

Sociolinguistic variation in Dima Basque¹

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Abstract

This research follows the research line that Aurrekoetxea (2003) begins in the Basque linguistics: that is to say, the research of the sociolinguistic variation in the Basque language. In this article the author studies in depth the linguistic changes between two generations in a small village in the south of Bizkaia (Biscay). For that purpose, the research is based on morphologic, syntactic, phonologic, and lexical parameters.

Keywords: language variation, geolinguistics, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

We wish to promptly make it known to the public the collated data and details of the work carried out by the research team EUDIA since the research project “Euskararen atlas sozio-geolinguistikoa” ‘Socio-geolinguistic atlas of the Basque language’ got to a start, because a research work gives no results and achieves no objectives until it is published.

While the data collection process is still on the way and the database gets larger, and until the final and complete results are published, we wish to bring to light some partial research analysing and publishing data from different places.

This article is put together within this context and follows those published some years ago. Some will wonder what is new and different about this one. Let’s say that this research work is a follow-up to the works published up to now (Aurrekoetxea 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007), because it has been carried out using the methodology and questionnaires of those but enhanced and enriched, and because those provide the basis for this one. The questionnaire used in this survey is different, more conclusive and thorough; the informants are different, though within the same age range; and this research work is part of a larger one that is being completed in the whole of the Basque Country. So we should be able to compare research data from this village with data from other places, and thus we will have the opportunity to analyse linguistic variation.

2. Theoretical approach

In the case of the Basque language, linguistic analysis amongst generations is a totally new concept.

However, this is nothing new in linguistics. It is a long time since André Martinet published his “Description phonologique du parler franco-provençal d’Hauteville (Savoie)” in 1939. This was a pioneering research piece in the study of linguistic variation from a sociolinguistic point of view. Martinet looked at three generations from the same family, whereas B. Cazacu (1965) contrasted the differences amongst two generations.

But Weinreich and especially W. Labov were the ones who established the new and consistent methodology. Endless linguistic investigations using a sociolinguistic approach have been carried out ever since.

Going back to Basque dialectology, we can say that there have been no accurate studies of this sort yet. In fact, some publications might have considered the sociolinguistic point of view, but not for a thorough study of the linguistic variation within a location or a small geographical area.

Amongst them we have the already mentioned works by Aurrekoetxea and also Pérez Landa (2006). Aurrekoetxea has looked at the phenomenon of levelling of the language in the light of data coming from different generations, and those investigations provide the basis and the goad for the research team EUDIA to design their project and get it going. In fact, the information withdrawn from that research shows the

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extent of the power of the standard language compared to varieties which coexist with it and have a lot less popular esteem. The so-called “Euskararen atlas soziolinguistikiko-dialektologikoa” ‘Sociolinguistic-dialectologic atlas of the Basque language’ (or socio-geolinguistic atlas of the Basque language) research project was meant to consider the situation of the different variants and to examine their relationship in different places. This research project was, in fact, meant to check whether the evidence found in a few locations and shown in Aurrekoetxea’s first works occurred in the whole of the Basque-speaking area or whereabouts.

Thus this research article concerning just one location has its place within the research project “Euskararen atlas soziolinguistikiko-dialektologikoa”.

The research done by Pérez Landa and backed up by Aurrekoetxea himself follows the same line, and it limits itself to the study of vowel combination in just one location. The results of the research clearly show the power of standard language and how it wears away local features.

3. Details of the investigation

Some details about the methodology used for the collection of data²:

- Data has been collected by means of a questionnaire which contains 202 questions regarding lexicon, morphology, and syntax. This questionnaire has specifically been put together for this project. It is partly made up of the questions that appear in the questionnaire used in the EHHA³ project. 120 questions regard the lexicon, 62 the morphology (22 concern nouns and 40 deal with verbs), and 20 the syntax. We do know that this is not a great number of questions in order to examine in depth the sociolinguistic variation of a language in a place, but it is enough to get an idea of the main patterns and frequency of such variability.
- In each place, Dima in this case, the questions have been asked to two people: a 55-year-old adult and a 24-year-old young person. Both live in farmhouses though none of them makes a living out of it: the adult works in a neighbouring factory, and the younger person is a university student. Both are male.

² For a detailed description of the project see Aurrekoetxea, G. & Ormaetxea, J. L. 2006.

³ EHHA (Euskararen Herri Hizkeren Atlasa ‘Atlas of Local Basque Dialects’) is a project promoted by Euskaltzaindia (The Royal Academy of the Basque Language) since 1984.

