

# The current situation of Basque: from language loss to language spread

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The linguistic situation of the Basque language in the city of Bilbao (Northern Spain) is described here in terms of bilingual competence and Basque usage as well as attitudes towards the language. After a summary of the historical events that have contributed to the present state of the language, information gathered through a sociolinguistic questionnaire is presented. The data shows a small number of fluent Basque speakers (around 12% of the respondents) with a higher number in the older generations (around 20%). There is a growing number of speakers (about 50%) at the intermediate level which indicates a positive trend for the future expansion of the language. However, the actual usage of Basque is very limited, since the majority of the people who know some Basque still use Spanish in most situations. In spite of limited Basque usage, there are widespread positive attitudes towards the language. The informants show a strong attachment to it, sustained by personal and integrative reasons, and they consider Basque and Castilian equally suitable. The revitalization of Basque is still in its early stages, and the language is not spreading uniformly throughout the population.

## INTRODUCTION

All the nationalistic movements in the past two centuries have placed a great deal of emphasis in the role of the native language of the nation. This has been the case of many countries in Europe (Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, etc). Language can become the unifying factor of a community with otherwise diverse interests or even history, allowing people to identify themselves as members of a certain community, different from other surrounding communities. With the upsurge of all kinds of nationalistic movements in Europe in this century, the language question has become more of a problem: what language or languages to teach, to whom and in what areas, how and why. The results are quite diverse, even when bilingual teaching has been in effect.

It is unquestionable that language and nationalism are interrelated. Once the nationalist aspirations find a more or less appropriate channel to achieve their objective, they embark in a process to promote the national language in

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order to increase the status of the previously underconsidered or underused local language. But then, a new problem may arise, that of turning a previously symbolic element, perhaps mostly restricted to the familiar and rural environment, into a fullfledged language suitable for all communicative needs of a modern society, sometimes in opposition with another language, up to then the dominant language in the society. The question is whether this revitalization or «normalization» can be achieved and made last.

In order to study the connection between language and nationalism, and the consequences for the language spread, I am presenting an analysis of the situation of the Basque language in the Basque Country of Spain. This analysis starts with a historical introduction, explaining the development and problems faced by the language during the centuries, with a special consideration to the XIX and XX centuries. This is followed by a description of the data gathered through a sociolinguistic questionnaire distributed among 450 speakers in the city of Bilbao in January of 1987. The data attempts to describe the patterns of Basque usage, how much it is used, where and with whom, as well as why it is used, motivations to learn it and how it stands in relation to the language of the majority, Castilian Spanish.

## LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

Throughout history, Basque has remained quite an isolated language, circumscribed to a very concrete –and shrinking– geographical area. With the Romanization the size of its domain started to diminish, remaining more or less stable during the Middle Ages. During this period, several small towns were created as a consequence of a preindustrialization, which brought wealth to the new class of merchants. Basque started to be confined to the rural population, while Castilian was embraced by other sections of society, aristocracy and bourgeoisie. This tendency continued throughout the XVI to the XVIII centuries. Basque lost ground in the towns and speakers in the rural environment, since many of them migrated to the cities or to America. In the XIX century, several crucial events shaped the history of the Basque Country: the defeat suffered by the Carlistas, the massive industrialization of Bilbao and other areas in the country, and the emergence of the new Basque nationalism.

The first two events were unquestionably negative to the Basque language. The Carlistas attracted the most traditional sectors of the society, while the Liberals enjoyed the support of the urban classes, who had broken ties with their native tongue. The victory of the Liberals brought the country closer to the Castilian sphere of action and influence. On the other hand, the industrialization, attracting workers from all areas of the peninsula and creating large urban environments, contributed decisively to an increased isolation of the language, its lack of appeal among the urban inhabitants, and a general loss of the Basque culture. These factors: lack of political independence, loss of traditional values, such as language and religion, population expansion based on non-native individuals, and an increase in the economical clout of the Basque oligarchy, triggered the creation of an organized Basque nationalism.

The ideology and objectives of the Basque nationalism were laid out by

Sabino Arana. Its overall goal was to win back a state of political independence, which he assumed had been in existence in the past. The exaltation of all things Basque included the language, which became a symbol of the identity and purity of the Basque race. Basque nationalism had two effects, one, it reinvigorated the interest in the language as a fundamental (although second to race) component of the Basque identity; and two, it alienated many people from learning the language, since it was interpreted as something belonging to the ethnic Basque population, not to the immigrants nor the sectors of the society which did not embrace the principles of the nationalist movement.

