

Article

An Educational Project Based on the YouTuber Phenomenon for the Development of a Minority Language

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Abstract: In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), the “Basic Law on the normalization of the use of Basque” (law 10/1982, of 24 November) establishes that Basque citizens have the right to express themselves in either of the two official languages (Basque and Spanish), and to receive instructions in both languages. Therefore, the Faculties of Education must train future teachers to be able to teach and communicate in the Basque language. However, data from the last VI sociolinguistic survey (2016) tell us that 33.9% of the population aged 16 and over living in the BAC is Basque-speaking, but balanced bilinguals who express themselves with the same fluency in both Basque and Spanish make up only 29.3% of Basque speakers. In a study on linguistic customs in the academic field carried out on a group of future primary education teachers, it was observed that although Basque is the language they will teach in the schools of the BAC, it is not their main language of communication. Given this situation, it was deemed necessary to introduce the use of technology to promote the use of Basque. To this end, a project was designed and implemented, involving the intensive use of the social network YouTube. This paper presents the results of the data generated in this didactic experiment at the university level.

Keywords: sustainability objectives; minority language; YouTuber phenomenon



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1. Theoric Introduction

In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), numerous languages are spoken from all over the world, but there are two official languages: Basque and Spanish. The Basque Government's Department of Culture and Language Policy seeks to achieve balanced bilingualism, following the latest sociolinguistic survey [1] carried out among the population over the age of 15 to obtain information on the knowledge, use and family transmission of Basque. The findings tell us that while 33.9% of the population aged 16 and over living in the BAC is Basque-speaking, balanced bilinguals who express themselves with equal fluency in both Basque and Spanish account for only 29.3% of Basque speakers. Moreover, bilinguals who are more fluent in Spanish than in Basque make up 44% of the population, and constitute the majority group among Basque speakers, with more than half of Basque speakers aged 16–24 years old being bilingual with their predominant language being Spanish (55.7%). In terms of gender, women were found to speak this minority language more than men, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Consequently, the Department of Language Policy ensures the correct development and application of Law 10/1982 of 24 November: the Basic Law on the standardization of the use of Basque and other complementary regulations, including the order of 15 June 2021, of the Regional Minister of Culture and Language Policy, which regulates and calls for the granting of subsidies for the promotion, dissemination and/or standardization of Basque in social aspects of life in 2021. In the digital sphere, the Basque Government has presented the 2021–2024 roadmap for the promotion of Basque in the digital environment, which

includes 4 strategic lines of work, 10 recommendations and 24 proposals for action, which are: (1) to promote digital content in Basque; (2) to promote digital tools, applications and resources in Basque; (3) to give visibility to Basque and to provide digital resources in Basque so as to encourage their use; (4) to guarantee technological vigilance. Our focus here is on the first of these strategic lines (<https://www.ehu.es/es/web/sae-helaz/ikd-curriculum-garapena-oinarriak> (accessed on 18 January 2021)).

In the field of digital communication and education, numerous studies have shone a light on Relation, Information and Communication Technologies (RICTs) [2–4], defining them as “spaces for conversation, play, recreation, interaction and construction; for laughter and gossip; for parodies and flirtations; spaces which generate a set of opportunities to learn what we call ‘life skills’, the capacity to feel and be moved, to meet others and socialise” [3].

RICTs have as a main component the “R-relational factor” in the digital environment for the purpose of learning. Its main characteristics are collaboration, creativity, motivation or metacognition [5]. It is important that we all have access to these types of tools; however, not all languages have the same space or the same importance on the Internet and in digital communication. Numerous authors [6–9] underline the hegemony of the English language on the Internet; therefore, the digital space seems to be far from being linguistically diverse—English is still the most used language, and there are languages that cannot access the Internet. However, the value of such tools is not denied; Krishna [10] said that communication technologies have opened up the geopolitical boundaries of traditional nation-states and offered a number of resources to diaspora members to construct and reconstruct their identities. Belmar and Glass [11] underline that the presence of a minority language online seems to be a necessary step for the empowerment of linguistic minorities in the digital sphere (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, for example). In Reershemius’ [12] study on the use of Low German (a set of Germanic language varieties) in such domains, it was examined how speakers of heritage languages make use of digital media through virtual media. The study was based on a six-month observation period, and the analysis showed that new literacy practices are developing among speakers of this language, such as the use of their language on Facebook, even though the speakers were previously reluctant writers of their mother tongue.

