

Evolution of Anthroponyms in an Area of Linguistic Transition: A Socio-Onomastic Study

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This study analyses the evolution of the anthroponymical repertoire of a municipal council located in the west of the province of Vizcaya, in the Spanish Basque Country. It has traditionally been a Spanish-speaking area, although it is now clearly influenced by the language policies of the Basque Autonomous Community to which it belongs, where recent years have witnessed a major expansion in the use of the Basque language in different ambits. This study examines the evolution of onomastic usages over a period that includes the transition from the Franco era to democracy in the 1970s, with the ensuing quantitative and qualitative shift in the choice of children's names. This period records an abrupt change in tendencies from the traditional Spanish onomastic sources to a new repertoire, somewhat alien to local usages, but with considerable identifying strength, a positive stereotype, and a stratification of the phenomenon according to the gender variable.

KEYWORDS Anthroponymy, socio-onomastics, gender patterns, Spanish, Basque

1. Socio-onomastic studies

Given names, and most especially those names that designate people – anthroponyms – behave in a very specific way, not only within the nominal class from a grammatical perspective but also in the way they reveal features of considerable interest from a semantic and sociolinguistic viewpoint (Fernández Juncal 2009). We may also contend, therefore, that a given name acts almost like a very special kind of deictic, what some scholars call a rigid designator (see Kripke 1972), which enables people, places and objects to be identified without needing to resort to the coordinates of space and time.

In contrast, nonetheless, the system of anthroponyms is probably the one most affected by the variations that make up a language's diasystem (Fernández Juncal 2011); it is relatively easy to trace their diachronic development. We might also establish patterns

of use for anthroponyms according to variables that are more or less obvious to us all, such as their bearers' gender, age, and socioeconomic status. It is also possible to draw a map to reveal the diatopic variation in the frequency of different names. Finally, the existence of hypocoristic terms, along with others such as nicknames and pseudonyms, reveals the system's diaphasic variation.

Nevertheless, a name is not a label that enables a person to be automatically classified; while it is generally true that we can identify gender from a name, there are often onomastic differences between the various generations (we intuitively know, for example, that *Jessica* and *Jonathan* will correspond to the younger generation in Spain), and we can even find indications of class. Yet in spite of this, a name does not become an infallible "marker" of its bearer. There is not even a choice in some societies, where the community lays down fairly rigid rules that restrict the options available.

These usages may still be perceived in our society; many girls and boys inherit their names from their parents, grandparents, or other family members, although all the data indicate that trends are changing (Fernández Juncal 2002). The custom of handing down names is falling into disuse, and even rejected; the tastes or opinions of parents and relatives now prevail. Nevertheless, this freedom of choice has its limitations; anthroponymical studies enable us to reconstruct a community's genealogical history, but they also permit us to trace the history of mind-sets, and changes in tastes, fashions, and values. A person's name is inextricably linked to her or his environment, and may provide a reason for reflecting upon a country's history, customs, and mores, whilst also – as in the case here – reflecting upon the influence of the language policy that has been put in place to favor a specific or minority language.

In short, it may seem that the trend in tastes for different names is an erratic, random, and haphazard process. Nevertheless, a community's onomastic process is informed by a series of factors, for example from the external circumstances of a political, technological, and cultural nature through to its own internal mechanisms (fashion, the mimicking of the naming habits of celebrities, etc.) and even specific historical events (Lieberson 2000, 8–20).

Despite its undoubted promise, anthroponymy has not been sufficiently studied – and less so from a "variationist" perspective. Socio-onomastics focuses its interest on the origins and types of name through to their use in the community, as well as their role in the construction of social identity and attitudes. Socio-onomastic analyses (Ainiala 2016; Ainiala and Östman 2017; Aldrin 2016, 2017; Billy 2012; Manu Magda 2012; Salaberry Zaratiegi 2014) enable us to consider simultaneously – what Labov would refer to as being in apparent time – the development of a successive range of onomastic processes (Satrústegui 2001). The superimposition of different strata reflects layers of historical events – as well as general and specific language policies – for encouraging the use of minority languages.

2. Study scope and methodology

The present study involves an onomastic register of Trucíos/Turtzioz (in Spanish and Basque, respectively), a rural council in the Encartaciones district in the Basque Country (Figure 1). Situated in the Agüera River valley around 40 km from Bilbao, the council is surrounded by mountain ranges that define its geographical layout. It has several



FIGURE 1 General map of Spain with the province of Vizcaya marked in red

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Localización_de_la_provincia_de_Vizcaya.svg.

wards – Cueto, Pando, Basinagre, Romaña, Gordón, and La Iglesia, the last of which is the administrative center of the municipality. The population has fluctuated over time, falling mainly due to a low birth rate and the rural exodus; its population of 865 people in 1800 has now dropped to 510, although it had 1038 in 1920, 949 in 1950, and 525 in 1990. The local economy has also gone from depending entirely on the primary sector to diversifying into the services sector.

