

# THE BASQUE EXPERIENCE

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Some keys to language and  
identity recovery



*In this film you will meet a family who failed in the transmission of the language, and then a person who rejected the language after a very difficult personal situation. We will also analyze the work carried out in those last 40 years on our way to recovery. To do so, we have had the help of many experts in the field.*

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Coordinator: Lore Agirrezabal Pertusa

garabide  
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# CONTENTS

Foreword.....6  
Introduction .....8

Language recovery ..... 11  
Language as identity..... 11  
Sociolinguistic perspective ..... 19  
Language loss .....25  
The route to language recovery .....28

The Basque experience ..... 35  
The history of our language..... 35  
The dream of language recovery..... 41  
The road to language modernisation..... 43  
Euskalgintza, the basis of language activism ..... 44  
The results of Basque language activism ..... 56

Summary: main lessons ..... 59  
Some keys in the recovery of the Basque language. 59  
Messages from our experience with the language. 65

# FORWORD

Someone who has suffered is capable of understanding another's suffering. Someone who has striven is able to comprehend another's striving. Each person's experience forms the basis out of which empathy between individuals may grow. The same may be said of human groups and of peoples.

The Basque language community combines unusual characteristics. It is a native language within the western world. Many have called it one of the world's oldest languages, yet full of innovation and modernity. One of the difficulties it faces is that of attempting the recovery of a language with relatively few speakers. Over the past 50 years it has been immersed in its revitalisation process facing formidable obstacles. However significant progress has been made in numerous areas.

We are moved by a desire to share our experience in innovation and recovery, telling of our successes and our problems. Our audience naturally includes all other peoples who have been subjected to external domination and converted into "minorities"; but in particular we wish to address those peoples who feel themselves driven and determined to revive their language and their identity. The urge to share our experience comes from the heart, but is ratified by rational considerations too. Here are two reasons.

First, we are persuaded that knowledge of the story of Basque is instructive for other native language recovery initiatives. It has been predicted that many languages will face extinction over the coming century, and most native languages are on the list of those heading for extinction in the middle term unless radical steps are taken to change their situation. Given this fact, it is worrying to see

that most people are not even aware of the gravity of the threat to their languages. Neither do most people possess an understanding of language revitalisation strategies. We therefore believe that sharing and explaining the Basque experience will make a helpful contribution from the point of view of such endangered languages.

Secondly, we wish for this sharing to be a two-way experience, and look forward to learning from other people and partaking of their positive energy. The Basque language community has shown itself to be an alert, enterprising community that is not afraid to fight back. This community has a dream: to continue to exist, to renew itself and to keep up generational transmission. It is good for us to join forces with other peoples with similarly painful experiences and comparable aspirations for the future. We find it motivating to practise such solidarity. It is a source of renewed courage to observe and be observed by, stimulate and be stimulated by, or simply rub shoulders with those who share our dream of human diversity.

Every period poses its challenges and presents its opportunities. Technology today offers a chance for us to increase our contacts; now it is up to us to use it to tell each other about ourselves. Garabide was created in order for the Basque language community to build bridges to other nations. It has begun to bring together and share the experiences of different native languages. One of our projects for the next few years is to compile a body of teaching resources on this subject. This book, which is planned as the first publication in the series, presents an overview of Basque language recovery and ventures to set forth some of the key issues in language recovery for the coming century.

**Garabide Elkartea**

# INTRODUCTION

A language recovery process requires the support of the language community in three fundamental ways: from the hands, the head and the heart. So it is with Basque language recovery, the success of which depends on a valid conceptual framework of strategies and action (the head), the will and determination of the Basque-speaking community to survive and continue its existence (the heart) and the work and dedication of groups and individuals within the community (the hands).

The first part of this book addresses the mind, the head. It attempts to distil a universal theoretical framework out of the sum of our people's experience in recovering its language. It examines the processes of language loss and recovery, the benefits of linguistic diversity and the dangers posed by the cultural assimilation to which native peoples are being exposed. However, while it is important for language recovery to reason through these issues, it will come to nothing unless theoretical knowledge is combined with affective motivation, with an emotional response.

All processes of language and identity recovery must ultimately be driven from people's hearts, by the language community's determination to be. It is necessary for a community wishing to give new life to its language to comprehend, internalise and truly feel its language's value. Now each language mirrors a distinct view of the world and the culture of the language's speakers, reflecting a community's way of relating to the world, its philosophy and its approach to the mystery of macrocosm and microcosm. Language is an essential part of the transmission to new generations of a people's world view, customs, traditions and culture, since thoughts are embedded in and shaped by language. So languages may be said to give speakers their identities as individuals. When a language dies, the history, wisdom and culture of a people disappear.

Part two takes leave of this theoretical approach to discuss a real case, reviewing initiatives in Basque language recovery over the last several decades. During this time a considerable number of Basques have devoted themselves, hands, head and heart, to a joint

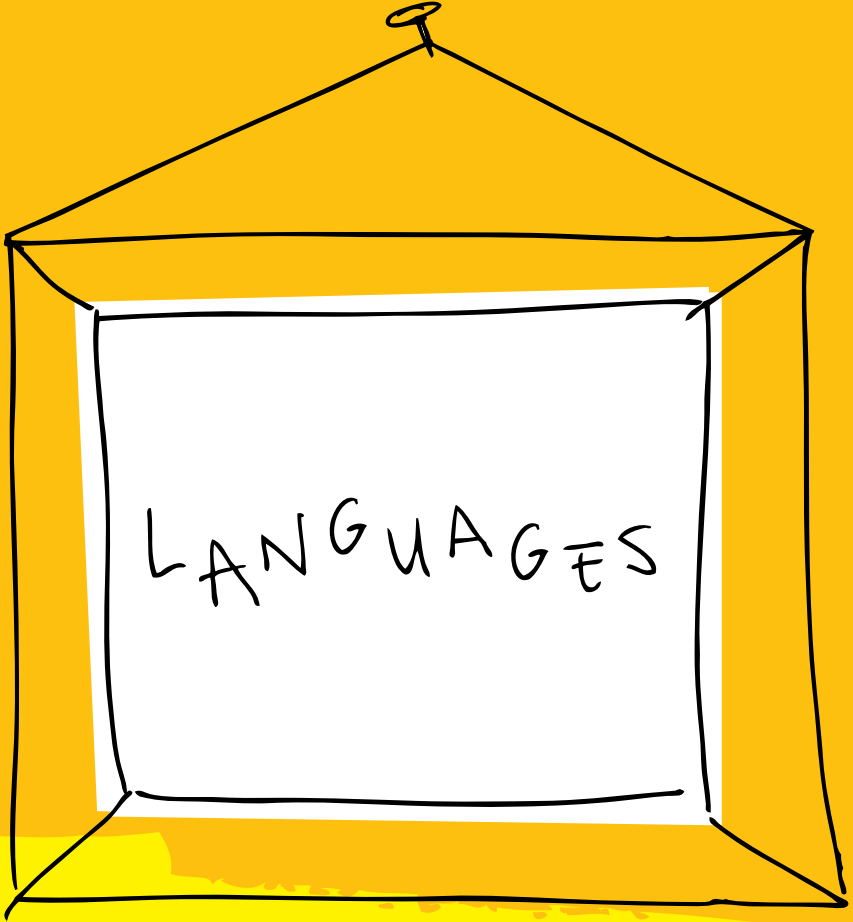


endeavour to make their dream come true. Thanks to them Basque, an ancient language, lives on today as a language immersed in the twenty-first century. Prior to their effort, Basque was absent from the media, the universities or public administration. Today it is present in all these spheres, not to mention new ones such as the Internet.

Finally, we list what we regard as the central factors in the success of Basque language recovery in the hope that this information will be of value to people everywhere involved in the recovery of their own minority languages and threatened identities as separate peoples.

Together with the book, Garabide will release a DVD series. As in the book, in those recordings we have tried to show to you the steps given on our way to language recovery. We know that many people around the world strive to keep their language alive-, we sympathize with them as we, Basque speakers, experienced pretty much the same. In this film firstly you will meet a family who failed in the transmission of the language, and then a person who rejected the language after a very difficult personal situation. We will also analyze the work carried out in those last 40 years on our way to recovery. To do so, we have had the help of many experts in the field.

Before moving on, we pause to express our debt of gratitude to the individuals and organisations that have helped us in different ways to make possible this first publication. We also wish to convey our congratulations and encouragement to the people and groups everywhere who are working hard in support of their language and their culture, and express our hope that they will persevere in their efforts to contribute to the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity. When the members of a language community have decided they are going to recover their language and save it from extinction, they are already half way there. Let us then proceed to the recovery, by means of persuasion and enjoyment, of that which we have been deprived of through coercion and imposition.



LANGUAGES

# LANGUAGE RECOVERY

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## Language as identity

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Language is our natural means of communication and chief medium for expressing ourselves. Each of us first communicates using the language that we acquire at home in early childhood. Through that language we come to comprehend the world around us; consequently it becomes an important component of our psychological identity.

Each of the thousands of languages spoken around the world is a compendium of

knowledge passed down from one generation to the next about how best to live in one's habitat. Today, the domination of a handful of major languages is threatening to bring to an end the transmission of a great many other languages. Because of this, a countless number of alternative views of the world and diverse bodies of inherited knowledge are in danger of being lost forever.

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# The language community: the bedrock of identity

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Language is a tool that has been developed by human beings for communication. What is more, language is the most significant and most long-lasting tool created by hominids in the process of evolving into humans.

A well-known proverb says that a picture is worth a thousand words. But in truth, words have played a key part in the evolution of human thought and mould the way we perceive the world. We choose our words to depict our view of reality. We also choose our words to portray an image of ourselves to others.

Every community in human history has been identified on the basis of the language it spoke and the culture it practised. The language is like the culture's DNA. Languages are storehouses for the sum total of thoughts and ideas developed by whole communities.

So, language and identity are intimately bound up together. Even though individual identity consists of more than just our language, it is through our language that we project who we are and express an identity. It is also through language that a child receives the identity it inherits; language is the vehicle for transmitting

to the child that knowledge which turns him or her into a person in society. Our language is even present in our internal thought processes. All our recollections, all our ideas and feelings, are stored and assimilated through the operation of language.<sup>1</sup>

Language is the key to a collective identity. In each generation the language accumulates an entire people's joint knowledge, and each new generation adds its own contribution. In this way the language is a repository for all the wisdom, the insights, the world view, the customs and the traditions created and developed by a given language community over time. For the community there exists a unique association between its special way of reading and communicating reality and its language. The language is thus the key to a people's particular form or existence, as men and women, in the world.

What is lost when a language disappears? Language death is more than just an unfathomable loss for the community of the language concerned. When a language goes, the key to understanding one way in which humans have come to conceive of the world is lost forever. As the use of the language declines, the very culture, handed down the ancestral chain through the medium of the language, starts to fossilise. Eventually it vanishes completely. All that may remain of what was once a living language is book-knowledge of its

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<sup>1</sup> Joxe Manuel Odriozola: *Euskalgintzaren lekukoak*, Elkar, 2004.



lexicon and grammar; but the living culture and the profound insights that were painstakingly passed along from generation to generation for so long will have ceased. What remains of the language is a fossil, an artifact, a phonological and morphological description, merely fit for the museum display case and as material for academic research.

Because human beings, both as individuals and as groups, encode the foundations of our identities through our language, a people that has lost its own language loses, with it, its entire symbolic world, including its sense of the land it lives in, starting with the very names of places and the meanings that those names hold for the speakers of the language. To quote Jose

María Sanchez Carrión *Txepetx*<sup>2</sup>, "language is mankind's first community, older, deeper and truer than any state or political structure whatsoever."<sup>3</sup>

Language, then, is more than a tool for human communication. It is a vehicle that transmits one's experience, including a way of viewing the world, not to mention customs, traditions and a whole folk culture. It is what transmits to individuals their identity. The loss of a language leads to the disappearance of a people's history, their knowledge and their culture as a living system.

<sup>2</sup> Jose María Sanchez Carrión *Txepetx* (linguist).

<sup>3</sup> Jon Sarasua. *Biziaren Hizkuntzaz: Txepetxekin solasean*. Gara. 1997.

## Native language

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Our mother tongue has come down to us through an unbroken chain or oral transmission from generation to generation.

One's mother tongue is what has provided our language community with its voice. Or if we prefer, the community of speakers has given its voice to the language, which has reached us via our parents through a process of generational transmission. Our language would not have any speakers now were it not for those mothers and fathers who, overcoming all obstacles successfully passed on their inherited language to their children. Thanks to their effort, as in the past, so also today the music of a language that earlier generations heard, even from inside the mother's womb can still be heard.

If our language lives it is because it has been transmitted from parents to their sons and daughters in the home. In particular, it is largely through the work of women that our language has been kept alive and spoken in our homes.

***We are born from the womb of our mother, the womb of our mother tongue***

**Jon Maia**

*(translated from Basque)*

## The family: the bridge across generations

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The education system is often given either the credit or the blame for the situation of a language. Undeniably schools can play a significant role, but the education system alone cannot ensure the survival of a language, because language use is so strongly influenced by the language of the home. The family, as a space shared by parents and children, acts as a bridge linking the generations. Parents' linguistic behaviour sets an affectively-charged example to children, presenting them with a model of how they themselves should behave linguistically.

There is good evidence for this in the Basque Country. For instance, research carried out in the town of Lasarte-Oria (in Gipuzkoa province) in 2003<sup>4</sup> provided a striking demonstration of the great importance of language use in the family by showing that the home environment exerted much more influence than school in determining whether or not young people would speak Basque outside the home. Eight out of ten youngsters who had learnt Basque at home tended to speak to their friends in Basque, whereas only two out of ten who had acquired Basque exclusively at school spoke Basque with Basque-speaking friends.