Basque language remained basically isolated during the first third of the century, although there were some efforts to teach it at some schools, and some publications, some in Basque about Basque culture and some in Castilian, appeared. After the civil war, the Franco regime forbade its use and teaching. Basque remained a condemned language until almost the decade of the 60's. At that time, certain airs of liberalization made possible the creation of schools where Basque was taught, first illegally, then legally. They met with immediate success and all the pro-democracy forces assigned Basque a fundamental role in the shaping of the Basque identity. Therefore, Basque was recognized as the language of the Basque people, and it became a symbol of the needed change in the political climate, a symbol on which everybody agreed, at least to some extent.

Finally, with the death of Franco and the ensuing democratization of the Spanish political system, autonomous governments became possible. The autonomous Basque government, created in 1976, set the teaching and spread of Basque as one of its priorities. As such, Basque is now being the object of an organized attempt to «normalize» it, to make it the language of communication for all the people who live in the Autonomous Basque Community. This represents the first time in history that Basque is being promoted and actively supported.

The interest in the language has historically stemmed out of extralinguistic motivations. For the nationalists of the turn of the century, Basque was to be cultivated by the ethnic Basque inhabitants because it represented the originality and purity of the Basque identity. Later on, it was prosecuted and banned, only to be embraced as a symbol of the necessary change sought by the forces opposed to the Franco regime, and of the will of the people to identify themselves as Basque and recognize their past and future as a nation.

In this respect, the language acts a multi-faceted object. It is a tool for communication, although so far only for a minority of speakers. But its main strength lies in the fact that it also is, or can be, a factor of cohesion in a complex society, made up of people of different backgrounds and aspirations. The various sides –language for communication, for integration and unification– are interdependent, and must all be present to successfully ensure the spread of Basque to the whole society.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDY

In order to gather data about the present situation of the Basque language in an urban environment, a sociolinguistic questionnaire was devised. It was distributed to 450 informants, which produced 361 valid questionnaires.

From previous studies, such as *El libro blanco del euskera*, it has been ascertained that Basque is increasingly becoming an urban language, since most of the population in the Autonomous Basque Community lives in urban areas (defined in the census as towns of ten thousand or more inhabitants). This is interesting, because Basque had been previously regarded as the dying language of farmers and shepherds living in the backward rural communities. And now, not only is Basque becoming an urban language, but the rural communities are still experiencing a loss of euskaldunes (native Basque speakers). While in 1981, 53% of the people living in rural areas were Basque speakers, in 1986 only 44% of them fitted that category. Still, the percentage of euskaldunes is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas, although the current trend of recovery has not reached the rural zones.

The concentration of the study on an urban area responds to the fact that it is there that Basque is showing signs of gaining speakers, as well as to the fact that most people in the Autonomous Basque Community live in urban areas: 73% live in urban communities and 27% in rural communities.

The city of Bilbao and adjoining belt of industrial towns represent the largest nucleus of population in the Autonomous Basque Community, with 910,578 inhabitants in the Greater Bilbao in 1981. This represents 44% of the total population of the Autonomous Basque Community.

The city is made up of a heterogeneous population in regard to origin (native born and non-native born), language competence (some fully bilingual speakers, more semi-bilingual speakers, and a lot of only Castilian speakers), political inclinations and social groups. Basque is spreading differently in each of the groups, as can be seen studying language proficiency, language usage and language attitudes.

The questionnaire comprised three sections, as well as biographical data on the respondents. It follows the structure used by Fishman (1977). Y. Solé (1975) and J. Rubin (1968). The first section included questions on the language competence in Basque of the informant and his / her family. The second section was directed towards the usage of Basque in various domains and for specific communicative activities, to gauge the frequency of Basque and Castilian usage among bilingual (from incipient to fully bilingual) speakers. The third section focused on the function assigned to Basque, its status in comparison with Castilian, and other attitudinal responses towards the situation of Basque and its spread.

The results of the questionnaires were processed using the statistical package SPSSX. After a preliminary frequency count and crosstabulation of pertinent variables, the data was subjected to a varimax factor analysis with rotation, which yielded a four factor solution, and the resulting factors were subjected to subsequent analyses of variance.

Of the 361 respondents a little over half (56%) are under 25 years old, group which is experiencing the maximum growth in Basque learners and speakers. They are for the most part native born (85%), although the number of informants with outside born parents and grandparents is higher. The majority of the respondents has at least attended secondary school and, in fact, almost half of them (42.5%) are students.



## LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND USAGE

As far as language competence, the results show that 13% understands Basque very well and 11% speaks it very well. In the 1981 census, in the province of Vizcaya 15% could understand and speak Basque very well, percentage which rose to 18% in the 1986 census. The percentage of euskaldun speakers (Basque speakers) is typically lower in the metropolitan area of the Greater Bilbao, where the present study took place. The distribution of euskaldun speakers in the study follows quite closely that of the census.

The intermediate categories, which include people who know Basque a little or quite well, are the largest, since most respondents fit that description. About half the respondents (42%) understands a little, and 19% understands it quite well. 39% can speak it a little and 13% quite well. The literacy rates are lower, about a third can read and write Basque a little and a tenth can do it quite well. These results appear in table 1.

Table 1: Basque Competence (%)

Understand Basque	1	2	3	4
Informant	26	42	19	13
Father	69.5	12	4	14
Mother	72	11	7	10
Paternal Grandparents	73.5	3	4	19.5
Maternal Grandparents	73.5	6	4	16
Speak Basque	1	2	3	4
Informant	36.5	39	13	11
Father	76	7	4	12
Mother	77	7.5	6	10
Paternal Grandparents	74.5	3	3.5	19.5
Maternal Grandparents	75.5	4.5	3.5	16

Answer key    1 = Nothing  
                   2 = A little  
                   3 = Quite well  
                   4 = Very well

Castilian-only speakers account for another third of the population interviewed (26% understands no Basque and 36% speaks no Basque). The heavy concentration on intermediate speakers is to be expected, since 84.5% affirms to have studied Basque. In spite of that fact, the majority of the respondents who know Basque (90%) prefers to express themselves in Castilian, which remains their best language.

The analysis of the language competence of the informants' relatives, as assessed by the informants, reveals that the extent of Castilian monolingualism is higher among the older relatives, while the spread of intermediate bilingualism is lower. However, the percentage of fully euskaldun speakers has practically remained unchanged: 13% of the informants understand Basque very well, as do 12% of their parents; and 11% of respondents and parents speak it very well.

If we go one generation back, to the respondents' grandparents, the findings show three facts: first, Castilian monolingualism is as widespread

among them as it is among the respondents' parents (combining the percentages for understanding and speaking for the grandparents, 74% of the grandparents knows no Basque, and 73.5% of the parents knows no Basque); second, incipient bilingualism is very low (about 4% understands and speaks Basque a little); and third, the spread of Basque competence (the ability to use Basque very well) is higher than among the respondents or even their parents, since it includes about 18% of the grandparents (versus 12% of respondents and 11% of their parents). The biggest gap in transmission of Basque in the family has occurred from the grandparents generation to the informants' parents generation. Reversely, the biggest gain in the spread of Basque is appreciated going from the older to the younger generation.

The crosstabulation of the level of Basque knowledge of the three generational groups proves conclusively the relationship between the level of Basque of the respondents and their relatives. This relationship is significant in every case, particularly between parents and children.

The study of the language competence of this sample, points at a previous process of language loss which has been arrested, as the stability of the highest level of Basque competence among informants and their parents show, and a new strength for the recovery of Basque, reflected in the increasing number of semi-bilinguals.

After analyzing the level of Basque knowledge in the sample, the level of Basque usage will be studied. Data on this aspect was obtained through 24 questions about usage habits in a series of contexts and with different interlocutors. The following table (table 2) offers the results.

Table 2: Basque Usage in the Family (%)

	1	2	3	4	5
Father to informant	81	6	3	2	8
Informant to father	81	6	3	3	8
Mother to informant	81	6	3	3	8
Informant to mother	80	6	3	3	8
Siblings to informant	60	20	10	5	5
Informant to siblings	60	19	11	5	6
Parents with each other	82	6	2	2	8
Parents gr.parents to informant	84	3	3	0	10
Informant to paternal gr.parents	83	3.5	4	1	9
Maternal gr.parents to informant	81	8	3	0	8
Informant to maternal gr.parents	83	6.5	2	1	8
Informant to spouse	67	14	9	2	8
Informant to children	23	5	27	18	27

Answer key  
 1 = Always Castilian  
 2 = Almost always Castilian  
 3 = Half Castilian, half Basque  
 4 = Almost always Basque  
 5 = Always Basque

It is clearly evident that Castilian is the most used language, since, out of the 24 situations presented, 18 take place exclusively in Castilian for, at least, 60% of the informants who knows some Basque.

