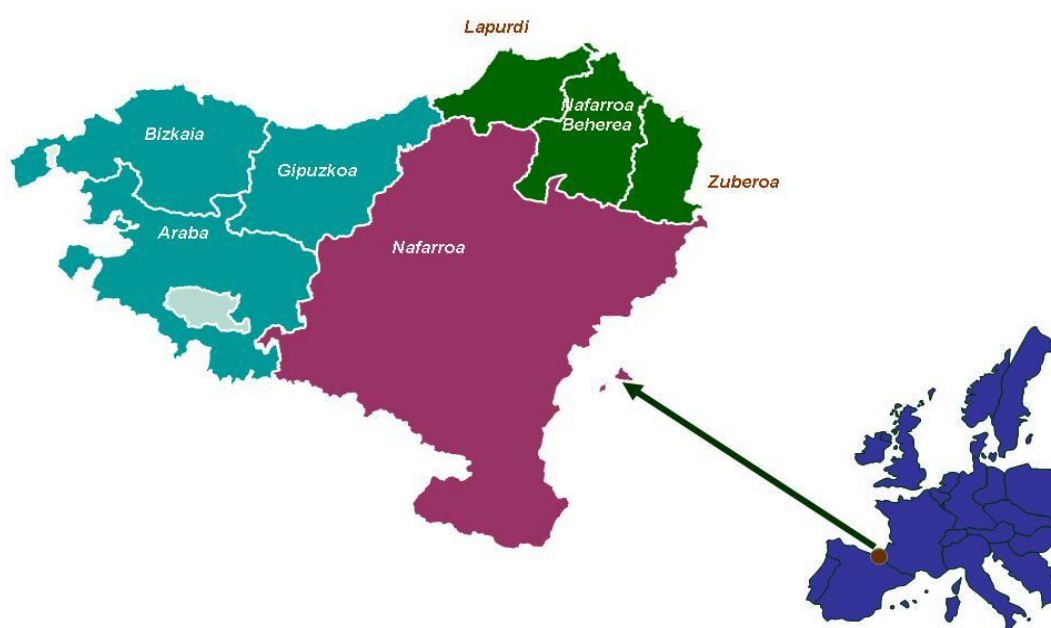


Evaluation of language policy in the Basque Country

According to Berthoud and Lüdi (2013, p. 479), the term “language policy” includes “any form of intervention (. . .) by a political authority to direct and regulate the use, by the administration and/or the population, of one or more languages in a given political area”. Although the notions of “language policy” and “language planning” are often used interchangeably, “language planning” is concerned with the “general linguistic, political and social goals” underlying the conscious efforts to effect change upon the linguistic behavior of a speech community, rather than these efforts *per se* (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert & Leap, 2009, p. 371).

Figure 1

Map of Basque-speaking Territories



Note. This map shows the Basque-speaking territories. The Basque Autonomous Community or BAC appears in blue, Navarre in purple and the French Basque Country in green (Department of Culture and Language Policy, 2020a).

Language policy can be based on different linguistic ideologies depending on the political and social aims of the formal and non-formal institutions that implement it, as the evolution of Basque in the last eighty years exemplifies. During Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975), the prevalent ideology behind language policy in the Basque Country was linguistic assimilation (Cobarrubias, 1983). Franco’s far-right regime enforced the use of Spanish, the dominant language, in all spheres of public life, denying the Basque-speaking minority equal linguistic rights. One of the contributing factors to Franco’s language policy was the strong resistance put up by Basques in the face of the dictator’s coup against the Second Republic (Fishman, 1991). After Franco’s death and Spain’s transition to democracy, the new Constitution (1978) granted autonomy to the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), made up of the provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, and to the adjacent province of Navarre (Figure 1). One year

later, the Statute of Autonomy of the BAC was approved. In 1982, the historic rights of Navarre were also restored after the approval of the *Ley Orgánica de Reintegración y Amejoramiento del Régimen Foral de Navarra* or LORAFNA (“Organic law on the Reintegration and Enhancement of the Foral Regime of Navarre”), which granted the province full fiscal autonomy. As a result of these legislative changes, a big part of the decision-making was devolved from the central government to the two regional governments. The latter have led language policy efforts in the last decades, aiming to reverse the power imbalances between Spanish and Basque and to guarantee the survival and ethnolinguistic vitality of the Basque language.

As of today, Basque is the native language of around a quarter of the population of the BAC (Eustat, 2018) and 9% of the population of Navarre (Nastat, 2020). We also find three Basque-speaking districts located in France, in the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques: Lower Navarre, Lapurdi and Zuberoa. However, here I will deal with Basque language policies in the BAC and Navarre, excluding the French Basque Country from my consideration.