The council belongs to the Basque Autonomous Community (Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco) – also referred to as Euskadi – which is situated on Spain's northern coastline. It is home to two languages, Spanish and Basque (Euskera). The latter has certain very particular features, as besides its extremely ancient origins it is a language isolate unrelated to any other known language in the world, and has a series of idiosyncratic traits that are linked to a strong identity. It is a language that has survived down through the ages with times of greater use and others of decline, such as during Franco's dictatorship when it was persecuted by the authorities. After the restoration of democracy in the late 1970s its status was protected, and a hands-on language policy has consolidated and increased its use in different fields (education, administration, culture, etc.). Thus, in 1979 the Basque Country's new Statute of Autonomy recognized it as a *lengua propia* (its own distinctive language) and also as an official language, in

this latter case alongside Spanish. In 1982, the Law for the Normalization of the Use of Basque (*Ley de Normalización de Uso del Euskera*) was enacted, and in 1983 the Basque government created its own department for language policy called the *Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística*. This department received the support of other advisory and regulatory bodies, with its remit being to articulate and monitor the Basque government's language policy. This process of normalization, also referred to as mainstreaming, has proceeded at an ever-faster pace throughout the autonomous community, albeit with the limitations imposed by the actual difficulty involved in learning such a complex language. Nevertheless, the extent of its use is very uneven, whereby there are areas that are highly *euskaldunizadas*, Basque speaking – as in the case of the province of Guipúzcoa – and others that are less so or even hardly so, as is the case with the area under study, the *Encartaciones*.

From a linguistic perspective, there is some debate over the western boundaries of the Basque-speaking area. Based on the study of place names (Echevarría Isusquiza 1998; Gorrotxategi Nieto 2000; Krutwig 1962; Sasia 1966; Tovar 1959), the territory whose personal name usage is studied herein has been classified as an openly Spanish-speaking area since as far back as the times of the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. The language of common use today is Spanish (also referred to as Castilian) and there is a very small number of largely neo-Basque speakers that have basically learnt the language at school (Gorrotxategi Nieto 2000, 2014).

The 719 names recorded in the survey were logged by consulting the ledgers at the council's civil register corresponding to the period 1965 to 2015.¹ The information provided by the entries on the registration of births includes the names of the father, the mother, and the paternal and maternal grandparents, which makes it possible to map out the onomastic landscape over several generations.² Given its very nature, the sample is shaped like an inverted pyramid, whereby the older generations feature more than the most recent ones, in which the data of the two family branches converge. As the period under study is a significantly long one, it is broken down into four stages, which correspond to four moments in the community's history that may have had an impact on the onomastic repertoire. First is an extended period, prior to 1965 (the date when the corpus of the newly born began), which includes all of the grandparents in the sample and some of the parents born before that year. Second is the period 1965 to 1980, which runs up to the start of the Transition (from Franco's death in 1975 to the consolidation of a democratic state) and the first steps taken in language policy in the Basque Country. The remaining period through to the present day is divided into two periods – 1981 to 2000, and post-2000 – so as to establish similar time frames for the overall period studied.

3. The socio-onomastic structure of Trucíos

We shall begin by verifying whether the system of inheriting names, which is one of the most traditional anthroponymical procedures in Spain, continues to operate, or whether it now coexists with – or has been replaced with – other naming mechanisms. Table 1 refers to the data obtained for parents and children, but not grandparents, whose kinship is not recorded.

TABLE 1
INHERITED NAMES

| | Total | Inherited names (n) | Inherited names (%) | Inherited names with some modification |
|----------------|-------|---------------------|---------------------|--|
| <i>Males</i> | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 50 | 12 | 24 | 3 |
| 1965–1980 | 51 | 24 | 47 | 12 |
| 1981–2000 | 55 | 14 | 25 | 7 |
| Post-2000 | 21 | 2 | 9 | 2 |
| <i>Females</i> | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 50 | 11 | 22 | 2 |
| 1965–1980 | 59 | 17 | 29 | 5 |
| 1981–2000 | 40 | 4 | 10 | 1 |
| Post-2000 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The first finding of note is the marked difference between the two genders, even more so when considering that there are two cases of names passed down from grandfathers to fathers and from fathers to sons as a kind of continuation of the family saga, whereas no similar case is found on the female side. Succession in name, as in other aspects, basically involves the paternal line, which tends to be more common in a society organized on a patriarchal basis. This pattern is repeated in other societies of the same nature. Rossi (1965) finds that male offspring are more closely linked to family continuity, and this is the reason why they are more often given their father's name or that of another male family member; in contrast, in the case of daughters – as we shall see in due course – the choice tends to be more a reflection of prevailing fashion and less of a feeling of family union and legacy.

