

# A Survey of Linguistic Variables in the Central Zone of the Deva River Valley

The zone of Placencia in contrast with its neighboring towns of Eibar and Vergara

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The present survey was carried out during the summer of 1972, at the conclusion of the Basque Linguistics Seminar, conducted by the University of Nevada, in Ustaritz (France) and Oñate (Spain). At the outset, I would like to record here my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Rudolf P. G. de Rijk of the University of Chicago, for his scholarly advice and encouragement. I am also deeply indebted to Professors Dr. L. Levine, Dr. Ray Dougherty and Dr. R. Costello of New York University, for having initiated me into the fascinating world of modern linguistics. Finally, I thank Mr. Josu Oregui and Rev. Aniceto Zugasti, members of the Basque Academy, who with their constructive criticism made this project possible.

The study of Basque subdialectology is at an incipient stage. Considerable research has been already done in the area of the traditional main dialects, but, unfortunately, little interest has been shown in recording the subdialectal variables of the towns and hamlets that dot the Basque countryside. The study of these subdialects deserves our careful attention and we cannot overlook its importance as a means of unravelling the complexity of the mechanics of linguistic change.

The urgency of the task of compiling valuable data should not be underscored, as we are witnessing at present, in the Basque country, a noble and praiseworthy endeavor to create a unified literary language that could do away with the main dialects and also usher in the death knell of the subdialectal peculiarities of a millenary and unique language in Western Europe.

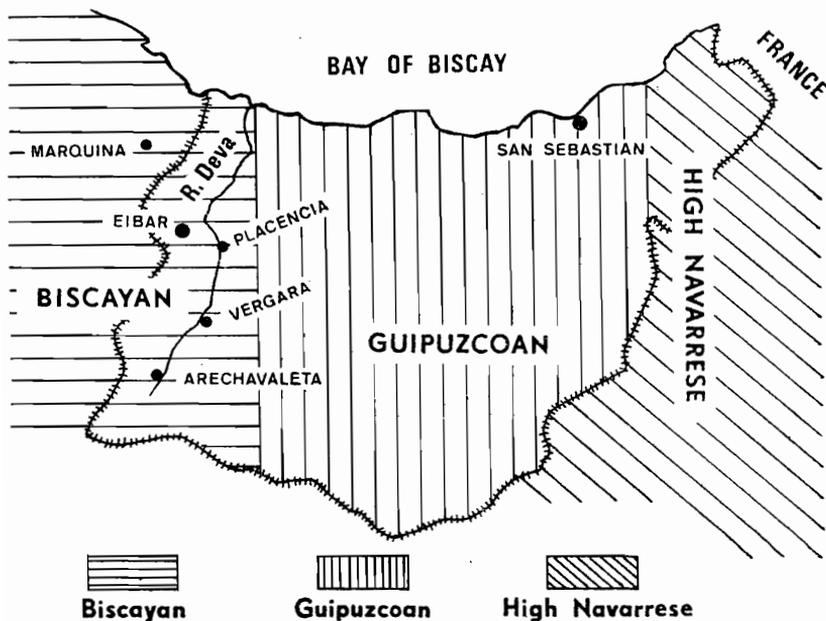
This paper will cover some aspects of phonology and morphology peculiar to Placencia. The survey is far from being exhaustive and we consider it as a modest beginning that could spark further and more thorough study in Basque subdialectology.

Placencia is a small town of about six thousand inhabitants, along the river Deva, in the province of Guipúzcoa. Most of the population

is engaged in industry. Its long industrial tradition dates back to the year of 1573, when there is historical evidence of the existence of an important royal arms factory. However, the municipal area includes also 82 farmhouses (*baserri* in Basque), of which 72 are still inhabited.

From a dialectological point of view, the people speak the Biscayan dialect. The Deva River forms the boundary between the Biscayan and Guipuzcoan dialects. Besides, the lower zone of the Deva Valley (Vergara, Placencia, Eibar), has subdialectal differences that set it apart from the upper zone of Salinas de Léniz, Mondragón and Arechavaleta. Further, the speech of Placencia presents special characteristics that make it unique.

It is within this general framework that we shall try to describe some of the linguistic variables found in Placencia. Whenever possible, we shall present them in contrast with those of Eibar and Vergara, which are respectively 5 and 8 km. away from Placencia and belong to the same subdialectal group. To further elucidate the contrast, reference will also be made to other neighboring dialects and subdialects, whenever necessary. The map reproduced here will show the location of the area under consideration.

