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Standardisation of Basque: From grammar (1968) to pronunciation (1998)

This paper deals with the standardisation of the Basque language. Standardisation will be here understood as the codification of a linguistic variety accepted by the majority of speakers as a common form of the language. In the case of Basque, that stage was reached soon after the Royal Academy of the Basque Language (*Euskaltzaindia* in Basque) proclaimed what was called Unified Basque (*Euskara Batua*) in 1968. It was then that the first stone was laid in a long and fundamentally successful process now facing the challenge of standardising pronunciation or, rather, finding a consensus on the pronunciation(s) of standard Basque.

The main hypothesis to explain the success of Basque standardisation is that a historical conjunction of political and ideological circumstances worked as a conspiracy of factors towards what constitutes so far the largest agreement ever reached by Basque speakers. Unified Basque achieved a social consensus that other political or cultural issues never obtained.

Technicalities are kept to a minimum in this paper. More phonological details may be found in Oñederra (forthcoming), a work with which this one has obvious intersections.¹

1 Historical landmarks on the way to standard Basque

1.1 Predecessors

Basque speaking communities are found in seven provinces; Basque speakers (also speak either French or Spanish as a native language. Four provinces are in the north of Spain and constitute two autonomous regions: Navarre and the Autonomous

¹ Part of what I will relate is based on my personal experience as a member of the successive groups working on pronunciation for the Academy, and now chair of the Pronunciation Committee. My years as a linguistic advisor for the public Basque radio and television (2001–2005) also provided me with important evidence and food for thought. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my ideas here. Thanks to Alison Keable for improving not only my English but the paper as a whole. Much of the literature used here was studied within the research project EHU 13/19 *Euskararen prosodiaren estandarizaziorantz* ("Towards the standardisation of Basque prosody"). I sincerely wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editors whose corrections, suggestions and comments clearly improved my work."

Community of the Basque Country, which comprises Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba. In southwestern France, we find Lapurdi, Low Navarre and Zuberoa.² Euskaltzaindia – the only official institution shared by all the territories where Basque is spoken – was founded in 1919 with the explicit aim of unifying the dialects of all those people.

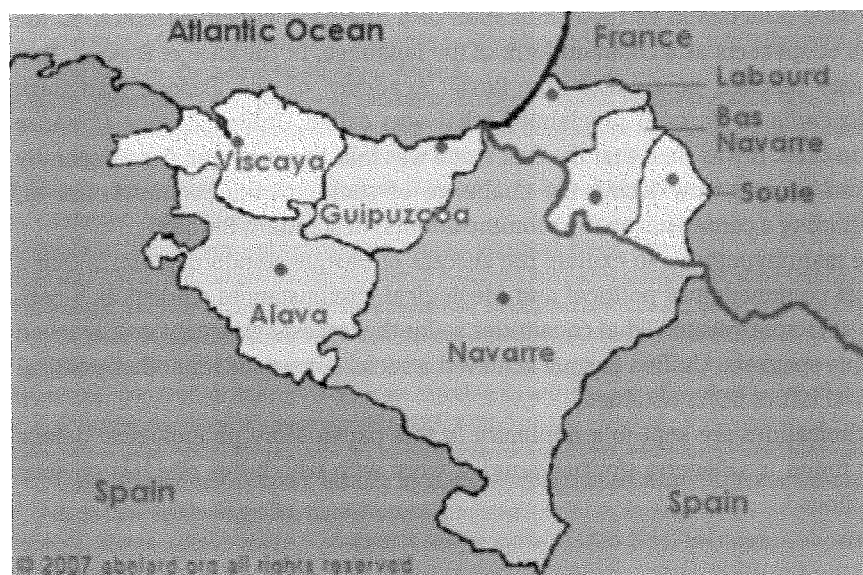


Figure 1: The seven provinces where Basque is spoken

Several authors had proposed different standard varieties even before the Academy was founded. The following sketchy account simply aims at illustrating how they all implied the choice of one of the dialectal varieties as the base for the common standard. For those interested in information and details not given in this paper for the sake of focus and space, I would recommend, among others, Zuazo 2008, Hualde and Zuazo 2007, and, very especially, Michelena's reflections scattered throughout his many publications (for example, Michelena 2011 [1977]).

² Names of authors, provinces and dialects are given following current practice in linguistic publications in English (I specifically lean on Hualde and Zuazo 2007). On the other hand, I refer to Koldo Mitxelena as Luis Michelena out of respect for his keeping the two forms of his name and always signing his publications in any language other than Basque as Luis Michelena. Some editors of posthumous publications (e.g. Michelena 2001 [1960] or the translations of Michelena 2011 [1977] and 2011 [1982] have generalised the Basque version).

