

**L. L. BONAPARTEREN ERAKUSKETA: BONAPARTE,  
FORERUNNER OF MODERN DIALECTOLOGY**

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

After having had the chance to listen to the President of the Royal Academy of the Basque Language, Prof. J. Haritxelar, and Jose A. Arana's amusing dissertation —although it was given in Basque, I think that listening to these Basque popular songs was really fun for all of us—, I would now like to return to the normal mode of presentation in official proceedings.

The late prof. Koldo Mitxelena, who was a prominent Basque linguist and, as many people noted, one of the most important intellectuals born in the Basque Country, claimed in a paper published in 1976 that dialectology and studies about dialectology in general are as old as the history of humanity itself or, at least, as old as the written evidence we have about our own history. However, among all the authors who wrote onto this subject, he added in the same article, there is no doubt that some few researchers, —and Bonaparte, with his different maps on Basque or English dialects must be included in this small group—, take a different and more scientific perspective on dialectology.

Those few linguists who began to research the language “in situ”, interviewing the speakers of different dialects, dismantled one of the basic claims that backed the prehistory of dialectology, namely, that in a given domain it is possible to group and separate clearly the dialects, subdialects or talk-varieties. We know now that divisions among dialects are not clear-cut and that we have to take into account the specific boundaries affecting different levels of language. Moreover, very often we are forced to conclude that the linking line between two given dialects breaks down in verb morphology, for instance, but not, let's say,

in the lexicon or in phonetics or even in noun phrase morphology. This new way of facing linguistic problems has made it possible to progress a lot in the development of research and inquiry, even though I don't think that the theoretical foundations of dialectology have actually changed since the 19th century. Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte, and this is a very good example, established the main division among Basque dialects a hundred years ago, and the same division, with slight changes, still holds and leads the studies of Basque scholars concerning dialectology.

Louis Lucien Bonaparte was born in Thorngrove (England) on the 4th January, 1813. His father was the brother of Napoleon the 1st and the fact that he was born in this land was just a matter of chance. We know that his parents were put under arrest while they were traveling and running away from Civita-Vecchia to the United States of America. So, he was born English because the family was in exile. However, to the time he began to study Basque, 40 years later, he was already back again in England.

Bonaparte married first Ana Cecchi, in 1832, but the marriage broke down in 1850, even though they didn't decide to revoke the legal union until the last months of Bonaparte's life a hundred years ago now, in 1891. During this time he lived with Clémence Richard, whom he married that year, following the death of his first wife. The relationship between Clémence Richard and Bonaparte was not based only on their marriage, but on the fact that they had common commitments regarding Basque: she could give a lot of help to the Prince, since she was very closely connected with Basque families and had a good command of the language. The Prince is buried in the Catholic Cemetery of St. Mary, very near the place where they lived for 40 years.

We know that Bonaparte did not begin to study linguistics or philology in his first student years. In fact, he took his degree in Chemistry and published several papers and research-studies about subjects related to the "hard" sciences: the atom, mineralogy, etc. But he became interested in linguistics about 1839, when he was actively involved in politics. Ten years later he was publishing his first piece of research: "Specimen lexicum comparativum omnium linguarum europearum".

During the Second Empire, he received the title of Prince and was assigned 130.000 francs a year. Moreover, after having received several official prizes of different types, he had the benefit of 600.000 francs from an inheritance, when he was 75 years old. These special economic circumstances allowed him to devote his life to the study of different languages and dialects, to maintain several violent public arguments with other linguists like Van Eys and Vinson and to patronise important and restricted publications about the studies he was carrying out on all these

languages. For the same reason, he was able to collect a lot of books and manuscripts in his private library. The researchers estimate that there were more than 25.000 books in his house when he died. These books were first catalogued and, some years later, put on sale by Bonaparte's widow. It seems that during these years almost 10.000 books disappeared for different reasons, before the library was bought by the Newberry Library of Chicago in the first year of this century. The price was in fact very high: \$21.000. It is worth noting that in the library there were a lot of booklets written by Bonaparte himself: according to the Catalogue elaborated by Victor Collins in 1902, 31 % of these specific works were devoted to the Basque language, 22 % to Italian, almost 20 % to English, and the rest to several other languages.

