

# AGENTIVITY AND MODALITY IN DEVERBAL ADJECTIVES IN BASQUE AND IN CATALAN\*

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## 0. Introduction

The title of the article refers to those adjectives derived from verbal bases by means of suffixes which express agentivity<sup>1</sup>, such as Basque *barregarri* '(sb./sth.) which causes laugh', Catalan *guanyador* 'winner', or modality, such as *hauskor* 'breakable, that can break' in Basque, *demostrable* 'demonstrable, that can be demonstrated' in Catalan. As it can be seen, adjectives which have modal value (*hauskor* or *demostrable*) can be related to ergative (*hauskor*) or passive (*demostrable*) structures.

As for the languages from which the data are drawn, two main reasons explain why those two languages - Basque and Catalan - have been chosen: besides being our mother tongues, they are two completely unrelated languages. Therefore, the assumption that the explanation given for agentivity and modality in deverbal adjectives in those two languages could work in other languages as well, seems pretty reasonable.

Let us start with the data presented in traditional grammars of Basque and Catalan, although our aim is to analyze these deverbal adjectives within the frame of Generative Morphology.

The Basque suffixes which attach to verbal bases and take the meanings of agentivity and modality are *-garri*, *-kor*, *-gaitz* and *-kizun*<sup>2</sup>. For Azkue (1923-25)

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1 Agentivity is used here in a broad sense, also including under this label values such as Instrument or Cause.

2 We will leave aside the nominal values of *-garri* and *-kizun*.

Basque *-garri* is the equivalent of Latin *-bilis*. Looking at the examples of *-garri* given by him, three different values can be found, namely those which the Latin suffix *-bilis* takes (as it will be pointed out later): one active, 'producer of, agent' (1a), and two passives, 'which deserves to be V-ed (worthy of being V-ed)' (1b), and 'which can be V-ed' (1c)<sup>3</sup>:

- (1) a. txiste barregarri  
joke laugh+*garri* (derivational suffix)  
'a joke which makes you laugh (a funny joke)'  
b. emakume miresgarri  
woman admire+*garri*  
'an admirable woman (worthy of admiration)'  
c. azalpen ulergarri  
explanation understand+*garri*  
'an understandable, comprehensible explanation'

Looking at (1), the readers unfamiliar with the structure of Basque will notice that the noun precedes the adjective in that language. It is also worth noticing that derivational suffixes, *-garri* as well as any other suffix, attach to verbal stems: *mirets*<sup>4</sup> and *uler*<sup>5</sup>. In *barregarri* (1a), the noun *barre* 'laugh' of the verbal

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3 However, Villasante (1974) and Azkarate (1990) emphasize that *-garri* is mainly an agentive suffix (we shall come back to this disagreement later on).

4 Sibilant affricates become fricative before consonant. This explains the change *mirets* → *miresgarri*.

5 The verbal stem is also used in imperative, conditional and subjunctive:

(i) uler ezazu (imperative)

'understand (you)'

(ii) uler dezakezu

'you can understand'

(iii) uler dezazun

'for you to understand'

In contrast, the past, present or future participle is used in the indicative mood, and the past participle, formed by adding *-i* or *-tu* to the verbal stem, is the citation form for verbs: *ulertu* 'to understand', *miretsi* 'to admire':

(iv) ulertu duzu

'you understood'

(v) ulertzen duzu

'you understand'

(vi) ulertuko duzu

'you will understand'

periphrasis *barre egin* 'laugh make, to laugh' is the base to which the suffix attaches (see footnote (11) below).

As for *-kor* and *-kizun*, Azkue and Villasante agree in their values: 'tendency, disposition to' for the former, 'possible actions' for the latter:

- (2) a. *eguraldi aldakor*  
weather change+*kor*  
'variable (changing) weather'  
b. *eritasuna sendakizun da*  
disease+art. cure+*kizun* is  
'the disease is curable'

Finally, *-gaitz* would designate 'impossible actions', that is, it refers to persons or things which 'cannot be V-ed':

- (3) *hipotesi frogagaitz*  
hypothesis demonstrate+*gaitz*  
'undemonstrable hypothesis'

In Catalan, agentivity and modality are expressed, among others, by the suffixes *-dor* and *-ble*, the first one being the most productive suffix to form deverbal agentive adjectives:

- (4) *el cavall guanyador*  
'the winner horse'

For modal passive adjectives, the suffix *-ble* is generally used, as shown in (5):

- (5) *una conducta criticable*  
'a criticizable behavior'

Nevertheless, *-dor* can also form adjectives with a meaning similar to those formed with the suffix *-ble*:

- (6) *blat segador*  
'wheat ready to be harvested'

In fact, Fabra (1954-56) postulates the existence of two different values for the suffix *-dor*: one having an agentive meaning - *guanyador* -, the other having a "passive" interpretation - *blat segador* -. The latter one has often an equivalent formed with the suffix *-ble*: *segador* = *segable*. More to the point in Fabra (1956) two different *-dor* suffixes are considered.

As it can easily be seen, there is a significant degree of coincidence among the data of the two languages under examination. This coincidence is still more surprising, since we are dealing with two unrelated languages. The question then

arises, of why there is such an overlapping between agentive and modal-passive values both in Basque *-garri* and Catalan *-dor*.

The aim of this paper is to explain why certain suffixes such as Basque *-garri* or Catalan *-dor* can form adjectives, that take two different values: they are interpreted as active-agentive some times, as modal-passive other times. Although the overlapping between these two values for a single suffix is found in several languages (Dutch *-lijk*, English *-er*, etc.), we will discuss only the data provided by Basque and Catalan. Nevertheless, our explanation is intended to be general and valid for other languages as well. The main points of our hypothesis are following ones:

- 1) Passive-modal adjectives receive an interpretation equivalent to the one of middle constructions (*bureaucrats bribe easily*).
- 2) Following Levin and Rappaport (1988) we assume that middle constructions have an external argument (namely, the internal argument of the non-middle form). We also assume that middle constructions have a modal  $\emptyset$  morpheme (Pesetsky 1991).
- 3) Adjectives interpreted as modal-passive are derived from a middle verbal base; adjectives interpreted as active-agentive derive from an active verbal base.
- 4) Be the adjective derived from a middle base, be it derived from an active base, the suffix always absorbs the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument of the verbal base (we will distinguish between 'absorption' of a  $\theta$ -role and 'reception' of a  $\theta$ -role; only in the latter case is the argument prevented from being projected into the syntactic structure).
- 5) The fact that the adjective receives an active-agentive interpretation or a modal-passive one depends on the kind of the verbal base (active or middle) to which the suffix attaches, and on the kind of  $\theta$ -role (Agent or Theme respectively) that is absorbed.