The first efforts made were by Basque authors from the French region. As early as the 16th century, Joanes Leizarraga, who was commissioned to translate the Calvinist Bible into Basque, made a conscious effort to find a linguistic pattern that could be understood by speakers of the different dialects. Neither his religious nor his linguistic choices had much echo, though, and the latter were substituted by standards that Catholic writers developed in the next century (Michelena 2001 [1960]: 52). Joanes Etxeberri is probably one of the most interesting authors of the 17th century, though he was not so influential in his time. The 18th century brings about a shift in standards, now based on the central dialect of Gipuzkoa, Larramendi's linguistic design being perhaps the most influential. During the 19th century the literary success of writers like Mogel or Añibarro promoted a written standard based on the western dialect of Bizkaia. In the years before the Civil War (1936–1939) Azkue turns once again to the Gipuzkoan dialect in his proposals. After the Civil War Krutwig (a prominent member of the Academy) models his proposal after Leizarraga's, and in the 1940s, Lafitte designs a model based on the central and western dialects from the French-Basque provinces. Finally, the standardisation proposed by Euskaltzaindia in 1968 reached the success that none of the previous efforts had achieved. Explanations of this success will be discussed below.

1.2 The struggle

After the Spanish Civil War the Academy had resumed work in the 1950s, still under Franco's dictatorship, but when repression was not as tight as in the years following the war. In 1964, the writer, engineer and linguist Txillardegi (pen name of José Luis Álvarez Enparantza) formally presented a demand for a unified Basque in a meeting held by the Academy on French territory. Four years later, Euskaltzaindia, led de facto by the prestigious linguist Luis Michelena (1915–1987),³ officially proclaimed the basic codification of a standard form or Euskara Batua at an extraordinary meeting organized in Arantzazu, a sanctuary up in the mountains and a highly symbolic place for Basque nationalist resistance under Franco.

It is important to note that the Academy stated explicitly that Euskara Batua was a standard variety for the written language (Euskaltzaindia 1968). That writers and teachers should accept and use it was clearly felt as a condition for its success. But the leaders of the movement must have known that those conditions had, to some extent, already been met. When interviewed by the journalist Ibarzabal, Michelena admitted that the linguistic pattern he had designed heavily leaned on what

³ He was not the president of the Academy, but chaired the committee that elaborated the proposal and had a central role in the debate about it.

the most active writers (who were often as active as political militants) were already using (Ibarzabal 2001: 160).

He was aware that the model fit the parameters of what was most feasible. It was a mixture of the central and eastern varieties: “un tipo de lengua “mezcla” de guipuzcoano, navarro y labortano” (Ibarzabal 2001: 162). This mixed variety, on the one hand, showed linguistic features that he had concluded to be fundamental in his seminal work *Fonética Histórica Vasca* (Michelena 1985 [1961]). On the other hand – and this was an even more important reason for him at the moment – the chosen variety stemmed from the varieties spoken in areas with the highest percentage of Basque speakers. Had Bilbao, the largest Basque city, been linguistically more Basque, things might have been different in spite of the linguistic arguments (Ibarzabal 2001: 161), i.e. the standard variety might have been based on western dialectal features.

Opposition to Batua, the standard proposed by the Academy, was, if I may borrow Ernst Håkon Jahr’s words,⁴ intense and passionate in the 1970s. It mainly came from moderate nationalists, Catholic members or sympathisers of the Basque Nationalist Party. The new standard was identified with Marxist ideas, with anticlericalism and atheism. In the properly linguistic realm, the main complaints were the contamination of Basque with Spanish as well as the reduction of dialectal diversity. A further issue was added from the province of Bizkaia (stronghold of the party); the standard variety gave priority to the Gipuzkoan dialect while Bizkaian was marginalised. Even during the next decade acceptance of the standard by the recent Basque Government was a matter of intense debate and was even at risk on occasion (Etxenike 2015).

In order to have a better understanding of those arguments against the Academy’s standard, we will quickly go over the historical factors that were most probably feeding the debate.

Sabino Arana Goiri who “founded” Basque nationalism and the Basque Nationalist Party in the 19th century had had a very purist attitude towards the language. His linguistic position was coherent with his social and cultural opinions. He was a paternalistic admirer of what he considered to be “true Basque values”, which he saw in the pure souls of fishermen and farmers, away from the influence of urban Basque-Spanish bilinguals or Spanish monolinguals. Many of those were immigrant workers from other Spanish areas who had arrived with the industrialization of the Basque provinces that started in the 19th century.⁵

⁴ Jahr (2014, 25) refers to discussion about the lexical choices of the journal *Saga*, published in 1816, only two years after Norway became a nation.