Secondly, the system of conveying names has a significant impact; until 1980 it had affected a quarter of the council's population, and sometimes much more. In terms of percentages there appears to have been an upturn between 1965 and 1980, but this statement needs to be qualified by considering how many of these names are the result of the modification of the original name in two ways, the first of which is incorporating a second name and thus creating a composite first name. As we can see, this is a particularly fruitful practice over that specific period. As we shall also see in due course, this practice represents a certain distancing from the former common procedure, and acts as an intermediate step for adopting new habits in the selection of children's names. Secondly, there are cases of replacements of the Spanish names of parents and grandparents with their Basque equivalents, as in the case of the Spanish *Luis* and the Basque *Koldo*.

Nevertheless, by examining these same data it also appears that the conveyance of names is declining, and that a name is ceasing to be a symbol of the link between the youngest generation and the preceding ones. We should not forget, however, that naming was often determined in the past not so much by the desire to perpetuate family ties as by the existence of a very small pool of names to choose from.³ When observing the trends across different countries (Lieberson 2000, 36–42), there are very few changes in the top positions on the list of the most popular names until the end of the last century, increasing in geometric progression through to the present day. In other words, until the beginning of the twentieth century, changes in the list of most frequent names

TABLE 2
ORIGIN OF ANTHROPNYMS

| | Spanish origin | | Basque origin | | Other origin | | Total |
|----------------|----------------|------|---------------|------|--------------|------|-------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | |
| <i>Males</i> | | | | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 229 | 97.9 | 1 | 0.4 | 4 | 1.7 | 234 |
| 1965–1980 | 46 | 90.2 | 3 | 5.9 | 2 | 3.9 | 51 |
| 1981–2000 | 22 | 40.0 | 28 | 50.9 | 5 | 9.1 | 55 |
| Post-2000 | 2 | 9.5 | 18 | 85.7 | 1 | 4.8 | 21 |
| <i>Females</i> | | | | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 231 | 97.5 | 2 | 0.8 | 4 | 1.7 | 237 |
| 1965–1980 | 50 | 84.7 | 7 | 11.9 | 2 | 3.4 | 59 |
| 1981–2000 | 22 | 55.0 | 11 | 27.5 | 7 | 17.5 | 40 |
| Post-2000 | 3 | 13.6 | 18 | 81.8 | 1 | 4.6 | 22 |

were uncommon – but from then on innovations in personal names multiply tenfold. Furthermore, and as we shall see later, the changes are more apparent in the names of females in all cases.

There are external influences that might explain this change from an inherited name to an individualizing name (Lieberson 2000, 42–68): firstly, an increase in schooling favors a break with practices whose sole merit is to be traditional; secondly, society’s urban growth and closer contact with the mass media increase the awareness of new alternatives; thirdly, the family model is changing, along with all of its associated customs; and finally, there appears to be a change in the value of the old or the past in favor of a greater appreciation of the young and the new. This means that although there may be a resurgence of the fashion for restoring certain names, anthroponyms that hark back to past generations do not seem to appeal to today’s parents.

The apparent trend toward new anthroponymic models can be ascertained by examining the names of the different origins in each one of the time periods.⁴ The results of the distribution are shown in Table 2.

A clearly outstanding feature is the inversion of the data between the first two groupings in the Spanish and Basque columns and the most recent grouping. Thus, the names of Spanish tradition account for more than 90% of those recorded prior to 1965 and between 1965 and 1980, and then fall sharply to around 10%. By contrast, the number of Basque personal names records a spectacular increase to become the majority for both males and females. The turning point is around 1980, when the figures are more or less on a par. Concerning the names of other origins, they correspond to the few foreign migrants that live in the council (*Nicolae, Johnny*), but above all to the appearance of new naming fashions involving names from elsewhere (*Sheila, Vanessa, Alexánder*), with some that sound as if they could be of Basque origin being adopted as such. This is the case of *Igor*, originally Scandinavian, introduced through Russian (Euskaltzaindia 2017), which is considered by many in the Basque Country to be of local origin because of its similarity to other regional names, as *Aitor*.