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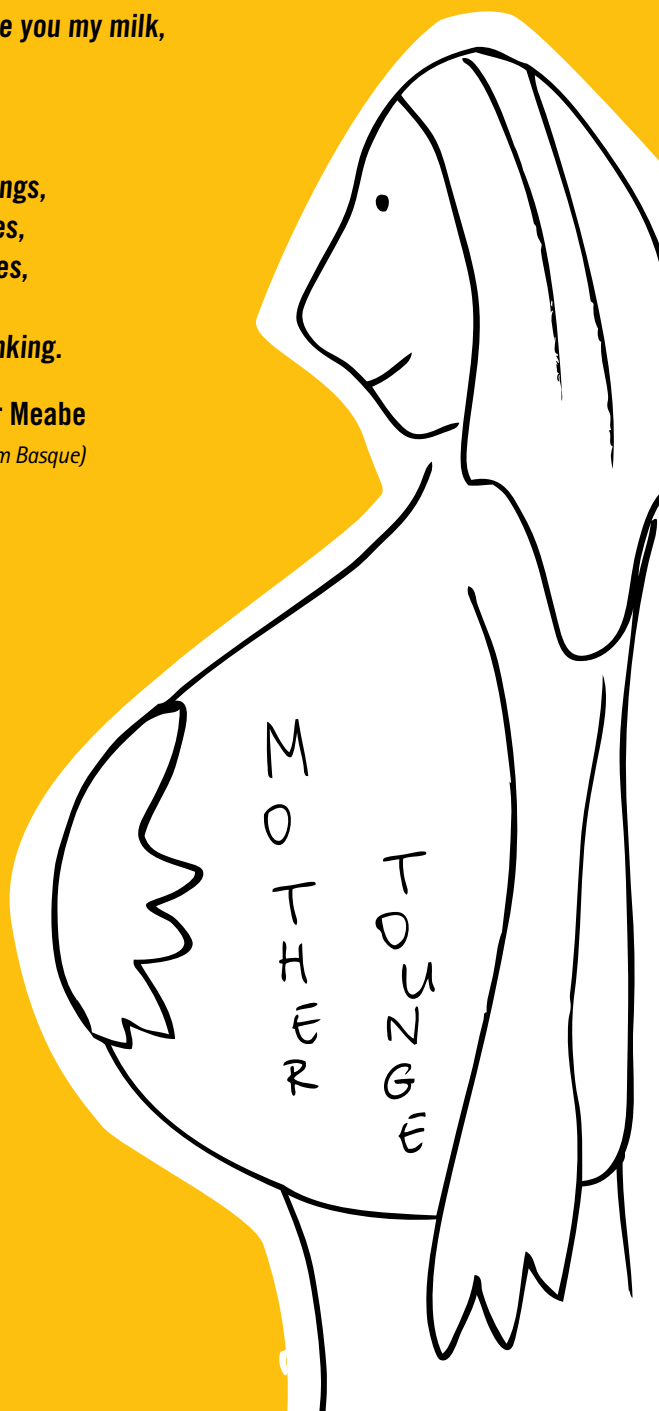
4 Pello Jauregi Etxaniz. *Euskara eta gazteak Lasarte-Orian-II*. Lasarte-Oriako Udala. 2003.

**From my mouth I will give you my milk,  
the phonemes, syllables,  
words, phrases ...  
my other milk.**

**The phonetics of your songs,  
the lexicon of your stories,  
the spelling of your games,  
your feelings syntax,  
the grammar of your thinking.**

**Miren Agur Meabe**

*(translated from Basque)*



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Granted the sentimental ties to one's language which are transmitted together with the language itself within the family, unless the number of parents who speak the heritage language rises it is hard to see how the use of the language can increase in future generations. The influence of school and the family have a combined impact in childhood, but on reaching adolescence the relative impact of school drops off and it is above all the profound pull of affective family ties that determines language choice.

The influence of the home may be compared to a well the depths of which are not visible to the naked eye yet constitute an endless source of influence. Hence the adult population holds the real key, since it is here that love and language converge overwhelmingly in parents' relationships with their offspring, producing a very clear impact<sup>5</sup>.

Given that the family and the home are such fundamental factors for ensuring the continued use of a language, failure at this level may have dire consequences for a community aspiring to keep its language alive. It may not be enough that schools, the media, public administration and other public domains are in the community's language if transmission in the family, where affective language attitudes are transmitted, fails. Of course, where the language is not used in domains outside the home,

the failure to transmit the language in the home either will have a far more immediate effect: in such cases, given that the language is not used outside the home, failure to use the language at home will write the language's death sentence.

## The threat to language diversity

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It has been calculated that since the diversification of human languages began, at least 30,000 languages have appeared and disappeared over time (some say 50,000). Most have vanished without leaving a trace. Not many languages last longer than two thousand years: some that have are Egyptian, Chinese, Greek, Latin, Persian, Tamil, Sanskrit, Hebrew and Basque. Even some that became the enduring languages of great civilisations, such as Latin, are now extinct.

An average of ten languages become extinct per year, and this rate is rising so fast that most of the languages spoken today are at risk.<sup>6</sup>

More and more languages and cultures are affected by this endangerment, ow-

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5 Pello Jauregi Etzaniz. *Oinarrizko taldeak eta Euskara: bihotzaren arrazoiak*. 2009-03-13.

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6 UNESCO. *Sharing a world of difference: the earth's linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity*. UNESCO-Terralingua – World Wide Fund for Nature, 2003.



ing partly to the globalised economy, and partly to state-internal assimilation processes. Of course globalisation facilitates communication between countries and peoples. However, globalisation is carrying and imposing the outlook, culture, fashions, values and languages of a small number of western nations around the world with little allowance made for local traditions. Rather than promoting, the long-term outcome is to make all cultures uniform and for the leading western powers to spread their own way of thinking everywhere.

Such uniform, homogenised thinking is fed to us through many channels; one of the major sources is the mass media. The western world view finds its way into the homes of people all over the globe via radio and television. Widespread migration from rural areas to the cities is another contributing factor making people resemble each other everywhere; the cities are the chief carriers of globalisation.

We live in an increasingly complex, changing, interconnected world where practically any language other than English, German, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese or Russian is a "minority" language of sorts. The only difference is in the percentage of their speakers who remain monolingual, whether they have official status, and the relative vitality of each speech community.

Nowadays 97% of the world's population speaks 4% of the world's languages, whereas the remaining 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 3% of the world's

population. Thus a small number of languages are the most widely spoken ones, and with each year that passes these have more and more speakers, hastening the demise of the remaining languages.

Some of these languages have passed the point of no return while others are now at the decisive, critical stage. Until now, these languages were handed down by spontaneous transmission, often being the only language spoken in a given geographical area. But nowadays they are no longer the only language found in close proximity to their own territories, and therefore native speakers are having to make decisions concerning which language to teach their children: whether to have them assimilate to the newly arrived language (to the exclusion of their own language) or make a stand to assert their own language (as a first step towards resistance to assimilation). The latter position need not signify the rejection of other languages and cultures.

Language loss and culture loss are going on before our very eyes and unless effective action is taken will result in the complete replacement of many of the world's languages and cultures, some small and some much larger, by a select few.

**Native speakers  
are having to make decisions  
concerning which language to  
teach their children.**

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# Language ecology

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Not only linguistic diversity but the future of many cultures and identities thus hangs in the balance. A language is the storehouses of a speech community's thoughts and ideas. Language holds the key to the relationship that a linguistic community has constructed with its environment; to a particular way in which regard its surroundings; to its philosophical system and way of understanding the world. When a language is lost, one of man's cognitive perspectives on the universe vanishes forever<sup>7</sup>.

According to linguists and anthropologists, the diversity of ideas that cultures maintain and languages implement are as necessary for mankind's subsistence and the very planet's survival as the diversity of living organisms and ecosystems.

The reason is this. Ecologists tell us that the strongest ecosystems are the most diverse ones. Hence diversity is closely linked to stability. The diversity of species in nature is called biodiversity. A robust level of biodiversity is a necessary condition for the satisfactory functioning of an ecosystem. The planet is currently losing 1% of its biodiversity each year as animal and plant species disappear from their natural habitats at an accelerating rate.

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7 Iñigo Iñurrategi. *Herriak eta Hizkuntzak: hizkuntzen ekologia.* HUHEZI. Mondrago Unibertsitatea. 2006. (Unpublished).

Ecosystems are thereby losing their ability to adapt, and dying as a result.

Likewise, the survival of the human species is tied to its ability to adapt to changing environments over the millennia, which is in turn linked to mankind's diversity. Thus linguistic divergence and cultural diversity are indicators of humans' adaptability to different surroundings and situations. So it is that human communities have evolved a wide range of differing cultures and languages, each of which has developed its own knowledge of how to coexist with its environment; varying forms of social organisation; diverse beliefs, values, behaviour patterns and forms of communication. Throughout history, human communities have been identified by their specific cultures and languages.

The number of languages and cultures found around the world is fairly small in comparison with the range of known biological species. Nevertheless, a high degree of diversity exists.

And this diversity contains the accumulated wisdom that is all mankind's historical inheritance, including the know-how whereby the world's most diverse and specialised biological environments have been successfully preserved and sustainably exploited. If, then, we lose over half of the world's languages over the coming century, will not our options for maintaining life in our world have diminished correspondingly?

Seen in such a perspective, the twin goals of promoting and protecting the health, vital-

ity, cultures and languages of human communities on the one hand, and protecting and conserving the biological ecosystem on the other, come down to one and the same thing!

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## Sociolinguistic perspective

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In order to conserve the language ecology and maintain the equilibrium between languages, it helps to identify the factors that lie at the foundation of the existing differences between languages. There is no such thing as superior or inferior languages; all languages are equal, yet may serve different functions in the language communities in which they are spoken. In human groups where more than one language is spoken, conflicts between languages usually arise where one of these languages begins to lose functions, whereby some of this language's importance, prestige and use in society are reduced.

To deal with these issues (to ensure that a language retains the prestige, use and functions that it ought to have), it is essential in practice that the language's speakers become full speakers, that is, that they are able to function in the language within all of the society's linguistic domains. Three prerequisites for achieving

this, which therefore need to be reinforced, are *motivation, knowledge competence and use*.

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## Language routes

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Languages are universally transmitted to new generations of speakers through the family. Normally a child is spoken to in the language that is spoken in the home, used in its immediate vicinity and employed within the family. In that case, acquisition of the mother tongue takes place naturally.

If, given this naturally-occurring form of learning, certain languages were harder to learn than others, children would experience more difficulty learning these, but such is not in fact the case. Children take just as long learning to speak Chinese, Swahili, Quechua, Aymara, Mayan languages, Guarani, Basque, English, Spanish or Portuguese.

In the first five years of life a child acquires the basic elements (the sounds, basic vocabulary, grammatical rules and so on) of its native language. This initial phase of learning proceeds intuitively, but concurrently therewith the child also learns what it means to be a person, while also becoming a being capable of using speech to communicate its needs and wishes. In this manner the child ends up having a special attachment to its mother tongue, and this comes about as a result of natural motivation giv-

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en that the child is mastering an important means of communication<sup>8</sup>.

The first two purposes that a language fulfils are precisely these: as a vehicle of thought and a means of communication with one's family and immediate surroundings. But gradually new spaces are opened up to the child, and if these too are in the child's mother tongue, use of the language will be intensified and reinforced, until after several more years complete competence in this language is acquired, entailing the ability to use it in any domain, including both formal and informal functions.

In the course of this process, the child here described first of all covers what we may call Route A:

### ROUTE A

USE ► KNOWLEDGE ► MOTIVATION

Then comes Route B, at the end of which what is produced is someone who we may call a full speaker and represented as AB:

### ROUTE B (child)

CULTURAL MOTIVATION ► CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE ► CULTURAL USE

Here we see that the child has learnt its mother tongue at home, spontaneously and

naturally (A), and subsequently has elaborated this tool academically and culturally (B), deliberately and consciously extending and perfecting its linguistic competence. In this process, it is almost essential that the child should be educated in its native language in order eventually to become a full speaker of the language. Once that is achieved, the speaker will have no difficulty using his or her native language in any communicative situation. Such speakers can carry their language forward to the highest level of development.

Now in the case of adults, learning a language is not a spontaneous process and follows a different route:

### ROUTE B (adult)

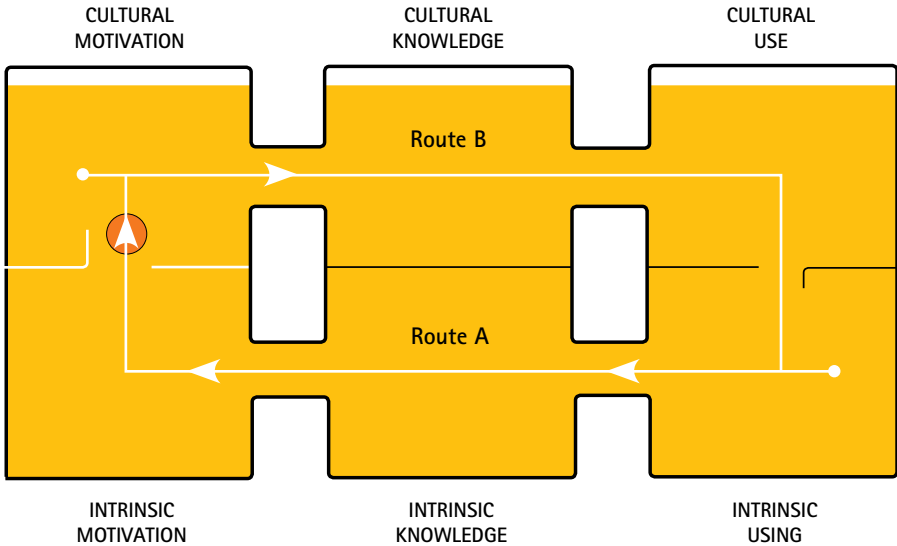
MOTIVATION ► KNOWLEDGE ► USE


To start with, MOTIVATION is necessary to learn such a language. Then, as one begins to achieve KNOWLEDGE of a language one can start to USE it. But once this route has been covered one may then begin Route A: using the language will result in knowing it better and this improved knowledge tends to increase motivation.

