

# Basque-ing in America: The difference gender makes

BEGOÑA ECHEVERRIA

## *Abstract*

*This paper argues that, in order to understand the language use of Basque immigrants to southern California, it is essential to consider how language ideologies intersect with gender. First, although traditional Basque culture privileges men, the culture has changed in the American context in ways that may make it more welcoming to women. Second, speaking Basque has different social meanings for men and women when it comes to “performing” gender identities. For men, speaking Basque is appropriate for presenting oneself as a man and as a Basque. For women, speaking Basque is often incompatible with presenting oneself as a fashionable woman. Third, men are more likely to speak Basque in the public domain even in America, because of their greater access to employment and social networks composed of Basque speakers. At the same time, some women have increased their use of Basque after emigration, in part because the American context provides a less negative semantic space when it comes to women speaking Basque. The implications of these findings for Fishman’s theory on Reversing Language Shift are discussed.*

## **1. Introduction**

Most of the world’s 6500 languages are in danger of extinction (Hornberger 1998:440); they are not used regularly for daily interaction or passed on to children at a rate that will ensure their use in the future. Basque (“*Euskera*”), the only language isolate in Europe, is spoken in a region traditionally called *Euskalerría* (“The Basque Country”) in southwestern France and northern Spain. It is considered endangered because while it is spoken by 660,000 people in this region (Trask, 1997) and is being learned by thousands of children and adults, most Basque speakers use another language (Spanish or French) for everyday communication (UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages: Europe); indeed, there are no longer any monolingual speakers of

Basque. Euskera is of particular interest to this collection because it is the only endangered language of the Iberian Peninsula with significant numbers of speakers – tens of thousands – in diaspora outside it (Trask, 1997). In fact, the largest number of speakers resides in immigrant communities in Nevada, Idaho and California (*ibid*).

To some extent, then, the fate of Basque – whether it continues to be spoken, and in what form – depends on how it fares outside its “homeland,” as an immigrant or heritage language. But sociolinguistic research on these communities is sorely lacking (Douglass, 1989: 262) and the time for such research is now, given Basque emigration has dwindled to a trickle.

In this paper, I hope to address this gap in the literature by focusing on one Basque immigrant community in southern California. But I also hope to make theoretical contributions to the scholarship investigating the fate of the world’s threatened languages, the term I will use to encapsulate languages variously referred to in the literature as “endangered,” “minority,” “immigrant” and “heritage.”

## **2. Threatened Languages: The Theoretical Framework**

Scholarly attention has been paid to threatened languages for at least a hundred years, when linguists and anthropologists set out to document the languages spoken by American Indians before their native speakers disappeared altogether. However, systematic attempts to “save” threatened languages – and research analyzing such attempts – began in earnest with the publication of Joshua Fishman’s *Reversing Language Shift* in 1991. Indeed, one can scarcely read any scholarship on threatened languages without some reference to this work or its follow-up ten years later, *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?* It is helpful, then, to review the argument Fishman’s framework proffers as well as the insights – and oversights – it makes when it comes to saving threatened languages.

Efforts to save threatened languages or Reverse Language Shift (RLS), Fishman argues, are worthwhile because the destruction of a language brings a concomitant destruction of a rooted identity, intimacy, family and community (Fishman, 1991: 5). He lays out a Generational Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) that measures the extent to which a language is threatened. A language at Stage 8 – wherein the only native speakers are socially isolated and elderly – is more threatened than one at Stage 1, where the language is used in some educational, media and government domains. But for RLS to be successful, efforts must ensure the language’s stability at Stage 6, in which the threatened language is used for normal intergenerational conversation in the home, even if another language is used for formal domains elsewhere. Indeed, one cannot skip Stage 6 because without this intimate, sheltered harbor, the threatened language will not be strong enough to face the

“dragons (the school, the media, the economy)” (Fishman 1991:95) awaiting it elsewhere.

This emphasis on intergenerational continuity is one of Fishman’s most important insights. Many RLS efforts try to make their language “compete” with the dominant language by standardizing it and putting it to use in “higher” domains such as education and government. But ultimately a threatened language will only survive if its speakers choose to use it regularly for their more intimate, informal interactions. Fishman’s framework is also helpful in differentiating the various domains in which a language can be threatened; his GIDS typology can assist RLSers to prioritize goals and take specific steps on a threatened language’s behalf, rather than trying out any “emotion-laden” (*ibid*: 1) strategy that presents itself.