Corpus policies

Corpus policies are concerned with the internal structure of a language and include activities such as “coining new terms, reforming spelling, and adopting a new script” (Cooper, 1989, p. 31). A central issue in the corpus policies regarding Basque has always been language standardization, or rather, the lack thereof. As far back as the 19th century, traditional dialectologists identified a total of eight different dialects of the Basque language with considerable variation on a lexical level (Mahlau, 1991). Despite this dialectal fragmentation, efforts to achieve the standardization of Basque were scarce for a range of reasons. For many centuries, Basque had to compete with romance languages like Spanish and French, which had higher prestige in Basque-speaking territories. As a result, the use of Basque was confined to rural populations and oral communication. Moreover, Basque literary tradition was also oral and consisted of musical renditions of spoken verses, which also excluded the need for a written code (Fishman, 1991). After several failed attempts at language standardization, including the congresses of Hendaia in 1901 and Hondarribia in 1902 (Mahlau, 1991), two meetings were organized in Bayonne (1964) and Aranzazu (1968) by the *Euskaltzaindia* (“Royal Academy of the Basque Language”). In these meetings, a series of orthographic and morphological conventions were put forward, giving birth to Unified Basque or *euskara batua*, which was originally conceived as a standardised written form of Basque (Mahlau, 1991; Nuñez Astrain, 2003). *Euskara batua* is a composite of the main dialects of Basque and includes linguistic features from the Gipuzkoan, Navarrese and Lapurdian dialects. The standardization of Basque is therefore often cited as an example of a polycentric selection of a standard language variety (Mesthrie et. al., 2009). Despite the initial reluctance from Basque speakers to adopt *euskara batua*, this unified form has become the variety of choice in official, scientific and academic publications, as well as newspapers, television channels and school materials (Mahlau, 1991).

Since the advent of democracy in Spain, the *Euskaltzaindia* is the main organization that has led, thanks to the financial support from the governments of the BAC and Navarre, corpus policy efforts. Some of these efforts culminated in the publication of the *General Dictionary of Basque* in the year 2005. This dictionary consists of a total of 14 volumes containing 14000 pages and is based on a computerized corpus of written literary works from the 19th and 20th

centuries. *Euskaltzaindiaren Hiztegia*, a second dictionary containing 20,000 more entries than the *General Dictionary of Basque*, was published in 2012 (Sagarna, 2012). Building on the standardization rules of the 1969 Aranzazu Congress, one of *Euskaltzaindia*'s aims was to set a series of lexicological criteria by which borrowings from other languages could be incorporated into Basque, and to establish the rules of word-formation of the Basque language. In order to do this, a panel of 23 academics was created in 1986. With the collaboration of the non-governmental organization *Unibertsitate Zerbitzuetarako Euskal Ikastetxea* (UZEI), a large number of written texts in Basque were digitised with the purpose of elaborating a corpus representative of the different dialects of the Basque language. This corpus was then revised on a regular basis by the panel of academics, who decided on a standard form for each of the lexical items contained in the corpus. These orthographic rules were later condensed in the *Unified Dictionary* published in the year 2000 (Sagarna, 2012).

As a non-governmental corpus planning agency, UZEI has also contributed to corpus policy by creating a terminology database called EUSKALTERM and by publishing more than 30 books on subjects like biology and computer sciences (Azkarate, 1999). These projects have sought to combat the commonly held notion that Basque "lacks much of the up-to-date terminology related to all branches and manifestations of modern secular life" (Fishman 1991, p. 159). Despite the work of both governmental and non-governmental organizations, *euskara batua* is still considered to be a "young standard language" (Mesthrie et. al., 2009, p. 372), with a strong presence in primary and secondary education but deemed inappropriate for science and technology at a tertiary or research level.

Status policies

Kloss (1969, as cited in Cooper, 1989, p. 66) defined the object "status planning" as being "the recognition by a national government of the importance or position of one language in relation to others". However, status planning and policy have also come to refer to the different functions allocated to different languages in a given society.

The functions allocated to Basque vary considerably across the different Basque-speaking territories. Having a look at the administrative bodies of Basque-speaking territories, we come across key differences. In 1978, the Spanish Constitution declared Spanish the nationwide official language, granting citizens the right to use the Spanish language in all administrative and institutional domains. Nevertheless, the wording of the Spanish Constitution left the door open for institutions on a regional level to decide the status of their respective indigenous languages. In the BAC, Basque attained official status in all three provinces with the Statute of Autonomy in 1979. In contrast, it was article 9 of the LORAFNA that granted official status to the Basque language in Navarre, but only in Basque-speaking areas of the province. These Basque-speaking areas were later defined in the Foral Law of Basque in 1986. Navarre was divided into three areas: a Basque-speaking area, in the north of the region; a "mixed" area that included the capital of the region, Pamplona, and its commuter belt; and an exclusively Spanish-speaking area in the south of Navarre (Irujo & Urrutia, 2008). The joint official status of Spanish and Basque was therefore restricted to the Basque-speaking area, whereas in the "mixed" area only the right to address public institutions in Basque was guaranteed.