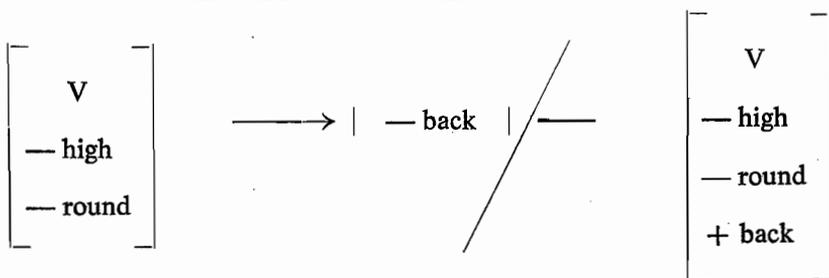


Most of the linguistic variables are found in morphology and are related to verbal forms. However, we shall start this survey with a reference to the topic of vowel interaction. Vowel harmony rules are found in many Basque dialects and subdialects. They play an important role in the overall functioning of the language, as the definite article is *-a*, affixed to base nominals, many of which end in a vowel.

Generative Phonology with its concept of ordered rules is of the greatest importance for Basque dialectology and it is within this context that we shall consider several aspects of vowel interaction (1). Basque has a five vowel system: *i, e, a, o, u*, with no distinctions of tenseness or length. The exceptional *ü* vowel will not be considered here. Using the system of binary features designed by R. Jakobson, M. Halle and N. Chomsky to characterize classes of vowels, we have the following table for Basque vowels:

	a	o	e	i	u
high	—	—	—	+	+
back	+	+	—	—	+
round	—	+	—	—	+

Using the notational conventions of Generative Phonology, we shall expand a general rule, common to the whole Biscayan area and which is listed in VIBB as «Rule Raa»:



(1) An excellent paper on the subject has been written by Prof. Rudolf P. G. de Rijk in *Fontes Linguae Vasconum*, "Vowel Interaction in Biscayan Basque". Editorial Aranzadi, Pamplona, Año 2, N.º 5 (1970). References to this article will be in the abbreviated form of VIBB.

This rule means that low unrounded vowels (a, e) are fronted before a low unrounded back vowel (a); that is,

$$a + a \longrightarrow e a$$

alaba bat (one daughter)

alabea (the daughter)

neska bat (one girl)

neskea (the girl)

In Placencia, however, the above rule has been simplified in such a way that the feature [— round] no longer appears in the environment of the rule. We have, then, a more general rule called in VIBB «Rule Rao»:

$$a + a \longrightarrow e a$$

$$a + o \longrightarrow e o$$

alaba bat

alabea

alabe ori (that daughter)

neska bat

neskea

neske ori (that girl)

We shall now list, using a simplified notation, the different patterns of vowel interaction in the zone of Placencia. References to Biscayan and Guipuzcoan will be abbreviated and entered as (B) and (G), respectively.

a) A + A  $\longrightarrow$  E A  $\longrightarrow$  I A

In Placencia, Vergara and Eibar, we have:

alabia neskia errekia (the brook)

Other forms: alaba (G) alabea (B) alabie (B)

b) E + A  $\longrightarrow$  I A

In Placencia, Vergara and Eibar:

beste (other) bestia (the other)

Other forms: bestea (G) bestie (B)

c) I + A  $\longrightarrow$  I A  
 $\searrow$   
 IXE OR IXA

In Placencia, Vergara and Eibar:

aizeri (fox)      aizerixa (the fox)      x = [š]

Other forms:      aizeria (G)      aizerixe (B)

We notice that in Placencia and other Biscayan areas, the epenthetic glide y turns into a true consonant.

d) O + A      —————>      U A

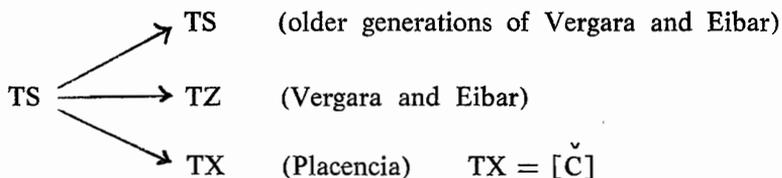
In Placencia, Vergara and Eibar:

asto (donkey)      astua (the donkey)

Other forms:      astoa (G)      astue (B)

Let us conclude this section with two peculiar problems of merging consonants:

e) *Merger of sibilants and affricates*



moltzo (rag, heap)

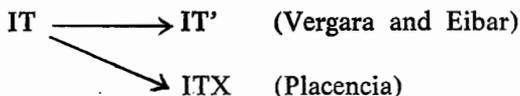
*the rag*      moltsua      (older people of Vergara and Eibar)

                 moltzua      (Vergara and Eibar)

                 moltxua      (Placencia)

In this connection, I would like to mention that the nickname given to Placencia is —Autxerri—, from —auts— (dust) and —erri— (village). It does not mean «dusty village», but rather «the village that pronounces —autsa— AUTXA».

f) *Palatalization of dentals*



ditut (I have - when the object is in the plural)

DIT'UT (Vergara and Eibar)

DITXUT (Placencia)

(T' denotes a palatalized, but non-affricated *t*)

We shall now deal with some of the linguistic variables found in verbal forms. We shall simply list them without any particular order or arrangement.