However, Fishman’s framework is also problematic in several ways. First, it seems to assume that languages act primarily as indexes of ethnic identity, so that all minority language communities are inherently interested in saving their languages for the purpose of preserving their community. But Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer’s (1998) work on efforts to revitalize Tlingit in Alaska shows that ethnicity can be separated from identity to some extent; many of those who identified as Tlingit did not speak the language. My own work among secondary school students in the Basque Autonomous Community showed that many rejected outright the idea that one had to speak Euskera to be Basque (Echeverria 2003b). Further, Abraham’s study on a Yiddish-speaking Hasidim in London showed that the resonance of the language lay primarily in its religious rather than its ethnic connotations (1998:77). Similarly, Sinke (1999) found that religion was the core of identity for Dutch immigrants to America so that one could “be Dutch” in English so long as one remained a Calvinist.

Second, much of Fishman’s framework is undergirded by the assumption that threatened languages should be saved because they are inextricably linked to an “authentic” culture that is in and of itself worth preserving – as if there were no unsavory aspects to this “authentic” culture that might make some (potential) speakers not willing to speak or pass on the language associated with it. But many scholars have shown that language not only marks social categories and hierarchies (Labov, 1972; Milroy, 1987), but can be used to construct – and contest – them as well (Bourdieu, 1991; Woolard, 1989). There’s no reason to believe that this is any less true of threatened languages – that they, too, can be used to position people in unequal ways (in terms of power/status, gender, race, class, etc). This possibility is insufficiently addressed in Fishman’s framework.

Third, Fishman’s framework does not seem to recognize that languages can index multiple identities simultaneously, many of which might conflict with one another. In addition to ethnicity, for instance, a language can index gender in various ways (cf Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992) – and this

indexicality might not sit easily with that between language and ethnic/national identity.

Taken together, these critiques suggest a fourth: that Fishman's framework assumes rather than investigates the language ideologies motivating RLSers and speakers of threatened languages. But if Fishman is correct in asserting that the focus of RLS efforts should be to ensure intergenerational transmission, then – I suggest – scholars who study such efforts should pay more attention than they have heretofore to the (possibly conflicting) language ideologies inhabiting the various domains in which speakers (or potential speakers) of threatened languages participate. In so doing, we can put ourselves in a stronger position to understand why or why not speakers choose to use the threatened language and/or pass it on to their children.

In making this argument, I focus on Basque immigrants to southern California who have maintained Euskera as their primary home language and transmitted the language to their children<sup>1</sup>. The more we know about the language use and ideologies in the diaspora – especially those that have maintained the use of Basque – the more their insights can help us as we undertake RLS efforts on Euskera's behalf elsewhere. I will show that the language use of these immigrants – both in Euskalerrria and in their diasporic community – cannot be fully understood without taking into account how language ideologies intersect with gender.

### 3. Gender in Basque language and culture

I have been investigating language and identity issues in various Basque-speaking communities since 1987, when I conducted fieldwork in rural parts of northern Navarra (Spain) and Lapurdi (France). Through this research I first observed gendered patterns in language use: I found that young men were much more likely to speak Basque than were young women. I also found that while older women spoke more Euskera than younger women, they were less likely to do so than older men in public domains.

In the doctoral research I conducted in San Sebastian (Basque Autonomous Community) ten years later, I found that many of the parents and teachers who had grown up in rural areas reported similar language patterns – that girls and women were more likely to speak Spanish than were boys and men. One couple said that girls spoke Spanish in order to compensate for an inferiority complex they developed in their jobs as store clerks. Another said that girls spoke Spanish “to marry up” into a Spanish-speaking family. Young

---

<sup>1</sup> According to a Basque chaplain who ministered to the southwestern communities for several years, only about one-quarter to one-third of American-born generation speaks Euskera well. A later phase of this project will examine the language practices and ideologies of this generation.

women preferred Spanish, in other words, because for them it indexed more power and prestige than did Basque.

These findings were the catalyst for my current research project among Basque immigrants to southern California. These communities are populated primarily by immigrants from the French Basque provinces and Navarra (Bieter and Bieter, 2000: 27). While all of them had Euskera as a mother tongue, they also had learned (at least some) Spanish and/or French before emigrating, and of course were exposed to English once in California. But even in these communities, I noticed that immigrant men, in general terms, were more likely than immigrant women to speak Basque, at least in public.

