Bilingual Education in the Basque Autonomous Community: Achievements and Challenges

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Bilingual Education in the Basque Autonomous Community: Achievements and Challenges

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This paper focuses on the situation of Basque in education in the Basque Autonomous Community. First, it provides statistical information about four crucial aspects of bilingual education: (1) Parental choice regarding the linguistic model, that is, the use of Basque, Spanish or both Basque and Spanish as languages of instruction over the last 20 years; (2) teachers’ proficiency in Basque and the special programmes for teachers to learn Basque; (3) teaching and learning materials including audiovisual and software materials; (4) promotion of the use of Basque at school including some special projects. The second part of the paper compares the situation and challenges Basque was facing in the 1970s before Basque became an official language and nowadays. This comparison shows that even though there have been important achievements regarding the use of Basque as the language of instruction and the number of Basque-speaking teachers at school, Basque continues to be a ‘small’ language. In the last part of the paper the possible ways to overcome current and future challenges are discussed.

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Introduction

The Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) has three provinces (Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa) and it is the most highly populated area in the whole of the Basque Country with 73% of the total population, approximately two million inhabitants. The capital cities are Bilbo-Bilbao, Donostia-San Sebastian and Vitoria-Gasteiz which is the administrative capital of the BAC.

The majority language of the BAC is Spanish. It lives side by side with Basque which is a minority language in its own territory. Both languages have an official status in the BAC. According to the Spanish Constitution (1978) all Spanish citizens have the duty to know Spanish and the right to use it. Other languages are equally official in their Autonomous Communities. The BAC Statute of Autonomy (1979) affirms that Basque has, like Spanish, the status of an official language in the BAC and that citizens have the right to know and use both languages.
English is becoming increasingly important for Basque citizens as a language of international communication and its role in Basque schools is becoming more prominent in recent years (see also Cenoz, 2005, forthcoming). However, English is not used as a language of everyday communication in the BAC and is actually a foreign language. As in many other areas in Europe, it is a third language but communicative competence in English is not as high in the BAC as in many other European countries (Cenoz & Jessner, 2000). Nowadays most school children start learning English at the age of four, in kindergarten. French used to be more popular in the past but nowadays it is an optional fourth language. An important new development in the Basque educational system is the increasing number of immigrants (see Etxeberria, this volume).

This overview is based on the general situation of primary and secondary education in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) excluding university studies.

**Sociolinguistic Situation**

Basque and Spanish have been in contact in the BAC for centuries and there was a long established pattern of diglossic use between them, although it is changing rapidly in recent times (see Cenoz, in press; Zuazo, 1995). Basque was the language of everyday use in all or most of the informal, orally-conducted spheres of life for the bulk of the population. Spanish (or some previous Romance language or variety) was the language of formality, the literacy-related language of power, academic life and of the high-status interaction networks. Traditionally, schooling was primarily in Spanish, although one of its basic components, religious formation, was bilingual in its written form and, at least initially, fully or predominantly Basque on the spoken plane. But that diglossic pattern has weakened substantially due to many factors such as industrial revolution and urbanisation, transportation and universal education, non-Basque speaking immigration or language policy pursuing a monolingual state. The situation in the BAC could be best described as fragmentary bilingualism with residual diglossia in the Basque speaking districts of the BAC. Spanish has reached into the home in most areas. Basque, on the other hand, has begun to appear on signs in the street, in schools and in the local press but never so far as to take away Spanish’s primary role from it, except at school.

Most present-day inhabitants of the Basque Country cannot speak Basque. According to the most recent sociolinguistic survey conducted by the Basque Government, (Aizpurua Tellería & Aizpurua Espín, 2005; Basque Government, 2003) 29.4% of the population in the BAC is bilingual (Basque-Spanish), and 11.4% is passive bilingual, that is they can understand Basque but have limited production skills. Monolinguals in Spanish are 59.2% of the population. According to the same survey, the proportion of people who are proficient in Basque has increased in the three BAC provinces and in 2001 there were 110,000 more bilinguals than in 1991. The number of Basque speakers has risen from 419,200 to 530,900 since 1991. The main increase has taken place in the 16–24 age group, from 25% of Basque speakers in 1991 to 48% in 2001. The effect of Basque-medium education is clear here. Even though these figures are encouraging, the level of command of Basque by those who claim to be Basque speakers varies greatly, with receptive skills being clearly stronger than productive ones, and
oral skills normally stronger than those that are literacy-related. Many of the new bilinguals are Spanish-dominant bilinguals who are speakers of Basque as a second language and have learned Basque at school. These speakers do not often speak Basque at home but sometimes they speak Basque with their friends. The bilingual population is estimated to be 28.2% Basque-dominant, 26.8% balanced, and 45% Spanish-dominant (Basque Government, 2003). This means that almost half of the speakers of Basque find it easier to use Spanish than Basque.

