



Dossier “New speakers of minority languages: belonging and legitimacy”

New Basque speakers: linguistic identity and legitimacy*

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Abstract

The number of Basque speakers has grown considerably in the last 40 years, due largely to the rising number of new speakers, or *euskaldunberri*, defined here as those people who have learned the language through any means other than family transmission. Although new Basque speakers constitute a strategic group for the future development of the language, until now no detailed study of this collective had been attempted.

In this article we present the results of research into the perceived linguistic identities of new Basque speakers, exploring the participants' reasons for assigning themselves to one of three principal categories: *euskaldun zaharra* (native speaker), *euskaldunberri* (new speaker) and *euskaldun* (Basque speaker). It is argued that these categories reflect identities that can be situated in a continuum of authenticity that, in turn, correlates with the speakers' self-perception as legitimate speakers of Basque.

Keywords

new Basque speaker, linguistic attitudes, linguistic identities, legitimate speaker

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Nuevos hablantes de euskera: identidad y legitimidad

Resumen

En los últimos 40 años el número de vascohablantes ha crecido mucho debido en gran parte al aumento de los nuevos hablantes o, utilizando la terminología en euskera, *euskaldunberris*, definidos aquí como todas aquellas personas que han aprendido esta lengua por un medio diferente a la transmisión familiar. Aunque el grupo de los nuevos hablantes de euskera es estratégico para el desarrollo futuro de la lengua, hasta esta investigación no ha habido ningún estudio en profundidad sobre ellos.

Este artículo presenta algunos de los resultados relacionados con la identidad lingüística de los nuevos hablantes. Se exploran las autoadscripciones a las tres principales categorías que las vehiculan –*euskaldun zaharra* (hablante nativo), *euskaldunberri* (nuevo hablante) y *euskaldun* (hablante de euskera)– y se argumenta que estas categorías indexan identidades que se sitúan en un continuum de autenticidad que, a su vez, se correlaciona con la autopercepción de los hablantes como legítimos hablantes de euskera.

Palabras clave

nuevo hablante de euskera, actitudes lingüísticas, identidades lingüísticas, hablante legítim

1. Introduction

1.1. Development of the Basque language in recent years

In the last 30 years, the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (henceforth BAC) has seen a reversal of the downward trend of Basque, at least in terms of number of speakers and domains of use. However, the language itself is far from standardised and presents a number of evident weaknesses, as illustrated by the following data: while the percentage of people who define themselves as Basque speakers rose from 22% in 1981 to 36.4% in 2011, 44% of people do not speak the language and 19% are passive bilinguals, meaning that they understand but do not speak Basque (Basque Government, 2014). Moreover, the number of active users has not increased in the same proportion as the number of those who claim a knowledge of the language (Soziolinguistika Klusterra, 2012). The recently published *Fifth Sociolinguistic Map* (Basque Government, 2014) not only confirms this situation but also reveals a decrease in the use of Basque among *euskaldun zaharrak* (native speakers) and in the family domain. The situation in Navarra and the French Basque Country (Iparralde) is still more alarming: in Navarra the number of Basque speakers has stalled at 11.7% of the population, and in Iparralde the transmission and use of the language are in steady decline (Basque Government, 2012).

Although a considerable number of people in the BAC learn Basque as adults, the greatest growth in the use of the language has been observed among young people, with more than 70%

of those under the age of 20 now Basque speakers. This is thanks primarily to the commitment by the Basque Government and the wider population to Basque immersion educational programmes, the success of which is illustrated by the official enrolment figures: in the academic year 1983-1984, enrolments in total immersion programmes accounted for 14% of the total, whereas in 2013-2014 they accounted for 76% (Basque Government, 2013).

