

Towards a Consistent Language Policy for the French Basque Country? Actors, Processes and Outcomes

J.B. HARGUINDEGUY and X. ITÇAINA

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the progressive constitution of a consistent language policy in the French Basque Country (*Iparralde*). By so doing, it questions how French Basque ethnolinguistic movements emerged and have consolidated since the Second World War. According to our hypothesis, the rise of this policy was favoured by a combination of endogenous and exogenous variables. Namely, the new institutional capacities reached after the decentralisation, the new relation with central state services, the constitution of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives, the new repertoire of collective action of activists – more peaceful – and the rise of cross-border relations between French and Spanish actors combined to favour the institutionalisation of a regional language policy in *Iparralde*.

KEYWORDS: Basque Country, France, Ethnonationalism, Language Policy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the situation of Basque language (also called *Euskera*) in France. *Euskera* is one of the four non-Indo-European languages found in Europe along with Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian; it is mainly spoken in the Basque Country, a territory located on the Atlantic coast and straddling the border between Spain (also called *Hegoalde*, the southern or ‘Spanish’ side, in *Euskera*) and France (*Iparralde*, the northern or ‘French’ side).

More specifically, this article centres on ‘ethnolinguistic mobilisations’ (LAPIERRE, 1988) for Basque language – that is the set of social and institutional actors mobilising for the protection and diffusion of *Euskera* through a specific language policy implemented at different levels: *status planning* (which intends to enhance the prestige of a given language by introducing its use in administration, mass-media, and so on), *acquisition planning* (to augment the number of speakers) and *corpus planning* (to create a homogeneous *koine*) (FISHMAN, 1974).

Thus, this study has a very functional aim since it questions the actual state of the private and public mobilisations around *Euskera* in France. In other words, after fifty years of ethnolinguistic mobilisation, do we assist to the rise of an autonomous language policy in the French Basque Country? And if the answer is yes, what factors have allowed this emergence?

We argue in this paper that such a process of institutionalisation has already started in the French Basque country. Following the analyses of researchers in regional studies (COLE and LOUGHLIN, 2003; COLE and WILLIAMS, 2004; JONES and FOWLER, 2007), we assume that the promotion of lesser-used languages and cultures (such as the

Basque ones) has been, and is still favoured by an ongoing process of territorial institution-building. Nevertheless, we argue that, on some occasions, this *endogenous territorial empowerment* approach is incomplete and must be completed by an *exogenous perspective*. The rise of an autonomous language policy in *Iparralde* is thus due to four main factors: the new institutional capacities obtained thanks to the new French decentralisation policy, a new relation with central state services, the constitution of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives and a new repertoire of collective action favouring organised discussions. As a fifth factor, this new polity has been favoured by the rise of several cross-border links between *Iparralde*’s actors and their *Hegoalde*’s counterparts. From this perspective, *exogenous resources* have partially compensated for the institutional weakness of a set of actors.

This research has been funded by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Programme *L’impact des partis nationalistes/régionalistes sur les modèles et les pratiques de gestion publique de la diversité territoriale en Europe*, Centre d’Études Politiques de l’Europe Latine, University of Montpellier I) – and was undertaken in various steps. It began in 2002 with a series of interviews in France, and this step was followed by the establishment of contacts with Spanish-Basque institutions and social movements in 2004. Finally, the data were updated in 2008 and 2009 through new interviews. Grey literature and local newspapers were used as secondary sources.

This article is organised as follows. The first section presents the literature, the theoretical framework and the empirical data necessary for analysing the constitution of the Basque language policy in France. In the second one we centre on the history of ethnolinguistic mobilisation since the 1990s that we analyse through a set of five variables. Finally, brief conclusions seek to draw out the implications of such developments.

THE BASICS OF THE PROMOTION OF BASQUE LANGUAGE IN IPARRALDE

THE LITERATURE ON BASQUE LANGUAGE POLICY IN IPARRALDE: WHERE DO WE START FROM?

Literature on *Hegoalde* language politics and policy (with some comparisons with *Iparralde*) is already abundant (LINZ et al, 1986; TEJERINA, 1999; BAXOK et al., 2006; MESO, 2008). This is mainly due to the consistent language policy implemented in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi and Navarre where *Euskera* enjoys a co-official statute since 1982 and 1986, respectively. In turn, the empirical study on the *Iparralde*’s Basque language policy only started in the early 2000s (AHEDO GURRUTXAGA, 2004; URTEAGA, 2004; AMADO BORTHAYRE, 2006). On the one hand, these analyses tend to stress the French rigid polity which formally impedes a national debate on the state of language minorities; on the other hand, they also demonstrate that the French Republic is able to integrate some arrangements at the local level. However, these researches stop in 2005 and only few of them develop a complete comprehensive analytical framework stressing the variables able to explain the recent developments in language policy.

This is a major problem since over the last thirty years language politics has generated a considerable literature in political sociology. Such *corpus* can be divided into five main currents. Firstly, some sociologists have centred their attention on the

link between regionalist movements and language by focusing on the symbolic violence transmitted through language (BOURDIEU, 1982), on ethnolinguistic militancy (BOURDIEU and BOLTANSKI, 1981; TOURAINE et al., 1981) and on language strategy of speakers (GRIN, 1990).

Secondly, political scientists and historians have analysed how the processes of state and nation building have converted regional languages into dominated idioms through the constitution of national economic markets, the development of press and mass-media and the building of infrastructures of transport (HOBSBAWM, 1996; KLATTER-HOLMER and VAN AVERMAET, 2001; ROMAINE, 2002).

Thirdly, regional studies' specialists have demonstrated the promotion of regional identities and minority languages did not always support separatist claims, viz. national minorities are not always language minorities and *vice versa* (BARBOUR and CARMICHAEL, 2000; O'REILLY, 2001) and consequently language activists can follow very different paths to reach their goals (COLE and WILLIAMS, 2004; HARGUINDEGUY and BALLESTER, 2007).

