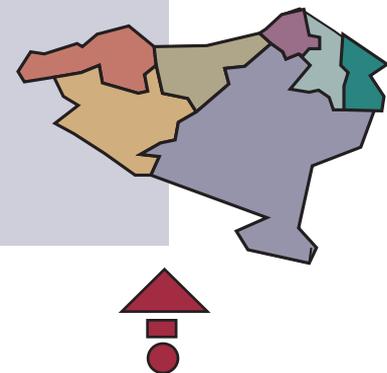


Euskara



The Basque Country can be found in the south-east of Europe straddling part of France and Spain.

Its northern-most borders are the Landes and Bearn regions of France and the Bay of Biscay. To the south it borders on the Rioja and Zaragoza, to the east Bearn, Huesca and Zaragoza and to the west Cantabria, Burgos and the Rioja.

It covers a surface area of 20,864 km² and has a total population of 2,876,879.

Basque and French are spoken in that part of the Basque Country which is in France and Basque and Spanish are spoken in the part of the Basque Country which is in Spain.



Català

Galego

Cymraeg

Elsässisch

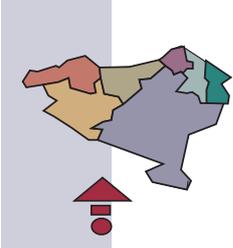
Language and History

Sociolinguistic status

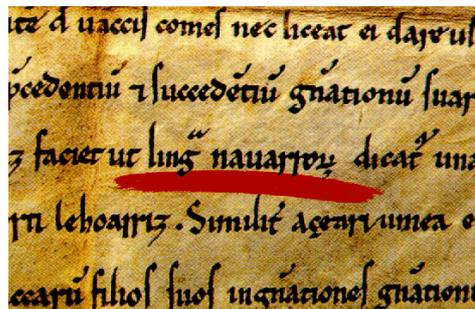
Language policy

Legal status





Sancho The Wise defined the Basque language as a "lingua navarrorum" (1167)



Language and History

Sociolinguistic status

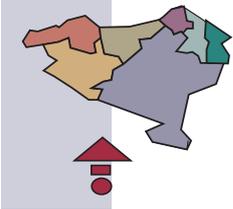
Language policy

Legal status

The Basque Country is currently divided up into seven different provinces or administrative territories: Lapurdi, Basse-Navarre and Zuberoa in the French part of the Basque Country, which account for a total of 249,275 inhabitants of the total population (according to the 1990 census) and the rest in the Basque Autonomous Community (comprised of Alava, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa) with 2,104,041 inhabitants (according to the 1991 census) and the region of Navarre with 523,563 inhabitants (1991 census).

According to data from the II Sociolinguistic Survey of 1996, 26.4% of the population is Basque-speaking in the French Basque Country, 25.3% in the Basque Autonomous Community whilst in the region of Navarre it is only 9.6%.





The Basque Country: the country of the Basque language

The continuous presence of the Basque people in this part of the European continent makes the Basques one of the oldest peoples in Europe, older even than the Indo-Europeans.

Language, people and land have been inextricably linked in the Basque Country ever since ancient times. It would seem that the Basques are the only people to have ever lived here and that this is the place where their language originated from. That it is why it is no surprise that the term Euskal Herria in the Basque language means both the Basque Country and "the people who speak Basque".

The Basque Country, far from being a country which looks inwards has, throughout its history, been a place where people with different languages and cultures have settled. At different moments in time the Basques have had contact with Celtic, Iberian, Latin, and other Romance languages such as Castilian, Navarre-Aragonese, Gascon and Occitain-Langue d'Oc.



The roman way at Saint Adrian

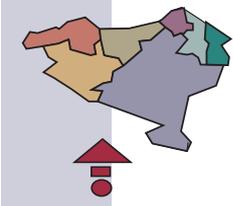
Language and History

Sociolinguistic status

Language policy

Legal status





The Argiñeta
necropolis



Language and
History

Sociolinguistic
status

Language policy

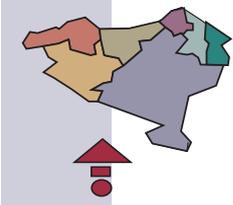
Legal status

The Basque Language

The Basque language is the last language to remain in Europe that dates from before the arrival of Indo-European languages, so it therefore pre-dates those languages that arrived in western Europe at the beginning of the first millennium b.c. Hence, Basque is an excellent tool for those wishing to delve into Europe's ethnolinguistic past.

