  
 ‘I wondered whether s\he buys the bread in Erandio.’

As in root questions, the particle *ote* adds the already mentioned ‘I wonder’ effect to the proposition containing it in embedded clauses. Also, it can be observed in example (17b) that the verb is not fronted in spite of the occurrence of *ote*; therefore, the idea that *ote* may have some [foc] feature must be discarded.<sup>13</sup>

So far, I have described the main properties of modal particles in Basque using *ote* as a model and some aspects and analyses of the grammar of the

<sup>12</sup> In fact, the modal particle *ote* can occur not only in indirect questions but also in semi-questions (Suñer 1993); also, it can appear in other non-interrogative contexts such as Noun Complement Clauses. The latter lacks illocutionary force following (De Cuba 2017). Therefore, the presence of *ote* in such contexts goes against the idea that modal particles only occur in sentences containing illocutionary force.

<sup>13</sup> One may wonder whether *ote* may have any relation to broad focus; as stated in section 2, the particle always modifies the whole proposition, even in contexts where FocP is lexicalised and the particles in in Foc<sup>0</sup>. Therefore, the scope of the particle does not change, although the scope of focus does.

Basque language dealt with in this article that I will develop below. To sum up, these are the relevant properties to bear in mind:

- Although Basque is a SOV language, the activation of information structure activates other orders as a result of (focused and topicalised) constituents moving to the CP-domain;
- Modal particles have no impact on the configuration of those focal and topical structures. This shows that MPs are not related to IS;
- Modal particles are clitics attached to the finite verb and their scope is always the whole proposition;
- *Ote* appears mainly in both root and embedded questions.

In the following section I will present data from eastern dialects where *ote* shows a distinct behaviour compared to the common one: on the one hand, it functions as a weak adverb and, on the other hand, it combines with *wh*-words. Both usages provide evidence of an interaction between the particles and the information structure.

### **3. MP *ote*'s dependency on FocP in Eastern dialects**

Basque dialects are known in Basque linguistics for their rich syntactic variation. Proof of that comes from widespread current research on Basque dialects, such as works on case marking (Aldai 2010), or on the evidential particle (Etxepare and Uria 2016), or on datives, differential object marking

and argument incorporation (Fernández and Etxepare 2013; Rezac and Fernández 2013), or on *wh*-question's configuration (Duguine and Irurtzun 2014), or on different kinds of complementizers (Artiagoitia and Elordieta 2016; Elordieta, A. and Haddican 2018). Henceforth I will focus on providing evidence on the non-canonical behaviour concerning the modal particle *ote*; only when the data follow the general behaviour of modal particles will be signalled.

The piece of data I am dealing with in this article is well found in literary works, but also in the spoken language as dialectological corpora shows (Camino 2009; Camino 2013; Camino 2017), especially in Low Navarre, Salazar and Roncal valleys<sup>14</sup> and Soule.<sup>15</sup> However, it has not drawn much attention in academic discourse. This will be a first approach to those novel data found in Eastern Basque in which I focus exclusively on the syntactic analysis; considering that the category of modal particles is mostly defined based on their bleached interpretation, it would seem reasonable to look into their semantic-pragmatics too. Nevertheless, an attempt to exhaustively examine this topic is out of the scope of this article and implies further

<sup>14</sup> The roncalese variety disappeared at the end of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, the data used for this work deals mainly with written sources from the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the data from written and oral sources, I have collected further information, especially dealing with grammatical judgments, by conducting interviews with native speakers from Labourd and Low Navarre during 2017-2018. I am grateful to all of them for their help and patience.

research. All in all, a first glance suggests that the three uses of *ote* presented in this article do not show significant differences concerning their interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

The syntactic properties of this usage of the modal particle *ote* are as follows:

1) it does not occur before the finite verb, unlike the common *ote*:

(18) Nola deitzen da ote kori?

how call.IPFV AUX P that

‘What’s the name of that OTE?’<sup>17</sup>

Although it may seem that *ote* is still attached to the finite verb, as a suffix instead of as a prefix, other constituents such as the interrogative marker *-a* or the complementizer *-(e)n(ez)* can intervene between the finite verb and *ote*:

(19) Egiazko apeza dea ote hori?

real priest.ABS is.P P that

‘Is that person a real priest OTE?’ (Salaberry 1978)

(20) Eztakit ardi orrek bildotxa ukhain dienez othe. gaur.

not.know sheep that.ERG lamb.ABS have.FUT AUX,C P today

<sup>16</sup> Since this use of *ote* is underinvestigated, I will not mark its interpretation as ‘I’m wondering’ but simply as ‘OTE’, avoiding generalisation of its contribution.

