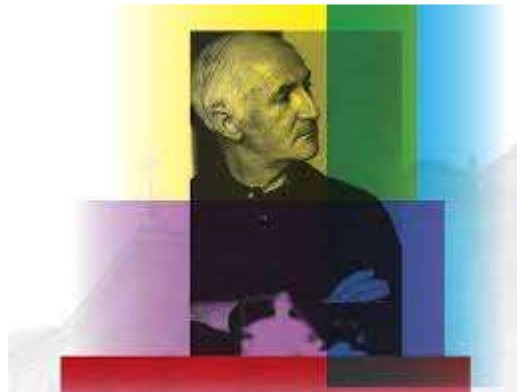


**LINGUISTIC EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
THE BASQUE LANGUAGE AMONG PEOPLE
FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS LIVING IN
ELGOIBAR**

Ekhine Eizagirre Zubiaurre

Saioa Iraola Urkiola



4th

Gotzon Garate

Research Fellowship, 2022.

Publication: Elgoibarko Udala
Text: Ekhine Eizagirre and Saioa Iraola
Translation: Elgoibarko Udaleko Euskara Saila
Layout and images: Limoiura
Printed by: GERTU

**LINGUISTIC EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE BASQUE
LANGUAGE AMONG PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS
LIVING IN ELGOIBAR**

Ekhine Eizagirre Zubiaurre and Saioa Iraola Urkiola

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| METHODOLOGY | 5 |
| ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS | 6 |
| Brief introduction to the interviewees | 6 |
| Living conditions and migration context | 9 |
| Interlocking forms of oppression | 11 |
| In-depth language analysis | 13 |
| Language use | 16 |
| Linguistic experiences | 18 |
| Values attached to languages | 21 |
| Language ideologies | 23 |
| Proposals and challenges | 24 |
| CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE | 25 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 27 |

INTRODUCTION

We completed this research project through the Gotzon Garate fellowship that was awarded in 2022. In this project, which was carried out over eight months, we studied the linguistic experiences, opinions and perceptions of the Basque language among people from diverse backgrounds living in Elgoibar. By following this approach, we wanted to present a more complete picture of the town of Elgoibar, provide a voice for people from diverse backgrounds who have come to live in the municipality and to learn first-hand about their circumstances, needs and experiences. As it is a qualitative study, we conducted in-depth interviews with twelve people with different ages, genders and countries of origin.

The key to gaining a better understanding or better knowledge of their linguistic experiences was to learn about their living conditions, circumstances, the ways in which they are oppressed or advantaged¹ and how they use languages, as these variables are closely related, because they all interlinked. Therefore, we wanted to find out about the interviewee's migratory processes, what they found when they arrived in Elgoibar and what support, relational networks and ways of life they have established in the town.

This document is a summary of all the research work that was carried out. In it we briefly outline the methodology followed to conduct the research, and discuss the most salient ideas gleaned from the analysis. Finally, it is worth noting that the theoretical contributions made over the last few decades by feminist anthropology and decolonial epistemology have underpinned our approach when writing this paper.

As remarked above, active listening and identifying and classifying experiences and perceptions have been central to this research. By understanding and acknowledging them, new opportunities will be created to strengthen the language policies that are developed in our community and the existing projects and resources for the promotion of the Basque language. Finally, we would like to add that these twelve interviews cannot represent all of the linguistic experiences and perceptions of people from diverse backgrounds living in Elgoibar. At the same time, each story has its value, and we want to present them as a contribution to the quantitative and qualitative studies carried out on this topic.

¹ These situations or states are not static or permanent. They may vary according to context.

METHODOLOGY

This project was carried out between May 2022 and January 2023. We followed a qualitative methodology based on conducting in-depth interviews. In total, we interviewed 12 people from diverse backgrounds who live in Elgoibar; some while they were having a coffee, and many of them while strolling around the town. Studying ethnography as we walked around allowed us to learn how these people perceive their environment and carry out their daily activities.

When selecting the interviewees, we took three aspects into account: place of origin, age and gender. We also gathered remarks on the languages they spoke in their places of origin and those they have spoken since they have lived in Elgoibar. Finally, we would like to note that all participants appear in the study with pseudonyms. We have prepared the following table with information about each interviewee:

| BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION | | | | LANGUAGE BIOGRAPHY | |
|--------------------------|-----|-----|--------------------|--|--|
| INTERVIEWEES | SEX | AGE | ORIGIN | ORIGINAL | IN ELGOIBAR IN BASQUE COUNTRY |
| Cian | M | 44 | Ireland | English | Spanish / Basque (a few words) / Gaelic (a few words) |
| Marco | M | 46 | Italy | Italian | Spanish / English / Basque |
| Patxi | M | 28 | Albania | Albanian | Spanish / English |
| Anne | F | 44 | Romania | Romanian | Spanish / English / Italian |
| Ana | F | 38 | Morocco | Arabic / Berber | Spanish / Basque (a few words) |
| Fátima | F | 22 | Morocco | Arabic / Berber | Spanish / Basque (a few words) |
| Sekou | M | 25 | Mali | Bambara / Soninke / Wolof (lower level) | Spanish (lower level) / French (lower level) |
| Angie | F | 32 | Nicaragua | Spanish | Spanish |
| Aroa | F | 46 | Dominican Republic | Spanish | Spanish |
| Lekuona | M | 58 | Argentina | Spanish | Spanish / Basque (a few words) |
| Ling | F | 40 | China | Mandarin / Cantonese Chinese | Spanish |
| Shahid | M | 34 | Pakistan | Urdu / Punjabi | Spanish / Basque (a few words) |