In addition to the social networks mentioned above, there are platforms for the production and consumption of multimedia content, such as YouTube, which offers a multidimensional space for cultural activities and products. YouTube is a convergent and divergent medium, as it allows for interconnections between media platforms and products on the one hand, and a channel for specific groups and interests on the other hand [13]. The YouTube platform is a space that turns ordinary people into influential communicators:

“For the first time in history, common people are becoming communicators with great influence, gatekeepers or non-official agents who determine the message flow to their community [14,15] thanks to their use of the YouTube platform and their social networks” [16] p. 97.

In addition, YouTube has enabled the presence of many languages and cultures. Globally, YouTube registers about 2 billion users per month, and is considered the most viewed video content service, ahead of Netflix and Instagram (<https://www.forbes.com.mx/> (accessed on 21 January 2021)). According to the YouTube statistics available online, on average, 8 out of 10 people aged 18–49 watch more YouTube per month than television. It is available in around 80 different languages in 91 countries (<https://www.brandwatch.com/es/blog/46-estadisticas-youtube> (accessed on 21 January 2021)). As can be seen from these figures, the reach of this digital medium is enormous.

A YouTuber or user who creates a video becomes a social communicator and must know what to talk about to whom, as well as when, where and how to talk about it and, therefore, must display the characteristic of communicative competence [17] in order to be understood.

Belmar and Glass [11] mention that virtual communities also seem to help transnational communication in stronger linguistic communities and give the examples of lan-

guages such as Catalan, Irish, Welsh or Basque. However, in order to access these digital spaces, minority communities must have resources and support in the following aspects, which is often not easy for them: (1) the development of websites with content in their own language; (2) free or open source software resources; (3) infrastructure and technical equipment in their languages and not in English; (4) the use of online oral and written form; (5) contemporary and relevant content to attract younger generations [18].

This research examines the experience of future teachers studying a degree in Primary Education in the Basque Autonomous Community, aged between 19 and 22 years old, who are given the task of creating a digital resource—specifically, a YouTube video—as a group, in order to develop their oral communicative competence in Basque as well as their digital competence. The focus of this experiment is placed on two strategic axes: sustainable linguistic development and the promotion of digital resources in Basque, as regulated in the Basque Government’s Language Policy.

Thus, we aim to answer the following question: does the creation of a digital resource in Basque influence the use of the language among the members of the work group? In addition, does the gender of these young participants have any bearing on the use of the language?

2. Participants, Materials and Methods

Before they had begun working on the video, in order to find out the language choice profile of the participating students, they were asked about their linguistic habits. They had to say which language they spoke in the different areas of the university environment. Their answers were not very different from the data obtained in the 2016 sociolinguistic survey: the students who participated in the project always or almost always spoke Spanish among friends in the cafeteria (80%) and on campus (81.3%). This percentage dropped in more formal or studious spaces such as the classroom, where half of the students surveyed said that they communicated in both languages (60%) and always or almost always in Basque (12.5%). In the study rooms, the responses were similar, with 50% saying they made similar use of both languages, compared to 35% who always or almost always spoke in Spanish. Participants always or almost always communicated in Basque with the administrative and service staff working in the faculty to which they belonged: 83.8% with the office staff, 88.8% with administrative staff and 91.3% with the deans. However, when interacting with library staff on the university campus, but outside the faculty, they communicated in both languages with the same frequency. This tells us that students spoke mainly in Basque in formal academic areas of the faculty where teaching, administrative or service staff are present. These data are shown in Table 1.

In informal spaces, among friends and outside the faculty, via WhatsApp, for instance, the students communicated always or almost always in Spanish (Table 2).

These linguistic habits did not vary as a result of the gender of the participants, as was found by applying the Mann–Whitney U test, since this independent variable was not normally distributed. According to the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the level of significance was 0.000 (Table 3).

Thus, we applied the Mann–Whitney U test to find out if there were significant differences according to gender in the use of one or the other languages in the different areas of the campus, and we observed that there were none according to this variable (Table 4).