⁵ Industrialization began earlier in the province of Bizkaia (cradle of Arana Goiri, and therefore of Basque nationalism) than in Gipuzkoa. At any rate, *pace* Fishman (1991: 150) language *erosion* had been happening well before immigrant workers arrived due to neglect by urban middle classes.

Arana Goiri is well known for the neologisms he invented in order to avoid the use of Spanish loanwords in Basque. Although Arana’s lexical choices were part of a larger purist movement (*a real revolution* in Sarasola’s [2005: ix] words), his proposals were by far the most influential, possibly because of his political status.

A personal anecdote may show how the purist movement might have had some bearing on the intergenerational transmission of the language. I attended a Basque (clandestine) school until I was 7 (1961–1965), still within the purist tradition of Basque nationalism. My grandmother, by far more competent in Basque than us, felt insecure because we could use all those words (e.g. *orlegi* ‘green’) whereas she made do with the more familiar loanwords (e.g. *berdea* ‘green’, cf. Spanish *verde*).⁶

In addition to that purist ideology stemming from the previous century, the 20th century brought its own fuel to the political antagonism and ideological struggle that for some time obstructed the way to linguistic standardisation.

Marxism began to flourish in Spain in the late 1960s early 1970s. This happened later than in other places in Europe due to hard repression, total control and the massive exile of leftists during the first decades of Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975). An important part of the evolution towards Marxist ideas occurred among Basque refugees in France. This directly leads us to the next element that made the discussion about standard Basque especially tense.

The ETA terrorist movement (or resistance movement as some people would still rather call it, but at any rate, one which was deliberately violent) was born at the very end of the 1950s. It is generally considered to have been founded in 1959 as the result of a merger of militant organizations (among which EGI, a radicalised subsection of the Basque Nationalist Party). The aforementioned Txillardegui, who demanded a new standard from the Academy in 1964, was a founder of ETA. This clearly explains how the debate relative to linguistic standardisation became entangled with the pro-/anti-violence division between moderate and radical nationalists. Things like some of the arguments used against the acceptance of the letter *h* in standard spelling should be seen in that context (for example, *h*, phonetically realised only in some varieties of the French area, was considered to be a “communist letter” in the title of a newspaper article). The clash is not entirely over yet, if I am correctly interpreting the call made by some media to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the linguistic standardisation in 2014 (i.e. 50 years after Txillardegui’s demand to the Academy) instead of waiting until 2018, the 50th anniversary of the 1968 most integrative agreement officially led by the Academy.

⁶ The explanation of the term *orlegi* in Pagola’s (2005: 308) study of Arana’s neologisms very nicely shows the kind of arguments used by purists for or against a given word.

1.3 Positive factors

1.3.1 Michelena. In spite of all such trouble, the standard variety proclaimed by the Academy in 1968 was soon successful in a measure never attained by previous attempts. Opposition was rather soon subdued. A crucial fact was that as confirmed by contemporary witnesses like Michelena (2011 [1977]) and Sarasola (1978), the model was adopted by the majority of educators, writers and culturally active intellectuals, i.e. the *influential groups* within a process of standardisation (Haugen 1966: 933).

Most young urban users of the language enthusiastically followed the Academy, immersed in the general atmosphere of the moment. It was a time of social opening-up and modernisation. The last years of Franquism following the Spanish boom in the 1960s (construction, tourism, the expansion of industrialisation in the Basque Country) had economically been good, which boosted innovation. With the new standard Basque came beards and denim trousers.

Michelena, already in his mid-fifties, was an essential element for the social success of this process (probably the only issue on which Basques have reached a substantial consensus). Crucially, Michelena personified an unquestionable political compromise during and after the Civil War, the wise flexibility to approve proposals coming from younger activists in spite of ideological distances, and a deep understanding of sociolinguistic issues.

Though a practising Catholic and member of the Basque Nationalist Party who never approved of the ETA methods nor its aim at independence, he opened the door to the new generations. As the outstanding linguist he already was, he chose linguistic standardisation because he believed the standard to be an absolute necessity for the survival of the language. As a nationalist militant he chose the unification of the language as a way to unify the people (Ibarzabal 2001: 163).

