

In memory of R. L. Trask

The status of Basque: situation and prospects

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1. Introductory remarks

Today's talk is in memory of Larry Trask. I met him but once in informal circumstances. I have since read some of his work and am impressed by his vigorous writing and knowledgeable argument. As I am frequently asked about the origins of Basque, a topic I know next to nothing of, it seems fitting that I should pre-empt any questions on that score by steering people towards Larry's work¹. However, 'the real mystery of Basque is not its origin, but its survival'², a quote which points towards my topic for today: what is the present situation of the Basque language and to what do we owe the continuing survival of Basque in the face of difficulties which have turned out to be insurmountable for many other, even more powerful, languages?³

Before examining the topic in detail, two introductory notes are in order: a brief geography lesson and a cautionary note on numerical and academic detail. First, the geography lesson: the Basque Country for today's purposes is defined as the area covered by the seven traditional provinces of the Basque Country⁴ and situated in the far south-eastern corner of the Bay of Biscay: the provinces are Araba, Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Lower (or French) Navarre, Lapurdi, (Upper or Spanish) Navarre and Zuberoa. As far as its present-day administration is concerned, we need to distinguish just two borders: the international border dividing the French (or northern) Basque Country from the Spanish part on the one hand and the regional border within the latter separating the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) to the west from Navarre in the east⁵. Secondly, a word about numerical and academic detail: the present-day situation of

¹ A good place to start is Trask 1995; further detail is available in Trask 1997: 358-429.

² Remark attributed to the prime Basque linguist Mitxelena, but which I have been unable to source.

³ Latin, a language which had a major impact on Basque, is a case in point.

⁴ Just what constitutes the Basque Country is a vexed topic, with definitions varying over time, by language and even by political viewpoint. By way of example but far from being a complete elucidation of the subject, it should be pointed out that *le Pays Basque* usually refers only to the provinces in France, *el País Vasco* in Spanish and Euskadi in both Basque and Spanish can refer to either the BAC on its own or to the totality I refer to above. The traditional Basque expression *Euskal Herria* in its various spellings can in addition to referring to the totality mentioned above also refer to the Basque speech community. This is not the place to discuss the topic further: suffice it to say that for today's purposes we are talking about the broadest area referred to by present-day nomenclature. Geoff West sensibly tries to avoid the terminological problem altogether by referring to this broadest area as the Basque Region (West 1998). As for the seven provinces, note that I have used the Basque names where no English version was at hand.

Basque is increasingly the object of analysis, accompanied by all the paraphernalia of modern academic work. To avoid getting bogged down in absolute numbers and precise percentages, I have on the whole relegated them (and other technical detail, including many references for further reading) to the footnotes, on the grounds that what we are aiming at is an overview of the wood, rather than the detail of each and every tree.

On to today's topic: the sociolinguistic situation and prospects of Basque. By situation I mean 'sociolinguistic situation of the Basque language over the past, say, fifty years or so' and by prospects I mean 'future sociolinguistic prospects of the Basque language, bearing in mind both natural developments and the efforts at language planning for Basque at present being carried out'.

2. The situation of Basque, now

So, what is the present sociolinguistic situation of the Basque language?⁶ The traditional starting point is that of discussing numbers of speakers. Let's start from the obvious. How many people claim to be Basque speakers? Somewhere over 800,000⁷. When talking of minority languages, one needs to relate that to the total population of the area under discussion: just over three million⁸. Thus, Basque speakers represent just over a quarter of the population. We could rank this reply with that for other minorities in Europe: Welsh-speakers in Wales form a closely comparable though slightly weaker group in both absolute and relative terms. Gaelic speakers in Scotland form a roughly comparable group for the situation in the French Basque Country, though they obviously lack the moral, practical and financial support that comes from having a relatively stronger kindred group just over the international border.

We need to refine the characterization of language claimant. We are not talking about use, but about **competence**: that difference is not particularly important in the case of

⁵ For further introductory detail see Cenoz 2001, Cenoz & Perales 2000, Azurmendi & Martínez de Luna 2006.

⁶ Perhaps the best starting point in English at the present time is issue 174 of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* and its sister-volume (Azurmendi & Martínez de Luna (eds) 2005; 2006). For further introductory material see Gardner *et al.* 2000, Cenoz 2001, Cenoz & Perales 2000.

⁷ An estimation. The latest sociolinguistic survey (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística 2012: 9) offers the figure of 27% of the population for over-16's, referring to 714,136 people. To that figure we have to add the under-16's (and, for a complete picture, those few speakers living outside the Basque Country, which I assume would push the total up over the figure given). I ignore the survey's additional figure of 388,255 passive bilinguals on the grounds that the language competence involved is in most cases probably too modest to be registered. The Ethnologue gives a more conservative estimate: 658,960 (Lewis 2009), though it is not clear to me if this is intended to include Basque speakers in France or not.

⁸ Another estimation. Trying to determine the population of any area is to shoot at a moving target. In this case it is further complicated by the existence of different administrations providing data for different dates and areas. In justification of the figure used in the text we can offer the figure of 3,007,661 provided by wikipedia (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_the_Basque_Country); or the sum of 3,090,702, based on figures obtained as follows: BAC: 2,174,033 referring to 1-1-2011 (www.eustat.es); Navarre: 644,566 referring to 1-1-2012 (www.cfnavarra.es); northern Basque Country: 272,103 in total referring to 1999 (Lapurdi), 2004 (Lower Navarre) and 2005 (Zuberoa) (<http://www.aztikerdb.com/dt/index.php?erakus=orriak&oid=64&zo=63>). All data retrieved on 17-02-2013.

native monolingual speakers of majority languages in their home countries: a monolingual English speaker in England, for example, both knows and uses the language. But Basque speakers, along with other minority language speakers in modern westernised contexts, are almost invariably bilingual and that second language, Spanish or French, may, depending on personal circumstance and inclination, be as much or even more used than the Basque they are claiming to know. We might also need to scrutinize language-knowledge claims even more carefully: both census and survey results being based on self-report, these may turn out to be distorted, often unwittingly, by claimants' other interests.

