Searching for a *rara avis*: the history of Basque optative

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Abstract

Though all languages are able to convey hopes and desires, only some among them have a specific verbal inflection for this purpose, the optative mood. Up to now, every grammatical description of Souletin Basque (easternmost dialect) has emphasized the existence of the optative mood, with verbal forms showing the prefix *ait-*. In historical Basque, such forms are attested also in western and central dialects; thus, the optative mood undoubtedly was a feature of common Basque. The aim of this paper is to offer a diachronic description of Basque optative. After a basic conceptualization (§1), we will address the Basque optative forms throughout both grammarians' works (§2) and texts (§3), their extension in space and time (§ 4), and we shall propose a hypothesis on the origin of the prefix *ait-* (§5). Finally, we will succinctly describe other means to express hopes and desires in Basque (§6).

Key-words: verbal morphology, modality, optative, Souletin dialect

1. The optative: an introduction

This paper deals with *hopes* and *wishes* and, when necessary, difference will be made between what Musi (2016: 25) names WISH 1 (*desire*) and WISH 2 (*regret*). Among the different ways of expressing wish and hope, some languages have developed syntactic strategies, and some others morphologic ones. These morpho-syntactic means vary depending on whether the wish is a projection into the past —regret for what has not happened— or a desire. Thus, among other possible choices, in contrafactual contexts English (1) uses the verb *to wish*, Russian (2) and French (3) elliptic conditionals, and Spanish (4) the particle *ojalá*. In the field of factual desire, English (5) uses mainly modal verbs, Russian (6) a future-based marked syntax, French (7) the formula *plaise / plût à Dieu* introducing a subjunctive, and Spanish (8) the particle *ojalá* —these all always among other possible choices.

(1)   I wish I had come!
(2)   Если бы   я   пришел!
        if   SUBJ   I   come.PFV
(3)   Si   j' étais   venu !
        if   I   BE.1SG.PST come.PFV
(4)   ¡Ojalá hubiese   venido!
        ojalá   HAVE.1SG.PST.SUBJ come.PFV
(5)   May she live forever!
(6)   Будет   ли   она   жить вечно!
        AUX.FUT PTCL she   live   forever
(7)   Plût   à   Dieu   qu' elle   vécût   pour toujours !
        please.SUBJ DAT God   COMPL she live.SUBJ   for   ever
(8)   ¡Ojalá viva/ viviese   para siempre!
        ojalá   live.3SG.SUBJ.PRS/ PST for   ever

Moreover, some languages have developed an inflection for the expression of wish, with a special mood within the verbal system: the optative (lat. *optāre* 'to choose' or 'to wish'). It is relevant to distinguish between inflectional and non-inflectional means of conveying hope and desire. Indeed, the term *optative* makes reference to a verbal conjugation devoted to the expression of a wish of the speaker. In order to discern whether a language actually has or not optative mood, Dobrushina, van der Auwera & Goussev (2013) establish three restrictions: i) it has to be inflectional; ii) it must be possible with all persons; and iii) the expression of wish must be the main function. Defined in these terms, the world languages having an optative are approximately a seventh —i.e. 48 of 319 languages studied in the WALS.

2. The Basque optative in grammatical descriptions

Historically Basque has had an optative mood which fulfils the three restrictions aforementioned. As we will see in more detail, its forms take the prefix *ait-*, and they make appear the marked word order [AUX VERB – MAIN VERB] at the beginning of the sentence —in this sense, Basque optative can be considered inflectional and syntactical at the same time.

(9) <u>Ai-nintz</u>   *etorr-i!*
     OPT-be.1SG.PST come-PFV
     'I wish I had come!'

(10) <u>Ai-l-edi</u>   *bizi betiko!*
     OPT-3SG.HYP-become live forever
     'May she live forever!'

Oihenart (1656) is the first author mentioning the Basque optative. He describes optative forms in both the synthetic and the analytic conjugations (1656: 65v-66v); within the analytic one there are forms with **edin* & **ezan* —auxiliaries for *irrealis* values— or with **izan* & **edun* —*realis*—. Among the latter, Oihenart makes a distinction between imperfective and perfective forms (*ainins egoiten* 'may I stay' *vs. egon ainins* 'I wish I stayed') (*ibid.* 68). Later Chaho (1836: 158) classed the optative under the tag *conditionnel abstrait*. Inchauspe (1858) used the label *voitf*, and distinguished future (**edin* & **ezan* auxiliaries) and present (*izan* & **edun*). Gèze (1873: 95) conferred a nuance of potential to the forms with the auxiliaries **edin* & **ezan*: "*aikínte* puissions-nous être", and Bonaparte proposed the widest paradigms (Table 1). Finally, for Ithurry "Le votif est formé du suppositif [= conditional] en remplaçant *ba* initial par *ai*. Ex. : *Ailego*, plaise à Dieu qu'il restât (actuellement)" (1895: 63).

