

**Be There, Take the Floor, Say
Something: Bertsolaritza Schools,
Agency, and Language Use**

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Let us imagine a bilingual society. Let us imagine that one of those two languages is a minoritized language. This is a description that fits the situation in the Basque Country, both in the Northern Basque Country (NBC) in France and in the Southern Basque Country in Spain. Let us continue imagining. Let us say that everybody in that society has language skills, to a greater or lesser degree, in the two languages mentioned. Although that situation is better than our current one, there, too, the key to minoritized language survival is its speakers' attitude and conduct: a certain number of speakers have to tend to use the minoritized language in order for it to survive. And the tendency to use that language—whether conscious or unconscious—is the result of daily choices. If Basque is to survive, then, there

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is a need for speakers who tend to use it, and not just people who can get by in it. It is a fact, however, that current data about the use of Basque is worrying (Eusko Jaurlaritz 2013), and the transition from knowing the language to actually using it has not been as automatic as had been expected. From the Basque sociolinguistic perspective, motivation, knowledge, and use have been seen as the key elements (Sánchez Carrión 1987). However, until the present those factors have seldom been examined in an integrated way: “The links between them have been sensed, and their existence declared, but how are they actually connected in practice? How does the leap from one to the other take place? Or, on the contrary, what type of gaps are there between those dimensions, gaps that affect them mutually?” (Hernández 2016, 188)

In this chapter I will try to explain several ideas I have developed during the research I am currently carrying out that may lead us toward the answers to those questions. In fact, the objective of my research is to examine how the tendency to use Basque is constructed and how it is maintained, particularly among young *bertsolaris* or oral improvisers in the NBC. The current-day language landscape in the NBC is not promising but, although there is a low density of Basque-speakers, there are several oases for Basque. One of them is the Seaska school network, another the *bertsolaritza*—or oral improvisation—school network and the *bertsolaritza* movement in general that, although smaller, may be more tightly woven. Young *Bertsolaritza* school (BS) pupils (from

the ages of seventeen to twenty), all of them Seaska pupils and former pupils, are the subjects of this research.¹ In fact, the research question is based on an observation: In addition to having a firm discourse in favor of the revival of Basque, young people at BS also have a proactive attitude to the use of Basque: they have decided to live in Basque, and, in order to do so, they take their everyday language decisions in an active manner. In my work, then, I will try to identify some of the major factors that may be behind these young people's proactive attitude toward Basque.²

Therefore, as I said, in what follows I will outline the key ideas of my work up to now. To do so, first, I will try to explain several concepts related to

1. This chapter is based on fifteen interviews and three years of fieldwork. The informers come from different linguistic origins (Basque is not the only home language for all of them), but they have all gone to language immersion schools. Some of them have been improvising since they were small children, while others started recently, and all of them have been participants in the bertsoaritz school at the Bernat Etxepare High School in Baiona.

2. Although the term "proactive" is mostly used in the work and institutional area, it is increasingly used in sociolinguistic psycholinguistics as well. The concept addresses individuals' active control of their attitude, in contrast to a reactive attitude to taking decisions, an attitude that depends on context and structure. I have not used the term in an absolute sense: no decisions are taken without any reference to the context. What I want to state with this term is that although the options that the context offers may not be diverse, they do seek out even the slightest opportunities, and in an active manner, in order to make choices that favor Basque.

language use, concepts that I believe will be needed in later analysis; second, I will explain how bertso activities influence BS pupils with regard to language attitudes and behavior, analyzing BSs as communities of practice.

Language Behavior, Motivation, Experienced Identity, and Agency

The factors that influence bilingual speakers to choose one language or another at a particular moment have been examined from various different points of view (perhaps mostly from a psycholinguistics perspective), and in our context work has been carried out to classify and model the factors that influence language use from a sociolinguistic point of view.³ Three areas are usually taken into account: social structure (with regard to the language's place and image in society, in other words, demographic, economic, political, legal, and cultural factors, among others); relationship networks and interaction areas (where, with whom, the subject under discussion, and so on); and the speaker or individual. From Anthony Giddens' duality of structure perspective, when a language becomes a paradigm for socialization, on the other hand, there is little point in making distinctions: individuals' characteristics are developed in their immediate surroundings, and those surroundings are developed within a larger structure and, at the same

3. I will refer to two pieces of research on the Basque Country in my analysis below: Jean Baptiste Coyos' theoretical model (Coyos 2007) and Iñaki Martínez de Luna's proposed model (Martínez de Luna 2004).

time, each individual's characteristics can affect those surroundings and that structure (Giddens 1979).

