

The Basque Language in the Educational System

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Introduction

This paper is going to look at the linguistic situation in the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and Iparraldea, with emphasis on the Basque Autonomous Community. Areas to be covered are the historical context, the linguistic situation, the rights that speakers of the language have, reasons behind the revival of the language, and the main focus of this paper, the role of education in the normalization of the Basque language today which will include the legal situation, types of schools, funding, material development and teaching staff.

Background

Basque is a language that is spoken in the northwest of Spain and the southwest of France. The Basque area was partitioned between France and Spain in 1598 with the area south of the Pyrenees becoming part of Spain and the area north of the Pyrenees becoming part of France (Bouget, 1976). Basque was spoken over a larger area than it is today and was spread as far south as Aragon, as far west as the western area of Catalonia and spoken in the mid-Pyrenees. It has been estimated that the traditional Basque speaking area that the language was spoken in was at least twice the size of what it is today (Abaitua, 1986). The spread of the Roman Empire saw the linguistic border move westwards and by the time of the fall of the Roman Empire, the Basque language had retreated to the northwestern part of Navarre. There was a mini revival of the language in the ninth and tenth centuries with outward migration from the Basque speaking areas to the southern part of Alava due to population increases. However, the pressure from the Spanish language saw a gradual decline of Basque in

Alava and by the 1700s it had largely disappeared from most of the area. More recently there has been a decline in the east of Navarre as well.

The French government has attempted to suppress the Basque language and the cultural identity associated with it. The French government has followed a policy of Francophonization of all its minority linguistic groups, i.e., Catalan, Basque, Breton, and resists any moves toward autonomy for them. This policy started in 1865 after the overthrow of the French monarchy with the purpose of eradicating all regional languages and incorporating the people into the French nation. (Bourget, 1976). The French government has for the first time recently administered a questionnaire seeking to find out the number of speakers of regional languages in France.

The geographical loss that Basque has experienced in Spain has come about from both political and social reasons. The Spanish state's treatment of its minority linguistic groups, i.e., Catalan, Galician, and Basque over the centuries has swung between granting some degree of autonomy to outright suppression. The intermittent repression of the language began in earnest in Spain in the eighteenth century during the Bourbon era when the language was banned from all administrative and educational functions and resulted in a social stigma that became associated with speaking the language. The elite of society, unlike their Catalan equivalents, increasingly switched to Spanish as the preferred medium of communication for use in political, business and social settings. Basque came to be seen as not being suitable for use in a modern society, and its speakers as uneducated and rural.

According to Clark (1981), there were between 400,000 and 650,000 speakers of Basque in the mid 19th century, and this appears to have remained stable until the 1930s. Under Franco's rule the language was vigorously suppressed, forcing it into a steep decline. The resultant suppression caused a severe socio-linguistic crisis for the language in its heartland. During the 1950s and 1960s large numbers of Spanish speaking people from other parts of Spain moved to the traditional Basque speaking areas, which put further pressure on the language (Amorrortu 2002). This influx of immigrants was not only into the industrialized cities but also into the rural communities

where Basque still remained the language of community.

The linguistic situation varied across the region in the early 1980s. Only 10 per cent of the people in the largest city in the region, Bilbao, spoke Basque, and much less in Alava itself. The situation in Bizkaia was much higher with 50 per cent of the people speaking the language in middle-sized towns and the countryside. In the San Sebastian area between 25–50 per cent of the people spoke the language.

Linguistic Situation: Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre

A look at Tables A and B below show that the number of speakers of Basque in Spain has increased over the 20-year period from 1976–1996. The province with the most speakers, Gipuzkoa, has experienced a small increase of two per cent. The percentage of speakers in Bizkaia has increased by five percent. Navarre has seen an increase of three per cent and Araba, where the number of speakers was very low, has witnessed the biggest increase with seven per cent. The percentage of Basque speakers in Basque Country is 23.4 percent. This shows an increase of four percent. The loss of speakers has been arrested and it seems from these figures that the language may be entering a period of stability, if not revival.