TABLE 1. The optative in Bonaparte's work (1869 I, adapted from the *Tableau 7*).

Optatif du conditionnel	présent	*ailitz erorten!* 'tombât-il !'
	parfait	*ailitz erori!* 'fût-il tombé !'
	parfait absolu	*ailitz eroririk!* 'fût-il déjà tombé !'
	parfait antérieur	*ailitz erori izan!* 'fût-il tombé !'
	parfait ant. absolu	*ailitz izan eroririk!* 'fût-il déjà tombé !'
Optatif du pot. conditionnel	futur	*ailedi eror!* 'tombât-il !'
	futur antérieur	*ailedi izan eroririk!* 'fût-il déjà tombé !'

Gavel & Lacombe (1937: 60) propose eight tenses for the optative, most of them mere aspectual nuances depending on the non-finite verbal form. Larrasquet (1939: 36-37) notices a main difference between both the present and future tenses ("*ainendi abia* plaise à Dieu que je parte") and the past tense ("*ainintz abiatu* plût à Dieu que je fusse parti(e)"). To put it shortly, Basque optative concerns verbal inflection, occurs with all persons, and is limited to the expression of wish; its forms take the prefix *ait-*, and make appear the marked word order [AUX – MAIN VERB] in initial position. In the analytic or conjugation, grammarians distinguish at least two tenses within the optative: the first one is determined by the use of the pair of auxiliaries *izan* & **edun* (*realis*), and the other by auxiliaries **edin* & **ezan* (*irrealis*).

3. The Basque optative throughout the texts[1]

Maybe because the vast majority of the authors describing the optative deal with Souletin Basque, or because its forms have especially lasted in this dialect, the optative has often been

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[1] For the whole of the Basque language we have recourse to the *Euskal Klasikoen Corpusa* [= The Corpus of Basque Classics]. For Souletin, we have worked with more than 40 texts form the 16th to the 19th centuries, the abbreviations of which are given in accordance with the GBD system (http://www.euskaltzaindia.eus/dok/oeh/ReferenciasBibliograficas.pdf). There is a reference absent from the GBD: *SteEli* (tragedy *Sainte Elisabeth*, ca. 1750; Basque Museum of Bayonne, Ms. 14).

considered as a characteristic of Souletin. Nevertheless, the Labourdins Leizarraga (1571) and Axular (1643) used forms of optative (11-13). What is more, forms of optative can be found in archaic texts of Western Basque too (14-15). Consequently, until 1600 the optative is documented in both the West and the East. Afterward, forms of optative appear in Classical Labourdin, above all in Pouvreau's works (17-20), an author supposed to use particular features from a cultivated language.

(11) <u>Ailitez</u> *trenka zuek trublatzen zaituztenak.* 'À la mienne volonté que ceux qui troublent vostre repos fussent retranchez'. (Lç *Gal* 5, 12)

(12) <u>Aitzinezate</u> *regna, guk ere zuekin batean regna dezagunzát.* 'À la mienne volonté que vous regnissiez, afin que nous aussi regnions auec vous'. (Lç *Cor* I 4, 8)

(13) *Eta Jainkoak* <u>ailliotsa</u> *liren asko.* 'And would to God that they could be many.' (Ax 419)

(14) *Eder baliz, on ez* <u>eiliz</u>. "Fuese hermosa y no buena" (Garibay, A56 *apud* GBD, *s.v. ai(t)-*).

