Attitudes Towards Basque, Spanish and English: An Analysis of the Most Influential Variables

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The enlargement of the European Union (EU) has strengthened the position of English, a situation which has led some voices to warn against the hegemony of this language. Yet, very few studies have been undertaken in contexts where English is added to the presence of both a minority and a majority language. This is the case of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, a bilingual community where English is undoubtedly the main foreign language. In this study 1087 under-graduates’ attitudes towards Basque (minority language), Spanish (majority language) and English (foreign language) are examined in an attempt to check which individual and sociolinguistic variables are the most influential when it comes to language attitudes towards the three languages in contact. The results showed the significant impact of variables such as language competence, the sociolinguistic context and the knowledge of a second foreign language (a key issue if, as the EU intends, multilingualism and multiculturalism are to be maintained).

Keywords: multilingualism, language attitudes, European Union

Introduction

Languages play a paramount role in any society in general and in education in particular. The student who faces a situation in which different languages are in contact realises from the very first school years that society, family and school all place importance on these languages. The students’ own assessment, together with the information and the knowledge they pick up, will ineluctably lead to the establishment of their attitudes towards the different languages, their speakers and their learning process.

One of the main characteristics of the European Union (EU) resides in its linguistic and cultural diversity. Apart from its 20 official languages, many other languages are spoken by its citizens, such as the ones spoken by the ever increasing immigrant population and the regional minority languages (Extra & Gorter, 2001). The social position of the latter has undergone an enormous change in the last few decades, a period in which, after a mammoth fight to recover their rights, its speakers have managed to regain the social representation denied to them for many years. School has thus become one of the main social spaces where minority languages are again taken into account and playing an active role in preparing the next generation of students. This is the case of the Basque Country, a bilingual community where both Basque as the minority language and Spanish as the majority language are used at all educational levels (see Lasagabaster, 2001a).
This sociolinguistic picture is complemented by a clear-cut desire and need to learn foreign languages. This situation has led to the emergence of English as the main lingua franca in many different fields. As James puts it:

It requires little linguistic sensibility to note the omnipresence of English in Europe today – both in the national domains of the educational systems, and in the international specialist domains of supra-govern-mental, business, scientific, technological, legal and general academic communication. (James, 2000: 24)

As pointed out by this author, this is also the case in the school system, as reflected in a study carried out by Eurostat in 1998 and where it was observed that 90% of all students in the EU do learn English as a foreign language. Moreover, for most of them English represents their first foreign language (Hoffmann, 2000). In this way, for the vast majority of European students living in bilingual areas, English has become the L3 to which they have access to in the curriculum. This is an important issue to bear in mind, because if we consider the case of Spain (to give an example), 34% of its population live in bilingual areas (Turell, 2001).

However, the presence of different languages in contact is always the seed for linguistic tensions. As a matter of fact, despite the fact that 77% of European citizens support the EU and what it represents, 34% are afraid of the risks this entails, such as a loss of identity and national culture (Florack & Piontkowski, 2000). The spread of multilingualism has also been recently tackled by UNESCO (2003) whose document entitled Education in a Multi-lingual World establishes that multilingualism is not a problem, but rather an even more extended way of life. This document points out the need to respect the L1 of those students who speak a minority language, to foster linguistic diversity in all educational levels and to boost multilingualism from an early age.

The EU clearly supports the spread of multilingualism, in an attempt to treat all state members on an equal basis. Nevertheless, there are also voices that call for English to become, eventually, the only working language for EU institutions. Such a language policy adaptation would obviously have an impact on the role played by the other languages in different spheres: ‘the principle of equality for all “official” languages, also as “working languages” of the EU, will be abandoned formally’ (van Els, 2001: 350). This poses a language dilemma that the EU will have to tackle, especially with the incorporation of countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The possible adoption of English as a lingua franca would likely provoke negative reactions in many citizens worried for the future of their languages. The English language is associated with particular countries, especially the USA, and this entails that in certain countries the need to learn English is felt as an imposition (Siguan, 2001). The undertaking of studies analysing language attitudes will thus become of the utmost importance.