The original nature of the Basque language's history means that the debate surrounding its actual origins has been going on for several years and in it several historians and European linguists from various eras and countries have taken part including J. de Valdés (1535), Poza (1587), Larramendi (1718), W. Humboldt (1817) and a long list of others. At a more scientific level, Basque specialists of all different nationalities have provided us with a whole range of more or less sound hypotheses about the origins and relationship of the Basque language with other languages or families of languages. Caucasian, pre-Indo-European and North-African languages are especially at the fore as hypotheses which explain the past of the Basque language.





A map of the dialects in Basque created by L.L. Bonaparte (1863)

Language and History

Sociolinguistic status

Language policy

Legal status

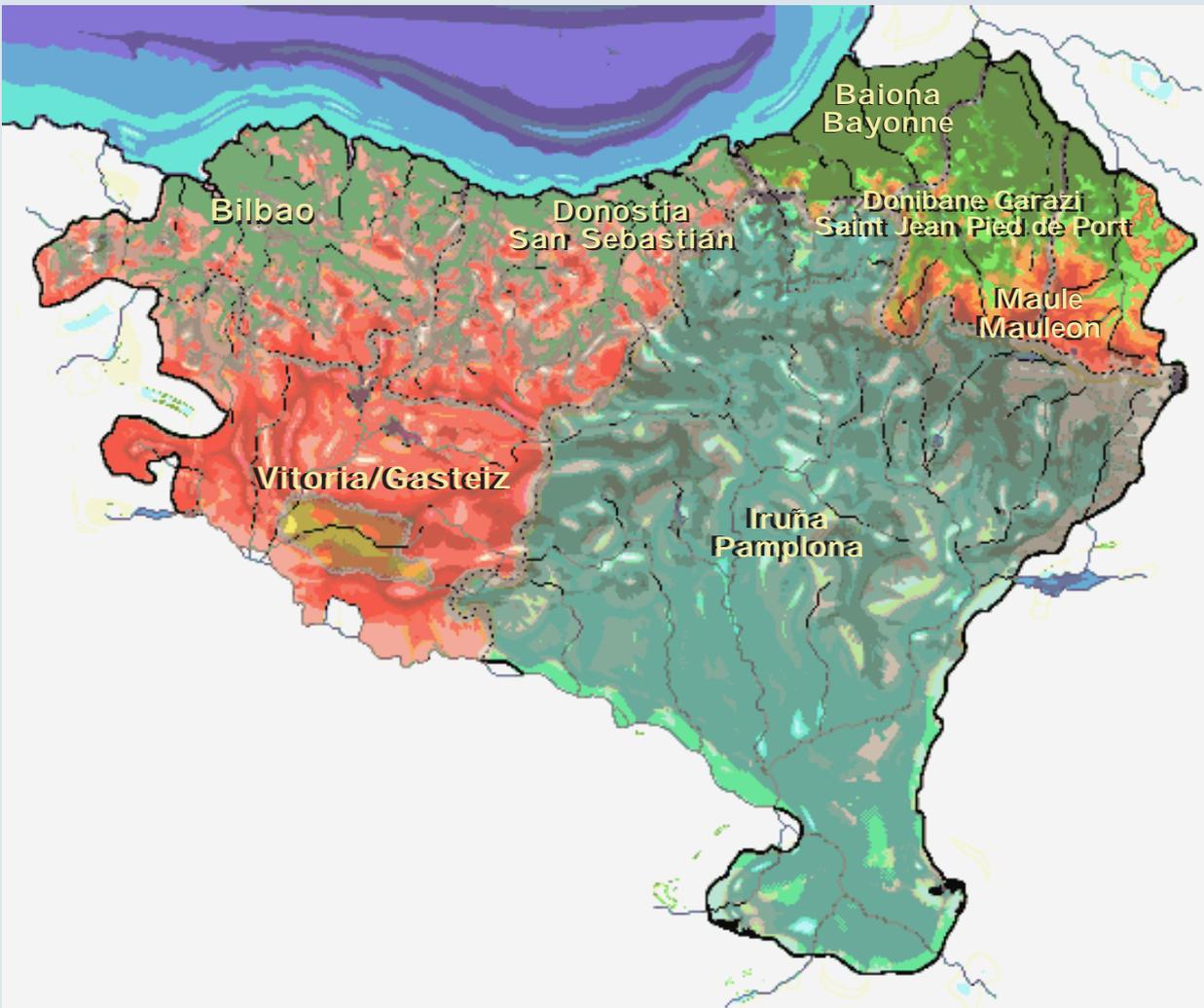
According to a classification made at the beginning of this century by R.M. de Azkue, which in its turn is based upon a previous classification made between 1860-70 by Prince L.L. Bonaparte, the Basque speaking area is divided up into six dialects: Vizcayan, Guipuzcoan; Upper Navarrese, Labortane, Suletine and Lower Navarrese. The last of these can be divided up into two independent dialects - the two that are spoken in the Aezcoa and Salazar valleys. A seventh dialect, Roncalese, which was to be found in those valleys of Navarre nearest to Aragon, has recently disappeared as a spoken dialect.

