Fifth Sociolinguistic Survey

Basque Autonomous Community,

Navarre and Iparralde

Vice Ministry for Language Policy
Basque Government

Donostia-San Sebastián, 16-07-2012
CONTENTS:

1. Introduction .......................................................................................... 5
2. Main Conclusions ..................................................................................... 5
3. Language Competence .......................................................................... 8
4. Language Transmission .......................................................................... 14
5. Development of Basque, Gains and Losses ........................................... 16
6. Use of Basque ......................................................................................... 18
7. Attitudes towards Efforts to Promote the Use of Basque ................. 25
1. Introduction

Sociolinguistic surveys are an extremely important means of measuring the development and situation of a language that is going through a process of recovery. With this in mind, it is absolutely essential to periodically elaborate a sociolinguistic survey whose goal is to analyse the reality of the Basque language throughout its different territories.

This sociolinguistic survey takes into consideration inhabitants aged sixteen or over throughout the whole Basque Country (approximately 2,650,000 people). That said, the age group left out of the survey is significant for the situation of Basque, given that, because of its schooling, this is the most Basque-speaking of all age groups. The study is stratified by gender and age, and 7,800 people were surveyed in this fifth edition: 4,100 in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), 2,000 in Iparralde (the Northern Basque Country) and 1,700 in Navarre. A structured, closed questionnaire was used to collect information.

The Fifth Sociolinguistic survey covers four research areas: people’s linguistic competence, language transmission, the use of Basque in different contexts (in the home, amongst friends, at work and on formal occasions) and attitudes towards Basque.

The fieldwork was carried out by Siadeco between June and December 2011 and conducted by telephone. The margin of sampling error for the entire sample of the Basque Country is \( \pm 1.5\% \) for a confidence level of 95.5\% and \( p=q=50\% \). For the same confidence levels, the error is \( \pm 1.9\% \) for both bilinguals and non-Basque speakers.

The sociolinguistic survey is a research work carried out once every five years and this is the fifth such study. Therefore, besides explaining the current situation of Basque, the survey also offers us the opportunity to describe how it has developed in the previous twenty years.

2. Main Conclusions
1. Society is changing rapidly, the ageing process continues to be more pronounced, the birth rate is still relatively low and the number of immigrants grew noticeably in a short space of time, especially in Navarre (representing 11.2% of the population in Navarre and 6.6% in the BAC).

2. There are 185,600 more bilinguals (currently representing 27% of the total population) in 2011 amongst inhabitants aged sixteen or over than in 1991. This increase in bilinguals has taken place in Navarre and, especially, the BAC. In Iparralde, meanwhile, although there continue to be losses, they are less pronounced than before and the number of young bilinguals continues to grow. At the same time, amongst those people aged sixteen or over, there are now 140,239 less non-Basque speakers than 20 years ago in the Basque Country (they represented 70% in 1991 and 58.4% today). The percentage of non-Basque speakers has declined in the BAC and Navarre. In Iparralde, meanwhile, both the number and percentage has risen.

3. If instead of taking the inhabitants aged 16 or over, one takes the whole population into consideration, the percentage of bilinguals in the Basque Country has grown considerably. Indeed, if one measures language competence in relation to age, one can see that this growth in the number of bilinguals is taking place amongst young people especially. In the BAC and Navarre, for example, the highest percentage of bilinguals is found amongst young people aged under sixteen.

4. Passive bilinguals have doubled in the Basque Country in the last 20 years: they represent 14.7% of the population today and 7.7% in 1991. The biggest growth has taken place in the BAC and Navarre and their proportion has increased to a lesser extent in Iparralde.

5. At present, in almost all cases where both parents are bilingual, Basque is transmitted by parents to their children in the BAC and Navarre (in 97% of cases in the BAC and 95% in Navarre), yet somewhat less so in Iparralde (87%). In the case of mixed couples, whilst transmission of Basque has grown, it is still not absolute (71% in the BAC, 67% in Navarre and 56% in Iparralde).