It cannot be denied that when decisions are taken, there are social conditions in addition to each individual's ability to choose: "they will use one language or another depending, on the one hand, on their priorities, wishes, values, and needs; on the other, the material and nonmaterial costs involved in each choice also condition each decision" (Grin 1990, 155, in Erize 2016, 118–19).

This language-choice dilemma has been examined in Basque sociolinguistics in terms of attitude to language use and motivation. And, with regard to motivation, in particular, two types of motivation have been differentiated: integrative and instrumental motivation. An integrative attitude is linked to symbolic motivation, and it has also been defined as being *identity creating* in our context (Martínez de Luna 2004). This type of motivation is usually defined in terms of attachment with regard to language, communication between speakers, certain groups, and cultural and social customs. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is connected to "the possibility of increasing social scale opportunities and economic advantages" as a result of using a particular language variety (Joly and Uranga 2010).

The main motivation, then, to use a minority language is integrative (leaving the language competence factor to one side), bearing in mind that the instrumental motivation has very little influence in our case (Martínez de Luna 2004). In the general context of the NBC, it is very clear that knowing

and using Basque brings very few social advantages, whereas there are many great advantages to using French. That being the case, it is obvious that without integrative motivation it will be very difficult to promote a tendency to speak in Basque.

As Iñaki Martínez de Luna himself points out, however, integrative motivation by itself is not strong enough, and “has to be put through the sieve of reality” (Martínez de Luna 2001). This is in fact the main problem: “although *identity creating* motivations are among the strongest, by themselves they are not enough to turn reality around” (Martínez de Luna 2004).

In this area, I think that the question that Jone Miren Hernández raises in order to understand the gap between knowledge and use is relevant: “what is the basis for one attitude or another at its starting point? What does it take to *motivate me*? What keeps my interest and commitment to Basque? (Hernández 2016a, 182). This is the key that Xabier Erize suggests: “In any case, bearing in mind that motivation is something internal, motivating from the outside is difficult and, in order for it to be successful, that external motivation must connect with something inside the person; otherwise, it is very difficult to achieve anything” (Erize 2016, 121).

The differentiation between identity creating and instrumental motivation or between internal and external motivations is concurrent with a concept of agency brought from psychological anthropology

to social sciences.⁴ I find Sherry Ortner's interpretation of this concept particularly interesting. Ortner believes that subjectivity is the essence of agency; in other words, agency is not a desire in itself but, rather, desires and intentions within the framework of feelings and thoughts, which are both constructed socially. This author understands agency as an "effect of critical subjectivity in action" to the extent to which the subject sees difficulties in his/her context (Ortner 2006).

From an anthropological perspective, several authors believe that the basis to general identification is the *experienced identity* (Terradas 2009). Thus language and national identity, for instance, are derived from real-life experience identity:

What is experienced identity? It is human recognition of life that is mainly based on memory of experiences had, their repercussions on feelings, and the feelings of belonging and connection that that memory requires. Experienced identity is the basis for cultural identity, which is never either wholly individual or wholly collective. It emerges half-way along the road between the memory of personal meanings and shared chronotope memories (Terradas 2009, 63–64).

The sentimental attachments, emotions and affection that emerge from things we do in daily life

4. Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, for example, have used the same concept to research agents' influence on the production and reproduction of social systems (Duranti 2004, 452).

make our *experienced identity*, and on that foundation we build our other identities such as language, culture, and national identities (which give rise to *identity creating* motivation). Identity is not something that we are given beforehand; it is, rather, something that results from things we do and do again (Butler 1990). The *performative turn* has led us to understand identity as something that is continually defined and redefined. From that perspective, then, language identity must also be understood in a dynamic way: depending on the language we use, we develop one language identity or another, and this will change if we change our language habits. We develop *identity creating* motivation through our (language) habits in the micro-spaces in our everyday environment or community of practice.

