

REGULAR ARTICLE**Person matters in impersonality****Ane Berro¹ | Ane Odria² | Beatriz Fernández²**¹University of Deusto²University of the Basque Country**Correspondence:**

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Abstract

The Basque impersonal is a detransitivized construction where the internal argument is the only overt argument and the external argument, although semantically present, does not have any morphological reflex. This article argues that, despite its intransitive shape, the impersonal involves a particular kind of Voice projection that we term *defective*. For case and agreement, being defective means having no uninterpretable ϕ features and no Case to assign. However, a silent PERSON pronoun is introduced in its specifier position, and thus, there are two arguments within VoiceP. The two arguments compete to value the ϕ features of the next functional head, namely T. With this analysis we account for the main properties of the impersonal, such as the syntactic activeness of the implicit external argument and the person constraint on the internal argument.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Basque has a detransitivized construction called *impersonal* (Ortiz de Urbina 1989, 1991, Albizu 1997a, 2001a, Ortiz de Urbina 2003, 2011–2019, Fernández & Berro 2021) or, alternatively, *mediopassive* (Brettschneider 1979, Ortiz de Urbina 2006, De Rijk 2008, Rezac 2009b). In this construction, which we will refer to as impersonal, the internal argument is the only overt argument, since the external argument, although semantically present, does not have any morphological reflex. Thus, the Basque impersonal has an intransitive shape; even though the lexical verb is

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transitive in this construction, the auxiliary selected is the intransitive auxiliary *izan* ‘be’. This is illustrated in (1).¹

- (1) Liburu horiek erraz sal-tzen dira.
 book those[ABS] easily sell-IPFV be;3PL.ABS
 ‘Those books are easily sold.’

As can be seen in (1), the internal argument *liburu horiek* ‘those books’ is the only argument pronounced and also the only argument crossreferenced on the intransitive auxiliary, which shows third-person plural absolutive agreement.

On the basis of the intransitive morphology, the agentive interpretation, and other properties that we will discuss, the Basque impersonal could be considered to be in fact passive (see section 2 for various previous approaches) and to be built on top of a fully constructed verb, like passives that have been analyzed in other languages, such as English and German: see Doron 2003, Collins 2005, Bruening 2012, Alexiadou et al. 2015. In those approaches, it is argued that passives are formed when a Passive head (or a Voice head, in Collins 2005) selects for a Voice projection (or, alternatively, a vP, when v is the head introducing the external argument) consisting of active Voice.² In this way, those approaches explain the systematicity and high productivity of the construction—in contrast, for example, to middles—and the syntactic activeness of the external argument. Like in passives, the external argument of Basque impersonals is syntactically active. The syntactic presence of the implicit external argument is supported by, among other things, the fact that it can license agent-oriented adverbs and instrumental phrases and the fact that it can control into purpose clauses. All of this makes Basque impersonals different from English-like middles (such as *Books read easily*), which similarly are intransitive and have an implicit agent argument. In turn, these tests situate the Basque impersonal closer to the passive construction (Fernández & Berro 2021).

However, the Basque impersonal diverges from the passive in some important respects: unlike in passives, in impersonals the internal argument—which is marked absolutive—must necessarily be third person, as (2) illustrates, and the external argument cannot be overtly realized in an adpositional phrase, as (3) illustrates.

- (2) Ni/zu hondora-tu nintzen/zinen.
 I[ABS]/you[ABS] sink-PFV be;1SG.ABS;PST/be;2.ABS;PST
 Inchoative: ‘I sank.’/‘You sank.’
 Intended impersonal (*ungrammatical*): ‘I was sunk.’/‘You were sunk.’
- (3) *Itsasontzi-a hondora-tu zen Billez.
 ship-DET[ABS] sink-PFV be[3.ABS].PST Bill.INS
 Intended: ‘The ship was sunk by Bill.’

¹Abbreviations used in the glosses in this article: 1 first person, 2 second person, 3 third person, ABS absolutive, ABL ablative, ALL allative, CL clitic, COM comitative, COMP complementizer, DAT dative, DET determiner, DOM differential object marking, ERG ergative, F feminine, INE inessive, INS instrumental, IPFV imperfective, LOC locative, M masculine, NEG negation, PFV perfective, PL plural, PROS prospective, PSR possessor, PST past, RELN relational, RES resultative, SG singular, TERM terminative.

²The contribution of the passive head (or the Voice head, in Collins 2005) is different depending on the author. Bruening and Alexiadou et al. argue that a Pass head saturates the external argument of Voice by existentially binding it. On the other hand, Doron claims that the passive head in Hebrew assigns to the external argument the thematic role of actor (but does not existentially bind it). Finally, Collins suggests that Voice (similar to the passive head in the analyses just mentioned) requires the participle (PartP) to move to spec,VoiceP in English, introduces the preposition *by* as its head, and checks the accusative case of the DP in spec,vP. Thus, in Collins 2005 the passive head does not prevent the projection of the external argument.

Thus, in this article we analyze the impersonal with a structure different from that of the passive. Particularly, the analysis put forward in this article does not assume that the impersonal is built on top of a fully constructed verb. Instead, it is argued that the type of Voice involved in impersonals is different from that of common personal transitive and intransitive clauses.

The present analysis has two important aspects that account for the main properties of the impersonal. On the one hand, we argue that the implicit subject is a silent PERSON pronoun, interpreted as [+human], that has an unspecified person feature (i.e., a person feature with no specific value) and no number features. Because it is a pronoun of category DP, we can account for the fact that the implicit subject can license secondary predicates and bind reciprocal anaphors and certain kinds of reflexive anaphors (Landau 2010). Additionally, being a PERSON pronoun but unspecified for person, the implicit external argument must be interpreted as an animate agent but cannot license adpositional phrases with agentive interpretation that have a specific person feature (first, second, or third person). In all these respects, Basque impersonals are similar to reflexive-marked impersonals/passives in Spanish (Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez 2002, Ormazabal & Romero 2019, 2020).

On the other hand, the person restriction on the internal argument—also attested in Spanish reflexive-marked passives/impersonals (Mendikoetxea 2008, MacDonald 2017, Ormazabal & Romero 2019, 2020)—is a consequence of the defectiveness of the version of the Voice projection that is involved. Assuming the typology of Voice proposed in Schäfer 2008b and later developed in Alexiadou et al. 2015, we propose that the defective Voice in impersonals is semantically transitive but lacks a D feature. Thus, although this Voice introduces a semantic argument, it is different from the Voice of common personal transitive clauses. As regards case and agreement, we propose that being defective means having no uninterpretable ϕ features and no Case to assign. Since there are nevertheless two arguments within VoiceP, the two arguments compete to value and delete the uninterpretable ϕ features of the next functional head, namely T. Given that T has a single set of features (one uPers and one uNum), the unvalued ϕ features are shared by the two arguments, and this leads to the person restriction on the internal argument. As we will show, this split in the ϕ -feature valuation of a given functional head is reminiscent of the split ϕ checking attested by the Person–Case Constraint, seen in ditransitive constructions (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Béjar & Rezac 2003, Rezac 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2011). As suggested in Rezac 2009b: 314–316, the silent external argument in the specifier of Voice (*v*, in Rezac’s terms) plays the same role as the applicative dative in ditransitives and thus prevents the internal argument from Agreeing in both person and number features with T.

However, the person restriction on the internal argument is overcome if an additional ϕ -probe head is introduced, as a last-resort repair strategy, at the syntax–LF interface (in order to assure Full Interpretation; Rezac 2011, Kalin 2018, T. Levin 2019). As we will show, in the Basque impersonal the internal argument can be first or second person if it is marked dative:

- (4) Zer duzu, baina, gaur triste ikus-ten zaizu.³
 what[3.ABS] have;2.ERG[3.ABS] but today sad see-IPFV be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘But what’s going on with you? You look sad today.’
 Lit. ‘... You are seen sad today.’

We will argue that dative Case is assigned by activating uninterpretable ϕ features in a KP projected on top of the internal-argument DP. With this extra Case licenser, the internal-argument

³Lyrics from the song “Oihana” (a name meaning ‘jungle’ or ‘forest’), written and performed by Mikel Urdangarin; track 1 of the album *Heldu artean* (Soraluze–Placencia de las Armas, the Basque Country: Gaztelupeko Hotsak, 2002): <https://www.badok.eus/euskal-musika/mikel-urdangarin/heldu-arteana>.

DP does not need to share the unvalued ϕ features of T, and as a consequence there is no person constraint.

This article is structured as follows. In section 2 we consider the various previous approaches to the construction under analysis. In section 3 we present an overview of Basque impersonals and provide evidence for the projection of a semantically active Voice. In section 4 we compare the impersonal with the middle and the passive and show that it cannot be paralleled with either of those constructions. Particularly, we argue that the impersonal cannot be regarded as a passive, given that it has a person restriction on the internal argument and does not allow the presence of an overt agent argument in an adpositional phrase. In section 5, we offer our analysis of impersonals, and in section 6 we show that the person restriction is overcome if an additional ϕ probe is projected and the internal argument is marked with differential case (differential object marking). Finally, in section 7, we conclude by claiming that Basque impersonals involve a defective Voice head but two DP arguments. With this analysis, we account for the intransitive morphology of impersonals, the syntactic activity and animate nature of the silent external argument, and the person restriction on the internal argument.

2 | PASSIVE, MEDIOPASSIVE, OR IMPERSONAL?

Instances such as (1) and (5a) have been described and analyzed as impersonals in Basque linguistics (Ortiz de Urbina 1989, 1991, Albizu 1997a, 2001a, Ortiz de Urbina 2003, 2011–2019, Fernández & Berro 2021). Nevertheless, the *impersonal* label obscures the similarity of this construction to Old Basque (*medio*)passives, a label used by Brettschneider 1979, Ortiz de Urbina 2006, De Rijk 2008, and Rezac 2009b. The Old Basque (*medio*)passive is exemplified in (5b), a sentence from the 16th-century writer Joan Perez de Lazarraga.

- (5) a. Liburu-ak sal-tzen dira.
 book-DET.PL sell-IPFV be;3PL.ABS
 ‘Books are sold.’
- b. Dirurren sal-du ninčan esclabea.⁴
 money.for sell-PFV be;1SG.ABS;PST slave
 ‘I was sold for money as a slave.’
 (Mounole 2014: 149)

There is an important difference between the examples in (5a) and (5b): the internal argument is third person in the former and nonthird (specifically, first) person in the latter. Thus, the third-person restriction on the internal object (see (2)) holds for impersonals in Contemporary Basque but not for Old Basque (*medio*)passives, as shown by Lazarraga’s sentence in (5b) (see Altuna 1980, Zulaika 1998, Ortiz de Urbina 2006, Mounole 2014).

Moreover, although, as exemplified in (3), in Contemporary Basque the external argument cannot be expressed as an adjunct in impersonals (Brettschneider 1979: 381, Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 773–776, Berro & Fernández 2019b, Urrestarazu 2019, Fernández & Berro 2021), this was not the

⁴Gidor Bilbao, Ricardo Gómez, Joseba A. Lakarra, Julen Manterola, Céline Mounole, and Blanca Urgell, editors, *Lazarraga eskuizkribuaren edizioa eta azterketa* (Bilbao, the Basque Country: University of the Basque Country, 2010): B17.60.

case in Old Basque (medio)passives (Ortiz de Urbina 2006: 773). This can be seen in (6), a sentence from Joanes Leizarraga's translation of the New Testament.

- (6) Gauza guzti-ak ni-ri neure Aita-z eman çaizquit.
 Thing all-DET.PL I-DAT my father-INS give.PFV be;3PL.ABS;1SG.DAT
 'All things have been given to me by my Father.'
 (Mt 11:27; Mounole 2014: 150)

This example is particularly interesting in that it would be acceptable nowadays—note that the internal argument is third person—except for the explicit mention of the agent argument by means of an instrumental phrase. (See section 5.3 for more on both of the contrasts just mentioned.)

Hence, we are dealing with a construction, known both as impersonal and (medio)passive, that is strikingly similar to a passive, as can be seen by comparison with the English translation of (6). In fact, the label *passive* is used in Altuna 1980: 232, 234, Zulaika 1988: 779–784, and Mounole 2014: 148–155 when referring to instances such as (5b) and (6).⁵

Leaving aside the terminological chaos, it could be posited that there is a shift in Basque from a true passive to a construction that shares many but not all of the properties of a passive (see section 5.3). The label *passive* by itself does not seem appropriate for referring to the constructions in (1) and (5a) available in Contemporary Basque (although, as we will see below—see specifically footnote 5—the label *impersonal passive* deserves some consideration); hence, the term *mediopassive* might be more suitable here. However, when compared to English and Romance middles—*type I* and *type II* respectively, in Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005's classification—the Basque construction does not seem to be as restricted as the English type, exemplified in (7a), and behaves more in line with the Romance type, exemplified in (7b) by Spanish.

