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Multilingual professionals in internationally operating companies: tensions in their linguistic repertoire?

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Abstract: Several studies on multilingualism in the workplace have emphasized the role of English as a lingua franca. Other studies have paid attention to the interaction between English and local languages in workplaces where global orientations and local languages co-occur. The present study focuses on internationally oriented workplaces in the bilingual Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). The study aims to analyze the use of the minority language Basque in the workplace and the challenges it faces in an emerging multilingual global context. The promotion and use of the minority language in internationally oriented workplaces is related to language policies of the regional government, the role of ‘new speakers’ of Basque, and the possible tensions between the efforts to revitalize Basque and the use of English as a global language, mediated by the position of Spanish as a strong international language. Our conclusion is that there is a need to establish new policies that are truly multilingual as well as to raise awareness in companies about the importance of adequate language management practices.

Keywords: multilingualism, workplace, English as global language, minority language

1 Introduction

Over the last decades, globalization, international workforce mobility and advances in communication technology have altogether led to changes in

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workplace discourse. In companies that want to operate on international markets, employees now often have to deal with foreign languages in their daily professional tasks. The introduction of new languages in the workplace is a complex matter related to language policies, proficiency and practices.

Already the ELAN report (2006) published by the European Commission indicated that international communication problems have financial consequences for companies as according to the survey 11% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have lost a business contract due to insufficient language skills. One out of ten European SMEs that operate internationally experience language barriers and intercultural problems when they do business abroad. On the contrary, companies that are successful in international trade share some characteristics regarding language management: employment of native speakers, recruitment of employees with existing language skills, use of professional interpreters and translators, and a language management plan or strategy in place. Companies investing in these elements achieved export sales 44.5% higher than those not making any of these investments. More recently the PIMLICO report (2011), also published by the European Commission, showed that 73% of the 40 participating companies in the survey indicate to have increased their turnover by more than 16% by introducing a strategy with new languages. Hence, language management is considered a key factor for companies in achieving economic growth.

The picture gets more complex when the professionals in companies that want to operate internationally already use more than one language due to a local situation where a minority and majority language coexist. In such cases the presence of two languages in the local market and its use among the staff has to be dealt with together with English and possibly additional foreign languages.

English plays an important role as a lingua franca in many contexts in society nowadays, among which the workplace is a significant domain (Seidlhofer 2011; Jenkins 2013). Attitudes towards the global role of the English language are going in different, even opposite directions, as some people consider English to be a serious threat to linguistic diversity and others see English as a facilitator of globalization and common language.

Attitudes towards the role of English are even more complex when it comes to bilingual regions where a minority language is in active use by the population. As Stavans and Hoffmann (2015) point out, linguistic minority communities are usually under pressure to maintain loyalty towards their own language whereas the majority community perceives the minority language merely as a possible option. Processes of globalization may bring additional pressures to a minority community, but globalization may also bring new opportunities and in specific cases increase the prestige of a minority language.

Angouri (2013) underlines the importance of investigating the role of minority languages in relation to English as a working language. Angouri and Miglbauer (2014) analyzed the perceptions of employees towards English as a lingua franca in multinationals in Europe. They consider that, despite the role of English as a lingua franca, the language ecology of modern workplaces is rather diverse. Languages in the workplace typically have different degrees of dominance (local language versus global language; majority language versus minority language) and are socially stratified (elite and non-elite languages) or functionally stratified (diglossia) (Gunnarsson 2013).

Amelina (2010), for instance, found different stratifications of languages in her study on the role of different languages in the careers of Russian-speaking professionals during their stay in Germany. She draws attention to the circumstance that English is mainly used for discussing professional or technical subjects and also as an improvisational measure when no common language is available. In contrast, the mother tongues of the employees and the host languages of the company are the main languages used for informal networking and for personal relationships.

Multilingualism in the workplace is further characterized by the aim of companies to obtain an economic benefit. Companies choose among different languages the working language that provides the most efficient benefit in the competitive global context (Alarcón 2005). Companies look for *communicative efficiency* -the capacity of transmitting a certain amount of information in less time than in another language-, often opting for linguistic homogenization as a strategy to lower the costs. The communicative potential of a language is important in this sense, depending on the number of native speakers of the language and its use as a lingua franca. Language diversity is usually seen as a barrier to economic efficiency (Solé et al. 2005). This relation to economic benefit and search for communicative efficiency creates a specific challenge for the promotion of a minority language in the workplace.

Gunnarsson (2014) and Mahili and Angouri (2017) provide overviews of studies about multilingualism in the workplace that have been carried out so far. This article aims to contribute to this field by discussing the role of the minority language in the workplace in a multilingual context in which other languages are also used for international purposes.

