

Foreword to *Glossaria duo Vasco-Islandica*

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The document *ASJU* publishes in the following pages provides us with the basic text from which we derive our knowledge of the linguistic aspect of the relationship between Basque whalers from the XVII century and northern European nations. It is clear that in the course of their whaling activities basque fishermen needed to establish commercial relationships with northern harbours. In this context, one may wonder about the language Basques used in those dealings. The document which, thanks to Gidor Bilbao's work, is published here allows us to draw a general picture of that language.

The text offered here is Nicolaas Gerardus Hendricus Deen's doctoral dissertation, submitted to the School of Humanities of the University of Leiden (Holland) on the fourth of July, 1937, and published that same year in Amsterdam by H. J. Paris. The thesis, entitled *Glossaria Duo Vasco-Islandica*, is an edition of two manuscripts found in Iceland containing Basque-Icelandic vocabularies. In the 'Prologomena' to this work, Deen informs us of the way he came upon the manuscripts. John Helgason, professor of Icelandic language and literature and director of the Biblioteka Arnarnagnaana at that time, found the two manuscripts in his Library. Obviously, he considered the documents to be highly interesting and set about to translate the Icelandic glosses to the Basque words into German, incorporating some remarks and comments on the manuscripts. He decided to send them over to the famous Dutch bascologist C. C. Uhlenbeck, professor at the University of Leiden, for further research. Uhlenbeck himself did not study the manuscript sent by Helgason, but well provided with Basque dictionaries, among them Resurrección María de Azkue's monumental *Diccionario Vasco-Español-Francés*, set about disentangling the mysteries of the manuscripts his teacher had trusted him with. In order to do so, he also travelled to the Basque Country, where he was able to obtain Julio de Urquijo's views and opinions on some uncertain points.

After noting some mistakes, orthographic and otherwise, in the translation of Basque words to Icelandic, Deen presents the texts of the two Basque-Icelandic glossaries, along with a German translation (perhaps Helgason's) of the Icelandic words, a translation into Spanish of the Icelandic/German text and some comments on the Basque words that the Icelandic scribe had tried to record.

The glossaries date from the XVIIIth century. According to Helgason, whose remarks Deen also includes, Basque fishermen are mentioned for the first time in an Icelandic document in 1613.

The first of the two glossaries bears the title *Vocabula Gallica*. It is not, however, a French vocabulary, but a Basque one. It contains a list of Basque words, probably elicited by an Icelander interested in such subjects, to a large extent by simply pointing at several objects and using mimicry. As one would expect from the elicitation procedure, there are a number of errors due to the fact that the Basque informant misinterpreted the concept whose expressions he was being requested. Thus, for instance, when our Icelandic philologist was looking for the Basque term for 'crew' (*skipsfolk*), he got the word *laguna* 'friend' (15), and the expression *zer da bori?* 'what's that?' (transcribed as *serdahari*) is interpreted as 'look at that' (338). Words are grouped together in part by semantic fields. For instance, in items 30 through 53 we find words related to clothing. Immediately afterwards, we encounter words related to books and religious objects, 76 through 104 refer to different body parts. Such systematicity, however, is purely accidental, and one is often taken back to a prior semantic field after having dealt with a different one.

The transcription of Basque words is the result of adapting to Icelandic orthography what the authors of the vocabularies believed to be hearing. It is therefore no surprising to find some of the Basque words clad in an exotic and sometimes hardly recognizable spelling.

As for the Basque dialect which forms the basis of the glossary, it seems clear that, as Deen concludes, informants from Labourd were predominant, even though there might have also been sailors from other regions. This might provide an explanation for the title *Vocabula Gallica*. This conclusion is also valid for the second glossary, which, however, is called *Vocabula Biscaica*. As a rather clear example, take the number lists given in both glossaries. Numbers 5 and 20 appear transcribed as *borts* and *hogoï* in the first glossary (464b) and as *Bortz* and *hogoï(ta)* in the second. These variants are typical of eastern dialects, rather than of Gipuzkoan or Biscaian.

The second glossary, called "*Vocabula Biscaica*", presents some peculiarities which make it more interesting than the previous one. At first it differs very little from the first glossary. However, in entries 90 and 91 we find that the glossed word is not Basque, but Spanish (*boca* 'mouth' and *lingua* 'tongue'), the same as in other cases like 99 *brasos* 'arms', 150 *ladrun* 'thief' or 178 *evmano* 'brother' ('hermano'). In 163 we find a variety of words from different languages for the same concept *mas, mes, giago* 'more'. 181 gives Basque *bai* and also *vj* (French *oui*) as a translation of Icelandic *ja* 'yes'. Item 191, *clinke*, glossed as Icelandic *ljtjed* 'small, little' seems to be Dutch.

Such multilingualism is not surprising, but what is definitely interesting is the presence in this glossary of a series of sentences belonging neither to Basque nor to any other known language. We find, among others, sentences like (217) *ser ju presenta for mi* 'what do you give me?', (220) *sumbatt galsardia for* 'for how many socks?', (224) *Christ Maria presenta for mi Balia, for mi, presenta for ju bustana* 'When Christ and Mary give me a whale, I will give you the tail', (226) *for ju mala gissuna* 'you are a bad man', (227) *Presenta for mi berrua usnia eta berria bura* 'give me hot

milk and fresh butter' and (226a) *ser travala for ju* 'what are you doing?'. Such sentences bear witness to the existence of a 'trade language' developed by Basque sailors in their commercial dealings with other European nations. Although their language incorporated a large number of Basque words, it also contained words from several other languages, like the rather perspicacious *for mi* and *for ju*. As for its structure, we can observe important differences with respect to Basque. Notice, for instance, that adjectives precede nouns, while the opposite order occurs in Basque. Something else worth mentioning is that the Basque determiner *-a* gets interpreted as being a part of the root form, appearing in many cases where it would not be found in Basque. For further reference and study of the language in these sentences, see Hualde (1984, 1988) and Bakker (1987).

Basque sailors had therefore learnt to communicate with foreign nations of a very different linguistic background by using a highly simplified linguistic code. It wouldn't be surprising if they tried to communicate in the same fashion with the Newfoundland natives they came in contact with. This may have been the source of the myth according to which American Indians understood Basque (see Hualde 1988). In fact, we have evidence which shows that Basque fishermen communicated with some American nations (see Bakker 1989, in press a, in press b), but what is far from evident is that such communication was conducted in basque rather than, as seems more likely, in a trade language like the one reflected in the glossary sentences.

Pidgin and trade languages have attracted a great deal of interest among researchers, due to the striking similarities often found in languages developed and used in areas of the world located far apart from each other. From what can be inferred from the sentences in the second glossary, the trade language developed by Basque sailors also shared many of the features common to languages of this type.

The documents edited by Deen are important in that they provide evidence for the Basque presence in Iceland in the XVIIth century. But their main importance derives, in my opinion, from the fact that they demonstrate the existence at that time of a trade language with a Basque lexical basis, some of whose characteristics can be easily determined. All this justifies the publication of this text in this journal, following its tradition of republishing works of difficult access to the public.

References

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