Source: Produced for the study

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Brief introduction to the interviewees

Cian (Ireland)

Cian is forty-four years old and has lived in Elgoibar for many years. He works in the hospitality sector. Twenty-two years ago he met a girl who was on an Erasmus course in Ireland. He came to spend a week in Elgoibar visiting the girl, but he extended his visit and decided to remain and live in Elgoibar. He likes travelling, learning about the town and *networking*.

Marco (Italy)

Marco is Italian, forty-five years old, and has been living in the Basque Country for nine years. He arrived in Elgoibar in 2013 with his family, as his wife is from the town, and they now live in a rural farmhouse. He lives there providing accommodation for tourists. He has a daughter and a son. He loves nature and the mountains and, when he has free time, he heads into the hills. He also likes reading novels. In Elgoibar, he takes part in the “Baso biziak” association.

Patxi (Albania)

Patxi is from Albania, he is twenty-eight and lives in Elgoibar. He told us that he had a lot of hobbies: e.g. music, partying and spending time with friends, travelling and getting to know different cultures and people. He is currently unemployed, but will soon start working. He is a cook, a job he did for five years in Galicia and six months in Zumaia. He is now going to change professions, and will start working with lathes and milling machines.

Anne (Romania)

Anne is forty-four years old and she is Rumanian. She came to Gipuzkoa at the end of October in 2008, following her husband, with the aim of paying off several debts they had in Romania. Firstly, they settled in Beasain, and remained there until July 2009. She currently lives in Elgoibar with her husband and child. She studied hairdressing, but now works for a cleaning company. She takes part in Lila, the women’s association.

Ana (Morocco)

Ana is Moroccan, thirty-eight years old, and has been away from her homeland for twenty years. When he was eighteen, she went to live in Andalusia with her mother, father, sisters and brothers. At the age of 26, in Malaga, she worked without a contract as a live-in domestic worker. She has been living in Elgoibar for nineteen years now. She is the mother of three daughters and sons, and apart from her husband and children, she has no relatives in the town, but she has made many friends on the courses she has attended. She also takes part in the Loreak association.

Fátima (Morocco)

Fátima is 22 years old, Moroccan, and has a two-year-old son. She studied for a high school diploma in physics in Morocco. She also told us that she very much likes physics, chemistry and mathematics. Her husband has lived in Elgoibar since he was young. They got married in Morocco, and she came with her husband to the Basque Country, specifically to Elgoibar. She likes cooking and learning languages. She takes care of her son on a daily basis and participates in the *Zabaltzen* association.²

Sekou (Mali)

He is from Mali and he is twenty-five years old. At the age of twelve, he came to Spain on a dinghy. He travelled on the dinghy for seven days and he told us that the journey was very tough. Thirteen years have passed since he left and he has not been able to return to Mali for a visit. He came to improve his life, but he admitted to us that life here was not easy. When asked about his hobbies, he replied that he liked football, and that in the future he dreamt of making a good living.

Angie (Nicaragua)

Angie is from Nicaragua and she is thirty-two years old. She arrived in Elgoibar nine years ago, driven by economic necessity. She told us that in Nicaragua they were very poor. She has two children, aged nine and three. When she first arrived, as she was pregnant, she did not get a job, but she did receive financial aid, with which she managed to get by. She now lives in a flat with her niece, who has just arrived from Nicaragua, and her two children. She would like to return to Nicaragua to visit her family.

² Zabaltzen-Sartu is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to facilitate the social and professional integration of people who are socially disadvantaged, if they so request. For this purpose, it is essential to work with people, and with the community, to build a more inclusive society and region. The association has offices in Elgoibar, Berriz, Durango and Amorebieta-Etxano.

Aroa (Dominican Republic)

Aroa is originally from Santo Domingo, she is forty-six years old and she has a five-year-old child. She first arrived in Madrid at the age of 28, because she was offered a contract as a domestic worker. Four years later, with the encouragement of a friend, she came to Elgoibar. The day after she arrived, she had a job interview and immediately started working in a bar. Because of her child and work, she has no time for leisure, but she is a sports enthusiast and likes to play baseball and volleyball.

Lekuona (Argentina)

Lekuona is fifty-eight years old. His grandfather was from Antzuola, and his family was from Eibar, Bergara and the surrounding area. In June 2023, he came to spend three months in Elgoibar. He arrived on a Friday and by Monday he was already working in a bar in Zarautz. Since 2008, he has been working in an aluminium foundry and he lives in Elgoibar. In 2005 he met a local woman, and they have a thirteen-year-old daughter. He likes the countryside and nature and he tends a vegetable garden.

