

Bilingualism, Immersion Programmes and Language Learning in the Basque Country¹

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The aim of this paper is to provide information concerning the educational system in the Basque Country, as the literature currently available in foreign languages regarding this subject is scant. The Basque language coexists with Spanish in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), the former being the majority language and the latter the minority one. This paper gives a brief insight into the Basque Country and the Basque language (number of speakers and actual use of the minority language) and the reverse language shift efforts made to date, before focusing on its main theme, that of immersion programmes. The linguistic and non-linguistic results obtained so far will be analysed, as well as compared with those of the Spanish educational system. The conclusion reached is that the effects of bilingualism and immersion programmes are clearly beneficial in the Basque context. However, it should be borne in mind that these immersion programmes are seen as a necessary step towards multilingualism at school, a parental demand with which the Basque educational system intends to deal.

The Basque Country: Location

There is not a great deal of information available in foreign languages about the Basque educational system, which is why this paper starts by giving a general picture of the country and the language, to focus finally on the educational system itself. The Basque Country is a small Basque speaking area with about 2,500,000 inhabitants. It covers an area bordering the Pyrenees and the Bay of Biscay, that in the north of the Pyrenees being part of France and that in the south belonging to Spain. The Basque Country refers therefore to the area occupied by the Basque speech community. The community of Basque speakers is split up into three political units: the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and Navarre in Spain, and the Atlantic Pyrenees Department in France (Figure 1), also known as continental Basque Country (Iparraldea in Basque). This paper will deal with the BAC. It is worth remembering that Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities, the BAC being one of them.

The BAC, established by the Statute of Autonomy of 1979, encompasses three provinces: Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. Since 1982, and as a result of the Basic Law on the Standardisation of Basque, this has become a bilingual community where both Basque (the minority language) and Spanish (the majority language) are official languages.

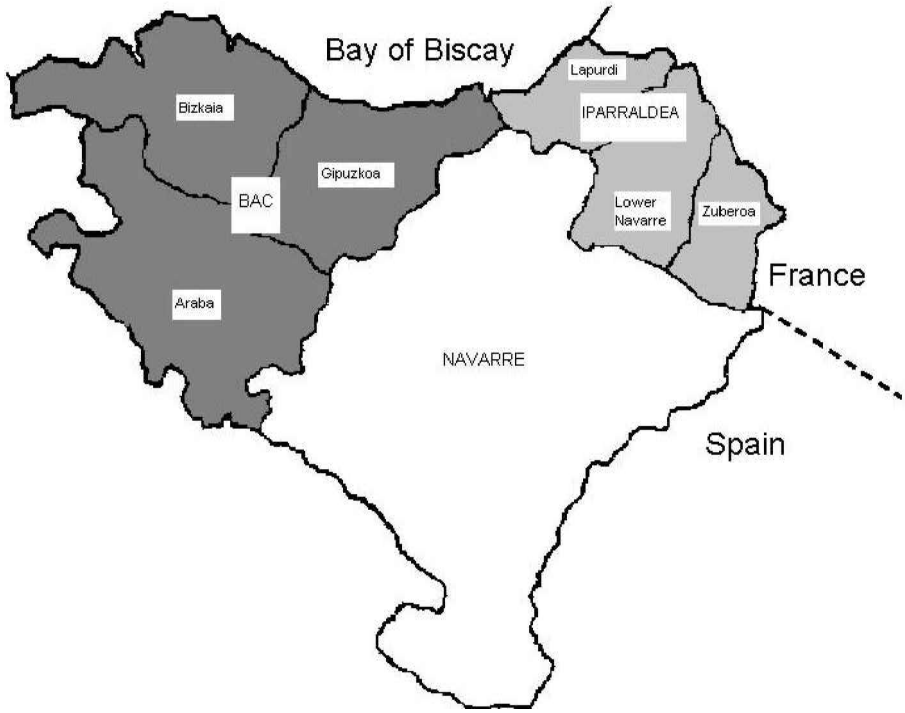


Figure 1 Map of the Basque Country

The Basque Language (Euskera)

The Basque language is probably one of the oldest languages in Europe and can be seen as one of the main symbols representing the identity of our community. It was the only pre-Indo-European language in the Spanish state that managed to overcome the pressure exerted by Latin. Most European languages stem from two language families: the Indo-European and the Uralic families. However, the origin of the Basque language is an unresolved question, since it has no known linguistic relatives. Whereas most western European languages stem from the Indo-European, this is not the case with Basque. Different theories have been proposed concerning the origin of Basque, three of which stand out from the others (Intxausti, 1992): (1) The first one suggests a linguistic relationship between Basque and old Iberian, a non-Indo-European language that died out during the Roman conquest; (2) a second hypothesis advocates a kinship between Basque and northern African languages; (3) whereas the third theory

supports its relationship with the Caucasian languages. However, while all these theories have their supporters, none of them has yet been vindicated.

As far as written remainders are concerned, it is worth mentioning that although the first text on paper comes from the 11th century (just a few words on a Latin manuscript), the first book, *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae* by Bernard Etxepare, was not published until 1545 (for further information on the Basque language see Hualde *et al.*, 1995). In this book the author 'expresses his pride in being the first Basque writer to appear in print, and encourages his fellow countrymen to help in the task of turning Basque into a language of high culture' (Zuazo, 1995: 12).

Most Basques, being basically an illiterate group, had little contact with the written version of the language. Basque was not used in the administration and its sociolinguistic situation was a very good example of diglossia. The 18th century turned out to be decisive in the decline of Basque. In 1716 the absolutist monarchy's trend in favour of centralisation reached the linguistic sphere and Castilian was introduced as the only official language of the monarchy. In France, after the French Revolution (1798), French was also proposed as the only official language of the Republic. In both cases the use of other languages was forbidden.

Moreover, later on one root factor in the decline of the Basque language was industrialisation, which had two main side effects: 'One was in-migration, the arrival of large numbers of non-Basque speaking workers in the new industrial towns. The second was the ever-growing urbanisation of Basque speakers. Thus, increasingly, Basques who had not previously needed Spanish found it necessary to learn and use it, as they moved to the towns' (Gardner, 2000: 26). Likewise, Zuazo (1995) points out that there are three main factors that have determined and still determine the evolution of the Basque language nowadays; the small number of Basque speakers, its limited territory, and the administrative division that it has suffered.