## 1. The data

### 1.1. The Suffixes

Let us analyze more closely the properties of the adjectives formed by these suffixes. In particular, let us look into the argument structure of these deverbal adjectives and their semantic interpretation. For this, each suffix will be examined separately. First, Catalan *-ble* and *-dor* will be analysed and next Basque *-garri*, *-kor*, *-gaitz* and *-kizun*.

#### -BLE

*-ble* is one of the derivational suffixes which has been most thoroughly studied not only in traditional grammars, but also in more recent works carried out within the

framework of Generative Morphology. Most grammarians agree in relating this suffix to active structures which undergo some kind of passive transformation (externalization of the internal argument, etc.). Thus, most have claimed that the suffix *-ble* requires a transitive verbal base (Chapin 1967, Vergnaud 1973, Aronoff 1976, Williams 1981, Sproat 1985, Roeper 1987). Other analysis of *-ble* are not based on transitivity, but on the  $\theta$ -grid of the verbal base (De Miguel 1986).

If we analyze more closely the data from Catalan, the following cases can be distinguished:

1. Cases where the subject of the adjective, i.e. the noun preceding the *-ble* adjective, corresponds to the direct object of the transitive verb, and takes the Theme  $\theta$ -role:

- (7) a. un comportament justificable  
x justifica un comportament  
'a justifiable behavior'  
b. una proposta acceptable  
x accepta una proposta  
'an acceptable proposal'  
c. un fet lamentable  
x lamenta un fet  
'a lamentable fact'

2. Cases where the noun preceding the *-ble* adjective does not correspond to the direct object of the verb<sup>6</sup>:

a) Some adjectives derive from verbs which do not have a direct object but a prepositional complement. The noun qualified by the adjective can receive the  $\theta$ -role Theme as in (8a), Path, as in (8b), or some other  $\theta$ -role related to prepositional complements<sup>7</sup>:

- (8) a. una persona fiable  
x es fia d'una persona  
'a reliable person'  
b. una carretera transitable

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6 See Fabb (1984) for similar examples in English.

7 *Qüestió opinable* 'an opinionable matter' (*opinar sobre*), *una persona prescindible* 'a dispensable person' (*prescindir de* 'to dispense with') would be other instances of the same kind of *-ble* adjectives.

x transita per la carretera  
'a practicable road'

b) In other cases, *-ble* seems to attach to intransitive verbal roots<sup>8</sup>:

- (9) a. un record perdurable  
el record perdura  
'a lasting memory'  
b. una música agradable  
la música agrada  
'a pleasant music'  
c. metall oxidable  
el metall s'oxida  
'oxidizable metal'  
d. sang coagulable  
la sang (es) coagula  
'"coagulatable" blood'

(9a) - (9d) seem to be counterexamples to the claim that *-ble* adjectives cannot be formed on intransitive verbs. However, the verbs in (9) are not true intransitives. They are unaccusative or ergative verbs, whose superficial subject occupies an object position in D-Structure. So, the subject of the adjective is the internal argument of the verb, which takes the  $\theta$ -role Theme. This can be easily proved, because true intransitive verbs, that is unergative verbs, can never be the base for a *-ble* adjective:

- (10) a. \*una persona dormible  
'a sleepable person'  
b. \*un professor rondinable  
'a grumblable teacher'  
c. \*un nen badallable  
'a yawnable child'

Therefore, looking at the data in (7), (8) and (9), we can conclude that the subject of the adjectives in *-ble* corresponds to the internal argument of the verbal base. This argument is often the direct object of the verbal construction and it receives the  $\theta$ -role Theme, although it is not always the case, as shown in (8) and (9).

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8 It is worth noticing that the Italian suffix used for (9a, b) is not *-bile* '-ble', but *-evole*: *durevole*, *piacevole* (We thank S. Scalise for this observation).

As for the semantic value of the suffix *-ble* (although it has been largely disregarded in generative literature) many grammarians have pointed out its modal and passive meaning, often distinguishing two types of modality: the *can* type modality and the necessity, worthy of, etc. type of modality (Alemany-Bolufer 1920, Marchand 1960, Guilbert 1971, Lyons 1977, Bauer 1983 or Val 1981, among others). Nevertheless, the existence of an active meaning has also been underlined.

Relating these semantic values to the structures analyzed in (7) to (9), we realize that the examples in (7) receive a modal and passive interpretation:

- (11) a. justificable = que pot ésser justificat  
          'which can be justified'  
      b. acceptable = que es pot acceptar  
          'which can be accepted'  
      c. lamentable = digne de lamentació  
          'which ought to be regretted, worthy of blame'

In (8), there is modality, but not passivity in Catalan<sup>9</sup>, since the verbal base is not transitive :

- (12) a. fiable = de qui hom pot fiar-se  
          'who can be relied on'  
      b. transitable = dit del lloc per on es pot transitar  
          '(road) which can be used'

Finally, in the examples in (9) there is not modality nor passive value, since they are not related to passive structures strictly speaking. That is, in those examples, there is not any direct object converted into subject; but there is an externalized internal argument, just as in passive constructions:

- (13) a. perdurable = que perdura  
          'which lasts'  
      b. agradable = que agrada  
          'which pleases'  
      c. existible = que pot existir  
          'which can exist'  
      d. oxidable = que es pot oxidar  
          'which can oxidize'

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9 The subcategorization of the verbal bases is not always identical in different languages.

- e. coagulable = capaç de coagular-se  
'able to coagulate'

As for modality, we realize that only (13c) - (13e) clearly contain a modal element in their definition. In fact, the verbs in (13) belong to two different classes: unaccusatives (13a) - (13c) and ergatives (13d) and (13e). Only the *-ble* adjectives derived from the latter ones clearly contain always modality (13d) and (13e).

Summing up, it seems that passivity entails modality, but not viceversa (cf. the contrast between (11) and (12)-(13)). On the other hand, *-ble* adjectives derived from ergative verbs always have a modal meaning, which is not always the case when the base is unaccusative.