Speaker Numbers 1996

Table A The Number of Basque Speakers in 1996

Areas	Total Population	Pop. over 2 years of age	Total Basque Speakers	Percentage of Basque Speakers
BAC*	2,104,041	2,068,927	543,617	26.3
Araba	272,447	267,557	22,995	8.6
Bizkaia	1,155,106	1,136,358	215,219	18.9
Gipuzkoa	676,488	665,012	305,403	45.9
Navarre	519,277	501,989	50,951	10.5
Basque Country	2,872,593	2,783,316	650,768	23.4

* BAC=Basque Autonomous Community
(Figures compiled from Gardner, 2002a)

Speaker Numbers 1976

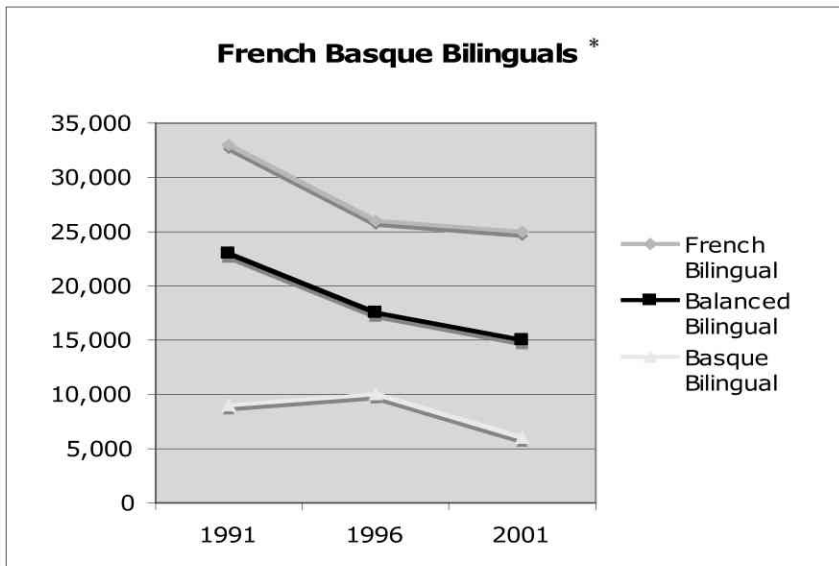
Table B The Number of Basque Speakers in 1976

	Total Population	Pop. over 2 years of age	Total Basque Speakers	Percentage of Basque Speakers
BAC	1,914,000	N/A	418,935	21.2
Araba	204,000	N/A	1,863	0.9
Bizkaia	1,043,000	N/A	215,219	13.4
Gipuzkoa	631,000	N/A	271,330	43.9
Navarre	465,000	N/A	36,143	7.8
Basque Country	2,379,000	N/A	455,078	19.2

(Figures compiled from Clark, 1981; and Vila, 1986)

Linguistic Situation: Iparraldea

Graph A below shows that the number of Basque speakers in Iparraldea, France had fallen by 15,000 between 1991 and 2001. The number of French speaking monolinguals in 2001 was about 75 percent of the region's population according to Graph B. It shows the linguistic competence in Basque of the total population of Iparraldea. Bilingual speakers' competence in the language has also decreased over the same ten-year period. The situation is looking grave for the future of the language in France. The language is spoken in the rural communities and transmission of the language to the young is falling. It is fast becoming a language of the elderly. The number of immigrants coming into the area has rendered the Basques a minority in their own region with 64 per cent of the people classified as non-native to the region. In 1997 it was estimated that people aged 50 and over made up almost 60 per cent of the Basque speakers in the area. Compare that to the 11 per cent for speakers under the age of 16 and the picture becomes clear (Pooley, 2003).