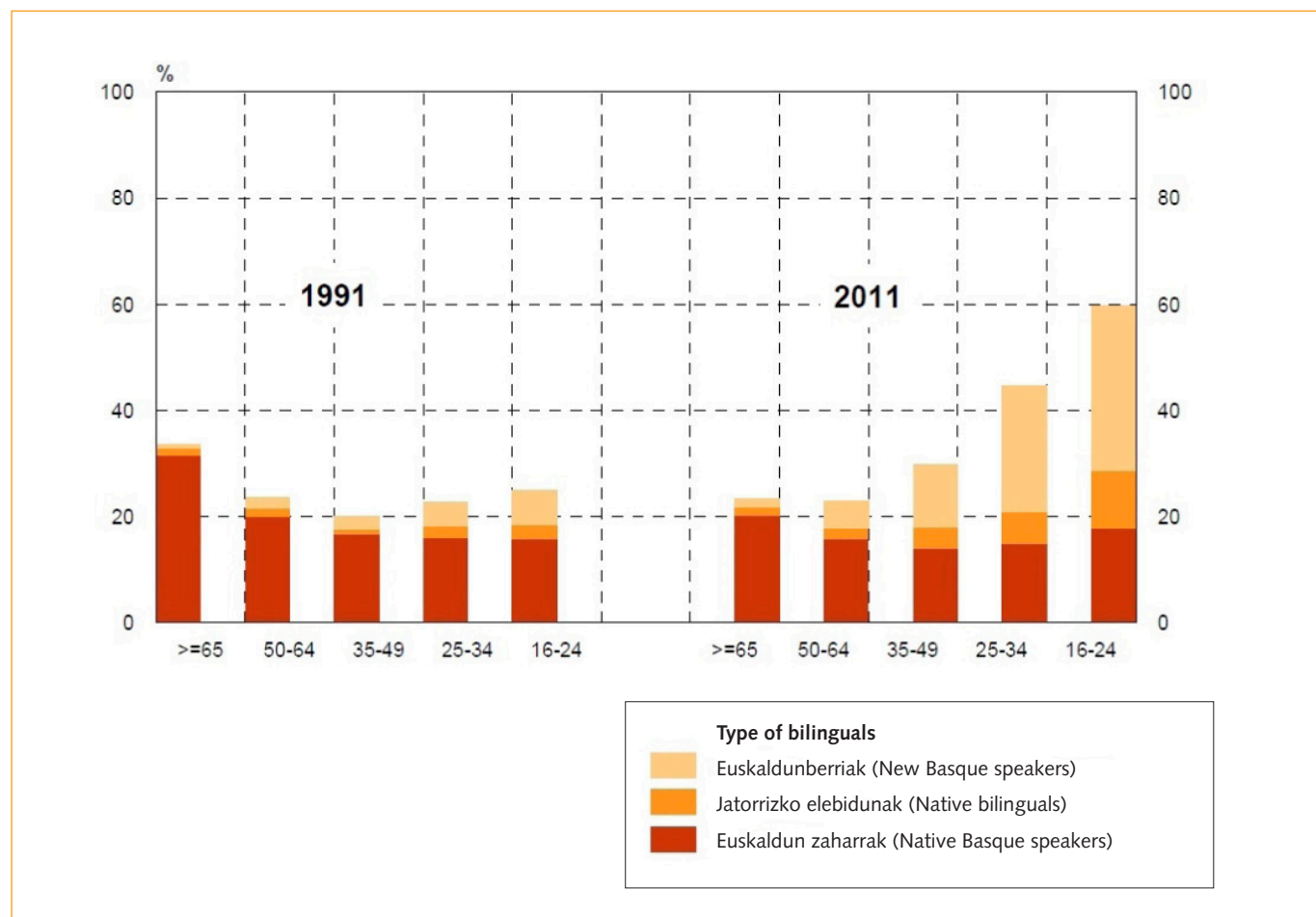
Figure 1 shows the evolution of the different types of Basque speakers: *euskaldun zaharrak* (literally, "old speakers", native speakers), who are those Basque speakers who acquired the language through an L1 family transmission model; *jatorrizko elebidunak* (L1 bilinguals), who are the product of bilingual transmission (Bilingual First Language Acquisition, BFLA, De Houwer 2009); and *euskaldunberri*, or new speakers, defined in the Euskal Herria Linguistic Indicators System¹ (Basque Government, 2008) as those speakers who, "while not having Basque as a mother tongue, speak and write Basque well". As the graph shows, in 1991 most Basque speakers in all age groups were native speakers. Two decades later, however, there is a far greater presence of new speakers, particularly among young people. In 2011, 60% of the population aged 16-24 years were Basque speakers, of whom more than half were new speakers, who had generally learned the language through immersion programmes.

In the new scenario created by this linguistic development, the strategic importance of new speakers is undeniable. However, until now there had been no in-depth, comprehensive study of this group, a fundamental task for monitoring the development of Basque language use and adjusting the linguistic standardisation

1. The *Euskal Herriko hizkuntza-adierazleen sistema*, or Euskal Herria Linguistic Indicators System (EAS) was created by the Basque Government and is applied by all language standardisation agencies.



Figure 1: Evolution of number of Basque speakers, by age group (CAPV, 1991–2011).



Source: V. Inkesta Soziolinguistikoa – Laburpena (Fifth Sociolinguistic Survey - Summary). Basque Government, 2012.

activities carried out across the BAC. New Basque speakers show a range of distinct profiles, but they are clearly different from native speakers in terms of the emotional relationship with the language, the configuration of the speaker's linguistic identity, the linguistic variety spoken, the patterns and contexts of use, and the patterns of language transmission.

1.2. The research project on new Basque speakers

The data presented in this article are taken from a broader study of new Basque speakers, which is summarised below:

Definition of subjects

The geographical framework of the study is the BAC. The definition of "new speaker" adopted for the project largely coincides with the definition of *euskaldunberri* given in the EAS: a person who has learned Basque by any means other than family transmission.