The paper describes the situation in the Basque Autonomous Community (hereafter referred to as BAC). The BAC is a region with around 2.1 million inhabitants, located in the north of Spain close to the border with France. This autonomous community is one of the three parts of the historical Basque Country that also includes the Autonomous Community of Navarre in Spain and the Iparralde area in France. In the BAC there are two official languages, the

minority language Basque and the majority language Spanish. An important effort has been done to normalize the use of the minority language at all levels of society, including the workplace (Juanikorena and Ignacio 2010). Meanwhile, due to the increasing internationalization of the Basque industry also foreign languages, and especially English, have gained in importance (Van der Worp et al. 2016; Van der Worp et al. 2017). One can observe that the internationally operating companies in the BAC combine the use of the local languages Basque and Spanish and the global language English in their workplaces that leads to interesting issues to be investigated.

The main research questions to be answered are:

- *What are the challenges for the use of Basque in international workplaces in the Basque Country?*
- *To what extent are Basque and English competing languages in the workplace?*

First, the language policies of the regional government to support the use of Basque in the workplace will be analyzed, as well as the data on the de facto use of the Basque language and the challenges that remain. Second, the role and use of English will be discussed in relation to the use of Basque.

2 Methodology

This article draws on data from different sources. First of all, document analysis of several reports of the Basque Government provided data about language policy and language use. A total of seven key documents from the Basque Government related to language use in the workplace have been analyzed, as shown in Table 1.

Second, we interviewed 25 professionals in managerial positions from 14 different companies in the BAC. The 14 companies were selected according to two characteristics: they had to belong to a wide range of different sectors and all of them had to be related to multilingualism, in the sense that the selected companies use different languages to different degrees. The companies belong to the following sectors: four are Basque internationally operating factories (hereafter referred to as F1, F2, F3, F4), one is a multinational factory (MF1), two are internationally operating service providing companies (S1, S2), three are corporations (two operate internationally (C1, C2) and one focuses on the local market (C3)), three are consultancy firms (two operate internationally (CS1, CS2) and one focuses on the local market (CS3)) and finally, one is a local language academy (A1). Six of the 14 companies (two factories, two corporations, the

Table 1: Seven key documents from the Basque Government related to language use in society and the workplace.

Reference	Document	Description of document
(Basque Government 1999)	<i>Plan General de Promoción del Uso de Euskera.</i> [General plan for the promotion of the use of Basque]	A document created to promote the necessary linguistic policies to guarantee the possibility to live through Basque and reach a complete normalization of Basque at all levels of society.
(Basque Government 2003)	<i>Euskararen erabilera EAE-ko enpresa handietan.</i> [The use of Basque in large companies of the BAC]	A study based on telephone questionnaires with companies of 100 or more employees analyzing how Basque is used in large companies of the BAC.
(Basque Government 2012)	<i>Plan de acción para la promoción del euskera.</i> [Action plan for the promotion of Basque]	A plan designed for the development of Basque over a time span of ten years, to encourage the use of Basque in modern society.
(Basque Government 2015a)	<i>Euskara. Jarrerak eta iritziak – Actitudes y opiniones.</i> [Basque. Attitudes and opinions]	A study based on a questionnaire among 2.100 inhabitants of the BAC analyzing their attitudes and opinions regarding Basque.
(Basque Government 2015b)	<i>Euskararen Gaineko Oinarrizko Diskurtsoean lanketa. EGOD egitasmoa. Eranskinak.</i> [Work on the basic discourse on Basque. The EGOD project. Appendixes]	A study on the existing discourses about Basque in Basque society, making comparisons and encouraging social debate.
(Basque Government 2015c)	<i>Valor e impacto económico del euskera.</i> [Value and economic impact of Basque]	A study on the contribution of Basque to the economy of the BAC, measuring economic wealth provided by Basque and quantifying the economic value of the different sectors related to Basque.

(continued)

Table 1: (continued)

Reference	Document	Description of document
(Basque Government 2016)	<i>VI Encuesta sociolingüística. Comunidad Autónoma de Euskadi.</i> [VI Sociolinguistic survey. Basque Autonomous Community]	A presentation of the most recent sociolinguistic data of the BAC.

language academy and one consultancy) have taken part in language policy plans to promote the use of Basque.

The choice of these companies is useful for different reasons. First, because in this way we can both look at factories that need multilingualism for internationalization and at the consultancies (and the language academy) that provide services to such internationally operating companies. From the factories we can obtain direct information about the role of multilingualism in their own company and the consultancies have the experience of working with professionals from many different companies over several years. The second reason is that by having different types of companies with different sizes, locations and degrees of internationalization it is possible to identify patterns in the role of multilingualism for professionals that go beyond the study of one specific type of company.