Douglass' (1976) work on the employment patterns of Echalar (Navarra) helped me to understand how these gender differences in language use may have come about. He argues that the job opportunities available to young rural women differed from those afforded rural men. Men usually went in groups with other Basque men to work, say, for timber companies where they worked in relative isolation from others not of their own ethnic group. Women, in contrast, usually went (often alone) to work in service industries – as maids, for example – where interaction with non-Basque speakers was frequent. Basque men fortified the use of Euskera in the public domain, while women strengthened their abilities in and opportunities to speak languages other than Basque.

However, if we are to understand Basque language variation and change – especially across such disparate contexts, as is true of immigrants – we must go beyond discussion of languages' "instrumental value." Rather "to the extent that speakers conceptualize language as socially purposive action, we must look at their ideas about the meaning, function and value of language[s]" (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994:70). In this light, I have argued elsewhere that the greater tendency for men to speak Euskera is also due, in large part, to gendered notions about language and identity, which reflect and reinforce the gender differentiation of Basque society more generally (Echeverria 2003). That is, like many other societies, Basque culture has articulated a discourse that locates women and men in separate spheres. This gender differentiation is perhaps exemplified by the term, "*Plaza Gizona*" (Plaza man), which "signifies a man who stands out and knows how to act in public" (Fernandez 1997:83). The *Plaza Gizona* has a wide variety of cultural activities through which he can make his presence known in the public sphere: rock-lifting and handball, dance and ritual verbal dueling (*bertsolaritza*). While women have begun to participate in some of these activities, their presence is often not welcomed there; women "who compete with men on their own terms ... [are denigrated as] 'Mari-gizonak' [Masculine women]" (Ugalde 1994:190). There is no Basque term for "Plaza Woman."

#### 4. Research site and methods

The southern California immigrant community provides a unique opportunity to investigate these issues further, for its immigrants come from precisely those rural areas where the gendered employment patterns discussed above obtain and where androcentric ideologies about Euskera are most likely to be salient. The data discussed in this paper were gathered by participant-observation in the community<sup>2</sup>, but especially on the data gathered by individual life history interviews (lasting between 3 and 6 hours) of three married couples from Navarra, as well as one other immigrant male and two American-born Basque speakers. This subset<sup>3</sup> was chosen for its potential greater relevance to the research cited above – that conducted by Douglass (1976) in Echalar in and my own research in Navarra, Lapurdi and Gipuzkoa since 1987.

##### 5.1 Basque-ing in Euskalerrria

In order to ascertain how ideologies of language and gender affected language use by these immigrants, I asked them to detail the language they used in their natal households. The traditional farmhouses (*baserriak*) in which these immigrants grew up typically have several generations living together: the heir, his/her spouse, their children, and sometimes the heir's parent(s) and unmarried siblings. I therefore asked each informant to name the family members with whom they grew up and to indicate the language(s) they used with each one:

Table 1: Language Use at Home (childhood)

<u>Interlocutor</u>	<b>Couple 1</b>		<b>Couple 2</b>		<b>Couple 3</b>	
	Miren	Mikel	Gloria	Gregorio	Linda	Luis
Grandmother	X	B	B	B	B	X
Grandfather	B	X	X	B	X	B
Mother	B	B	B	B	B	B
Father	B	B	SB	B	B	B
Aunt(s)	X	X	X	X	B	X
Uncle(s)	X	B	B	B	X	B
Sister(s)	B	B	SB	B	B	B
Brother(s)	B	B	SB	B	B	B

<sup>2</sup> All members of this community are well-known and, in some cases, related to me. While this provided me with access to these individuals' lives, it also brings with it special responsibility for confidentiality. As such, participants are identified only with pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup> This subset has many of the features for multiplex and dense networks as discussed by Milroy (1987). That is, all its members know and are connected to each other in various ways (as friends, neighbors, and/or relatives; as sources of information and material support).