Another aspect of language knowledge claims of interest in the Basque case is how the person acquired his or her knowledge: is Basque a mother- and/or father-tongue, acquired initially in the home; if not, has it been learnt on the streets or in some institution formally organised with that purpose in mind? In the Basque case the proportions of non-native speakers are surprisingly high⁹. For various reasons (both integrative and instrumental) Basque attracts a substantial number of second-language learners, a relatively unusual situation, I think, amongst minority languages¹⁰, and a positive sign: you learn a language you (or, in the case of schoolchildren, your parents) value in some way. Competence also varies remarkably, both among native and non-native speakers of the language. Indeed, looking at some individual language acquisition histories one might be hard put to decide which category the protagonist belongs to. We might further want to look at differences on the lines of age, gender and social class. The most interesting of these at the present day is age, given that that is where the change being wrought in the situation of Basque becomes visible.

If we look at Basque language *use*, we find it to be much lower than proclaimed competence might lead us to expect: the most recent study¹¹ records a figure of just over 13% of language use on the street within the Basque Country as being in Basque, based on sampling by direct observation. No doubt, different figures would be obtained in different domains, were they available, but the overall figure offered certainly does not seem unreasonable, though variation from one place to another is probably extreme.

We have so far briefly asked questions about language competence and language use in Basque. There are two more areas worthy of attention: first, the language itself¹² and

⁹ The younger the higher: in the most extreme case (BAC) in the 16-24 age group, there are more non-native speakers of Basque than native speakers! See Gobierno Vasco 2012: 12 (internet summary in English).

¹⁰ Azurmendi & Martínez de Luna (2005: 3-6) discuss other features of the Basque situation they consider to be atypical.

¹¹ To be precise, 13.3% in Altuna *et al.* 2012: 33.

¹² One minor and, admittedly secondary, index of language strength is the ability of the language in question to influence other languages, which usually occurs not because of features of the language in itself, but because its users are politically, militarily, economically and/or socio-culturally dominant or influential. We must note, therefore, that Basque has been far more influenced by surrounding languages than it has itself influenced them (particularly Latin and Spanish, less so (Occitan) Gascon and French and, exceptionally, Arabic usually via other Spanish languages. The influence of English has perked up in recent years, following the worldwide trend.

Influence in the opposite direction is very limited indeed, being most notable in Spanish. Once again Trask's work can serve as a starting point (Trask 1997: 415-429). Although marginal to our present

second, discourse about the language and its users. Let us take **the language itself** first of all: is it fit for purpose as a modern Western European language in a sophisticated, modernized setting? The brief overall answer, today, has to be yes, while adding riders to the effect that standard Basque (*batua*) is still being developed and that terminological development is still in full swing. The fulfilment of the typical goal of such minorities as proof of their language's worthiness, intertranslatability with 'modern standard European', draws ever closer. In addition, observers note the usual signs of intense, long-lasting language contact, where the socially weaker language is the most impacted: loanwords, calques and other signs of influence at different levels of the language, including pronunciation, grammar and semantics, are easily observed in Basques' language production, perhaps more so orally than in writing.

Finally, as for **discourse and opinion** and about the language and its users, it would be pretentious to attempt to survey all the considerable material available¹³. We can summarize or, perhaps more accurately caricature, the main features of the reactions to Basque & Basqueness as follows¹⁴:

1. That of ridicule or scorn: the ignorant, physically strong, mentally limited, overeating peasant stereotype, out-of-date and out-of-place in modern society, relic of a bygone age. This particular stereotype, which achieved a certain popularity under Franco, has largely disappeared. The Basque native equivalent was self-hatred¹⁵, characterised by acute discomfort for one's ignorance of the state language and by the effort to rid one's children of the stigma. The result was, of course, a shift towards the corresponding state language.
2. That of Basque and Basqueness as a source of danger: in its most acute form, it turns up as an equation between Basque and terrorism, though the practical disappearance of ETA has substantially weakened that characterization. However, many still regard the promotion of Basque as a primarily Basque nationalist phenomenon and, to the degree they reject that nationalism as disruptive in a modern unified state (both in France and, especially, in Spain), Basque too is to be rejected.

interest, it seems appropriate to record the influence of Basque on English: it can be summarised as anecdotal, limited to a handful of vocabulary items, mostly obscure and frequently of doubtful provenance. Here are the words commonly cited: **jai alai** (Basque ball-game (court/stadium)) AmE (from Basque *jai alai* 'happy feast'); **chaparral** (scrubland) AmE (via Spanish); **silhouette** (from Basque surname *Zulueta* via French); **Jingo** (supposedly from Basque *jinko* 'god' but widely regarded as doubtful); **charivari** (noisy serenade/hubbub), but alternative etymologies are available; **bilbo** (type of sword or dagger, mentioned in Shakespeare) probably from one of the Basque names for Bilbao; **bizarre** (reportedly related to Basque *bizar* 'beard', but also doubtful); **chaconne** (a dance); **haberdine** (a fish); **anchovy** (the source of all three is, however, debatable). As for influence in the opposite direction, Basque has like many languages worldwide been impacted by modern English, absorbing words related to pop culture, management, business, ICT, almost invariably via Spanish. At the traditional level, one can mention **blak** ('pitch (for caulking boats)'), reportedly used in the village of Bermeo, presumably from Eng. 'black', instead of the standard '**bike**'.

¹³ Further discussion in English is available in Hernández *et al.* 2006.

¹⁴ The text follows and develops a recent unpublished discussion by Zalbide.

