

How reliable and comprehensive is the DGV?

RUDOLF P. G. DE RIJK
University of Leiden

The appearance, in the last month of 1987, of the first volume of the long-awaited *Diccionario General Vasco* constitutes a great event in the history of Basque Studies. Were it not for the widely felt sorrow caused by the tragic circumstance that its principal compiler Dr Luis Michelena was not fated to see its publication, this would have afforded a splendid occasion for a truly Decheparean celebration: *Hiztegia da kanpora eta goazen guztiok dantzara*¹.

There is no question at all that the completed work will be an impressive monument of scholarship as well as a most useful tool for all who are engaged in Basque linguistics or philology. Even students of Basque literature or ethnography, and more generally, anyone whose work or interest touches in any way upon matters of Basque idiom, will be impelled to resort to this unique work of reference and consult it time and time again.

Yet for all its merits, having used the published volume assiduously in my own research over a period of several months, I have become acutely aware of certain shortcomings —all the more annoying as they could have been so easily avoided.

Considering that many further volumes are slated to be published over the years to come, so that suggestions for improvement need not remain fruitless but can be readily implemented, I feel that blithely overlooking these blemishes would be a rank disservice to the compilers of the dictionary and to the Basque community at large. Therefore, I find myself obligated to embark on a critical assessment of the dictionary, an unenviable task which may lead to some dampening of the generally prevailing satisfaction.

As the remarks that follow tend to be rather critical in nature, I wish it to be clearly understood that they are by no means intended to disparage the work in its totality, nor to belittle the efforts expended in its realization.

As I do not relish writing book reviews of any kind, much less engaging in polemics, I dare hope that these criticisms will be regarded as reflecting but a single ambition, shared, no doubt, by all concerned: to help make the present work into the exemplary dictionary the Basque nation deserves.

I will begin by recalling an early statement referring to the preparation of

(1) (Added in proof): The second volume, *Ame-Asdun*, came out in March 1989, the third volume being scheduled to appear later in the year.

this very dictionary: «Se examinará en lo posible la totalidad de los testimonios antiguos, por lo menos hasta 1700, para tratar de completar la parte histórica del diccionario» (BAP, 13 (1957), p. 359).

Why, then, I now venture to ask, was this not done? Although on page XIV of the introduction we find asserted: «De una manera general, para el período que abarca hasta 1745, hemos despojado casi exhaustivamente toda la documentación conocida y disponible», a quick glance at the list of exhaustively examined texts on page XLV reveals that nothing could be farther from the truth. A large part of the seventeenth-century texts has not been exhaustively examined, and, incredible though it may seem, a sizable portion of even the sixteenth-century texts has been most cavalierly dealt with. I am referring here, of course, to the appalling decision to dispense with Leizarraga's New Testament translation, at least as far as exhaustive analysis is concerned. Instead, quotes are supplied from Gabriel Aresti's article «Léxico empleado por Leizarraga de Briscous» (FLV V (1973), No. 13). Thus, all the DGV has to report about *abiroin* is this: «"Espacio o tiempo aproximado" en Leizarraga sg. Aresti, FLV 1973, 63». I, for one, expect considerably more from a dictionary of this scope. If it is too much to ask for a full listing of the corresponding New Testament citations, one instance, at least, ought to have been provided. To be sure, *abiroin* is a Romance loan — an obvious relation of Old French *à viron*; has not been heard of again since Leizarraga; was never included in any dictionary; and is thus of no interest at all to the average speaker of Basque. All the same, is the DGV not intended to be more than just a practical dictionary? Should it not also serve the needs of linguists and philologists? For a student of loan phonology or loan semantics, the case of *abiroin* might very well prove to be of uncommon interest².

As for the seventeenth-century texts, seven books have not been adequately dealt with: *Ama Virginaren officioa* by Cristobal de Harizmendi; the second part of the *Manual Devotionexcoa* and the whole of *Eliçara erabiltceco liburua* by Joannes Etcheberri of Ciboure; *Guiristinoaren Doctrina* by Silvain Pouvreau —his *Gudu espiritualala* being nowhere even mentioned; *Arima penitentaren occupatione devotaq* and *Onsa hilceco bidia*, both by Jean de Tartas.

