Language Awareness in Minority Language Contexts

David Lasagabaster

Introduction
It is estimated that today there are around 7,000 languages spoken in the world, but half of them are expected to disappear in the next few years. Language shift, the process whereby a given speech community of a lesser-used language shifts to speaking a more dominant language, has been a constant in human history, but what is unheard of is the speed at which this process has been taking place in the last decades. As a result of globalization, economic, social and political pressure is exerted on a large part of the world’s population to stop the intergenerational transmission of lesser-used or minority languages, that is, the transmission of the traditional language through the different generations of a family, in order to adopt the more dominant language that will purportedly secure social and economic mobility to siblings. This language shift brings about feelings of language loss and, therefore, identity loss, because language and identity are ineluctably connected. The side-effects of this global trend are variegated, but among the first ones to emerge, the dramatic fracture that often occurs between the older generation (grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles) and the younger generation (children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews) clearly stands out.

Language awareness plays a paramount role in any context, but this is especially so in settings in which a minority language is spoken because of the distinctiveness of such multilingual situations and the linguistic strains that the coexistence of languages usually generate. In fact, the linguistic Arcadia, the imaginary idyllic paradise where languages coexist in peace and their speakers show respect to each other, is very far from everyday reality. In an ever-increasing number of countries, speakers of minority languages see their linguistic rights curtailed and are invited, when not directly forced, to abandon their own traditional language and adopt a new one. Similarly, in some countries authorities pay lip service to minority languages, but reality shows that the language policies implemented are just playing to the gallery. In Bolivia, for example, the 2009 Constitution includes 36 Indigenous languages as official languages alongside Spanish, but Bolivians need to master Spanish to achieve social mobility while there is no real incentive to learn any of the Indigenous languages (Eisenchlas, Schalley and Guillemin, 2015).
A minority language could be defined as the language spoken by a numerical minority within a region or country, which coexists with the language of the wider community (the majority language), irrespective of whether the former enjoys co-official status or not. This minority language definition would therefore encompass both regional languages and the languages spoken by the immigrant populations. The former is dealt with in this chapter, whereas the latter is analysed by Hatoss (this volume).

This chapter focuses on the affective parameter of language awareness, that is, the attitudes speakers harbour towards a particular minority language. Since attitudes reflect the value, importance and status attached to a language, they act as a health indicator of any minority language. Speakers usually hold attitudes not only towards language use, but also towards many other aspects (elegance, usefulness, solidarity, adequacy, etc.) related to a particular language, and in the case of minority languages, these attitudes have a direct bearing on their normalization process. However, language attitudes are strongly linked to institutional support, namely the incumbent language policy and the actual possibility of using the language concerned in different social spheres such as education, the government or the media. Language attitudes can consequently be analysed in relation to both the official and broader language policy (the macro perspective), as well as in relation to the educational language policy (the micro perspective). The combination of the macro and the micro perspectives will allow us to delve into how language policies at these two levels affect the stakeholders’ attitudinal stance, as language awareness issues include language attitudes amongst “students and in wider society” (Svalberg, 2016: 8). According to Eisenclals, Schalley and Guillemin (2015), societal attitudes and educational policies are two factors that strongly affect achievement of literacy in multilingual contexts.

Against this backdrop, in this chapter particular attention is paid to the situation of Basque, a minority language that represents a case well worth considering due to the implementation of remarkably different language policies in the three territories where it is spoken. Therefore, the impact of both the more general language policies and the more particular language education policies on language attitudes is examined. From an international perspective, the situation of Basque can be compared to many other contexts, since the different language policies implemented in this small geographic area encompass the most habitual ones to be found in most minority language contexts, namely co-officiality only in some parts of the State concerned (as is the case of Catalan and Galician in Spain or Welsh and Irish in the UK) and no official status at all (as is the case of minority languages in France, Spanish in the USA, or Aboriginal languages in Australia, to name but a few).

Revitalization and Language Policy

In the European Union, there are currently 24 official languages, but approximately 60 other heritage languages are also spoken in specific regions or by specific groups, in addition to the wide range of languages used by the immigrant populations. In this extremely rich linguistic context, European institutions have strongly advocated the promotion of language learning and the protection of linguistic and cultural diversity as one of Europe’s main inherent features and as a treasure to be cherished. At the European institutional level, there is a strong awareness about the loss that the disappearance of endangered languages would entail, which is why action has been taken
to reverse language shift through revitalization programmes, bilingual education playing a crucial role in this regard.