- The collection of data has been carried out by means of a guided interview using direct questions, periphrastic questions, translations, and so forth.
- Language register. The informants were told to use an informal register, that is, the type of language they would produce amongst friends and family. They were told not to think about how they should say it, or how it appears in texts, and so on. We were looking for the first thing that came to their minds as soon as they listened to the question. However, it is true that the results achieved through this methodology should be taken with caution, because alongside the informal register some formal patterns come to show here and there in the course of the interview. As a result, even if we intended to pick up an informal register, a more or less formal one is gathered.

4. Analysis between generations

These are the steps to be followed in the collation of data: the analysis between generations will be done within certain linguistic areas or parameters first and in general at a later stage. These results will give a dual answer to the linguistic variation between both generations: a quantitative answer that accounts for the different linguistic features.

Various factors have been considered in the data collation process, but the differences fall mainly into two categories: culturalization and deculturalization.

Culturalization refers to the language richness that comes together with language strengthening phenomena; for instance, the speech nuances acquired through schooling, those gained as a result of the development of standard Basque, etc.

Deculturalization alludes to language weakening phenomena such as lexical borrowing, not knowing concepts, loss of language peculiarities, etc.

The decline or loss of a language is usually not only a linguistic issue. In most cases it is the result of a deculturalization process undergone by the language users. This deculturalization is brought about by many sociolinguistic factors, the best known of them being the phenomenon of diglossia. However, diglossia is just one sign of deculturalization.

At a first stage of the deculturalization process and through the discredit of our culture, we lose our own culture; together with our own culture, we lose inner reference points, and as a result, referents from a foreign culture get in deeper every time.

As we lose our own cultural values, we lose our language. The first sign of such a loss is said to be the loss of lexical properties of one's language. At a later stage, we end up losing grammatical nuances.

A close examination of informants from different generations provides a feature that applies to the whole of the Basque territory: whereas the older generation has grown up during a weakening phase of the language, the younger generation lives generally a strengthening phase of the language.

In fact, those affirmations might need to be much more precise, and perhaps each location is different, but taking the whole of the Basque area and making the necessary exceptions, we can say that the older generation has mainly been schooled and educated in a foreign language; and apart from exceptions, the schooling of the younger generation has for the most part been done in Basque, for some to a greater extent than for others.

So, to the usual differences between generations, we should add that the older informant belongs to a deculturalized generation, whereas the younger one is part of a culture gaining generation. This is a feature that needs to be considered, because it can become of significant importance in some cases.

We should not forget that within the deculturalization process there is also a change of culture from generation to generation, and it shows in the data. The younger person has jumped from the farmhouse centred culture of the older generation to an urban type of culture. Both generations know each other's culture and its significant features, but each of them keeps its own everyday habits, some tighter and others in a more relaxed way.

4.1. Systematic analysis of the linguistic similarities and differences (lexicon, morphology, syntax, phonology)

4.1.1. Lexicon

Out of the 120 questions regarding the lexicon, 50% of the answers given by both generations are the same, and as many are different.

This is a surprising piece of information and a very meaningful one, because it provides us with a raw description of the significant linguistic changeability that is happening in the different Basque dialects.

Deculturalization phenomena are frequent especially amongst members of the older generation in the case of the Basque language. Some instances of this are *sur*, *remolino*, *arkoiris*, *junio*, *inundasiño*, *arbol*, *enbudo*, *mantekilla*, *binagre*, *sien*, *tuerto*, *kostunbre*,

asul... All borrowed words, originally from neighbouring Spanish and now made their own.

Members of previous generations use instead words that are at the basis of this local dialect: *egoaixe* or *goikoaxe*, *zirimola*, *uztarku*, *bagilla*, *uriola*, *zugatza*, *onila*, *gurina*, *ozpina*, *loka* or *garaunak*, *begibakarra*, *ekandua*, *urdina*... These words embody the "base dialect", a concept used by Bellman (1998).

The "base dialect" is made up of the corpus produced or used by its oldest speakers. They are capable of producing the most "extreme" and most characteristic corpus of their dialect.

This concept is of great importance in this type of research. In fact, it helps specify the "primary" forms and lexicon, and it provides to a great extent the means to give a typological analysis of the language corpus used by each age group in the study of linguistic differences between generations.