(15) *Ai joat gabiraia* / […] <u>Ait joat</u> *gabiraia.* (*Perutxo's song* 4 & 7, *TAV* 104)

(16) <u>Aitnetza</u> *hek ungi* <u>guarda</u>, *Jauna ona* 'That I might obey them well, good Lord.' (EZ *Eliç* 207)

(17) <u>Ailitzaiku</u> *egun hura ilki!* <u>Ailute</u> *hemengo kauza guziek fin hartu.* 'Oh would that this day might shine forth, and that all these temporal things would come to an end.' (SP *Imit* III 48, 1)

(18) *Iainkoak* <u>ailliotsa</u> *bertuteen aitzinamendua elizen osoki loakartu zure baitan.* 'May progress in holiness not wholly fall asleep in thee.' (SP *Imit* I 18, 6)

(19) <u>Ainadilla</u> *bada bizi egin merezi eta behar bezala.* 'Oh, that I might live worthily and perfectly.' (SP *Imit* III 15, 2)

(20) *Berdin pairatu behar dut, eta* <u>aidezadan</u> *emeki paira.* 'Therefore I ought to bear, would that it be with patience.' (SP *Imit* III 29, 2)

In the South some texts attest for the optative. Apart from the archaic examples above (14, 15), in the 18th century we find the form *eitegi* (21); it is special because a) it starts with *eit-* instead of *ait-* and b) it is based on a present-tense inflection of the verb *egin* 'to do', used as transitive auxiliary in WB. There is yet a form in a 17th-century Navarrese text (22).

(21) *Edan* <u>eitegi</u> *adinon.* 'That you may drink moderately.' (*Acto* 262)

(22) *O kometa gizonen lotzazale bortiza joan* <u>aitziñan</u> *Turkoaren Buru kruela genzera.* "<u>Fueraste</u>, ò cometa vago astro espurio a la otomana cabeza cruel tirana digna solo desde estrago". (*TAV* 137)

Turning to Souletin, the attestation of the optative is exceptional. Until the 19th century, forms with *ait-* are found out only in Oihenart (23) and a religious text of 1782 (25). If we consider (24), written in a marked eastern variety other than Souletin, in all we have gathered four occurrences in Eastern Basque. In the 19th century Inchauspe uses it more frequently in his late production (26-29), which points to the choice of a cultivated author.

(23) *Egundan* <u>ez-ailiz</u> *jaio gaxtagina / Ederza, nezkato onaren zegina, / Edo jai eta, berhala / Hil* <u>ailiz</u>, *inhar bezala.* "Plût au ciel qu'il ne fût jamais né, le scélérat qui fit *Beauté* servante de *Richesse*, ou que, à peine né, il se fût éteint, comme une étincelle !" (O *Po* VI 4)

(24) <u>Ailira</u> *poroanza suerte horiek bekanago.* 'May those sorts of ordeals rarer.' (AR 97)

(25) <u>Alledüka</u>, <u>alledüka</u> *bihoz erdian!* 'That she might hold him in the middle of the heart!' (*NLilia* 9)

(26) *Badakitzat zure egitatiak, etzirela ez hotz ez bero,* <u>aizina</u> *hotz edo bero!* (Ip *Apok* 3, 11)

(27) <u>Ainendi</u> *untsa eta zük merexi bezala!* 'That I might live worthily and perfectly' (Ip *Imit* III 15, 2)

(28) *Eta* <u>aineza</u> *orano oren erdi hura berere untsa igaran!* (Ip *Imit* IV 1, 4)

(29) <u>Ainentzazü</u> *zure presentziaz osoki süsta, erra eta zihaurtara khanbia!* 'Oh that Thou wouldest altogether by Thy presence, kindle, consume, and transform me into Thyself!' (Ip *Imit* IV 16, 3)

4. On the area and length of the Basque optative

Since addressed by most of the descriptions of Souletin, the optative has been taken for one of the most conspicuous features of this dialect. As shown before, forms of optative are documented in Archaic and Old Basque texts written in virtually all dialects. Therefore, in the past the optative was a common feature of Basque (Lafon 1944 I: 73). Nevertheless, the optative is a low-frequency item in texts and, concerning the Country of Soule —alleged reservoir of the optative— we find that most of classical authors did not use it. Which is the

reason for that? Why do not we find it in the tradition of popular drama? One might think that the optative mood was quite a choice that cultivated authors reserved for an elevated style.

It is likely that for the 17ᵗʰ or 18ᵗʰ centuries the forms with the prefix *ait-* had fallen in disuse or, at least, had withdrawn in favor of other ways of expressing wish. In Mounole's words, by the 19ᵗʰ century the forms of the optative "ne semblent exister qu'en souletin […] et elles étaient toujours usitées au 20ᵉ siècle, du moins dans certaines variétés" (2011: 218). The idea is expressed by Bonaparte (1869 II: 8ff), Gavel & Lacombe (1937: 48) and Lafitte (1944: §722). Lafon (1944 I: 495) stated that the optative has disappeared even in Soule. Conversely, Casenave-Harigile (1993: 492) suggests that he has listened forms of the type *ait-*, and Etxegorri (2003: 269) assures that the optative is still in use in Esquiule and Geronce.