A broad definition was chosen in order to include the greatest possible number of profiles and experiences.

Subjects are aged between 18 and 55 years and are all competent Basque speakers: they have a linguistic competence of level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and/or are competent to carry out professional functions and interact socially.

Research objectives and expected outcomes

This project is the first general study of new Basque speakers and aims to provide the first comprehensive description of this group. Specifically, we examine issues such as the speakers' attitudes towards Basque, their experiences of learning and using the language, their individual motivations, changes in perceived linguistic identity through learning the language, the factors that favour or impede the use and transmission of Basque, and the participants' views on their status as legitimate speakers of the language.



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The research has produced two main outcomes:

- a classification of the main themes and ideas that characterise the area of study;
- a classification of the different profiles of Basque speakers.

It is hoped that the results will also be of use to those involved in the normalisation of the Basque language, particularly our conclusions regarding the factors that have a bearing on its use and transmission.

Methodology

The research combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies, an approach that has provided highly satisfactory results in previous studies of linguistic attitudes (Amorrortu *et al.*, 2009).

The data presented below are taken from the qualitative study. Nine focus groups and 9 individual semi-structured interviews were carried out, with a total of 75 participants. The focus groups developed their discussions from a general initial question, with minimal input by the moderators, so that participants could raise and explore their *own* issues in a collaborative environment. The semi-structured interviews allowed us to obtain more detailed information on specific questions and profiles. The data were analysed according to the principles of inductive content analysis (Mayring, 2000), which resulted in a hierarchical system of thematic categories. The qualitative analysis software NVivo 9 was used to codify the data.

Linguistic identity was a recurring theme in the focus groups and generated extensive discussion. It was also one of the themes proposed by the researcher responsible for the individual semi-structured interviews. To analyse this theme, a category to gather all contributions referring to types of Basque speaker (including self-perception), with special attention to the terms or “labels” used by the participants and their justifications for choosing a particular term.

2. Values, linguistic identity and legitimacy

This article focuses on linguistic identity, understood as the identification of subjects with particular categories of Basque speaker. The categories are established on the basis of terms explicitly and intentionally used by the participants to define their linguistic status, which are in general use in the Basque context: *euskaldun zaharra* (native Basque speaker), *euskaldunberri* (new Basque speaker) and *euskaldun* (Basque speaker).

The question “What type of Basque speaker am I?” emerged as one of the most important issues for participants in each of the focus groups. Analysis of the extensive discussion it generated gave us an understanding of the relationship that exists between

the linguistic identity of each participant and the values attributed to that identity.

For Woolard (2008), the prestige and legitimacy of a language or linguistic variety, above all in the case of minority languages, derive from the interplay of two competing axes of values: authenticity and anonymity. The value of authenticity rests on the relationship of a language with a specific community, in its role as the authentic voice of that community. The value of anonymity, by contrast, is attributed to the variety that is not socially indexed, which represents the voice of everyone and of no-one in particular, making it suitable for an official language and common language of use.

In the Basque context there are three varieties which are relevant to our discussion: Spanish, which was the official language and the only one operating at institutional level until the beginning of the linguistic revitalisation in the 1980s; local and dialectal varieties that constituted the “living” Basque language, the varieties that were spoken, imbued with values of *solidarity* but with little or no *instrumental* value (Lambert, 1967); and finally, following its creation in the late 1950s, standard Basque, or *euskara batua*, a relatively young standard. The revitalisation of Basque represents a big scale effort to restructure the functions, uses, and values of the linguistic varieties that coexist across the Basque Country (Urla *et al.*, in press).

Basque is a language rich in dialects. Apart from the main dialects there is a great amount of local varieties, which are very much marks of identity: varieties legitimated by their high value of authenticity. The standard *batua* was created specifically as a new linguistic form, an amalgam of the many existing dialects (hence the name *batua*, meaning “unified”) (Villasante, 1980; Urla, 1993). As such, it can be considered a variety that has been invested with *anonymity* from its very origins: the language of all and of no-one in particular, designed to assume the functions of a common Basque tongue and official language. *Batua* is the standard variety used in the education system and is therefore the variety learned by the vast majority of new speakers, both in *euskaltegis* (Basque language learning centres for adults) and in compulsory education.

The study of linguistic identities is of interest to us as it sheds light on the ideologies that underpin what the Basque community considers a “true” Basque speaker and legitimate speaker. We are interested in whether new speakers are adjudged to be legitimate Basque speakers (by themselves and by others) and the criteria on which this judgement is based; whether the linguistic identities of new speakers are “fixed” or if there is scope for progress towards more legitimate identities; whether, as Bucholtz (2003) contends, legitimacy should be understood in terms of processes of legitimation negotiated by social practice; and what the factors that serve as pathways to legitimation in the Basque context are. This study aims to contribute to these questions.