Upon completion of both routes (BA) one may become a full speaker of the language, capable of using it in both its formal and its spontaneous functions. Such a speaker will have learnt the language, as a second language, yet can eventually achieve the full competence that results from the AB route. There is no limit to learning, and given adequate conditions a BA-type speaker may acquire similar skills to those displayed

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8 Juan Carlos Etxegoien *Xamar. Orekan: Herri eta Hizkuntzen Ekologiaz*. Pamiela Argitaletxea. 2001. J.M. Sanchez Carrión *Txepetx*. Jose María Sanchez Carrión. *Un futuro para nuestro pasado: claves de la recuperación del Euskara y teoría social de las lenguas*. Second edition, 1991.



 *In order to reclaim a language it is essential to take the step to make the route B.*

by speakers who have covered the AB route. If BA speakers work on all the cultural functions in which they feel comfortable in their first language, they can then become AB speakers.

MOTIVATION, KNOWLEDGE and USE are the three decisive factors that determine a language's vitality. First one needs to know the language (its vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and so on) in order to be able to use it. But without motivation, it is impossible to learn a language or to keep up one's knowledge of it. But of course, a language, once learnt, needs to be used: speakers who do not use their language will ultimately lose it.

But it is essential too, for a language to be kept alive, that speakers who have completed Route A should also cover the cultural

route: they must take the next step and embark upon Route B. What this means is that they should become literate in their native language and be capable of using it to communicate in any area in which the opportunity to use the language presents itself. The way to achieve this is through education in one's own native language, from the natural sciences to mathematics or physics, from literature to human sciences. It is not sufficient to merely learn the language: knowledge of other subjects should be acquired in this language if the language community wishes to have full speakers of its language.

The progress of the Basque language recovery process in the Basque Country has demonstrated beyond any doubt that in schools of a type where the minority language is

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## Most pupils who receive their education in the minority language do become full speaker in both languages.

only taught as a subject, most pupils never become full speakers. Conversely, most pupils who receive their education in the minority language do become full speaker in both languages: either in Basque and Spanish or in Basque and French.

The life of a language may be thought of as a liquid which flows freely between three vessels and in normal situations fills all three completely. However, to be able to move back and forth from one vessel into another the liquid needs to reach a certain minimum level to achieve a flow. Thus a person may be motivated to learn English but if the motivation is insufficiently great, it will not become knowledge (the person will not start studying). And if they study English they need to reach a certain level of knowledge in order for this to translate into actual use of the language.

## Living languages

For a language to live it needs to be used in all areas of society. When this is the case, the language's spontaneous and cultural routes are covered and its speakers are full speakers.

Living languages may be in different situations but a language that wishes to stay alive needs to find itself in a particular

situation, namely AB, where its speakers can become full speakers by covering both the spontaneous and cultural routes.

### Language situations:

**Situation A:** languages with spontaneous (family) transmission only (e.g. Quechua, Mayan languages, Guarani, Aymara)

**Situation B:** languages with cultural transmission only (e.g. Latin or Sanskrit)

**Situation AB:** languages with both spontaneous and cultural transmission (e.g. English or Spanish)

**Situation BA:** languages with both kinds of transmission but having cultural rather than spontaneous transmission as the starting point (e.g. Hebrew at the beginning of the modern language recovery process)

**Situation Ø:** languages that were alive in the past but are now extinct (e.g. Etruscan or Iberian)

A language that wishes to remain alive needs to get into situation AB. Therefore the goal is to become a language that is transmitted spontaneously and culturally. Efforts not aimed towards this objective will be mere approximations which, on their own, cannot ensure a language's survival.

The speakers who form the nucleus of a speech community of a language in an AB situation are full speakers of that language who have become so either by the AB or

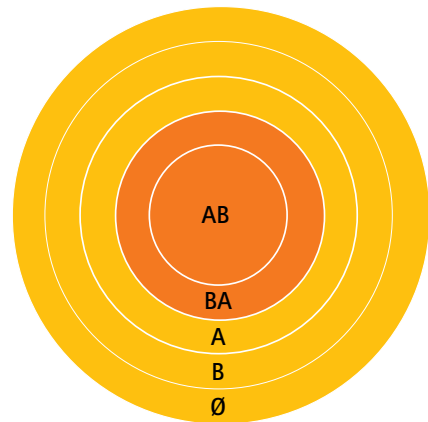
the BA route. The former type represent the fullest knowledge of the language since it is the speakers' mother tongue (A) and they have also cultivated it (B). Yet the latter type often presents the highest motivation, since they have made the effort to get all the way from no knowledge of the language to becoming full speakers. Together these make up the heart and soul of the language community, whom other speakers must look upon as their models and guides. It is up to these speakers to carry the language into new domains and effect the innovations appropriate to each period of the language's development. Without such speakers, how can a language be expected to survive the twenty-first century?

But this does not mean that other speakers are of no value. Speakers who are less than full speakers also form part of the language community. These include native speakers of the A type, who have never cultivated their mother tongue; they nevertheless possess the wealth of knowledge of the language that has been passed down orally through the generations, and if they further undertake the cultural route are quite capable of assimilating its wealth too.

Then there are those who have learnt the language by the cultural route alone (B). If they are sufficiently motivated and they become users of the language, they can develop into BA speakers.

Finally, there is one more type of "speaker", the  $\emptyset$  type, who does not know the

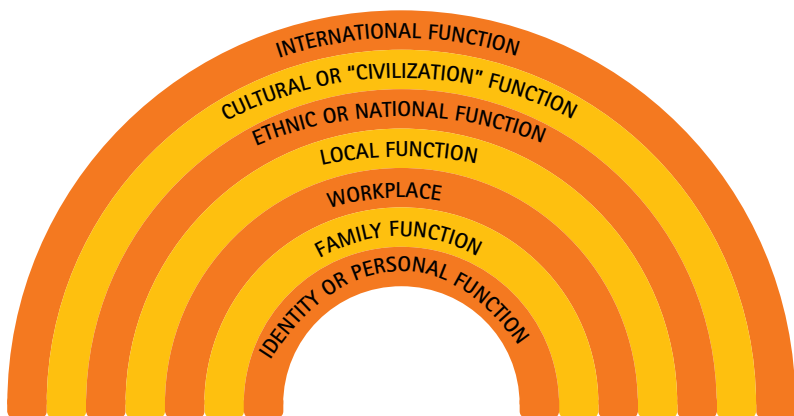
### Speakers diagram:



language but may potentially become speakers. They should be taken into consideration too since they are capable of learning the language and thus of participating in its recovery.

## The chief language functions

Languages fulfill many functions in the territories or communities in which they are spoken. Listed from "bottom to top", these include the identity or personal function, the family function, the workplace, the local function and the ethnic or national function. Outside their original community or territory some languages also have two other functions: a cultural or "civilization" function and an international function.



Any living language has the first two functions, serving as a vehicle for people's internal thought processes and the language of the family. The third function is that of the language of work, which may be specialised. Then we have the language used predominantly within the local area where we live, and finally the language that operates at the national level.

Some languages possess additional functions that go beyond the national ambit, in the case of languages with official status or used as a language of culture in countries other than the country of origin of the language in question. Examples of some such languages are Spanish, German, English, Russian, Chinese, French or Swedish.

Lastly, certain languages are used for international communication. English is the language that most notably fulfils that function today.

A normalised language fully performs the first five functions, such that all the areas

of one's life function in the language, such as the family, education, public administration, work, public services, the courts, the mass media, cultural activities, and so on.

If a language is not used to perform all five functions, this means that another language fulfils one or more of such needs, and the first language is being excluded from those areas.

A language cannot, on its own, change the language of the majority of speakers. But if the majority language is only used to perform personal or family functions, or if other languages are assigned the national function (as with Spanish and French in the case of the Basque language), the way is open for the language of the majority to start becoming a minority language. The language with the national function will replace the other language.

Such replacement is just one step on the way towards language loss.



# Language loss

Why, and how, do languages die? How may they be recovered?

Although every language, and every community of speakers, is unique and has a unique history, all endangered languages have undergone a similar process. The same may be said of all languages that have undergone language recovery. Next we will describe these processes, identifying the chief factors leading to language loss and the most important steps in language recovery.

## Language shift

All languages need to serve the first five functions identified above in order to conserve vitality in their territories. Thus when a new language comes to occupy one of these functions, the life of the original language is endangered on that territory.

Language shift does not occur from the bottom up; it is a top-down phenomenon. The displacing language will serve the first functions on the national level, in politics, education, administration, health services and so on. In this way a need for this language is created.

Therein lies the key: in the creation of a need for a language. When a language is neces-

sary to fulfill basic functions, it is used and rapidly expands to all domains.

Need for the language causes it to expand, on the national level, into all functions, invading the domain of the vernacular language and gradually spreading to the family, the home and the individual. When the language imposed from the outside reaches that level, fulfilling all functions, language shift may be considered completed. The language has now gone from being the language of the majority to being that of a minority.

- **Unilateral bilingualism = diglossia**

In such situations, unilateral bilingualism begins to prevail: most of the speakers of the minority language now become bilingual. Speakers of the other language feel no need to become bilingual: the original language of the area is after all no longer necessary for all functions. In this context the word "bilingualism" is often used, but it would be more accurate to refer to this state of affairs as diglossia, because the speakers of the original language do indeed know both languages, but not equally: one of the two languages fulfils more and more functions, while the other is progressively marginalised. The two languages do not stand on equal footing; therefore the speakers of the minority language will irremediably become bilingual diglossic.

In all cases of social diglossia, the original language dies out unless its speakers make an early move.

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## • The process of language shift

Where language shift takes place in a human group or language community, at first the group has a single language and its members are monolingual. Subsequently the need is recognised for some of the speakers to know another language. Later, while it is still necessary to speak the native language, the need for the second language starts to spread progressively. Over time, this second language acquires further functions and its use becomes essential or becomes more widespread in some parts of the society. Eventually the second language takes on all communicative functions except for those within the family. That is to say, the domain of the original language becomes limited to the family and personal uses. The outside language is now the necessary one; the local language is no longer necessary. As the situation continues to develop, the local language is progressively excluded and the society once more becomes monolingual, but now in a language that has been introduced from elsewhere.

Following this, the passage of two generations is sufficient to complete language shift, going from the monolingual grandparents' generation to that of their more or less bilingual children and from that to the newly generation of the grandchildren who are monolingual in the language that has been brought in from outside.

Put in this way, it may seem that the speakers are the ones responsible for having switched languages. But what is the real

cause that explains why the speakers of a minority language fail to transmit their mother tongue to their children? How does this situation come about?

These are the main factors<sup>9</sup>:

1. Non-use of the native language in formal education (i.e. in schools). This makes it difficult for children to acquire full knowledge of their language, including literacy in it. Thus the dominant language is studied instead of the native language, supplanting it.
2. Use of the dominant language in the most important media, leisure products and cultural projects.
3. Migration to urban areas and urbanisation often brings about the disintegration of speech communities. As a result children become less likely to hear and use their parents' language in contemporary settings and language transmission is adversely affected.
4. Pressures in the labour market demanding the use of the dominant language while failing to employ economic and psychological measures to protect minority languages.
5. Failure to ensure observance of language-related human rights.

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9 UNESCO. *Sharing a world of difference: the earth's linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity*. UNESCO-Terralingua-World Wide Fund for Nature, 2003.

6. Mind-sets which regard monolingualism in the dominant language, rather than multilingualism, as normal, adequate and necessary, both for the state ("one nation, one language") and individuals. This is linked to the view according to which parents are said to have to choose whether they prefer their children to study in their native language (with a consequent loss of opportunities in the work market) or in the dominant language (to the exclusion of the native language).

## Language loss

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Through the process of language shift, the original language becomes a minority language and is set on the road to language loss. The usual steps in the process of language loss are as follows:

- **Loss of functions**

The monolingual minority who speak the state language establish themselves on the central stage: the nation is their nation and theirs is the national language.

- **Unilateral bilingualism**

The fewer functions there are remaining to the minority language, the less this language will be spoken in its own community; now use of the language becomes limited to certain specific domains, such as the home

**From the monolingual grandparents' generation to that of their more or less bilingual children and from that to the newly generation of the grandchildren who are monolingual in the language that has been brought in from outside.**

or exchanges among friends. Monolingualism in the official language becomes more widespread: such speakers do not become bilingual because they perceive no need to be able to speak the minority language. On the contrary, most speakers of the minority language become bilingual diglossic, using the official language in formal domains and reserving their own language for informal ones. The original monolingual speakers of this language, those of the older generation, start to pass away, and the hangups associated with the idea of a minority language set in.

- **The "minority language complex"**

Speakers with a "minority language complex" assume, since their original language is not used in the major functions, that their language is not fit for such use. It has diminished prestige. The way many such native speakers think is that, given that their language is no good for the "big" functions, it is pointless to bother to use it at all. Thus the official language ends up becoming the language of the community.

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- **Destructuring of the language community**

Top-level decisions are passed down in the official state language, and there is even less motivation or capacity on the part of civil servants and the professional élite to use the minority language than among the rest of the community. At this stage there remain no monolingual speakers since most of the minority language speakers have become bilingual.

- **Legal discrimination**

Ultimately the original language community is completely destructured and loses all cohesion, having become a merely peripheral phenomenon. The language's status concedes no legitimacy or protection to it.

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## **The route to language recovery**

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How can a language that is on the route to language loss be recovered?

Based on the experiences of Basque and several other languages, we know that the decision to reverse the direction of language loss belongs to the generations who are undergoing the loss and it is up to them to make a move to recover their language. Typically they do wish that they could live

out their lives in their own language, and that wish may drive them to overcome all the obstacles placed in the way of language recovery.