Having been schooled and educated in Basque, the young informant, on the other hand, uses words from the Basque heritage instead of those used by the older informant, and these are some of the answers obtained: *egoaixe*, *aixesirimbola*, *ostadarra*, *ekaña*, *uriolak*, *suaitzak*, *tutue*, *guriñe*, *garune*, *begibakarra*, *oiturea*, *urdin*... In this answers we find words pertaining to the "base dialect" as well as words from the Basque heritage, and as we shall see later, a significant influence of the standard variety is present in them.

In order to make a wholesome examination of the answers of the younger person, we must say that there has been a variety of answers; that is, apart from the ones above, there are other answers too, and sometimes two answers have been given for each concept. Words used by the older generation have in some cases been forwarded as second answers: for instance, *inisituek* and *tximistek*, *uriolak* and *inundasiñoak*, *arbolak* and *suaitzak*, *tutue* and *enbudoa*, *guriñe* and *mantekiyea*, *tuertoa* and *begibakarra*, *asule* and *urdin*. 11 such cases have been gathered in the lexicon.

There is another important feature that needs to be mentioned about the Basque used by the younger generation and which results from the influence of the standard variety. It is mainly the standard language that has been used at school by the younger generation. Their schooling has set off a Basque culturalization process: the culture expressions and referents learned at school are no longer as unfamiliar as they once were; little by little expressions from the Basque culture produced in the Basque Country are learned. This has a great influence on the education of young people and has effectively changed their culture expression.

Schooling in standard Basque has placed the varieties that differ from it in a diaglossic situation; that

is, features from the standard variety get in and find a prominent place within the different dialectal varieties. Even if the data provided by the survey are not enough (larger areas should be researched) to make an in-depth investigation of this diaglossic situation in the whole of the Basque Country, we do have the chance to examine smaller areas and local varieties.

Looking at the data, we find that many of the answers given by the younger person are linked to the standard variety. Amongst them we have *ostadarra* (vs. *arkoiris*), *tximistek* (vs. *inisitu*), *ekaña* (vs. *junio*), *suaitza* (vs. *arbol*), *logela* (vs. *kuartu*), *tutue* (vs. *enbudo*), *guriñe* (vs. *mantekilla*), *begibakarra* (vs. *tuertoa*), *oiturea* (vs. *kostunbre*), and *urdin* (vs. *asul*). In the following two answers, a more cultivated variant has been chosen instead of the new word: *itargie* (vs. *idergi*) and *labe* (vs. *laba*). We understand that *itargi* is a more cultivated version of the dialectal form *idergi*, because it is closer to the standard form. The same applies to the form *labe*, which belongs to the lexicon of standard Basque.

The young person has used words or variants from standard Basque in 12 cases (10%). We can say, therefore, that 10% of the lexicon of a dialectal variety has been influenced by standard Basque from one generation to the next.

This survey does not measure the passive competence of the informants. The data collection methodology (Aurrekoetxea 1986) used so proficiently in the EHHA project to measure the active and the passive knowledge of the informants has not been used this time. In the collection of the data on that occasion and for that purpose, apart from the answers provided spontaneously by the people interviewed or informants, new words would be suggested question after question asking them whether they knew them and in which context. This methodology achieved very interesting results, though they have not yet been analysed with the required accuracy. The truth is that anybody able to speak a language has the capacity to actively produce the language and also to understand but not produce a number of words and expressions. We call this passive competence (for further details see Aurrekoetxea 2002).

This research work does not engage in the study of such competence. In fact, this research project has different objectives concerning the methodology. Not only does it aim at examining geolinguistic variation, but it also intends to examine sociolinguistic variation.

However, it would be highly interesting to apply that methodology to find out how much does the older generation understand about the standard Basque words used by younger people.

The change of culture from generation to generation has been mentioned above. This cultural change has a

direct influence on the use of the language. There are concepts that get lost, jobs and utensils that disappear, activities that become unknown, etc.

Evidence of the cultural change starts to show in the data obtained. Questions without answers are a sign of concept disappearance and follow a clear typology. The lack of answer could be due to two reasons: the concept is not known, or even if the concept is known, the informant does not remember there and then the words.

In our survey, and as far as the lexicon is concerned, the young informant could not find the words for the concept in question in 6 instances: *morcilla* 'black pudding', *pollo* 'chicken', *alfiler* 'pin', *pantorrilla* 'calf', *suspiro* 'sigh', *verno* 'son-in-law'. We might be surprised at the lack of answer to one or more of those questions, but from the answers to the rest of the questions, we come to the conclusion that a considerable change of culture has taken place.

Another indication of the change in the culture is the simplification of concepts: the older person has sometimes got two words (*berna-anka*), whereas the younger person has only got one (*anka*)...

