

For whom does language death toll? Cautionary notes from the Basque case

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Abstract

In this article, I show that despite a seemingly inclusive, language-based identity promoted in schools and pedagogical materials, Basque identity and language are embedded with social histories that exclude large swaths of the would-be Basque nation: women and second language learners of Basque. To the extent that these processes continue to operate in society and are ignored in the curriculum-in-use, it bodes ill for the future of Euskera as a language of everyday use. Specifically, I examine elements of Basque identity, culture and language featured in classrooms or pedagogical materials used to teach Basque language and culture in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) of Spain and the diaspora, and show how they are socially constructed to position some kinds of Basques as “more Basque” than others. These social constructions are problematic, in that efforts to revitalize threatened languages like Euskera need to welcome speakers rather than marginalize them.

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*Naparrako Iparrallean Erronkari Ibaxa
Mendi-andi, lerren artean daure zazpi iriak
Arripean ardiñoa, ardi allean axurua
Irietan etse zarrak, etse barnean erdara
Ezta ilen, ezta ilen
Erronkari'n uskara
Iri plaztan ezta entzuten
Ez uskara ez txuntxunik
Gaiza guzuak galtu tiagu
Xakin bage Erronkari'n
Gore uskara iltan dago,
xan fite neskatoa
Matto bero andi Uskarari emoitra
Ezta ilen, ezta ilen
Erronkari'n uskara
(Estornes Lasa, 1982, p. 461)*

In Roncal valley of northern Navarra
Amid mountains and pine, seven towns lie
Little sheep among the rocks
Old houses in the towns
It will not die, it will not die
The Basque language, in Roncal
In the square is not heard
Basque or the “txuntxun¹”
We have lost everything
In Roncal, without knowing it
Our Basque is dying
Go quickly, little girl,
Give it a big, warm kiss
It will not die, it will not die
The Basque language, in Roncal

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¹ A Basque drum.

1. Introduction

Alas, Basque did die in the Roncal valley with the passing of its last speaker—Fidela Bernat—in 1991. I begin with these plaintive verses because, as it went with this particular variety of Basque, so it often goes with endangered languages as a whole: they cease to exist as regularly spoken languages despite the good intentions of their speakers and the best interventions of their advocates and experts. The finger of blame for the demise of such languages is usually pointed to macro forces like globalization and domination (institutional, political, economic, etc.). And certainly, the historical record bears this out.

But in this paper, I would like to suggest that the specter of language death looms within endangered language communities as well as without, to the extent that efforts to revitalize (or resurrect) such languages promulgate inequitable visions of the language community they attempt to (re)create. Specifically, I will show that efforts to teach Basque (“*Euskera*”) promote androcentric—sometimes, outright sexist—views of the Basque community, which might discourage students from joining its ranks as active Basque speakers. I begin by briefly reviewing the sociolinguistic status of *Euskera*, before moving to an analysis of the pedagogical materials used to teach the language in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and the diaspora. I then offer some alternatives to the androcentric messages found there, culled from Basque oral literature. I conclude by discussing the implications of my work for scholarship on endangered languages more generally.

2. *Euskera* as endangered language

Estimates of *Euskera* speakers in the seven provinces that constitute the historical Basque Country (“*Euskal Herria*”) range between 660,000 (Trask, 1997, p. 1) and 750,000 (Urla, submitted, p. 3); 80% of these live in the BAC (Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa),² where efforts to teach and learn Basque have been strongest. One might quibble with the notion that *Euskera* has anything to worry about; after all, a language with almost 800,000 speakers might seem quite robust when compared to the large number of Native American languages, for example, whose speakers number only in the hundreds or the handful (Krauss, 1992). However, *Euskera* is considered an endangered language for several reasons. First, the number of individuals who speak Basque in its historical territories pales in comparison to the millions who speak Spanish or French—which, obviously, also play much more prominent roles on the world stage. Second, most of those who can speak Basque use Spanish or French as their everyday language (UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages: Europe). My observations show this is the case much of the time, in *Euskal Herria* and the diaspora (with many immigrants using English as well), even when all interlocutors know Basque; thus, this preference for languages other than *Euskera* (“*erdara*,” in Basque) cannot be attributed entirely to lack of opportunity. Third, many (perhaps most) Basque speakers today have learnt it in school, as a second (or even third) language. While this speaks favorably of schools, it does not necessarily mean that *Euskera* is also being used for normal intergenerational conversation in the home—the standard against which revitalization efforts should be measured, according to the criteria outlined by Fishman (1991). Finally, *Euskera* continues to be scarred by stigmatization and political oppression.

While public instruction in, or through, Basque has been available in the BAC since 1982, for most of its history, it was considered unworthy for use in “higher” realms because of its associations with the countryside and sea. The use of Basque for public purposes was forbidden under the Franco regime (1939–1975), and continues to be assailed by right-wing political parties even today. As recently as 2007, a *Wall Street Journal* article called the mandate requiring some public servants to learn Basque—at government expense—a “Basque Inquisition” (Johnson, 2007), a particularly galling analogy as Basque “witches” were burned at the stake by the Spanish Inquisition in centuries past, most notably in Logroño in 1610.

This is not to equate the current climate with the political oppression of yore, nor to deny the success of attempts to revitalize *Euskera*, especially in the Basque Autonomous Community. In the BAC, *Euskera* has co-official status with Spanish; it is used for government, education and media and these efforts have contributed to an increase in the prestige and knowledge of Basque. Even so, *Euskera*’s survival as a habitually spoken language is far from guaranteed.