In 10 of the 14 companies an interview with only one informant was sufficient to obtain the data we wanted. In four companies more than one informant was interviewed, in order to gather more complete data, because of the way the work was distributed. In Table 2, an overview of the participating companies and informants is presented together with the corresponding reference codes.

Taken together the group of 25 informants presents a solid and extensive understanding of multilingualism in the workplace in the BAC.

The participants were interviewed individually using a semi-structured schedule with open questions, and the respondents were given the opportunity to discuss other topics they considered relevant. The interview questions included basic information about the participant and the company, the language use and competences of the employees, language requirements, language policy, translanguaging and new speakers. The interviews were held over a time span of half a year, between January 2014 and July 2014. The interviews lasted between 40 and 105 minutes. The participants were allowed to choose their preferred language for the interview. In our study seventeen participants chose

Table 2: The participating companies and corresponding interviewed professionals (N = 25).

Sector	Company description	Informants
Factories	1. Factory of metallic parts (F1)	1. General director (F1.1) 2. Director of client services (F1.2) 3. Director of language commission (F1.3) 4. Human resource manager (F1.4) 5. Quality manager (F1.5) 6. Sales manager (F1.6)
	2. Factory of professional and industrial tools (F2)	7. General director (F2.1) 8. Export manager Asia (F2.2) 9. Export manager America (F2.3) 10. Export manager Middle East (F2.4) 11. Regional manager (F2.5)
	3. Factory of electronics (F3)	12. Corporate chief technology officer (F3)
	4. Factory of adhesive tape (F4)	13. Sales manager (F4)
Multinational	5. Factory of automotive components (MF1)	14. Floor manager (MF1)
Service providers	6. IT service company (S1)	15. Marketing director (S1)
	7. Logistics company (S2)	16. Branch manager (S2)
Corporations	8. R&D group (C1)	17. Director of international development (C1)
	9. Business Group (C2)	18. Director of co-operative dissemination (C2)
	10. Association of Language Industries (C3)	19. General director (C3)
Consultancy firms	11. Internationalization consultancy (CS1)	20. International sales consultant (CS1.1) 21. Inside sales manager (CS1.2)
	12. Internationalization consultancy (CS2)	22. General manager (CS2)
	13. Basque consultancy (CS3)	23. Head of consultancy (CS3.1) 24. Innovation and project manager (CS3.2)
Language academy	14. Language academy (A1)	25. Director of communication (A1)

Spanish and eight Basque. The interviews were audio-recorded, while during the interviews additional notes were taken. All interviews were transcribed and coded in ATLAS.ti for further qualitative data analysis.

3 Results

3.1 Language policies for Basque in the private sector

After the transition to democracy, both Basque and Spanish were recognized in 1979 as official languages in the BAC by the Basque Statute of Autonomy. The minority language Basque does not belong to the Indo-European language family and it is very different from the majority language Spanish. First some background information on the language situation will be given.

The inhabitants of the BAC are not all equally competent in both official languages. According to the Sixth Sociolinguistic Survey, published in 2016, 33.9% of the population in the BAC of 16 years and older consider themselves to be bilinguals who can speak both Spanish and Basque. Another 19.1% are passive bilinguals with only receptive skills in Basque, and the other 47% are monolingual Spanish speakers. Over the last 25 years the knowledge of Basque has gone up, with an increase of almost 10% more bilinguals, 11% more passive bilinguals and 12% fewer Spanish monolinguals (Basque Government 2016). It is taken for granted that everyone speaks Spanish, and Basque remains clearly the minority language. It should also be taken into account that even being bilingual does not imply an equal competence in both Basque and Spanish. Among bilinguals, only 26,8% feel more comfortable of expressing themselves in Basque than in Spanish (i.e. are Basque-dominant bilinguals), 29,3% of bilinguals feel equally capable of expressing themselves in Basque and Spanish (i.e. are balanced bilinguals) and 44% of bilinguals, the largest group, express themselves better in Spanish than in Basque (i.e. are Spanish-dominant bilinguals) (Basque Government 2016).

In terms of general language policy, the formal recognition of Basque in 1979 was a significant milestone. From then onwards, important efforts have been carried out to promote Basque. However, over time the need was felt to bundle efforts, to overcome difficulties of the past and to orient the revitalization of Basque as a common task of all sectors of society. For those reasons in 1998 the Basque Government set up the ‘General Plan for the Promotion of the Use of Basque’ (Basque Government 1999). The focus of the plan is on three main areas: the transmission of Basque, the use of Basque in different domains and the presence of Basque in the media and cultural production. The plan takes into account a wide range of domains, such as education, leisure, sports, culture, media, religion, government services and also the workplace (Gorter et al. 2014). In practice, most weight has been given to promoting Basque in education and in that domain it has been relatively successful. Over the past 35 years the

teaching of the Basque language at school has gradually increased and Basque has now become the main language of instruction in compulsory education (Martínez De Luna et al. 2014) and it has become an important language of instruction at university as well (Cenoz 2009).

