Sociolinguistic Studies

ISSN: 1750-8649 (print)
ISSN: 1750-8657 (online)

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Article

Parental ideologies in multilingual Family Language Policies in the Basque Autonomous Community (Spain)

Maite Garcia-Ruiz[a], Ibon Manterola[b], and Ane Ortega[c]

Abstract

The study of Family Language Policy (FLP) with a minority language has most often focused on the policies on the minority language within the framework of the hegemonic position of a majority language. This article, however, takes the view that a multilingual approach is needed to better understand parental decisions in their FLPs when a foreign language is also present in the education of their children. The data presented in this article is based on a PhD research project which studies the FLPs of Basque parents living in a mostly Spanish-speaking area of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) and whose children attend a Basque-medium school with early introduction of English as the L3. Results show that their ideological positioning in relation to Basque, the different values attached to each of their children's languages, as well as their ideas about multilingualism determine to a great extent their FLPs. Whilst all parents support Basque and positively value learning English, some differences have been identified: Basque is prioritised above all by the most activist parents, who establish an iron-cast hierarchy among languages; English has been found to have a clear value and function, but its place in this hierarchy varies; and in all cases, Spanish is considered to be guaranteed and not requiring special *ad hoc* strategies. The study confirms the ideological positioning in relation to the minority language as a key factor in minority language FLPs, but also shows the impact of ideas about multilingual upbringing in their decisions, their expectations, and the degree of satisfaction or frustration with results.

Affiliations

[a] Begoñako Andra Mari Teacher Training University College, Spain
maitegarcia210@gmail.com

[b] University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Spain
ibon.manterola@ehu.eus

[c] Independent Scholar, Spain
aortegaet@gmail.com

SOLS VOL 18.1–2 2024 59–79 https://doi.org/10.1558/sols.24849
© 2024, University of Toronto Press

KEYWORDS: Family Language Policy, language ideologies, multilingual approach, Basque, Spanish, English as L3

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

1 Introduction

Intergenerational transmission is a fundamental indicator of the degree of endangerment of a minoritised language since it reveals to what degree a linguistic community has consummated the process of minority language shift towards a dominant or hegemonic language (Fishman, 1991). Thus, reinforcing and restoring the use of the minoritised language among the diverse generations of the community constitutes a major goal of language maintenance and revitalisation processes (Olko and Wicherkiewicz, 2016; Flores Farfán, Córdoba, and Cru, 2020). The case of Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community of the Spanish State constitutes a good example of this: after the dictator Franco's demise, the new Spanish Constitution (1978) led to a new legal framework for the management of linguistic diversity in the Spanish State. In this context, Basque was declared co-official alongside Spanish in the Basque Autonomous Community (henceforth BAC).

The 1982 Law for the Normalisation of the Use of Basque constituted a key milestone: provisions were made for the introduction of Basque in formal domains of language use, such as Education and Media. In the specific case of the educational system, a Decree passed in 1983 defined three linguistic models or types of programs of bilingual education depending on the presence and role of Basque and Spanish in each of them. Parents were given the right to choose the type of bilingual program: in model A Spanish was the language of instruction, in model B both Basque and Spanish were languages of instruction (at varying degrees, depending on the school), and finally, Basque was the only language of instruction in model D. In the three models, both languages had to be taught, as well as English from Primary onwards.

The increasing social prestige of Basque, fuelled in the educational domain by many parents, teachers, school principals, and the Basque government itself, brought about the growth of model D (Zalbide, 1998). Indeed, current enrolment data confirm this trend: the choice for the A model has decreased from 65% in the 1980s to 4.4% in 2022, whereas enrolment in the D model has increased from 20% to 75.6% in the same period. In fact, taking the B and D models together, 95% of students attend a Basque-medium school today. This generalised choice by parents for the D model is one of the key factors that explains the significant growth in the number of potential speakers of Basque among young people: in the 16–24 age group the percentage of those who can speak the language shows

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

an increase from 25% in 1991 to 71.4% in 2016 (Basque Government, 2019). Of special relevance is the fact that approximately 50% of the population in the 16–34 age-group are new speakers: that is, they learnt Basque not at home but at school or in adult education.

The consolidation of family transmission is another factor that has reinforced the increase of Basque speakers among children and the young in the BAC (Kasares, Ortega and Amorrortu, 2022): in families where both parents are Basque speakers, the percentage of transmission of Basque to children is 80%. When only one of the parents is a Basque speaker, the percentage is 62%. Still, despite these positive data on school and home language transmission, data also show that Spanish is still the dominant language in the homes and streets of the BAC. The percentage of the overall use of Basque at home has increased very slightly, from 17.3% in 1991 to just 19% in 2016, and only 25.7% of the population aged 16 or older use Basque to some extent (16.5% intensively and 9.2% less than other languages) (Basque Government, 2019).