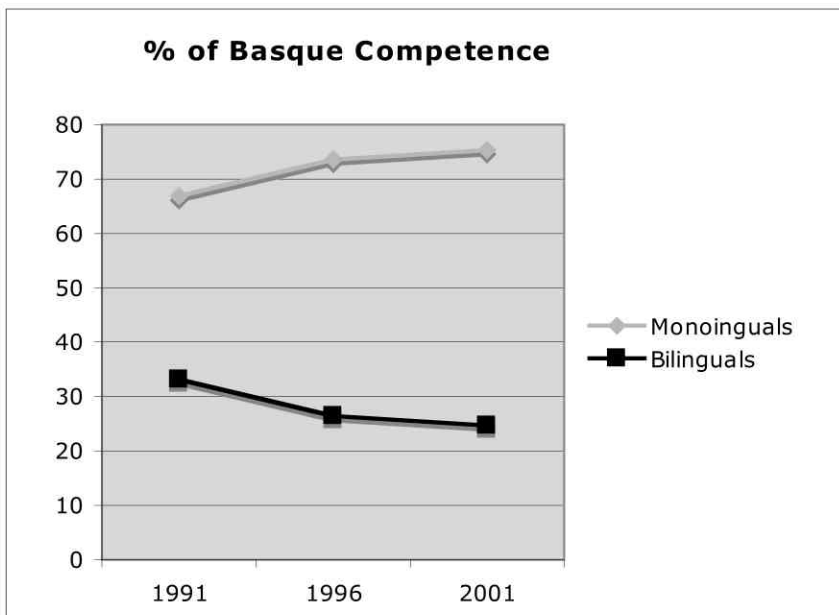
Graph A The Number of French Bilinguals in Iparraldea

* French Bilingual=French is the main language

Balanced Bilingual=Both languages are equal

Basque Bilingual=Basque is the main language

(Adapted from Hizkuntz Eskubideen Behatokia, 2007)



Graph B Basque Language Competence in Iparraldea

(Adapted from Hizkuntz Eskubideen Behatokia, 2007)

Reasons for the Revival in Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre

Reasons for the revival are complex and although the autonomous government's support of Basque has been a positive factor, there would be no revival without the support of the ordinary people of the region. Irish is a good example of this. The Irish government supported the language through legislation and education, and although the Irish people supported the idea in principle, they never really got behind the idea in practice. Reasons for this are varied, but one important factor is that the Irish feel 'Irish' even through the medium of the English language. In other words, their identity as Irish is in no way compromised by the language they speak.

The Basques, on the other hand, feel differently. The loss of Basque made the people conscious of the loss of being distinctive and equated the loss of the language with a loss of identity. The linguistic movements emphasized the affective dimension of a language as one of belonging to a group (Tejerina, 1996). People who had not transmitted the language to their children encouraged their children to learn the language, or those who had not acquired the language from their parents wanted to learn it. The non-native Basque immigrants also wanted to integrate into their adopted society for both economic and social reasons and therefore opted to learn the language. This was very important given the large number of immigrants present in the region. The urban young have been important in changing the perception of the language as rural in nature and therefore not suitable for a modern industrialized society. These young people were politically and socially active and used the language in both of these settings (Amorrortu, 2002).

Linguistic Rights: Autonomous Basque Community

With the amending of the Spanish constitution in 1978 recognizing multilingualism in Spain, the Basque Autonomous Community was established, which included the provinces of Araba, Bizkaia (Biscay) and Gipuzkoa. The Basque Autonomous government passed the linguistic law of 1979, which recognized the basic right of all citizens to use Basque alongside Spanish both orally and in writing. The linguistic rights act afforded

to the citizens the right to be educated in either Basque or Spanish. It also gave them the right to address themselves in either of the languages to any administrative body in the Basque Autonomous Community and in any meeting held publicly. The right to have access to all forms of media in Basque was also guaranteed (Euromosaic, 2000). In 1982 the parliament of the Basque Autonomous Community passed the act, called the normalization of the Basque language, which outlined the general planning guidelines to be carried out by government bodies to ensure that Basque was given the same status as Spanish. An advisory board was created to regulate the use of Basque in the media and education.