There are already scholars defining the hegemonic position of English as an example of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) or labelling it as a killer language (Goodman & Graddol, 1996), whereas others (Pennycook, 1994, 2000; Phillipson, 1992) state that its expansion is the result of an orchestrated
campaign put into practice by British and US agencies, with the help of multinational companies with a view to establishing a determined world order. Some others (Hall & Heggington, 2000) even warn about the role of teachers of English as transmitters of a political gambit whose aim is to spread the hegemony of English all over the world, apart from the economic benefits inherent to this linguistic predominance for those who have it as L1 (Tollefson, 2000). On the other hand, authors such as Brutt-Griffler (2002) and House (2002) share a less negative vision, in which the speakers of English as an L2 cannot be considered as mere passive labourers in this capitalist–imperialist game. From this perspective, English is used only to achieve the personal aims of the speaker. Moreover, in their opinion this extension of the English language results in a greater importance attached by minority language speakers to their language as a link to their customs and culture. In this case English would not represent a killer language, on the contrary, there would be space for all languages, as each of them would have different functions.

The desire to avoid this linguistic predominance leads to situations such as the promotion of multilingualism by the French authorities, in an attempt not to spread the knowledge of the EU’s other official languages, but rather to ensure the status of French. Moreover, this French policy clearly excludes minority languages. French authorities consider that the EU rhetoric in favour of multilingualism indirectly benefits English, whereas the French policy of multilingualism is not a real interest in other languages but in the promotion of French: ‘Not only has this observation been made by the Basques, Bretons and Corsicans but also by the Swedes, the Greeks, the Dutch and others’ (Oakes, 2002: 385). The result of this situation is that there is a dire need to analyse language attitudes in the different European states.

Yet, and despite this ineluctable multilingual landscape, in the field of language attitudes, very few research studies have been undertaken in contexts where more than two languages are in contact (Lasagabaster, 2003), which is the main objective of this work. But before focusing on the study itself, the next section will be devoted to the importance of language attitudes.

### Language Attitudes

Attitudes are part of the so-called affective variables of language learning, together with personality, motivation, the learner’s expectations, sociocultural experience or anxiety (Skehan, 1989). Since Gardner and Lambert (1972) emerged in the 1960s as forerunners of the study of language attitudes, this field of research has drawn the attention of scholars from a wide range of different fields. As a result of this interest, there has been a considerable increase in the number of studies and an enhancement of both methodological sophistication and theoretical foundations. The study of language attitudes is aimed not only at discovering people’s attitudes, but also at understanding what determines and defines such attitudes (Garrett et al., 2003). Furthermore, it is considered that language attitude is the most relevant sociolinguistic concept when it comes to setting up particular strategic options in the process of teaching and learning languages (Huguet & González Riaño, 2004).
The conclusion to be drawn is that attitudes are a key factor in sociolinguistics and language learning. However, it also a fact that, as Oliver and Purdie (1998) and Baker (1992) point out, while much attention has been paid to the excellence of various theoretical models of motivation, the attitudinal component has played second fiddle. Furthermore, and although studies on second language acquisition and motivation habitually find it hard to distinguish between attitudes and motivation, to tackle both concepts as if they were one is misguided and turns out to be of very little help (Chambers, 1999: 26).

The paramount role of language attitudes in all models aimed at analysing the final attainment in the L2 learning process is beyond any doubt. The maintenance of the student’s motivation requires some sort of affective support and this seems to be the function of attitudes (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Lambert, 1974). But in our current societies, as was previously mentioned, there is a desire to maintain minority languages and to learn foreign languages, and this requires the examination of language attitudes. If the authorities intend to implement coherent language policies, it is necessary to know the use of the different languages in contact in the diverse social contexts and how their functions are being extended or restricted. In order to understand this question, we have to know what the linguistic situation of the different languages (majority, minority and foreign language) is and which favourable or unfavourable attitudes are held, as well as their relative importance. ‘It is equally important that we should have some understanding of the way bilingualism and the attitudes it helps to form determine, or at least influence, the total structure of a society’ (Lewis, 1981: 261).

Therefore it is important in the Spanish context to examine the situation of the minority languages (Basque, Catalan and Galician) which share co-official status with Spanish in some bilingual autonomous communities. In general the Spanish speakers are not acquainted with these minority languages, and in general they are seen as a problem rather than as a source of knowledge: ‘…the Spanish educational system in general reinforces a sort of pathology model whereby a lack of knowledge of any of the recognised languages involves a situation in which something is to be cured’ (Turell, 2001: 19).