This situation is reflected in the use of the language. Some studies have observed the languages people speak on the street (Altuna, 2002a). Four studies of street measurements have been carried out since 1989 and altogether over one million people have been observed. The results indicate that there has been a slight increase in the use of Basque in Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia but not in Araba (Altuna, 2002b). The percentage of people using Basque on the street in Gipuzkoa has gone up from 23.3% in 1989 to 29.9% in 2001. In Bizkaia it has gone up from 8.1% to 11% but in Alava it has gone down from 3.9% to 3.3%. These figures indicate that in spite of the higher number of speakers who are proficient, Basque is still a language at risk.

**Bilingual Education**

**Legal background**

Compulsory education in the Basque Autonomous Community includes six years of primary (6 to 12-year-old children) and four years of secondary school (12 to 16-year-old children). Most children go to school from the age of two or three and many attend day-care centres from an earlier age. Non-compulsory secondary education goes from 16 to 18. There are state and private schools and each type accounts for approximately 50% of the total number of students. Private schools are in many cases Catholic schools but some non-religious schools are also private.

Basque was banned from education during the Franco regime (1939–1975) but despite legal strictures, in the 1960s, groups of enthusiastic parents and teachers in the BAC fought for and succeeded in re-opening a number of private Basque-medium schools (or ‘ikastolak’). These schools were not officially recognised in the beginning, but the Franco government was eventually forced to accept them because they had attracted so many students that they could not be ignored.

With the end of the Franco regime, a new political climate that was more favourable to Basque and the Basque Country ensued and exists to this day. For example, in 1982, the Law for the Normalisation of the Use of the Basque Language recognised the possibility of using either Basque or Spanish as the language of instruction. This led to the Bilingualism Decree (1983) which established the models of bilingual education.

As far as McRae’s (1975) clear-cut dichotomy between the personality and the territoriality principles of language rights is concerned, the legal framework of the BAC rests primarily on the individuality of language rights. It is the parents (tutors or students themselves if over 18) and not the government or any other public authority who have the right to choose the medium of instruction for their children. Public powers have the duty of guaranteeing the fulfilment of this right.
Another interesting point of the legal framework is the objective to be achieved regarding language proficiency in Basque and Spanish: ‘the public authorities have to guarantee that all students have a sufficient practical knowledge of both official languages by the time they finish their compulsory studies’ (Law for the Normalisation of the Use of the Basque Language, 1982: article 17). This objective is quite ambitious and not achieved in many cases.

Bilingual education in the BAC is organised according to the following basic tenets:

(1) Schooling is the basis of Reversing Language Shift (RLS): school is the means whereby Basque bilinguals are being created or will be created. After that, it will be possible to spread the use of Basque throughout geographic and sociofunctional space.

(2) If it is properly organised, the school will be able on its own and unaided to achieve fully balanced bilingual new generations in the BAC. In this formulation, ‘proper organisation’ means, above all, school subjects (as many as possible) being taught and learnt through the medium of Basque. The amount of exposure to the language, although not the only factor, is regarded as paramount.

However, these tenets are not necessarily true. The Basque language faces an important problem regarding language use even among students who have Basque as the language of instruction (see Martínez de Luna & Suberbiola, this volume). The amount of exposure to the language is an important factor in second language acquisition but it is still difficult for second language speakers to become balanced bilinguals and to use Basque instead of Spanish.

Models of Basque education

Regarding the language of instruction, there are three models of education in the BAC, traditionally referred to as models A, B and D in ascending order of exposure to Basque (there is no letter ‘C’ in Basque):

Model A

It is intended for native speakers of Spanish who choose to be instructed in Spanish. Basque is taught as a second language for three to five hours a week. Schoolchildren in this model acquire minimal proficiency in Basque as a second language. Even though according to the legal framework students are expected to be competent in both official languages by the end of compulsory education, the results of evaluations comparing the different models indicate that proficiency in Basque is very poor as compared to the other models (Gabiña et al., 1986; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1989, 1991; see also Sierra, this volume). Following Baker’s typology this would be a weak model of bilingualism (Baker, 2006).