Although he was only able to start a formal academic career at the age of 33, after he was released from prison in 1948, his gifted mind and strong will helped him attain prestige as an intellectual and linguist. His copious written work provides good evidence of that.⁷ It was extremely fortunate in the history of the language that he was there, in the right place at the right time: he was the architect who designed the main features of the grammatical standardisation. He could do it in a linguistically sound manner too, after his seminal work on diachronic and synchronic aspects of the language.

⁷ *Lenguas y protolenguas*, published as early as 1963, is a brilliant example. I mention it here because it is now accessible in English, edited by professor Joaquín Gorrochategui and translated by the linguists John Tynan and Charo Pascual Pérez (see Michelena 1997).

His tough life during the Civil War and under Franco's dictatorship made of him a respected figure who deserved the loyalty of many. We could say that his personal bad luck also turned out to be good for the language: he could hold factions together, as he was respected by radicals as well as moderates, by older and younger generations alike. Michelena had the political support that previous reformers like Azkue had lacked (Michelena 2011 [1982]: 16). As such, he was the bridge that made unity possible. In addition to that, being an expert in linguistics he guaranteed protection against unsound solutions like the ones held by Arana and his followers.

1.3.2 Language and resistance. From a social perspective, in order to understand the success of standardisation in 1968, we should also take into account that in the 1960s the language had definitely become the main cohesive factor of Basque nationalism in contrast to the more ethnically-oriented 19th-century ideology.

In the struggle against Franco's repression of minority languages (Siguan 1994), Basque was an important symbol. Support of the language became a form of cultural resistance and people got organized to learn and teach Basque as the dictatorship grew relatively softer throughout its final years.⁸ The language taught in the *gau-eskolak* (literally, night-schools⁹) was the new unified standard. Those evening classes later developed into the present numerous public and private Basque language schools.

After Franco died in November 1975 and Spain became a democracy, Catalan, Galician and Basque obtained the status of official languages together with Spanish in the autonomous communities where those languages were spoken. Basque therefore became co-official with Spanish in part of the Basque speaking territory: in the three provinces of the autonomous Basque Country and in part of Navarre; the rest of Navarre and, of course, the three provinces belonging to France were left out of this.

As an official language, Basque entered new fields such as the mass media, the (also new) university, and public administration, where it had never been present before. It was a generally shared idea that the standard variety was the most adequate choice for the new functions of the language. Another important consequence of this change in status was the increasing numbers of second-language learners who had an instrumental motivation.

⁸ Those who could already speak Basque learned the new standard in those schools.

⁹ Classes were taught during the evening, when the language learners had finished work.

2 The Academy on pronunciation

The much debated and finally accepted 1968 norms had fixed spelling and nominal declension paradigms of standard Basque. Auxiliary verbal paradigms were settled between 1972 and 1973, and the standard form of synthetic verbs was standardised by 1977. How that written standard should be pronounced was an open question. In fact, the debate on pronunciation has lasted to our days.

Every process of standardisation is in continuous development. But that is particularly obvious in the case of Basque, because the process is relatively recent and also because generalization of the linguistic standard variety was to a large extent simultaneous with the sociological expansion of the language to new speakers and new functions. As we will see, relative novelty of norms, second language learners and the diversity of language uses confront the pronunciation of Basque nowadays.

As already pointed out in Section 1.2, the Academy clearly expressed that the standard norms proclaimed in 1968 were designed for the written language. All the subsequent developments of the standard were equally, albeit implicitly, oriented to the written form. It was only after public radio and television insistently asked for some sort of pronunciation guide that the Academy stepped in on the matter.¹⁰

The need for a pronunciation pattern was not exclusive to media professionals, however. Speakers of all types used the language orally. Most teachers chose the standard form considering it more appropriate for the transmission of the language to new learners, or because that was the variety in which modern didactic material was written. New learners then had no other option but the standard. New areas of language use also suggested the adequacy of the new standard. Finally, the unified language was felt to be the strengthening factor of the new era.

In the meantime, critical voices like Txillardegui's notwithstanding, the Academy ignored the question of pronunciation, busy as it was with many important problems that had to be solved immediately. I also dare say that pronunciation for most members of the Academy was (and still is to some degree) a secondary matter vis-à-vis the written language. Many Basque scholars are no exception to the general tendency to take the "[s]poken language (...) for granted" (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 55).