## **The turning point**

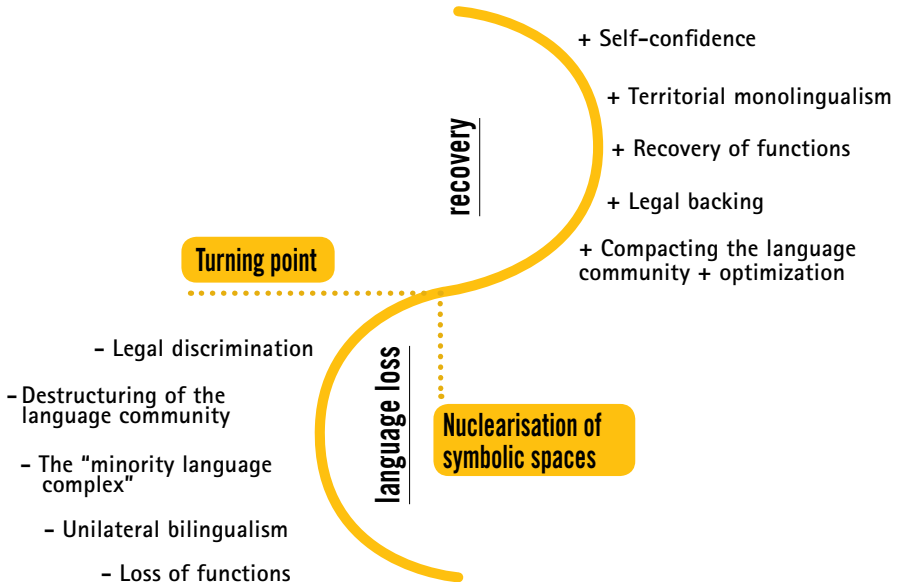
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When a point of desperation has been reached in the course of language loss, speakers can easily lose faith in their language and their language community. Although at this stage speakers may simply give up and abandon their language altogether, such a critical state of affairs does sometimes provoke the opposite reaction, if some of the speakers adopt a new attitude and set out on a road to language recovery. When a decision is now made to switch tracks and undertake to recover their language, a turning point has been reached. From here onwards, the language community starts to take steps to put its language on the road to recovery.

## **Language recovery**

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Language recovery can be achieved in a variety of ways, and the steps described below are not always all followed, yet the surest way to move vigorously towards language recovery is probably to endeavour to achieve these goals:



#### a) Compacting the language community + optimization

Restructure the language community, bringing together a group of speakers of both AB and BA types as representatives lending the language a prestigious and politically effective presence.

#### b) Legal backing

Redistribute linguistic power. Political power reflects linguistic power. Encourage the proliferation of groups of speakers which each have an understanding of their function and assume responsibility for it.

#### c) Recovery of functions

The number of speaker collectives increases, and each collective understands and assumes their function.

#### d) Territorial monolingualism

In order for a minority language to be able to develop fully and for the language community to be able to function in that language, it needs to have a territory or linguistic habitat that is the exclusive stronghold of the language.

#### e) Self-confidence

The whole language community should assimilate the notion that its language, although it has existed as a minority language, has the full capacity to meet all kinds of needs.

An endangered language, then, can go either of two ways: it may die out or it may embark on language recovery. When a critical moment is reached, this can be made into a turning point if the trend towards

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language loss is interrupted and language recovery commences.

Such a turnaround involves putting an end to the diglossia that has reigned unchecked hitherto. The generation that makes such a decision will play a vital role in the history of its language. In fact, the most salient trait of this generation of language activists is that all their efforts are made for the sake of future generations; with that in mind and without further delay, they simply get down to work. This is the turning point.

Beyond this turning point, it may take two generations (20–25 years) to revitalise the language. But the length of this period is less critically important than the wish and resolution to live out their lives in their own language that is felt by the pivotal generation that brings about this turnaround.

## The determination to exist

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The goal of any language recovery process is for the language to become necessary, to be known and used on its territory. This can only be achieved if there is a will to do so and a determination to exist is borne out by all the successful cases of language recovery, such as Albanian, Czech, Armenian, Lithuanian, Maltese,

**The first and foremost prerequisite for the recovery of a language that has already become a minority language is the will and determination of its speakers.**

Norwegian, Polish, Hebrew, Rumanian, Slovak, Estonian, Finnish or Faroese.<sup>10</sup>

The first and foremost prerequisite for the recovery of a language that has already become a minority language is the will and determination of its speakers. If the language community doesn't really care about maintaining its identity and is happy to be assimilated (either consciously or unconsciously), not much can be done to avoid it.

But the determination to exist may give rise to a motivation on the part of individual speakers to do something about it: to resolve to sacrifice personal considerations in order to overcome whatever problems and obstacles stand in the way for the sake of passing their language along to coming generations in a healthy and viable state. When a certain number of speakers adopt such attitudes, the language community may be said to possess a determination to exist; if so, then the next step is to bring such speakers into contact with each other.

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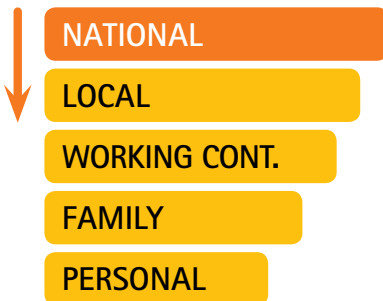
<sup>10</sup> Juan Carlos Etxegoien *Xamar. Orekan: Herri eta Hizkuntzen ekologiak*. Pamiela Argitaletxea. 2001.

As Txepetx also points out, a viable language community cannot tolerate being told by other communities that their own language is of less worth. At all times in history, the robustness of a given language community is founded upon its conviction that its language is as good as any other. Such a belief provides support for continued development of the language as a whole, without which any language is subject to endangerment. And indeed, this is precisely the problem facing endangered languages today.

Thus the prestige of a language is a necessary condition for its linguistic development. But prestige is a social value, linked to the society that confers it. In truth, if a language community does not recognise the prestige of its own language it can hardly expect other language communities to do so.

Basque is a case in point. In some parts of the Basque Country the Basque language stands at Level 5 (national language status), while in other areas it is no higher than Level 2 (language of the family) and in yet others it is at Level 1 (a sub-language), not to mention its status outside the Basque Country, of course. But Basque needs to ensure its status as a national language throughout its territory, for if it does not, it will fall to the level of a local language (with the status of a "dialect"), at which point languages are denied access to becoming languages of culture: the struggle descends to Levels 3 and 4, and from there to Levels 2 and 1, until language shift becomes complete.

Language recovery is necessary to escape from this loop. For that, it is important to acknowledge that the language is really at risk and to set in motion all the resources that are necessary to attain a viable equilibrium for the language.



**A LANGUAGE**

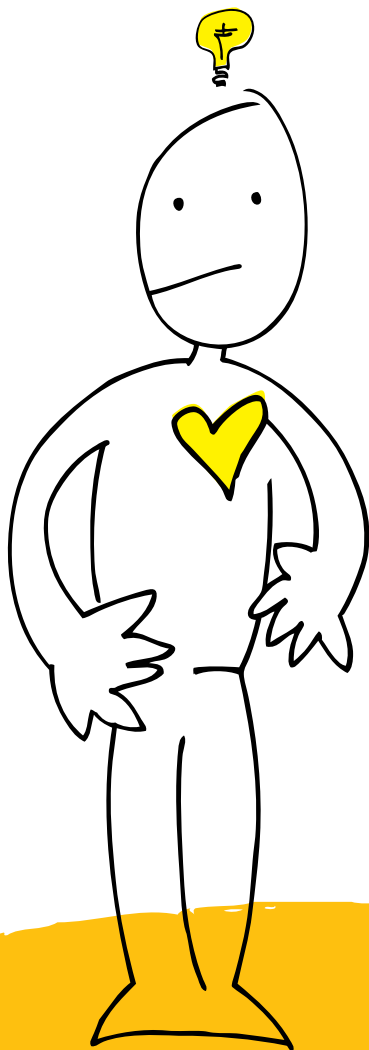


**B LANGUAGE**

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## Heart, head and hands

When setting in motion a mechanism for language recovery, one may endeavour to follow a strict theoretical paradigm, and indeed it is important to devote atten-



tion to the correct design of strategies, language policies, plans and so on. Yet for all this, little progress can be expected if a sense of necessity and will to implement them are not there. Indeed there are times when the necessity and the will cannot wait for a well-designed plan to be produced, and speakers forge ahead in any case, driven by their sense of a desperate need to start doing something.

What this means is that while the *head* (i.e. knowledge of how things should be done) is indeed important, so are the *heart* (the feeling that motivates people to strive to save their language) and the *hands* (people's willingness to work).

## From oral to written language

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Let us repeat that the goal of a language embarking on language recovery is to come to be used everywhere in the community in which the language is spoken; in other words, to occupy what we have defined as the national function.

This entails being used as a written as well as a spoken language. In addition to being the **language** of the home and of friends, and also being spoken in public and in the workplace, then, the goal is for the lan-



guage also to be used in education, literature, the media, public administration and many other domains besides.

This goal imposes the need for a standard language, a form of the language which unifies its different variants. The lack of a written norm may pose serious difficulties for those attempting to write in the language and results in greater demands being placed on readers, who will be required to make sense of each individual author's writing "rules". Codifying the language helps to overcome such obstacles and contributes to achieving greater cohesion among the language's full speakers.

Although Basque authors have always expressed concern about the language unification issue throughout the history of Basque literature, the first steps towards Basque language standardisation were not taken until the beginning of the twentieth century. From that time onwards, the drive towards language unification has largely been led by Euskaltzaindia, the Basque language academy, which has nevertheless been assisted and often stimulated in the endeavour by other institutions striving to modernise the language's corpus through their contributions in such areas as popular science writing, dictionary making, translation or the media, to name a few such areas.

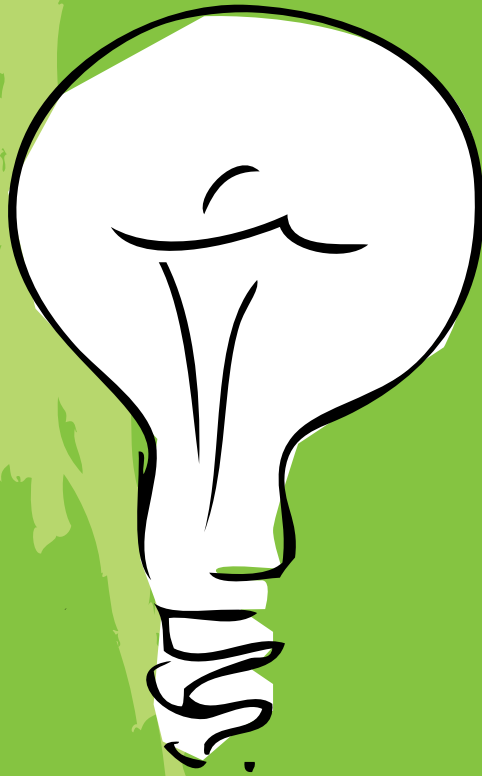
The earliest steps in Basque language unification required a consensus to be

achieved but also involved debate and polemics. In all events, the present standard language grew out of the search for a balance between the different Basque dialects and drew on the resources of all of them. Initial differences have now been set aside and, in response to a growing need, the use of standard Basque has spread and won acceptance in present day Basque society.

In this process, the unified language has not displaced the dialects since that is not the purpose for which it was created. The purpose of standard Basque is use in formal domains, either orally or in writing, such as radio and television programmes, the press, dubbing of films, provision of general information, public signs, research, teaching, literature or the administration. But in less formal domains, particularly those that were already Basque-language domains, the dialects are retained, for indeed loss of the traditional dialects in such contexts would be counter-productive, for here the traditional language retains its freshness and diversity, which may still be drawn upon to enrich the unified language with further vocabulary, expressions and other subtleties of expression.

The standard language, then, is chiefly characterised, virtually of necessity, by the due consideration given to the balance between local language varieties, their diversity and the wealth or resources they represent.

# BASQUE LANGUAGE



# THE BASQUE EXPERIENCE

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## The history of our language

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The history of a language is made by its speakers and the history of the speakers is that of the language.

The history of the Basque language and the history of the Basques are both thousands of years old and there are numerous hypotheses about their origins, none of which has been proven. Thus the origin of both the Basques and their language remains a mystery.

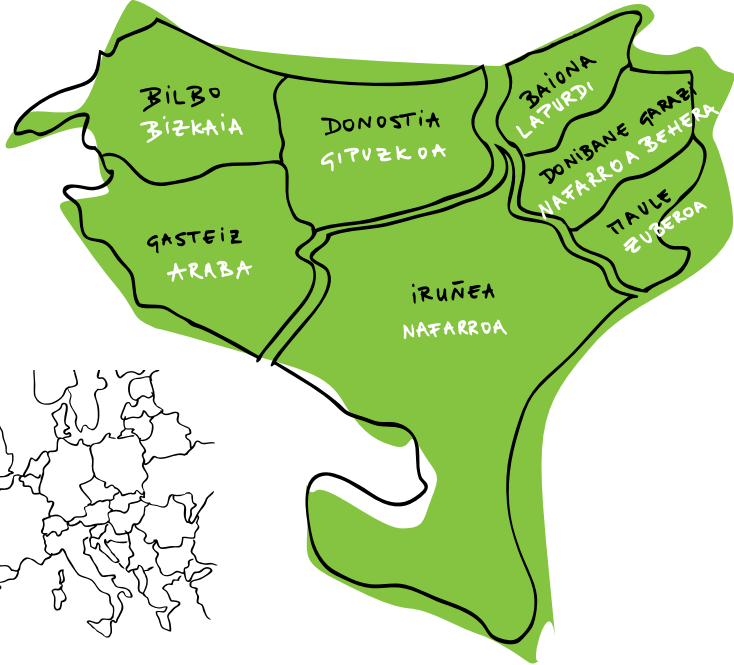
But everyone agrees that Basque is one of the oldest languages in Europe, for it is one of the few languages to have been spoken continuously on this continent from antiquity down to the present time.

The Basques constitute a Basque-speaking language community. This fact is reflected in the Basque name for the Basques (*eu-skaldunak*) which defines them, amidst all the other language communities of Europe, as the people of the Basque language.