<sup>17</sup> Prof. Camino (p.c.) informed me that this use was apparently common in Salazar Valley too. I thank him for that piece of information and for providing me with an example.



‘I don’t know whether that sheep will give birth today OTE.’ (Camino 2009)

Moreover, the discourse marker *ba(da)* can appear between the verbal complex and the particle *ote*. Unlike modal particles, *ba(da)*<sup>18</sup> is not a clitic but an independent word; therefore, *ote* cannot be considered to function as a clitic attached to the verb as it does in its common behavior:

- (21) Nor deitzen du bada ote Peiok egun guziz?  
who call.IPFV AUX DP P Peio.ERG day all.INS  
‘Who does Peter call every day OTE?’

Also, it shows a change in the intonational contour<sup>19</sup>, which is not surprising since *ote* in this usage does not behave as a clitic; therefore, it forms an

<sup>18</sup> See (Lizardi-Ituarte in press) for an analysis of *ba(da)* in neoperformative terms.

<sup>19</sup> Although this is a topic that needs further research, some distinctions can be perceived at first sight: unlike the common *ote* which can receive stress in the first or second syllable depending on the length of the finite verb (i-ii), *ote* here always displays the same prosodic pattern:

- (i) Ni othe' niz, Jau'na?  
I.ABS P be sir.ABS  
‘Is it me, Lord?’ (Inchauspe 1856)
- (ii) Bil o'the dai'te elhorrie'tan maha'xic e'do phico'ric  
naharre'tan? (ibidem)  
gather P can hawthorn.IN.PL grape.PART or fig.PART  
blackberry.IN PL  
‘Can we gather grapes from hawthorns or figs from blackberries?’  
(ibidem)

Moreover, although it could be considered that *ote* behaves as a clitic too in this use but, unlike the common behavior, it is incorporated after the verb, this does not seem an option since it does not show any change in its intonational contour depending on the length of the verb.

independent prosodic unit (cf. Cardinaletti 2011). Furthermore, it cannot occupy separate positions in the clause, i.e. *ote* always occurs in a specific syntactic position and remains immobile (cf. Bayer 2009) even when other constituents, either the verbal complex or phrases occupying specifier positions move towards the Left Periphery:

(22) Nor deitzen du (ote) Peiok (\*ote) egun guziz (\*ote)?  
 who call.IPFV AUX P Peio.ERG P day all.INS P

Finally, *ote* can take some case markings as partitive; note that some adverbs in Basque can function similar to nouns in some contexts such as *atzo* ‘yesterday’ or *bihar* ‘tomorrow’. Hence, they can also receive case marking, for instance:

(23) Negar egingo zenuke (...) biharrik ez balego.  
 cry do.FUT AUX tomorrow.PART not if. AUX  
 ‘You would cry if there were no tomorrow.’ (Oñederra 1999)

(24) Ez, eta otherik gabe oraino. Zu hunen irakurtzen ari  
 ziren bezen segur.  
 not and P.PART without still you this.GEN read.IPFV PROG  
 AUX.C so sure  
 ‘No, and even with no doubt. As sure as you’re reading this.’ (Hiriart-Urruty 1972)

In addition to this, *ote* as a weak adverb cannot suffered apheresis, unlike the common *ote* which can be reduced in specific environments.