English represents the opposite role, as it is the main language for international communication, as a result of which the attitudes of European students towards this language are very positive. This trend has been observed in contexts as diverse as Belgium (Dewaele, 2002), Finland (Hyrkstedt & Kalaja, 1998), Germany (Erling, 2002), Hungary (Dörnyei & Csizer, 2002), the Netherlands (Truchot, 1997), Sweden (Berg et al., 2001) and Switzerland (Brohy, 2001); or Catalonia (Mateu et al., 1994) and the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) (Lasagabaster, 2001b) in Spain.

Most of the studies completed so far in the BAC have been focused on both the majority and the minority language, but not on the foreign language, a position that overwhelmingly corresponds to English in the Basque educational system. Therefore this is the gap that our study intends to fill by analysing the effect of different individual and sociolinguistic variables on the attitudes harbourered by Basque university students towards the three languages in contact.
The Study

This study was completed in the BAC, which is one of the smallest autonomous communities (2,200,000 inhabitants) of the 17 that make up Spain. The University of the Basque Country is the public university of this community and there are approximately 50,000 undergraduate students enrolled in the different degrees offered at its 30 faculties. The reason behind engaging university students for this research lay in the fact that the few previous studies (Cenoz, 2001; Etxeberria et al., 2002; Sagasta, 2002) which had analysed attitudes towards the three languages in the BAC had relied on primary and secondary education participants, while tertiary education was still to be examined.

The sample

The participants were 1087 undergraduates in the age range of 18–50, the mean age being 20.65. Although the vast majority of them were chosen because they were studying English as a subject at university, some of the groups were also randomly selected. The main reason for selecting the students who had English as a subject lay in the fact that it made the data gathering easier, because the researcher is a member of the English Studies Department at the University of the Basque Country. However, this was not expected to have a bearing on the results, as those who studied English had to take it compulsorily in their different degrees, that is to say, it was part of their degree programme. Those randomly selected were chosen to make up numbers. As all Basque students are obliged to learn English as part of their curriculum at preuniversity level, whether it was a compulsory part of their university degree or not, was not considered to have an impact on the results. In fact, $t$-test analyses bore out this hypothesis, as no significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were observed between these two groups.

The questionnaires were completed by students from the three campuses in which the University of the Basque Country is divided: Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa (named after the province in which they are located).

Most of the students were first year (20.8%), second year (37.5%), third year (22.1%) or fourth year undergraduates (11.7%), although a few were in their fifth or six year (1.6%). Students had either Basque (21.2%), Spanish (57.4%) or both Basque and Spanish (21.5%) as their L1, and their specialisations covered a wide range of different degrees: Business Studies, Art History, Basque Philology (only 34 subjects, that is to say, 3.1% of the sample), English Philology, German Philology, French Philology, Spanish Philology, Law, Biology, Naval Machinery, Political Sciences, Audiovisual Communication, Engineering, Teacher Training, Architecture, Translation and Interpretation, History or Geography. As for gender, 50.2% were male students and 49.8% female students. All these participants had some knowledge of the three languages under examination, as they had been learning both Basque and Spanish since the very beginning of primary education (apart from the presence of the two official languages in their everyday lives) and English for at least seven years. Nowadays the early teaching of English has become very fashionable in the BAC and in fact most schools start teaching it at the age of 4.
However, the vast majority of the participants in this study started learning the foreign language at the age of 11, that is to say, in the 6th grade of primary education.

The instrument

The students completed a questionnaire based on an adaptation of Baker (1992). A five-point Likert-type scale was used, in which the minimum score for each item was 1 (very negative attitude) and the maximum 5 (very positive attitude). The questionnaires were completed in class and the time allowed was 20 minutes. Their answers were recorded on answer sheets, which after having been codified were statistically evaluated. The statistical analyses were carried out by means of the SPSS.

