

Agency, Access, and Reclamation in the Basque Language Revival Movement

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“Hence the truly irreparable loss, the diminution in the chances of man, when a language dies. With such a death, it is not only a vital lineage of remembrance—past tenses or their equivalent—it is not only a landscape, realistic or mythical, a calendar that is blotted out: it is configurations of a conceivable future. A window closes on zero. The extinction of languages which we are now witnessing—dozens pass annually into irretrievable silence—is precisely parallel to the ravaging of fauna and flora, but with greater finality. Trees can be replanted, the DNA of animal species can, in part at least, be conserved and perhaps reactivated. A dead language stays dead or survives as a pedagogic relic in the academic zoo. The consequence is a drastic impoverishment in the ecology of the human psyche. The true catastrophe at Babel is not the scattering of tongues. It is the reduction of human speech to a handful of planetary, “multinational” tongues. This reduction, formidably fueled by the mass market and information technology, is now reshaping the globe.” -George Steiner, *Tongues of Eros*

i. Abstract

The Basque language has long been a point of interest for linguists and historians looking to understand how the Basque people have preserved their culture and tradition through imperialism, religious conquests, invasions and wars, a dictatorship that outlawed their language and imprisoned many Basque people, and now, globalization. This question has been approached on various fronts by linguists like David Lasagabaster, whose work focuses on large-scale patterns of language use and language attitudes in the Basque Autonomous Community (Lasagabaster 2007) and Jacqueline Urla, who has dedicated much of her work to examining social and cultural factors that influence language planning and attitudes in the Basque Country (Urla 1999).

My research builds on this work by delving into language attitudes of college-aged Basque youth, who have grown up fully immersed in the educational and institutional systems built by language planning initiatives after the fall of the Franco regime. I have conducted six interviews with college-aged Basque people who have been involved in political organizing and counter-establishment cultural initiatives. In keeping with Urla's approach, I chose to focus on radical youth culture to provide new insight into the current state and future trajectory of the language, given how well broader-scale language attitudes across the region have already been fleshed out in the literature.

My study focuses specifically on interrogating into the underlying philosophy of the Basque Language Revival Movement. In her compilation of the movement's foundation and history, Urla outlined how Basque activists and intellectuals have worked through the generations to make this philosophy a central pillar of Basque culture. This philosophy took root in an entire society's worldview, and until now, this is why the language has survived, despite all imaginable variables (Urla 1988). My intuition was that this philosophy could be distilled into one simple claim: *you must speak Euskara to claim the Basque identity*.

In my interviews, I addressed my informants' political engagement, the institutions that define their use of Euskara (i.e. the government and the university), as well as their personal opinions about the claim I have distilled in my hypothesis. In my analysis, I look at the explicit and implicit messages about their language attitudes expressed in their answers, categorized under four major themes that I found ran through all of my interviews: history, access, reclamation, and agency.

Through this analysis, I demonstrate the complexity of the current positioning of Euskara in Basque society: in order to even begin questioning whether or not my hypothesis holds true, we must first explore a nuanced understanding of the context, or "ecology" (Muhlhausler 2000), in which Euskara lives. Then, given these external factors, my interviewees found a way to adapt the philosophy I proposed to their current conditions: a Basque person's motivation to learn, advocate for, speak, and uphold Euskara is derived from the strength of their affiliation with Basque identity and nationhood.

Overall, this study serves to add to the literature about the complexity of the Basque Language Revival Movement, demonstrating the importance of considering personal accounts about the condition of Euskara in language planning initiatives. Without them, it is impossible to understand what is working and what is lacking in a language revival movement, which at this point in time, is absolutely crucial to keeping Euskara alive and flourishing.

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1. Introduction

The driving motivation behind my work has been to understand what role language plays in forming cultural identity. The field of linguistics often takes for granted the value of language in human interaction and connection. Our intellectual and social development, our place in society, and the way we define ourselves are all entirely relational processes and positionings that depend heavily on the human language faculty. As a linguist, my training is primarily in examining the *commonalities* that languages worldwide share. Accounting for difference, or variability, is contained within that practice. When rules are broken, we go back to the drawing board, and with those new accommodations, our knowledge base expands. This study is an attempt to diverge from the dichotomy of examining each language in its particularities and linguistics as it speaks to a certain universality. Instead, through a small-scale ethnographic study, I will be looking to explore language as a living entity of consciousness, connection, and shared humanity.

The Basque language, or *Euskara*, as it is known and will be referred to throughout this paper, will be the focus of my study. This particular language, an isolate classified as “vulnerable” under the UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger, has undergone significant repression and revitalization efforts (Salminen 2013). *Euskara* is of interest to many linguists because its Revival Movement has undertaken the task of removing the language from its restricting ties to the Basque Country’s pre-industrialized, pre-globalized culture and state. Now, having successfully standardized and modernized the language, Basque people can preserve their connection to their ancestors, who have inhabited their land and spoken *Euskara* since before recorded history, through a language that also remains relevant to the practical functioning of modern society.

In order to best capture how Basque culture relies on *Euskara*, I have approached this study through the field of linguistic anthropology. A successful Language Revival Movement must account for how “ritual figurations of social identity come to life, interactionally activated in the here-and-now of discourse for the intersubjective work of creating, maintaining, or transforming social relations” (Silverstein 2004, p. 622). Although the language Silverstein uses in this work refers more specifically to the type or form of language we use in our daily interactions that reveal and reinforce our ideological leanings, a broader statement about which language Basque people choose to speak can be extrapolated from his theory. Cultural loyalties as they are expressed through language use are best studied on a discursive and intersubjective scale to understand the underlying motivations for and sociohistorical influences on Basque people’s participation in the Language Revival Movement, including speaking *Euskara* as their primary language in social interactions and institutional settings alike.

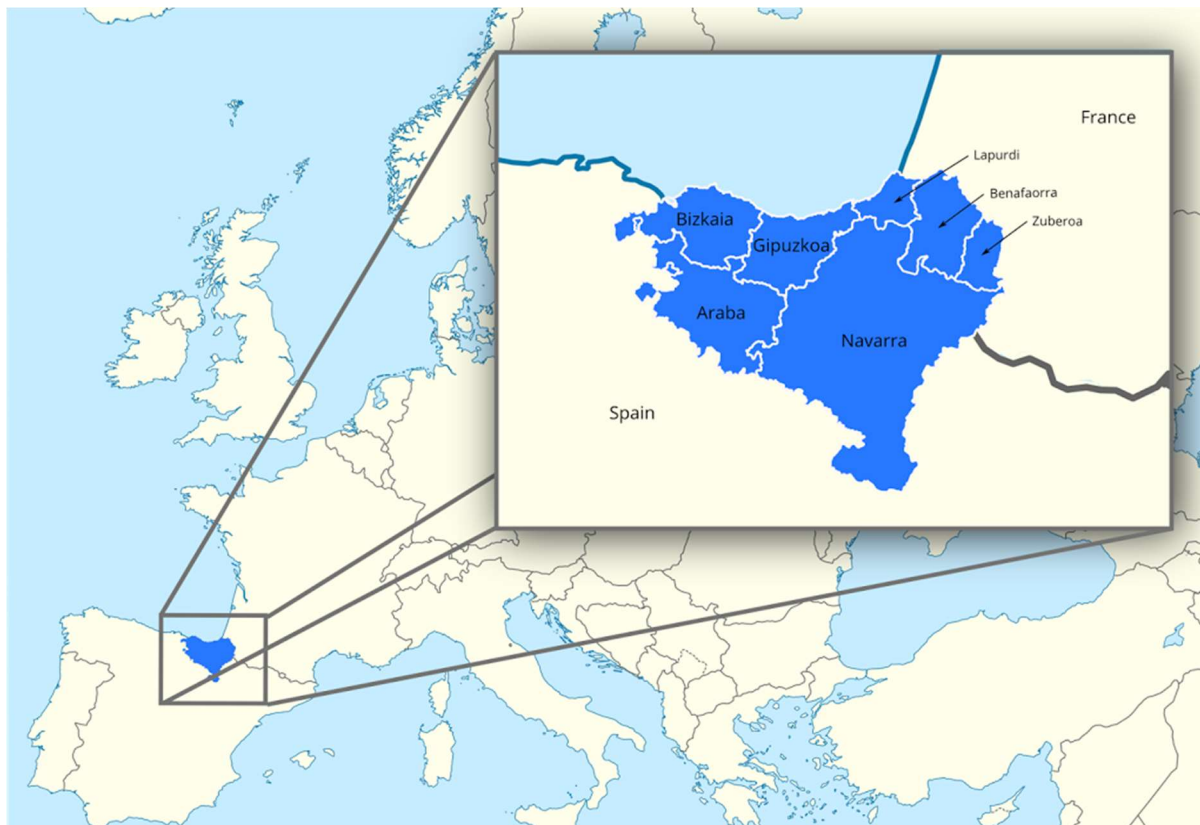
My study focuses on talking to young Basque people who take for granted the understanding that their linguistic choices have greater societal and political implications and effects as a way to step closer to answering my original question of how language and cultural identity formation influence one another. Following Katherine Riley’s proposition that “definitive speech community norms do not exist at all except as ideological reifications” (Riley 2008, 405), I inquire into the norms that politically engaged Basque-speaking people espouse as a way to better understand how tied their language attitudes are to the means by which a person can authentically make a claim to Basque national identity. My understanding of the ideological reifications that Riley refers to in this case are the means through which a person expresses their “Basqueness”, the norm being that the right to authentically claim that identity marker is earned through choosing to speak *Euskara*.

Of course, the framework of cultural expression through language use that I will build throughout this paper will have to account for how “sociohistorical forces, institutionally channeled, act as a kind of meta-interactional level or layer of meaning that permeates and is immanent in microcontexts” (Silverstein 2004, p. 645), microcontexts in this case being day-to-day interactions, where the option exists to speak either Spanish or *Euskara*.