It is of course true that speakers continued using the language orally. From 1968 on, when speakers spoke in the standard variety, they naturally based their pronunciation on the written form of standard Basque. Letters of the standard spelling were automatically identified with the underlying form of phonemes (the speaker's units of perception). So, speakers who would spontaneously have rendered *ez dakit* 'I don't know' as /estakit/ would "standardise" it by pronouncing it /esdakit/. As

¹⁰ Public Basque Radio and Television (*EITB* in its Basque initials) began broadcasting in Basque and Spanish (through parallel channels) in 1983.

such, they would avoid the pronunciation of that initial *d* of the verbal form *dakit* as /t/, keeping the realisation of the sound identical to their interpretation of the written character.¹¹

Some specific choices were directly dependent on the speaker's dialect: for example, western speakers would not differentiate *z* and *s*, because the laminal-apical sibilant originally underlying the orthographic distinction had long been neutralised in that dialectal area. Similarly, *h* would not be pronounced by speakers of most dialects, which had lost that phoneme centuries before.¹²

Second language learners had to lean on their Spanish or French phonological competence when facing the task of pronouncing Basque, which was more often than not taught from written texts and pedagogical material.

To make a long story short, we could say that slightly different varieties (fundamentally linked to speakers' linguistic backgrounds) of spelling pronunciation became the oral form of standard Basque. In truth, differences between the spontaneous dialectal pronunciations and the new one were not strikingly obvious. As even those readers not familiar with the language may have guessed from the examples, Basque orthography is highly phonetic. Standard Basque followed in that sense what had been with few exceptions the general trend all throughout the history of the language. Therefore "reading" letters does not dramatically alter the spoken language to the ears of the layman.

Linguists and particularly sensitive speakers, however, notice two unsettling problems in the acritical identification of written units with phonemes. The first one has to do with diversity. The second one is the subordination to Spanish or French phonologies. The latter is not exclusive to those who learn Basque as a second language. Nowadays, practically all native Basque speakers are bilingual, as they also acquire either French or Spanish during childhood.

In 1993, ten years after the first Basque television broadcast, the Academy called upon a group of linguists to constitute the Pronunciation committee (among them, Txillardegui, who was by then professor at the University of the Basque Country). The committee presented a proposal at the 1994 public conference of the Academy (Oñederra 1994a, 1994b), after a year of internal conflict between those who did not believe at all in the possibility of standardising pronunciation and proponents of a uniform spoken standard. Among the not-so extremists, some voices considered

¹¹ For the sake of clarity I am altogether avoiding allophonic details that are of no bearing here. That is why slashes are used to indicate the pronunciation.

¹² During the initial standardisation period, some teachers required the pronunciation of *h* from learners who had no aspiration (/h/) in their phonemic inventory (Zuazo, 2008: 866). I thank José Ignacio Hualde for sharing this observation with me. In their enthusiasm those teachers must have accepted [x] (the Castilian pronunciation of *j*) as the realization of standard written *h*. *Ceteris paribus* sound units not represented in the phonemic inventory do not exist in the speakers' perception and cannot therefore be purposefully produced (Donegan 1995).

that the weakening of dialectal features that standardisation would potentially cause was not an important worry, as it would only bring about the loss of *vulgarisms*. The committee was never called in after the conference.

In 1996 the Committee for Standard Basque organised a subsection that was to work on the 1994 proposal for the standardisation of pronunciation. An interesting characteristic of the team, which included language teachers (four out of seven) and a language advisor of Basque TV, was their focus on practical aspects. A proposal that insisted on the need to acknowledge dialectal and stylistic diversity was presented to the Academy in several plenary meetings. Its basic tenets were finally accepted and the norms for the Careful Pronunciation of Standard Basque (Basque: *'Euskara Batuaren Ahoskera Zaindua'*) were published in 1998. After that, normative work on pronunciation was interrupted until 2013, when a new Pronunciation Committee was instituted.

3 Limited success of pronunciation norms

Success of the 1998 norms has been rather limited. When they were published, nobody was fully satisfied. Sceptics, who thought pronunciation should not or could not be prescriptively standardised, were naturally against the norms. On the other hand, those who were in favour of the norms wanted more. They demanded more and more elaborate norms, specifically those related to accent.

An important drawback of the 1998 norms for the pronunciation of standard Basque is probably that they were neither effectively announced, nor well explained. Both things were indeed difficult. Unlike the atmosphere of enthusiasm of the 1960s and 1970s when no special effort had to be made for the communication of any measure regarding the language, the 1990s were already a time when use of the language and even its survival were taken for granted by a large fraction of the population (including those who did not speak it). Teaching the language is no longer the mission of militant volunteers, but a regular job that can even have a permanent public contract.¹³ In fact, the pronunciation norms are mainly known by professionals of education and media and, at best, by citizens applying for some sort of language certificate.

