

plurilingual in the course of their life. Social life, work, commerce, science and politics all have considerable influence on the learning of regional, state or international languages. It is important to stress that any language learning process constitutes an asset to training and culture which is increasingly valued and necessary. Learning another language brings direct access to another culture, substantially increases the capacity for understanding cultural heritage and improves communication power. Advances in educational linguistics, audiovisual and computer technologies and access to the media allow substantially faster and more efficient language teaching.

Although all these experiments take place basically in the case of second languages which in their context act as dominant languages, nevertheless there are also cases in which thanks to specific educational programmes languages which may be in a minority situation can be learned as L2 or L3. The fact that members who have lost their language or that members of other communities learn a minorised language is also a source of prestige for this language. Of course, if this option is to play a decisive role in the recovery of a language, it must be of a social nature, and school is one of the means used to this end. This is the purpose of education in any language recovery programme, and its influence will be positive, and sometimes decisive, so long as the community integrates the educational initiative in a more general and complete recovery plan. In these cases, the identity value attributed to a language, and the possibility for social integration learning it allows, is decisive for the success of the initiative. The examples of Hebrew, Maori, Basque, Welsh and Catalan (Fishman 1991) and the initiatives reported for Triqui, Kaxinawa, Mapudungun, Sami, etc. show that, though difficult, it is not impossible to revive a language and that education can be an important tool for achieving this object.

### WHY LEARN THE LANGUAGE? WHY BE LITERATE? THE BASQUE EXPERIENCE, 1960-2000

The Basque community (Euskaldunak) and its language (Basque – Euskara) have had a remarkable experience in the Basque Country (Euskal Herria) over the last 40 years in teaching the language to adults and, at the same time, in acquiring literacy in their own language.

This linguistic community is currently (1996) estimated to have 12,000 monolingual Basque speakers, 534,000 bilingual (Basque-Spanish/Basque-French) speakers and 352,900 passive bilingual speakers. At the same time, Basque was the mother tongue of 31.6% of the inhabitants of the Continental Basque Country, 24.2% of the Basque Autonomous Community and 10.1% of Navarre.

Thus the levels of familiarity and use of the language vary considerably according to the geographical area of the country and the sociolinguistic level of the population. Furthermore, in general, the need, opportunity and/or wish to

acquire the language on the part of adults and/or the convenience of doing so and becoming literate in Basque also varies widely in the three areas of the Basque linguistic community. Learning the language and literacy must therefore be seen in this varied and sometimes contradictory setting. As we shall see, in recent decades the acquisition of language and literacy has played an important part in this community.

In general, we might say that the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) is where the best organised plans for positive promotion have been set up, both through private social initiatives and through the Administration's official public initiatives, but conditions for this between 1940 and 1975 were especially difficult. Neither before nor during those decades could teaching of the language to adults or Basque literacy for speakers use the general school system, the cultural institutions or the media. Only a stubborn effort by the community managed to open a breach in the status imposed.

Various socio-cultural factors came together to reactivate the social foundations of the language. Amongst them were a few worthy individual initiatives (fifties), the teaching in the Seminars of the Catholic Church, which included courses in Basque (fifties), the creation of the Basque Schools and their social milieu (*Ikastolak*), the introduction of spoken and written journalism (sixties), the massive secularisation of already literate Catholic seminarists (who became new agents of literacy: 1968...), the spread of the children's literacy press (1959, 1966) and the offer of radio programmes promoting the language (1966), amongst others.

To all this can be added, in the sixties, as basic factors, the economic development of areas with a high proportion of Basque speakers (with a twofold rural/industrial domestic economy) and the growing discredit of the Franco regime's educational and cultural policy. Thus possession and mastery of the language emerged more and more as a liberating factor and an instrument for a more harmonious future for the country. Political resistance and cultural creativity came together in a single movement.

In this context, there was a proliferation of modest local initiatives for Basque literacy and language learning (at first, *Gau-Eskolak*: extracurricular evening classes), also helped by a wide range of social movements and after 1966 gathered under the protection of the *Euskaltzaindia* (Basque Language Academy). In 1975, a broad network of *euskaltegiak* (Basque language and literacy centres) came together as a general coordinating association (AEK) and began operations alongside other professional centres of the same nature. At the end of the seventies, annual enrolment at these centres reached about 30,000 (of which 91% were for Basque language and 9% Basque literacy).

