

INTERACTING SEMANTIC PREFERENCES? THE *BELIEF-INTENT* ALTERNATION IN BASQUE



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The *belief-intent* alternation

Class of clause-embedding predicates (CEP) that can combine with a complement clause (CC) expressing a belief as well as with a CC expressing an intention:

- (1) a. *B convinced A [that the sky is green].*
 ≈ B made A come to believe that the sky is green.
 b. *B convinced A [to give up linguistics].*
 ≈ B made A come to intend to give up linguistics.

→ different CC types → meaning difference is contributed by CC type (Jackendoff 1985; Grano 2019)

Form-meaning mapping less strict in Basque → additional factors relevant?

Data

Corpus study

- 8 CEPs in the Corpus of Contemporary Texts (ETC), 100 occurrences each annotated for type, semantics, TAM and aktionsart of the CC and coreference of the embedded subject
- Complemented by specific search for past tense VN complements of the verbs and if necessary by classification of up to 50 additional VN complements and/or indicative clauses containing future marking or appropriate modal

Survey

- 720 participants from all provinces and age groups, 554 of which completed the questionnaire
- Matching task: short description of a situation containing either a belief or an intention, participants were asked whether the sentence containing an indicative clause or the sentence containing an absolutive VN describes the situation correctly and why the one not chosen is not a correct description
- Variables: CEP (*pentsatu* ‘think’ vs. *bururatu* ‘occur’), tense (FUT vs. NFUT) and agentivity (dynamic verb + coreferential agent vs. dynamic verb + non-coreferential agent vs. stative verb + non-coreferential subject) of CC

Factors

Semantic

- Intentions are carried out volitionally and in the future
→ future tense or future-oriented modal
→ dynamic, agentive
→ agent coreferential with attitude holder

→ properties compatible with intent interpretation subset of properties compatible with belief interpretation

Lexical

CEP	belief	intent
<i>gogorarazi</i> ‘remind’	94%	3%
<i>pentsatu</i> ‘think, plan’	92%	6%
<i>ukatu</i> ‘deny’	91%	7%
<i>konbentzitu</i> ‘convince’	67%	32%
<i>bururatu</i> ‘occur’	38%	55%
<i>zin egin</i> ‘swear’	28%	65%
<i>erabaki</i> ‘decide’	13%	82%
<i>proposatu</i> ‘suggest’	2%	94%

→ *belief-prominent* vs. *intent-prominent*

Structural

- 4 CC types used with belief-intent verbs:
 - Subjunctive clauses** and **purposive verbal nouns (VN)** always express intent
 - Indicative clauses** and **absolutive or instrumental VNs** can express both – but strong preferences in the studied corpus:

	indicative	ABS/INS	total
belief	411	15 (14 of which CCs of <i>ukatu</i>)	426
intent	70 (63 of which CCs of <i>zin egin</i>)	217	287
total	481	232	713

- VN clauses in belief contexts were accepted by 0,8%-45,4% of survey participants (9,9% on average)
- Indicative clauses in intent contexts were accepted by 14,3%-61% (45,8% on average) → semantic difference more blurry since beliefs about what one will do largely coincide with intentions

Interaction in the corpus

Lexical & structural

- VN belief clauses only with belief-prominent CEPs, indicative intent clauses only with intent-prominent CEPs
→ illusion created by low frequency of both atypical form-meaning combination and dispreferred meaning?
- Differences in frequency of atypical combinations: especially frequent with *ukatu* ‘deny’ and *zin egin* ‘swear’

Structural & semantic

- VN belief clauses seem to be almost always past tense or stative → intent interpretation impossible or unlikely

(2) [*atentatu-a-Ø* *gaitzets-i* *ez* *izan-a-Ø*] *gogoraraz-ten* *d-i-o-te* *oraindik*
attack-SG-ABS condemn-PFV NEG be-SG-ABS remind-IPFV 3SG.ABS-AUX.DITR- still
3SG.DAT-3PL.ERG