¹⁵ As a result of the weakening of this attitude, implicit traditional sociolinguistic rules followed by some, such as not to talk to strangers nor to do business in Basque (even where interlocutors know the language), have also weakened considerably over the past forty years. Though such rules are not merely the product of attitude: lack of opportunity to develop one's language at school or elsewhere to deal with business in Basque also plays its role.

3. That of tolerance and even respect of Basque and things Basque: in a modern democratic state minorities and their languages are to be tolerated. Under this approach one can signal two different outcomes in the Basque Country: what we might call the ‘reservation approach’ (let ethnic Basques use the language in areas it is still dominant but don’t allow language spread) or the ‘legitimate revindication approach’ (if they really want it they are entitled to it: in any case, as part of the cultural heritage the language shouldn’t be allowed to die). Either way, some help, including access to public funds, is forthcoming.
4. That of enthusiasm: Basque is a source of identity and its use a source of life-long satisfaction. Ensuring intergenerational continuity and a secure (some would say a pre-eminent) status for the language in its traditional territory is essential. This involves language maintenance, language spread and language shift, necessitating at the least substantial access to public funding as well as much enthusiastic un(der)funded work.

3. Evolution of the situation of Basque

Which brings me to the next step in this rapid canter through the Basque situation: far more revealing than data on the situation today is the evolution of data over time. We can of course choose differing periods. Let’s start with a long-term comparison.

Figure 1: Competence evolution table in southern Basque Country, 17th-20th centuries¹⁶				
	Monolingual Basques, 17th c.		Most Basques in 1980	
Skill	In Basque	In other language	In Basque	In other language
Listening	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Speaking	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Reading	No	No	(Yes)	Yes
Writing	No	No	?	(Yes)

Over the long term it is fairly easy to summarize changes with regard to knowledge and use of Basque: 350-400 years ago most Basques were probably monolingual or Basque-dominant bilinguals, with the upper echelons of society, certain professionals (churchmen, king’s servants, military, overseas merchants, local notaries, doctors...) and travelling workers (sailors, transhumant shepherds, itinerant masons...) constituting the bulk of bilinguals, from basic to competent, mostly born and brought up in monolingual Basque families. Non-native speakers were probably relatively few and far between: they would have acquired the language through informal contact rather than formal schooling.

Today, in contrast, practically all native speakers of Basque over the age of, say at most, five are bilingual in the main state language, French or Spanish. Not a few have been brought up in mixed language homes, where two tongues have been transmitted natively. And a substantial number of people have learnt their Basque within the school

¹⁶ Translated and simplified from Zalbide 2007.

system or its adult equivalent¹⁷: most of those bilinguals are dominant in the state language, not Basque. In terms of sheer numbers, there are probably more Basque speakers alive today than at any moment in the past, but their command of Basque, particularly in terms of everyday naturalness, is often weaker. But there are more positive notes too:

- Most younger Basques can to some degree read and write in Basque as well as in the state language, unthinkable just a generation ago.
- Intergenerational language transmission within the family has recovered substantially from the sixties: if both parents are Basque speakers, the offspring will almost certainly be brought up as a native speaker of Basque; if only one is, there is still a two in three probability that Basque will (also) be transmitted to the offspring¹⁸.

But for more than a very general description of the change that has taken place, what time-scale should we choose? Should we wish to dig deeper there are two obvious turning points we might like to take into account: one is the situation in, say, the late fifties or early sixties of the last century when the present effort to revitalize Basque was just starting up; a second one is at the end of the seventies and early eighties occurring with the change of regime, when those Basque revivalist efforts began to obtain access to substantial government funding. In practice, however, we are limited by availability of data: losers, and such was largely the case of Basque speakers until recently, usually find history excludes them. From around 1980 on, however, various series of data have been developed¹⁹: census language questions²⁰, adult language use, competence and

¹⁷ On the teaching of Basque to adults, see Azkue & Perales 2005. To learn Basque in the Basque Country as an adult, contact HABE (<http://www.habe.euskadi.net/s23-5492/es/>)

¹⁸ “In the case of mixed couples, that is, where one parent does not know Basque most offspring between the ages of two and fifteen have had Basque and Spanish transmitted to them, but not to the same degree in all territories: 71% of offspring in the BAC, 67% in Navarre and 56% in the French Basque Country.” Own translation of text from Aizpurua & Ortiz de Landaluze 2012: 74.

¹⁹ For a summary of sociolinguistic activity in the Basque Country, see Martínez de Luna *et al.* 2006.

²⁰ Gobierno Vasco 1989, 1998, 2005, 2009.

attitude surveys²¹, school surveys²² and direct-observation language-use surveys²³. More detailed information is available on specific topics²⁴.

Crudely summarised, we can say that the evidence points to a continual increase in the percentage and numbers of Basque speakers, and to a very modest rise in actual use. Most indicators are more positive in the BAC than in Navarre, where they are in turn more positive than in the French Basque Country. If we look more closely at the information, however, that summary needs further nuancing. For example, older schoolchildren actually seem to use less Basque than younger schoolchildren. Indeed, one observer goes so far as to suggest that in terms of the individual life-cycle, Basque language use is higher in childhood, drops in adolescence, rises again in adulthood, particularly while raising a family, and falls yet again in old age²⁵. Why might this be? One can hypothesise that the young child is more strongly influenced by the reward system of a pro-Basque school, whilst an older one has already begun to appreciate that in the world of adulthood beyond the school a lot of rewards are only, or at least better, available through other languages. Similarly, whilst young parents may feel societal pressure to pass the language on, once that task has in their opinion been completed they may no longer feel so enthusiastic about it.

4. Factors promoting the decline of Basque

Basque has historically long been facing decline²⁶, but in the last fifty years we can also observe an increasing number of positive factors pointing in the opposite direction. In this section of the presentation, I shall be examining what factors underlie Basque's long downward slide and in the following one the factors at present acting in its favour.