This people inhabit a land in southwestern Europe which covers an area of 20,664 sq km (7,978 sq mi). Today this territory is divided between the two states of Spain and France.

The part of the Basque Country that is in the Spanish state includes the Basque Autonomous Community (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba), with a population of about two million, and Navarre (Nafarroa) with approxi-

## BASQUE COUNTRY



## EUROPE



mately 600,000 inhabitants. The remainder of the Basque Country, called the Northern Basque Country (Lapurdi, Nafarroa Behera or Lower Navarre and Zuberoa)<sup>11</sup>, whose population is close to 260.000, is within the state of France, It does not constitute a separate department but is a part of the department of Pyrénées Atlantiques.

Prior to the creation of the political structure just described, the Basque-speaking people had long dwelt on both sides of the Pyrenees in a more extensive territory than that of today.

At the time when Indo-Europeans spread across Western Europe, about three thousand years ago, Basque was spoken in the

northeast of the Iberian Peninsula and the southwest of present-day France.

Although we cannot know for how long Basque had been spoken in this area prior to that period, on the basis of linguistic evidence scholars have reached the conclusion that many ideas and beliefs embedded in the Basques' culture are rooted in the Neolithic age, between 2000 and 3500 BC.

While the prevailing Indo-European languages have long shown a tendency to expand all over the world, the Basque language, rather than growing territorially, has shown a capacity to endure over time, without which it would not have survived to the present day despite predictions of its imminent demise. No small part in this success was played by the willingness of

11 See the map.



the Basque-speaking community to absorb influences from other cultures and to continue forward by evolving.

Thus the Basque language still lives on, yet the Basque of today differs from that of long ago in both its form and the area where it is spoken. Although it remains true to its roots, Basque has evolved under the influence of a long succession of neighbouring languages. Parts of the territory that was Basque-speaking in Roman times were lost to Romance languages, and its area has subsequently been reduced still further, notably so since the eighteenth century owing to the impact of the language policies pursued by the Spanish and French governments.

The story of Basque presents a clear example of language shift, yet Basque has never quite given in. Even in the hardest of times, Basque speakers still kept their language alive in their homes.

Overcoming obstacles and opposition, a great effort to achieve Basque language recovery forged ahead, particularly in the twentieth century. The outcome of those efforts varies greatly today from one part of the Basque territory to another:

**North:** French remains the only official language of the state.

**South:** Basque shares official status with Spanish within the Basque Autonomous Community. But in Navarre, it is only official (with Spanish) in the north of the province, not in the centre or the south.

## • Language shift in the Basque Country

The gradual process of language shift away from Basque accelerated in the eighteenth century, when the French and Spanish monarchies began to intensify the policies that favoured their own languages. Spurred on by Louis XIV's policy of forcing the French language on the whole of France, the Bourbon dynasty introduced a new language policy for its domains in the Iberian Peninsula. During the second half of the century (specifically between 1760 and 1780) the state tried to enforce a coercive policy to impose Spanish all over the peninsula and in the American colonies. This led to the most stringent measures ever implemented aimed at stamping out native languages in the Americas.

In the following centuries things got no better for Basque speakers. The obligation to know the official language was intensified progressively. Up until then, not going to school or learning literacy was not a problem for people living in the Basque Country who in any case had an oral culture of their own that was adequate to their needs. But that lifestyle ended abruptly in the twentieth century, when the Spanish government decided once and for all, at the beginning of the century, that all children must be sent to school; besides, daily life was becoming more complicated and it became more and more impossible to remain illiterate while participating in modern society.

That meant literacy in the official language, of course. In both Spain and France

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measures had already been introduced before the start of the twentieth century to ensure that French or Spanish, respectively, were the only languages allowed in schools. Such policies remained in force throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

In those years many Basque speakers lost confidence in the Basque language. At this time a new generation arose whose only language was Spanish or French.

## • Towards diglossia

The line separating bilingualism and language shift is a very fine one. When the need to be bilingual becomes general and takes root in a territory, speakers of the unofficial language tend to develop a certain lack of confidence in their native language. They perceive that their language is inadequate for some purposes and that the other language is needed to perform many actions in society. This feeling may be exacerbated further if such speakers are also ridiculed for the least mistake made when they speak the invading language, giving rise to ever increasing hangups. Such a speaker will end up concluding that their mother tongue is no use for modern life; the other language is the one that is needed.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Basque survived as a living tongue chiefly among farmers, sheep herders and fishermen, while in the towns, in all dealings with administrative offices and for edu-

catinal purposes, the need for Spanish or French was increasingly felt.

Hence the prospects for the Basque language were bleak. Everywhere Basque was dwindling, or rather being silenced. And yet, from the most urbanised areas of the country came the initial ideas and initiatives about bringing the language up to date and changing its status; the pro-Basque movement came to life largely in the towns. If it had not done so, the extinction of the Basque language would almost have been a certainty, for although most of the population in the smaller towns and villages was still Basque-speaking at the time, the high-level language of all formal activities and professions, the language spoken in the administration, by doctors and veterinarians, by lawyers etc. etc., was the state language; Basque was restricted to the lower strata. It was therefore essential, in order to overcome the "minority hangup" and give Basque more prestige, for Basque to be recognised and supported in urban centres.

The Basque experience has shown that if the minority heritage language is limited to villages and rural contexts only, this results in it being further relegated to oblivion. The fact of people being able to go into town from their village and get around speaking their native language adds to the language's status by showing that it has a place. It is difficult to keep a language alive if all efforts are concentrated in a single locality. So was it in the case of Basque: the farmers alone could hardly have ensured the survival of Basque into the future. Given that all that a villager needed to be able to move



to town was knowledge of the official language, unless one's original language could be seen to be useful in town, that language was perceived to be useless, and the tendency was towards its abandonment.

## • Language and identity

Around the turn of the twentieth century, after a series of devastating wars<sup>12</sup>, there commenced a period of reflection about Basques' identity as a people and the place of language as an important means of preserving that identity. New cultural and political initiatives got underway and new, louder voices in support of the language began to make themselves heard.

In this climate, those who were concerned for the Basque language saw the need to create institutional resources to support the language and to begin a process of unifying the language for the whole country. It was no easy task to get southerners and northerners to join forces but some successful initiatives came about, culminating in the creation of the Basque language academy, Euskaltzaindia, in 1919.

Early progress in Basque language education was also made in this period. In the South, the Muñoa family founded the first

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<sup>12</sup> Namely the Carlist Wars, the second of which led to the abolition of the charter (*fueros*) specifying historic legal concessions to the Basque Country based upon ancient legal customs and tradition.

*ikastola*<sup>13</sup> in Donostia in 1914. This was the Koruko Ama School, which eventually had 300 pupils. Similar schools opened up in Navarre in the republican period as an initiative of the Friends of Basque association. In Bizkaia, a movement of "neighbourhood schools" developed. At the same time projects of the kind were being started in the Northern Basque Country.

But that Basque language movement was wiped out by the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the subsequent dictatorial régime of Francisco Franco (1939-1975), which produced terrible suffering for everyone but whose persecutory language policies were particularly catastrophic for Basque speakers.

The purpose of the victors' language policy was unambiguously to wipe out the Basque language once and for all. Speaking Basque was forbidden in public, at church, in schools, and it even became an offence to have a Basque name.

Persecution of the Basque language did not begin with Franco, but granted that such policies had already existed; the Franco régime carried them to their most extreme consequences in the hope of finishing the job earlier Spanish governments had only started of achieving complete assimilation and stamping out all signs of Basque identity. The language played a central role in this conflict: the voices of Basque speakers were silenced and the Basque language

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<sup>13</sup> The *ikastolak* are explicitly Basque-medium schools.

was denied any legal status whatsoever. The policy's ideological underpinning was the colonialist slogan of *one nation, one language*.

The harsh measures introduced as part of this policy meant that monolingual Basque speakers in the southern Basque Country were pushed to the fringe of society, and even being bilingual in Basque made life difficult and was sufficient to subject such speakers to public ridicule. Basque speakers often came to feel shame and embarrassment as a result. Being a Basque speaker created hangups in many (the "minority complex"), and so once again native language transmission to the new generation was interrupted in urban and suburban areas. Once more, Basque was limited to the home, the family and the farm. If it survived at all, this could only be due either to Basque speakers' awareness or to the force of inertia.

Franco only governed in the southern Basque Country. Yet in the North the situation was not much better for Basque speakers. The French government denied Basque any legal status and made French the only official language. Whether out of shame and embarrassment or in the hope of giving the next generation a better future, many Basques gradually abandoned their language and only transmitted French to their children.

That is what happened in Fermina Jaurégi's home in the Lapurdian town of Zibururu, which was featured in *The Basque experience* documentary. The daughter

## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF RECENT LANGUAGE LOSS

- Industrialisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- Lack of recognition by the Spanish and French government.
- Impact of lack of prestige for Basque on language transmission.
- Authorities practised persecution rather than protecting the language.
- Absence of a unified standard form of the language.
- Position of Basque as a shrinking minority language

of monolingual Basque speakers, Fermina and her husband always spoke Basque to each other, although they also knew French. But when they had children they only taught them French in the belief that if they had a good command of French they would get along better in life.

The interruption in the transmission of Basque resulted in considerable language loss. In the nineteenth century, Basque speakers in the southern provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa made up 69% of their population<sup>14</sup>. A century later, in 1981, only 21.53% of the population of these provinces could speak Basque.

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<sup>14</sup> Statistics based on data collected by the historian Ladislao Velasco between 1866 and 1868.





## The dream of language recovery

The vision of their language moving towards extinction was highly traumatic for Basque speakers. Yet by reaching such a desperate point, the situation also drove home the need to wake up and do something. So language recovery began: people who knew the language started speaking it more often, while those who did not, acquired a motivation to learn it.

This was the turning point generation, after which it has taken another couple of generations to halt their language's race to extinction.

To be sure, there were some earlier attempts at Basque language recovery, but these had mostly been individual initiatives, whereas the moves made in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War were social processes initiated collectively by substantial numbers of people.

Now the challenge to recover and start cultivating the Basque language was taken up with pride and enthusiasm by a generation who clearly saw that Basque is the heart of the Basque Country and that as long as the Basque language remains alive, the Basque Country will live.

This awareness led to a social movement to reorganise many aspects of social life that involved the language, such as schools, the

media and cultural activities. The part of the Basque-speaking community with the highest level of awareness got organised and set in motion a broad social movement to stop the trend towards language loss, with the support of non-Basque-speakers who appreciated the importance of keeping the language alive.

The first and foremost prerequisite for recovering a language is the will of its speakers to do so. If the language community does not resolve to keep its identity and its very being alive, but consciously or unconsciously resigns itself to assimilation, nothing can be done.

### • Profile of the new generation<sup>15</sup>

- YOUNG. They were not involved in the war, escaped its traumas and know little about the prewar cultural efforts. Wanted a clean break with the past, not interested in the old ways from before the war. When they talked about recovering traditions, their main concern was for the language. Subsequently the impulse to break with all earlier traditions softened and interest grew in efforts to study and reestablish the things that had been done before.
- STUDENT. At first seminary students, and later university students. Interest first started in the seminaries and was then

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<sup>15</sup> Joan Mari Torrealdei. *Euskal Kultura Gaur: Iburuaren mundua*. Jakin. 1997.

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spread beyond them through broader activities and studies.

- **MILITANT.** Many of this generations achievements were attained in defiance of the law, and were in any case well outside the agenda of the Franco-era institutions from whom no support could be expected. Most of the organisations and activities benefitted from some support from some clergymen, enabling them in part to get started until they could stand on their own two feet. The protection received from certain religious orders was vital for the founding of practically all the periodical publications that appeared in the South, many of the new Basque publishing houses and the first ikastola schools, which initially were very shaky in legal, economic and infrastructure terms. What was done was made possible thanks to the modest financial contributions of a small number of language enthusiasts, members of the public who came out in favour of the language movement and much perseverance and hard work. On the whole, the Basque cultural renaissance was given the cold shoulder by the business, industrial and economic forces. Only very late in the day did some pro-Basque-language initiatives start to receive attention and support from public institutions (following the creation of the Basque Autonomous Government in the nineteen-eighties).
- **BASQUE NATION-BUILDING** was the ultimate goal that provided the basis for all these efforts, the political work, the social thrust, the cultural, educational,

linguistic and literary endeavours. When starting out, the whole range of initiatives seemed like a single phenomenon forming part of the same social and political movement, but later on the various activities gradually differentiated and acquired autonomy, becoming separate by the nineteen-seventies.

The historic task of this generation was to establish a new, prestigious image for the Basque language and to carry the language into every single domain: from infants' school all the way up to the university, from literature to science, and from folk tradition to the newest trends. The new generation defined Basque culture in Basque, creating its own structures that for many years remained separate from the official institu-





tions and acted without legal recognition. All the key projects of the Basque movement crystallised in that period: the ikas-tola movement, adult Basque language and literacy classes, the new Basque music, the verse-singing (*bertsolaritza*) revival, periodicals and publishing companies, to name but a few.

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## The road to language modernisation

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Can a millennia-old language be “modern” and up-to-date? Is it possible to do mathematics and teach technology in Basque? Can football, economics, the environment, politics or international affairs be discussed in Basque? Can a book on quantum mechanics be written in Basque?

All this, which was virtually unthinkable only forty years ago, has happened in the Basque Country, although the rhythm of language modernisation has varied in different parts of the country, so that the present state of the language is not the same in Navarre, the North and the Basque Autonomous Community.

Nonetheless, today Basque is a living, contemporary language. Some people thought Basque would never be a “modern” lan-

guage in which mathematics could be explained and medicine practised. But languages are in themselves, *per se*, neither modern nor old-fashioned; languages are what their speakers make them! The ability to bring a language up to date does not reside in the language itself but belongs to those who speak it.