The language policy for the private sector became more prominent after the adoption and implementation of a more specific ‘Action Plan for the Promotion of Basque’ (Basque Government 2012). The plan mentions as main challenges for companies and private institutes their communication in Basque and a greater sensitivity towards the use of Basque in workplace practices, as well as with their clients. Specific proposals in the plan focus on economic support for the acquisition of Basque among employees and the enhancement of its prestige in the workplace as well as further improvements in the dissemination of Basque language plans for individual companies as part of the *Lan-Hitz* (‘Language at work’) program. Already in 1997, the *Lan-Hitz* program was set up to develop specific Basque language plans for companies to increase the presence and use of Basque. Companies participating in the program can obtain funding to develop their own language plan (grants are available for the design of a plan, translation of documents into Basque, special software, Basque language classes and even for the evaluation of the results of the company’s plan). The program seemed reasonably successful and according to the information in the Action Plan 25.000 employees were at that time involved in the language plans for Basque in the private sector (Basque Government 2012). This may sound as an impressive number for a minority language, but it of course represents only a small percentage of the total work force in the BAC.

It is interesting to mention that as part of the *Lan-Hitz* program, a standardized tool called *EME (El Marco de Referencia Estándar: ‘The Standard Reference Framework’)* was designed to develop tailor-made language policy plans for Basque. The tool is designed in such a way that a company can systematically develop, implement and also evaluate their plan for the use of Basque. The tool covers three key areas: (1) corporate image and communication, (2) external relations and (3) internal relations. For each area, the tool provides a detailed diagnosis of the contents of communication. As a whole, it constitutes a framework with 143 different sections of language use. For each (sub)section, a company is asked to describe how they plan to use Basque next to Spanish. The outcome of the diagnosis is turned into an overall language plan for Basque that also includes a detailed timetable for its implementation.

In addition to these somewhat technical and detailed plans, another initiative is the so-called *Bikain* (‘excellent’) certificate (Euskalit 2014). The primary aim is to increase the prestige of Basque in the workplace. The certificates are awarded based on systematic external evaluation of the use of Basque in companies. One of the

secondary aims is to integrate the criteria of language management with standard quality evaluations that are normally used in the private sector (see also Urla 2012). The related website contains a list of 303 public and private entities that have been awarded the *Bikain* certificate between 2008 and 2016. The certificate is supposed to demonstrate quality in Basque language management.

Today there are also other initiatives for the promotion of Basque in the private sector. For instance, there is the grant scheme by the city of Donostia-San Sebastián to give subsidies for using Basque in public signage. The local government provides a subsidy of up to 50% to shop owners for the costs of new signs when those are in Basque only and 30% when they become bilingual Basque-Spanish (Aiestaran et al. 2010; Gorter et al. 2012). Similar programs exist in other municipalities. Another example is an agreement in 2015 between ten major companies in the BAC and the Basque Government. The companies have committed themselves to respect the linguistic rights of their clients by stimulating the use of bilingual communication, both orally and written. The companies receive financial support to train their staff and carry out and evaluate the agreement (Basque Government 2015d).

All in all, the use of Basque in the private sector receives relatively strong support. Companies in both the public and private sector can obtain support and recognition for using Basque in the workplace. The analysis of the policy documents demonstrates that Basque still faces some serious challenges in the private sector, which provides part of the answer to our first research question.

3.2 The actual use of Basque in the workplace

We continue to look in challenges for the use of Basque in the workplace, by discussing the results of a number of studies into its actual use and we add observations of our informants. Some time ago the Basque Government (2003) published a survey among 455 large companies (of 100 employees or more) about the number of Basque speakers in the workplace. The survey showed that at the time on average 35% of the staff was Basque speaking. This type of specific survey among companies was never repeated, but more recently the Basque Government (2015a) carried out a telephone survey among 2.160 inhabitants of the BAC of 18 years or older to learn more about their attitudes and opinions about Basque. Some questions were related to the workplace and the labor market and those showed that a majority of respondents agreed that Basque is increasingly necessary for finding a job, and they also agreed that for some job positions knowledge of Basque should be a requirement. In the most recent general sociolinguistic survey among the population at large it was

also found that 25.3% of the working respondents use Basque as much as or more than Spanish with colleagues in the workplace (Basque Government 2016).