In recent years there has been a growth in qualitative research seeking to understand the 'whys' and 'hows' behind these figures (Ortega and Manterola, 2022). With regard to intergenerational Basque transmission, be it via Basque-medium schools or in the family, parental choices reveal a multifaceted configuration of language ideologies, strategies, and practices. All those components can be studied in the framework of Family Language Policy, an area of research that has successfully shed light in the last decade on sociolinguistic issues related to parental language planning and children's multilingual upbringing (Lanza and Lomeu-Gomes, 2020). FLP conceives the family as a site where languages are managed, learned, and negotiated (Spolsky, 2012). Following Spolsky's (2004) three elements involved in Family Language Policy (FLP) – linguistic ideologies, management, and practices – studies in this field focus on the language values and beliefs that parents have regarding languages, their decisions and efforts they make to influence the linguistic practices of the family members, and finally, the actual language choices and usage of family members in the family domains (Schwartz, 2010). In this article, we examine the ideological component of the families under study.

Linguistic ideologies are ideas, perceptions, and expectations about language, which are manifested in all sorts of language use (Blommaert, 1999). They constitute a fundamental area of inquiry in the study of the relationships between language and society. Specifically dealing with the topic of this paper, language ideologies have a crucial role in the design and implementations on language policies at all levels (Schiffman, 2006: 112). For instance, focusing on the Basque context, a range of parental ideologies have been shown to influence

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

parental choice for Basque-medium schooling for their children. Examples of beliefs and positive values include the benefits of early childhood bilingualism, the economic value of Basque, the values of identity and love for Basque, the value of Basque culture, and also the integrative value of Basque (Amorrortu, Ortega, Idiazabal, and Barreña, 2009; Ikardo, 2017; Kasares, Ortega, and Amorrortu, 2022). In contexts where a minority-language speaking community struggles to coexist under the pressure of the hegemonic language, the study of FLPs, and specifically of parental language ideologies, has proved to be an important area of inquiry for understanding the complex dynamics of intergenerational continuity and the disruption of minority languages (Nandi and Devasundaram, 2017; see also Maseko, this issue).

In the specific context of the BAC, parental language beliefs and choices become even more complex if we take into account the presence of English in the Basque educational system and in society in general. Concerning education, English has been taught as a subject since the 1980s and has been used as a language of instruction since the 1990s (Elorza and Muñoa, 2008). Nowadays, the Basque curriculum requires students to develop a plurilingual communicative repertoire which includes Basque and Spanish, as well as English at a lower degree of competence in Primary, with the option of a second foreign language in Secondary. As well as the languages set by the curriculum, children from immigrant backgrounds bring to the classrooms an increasing number of home languages. The status of English has consolidated in recent decades in Basque society: 45% of the current population of the BAC report being able to speak English, in contrast with the mere 7.8% of the previous generation (Basque Government, 2017). Besides, a further 53% say they would like to learn English.

In this context, this paper seeks to discuss the beliefs, hopes, and expectations of a group of parents dealing with the multilingual upbringing of their children in Basque, Spanish, and English. These parents have chosen a Basque-medium school with an early introduction to English. The families live in a BAC urban area where Spanish clearly predominates. The paper takes the view that a multilingual approach is needed to better understand parental decisions in their Family Language Policies, as English is also present and has a place in the upbringing of children.

2 This study

Data in this article come from Garcia-Ruiz's doctoral research, which studies the different multilingual FLPs in a Spanish-dominant area in the BAC. For this purpose, an urban municipality of Greater Bilbao was selected. In this location,

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

33.28% of the population is competent in Basque (data from EUSTAT, 2019), but the use of Basque is just 9.2% (according to the latest data from the local council from 2006, 28.3% of the population knew Basque at that time).

An *ikastola* was selected for the study, due to the historical importance of this type of school in the revitalisation of Basque, and for its reputation as promoters of Basque language and culture. The *ikastola* schools are semi-private D-model schools created in the 1960s in a context of the linguistic repression during General Franco's dictatorship. All participants are parents in the selected *ikastola*. At the time of the collection of data all participants had at least one child in Primary grades 4, 5, or 6 (ranging from 9 to 12 years old). These ages were selected based on previous data suggesting that, from ages 9 to 12, there is a substantial decrease in the use of Basque in school settings (Basque Government, 2020).

Original data were collected between 2018 and 2020 through an online questionnaire (51 parents responded), two semi-structured focus groups (one with four parents, one with five) and 17 semi-structured individual interviews. The participants' linguistic ideologies were taken into account in all three stages of the data collection, but focus groups and individual interviews provided the opportunity to make in-depth qualitative research. Data from the focus groups and interviews were audio- and video-recorded and later transcribed using SoundScriber. Qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) of the data was carried out via the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, using a combination of inductive and deductive analysis.

For the purposes of this article, the data presented will be limited to the data from focused groups and individual interviews. All excerpts have been translated by the authors into English from the original transcripts in Basque or Spanish. The subjects mentioned in the different excerpts are identified as follows: fictitious surnames for the family, father/mother, 'ELK' for data collected in an interview and 'ET' for focus group and number, followed by the conversational turn in the transcript (for example: Otxoa mother, ELK10: 130).