Although multilingualism is fraught with linguistic tensions, minority language speakers become used to dealing with different languages from a very early age. Gorter offers the following reflection:

It is interesting to note that speakers of European minority languages, such as Basque, Frisian, Welsh, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Breton and Catalan, share certain characteristics that distinguish them from speakers of majority languages, especially the fact that they all become fluent bilingual speakers. Without exception they speak at least two languages, often three or more. For them, being a multilingual speaker is nothing special; it is what they know themselves to be from an early age.

Gorter, 2015: 86

This statement is in sharp contrast with the widespread monolingual mindset whose main objective is to undermine multilingualism on the grounds that monolingualism is a normal state of affairs. To this effect, the advocates of the monolingual mindset strive to find something wrong with multilingualism, “whether it is expensive or confusing or impossible” (Clyne, 2005: 27), despite the fact that there is ample empirical evidence that proves that cognitive skills are enhanced by bilingualism and that there are social and economic advantages associated with multiple language learning.

In many education systems the world over, the monolingual habitus has attempted to establish monolingualism as the norm and, for instance, remarkable examples can be found in the European context. In this vein, Blackledge and Creese (2009: 159) point out that “In British political, media, and other discourses a powerful ideology similarly proposes that minority languages other than English are a negative force in society”, while in France, Republican principles and language ideologies in the education system foster reluctance to acknowledge linguistic diversity and “teachers are often not aware that a certain number of their pupils speak a language other than the language of education at home” (Young, 2014: 161). Young claims that the promotion of monolingualism is a form of internal colonialism that has been institutionalized largely through education and that France is still clinging to the monolingual habitus in the 21st century.

It is in this context where language awareness should come to the fore, because its main objective lies in fostering multilingualism by bringing to light all the languages that coexist in society in general and at school in particular. Language awareness becomes thus a model of language education which revolves around three main dimensions: a cognitive dimension that fosters reflection on language and languages, a sociocultural dimension in search of a plurilingual socialization, and an affective dimension aimed at students’ attitudes towards languages, the promotion of tolerance, and the opening to others (Hélot, 2008). This chapter will focus on this last dimension by delving into language attitudes towards minority languages.

The study of language attitudes is aimed not only at discovering people’s attitudes, but also at understanding what determines and defines such attitudes (Garrett, 2010). In addition, language attitude is considered to be one of the most relevant sociolinguistic concepts when it comes to setting up language policies as well as particular strategic options in the process of teaching and learning minority languages. If authorities intend to implement coherent language policies, there is the compelling need to know what the linguistic situation of the different languages in contact is, and which favourable or
unfavourable attitudes are held, as well as their relative importance. This is why, in the last three decades, in the Spanish context there has been avid interest in examining the situation of the minority languages which share co-official status with Spanish.

**Spain: A Multilingual State**

Bilingual contexts can be found in European countries such as Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, to name but a few. However, Spain is a very interesting case in point, because of the 20 million speakers of lesser-used languages in the European Union, 50% are found in this State. Apart from Spanish, which is the official language all over the country, different minority languages are spoken in Spain, such as Aragonese, Astur-Leonese or Bable, Basque, Catalan and Galician.

However, only those commonly known as ‘historical’ languages, namely Basque, Catalan and Galician, are co-official languages in 6 of the 17 autonomous communities that make up Spain: Catalan in Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands, Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC henceforth) and Navarre, and Galician in Galicia. The other minority languages have no official recognition whatsoever. In fact, in January 2016 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued some recommendations to the Spanish authorities on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. One of the recommendations urged the authorities to consider extending the recognition of the minority languages with a co-official status in six Autonomous Communities to other Autonomous Communities, provided that there is a sufficient number of users of the regional or minority language involved, as is the case with Catalan and Aragonese as traditionally spoken languages in Aragon.