The first real attempts to develop some language planning to ensure its survival did not take place until the beginning of this century. Thus in 1918 a cultural society called *Eusko Ikaskuntza* was founded, and a year later the Academy of the Basque Language or *Euskaltzaindia* was created. However, all these efforts were savagely interrupted in 1937, when all the Basque territory in Spain came under Franco's control. One of the earliest measures taken by the dictator was to forbid the use of the Basque language, not only at school, but also in every single social sphere, and those who violated this were persecuted. For example, those teachers who were members of nationalist parties were forced to give up their jobs, and those who sympathised with them were moved to other regions (Torrealdai, 1998). This had an obvious and damaging impact on the number of Basque speakers (numbers fell dramatically), although during the last decade (1965–1975) this linguistic repression was somewhat lessened, as the regime was breaking down and was not as oppressive as before. However, the figures speak for themselves: at the beginning of the 20th century 83% of the population in the BAC could speak Basque, whereas after the important migratory movements towards this community and Franco's regime, this percentage had plunged to 24% (Etxeberria, 1999).

The most recent attempt by the Basque speech community to reverse the decline of its mother tongue can be divided into two phases (Gardner, 2000). The first phase spans the period from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s, and the second one from then to now. The key for this division is the period from 1975 to 1980, that is to say, the transition from a dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy. The first phase is characterised by very harsh conditions for all those involved in the defence and survival of the Basque language, since they lacked official support, minimum resources, or any legal framework. The *Ikastola* or Basque school, where the author of this article started to learn through the medium of Basque in Vitoria-Gasteiz, for example, had to start from scratch. In fact, during its early years the lessons took place in secret in the house of the person who, once the *Ikastola* became legal, would be its first director. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, meetings of small groups in private flats to receive a rudimentary education in Basque was common practice. These teachers had obviously no degree or qualification to teach in Basque, as no teacher training existed for it. To put it in a nutshell, the situation was extremely precarious due to the lack of trained Basque speaking teachers, shortage of teaching materials and extremely limited economic resources. Despite all these hindrances, several important steps were taken, such as the first major decisions towards the achievement of a unified written standard in 1968 and the establishment of the first Basque language certificates in 1974 by *Euskaltzaindia*.

Since Basque acquired co-official status with Spanish in 1978 efforts to revive the language have been made on the part of both public and private institutions (Cenoz & Perales, 1997). Research carried out in the BAC by the Basque Statistics Institute (Eustat) divides language speakers according to three categories:

- (1) Basque speakers: this group is made up of fluent Basque speakers.
- (2) Quasi-Basque speakers: those who can speak Basque with difficulty and who can understand it well or reasonably well.
- (3) Spanish speakers: those people who can neither speak nor understand Basque.

A comparison of the number of speakers in each of these groups in 1981 and 1991 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of Basque, Quasi-Basque and Spanish speakers

BAC	1981		1991	
	Speakers	Percentage	Speakers	Percentage
Basque speakers	447,776	21.56	542,387	26.22
Quasi-Basque speakers	300,394	14.47	350,454	16.94
Spanish mono-linguals	1,328,278	63.97	1,176,086	56.84
Population older than 2	2,076,448		2,068,927	

Source: Eustat, Isasi 1994.

We can see that the number of Spanish monolinguals has decreased by more than 7% from 1981 to 1991, which equates to the percentage increase by the Basque and quasi-Basque speakers (it is important to consider that monolinguals in Basque are only 1% of the population). Nevertheless, it is the use of a language in society which really shows its vitality. A study (Altuna, 1998) was completed in the BAC in 1997, in which the language used by more than 260,000 people was scrutinised by means of direct observation. This study came up with the following: that in Araba Basque was used 2.93% of the time; in Bizkaia 6.56% and in Gipuzkoa 22.92%. Yet, these results can be compared with those of two similar studies carried out eight and four years before, in 1989 and 1993 (Iñigo, 1994), a comparison which proves that in such a short period of time the use of Basque has increased by 31% in the BAC as a whole. This is clearly displayed in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

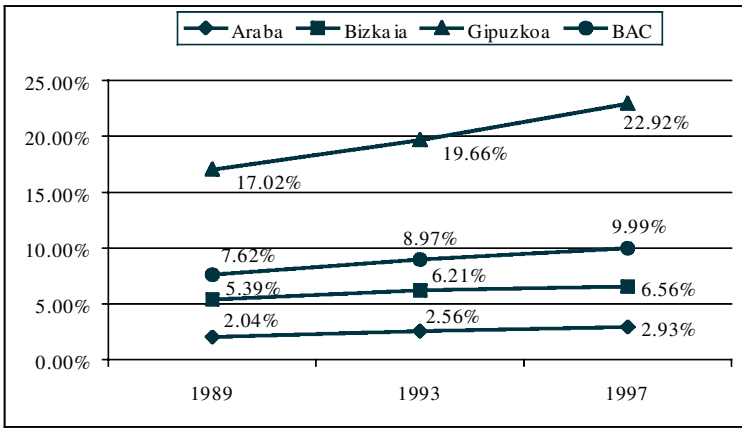


Figure 2 Percentage use of Basque in the BAC

Source: Altuna, 1998.

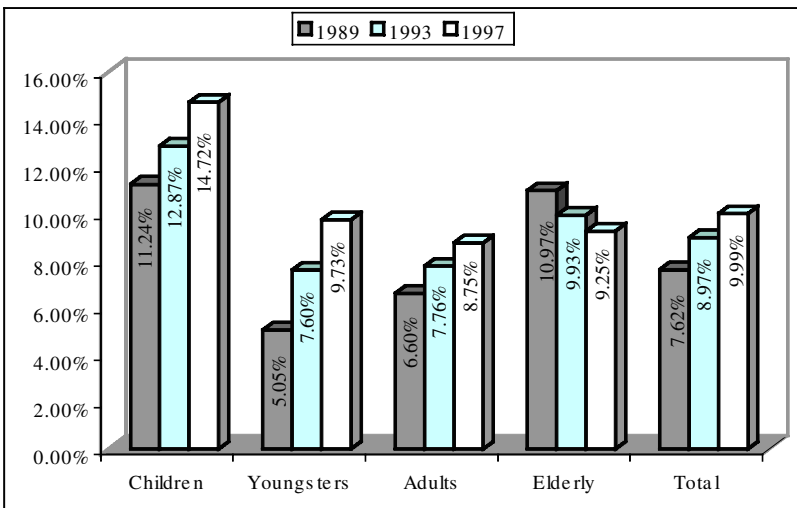


Figure 3 Percentage use of Basque depending on age group

Source: Altuna, 1998.

Therefore, it can be stated that there is a steady, albeit small, increase in the number of people who can and do speak Basque in their everyday life, especially among children and young people; but despite this, Basque is still clearly a minority language. It is also worth noting that nearly half of the Basque speakers are found in the province of Gipuzkoa (Zuazo, 1995). In the BAC the percentages according to mother tongue are the following: Basque (20.5%), Spanish (75.8%) and both (3.7%) (Basque Government, 1996).

