The standardization of the Basque language

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The standardization process of the Basque language presents some unusual characteristics. Although some of the first authors to publish in Basque in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries explicitly remarked on the difficulties brought about by dialectal diversity, very little progress in the standardization of the language was made until the second half of the twentieth century. Even the impact of the rise of Basque nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century was not entirely positive, since the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party favored the development of a different written variety for each of the Basque provinces. The extreme puristic and neologizing tendency of some writers at the time was also a source of obstacles on the path towards standardization. A Basque language academy was founded in 1918 with the unification of the written language as one of its main goals, but it made essentially no progress until the linguist Luis Michelena (Mitxelena) presented a report to the Basque Academy in 1968 on the bases for a written standard language. From then on, other stages in the standardization process have taken place very rapidly. This new standard has had an enormous success and in a few decades has become firmly established in Basque society.

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By any criterion that we may choose, the standardization of Basque in recent years has been a very successful project. Nowadays, standard Basque, which was not developed until the late 1960s, is used in education at all levels, from elementary school to the university, on television and radio, and in the vast majority of all written production in Basque. This success in the societal acceptance of standard Basque is most remarkable given the fact that there is no administration common to all territories where Basque is spoken (divided as they are between Spain and France and even, within Spain, into two separate administrative regions with different legislation regarding the Basque language) and that Basque speakers are almost always fully bilingual in either Spanish or French, so that the existence of a standard Basque language is not strictly required for communication beyond the local level.

Basque is, at present, co-official with Spanish in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, which comprises the three provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba (in Basque) or Alava (in Spanish). It also has a more restricted official status in Navarre (in Basque, Nafarroa; in Spanish, Navarra), which is a separate Autonomous region within Spain. Basque is also spoken, but lacks official status, in the three historical territories of Lapurdi (in French, Labourd), Low Navarre, and Zuberoa (in French, Pays
de Soule), which together make up the western half of the French Département des Pyrénées Atlantiques.  

The purpose of this paper is to give an account of the development of standard Basque and to investigate the reasons that may explain the success of this standardization process after a long period of failed efforts. For expository purposes we will follow Haugen’s (1972) four-stage model of language standardization (selection of norm, codification of form, elaboration of function, and acceptance by the community), as has been done for the two main standard languages with which Basque is in contact, French (Lodge 1993) and Spanish (Penny 2000:194-206). As we will show, the rapid progress experienced once a variety was selected to become a standard in the 1960s contrasts with the slow process of selection both before the existence of a Basque Academy and since the Basque Academy (Euskaltzaindia) was established in 1918.

Selection

1. Before the Basque Academy

The standardization of Basque was considerably delayed compared to that of the neighboring Romance languages. This is clearly a consequence of the narrow range of functions that, until recently, were assigned to the language. The first thing to remark is that, throughout its history, Basque has never had official use in administration until recent decades.

When Latin started to be replaced by “vulgar” languages for official purposes in western Europe, the Basque-speaking area was divided into a number of territories. Among these we find the independent Kingdom of Navarre, where the majority of the population was Basque-speaking. However, in Navarre a local form of Romance that had developed in southern areas of the kingdom, and not Basque, was adopted for official purposes. As Lacarra (1957:14) explains, the choice of Navarrese Romance over Basque is understandable given the fact that the reigning monarchy had roots in the southern, Romance-speaking, part of the kingdom, in addition to the fact that replacing Latin with a completely different language such as Basque would have required a necessarily more complex adaptation of usages.

Other Basque-speaking territories outside the Kingdom of Navarre were not independent entities. The territories of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa and Araba/Alava fell under the orbit of Castile after a short period of union with Navarre and had Castilian Spanish as their official language. North of the Pyrenees, in Lapurdi and Zuberoa, Gascon or French was used for official purposes. Eventually, the Kingdom of Navarre too was annexed by Castile (in 1515), except for a small northern area, Low Navarre, which was ultimately united with France. As Spain and France became increasingly centralized states, the Basque language came to occupy a subordinate position with respect to Spanish and French.

Besides this lack of official use, it is important to point out that virtually all Basque-speaking writers have always been literate in a language of greater currency, Spanish or French, which most of the time they chose as their written means of expression. Until very recently, the few authors who chose to express themselves in
Basque did so either for purposes of religious indoctrination or, less commonly, with belletristic aims. There are very few pre-1960 Basque-language books that do not fit into either one of these two categories.  

Historically, then, the societal forces that would impel the development and spread of a unified form of Basque have been very weak. Nevertheless, authors who chose to write in Basque (again, usually for religious purposes) had constantly to confront the problem of dialectal diversity. Joanes Leizarraga (or Leiçarrague), a Calvinist preacher who produced the first translation of the Bible into Basque, made this issue explicit in the preface “to Basque speakers” that accompanied his translation: “Everyone knows what difference and diversity there is in the manner of speaking in the Basque Country, almost from house to house” (Leizarraga 1571). His solution was to employ a somewhat hybrid language, choosing those words and morphological forms that he believed to have greatest currency: “regarding language, we have attempted as much as possible to make ourselves understood to everyone, instead of keeping to the specific language of any place in particular.” In practice, Leizarraga’s language mixes elements from the dialects to the north of the Pyrenees (in modern-day France), the only Basque area where the Calvinist faith had official support and followers. This first attempt at standardization did not have any following: it died out along with Basque Calvinism. 

More successful were the efforts of several Catholic writers of the Counter-Reformation who, some decades after Leizarraga, established what is now known as the “Classical Lapurdian School.” The most important work of this religious-literary school is Pedro de Axular’s Gero (“Later”), an ascetic treatise first published in 1643. 

