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# Basque Standardization and the New Speaker: Political Praxis and the Shifting Dynamics of Authority and Value.

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# Standardizing Minority Languages

Competing Ideologies  
of Authority and Authenticity  
in the Global Periphery

Edited by Pia Lane, James Costa,  
and Haley De Korne



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## 2 Basque Standardization and the New Speaker

### Political Praxis and the Shifting Dynamics of Authority and Value

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#### 1. Introduction

In his classic essay "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language," sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1991) argued that notions of what constitutes proper or good language are intimately tied to hierarchies of class and institutional power. Taking France as his case, he argued that the greater or lesser prestige that official French enjoys derives not from the properties of the language itself but from social factors: the class status and political power of its speakers. Similarly, he insisted that the forging and spread of a standard variety—often ideologically closely associated with "proper language"—is a function of socioeconomic processes, including nation-state building, the spread of a unified state administration, civil service, mass education, and an increasingly unified economic market that demand uniformity and reward those who possess this linguistic capital.

Bourdieu's work paved the way for theorizing about how ideological structures of linguistic value (e.g., attributions of prestige, authority, rationality) are tied to social structure. His work invited us to think about the convertibility of linguistic, economic, and social capital. While his theorizations served well to give a political economic grounding to the denigration of the "patois" of rural peasants, they have proven insufficient for those of us attempting to explain the complex dynamics of value and authority that arise in the context of minority language movements. Such language movements and their related policies generate new pathways of language acquisition, alternate linguistic markets, corpus reforms, and modes of disseminating them that can sometimes have very different sociopolitical origins and institutional presence than those we find for majority language standards. The result may give rise to paradoxical effects that do not reproduce in any simple way standardization dynamics that we find for state-endorsed majority languages.

This chapter advances this argument via an analysis of the results of a study we have conducted of attitudes of Basque language speakers towards standard Basque some 50 years after its introduction. Our data is drawn

from the Basque Autonomous Community (henceforth BAC) of Spain, where language standardization has coincided with Basque social "normalization," that is, the project of expanding the knowledge and public use of Basque. We begin providing a brief history of how standard Basque, commonly known as *Euskara Batua*, or simply *Batua*, was created and provided the basic features of the empirical study of language attitudes we conducted with individuals who have been schooled only in standard Basque. We draw on Kathryn Woolard's (2008) formulation of the sources of linguistic authority as well as notions of enregisterment (Agha 2005; 2007) as conceptual tools for making sense of the shifting dynamics of value in contexts of revitalization. Our chapter then analyzes some key extracts from our data that illuminate how this particular group of "new" Basque language users characterize and attribute value to the standard Basque they learned in school and the vernacular Basque they often hear spoken among native speakers. Our findings show that while these new speakers report the utility of knowing standard Basque, they do not attribute greater prestige to it nor feel that it gives them greater authority over vernacular speakers.

The still-limited institutional presence and socioeconomic rewards of standard Basque may partly account for these results. However, we will argue that the attitudes new speakers have towards standard Basque and its relatively "weak" authority may come not just from the as yet incomplete process of normalization. It may also be a function of the participatory nature of the grassroots language movement that socialized and supported standardization. Our argument, in short, is that the Basque case suggests that political praxis—the sociopolitical processes by which language reforms are enacted—can be a contributing factor in determining the social effects and reception of standardization. Basque language standardization and revival has benefitted from a populist approach involving broad social participation and debate that has tempered some of the de-authorization of vernacular that standardization has been known to provoke in other language revival contexts.

#### 2. Basque Language Standardization

The standardization of Basque is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of its known history, Basque was primarily a spoken language characterized by significant dialectal variation (Zuazo 2013). In their review of Basque standardization, Hualde and Zuazo (2007) note that standardization comes late because the social forces that would impel the development and spread of a unified form were very weak. Basque or Euskara speakers are spread across the provinces of what is today northern Spain and southwestern France. Basque is a linguistic isolate and unlike neighboring minority languages, such as Catalan and Galician, it is neither related to French or Spanish, nor did it have a literary tradition comparable to these other languages. The elites of the Kingdom of Navarre that ruled for eight centuries

over this territory (816–1620) never adopted Basque as the language of the court. A modest amount of writing in Basque began to appear in the sixteenth century, mostly for religious indoctrination. Authors tended to write in the dialect of the region where they lived, using the Roman alphabet and borrowing words and spellings from one another in an effort to make their texts legible to as many readers as possible.

We find no evidence that this state of affairs presented any great anxiety until the late nineteenth century, when modernizing reformers and nationalist elites turned the status of Basque into a focus of attention and made both its declining use and “unregulated” nature into a problem. The growing movement for schooling in Basque, industrial expansion, and possible state-building on the horizon all made the standardization of Basque appear an inherent part of becoming a modern and rationalized nation (Urla 2012a). While a Basque Language Academy was formed in 1918 and given the task of standardization, the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and dictatorship interrupted these efforts for many years. A common orthography was only successfully accepted in 1964. Four years later, in 1968, the Academy voted to begin work on developing guidelines for standardizing various aspects of the grammar (e.g. verbal morphology, declensions, syntax). The task was entrusted to the respected linguist and member of the Academy, Koldo Mitxelena. Rather than picking an existing variety as the new norm, Mitxelena and the Academicians opted for building an amalgamated standard to be known as *Euskara Batua* (Unified Basque). Unified Basque drew heavily on the central dialects, but at the time of its creation, the standard “was nobody’s spoken language” (Hualde and Zuazo 2007, 152). What Batua had behind it—and this is a critical fact to which we shall return—was not the economic or social capital of a group of existing speakers, but a grassroots Basque schooling and adult literacy movement that was its advocate and early vehicle for dissemination. It would become emblematic of the national language reclamation movement and the new speaker in particular.

### 3. New Speakers

We use the term “new speaker” following O’Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo (2015) to refer to individuals who have learned a language by means other than family transmission, typically, though not exclusively, through some mode of formal education.<sup>2</sup> New speakers are an especially interesting group to consider when it comes to social effects of standardization in the BAC. First, because they constitute the majority of younger Basque speakers today and second, because their formal schooling has been overwhelmingly in the newly created standard Basque. Their attitudes and language habits are of key concern to revitalization efforts because in many ways they have become the demographic future of the Basque-speaking population.