Linguistic rights: Navarre

The province of Navarre was also given special status under the amendment of the constitution of 1978. The government of Navarre passed the Basque act in 1986, which gave equal status to Basque alongside Spanish (Mosaic, 2007). This gave the people living in the Basque speaking north of the province the right to have Basque taught in schools and the right to use it in administration. It was given the same status as in the Basque Autonomous Community. In the mixed area, where both linguistic communities reside, Basque is recognized as part of the cultural heritage of Navarre and people have the right to address themselves in Basque in front of public administrative bodies. They also have the right to a Basque medium education. The language does not, however, share the same legal status as in the Basque-speaking region of Navarre.

Linguistic rights: Iparraldea

Iparraldea is comprised of the provinces of Lapurdi, Zuberoa and Navarre Beherea. The Basque language is recognized as a regional language, but it has not been given any legal standing alongside French in Iparraldea by the central government and there are no signs of that changing in the future. The people have no constitutional right to use the language in their dealings with public administrative bodies nor to have it included in the educational system. Any action that is taken has to be done on a local

level, but local authorities do not have very much authority in the area of language policy as most decisions come from the central government in Paris.

Educational System: Basque Autonomous Community Pre-1983

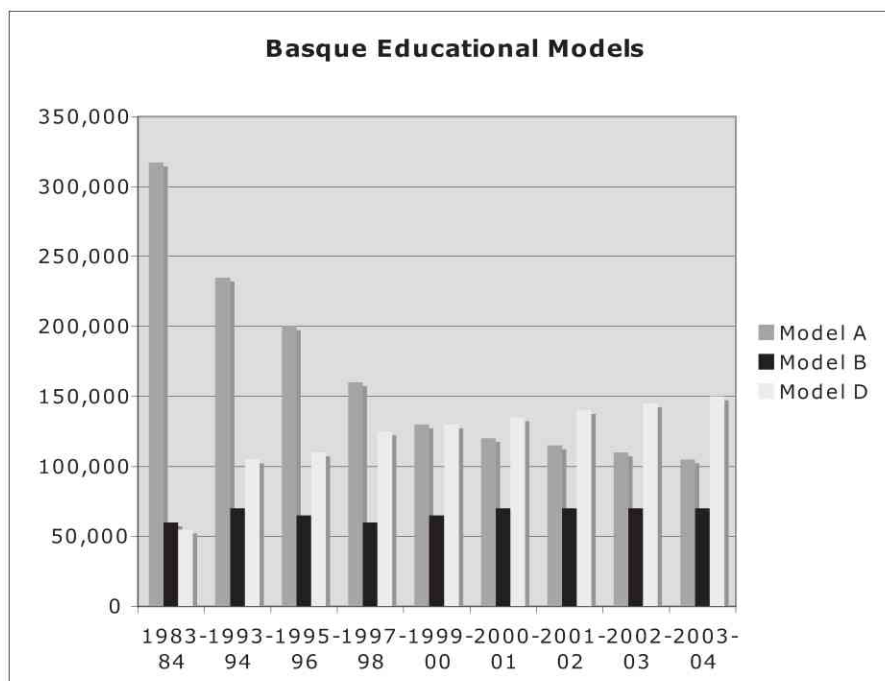
Prior to 1983, the teaching of the Basque language was confined to the *Ikastolas*, a system of privately run schools established in 1960. Two types of *Ikastolas* were created: one, *gau eskolas*, aimed at teaching adults Basque as a second language at night schools, and the other, *Ikastolas*, to instruct children in Basque (Amorrortu, 2002). Due to the number of children who were not functional in the Basque language, instruction often had to be carried out bilingually in both Basque and Spanish (Tarrow and Iram, 1987). Due to a lack of funding from the central authorities, tuition was costly and children who attended these schools were mainly from the middle and upper classes. From a modest beginning of only a few *Ikastolas* in the early 1960s, the number had increased to several hundred by the early 1980s. Gipuzkoa had the most *Ikastolas* with 77 and Araba the least with 29 (Vila, 1986). In 1993, the government of the Basque Autonomous region passed an act on Basque state schools, which forced the previously independent *Ikastolas* to either join the public school sector or the private school sector. This effectively put an end to their independence (Gardner, 2002a).