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3. Linguistic identity among new Basque speakers: "What type of speaker am I?"

The participants took different views on their status with respect to the three categories of Basque speaker considered:

3.1. "Ez naiz euskaldun zaharra": I'm not a native speaker

None of the participants in the focus groups defined themselves as a native speaker, or *euskaldun zaharra*, justifying it on the simple grounds that they had not learned Basque from their families. This consensus reveals the extent to which the "mother tongue ideology" (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1989) has taken root in the Basque context. The use given to the term *euskaldun zaharra* at institutional level (for example, in the sociolinguistic maps and surveys created by the Basque government) also appears to be accepted socially. According to this ideology, the language learned at home determines absolutely and permanently an individual's linguistic identity. Many of our participants took the view that, if they had not learned Basque at home, regardless of the communicative competence they acquired and the importance of Basque in their identity, they would never be *euskaldun zaharra* or native speakers.

To an extent it was surprising that those Basque speakers who learned the language through early immersion from the age of 2 shared this view; we anticipated that some would define themselves as *euskaldun zaharrak*, but this was not the case.

Having ruled out this term and this identity, participants could place themselves in one of two categories: *euskaldunberri* or *euskaldun*. Below we examine the reasons given for the choice of category and the terms in which these reasons were expressed.

3.2. "Euskaldunberria naiz": I'm a new Basque speaker

Among the participants who placed themselves in this category we observed a range of profiles, including many young speakers who learned Basque in early immersion programmes. However, there was a broad consensus across all age groups with respect to the reasons cited for the choice of category. Thus, participants defined themselves as *euskaldunberri*:

- because their mother tongue is Spanish;
- because they *learned* Basque, either at school or in programmes for adult learners;

- because Spanish is the language they use predominantly or exclusively in their daily lives;
- because Spanish is their dominant language in terms of linguistic competence;
- because their "mental patterns" are arranged in Spanish.

As we can see, the criteria are highly diverse; some derive from the mother tongue ideology, whereas others are related to the participants' level of communicative competence or opportunities to use Basque.

Below is an example of how these ideas are expressed:

(1) Eguneroko bizitzan gaztelania erabiltzen dudalako gehienetan, eta gañera, ba hori, etxean txikitatik gaztelania ikasi nebalako, gero ikastolan sartzerakoan hasi nintzen euskera ikasten. Baña, zelan da, lengua madre, edo hori, ama hizkuntza, gaztelania izan da, beraz, horregatik hartzen dut neure burua euskaldunberri. / Nik askotan pentsatu behar dodaz lehenengo gauzak gaztelaniaz gero euskeraz botateko. Beharbada hor egongo litzateke ezberdintasuna, eta neuk, bueno, gaztelaniaz pentsetan dot. Bueno, hasten banaz euskaraz berbetan, ba bueno, automatikoki irtetzen zait ere, baña printzipioz nire pentsamoldeak antolatzeke hizkuntza gaztelania da. Niretzako hor egongo litzateke behar bada ezberdintasuna, euskaldunbarri baten kasua edo euskaldun zahar batena. (BI-D, 164 / 188²)

Because for everyday things I tend to use Spanish almost always, and because, well, because at home from a young age I learned Spanish, and it was later when I started school that I began to learn Basque, so that's why I consider myself an *euskaldunberri*. / A lot of the time I tend to think things in Spanish first and then say them in Basque. Perhaps that's where the difference is, and I, well, I think in Spanish. If I start speaking in Basque, well, it comes out naturally, but to start with I organise my thoughts in Spanish. For me perhaps that's where the difference is between an *euskaldunberri* and an *euskaldun zahar*. (BI-D, 164 / 188)

3.3. "Euskalduna naiz": I'm a Basque speaker

Many of the participants do not place themselves in the category of *euskaldunberri*, defining themselves instead as *euskaldun*, "Basque speaker", neither *zahar* nor *berri*. Their express rejection of the category *euskaldunberri* ("I'm not an *euskaldunberri* any more", "I'm not an *euskaldunberri* because...") and an analysis of the

2. Participants' contributions are labelled confidentially: the letters before the hyphen indicate the place in which the focus group was held, the letter after the hyphen denotes the participant. So, for example, *BI-D* identifies participant D from the Bilbao focus group. The number identifies the turn in the conversation.



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corresponding discourse reveal that aligning themselves with the category of *euskaldun*, adopting this linguistic identity, is a mark of progress, of “promotion” even; from the *euskaldunberri* status; being an *euskaldunberri*, which they once were, is something from which these speakers have moved on. In the case of subjects who learned Basque as children, there is also evidence that being an *euskaldun* is in some way considered “better” than being an *euskaldunberri*. By analysing the wealth of discourse used to justify the choice of linguistic identity we have been able to identify a number of key factors.