In 2011, we launched the *Euskal Hiztun Berriak*—New Basque Speakers—research project. This is the first attempt to do a systematic qualitative study

of the language attitudes, educational experiences, and habits of language use among individuals who have learned Basque by means other than family transmission. Our aim was to develop a typology or set of profiles for new speakers, assess whether they had become the active speakers that the revival movement had hoped to produce, and to try to identify the factors that seemed to facilitate or hinder their process of becoming regular speakers of Basque. Relative to the other territories in France and Spain with Basque speakers, the BAC has been the most proactive in Basque language revival.<sup>3</sup> It was the focus of the most vigorous early mobilizations on behalf of Basque language schooling, and subsequently has provided the greatest funding and institutional support for incorporating Basque into public education, media and public administration.

These efforts have resulted in a significant turn-around in what had been until then a steady process of language shift. At the time of Franco’s death in 1975, Basque language speakers in the BAC hovered at barely a quarter of the population. Today, that percentage of the population is closer to 36.4%, with another 19.3% who describe themselves as “passive bilinguals,” that is, able to understand (but not speak) Basque well (Basque Government 2013). Aside from the increased competency in Basque, the introduction of Basque into the educational system from the 1980s onward has changed the demographic profile of the Basque speaking population in two salient ways. First, if 30 years ago the prototypical Basque speaker was an elderly person living in a rural or coastal fishing village, today more and more Basque speakers are young people living in urban areas. Secondly, recent government surveys show that in the last 20 years, people who have learned Basque outside the home have come to outnumber native speakers among youth in the 16–24 year old age group (Basque Government 2012).

For our research, we conducted focus group discussions and individual interviews with people who have successfully learned Basque outside the home and have enough competency to carry out a conversation in it.<sup>4</sup> In the design of the project, we looked to assemble focus groups with a cross section of people of different age groups who could represent the diversity of sociolinguistic environments in which new speakers experience Basque as well as the different kinds of learning pathways available. Thus, we had people from cities where very little Basque is spoken in public life and others who live in towns where speaking Basque is a common part of everyday life.

Understanding attitudes towards standard Basque was not one of our intended research questions. However, in the course of focus group discussions and interviews, we encountered a significant amount of explicit commentary on unified and vernacular or spoken Basque that we analyze below. Two features stand out. First, that mastery of vernacular seemed to be a more relevant factor in shaping new speaker’s success in transitioning into active speakers than language planners had anticipated. Second, that standard Basque was not seen by these participants as superior or more authoritative than vernacular. In order to make sense of this data,

we begin by laying out the conceptual tools we will be using for analyzing linguistic value

#### 4. Anonymity and Authenticity in New Speaker Repertoires

In approaching questions of the value and prestige of standards in situations of language recovery, we have found the theoretical framework of Kathryn Woolard (2008) to be highly useful.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to Bourdieu's depiction of language prestige or authority organized along a single gradient—from low to high—Woolard has argued that linguistic varieties are attributed respect and authority on the basis of two competing axes or sets of qualities that she describes as anonymity and authenticity (see also Gal, this volume). By anonymity, she refers to characterizations of speech forms that ground themselves in the affirmation of indexical neutrality. They are not seen to point to any particular social class or group. Deracinated, they are presented as belonging to everyone and no one in particular. Authenticity, by contrast, can also be grounds on which a variety enjoys authority or value. However in this case, that authority is grounded precisely on being perceived as particular, the “genuine” voice of a specific group of people and place (2008, 2). How particular varieties come to be attributed values of anonymity or authenticity, notes Woolard, is very much conditioned by histories of power. State-supported “official” languages or varieties often tend to be attributed values of anonymity. They are regarded as the language of the whole nation, the broader public. Their historical origins in the speech forms of particular ethnic, class, or racial groups are under at least some degree of erasure, although not necessarily uncontested. It is not that minoritized languages are without value. Indeed, they may abound with authenticating value. But they are typically seen as overly “specific” and unsuitable candidates for official, public, or institutional use.

Woolard suggests that one way to understand many minority language movements of the twentieth century is as mass-scale efforts to change this structure of valuation. This is certainly true for the Basque case. While nationalist ideology shores up the idea of Basque as the original or authentic language of the Basque people, language revival efforts since the twentieth century have aimed not simply to preserve Basque, as a kind of museum relic, but to authorize it as a legitimately public language, gaining presence in those arenas previously dominated exclusively by Spanish: official communications, civic life, publishing, and education. Indeed, language advocates argued that without this, the future of Basque would be at risk.

Basque and other minority language advocates in Spain have tended to describe their efforts at language reclamation as language *normalization*. While a certain amount of ambiguity surrounds exactly what normalization means, the aim is not—despite the repeated accusations of critics—monolingualism, but rather, to arrive at a situation where the use of the

minoritized language would become possible and unremarkable in any and all spheres of social life—public as well as private. The term *normalization* is especially interesting for the way the verb “to normalize” semantically links the making of “norms” and the project of becoming “normal” (Urla 2012a, 83–84). As Michael Silverstein (1996) has observed, the presumption of a common set of shared norms is foundational to European language ideology and what it means to be a “real,” “modern,” or “public” language. Silverstein describes this “ideology of monoglot standard” as a fundamentally intertwined with notions of the modern nation-state. It is understandable, then, that Basque language advocates concerned with modernizing and institutional-building would see standardization as a necessary strategy for Basque to gain legitimacy as a viable public language (Gal 2006). Standards thus have a multivalent role. They are seen as evidence that a language is indeed a “language,” both rationalized and unitary. And they are also regarded as the instrument for achieving these goals.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, what Woolard describes as an ideological restructuring of values, and what Basque advocates call *normalization*, are deliberate efforts to intervene on the enregisterment of the minority language. As defined by Agha (2005; 2007) enregisterment refers to the processes by which linguistic varieties or repertoires come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as emblematic of particular kinds of social actors, relationships, or practices. Some repertoires may actually be named and recognized as belonging to very particular communities of speakers (e.g. lawyerese, gangbanger talk, Valley Girl talk), while others may go unnamed. Registers, as Agha notes, are culturally shaped models that link a repertoire of speech forms with “particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices” (2007, 24). These models, as he is keen to note, are responsive to the social environment and changes in it. As such, registers are not a fixed set of equations but rather historically changing, living formations that depend upon dissemination and reproduction through communicative processes in everyday life and normative institutions (Agha 2007, 38). As the social domains of use and users change, as a variety becomes adopted into new contexts or social institutions, one can expect enregisterment to also shift. So too, one can expect shifts, says Agha, in the alignment or “footing” that speakers take towards the personae that speech forms are seen to conjure (Agha 2005).