Individuals participate in multiple communities of practice, and individual identity is based on the multiplicity of this participation. Rather than seeing the individual as some disconnected entity floating around in social space, or as a location in a network, or as a member of a particular group or set of groups, or as a bundle of social characteristics, we need to focus on communities of practice. Such a focus allows us to see the individual as an actor articulating a range of forms of participation in multiple communities of practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 8).

However, from the sociolinguistic perspective we often forget that the speaker, the individual, is a body, and everything we have lived through has been as a body, and from a body. As Mari Luz Esteban

underlines, recent theories and methodologies have made the body a central issue. From that point of view, the body is seen as an agent, in other words, as “a bridge between structure and practice” (Esteban 2010). When the scientific paradigm—which sees the mind and the body as well as rationality and emotionality in a dichotomous way—moves the body to the center of the paradigm, emotions, too, become objects of research. In fact, the body and the emotions are taken as the basis for inter-subjectivity, and thus, for identity construction (Esteban 2011, 29).

Before moving from these conceptual considerations to reflections about my research, let me say that I have chosen to analyze BSs as communities of practice, with the objective of examining the language identity construction process in a group that is created and structured around the practice or *bertsolaritza*.⁵ A decade after Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) created the concept of community of practice, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet revisit it in their research about language and identity construction (Eckert 2001; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995), defining it as: “An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations in short practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 464). In our case, thanks to this concept as defended by Hernández (2007) and

5. For more information about the choice of analyzing BSs as communities of practice, see Artetxe (2014).

Paula Kasares (2013), identity has been analyzed as an element constructed by practice.

From this position, and with the intention of analyzing the language behavior phenomenon in a more complex way, I will explain several phenomena that take place in BSs: for one thing, I will bring up the fact that there is a link between the feeling of agency and the presence of the body, the voice and the fact that we create a discourse while we sing improvised verses. For another, I will put forward the notion that individual and collective experiences of agency can influence language behavior.

Bertsolaritza School: Being There, Taking the Floor

Let us begin at the beginning. Subjectivity and identity are embodied through practice. So far so good. But which practices are carried out at BSs? Around which practices is the community constructed?⁶

Firstly, a group comes together at the BS. Individuals decide whether to go there in their free time: it is a leisure activity. Some of them have been going to the BS for years. Others have just begun. The BS can be described as a place for developing bertsolaritza skills, but it could not be adequately defined without specifying that it is also a space for pleasure.

6. In this chapter, rather than analyzing what is done at the BS, I will make use of an actual BS session in order to offer meaningful examples, based on an observation carried out at Bernat Etxepare High School on March 5, 2014.

There was already a good atmosphere among us all, a really good atmosphere during our three years at high school, and at the beginning we used to go to the bertsolaritza school with the intention of thinking up verses, but. . . I don't know how many hours we've spent there, laughing out loud, talking about I don't know what, discussing things, having our afternoon snack. . . So we did use to go to the bertsolaritza school, but it's not just limited to that, there are hundreds of other things you can do as well as verses.

—*Boy [I], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

Members of the BS meet up at the school gates and get chatting there. The teacher comes and the atmosphere doesn't change: we say hello in a friendly way, and we all head to the classroom, talking all the way. When we're in there, we move the tables and chairs around and put the chairs into a circle. And then "So, shall we start?" is what you hear, and the teacher gives us an exercise: someone will stand up and say a word, which will be the base for the rhyme, and somebody else starts a verse off. As soon as this other improviser sings some words, the next member gives the next rhymed word and so on, until the stanza is completed. The first one completes the stanza and starts the humor off: some by choosing the rhymed word (by mentioning events external to the school, and making the others sing about

that), others by singing the verses that make up the rhyme (making an effort to get over the obstacles set up). Laughter is heard from verse to verse and after hearing the rhymes set for each improviser. You hear comments about the verses. And applause when the verses are good. Some rhymes lead to discussions. “Lakona,” “Lakabe,” Zutabe.”⁷

Bertsolaritza as a social practice involves features that make it easy to enjoy it and feel emotions: the disassociation between composing and performing, the disassociation between the creator and the audience, and the disassociation between the individual and the community becomes fuzzy (Casals 2009), and mutual connections and feelings of identification are strengthened: “oral improvisation, as a playful activity that consists of an unavoidable functionality, has been seen to be a generator of group identities and modifications in individual identities” (Casals 2010, 6).