6. The ease of expression speakers of a language have, their relationship networks and the key contexts in which they use the language are crucial. Many speakers, especially young people, are non-native Basque speakers. In 2011, non-native
Basque speakers make up 52% of the 16-24 bilingual age group in the BAC, 38.6% in Iparralde and 54% in Navarre. In 1991, by contrast, non-native Basque speakers made up 14% of bilinguals in the BAC, 9% in Iparralde and 16% in Navarre. Furthermore, half of all bilinguals live in non-Basque-speaking areas. Therefore, most bilinguals live in extensive relationship networks that are mainly carried out in Spanish or French and only have limited spaces in which to use Basque.

7. It is not just knowledge of but also use of Basque that has increased, mainly in formal areas. The growth that is taking place in the use of Basque is most evident amongst young people. Indeed, more people under 35 now use Basque than they did twenty years ago in all three territories, especially in the BAC.

8. If instead of focusing on the use of Basque throughout the whole of society one just looks at use amongst bilinguals, although there are more bilinguals now, use of Basque has declined compared to 1991. In general terms the use of Basque in society has increased considerably yet bilinguals today do not use Basque as much as they did in 1991. However, the tendency has been changing since 2001 and now young bilinguals use Basque more than ten years ago in the BAC and Iparralde, although not in Navarre.

9. Favourable attitudes towards Basque and the willingness to see it recover successfully have increased in the BAC and Navarre, but not in Iparralde amongst the whole population. Whilst such attitudes have increased amongst all age groups in the BAC and Navarre, as regards Iparralde, in the last five years favourable attitudes towards Basque have increased amongst young people.

10. From an overall analysis of the data, it can be confirmed that bilingualism has grown in the BAC and Navarre; more strongly in the BAC and somewhat less so, although still consistently, in Navarre. On the contrary, in Iparralde it still continues to decline. However, as noted, this decline is not as pronounced as before and the number and percentage of bilinguals continues to rise amongst young people in Iparralde.
3. Language Competence

According to the 2011 data, 27% of the population of the Basque Country aged 16 or over is bilingual (almost five points higher than in 1991, namely, 22.3%), 14.7% is passive bilingual (7.7% in 1991) and 58.4% is non-Basque-speaking (70% in 1991).

Language competence by territory, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence</th>
<th>Basque Country</th>
<th>BAC</th>
<th>Navarre</th>
<th>Iparralde</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,648,998</td>
<td>1,873,498</td>
<td>537,139</td>
<td>238,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilinguals</td>
<td>714,136</td>
<td>600,058</td>
<td>62,977</td>
<td>51,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive bilinguals</td>
<td>388,255</td>
<td>325,967</td>
<td>40,546</td>
<td>21,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Basque speakers</td>
<td>1,546,607</td>
<td>947,473</td>
<td>433,616</td>
<td>165,518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By territory, 32% of people aged 16 or over in the BAC is bilingual (24.1% in 1991), 21.4% in Iparralde (26.4% in 1996) and 11.7% in Navarre (9.5% in 1991).

Language competence by territory, 2011 (%)

Note: The size of each circle represents the population of each territory

In other words, amongst the population aged sixteen or over there are 185,600 more bilinguals in 2011 than there were in 1991. This growth in bilinguals has taken place in Navarre and, especially, the BAC. By contrast, in Iparralde the number of bilinguals still continues to decline, although it is not as pronounced as before and the number and percentage of bilinguals continues to rise amongst young people.


When one measures linguistic competence by age, one can see that the increasing number of bilinguals is especially prominent amongst young people. In the BAC and Navarre, for example, the highest percentage of bilinguals is in the 16-24 age group (59.7% and 20.8% respectively). In Iparralde, by contrast, the highest percentage of bilinguals is in the over-65 age group and the younger the age group, the lower the percentage of bilinguals. However, a changing tendency that was noticed five years ago amongst young people in Iparralde has been confirmed, and according to the 2011 data the number and percentage of young bilinguals has risen there.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence by territory and age, 2011 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Basque speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navarre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Basque speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iparralde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive bilinguals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Basque speakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, there are 140,239 fewer non-Basque speakers than 20 years ago in the Basque Country (70% in 1991 and 58.9% in 2011). The percentage of non-Basque speakers has declined in the BAC and Navarre. In Iparralde, by contrast, both the number and the percentage have risen. The decreasing number of non-Basque speakers and rising number of bilinguals is even more striking if one bears in mind the socio-demographic changes experienced by society in recent years. On the one hand, Basque society is getting older. The birth rate is very low so the category of young people, specifically the group with most bilinguals, is increasingly less prominent in society as a whole. At the same time, the percentage of immigrants has grown considerably during the last twenty years. In the BAC it stands at 6.6% and in Navarre 11.2%. The effect of people moving to Iparralde from elsewhere has been very pronounced (according to survey data they represent 41.5% of all inhabitants).
Likewise, 20 years ago the percentage of immigrants in Iparralde was higher than that of the other two territories.