The dynamism of enregisterment as an evolving symbolic process is part of what makes it useful for analyzing processes of minority language recovery. Approaching the enregisterment of standard Basque as an historically rooted process shaped by multiple sociopolitical factors, including the changing demographics of new speakers, its gradual institutionalization, as well as the particular political values and democratic praxis of the language revival movement as a whole will help us to better understand how and why it has the social status it has, and also why it has not replicated the hierarchical effects so often associated with standardization. While it may be true, as

sociolinguists often point out, that minority language advocacy reproduces the monoglot ideals of dominant language ideology, the Basque case shows that outcomes are shaped by more than ideology. Civic engagement and the modes by which language advocacy is undertaken can be consequential for the social effects of standardization.

### 5. The Enregisterment of *Batua* and Vernacular

We turn now from theorizations about value as it relates to standards and registers to the data collected through our new speaker focus groups. Here our key questions are: what insights can the metalinguistic commentary and narrated experiences of new speakers give us into the contemporary enregisterment of standardized and vernacular Basque? How are values of authenticity and anonymity manifest in their evaluations of *Batua* and vernacular Basque? Has Basque—standard or otherwise—achieved the status of an unmarked, deracinated public language?

Our focus group discussions showed us that new speakers recognized either in a general way or from personal experience, that knowledge of standard Basque has instrumental value for accessing the particular labor markets and forms of media: careers in education, local civil service, newspaper, radio, and television. No one contested the necessity of a standard for Basque society, and some explicitly affirmed it. But none described standard Basque as being more correct or proper Basque. Although this was not a frequent complaint, a few participants recounted being told that *Batua* was artificial or “not really Basque.” Many described it as best reserved for reading and writing or the media, but not for everyday spoken communication.

One of the most interesting findings was the decidedly strong interest in speaking what some of our participants called “local Basque” [*bertako euskera*] or “everyday Basque” [*eguneroko euskera*]. This was made quite explicit in statements like the following by a young university student who studied in Basque since early childhood and at the time was living in a highly Spanish-speaking area of Greater Bilbao.

- (1) [Niri gustratuko litzaidake] leku bateko euskeraz egitea, lagunekin egunero euskeraz egitea, ba lotsarik gabe euskeraz egitea.  
(Gazte-BI-E, 317)

[I would like to] speak a Basque from somewhere, speak Basque everyday with my friends, speak in Basque without feeling embarrassed.

This feeling was more acute, as we might expect, among new speakers who lived in areas with large numbers of Basque speakers and came into daily interaction with native speakers. The latter tend overwhelmingly to speak in local vernacular. The next two excerpts from individuals living

in towns where Basque-speaking is commonplace illustrate this further. Excerpt (2) is by an older man living in the town of Arrati.

- (2) Bueno, gero ba kalekoa ikasi behar, claro, ze hango euskeragaz hemen Arratien, ba bueno, txokantea da, ezta? Egia da, ikasten dozuna euskalgietan gero erabiltzeko, ba bueno, esparru hau ez da igual egokiena, beraz, ba bueno, kalekoa, eta bueno, ba horretarako be nahiko laguntza nuen ba lagunengandik, ez?  
(ZEA-D 10)

Well, then you have to study street [Basque], of course, since here in Arratia, well, [*Batua*] is shocking, you know? The truth is that what you learn in the language school is not the right thing to use here, so, yes, [you need] the street [Basque] and for that I had a lot of help from my friends, you know?

This next comment is from a middle-aged schoolteacher who is recounting his experience teaching in the highly Basque-speaking town of Gernika. Note here that another participant [BI-A, 173] interjects, affirming that the schoolteacher is well received by locals because he can speak in vernacular (“because you do not speak in *Batua*”). The moderator of the group then asks him if he considers himself an *euskaldunberri*, a commonly used term for new speakers.

- (3) Urte asko emon dodaz, esan bezala, Gernika, Gernika inguruan, eta gero Lea-Artibaitik, eta lana dela-eta, eta nik ikusi dot be bai hangoen erreakzioa, eta hainbatetan harritu egiten dira jakitean euskaldun berririx nazela [...] igual berba eitzeko era, edo ez dakit, ez dakit [...] Izan leike doinua, izan leike hiztegia ...  
(BI-C, 166 / 170 / 172)

—Batueraz ez duzulako egiten.

(BI-A, 173)

—Gernikeraz egiten, edo ... ni pozik, pozik eta harro.

(BI-C, 176)

—Eta zuk zure burua euskaldunberritzat daukazu edo etapa hori ja ...?  
(BI-M1)

—Euskalduntzat, ez barrixe, ez zaharra, ez.

(BI-C, 180)

—[I have worked a lot, first in Gernika, then in Lea-Artibai, and I have seen the reaction of the people there, how they could not believe I was

a *euskaldunberri* [...] Perhaps because of the way I speak [...] it could be the pronunciation, could be the vocabulary I use ...

—It's because you don't speak in *Batua*.

(BI-A, 173)

—I speak the Gernika way [...]. And I felt happy, happy and proud.

—Moderator: And do you see yourself as an *euskaldunberri*?

—As an *euskaldun* [Basque speaker] neither new nor native.