Fourthly, sociolinguists specialised in language policy have proposed interesting dichotomies to interpret the grade of constraint and the territorial extension of such policies: the distinction between 'territorial' and 'individual' language rights (SCHIFFMAN, 1996), the concepts of 'critical mass' and 'language rationalisation' (LAITIN, 1988), or the division of linguistic abilities into monolingualism, bilingualism and diglossia (FERGUSON, 1959) are useful tools for analysing the relations between language and power.

Lastly, justice theorists have identified three basic ideal-types of relation between the state and minority languages: a neutral relation with all languages as this is theoretically the case in the United-States; the active promotion of all threatened languages like in Canada; or the active support of just one language (or a few languages) as in France (TAYLOR, 1985; MAY, 2001; KYMLICKA and PATTEN, 2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HOW TO INTERPRET CHANGES IN LANGUAGE GOVERNANCE?

Assuming that public policies do not appear as if by magic, we decided to focus on the relations of power established in *Iparralde*. Drawing on the analysis of COLE and WILLIAMS (2004) on the need to improve regional capacity building for defending vernacular languages, we argue that at least five essential factors (endogenous and exogenous) must be taken into account to explain the recent shift in the governance of language issues in *Iparralde*.

The institutional capacities of territorial representative institutions: this is especially important in France where central state traditionally rules this issue – but also in other European countries and regions like Wales or Flanders. The new legitimacy of municipal and regional representatives thanks to their election at the universal suffrage and the transfers of money and competences are essential for launching ambitious cultural policies. But the concept of institutional capacities does not only lie on the empowerment of existing institutions. Actually, innovating by creating inter-municipal organisations and public-private agencies can be a way for regional governments to impose or modify a given language policy (HARGUINDEGUY and BALLESTER, 2007).

The relations with central state services: the progressive loosening grip of European central state services on their territorial authorities demonstrates that

Westphalian states are no longer able to respond to the whole claims of their citizens. Local arrangements have always been realised even under a strict regime of tutelage by central state, nevertheless, the different waves of decentralisation opened a new political opportunity structure to ethnolinguistic actors (KEATING, 1998; ANDERSON and O'DOWD, 1999), for example by lowering the cost of access to European institutions and cross-border co-operation with neighbouring regions.

The constitution of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representative institutions: the question of struggle and co-operation is central in territorial governance issues. The capacity of territorial actors to create a stable coalition able to deal directly with state representatives is fundamental. The examples of the CELIB (*Comité d'études et de liaison des intérêts bretons*) in Brittany or the Welsh movement in Wales show that socio-economic agents, pressure groups and political representatives can shape their political opportunity structure. Obviously, this raises the question of the integration of social activists into a more rigid institutional framework (HARGUINDEGUY and COLE, 2009).

The evolution of repertoires of collective action: the concept of repertoire was originally defined as the whole set of means that a group has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups. This notion has recently been re-used by political scientists (PASQUIER and SMYRL, 2002) to identify the regularities and changes of behaviour of the different actors involved in the governance of a territory – especially at the regional level. It is an essential parameter to understand the institutionalisation of the *Euskera* policy in *Iparralde* where a clear shift from street struggles to institutionalised discussion has been undertaken.

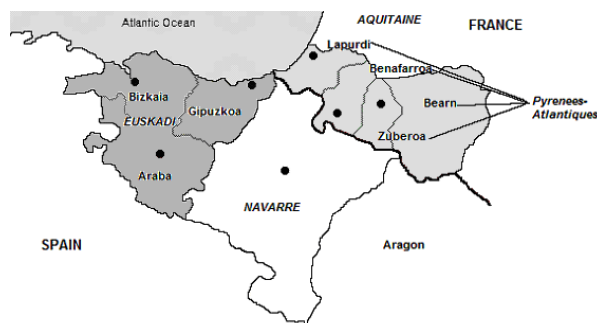
The rise of cross-border relations: while cross-border co-operation was still an 'exotic' activity until the 1980s, we assisted to a dramatic increase of the number of euroregions, euro-provinces and euro-municipalities since the end of the 1990s (PERKMANN, 1999). Moreover, cross-border links are not limited to public representative institutions since many social movements have included it into their strategy, especially in the Basque Country (LETAMENDIA, 2006; MANSVELT BECK, 2008). This imposes to think about the progressive re-scaling of politics and policy since, in certain cases, traditional territories are no longer the best fitted to provide new services; for not to speak of the effect of comparison induced by the proximity between two neighbours like *Hegoalde* and *Iparralde*. This endogenous variable must necessarily be taken into account to understand the growth of the *Euskera* policy in France.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN IPARRALDE: WHAT RESULTS HAVE BEEN REACHED?

Before exploring the process of language policy-making occurring in *Iparralde* we need to observe what has been done until now. At first stance, the results are quite kaleidoscopic in the sense that some bilingual improvements have been reached in very specific niches (for example in the education by immersion) while other sectors remain entirely in French (local administration for instance). This is the result of an asymmetric process.

In absolute numbers Basque is mainly spoken in the autonomous communities of Euskadi (encompassing the administrative provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Araba) and of Navarre (a mono-provincial autonomous community). These political divisions approximately coincide with the four major dialectal sub-divisions of the Basque language in Spain. Basque is also used in France in the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques, which is one of the five departments forming the Aquitaine region.

Pyrénées-Atlantiques (formerly Basses-Pyrénées) is an administrative territorial subdivision created in 1790 by French revolutionaries who sought to group the Bearn (Occitan-speaking area) with the three French provinces of the Basque Country (Zuberoa, Benafarroa, and Lapurdi), in order to avoid irredentist and monarchist claims. These three provinces approximately correspond to the three dialectal areas of Basque in France (BAXOK et al., 2006). Following the Congress of Arantzazu (1968), a standardised Basque (called *Batua: unified*) was agreed by the *Euskaltzaindia* (Royal Academy of Basque Language), which was founded in 1919 by Basque intellectuals from France and Spain.



Map 1. Basque Country.