2. Background

2.1 Introduction to the Basque Country

The Basque Country encompasses *Euskadi* (the provinces Gipuzkoa, Araba, and Bizkaia, all situated in the Spanish constituent called the Basque Autonomous Community), *Nafarroa* (the Spanish constituent, translated to English as Navarre, also an autonomous community), and *Iparralde* (the regions *Lapurdi*, *Benafarroa*, and *Zuberoa*, all situated in the French Basque Country). In this paper, I will most often be using “The Basque Country” to refer to the region defined as the Basque Autonomous Community. I will not be making distinctions between these terms for the sake of uniformity between my own writing and the language used by my interviewees. I will not account for the French Basque Country in this paper for a lack of time and resources, and while inclusion of this region in political discussions is crucial to the overall consideration of the region’s sovereignty and the Basque movement, it unfortunately falls outside the scope of this paper.



Map 1. Source: Agirre Lehendakaria Center. 2016. “One of five management gurus in the world on the Basque case.” UPV-EHU.

As its geopolitical situation may suggest, the Basque Country has historically been known as a politically contentious region of the world. There are many sides to the debate about the region’s sovereignty and recognition, so in the interest of elevating the voices of Basque people in this project, the frame of my argument will be one that fits as close an approximation as I am able to the way my interviewees conceive of the Basque Country: as a sovereign nation that has not received adequate recognition from Spain and France, whose borders currently splits the Basque Country in two.

Throughout history, the Basque people have been subjected to the influence of various empires and kingdoms who have laid claim to their land. In more ancient history, the Roman Empire considered the Basque people under their territory, although little cultural and political influence was actually enacted upon this region (*Euskal Kultur Erakundea*, History). In response

to other medieval European tribes who attempted to conquer the region, as well as the Moors' invasion of the Iberian Peninsula (beginning in 711), the Basque people united under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Navarre, which maintained an independent front against external influence until the 16th century, after which point the Kingdom of Castile and the Kingdom of France took claim to the Basque land, people, and some of their political autonomy. In the midst of political conflict, Basque fishermen and other maritime traders brought economic prosperity to the region throughout the Middle Ages, and industrialization propelled the Basque Country into a stable economy throughout the contemporary era (Euskal Kultur Erakundea, History).

Throughout the 19th century the Basque Country progressively lost political autonomy, starting with the elimination of the *fueros* during the Carlist wars, which had previously granted them almost complete self-governance, and leading into the Spanish Civil War, which resulted in Franco's dictatorship from 1936 to 1975 (Urla 2012). The stronghold of the Spanish government during this time sparked a number of underground resistance movements in the Basque Country, one of which most famously led to the formation of ETA, originally starting as a secret gathering of students looking to study and maintain their culture in the face of the regime, and eventually adopting an ideology of militarized resistance as the only solution to authoritarianism (Conversi 1990). Basque nationalists explicitly participated in the Republican resistance to Franco, and were thus actively targeted by the regime – any expression of Basque cultural and linguistic difference were repressed in the interest of creating a monolithic Spanish identity across all regions under the Spanish Kingdom (Clark 1981). Policing reached such high levels in the Basque Country that nationalists in particular categorized the region as under “military occupation” – around 8500 Basque nationalists were detained, tortured, and/or chased into exile during the twelve states of exception declared between 1956 and 1975 (Shabad & Ramo 1995).

Political theorist Daniele Conversi wrote a piece speaking to the emergence of ideological conceptions of Basque nationhood in response to Franco's oppressive regime. According to Conversi, the collective memory of suffering, rather than a unifying sense of culture, is what brought Basque nationalists of the latter half of the 20th century together (Conversi 2003). Although the political ideology of those involved in the “underground network of deepening mobilisation” that defined Basque nationalists under the dictatorship does not appear to align with what we will see in the next section regarding the Basque cultural and language revival movements, Conversi's profile of these radical nationalists highlights the emergence of a defining shift in their qualifications for Basque nationhood. Nationalists espoused “a vision in which characteristics acquired by individual choice, rather than inherited givens, played a central role [in an individual's Basqueness]” (Conversi 2003). According to Conversi, they followed a principle of *active participation*, in which the degree of an individual's involvement in nationalist efforts defined their merit in the claim to the Basque identity. The presence of immigrant communities, the great loss of cultural inheritance, and the dangers of participating in Basque nationalism removed Basqueness from its ties to ethnicity and inherited culture within the more radical Basque political movements resisting Franco's state-centralized regime. Conversi claims that the shift from ethnoracial qualifiers to this principle of active participation was a reaction to a sense of desperation among Basque people looking to preserve their sovereignty in any way possible. Put simply, “the preservation of Basque culture was regarded as a guarantee of loyalty and anti-regime feelings.” Given its status as an outlawed language throughout the forty years of authoritarianism that ruled the country, the survival of Euskara became a living symbol of the strength of Basque resistance.

2.2 History of the Basque Language Revival Movement

Jacqueline Urla wrote an extensive history of the Basque Language Revival Movement in her book *Reclaiming Basque*, in which she traced the movement back to its inception. According to Urla's research, Basque scholars used to argue that their language was the original language

of the Iberian Peninsula that gave rise to Spanish (Urla 2012, 26-27), tying Basque people to the land as natives, and claiming ownership to the “purest” Spanish identity. That being said, Spanish has been present in Basque elite and among professions who interact with outside world since before industrialization (Urla 2012, 29). When the Basque Country lost autonomy and became politically incorporated into the Spanish kingdom in the late 1800’s, Euskara became symbolic grounding for a Basque nationalist identity completely set apart from Spain, wherein “etymology and linguistic evidence figure prominently as proof” of their difference in origin and ethnicity (p. 28). In this time, Arturo Campion founded the Asociación Euskara de Navarra, a cultural association that organized traditional Basque festivities as a way to celebrate Basque culture, with a heavy emphasis on the use and celebration of the language. He also wrote critically about the upper classes and their contribution to the decline and stigmatization of Basque through their assimilation into mainstream and cosmopolitan urban centers.

In an earlier work, *Ethnic Protest and Social Planning* (Urla 1988), Urla’s analysis of the movement to revive and maintain Euskara turns away from the data around successful language revival in relation to language planning policies, instead bringing to light how the practice of language revival itself was integrated into Basque culture. In the Language Revival Movement’s inception, Basque language promoters educated the public on diglossia and prestige as they apply to Spanish and Basque, playing into the general public opinion that being Basque is just as if not more valuable as an identity as being Spanish, in order to shift the public’s consciousness about the significance of their language use. Urla points to the Basque Studies Society (*Eusko Ikaskuntza*), formed in 1918, as a source for this practice. This Society spread the notion that cognitive functions and in turn individuals’ worldviews were fundamentally shaped by people’s mother tongues, inspiring families to value having their children be native speakers. Basque identity soon became rooted in people’s ability to speak the language, even more so than ethnicity or family history.

The Basque Language Revival Movement took form before the Civil War and the dictatorship, but Franco’s strict laws gave the movement a deep sense of urgency and alarm at the language’s potential demise. Clark (1981) covers extensively how far-reaching Franco’s language policies were during his time in power:

“From 1937 to the middle 1950s the Spanish policy was one of total suppression of the language. The only university in the Basque provinces was closed. Libraries of social and cultural associations were seized by troops and there was a mass burning of books in Euskara. The teaching of the language was prohibited in all schools, public and private. The use of Euskara was prohibited in all public places, including casual conversations in the street, and on the radio and in printed media. Basque cultural societies and their publications were proscribed. Euskara was prohibited in all religious publications, as well as in religious ceremonies. A decree was issued that required the translation into Spanish of all Basque names in civil registries and other official documents, Basque names could not be used in baptism, and all inscriptions in Euskara were ordered removed from tombstones, funeral markers and public buildings” (Clark 1981, p. 93).

The undertaking mentioned in the previous section of students during the regime to gather secretly and to intentionally study and uphold Basque culture arose in large part in response to such stringent policies that directly targeted and suppressed any form of Basque expression. The collective memory of suffering that Conversi uses to explain the rise of nationalism in the contemporary era becomes relevant again when exploring the evolution of the Language Revival Movement post-1975.

Since the fall of the Franco regime, protective and restorative measures such as Basque autonomy have been a key focus for regional governments. Alongside planning efforts oriented toward modern-day self-governance regarding the Basque health system, social insurance, schools, public government, etc., Basque cultural revivalists included language planning as a central project to rebuilding Basque autonomy (Urla 1988). Of course, claims that Euskara is

“archaic” or “outdated” could have been difficult to dispute given the language was outlawed during a crucial point in technological advancements that define the modern age. Basque scholars tackled the issue of bringing Euskara up to speed to maintain its relevance by engineering a language *transformation*, rather than a *restoration*, defined in Bentahila and Davies’ (1993) terms as molding the language to the daily needs of those who could presently use the language, as opposed to attempting to resuscitate Euskara in its pre-industrialized form. The project of transformation required a unified code for Basque people in order to use Euskara in formal governance and standardized institutional settings, especially given the variety of Basque dialects, some of which border on being mutually unintelligible. This code was created primarily by scholars in the Basque Academy (in Basque, *Euskaltzaindia*, founded in 1918 alongside the Basque Studies Society) through a synthesis of various regional dialects, along with the official introduction of new vocabulary in order to accommodate for societally relevant developments (Hualde & Zuazo 2007). And thus, *Euskara Batua* (translated as “Unified Basque”), a standardized Basque language, was born.