- (7) a. Books read easily.
 b. Los libros se leen fácilmente.
 DET.PL book.PL CL read.3PL easily
 'Books read easily.'

Interestingly enough, the properties of the Basque construction differ considerably from those attributed to English-like middles (see section 4.1), but the construction shows striking similarities with the Romance-type middle, in particular the Spanish reflexive-marked impersonal/passive (Mendikoetxea 1999; see section 5.1).

Circling back to the beginning, (1) and (5a) might also qualify as impersonals. In fact, this is the term generally used to refer to this construction, as we noted above, and it is tentatively used by us here. The term *impersonal* actually covers a very broad area, given that it has been used in Basque linguistics to refer not only to the detransitivized construction under discussion but also to constructions with nonreferential or impersonal interpretation of personal verb markers (Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 572–576) and to weather expressions (Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 577–579, Arteatz & Artiagoitia 2018), among other things. The term has also been used to refer to *subject-suppressing impersonals*, attested in Balto-Slavic, Balto-Finnic, and Celtic languages (Blevins 2003) and discussed by Fernández & Berro 2021 in comparison to Basque. As with the

⁵The very same *passive* label is, however, also used by the same authors to refer to another construction that does not seem to fit the definition of a true passive (see section 4.3).

Basque construction, there is no consensus on the proper characterization of subject-suppressing impersonals. For instance, Polish *-no/-to* constructions (Siewierska 1988, Kibort 2004), which exemplify them, have been considered *impersonal passives* since they lack a subject (Comrie 1977) and also *nonpromotional passives* (Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019: 84–85) since the internal argument remains in the object position. As shown by Fernández & Berro 2021, there are many similarities between subject-suppressing impersonals and the Basque construction. However, unlike them, Basque impersonals are not morphologically transitive but rather show a detransitived morphology.⁶

In a nutshell, the Basque construction under discussion shares several properties with passives, middles, and impersonals, and as a consequence it has received various labels in the previous literature. Here we have opted for the term *impersonal*, even though we are aware of the fact that it may not fully describe the nature of this construction.

3 | BASQUE IMPERSONALS AND VOICE

In this section, we argue that Basque impersonals involve a Voice layer that is responsible for introducing a thematic subject. Even though the impersonal shows intransitive morphology, namely the auxiliary *izan* ‘be’ and a lack of ergative agreement (section 3.1), we show that the external argument is semantically present in impersonals, unlike in inchoatives (section 3.2).

3.1 | Morphologically intransitive

Basque is an ergative language, in that the subject of a transitive verb is marked by ergative case (*-k*) whereas the subject of an intransitive verb and the transitive object are assigned absolutive case, that is, the unmarked case (Levin 1983, Ortiz de Urbina 1989). Also, Basque shows a three-way agreement system: the arguments marked by ergative, absolutive, and dative case trigger agreement on the auxiliary verb (Hualde 2003). Additionally, Basque is a language with two auxiliaries that alternate, *izan* ‘be’ and **edun* ‘have’.⁷ Transitive verbs require **edun*, whereas intransitives can choose between the two. Broadly speaking, agentive or unergative verbs require **edun*, while patientive or unaccusative verbs select *izan* (Levin 1983; see Pineda & Berro 2020 for a recent approach). Albizu 2001b and Arregi 2004 argue that **edun* shows up when ergative agreement marking is present in the auxiliary.

As for impersonals, these show an intransitive shape and look exactly like inchoatives. In particular, the sole argument shows absolutive case, the auxiliary selected is *izan*, and no ergative agreement is present (Fernández & Berro 2021). If we compare the examples in (8), it can be

⁶We leave for further research the study of these subject-suppressing impersonals or impersonal passives in relation to the analysis pursued here and also that of other impersonal/passive configurations that seem to be similar to Basque impersonals (such as Spanish reflexive-marked impersonals/passives). It is worth noting that the Basque construction under discussion has also exceptionally been called *impersonal passive* (Holmer 1999: 191—but see fn. 7) and been compared to constructions with the same designation (Eguzkitza 1981: 242). Although we are not using this designation here, it might well be the most accurate one, given the properties that the construction shares with both impersonals and passives.

⁷The citation form of the transitive auxiliary, **edun*, is preceded by an asterisk because it is a historically reconstructed participial form and thus unattested as a nonfinite verbal form. See Hualde 2003 for further details on this reconstructed auxiliary and others, which are omitted here for the sake of brevity.

observed that a verb like *hil* ‘kill/die’ that allows the causative–inchoative alternation can occur in three constructions: in the causative, as in (8a), in the inchoative, as in (8b), and in the impersonal, as in (8c).

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| (8) | a. | Unai-k
Unai-ERG | armiarma-k
spider.DET-PL[ABS] | hil
kill.PFV | ditu.
have;3PL.ABS[3.ERG] | Causative |
| | | ‘Unai has killed the spiders.’ | | | | |
| | b. | Armiarma-k
spider.DET-PL[ABS] | (berez)
by_themselves | hil/hil-tzen
die.PFV/die-IPFV | dira.
be;3PL.ABS | Inchoative |
| | | ‘The spiders have died/die (by themselves).’ | | | | |
| | c. | Armiarma-k
spider.DET-PL[ABS] | (zapata honekin)
shoe this.COM | hil/hil-tzen
kill.PFV/kill-IPFV | dira.
be;3PL.ABS | Impersonal |
| | | ‘The spiders have been killed/are killed (with this shoe).’ | | | | |

In the causative example (8a), the auxiliary selected is **edun*, which agrees with the ergative subject *Unaik* ‘Unai’ and the absolutive plural object *armiarmaak* ‘the spiders’. By contrast, both in the inchoative example (8b) and in the impersonal example (8c), there is only one argument, *armiarmaak*; the auxiliary is *izan*; and the sentence shows third-person plural absolutive agreement. As shown in Fernández & Berro 2021, the only way to disambiguate examples like (8b) and (8c) is to introduce modifiers like *berez* ‘by themselves’ or *zapata honekin* ‘with this shoe’. The former forces an inchoative reading, whereas the latter favors an agentive reading in which the external argument is not formally present but receives an arbitrary interpretation. Without those modifiers, though, the inchoative and impersonal look exactly the same.

As for the auxiliary alternation, in this article we will simply assume, in accord with Berro et al. 2018, that **edun* is selected when the Voice head has a D feature and *izan* is selected when Voice lacks such a feature. Assuming that auxiliaries are inserted in T, this can be stated with the following spellout rules.

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| (9) | a. | <i>izan</i> ‘be’ auxiliary → T/____Voice _∅ |
| | b. | <i>*edun</i> ‘have’ auxiliary → T/____Voice _{D} |

Thus, we propose that in both unaccusatives and impersonals there is a Voice head projected that has no D feature. However, the Voice head selected in impersonals is different from that in unaccusatives in that in impersonals Voice is semantically active. In section 3.2, we will offer evidence for the presence of a semantically active Voice in impersonals.

Another question that must be considered here is that of promotion of the internal argument of the impersonal. One of the formal explanations for the promotion to subject that is found in middles and passives in accusative languages involves the raising-to-subject type of A movement, as discussed by Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005. However, this A movement is not so obvious when dealing with an ergative language such as Basque. To begin with, in an accusative language with overt case or agreement marking, the subject of a transitive verb is marked nominative whereas the object is marked accusative. This being the case, promotion to subject is morphologically visible, since the theme is marked by accusative case in object position and nominative in subject

position. By contrast, in an ergative language such as Basque, the theme is marked absolutive in both transitive-object and intransitive-subject positions. As a consequence, the posited A movement, if available, cannot be morphologically identified. Word order does not clarify the question either. In an SVO language, such as English or a Romance language, the preverbal position is associated with the subject and the postverbal position with the object. In contrast to this, Basque being an SOV language, both the transitive-subject and transitive-object positions are preverbal, which blurs the differences between them with respect to the verbal position. Be this as it may, we will consider the absolutive argument to be merged in object position and to be assigned Case in that position by T. We will not speculate about whether it raises to the specifier of T afterwards, since this is not strictly necessary for our analysis.

3.2 | Voice in impersonals

In this section, we will provide evidence for the presence of a semantically active Voice in impersonals. As mentioned in section 3.1, we consider Voice to be present in both impersonals and unaccusatives, although with important differences. In both, the Voice head projected does not have a D feature; but in impersonals, unlike in unaccusatives, the Voice head introduces a semantically active external argument. Additionally, in this article we will argue (see particularly section 5) that the specifier of Voice in the impersonal is also syntactically active.

As shown in Fernández & Berro 2021, the implicit external argument of impersonals behaves like a syntactic argument according to several tests: it can license agent-oriented modifiers, as in (10a), instrumental and comitative phrases, as in (10b), and secondary predicates, as in (10c); and it can control the PRO argument of an adjunct clause (Rodet 1992), as in (10d).

- (10) a. Itsasontzi-a nahita / kontu handiz hondora-tu zen.
 ship-DET[ABS] deliberately carefully sink-PFV be[3.ABS].PST
 Impersonal: ‘The ship was sunk deliberately/carefully.’
 Inchoative (*pragmatically deviant*): ‘The ship sank deliberately/carefully.’
- b. Karramarro-a-k erraz harrapa-tzen dira eskuekin/
 crab-DET-PL[ABS] easily catch-IPFV be[3PL.ABS] hand.DET.PL.COM/
 salabardoarekin.
 trap.DET.COM
 Impersonal: ‘Crabs are easily caught by hand/with a trap.’
 Lit. ‘Crabs are easily caught with hands/a trap.’
 Inchoative (*ungrammatical*)
- c. Ibai-a erraz zeharka-tzen da oinutsik.
 river-DET[ABS] easily cross-IPFV be[3.ABS] barefoot
 Impersonal: ‘The river is easily forded barefoot.’
 Inchoative (*ungrammatical*)
- d. Itsasontzi-a hondora-tu zen aseguru-a kobratzeko.
 ship-DET[ABS] sink-PFV be[3.ABS].PST insurance-DET[ABS] collect.to
 Impersonal: ‘The ship was sunk to collect the insurance.’
 Inchoative (*pragmatically deviant*): ‘The ship sank to collect the insurance.’

Inchoatives are at best pragmatically deviant according to the same tests for a syntactic external argument. Hence, while the examples in (10) are licit as impersonals, they are ungrammatical or pragmatically deviant when interpreted as inchoatives.

Thus, even if Voice may be present in both inchoatives and impersonals, the semantic and syntactic contribution of this head is clearly different in the two instances. As stated above, we assume that in both inchoatives and impersonals Voice lacks a D feature; this is the reason why they select the auxiliary *izan* ‘be’. Nevertheless, assuming the typology of Voice proposed in Schäfer 2008b and developed in Alexiadou et al. 2015, we will claim that, unlike in inchoatives, in impersonals Voice introduces a semantically active subject. Apart from that, we will argue that, even though Voice does not have a D feature in impersonals, a silent PERSON pronoun—in other words, a full DP—is merged in its specifier and that this explains the ability of the subject to license secondary predicates and to bind reciprocal anaphors and certain reflexive anaphors (see section 5.1).

4 | IMPERSONALS ARE NEITHER MIDDLES NOR PASSIVES

In section 3, we showed that even though impersonals have intransitive morphology (i.e., they have just one overt argument, marked absolutive, and select the auxiliary *izan* ‘be’), they involve a Voice layer that introduces a semantically active external argument. In this section, we will discard two possible analyses that posit a nonovert but semantically present external argument. In particular, we will show that impersonals cannot be regarded as either middles or passives (Fernández & Berro 2021). Additionally, we will discuss briefly another construction that could potentially be considered passive in Basque, and we will conclude that Contemporary Basque lacks any construction that matches the properties of passive configurations crosslinguistically.