#### -DOR

As we said above, some Catalan modal adjectives are formed by adding the suffix *-dor* to a verbal base. However, *-dor* usually has an active meaning (agentive or instrumental) in nominals as well as in adjectives (Gràcia 1992), just as its English correlate *-er*:

- (14) a. jugador  
'player'  
corredor  
'runner'  
guanyador  
'winner'  
b. obridor  
'opener'  
encenedor  
'lighter'

It is generally assumed that this suffix absorbs the external  $\theta$ -role of the verb (Agent or Instrument), so that the complex word has an active meaning.

Nevertheless, the examples in (15) and (16) show that *-dor* adjectives can be interpreted in another way<sup>10</sup>:

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10 However, this process is not productive, and some of these examples are rarely used. From an etimological point of view, not all the words formed with the suffix *-dor* derive from the same Latin suffix. Whereas agentive *-dor* (ex. in (14)) always derive from Latin *-tore*, the suffix of the adjectives in (15) and (16) can derive from *-tore* or from *-toriu*:

obridor (15c, 16e)	-toriu
obridor (14b)	-tore
entrador (16b)	-tore



- (15) a. una lletra llegidora  
'writing that can be read, easy to read'  
b. una suma pagadora  
'amount (of money) that can or must be paid'  
c. una capsa obridora  
'a box that can be easily opened'  
d. una acció lloadora  
'an action that deserves to be praised, worthy of praise'
- (16) a. un noi sortidor  
'boy that tends to go out, that often goes out'  
b. un parlar entrador  
'a way of speaking that easily penetrates; a persuasive way of speaking'  
c. els bens terrenals són moridors  
'earthly goods are to die' (meaning that earthly goods don't last forever)  
d. una planta creixedora  
'plant that grows or has to grow up'  
e. un préssec obridor  
'peach that opens easily, spontaneously'

Although *-dor* has a basically active meaning, the adjectives in (15), which derive from transitive bases, have a modal-passive interpretation, similar or identical to the value of *-ble* adjectives. In fact, some of the adjectives in (15) have a synonymous form in *-ble*: *llegible*, *pagable*, *lloable*, etc.

On the other hand, the examples in (16) do not take a modal-passive interpretation like those in (15); but, at the same time, they are not active as those in (14), because their meaning involves a modal component - 'that can be', 'easily', 'tending to', etc. - which is lacking in the examples in (14).

Our hypothesis predicts that *-dor* adjectives can derive from 'normal' verbal roots having an active non modal meaning (as those in (14)) or from middle forms

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lloador (15d)	-toriu
lloador (active)	-tore
llegidor (15a)	-toriu
llegidor (active)	-tore

This fact correlates with the distinction between Spanish *-dor* (-tore) and *-dero* (-toriu). Now we are leaving aside the etimological origin of *-dor*, which we consider irrelevant for nowadays speakers.

which take a passive modal interpretation (as those in (15)). When the verbal base is ergative (*obridor* in (16)), the adjective is interpreted as modal and when derived from unaccusative verbs (the other examples in (16)), the adjective sometimes receives a modal interpretation, and some other times it does not, just as occurs with *-ble* adjectives.

Note that whereas the suffix *-dor* in (14) absorbs the external  $\theta$ -role of the verb (Agentive or Instrumental), the same cannot be claimed for the adjectives in (15) and (16).

To conclude this presentation of the Catalan data, we can say that *-ble* is a suffix that productively forms modal-passive adjectives, whereas *-dor* generally creates adjectives with an active non modal meaning. Nevertheless, examples which show just the opposite can also be found: active non modal *-ble* adjectives and modal-passive *-dor* adjectives.

Let us now look at the Basque suffixes which form agentive or modal-passive adjectives: *-garri*, *-kor*, *-gaitz* and *-kizun*.

#### **-GARRI**

Besides what has been said by Azkue (1923-25), Villasante (1974) and Azkarate (1990), if we analyze this suffix on the basis of the argument structure of the verbal root, we realize that:

1) In the examples in (17) the noun preceding the *-garri* adjective corresponds to the subject of a transitive verb:

- (17) a. *irakasle beldurgarri*  
teacher frighten+*garri*  
'fear causing teacher, frightening teacher'
- b. *ume higuigarri*  
child disgust+*garri*  
'child that causes disgust'
- c. *egoera negargarri*  
situation cry+*garri*  
'situation that makes someone cry; sad situation'
- d. *erantzun mingarri*  
answer offend+*garri*  
'answer that offends someone offensive answer'
- e. *sustantzia oxidagarri*  
substance oxidize+*garri*  
'substance that causes oxidization'

- f. gaixotasun hilgarri  
disease kill+garri  
'disease that kills, mortal disease'

The suffix *-garri* absorbs the external argument - be it Agent or Cause - and has therefore an active value<sup>11</sup>. It is worth noticing, however, that the verbs in (17) have all causative value, except *negar egin* 'to cry' in (17c)<sup>12</sup>. In fact *-garri*, when attached to non-causative transitive verbs, can never take an active value; then, the adjective takes a passive meaning as the data in (18) show:

- (18) a. \*irakasle irakurgarri  
teacher read+garri  
'teacher who reads'

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11 The internal argument can be realized as the first member of a compound adjective (which usually appears in a copular construction):

- (i) bihotz-erdiragarri da umeak hiltzen ikustea  
heart break+garri is child+pl.art. dying see+nominal. suffix  
'to see children dying is heart breaking'

or as an *-en* complement of an adjective which also appears in a copular construction:

- (ii) esaneko umea gurasoen pozgarri da  
advice+genit. child+art. parents -genit make-happy+garri is  
'an obedient child causes the happiness of his/her parents; makes his/her parents happy'

See Azkarate (1990). A similar situation can be found in Catalan (Gràcia 1992).

12 Basque has a fair number of verbs formed by a noun and the verb *egin* 'to make' such as:

- (i) a. negar egin  
'to make cry; to cry'  
b. barre egin  
'to make laugh; to laugh'  
c. lan egin  
'to make work; to work'

However, this pattern ceased being productive long ago. The causative of these verbs is also formed on an obsolete pattern:

- (ii) a. negar eragin  
'to make someone cry'  
b. barre eragin  
'to make someone laugh'  
c. lan eragin  
'to make someone work'

Nowadays, a lot of Basque speakers use the regular causative pattern, which consists in adding *arazi* (*eragin* in Biscayan dialect) to the verbal root, even in these verbs: *negar eginarazi*, *barre eginarazi* or *lan eginarazi*.