This sea change is confirmed by examining the most popular names in each generation (Table 3). We can confirm that no name has stood out from all the others in the most recent grouping after 2000, so in this case the list is provided in alphabetical order.

There is clearly a qualitative jump between the younger generations and the two preceding ones: Basque names, absent in the first two lists, are in the majority in the third

TABLE 3
MOST POPULAR BOYS' NAMES

| | Pre-1965 | 1965–1980 | 1981–2000 | Post-2000 |
|-----|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | Manuel | Miguel Ángel | Asier | Aimar, Aitor |
| 2. | José | Jesús M ^a | Imanol | Aketza, Ander |
| 3. | Jesús | Álvaro | Aitor | Aratz, Aritz |
| 4. | José Luis | Eduardo | Alejandro | Beñat, Enai |
| 5. | Antonio | Francisco Javier | Alexánder | Eñaut, Gorka |
| 6. | José M ^a | Javier | Andoni | Ian, Igor |
| 7. | Juan José | Jesús | David | Iker, Iñaki |
| 8. | Luis | José Ángel | Francisco Javier | Iván, Itzei |
| 9. | Vicente | José Ignacio | Igor | Jarein, Joseba |
| 10. | Ángel, Francisco, Juan | José Luis, Juan | Joseba, Josu, Raúl | Markel, Mikel, Ugaitz |

Note: Anthroponyms of Basque origin are featured in bold.

TABLE 4
MOST POPULAR GIRLS' NAMES

| | Pre-1965 | 1965–1980 | 1981–2000 | Post-2000 |
|-----|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. | María | Begoña | Leticia | Ainhize, Anne |
| 2. | Isabel | Luisa | Maitane | Emma, Goizane |
| 3. | Carmen | Teresa | María | Haizea, Haizene |
| 4. | M ^a Jesús | Agustina | Sheila | Ilargi, Irati, Izaro |
| 5. | Dolores | Amaya | | Libe , Lorena Luisa |
| 6. | Aurora | Ana | | Maialen , María |
| 7. | Josefa | Elena | | Miren, Nahia |
| 8. | Luisa | Magdalena | | Naroa, Noa, Oiane |
| 9. | Pilar | Nuria | | Uxue, Zihara |
| 10. | Teresa | Vicenta, Victoria | | |

Note: Anthroponyms of Basque origin are featured in bold.

and fourth ones, occupying the top positions in both cases. The first two groupings share certain names in the simple or composite form, to such an extent that the first six places are held, albeit in different positions, by the same names (*José, Jesús, Luis, Francisco, Juan, Ángel*). The new generations reflect a clean break, whereby only one name from the first two groupings is repeated (*Francisco Javier*), with new ones appearing and others featuring more than in the previous groupings. This overhaul of names has occurred so quickly that in just over three decades the last two groupings do not share a single one of the most popular names in each case, including names of Basque origin.

As shown in Table 4, this renewal of names is especially significant in the case of females. As with males, the corpus does not have any prevailing names in the younger groupings after 2000, so all of them are listed.

As noted earlier, there is a clean break in naming habits between the younger and older generations. Those born before 1981 share only two names, and in different positions (*Luisa, Teresa*) – but with almost no transition there are names in the last lists that did not appear in the preceding lists, although *María* reappears, reflecting a general tendency nationwide in Spain. Nevertheless, the renewal is more noticeable than among males; females of all generations escape more readily from any continuity in naming in favor of more individualistic patterns. Their names therefore appear to be affected by a wish to be original and different.

TABLE 5
INDICES OF ONOMASTIC DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION

| | Total | Different names (<i>n</i>) | Onomastic Diver- sity Index | New names (%) | Onomastic Inno- vation Index |
|----------------|-------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Females</i> | | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 237 | 107 | 0.45 | | |
| 1965–1980 | 59 | 44 | 0.75 | 43.2 | 32.4 |
| 1981–2000 | 40 | 36 | 0.90 | 83.3 | 75.0 |
| Post-2000 | 22 | 20 | 0.90 | 95.0 | 85.5 |
| <i>Males</i> | | | | | |
| Pre-1965 | 234 | 101 | 0.43 | | |
| 1965–1980 | 51 | 37 | 0.72 | 18.9 | 13.6 |
| 1981–2000 | 55 | 41 | 0.74 | 78.0 | 57.7 |
| Post-2000 | 21 | 21 | 1.00 | 66.7 | 66.7 |

Note: The very definition of the Onomastic Innovation Index means that data for the earliest time period do not exist.