With the aim of fostering the use of the Basque language among friends, both inside and outside academic spaces, students were given the task of creating a YouTube video. The project followed the university’s Cooperative and Dynamic Learning model, placing emphasis on making students the masters of their own learning, and training them in a comprehensive, flexible way that is adapted to meet the needs of society (<https://www.ehu.eus/es/web/sae-helaz/ikd-curriculum-garapena-oinarriak> (accessed on 16 February 2021)). This educational model promotes projects in which the central axis is the learner and aims for students to interact fluently with their teachers, peers

and environment; to commit themselves to solving the problems and challenges facing Basque society and culture within the criteria of sustainability and social responsibility; to turn learning into a vital and permanent activity; to use RICTs and to be able to develop their activity in a multilingual way. Within this pedagogical framework, there is a need to develop communicative competence in Basque and digital competence. (<https://www.ehu.eus/es/web/sae-helaz/ikd-curriculum-garapena> (accessed on 21 January 2021)). In addition, this addresses two of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development passed on 25 September 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly: SDG18 (Linguistic and cultural diversity) and SDG4 (Education and quality).

Table 1. Students' linguistic habits in formal spaces.

			Frequency	Percentage	
Formal spaces	In the faculty	In exchanges with the caretakers	Similar in both languages	9	11.3
			Always or almost always in Basque	67	83.8
			Always or almost always in Spanish	4	5.0
		In exchanges with the administrative staff	Similar in both languages	7	8.8
			Always or almost always in Basque	71	88.8
			Always or almost always in Spanish	2	2.5
	In exchanges with the deans	Similar in both languages	6	7.5	
		Always or almost always in Basque	73	91.3	
		Always or almost always in Spanish	1	1.3	
	In exchanges with classmates	Similar in both languages	22	27.5	
		Always or almost always in Basque	10	12.5	
		Always or almost always in Spanish	48	60.0	
In exchanges with peers in study rooms	Similar in both languages	40	50.0		
	Always or almost always in Basque	12	15.0		
	Always or almost always in Spanish	28	35.0		
Outside the faculty	On campus	Similar in both languages	10	12.5	
		Always or almost always in Basque	5	6.3	
		Always or almost always in Spanish	65	81.3	
	In the library	Similar in both languages	26	32.5	
		Always or almost always in Basque	28	35.0	
		Always or almost always in Spanish	26	32.5	

Table 2. Students' linguistic habits in informal spaces.

			Frequency	Percentage
Informal spaces	In the cafeteria	Similar in both languages	10	12.5
		Always or almost always in Basque	6	7.5
		Always or almost always in Spanish	64	80.0
	Via WhatsApp	Similar in both languages	15	18.8
		Always or almost always in Basque	7	8.8
		Always or almost always in Spanish	58	72.5

Table 3. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for one sample.

		Gender
N		80
Standard parameters ^{a,b}	Media	1.19
	Standard deviation	0.393
Maximum extreme differences	Absolute	0.496
	Positive	0.496
	Negative	−0.317
Test statistic		0.496
Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)		0.000 ^c

^a. The test distribution is normal. ^b. It is calculated from data. ^c. Lilliefors significance correction.

Table 4. Mann–Whitney U test according to gender in the different areas of the campus.

	In the Cafeteria with Classmates	In the Classroom with Classmates	On Campus with Classmates	Via WhatsApp with Classmates	In the Faculty with the Caretakers	With the Library Staff	With the Administrative Staff	With the Dean's Staff	In the Fish Tanks (Place Where the Students Meet Outside the Faculty.)
Mann–Whitney U	480,500	325,500	445,000	468,000	452,500	460,500	408,000	485,500	455,500
W of Wilcoxon	2,625,500	445,500	565,000	588,000	2,597,500	2,605,500	528,000	605,500	575,500
Z	−0.124	−2289	−0.771	−0.307	−0.673	−0.353	−1788	−0.050	−0.433
Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	0.901	0.022	0.441	0.759	0.501	0.724	0.074	0.960	0.665

For this project, small groups of students had to become “Euskal YouTubers”, so as to promote the use of Basque in educational settings outside the classroom. Groups from the higher years accompanied them throughout the process, advising them on the more formal didactic features of a good educational YouTuber, and assisting them in the sociolinguistic research prior to the production of the video. In addition, they provided them with data on the use of Basque throughout history. The Cooperative and Dynamic Learning model thus follows a methodology based on Cross-level Collaborative Projects, through intensive cooperation among pupils from different education levels, and also based on research, which is seen here in the students’ study on the use of languages, overseen by the teachers involved and in collaboration with an expert in research of this kind.