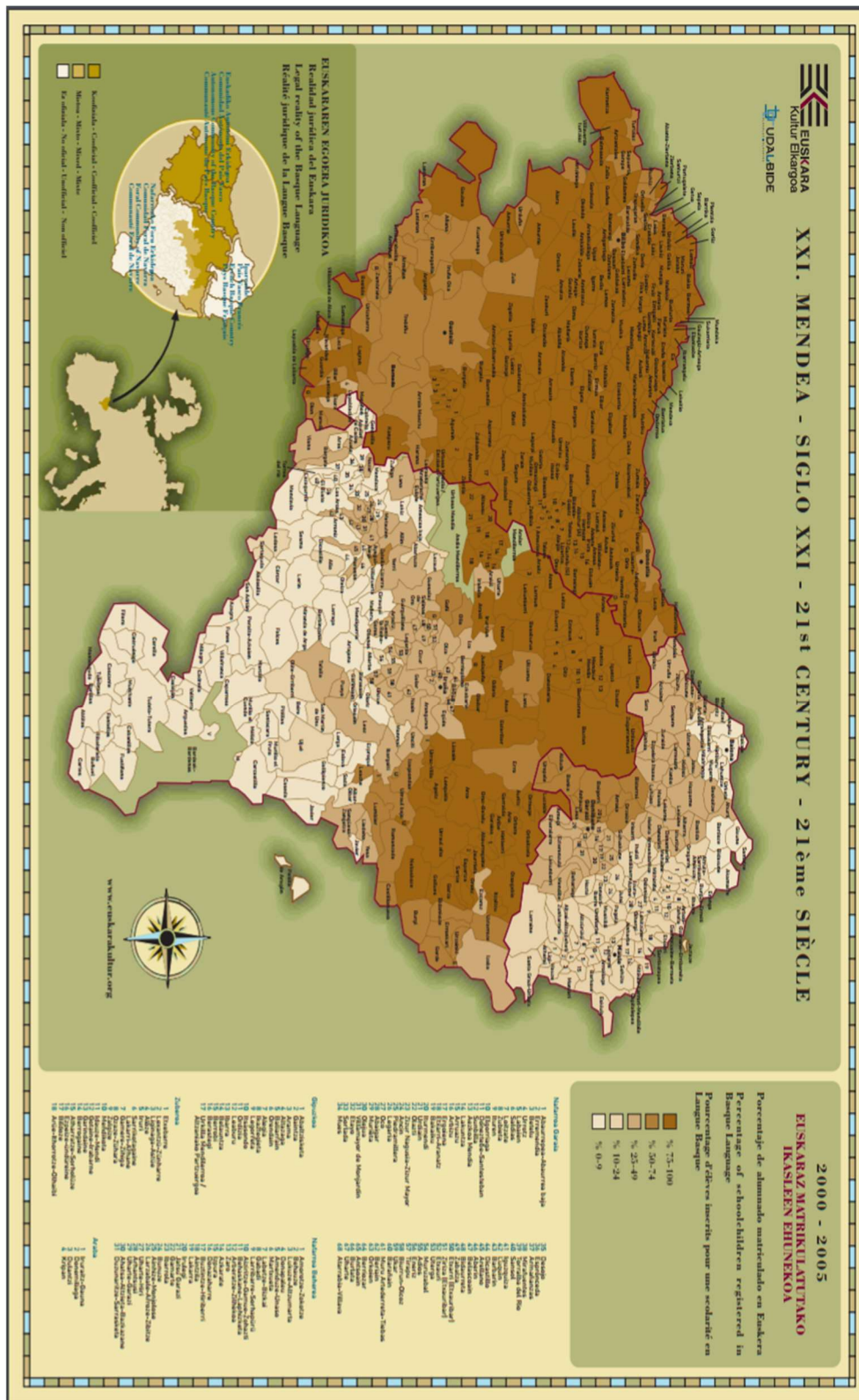
2.3 Current state of the movement

A transitional and transformational document that brought the Spanish Kingdom into its modern democratic state, the Spanish Constitution of 1978 allowed for Euskara, Catalan, and Gallego to be declared official languages of Spain, as well as the autonomous communities that speak them (Spanish Constitution, PP:S3). The Language Revival Movement since then has blossomed into a movement that permeates all facets of society.

Much of what the language planning efforts in modern times have been focused on has been concentrated in the school system. Schools where Euskara is the primary language of instruction for all subjects outside of language courses are commonly referred to as *ikastolas*, and they serve as the foundational location for many students’ linguistic development in Euskara. According to a study conducted in 2011, only 27% of inhabitants of the greater Basque Country speak Euskara, with about 720,000 speakers total (Gobierno Vasco 2012). The same study showed that Gipuzkoa, the region from which my interviewees hail, has the highest concentration of speakers whose first language was exclusively Euskara, at 34%, in comparison to the national average of 15%. Overall, Gipuzkoa has the highest concentration of speakers, and almost all schools in the region are conducted in Euskara (see Map 2).

In order to accommodate for the increasingly diverse set of languages essential for communication in a globalizing context, Basque language planning initiatives for lower education have developed an “Integrated Language Curriculum” wherein Euskara, Spanish, English, and French are taught to students under an umbrella of language learning processes, as opposed to siloed out subjects on the same plane as mathematics or history (Elorza & Munoa 2008). The end goal of this curriculum is to build proficiency in all of these languages, with Euskara as students’ base, serving as the language of instruction for other courses, as well. On a broader scale, Elorza and Munoa account for the administrative structures, social/extracurricular realm, and parental/community relations as potential “fields of intervention”, where an increased use of Euskara would contribute to the overall integration of the language in young students’ environments.¹ Although a lot of *planning* has gone into building these structures and guidelines for educators to follow throughout the educational process for Basque children and adolescents, the gap between theory and practice remains. Actually implementing the frameworks that Elorza and Munoa describe in this paper requires

¹ See appendix 1 and 2 for Figures created by Elorza and Munoa to draw out the fields of intervention and the integrated language curriculum



Map 2. This map was put together by the Euskara Kultur Elkargoa, a foundation created for the purpose of promoting the Basque language, in collaboration with Udalbide Elkarlan Elkarte, also a language activism organization based in Navarre. The sources for the information on this map are as follows: Basque Government. Department of Education. EUSTAT. EAS. Government of Navarre. Department of Education. Navarrese Federation of Basque Schools. Seaska. Public Basque Language Office: Quantitative Analysis of the Availability of Education in Basque Azpeitiko Euskara Patronatua: www.erabili.com

the resources – in this case, teachers fluent in Euskara and willing to participate in the public school system – to actually effect change.

To better understand this demographic's potential influence on society, Lasagabaster (2007) conducted a sociolinguistic study on university students getting their degree in pre-university education (i.e. to teach at any school level below university level). The study itself is incredibly extensive, but most notably, the contrast in their attitudes toward Euskara and Spanish spoke volumes to the outlook that will be passed down to future generations in relation to Euskara and other languages. While 71% of teachers-in-training in this study felt positively inclined toward the use and existence of Euskara, only 42% of these students felt similarly positive toward Spanish. There was also a heavy overlap between the subset of participants with positive attitudes toward Euskara and participants whose first language is Euskara or otherwise have had heavy exposure toward the language (Lasagabaster 2007).

Lasagabaster writes about these findings with a tone of optimism, heartened by how future teachers orient themselves toward linguistic transmission. That being said, this pattern highlights the harsh reality of how historical oppression perpetuates itself. Those who have access to institutions and social structures that allow for an individual to learn Euskara and integrate themselves in a Basque-speaking community are more likely to feel positively toward the language than those who haven't been granted that same access.

The elaborate intervention structures that Elorza and Munoa delineated address the many facets of societal influence that need to be considered when creating an environment that is intended to be adequately accessible for children to develop a strong command of Euskara. Another layer to consider in the language planning framework is that the type of intervention necessary on a social scale will occur in a different linguistic register than it will in administrative and pedagogic structures, which are generally conducted in Euskara's standardized form, *Batua*, as opposed to whatever dialectical variation of Euskara is spoken in less formal environments.

When discussing access, in addition to how accommodating institutions are to Basque speakers, I will be referring equally to social structures, as integration in the Basque community goes far beyond linguistic competency. Urla et al. (2017) tackled this question of social integration in a very recent anthropological study, in which they asked focus groups of Basque speakers about their attitudes toward *Batua* and *vernacular*² forms of Euskara, including questions of perceived prestige and fluency. Interestingly, the majority of Basque speakers who learned Basque exclusively in school (technically non-native speakers, although exposed to Basque from a very young age) expressed in this study that their measure for whether or not they felt truly integrated into the Basque-speaking community was based entirely around whether or not they felt they could speak the local dialect. Ultimately, this paper shows how the expected trend of standard linguistic forms holding a higher degree of prestige than dialectical varieties is flipped, proving through a greater cultural analysis that there is nothing inherent to standard, widespread forms that makes them in any way objectively better, but rather the power and prestige of a language or variety is a *consequence* of cultural values:

“The Basque case suggests that political praxis – the socio-political processes by which language reforms are enacted – can be a contributing factor in determining the social effects and reception of standardization. Basque language standardization and revival has benefitted from a populist approach involving broad social participation and debate that has tempered some of the deauthorization of vernacular that standardization has been known to provoke in other language revival contexts” (Urla et al. 2017, p. 2-3).

² I will not be using this term (vernacular) when describing dialects of Euskara in my own work. Urla et al. use it to refer most broadly to informal and dialectical speech, so I will use the term in reference to her study, but given the potential value judgments that could be associated with it, I have chosen not to adopt this terminology.

The conclusions that Urla et al. draw from their study bring us back to Conversi's discussion of active participation as a metric for a Basque person to stake a claim on their national identity. We will see in the conversations I had with my interviewees how both the principle of active participation and the value of cultural authenticity run deep in their take on the relationship between being Basque and speaking Euskara.

3. The question, revisited

3.1 Motivation for the question

My inquiry into language planning in the Basque Country began with a general admiration for the grassroots political organizing culture I saw while living in and visiting the region. The movement to honor and celebrate Basque history and culture is widespread in reach and accessibility, making far more intimate ties between passionate student activists, artists, school-teachers, public servants, healthcare providers, the government, and the rest of the general population than I have witnessed in any other Western industrialized society. In seeking unity across such a broad spectrum of careers, affiliations, and life trajectories, one can imagine how powerful language is for opening lines of communication, as well as serving as a common denominator. In a society as communicative and interwoven as the Basque Country, this expectation of linguistic unity is, interestingly, by no means fulfilled.

Despite the myriad obstacles facing the language revival movement, however, there is a population of Basque people who fiercely defend their language, taking pride in their nation, culture, and history. While only 30% of the population currently speaks Euskara, speaking from personal experience alone, when living in a town where the dominant attitude in all of my immediate surroundings heavily favored a Basque nationalist attitude, the sway toward adopting their ideology was strong. In many ways, cultural beliefs are formed by following the path of least resistance in our socialization, and in such a community, that meant holding the furthering of the Basque cause in the highest regard, consistently, across all sectors of life. All of this is to say, having experienced what I will categorize as the ideal of a successful revival movement, I wanted to understand more concretely why the Language Revival Movement took root in this region, and I wanted to provide nuance to the many large-scale quantitatively focused studies.

