

# **Basque Diaspora in the USA and Language Maintenance**

**David Lasagabaster**

*University of the Basque Country, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain*

The Basques first immigrated on a large scale to the USA during the Gold Rush of 1848. After immigrating to the USA, they settled in pockets throughout the West, especially in California, Nevada and Idaho, and it is currently estimated that more than 35,000 Basque-Americans live in these three states. This represents one of the largest concentrations of Basques outside the Basque Country. Although Basque identity and culture have been preserved thanks to Basque Clubs scattered throughout these states, little is known about their language proficiency and language attitudes. This paper looks into this question. The participants in the study were 80 Basque-Americans who completed a questionnaire aimed at examining their language attitudes towards Basque, Spanish, French and English, as well as their command of these languages. Thirty of the participants were also interviewed in order to research the issues in greater depth. The results show that, although the attitudes held towards the different languages are in general very positive, the attitudes towards Basque warrant particular attention, even though language attitudes and language competence are far from comparable.

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## **Introduction**

This paper sets out to analyse Basque-Americans' language competence (in Basque, Spanish or French, and English) and their attitudes towards these languages. As some background information is necessary, the historic development of the Basque diaspora in the USA will be outlined first, to later on focus on the relationship between diaspora and language. Thus, reference will be made to other examples of diaspora in the American context, in particular that of Cubans in Miami, in the belief that this will help in understanding and appreciating the Basque diaspora better.

## **Diaspora**

Although there was a precursor, Basque presence in parts of the USA within the Spanish colonial enterprise in the 15th and 16th centuries, and although some Basques arrived in California in the 17th and 18th centuries (most of them as churchmen with a religious mission), it could be said that the Basques first immigrated in numbers to the USA during the Gold Rush of 1848. However, as early as the 1850s the Basque immigrants had already given up the quest for gold and turned to sheepherding (Cooper & McClanahan, 1995). At that time the cattle industry was in difficulty because of a severe drought followed by floods and epidemics, which indirectly benefited the shepherds as

there was a dire need to feed all the miners attracted by the promise of wealth. Lamb and mutton became the main source of food and sheepherding a profitable way of life.

Moreover, there were two other important factors that encouraged Basque immigrants to focus on the sheep industry. Access to rich pastures was free and English language proficiency was not a prerequisite for it to be successful. It was therefore a very favourable situation involving little initial outlay, and the Basques soon realised it provided a more reliable source of income than the mining industry. This is why the Basque presence in the USA was for many years closely linked to sheep-raising.

At the end of the 19th century the development of communications allowed these Basque immigrants to send for their relatives and friends. Especially significant was the effect of the Transcontinental Railroad, which in 1869 connected the east and west coasts of the USA and put an end to what was previously an expensive, dangerous and interminable journey to the American West.

After immigrating to the USA, Basques settled in pockets throughout the West, especially in California, Nevada and Idaho, and it is currently estimated (Totoricagüena, 2003a) that more than 35,000 Basque–Americans live in these three states. This represents one of the largest concentrations of Basques outside Europe.

The political, social and economic factors that boosted Basque migration are many and varied, but the following could be highlighted (Totoricagüena, 2002): economic hardships in the homeland due to the devastating effect of industrialisation on rural areas and the loss of Spanish colonies such as Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines (Bieter & Bieter, 2005), the system of primogeniture inheritance predominant in rural Basque society, the First (1833–1839) and Second (1872–1876) Carlist Wars, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the subsequent Franco dictatorship (1939–1975). Whereas Basques who had some kind of formal education were more likely to emigrate to Latin America, where their command of Spanish was an obvious advantage, those from rural areas were more liable to emigrate to the USA.

Moreover, in the 1940s there was a shortage of labour to work in the sheep industry due to the fact that many men had joined the army. As Basque shepherds were regarded as reliable and hard workers, the owners of sheep herds put pressure on the government so that the so-called ‘Shepherds’ Laws’ were eventually passed to make up for this shortage. This law not only allowed Basque shepherds to obtain a residence permit, but the immigration quota was also increased (Bieter & Bieter, 2005).

However, calculating the number of Basques living in the USA at any one time in the past is not an easy task, due to the fact that they have traditionally been counted as Spanish or French in censuses. It is worth remembering that the Basque Country (*Euskal Herria* or *Euskalerria* in Basque) refers to the Basque speech community, which spreads over three legislative administrations: the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) – encompassing the provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa – and Navarre in Spain (*Hegoalde* in Basque), as well as part of the Atlantic Pyrenees Department in France (*Iparralde* in Basque, which is made up of three provinces: *Lapurdi*, *Zuberoa* and *Behenafarroa*). In the

rest of this paper we will refer to those from the BAC and Navarre (*Hegoalde*) as the ones whose ancestors came from the *Spanish Basque Country* and those from *Iparralde* as the ones from the *French Basque Country*.