It is worth noting that 41% of the Spanish population live in officially bilingual autonomous communities, a fact that is unknown to many Spaniards. My own teaching experience is rather telling concerning the lack of awareness about Spain’s inherent multilingualism. I teach a module on language attitudes and motivation in the *Language Acquisition in Multilingual Contexts* Master’s programme delivered at the University of the Basque Country. Although the vast majority of our students are multilingual language specialists, most of them are not aware of all the minority languages spoken in Spain and, in fact, they usually find it difficult to locate these minority languages on a map of Spain. If this is the case among these particular students, the reader can easily imagine what the results would be if this task were carried out among a sample of the general population.

For centuries, minority languages have undergone a diglossic situation in Spain and their public use was even forbidden not so long ago. During Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975), the superimposition of Castilian Spanish was part of the nation-building project to maintain national unity and strengthen the sense of being verbally Spanish, while any separatist or differing feeling was harshly repressed. These centralizing policies resulted in the denial of linguistic rights, while “minority languages were portrayed as inferior and inconsequential and the use of any non-Castilian language was heavily suppressed, and even prohibited in public” (Hernández-Campoy and Villena-Ponsoda, 2009: 184). Such linguistic repression fuelled a sense of resistance and a closer tie between language and identity, which has led to a situation in which language issues still spark spirited and acrimonious social debates. With the
advent of democracy, normalization processes were stimulated with a view to revitalizing Basque, Catalan and Galician in their respective communities after centuries of shortcomings and decline.

Nevertheless, a monolingual Romantic national ideal has traditionally presented Spanish and the co-official languages as mutually exclusive languages and their corresponding identities in a perennial conflict, a binary opposition that has recurrently been portrayed by political and media representations (Woolard and Frekko, 2013) and that can also be found in many other contexts in Europe and beyond.

One of the key factors in the revitalization process in Spain and, by extension, in many other contexts, has to do with the prestige conferred to the minority languages. Language prestige has a clear bearing on the attitudes towards a minority language. Thus, by making minority languages co-official, native speakers feel supported in the intergenerational transmission process and new speakers decide to learn the language.

**A Case Study: The Basque-Speaking Community**

Bearing space constraints in mind, this section will focus only on Basque for the following three main reasons. Firstly, Basque is a pre-Indo-European language that stands out as genetically isolated amongst the world’s languages (Hualde, Lakarra and Trask, 1995), which is why it has long fascinated linguists. Secondly, the community of Basque speakers is split into three political units: the BAC and Navarre in Spain, and the Atlantic Pyrenees Department in France. In this paper, I will use the FBC (French Basque Country) acronym to refer to the latter. The BAC is made up of the provinces of Bizkaia, Guipuzkoa and Araba, and the FBC of the provinces of Lapurdi, Zuberoa and Nafarroa Behera (see Figure 25.1). And thirdly and more importantly, each of

![Figure 25.1. Map of the Basque Country.](image_url)
these regions has a different language policy: in the BAC, Basque has co-official status with Spanish, in Navarre it is co-official only in parts of the territory, whereas in France Basque is denied any legal or educational recognition at all. This heterogeneous language policy makes the Basque-speaking community a very interesting case study, since in a limited region which straddles the national border between France and Spain along the Pyrenees mountains, three completely different policies are currently in force. From a language awareness perspective, the impact of such diverse language measures on language attitudes is thus well worth considering. This paper echoes the statement by Azurmendi, Larrañaga and Apalategi (2008: 58), who underscore that “the Basque case is of great interest in the context of the EU, because today it presents a dynamic, changing scenario, full of contradictions and new proposals that are difficult to interpret, yet ideal for studying all the questions raised [about language revival] from a position of uncertainty as challenges for the future”.

Basque has undergone a diglossic situation for centuries, and since the Middle Ages, the areas where it was traditionally spoken have steadily shrunk. Despite the gloom expectations spread by the harbingers of its death through the so-called discourse of the death of Basque (Erize, 2006), the Basque-speaking community has long fought to maintain their language, which has always been closely tied to their Basque identity. In fact, the language has played a paramount role in constructing Basque identity, a historical process in which it became the trench of cultural resistance (Järlehed, 2008). This has remained so not only amongst those who live in the Basque Country, who have historically shown great loyalty towards Basque (Azurmendi, Larrañaga and Apalategi, 2006), but also amongst the members of the Basque diaspora (Lasagabaster, 2008).