Languages can hardly be useful unless their speakers adapt them to their own lives and needs. And there are also three other conditions languages need to meet in order to achieve this: they need a linguistic habitat, or territory, that is exclusively theirs; there need to be full speakers of the language; and the language needs to be unified and standardized.

In order for a language to evolve it must perform the first five functions<sup>16</sup>: the identity or personal function, the family function, the work function, the local function and the national function. It is also important to develop domains of use in the course of the recovery process, such as education, media, a consolidated corpus, professional use, culture and public administration. In this expansion process, social movements to support the language play a significant role by helping to promote language recovery.

In the Basque case it was necessary to start to teach Basque speakers to read and write in this language, to be literate in Basque. This entailed teaching Basque literacy to adults, whether or not they were already literate in Spanish or French. Meanwhile, it

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<sup>16</sup> See the section on language functions.

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was also necessary to teach non-Basque-speaking adults the language, to become Basque speakers. And of course children had to start receiving an education in Basque, to which end the ikastolak opted for the solution of Basque-medium schools, where other languages (Spanish and French) were not excluded but Basque had to be the primary language. It was clear to the founders of the ikastola movement that a Basque education could only be guaranteed by making Basque the primary language at school.

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## Euskalgintza, the basis of language activism

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We observed earlier that heart, head and hands must all be involved in a successful language recovery, which requires both strong commitment and knowledge of the right way to do things; not only passion and optimism to defend one's language, but a willingness to work long and hard for the sake of it.

All these were present in the social movements that contributed to Basque language recovery. Those who, in the early days, created the groups, associations, institutions and diverse resources that were necessary to bring new vitality to Basque, were people from all walks of life; whether teachers or

translators, creative writers or dictionary makers and grammarians all their efforts were needed.

To sum up, Garabide has divided the groups and institutions that took part in the recovery of the Basque language into 8 different areas: corpus, education, cultural production, media, social movements – both national and international-, public institutions and working context.

Let us now take a closer look at how such structures and resources came to exist<sup>17</sup>.

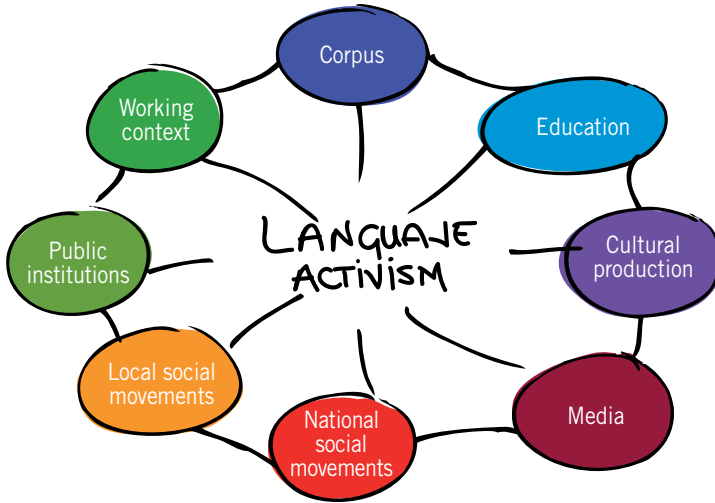
- **Euskaltzaindia, the Basque language academy**

Euskaltzaindia (Basque language academy) was founded in 1919 for the purpose of developing a unified Basque language. It has full official recognition, having been designated in Spain as the "Royal Academy of the Basque Language" since 1976, and an organisation of public interest in the French Republic since 1995.

In addition to its research and documentation activities, Euskaltzaindia came into being with a brief to unify the written Basque language. Like practically all languages, Basque naturally has numerous varieties: seven dialects and 24 sub-

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<sup>17</sup> This book provides a brief overview of these structures and resources; more complete information will be provided in subsequent DVD-books.



dialects have been recognised. While they enrich the language, they also divide it and present a barrier to communication between speakers on occasion. Moreover, if a language is to be given a national function and its use is to be normalised in all areas, a form of the language that can be understood by everyone is necessary. The way in which such unification can be achieved will depend on each particular language's history and its speakers. In the case of Basque, the need to unify has been felt most strongly since the mid-twentieth century. Written production in Basque was on the increase and the lack of a standard was resulting in a confusing state of affairs in the written language. Meanwhile, use of Basque in the media was also on the rise, and there was a need for a form of the language that everyone in the country could understand. Additionally, it was now necessary for modern topics to be

discussed in Basque too, and the lack of uniformity stood in the way of the development of a scientific and technological corpus.

At first, the move towards standardisation gave rise to arguments and controversy. The biggest quarrel arose between people for and against use of the letter *h*. This caused a rift between those who defended the local dialects and the proponents of a unified standard. Eventually a set of rules was established and normalisation has been able to proceed. Amidst all the criticisms and polemics, Euskaltzaindia carried on with its work of building a foundation for the future Euskara Batua, a standard form of the language intended for use in schools, literary production, the media and the administration, where nowadays there is practically universal acceptance of the Euskaltzaindia-backed rules.

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- **The Basque Institute of University Services (UZEI)**

The Basque Institute of University Services (UZEI) was started in 1977 for the purpose of developing technical and scientific jargon in Basque and preparing the language for use in academic subjects. Its first technical dictionary, for physics, was published in 1979. Since then UZEI has produced an impressive list of specialised dictionaries for different fields of knowledge and professions, and also university and secondary school level textbooks.

- **The Elhuyar Foundation**

The Elhuyar Cultural Association was founded in 1972 to develop and promote the use of Basque in science and technology. Over the following years it did much to bring about the normalisation of the corpus and status of Basque. It commenced the publication of an all-Basque popular science magazine of the same name in 1974, and the monthly Elhuyar Science and Technology journal in 1986. The foundation also produces textbooks in Basque, and both television and radio programmes on science and technology.

- **Translators' School**

Founded in 1980, the Donostia Translators' School trained four hundred translators over a ten-year period, until this degree was incorporated into university programmes. The Association of Translators, Correctors

and Interpreters of Basque Language (EIZIE), founded in 1987, now serve the needs of the many professionals currently working in this field.

- **The ikastola movement**

In the area of education within Basque language recovery, a crucial part was played in the nineteen-sixties by the growing ikastola movement which set up a network of all-Basque-medium schools.

The ikastolas started a new way of teaching, which has enabled their students to be full speakers in both languages. In fact, this is the model that has been most widely accepted by the system since the eighties.

The proponents of Basque saw very clearly that to give a language a future, it is of the greatest importance that children should be educated and taught to live in that language. Following the example set before the Spanish Civil War, after the war a new drive was undertaken to create a Basque-language school network, starting with isolated initiatives which were to grow and multiply over the next forty years, ultimately giving rise to a vast and enduring movement.

The first post-war ikastola schools, started during the early days of the Franco dictatorship, were illegal affairs. The movement to create and run them was led by a woman called Elbira Zipitria, who having returned to Donostia from the North after the end of the war, began teaching children through



Basque in the houses of some of her friends and acquaintances. Exclusive use of Basque at school was not the only special feature of the ikastolak, for Zipitria was an advocate of highly innovative teaching methods.

Starting out with a small number of schools, the movement grew until by the mid-sixties ikastolak were being set up in almost every town, in spite of the fact that they were still outside the law and possessed extremely limited resources. In the decade between 1960 and 1970 seventy-one such schools sprang up, mostly in bilingual towns and in the cities. Hence the ikastola schools were urban.

The public authorities found the movement to be unstoppable. With the demand increasing from parents and a ever-growing number of pupils enrolled, they could not be kept underground forever. To get around this, most of the ikastolak were legally recognised as church schools, taking advantage of privileges granted by the concordat with the Spanish state. But it was really the determination and hard work of parents, teachers and language activists that made it possible to overcome the many obstacles. Money was raised by means of raffles, fêtes or drink stands<sup>18</sup>. Parents got directly involved in the running of their own schools. It is often considered almost a miracle that the movement was able to get off the ground at all.

<sup>18</sup> Basque fiestas and festivals are always enlivened by stands where drinks and sometimes snacks are sold (txosnak), some of which may serve to raise money for a cause or a group.

**In the decade between 1960 and 1970 seventy- one such schools sprang up, mostly in bilingual towns and in the cities. Hence the ikastola schools were urban.**

Today, the ikastolak are still locally-run schools that offer Basque-medium education. They are recognised as a part of the school system, and although not belonging to the public school network they receive public subsidies.

## • Teacher training college

In view of the need for qualified teachers for the growing provision of Basque-language education, a teacher training college was founded in Eskoriatza (Gipuzkoa province) in 1976 by the Hezibide Association, which was made up of the teaching cooperatives of the Upper Deba region. Initially the teacher training college lacked official recognition, and started life as a dependency of the Episcopal University of Salamanca (in northwestern Spain), but in 1987 it was granted official recognition by the Spanish ministry of education. In 1997, the teacher training college became incorporated into Mondragon University and has been renamed the Faculty of Sciences of the Humanities and Education (HUHEZI).

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- **The Basque Summer University (UEU)**

The Basque Summer University (Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea, or UEU) was created in the seventies for the purpose of bringing into existence a national, public, Basque-language university. The UEU does not offer year-round university-level classes or academic qualifications. However, every year it organises a variety of summer courses in both the North and the South of the Basque Country, and provides various other courses and events during the rest of the year.

UEU was founded thanks to many young teachers and students. Many lovers of the Basque language who were teaching or studying in Spanish at different universities, decided to gather for 15 days in summer. Their aim was to prepare university-level courses in Basque for the first time. Most of the institutions working on the technical side of the Basque Language nowadays were created as a continuation of those summer courses.

At present, it is possible to study in Basque or in Spanish at any of the private or state universities of The EAE. However, the situation in Nafarroa and in the Northern Basque Country is just the opposite: The presence of Basque at University level is almost nonexistent.

- **Basque language and literacy training for adults**

The first Basque literacy classes were part of a movement founded by Rikardo Arregi<sup>19</sup> with the joint goal of nation building and language recovery. This was again not a programme supported by public institutions but rather a grassroots initiative. Before long, Basque-speaking adults who had only been educated in Spanish, and also non-Basque-speakers, were becoming literate in Basque. Such Basque language schools and Basque-speaking groups were set up in towns and cities across the country. Then in 1968 the organism AEK was created to coordinate such literacy and language schools all across the Basque Country. Founded under the auspices of Euskaltzaindia (the language academy), in 1974 AEK became an independent organisation. Today it is still the only such country-wide body, but there are other networks of schools at more local levels, such as the municipal Basque schools and the IKA schools (in Navarre and Araba).

- **The New Basque Song Movement**

Although the first records of Basque music were published by the priest Nemesio Etxaniz and the folk singer Mixel Labegerie, an outstanding role in turning young people's attention to Basque song was played by a

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<sup>19</sup> Rikardo Arregi: Basque writer, journalist and cultural activist (Andoain, 1942–Mendara, 1969).



group of artists and performers called *Ez Dok Amairu* (literally, "Not Thirteen"), which arose during the Franco era when the dictatorship was having a profound effect on Basque people's lives.

The name of the movement was suggested by the sculptor Jorge Oteiza, an avant-garde artist whose works and ideas were particularly influential among young Basques. Oteiza was a passionate advocate for a broadening of the concept of "Basque culture" and invited artists to explore new directions.

His message was that just because Basque music and culture were ancient, that need not stop them from moving into the artistic and musical vanguard. He called for an end to being content with just producing second-class "folklore" (such as colourful provincial song-and-dance recitals) and second-class arts and handicrafts, and proposed instead that these ancient roots could be transformed into innovative art, music and other forms of original expres-

sion. Oteiza drew a direct connection between the neolithic cave art found in the Basque Country and the modern artistic avant-garde. But underpinning this whole movement was the fundamental sense of the value of what we are for the present and the future and of our legitimate place in the creation of new artistic currents.

Inspired by the example of the contemporary *Nova Cançó* ("new song") movement in Catalonia, the authors and musicians of this school were determined to give the Basque language a new pride of place in their works.

Thus, a new vanguard of Basque artists turned against the sterile, static, "folklorist" attitude that had characterised the preceding postwar era and aimed to create forms of artistic expression, consisting principally of a new kind of Basque music and Basque songs reflecting the young generation's sense of protest and hankering for social and political freedom, which was coming into prominence in the



*Group of artists and performers called "Ez Dok Amairu"*

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non-conformist political, social and cultural movements in the Basque Country in the period.

At first, their declared aim was to make traditional Basque music better known and modernise it, but they went further, combining songs, poetry, dance and drama into a performance that was not so much a mere song recital as a complete show.

They faced criticism from the beginning. But they achieved massive success and became immensely popular among the younger generation of Basque language supporters.

This cultural movement became a symbol of what we were and what we were determined to be.

## ● Verse improvisation

Bertsolaritza or verse improvisation<sup>20</sup> is conversation set to a melody, a rhyme and a rhythm; the custom, going back to the roots of oral Basque folk literature, remains a living tradition today which the bertsolari<sup>21</sup>

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20 Bertsolaritza is a custom of composing verses (*bertsoak*) in which the words are improvised, especially in oral exchanges in front of a group of listeners, according to certain "rules" governing melody, metre and rhyme, cf. Joxerra Gartzia, Andoni Egaña, Jon Sarasua. *Bat-bateko bertsolaritza: gakoak eta azterbideak*. Bertsozale Kultur Elkarte. 2001.

21 *Bertsolari* is the Basque name for someone who composes such verses, sometimes in writing but most typically in "real-time" oral improvisation.

has successfully adapted to the changing conditions of Basque society. At one time bertsolariak were to be found among small groups of friends in the cider houses. In the twentieth century they set foot in the public thoroughfare and adapted to the modern way of life.

In the modern period of Basque verse improvisation, running from 1935 to 1968, the bertsolariak started their move out of the cider house and the rural context, but had to deal with Franco's severe censorship laws. After the first "general championship" on Basque soil, held in 1960, the popularity of bertsolaritza started to rise; from 1977 onwards, verse contests became more frequent and the first generation of young bertsolariak from the bertsolaritza schools came on the scene. Local media started paying attention to the phenomenon and the number of followers reached an all-time high. In the eighties the number of bertsolari schools mushroomed and the first female professionals made their appearance on a stage long reserved for men. That decade also saw the creation of the Basque bertsolaritza association (Euskal Herriko Bertsozale Elkarte).