For new speakers who live in areas where native speakers are in abundance, acquiring some familiarity with the informal and vernacular speech forms was clearly attractive. And indeed, close to half of the new speakers in our focus groups (46%) said they could speak in a local variety of Basque. Among those who lived in areas where Basque speakers made up 60% of the population or more, this figure was 84%. On numerous occasions participants' comments recounted their process of acquiring fluency in vernacular as a particular point of pride and pleasure. The teacher (BI-C) quoted above was not the only participant for whom a command of vernacular had authenticating value as demonstrated by his choice to leave behind the label "new speaker."<sup>6</sup>

In a more in-depth interview conducted in Spanish, another subject, a middle-aged carpenter, explained that for him, learning Basque was an achievement of which he was proud. But that learning vernacular made him feel he had crossed a significant social barrier and that he now experienced a stronger identification with Basque. We seem him struggling a bit with the existing categories of speakerhood. Is he a native speaker? He does not seem to feel he has the right to claim nativeness, and like the above speaker, he signals his new status by calling himself simply a Basque speaker [*euskaldun*].<sup>7</sup>

(4) —Yo me siento *euskaldun*, entonces, de ahí para adelante. Y luego, pues para mí, pues igual ser *euskaldunberri* es una medalla en un momento dado, porque me lo he trabajado yo, o sea, me lo he currado yo y es algo que lo he conseguido yo. Es simplemente parte de ... es un proceso, ¿no? *Euskaldun* zaharra tampoco, porque sabes que no eres ... Pero en un momento dado yo igual me metería más, o me gustaría más, o yo igual, a mí mismo ... sin igual decir a nadie ... igual sí me metería en el saco de los *euskaldun* zaharras, porque hablo más como un *euskaldun* zaharra.

I feel like a Basque speaker [*euskaldun*], at least that, if not more. Then, the way I see it, to be a new speaker [*euskaldunberri*] may have been a medal at a certain moment in time, because I worked for it and it's something I myself achieved. But it's just part of a process, isn't it? Native speaker [*euskaldunzaharra*], I'm not that either, because you know

you are not that ... But at times I would include myself ... or I'd like to ... without telling anyone ... because I speak more like a native speaker [*euskaldunzaharra*].

Our data show us that in contrast to the above participant, some new speakers feel themselves to be what William Labov (1973) called a "lame." In his seminal study of urban African-American vernacular, Labov borrowed the term "lame" from the adolescent street culture he was studying—to refer to individuals who lacked fluency in the vernacular forms of their peer group. In the case of Basque language normalization, new speakers' "lameeness" may refer both to knowledge of dialectal forms (e.g. grammatical features, phonology), lexicon, as well as informal register markers that are used as one participant said, "in the street." Lameeness is a structural outcome produced by the reliance on language learning through schooling—which teaches standard Basque—and the uneven sociolinguistic context that makes it such that many of the people studying Basque may not have many sustained extra curricular occasions to interact with vernacular speakers in Basque informally. As a result, some new speakers, particularly those living in areas with low density of Basque speakers, do not acquire a local dialect, if there is one, and/or will comment that they do not feel competent in informal registers necessary for everyday talk.<sup>8</sup>

The differences between standard Basque and local vernacular may certainly present some problems of intelligibility. Verbal morphology for standard Basque, and the Bizkaian dialect in particular, can be markedly different. The use of contractions or allocutive pronouns in some regions can also be challenging. But it is our sense that once basic grammatical knowledge is acquired, problems for interactions between native and new speakers may be more related to register mismatch. New speakers have indeed learned "Basque" (i.e. *Batua*) but not the variety that is habitually used in informal Basque-speaking social networks. Our data suggests that opportunities for socialization in Basque-speaking networks and the familiarity with vernacular ways of speaking it engenders may be a more relevant factor in shaping new speakers' success in transitioning into active speakers than language planners have heretofore anticipated.

The experiences narrated by new Basque speakers show how language normalization can ironically run afoul of its goals to facilitate new and native speaker integration when policies are framed in terms of "languages" as if these were homogenous entities. Despite the long-standing commitment of the language movement to a "communication"-based approach to language teaching, it has remained tied to a vision of itself as the recovery of a "language" more than speakers. From a speaker-centered point of view, registers are a vital element of how languages are lived. As Agha (2007) explains, we become acquainted with registers through socialization via explicit instruction, implicit modeling, and meta-linguistic commentary that continues over the course of a lifetime, first in the family, then peer groups, and continuing on via the kinds of work and social groups in which



we participate. The range of registers a person is able to use, recognize, and interpret bears the traces of his or her life trajectory. The existence of registers is one of the ways that speech forms are instrumental in producing and reproducing meaningful social boundaries. "Once acquired, proficiency in the register functions as a tacit emblem of group membership" (Agha 2007, 29). At the same time, Agha underscores that the indexical properties of speech forms are "open systems" susceptible to reanalysis, revalorization, and change. These are points to bear in mind as we seek to understand the impact standardization has had on the linguistic ecology of Basque as a whole and its relative position vis a vis vernacular in particular.

## 6. The Ironies of Anonymity

"The paradox of language normalization campaigns," writes Woolard, "is that they are marked efforts to make the language the unmarked choice" (2008, 14). And so we might ask, have the truly impressive efforts in Basque education and normalization efforts succeeded at this? What role has standardization played in this?

Our focus group data admittedly cannot fully answer this question, but it does seem to point to the fact that standardization has produced a variety more aligned with values of anonymity. *Batua* operates as a deracinated and denicized code available to anyone anywhere regardless of their heritage or identification with *euskaldun* [Basque-speaking] culture. But perhaps what is more interesting is that the discussions of new speakers showed that becoming an "unmarked" language is not without its complexities for minoritized language speakers. New speakers in our study, particularly those living in predominantly Spanish-speaking areas, were keenly aware that speaking in Basque, regardless of variety, does not have the status of what Woolard calls "the anonymous invisibility of 'just talk'" (Woolard 2008, 13). The following excerpt makes clear that some of our college-aged new speakers felt that language choice remains marked in many contexts and frequently weighted with political meaning.

- (8) Nik usre be bai, euskalduna izatea, euskaldun, euskaldun izatea azke-  
nean ba politikari erlazioarekin e bai, o sea, lotzen da.  
(Gazte-Do-C, 359)

I think that, yes, to be a Basque speaker [. . .] is, in the end, it gets tied to politics.

- (9) —Eske badago igual ikuspegi bat hor, horrelako ikuspegi bat, hemen ez dakit, igual ez herri txikietan edo horrelako leku batean, baina Algorta edo Bilbo hurbileko herri batean ba bai, ia-ia, pues ez dakit, erronka bat . . .  
(Gazte-GE-B, 469)

—Bai, militantzia bat.

(Gazte-GE-D, 470)

- . . . militantzia bat al euskera, ez dakit, como reciclar, ez dakit, zer-baiten, casi casi zerbaitean aurka ari zarela euskara egiteagatik . . .  
(Gazte-GE-B, 471)

—Its just that here there is this idea, maybe you would not find it in small villages or those kind of places, but in Algorta or in Bilbao [places where Basque is less commonly spoken], it's a challenge . . .