4.1 | Impersonals are not middles

A reasonable move would be to consider Basque impersonals middles, since they have some of the properties that are characteristic of middle constructions. According to Schäfer 2008a and 2008b, in middles (i) the grammatical subject corresponds to the thematic or internal object; (ii) the agent is demoted and has an arbitrary interpretation; and (iii) the aspectual interpretation of the sentence is nonepisodic. Apart from those features, it has also been argued that middles (iv) need to co-occur with a certain kind of modal adverb, namely the kind that generates potential modal interpretations; (v) are formed only with a subset of verbs, namely those that entail a change, such as activities and accomplishments; (vi) do not occur in the imperative or the progressive; and (vii) select the HAVE auxiliary in languages with auxiliary selection (Keyser & Roeper 1984, Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005).

Basque impersonals have some but not all of these properties (Fernández & Berro 2021).⁸ For instance, as shown in section 3.1, the auxiliary selected in impersonals is *izan* ‘be’, not **edun* ‘have’. Furthermore, they can be episodic; when the verb combines with the perfective

⁸It must be noted that crosslinguistically middles do not show uniform behavior (Lekakou 2005). For instance, Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005 makes a distinction between middles that have most or all the properties listed, termed type I middles, and those that do not, termed type II middles. The Basque impersonal patterns with type II middles, in that it seems to be a broader and more permissive construction than the semantically similar but much more restrictive type I middles. In accord with Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005, Lekakou 2005, Fábregas & Putnam 2014, and Fernández & Berro 2021, we consider middles to be a particular semantic interpretation obtained in a syntactic construction that is more broadly used in the language, namely the impersonal construction.

aspectual suffix, the event denoted by the verb is instantiated and can be located in space and time:⁹

- (11) Burokrata-k erraz eros-i dira azken
 bureaucrat.DET-PL[ABS] easily buy-PFV be;3PL.ABS last
 hauteskundeetan.
 election.DET.PL.INE
 ‘Bureaucrats have been easily bribed in the recent elections.’

Moreover, as (12) shows, the verb need not be accompanied by a modal adverb, and regarding the type of modality, not only potential modal interpretations but also prescriptive and epistemic ones are possible.

- (12) a. Paper hau (erraz/honela) garbi-tzen da.
 paper this[ABS] easily/like_this wash-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘This paper is easily washed/washed like this/washable.’
 b. Sustrai hau (erraz/honela) ja-ten da.
 root this[ABS] easily/like_this eat-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘This root is easily eaten/eaten like this/edible.’
 c. Irtenbide hau (erraz/honela) eztabaida-tzen da.
 solution this[ABS] easily/like_this discuss-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘This solution is easily discussed/discussed like this/debatable.’

Finally, Basque impersonals can be formed with a wide range of verbal classes, such as activities, accomplishments, achievements, and a few statives, as illustrated in (13). Thus, though the change meaning is a semantic factor that favors the formation of impersonals, it is not strictly necessary.

- (13) a. Piano-a (erraz/honela) jo-tzen da. Activity
 piano-DET[ABS] easily/like_this play-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘The piano plays easily/is played like this/is playable.’
 b. Liburu hau (erraz/honela) irakur-tzen Accomplishment
 book this[ABS] easily/like_this read-IPFV
 da.
 be[3.ABS]
 ‘This book reads easily/is read like this/is readable.’
 c. Muga hori (askotan/erraz) gurutza-tzen Achievement
 frontier that[ABS] many_times/easily cross-IPFV
 da.
 be[3.ABS]
 ‘That frontier is crossed many times/easily crossed/crossable.’
 d. Iberdrola dorre-a (urrunetik) ikus-ten da. Stative
 Iberdrola tower-DET[ABS] far.ABL see-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘The Iberdrola tower can be seen (from afar).’
 e. Horrelako istorio-ak gorrota-tzen dira. Stative
 like_that.RELN story-DET.PL[ABS] hate-IPFV be;3PL.ABS
 ‘Those kinds of stories are hated.’

⁹It is worth noting that the example would be equally acceptable if the auxiliary were in past tense (*erosi ziren* ‘were bribed’ rather than *erosi dira*).

A requirement that is imposed on impersonals involves the external argument, which remains implicit: in their personal counterparts, the case assigned to the external argument must be ergative. This is illustrated in (14), which contains counterparts to each example in (13). Note that the external argument also triggers ergative agreement on the transitive auxiliary.

- (14) a. Gazte-ek piano-a (erraz/honela) Activity
 young_people-PL.ERG piano-DET[ABS] easily/like_this
 jo-tzen dute.
 play-IPFV have[3.ABS];3PL.ERG
 ‘Young people play the piano (easily/like this).’
- b. Gazte-ek liburu hau Accomplishment
 young_people-PL.ERG book this[ABS]
 (erraz/honela) irakur-tzen dute.
 easily/like_this read-IPFV have[3.ABS];3PL.ERG
 ‘Young people read the book (easily/like this).’
- c. Gazte-ek muga hori Achievement
 young_people-PL.ERG frontier that[ABS]
 (askotan/erraz) gurutza-tzen dute.
 many_times/easily cross-IPFV have[3.ABS];3PL.ERG
 ‘Young people cross that frontier (easily/many times).’
- d. Gazte-ek Iberdrola dorre-a Stative
 young_people-PL.ERG Iberdrola tower-DET[ABS]
 (urrunetik) ikus-ten dute.
 far.ABL see-IPFV have[3.ABS];3PL.ERG
 ‘Young people see the Iberdrola tower (from afar).’
- e. Gazte-ek horrelako istorio-ak Stative
 young_people-PL.ERG like_that.RELN story-DET.PL[ABS]
 gorrota-tzen dituzte.
 hate-IPFV have;3PL.ABS;3PL.ERG
 ‘Young people hate those kinds of stories.’

This requirement limits the verbs that can occur in the impersonal construction. Assuming that ergative arguments are introduced in the syntax by the head introducing the external argument (v or Voice; Legate 2002, Massam 2002, Aldridge 2004, Woolford 2006, Legate 2008, Coon 2010, and others), we claim that the only argument-introducing head that can introduce an implicit subject in impersonals is Voice. Another argument-introducing head projected above vP, such as High Appl(licative) (Pylkkänen 2008), cannot introduce an implicit argument of this sort. As discussed in Fernández & Ortiz de Urbina 2010: 80, Ortiz de Urbina 2011–2019, and Fernández & Berro 2021, instances of impersonals that include a theme and an implicit dative of the high type, such as an experiencer, are ungrammatical; this can be seen in (15b), for example. In (15a), the experiencer has been introduced by High Appl (Rezac 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, Fernández 2010a, 2010b, Fernández & Ortiz de Urbina 2010) and bears dative case. As shown by the ungrammatical impersonal counterpart, this experiencer cannot remain implicit.

- (15) a. Gazte-ei surf-a gusta-tzen zaie.
 youth-PL.DAT surf-DET[ABS] please-IPFV be[3.ABS];3PL.DAT
 ‘Young people like surfing.’
- b. *Surf-a gusta-tzen da.
 surf-DET[ABS] please-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 Intended: ‘One likes surfing.’

Note that this is a restriction not on psych verbs per se but rather on the case of the external argument in this case, namely dative. As (13e) shows, other psych verbs are perfectly grammatical in impersonal constructions, if the case of the external argument is not dative but ergative as with *gorrotatu* ‘hate’ (cf. (14e)). Thus, the implicit subject of an impersonal can be either an agent (13a–c), a perceiver (13d), or an experiencer (13e), but it must have been introduced by Voice.¹⁰

Given the existing differences between middles and Basque impersonals, the analyses for middles proposed by Doron 2003, Schäfer 2008a, 2008b, and others are not suitable for this construction. In fact, in Doron’s approach, the projection of the middle voice prevents the projection of the external argument (in the specifier of *v*, in her analysis), and thus any potential (implicit) external argument would remain syntactically inactive. On the other hand, Schäfer argues that, in generic middles like those seen in Germanic languages, Voice is expletive. In his typology of Voice (also developed in Alexiadou et al. 2015), an expletive Voice is nonthematic—and therefore does not introduce an agent role—but has a D feature, which means that an argument should merge in its specifier position. As a consequence of the projection of expletive Voice, the external argument is syntactically inactive and thus diverges from the implicit external argument of passives, which involve a thematic (nonexpletive) Voice head, with no D feature.¹¹ According to Schäfer, another structural and semantic factor that determines the nature of generic middles is that the sentence is under the scope of the operator Gen (genericity), which favors the agentive interpretation of the predicate in predicates that have low spontaneity. As mentioned, this analysis is proposed for languages where the implicit external argument does not show any syntactic activity, in contrast to the implicit external argument of passives or the implicit external argument of middles in other languages, like French and Greek (Lekakou 2005). In Basque, as shown in section 3.2 (see also section 5.1), the implicit external argument of impersonals is semantically and syntactically active according to a number of tests, so that a different analysis is needed. Moreover, as we will discuss in section 4.2, Basque impersonals have a person restriction on the internal argument, which cannot be explained by the accounts discussed above. All this suggests that Basque impersonals require some other explanation.

4.2 | Impersonals are not passives

Perhaps a better option would be to claim that impersonals are really passives, given that their implicit external argument is semantically and syntactically active in terms of the tests applied

¹⁰Low Appl is available in Basque impersonals, since dative arguments of the low type, such as goals, are perfectly grammatical. Actually, Basque is not subject to the *antidouble condition* on type I middles discussed by Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005; see footnote 7 of this article and Fernández & Berro 2021. In this regard, Basque impersonals diverge from English-like middles and are akin to passives. Moreover, as we will discuss in section 6, Basque impersonals do allow the theme to be marked by dative as a repair strategy for a person-constraint violation. As suggested by a reviewer, there might be a connection between the dative-involving repair strategy and the impossibility of the implicit external argument being introduced by a High Appl. This supposition can also be related to the relation between the presence of low-type datives such as goals and the absence of an implicit external argument due to a High Appl. In fact, we would not expect both High and Low Appl to be present in the same construction, unless the Low Appl in question is a noun- or adjective-internal Appl head, of the type discussed and analyzed by Berro & Fernández 2019a, or appears as a nonagreeing PP (Odría 2014, 2017, 2019).

¹¹In Schäfer’s analysis, marked unaccusatives and middles are syntactically similar. Both of them have an expletive Voice, and the only argument is an internal argument. Nevertheless, middles are under the operator Gen (genericity), which, in the case of predicates that have low spontaneity, triggers an agentive interpretation (and thus an implicit external argument will be interpreted). Crucially, for that to be possible, Voice must be projected (as in the case of middles and not for instance in unmarked unaccusatives).

in section 3.2. For instance, Ackema & Schoorlemmer 2005 and Lekakou 2005 suggest that in languages where middles have a syntactically active external argument, the middle construction is parasitic on the passive. According to this line, as also pointed out by Schäfer 2008b, middles in those languages would simply be passives where a generic operator applies to the sentence. As will be shown in this section and also in section 5.1, this analysis cannot be extended to Basque impersonals, given that they do not behave like passives in some important respects. In fact, there are several properties that separate impersonals from well-behaved passives like those seen in English and Spanish.

Firstly, as discussed in detail by Fernández & Berro 2021, the absolutive argument of impersonals must be third person (see also Euskaltzaindia 1987, Rodet 1992, Ortiz de Urbina 2003, De Rijk 2008: 279–280, Rezac 2009b, 2016).¹² Hence, in a construction involving a verb that allows the inchoative–causative alternation, with a first- or second-person absolutive argument as in (16a) the interpretation must necessarily be inchoative. As a consequence, an agent-oriented adverb such as *nahita* ‘on purpose’, as shown in (16b), can only be interpreted as meaning that the internal argument has sunk herself/himself on purpose, an interpretation that is pragmatically quite deviant.

- (16) a. Ni/zu hondora-tu nintzen/zinen.
 I[ABS]/you[ABS] sink-PFV be;1SG.ABS;PST/ be;2.ABS;PST
 Inchoative: ‘I/you sank.’
 Intended impersonal (*ungrammatical*): ‘I was sunk.’
- b. #Ni/zu nahita hondora-tu nintzen/zinen.
 I[ABS]/you[ABS] on purpose sink-PFV be;1SG.ABS;PST/ be;2.ABS;PST
 Inchoative (*pragmatically deviant*): ‘I/you sank on purpose.’

In the same vein, with a verb that only allows the causative variant, the sentence will be ungrammatical if the absolutive argument is first or second person:

- (17) *Ni/zu atxilo-tu nintzen/zinen.
 I[ABS]/you[ABS] arrest-PFV be;1SG.ABS;PST/be;2.ABS;PST
 Intended: ‘I/you was/were arrested.’