Now there is a standard variety of Basque which was proposed by the Royal Academy of the Basque Language and which is totally accepted throughout the Basque Country.

Since 1979, which is when the Basque Statute of Autonomy was passed, Basque has been, together with Spanish, the official language of the Basque Autonomous Community ■

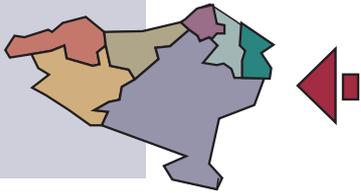


Euskal Herria



Euskara

Language and History



"Euskara, euskaldunon hizkuntza" (Basque, the language of the Basques), by J. Intxausti (1990)

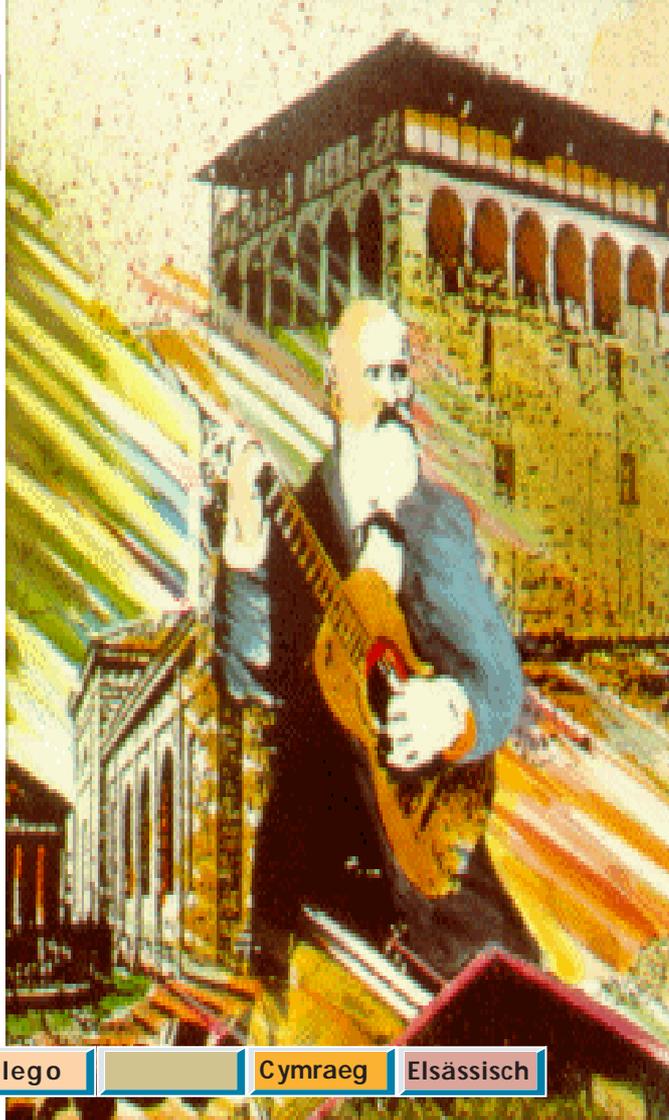


Català

Galego

Cymraeg

Elsässisch



A chronological account of the Basque language

The 20th Century

The occupation of lands in the south

The Basque traditional economic sector

Industrialisation

Different social groups

Institutional support

A chronological account of the Basque language



"La Hechicera"
dolmen (Elvillar,
Rioja Alavesa)



2nd millennium b.c. The majority of anthropologists, pre-historians and linguists agree that Basque was already being spoken at this time, during the Neolithic period, although the exact date of its birth is unclear, and may be even earlier.