Since no defense is offered for this neglect, one can but guess at the underlying motivation. Is it a belief that those seventeenth-century texts that have been examined already give a complete enough picture of the vocabulary of those times? Yet, the compilers themselves have found out otherwise, since several examples from the neglected texts did somehow find their way into the dictionary. But, as only chance dictated what was included and what was not, the end result is not really all that satisfactory.

One requirement a dictionary of this kind is supposed to fulfil is that it correctly indicate the date of first appearance of a lexical item. The DGV does indeed address itself to this important task. However, handicapped as it is by its arbitrary neglect of so large a proportion of the seventeenth century's literary legacy, the dictionary's performance is sometimes wide of the mark, as borne out by the following three examples:

For *aldikal*, it cites Belapeyre's *Catechima Laburra* of 1696, but

(2) I am happy to hear that, beginning with the DGV's second volume, Leizarraga's works, including his New Testament translation, are indeed exhaustively analysed.

not Tartas's *Onsa hilceco bidia*, written not later than 1657: *apairu al-dikal* (p. 40 in Eguzkitza's edition).

For *aitormen*, it cites the Burgos catechism of 1747, whereas the word already occurs in Tartas's *Onsa hilceco bidia: Aithormen eta kofesione hura egin du Apostoliak berak*,... (p. 135-136 in Eguzkitza's edition).

For *abalquesun*, it cites Pouvreau's *Iesusen Imitacionea* written circa 1660, but not Etcheberri's *Manual Devotionezcoa II* of 1627, where it appears on page 204: *Abalquesunex betheric humillqui othoiztera*,...

Incidentally, for later periods too the accuracy of the DGV's information leaves here and there something to be desired:

The first appearance of *almen* is not in the Burgos catechism of 1747, nor in the *Diccionario Trilingüe* of 1745, but in Cardaberaz's early work *Cristavaren vicitzza* first published in 1744: *ta almen edo potencia bata ez da bestea*... (p. 89, in the 1850 edition)³.

The first mention of *adimen* occurs not in Añibarro's *Voces Bascongadas*, generally dated around 1820⁴, but on the next to final page of J.A. Moguel's *Confesino Ona* of 1803: *Aditu, Adimena Entender, Inteligencia*. (Under the heading «*Verba Batzuben Adividia*»).

Blunders of this sort clearly illustrate that a dictionary aiming for historical accuracy can ill afford to neglect any of the existing sources, especially the earlier ones. Nor did it need to do so, as the total collection of texts up to 1700 or thereabouts is, after all, quite manageable. An increase of the dictionary's basic corpus by a mere 5% would have been sufficient to save it from doling out all this misinformation.

It would be a more than excellent turn of events if the compilers could be persuaded to extend forthwith the corpus to embrace without exception all documentation prior to 1700, thus enabling the DGV to approach the definitive achievement it is meant to be.

For the texts after 1700, exhaustive sampling is obviously out of the question. Accordingly, which texts to include and which to exclude becomes a debatable issue. While, I am happy to say, I concur with many of the choices that have been made, I would like to offer some suggestions as to which additional texts I consider essential to exploit in full detail. My desiderata are no more than five in number:

1. The vocabulary at the end of Martin de Harriet's *Gramatica escuaraz eta francesez* of 1741 constitutes an important document, the more so as it is known to be among the sources of Larramendi's *Diccionario Trilingüe*. That the DGV has not paid it all the attention it deserves, results from the following observation. Discussing the word *aipamen*, the DGV refers to «la acepción larramendiana de 'proposición'». This is misleading on two counts. First, 'proposición' is not the only meaning for *aipamen* in the DT; it is also found as one of the Basque equivalents

(3) As J. A. Lakarra pointed out to me, I am making the assumption, possibly unwarranted, that the word *almen* found in the 1850 edition of Cardaberaz' work goes in fact back to the first edition of 1744. Regrettably, this uncertainty is not easily cleared up, as there is no evidence that any copies of this edition still exist.