Defining them as places and times for pleasure gives us the basis for examining the activities that are carried out there: the subjects build a positive narrative about what takes place there. In other words, starting with the emotional repercussions that the subjects feel there (Terrades 2004) and identification with the group, the BS is a suitable place for building individual identity (Artetxe 2014).

“Who wants to sing now?” says the teacher. After some warm-up exercises, it is time to begin in a more

7. “Lakona” is a breed of sheep; “Lakabe” is an occupied town; the word “zutabe” means column, but is also the title of ETA’s printed bulletin (*Zutabe*).

serious way. Now two people are going to sing about a topic, and the others will listen. “Alright, L and A stand up, ok?” They both get up, prop themselves on the table in front of the others, who are in a circle. “You’re a fifteen-year old girl, A, and it’s the first time you’re going out at night. Luckily, L, your sister, who’s eighteen and used to going out, has come out with you.” They agree who is to begin. The teacher tells them to stand up, and suggests they take the microphone (a broom resting against a chair). Some people think that’s a good idea, but A and L prefer not to use it.

Improvising verses involves moving out of the group and standing somewhere the others can see them. After hearing the subject, they think about what they are going to say, and start to sing. Improvising verses thus leads to becoming the center of attention in public. Your presence itself is under examination: your body, your position, movements, and gestures. And knowing how to be there is another necessary skill in *bertsolaritza*. An example of that can be seen at the BS where, although there is no explicit training in managing emotions, the *bertsolaris* are asked to know how to feel comfortable under the others’ gaze: “As well as the ability and skill to improvise verses, beginners are taught how to adopt typical bertsolari postures and use typical techniques” (Esteban 2004, 198). So the body, even if in negative terms, is the improvisational improviser’s first tool (Alberdi 2012), and putting their body in front of others influences themselves and the others.

Alessandro Duranti states that presence is a type of individual agency that affects everybody: “human presence is something that must be reckoned with by others and therefore implies the power to affect others” (Duranti 2004, 455). In fact, this author confirms different levels of agency during performances. And the first level, in fact, is the individual’s self-affirmation or “ego-affirming” level. Duranti mentions two things on this level: presence and voice: “A and B agree on a melody and concentrate, looking down at the floor. The other people, carry on chatting for a while in a respectful but—at the same time—informal tone of voice. Then they realise that A is ready to start the verse from the look on her face. They keep quiet and look at her. Another twenty seconds go by, and then A starts singing.” Her voice, in both speech and song, is a coordinated action of her whole body. The voice and respiratory system, the digestive system, vocal resonators, and many muscle groups are used to project the voice. Creating a voice is not one of this area’s main function. The voice, however, is the immediate expression of our identity: “an irreducible sign of identity” (Merleau-Ponty 1970).

And, as well as being a sign of identity, bringing your voice out is also an action of self-affirmation for the individual. Speaking in itself denotes agency:

The very act of speaking in front of others who can perceive such an act establishes the speaker as a being whose existence must be reckoned with in terms of his or her communicative goals and abilities. As the most sophisticated form of human expression,

language use implies that its users are entities that must also possess other human qualities including the ability to affect their own and others' ways of being. Hence, this most basic level of agency—an agency of an existential sort which, however, needs others (whether as a real or imaginary audience)—does not need to rely on referential or denotational meaning. It is language per se as a human faculty rather than the meaning of its words that is sufficient for agency as ego-affirming to be at work. (Duranti 2004, 455)

Inevitably, then, taking turn to speak is an affirmation of the individual's character: *This is me, I'm here and this is my voice*. And this “both affirms the speaker qua speaker and reveals human qualities” (Duranti 2004, 459). Thus the experience of speaking is not neutral, and learning to have confidence in oneself is also learning to improvise:

The bertsolaritza school has given me this . . . The way I am . . . *M.A.S.: What?* I don't know . . . It's a lot of things. Perhaps I know myself better now . . . I've gotten rid of that timidity, or I'm trying to, trying to have more self-confidence.