²¹ Gobierno Vasco *et al.* 1997; Gobierno Vasco 1995, 2003 (for an interpretation of this survey see Aizpurua & Aizpurua 2005; reviewed in Martínez de Luna 2005a), 2008, in press.

²² Note especially: Gabiña *et al.* 1986; Sierra & Olaziregi 1989, 1991a, 1991b; Hezkuntza, Unibertsitate & Ikerketa Saila 2013. For an overview of the school situation see Gardner & Zalbide (2005), in English, and Zalbide 1999, in Spanish. For the Spanish Basque Country see Gardner 2005; for the BAC see Gardner 2000; for Navarre see Aldasoro (2001); for the French side, see Stuijt 2007. For a number of evaluations of the situation of Basque in BAC schools visit the web-site of ISEI-IVEI, the Basque Institute for Research and Evaluation in Education. (<http://www.isei-ivei.net/eng/indexeng.htm>). Information on the situation of Basque in the universities is harder to come by, but a start can be made at: <http://www.euskara-errektoreordetza.ehu.es/p267-home/es/>.

²³ The first such survey throughout the Basque Country was in 1989. Subsequent surveys can be consulted as follows: Altuna *et al.* 2012, Amonarriz 1994, EKB 1998, SEI 2002 (reviewed in Azurmendi 2005), Soziolinguistika klusterra 2007. This list ignores more detailed local information (often by province or local council), frequently derived from more than one source.

²⁴ Consult, for example, EAS, the language indicator system of the Basque Country on internet: http://www1.euskadi.net/euskara_adierazleak/indice.apl?hizk=i.

²⁵ Iurrebaso 2012: 119.

²⁶ For a rough-and-ready graphic summary, see the map accompanying the Demographics section of the Wikipedia page on the Basque language (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_language). Retrieved on 04-02-2013.

Fishman summarizes the factors responsible for or at least co-occurring with language decline in the single word 'dislocation', subsequently discussing demographic, social and cultural dislocation (Fishman 1991: 57-65)²⁷. Let's take a brief look at how this dislocation has played out in the Basque Country over the last thirty odd years.

a) Population

A number of features are salient. First of all, the fall in the birthrate. Easily accessible contraception arrived later in Spain than in the rest of Europe, but the effects were very concentrated over time: by way of example, births in the three provinces of the BAC dropped by well over half in less than 20 years from 1976²⁸. Even today they have only partially recovered. The drop seems to have affected Basque and non-Basque speakers more or less equally. Secondly, although the economic crisis of the 1980's largely put paid to immigration from other parts of Spain, a new wave of immigration, this time from abroad, particularly from South America (Spanish speaking) and Africa (allophone), started in the '90's and seems to be coming to an end or, at least, slowing substantially with the present economic crisis. Thirdly, highly educated young Basques are increasingly looking for work outside the Basque Country.

b) Social dislocation

On this parameter we can point to the rapid changes in territorial organisation: road quality has improved, travelling times have been reduced. Basques relate to more people in more roles and in more languages over greater areas; at the same time, the role of the family has been relatively weakened. Basques of different dialects may more frequently share the same workplace; almost all will (also) work with non-speakers.

c) Cultural dislocation

Perhaps the most salient feature in recent years is the explosion in mass consumption, an expansion which often comes partly through the medium of English as the language of wider communication (LWC). The Spanish Basque Country is relatively wealthy by local and even European standards²⁹. The last of the traditional rural socioeconomic

²⁷ The founding father of the sociology of language or macrosociolinguistics has paid considerable attention to the Basque case, visiting the country on several occasions. See Fishman 1987, 1990, 1991, Fishman (ed) 2001 (especially but not only 234-259).

²⁸ To be more precise, there were 41,100 births in 1976 in the BAC; this dropped gradually to 15,248 by 1994 and has climbed slightly to 21,180 (provisional figure) in 2011. Data retrieved on 2013-02-15 from: http://www.eustat.es/elementos/ele0005700/ti_Nacidos_vivos_y_tasa_de_natalidad_por_1000_habitantes_por_territorio_historico_1975-2011/tbl0005708_c.html#axzz2KzI0VY8y. Evolution of births in Navarre was similar but the drop less pronounced: live births in 1976 were 8,663, dropping to a low in 1992 of 4,549 and rising by 2011 to 6,747. Data retrieved on 2013-02-17 from: www.cfnavarra.es. The French or northern Basque Country seems to have followed the general European pattern with, as far as one can discern from the somewhat imprecise figures, a relatively minor drop over the entire period: average number of births in the period 1968-1975 was 3.135; this dropped to 2.784 by the year 2004. Data retrieved on 2013-02-17 from: <http://www.aztikerdb.com/dt/index.php?erakus=orriak&zoz=235>.

²⁹ For background information on the BAC in European context see <http://es.eustat.es/document/epubs/euskadienlaue27ce/files/3dissue.swf>. Similar data are available for Spanish Navarre at <http://www.cfnavarra.es/estadistica/redie.asp?qry=0704>. As the French Basque Country does not coincide with French administrative units, it is more difficult to access relevant data.

base, primarily farming in smallholdings and fishing, is crumbling; the heavy basic industry of the seventies has given way to ever more sophisticated modern industry (machine tools, electronics, white goods, transportation hardware...); services too have increased³⁰. All this has impacted on Basque speakers' professional training, relationship networks and, hence, language use.

d) Urbanisation

Finally, we perhaps ought to treat urbanisation as a special case to the degree in which it seems to imply all three of the foregoing³¹. We can detect at least two phases in that process: first of all, rural Basques moved to towns small and large, where they took up new tasks, forged a new, broader set of social relationships and changed their language use as well. More recently, thanks to improved communications, it has become possible to live in urban fashion in all but the remotest farmhouses: there's always a town somewhere nearby where one can slip away to enjoy the features of urban life. At the same time, those improved communications have allowed town-dwellers, often Spanish speaking, the opportunity to move to Basque speaking villages, altering the linguistic balance there too. This relatively recent development, promoted in part by land-planning rules, has meant the nearest thing Basques had to *Gaeltacht* areas are themselves now being weakened, whereas they had on the whole survived previous phases of urbanisation³².