—Yes, a militancy.

— . . . a Basque militancy, I don't know . . . it's almost like being against something just because you speak Basque . . .

As this comment suggests, part of the obstacle to becoming "just talk" arises in sociolinguistic contexts where there are few Basque speakers.<sup>9</sup> Language choice becomes militancy under such conditions. But another factor to consider pointed to in our data is the history of language advocacy. It has been a mainstay of the language movement to promote a socio-political understanding of linguistic practice and a sense of ethical duty towards the language. One of the most well-known slogans of the language movement encapsulates this view well: "A language is not lost because those who do not know it, do not learn it, but because those who do know it, do not use it." The topic of whether or not a person should feel a responsibility to speak Basque in everyday life generated animated discussion among some of our new speakers and marked a difference between the older new speakers that had intentionally chosen to learn Basque, and younger generations who had been immersion-schooled. The former were more likely to have a more political understanding of language choice and describe their motivations to learn Basque as coming from a deliberate commitment [*konpromisoa*] and conscious effort [*ahalegina*] to counter the marginalization of Basque. By contrast, for the younger new speakers, access to Basque is a given. They see that their classmates and friends all know Basque, and at least in this phase of their life, while they are still in educational settings, they may not experience Basque as socially marginalized. Such was the case for one of our younger, immersion-schooled participants who adamantly rejected the idea that she should feel any special obligation to speak Basque.

The following exchange between participants "D" and "A" in our Bilbao focus group gives a sense of the contrasting views.

- (10) —Jo, noizbait, gainera komentatu dut noizbait lagun batekin, errudun sentitzen garela euskara baztertu izanagatik, askotan, ezta? [. . .]  
Bartzutan errudun sentiten gara, badakigulako, ikusten dogulako no-labait beharbada galdu daitekeela, eta ez dogulako zera bat egiten, esfortzu bat egiten mantentzeko, ezta?  
(B11-D, 234)



—Ba begira, ni horren . . . osea, por seguir en la línea de eso que acabas de comentar, niri, osea, nik ez dut faltan botatzen, baina gustatzen ez zaidana da batzuek pentsatzea ni erredun sentitu beharko nintza-tekeela euskeraz ez egiteagatik. Horrek, nik berdin-berdin lo egiten det e, baina . . . eta gainera ez naiz txarto sentitzen ez egiteagatik, ez, egiten dut . . . euskeraz egiten ez dudanean ba erabaki hori hartu dudalako da. Eta neri gustatzen ez zaidana da batzuk ni kriminalizatzea era batean edo bestean, ez dakit, bai . . . Barkatu, baña nere hizkuntza, osea, nik hizkuntzaren erabilera nerea da eta nik erabiltzen dut nahi dudanean, nahi dudana moduan. Eta horrek bai fastidiatzen nau.

(BI-A, 235)

—Bueno, nik esan dudana, neure kasuan behintzat, erreduntasun sentimendu hori ez datorkit kanpotik, baizik eta barrutik . . .

(BI-D, 236)

“D”—I’ve sometimes discussed this with my friends, that we feel guilty for having abandoned Basque, in many occasions . . . We feel guilty sometimes because we know, because we can see that Basque could disappear and because we do nothing to help maintain it.

“A”—You know what? [. . .] what bothers me is that some people think I should feel guilty for not using Basque. Well, I don’t lose sleep over that, and besides I don’t feel guilty for not using it, well, I do use it . . . but when I don’t, it is because I have decided not to. I don’t want people to criminalize me in one way or another . . . Excuse me, but my language, the use I make of the language is mine and I use it whenever I want it and the way I want it. And, yes, that really annoys me.

“D”—Well, what I am saying, in my case at least, that guilty feeling isn’t imposed by others, it comes from within . . .

On the other hand, an older person in the same focus group who learned Basque as an adult thinks that this sense of social responsibility towards language revival continues to be important.

(11) Baña ulertzen duzu esaten dudana da, militantismo puntu hori ez badugula mantentzen, ez badugula mantentzen jai daukagula, eta zuek, ni hor, ez dakit, guk ikusi dugu, nik behintzat ikusi dut aha!egin ikaragarri egin dugula gure adinekoak, eta gure seme-alabek aukera daukate biak egiteko eta . . . bueno ba, hatak egingo dute aurre edo ixo.

(BI-E, 88)

But what I say is that if we don’t keep the activism then we are lost . . . I don’t know, we’ve seen that, at least I’ve seen that people of our age have

done a big effort and now our children have the choice to speak both and . . . well, it will be in their hands whether this goes forward or dies out.

The positions we see articulated in this exchange demonstrate some of the ironies or tensions that surround the acquisition of values of anonymity for a minoritized language. For participant “A,” Basque is, and should be, an unmarked language. She wants her language use to be divested of the political meanings and identitarian indexicality that such choices acquired through the activism and consciousness raising of the language movement. We could call hers a “post political” or, following Joan Pujolar (2007), a “post-national” understanding of language choice. For this person, linguistic practice should be an arena of individual freedom and personal choice. Hers is a view of language that scholars see as gaining increasing ground in neoliberal times (Cameron 2000; Urcioli and LaDousa 2013; Heller 2011; Heller and Duchêne 2012). As the above debate makes clear, however, becoming “just talk” presents complications for a minority language precisely because it comes into tension with the values of solidarity and sociopolitical linguistic awareness that have historically propelled the movement forward and which many speakers still embrace.

## 7. Political Praxis and Social Consequences of Standardization

We have argued that minority language normalization can be understood as an intentional effort to rework the structure of linguistic values. In contrast to the model of a single gradient of prestige or authority, we have followed Woolard’s suggestion that the authority or legitimacy of a variety can come from different and competing values of authenticity and anonymity. This helps to make sense of ideological work and tensions in Basque language normalization and standardization. Nationalist language ideology reinforces values of authenticity in its recurring characterization of Basque as a unique cultural heritage. At the same time, aspirations for generalizing the use of Basque and incorporating it into public institutions pushed forward the creation of an amalgamated standard, *Batua*, that is an intentionally deracinated variety for public use. Knowledge of this standard has become a linguistic resource needed for passing exams and accessing some public sector jobs, particularly in education. But this has not spelled the demotion of vernacular. On the contrary. Our data shows that for many new speakers, especially those in Basque-speaking zones, there is a clear sense that one needs both vernacular and standard if one wishes to be a socially competent Basque speaker of the twenty-first century.