During the interviews our informants confirmed that the use of both Basque and Spanish in companies is nowadays quite common, although the extent of the use of each of the two languages can differ widely between companies. At one end of the scale, there is one company where the directorate and the workers decided to work through the medium of Basque completely, at least as much as possible. At the other end of the scale, in another company, all professionals exclusively use Spanish as their working language. Most companies are situated somewhere in between, with employees using both languages in their daily tasks, at least to some degree and also depending on their proficiency. Overall Spanish prevails, probably because everyone can speak Spanish fluently, and only a proportion can speak Basque.

We were told that in formal settings such as meetings, Spanish dominates, while in the informal sphere, such as chatting with colleagues during a coffee break, it is rather common to find the use of both Basque and Spanish. Not only is Spanish predominant, but Basque speakers also are reported to switch easily and often from Basque to Spanish to accommodate to other speakers. An informant of an international consultancy (CS1.1), who is a Spanish native speaker, explains that his Basque colleagues alternate between Basque and Spanish but that Spanish dominates:

My colleagues are both from the *ikastola* (Basque medium school), so they have always used a lot of Basque, but still the working language in our company is Spanish, [...] If you are talking in Basque but all of a sudden you have to talk about a work issue or you have to write in Spanish, you change to Spanish. [...] when they start a conversation and don't have to use Spanish because there is nobody who doesn't speak Basque or they are not talking about something dealt with in Spanish, they might go on in Basque, yes, but otherwise Spanish prevails.

The account provided by the informant is in line with the results of the EGOD project (Basque Government 2015b), which presents general debates about Basque and the use of the local language in the workplaces. The report confirms that “in companies, the use of Spanish clearly dominates” (Basque Government 2015b: 219).

Switching from Basque into Spanish is generally perceived as something logical due to the presence of non-Basque speakers or because the common working language is Spanish, however, switching in the other direction might cause some tension. The Spanish-speaking informant from an international consultancy firm (CS1.1) makes the following observation:

Perhaps it could be of bad taste talking in Basque in the presence of the ones who don't speak the language, because we don't understand what they are saying. [...] I personally don't disapprove that they talk in Basque, but perhaps our director, who doesn't speak anything, he doesn't understand Basque, so he perhaps might prefer that we use Spanish.

So in the workplace Spanish does not only have a more dominant presence than Basque, both languages are also functionally stratified, since Spanish is used in formal settings and Basque is more limited to informal settings. Moreover, professionals easily switch from Basque to Spanish.

3.3 Multilingualism and the use of Basque

From the foregoing two sections, it will be clear that serious barriers exist for the use of Basque in the workplace. However, there are still other challenges that came to the fore in our interviews. An important challenge was pointed out by one informant of a local consultancy firm (CS3.1). She mentioned the difficulty to convince companies about the added value of language management. "If we use the company discourse about competitiveness, it is not always clear that the investment [in language management] has a certain return". It appears to be difficult to convince the companies of the need of an adequate multilingual environment, as it is difficult to measure the return on the investment this can imply. Evidently language management is thought of in economic terms in many companies.

Another important barrier to develop a multilingual working environment that includes the minority language became clear during the interviews; the persistent negative perceptions of multilingualism. These were expressed as for example: "Multilingualism is like the tower of Babel, it is a problem. From the point of view of internal efficiency, the ideal would be to speak just one language" (S1). This way of conceiving multilingualism as a serious problem will prevent any company from carrying out language management or from the promotion of Basque in the international workplace.

However, the data in the EGOD report (Basque Government 2015b) regarding societal debates about the use of Basque tell us that a majority of the inhabitants of the BAC does not see the use of Basque as a burden for companies and commerce. Moreover, it seems that a large majority of the inhabitants believes that companies should respect the wish of their clients to be attended to both in Basque and in Spanish. The Action Plan of the Basque Government actually already included the use of Basque with clients. There it was designated as one of the challenges for the future: "to guarantee and promote the possibility to use Basque in the relations with the clients, taking into account that the right of

clients to use Basque is as important as the use of Basque in the daily work of the companies” (Basque Government 2012: 36).

Another obstacle for the use of Basque is the international position and prestige of Spanish. Several of our informants underlined the importance of Spanish for internationalization of companies from the BAC to do business in Latin America. Many companies opt for exporting to Latin America considering there is not a language barrier. As the informant of the service provider points out (S1): “Everybody speaks Spanish. In Latin America they speak Spanish, or something similar, their Spanish. Then, in Portugal where we have offices in Lisbon and Porto, they are the ones who do an effort, because it is rather natural for them to talk to us in Spanish”. The fact that the majority language Spanish is a global language creates some concern for the head coordinator of the local consultancy firm (CS3.1): “It is what’s happening to the English, having their native language English, few people know other languages, because they think they can go anywhere with their language. In our case, with Spanish, such a strong language, I think it goes against us”. Spanish is thus seen as an important lingua franca for internationalization to Spanish speaking countries and this further enhances the differences between use of the minority and the majority language.