In the preface to his book, Axular also appears concerned with the readability of his language for Basque-speakers from different areas: “I know, at the same time, that I cannot hope to reach all ways of speaking Basque, because in the Basque Country they speak in many different ways: in High Navarre, in Low Navarre, in Zuberoa, in Lapurdi, in Bizkaia, in Gipuzkoa, in Alava, and in many other places…. Basques do not all have the same laws and customs, or the same Basque speech, because they have different kingdoms” (Axular 1643:17). Axular’s practice, and that of the other members of the Lapurdian school, was to employ the dialect of the region where they lived, Coastal Lapurdi. Given the central location of this dialect within the Basque Country, this type of language would in fact have been easily understandable to many Basque readers. A literary device favored by Axular that would also contribute to the intelligibility of his language is the frequent piling up of several coordinated synonyms or near-synonyms. 

Axular did not attach much importance to his choice of dialect, “But, since commonly, in writing as in speaking, everyone thinks of his own as the best and most beautiful, and this of mine is not like yours, please do not argue and speak badly for that reason. If you are not happy with this, you may make it in your own manner, following the usage of your town, because I will not take offense because of that and will not get angry” (Axular 1643:18-19). 

Coastal Lapurdi acquired a certain prestige in the territories then under the French crown, but it did not become the undisputed model for all writers. For instance, Jean de Tartas, a writer from the easternmost region of Zuberoa, in his 1666 book Onsa hilzeco bidia (“The way to die well”), went back to Leizarraga’s solution of mixing elements from all Basque dialects in French territory: “I don’t know if my Basque
In the southern provinces, belonging to the Spanish crown, the first book-length work in Basque that has come down to us is a manuscript by Joan Pérez de Lazarraga (1550-1605) written in his own native Alavese variety. This manuscript remained unpublished and was discovered only in 2004. Printed literary production in the Spanish Basque Country started much later, essentially with the work of Manuel de Larramendi, author of the first Basque grammar (1729) and of an influential Basque dictionary (1745). In his (limited) written production in Basque, Larramendi used his native dialect, northern Gipuzkoan.

Northern Gipuzkoan shares with Coastal Lapurdian a central position within the Basque Country, which contributes to its intelligibility to speakers of more peripheral regions. In the territory south of the Pyrenees, this variety acquired the prestige that was formerly reserved for Coastal Lapurdian to the north of the political border. But this prominence did not go unchallenged, because of provincial rivalry. An interesting example is found in the work of the Bizkaian priest Juan Antonio Mogel (Moguel), who chose to write his book *Confesio ta comunioco sacramentuen gañean eracasteac* (“Instructions on the sacraments of confession and communion” 1800) in northern Gipuzkoan on account of its greater intelligibility to speakers from different areas in the Basque provinces under the Spanish crown: “I believe that the Basque language of this book will be understood in all of Gipuzkoa, in many towns in Bizkaia and in most of Navarre.” It appears, that some of his fellow Bizkaian priests did not understand these reasons and were offended that a preacher from their province had chosen the dialect of a different province. Three years later, in 1803, Mogel published a second edition of his book, this time in the Bizkaian dialect.

The founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, Sabino Arana Goiri (1865-1903), expressed very strong opinions regarding the standardization of the Basque language, even though he had learned the language as an adult. His reasons were more ideological than linguistic or practical. He envisioned a federal structure for a future independent Basque Country where each of the six historical provinces (Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Alava, Navarre, Lapurdi and Zuberoa) would largely retain self-government. In his opinion, this autonomy should be extended to matters of language, each Basque province developing its own provincial standard (Arana Goiri 1980:810-982). It is perhaps worth pointing out that, from a purely linguistic point of view, the idea of six province-based standard languages would not be very sensible, as, in general, the major isoglosses do not coincide with provincial boundaries.

2. The Basque Academy: First period 1918-1936

The Basque Academy (in Basque, *Euskaltzaindia*) was founded in 1918, under the auspices of the governments of the four Basque provinces within Spain. From the beginning, one of its main tasks was the standardization of the Basque language. Since, as we have seen, before the founding of the Academy no specific variety was uniformly regarded as the obvious basis of a written standard for the whole of the Basque Country, the standardization work of the Academy necessarily had to involve the selection of such a variety, before its codification could be undertaken.
Initially, the selection process was mired in controversy, as very different opinions were expressed by different members of the Academy. We must remember that there was no truly socially dominant Basque dialect, given the subordinate position of Basque with respect to Spanish and French on either side of the political border. As mentioned before, north of the Pyrenees, Coastal Lapurdian had acquired a certain prestige and, south of the border, northern Gipuzkoan was seen by many as the obvious choice for interdialectal communication; but the fact is that the preferred mode of expression of the urban middle classes in the Basque Country was French or Spanish and not any Basque variety. Not everyone accepted the preeminence of Gipuzkoan and Lapurdian and, even for those who did, there was the problem of having to choose between these two varieties if the goal was to define a single standard for the whole community of Basque speakers.

The first president of the Basque Academy, R.M. de Azkue, himself a native speaker of a Bizkaian variety, was of the view that the foundation of the written standard had to be “Completed Gipuzkoan” (gipuzkera osotua), by which he understood northern Gipuzkoan, complemented with elements from other dialects (see, for example, Azkue 1932[1917], 1934-35). Other notable academicians such as A. Campion and P. Broussain also thought that the standard would have to be based either on Gipuzkoan or on Lapurdian, or on a mixture of these two dialects (Campion & Broussain 1922). But there were other opinions as well. There were, for instance, some Bizkaian writers, such as B. Gaubeka (1922), who thought that the standard should be based on Bizkaian, because, in Gaubeka’s opinion, this was the “oldest” and “richest” dialect. There were also those who conceived the creation of a standard language as an exercise in linguistic reconstruction and regularization of morphological anomalies. Azkue himself went down this path in his early work, for instance (Azkue 1891) proposing to regularize the conjugation of the verb “to be,” which is irregular in all attested forms of Basque (as in many other languages). Although Azkue later rejected this procedure, which he rightfully came to see as a sin of youth, other writers, with a very poor understanding of how languages are structured and develop, published quite radical proposals along these lines (Soloeta-Dima 1922).