Within the family, most interactions occur always in Castilian. 80% uses only Castilian with their parents, as well as with their grandparents, and 60% uses only Castilian with siblings and mate (spouse, girlfriend, boyfriend). The percentages of Basque-only users account for only between 8% and 10%. The intermediate categories offer very small numbers, except for three cases: between siblings, with the spouse, and with their children. Between siblings, about 20% uses mostly Castilian (hence, a little Basque) and 11% uses each language about half of the time. Only 5% uses Basque almost always. With the spouse, 14% uses mostly Castilian, 9% uses both languages. With their children, the results are completely different: 23% says they use now, or would use when they have children, only Castilian, 27% uses or would use both languages equally, 18% uses or would use mostly Basque and 27% uses or would use exclusively Basque. These figures are so in opposition with the rest of the percentages of Basque usage in the family, that they must be interpreted as depicting a future situation, what the informants would like to do when they have children. They indicate a desire for an increase in the use of Basque, on the one hand, while less than a third maintains loyalty to Castilian to the exclusion of Basque. In fact, three tendencies are represented: exclusive Basque maintenance (45%), exclusive Castilian maintenance (28%), and coordinate bilingualism (27%).

The crosstabulation of the variables representing Basque usage in the family attests to the stability of both languages in their environment. The reciprocity of language usage is very high; those who come from families who know Basque, use it, and those who come from families who do not know Basque, use Castilian. The highest use of Basque is among siblings, where the tendency is towards increased inclusion of Basque.

Outside the home, the situation is quite similar. In the street, at school, at work, most speakers use only Castilian, although there is certainly an increase in the number of people who use Basque to some extent, as can be seen in table 3.

Table 3: Basque Usage Outside the Family (%)

	1	2	3	4	5
With older neighbors	75.5	12	5.5	2	4
With same age neighbors	69	19	7	3	2
With colleagues	61	13	10	1	14.5
With friends	53	23	15	6.5	2
With classmates	48	15	18	9	11
In public meetings	70.5	12	7	3	7
In church	53	18	17	6	6
To order drinks in Bilbao	51	30	14.5	3	2
To order drinks in rural areas	33.5	26	9	13	18

Answer key      See page 8

There are more people using some Basque in their social life than in their family life, and the more informal and less linguistically demanding the interaction, the more Basque is used, as is the case in bars and church.

Another important factor that determines how much Basque is present in the conversation is given by the age of the participants. People in the same

age group (neighbors, friends, classmates, colleagues) tend to use some Basque with each other, although definitely not to the exclusion of Castilian.

From the description of the patterns of Basque usage, a few crucial factors for the spread of the language emerge. In the positive side, the rise in the number of semi-bilinguals, even in families where Castilian has traditionally been the dominant language, can lead to widespread use of Basque. Of these semi-bilinguals, 68% are confident they will be able to express themselves well in Basque in the future. It is also encouraging the fact that Basque is making some headway in certain contexts with certain speakers, such as members of the same age group, be it siblings, neighbors, friends or classmates.

It must be noted that the choice of language is not a problem for most people. When asked if they felt uncomfortable for using Castilian instead of Basque 62% answered they did not. On the other hand, when asked if they felt uncomfortable for not knowing Basque 58% affirm they did. Obviously, they would like to know Basque, but, at the same time, there is no pressure against Castilian, which remains the main language for communication in Bilbao.

Since there are so many levels of Basque competence among the population, it is not always possible for those who know a little or a lot of Basque to use it, because their listeners may not know as much or they may each be at a different stage of knowledge. When Basque is expected, such as in bars in heavily bascophone areas, the percentage of speakers using Basque is higher. The more Basque is used, the more it will become a force in making other people use it. Continued pressure from Basque speakers is necessary in order to achieve widespread use of Basque.

The introduction of Basque in society (or re-introduction in some cases) is in its first phase. The reality is that about a 10% uses only Basque in the family, presumably those who come from Basque speaking families, and even less than 10% uses it outside the family, except in the few contexts that we have just seen. For speakers who come from monolingual Castilian families, the opportunities to use Basque derive from social interaction with their peers.

## LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Language attitudes cover a series of diverse elements that measures the degree of agreement or disagreement towards Basque usage, the prestige it conveys, its functions, the level of identification with or indifference towards Basque, the level of support or rejection for its promotion. At this critical point for the language, the analysis of the language attitudes will provide an instrument to evaluate the direction of the spread of Basque. It will also reveal the tensions that the spread of Basque is creating.

The main objective of the process to spread Basque is to achieve its «normalization», defined by Ninyoles (1975) as a linguistic and social process with a double purpose: to create norms or rules of usage, and to restore

to normalcy a culture and a language. In the process that will lead to the normalization of Basque, Castilian speakers will learn it in order to integrate with the Basque speaking community. Therefore, the first part of the language attitudes is made up of a study of the motivations to learn Basque.

