

Año LVI. urtea

137 - 2024

Urtarrila-ekaina

Enero-junio



# FONTES LINGVÆ VASCONVM STVDIA ET DOCUMENTA

SEPARATA

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## The division of labour between the Basque articles in the indefinite domain

Silvie Strauss

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# Sumario / Aurkibidea

## Fontes Linguae Vasconum. Studia et Documenta

Año LVI. urtea - N.º 137. zk. - 2024

Urtarrila-ekaina / Enero-junio

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# The division of labour between the Basque articles in the indefinite domain

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Euskal artikuluen arteko lan-banaketa eremu zehaztugabeen

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La división de trabajo entre los artículos vascos en el ámbito indefinido

Silvie Strauss  
Universität Leipzig  
silvie.strauss@uni-leipzig.de  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9684-6133>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35462/flv137.2>

Received: 04/08/2023. Provisionally accepted: 22/04/2024. Accepted: 08/05/2024.

## ABSTRACT

The usage of the Basque definite and indefinite articles differs significantly from their Romance counterparts. While the definite article is used as a default article for NPs without another determiner, the exact function of the indefinite article in this system has remained somewhat unclear, although specificity has been brought up as a factor. A comparison with Eastern Armenian, which has a threefold definiteness/specificity distinction, in three parallel texts shows that the use of the indefinite article in Basque follows two different systems in different varieties: in the West it is based on discourse prominence and in the East on individuation.

**Keywords:** definiteness; specificity; discourse prominence; bare nouns; articles.

## LABURPENA

Euskal artikulu mugatuaren eta mugagabearen erabilera erromantzeen baliokideetatik nabarmen aldentzen da. Artikulu mugatua artikulu lehenetsi bezala beste determinatzailearik ez duen edozein ISrekin erabiltzen den arren, sistema horretan artikulu mugagabeak duen funtzio zehatzak ilun samar jarraitzen du, espezifikotasuna faktore gisa aipatu izan bada ere. Mugatutasun/espezifikotasun bereizketa hirukoitza duen ekialdeko armenierarekiko konparaketak, hiru testu paralelotan oinarrituta, erakusten du artikulu mugagabearen erabilerak bi sistemari jarraitzen diela aldaeretan; mendebaldean diskurtsoko nabarmentasunean oinarritzen da eta ekialdean, aldiz, indibiduazioan.

**Gako hitzak:** mugatutasuna; espezifikotasuna; diskurtsoko nabarmentasuna; izen biluziak; artikuluak.

## RESUMEN

El uso del artículo definido e indefinido vasco difiere notablemente de sus contrapartes románicas. Mientras que el artículo definido se utiliza como un artículo estándar con cualquier SN que no tenga otros determinantes, la función exacta del artículo indefinido en este sistema ha permanecido poco clara, aunque se ha planteado la especificidad como un factor. Una comparación con el Armenio Oriental, que tiene una triple distinción de definitud/especificidad, en tres textos paralelos muestra que el uso del artículo indefinido en vasco sigue dos sistemas diferentes en diferentes variedades: en occidente se basa en la prominencia del discurso y en oriente en la individuación.

**Palabras clave:** definitud; especificidad; prominencia del discurso; sustantivos desnudos; artículos.

1. INTRODUCTION. 2. REFERENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND ARTICLE TYPES. 3. MORPHOLOGICAL MARKING OF DEFINITENESS IN BASQUE. 3.1. Definiteness, number and case. 3.2. The indefinite article. 3.3. The partitive. 3.4. Distribution of the articles. 3.5. Historical development. 4. IS *BAT* A SPECIFIC INDEFINITE ARTICLE? 4.1. Comparison with Eastern Armenian. 4.2. Discussion. 5. CONCLUSION. 6. ABBREVIATIONS. 7. REFERENCES.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Definiteness is a concept that is best defined in terms of identifiability of a referent by both the speaker and the hearer, i.e. a noun phrase marked as definite signals to the hearer that they are in a position to identify the referent (Becker, 2021, p. 70; Lyons, 1999, pp. 13-15).

Morphological marking of definiteness is often an areal phenomenon. The greatest area of languages having definite articles today consists of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, where even genetically unrelated languages possess this feature (Becker, 2021, p. 48). One of these languages is Basque, which has been in increasingly intense contact with Romance languages since the arrival of the Romans in Aquitania and on the Iberian Peninsula. Nevertheless, its use of the definite article deviates significantly from its Romance neighbours (Etxeberria, 2014, p. 293; Martínez Areta, 2009, p. 65; Trask, 2003, pp. 118-119; Zubiri & Zubiri, 2000, p. 137). In fact, the Basque definite article appears also on NPs that cannot be argued to be identifiable by the hearer in any way. Its occurrence on the predicate noun in (1), for example, does not signal identifiability, since Mark Welland is in fact not the only teacher at the University of Cambridge.

- (1) *Mark Welland-Ø* [...] *Cambridge unibertsitate-ko irakasle-a-Ø* *da*  
 Mark Welland-ABS **Cambridge university-LGEN** **teacher-DEF.SG-ABS** COP.3SG  
 'Mark Welland is a teacher at the university of Cambridge.' (EPG: Berria 2004-07-30)

As the so-called definite article can also appear on NPs with indefinite interpretation, the exact function of the indefinite article in this system has remained somewhat unclear, although sometimes specificity has been brought up as a factor. This paper aims to clarify

the role of specificity and possible other factors in the use of the two Basque articles. After giving an overview on the morphological means of marking definiteness in Basque, previous descriptions of their distribution and their historical development, the Basque article system will be compared to Eastern Armenian, a language with a three-way distinction between definite, specific indefinite and non-specific indefinite, based on three parallel texts.

## 2. REFERENTIAL FUNCTIONS AND ARTICLE TYPES

The notion of definiteness refers to the way discourse referents relate to the mental spaces of the discourse participants. Becker (2021, p. 70) defines definiteness as mutual and unambiguous identifiability by both the speaker and the hearer and indefiniteness as the lack thereof. Mutual and unambiguous identifiability of a referent requires that the referent is part of the mental spaces of both the speaker and the hearer and that both assign the same referent to the referring expression used (Becker, 2021, p. 62). Since mutual identifiability can be achieved in different ways, like previous mention, shared experience or uniqueness in the discourse situation, the definite domain contains different referential functions that may be covered to different extents by different articles in different languages (Becker, 2021, p.62). However, since the Basque articles do not show any unexpected behaviour in the definite domain, in this paper the focus will be on the indefinite domain, where the main distinction to be made is specificity.

In Becker's (2021, p. 92) definition, a specific referent is a particular referent that is not unambiguously identifiable by the hearer, and specificity is consequently a property of indefinites. According to other definitions, specificity is independent of definiteness (Lyons, 1999, p. 167; von Heusinger, 2001, p. 167), although in languages marking both definiteness and specificity, specificity seems to be distinguished only in indefinites (Lyons, 1999, p. 177).

Specificity is usually defined as referentiality or presuppositionality (Ionin, 2006, p. 175) or paraphrased as «the speaker has the referent in mind», «the speaker can identify the referent» or «it matters which referent we select out of the set of entities that fulfill the description» (von Heusinger, 2001, p. 167). The difference is illustrated by the two sentences in example (2):

- (2) a. *I'm going to buy a suit tomorrow – you'll be horrified by the colour.*  
 b. *I'm going to buy a suit tomorrow – even if I can't find one I really like.*  
 (Lyons, 1999, p. 168)

In English, there is no morphological distinction between the specific *a suit* in (2a) and the non-specific *a suit* in (2b), but the continuation shows that the suit in (2a) is already known to the speaker while the suit in (2b) is not.

There are, however, at least three different properties that have been assigned to specificity and which do not always coincide: scope, referentiality and *noteworthiness* or discourse prominence.

