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Authors and languages in a sociohistorical context: Basque religious literature in seventeenth-century France

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Abstract: In this paper, we apply the methods of historical sociolinguistics to seventeenth-century religious literature in Basque. We explore issues related to macrosociolinguistics, and, in particular, the problem of contextualisation of authors and their works. As an example of this approach, we analyse *Doctrina Christiana* by Esteve Materra (published in 1617 and 1623), the first Basque Catholic catechism in the province of Labourd, in the northern part of the Basque Country. It marked the beginning of an intense period of publishing in Basque which lasted until the late seventeenth century. We place the book in the context of major religious movements in France at that time. Materra's catechism was a response of the Catholic Church to the Reformation in the Basque Country, and was produced with the support of the Church authorities, which needed Basque to reach monolingual speakers. Notwithstanding, Materra's catechism also attests to the development of a model of written language to be used in the Labourdin literature.

Keywords: Basque language, Basque literature, France, historical sociolinguistics, seventeenth century

1 Introduction

The seventeenth century saw an intense development and then decline in Basque-language religious literature in the province of Labourd on the French side of the Basque Country. In this paper, we seek to improve our understanding of Basque books printed during that period, and, more generally, of the sociolinguistic situation of Labourd at the time. For that purpose, we deal with the following issues

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pertaining to historical sociolinguistics: the institutional support that the Basque authors and books had, the status that the language had in society, the relationship between language and religion, the language standardisation processes and the linguistic models used by authors, and the readers for whom the books were produced.

Specifically, we analyse Esteve Materra and his *Doctrina Christiana* (Bordeaux 1617; reprinted in 1623), the first Basque Catholic catechism in the northern part of the Basque Country. All copies of its first edition were considered lost until 2014, which is when it turned out that a copy of it is held at The Royal Library in Copenhagen (see Krajewska et al. 2017 for more details). This discovery has opened up new opportunities for research.

The linguistic-cultural entity historically termed Euskal Herria (Basque Country) has never been an independent state. The Basque area is divided between France and Spain, and there are further administrative subdivisions inside each part (Figure 1). Because of that, the historical Basque territories have been involved in different military, political, economic and administrative dynamics. This has had a direct impact on the Basque culture and language, and, in particular, on attitudes towards the language, language use and language policies.

Basque has always been in a diglossic situation (Amorrortu 2003; Urla 1988; Zubiri 2013) as defined by both Ferguson (1959) and Fishman (1972).¹ The diglossic situation was especially pronounced in some areas, for example on the Spanish side, where few Basque books were printed before the eighteenth century. Until the nineteenth century, Basque authors rarely viewed their works within the same tradition, and they frequently adopted a utilitarian attitude towards Basque. Writers were usually related to the Church in some way, and, since the everyday language of society was Basque, they considered it an instrument to spread religious ideas. More elevated texts, though, such as administrative or literary tomes, were produced mostly in Latin, Spanish, Occitan or French. This is why almost 90% of the books in Basque until the late nineteenth century dealt with religion (Sarasola 1971: 25; Lakarra 1997: 455). This situation is not unlike what we find in other parts of the world. For example, in South Africa, indigenous languages were for the first time used in writing in the domain of the Church, because the religious authorities realised that the Church had to use local languages in order to reach people (Kamwangamalu 2006: 90–91).

The perspective of historical sociolinguistics is necessary to analyse Basque texts produced in such a diglossic context and achieve a more accurate picture of

¹ Basque is nowadays considered a minority language: it has around 750,000 speakers in a community of approximately 3,000,000 inhabitants that use primarily Spanish or French (Government of the Basque Autonomous Community & Government of Navarre 2016: 6).

Figure 1: The political and administrative division of the Basque Country.

the language's past. In fact, there have been a few important contributions in this field recently: Madariaga (2014), for example, provides an overview of the situation of Basque and Basque society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Zalbide et al. (2015) propose a methodological model for the study of the social history of Basque, and Monteano (2017) investigates the status of Basque in the sixteenth century Navarre.

Following Bergs (2012: 96), we believe that “every language period and every linguistic community must be investigated independently and in its own right”. Moreover, as McColl Millar (2012: 41) points out,

With the knowledge not only about how a particular individual used language, but also a society-wide sense of how written (and spoken) language was viewed, along with the preference that might have been given to a particular variety over others and the social distinctions which may have affected language use, we can truly begin to understand what caused individuals and groups to use language(s) in a particular way.

Additionally, a sociolinguistic approach helps overcome some difficulties related to the quality of data. Labov's (1994: 11) principle of "making best use of the bad data" applies to all disciplines studying the past of a language, and "for historical sociolinguists in particular, it would be desirable to be able to place their sociolinguistic objects in a more holistic perspective so as to be better prepared to meet the 'historical paradox'" (Nevalainen 2015: 247).

The limitations of the Basque corpus make it necessary to fully exploit Labov's principle. According to Mounole and Lakarra (2018: 358), the corpus is relatively small, homogeneous (most of the pre-nineteenth-century texts are religious) and disproportionate (not all dialects are equally well documented). Because of that, we are usually unable to undertake the kind of diachronic studies possible for some other languages such as English, French or Dutch; for instance, large quantitative studies or analyses of the variation among the members of a given family (e.g. Bergs 2005). Likewise, the historical corpus of Basque provides limited options for studies based on classic microsociolinguistic variables such as gender or age.

In this paper, however, we want to show that the issues related to macrosociolinguistics can (and should) be investigated for Basque. More specifically, we will work on several fields among those listed by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2012: 27) as parts of a cross-disciplinary perspective on historical sociolinguistics, i.e. the social history of the language (we analyse the sociocultural situation of a period), the history of an individual language model (that established by the author under investigation), and the persistence of the language model selected by the author. In general, we think that one of the first steps in reconstructing the past should be to contextualise authors properly. As Nevalainen (2015: 245) points out, "the historical context typically involves real-time processes, accounting for differences of and changes in the status and function of languages and language varieties in the past".