¹²We have not found any examples of impersonals involving first- and second-person absolutive arguments in Contemporary Basque corpora, in particular, in the Contemporary Reference Prose corpus (*Ereduzko Prosa Gaur*; Sarasola et al. 2001–2007) or in the Corpus of Contemporary Basque (*Egungo Testuen Corpusa*; Sarasola et al. 2016a). Nevertheless, some speakers of southwestern varieties of Basque accept instances such as (*Ni ondo ikus-ten naiz?* = (I.ABS) well see-IPFV be;1SG.ABS ‘Am I well seen?’ In the opinion of one of our reviewers, a western-Basque speaker, such utterances, far from being exceptional, are commonly used and heard. Our own feeling is that this might hold for impersonals involving perception verbs such as *ikusi* ‘see’ but not other verbs such as *eraman* ‘carry’. No doubt further research could clarify this issue.

As observed by the same reviewer, in the presence of a locative phrase, an implicit argument would be needed: (*Ni hemen eguzkitan ikus-ten naiz* = (I.ABS) here sun.INE see-IPFV be;1SG.ABS ‘Here I am seen sunbathing’.

Additionally, according to Bernard Oyharçabal (personal communication), in northeastern Basque varieties first- and second-person absolutives with a perfective participle are also banned unless accompanied by a determiner *-a/-ak*; however, with an imperfective participle the ban is less clear to him. For instance, some northeastern speakers accept (*Ni entzu-ten naiz?* = (I.ABS) hear-IPFV be;1SG.ABS ‘Am I heard?’, (*Ni ikus-ten naiz hemen?* = (I.ABS) see-IPFV be;1SG.ABS here ‘Am I seen here?’, or (*Zu ez zira entzu-ten!* = (you.ABS) NEG be;2.ABS hear-IPFV ‘You are not heard!’).

We leave these exceptions also for further research. See also Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 588–589, Berro & Fernández 2019b, Fernández & Berro 2021, and the references in those works for discussion.

Secondly, as pointed out by Ortiz de Urbina 2006, impersonals do not allow an agent argument to be overtly expressed within a postpositional phrase (though see section 5.3), like the *by* phrases of English passives (see also Brettschneider 1979: 381, Urrestarazu 2019):

- (18) *Itsasontzi-a hondora-tu zen Billez.
 ship-DET[ABS] sink-PFV be[3.ABS].PST Bill.INS
 Intended: 'The ship was sunk by Bill.'

These two properties of Basque impersonals show that the impersonal construction must not be regarded as a passive. In addition to this evidence, we will show in section 5.1 that the implicit subject of impersonals also differs from the implicit subject of passives in that it can license secondary predicates and can bind reciprocal anaphors and some reflexive anaphors. Thus, the implicit external argument of the impersonal in Basque seems to be structurally different from that of passives in other languages.

In the line of analysis developed in Doron 2003, Collins 2005, Bruening 2012, and Alexiadou et al. 2015, among others, it is argued that passives in a language like English or German are formed on top of a fully constructed verb. The Passive head selects for a Voice projection (or, alternatively, a vP, when *v* is the head introducing the external argument) whose head is active. In this way, the authors cited explain the systematicity and high productivity of the construction (in contrast, for example, to middles) and the syntactic activeness of the external argument. In Basque impersonals, the implicit agent is syntactically active, so active Voice should be involved in the construction. Nevertheless, as just noted, the construction shows some important limitations (a person restriction on the internal argument and a ban on agent postpositional phrases), and the external argument can license secondary predicates and bind Condition A anaphors. On the basis of these observations, we propose that the impersonal cannot be structured like the passive in the languages mentioned (though see sections 4.3 and 5.3 about Old Basque (medio)passives); instead, we will argue that it is built with a particular type of Voice head.

4.3 | Is there a real passive in Basque?

In section 4.2, we concluded that the construction under analysis in this article cannot be regarded as a passive. In fact, whether Basque has a real passive at all is a topic that has been much discussed in the literature. The works claiming that it does, such as Bollebacher 1977, Rebuschi 1984, Saltarelli et al. 1988, Euskaltzaindia 1991: 294–296, 1993: 16–19, and Alberdi & Sarasola 2001: 44–45, 160–164, point to the construction illustrated in (19), which involves an adjectival participle ending in *-a* (Fernández & Berro 2021).

- (19) a. Gutun-a bidal-i-a da/dago.
 letter-DET[ABS] send-PFV-RES be[3.ABS]/locative_be[3.ABS]
 'The letter is sent.'
 b. Gutun-a-k bidal-i-a-k dira/daude.
 letter-DET-PL[ABS] send-PFV-RES-PL be;3PL.ABS/be;LOC;3PL.ABS
 'The letters are sent.'

In this construction, the perfective participle is headed by *-a* and agrees in number with the internal argument. The construction involves an intransitive copula (either *izan* 'be' or the locative

copula *egon* ‘be’), which agrees in person and number with the internal argument. Note that although the construction is intransitive in shape, the lexical verb is a (di)transitive one (here *bidali* ‘send’).

This construction has been argued to be a passive because (i) the only argument available in the construction is the internal argument, (ii) the external argument is omitted, and (iii) it is an intransitive construction, as shown by the intransitive copula. Nevertheless, we disagree with that analysis. As convincingly argued by Ortiz de Urbina & Uribe-Etxebarria 1991, this is not a monoclausal passive but a biclausal construction with a participial clause as a complement of the copula; see also Eguzkitza 1981 and Berro 2019 for an analysis and Fernández & Berro 2021 for discussion. This view is supported by various pieces of evidence, notably word-order constraints, the optional presence of the ergative external argument, and optional dative agreement. For reasons of space, we will not pursue this issue further here, but the interested reader can refer to the works cited.

5 | TOWARDS AN ANALYSIS OF IMPERSONALS

In section 4.2 we showed that the Basque impersonal diverges from well-behaved passives in that the absolutive object must be third person and a postpositional phrase interpreted as the agent is not allowed. In this section we will present an analysis of Basque impersonals that, as we will explain, accounts for several properties mentioned in sections 3 and 4: in short, the fact that the external argument is interpreted arbitrarily but at the same time is syntactically active and the fact that the absolutive-marked internal argument is necessarily third person.

Given that the impersonal construction is not as productive as the transitive/active variants of the predicates involved—in that its use is limited to third-person absolutive internal arguments—we consider that the impersonal is not built on top of a fully constructed verb, and our analysis thus diverges from some analyses of the passive (Doron 2003, Collins 2005, Bruening 2012), where it is argued that a head Passive is projected above the head introducing the external argument. If that were the case, we would expect the verbal configuration below this head to be similar to that of common personal sentences, but this cannot be the case here, since the impersonal shows a number of restrictions: the person restriction on the internal argument discussed in section 4.2 and the animacy condition on the external argument, which will be examined in section 5.1. Instead, we propose that the impersonal arises due to the projection of a particular type of Voice.

5.1 | The implicit subject of impersonals

Assuming the typology of Voice given in Schäfer 2008b and later developed in Alexiadou et al. 2015, we consider that the Voice head in impersonals is thematic but lacks a D feature (Voice_(λx, ∅)). This Voice head is similar to the one proposed by Schäfer for passives and by Alexiadou et al. for Greek passives specifically. As we showed in section 3.2, the external argument introduced by this Voice head is able to license agent-oriented modifiers and instrumental and comitative phrases and can control the PRO argument of an adjunct clause. Like in passives, this is possible because Voice is thematic. However, in the present account, lacking a D feature does not mean that the specifier of Voice is empty. In fact, unlike in Schäfer’s passives and Alexiadou et al.’s Greek passives, the specifier of Voice in impersonals seems to be syntactically projected. In

this section, we will examine more closely the nature of the implicit external argument and will argue that it is a silent pronoun of category DP. Thus, we agree with previous proposals such as Albizu 1997a and 2001a that argue that the subject in impersonals is an arbitrary *pro*. We further specify that the silent pronoun is a PERSON pronoun that is consequently necessarily interpreted as [+human] and that has an unspecified value for the person feature and no number features.

Firstly, we will show that the implicit subject must be interpreted as an animate entity with no number features (Rodet 1992). The sentences in (20) involving the verb *eraman* ‘take’ illustrate this restriction. *Eraman* does not allow the inchoative–causative alternation. In the active example, either an animate subject (*langilea* ‘the worker’) or an inanimate subject (*haizea* ‘the wind’) can be the initiator performing the action of carrying the tiles to the beach. By contrast, in the impersonal example, only the agentive–subject interpretation can remain. With regard to this animate agent, the number interpretation is arbitrary; it could be interpreted as either one person or a group of people.

- (20) a. Langile-a-k/haize-a-k teilatueta-ko Active/transitive
 worker-DET-ERG/wind-DET-ERG roof.PL-RELN
 teila-ak eraman ditu
 tile-DET.PL[ABS] take.PFV have;3PL.ABS[3.ERG]
 hondartza-raino.
 beach.DET-TERM
 ‘The worker/storm has carried the roofing tiles to the beach.’
- b. Teilatueta-ko teila-k eraman dira Impersonal
 roof.PL-RELN tile.DET-PL[ABS] take.PFV be;3PL.ABS
 hondartza-raino.
 beach.DET-TERM
 ‘The roofing tiles have been carried to the beach’ (by someone/a group of people/*the wind).

Thus, even though the verb is in principle compatible with an inanimate causer (and consequently with a Voice head that introduces that), the impersonal is more restrictive in that it only allows an animate subject.

A similar restriction has been attested for the silent causee of Icelandic indirect causatives, as shown by E. F. Sigurðsson & Wood 2020. The causee, if it remains implicit as in (21b), cannot be a nonvolitional causer such as a storm. The causee must be animate, even though this leads to a semantic anomaly in the example given. Compare this with the explicit causee in (21a).¹³

- (21) a. Guð lét storminn kasta skipinu
 God.NOM let.PST storm.the.ACC toss.INF ship.the.DAT
 til.
 about
 ‘God made the storm toss the ship about.’
- b. #Guð lét kasta skipinu til.
 God.NOM let.PST toss.INF ship.the.DAT about
 ‘God made (someone/*the storm) toss the ship about.’

¹³Similar restrictions regarding the implicit argument have been observed in the Icelandic new impersonal passive (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, Maling 2006, Ingason et al. 2013) and in the Icelandic impersonal modal construction (H. Á. Sigurðsson & Egerland 2009).

Sigurðsson & Wood link the animacy condition on the null causee to its ϕ P nature. A ϕ P is an impoverished argument, syntactically “smaller” than a full and referential DP (Landau 2010, E. F. Sigurðsson & Wood 2020). They suggest that the animacy restriction may be related to ϕ P status, given the existing relation between animacy and ϕ features.

However, the implicit subject of Basque impersonals should not be considered a ϕ P, given that, as we will show shortly, it behaves like a DP pronoun in the contexts analyzed by Landau 2010. Thus, we propose that the animacy condition illustrated in (20) is a consequence of the implicit subject being a PERSON pronoun, therefore [+human], not of it having an impoverished status as a ϕ P.

In any case, this is yet one more restriction that differentiates Basque impersonals from passives in other languages, such as English and Spanish (Ormazabal & Romero 2019, 2020). In Spanish analytic passives, the event can be understood to be initiated by a nonvolitional causer (e.g., a fire), as can be seen in (22a). In fact, Spanish analytic passives contrast with reflexive-marked passives in this respect. The implicit subject of reflexive-marked passives, such as (22b), must be an animate agent, like in Basque impersonals (Mendikoetxea 1999, Sánchez 2002, Ormazabal & Romero 2019, 2020).

- (22) a. Muchos libros fueron quemados/destruidos
 many books be.3PL.PST burn.PFV.M.PL/destroy.PFV.M.PL
 (por el fuego) aquella noche.
 by the fire that night
 ‘Many books were burned/destroyed (by the fire) that night.’
 (Ormazabal & Romero 2019: 62)
- b. Se quemaron muchos libros aquella noche.
 SE burn.3PL.PST many books that night
 ‘Many books were burned that night’ (animate generic agent only).
 (Ormazabal & Romero 2019: 62)

In Spanish analytic passives, a silent PERSON argument is not projected in the specifier position of Voice, and the Voice head projected is not defective. Therefore, there is no restriction regarding the interpretation of the implicit argument as animate or inanimate.