Ling (China)

She arrived from China with her family around the year 2000 in search of a better life. She has lived in Madrid, Catalonia and Bilbao. Since 2007, she has lived in Elgoibar, and runs a business in the town. She told us that she got married at a very young age, when she was nineteen, and has had three children since then. She works in her shop and likes to talk to people. When asked about her hobbies, she said that she has not had time to think about them since she first arrived.

Shahid (Pakistan)

He is from Pakistan and is thirty-four years old. When he was eighteen, he started working in Pakistan, but he didn't have many opportunities and he was treated very badly at work. He started his journey in search of a better life. He went to Russia to study but was the victim of a scam and ended up on the street. From there, he travelled alone, and has no relatives nearby. When he was young he liked to play, go out with friends and party. He likes football and cricket.

Living conditions and migration context

There are several reasons why they decided to migrate to Elgoibar. Most of them told us that they were driven by family relationships or necessity and that they came in search of a better life. As we have seen, for some people, the road to Elgoibar has been long, as they have had to pass through many countries and cities. Many people came here with the desire for a better life, driven by necessity, but for Aroa, Sekou and Shahid, for example, the European dream is a long way away.

Sekou: In my country, a lot of people say that Europe is really good. You come here and you don't have a job. The council and job centre have no jobs. I have no friends, nothing. I have no wife, no husband, nothing, I am single. Life isn't easy for me.

Most of the people we interviewed, Patxi, Cian, Lekuona, Marco, Anne, Shahid and Aroa, go to their home countries at least once a year. However, Angie and Sekou have not been able to return to their country of origin because one has no papers and the other has no money.

Angie: I'd like to go back to Nicaragua. There is a better life here, there is more support. Falling pregnant twice has made it difficult for me to get my papers, to work. In one interview they saw me with a child and they said no, because I had two kids. I feel trapped and shackled. Because I can't go to my country without papers. Not even for a month. There's no way out.

The migration processes of many of the interviewees have been difficult and tough and they have been victims of racism. Anne, Ana, Aroa, Patxi, Lekuona, Cian, Fátima and Marco have found it helpful to have family or friends in or around Elgoibar. Among those who have family in Elgoibar, we observed two groups: one, who have family who live and were born in the Basque Country, and who do not suffer racism; and the other, who have relatives who have come in search of work or a new life. Many of them suffer racism, but not all of them. These family networks, in all cases, have been helpful in finding work or housing. Also, because of the stigma attached to their place of origin, their skin colour and racism, they have often had great difficulty finding work or housing. Ana told us that not speaking Basque is also an obstacle to finding work.

Meanwhile, Sekou and Shahid arrived in Elgoibar without any family or friendship network. In the stories they tell, we can clearly see the vulnerability, lack of protection and violence involved in travelling alone.

Shahid: Some people have a relative here and when they arrive their family member can take care of them, they may work or they may not. They won't have any problem. But for a person who has no family here, there comes a time, they are new, they don't speak the language, they can't communicate with people, so they can't go and find a place where they can work or make a living, it's tough.

In terms of age, most people from diverse backgrounds who live in Elgoibar are at an age when they can get a job (Uranga 2022,10). Most of them repeatedly emphasise the lack of time, and it is mainly women who mention this situation. As we observed in the introduction to the interviews, Ling, Aroa, Angie, Ana...remark that it is impossible to meet life's basic needs, e.g.: work or refer to the difficulties in finding rental housing.

In the case of the interviewees, before arriving in Elgoibar, many of them knew Spanish, some because it is their native language, and many others because they had previously been in other parts of Spain, or had spent months or years in Galicia or Catalonia: for example, Shahid, Patxi, Ana, Aroa and Ling. Even Fátima studied Spanish for two months before arriving in Elgoibar. They explained to us that it is difficult to get by without knowing the language, and that this leads to them becoming dependent on others. Moreover, the situation is even more difficult for those who have no support, family or friends around them.

Shahid: When you're in a country, a place where you can't speak the language, you don't know where you have to go, where to go to eat, well, in the end, it's a bit overwhelming, isn't it? Fear, I don't know...ultimately I'd say it's anxiety or you are thinking, damn, what's going to happen next?

As we have been told, all the interviewees still have some connection with their country of origin, and also maintain their customs. They use WhatsApp, Facebook, video calls, telephone calls and the social media sites that are available. For the most part, the customs they have maintained have been their food, festivals, religion and language. Furthermore,

most of them consider it very important to maintain their native language, and to speak in their language with people in their own community, and, at home, with their families.

Most of the people we interviewed have friends who belong to the community from their country. They told us that the workplace helps them to engage with a lot of people, as does taking part in local associations or in different courses.

Interlocking forms of oppression

We cannot treat language-related experiences and perceptions as if they were an isolated issue. Therefore, we would now like to discuss how factors such as class, place of origin and gender affect migrants and, above all, those who are victims of racism.

Most of the women we interviewed have, at some point in their lives, worked in casual jobs. Additionally, they have highlighted the problems they have in finding work, due to racism, and, in many cases, because of the responsibility of caring for minors in their care. Undoubtedly, gender has a major impact on living conditions. In the Basque Country and in Elgoibar, the data show the existence of female-dominated immigration (Uranga, 2022). The testimonies of numerous female interviewees bear testament to what has become known as the *Doppia presenza* (Sagastizabal 2020, 17), i.e. “the double presence of working women: the workload and the lack of time they have due to having to work both inside and outside the home”.