From an overall analysis of the data, it can be confirmed that bilingualism has grown in the BAC and Navarre; more strongly in the BAC and somewhat less so, although still consistently, in Navarre. On the contrary, in Iparralde it still continues to decline. However, as noted, this decline is not as pronounced as before and the number and percentage of bilinguals continues to rise amongst young people in Iparralde.

The bilingual group has changed significantly during the last 20 years. In 1991 most bilinguals (79.3%) were native Basque speakers, that is, they had learnt Basque at home (and Basque as the sole familial language). Moreover, native Basque speakers dominated all the age groups. In 2011, by contrast, although native Basque speakers continue to dominate (52.4%), the situation has reversed amongst young people. In fact, more than half (51.9%) of young bilinguals in the 16-24 age group are now non-native Basque speakers. In other words, they learnt Basque either at school or at an euskaltegi (a Basque language school for adults). By contrast, in 1991 non-native Basque speakers made up just 15% of bilinguals in this age group.
Meanwhile, increasingly more people are native bilinguals, that is, they learn Basque and Spanish or French, two languages simultaneously, at home. They are the children of mixed language-competence couples and non-native Basque-speaking couples. Thus, 18.9% of young bilinguals in the 16-24 age group are now native bilinguals.
The predominance of non-native Basque speakers amongst young people is evident in the BAC and Navarre, and they are also on the increase in Iparralde. This is linked directly to the ease or difficulty people have when it comes to using Basque. In fact, amongst bilinguals, non-native bilinguals (people who get by better in Spanish or French than Basque) make up the biggest group in the BAC and Navarre, and are increasingly more prominent in Iparralde.

**Development of native Basque speakers, native bilinguals and non-native Basque speakers by age group. Iparralde, 1996-2011**

4. Language Transmission through the Family

In order to understand how language transmission takes place today, those people surveyed with children between 2 and 15 years of age were selected and how they transmitted language to their children analysed.

At present, in almost all cases where both parents are bilingual, at home they transmit Basque to their children in the BAC and Navarre, yet somewhat less so in Iparralde.

The language competence of couples totally conditions language transmission:

a. If the parents are bilingual, 97% of children learn Basque at home in the BAC and 95% in Navarre. In Iparralde, whilst that percentage is similarly high (87%), it is still lower than the other territories.

b. If one of the parents does not speak Basque, however, 71% of children in the BAC learn Basque at home, 67% in Navarre and 56% in Iparralde.

Language transmitted to children aged 2-15, by parents’ language competence, 2011(%)
In the case of both parents being native Basque speakers or native bilinguals, almost 100% of them transmit Basque at home in the BAC and Navarre, and nearly 90% in Iparralde. If one or both parents are non-native Basque speakers, however, the transmission percentage is lower, although most still transmit Basque to their children at home.

It is significant that, unlike before, most mixed language-competence couples today transmit Basque together with Spanish or French, although there are differences according to what the parents’ mother tongue is, namely, whether they are native Basque speakers, native bilinguals or non-native Basque speakers.

The fact of transmitting Basque together with Spanish or French is linked to the language competence of the couples. In fact, following the process of language recovery during the last 25 years, there are now increasingly more non-native Basque-speaking couples.
5. Development of Basque, Gains and Losses

Amongst young people it is significant to note increasing gains and hardly any losses, and this is also reflected, although in more modest form, amongst the young people of Iparralde too.