The reasons why Basque is being learned are basically two-fold: for integration in the community and for personal and cultural improvement. These two reasons are deemed important by three fourths of the respondents, about 70%. Instrumental reasons are important for 55% of the respondents. Table 4 shows the percentages for each motivation.

**Table 4: The Functions of Basque (%)**

	Important	Not important
To improve my education	13	87
To integrate better in the community	22	78
To maintain the Basque identity	23	77
For personal satisfaction	23	77
To maintain cultural traditions	24	76
To communicate with more people	28	72
To achieve a stronger Basque identity	32.5	67.5
To read or watch TV for entertainment	37	63
To find a job	41	59
To get more points in a public examn for a job	45	55
To improve my job situation	49	51
To achieve greater intimacy with Basque speaking friends	53	47

Basque seems to serve several functions for the population: integrative, personal, and, to a lesser degree, instrumental. It is important to note this diversity, which signifies that Basque, as a healthy language, can realize all the necessary functions of a working language. It is not just perceived as a symbol of a certain identity nor an instrument to attain specific objectives.

Another element of the language attitudes refers to the level of preference or rejection towards Basque. This fact reflects the prestige associated with each language. In order to elicit information on this aspect, the informants were presented a list of activities and asked what language (Basque, Castilian or both) they thought was more appropriate. Table 5 shows the results of this question.

**Table 5: Language Preference (%)**

What language is more appropriate for these activities

	Both	Basque	Castilian
Pop music	74	10	16
Literature and media	74	10	16
Advertising	74	9	17
Internal political activities	71	16	13
Religious activities	69.5	8	23
Teaching in high school	67	17	16
Addressing children	64.5	26	9.5
Teaching at the university	63	12	25

	Both	Basque	Castilian
Greeting friends in the street	61	24	15
Shopping	60	16.5	23.5
Telling jokes	60	11	29
Documents of the Basque Government	57.5	35	7.5
Relations between the Basque Government and local authorities	56	38	6
Research	47	4	49
Folk music	39	56	5
Relations between the Basque Government and Madrid	34	3	63

Most informants consider both languages equally appropriate in practically every situation, since at least 56% chooses both languages for 13 of the 16 contexts offered. The dominant tendency is to accept the two languages. In certain activities, Castilian is second choice to both languages, such as telling jokes (29% are in favor of Castilian, 11% in favor of Basque), teaching at the university (25% are in favor of Castilian, 12% in favor of Basque), shopping (23.5% are in favor of Castilian, 16.5% in favor of Basque). For other activities, Basque is the second choice, such as talking to children (26% are in favor of Basque, 9.5% in favor of Castilian), greeting friends (24% are in favor of Basque, 15% in favor of Castilian), teaching in high school (17% are in favor of Basque, 16% in favor of Castilian).

There is only one case where most informants (52%) prefer Basque, and it is for folk music; other contexts where Basque is favored over Castilian include the relations between the Basque Government and the local authorities (38% are in favor of Basque, 6% in favor of Castilian), and writing the official documents of the Basque Government (35% are in favor of Basque, 7.5% in favor of Castilian). Conversely, there are two cases for which Castilian is deemed more suitable: for the relations between the Basque Government and the Madrid Government (63% are in favor of Castilian, 34% in favor of both, and 3% in favor of Basque), and for research (49% are in favor of Castilian, 47% in favor of both, 4% in favor of Basque).

The percentages supporting both languages indicate an equal acceptance of Basque and Castilian for all purposes. Together with such generalized approval, the distribution of the preference for each language in the few cases where one of the two is preferred over the two of them, points at a slight tendency to reserve Castilian for public activities whose context may exceed the limits of the Basque Community; on the other hand, Basque is as reserved for internal activities whose participants are members of the community. In spite of this differentiation, the most relevant finding is the equal status of Basque in a mostly Castilian-speaking society. Basque is as good and suitable as Castilian, and this positive attitude appears even though we know that only between a 10% and a 20% of the respondents uses it regularly. Those who do not use it also share the view that Basque is not an inferior language. The results also manifest a degree of loyalty to Castilian, since it is considered suitable in so many of the situations presented. Both coexist, one (Castilian) as the dominant language in terms of speakers and frequency of usage; and the other (Basque) as the minority language which has shed off the lack of prestige found in other minority languages, without having yet developed patterns of usage nor a preference for it instead of Castilian.



The attitudinal variables were also subjected to a varimax factor analysis with rotation, which yielded a four factor solution; subsequent analyses of variances were executed on each of the four factors (with the procedure called Manova), and they were followed by a secondary analysis (done with Oneway) to find out the groups with differential behavior in each factor.

