

BASQUE AND GASCON LANGUAGE CONTACT

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Basque and Gascon are genetically unrelated and typologically very different languages, yet they happen to be in close contact in the Southwest of France. Overcoming genetical and typological differences, they have thus been able to influence each other over the centuries. Moreover, in this century, French has had more and more impact on both languages.

1. THE SCENARIO

1.1. Bilingual communities

On both sides of the language border we find a number of bilingual communities. In these communities, speakers (from the age of about 40 to 45 upwards) who define themselves as Basque or bilingual usually speak Basque, Gascon, and French with equal native or native-like proficiency. Speakers who define themselves as Gascon speak Gascon and French with equal proficiency. They know a few words of Basque, but do not speak it; they usually understand Basque only to a very limited extent.

As the parents-child transmission of Gascon has almost completely stopped after the Second World War and was replaced by French, it is nearly impossible to find speakers of Gascon under the age of forty. Basque speakers are slightly more loyal to their language. Some families keep on raising their children in Basque and French, although French monolingualism is the rule.

There is a strong political movement in favor of Basque, whereas efforts to conserve Gascon are very weak. So it happens that children of traditionally Gascon (i.e. non-Basque) families may start learning Basque in evening courses or the like. As a result, even in bilingual communities with a considerable proportion of non-Basque Gascon speakers (e.g. Bastida / Labastide-Clairence with about 70%) the Basque proportion is increasing, although this will not affect the rise of French.

1.2. Commerce (market-place language)

Gascon is the traditional language of the market places in the North-Eastern part of the Basque country (Eastern Lower Navarra and Soule).

The important market places of this area are in Bastida / Labastide-Clairence and Garruze / Garris, the latter having been transferred to Donapaleu / St. Palais about 25 years ago (with a remarkable change in linguistic habits from Gascon to French).

People used to go to the market not only for commercial reasons, but also for their amusement and in order to meet people. Among the social functions that

they fulfilled, they were a favorite place to pave the way for marriages. Traders from Gascony came here to sell their goods, Basque farmers from behind the contact zone also went to these markets, and had to have at least some basic knowledge of Gascon in the field of commercial exchange.

1.3. Migrant farm hands

Young Basques used to go and work on farms in Gascony. This migration had two reasons: First of all, they could improve their knowledge of Gascon. More important, however, was the fact that only the first child (male or female) of a Basque family would inherit the parents' farm, which could not be divided. Therefore, the younger children had to find work outside the family-farm system of the Basque country.

The market-place contacts and the migration of young people can explain the high number of Basco-Gascon intermarriages, which in their turn account for Basque names in surrounding parts of Gascony and vice versa.

1.4. Other means of contact

Sheep breeding is a very important occupation in the Basque country. In the search for good pasture places, shepherds travel around a lot, and come in contact with people of different tongues. That is the reason why they usually show a proficiency in an impressive number of languages: Basque, French, Gascon, and Spanish as well as some sort of shepherd jargon, called 'Black Spanish', heavily drawing upon Gascon and Aragonese.

A similar case is that of smugglers, although smuggling is not a traditional craft of this area, since the political frontier became a customs-frontier only in the second half of the 19th century.

2. CONTACT-INDUCED LANGUAGE CHANGE

Three means of contact-induced change will have to be distinguished:

1. Gascon influence in Basque
2. Basque influence in Gascon
3. Changes due to language loss

It has to be emphasized that the phenomena we encounter in each of these cases differ very much from each other (for the first two types of interference cf. Thomason / Kaufman 1985).

2.1. Gascon influence in Basque

As can be deduced from the scenario presented above, Gascon is the more prestigious language in the contact situation with Basque. It functions as a model language (L_M), whereas the latter is the replicant language (L_R), borrowing from Gascon: In this case mainly lexical borrowings are introduced, but in the long run subsequent phonological and morphosyntactic changes come about. On a grammaticalization scale this kind of language change proceeds from less to more grammaticalized entities.