## ● The Durango Basque Book and Record Fair

The Durango Basque Book and Record Fair started in 1965, during the Franco dictatorship, with the aim of publicising the books and records produced in the Basque Country and, at the same time, providing a meeting place for all involved in the Basque language scene.



Books sold at the Durango Basque Book and Record Fair may or may not be in Basque, but those not in Basque must be somehow related to Basque interests. But only music that is sung in Basque is admitted in the record section, and purely instrumental albums sold must be the work of Basque artists.

## ● Press and media

In the postwar period, printed periodicals all in Basque started to appear on the scene in the fifties. The earliest attempts were produced by the seminaries, and later ones came from university circles. Two important periodicals that have survived from that period are the cultural journal *Jakin* ("Know") and the weekly *Argia* ("Light"), formerly *Zeruko Argia* ("Heavenly Light").

Basque radio was the next to come into existence. Back in the fifties there were already some church-produced Basque-language programmes on religious, sports or cultural subjects. Other kinds of radio programmes were first made in the sixties; the forerunner was *Loiolako Herri Irratia* ("Loiola People's Radio" station), which set out to move Basque out of the rural ghetto and forge its use as a language for town life too. In the North, the first Basque programmes were broadcast on Bayonne's *FR-3 Pays Basque* station in 1963.

In 1976 the Donostia and Loiola *Herri Irratia* stations jointly organised an event to raise support for an all-Basque radio station, called *24 Orduak Euskaraz* ("24 Hours in Basque").

Then in the eighties came the stations *Gure Irratia* ("Our Radio") in Bayonne, *Euskadi Irratia* (part of the public network EITB), *Irulegi Irratia* and *Zuberoko Botza* (local stations in the North). Thus began the era of all-Basque radio. Today, besides *Euskadi Irratia*, EITB also runs a second all-Basque station targeting a younger audience, and a bilingual music-only station.

The Basque Government (i.e. the government of the Basque Autonomous Community) created the Basque public broadcasting company EITB (*Euskal Irrati Telebista*, "Basque Radio and Television") in 1981. Regular television programmes (in Basque) began in 1983. Its television service (ETB, *Euskal Telebista*, "Basque Television") now comprises ETB1 and ETB3, all in Basque (the latter for young audiences), ETB2, all in Spanish, ETBSat for Europe (a bilingual service), and Canal Vasco for America.

Additionally, a considerable number of local Basque-language magazines and radio and TV stations have grown up around the Basque Country since the eighties, as initiatives of local Basque associations and today under the aegis of the umbrella organisation *Topagunea* (literally "meeting place"). At present they consist of thirty-three local magazines with a joint circulation of about 260,000 readers, not to mention six radio stations and seven television channels.

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- **The first daily Basque-language newspaper**

One of the most important things that were done in the twentieth century to further Basque language recovery was the founding of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* ("the Basques' daily") an all-Basque-language, Basque-Country-wide daily newspaper. Inaugurated in 1990 as an initiative of journalists from the weekly magazine *Argia*, the "*Egunkaria*" became a common reference point for the entire Basque language community. Then, on the 20th of February, 2003, the Spanish Supreme Court ordered its closure and the arrest of some members of its staff. This was received by Basque language supporters everywhere as a direct attack against themselves, and resulted the most massive demonstrations and acts of protest ever seen. A gigantic wave of popular reaction set in, and almost immediately, town by town and nationally across the whole Basque Country, a drive for a new Basque-language newspaper was set into motion. Following the same strategy as when *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* had been established, support groups sprang up to organise public events, sell shares and recruit subscribers. In the meantime, journalists carried on informing the public, in Basque, through a daily printed bulletin called *Egunero* ("every day"). After one year, the first issue of a new Basque-language national newspaper hit the streets; its name was *Berria* (which, ambiguously, may be translated as "the new one", or may refer to "news"). Thus grassroots initiative once again was responsible for the setting in motion of a new Basque-language newspaper.

Two years after the closure of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, the Basque Communications Group (EKT) was founded, its aim being to create and support Basque-language news media. The principal projects covered by EKT at this time are the *Berria* newspaper, the [www.berria.info](http://www.berria.info) web portal and a network of local newspapers called *Hitza* ("word").

- **Basques supporting their language**

As the Basque language movement built up, more and more people gained an awareness of the language issue. One of the landmarks in this growing trend was Euskaltzaindia's 1978 *Bai Euskarari* ("Yes To Basque") campaign culminating in an event held in Bilbaos San Mamés football stadium that drew 40,000 people. Twenty years later, the pro-Basque umbrella organisation Kontseilua was to organise another campaign with the same slogan that was attended by 120,000 supporters of the Basque language who filled five football stadiums across the length and breadth of the Basque Country.

Other mammoth demonstrations of Basques' firm support for their language are organised on a yearly basis by the ikastola schools. The first of these was held in 1977 as a fund-raising event for the ikastolak of Gipuzkoa province called *Kilometroak*. This was followed by a similar annual event in the province of Bizkaia (*Ibilaldia*) starting in 1978; another in Araba (*Araba Euskaraz*) as of 1980, yet another in Nafarroa (*Nafarroa Oinez*) as of 1981,

and starting in 1984 there has been yet another great annual festival in support of the ikastolak of the northern Basque Country, named *Herri Urrats*. Since a couple of decades Basque Public School is also celebrating a similar celebration each year.

AEK (the nation-wide adult Basque language and literacy organisation, see above) has held its own biennial macro-event since 1980, called *Korrika*, a 24-hour-a-day ten-day relay race in which participants from every city, town and village along the way complete a grand circuit taking the message all around the country, with local people lining the roads to cheer the runners along or accompany them for a few miles or yards wherever they pass, night and day. Individuals, clubs, businesses, private organisations and public institutions vie to sponsor the kilometres of their choice, providing the coordinating body with a means of raising funds to help finance the year-round work of the member language schools.

## • Basque associations

The first local Basque associations or clubs were started around the same time. They aimed to promote Basque language normalisation, whereby Basque was to become the main language used locally in different places and contexts. The flagship of this movement was AED (*Arrasate Euskaldun Dezagun*, "Let Us Make Arrasate Basque-Speaking"), founded for the purpose of bringing people together in the Gipuzkoan provincial town of Arrasate (or Mondragón) to work in support of the Basque language, raise local awareness and motivation, create spaces of Basque language use, and pressure for measures to support language revitalisation. Another of AEDs aims was to influence public policies, and the organisation asked the town council to take two measures in particular: to set up a Basque language committee in the town council, and to create a Basque language office as a council service.

In another of its activities, AED has got 92 local business concerns and entities to sign up with it and become members of the



*The singer Mikel Laboa (1934–2008) running in the sixth edition of "Korrika", in 1989.*

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federation of Basque associations, called Topagunea (mentioned earlier), which provides support and organises a number of services for such Basque associations, such as the design and development of local Basque revitalisation projects, bringing Basque speakers together, programmes to encourage learners of Basque to get together and practise the language, local and regional information services via the media, providing Basque-language leisure activities for children and young adults, organising Basque-language cultural events, and a system of voluntary agreements with local organisations and entities on the promotion of Basque language use. Topagunea was started in 1996 and has since taken on responsibility for a number of functions including the supervision of local Basque-language media, implementation of the Basque language in public bodies, cultural activities, and special activities targeting children, adolescents and adult Basque language learners.

Following the success in Arrasate of AED, it served as a model for other local associations most of which were created in the nineties, during which period the Arrasate group set up a seminar called *Adorez ta Atseginez* ("Passion and Pleasure") teaching the theory of Jose María Sanchez Carrión *Txepetx*<sup>22</sup>, which was attended by many language activists including the founders and promoters of the local

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22 Jose María Sanchez Carrión. *Un futuro para nuestro pasado: claves de la recuperación del Euskara y teoría social de las lenguas*. Second edition, 1991.

## Another significant innovative attempt to put Txepetx's theory into practice was the Kafe Antzokia ("Café Theatre").

Basque organisations that came into being during this period, such as the Ttakun (in Lasarte-Oria), Bagera (in Donostia), Galtzandi (in Tolosa), etc.

Another significant innovative attempt to put Txepetx's theory into practice was the Kafe Antzokia ("Café Theatre"). The first such undertaking opened its doors in Bilbao in 1995 as an initiative of the local Basque association, the Zenbat Gara. This was a meeting place where the thousands of Basque speakers living in this chiefly Spanish-speaking city could go to hear and speak Basque, whether they were native Basque speakers, non-native speakers or language learners, all coming together as one language community. Sharing the premises of the Kafe Antzokia, Zenbat Gara brings together the Bilbo Hiria Basque-language radio station, the Gabriel Aresti adult Basque language school and the Gara publishing company. In 2002, the association participated in the opening of another Kafe Antzokia in Ondarru (Bizkaia province). The Plateruena Kafe Antzokia was created in Durango (Bizkaia) along similar lines, as an initiative of the local Berbaro Basque association, in 2006. Meanwhile, Doka Kafe Antzokia in Donostia-San Sebastian opened its doors in 2007.



## ● Euskal Herrian Euskaraz

Euskal Herrian Euskaraz (or EHE) was started in 1979 as an association to promote the use of Basque throughout the country: the name translates as "in the Basque Country, in Basque". It is a pressure group with the aim of building a Basque nation that lives its life entirely in Basque although having multilingual citizens. The organisation argues that bilingualism is a transitory, unstable state.

## ● The Council of Basque Language Organisations

As we have seen, a great many associations and organisations dedicated to supporting and normalising the Basque language arose and flourished from the nineteen-eighties onwards, all of which have made important contributions to this cause in their special areas and benefitted the overall situation of the language.

The initial thrust of each of those efforts has naturally tended to slacken off over time. In the first years of vigorous activity, the general pattern was for each such group or organisation to work independently although they shared the common goal of supporting the Basque language. Due to concern over the future of the movement given such dispersion, a conference was held to bring together people working in all areas of the Basque language to consider and debate this question. The representatives of the Basque language movement who were gathered

at this conference, named *Euskararen Unibertsoa* ("the universe of the Basque language"), having evaluated their own efforts, resolved to create the Council of Basque Language Social Organisations, usually known simply as *Kontseilua* ("the Council"), as an umbrella organisation to provide a source of more solid support for the language.

*Kontseilua's* first challenge was to obtain the support of the political parties for the initiative and to forge the so-called *Bai Euskarari* ("yes to the Basque language") Agreement, co-signed by *Kontseilua* itself and the major social actors in Basque society. Subsequently, *Kontseilua* has created the *Bai Euskarari* certification programme, to drum up support for the Basque language in the business sector; the Observatory of Linguistic Rights; and various other programmes besides. The chief goal of *Kontseilua* is to help further the language normalisation process through two main lines of action: by encouraging cooperation between the various organisations working in support of the Basque language the better to channel their forces, and to encourage the involvement of social leaders, economic forces and the political parties in language normalisation projects.

## ● Official institutions

One of the most important official moves made in the Basque Autonomous Community was the Basic Law Regulating the Use of the Basque Language, passed by the Basque Government in October, 1982, which paved the way for the development

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of governmental language policy initiatives and promised official support for the knowledge and use of the Basque language in key social areas.

Following the passage of this legislation, Basque officially began to be brought into the university, schools and public administration. Thus in 1983 the Basque Public Administration Institute (IVAP) was created to implement and regulate the use of Basque in the administration and to establish recommended linguistic usage in administrative contexts.

In local government, as a response to the suggestion of local Basque associations such as AED, town councils established Basque language committees or departments and hired officers specialised in providing professional linguistic guidance where needed. Such departments have now taken on some of the functions previously performed by the Basque associations of each locality.

In 1991 they created UEMA –the association of Basque towns. The creation of this institution was very important to all those who wanted to guarantee and promote the use of the Basque language in those villages and towns where it was spoken. The main aim of UEMA is not only to spread the use of the Basque language all over the different social situations, but also to draw the boundaries of Basque speaking grounds. They truly believe that the drawing of this map of Basque-speaking grounds will only be possible if Basque is spoken and used as main and national

language in those Basque-speaking towns. According to this institution, as the use of the Basque language in this area is common in the family, with friends, at school, with the administration, with social services and at work. the recovery of the language will be easier than in those towns where Spanish is the main language.

## ● Working context

The first steps towards promoting the use of the Basque language at work were given in the eighties, being Arrasate one of the first towns in taking this road. It was there where the first structure of Euskalan was created. We must find its origin inside AED. Almost 100 companies signed in favour of the use of the Basque language. Next year this group launched a major campaign under the motto: if you know Basque, use it.

In 1991 Elhuyar started to offer a consulting service. Their main aim is to offer help when trying to incorporate Basque in working life. Nowadays they are hired to work in many companies and institutions. They are in charge of making Basque present in normal working life.

In 1997 Emun came to life with the same aim. They offer services to all those who want to create a Basque working environment. In general, what Emun and Elhuyar offer is language consulting and translation services. They always offer programmes who have been carefully designed in situ.



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## The results of Basque language activism

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The generation of Basques who took the first steps towards Basque language recovery and normalisation made it possible for subsequent generations to become AB-type full Basque speakers who acquired the language via spontaneous transmission and have also had an opportunity and the necessary resources to achieve full Basque-language literacy.

The generation born forty years ago encountered an ample range of new language domains, including Basque-language media, Basque-language education, a plethora of forms of cultural production in Basque such as literature, theatre and music, and numerous opportunities to hear, speak, read and write Basque in diverse media. They had opportunities to acquire knowledge through the medium of the Basque language. They also had access to a wealth of information about Basque of a professional quality such as had never hitherto been seen by any generation of Basque speakers.