In short, we can say that the Basque Country has experienced a long period of rapid dislocation: many of the downturns in the fortunes of Basque seem to be related to these changes, as the most common result has been greater interaction with non-Basques and a greater need to master their languages. Many have perceived in the past that upward social mobility depended on mastering the dominant language³³, but not everybody embarked on that path, whether by choice or lack of opportunity. Nowadays, virtually all have already mastered the dominant language and some are more concerned by the maintenance of their mother tongue.

5. Planning to reverse language shift

Basque's downward slide is, of course, only part of the story. What are the factors favouring the survival of Basque or, even, a return to it?

³⁰ For an English language discussion of the role of economic factors in Basque language use, see Zendoia 2006.

³¹ Indeed, almost all the factors mentioned above can also be related to each other. Thus, the arrival of a new source of cheaper immigrant labour has changed the linguistic panorama of child-care and old people's care completely. A phenomenon that was initially demographic has wrought both social and cultural change.

³² Once again, there are comparable Welsh experiences: projected new homes in small Welsh speaking villages are sometimes rejected by locals on the grounds that they will weaken the Welsh character of the village.

³³ Cf. 'dependency interaction' e.g. in Fishman 1991: 60.

One repeated strand is that of the motivation to maintain the language. At the most basic level, there is a faithfulness to the language, the idea that it is a treasure to be preserved. One author observes the tendency to hold fast to the language³⁴, another that some Basques at least tend to use the language more frequently than is statistically probable³⁵. This goes against the grain of much of the argument about the death of languages, which runs roughly on the lines of ‘big fish eat little fish’³⁶. However, the idea of a counter-legitimacy or resistance, based on deliberate flouting of majority (language) norms and fidelity to the minority group of reference is also possible and can perhaps explain in part the survival of minority languages. To that traditional motivation from, say, the mid nineteenth century on, a second motivation was added: that of wishing to conserve one’s vanishing inheritance, a motivation that reappears today under the universalist guise of language ecology: languages, though merely human artefacts, are as worthy of conservation as animal and plant species, for the riches they contain and reflect. With the foundation of Basque nationalism at the turn of the 20th century, many people found a further motivation: Basque became the cornerstone of the Basque identity they sought to defend politically, some by pursuing an independent state, some by pursuing cultural self-regulation in their present political environment. By the 1960’s, Basque was becoming the symbol -as much as of Basque nationalism- of anti-regime sentiment: such that, for many non Basque speakers as well, the well-being of Basque became one more of the desirable improvements to be achieved (alongside democracy, the rule of law, education, health and social benefits for all...) once Franco had been overthrown.

A second strand involves conscious language planning with the objective of reversing language shift (RLS). From the mid-eighteenth century, the increasingly widespread awareness that the situation of Basque was not the one desired by initially a very modest elite and subsequently an ever-greater number led, not surprisingly, to attempts to plan a better future for Basque. Those attempts were often individual rather than collective, bottom-up rather than top-down, rarely got off the ground and were just too weak to have the kind of influence necessary to reverse the fortunes of the language. The last of those attempts³⁷, led by Basque nationalists, had been scuttled by Franco’s victory in the Spanish civil war, leading to a conscious planning for a severe limitation in the use of Basque and the establishment of Spanish as the only language in the long term.

By the mid 1950’s, however, came the first stirrings of a new bottom-up planning for Basque: the Academy of the Basque language (*Euskaltzaindia*) became active once

³⁴ Cf. Erize 1999, 2006.

³⁵ Cf. the concept of anisotropic language use in Txillardegi 2002 (reviewed in Martínez de Luna 2005b). In other words, some Basque speakers at least demonstrate a considerable degree of language loyalty. The theory is discussed in English in Martínez de Luna *et al.* 2006: 79-83. In building their model other researchers have found it essential to distinguish between Basque speakers by strategy, distinguishing those who conceal their knowledge of the language in encounters with unknown interlocutors and those who don’t: see Iriberry & Uriarte 2012.

³⁶ Whether one takes the language conflict line (Catalan sociolinguists) or the language market line (e.g. Bourdieu), minority languages seem theoretically set for almost inevitable decline. Note, in any case, that it is not merely a question of speaker numbers, but the power (economic, military, cultural, political or whatever) expressed through that language and associated with it which normally determines the outcome according to these theories.

³⁷ For a description of that effort and its cultural context, read Zalvide n.d.

again, a literary magazine (*Egan*) started up, the first clandestine Basque-medium *ikastola* schools were set up. Noticeably stronger by the mid-seventies, this bottom-up planning began to receive top-down support, leading with time to full-blown state intervention in favour of Basque.

What sort of interventions are involved in the name of planning?³⁸ How far are they successful? There are many different emphases possible and many of them³⁹ have been pursued with regard to Basque in the present planning initiative.

Schooling: the school has been adopted by reformers in many different societies as a way to change the world and Basque language planners have tried to do exactly that via language acquisition planning⁴⁰. Native speakers of Basque can achieve literacy, formal registers, and acquaintance with the tradition; non-native speakers can achieve some competence in the language along a continuum ranging from basic listening to highly capable. The initial impulse was through those private *ikastola* schools paid for by parents; in Spain, once the old regime came to an end, the state offered support to those schools and also extended the use of Basque within the state system. School systems in the three areas indicated differ, however, in the absolute and percentage numbers of children involved in Basque language programmes, which are basically of three types: Basque as subject and medium (with the state language as subject); both languages as both subject and medium; Basque as subject only⁴¹. Achievements, particularly with regard to actual use of Basque, have not always satisfied the most enthusiastic language acquisition planners. But to the degree that school is a mirror of society, or, in another terminology, just one of the agencies that society uses to reproduce itself / socialize its new members, it can never be the sole agent of language change⁴².