As states the *IV Sociolinguistic Report of the Government of Euskadi* (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006) in relative numbers the highest percentages of Basque language speakers can be found in Euskadi, in *Iparralde* and in Navarre, respectively. While *Iparralde* is still losing speakers over 65 (who represent almost 40% of the total speakers in the hinterland), the trend has changed since new speakers are appearing among the young – thanks to the efforts realised in the field of education – even if French remains the mother tongue for 72.3% of *Iparralde* inhabitants. Even if 41.2% of *Iparralde* inhabitants are favourable to the use of Basque, French is used in 77.4% of the social interactions (business, family, administration...). This trend is accentuated on the Basque coast, in large part because of the rapid urbanisation process taking place from the north of Bayonne until Saint-Jean-de-Luz which attracts immigrants from the rest of France (Tables 1 and 2). It is also worth mentioning that there is a strong correlation between the ability to speak Basque and the feeling of belonging to the Basque Country, whatever is the territory or the age of reference (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

	Bilingual	Passive bilingual	Not in contact with Basque	Total inhabitants
Hegoalde	25.5%	16.2%	58.3%	2,359,400
Euskadi	30.1%	18.3%	51.5%	1,850,500
<i>Bizkaia</i>	23%	19.4%	57.6%	
<i>Gipuzkoa</i>	49.1%	15.9%	35%	
<i>Araba</i>	14.2%	20%	65.8%	
Navarre	11.1%	7.6%	81.3%	508,900

Table 1. Proportion of Basque speakers in Spain (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

	Bilingual	Passive bilingual	Not in contact with Basque	Total inhabitants
Iparralde	22.5%	8.6%	68.9%	230,200
<i>Lapurdi (coast)</i>	8.8%	5.4%	85.8%	
<i>Lapurdi (hinterland)</i>	25.6%	11.3%	63.1%	
<i>Zuberoa</i>	55.5%	10.7%	33.8%	
<i>Benafarroa</i>				

Table 2. Proportion of Basque speakers in France (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

Because of the lack of real regional language policy until the 1990s, the promotion of *Euskera* in France has been traditionally led by civil society organisations through different techniques of learning. In the field of education, one of the first initiatives was led by the Catholic Church, through the efforts of Bishop Gieure in the 1920s. After the Second World War, the Deixonne Act (1951) enabled the organisation of Basque courses three hours a week as a second (or third) language in public schools. In 1975, the Haby Law confirmed this provision, but at the same time, the Bas-Auriol Law made compulsory the use of French in business and mass-media (in order to stimulate the *Francophonie*). Despite these limits, the reforms of 1982 and 1995 enabled the teaching of *Euskera* through courses of ‘Regional Culture and Language’ in public schools. In 1982, the Savary decree allowed private, ‘contracted-in’ schools to teach regional languages if public schools were not able to do so. As a result, since 1982, the association *Ikas-bi* has administered a system of bilingual school teaching in public schools while *Euskal-Haziak* organises a similar system in catholic private schools. This bilingual training is seen as the first step to a B.A. degree course in Basque, as proposed by the *Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour* (Pau and Bayonne) and the University of Bordeaux. Since 1969, a model of Basque learning by *immersion* has also been available thanks to efforts realised by the *Seaska* association and its *ikastola* schools (JACOB, 1994). In 1992 the Ministry of National Education recognised this initiative and restated this agreement in 2009 by co-funding a part of the project. As expected, such an official recognition of the *ikastola* generated debates between the supporters of such an institutionalisation and those giving the priority to the social movement dimension of the *ikastola* (BORTAYROU et al., 2005). Lastly, the main association for adult language training in *Iparralde* is AEK (*Alfabetatze Euskalduntze Koordinakundea*: Coordination for the Alphabetisation in *Euskera*) which organises courses, linguistic exchanges, and immersion training camps for French students in its Euskadi and Navarrese branches (ORONOS, 2002; BORTAYROU et al., 2005; ORONOS et al, 2008; GARAT and AIRE, 2009).

The presence of regional languages outside of the classroom is much more reduced since the Villers-Cotterêts regulation still imposes the use of French in the administrative and justice systems since 1539. This centralist *credo* was re-affirmed in 1992 adding that 'The language of Republic is French' to the French Constitution (art. 2) and in 1994 through the Toubon Law implementing positive action measures to defend French against English in the public sphere. Despite these measures, road signs and postal addresses can be written in vernacular language. In turn, Basque is practically absent from private business in France.

For what regards mass-media, the Basque station of the *Radio France* public network broadcasts daily programmes in Basque, but this is a recent and quite irregular initiative. In turn, many associative radio stations (*Gure Irratia* in Lapurdi, *Iruelegiko Irratia* in Benafarroa, *Xiberoko Botza* in Zuberoa) appeared in the 1980s and use *Euskera* as their first language. At the level of TV channels, the national public channel *France 3* provides only short news programmes in Basque. Nevertheless, the Spanish-Basque channels ETB 1 and 2 (*Euskal Telebista*, Basque Television) also broadcast their programmes to *Iparralde* and fund some correspondents in Bayonne (where this delegation may be closed soon since a non-Basque nationalist coalition led by socialists won the power in Euskadi in 2009). Newspapers distributed in *Iparralde* are usually written in French, with few exceptions (such as the daily newspaper *Berria* or the Christian-Democrat weekly *Herria*). On rare occasions, *Sud-Ouest* or *La Semaine du Pays-Basque* will publish short articles in *Euskera*. Even French Basque nationalist newspapers such as *Enbata* are written in French. For this reason, the experience of *Egunkaria* is interesting since it is the only cross-border newspaper entirely in Basque available to Basque speakers living in Spain and France. Some publishing companies (*Elkar* for instance) support the diffusion of *Euskera*, but this is a difficult task since Basque-speakers represent a limited potential market, at least on the French side of the border (ORONOS, ETXEZAHARRETA and ARBELBIDE, 2008).

TOWARDS AN AUTONOMOUS BASQUE LANGUAGE POLICY: LANGUAGE AT THE CORE OF THE NEW TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE (1990-2010)

LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL EMPOWERMENT: HOW DID THE CAPACITY-BUILDING PROCESS AFFECT THE LANGUAGE ISSUE TRADITIONALLY LED BY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?