Regarding the categorial nature of the silent argument, we claim that the PERSON argument of Basque impersonals must be regarded as a DP, not as a ϕ P. Landau 2010 argues that only DPs, not ϕ Ps, can license secondary depictive predicates and bind anaphors. In fact, the null causee of Icelandic indirect causatives is argued to be a ϕ P, which explains why this construction does not accept secondary predicates (E. F. Sigurðsson & Wood 2020). By contrast, the null subject of Basque impersonals can license secondary predicates naturally (Fernández & Berro 2021):

- (23) a. Ibai-a erraz zeharka-tzen da oinutsik.
 river-DET[ABS] easily cross-IPFV be[3.ABS] barefoot
 ‘The river is easily forded barefoot.’
- b. Herri-ko ereserki-a zutunik kanta-tzen da.
 town-RELN hymn-DET[ABS] standing_up sing-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘The town’s anthem is sung standing up.’
- c. Kanta hori mozkortuta kanta-tzen da.
 song that[ABS] drunk sing-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘That song is sung drunk.’

Again, the availability of depictive predicates predicated of the implicit subject is another property that differentiates impersonals from passives. The implicit subject of passives does not

generally license secondary predicates in languages like English and Spanish (although see footnote 13). According to Landau 2010 secondary predicates must be predicated of strong implicit arguments, namely DPs. Landau argues that this is the reason for the implicit argument of passives not allowing such predicates in English.¹⁴

- (24) a. It is impossible for me [to be visited (*together)].
 b. The room was left (*angry).
 c. The issue was decided (*unassisted).
 b. The game was played (*shoeless).

In contrast to the implicit argument of passives, he shows that PRO arguments can license secondary predicates:

- (25) a. It is possible [PRO to visit me together].
 b. They expected [PRO to leave the room angry].

As for Spanish, as shown by Ormazabal & Romero 2019, analytic passives do not allow adjectival phrases predicated of the implicit subject:

- (26) a. *María no es besada borracho.
 Mary no be.3SG kissed.F.SG drunk.M.SG
 Intended: 'You (generic) cannot kiss Mary drunk.'
- b. *Allí, todos los años las fiestas son
 there all DET year.PL DET.F.PL festivity.PL be.3PL
 celebradas vestidos con trajes típicos.
 celebrated.F.PL dressed.M.PL with dress.PL typical.M.PL
 Intended: 'There, every year they (generic) celebrate the festivities
 dressed in regional costumes.'
 (Ormazabal & Romero 2019: 76; glosses and translations ours)

¹⁴Whether English passives allow such secondary predicates is under debate. Collins 2005 argues that they do, based on examples like those in (i), and takes that as evidence of the syntactic presence of the external argument (see also Baker et al. 1989, Landau 2000, and the references in those works for further discussion).

- (i) a. The book was written drunk.
 (Collins 2005: 101)
 b. At the commune, breakfast is usually eaten nude.
 (Collins 2005: 101)
 c. The song must not be sung drunk.
 (Baker 1988: 318)

Also, the situation across languages seems to be complex. For instance, in German, passives can license secondary predicates, as Alexiadou et al. 2015: 132 shows:

- (ii) Der Raum wurde wütend verlassen.
 the room became angry left
 'The room was left in an angry mood.'

By contrast, reflexive-marked passives can license secondary predicates once tense, modal, and aspectual factors are controlled, as (27) shows. Note the contrast between the reflexive-marked passives in (28) and the analytic passives in (26).

- (27) a. El río se atraviesa descalzo.
 DET.M river CL cross.3SG barefoot.M
 ‘The river is forded barefoot.’
- b. En esta casa, se ve la tele sentado.
 in this house CL watch.3SG DET.F TV seated.M
 ‘In this house TV is watched seated.’
- (28) a. ¡No se besa a María borracho!
 no CL kiss.3SG DOM Mary drunk.M
 ‘One cannot kiss Mary drunk.’
- b. Allí, todos los años se celebran las fiestas
 there all DET year.PL CL celebrate.3PL DET.F.PL festivity.PL
 vestidos con trajes típicos.
 dressed.M.PL with dress.PL typical.M.PL
 ‘There, they (generic) celebrate their festivities every year dressed in regional costumes.’
 (Ormazabal & Romero 2019: 75–76; glosses and translations ours)

Landau 2010 also argues that only DPs can act as antecedents for Condition A binding. Landau states that a Condition A binder must be a strong implicit argument, that is, it requires a D layer. With its D feature, the binder enters into an Agree relation with T and in this way checks the D feature of the anaphor. As can be seen in (29) and (30), reciprocal anaphors can be bound by the implicit subject (Albizu 1997a, Ortiz de Urbina 2003), especially when the verb has imperfective aspect and the interpretation is nonepisodic.

- (29) elkar engaina-tzen denean
 each_other[ABS] deceive-IPFV be[3.ABS].when
 ‘when everyone deceives each other’
 Lit. ‘when each other is deceived’
 (Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 588)
- (30) a. Hona heltzean, elkar agur-tzen/besarka-tzen da.
 here.ALL arrive.when each_other[ABS] greet-IPFV/hug-IPFV be.[3.ABS]
 ‘When one arrives here, everyone must greet/hug each other.’
 Lit. ‘When one arrives here, each other is greeted/hugged.’
- b. Hemen-dik erraz ikus-ten da elkar.
 here-ABL easily see-IPFV be[3.ABS] each_other[ABS]
 ‘Everyone can see each other from here.’
 Lit. ‘Each other can be seen from here.’

As noted by Ortiz de Urbina 2003, third-person reflexive anaphors are not acceptable in this construction:

- (31) *bere buru-a engaina-tzen denean
 3.PSR head-DET[ABS] deceive-IPFV be[3.ABS].when
 Intended: ‘when oneself is deceived’
 (Ortiz de Urbina 2003: 588)

However, we believe that the unacceptability of reflexive anaphors in impersonals is a consequence not of the categorial nature of the implicit subject but of the person specification of the anaphor, which is incompatible with the unspecified value of the person feature of the implicit subject (Albizu 1997a). A similar restriction has been observed for Spanish reflexive-marked passives. Ormazabal & Romero 2020 argues that *se* in reflexive-marked passives cannot license reflexive pronouns like *su* ‘his/her’ because *su* is specified for person features whereas *se* is not. Similarly, the Basque reflexive anaphor *bere burua* = his/her head ‘himself/herself’, which varies depending on the person features of the antecedent (*nire burua* = my head ‘myself’ for first-person antecedents, *zure burua* = your head ‘yourself’ for second-person antecedents), cannot be bound by the implicit subject of impersonals because it requires a binder with the same person specification, whereas the implicit subject has an unspecified person feature: it can be interpreted as first person, second person, indefinite, or generic, like the PERSON pronoun *se* in Spanish (Mendikoetxea 1999).

Interestingly, Basque has another reflexive anaphor, one that requires an unspecified animate antecedent, namely *norbere burua* = oneself’s head ‘oneself’. This anaphor can occupy the thematic position of either the direct object, as in (32a), or the indirect object, as in (32b).

- (32) a. *norbere buru-a engaina-tzen denean*
 oneself.PSR head-DET[ABS] deceive-IPFV be[3.ABS].when
 ‘when oneself is deceived’
- b. *Ikastaroko lehen egunean, norbere buruari gutun bat*
 course.RELN first day.INE oneself.GEN head.DET.DAT letter DET[ABS]
idatziko zaio.
 write.PROS be[3.ABS];3.DAT
 ‘On the first day of the course, we will write a letter to ourselves.’
 Lit. ‘... a letter will be written to oneself.’

Since *norbere burua* requires an animate antecedent that is unspecified for person, it cannot occur in sentences with an overt or silent DP antecedent specified for first, second, or third person, such as (33b), contrasting with (33a).

- (33) a. *Beste inorena baino lehen, norbere*
 other anybody.GEN.DET[ABS] than before oneself.GEN
burua maita-tzen da hemen.
 head.DET[ABS] love-IPFV be[3.ABS] here
 ‘Before anybody else, we love ourselves here.’
 Lit. ‘... oneself is loved here.’
- b. **Beste inorena baino lehen, (ni-k/zu-k/*
 other anybody.GEN.DET[ABS] than before I-ERG/you-ERG/
horrek) *norbere burua maita-tzen*
 that one.ERG oneself.GEN head.DET[ABS] love-IPFV
dut/duzu/du.
 have[3.ABS];1SG.ERG/have[3.ABS];2.ERG/ have[3.ABS;3.ERG]
 Intended: ‘Before anybody else, I/you/that one love(s)
 myself/yourself/himself/herself.’

In the active transitive example (33b), the overt subject *nik* ‘I’, *zuk* ‘you’, or *horrek* ‘that one’ or its silent counterpart is crossreferenced by the corresponding agreement markers on the auxiliary.

If, instead of *norbere burua*, the example in (33b) contained a reflexive anaphor with a specific person value, it would be grammatical, as expected:

- (34) Beste inorena baino lehen, (ni-k/zu-k/horrek)
 other anybody.GEN.DET[ABS] than before I-ERG/you-ERG/that one.ERG
nire/zure/bere burua maita-tzen
 my/your/her head.DET[ABS] love-IPFV
 dut/duzu/du.
 have[3.ABS];1SG.ERG/have[3.ABS];2SG.ERG/have[3.ABS;3.ERG]
 ‘Before anybody else, I/you/that one love(s) myself/yourself/himself/herself.’

In (34), the reflexive anaphors agree in person with their corresponding subject, and as a consequence, the sentence is grammatical. Thus, the only problem in (33b) is that *norbere burua* is incompatible with a person-specific antecedent. In contrast, since in an impersonal the implicit subject is animate and has an unspecified value for person, it is a suitable antecedent for *norbere burua*, as in (33a).

Due to the unspecified nature of the silent PERSON argument and to the kind of Voice head involved in the impersonal, its subject differs considerably from a common DP argument, in that it cannot be overtly pronounced, does not bear ergative case, does not trigger ergative agreement on the auxiliary, and does not affect auxiliary choice. In a personal finite clause, when the external argument is a DP (overt or silent), the auxiliary must show the corresponding ergative agreement marker, and the auxiliary root must be **edun* ‘have’ instead of *izan* ‘be’:

- (35) (Gazte-ek) kanta hori mozkortuta kanta-tzen
 young_people-PL.ERG song that[ABS] drunk sing-IPFV
 dute/*da.
 have[3.ABS];3PL.ERG/be[3.ABS]
 ‘Young people/they sing that song drunk.’

In contrast, as we have shown, the implicit external argument of impersonals does not have any morphological reflex on the auxiliary and does not change the auxiliary root into **edun*. As we will explain in the next section, this is a consequence of its having a defective kind of Voice, which lacks a D feature and does not provide uninterpretable ϕ features to be valued by a DP and deleted.

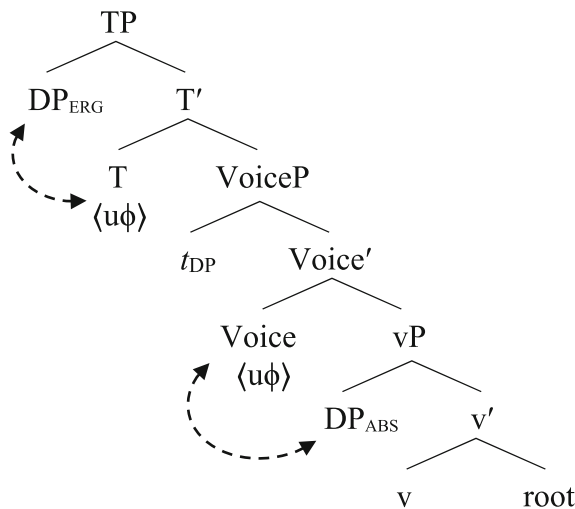
5.2 | Defective Voice

As mentioned at the outset of section 5.1, we claim that the Voice head in impersonals is thematic but has no D feature (like in Schäfer 2008b’s passives or Alexiadou et al. 2015’s Greek passives). We label this kind of Voice head *defective* for convenience, in order to compare it with the Voice head that occurs in common transitive sentences, which is both thematic and has a D feature. As we noted, in our account the fact that Voice does not have a D feature does not mean that a certain kind of external argument cannot be merged in its specifier position. We argued in section 5.1 that the external argument of impersonals is a silent PERSON pronoun with an unspecified person feature, similar to the *se* pronoun in Spanish reflexive-marked passives (Ormazabal & Romero 2019, 2020). If so, in impersonals there are two active arguments: a silent

PERSON pronoun with unspecified person features and an internal argument, which can be either overt or silent. The fact that there are two arguments within a defective VoiceP causes the person restriction described in section 4.2. We assume that Voice is the head that introduces the external argument (Kratzer 1994, 1996) and assigns Case to the internal object of transitive predicates (like little *v* in Chomsky 1986).