Table 1 shows that Basque was the main language used by the informants in their natal households. For five of them, it was the only language used in the home; this was also true for Ignacio, an immigrant who married an American-Basque in California. The only exception is Gloria, who reported using Spanish sometimes with her sister, brothers and father. Her mother and grandmother knew no Spanish; her uncles did, but she spoke to them in Euskera nonetheless. Further, her use of Spanish was linked to politics in interesting ways. Her father was a Basque Nationalist – whose goal was to outlive Franco, which he did – with whom Gloria would often engage in political debates. But she did so in Spanish.

Outside the home domain, however, we begin to see use of Spanish by the other informants as well:

Once again, Gloria's language use stands out from the rest. Only when interlocutors spoke no Spanish at all – i.e. midwives – did she report speaking only Basque with them. Otherwise, she spoke at least some Spanish with all interlocutors. The other five reported using Spanish much less often. In the school domain, they reported using primarily Spanish with their (female) teachers and classmates. This is not surprising, given that they grew up under a regime that forbade the use of language other than Spanish in school. But they reported speaking Basque with their schoolmates when their teacher was out of earshot, and only Basque with their friends outside of school. Technically, this too was illegal for Franco had forbidden use of regional language even in private conversation. But as Mikel said, "Franco didn't want Basque, but he never showed up in our area."

Table 2: Language Use: Social Life & Community (childhood)

<u>Interlocutor</u>	<b>Couple 1</b>		<b>Couple 2</b>		<b>Couple 3</b>	
	Miren	Mikel	Gloria	Gregorio	Linda	Luis
God (prayer)	B	B	SB	B	SB	B
Priests	B	B	SB	B	B	B
Nuns	SB	SB	S	X	S	SB
Doctors	SB	SB	S	S	S	S
Teachers	SB	SB	S	SB	SB	SB
Midwives	B	B	B	B	X	B
Female schoolmates	SB	SB	S	SB	SB	SB
Male schoolmates	SB	SB	S*	SB	X	SB
Other female friends	B	B	S	B	B	B
Other male friends	B	B	SB	B	B	B

\* Only in her first year of school did Gloria have boys in her classes. Otherwise, she attended all-girls' schools, as did Linda throughout her career.

In the health domain, we see that five interviewees had some interaction with midwives and that these interactions took place in Euskera. But doctors

serving this area usually did not speak Basque; only Miren and Mikel ever interacted with one in Euskera.

It is in the religious domain that language use gets more complicated. In talking to God (i.e. in prayer), all the men reported using only Basque, as did Miren, while Gloria and Linda reported using Spanish and Basque. As Miren did not share the other women's language practices in this regard, it is hard to say that gender matters – if by that one means the gender of the speaker. But the language use reported with priests and nuns suggests that the gender of the *addressee* makes a difference. All interviewees reported using more Basque with priests than nuns. Indeed, except for Gloria, all informants reported speaking only Euskera with priests. The opposite trend is evident with nuns. Linda and Gloria reported using only Spanish with nuns; Linda did so because those she knew growing up did not speak Basque. Gloria spoke Spanish even with those that did: her father's five sisters who were nuns and those at the convent school she attended as a teenager. Miren, Mikel and Luis reported speaking both Basque and Spanish with nuns that were bilingual. But they all reported that most nuns eventually forgot most of their Basque; the dominant language of the (usually cloistered) convents they entered, even those in Euskalerría, was Spanish.

These differences when it comes to religious interlocutors suggests a more subtle way in which gender played a role in language use. Boys had role models for upwardly-mobile professions where Euskera was employed, while girls did not. The highest-status jobs – in medicine and the clergy – were occupied only by men. Priests came from the area and spoke Basque in carrying out their duties; as we saw above, this was true for one doctor as well. The highest-status position girls could aspire to – as nuns or teachers – were those where Euskera was of little value. Thus, girls may have come to believe that becoming socially mobile meant abandoning Basque.

To explore how employment opportunities affected language use, I asked each informant to detail all the jobs they had after completing their schooling until they immigrated to America. The interview data show that the women held precisely the kinds of service jobs Douglass (1976) discussed. All three spent at least some time working as seamstresses and waitresses/maids; each of these environments entailed frequent interaction with speakers of languages other than Basque. Gloria, for instance, had the financial wherewithal to continue her studies until the age of eighteen, then spend her time till marriage twenty years later in various unpaid capacities learning to sew and make patterns. Her employers and fellow employees were all women; Gloria spoke only Spanish here, even with those who knew Euskera. Gloria also worked in restaurants, setting up for banquets and learning to cook. She spoke Spanish most of the time in these jobs, too. She said she spoke Basque exclusively only to an older female cook; Gloria was not sure this woman even knew Spanish.