The third typological feature of the change between generations is simplification: *silbota* meant "panza" 'belly' (see Azkue's dictionary) and now means "ombligo, cordón umbilical" 'navel, umbilical cord' (that is, *zil*); *garauek* used to designate "grano" 'grain' and now also alludes to all types of 'spots' including 'anthrax'; the word *katarroa* is used to mean both "constipado" 'common cold' and "catarro" 'cough'. In this group we include the word *penea* too, because it means both "pena" 'pity' and "compasión" 'compassion' (*errukia*).

4.1.2. Morphology

First we shall make a separate morphological analysis of nouns and verbs, and later we shall put the results together.

4.1.2.1. Noun morphology

Out of 22 questions, 17 of the answers by old and young are the same and 5 are different. Compared to the results achieved in the lexicon, the difference is outstanding: in the lexicon 50% of the answers were the same, whereas in the noun morphology 77,27% are the same.

These are the differences:

- the older person *alabea* – the young one *alaba*
- the older person *itzosorarte* – the young one *itxosoraño*
- the older person *lar* – the young one *larregi*

- the older person *birriten* – the young one *bi bider*
- the older person *senan* – the young one *selan*

The variation that present four out of the five cases (the last four) is dialectal, and both variants are part of the “base dialect”, both coexist within the same dialect. However, the forms chosen by the young informant are undoubtedly closer to the standard variety than those given by the older person.

For one thing, it is not easy to determine the factors (linguistic or non-linguistic) that cause the variation shown in the pairs *senan–selan* and *lar–larregi*, because they are widely spread out. In the case of the pair *itzosorarte–itxosoraño*, the use of different affixes for concepts of time and space seems to have been lost in this dialectal variety, because older informants use almost solely just one affix (*-ra arte*).

Out of the five different answers only one can be said not to belong to the “base dialect”, namely, the younger person’s *alaba*. Here the influence of the standard variety is so clear that it cannot be questioned.

All in all, there is a 22,72% difference in the noun morphology of old and young, and we can claim as a second conclusion that the young person’s choices are closer to the learned standard variety than the older informant’s.

4.1.2.2. Verb morphology

Out of the 40 features that are studied within the verb morphology, old and young coincide in 18 of the answers and differ in 22.

There are many differences, but their importance needs to be pondered, because they occur at different levels. Some are phonological differences; for example, *dotzo/otze*, *dotzies/otzes*, *dotzogu/odu*, *dotzie/otzie*, *deustesu/ostesu*, *dekie/deukie* (the first one by the older informant and the second one by the young informant). In these cases there is no system change; the forms belong to the same system, even though their inflectional affixes have evolved differently under the influence of certain phonological rules.

The variation that shows in these other three cases is of a cultural nature, and both variants belong to the same dialectal variety: *al dau/leikite*, *al dau/leike*, *al dotzo/leikio* (the first one by the older person and the second one by the young person). The only difference between these two variants is a matter of register. These inflected forms too belong to the same verb system.

Dialectal variation has been recorded in another two cases too: *ebesan/sauriesan*, *eban/sauen*. The language used by old and middle-aged people, on the one hand, and the language used by young people, on the other, is

probably what characterizes these variants. In fact, and as it happens in most of the Basque territory, the mark for the third person singular has changed from Ø to *s-*. This change is characteristic of dialects in a diaglossic community. It is the means by which dialectal varieties subsist: the system stays the same, but a feature from the stronger variety is made their own, and this is how they manage to survive. A similar feature is mentioned by Christen (1998: 57-58) in the language of young people who speak the Swiss German dialect: instead of the zero affix of their dialect, they use an affix like in the standard variety, though not the same affix.

Finally, there are another 4 features that show the influence of the standard variety: *gintzesan/giñen*, *daus/ditu*, *yoa nintzen/nindoan*, *eukiosan/eukosan-eukasan*, *Ø/genbisen*. It might be questionable in some cases, but in one way or another there is an influence in all of them. In the first of the cases, both variants are part of the “base dialect”, but the choice of the younger informant is closer to the standard version. The same can be said about the pair *daus/ditu*. In the pairs *yoa nintzen/nindoan* and *eukiosan/eukosan-eukasan*, the influence of the standard variety shows not only in the form of the inflected verbs but also in the aspect; in fact, the informants were asked to give the forms of the past progressive. In the last case, the older informant was unable to find the right verb tense to translate the given sentence, whereas the young informant’s translation is quite close to the standard version.