Comparatively speaking, the social acceptance of *Batua* remains remarkably successful. The standard has not been rejected, and although it did initially generate significant controversy and alienation among native speakers, particularly in Bizkaia, it does not seem to have been so intense or long lasting as to derail its normalization (Hualde and Zuazo 2007). At the same time,

standardization has not produced the pronounced hierarchical effects that current theorizing about standardization might have predicted. Our focus groups with new speakers indicated to us that they do not regard standard Basque as more correct or prestigious than vernacular. Two subsequent focus groups we conducted with native speakers in 2013 showed that native speakers also do not confer greater prestige to *Batua*. Rather, they praised new speakers for learning Basque and especially those who could, as they said, speak “the local way,” describing them as speaking “well,” “normal,” and “just like us.”

In this final section, we would like to offer some way of understanding these two issues: the widespread acceptance of standard Basque and yet its decidedly non-hegemonic status vis-a-vis vernacular. What has constrained the ascendancy of standard Basque, such that it tends to be treated more as a *lingua franca* for formal occasions rather than a superior, more prestigious, or more correct form of Basque? How do we understand this state of affairs especially when standard is the variety that permits access to new linguistic markets of public sector jobs, media, and education that have emerged with language normalization? A strictly political economic analysis focused on the degree of convertibility of language resources into economic reward will not suffice. We propose four inter-related factors—1) language ideology, 2) the attachment to values of solidarity and local forms of identification forged in a context of sociolinguistic marginalization, 3) political economy, and 4) political praxis—are at work. The first two assign values of authenticity and solidarity to vernacular, while the latter two work to constrain standard’s authority.

Nationalist language ideology plays a clear role in sustaining the importance of values of authenticity when it comes to Basque. Although arguments for Basque drawing on values of competitiveness and economic development are on the rise in language policy (Bazarrika 2009; Urla 2012b), Basque nevertheless continues to be figured and valorized as a unique cultural heritage. The division of labor between vernacular and *Batua* described earlier contributes to heightening vernacular’s emblematic status as the more authentic of the two. As standard Basque has begun to occupy some of the public and official functions once held by Spanish, vernacular, in turn has come to occupy the position once held by Basque vis a vis Spanish—indexing rootedness in *euskaldun* (Basque-speaking) culture and authenticity. The closely related notion of “mother tongue” ensures that in this contrast, the vernacular spoken by “native” speakers gains distinction as the most authentic expression of the language (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1989; Bucholtz 2003).

Vernacular’s value, however rests on more than the enduring effects of romantic nationalism and mother tongue ideology. It is more than a passport to a prized authenticity. Sociolinguistic work on loyalty to non-standard and local linguistic variants suggests to us that the attractiveness vernacular holds and the loyalty its speakers have towards it may also be telling us something about the continuing centrality of values of solidarity

(over status) and membership in local community networks has for Basque speakers.<sup>10</sup> Local forms of Basque are very much tied to place. As one of our research subjects said: he wanted to speak the Basque of *somewhere*. Although Basque speakers will sometimes use the linguistically based dialect classifications—Gipuzkera, Bizkaiera—to describe speech, vernacular is popularly described as the speech of one particular town or another. The loyalty to vernacular is a manifestation of the powerful and enduring identification people have with their hometowns, as well as the intense ethic of solidarity that characterizes local, Basque-speaking networks of family, age cohorts, and neighbors. We suggest this should be understood as a feature of marginalization, not simply a “cultural trait.” Like racialized and other minoritized groups, the sense of solidarity is intensified by a shared experience of marginality, not only of the language, but of the larger expressive culture and historical experience of Basque speakers. Values of solidarity, forged in the context of an ideology of contempt towards Basque and direct suppression of its use under the dictatorship, are what sustained Basque language use among native speakers for so long. José Luis Alvarez Enparantza’s (2001) research has documented that in order to be able to use their language, Basque speakers had to be preferentially seeking each other out and sustaining tight social networks. Vernacular loyalty needs to be situated and understood not simply or even necessarily as a function of nativist ideology, but as an outcome of strategies of resistance by Basque speakers in a context of linguistic domination. In contrast to the deracinated, standard Basque, vernacular conjures a whole sociocultural world and flags a speaker’s engagement with tight-knit social networks that were important sites for its survival and continue to be an important part of what it means to be a participant in *euskaldun* culture. These factors conjoin to play a role in counteracting the demotion of vernacular that scholars have often seen as the inevitable result from standardization.

Should we conclude that standard Basque is socially weak? That it suffers diminished social prestige? What underwrites the social status of standard Basque? Susan Gal’s (2006, 164) useful discussion pinpoints social structure and institutions as key in shaping the status standards enjoy

participation in a regime of standardisation is not primarily a matter of speaking such highly valued forms. Rather it requires exhibiting loyalty towards a standard variety whose high status is supported by the centralising institutions of education, labor markets, mass media and government bureaucracies that inculcate in the population a respect and desire for such linguistic forms. For those living in standardised regimes—as we all do now—standards command authority; other linguistic forms seem inadequate (non-language) or simply invisible.

Without a doubt, the creation of the BAC (1979), and the Law of Euskera (1982) were key to opening the door for standard Basque to gain

a presence in state-like institutions of regional civil service, education and media. *Batua* has emerged as a valued linguistic resource in competitions for jobs in these sectors. While significant, this is nevertheless a still limited socioeconomic niche. Spanish and increasingly English are the ruling languages of the private sector—business, banking, the broader entertainment industry—and, of course, the central government of Spain. The power elite is still overwhelmingly Spanish speaking. Thus, we would conclude that the larger national market sustaining Spanish, the limited or incomplete Basque normalization process, and the ensuing restricted mobility and economic rewards that this resource can provide has something to do with the perceived utility, but limited social prestige and authority that *Batua* is able to command relative to vernacular and more generally.