In my exploration of the existing literature, I found myself seeking answers to a few broader questions, which I had formulated based on both my personal experience with Basque culture and previous research I had done about Basque history. These questions were: Why has the Basque Language Revival Movement been successful? Is it as successful as it seems? What will the future of the language look like under new and changing conditions? Will cultural shift make the movement obsolete?

Much of what Jacqueline Urla has done in recounting the history of the Basque Language Revival Movement laid the groundwork for answering my questions. Additionally, looking at larger scale quantitative sociolinguistic studies were helpful in providing an objectively focused answer to my inquiry into societal trends, but in seeking to understand the Basque language's place in creating a cohesive society, I opted to focus my energy on uncovering Basque speakers' underlying motivations to speak and perpetuate Euskara. In doing so, I hoped to place Euskara's role in Basque nationhood more concretely, while continuing to examine the measures of success for the Language Revival Movement.

3.2 My hypothesis

In Urla's 1988 paper, I found that the Basque Studies Society placed proficiency in Euskara as central to claiming the Basque identity. The word *euskaldun* is referenced tirelessly by Basque speakers and scholars alike in explaining how important the language considers itself to be in perpetuating Basque nationhood. As a result of my preliminary research and personal

experience, I formulated my driving hypothesis for the study as follows: There is an underlying philosophy to the Basque language revival movement that Basque activists and intellectuals have worked through the generations to make a central pillar of Basque culture. This philosophy took root in an entire society's worldview, and until now, this is why the language has survived, despite all imaginable variables. My intuition was that this philosophy could be distilled into one simple claim: *you must speak Euskara to claim the Basque identity.*

4. Approach

The focus and scale of my study was inspired primarily by Jacqueline Urla's (1999) analysis of a comic created by radical Basque youth, wherein mocking Spanish and French was used a tool to subvert and challenge historically imposed diglossia between these dominant languages and Basque. Urla's interrogation of the Language Revival Movement's emphasis on implementing Euskara in formal institutions adds a unique perspective to the literature in that it was conducted via an examination of artefacts of popular culture. In doing so, she demonstrates the multiplicity of language revival movements—the institutional implementation of the language is crucial to ensuring the language is used in all aspects of society, but ultimately, a language's life is defined by whether or not people feel compelled to use it for personal expression. This is summarized best by Urla herself:

“If we look *outside* the domains of formal language planning, outside the academies, and the schools, to that of popular culture, and youth culture in particular, we see other kinds of efforts aimed at language revival, ones that are not aimed at creating norms, that are not attempts to invest Basque with the signs of rationality, but quite the opposite. We find strategies based on language play that exploit the dialectal variability of Basque, that use debased slang and colloquialisms, and that embrace precisely the backward stereotypes of Basques to parodic effect” (Urla 1999).

The field of sociolinguistics in its entirety is dedicated to understanding how the individual's linguistic patterns and affiliations align with society. In all of her work, Urla has shown a dedication to an authentically holistic study of the Basque language, and my study is an attempt to follow her lead.

4.1 Choosing a demographic

To answer my initial questions, I chose to forego compiling eloquently formulated, theoretical texts found in language activists' websites, articles, manifestos, and academic documents. My desire to measure the success of the Basque Language Revival Movement, as well as to find out what lies at the core of people's motivation to speak Euskara all led me to a targeted, small-scale ethnographic approach to my study. I chose to interview politically engaged Basque youth who have been raised in an immersive Basque-speaking environment (i.e. the kind of society the revival movement strives to create), as some of the best informants on how the Basque language revival movement's ideology has taken root in people's understanding of Euskara's place in their society.

4.2 Interview questions

In planning these interviews, I pieced together a set of questions to address both explicit and implicit ways my informants espoused and adhered to Basque Language Revival Movement ideologies that I have found in the literature. The main questions I settled on were as follows:

1. Can you talk to me about your participation in political movements, protests, youth houses, student movements, etc.?
Me puedes hablar sobre tu participación en movimientos políticos (manifestaciones, vuestro gazte etxea, movimientos de estudiantes)?
2. In those movements, what role does Euskara play?
En esos movimientos, que rol tiene el Euskara?
3. What are your opinions about/experiences with the use of Euskara in formal institutions (for example, in universities, in the government)?
Cómo ves el uso del Euskara en instituciones formales (por ejemplo, en las universidades, y en el gobierno)?
4. Do you think the government has an obligation to speak primarily in Euskara? Why?
Creer que el gobierno tiene una obligación a hablar ante todo en Euskara? Por que?
5. Do you think it's necessary to speak Euskara in order to claim a Basque identity?
Respeto a la identidad nacional vasca, crees que es un requisito hablar Euskara para ser vasco?

Through examining their engagement with language activism and their reactions to various institutions' language use patterns, I hoped to uncover how the Language Revival Movement's ideologies manifested themselves in my interviewees' broader understanding of the structures that shape their lives and Basque culture more generally. My explicit inquiry of their alignment with my hypothesis was aimed at bringing light to how speakers who are in many ways products of the systems the Language Revival Movement designed interpret this underlying philosophy as it plays out in their constructed worldviews. As carriers of the Language Revival Movement's message, my interviewees' interpretation of its underlying philosophy ultimately determine how cultural beliefs are formed around Euskara in environments where it is commonly spoken.

4.3 Interviewees

I have remained in close contact with many of my classmates from my time living in the Basque Country. I reached out via WhatsApp to my friends, former classmates, and host family, briefly explaining my project and requesting to interview them. I received eight positive responses, six of whom followed through with the interview itself. I did not provide them with the specific questions before the interview, to avoid the possibility of my interviewees crafting formulated answers, although I gave them a specific description of my goals for the interview. I had one session with each of my interviewees via Skype, during which I asked for permission to record our conversation. Consent for recording was given by all participants. Given my prior relationships with my interviewees, these interviews took on an informal, conversational tone. My interviewees were all born and raised in Urnieta, a town of a little over 6000 inhabitants, just outside the city of San Sebastian, in the northeast of Gipuzkoa (Wikipedia, Urnieta). As highlighted in Section 2.3, Gipuzkoa is the region of the Basque Country with the highest concentration of Basque speakers. All of my interviewees were schooled entirely in Euskara, from age three onward. All but one of my interviewees currently study in the Basque Country, at public universities, where Euskara is advertised as the language of instruction. The informant who does not study in the Basque Country is situated at a university in Cantabria, a nearby region in Spain. The age range was 19-21. Interviews were conducted in Spanish.

4.4 Data processing/analysis

After each interview, I transcribed the full texts in English. I found four themes that arose in all of my interviews, which I used to frame my analysis. In the interest of avoiding repetition, I selected quotes from specific portions of the interviews which spoke to the themes in question. I made sure to include differing viewpoints when they occurred, as well.

5. Results/Observations

Starting during the rise of Basque nationalism (see Section 2.1), Basque activists and intellectuals have worked through the generations to make the principle of active participation in Basque culture a central pillar of Basque identity and nationhood. This philosophy has carried into today's reality, an example being Urla et al.'s (2017) study, wherein fluency in "vernacular" Basque was seen as the most authentic performance of Basqueness, given dialectical forms of Euskara are far more rooted in Basque history (for further detail, see Section 2.3). In my hypothesis for this study, I attempted to distill into one simple claim what I had understood from the aforementioned literature to be the underlying philosophy of the Basque Language Revival Movement: *you must speak Euskara to claim the Basque identity.*

The questions I asked in my interviews addressed three general topics of interest in my informants' lives and worldviews: political engagement, institutions, and identity. In this section, I will be analyzing the explicit and implicit messages expressed in their answers, which I will categorize under four major themes that I found ran through all of my interviews: history, access, reclamation, and agency. I will explain in each section how their answers can be encapsulated in that respective theme, also drawing on some of the existing literature to contextualize their claims.

5.1 History

All six interviewees brought up at some point throughout the conversation the complicated history of the Basque Country, and the survival of Euskara in particular. This unifying theme is a testament to how deeply my interviewees' understanding of their positioning in society is rooted in the conditions that have shaped the current state of the language, and their nation as a whole. In response to my question directly addressing my hypothesis, S6 addressed the problematic presuppositions such a statement carries:

S6: "I think if you're Basque, in principle you speak Euskara, but for example there are people who weren't allowed to speak Euskara, but they feel Basque and their whole life is Basque, and all that. Young people like me who have always spoken Euskara, in school we learned Euskara, well, yeah it's normal that we speak in Euskara, but for example my father, or mother, who have never spoken Euskara in their life, not in school or anywhere else, because they weren't allowed to, or because they didn't go to a school where they spoke Euskara, well, yeah they're Basque."

S1's remarks on the same topic complicates this discussion further, addressing those who kept the language alive during its peak of oppression.

S1: "And among the older people, I think that the older *euskaldunes* have a much stronger feeling about [Euskara] than anybody else, because Euskara was really oppressed, being Basque has been really frowned upon for many years ... They suffered, but they maintained it at the same time, which is a feeling that I think I won't ever be able to understand, because on top of everything I got to study Euskara. I don't know, that's the way I see it. ... There isn't really a uniform answer [to what makes a person Basque], every person will tell you something different."

Reading through the history of the Basque Country, it is very clear that the circumstances of generations preceding that of my interviewees largely invalidate any sort of argument that one

could make about the objective truth of the claim that a Basque person must speak Euskara. Understanding the ways their history lives in my interviewees' worldviews is crucial to examining the success of the language revival movement. There is a constant tension between the prescriptivism some language activists have espoused and the descriptive reality that my interviewees adhere to. The prescriptive viewpoint mentioned here is inspired by the Language Revival Movement's foundational principles: Urla (2012) refers to the foundation of the Basque Nationalist Party in 1895 as a place where "language loyalism" to Euskara took root in political infrastructure, stating that "Basque nationalism made Euskara a symbol of Basque nationhood" (32). Urla also references Zalvide (1988), who spoke to the ideological foundations for language loyalism that emerged around the same time in the 1890s, at which time the slogan "Zazpiak Bat"³ became popularized, journalists began to write in Euskara, and schools began to teach in Euskara, as inspired by the uptick in Basque Nationalism at the time.