Model B

This model is intended for native speakers of Spanish who want to be bilingual in Basque and Spanish. Both Basque and Spanish are used as languages of instruction for approximately 50% of school time, although there is considerable variation from school to school (Arzamendi & Genesee, 1997). This model is similar to Canadian models of early partial immersion in which French and
English are used as languages of instruction for majority group English speaking students (Genesee, 1987).

**Model D**

Basque is the language of instruction in this model and Spanish is taught as a subject for four to five hours a week. This model was originally created as a language maintenance programme for native speakers of Basque, but currently also includes a large number of students with Spanish as their first language. Consequently, Model D can be regarded as both total immersion programmes for native Spanish speaking students and first language maintenance programmes for native Basque speakers. Model D is similar to Canadian early total immersion but more intensive in the case of the BAC.

An important difference when comparing these models and Canadian immersion is that children with Basque as their first language are often mixed in the same class with children with Spanish or Basque and Spanish as their first languages. This happens in model D in particular where children with both Spanish and Basque speaking home backgrounds are likely to be mixed in a single class group. This happens rather less in model B, as most children with a Basque speaking home background these days attend model D classes, but there is no prohibition on mixing children from different home backgrounds in model D, neither according to model design nor by law.

The aim for Spanish-dominant children instructed through Basque is to achieve a level of functional competence in L2 (not equivalent, nevertheless, to that achieved by a child with a strong Basque language background from home) alongside the ‘usual’ level of knowledge of L1, without delay or loss in academic development. In the case of Basque-dominant children, the aim is to develop these children’s first language as broadly as possible. It is important that they pass from oral language to reading and writing, and that they develop their language style towards higher, more formal registers of the spoken language including the use of richer terminology. It is expected that they will develop their L2 (Spanish) adequately both orally and in writing through the influence of the social environment and the Spanish language classes. Being taught through Basque is also intended to expose them to Basque culture in general.

In practice there are more models than the three described. There is a lot of variation in the case of model B regarding the number of subjects taught in each language and the acquisition of literacy skills (Arzamendi & Genesee, 1997). When the models were established there was also a model without any Basque (model X) which is practically non-existent now. An important characteristic of educational models in the BAC is that schools can combine different models. For example, additionally to exclusive A, B or D model schools, there are frequently A + B stream classes, B + D formulations or, more exceptionally, A + D model combinations in the same school.

The numbers of students studying under models A, B and D each year since the Law for the Normalisation of the Use of the Basque Language (1982) are shown in Figures 1 and 2. The figures are based on the total number of students in both state and private schools.

Figure 1 shows that use of Spanish as the language of instruction (model A) has undergone a significant decline while the use of Basque as the medium of
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Instruction (models B and D) has attracted an increasing number of students. Figure 1 also records a steady decline in the numbers of students in all programmes in the BAC. The figure falls from 519,869 in 1984–1985 to 314,736 in 2006–2007, a 39.46% decrease. When this demographic effect (Gardner, 2000, 2005) is removed, by expressing the number of students in each programme as a percentage of all students (Figure 2) the full extent of the increase in Basque-medium teaching (models B and D at the top of the figure) is more apparent.

The percentages in Figure 2 indicate the increasing use of Basque as the language of instruction in models B and D. Only 20% of students had Basque-medium teaching (model B and D) in 1982–1983, compared with almost 80% in 2006–2007, a four-fold increase. The reverse is the case for the teaching through Spanish only. The distribution of the models is not the same in the three provinces of the BAC but the increasing use of Basque as the language of instruction is taking place in all the provinces.

Figure 1 Primary and secondary school student totals in the BAC by model, 1982–2007

Figure 2 Primary and secondary school student percentages by model in each school year, 1982–2007
More and more pupils study in part (model B) or wholly (model D) through the medium of Basque. As far as pre-primary and primary levels are concerned, only 8.8% of all students in the BAC are in model A, while 28.7% are in model B and 61.7% in model D. It is expected that these children will also go on learning through the medium of Basque in secondary school.