There is a second set of what we can call mainly ‘pedagogical reasons’ why Basque language schooling cannot achieve the aim some would ascribe to it: a book in Basque

³⁸ For an overview of top-down planning in the BAC, see Mateo 2005; for Navarre and the French Basque Country, see Legarra & Baxok 2005.

³⁹ But not all. Some, for example, have considered that one of the ways to give a language prestige and, hopefully, thereby to revive it is by giving it a great literary tradition: the success of Lönnrot’s Finnish *Kalevala* or Mistral’s Provençal *Mireio* led to the Basque poet Orixo being commissioned to write a great Basque equivalent. He completed *Euskaldunak* in 1936 but was unable to publish it until 1950. Its traditional rural emphasis makes it the symbol of a bygone age for present-day Basques and its impact on the use of Basque must be minute, if any. No such attempt has been made during the span of the present revitalization initiative.

⁴⁰ The term ‘acquisition planning’ is from Cooper 1989.

⁴¹ The BAC’s terminology is the most widely used: the first option is called Model D, the second, half and half option, B and the third A. The situation has been complicated in recent years by the introduction of English as medium in some subjects in some schools.

⁴² See Fishman 1990 or 2001: 368-380. ‘The over-reliance on the school with respect to the attainment of RLS goals is merely an example of the more widespread tendency to seek out and depend upon one-factor solutions to a very involved, multivariate problem’ (2001: 379).

significantly titled *The School in Search of Speakers*⁴³ “examined some of the causes of this problem. [Zalbide] points to five interrelated features of pupils’ lives in explanation:

- School lessons occupy a very limited part of a child’s week. Year in, year out, model D schoolchildren spend only about 14% of their waking hours in Basque-language classroom activity; in model B the proportion drops to about 8% and in model A to around 3%. Other activities bulk far larger in the child’s day, particularly with family initially, but thereafter time spent with peers increases too.
- The nature of classroom interaction tends to favour learning to listen and read and to some degree to write; pupils have relatively fewer chances to speak.
- Classroom activities tend to purvey the more formal registers of language, whereas most of the child’s day outside the school requires more informal registers. One of the consequences has been the development of a new type of Basque speaker, relatively at home in formal discourse, but clumsy in informal discourse, limited in the expression of feelings and intimate interests.
- The command of Basque of the child’s school interlocutors, whether teachers or peers, may be insufficient to provide quality models. In BAC schools, alongside teachers who are native speakers (or, even, exceptionally, non-native speakers) with excellent mastery of the language, can be found native speakers with limited command of the more formal registers and numerous non-native speakers with a command ranging from moderately good to frankly poor, often weakest in informal registers.
- Sociolinguistic features of the child’s immediate environment have an overwhelming influence: the language of family and relatives may be Basque, Spanish or a mixture of the two; the degree of local presence of Basque can also vary tremendously. Basque speakers are in a clear majority in some rural areas and in some low-density semi-urbanised areas, but in the BAC most live in high-density areas dominated by Spanish. Thus, the starting point of children entering the education system varies considerably, on a cline from native Basque with little or no Spanish to native monolingual Spanish who may hardly have heard Basque, with all possible variants in between”.

In a modern westernised society such as the Basque Country the role of the school is nevertheless an absolutely essential one, in so far as it is *the* institution where literacy in any language is habitually acquired. Without literacy in Basque, the language’s future would be much bleaker. Without schooling in Basque, there would be far fewer non-native speakers.

Legal measures: there was widespread support for a change in the legal status of Basque after the change of regime in Spain. The new Spanish Constitution (1978) opened the door to establishing a certain official status by law for the other languages of Spain and both the BAC (in 1982) and Navarre (in 1986) made use of it. Those regional laws have given rise to much further secondary legislation since then. There has been no such advance in the French Basque Country, although greater tolerance is visible. Some Basques seek further changes in the law (for example, to make Basque medium schooling compulsory for everybody or to establish monolingual Basque-speaking

⁴³ Zalbide 1991. The English language summary quoted is from Aldekoa & Gardner 2002: 341-342. The text refers to the BAC, but extrapolating the observations to the other territories does not seem unreasonable.

areas), but these pressures seem to arise from a misunderstanding of the role of laws in language change. A law establishes the language playing field through choices which can be in consonance with, or militate against, societal language dynamics. At best, it facilitates change by permitting use of a (minority) language in new functions or by new speakers and by legitimating the provision of funds to support such changes. Like schooling, it cannot be the sole agent of language change. Although the laws mentioned are slightly out-of-sync with the present situation, trying to tighten them in favour of Basque could equally lead to an ‘anti’ backlash, with no obvious gain for the language.

Improving the language: another recurrent concern of language planners is to make the language fit for (new) purpose, in other words corpus planning⁴⁴. In the Basque case, there have been two primary concerns: the creation of a standard language and vocabulary expansion⁴⁵. One of the reasons for the foundation of the Academy (now Royal Academy) of the Basque Language was, in addition to the usual language-academy functions⁴⁶, that of establishing a standard language, above all written, in the face of a complicated dialectal panorama. The work of codification⁴⁷ to that end is well on the way to being completed: morphology (noun declension, verb conjugation...), grammar, dictionaries (including spelling) have all been dealt with at length by the Academy. It is, however, one thing to create or standardize a code; quite another for its potential users to accept and use it⁴⁸. This latter part of the path, acceptance, implementation and use of the newly created standard, has not always been a smooth one: as the solution has been to opt primarily for the central dialects, dialect users at the eastern and western ends of the Basque Country have proved to be the losers, relatively speaking. Speakers of Biscayan at the western end are numerous and have been particularly vociferous. Nevertheless, the standard has won a notable degree of acceptance. The second task, vocabulary expansion, is important if the language is to be used for new functions. At the present time the Academy oversees the work of the Basque government and other agencies in this area. In both those areas the earlier excesses of language purists⁴⁹, which made for a language partly unintelligible for (and,

⁴⁴ Further detail on corpus work can be found in Urkizu 2006.

