

A NOTE ON THE COMPLEMENTIZER *-ELA* AND LONG-DISTANCE LICENSING OF NPIS IN NAVARRO-LABOURDIN BASQUE¹

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Abstract

*This article presents ample evidence from written texts that the Basque Navarro-Labourdin dialect, which lacks a contrast between the complementizers *-ela* and *-enik* in declarative sentences, uses the first one in exactly the same syntactic contexts as *-enik* is used in Central and Western Basque, that is to say, in the context of matrix questions and negation. Consequently, negative polarity items inside *-ela* complement clauses can be licensed from the upper clause; the lack of truth-value presupposition attributed to *-enik* sentences is also manifested with *-ela* clauses in this dialect.*

Keywords: *syntax, navarro-labourdin, complementizer, NPI, negation.*

¹ This squib goes for Iñaki Gaminde, a long life friend from AEK times since the early 80s. Zorionak, Iñaki, eta eskerrik asko euskarari emandako arnasagatik. I thank Maia Duguine, Maitena Duhalde, Céline Mounole for sharing their linguistic intuitions with me and Maider Huarte for comments on a previous draft. All remaining errors are my own. The following abbreviations are used throughout the article: IND = indicative, NEG = negation, NPI = negative polarity item, SUBJ = subjunctive.

Introduction

The purpose of this squib is rather simple: to show that Basque varieties which lack the so-called negative complementizer *-enik* and use, instead, the declarative complementizer *-ela* permit the same kind of readings and syntactic licensing as the former; evidence comes from written texts, present and past, and the intuition of several native speakers consulted. The article has the following structure: section 1 discusses the theoretical background needed to understand the relevance of the *-ela* vs. *-enik* distinction, which bears on the long distance licensing of NPIs in subordinate clauses and on the interpretation of the subordinate clauses themselves; I review Laka's (1990) original proposal, Uribe-Etxebarria's (1994), and the more recent Artiagoitia & Elordieta (2015) and Elordieta & Artiagoitia (2016) works. Section 2 presents the relevant data from the Navarro-Labourdin dialect, with an excursus on long distance licensing on NPIs in declarative sentences headed by *-en*; section 3 summarizes the conclusions.

For the purposes of this squib I assume the correctness of Zuazo's (1998 and subsequent work) classification of today's Basque dialects into Western, Central, Navarrese, Navarro-Labourdin and Souletin.² This state of affairs need not reflect the situation in previous stages of the language, where Labourdin and Low Navarrese have been considered separate dialects, with Low Navarrese even split into two separate dialects, Easter and Western Low Navarrese (cf. Bonaparte 1863); for the 19th century and previous written texts, I thus use the term *navarro-labourdin* in an inclusive way, meaning 'Low Navarrese and Labourdin' dialects.

1. Previous accounts of the *-enik/-ela* distribution

As is well known (Euskaltzaindia 1999), the contrast between declarative sentences headed by complementizers *-enik* and *-ela* has to do with the nature of the main sentence: if a polar element (mostly negation but also a question operator) is present in the main sentence, then *-enik* is used in the subordinate clause, but not otherwise:

- (1) Jonek esan du Miren gaixorik dago-*ela*.
'John said that Mary is sick'
- (2) a. Jonek ez du esan Miren gaixorik dago-*enik*.
'John didn't say that Mary is sick'
b. Esan du Jonek Miren gaixorik dago-*enik*?
'Did John say that Mary is sick?'
c. *Jonek esan du Miren gaixorik dago-*enik*.
'John said that Mary is sick'

The use of *-enik* is in principle restricted to Western, Central and, more marginally, Navarrese Basque (Zuazo 2014). In the rest of the dialects (presently Navarro-Labourdin and Souletin), *-ela* would be the default complementizer in all cases:

- (3) a. Jonek erran du Miren eri d-*ela*.

² See Lakarra (2011) for a view critical of Zuazo's classification.

- ‘John said that Mary is sick’
 b. Jonek ez du erran Miren eri d-*ela*.
 ‘John didn’t say that Mary is sick’
 c. Erran du Jonek Miren eri d-*ela*?
 ‘Did John say that Mary is sick?’

