STANDARD BASQUE AND ITS DIALECTS

Koldo Zuazo

Standard Basque and Its Dialects

The origins of Basque dialects, a highly disputed area of research in Basque studies, are examined.

The author, the foremost expert on Basque dialects, traces their emergence to medieval times, using: a) the profusion of features common to all dialects: b) the large number of innovations common to all dialects; and c) the fact that the only truly divergent dialects are the western and Souletin ones. In contrast, the three central dialects differ in far fewer and less important respects.

The main contribution of *Standard Basque and Its Dialects* to the scholarly debate about the formation of Basque is that it identifies the nuclei from which the current dialects almost certainly emerged. The book explains the points of view that Basque speakers have upheld concerning their dialects, the formation of provincial standards starting in the eighteenth century, and the launch of Standard Basque in the second half of the twentieth century.

Koldo Zuazo is a Basque linguist, professor at the University of the Basque Country and specialist in Basque language dialectology and sociolinguistics. His main contribution has been the study and classification of Basque dialects and the indication of their possible places of origin. He has worked on the formation of Standard Basque.

Gregor Benton is a student of Basque and Emeritus Professor of Chinese history at Cardiff University. He has translated books from many languages.

This page intentionally left blank

Standard Basque and Its Dialects

Koldo Zuazo

Translated by
Gregor Benton

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Zuazo, Koldo, author. | Benton, Gregor, translator.
Title: Standard Basque and its dialects / Koldo Zuazo ; translated by Gregor Benton.
Other titles: Euskera y sus dialectos. English
Description: Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018036846 | ISBN 9781138367548 (hardback) | ISBN 9780429429729 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Basque language--Dialects.
Classification: LCC PH5187 .Z8313 2019 | DDC 499/.927--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018036846

ISBN: 978-1-138-36754-8 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-429-42972-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

To the sculptor and creator Jorge Oteiza (1908–2003), for his contribution to rescuing Basque culture from the "void" and presenting it to the world

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Illustrations

Figures

Table

Introduction

The University of the Basque Country is a relatively young institution, born in 1980. This late date might surprise some, given the dense population of the Basque Country and its high level of economic development. The reason lies in large part in the Spanish Civil War, after which the victors imposed a long and severe punishment on the vanquished. As a result, hundreds of young Basques had to move every year to Valladolid, Salamanca, or Zaragoza to pursue their university degrees. As for the youth of the Basque provinces in the French state, they attended – and continue to attend – universities in Pau, Toulouse, or Bordeaux.

True, there were two private universities, one run by the Jesuits of Deusto, in Bilbao, and the other by Opus Dei in Iruña (Pamplona), but neither offered courses relevant to the Basque Country – including its language, a field in which the lack of university research that might develop and invigorate its study and train specialists in it was sorely missed.

It is also true that the creation, in 1948, of a chair in the Basque language at the University of Bordeaux and of a second chair, in 1952, at the University of Salamanca had positive consequences. However, this was not enough to promote research and channel it in the necessary direction.

The intervention of some well-known international linguists also helped establish Basque studies. International scholarly attention started early, in the sixteenth century, and has continued until this day. In the second half of the twentieth century, for example, René Lafon, Antonio Tovar, Rudolf de Rijk, and Larry Trask were among those who contributed most to the study of Basque and to its spread across the world. Even so, their contribution was insufficient.

Within the Basque Country, linguistic studies have tended to be a church concern. One cannot but acknowledge the good will and high seriousness that many ecclesiastical scholars have devoted to this endeavour. Nevertheless, given the minimal linguistic expertise acquired in the seminaries and convents, their work too has failed to raise Basque studies to the same level as those of other languages.

It is a fact that, for all these and other reasons, Basque has become the object of a host of myths and legends that result in its portrayal as an enigmatic and mysterious language.

In this book, I set out to bring to public attention some of the results achieved over the last few years in linguistic research, starting with the birth of the Departments of Basque Philology after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco. My specific aim is to tackle various themes related to the study of standardisation and the Basque dialects.