Results

Regression analyses were performed in order to check which individual and sociolinguistic variables were the most influential when it came to language attitudes. Therefore, it is intended to go beyond bivariate analyses in which attitudes to a language are looked at with respect to one other variable at a time, but rather to delve into them by means of multivariate analyses, which allows the researcher to consider all the variables at one go (Baker, 1992). The variables under analysis were the following: age, specialisation, course, gender, mother tongue, language proficiency, stay in English speaking countries, size of home town, province, language most widely spoken in home town, type of school and knowledge of languages other than Basque, Spanish and English. All these variables were from Baker’s original questionnaire or were added because they had exerted a significant effect on language attitudes in previous studies undertaken in the BAC (Cenoz, 2001; Etxebarria, 2000; García, 2001; Jausoro et al., 1998; Larrañaga, 1996; Lasagabaster, 2001a; Madariaga, 1994; Martínez de Luna, 1995; Sagasta, 2002). The results concerning language attitudes towards Basque are given in Table 1.

The independent variable competence in Basque exerts the most significant influence on the attitudes towards the minority language and explains more than 47% of the variability of the dependent variable, followed by the added effect of the sociolinguistic context ($R^2 = 0.481$), age ($R^2 = 0.485$) and gender ($R^2 = 0.490$). The following step was consequently to analyse these variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
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<tr>
<td>Competence in Basque</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>22.646</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic context</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>3.482</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>2.844</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>2.722</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
independently to pinpoint the differences between the resultant groups. In the case of the level of competence the results can be seen in Figure 1.

As expected after observing the results obtained in the regression analysis, the degree of competence in Basque happened to significantly influence the students’ attitudes towards Basque. So much so that very competent students held more positive attitudes than those with a good command \( t(713) = 13.315; \ p < 0.001 \) and those with no or little command \( t(733) = 29.349; \ p < 0.001 \). The same picture is reproduced when those with a good command are compared to those with a poor or no command in favour of the former \( t(620) = 12.812; \ p < 0.001 \). In the case of the sociolinguistic context the differences were also significant (see Figure 2).

Those who lived in a mainly Basque-speaking community showed significantly more positive attitudes towards Basque than those living in a mainly Spanish-speaking community \( t(1010) = 13.036; \ p < 0.001 \). As far as age was concerned, the university students were divided into three groups. The first one consisted of students under 20 (17–19 years old) and who represent 31.8% of the sample. The second group was made up of those aged 20–24 (63.1%) and the third one of those over 24 (5.1%), that is to say, those students in the age range 25–50. As can be seen in Figure 3, it is first of all the positive attitude towards the minority language of all age groups which stands out, but especially those of the youngest students (17–19 year olds), whose

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1** Attitudes towards Basque depending on degree of competence

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2** Attitudes towards Basque depending on sociolinguistic context
attitudes are significantly more positive than those of the second \( t(800) = 7.069; p < 0.001 \) and third \( t(315) = 2.141; p < 0.05 \) groups. As it happens, the differences between the second and the third groups are not significant, which is why it can be concluded that the youngest students are the ones who more definitively support the minority language (see Figure 3).

As regards gender (see Figure 4), the \( t \)-test analysis performed showed that female students held a more positive attitude towards Basque than their male counterparts, the differences between the two groups being significant \( t(1000) = 2.914; p < 0.05 \). Therefore, it can be concluded that those with more positive attitudes towards Basque are female students in the age range 17–19 who come from a mainly Basque-speaking sociolinguistic context and whose command of Basque is very good. In any case, the independent variable degree of competence exerts the most significant effect on attitudes towards Basque, so much so that those with a very good command harbour the most positive attitudes, followed by those whose proficiency is good. It is worth pointing out the lack of effect of variables such as the province of origin, the size of the home town, their specialisation or L1, variables whose influence was significant in previous studies completed in the BAC (after performing bivariate analyses), but whose effect vanishes when a multivariate analysis is carried out.

![Figure 3](image1.png)  
Figure 3 Attitudes towards Basque depending on age

![Figure 4](image2.png)  
Figure 4 Attitudes towards Basque depending on gender
As far as attitudes towards Spanish were concerned, the same procedure used in the case of the minority language was followed. The results of the regression analysis are therefore exhibited in Table 2. The most determinant variable with regards to the attitudes towards Spanish dependent variable is sociolinguistic context ($R^2 = 0.141$), followed by its effect together with the student’s mother tongue ($R^2 = 0.164$), competence in Spanish ($R^2 = 0.183$), size of home town ($R^2 = 0.187$) and knowledge of languages other than the three present in the Basque curriculum ($R^2 = 0.191$). The $t$-test analysis showed that the variable sociolinguistic context produced significant differences, as can be observed in Figure 5.