Another important challenge for the use of Basque in the workplace, to which we turn in the next section, is posed by the presence of many new speakers of Basque.

3.4 The use of Basque by new speakers

The general language policy of the regional government has made substantial efforts to stimulate the learning of Basque in education to compensate for the lack of transmission in the family. This policy has been successful, when one takes into account the steadily increasing number of Basque speakers. However, one effect has been that Basque speakers as a group have become more heterogeneous, with different relationships to the language between “old” and “new” speakers; a distinction that is commonly made among Basque speakers. Ortega et al. (2015) conclude that new speakers face the challenge to gain a greater sense of legitimacy and deeper attachments to Basque that can help them to become full participants in the Basque-speaking community. New speakers of Basque have to engage deeply with a language other than their first language Spanish. Ortega et al. (2015) looked into the linguistic identity of new speakers of Basque to find out to what extent they consider themselves different from native speakers. They found that for a new speaker, knowing how to speak Basque is

not the same as being a Basque speaker. The main difference they point out is that family-based language learning usually leads to greater proficiency but also to an inner language that is central to one's sense of self.

The data we obtained from our interviews with professionals also revealed some interesting perceptions concerning new speakers of Basque, and their use of the language in the workplace. The informant of an international consultancy firm (CS1.1) considers himself a new speaker and expresses his feelings about working in Basque as follows:

Well, the thing is, I don't know so much to defend myself in Basque at work, I don't initiate speaking in Basque. Only a little bit, perhaps in the beginning, in the morning for greeting and so on. I am delighted that my colleagues speak to me in Basque, because that way I can practice a little bit. But later I always answer in Spanish.

It seems that as a new speaker, he might use some Basque with his colleagues in informal settings, but he does not use the language for professional purposes: "because I don't feel at ease in Basque." There thus seems to be a competency gap. The informant points to his own lack of competence in Basque as a reason for his language behavior: "As a new Basque speaker, I don't feel prepared." The workplace seems to require a variety of language competencies that new Basque speakers have unevenly mastered. The same informant also gives a clear reason:

With Basque I'm having troubles to improve, because everybody knows Spanish, so when you don't have a sufficient level to express yourself completely, well, the easy thing is to use Spanish, and of course then you don't improve.

The experiences of this professional nicely demonstrate a common issue for new Basque speakers. Someone with a lower level in Basque does not feel able to talk freely in Basque and therefore prefers to use Spanish. However, due to the shared language, opportunities for practicing and thus improving Basque get lost. Even if new speakers have learned to speak Basque, it does not lead to the actual use of the language in the workplace. This circumstance can create important tensions in the Basque speaking community between "old" and "new" speakers.

The participants in the survey for the EGOD report (Basque Government 2015b) point out another factor. They mention to feel sometimes ashamed about being a new speaker of Basque and about making mistakes: "I am afraid to talk badly in Basque and that slows things down a lot. I think it is allowed not to speak it perfectly, but it is in our head that we feel ashamed" (Basque Government 2015b: 322). In the same report, first language speakers of Basque mention that in order to break the barriers between "new" and "old" speakers, perhaps they themselves should accept more easily the way new Basque

speakers speak, to make them feel more comfortable speaking Basque, despite making mistakes.

One of the companies that successfully implemented an individual plan of Basque has found a way to prevent new Basque speakers from giving up on using Basque. As our informant from one of the factories (F1.3) explained:

In engineering there is a new Basque speaker and he is specialized in very technical things. He explained to the company that to provide technical instruction, the use of Basque limited him a lot, and therefore we decided the following: With this person we do the meetings in Basque (he doesn't have any problems with that), but when he needs to give a technical instruction, he does this in Spanish, because we understand that he cannot explain these technical details equally well in Basque.

She confirms that in this company, the new Basque speakers manage well with using Basque in their workplace.

An informant from the multinational factory (MF1) indicates that they use receptive multilingualism as a solution for new Basque speakers: “For example, today at the meeting, there were two persons that are not from here. However, these people are in the meeting in which we speak 100% in Basque. They understand it, and somehow follow the conversation and when they have to make a contribution, they do so in Spanish.” This receptive multilingualism may be a key strategy in preventing native Basque speakers from switching to Spanish when speaking with colleagues with less proficiency in Basque.