In formal semantics, specificity is described as NPs having wide scope vs. narrow scope. The sentence *John didn't meet a stranger* can be understood as *There is a stranger that John didn't meet* or as *John didn't meet any stranger*. The different semantic representations of these two interpretations are given in (3):

- (3) John didn't meet a stranger.  
 a.  $\exists x (\text{stranger}(x) \ \& \ \sim \text{met}(\text{John}, x))$   
 b.  $\sim \exists x (\text{stranger}(x) \ \& \ \text{met}(\text{John}, x))$  (Lyons, 1999, p. 169)

In (3a), read as: «There is some  $x$  such that  $x$  is a stranger and John didn't meet  $x$ », the existential quantifier  $\exists$  has scope over the whole proposition, it has *wide scope*. In (3b), read as: «It is not the case that there is some  $x$  such that  $x$  is a stranger and John met  $x$ », it is inside the scope of the negation operator  $\sim$ , it has *narrow scope*. The same holds for the sentences in (2): (12a) can be paraphrased as: «There is a suit and I'm going to buy it», and (12b) as: «It is going to be the case that there is a suit and I buy it». Such differences in scope can be observed in so-called *opaque contexts*: with verbs of propositional attitude (such as 'want', 'believe', 'hope', 'intend'), negation, questions, conditionals, modals and future tense (Lyons, 1999, p. 166).

- (4) a. **A dog** was in here last night – it's called Lulu and Fred always lets it sit by the fire on wet nights.  
 b. **A dog** was in here last night – there's no other explanation for all these hairs and scratch marks. (Lyons, 1999, p. 171)

In (4) there is a similar distinction as in (2), but the existential quantifier has wide scope in both cases: «There is some  $x$  such that  $x$  is a dog and  $x$  was in here last night». These contexts are called *transparent* (Lyons, 1999, p. 170). The sentences do not have different semantic representations, the distinction is pragmatic rather than semantic (Lyons, 1999, p. 171): (4a) is specific, because the speaker is talking about a particular individual which happens to be a dog, but could also be referred to in other ways, e.g. by its name *Lulu* – the NP *a dog* is referential. (4b) is non-specific, because the speaker does not have any particular dog in mind. The NP *a dog* only describes one crucial property of the unknown individual – it is non-referential (cf. Lyons, 1999, p. 171). The specificity distinction in transparent contexts is therefore better described as referentiality.

Thus scope and referentiality do not necessarily coincide: while narrow-scope NPs must be non-referential, wide-scope NPs can be referential or non-referential, as shown in (4). This is why Lyons speaks of two different types of specificity, one concerning scope and the other one concerning referentiality (Lyons, 1999, pp. 173-174).

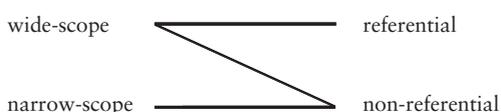


Figure 1. The relation between scope and referentiality (Lyons, 1999, p. 174).

Furthermore, in many languages showing a morphological distinction between specific and non-specific, a NP is not mandatorily marked as specific just because the speaker is able to identify the referent. As Lyons puts it, «the speaker may be in a position to identify the referent of the noun phrase but chooses to treat its identity as significant or not» (Lyons, 1999, p. 178). The Turkish article *bir*, for example, «tends to be omitted when the identity of the referent does not matter» (Lyons, 1999, p. 178).

In order to account for this fact, Ionin (2006) defines specificity as «noteworthiness». In her analysis of English *this* used as a specific indefinite marker, she finds that a NP is marked as specific if there is «something noteworthy about the individual» (Ionin, 2006, pp. 180-181), i.e. if the speaker is «able to say *something*» about the referent (Ionin, 2006, p. 184). Thus a specific NP is usually followed by a «statement of some *noteworthy property*» (Ionin, 2006, p. 184).

Givón in his study of the indefinite article in colloquial Hebrew characterises the difference as follows: a NP is treated as specific if «[the referent's] specific identity matters» and it is treated as non-specific if «only its type matters» (Givón, 1981, p. 38).

This corresponds more or less to what Becker (2021, pp. 245-246) calls *discourse prominence* and treats as a property distinct from specificity and referential functions in general, since it is independent of the identifiability of the referent. Discourse-prominent referents are «referents that are newly introduced in the discourse, that correspond to the center of attention of the current discourse segment and often to the initial element in a topic chain» (Becker, 2021, p. 246). They contrast with «referents that are not relevant to the discourse or whose identifiability does not play a role in the current discourse situation» (Becker, 2021, p. 251).

While in some languages a distinction is indeed made between identifiable and non-identifiable referents (cf. Becker, 2021, pp. 260-281, pp. 289-297), in other languages described as distinguishing between specific and non-specific referents, the crucial property seems to be in fact discourse prominence. In example (5a) from Eastern Armenian, the identity of her husband can be expected to be clear to the speaker, but there is nothing noteworthy about him in this context, in other words, she is not going to talk about him in more detail, which is why the NP is not marked as specific. In contrast, in (5b) the husband is introduced in order to tell more about him and the NP is marked with the specific indefinite article *mi*. Similar patterns are also found in Samoan (Oceanic), Hausa (Chadic) and Sissala (Atlantic-Congo) (Lyons, 1999, p. 178). In (5c), on the other hand, the desired husband is non-referential and inside the scope of the conditional, but still marked as specific, because there is something noteworthy about him, i.e. the properties he should have are further described.

(5) Eastern Armenian

a. Ես արդէն գտա իմ բախտը, ես ամուսին ունեմ:

*es arden gt-a im baxt-ə, es amowsin own-em*  
 1SG.NOM already find-AOR.1SG 1SG.GEN luck-DEF 1SG.NOM **husband** have-1SG  
 'I have already found my happiness, I have a husband.' (EANC: Sero Xanzadyan, *K'ajaran*)

- b. Մի ամուսին ուներ, Ենոքը, և ամբողջ Չեյթունը գիտեր, որ Ենոքը [...]  
*mi amowsin own-er, Enok'-ə, ew amboļj Zeyt'own-ə*  
 INDEF husband have-PST.3SG Yenok-DEF and whole Zeytun-DEF  
*git-er, or Enok'-ə [...]*  
 know-PST.3SG SUB Yenok-DEF  
 'She had a husband, Yenok, and the whole of Zeytun knew that Yenok [...]'  
 (EANC: Step'an Alajajyan, *Etegnere č'xonarhvec'in*)
- c. Եթե ինքը թեկուզ հոգատար մի ամուսին ունենար, էթե նա իրեն ազատ պահեր նման կյանքից :  
*et'e ink'ə t'ekowz hogatar mi amowsin Ø-ownen-ar,*  
 if 3SG.REFL.NOM at\_least considerate INDEF husband OPT-have-3SG.PST  
*et'e na iren azat Ø-pah-er nman kyank'-ic'*  
 if DIST.NOM 3SG.REFL.DAT free OPT-keep-3SG.PST similar life-ABL  
 'If only she had a considerate husband, if he kept her away from such a life.'  
 (EANC: Gelam Sewan, *Hoł ew ser*)

Discourse prominence alone cannot account, however, for all NPs marked as specific in Armenian either. In (6) the book is not further described or even relevant, but the person is not looking if there are any books on the cabinet, but searching for a particular one<sup>1</sup>. The NP, not being discourse-prominent but referential and wide-scope, is marked as specific. While in (5) discourse prominence and not referentiality is the reason for the NP being specific or not, in (6) referentiality and not discourse prominence is the reason.

(6) Eastern Armenian

- Պահարանի վրա մի գիրք էր փնտրում իմ այդ հարցը տված ժամանակ, երբ լսեց, (...) ասաց.  
*paharan-i vra mi girk' ēr p'ntr-owm im ayd*  
 cabinet-GEN on INDEF book AUX.PST.3SG search-IPFV 1SG.GEN MED  
*harc'-ə tv-ac žamanak, erb lsec'-Ø, [...] asac'-Ø:*  
 question-DEF give-RES time when hear-AOR.3SG say-AOR.3SG  
 'She was looking for a book on the cabinet when I asked that question, and when she heard me, she [...] said:' (EANC: Vrt'anes P'ap'azyan, *Patmveck'ner*)

Thus it seems that neither of the three factors scope, referentiality and discourse prominence alone captures the distinctions different languages make in indefinites. There are some languages that encode only differences in scope and have no specificity distinction in transparent contexts; many languages, however, encode the distinction between referential and non-referential in transparent contexts identically to the distinction between wide and narrow scope in opaque contexts (Lyons, 1999, pp. 174-175). Lyons does not deal with the factor of discourse prominence (although he does paraphrase this

1 Note that it is not the speaker but the subject of the sentence that has the referent in mind, which shows that referentiality is not necessarily anchored in the speaker (cf. Lyons, 1999, p. 173).

property), but example (5) suggests that his Figure 1 can be extended as follows to cover the discourse prominence distinction as well:

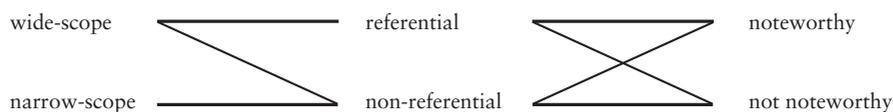


Figure 2. Types of specificity distinctions and relations between them.