Those living in a predominantly Basque-speaking area were not so favourable to Spanish as those whose home town was mainly Spanish speaking ($t(1024) = 11.818; p < 0.001$). Similarly, students with Spanish as their L1 were the most positive, followed by those who had both Spanish and Basque as L1, whereas the L1 = Basque students were the least positive (Figure 6). The Scheffe test displayed significant differences in favour of the first group with respect to the second ($p < 0.01$) and third ($p < 0.01$) groups, and in favour of those with both languages as L1 when compared to the L1 = Basque group ($p < 0.01$). These differences are also observed in 8 out of the 10 items in the battery.

As a result of considering the degree of competence independent variable, some important differences were observed (Figure 7). Thus, those who had a very good command of Spanish supported the Spanish language more.

### Table 2  Regression analysis (stepwise); dependent variable: Attitudes towards Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic context</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>8.005</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>4.301</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence in Spanish</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>3.882</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of hometown</td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>2.086</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of other languages</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>2.022</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 5](image-url)  
**Figure 5** Attitudes towards Spanish depending on sociolinguistic context
strongly than those with a good \( t(1022) = 7.384; p < 0.001 \) or low \( t(782) = 2.297; p < 0.001 \) command. In any case, a word of caution is necessary here with respect to the low command group, as it consisted of only eight students (0.9% of the sample). This minority is represented by students born in mainly Basque-speaking areas who have been taught through Basque and do not feel at home when it comes to using the majority language. Similarly, those who lived in small towns or villages were less disposed \( t(1039) = 5.561; p < 0.001 \) to Spanish than their counterparts living in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants (Figure 8).

The knowledge of languages other than Basque, Spanish and English also affected language attitudes (Figure 9). As a matter of fact, those who knew some other language held more positive attitudes when compared with those whose linguistic background was limited to the three languages present in the compulsory Basque curriculum \( t(1047) = 2.241; p < 0.05 \).

Consequently, in the case of the Spanish language those students whose home town has a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants and wherein Spanish is the predominant language, whose L1 is Spanish and who have a very good command of the majority language and know other languages apart from Basque, Spanish and English are the ones who exhibit more positive attitudes.

When attitude to English was considered as the dependent variable, the regression analysis displayed the results shown in Table 3. As happened in the

![Figure 6](image6.jpg) Attitudes towards Spanish depending on L1

\[ \text{Figure 6} \] Attitudes towards Spanish depending on L1

When attitude to English was considered as the dependent variable, the regression analysis displayed the results shown in Table 3. As happened in the

![Figure 7](image7.jpg) Attitudes towards Spanish depending on level of competence

\[ \text{Figure 7} \] Attitudes towards Spanish depending on level of competence
case of the minority language, the degree of competence also turned out to be the most influential variable when attitudes to English was the dependent variable, explaining the highest proportion of the variance ($R^2 = 0.146$), followed by the accumulated effect of the sociolinguistic context ($R^2 = 0.171$) and the knowledge of other languages ($R^2 = 0.194$). As we did in the case of the other two languages, these three independent variables will be individually analysed below.

With regards to the effect of the students’ competence in English (Figure 10), the intergroup differences were significant in all cases. Thus, those students with a very high degree of competence held more positive attitudes than those with high $t(546) = 5.407; p < 0.001$ or no/little $t(559) = 9.885; p < 0.001$ competence, whereas those with a good command of English were significantly more favourable than those with no or little knowledge $t(981) = 10.829; p < 0.001$. Similarly, the sociolinguistic context also played a paramount role (Figure 11) and those living in a mainly Spanish-speaking community were more favourable than those who came from predominantly Basque-speaking areas $t(1029) = 5.938; p < 0.001$.