The use of Basque as the language of instruction for Spanish-dominant children implies a substantial change in the bilingual schooling system of recent years. Less importance is given to the child’s home language background now than in the past when it comes to defining the medium of instruction. As we have already pointed out, parents can choose the model they want for their children, and each model is available in the public and private sectors. Access to all three options is limited in some areas of the country, however, where there are not enough students interested in a particular model.

Some schools have introduced English as an additional language of instruction for some of the school subjects (see Cenoz, 1998, 2005). The use of English as an additional language of instruction is still exceptional but it is taking place in the different models (see Elorza & Muñoa, this volume). Even though it provides the opportunity to increase the limited time devoted to English it also faces problems related to the teachers’ proficiency in English and the development of specific materials.

The evolution of bilingual models in the BAC: Challenges

The dramatic change regarding the language of instruction in Basque schools has important implications in different areas of the educational system (see also Gardner, 2000; Gardner & Zalbide, 2005). Some of the most important changes have taken place in the following areas: (1) teachers’ proficiency in Basque; (2) the development of teaching and learning materials in Basque; (3) the use of the language.

Teachers’ proficiency in Basque

The level of command of the Basque language required of a teacher to be hired for teaching Basque or through the medium of Basque is one of the main challenges the educational system in the BAC. This is not an easy task in a system where state school teachers are tenured and the number of students has dropped because it means that the weight of the Basquization of teachers is in in-service training and not in pre-service training. Figure 3 shows the available percentages of public sector teachers qualified to teach Basque or through Basque in the BAC.

The data show the important increase in the percentage of Basque speaking teachers. In order to be qualified teachers have to obtain a certificate of proficiency (see also Gardner, 2000). Some teachers have obtained this certificate before they get a job but many others were already teaching through the medium of Spanish and studied Basque in order to be qualified. In some cases there were teachers who had Basque as the first language but had only used Basque orally because the language of instruction at the time they were students was Spanish. In these cases special courses to acquire literacy skills and enrich their vocabulary and grammar have been organised. The data in the figure does not include the private schools where approximately half of the students in the BAC are enrolled. In these schools there are fewer teachers (approximately 63%) who have obtained the certificate of Basque proficiency.
the Basque government department of education has organised in-service training through the programme iraLe. this programme offers the possibility of whole or partial release from teaching duties so that teachers become full-time students of Basque for a period of up to three years. teachers in this situation get their full salary. Table 1 shows the number of places available and the teachers taking part in the IRALE programme over the years.

The table gives some idea of the thousands of teachers who have participated in the IRALE programme. The 1990s have clearly been the most intensive decade of in-service training efforts at the basic level, that is at the level of preparing for the Basque proficiency certificate. The IRALE programme also includes teachers on full time courses during the summer holidays or on part time courses during the school year who are not included in the table because they go on with their teaching.

The development of teaching and learning materials in Basque

Another major challenge faced by bilingual education in the BAC is the development of appropriate materials in Basque. When Basque became an official language that could be used as the medium of instruction there were very
few materials in Basque. Along these years the availability of materials in Basque for primary and secondary school has increased and in most cases schools can even select among three or more textbooks or other materials. The Basque Government Department of education has set a number of programmes to incentivise the creation, production and circulation of curricular material in print, audiovisual and electronic media. Table 2 gives an idea of the number of materials that have been funded in the years 2003–2005.

The data indicate that the production of teaching and learning materials is important in the BAC. The materials are produced by individuals and companies who get funding from the Basque Government. As Gardner and Zalbide (2005) point out, this funding is based on the principal of equal opportunity so that parents who have to buy Basque materials do not have to spend more that if they bought them in Spanish.

The use of the language

The use of Basque is one of the main challenges not only in education but for the survival of the Basque language in general. The fact that speakers of Basque in the BAC are also proficient in Spanish and that the changes in society have derived in the weakening of Basque speaking spaces has consequences for the use of Basque. In the school context it is common, at least in Spanish-dominant areas, for students with Basque as the language of instruction to use Spanish among themselves. The promotion of Basque language use in the school domain has been considered an important aim of schooling and language use dynamisation plans have been set up. This language use promotion programme for schools has been running for about 20 years, though its initial form offered far fewer options and far less financial support.