(4) Thanks to recent investigations by B. Urgell, it must now be assumed that Añibarro's *Voces Bascongadas* is approximately twenty years older than previously thought. If so, Añibarro's mention of the word *adimen* may well be prior to that of Moguel.

of 'mención'. Second, the meaning 'proposition' for *aipamen* originates with Harriet (*Voc.*, p. 410: proposition: *aipamena*), from which Larramendi took it.

2. For the sake of establishing the first occurrences of typical Guipuzcoan words and expressions, it seems necessary to include Cardaberaz's early work *Cristavaren vicitza* of 1744 in its entirety, as Ochoa de Arin's *Doctrina* is much too meager on which to base our knowledge of early Guipuzcoan vocabulary⁵.

3. Granting that the totality of Mendiburu's writings is too extensive to be included as such in the dictionary's corpus. I would make a special plea for *Jesusen Bihotzaren Devocioa* of 1747, the reason being that it is the earliest testimony of Mendiburu's characteristic variety of Basque.

4. According to the list on page XLV, three works by Duvoisin have been exhaustively sampled: *Dialogues basques*, *Laborantzako liburua* and *Liburua ederra*. Not included, however, is Duvoisin's Bible translation. This decision may now have to be reconsidered, as it has led to the regrettable absence of quite a number of words that ought to have been present. Some instances I noted are the following:

abalkagarrikeria in Jer. 3,24: *Gure haurtasunetik, abalkagarrikeria batek iretsi ditu gure aiten lanak (Confusio comedit laborem patrum nostrorum ab adolescentia nostra);*

abalkagarritasun in Jer. 3,25: *Gure abalkagarritasunean lo-eginen dugu (Dormiemus in confusione nostra);*

abalkamendu in *Erran-zaharrak* (Proverbs) 10,14: *...aldiz, zoroen ahoa abalkamenduari hurbil dago (...os autem stulti confusio proximum est)*, and in Dan. 3,40: *...zeren abalkamendurik ez baita zure gaineko sinbestean bizi direnentzat (...quoniam non est confusio confidentibus in te);*

abalkapen in Jer. 11,13: *abalkapenezko aldare (aras confusionis);*

aldatzapen in Job. 14,14: *Orai gudutan daramaztan egun guztiez ene aldatzapenari begira nago ethor dadien arteo (Cunctis diebus, quibus nunc milito, expecto donec veniat immutatio mea);*

akipen does occur in the DGV, but lacks a proper citation. Duvoisin's translation of *Daniel* 9,27 provides one: *...eta akhipeneraino eta akhabantzaraino irauen du desmasiak (...et usque ad consummationem et finem perseverabit desolatio);*

aldapen is also mentioned in the DGV, but the only example given is one in Lizardi's *Itz-lauz*, omitting a much earlier example in Duvoisin's translation of *Hebrews* 7,12: *Alabainan aldatu denaz geroztik apheztasuna, premia da egin dadien legearen aldapena ere. (Translatio enim sacerdotio, necesse est ut et legis translatio fiat).*

Those five words that are not in the DGV, I found by sheer accident, without any systematic search. They must therefore be indicative of many more. It thus seems to be the case that quite a number of words in Duvoisin's Bible translation have not reached the DGV from any other source either. This fact alone constitutes the strongest possible argument for including this work among those to be exhaustively analysed.

5. I noticed very few citations from the writings of Koldo Mitxelena himself.

(5) Unfortunately, it is quite possible that the first edition of *Cristavaren vicitza* is no longer extant.

This modesty, while understandable, is scientifically unsound. More than anyone else, Mitxelena has shaped present-day Batua usage, and he has done so mainly through the alluring example of his own style of writing, in which a careful, even meticulous, choice of words is an outstanding characteristic. For this reason *Mitxelena* *Idazlan Hautatuak* should definitely be included in the DGV's basic corpus, if not the complete collection of Mitxelena's Basque compositions⁶.