Most of those people whose mother tongue is Basque or Basque and Spanish or French (88% in the BAC, 83% in Navarre and 75% in Iparralde) have maintained the language and are today bilinguals.

However, there are people who have lost some or all of their Basque (around 3% of inhabitants aged 16 or over). In some of these cases (around half in the BAC and Iparralde, and a little over a third in Navarre) this has been a partial loss, that is, although this person does not speak Basque very well, he or she can understand it.

At the same time, though, even if their mother tongue is Spanish or French, there are 249,918 people who have learnt Basque and that are now bilingual amongst inhabitants of the Basque Country aged 16 or over, namely, 178,216 more than in 1991. These people, the non-native Basque speakers, represent the gains of Basque.
There are 219,674 people who have learnt Basque in the BAC (160,000 more than in 1991), 23,470 in Navarre (17,000 more than in 1991) and 6,774 in Iparralde (almost 5,000 more people than in 1991). These gains have been mostly amongst young people.
6. Use of Basque

Taking into account all of the territories of Basque, 24.2% of inhabitants aged 16 or over use Basque to some extent:

a) 16.1% use Basque intensively, that is, they use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French in their everyday communication.

b) At the same time, 8.1% use Basque, although less so than Spanish or French.

![Typology of Basque use. Basque Country, 2011 (%)](image)

The results about use vary considerably from territory to territory. Thus, those people who use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French, in other words those who use Basque intensively, amount to 20% in the BAC, 9.6% in Iparralde and 5.5% in Navarre. Additionally, those who use Basque, although less so than Spanish or French, amount to 8.9% in the BAC, 9.3% in Iparralde and 4.6% in Navarre.

When analysing the development of language use in the last 20 years, the use of Basque has increased in the BAC, remained the same in Navarre and declined in Iparralde.

Use by Context

Taking into account the whole Basque Country, use of Basque has increased most in formal contexts. In the home, however, its use has declined, except for when it is transmitted to children. Amongst the formal contexts of use, the most significant increase in the use of Basque during the last 20 years has taken place in health care, although the percentage here is still below that of other contexts in which it is used.

The use of Basque has increased in all contexts of use in the BAC, with the exception of the home. This increase has been most pronounced in local council services (24.8%), in health care (19.8%) and at work (24.5%). Its use to communicate with children (22.8%) and with friends (21.3%) has also increased. Yet if one takes into account every member of the home, there has been no increase (it was 17.3% in 1991 and is 17.1% today).
Use of Basque is around 11% in the home and amongst friends in Iparralde. Significantly, the greatest use is amongst friends (14.5%). Use of Basque, however, is limited in formal contexts (8.3% in local council services and 3.5% in health care). In general, the use of Basque has declined.
The use of Basque is between 5% and 8% in all contexts in Navarre (5.4% in the home, 8% in communicating with children, 7.5% amongst friends and 7.1% with colleagues). In formal contexts, there is 6.3% use in local council services and 4.8% in health care. Use of Basque has changed very little in the last 20 years (around 2 points).

![Development of people who use Basque more than or as much as Spanish by context of use. Navarre, 1991-2011 (%)](chart)

Significantly, in Iparralde the use of Basque has increased not just amongst those people aged under 25 but, for the first time since 1996, also amongst those aged under 35.

**Use by Age Group**

In the last 20 years, the percentage of people that use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French has increased amongst those aged under 50, and declined amongst those aged 50 and over. This increase, however, has not taken place uniformly everywhere. In fact, it has just been a feature of the BAC. In Navarre and Iparralde, by contrast, this increasing use of Basque has occurred amongst people under 35.

The increase in the number of people that use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French is most pronounced in the BAC amongst those under 35 years of age (8 points amongst the 25-34 age group and 14 points amongst the 16-24 age group). In Iparralde and Navarre, this increase has been less pronounced.

**Use amongst Bilinguals Alone**

The reason for the growing use of Basque is the increasing number of bilinguals. There are increasingly more bilinguals and, as a consequence, the number of people using Basque has also grown. The issue is that the number of bilinguals and people using Basque, as one would expect, have not increased at the same rate.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, instead of taking the use of Basque throughout society as a whole, we will concentrate on its use only amongst bilinguals.