In contrast, Linda and Miren also spent some time learning to sew and such, but they did so after hours from their paid jobs. And their working (and living) environments were more multilingual than Gloria's. Linda first worked, between ages twelve and fourteen, as a nanny for her uncle's children; she spoke Basque in this capacity. Then she worked in the French Basque Country as a companion to a widow living with her son and his family. Because Linda knew no French, she spoke Basque with them and they spoke Basque in front of her. But French was the main language used by the family with each other. These jobs were followed positions in restaurants/pensions in the French Basque Country. She spoke Basque with her co-workers in these contexts, and sometimes with her employers, but she learned to speak some French because most of the customers came from central France.

Miren's work environment was also quite multilingual. In the French Basque Country, she first worked as a nanny for a doctor who returned to his mother's house from Paris every summer. While the doctor and his mother spoke Euskera, his wife and children did not. She also worked as a maid for two brothers who'd fled Franco. Despite their political commitment to the Basque cause, they did not speak Euskera that well; even so, they spoke it with Miren, though they spoke Spanish with one another.

Miren's experiences as a waitress/maid were yet more linguistically rich. While many of her co-workers spoke Basque, few of her customers did; most spoke French, some spoke Spanish and a few even spoke English. Indeed, the only regular Basque speakers she came into contact with were local men who came in to the bar to play cards with the hotel's owner, but she spent most of her time serving hotel guests who spoke no Basque. Further, did not always feel comfortable speaking Basque when she had the opportunity. In addition to these jobs in France, Miren also worked with her sister as an aide at a clinic in the Spanish Basque Country. But when they spoke Basque together, co-workers from other parts of Spain would complain.

As for the men, their work and language environments were quite different. Like many men from that area, they went to work in teams with other Basque-speaking men to jobs entailing hard physical labor. But one of the most common jobs was one not discussed by Douglass (1976): smuggling goods (lace, alcohol, sugar, buttons, copper) across the Spanish/French border. Mikel smuggled intermittently from the age of fourteen till he immigrated at twenty-five, sometimes during the off-season from other jobs; Ignacio also did this for several years. But smuggling was the only work Gregorio did in Euskalerría –from age fifteen till he emigrated at twenty-eight.<sup>4</sup> All of them were “runners” – they would be notified by their bosses that packages would be awaiting them at certain houses in the mountains where they lived. They would walk there at night, meet up with other runners

---

<sup>4</sup> Luis emigrated at age seventeen, so he held no jobs in Euskalerría, nor was he expected to fulfill military service.

at the specified location, and carry the packages to their destinations in pairs. Their fellow smugglers were always already known, and sometimes related, to them. Not only was it possible to speak only *Euskera* in doing this work, it was imperative to do so – all the better to evade the Civil Guards looking for them, who only spoke Spanish.

In addition to smuggling, Mikel and Ignacio worked as loggers in various parts of Spain, but primarily in France. This, too, entailed environments where a lot of Basque was spoken. Mikel went with some friends to Roncal Valley, where they were met with teams from elsewhere in Spain. While he spoke Spanish with the latter, he continued to speak Basque with the former. This was followed by two stints in France; these teams were composed only of men from other Basque villages. He spoke *Euskera* with all of them except for one from Bizkaia; since his Basque was hard for Mikel to understand, he spoke to him mostly in Spanish. Ignacio also worked in France as a logger for two years, primarily with other Basque speakers.

When it comes to employment patterns, then, we can see that gender operates in a more obvious way than it had heretofore. While the women had many Basque-speaking co-workers and employers – and might themselves use *Euskera* with these interlocutors – they worked and lived in environments where other languages were used on a daily basis. Men, on the other hand, were in environments where Basque was often the only language they spoke or heard. Loggers, for example, not only worked but lived together, with little contact with others. Another way to understand these patterns is to say that men and women established different kinds of social networks as they entered the workforce (cf Gal 1979, Milroy 1987 on the importance of social networks to language use). The men were more likely to enter into informal and formal relationships with other Basque-speaking men. Further, these social networks were embedded in precisely the kinds of working-class jobs most conducive to maintenance of vernacular norms (cf Labov 1972, Milroy 1987, Pujolar 1997).