As is apparent from this figure, there are quite a few possibilities for referents to be specific in one sense and non-specific in another. While a referentiality distinction can only be made for wide-scope referents and a scope distinction only for non-referential referents, discourse prominence is completely independent of scope and referentiality, which supports Becker's (2021) approach to treat it as a distinct concept orthogonal to the referentiality distinction. Still, there are apparently languages like Eastern Armenian which conflate discourse prominence and referentiality in the use of their specific indefinite article. The examples in (5) and (6) suggest that in Armenian in general discourse prominence is decisive for a NP to be marked as specific but that the specific article may also be used with non-prominent NPs in order to clarify that they are referential. In colloquial Hebrew, on the other hand, it seems that a prominence distinction can only be made in referential NPs (cf. Givón, 1981).

Ionin (2006, p. 215) observes that the distinction between specific and non-specific seems to be less rigid than the distinction between definite and indefinite, which might be due to a conflation of referentiality and discourse prominence as well as the more subjective and gradual nature of the latter.

Since in the literature so far referentiality and discourse prominence have often not been neatly distinguished when talking about specificity, I will use specificity as a cover term including both, but distinguish between them whenever it is necessary and possible.

Articles in the languages of the world can cover different combinations of referential functions inside or across the definite and the indefinite domain (Becker, 2021). The following article types will be relevant for the discussion of the Basque data (Becker, 2021, pp. 94-97, 246):

1. A *definite article* marks at least anaphoric, situationally unique and contextually unique referents in the definite domain and no functions in the indefinite domain.
2. An *indefinite article* marks referential and non-referential indefinite referents and no functions in the definite domain.
3. A *referential article* combines the functions of a definite and an indefinite article.
4. A *presentational article* marks discourse-prominent indefinite referents.

### 3. MORPHOLOGICAL MARKING OF DEFINITENESS IN BASQUE

#### 3.1. Definiteness, number and case

The nominal morphology of Basque is characterised by a lack of grammatical gender and a predominantly agglutinative morphology with approximately 17 cases. It is group inflecting, i.e. only the last member of a phrase bears inflectional suffixes. Basque nouns do not show any number distinction by themselves, number can only be specified by means of a determiner. The most grammaticalised determiner is the suffixed definite article, which is referred to as *-a* in its citation form but has various allomorphs depending on the case. For this reason, the definite article is traditionally treated as part of the case paradigm, which in consequence has a threefold number distinction: definite singular, definite plural and indefinite transnumeral, the latter being number-neutral.

Table 1. Basque declensional morphology<sup>2</sup>

Case	Singular	Plural	Transnumeral	
Absolutive	-a-Ø	-ak	-Ø	
<i>Marked singular + plural</i>				
Ergative	-a-k	-e-k	-(e)k	
Dative	-a-ri	-ei	-(r)i	
Instrumental	-a-z	-e-z	-(e)z	
<i>Marked singular</i>				
Genitive	-a-ren	-en	-(r)en	
Sociative	-a-rekin	-ekin	-(r)ekin	
Destinative	-a-rentzat	-entzat	-(r)entzat	
Motivative	-a-(ren)gatik	-engatik	-(ren)gatik	
Inessive animate	-a-(ren)gan	-engan	-(ren)gan	
Ablative animate	-a-(ren)gandik	-engandik	-(ren)gandik	
Allative animate	-a-(ren)gana	-engana	-(ren)gana	
Terminative animate	-a-(ren)ganaino	-enganaino	-(ren)ganaino	
Approximative animate	-a-(ren)ganantz	-enganantz	-(ren)ganantz	
<i>Marked plural</i>			<b>complex</b>	<b>simple</b>
Inessive inanimate	-(e)a-n	-e-ta-n	-(e)ta-n	-(e)n
Ablative inanimate	-(e)tik	-e-ta-tik	-(e)ta-tik	-(e)tik
Allative inanimate	-(e)ra	-e-ta-ra	-(e)ta-ra	-(e)ra
Terminative inanimate	-(e)raino	-e-ta-raino	-(e)ta-raino	-(e)raino
Approximative inanimate	-(e)rantz	-e-ta-rantz	-(e)ta-rantz	-(e)rantz
Purposive (inanimate)	-(e)rako	-e-ta-rako	-(e)ta-rako	-(e)rako
Local genitive (inanimate)	-(e)ko	-e-ta-ko	-(e)ta-ko	-(e)ko
<i>Only transnumeral</i>				
Prolative			-tzat	
Partitive			-(r)ik	

2 In English grammars of Basque the case terminology is far from being uniform. I am following the Basque tradition of terminology (e.g. Etxeberria, 2008, p. 994; Euskaltzaindia, 2021; Zubiri & Zubiri, 2000, p. 14), slightly deviating from it only for the terminative, approximative and purposive cases, which in Basque have hybrid Basque-Latin names (*muga-adlatiboa* ‘allative of limitation’, *hurbiltze-adlatiboa* ‘allative of approximation’ and *helburuzko adlatiboa* ‘allative of purpose’ (also: *adlatibo destinatiboa*) respectively).

As is apparent from Table 1, synchronically Basque cases can be grouped into four classes according to their number marking strategies. The transnumeral (*mugagabe* ‘non-determined’ in Basque) is generally zero-marked. Case endings starting with a vowel take an epenthetic *-r-* after vowels and case endings starting with a consonant take an epenthetic *-e-* after consonants. The singular has an epenthetic *-e-* only in the local cases and the plural completely lacks epenthesis.

Skipping the absolutive, which has a completely irregular plural, the first set of cases consists of ergative, dative and instrumental. This set can roughly be described as having number marked by the suffix *-a* for singular and *e* for plural, which is followed by the case ending.

In the second set, consisting of the genitive and several cases built upon the genitive, singular case endings are formed as in the first set, with the singular suffix *-a* followed by the case ending. The plural endings, however, look like the transnumeral without an epenthetic *-r-*.

A completely different marking strategy is found in the third set of cases. It consists of the inanimate local cases and has two rows of transnumeral endings, a complex one used for common nouns and a simple one used for proper names. Here only the inessive bears a definite singular marker *-a<sup>3</sup>*, in the remaining cases the singular ending is equal to the simple transnumeral, consisting of the bare case ending. The plural marking consists of the plural marker *-e* and a suffix *-ta*, which is present in the transnumeral endings for common nouns, too, while the endings for proper names, just like the definite singular, lack this suffix.

The last set of cases consists of two cases which only exist in the transnumeral<sup>4</sup>: the prolative, a case used with certain verbs from the semantic domain of ‘to regard sth. as sth.’, and the partitive, whose function will be described in more detail in 3.3.

In the Western varieties of modern Basque, a deictic distinction of the definite article exists in the plural. The *proximate plural* is used for noun phrases referring to the first or second person or to something close to the deictic centre: *langileok* ‘we workers’ / ‘you workers’ / ‘these workers’. It is marked by *-o* instead of *-e* in all cases, the absolutive ending being *-ok* (Trask, 2003, p. 122).

The transnumeral occurs almost exclusively with quantifiers and indefinite or interrogative pronouns (see section 3). As shown in (7), number agreement on the verb can be singular or plural depending on the semantics, although some quantifiers expressing plural can optionally have singular agreement (Martínez Areta, 2009, p. 89).

3 Unlike the *a* in the other case endings, in the inessive this *a* becomes *ea* after stems ending in consonants, which has led several scholars to propose different origins for the two singular markers (cf. Manterola, 2015, pp. 44-45). Manterola (2015, pp. 261-268), on the other hand, argues rather convincingly for a common origin.

4 Martínez Areta (2009, p. 64) classifies them as «not assigned to any number value», but since they cannot combine with demonstratives and personal pronouns, I consider them transnumeral.