To find out whether this cooperative and dynamic learning-based project, with the inclusion of educational technology through the intensive use of the social network YouTube, had contributed to promoting the use of Basque within the duration of the project (ten weeks), a test was applied, assessing the linguistic habits of the students before and after the project, whereby the students had to indicate which language they spoke with each of the members of the collaborative group, according to the following scale: (1) only in Basque, (2) mostly in Basque, (3) mostly in Spanish, (4) only in Spanish.

3. Results

The future teachers, bilingual young people from the Basque Autonomous Community, carried out this project. As already explained, students of different academic levels took part in this collaborative project. The data collected in a graph with a scale of 1 to 4 (see Section 2), before and after the project, was analyzed with Microsoft SPSS software.

On the basis of the data obtained, we compared the sample averages before and after the project and observed that the use of the minority language as the main language of communication among the members of the working group did indeed increase during the time the project took place (Table 5):

Table 5. Comparison of the sample averages before and after the project.

	N	Media	Standard Deviation	Average Standard Error
Before the project	80	3225	0.7459	0.0834
After the project	80	2425	0.6940	0.0776

We used the Mann–Whitney U test to prove that there were differences between the two groups with quantitative variables and with non-normal distribution. This test is based on rank differences, in opposition to the Student’s t test that uses quantitative variables with a normal distribution [19]. The Mann–Whitney U test was applied and, as with language habits, no significant gender differences were observed in the sample averages before and after the project (Table 6):

Table 6. Mann–Whitney U test of the sample averages before and after the project ^a.

	Before the Project	After the Project
Mann–Whitney’s U	349,500	475,500
W of Wilcoxon	469,500	595,500
Z	−1832	−0.159
Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)	0.067	0.874

^a. grouping variable: gender.

4. Discussion

The Basque Youth Observatory cites a study carried out by 50 researchers over three years as part of the European project Transmedia Literacy: *Exploiting transmedia skills and informal learning strategies to improve formal education*. The main objective of said project was to investigate the transmedia skills that are developed, among other things, throughout

young people's production of online content and their participation in social networks. It should be noted that this project was developed in countries such as Spain, Uruguay and Colombia, all of which have Spanish as their main language. Based on the research that was carried out, specific materials consisting of didactic activities were created for teachers. They came to the conclusion that these kinds of materials and online projects benefit students: "The idea is to propose alternatives to benefit from the transmedia competences developed by adolescents outside school, through their application within the formal education system".

Regarding the influence of the use of transmedia resources in language learning, there is talk of transmedia narratives that Andrade and Fonseca [20] define as those stories that are explained from different perspectives depending on the media. The mass media of the Internet, such as YouTube, according to Ibañez [21], allow for the finding of content and the creation of videos to then be shared with the world.

In the world, there are many languages that are in danger of extinction. Ethnologue specifies the status of each language according to the EGIDS scale [22] and the recognition it has in the country where it is spoken. Basque is defined as an isolated language, as are some languages of Colombia (Camsá), Nigeria (Centúúm), Ecuador (Cofán) and Mexico (Seri). Fernandez de Arroyabe et al. [23] warn of the risk that this type of language "succumbs to the push of hegemonic languages such as Spanish and English. And this danger is even more real in the digital age". The same authors carried out a study on the presence of Basque in the consumption and creation of online audiovisual content, concluding that the presence of this language in said content among teenagers in the Basque Autonomous Community is scarce, and defended the creation of online audiovisual resources to promote a minority language and the ability to learn it:

The presence of Basque in the consumption and creation of online audiovisual content among Basque teenagers is scarce. Spanish is the dominant language, and English occupies a marginal position, although in some cases it even overtakes Basque. Thus, the future of this minority language depends, to a large extent, on encouraging consumption and creation among the new generations in accordance with the strengths and weaknesses identified in this work. In relation to the research questions posed, the consumption and creation of said content is mainly in Spanish. While English is ahead of Basque in terms of following, it is non-existent in terms of creation, where bilingualism is preferred, but with a predominance of Spanish. Reference materials for school use are usually consulted in Spanish, although Wikipedia in Basque reaches very high percentages, which supports efforts to promote it in this language. With the exception of specific cases, no significant differences have been detected regarding school year that indicate any trend in this respect, which is surprising, given that this is a significant variable.

([23], p. 368)

In this context, UNESCO's promotion of universal access to information through open solutions is a direct contribution to the achievement of goal number 10 (reducing inequalities), focusing on development and fostering innovation, especially through RICTs. The "YouthMobile" initiative aims to teach young people how to mitigate sustainable development challenges in their immediate geographical context by finding relevant mobile application solutions in local languages (<https://es.unesco.org/sdgs/ci> (accessed on 7 March 2021)).