Recent advances within the sociology of language and religion are also relevant for this paper. As put by Fishman (2006: 13), even though the first research into the relationship between language and religion comes from half a century ago, "we now stand in the sociology of language and religion just about where we were relative to the sociology of language per se some 40 or more years ago". However, interesting contributions have been published over the last decades; for instance, Omoniyi and Fishman (2006) or Darquennes and Vandenbussche (2011). Especially interesting for us are the connections between the language, religion and literacy, and, to be more precise, the language policies related to religious texts (see Spolsky 2006) and the influence of language models used in the domain of religion on the language standardisation.

As an example of this approach, we focus on E. Materra and his doctrine, and analyse the relations between the author and text and their sociohistorical context. In particular, we are interested in questions such as the following:

- i) Who was E. Materra? Whose support did he have? Whose initiative was it to publish a Basque catechism?
- ii) What was the doctrine's function at the time and place in which it was printed or diffused?
- iii) Why and for whom was the text written?
- iv) How was the text received and how influential was it?
- v) What language model is reflected in the text? Was this model influential in the standardisation of the language?

We believe that with more accurate knowledge about those processes we will achieve a more complete account of the history of Basque.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, we start with an overview of Basque literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with an emphasis on the major religious movements at the time: namely, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Section 3 is devoted to Materra. We begin with what is known about the author's biography in Section 3.1. In Section 3.2 we consider three questions: (a) the language policies of the Church authorities, (b) the readers for whom the catechism was written, and (c) the language model used in the book and the image Basque had at the time. In Section 4 we discuss the results and make a case for (Basque) historical sociolinguistics.

2 Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the Basque Country

2.1 Sixteenth-century Basque literature

The evolution of seventeenth-century Basque literature should be analysed against the background of the religious currents and conflicts of the period. To provide a broader context, we will also briefly describe sixteenth-century developments.

In the sixteenth century, very few books were published on the Spanish side of the Basque Country. On the French side, however, there were two major achievements: the poetry of Bernard Etxepare (1545) and the translations of Joannes Leizarraga (1571a, 1571b, 1571c).

Etxepare was the author of the first printed book in Basque: poems entitled *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae*, published in 1545 in Bordeaux. Etxepare's main objective, in the spirit of the Renaissance, was to place Basque on the level of languages which had printed books (Arcocha-Scarcia 2008). However, it did not influence Basque literature until the rediscovery of an *unicum* copy in Paris in the nineteenth century (Mounole and Lakarra 2018: 390).

The next author of importance was Joannes Leizarraga. In 1560, Queen Jeanne D'Albret of Navarre rejected Catholicism, converted to Protestantism, and promoted the Protestant Reformation in the territories under her control. Since Protestants wanted to facilitate an individual interpretation of the Bible, its translation into vernacular languages was an indispensable task. Leizarraga was asked to translate it into Basque, and the book was published in 1571 by the Pierre Hautin Press in La Rochelle. He also prepared a religious calendar and a Christian instruction (also published in 1571 in La Rochelle).

However, the Basque Protestant Reformation was unsuccessful on account of the resistance of orthodox Catholicism and the queen's death in 1572. Jeanne's son, Henry III of Navarre (later Henry IV of France), rejected Protestantism in pursuit of the crown of France (with the famous phrase "Paris is well worth a mass"). This decision ended the institutional support for the Protestant Reformation and halted the diffusion of Leizarraga's works.

Seventeenth-century writers did not continue the endeavours of their predecessors. As noted, Etxepare's book disappeared and was not (re)discovered until the century, and Leizarraga's Protestant translation was forbidden and could not be used openly.²

2.2 Seventeenth-century Basque literature in Labourd

According to Lakarra's (1997) periodisation of the history of Basque, a boundary can be established around the year 1600, which separates Archaic Basque (1450–1600) from Old Basque (1600–1745). This division was proposed on the basis of linguistic features, but sociohistorical arguments can be added to

² Nevertheless, there are indications that some authors read Leizarraga. In Axular, for instance, there are various fragments which appear to be quotes from Leizarraga (Salaberri Muñoa 2000; Urgell 2015). Words from Leizarraga are frequent in the dictionary by Pouvreau (~1650) (Urgell 2015: 653). The influence on Materra, the author studied in this paper, is more controversial. Urgell (2015: §2.1) described similarities between the two authors in spelling, but they concern the 1623 edition (spelling in the 1617 edition is different). Likewise, Urgell saw a few resemblances in the lexicon, even though they are rather inconclusive and would have to be studied in more detail.

support it. For the northern varieties of Basque, which concern us here, the Counter-Reformation acted as a key catalyst of change.

The decisions of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) spread at different rates. In France, unlike in Italy, its influence was felt much later (Courouau 2012: 162). In the Basque Country, the council's rulings were put into practice in the early seventeenth century. The main aim of the Church after Trent was to eradicate Protestantism and establish an (ultra)orthodox Catholicism. This endeavour led to the emergence of religious literature in the province of Labourd as early as the 1610s, when authors gave up pursuing work in the existing scarce literary tradition and began to produce a different kind of literature.

The first milestone was *Doctrina Christiana* (Bordeaux, 1617), a catechism written by Esteve Materra, the author under study here. The Counter-Reformation in Basque literature lasted until the second half of the seventeenth century (~1685). It was an extraordinary period in the history of Basque literature, with no parallels in other Basque regions before the nineteenth century.