1st millennium b.c. The first Celtic people settled in the south of the Basque Country. These settlements meant that Basque came into contact with a foreign language for the first time. It would seem that the Basque language has been only minimally marked by this outside influence.

2nd century b.c. The first evidence of Roman settlement in the south of the Basque Country. The Roman's aim was to extend Mediterranean agriculture, exploit mines and set up military bases. That is why the Roman influence is so much greater in the agricultural south of the country, although there is also evidence of the presence of Romans in more northern urban areas.

3rd century a.d. The Roman Empire begins to crumble and Basque society becomes eminently rural. This process lasts for centuries and, in fact, strengthens and stabilises Basque society, protecting it from outside influences.

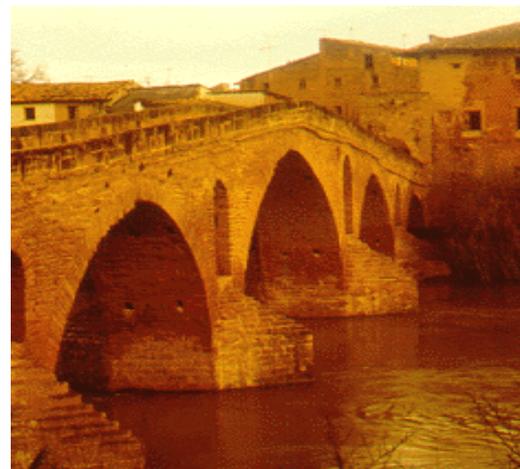
The medieval city walls
of Vitoria-Gasteiz



A chronological account of the Basque language



The Romanesque bridge in Gares (Navarre, 11th century)



5th - 10th century a.d. Just as in other areas of Spain, the Latin spoken in the Basque Country develops towards Romance languages. Afterwards these languages give rise to Gascon, spoken in areas of the north of the Basque Country, and Spanish spoken in the south.

10th century. The Christians re-conquer the Moorish kingdoms. This re-conquest also meant a re-populating movement which has very different linguistic consequences for different areas of the Basque Country. On the one hand Basque-speakers move to the south of Alava, parts of the Rioja, Burgos, Soria and the southern half of Navarre: and on the other hand Romance-language speakers overtake the western part of Bizkaia and the area known as Encartaciones, completely wiping out Basque in this area.

11th and 12th centuries. The territories of Vizcaya (1180), Alava (1199) and Guipúzcoa (1200) are included within the Kingdom of Castile. It has often been said that this had a decisive influence on the choice of Spanish as one of the official languages of the Basque administration.



Language and History

A chronological account of the Basque language



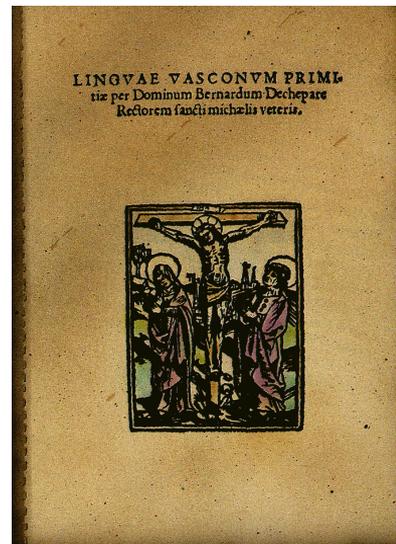
1539: Francis I of France passes the Villers-Cotterêt bye-laws meaning that French replaces Béarnaise as the official language of the French Basque Country.

1543: Bernard Etxepare, a priest from Lower Navarre, publishes the first book in Basque. The work is entitled *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae*.

1563: As a reaction to the advance of Protestantism, the Trent Council ratifies the decrees governing prayer and catechises in Basque. From then onwards numerous catechisms and books are published in Basque.

17th Century: The tendency for Romance languages to penetrate those parts of the Basque Country with a long trading tradition is consolidated. The slow process of replacing Basque by Spanish in the linguistic contact areas of Alava and Navarre continues.