Table 3 provides information about the the extent of the language schemes developed to promote the use of Basque at school. The Ulibarri programme consists of language policy making for individual schools so as to promote the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Number of learning and teaching materials supported by grants. Data for 2003–2005 on written, audiovisual and software products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Printed materials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>The Ulibarri programme to promote the use of Basque (2004–2005)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ulibarri programme of school language schemes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Number of schools involved</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language normalisation schemes</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Grants for the promotion of language use at school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant programmes</th>
<th>Number of schools involved</th>
<th>Number of classes involved</th>
<th>Number of events</th>
<th>Number of pupils involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral expression, including:</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>3240</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>57,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School drama</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>701</td>
<td></td>
<td>12,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improvised sung verse at school</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>637</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School choirs</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>857</td>
<td></td>
<td>16,513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Story telling</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School radio</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>872</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities (IKE)</td>
<td>315</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>97,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-stay centres for students to improve informal language skills, other than government-staffed (EGE)</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>618</td>
<td></td>
<td>14,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twinning schools within the Basque Country (IKABIL)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors on school visits (EIE)</td>
<td></td>
<td>389</td>
<td></td>
<td>15,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on literature (EIE)</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basque in films (TINKO)</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>4,607</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>71,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The schools taking part in the Ulibarri programme and other schools can also apply for grants for special activities to promote the use of Basque. The figures corresponding to the main activities carried out with these grants in the year 2005–2006 are given in Table 4.

The NOLEGA programme also includes other activities such as short-stay centres for students to improve informal language skills and competitions to improve elocution and writing skills.

A Comparison of Current and Past Challenges

The information provided so far indicates that a great effort has been made to use Basque as the language of instruction in the BAC. This effort has involved human and economic resources and it has resulted in a very important shift in the language used in education. Are the challenges now very different from those of the 1970s? In this section we are going to compare the situation in the 1970s when Basque was not an official language and was only used as the medium of instruction in a few schools with the situation three decades later. Table 5 summarises the main differences.
When we compare the situation we can observe the following:

(1) *Basque as the language of instruction.* Basque medium schools were few and far between in the 1970s and pupils studying in Basque were a clear minority. Basically, the ‘ikastola’ schools were the only ones attempting to provide a Basque language education. The use of Basque as the language of instruction has grown substantially both in public and private schools. Nowadays Basque is the main language of instruction in the BAC.

(2) *Legal status and funding.* Basque-medium education received no official funding at that time and legal authorisation for such education was unclear at the least. The schools which teach wholly or partly in Basque enjoy full legal status at the present time. These schools are on a par with Spanish medium schools with regard to material resources, human resources and funding.

(3) *Teachers’ competence in Basque.* There were hardly any teachers capable of teaching in Basque or of getting by in Basque. In 1977, less than 5% of teachers reported that they knew Basque and there was not a single teacher training college training teachers to teach through the medium of Basque. At the present time, the majority of teachers in the BAC are bilingual. Some have Basque as their first language and others Spanish and have learned Basque later, in many cases in the IRALE programme. Around 21,000 teachers have achieved the level required to teach through the medium of Basque.

(4) *Learning materials.* There were virtually no learning materials in Basque in the early 1970s, Nowadays, there is a considerable variety of materials to choose from in primary and secondary school. There are usually several textbooks and reference materials in Basque to choose from for each subject and an increasing number of audiovisual material and educational software. The materials in vocational training are more limited. The development of learning materials is a never ending process because of curriculum innovation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>Basque-medium education. Differences between the 1970s and the current situation in the BAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Basque as the language of instruction</td>
<td>Only in very few Basque-medium schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Legal status and funding</td>
<td>No official funding, unclear legal status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Teachers’ competence in Basque</td>
<td>About 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Learning materials</td>
<td>No learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Standard Basque language</td>
<td>No standard for school Problems with technical terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Standard Basque language. Standard Basque for school purposes was undefined and technical terminology was very limited. Major steps have been taken in the last decades with the development of ‘euskara batua’ (unified Basque) in the establishment, acceptation and use of the standard form of Basque.

In spite of these important differences between the situation in the 1970s and now Basque continues to be a minority language in its own territory. On the international scene, Spanish has moved upwards over the last 25 years and is likely to improve its standing even further over the next 25 years. Basque will inevitably remain a small language. As compared to three decades ago Basque’s breathing spaces, that is those physical environments where Basque has been dominant, are weakening. Moreover, Basque is now losing out or weakening in domains once regarded as its very own: the home, the local community, friendship networks and the local worksphere. Schoolchildren who come from fully or primarily Basque speaking homes are an exception rather than the rule, even in model D. The use of Basque in different domains has important implications for the educational system.