From the early seventeenth century on, a group of about 20 clerics from different strata of the Church was active in Labourd (more specifically, around Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Ciboure and Sare). Among them, we find classic Basque authors such as Axular (Aguerre 1643), Etxeberri (1627, 1665 [1636]), Haranburu (1635), Argaiñaratz (1641, 1665), Pouvreau (1656), Harizmendi (1660 [1658]) and Gazteluzar (1686). However, we have reasons to think that more clergymen, not just the well-known authors, were involved in the Counter-Reformation. For example, in Materra's books some of the publication approvals are signed by priests about whom we know very little, but who must have been important in the religious life of the region. Some of the Labourdin authors knew each other as Labourd is rather small, and they moved around the same territory for years. Moreover, their works shared the same objectives, and they often signed each other's books' publishing permissions. That said, the information we have on the relations among them has to be interpreted with caution. This is especially the case with a fragment from Pedro Agerre "Axular", which eventually turned into a myth. Axular, the most acclaimed classic Basque writer, explains in the preface of his only book (*Gvero*, Bordeaux, 1643) that he decided to write it after some friends persuaded him to do so. Whether or not it was a rhetorical convention, some researchers overinterpreted his words and claimed that there was a "school of Sare", a religious literary school with Axular as the axis and guide, and other Basque writers as students or fellows (Michelena 1960; Sarasola 1976; etc.).

Modern historiography (Salaberri Muñoa 2002; Urgell 1991), however, has shown that there are no reliable data to defend the idea of a "school", and that this concept does not help understand seventeenth-century Labourdin literature. A by-product of Axular's glorification was relegating other writers to a secondary

rank, and there have been few attempts to alter this vision. This hierarchy, though rarely spelled out, is visible in the treatment of texts from the period. Until the publication of the critical edition of Materra (Krajewska et al. 2017), only works by Axular and Etxeberri had critical editions.³

In sum, the seventeenth century was an important period for the Basque language, but it still requires more research, especially because of well-entrenched and unjustified assumptions. Many of them have been challenged recently, and we will address a few more here. As we will show, proper contextualisation of each author is crucial in this task.

3 The author and book in context: E. Materra's *Doctrina Christiana*

3.1 The author and his books

We have little information on E. Materra's life, and most of it comes from his books. We know that he was a Franciscan monk, studied theology in Paris, and spent some time in different monasteries in south-western France. In 1610, he lived in the Franciscan monastery in Bayonne (Labourd), and his signature appears in a 1610 document approving the reform of the order (Dedieu 1977: 97). In 1617, he was the superior of the Franciscans in La Réole. According to Dedieu (1977), in 1623, he resided in an abbey of the same order in Toulouse. In 1628, he was most likely in Rodez. The last probable mention of him comes from 1645, when he is said to have been a monk in Aquitaine. The places related to Materra's life can be seen in Figure 2.

In the Basque context, Materra is famous for the Basque catechism, but he also published five volumes in French (Materra 1606, 1607, 1608, 1628, 1645). Two of them are translations of Spanish religious treaties by Juan Márquez (*Les deux estats de la spirituelle Hierusalem Militante et triumpante*, 1607) and Diego de la Vega

3 Argaiñaratz could be seen as an example of that. He authored two books: *Avisu eta exortacione probetchosac bekhatorentzat* (1641) and *Devoten breviarioa* (1665). The former is now considered lost. In his bibliography, Vinson (1891) uses secondary sources to describe it, and the most recent example of someone claiming to have seen it comes from Brunet (1857: 507). However, we have recently found out that a copy of this work was kept in the city library of Tours (France) until German bombardments in June of 1940 caused a huge fire which destroyed the library and approximately 25 thousand of its books and documents (Schweitz 2009). It remains a question why the book was not analysed, transcribed and edited before it perished, i.e. whether it was simply bad luck or rather lack of interest on the part of scholars.

Figure 2: Some of the places mentioned in the text.

(*Employ et saint exercice sur les Evangiles des dimanches de l'année*, 1608). He also authored a spiritual guide for priests (*L'Horologe spirituel*, 1606), a collection of prayers useful in times of pestilence (*Recueil de prières en temps de contagion*, 1628), and a manual about how to confess properly (*Le Directeur familial*, 1645), which seems to be his last publication.

Even though we cannot say so for sure, Materra could have been of Occitan origin. The surname Materre⁴ is common in the department of Corrèze in south-western France and also appears in neighbouring regions. Apart from that, except for his early books, printed in Paris, others were published in the south such as the Basque doctrine in Bordeaux, prayers from 1628 in Rodez and his last book in Toulouse. Likewise, dedicatories of his works are related to these regions. For instance, his 1606 book is dedicated to the abbess of Sainte Claire monastery in Toulouse, and a translation published in the subsequent year honours the bishop of Rieux.

Whatever the case, we know that he was not a native Basque speaker. He spent some time (probably between 1610 and 1617) in Labourd, in the monastery of Bayonne and in Sare, as he himself explains in the 1617 catechism. He is said to have learned Basque extremely quickly: the vicar general of Bayonne says in the printing license that Materra mastered the language in a year or so.

⁴ The author has been traditionally referred to as “Materre”, because this variant appears in his French works, as well as on the front page of the 1623 edition of the Basque catechism. However, “Materra” is found several times in the 1617 edition (for more details, see Krajewska et al. 2017: 15–16). We have chosen “Materra”, because it is the variant used by the author himself when he wrote in Basque.

It has been taken for granted that Materra learned Basque and wrote the doctrine in Basque himself. In general, scholars' image of Materra tends to be one of a person who wanted to contribute to the development of Basque literature and who acted selflessly. In the preface to the doctrine, Materra says that he decided to write it in Basque because he owed it to the Basque people who gave him an opportunity to learn their language:

Ceren Iaincoac niri hitzcuntça hunen ikhasteko ance aphur-bat eman derautanaz gueroz, iduritcen çait hoben nuqueiela, eta are eçagutça gutitaco eta esquer-gabe içanen nincela, baldin Euscal-Herrian ikhassia Euscal-Herrico probetchutan emlegatu ez-panu (1617: 11–12)

[Since God has given me some talent to learn this language, I think that I would be wrong and ungrateful, if I did not use what I have learned in the Basque Country to benefit the Basque Country.]