3 Some results on the ideological component of parental FLP

The families in this study live in what is *de facto* a multilingual situation: a bilingual Basque-Spanish community with an educational system that has three curricular languages from Primary school onwards: Basque, Spanish, and English (and the possibility to study a fourth one in Secondary Education). But, as stated before, although the presence of Basque in the town where they live is not negligible, the actual usage of the language in the street is low (9.2% according to

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

the local council's data from 2006). Parents in this study frame their FLP within that context and they bring to it their own ideas, hopes, and expectations as well as different 'readings' of the opportunities and challenges that this context offers. Next, we will examine the beliefs, hopes, and expectations of parents to discover the ideological component of their FLP. We will do so by showing their direct statements on the matter but also by the light shed by their reported frustrations as well as the level of satisfaction with the results in relation to their children's bi- and trilingualism.

3.1 'The more the better': Generalised positive attitudes towards multilingualism ... but not all the languages are the same

The belief that learning languages is positive was unanimously shared by the parents in this study without exception; all parents support their children's development as multilingual speakers.

Excerpt 1

> I think it's important, the more languages, the better. / Knowing languages is culturally enriching. / Languages are always positive. (Hormaetxe father, ELK05: 10/36/180)

Excerpt 2

> I think that knowing languages opens many doors in different countries, and it's very important to connect with people. We miss a lot if we don't speak languages. (Otxoa mother, ELK10: 130)

Both excerpts above show the 'the more languages, the better' ideology, a widespread positive ideology in the Basque context (Amorrortu, Ortega, Idiazabal, and Barreña, 2009). The substantiating reasons refer to cultural enrichment, languages as pathways to understanding the other, and as key to communication between peoples and cultures. In contrast, not knowing languages is seen as negative, as the Otxoa family's mother said, 'we miss a lot if we don't speak languages'.

The 'the more languages, the better' ideology is directly reflected in the overt support parents show in favour of their children becoming trilingual in Basque, Spanish and English (even if they hesitate to use the term itself for their children, as discussed further on), and this is an important cornerstone in their FLPs. However, they attach different values to each of the languages, and they have different objectives and expectations for each. In fact, parents have shown that they have a clear hierarchy between languages that permeates their FLP. We shall come back to this point in section 3.2.

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

But do parents in this study believe their children to be bi/multilingual? The question was posed to them directly in the interviews and discussion groups. Their responses show that, in general, they do believe their children to be bilingual in Basque and Spanish, but they do not believe their children to be trilingual (with English), although some think they may become trilingual eventually. The way they justify their answers gives us interesting information about the criteria they use and the ideas about multilingual competence they have. We found both the level and type of competence to be crucial. What level constitutes enough competence to be considered bi/multilingual is an ongoing topic of discussion even among experts, but at the level of the general public, what these parents show is a fairly ambitious view of the level required.

With regard to parents' notion of linguistic competence, they have a communicative view of competence, as seen in the following excerpts. For some parents, top proficiency in the languages involved is necessary for their child to be considered bi- or multilingual, as seen in Excerpt 3, other parents have a less ambitious view, as shown in Excerpt 4:

Excerpt 3

> Being trilingual means being able to work with fluency, appropriateness and adequacy in the three languages, and in a natural way. / It is when they are able to use both languages interchangeably with a total and absolute fluency and in a natural way. (Kalamua mother, ELK04: 56/58)

Excerpt 4

> I think (you are bilingual) when you have a conversation in that language, you can read it, understand it… at least with a certain level of competence, which does not have to be that high. (Dorregarai father, ELK02: 206)

So far, we have shown that the parents in our study share a number of beliefs. But their priorities in relation to each of their children's languages, based on the values attached to each, and their sense of which language needs to be supported the most in their context leads to different FLPs.

For all parents, Basque is the first language to support. The point made by the Perurena mother in the next excerpt is one that was shared by most parents:

Excerpt 5

> Languages are very important in life. But mostly Basque because Basque is our language, and English to open to the world, right? (Perurena mother, ELK11: 75–78)

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

This parent points to the core values many parents appear to attach to each of the two languages: identity for Basque (*our* language) and international communication for English. From these different values, the reader will probably predict a quite different emotional involvement with each and probably different objectives and strategies in their FLPs.

In the following excerpt we can see that the 'the more languages, the better' belief is conditioned on one of them being Basque, which gives us another clue about the position this minority language holds for some of these parents:

Excerpt 6

> The more languages (...) English, French and German (...). [Sarcastically] Fantastic! For example, my sister-in-law studied English at university and knows German, but she doesn't know Basque. That doesn't make sense (...). Being in the Basque Country, she cannot speak to her niece in Basque. 'No, but I know English and German'. 'What for, if you cannot talk to your niece?' That's the way I see it, I'm quite radical. In the Basque Country: Basque and Spanish. (Hormaetxe father, ELK05: 186)

Parents implement strategies that are coherent with the priority given to Basque. Sending their children to a Basque-medium school is one of the most important strategies in parents' pro-Basque FLP. Many parents realise, however, that 'school is not enough', and some supplement Basque-medium education with extracurricular activities and leisure activities, as shown by the Kalamua mother:

Excerpt 7

> [In answer to the question about why she took their children to leisure activities in Basque] The main reason is that I didn't want my sons to associate Basque with academic use [school]. What I wanted was to give them options to use Basque in other contexts, not just in the *ikastola*. What I mean is that, for me, as an adult person, going to sing [childish songs] in Basque, it's not what I would choose. And for example, going to the theatre or the cinema, in Basque, their father and I would look at the screen and I go along with it graciously, but it is not that I go there thinking, 'I will enjoy it', no. If I'm listening to a language I master, I can say, 'Well, I'm watching a children's movie, but that's fine'. But no, you are watching a movie in Basque, our Basque competence

> is very basic (...). But this gives them the opportunity to do things in Basque, so that is not just *ikastola*. (Kalamua mother, ELK04: 32)

This mother, who has a very limited knowledge of Basque, has systematically accompanied her children to cultural and leisure activities with the clear objective that her children would not see Basque as just a language for the school. She is not sure she has achieved it, since she understands the impact of the Spanish-speaking context where they live is difficult to counteract, but she hopes that having fun and positive Basque experiences outside school will encourage them to make choices to use Basque because, as they grow up, it will be up to them.

This parent's insight is very interesting, as research is increasingly showing the negative impact that associating Basque solely with school is having among young people, to the point that it may explain some of the views they have of Basque and their reluctance to use Basque more, especially among new speakers living in highly Spanish-speaking places (Ortega, Amorrortu, Goirigolzarri, and Urla, 2016). In fact, recent Basque language policy at different levels has sought to actively loosen this tight association by increasing the offer of fun leisure activities in Basque outside the school.

The Basque educational system has been successful in 'producing' Basque speakers, as seen in the Introduction, but research shows that competence does not automatically bring about a bond and usage among new speakers who have learned the language at school (Ortega, Amorrortu, Goirigolzarri, and Urla, 2016). In the same way that competence does not automatically produce usage, willingness to use does not always result in usage either, especially among those living in highly Spanish-speaking contexts who encounter many difficulties to use Basque in everyday life (Amorrortu, Ortega, Idiazabal, and Barreña, 2009; Goirigolzarri, Amorrortu, and Ortega, 2019). Indeed, the Basque case clearly proves Fishman's (1991) warning that 'school is not enough', and this message has been gaining in importance in public discourse and language policy makers. We have found that some parents in this very pro-Basque school are aware of the need to support the school in promoting Basque, as we see in the Kalamua mother above and the Calamendi mother below:

Excerpt 8

> Schooling your child in the D model [Basque-medium education] does not guarantee that your child will speak Basque. (Calamendi mother, ET1: 80)

Even if sending their children to the Basque-medium school is a key strategy for all parents, parents who are themselves Basque speakers have made sure

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

that their children learn Basque in the family, many of them speaking to their children exclusively in Basque and making the family a space for Basque as much as possible in the Spanish-speaking town where they live. Where both parents are Basque-speakers, they follow the 'maximal engagement with the minority language' principle by which the family and the home are constituted as Basque-only spaces as much as possible because 'the more engagement the child has with the minority language, the greater her or his likelihood of using it' (Yamamoto, 2001: 128). Even if not all parents can do this, we have found that parents share the Mother Tongue ideology (Skutnabb-Kangas, and Phillipson, 1989). According to this ideology, the language that is learned as the first language (L1) since birth determines, or at least conditions, the psycholinguistic configuration of the child; it has a strong chance of becoming the most dominant language of the person, ensures natural usage, and is invested in a strong emotional charge, even a clear cultural identity. We see the power of this ideology in the next excerpt, precisely because it features parents who are not traditional Basque speakers; they are new speakers with a developing command of the language.

Excerpt 9

> To be honest, we didn't think much about it, it was clear to us: 'when the child is born, we'll both speak to him in Basque', and yes, said and done. He [my husband] wasn't afraid, quite the opposite; he was learning Basque at the time, so he has been learning at the child's pace, it has been helpful for him. (Sagasti mother, ELK15: 10)

We have shown that all parents choose a Basque immersion schooling, and parents who have some command in Basque also choose it as the home language. Having seen that English is also a language they all value and want their children to learn, what values do parents attach to this language? It is clearly its role as the most important international language that gives it its place in their children's education. The following excerpts illustrate these parents' opinions.

This mother hints at the fact that it is not English as such but that their children need to learn whichever language is the one of international communication:

Excerpt 10

> In our opinion, English is an essential language nowadays. In this globalised world, we need to have a language for us all to communicate, and it seems that it is English, at least for the moment. (Rotaetxe mother, ELK14: 24)

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

The instrumental value and function attached to English as necessary for international communication presents a stark contrast to Basque, and thus objectives and expectations are very different. Some parents hope for a good proficiency level by the time their children leave school; others would be happy with 'enough to communicate', but in all cases the way it should be treated at school is seen as very different from Basque:

Excerpt 11

> English (...) they have to learn English, (...) They have to learn it as they learn mathematics. I don't give it any more importance. / Basque, we need to support Basque because of our situation, it must be given more importance. Because of its situation. (Foruria father, ELK01: 147/149)