The manuscripts were working-papers, systematic translations of parts and chapters of the Bible, written sometimes by Bonaparte and usually by his local assistants, native speakers of the languages and dialects or subdialects he was studying. Many of the manuscripts were sent spontaneously by other people also. In one of his trips to London, R. M. de Azkue, who was one of the founders, and the first president, of the Basque Academy of the Language / Euskaltzaindia, noticed at once the importance of these manuscripts that were on sale too but hadn't been acquired by the Newberry Library. He canvassed for help from the Spanish ambassador in London and the presidents of the local Basque governments, as well as from the Basque deputies and other politically influential people. Finally, Azkue's suggestions were accepted and, on payment of £ 350, the manuscripts came to the Basque Country, where they can now be consulted and studied by researchers, in 1904. Carlos Gonzalez Echegaray and Jose A. Arana Martija published a detailed and general Catalogue of Bonaparte's manuscripts and publications last year.

Anybody who has attempted to study Basque dialectology knows that the guiding lines of this subject were established by Bonaparte, as I said at the beginning of my talk. Between 1856 and 1869, Bonaparte went to the Basque Country five times, spending 9 months in all. The activity of the Prince during these months was highly impressive and revealing of his personal involvement with problems concerning Basque: on his first trip he was able to connect with most of the sources who were to be part of this peculiar group of researchers and collaborators for the rest of his life; he had put into print, and published, two books, and two others were left prepared; he also took a very important collection of manuscripts and books from the village of Zarautz and sent them to London, etc. After this first journey, many of his collaborators and assistants, Abbadie, Duvoisin, Intxauspe, Uriarte, Etxenike and others, began to work, translating texts following Bonaparte's indications, finding new collaborators, etc. I would like to mention something else: before he

went back to Bayonne, just one year later, he had already published in London six more books, among them the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Gipuzcoan, Biscayan and other dialects. It is not easy to understand how, and how well, Bonaparte was able to learn Basque and argue with native speakers about the smallest details concerning different dialects. It gives us a very good idea of the Prince's remarkable activity.

But let me turn for a moment to some other aspects of Bonaparte's research that might be more unfamiliar. In particular, it is not very well known that the Prince was concerned with other languages too, even though he did not study any other language as carefully as he did Basque. His ability to classify languages and dialects won him a great reputation. On the contrary, his reliance on the fact that a particular language can be studied only if the researcher knows the language very well, brought him a lot of sometimes unpleasant discussions with prominent linguists: I would like to remind you here of the different scientific positions regarding Basque studies and researchers adopted by Van Eys and Vinson, who, unlike Bonaparte, had no confidence in Basque Grammarians.

The list of vowels and consonants, and the identification of European vowels, with examples, given by Bonaparte impressed Alexander J. Ellis, as he recognized in his "Early English Pronunciation". I'm quoting him: "The Prince [...] as the outcome of his phonetic studies pursued during many years, with unprecedented facilities for hearing varieties of pronunciation, drew up a schema of vowel and consonant classification. [...]. At my request [...] he verified his appreciation by giving in each language a word containing that vowel-sound, together with its meaning, serving to identify it. He has thus constructed the most extensive series of key-words ever attempted, and has furnished a means or arriving between comparatively narrow limits at the meaning of the palaeotypic symbols".