The Education Act of 1983

Under the Basque Education Act, three models of schools were established to account for the different linguistic groups in the area. Model A allows for classes to be taught in Spanish, though Basque can be used for extra curricula activities. Basque is taught as a second language for up to five hours a week. Model B allows for classes to be taught in both Basque and Spanish. Although both languages are supposed to be used about 50 per cent of the time in instruction, this varies from school to school and region to region. These schools were set up for Spanish speakers who wanted to become fluent speakers of Basque. Model D allows for classes to be taught exclusively in Basque. Spanish is taught as a second language for up to five hours per week. There

are a number of Spanish first language speakers in these schools studying alongside Basque native speakers. The system can be seen as a total immersion programme for the former and a language maintenance programme for the latter (Vidal, 2002).

Graphs C demonstrates the changes that have taken place in the number of students attending each of the three models of schools between 1983 and 2003.

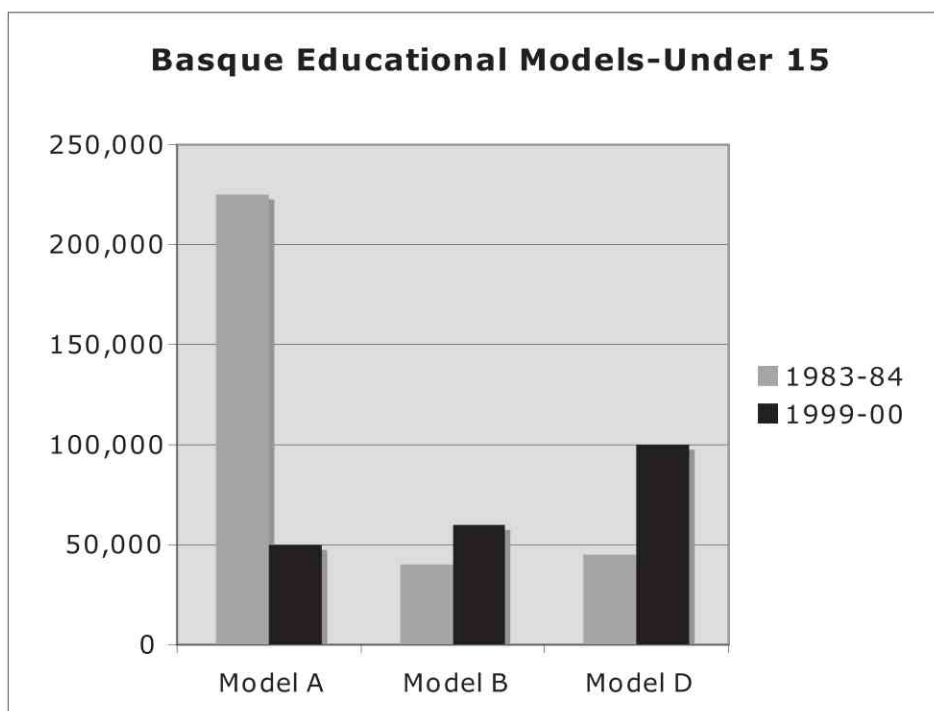


Graph C Basque Educational Models
 (Adapted from EUSTAT 2005 and Gardner 2002a)

The above figures are for the period 1983 to 2003. These figures show that the number of students opting for the Spanish only medium teaching model has fallen by two thirds over a 20-year period. The 1983 figure was about 320,000 and the 2003 figure was 105,000. The bilingual model has shown a slight increase in the number of students attending that model of school, with an increase somewhere in the region of 10,000 over the same period of time. The biggest gain was in the Basque only medium schools,

which trebled from just over 50,000 students in 1983 to 150,000 in 2003. The number of students attending the Basque only medium school model has shown a consistent increase year on year throughout the 20-year period.