—*Girl [P], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

And if we look beyond speaking in public, to singing verses (or, as Marta Font defines it, poetic *performance*), agency takes on another dimension

that can become a subversive experience, both inwards and outwards (Font 2011).

After L's first verse, A spends a long time thinking. People look at him, and he says "-ela." The suggestions come straightaway: "gela," "arbela," "horrela," "epela," "itzela," "txapela" . . . They are still shouting out rhymes as A starts singing. Another two verses, and the two-bertsolari session has finished. The members who are listening sing out the repetition of the last line at greater volume than before, giving the session a happy ending. The applause, too, is louder than before.

Learning to improvise is learning the technique in order to improvise verses. But making verses involves more than that, as the objective of improvising is actually saying something pertinent. The bertsolari needs to master technique in order to be able to create a discourse. Jon Sarasua, Andoni Egaña, and Joserra Gartzia, who have carried out considerable work developing and transmitting the theoretical bertsolaritza corpus, place bertsolaritza's rhetorical and poetic value above its technical value (Gartzia, Sarasua, and Egaña 2001).

With regard to content, the need to create discourse clearly calls for reflection: the bertsolaris have to deal with a subject, place themselves in a situation, or give an opinion. Bertsolaris have to choose what to say and how to say it, and then try to be true to that decision, respecting the verses' formal limitations. The dynamic of reflection created during the poetic dialogue process is even

more interesting. During an artificially created dialogue situation, what Eric Dicharry calls “twofold intellectual decentralization” takes place (Dicharry 2013, 65). On one hand, the poet has to distance him/herself from his/her own point of view, forced to interpret or play a certain personality or situation, and on the other, he/she has to place him/herself in relation to the fellow bertsolari’s point of view.

That makes you think, ideas and so on, “What would I say there?” and then you have to think it through. And, well, we think it through . . . And when we listen to the others, too. “Oh, yeah!”

Boy [K], fifteen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).

Half an hour has already passed since they came chatting into the room. They’ve all sung one by one during the first exercise, then a first round in pairs, and it’s time to do the second round. First they had to sing in the *zortziko handi* meter (four rhymes, long verses), and now it’s a *zortziko txiki* (four rhymes, short verses). It’s advisable for different meters. A and J have gotten up, stood in front of the others, and the teacher has given them their subject: “You’ve been classmates since you were little. You can’t stand each other. You’ve started at high school this year, and today’s your first day at class. The teacher tells you where to sit when you come in . . . And you’re next to each other.” A thinks of an idea straightaway.

You can see that in her facial expression. “J starts,” says the teacher. “A has an idea,” answers J. He does not have any ideas, and wants A to begin. “Ok, A can start!” says the teacher.

A specific idea come from a single word, an image, a memory, or a sensation. And if you think it is a good idea, that is because you confer an expressive force to that idea. A potential expressivity. However, you have to say it using a specific number of syllables. Using specific words. In a specific order. So there is a specific aesthetic.

After thirty seconds, A begins: “Erakasle hone-taz, ezin ginen fida/ Ta hala ikusi dut arbelan begira/ Hartu regla eskutan, mugitu kadira/ hasieratik limitak markatu behar dira”[“We can’t trust this teacher / I’ve seen that on the board / Pick up your ruler, move your chair / You have to draw the lines from the start”]. Laughter is heard. The people sitting down act the situation out. They look at each other aggressively, as if they wanted to be as far apart from each other as possible. More laughter. And silence once more. Now it is J’s turn.

The second agency level that Duranti mentions is “Act-constituting agency.” Duranti pays special attention, however, to the creative power of poetry, singing, theater, humor from daily life, and narrative: “This is a dimension where speakers/singers/actors/story-tellers exploit some taken for granted or hidden properties of language, transforming our ordinary understanding of language and its relation to reality” (Duranti 2004, 459). In these genres “language users [are] accountable for the form of

their expressions and the style of delivery” (Duranti 2004, 459).