If we look at the list mentioned by Ellis, we will find that Bonaparte is constructing his own model and system using data from 45 different European languages. It is worth noting that the first language included there is precisely Basque, where Bonaparte finds 13 vowels, in fact allomorphs of the basic five vowels. Years and years later, with our modern systems of electronic analysis that make it possible to establish precisely the exact measures of the formants of human speech, we can conclude that Bonaparte was basically right when he decided that in Basque, the "a" in "ahalke", for instance, is different from the "a" in "ura" or that "e" in "begi" is not the same as "e" in "mehe". Bonaparte analyses there the vowels of Finnish, Estonian, Livonian (extinct dialect of Salis, still spoken at the beginning of the 19th century, as he notes),

Lap (a dialect from Finmark), Permian, Votjak, Tsheremissian (a dialect of the right bank of the Volga), Hungarian, Ostiac (a dialect of Surgut) and many others up to 45, and classified all of them in two main classes: Class I, of Basque stem and Altaic Stem, and Class II, of Indo-germanic stem and Semitic Stem. Each stem is also classified according to the different linguistic families.

Bonaparte's broad and vast work was astonishing. Jose A. Arana has been studying for the last few months the manuscripts and the books published by the Prince, just in order to present them in a pedagogic way for future researchers. I would like to pick up here some of them, only a few of them, to give you an idea of the type of work that Bonaparte managed to do. I shall not mention here the almost 200 works that he himself wrote, ranging from that part of the Bible translated into 72 different versions of European languages to the many observations about the pronunciation of different dialects of Italian or the analysis of the pronunciation of Portuguese, Spanish from Asturias and Castile, etc. There are papers comparing Basque to the Finnish languages and morphological classifications of European languages. It is possible to find observations about the lexicon Cornu-Britannicum or interesting remarks on Basque, Scandinavian and Uralic names for "Saturday", as well as the list of the languages and dialects belonging to Basque, Uralic, and Aryan families in Europe. A close observation of the manuscripts will show us a paper entitled "Albanian, modern Greek, Gallo-Italic, Provençal, and Illyrian still in use (1889) as linguistic islands in the Neapolitan and Sicilian provinces of Italy". But, as I have already said, it is not my intention to speak about them here.

The same as in the Basque Country, Bonaparte had different collaborators in other parts of Europe. In research about Italian, for example, Federico Abis was one of them. He sent different translations to the Prince: "Il Vangelo di S. Mateo, volgarizzato in dialetto sardo cagliaritano" and four other translations, published here, in London, around 1860. Luigi Scalia translated several texts into Sicilian dialect and Giovanni Spano worked with at least 12 large texts, published in London as well. Lucien Adam helped Bonaparte in the study of Uralo-Altaic languages. The Finnish philologist August Ahlquist published studies in Vogul and Votjak and dialects from Northern Russia and Siberia. Henry Baird, William Barnes and Daines Barrington translated into Devonshire, Western, Dorset and Cornish English Dialects several parts of the Bible. Others did the same with more dialects. Thomas Spencer Baynes, under whose direction the ninth edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* was published, used to be a qualified assistant to Bonaparte: he carried out work in the pronunciation of the Somersetshire Dialect, including also several other dialects.

Irish also was studied by Bonaparte: B. Bedell translated the Song of Solomon into the living Irish dialect, as the title says. Gonçalvez Vianna helped Bonaparte with his essay on the Phonetics and Phonology of Portuguese, in the same way as Halbertsna helped with Neo-Frisian dialects. George Henderson translated the Gospel of St. Matthew into "lowland Scotch". In these manuscripts it is possible to read the days of the week in Asiatic and African Languages next to the Gospel of St. Matthew in "dialetto piemontese" or the song of Solomon in Russian, which was printed in Russian characters. J. Seivert translated the same text into dialects from Transylvania.

Well; I am finishing now. The purpose of this short talk was to give you a general overview of Bonaparte's huge task and to focus on some of the work that he carried out. He did his job with enthusiasm and pleasure. He worked not only in Basque but, as we have seen, in any language he had knowledge of. A hundred years later, the Royal Academy of the Basque Language / Euskaltzaindia, along with the British Museum, is trying this afternoon to pay him back, through this official act, a small part of the huge debt we owe to him. It was very kind of you to attend this lecture. Thank you very much.