Even the very need for a single written standard was not universally accepted. In this camp were some of Arana Goiri’s followers, for the ideological reasons mentioned above. The writer Nikolas Ormaetxea (who used the pen-name “Orixe”) was also against unification. He thought that the multiplicity of dialects was a richness to be exploited for literary purposes and that different dialects could be used for different literary genres, as in ancient Greece. Consistently with this view, he wrote literary works in Bizkaian, in Low Navarrese, in Gipuzkoan and in a Gipuzkoan-High Navarrese mixture.

The great Spanish philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who was invited to Bilbao in 1920 to speak on the topic of the unification of the Basque language, expressed the view that the main task of the Basque Academy should be the preservation of the traditional dialects. He saw the creation of a written standard both as unnecessary, since Basque writers could easily express themselves in writing either in Spanish or in French, and as potentially harmful, since the spread of an artificial standard without scientific interest could mean the disappearance of the vastly more valuable historical dialects (Menéndez Pidal 1962:53-54). In any case, he thought it rather unlikely that the standardization work of the Academy would have any real impact on the language of Basque speakers: “You may eventually have a single written Basque, but that will not be
an instantaneous work. It is relatively easy to make a book for the use of a few writers, a combination of Gipuzkoan and Lapurdian, and to provide it with perfections from other dialects, but I do not believe that will ever be the language of a people” (Menéndez Pidal 1962:53).

The fact is that very little progress was made in the selection of a standard variety during the first decades of the work of the Basque Academy. In a sense, codification preceded selection in this period, since some agreements were reached regarding Basque orthography, regardless of the particular variety favored by the writer. All activities of the Basque Academy would come to an abrupt halt with the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 and World War II.


Immediately following General Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War, all activities in favor of the Basque language were prohibited. After a few years, however, there was some relaxation in the repressive measures and the Academy was allowed to operate again in 1945.

Regarding the selection of a standard variety, Azkue’s choice, Completed Gipuzkoan, never really caught on. Even though he was the Academy’s president, the project was left somewhat undefined and was not officially sanctioned by that body. Some Gipuzkoan authors simply wrote in some form of Gipuzkoan, sometimes including lexical and morphological variants that were geographically very restricted. Some non-Gipuzkoan writers, particularly Bizkaian, who tried to follow Azkue’s recommendation, eventually became disenchanted with the possibility of unifying the language in this manner.

North of the Pyrenees, Completed Gipuzkoan had very little appeal. Instead, a group of Lapurdian and Low Navarrese writers adopted a written language that was close to the contemporary dialects of the area, creating a new northern koiné, Literary Navarro-Lapurdian, systematized in Lafitte’s (1944) grammar. This northern koiné was easy for northerners to use but more difficult for southerners to understand than Classical Lapurdian.

An interesting, but rather misguided, proposal was that of F. Krutwig. He concluded that a written standard had to be perceived as a language of high culture and that the way to accomplish this in the case of Basque was to employ an archaic-looking variety based on the language of the sixteenth-century writer Joanes Leizarraga and with a profusion of borrowings from Ancient Greek.

Finally some writers and linguists, including J. L. Alvarez Enparantza “Txillardegi” and the poet G. Aresti, started to see clearly that the only way to create a written standard valid for the whole of the Basque Country was to develop a modern variety with strong links to the language of the Classical Lapurdian school but modernized, taking into account the contemporary usage of the central area, from both north and south of the political border. The linguist Koldo Mitxelena (Luis Michelena, in the Spanish form of his name) was also of this conviction, and he was entrusted by the Academy with the task of making a proposal for the unification of the Basque language.
Mitxelena’s proposal was presented and adopted by the Academy in 1968; this has become the modern standard variety or euskara batua (‘Unified Basque’).

In essence, this concluded the selection process. Modern standard Basque has its origin in the proposal presented by Mitxelena and approved by the Basque Academy in its open meeting of October of 1968 in Arantzazu. It has to be said, however, that Mitxelena was not alone in his conception of what standard Basque should be like. In particular, in his 1959 long poem Maldan behera (“Downhill”), the poet Gabriel Aresti employs a language that is virtually identical to that adopted by the Academy in 1968, as Mitxelena himself pointed out (Mitxelena 1978:472-473), and to present-day standard Basque. Mitxelena could rightly defend the Academy’s euskara batua against accusations of artificiality by arguing that, rather than making up a standard, the Academy had selected among the alternatives that at the time were observable in Basque literary usage.

In the construction of a new standard, Haugen (1972:109) identifies three procedures: “For related dialects one can apply principles of linguistic reconstruction to make a hypothetical mother tongue for them all. Or one can be guided by some actual or supposed mother tongue which exists in older, traditional writings. Or one can combine those forms that have the widest usage, in the hope that they will most easily win general acceptance.” Haugen calls these three procedures “the comparative, the archaizing, and the statistical.” In the construction of standard Basque, both the archaizing and the statistical procedures have been employed, whereas the comparative procedure, the use of reconstructed hypothetical forms, has been rejected.

To give an example, an area of great variation among Basque dialects is the morphology of auxiliary verbs, some of whose forms are based on different roots in different areas. For instance, “they have given it to me” is eman didate in Gipuzkoan, eman dautate in Lapurdian and emon deuste in Bizkaian. The forms that have been selected in standard Basque represent a choice between those found in the literary tradition of the central areas (Gipuzkoan and Lapurdian). Whereas in the particular example that we have mentioned (trivalent transitive forms) the Gipuzkoan paradigm (which is more regular) has been chosen over the Lapurdian one, in other cases standard Basque continues the Lapurdian tradition, when its forms are more regular and/or geographically more widespread, as with dut “I have it,” du “s/he has it” (vs. Gipuzkoan det, du—Bizkaian has dot, dau) or gara “we are” (a form which is also found in Bizkaian vs. Gipuzkoan gera). Time and again the Academy has asserted that the new standard does not involve any forms not previously attested in the tradition of the language (with an exception regarding pronunciation to be mentioned below).