² The seven provinces (*Euskal Herria*) where *Euskera* has historically been spoken are divided into three political entities: the Autonomous Basque Community (Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa) and Navarra in Spain; Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea and Zuberoa, and the neighboring Bearn region, compose the Pyrenees-Atlantique in France.

Interactional norms and linguistic insecurities continue to plague Basque revitalization efforts: Basque speakers will switch to Spanish (or French) when only one non-Basque speaker is among them (Urla, submitted, p. 241), whereas in many other communities code-switching occurs. Standardization has made many native speakers question their own linguistic instincts, so that “the creative capacity of the Basque speaker is being lost, the capacity to play with and enjoy the language. And when that is lost, the language itself is on the way to being lost” (Urla, submitted, p. 132, quoting Zuazo 2000). Perhaps most alarming is that most Basque speakers do not speak the *Euskera* they know: A 2001 street survey found that “while knowledge of Basque had increased to 25% of the total population as a whole, public use of Basque averaged only 14%” (Urla, submitted, p. 240). In other words, like the scrivener in Melville’s (1986) [1853] short story, many Basque speakers are capable of carrying out the task at hand; they just “prefer not to.” Part of this dispreference, I suggest, might be due to the narrow boundaries drawn around Basque identity in materials used to teach *Euskera*—despite the seemingly inclusive definition of “Basqueness” and the gender neutrality of the language itself.

3. Who is Basque—and who gets to say?

As scholars such as Woolard and Schieffelin (1994) have attested, the ostensibly automatic association between a language and ethnic/national identity is not natural but socially constructed. Despite the seeming correspondence between the words for Basque person (“*Euskalduna*”) and Basque language (“*Euskera*”), historically, “Basqueness” has not always been linked to language. Indeed, Monteiro (1887, p. 266) argued that the term “*Escualdunac*” (an earlier spelling) came from the Basque word for hand (“*escu*” or “*esku*”)—perhaps, I suggest, to emphasize their livelihoods depended upon the work of their hands.

Sabino Arana, the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, privileged ancestry over language when it came to Basque identity. Indeed, he even coined a term for ethnic Basques who did not speak the language: “*euzkotar*.” He opted for a ‘z’ rather than an ‘s’ on “an etymological theory that the common root of these words was ‘sun’ [*eguzki*] . . . [because he] subscribed to the theory that Basques had once been sun-worshippers” (Urla, submitted, p. 165). Arana’s etymological gymnastics must be seen in the context of the mass internal migration to the industrializing Basque regions in the late 19th century; his goal was to erect a border between Basques and these immigrants.³

When immigration continued throughout the 20th century, Arana’s primordialist definition of Basque identity was rendered untenable. Language moved to the epicenter of Basque identity, ironically, in part because of Franco’s repression of *Euskera*: it “made Basques more acutely aware of the decline of their language thereby prompting a stronger adherence to it as a badge of identity” (Urla, submitted, p. 103, quoting Tejerina 1996).

However, it is important to note that alongside this definition are others which have nothing to do with language. Shafir (1995) showed that most respondents to Linz’s (1986) survey subscribed to a “civic” definition of Basque identity encompassing all who live and work in the Basque Country. My own work demonstrated a similar, “territorial” definition was espoused by high schoolers in Spanish-medium schools⁴; they considered all those who live in the Basque Country to be Basque, regardless of their place of origin and language background (Echeverria, 2003b).

But my analysis of textbooks used in the BAC (Echeverria, 2003a) showed that it is the linguistic definition of “Basqueness” that reigns in schools, whether the language of instruction is Basque, Spanish, or both. I called this “Ethnolinguistic Pedagogy.” Specifically, textbooks linked the importance of Basque language to Basque identity by presenting *Euskera* as “our language” and Spanish as just one of many other languages. In textbooks used in Basque-medium and bilingual elementary school textbooks, for example, a smiling gnome-like figure carried a little lantern with “*Euskaraz Bizī*” (“Live in Basque”) written around it. Then the gnome’s smile turns to a frown when the long cap on its head is caught under a stone monolith with “ERDARA” written on it in menacing capital letters (recall that “*erdara*” refers to all languages besides Basque). Elsewhere the gnome-like figure proclaims, “To each its own,

³ In assessing Arana’s views about immigrants, it is important to keep in mind the context in which he wrote: “Arana thought of himself as a part of the anti colonial rebellion against Spanish rule. Establishing Basques as a race was unremarkable; this was how nineteenth century Europeans thought about cultural diversity. Throughout Europe, nations were conceived of as the primordial or natural groupings of humankind and described as races, a term which meant something like “peoplehood,” lineage or gens” (Urla, submitted, p. 57, quoting Douglass 2002).

⁴ Observational data discussed here were collected in 1997 in Donostia (San Sebastian) from three high school classrooms where Spanish was the medium of instruction and Basque was taught as a subject, and four high school classrooms where Basque was the medium of instruction and Spanish was taught as a subject. Textbooks analyzed were used throughout the BAC.

Basque is ours” (*Bakoitzak berea, Euskara gurea!*). Textbooks used to teach *Euskera* in Spanish-medium schools also emphasize the importance of *Euskera* to Basque identity. One image showed a young man pondering the equation “*Euskera + Herria = Euskalherria*” (“*herria*” means “country” or “people”). When he turns this around to a subtraction problem, he is confused: “*Herria-Euskera = ???*”

The message of these images is clear: *Euskera* is the primary criterion defining the Basque person. We might expect, then, that a wide variety of speakers to be represented of the Basque people in images used to teach Basque language and culture: native Basque speakers and those who have learnt it in school; urban and rural dwellers; females and males. Including images of such speakers reflects the current sociolinguistic reality of *Euskera* speakers.