A look at the breakdown for students between the ages of 3-14 in Graph D demonstrates by just how much the Basque only medium model has progressed. The following graph will demonstrate this progression.



Graph D The Number of Under 15 Year Old Students in the Basque Educational Models (Adapted from Gardner 2002a)

The move away from Spanish only medium schools is more pronounced in the under 15 school age bracket. The number of students in the bilingual model is similar to the overall figure for all ages of students. However, the Basque medium model has become the leading form of education among the younger generation with 45 per cent of students in this age bracket attending these schools. This shows an increase of just over

two and a half times.

According to EUSTAT (2008), the student pass rates in the respective medium schools for general education in the primary system are as follows: Spanish language medium students had a pass rate of 96 per cent, the same as the mixed language medium students according to 2006–2007 figures. The Basque language medium school students had a 97 per cent pass rate. According to these figures, studying in Basque does not disadvantage Basque medium primary school students.

In the secondary school system students studying through Basque had an eight per cent better pass rating than the Spanish medium school students who had a 90 per cent success rate. The mixed language medium school students had 87 per cent. It has been found that there are no significant differences between the models in the level attained in mathematics and social sciences. The number of students in Model D schools only account for 18 per cent, markedly lower than the primary level, but this figure has risen from three per cent in 1983. Research has also shown that the level of proficiency in Basque varies across the three models. Students in model D are the most proficient in Basque while students in Model A are the least proficient. With the increase in the number of students opting for Model D schools, the language proficiency of young Basques as a whole should increase in the future.

In the university system, Basque is taught in colleges of education, and in some departments of universities it is the language used as the medium of instruction. The University of the Basque Country has almost 40 per cent of the curriculum taught in Basque. Students have the right to submit papers and sit for examinations in Basque.

The distribution of Basque medium schools varies according to geography, age and school type. The areas with high concentrations of Basque speakers tend to have a high percentage of children enrolled in Basque-medium schools. The younger generation of students has a higher representation in the Basque medium schools than their older compatriots. The public or government run schools have a higher proportion of Basque medium schools than the privately run schools.

Educational System: Navarre

In the non-Basque speaking area of the province, the language is offered as a subject and the policy here is similar to the mixed speaking area. It was not until 1990 that the Navarre government assumed full responsibility for education. They set up schools modeled on those in the Basque Autonomous Community. The following table will show the percentage of students studying Basque as a subject and those being taught classes in it.

Table C The Function of Basque in Educational Levels

	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Basque as Subject	14%	10%	4%	1%
Basque As Medium	23%	16%	10%	4%

(Adapted from Euromosaic, 2000)

The Basque speaking area of Navarre accounts for 79 per cent of the children enrolled in Basque medium pre-schools. The number is 16 per cent for the mixed area and five per cent for the Spanish speaking part of Navarre. Figures for secondary schools are not available, but the majority of the students in Basque medium secondary schools would most likely be found in the Basque speaking area. Keeping in mind that the system did not begin until after 1990, it can be expected that the number of students in Basque medium secondary schools should increase as those attending primary school move through the system. At the tertiary level, Basque is only used as the language of instruction in a few colleges. The language is mainly confined to teacher training courses. However, as in the case of secondary schools, the number of courses could rise in the future as the primary school age children reach the age level for university.

Educational System: Iparraldea

It is the local governments within the region that must find a role for Basque within the educational system given the central government's complete lack of interest.