We cannot, however, know how much of what he says is due to rhetorical conventions. Still another issue is to what extent Materra could learn the language. While there are records of priests who learned Occitan surprisingly quickly to work with local people (Courouau 2012), it is harder to learn Basque.

We believe that a more likely scenario is the one suggested in Krajewska et al. (2017), namely that Materra guided the preparation of the doctrine, but did not write it on his own. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that Materra learned some Basque during his stay in Labourd,⁵ but someone must have helped him write the text. It seems that it did not make sense to bring someone to Labourd and teach him Basque, because there had already been people there who could do that. What local Church authorities probably needed was a name to sign the text. Basque religious literature flourished in Labourd after the work of Materra, but his doctrine was the first in the northern provinces of the Basque Country.

We might speculate that Materra was chosen for the task because of his background and experience in the works of the Counter-Reformation. The task itself was more complex than it might seem. The first modern catechism in France was published by Calvin in 1541 (Dhotel 1967), and the first Catholic doctrine in question-and-answer format appeared in 1563. Catechisms quickly gained popularity, but, according to Dhotel (1967), initially, they were mainly translations and few original books were printed in France in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century. The tradition of diocesan doctrines in France was well established by 1680 (Venard 2002: 13). Thus, taking into account the French

⁵ Materra would not be the only author to do that. Another example is Silvain Pouvreau, a non-native Basque speaker, who published several works in Basque in the second half of the seventeenth century (see Etxagibel 2014).

publishing market, Materra's doctrine, though by no means extraordinary, was published relatively early.

The Materra's doctrine was first published in 1617 (Pierre de la Court, Bordeaux) and then in a revised and expanded form in 1623 (Jacques Millanges, Bordeaux). While we focus on these two editions, it is important to add that the book was reprinted subsequently on three occasions, i.e. in 1648 (with minor changes with respect to the 1623 text, and a few additions), in 1693 (with numerous additions, mostly in Latin, and modifications) and, finally, in 1704 (without the parts added in 1693). This shows that the catechism achieved remarkable success.

The first edition contains 13 chapters on the major aspects of the Catholic faith. The second edition was changed significantly, especially in the way in which the doctrine is presented. Another change concerns the reader for whom the book was written. The first edition was directed at schoolchildren, but the second was conceived for the general public.

In sum, Materra's literary production and the functions he held in the Franciscan order make us think that he was a relatively important figure in the Catholic Church, at least within Franciscan circles and in south-western France. Most of his works are aimed at priests or highly educated readers, but two were written with ordinary people in mind, i.e. the doctrine for monolingual Basques and the posterior manual of confession. Both lines are closely related to the ideas of the Counter-Reformation which sought to reform the clergy, but also wanted to reach the masses, and one way to do so was through vernacular languages.

3.2 *Doctrina Christiana* (1617): The book in context

In order to understand the situation of local languages in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Courouau (2012) explores three main questions for the different books. The first is whether the book in question was published with institutional support. Its presence might suggest a positive attitude towards the language or, at least, the understanding of the importance of reaching readers in their mother tongue. The second matter is for what kind of public it was written. Finally, it is interesting to consider what image of the language emerges from the text: for instance, whether and how the language choice is explained, or whether it is presented as *patois*.

In what follows we will consider these issues for Materra's doctrine, focusing especially on new insights that might be gained from the recently discovered copy of the first edition.

3.2.1 Language policy

It might be an anachronism to talk about conscious language policy with reference to earlier periods (Burke 2004: 72–73, 75), but governments often tried to impose or outlaw the use of a language. In France, an example of that was the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts (1539), which banned Latin in the domain of law and administration. Even though it did not explicitly prohibit the use of local languages (Trudeau 1983), it precipitated the expansion of French in administration.

As regards the religious domain, language is the vehicle for the spread of faith, and because of that, religion plays an important role in the history of languages (Hartweg and Kremnitz 2013: 159). In France, both Catholics and Protestants had to deal with a multilingual population, which led to something we could call *language policy*.

In general, religious production was important in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but there were differences between languages in that religious literature existed in Occitan, Breton and Basque, but not in langues d'oïl and Franco-provençal. For Basque and Breton, most of the printed production was religious (Courouau 2012: 159).

The first Breton catechism had already been published in 1567, and a translation of Bellarmine's catechism appeared in 1612 (Courouau 2008: 60). In fact, in the second half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, more religious books were published in Breton than in Basque and Occitan (Courouau 2008: 57). This also suggests some access to literacy in the Breton society, as pointed out by Hartweg and Kremnitz (2013: 162). However, publishing was mostly done without explicit institutional support (Courouau 2008: 64, 2012: 161).

As regards Occitan, some religious books appeared in the first half of the sixteenth century. A period of stagnation followed though, and the first catechism in the seventeenth century was published in 1640 (Courouau 2012: 172–179). Several other religious texts were printed in the 1640s and 1650s (mostly in Toulouse) thanks to the efforts of a part of the clergy. This support was however limited in space (south-western France) and time (in most cases the next bishop would not continue the efforts of his predecessor) (Courouau 2012: 260). According to Martel (2013: 514), the Occitan Church never really committed to the cause of language, even though there were a few influential religious authors who wrote in Occitan.

In this section, we will argue that institutional support was crucial for the appearance of Materra's catechism. In general, it appears that it was difficult, if not impossible, to publish books in Basque without it. This support was also relatively early. As Courouau (2012: 201) notes, at the time of Materra's publication (1617), there was nothing comparable, for example, in the Occitan book market.

In Materra's book there is no explicit information that it was ordered, but it is nevertheless clear that it was created along the lines of the Counter-Reformation and with the help of the Church, and especially with the support of Bertrand Etxauz (1556–1641), the bishop of Bayonne between 1599 and 1617.