In my interviews, however, any sort of assertion that the ability to speak Euskara is a determining factor of a Basque person's claim to their nationhood was immediately qualified by the historical trauma that assertion elicited for them. The history my interviewees addressed was nuanced and multifaceted. S3 brought up a discussion of the social and demographic factors that influenced the degree to which Euskara was transmitted in prior generations, leading into today's reality, as well.

S3: "In our parents' generation, there was a really large wave of immigrants that came from elsewhere to work here in the industry, so within that population, there's a very small percentage of people who learned Euskara, so the families of those generations that came here, in the 60's and 70's, they had more difficulty to enter into the Basque environment and, I don't know, become *euskaldun*⁴, and the same thing is happening now. It's not just the people who come from other places, but also people from here, I don't know, some people never feel that duty to study Euskara, because since it's a bilingual situation, and you can manage in your day-to-day just as well in Euskara as you can in Spanish perfectly well without any problems, it's like, [a person's desire to speak Euskara] doesn't depend as much on the generation as it does on other factors."

Looking at S3's above comment without much context, it may appear that this informant places personal responsibility on those who choose not to study Euskara, for their complacency or desire to take the path of least resistance.

While a lot of Basque people's perception of Euskara's endangerment is qualified by extenuating circumstances, determined by a regime that took an interest in actively stamping out everything unique about this culture, the long-term effects of the dictatorship's policies are much farther reaching than the current reality they created during the regime. The influx of migrant workers, the devaluation of Euskara in its functionality, and the diglossia between Spanish and Euskara are all attributable to the regime (Conversi 2003). These factors still affect the daily lives of Basque speakers, as seen in the ways it lives in my interviewees' consciences. All that is to say, there may be some degree of criticism merited in the discussion of Basque people's complacency toward Euskara, which I will touch on more later, but in the meantime, my interviewees made it clear why it is important to understand that Basque culture did not immediately jump back into full swing after Franco died – the revival has been an uphill battle, to say the least. S3 spoke directly to this point later in our interview:

S3: "I would like to note though that it's still important to keep in mind the difference between generations. In our parents' generation and a little younger than them, in those times Euskara wasn't as deeply valued as it is now, and speaking Basque wasn't an

³ Translates to "Out of seven, one", referring to the unity of the seven provinces of the Basque Country

⁴ *Euskaldun* is the term for "Basque person" in Euskara. It also translates directly to "speaker of Euskara", and the two definitions are used interchangeably.

essential requirement to be able to work in public service work. However now, for example in hospitals, in Osakidetza⁵, since there has been a new, young generation, and a new conscience has been created, now for example in hospitals, you do hear a lot more Euskara, and they do speak more [Euskara], and there is that kind of direct treatment with patients in Euskara. But in many other institutions, let me tell you, in universities... they don't comply with it at all. And in the Basque government, they don't either.”

As S3 mentioned in this commentary, there appears to be a greater push for institutions to expect proficiency in Euskara, now that there is a greater likelihood of speakers having had formal education in the language. This brings us to the discussion of the role of institutions in the Language Revival Movement, as responsible actors for promoting this cause.

5.2 Access

When asked to speak on their experiences with institutions such as the government and academia, my interviewees were far more inclined to take a concrete stance on how widespread they felt speaking Euskara should be. In keeping with their inclination to recognize the complexity of the situation, my interviewees expressed frustration at the disparities between their institutional rights to accessible services in their preferred language and the quality or degree of that accessibility.

As mentioned earlier, S6 has a very measured way of understanding how Basque identity is related to Euskara: if you have had the opportunity to learn Euskara, as a Basque person, you should be able to speak Euskara; if your circumstances haven't been favorable, you should not be faulted for that, and it doesn't make you any less Basque. Nevertheless, on the topic of institutions, S6 stood firm on her belief that linguistic accessibility should be a given in Basque society:

Alina: “*Do you think the Basque government has an obligation to operate in Euskara?*”

S6: “Look, there, I think so. We're in the Basque Country, at the end of the day, you should theoretically know how to speak Euskara, I don't know, in your work, the same way you [as a government worker] speak to people in Spanish, it's very possible there are people who only know Euskara, you'll encounter people who, because of circumstance, don't know how to speak Spanish, and you have to communicate with them in Basque, if you don't know how to do that then it's a really big problem for all parties involved.”

My conversations touched on a range of theoretical to practical understandings of my interviewees' concerns about the current state of accessibility. S5 reiterated many of the same sentiments expressed here, stating concisely, “we don't doubt that the government should speak in Spanish so that everyone can understand but let's not forget that we're living in the Basque Country and around a million people speak Euskara and it is also our right to have them speak to us in our language.” S5 and S6's concerns here represent an underlying truth that all of my interviewees agreed upon, namely that between Basque people who speak very little Spanish, and bilingual Basque speakers who primarily use Euskara in their daily lives, Basque speakers' rights are equally important and should be equally fulfilled. That being said, some of my interviewees touched on how that actually plays out, and it is by no means a simple process:

S4: “I mean, all of that is being regulated more right now. So right now there is much more of an emphasis, for any type of public service work in Euskadi, they ask for a certificate,⁶ but until now that isn't common practice. So even though it's our right to

⁵ Basque health services

⁶ Certificate in order to demonstrate command of Euskara, obtained through standardized testing. Conceptually similar to the TOEFL certificate for non-native English speakers.

receive services in Euskara, in any publicly funded setting, whether it's the doctor, the dentist, whatever it may be, that right isn't fulfilled, it's not honored.”

In their attempts to reconcile their history and current situation with the ideologies they have adopted as defenders of the Language Revival Movement, my interviewees have carefully considered all of the necessary steps for reaching their projected ideal, and this particular step of institutionalizing linguistic accessibility across the board appeared to be primarily a source of frustration and dissatisfaction. As seen in the previous section, S3 emphasized the importance of considering their nuanced history when making claims about what Basque society should look like today. She mentioned the health system as a place where positive changes are visible, with the creation of a “new conscience” wherein young people coming into the workforce are emphasizing a greater use of Euskara in their professional lives too. That being said, when it came to discussing her personal experiences as a student and a civilly engaged citizen, she did not hesitate to defend her rights in the face of all that remains to improve, and the rights of her fellow *euskaldunes*:

S3: “I think there is a pretty big problem, especially in the government and the universities, where in theory they offer a variety of services, first and foremost in Euskara, but when you look more closely at the reality of the situation, many of the people who work in these institutions don't have the credentials, or they don't have adequate levels of Euskara, and the majority are Spanish-speaking. That is, it's possible they'll understand [Euskara] more or less, but they'll never address you in Euskara because the institutions don't demand it of them, as necessary. Now, in the past few years, they do ask more frequently for the credential proving proficiency in Euskara, but for the past 40 or 50 years it wasn't an indispensable requirement to know Euskara in order to work in the Basque government, or in the universities, they didn't require it of you. Now, however, they've made new laws, and more and more they're trying to require qualifications in Euskara. After four years here, though, we haven't seen it happen in practice, and even today, when you go to the library, or whatever it may be, you always have to refer to yourself in Spanish, because they're not going to respond to you in Euskara.”

Most of our talk about governmental functions were highly critical of the institutions themselves, and appropriately so for a movement that is fighting for complete overhaul of daily practices within bureaucratic processes. The Basque government itself recognizes the difficulty of ensuring that Euskara is used in these processes, advocating in a governmentally-endorsed introductory handbook to the Basque Country that “a compensatory policy of affirmative action must be used in education, in a variety of spheres (documents, signs, institutions, promotion...), in places where the public is served (government offices, public services and increasingly also in private services aimed at the public) and that the right of Euskara speakers to be attended to in the specific language of the country must be guaranteed” (Zallo & Ayuso 2009, p. 42). In practice, however, the use of Euskara in these environments does not often go beyond legally sanctioned accommodations. My interviewees blamed this primarily on the institutions for not emphasizing the practice of using Euskara in daily operations, but another side of this discussion is one that S2 brought to the table concerning agency, which serves as a preface to the upcoming sections:

S2: “The people in the town house in Urnieta, they do know Euskara, so if you want to talk to them in Euskara you can, but if you go to any random place they won't respond to you in Euskara. ... But on top of that it's our fault, because we go in and the first thing we say is "hola" – when we go to serious places and all that, you always speak in Spanish instinctively, because it's like, it's rare that someone would know Euskara, I don't know.”

It goes without saying that these students dedicate a lot of time to being actively critical of how society is run, and through their involvement in activism and community organizing, they have

invested personal stakes in changing the daily order of linguistic accessibility and cultural preservation at all levels of society. My interviewees embody Conversi's (2003) principle of active participation, making centering their political engagements and ideologies in their social and academic lives. So, naturally, they have a strong sense of personal responsibility and a belief in their purpose and ability to enact change, so it was unsurprising to hear S2 turn the criticism, if only for a moment, back on themselves. Not only does this demonstrate how far the scope of their ideology reaches, it also shows the undeniable power that institutions hold over their citizens.

Underneath S2's willingness to implicate herself lies a certain species of doubt that always creeps up on those who fight back against a system of prestige. Their daily reality is one in which Spanish is the default language. Speaking Euskara is simultaneously a political statement and an act that is by no means guaranteed to be received well or reciprocated. As much as they may argue in favor of institutional change, and as impactful as their voices are in their political efforts and daily practices, it is ultimately in the power of the institutions themselves to make real, lasting change. Resetting the standard is an institutional responsibility, and as my interviewees have expressed across the board, it is an urgent task.

The urgency and nuance expressed thus far are particularly evident in my interviewees' experiences within the university setting, where they faced up daily with the effects of the Basque Country's complex relationship with its diglossia. S1, S2, S3, and S4, have all attended three and a half years of university at the University of the Basque Country, a publically funded institution that promises to operate entirely in Euskara. All of them recounted experiences where faculty and staff fell short of their right to linguistically accessible education.