5. On the origins of the prefix *ait-*

The prefix *ait-* has an allomorph *eit-* in Western Basque (21). For Mounole (2011: 101) *eit-* and the western modal particle *ei* would have a common origin. Even if the connection is plausible, the prefix of the optative has a particularity: it causes changes in the form to which it is added —*b*, *d*, *g* > *p*, *t*, *k*, and *z* > *tz*; conversely, before *n*, *l* or *h* it is the prefix that changes from *ait* to *ai-*. Thus, Leizarraga's *aitzinezate* led Lafon to propose that the prefix was *ait-* rather than *ai-* (1944 I: 495). In actual fact, the forms that make appear *t* —or any phonological change cause by *t*— are common; *cfr. eitegi* (*eit+egi* 21), *aitziñan* (*ait-+ziñan* 22), Pouvreau's *aitzine* (*ait-+zine*) or *aitzinitzat* (*ait-+zinitzat*), and Inchauspe's *aikünü* (*ait-+günü*) & *aikina* (*ait-+gina*), not to mention *ait joat* (15) and *aitneza* (*ait-+netza* 16). In sum, the claim can be made that the optative morpheme is *ait-*.

As for the origins of the optative morpheme, Lafon (1944 I: 495) saw the exclamative particle *ai* —the *-t* of the optative would be the result of an analogy with the forms derived by the prefixes *bait-* & *albait-*. Without excluding this hypothesis, another possibility is to consider that *ait-* is an evolution of the prefix *bait-*. The connection between the prefixes *ait-* and *bait-* is coherent: present-day Souletin variant *beit-* is a recent evolution of *bait-* —for the period in which the optative was productive Souletin texts always show *bait-*. Moreover, we must highlight the fact that the optative morpheme is a prefix, which implies great antiquity —*ait-* is one of the very few productive Basque prefixes in historical times. Last, but not least, the fact that forms with *ait-* are documented in all dialects is also a solid argument in favor of the antiquity of the optative, as the dialectal split began in the early Middle Ages.

From a typological perspective, it is hard to determine the grammaticalization paths of the optative: if the imperative occurs in the vast majority of world languages, the hortative, the prohibitive or the admonitive and the optative itself happen to be much less habitual (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 211). Nevertheless, the grammaticalization paths for the optative are probably futures, the conditionals, subjunctives and imperatives (Sadock & Zwicky 1985: 164). Thus, the Old Common Basque prefix **bait-* that we have postulated could have expressed at least one of those meanings; at this point, it is worth mentioning that historical prefix *bait-* conveyed a conditional value too (Krajewska 2016: 261).

6. Other means of expression of wish and regret

This section offers an overview on the evolution of these other morpho-syntactic resources. In general, the sources for the elements which convey wish in all Basque dialects are common in the world languages: i) conditionals; ii) forms of injunction; and iii) future tense sentences.

6.1. *The prefix* ba-

In Basque conditionals typically involve the use of the prefix *ba-* 'if'. The protasis of a conditional sentence may undergo insubordination and convey meanings such as wish. The replacement of the optative forms by conditional constructions seems to be very old. In 1562 Landuccio (299 *apud* Mounole 2011: 102) gives the equivalence *oxala* (desiderative particle) = *validi* 'if it was'. The examples below illustrate this type of construction in Souletin; notice the contrast between regret (30) and desire (31).

(30) *Sekula ikhusi* <u>ezpanü</u>, *oh krudel destinatia! Maradikatü da enetako sorthü nintzan mementua. Argi gabe izan* <u>baliz</u> *ni sorthü ninzan egüna edo sabelian ninzala hil* <u>baliz</u> *ene ama!* 'If I had never seen him, oh cruel destined! Accursed is for me my birth moment. If the day of my birth was without light, or if my mother was dead while I was in the womb!' (*Edipa* 92-93)

(31) *Ene haurren artian posible* <u>baliz</u> *ünionia! Ah, othoi lagünt nezazü, ene salbazale maitia!* 'If union was possible between my sons! Oh, please help me, my beloved Savior!' (*SteEli* 1220)

6.2. The construction ai ba-

Besides exclamation, in Basque the interjection *ai* can express desire too (Lafon 1944 I: 495). According to the GBD, "En oraciones con el verbo en modo hipotético, exclamación que expresa un deseo irrealizable" (*s.v. ai* 1). When illustrating the construction *ai ba-*, the GBD gives examples from western authors since the 18th c., and from the beginning of the 20th c. also from eastern texts. In Souletin this construction occurs with the interjection *ah!* (32, 33).