The factor analysis and subsequent analyses of variance show a population divided in terms of the attitudes manifested towards Basque.

Four factors were identified in the factor analysis (see table 6):

1. preference for using Basque over Spanish.
2. varied function of Basque.
3. support for the spread of Basque.
4. instrumental function of Basque.

**Table 6: High Loading Items on Factors**

F 1: Both languages are appropriate for internal activities

Loading	Text
.72	For shopping
.71	For advertising
.68	For literature and media
.68	For greeting friends
.64	For internal political activities
.63	For telling jokes
.59	For teaching in high school
.58	For pop music
.55	For the relations between the Basque Government and local authorities
.54	For documents of the Basque Government

F 2: Active support for the promotion of Basque

Loading	Text
.67	It is better to learn Basque than English
.65	It is necessary for all to know Basque even though we all know Castilian
.59	It is uncomfortable to use Castilian
.56	Basque should be used in school to teach certain subjects
.53	The government must support economically the spread of Basque

F 3: Basque learned / used for integrative, personal and communicative reasons

Loading	Text
.69	To achieve greater intimacy with Basque speaking friends
.67	To keep our own cultural traditions
.65	To be more like the people here
.64	To communicate with more people
.63	To maintain Basque identity
.61	To increase historical identity
.61	For personal satisfaction
.59	To read or watch TV for entertainment

F 4: Basque learned / used for instrumental-laboral reasons

Loading	Text
.88	To get a job
.87	To obtain more points in an exam (to get a job)
.86	To improve my position

The first factor represents the level of support for the exclusive use of Basque over Castilian. The second factor includes all the functions of Basque, integrative, personal and communicative, except the instrumental-laboral, which is the fourth factor. The third factor represents the positive attitudes towards Basque, including its teaching at school and its promotion by the government. The analyses of variance show that Basque does not accomplish the same function for everybody and is not equally supported by every group.

In the first three factors, the group the most attached to the Basque community obtains significantly higher values than the group the least attached. The first group is formed by those born in the Autonomous Basque Community, as opposed to those born outside the Autonomous Basque Community; those who are born in families where the parents or grandparents are born in the Basque Community; those who claim Basque as their nationality both in Spain as well as abroad, as opposed to those who would declare themselves to be Spaniards or from Bilbao or Vizcaya; those who use Basque the most, understand it and speak it the best. On the other hand, the fourth factor shows a reversal of the group obtaining the highest values. Now it is the group born outside the Basque Community, who would say they are Spaniards, whose language is Castilian, who never uses Basque and does not speak it nor understand it, showing the highest significant values.

These results prove that the process of revitalizing Basque is not receiving an homogeneous support from all the population. The group with the least links and roots in the Basque Community accepts it only in as much as it is being presented to them as a necessary requirement to finding employment and not for its integrative or personal values. Another group who supports Basque as a mere instrument to finding work or improve their position is made up of the young students (under 25). This is quite revealing since most of the people learning Basque at the present time are in that age group. If they are not learning Basque because it is a fundamental part of their identity but only because it is useful at this point, then there is little chance that Basque will become for them the language for communication and integration.

There is a certain level of conflict in the attitudes manifested towards Basque. It is true that practically everyone supports the spread of Basque (96%), considers it important that everybody knows it (89%) and thinks that it should be mandatory at school (which it is) (63%). Nonetheless, the results from other questions indicate that people respect Castilian and feel cautious as to how Basque should be promoted. Thus, 51% considers that language planning in favor of Basque has been discriminatory. This is a measure of a certain discontent among the population with how Basque is being implemented.

Another important element is linked to the integrative value of Basque. Integration in the community is one of the main reasons cited for learning Basque. But, when asked if it was possible to be Basque without knowing Basque, 82% admitted it was possible; 12% disagreed and 6% had no opinion. In other words, the language is not the defining element of the Basque identity. This result has already been noted in previous studies, such as the one by Gunter, Sani and Shabad in 1985 and Del Campo in 1977. It

emerges from this survey that the decisive criteria to be considered Basque is place of birth. It has to be remembered that many people who live now in Bilbao come originally from different regions of Spain, if not they themselves, at least their parents or their grandparents. Since most people do not know Basque sufficiently well and have little chance to use it, then obviously it would be counterproductive for them to equate being Basque with knowing Basque.

