

## Investigating variation in a bilingual context: evidence from Basque reflexives

IRANTZU EPELDE  
*IKER*

In language contact situations it is very common to have the less prestigious language being influenced by the most prestigious one, but the contrary is also attested (Heine & Kuteva 2005). Basque is considered a 'vulnerable' language (Moseley 2010), one that lives in a diglossic situation with respect to two of the world's most powerful languages; Spanish and French. Nowadays, all Basque speakers are bilingual with either French or Spanish, and this language contact situation makes Basque very prone to borrowings from these two languages.

The case of grammatical features is of a special relevance in internally- and externally-induced variation and change phenomena (Chambers 2002, Labov 1994, Silva-Corvalán 2001, Trudgill 1974). In this paper, we will focus on reflexive constructions of two Basque dialects from the French area (Labourdin and Low Navarrese), as for most Lapurdian and Low Navarrese speakers the reflexive noun phrases are formed by combining the genitive of an intensive personal pronoun with *buru* 'head' and the definite article -a (Hualde 2003). However, many young speakers use a different reflexive construction, in which the transitive verb is construed intransitively and no reflexive NP is present.

In our data, the emergence of these units appeared to be associated with differences in age. We will focus on three age groups: young speakers (-30), middle-aged (40-60) and octogenarians (+80) from the traditional provinces of Lapurdi and Low Navarre (France). All of the informants (60) have the Basque language as their mother tongue and home language, but the older ones received education only in French language and use French in formal (and often informal) situations, both in oral and in written communication. The data come from recorded interviews individual as well as in-group held in Basque, and from specific questionnaires and word lists used in our project *Norantz: contact des langues et variation linguistique. Création d'un observatoire des nouveaux parlers basques*. A sample of data is analysed in detail in order to study these reflexive constructions among our informants.