As happened in the case of attitudes to Spanish, the knowledge of languages other than Basque, Spanish and English also had a significant impact on the participants’ attitudes towards the foreign language (Figure 12),
so much so that those who could speak another foreign language (apart from English) were more favourable to English \( t(1050) = 7.056; p < 0.001 \).

Hence, it can be affirmed that the Basque university students who consider their degree of English competence as good or very good, coming from a predominantly Spanish-speaking context and who know other languages are the ones whose attitudes towards the foreign language are more favourable. Once again it is worth considering how the effect of some variables is not significant when a multivariate analysis is performed. This is the case, for example, for the independent variables size of the home town, stays in English-speaking countries, the degree programme in which they are enrolled at university and the students’ mother tongue.

**Discussion**

The main objective of this study has been to establish which variables exert a greater influence on the language attitudes of university students in the BAC, a context in which three languages are in contact throughout the preuniversity compulsory curriculum. The presence of two or more languages in contact habitually brings about linguistic tension, especially if there is a minority language in the context under scrutiny. The BAC is such a context, and since the desire to maintain minority languages and the need to learn foreign languages is becoming more and more important all over the world, it seems obvious that language attitudes have to be analysed.

In the present study the attitudes towards the minority (Basque), the majority (Spanish) and the foreign language (English) have been examined. As far as attitudes to Basque are concerned, the regression analyses demonstrated

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<tr>
<td>Competence in English</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>11.293</td>
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<td>Sociolinguistic context</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>5.709</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of other languages</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>5.171</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 3 Regression analysis (stepwise); dependent variable: Attitudes towards English

![Figure 10](image)

**Figure 10** Attitudes towards English depending on level of competence
that the degree of competence is the most influential variable, together with the sociolinguistic context, age and gender (see Scheme 1). Therefore the effect of the students’ L1 (underlined in studies such as those by Jausoro et al., 1998 or Lasagabaster, 2004) fades in comparison to the pressure exerted by degree of competence, which becomes the more definitive influence on the attitudes of the participants.

Moreover, it is important to focus on the effect of age on attitudes towards the minority language. In two previous studies (Elzo et al., 1996; Etxebarria, 2000), also completed in the BAC, the authors observed that the attitude to Basque was more favourable among the younger subjects, the decline being more prominent among those over 40. In the present study, where the participants’ age is rather homogeneous as a result of their being university students, once the sample is split into three groups there are significant differences. As a matter of fact, those students in the age range 17–19 are more positive than their counterparts. And these differences cannot be explained in terms of the older students having grown up in a different sociolinguistic setting, as the Basque context has not changed in the last five years as much as to be made responsible for these results; it has to be borne in mind that 94% of the sample were 24 or younger. These results coincide with those of research studies completed in contexts as diverse as the BAC (Cenoz, 2001), India (Dua, 1986), Galicia (González et al., 1996) and Wales (Baker, 1992). This is

![Figure 11 Attitudes towards English depending on sociolinguistic context](image1)

![Figure 12 Attitudes towards English depending on knowledge of other languages](image2)
undoubtedly one of the main challenges of all those societies wherein a minority language is spoken, as the support shown by the youngest citizens is not habitually maintained by their seniors.

Unexpectedly, the variable gender maintains its effect in both the multivariate and the bivariate analyses, and therefore the female university students harboured more favourable attitudes than their male counterparts. These results coincide with those of Sharp et al. (1973) who found out that Welsh female students were more positive about the minority language (Welsh), whereas no differences were detected between male and female students with respect to the majority language (English), as happens in the Basque context with respect to Spanish.

The attitudes towards the majority language are determined primarily by the sociolinguistic context, whose effect is added to that of the L1, the level of competence in Spanish, the size of the home town or the knowledge of other languages (Scheme 2). Therefore, there seems to be a need to improve attitudes towards Spanish in those contexts with less than 100,000 inhabitants in which Basque is the predominant language, where the highest number of students with Basque as L1 are gathered and whose Spanish is less proficient. In these contexts there is a need to implement a linguistic policy aimed at boosting a more positive attitude towards the majority language. In any case, it has to be remembered that the political situation undergone during the dictatorship (1939–1975) is responsible for this situation, as for almost four decades the Basque language was forbidden in every social sphere, but especially in the educational setting.
After the demise of Franco, and after decades of stable diglossia, the Basque language was allocated co-official status alongside Spanish in the BAC, but many Basque language loyalists believe that the linguistic situation still needs to be greatly improved. In their opinion, and although there is a steady, albeit small, increase in the number of people who can and do speak Basque in their everyday life, Basque needs much support, as it is still clearly a minority language. This situation is reflected in the scant presence of Basque in the working world, as most jobs do not have a formal language requirement. These language loyalists, who feel stronger in little Basque-speaking villages, consider that there is a dire need for more social functions and a greater presence of Basque in most parts of the BAC.