Bishops played an important role in the Counter-Reformation (Bergin 1999; Suire 2000). As a result of the decisions of the Council, on the one hand, they were expected to lead an exemplary life as well as preach and visit their parishes regularly, but on the other, they also gained power.

Etxauz was a native Basque speaker from a noble family, born in Baigorri, in Low Navarre. As the chaplain of King Henry IV of France and knight of the Order of the Holy Spirit, he was an influential figure. One of the most important events he presided over as bishop of Bayonne was the “visit” of Pierre de Lancre in 1609, who was responsible for a massive witch hunt and subsequent death of many of those accused of witchcraft.⁶ Another landmark in Etxauz's mandate was the foundation in 1611 of a Franciscan monastery between Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure.

His role in the development of Basque religious literature was important, as dedications in Basque books witness. The 1617 edition of Materra's catechism – the first book of the Counter-Reformation in Labourd, and the only one published when Etxauz was still bishop of Bayonne – is dedicated precisely to him. Materra says that Etxauz brought him to Labourd, and considers him the “foundation and source” of the book:

Eta arraçoifiaren eta çucenaren arauaz-ere ene euscarac bere lehenbico agurra eta eçagutça çuri eguin behar cerautçun, ceren nic hitzcuntça hunetan daquidan guztia çuri çor bai-terautçut: çure errana gatic, çuc esporçaturic, bihotz emanic, eta are egoiteco lekhua-ere çuc cerorrec Saraco herria seiñalaturic, daquidana han ikhassi bai-tut. (Materra 1617: 8)

[It is right that my Basque language be grateful to you, for I owe to you all I know in this language: because of your words, your effort and your encouragement, and also because you have indicated Sara to me as the place to stay, and all I know I learnt there.]

Eta hala, baldin ene enseiu hunec ohoreric edo laudorioric batere mereci ba-du, çuri dagotçu guehiena eta principalena, ceren çu içan bait-çara hunen cimendua eta ithur-burua. (Materra 1617: 9)

[And thus, if my effort deserves any esteem or praise, most of it corresponds to you, because you have been its foundation and source.]

6 Witches are mentioned in Materra's catechism, which is a clear reflection of the times. Interestingly, the fragment about them (it is said for instance that they are the worst kind of people in the world and that they deserve to be burnt) is one of the few passages that do not appear in the Bellarmine's catechism, which we think Materra used to prepare his book (see Section 3.2.2).

Etxauz is honoured also in one of the books by Etxeberri (*Eliçara erabiltceco liburua*, 1665 [1636]) and in Axular's *Gvero* (1643). According to Axular, all authors writing in Basque were indebted to Etxauz: "Cer ere esquiribatuco baita euscaraz, hura guztia euscaldunen buruçagui beçala, çuri dagotçula, çuri çor çaitçula" (1643: 9–10) [We owe you, as the leader of all Basque people, whatever will be written in Basque]. As Salaberri Muñoa (2002, 2016) demonstrates on the basis of paratexts, the image of Etxauz, similar to that of Axular, was mythologised, and he is often presented as the good shepherd of all Basques and ardent advocate of the Basque language.

However, dedications tended to idealise the addressee and made use of rhetorical conventions. The priority of Etxauz was to strengthen the Catholic Church, and Materra might be seen as just another element of this plan. In fact, Etxauz managed to gather a group of clerics – some of them involved in religious writing – who were committed to the cause of Catholic Reform (as explained in Section 2.2). It is possible that Etxauz himself was behind the idea of publishing the first Labourdin catechism. However, we cannot know whether Etxauz wanted to defend the Basque language or whether he resorted to Basque out of necessity, as bishops did in other parts of France where languages other than French were used. As Courouau explains:

Face à la dévalorisation symbolique dont sont victimes les langues de France, l'Eglise catholique, majoritaire dans le pays, et les hommes qui la servent offrent-ils un rempart? L'Etat ignore ces langues, mais, confrontée sur le terrain aux nécessités d'une évangélisation promue par le Concile de Trente, l'institution catholique ne peut, elle, agir comme si toute la population comprenait le latin ou le français. Elle doit composer avec une réalité linguistique que ne facilite pas la diffusion du message religieux et, pour autant qu'elle le désire, rechercher des solutions. (Courouau 2012: 159)

In order to produce well-behaved Christians, the Church needed an effective communication channel, and Labourd was predominantly a Basque-speaking territory at the time (except for some coastal Gascon towns). Even though mass was administered in Latin, preaching had to be done in Basque too. Printed texts in the vernacular language were the next step, and the role of bishops was crucial:

Dans ce contexte [largely Basque monolingual society], l'attitude adoptée par l'Evêché en matière linguistique prenait une grande importance, car c'est sur lui que reposait principalement la formation des esprits, et la surveillance de l'enseignement élémentaire dans les paroisses, lui même étroitement associé à la catéchèse. De fait, l'apparition d'une tradition écrite en langue basque était largement dépendante des choix linguistiques de l'évêché dans l'organisation de sa pastorale et l'élaboration de la littérature correspondante. (Oyharçabal 2001a: 226)

After Etxauz, later bishops pursued his efforts. For example, the 1623 edition of Materra's doctrine contains a dedication – this time in French, and not in Basque – to Claude de Rueil (bishop of Bayonne from 1621 to 1628), who continued to support Basque-language printing.

Thus, the flourishing of Labourdin literature can be linked to the language politics of the Church. To end this section, we would contend that its subsequent decline might be explained through the diminishing Church support. The peak period of publishing in Labourd was traditionally linked to a prosperous economy, and its decay to an economic downturn (Lafitte 1941; Michelena 1960; Sarasola 1976; Villasante 1961). The Treaty of Utrecht (1713–1715) was detrimental to fishing activities in Labourd, which in turn brought a decline in both the province's economy and culture. Oyharçabal (2001a), however, argues that this explanation cannot be maintained. The economic crisis began to have an impact after 1740, but the decline in literary production happened earlier, at the close of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Oyharçabal does not propose any alternative explanations.

