

The linguistic choices of an early 19th century Basque writer

The Basque language in its literary tradition appears fragmented in a number of dialects and local varieties as the standardisation was not developed until the twentieth century (Hualde & Zuazo 2007). Manuel Umerez, a clergyman who wrote two manuscript books in the early 19th century, used his own local variety not elaborated before by any other writer. Traditionally, Basque philologists have been concerned with the unique regional variety that Umerez chose (Mitzelena 1958), but sociolinguistic factors have not so far been discussed. His work has not been published either.

Religious educational texts written by highly-educated people may not be the most productive source for a language history ‘from below’ (Elspaß 2007) and some other social factors must be considered in regard of the ‘bad data’ (Nevalainen 1999, Schneider 2002, Hernández-Campoy & Schilling 2012). However it is interesting to note that the addressees of those books were two peasants, the writer’s nephew and a close friend of him respectively. It is not even clear whether the handwritten texts were meant to be for publication or only for a private reading.

This presentation will pay attention to the variation in some of the author’s stylistic choices and the possible motivations, like the influence of different forces: prestigious patterns used by other educated authors or the wish to approach the addressee using a closer language, among others. Although there is some interesting variation in grammar and vocabulary -e.g., presence of Spanish loanwords-, they are specially considerable and measurable those changes that concern spelling. Different orthographic solutions were offered at that time, until the definitive acceptance of the current standard norm. For instance, the use of alternative <ze>, <zi> spelling variants instead of traditional <ce>, <ci> and the hesitation between and <v> graphemes in some words will be considered.

References

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