Now that I have given full scope to airing my main complaint about the DGV, namely the unwarranted narrowness of its basic corpus, I shall go on to voice some lesser complaints and make some additional comments.

To begin with, there is the matter of morphological variants. To treat them all under one single heading, as the DGV does, seems indeed to be the only sensible policy. However, the question as to which forms constitute morphological variants of each other can be a matter of serious controversy, as it is in the case of the notorious suffixes *-pen* and *-men*. One may well wonder why *agerpen* has been deemed a variant of *agermen*, whereas *aitormen* and *aitorpen* have been allotted separate entries.

To enable the reader to find what he is looking for, cross-references have sometimes been provided, e.g. on page 637: «*albin, albinu, v. albainu*». Quite often, however, there is no cross-reference where one is sorely needed. For instance, since there is no reference to it between *abalkeria* and *abalketaratu* on page 38, and since it is not listed as a variant of *abalketasun*, I thought for weeks that the item *abalkesun* was not in the dictionary at all, until one day I finally found it on page 36 as a variant of *abalkeizun*. Similarly, on page 811, one could use an entry *almen* referring the casual reader to *ahalmen*. In general, I would like to register a plea for a vastly more liberal use of cross-references in the DGV, since not all users of the dictionary will be qualified philologists.

The DGV is praiseworthy in scrupulously acknowledging its indebtedness to previous lexicographers wherever this is the case. Quite naturally, it has made full use of the data gathered by the recent DRA. Fortunately, it is not wholly uncritical in its borrowing, as we can see from parenthetical comment on page 262:

«*Bana ori egin due, Jaungoikoaren inspirazio edo agermen egiazkoarekin Gco II 199 (ap. DRA, pero no se encuentra en esta página)*». Disappointingly, we are not informed as to where the citation does come from.

Yet, sometimes errors from the DRA did find their way into the DGV without comment or correction. On page 386, following the DRA, the citation from Pierre d'Urte, *Egin diozokoon nitaz aiphamen Faraoni*, is wrongly marked as *Ex 40, 14*. Urte never got this far in his translating, the text is from *Gen 40, 14*.

This quotation, with its misprinted *diozokon*, brings us to the next point. In general, the DGV, prepared with the utmost care, is suprisingly free of misprints, especially in the Basque citations. English ones are a different matter; e.g., on page 625, for *on the other Land* read: *on the other hand*.

Finally, since no dictionary can achieve completeness, no matter how hard it may try, any user will be able to produce a list of words he has looked for to no avail. Mine includes the following:

abasailamendu 'vassalage';
abatandre 'abbess' (Plácido Múgica, *Dic. Castellano-Vasco*, p. 2);

(6) *Mitxelena* *Idazlan Hautatuak* have been fully analysed as of the second volume of the DGV.

abela in the meaning 'person leaving without paying' (Cf. *Euskera* XII (1961) p. 25);
abelazkuntza 'cattle breeding';
aitzinaldi 'precedence over others' (Lhande: 'tour de faveur');
alamu: Variant of *aldamu*? (Cf. *Auek, e, alamuz etorriko zian Atauna...*, in: A. Arrinda Albisu (Anes Lazkauko) «*Semeno de Lazkano*», p. 22);
alun 'alum', and its many compounds, such as *alunarri* 'aluminum'.

Since I have quoted Etchepare in my opening paragraph, it is only fitting that I should end my closing paragraph with another quote from the same source. Harsh as it is, it aptly summarizes what I have wanted to convey: *Debile principium melior fortuna sequatur*⁷.

(7) Disturbing rumors have come my way that the official sponsorship of the DGV has decreed that its corpus must henceforth be closed —no more material to be added under any circumstance— so as to be able to finish the project as soon as possible. As important texts of various periods and literary genres are being discovered every year, such an attitude appears ludicrous and irresponsible. Truly, the traditional wisdom of *lan lasterra lan alperra* applies here in full severity.