We think that the key to understanding the reason for the decline in literary production is the change of attitude among the Church authorities towards Basque. Jean d'Olce (bishop of Bayonne between 1643 and 1681) was the last seventeenth-century senior Church figure to support Basque-language literature. He ordered a book entitled *Pregarioac* in 1651 and the doctrine by Silvain Pouvreau was dedicated to him. After that, two other books were published before the eighteenth century (Arambillaga's *Jesu Christoren imitacionea* in 1684, and Gazteluzar's *Eguia catholicac* in 1686). Both were printed with the bishop's (Gaspar de Priale) permission, but only Aranbillaga's book is dedicated to him. One example of this change in the authorities' attitude are the works of Joannes Etxeberri of Sare (1668–1749), including a textbook to learn Latin through Basque and a Basque-French-Spanish-Latin dictionary. They remained unpublished (and the dictionary perished), because the author did not manage to obtain help from the institutions (Bilbao 2006: 29–30).

Books continued to be printed in Basque in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were mostly new editions of older publications. Materra's doctrine is a case in point in that it was printed again in 1648, 1693 and 1704. There were various modifications in the text, but in most cases, the proportion of Latin to Basque grew (the 1617 edition was fully in Basque).

In conclusion, one could argue that the support of the Church and especially its bishops was crucial for Basque texts to be published. The usage of the local language was a consequence of the Church's strategy at that time.

3.2.2 Readers

Chartier (1987) claims that, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, despite low levels of literacy, written texts played a fundamental role in spreading cultural models. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, it is thus interesting to focus not only on the goals and genesis of Materra's book, but also on its readers.

The 1617 edition was written with schoolchildren in mind, which is unusual in Basque literature. Children are mentioned in one of the permissions, namely in that of Axular, who remarks that the book is worth being used by everyone, and by schoolchildren in particular. What was, then, the function of Materra's book? In the introduction, we find the following explanation: "Eta et-çait iduri asco dela cadiratic predicatuz probetchu eguitea eta eracustea, baiña are uste dut esquiribuz-ere behar dela enseiatu eta travaillatu" (Materra 1617: 13) [I do not think it is enough to preach from the altar, and I believe that we should also work through writing].

This idea is also found in the dedication to Etxauz, where Materra emphasises the importance of young Christians' education, and says that there were many clerics in the diocese teaching the doctrine, and that it could be helpful for them and their disciples to have a written catechism.

The sources that were used to prepare the doctrine are consistent with the type of public the book wanted to reach. Materra's book, though not exactly a translation, is not fully original either. It is an adaptation of the catechism for children by the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (Zuloaga et al. 2020). The source is not explicitly stated anywhere in the text, but numerous similarities with *Dottrina Christiana breve* (Bellarmine 1597), such as the order of topics and fragments which appear to be translations, indicate that Materra used Bellarmine's book as a base, which he then modified (e.g. adding a few parts inspired by *Dichiarazione piu copiosa della dottrina christiana*, a doctrine addressed to priests and more advanced users, also by Bellarmine (1598)). Bellarmine's doctrine was approved by Pope Clement VIII, and it quickly gained popularity in France (Dhotel 1967: 107). Francis de Sales, who praised Bellarmine's works and contributed to their esteem in France, translated *Dottrina Christiana breve* into French in 1601 (Courouau 2008: 60). Thus, Materra adapted a book aimed at children and popular in France at that time, which is just another element that places him within French culture.

The mention of schoolchildren raises the question of schooling and literacy. In the second half of the seventeenth century, there were *petites écoles* in the northern parts of the Basque Country (Oyharçabal 1999). Though run (and often paid for) by local communities, they were closely controlled by the Catholic Church. Their primary goal was to propagate the Catholic faith, mainly through memorisation of the catechism. Other matters, such as reading and writing, were subordinate to that objective:

The need that the *petites écoles* fulfilled was primarily religious and social. In the eighteenth century few parents believed that being able to write would bring great advantages to their children; thus, parents did not pay school fees with learning this skill in mind. (...) Instruction in religion was something that everyone needed, however, and for this reason parents were willing to send their children to *petites écoles* and pay their fees. In school children learned to read but primarily for religious purposes. (Carter 2011: 13)

For Protestants, schooling and literacy enabled people to read the Bible. Catholics acted differently, i.e. the first efforts in response to the Reformation were directed at the clergy and sought to improve their preparation (it is revealing that the first Catholic catechisms were written for priests). The crucial moment, as Chartier et al. (1976) argue, came when the Church shifted the focus towards lay people and their education, which is reflected in the proliferation of catechisms aimed at different levels of education, especially for the elementary levels.

As regards Basque doctrines, Oyharçabal (1999) shows that the earliest reference to Basque-language schools comes from the doctrine by Athanase Belapeire printed in 1696, which was intended to be used in the province of Soule. The discovery of the 1617 edition of Materra's doctrine provides evidence that elementary schooling in Basque existed in Labourd some 80 years earlier. We do not know how common such schools were, but it nevertheless seems that they had to be fairly important if a book was written with them in mind. The catechism contains almost no information of how teaching was to be conducted. Indeed, the only interesting fragment comes from one of the permissions, where the reader is advised to read the book and learn it by heart. Memorisation, as already mentioned, was fundamental in education at that time.

In the 1623 edition, all references to children were eliminated, and the catechism is presented as a book for a general Basque monolingual (but literate) public instead. In a part absent in the 1617 edition, a particular group of readers is adduced to – sailors. This is not that surprising if one considers that an important part of the society of Labourd worked in trades related to the sea. Materra claims, with little modesty, that no literate seamen will fail to buy his book. It seems that there was a need for a more “advanced” book in society, and this might be the reason for the changes made in the second edition. The first edition is fine for young readers, but the second is significantly more difficult (it includes rather complex prayers and a few parts are in Latin). Materra was not the only seventeenth-century Basque author to take sailors into account (Arcocha-Scarcia 1999, 2002), which reflects the importance of this group in the Labourdin society. Joannes Etxeberri, for example, included prayers for sailors in his *Manual devotioezcoa*. A Basque translation of a technical treaty for maritime pilots, one of very few non-religious Basque books of the period, was also published by Etxeberri Dorre in 1677.