S4 gave the example of supplementary resources provided by professors, stating frankly that "the professors and the notes that are given for the class don't have the same level of Euskara that they supposedly should have, despite what you have signed up for." S2 recounted an experience a close friend of hers had in studying to become an orthodontist: "the students don't know going into it which subjects they're going to have to do in Spanish and which they're going to have to do in Euskara because supposedly there aren't professors, so you don't have the option to do it 100% in Euskara, your education, even though they sell it to you as if that were the case and even though it's a public university." As they recounted their experiences in the education system, the discussion got relatively heated for all of my interviewees. As S2 explained, the public higher education system is a place where there is a clear expectation that young people will be able to express themselves comfortably in Euskara, which is especially important for students whose primary and secondary education has been conducted entirely in Euskara. Similarly, S1 shared her thoughts on the difficulty of switching over to Spanish in the classroom:

S1: "In reality, it's shit, man. For example in my university, and most likely in all of them, to start, I can't study all of my subjects in Euskara, because supposedly there aren't any professors who know how to do certain subjects in Euskara, so I have to do them in Spanish. ... The core classes are all in Euskara, but later when you get to the more advanced stuff, that's when you end up taking some classes in Spanish. ... It's the fucking worst, because, on top of everything they mix us with people who study in Spanish, so of course, to start there are two levels, it's really extreme... I for example can definitely hold my own in Spanish, but there are people in my class who just don't know [how to speak Spanish well enough], and of course, to have to give a presentation in front of an entire class of people, full of people who have studied in Spanish their whole lives, and you're up there, you as a person who struggles to put together four consecutive sentences in cohesive Spanish, and on top of all that in technical vocabulary, where you have no clue what you're talking about anyway, well... it's the worst. But the professors also understand, like, they know that it's a lot harder for us. And it's really hard, speaking in

Spanish, for example, imagine, I'd have to speak with S2 in class in Spanish, you know? It's really shocking, that aspect of it. But... that's how it's going for us.”

All of this frustration stems from a lack of access to Basque-speaking professors with technical education conducted in Euskara, a direct result of the oppression of Euskara. Although many of the employees of universities are of the same generation that my interviewees spoke forgivingly about with regards to circumstance hindering their ability to speak Euskara, our discussion was directed at the institutions themselves, and holding universities to their word is something my interviewees were willing to prioritize in a more personal and ideological discussion. They recognize that individuals should not be faulted for not having access to learning or developing Euskara, so naturally, they feel a deep sense of injustice when they are denied that very same access. This is, of course, deeply complicated, as the reason for their professors' inability to provide them with a fully comprehensive education in Euskara lies in the Basque Country's history of oppression.

5.3 Reclamation

In direct response to the institutional injustices the Basque people have faced, much of the Basque cultural revival movement's focus has been on the act of *reclamation*, a term which I define most broadly as specific actions my interviewees undertake as a means to counter their perceived cultural oppression. These actions comprise a large part of their cultural environments and social activity. Their engagement with reclamation practices also runs line with the social theory upon which the Language Revival Movement is built:

“To use the term “revival” to describe what goes on in a language movement can be, in fact, somewhat misleading. For while language advocacy often frames itself as recovery of the past, the outcomes and objectives of the movement are as much about change and reinvention as they are about reproduction. Revival is fundamentally about creating a new linguistic future. In attempts to reclaim Basque, the practices of language loyalism are simultaneously introducing distinctively modern ways of conceptualizing the Basque language, identity, and speaker” (Urla 2012, p. 9).

My interviewees spoke in great detail about their involvement with activism and community building efforts. In their circles, there is a strong culture around being politically engaged, cultivating Basque nationhood, and engaging with their heritage. S1 gave an overview of all the many ways this culture takes form in their lives:

S1: “We are involved in Poxta Zahar, an association for young people in Urnieta, that prepares festivals in the town, so that there's a sense of community, but it's not just for festivals, but also so that the town is active, so that it doesn't just operate as a small town where there's nothing going on ever. And then there's a new association that we're forming, it's called "Marimore", and what we want is a group of women who come together around feminism, so that there's also feminist activity in the town. And... I don't know, protests and all that, yeah we usually go. ... In Vitoria (where S1 attends University) for example you have so many different organizations, for everything, from small things like a flea market, a benefit concert, or small protests, or the Green Week there, you'd have talks about the environment, and also a really famous thing in the UPV, Herri Unibertsitatea, which means, University of the Town. They do it in 3 or 4 days, and they take over a section of rooms in the university and all day long they have talks, students give talks to later debate about whatever it is they're addressing, and then later they sleep in the university, and each organization that's there will sign up to cook a different meal or partake in setup, and basically for a few days we just live life in the university, and it's also to go against the education system that we have.”

When I asked my interviewees what role Euskara played in actions of the nature that S1 described here, there was no question that the language played a crucial role in unifying

participants around their collective goals. Euskara, in many ways, is characterized as the language of resistance:

S5: “I think that Euskara has a fundamental role within the movements that have existed and that are currently ongoing. Taking into account that the culture, history, and the social movement were illegal only 50 years ago, they carry a vindication of Euskara within all of them. Also, the language is the fundamental characteristic that we have in comparison with everyone else and for that reason and taking into account that even today our language isn’t normalized neither in the streets nor in the institutions, it should always be one of the principal vindications within the social movement.”

S5 expressed more broadly here what all of my interviewees agreed with, in that aside from being a cause in itself worth fighting for, Euskara can serve as a unifying code for Basque people of all walks of life, whether they are setting up flea markets, on the front lines of protests, teaching in universities, or nursing patients to health in hospitals. And while Spanish often seeps into these realms, it is in explicitly political actions where the need for that unity becomes most pronounced:

S4: “To take the incinerator as an example, in summer there was a group called *Gipuzkoa Zutik*, that was people coming together from all of *Euskal Herria*, more or less, there were more people from Gipuzkoa but, we came together to talk and to seek out solutions for this topic or propose something to the government. And there, even though there were plenty of people who didn't know Euskara, who only knew Spanish, the primary language that was used in those discussions was also in Euskara, they always use Euskara. They offered to people a space where two other people went to translate for those people who didn't know Euskara, but, the importance was placed completely on Euskara. In that aspect, I think so. The space that is created for reclamation of whatever cause we're addressing is also a reclamation of Euskara. There isn't a moment where it gets left behind as a secondary cause, the way it does in other environments, in this case I don't think it does.”

Of course, the consideration for those who do not speak Euskara is always present, as S4 expressed here, but it is respected that the reclamation of the language takes precedence in these settings, as a demonstration of the true roots of the Basque people, and to honor their history and culture.

When discussing the role that Euskara plays in my interviewees’ political engagements, it quickly became clear that their involvement in grassroots organizing and community-based activities goes far beyond what one might imagine as just being a fraction of their time spent outside of class. This happens as a result of how the line has been blurred between strictly cultural celebrations and political actions. Active participation for my interviewees is a matter of constant engagement with Basque culture, wherein participation in cultural activities and speaking Euskara alone have become politicized as acts of resistance to Spanish hegemony. As seen in what S1 described in this section, there are a plethora of opportunities to engage in anti-establishment movements in the Basque Country, and as S4 and S5 expressed, Euskara plays a central role in these movements.

My interviewees spoke of the politicization of the very act of speaking Euskara and engaging with Basque culture as a reaction to the alarming reality that less than a third of the population currently speaks Euskara, and even those who are able often opt for Spanish as their primary language of communication. Referring back to my discussion with S2 in regards to access and choosing how to address strangers in formal settings especially, her comment that “it's rare that someone would know Euskara” encapsulates a sentiment that ran through all of my interviews, in that it is taken as the norm as opposed to the exception that Spanish is the default language of the Basque population. The way my interviewees address their frustration at this reality can be understood through S4’s comment on how in spaces concerned with

reclamation, Euskara never gets “left behind as a secondary cause, the way it does in other environments.” Those “other environments” are likely in reference to the institutions discussed above, wherein my interviewees are allowed much less space for self-determination and agency over how to interact with Euskara. The discussion of agency is one that consumed much of my conversations with my interviewees, and it is one I will explore further in the following section.

5.4 Agency

In keeping with my earlier exploration of the dynamics between dialects of Euskara and *Batua* as they relate to people’s claim to the Basque identity (Section 2.3), the themes I have explored thus far contribute to what Peter Muhlhausler (2000) terms the “ecology” of language planning, which essentially describes all of the groundwork my interviewees and the literature have to lay before getting into any discussion of how to enact change and where individual action can be considered:

“The ecological approach [to language planning] sees human communication embedded in a complex socio-historical, spatial and interpersonal ecology. Its basic assumption is that *meaning is created not because interlocutors share a code but because there are relations between them* that enable them to arrive at an agreed meaning” (Muhlhausler 2000, p. 331; emphasis added).

Muhlhausler’s proposition here suggests that a language holds significance not for its purely linguistic properties, but rather because those who speak that language create meaning *through and around* that particular language, influenced in large part by the “complex socio-historical, spatial and interpersonal ecology” that that language inhabits.

Using this framework, the significance that Euskara holds in the Basque society, according to my interviewees, is shaped by an ecology comprised of the Basque Country’s and language’s sociopolitical history, institutional accessibility to speakers of Euskara, as well as the grassroots cultural reclamation movement that centers language in all of its efforts. I have mentioned in previous sections (2.1, 2.3, 5.2, 5.3) how the Language Revival Movement operates on the principle of active participation as a metric to determine individuals’ authenticity in claiming the Basque identity, and in this section I will expand upon that principle to account for the ecological factors that my interviewees have laid out. The fact of personal motivation and engagement with the movement is a crucial component to keeping Euskara alive and flourishing, so to account for the context that arguably shapes the entirety of Basque people’s motivations in this discussion, I will be using the framework of “agency”, as defined by Sicoli (2011), which encompasses *both* the ecological influences and the individual’s positioning in the discussion of language endangerment:

“Actions are socioculturally constrained both in the possibility of their deployments and in their side effects. From this perspective individuals are not simply free agents of their actions but are positioned subjects. ... Acts that change and sustain a society are situated in the social and cultural matrices of which persons are a part, rather than solely in individuals. It is thus problematic to assume agency is located solely in individual action. ... Agency is emergent in practice and not reducible to individuals or societies” (Sicoli 2011, p. 162).