- b. artikulu irakurgarri  
article read+*garri*  
'readable article'

With non-causative transitive verbs, agentivity is expressed by the suffixes *-le* or *-tzaile*<sup>13</sup>:

- (19) a. emakume saltzaile  
woman sell+*tzaile*  
'woman seller, seller who is a woman'  
b. zaldi irabazle  
horse win+*le*  
'winner horse'

2) But there are also cases where the preceding noun corresponds to the internal argument of a transitive verb. In those cases, the adjective receives a passive interpretation where modality is obviously present:

- (20) a. elementu berreskuragarri  
element recover+*garri*  
'element which can be recovered, recoverable'  
b. hipotesi frogagarri  
hypothesis demonstrate+*garri*  
'demonstrable hypothesis'  
c. proposamen onargarri  
proposal accept+*garri*  
'acceptable proposal'  
d. sustantzia gasifikagarri  
substance gasify+*garri*  
'substance which can be gasified'

The verbal base must be transitive, either causative or non-causative. Taking into account what has been said about the base of the 'active' *-garri*, it could be predicted that *-garri* adjectives derived from causative verbs will be systematically ambiguous;

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13 Those suffixes form nouns as well as adjectives, just as it happens with Catalan *-dor* or English *-er*. On the other hand, they oppose to *-garri* (which also forms nouns and adjectives) in that they do not express an Instrument (Azkarate 1992). As for the distribution of *-le* and *-tzaile*, see Azkue (1923-25).

namely, the adjective will be able to receive an active or a passive interpretation. In fact, this is what happens. Pairs such as those in (21) are found in Basque:

- (21) a. *sustantzia gasifikagarri*  
      ‘substance which can be gasified’  
      b. *faktore gasifikagarri*  
      ‘factor which makes sth. become gas’

Due to diachronic reasons<sup>14</sup>, the active interpretation will be preferred in those cases. However, the choice between the active and the passive reading will depend on the context, that is, on the relation between the semantic properties of the preceding noun and those of the *-garri* adjective.

3) A third group of adjectives is found in (22):

- (22) a. *datu aipagarri*  
      *data mention+garri*  
      ‘data worthy of being mentioned’  
      b. *irakasle errespetagarri*  
      *teacher respect+garri*  
      ‘teacher worthy of being respected’  
      c. *party gogoangarri*  
      *party take-in-mind+garri*  
      ‘party worthy of being remembered; memorable party’

Semantically the adjective has a passive value, but there is also an additional component in its meaning: ‘worth being V-ed’. This additional nuance led some people to take this kind of adjectives as a ‘bridge’ between the type analyzed in (18) and the type represented in (20). In (22b), for instance, there is no doubt that *irakasle* ‘teacher’ corresponds to the internal argument of *errespetatu* ‘to respect’; but, at the same time, *errespetagarri* can also be viewed as referring to someone or something which causes respect. That is why they have been considered intermediate cases between (17) and (20)<sup>15</sup>.

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14 Up to now, *-garri* has been much more productive in the ‘active’ value. Nowadays this suffix is undergoing a semantic shift and the ‘passive’ value is becoming more and more productive, at least in the standard language.

15 The same can be said of Catalan adjectives such as *lamentable* (in (11c)) or *respectable* ‘respectable’, *memorable* ‘memorable’.

-KOR

Basque *-kor* mostly attaches to unaccusative or ergative verbal bases<sup>16</sup>, including psych verbs of *preoccupare* type (Belletti and Rizzi 1988):

- (23) a. beira hauskor  
glass break+*kor*  
'fragile glass, which can (easily) break'
- b. egoera iraunkor  
situation last+*kor*  
'lasting situation'
- c. gizakia hilkorra da<sup>17</sup>  
human-being+art. die+*kor*+art. is  
'the human being is mortal'
- d. irakasle haserrekor  
teacher get-angry+*kor*  
'teacher who (easily) gets angry'
- e. aitona pozkor  
grand father get-happy+*kor*  
'old man who (easily) becomes happy; cheerful old man'

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16 There are a few adjectives such as *sineskor* 'credulous' or *sentikor* 'sensitive' formed on transitive verbal bases:

- (i) gizon sineskor  
man believe+*kor*  
'a credulous man'
- (ii) pertsona sentikor  
person feel+*kor*  
'a sensitive person'

In those cases the subject of the adjective corresponds to the external Experiencer argument. Then, *-kor* opposes to passive *-garri*:

- (iii) gezur sinesgarri  
lie believe+*garri*  
'lie which can be believed'
- (iv) ume sineskor  
child believe+*kor*  
'credulous child'

17 The article in Basque is expressed by the suffix *-a* which attaches to the last element of the NP or AP. However, it is worth noticing that there are nouns which have this vocalic ending, such as *pertsona* 'person' or *beira* 'glass'. In those cases, if the article is attached to these nouns, contraction of both *-a* vowels happens in standard Basque.

In (23) the noun preceding the adjective in *-kor* corresponds to the internal argument, be it Theme (23a) - (23c) or Experiencer in the case of psych verbs (23d) - (23e). Thus, we realize that the difference between active *-garri* and *-kor* mainly lies on the type of verbal base to which they attach: transitive vs. unaccusative or ergative. The examples in (24)-(26) show this contrast:

- (24) a. berri po<sup>z</sup>garri  
news make-happy+*garri*  
'news that makes (someone) happy'
- b. aitona po<sup>z</sup>kor  
grand father get-happy+*kor*  
'old man who (easily) becomes happy; cheerful old man'
- (25) a. bekatu hilgarri  
sin kill-*garri*  
'mortal sin'
- b. gizakia hilkorra da  
human-being+art. die+*kor*+art. is  
'the human being is mortal'
- (26) a. erantzun haserregarri  
answer get-angry+*garri*  
'answer that makes someone get angry'
- b. gizon haserrekor  
man get-angry+*kor*  
'man who easily gets angry'

Looking at (24)-(26), we notice that Azkue (1923-25) and Villasante (1974) captured the difference between these two suffixes in a very accurate way: *-garri* means 'producer of' and *-kor* denotes 'tendency, disposition of the subject to execute the action expressed by the verbal base'.