In response to the growing importance of this phenomenon in society, in the following decade (the eighties) the authorities (in this case, the Basque

Government of the BAC) took on themselves the institutional coverage of Basque language and literacy (HABE: Basque Adult language and Literacy Institute, 1983). At the same time, the declaration of the language as (co) official in the Basque Autonomous Community and the Autonomous Community of Navarre (1979, 1982) and the projects for its normalisation have also generated increased demand for Basque teaching, doubtless also as a result of the social prestige arising from the legality of the language and its new professional or occupational utility (access to posts in the Administration).

Along with the schools mentioned above, several complementary actions should also be mentioned, in both the private and public sectors. First of all, there are the *Barnetegiak* (boarding schools) and, in another field, the publication of magazines for pupils (*Habe*, *Aizu*) and teachers (*Hizpide*, *Ele*), as well as classroom teaching materials. Proficiency and refresher courses for teachers have not been overlooked either (1992–1997). Two methodological criteria have guided this teaching activity: careful progress in the study of language structures and special attention to the communicative component in learning (Perales 2000). The experience gathered in the preceding years has made it possible to design a “Basic Syllabus for the Teaching of Basque to Adults” (Decree of 24/01/2000).

At the same time as Basque language and literacy acquisition has been endowed with technical and organisational resources, it has also sought public support for the process, to which end social/leisure events have been created, such as *Korrika*, a people’s march across the Basque Country (every two years since 1980) or *Aek-Eguna*, a festive occasion for schools and for anyone interested in the recovery of the language.

What point has currently been reached in language and literacy acquisition in the Basque Country? The size and nature of the student population is suggested in the following figures. In 1995, there were 1,135 registered students in the Continental Basque Country, while in Navarre the annual number of students can be estimated at 3,500 people and in schools in the BAC there were 42,064 (1997–1998). It is estimated that between 3,500 and 4,000 people pass the top grade in Basque language every year (BAC). To all this must now be added a new form of action, that of technical literacy teaching, which aims to prepare professionals and the public in general in the use of the language in the specialised sphere of their professional or occupational life.

The future transmission of the language to adults will be particularly conditioned by other initiatives as important or more so: by the general educational system (increasingly Basque-speaking by families’ choice), by the perhaps more difficult process of bilingualisation of civil servants, by the influence of the media (overwhelmingly dominated by French and Spanish) and more generally

by the fact that greater knowledge of the language also has a positive effect for the real use of the language.

After almost forty years of private efforts by society (1960–1980) and by social institutions – private and public (1980–2000) – two objectives can be seen to have stimulated the linguistic community in this field: that of recovering the lost language and that of achieving full social normalisation of this minority language. The awareness of and esteem for the cultural and identifying value of the language have been decisive in the process of learning, as well as that of literacy. This was evident in the seventies and recent surveys have confirmed it once more (Perales 2000). The will of society and of the political institutions has collaborated in both senses with noteworthy effect, especially in the BAC.

**Joseba Intxausti**  
**Basque Country, Spain**

### Recommendations on language and education

State, regional and local authorities, especially educational and cultural administrators, must bear in mind the following points:

- Multilingualism is the skill best suited to safeguarding cultural diversity and confronting the dangers of globalisation. The priority educational aim for the new millennium must be approached in terms of language proficiency.
- Multilingualism must be an aspiration and a demand for everybody, not just for the speakers of minority languages. Knowledge of the language of one's own community is not enough, but neither is knowing only the language of the state.
- Minority linguistic communities must have institutional assistance and advice to create and develop their educational system, but they must be allowed to define their own objectives according to their linguistic and cultural needs.
- The fact of not having a written language must not prevent the use of a language at school. Furthering formal and informal oral uses must be an educational priority in languages with and without writing, especially when the presence of a language in society is limited.
- The educational models that can contribute most to preserving linguistic diversity and thereby the identity and integrity of all linguistic communities are those that have successfully trained multilingual or at least bilingual individuals.