With regards to the English level they expect their children to attain, 'being able to get by' is enough for some. This idea reflects the above-mentioned communicative view of multilingualism:

Excerpt 12

> I always say this: English is important, it is the most important language in the world, when you go away it is always English, isn´t it? And then I think its role is (...) not to master it as you would want to master Basque, but to manage, to know enough to manage in it. I think it is important to achieve an intermediate level or so. (Hormaetxe father, ELK05: 34)

Having said that and following the latest evidence in language-learning research as well as current parental demands, the Basque educational system started to introduce English in pre-primary school for a few short periods a week and also teach a curricular subject in English at the secondary level. Adding more English hours at school means taking some hours away from Basque and somewhat breaking the total immersion policy for pre-primary education. Parental attitudes to this are varied: some parents believe that 'the earlier the better' principle should be applied to English, whilst others are sceptical since it may jeopardize the 'priority of Basque'. In fact, English may be seen as a threat to Basque, especially if allowed to enter the educational system without control. We observe this opinion in this parent's criticism of some schools that decided to move towards a trilingual program with more hours in English:

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Excerpt 13

> I am still sceptical about languages. (...) I think that the Basque government and they are fostering trilingualism in many schools, but the truth is that the language that we need to protect is Basque. Basque is getting behind. English they will learn, Spanish they will learn, but don't take away hours from Basque because they don't have it on the street. But it is cool, you know [sarcastically]. (Etxebarria mother, ET2: 477)

Demand for the early introduction of English in schools has been growing steadily among parents in the BAC, following the very widespread belief in 'the earlier the better', even if evidence from research carried out in Basque-medium schools has shown very limited advantages in introducing 'a bit' of English in pre-primary (Cenoz, 2005). As seen above, at least some parents in this study seem to have internalised this ideology, although the fact that it conflicts with 'priority for Basque' may be keeping it at bay.

This parent suggests that this is almost a fashion, but the reality is that parents perceive it as social pressure and feel the need to send their children to extracurricular activities in English:

Excerpt 14

> And then English (...) as we have seen that nowadays it is necessary. I think everybody is in the same discourse. Children are sent to extracurricular activities in English, I think this is generalised. It is almost an obligation. (Querejazu mother, ELK2: 24)

Finally, there is Spanish. Interestingly, Spanish is often not even mentioned. The reader will remember that Spanish is still the dominant language in the BAC and very dominantly used in the context they live in. Thus, it is not a matter of debate whether their children will learn it, in fact, most children are dominant in Spanish, as reported by their parents. Discussing it in the last place merely reflects how parents talk about it, very often they even forget to mention it when discussing their FLPs. Indeed, it is a completely common belief that Spanish is guaranteed by its hegemonic position in Basque society in general and by the sociolinguistic context of the study in particular.

In the *ikastola* of this study, Spanish is not introduced as a subject until year 3 of Primary education, in order to consolidate Basque as much as possible through total immersion. Parents believe this to be the correct way to go about it, mainly to counterpart the hegemonic presence of Spanish:

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Excerpt 15

> [When asked about Spanish] Spanish? It's true, I forgot about Spanish. I think the school gives a correct treatment to Spanish. It must be taught from year 3 on, as that is what the Education Law states, in year 3 they have Spanish as a subject, but that's it. I think it is a necessary thing, of course, but I don't think it carries a lot of weight in Primary school. / [Should it be given more importance or space in the curriculum?] In my opinion, to learn Basque well and to leave some room for English and having Spanish outside school, on the street, everywhere, I don't think so. Spanish already has a big space in many other domains, it is not necessary to add more. If we do, we know what would happen. / [What would happen?] That it takes over everything. It is very easy to lose what we have achieved [she refers to Basque]. We are at risk of losing very easily what we achieved with a lot of work. (Querejazu mother, ELK12: 40–44)

So far, we have shown parents' ideas about multilingualism, as well as the values attached to each of their children's languages and how these should be supported. Below, we will discuss in more depth how parents evaluate their success in what could be termed as a 'priority for Basque' policy.

3.2 Prioritising Basque: Frustration or satisfaction with results?

Parents of this study give different values to each of the three languages – Basque, Spanish, and English – and establish a clear hierarchy which crystalizes into priorities when displaying strategies to support each language. Although all parents in the study report putting Basque first, there are differences in the proactivity and emotional involvement of parents. A very clear parent profile is the very proactive pro-Basque profile. When talking about their decision about what school to choose for their children, the Jauregi family's mother clearly describes the place each language has in her FLP:

Excerpt 16

> Support Spanish? No. Unfortunately, we learn Spanish whether we want to or not. [Support] English, yes. For my partner and me, it has always been important, and it even crossed our minds to choose an English school but just crossed our minds. It is a bit surrealistic to choose an English school here. Well, we do give importance to

> English but more to Basque, that's the reason for our decision [to send their children to the Basque-medium school]. (Jauregi mother, ELK60: 03)

For parents in this profile, Basque has absolute priority. Even if in the Jauregi family learning English well was important for the mother, the fact that they wanted to secure the learning of Basque led to the decision to send their children to the Basque-medium school. It does not cross their minds that Spanish needs special attention as, in their sociolinguistic context, learning Spanish is guaranteed by its hegemonic situation. The way she expresses this is interesting: '*Unfortunately*, we learn Spanish whether we want to or not', suggesting that she considers the position of Spanish excessive, most probably comparing it to the lesser presence of Basque.