This is an important issue to bear in mind when analysing the effect of the sociolinguistic context on attitudes towards Basque and Spanish. The Basque language is immersed in a process of reverse language shift, but there is still a long way to go. In fact, all minority languages, and Basque is not an exception, are more or less excluded from what Truchot (1997): 76) labels as the ‘linguistic market’, as they lack international appeal and a powerful economic position and, moreover, the number of speakers of these languages is very limited.

On the other hand, English, the foreign language in the BAC, represents just the other side of the coin, as it has become the main lingua franca all over the world. Once again the degree of competence in the language concerned turns out to be fundamental, as it is the independent variable that explains a highest percentage of the variance, together with the sociolinguistic context and the knowledge of other languages (see Scheme 3).

If the most influential variables in each of the languages are compared, the first thing that draws our attention is the fact that language competence appears as a very influential variable in all cases. A review of the studies on language attitudes (Lasagabaster, 2003) shows that the largest number of research studies has been focused on the relationship between attitudes and L2 learning achievement. The conclusion to be drawn is, mutatis mutando, that positive attitudes usually facilitate the L2 learning process; despite the fact that there are some studies which do not bear out this idea, the vast majority of them coincide in the diagnosis. Morgan (1993) affirms that students’ attitudes towards the L2 and its culture play a paramount role in the process, although it is also true that the reverse may occur: that is to say, the attainment of a high command in a particular language may lead to more positive attitudes. That is the reason why in the three models put forward in this conclusion section the

![Scheme 3 Model for the attitudes towards English](image-url)
relationship between attitudes and competence is represented by a bidirectional arrow (see Schemes 1–3).

In any case, it is beyond any doubt that there is a need for longitudinal studies, which may help us to determine the causality issue in more depth. Unfortunately, this type of study is not very common in this field of research in particular (language attitudes) and in second language acquisition in general. As longitudinal studies require more human and economic means, and, above all, more time to gather data and examine the results than cross-sectional studies like the present one, researchers who can afford them are minority.

Similarly, the sociolinguistic context turns up as a basic variable in the regression analyses of the three languages. Our results indicate that those students living in small towns and villages (where Basque is the predominant language) are more favourable towards the minority language, whereas those who live in bigger towns or cities (where Spanish is clearly the majority language) are more positively disposed towards the two international languages. Therefore, it seems that it is necessary to put into practice linguistic policies that help to bridge the gap between these two types of sociolinguistic contexts when it comes to language attitudes. There is an underlying risk that has also been observed in other bilingual contexts in Spain and which has to do with the scant use of the minority language made by youngsters in big cities (and not due to lack of knowledge), which is linked to less positive attitudes towards the minority language. This is the case of Bilbao in the Basque Country, Vigo in Galicia and Barcelona in Catalonia, where the younger generations tend to speak Spanish much more habitually than the minority language (whether it be Basque, Galician or Catalan). And the same applies to other contexts with respect to the foreign language. In Hungary, for example, it has been observed (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001) that attitudes towards foreign languages are more positive in the capital than in provincial towns.

Schools should therefore endeavour to avoid the rigid isolation of languages (as is usually the case in the BAC) and implement language awareness courses in the curriculum that can offer considerably greater pedagogical implications to expand students’ language attitudes. The spread of English is such that minority groups have to face not only the menace of a majority language, but also that of a foreign language as powerful as English is nowadays. This situation has led Basque speakers living in small towns to build attitudinal fences in order to stand up for their linguistic rights. Hence, the solution to this inevitable linguistic friction in multilingual settings is not simple, as many difficulties are involved in language planning in general and in engineering of language attitudes in particular, but the aforementioned language awareness courses would probably help to change the picture. They could become a practical way to give insights into the language-learning process and thereby to boost the learning of the minority language, majority language and foreign languages. If these courses are included, teachers may also help to develop an understanding among students of the richness of language diversity within the class, school, community, region, nation and world. A realistic step could be to encourage greater co-operation between Basque, Spanish and foreign language teachers at secondary level in an
attempt to bring languages together in a co-ordinated policy, which would ideally end up having a positive impact on language learning in general and language attitudes in particular.