The book comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 sketches the history of Basque, in order to provide the necessary context for a proper understanding of the issues under discussion. One of the consequences that can be drawn from this brief sketch is that the current weakness of the language, and the shrinking of its domain across the centuries, has not been due to a lack of interest or to neglect on the part of the Basques themselves, as many have claimed. On the contrary, as with most of the world's endangered languages, Basque's debilitation and decline are due to the language policies adopted by governments. We know that as early as the sixteenth century, governments were already taking measures to restrict Basque. The Nueva Planta decree of 1716, in Spain, and the reforms carried out after the Revolution of 1789 in France were decisive in promoting the ascendancy of Castilian and French, to the extent that they marginalised other languages, including Basque. The diversification of Basque into dialects is also, in large measure, a consequence of policies of linguistic marginalisation.

Chapter 2 considers the origins of the dialects. This subject is dominated by a deeply rooted misconception. Up until recently, the general view was that the present-day dialects reflect tribal divisions from the pre-Roman period. Here, in contrast, I defend a very different thesis, first propounded by the linguist Koldo Mitxelena. Like him, I believe that today's dialects almost certainly originated in the Middle Ages.

Chapter 3 seeks to identify the precise foci around which the dialects arose. I argue that Iruña (Pamplona in Spanish), the most important Basque city in ancient times, was probably the initial focus. Later, Gasteiz (Vitoria in Spanish) probably played a major role in the West, a role never previously acknowledged. The central zone of Bizkaia (Biscay), also in the West, the provinces of Zuberoa (Soule in French) and Lower Navarre, in the East, and the Gipuzkoan region of Beterri, which lies between Tolosa and Donostia (San Sebastián in Spanish), have also served as innovatory centres.

Chapter 4 examines how Basques have viewed their dialects. In the eighteenth century, Manuel Larramendi declared that the Basque dialects, divine in nature, were an authentic fount of riches that must be cultivated and protected – thus propagating what became an abiding myth about the language. There was also a contrary thesis – that the dialects were vulgar and degenerate forms of speech that made communication between speakers of Basque difficult or impossible and could therefore play no role in the adaptation of Basque to the necessities of modern life.

Chapter 5 describes the five literary dialects of the Basque Country. It will be seen that their constitution and development are closely related to the myth invented by Larramendi and the defence of the dialects. At the same

time, I will describe two linguistic experiments devised in the late nineteenth century in Bizkaia which, in my opinion, have had truly lamentable consequences for the language: purism, and what I call "the reconstruction of original Basque."

Finally, Chapter 6 starts with a brief description of the history of the standardisation of Basque. I explain why this did not happen until late, starting in 1964, and demonstrate the bases upon which the present model of a standard language was erected.

This book is meant not just for linguists but for everyone interested in language and particularly in Basque. I have therefore tried to keep technical terms to a minimum. However, Chapters 2 and 3 require some knowledge of linguistic terms and concepts, so I have added a glossary and indicated relevant terms in the text by adding an asterisk to the right of them. These two chapters differ from the rest, but the materials they present are more novel in character.

This book is a synthesis and at the same time a further elaboration of existing studies, published in Basque and developed with the help of José Ignacio Hualde, of the University of Illinois, and my friends and colleagues Xabier Artiagoitia and Ernesto Pastor Díaz de Garayo at the University of the Basque Country. Nahia Grande helped me with the maps. I would like to express my sincere thanks to all these people.

1 Basque's survival

The origin of Basque is a principal issue in Basque studies. Another, no less important issue, is why Basque has survived. Basque and its precursors managed to stay alive despite pressure from Indo-European languages, Latin, and the dialects that emerged from Latin, including Occitan, Navarrese Romance (a variety of Navarro-Aragonese, now extinct), French, and Castilian.

That Basque survived these assaults is a cause for rejoicing – on the part of its speakers, who have defended it so tenaciously, and of all humanity, for whom Basque is part of a universal linguistic heritage and provides unique evidence of the nature and structure of language.