1. *DITUT*. Present Tense of the verb IZAN (to have)

Marquina	Eibar	Vergara	Placencia
DITUT	DIT'UT	DIT'UT	DITXUT
DITUK	DIT'UK	DIT'UK	DITXUK
DITU	DIT'U	DIT'U	DITXU
DITUGU	DIT'UGU	DIT'UGU	DITXUGU
DITUZU	DIT'UZU	DIT'UZU	DITXUZU
DITUZUE	DIT'UZUE	DIT'UZUE	DITXUZUE
DITUE	DIT'UE	DIT'UE	DITXUE

2. *Dative Auxiliary Transitive Forms* (I to him)

Marquina	Eibar	Vergara	Placencia
DEUTSAT	DETZAT	DOTZAT	DOTXAT
DEUTSAK	DETZAK	DOTZAK	DOTXAK
DEUTSA	DETZA	DOTZA	DOTXA
DEUTSAGU	DETZA(G)U	DOTZA(G)U	DOTXA(G)U
DEUTSAZU	DETZAZU	DOTZAZU	DOTXAZU
DEUTSAZUE	DETZAZUE	DOTZAZUE	DOTXAZUE
DEUTSE	DETZE	DOTZE	DOTXE

Besides the forms found in Marquina: «Nik ari deutsal», we have also the typical (B): «Nik zuri deutsal».

In the above forms we notice the following combinations of sounds:

EU	_____	TS	(Biscayan)
O	_____	TZ	(Vergara)
O	_____	TX	(Placencia)
E	_____	TZ	(Eibar)

3. *Variables in Dative Forms (Let him bring it to me)*

Ekarri da(g)idala		(Biscayan)
Ekarri daidala		(Vergara)
Ekarri deixadala	or	
Ekarri deixarala		(Placencia and Eibar)

Both of the last two forms may occur. In Placencia there is mostly *d*.

4. *Familiar Verbal Forms for men and women*

(I have brought it)

	Biscayan	Vergara-Placencia-Eibar
Men	EKARRI YUAT	EKARRI JUAT
Women	EKARRI YONAT	EKARRI JONAT
M.	EKARRI YOK	EKARRI JOK
W.	EKARRI YON	EKARRI JON
M.	EKARRI YUAGU	EKARRI JUAGU
W.	EKARRI YONAGU	EKARRI JONAGU
M.	EKARRI YUEK	EKARRI JUEK
W.	EKARRI YONE	EKARRI JONE

«J» is pronounced like the Spanish *j*.

The future tense of these familiar forms yields the notorious «Ekarriko jone» (They will bring it), so typical of the zone of Placencia.

5. *Synthetic Form of the verb «etorri» (to come)*

Preterit (Imperfect)

Biscayan	Placencia
NI NENTORREN	NI NENTORREN
I ENTORREN	I ENTORREN
URA ETORREN	ZETORREN

Vergara	Eibar
NI NENTORREN	NI NENTORREN
I ENTORREN	I ENTORREN
<i>ZETORREN</i>	ETORREN

The italicized forms show Guipuzcoan influence.

6. *Present Tense of the verb «to be»*

I shall list here the main forms found in Biscayan and Guipuzcoan together with the familiar forms of Placencia, Vergara and Eibar.

Biscayan		Guipuzcoan
NI NAZ		NI NAIZ
ZU ZARA		ZU ZERA
BERA DA		BERA DA
GU GARA		GU GERA
ZUEK ZARIE		ZUEK ZERATE
EUREK DIRA		AYEK DIRA

Placencia	Eibar	Vergara
NEU NOK	NI NAIZ	NEU NOK
EU AIZ	ZU ZARA	I AIZ
BERA DOK	BERA DA	AURA DOK
GEU GAITXUK	GU GARA	GEU GAITXUK
ZUEK ZARA	ZUEK ZARIE	ZUEK ZATE
BERAK DIRA	AREK DIRA	ERAK DITXUK

The survey presented here is not exhaustive. Not all the linguistic variables of the area have been treated here. Much more remains to be done in Basque subdialectology and we sincerely hope that others will also continue the work to put Bascolology within the reach of the modern linguist. The importance of Generative Phonology, as developed by N. Chomsky and M. Halle, for Basque studies is of paramount importance, and vice versa, we can also say that the

myriad aspects of Basque dialectology should offer a rich ground to generative phonologists.

The present situation in the Basque country is not conducive to an upsurge of Bascology. However, we sincerely hope that enlightened linguists all over the world will not fail to discover the unique richness of one of the oldest living languages in the Western World.

February 2nd. 1973.

#### R E F E R E N C E S

- R. M. Azkue: *Morfología de la lengua vasca.*  
S. Altube: *Observaciones al tratado de Morfología vasca.*  
T. Echeverría: *Flexiones verbales de Eibar.*  
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