In short, the way this framework plays out in the Basque Country is that a person’s motivation to participate in the Language Revival Movement is influenced by the ideology they have been exposed to, and it is also limited by their access to learning and speaking the language, which is shaped by the history of oppression that Euskara has faced. Of course, while my interviewees always qualified their claims to account for Euskara’s past and present ecology, most of them still hold strong convictions about the responsibility of people who have access to Euskara to honor all of the work previous generations have done to keep the language alive and the privilege they have of being able to speak it:

S4: It's important to validate everyone's opinion, but I don't think there's one set definition of being Basque. It's a really big conflict here, I think. It also depends on the opportunities you've had. So for example to me if a person was born here, has gone to the *ikastola*, has had the opportunity to live their life in Euskara, in all of that, and when you reach adolescence, you already don't use it, I see that as *disgraceful*, and it seems to me that people like that don't have any sense of responsibility/virtue. And then when you take someone who wasn't born here, and hasn't had the same opportunities, but maybe those people work harder, put in more effort into Euskara... For example, a mother who, okay, she doesn't know Euskara, but she brings her kids to the *korrika*,⁷ she turns on the cartoons for them in Euskara, all the books they read that she doesn't know are in Euskara, well damn, who's more Basque here? So, yeah, there the language does have importance too, but you don't know what to value most. I don't know... there are a lot of different parts to it.

S4's question in this quote is an exemplary manifestation of the ecological dilemma that the active participation ideology attempts to resolve: if, because of circumstance, an individual has never learned Euskara, they can still perform Basque ideals by actively engaging with and upholding the language in every way possible to keep it alive. This allows for the Language Revival Movement to simultaneously be inclusive of those who cannot speak Euskara and condemn those who can speak Euskara but do not do so in their daily lives. To elaborate on this point, S4 spoke of a classmate who developed a passion for Euskara despite his circumstances:

S4: We also have the good fortune of being from a very Basque-speaking region, where we use Euskara, but there are a lot of people from Iruña (Pamplona) down (in Navarre) who have a lot of difficulties. There are maybe five *ikastolas*, counted on one hand, in that region. And the idea that those people put in three times the effort [to learn Euskara] because they're interested in these things, it's a lot more admirable. For example I'm studying Basque philology, and in my cohort there's a guy from Tuterá, which is almost, I mean, Rioja. And that that person is interested in Euskara and puts in that work, that seems to me really wild, because he didn't have that right the same way we have had, because for us, it's already set up, we're born, we're put into the *ikastola*, we're surrounded by the language in all respects, and in the end it's so much easier for us, and you don't appreciate it because you see it as your normal, because it's what you're surrounded by.

This example demonstrates how S4, as someone who studies Basque philology, and thus a staunch supporter of the Language Revival Movement, does not demonstrate much sympathy for people who internalize the prestige hierarchy of the Spanish-Euskara diglossia, which as demonstrated in Section 2, heavily favors Spanish. Instead, S4 expresses deep admiration for those who, against all circumstantial forces, work to maintain the language. The authority and passion with which S4 speaks is especially important to consider when placing this discussion in a broader context of language endangerment trends, which in varying scales and capacities demonstrate how heavily the odds are stacked against the Basque Language Revival Movement. Although perhaps counterintuitive, Amano et al.'s (2014) study shows that when a region faces greater economic prosperity, the minority languages have a much higher likelihood of dying out. Although Spain has suffered significantly from economic downturns in the past decade, the Basque Country has historically been one of the most economically secure regions in the Iberian Peninsula (Euskal Kultur Erakundea).

⁷ Run for the first time in 1980, *Korrika* is now an annual event and staple of modern Basque culture where people of all ages run across the Basque Country, all day and night, passing a baton at every kilometer, for the sake of raising awareness about and celebrating Euskara ("Korrika" 2017). See Appendix 3 and 4 for images.

Because of this, in her positioning as a student of Basque philology, a native speaker of Euskara from a small town in a predominantly Basque-speaking region, and as a young woman who fights daily for the Basque language, S4 is a person whose voice must be elevated, listened to and taken very seriously when considering the value of language maintenance in the Basque Country, as well as the broader value of endangered language revival. I take for granted in this study that S4's peers agree generally that Euskara should be spoken by all those who are able, and should be revered and fought for adamantly by all residents of the Basque Country (and beyond) regardless of the degree to which they are familiar with the language. It would be irresponsible, however, not to acknowledge that even amongst my interviewees there were differing opinions about how strictly people should adhere to the ideology that S4 espouses. S3 spoke more to why not everyone sees upholding Euskara as their first and foremost priority in their social and political engagements:

S3: "Here in the Basque Country it depends a lot on which region of the Basque Country you were born, your family's perspective on everything, all that, then, what kind of people you're surrounded by, your friends, and then, I think it depends on the individual, I mean, it depends on everyone saying for themselves, damn, I've been lucky enough to be born in this place, to have a language and culture [like this one], I've also got to do my part to make an effort so that this goes forward and doesn't disappear, so I think it depends a little on external factors, but when it comes down to it what matters more is what each individual feels, what they value and what they don't."

Here we see how, as powerful as agency may be in making strides forward in the Language Revival Movement, this principle still very much leaves open the option of choosing *not* to speak Euskara. Further, S3 spoke to how agency is not by default a solution or countering force to the fact of the prestige that Spanish holds in this diglossia, given that prestige plays directly into how people choose to engage with Euskara:

S3: "But, on the other hand, there could be someone who knows how to speak Euskara perfectly, who was born here, and who speaks Euskara with their family and all that, but because of work or friends, doesn't use Euskara, and sees it as something negative, or that it isn't worth much, and then goes on to displace it day by day from their daily life, that in the end brings us to losing another speaker. For all that it's worth that you know the language and for the familial context/individual has been completely in Euskara, but when addressing the prestige aspect, the prestige, work, and a little bit of the context of friends or people who surround you in your daily life, they could bring you to devalue Euskara a lot, and so that you speak Spanish instead, and I think that happens, unfortunately a whole lot. And so, those are *euskaldunes*, because in theory they were born here, they have *euskaldun* family, they got an education in Euskara, but later individually they've decided not to speak it. ... I think that transmission is also really important, using it versus not using it, being conscious of having to transmit it, maybe we have to give it more importance, I don't know... to use it more in practice."

S3 acknowledges here that it's very possible that resulting from social factors, people will passively fall out of the habit of speaking Euskara, especially because speaking it is not necessary, according her, to operate fully in Basque society.

Prestige being accounted for, not all of my interviewees shared the opinion that those who can speak Euskara should by all means do so:

Alina: "Do you think you have an obligation to speak Basque, and why, or why not?"

S6: "No, I don't have any sort of obligation, every person has the right to speak whatever language they feel like speaking, wherever and whenever they want to. So, I speak Euskara because I like it, and I want to speak in Euskara, and I think that it's an awesome language and I think it's a beautiful language, a language with which I can command confidently, because it's my native language, so I speak because of that, but

there are people who know the language who don't speak it because they don't like it, so everyone speaks whichever way they want to.”

As S4 mentioned earlier, given their desire to validate everyone’s opinion, it is difficult to come to a consensus on the individual Basque speaker’s responsibility to uphold the language. That being said, most of my interviewees were not hesitant to express disappointment in how young people with access to the rights they are fighting so actively for are not honoring the value of that work:

S1: “In reality here, among young people, everything to do with Euskara is losing a ton of support. Among the younger kids in our town you really hear very little of Euskara. And I don't really understand why that is, because in reality, we all have the opportunity to speak in Euskara and we all know it, I mean, we study in Euskara, but I don't know why, it's like there's no... I don't know, it's like if you speak in Spanish, it's another level, I don't know why they tend to speak in Spanish, and in reality, those people never do anything to uphold/support Euskara, so they feel like it's just another subject in school that they are obligated to learn, and that's it, and then there are other young people who really feel like they're Basque and like they want to do something for Euskara, and apart from speaking it, well, they do everything for it.”

If we look strictly at the numbers, we would perhaps not predict the reality that S1 is describing, given that, in comparison with the overall measurement of only 27% of the Basque population being able to speak Euskara, Spanish-Euskara bilingual speakers between the ages of 10-14 was last recorded at around 77% (IV Mapa Sociolinguistico 2006). So while access might be on the rise, getting people to engage with active participation in Basque culture still remains as a major obstacle to keeping Euskara relevant and thriving in the Basque Country.

5.5 Revisiting the hypothesis

My original hypothesis looked to answer the question of how mutually intertwined speaking Euskara and being Basque by ethnicity and/or national identity were. In the above four sections, I have laid out a framework of the “language ecology” of Euskara, providing context for the current state of the Language Revival Movement through the eyes of my interviewees, all of whom were raised into the systems built by advocates of the Language Revival Movement and shaped by the ideologies the Movement espouse and adhere to. As stated at the end of the previous section on agency, even when all structures are in place to allow for Euskara to thrive, there is no guarantee that everyone will be on board to adopt it as their primary language of communication and daily use. It is unsurprising, then, that when asked directly as to whether or not my interviewees believed firmly in the statement that I proposed in my hypothesis (*you must speak Euskara to be Basque*), their answers were varied and nuanced, which I will work through in this final section in an attempt to tie up the loose ends of my contribution to this ever-growing conversation.

To start, S5, who adheres more strictly to the nationalist and cultural movement ideologies than my other interviewees, responded very affirmatively to this question:

S5: “Yes, [I think you have to speak Euskara to be Basque,] if not it doesn't appear to me as though we would be able to understand our customs, our history or more simply I would say that it is the fundamental property that unites all of us.”

S5's response is unique in this study in that he roots his discussion of Euskara in not just the fact of its origins in the Basque Country's long and revered history, but also and especially in that the language itself has been instrumental in shaping and creating the customs themselves that Basque people today celebrate with such pride and joy. His discussion of our present understanding of Euskara's place in society also roots itself in the unique and unifying nature of the language—to S5, Euskara has the power and potential to bring an ever-changing society

together around a shared mode of communication, which, in his eyes, is the most powerful bond a people can have.

S3, on the other hand, sees Euskara as less centrally unifying to Basque people, and instead she places an emphasis on recognizing the many influencing factors that bring a person to participate in and identify with Basque culture:

S3: “I think there are a lot of people who place a lot more importance on the fact of having been born here, or being from somewhere else and having come here and having studied the language, or not, I think it's an aggregate. It doesn't just depend on a few factors, but rather in the end what makes you identify or feel Basque is an aggregate of things, that you have to have all of. I don't know how to express it, but the fact of speaking the language, living out the culture, feel the culture, love your land, but the fact of not having been born here also gives you the right to do all of those things. It's not uniquely our right to do those things, but rather it's an aggregate of things that you have to feel and do, to internalize that feeling. ... It's a topic that spurs a lot of debate.”