18th Century: There is a dramatic drop in Basque use in the plains of Alava, due, amongst other reasons, to the growing influence of Vitoria on the surrounding area and in general on the whole of Alava. Likewise, with the end of the French revolution (1789), the Basque special privileges existing in the French Basque Country are abolished. Later (in 1793) legislation is passed making French use compulsory.



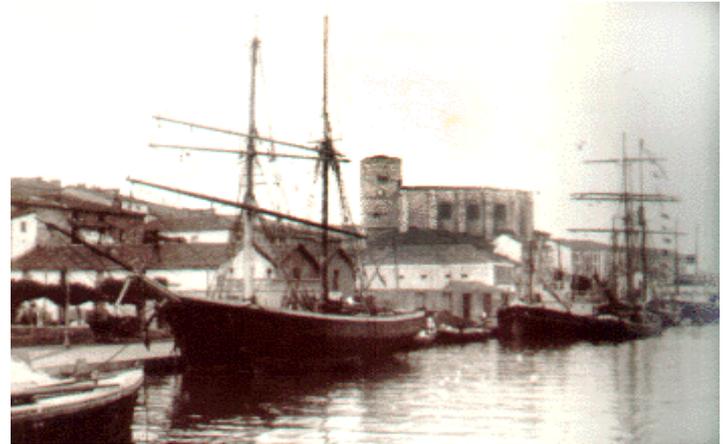
"Linguae Vasconum Primitiae", the first book to be published in Basque in 1545



A chronological account
of the Basque language



Yachts



19th Century. The influence and number of Basque speakers in Navarre decreases. However, many people from the more rural (and hence Basque-speaking) areas of Navarre emigrate to America. And finally, during the last third of the nineteenth century, several events occur which are to mark the future of the Basque Country (especially in the Spanish part), including the abolition of ancient rights, the beginning of the industrial revolution and the birth of Basque nationalism and socialism ■



Neighbourhood schools



1914. The first ikastola (school where all subjects are taught in Basque) is founded.

1918. The Royal Academy for the Basque Language (Euskaltzaindia) is founded.

1920. The Bizkaia Provincial Government sets up district schools where bilingual education is offered to Basque-speaking pupils.

1936. The Spanish Civil War breaks out.

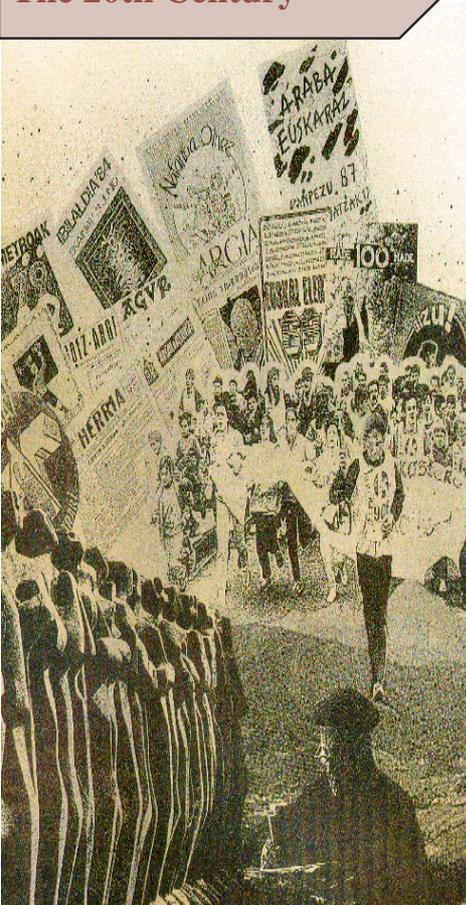
1936. The first Basque government is founded. Its President is José Antonio Agirre. The First Statute of Autonomy is passed which, for the first time, recognises the status of Basque as an official language.

1939. The Spanish Civil War ends with the abolition of the Republic as well as the Statute of Basque Autonomy which recognised the official nature of Basque.