As a result, even though the answers of older and young informants are very different in the morphology of their verb forms, the influence of the standard variety rates at 10% according to the data.

Putting together the two sections of the morphological analysis, both age groups give the same answers in 23 cases out of 62 (37%), and in 39 of them the answers are different (63%). And there is an 8% influence of the standard variety on the morphology of the language of the youth.

4.1.3. Syntax

20 questions have been asked in order to gather syntactic features. Old and young coincide in 7 of the answers and differ in 13 (65%).

A more in-depth examination shows that in two cases out of the 13 answers the differences are phonological: *doas/as* and *ikusi dot/ikusi ot*. As happened above, in both cases the forms belong to the same verb system: in the first case, we examined the agreement of the verb and a direct object with a quantifier, and we see that both forms are marked for plural. In the second case, we looked at the auxiliary used with the verb *ikusi* when the direct object is a person, and here too both forms are divalent.

The following two answers are also determined by the verb forms used in them. On the one hand, we examine how the present continuous form of the verb *jan* is constructed: the older informant answered *yaten dabil*, and the young person said *yaten dau*. On the other hand, we want to know whether the verb *lagundu* takes a divalent or a trivalent auxiliary: the older informant answered *lagundu dotzo*, and the younger one said *lagundu dau*; the first form is trivalent, and the second form is divalent.

There are two instances related to language decline phenomena, and consequently to deculturalization. In the first instance the older informant answered *yan in bear isin dau*, whereas the answer given by the younger person was *yan dau* (translating from Spanish *no estaba rico pero se lo ha comido* 'it wasn't tasty, but he/she has eaten it'). It is because in his answer the modal verb itself is the focused element that the older informant managed to render the sentence, regardless of the use of a periphrastic verb form that makes the answer longer; the young informant, on the contrary, failed to add the needed element that would have placed the focus on the verb itself. The second pair of different answers allows us to study the nature of the auxiliary taken by the verb *deitu*: the older informant's answer is *geitu in dostie* and the younger one answered *deitu nostie*; as it seems, the language decline process has brought about the simplification of the paradigm.

And finally, the influence of standard Basque on young people is evident in another four answers:

- the older informant's answer *akordeta nas aitekin* vs. the young person's answer *gurasoatas akordetan nas*. As for the declension of the object of the verb *akordau*, the young informant uses a case that is more frequently used in standard Basque. We consider this an influence of standard Basque. Besides, and taking into account that the aim of the question was to determine the case mark, the use of the standard Basque mark *-ekin* by the older informant is very telling.
- the older informant's answer *urten dau* vs. the young person's answer *urten da*. The verb *urten* and its variants show two patterns across the Basque-speaking area. In Bizkaia (Biscay), and particularly in the dialect that is the object of this study, it has always behaved as a transitive verb, but in the language of the young informant and due to the influence of the standard pattern, it appears with the intransitive auxiliary.
- the older informant's answer *bardin doste* vs. the young person's answer *bardin bardin yat*. The two possible patterns using the word *bardin* in a verbal periphrasis come up: the

older informant uses the transitive auxiliary and the young person the intransitive one.

- the older informant's answer *yoan in bear dosu* vs. the young person's answer *yoan in bearko sara*. The older informant uses the transitive auxiliary with the modal verb *behar* accompanied by an intransitive verb, whereas the young person uses the intransitive auxiliary. In standard Basque both uses are admitted, but the older speaker follows the pattern of the modal verb *behar*, and the young one conforms to that set by the main verb.

Therefore, according to the data, it can be said that there is a 40% influence of standard Basque on the syntax.

4.1.4. Phonology

Above, when we described the questionnaire used in this survey, no question dealing with phonological issues was mentioned. There has been no special questionnaire for the examination of phonological features. That matter was intentionally left for a later research project.

However, amongst the data collected for the study of the other linguistic parameters, there is a lot of phonological information and will be used in the analysis of this section.