Furthermore, the inesive case mark *-an* can be identified in the word *otean* attached to the particle *ote* (Peillen 1979). This is only found in eastern varieties and conveys the speaker's surprise, astonishment or admiration (Lhande 1926; Mitxelena and Sarasola 2017); in comparison to modal particles, *otean* does not display syntactic restrictions as it can occur in sentential first position and not adjacent to the verb:

(25) Eztüta      nik      othian      egün      bonür      handia?  
not.AUX.P    I.ERG    P.IN      today    happiness    big.ABS

‘Don’t I have perhaps today great joy?’ (Oihenarte 1971[1848])

Therefore, it can be considered an adverb which can be separated into the non-canonical *ote*, bearing in mind its geographical extension, and the inesive case mark *-an*.<sup>20</sup>

I conclude that the patterns described above can hardly be explained if *ote* behaved as a clitic-head; therefore, based on this data and the analysis Cardinaletti (2011) applies to similar particles in Italian (cf. Munaro and Poletto 2002), I propose that *ote* in eastern dialects has also a phrasal nature and can function as a weak adverb. Concerning its syntactic position, *ote* always appears after the fronted finite verb and before the subject, as can be observed in examples (19-21). A verb occurring in first position is what could be expected in these contexts since we are dealing with questions and, as

<sup>20</sup> We note similar constructions regarding other adverbs such as *aspaldian* (‘long ago, lately’) formed by the adverb *aspaldi* (‘long ago’) and the inesive *-an*.

explained above (section 2), verbs are always fronted in root questions. Therefore, its position must be the specifier position of a phrase located below Focus Phrase but above the TP-domain:

(26) FocP > [XP *ote* [X' [X ] ] ] > TP

As described also in section 2, *wh*-questions and polar questions show separate derivations in embedded contexts: constituent questions are formed by fronting both the *wh*-word and the verbal complex, whereas yes-no questions usually have the verb *in situ*, i.e. at the end of the clause, unless there is a focal constituent fronted in the CP-domain. If we observe now the data presented above, we see that the verb is fronted in all examples of this kind of *ote*, even in embedded polar questions:<sup>21</sup>

(27) Kala<sub>i</sub> [izanen denez]<sub>j</sub> ote artan t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub>, eztakid.  
 that.way be.FUT AUX.C P that.IN not.know

‘I don’t know whether it will be like that there OTE.’ (Irigoyen 1957)

(28) Eztakit [ardi horrek]<sub>k</sub> bildotxa<sub>i</sub> [ukhain dienez]<sub>j</sub> othe gaur t<sub>j</sub>  
 t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>k</sub>  
 not.know sheep that.ERG lamb.ABS have.FUT AUX.C P today

<sup>21</sup> As stated in section 2, embedded polar questions have the canonical order SOV; however, if any constituent of the embedded clause receives focus, then the verb is fronted in order to be adjacent to the focal constituent which triggers movement to FocP. This behaviour is independent of the presence of *ote*; therefore, both distributions can occur in clauses with and without *ote*.

‘I don’t know whether that sheep will give birth today OTE.’ (Camino 2009, 153-218)

- (29) Guiazale itsuac (..) beldurraci dagonezi hote mussquito bat tj ti  
guide blind.ABS fear.ABS be.C P mosquito one  
‘Blind guides (...) feared whether there’s a mosquito OTE.’ (Pagola 2004)

In fact, some of them contain the complementizer *-(e)nez*,<sup>22</sup> typical of Eastern Basque. The fact that our corpus lack examples of embedded yes-no questions without fronting brings up the question whether the particle can appear at the beginning of an embedded question containing no focus such as:

- (30) Ez dakit (\*ote) ardi horrek bildotxa ukain (ote) duen.  
not know P sheep that.ERG lamb.ABS have.FUT P AUX.C  
‘I don’t know whether that sheep will give birth today.’

Native speakers I consulted<sup>23</sup> do not accept this first sentential position for *ote*; however, its use is felicitous if *ote* precedes the finite verb following the canonical behaviour of Basque modal particles. Rather, in examples as (31)

<sup>22</sup> Rebuschi (2013) decomposes that complementizer as the general complementizer *-(e)n* and , the head of FocP *-(e)z*.

<sup>23</sup> The data found in *Basyque*, the Basque syntactic database, also confirms this judgement. In this project interviews were conducted to collect syntactic data from north-eastern dialects and some of the questions were related to the position of modal particles. One of those positions was at the beginning of the clause in a *wh*-question. It was rejected by the vast majority of consultants, only two speakers seemed to accept it, actually from areas where they do not even use *ote* as a weak adverb; therefore, these two judgements seem to be compromised and I have decided not to take them into consideration.

the only interpretation possible is the one which relates *ote* to the main clause, that is, that one in which *ote* occupies a position after the finite verb:

(31) Badakia ote nungoa den mutil hori?