But, I would argue, it is not merely the availability of Basque interactants that makes a difference; rather, the language ideologies available in these social networks and domains also matter. To the extent that the women's social networks brought them into contact with speakers of languages other than *Euskera*, it also made them more vulnerable to the negative language ideologies about Basque. While learning to sew after work hours, for example, Miren would hear comments like, "*Los vascos ...ni saber comer!*" (Those Basques....they don't even know how to eat properly!). Linda also took sewing classes after hours when she worked in France and this experience also conveyed the idea, albeit in more subtle ways, that Basque was in a subordinate position to French. As they sewed, the nuns led everyone in the rosary – in French. Recall, too, that Gloria spent twenty years in various capacities in the "domestic arts," and speaking almost exclusively Spanish as she did so. During that time, she said, speaking Basque was seen as very "*aldeano*" – something that only lowly peasants did. In subtle and not-so-

-subtle ways, Miren, Linda and Gloria were given the message that Basque was not the language most conducive to performing (Butler 1990) their “feminine” identities in the wider world.

The men had no such struggle when it came to their gender identities. So long as they were strong and willing to work hard, they could do their jobs and it didn’t really matter what language they used to do so. Ironically, this was true even in an environment one would think was most dangerous for linguistic defiance – the military. Mikel and Ignacio served in the army for two years; almost all of their superiors and most of their fellow soldiers spoke no Basque. But Mikel reported that most of the friends he made in the army were Basque, and Ignacio spent most of his service working with fellow Basques on various projects near his village. But while they both spoke a lot of Euskera as a result, they were never told not to or punished when they did so. Ignacio said that the only time he ever got punished was for not doing his job right. As for Gregorio, he was able to fulfill his (much shorter) military service obligations in France because his father was born there: “Whether it’s France, Spain or Russia, I only have the one language!”

It is an interesting question, then, what happens to the language practices of these women and men in America, where the nexus of language, gender and employment was likely to be quite different. The next section examines this issue.

### *5.2 Basque-ing in America*

My interview and observational data indicate that use of Euskera continues to be gendered in this southern California community in three ways. First, immigrant men speak more Basque than do women in the public sphere. Second, men are more likely than women to be addressed in Euskera. Third, if a conversation is being conducted in Basque, men are more likely to continue in Basque while women are more likely to switch to another language (Spanish, French, or English).

These patterns are true in general terms, rather than of these focal couples in particular. But the immigrant experiences and social networks of the focal couples – as they are typical of this immigrant community – go a long way in explaining these general patterns. Most of the men who settled in the southwest were able to do so because of special “Shepherds Laws” enacted on Basques’ behalf<sup>5</sup>. As Ignacio put it, they “got to America like suitcases:” names pinned to their shirts, they were met by guides at each point along the way until they reached their destination (cf Douglass 1976). Once in California, they were met by their families and/or employers, provided with a place to stay till they began their work. The time they worked as shepherds varied: 7 months for Mikel; 5 1/2 years for Ignacio; 7 years for Gregorio.

---

<sup>5</sup> These laws, enacted in the early 1950s, “allowed Basque herders to emigrate to the United States on three-year contracts, renewable if the herder temporarily left the country when the contract expired” (Bieter and Bieter, 2000: 102).

Thus, these men were afforded opportunities to work primarily (at least initially) with other Basque-speaking men. In many cases, this involved maintaining social networks from Euskalerría – as many came with or to their brothers or other male relatives – as well as establishing such social networks that were new. And these opportunities extended beyond the work domain; these men often lived together in boarding houses and socialized together – to play handball or *mus* (a Basque card game) or to sing.

The women's experience with immigration was quite different. Perhaps because there were no legal dispensations for the work they would traditionally do, the women who came to this community did so primarily because they married (or were soon to marry) the immigrants already there. Once in California, their primary focus became raising children and running the household. Their access to Basque-speaking social networks, then, was more limited than the men's in two ways. First, they were excluded from work domains where Basque speakers clustered – no woman was ever recruited to herd sheep. Second, they were discouraged from participating in networks that were *social* where Basque was spoken – the bar and the boardinghouse were not places a respectable Basque woman wanted to be spending too much time.