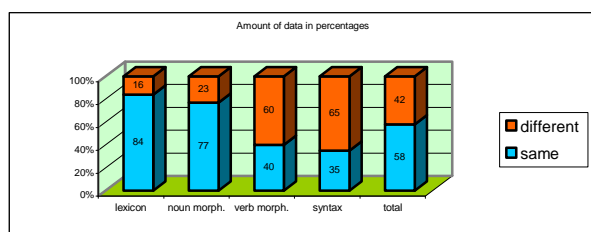
In the lexicon there are numerous phonological features worth a comment, but we will limit the research to just some of them:

- a) Loss of the *-g-* sound between vowels: it is a change happening from the older generation to the younger one: *eguski-euski*, *egur-eurra*, *aginke-ainke*. This feature seems to be quite rooted, and it is somewhat a firm difference between generations.
- b) Yeism: this is a feature more and more rooted in Basque, and the data from Dima show a significant difference between both generations. The older informant uses the traditional type of pronunciation, whereas the young speaker is yeista. These are the answers collected: *kinpulle-kinpuyek*, *kullara-koyarea*, *kutxillo-kutxiyoa*, *mantekilla-mantekiyea*; though the young person on one occasion produces the lateral sound in *orkatilla*.
- c) The young informant tends to palatalize consonants more than the older informant: *bilusik-billusik*, *isen-ixena*, *abisen-abixena*, *atxamar-atzamararak*, *atxaskal-atzaskalak* are the pairs of data to exemplify this.
- d) Vowel changes: there are many examples of vowel changes in both age groups. Here are some pairs of answers by older and young informants:

inotz–inuntza, etxoten–itxoten, burruntxali–burduntzalue, iñerrea–iñarrea, ekuondo–ukondoa, ortusik–ortosik, gixorik–geixorik, interru–intierrue, kanpasantu–kanposantue, amoma–amama, sikete–sikite, udebarri–udabarri. If we were to classify these vowel changes, we would have to differentiate more than one case: monophthongization cases, assimilation-dissimilation cases, etc.

4.2. General analysis of the data

The following diagram comprises all the data:



In this diagram the data is given in percentages. We think that in that way it is clearer to see the difference rate between the language of the older and younger generations within each parameter. The diagram shows the percentages of same and different answers. As can be seen, the lexicon is the parameter with the greatest percentage of same answers (84% of the answers by old and young coincide and 16% differ). Noun morphology follows it closely with 77% of the answers being the same.

In order to understand well this diagram, note that two things have been taken into account in the analysis of the lexicon: any difference, on the one hand, and lexical differences on the other. When we say any difference, we mean that any difference between the answers of both age groups to questions pertaining to the lexicon has been considered, be lexical or other type of difference (phonological, morphological, etc.). On the contrary, lexical difference refers to etymological difference only. So, in the section dedicated to the lexicon (section 4.1.1.), all differences have been considered; and that is why in 50% of the cases the answers are different.

In this section, however, the phonological differences have not been counted as differences; the answers that present phonological variations only have been counted as one: the older informant's *kinpulle* and the young person's *kinpuyek* have been taken as equal, disregarding the different pronunciation of the palatal consonant (and needless to say, the fact that one is indefinite and the other is definite). With this example

we try to make clear that, same as in the lexicon also in the rest of the parameters, the phonological factors have not been taken into consideration; that is, only the features that apply to each parameter have been considered.

In the verb morphology and the syntax, the percentage of same answers is significantly lower: 40% in the verb morphology and just 35% in the syntax.

All in all, in 58% of the cases the answers coincide, and in 42% of them the answers differ. This means that in a generation nearly half of the language has changed.

We reckon that this fact is incredible by itself. It undoubtedly describes the situation of the Basque dialects in a graphic way. The dialectal variety we are examining is submerged in a state of change. And it is not that this variety is in a special situation, but our hypothesis is that also the rest of the varieties are undergoing a similar process. This hypothesis is in fact the main reason why we undertook this research project.

Likewise, this research offers some interesting data: it is widely believed that the lexicon is the parameter that changes first and foremost in a language; however, according to these data, it is the parameter that changes the least (16%), closely followed by the noun morphology with 23%.

The change is more significant in the verb morphology, and particularly in the syntax. The syntax presents the greatest variation: with 65% of the data from both generations different, the system proves to be very unstable in this area.

The data we are dealing with should be confirmed in the partial analysis of local dialects at a first stage and later in a more general way; however, this hypothesis cannot be discarded, and it should be very present in any research on speech dialects.

The data show that this local variety has no inner cohesion, and we can affirm that it is completely diversified. Bearing in mind the data, we wonder whether we can defend the idea of them being part of the same linguistic system. We wonder whether the variation that we find in them is not too big to maintain that they form one system.

Moreover, we doubt whether there is one or more systems in this location. We doubt whether there is more than one linguistic system coexisting in the same place. But at the same time, it is certainly hard to defend the idea that there is more than one system with what we nowadays know, because we are still unaware of the methodology and procedures to distinguish two linguistic systems.

