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Pello Salaburu and Xabier Alberdi (eds.). *The Challenge of a Bilingual Society in the Basque Country.* Current Research Series No. 9. Reno, NV: Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno. 2012. 222 pp.

Reviewed by Frank Nuessel

This publication is a joint research project in collaboration with the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, and the University of the Basque Country (the only public university in the Basque Country, Spain). Co-editors and co-authors (Introduction, Chapter 5) Pello Salaburu and Xabier Alberdi are both Professors of Basque Language and Communication at the University of the Basque Country. In their introduction, Salaburu and Alberdi point out that Euskara, or Basque, has only recently enjoyed co-official recognition by the public administration in one part of the Basque Country (7). Moreover, Basque has no known relation with any other language in the world, making it linguistically unique.

Chapter 1 (“A Nation in Search of a Name: Cultural Realities, Political Projects, and Terminological Struggles in the Basque Country”) by Ludger Mees addresses the profound onomastic question of what to name the Basque Country. Various names have been proposed: *Euskal Herria*, *Eskual Herria*, *Euskalerrria*, *Euskaria*, *Euskeria*, *Vasconia*, *Euzkadi*, *Euskadi*. *País Vasco*, *País Vasco-Navarro*, *Pueblo Vasco*, *Pays Basque*, and *Bizkaia* (11). As the author points out, the abundance of possible designations indicates that this choice is a complex political, social, and cultural issue. Mees aptly notes that naming the Basque country reflects the local struggle for power — one that is “characterized primarily by the emerging nationalism and its concomitant need to mark its territory and establish a political profile of its own and, later, among the different sectors of nationalism in the battle for hegemony” (12). To be sure, the decision on a suitable name remains a complex social, political, legal, and psychological issue.

The following chapter (“The Legal System of a Bilingual Society”) by Alberto López Basaguren, addresses legal questions contained in the Preamble to the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which states that it will “Protect all Spaniards and the peoples of Spain in the exercise of ... their cultures and traditions, languages and institutions” (33). As a result, regional languages have legal force to ensure their proper recognition within Spain. In the rest of this article, the author discusses various legal manifestations of this constitutional right, most notably its role in the school system.

In the third chapter (“Basque and Romance Languages: Languages with Different Structures”), Igone Zabala and Itziar San Martin note that Basque has no phylogenetic relation with any other language in the world. The authors discuss some of the most salient linguistic features of the language including the fact that it is an ergative language with head-final lexical morphology, postpositions, and free word order, to name but a few of its distinctive features. Basque thus has a special status as a unique language due to its areal linguistic situation, namely, its close proximity to several Romance languages.

The fourth chapter (“A Small Country, a Small Language, Many Dialects and Accents”) by Jesus Mari Makazaga reviews the extant research on Basque dialectology, and present-day Basque dialects (Western, Central, Navarrese, Navarrese-Lapurdian, Zuberoan, Eastern Navarrese). Given the relatively small territory of the Basque Country (8,000 square miles), the language has a significant amount of variation within its borders.

In Chapter 5 (“The Search for a Common Code”), Salaburu and Alberdi point out that the Basque language “lacked a common code and a shared writing system until very recently. Writers did not have a clear model or a well-defined writing standard to abide by” (93). In this essay, the co-authors provide a succinct history of the orthography and the need for standardization. They also address morphology, the lexicon, toponomastics, and syntax. Salaburu and Alberdi also discuss the 1968 Arantzazu Congress (a town in the Spanish province of Biscay), and Professor Koldo Mitxelena’s keynote address on Basque orthography. The latter’s recommendations have had profound consequences for language standardization.

In the sixth chapter (“The Current Situation of the Basque Language: Speakers”), Miren Azkarate Villar provides important statistical data about Basque speakers. The author then notes several future challenges with regard to the maintenance of the language. Chapter 7 (“Linguistic School Models in the Basque Country”), by Julian Maia, provides a useful linguistic description of the Basque Country (137):

The Basque Country/Euskal Herria as a whole can be considered a trilingual country, divided into two bilingual parts. Three languages are relatively widely used in the territory of its seven historic provinces: while to the north of the Pyrenean political border (Iparralde in Basque) Euskara and French are spoken, to the south (Hegoalde) Euskara and Spanish are used.

The rest of this chapter reviews bilingual education in the Basque Country and discusses the use of Basque in the university system (151–152). To a certain extent, the university data provide a clue to the future of the maintenance of the language.

In the penultimate chapter (“The Basque Language in the Minds of Native and Nonnative Bilinguals”), Itziar Laka, Mikel Santesteban, Kepa Erdocia, and Adama Zawiszewski provide, on the basis of recent psycholinguistic research, an

informative discussion of what it means to be bilingual. They then discuss its application to the study of Basque-Spanish bilingualism within a Chomskyan theoretical framework.

In the final chapter (“Current Basque Literature”), Jon Kortazar discusses one significant effect of the 1978 Constitution, namely to foment a profusion of noteworthy Basque literature through subsidized publishing houses, a literary society, and a translation society, with the result that since the 1980s there is a recognizable Basque literary canon. National literature prizes have also contributed to this expansion. Kortazar then surveys noteworthy Basque authors and their works.

An extensive reference section (191–206), a useful index (207–222), and a list of contributors (223) complement this valuable book.

The nine essays in this excellent and informative compendium address a wide variety of cultural and linguistic issues related to the preservation of the Basque language. These include onomastics, the law, the issue of languages in contact (Basque, French, Spanish), language variation, standardization, speaker population, education, bilingualism, and culture and literature. This anthology offers a first-rate overview of the Basque language and its cultural, social, and political significance in Spain today, and constitutes an outstanding case study of the multiple issues related to the maintenance of the Basque language.

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