In the Spanish context, where the majority of Basque speakers are found, significant language rights and some political autonomy were achieved in the 1930s, but they all vanished into thin air once the Spanish dictator Franco managed to hold the upper hand in the Spanish civil war (1936–1939). However, with the advent of democracy in the late 1970s, the Basque language garnered much social and political support, and different measures were undertaken in an attempt to revitalize and normalize its use. In the French context, Basque has no legal support, as, since the French revolution, national policy in this country has strongly been anti-minority languages (Young, 2014).

Interestingly, the autonomous Basque Government located in the BAC decided to carry out sociolinguistic surveys every five years, which allow us to examine the evolution of language attitudes towards the minority language over the last two decades in the aforementioned three territories. The first sociolinguistic survey was undertaken in 1991 (Basque Government, 1995) and the last one in 2011 (Basque Government, 2013). The analysis of the data indicates that the sociolinguistic situation significantly varies in the three regions as a result of the different language policies.

The 1991 survey gathered data among more than 5,000 participants who were aged 15 and above. The survey was carried out through individual interviews at home using a structured and closed-ended questionnaire. The 2011 survey was undertaken among 7,900 participants aged 16 and above. The survey was based on phone calls, again using a structured and closed-ended questionnaire.

In 2011, 2,649,000 people aged 16 or over lived in the Basque Country as a whole, the overwhelming majority of whom (70.7%, that is, 1,873,000 people) resided in the BAC, 20.2% (537,000) in Navarre and the remaining 9% (239,000) in the FBC. According to the 2011 survey, 27% of the population in the Basque Country were bilingual, that is,
today there are 714,000 bilinguals in the Basque Country (185,000 more than in 1991),
but the figures vary considerably in the three regions. The evolution undergone in each
of the regions can be seen in Table 25.1.

Although there was an overall increase in the number of Basque speakers in 2011,
the figures varied across each region: 32% of the population in the BAC was bilingual,
11.7% in Navarre and 21.4% in the FBC. The BAC showed the most promising figures,
with an increase in both active and passive bilinguals and a fall in non-Basque speakers.
The figures were completely reversed in the FBC, and in fact they looked rather gloomy,
especially given the increase in the proportion of non-Basque monolinguals from 64.2%
to 69.4%. Navarre is in between, as shown by the small shift from passive to full bilin-
gualism, although the number of non-Basque speakers remains constant (80.6% and
80.7%, respectively). It could thus be affirmed that the figures for Navarre point to a
process of relative stabilization.

The analysis of language competence by region and age strongly indicates that the
highest percentage of bilinguals in the BAC and Navarre was found among young peo-
ple aged 16 to 24 (59.7% and 20.8%, respectively). Conversely, the FBC showed the
highest percentage of bilinguals among those aged 65 and over, a percentage that fell as
age decreased. However, although there was a general drop in the number of speakers
in the latter territory, the percentage of bilinguals rose among young people, as a result
of an increasing number of schools where Basque is being introduced (without support
from the central French government).

Therefore, as far as language competence is concerned, the rise in the number of
bilinguals relies on the BAC (not only because of its highest percentage, but also because
it is the most populated territory), where the percentage of bilinguals has increased by
almost eight percentage points in the last two decades. The increase in Navarre has been
significantly lower, only 2.2 percentage points, whereas in the FBC the number of bilin-
gual speakers continues to fall (see Figure 25.2).

Regarding language attitudes, the study by the Basque Government divides them
into three categories: in support of, neutral, and in opposition to the promotion of the
Basque language. In the 20-year period under scrutiny, there has been an increase in
the percentage of people who (strongly) support it (from 47.5% to 55.2%), whereas a
decrease can also be observed in the percentage of people who are (strongly) opposed
to its promotion (from 20.9% to 17.1%). Those holding a neutral attitude were 31.7% in
1991 and 27.7% two decades later.