Relatively little attention has been given to the introductory lines of the 1998 norms, which are often absent in the part devoted to pronunciation of texts used in the classroom. Precisely those lines and some partial hints within the norms, alongside their title, contained the message about the stylistic and sociological limits of the pronunciation norms.

¹³ These comments relate mainly to the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Circumstances may be quite different in other areas.

Lack of interest in linguistic variation on the part of prescriptive agents (here including the bulk of academicians, teachers, examiners, editors, etc.) and the abovementioned secondary status of pronunciation in relation to written language underlie the present rather chaotic application of pronunciation norms. Social circumstances and the degree of consciousness of individual speakers condition their active use.

Traditionally, Basque has not developed much stylistic variation. With the exception of some clergymen and a few intellectuals, social elites seem to have neglected the language that they only kept (if at all) for communicating with servants and farmers or fishermen. The language has mainly survived among illiterate lower classes.

Dialectal variation is consequently great, but that does not mean that speakers fall back on their dialects when confronted by the need to pronounce the standard variety. Much to the contrary, in sociolinguistic circumstances in which they choose to use the standard variety, they tend to avoid the application of dialectal rules. As a matter of fact, many teachers still perpetuate the spelling pronunciations that became widespread as a result of the standardisation of the written language in 1968. They do so even out of the classroom, solidifying what has become some sort of an oral standard.

This pattern – or, rather, patterns – is in turn the only reference on which second language learners may model their pronunciation if teachers avoid dialectal features in the classroom. These speakers are also deprived of the capability of stylistic variation, as they do not have any dialectal background to lean on as a resource for colloquial registers.

In order to have a clear picture of the current situation, we must take into account that many language teachers learned Basque as a second language. That is also true of teachers who teach in Basque from nursery all the way up to university.¹⁴

There is however another interesting type of monostylism. Besides the abovementioned sceptics towards the pronunciation norms, there are other educated speakers who do not follow the standardisation norms (grammatical ones included) even in circumstances that would normally require it. Their lack of variation is formally the opposite of the monostylistic standard of second-language learners, but it is equally limited. In the absence of more systematic studies, we could define this type of speaker as a young person who is subjectively or objectively distant from the standard variety. That is, they are either speakers of dialects not chosen as the basis for the standard, or they want to differentiate themselves from the speakers who use

¹⁴ The teaching of Basque is compulsory at all levels of lower and secondary education in the Basque Autonomous Community, the most extended models being curricula that include teaching of at least some of the courses in Basque.

the standard.¹⁵ In spite of their at least minimal command of the written standard, some only seem to be able to use colloquial registers. Their speech is heavily coloured by their own dialect, and not only with regards to pronunciation. The high intensity of that dialect colouring is the main difference between these speakers and politicians who speak dialectal Basque in public speeches because they do not take care to use the standard, though they may not be particularly proud of that.

Those younger speakers did not experience the collective fight for the standard as the way to save a threatened language. In addition to that some dialectologists and other leading figures are again putting forward the issue of dialect preservation in opposition to language standardisation. And finally, on a wider scale, all this should be seen in the context of a general trend towards the limitation of standards and the reinforcement of vernacular varieties that Elordui (2016) interestingly observes in her study of *Euskadi Gaztea*, the Basque public radio station for the young.

4 Prosody

In contradistinction to those speakers and probably scandalized by them, we find those who were frustrated by the 1998 norms for the pronunciation of standard Basque because they feel that there should be tighter norms and more of them. One of their main complaints was the lack of an accent pattern for the pronunciation of standard Basque.

Their requirement runs totally against the idea underlying the 1998 norms. The group of linguists and teachers working on the preparation of those norms considered that pronunciation should only be minimally normed: the most basic common phonological dynamics shared by all or most dialects had been chosen, in order to obtain an abstract pattern that would work as a reference of different pronunciations that would still be recognisable as standard due to those very few basic features like the palatal pronunciation of *j*. Apart from that, the 1998 norms simply tried to rescue Basque phonological features eliminated by the spelling pronunciation. On the whole, the idea was to have a norm flexible enough to be compatible with the dialects under the different circumstances of speech realisation.

That flexibility was especially sought in the area of prosody. Accent, intonation and the rest of prosodic features are indeed the main factors in the organization of pronunciation varieties (Donegan and Stampe 1979: 142). It would therefore make no sense to advocate one single prosodic system and at the same time propose dia-

¹⁵ The preservation of Basque in rural areas and small villages rather than in cities where, on the other hand, most immigrant Spanish speaking workers concentrated in the last two centuries make rural sounding speech attractive for these speakers.

lectal diversity as the basis for the different registers of the language, starting with the most colloquial.