Parents who clearly prioritise Basque have high hopes for their children as Basque speakers, both in terms of competence (wishing them to be dominant in Basque with excellent competence) and usage (wishing Basque to be their main language of communication with friends, classmates, and other Basque speakers). However, we have found that some of them feel disappointed by their children's competence and even more by how little they use it.

In relation to competence, some parents (both Basque speakers and Spanish speakers) note that their children express themselves better in Spanish and that they report a lack of fluency or 'naturalness' in Basque, as well as gaps in their vocabulary. They learn Basque at school but lack of usage prevents them from having that 'natural' feel they would like.

Excerpt 17

> [In answer to the question whether they are happy with their children's competence in Basque] Content, yes, happy, no. We would like them to use it much more, to know more, to have more fluency. / Not to have to resort to Spanish [when they don´t find the word or cannot express what they want]. (Foruria father, ELK01: 153/155)

If competence in Basque is a source of worry among some parents, the really great source of frustration is the fact that their children do not use Basque as much as they had hoped, let alone have it as their main language of communication among friends and classmates (all of whom are competent in Basque). Many parents, such as the mother below, cannot understand this and are fearful of what this means in terms of the overwhelming presence of Spanish:

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Excerpt 18

> If the friend doesn't know Basque, I don't think it's wrong, but if the friend knows Basque, it kills me [not to hear them using Basque]. I tell them 'Basque is your language; you have to support it. Basque is your language, Spanish is not'. […] I don't know, maybe it's my history, my age, my life, and everything. Perhaps because I see that Spanish is getting everywhere in all areas of society (...). So, if they [the friends] don't know Basque, I have no problem, but if they do, I'm sorry, they have to do it; if not, the language won't be spoken. (Perurena mother, ELK11: 82)

In fact, right now it is the most important cause for concern in Basque society and Basque sociolinguistics: the fact that usage has increased very little, especially when compared with the increase in competence, as seen in Section 1. This concern is especially serious in relation to the young, who show the greatest percentage in competence in Basque and who are seen as 'the future of the language'. In fact, in sociolinguistic contexts where Spanish is dominant, such as the one in this study, using Spanish with friends even within school boundaries (corridors or playground) is the norm (Basque Government, 2020). It could be argued that these parents' expectations are more guided by their desires and fears and not by an adequate awareness of their context and the true impact it has on their children's practices.

But not all parents have such a negative view of what the competence and usage their children demonstrate. Most are generally satisfied with their proficiency level and to a great extent accept that the usage is what it is. There is less emotional frustration, they look at it in a more positive way, and they seem to counteract what is not being achieved with what they have achieved as it can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 19

> [In answer to the question whether he thinks his daughter is trilingual] No, (she isn't trilingual) she has a different level in each of the three languages, and that makes me sad, but it's the way it is, and we will see. For what I can see, she has a very good level of Basque, yes, but she has a better mastery of Spanish. (Madariaga father, ELK08: 16)

Excerpt 20

> [In answer to the question whether their expectations have been fulfilled] Yes, well, I didn't have a clear goal. Because, in fact, they will continue [in Basque-medium education] until university and beyond, and I hope that they'll continue in Basque. But yes, my expectations that they will be able to speak in Basque, yes, they have been met. (Dorregarai father, ELK02: 175–182)

In fact, it could be argued that parents in this frame of mind have a more realistic 'reading' of what can be achieved in the context where they live, or perhaps they are not so emotionally involved with Basque as other parents are. But the result is less tension and less frustration in the way they live their situation.

Excerpt 21

> [In answer to why he thinks the children use more Spanish than Basque] I don't know, habit? I guess that if we lived in Bermeo, I guess they wouldn't speak much Spanish, but here, what they see and hear is Spanish (Dorregarai father, ELK02: 60)

This parent is very aware of the difference between living in highly Basque-speaking Bermeo and the Spanish-dominant town where they live. As he says, 'here, what they see and hear is Spanish'.

As we hope to have shown, beliefs and decisions in the parents of this study show a great complexity and are intertwined in ways at times common and often quite different regardless of the parents' linguistic profile.

4 Discussion and conclusions

This article aimed to discuss the ideological configuration of the FLPs of a group of parents living in a Spanish-dominated Basque-Spanish urban area of the BAC, in a context where English is also present at school. Focusing on those parents' linguistic ideologies, we have tried to delve into the ideas, hopes and expectations that those parents have in relation to the multilingual upbringing of their children. We have identified both shared and contrasted 'readings' of the opportunities and challenges that the context creates in order to carry out their FLPs.