People who define themselves as *euskaldun*...

- have attained a high level of communicative competence and spoken fluency;
- are integrated into social networks that use Basque, particularly networks that are emotionally meaningful, such as family and circles of friends, as well as professional;
- use Basque in their daily lives and in different contexts;
- understand and express themselves in a dialectal variety (albeit in some cases imperfectly and with some elements of standard Basques).

The criteria are largely the same as those for the category of *euskaldunberri*, although several important distinctions emerge: no reference is made to the mother tongue ideology (although its importance is not questioned); the criterion regarding use of the language is not qualified (speakers in this group have not only integrated Basque into their active language production but also use it in emotionally significant social contexts); and speakers exhibit a high level of linguistic competence but also show an ability to express themselves in dialect.

The following quotation is an excerpt from a conversation between three participants in the Zumaia focus group. It should be noted that the knowledge of Basque is particularly high in Zumaia, where 71.5% of people speak the language (Eustat, 2013). The three participants are a 25-year-old woman (ZU-C), a 43-year-old man (ZU-A), and a 51-year-old man (ZU-B) from another autonomous community in Spain (La Rioja), who learned Basque at the age of 20. ZU-C states that she is not an *euskaldun zaharra* but does not see herself as an *euskaldunberri* either; she is an *euskaldun*, a Basque speaker, pure and simple. However, all three participants agree that ZU-A and ZU-B are *euskaldunberri*s because they learned Basque as adults.

(2) — Ni, euskalduna, ez det esaten ez berri, ez zahar, ez. Ni euskalduna naiz euskera erabiltzen detelako. Baina esaten detenean etxian hona netorrela, nere mutilak esan dit, «Baina zu ezea euskaldunberria». «Klaro ezetz, baina bai ama [hizkuntza] aldetik, ama hizkuntza da erdera, orduan horregatik». (ZU-C, 56)

— Klaro, guk ulertzen duguna euskaldun berria, gu bai gerala euskaldunberria. (ZU-B, 57)

— Bai, ezta? Ya helduagoak ikasi dugula. (ZU-A, 58)

— I’m an euskaldun, I wouldn’t say new or old, no. I’m an euskaldun because I use Basque. But when I mentioned at home that I was coming here, my boyfriend said: “But you’re not an euskaldunberri”. “Of course not, but in terms of mother [tongue], my mother tongue is Spanish, so that’s why”. (ZU-C, 56)

— Right, the way we understand euskaldunberri, we definitely are euskaldunberri. (ZU-B, 57)

— That’s right. Because we learned as adults. (ZU-A, 58)

It is not only young Basque speakers who identify themselves as *euskaldun*, however. The following excerpt is taken from the Bilbao focus group. BI-C is a 49-year-old man who learned Basque as an adult but worked as a teacher in the Gernika region (67.6% Basque speakers according to Eustat, 2013). He considers himself an *euskaldun*, primarily because this is how the native speakers see him as he does not use the standard *batua* but rather the local variety:

(3) — Urte asko emon dodaz, esan bezala, Gernika, Gernika inguruan, eta gero Lea-Artibaitik, eta lana dela-eta, eta nik ikusi dot hangoen erreazioa, eta hainbatetan harritu egiten dira jakitean euskaldunbarrixa nazela. (...) Igal berba eitzeke era, edo ez dakit, ez dakit (...) Izan leike doinua, izan leike hiztegia... (BI-C, 166, 170, 172)

— Batueraz ez duzulako egiten. (BI-A, 173)

— Gernikeraz egiten, edo... (...) Ni pozik, pozik eta harro. (BI-C, 176)

— Eta zuk zure burua euskaldunberritzat daukazu edo etapa hori ja...? (BI-M1, 179)

— Euskalduntzat, ez barrixe, ez zaharra, ez. (BI-C, 180)

— I’ve spent many years in Gernika, as I said before, in the area around Gernika, and then in Lea Artibai, for work, and I’ve seen how people from there react, and often they’re surprised that I’m euskaldunberri (...) Perhaps because of the way I speak, or, I don’t know, I don’t know (...) Perhaps because of the intonation, perhaps because of the vocabulary ... (BI-C, 166, 170, 172)

— Because you don’t speak in *batua* [in standard language], that’s why. (BI-A, 173)

— I speak the variety from Gernika. (...) And I’m happy, happy and proud. (BI-C, 176)

— ¿And do you consider yourself an euskaldunberri or in that phase by now...? (BI-M1, 179)

— Euskaldun, not new nor old, no. (BI-C, 180)

The feeling of pride —so clearly expressed by this participant— at being taken for an *euskaldun zaharra*, and the status afforded to those who define themselves as *euskaldun*, lead us to think that these categories reflect identities with differing degrees