To confirm this trend, we shall seek two substantial figures in our corpus: the number of different names in each of the time periods and the number of new names in each group compared to the previous. This information will enable us to create two indices, the first of which is the Onomastic Diversity Index – in other words, the size of the anthroponymical repertoire in terms of the overall population. Diversity is calculated as the number of different names divided by the number of individuals, which gives a figure between $1/n$ and 1, which are the measure's extremes; in the former case, all the members of the group would be sharing the same name, and in the latter case, they would all have different names. This index is very useful for measuring the size of the catalogue of names, although it has the drawback of not providing information about the change in usage because it may have recorded the same figure for identical repertoires that have the names in a different order. To remedy this drawback, the Onomastic Innovation Index is calculated according to the number of new names that a generation uses compared to the previous one, weighted in turn by the Onomastic Diversity Index. The results for both indices are shown in Table 5.

Firstly, we can see how diversity in one or other gender increases as we move towards the youngest generation, in step with the inclusion of names of other origins – mainly Basque ones. Furthermore, as noted earlier, we may attribute this finding to a tendency for individualizing newborns through their names, in detriment to other practices, such as legacy. Diversity is slightly higher among girls in most cases.

The Onomastic Innovation Index, which is more in keeping with our interests here, provides results that ratify the scenario described so far. In the first place, it confirms the inverse relationship between age and the renewal of names, which means that members of the youngest generation are being given more new names than their forebears. There is a very clear quantitative leap in the 1980s, when the figures triple and quadruple those of the preceding generation. We once again see how historical–political circumstances as well as the first measures taken in language policy have an impact on anthroponymical habits.

In the second place, it is conclusively shown that females are more affected by this trend across all the generations under study, which means that the reasoning behind the naming choice is related more to originality than to other considerations such as conveyance. As stated at the start, this may be because we are dealing with a patriarchal society in which succession follows the patrilineal line. Moreover, socially speaking,

females are not the owners of their surnames in the same way that males are: numerous scholars (see, for example, García Meseguer 1994, 33–4) have reported that this is the area in which the highest ratio of asymmetry is recorded in the naming of girls and boys, and there is a tendency to think that behind a surname there is always a male. This may explain why a name acts as a mechanism that enables females to be identified without having to resort to their surname, which is more necessary in the case of males, who have a fewer number of first names. This preference for innovation is widespread, being compounded by other factors (institutional actions, and specific circumstances, or stable situations), thus creating complex onomastic patterns.

4. Conclusions

An analysis of the data gathered confirms an evolution from traditional Spanish anthroponymical models linked to Christianity and familiar heritage to the incorporation of a new repertoire, somewhat alien to local usages but with considerable identifying strength and a positive stereotype. The introduction of these names in a linguistic context deemed to be resistant to change (López Morales 2003) may be interpreted, on the one hand, as a natural outcome of the contact with new trends in naming (Liebersson 2000; Vallejo 2013). On the other hand, we may also explain this situation in the light of the influence exerted by measures adopted by the political institutions with the aim of the linguistic and attitudinal integration of peripheral areas to the language being promoted, here Basque (Fernández-Ulloa 2005). In any case, there has been a remarkable transformation of the anthroponymical patterns, so the names of Basque origin have virtually replaced those of Spanish origin.

This process, which has been conducted in just three decades, reveals the existence of two very important independent variables. The first is the time period, which is naturally linked to the evolution of onomastic customs: today different generations coexist with notable differences in their personal designations. Secondly, within the general guidelines, it is possible to distinguish gender patterns; thus, the female names are more affected by innovation and differentiation than those of the males.

We have assumed that originality is a value in itself, and instead of originality we could also say diversity or youth. Onomastics is a witness and instrument in the analysis of the historical evolution of mind-sets. One might well ask whether new names are, to some extent, a way of breaking with the past or with an origin that people wish to leave behind.

Notes

¹ Not all the local people have been registered in the council, as in a minority of cases the parents have chosen to record the birth in the council of the hospital where the baby was born.

² The number of births recorded over the period 1965 to 2015 is 149 (78 males and 71 females), to which we need to add the names of parents and grandparents, which are counted only once if they appear in more than one register, which is easy to detect through their surnames.

³ Søndergaard (1979) reports that up until a hundred years ago in Denmark, there was a pool of only just over thirty names.

⁴ We are interested in singling out the names of Basque origin, excluding those that have already been phonetically and orthographically assimilated within Spanish tradition (e.g., *Javier*, *Begoña*, and *Aránzazu*).

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