Aroa: Imagine, when you work in a bar, on a split shift, you have a child. I’m always rushed off my feet. I get up, rush my child to school, rush to make lunch and bring it in at midday, rush back at four in the afternoon to pick up the child, come in, have a little time with her or take her to an activity and then go back to the bar at seven o'clock. That is my daily activity. Every day.

We might add that this lack of time is one of the greatest hindrances and obstacles to learning a new language. Most say that the main reason for leaving their home countries was to find better living conditions. Therefore, their priorities are clearly survival and work.

Without question, we have observed that their places of origin and the colour of their skin lead to experiences and discrimination that are linked to racism. Being of European, African or American origin is not the same thing. Being a white or black person is not the same thing. The darker the skin, the greater the problems, violence and discrimination suffered.

Being a European who was born in Italy or Romania is not the same thing. Finally, social class and financial means have a direct effect.

Ana and Fátima are Moroccans and Muslims. They have told us about the racism they have experienced because of their clothing and appearance. According to Ana, people around her approach and address her with a different attitude, depending on whether or not she is wearing a veil. She says that people treat her differently. They are more approachable if you are not wearing a veil, while people who are wearing veils are eyed with suspicion. Ana remarks that the veil has made it very difficult for her to find work. For this reason, for the photograph on her CV, she decided to remove her veil and wear a cap, leaving her hair down. Despite this, she has not found a job.

In Shahid's view, the most challenging thing is not finding a job, but finding a place to live. He adds that there is work, and explains that, nowadays, there are jobs aimed at immigrants:

Shahid: Being a foreigner makes it more complicated, especially getting a flat...nowadays. I'd say work isn't a problem now because, in the end, there are some jobs that only foreigners can do. Nobody is going to do farm work for you unless they're a foreigner. I've been lucky, I haven't needed to work there. I worked there for a few days when I didn't speak the language, but then I got my papers and a work permit and learnt Spanish quickly.

Anne is Romanian. She says that when they have heard her speak and found out that she is Romanian, many people have racially discriminated against her. Compared to Marco, who was born in Italy, we see that the social stigma attached to place of origin is totally different in each individual case. Patxi, Lekuona, Cian and Marco are white men and, although they say that racism exists, they tell us that they have not experienced any such thing. Although being white, may at first glance avoid many racist attitudes, hearing a person's accent when they speak or finding out where they come from can trigger such prejudices and attitudes.

Aroa: In the outpatients department. In fact, I even filled in a complaint form. They treat you a certain way because of who you are, where you come from. Like I said. If we both go there. They see the both of us and they go straight to you. They answer you one way and me another.

You know, since you're not from here I'll talk to you like...I don't know... I've felt rejected. You feel like dirt here. I can. The only difference with me is that I'm not from here, but I'm working just like you.

The problems faced by many of the interviewees in finding a rental property or housing shows that there is structural racism. A lack of papers also makes it doubly hard to find housing. We have also obtained testimonies about the discrimination suffered at the hands of public officials, in the service and reception that they have received.

Malu: My husband works in Bergara, and his friend is from here, he's Basque. He said to him: please tell your wife to look for a flat here in Elgoibar. I said no, that it would be better if he came. I'm going through the door and without saying a word, they said this to me: 'There's nothing available to rent'. 'Please, let me speak', I said. I hadn't said a thing, not so much as a 'hello'. Before I even entered they said: 'We have nothing'. I say: 'Please, it's not for me'. 'We have nothing'. But I'm not the only one it's happened too, right.

In-depth language analysis

We will now outline the languages that the interviewees are able to speak and how they communicate. We interviewed 12 people in total, who come from the following countries: Ireland, Italy, Albania, Romania, Morocco, Mali, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Argentina, China and Pakistan. In addition to Basque and Spanish, they speak fifteen other languages: English, Albanian, Arabic, Berber, Mandarin, Cantonese, Italian, Bambara, Soninke, Wolof, Urdu, Punjabi, Romanian, Gaelic and French. We can therefore say that the linguistic map of Elgoibar is very diverse.

According to the quantitative study carried out by the Sociolinguistics Cluster in Elgoibar, the official language of the countries of origin of 49.2% of the foreign-born population is Spanish. Most of the interviewees speak Spanish, to be precise, ten out of twelve of the people. The other two people have comprehension problems. In the case of the Basque language, a very different picture emerges. While everyone may know a word or two and some may understand a little, of those twelve people, only one can express themselves in Basque.

In addition to the official languages of their countries of origin, we have noted the presence of numerous minority or non-dominant languages. They include Bambara, Soninke, Wolof, Berber, Cantonese and Punjabi. Many people compare non-dominant languages with dominant languages. When discussing this topic, as with Basque and Spanish, they compare Cantonese and Mandarin, Berber and Arabic and Punjabi and Urdu.

We would like to underline three ideas that have been voiced about the citizens, language speakers and language context of Elgoibar. Firstly, the separation between Basque speakers and Spanish speakers. Secondly, we were often told that there is limited use of Basque in Elgoibar. In addition to that, the third idea is that you can live in Elgoibar without speaking any Basque, but not without speaking any Spanish.