However, once again the analysis of the data by territory reveals some remarkable
differences. In the last two decades, Navarre has undergone the strongest growth in

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<td>BAC</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
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<td>Navarre</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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<td>FBC</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
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favourable attitudes towards Basque from 21.6% to 37.7%. The BAC’s sample adopts the most positive stance and it has also experienced a significant increase of seven percentage points (from 55% to 62.3%). In the FBC, conversely, the trend is just the opposite, since those in favour of the promotion of Basque dropped from 42.3% to 38.5%, that is, a fall of almost four points. Similarly, the percentage of those against the actions undertaken to promote Basque diminished in both the BAC and especially in Navarre, but it steadily increased in the FBC by more than ten percentage points to reach 21.3% in 2011. Nevertheless, Navarre had the highest percentage of negative attitudes in 2011, 34.5% to be precise.

Further analyses of the data also indicate that there is a clear-cut connection between attitudes towards the promotion of Basque and language competence. In fact, more than 88% of bilinguals in the BAC and Navarre were favourable towards efforts to promote Basque, while this percentage reached 73% of bilinguals in the FBC. Age is also a variable well worth considering. Whereas young people in both the BAC and Navarre displayed favourable attitudes towards Basque, in the FBC the youngest respondents were the ones that expressed the lowest percentage of support and, in contrast, those over 65 held the most favourable attitudes. As far as the linguistic model is concerned, 66% of the inhabitants in the BAC would choose model D (a Basque-medium instruction model; see the next section) for their children, while this figure plummets to 32% in Navarre and 19% in the FBC.

To have the whole picture, we need to move from the macroperspective (the effects of the language policy in the wider society) to the microperspective (the educational policy), to which the following section is devoted. Since attitudes towards languages are manifestly influenced by the languages’ presence and their role in education, special heed is paid to the linguistic models in the BAC in the following section. The stigmatization of minority languages in the education domain has resulted in negative attitudes towards them, even among their own speakers, not only in Europe (Laakso et al., 2016; Lasagabaster, 2015) but all over the world (May, 2012).
Educational Language Policy

In the Spanish bilingual regions, the education system must guarantee that Spanish and the co-official language are taught at school and university. This means that minority languages are taught alongside Spanish, but English is also included in the linguistic equation because there is widespread social agreement about the need to improve students' proficiency in this currently hegemonic foreign language (Lasagabaster, 2015). The education system becomes a key player when it comes to analysing the relationship between language awareness and the minority language, since the latter is surrounded by two international languages (Spanish and English), with millions of speakers the world over.

In this section, I will pay special heed to the three linguistic models currently available at the BAC, because they represent an illuminating example of how education exerts a great influence on the spread of language awareness in minority language contexts. Furthermore, it has to be underscored that, as is usually the case in most minority language contexts (Baker, 1992; Garrett, Coupland and Williams, 2003), school has become a driving force in the language shift process aimed at improving the sociolinguistic situation of the minority language and the attitudes towards it. The main features of these three linguistic models are as follows:

(i) **Model A**: this is a programme in which Spanish is the vehicular language and Basque is only a subject (usually taught 3/4 hours per week). The L1 of the students is Spanish. Although it was originally designed to include some subjects in Basque in the last years of compulsory education, which would make it comparable with the Canadian late partial immersion, this original resolution has never been implemented.

(ii) **Model B**: this is an early partial immersion programme in which both Basque and Spanish are used as means of instruction. Students’ L1 is usually Spanish, although some may be Basque L1. The time allotted to each of the languages in the curriculum may vary depending on different factors such as the sociolinguistic setting in which the school is located or the availability of Basque teaching staff.

(iii) **Model D**: Basque is the means of instruction. Hence it is a total immersion programme for those students whose L1 is Spanish and a maintenance programme for those with Basque as L1. Spanish is only taught as a subject (usually around 4 hours per week). It has to be noted that, in Spain in general and in the BAC in particular, students attending bilingual programmes are not usually separated according to their mother tongue, as such programmes are aimed at both majority and indigenous minority language populations (Lasagabaster, 2015).

Over time, the two bilingual models (B and D) became much more popular than the monolingual model A and, in fact, in the 2015/16 academic year more than 83% of pre-university students were enrolled in models B (18.8%) and D (65.5%, the most popular model by far), whereas only 15.7% chose model A. It is worth remembering that, when the models were first established in 1983, the situation was just the opposite and model A was the most popular one (72.8%), followed by models D (16.5%) and B (10.5%). These figures make it evident that there has been an outstanding language shift in the BAC’s educational system and that in the next decades Basque-medium instruction is
going to become the overwhelming option, as the model B and above all model D percentages are the highest on the lower rungs of the system. Although model A is aimed at providing students with the linguistic resources to discuss everyday matters in Basque, to prepare them to take part in Basque-speaking environments and to develop positive attitudes towards Basque, research studies recurrently bear out that model A students achieve a very poor command of Basque, despite having spent more than 12 years exposed to it (Cenoz, 2009).