‘They still remind him/her that s/he didn’t condemn the attack.’ (ETC: Berria, 2019-09-28)

(3) [*hurrengo* *urte-Ø-ko-ak* *%3-tik* *behe-ra* *iza-te-a-Ø*] *pentsa-tzen da*
next year-SG-LGEN-PL.ABS 3%-ABL low-ALL be-NMLZ-SG-ABS think-IPFV AUX.ITR.3SG

‘It is thought that next year’s [economic forecasts] will be below 3%.’ (ETC: Egunkaria, 2002-09-05)

Interaction in the survey

Lexical & structural

- No effect of belief/intent-prominence:
 - VN clauses in belief contexts accepted not more often with belief-prominent *pentsatu* than with intent-prominent *bururatu*
 - Indicative clauses in intent contexts accepted not more often with *bururatu* than with *pentsatu*

Structural & semantic

- VN in belief context:
 - Highest acceptance in past tense: 28,8% vs. 3,6%
 - No difference between dynamic and stative embedded predicates: 1,7% vs. 1,8%
 - Preference for coreferential subject: 19,2% vs. 3,8%

(4) ?[*agian* *elkar-Ø* *gaizki* *uler-tu* *izan-a-Ø*] *burura-tu* *zai-o* *Aritz-i*
maybe RECIP-ABS wrong understand-PFV be-SG-ABS occur-PFV 3SG.ABS-AUX.EITR- Aritz-DAT
3SG.DAT

‘It occurred to Aritz that they had maybe misunderstood each other.’ (accepted by 45,4%)

- Indicative clause in intent context: in 3 out of 4 contexts accepted by 52,3%-61%, (6) accepted only by 14,3% → partial coreference increases difference between belief and intent interpretation

(5) ?*Harkaitz* *eta* *Anderr-ek* [*katu-a-ri* *Pirritx* *izen-a-Ø* *jarr-i-ko*
Harkaitz and Ander-ERG cat-SG-DAT Pirritx name-SG-ABS put-PFV-FUT

d-i-o-te-la] *pentsa-tu* *d-u-te*
3SG.ABS-AUX.DITR-3SG.DAT-3PL.ERG-COMP think-PFV 3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-3PL.ERG

Targeted meaning: ‘Harkaitz and Ander plan to name the cat Pirritx.’ (accepted by 61%)

(6) ??[*den-ak* *itsaso-a-n* *baina-tu-ko* *dir-ela]* *burura-tu*
all-PL.ABS sea-SG-INE bath-PFV-FUT 3SG.ABS-AUX.ITR-COMP occur-PFV

zai-o *norbait-i*
3SG.ABS-AUX.EITR-3SG.DAT someone-DAT

Targeted meaning: ‘Someone had the idea that they should all bath in the sea.’

Conclusion

- CC type by far the most important factor in Basque, too, atypical uses possible but rather rare (depending to some extent on the CEP)
- Contexts facilitating atypical combinations:
 - a) Semantic properties incompatible with intent interpretation
 - b) No huge difference between both interpretations
→ avoidance of ambiguous constructions
- Atypical combinations two different sources:
 - Indicative-intent: blurry line between intentions and beliefs about future actions
 - VN-belief: new construction spreading from other contexts
→ reflected in very different degrees of acceptance

References

Egungo Testuen Corpora (= ETC) [Corpus of contemporary texts] (2021): <https://www.ehu.eus/etc/> • Grano, Thomas (2019): “Belief, intention, and the grammar of persuasion.” *Proceedings of the Fifty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*: 125-136. • Jackendoff, Ray (1985): “Believing and intending: Two sides of the same coin.” *Linguistic Inquiry* 16, 445-460. • Trask, R. L. (1995): “On the History of the Non-Finite Verb Forms in Basque.” In Jose Ignacio Hualde / Joseba A. Lakarra / R.L. Trask (eds.): *Towards a History of the Basque Language*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 207-234.