Another important challenge that Basque has to face in the near future is related to quality. The figures given in this article indicate that the Basque language education has to a substantial degree won the struggle for quantity. Now the important challenge is quality understood as quality in teachers’ Basque medium performance, in the linguistic and curricular appropriacy of learning materials and, above all else, in pupils’ results. The advances made in quantity should be matched by a similar leap in quality.

The Future of the Bilingual Models

Bilingual models were established in 1983 and the degree of consensus on them is a long way from being total. On the one hand students in the A model only acquire very basic skills in Basque and this is not considered satisfactory. In fact, the evaluations carried out indicate that schoolchildren in the A model do not acquire sufficient practical knowledge of Basque as it was expected according to the Law for the Normalisation of the Use of the Basque Language (1982). On the other hand the Basque educational system is facing new challenges such as the arrival of immigrants or the increasing need to learn English. Should the models be changed? Nowadays the debate about the future of the models is open in the BAC and there are different positions. The main bodies of opinion are given in the following paragraphs.

On the one hand there exists a body of opinion which considers the final objective and the means deployed to achieve that end as insufficient because the educational policy of the BAC is not applied in the whole of the Basque Country. This body of opinion also considers that the current models do not ensure that all pupils (and not even the majority of pupils) in the BAC obtain by the end of their compulsory schooling a sufficient practical knowledge of both official languages as intended in the legal framework. For some of the advocates of this criterion, the bilingual models should be suppressed and replaced by a single model with Basque as the language of instruction for all students. This model would not take into account very strongly the home language, the
sociolinguistic environment or the desire of the parents to have their children educated via one or other official language.

On the other hand, there is another body of opinion which considers that the revitalisation of Basque in education has been excessive or even injudicious. They consider that the intensive use of Basque in education is producing (or will in the future produce) negative results as far as the global objectives of academic development. They also disagree with the pressure on Spanish speaking teachers to learn Basque. There are many different possibilities but one of the most clear-cut proposals within this school of thought is to replace the models by one single model for everyone with Basque and Spanish as languages of instruction but with more emphasis on an international language and a broader possibility for each school to fine-tune this overall model to its own preferences.

As we can see these two viewpoints are completely opposite and not all points of view can be reduced to these two bodies of thought. Both viewpoints include a good part of the proposals for substantive change in the present legal framework. An additional formula gives more power to the school so as to decide the weight of the different languages in the curriculum within the legal framework. But is it possible to have a form of language acquisition planning radically different from the present one? A radical change would have to be in accordance with the legal framework and it would have to bear in mind the sociolinguistic configuration of the country in general and of school pupils in particular. It would also have to take educational requirements into account, give due attention to strictly pedagogical and educational requirements and be aware of the human, economic, material and organisational resources that such changes would necessarily require.

**Limitations to changes in the models**

The legal, sociolinguistic and educational situation of the BAC implies some limitations when considering different possibilities for bilingual education as an alternative to the models created in 1982.

**Legal limitations**

On the legal plane, there seems to be very little room for manoeuvre. Since Basque and Spanish are official languages, and the right of choice belongs to parents, models A and D will continue to be legal and necessary. The present day model B, on the other hand, is not compulsory by law but it stands completely within the legal framework, and as far as parental choice is concerned, its future seems secure. The stipulation that one must ensure that all students, by the end of their period of compulsory schooling, attain a sufficient practical command of both languages (Spanish and Basque) also has deep roots in the legal framework. The continuing validity of this last objective in the *modus operandi* of the Basque school system thus also seems assumed.

**Sociolinguistic limitations**

On the sociolinguistic plane it is clear that the options for change would be somewhat broader. There is the possibility of strengthening the Basque language in the curriculum and this could be accepted by society in the BAC as has been shown in the last decades. But attitudes are not static and Basque society could think in a different way in the future. The section of society which views
Basque medium schooling with deep mistrust is unlikely to contribute to the strengthening of any model going beyond model A. Further, the major influx of foreign, often young, immigrants over the past few years, many of whom are native speakers of Spanish, may influence the evolution of the models, if the new arrivals continue to show a relative preference for model A.