In summary, we can state that so-called new Basque speakers evidently use less Basque in the workplace than native Basque speakers. One difficulty for new speakers to improve their Basque lays in the circumstance that others often switch to the majority language, but also that if they do not know Basque well enough, they can always rely on Spanish as the default language. Furthermore, limited skills may lead to feelings of lack of confidence in technical or professional discourses or new speakers may fear making mistakes in Basque and rather use Spanish. Findings in the general sociolinguistic survey confirm that even if speakers report to be proficient in both languages, a majority expresses that they feel less competent in Basque than in Spanish (Basque Government 2016). Thus, in the end, mainly the native Basque speakers use Basque with clients and for other professional purposes.

3.5 Basque and English as competing languages

In order to answer our second research question about the extent of competition between Basque and English in the workplace, we will again use the data from

our interviews as well as from the EGOD report and the policy documents. In general we can observe in Basque society, as elsewhere, that increasing importance is given to obtaining or having knowledge of English. This is a social process related to effects of globalization and it also leads in this case to a successful commercialization of the learning of English outside the regular school. However, for the time being knowledge of English is not widespread in the BAC, nor in the rest of Spain. Inhabitants of Spain have only a moderate proficiency in English, and Spain takes the 25th place in a ranking of English proficiency among 72 countries (EF 2016; see also European Commission 2012). Despite this moderate proficiency, it must be said that the BAC is the autonomous community with the relatively highest proficiency in English as compared to the other autonomous communities in Spain. It further has to be taken into account that there is little exposure to English outside education (Arocena and Popma 2014).

In general, our informants express the idea that professionals are linguistically not well enough prepared to work in other languages than Spanish or Basque. Even when (some) English is used in the workplace, many informants are concerned about the level of English of their employees. A few excerpts can illustrate these concerns. A quote from the director of a local corporation (C3) emphasizes the challenges ahead: “If a company wants to internationalize, internally there is still a lot of work to do. There are no people who are prepared linguistically, and then the organization and documentation is not prepared either. That’s where problems arise”.

Although the use of English plays a role in some companies that work internationally, English in the workplace seems to run into difficulties. These difficulties are more complex than just a mere lack of English speaking skills. Some of our informants indicate that being able to speak English is not the same as working through English. This idea is pointed out by the sales manager of one of the factories (F4) “One thing is knowing English, and another thing is being able to speak it and work with it”. The head coordinator of the local consultancy (CS3.1) uses similar words to express her concerns, adding a telling example: “One thing is talking English, and another thing is doing business in English. Knowing English for going on holiday to London does not mean you can do a business deal of many millions of euros in English. That is a big step”. English in the workplace seems to involve several skills that not all professionals have acquired to the same extent.

Our informants show an awareness of the problems companies may encounter when they have to use English for an international market. This is a circumstance that can also have consequences for Basque. One of our informants pointed out that in the international corporation (C3) where she works the

learning of English is prioritized and there is no support for Basque language learning, because as she explains:

We don't support the learning of Basque. [...] Our company is about technological investigation. So, we do interact with Basque clients in Basque, but then for the technology we develop, we use a lot of papers, conferences, researches and international projects at international level, so English is a necessary language to carry out our job. (...) Basque can be a vehicle to communicate with the client, but English is a language to make your work become of better quality.

So because of the way the company operates, its internal language policy leads to a competition for learning resources between Basque and English; in this case it is settled in favor of English.

The EGOD report (Basque Government 2015b), includes data that demonstrate that in some large companies, English has started to influence the place of Basque and some participants in the study expressed a fear that this could soon be the case in smaller companies and at other levels of society as well. The tension between spaces for English and Basque is illustrated by the observation that in companies and among professionals, Basque is not even a second language anymore, because English has started to take over (Basque Government 2015b: 349). The data in the EGOD report also show differences in perceptions of Basque and English. Frequently the question is asked “what is Basque useful for?” (Basque Government 2015b: 186), which is challenging the minority language. It is a question that is almost never asked for English. It shows an underlying language ideology in which the use of Basque is often based on ideas of identity, culture, education, the local and the patriotic. The use of English is more often based on ideas of progress, internationalization, business, opportunities, improvement and success.

In this context it is interesting to observe that the regional government has developed an extensive set of instruments to promote Basque, as was outlined above, but at the same time language planning is not included in governmental plans to internationalize economic activities by companies. In some of the interviews similar observations were made, which show there is some awareness in the field. For example, the head coordinator of a local consultancy firm (CS3.1) explains: “What is missing is that the companies realize this [i.e. the need of language management] and that also the government, when promoting internationalization, has to bring up the linguistic management as something to take into account; that it is important and that being mistaken about this can have a cost”. Also the informant from an international consultancy firm (CS2) clearly sees that there is no reflection on language management. She says: “Don't think that you can internationalize and that your language management

problem will be solved by contracting a person who knows English. The issue is much broader than that. I think they [the companies] improvise a lot, they act very partially, fulfilling the needs that come up, but there is no deep reflection that deals with this issue in a planned way.” She adds that in her opinion both at the company level as well as at the governmental level, more attention could be paid to develop language management as part of the process of internationalization.