This undoubtedly plays a role. Standard Basque, to use Bourdieu's terms, has a still quite fragmented and limited market. Many analyses might end right here. However, we believe another factor needs to be considered in explaining *Batua*'s acceptance but non-hegemonic relationship to vernacular Basque. It might not be only a result of something that went wrong, domains that have not yet been conquered, political or economic rewards that have not yet been achieved, but rather a result of something that went right and was quite intentional. The non-hegemonic enregisterment of *Batua* vis a vis vernacular, we argue, is partly a consequence of the deliberately populist nature of the language movement, both in the way it mobilized support for standardization in its early stages and how it continues to produce arenas for citizen involvement and experimentation in Basque language cultural production.

Standardization, populist? It seems an oxymoron. It is true that the norms for *Batua* were established and authorized by experts. But *Euskaltzaindia*, the Basque Language Academy is not the kind of ultra-conservative group of scholars that we tend to imagine when we think of language academies (Median, del Valle and Monteagudo 2013). To be sure, the academicians sought to base their decisions on what they thought were objectively sound linguistic principles, but its members were always in conversation with a social movement struggling against the legacy of a dictatorship hostile to Basque. *Batua* was called for and backed by a grassroots language movement with a wide basis of social support that campaigned on its behalf. Key advocates were politicized writers of revolutionary leanings, the Basque primary school movement (*Ikastolak*) and the Adult Language and Literacy organization, AEK [*Alfabetatzen Euskalduntzen Koordinakundea*]. After it was founded in 1979, the leftist-nationalist Basque language advocacy group, *Euskalberrian Euskaraz* [Basque in the Basqueland] became a powerful advocate for *Batua* as well. It is important to remember how different AEK was from today's more professionalized language schools. AEK's founder, Rikardo Arregi, saw the Basque language school as an instrument for social liberation and nation-building. Not unlike the Young Lords, Puerto Rican leftist nationalists of the nineteen sixties (Wanzer-Serrano 2015), language

politics were seen as an integral part of a larger project of overthrowing a colonized consciousness. AEK organizers used a populist form of community organizing, traveling from town to town, helping to set up adult classes, recruiting locals to be teachers, and giving talks on language domination and the importance of preserving Basque. Among AEK's creations was the *gau eskola* [night school], offering low-cost evening classes so as to be accessible to working people. This decentralized, participatory, and working-class-conscious approach (Kasimir 2002) shaped the praxis of the language movement and, by extension, infused the enregisterment of its primary emblem, *Batua*, in its early (pre-Basque autonomy) phase with values of patriotism and radicalism.

Because standardization was disseminated in this way and because its sociopolitical motivation was not mystified, as so often happens with standards (Inoue 2006), it was not lived as just the top-down dictate of linguists, but as a contested project in building a solidary nation. There was a significant level of popular engagement and debate, some of it passionate and vehement, in the project of standardization. The President of the Academy, Luis Villasante, was at pains to explain in plain language the criteria they had used in deciding on *Batua* forms and to insist that *Batua* was not a better or more correct form of Basque.

Some might say the Academicians were being naïve. As Gal (2006, 171) has argued,

by the nature of the standardization process, every creation of a standard also creates stigmatized forms—supposed 'non languages'—among the very speaker whose linguistic practices standardization was supposed to valorize. Contrary to the common sense view, standardization creates not uniformity but more (and hierarchical) heterogeneity.

Gal's observation is spot on: what standardization creates is norms not uniformity. But we also note the parenthetical term, hierarchical, is presented as an equally inevitable outcome. Our claim is not, of course, that hierarchy was absent from Basque standardization. It is well documented that for some time after it was introduced, native speakers illiterate in Basque responded to *Batua* by questioning if their ways of speaking were corrupt or incorrect. (Zuazo 2000) Nor do we want to suggest that buy-in was complete or that *Batua*'s adoption was a totally consensual affair. Opposition and debate was very much a part of the process and our data from new speakers shows some of the insecurities, stresses and strains that Gal quite rightly identifies as ironic outcomes of minority language standardization. Institutional support has been key to *Batua*'s social power. Its adoption as the de facto official variety in schools and public administration was undoubtedly a key factor in its eventual acceptance. But what is also unique and consequential for the non-hegemonic enregisterment of *Batua* has been the class-conscious form of its dissemination at its inception as well as the continuing popular

movement that has characterized Basque language revival as a social process. This involvement has sustained multiple venues for reflection, debate, reassessment of prior stances, and creative experiments in reappropriating and valorizing vernacular that we argue have left their mark in mitigating standardization's hierarchizing effects.

One sees this most clearly in the multitude of often small-scale cultural projects and publications produced in and around language advocacy circles, from the more widely distributed cultural magazines like *Argia*, which regularly features debates on language policies, to large-scale events like UEU [*Udako Euskal Unibersitateak*], the Basque Summer University, that has been running annually since the seventies, to the many local Basque associations (*euskara taldeak*) that began to emerge in the nineties. The existence of local spaces in which to become involved and the diverse projects such associations have created, including local media, provide opportunities for debating policies but also experimenting with informal genres and an array of activities from cooking classes, yoga, to gardening that brought new and native speakers together outside the classroom where standard holds dominion. Basque television, media, and zines provide a rich terrain for tracing the shift in stance toward *Batua* and an increasing incorporation of dialectal features into local and regional Basque language print and broadcast media (Urla 1999). Basque comedy shows and popular culture have provided some priceless satires of the early years when advocates were wedded to the dictates of the Academy and *Batua*. Regimenting Basque, for example, has not led to the disappearance of vernacular oral poetry, as has happened for Romani speakers (Gal 2006, 171). If anything, there is an increasing pride and curiosity about this mode of poetry and other vernacular voices. In short, stances towards the authority of standard and vernacular Basque have clearly been dynamic and shifting.

## 8. Conclusion: Questioning the Reproduction Thesis

In her insightful review of scholarship on standardization, Miyako Inoue (2006) reminds us of how important it is to situate matters of language in their broader historical and political economic context. When assessing the impact of standardization it is critical she argues, to pay close attention to "the historical, political-economic, and cultural specificity and diversity of the ways in which a particular standard came to be standardized and normalized" (2006, 122). To date, scholars have given most of their attention to political and economic factors of material advantage and institutional support to explain the status of a standard. These remain unquestionably critical. But the Basque case, we believe, points to the important yet understudied effects of praxis: in this case, the differing modes of dissemination and civic engagement in standardization efforts. The social support that Basque standardization has enjoyed may have something to do with the decentralized and populist character of the language advocacy movement

that has been attentive to issues of accessibility, ongoing self-critique, and tactical shifts. There has been a relatively fluid contact between linguists, language advocacy, and local communities of speakers in the BAC facilitated by its diverse network of non-governmental language associations that are sites of discussion and often very creative experimentation. Time, no doubt, has also played a factor. Some of relaxed stance towards vernacular heterogeneity that we see today might also be an effect of the confidence advocates have gained from more than three decades of language promotion policies. But we think it reasonable to consider that the "weak" authority of standard Basque is not simply an effect of time or the "failure" of an inadequate normalization, but at least partly an outcome of the mechanisms by which social actors have chosen to carry out this process.