In other words, we wonder how much variation is allowed in a linguistic system; or which degree of variation can be accepted within it.

It is true that languages have a dynamic quality and that there is no permanent linguistic system; that languages are constantly changing and that variation is an inner quality of languages. Nevertheless, whatever the linguistic system, independently of its constant variation, when can we say that we have moved from one system to another, where does one finish, and where does the next one start?

And in this linguistic situation, the speakers (old, middle-aged, young, and children) understand one another because of the polilectal quality of their (of any competent speaker's) grammar, or in so far as they have that faculty. That is, speakers of different linguistic systems, or in other words, speakers with a different grammar, understand one another precisely by means of their ability to understand one another.

Looking at our data, we believe that the methodology used by traditional dialectology should be discarded in the planification of new research projects. When a language loses its inner cohesion and shows such a big difference from generation to generation, an analysis of it without a sociolinguistic methodology in mind makes no sense. The language of the old is no longer representative of the language of a place but just of speakers with some particular sociolinguistic features.

There is a need to restate the methodology typically used in dialectal monographs if we want to research a local variety in its entirety.

4.2.1. Influence of the standard variety

In which way does the standard language or variety affect linguistic variability?

In this study we consider this factor too, and whenever there is variation in the answers, we check if there are any elements from the standard variety showing. Thus we are able to determine the role played by those elements in the variation and the importance of it.

In the lexicon the influence of the standard has been established at 10%; in the morphology (noun and verb morphology put together) at 8%; and in the syntax at 40%. Joining all three parameters, the influence of the standard on the dialect spoken in Dima amounts to 13% according to our data.

This means that in Dima, and to the prejudice of the "base dialect", the presence of the standard variety in the language of the younger generation is rated at 13%.

This influence is quantitatively and by large much bigger in the syntax than in the rest of the parameters.

5. Comparing previous research with the present one

It is appropriate and necessary, following sociolinguistic procedures, to contrast the findings provided by previous research on this location with the conclusions reached in this contribution.

For that purpose we will consider the following studies: firstly, "Estandar eta dialektoen arteko bateratze-joerak (ikuspuntu teorikotik begirada bat)" 'Unifying trends between standard Basque and dialects (from the theoretical point of view)' (Aurrekoetxea 2004), and secondly "Hizkuntza estandararen eta dialektoen arteko bateratze joerak" 'Unifying trends between standard Basque and dialects' (Aurrekoetxea 2006). The questionnaires used in each of those studies are different, and the same must be said about the informants in one and the other. The goal of both papers was to measure the influence of the standard variety on the Basque dialects spoken in Arratia by three generations: old, middle-aged, and young. The informants used in Dima are younger than those used in the other two investigations, which we think might slightly affect the results. However, it cannot be denied that they are valuable all the same for a first approach.

Apart from these differences, we have to add that while the objective of the mentioned two studies was to measure the influence of the standard variety in a certain geographical area, on this occasion we aim at giving a detailed account of the differences between two generations.

Features of standard Basque are present in the syntax at the highest rate: 57% in the first investigation (Aurrekoetxea 2004), 44% in the second (Aurrekoetxea 2006), and 40% in this one.

A handful of comments on the data: firstly, that features from standard Basque are used at a high rate. We find this figure surprisingly high once again. We need to bear in mind that there is a significant difference between the two generations of informants used in this survey: the older generation has been culturalized (schooled) in a foreign language, but the younger generation has been culturalized in Basque.

Second note: the syntax is the linguistic parameter with the highest number of features from the standard variety. This characteristic is not specific from Dima; it was also found in the whole area of Arratia (Aurrekoetxea 2006: 144)⁴:

⁴ "Hizkuntza arlokako datuak aztertutik Arratian egin den ikerketa honetan hizkuntza aldaketaren aitzindaritzat datu

‘Looking at the data on the different linguistic parameters in this investigation carried out in Arratia, the morphosyntactic data are at the lead of the linguistic variation. This parameter presents the highest number of foreign features in all locations except in Artea. The findings have been classified into two groups [...]: on the one hand, Zeanuri (26%), Areatza and Artea (25% each), and Igorre (24%) with similar figures; on the other, Lemoa and Dima have much higher rates and the morphosyntactic features stand out (42% and 44%, respectively). The morphosyntactic data are thus at the lead of the variation.’

These data prove the opposite of what was believed to date.

