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Intra-writer variation and speaker design in pre-standardized Basque dialects

Basque did not develop a supradialectal standard until 1968. Before that, only a partial standardisation of some dialects was achieved. In this paper we focus on the Western Basque standard dialect, which emerged in the early 19th century. Two approaches competed in that period: (a) the “general” model, which tried to exclude local forms, and (b) the “local” model, which used a given local variety.

We explore what insights on the standardization processes of the Western Basque can be gained from applying the concept of intra-writer variation, and especially the speaker design model (Coupland 2007, Hernández-Campoy 2016), to the writings of Basque authors. In particular, in order to better understand the processes which led to the emergence of the Western Basque standard, we analyse two 18th century writers, D. L. Urkizu and B. Sarria, and focus on the most salient and variable features of their language: vowel interactions, case markers and finite verb forms.

We show that both authors used very different models – more or less local – in their writings. For example, Urkizu adopted the more general model in his 1737 book about religion, but the popular songs included in the same publication contain many local forms. The author turned to the less local option again in the songs he published in 1740. Sarria, in turn, employed a variety which diverged from his own in his sermons, but in the notes he wrote for himself, he preferred his dialect. Our goal is to understand what reasons and motivations both authors had when they chose a given style, and how their decisions contributed to the emergence of the standard dialect.

References

- Coupland, Nikolas 2007. *Style: Language variation, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hernández-Campoy, Juan Manuel 2016. *Sociolinguistic styles*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.