3.2.3 The model and image of the language

Materra's book laid the foundations of Classical Labourdin, even though, almost certainly, it was not an objective that Materra himself pursued consciously. Apart from spreading the Christian doctrine, one of Materra's goals was to provide a model of how the Basque language should be written. At that time, there was no standard language norm, neither for the whole Basque language nor for the Labourdin dialect, for no one followed the linguistic model proposed by Leizarraga. Because of that, the language choice each author made and reasons for it were typically noted in the prefaces of books.

Materra, who was aware of dialectal diversity, opted for the language used in Sare. The reason might have been necessity (Salaberri Muñoa 2002: 79), since it was the only variety he knew, as he himself said in the preface of the catechism:

Gaiñeracoan, ba-daquit Euscal-Herrian anhitx moldez minçatcen direla, eta nori bere herrico euscara çaicala hoberenic eta ederrenic. Handic gogoac emaiten deraut, ene esquiribatceco molde haur etçaiela guztiei ongui idurituco. Baiña nahi dut iaquin deçaten halacoec nic hitzcunça hunetan daquidana Saran ikhassia dudala, eta hango euscara ongui erabiltcen ba-dut ez-naicela gaitz erraitceco, eta-ez arbuiatceco, ceren ez-pai-taquit nic hangoa baicen. Ordea ea Saraco euscara denz Euscal-Herrico hoberena eta garbiena, ez-naiz ni hartara sartcen, bat-bederac emanen du bere iduriric. Eta Saraco euscara hunetçaz content ez-tenac esquiriba beça bertce euscara hobeago batez eta hobequiago; ez-naiz ni hargatic bekhaiztuc, eta ez imbidios içanen. (Materra 1617: 14–15)

[I also know that people talk in different ways in the Basque Country, and everyone thinks that the Basque of their village is the best and the most beautiful. Because of that I suppose that not everyone will like my way of writing. But I would like them to know that it is in Sare where I have learnt all I know in this language, and if I use it well, I am not to be disapproved of or loathed, since I do not know anything else. Now, whether the Basque of Sare is the finest and purest, I will not deal with this matter, and everyone can have their opinion. And if someone is not pleased with this Basque of Sare, he is free to write in a better Basque and in a better way; I will not be angry or jealous because of that.]

Materra was the first Basque writer to explain that he picked the language variety of a certain place. Many authors followed Materra in this decision, and quite a few in the choice of the variety of Sare.⁷ These decisions, together with the fact that Axular, the most praised Basque author, was a parish priest in Sare, contributed to the idea that Sare was one of the most important centres of the Basque language. As put by Fishman (2006: 17), “As a result of the partial use of varieties of vernaculars for sanctified purposes, these varieties often come to be viewed as co-sanctified themselves”.

7 The dialect of Sare was studied by Schuchardt (1922) and, more recently, by Zuazo (2018).

Nevertheless, Materra's prefaces are highly conventional. Similar concerns related to the lack of standard language and the necessity to choose a language model can be found in prefaces by other Labourdin authors too, for example Etxeberri and Axular (and, more generally, in books printed in Europe at that time).

The language of Materra's book is hardly a transcription of the Basque spoken in Sare. The language model employed does not look like it was invented on the spot, for the purpose of this book. There are almost no traces of orality or features typical of writings by more inexperienced writers (which are common, for instance, in eighteenth-century private Labourdin letters; see Lamikiz et al. 2015). On the contrary, its spelling and word division is very consistent. There are no contractions or other reflections of pronunciation. Apart from that, the language used is rich, and even though the text is based on a catechism by Bellarmine, it does not have calques or odd constructions typical of many Basque translations or adaptations.

It seems that the language model (including spelling) that would come to be termed Classical Labourdin had already been established by the time the book was published. We might hypothesise that this model originated in the language used for teaching in Church, e.g. in sermons, and was later employed and further developed in writing (similar processes took place in other dialects). We thus find a standardised variety "especially reserved for religious activities and used for very little else, except perhaps as school subjects or literary and scholarly languages" (Fasold 1987: 77–78).

According to Salaberri Muñoa (2002: 79), even though it makes little sense to talk about seventeenth-century Labourdin writers as a "school" or "literary group", each author took previous ones as their departure point, and as a result, there was a certain homogeneity in the language and style. In the case of Materra, he did not have printed models, but he could have used the language that the religious community around Sare used (in speaking or in writing) as inspiration.

Materra explained in the preface that his goal was not only to spread faith but also to show how to write and read in Basque: "(...) ikhus dadin laburzqui cer-ere sinhetsi, obratu eta escatu behar bai-ta, eta guero ikhus dadin, halaber, nola eta cer moldez behar den euscara esquiribatu eta iracurtu" (Materra 1617: 13–14) [(...) so that it is clear what to believe, what to do and what to ask for, and also how and in what manner Basque should be written and read].

It appears that Materra did influence the successive Labourdin authors. The next Basque book published after Materra was *Manual devotionezcoa* by Etxeberri (Bordeaux, 1627); thus, for 10 years Materra's two catechisms were the only Basque texts available for monolingual readers. The impact that Materra's doctrine had can be measured in two ways: on the one hand, by the number of editions it had, and, on the other, by the number of subsequent authors that used his text.

Passages more or less literally copied can be found in Haranburu (1635, Salaberri Muñoa 2013), Argaiñaratz (1665) and also in the Souletin doctrine by Belapeire (1696, Agirre 1998). Less obvious influence can also be found in Axular. Salaberri Muñoa (2001) points out numerous similarities in the introductions of Axular's *Gvero* and Materra's catechism.