The Basque case we have presented prompts us to call for some reconsideration of scholars' frequent claim that in advocating for their linguistic rights, minority language movements tend to reproduce the values of dominant language ideology and, inadvertently, the inequalities and hierarchies these values entail. The affirmation is made often with a sense of disappointment or irony that such movements frequently fail to provide real alternatives to the dominant ideologies that have marginalized language variation. We call this the "reproduction thesis." Standardization efforts and the nationalist framings of language (one nation, one language) used by minority language advocates are some of the most common examples of the reproduction thesis. While it is true that some of the very same discursive tropes and values are invoked in a good deal of revitalization discourse, we think that the stances we have found among Basque new speakers show us that the reproduction thesis begs for more nuance. At a semiotic level, standardization produces, ipso facto, its opposite: the non-standard. But how non-standards are socially regarded is mediated by multiple factors. A careful social history of praxis, historical context, and the evolving linguistic market needs to accompany our analyses of the semiotic features of language ideology and discourse. One could say, and indeed we think the Basque case shows, that the conditions of minoritized languages and advocacy efforts are rarely rehearsals on a smaller scale of majority language dynamics. They generate ironies, predicaments, and innovations that need to be appreciated in their full complexity.

## Notes

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- EU Action IS1306, "New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges." The authors would like to thank these institutions, Kike Amonariz, and the research participants.
2. The term "new speaker" was developed in an effort to set aside the ideological connotations of inauthenticity that terms like "non-native" speaker tend to imply. See Rampton (1990), O'Rourke and Pujolar (2013), and O'Rourke et al. (2015).
3. It is important to note that many language advocates see the scope of their work as the totality of the Basque-speaking territory that spans four provinces in Spain and three in France. There are various efforts at collaboration across these territories. However, language policy is variable across these spaces. Useful documentation on policy can be found on the web site of the BAC's Department of Language policy [www.euskara.euskadi.eus](http://www.euskara.euskadi.eus) [accessed May 20, 2015].
4. Our findings are based on nine focus groups and nine individual interviews in 2011 and 2012 with 74 new speakers between the ages of 18 and 56. In 2013, we conducted two additional focus groups with native speakers of the two main dialects of the BAC (Gipuzkoan and Bizkaian) to assess their attitudes towards new speakers and standard Basque. For more details on methodology and recruitment of participants, see Ortega, Amorrotu, Goirigolzarri, and Urla (2016).
5. This framework is anticipated in the earlier work by Gal and Woolard on the linguistic construction of publics (Gal and Woolard 2001).
6. Knowledge and use of vernacular forms declined to 67% in municipalities with 30% to 60% Basque speakers. Only 8% of new speakers living in areas with less than 30% Basque speakers spoke in dialect. It is worth noting that despite this variance, the vast majority of our participants (82%) affirmed that they could understand well one or more dialectal varieties of Basque.
7. For an elaboration on how the popularly used labels *euskaldun* [Basque speaker], *euskaldunberri* [new Basque speaker], and *euskaldun zahar* [native Basque speaker] are used, see Ortega, Urla, Amorrotu, Goirigolzarri, and Uranga (2015).
8. The markers of local vernacular merit their own study to understand not only what the markers are but how and when they are used. See, for example, Lantto (2014) on the colloquial register of Basque in Bilbao.
9. See O'Rourke and Ramallo (2013, 299–300) for a similar situation in which use of Galician outside of rural areas is taken to index political support for Galician nationalism.
10. On vernacular loyalty, see the classic work by Milroy and Milroy (1978), Milroy and Margrain (1980), and Blom and Gumperz (1972). Roseman's (1995, 1997) work on vernacular loyalty in Galicia stresses the importance of a longitudinal view.

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### 3 On the Pros and Cons of Standardizing Scots Notes From the North of a Small Island

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#### 1. Rejecting Standardization in a World of Standards

In an article published in early 2016 in the left-wing, Glasgow-based and pro-independence newspaper *The National*, a famous Scots language advocate and celebrated novelist called for a standard form of Scots to be established. "The lack o a Standard is simply haudin the language back when it needs tae be gangin forrit,"<sup>2</sup> Matthew Fitt wrote, urging the various interested parties to start working at once.<sup>3</sup> This call was in sharp contrast to the positions he had taken up to then, as he also asserts in that same paper. The opinion voiced by Matthew Fitt also stood in opposition to the generally prevailing opinion among language advocates that Scots needs no standard since it is overly diverse dialectally for a general agreement to be reached without much conflict. From Shetland in the North Sea to the border with England, from rural areas to urban centers such as Glasgow or Edinburgh, the realities of vernacular practices in Scotland are undoubtedly complex. Whether or not this complexity impedes or, on the contrary, warrants a standard form has, however, been a matter for debate throughout much of the twentieth century—a debate that seemed settled when an anti-standardization consensus began to apparently prevail towards the end of the twentieth century, but which continues to re-emerge among Scots writers today.

Fitt himself had, until his 2016 commentary, been a strong advocate of the anti-standardization position. The Scots language, proponents of this approach generally argue, does not need a standard because, in the words of James Robertson, an internationally acclaimed novelist, "[o]ne of the language's very strengths lies in its flexibility and its less-than-respectable status: writers turn to it because it offers a refuge for linguistic individualism, anarchism, nomadism and hedonism" (Robertson 1994, xiv). In a more radical form, this view can take the shape of the words of the lexicologist Iseabail Macleod, for whom Scots "covers everything from dialects which the English—or even other Scots—wouldn't understand, to the way we're speaking just now, which is English with a Scottish Accent" (quoted in Dossena 2005, 15).

Under such conditions, it is no surprise that a position that rejects normative approaches to language should be rejected in favor of more inclusive