- (7) a. *Zein mendi-Ø ikus-i d-u-zu?*  
 which mountain-ABS see-PFV **3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-2SG.ERG**  
 'Which mountain did you see?'
- b. *Zein mendi-Ø ikus-i dit-u-zu?*  
 which mountain-ABS see-PFV **3PL.ABS-AUX.TR-2SG.ERG**  
 'Which mountains did you see?' (following Martínez Āreta, 2009, p. 65)

### 3.2. The indefinite article

As in many languages (Himmelman, 2001, p. 837; Lyons, 1999, p. 95), the Basque indefinite article *bat* derives from the numeral 'one'. It has a plural form *batzuk* 'some'. *Bat* usually combines with the transnumeral case endings, but there is some variation in the local cases: in the most Western dialect, Biscayan, the simple transnumeral *baten* is used for the inessive, in the East, especially in Souletin, the complex transnumeral *batetan* and in the remaining dialects, as well as in Standard Basque, the definite singular *batean* (Sarasola, 1991, pp. 818-823). *Batzuk* is inflected in the plural or, in Eastern varieties or a more elevated style, in the transnumeral (de Rijk, 2008, p. 42).

- (8) *auzi jakin bat-i buruz ari gara*  
 issue specific **INDEF-DAT** about PROG AUX.ITR.1PL  
 'We are talking about a specific issue.' (EPG: Berria 2004-03-08)
- (9) *kontzertu proiektu bat-zu-eta-n lan egin-Ø nahi*  
 concert project **INDEF-PL-DEF.PL-INE** work make-INF want  
*gen-Ø-u-en*  
 1PL.ERG-3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-PST  
 'We wanted to work in some concert projects.' (EPG: Berria 2006-02-07)

### 3.3. The partitive

The partitive case has also been called *negativus* or *nominatif négatif* (de Rijk, 2008, p. 289). Its main function is to replace the absolutive in polarity contexts like negative or conditional sentences or polar questions (Etxeberria, 2014, p. 309; cf. (10b-d)) if the noun phrase is indefinite and non-specific. While it is traditionally considered a case, the grammar of the Academy of the Basque language notes that it may also be considered a kind of determiner (Euskaltzaindia, 2021, p. 567). Although the marker derives from the ablative (Ariztimuño López, 2014) and is thus historically clearly a case, synchronically it has in fact properties of both a case and a determiner: it functions as a case because it is restricted to the same syntactic positions as the absolutive, i.e. direct objects and intransitive (mostly patient) subjects, and it functions as a determiner because its use depends on the definiteness and specificity of the NP.

Verbal agreement with partitive NPs is always singular, irrespective of the semantics.



- (13) *Mark Welland-Ø [...] Cambridge unibertsitate-ko irakasle-a-Ø da*  
 Mark Welland-ABS Cambridge university-LGEN teacher-DEF.SG-ABS COP.3SG  
 'Mark Welland is a teacher at the university of Cambridge.' (EPG: Berria  
 2004-07-30)

The most extensive description of the use of *-a* is found in Trask (2003, pp. 119-121), who lists 11 contexts where the definite article is used, covering definite, generic, non-specific and non-referring NPs as well as contexts described as «an NP which is identifiable to the speaker, but not to the hearer» as in 'I have a wife', thus specificity in the sense of referentiality. What is probably the most remarkable point is that *-a* is also used in the citation form of a noun or adjective (Trask, 2003, pp. 119-121). Even isolated nouns in inscriptions or headings are never found without the article (singular or plural) (de Rijk, 2008, p. 36) and a native speaker of Basque (except for the easternmost varieties), when asked for the Basque translation of a word, will most probably give the word in the definite absolutive (de Rijk, 2008, p. 35; Trask, 2003, p. 121).

Becker (2021, p. 372) in her typological study of articles in the world's languages also comes to the conclusion that *-a* covers all referential functions and classifies it therefore as a referential article. Its use extends, however, even beyond that of a prototypical referential article, whose function is to «signal that a nominal expression is a referring expression» (Becker, 2021, p. 304). In contrast, *-a* is not only used with isolated nouns that can hardly be considered referring expressions, but predicative adjective phrases usually bear the article, too (Trask, 2003, p. 121). The restrictions on bare adjective phrases are, however, not as rigid as on bare NPs. Both dialectal variation and the semantics of the subject play a role: adjective phrases without an article are, on the one hand, more common in Eastern and Northern varieties (EGLU I, 80) and on the other hand they are more likely to occur the less referential load the subject has (Manterola, 2009, pp. 246-248). With impersonal or sentential subjects, adjective phrases usually do not require the article and some adjectives even reject it, but most of the times it is a matter of style: using the article is more colloquial, leaving it out is more literary, at least in Southern varieties (de Rijk, 2008, p. 43, pp. 453-454).

To sum it up, the so-called definite article *-a* clearly does not conform to the definition of a definite article introduced in Section 2 and will therefore not be glossed as such but only as *singular* or *plural* in the following. Since it is used with referents from both the definite and the indefinite domain, NPs bearing the article *-a* can be ambiguous as in (14), which can be interpreted either as definite or as indefinite.

- (14) *Dudley-k zergatik nahi z-Ø-u-en lasterketa-ko*  
 Dudley-ERG why want 3SG.ERG-3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-PST race-LK  
*bizikleta-a-Ø [...]*  
**bicycle-SG-ABS**  
 a. 'Why Dudley wanted a racing bike [...]'  
 b. 'Why Dudley wanted the racing bike [...]'  
 (EPG: Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter eta sorgin-harria*)

There are, however, two contexts, where NPs marked with the definite article are unambiguously definite: absolutive NPs in polarity contexts, where an indefinite NP is inflected in the partitive as in (15a) while definite NPs keep the definite absolutive as in (15b), and NPs quantified by a numeral, which are inflected in the transnumeral as in (16a), if they are not definite as in (16b).

- (15) a. *har-k inoiz ez z-Ø-u-en telefono-rik erabil-i*  
 DIST.SG-ERG ever NEG 3SG.ERG-3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-PST **phone-PTV** use-PFV  
 'He had never used a phone.' (EPG: Joanne K. Rowling, *Harry Potter eta Azka-bango preso*)
- b. [...] *ez l-Ø-u-ke-ela telefono-a-Ø entzun-Ø-go*  
 [...] NEG 3SG.ERG-3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-COND-COMP **phone-SG-ABS** hear-INF-PROS  
 '[...] that he would not hear the phone.' (EPG: José Saramago, *Lisboako setioaren historia*)
- (16) a. *hiru baldintza-Ø behar dit-u-Ø-ela*  
**three requirement-ABS** need 3PL.ABS-AUX.TR-3SG.ERG-COMP  
*d-io-gu*  
 3SG.ABS-say-1PL.ERG  
 'We say that [the cease-fire] must meet three requirements.'
- b. *lehen aipa-tu dit-u-da-n hiru baldintza-ak*  
 earlier mention-PFV 3PL.ABS-AUX.TR-1SG.ERG-REL **three requirement-PL.ABS**  
 'The three requirements I have mentioned before.' (EPG: Berria 2004-11-20)

The distribution of *-a* is thus best explained in terms of avoiding bare nouns at all costs: if no other determiner is present, *-a* is used regardless of the referential status of the NP, if, however, another determiner like partitive marking or a numeral is present, *-a* keeps its original function as a definite article.

Little attention has been paid to the indefinite article *bat* compared to the non-definite use of the definite article (Manterola, 2012b, p. 241) and according to the grammar of the Academy of the Basque language, «there is no clear way of distinguishing between the article *-a* and the indefinite article *bat*», since from the oldest texts, both articles appear in contexts where the other one could be used as well (Euskaltzaindia, 2021, pp. 574-575). De Rijk (2008, p. 37) contrasts them only in one example, stating that the indefinite article (at least in that particular example) means rather 'one' than 'a'. Trask (2003, p. 122), on the other hand, describes the indefinite article as corresponding «more directly to 'a certain', rather than merely to 'a(n)'. Manterola (2012b, p. 241) gives a similar example:

- (17) a. *azeri bat-Ø ikus-i d-u-te herri-a-n*  
 fox INDEF-ABS see-PFV 3PL.ABS-AUX.TR-3PL.ERG town-SG-INE  
 'They have seen a (certain) fox in town.'
- b. *azeri-a-Ø ikus-i d-u-te herri-a-n*  
 fox-SG-ABS see-PFV 3PL.ABS-AUX.TR-3PL.ERG town-SG-INE  
 'They have seen a fox in town.' [not e.g. a wolf] (following Manterola, 2012b, p. 241)

(17) shows a difference in discourse prominence: in both cases a particular fox has been seen, the NP is referential, but in (17b) its identity is treated as insignificant since the referent as such is not relevant to the discourse. Manterola (2012b, p. 241) therefore calls *bat* a specific marker and compares it to the specific indefinite article in colloquial Hebrew.