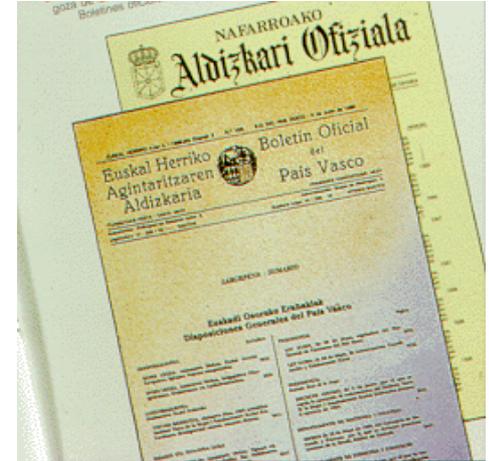
1960. In the sixties Basque language and culture re-emerges. Ikastolas begin to spring up everywhere, a movement towards adult literacy in Basque begins and the foundations of a standardised Basque language are laid down. Likewise, Basque singers, poets and writers start to abound.

First page of Chapter VII of the book by J. Intxausti "Euskara, euskaldunon hizkuntza" (Basque, the language of the Basques)(1990)





Official Bulletins of the Basque Country and Navarre



1978. The Spanish Constitution is passed and it recognises the public's obligation to know Spanish and its right to use Basque.

1979. The Basque Statute of Autonomy is passed which makes both Basque and Spanish officially recognised languages in the Basque Autonomous Community. The first Provincial Parliament of Navarre of the democratic era is formally set up.

1980. The Second Basque Government is formed.

1980. The University of the Basque Country is founded.

1982. The Law for Basque Language Use Normalisation and the Law creating Basque Public Television and Radio are both enacted. The Basic Law of the Autonomous region of Navarre is passed. This gives official status to the Basque language in the Basque-speaking areas of Navarre.

1983. Bilingual educational models are set up in schools in the Basque Autonomous Community and the Basque Governments Secretariat for Language Policy is created.



The occupation of lands in the south



Corn fields on the plains of Alava



The occupation of lands in the south of the Basque Country (the south of Alava and Navarre) for military and agricultural reasons by Celtic, Roman, Moorish and Visigoth settlers meant that right from early times there was language contact between Basque speakers and speakers of other languages. Language contact was especially important in the case of Latin and subsequently Spanish. From these areas in the south of the country, Spanish slowly but surely penetrated the peninsular part of the Basque Country.

In this sense, the history of Basque is, to a large extent, the history of a language which gradually loses part of the territory where it is spoken from south to north.

As far as linguistic contact between Basque speakers in the French Basque Country with non-Basque speakers of the surrounding areas goes, economic and linguistic pressures were not so intense, meaning that this part of the Basque Country was able to maintain its linguistic integrity for many centuries ■

The Mendoza fortress (Alava)

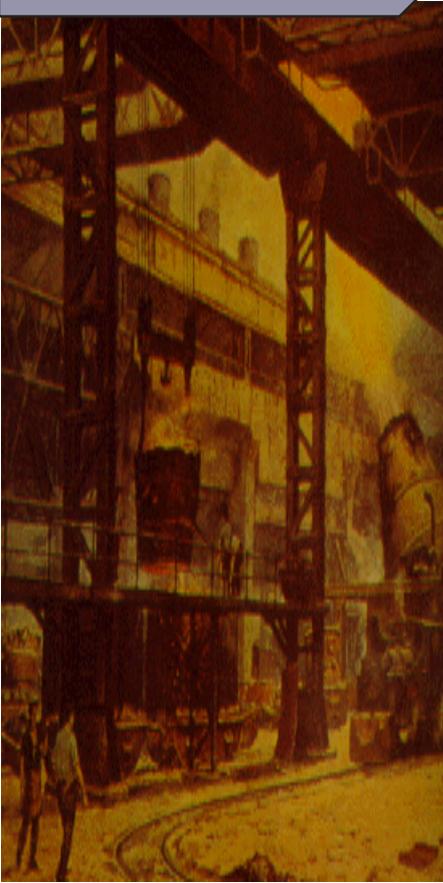
The Basque traditional economic sector



Oñati University

The relative importance of the Basque traditional economic sector (livestock rearing, agriculture and fishing) in relation to the urban world is another of the factors which explains what happened to the Basque language. Basque has always been very closely related to the traditional, rural world and in this setting very much protected from external influences. In cities and towns, however, it was far easier for Romance languages to penetrate. This gave rise to a process of sociolinguistic fragmentation with urban areas having a predominance of Romance languages and others, of a more rural nature, a greater presence of Basque. Basque was gradually displaced in the main cities, first of all as a business language and later as a habitually-used social language.