However, this is not the case. In my previous work, I showed that images of Basque people in textbooks used in the Basque Autonomous Community focused primarily on rural male speakers of the Basque vernacular—the Man of the Public Square (“*Plaza Gizona*”), “a man who stands out and knows how to act in public” (Fernandez de Larrinoa, 1997, p. 83). Textbooks are replete with images of men engaging in feats of strength such as stone-lifting, handball, or wood-chopping: all “traditional” rural sports actively promoted on television and other media outlets. Textbooks are also filled with men engaged in celebrated forms of Basque oral literature, especially *bertsolaritza* (ritual verbal dueling). *Bertsolaritza* competitions are well attended and broadcast on television and radio. Famous verses comprise a significant portion of Basque language and literature lessons taught in schools in all languages of instruction.

In short, the images of men in these pedagogical materials display *indarra*, an important Basque cultural value, which “combines tremendous stamina, determination and energy with great strength . . . while *indarra* is admired in both men and women, it is related most closely to men of action (“*ekintza*”) who engage in tests of physical strength” (del Valle & Apalategui, 1985, p. 178; Ott, 1991, p. 194).⁵ In contrast, textbooks position women in “traditional” or mythological roles (Echeverria, 2003a)—far away from the public square where *indarra* is usually exhibited.

Indeed, the domains most conducive to displays of *indarra* have usually excluded women. Historically, women were hired to improvise dirges honoring the dead at funerals, but a law prohibiting the practice was passed in 1452 (Aulestia, 1995, p. 69). A similar law was passed against *profazadas*, women who went from town to town “invent[ing] couplets and ballads with the intention of defamatory libel” (Aulestia, 1995). And, until recently, social convention proscribed women from attending—much less participating in—the *bertsolaritza* contests, as they were often held in venues such as the tavern or cider house.

Women who evinced an interest in sports were censured as “*Mari Gizonak*” or “*Mari mutikoak*” [Masculine women or girls] (Ugalde, 1994, p. 190). Indeed, they have been subject to verbal and physical abuse—sometimes, by other women—when they have tried to participate in a previously all-male activity such as the “*Alarde*” parades celebrating military victories against the French (Bullen, 1999).

Certainly, women are participating in ever-increasing numbers in Basque culture in the public square, as musicians, singers, dancers, ritual verbal duelers. Indeed, a woman, Maialen Lujanbio, won Gipuzkoa’s annual *bertsolaritza* contest in 2003 and I am aware of one female stone-lifters: one in *Euskal Herria* and another in the United States. Further, 5 of the 29 members of the Basque Language Academy (*Euskaltzaindia*) are women. Established in 1918, *Euskaltzaindia* has been all-male for most of its history. However, as the number of women serving on the *Euskaltzaindia* has increased so has the number of members overall, so that the female participation as a percentage has remained very low.

Interestingly, the footprint of the Man of the Plaza can also be found in materials used to teach *Euskera* in the diaspora. The Center of Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, contains the greatest number of Basque-related materials outside the Basque regions of Spain and France. It is also publishes several manuscripts a year on all aspects of Basque cultural life in *Euskal Herria* and the diaspora, and offers instruction in *Euskera* in classrooms and on-line. As part of its mission, it published a *Basque-English Dictionary* whose goal is three-fold: “creating a general reference work, preparing an instructional aid for students taking Basque language and literature courses at the university level, and producing a tool for the Basque-American population of the United States” (Aulestia, 1989, p. a13).

In carrying out these goals, the Dictionary also argues for the centrality of *Euskera* to Basque identity, consistent with those discussed throughout this paper, stating that “the language is the essence of the Basque identity” (Aulestia,

⁵ Sometimes *indarra* is also a quality of a relationship; at other times a force that acts upon the natural world” (Ott, 1991, p. 194). *Indarra* also has a symbolic dimension in that it connects the house with its tomb, as well as with its living and dead members (Ott, 1991, p. 96). The *indarra* of God is considered the most “ultimate form of efficacious *indarra*” (Ott, 1991, p. 203).

Table 1
Gender-marking in Basque.

zu	hi
<i>zu z-a-ra</i>	<i>hi h-a-iz</i>
you 2sg-Pres-AUX (f/m)	you 2Sg-Pres-AUX(f/m)
'you are'	'thou art'
<i>lan egin du-zu</i>	<i>lan egin du-n</i>
work do AUX-2SgErg (f/m)	work do AUX-2sg FemErg
'you have done work'	'thou hast done work'
	<i>lan egin du-k</i>
	work do AUX-2sg MascErg
	'thou hast done work'
<i>gertatu ϕ-zai-zu</i>	<i>gertatu ϕ-zai-n</i>
happen 3Abs-AUX-2SgDat (f/m)	happen 3Abs-AUX-2sg FemDat
'it happened to you'	'it happened to thee'
	<i>gertatu ϕ-zai-k</i>
	happen 3Abs-AUX-2sg MascDat
	'it happened to thee'

Table 2
Allocutivity in Basque.

zu	<i>laguna-k ikusten n-a-u-ϕ</i>
	friend-Erg sees 1SgAbs-pres-root-3SgErg (f/m)
	'a friend sees me'
hi	<i>laguna-k ikusten n-a-i-n-ϕ</i>
	friend-Erg sees 1SgAbs-pres-AUX- ALLOCfem -3SgErg
	'a friend sees me'
	<i>laguna-k ikusten n-a-i-k-ϕ</i>
	friend-Erg sees 1SgAbs-pres- AUX-ALLOCmasc -3SgErg
	'a friend sees me'

1989, p. a14). How, then, does the Dictionary portray Basque language and identity? I will show that, like in textbooks used in the Basque Country itself, this text present a vision of Basque identity that favors males.