CL.know.P P where.GEN.ABS AUX.C boy that

Does s/h know where that boy is from OTE?’

Finally, I would like to point out that speakers do not reject clauses as (30) because the context does not make felicitous the use of *ote*; on the contrary, examples as those are accepted if the particle occurs either affixed to the finite verb, or as in examples (28), i.e. after the fronted finite verb. Therefore, there seems to be a connection between the position of the verb and the occurrence of the weak adverb *ote*. This behaviour reminds of Munaro and Poletto (2002) who claim that modal particles need the CP-domain to be activated, or Bayer and Obenauer (2011) and Egg and Mursell (2017), who relate the use of some modal particles (*doch, wohl*) to the information structure. Both hypotheses aim to explain why modal particles are restricted in some embedded contexts and how modal particles interact with the illocutionary force in order to integrate their contribution in the proposition.

However, in the case of the modal particle *ote* I have discarded the idea that *ote* modifies the illocutionary force<sup>24</sup> since it can occur in contexts where

<sup>24</sup> In (Zubeldia 2013) the modal particle *omen* is examined in terms of semantics-pragmatics and she concludes that this particle does not contribute the illocutionary force.

illocutionary force is claimed not to exist (De Cuba 2017), such as Noun

Complement Clauses:

(32) Egia      ote    dakien    kezak      beldurtzen    nau.

truth.ABS P      know.C    worry.ERG    scare          AUX

'The concern that s/he may know the truth scares me.'

Therefore, the presence of *ote* does not need ForceP in the CP-domain to be activated.

Nevertheless, *ote* seems to be dependent on the activation of FocP, since, if this is not lexicalised, the weak adverb cannot occur. This approach is similar to the analysis (Bayer and Obenauer 2011) or (Egg and Mursell 2017) on German modal particles interacting with contrastive and information focus (Bayer and Obenauer 2011) or bound and free focus (Egg and Mursell 2017); it also shares properties with the analysis of the particle *kya* in Hindi/Urdu (Biezma, Butt, and Jabeen 2018) since as these authors claim, *kya* is a focus sensitive operator and interacts with the focal constituent in a way such as the particle is always adjacent to the focused material.

Following (Elordieta 2001), focus in Basque can appear in a preverbal position, usually located in the specifier position of CP, or it can stay in situ; both kinds of foci are information focus and neutral, that is, the constituents carrying focus must be considered as new information; nevertheless, those in the CP-domain can also be contrastive in some contexts. In addition to this, she also checks if these separate mechanisms to mark focus correspond to exhaustivity, as claimed for Hungarian (Szabolcsi apud Elordieta 2001),

concluding that they are not related to exhaustivity. However, she says that there is a difference between focus in situ or in the CP-domain: whereas the former may be wide focus, the latter can only be narrow focus, that is, only the constituent located preverbally can be interpreted as focus:

(33) Gaur umeek abesti berri bi abestu dituzte.

today children.ERG song new two sing AUX

I. '*Today the children sang two new songs*'<sup>25</sup>

II. 'Today the children *sang two new songs*'

III. 'Today the children sang *two new songs*' (Elordieta 2001: 131)

(34) Mikelek [goxoki batzuk]i umeei ti ekarri dizkie.

Mikel.ERG sweet some children.PL.DAT bring AUX

'Mikel brought some sweets *to the children.*'

\*'Mikel brought *some sweets to the children.*' (ibidem)

Nevertheless, I would not propose that *ote* can be used to distinguish such kinds of foci (wide and narrow foci), since syntax already does it. However, it is true that *ote* requires FocP in the information structure activated to its left. So there seems to be some kind of sensitivity to the different foci.