It is typically the case that what become standard varieties are those spoken “by the wealthiest and most powerful groups” (Penny 2000:197). This is clear in the development of standard French from the Francien variety once natively spoken only around Paris and at the court of the King of France (Lodge 1993), and in the selection, in the Middle Ages, of the speech of Burgos and Toledo, where Castilian power was centered, as the language that was to become standard Spanish (Penny 2000:196-200). In the case of Basque society, however, the élite did not speak Basque, and the variety that was selected was the literary creation of a few poets and writers. At the time of its selection by the Basque Academy, euskara batua was nobody’s spoken language.


Codification

Mitzelena’s 1968 foundational report included a number of recommendations regarding orthography, morphology, lexical variants and the adaptation of neologisms. Luis Villasante, who was elected president of the Basque Academy in 1970, published three short books (in Spanish) further pointing the way towards unification of “common literary Basque” (Villasante 1970, 1972, 1980). Since then, the Basque Academy has worked continuously towards the codification of standard Basque by establishing rules, publishing lists of words in their approved standard form, and engaging in the publication of a substantial grammar of standard Basque, of which six volumes have appeared so far (Euskaltzaindia 1985-). The Basque Academy maintains a webpage (www.euskaltzaindia.org) where the complete list of grammatical and orthographical rules so far approved by the Academy can be found, along with a standard Basque lexicon (hiztegi batua). It is also possible to write to the Academy with specific linguistic questions, whose answers are also then posted on this webpage. A recent consultation, for instance, had to do with the expression of amounts of money in Euros.

Because of the particular circumstances of the Basque language, an aspect that has required the serious regulatory attention of the Academy, from early on and up to today, is the determination of what is and is not a Basque word (see Villasante 1988:61-91). In situations of language contact and, very particularly, in the case of minority languages, we may find different opinions regarding how much lexical borrowing from the majority language – and what kinds of borrowings – should be admitted in written standard usage. This is, to a great extent, a matter of taste for bilingual speakers. In the particular case of Basque, we have the enormous complication that, given its centuries-long language-contact situation, a sizeable part of Basque vocabulary is, in fact, of Latin and Romance origin. For a (bilingual) Basque writer it is often not obvious what is a Basque word that happens to be of Romance origin and what is, instead, a foreign word that perhaps should be avoided. Different attitudes in this respect are observable in the history of Basque writing. Among the first authors to write in Basque, for instance, Joanes Leizarraga (1571), the Calvinist translator of the New Testament into Basque, makes more liberal use of latinate words than the Catholic Axular (1643) does in his text. On his part, Joan Pérez de Lazarraga (1567) peppered his text with what, from our perspective, seems like excessive amounts of very crude and unnecessary borrowings from Spanish. For him this language mixture was perhaps a display of literary virtuosity.

The issue of what is and is not a Basque word became complicated with Larramendi’s (1745) dictionary and even more with the work of Sabino Arana Goiri and his followers at the end of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries. As already noted, Manuel de Larramendi was the author of the first Basque grammar ever published (Larramendi 1729), based on the Gipuzkoan dialect, and had an enormous influence in the development of Basque writing in the Southern provinces. With his trilingual Spanish/Basque/Latin dictionary, his goal was to fight against the detractors of the Basque language by demonstrating that Basque is as rich in lexical resources as Spanish or Latin. When he could not find a lexical equivalent for a Spanish word, he happily made one up. Given his prestige, other writers adopted many of Larramendi’s
neologisms (although Larramendi himself was rather more cautious in making use of his own lexical inventions in his writing).

Arana Goiri’s purist school had even more pernicious effects. Arana Goiri was determined to purify the Basque language by eliminating not only unnecessary recent borrowings and foreign words for which a perfectly good native equivalent could be found, but, in fact, all traces of foreign influence. When we consider that Basque has been in contact with Latin and its Romance descendants for two thousand years and that, as a consequence of this, a large part of the Basque lexicon is of Latin or Romance origin, it is obvious that this is quite a radical proposal. Even words that had been part of the language since the Christianization of the Basque Country such as arima “soul” (< Lat. anima), aingeru “angel” (< Lat. angelus), apezpiku “bishop” (< Lat. episcopus) and eliza “church” (< Lat. ecclesia), to name a few, were considered foreign invaders that had to be excised from the language. It may be useful to consider how replacements were found for these words. For “soul”, gogo “desire; thought” was preferred. A replacement for aingeru “angel” was found in the neological gotzon, coined by compounding gogo and on “good.” This compound, like many others invented by Arana Goiri, also shows a creative use of morphophonological rules. In the traditional Basque lexicon, we find a morphophonological alternation, limited to some lexical items, that is illustrated by bet-ile “eye-lash,” from begi “eye” + ile “hair,” ot-ordu “meal” from ogi “bread” + ordu “hour,” etc. There are about a dozen roots that undergo this alternation. Arana Goiri apparently reasoned that if begi “eye” had a compositional form bet-, or ogi “bread” had a compositional form ot- (and so on), gogo should also have a form *got(z)- in compounds, although, in fact, such form is nowhere attested. For “bishop” gotzain, lit. “soul-guardian,” was coined, and eliza “church” was replaced by txadon, from etxe “house” + done “holy” (Arana Goiri apparently did not realize that this second element, traditionally used with the name of some saints, is also ultimately from Latin dominus). By the radical application of what they took to be the purest Basque rules of composition, Arana Goiri and his followers coined a great number of neologisms that were completely unintelligible to an average uninformed Basque speaker. Clearly, however, an unaltered compound such as gogo-on, literally interpretable as “good intention,” would be a worse alternative for the intended meaning of “angel” than the opaque gotzon.