Another important question to bear in mind has to do with the scant presence of Basque in the working world, and it is clear that few jobs in the private sector have a formal language requirement. Gardner (2000:36) points out that 'a 1996 survey of vacancy advertisements for degree holders published in the local press of the BAC suggests that Basque was required or positively valued in just under 10% of the vacancies. On the other hand, English was required or valued for 57% of the posts'. These figures should prove of interest to those who consider that Basque is given too much importance and the efforts made to date are more than enough.

Due to the enormous sociolinguistic diversity which exists in the BAC, the opportunities to use the Basque language in everyday activities varies greatly from one place to another. Some French and Spanish speakers (many in the past and a few still in the present) have usually regarded Basque as a rural language, suitable perhaps for domestic and rural purposes, but not for the modern world, university or technology. The main problem, however, is that although measures have been taken in order to promote its use in the scientific and technological world (which affects a small number of users), language planners have not taken measures to foster its social use, which is what really has a more direct effect on a great number of Basque speakers.

In this sense Zuazo (1995: 23) underlines that:

the revitalization of the Academy of the Language or Euskaltzaindia, and the opening, after Franco's death, of Basque philology departments at the Universities of the Basque Country, have made it possible for the formation of a whole new generation of researchers in the country itself.

It is worth noticing the negative attitudes of some Spanish-speaking sectors, who after having initially shown some tolerance, nowadays consider that there exists an unjustified discrimination in favour of Basque speakers. Gardner (2000: 82) lists their main complaints:

- Maintenance, but not expansion, of Basque. To this end some would limit the area of the BAC where Basque is official.
- Less public money for and less government speed in implementation, because other policies deserve greater priority.
- Spanish speaking teachers' and public servants' job security and right to use Spanish only should be given precedence over those of Basque speakers to deal with the administration and to receive schooling in the language of their choice.

The more extremists defend that Basque is drowning Spanish, although the results shown in Table 1 clearly run counter to this statement. Besides, more than 92% of Spanish speaking adults do not learn the minority language, as a result of which the reverse language shift is fundamentally based on the school (Rodríguez, 1999).

In Navarre the picture is more blurred. Many factors make this happen: the language only enjoys co-official status in parts of the territory, there are many impediments for its normal development at university, there is no teacher training in Basque, *ikastola* schools have to face many problems from a legal perspective, English has a higher social recognition than Basque, and so on and so forth.

As far as the continental Basque community is concerned, it has to be said that France is the only member of the European Union, whose constitution watches over a privileged position for just one official language in all its territory, while at the same time the historically present linguistic minorities have no status at all (Sanmarti, 1996: 83); and there are seven linguistic minorities (Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Flemish and Occitan) within its borders. The Basque minority is not an exception; the French state has traditionally denied them any legal or educational rank at official level. Moreover, the part of the Basque Country situated in France has suffered a great degree of inward migration – up to the point that in the district of Lapurdi 43% of its population were born outside the area. The number of adult Basque speakers is greater than that of under-16s, which manifestly exhibits the existing breach in the intergenerational transmission of the Basque language in the north of the Pyrenees. Despite the lack of any legal support for Basque, the percentage of Basque speakers in this area is of 32%.

Immersion Programmes in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC)

As is the case in most Western countries with a minority language, education has been the main force when attempting to help the Basque language to survive. As a result, the Basque educational system has undergone an enormous change in the last two decades. In the following section this evolution will be briefly analysed.

A historical review

As previously explained, before all parents could legally choose the language of education of their children, there were some who were already exercising their right to do so. This is the case of the *ikastola* schools which sprang up in the 1960s to give children the chance to use the language of their ancestors and to foster its culture. The *ikastola* schools continue to play a vitally important part in the survival and recovery of the Basque language.

By 1976 there were three different types of school in the BAC: a public sector; a private sector (overwhelmingly owned by religious orders of the Roman Catholic Church); and the *ikastola* sector. In 1982, with the passing of the *Basic Law on the Standardisation of the Basque Language*, every student's right to be taught in Basque and Spanish was recognised, as a result of which three linguistic models (models A, B and D) were established in the following year. During the first few years after the end of the dictatorship there was a fairly clear-cut picture: Model B (a partial immersion programme) was predominant in the public sector, model D (a total immersion programme for those students with Spanish as their L1 and a maintenance programme for those with Basque as L1) was established in the *ikastola* schools, and model A (a regular programme with Basque only as a subject)

reigned supreme in the private schools. From their origin the *ikastola* schools were legally private as a result of their attempt to secure students their schooling using the medium of Basque. Nevertheless, from the late 1970s the public sector started to deal with this parental demand for teaching of and in Basque. Hence politicians decided in 1993 to put an end to the separate *ikastola* network by making them choose between the public or private sectors; the result was that about 65% of them opted for the private sector. Those *ikastola* schools in a weaker position financially were the ones that joined the public sector. As Gardner (2000: 58) puts it 'ikastola schools no longer legally constitute a separate school network, though the name, and in many cases, a rather Basque-er atmosphere than in the general run of state and private schools still survives'. Since 1993 half of the total school population is enrolled in the public sector and the other half in the private sector.

Teachers and teacher training

The shortage of qualified teachers could be considered as the first and biggest hurdle that Basque medium education has had to overcome. Consider the following statement: in 1977 only 5% of state primary teachers could speak Basque (Basque Government, 1990), and they were not generally proficient in its use in writing or for academic purposes. Basque was not even heard in teacher training colleges, so there was little chance of training teachers able to teach in and through Basque.

This is the reason why the training question was immediately handled by the Basque Government. The so-called IRALE, an in-service retraining programme, was established in order to provide practising teachers with opportunities to acquire the required level of Basque. With this in mind, two linguistic profiles (PL) were established: (1) PL1: elementary knowledge of Basque: (2) PL2: qualification to teach in Basque.

Time constraints placed on teachers to obtain the necessary language profile are rather loose, and for those aged over 45 it is not compulsory. These conditions, in conjunction with the fact that there are some teachers with no profile in positions where P1 or P2 are required, or with a homologation of profiles that were provisional in origin, have come in for a great deal of criticism from some educational sectors (Rodríguez, 1999). Whereas the 'Basquisition' process is fairly advanced in primary education (25% of the public teaching sector and 35% in the private have no profile at all), in secondary education the situation is worse (37% in the public sector and 55% in private education). The latter confirms the existence of an imbalance between Basque teaching needs and resources. In order to meet the challenges of Basque education, all new teaching staff should be bilingual. As far as the linguistic profile is concerned, the percentage of pre-university teaching staff is as follows: 31% have no profile at all, 9% PL1 and 60% PL2 (Zalbide, 1998).

Those teachers who are interested in taking part in one of the IRALE courses need to demonstrate interest and willingness by achieving a minimum level of competence in Basque beforehand; that is to say, participation is not allowed for those who have to learn Basque from scratch. Teachers are offered part or full-time release from teaching duties on full salary for a period up to three school years (1500 took advantage of these facilities during the 1999–2000 school year).