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of proximity to the status of an *authentic* Basque speaker, the referent of which is the native speaker, or *euskaldun zaharra*. As an example, see the following quote, in which participant BE-C, a 41-year-old woman, explains how she learned to speak “real” Basque after she married, when she moved to Bermeo (72.7% Basque speakers, Eustat, 2013) and became more closely integrated into the Basque-speaking family of her husband. In the analysis she makes of her linguistic identity, there is a clear attempt to justify why she considers herself a true Basque speaker:

(4) Horrelako sailkapenak oso gatzak direz esaten baietz edo ezetz. Berria ze zentzutan? Zentzu baten bai ze ikasi dot, ikasi dot gehiena, guztia ez esatearren, ze egia esan gero, ezkondu eta gero, ba familien eta kalien eta, ba ikasi dot asko entzunez edo, ba hiztegi aldetik batez be, baserritar artien, ze amaginarreba eta aitaginarreba eta hango mundua, gauza bat da otzara bat, zabala, beste bat lastozkoa, beste bat... (BE-C, 284)

It's very difficult to give a yes or no answer to these types of classifications. New speaker, in what sense? In one sense yes, because I've learned it, I've learned almost everything –if not everything- because the truth is that after I got married, with family and in the street, I learned a lot by listening, particularly vocabulary, among farmers, because my mother and father-in law are from that world... A basket, a wide one, is one thing; a wicker basket is another, ... (BE-C, 284)

Analysis of the terms that participants use to assign themselves to one of the categories, *euskaldunberri* or *euskaldun*, and their views on the category *euskaldun zaharra*, lead us to conclude that these categories reflect identities considered to be more or less *authentic* along a *continuum* such as the one shown below (see also Ortega *et al.*, in press):

Figure 2. Linguistic identities in a continuum of authenticity

euskaldunberri ←-----→ euskaldun ←-----→ euskaldun zaharra

According to our data, the status of native speaker is an identity that cannot be attained (on the grounds of the mother tongue ideology) and sits at one extreme of the continuum of authenticity, as described in other minority language situations (O'Rourke and Ramallo, 2011; Bucholtz, 2003). Of the two options available to new speakers, the category *euskaldunberri* is adopted by speakers who perceive their linguistic identity to be incomplete. For many, it is a fixed identity — “I'll always be *euskaldunberri*”; however, we also see that many have “progressed” to a new identity, to being an *euskaldun*, which is experienced and expressed as a form

of overcoming the status of *euskaldunberri*. Participant ELK-H expresses these ideas clearly. This participant is a 40-year-old man who lives in Usurbil, a municipality in Guipúzcoa with 69.7% Basque speakers (Eustat, 2013). Although he attended classes at an *euskaltegi*, much of his language was learned “in the street”. He speaks Basque regularly, with family and friends and at work. He expresses his views as follows:

(5) Yo me siento euskaldun, entonces de ahí para adelante. Y luego, pues para mí, pues igual ser euskaldunberri es una medalla en un momento dado, porque me lo he trabajado yo, o sea, me lo he currado yo y es algo que lo he conseguido yo. [...] Es un proceso, ¿no? Euskaldunzaharra tampoco, porque sabes que no eres, pero en un momento dado yo igual me metería más... o me gustaría más... o yo igual, a mí mismo, sin igual decir a nadie..., igual sí me metería en el saco de los euskaldunzaharras porque hablo más como un euskaldunzaharra. (ELK-H, 182; original en castellano)

I consider myself euskaldun. And for me, well, perhaps being an euskaldunberri is a medal at a given moment, because I've worked for it — as in, I've put a lot of effort into it and it's something that I've achieved myself. [...] It's a process, right? Not an euskaldun zaharra though, because you know that you're not, although at some point maybe I'd consider myself more... or I'd like to... perhaps I'd consider myself, without telling anyone [that I am not], perhaps I would include myself more in the group of euskaldun zaharras because I speak more like an euskaldun zaharra. (ELK-H, 182; original in Spanish)

We interpret the factors used in this section as justifications for the choice of *euskaldun* status as *pathways to legitimation* (Bucholtz, 2003). Two in particular appear to play a key role and are discussed in the following section: the opportunities to use Basque, and the particular linguistic variety that the speaker uses.