There is no system in place as there is in the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre. There are some public schools that use Basque as the medium of instruction, but the vast majority of schools educate through French. There is some provision for the teaching of the language as a subject in some public schools as well. The private school system is more active in the use of Basque, especially at the pre-school and primary school level. It is estimated that there are about 3,000 students studying Basque in the private system at present. The association of Basque schools, Seaska, has 18 schools under its control. The system employs 90 teachers and has an enrollment of 1,300 students (Euromosaic, 2000). There are even fewer schools at the secondary level where Basque is used as the language of instruction or taught as a subject. There is only one school, which has Basque as a compulsory subject. At the tertiary level, the Institute of Basque Studies is the only institution that has a programme for Basque studies. Ironically, Bordeaux University, not situated in the Basque region, recently set up a bachelor's degree course as well a master's degree course in Basque.

Language Planning: Basque Autonomous Community

The Basque Autonomous government's policy toward language planning can be divided into three sections, public opinion, equality and intervention (Hizkuntza Politikarako Sailordetza, 1997). Policies that are implemented need to have the backing of the majority of the population for two reasons. The first is that it is a democratic society and the will of the people must be respected, and the second is that without the support of the people, the language policy will not be overly successful. Where inequalities exist, the government will take action to ensure that the Basque language has the same standing as Spanish. This entails the passing of laws and regulations and distributing funds where necessary. However, the government prefers to rely on the local communities to redress situations as they arise for two reasons. One is that there is only so much a centralized government can do, and grass root support of the language in both use and organization is seen as paramount to ensuring the successful reintroduction of Basque into everyday social settings.

Funding

One advantage that the government of the Basque Autonomous Community has over other minority language groups and autonomous governments is the right to raise taxes directly. More than 90 per cent of all taxes collected by the Autonomous government remain in the region. The Basque government accounts for 72 per cent of all spending relating to the promotion of the Basque language. Provincial governments account for just over nine per cent, the capitals three and a half per cent and the local councils just under 16 per cent. The costs in percentage terms of total budget outlays for each government level is nearly two per cent for local councils, less than one per cent for provincial and provincial capital governments, and about one and a half per cent for the Basque Autonomous government (EAS, 2007). Sixty per cent of the government budget is spent on the Basquization of the region and increasing the literacy level among the population.

Teaching Staff

When the Basque Autonomous government adopted the three models of education for the primary and secondary school systems it was faced with a serious lack of teachers qualified to teach a range of subjects in the Basque language. In order to rectify the situation, the Basque government looked to the universities and teaching colleges to remedy the situation. Up until this time it was mainly the colleges that were responsible for teacher training. The government changed this by also making universities responsible for educating Basque-speaking teachers who would be able to teach various academic disciplines. The government also initiated a large programme for the retraining of existing teachers. This has meant that Spanish monolingual teachers wishing to become teachers had to be trained to work in the Basque language (Aldekoa and Gardner 2002). To qualify for a teaching post at a public school, a prospective teacher must first attain a level one which is awarded to those who have been deemed to have a complete command of the language as a means of communication. Level two is awarded to those who are deemed to have mastered the language and have the ability

to use it as a vehicle of instruction. The teachers must also have an in depth knowledge of the history and culture of the Basque country and the pluralistic linguistic situation present in the region.

Material Development

When the Basque Autonomous government embarked on its plan to promote the language in education there were few materials available to the teaching staff to use in the various subjects on the curriculum i.e., books, videos, software. The government have encouraged the development of these materials through grants to developers to ensure that there are plenty of material available in Basque and to ensure that the cost of these materials is comparable to those in Spanish. The Basque Language Service, a section within the Directorate for Language Innovation, is responsible for the giving of grants to various organizations to facilitate the development of teaching materials (ALTE, 2008). At the present time, both the government and the people in the Basque Autonomous community seem willing to cover these extra costs. People sometimes question the cost of financing such a policy as pursued by the Basque Autonomous government, but a study done by Francois Grin (2004) of the University of Geneva found that the addition to the overall education budget was only four per cent per student.