As far as language attitudes are concerned, our main focus of attention, studies undertaken in the last two decades (Aiestaran, 2003; Etxeberria-Sagastume, 2006; García, 2001; Larrañaga, 1995; Lasagabaster, 2004, 2005, 2008 and 2015) have revealed that attitudes towards Basque are sharply influenced by several factors, (results confirmed with primary, secondary and tertiary education students):

(i) Those students whose L1 is Basque usually harbour more positive attitudes towards the minority language than those with Spanish as L1.

(ii) The higher the language competence in Basque, the better the attitudes towards it. However, it has to be noted that these studies do not allow us to delve into the cause and effect question due to their cross-sectional nature and, therefore, they only confirm that there is a highly significant correlation between language competence and attitudes, but not whether the former precedes the latter or the other way round.

(iii) The linguistic model exerts a significant influence, as model D students are more favourable towards Basque than those enrolled in models A and B, as are model B students when compared to those from model A. Research studies carried out in the BAC recurrently confirm that those students who have attended schools in which Basque is used as the medium of instruction are more positive towards this language than those enrolled in schools in which Spanish is the vehicle language. Similar results have been obtained in Catalonia (Huguet, 2007), Galicia (Loredo et al., 2007), the Valencian Community (Safont, 2007), and other European contexts (see Lasagabaster and Huguet, 2007).

(iv) The sociolinguistic context also has an important bearing on students’ attitudes: the higher the percentage of Basque speakers in their social context, the more favourable their attitudes are.

These results lead us to conclude that the more positive attitudes towards the minority language cannot be exclusively attributed to the education system, but it is more than likely that this is the result of a combination of different factors. Hence, favourable attitudes seem to rely on the linguistic model, the students’ family language, the social network and the sociolinguistic context (Aiestaran, 2003; Cenoz, 2009; Lasagabaster, 2005). As for intergenerational transmission, in homes with children under 16, almost all parents who know Basque transmit the language to their children. When both parents are bilingual, the transmission rate rises to 97% in the BAC (Basque Government, 2013).

The 2011 sociolinguistic survey (Basque Government, 2013) also includes some additional interesting data concerning language attitudes. In this vein, 81% of the BAC population deem it indispensable for children to learn Basque at school and only 14% believe that learning Basque should not be compulsory. Similarly, 83% of the whole population believe that immersion programmes are positive for children. These results
clearly demonstrate that the bilingual linguistic models are widely supported by the Basque society.

As for language competence, the education system is similarly having an enormous impact on the number of bilingual speakers. Whereas the percentage of bilingual speakers amounts to 32% in the BAC, this percentage is almost twofold and rises to 60% in the 16–24 age range, a substantial increase amongst the youngest generation that is brought about by the popularity of the bilingual linguistic models. The use of Basque as means of instruction has augmented the number of new speakers, that is, those who have not learned the language via family transmission but rather have acquired it through bilingual education programmes or as adult language learners. In the BAC, the majority of new speakers have learnt Basque in the school system, as is also the case in many other minority language contexts (Laakso et al., 2016; May, 2012).

The linguistic model also exerts a significant influence on language use at school, both in a formal context such as the classroom and in a more informal context such as the playground: Model D students speak Basque much more often than their model B counterparts, and this difference turns out to be even more remarkable when compared to model A students (Uranga, 2013). Nevertheless, there seems to be a clear age effect that permeates models B and D (as Basque is hardly ever used in model A). The older students become, the less often they use Basque both in class and in the playground. This is so even among model D students whose use of Basque in class significantly decreases from 79% in primary education to 44% in secondary education, and from 41% to 29% in the playground. These results concur with those obtained in Catalonia (see Trenchs-Parera and Newman, 2015), where it has also been observed that children whose language use is initially Catalan-dominant tend to become increasingly bilingual. In contrast, those that showed a bilingual use or learnt Catalan at school steadily move toward exclusive use of Spanish. As for minority language use, it can therefore be concluded that the linguistic model exerts a significant influence in the early stages of schooling, but its positive effect seems to wane when students reach adolescence, a trend also observed in the Welsh context (Baker, 1992). The mismatch between language competence and language use in minority language contexts is a global trend, which has led some researchers to create reference models for managing language normalization within organizations with a view to fostering the presence and use of the minority language (Marko and Pikabea, 2013).