**-GAITZ**<sup>18</sup>

What distinguishes that suffix from 'passive' *-garri* and *-kor*, is that its meaning contains an additional component, namely, that of negation. Therefore, Basque expresses with a single suffix, *-gaitz*, what English and Romance languages express by means of a prefix (negation) and a suffix (possibility), is done in Basque by a single suffix, *-gaitz*:

- (27) a. *hipotesi frogagaitz*  
hypothesis demonstrate+*gaitz*  
'undemonstrable hypothesis (or extremely difficult to demonstrate)'
- b. *proposamen onargaitz*  
proposal accept+*gaitz*  
'unacceptable proposal'
- c. *beira hausgaitz*  
glass break+*gaitz*  
'glass which hardly breaks'
- d. *irakasle haserregaitz*  
teacher get angry+*gaitz*  
'teacher who hardly gets angry'

When the verbal base is transitive, (27a) and (27b), *-gaitz* opposes to *-garri*, the latter expressing affirmative modality and the former negative modality (cf. (20b.) vs (27a), (20c) vs (27b)). With ergative or unaccusative verbal bases, *-gaitz* opposes to *-kor*: (23a) vs (27c), and (23d) vs (27d).

**-KIZUN**

Although this suffix shows a higher degree of productivity to form deverbal nouns, it has been used in adjective formation as well. Here, we are going to deal with adjective-forming *-kizun*:

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18 We are not going to discuss here whether *-gaitz* is a suffix or a full adjective. Azkue (1923-25) and Villasante (1974) took it as suffix, although Villasante remarks that *gaitz* has been also used as adjective, meaning 'great' or 'very difficult'. Nowadays, it is still alive in Biscayan dialect with the meaning 'very difficult'

- (i) *harkaitz*  
(*< harri* 'stone' + *gaitz* 'great')  
'great stone, rock'
- (ii) *hori sinestea gaitza da*  
that believe+nom.+art. very-difficult+art. is  
'it is really difficult to believe that'



- (28) a. hori eginkizun balitz  
that make+*kizun* if+it-was  
'that feasible if was; if it was feasible'
- b. eritasun hori sendakizun da  
disease that cure+*kizun* is  
'that disease is curable'
- c. nekeak eramankizun dira  
suffering+pl.art. bear+*kizun* are  
'the sufferings are bearable'

As it can be seen in (28), *-kizun* can be attached to transitive verbs. It is also evident that the adjectives formed with the suffix *-kizun* have a passive and modal meaning 'which can be V-ed'; so the suffix *-kizun* has the same value as the 'passive' *-garri* (cf. (20) and (28)). Finally, it may be worth noticing that those adjectives usually show up in copular sentences and occur rarely in postnominal position (the position of the adjective in Basque; cf. the data in (22) or (23)). Nevertheless we are going to confine ourselves to a mere statement of this fact, without looking further into it<sup>19</sup>.

If *-kizun* and 'passive' *-garri* are equivalent, examples such as those in (29) where the adjective takes the additional nuance of 'worth being V-ed' are not surprising at all. Those examples parallel the ones in (22):

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19 We are disregarding as well another use of the suffix *-kizun*, namely that represented in (i) where the adjective formed with that suffix takes on the meaning of 'future action', 'related to an action which is to happen':

- (i) a. etorkizun zeuden gauzak  
e+*kizun* were+rel. thing+pl.art.  
'things that were to come'
- b. zu bekatutik irtenkizun zaude  
you sin+from go-out+*kizun* are  
'you are still to leave sin (the state of sin)'
- c. euskararen atlasa eginkizun dago  
Basque+genit. atlas+art do+*kizun* is  
'the atlas of Basque is to be done'

As it can be seen, the verbal base can be either transitive or intransitive (unaccusative), just as in (28) and (29). The difference lies in the meaning; in (i), the nuance of future action takes over modality. The construction in which the adjective appears contributes to the choice of one meaning or the other: the occurrence with the verb *egon* 'to be, stay', as it is the case in (i), favors the interpretation of 'action to come'.

- (29) a. hura kondenakizun da  
that condemne+*kizun* is  
'he is worth being condemned; he deserves to be condemned'  
b. intsentsu estimakizuna  
incense appreciate+*kizun*+art.  
'incense worth being appreciated'

However, if the verbal base is unaccusative, the modal value is kept, but, obviously, there is no passive value, at least in the traditional sense in which passive is understood:

- (30) a. ixilunea gertakizun da  
pause+art. happen+*kizun* is  
'a pause which can happen'  
b. gizona hilakizun da  
man+art. die+*kizun* is  
'the man is mortal'

Summing up, we get a the following picture for Basque derivative deverbal adjectives: when forming modal-passive adjectives, nowadays, transitive verbal bases take *-garri*, whereas *-kor* will be chosen if the base is ergative or unaccusative. *-gaitz* attaches to any verbal base of the type just mentioned, namely to transitive, ergative and unaccusative; but opposes to *-garri* and *-kizun* in its meaning of *negative* modality. The other suffix that has been analyzed above, *-kizun*, is no longer productive to form adjectives.

## 1.2. Conclusions

The behavior of the suffixes which form deverbal adjectives in Basque and in Catalan, and which have been analyzed above, can be summarized in the following picture, where the upper row contains the type of verbal base to which the suffix is adjoined. In addition, for each suffix, it is specified:

- a) Whether it takes or not a certain type of verbal base, be it transitive, ergative, etc.
- b) Whether the noun preceding the deverbal adjective would be interpreted as the external or the internal argument of the base.
- c) Whether the derived adjective receives or not a passive interpretation. The brackets indicate that there is no properly passive meaning, but that there is externalization of the internal argument, just as it happens in passive structures.
- d) Finally, the 'modality' feature indicates whether the meaning of the adjective includes a modal component.