But, as I have argued above, it is not only access to Basque-speaking domains and networks that matter, so too do the language ideologies that inhere in them. And what we see is that gender and language ideologies interact in complicated, even contradictory, ways in the American context. On the one hand, Basque culture continued to be quite androcentric. Not only was it considered unseemly for women to participate in the cultural activities mentioned above, they were excluded from membership in some Basque Clubs for decades. Further, the iconography of Basque culture continues to be male-centered even today, usually featuring male handball players, dancers or members of the *klika* (a bugle corps) on its posters, flyers and other advertisements for Club functions and festivals.

Even so, one could argue that Basque culture is less androcentric than that in Euskalerría. Though they are still in the minority as compared to men, many women do play *mus*, for example, and one American-born Basque woman even plays *pala* (played on a handball court with a wooden paddle) with the men. Girls and women tend to dominate in the Basque dance and singing groups; women hold leadership positions in some Basque organizations.

Overall, then, I would argue that the American context provides a less negative semantic space when it comes to women speaking Euskera. While they might speak Basque in the public sphere less often than the men, in many cases they speak more Basque than they did in Euskalerría itself. Indeed, Gloria admitted as much. A French-Basque woman volunteered that she actually relearned Basque in California; she and her sisters had long preferred French though her brothers had favored Basque.

The use of Basque by immigrant men might seem less surprising, given that Basque culture and language continued to have positive connotations for

men even in the diaspora. But I would argue that for the Spanish-Basque men who were the focus of this study, the political context of the host society also made a difference. As we have seen, these immigrants grew up in a time where Basque was politically oppressed and socially stigmatized. But it seems unlikely that the receiving society was aware of the stigma attached to Basque; indeed, since all these immigrants also spoke (at least some) Spanish, their interlocutors may have been unaware that they spoke another language as well. Thus, these men may have felt even more free to speak Euskera in the diaspora than they did in the homeland; after all, there were no legal proscriptions against their doing so. In fact, the image of the lone Basque shepherd out there in the wild with his flock fits right into American lore about rugged individualism, further imbuing their image – and perhaps their culture and language – with positive meanings<sup>6</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown how the interaction of language ideologies with gender across various domains illuminates the language use patterns among Basque immigrants to southern California. In so doing, I hope to have enhanced the sociolinguistic understanding of the Basque diaspora, research on which has been lacking. But I also hope to have made some theoretical insights that can inform future research addressing the fate of threatened languages more generally.

Specifically, I began this paper by pointing out some of the shortcomings of Fishman's framework with regard to Reversing Language Shift. First, I argued that it assumes that minority language communities are inherently interesting in "saving" their languages because the language is linked to their ethnic identity. As I have shown the problematic nature of the Basque language-ethnic identity link elsewhere (Echeverria 2003b) I have not pursued this point further here.

Second, I pointed out that Fishman's framework assumes that the threatened language is worth saving because it is linked to some seemingly "authentic" culture that is unproblematically positive, as if it had no unsavory elements to it. But my research – both in Euskalerrria and in this diasporic community – has shown that Basque culture does not embrace all comers with the same warmth. To paraphrase Napoleon in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "All Basques are Basque. But some are more Basque than others." Both in Euskalerrria and in this immigrant community, Basque culture privileges men; it is they who are the icons of the culture; it is their participation in the Basque culture that is courted and celebrated. I have also shown, however, that this

---

<sup>6</sup> This supports Bieter and Bieter's (2000) argument that, while early shepherds to Idaho were discriminated against, they had established a positive reputation as hard workers by the 1950s.

“Basque culture” has changed in the American context, making it less androcentric and more accessible to female speakers. This suggests, in more general terms, that as an “authentic” culture changes it might do so in ways that make it more welcoming to those who had been previously marginalized or excluded from it, thereby (perhaps) drawing more people to speak the language associated with that culture.

Third, I pointed out that Fishman’s framework does not sufficiently acknowledge that language can index multiple identities simultaneously, and that these identities might conflict with one another. I have shown that speaking Basque has different social meanings for men and women, when it comes to how Euskera can – or cannot – be used to “perform” (Butler 1990) gender identities. Both in Euskalerría and in this immigrant community, speaking Basque for men is like wearing a seamless garment; always appropriate for presenting oneself as a Basque and as a man. For women, speaking Basque can be like wearing white shoes after Labor Day – something that simply isn’t done by the fashionably sophisticated.