The debate over the linguistic-cultural policy is at the heart of structural shifts experienced by the French Basque Country territorial governance from the late-1980s. Paradoxically, following an initiative coming from the prefect – the local representative of the central state – a series of mutual consultations associating actors from very distinct backgrounds (civil society actors and elected representatives, Basque nationalists and non nationalists, etc.) gave birth to a prospective scenario on the future of the French Basque country titled *Pays Basque 2010* (CHAUSSIER, 1996). As a result, and in concordance with the participative U-turn induced by the French decentralisation policy, new semi-public institutions emerged soon. The Basque Cultural Institute, the Country Development Council, and the Council for Elected Representatives were set up respectively in 1989, 1994 and 1995 (AHEDO GURRUTXAGA, 2005). These organisations were conceived as new debating arenas for the elected officials and civil society representatives and as a compromise between

nationalists and centralists on the one hand, and between civil society and political representatives on the other hand.

This process of institutionalisation had concrete consequences in terms of territorial planning, but it also had collateral effects on language policy. In 1997, the French Basque Country was officially recognised as a '*pays*' in accordance with the 1995 Law on Territorial Planning (*Loi du 4 février 1995 d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire*) – thought to promote local economic development through the existing territorial networks. As a result, a first territorial contract was signed in 1997 between local authorities and the state, and a Specific Agreement for the Basque Country (*Convention spécifique Pays Basque*) was ratified between the state, the regional and local authorities for the 2000-2006 programming period. This partnership was renewed by the early 2000, when a new prospective consultation process (*Pays Basque 2020*), started in 2005 which generated in 2008 a Territorial Contract on Local Development between the state and the territorial authorities. As a whole, this new form of territorial governance was largely open to civil society, especially respect to issues usually managed by activist circles (on local development, agriculture, environment, culture and – obviously – language).

In parallel with the changes occurred in the territorial governance, Basque language progressively converted from a *social issue* into a *public problem*, and then into a *political one* (Lascoumes et Le Galès, 2007). Firstly, in 1984, a *Centre Culturel du Pays Basque* (Cultural Centre for the Basque Country, CCPB) had already been created to favour the diffusion and production of cultural events in general (including theatre, painting, music in French and in Basque). Secondly, in order to respond to the growing mobilisations of nationalists, small elected officials and language activists, the CCPB split in 1988. It reappeared as a 'generalist' cultural institution (the *Centre d'Action Culturelle de Bayonne et du Sud-Aquitaine*, Centre for Cultural Activity of Bayonne and South-Western) on the one hand, and as a more specialised institution in Basque cultural matters (the *Institut Culturel Basque*, Basque Cultural Institute) on the other hand (LABORDE, 1999). From that period, Basque language was promoted by the Basque Cultural Institute, the three educational networks of Basque teaching schools (immersive, public bilingual and private bilingual), and the AEK alphabetisation network. But despite the creation of these new tools, the fragmentation of language governance rapidly demonstrated to be a problem. Institutional actors and activists asked thus for a specific institution for leading the incipient *linguistic* policy; an institution that would be distinct from a *cultural* one in order to avoid the dilution of funding and initiatives.

As a result, the institutionalisation of a linguistic policy *per se* became possible. For the first time in France, the Basque language was included in a territorial development project within the *Schéma d'aménagement du Pays Basque* (Territorial Scheme for the Basque Country) in 1996-1997, then with the Specific Agreement (*Convention Spécifique Pays Basque*) agreed between the state, the Aquitaine Region and the Pyrénées-Atlantiques *département* in 1999-2000. Among other measures, AEK benefited from gaining its first official recognition as a vocational training body through the Specific Agreement. Public and third sector actors met around a common program of subsidies for promoting linguistic operators (2000-2004) under the leadership of a newly created semi-public organisation: the Council for the Basque Language (grouping the central state, the Aquitaine region, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the Council of Elected Representatives). Moreover, as soon as 1999, the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques also opened a new internal subdivision dedicated to linguistic policy, both for the Basque and the Occitan languages. In January 2005, the Council for

the Basque Language was converted into the Public Office for the Basque language (*Office public de la langue basque*, OPLB). The OPLB was supposed to play a double role by supporting and coordinating the offer and demand for teaching *Euskera* and 'in' *Euskera*, and by promoting the language in society with the help of public authorities.

At that point, the promotion of *Euskera* was not anymore the monopoly of a nucleus of social activists but it soon constituted a specific policy programme led by public institutions. New developments occurred in 2000 when this new policy began to integrate the sociolinguistic expertise. In 2000, the Specific Agreement (*Convention spécifique Pays Basque 2001-2006*) referred to Fishman's 'reversing language shift' concept as a potential theoretical basis for a new linguistic policy in the French Basque country (COYOS, 2004 and 2008). The threefold approach of language recuperation (motivation/knowledge/use) developed by Spanish Basque sociolinguist José Ma; Sanchez Carrion "Txepetx" was also introduced in *Iparralde*, notably by the French Basque sociolinguist Baxok (2008), himself familiar with other linguistic debates, such as the Canadian one.

The new division of work between language and cultural policies produced by this intensive process of institution-building raised some questions about the existing institutions. For instance, until then, the mediation between the ethnolinguistic activists and public authorities had been assumed by the Basque Cultural Institute for what regarded the cultural matters, and by Ikas in the field of Basque teaching systems. Nevertheless, within the new framework, the Basque Cultural Institute had to wonder about its statute and its function: should it remain a public-funded association or become a public body? More generally what did 'Basque culture' mean in this new context? (Basque-speaking cultural productions/any cultural production made by Basque artists/Any cultural production carried out in the Basque country). In that sense, the 2005 survey on Basque culture and identity was an attempt from the Basque Cultural Institute to perceive these representations in the wider public opinion (Baxok et al., 2005).