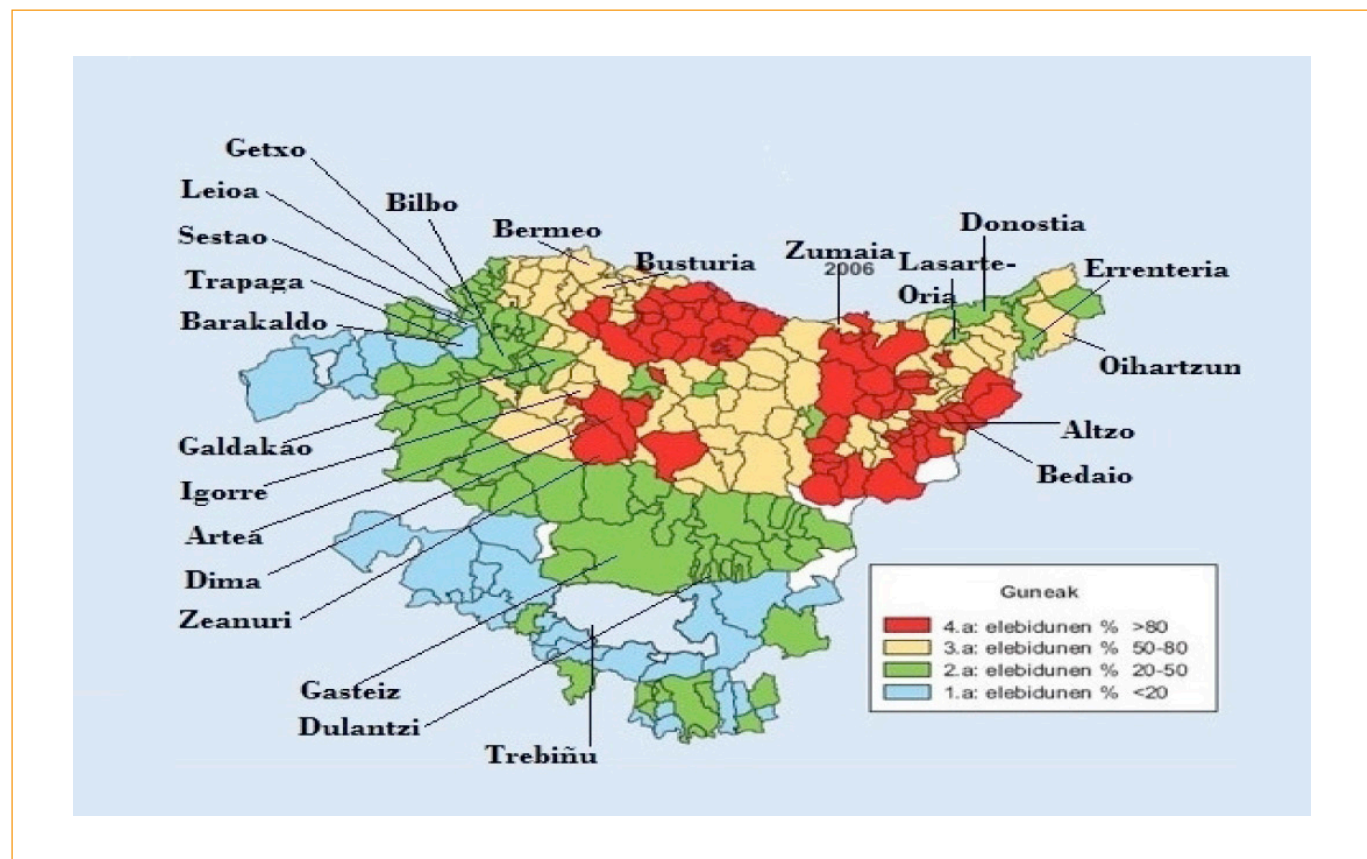
4. Living in Basque and speaking in dialect, keys to legitimation

4.1. Opportunities for using the language: the importance of the socio-linguistic context and social networks

The use of Basque in everyday life is a factor identified by both *euskaldunberri* and *euskaldun* in justifying their belonging to one of these categories. It is no surprise that many of those who define themselves as *euskaldun* live in areas with a high proportion of Basque speakers, which give them ample opportunity to practise the language.



Map 1. Percentage of Basque Speakers by city councils



Use is subject to two types of contextual constraints: the sociolinguistic context in which the speaker lives, and the existence of personal or professional social networks. These are external factors, notionally at the margins of the subjects' agency, yet we have found them to be decisive in determining the categories to which the participants assign themselves. To understand this we must have a general knowledge of the sociolinguistic map of the CAPV. Map 1 shows the percentage of Basque speakers in each municipality in 2011 and the areas in which our participants live. There are clearly areas in which participants can "live" entirely in Basque and other where opportunities for natural use are far from guaranteed.