Without taking such an extreme view, R. M. Azkue, the first president of the Basque Academy, also excluded from his influential dictionary (Azkue 1905-06) all words of foreign origin for which he thought a “pure” Basque equivalent was available. Thus, for instance, as Villasante (1988:71) notes, Azkue’s dictionary does not include the word fede “faith,” even though it is found in all Basque dialects and has deep roots in the Basque literary tradition. Azkue thought that the native word sineste “belief” could be an adequate “pure” Basque equivalent, which eliminated the need for the “foreign” word.

All of this linguistic extremism created considerable confusion in lexical matters, which made it advisable for the Academy to make a pronouncement, even before the bases for a standard were established. Following Mitxelena’s advice, the Academy

sensibly ruled that a word should be considered to be “Basque” to the extent that it has a tradition in Basque usage, regardless of its etymology and regardless of the supposed availability of “pure” synonyms (Euskaltzaingoa 1959). Since then, most of the neologisms introduced by the Arana Goiri school have fallen out of use – not all of them, however, since a few of these neological formations continue to be employed. These are mostly words that refer to the ideology of Basque nationalism and to specifically Basque realities, even if originally they were intended to have a broader meaning, including, for instance, aberri “nation,” ikurrin “(Basque) flag,” ikastola “Basque school” and lehendakari “(Basque) president.”

The question of what is a Basque word continues to generate debate (see, for instance, Sarasola 1997). Whereas in 1959 the concern was that many genuinely Basque words were being excluded solely because of etymological prejudices, in 1991 the Academy appears concerned with the excessive use of borrowings from Spanish (in the south) and French (in the north) in the media, in the present-day situation where virtually all Basque speakers are fully bilingual in one of these two languages. In the Academy’s view “Those [words] that a Basque speaker would not be able to understand without knowing Spanish or French are not Basque words at all. It seems that in order to understand some shows of some mass media Basque speakers are forced to learn Spanish first, and those from the south, French”10 (Euskaltzaingoa 1991:446).

At the present moment, then, codification in the case of Basque involves not only orthographic matters, establishing rules of “good usage” and deciding which dialectal lexical, morphological and syntactic variants are acceptable in the standard, but, crucially, also strictly distinguishing between Basque on the one hand and Spanish and French on the other, given the fact that, almost by definition, Basque-speakers are fully bilingual in one of these two latter languages.

Like all standard languages, standard Basque was initially conceived of as a medium for written communication. Under a common orthography it is possible to hide certain differences in pronunciation, with the understanding that actual pronunciation may vary depending on the dialect of the writer/reader. A sign of modern times is that, especially because of its oral use on radio and television, in 1998 the Academy felt compelled to codify the proper pronunciation of standard Basque in formal contexts, such as news broadcasting. The most difficult point was the pronunciation of <j>. It is perhaps worthwhile briefly dwelling on this point since it is illustrative. Because of different phonological evolutions, words like jaun “lord,” jo “hit” and jakin “know” have very different initial segments in different Basque dialects (see Trask 1997:155-157, Hualde 2003:27-28). Whereas Coastal Lapurdian has a glide [j-], Gipuzkoan has a postvelar [x-] (identical to Castilian “jota”), and other solutions are found in other dialects. Before the creation of the new standard, [j-] was the prestige variant in the north and pronunciations with [x-] had prestige in the south. In the standard orthography, the letter <j> provided a convenient way to hide this diversity in pronunciation under a single spelling. Also, in many borrowings like jeneral “general,” justifikatu “justify,” and teolojia “theology,” everyone could write <j> and pronounce it as in Spanish or as in French, depending on the contact language of the area. This solution worked extremely well for the written standard. This diversity, however, could not be sustained if euskara batua was also to function as an oral standard.
In the codification of this point of standard pronunciation, the Academy deviated in part from the criteria established by Mitxelena (by this time deceased) by violating the injunction against inventing forms not found in the tradition of the language. As a general rule, the Academy recommended pronouncing \( \text{j} \) as a palatal. In so doing, it followed the criterion of favoring the most conservative pronunciation, since historically this pronunciation is clearly the earliest. In terms of geographical distribution, the solution is also adequate, since a palatal pronunciation in these words is found not only in Lapurdi, but also in areas of Navarre and of Bizkaia. However, the ruling went against the statistical-demographic criterion, since a majority of Basque speakers (in all of Gipuzkoa and parts of Bizkaia and Navarre) had \([x]\). The true experiment in language engineering, however, concerns the pronunciation of technical borrowings with the spelling \(<\text{ge}>\), \(<\text{gi}>\) in Spanish and French (and English). Against earlier practice, the Academy recommended writing, for example, \textit{geologia} instead of \textit{jeolojia} and pronouncing \(<\text{g}>\) as a voiced velar stop (or approximant), as in native words. That is, both the “Spanish-style” and a “French-style” pronunciation of borrowings with \(<\text{ge}>, <\text{gi}>\) were rejected and, in their place, a “German-style” pronunciation with no tradition in the Basque language was introduced.

**Elaboration of function**

As Haugen (1972) defines this aspect of the standardization process, one of the goals of new standard languages is that they be used for the maximum number of possible linguistic functions. We already saw that Menéndez Pidal questioned the advisability of developing a standard Basque language. In his opinion there was no room for it. All linguistic functions not assigned to the local spoken Basque dialects were already fulfilled by standard Spanish and standard French. The same view was expressed in a more strident manner by the Basque-born Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, who in his youth had made an effort to learn the Basque language:

Basque culture, what one calls “culture,” has been made in Spanish or in French. It was in Spanish that Inigo of Loyola, the founder of the Company of Jesus, wrote his letters and exercises; and it was in French that the abbot of Saint-Cyr, founder of Port-Royal, bastion of Jansenism, thought and wrote…. In Basque it is not possible to think with universality. And the Basque people, when they rise to universality, do so in Spanish or French…. The authors of the report [Campion and Broussain] know perfectly well that one could not use Basque to explain chemistry or physics, or psychology or … any other science. They know perfectly well that the religious, theological and psychological vocabulary of Basque is of Latin origin. (Unamuno 1958:345-347)