The awareness in the field we noted above does have some influence, as the example of the *Elhuyar* foundation demonstrates. *Elhuyar* is a well-established consulting agency for language planning, that has recently engaged in efforts to expand its advisory work for the planning of Basque and the management of Basque-Spanish bilingualism, into the development of more multilingual plans, that also include English and possibly other languages. The agency has created an online platform called *Hizkuna*, intended for language management in multilingual environments, consisting of a number of resources such as machine translation, voice synthesis, and digital dictionaries that are all meant as tools to support work in an international environment (see <http://hizkuna.elhuyar.eus/platform>). *Elhuyar* has also participated in the so-called EPIC project (Enhancing and Promoting International Business Communication, see <http://epicforyou.eu/en/>) a collaborative network with partners from various European countries aimed to help SMEs to overcome language and cultural barriers in international trade. The partners in the EPIC project have developed a common Language Communication Audit (LCA). The audit leads to a tailor-made policy plan for multilingualism with an analysis of the current linguistic situation and recommendations for improvement. Some of those plans have also been applied in Basque companies. However, the success of these plans is still limited, among others due to the challenges that were described in sections 3.3 and 3.4.

In sum, we observe that for English, professionals generally do not feel well enough prepared to use the language (see also Van der Worp 2017). It is actually one of the reasons, as was mentioned before, that several companies aim their internationalization efforts to the market of Latin America, where Spanish is supposedly available as a shared language. However, for other markets in Europe or beyond, generally no other common language than English or the local language of the client is available. In those cases professionals have to manage that language, regardless of their competences. This situation is different from Basque, since Basque speakers always can rely on Spanish as the default language.

The policy for Basque rests on a strong drive to revitalize the language and to turn it into a normal language of the workplace. The increasing efforts for internationalization by companies supported by some of the regional

government's agencies and the related increase in the use of English, may be a competing factor for language planning for Basque.

4 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we have tried to shed some light on the use of Basque in companies in the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, in the context of the regional language policy, the increased use of English and internationalization processes.

One department of the Basque Government is responsible for the development of Basque language policy. The language policies have to some extent proved successful over time, for example by increasing the number of Basque speakers through huge efforts in education and by promoting the use of Basque in the workplace (Juanikorena and Ignacio 2010; Urla 2012). However, it is obvious that overall Basque has not reached the same level of use in the workplace as Spanish and new speakers of Basque do not make full use of their Basque resources, in comparison to the native speakers of Basque. Moreover, in companies the value given to English for internationalization might sometimes outweigh the cultural value of Basque, which reflects a contrast in language ideologies between modernity and tradition, or, between 'profit' and 'pride', that goes back a long way in history in Europe (Gal 2012).

The Basque Government has as one of its economic aims the internationalization of local companies. However, in contrast to its language policies for Basque, there is almost no attention to the development of language planning as a factor in the process of internationalization. Some recent initiatives include a diagnosis of the use of other languages than Basque and tools such as *LanHitz*, *EME*, or *Hizkuna* seem to have the potential to convert existing plans for Basque into multilingual plans. However, in order to carry out such new language policies, companies have to become more aware of the need for language management. We saw that consultancies have had a hard time so far to convince companies to invest in language management. In fact, in the process of internationalization, language management gets little attention at both the level of companies and the government.

As the EGOD report (Basque Government 2015b) mentions, today there are new challenges of diversity and internationalization and to respond to these challenges we cannot use the same discourse as some decades ago. However, so far language policies have focused on one language at the time (Basque or English) without developing multilingual language policies that include the

minority, majority and global language. An important effort is being made to encourage the normal use of Basque in business companies and institutions but in most cases this normalization only takes the use and future of Basque into account. On the other hand, many business companies highlight the importance of English because of internationalization. Language policies need to be adapted to these needs so that the three languages (or even more) have their spaces. The new challenges faced in the workplace are not limited to adding a new language to the existing policy because the focus should be on multilingualism as the point of departure (see also Cenoz and Gorter 2015 for the field of education).

Multilingual language policies should be based on the real contexts where speakers communicate, that is, real language practices (see also Blommaert and Rampton 2018; García et al. 2016). As we have already seen, these language practices do not necessarily involve the use of one language at the time but also other possibilities such as receptive multilingualism. Research that examines multilingual practices and the way multilingual speakers use their linguistic repertoire in the workplace could be the first step to develop policies that are needed to promote minority languages along with multilingualism in a globalized world.

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