In order to explain the derivation of impersonals, we will first consider that of personal transitive clauses. In such clauses, Voice has a D feature and the ability to assign absolutive Case to the internal argument. Thus, it can be regarded as a strong phase, equivalent to the v^*P of Chomsky 2000 and Chomsky 2001. We will remain agnostic about the Case assignment of the external argument: this account is compatible with an analysis where the external argument receives inherent ergative case from Voice (in line with proposals such as Legate 2002, Massam 2002, Aldridge 2004, Woolford 2006, Legate 2008, Coon 2010) or with one where it is Case assigned structural ergative case by T (for a recent approach, see Rezac et al. 2014). In any case, we propose that, as shown in (36), in personal transitive sentences, the external argument values and deletes the set of uninterpretable ϕ features on T ($u\phi$, consisting of $uPers$ and $uNum$) and the internal argument values and deletes the uninterpretable ϕ features on Voice ($u\phi$, also consisting of $uPers$ and $uNum$). This gives rise to the agreement markers (ergative and absolutive respectively) that occur in personal transitive sentences.

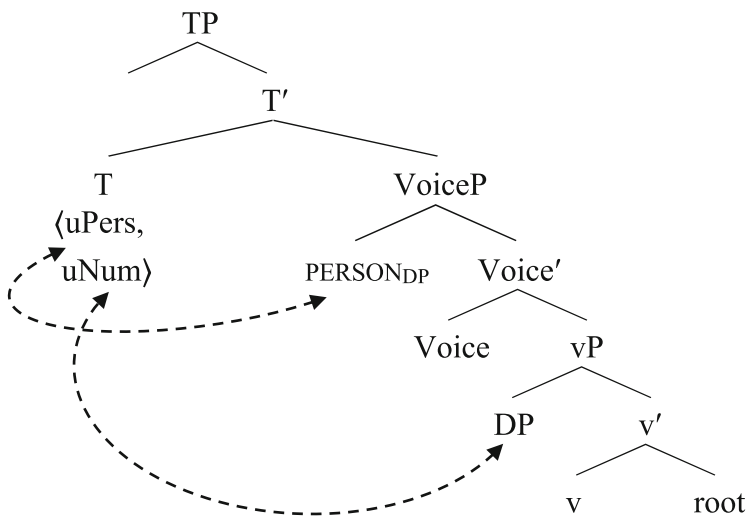
(36) Personal transitive sentences; nondefective Voice



By contrast, in impersonals, Voice is defective in that it lacks a D feature. For case and agreement, we consider that being defective means having no uninterpretable ϕ features and thus no structural Case to assign. Defective VoiceP can also be characterized as a weak phase, similar to the one that is present in unaccusative predicates (Chomsky 2000, 2001). Hence, contrary to what we see in personal transitives, VoiceP in impersonals does not involve a complete domain for Case licensing, and thus the internal argument introduced within it enters into Agree with the next functional head that has uninterpretable ϕ features, namely, T. In accord with Chomsky 2000 and Chomsky 2001, we assume that the uninterpretable ϕ features in T are in fact inherited from the phasal head C.

In spite of its defectiveness, we nevertheless claim that the VoiceP in impersonals actually contains two arguments: the external argument, in its specifier position, and the internal argument, in its complement position—that is, within vP. Given the nonphasal nature of Voice, both the external and internal arguments coincide in the same phasal domain, namely, CP. Therefore, the two of them will try to Agree with T, the only functional head bearing uninterpretable ϕ features within CP. The external argument being structurally higher than the internal argument, T first probes the ϕ features of the external argument. Given that this is a silent PERSON pronoun not specified for number, it bears person but not number features and is thus defective in its ϕ features. Consequently, T will only Agree in person features with it, and as a consequence, the internal argument will have the option to Agree with T in number features only. Thus, we propose that, as shown in (37), the feature set present in T is divided: the external argument values the uPers feature, whereas the internal argument values uNum.

(37) Impersonal sentences; defective Voice



Since the internal argument cannot value uPers, first- and second-person absolutive objects are banned in this context, given that these bear both person and number features. By contrast, third-person arguments are allowed, because—as argued in the literature on the Person–Case Constraint, which applies in ditransitive constructions—these bear number but not person features (see, among others, Anagnostopoulou 2003, Béjar & Rezac 2003, Rezac 2007, 2008a, 2009a, 2011, Adger & Harbour 2007). We thus claim that the nature of the person restriction in impersonal constructions is identical to the Person–Case Constraint as attested in ditransitives. See Rezac 2009b: 314–316 for this same claim. In ditransitives, the Person–Case Constraint captures the incompatibility of first- and second-person objects with an agreeing (indirect-object) dative (Bonet 1991, 1994). This is a syntactic constraint that arises when the two internal arguments—the direct and indirect objects—co-occur in the same Agree/Case locus, namely, v (equivalent to transitive Voice). For Basque, the Person–Case Constraint is illustrated by Laka 1993's classic examples in (38); see also Albizu 1997b and 1997c for a thorough examination of the Person–Case Constraint in Basque and crosslinguistically.

- (38) a. *Zu-k harakina-ri ni sal-du naiozu.
 you-ERG butcher-DAT I[ABS] sell-PFV have;1SG.ABS;3SG.DAT;2.ERG
 'You have sold me to the butcher.'

- b. Zu-k harakina-ri liburua sal-du diozu.
 you-ERG butcher-DAT book[ABS] sell-PFV have[3.ABS];3SG.DAT;2.ERG
 ‘You have sold me the book.’
 (Laka 1993: 27)

As has been argued with respect to ditransitive constructions, we assume that in first- and second-person arguments it is not sufficient to check their [number] feature in order for them to be Case licensed (Anagnostopoulou 2003). The Agree relations in impersonal constructions are then identical to those that hold in ditransitives: due to the intervention of a higher argument—the dative in ditransitives, the implicit external argument in impersonals—first- and second-person internal arguments are banned from undergoing regular Agree with their actual Case licenser, namely, *v* in ditransitives and *T* in impersonals. This violates the Person-Licensing Condition, which states that “an interpretable first/second person feature must be licensed by entering into an Agree relation with a functional category” (Béjar & Rezac 2003: 53).

Another factor in favor of the claim that the internal argument only values *uNum* on *T* is that the internal argument, apart from being third person, is usually nonhuman (Rodet 1992) or inanimate (Berro & Fernández 2019b, Fernández & Berro 2021). As mentioned by Berro & Fernández 2019b, the impersonal construction is much more frequent in the corpora when the internal argument is inanimate, although inanimacy is not a necessary condition to form an impersonal (see section 6.2 for the derivation of third-person animate internal arguments). A similar tendency has been observed in the spread of the reflexive-marked passive in Spanish (Cabañas 2006).

In sum, we argue that in impersonals the only feature set, provided by *T*, is shared by two arguments and that this is the source of the person restriction found. Instead of functioning as a homogeneous block, the ϕ features on *T* happen to be valued separately by the external argument on the one hand and the internal argument on the other: the former Agrees with *T* in person features and the latter in number features. In ditransitives, as argued in Béjar & Rezac 2003: 54, given that dative Case is licensed by *Appl*, the indirect object can only Agree defectively with *v*, and thus the person features in *v* get a default value, that is, third person. Similarly, in impersonals, since the implicit external argument bears unspecified person features, *uPers* on *T* gets a default value: again, third person.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the implicit external argument does not trigger ergative agreement on the auxiliary, as external arguments usually do in Basque (leaving aside ergative-displacement phenomena). Why absolutive instead of ergative? We suggest that the choice between absolutive and ergative agreement markers might be governed by a PF-interface operation, a vocabulary-insertion rule that varies depending on the nature of the Voice head adjacent to *T* (in a similar vein as the vocabulary-insertion rule for auxiliaries given in (9)). When *T* has an adjacent Voice head that has a *D* feature, the valued ϕ features of *T* will be realized as ergative agreement markers; otherwise, if the adjacent Voice head does not have a *D* feature, they will be realized as absolutive agreement markers.

As will be shown in section 6, the person restriction on the internal argument can be overcome if it is marked dative instead of absolutive. In that scenario, we will claim that an extra Case licenser has been introduced into the derivation (Rezac 2011, Kalin 2018, T. Levin 2019). The fact

¹⁵The claim that the external argument values the person probe on *T* as third person by default is supported by the fact that, with first and second person, the person features do not make interpretive sense without the number features (Taraldsen 1995, Anagnostopoulou 2003).

- b. tenta-tzen zela **Satan-ez**
 tempt-IPFV be[3.ABS].PST.COMP Satan-INS
 ‘while he was tempted by Satan’
 (Mt 1:13; Ortiz de Urbina 2006: 773)

As can be seen, not only does the (medio)passive in (40a) have a first-person subject, like (39) does, but both (40a) and (40b) have an overt agent marked by an instrumental, *çiuueçaz* ‘by you’ in (40a) and *Satanez* ‘by Satan’ in (40b). (See Altuna 1981, Irigoyen 1992, Zulaika 1998: 780, Ortiz de Urbina 2006: sect. 3.2, and the references in those works for discussion.)

The use of an adpositional phrase to express the agent, as in (40), is significant crosslinguistically. As commonly observed, the agentive adpositional phrase can be headed by an instrumental, a locative (as in English *by*), or a genitive (for further details, see Siewierska 1984, Keenan 1985, Kazenin 2001, Keenan & Dryer 2007, and Siewierska 2013, among others). Hence, Old Basque shares with other languages the property of using instrumental adpositional phrases to introduce agents.¹⁸ It should additionally be noted that the agents in (40) are very specific—a second-person pronoun in (40a) and a proper noun in (40b)—another property that departs significantly from contemporary impersonals, where the agent has a nonspecific interpretation.

Considering the Basque historical data, the Old Basque (medio)passive seems to be much closer to a passive than its contemporary counterpart. In fact, two relevant properties of passives—no person restriction on subjects and overt expression of the agent—are found in Old Basque (medio)passives but are no longer extant. Even if the agent phrase were not essential to characterizing a construction as passive—as it is claimed to be in Keenan & Dryer 2007: 342–345 and elsewhere—the fact that it is available in Old Basque would still be very significant.

Therefore, we can tentatively say that the defective Voice proposed for contemporary impersonals may not be present in Old Basque (medio)passives. Instead, the Old Basque construction is best analyzed as a passive built on top of a fully constructed verb, with a transitive Voice similar to that illustrated in (36) and perhaps an extra head Passive that is responsible for the passive interpretation (in line with proposals like Doron 2003, Collins 2005, Bruening 2012, Alexiadou et al. 2015). Since Voice is not defective in this structure, the internal argument does not need to share the ϕ features of T and can Agree in both person and number features with Voice. Consequently, the internal argument can be either first, second, or third person and have the corresponding absolutive agreement markers on the auxiliary.

6 | CIRCUMVENTING THE PERSON RESTRICTION: DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING

So far we have established (i) that Basque impersonals are built up by a Voice head that is defective in the sense that it lacks a set of uninterpretable ϕ features and (ii) that as a consequence, the uninterpretable features of T have to be shared by two arguments: the external argument and the internal argument. Since the external argument bears person but not number features, T checks uPers with it, leaving uNum unvalued, able to be checked by the internal argument. Given that

¹⁸It is worth noting that Basque examples are used in Keenan 1985: 248–249 and repeated in Kazenin 2001: 903 to exemplify instrumental marking of agents. However, the purportedly passive example given shows not an instrumental agent but an ergative agent. Thus, instrumental marking of agents is wrongly exemplified. The Basque examples are not included in Keenan & Dryer 2007, and instrumental marking of agents is exemplified by Kinyarwanda instead.

the person feature of the external argument has an unspecified value, *uPers* in *T* is valued as third person by default. On the other hand, since the internal argument can only Agree in number features, third- but not first- and second-person absolutes are allowed. The person restriction in Basque impersonals is thus a constraint related to Case licensing: just as with the Person–Case Constraint as manifested in ditransitive constructions, it is due to a Case-licensing failure on the internal argument, a failure that arises as a consequence of the intervention of a higher PERSON argument.

In this section we will argue that, as with other Person–Case Constraint constructions, the restriction holds when the internal argument remains unlicensed; the licensing failure is accordingly repaired when an independent ϕ probe is provided for this argument (or for the argument blocking its licensing, in the case of ditransitives). We thus claim that the commonalities between the person constraint in personal ditransitives and the one in impersonals are not only the triggering configuration of the constraint itself but also the mechanism lying behind its repair: the latter basically follows the same process in both instances.