The Teachers’ Role

The linguistic diversity found at bilingual schools is increased by the languages spoken by the rapidly rising number of students of immigrant origin. Consequently, teaching staff need to be prepared to work in school contexts with multilingual populations, as schools are ever more diverse. Prospective teachers should not constrain their role to that of language and content teachers, nor should they limit their knowledge to multilingualism itself and pedagogical practices related to multilingualism, but they should also understand the social, political and economic struggles that surround their different languages while becoming critically aware of what this implies. Although this is very important for all teachers, it is crucial for those working in schools in which minority languages are spoken. Teachers need to be aware of the fact that their language choices and attitudes have social, cultural and political implications, which will be reflected in their teaching practices. Multilingual awareness “does not actually involve the
acquisition of language skills but focuses more on education for linguistic tolerance” (Hélot, 2008: 377). In this vein, teachers should first come to terms with all the issues surrounding the languages that make up their own linguistic repertoire, which will similarly enable them to value the minority languages and cultures present in schools.

Returning to the BAC, it has to be mentioned that in the early 1980s only around 20% of teachers in public schools could speak Basque, few of whom were “proficient in its use in written form or for academic purposes” (Cenoz, 2009: 67), whereas nowadays more than 90% have been granted the certificate which enables them to teach through the medium of Basque. Many of them have received in-service training, but those belonging to the younger generation have learnt Basque at school.

In the case of the minority language, the revitalization process has also had a positive impact on teachers. In the education system, there is no doubt that teachers play a paramount role in the promotion of language awareness. Not only do they need to understand the important role that the first language has on the development of the second or how to build on the students’ first language to develop literacy in additional languages, but they also need to reflect on the importance of fostering positive language attitudes towards all the languages in contact. In multilingual contexts teachers need to be multilingual aware (García, 2008), because otherwise they will not be able to foster their students’ multilingualism and language awareness. According to the so-called Pygmalion effect, if teachers’ attitudes towards a minority language are positive (or, conversely, negative), these attitudes will correlate with their students’ performance level in the minority language. The teachers’ influence can be beneficial or detrimental depending on the label they assign to their students’ multilingualism. Hence, the main role of the language awareness component in teacher education should be to develop teachers’ sensitivity to language (Pedrosa and Lasagabaster, 2011).

The positive impact of the minority languages’ recognition in the education system was confirmed by Lasagabaster and Huguet (2007). These authors coordinated a large-scale study on language attitudes of pre-service teachers towards multilingualism in a number of European bilingual contexts. In the case of the four Spanish bilingual regions under scrutiny (Catalonia, Galicia, the Valencian Community and the BAC), the future teachers were overwhelmingly bilingual in Spanish and the co-official language. In fact, those whose command of the minority language was good or very good amounted to 98.7% in Catalonia, 93.1% in Galicia, 75% in the Valencian Community, and 81% in the BAC, whereas the percentages were close to 100% in all cases with regards to Spanish. These results led the authors to conclude that competence in Catalan, Galician and Basque amongst pre-service teachers in these four contexts is higher than ever before.

In these four contexts, the participants harboured predominantly favourable attitudes towards the minority languages, which were much more pre-eminent than the neutral or unfavourable ones. The percentages of positive attitudes were the following: 80.5% in Catalonia, 73.4% in Galicia, 49% in Valencia, and 71% in the BAC. Only in the Valencian Community was the percentage of favourable attitudes towards Spanish higher than that of favourable attitudes towards Valencian and, in any case, only marginally so. A remarkable fact was the very low presence of negative attitudes towards any of the three languages under scrutiny (the minority language, Spanish and English as the hegemonic foreign language). These findings confirm the significant effect of the linguistic policies undertaken in order to protect minority languages in Spanish autonomous communities and to boost their use. When these future teachers join the education
system in the future, they will undoubtedly help to strengthen and underpin the minority language recovery process.