The person singing the verses, however, chooses a way to say what he/she wants to, taking on the role assigned, putting together the best possible idea and expressed in the best possible way, respecting the formal limits or, perhaps more accurately, making use of them. In fact, Bertolarita's symbolic strength is based on those formal limits. Being able to say things within those limits gives the message its strength: “Poetically organized discourse (POD) and, in general, poetic procedures may be regarded as a special way of formalizing speech by means of a number of constraints on how the text is organized—such as meter, rhythm, morphosyntactic parallelism, assonance, and other procedures—. . . Such constraints, that often occur together, heighten and specialize the symbolic impact of an utterance” (Banti and Giannattasio 2004).

But J starts to get nervous right away. He can't think of anything. “I don't know what to say,” he says. The others keep quiet. They don't want to say anything right away. It seems they would rather he tried and managed it by himself. But they have stopped their theatrics. Time passes slowly. A minute. Two minutes. “Come on, J!” says the teacher. “I really can't think of anything.” When he gives up, the others start shouting ideas out. “You'll get on better as time goes by.” “Really that's what you wanted, being side-by-side.” Laughter once more. Everyone relaxes. Conversations start up once more while J gets his

verse ready. “Gela hontan badira ikasleak hogeita hamar / ta nik zure ondoan nuen erori behar / ezin gira soporta bizi osoan zehar/hori jakin nuelaik in nuen negar!” [“There are thirty pupils in this room / And I have to sit next to you / We can’t stand each other / I cried when I found out”]. There is applause and shouts of encouragement in the room. “That’s it, that’s it!” “Great stuff, J!” J breathes a great sigh of relief. He is not satisfied, and the others know that too. They all feel a little frustrated.

As we have seen, improvising a *bertso* puts the individual on show. First, your body in front of the group. When the singing starts, each person’s voice, and the internal situation that each voice expresses. Ideas, and the ways chosen to express them. Furthermore, the *bertsolari* may make a mess of the formal aspects of the creative process. Getting stuck. Making obvious mistakes. Or not. Even if there are no problems, even if you have to sing about a subject you know about and from a role you are familiar with, each person has to choose an idea and, so, the others, the listeners, will decide whether the idea is appropriate and whether it has been well expressed, and the *bertsolari* knows that from the moment he/she stands up.

Therefore, from the moment he/she dares to make verses until after singing, he/she has the sensation of being evaluated (by him/herself and by the others), and that gives rise to emotions in the *bertsolari*’s body as well as in those of the listeners, through empathy. As Hernández underlines, *bertsolaritza* does take the improvisers’ bodies and emotions—as

well as those of the listeners—to be an essential part of the whole. Thus for agency performance, there is no alternative to taking the risk of making mistakes. Making decisions, and living with them. If there were no evaluation, there would be no agency. Duranti, in fact, puts forward the following characteristics for defining agency: “Agency is here understood as the property of those entities (i) that have some degree of control over their own behaviour, (ii) whose actions in the world affect other entities’ (and sometimes their own), and (iii) whose actions are the object of evaluation (e.g. in terms of their responsibility for a given outcome)” (Duranti 2004, 453).

As the BS is something that is held every week, and its members are not forced to attend, it is reasonable to suppose that, in that context, it is an emotionally bearable experience for them, both when singing and when listening. Although experiences outside the BS may be very different, the young people interpret the BS as an opportunity for agency performance.

I know the other members of our school very well, so I don't mind about singing badly or well, doing this or that. Knowing the others better removes that timidity about singing in front our your bertsolaritza school classmates . . . I'm the first person to put my foot in it, so I know only too well that when I do, they don't say “Oh! You did that badly;” they're more likely to say “You should have done it another way.” But without mocking you, or anything like that.

—*Boy [I], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

I do get nervous at bertsolaritza school because I put myself under pressure, but then I know they aren't going to judge me, so I'm relaxed with the others. But nervous, too, because I demand things of myself, but I know the teacher won't say anything bad, the others won't say I've done it badly and they'll help me, we'll help each other.

—*Girl [N], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

Those young people are aware of the agency experience they get at the BS, and their discourse both reflects that and influences them:

Bertsolaritza has given me self-confidence, I've seen I can do it and I sometimes even reach the championship, and that gives you a positive image of yourself.

—*Girl [N], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

It is even more than that. Empathy based on inter-subjectivity determines the group identity of the BS community of practice, and, at the same time, identifying agency experience also leads to each person identifying him/herself as an agent. This is why the expression "I'm in the BS" was mentioned a lot in the interviews.