⁴⁵ Another, very sophisticated area at present the object of attention is the development of readable modern prose: the earlier spread of rigid prescriptive word ordering rules along SOV lines rendered the comprehension of complex sentences difficult for many. Hence, the return to traditional structures which allow the verb to ‘move up’ in sentence order, in writing as well as speech. A good example of *elaboration*, to use Haugen’s terminology (Haugen 1983: 275).

⁴⁶ Cf. the French Academy’s objective: ‘d’établir des règles certaines de la langue française, de la rendre la plus parfaite des modernes, et non seulement élégante, mais capable de traiter tous les arts et toutes les sciences’ or the Royal Academy of the Spanish language’s motto: ‘Limpia, fija y da esplendor’.

⁴⁷ Cf. Haugen 1983: 275.

⁴⁸ Fishman repeatedly underlines the importance and delicateness of this second part of the process. For example: “It is a devastating mistake to assume that corpus planning merely requires the interplay and coordination of linguistic expertise and technological expertise, devastating certainly if one’s goal is not merely to do corpus planning (i.e. not merely to *create* a nomenclature in chemistry, for example, or in some other modern technological area) but to have it *accepted* (i.e. to have it liked, learned, and used)” (Fishman 1983. 109).

⁴⁹ Part of pre-Spanish civil war Basque language-loyalism was very keen on purifying the language and ridding it of any connection with Spanish, its hand being strengthened by the legitimacy conferred on the process by the attempts in that very direction by the founder of Basque nationalism: a typical case of *Ausbau* corpus planning, to use the term invented by Kloss and popularised by Fishman. See, for

hence, unacceptable to) ordinary users, have more or less come to an end. Most Basque writers continue to have a purist streak (in that their cultivated written form of the language is at least one remove from their everyday spoken Basque), but that form is on the whole no longer inaccessible to the average reader.

Language normalisation: this term, popular from the early eighties in southern Europe in particular, refers in its narrowest sense to finding a place for the minority language in the prestigious institutions of modernity including administration, the media, university, the higher worksphere and the political arena (i.e. presence, however modest, in regional, state and European institutions)⁵⁰. Minorities all over Europe have worked along these lines and Basque language planners, specifically, have devoted much effort to all those spheres. Whilst it is satisfying for minorities to have, say, their radio and TV channels, and daily and periodical press (and Basque has achieved all of these), they require considerable and, in most cases, repeated investment of human and financial resources for what is probably a relatively small contribution to language survival.

Primary socialisation: if we now ask ourselves what is central to language survival, we have to recognise that it is what many consider the lacklustre functions of everyday life (nuclear and extended family, friendship networks, local neighbourhood, primary and, in the Basque case at least, secondary schooling, the lower, local worksphere...) that are most likely to feed back into minority or, to anglicise the local term stressing political implications, *minoritised* language maintenance⁵¹. Recognising this has major consequences, a) because, with limited funding available, it will lead to prioritisation of less prestigious actions than, say, those involved in language normalisation; and b) because family and friendship networks are not very amenable anyway to planned intervention. Yet they are the agents of primary socialisation, in language as in other spheres of life. There are already Basque initiatives in all the areas mentioned.

Let us turn, if but briefly, to the agents involved. I have already suggested that the work of agencies planning the language itself is nowadays satisfactorily coordinated and seems to proceed without more ado. Just as importantly, its products are achieving some degree of popular acceptance, essential to making the effort worthwhile⁵². On the status side, however, clashes have in the past been frequent: top-down official planners have frequently come into conflict with some individual and increasingly coordinated

example, Fishman 1991: 350-352. Some of those inventions stuck (the word *ikastola* 'school' mentioned in the section on schooling, though the word has taken on more specialised meanings as well); others didn't (*igali* 'fruit' to replace the traditional *fruitu* or *fruta*); still others are widely known but little used (*urrutizkin* 'telephone' instead of *telefono*).

⁵⁰ A more recent addition to this list is ICT. Basque language loyalists have achieved not only Basque versions of *Office*, *Open Office* and *wikipedia*. They are also expending considerable energy on ensuring mobile phones can work in Basque, that there is an ICANN .eus domain-extension, and many other such details.

⁵¹ Once again, it is Fishman (1991, 2001, 1987) who has perhaps argued this point with greatest thoroughness, particularly on the basis of his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS); he has also specifically criticised Basque priorities. For a different perspective, which considers that it necessary to go beyond Fishman's RLS proposals, though allegedly without contradicting them, see Martínez de Luna & Azurmendi 2005.

⁵² For a review of the problems involved in making corpus planning acceptable to its intended recipients see Fishman 1983: 107-118. For further discussion see Haugen 1983.

bottom-up ones, though in the last few years cooperation seems to be ever more widespread⁵³. There are top-down planning units at all levels of government, in education obviously, but also to a (very much) more modest degree in health, policing and justice. A minority of companies also have language planning personnel, assisted by outside consultancies. Clearly bottom-up are the host of NGO's whose remit is often limited to a single town or village as well as other professional groupings by sector⁵⁴. In addition, ordinary NGO's may or may not be implementing their own language policy.