In Marco's opinion, "in Elgoibar there are two groups, two spheres: the Basque-speaking and the non-Basque-speaking, and they don't mix very much. I joined the Basque group, so it has motivated me (to learn Basque)".

According to Lekuona, living in Elgoibar has not meant that he is in a Basque-speaking environment.

Lekuona: I could have ended up living in Azpeitia or in some other town where they speak more Basque. They don't speak Basque as much here in Elgoibar. You walk down the street, and you hear a lot of Spanish. But if I'd ended up living elsewhere, I'd have learnt the language, whatever it was. I'd have found it difficult, but I'd have done it.

For example, Cian, Fátima and Anne told us that shortly after they arrived in Elgoibar, people almost always spoke to them in Spanish. Most of them think that Spanish is vital for general communication, and they regard being able to speak the language as essential (Uranga and Aierdi 2021, 14).

Marco: If you can't speak Spanish it's impossible, you can't live here. It's possible without speaking Basque, yes, but something is always missing. For example, lots of activities are in Basque and my friends talk to each other in Basque when we are out. It's possible, but you're always a little restricted. And indeed, I do think that it's also very important to be able to speak the language here in order to understand the culture.

Ling: The thing is, people can understand the language you speak. So you aren't motivated to learn another. I've been living and working here for so many years and the only thing that's pushed me to learn a language is necessity. A need. I'll learn how to do something when I need to, whatever it is. I find it easier to learn that way. Otherwise, I don't think it's worth doing.

When we asked Marco if it was possible to live in Elgoibar if you can only speak Spanish, but not if you can only speak Basque, he replied as follows.

Marco: I think that there are historical reasons behind this. That's my opinion. During Franco's dictatorship, the Basque language was banned, and some people may have forgotten how to speak it, and also, during that period there was quite a lot of migration from Spain. And as you weren't allowed to speak Basque, the people who came from Spain couldn't do it or didn't need to.

Regardless of whether or not they spoke Spanish, shortly after they arrived (and even later), many of the interviewees were unaware that the Basque Country is a nation and a historical territory with its own culture and language. In the interviews, they keep repeating: "here, in Spain", "when I came to Spain", or similar. Many people have felt the need to learn Spanish because they have been advised to do so or they have felt they should do so because they're in Spain. In some cases, they also thought that Spanish was the only language in Spain, and some of the people interviewed did not know that the Basque language existed in the Basque Country.

Shahid: I had no choice but to learn Spanish. I've arrived in a country, it has a language, and in order to get by I have to learn it, whatever happens.

Ana: Until I came here I didn't know that people spoke Basque. I thought that they only spoke one language in Spain.

Soon after arriving in Elgoibar, Malu and Sekou met lots of people on the street who advised them to learn Spanish, and the same thing happened at the Adult Learning Centre (EPA).

Malu: When we came here, we were asked to learn Spanish, not Basque. Everywhere, in the school, on the street, everywhere. But then, when you're looking for work, they speak to you in Basque. You need to know the basics. Also, when people come from outside, faced with a new language, they should be told that there are two languages, not just one. Not just Spanish. That's why I could only cope with Spanish. I didn't think about Basque until my daughters started school. That's when I realised, when my daughters started school, no, there is another language.

Finally, Fátima told us that, although many Basque speakers knew that she spoke neither Basque nor Spanish, they spoke Basque among themselves, but addressed her in Spanish. Patxi also told us something similar, that many of his friends speak Basque, but: "[...] but then the *guiiri* (foreigner) arrives they all start speaking in Spanish".

Some of the people interviewed know and can speak minority languages. As happens with the Basque language, they are concerned about it disappearing. In Shahid's words, the key to stopping it from disappearing is passing it down.

Shahid: Teaching our kids. When people become parents, they should teach their kids. If the state or whoever is not taking care of you, then you have to take care of yourself. You feel that it's your thing, it belongs to you. Teaching your children and saying: wherever you go you have to take this with you. Ultimately, I think that's the way to do it.

Language use

We have observed that all interviewees speak more than one language. In each place, depending on the context, we use one language or the other, sometimes unconsciously, sometimes by choice. Often, going to live in a new place makes it necessary to learn new languages. Most keep using their mother tongues, and use similar strategies to preserve them. We have seen how the home and the community of origin serve as language repositories. In the public and private spheres, we have observed that Spanish, as the dominant language, is highly prevalent on the street and in the workplace. We also note that passing on the native language is the strategy used to preserve it. In all cases, they have taught their native language to the next generation, and in most cases, they have also taught them the official or dominant language from their country of origin.

Although they are not able to communicate in Basque in their everyday lives, Ling, Lekuona, Ana, Sekou and Shahid are familiar with some basic words, and some of them use them in their day-to-day activities. Above all, they use the greetings: “*kaixo, agur, egun on, arratsalde on, gabon, zer moduz?*” They also know a few odd words: *eskerrik asko, ez horregatik, ondo pasa, poliki-poliki, kontuz*, etc. However, the presence of Basque is practically negligible among most of the people interviewed, but, from a purely symbolic perspective, we believe that it may be interesting to study the reason for the decision to use greetings or some basic words in Basque.