Basque is then a special identity symbol and its role as such is not assumed by everybody. It is also necessary to realize that Basque acquired importance as a cultural and national Basque symbol through its association with the nationalist movement at the end of the XIX century. It was an exclusive nationalism in that it was not trying to integrate Basque people and non-Basque people (arrived during the industrialization of Bilbao) but, rather, it was trying to protect Basque people and their values from the perceived threat of the immigrants as well as trying to recover a level of political and economical independence or, at least, autonomy. These goals caused the movement to be restricted to and accepted by mainly the middle class of Basque origin, leaving out the immigrants, Basque people of different political aspirations, and non-religious people (Basque nationalism was deeply religious). Therefore, the language itself was not an object of interest for the non-natives and other groups of the society, including many Basque people for whom their language was a mark of a rural life style. Although now Basque is not considered an inferior language, it is still not equally accepted by the native-born as by the non-native-born section of the society.

Another figure that reveals the special situation of Basque is how people answer the question of what language they would rather learn, Basque or English. 50% answers Basque and 37% chooses English, with a 14% who expresses no opinion. 89% agrees that it is important to learn Basque, but then more than a third prefers to know a foreign language rather than Basque. The reasons for preferring English over Basque are that English is more useful for their professional lives and that English is a more universal language. Also, there is a high percentage of people (66%) who says that Spanish instead of Basque should be used whenever there are people who do not understand Basque –situation which is going to happen most of the time.

## CONCLUSIONS

The information gathered here shows a measure of the widespread support for Basque, attitude which is accompanied by loyalty to Castilian, as has been seen studying the preference for Basque, Castilian, or both in a series of activities.

Basque has not yet found a context or set of contexts where its use is expected and common in the city of Bilbao. This leads us to the question of bilingualism and diglossia. It is not possible to characterize in a uniform manner all of the Basque Community, due to the variety of linguistic situations offered. In the city of Bilbao, in specific, with a predominant Castilian monolingual population and a growing number of bilinguals, there is bilingualism to some extent and not always accompanied by diglossia.

Diglossia is perceived by some people as something to be avoided, because it would in fact perpetuate the existence of Castilian and the objective of the current language planning is to obtain a population of active speakers of Basque and passive speakers of Castilian.

There is not a clear cut distinction on when each language is appropriate, and from the language usage survey, it is clear that Basque is certainly not adscribed to any particular realm of interaction or type of speakers. Castilian is dominant in practically every context, and it is considered suitable in every context too. The only exception to this is that native Basque speakers use Basque at home and non-native speakers hardly ever use it at home. Outside the home, it is difficult to predict how often Basque will be used: it depends on how much Basque each person knows, age of speakers, and how demanding the interaction itself is.

In spite of scarce use, Basque has a definite prestige, as is reflected in the highly positive attitudes towards it. It has lost its old association with the rural world and it is considered as acceptable as Castilian in most cases by most people. It is not an inferior language.

The linguistic situation could not be farther from being stable. The incorporation of Basque to the linguistic register of a lot of people is making it possible, at least in theory, to use it more frequently, although it must compete with Castilian in every situation. If there is diglossia, it is only among the native *euskaldunes* who always speak Basque at home and hardly ever outside the home. For the new speakers of the language, there is little bilingualism in the first place, but even then Basque is highly regarded.

It is difficult to say that there is diglossia in Bilbao, at least, generalized. Some people have mentioned the possibility of ending up with an «elitist diglossia», where only a privileged minority will know Basque, such as the educated, people working for the government or in the public service. This can no doubt be a danger if Basque is used as an instrument to control social and professional improvement. This phenomenon (elitist diglossia) can become true in part because Basque is being primarily acquired through formal schooling, and it is more emphasized for white collar-type of positions. This benefits more the middle class student used to taking exams and so on. Also, since a lot of white collar jobs are increasingly requiring or at least rewarding new candidates for knowing Basque, they try and learn it (not necessarily use it). Not so for the typical industrial jobs in factories and other blue collar positions, where workers are not required to know Basque. This is something to take into account in future research.

The goal of the campaign to «normalize» Basque, or spread it to the total population of the Basque Community, remains still unreached, and it is not certain that it will be achieved. Not all of the social groups are embracing Basque and its role in society similarly. The transition between language loss to language spread is certainly taking place in the Basque Community, and so far it has proven to be more advanced in the urban areas than in the rural communities (which still remain more *bascophone*). Due to the implantation of Basque in school, most of the school-age population is learning Basque and the number of Basque learners decreases as the age increases. The exclusive use of Basque is restricted to very few contexts for very few speakers, although there is a more frequent occasional use of Basque.