By way of exemplification one particular agent we might briefly look at is the catholic church⁵⁵: from at least 1900 on, a growing number of churchmen had felt that to achieve its proselytizing aim the church also needed to work through Basque, but had largely been prevented from doing so by civil and religious authorities. With the introduction of the vernaculars in church services by the Second Vatican Council (1962-5), many clergy now felt legitimated to act: the use of Basque seemed to be fully coherent with the church's worldwide language policy. In consequence, they made a huge effort to Basquize the church's activities, with very little in the way of financial resources: the irony of the situation is that in a sense they were successful in developing all the human and material resources they needed and yet failed to the degree that the European-wide process of secularisation developed rapidly in Spain after the collapse of the previous regime, so that far fewer people than intended have been influenced by the church's change in behaviour.

6. Conclusion and future prospects⁵⁶

Many factors are involved in the survival or demise of a language, both internal and external. Which suggests that it might be appropriate to end this presentation with a SWOT analysis⁵⁷, albeit a superficial one.

1. Internal strengths

The Basque language has assured its future for another generation. Intergenerational language transmission is functioning reasonably well. The language has a core of literate Basque users. Thousands of Basque speakers have obtained work thanks to their

⁵³ The fault-line in Basque society over the use of political violence seems to correlate closely with those conflicts. To the degree that societal wounds begin to heal, it seems likely that the future tendency will be towards the ever-greater cooperation needed in the face of a difficult situation.

⁵⁴ For details see Mendiguren & Iñigo 2006.

⁵⁵ Note that the church's primary function is not language planning. Other non-language organisations (for example, government, trade unions or companies) are in the same position: perhaps we could call them secondary language planners (ie.: they plan language only in so far as it helps them achieve their primary objective) as opposed to the primary planners in organisations (NGO's; Vice-Ministry for Language Policy) whose only objective is to improve the status of Basque.

⁵⁶ For a fuller discussion of the future prospects of Basque from a Fishmanian perspective, see Zalvide *et al.* 2006 (in English).

⁵⁷ This particular form of analysis examines internal Strengths and Weaknesses alongside external Opportunities and Threats. See, for example, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis. Several language planning agents in the Basque Country have made use of it.

knowledge of Basque in addition to professional requirements. Many regularly use the language at work in modern environments, thus achieving new functions for Basque. The standardization process is well advanced and vocabulary is available for most major uses of the language. Its legal situation, though by no means perfect, provides ample opportunity for positive action. Attitudes towards present language policy, with the partial exception of Navarre, are quite positive.

2. Internal weaknesses

The situation in the northern Basque Country is still one of decline, even if that decline has now slowed. The massive presence of Spanish and French, with all their attractive modernity, is a continual invitation to many Basque speakers to use them, even where Basque is a realistic option: where this occurs within the family it is a source of considerable concern for planners. Some Basque speakers, particularly second language learners, do not have the grasp of lively colloquial language that is at the heart of everyday language maintenance and transmission. Self-regulated autonomous cultural production (as opposed to merely copying or translating models from other languages) in Basque and the consumption of Basque language cultural products of whatever sort is limited.

Basque language loyalists have yet to clarify goals and to reach a consensus within the movement. At the risk of caricaturing the positions we can ask: is the objective balanced bilingualism for all, monolingualism in Basque or some sort of sociofunctional compartmentalisation of language roles along the lines of traditional diglossia⁵⁸? The first, officially proclaimed option, is unsustainable: two languages available equally for all functions will lead rapidly to the eclipse of the weaker; the second, beloved of some radical Basque nationalists, is unachievable in its strongest form, given the present sociolinguistic dynamics; the third would require the full acceptance of unbalanced bilingualism and much hard work in the definition of the functional distribution to be pursued, as a purely territorial base seems unworkable. Basque language loyalists further need to come to an agreement on tactics: how should all the different planning initiatives outlined in the previous section be weighted?

3. External opportunities

The end of political violence might well improve the opportunities for the Basque area and Basque itself to obtain some official status in the French Basque Country. It might help to lessen strains over language policy in Navarre and, along with other factors, already seems to be assisting in facilitating coordination of different pro-Basque initiatives.

Globalization is probably more of a potential threat than a boon, but “in the face of globalization many feel a need for a more rooted, particularized identity: in the Basque Country that need for a counterweight to globalization may strengthen [...] people’s positive evaluation of Basque”⁵⁹.

⁵⁸ Argued in e.g.: Fishman 2001.

⁵⁹ Zalbide *et al.* 2006: 124.

4. External threats

Some external threats are immediate and obvious: right-wing Spanish Popular Party politicians are trying to recentralise education and it is dubious indeed whether the Spanish educational system will continue to be quite so tolerant of Basque as it has been over the last thirty-odd years. The present economic situation, with no improvement in sight, has already reduced the funds available for the maintenance and spread of Basque.

The effects of globalization continue to play out in the Basque Country with potentially negative effect for the language: immigration, emigration, English as LWC.

In language planning matters no basic consensus has been reached with forces against the present initiative: the attempt to set the clock back in education may well spread to other spheres.

Finally, climate change is at present an imponderable, but over the longer term may well have negative consequences, as a result of mitigation costs, damage wrought by freak catastrophic events, supply difficulties or changes in nature that are hostile to human beings, thus creating a new source of dislocation⁶⁰.

To summarize: so far, all the prophecies of a rapid disappearance have been proved wrong⁶¹. The price of reversing language shift and minority language maintenance is eternal vigilance, but if the minority pays that price and not a few Basques at least seem willing to do so, then Basque has a good chance of survival for the foreseeable future.

⁶⁰ “When this physical basis [of life] is dislocated, the continuity of life itself becomes threatened” (Fishman 1991: 57).

⁶¹ E.g.: Reclus 1867; or Unamuno as quoted in Zalbide n.d.: 81.

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