In her pioneering work, Laka (1990) states that both complementizers can be used in similar syntactic contexts and proposes that the contrast between *-enik* and *-ela* is related to a difference in presupposition. Let us take the following pair:

- (4) a. Iñigok ez du sinesten lurrak eztanda egingo du-*ela*.
 ‘Iñigo doesn’t believe that the earth will explode’
 b. Iñigok ez du sinesten lurrak eztanda egingo du-*enik*. (Laka 1990: 211)
 ‘Iñigo doesn’t believe that the earth will explode’

In sentence (4a), the speaker asserts that Iñigo doesn’t believe something which is taken to be a true fact (i.e. that the earth will explode); sentence (4b) doesn’t make such a presupposition, and the earth might explode or not.

Laka (1990) further proposes that the complementizer *-enik* be treated as an inherently negative Comp_[Neg] head which may license NPIs in subordinate clauses. Evidence for this claim would come from semantically negative verbs which, apparently, resist to license object NPIs:

- (5) a. *Josebak ezer ukatu. / *John denied anything
 b. Amaiak inork gorrotoa dio-*nik* ukatu du. / Amaia denied *that* anybody hates her

The idea is, then, that the negative feature of the complementizer head is responsible for the licensing of the NPI element inside the subordinate clause:

- (6) a. Amaiak [[_{TP} *inork gorrotoa dio*][_{Neg}]-*nik*]_[Neg] ukatu du. /
 b. I deny [that]_[Neg] [_{TP} *anybody hates her*]

Characterizing *-enik* as an inherently negative complementizer, as opposed to *-ela*, provides the basis to account for the following contrast (from Laka 1990: 211):

- (7) a. * Iñigok ez du sinesten *ezerk* eztanda egingo du-[*ela*].
 ‘Iñigo doesn’t believe that anything will explode’
 b. Iñigok ez du sinesten *ezerk* eztanda egingo du-[*enik*]_[Neg].
 ‘Iñigo doesn’t believe that anything will explode’

In other words, it is only the complementizer *-enik*, endowed with the feature [Neg], that can license the NPI *ezerk* in the subordinate clause.

Interestingly, Laka (1990: 212) assumes for English that the complementizer *that* present in examples like (7) must have a [Neg] feature; given that the contrast between the two complementizers is undetectable (the declarative and the negative version of *that* are phonologically identical), it is also reasonable for her to assume that the English version of (4a-b) above gets interpreted as having the negative feature. She makes a

complementizer. For the second issue, I also present a small piece of data based on Quer's (1998) and Kempchinsky's (2009) work, which would also confirm that *-ela* clauses do not necessarily presuppose the truth value of the proposition.

2. *-ela* complement clauses in Navarro-Labourdin

This section presents written evidence on long distance NPI licensing in *-ela* clauses (§2.1), in declarative *-en* clauses (§2.2) typical of this dialect, and a short comment on the interpretation of *-ela* clauses under the scope of matrix negation (§2.3).

2.1. Long distance NPI licensing in *-ela* clauses

The availability of long distance NPI licensing in *-ela* declarative clauses from matrix negation or question operators seems out of the question. Here we present 21st century examples drawn from the *Contemporary Dynamic Prose* corpus; the examples refer to the negative polarity items *nehor* 'anybody' and *deus* 'anything' and are drawn from dialectal magazines or Navarro-Labourdin writers who stick to their dialectal speech even when they write in Standard Basque.

- Long distance NPI licensing with *nehor*:

- (12) Ez du iduri *nehork* pena haundirik baduela Wahid presidentaren kanporatze hortaz. (*Herria*, 2001/08/02)
 'It doesn't seem that anybody feels any sorry for the expelled president Wahid'
- (13) Jendeak laguntzen baitu. Ez dut aditu *nehor* izan dela... (Mexane Oxandabartz, *Ez da musik*, Elkar, 2006, p. 219)
 'Because people help. I have not heard that anybody has been...'
- (14) ...eta hola mintzatuz, ez dut uste *nehork* kondenatzen ahal nuela. (Xipri Arbelbide, *Xuri-gorriak*, Elkar, 2007, p. 88)
 '... and speaking this way, I don't think anybody can condemn me'
- (15) Jendearen isilarazteko, jokatu zuen hirugarren partida, alabaina ere, anitzek ez baitzuten uste *nehor* ere gai zitekeela Mondragones bezalako pilotari bati irabazteko. (Angel Aintziburu, *Luzaiden gaindi 2*, Elkar, 2009, p. 11).
 'To make people shut up, he played the third match any way, since many people didn't believe that anybody would be able to beat a handball player like Mondragones'