4. Gender neutrality in Basque

Before detailing the ways in which androcentricism is perpetuated in the Dictionary, it is important to point out that the Basque language itself has no natural or grammatical gender. Indeed, the only place where gender is marked at all is in the familiar second-person pronoun, “*hi*” (Aulestia, 1989, p. a49).

There are two second-person singular pronouns that are used in all dialects of Basque: *zu* and *hi*.⁶ *Zu* is considered the pronoun of respect, while *hi* connotes intimacy (cf Echeverria, 2003a, p. 290). *Zu* is gender-neutral; it is used exactly the same way, regardless of the sex of the speaker and addressee. However, *hi* marks the sex of the addressee. When the addressee is the subject of a transitive verb (ergative case) or is the indirect object (dative case), the auxiliary verb marks the addressee's gender: “*noka*” marks female addressees with with “-n” if female; “*toka*” marks male addressees with a “-k.”

A more unusual property of this gender-marking is its allocutivity, by which the inflected verb agrees with addressee's gender, even when addressee is not in sentence (Oyharcabal, 1993, p. 91).

Thus, “thou” is not an argument in this sentence, yet the verb “to see” marks the gender of the person being addressed.

⁶ There are also two other second person singular pronouns: *Xu*, used in eastern dialects; and *berori*, historically used in western dialects to show great respect, which has largely disappeared (Alberdi, 1995).

Table 3
Male dominance in sample sentences.

Male only	Female only	Both	Total
2208	129	53	2390
92%	5%	2%	

One could argue that the *Basque-English Dictionary* could be rendered gender-neutral quite easily. Unlike the Spanish or French into which Basque is usually translated, English has no grammatical gender to contend with. And the Dictionary could neutralize natural gender by following the lead of English language reformers who use gender-neutral forms (i.e. *s/he*, *it*, or plural forms) over gender-specific ones.

I examined all sample sentences used in the Dictionary (containing approximately 50,000 words) for all those which indicated gender in any way (Echeverria, 2007). In Basque, this meant the use of proper names, gender-differentiated pairs (mother–father, daughter–son, etc.), and the second-person familiar pronoun “*hi*” discussed in Tables 1 and 2 above. In English, this meant not only use of proper names and gender-differentiated pairs, but also how gender-neutral Basque sentences were translated. This most often meant that “*she*” or “*he*” was used to translate the gender-neutral third-person pronoun “*hura*,” and/or that “*hers*” and “*his*” were used to translate the third-person possessive “*haren*.”

I found that the Dictionary presents an androcentric vision of the Basque-speaking community in several way. First, it uses male referents for the overwhelming majority of gender-specific sample sentences (Table 3).

There are a total of 2390 sentences in the Dictionary which reference gender in some way. The great majority ($N = 2208$; 92%) use only male references, while another 53 (2%) use both male and female references. Thus, only 5% ($N = 129$) sentences use female references exclusively. In addition, 29% (53 of 283) sentences with female referents include male referents as well, while this is true of only 2% (53 of 2303) of the sentences with male referents. Put another way, female referents often share the stage with male referents, while male referents usually stand in the spotlight alone.

Similarly, male referents are individuals to a greater degree than the female, in that they are given proper names: male names are used 59 times, but female names, only 17 times. Common names such as “Peter” or “John” comprise 14 of the male names. But the Dictionary makers seemed intent on showcasing men who have contributed to Basque culture and the world in general. Twenty-two of the sentences feature men such as the writer Pedro Axular (1556–1664) or the philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936)—despite the fact that the latter “could never bring himself to believe that Basque was really a ‘proper’ language as deserving of respect as any other” (Trask, 1997, p. 58). Further, nine men were mentioned even though they were not ethnically Basque and made no contribution to Basque culture or language per se: Fidel Castro, Albert Einstein, Victor Hugo and even Adolf Hitler (used for the odd sentence, “Racism killed Hitler”).

The opposite pattern is true of female referents; they are referred to in generic terms (8 of 17 names are “Mary”). No mention is made of accomplished (but “untraditional”) Basque women, such as “Lieutenant Nun” Katalina de Erauso (b. 1592), or the Communist militant, Dolores Ibarruri (1895–1989). Given the Dictionary’s inclusion of famous non-Basque men in sample sentences, one might expect it to also consider their female counterparts, such as Spain’s Queen Isabel or France’s Joan of Arc. More to the point, the Dictionary could mention women who have contributed to Basque culture or language, such as like Clemencia Isaura, a 15th century noblewoman who revived Basque poetry competitions in Tolosa (Monteiro, 1887, p. 210) or Navarra’s Queen Jeanne d’Albret, who commissioned the first Basque (Protestant) New Testament, in 1571. Neither is included.

Like pedagogical materials used in the Basque Country itself, the Dictionary also relegates female reference to “traditional” or restricted roles, while using male referents for ones associated with the world at large. One example of this is the translation of the Basque synonyms “*argiratu*” and “*argitartu*.” Both can be translated into English as “to publish, to bring to light, or to give birth”:

Text 1: To publish or to birth

argiratu vt to publish, to bring to light. *Alabatto bat argiratu zuen*.

She gave birth to a small daughter.

Argitartu vt to publish; vt to give birth to. *Liburu berri bat argitartu du*.

He has published a new book.

Thus, the Dictionary uses the female referent for the definition that is most restricted, related to her procreative functions (cf Echeverria, 2007). But “*du*” (“that third person has”) could just as easily been translated using “*she*” as “*he*.”