The government pays for both the learner's tuition and the corresponding supply teacher. Although the opportunity to take part is offered irrespective of the mother tongue of the teacher, the release period for native speakers of Basque has always turned out to be shorter than that for non-natives (Gardner, 2000). As the teacher shortage has gradually decreased, the level of competence demanded to achieve the necessary linguistic profile has increased. In the past it was considered that if the working environment was sufficiently supportive, the linguistic improvement would continue with everyday practice. Nowadays, however, it is more difficult to pass these Basque language exams than it was 15 years ago.

It is also worth mentioning the important role played by the *ikastola schools* regarding innovation in aspects such as the language ability of the teaching staff, methodology, and the production of textbooks (Arzamendi & Genesee, 1997; Gardner, 2000). Similarly, it is important to remember that the Schools of *Magisterio* (or Teacher Training Schools) have accomplished a very important job in Basquisating many of the teachers that have received their teaching certification from the 1980s onwards; the Teacher Training School in Donostia, for example, has had a great impact on the teaching practices done in many schools in Gipuzkoa.

In order not to infringe upon the linguistic rights of the community, the Department of Education is in charge of linguistic planning; even so, conflict sometimes occurs.

As teachers tend to have considerable influence in school community decisions, there is no guarantee that in such circumstances parents' interests would be fully protected, particularly where the interest of teachers are notably at variance with those of parents. (Gardner, 2000: 57)

Nowadays it is estimated that about 60% of practising teachers have already been qualified to teach in Basque, which, depending on the source, is interpreted as highly satisfactory or unsatisfactory (these are the inherent risks to statistics). Unluckily, Basque depends too much still on governmental support, rather than on the flow of natural life (Fishman, 1991).

Governmental support

Apart from the teacher training programme (*IRALE*) previously dealt with, there is also a vigorous adult language learning movement, run chiefly by the government, through *HABE* (the organisation in charge of promoting Basque learning for adults) and by the independent bodies *AEK* and *IKA* (which teach Basque to adults). The presence of Basque is similarly reinforced by means of extra-curricular activities which are subsidised by the government, such as: Linguistic Normalisation Projects aimed at the whole community (administration, parents, etc.), theatre schools, choirs, stays in Basque speaking areas, summer activities in Basque, the twinning of schools in different areas, Basque writers visiting the schools, cinema films in Basque, amongst others.

The elaboration of materials in Basque is also a matter of paramount importance. In the 1970s the materials were very scant (22 educational books according to Torrealdai, 1981) and aimed only at primary education, since it was not until the 1980s that materials for secondary education were created. Furthermore, the Basque market was very limited, and so publishers were not very interested in

developing the necessary materials. This situation led the Basque Government to implement the EIMA programme in 1982, with the objective of supporting economically the creation of materials. The EIMA programme comprises not only the publication of textbooks, but also audio-visual resources, software and the formation of working groups dedicated to the design of new materials. In summary, the Basque Government's support is indispensable, essential and fundamental.

Three linguistic models

Since the passing in 1983 of the law establishing the use of the Basque language at pre-university levels in the BAC, and due to the existence of different social attitudes towards bilingualism, there are three linguistic models in which children can complete their studies:

Model A: this is a regular programme in which Spanish is the vehicle language and Basque is taught only as a subject (four to five hours per week). The L1 of the students is Spanish. Although it was originally designed to include some subjects in Basque in the last years of compulsory education, which would make it comparable with the Canadian late partial immersion (Genesee, 1983), this original resolution has been discarded.

The Basque language objectives in this model are:

- to understand Basque well;
- to be able to give basic explanations in Basque on everyday matters;
- to prepare the student for participation in Basque environments;
- to strengthen positive attitudes towards Basque.

Even so, these students exhibit more negative attitudes towards the minority language than their bilingual counterparts (Madariaga, 1992, 1994).

Model B: this is an early partial immersion programme in which both Basque and Spanish are used as means of instruction. These students' L1 is usually Spanish, although there may be some rare exceptions with Basque as their L1. In this model the first three schooling years (kindergarten) are generally taught through Basque. At the age of six, that is to say, the first year of primary education, they start to learn the reading-writing process and mathematics in Spanish. Some schools evolved towards a more *intensive* model B, in which the reading-writing process and part or the whole subject of Maths is performed in Basque (this question will be dealt with in more depth in the following section). Without any doubt this is the most heterogeneous model and, depending on different factors – such as the sociolinguistic setting in which the school is located or the availability of Basque teaching staff – the time allotted to each of the languages varies considerably.

The Basque language objectives in this model are:

- to acquire suitable competence to perform in Basque as well as securing a high level of comprehension;
- to prepare students to carry out further studies in Basque.

Model D: a total immersion programme for those students whose L1 is Spanish and a maintenance programme for those with Basque as L1 (unlike Finland or Canada, where total immersion programmes are only used with students who

have no knowledge of the vehicle language). Spanish is taught as a subject for only four to five hours per week.

Although some schools tend to keep native and non-native speakers of Basque separate, in this model qualitative research is needed with respect to the presence of students with a different L1 in the same classroom. This is a very interesting question to look at and to which little attention has been paid so far.

The Basque language objectives in this model are:

- to strengthen competence in Basque, enriching language skills and converting Basque into an instrument of communication for conversation and teaching;
- to strengthen the community of Basque-speaking students to stand up to the pressures of the Spanish-speaking environment and to make it a driving force in the Basqueisation of the inhabitants of the BAC.

Reference has to be made to model X, a marginal programme in which Basque is not taught at all (not even as a subject) and which was the regular programme during Franco's regime. Nowadays the students included in this programme are exempt from Basque lessons for various reasons, such as the fact that they are studying temporarily in the BAC (they represent less than 1% of the schooling population).

The evolution of these linguistic models is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 Percentage distribution of students aged 3–14, from 1983–84 to 1998–99

	1983–84	1986–87	1990–91	1996–97	1998–99
Model A	72.87%	64.11%	50.64%	31.54%	26%
Model B	10.54%	15.92%	24.91%	27.73 %	28%
Model D	16.59%	19.97%	24.45%	40.71%	45%

Source: Basque Government, 1997; Gardner, 2000.

There has been a change from a monolingual educational system to a bilingual one, in which model X has practically disappeared. Enrolment figures in model A go steadily down, whereas models B and D go steadily up (182,851 students were enrolled in immersion programmes at pre-university levels in the 1996–97 school year). Nonetheless, this trend slows down in secondary education, which could be attributed to the following factors:

- Model B is less widespread at this level, particularly in technical colleges.
- Some students who started their schooling process in model B move into model A in secondary education, because they are afraid of dealing with a greater cognitive effort in Basque; they consider their command of the minority language to be insufficient to succeed academically at a higher level.
- There is a shortage of qualified teachers in Basque to teach at this level (this refers to teachers with tenure and not to supply teachers).