The more normative grammar of Standard Basque by Ilari and Entzi Zubiri recommends as a rule of thumb that the indefinite article should generally only be used when the use of the definite article would be ambiguous between a definite and an indefinite reading (Zubiri & Zubiri, 2000, p. 134). According to this grammar, it is often also used for predicate nouns modified by an adjective, sometimes in answers where the copula is omitted, at the beginning of narrations and with generic NPs (Zubiri & Zubiri, 2000, p. 135). The use at the beginning of narrations is also mentioned in Euskaltzaindia (2021, p. 580). It is typical for specific NPs (Heine, 1997, pp. 72-73; Lyons, 1999, p. 176) and can be explained in terms of discourse prominence: the characters and objects introduced are prominent, as there will be a whole story about them. *Bat* being used in predicate nouns modified by an adjective and not with unmodified predicate nouns might be due to discourse prominence, too: an adjective is more likely to be used with a noteworthy referent and, on the other hand, an adjective can make a referent noteworthy, if it is describing an unexpected property (Ionin, 2006, p. 185).

Becker (2021, p. 376) also analyses *bat* as a presentational article, i.e. an indefinite article used with discourse-prominent referents, and links its function to the distribution of the referential article *-a*, stating, similar to Zubiri & Zubiri (2000, p. 134), that *bat* is used «when the referential article is not sufficient to signal that the referent is non-identifiable» (Becker, 2021, p. 376).

Thus, despite being rather diverse and often a bit vague, by and large, these descriptions suggest a specificity distinction in the sense of discourse prominence between the indefinite article and the use of *-a* with indefinite referents, with the indefinite article being restricted to discourse-prominent indefinite NPs. As Manterola (2012b, p. 241) notes, there is, however, some variation in its usage across different varieties and speakers. The data in Section 4 will shed some more light on this question.

### 3.5. Historical development

The Basque definite article is first attested in person and place names in medieval documents (Manterola, 2009, pp. 239-241) and as in many languages, it derives from a distal demonstrative, *\*(h)a(r)* (Manterola, 2015, p. xxxi). This development has taken place in the larger context of several Western European languages acquiring a definite article from a demonstrative in the Early Middle Ages (Manterola, 2015, p. xxxvi).

But apparently, the Basque article *-a* has expanded to far more contexts than its Romance equivalents. The beginning of its use in the citation form of nouns is attested

already in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in a Basque-Latin word list collected by the French pilgrim Aimery Picaud. Some examples are shown in (18):

- (18) a. *echea* (modern Basque *etxe-a* '(the) house')    b. *ogui* (mod. *ogi* 'bread')  
       *iaona* (mod. *jaun-a* '(the) lord')                                *ardum* (mod. *ardo* 'wine')  
       *andrea* (mod. *andre-a* '(the) lady')                             *aragui* (mod. *haragi* 'meat')
- (cited in Martínez Areta, 2009, p. 76)

As is apparent from this sample, Picaud's informant was already using the article in the citation form – but only with the countable nouns in the first column, the uncountable nouns in the second column do not bear the article. This is true for all words in the list almost without exception (Martínez Areta, 2009, p. 76).

Four centuries later, in Lucio Marineo Siculo's word list (Basque-Latin as well), the same uncountable nouns are given with the article:

- (19) *oguíá* (mod. *ogi-a* '(the) bread')  
       *ardáoa* (mod. *ardo-a* '(the) wine')  
       *aragúia* (mod. *haragi-a* '(the) meat')                             (cited in Michelena, 1990, pp. 146-147)

The same can be observed in Landuchio's *Dictionarium Linguae Cantabricae* from the same century, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century Biscayan (i.e. Western Basque) grammarian Mikoleta claims that in Basque every noun ends in *-a* (Martínez Areta, 2009, p. 77). The article has, however, expanded further in Western varieties of Basque than in the East (Martínez Areta, 2009). The easternmost dialect, Souletin, still allows bare NPs as direct objects and as predicate nouns (Etxeberria, 2014, pp. 302-306).

Manterola (2012b, pp. 240-241) suggests that the spread of the definite article to non-definite NPs is linked to the fact that Basque does not mark number on nouns, whereas the neighbouring Romance languages, at least historically, do have a clear, grammaticalised number distinction<sup>5</sup>. The article offers the possibility to mark number by means of a suffix, exactly as in the Romance languages:

- (20) a. Basque  
       *Nerea-Ø*    *eta*    *Maiders-Ø*    *neska*    *jatorr-ak*    *dira*  
       Nerea-ABS    and    Maiders-ABS    girl    nice-PL.ABS    COP.3PL
- b. Spanish  
       *Nerea*    *y*    *Maiders*    *son*    *chica-s*    *agradable-s*  
       Nerea    and    Maiders    COP.3PL    girl-PL    nice-PL  
       'Nerea and Maiders are nice girls.' (following Manterola, 2012b, pp. 239-240)

<sup>5</sup> In modern French, the number distinction on nouns has been lost to a large extent, although it is still preserved in the orthography.

Thus it is possible that of the two features the definite article encoded, definiteness and number, the latter became dominant, shifting the main function of the article from marking definiteness to indicating number on NPs where no other determiner is present (Manterola, 2012b, pp. 240-241). This could also explain the use of the definite article with predicate adjectives, which in the Romance languages are marked for number, too. The fact that the definite article was used for the citation form of countable nouns earlier than for the citation form of mass nouns supports this hypothesis, as there is no need to mark number in mass nouns.

If the imitation of Romance plural marking was decisive in the spread of the article, it would be logical if it was the plural article that spread first to atypical contexts, because in the Romance languages, too, it is the plural that is being marked. Manterola (2015, pp. 451-456) does, however, not find any evidence for this in predicate nouns of 16<sup>th</sup> century texts.

Furthermore, the data we have seen suggests that the spread of the definite article in non-definite contexts can roughly be sketched as in (21), with the last stage still being in progress. If number marking was the primary motivation, one would expect the article to spread to predicate adjectives before spreading to mass nouns. The avoidance of bare nouns must thus have come into play quite early, too.

(21) *count nouns* > *mass nouns* > *predicate adjectives*

Like the grammaticalisation of a definite article from a distal demonstrative, the grammaticalisation of an indefinite article from the numeral ‘one’ is paralleled in many languages, too (Givón, 1981, p. 35). Both *bat* and its plural form *batzuk* are attested in the first texts of all dialects (i.e. from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on), therefore it does not seem to be a recent innovation at that point (Manterola, 2012b, pp. 241-242). As there are no occurrences of the indefinite article earlier than the first texts, it is difficult to know how old it is. The fact that its plural form bears the collective suffix *-zu*, whose productivity was already decreasing in the Middle Ages (Manterola, 2012b, 241-242), indicates that it is quite old, although it has still the same phonological shape as the numeral. Its grammaticalisation might have followed the Romance model, but since the development from the numeral ‘one’ to an indefinite article is quite common among languages from different families and regions, this needs not necessarily be the case. In any case, the grammaticalisation of the Basque indefinite article apparently has not proceeded as far as in its contact languages.

#### 4. IS *BAT* A SPECIFIC INDEFINITE ARTICLE?

##### 4.1. Comparison with Eastern Armenian

Since specificity seems to play a role in the use of the Basque articles, in this section Basque data will be compared to Eastern Armenian, a language with a threefold

distinction between definite, specific indefinite and non-specific indefinite NPs (Dum-Tragut, 2009, pp. 102-111).