Basque has persisted despite geographic shrinkage, social marginalisation (both now and in the past), profound changes in its internal structure, and extreme dialectal fragmentation, as I go on to show.

Geographic shrinkage

We know little or nothing about the geographic extent of Basque in antiquity. We can only hazard some guesses about the situation at the time when the Roman Empire established a hold on the region, 200 years before the beginning of the common era. In those days, Basque seems to have occupied a broad stretch of territory in the southwest of what is now France. It coincided, more or less, with the course of the Garonne river, which originates in the Aran Valley (Val d'Aran), in the Catalan province of Lleida, and meets the sea north of Bordeaux. This Basque-speaking territory therefore corresponded to what until 2016 was the French administrative region of Aquitaine. Epigraphs found in the region, written in Latin in the first to third centuries, contain the names of people and divinities that are in many cases structurally similar or identical to present-day Basque (see Gorrochategui 1984, 1995).

To the south, the territory where Basque was spoken probably extended to regions that are today part of the provinces of Burgos, La Rioja, Soria, Zaragoza, and Huesca in the Spanish state. Toponymic evidence suggests that Basque was almost certainly spoken in places close to the Pyrenees, on both the French and the Spanish side, at least as far south as the Aran Valley.

We do not know when Basque was finally lost to these areas. In some places the loss must have happened during the period of Roman rule, but in others Basque survived much longer. We have only two pieces of evidence regarding areas in which Basque was spoken in the remote past. We know that in the first half of the thirteenth century, between 1234 and 1239, King Fernando III of Castile conceded a *fuero* (a charter or code of laws) to the inhabitants of the Ojacastro Valley in La Rioja, allowing the use of Basque in courts. Here is a text regarding the event, in which Don Moriel, the Merino Mayor of Castile, and the Mayor of Ojacastro played leading roles (Merino Urrutia 1978: 18):

> The mayor of Ojacastro, asked to bring in Don Morial who was Merino (Chief Law-Enforcement Officer) of Castile, so he would know that a man from Ojacastro had the right to reply in Basque if he was sued by another man from the town or from outside of the town. Thus Don Morial came to know that the inhabitants of Ojacastro had this *fuero*.[1]

On the other hand, as José María Lacarra has shown (Irigarai 1974: 115), the municipal ordinances of Huesca in 1349 prohibited the use of Arabic, Hebrew, and Basque in the local market, suggesting that Basque was in fact used by traders in that northern Aragonese city:

> Let no merchant be employed who does any trading, who buys or sells with anyone speaking in Arabic, or in Hebrew, or in Basque; and whoever does it, should pay 30 *solidi* as a fine.[2]

However, none of this evidence is definitive. In some cases, the Basque population might have expanded beyond its original territory in more recent times, by populating new areas or repopulating old ones, perhaps as a consequence of the expulsion of the Arabs.

Starting in the sixteenth century, more copious and reliable evidence is available, as I now go on to show.

Basque in the sixteenth century

It seems that by the sixteenth century the area in which Basque was spoken had shrunk into the seven Basque provinces of the present day: Lapurdi (Labourd in French), Lower Navarre, and Zuberoa (Soule in French) on French territory, and Araba (Álava in Spanish), Bizkaia (Biscay), Gipuzkoa, and Navarre on Spanish territory. These provinces were not entirely Basque-speaking. The western part of Bizkaia, to the west of Bilbao, and the southern territories of Araba and Navarre, used Romance (a generic name for languages derived from Latin), as did Baiona (Bayonne in French) and the surrounding area in Lapurdi. On the other hand, people in some border

regions that were not administratively part of the Basque Country spoke Basque. Today, one example is Eskiula (Esquiule) in the former French province of Béarn.

There were also hybrid languages, or pidgins, based in part on Basque. One pidgin was a mixture of Icelandic and Basque, another of Basque and various aboriginal Canadian languages. The Basque coast was a veritable fishing and whaling power in earlier times, and Basque traders and seafarers were active far and wide.