- Long distance NPI licensing with *deus*

- (16) Zer nahi dela, *nehork* ez du erranen *deus* galdu dutela beren nahikeriatik. (*Herria*, 2001/11/08, p. 7)
 'In any event, nobody will say that they lost anything from their whim'
- (17) baina [Mahmoud Abbas] hunek ere ez du iduri *deus* gehiago erreusitzen duela Hamasan gibelarazteko. (*Herria*, 2003/06/26, p. 2)
 '... but it doesn't seem that this [M. Abbas] can obtain anything more to make Hamas step back'

This long distance NPI licensing in declarative sentences headed by *-ela* in Navarro-Labourdin is far from being a novelty in the language; there is ample of evidence in 20th century texts, too:

- Long distance NPI licensing with *nehor*, 20th century:

- (18) Ez nuen bada uste *nehor* handirik bazitekela nere ikusteko, Goix-bideko borda zaharraren aldean (J. Barbier, *Supazter Xokoan*, 1924, p. 53)
‘I didn’t think anybody big would be to see me around the old shack in Goixbide’
- (19) Uste duk badela *nehor*, / Balujan, Dik ala Medor, / Ni funditzeko gai denik? (Oxobi, *Lan oroitgharri zenbait*, 1966, p. 104)
‘Do you think there is anybody in Baluja, Dik or Medor, that will be able to destroy me?’
- (20) Ez konda, nik *nehor*, edo berotuko dudala Ameriketarat, edo harat joaitetik, gibelatuko dudala (P. Larzabal, *Iru ziren*, 1962, p. 142)
‘Don’t count that I will send anybody to America or that I will prevent him from going there’
- (21) Itzal bat hori, nahi baduzue, bainan itzal ederra, biziki bakan ikusten dena egungo egunean, kasik nehork nehon *nehoren* gogoaren berri badakiela xuxen eta segurki ez baitu erraiten ahal (J. Hiriart-Urruty, *Mintzaira, Aurpegi: Gizon!*, 1971 [1902], p. 108)
‘A shadow, if you will, but a beautiful shadow, one that is rarely seen these days, because almost nobody can say anywhere that he knows any news of anybody’s will correctly and clearly’

Oxobi’s example is so far the only one I provide where the licenser of the NPI turns out to be a matrix question, not negation.

The number of similar examples with *deus* is apparently higher, as least from the evidence I have been able to gather:

- Long distance NPI licensing with *deus*, 20th century:
- (22) ...eta ez zitautan iduritzen *deus* hoberik egiten ahal nuela. (J. Hiriart-Urruty, *Zezenak errepublikan*, 1972 [1893], p. 49)
‘... and it didn’t seem to me that I could do anything better’
- (23) Ez ginitazke bi asteren buruan, *deus* izan dela ere orroit, ez delarik bizkitartean ehun urte huntan hori baino gertakari handiagorik ikusi Frantzian. (J. Hiriart-Urruty, *Zezenak errepublikan*, 1972, p. 145)
‘We would not remember in a two week period that anything has happened, since no event more important than this has taken place in the last century in France’
- (24) ...eta etzaut iduritzen *deus* beharragorik baduketala orainxe, nola *bock* bat (Jean Etxepare, *Buruxkak*, 1936, p. 93)
‘... and I don’t think that I have anything more necessary right now than a *bock*’
- (25) Eta, hola apailatuz, ez zaut iduritzen, *deusek* barreiatuko duela gure amodioa. (P. Larzabal, *Iru ziren*, 1962, p. 46)
‘And, fixed this way, it doesn’t seem to me that anything will dissipate our love’
- (26) Nik ere ez nuen *deusik* sumatu eta ez nuen den gutienik sinetsi bazuela lotinantak, gau hartan, *deus* gaixtorik egiteko gogorik, ez ahalik. (P. Larzabal, *Oroitzapenak*, [Oroitzapenak](#), 1998).
‘I didn’t observe anything, and I did not believe at all that the lieutenant had that night any will to do anything bad, neither any power’
- (27) Ez dugu uste Beljikan berean *deus* lotsagarriagorik ikusi ginuela ahure xahar bat, bere emazte xahar ezindua eskorga batean etzanik, hari pusaka baino! (J. Elizalde *Zerbitzari*, *LVII.a gerlan*, 1995 [1914-1960]).

‘We don’t believe that we saw anything more embarrassing right in Belgium than a old man pushing a trolley with his handicapped wife lying down’

In many of these examples the indefinite pronoun *deus* appears with the partitive determiner *-ik*, which is considered itself a polar determiner in need of a syntactic licensing, as we explained above (de Rijk 1972).