Finally, I suggested that Fishman’s framework assumes rather than investigates the language ideologies of threatened language speakers. The language ideologies and practices of these immigrants interact with gender – including gendered employment and immigration experiences – in complex, even unexpected ways. It behooves those of us who study or carry out RLS efforts to pay attention to these kinds of ideological complexities. Fishman argues that in order for a threatened language to survive, its intergenerational transmission must be secured in informal domains like the home, for this will provide it with a strong shelter from which to face dominant languages elsewhere. I would add that if the ideological foundations of this shelter – i.e. the language ideologies of the threatened language’s speakers – are not taken into account, the institutional foundations built to support the language won’t work for long.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank Jose Ignacio Hualde, Margaret Nash, Virginia Panish, Robert Ream, and Eva Ritter for their very helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Maritza Rodriguez, Eva and Virginia conducted the literature review that (hopefully) enriched the analysis, for which I also thank them. Finally, I am grateful to the following grants and fellowships that made this research possible: the Regents’ Faculty Fellowship and Academic Senate Award (both from the University of California, Riverside); and the National Academy of Education/Spencer Post-doctoral Fellowship.

## References

- Abraham, J.E. (1999) Perceptions of English learning in a Hasidic Jewish sect. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, **138**, 53-80.

- Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bieter, J. & Bieter, M. (2000) *An enduring legacy: The story of Basques in Idaho*. Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Dauenhauer, N. M. & Dauenhauer, R. (1998) Technical, emotional and ideological issues in reversing language shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska. In *Endangered languages: Language loss and community response* (Grenoble, L. & Whaley, L., editors). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Douglass, W.A. (1976). Serving girls and shepherders: Emigration and Continuity in a Spanish Basque village. In *The changing faces of rural Spain* (Aceves, J.B. & Douglass, W.A., editors), pp. 45-62. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Douglass, W.A. (1989) Factors in the formation of the New-World Basque emigrant diaspora. In *Essays in Basque social anthropology and history* (Douglass, W.A., editor). Reno: University of Nevada Press.
- Echeverria, B. (2003<sup>a</sup>) *Language ideologies in (en)gendering the Basque nation*. *Language in Society*, **32**(3), 383-414.
- Echeverria, B. (2003b) *Schooling, language and identity in the Basque Autonomous Community*. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, **34**(4), 351-372.
- Eckert, P. & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992) Think Practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **21**, 461-490.
- Fernandez de Larrinoa, K. (1997) *Mujer, ritual y fiesta: Genero, antropologia y teatro de carnaval en el valle de Soule*. Pamplona-Iruñea: Pamiela.
- Fishman, J. (1991) *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Fishman, J. (2001) *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing language shift, revisited: A 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Gal, S. (1979) *Language shift: Social determinants of linguistic change in bilingual Austria*. New York: Academic Press.
- Hornberger, N. (1998) Language policy, language education, language rights: Indigenous, immigrant, and international perspectives. *Language in Society*, **27**, 439-458.
- Irvine, J. (1998). Ideologies of honorific language. In *Language ideologies: Practice and theory* (Schieffelin, b., Woolard, K. & Kroskrity, P., editors), p. 51-67. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Labov, W. (1972) *Sociolinguistic patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Milroy, L. (1987) *Language and social networks*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Orwell, G. (1990). *Animal Farm*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Javanovich.
- Pujolar i Cos, J. (1997) Masculinities in a multilingual settings. In *Language and masculinity* (Johnson, S. & Meinhof, U.H., editors), p. 86-106. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Sinke, S. (1999) Gender in language and life: A Dutch American example. *Gender Issues*, **17** (1), 1-19.

Trask, R.L. (1997) *The history of Basque*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ugalde, M. (1994) Apuntes sobre el género como categoría y de análisis para la historia del nacionalismo. El caso vasco del primer tercio de siglo. In *Nationalism in Europe Past and Present* (Beramendi, J.G., editor) Volume 1., p. 353-380. Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela.

Woolard, K.A. (1989) *Double talk: Bilingualism and the politics of ethnicity in Catalonia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Woolard, K.A., & Schieffelin, B. (1994) Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **23**, 55-82.

*Begoña Echeverría*

Graduate School of Education

University of California, Riverside

Riverside CA 92125-0128

b.echeverria@ucr.edu