This attitude is also represented in the literature, particularly Urla's (2012) description of Heiberg's (1982) analysis of the development of Basque nationalism, in which she claims that “neither Euskara nor any other aspect of Basque culture was considered to be in and of itself indispensable to Basque nationalists” (Urla 2012, p. 37). This is not to devalue the importance of Euskara as integral to Basque culture, of course, but when it comes down to defining a conception of Basque nationhood, language is not the only consideration that most of my interviewees have for how to qualify the Basque identity. S2 also agreed that in addressing this question, “in the end it's also just a feeling, because... it's not just, Euskara. It's a whole culture, not just a language.” Taking these opinions into account, we can see how my original hypothesis requires a lot of qualification, to the point where asking the question itself of whether a language as a separate living entity can be central to defining a culture becomes an unproductive endeavor, given how impossible it is to distill language from all of the many ways other cultural and political factors must be considered to even begin having this discussion.

Speaking more practically, however, when it comes to actually acting on the principles that my interviewees and the literature promote as ways to live out their Basque identity, those characteristically Basque *actions* and the use of the Basque *language* were still talked about by my interviewees as heavily intertwined:

S2: “I think that in the towns here, there's plenty of movement happening, because in almost every town there are organizations or associations that organize around all of the injustices/unrest in our society. And ordinarily, those associations are made up almost entirely of people who speak Euskara. So, those that speak Spanish and all that don't really organize that much, here.”

What the language-identity relationship boils down to for S2 here is that, theory aside, there is a practical reality to the ways she sees her society functioning: those who show up to and/or organize the movements that work tirelessly to address social injustices in the Basque Country are also for the most part people who speak Euskara, and those who only speak Spanish are typically nowhere to be seen in such circles. Whether or not this is a correlative or causative relationship is less important to S2 than how these dynamics manifest themselves.

Ultimately, the question of affiliation to Basqueness as demonstrated by engagement with the Basque language is a nuanced and winding path, as shown by all of the ways my interviewees talked through the question at hand:

S1: “It's a feeling, like, someone who spends their whole life here could feel Spanish, and another person who's come here at 30 and has lived here for 20 years, for example, could feel completely Basque. ... You can't really explain it, it's like, something you feel, if you feel immersed in this society... In reality, in Euskara its *euskaldun*, which means

Euskara-duna, which is "the person who has Euskara", that's the literal translation. But I don't know, it's how you feel."

While I could not arrive at a definitive answer to whether or not my hypothesis is true in my interviewees' worldviews, there is certainly a generalizable drive to uphold Euskara among those who identify with Basque nationhood. That being said, what I would judge to be the most valuable conclusion to come out of this study was not in direct response to the degree of truth in my hypothesis, but rather the discussion my interviewees explored about agency and active participation provide crucial insight into what the future of the Basque language will look like.

If we look back to the pure numbers, the statistics referenced at the end of Section 5.4 might on their own be incredibly misleading, providing a false sense of hope or complacency that completely glosses over what my interviewees discussed throughout all of the conversations we had, namely, the reality of the uphill battle for agency, access, reclamation and active use is still very much ongoing in the Basque Country, and the lived stories of Basque people must be considered as equally if not more important than census statistics. The time and energy that goes into this task of listening is incredibly small when compared to the weight and importance of doing so. In merely two hours (i.e. six twenty-minute conversations), I learned a vast amount about what makes the Basque Country's linguistic reality one that, while heavily studied, still requires a lot of attention and care to keep Euskara alive, and more importantly, to allow for the language to truly flourish as a central part of Basque culture and daily life.

6. Conclusion

This study serves to explore a range of theoretical to practical understandings of how the Basque Language Revival Movement, as a movement that appears to be relatively successful, continues to grapple with the questions of how to integrate a language of immense historical and cultural significance, and very little perceived practical use, into an increasingly globalizing society. I have found in my interviews as well as in the literature that the Basque Language Revival Movement appeals to the contingent of the Basque population who feel called to uphold the Basque Country's cultural and political sovereignty by any means necessary, regardless of vocation, location, or social positioning. The question remains, then, as to how to instill such values in the Basque population at large. Urla et al. (2017) explore the ways that fluency in the regional dialect of Euskara affect non-native⁸ speakers' motivations to continue speaking Euskara on a regular basis:

"Our data suggests that opportunities for socialization in Basque-speaking networks and the familiarity with vernacular ways of speaking it engenders may be a more relevant factor in shaping new speakers' success in transitioning into active speakers than language planners have heretofore anticipated" (Urla et al. 2017, p. 12).

Studies such as Urla's are crucial to deepening the knowledge and frameworks that language planners, educators, policy makers, and movement leaders may use to understand how to move forward with promoting Euskara, and especially to locate how Basque people are engaging with Euskara and what needs to receive attention in order to maximize that engagement. In her 2012 work, Urla also spoke to the potential language has, given the very nature of choice of engagement that has provided my interviewees and my study as a whole with so many loopholes and loose ends:

⁸ Urla defines non-native or "new" speakers as anyone who does not speak Euskara at home. This includes people who learned Euskara at school from a young age, and who may consider themselves native speakers (this is the case with S6 who explicitly identified herself as such), but who are perhaps less likely to be taught the Language Revival Movement's ideology that would come up more conversationally through learning Euskara at home.

“Language in particular is a conundrum for the ethnic/civic opposition. Where does it belong? Language is the medium through which we are socialized and acquire culture. It is often described and experienced as something one is “born with,” deeply embedded into the core of our identities, as suggested by the very term “mother tongue.” But language can also be chosen; it can be learned. Language transgresses the opposition between nature and culture that is at the root of the civic/ethnic contrast: it is both.” (Urla 2012, p. 67)

The concept of choice feels like a dangerous game to play, given how open the option always is, as I have said, to choose *not* to speak Euskara, and given the ecological factors I have explored in this study, it seems like there are plenty of motivating influences (i.e. prestige, practicality) that could push an individual away from wanting or needing to engage with Euskara at all.

My lingering question after combing through the literature and conducting these interviews, was as follows: When speaking Euskara is no longer seen as an act of pride in resistance, what is the motivation to speak it? In listening again and providing my own interpretation for how my interviewees spoke about Euskara, I realized that what they inherently understood was that the answer to that question lies in *recognizing the power of language as the living consciousness of their shared humanity*. Euskara carries Basque people’s history. It carries their indigeneity. It carries their uniqueness, their strength, their resilience, and honoring that is honoring all those who came before them and allowed for them to live today, and all those who will live after them, as proud Basque people.

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9. Appendix

1.

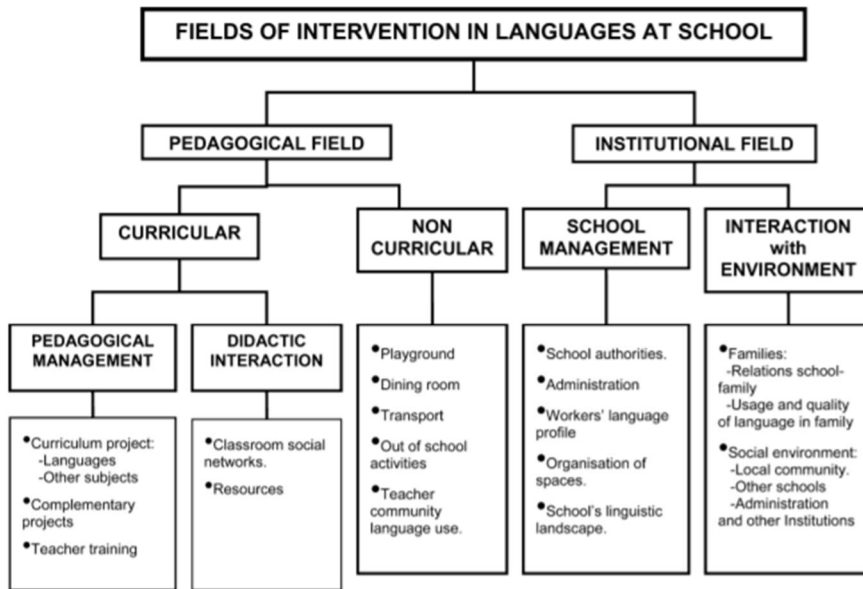


Figure 1 Fields of intervention in languages at school

(Elorza & Munoa 2008)

2.

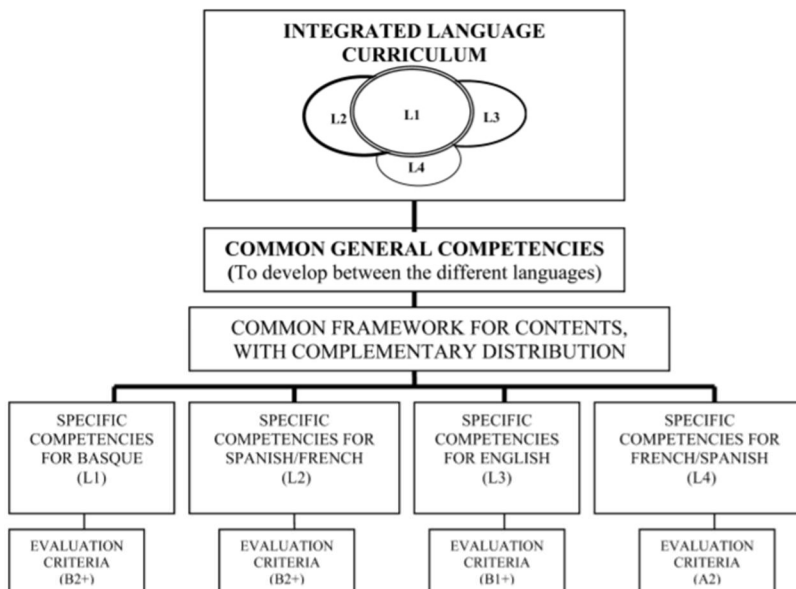


Figure 2 The integrated curriculum for languages

(Elorza and Munoa 2008)

3.



Korrika in 1980 ("Korrika" 2017).

4.



Korrika in 2016 ("Korrika" 2017).