The enrolment figures for 3-year-olds in the 1999/2000 school year in the BAC merit consideration, since they indicate the way trends are moving: model A (11%), model B (32%) and model D (57%). Even in Araba, the province where there is a lower percentage of Basque speakers, models B and D are much more

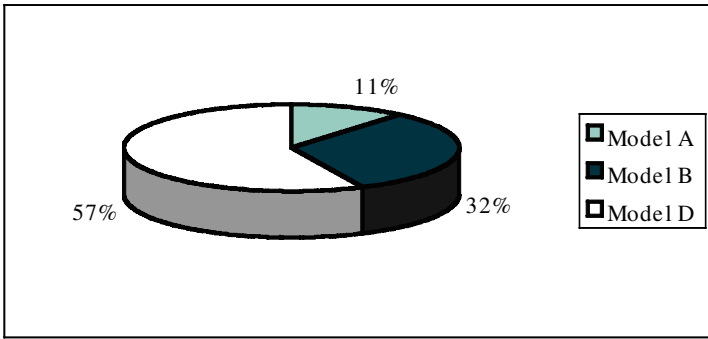


Figure 4 Percentage distribution of students aged 3, 1999–2000

popular than model A at kindergarten. That this new generation of parents are in favour of the immersion programmes is beyond doubt.

It is important to note that the Basque Autonomous Community's birth rate is one of the lowest in the world, and there has been a vast decline in the number of students. This has led schools to try to persuade parents to enrol their children in their linguistic models (whether A, B or D), stating that a particular model (the one offered in the schools concerned) obtains better academic results than the other models in an attempt to increase their enrolment figures. As the number of students is smaller, some schools try to sell their model as the best option, in an ever-diminishing and more demanding market. Since empirical support (as we will see later) clearly shows that model B and D students become much more competent in Basque, in many areas the enrolment figures of model A schools are falling sharply. In fact, the competition between schools is such that 'there seems little doubt that, in their enthusiasm to secure a satisfactory number of new entrants, some schools have occasionally provided plainly biased information on the models to parents' (Gardner, 2000: 54). Thus, some model A schools have argued the case that native Spanish speakers should be instructed in their mother tongue, on the grounds that Basque instruction could limit the student's cognitive development.

Whenever and wherever there are two languages in contact, there is a strong likelihood of linguistic conflict, and the Basque Autonomous Community is not an exception. Thus, whereas some social sectors have proposed the abolition of model A (especially in Gipuzkoa, the province with the highest presence of Basque) due to its proven inefficacy concerning the learning of Basque, others consider that model X (the one with no Basque at all) should be reintroduced (especially in Araba, the province with the lowest percentage of Basque speakers). With the current language laws in mind, the government has turned down both proposals. As a result of the poor results obtained in Basque, a third proposal consists in introducing Basque as vehicle language in one or two subjects in model A, as was originally recorded in the Law on the Standardisation of Basque (1982) in pre-university education, but this has also been abandoned without any other satisfactory alternative.

Due to the parental demand of models B and D, more and more schools are introducing these models in an attempt to survive and gain a bigger share of the market.

The reading-writing process

Special heed will be paid to this question due to its important role when parents have to choose the linguistic model for their children. Whereas models A and D are clearly defined in this respect (they use Spanish and Basque respectively in this process), the heterogeneous model B deserves the reader's attention. The reason why many parents decide to enrol their kids in model B is closely linked to the fact that in this model the learning of the reading–writing process is carried out in Spanish; parents believe that, if it were completed in Basque, this could confuse their children, despite the ample evidence contrary to this idea both in the BAC and elsewhere (Genesee *et al.*, 1989).

There is a particular study (Olaziregi, 1994) aimed at analysing this question. The starting point was that there is an underlying reading ability which allows transfer from one language into the other. Thus, this study was designed with the following hypothesis in mind. Since research had shown that there were no differences in proficiency in Spanish among the different linguistic models, it was expected that model B Spanish speaking students starting the reading–writing process in Basque would attain the same reading comprehension level as those who set it out in Spanish. The results demonstrated that there were no differences in the Spanish reading comprehension scores of those who began the reading–writing process in Basque when compared with their counterparts, whereas the former significantly outscored the latter in the Basque reading comprehension test. The author finally concludes that there is no reason to start the reading–writing process in Spanish, since no advantage is found.

Moreover, we should also consider that both Spanish speaking total immersion students and Basque speaking maintenance students (model D) obtain the same results in Spanish as their counterparts in regular programmes (model A). As a result of all this evidence, we could ask ourselves: 'What are the advantages of early partial immersion programmes (model B)?' (Sierra, 1993: 35).

Multilingualism at school

In all these programmes, the teaching of the foreign language (English having a predominant position), after an experimental period in several schools, is to be started at the age of 4 from the 2000/2001 school year onwards; till this year it was first taught in Grade 3 (8–9 years old). There are usually three to four sessions of about 30 minutes. In primary education the time allotted to the English lessons is of about three hours per week. Björklund's and Suni's comment can be applied to English in the BAC:

The gradual lowering of the student age for the introduction of L2, L3 and L4 in kindergarten and school is another important and somewhat controversial issue. Nowadays there are no specific guidelines or clear recommendations on how early to start, how many languages to introduce and what language didactics to implement in language programmes, despite a great interest in and need for bringing on multicultural and multilingual

students. That is, the end product is clearly defined, but how to achieve it remains to be worked out, evaluated and discussed. (Björklund & Suni, 2000: 211–212)

As far as the English language is concerned, as a result of the considerable support and confirmation that the European Union has been receiving in the last decade (the Monetary Union being a very good case in point), and due to its role as a lingua franca and to the ever-increasing migratory movements, English is without any doubt the most widespread foreign language in our community. Furthermore, the European Union proposed in 1995 the introduction of a second foreign language in Secondary Education, which leads to a four-language-in-contact curriculum in those areas which are bilingual. It seems obvious that everybody (society at large, but politicians and parents above all) agrees on the need for a multilingual Europe, which is the reason why there are ever more educational systems wherein three languages are taught. It is worth remembering that 35 languages coexist just within the European Union, and about 75 in the European continent.

The presence of several languages in the school curriculum is becoming more and more widespread (see Lasagabaster, 1998a) and is something that cannot be ignored. The result of this situation is that, because of the coexistence of several languages, the attitudes of parents towards school multilingualism can be divided into three main groups. The first group consists of those parents who believe that the learning of three (or more) languages at school will foster their children's cognitive development, instead of holding it back. They consider that all the languages will be mastered without affecting each other's development negatively. The second group is made up of those parents who maintain that the presence and use of the minority language can become a stumbling block in the acquisition of the majority language or an additional one. Swain *et al.* (1990: 65–66), for example, observed that many immigrant parents in Canada believed that:

By speaking or reading to their children in their own language, they will seriously slow down their child's acquisition of English; that initial education in a child's first language (be it Tagalog, Urdu, Arabic, Italian, etc.) is seen as taking time away from the important task of learning a second language – that of school and society; that it is common practice for teachers to recommend to immigrant parents of children who are having trouble in school to use more English with their children.