As far as language acquisition is concerned, the language of the country of origin has been acquired through the family. Subsequently, many have learned the official languages at school: Urdu for Shahid, French for Sekou and Mandarin Chinese for Ling. The interviewees who did not know Spanish began to learn it as a result of the migratory processes, most of them in an effort to get by and find a job. Anne, Ana, Sekou, Fátima and Shahid have taken some courses. However, Anne, Patxi, Cian, Marco, Sekou, Shahid and Ling told us that they also learned while on the street or at work.

Patxi: I learnt street Spanish there. I haven't been to school or anything. Talking to people, interacting. I haven't completed a course or gone to school or anything.

Ling: We can't speak very good Spanish, we know that already. Nothing at all like local people. We've learnt the language on the street.

As for Basque, Lekuona, Angie and Marco have attended courses, but as above, most of them – Aroa, Cian, Marco, Shahid and Ling – have learnt at work and on the street. Most of them told us that they were able to understand and interpret single words and sentences, but Marco is the only one among them who is able to speak and communicate in Basque.

Ling: “Kaixo!”, you also say ‘kaixo’ (hello). That’s right. People say simple things to you, I can understand them too. They may have been speaking in Basque, but although I didn't know the words, I understood what they meant.

As we observed in the interviews, most of them learnt languages by listening and practising at work or on the street. When trying to improve listening comprehension, radio and television often helped them, as well as magazines, newspapers and books. A minority have taken intensive courses, most have spent very little time learning languages. In this case, we were struck by the fact that, out of three people who have studied Basque, only one is able to communicate in this language. The same is not true of Spanish. In many cases, the ones who have attended a school or taken a course are able to communicate in the language.

Linguistic experiences

When learning new languages, the subjects of this study have had a wide variety of obstacles and advantages. Basque and Spanish are the official languages in the Basque Country. Therefore, knowing one of the two languages is a great advantage for communication. The native language of Aroa, Angie and Lekuona is Spanish, so they have not felt any specific need to learn the entire language. By the time they got to Elgoibar, Ling, Shahid, Sekou, Ana and Patxi already knew Spanish. They had to learn it after leaving their respective countries. Fátima, Cian and Marco learnt Spanish after they arrived in the Basque Country.

The ones who speak languages derived from Latin say that they learnt Spanish with ease. However, this is not the case for Shahid or Ling, as they both found it extremely difficult to learn it.

Ling: I found it very hard. At first, everyone was saying that Spanish is easy. Learning a language is never easy.

Lekuona, Angie, Fátima and Ana have taken short courses to learn Basque. Despite the courses, they have told us that they lack places to practise the language and that, moreover, there is limited use of the Basque language on the street.

Lekuona: You don't learn Basque on the street. That's what I meant. If I lived in Azkoitia or in Azpeitia and Markina, I would have learned every day.

Often, a lack of time or financial resources makes it difficult to learn Basque. Ling, Lekuona, Shahid, Anne, Patxi and Aroa say that they do not have enough time.

Shahid: Sometimes, I can hear people talking, and it also makes me curious. To find out what they're talking about. I get excited, and I think: "I'm going to learn". But in the end, with work and what not, I don't have time.

Aroa: I know, I understand that maybe I should...would you learn it? Why don't you study? Help how? OK, going to school. But sometimes you...how much does a course cost in the Basque language school? I think it's in the four or two hundred range, I don't know. I can't afford it. I don't have that much money and I don't have the time. As long as I can keep on working, even without that language, and learn from others. I can't afford it, because I don't have the money. The cost of the Basque language school is very expensive. But people like us with responsibilities, who come from outside, we can't afford it.

Laziness is also mentioned among the reasons for not learning Basque.

Cian: I regret not learning it sooner a little. I'm lazy now, I'm not going to learn it. I know I'm not going to learn it.

Ling: The thing is, I'm a bit lazy, I haven't learnt any more.

Language ideologies can also be an impediment to learning Basque. Many of the people interviewed believe that it is a difficult language, that it is not that important or worthwhile, and that they will not be able to learn it. Furthermore, the lack of information is a major obstacle, for example, ignorance about the services offered by the town council or the inability to make use of the existing services.

Some people have had negative experiences because they cannot speak Basque. And that can also become a hindrance or lead to a loss of motivation to learn it. The situations they told us about happened in the workplace.

Cian: There are things that really annoy me. I was in a bar and a group of people came in, all speaking Spanish. And then, "*Zu! Euskeraz bai, eh!*". Then they spoke to me in Basque. I can't be doing with it! You are all speaking in Spanish and then you say "Kaña bat"!

As far as motivation to learn a language is concerned, most of them acknowledged that they learnt Spanish because they felt they needed it to work and get by. Above all, we asked the interviewees about their motivations for learning Basque. Among these reasons, the following ideas were repeated continuously: to socialise, to understand the people around them, to learn, to find a job or to help the children in their care.

Ana: I want to learn now, I want to get to know more, to talk to people and especially if I want a job in a nursing home or similar. They accepted by CV in the nursing home in Eibar, but as I don't speak Basque it makes the job difficult.

To help my kids at home. If they have homework in Basque, you're not going to understand what they have there. You just stare at it blankly.