Let us set aside this topic for a moment and observe the syntactic position and properties of *ote*. It is easily noted that it shares some properties with those adverbs which occupy Mod(ifier) Phrase in Rizzi (2004); these are the characteristics listed by Rizzi for those adverbs: a) their intonational contour

<sup>25</sup> The constituents marked in italics correspond to the intended focus.



resembles that of topics, causing them to be perceived as prominent; however, they have no connection to the background, unlike topics; b) they are neither focus or topic (although in special contextual circumstances they can move to FocP or TopP); c) in conclusion, Rizzi (2004) proposes a third Phrase between ForceP and FinP, i.e. Mod(ifier) Phrase. Furthermore, Rizzi assumes that the adverb occupying this position modifies the structure the adverb is related to. This definition reminds how modal particles are described to contribute the interpretation of the proposition. The difference between both the modal particle *ote* and preposed adverbs (following Rizzi's (2004) terminology) is that the former cannot occupy topic or focal positions, no matter the context is; however, this property is also shared by modal particles in other languages such as German (Struckmeier 2014). The fact that they cannot move along in the syntactic structure is a reason not to consider them as full adverbs.

Based on all these facts, I propose that *ote* occupies a Mod(ifier) Phrase located between FocP and FinP; moreover, I suggest that this ModP is sensitive to the presence of FocP i.e. ModP occurs if the FocP is activated by the movement of a focal constituent to that phrase, namely to the FocP. This analysis also explains the following piece of data:

- (35) a. Non *ote*?      b. Célinek *ote*?      c. Bai *ote*?  
           where P                      Céline.ERG P                      yes P  
           ‘Where OTE?’                      ‘Céline OTE?’                      ‘Really OTE?’

As can be observed in these examples, *ote* occurs next to *wh*-words, focalised constituents and the polarity particles (yes/no), once the rest of the proposition is elided. I analyse these clauses as follows: the *wh*-words, constituents receiving focus and polarity particles trigger movement to FocP; this movement activates FocP and, therefore, it licenses the occurrence of *ote* next to them in ModP; finally, TP and phrases below it are omitted.

In this configuration there must be a movement to the Left Periphery to provide a questioned constituent. It must be pointed out that the occurrence of any kind of focus is not enough for *ote* to occur; in fact, the lexicalization of FocP is mandatory, since this usage of *ote* is not found when *in situ* focus occurs in the clause. It must be information structure focus which is activated and precedes the particle, as can be noticed in the agrammaticality of the following examples:

- (36) a. \**Ote non?*  
           P       where
- b. \**Ote Beñati?*  
           P       Beñat.DAT

These examples borne out the hypothesis that *ote* must follow the information structure focus containing the constituent in question.

Also, as shown in previous examples such as (19) and (21), the interrogative marker *-a* and the discourse marker *ba(da)* can intervene between *ote* and the constituent moved to FocP in these constructions. This proves that *ote* cannot occupy the head of FocP:

- (37) a. Baia ote?  
           yes.P P  
           ‘Really OTE?’
- b. Zergatik bada ote?  
               why P P  
               ‘Why BADA OTE?’

In conclusion, although the topic deserves a deeper analysis, *ote* in some varieties of Eastern Basque can also behave as a weak adverb located in the specifier of Modifier Phrase (following Rizzi’s (2004) terminology) which is somehow related to the information structure focus (cf. Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Egg and Mursell 2017) since it can only appear in contexts containing a lexicalised FocP. Evidence reinforcing this hypothesis is found in clauses as (35) where only the focal constituent and *ote* occur. Indeed, this kind of configuration has given rise to the construction under examination in the next section, i.e. ‘*wh*-word *ote*’.

#### 4. Microvariation on the MP *ote* in North-Eastern dialects: ‘*wh*-word *ote*’

Eastern varieties, namely north-eastern dialects of Basque, also show a usage of modal particles not so common cross-linguistically. The modal particle *ote* forms a single constituent with a *wh*-word; for instance:<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See (Trotzke and Monforte to appear) for a detailed account of this construction

(38) Nork ote jan züan?

who.ERG P eat AUX

‘Who ate it OTE?’ (Casenave-Harigile 1997)

(39) Nor ote deitzen du Peiok egun guziz?

who P call.IPFV AUX Peio.ERG day all.INS

‘Who does Peter call every day OTE?’