On the other hand, some other parents, those of the third group, are of the opinion that the early introduction of the foreign language as L3 in a bilingual context like the Basque Country could 'only serve to further confuse' (Cenoz & Lindsay, 1994: 203), and therefore hinder the survival of a minority language such as Basque, the learning and use of which have been strongly encouraged in recent years. Thus the presence of two international languages could become too much of a burden. Bild and Swain (1989) describe a similar situation in Canada (and Sanders & Meijers, 1995, in The Netherlands), where some parents and educators of students with a minority language as L1 believe that the teaching of French as L3 will disorientate them and take too much time from English (their

L2). Bild and Swain underline that the people in this type of situation need access to evidence and research studies on which to base their opinions when it comes to making a decision.

The vast majority of parents in the BAC are in any case in favour of giving more presence to English in the curriculum, which is the reason why during this school year a trilingual experimental programme will be implemented in a state school located in Bilbo. Some private schools have put into practice this trilingual programme in the last few years, the general feeling being of broad satisfaction with the results (see Cenoz, 1998 for further details).

This interest in multilingual education and multilingualism is reflected in the International Conference on Plurilingual Education held biannually since 1992 in Vitoria-Gasteiz, a scientific forum attended by experts from all over the world and very popular among the teaching staff of our community.

Linguistic results

Although far away from the over 1000 research studies on Canadian immersion bilingual education (Baker, 1996), several research studies (about 50) have been conducted in the BAC, with more than 30,000 students involved. Although the first study was undertaken in 1973 (Aierbe *et al.*, 1974), it was not until the 1980s that there was much overt interest in this issue (Etxeberria, 1999). As is usually the norm in the immersion world (Arnau *et al.*, 1992; Björklund, 1998), most studies focus on first and second language development.

Research studies have repeatedly demonstrated that model A students' competence in Basque is extremely poor (Gabiña *et al.*, 1986; Lasagabaster, 2000a; Lasagabaster & Cenoz, 1998; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1989). Basque language objectives are very far from being fulfilled in this model. The students enrolled in model B attain a higher level of competence in Basque than model A students, but lower than that of model D Spanish speaking students (Gabiña *et al.*, 1986; Lasagabaster, 2000a; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1991) and far lower than that of native speakers. However, their results are dependent on how intensive they are; the closer they are to model D, the higher the results are (Etxeberria, 1986, 1999). Model D students are the ones who achieve the highest scores in Basque and hence the ones who are closer to balanced bilingualism, that is to say, bilinguals with a high level of competence in both languages. However, Basque native speakers usually outperform their Spanish speaking counterparts. This is the only model that guarantees the possibility of completing superior studies in Basque successfully.

Regarding Spanish, in no research has any significant difference between the three models been observed, results brought about by the social importance of Spanish in society where it is a majority language (Lasagabaster & Cenoz, 1998; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1990; Sierra & Olaziregi, 1991). Therefore model D is not a bilingual programme *per se*, but its linguistic outcome is the only actually bilingual, since students' proficiency in both languages is balanced.

On a similar note, Erriondo *et al.* (1993) carried out an interesting pilot study, in which the university student participants, the vast majority of them being native Basque speakers, had completed both primary and secondary education in Basque. Despite this linguistic background, in the lexical test they had to perform the production of Spanish lexical items (62.16%) was almost double that

of Basque (37.84%). This clearly showed that even Basque speakers of these characteristics had a clear linguistic imbalance in favour of Spanish.

These results led Balluerka *et al.* (1994) (see also Erriondo *et al.*, 1993) to focus on the development of bilinguality of native Basque speakers from the Urola Valley, one of the most Basque speaking areas of the BAC where 85% of its population can speak Basque. All of them were schooled in model D. The bilinguality indices (Hamers & Blanc, 1989) reflected that the participants attained a low competence in Spanish in Grade 4 (9–10 years old); in Grade 6 (11–12 years old) there was a similar competence in both languages, but surprisingly, in Grade 8 (13–14 years old) there was a better command of Spanish. This proves that even under the most favourable sociolinguistic conditions (native speakers who study in their L1 in a Basque speaking area), the Basque language is still a minority language subordinated to the majority one. There is no doubt that the social use of Basque makes progress, but there is also an urgent need to conform sociolinguistic spaces for its generalised use as an indispensable and imperative step towards the consolidation and normalisation of the minority language (Rodríguez, 1994).

Focusing on the foreign language, it has to be said that till the late 1970s French was the most studied language at school, but nowadays English is the language studied by 97% of pre-university students as the first foreign language. As happens in many other contexts, English receives overwhelming social support, as it is regarded as being the most international language (Björklund & Suni, 2000).

In the BAC, the number of evaluations carried out on the learning of English as an L3 is not very large and all of them have been completed in the last decade. The first of these studies is that of Cenoz (1991): 321 students from pre-university grade (*Curso de Orientación Universitaria*) enrolled in models A and D were examined concerning their level of proficiency in English. Bilingual students (model D) outperformed monolingual students (model A). After analysing the results obtained by the students in the different tests, this author concluded that the level of competence in the foreign language attained at school by the students was insufficient, an opinion shared by the students themselves and their parents. In fact many of these students attended private classes outside school.

The second study (Cenoz *et al.*, 1994) is that of the Federation of *Ikastola* schools (Basque schools), whose main aim was to observe the influence of the early teaching of English, at the age of four, on the L1 and L2 of the students. There were no differences between the control and the experimental groups as regards Spanish, but a significant difference was observed in favour of the experimental group in Basque, particularly in the oral production test which consisted in telling a story, a very frequent activity in the English lessons. Accordingly, the authors concluded that the early teaching of English did not hold back the learning of Basque and Spanish at all.

In the third study (Lasagabaster, 1998b) the participants were 252 students from Grade 5 (10–11 years old) and Grade 8 (13–14 years old), 42 of them from each of the three linguistic models in each grade. Competence in English was measured via a vocabulary and a grammar test and by tests corresponding to the four language skills, except that grade 5 did not do a writing test, because this was thought to be too difficult for children who were unaccustomed to writing in

English. The overall English score was the sum of the results from the five tests (see Lasagabaster, 2000a for further details). The results showed that model D students were the ones who obtained the best scores in both grades, outperforming model A in grade 5 and both model A and B in grade 8, whereas no significant difference whatsoever was observed between model A and model B. As a conclusion, it could be stated that only those students who achieved a high level of competence in both languages (Cummins, 1976), that is to say balanced bilinguals, could take advantage of their bilingualism concerning the learning of English as an L3. In such a Spanish speaking context as Vitoria-Gasteiz, where this study was undertaken, it seems clear that only those students enrolled in the total immersion or maintenance programme (model D) can reach this high competence in both languages, which benefits their learning of English.

