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Changing the sociolinguistic order: the experience of young Basque speakers in Bilbao

Actions for social justice in multilingual societies Symposium
La Cristalera, 2025, May 15-16



Changing the sociolinguistic order: the experience of young Basque speakers in Bilbao

TODAY I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT:

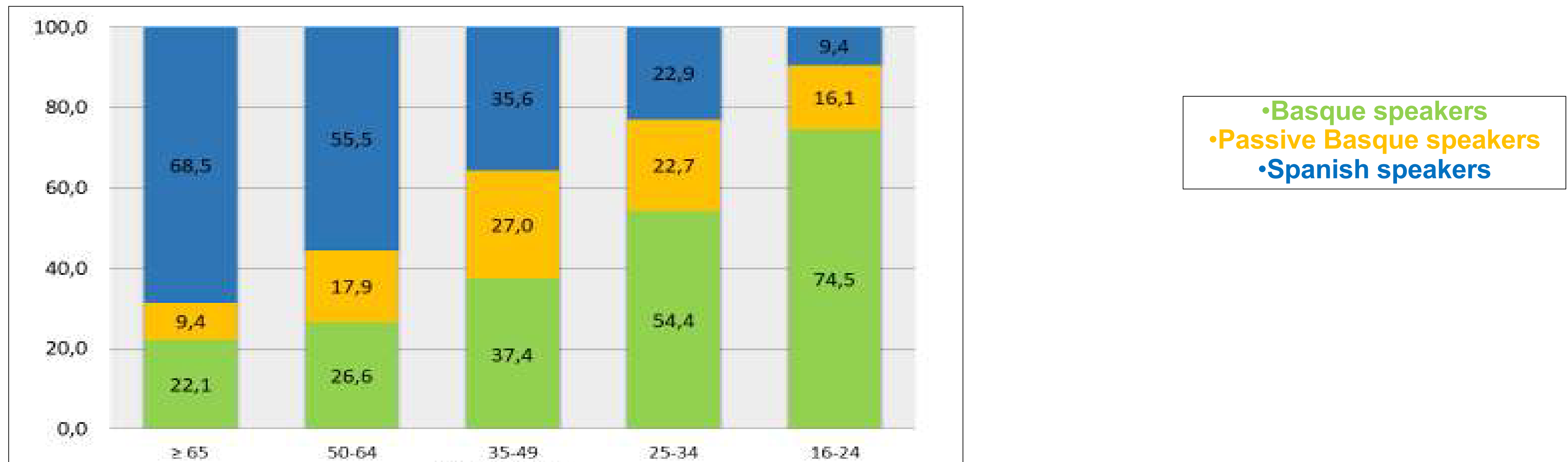
1. Young speakers of Basque in Bilbao: some testimonies
2. Contextualization
3. Two inequality dimensions
4. PAR: Colective reflection and experimentation to change linguistic practices (Freire 2005)
5. Did co-participants manage to transform their linguistic practices and subjectivities?
6. Some conclusions

1. YOUNG SPEAKERS OF BASQUE IN BILBAO: SOME TESTIMONIES

*From **Participating in the language, sharing the language. A participatory action research study with young people** video (0:16-1:27)*

2. Contextualization: Basque speakers after 50 years of revitalization efforts.

Basque speakers by age, Basque Autonomous Community) (%)



In 2021 74.5% of 16-24 young people are Basque speakers (25% in 1991)

(Basque Government 2023. 7th Sociolinguistic Survey 2021)

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION: BILBAO

- 90,030 Basque speakers (27 % of the population) (Basque Government 2020)
- Informal use in the street: 3.5 % of the conversations (Soziolinguistika Klusterra 2023).
- "Spanish is the language of the streets" (see Ortega et al. 2022, Amorrortu et al. 2025)

3. TWO INEQUALITY DIMENSIONS

See also Martin-Rojo et al (2025)

- **LINKED TO THE MINORITIZED STATUS OF BASQUE:** it prevents Basque language use

When I was little I used to speak in Basque. Then adolescence arrives, and you find yourself there, and you say: I have to speak in Spanish. You want others to see you as a normal person (Ehari)

3. TWO INEQUALITY DIMENSIONS

- **LINKED TO BASQUE SPEAKERHOOD MODELS:** it also prevents Basque language use

Irati: When you get to university you mix with people from different towns

June: The so-called "Eusko label"

Irati: And you feel a bit different

June: The Basque we spoke was never good, it was never enough and everything from the outside affected us a lot. We still lack the language of the street.