Conclusions

Language is the medium that lies at the heart of our social human nature, one of the wonders of the natural world. Each language expresses the unique history, knowledge and view of the world of its speaker community. The disappearance of any language is a deadly blow to the richness of human linguistic diversity, which is why the different measures taken in the three Basque-speaking territories are worth close attention.

After analysing the results obtained in the last sociolinguistic survey carried out in the Basque Country and comparing them with those of the first one conducted 20 years earlier, it can be concluded that, while the overall attitudinal trend is positive, on closer inspection it is in no way uniform. These results demonstrate that there is a clear relationship between the status of the minority language, the language policy enacted in each territory and the attitudes towards the promotion of Basque. The most positive attitudes are in fact found in the BAC, the only region where Basque is official in all its territory. Contrarily, the FBC is the only region where negative attitudes are on the increase, a reflection of its lack of legal support. Curiously enough, Navarre garners the highest percentage of negative attitudes (34.5%), but once again the effect of the language policy stands out clearly, as those who adopt a negative stance are overwhelmingly found in the part of the territory where Basque is not co-official. Despite being a small speaking community, Basque speakers thus show a very intricate attitudinal picture in which the language status, the language policy and the educational policy play a paramount role.

The BAC context proves that, by giving the two languages in contact an equal status both at the societal and the educational levels, positive attitudes towards multilingualism can be promoted. The transition from the Spanish historical monolingual habitus to the current pro-multilingualism habitus has been fraught with tensions and, in fact, it still needs to overcome some hurdles. However, it is an example of how language policies and social support can eventually contribute to the revitalization of minority languages while multilingualism becomes a highly regarded asset. This is a process that takes time, but once the language awareness component is rooted in society in general and in the education system in particular, there is no turning back and multilingualism becomes the only road to the future.

Against this backdrop, the education system in general and teachers in particular have to play a paramount role when it comes to bolstering solid and active support for multilingualism while challenging the still widespread monolingual mindset. In order to reach this objective, “the integration of a critical language awareness component into both initial teacher education and continual professional development” (Young, 2014: 168) becomes of the utmost importance. Teacher training programmes have the on-going challenge of providing the school system with well-prepared teacher candidates and of fostering multilingual awareness amongst in-service teachers, and this is especially so in our current linguistically and culturally diverse societies. Not only does successful language teaching require proficiency in language use, knowledge about language and knowledge of teaching methods (Wright, 2002), but it also demands the development of sensitivity towards the affective dimension of language learning and teaching (Pedrosa and Lasagabaster, 2011). The BAC education system is a very good
example of how this can be achieved, because the fact that the minority language enjoys high status in the eyes of the students enrolled in the bilingual models instils favourable attitudes towards it. However, the role of Basque in the education system still sparks acrimonious debates, and so the advocates of minority languages need to remain on alert and keep feeding societal language awareness.

This is the reason why linguistic tolerance is one of the main axes of the language awareness movement. Schools should foster activities that pay attention to the development of language tolerance and should instil positive attitudes towards all the languages present in the curriculum and spoken at school. Nowadays one of the main challenges of the education system is to transform the traditional monolingual approach into a multilingual one. By including minority languages in the curriculum, students are presented from a very early age with different languages, so fostering their language awareness. Not only has the inclusion of minority languages in the education system multiplied the number of minority language speakers, but it has also “instilled a greater sense of sociolinguistic awareness amongst the younger generation” (O’Rourke and Ramallo, 2015: 149).

This multilingual education system challenges traditional binary oppositions (the majority language versus the minority language), linguistic prejudices and their associated negative attitudes. The inclusion of a language awareness component in the curriculum will help students to understand the social, political and economic struggles surrounding the use of minority languages in ever more diverse school systems on a global scale. New speakers will thus become aware of their responsibility when it comes to ensuring the survival of any particular minority language, whereas native minority-language speakers will become more flexible and will negotiate more sophisticated identities “than the heritage positions ascribed to them institutionally” (Blackledge and Creese, 2009: 552).

Related Topics

Minority language; language policy; education system

References

David Lasagabaster