Here is an example of a lexically based structural change: Negations are formed on the basis of question words, to which an element *e-* or *i-* is prefixed (in some dialects with metathesis, by which *iñor* becomes *nehor* 'nobody'). If a sentence contains such an element a negation marker is (additionally) inserted before the finite verb of the negative sentence. Here is a table of the question/negation correlatives:

(1)	nor 'who'	iñor, nehor 'nobody'
	non 'where'	iñon, nehon 'nowhere'
	noiz 'when'	iñoiz, nehoiz 'never'
	nola 'how'	iñola, nehola 'no way'
	zer 'what'	ezer 'nothing'
	zein/zoin 'which'	ezein/ezoin 'none'

Especially in the Northern contact zones, some of the negative correlatives are substituted by new negative words (negator nouns):

(2) <i>instead of</i>	ezoin:	bihi(r)ik 'none'
<i>instead of</i>	ezer:	deus(ik), fitxik 'nothing'
<i>instead of</i>	nehoiz:	sekula(n) 'never'

These nouns originally were independent lexical borrowings (*bihi* can still be found independently), which have been grammaticalized as negator nouns in the course of the time. With the exception of *bihi*, all of them can be used as negators only.

Lexically initiated structural changes include the introduction of new phonemes, a number of modifications in the case system, restructuring of the tense-aspect-mood system, new subordination strategies and other innovations. I have treated this kind of contact-induced change in Haase (1992).

2.2. Basque influence in Gascon

In Gascon it is almost impossible to find loan words from Basque, on the other hand it shows a great many phonological and morphosyntactic peculiarities (with respect to other Romance languages) which probably go back to Basque substratum influence. On a grammaticalization scale such changes are located on the grammaticalized pole. Substratum influence is due to prior language shift from a less prestigious substratum language (L_S) to a new target language (L_T), in this case from Basque to Gascon. As L_S is less prestigious, speakers (i.e. language shifters) have no interest in borrowing from that language, which they have decided to shift away from. On the other hand, they do not have full access to L_T . The new language they speak is a version of L_T modified under the influence of L_S .

Basque words cannot begin with an [r]. Foreign words are integrated by prefixing an anaptyctic [e], so the Latin loan word *rege(m)* becomes *errege*. Basque speakers shifting to Romance were confronted with many words beginning with [r], which they could not pronounce without an anaptyctic vowel. Since they did not use Basque as a model language, the inserted vowel did not necessarily have to be [e]. Actually, Gascon inserts [a] in such a context. Allières (1987) gives examples of phenomena in Gascon which may be explained by substratum interference.

The important point here is that substratum interference does not result in a 1:1 correspondance of linguistic items between L_S and L_T , all the more as L_S is not used as a model to draw upon.

An interesting morphosyntactic example in this context is the so called enunciative (cf. Pilawa 1990 for details). In the dialects in contact with Basque, every main clause contains an obligatory *que* (cf. (3) and (4), my own field-work data).

(3)	La	hemna	qu'	arrit.	or	Qu' arrit la hemna.
	ART	woman	ENC	laugh.3S.PRS		
	'The woman is laughing.' (ART: article, ENC: enunciative, PRS: present)					

- (4) Que lo bon diu que '[n]s perdoni.
 COMP ART good god ENC us forgive.3S.SBJ
 'May God forgive us.' (SBJ: subjunctive, COMP: complementizer)

In Basque we find an element which is often taken to be the source for the Gascon phenomenon, and therefore also called enunciative, viz. preverbal *ba-*. The equation of the two forms is made too easily, because *ba-* can appear under conditions where *que* would not (e.g. as marker of a conditional protasis), whereas it would not appear with imperatives or subjunctives as in (4). The use of *que* can be better explained: It serves as a delimitator of the verbal complex of a clause, the enclitic object pronouns can 'lean' upon it (cf. (4) above), and just as in Basque the verbal complex (containing both subject and object marking) can freely be moved around in the sentence (cf. (3), *scrambling word order*).

2.3. Changes due to language loss

Gascon shows quite a number of changes which are due to language loss, as it is more and more replaced by French. Basque seems to be more resistant. Loss can affect all spheres of the language in an equally heavy way.

Here is just one example: Rusty speakers of Gascon tend to reduce the three-level system of demonstratives and local adverbs (proximal, medial, and distal deixis) to a two-level system; even Basco-Gascon bilinguals do so, although Basque has a three-level system as well.

3. CONCLUSION

In this paper I could give only some limited insight into the contact situation of the Western Pyrenees.

When we get nearer to the Spanish border, Castilian and Aragonese enter the scenario (cf. 1.3. and 1.4.). The complex contact situation, including prestigious 'national' languages overlaying others, can explain the structural convergences, which can be seen as the outset of a *Sprachbund*.

The distinction of different types of contact-induced change is crucial for the understanding of the relation between language contact and change in general. It also shows that contact-induced change depends on the sociolinguistic setting (language prestige, shift, maintenance etc.) of the contact situation.

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