(31) a.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUSAT.	UNERGAT.
-BLE	+ble +int.arg. +passive +modality	+ble +int.arg. (+passive) +modality	+ble +int.arg. (+passive) ±modality	-ble ---- ---- ----

(31) b.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUSAT.	UNERGAT.
-DOR <sub>1</sub>	+dor <sub>1</sub> +ext.arg. -passive -modality	-dor <sub>1</sub> ---- ---- ----	-dor <sub>1</sub> ---- ---- ----	+dor <sub>1</sub> +ext.arg. -passive -modality

(31) c.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUSAT.	UNERGAT.
-DOR <sub>2</sub>	+dor <sub>2</sub> +int.arg. (+passive) +modality	+dor <sub>2</sub> +int.arg. (+passive) +modality	+dor <sub>2</sub> +int.arg. (+passive) ±modality	-dor <sub>2</sub> ---- ---- ----

(31) d.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUS.	UNERG.
-GARRI <sub>1</sub>	+garri <sub>1</sub> +ext.arg. -passive -modality	-garri <sub>1</sub> ---- ---- ----	-garri <sub>1</sub> ---- ---- ----	-garri <sub>1</sub> ---- ---- ----

(31) e.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUS.	UNERG.
-GARRI <sub>2</sub>	+garri <sub>2</sub> +int.arg. +passive +modality	-garri <sub>2</sub> ---- ---- ----	-garri <sub>2</sub> <sup>20</sup> ---- ---- ----	-garri <sub>2</sub> ---- ---- ----

20 -garri<sub>2</sub> was not attached to unaccusative verbs at least in a productive way. Nevertheless, adjectives like *gertagarri* 'which can be happen' can be heard nowadays.

(31) f.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUS.	UNERG.
-KOR	-kor	+kor	+kor	-kor
	---	+int.arg.	+int.arg.	---
	---	(+passive)	(+passive)	---
	---	+modality	±modality	---

(31) g.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUS.	UNERG.
-GAITZ	+gaitz	+gaitz	+gaitz	-gaitz
	+int.arg.	+int arg	+int.arg.	---
	+passive	(+passive)	(+passive)	---
	+modality	+modality	+modality	---
	+negation	+negation	+negation	---

(31) h.

	TRANSITIVE	ERGATIVE	UNACCUS.	UNERG.
-KIZUN	+kizun	-kizun	+kizun	-kizun
	+int.arg.	---	+int.arg.	---
	+passive	---	(+passive)	---
	+modality	---	±modality	---

The following conclusions can be drawn from the picture sketched out in (31):

- 1) Each language, Basque and Catalan, had two different suffixes with the same behavior which entailed that one of them (*-dor<sub>2</sub>* in Catalan and *-kizun* in Basque) became unproductive.
- 2) In Basque, *-garri<sub>2</sub>* and *-kor* are in complementary distribution, the nature of the verbal base being the determining factor. The values of both suffixes, *-garri<sub>2</sub>* and *-kor*, are taken on by a single suffix, *-ble*, in Catalan.
- 3) In both languages, there are suffixes - Catalan *-dor* and Basque *-garri* - which can take either an active or a passive meaning.

## 2. Proposal of an analysis

Two intriguing questions arise from the picture outlined in 1.2. First of all, as it was said in the Introduction of this article, we could ask why there is an overlapping between agentive and modal-passive values both in Basque and in Catalan. On the other hand, is it possible to derive both type of adjectives - those having an active meaning and those having a passive one - applying the same rules, that is, performing the same kind of operations? Otherwise, the existence of a single suffix

(-*dor* or -*garri*) could be questioned (remember that in Fabra (1956) two different -*dor* suffixes are considered).

As for the first question, it is worth noticing that overlapping between active and passive values also happens in other languages. According to Val (1981), for instance, Latin suffix -*bilis* had several meanings: a) it expressed possibility, necessity or obligation, from a passive point of view; b) it could take an active value, and then the meaning of possibility was optional (that is some adjectives contained the idea of possibility and some others not); and c) it could also have an active (instrumental or causer) value, which, as a matter of fact has been considered to be the primitive one. All that matches perfectly the data given for Basque -*garri*.

The same sort of data can also be found for Dutch -*lijk* (van Marle 1988) a suffix which, diachronically, formed adjectives associated with the “case-labels ‘object’ (*beminnelijk* ‘lovable’), ‘force’ (*aantrekkelijk* ‘attractive’) and ‘experience’ (*sterfelijk* ‘mortal’)”. English -*er* can also form some “passive” nouns, besides the more usual “active” ones.

Thus, if the overlapping between active and passive value in a single suffix is quite general, a fact, our second question, becomes crucial: how can those adjectives be derived to get an active or a passive interpretation? Or should two different suffixes be posited in each language? It goes without saying that the hypothesis of a single suffix is to be preferred. But there is still another question: how can passivity and modality - two components which appear closely connected - be related?

### 2.1. ‘Middle’ constructions and the modal value of deverbal adjectives<sup>21</sup>

If we look at (31) we realize that:

- a) The verbal base does not condition the active or passive interpretation. In other words, transitive verbal bases do not always correlate with passive meaning. For instance, Basque -*garri* adjoins to transitive bases, but it can take both meanings. Therefore, it can be concluded that the interpretation the deverbal adjective takes does not depend on the type of the verbal base.
- b) It is also evident that passivity always entails modality. In fact, this can be clearly seen in the examples (11a), (15a), (20a), (27a) or (28b) repeated here:

- (11) a. justifiable  
      ‘which can be justified’

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21 When we use the term ‘deverbal adjective’ we are only referring to those adjectives formed by the suffixes analyzed in this article.

- (15) a. *lletra llegidora*  
'writing that can be read, easy to read'
- (20) a. *elementu berreskuragarria*  
'element which can be recovered, recoverable'
- (27) a. *hipotesi frogagaitz*  
'undemonstrable hypothesis (or extremely difficult to demonstrate)'
- (28) b. *eritasun hori sendakizun da*  
'disease that curable is, that disease is curable'
- c) Modality is also found where the passive interpretation is ruled out, namely with ergative and unaccusative verbal bases<sup>22</sup>. However a (+passive) feature is assigned to suffixes which take that kind of bases because, as explained above, externalization of the internal argument occurs in examples like (13d), (23b), (30a), repeated here; namely, the same process that applies to passive structures:
- (13) d. *oxidable*  
'which can oxidize'
- (23) b. *egoera iraunkor*  
'lasting situation'
- (30) a. *ixilunea gertakizun da*  
'a pause 'happen-possible' is; which can happen'
- d) Nevertheless, according to (31), some adjectives derived from unaccusative verbs have a modal meaning, whereas others do not. If, in those cases, there is always a passive-like externalization of the internal argument, we can ask when this externalization is not related to modality. If we look into that question, we realize that the few examples where there is no modality are lexicalized cases (cf. *perdurable* 'lasting' (13a) or *agradable* 'pleasant' (13b)). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that passivity - not necessarily implying transitive verbal bases, but taken as externalization of an internal argument - and modality are always related to each other.

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23 The meaning that grammarians attributed to suffixes such as *-kor* or *-kizun*, namely 'tendency, inclination, easiness to perform the action denoted by the verbal base', gives further evidence for the modality meaning present in these suffixes.