(32) <u>Ah</u>, *zü izan* <u>bazina</u>*!* 'Ah, if you had been [there]!' (*Chiveroua* 248, in Urkizu 1998: 147)

(33) <u>Ah</u>*! Hori izan ahal* <u>baledi</u>*!* 'Ah, if that could be!' (*SGrat* 6)

6.3. The constructions aments ba- *and* sikiera ba-

During the 18th century, the adverb *aments* 'at least' (< Oc. *au ments*) emerges combined with the prefix *ba-* in Souletin. This has well-known parallels: Fr. [*si au moins/ seulement* + SUBJ], Sp. [*si al menos* + SUBJ], Eng. [*if at least / only* + SUBJ] or Rus. [*если бы только* + SUBJ]. Corpora show that the use of *aments ba-* is limited to Souletin and Eastern Lower-Navarrese. As it can be perceived in examples 34 and 35, this construction is mostly used to express regret. In WB the most obvious equivalent is *sikiera ba-* (< Sp. *siquiera*; GBD, *s.v.*).

(34) <u>Aments ezpalirade</u> */ bataillan ene semiak!* 'I only my sons weren't in the battle!' (*Edipa* 424)

(35) <u>Aments ezpaledi</u> *jin orano erauntsi hori!* 'If at least that hail came not!' (*SGrat* 8)

6.4. The composed prefix alba-

Lafon (1944 I: 477) classed the forms having the prefix *alba-* (← *ahal* + *ba-*) as *potentiel de suppositif*, and those in the hypothetical tense "peuvent servir à exprimer un désir, un souhait, un regret". Such forms are documented since 1545 (36). For the following centuries the outcomes of the corpus include western authors, which shows that the forms of hypothetic with the prefix *alba-* spread over most of the Basque-speaking area —except in Soule.

(36) *Elas izul* <u>albaneza</u> *iragan den denbora.* "Ah! si je pouvais faire revenir le temps passé" (E VI 21)

6.5. The particle ba(d)linba

In addition to a likelihood meaning (GBD *s.v. baldinba*), the particle *bal(d)inba/ balima* can also express wishes in indicative sentences (Gèze 1873: 242; Ithurry 1895: 362). Classical Labourdin authors used *bal(d)inba* with the sense of desire (37-38). In the illustration of *bal(d)inba/ balima* the GBD gives numerous witnesses from all continental dialects; in peninsular Basque the occurrences of this particle are limited to very few 20th c. men of letters. In Souletin *balima* seems to arise in the 18th century (39).

(37) Eta orain ixilik kanpora egoizten gaituzte? Ez <u>balimba</u>*: baina berék ethorririk idoki gaitzate.* 'Plaise à Dieu que non' (Lç *Act* 16, 37)

(38) <u>Baldinba</u> ez ahal naiz *hunen gatik ifernurako* 'Il faut espérer que je n'irai pas en enfer pour ceci' (Ax 57 *apud* Ithurry, 1895: 362)

(39) <u>Balinba</u> *Jinkuak benai enzünen!* 'That the Lord may listen to me!' (*StJul* 1146)

(40) <u>Balinba</u> *zure etsenpliek phitzeraziren naik.* 'May your example wake me.' (*MaiMarHil* 71)

6.6. The particle oxala

Mounole (2011: 208) has documented the particle *oxala* (< Sp. < And. Arabic) in a 1729 Navarrese sermon and in Urte's grammar (ca. 1712). Lafitte explain the spread of *oxala* by a need of disambiguation of the conditional and votive uses of the prefix *ba-* (1944: §722). This element is found neither in Souletin nor in Lower-Navarrese texts. In the examples below, *oxala* is combined with a jussive and with the prefix *ba-*:

(41) <u>Ojala</u> estaiela *arla izan* (Navarrese sermon of 1729, 7)

(42) *Ez zaretela ez hotz, ez bero.* <u>Oxala</u> *hotza* <u>baziñe</u> *edo beroa.* (He *Apok* 3, 15)

6.7. The particle ahal

In Western Basque the construction [*ahal* + PROSP PART] is used in the expression of wish. The first record of this construction dates from the 17ᵗʰ century (43). After the GBD data, by the 19ᵗʰ c. it spread into Labourdin. Eastward, we find it in a malediction of 1807 (44).