When not constraining female referents to their biological roles as mothers, the Dictionary cloisters them in convents. “*Botu*,” for example, can be translated into English as “vote” or (ecclesiastical) “vow.” It is the more restricted, religious definition that is used with the female referent:

Text 2: To vow or to vote

botu (B, G, U) n. vote, n (ecc)l vow. *Lekaiame berriek lehen botuak egin dituzte.*

The new nuns took their first vows.

It is male referents that are used when it comes to political agency:

Text 3: To vote or to vow

botu eman vt to vote. *Errepublikanoari eman dio bere botua.*

He has given his vote to the Republican candidate.

Thus, “*dio*” (auxiliary verb, “That third person has it to that third person”) is translated with “he” as the subject, even though “she” would have done just as well.

Further, female referents are sexualized in ways that males are not. “*Droga*,” for instance, can be used as an idiom for argument in addition to its more obvious translation. The Dictionary provides two examples, both employing the gender-neutral “*zuen*” (past tense 3rd person of “to do” or “to have”).

Text 4: To debate or do drugs

droga n drug. *Drograk erosteko dirua, gorputza salduz irabazten zuen.*

She earned the money to buy drugs by selling her body.

droga n. argument. *Droga ederra atera zuen.*

What an argument he caused!

While the female pronoun could have been chosen for both sentences, “she” is used only for the first, whose meaning is not only sexual, but clearly negative.

Similarly, female referents were conspicuously absent when it came to sample sentences used for words relating to Basque language, culture, or identity. I found 14 sentences that referred to Basque language or literature directly, and 10 others that mentioned Basque culture or identity explicitly. While this number only represents a small portion of the total sample sentences used in the Dictionary, it merits our attention for two reasons. First, very few of the words being modified in these sentences actually refer to Basque language, culture or identity explicitly: *Bizkaitar* (“Biscayan”); *Euskaraz* (“in Basque”); *Euskazale* (“Bascophile”); and *Euskozaletu* (“to become fond of Basque or Basque culture”). Thus, Aulestia and his colleagues seem to have made an effort to include Basque references even when they were not necessary to define the target word.

Second, the agents and subjects of these sentences are translated as male, even though the original sentences feature the gender-neutral third-person pronoun *zu*. Below is a list of Basque words and the English translation of their sample sentences (Table 4).

Thus, of 15 references to Basque language or literature, none features females as protagonists or subjects. Even Example 13, whose subject is translated into English as the gender-neutral “you,” is not so in the original as it uses verb forms for male addressees (see Tables 1 and 2 above). The omission of female referents in these sentences is significant, given the current emphasis on *Euskera* as primary marker of Basque identity, echoed in the Dictionary’s preface.

Table 4

Dictionary references to Basque language & literature.

-
1. *Aintzinasun* n quality of being ancient, antiquity. He has talked about the antiquity of the Basque language.
 2. *Aipatu* vt to mention, to make reference to, to name. He has mentioned the best books of the Basque writers.
 3. *Arduratu* vi to look after, to take care, to be interested. I didn’t know that he was interested in the Basque language.
 4. *Bizkaitar* adj/n Biscayan. This Biscayan student, after learning Biscayan well, threw himself into unified Basque.
 5. *Delako* v.aux. because he is. He is learning Basque because he is Basque.
 6. *Etorri* v. to come. If your son came to the Basque school, he would speak Basque.
 7. *Euskaraz* adj in Basque. He has spoken in Basque. He has spoken about Basque.
 8. *Euskazale* adj Bascophile. He was a bascophile but he did not conquer the Basque language.
 9. *Garaile* adj triumphant, victorious. He is the winner of this year’s Basque troubadour competition.
 10. *Gartsuki* adv ardently, passionately, fervently, enthusiastically, vehemently. He learned Basque so enthusiastically!
 11. *Gehiago* adv more; else. If you were to give a Basque child his studies in Basque, he would make much more progress.
 12. *Idazle* n writer. He didn’t write in the Biscayan dialect although he was a Biscayan writer.
 13. *Menderatu* vt to overcome, to conquer, to dominate, to subjugate, to subdue. You have a profound knowledge of Basque.
 14. *Tankera* n aspect, form, style. He translates even the easiest subjects into Basque in a style that no one will understand.
 15. *Trebetasun* n skill, skillfulness, dexterity. He had an inborn skill for creating Basque verses.
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Table 5

Dictionary references to Basque culture or identity.

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1. *Arren* int please! Conj although, even. Although he is Basque, he is always speaking French.
 2. *Barriz* adv again. Conj but, however, on the contrary. His father is Basque, but his mother is French.
 3. *Erliki* n relic. He used to keep the prewar Basque flag as a relic.
 4. *eta* conj and, because, since. Used at the end of a sentence. He has returned to the Basque Country because he loves it very much.
 5. *Euskozaletu* vi to become fond of Basque or Basque culture. He became fond of Basque culture in a foreign land.
 6. *Izan* aux vi to be, to exist. He always seemed tied more to his Basque name than his Basque identity.
 7. *Kultura* n culture, education, acquired knowledge. He wanted to give culture to the Basque people.
 8. *Nabari izan* vi to be obvious, to be evident. It is obvious that he is not Basque.
-

As we see in Table 5 below, there is also an absence of women when it comes to Basque culture and identity more generally.

Here, a female presence makes herself known in Example 2, but it is hardly an unambiguously positive one. “His” father is given a clearly positive identity as Basque (given the Dictionary’s goals), while “his” mother is not.