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, for example, the percentage of Basque speakers is 22.4% (Eustat, 2013) and Basque use is low. The participant below describes the situation as follows:

(6) *Jende asko gara, baina ez gara, gure artean, ba ez dago sarerik, ez dago... Ni beti harritzen naiz, beti ezagutzen duzu jende berria, eta ikusten dezu jende askok dakiela baina, bakoitzak bere bizitza egiten du eta... Baina ni seguru*

nago gure artean ezagutuko bagina, euskara entzungo zan Gasteizen askoz gehio, ba, ez dakit, sei elkarrizketatik bat, ba sei elkarrizketatik bat. (GA-A, 36)

We are a lot of people, but there aren't any networks between us, there aren't any... I'm always surprised, you always meet new people and you realise that many people know [Basque], but everyone leads their own life... But I'm convinced that if we got to know each other, in Gasteiz you'd hear much more Basque than you do today, I don't know, one in six conversations, one in six conversations. (GA-A, 36)

Just as important as the "normal" presence of Basque in the street is the access to social networks in which the language is spoken, particularly if these networks have a strong bearing on speakers' emotional lives (Amorrortu *et al.*, 2009). Many new Basque speakers have integrated into families and groups of Basque speakers through their partners, but this isn't always the case. This can lead to considerable frustration among those



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who would like to form an active part of the Basque-speaking community and, in addition to being unable to achieve this, actually find their language skills diminishing through a lack of opportunities to use Basque, a problem expressed by the following participant from Vitoria-Gasteiz:

(7) *Inork ere ez daki euskaraz, nire inguruan inork, bakarrik lankideek. (GA-C, 42)*

Nobody around me knows Basque, nobody, only work colleagues. (GA-C, 42)

Even so, in these less conducive environments some speakers develop strategies that enable them to use the language (for example, buying in shops where customers are attended in Basque) and often attend events that are held in Basque, which provide authentic *communities of practice* (Meyerhoff, 2002).

4.2. Linguistic variety

The association between *batua*-speaker and *euskaldunberri*, on the one hand, and dialect-speaker and *euskaldun zaharra*, on the other (as illustrated in quote 3), is widespread. The participants largely recognise the usefulness of the standard variety and acknowledge its function as a “common language”, but many believe that it is not authentic Basque, describing it instead as “textbook”, “plastic” or “artificial”, as is seen in the case of other minority languages (Dorian, 1981 and 1994; O’Rourke and Ramallo, 2011). By contrast, as noted in section 2, our participants place a particularly highly value on local dialects, which reveals a strong attachment to the value of authenticity of the language, as seen above (Bucholz, 2003; Woolard, 2008). The standard *batua*, the anonymity that it represents, is valued as useful, but the real value lies in authenticity.

The perceptions of the different varieties of Basque are also extended to their speakers, hence, as we have seen, the use or non-use of a vernacular variety is decisive in new speakers’ self-designation as *euskaldunberri* or *euskaldun* (Urla *et al.*, in press).

The desire expressed by this young participant from the Gran Bilbao area, who learned Basque through early immersion, and describes himself as *euskaldunberri*, rather than *euskaldun*, is a vivid illustration of some of the issues discussed in this study:

(8) *[Niri gustatuko litzaidake] leku bateko euskeraz egitea, lagunekin euskeraz egitea, ba lotsarik gabe euskeraz egitea. (Gazte-BI-E, 317)*

[I’d like] to speak a Basque that is from somewhere, to speak Basque every day with my friends, to speak Basque without feeling ashamed. (Gazte-BI-E, 317)

5. Conclusions

In this article we have presented a series of results relating to the linguistic identity of new Basque speakers in the BAC. Specifically, we have examined each speaker’s self-assignment to one of the three categories of Basque speaker broadly used in institutional and social contexts: *euskaldun zaharra* (“old” Basque speaker, native speaker), *euskaldunberri* (“new” Basque speaker) and *euskaldun* (Basque speaker).

The reasons given by the participants for their choice of category reveal, on the one hand, the mother tongue ideology as a determining factor in rejecting the status of *euskaldun zaharra* for themselves and assuming instead the identity of an *euskaldunberri*. This is seen even in the case of those new speakers who “pass for” natives and young participants who learned Basque through early immersion (from the age of 2 onwards).

The data also reveal the importance of actual use of the language and the linguistic variety spoken, thus the *euskaldunberri* consistently highlight the lack of opportunities to speak Basque and tend to use the standard *batua*, whereas those who classify themselves as *euskaldun* often live in areas where Basque is used commonly, have strong Basque-speaking social networks and speak a vernacular variety of the language, giving them a profile similar to that of *euskaldun zaharra*. Authenticity has been identified as the key legitimating value of Basque speakers. Though no direct comparison is made with the views of native speakers about their own variety and the standard *batua*, it is clear that for the *euskaldunberri*, authenticity is crucial, hence those new speakers who acquire a local variety of the language feel that they are invested with greater legitimacy.

It is important to note that *euskaldunberri* and *euskaldun* are not necessarily fixed identities, and indeed in this study we have revealed some of the keys to moving from the former category to the latter. If we consider that acquiring the status of *euskaldun* is seen as a sign of progress and achievement, these keys must be viewed as the true keys to legitimacy.

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