Well, thanks to the bertsolaritza school, I don't know, I think. . . Yeah, our bertsolaritza school, for instance, makes me feel good, and then . . . really when we are at the bertsolaritza school, or bertsolaritza summer camps, or anything connected with bertsolaritza, it's me, it's really me, well, I don't know how to put it.

—*Girl [M], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

There is positive identity in that “It's really me.” This “I” is an agent capable of performing in front of others, making choices, and seeing itself to be capable. And affinities and identifications are developed along with that experienced positive identity.

In the end, people are a bit like you. And . . . yeah. That's more than just acceptance, confidence, or something like that . . . It's not confidence, it's more than that. I mean it's really something amazing.

—*Girl [U], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

Why do I actually have a good time? Well, because I like bertsolaritza, but, you know, the people. . . That's it, you trust each other, and they're like you, so you identify with them right away, and. . . you have an amazing relationship with the people.

—*Girl [U], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

Conclusion: Experienced Agency and Language Behavior

Viviani has researched popular young musicians in La Plata, Argentina, and states that “the musical experience empowers young people, and take shape in different moments of everyday life, not only in those specifically linked with musical experience” (Viviani 2014, 210). In other words, this author believes that “this experience and the possibilities which it offers make up emotional structures and behaviour patterns which later affect other areas of the young people’s lives” (Viviani 2014, 210–11).

I believe that we have the ability to communicate within the group and to do things in group, and that’s important . . . Bertsolaris do have the ability to communicate well, that’s it. And then, well. . . I don’t know, feeling involved or something . . . In general, in life the way other people look at you [worries me], really a lot, so I don’t dare to do some things, and bertsolaritza really helps me to do more things.

—*Girl [N], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

Maybe, well, the way we sing in front of people, we find it easy to explain what we need and so on. So sometimes we do stand up to the [high school] teacher.

—*Boy [K], fifteen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

It's true that at secondary school, for instance, there are different groups, Baxoa Euskaraz [the movement in favor of being able to take university access examinations in Basque], the radio, some other types of groups, and the bertsolaritza school gives life to absolutely all of those groups, no doubt about that, I don't know why.

—*Boy [A], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

More research needs to be done on how or to what extent that individual and collective agency experience shows itself outside the BS, outside in general. But it can be affirmed that it does influence language use.

The individual's agency, identification with others, and the group's and with individual's positive identities are all elements I have mentioned as factors that define the BS as a community of practice. But they are not the only factors because those experiences happening in Basque is no mere detail. Another meaningful feature of the BS community

of practice is that communication among the members of the BS takes place in Basque. And, what is more, the pretext or reason for coming together uses Basque as an essential element of the activity itself. In any case, the experiences of group members related to those practices are also experiences lived out in Basque, and language experiences cannot be separated from other experiences. Thus the agency sensation, among other things, is something that the young people have experienced in Basque and that influences their attitude to the language:

It was the only moment in the week when I felt myself . . . and it just happened to be the only moment of the week when I was doing something in Basque. . . . I felt myself, I felt accepted, I felt really good.

—*Girl [N], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).*

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, other types of identification, including language identity, are based on experienced identity. At the BS, these young bertsolaris experience agency, and experience it in Basque. Language identity is thus constructed in relation to this experience of agency, which enhances *identity creating* motivation. At the same time, the basis for a proactive language behavior with regard to language choice is individuals and groups acting as agents. My point is that experiencing agency in the BS can lead to seeing oneself as an agent in other aspects of social life.

If you go to a good bertsolaritza school, well, I don't know how to put it, I don't know what a good bertsolaritza school is, but, if there's a good atmosphere at the bertsolaritza school, you have to take that outside with you too, and you reflect that to other people, and . . . And I don't think it's enough for you to say to yourself "I'm going to speak in Basque;" well, I think, me for example, I know I'm not strong enough to say to myself "Hey, from now on I'm going to speak in Basque;" well, no, well, I need to feel my friends are there . . . I don't know if I'd be strong enough to do that by myself, well, I don't know what would happen if I wasn't at the bertsolaritza school.

Girl [L], seventeen years old. Member of the bertsolaritza school at Bernat Etxepare High School (Baiona).

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