The transition is also marked by a certain level of conflict. First, because

there are two segments of the population separated by the role assigned to Basque. And, second, because even for those who support Basque and assign it integrative and personal functions, the positive attitudes manifested are not always accompanied by a real usage of the language. How these conflicts are resolved will determine the success of the campaign to spread Basque. And the success is not purely due to linguistic reasons (how many people know it) but also to political reasons. The language has to continue to be supported and promoted not only as a necessity to get a job, but also so that everyone can become a full member of the community.

The case of Basque illustrates the dangers and difficulties of revitalizing a minority language in an industrial and heterogeneous society. Its survival is linked to the groups who identify themselves the most as Basque. However, its ultimate success as a language for communication and factor of cohesion depends on the acceptance by all the sectors of the society of the process to spread Basque. This process must be accompanied by the promotion of all the cultural manifestations peculiar to the Basque Community, so the members must accept not just the language but also the values and history represented by it. In this manner it will be possible to finish with the past subordination of Basque to Castilian, and with the consequences of an isolationist nationalism.

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## LABURPENA

Lan honetan Bilbo hiriaren hizkuntz egoera azaltzen da, euskararen ezagupen eta erabilpen maila, hala nola bertakoek hiz-

kuntzarekiko dituzten jarrerak aztertuz. Hizkuntzaren eboluzioan eraginik handiena izan duten arazo historikoak laburki aipatu ondoren, datu batzuk aurkeztuko dira, galdesorta soziolinguistiko baten bidez bilduak. Datu hauek haxe erakusten digute: hiztun kopuru txiki bat badela euskaraz ongi mintzatzen dena (inkesta egin dutenen % 12a gutxi gora behera), eta kopuru hori haunditzen dela adineko jendearen artean (% 20a gutxi gora behera). Gaitasun erdiko euskal hiztunak gero eta gehiago dira (% 50a), eta hau joera positiboa da etorkizunari begira. Hala eta guztiz ere, oso gutxi erabiltzen da euskara, pixka bat dakitenek gaztelania erabiltzen bait dute ia beti. Hori ez da oztopoa euskararekiko hezkuntz jarrerak oso positiboak izan daitezen. Informatzaileak, arrazoi pertsonal eta integratzaileak tartean direla, euskararen alde agertzen dira, eta berdin onartzen dituzte euskara ete gaztelania. Euskararen berpizkundera hasberria da eta ez da populazio osoan hedadura berdina izaten ari.

## RESUMEN

En este trabajo se describe la situación lingüística en la ciudad de Bilbao, analizando tanto el nivel de conocimiento y uso del euskera como las actitudes lingüísticas por parte de la población. Después de un breve resumen de los factores históricos más decisivos en la evolución de la lengua, se presentan los datos recogidos a través de un cuestionario sociolingüístico. Estos datos muestran que hay un pequeño número de hablantes que hablan bien euskera (en torno al 12% de los encuestados), número que aumenta entre las personas de mayor edad (en torno al 20%). Hay un número creciente de hablantes con capacidad intermedia en euskera (un 50%), lo cual representa una tendencia positiva de cara al futuro. Sin embargo, el uso real del euskera es mínimo, ya que la mayoría de las personas que saben algo de euskera usan el castellano en casi todas las situaciones. Ello no obsta para que las actitudes lingüísticas hacia el euskera sean altamente positivas. Los informantes indican un fuerte nivel de apoyo al euskera, mantenido en base a razones de tipo personal e integrativo, y aceptan por igual al euskera y al castellano. La revitalización del euskera está en un estado inicial y no se está extendiendo de manera uniforme por toda la población.

## RESUME

Cet article décrit la situation linguistique de la ville de Bilbao, analysant tant le niveau de connaissances et l'emploi du basque que les attitudes linguistiques de la population. Après un bref résumé des facteurs historiques les plus décisifs pour l'évolution de la langue, on présente les données recueillies à



travers une enquête sociolinguistique. Ces données montrent qu'il y a un petit nombre de personnes parlant bien le basque (environ 12% des personnes interrogées), pourcentage qui augmente chez les personnes les plus âgées (environ 20%). Il y a un nombre croissant de personnes parlant le basque avec une capacité intermédiaire (50%), ce qui représente une tendance positive pour l'avenir. Cependant l'emploi réel du basque est très limité, étant donné que la plupart des gens qui ont quelques connaissances de basque utilisent l'espagnol dans presque toutes les situations. Ce qui n'empêche pas que les attitudes linguistiques envers le basque soient très positives. Les informateurs indiquent un haut degré d'appui du basque, maintenu pour des raisons d'ordre personnel et d'intégration, et ils acceptent tout autant le basque que l'espagnol. La revitalisation du basque se trouve à un stade initial et ne se répand pas de façon uniforme dans l'ensemble de la population.