Latent claims for stricter rules have taken some time to crystallise, but they are there now under different forms: a publication from a government agency that deals with didactic material (Alberdi 2014), lectures by theatre coaches and other educational agents (Marin 2014), and also phonologists' proposals (Hualde 2011) followed by the publication of the results of a large database of recordings as the route to one single prosodic pattern (Gaminde et al. 2014).

In general, arguments for more norms and homogeneous accent patterns are based on the existence of second-language learners and bilingualism of first-language speakers as sources of Spanish or French influence. The automatic consequence is that all new speakers of the language should be taught one single prosody.

Precedents exist: in the 1980s Txillardegui (based on his own research on Basque accent [Álvarez Enparantza 1984]) taught those who attended the popular Basque summer university (*Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea*) that instrumental research could help find the optimal standard accent. An important number among his audience were precisely Basque-language teachers, which may explain why the idea of one ideal prosodic pattern is still strong among the ongoing debates on the standardisation of accent.

However, following the path opened by the group working for the Academy from 1996 to 1998, the Pronunciation Committee considers that prosody is not merely accent and that, besides this, there are different prosodic systems among the Basque dialects. In addition to that, Basque accent patterns are quite different from Spanish in the most extended dialects. Very simply put, accent position is not fixed relative to the word. It is also less perceivable for the speaker than Spanish or French accents. It is therefore impossible to improve the incorrect accentuations of second-language learners by a simple accent shift from one syllable to another. Besides, altering its position within the word simply to avoid Spanish or French patterns may alter the structure of rhythmic domains in Basque.¹⁶ Nevertheless, there are voices proposing an orthographic representation of word accents.

Certainly, the spoken standard is often mapped onto Spanish or French prosodic patterns both by second-language learners and by first-language speakers (Elordieta et al. 1998, Oñederra 1998b). When native speakers of dialects switch to the standard, they seem to feel some urge to also change their prosody. Doing so, they seem to mimic second-language learners.

The Pronunciation Committee is presently evaluating the compatibility of different dialectal pronunciations with a spoken standard. With that in mind, the

¹⁶ Head-last agglutinative languages tend to make syntactic phrases coincide with rhythmic phrases (Donegan and Stampe 1996).

speech of specific speakers from diverse dialectal backgrounds in formal situations is being empirically analysed. The ultimate aim would be to find different prosodic patterns onto which the standard pronunciation of vowels and consonants might be mapped.

5 Present challenge

The Committee believes along with Haugen (1966: 932) that “[a] complete language has its formal and informal styles, its regional accents, and its class or occupational jargons, which do not destroy its unity so long as they are clearly diversified in function and show a reasonable degree of solidarity with one another”. It may be reasonably questioned whether all that linguistic variation can be externally planned. Basque is a minority language that has never developed all the styles and jargons that independent languages normally develop. It would also be possible to let speakers spontaneously react to the new social expansion of the language, and see what happens.

At this point our concern as language planners has a double source. On the one hand, Basque speakers are bilingual and speak Basque alongside Spanish or French in a society where, with the exception of small villages, only a relative minority is competent in Basque. This may well be the reason for the ease with which speakers adopt Spanish or French pronunciation patterns when switching from dialect to standard.¹⁷

The other cause for concern is the existence of a significant number of second language speakers.¹⁸ If standard Basque is the only variety they are exposed to, their Basque expression will be devoid of stylistic resources. Actually telling learners of the language that what they have learned in the classroom so far is not enough makes many a teacher uncomfortable (as admitted in private conversations).

The dialects-or-standard dilemma is not new, but it becomes unavoidable when dealing with the spoken language. We all know that standardisation promotes uniformity and that a single choice is the most comfortable from a normative point of view. Nevertheless, linguists should be able to find a way to really make standard Basque compatible with the dialects, if a socially multifunctional and normally expressive language is the objective.

¹⁷ Younger generations who have received a formal linguistic instruction at school may simply only use the standard; the tendency is especially strengthened when their parents are second-language speakers of Basque.

¹⁸ In 2011, these speakers were more than half of the 16–24-year-olds in the Spanish area: 52% of these are in the Basque Country and 54% in Navarre; in the French Basque provinces the proportion of new speakers in this age range was 38.6% (Eusko Jaurlaritzza/Gobierno Vasco 2013).