In any case, examples of the kind described here go as far back as the Old and Classical Basque period (17th century), for Axular has several examples of the sort discussed here:

- (28) Zeren nola baitziren munduko lehenbizikoak, etziakiten oraiño heriotzearen berririk, etzuten *nehor* hiltzen zela ikhusi, eta halatan erraxki enganatu zituen (Axular, *Gero*, 1643, §42)
‘Since they were the first in the world, they didn’t know yet about death, they didn’t see that anybody died, and so they were easily deceived’.
- (29) Eztut edireiten ezen Iudas, Iaunaren saltzaillea, *nehork* kondenatu zuela, ez Pilatusek, ez herriak: (Axular, *Gero*, 1643, §283)
‘I don’t find that anybody condemned Judas, Jesus’s traitor, neither Pilate, nor the people’
- (30) Ezta ez erran behar *nehor* dela bere gogora, kanpoko bere gogarakgatik, aberatstasunakgatik, ian-edanakgatik, eta ez bertze frankiakgatik: (Axular, *Gero*, 1643, §288)
‘It must not be said that anybody is happy due to external joys, wealthiness, food and beverages, nor because of other abundancies’
- (31) Emaztetara emana den batek, eztu uste, emaztekin segitu gabe, *nehor* bizi ahal ditekeiela (Axular, *Gero*, 1643, §325)
‘Someone used to frequent women doesn’t believe than anybody may live without frequenting women’

For the NPI item *deus*, we can go even further back up to Archaic Basque, given these examples from the 16th century by Leizarraga:

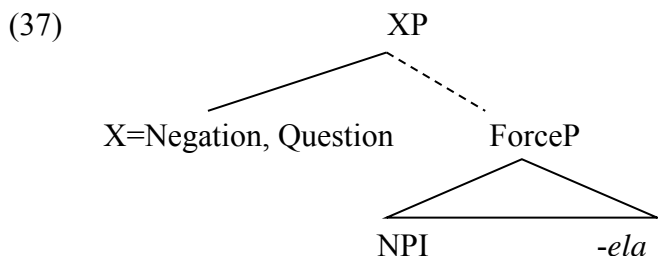
- (32) Baina ezтик irudi biktoria horretarik *deus* emendiorik ethorten zaikula, ikusirik ezen halakotz gu ezigarela hil gabe azkenzen (J. Leizarraga, *Katexisimea*, 1571)
‘Baina it doesn’t seem that any improvement may arise from that victory once we see that we don’t extinguish without dying’
- (33) Eta badaritzak hik, haren borondatearen kontra *deus* egin ahal daitela? (J. Leizarraga, *Katexisimea*, 1571)
‘And do you consider that anything can be done against his will?’

But examples of this sort are not isolated in the history of Navarro-Labourdin; here are a few more examples:

- (34) Graziak gauza guziak bihurtzen diotza Jainkoari, zeñaganik heldu baitire: eztu uste baduela *deus* onik, ... (M. Xurio, *Jesu-Kristoren imitazionea*, 1720)
‘Grace gives back all things to God, from whom they came: it doesn’t believe that it has anything good’
- (35) Uste duzu *deus* hoberik badathorrela hortarik? (L. Goietxe, *Fableak edo Alegiak*, 1852)
‘Do you think that anything better comes from there?’

- (36) Eta horiek oro ditudan arren, *deusere* badudala etzait iduri (J. P. Duvoisin, *Bible Saindua*, 1859-65)
 ‘And though I have all of these, it doesn’t seem to me that I have anything at all’

In sum, we can be sure that the following configuration:



is certainly well attested in Navarro-Labourdin from at least the sixteenth century; the NPI in question can be a subject or object (in the examples at hand) and, in the case of *deus*, it may constitute a heavier DP together with an adjective and the partitive (polar) determiner.⁵ Example (26) represents a case of even longer distance licensing of an NPI element: the NPI element is inserted in tenseless complement to a noun inside a subordinate clause.

