

Meaning and use of evidential/modal particles in Basque

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All languages have means to express the speaker's source of knowledge —evidential element— and/or her stance towards the truth of the proposition expressed —modal element, mainly epistemic or doxastic— (verbs, adverbs, enclitic elements, etc.). Basque language is distinguished from its neighbouring languages, among other things, in having particles that express those both dimensions: especially *omen*, *ei*, *bide*, *ote* and *al*.¹ Besides of having this semantic/pragmatic common feature, they are all grouped together syntactically —they appear in the verbal complex, before the conjugated verb, in their canonical use (Monforte 2018). In fact, Basque particles have been mainly analysed from the syntactic point of view (among others, Etxepare 2010 and Monforte 2018). In contrast, there are just a few works that analyse their meaning and use (inter alia, Garmendia 2014, Korta & Zubeldia 2014).

We make that attempt in analysing especially *omen* and *bide* from the semantic and pragmatic point of view. We argue that:

1. Both particles are related to the two dimensions above. The evidential element is the encoded meaning in the case of both particles. In contrast, the doxastic element has a different status: the uncertainty associated to *omen* belongs to pragmatics, whereas the high but incomplete certainty associated to *bide* belongs to semantics —it is also part of its encoded meaning.
2. Both particles are illocutionary modifiers, and, in addition, *omen* contributes to the truth-conditions of the utterance.

Our conceptual arguments are complemented with corpus study and experimental research.

Regarding the first issue, we conclude that the speaker, by means of an *omen*-utterance, expresses (asserts) that she is reporting what someone other than herself said (stated), and the content of uncertainty often attributed to it (*pace* Euskaltzaindia [The Royal Academy of the Basque language] 1987) is not part of the meaning of an *omen*-sentence, but a generalized conversational implicature (Grice 1967) that can be generated by an *omen*-utterance.

Bide has also been associated to two aspects. On the one hand, to the evidential dimension: by a *bide*-utterance the speaker asserts that she has indirect evidence for a proposition *p*. On the other hand, it has been linked to an epistemic or doxastic dimension: using a *bide*-utterance the speaker expresses that she assigns high probability to *p* —that *p* is highly likely but not absolutely certain. We propose that *bide* is only appropriate when the speaker attributes, in a scale of probability of 0 to 1, a probability higher than 0.5 to the proposition *p*. Infelicitous utterances are created when making utterances that express speaker's complete certainty on the truth (or falsity) of the proposition as a continuation of a *bide*-utterance.

- (1) #*Euri-a egin bide d-u, ikus-i*
rain-DET.sg do.PFV PART 3SG.ABS.PRS-have see-PFV
d-u-t nola ari z-u-en.
3SG.ABS.PRS-have-1SG.ERG how PROG 3SG.ERG.PST-have-PST
'It has *bide* rained, I've seen it.'

¹ We leave aside, in this proposal, the question particle *-a*, used in Eastern dialects.

It can be concluded, then, that the lack of complete certainty assigned to *bide* is an unchangeable aspect of *bide*-sentences regardless of context—that is to say, it is part of the meaning—and not a pragmatic content.

As for the second issue, we argue that *omen* contributes to the propositional content of the utterance. Our evidence comes from the results of two tests (assent/dissent and scope) and experimental research. On the one side, the results of the assent/dissent experiment show that the speakers accept rejecting the evidential content besides the reported proposition. On the other side, the application of the scope test show that *omen*'s semantic contribution gets narrow scope under sentential (external) negation, and communication and knowledge predicates. So, the proposition *p* expressed by means of a bare utterance *S* and the proposition *p_{omen}* expressed by its *omen*-counterpart are two different propositions. Both are assertions, but they assert different things. Furthermore, *omen* is also an illocutionary point indicator. It can only be used to report statements; that is to say, utterances of declarative sentences—whatever their illocutionary point—; whereas *omen*-utterances have a restriction: they always have the assertive illocutionary point. Hence, we contend that *omen* is an element that contributes to the propositional content and it is, concurrently, an illocutionary point indicator (see Caudal 2009 and Jayez & Rossari 2001).

In contrast, *bide* is just an illocutionary force indicator with no contribution to the truth-conditional content of the utterance. The *bide*-utterance and its bare counterpart without *bide*, both are assertions, but they differ in the degree of strength of the belief that constitutes the sincerity condition. It seems that *bide* just constrains that the degree of strength has to be in the interval between 0.5 and 1—strictly higher than 0.5 and strictly lower than 1.

Concerning the second point, we extend our analysis to the interrogative particles *ote* and *al*, and maintain that they are also illocutionary modifiers. They both indicate that the utterance is a question. *Ote*, in addition, adds a kind of “indirectness”—the speaker believes that the hearer is not, at the moment, in the condition of answering the question.

To sum up, our conjecture is that these four Basque particles are illocutionary modifiers, and *omen*, in addition, contributes to the propositional content of the utterance. So, we conclude that the five particles under study share three properties: they occupy the same syntactical slot in the sentence, they are modal/evidential elements and they modify illocutionary force.

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