Marco is the only one who speaks Basque, and he says that, in his case, family was his motivation. Patxi and Sekou say they would like to study Basque, but one doesn't have the time, and it's not a priority for him; the other, however, says it's difficult to learn. Besides all these views, we believe that what Ling says about motivation is important, i.e. that knowing a language which is understood by the people around you can make you lack the motivation to learn another language. Finally, Marco makes the following point about motivation.

Marco: More and more people are speaking Basque on the street. There's an increasing number of activities in the Basque language. That's great motivation. Because, otherwise, people don't understand you, so you have to learn. There's no way around it.

Listening is very important for speakers, and language ideologies, personal prejudices and perceptions, and power relationships between languages influence listeners. Discussions around race and gender inform the way we listen to the people we meet, i.e. "we have the same opinion about the language as we do about its speakers and its language community, and about its society" (Agirre and Eskisabel 2019, 38). We asked the interviewees whether they were treated differently because of their different backgrounds. We have collected testimonies that reveal that it is not only the colour of skin that triggers racism, language does too.

Anne is white and Romanian. On numerous occasions, she has sensed a change in attitude towards her as soon as people have heard her speak. When we asked her if she was undervalued, belittled or not listened to in the same way as other people because of the way she spoke, the answer was yes.

Anne: Once, when people heard and recognised my language, they turned away from me and another time they slammed the doors on me at a petrol station. You don't so much as speak or look at them, but there's always someone who wants to provoke you.

Ana also told us that when people have heard her speaking Arabic, they have often ignored her. Aroa, however, remarks that when she has been on the phone and people have noticed her accent, she has often been treated unequally.

Values attached to languages

We remarked that language is the repository of linguistic identity (Vázquez 2020). Without question, it is inextricably linked to attachment to culture and identity. Many of the people interviewed associate their native language with their roots and their country.

Patxi: You shouldn't forget your mother tongue. In the end, wherever I am... my language is the most important thing I have. Because this is what I grew up with, with my language, I don't know... My homeland is my homeland, with all its problems, but, well, it's not the people's fault, it's all down to politics at the end of the day. The people are very good, but the politics is bad, just like everywhere.

Shahid: Punjab is my land, my birthplace. It's where I belong, where I came from, you know.

Culture, identity and language often form a sort of triangle that is directly linked to politics. Some have criticised this triangle and the impact that politics has on it.

Cian: I'm very strange. There are people here and in Ireland who think: the culture and languages, they belong to us. I've recently realised that I may not like certain things. I've been told that I should like them. This also happens with some things in Ireland. They may or may

not be political. When you're young you try to express your opinions. To a certain type of person, to learn about so-called culture.

In the interviews we conducted, some people had a closer link with families that were Basque-speaking or with Basque roots. Lekuona's family was from the Basque Country. He also tells us that he feels like a local and that he has a special bond with the culture. Among other things, he blames a failure to pass on the Basque language for its limited use. Marco also remarks that he has a special relationship with Basque culture.

Marco: I feel a stronger connection with Basque than with English. I don't know why. I think it's down to the culture. I haven't analysed or examined it, but that's the way it is. I have positive feelings towards Spanish, because the cultures in Italy and Spain are quite similar. And I feel an even stronger connection with the culture here, in the Basque Country. Because I think that the culture in northern Italy is similar to the one here.

People who speak a minority or non-dominant language in their countries tend to compare it with Basque. When it comes to placing value on languages, we have observed that language ideology has a major influence on the reasoning they use.

The value placed on each language differs and this can help us to understand the choices made by the people we interviewed about learning or using a given language. Much like English, Spanish was described as an important global language by many of the interviewees. As odd as it may seem, of the people who can speak English, Marco is the only one who told us that he uses it. When it comes to the Basque language, Angie, Cian, Ling and Patxi tell us that you can only use this language in the Basque Country. In some interviews, people have remarked that each language is important wherever it is spoken. But in others, they have said that dominant or global languages are more important than minority languages, remarking that if things remain as they are, the Basque language may even disappear.

Patxi: Common languages are more important than rare or, for want of a better word, small languages. I have nothing against minor or small languages, which nobody in the world knows outside the place where you live, but the most important thing is to learn what is most widely

spoken. We don't know what language we will be speaking in a hundred years time. It may even be a new one, it's possible. Some things are evolving, other things will be lost.

Fátima: English, I'd like to learn English. It's easy, right? No. And Spanish? Basque is more difficult. Better to learn Spanish, Basque is very difficult. I can't remember the words.

However, in the opinion of Angie, Ling and Anne, you cannot rank certain languages higher than others. They are all important and should be valued accordingly.

Language ideologies

Taking language ideologies into account, we have recorded the words expressed by the interviewees in order to explain their beliefs and feelings towards languages. When conducting the study, we were struck by the dichotomous view that exists. At all times, the interviewees distinguish between difficult and easy, modern and traditional, functional and non-functional languages... Time and time again, the mantra that claims that Basque is difficult was repeated:

Lekuona: I found English difficult, as if I'm going to learn Basque. [...] I couldn't learn Basque. Well, maybe the odd sentence, after giving it a lot of thought. I can hold a conversation, but I have to practise and I don't practise.