- e) Finally, we can also see that the suffixes *-dor<sub>1</sub>* and *-garri<sub>1</sub>* have an active value when attached to transitive bases. Therefore, there will not be any modality component in the meaning of the adjectives derived by those suffixes.

Looking more closely at the adjectives which have modal meaning, we realize that this modal meaning is very similar to the modal value of 'middle' constructions:

- (32) a. Bureaucrats bribe easily  
b. Bureaucrats are bribable

In fact, middle constructions are characterized by the generic value of the implicit agent and by their non-eventive interpretation<sup>23</sup>. They do not indicate any action or process, but rather a characteristic of the subject; this subject, in turn, corresponds to the internal argument of the verb (just as happens with passive subjects).

The  $\theta$ -role of the external argument is considered to be absorbed by a clitic *se* in Romance languages or by an abstract clitic in English (Keyser and Roeper 1984). (A similar abstract clitic could be postulated in Basque as well). This absorption of the external argument would explain the impossibility for the implicit agent to be realized in middle constructions. But, in fact, implicit arguments do appear in middle constructions (at least in some languages), realized as *by* phrases, given that they refer to non-specific agents. Curiously enough, implicit agents can also appear with *-ble* adjectives derived from transitive verbs, under the same restrictions in respect to specificity. The contrast in Catalan between (33a) - (33b) and (34a) - (34b) illustrates this restriction<sup>24</sup>:

- (33) a. ?Els buròcrates se sobornen fàcilment per qualsevol que els ofereixi diners  
'bureaucrats bribe easily by anyone who offers them (some) money'  
b. \*/?? Els buròcrates se sobornen fàcilment pel meu germà  
'bureaucrats bribe easily by my brother'

---

23 "Middle constructions are state propositions that are held to be generally true. They do not describe particular events in time (...). Middle verbs do not refer to events" (Keyser and Roeper 1984: 384).

24 The Agent cannot be realized in middle sentences in Basque. It is also very rarely found with deverbal adjectives and, it is restricted to literary registers:

(i) zu, ez herioak, ez gaitzek dainakizun ez zinena  
you, not death+art.+erg., not disease+erg. damn+kizun not were  
'you, who were not damnable by death or by any disease'

- (34) a. ? Un llibre fàcilment recomanable per qualsevol que l'hagi llegit  
'a book easily recommendable by anyone who had it read'  
b. \*/?? Un llibre recomanable pel professor de literatura  
'a book recommendable by the teacher of literature'

Another distinguishing feature of middle constructions is their need for a manner adverbial (*easily, well...*). If we look at the definitions given in dictionaries to some modal adjectives, we realize that these definitions often include a manner adverbial (cf. (15c), (16e), (23a), (23d), (27c) and (27d)).

Taking into account all the data, the conclusion can be drawn that middle constructions are very similar to passive-modal deverbal adjectives.

At this point, it should be recalled our hypothesis that modal adjectives are derived from middle verbal forms, whereas non modal adjectives derive from simple verbal roots.

## 2.2. How deverbal adjectives are derived

Following Levin and Rappaport (1988), we propose that modal deverbal adjectives are derived from middle verbal forms. The same proposal was made by Levin and Rappaport (1988) to explain the fact that nouns formed by English *-er* can refer to the internal argument of the verbal base (*broiler* 'a young small chicken raised esp. to be cooked by broiling', *fryer* 'a small young chicken that is to be cooked by frying', *roaster* 'a piece of meat suitable for roasting', *steamer* and so on), whereas nouns formed by this suffix usually refer to the external argument, be it Agent or Instrument. In fact, Levin and Rappaport (1988) propose that middle forms are created in the lexicon by a rule which externalizes the internal argument, so that middles are verbal forms with external argument. This proposal allows them to keep the generalization that English suffix *-er* always absorbs the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument.

Therefore, taking into account (31), we would have two sorts of deverbal adjectives:

- a) Adjectives directly derived from transitive or unergative verbal bases, which have no modality value (31b) and (31d).
- b) Adjectives derived from middle verbal forms, which have modal meaning. The middle form, in turn, can derive from a transitive, ergative or unaccusative verbal base (31a), (31c), (31e) - (31h).

Now, if we assume that middle forms have external argument, the suffixes which form modal deverbal adjectives will 'absorb' the  $\theta$ -role of this external argument. Thus, the subject of all deverbal adjectives will be interpreted as the external argument of the verbal base, be it a 'root' verbal base or a middle verbal base. On the other hand, Pesetsky (1991) assumes the middle forms have the a modal



zero-affix followed by another passive zero-affix (CAN + PASS). If this assumption is correct, the passive and modal meaning of deverbal adjectives derived from middle bases would be automatically explained.

Before going ahead, it should be made clear what we understand by absorption. Generally it has been assumed that when a suffix absorbed a certain  $\theta$ -role, there could not be any NP that received this  $\theta$ -role. However we will distinguish between absorption of  $\theta$ -role and reception of  $\theta$ -role. Absorption of  $\theta$ -role will be considered a lexical process, whereas reception of  $\theta$ -role will be taken as a syntactic process. Under this point of view, the absorption of a  $\theta$ -role does not imply that it cannot be projected into syntax. In fact, the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument that suffixes which form deverbal adjectives absorb, is projected into syntax as the subject of the adjective. On the other hand, when a suffix receives a  $\theta$ -role, it is not possible to realized again this argument. This is the case of nominal agentive *-dor*. The contrast between (35a) and (35b) illustrates this difference:

- (35) a. el cavall guanyador (adj.)  
          'the winner horse'  
      b. \*el guanyador (noun) pel cavall  
          'the winner by the horse'

Let us present the advantages of a hypothesis such as the one we are proposing here. In fact, to put forward that suffixes forming deverbal adjectives always absorb the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument of the base, gives an explanation for the problems that remained unsolved up to now.

First of all, along the traditional analysis, it was assumed, for instance, that the suffix *-ble* absorbs the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument of a transitive verbal base. But it is not always the case that the base of *-ble* is transitive, as it can be seen in (31a); *-ble* attach to ergative and unaccusative bases as well. The question then arises of what  $\theta$ -role the suffix absorbs in these cases. On the other hand, (31a) also shows that the derived adjective, no matter whether the base is transitive, ergative or unaccusative, has a modal meaning. The hypothesis that all adjectives having a modal meaning derive from middle bases and that these bases always have an external argument, allows us to make a general statement about the suffix *-ble*: it always absorbs the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument. The same generalization can be extended to other suffixes which form deverbal adjectives with a modal meaning.