Irati: I agree. Flirting, joking in Basque, for example, isn't our strong point

3. TWO INEQUALITY DIMENSIONS

- **LINKED TO BASQUE SPEAKERHOOD MODELS:** it also prevents Basque language use

Urko: There were differences even among people in the Basque language class. Biscayans, Gipuzcoans

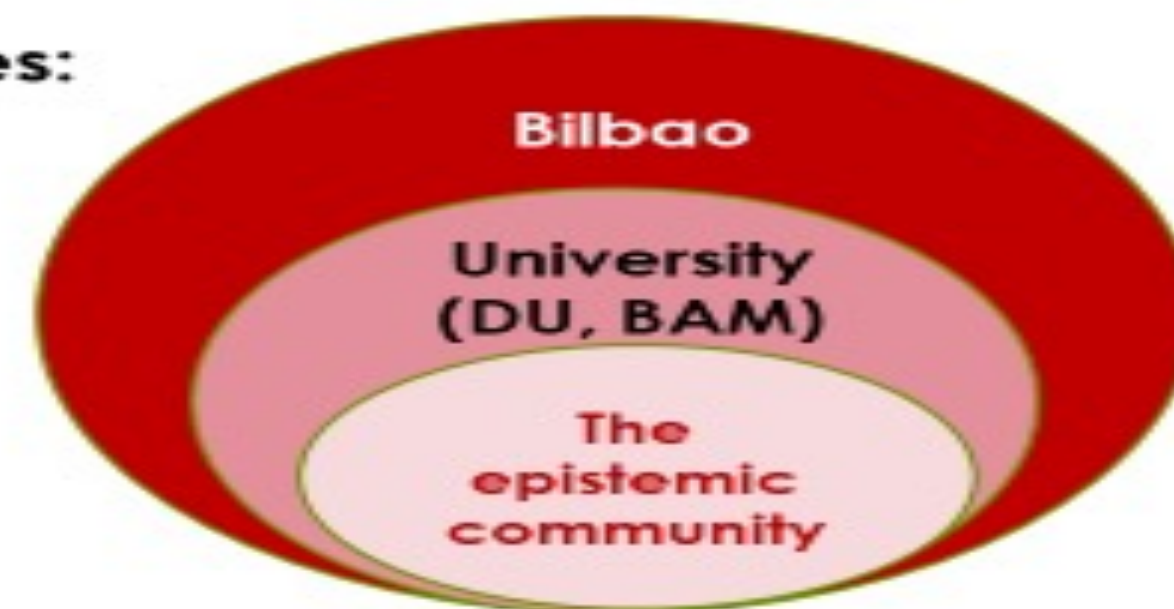
Borja: I felt very self-conscious speaking with them. "Perhaps they think my Basque isn't good enough"

Urko: At school, we were taught about the dialects spoken in different towns, almost as if they were something mystical. They told us: "You have been unlucky because you are from Bilbao".