Media: Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and Iparraldea Publications

The education system can lay the foundations for the normalization of Basque usage, but without the presence of the language in the form, the normalization process will be restricted. In October of 2005, a sixth Basque language daily newspaper, *Busturialdeko Hitza*, began publication. The other Basque language daily newspapers available are *Tolosaldeko Eta*, *Leitzaldeko Hitza*, *Oarsoaldeko Hitza*, *Lea-Artibai Eta*, *Mutrikuko Hitza*, *Urola Kostako Hitza* and *Goierriko Hitza* (Mercator, 2006). The number of printed material including newspapers, magazines and journals that are published daily, weekly or monthly have increased tremendously in the past decade. The topics that are represented by these publications cover a whole range of interests.

Examples of some of the topics include music, religion, comics, history, culture and leisure. A breakdown by area is shown in the following Table D.

Table D Basque Publications

Region	Total	Weekly/Monthly	Less Frequent
Araba	2	1	1
Bizkaia	19	14	5
Gipuzkoa	37	35	2
Navarre	6	4	2
Iparraldea	2	1	1
Basque Region	45	25	20
Total	111	80	31

(Figures based on 2004 data from EAS, 2005)

The figures show that the areas where the Basque speaking population is centred have the most publications, namely Gipuzkoa. Araba, the weakest in terms of literacy in Basque of the three provinces that make up the Basque Autonomous community, has a very low number of publications. The situation in Iparraldea is even worse with only three publications available. The regional newspaper, *Sud-Oust*, has some articles written in Basque. There are no figures available to indicate how many of the Basque region wide publications are available in Araba, Navarre or Iparraldea, nor is there any information on how many copies are sold.

Television and Radio: Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and Iparraldea

People in most countries today spend a lot of their free time watching the television and to a lesser extent listening to the radio. If the Basque language is to continue its resurgence then it needs to have greater representation in these media.

The majority of radio stations in the Basque region broadcast solely in Spanish, but there is now one station that broadcasts throughout the Basque region in Basque exclusively. It is a public owned station called *Euskadi Irratia* and it has an audience of

84,000 (Euromosaic, 2000). Two privately owned radio stations also broadcast only in Basque. The creation of Euskal Telebista, a television channel, transmitting its entire selection of programmes in the Basque language, was an important step in increasing the profile of the language. It has a viewing audience of over 200,000, which represents an 11 per cent share of the television market. There is, however, very little programming in Basque on the state owned television network or on the privately owned stations. There are no television stations inside Navarre that broadcast programmes solely in Basque. Euskadi Irratia, the television station situated in the Basque Autonomous community, can be received inside Navarre. However, the regional station, Television Espanola, broadcasts some programmes in Basque. In Iparraldea there is only one public radio station that airs programmes in Basque on a regular basis. The station, Radio France Pays, transmits in the Basque language an hour per day. Three private radio stations air Basque language programmes for up to 100 hours per week.

Conclusion

The Basque language finds itself in a much more stable situation today than it was at the end of the Franco era in Spain, especially within the area governed by the Basque Autonomous government. This is cause for optimism regarding the future of the language. The reasons for the improved situation are many. The language has official status alongside Spanish in the areas that it is spoken. This has enabled the local governments to pass legislation to ensure the language's use in all facets of life such as the legal system, the educational system and the bureaucratic system. The language has a central role within the educational system whereby students can and do have the right to be educated in their own language if they so wish. The number of schools which have classes taught through the Basque language have been increasing steadily over the years while the number of schools that teach through the Spanish language have been decreasing. There has also been a change in the attitude of the people in the region, both Basques and Non-Basques alike. Basque people now want their children to learn the language, even if they themselves do not speak it. Non-Basques who are

immigrants from other regions of Spain see both economic as well as social benefits in learning the language. Basque is still not used as much as Spanish in the media, but here too there has been some improvement over the years.

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