6.1 | First- and second-person dative objects

In this section, we will establish that in impersonals the first- and second-person objects that are unable to bear absolutive marking can instead appear dative marked (Hualde 1988, Ortiz de Urbina 1988, 2003, Rezac 2009b, Ortiz de Urbina 2011–2019, Ortiz de Urbina & Fernández 2016, Rezac 2016, Fernández & Berro 2021).

In (41a) we present a transitive sentence with a second-person theme; (41b) shows an impersonal with a second-person theme marked by absolutive case (see footnote 11); and in (41c) there is an alternative to (41b), an impersonal whose theme is marked by dative case and agreement.

- (41) a. Aspaldian ez zaitugu ikus-i Transitive
 a_long_time_ago NEG have;2.ABS;1PL.ERG see-PFV
 (zu).
 you[ABS]
 ‘We have not seen you since a long time ago.’
- b. */? Aspaldian ez zara ikus-i (zu). Impersonal
 a_long_time_ago NEG be;2.ABS see-PFV you[ABS]
 Intended: ‘You have not been seen since a long time ago.’
- c. Aspaldian ez **zaizu** ikus-i **(zu-ri)**.
 a_long_time_ago NEG be;2.DAT[3.ABS] see-PFV you-DAT
 ‘You have not been seen since a long time ago.’

The sentence in (41c) shares some of the properties of the impersonal we have discussed so far. Being a detransitivized construction, (i) it is built from a transitive verb, but (ii) it lacks ergative morphology in both case and agreement, and (iii) it involves the intransitive auxiliary (*izan* ‘be’). However, this construction lacks one of the properties observed in impersonals: it does not have an absolutive-marked internal argument. In fact, there is no absolutive argument at all. Moreover, the theme is marked by dative rather than absolutive, and there is no explicit argument other than the one marked by dative; this is unexpected in an ergative language like Basque that marks the sole argument of monovalent unaccusatives by absolutive.

It is worth noting that this construction is not usually attested in formal and written registers, and it is therefore hard to find in corpora such as the Contemporary Reference Prose corpus

(*Ereduzko Prosa Gaur*; Sarasola et al. 2001–2007) or the Corpus of Contemporary Basque (*Egungo Testuen Corpusa*; Sarasola et al. 2016a). Nevertheless, it can occasionally be found in written instances of colloquial-like Standard Basque. We illustrate this in (42) with sentences from the lyrics of a modern song (42a), a recently published novel (42b), and a sports report (42c).¹⁹

- (42) a. Zer duzu, baina, gaur triste ikus-ten
 what[3.ABS] have;2.ERG[3.ABS] but today sad see-IPFV
 zaizu.
 be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘But what’s going on with you? You look sad today.’
 Lit. ‘... You are seen sad today.’
- b. Alice ez zen horrelakoa, baina azkarra zen
 Alice not be;3.ABS;PST like that but intelligent be[3.ABS];PST
 eta edozer-tara adapta-tzeko gogotsu ikus-ten
 and everything-ALL adapt-COMP eager see-IPFV
 zitzaion.
 be;3.DAT[3.ABS];PST
 ‘Alice was not like that, rather she was intelligent and seemed eager to adapt to everything.’
 Lit. ‘... she was seen eager to adapt to everything.’
- c. Handi ikus-i zaio Athletic-i zelai-a-n, eta
 big see-PFV be;3.DAT[3.ABS] Athletic-DAT field-DET-INE and
 txiki utzi du Bartzelona.
 small leave have[3.ABS];3.ERG Barcelona
 ‘Athletic came across in great form and left Barcelona looking pretty poorly.’ Lit.
 ‘Athletic was seen big in the field and ...’.

Similar spoken examples from informal Standard Basque are also available, for instance in the “*Goenkale*” *Corpusa* (Sarasola et al. 2016b).²⁰ Leaving aside informal Standard Basque, we have obtained, from spoken usage, several dialectal examples of impersonals with dative themes. These include the examples in (43) from Lekeitio Basque, provided by Arantzazu Elordieta (personal

¹⁹For the source of (42a), which was given earlier as (4), see footnote 3. The example in (42b) is taken from the novel *Amek ez dute* by Katixa Agirre (Donostia–San Sebastián, the Basque Country: Erein Argitaletxea, 2018): 69. Finally, (42c) was found in a report on the Spanish Super Cup Final between the Athletic and Barcelona football clubs, entitled “Perfekzioaren mugan” and published in the Basque newspaper *Berria* (January 18, 2021).

²⁰*Goenkale* is a Basque TV series produced by Pausoka Entertainment that was broadcast by the Basque-government-owned radio and television corporation EITB between 1994 and 2015. The “*Goenkale*” *Corpusa*, whose content consists of sequences of text excerpted from the series, contains many spoken examples similar to the written ones in (42), such as the following.

- (i) Aldatua ikus-ten zaizu.
 changed see-IPFV be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘You look changed.’
 (Episode 118, “Umeen negarra,” chap. 10, Leonor)
- (ii) Azken egunotan, pittin bat desberdin ikus-ten zait.
 last days.INE bit a different see-IPFV be;1SG.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘I look a bit different these days.’
 (Episode 1027, “Errudunaren bila,” chap. 9, Aitor)

communication), and those in (44) from Getxo Basque, provided by Xabier Bilbao (personal communication); both of these are varieties of western Basque.²¹

- (43) a. Morena ikus-ten jatzu. Lekeitio Basque
 tanned see-IPFV be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘You look tanned.’
- b. Ikus-ten jat hamen?
 see-IPFV be;1.DAT[3.ABS] here
 ‘Am I seen here?’/‘Can one see me here?’
- c. Ezagutu be ez jatzu eitxen daukazun
 know too no be;2.DAT[3.ABS] do.IPFV have;2.ERG[3.ABS];COMP
 etxuriagaz.
 appearance.DET.COM
 ‘You cannot be recognized.’/‘One cannot even recognize you with that appearance.’
- d. Erungo jatzu gero etxera, trankil.
 carry.PROS be;2.DAT[3.ABS] later home.ALL calm
 ‘You will be taken home later, relax!’
- (44) a. Baltzakiñe ikus-ten datzu. Getxo Basque
 tanned see-IPFV be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘You look tanned.’
- b. Ikus-ten dast hemen?
 see-IPFV be;1.DAT[3.ABS] here
 ‘Am I seen here?’/‘Can one see me here?’
- c. Ezetu bere ezatzu iten dekozun
 know too no;be;2.DAT[3.ABS] do.IPFV have;2.ERG[3.ABS];COMP
 itxureaz.
 appearance.DET.COM
 ‘You cannot be recognized.’/‘One cannot even recognize you with that appearance.’

The instances in (43) and (44) are only a few examples of a strategy that seems to be alive at least for speakers of southwestern varieties of Basque.²² Apart from the western dialects spoken in Lekeitio, Getxo, and Arratia, we have found the same strategy in the Navarrese varieties of Lesaka and Baztan, in the central varieties of Itsasondo, Hondarribia, and Zumaia, and in the transitional central-western variety of Elgoibar.²³ By using dative and not absolutive marking, these speakers overcome the person restriction caused by the external argument. In the spirit of Rezac 2011,

²¹The counterparts to these sentences in (informal) Standard Basque would be as follows, respectively. (i) *Beltzarana ikusten zaizu.* (ii) *Ikusten zait hemen?* (iii) *Ezagutu ere ez zaizu egiten daukazun itxurarekin.* (iv) *Eramango zaizu etxera gero, lasai.* The informants offered the dialectal variants given here when provided with impersonals involving first- and second-person absolutive subjects. The informant for Getxo Basque gave us, for the (d) sentence, a personal variant that has not been included here.

²²An exhaustive survey is needed to determine the extent of this dative-marking strategy’s presence in northeastern Basque. Thus far our preliminary observations indicate that the pattern is more widespread in southwestern Basque.

As noted by one of our reviewers, the presence of this strategy in informal Standard Basque might be interpreted as a question of register rather than dialect. Nonetheless, we feel that some intradialect research might prove fruitful.

²³However, with regard to Lesaka and the central varieties mentioned, while the dative-marking strategy is available for counterparts of (43a–c) and (44a–c), our informants for these varieties, like our informant from Getxo (see footnote 20), employ the personal variant for the verb *eman* ‘give’. Our preliminary observations indicate that this kind of impersonal involving a dative object is most commonly used with perception verbs like *antzman* ‘feel’, *igarri/sumatu* ‘perceive’, *ikusi* ‘see’, *entzun* ‘hear’, and *ulertu* ‘understand’.

Kalin 2018, and T. Levin 2019, we argue that this is a repair strategy that consists of activating a ϕ probe for the first- and second-person objects that would otherwise remain unlicensed—a ϕ probe that is, of course, independent from Voice and T.

6.2 | Dative marking, a consequence of the activation of a ϕ probe

In section 5.2, we explained that the person restriction in impersonals follows the same pattern as the Person–Case Constraint in ditransitives. In this section, we will further show that the parallelism between impersonals and ditransitives is reflected in the repair strategies used to circumvent the person restriction in the two cases.

As is extensively argued in Rezac 2007, 2009a, and 2011, in ditransitives the Person–Case Constraint can be repaired by activating a ϕ probe that was previously inactive in the derivation. The activated ϕ probe provides Case licensing to either the indirect or direct object: the indirect object in languages like French and Basque and the direct object in languages like Georgian (see also Béjar & Rezac 2003). In the former case, the whole ϕ -feature set of v is left available for the direct object, since the dative is realized as a locative or nonagreeing PP; in the latter case, it is the direct object itself that, being embedded within a PP, ends up outside the Agree locus in v . In either case, the repair prevents the two internal arguments from competing with each other to Agree with v .

We argue that the Case failure that derives the person constraint in impersonals is repaired by means of the same mechanism, namely, adding uninterpretable ϕ features to the numeration, as dictated by the interface algorithm in (45) (Rezac 2011: 219), which is a subcase of the more general one in (46) (Rezac 2011: 20).

(45) \mathfrak{R} (for Agree/Case)

An uninterpretable feature (probe) may enter the numeration on a potential Agree/Case locus if needed for Case licensing.

(46) \mathfrak{R}

An uninterpretable feature may enter the numeration only if needed for Full Interpretation of the syntactic structure built from it.

Rezac 2011: 18–20 argues that uninterpretable features are the mechanism by which syntax can dynamically respond to the needs of Full Interpretation. Rezac states that in order to avoid illegibility at LF the numeration can be modified by adding uninterpretable features that make it possible to form new syntactic dependencies. The inclusion of uninterpretable features must therefore be regarded as an operation that takes place at the syntax–LF interface.

Building on Rezac 2011, we thus propose that, as in ditransitives, impersonals have a last-resort repair strategy available to repair the Case-licensing failure on first- and second-person objects: the activation of a dative-Case-assigning ϕ probe. Through the activation of this probe, the first- and second-person objects that are otherwise unable to bear absolutive marking can appear with dative case and agreement:

- (47) a. *Ondo ikus-ten naiz?
 well see-IPFV be;1SG.ABS
 Intended: ‘Am I seen well?’
- b. Ondo ikus-ten zait?
 well see-IPFV be[3.ABS];1SG.DAT
 ‘Am I seen well?’

At this point, it should be noted that (as the reader may have noticed in section 6.1, in examples like (42b)) third-person human objects can also resort to this kind of repair, given that they may

appear with either absolutive or dative marking:

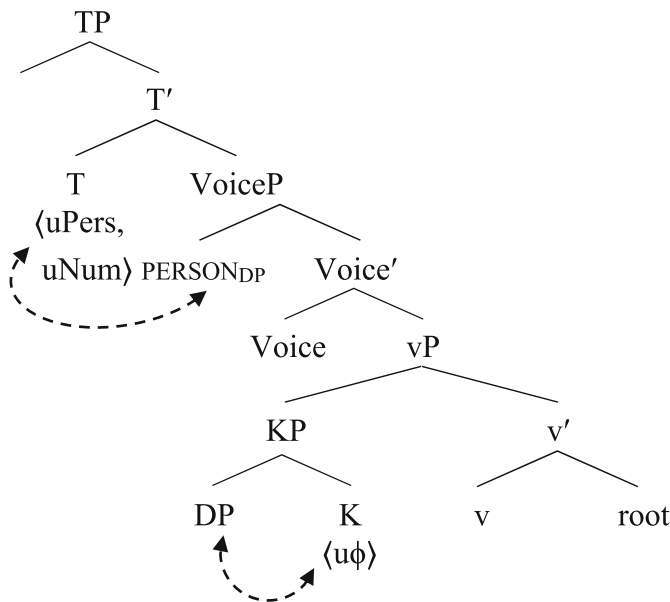
- (48) a. Jon ikus-i da.
 Jon[ABS] see-PFV be[3.ABS]
 'Jon has been seen.'
- b. Jon-i ikus-i zaiio.
 Jon-DAT see-PFV be[3.ABS];3SG.DAT
 'Jon has been seen.'