At present, the percentage of bilinguals that use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French remains stable (59.4%), according to the general data.

By age group, more bilinguals aged 35 and over use Basque today than 20 years ago.
Amongst young bilinguals, use of Basque has declined compared to that of 20 years ago. In 2011, 49% of those aged between 25 and 34 use Basque more than or to the same extent as Spanish or French, and amongst those aged between 16 and 24 the figure is 43.2% (in 1991 these figures were 58% and 49.6% respectively).

Nevertheless, the tendency changed from 2001 onwards. Today young bilinguals use Basque more than they did ten years ago. This increase has taken place in the BAC and Iparralde, but not in Navarre.

![Development of numbers of people who use Basque more as much as Spanish or French by age group. BILINGUALS. Basque Country, 1991-2011 (%)](image)

Amongst bilinguals, and specifically amongst young bilinguals, the main reasons for not using Basque more are: because their mother tongue is Spanish or French, they find it more difficult to communicate in Basque; and most young bilinguals live in Spanish- or French-speaking environments.
7. Attitudes towards Efforts to Promote the Use of Basque

In order to understand attitudes towards efforts to promote the use of Basque, the Vice Ministry for Language Policy drew up a typology based on the opinions of people aged 16 or over supporting or opposing the fomentation of Basque in different fields.

Amongst inhabitants aged 16 or over, 62.3% support promoting the use of Basque in the BAC, 38.5% in Iparralde and 37.7% in Navarre.

A significant number of people neither support nor oppose promoting Basque: 40.2% in Iparralde, 27.8% in Navarre and 26.1% in the BAC.

Those people opposed to promoting Basque represent 11.6% in the BAC, 21.3% in Iparralde and a third of those surveyed, 34.5%, in Navarre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes by territory, 2011 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basque Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taking into account all these data, favourable attitudes to promoting the use of Basque have increased by 7 points in twenty years. In 1991, 47.5% of Basque citizens supported promoting Basque and today that figure is 55.2%.

During this twenty-year period, the biggest increase in favourable attitudes towards promoting Basque was in Navarre, with 21.6% in favour of promoting Basque in 1991 and 37.7% today.

In the last twenty years, too, there has been a 7-point increase in favourable attitudes towards Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community (55% in 1991 and 62.3% in 2011).
The opposite has been true, however, of Iparralde. In 1996, 42.3% of the population supported promoting Basque and today this figure is 38.5%.

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that favourable attitudes towards Basque are closely linked to language competence. Indeed, over 88% of bilinguals in the BAC and Navarre, and 73% in Iparralde, support promoting the use of Basque. Amongst non-Basque speakers, 18.3% oppose promoting the use of Basque in the BAC, 41.2% in Navarre and 27.8% in Iparralde.

As regards age, a fairly high number of young people in the BAC and Navarre support the promotion of Basque use, as do adults in the BAC. In Iparralde, however, young people make up the lowest percentage in this regard, although this figure has increased in the last five years. Likewise, a larger percentage in favour of promoting the use of Basque was to be found amongst those aged 65 and over in Navarre and Iparralde than in any other age group.

Amongst responses to the survey questions, it is worth highlighting that the majority of inhabitants in the BAC aged 16 or over believe it is essential for children to learn Basque (81%) and for people to speak Basque in order to work in the public administration (75%). Most inhabitants think the same in Iparralde (51% and 53% respectively). In Navarre, however, whilst most people believe knowledge of Basque to be an essential condition of working in the public administration (53%), most do not think it essential for children to learn Basque (43%), and indeed many are also opposed to this idea (48%).

Continuing with other opinions about Basque, as regards selecting an educational model for their children, 66% of people in the BAC would like them to be schooled in a Basque-language model, 32% in Navarre and 19% in Iparralde.

As regards the remaining educational models, a third of the inhabitants of Iparralde (34%) would be in favour of bilingual (Basque and French) education. In Navarre, though, a quarter of all inhabitants (24%) would choose the bilingual Model B. In the BAC, too, 25% would choose Model B (the mixed model combining Basque and Spanish) for their children.