Hence, and despite the limited number of studies completed in our community, it can be affirmed that the results obtained in the BAC coincide with those of research studies from many other different contexts, since the Spanish–Basque bilingual students perform significantly better than their monolingual peers as regards the learning of an additional language. In any case more studies are needed.

The number of research studies on trilingualism (or even more languages in contact) will undoubtedly increase in the future, since the education of those who are multilingual is going to become an unavoidable objective in a Europe without borders where contacts between the different countries are increasing very rapidly. Despite the fact that most studies completed outside the BAC (Bild & Swain, 1989; Klein, 1995; Thomas, 1988) have shown that bilingual subjects outperform monolinguals in the learning of an L3 (the L2 for the monolinguals), there are some studies (Genesee & Lambert, 1983; Lebrun & Baetens Beardsmore, 1993) in which no differences have been observed, while very few have shown a monolingual superiority (Mägiste, 1979, 1984). The few studies in which the bilingual subjects achieved poorer results than the monolingual ones at school show deficiencies concerning their design or inadequate control of the participating variables in the L3 acquisition process, for which the results should be looked at with caution (Bild & Swain, 1989). The analysis of these studies on the learning of an L3 indicate that every context is different and that the same results are not always obtained.

The linguistic creativity developed in each of the three models in the Basque educational system has also been under study. Linguistic creativity was measured by means of Torrance's (1990) *Thinking Creatively with Words. Verbal Booklet A*. The verbal form was chosen, instead of the figural one, on the grounds that the study's hypothesis (Lasagabaster, 2000b) would be related to the effect of different bilingual education models on linguistic creativity, which led us to conclude that the verbal form was the most appropriate one. In this study both fluency, flexibility and originality were measured, obtaining an average score by calculating the mean score of the marks obtained in them, because this average score 'is perhaps the best overall indicator of creative strength' (Torrance, 1990: 45). In this respect the conclusion to be reached is that the positive effects of bilingualism on linguistic creativity seem to appear at a later stage of education, as no difference was observed depending on the bilingual education model in grade 5, but it did have an effect in the case of the grade 8 sample. The fact that there was

no difference between model B and D bilinguals in either grade led us to hypothesise that the learning of an L2 may foster the development of creativity irrespective of the level of competence attained in the L2: at least once a *minimum level* is attained, since the teaching of the L2 only as a subject, as is the case in model A, did not bring about any positive cognitive effect concerning creativity.

As regards metalinguistic awareness, that is to say, 'the ability to think about and reflect upon the nature and functions of language' (Baker, 1996: 122), bilingual subjects (models B and D) have also significantly outscored monolingual (model A) subjects, whereas balanced bilinguals (model D) do so with respect to their non-balanced (model B) peers (Lasagabaster, 2000c). These conclusions have been drawn by using the MAT-2 (Pinto *et al.*, 1999), a standardised test for the measurement of metalinguistic ability conceived for ages 9 to 14 and made up of four tests (comprehension, synonymy, acceptability and phonemic segmentation).

Most studies undertaken all over the world agree with the idea that the relationship between creativity/metalinguistic awareness and bilingualism nearly always has positive effects, and not only in elite or privileged language learning situations, but also in disadvantaged contexts (Braccini & Cianchi, 1993; Francis, 1999; Pinto *et al.*, 1999; Yelland *et al.*, 1993).

Researchers fall back on the explanation that the bilingual person – being able to count on two distinct systems – is more able to work out the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign and of the system as a whole (Cummins, 1976; Landry, 1973; Peal & Lambert, 1962; or Siguán, 1983), which makes the bilingual wonder about the functioning and characteristics of both systems and be more creative than the monolingual subject, who lacks the opportunity of comparing two systems. The bilingual subject conceptualises according to the general properties of the linguistic sign instead of depending on the linguistic sign itself, which fosters his cognitive development.

The fostering of the development of metalinguistic awareness is considered to be a key issue (Lasagabaster, 1998c) in multilingual settings with respect to L3, L4 or LX language learning, since as Cummins (1993: 65) puts it, 'considerable evidence shows that the development of competence in two languages can result in greater levels of metalinguistic awareness and the facilitation of additional language learning'.

Non-linguistic results

Except in the case of a study carried out in 1998 (Urrutia *et al.*, 1998), research agrees on the fact that there are no differences between models as regards other subjects (Lukas, 1990). Learning through Basque does not hinder progress in the rest of the subjects. In fact, the percentage of academic success in primary education is higher in models D (89.8%) and B (81.3%) than in model A (74.7%); the same trend is observable in secondary education (Etxeberria, 1999). Likewise, in Table 3 the percentage of students from models A and D according to the mark in the University Entrance Exam (*Selectividad*) can be observed, which leads us to conclude that there are no important differences between the linguistic models.

Table 3 Results in Selectividad depending on linguistic model

<i>Score</i>	<i>Model A</i>	<i>Model D</i>
A	0.5%	0.3%
B	15%	19%
C/D	76%	74%
Fail	7%	6%

Source: Basque Government, 1997.

Comparison with the Spanish educational system

A comprehensive study was completed in the Spanish state by the National Institute of Quality and Evaluation (INCE, 1996, 1998) with the intention of comparing the academic results obtained in the different 17 autonomous communities. The results were very satisfactory, since the BAC students obtained the highest scores in mathematics, social sciences and Spanish in primary education. In secondary education the results were very much in the same vein, since the BAC students were amongst the best in reading comprehension, linguistic rules, literature (all of them in Spanish) and mathematics. These results run counter to all those pessimistic comments, fears and attitudes towards the little presence of the majority language in the immersion models, on the grounds that students' command of the majority language is becoming deficient and impoverished.

The University of the Basque Country

The University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) obviously has a role of paramount importance in the normalisation of Basque, since it should face the Basqueisation of its different degrees with a view to providing society with Basque speaking graduates ready to use the language in all social spheres. As usually happens, the main stumbling block to carrying this off has to do with economic limitations. The number of university teacher civil servants with no qualification to teach in Basque is still pretty high (67%). In the 1999/2000 school year 55.5% of the compulsory subjects could be taken in Basque, and 20% of university students completed their degrees in Basque. A second important question is related to the publication of materials; just 65 books have been published in Basque to date, a very meagre number (Etxeberria, 1999).