“Her” exclusion from these lists is especially striking in that all of the original sentences in their Basque form, save Example 13 in Table 1, employ gender-neutral third person pronouns. Recall that these pronouns could have easily (and more literally) been translated as “one” or “that third person,” but the Dictionary glossed them as “he” or “his” in every case. This pattern is consistent with my findings the larger project on the Dictionary (Echeverria, 2007). This persistent androcentric bias in pedagogical materials—in the Basque Country and the diaspora—begs the question: Whom does the language movement envision as part of the Basque community? All who speak Basque, or just those who are male?

In the next section we will see that another seemingly expansive feature of Basque language and culture – the gender neutrality of the language itself – is also socially constructed in such a way to favor males.

4.1. Gendering linguistic equals

Bourdieu (1977) observed that “linguists are right in saying that all languages are linguistically equal; [but] they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal” (1977, p. 652). When it comes to *Euskera*, the same can be said with regard to a particular aspect of the Basque language: second-person pronouns. As we saw above, *Euskera* is almost entirely a gender-neutral language; the only place gender is marked is the second-person pronoun, “*hi*.” In terms of its use socially, however, *hi* is far from gender-equitable. Indeed, although *hi* is a small part of Basque linguistic structure, it looms large in the sociolinguistic landscape in which *Euskera* is used.

At the beginning of this section, I outlined the linguistic structure of *hi*. Below, I attend to the social norms and values surrounding *hi* usage, demonstrating how it favors male interlocutors. Finally, I provide alternatives to this androcentric vision, drawing on my preliminary archival research on Basque oral literature.

As discussed above, currently there are two second-person singular pronouns in Basque: the formal *zu* is the pragmatically unmarked form for most interlocutors, while the use of *hi* is more marked. *Hi* is also the only place in *Euskera* where gender is marked: *noka* is used with a single female addressee, while *toka* is used with a single male addressee. In that sense, *noka* and *toka* forms can be said to be linguistically equal; they occupy the same place in Basque grammar and, theoretically, can be used to serve the same interactional purposes. Indeed, Basque linguists agree that historically, such was the case: *hi* was the only second-person singular pronoun, while *zu* was the second-person plural pronoun (cf Alberdi, 1992; Oyharcabal, 1993 for details). Further, pedagogical materials present *noka* and *toka* forms as if they were still sociolinguistic equals: as forms of address used with (gender-differentiated) familiars, in contrast to the formal forms (*zu*) used to mark distance or respect. This presentation might lead a student to equate *hi* with the *tu* forms of Spanish (or French), as forms that can be used with one’s intimates liberally, regardless of interlocutor’s gender.

However, the sociolinguistic rules about *hi* usage differ from other *T* forms in important ways. Even though *hi* is considered a marker of solidarity and intimacy vis a vis another second-person pronoun, *zu*, it is the latter rather than the former that is used by most speakers for most interactional purposes. Even so, *hi* is similar to other *T* forms as described by Brown and Gilman (1960) in that it is used between close friends, for making jokes or showing anger. It is also often used when addressing persons of similar social rank (siblings and friends one’s own age) and persons

of lower social rank (children, younger siblings). In this sense, *hi* is considered primarily a marker of solidarity or familiarity (Echeverria, 2003a; Urla, submitted).

But *hi* also indirectly indexes social meanings not necessarily paralleled by other *T* forms, such as “authentic” Basque identity and masculinity (cf Echeverria, 2003a). In (primarily) rural areas where *hi* usage has been retained, it is most likely to be used between male interlocutors than by male(s) to female, or female(s) to female. Further, while *hi* is still used in “traditional” cultural domains (rural sports, ritual verbal dueling)—as well as new spheres such as pirate radio, hip hop, punk and rock music (Urla, 1995, 2001, submitted)—it is mostly *toka* forms that are found there, perhaps because those cultural domains are male-dominated (Echeverria, 2003a).

Noka, on the other hand, occupies a much more ambiguous social space. My ethnographic research in the Basque Country and the diaspora indicates that there is no positively valued cultural domain associated with *noka* usage. In fact, the ideological cast of *noka* is often quite negative. Informants told me that using *noka* was “not looked well upon” or considered it ugly speech. On occasion I have playfully used *noka* to see what reaction I would get, to be met with an eyebrow raised in offense, mock or real. The few uses I found of *noka* usage in textbooks occurred in dialogues between witches. These reminded me of legends and songs I have heard my whole life that featured witches and other n’er-do-wells. This inspired me to examine more closely how *noka* was used in Basque oral literature, specifically, Basque song; some preliminary results are discussed below.

5. Basque oral tradition: *Noka* in the archives

I cull examples of *noka* usage from Basque oral literature for two reasons. First, it is Basque oral literature (all sung poetry) rather than formal schooling that has been the primary repository of Basque culture. The corpus includes genres such as ballads, war songs, funeral dirges, and *bertsolaritza*, addressing a wide range of issues—religion and history, daily life, illness and death, politics and relationships (Aulestia, 1995). Second, Basque oral literature is explicitly drawn upon as a source for Basque culture and language in both kinds of pedagogical materials discussed here: textbooks in the Basque Country and *The Basque-English Dictionary*. I focus on use of *noka* in particular because, as *noka* is used with female addressees, songs which use *noka* are those most likely to involve female “characters.”

In my previous work (Echeverria, 2003a), I have shown use of *noka* in textbooks is spare, and the social meanings implied thereto negative, as *noka* is primarily to found in the mouths (and ears) of witches. My ongoing research on *noka* usage in religious and mythological texts suggests that, indeed, *noka* usage is more likely to be directed to witches and fairy-like creatures called “*laminak*,” my examination of *noka* usage in Basque songs across all dialects in *Euskera* (Amuriza, 1995, 1998, 2006; Ansorena, 2000; Arbelbide, 1987; Elizanburu, 1991; Estornes Lasa, 1982; Garzia, 2003; Lomax, 2004; Ormaetxea, 1972; Urkizu, 1987, 2003; Zavala, 1985, 1998) shows a wide variety of uses of *noka* between ordinary human females.