Perhaps more surprisingly, in the years before the adoption of \textit{euskara batua}, some Basque writers and members of the Basque Academy also expressed the opinion that Basque, as a written language, should be restricted to the least technical domains, which would have made the creation of a standard unnecessary. This was the view of the playwright A.M. Labaien:
We have some new “developers” who would like to bring the Basque language further: to the domains of Philosophia Naturalis, Bacon, Newton and Einstein. As a dream, it is not a bad one. My feeling is, however, that that may be going too far, for the time being. We will always have to learn high theology, chemistry and similar things in another language. Asking for too much, without measuring our strength and possibilities, could be damaging. I would be happy if we continue in a more humble manner. I would limit our literature to this “quadrivium”: 1) the Christian catechism and religion, 2) folk wisdom (tales, songs, comedies, poems and novels), 3) instruction on nature, 4) the basics of elementary mathematical science.12 (Labaien 1954:155)

N. Ormaetxea, who, as we mentioned above, was against the creation of a standard and in favor of using different dialects for different literary genres, was also explicit in stating the narrow domain of action that he thought appropriate for the Basque language:

The Basque language has a place to show its beauty: in belles lettres or literature, in ontological topics or metaphysics, in the laws of beauty or aesthetics, in language or grammar. Let us leave aside chemistry and similar things; those are not proper human language. Those have never made a language more beautiful…. When the need arises, let us work on those sciences in any other language.13 (Ormaetxea 1959:92-93)

Mitxelena and other proponents of euskara batua disagreed with this view. They thought that the only way Basque could survive was by developing a standard to be used for all linguistic functions. The Government of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, following the wishes of the majority of voters, has favored the extension of Basque (that is, euskara batua) to domains previously reserved for Spanish, such as public administration, television and other mass media, and education, including the university. All of this has required an enormous effort, both public and private, which is ongoing, including the publication of technical dictionaries in Basque, free Basque lessons for public servants, and campaigns in favor of the Basque language. This is necessarily a long process. Regarding education, nowadays the majority of school-children in the Basque Autonomous Community are educated either in Basque or in bilingual Spanish-Basque programs (see Gardner & Zalbide 2005), but the University of the Basque Country still offers many subjects only in Spanish, perhaps because there are not enough qualified Basque-speaking professors in all academic fields.

On the one hand, elaboration of function in the case of Basque implies sharing functional domains with Spanish (and French). On the other, it implies taking away functions from the traditional Basque dialects. In principle one could imagine a situation where both the standard and the traditional local dialects would thrive, by assigning different functions to them, as argued by Zuazo (2000, 2005). In this scenario, euskara batua would compete for functions with Spanish (and French), not with the traditional dialects. The fact is, however, that education in euskara batua is having a profound effect on the speech of the younger generation in many areas. The process of convergence with standard Basque is more advanced in some areas – where we see a clear break with the local tradition – than in others (Elexpuru 1996, Aurrekoetxea 2004).

Even in geographical areas where the local dialect remains strong, some of its more complicated structural aspects are being eroded when they do not coincide with euskara batua. This is so, for instance, with accentuation. Among Basque dialects, we
find a great diversity of prosodic systems. Some of them have a certain complexity, including some pitch-accent systems found in coastal Bizkaian and some Navarrese varieties. A common observation is that contrasts in accentuation present in local varieties are normally not transferred to euskara batua. Some of the linguistic contrasts expressed by accentuation in local varieties, such as a contrast between singular and plural forms, are segmentally marked in standard Basque. For virtually all speakers, euskara batua does not have contrastive word-accent. In turn, fluency in euskara batua seems to be leading to the loss of contrastive word-accent in local dialects among young speakers. In this, of course, Menéndez Pidal’s predictions are being fulfilled.

One could argue, nevertheless, that the traditional local Basque varieties were bound to lose their distinctiveness with or without the existence of standard Basque. The fact is that in modern societies there is much greater mobility than there used to be and most people spend many years in the educational system. The amount of linguistic input in a local variety that young speakers receive has thus been considerably reduced.

Although euskara batua is now the variety used in the vast majority of Basque educational settings, some Bizkaian schools employ a regional standard, literary Bizkaian, in the first educational levels.

Acceptance

Immediately following the Academy’s sanction of Mitxelena’s proposal for standard Basque in October 1968, there was a strong negative reaction on the part of a relatively small but very vociferous minority. The attacks focused on a seemingly minor orthographic point of the proposal: the use of the letter <h>. Traditionally the letter <h> had marked a salient difference between northern and southern written usage. Most dialects north of the Pyrenees have contrastive aspiration in a number of phonological contexts: word-initially (e.g. hori “that”), between vowels, either identical (e.g. zahar “old”) or different (e.g. ohe “bed”), and after a postvocalic coronal sonorant (e.g. alhaba “daughter,” urrhe “gold,” unhatu “get tired”), as well as a series of aspirated stops (e.g. epher “partridge,” ethorri “come,” leku “place”). Traditionally, northern texts employed the letter <h> to indicate aspiration in all these contexts. The isogloss of aspiration coincides almost perfectly with the French-Spanish border. None of the southern dialects has any aspiration, and southern writers did not employ the letter <h> at all. This orthographic element then allows one to identify the geographical origin of a Basque text at a glance: whereas northern texts show a profusion of aitches, in the southern literary tradition, continued by Azkue’s Completed Gipuzkoan, as well as literary Bizkaian, etc., there are no aitches at all.

Mitxelena proposed to include the letter <h> in the new standard, but in a limited way: only word-initially and between vowels, in those words where the northern dialects have aspiration in these contexts. In this too, he was following the lead of contemporary southern writers like Aresti and Txillardegi, who were also intent on creating a pan-Basque standard that would bring together the northern and southern literary traditions. The orthographic choice represented in standard Basque can be illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern tradition</th>
<th>Southern tradition</th>
<th>euskara batua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

13
Even this compromise solution, however, was unacceptable for some southern writers who, all of a sudden, had to learn how to spell hundreds of words if the new standard were adopted.