The regional authorities in the BAC and Navarre have tried to allocate new functions to the Basque language beyond the administration, functions that were fulfilled by Spanish in the

past. This process has been called “normalization” (Fishman 1991, p. 152). One of the domains where governmental and non-governmental agencies have aimed to promote the use of the Basque language is the media. Since the public media corporation EITB was founded in 1982, the government of the BAC operates a television channel (ETB1) and a radio station (*Euskadi Irratia*) that broadcast entirely in Basque. The presence of Basque in the private media has since grown and nowadays, we find numerous Basque-language channels and stations on a local level, especially in the province of Gipuzkoa. In Navarre, efforts to promote the use of Basque in the media have had moderate success. The private Spanish-language *Navarra Television* offers some programs in Basque and from 2015 to 2016, a Basque-language television channel was operated by *Nafar Telebista*. The corporation ceased broadcasting citing lack of financial support from the Government of Navarre (Nafar Telebista, 2016). Conversely, the private radio station Euskalerrria Irratia, founded back in 1988, obtained a broadcast licence in 2016 and still offers content exclusively in Basque. Regarding written publications, the main Spanish-language daily newspapers have received funding from the governments of the BAC and Navarre to devote several pages to news items in Basque (Fishman, 1991). There are also smaller publications that are either bilingual or feature items only in the Basque language.

Cultural production in Basque has also received support from the regional institutions of Basque-speaking territories. For example, the BAC subsidizes the publication of books in Basque (Fishman, 1991). Oral traditions like *bertsolaritza*, or improvised oral poetry, have not only continued to take place, but they have also grown and spread from rural areas to bigger cities. Some Basque-speaking schools are even teaching *bertsolaritza* as part of their curriculum (Fernández Ulloa, 2006). *Pastorales*, or traditional Basque theater, has also been reinvented and is still preserved in rural areas (Fernández Ulloa, 2006; Fishman, 1991). Education is also a domain where the Basque language has also made considerable progress in the last decades, especially in primary and secondary schools in the BAC. I will cover this in depth in the next section.

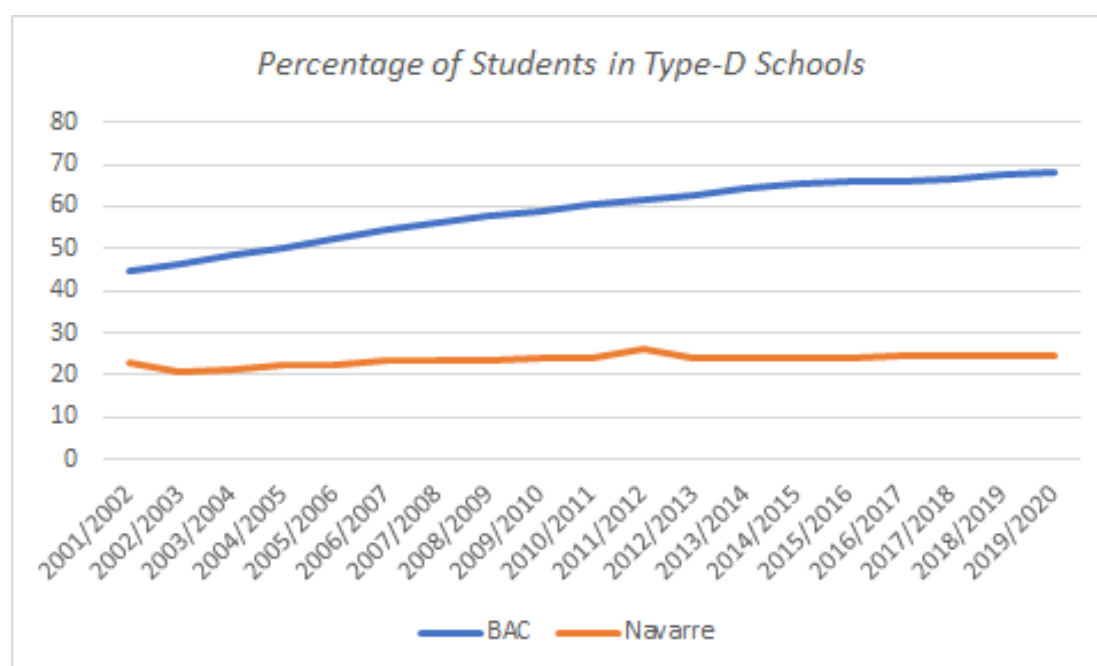
Acquisition policies

Acquisition planning and policy comprise the “efforts to spread and promote the learning of a language” (Mesthrie et.al., 2009, p. 374). The aim of acquisition policies is to increase the number of users of a language, rather than the number of domains where a language is used (Cooper, 1989). In the Basque-speaking territories, we can differentiate between two types of efforts regarding the acquisition of Basque: on the one hand, Basque language classes are offered to adults all over the BAC and Navarre. These are targeted at those generations raised during the Francoist dictatorship or the years following the arrival of democracy. The recipients of these classes have only used Basque orally or possess no command of Basque whatsoever. On the other hand, primary and secondary education have been the main vehicles by which the competence in Basque of the new generations has improved.