Thus far, I have found 68 songs which use *noka*. Five use allocutive conjugation (see Table 2 above) with an unspecified addressee; without further research, I am unable to determine the addressee of another three songs. Of the 60 songs remaining, most identify the *noka* addressee in terms of their kin or relationship status: as daughters (19); daughter-in-law (1); wives (10); sisters (4); niece (1); romantic partners or objects of romantic interest (5). The themes of the remaining songs pertain to “traditional” Basque cultural life or conventional gender expectations. In addition, two songs use *noka* to addresses witches; one other features a father using *noka* to his daughter about witches; it is unclear if the daughter herself is a witch. Four other songs use *noka* to address a religious theme. In general, *noka* is used most commonly to chastise, tease or make a command.

One might conclude from the above list that Basque pedagogical materials—the Dictionary in particular—accurately represent oral literature, after all. For it is, indeed, populated primarily by female characters in “traditional” gender roles. My preliminary analysis uncovered 17 cases in which the females occupying these roles exhibit attitudes and activities that are hardly “traditional” or “ladylike: they berate husbands for excessive drinking or drink heavily themselves; resist grooms their parents have chosen for them; or rebuff unwanted sexual advances.

Indeed, some of the songs feature women or girls taking on bold behaviors or public stances the pedagogical materials discussed above reserve for men. In “*Agur, agur, agur, ama neuria*” (Greetings, my mother), a son presents his new wife to his mother. She asks him whether she is Spanish or French; he replies she is the latter, but of “pure noble blood.” For reasons not explained in the song, the mother cannot abide this; she orders her son to take his wife to a deserted place and kill her.

Evidently not the greeting he expected, the groom tells his brother—also a priest—about his bride. The brother/priest, too, tells him to kill her. It is only the groom’s sister who, “as was fitting,” welcomes the new bride, telling her brother to take his wife home and love her. Unfortunately for the bride, the sister is nowhere to be found when she is taken away. The wife tries to bribe her husband; when this fails, she appeals to his impending fatherhood (**noka in bold**):

Text 6: “Greetings, my mother”

*Neregatik ezpada ere barrenkuagatik
-Ik barrenian zer **dun** onbor zar bat baizik?
-Onbor zar balin badut egonek tuk
Onbor zar balin badut egonek emanen tuk
(Zavala, 1998, p. 202)*

If not for my sake, spare what’s inside me
What’s inside you is an old chunk of wood
If I have an old chunk of wood
If I have an old chunk of wood, it was made by you

This appeal fails, too; and the husband uses *noka* in rejecting (and insulting) his wife. Whether the mother is supposed to be lauded or condemned for her death order only further research will show. Certainly this text shows women behaving quite differently than do the pedagogical materials discussed above.

There is no ambiguity as to valence in the protagonist of “*Sarako Martira*” (“The martyr of Sara,” a French Basque town). Twelve verses, three of which appear below, tell the tale of 15-year-old Madalena Larralde, captured by French soldiers in the late 18th century, returning from Bera (a Spanish Basque town) after making her confession (as no priests were available in France):

Text 7: “The Martyr of Sara”

*Saratik Donibanera, soldaduek burlaka
Badabilkate gaixoa xizpa-zurekin joka
“Oihu egin **zan**, ergela: Biba nazioea”
Madalenak aldiz beti: “Bib’ erlisionea”*

*Phestara bezala doha guillotinari buruz
Bertze guziak nigarrez, hura gozoki kantua
Begiak zerura beha, dio: Salve Regina
Bidera dohakon deituz Martiren Erregina*

*Madalena Saratarra, igan zare zerura
Egia betikoaren betikotz goatzera
Dezagun zurekin ikas egiaren maitatzen
Denetan, zer nahi gerta, gezurretik beirutzen
(Garzia, 2003, p. 381)*

From Sara to Donibane, the soldiers mocked her
Hitting the poor thing with the butts of their rifles
“Cry it out, fool: ‘Long live the nation!’”
But Madalena always responded: “Long live my religion!”

She goes to the guillotine as if it to a festival
Everyone else cried, but she sang joyfully
Her eyes facing heaven: ‘Salve Regina’
The Queen of Martyrs goes to meet her, calling her

Madalena of Sara, you have ascended to heaven
To enjoy eternal truths forever
Let us, with you, learn to love the truth
In all things, whatever happens, to beware of lies

Young, brave (presumably) virginal Madalena goes willingly to her death in the name of her religion—just like Joan of Arc. The historical figure on which this song was based, however, was actually 35 when she was executed, not just 15 (Haritschelhar, 1998).

Space limitations prevent me from further exegesis of these songs, but one thing is clear even from this glimpse: there are examples of women and girls speaking forcefully and acting bravely; in the case of the martyr, engaging in public displays of the *indarra* that is so valued in Basque culture. There are also examples of women and girls behaving quite badly, suggesting that this prerogative is not only male. Given that half of population of (would be) Basque speakers is female—and that we live in a time where gender roles are questioned, by many men as well as women—it is not clear why “untraditional” gender role models from the Basque oral tradition are excluded from materials used to teach *Euskera*.

6. Discussion

In this paper, I have shown that seemingly neutral, inclusive aspects of Basque identity and culture – an identity ostensibly open to all who learn the language, a language with few gender distinctions embedded into its structure – have been socially constructed in ways that are exclusionary. Schools and pedagogical materials present Basque identity as if it has always been linked to the Basque language, which denies a history of defining the term “Basque” along other criteria—often in ways that position Basques (however defined) in a positive light vis a vis others. To elide this history and present Basque language as if it were—and has always been—the only “true” measure of Basqueness is to potentially alienate non-native speakers from the Basque ethnic community.