4. PAR: COLECTIVE REFLECTION AND EXPERIMENTATION TO CHANGE LINGUISTIC PRACTICES

12 DU 1st year students
12 BAM 1st year students

3 nested spaces:



Begoñako Andra Mari Teacher Training
University College (BAM)



University of Deusto (DU)



bam.edu.es

BAM
Begoñako Andra Mari
BILBAO ANDRA MARI
ESKOLA UNIBERTSITARIOA DE TREKATZU



1. EGOERA
ARRAKASTASUA

EGOERAREN
DESKRIBAPENA

Lehenengo egunean, askarileren
nengoela 2 lagunengana hurbildu
nintzen. Harek gaitelaniat
hitz esiten ari ziren beraien artean,
baina nik euskaraz hitz esiten hasi
nintzen, ondorioz beraien ere
euskaraz jarraitu zidaten. Baina
denbora beti gasa ondoren gaitelaniak
buelatu ginen.

ARRAZOIAK

Lagunei lehenengo hita euskaraz
esin nienet, baina dut momentu
horretan euskaraz esileko belduria
sentitu nuela.

EMOZIOAK

Momentuan guttura sentitu
nintzen, nik euskaraz esin
du euskaraz jarraitu
zidatelako.

2. EGOERA
EZ ARRAKASTATSUA

EGOERAREN
DESKRIBAPENA

Hirugarren egunean, klase bat
buktatukoan, lagun batzuei zerbaiz
esan nion euskaraz, baina berak
gaitelaniat erantzun zidan. Ondorioz
nik ere gaitelaniak jarraitu nuen.

ARRAZOIAK

Ilusi: nunean lagunek gaitelaniak
hitz esin nahi zuela gaitelaniara pasatzea
arabaki nuen.

EMOZIOAK

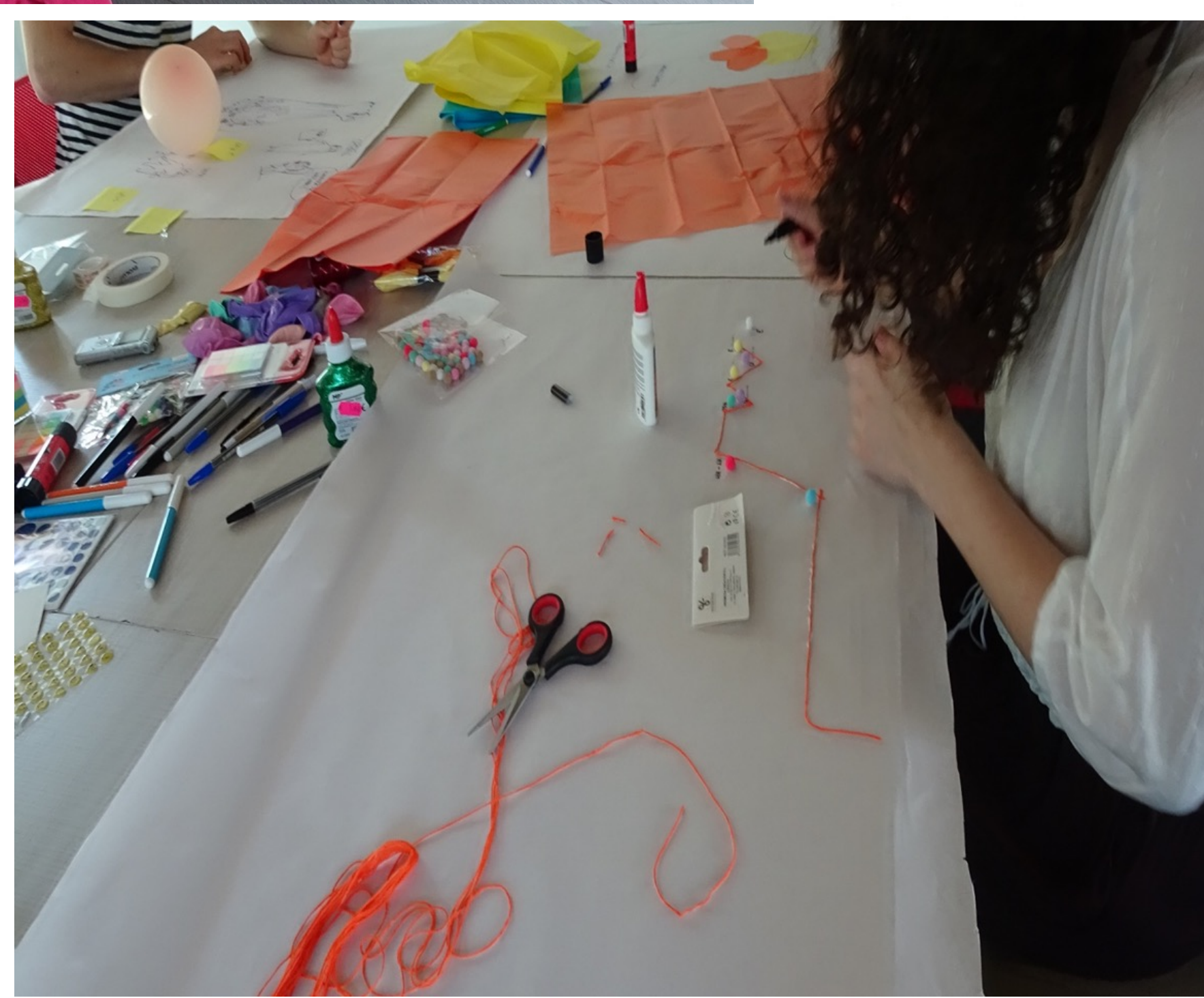
Purka bat deseroso sentitu
nintzen, hitzketan aldeteketa
deba eta.