The combination of geographic factors with the growing importance of the urban world explains, to a large extent, the reason why Basque started disappearing earlier in Alava and Navarre. In both cases, together with the historical presence of Latin and Romance languages, there is the growing importance of the city of Vitoria in the case of Alava and Pamplona in the case of Navarre ■



Stained glass

Industrialisation was another decisive factor in the development of the Basque language. The industrial revolution which began at the end of the nineteenth century was especially important in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa and in just a few years managed to push Basque into a minority language situation in both areas. This whole process of pushing Basque to minority status was brought about by three factors which are very closely related to industrialisation.

Firstly, the Basque-speaking population moved from rural areas to towns where, as we have already mentioned, Basque was socially a lot less important.

Secondly there was the influx on a massive scale of Spanish-speaking workers from other areas of Spain, with the result that in many areas, the Spanish-speaking population outnumbered the Basque-speaking population.

And thirdly schooling, which was exclusively in Spanish, became more widespread ■

Etching: a factory dating from the end of the 19th century



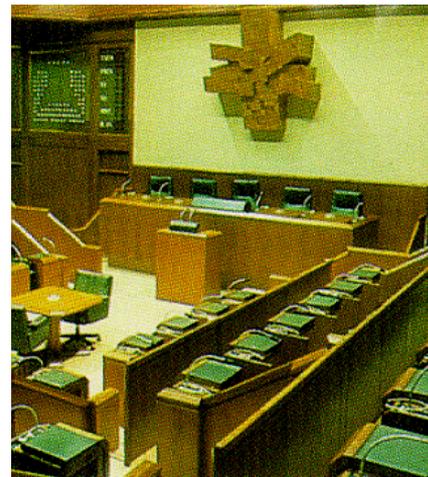
The Aranzazu Sanctuary

The linguistic attitude of different Basque social groups also influenced the way Basque has developed. In general it can be said that the ruling classes in the Basque Country, comprised of nobles, tradesmen, religious leaders and the bourgeoisie were not very favourable towards Basque. The only and quite remarkable exception to this rule were certain sectors of the church ■

Docks at Saint Jean de Luz.
Etchin: Ozanne, 1776



The Basque Parliament.
Vitoria-Gasteiz



And finally, institutional support is the last decisive factor in the sociolinguistic continuity and revitalisation of Basque. Even though in former times the Basque Country was privileged with a series of ancient rights, these were insufficient to protect the social use of Basque, as can be seen from what happened to the situation of the Basque language in Alava during the eighteenth century and Navarre during the first half of the nineteenth century. With the exception of some specific action taken by the provincial governments during the first decades of the twentieth century and the brief interval during which the Basque Government was formed (1936) during the Spanish Civil War, there was no true institutional support for the language until the 1980's, once democracy had returned to Spain and the Statutes of Autonomy of the Basque Autonomous Community (1979) and Navarre (1982) were approved.

The successes obtained in the standardisation and modernisation of the language, its presence in the education system, culture, the media, the administration and business have been made thanks to the support from the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre.

Cover of the book entitled "Euskararen jarraipena" (The Continuity of Basque) 2nd Sociolinguistic Survey, 1996





Euskararen jarraipena



The Parliament of Navarre.
Iruña-Pamplona



The community of Basque speakers, which in relation to the number of French and Spanish speakers had reached an all-time-low in 1981, started, from this moment onwards to change the direction of the history of the Basque language. There really was a complete turnaround at this point which, in the case of Navarre meant putting a break on the gradual decline of the language. In the case of the Basque Autonomous Community, Basque is recovering and continuously progressing. It is only the French Basque Country, where there is a complete lack of institutional support, which has been left out of this positive trend. In fact here, Basque is clearly declining and urgent steps must be taken if the language is not to disappear completely.

The comparative analysis of the situation of Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and the French Basque Country clearly highlights the importance of institutional support for the future of minority languages. It also reveals the complete hypocrisy of those who necessarily associate modernity and progress with the disappearance of small language communities. The future of minority languages is going to depend fundamentally on the social and political will of those who stake there bets on the continuity and development of a world which is increasingly open and interrelated ■