That generation drank in the springs of enthusiasm, commitment, interest and awareness about working for the Basque language that they inherited directly from their predecessors who had taken the first steps in modern times towards the full

cultivation of this language. They also inherited their predecessors' creative, constructive knack for turning obstacles into opportunities.

The feeling and sense of just how much this grand effort to gain a new lease on life for the Basque language has begun to evaporate and is no longer apparent to the young generation. Today's children have no notion of what an enormous change it has been. They only perceive its outcome; they fail to comprehend its importance and significance.

The "language recovery generation" concentrated on transmitting knowledge of the language and expanding the language's functions on the assumption that these factors would have a direct impact on language use, but it is now evident that language use has not advanced at the same rate as knowledge of the language. That is the cloud that still looms over the landscape of Basque recovery and normalisation, pointing to a major remaining challenge.

Whatever the faults of the Basque recovery process that may be revealed by hindsight, a generation of Basque speakers did their best to give their language a future and the fruits borne of their hard work are apparent in today's world of the Basque language.



# SUMMARY: THE MAIN LESSONS

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## Some keys in the recovery of the basque language

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- The language is the nucleus

The Basque experience confirms a basic intuition: that the language is the heart of a people, the central vehicle of a cul-

ture. Language is not the only element of a culture but it is its vehicle and its material, the central axis where one's way of being in life is articulated. Language is the outcome of centuries and millennia of intellectual, sentimental and practical creation of the life of a people, and its cultural continuity is founded on it. Whatever elements make up a people's world view, its relationship with the earth, its economy, its rites, creations and other cultural elements are centred around the language it speaks.

When a language dies, the axis of continuity of a people vanishes. Some philosophical, folk or cultural elements may

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survive in isolation or linked together, but what remains is not the people as such but merely a part of another people that conserves certain assimilated features.

## • The importance of feelings

Collective feelings play an important part in the recovery of a language and identity. It is collective feelings that lead to political and cultural strategies for developing identity. In the Basque experience there were historical occasions when a qualitative leap occurred in the community's feelings, in response to certain key individuals who stimulated them. Such leaps form a basis for political and cultural action.

Pride in one's existence, the pride of a "first people", is a key feeling in the Basque language recovery process. Peoples that have been converted into minorities and forced into submission need historical occasions, leaders or events that arouse their pride to make up for all the accumulated feelings of inadequacy and overcome all the difficulties to be faced when attempting to maintain their original identity.

The generations of Basques who carried out Basque language revitalisation displayed such pride in their Basqueness. Being Basque gave us a feeling of being something important, something grand, something worth being committed to. This vigorous self-assertiveness might seem a bit over the top, but is necessary at certain points in history in order to overcome an existing

inertia that impedes us from living in our own language. To throw off the yoke of contempt imposed on one requires forcefulness. Communities subjected to domination need to activate positive feelings, to feel pride (even, indeed, to feel at times that they are something special in comparison with the dominant culture to which they have been subjected), and to dream.

Artists, writers and musicians can exert influence in this domain of feelings. Poetry, novels, songs, festivals, pictures, theatre and dance can all rouse pride, activate dreams and provoke emotions that subsequently affect the community's ability to act to revitalise its identity.

## • Traditional is modern

Basque language culture has managed to combine its ancient, traditional character with its ambitions of modernity and innovation. A sense of modernity and even a certain avant-gardism in culture have arisen, paradoxically, out of the community's awareness of its ancient, profound roots. The generations who have revitalised Basque over the last few decades have felt Basque language culture to be something very old and very modern at the same time. Poets, artists, musicians and other members of the Basque cultural movement have taken the approach of combining their roots with the creative possibilities available today, contributing to the feeling that our identity, our culture, is for the present and the future.

- The decisive role of grassroots initiatives

The chief agent of Basque linguistic and cultural recovery has been social or civil initiative. Organisations that were born directly out of Basque society are the ones that have played the leading roles in this revitalisation process.

The fundamental components of the Basque language recovery process came into themselves during the period of Franco's dictatorship when the Basque people had no public or political power at all. That was when the basic tenets of revitalisation were established, namely: 1) the emergence of widespread feelings of pride and constructive aspirations, 2) written standardisation, 3) the founding of schools in which the primary language was the original native language, 4) the trend towards cultural creation in the Basque language, and 5) the invention of a range of further linguistic or cultural initiatives.

Later, when a new autonomous government with local power established its own public institutions, these began to play a significant role in some ambits of linguistic and cultural revitalisation. Yet the grassroots forces remained necessary in this process, and still are the central points of reference for the vision and strategy of the movement. These two sectors, the grassroots initiatives and the public bodies, absolutely need to cooperate in the revitalisation pro-



**A sense of modernity and even a certain avant-gardism in culture have arisen, paradoxically, out of the community's awareness of its ancient, profound roots.**

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cess. At times, their lack of coordination and mutual acknowledgment has led to unnecessarily wasted energy.

## ● Putting unity first

The recovery of an endangered minority language requires that all those who are engaged in pursuing this objective join forces. In the case of Basque, such unity has been an essential factor in the areas where substantial progress has been made, while in other areas the lack of unity has led to wasted time, energy and effort.

### **In bilingual systems it is always the strongest language that comes out on top.**

For example, corpus standardisation (such as achieving a unified spelling) was based on a joint effort and its achievement was a basic prerequisite for everything that followed. The second key factor, Basque language education, was likewise possible owing to a united *ikas-tola* (Basque-medium school) movement. In general, the larger-scale revitalisation projects have benefitted from groupings including contrasting political tendencies even where this is difficult and only partial cooperation could be achieved.

The language community must be over and above political divisions. This requires a conviction of the greater importance of what unites us (the cultural and linguistic

community) than of that which separates us (contrasting political perspectives). Strategies for the recovery of language and culture should constantly create areas where cooperation is possible.

## ● Creating full speakers

The only way for the language to survive today is by creating full speakers of our language. A full speaker is one who can perform all the natural and cultural functions of the language, including both family and community level communication on the one hand, and writing, art, research and so on on the other, all in one's own language.

In the case of Basque, there were hardly any full speakers before the renaissance of the sixties and seventies. Our parents and grandparents were native speakers who used the language at home and in their local area, but not to write, read, perform academic functions and so on. Two options remained to our generation: to be the last Basque-speaking generation (for if we did not become complete speakers the language could die out in a question of decades) or to become the first generation of full speakers. The decision of our parents to create schools where the dominant language is Basque resulted in us becoming full speakers. Today there exist a good number of full speakers who really make up the heart of our language's vitality. Our generation stood at the crossroads between life or death for our language; a choice had to

be made between letting the language die or creating full speakers. The second option is a must, and even so the future health of the language is not a certainty. But there was no viable middle road. Today, for other native languages, there is also no middle road.

Our parents' generation have the merit for having made the decision they did. They dared to imagine their sons and daughters as full Basque speakers. They, as native Basque speakers, realised that we would have to be fuller speakers than they themselves.

No language is destined to be a second-class language. Any language that does not produce full speakers has no chance of survival in the twenty-first century, when access to information and technology will become more widespread. Native languages that lack standard spelling, a primary role in education and access to the information society and its technology are unlikely to endure longer than a few decades. This century will be the make all or break all for most native languages in the world. The key to survival resides in whether or not full speakers are created.

## • Creating open hegemonic spaces

The model of coexistence between languages is a model of interculturality based on hegemonic spaces for each language, with certain shared spaces.

Bilingualism is often a trap for native languages. Bilingual schools or bilingual media are usually systems that tend to strengthen the bigger language and weaken the native language. In bilingual systems it is always the strongest language that comes out on top, there is no such thing as equal treatment, and so it has been throughout history. The Basque experience also shows that the only strategies to have worked in favour of language recovery have been hegemonic spaces for the native language.

The only way a language can live is by having its own hegemonic spaces. Bilingual schools, publications, television and so on are not useful for recovering a native language. Why? Because in reality they are hegemonic spaces for the bigger language; real bilingualism doesn't exist. Bilingualism is nearly always false. In each school or television station or periodical or organisation or family, there is one primary language; other languages are used in a subordinate role. The question is: which is the primary (or hegemonic) language that we wish to occupy each space?

Normally a native language is unable to occupy all these spaces. If it can only occupy a few of them, one must begin with those few. The important thing is that it should have *some* spaces (it is preferable to have a few hegemonic spaces than a lot of subordinate roles in bilingual spaces), and to gradually open up new spaces. That is the only real way for multilingualism or interculturality. Otherwise,

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so-called interculturality is nothing more than a fancy disguise for domination by the imposed language.

In the case of Basque, only schools or spaces with native language hegemony have been good for language recovery. These spaces may at the same time be open spaces where there is a place for other languages and for the study of these (such as Spanish).

## ● Quantity and quality

- In the history of Basque revitalisation strategies there have been both good judgments and some mistakes or areas where improvement is possible. Among the latter we might include a tendency to overemphasise the target of having a large number of speakers or to stress quantity generally (how many books? how many publications? how many products? etc.) at the expense of quality. This has led to problems: for example, many children and adults who have studied Basque have failed to learn to express themselves well enough to use it communicatively to full potential. They have failed to achieve the minimum quality required.
- More recently there has been a rising awareness of the importance of language quality. Language may be the axis of cultural identity indeed, but it is also a complex and productive medium of communication. It is necessary to cultivate and develop a language's commu-

nicative aspects, its creative dimensions, its recreational and philosophical aspects. A language is there to be enjoyed and used as a means to communicate, engage in artistic creation, and acquire wisdom and knowledge.

- It is important to develop one's language continually and to transmit it in all its splendour. That is why a language has a unique added value. Each language comes equipped with its own special range of poetic, philosophical, regional or domestic resonances. All that wealth and versatility of communication and expression must be transmitted, recreated and further developed.

## ● The chief tools of language recovery

There are four major tools involved in a language recovery process. There are also many other strategies and actions to be taken, but these four are the most basic and important in Basque language recovery. They may be equally basic for native languages if they are to survive the present century:

- **Corpus planning:** standardisation and development of a language's corpus, i.e. the unification and standardisation of the writing system or systems, development of new terminology and generally all strategies for preparing the language for its present and future functions. This is a basic step, necessary



in order to be able to carry out education in the native language and other fundamental actions.

- **Education:** create education systems primarily in the native language, providing an education that aims to bring up full speakers of the native language (bilingual education that relegates the native language to a secondary status is no use), starting at the elementary school level and continuing all the way to university. This is the most important and most basic influence for the future life of a native language and its culture.
- **Press and media:** create native-language systems of television, radio, press and internet communication. Here again, on the whole, bilingual approaches are ineffective and open hegemonic spaces are what is needed. At the present stage of technology in which we are immersed, it is vital that a language perform functions in press and/or the media if it is to survive.
- **Cultural creation:** creativity in music, literature, the arts, audiovisual productions and all other forms of cultural expression based in the native language must be cultivated. Through such creation a native language and culture continue to reproduce their unique added value, thereby strengthening the will of the language community to live on as a native people, maintaining its self-esteem, keeping its past and future dreams alive. Cultural creation is the symbolic fuel of a community which

writes, sings, symbolises and celebrates all that a community is, aspires to and dreams of. In the case of Basque, literature, verse improvisation and song played important roles reinforcing the cultural revitalisation effort, without which it is hard for a native language community in a minority situation to summon the strength and motivation needed to revitalise its identity.

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## Messages from our experience with the language

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Based on the experience of the Basque language recovery process and an analysis of the actual situation of native languages worldwide, we would like to send out the following three messages to indigenous organisations and institutions of all continents:

- **A message of warning:** native languages are now in grave danger, and this loss of transmission may be irreversible according to the experience and understanding of the history of many now-extinct languages. The situation is very serious, and perhaps the worst part is the lack of awareness of its seriousness on the part of so-called "indigenous" organisations led astray by other types of discourse about iden-

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**Languages are the chief carriers of cultures; the heart of a culture is its language. When a language is lost, so is a people because the kernel of its identity is gone.**

tity. There must be a new awareness of how serious this situation is.

- **A message of hope:** it is possible to revitalise native languages. The experience of Basque and other languages has shown that effective strategies exist for recovering part of the life of a language. It is always a long and arduous struggle involving numerous complicated factors, but if a people has a will to live its revitalisation is possible.
- **A message of responsibility:** it is the responsibility of each language community to undertake the recovery of its own language and culture. The people and its organisations are responsible for this. Demanding rights and talking about identity is not enough. Only native peoples that commit to creating structures and strategies to revitalise their languages and cultures have any chance of surviving in this century of global technology.

Behind these three messages there lies a single basic principle that needs to be

comprehended. Languages are the chief carriers of cultures; the heart of a culture is its language. When a language is lost, so is a people because the kernel of its identity is gone. What remains afterwards will be mere fragments: some ideas, some remnants of a world view, certain customs, bits of folklore... All very curious for the anthropologists, very exotic for the tourists, very fascinating to produce books about, and possibly even very useful as a pretext for "indigenous leaders" to lay claim to funds and get projects assigned to them. But the culture will have vanished because it was the language that kept the culture alive, held the culture together, gave the culture its form of expression, and digested the culture within itself.

Language is what makes us what we are. To fight for one's language is to fight for oneself; it is to fight to continue being what one is, culturally, in essence. To defend the life of one language is to love all of the world's languages. It is to work for the equality of all the peoples on this planet and seek relations based on this fundamental respect. It is to put into practice, starting with oneself, the basic intuition of native peoples that we must protect human diversity through open identity.



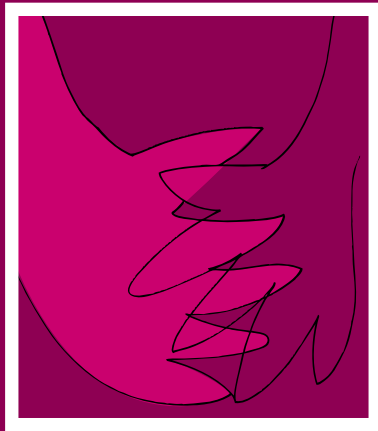
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