As for the teaching of the Basque language to adults, both public and private institutions have played their part. The non-governmental organization AEK offers Basque courses in over 100 schools in all Basque-speaking provinces. These schools are called *euskaltegis* and are often funded by the governments of the BAC and Navarre. We also find public teaching centers funded by local authorities (Department of Culture and Language Policy, 2020b). Finally, the

Official School of Languages, funded by the central Spanish government, offers Basque tuition to adults from the age of sixteen in venues across the BAC and Navarre.

Figure 2



Note. This graph represents the percentage of students in primary and secondary education enrolled in type D (Basque only) programs in the 2001-2020 period. BAC students appear in blue and Navarrese students in orange (Department of Culture and Language Policy, 2020c).

The introduction of Basque in education has been a more costly endeavor. During Franco's dictatorship, Basque-language schools or *ikastolas* were only operated on a clandestine basis. In the public educational system, the outlook for Basque was equally bleak. At the end of Franco's regime, it was estimated that 95% of teachers in the public sector had no command of Basque (Fishman, 1991). In order to reverse this situation, the government of the BAC has invested a large amount of resources, offering subsidized part-time Basque tuition after work hours, as well as language courses during the summer. Some teachers are even allowed to take up to three years off from their teaching duties to learn Basque on a full-time basis (Fernández Ulloa, 2006). New prospective teachers, in contrast, are required to pass a demanding Basque language examination, *EGA*, before they apply for teaching positions in the BAC. The growing demand for primary and secondary education in Basque is one of the reasons why these many resources are devoted to the acquisition of this language. In the BAC, four linguistic models are offered to students in primary and secondary education: type X schools have Spanish as their sole medium of instruction, type A schools also have Spanish as the exclusive medium of instruction, except for a subject in Basque language and literature; in type B schools, instruction in Basque and Spanish is distributed evenly across the different subjects; in type D schools, the exclusive medium of instruction is Basque, except for a subject in Spanish language and literature. The same linguistic models are offered in the region of Navarre, with the exception that type X schools have been renamed as type G schools in

legislation. In the BAC, type D programs have increasingly grown since their introduction in the BAC's educational system. In the 2001-2020 period, the percentage of BAC students enrolled in type D programs increased from 44% to 68% (Figure 2). In the same period, the percentage of students in type A and type B programs went from 32% to 13% and from 22% to 18% respectively, while the number of students in type X programs has remained negligible (EAS, 2020). The picture in Navarre is quite different. While the percentage of students enrolled in type D schools grew by almost 12% in the 1989-2001 period (Aldasoro Lecea, 2001), it has remained relatively stable in the last 20 years, with type G programs currently preferred by 62 % of Navarrese students in non-tertiary education (EAS, 2020).

Discussion

Although it is clear that Basque has gained a strong presence in the administration, in the media and in education, the data show that the knowledge of Basque has grown at a much faster pace than its actual use (Zalbide, 2016). The efforts to enhance the intergenerational transmission of the language (Fishman, 1991) seem to have had very limited success. Furthermore, Basque has yet to reach some domains of public life in Basque-speaking territories, such as big corporations and universities, where Spanish is by far the predominant language.

I have also found that the BAC and Navarre have very different language policies with respect to Basque. This has hindered the progress of language policy. To name a few of the problems that the citizens of Basque-speaking provinces may encounter, the fact that Basque only holds official status in the north of Navarre means that students from non-Basque areas of the province have very limited access to full-time education in said language. Similarly, Basque-speaking individuals who relocate from the Basque-speaking area of Navarre to the mixed area or the non-Basque area have to switch to Spanish in all domains of public life.

The way that financial resources are spent on the promotion of the Basque language should also be revised. The Basque-speaking public television, for instance, is allocated a big budget despite the low viewer ratings. Emphasis ought to be instead placed on increasing the social prestige of the language. Despite perception having changed in the last decades, Basque is still strongly associated with rural areas and with separatist violence, especially by urban dwellers whose first language is Spanish. It seems, however, that prestige policies have unfortunately been ignored by the governments of the BAC and Navarre. Having made these suggestions, it would be unfair to deny that language policies in the Basque Country have overall achieved moderate success and that Basque is now in a much safer position than Irish, Welsh or Frisian.

(2742 words)

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