In any case, in December 2009, four years after its foundation, the OPLB was able to do a first balance of its activity (MOLLE, 2009). Good results were obtained concerning language transmission, notably concerning bilingualism in the primary education and the starting linguistic policy at the local municipal level. Budget consolidation was guaranteed for 2010, despite a very bad economic conjuncture. For the 2010-2016 planning, the OPLB admitted, in line with all the sociolinguistic surveys, that its action had to be re-directed towards the social and public uses of language and not only towards its transmission (TABERNA, 2009).

RELATIONS WITH CENTRAL STATE: DO THE STATE ACT IN THE SAME WAY AT THE CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL LEVELS?

The relations with central state services played a significant role in the growing autonomy of the Basque language policy in France. At first glance, the institutionalisation of a cultural and linguistic policy in the Basque Country benefited from the process of decentralisation experienced by the French state since 1982. By changing the scope of territorial governance, the decentralisation process gave more latitude to local authorities and provided new structures of opportunities to local civil society actors. In that sense, the new French Basque territorial governance should be seen as constituting much more than what scholars of Basque nationalism have called a 'cosmetic decentralisation' (MANSVELT BECK, 2005) or a 'private type of institutionalisation' to compensate for the non-creation of a specific Basque department

(LETAMENDIA, 1997). Firstly, the '*pays*' *Pays Basque* created in 1997 did not go into the opposite direction of the French decentralisation. On the contrary, the Basque experience has always been seen as a virtuous example of local development, and it has inspired the national policy of the '*pays*' led by the central state. Secondly, the territorial institutionalisation of the French Basque Country, far from being controlled or inspired by Basque nationalists, was rather the result of a permanent compromise between different political fiefs' leaders (French right and centre-right, socialist party, greens, Basque moderate nationalists) and socio-economic milieus. Thirdly, over the last ten years, the new French Basque territorial institutions have had tangible effects on the territorial governance, especially in linguistic and cultural matters. The efforts realised by the Country Development Council to negotiate consensual territorial contracts involving the state, the Regional Council of Aquitaine, the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and local authorities constitute an evidence of the will to include and recognise the whole actors of *Iparralde*.

The mobilisations in favour of the Basque language also benefited from the debate over the legal regime of language minorities opened in France in the late 2000s. A debate on regional languages took place in the French National Assembly and in the Senate on 7 May 2008. The 21 July 2008 the French Constitution was revised, despite a harsh opposition led by different pro-French interest groups like the *Académie française*, and the sentence 'regional languages are part of the French national heritage' was included into article 75-1. However, the legal statute of regional languages remains hazy. In May 2008, Culture Minister Christine Albanel announced that the government was preparing a law project on regional languages, while still refusing to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages of 1992. A few months later, in December, 2009, Immigration and National Identity Minister Eric Besson stated that he was opposed to a law on regional languages. As expected, this paradoxical situation provoked the immediate mobilisation of language activists in the whole country. Despite such political dithering and the relatively low interest paid by the French national mass-media, linguistic issues were given a small opportunity to enter into the state governmental agenda, even in a marginal way.

TERRITORIAL COALITIONS: DID CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES GENERATE STABILITY IN LANGUAGE ISSUES?

The process of institutionalisation of an autonomous Basque language policy in France was also the result of the changes occurred in the territorial coalitions.

Firstly, at the French level, the recent politicisation of the linguistic issue gave a new impetus to the strategic coalitions between the different French regional or minority languages such as the FLAREP (*Fédération pour les langues régionales dans l'enseignement public*, whose members come from Brittany, Alsace, Occitany, Corsica, Catalonia and so on) in the public education system, or the Interregional Meeting for Minority Cultures and Languages (*Rencontres interrégionales des langues et cultures minoritaires*).

Secondly, new coalitions appeared in the French Basque Country. The most visible is probably the network which groups the local public institutions and the associative actors *via* the mediation of the OPLB. Such a partnership is the result of the participation of civil society to the Advisory Council of OPLB (the *Aholku batzordea*) from the beginning of the project. As a new territorial institution managed in a collective way, the OPBL also provided a new career opportunity for local politicians and activists (HOURCADE, 2007). The presidency of the OPBL was attributed, for

instance, to Max Brisson – a right-wing elected member of the departmental General Council. Thus, the consolidation and institutionalisation of the territorial expertise on language, culture, local development, etc. constituted an entry door not only for the moderate Basque nationalist activists, but also for the state local representatives and for French parties' politicians looking for a new political legitimacy and new strategies for accessing a plurality of charges at the local level. Other coalitions have appeared beside the OPLB. One of the most important is the *Hiru sareak* (the three networks) community which connects the three bilingual and immersive educational networks (*ikastola*, public and private-Catholic bilingual systems). Its creation responds to the demand from pupils' fathers to increase the investments in Basque language education since the number of children studying in Basque has increased from 2907 in 1993 to 6149 in 2004 (BETBEDER, 2006).

Thirdly, despite their easy access to the policy process, these new coalitions cannot prevent the organisation of demonstrations organised by language activists against the current Basque language policy. At the margins of the institutional debate, cultural pro-Basque associative movements (*Behatokia*: the observatory, *Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua*: Council for the Basque civil society organisations, *Euskal Konfederazioa*, *Euskal Herrian Euskaraz*: In Basque in the Basque Country, *AEK*...) remain very critical – even towards the OPLB. According to these ethnolinguistic movements, the use of language experts and socio-language statistics by public authorities only contributed to depoliticise the debate and to exclude social movements from the bargains. Moreover, the cross-border movements *Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua* and *AEK* repeatedly argue in favour of the legal recognition of the Basque language by the French state and claim a specific department for the French Basque country as constituting two previous conditions for any successful linguistic policy. In the mind of radical ethnolinguistic activists these two conditions are intimately linked: an efficient language policy should include a compulsory dimension to learn and to use Basque (e.g. the generalisation of the Basque language supply at school, the imposition of linguistic quotas in mass-media and the normalisation of the use of Basque language in the socio-economic sectors) (RENTERIA, 2009). Following this critics, a common department would be necessary in order to constrain citizens to adopt the necessary language policy measures. As a full member of the OPLB, the French state logically refused until now to support any compulsory dimension and maintained the principle of free choice.