IZEN-ABIZENA:

TALDEA:

ERRONKAREN
LORPEN MAILA (%)

Esperimentua aldatzea
erabaki zenuen? Zergatik?



A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

PHASE 1: March-May, 2018. Concientization space

PHASE 2: December, 2018. Individual interviews.

PHASE 3: December, 2020. Interviews in couples.

PHASE 4: June, 2022. End of Project group meeting. Contrast of analysis.

PHASE 5: November, 2024. Video and individual interviews.

5. DID CO-PARTICIPANTS MANAGE TO TRANSFORM THEIR LINGUISTIC PRACTICES AND SUBJECTIVITIES?

I have learned that my Basque is my own, I have learned to love my Basque. And I have learned this now: with my level of Basque, with the way I speak, I can do anything. And now I don't care who with I am talking. Don't know how to explain it... I have become stronger, I have become 'bigger'. And now I just don't care (June, May, 2018).

Do I consider myself an active speaker of Basque? Yes, in my case, yes. Now yes. It has been awesome! Ay, ay, ay! Yes, incredible! I mean, now, after the process we've had and everything... I remember what I was like at the beginning, imagine, if I saw myself in a video, I'd say, "Gosh, what a change!" At the beginning I was super small, I did not dare... But now, it's been superb, really. I had a place to explain my situation, to listen to others... For me it has been fantastic. I still have to believe what I have done... To speak in front of other people has been... Guau! Fantastic. And yes, now I feel I am an active speaker. (June, December, 2018)

I started in this project with a lot of prejudices, full of complexes and insecurities; not empowered precisely, just the opposite. I was in a bad way. And in this process I have learned a lot, such a lot. Above all, the first step, to know myself and to accept what I feel. And that it is ok to feel bad, that it is normal. We are the result of the society in which we live, unfortunately, but we have to learn to manage that. (...) And then, to take the next step: to be an agent myself. Here it is: now I am going to have an impact on other people, I'm going to be their ally, I'm going to accompany them, accompany others (June, June 2021).

Yeah, I usually talk to my family in Basque, and to most of my friends too, but with those friends I don't speak Basque, they've changed that chip and started to speak in Basque (...)

Yes, I have used Spanish, logically, but I realized Euskera (...), that I could live in Basque in Deusto. (Urko, December, 2018)

6. CONCLUSIONS

- **PAR helps concientization**
- **Need to address linguistic inequalities and their causes**
- **Crucial elements: reflection, experimentation, and doing it in a group**
- **A longitudinal approach to be sure of transformations**

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