To summarise, teacher training and the creation of materials in Basque are the two crucial difficulties the university has to cope with. According to the university linguistic planning, it is expected that 50% of tertiary education students will complete their degrees in Basque in the year 2005. Despite the meaningful improvement in the figures of Basque speaking lecturers, there is still a long way to go.

Final Considerations

The sociolinguistic situation of Basque is better than ever before; it has a legal status, the number of speakers is steadily increasing, it has widespread social support, more printed books are published than in the previous four centuries combined, and it is being used in new areas (university, technology, etc.). It

seems that its survival is ensured, but we must be careful. We should remember that among those who can speak it, some rarely do so or their command is considerably weak. Furthermore, we should not forget the role played by international languages, particularly English, regarded by many people as essential for work. And then we have to think of the immigrants who add their own language (L4) and who represent a linguistic challenge for the future (Siguán, 1992).

It should therefore be concluded that, despite the reverse language shift efforts, the Basque language has still a long way to go, the most important being that of securing intergenerational transmission and public use (Fishman, 1991; Madariaga, 1992). It is a fact that the educational system has given the Basque language a timely injection, as is shown in the number of young people who can speak it (see Figure 3). The role of the school is vital, but the production of competent second language speakers is not enough regarding the survival of Basque; it cannot improve the situation on its own. Institutional action alone, without the support of social movements, is incapable of carrying out this task successfully (Alvárez, 1990). In this respect it has to be underlined that the Basque Government has made a first step aimed at stimulating the social use of Basque with the publication in 1999 of its general plan for the promotion of the use of Basque. As Gardner (2000: 89) puts it: 'Some would probably like to turn the clock back, but the Country as a whole is clearly in no mood to do so'. The statement: 'Basque language measures are hotly debated and are seen as insufficient by some sectors of the population, too demanding by others' (Cenoz & Perales, 1997) is a constant in the BAC.

Another important question to remember is related to politics. During the last elections the Basque nationalist parties have lost political weight and this could also lead to the fading away of this pro-Basque language climate. After more than 20 years, Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque Country, has a non-nationalist mayor. His first two proposals concerning bilingualism have been: (1) to offer what he calls a unique bilingual model (without any further specification) for everybody in the nurseries run by the city council, in which the presence of Basque would obviously not be that of model D; and (2) to change all public signs from their current bilingual presentation into a monolingual one (he has not specified in which language that would be, but it can be inferred that it is not going to be Basque). Therefore, and as far as the survival of Basque is concerned, all is not as well as it may seem.

The Basquisition of the public educational system seems to be in the ascendant and consolidated (Rodríguez, 1999). Yet, the Basque educational system is a very complex reality. The linguistic competence in model D in a Spanish speaking area and in a Basque speaking area is also a very good case in point. Although model D is undoubtedly the one where better results are obtained in Basque proficiency, it is still possible to find students in Spanish speaking areas who, once they have finished their schooling, are unable to achieve a satisfactory command of the Basque language. Therefore there is a need for more social functions and a greater presence of Basque in most parts of the BAC. On the other hand, some parents in Basque speaking areas are worried about their children's weak command of Spanish, so much so that they demand extra Spanish lessons because they consider that Spanish will be necessary in their children's foreseeable future. Studies completed in these areas seem to conclude that this percep-

tion is misguided, since even in these Basque speaking areas bilinguality is unbalanced in favour of the majority language (Balluerka *et al.*, 1994; Erriondo *et al.*, 1993).

In the BAC the social demand for bilingual models is increasing in the public sector and in the private sector only in the case of the *ikastola* schools. The situation in the private sector (the aforementioned private *ikastola* schools being the exception) is not so positive, since model A (Basque only as a subject) presents considerably high numbers and the presence of model D's is scant. From the age of 16 onwards, the picture is yet more discouraging. Technical colleges are basically monolingual and, from a sociolinguistic perspective, much has to be done at university level and in the working world.

Nowadays there is no doubt that, under certain conditions, the effects of bilingualism and immersion programmes can be beneficial. In fact the great majority of studies made in additive bilingualism settings, situations where the number of balanced bilingual students is greater, have definitively shown the positive effects of a bilingual education. Laurén (1999), Siguán (1984) and Titone (1976) mention that while the negative effects of bilingualism on the intelligence, on personality or on *psychic hygiene* have been talked about, these effects are neither necessary nor universal, but are better presented as the exception or as the effect of other factors connected with bilingualism solely in a contingent manner.

The analysis of the data we have available in the BAC leads us to the conclusion that the bilingual subjects enjoy certain cognitive advantages compared to their monolingual counterparts. The different research studies coincide in one conclusion: model D is the only one which is close to balanced bilingualism, since its students are approximately equally fluent in the two official languages in the BAC and their competence in both languages is well developed. Likewise, Model A needs revision, otherwise, the social fracture between Basque and Spanish speakers (with different attitudes and values) will be exacerbated. These students should be provided with the linguistic tools that will allow them to take part in a fruitful learning of the minority language and to socialise in a more integrated way in the community (Etxeberria, 1999).

It has been clearly demonstrated that the ample attention given to the L1 when it is a minority language (as in the case of Basque), does not impede in any way the normal acquisition of an L2 or L3, results which coincide with those of other contexts (Appel & Muysken, 1987; Thomas, 1988; Byram & Leman, 1990; Swain *et al.*, 1990). In the same way, the acquisition of an L2 or an L3 does not imply any negative effect upon the normal development of the L1 when this is a majority language (Genesee & Lambert, 1983; Genesee, 1998). Research shows that if a high degree of competence is achieved in L1 and L2, the L3 can be seen as beneficial, as this promotes and helps development of greater metalinguistic awareness. This results in greater competence not only in the L3, but also in all the languages in the curriculum.

Multilingualism at school is becoming the norm rather than the exception. We need look no further than the European continent for examples: six communities in Spain (Balearic islands, Cataluña, Galicia, Navarre, the BAC and Valencia), Brittany in France, Friesland in The Netherlands, Bolzano and the Aosta Valley in Italy, Vaasa, Turku and Helsinki in Finland, the German minority in Denmark, Luxembourg, the Foyer model in Brussels, the European School located in

several different European countries, or the linguistically unknown former socialist countries in the east of Europe, to name but a few. As Laurén (1998: 33) puts it: 'Europe is a multilingual continent, and wants to remain one.' Nevertheless, it cannot be said that there is any one trilingual or multilingual model that can be considered suitable for every school system throughout the world, which is why we should look at the results obtained in other contexts, but always bearing in mind the peculiarities of our own.

Last but not least, it has to be said that where widespread agreement exists is in the fact that research into the cognitive development of bilingual/multilingual subjects in bilingual/multilingual educational setting is a fascinating field, and that there is still much to be covered. In the case of the BAC, the author of this article believes that the results of this research should be made known to society as a whole in a much greater way than has been done up until now, so that parents choose the type of education that they consider most adequate for their children.

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Note

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