The qualitative analysis has revealed that the parents participating in the study share positive attitudes towards multilingualism and it confirms that the 'the more languages, the better' ideology, already identified at the beginning of

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

the 21st century in the BAC society (Amorrortu, Ortega, Idiazabal, and Barreña, 2009), is still a powerful linguistic ideology. We have also shown that parents do not believe their children to be trilingual with English as the third language, but they do believe them to be Basque/Spanish bilinguals. This is because their view of multilingual competence is based on a high competence also in English. In that sense, those parents seem to have an idealised view of what it means to be a multilingual speaker, based on the idea that a multilingual speaker is the sum of several monolingual speakers who must master and use all the languages exactly in the same circumstances for all the same functions. Interestingly enough, this is not how the Basque education system describes the objectives for students, with a clear hierarchy in the level of attainment of the languages at the end of compulsory education (B2 level in Basque and Spanish and B1 level in English), but it seems that parents entertain a different idea of what it means to be multilingual.

Another issue that our study has allowed us to identify is that beyond the general parents' positive attitudes towards multilingualism, there are at least two aspects that require further reflection. On the one hand, the parents participating in the study establish a hierarchical configuration based on the values assigned to each of the three languages under question. Basque is the first language to support and the one that is invested in an identity value. Indeed, Basque seems to have *the right to veto* dealing with the 'the more languages, the better' belief in the sense that the positive attitude towards children's multilingualism is conditioned by the presence of Basque in the multilingual repertoire of their children. We have identified some parents who think that Basque needs to overcome the ideological load of being just a language of the school. This is a belief that we did not see for English, which has a completely different function, certainly not a language of everyday communication. Even if the presence and usage of English in these families' context and in the children's education is limited, due to the higher value they attach to Basque, this does not result in any frustration for the parents. Finally, the absence of Spanish as a topic of discussion of the data collected in focus groups and personal interviews is a clear sign of its hegemony all over the BAC and specifically in the context of our study. Parents' interpretation of this hegemony leads them to defend a subject-matter status of Spanish at school. As parents are aware of the fact that their children generally speak in Spanish with peers even in school settings, they argue against giving it more space in the curriculum. All participants showed a clear preference for a trilingual model with Basque in its axis (Nandi, Garcia-Ruiz, and Manterola, 2023).

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

On the other hand, we have shown that parents have differing priorities for their FLPs, given the hierarchical configuration of values explained in the paragraph above. Those who clearly prioritise Basque hope that their children will attain an excellent competence and will use it widely. But parents themselves report that that is not the case, which constitutes a source of frustration for some. One could interpret that these parents' expectations are overestimated, that these parents are not aware enough of the sociolinguistic context where their children are being socialised. Nevertheless, we feel this ideological stance may serve as an FLP component interrogating the dominion of Spanish and thus as a constitutive element of 'counter-hegemonic strategies to destabilise the normalisation and legitimisation of the dominant discourse' (Nandi, 2018).

Finally, our data seem to confirm that a positive parental attitude towards the construction of a multilingual competence in their children does not establish a scenario where all languages are treated equally. On the contrary, in the sociolinguistic context of the BAC, the management of multilingualism in these parents has been seen to follow a clear plan, where each language is treated differently as per the values and functions each family attaches to them. Some parents are quite comfortable with what they can achieve in their situation while others live it with frustration because, despite their efforts, they cannot achieve the expectations they have of Basque being the main language of their children in the context they live. In fact, giving each language a different value and function may in itself be a strategy to manage multilingualism while retaining priority for Basque.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been supported by the Basque Government under Grant IT1627-22, developed by the ELEBILAB research group (University of the Basque Country).

About the authors

Maite Garcia-Ruiz is a Lecturer at the Department of Language and Literature Education at the Begoñako Andra Mari Teacher Training University College, Basque Country, Spain. Her main research fields of interest include family language policy, immersion education, and language teaching.

Ibon Manterola is an Associate Professor at Department of Linguistics and Basque Studies at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Spain. His main research interests are immersion education, multilingual didactics, new speakers of minority languages, and family language policy.

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Ane Ortega has until recently been a Lecturer at the Department of Language and Literature Education at the Begoñako Andra Mari Teacher Training University College, Basque Country, Spain. She is now an independent scholar working in a number of projects in the area of Basque sociolinguistics, especially with a focus on new speakers of Basque and language use and ideologies in the Basque context. She is also actively involved in language cooperation, and currently works with the indigenous Nasa community (Colombia) in the revitalization of their language.

Maite, Ibon and Ane are members of the ELEBILAB research team, and the UNESCO Chair of World Language Heritage of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). Maite and Ane are research team members of the Equiling project (www.equiling.eu/es/) and Ibon and Maite are research team members of the AMRELSE project.

References

Amorrortu, E., Ortega, A., Idiazabal, I., and Barreña, A. (2009) *Actitudes y prejuicios de los castellanohablantes hacia el euskera*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Servicio Central de Publicaciones del Gobierno Vasco.