In 1937, the Dutchman Nicolaas Deen published an extensive vocabulary of Basque-Icelandic Pidgin, including entire sentences in the language (Deen 1937). We know next to nothing about the Basque-Canadian pidgins, whose scant remnants have been recovered and researched by another Dutchman, Peter Bakker (1991). However, the existence of this pidgin is attested in various primary sources. For example, the Gipuzkoan chronicler and historian Esteban Garibai, in his *Compendio historial*, published in 1571 (Zubiaur 1990: 135–6), wrote:

> Navigators of the province of Gipuzkoa, the dominion of Bizkaia, and the Basque lands [Lapurdi] went once a year to Newfoundland to fish for cod and hunt whales, and the savages of that region got to know their language, despite the brevity of their annual communication, which lasted less than two months.[3]

The French inquisitor Pierre Lancre (1553–1631), who ordered so many Basques to be burned at the stake, also collected testimony regarding the relations between fishers and traders from the Lapurdian coast with inhabitants of Canada (Lancre 1613 [2004]: 32–3):

> They were delighted to find, even before they became familiar with those places, that the Basques were already trafficking there, even to the point that the Canadians negotiated with the French in no other language than that of the Basques.[4]

The Basque-speaking region starting in the sixteenth century

Starting in the sixteenth century, the Basque language suffered a never-ending series of setbacks, especially in Araba and Navarre. In the course of the eighteenth century, the Spanish Crown took measures against all languages other than Castilian. An example is the Nueva Planta decree of 1716, promulgated by Felipe V of Bourbon, which established Spanish as the only language of the courts of law and government, mostly at the expense of Catalan. In the nineteenth century, the Basque Country was ravaged by the Carlist wars of 1833–39 and 1872–76. The long years of military dictatorship following the Civil War of 1936–39, until the death of Franco in 1975, were similarly devastating, and brought Basque to the brink of extinction.

In 1973, a study appeared that quantified the total number of Basque speakers (Irizar 1973). Its author, Pedro Irizar, counted around 610,000 Basque speakers, of whom only 532000 lived in Basque-speaking areas. The rest were emigrants who had settled in Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Pau, Bordeaux, various parts of the Americas, and other places. The number of speakers was shown to have fallen greatly, calling into question the language's very continuity under the social conditions of the late twentieth century.

A closer look at the figures suggests that the situation was even worse than it appeared at first sight. For example, in Eibar, my place of birth, the number of Basque speakers was around 11,000, out of a total population of 37,073. One third of the population knew Basque, but only the older ones, above the age of 40–45, especially men, used it as a matter of routine in their daily lives. Younger people spoke above all in Castilian and used Basque only at home and when speaking to older people. In many families, the parents found it hard to speak Castilian, whereas the children were unable to construct a full sentence in Basque. Basque had attracted the stigma of a "rural language," which did not help at a time when much of the Basque Country was beginning to industrialise. What was true of Eibar was also true of other urban nuclei in Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia, such as Tolosa, Beasain, Ordizia, Urretxu, Zumarraga, Legazpi, Oñati, Arrasate, Elgoibar, Durango, and Amorebieta.

Table 1.1 shows the distribution of Basque speakers by province in the early 1970s:

Table 1.1 Basque speakers by province

Province	*Basque speakers*
Gipuzkoa	276,843
Bizkaia	140,229
Lapurdi	39,530
Navarre	35,228
Lower Navarre	27,016
Zuberoa and Béarn	11,907
Araba	1,863
Total	532,616

The situation in Araba was particularly critical. Only 1,863 of its inhabitants were thought to know Basque, including residents in industrial centres such as Agurain (Salvatierra in Spanish), Araia, and the capital Vitoria-Gasteiz, who had moved there from neighbouring Basque provinces. Of the 1,863 Basque speakers in Araba, 1,432 lived in Aramaio, at the intersection of Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia, while the remaining 431were scattered across Zigoitia, Legutio, Baranbio, and Laudio, at the same intersection. In Araba as in the whole of the Basque Country, the disappearance of Basque seemed to be an imminent and irreversible fact of the post-war period.