Even if we assume that all these adjectival suffixes absorb the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument, another question remains to be explained: the matter of the overlapping between active and passive value. That is, why is it that an adjective formed by *-dor* or by *-garrí* is sometimes interpreted as active and some other times as passive? This difference in interpretation stems from the different  $\theta$ -role absorbed by the suffix in each case. Even though what the suffix absorbs always corresponds to the external argument, the actual  $\theta$ -role absorbed will not always be the same.

When the adjective is derived from 'root' verbal bases, Agent (in a broad sense) is the absorbed  $\theta$ -role (the same  $\theta$ -role that the subject of the verb receives); in these cases, the adjective takes an active value. But when the adjective is derived from middle bases, the external argument corresponds to Theme, this being the  $\theta$ -role that the subject of the middle sentence receives, which, in turn, corresponds to the object of the active sentence. The adjective is then interpreted as passive.

Furthermore, our hypothesis, relating modal value to middle constructions, explains why no such modal value can be found in adjectives derived from unergative bases. Since unergative verbs cannot appear in middle constructions, our hypothesis predicts that unergatives will never be the base of a modal adjective.

### 2.3. *On the relationship between nominal and adjectival forms: a point for further research*

There is, however, a final question which deserves some attention. It has been mentioned through the article that some suffixes - Catalan *-dor* and Basque *-garri* and *-kizun* - form nouns as well as adjectives:

- (36) a. el guanyador del premi  
      'the winner of the prize'  
      b. l'obridor es va trencar  
      'the can opener broke'  
      c. l'atracador  
      'the armed robber'
- (37) a. ongarria  
      improve+*garri*+art.  
      'the fertilizer'  
      b. Erromako oroigarria  
      Rome+genit. remember+*garri*+art.  
      'a souvenir of Rome'  
      c. lapikoaren euskarria  
      pot+art.+genit. handle+*garri*+art.  
      'the handle of the pot'
- (38) a. etorkizuna  
      come+*kizun*+art.  
      'the future'  
      b. ospakizun ederra  
      celebrate+*kizun* beautiful+art.  
      'a beautiful celebration'

- c. eginkizun zaila  
do+kizun difficult+art.  
'a difficult task'

Although there are a few examples, nouns formed by the suffix *-ble* can also be found<sup>25</sup>:

- (39) a. una variable  
      'a variable'  
      b. un injectable  
      'an ampoule'  
      c. un dirigible  
      'a dirigible'

Therefore, the relationship between noun and adjective forming *-dor* or *-garri* should be looked into. Two solutions could be proposed: either there are two suffixes, one forming nouns and the other forming adjectives, or there is a single suffix *-dor*, *-garri* and so on. It is obvious that the latter proposal is to be preferred. In fact, positing two different suffixes is less generalizing than proposing a single suffix which would form nouns and adjectives. On the other hand, the meaning of the derived nouns in (36) - (39) clearly suggests that we are dealing with a single suffix.

If it is assumed that a single *-dor*, *-ble*, *-garri* or *-kizun* forms words belonging to two different lexical categories, nouns and adjectives, the question arises of what kind of relationship there is between those two categories. Three different sort of relationships could be thought of:

- a)  $V \rightarrow A \rightarrow N$   
b)  $V \rightarrow N \rightarrow A$   
c) N and A are independent from each other. Thus:  
     $V \rightarrow N$   
     $V \rightarrow A$

The first two hypotheses, namely a) and b), can be jointly considered, since both entail a first derivational process by which a phonologically realised morpheme is attached to a verbal stem giving raise to a noun or to an adjective. Afterwards, some

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25 There are even some rare cases where *-ble* attaches to transitive bases and forms nouns which can have an agentive value:

- (i) l'adquirible  
    'person who acquires'  
    el comptable  
    'the accountant'

kind of process (zero affixation, categorial conversion, etc.) changed the lexical category of the noun or the adjective. It could be proposed, for instance, that *-garri* and *-ble* follow the first derivational pattern, namely those suffixes form adjectives and in a second step some of these adjectives become nouns. In fact, all these nouns can also appear as adjectives given the appropriate context. As for *-kizun*, it seems that present-day speakers competence shows that the derivational path could correspond to b): nowadays *-kizun* is more productive and more widely used in forming nouns, but, in a formal, 'learned' register, those nouns can also be used as adjectives (*asmakizun* 'invention, riddle' vs. *gertakari asmakizuna* 'event that can be guessed').

Things are not so clear for nouns formed by *-dor*. Choosing a) or b) would entail that either the set of adjectives in *-dor* is a subset of the nouns formed by this suffix or viceversa (the set of nouns is a subset of the adjectives). None of those two proposals seems to work since in many cases just one lexical category is found, the noun or the adjective (*atracador* 'assaulter' which is only used as noun, (*musica*) *evocadora* 'evocative music' which belongs to the lexical category A). Thus, c) seems to explain better the behavior of *-dor*; nouns and adjectives would not derive one from the other, but directly from the verbal stem. If there are coincidences between both lexical categories it is because they derive from the same stem and by the same suffix. This analysis implies that *-dor* selects a verbal base and gives raise to a noun or to an adjective.

As it can be seen, further research is needed to come up with a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between both lexical categories, nouns and adjectives but for the time being, be they enough the bare suggestions made along the previous lines.

### 3. Conclusion

Several Basque and Catalan suffixes which form deverbal adjectives have been analyzed in this article, namely, *-ble* and *-dor* for Catalan, and *-garri*, *-kor*, *-gaitz* and *-kizun* for Basque. In order to explain the overlapping that certain suffixes - Basque *-garri* and Catalan *-dor* - shows between active and passive value, the claim was made that all these suffixes absorb the  $\theta$ -role of the external argument of the verbal base, taking absorption as a lexical process which does not prevent the absorbed  $\theta$ -role from being projected into syntax. Assuming that middle structures always have an external argument, it was also claimed that deverbal adjectives which have modal meaning are derived from middle verbal bases. Therefore, the active or passive interpretation of the adjective is related to the active or middle value of the verbal base.

Although we have not examined in detail the data from English or Dutch, we claim that the kind of solution that we propose in this article could work in all the languages which show the same sort of overlapping.

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