(43) *Laster etorri nadin* <u>gurako al dozu</u> 'May you want that I arrive soon' (*ConTAV* §5.1.4)

(44) *Larria* <u>elkhiren</u> <u>ahal</u> *zeik etxera beno lehen!* 'May your skin strip before you arrive at home!' (*Malqu* 430, in Urkizu 1998: 253)

6.8. Formulae related to God

In Archaic and Old Basque there is a plethora of votive formulae containing *Jainko* 'God' and some of the old verbal roots which used to express the idea of wish. The grammatical optative is documented in the formula *Jainkoak ailiotsa* 'May God want it' (13, 18), and the same root appears in the conditional *Jainkoak baletsa* 'if God wanted it' (45-47). According Lafitte, "La vieille formule *Jainkoak baletsa*… plaise à Dieu, nous paraît plus locale, mais elle n'existe presque plus." (1944: §722). Finally, in Souletin the verbal root present in both *ailiotsa* and *baletsa* turns up in jussive constructions (48, 49).

(45) <u>Baletsa</u> jaungoikoari */ Har nezan zerbitzari / Hark er', eta leristan / hanbat on zein nik hari.* "S'il plaisait à Dieu qu'elle me prît pour serviteur et qu'elle m'aimât autant que je l'aime" (O *Po* XIII)

(46) <u>Jinkuak</u> <u>baletsa</u> *hen bizitzia, jakitiaren araur izan lizan!* 'Would that their life and knowledge had agreed together!' (Mst I 3, 6)

(47) <u>Jinkuak baletsa</u> */ ükheitez zük biktoria* 'May God want you get the victory.' (*Jean de Paris* 85)

(48) <u>Jinkuak datsala</u> *grazia hori merexi dezadan.* 'Grant me to prove worthy.' (Mst III 56, 5)

(49) *Fidelak jin balite indigne izatera —*<u>Jinkoak eztatsala</u>*—.* 'If the faithful happened to be unworthy —God forbid—.' (Mercy 18)

7. Conclusion

In historical Basque, there are a set of morpho-syntactical means to express hope, desire and regret. The most special among them is the optative mood, with verbal forms taking the prefix *ait-*. The Basque optative has lasted in the Country of Soule longer than elsewhere: depending on the witnesses, until the 19ᵗʰ or 20ᵗʰ centuries, and it is supposed to be still in use in two Souletin villages. Paradoxically, the forms of optative are extremely uncommon in Souletin texts. From a wider perspective, we can conclude that for the 18ᵗʰ century the optative was an archaism and had already fallen in disuse in most of the Basque territories.

We have claimed that the morpheme of the optative is not *ai-*, but clearly *ait-*, as phonetic changes prove. We are skeptical of the alleged common origin of the optative morpheme *ait-* and the Western Basque modal particle *ei*. Concerning the origin of the prefix *ait-*, we have

considered two plausible sources: i) the interjection *ai*; and ii) an ancient prefix **bait-*, perhaps with conditional value. The fact that the optative morpheme *ait-* is one of the very few productive prefixes in historical Basque, and documented in all dialects, points to a situation prior to the dialectal split, i.e. Ancient Common Basque (ca. seventh century AD).

As for the rest of ways of expressing wishes, in general the conditional-based constructions spread out during the historical period. The most obvious among them is the use of the conditional prefix *ba-*, with or without an interjection. The prefix *alba-* typically occurs in the oldest Basque texts. The particle *bal(d)inba*, first attested in Labourdin, arises in Souletin in the 18th century. In parallel, *oxala* emerges at the beginning of the 18th century, and appears also in Labourdin, but not eastward in Aquitaine. Otherwise, since the 18th c., the constructions *aments ba-* & *sikiera ba-* ('if at least') arise in Souletin and Biscayan, respectively, as a mirror in the two ends of the Basque Country. Additionally, in the 18th century, in WB the modal particle *al* (EB *ahal*) begins to be used with a meaning of desire in a construction with the prospective participle. Finally, as most of the languages, historical Basque developed a set of formulae involving the name of God and the verb TO WANT.

In our opinion, the marginal attestation of forms with the prefix *ait-* in Souletin texts does not justify the image —maybe due to the grammatical descriptions— of the optative being one of the most salient features of this dialect. Nevertheless, the fact that Basque optative is typologically uncommon and diachronically ancient made necessary this study.

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