As regards the image of language, we have little information about the status and perception of Basque in early seventeenth-century. In Materra's book, the choice of Basque is not explained (maybe such decisions did not require any justification at that time?).

We find indications of conscious language choice in the works of several authors. The best example is Etxeberri, who explained that he wrote his *Manual devotonezcoa* (1627) in Basque because it was his mother tongue, but he also affirmed that the king of France should protect linguistic diversity. In the dedication to the bishop of Bayonne (C. de Rueil), he mentioned potential critics of the book, and Oyharçabal (2001b) argues that it is a reference to a language conflict. In the 1630s, Haranburu in his *Devocino escuarra* (1635) affirmed that some people would criticise his language choice. According to Oyharçabal (2001b: 211), "Dans cette interprétation, nous trouvons un nouvel écho, huit ans après la publication du *Manuel*, de l'existence d'un courant de pensée hostile sinon à la langue basque, du moins à sa libre utilisation dans les textes de doctrine religieuse". In a similar way to other regions in France (see Courouau 2012: 178–183), some priests did not consider it appropriate to employ Basque in religious matters, and preferred French.

We can draw several general conclusions about the place of Basque and its image among seventeenth-century Labourdin writers and clergymen. Taking into account the sociocultural context and the nature of books printed, it is clear that the main objective which the authors had was not to promote Basque, but rather to spread ideas related to religion. However, the choice of means to achieve that led to the elaboration of the language and to an increase of its prestige. The paratexts mentioned above clearly show that the authors consciously chose Basque – with the support of religious authorities – as the vehicle to disseminate religious ideas. Basque was necessary for that task because a large proportion of the population was monolingual Basque speaking. Some writers had a higher level of linguistic consciousness, and, aside from practical reasons, they also give sociolinguistic explanations to motivate their choice of language. Labourdin writers, then, exhibited a linguistic consciousness not found very often in seventeenth-century France: "(...) le degré de conscience linguistique et sociolinguistique des écrivains religieux basques, pour ce qu'on en connaît à travers ce qu'ils nous donnent à lire, paraît largement supérieur à celui dont font preuve les auteurs d'expression occitane – et *a fortiori* bretonne – dans les parties correspondantes de leurs œuvres (dédicaces, prologues)" (Courouau 2012: 201–202).

4 Conclusions

In this paper, we focussed on the history of Basque in the context of major cultural developments of seventeenth-century France. Our goal has been to analyse the influence of religious movements on local languages such as Basque, showing that the study of the connections between the language and religion can bring significant progress to historical sociolinguistics. With the example of the Basque catechism by E. Materra, we have reflected on three issues, i.e. the attitude and language policy of the French Church towards Basque, the reader for whom Basque books were written and the language model used.

We have concluded that the institutional support of the French Church was crucial for the development of religious literature in the Northern Basque Country in the seventeenth century. Materra's *Doctrina Christiana* (1617) was the first milestone of Counter-Reformation writing. The paratexts of this book and others published thereafter make it clear that the bishops not only accepted the use of Basque in printing, but, until the late seventeenth century, they also actively encouraged it. There were three main reasons for the Church's attitude towards Basque:

- i) Apart from urban Gascon speakers, most inhabitants of the Basque Country were Basque monolinguals. Thus, the Church needed Basque in order to reach this group of people.
- ii) The linguistic distance between Basque and the Romance languages is greater than that between different Romance languages (e.g. Occitan and French).
- iii) There were native Basque-speaking priests who had a positive attitude towards Basque, and who were aware of the sociolinguistic situation of the Basque Country explained in i) and ii) above.

In our view, the diminishing interest of the Church authorities brought about the decline in Labourdin religious literature. From 1650 on, less original works were published, though new editions of older books continued to be printed. One could argue that the works printed until then were enough for the task that the Church was interested in, notably the reinforcement of the Catholic faith. Apart from that, Latin gained prominence in some books, e.g. in subsequent editions of Materra's catechism. Moreover, in late seventeenth-century publications we do not find dedications to a bishop so often. Finally, French was gaining strength at that time, especially among the higher social strata.

Materra's doctrine has to be placed within the context of French religious culture, and its main source was a catechism by the Italian Jesuit Bellarmine, widely used in France at that time. The comparison of paratexts from the two

editions (1617 and 1623) reveals a change of focus from children to the general public. It also provides some information about the level of literacy and schooling in Basque. The first edition was prepared with schoolchildren in mind, and this makes us think that there were already some small basic level schools (the so-called *petites écoles*) in Labourd in the early seventeenth century. The next edition was aimed at Basque literate monolinguals, among whom sailors have a special mention in the book. This shows that part of the society knew how to read, and, even more importantly, they knew how to read in Basque.

Our analysis confirms that the influence of French came late to the Northern Basque Country, and in the seventeenth century, Basque was still the most important language (apart from Gascon-speaking towns). Basque was the language of basic level schooling, and it was the language in which ideas were spread among the population. However, Basque was not standardised at that time, and until the twentieth century, writers used local dialects as the basis for the written language. The Labourdin literary dialect was the first of such models, and was also the most prestigious one. Materra's catechism was the first example of this model in print, but there are reasons to think that the language model employed in the book was not created by Materra himself. Rather, it was in use at the time by a community of clergymen in their work, and then further elaborated and standardised to some extent when books began to be printed in Basque.

This paper corroborates one of the fundamental principles of historical sociolinguistics. Rather than treating them as parts of decontextualised linguistic history, writers and their works have to be analysed within the correct historical and sociolinguistic context. We have shown that macrosociolinguistic variables can be helpful in gaining new data on texts and authors. At the same time, more thorough knowledge about sources and authors allows us to reconstruct the historical sociolinguistic situation more accurately.

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