As mentioned in section 5.2, third-person objects in impersonal constructions are usually non-human; thus, as is the case in ditransitives, it is not very common to find human objects. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that for third-person human objects the option of appearing with dative marking follows from an “extended” Person-Licensing Condition (Béjar & Rezac 2003), given that in this case the relevant feature, the one requiring Case licensing, seems to be animacy, not person (Ormazabal & Romero 1998, 2007, 2013). In order to capture the dative marking in (48b), we thus suggest that third-person human absolutive objects can also bear person features, as is the case with first- and second-person objects.

In this sense, the presence of person features could be linked to the Person feature proposed by Richards 2008, a privative formal feature that formalizes a single, discrete, binary property related to humanness and/or definiteness. Person–Case Constraint effects would then be predicted to occur with human third-person objects too, since indefinites and inanimates would bear only number features and would consequently be able to Agree with a defectivized probe bearing only uNum, such as T in impersonals. All in all, we tentatively propose that the optional nature of dative Case in third-person human internal arguments arises as a consequence of the optionality of grammaticalizing humanness—and even definiteness—by means of Person; those arguments bearing such a feature will resort to the repair strategy of activating an additional Case licenser, whereas those lacking it will be directly licensed by Agreeing for number with T.

The tree in (49) illustrates the activation of a ϕ probe required for first- and second-person—and even third-person human—objects to be Case licensed.

(49) Impersonal with an extra ϕ probe



In Basque, dative Case is commonly considered to be assigned either by (High/Low) Appl or by a P head (see, among many others, Albizu 2001a, Rezac 2008a, 2008b, Albizu 2009, Etxepare & Oyharçabal 2009, Rezac 2009a, 2009b, Fernández 2010a, 2010b, Fernández & Ortiz de Urbina 2010, Rezac 2011, Fernández & Ortiz de Urbina 2012, Etxepare & Oyharçabal 2013, Odria 2014, Fernández 2015, Odria 2017, Ormazabal & Romero 2017, Odria 2019). However, in order to distinguish the dative object of impersonals from other inherent datives, we propose that the dative Case assigner in impersonals is instead K, a more general functional head that stands for (structural) Case—this is in fact the head that assigns dialectally attested differential object marking in transitive constructions (Odria 2017). Hence, we also assume that the dative markers in the finite verb involve clitic doubling, that is, the movement of a head that, after Agreeing with the licensed nominal, brings its interpretable ϕ -feature bundle to Voice/T, as is argued by Etxepare 2006, Rezac 2006, 2007, Arregi & Nevins 2008, Rezac 2008a, 2008b, Preminger 2009, Rezac 2011, Arregi & Nevins 2012, Etxepare 2014, Preminger 2014, Rezac et al. 2014, Odria 2017, and Odria 2019, among others.

As can be seen in (49), when the object Agrees with K, the number features in T remain unvalued; they are thus interpreted as singular by default, since this is the morphologically unmarked value for number features (see Kramer 2014, Preminger 2014, and T. Levin 2019, among others).²⁴ This contrasts with third-person objects that receive absolutive Case by Agreeing in number features with T, because the absolutive agreement marker depends on the number specification of the object. The latter is seen in (50), whereas, when the object is marked dative as in (51), the number features in T remain unvalued/singular, regardless of the number features of the object, since these are actually crossreferenced by dative agreement.

- (50) a. Liburu hori erraz sal-tzen da.
 book that[ABS] easily sell-IPFV be[3.ABS]
 ‘That book is easily sold.’
- b. Liburu horiek erraz sal-tzen dira.
 book those[ABS] easily sell-IPFV be;3PL.ABS
 ‘Those books are easily sold.’
- (51) a. Pozik ikus-ten zaizu.
 happy see-IPFV be;2.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘You (singular) look happy.’

²⁴As a reviewer points out, the proposal that the uNum feature of T can remain unvalued makes the prediction that intransitive verbs are also possible in the impersonal configuration in Basque, with the sole argument being the silent external argument in the specifier of Voice. As (i) illustrates, this prediction is in fact borne out: unergative verbs like *dantzatu* ‘dance’, *eskiatu* ‘ski’, and so on can easily be found in this construction (Ortiz de Urbina 2003), with the sole argument remaining implicit.

- (i) Hemen ondo dantza-tzen/eskia-tzen da.
 here well dance-IPFV/ski-IPFV be;3.ABS
 ‘People dance/ski well here.’

Certain unaccusative verbs can also occur in the impersonal construction, but their distribution is much more limited. We would suggest that in intransitive impersonals the implicit external argument checks uPers on T and uNum remains unvalued.

- b. Pozik ikus-ten zai-zue.
 happy see-IPFV be;2PL.DAT[3.ABS]
 ‘You (plural) look happy.’

Again, the contrast between (50) and (51) corroborates the idea that the intervention of the implicit subject exclusively affects uPers in T. Otherwise, we would not expect a number contrast when the object Agrees with T and appears absolutive marked, as in (50).

6.3 | Differential object marking in impersonals and nonimpersonal transitives

In line with Rezac 2011, Kalin 2018 argues that finite clauses have one obligatory Case licenser that is always merged whereas other licensers are merged secondarily—that is, when needed for convergence. Thus, as in Rezac 2011, the addition of a secondary Case licenser is seen as a last-resort operation, given that it is exclusively applied in cases where the derivation would otherwise crash. In this way, Kalin accounts for the crosslinguistically widely attested phenomenon of differential object marking, by arguing that the differential marking arises as a consequence of the activation of such a secondary Case licenser, which licenses otherwise unlicensed objects.

Differential object marking refers to the phenomenon where objects high in animacy and/or specificity bear a given marking not attested in other objects (Bossong 1985, 1991, Aissen 2003). Differential object marking is also available in some Basque southwestern varieties. An example is in (52b), whose dative-marked object contrasts with the absolutive-marked object in (52a). In the varieties in question, objects high in animacy and specificity, especially first- and second-person objects, tend to bear this dative marking instead of the canonical absolutive expected in an ergative language like Basque (Fernández & Rezac 2010, Mounole 2012, Odria 2014, Fernández & Rezac 2016, Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2016, Odria 2017, Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2017, Odria 2019).

- (52) a. Gaur triste ikus-ten zaitut (zu).
 today sad see-IPFV have;2.ABS;1SG.ERG you[ABS]
 ‘You look sad to me today.’
 Lit. ‘I see you sad today.’
- b. Gaur triste ikus-ten dizut (zu-ri).
 today sad see-IPFV have[3.ABS];2.DAT;1SG.ERG you-DAT
 ‘You look sad to me today.’
 Lit. ‘I see you sad today.’

This differential object marking is similar to that found in Spanish and Hindi, where animate and specific objects show the same marking as dative indirect objects: *a* marking in Spanish and *-ko* marking in Hindi. Kalin 2018 argues that in languages like Spanish and Hindi transitive *v* is an obligatory licenser and Appl an optional one, which merges when the object needs licensing and this requirement is not satisfied by *v*. Thus, according to Kalin, in these languages Appl behaves as an obligatory licenser for indirect objects and as an optional one for direct ones. Similarly, T. Levin 2019 regards differential object marking in Palauan as an exceptional-licensing phenomenon since it requires the addition of a Case licenser not otherwise present in the derivation.

As we have already pointed out, the same mechanism applies in Basque impersonals: first- and second-person objects end up being dative marked, as in (41c), by Agreeing with a previously

inactive ϕ probe (Rezac 2007, 2009a, 2011) or, to put it otherwise, by Agreeing with a secondary or optional licenser (Kalin 2018, T. Levin 2019). Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that the dative Case assigned by K in Basque impersonals is in fact an instance of differential object marking, since it is also attested with human but not nonhuman objects and is a pattern available for differential-object-marking speakers.²⁵

Nevertheless, observe that in transitives differential object marking co-occurs with the transitive auxiliary **edun* ‘have’ (52b) and in impersonals with the intransitive *izan* ‘be’ (41c); the latter fact reduces to the defectiveness of the Voice head in impersonals. Furthermore, in the differential object marking found in transitive constructions, first- and second-person datives alternate with the absolutive; the phenomenon is optional for many speakers, and those who have it obligatorily also use the absolutive in nonfinite contexts (Fernández & Rezac 2016, Odria 2017). This is not what we see with dative objects in impersonals: although third-person objects may alternate between the dative and the absolutive, first- and second-person objects can only appear with the dative (however, see footnote 11). As argued in Odria 2014, Fernández & Rezac 2016, Odria 2017, and Odria 2019, the alternation found between differential object marking and absolutive marking in transitive constructions may be due to the fact that, unlike in impersonals, the object Agrees with v/Voice before receiving the differential marking.

In sum, both Kalin 2018 and T. Levin 2019 argue that differentially marked objects, due to their ϕ -feature specification, always require Case licensing and that the absence of it leads to ungrammaticality. This is, again, analogous to what happens with first- and second-person objects under the Person–Case Constraint as manifested in both ditransitives and the impersonals under study. In fact, as Levin notes (p. 193), “we could intuitively maintain that all [differential-object-marking] patterns are triggered by ‘extended’ [Person-Licensing Condition]–like statements.” Kalin 2017 takes a further step in unifying the Person–Case Constraint in ditransitives with differential object marking, stating that the similarities between the two include (i) the number of arguments involved in each (two: the indirect and direct objects with the Person–Case Constraint and the subject and object in differential object marking); (ii) the fact that in both cases the phenomenon affects the lower argument, namely the object; (iii) the fact that both the Person–Case Constraint and differential object marking are triggered by the intervention of a higher argument and neither of them persists when the higher argument is removed; and (iv) the fact that both are repaired by adding a secondary licenser to the construction. In addition, it is important to recall that the relationship between the dative marking of the object and the Person–Case Constraint appears even closer in the case of Basque impersonals than in transitive contexts, because the differential-object-marking pattern is actually caused by a person restriction that could simply be an instance of the Person–Case Constraint.

7 | CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have analyzed the impersonal in Basque. We have proposed that in this construction Voice introduces a semantically active argument but has no D feature (Schäfer 2008b, Alexiadou et al. 2015), and we have called this type of Voice defective. In this analysis, Voice

²⁵However, as pointed out by Ortiz de Urbina 2011–2019, the dative in impersonals is independent from the dialectal differential object marking discussed in the literature. In other words, speakers that do not show dialectal differential object marking do have the dative-marking pattern observed in impersonals, although we presume that this strategy is restricted to southwestern dialects.

being defective also implies having no uninterpretable ϕ features, leaving T as the only functional head with ϕ features to be valued by a DP and deleted. However, even though Voice is defective in impersonals, we have suggested that a silent PERSON pronoun is introduced in its specifier position and thus that there are two arguments within VoiceP. As a result, the uninterpretable ϕ features of T are split between the two arguments, and this causes a person constraint on the internal argument: it can only be third person. In line with Rezac 2009b, this article has shown that there are significant similarities in nature between the person constraints occurring in impersonals and in ditransitive constructions. Their commonalities also include the repair strategy that is used to overcome them, which consists of activating a ϕ probe that was previously inactive in the derivation (Rezac 2007, 2009a, 2011). As a consequence of the repair, in impersonals, first- and second-person internal arguments are embedded under KP and morphologically marked with dative case and agreement, circumventing in this way the person restriction (Kalin 2018, T. Levin 2019).

With this analysis, we have accounted for the main properties of the impersonal: the fact that the implicit subject is syntactically active as well as able to license secondary predicates and bind reciprocal anaphors and certain reflexive anaphors; the construction's intransitive morphology; and the person constraint on the internal argument. Additionally, we have provided an analysis of impersonals with dative-marked internal arguments and proposed that this is an instance of differential object marking. The impersonal construction with differential object marking is basically similar to that without it, the difference being that in the former, an extra ϕ probe has been introduced into the derivation in order to license a first- or second-person internal argument.

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DATA-AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The English, Spanish, and Icelandic data discussed in this article, as well as some of the Basque data, have been previously reported in the literature cited. The Basque data that were generated by the present study have been given explicitly in this article.

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