REPertoire OF COLLECTIVE ACTION: FROM THE STREET TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE?

For what regards the repertoire of collective action of territorial actors participating to the Basque language policy, a shift from street struggles to discussion with authorities has been undertaken. This means that on the one hand a new generation of actors accepts to participate to institutional *fora* and official discussions with local, regional and state representatives; but on the other hand the repertoire of collective action of Basque language defenders remains partially based on the classical tools of protest like popular demonstrations, petitions, sittings, happenings, etc.

During the 2007-2010 period, this classical repertoire of contention has been used in two occasions. A first series of campaigning was directed towards the French state and asked for a change in the state's policy towards regional languages and the officialisation of *Euskera*. These mobilisations, as the huge *Deiadar* demonstration held in Bayonne on the 24 October 2009, benefited from a large support from the social

movement but was also backed by local elected officials and socio-economic milieus, not limited to the *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) sphere. Nevertheless, among these actors, some of them also criticised the new territorial institutions as testified by the demonstration held in November 2007 in front of the OPLB by the cross-border association *Euskal Herrian Euskaraz* in order to condemn the weakness of the actual language policy and the current institutional framework of the French Basque Country (ANÓNIMO, 2007). Finally and subsequently, the ongoing institutionalisation of a language policy in the French Basque country also provoked an increase of a defensive French nationalist and Jacobin reaction, especially on the Basque coastal zone (THOMAS, 2005).

CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION: DOES THE SOUTH COMPENSATE FOR THE NORTHERN LANGUAGE POLICY WEAKNESSES?

Cross-border mobilisations constitute an important element in order to explain the rise of an autonomous language policy in the French Basque Country. The North-South linguistic mobilisations benefited from the increase of the cross-border cooperation between Spanish and French Basque actors since the mid-1980s, notably when Spain joined the European Community.

A survey conducted in the mid-1990s among the projects funded by the Aquitaine-Euskadi Common Fund showed evidence that among the great variety of proposed projects, the cultural and linguistic ones were those which attracted more actors from Euskadi and from the French Basque Country (ITÇAINA et al, 1997). However, several projects met with difficulties during their implementation because of the institutional asymmetry between both partners. The French official counterpart of the Basque Autonomous Community was not the French Basque Country, which had no institutional representation before the mid-1990s, but the Aquitaine region. Letamendia (1997) has stressed the double gap existing between the co-operation between equivalent institutional bodies, and the collaboration between Basques acting on the basis of a common identity. Firstly, institutional relations between Euskadi and the Aquitaine region are affected by a deep financial asymmetry since the budget of the Basque Autonomous Community is more than ten times greater to any French region. Secondly, a gap exists also between the perception of the Regional Council of Aquitaine (controlled by right or left-wing French parties since 1986), and the Autonomous Basque Community (ruled by Demo-Christian Basque nationalists of the PNV-Basque Nationalist Party from 1980 to 2009) about interregional co-operation. While the former support the maintaining of strong nation-states, the latter is favourable to a deeper process of devolution leading to a new deal between central states and regions governments.

The new model of territorial governance in the French Basque Country considerably helped to go beyond the limits of the traditional official cross-border relationships. As expected, the instauration of the '*pays*' *Pays Basque* and the subsequent launching of the OPLB – co-funded by the Euskadi's government – in 2005 intensified the cooperation between public authorities: the Southern regional government had an institutional counterpart in the North.

In general term, cross-border linguistic relations can be described as a support coming from the Southern actors to the Northern ones. Such a support took two forms: transnational associative networks organised on a Basque 'national' basis and an institutional support from Southern public bodies towards Northern associations. Among the social movements cooperating across the border, Amado Borthayre (2006)

elaborated a distinction between those which aim to lobby the representative institutions for reinforcing the current language policy (*Euskal Herriaren Euskaraz, Kontseilua-Euskal konfederazioa*, public bilingual schools fathers' associations) and the social movements which propose an alternative policy model. Far from limiting themselves to lobbying, the latter considered themselves as constituting real educational and social alternatives. Significant examples are the immersive associative schools (*ikastola*), the association dispensing Basque lessons to adults AEK, or the Basque Summer School (*Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea*). All of these experiences share four characteristics: a) their activity and structure are transnational; b) their internal organisation is based on democratic principles, that is collective decision-making and horizontal power-relations; c) many of these initiatives depend on Southern Basque financial resources (which reproduces at the civil society level the institutional asymmetry we stressed sooner); d) they use Europe as a tool for enhancing cross-border collaboration *and* promoting *Euskera*, notably via the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. These networks showed a high learning capacity with respect to the European norms and programmes. As an evidence, in 2009, the federation of the *ikastola* from both sides of the border created a European Cooperative Society for allowing mutual help between the *ikastolak* from Euskadi and Navarre and Iparralde, thus mobilising both the new European norms and institutional opportunities on social economy, minority languages and cross-border relationships.

For what regards the support brought by *Hegoalde* authorities to *Iparralde* associations, these relationships took, at least, two forms. Firstly, the Southern autonomous government – at least until 2009 when controlled by the PNV and its allies – intervened in the French Basque Country since the 1990s by funding the educational networks and the Basque-speaking media. Secondly, new public policies were set up jointly by public institutions from both sides of the border. The foundation of a cross-border radio station (*Antxeta irratia*) in Txingudi illustrates this point. In the same vein, sociolinguistic surveys were conducted on both sides of the border from 1996 by the Basque government, in association with Navarrese and French Basque actors. More generally, cross-border collaboration ranked among the three priorities of the Basque Country Development Council in their *Pays Basque 2020* prospective programme, together with territorial reciprocity (between the coastal zone and the inner countryside) and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

France is usually portrayed as a monolingual country where regional differences have disappeared. This is a partial vision which caricatures a much more complex situation. As we saw, some regions have maintained their own local cultural features despite the cultural centralisation policy exerted by central state. From this point of view, the case of the French Basque Country is particularly interesting since language policy issues are debated by a large range of very different actors from political representatives to radical nationalists.