Patxi: It's a difficult language, one of the oldest in Europe or the world. One of the oldest, and people tell me that the words are difficult to pronounce.

They also associate its difficulty with another of its characteristics. Patxi says that it is one of the oldest languages in Europe and in the world, and Marco describes it as if it were a treasure, "because it is very-very old, ancient, and very special". These words are consistent with Azurmendi's definition of the Basque language, which he described as 'archaic' or 'ancient' (1992, 30) and they remind us of the intrinsically subordinate nature of the Basque language remarked upon by Agirre and Eskisabel (2019, 24).

Some interviewees told us that Basque was difficult and Spanish was easy. Others, for example Ling, told us how difficult it was to learn a new language.

Ling: I don't think I'm out of the ordinary. Everyone says how difficult Basque is, but... Basque is not the only difficult language. But if there were no other languages, we'd have to learn Basque. Ultimately, every language is difficult for me and for everyone. Many people say that Spanish is easier, but I don't think it's that easy to learn.

A common notion is that languages are easier to learn in childhood, and that they are more difficult to learn in adulthood.

Angie: What happens is, when you're young, you're able to open up your mind more, and later on you can't. As you get older, your mind closes itself off. It's not the same when you're little and everything is engraved on your mind.

Proposals and challenges

In this final part of the analysis, we will outline the proposals made by the interviewees and some of the challenges that we identified.

- To promote the customs and culture of people from diverse backgrounds, as well as respect for their cultures and languages in societies where racism and prejudice are rife.
- To create a role for cultural intermediation in order to provide the necessary support in public services.
- To take advantage of new developments in technology, e.g. for translations. To make those resources available to all citizens.
- To offer free-of-charge online courses to learn Basque with flexible timetables and a greater number of places.
- To ensure that Basque is used in courses. The possibility of combining Basque and Spanish.
- To provide spaces and meeting places to practise the Basque language.
- To promote cultural offerings in Basque.

CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

As we have observed, the linguistic experiences and perceptions that people from diverse backgrounds have of Basque vary, but there are certain variables that have a direct impact on them, including gender, class, background and race. To conclude the study, taking into account the experiences and insights presented in it, we will outline a series of suggestions and recommendations that may be useful in the future:

- The need for a place of reference, where citizens from diverse backgrounds are offered assistance and support. In addition, it is important to understand their needs and their situation, in order to support them and make the town's resources available to them. Additionally, to ensure their full integration, it will be important to introduce the language, culture and history of our town, among other things.
- To think of new ways to publicise language-related municipal services.
- Address the prejudices that drive power relationships between languages and language ideology. The need to promote collective reflection. The need to stress the importance of all languages.
- To identify and recognise the different ways in which citizens from diverse backgrounds perceive leisure. To create communal spaces for the mutual understanding of the communities living in Elgoibar and for the development of multiculturalism from a constructive standpoint. Furthermore, the town council should provide those spaces.
- To promote positive experiences of the Basque language.
- The need to take into consideration the motivations of citizens from diverse backgrounds for learning Basque and, at the same time, to promote the learning of it.
- To promote comprehensive plans to promote the use of Basque on the street, at work and in the town in general, developing projects that combine employment and Basque language teaching, running specific courses for women employed in the domestic work sector, adjusting timetables and making it possible for them to attend free of charge. Moreover, to create informal spaces to practise the Basque language.

- The need to enhance language-related resources: free-of-charge, flexible course timetables, more places and courses.
- To implement language policies from a decolonial perspective, in order to develop grassroots proposals and, for example, to protect and highlight other cultures and languages. The need to promote multiculturalism and encourage an anti-racist attitude. The need to showcase the different languages and cultures that exist in Elgoibar and to counter messages of hatred.
- To take into consideration the diglossic situation regarding the Basque language and the need to empower Basque speakers and the citizens of Elgoibar in general. The need to showcase the Basque language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Agirre, Lorea & Eskisabel, Idurre. 2019. *Trikua esnatu da*. Susa

Azurmendi, Joxe. 1992. *Espainolak eta Euskaldunak*. Elkar.

Sagastizabal, Marina. 2020. *Hiruki gatazkatsua*. Susa.

Vázquez, Violeta. 2020. Contar lenguas. *Otros diálogos* [electronic publication]. 10. Hemen eskuragarri: <http://bit.ly/3WPBFw> (consulted on 10-07-2022)

Uranga, Belen & Aierdi, Xabier. 2021. Jatorri atzerritarreko biztanleen hizkuntzak, hizkuntza-bizipenak eta jarrerak Gipuzkoan. *BAT Soziolinguistika aldizkaria*, 119, 59-84.

Uranga, Belen. 13 December 2022. Elgoibarko hizkuntza-aniztasunaren mapa. Datuen azterketa. Immigrazioko biztanleriaren jatorriaren araberrako hurbilketa. [Presentation of the study] Soziolinguistika klusterra.

Uranga, Belen. 2022. *Elgoibarko hizkuntza-aniztasunaren mapa. Datuen azterketa. Immigrazioko biztanleriaren jatorriaren araberrako hurbilketa. BAT Soziolinguistika klusterra.*