Indeed, the same can be said of the term “*Euskaldun*.” Neologisms distinguish between “*Euskaldunzaharrak*” (in this context, “*zaharrak*” means “Old” or “native” speaker) and “*Euskaldunberriak*” (here, “*berriak*” means “new” or “second-language learner”). If “having Basque” truly were enough to “be” Basque, why make further distinctions

between *kinds* of Basque speakers? This narrowing of a seemingly inclusive definition is something that endangered language communities like the Basques' can ill afford.

None of this may seem to matter unless we recall the teaching of Lao-Tzu: “words have ancestors, deeds have masters” (Addiss & Lombardo, 1993, p. 70). The words we use to describe our world are not neutral, but already socially stratified, overlain with others' intentions and meanings (Bahktin, 1981). This is no less true of words used to describe social categories such as ethnic identity. Historically, some individuals have been in positions powerful enough to decide how “Basqueness” should be defined and they did so in ways to demarcate social distinctions with others of import to them at that particular point in time. To the extent that these “others” become aware of these processes and feel excluded, it should not be surprising if they decide not to speak the language identified with that identity—even if they have been given the opportunity to learn it.

A similar story can be told when it comes to those who do speak Basque, when it comes to the pronoun “*hi*.” It is true that *hi* is only a small part of formal Basque instruction: only Basque-schooled students are likely to have any explicit lessons on *hi*, where they are told it is a familiar mode of address, whose forms differ according to addressee's gender. But *hi* looms larger in the sociolinguistic landscape than its bare mention in pedagogical materials would suggest. As I have argued elsewhere (Echeverria, 2003a), *hi* is also the main marker of “authentic” Basque identity—and masculinity because of its use in male-dominated cultural domains. Indeed, my foray into the archives suggests that *noka* is not only a dispreferred mode of address but a dangerous one. Historically, it has been linked to groups of people who have literally been burned at the stake: Protestants and “witches”—most of the latter have been women (Echeverria, 2006a, 2006b). Some of my ethnographic evidence suggests that *noka* continues to be linked to marginalized women like “*buhameak*” (gypsies) or wayward women, like the prostitute in the popular soap opera “*Goenkale*” (“High Street”) who is addressed in *noka* by her pimp.

At the very least, we can say that the “ancestors” of *toka* are held in greater esteem than those of *noka*. It is true that *toka* and, especially, *noka* usage is much more restricted than *zu*. In those contexts where they are used, *toka* is used for a wide variety of interactional purposes and in ways that ascribe it positive connotations. This is not the case with *noka*: it is used much less than *toka*, and its social meanings are much more ambiguous. Based on the preliminary archival research discussed above, I suggest that the restricted and often negative association ascribed *noka* might be mitigated if the complexities of its usage in Basque oral literature played a more prominent role in pedagogical materials.

Why should we care about this, when it comes to language and education in the Basque Country? Certainly, *Euskera* is in a stronger position today than ever before given the Basque government's formidable efforts to promote it in schools, official domains in the public domain. Yet, not all is perfect. While an increasingly number of people are learning *Euskera* in the Autonomous Basque Country, especially children, it is still the case that many of those who can speak Basque nevertheless do not do so much of the time. Indeed, a slogan oft posted on classroom walls bemoans this fact: “A language is not lost because those who do not know it do not learn it, but because those who know it, do not speak it.” I would argue that, in order for *Euskera* to strengthen its position vis a vis the dominant languages that surround it, it must be taken up by new speakers *and* be used regularly by native speakers. But a language in need of “saving” must also be “savored.” I have pointed out the ways in which the latter has sometimes been difficult to do.

7. Conclusion

Of the world's 6500 languages, most are expected to disappear in the next generation (Hornberger, 1998, p. 440). We in the scholarly community are regularly incited to rage against the machine—globalization, hegemony, language domination, misrecognition—that contributes to this loss of our human heritage. More specifically, we are exhorted to do what we can to fight against it: develop writing systems or make dictionaries for those languages that lack them; teach these languages in schools; lobby for their use in public institutions and the media. Or at least offer them a proper burial by documenting them when it is too late to save them. These efforts are often under-girded by the premise that languages have an intrinsic right to exist, and that speakers of those language “should” keep speaking them. More accurately, efforts to save these languages often assume that these efforts are worth undertaking because their native speakers want—or should want—to keep them alive.

I am among those interested and invested in stemming the loss of endangered languages. A native speaker of *Euskera*, I grew up in an immigrant community where I now teach Basque to adults. I have conducted ethnographic and archival research in various Basque communities for over 20 years, and have been performing and writing Basque

songs for the last 10 years. Like many scholars of endangered languages, then, my interest in the topic is not “just academic” but personal.

Yet, despite my personal and professional experiences with things Basque, it has taken me a long time to realize that while the goals of “saving” languages might be noble, the means of doing so sometimes are not. Efforts to revitalize endangered languages are often faced with a paradox: to dismantle the master’s house (i.e. the institutionalized power of dominant languages), language minority movements often resort to using the master’s weapons (i.e. standardization, prescriptivism, tightening ethnic boundaries). I have shown Basque identity and language are embedded with social and historical histories that exclude large swaths of the would-be Basque nation: women and second language learners of Basque. To the extent that these processes continue to operate in society and are ignored in the curriculum-in-use, it bodes ill for the future of *Euskera* as a language of everyday use.

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