The fact is that the introduction of the new standard coincided with a profound generational change in Basque society. Some of the most important younger writers in Basque who favored the new standard were religiously agnostic or atheistic and politically left-leaning. This contrasted with an older generation of Basque writers who were profoundly Catholic and politically conservative. In these circumstances, an identification of content and form took place. In a number of articles and pamphlets published at the time, opponents of the new standard identified it, and in particular its most visible exponent, the use of <h>, with the ideology of writers like Aresti and Txillardegi, which they found objectionable. For these keepers of traditional family values, writing in *euskara batua* was tantamount to espousing a pernicious Marxist, anti-Catholic ideology (see, among others, Labaien 1972:28-29, Arenaza 1974).

Eventually, however, most of Basque society, including conservatives, came to see that the claim that the use of *euskara batua* necessarily implied a Marxist ideology had no merit. Contributing to this realization, in some measure, was the fact that some public figures of unquestionable Catholic credentials, like the then-president of the Basque Academy, Father Luis Villasante, a Franciscan, took a clear stand in support of the new standard, rejecting any supposed connection between it and any “revolutionary” ideology. The universally recognized prestige of Mitxelena, who was the author of outstanding contributions to Basque linguistics and philology, also led intellectual weight to the Academy’s proposal.

If the alleged connection between *euskara batua* and Marxism was clearly preposterous, an ideology to which the creation of a new standard is almost necessarily linked is a nationalist ideology. A standard language is created to serve the needs of communication within what is taken to be the national group (see Haugen 1972:103-104). In this respect, the rapid acceptance of the new standard within Basque society is undoubtedly related to the strength of Basque nationalistic feelings at the time of its adoption. General Franco’s repression of Basque culture had the unintended effect of increasing the sense of a Basque identity under attack among the majority of the population of the Basque Country which was opposed to the regime. This was especially the case in Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, which Franco had declared “traitor provinces” at the end of the Spanish Civil War. All symbols of Basque culture, and especially the Basque language, acquired a special value, even among those who had grown up speaking only Spanish. There was a strong desire to learn the language among Spanish monolinguals and to be educated in Basque among native speakers (see Martínez de Luna & Azurmendi 2005:30). To serve these functions, the existence of a standard was essential. The rapid acceptance of the new standard is explained by the fact that the Academy was reacting to a strong demand for it from Basque speakers and those who wanted to learn the language.
Nevertheless, the expected correlation between support for a national standard and a nationalist ideology is by no means perfect in our case. It may seem anomalous that some writers who strongly rejected the possibility of developing a single standard for the whole of the Basque-speaking community, north and south of the Pyrenees, were in fact ideologically aligned with the Basque nationalist movement. They believed in the existence of a Basque nation and yet rejected the idea of a national language. This belief is related to the influence of Arana Goiri’s confederal conception of the Basque nation and the Basque language, as we saw before.

On the other hand, standard Basque has also received support from non-nationalist quarters. The Autonomy Statute of the Basque Autonomous Community (approved on December 18, 1979), known as Statute of Gernika, which was signed by both Basque and Spanish nationalist parties, recognizes the authority of the Basque Academy in all linguistic matters (art. 6.4). The Navarrese Government, which has always been in the hands of Spanish nationalist parties, has also recognized euskara batua, even though the political forces in power in Navarre reject the integration of Navarre within the Basque Autonomous Community (a possibility contemplated by the Spanish constitution) and do not believe in the existence of a Basque nation.

It can be said that euskara batua has become the only realistic option for most written functions in Basque. A possibility for non-supporters of Basque nationalism in the Navarrese case, consistent with their ideology, would have been to develop a separate Navarrese Basque standard, but, given the dialectal diversity within the region and the small percentage of Navarrese citizens who speak Basque, this was never seriously considered. Instead, the Navarrese legislation (Navarrese Law on the Basque Language 18/1986 of December 15) also recognizes the authority of the Basque Academy (art. 3), while declaring that the dialectal variants of Navarre will be “the object of special respect and protection” (art. 1).

Euskara batua is also becoming increasingly accepted in the French Basque Country, where textbooks and teachers from south of the border have an important presence in the relatively small number of schools where Basque is taught. Many writers from the older generation, however, remain loyal to Navarro-Labourdín and the local varieties, which they see as dying out. Written Zuberoan also remains the only accepted medium of a very popular form of theatrical representation particular to this region, the “Pastorals,” although there are reports that it has become difficult to find young actors who speak Zuberoan fluently.

The norms of the Academy are closely followed in publishing, the media, and educational circles, even when they go against widespread earlier practice. Whereas in matters of spelling and lexical variants the speed with which new rules of the Academy gain general acceptance in Basque society is remarkable, perhaps the most striking example of this conformity with the rulings of the Academy on the part of educated Basque speakers is found in the area of pronunciation. To go back to an example given earlier, shortly after the Academy made public its decision regarding standard pronunciation, many speakers who until then had always said [xakin] “know,” and [xeoloxia] “geology,” started to favor [jakin] and [geologia], in accordance with the new norm.

The benefits that the Academy’s standard has brought to Basque society are widely recognized. First of all, it has made it possible for Basque speakers to discuss any
topic in Basque. Secondly, it has eliminated the (sometimes serious) obstacles that previously existed in communication between speakers from different areas of the Basque Country. At the same time, euskara batua is still nobody’s “real” native language, a situation that not uncommonly creates feelings of linguistic insecurity, together with a willingness to accept external norms of linguistic use.