Eastern Armenian has a definite article that is also used with generic NPs and an indefinite article that, as we have seen in the examples (5) and (6) in section 2, generally marks discourse-prominent NPs but can under certain conditions also be employed with non-prominent referential NPs. Other than that, non-prominent indefinite NPs do not receive an article. Thus, in the terminology of Becker (2021), the Eastern Armenian article system consists of a definite article and a presentational article. Just like in Basque, the definite article is a suffix deriving from a distal demonstrative and the indefinite article is an independent word deriving from the numeral ‘one’. The definite article is restricted to argument NPs (Dum-Tragut, 2009, p. 104), the indefinite article occurs with NPs in all syntactic positions but only in the singular.

Table 2. The Eastern Armenian article system

	Definite	Referential	Non-referential
Prominent	Definite article	Indefinite article	
Non-prominent		(Indefinite article)	

What makes Armenian a very suitable candidate for this comparison is, in addition to its grammaticalised specificity distinction, also the fact that it is completely unrelated to Basque, not only genetically but also geographically. Thus, if both languages show an overlap in the distribution of their markers of definiteness and specificity, this cannot simply be attributed to areal convergence or a common source, but has to be a more universal pattern.

The parallel texts used for the comparison are taken from two novels, *Harry Potter and the philosopher’s stone* (= HP), translated into both languages from English, and *The little prince* (= LP), translated into both languages from French, as well as from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (= UDHR), whose source language is indicated in neither translation.

204 NPs were analysed, 87 of which were treated as non-specific indefinite in Armenian, 25 as specific indefinite and 92 as definite. NPs that obligatorily bear the definite article in Armenian (proper names, NPs used with demonstrative and possessive pronouns as well as nominalised adjectives, quantifiers and possessive pronouns) were not considered.

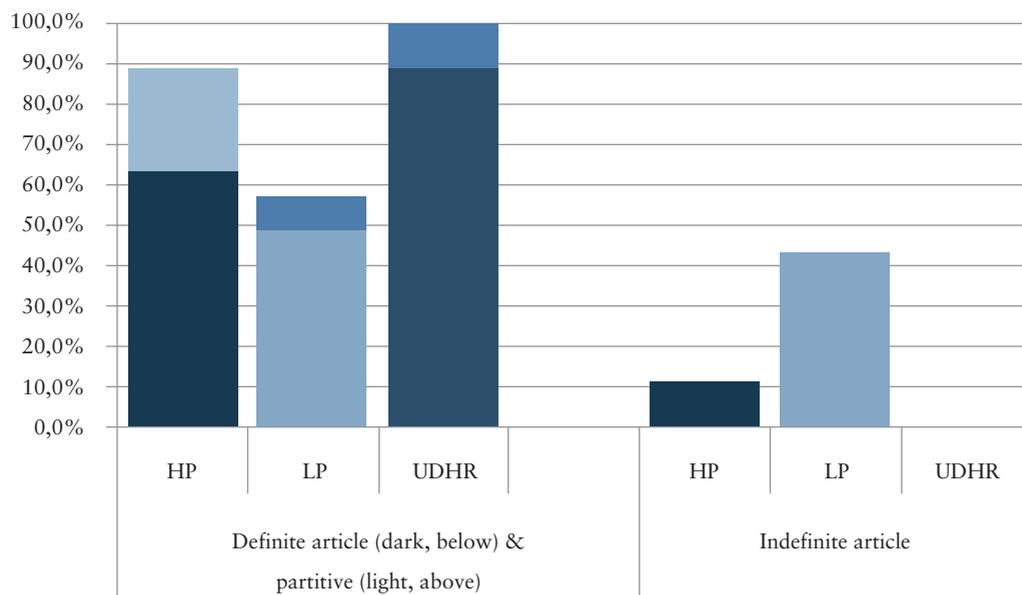


Figure 3. Basque correspondences to Armenian non-specific indefinite NPs.

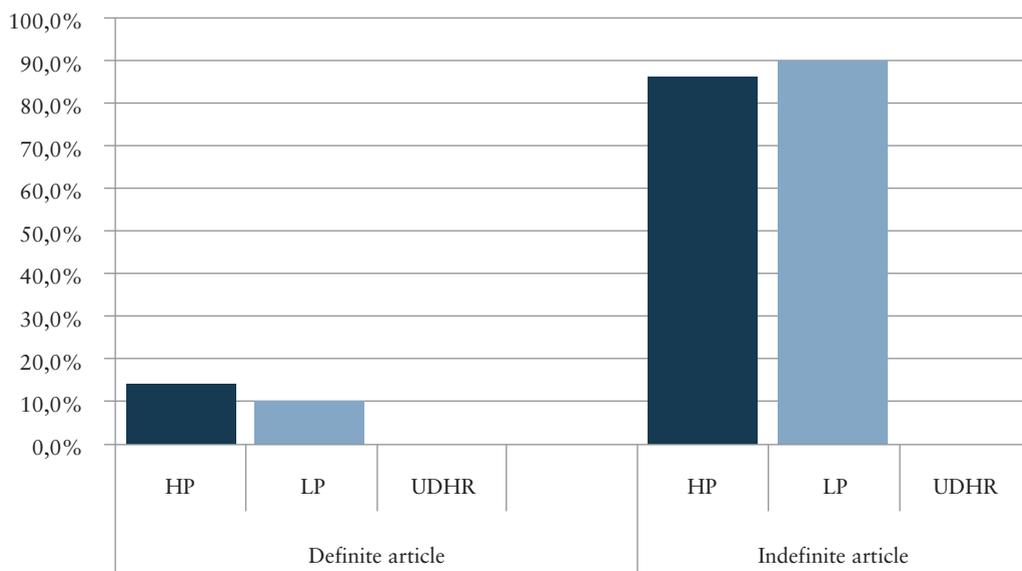


Figure 4. Basque correspondences to Armenian specific indefinite NPs.

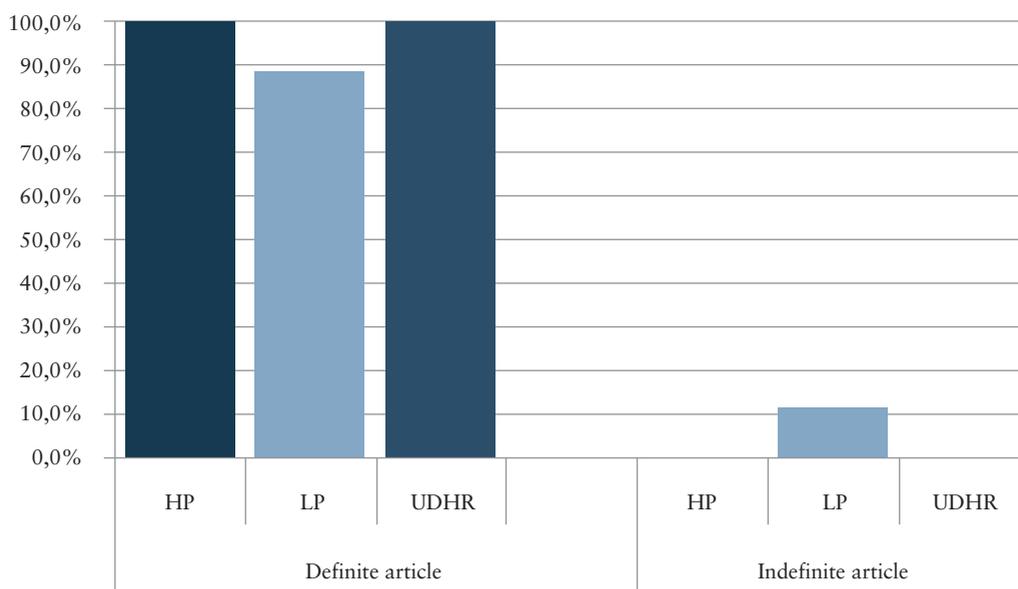


Figure 5. Basque correspondences to Armenian definite NPs.

In HP and UDHR, the distribution of *-a* and the partitive on the one hand and *bat* on the other hand matches the Armenian specificity distinction almost perfectly. Non-specific indefinite NPs, with three exceptions in HP, do not get the indefinite article, they are marked either with *-a* or, in polarity contexts, with the partitive (Figure 3). Specific indefinite NPs do not appear in UDHR (which is not surprising, as discourse-prominent referents are not very likely to appear in a universal declaration). In HP most of them are marked with *bat*, with only two exceptions (Figure 4). As the specificity distinction is less rigid and not marked in English, it is not surprising that there are five cases (out of 42 indefinite NPs) where the languages do not coincide. Four of the NPs in question are modified, but the referents of all five play no role in the immediately following discourse, probably leaving it to the translator to decide if the modification makes the NP prominent or not. (22) and (23) show two examples of these grey areas: in (22), the sharp look is treated as prominent in Armenian but not in Basque, whereas in (23) the kind of sister is prominent in Basque, but not in Armenian. The NP in (23) is non-referential, but this does not seem to be decisive, since the other two instances of Basque NPs with an indefinite article that correspond to Armenian bare nouns are both referential, and, as discussed below, there is one example of a non-referential NP bearing the indefinite article in Armenian, too.