The pronunciation standard proposed by the Academy in 1998 shows a certain degree of permeability among norm, dialect and sociological factors in its formulation. It is in this context that, for example, palatal pronunciation of sonorants after /i/ (e.g. *bila* ‘(in) search’ /biʎa/) is considered exactly as formal as the alveolar pronunciation (/bila/).¹⁹ This optionality seeks to reflect the dialectal reality of Basque where there exist palatalising and depalatalising dialects. Other cases of less expanded variability were accepted but recommended for the colloquial registers. That is the case of the different possibilities for the pronunciation of the vowel sequence /ea/. If other pronunciations exist in the dialect, /ea/ would only be the most formal, whereas /ia/, /ie/, /i:/ or /i/ would represent different dialects or different degrees of informality within one single variety.

In each dialectal area, then, the presence of local features would correlate with the degree of formality or informality of the speech situation. More formal levels should show relatively less dialectal features and be closer to the standard reference. The more colloquial styles would allow for more marked dialectal pronunciation and therefore show greater diversity.

Prosodic features should also follow dialectal systems all the way from colloquial to formal styles, if the standard is to be regarded by the speaker as one of the several stages on a spectrum of stylistic variation, and not as an independent variety. This also applies to the perception of those speakers who, due to their job or other sociological factors, will never need to actively use the most formal registers of the language.

For such a pattern to be possible, the collaboration of teachers is absolutely essential. It is important that rulers, learners, educators, translators, journalists, and every other participant in the process should understand that the proposed gradual dialectal colouring would give functional flexibility to the standard, preventing at the same time massive dialectal loss.

A not-in-the-least trivial difficulty is the teaching practice. To begin with, pronunciation is more difficult to teach in the traditional classroom than grammatical rules or vocabulary. In addition to that, can variation be learned? Apart from methodological and other technical questions that language-teaching experts will have to deal with, there is also the challenge of the social diffusion of such a dynamic, flexible norm.

The 1996–1998 working team stated (without much echo) that the pronunciation would be more effectively taught if understood as some sort of singing or theatre than studied in the same way as grammar and vocabulary (Oñederra 1998a). At present João Veloso (phonologist and linguistic consultant of the National Theatre of Porto) and Julia Marin (expert in the coaching of Basque actors) were called to take part in the 2015 Academy conference on pronunciation (held at the end of Oc-

¹⁹ See Oñederra 2012 about the delateralisation of /ʎ/ in present-day Basque.

tober). Discussion with teachers opened the path to bring their experience to the classroom (cf. Marin 2011, Veloso 2013).

6 Final remarks

For what has been said, the standardisation of Basque seems to be undergoing the elaboration of its functions, though not exclusively in the positive direction described by Milroy and Milroy (2012 [1985]: 22).²⁰ It would be good if discussions about the standardisation of pronunciation, its different levels, the harmonisation of the abstract reference with existing dialects, etc. would aid in the understanding of what a standard means in the present situation of the language. Only a qualified acceptance would reinforce both the standard variety and the dialects, and that would be the way to reconcile antagonistic attitudes that could prove particularly destructive in the minority language split between two different bilingual areas.

The standardisation of pronunciation has not had the same repercussion as the first standardisation proposal of 1968. Things are, of course, very different culturally, politically and socially. We are in a different historical moment. The more militant atmosphere of the late dictatorship has long ago disappeared. The language, though still minority but the object of much popular support, is now felt as more solidly established. The present times are probably less suitable for the implementation of complex patterns of standardisation than the enthusiastic beginning of democracy was for the unification of Basque.

The difficulties inherent to the normative treatment of pronunciation and the lower status given to the spoken language in prescriptive milieus are also part of the story. The community of agents involved in the standardisation process should consciously assume the new task as an ideology (Milroy 1994: 28) if they are to have any success at all. (See also Ramberg (this volume) and Røyneland (this volume) for discussions of some constraints of democratic legitimacy and the challenges that these impose on processes of standardisation.)

Protective attitudes towards a threatened language should include providing functional and expressive resources for its speakers. If only a uniform standard is created rather than sociologically and stylistically variable speech models, its expression by the numerous speakers who have no dialectal background will be highly limited. This will seriously jeopardise the normal evolution of the language as a whole.

²⁰ Tieken considers elaboration of function to be one of the stages in the Milroys' model (selection, acceptance, diffusion, maintenance, elaboration of function, codification and prescription [Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2012: 36]). I think it can also be understood as a means of maintenance. I thank Ingrid Tieken for drawing my attention to this passage of her work.

7 References

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