Explicit language awareness activities may also include discussing the different languages in contact at school, which would mitigate feelings of inferiority amongst those who speak the minority language, whereas it would also improve the attitudes towards Basque of those who do not have a good command of the minority language. It is important to foster better relations between the different languages by arousing students’ awareness of the characteristics of the different languages and their place in the world. Linguistic tolerance does not come naturally; it has to be learned and to be worked at, if we are to avoid a society marked by a high degree of linguistic parochialism.

There is a third variable whose effect is also worth pinpointing, and that is the knowledge of languages other than Basque, Spanish and English, which affects the students’ attitudes towards the two international languages, but not towards Basque. This is an important issue to bear in mind, as the EU has decidedly aimed for a policy of multilingualism and multiculturalism in an attempt to maintain the continent’s traditional linguistic and cultural diversity. Those Basque students who can speak another language (irrespective of their degree of competence) are the ones who hold more positive attitudes towards Spanish and English, which clearly shows the importance of spreading the knowledge of a second foreign language in the school curriculum.

A quick look at the statistics in the BAC allows us to detect a monochromatic tendency in postsecondary (16–18 year olds) education, where 100% of the students learn English, and French, the second most widely taught language, is studied by only 6%; German is the third ‘more popular’ foreign language and it is even further (0.1%) from English. These extremely low percentages for German and French do not paint a bright picture. Despite the administration’s increasing interest in fostering the learning of a second foreign language and the different experimental programmes implemented to awaken students’ linguistic consciousness and to develop multilingualism and multiculturalism by means of courses, experimental programmes, seminars, etc. (Cots & Nussbaum, 2002; Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2001), the figures are not very encouraging. Thus, the supremacy of English over other foreign languages in the Basque educational system is definitive, and this situation can be extrapolated to the whole of Spain. The European Commission recommends starting the teaching of foreign languages at preschool level so that the second foreign language can be introduced in secondary school. The fact that foreign languages other than English play such a minimal role in the Spanish educational system seems to support the need for this measure.

And the same situation can be found in the rest of Europe. Dörnyei and Csizér’s (2002) study deserves further attention, not only for being very recent, but also for analysing the sociolinguistic changes that have taken place in Hungary during the 1990s in the attitudes and motivation of 13–14 year olds (last year of primary education) from different parts of the country towards five languages: English, German, French, Italian and Russian. These five languages were selected on different grounds: English due to its role as the
most international language, German for having been the traditional lingua franca in Europe, French as an important international language, Italian as a control language (Hungarians do not consider it to be a relevant language) and Russian as the imposed language during the last 40 years for obvious political reasons. It is a cross-sectional repeated study in which the same questionnaire was fulfilled in two different moments in time, in 1993 and during the last months of 1999, by 8593 students overall.

The main conclusion of the study was that the attitudes and motivation towards the learning of foreign languages were sharply in decline after six years, the only exception being English, an outcome that Dörnyei and Csizér frame within language globalisation, as a result of which the indifference towards foreign languages other than English is escalating. The study of other languages is becoming a marginal specialisation even in the case of German, the traditional lingua franca in the country and which is moving towards the non-world-language category: a term coined by the authors and which comprises all those languages in which students’ interest is vanishing. And this situation is occurring when the liberalisation of Hungarian politics and economy increases interethnic relationships. Although the study was carried out in a small central European country, the authors maintain that the results are applicable to many other European contexts. This leads us to affirm that the indifference towards the learning of foreign languages other than English is very widespread all over Europe. However, our results show that the knowledge of a second foreign language exerts a positive influence on language attitudes towards other languages, and therefore the European Commission’s recommendation should undoubtedly be taken into consideration and really become common education policy in all European countries.

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**References**


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