2.2. An excursus on long distance NPI licensing in clauses headed by conjecture *-en*

In the context of the discussion above, it is worth bearing in mind that Navarro-Labourdin (as well as Souletin) Basque uses the common *wh*-complementizer *-en* in non-interrogative, declarative, contexts. According to Lafitte (1944), the nuance introduced by this complementizer is conjecture or lack of certainty on the part of the speaker. The use of this complementizer is limited to a few lexical predicates such as *baditake* ‘could be’, *uste ukan* ‘think, consider’, and *iduri* ‘seem’; the last two also admit *-ela* complement. Here are some relevant examples reported in Artiagoitia and Elordieta (2015):

- (38) a. *iduri zaut* [“marluz” *err(a)ten d-en*] (Camino 2004: 477)
 ‘It seems to me that it is said “marluz”’
 b. *etzaut iduitzen* [*bera lotzen ahal d-en*] (Camino 2004: 477)
 ‘It does not seem to me that it can burn by itself’
 c. *Ba-dita-ke* [*ez-t-en hain gaztia*] (Epelde 2003: 194)
 ‘It could be that she is not so young’

Interestingly, whether the main verb is negated or not, this does not affect the choice of the complementizer in this case either, as the reader can verify by comparing examples (38a) and (38b). Thus, in this case too, we may wonder whether matrix negation might license NPIs in the subordinate clause. The answer seems to be affirmative:

⁵ Long distance NPI licensing of adjuncts is also possible, of course:

- (i) *Ez dugu uste holako iatzar-aldirik ukan zuela nihoiz* eskualdunak, guziz Bizkaiko bazterretan eta Gipuzkan (J. Etxepare, *Berebitez*, 1931)
 ‘We don’t think Basque people had an awakening period like that ever, in the entire Biscay and in Gipuzkoa’

But due to space limitations, I have kept the examples to argument NPI elements.

- (39) Nik ez dut uste *nehor* ari den gaur lanean debaldetan. (*Herria*, 2004/10/28, p. 6.)
‘I don’t think that anybody is working today for nothing’
- (40) Tallurren komandoan sarrarazi zaitutalarik, ez dut uste *nehoren* kontra bidegabekeriarik egin dutan (G. Joannateguy & M. Etxeandi, *Alemaniarra deportatua*, 2003, p. 89)
‘Having introduced you in the seamstress’ group, I don’t think that I have done any injustice against anybody’
- (41) Uste dut hola zela. Ez dut uste *nehork* etxean atxiki dituen... (M. Oxandabartz, *Ez da musik*, Elkar, 2006, p. 30)
‘I think it was so. I don’t think anybody kept them at home’
- (42) Europako hautagaien bozkak iragan dira ezti-eztia; ez dut uste *nehork* buruko minik bildu duen aldi huntan. (*Herria*, 2004/06/17, p. 4)
‘The elections for European candidates have gone by softly; I don’t think anybody has had a headache this time’
- (43) Ikusi dugu biltzarretik hasarrean kanporatu zareztela, bainan, ez uste izan *nehorek* baduen dudarik zuen zintzotasunean. (P. Trounday, *Galerna*, Maiatz, 2012, p. 107)
‘We saw that you came out of the meeting furious, but don’t think that anybody has any doubt about your honorability’

In this case, I have not been able to find any example with *deus*.⁶ All these examples belong to the 21st century *Contemporary Dynamic Prose* corpus. Nonetheless, as expected, this kind of examples is found earlier on in the language:

- (44) Ez dut uste *nehork* maitatu duen Euskal-herria bihotz kartsuago batekin eta ukan fede gehiago gure etorkizunean (J. Etxepare, *Buruxkak*, 1936, p. 158)
‘I don’t believe that anybody loved the Basque Country with a more passionate heart and had more faith in its future’
- (45) Ez dugu uste *nehor* izan den horren gatik Jondoni Petriri harria botatu dionik: (P. Narbaitz Ardoy, *San Frantses Jatsukoa*, 1962, p. 321)
‘We don’t believe that anybody threw a stone to Saint Peter because of that’
- (46) Bainan ez zautak iduritzen badudan *deus* arrangurarik kontzientzian. (P. Larzabal, *Antzerki Laburrak*, 1934-1966)
‘But I don’t consider that I have any sort of complaint in my mind’
- (47) ...ez du iduri *deus*-ere baden soka horren puntan, hain da arin eta aise erabiltzen. (P. Lafitte, *Murtuts eta bertze*, 1945)
‘... it doesn’t look like there is anything at the end of the rope, it is carried so lightly and easily’

Thus, we equally find NPIs in subordinate clauses headed by *-en* when it has a declarative value:

⁶ Strictly speaking, this is not true:

(i) Ez baitut uste sekulan *deus* ikasi dudan, bihotzez ez bada (P. Perurena, Trapuan Pupua, Erein, 2001, p. 108).

‘Because I don’t think that I have ever learned anything, unless it was from the heart’

However, Perurena is not a speaker of Navarro-Labourdin Basque, but of Navarrese, a dialect which also shares the use of *-en* in declarative complements (Zuazo 2014: 238).

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