Basque Government (2017) *Atzerriko hizkuntzen ezagupena eta ikasketa. Conocimiento y aprendizake de idiomas extranjeros*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurlaritza-Gobierno Vasco. https://www.euskadi.eus/eusko-jaurlaritza/-/dokumentazioa/2017/atzerriko-hizkuntzen-ezagupena-eta-ikasketa/

Basque Government (2019) *Sixth sociolinguistic survey 2016*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurlaritza-Gobierno Vasco. https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/noticia/eas_mas_noticias/en_def/adjuntos/inkesta_EN.pdf

Basque Government (2020) *EAEko ikasleen euskararen erabilera eskola-giroan (2011–2017). Arrue proiektua. Txosten exekutiboa*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Eusko Jaurlaritza-Gobierno Vasco. https://soziolinguistika.eus/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/e_erabilera_web.pdf

Blommaert, J. (1999) *Language ideological debates*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Cenoz, J. (2005) English in bilingual programmes in the Basque country. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 171: 41–56. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2005.2005.171.41.

Elorza, I. and Muñoa, I. (2008) Promoting the minority language through integrated plurilingual language planning: The case of the Ikastolas. *Language, Culture and curriculum* 21(1): 85–101. Doi: https://doi.org/10.2167/lcc345.0.

Fishman, J.A. (1991) *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Flores Farfán, J. A., Córdoba Hernández, L., and Cru, J. (2020) *Guía de revitalización lingüística: para una gestión formada e informada*. Ciudad de México: Linguapax América Latina / CIESAS México.

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80

Goirigolzarri, J., Amorrortu, E. and Ortega, A. (2019) Activación lingüística de jóvenes neohablantes de euskera en la universidad. In F. Ramallo, E. Amorrortu, and M. Puigdevall (eds) *Neohablantes de lenguas minorizadas en el Estado español* 23–46. Madrid and Frankfurt: Iberoamericana / Vervuert.

Ikardo, U. (2017) Ikastoletako guraso erdaldunak eta euskararen jarraipena Lapurdiko kostaldean. *Bat Soziolinguistika Aldizkaria* 105(4): 11–45.

Kasares, P., Ortega, A., and Amorrortu, E. (2022) Basque intergenerational transmission from a language socialisation perspective. In M. Hornsby and W. McLeod (eds) *Transmitting minority languages* 217–246. London: Palgrave. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87910-5_9.

Lanza, E. and Lomeu-Gomes, R. (2020) Family language policy: Foundations, theoretical perspectives and critical approaches. In A.C. Schalley and S.A. Eisenchlas (eds) *Handbook of home language maintenance and development* 153–173. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Mayring, P. (2000) Qualitative content analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1(2): 1–10.

Nandi, A. (2018) Parents as stakeholders: Language management in urban Galician homes. *Multilingua* 37(2): 201–223. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0020.

Nandi, A. and Devasundaram, A.I. (2017) Contesting the conventionalising of Castilian: The role of Galician parents as counter-elites. In F. Lauchlan and M.C. Parafita-Couto (eds) *Bilingualism and minority languages in Europe: Current trends and developments* 12–33. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Nandi, A., Garcia-Ruiz, M., and Manterola, I. (2023) Reclaiming voice through family language policies: Parental sociolinguistic citizenship in Castilian-Spanish dominated multilingual settings. In J. Gspandl, C. Korb, A. Heiling, and E.J. Erling (eds) *The power of voice in transforming multilingual societies* (pp. 101–120). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Olko, J. and Wicherkiewicz, T. (2016) Endangered languages: In search of a comprehensive model for research and revitalization. In J. Olko, T. Wicherkiewicz, and R. Borges (eds) *Integral strategies for language revitalization* 649–676. Warsow: University of Warsow.

Ortega, A., Amorrortu, E., Goirigolzarri, J., and Urla, J. (2016) *Euskal hiztun berriak: esperientziak, jarrerak eta identitateak*. Bizkailab/Deustuko Unibertsitatea.

Ortega, A. and Manterola, I. (2022) 40 años de revitalización del euskera: investigación y cultura lingüística. In E. Eggert and B. Peter (eds) *Kultur(en) der regionalen Mehrsprachigkeit* (pp. 267–307). Berlin: Peter Lang. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3726/b19963.

Schiffman, H. (2006) Language policy and linguistic culture. In T. Ricento (ed.) *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* 111–125. Oxford: Blackwell.

Schwartz, M. (2010) Family language policy: Core issues of an emerging field. *Applied Linguistics Review* 1: 171–192. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110222654.171.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. and Phillipson, R. (1989) 'Mother tongue': The theoretical and sociopolitical construction of a concept. In U. Ammon (ed.) *Status and function of languages and language varieties* 450–477. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Spolsky, B. (2004) *Language policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spolsky, B. (2012) Family language policy – the critical domain. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 33(1): 3–11. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2011.638072.

Yamamoto, M. (2001) *Language use in interlingual families: A Japanese-English sociolinguistic study*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Doi: https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853595417.

Zalbide, M. (1998) Normalización lingüística y escolaridad: un informe desde la sala de máquinas. *Revista Internacional de Estudios Vascos* 43(2): 355–424.

(Received 30th November 2022; accepted 28th February 2023;
final revision received 20th June 2023)

https://utppublishing.com/doi/pdf/10.1558/sols.24849 - Wednesday, November 19, 2025 3:06:10 AM - UVI-FFT IP Address:193.146.45.80