**Educational limitations**

When thinking about radical changes, it is evident that some things will be impossible over the next 5 or 10 years. For example, about 37% of private sector teachers do not know Basque. Even if language training IRALE programme were to continue at full speed and most of the new hiring were of bilingual teachers, then there would still be a substantial group of teachers unable to teach in Basque 5 or 10 years hence.

**Potential changes**

In spite of the limitations, it is evident that it is possible to implement specific changes in a number of spheres. Some of the possible changes are the following:

**Basque-dominant children**

There could be a more differentiated treatment of children who have a good command of Basque from home and children from Spanish-dominant bilingual or non-Basque speaking homes. If we take the experience of many teachers into account, it would seem that the advantages gained by non-Basque speakers are frequently matched or even surpassed by decline amongst Basque speaking pupils. That does not mean that children of different home language backgrounds must be placed in different models or even different schools. But it does mean that the language of the home must be protected and fostered, so as to develop the potential for language normalisation to the full.

**Varieties of Basque**

When developing that potential, teachers must attend to the variety of Basque used by their pupils, in the home, on the streets, and in the local community, particularly if the dialect is far removed from the standard variety of the language. Facilitating oral fluency in the language is to be set above grammar based models of correctness in the initial years of those schoolchildren’s education.

**Spanish-dominant children**

Some changes are also necessary for children with non-Basque speaking home backgrounds who learn Basque as a second language. All students should know how to use both official languages orally and in writing by the end of their period of compulsory schooling, as it is a clear expression of the school system’s prime language objective. Nevertheless, that is not enough to ensure the appropriate steps to achieve that objective in the case of Basque. It is necessary to go further by establishing precisely the targets to be achieved at the end of the intermediate stages and examining whether those objectives are being attained or not via external or other evaluation.

**Teachers’ language skills**

Another urgent matter is the improvement of skills of teachers on active service both at the level of practical knowledge of Basque and in connection with the Basque dimension of the curriculum. A good number of teachers have
serious limitations with regard to oral ability (particularly those who have learnt Basque over the last few years through in-service training), as they themselves increasingly recognise. Many native speakers of Basque have also expressed their clear limitations to cross over from informal registers to more formal explanatory ones in the written forms of the language. Many teachers who are native speakers of Basque had Spanish as the only language of instruction and find it difficult to use academic and technical language in Basque. The situation is even more complex when their listeners, over half of the students, are from non-Basque speaking homes, and if we take into account that the presence of Basque is frequently modest in the community, on the streets and even among friendship groups. With regard to pre-service teacher training, it seems essential to collaborate with the universities in the BAC so as that the real needs of teachers at work are taken into consideration.

International language

English is taught from the age of four in most schools in the BAC although its teaching is not compulsory until the third year of primary when children are eight years old. However, there is still the need to improve proficiency in English and some schools have English as an additional language of instruction. This can result in a higher level of proficiency in English but it is necessary to establish very clear objectives for Basque, Spanish and English because these languages have different roles in the sociolinguistic context of the BAC. It is also important to design the syllabuses of the different languages from an integrative perspective so as to enhance language awareness.

The different sectors of the educational system in the BAC have made a great effort to promote the use of Basque in education. However, a school does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of the society where it is located and it is related to the sociolinguistic context (see also Fishman, 1991). The success or failure of the school-based Basquisation process depends on factors external to the school, on the reward and sanction system operating in the vast domain, external to the school. Given that dependence, these school-based initiatives could turn out to be a waste of time unless they are integrated in broader, out-of-school planning. If, after spending 10 to 15 years studying in model B or, particularly, in model D, school-leavers do not find domains, relationship networks and suitable interlocutors to use their Basque their Basque language skills will be at risk. Users of Basque must find solid relationship networks in Basque for their post-school years, particularly those involving everyday topics and spheres of activity. To achieve that, language planning for the school sphere must be linked to the preservation of Basque speaking environments in those districts where Basque still retains its place in everyday life.

The most important challenge for the future, without any doubt, is to ensure that the Basque language is equipped for the many new demands that will be made of it in urban areas. Before this can happen consensus is required not only on standards for the language itself, the production of learning materials, and the training of teachers, but also some consensus on the varieties of bilinguism that are acceptable and realistic for speakers of Basque. The desire to ‘save Basque in its entirety’ is lodged deep among Basque speakers in the BAC. Perhaps the efforts made in education will show how Basque can find a place for itself outside the school that comes as close as possible to this objective.
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References