Drawing on these data, we can state that an incipient autonomous Basque language policy is now being implemented in *Iparralde*. Obviously, such a language policy cannot be compared with the long-standing programmes working in *Hegoalde* since the 1980s. Their respective financial aspects are extremely different; for not to speak about the degree of legal constraint exerted on *Hegoalde* citizen to learn and speak Basque.

Anyway, this policy innovation must be considered as a real novelty in the context of the Fifth French Republic.

The rise of this policy is due to numerous causes. As said at the very beginning, the rise of this policy was favoured by a combination of endogenous and exogenous variables. Namely, the new institutional capacities reached after the decentralisation, the new relation with central state services, the constitution of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives, the new repertoire of collective action of activists – more peaceful – and the rise of cross-border relations between French and Spanish actors combined to favour the institutionalisation of a regional language policy in *Iparralde*.

Some questions remain unsolved. The first one is connected to the degree of autonomy that French actors are disposed (and able) to reach with respect to the Spanish-Basque government and social movements. The future of funding, the creation of a new Basque department and the agreement of the central state actors remain unknown. The incremental policy-style of this language policy reflects the continuous changes of relations among the different actors of the game. In sum, progress are made only when local actors find an agreement at the same time a devolution-friendly leader is appointed at the head of the Minister of Education or the Home Affairs Minister. But as we demonstrated, such a policy windows only opens for a while.

The second question is about the actors of the current *Iparralde* language policy. In this paper we stressed the complex bargaining between the several civil society and political representatives; but it seems the recent professionalisation of language issues already tends to 'rationalise' the attributions of different policy actors. In other words, it is very probable the high number of actors participating to this policy sub-system will reduce dramatically within the next years. This could bring some stability to this issue after ten years of constant change.

Another important question relates to the possible consequences on the French Basque Country of the political shift in the Basque autonomous government occurred in March 2009. The defeat of the nationalist party PNV after 30 years at the head of the Basque Executive can have at least two consequences. Firstly, according to a path-dependent mechanism the new non-Basque nationalist coalition led by the Spanish Socialist Party could decide to follow the policy trend of the PNV by maintaining its support to *Iparralde* Medias, schools and cultural projects. Secondly, in a context of budget reduction and harsh opposition between Basque and non-Basque nationalists, the new *Euskadi* executive could choose not to add more fuel to the fire. This means that it could centre its future policy on domestic issues like health, housing or transport and it could stop (or weaken) its logistic support to French actors promoting Basque language.

Lastly, from a more theoretical viewpoint, it could be interesting to test our hypothesis of 'compensation for institutional weakness by exogenous variables' in alternative fields. At first stance, this hypothesis could work in the Catalan case, or even in Ulster where we find a similar configuration than in the Basque Country with a common language and institutional and social ethnolinguistic mobilisations across the border.

REFERENCES

- AHEDO GURRUTXAGA I. (2004) El euskera desde fuera en Iparralde, *Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos*, 49 (2), 383-434;
- AHEDO GURRUTXAGA I. (2005) Nationalism in the French Basque Country, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 15 (1), 75-91;