Conclusion

In this paper we have reviewed the standardization process of the Basque language. The development of standard Basque is a recent phenomenon. This is undoubtedly because Basque is spoken in societies where other languages have traditionally occupied all functions beyond informal communication at the local level. Only some of the few writers who chose to write in Basque — generally for religious propaganda, less commonly for literary purposes — felt the need for a standard variety. The creation of standard Basque has to be connected to the strengthening of Basque identity sentiment in the 1950s and 1960s. With the new standard, the Basque Academy was responding to a strong societal demand for education in Basque and for an expansion of the roles assigned to the Basque language, including the media and public administration. It was fortunate that a linguist of the stature of Koldo Mitxelena, who had an unsurpassed knowledge of the history of the Basque language, Basque dialectology and Basque literature, was given the authority to set the guidelines for the new standard. The new standard became an immediate success, in spite of an initial negative reaction in some quarters. Nowadays, less than forty years after the introduction of euskara batua, the domains of the Basque language have been expanded considerably, even in geographical areas where the language had been lost centuries ago, and the position of standard Basque in Basque society appears secure – to the extent that the Basque language itself has a secure position.

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Laburpena

Euskararen batasun bidea


Resumo

La normigo de la eúska lingvo
La normiga procedo de la eŭska lingvo prezentas kelkajn nekutimajn karakterizaĵojn. Kvankam iuj el la unuaj aŭtoroj, kiuj publikigis siajn verkojn en la eŭska en la deksesaj kaj deksesaj jarcentoj, eksplicite rimarkis la malfacilajn kauzitajn de dialekta diverseco, oni malmulte progresis en la normigo de la lingvo ĝis la dua duono de la dudeka jarcento. Eĉ la efiko de la kresko de eŭska naciismo fine de la deknaŭa jarcento ne estis komplete pozitiva, ĉar la fondinto de la Eŭska Nacista Partio favoris la evoluigon de malsama skriba varianto por ĉiuj eŭska provinco. El la ekstreme purisma kaj neologismiga emo de iuj tiutempaj verkistoj ankaŭ fontis obstakloj sur la vojo al normigo. En 1918 oni fondis akademion de la eŭska lingvo, unu el kies ĉefaj celoj estis unuigo de la skriba lingvo, sed ĝi faris neniu esencan progreson ĝis la lingvisto Luis Michelena (Mitxelena) prezentiĝis raporton al la Eŭska Akademio en 1968 pri la fundamentaj principoj por skriba normlingvo. Ekde tiam, pliaj stadioj de la normiga procedo okazis tre rapide. La nova normo elstare sukcessis kaj ene de kelkaj jardekoj ĝi fariĝis firme starigita en la eŭska socio.

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[Please insert the map at a convenient place early in the text]

**The Basque Country**

The Basque Country constitutes the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Nafarroa (Navarre) is a separate Autonomous Community. The three historical territories of Lapurdi (Labourd), Nafarroa Behera (Basse Navarre or Low Navarre) and Zuberoa (Pays de Soule) are part of the Département des Pyrénées Atlantiques.

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**Notes**

1. For a detailed presentation of the legal situation of the Basque language in the different territories where it is spoken, with an emphasis on the educational system, see Urrutia Libarona (2005). See also Gardner & Zalbide (2005), Legarra & Baxok (2005), Mateo (2005).

2. One of these is Jean Pierre Duvoisin’s (1858) *Laborantzako liburuak* (“A book of farming”). Another is Piarrres Etxeberri’s (1677) *Itsasoko nabigazionekoa* (“On sea navigation”), a Basque adaptation of a
3 Bat bederak daki Heuskal Herrian kasi etxe batetik berzera ere mintzatzeko maneran zer differenzia eta dibersitatea den.

4 Lengoajez den bezenbatean, ahalik gehiena guziei adieraziteari jarreiki izan gaitzatza, eta ez xoil edozein lekhu lekuak jakinoko lengoaje berezir.


6 Baiña zeren komunzki hala eskiribatzea nola mintzatzea, nori berea idurizen baitzaika hoberenik eta ederenik, eta ene haur ezpaita zurea bezala, ez othoi hargatik arbua eta ez gaitz erran. Honezak kontet espazara, egizu zuk zeure moldera, eta zure herrian usatzen eta segitzen den bezala, zeren ez naiz ni hargatik bekhaiitzuko, eta ez muthurturik gaitzez jarriko.


8 Uste det, berriz, liburu onetako euskara izango dala aditua Giputz guzian, Bizkaiko erri askotan,ta Nafarroa geienean.

9 Podréis llegar a tener un éusquera único, pero ésa no será obra momentánea. Fácil relativamente es hacer un libro para uso de unos cuantos escritores, una combinación del guipuzcoano y el labortano y proveerla de perfecciones de otros dialectos; pero esa creo no llegará nunca a ser la lengua de un pueblo.

10 Ez dira erabat euskal hitzak gaztelera edo frantsesa jakin gabe euskaldun batek ezin aditzekoak, no bairruduk euskaldun teknologikak edo teknologiako lehenik letak ezin dezaketenak, eta ez gaitz erran. Honezak kontet ezpazara, egizu zuk zeure moldera, eta zure herrian usatzen eta segitzen den bezala, zeren ez naiz ni hargatik bekhaiitzuko, eta ez muthurturik gaitzez jarriko.

11 La cultura vasca, lo que se llama ‘cultura’, se ha hecho o en español o en francés. En español escribió sus cartas y sus ejercicios Inigo de Loyola, el fundador de la Compañía de Jesús, y en francés pensaba  y escribía el abate de Saint-Cyr, fortaleza del jansenismo…. En vascuence no se puede pensar con universalidad. Y el pueblo vasco, cuanto se eleva a la universalidad, lo hace en español o en francés…. Los autores del Informe saben de sobra que no se podría explicar en vascuence ni química, física, ni psicología. ni… ciencia alguna. Saben de sobra que el vocabulario religioso o teológico y psicológico del vascuence es de origen latino. Note that, following this logic, English would not be an adequate language to write about these topics either, since most of the technical vocabulary of English is of Latin origin.