Third note: the figures revealed are very similar in the three investigations: 43% in the first one (Aurrekoetxea 2004: 54), 44% in the second (Aurrekoetxea 2006: 144), and 35% in this one. There are only 9 points difference between the highest and the lowest percentage. This similarity in the figures is somehow a guarantee for those results.

With respect to the lexicon, the present work establishes the influence of the standard at 10%; but the other two papers mentioned estimated it at 34% (Aurrekoetxea 2004: 54; Aurrekoetxea 2006: 144). The figures show a considerable gap; the data suggest that we should get into the investigation more deeply.

In the morphology (noun and verb morphology put together) this contribution establishes the influence of standard Basque at 8%; the first research, on the contrary, placed it at 49% (Aurrekoetxea 2004: 54). The second research made a joined analysis of the morphology and the syntax, and we mentioned those results above.

Joining all the parameters together, the influence of standard Basque on this dialectal variety is estimated at 13%. This result coincides with the findings of the two

morfosintaktikoek erakusten dute. Artea izan ezik beste herri guztietan kanpoko ezaugarrien kopuru handienak arlo honetan biltzen dira. Emaizak bi multzotan sailkatu [...]: batetik, Zeanuri (%26), Areatza eta Artea (%25na) eta Igorre (%24) agertzen dira kopuru berdintsuekin; bestetik, Lemoa eta Dima askoz ere kopuru handiagoekin baina ezaugarri morfosintaktikoak gailen dituztela (%42 eta %44, hurrenez hurren). Hots, datu morfosintaktikoak izango lirateke aldaketaren aitzindariak.”

previous investigations on the whole of the area of Arratia, though not as far as the data from Dima were concerned (Aurrekoetxea 2006: 143)⁵:

‘Even if more research work needs to be carried out in order to contrast and deal with reliable data, looking at these data alone and considering the development to date, it can be said that in Arratia, if nothing changes, within each generation the local dialect is disappearing at a rate of approximately 10%.’

6. Conclusions

This paper is an investigation of the dialect spoken in Dima and finds its place within the research project “Euskal atlas sozio-geolinguistikoa”. The investigation focuses on the linguistic connection between two generations: the older generation and the young generation. As well as the usual differences between generations, in this case the following needs to be added: whilst the older generation has been culturalized in a foreign language, the younger generation has been schooled in Basque.

The first main conclusion from this survey is the following: it shows that there is a surprisingly large amount of variability taking place in Dima Basque at the present time. This variability is greater than we thought, and it works in different directions: the tendency towards the standard variety and the culturalization of generations. The linguistic relations between both generations suggest that there is a lack of linguistic unity.

The syntax is the most disunified parameter with 65% variation between both generations. It is followed by the verb morphology with 60% of different answers. Then comes the noun morphology with 23%, and finally the lexicon with 16%.

Joining the lexicon, the syntax and the morphology together, 42% of the collected answers are different, which means that in a generation a third of the language has changed.

We reckon that this is a shocking finding in itself. It undoubtedly gives a graphic description of the state of our dialects. The local variety that is the object of this investigation is submerged in a state of significant

⁵ “Datuak kontrastatu eta ziurtasun batekin tratatzen hasteko ikerketa gehiago egin behar den arren, eta datu hauek huts-hutsean hartuz, esan daiteke Arratian, orain arteko bilakaera ikusiz eta aldaketarik ematen ez bada, belaunaldi bakoitzean gutxi gora-behera %10ean galtzen dela bertako hizkera.”

change. And it is not that this variety finds itself in a special situation, but our hypothesis is that also the rest of the dialectal varieties are subject to a similar process. This hypothesis is, indeed, the main reason for this research project.

Here follows the second conclusion: standard Basque has been one of the agents to bring about the lack of unity that this dialect suffers from. The influence of standard Basque on this dialect is large, and it is the direct reason for the lack of linguistic unity between generations. All in all, the influence of the standard on this dialect is established at 13%.

Third conclusion: that we need to reflect on the linguistic situation in which this dialect and all dialects in general find themselves. The linguistic system of this dialect shows very poor, scant unity. We ask ourselves whether it would be legitimate to consider two coexisting systems rather than just one. Perhaps the time has come to talk about the nature and number of necessary features to split a linguistic system into two. This idea that we present as a hypothesis needs to be studied in depth with further research.

Finally, we ought to mention a fourth conclusion too: this research work shows the need for new hypotheses and new methodology in the investigation of speech dialects. The methodology used in traditional dialectology is no longer valid; the sociolinguistic point of view is absolutely necessary if we want to make an accurate investigation of the linguistic features of a local variety.

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