(22) a. Eastern Armenian

Նա մի սուր հայացք նետեց Դամբլդորի կողմը :

*na mi sowr hayac'k' netec'-∅ Dambldor-i koim-ə*  
 DEM.DIST INDEF sharp look throw-AOR.3SG Dumbledore-GEN side-DEF

- b. Basque  
*begiratu zorrotz-a-Ø bota-Ø z-i-o-Ø-n*  
**look sharp-SG-ABS throw-PFV 3SG.ABS-AUX.DITR-3SG.DAT-3SG.ERG-PST**  
*Dumbledore-ri*  
 Dumbledore-DAT  
 ‘She threw a sharp look at Dumbledore.’

- (23) a. Eastern Armenian  
 Եթէ ինքն էլ նման քույր ունենար  
*et'e ink'-n ēl nman k'owyr Ø-ownena-r*  
 if self-3SG PART **similar sister** OPT-have-PST.3SG
- b. Basque  
*bera-k hala-ko arreba bat izan-Ø*  
 3SG.EMPH-ERG **so.DIST-LK sister INDEF** have-PFV  
*ba-l-Ø-u-Ø*  
 COND-3.ERG-3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-SG.ERG  
 ‘If he himself had such a sister’

In LP the picture is quite different. With non-specific NPs *-a* is not much more common than *bat* and there is one NP treated as specific in Armenian that bears the article *-a* in Basque ((28) discussed below). Referentiality does not seem to play a role, the proportion of NPs bearing the indefinite article is almost the same for referential and non-referential NPs. The decisive criterion rather seems to be individuation: 14 out of 25 non-specific NPs bearing *-a* are plural, one is a mass noun and 8 are abstract nouns (*froga* ‘proof’, *kontu* ‘matter’, *salbuespen* ‘exception’ as well as several scientific disciplines), whereas out of the 22 non-specific NPs bearing the indefinite article only one (*lanbide* ‘profession’) is abstract and one plural. Still, there are three instances of non-specific concrete singular referents marked with *a* in Basque, one of them given in (24). The other two are *oso arkume txikia eman dizut* ‘I have given you a very small lamb’ and the sentence given in (28b).

- (24) a. Eastern Armenian  
 Եթէ դա բողկի կամ վարդենու ընծյուղ է  
*et'e da boik-i kam varden-ow ənjoyowl ē*  
 if DEM.MED **radish-GEN or rose\_bush-GEN shoot** COP.3SG
- b. Basque  
*errefau edo arrosondo kimu-a-Ø izan-ez gero*  
**radish or rose\_bush shoot-SG-ABS be-INS after**  
 ‘If it is a radish or rose bush shoot’

Interestingly, (24) is followed by a semantically completely parallel clause, given in (25), where the predicate noun bears the indefinite article in Basque. Although Armenian uses a bare noun here, too, a difference in discourse prominence is conceivable, since the predicate noun in (25) is contrasted with the one in (24).

- (25) a. Eastern Armenian  
 Բայց եթե մոլախոտ է  
*bayc' et'e molaxot ē*  
 but if weed COP.3SG
- b. Basque  
*baina landare txar bat-Ø baldin ba-da*  
 but plant bad INDEF-ABS if if-COP.3SG  
 'But if it is a weed'

In all three texts the partitive is used exclusively with non-specific NPs and in almost all cases NPs that are definite in Armenian receive *-a* in Basque, too, with the exception of three mismatches in LP. In two of them, the NP seems to be construed as referring to a kind in Armenian, thus being treated as generic, and as referring to an individual in Basque, like in (26):

- (26) a. Eastern Armenian  
 Գլխարկը ինչո՞ւ պիտի վախեցնի  
*glxark-e inčo'w piti Ø-vaxec'n-i*  
 hat-DEF why must OPT-frighten-3SG
- b. Basque  
*zer d-ela eta beldur-tu behar gait-u-Ø*  
 what be.3SG-COMP and frighten-PFV need 1PL.ABS-AUX.TR-3SG.ERG  
*kapela bat-ek*  
 hat INDEF-ERG  
 'Why should a hat frighten us?'

Although the Armenian indefinite article can in principle be used with non-referential NPs, there are only two examples of this in the corpus, one in HP and one in LP, corresponding to the Basque indefinite article in the former, given in (27), and to *-a* in the latter, given in (28). In (27), the two languages agree in treating the bread roll as discourse-prominent, although the source of this prominence is not very obvious. It might be the fact that buying a bread roll for lunch is not part of Mr Dursley's everyday routine but a specific decision he makes on that day, rendering the whole endeavour more salient.

- (27) a. Eastern Armenian  
 Որոշեց դիմացի հացատնից մի բուլկի գնել:  
*orošec'-Ø dimac'-i hac'atn-ic' mi bowlki gn-el*  
 decide-AOR.3SG front-GEN bakery-ABL INDEF bread\_roll buy-INF  
 'He decided to buy a bread roll from the bakery across the street.'
- b. Basque  
*beste alde-ko okindegi-a-n opil bat eros-te-ko*  
 other side-LGEN bakery-SG-INE bread\_roll INDEF buy-NMLZ-PUR  
 '(He decided to stretch his legs and go across the street) in order to buy a bread roll from the bakery on the other side.'

In (28) the lamb is construed as discourse-prominent in Armenian and as non-prominent in Basque, although in both cases a relative clause specifies the properties it should have. It is possible that the position of the relative clause plays a role here: since it is extraposed to the end of the clause in Armenian, it might be necessary to signal on the NP that its referent is going to be specified further, something that is not necessary in its Basque counterpart with its prenominal relative clause. Interestingly, however, in the other two sentences talking about the little prince wanting or needing a lamb, namely *Eta nik arkume bat behar dut* ‘And I need a lamb’, which occurs before (28), and *Norbaitek arkume bat nahi izatea duzue haren existentziaren froga* ‘If someone wants a lamb, this is proof of their existence’, which occurs after (28), Basque uses an indefinite article (and Armenian a bare noun).

(28) a. Eastern Armenian

Ինձ մի գառնուկ է պէտք. որ երկար ապրի:

*inj mi gařnowk ē petk' or erkar Ø-apr-i*  
 1SG.DAT INDEF lamb AUX.3SG need SUB long OPT-live-3SG  
 ‘I need a lamb that lives long.’

b. Basque

*luzaro-a-n bizi-ko d-en arkume-a-Ø nahi*  
 long\_time-SG-INE live-PROS AUX.ITR.3SG-REL lamb-SG-ABS want  
*d-u-t ni-k*  
 3SG.ABS-AUX.TR-1SG.ERG 1SG-ERG  
 ‘I want a lamb that lives long.’

As for non-prominent referential NPs bearing the indefinite article, the corpus does not contain any example of a NP with an indefinite article in Armenian that is clearly not discourse-prominent. It is, as mentioned before, common in the Basque translation of LP, but not found in the Basque translation of HP either. Whether the Basque indefinite article can in varieties with a prominence distinction be used with referential non-prominent NPs as in the Armenian example (6) remains thus an open question.

It is quite striking that, while in HP and UDHR a distinction is made between discourse-prominent and non-prominent indefinite referents, in LP the distinction is rather between plural, mass or abstract nouns on the one hand and concrete singular nouns on the other hand. LP has been translated from French, while HP, and probably also UDHR, is a translation from English, but since these languages do not differ much in their use of the indefinite article, this is unlikely to be the reason. More likely it is a matter of the variety used: The Basque translation of LP has some clearly Eastern features, e.g. the use of the first person singular possessive pronoun *ene* instead of *nire*, and other lexical characteristics like *kasik* ‘almost’ instead of *ia* or *ahantzi* ‘to forget’ instead of *ahaztu* (OEH s. v. *ene*, *kasik*, *ahantzi*). Eastern varieties are indeed known to use *-a* less and *bat* more (Manterola, 2012b, p. 257).