- AMADO BORTHAYRE L. (2006) Los movimientos sociales 'nacionales' de la lengua ¿Creadores de políticas públicas 'nacionales' vascas?, in LETAMENDIA P. (Ed) Acción colectiva Hegoalde-Iparralde, pp. 285-299. Fundamentos, Madrid;
- ANDERSON J. and O'DOWD L. (1999) Contested Borders: Globalization and Ethnonational Conflict in Ireland, 33 (7), 681-696;
- ANÓNIMO (2007) Euskararen Erakunde Publikoaren 'iruzur eta itxurakeria' salatu du EHEk, Gara 13, November;
- BARBOUR S. and CARMICHAEL C. (Eds) Language and Nationalism in Europe, Oxford University Press, Oxford;
- BAXOK E., ETXEGOIN P., LEKUMBERRI T., MARTÍNEZ DE LUNA I., AHEDO I., MENDIZABAL L., ITÇAINA X. and JIMENO R. (2006), Sociedad de Estudios Vascos, San Sebastián;
- BAXOK E. (2008) Hizkuntza antolaketaren bideetan, Bat, Soziolinguistika Aldizkaria, 67 (2), 67-77;
- BETBEDER T. (2006) Euskararen Erakunde Publikoa. Hizkuntza politika bat egituratzen Ipar Euskal Herrian, Bat, Soziolinguistika Aldizkaria, 59, 41-58;
- BORTAYROU J., ETCHEVERRY-AINCHART P., GARAT M. and al. (2005) Le mouvement culturel basque. 1951-2001, t. 2 : filières bilingues, Seaska, AEK, Elkar, Bayonne;
- BOURDIEU P. (1982) Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques, Fayard, Paris;
- BOURDIEU P. and BOLTANSKI L. (1981) Le fétichisme de la langue, Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales 3, 2-17;
- CHAUSSIER J.D. (1996) Quel territoire pour le Pays Basque? Les cartes d'identité, L'Harmattan, Paris;
- COLE A. and WILLIAMS C. (2004) Institutions, Identities and Lesser-used Languages in Wales and Brittany, Regional and Federal Studies 14 (1), 554-579;
- COLE A. and LOUGHLIN J. (2003) Beyond the Unitary State? Public Opinion, Political Institutions and Public Policy in Brittany, Regional Studies 37 (3), 265-276;
- COYOS J.B. (2004) Politique linguistique. Langue basque et langue occitane du Béarn et de Gascogne, Elkar, Bayonne;
- COYOS J.B. (2008) Hizkuntz politika Ipar Euskal Herrian: nondik nora? Ibilbidearen azterketa, Bat, Soziolinguistika Aldizkaria 2, 79-102;
- FERGUSON C.A. (1959) Diglossia, Word 15 (2), 325-340;
- FISHMAN J. (1974) (Ed) Advances in Language Planning, Mouton, The Hague;
- GARAT M. and AIRE X. (2009) Seaska, 40 urte euskararen alde, Elkar, Donostia;
- GRIN F. (1990) The Economic Approach to Minority Languages, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 11, 153-174;
- HARGUINDÉGUY J.B. and BALLESTER LÓPEZ M. (2007) Acción colectiva y enseñanza de las lenguas regionales en Francia (1951-2006). Una primera aproximación, Revista Española de Ciencia Política 16, 89-108;
- HARGUINDÉGUY J.B. and COLE A. (2009) La politique linguistique de la France à l'épreuve des revendications ethnoterritoriales, Revue Française de Science Politique 59 (5), 939-966;
- HOBBSAWM E. (1996) Are all Tongues Equal? Language, Culture and National Identity, in BARKER P. (Ed) Living as Equals, pp. 85-122. Oxford University Press, Oxford;
- HOUCADE R. (2007), Le Pays basque en représentations, ou les effets sur l'action publique et le territoire d'un instrument de 'gouvernance' locale: *le Conseil de développement du Pays basque*, Master Recherche Action et Espaces Publics en Europe, Rennes, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Rennes;
- ITÇAINA X., PALARD J. AND VIGNES B. (1997) Politique institutionnelle ou mobilisation sociale? Le Fonds commun Aquitaine-Euskadi in PALARD J. (Ed) L'Europe aux frontières, pp. 131-154. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris;
- JACOB J. (1994) Hills of Conflict: Basque Nationalism in France, Reno University Press, Reno;
- JONES R. and FOWLER C. (2007) Where is Wales? Narrating the Territories and Borders of the Welsh Linguistic Nation, Regional Studies 41, 89-101;
- KEATING M. (1998) The New Regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial Restructuring and Political Change, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham;
- KLATTER-HOLMER J. and VAN AVERMAET P. (Eds) (2001) Theories on Maintenance and Loss of Minority Languages, Waxmann, Münster;
- KYMLICKA W. and PATTEN A. (Eds) (2003) Political Theory and Language Rights, Oxford University Press, Oxford;
- LABORDE, D. (1999) Politique culturelle et langue basque, in BLANCHET P., BRETON R. and SCHIFFMAN H. (Eds) The Regional Languages of France: an Inventory on the Eve of the XXIst Century, pp. 141-160. Peeters, Louvain-la-Neuve;
- LAITIN D. (1988) Language Games, Comparative Politics 20 (3), 289-302;
- LAPIERRE J.W. (1988) Le pouvoir et les langues, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris;
- LASCOURMES P., LE GALES P. (2007), Sociologie de l'action publique, Paris : Armand Colin.
- LETAMENDIA, F. (1997) Basque Nationalism and Cross-Border Co-operation between the Southern and Northern Basque Countries, Regional and Federal Studies 17 (2), 25-41;
- LETAMENDIA, F. (Ed) (2006) Acción colectiva Hegoalde-Iparralde, Editorial Fundamentos, Madrid;
- LINZ J., ORIZO F.A. and VILA MADRID D. (1986) Conflicto en Euskadi, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid;
- MANSVELT BECK J. (2005) Territory and Terror: Conflicting Nationalisms in the Basque Country, Routledge, London;
- MANSVELT BECK J. (2008) Has the Basque Borderland Become More Basque after Opening the Franco-Spanish Border?, National Identities 10 (4), 373-388;
- MEZO J. (2008) El palo y la zanahoria: política lingüística y educación en Irlanda y el País Vasco, Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, Madrid;
- MOLLE B. (2009) L'Office Public de la Langue Basque peaufine ses orientations pour 2010-2016, Le Journal du Pays Basque, 5 December;
- O'REILLY C. (Ed) (2001) Language, Ethnicity and the State, vol. I, Palgrave, London;
- ORONOS M. (2002), Le mouvement culturel basque, 1951-2001, , Donostia, Elkar, Bayonne;
- ORONOS M., ETXEZAHARRETA L. And ARBELBIDE X. (2008) Le mouvement culturel basque 1951-2001, Tome 3, Elkar, Donostia;
- PASQUIER R. and SMYRL M. (2002) From Identity to Collective Action: Building Political Capacity in French Regions, in BUKOWSKY J, SMYRL M. and PIATTONI S. (Eds) Between Europeanization and Local Societies: The Space for Territorial Governance, pp. 67-90. Rowman & Littlefield, London;
- PERKMANN M. (1999) Building Governance Institutions Across European Borders, Regional Studies 33 (7), 657-667;
- RENTERIA A. (2009) Legeari beha, hizkuntzaren geroa hizpide, *Berria*, 29 December;
- ROMAINE S. (2002) The Impact of Language Policy on Endangered Language, International Journal on Multicultural Societies 4 (2), 194-212;
- SCHIFFMAN H. (1996) Linguistic Culture and Language Policy, Routledge, London;
- TABERNA G. (2009) L'OPLB revoit sa copie et son action visera aussi l'usage de l'euskera, Le Journal du Pays Basque, 17 December 2009;
- TAYLOR C. (1985) Human Agency and Language, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge;
- TEJERINA B. (1999) El poder de los símbolos. Identidad colectiva y movimiento etnolingüística en el País Vasco, Revista Española de Investigación Sociológica 88/99, 75-105;
- THOMAS P. (2005) Usage et dénonciation de la notion d'ethnie basque par l'anti-départementalisme en Pays Basque nord, Lapurdum 10, 233-246;
- TOURAINÉ A., DUBET F., HEGEDUS Z. and WIEVORKA M. (1981) Le pays contre l'Etat, luttes occitanes, Seuil, Paris;
- URTEAGA E. (2004) La politique linguistique au Pays basque, L'Harmattan, Paris;
- VICECONSEJERÍA DE POLÍTICA LINGÜÍSTICA (2006) IV Encuesta Sociolingüística, Gobierno Vasco, Vitoria.

* * *