Taking into account the transmedia resources in mass media such as YouTube, the need to work with this educational project on the sustainable development goal number 11 of the Euskadi 2030 Agenda, which seeks to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, is clear. One of its goals is to promote the use of the Basque language: Euskera (https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/agenda2030/es_def/adjuntos/Agenda_Euskadi_Basque_Country_2030_desarrollo_sostenible.pdf (accessed on 9 March 2021)).

Therefore, the educational project described above was designed and implemented with the support of YouTube and has been found to be of use to the development of the Basque language among the members of the group that had carried out the task of creating online videos. It should be noted that this tool has a number of features that offer benefits for minority languages and for those who are learning a language, such as: it is attractive, it is real (i.e., the videos are samples of real life), it is a way of free advertising, it is global, it allows content to be shared, and finally, it allows comments and subscriptions to be made [24]. As a result, in addition to raising awareness of the cultures, identities and languages of few speakers, it can help students work on skills such as speaking, listening and writing [25–32]. In addition, the Basque speakers of the videos offer identity references for adolescents as they become role models, especially among the youngest, thanks to their ability to improvise, change and surprise their audiences, as well as for the sense of authenticity, accessibility and intimacy they share with their followers [33]. As listed by Fedele [34] and Aran et al. [33], these types of media can have the following social functions: entertainment functions (e.g., they provide fun, humor, a way to pass time, a way to avoid boredom and an escape from routine), consumption situation functions (e.g., serving ritual, structural and relational functions), narrative and socialization functions (e.g., serving an identity function, a community function, a way of learning about reality, a modeling function, a sharing function amongst peer groups through conversations, identification and admiration with and towards characters, (i.e., through forming parasocial relationships with characters)). Through this project, it was seen that YouTube fulfils a socialization function linked to the identity aspect and to learning about and in reality.

In line with the above-mentioned studies, the creation of transmedia narratives should be incorporated into teacher training for two reasons: first, from an informal point of view, it appears that the choice of language for communication between colleagues can change, as shown in Graph 3 of this paper; and secondly, languages and their identity characteristics are introduced through real texts and audiovisual content. “Language, like other identity elements, is part of a wide network of symbolic representations through which groups define and redefine their identity positions. We understand that the language/identity dynamic is not established by immanent forces; on the contrary, it is constructed in social interaction and under specific historical, social and cultural conditions” [35].

5. Conclusions

Taking gender into account, the main conclusion was that, as shown in the results section, there were no significant gender differences in language use either before or after the project, be this within the different areas of the campus (in the cafeteria, in the classroom, by the fish tanks or on campus), via WhatsApp, with the faculty, the library staff, the administrative staff or the dean’s staff. We thought that gender could significantly affect the results because of the Cluster sociolinguistic analysis, which showed that women used Basque more than men in every age group except the elderly [1].

Graph 3 shows the results of the creation of a digital resource in Basque, influencing language use among the members of the work group. Paricio and Martínez [36] carried out a literature review on the revitalization of some minority languages and concluded that new technologies play an important role in this:

The experiments that have been applied and studied in minority languages all over the world have generally obtained results that inspire optimism. One need only review the literature on the revitalisation of languages such as Hawaiian, Maori, Welsh, Irish, Mohawk, Occitan, Sardinian, Amharic, etc. (Wright, 2004; Galla, 2009; Cunliffe et al., 2005; Eisenlohr, 2004; Bittinger, 2006; Djordjevic, 2007; Streiter et al., 2006), to observe that, in languages whose communities have access to new technologies, these play a very relevant role in the revitalisation programmes that are being developed, either in a planned way—as in the case of Hawaiian since 1994 (Galla, 2009)—or through the individual action of activists or speakers, as in the case of Occitan (Djordjevic, 2007).

([36], p. 2)

The present project has some limitations. For example, it is an experience carried out in a short time, with relatively few people in a specific place (the Faculty of Education in Bilbao). It would be necessary to extend the time, the number of participants, to try it out in other places in the Basque Country and also in other places where there are minority languages.

Therefore, in the future, we plan to extend this type of teaching practice, observe by means of questionnaires that ask about language use, as we did in this project, and also to use other types of tools such as validated questionnaires on cooperative work or student motivation.

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