## 4.2. Discussion

Contrary to claims that no clear rules can be established for the use of the two Basque articles in the indefinite domain, the three parallel texts used in this study show very

clear patterns in the distribution of the articles. They reveal two distinct article systems: a Western one, shown in Table 3, where indefinites are distinguished according to discourse prominence and the indefinite article is reserved for prominent referents, and an Eastern one, shown in Table 4, where indefinites are distinguished according to individuation and the indefinite article is the first choice for (concrete) singular referents. This Eastern system corresponds very closely to the Romance languages, where abstract and plural nouns tend to be bare or, in the case of French, bear the partitive article, whereas (concrete) singular nouns require the indefinite article (Stark, 2007, pp. 50-51). This might have been a language internal development, but more likely it was at least accelerated by language contact.

Table 3. The Western Basque article system

	Definite	Referential	Non-referential
Prominent	Definite article	Indefinite article	
Non-prominent		Definite article	

Table 4. The Eastern Basque article system

	Definite	Referential	Non-referential
Singular	Definite article	Indefinite article	
Plural, mass, abstract		Definite article	

Thus two different systems coexist in different varieties of Basque and probably influence each other to some extent. This would explain why some NPs, like the ones in (24) and (28), are marked according to discourse prominence rather than individuation in LP, too, and why scholars struggle so much to find a rule for the distribution of the indefinite vs. the definite article. In fact, the example the grammar of Euskaltzaindia (2021, p. 575) gives in order to illustrate that both articles can be used interchangeably can probably also be explained in terms of the observed dialectal differences: In the sentence ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter’ from the New Testament, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Labourdin author Leizarraga, a speaker of Eastern Basque, uses the indefinite article on the NP ‘a sheep’, whereas in the version of 1980, which was translated by a group of speakers of different dialects (Etxezarreta, 1981, p. 199), this NP bears the definite article, indicating that probably Western Basque speakers prevailed or that in this context *-a* is more acceptable to Eastern speakers than *bat* to Western speakers.

Like Eastern Armenian, Basque distinguishes between definites and two kinds of indefinites, but unlike the former it uses its two articles to cover all three categories. In both systems the indefinite article is used with one subgroup of indefinites while the rest is marked with *-a*. This shows again that the distribution of *-a* is not based on any semantic but on morphosyntactic motivations, namely covering all NPs that do not have any other determiner.

As for the historical development, it is conceivable that Basque at some point had an article system similar to Eastern Armenian, consisting of a definite and a presentational or in some other way restricted indefinite article, and *-a* simply spread to those indefinite contexts that were not covered by *bat*. Another possibility, brought up by Becker (2021, p. 379), is that the presentational article developed after the spread of *-a* to indefinite contexts as a means of marking discourse-prominent indefinite referents as non-identifiable, replacing the definite article in those contexts. This hypothesis is based on the fact that the languages in her sample that have presentational articles either have no other articles or an article that is used with referents from both the definite and the indefinite domain. It is contrary to Manterola's (2012b, p. 257) hypothesis that the further grammaticalisation of the Basque indefinite article in the Western varieties was prevented by the earlier spread of the definite article to the indefinite domain, which is supported by the fact that the indefinite article has a broader use in the Eastern varieties, where the definite article is generally used less (up to still allowing bare nouns in argument position in Souletin). This would mean that the indefinite article developed before the definite article had spread to the indefinite domain, at least in Eastern varieties of Basque. Eastern Armenian shows that a presentational article can indeed develop in a system with a clear distinction between definite and indefinite NPs, too.

Indefinite articles restricted to specific indefinites constitute an earlier stage of the grammaticalisation process (Lyons, 1999, p. 98). On the grammaticalisation path proposed by Givón (1981, pp. 48-50) the indefinite article first marks only referential indefinites and gradually extends to non-referential indefinites of all kinds, including generic referents. This development is also part of Heine's (1997, pp. 72-73) grammaticalisation path of the numeral «one», which consists of five stages:

(29) *numeral* > *presentative marker* > *specific<sup>6</sup> marker* > *non-specific marker* > *generalised article*

According to this path, before marking referential indefinites in general, the indefinite article is restricted to the first occurrence of a referent which will play a role in subsequent discourse, in other words, a discourse-prominent referent. The last stage is characterised by the use of the indefinite article with plural and mass nouns. Thus according to Heine, the new indefinite article first spreads from discourse-prominent referential to non-prominent referential NPs. Becker (2021, p. 248) contests this view based on the types of articles found in her study. She notes that the extension from discourse-prominent referential NPs can indeed happen along the pragmatic dimension, from discourse-prominent to non-prominent referential NPs, yielding a so-called exclusive-specific article; the article can, however, also extend along the semantic dimension, from discourse-prominent referential to discourse-prominent non-referential NPs, yielding a presentational article like the one found in Western Basque. The Basque article *bat* also corroborates her claim

6 Heine (1997, pp. 72-73) understands specificity as referentiality.

that presentational articles are not necessarily an unstable intermediate stage in the grammaticalisation from a numeral to a full indefinite article (Becker, 2021, p. 246), since it has survived in this function until today even though the contact languages of Basque have indefinite articles with much broader uses. The fact that Western Basque and Armenian coincide almost completely in the distribution of their indefinite articles is further evidence that the presentational article in both languages is a robust category with a clear and systematic distribution. In Eastern Basque, on the other hand, the indefinite article has indeed grammaticalised further and extended to non-prominent indefinites, although it still seems to be not completely obligatory in this context.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Basque article system, although consisting of two articles that are commonly referred to as definite and indefinite, too, is organised rather differently from those of its Romance neighbours. The so-called definite article covers not only all referential functions from the definite and the indefinite domain, it is also found with non-referring NPs and adjective phrases, which extends even beyond the functions of a referential article as defined by Becker (2021, p. 102). While previous descriptions of the use of the indefinite article have often remained rather fuzzy, the comparison with the Eastern Armenian article system yielded a very clear picture of a use based on discourse prominence in Western varieties and on individuation (with some traces of discourse prominence) in Eastern varieties.

There are, of course, some limitations to this study: as Armenian marks specificity only in the singular and definiteness only in argument cases, the results only apply to these contexts. It is thus possible that in non-argument cases or in the plural, Basque articles behave slightly differently. In addition, all three texts are from carefully written and edited genres and might therefore be more consistent in their use of the articles than spontaneous speech.

The fact that there are three cases of concrete singular referents marked according to discourse prominence rather than individuation in LP suggests that Eastern Basque still preserves some traces of an earlier stage of grammaticalisation, which is possibly facilitated by the persistence of a prominence-based system in other varieties. This, as well as the difficulties scholars have had to recognise a clear pattern in the use of the indefinite article, raises the questions whether the two coexisting systems are indeed separate or part of a continuum of grammaticalisation, to what extent they influence each other and how acceptable one usage sounds to speakers of the respective other varieties.

Finally, it would also be interesting to compare the two different systems in more detail to the contact languages and see whether differences between French and Spanish might play a role in the divergent development in Basque varieties.

## 6. ABBREVIATIONS

1	1 <sup>st</sup> person	ITR	Intransitive
2	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	LGEM	Local genitive
3	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	LK	Linker
ABL	Ablative	MED	Medial
ABS	Absolutive	NEG	Negation
AFF	Affirmative	NMLZ	Nominaliser
AOR	Aorist	NOM	Nominative
AUX	Auxiliary	NP	Noun phrase
COMP	Complementiser	OPT	Optative
COND	Conditional	PFV	Perfective
COP	Copula	PL	Plural
DAT	Dative	PROG	Progressive
DEF	Definite	PROS	Prospective
DEM	Demonstrative	PST	Past
DIST	Distal	PTV	Partitive
DITR	Ditransitive	PUR	Purposive
EMPH	Emphatic	Q	Question marker
ERG	Ergative	REFL	Reflexive
GEN	Genitive	REL	Relative
INDEF	Indefinite	RES	Resultative participle
INE	Inessive	SG	Singular
INF	Infinitive	SUB	Subordinator
INS	Instrumental	TR	Transitive
IPFV	Imperfective	TRN	Transnumeral

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