As suggested in the previous section, this construction seems to be the reanalysis of constructions such as those in (35a). If both usages are compared, we note that they do not behave similarly in contexts where the verb is not elided: whereas *ote* appears always after the finite verb in the use dealt with in the previous section, here *ote* is always attached to the *wh*-word. Proof of this adjacency can be found in ‘why’ questions and embedded questions. In the former ones the *wh*-word is claimed to trigger no movement to the Left Periphery because that is where *why* is base generated (Rizzi 2001; Cecchetto and Donati 2012); therefore, in this case the adjacency between the *wh*-word and the finite verb is optional, unlike other *wh*-words (as explained in section 2):

(40) a. Zergatik ote Peiok hori erran data?

why P Peio.ERG that.ABS say AUX

Why did Peter ask me that OTE?

b. Zergatik ote erran data Peiok hori?

why P say AUX Peio.ERG that.ABS

- c. \*Zergatik Peiok hori ote erran data?<sup>27</sup>  
 why Peio.ERG that.ABS P say AUX

Finally, North-Eastern Basque allows the verb to remain *in situ* in embedded *wh*-questions, unlike the rest of dialects and standard Basque:

- (41) a. Ez dakit non ote kazeta utzi dudan.  
 not know where P newspaper.ABS leave AUX.C  
 ‘I don’t know where I left the newspaper OTE.

- b. \*Ez dakit non kazeta ote utzi dudan.<sup>28</sup>  
 not know where newspaper.ABS P leave AUX.C

Based on these data, I propose that *ote* forms a single constituent by merging with a *wh*-word, since nothing can intervene between the *wh*-word (except for ‘why’) and the finite verb (Trotzke and Monforte to appear).

Wh-words combine with not only the particle *ote*, but also the discourse marker *ba(da)*:

<sup>27</sup> The particle can also occur in its common or standard position in this context:

- (i) a. Zergatik Peiok hori erran ote data?  
 why Peio.ERG that.ABS say P AUX  
 ‘Why did Peter ask me that OTE?’  
 b. Zergatik erran ote data Peiok hori?  
 why say P AUX Peio.ERG that.ABS

<sup>28</sup> Also, in this case *ote* can be appeared to the left of the finite verb following the common behaviour of modal particles:

- (ii) a. Ez dakit non utzi ote dudan kazeta.  
 not know where leave P AUX.C newspaper.ABS  
 ‘I don’t know where I left the newspaper OTE.’  
 b. Ez dakit non kazeta utzi ote dudan.  
 not know where newspaper.ABS leave P AUX.C

(42) Nondik bada zetozen eskatu zien.

where. P come.C ask AUX

‘S/he asked them where they were coming then from.’ (Borda 2005)

(43) Zergatik bada erraten dizkiodan (...) oro.

why. P say.IPFV AUX all

(...) why I didn’t tell him all (...). (Landart 1999)

This kind of structure is also found in other languages such as German (Abraham 1991; Bayer and Obenauer 2011; Trotzke and Turco 2015), Italian (Munaro and Poletto 2002; Coniglio 2007), Dolomitic Ladin (Hack 2014) and Japanese (Endo 2018):

(44) Von wem schon kann man das sagen?

of who P can one that say

‘Who can one say that about? About nobody!/ Hardly about nobody!’

(45) Cosa mai avrebbe Gianni potuto fare in quel frangente?

what P would.have Gianni could do in that occasion

‘What could Gianni do on that occasion?’

(46) Nani-yo John-tara kidotteru wa

what- P John-TOP vain mood

‘John is so vain/ John acts cocky’

A characteristic shared by Basque and German is that this construction receives more emphasis in its intonation than the regular prosody of *wh*-words in similar contexts in both languages. In fact, Trotzke and Turco (2015) claim

that the prosodic effect found in these configurations should be considered as ‘emphasis for intensity’. They make a syntactic distinction between two notions of emphasis: information structure emphasis and emphasis for intensity; the latter is related to the speaker’s attitude and evaluation of the proposition. Based on the separate behaviour those kinds of emphasis display, Trotzke and Turco (2015) say that the differences in pragmatics should be reflected on the syntax and, therefore, they propose that the non-information-structural focus should occupy the Emphasis Phrase located above FocP. As for the Basque language, this distinction in focus has also been proposed by Etxepare (1997) and Irurtzun (2016). The latter adopts the analysis of Etxepare (1997) who differentiates two foci: contrastive focus and emphatic focus which differ not only in semantic terms but also in some syntactic properties such as the adjacency of the verb or their syntactic position. Later Irurtzun (2016) claims that contrastive focus can be termed as “mirative focus” following the terminology used in cross-linguistic literature; let us observe the following examples:

(47) [Jonek]<sub>F</sub> ekarri du ardoa. [Standard focus]

Jon.ERG bring AUX wine.ABS

‘[Jon]<sub>F</sub> brought the wine’

(48) [Jonek]<sub>F</sub> ardoa ekarri du. [Mirative focus]

Jon.ERG wine.ABS bring AUX

‘[Jon]<sub>F</sub> brought the wine’

As can be noticed, the mirative construction recalls those in (41) since the focal constituent does not need to be preverbal; nevertheless, ‘*wh*-word *ote*’ configuration can pattern either as in the mirative focus or as in the standard focus. Therefore, it does not seem that we are dealing with the same phenomenon. Indeed, as pointed out by Irurtzun (2016), mirativity has not been deeply examined in Basque and further research is necessary. To sum up, these instances of foci have been identified in the literature not only in Basque, but also in languages such as German.

Coming back to the ‘*wh*-word *ote*’ construction in Basque, speakers, in fact, offer judgments in favour of an analysis considering these constructions as emphasized: on the one hand, questions (38) displaying ‘*wh*-word *ote*’ uttered with the regular prosody of standard *wh*-questions are judged as wrong; only when the ‘*wh*-word *ote*’ receives an emphatic stress, the use of *ote* attached to *wh*-words is felicitous. On the other hand, speakers agree that this kind of construction amplifies the meaning of the *wh*-word; in fact, whereas in standard interrogatives the question covers the whole proposition, i.e. the whole proposition is prominent in that question, this seems to be limited to the *wh*-word in the configuration presented in this section or, at least, the *wh*-word seems to be more prominently questioned. Although this interpretation makes sense considering the prosodic emphasis those configurations receive, I find it interesting the fact that *ote* merged with a *wh*-word only allows the extra emphatic intonation and extra prominent interpretation of the *wh*-word.



I conclude that, although *wh*-words always move to FocP in *wh*-questions and, therefore, *wh*-words occupy the position of the information focus, the use of the modal particle *ote* attached to *wh*-words attracts prosodic and pragmatic emphasis for intensity. Interestingly this pattern is also found in German (Trotzke and Turco 2015); this may suggest that this is a cross-linguistic property of this kind of construction which turn an information structure emphasis into an emphasis for intensity.

## 5. Conclusions

Along this article I have looked into the modal particle *ote*, which displays high microvariation in Eastern Basque, and its relation to the information structure. After having described how modal particles behave in general in all dialects and standard Basque, I have turned to examine data from various eastern varieties and concluded that the modal particle *ote* displays the two syntactic statuses assigned to modal particles in the literature, i.e. the head status and the phrasal one. Nevertheless, the latter is only found in eastern varieties, whereas the former is the general behaviour of modal particles in all dialects. In addition to those differences in the syntactic status, those distinctive uses also occupy separate syntactic position: modal particles which have a canonical behaviour occur in the TP-domain, while *ote* functioning similar to a weak adverb occupies a position in the CP-domain,

namely the Modifier Phrase between FocP and FinP. Also *ote* can be combined with *wh*-words forming the construction *wh*-word *ote*, this co-constituency is also found in other languages such as German or Japanese.

Concerning the relation of the particle to IS, I have noted that, although the modal particle *ote* cannot be considered a focus particle, it is intrinsically related to the focus in two usages found in Eastern Basque. On the one hand, *ote* behaving as a weak adverb is sensitive to the lexicalization of FocP, i.e. if there is no constituent as information focus in the specifier of FocP, *ote* cannot occur as can be observed in embedded polar questions. Therefore, *ote* is dependent on the realisation of FocP. On the other hand, *ote* attached to the *wh*-word in configurations as '*wh*-word particle' displays what has been denominated 'emphasis for intensity' (Trotzke and Turco 2015) provoking a higher prominence of the *wh*-word.

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