Unlike in previous censuses, the last three (1980, 1990 and 2000) allowed Basque–Americans to define themselves as Basque, which has obviously facilitated the work of researchers. In the United States, census results show that with each decade, higher numbers of people are claiming Basque identity. California has the largest Basque population by state boundaries. However, Basques are simply one more ethnic group of hundreds and are not as noticeable as they are in Idaho or Nevada, where the overall population is much lower (Totoricagüena, 2003b: 29).

A total of 57,793 individuals identified themselves as Basques in the US Census of 2000, an increase of about 10,000 with respect to the 1990 census. However, as the expert on the Basque diaspora Totoricagüena (2002: 43) points out, ‘many people who do consider themselves as Basque did not mark it on the form. Some people did not understand the question, and others did not think it important. I would argue there are many more thousands of Basques all around the United States, although there is currently no other manner to obtain a scientific count State by State’.

The figures of the 2000 census reflect that the presence of Basque–Americans is significant in the West, particularly in California, Nevada and Idaho, the three states where the data for this paper were gathered (Table 1).

According to Echeverria (1999) and Osa (1989), Basque Centers and Basque Hotels are the main meeting points for these Basques, being places where their language and culture can be kept alive. The *North American Basque Organization* (NABO) is a network set up in 1974 in order to improve coordination between

**Table 1** Basques in the USA (US 2000 Census)

<i>State</i>	
California	20,868
Idaho	6,637
Nevada	6,096
Washington	2,665
Oregon	2,627
Florida	2,127
Texas	1,691
Colorado	1,674
Arizona	1,655
Utah	1,361
New York	1,252

Source: Totoricagüena (2002: 43)

Basque clubs, share information and facilitate relationships with the Basque Country. Given the paper's focus on language, it has to be said that NABO also organises Basque language classes in many Basque communities.

Basque festivals have become a key social event for the Basque community (Corcostegui, 1999; Douglass, 1980). The first National Basque Festival was organised in 1959 in Sparks, Nevada, as a way to bring Basque–Americans together. The event attracted more than 6000 participants from around the West and became the model for future festivals that are now held each summer in many communities in California, Idaho, Utah and Nevada, although nowadays the Elko (Nevada) annual event is considered to be the National Basque Festival (Douglass, 1987). Because of the success of the organised activities, and the geographical centrality of Elko to other Basque communities, Elko assumed the position of the site of the annual National Basque Festival. This festival has been the subject of both American and European documentary films, so helping to project the Basque–American image to both a wider American and European audience.

In the 1960s the sheep industry went through a period of hardship due to the fact that wool was being replaced by synthetic materials and to the ever more limited availability of pastureland (Bieter & Bieter, 2005), and thus many Basques were forced to take to other occupations. Moreover, the economic situation in the homeland was thriving and a flourishing industry started to change the social configuration of the Basque Country. As a result of this, emigration became less and less popular, both among the French–Basque and the Spanish–Basque communities. During the last decades the Basque–American population has dwindled, as large scale immigration from the Basque Country has slowed to a trickle.

It is also worth mentioning that there is a Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), whose main objectives are to spread Basque Studies in the North American academic world and to serve as a resource for Basque–Americans in the USA (Douglass, 2003; Salaburu, 2000). This institution is unique, as it is the only one of its kind outside the Basque Country.

### **Diaspora and language**

The dynamic of language contact among the diaspora has not received much scholarly attention (Porcel, 2006), a surprising fact if it is considered that human beings have departed their homelands and settled in other countries for centuries. Despite this inherent characteristic of the human being, ethnic groups have maintained their ethnicity and ties to their homeland, their own language(s) playing a key role in many cases. Moreover, and as Woolard (1998: 3) puts it:

Ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious

ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law.

Although ethnic groups differ in the extent to which they consider language as central (Edwards, 1995; Smolicz, 1984, 1991), some, 'almost by necessity, are more language-centred than others'. Smolicz also comments that 'language may become an agent of hegemony, as the adoption of a particular language may well entail absorbing the cultural beliefs and values embodied in it' (Mills, 2005: 260). The result of this situation is that there are basically three major possible linguistic outcomes of prolonged contact among ethnic groups: language maintenance, bilingualism (and here we should add *multilingualism*) or language shift (Paulston, 1984; Romanov, 2000). In this section we will analyse some recent studies focused on these possible outcomes.

Although there are exceptions, scholars researching the diaspora point out that there is an ominous rule whereby ethnic groups tend to lose their language by the third generation (Porcel, 2006; Totoricagüena, 2003b). This is even the case (to set a meaningful example) of the Cuban diaspora in Miami, the third largest Hispanic community in the USA, which makes up 3.7% of the USA Hispanic population. At this stage it is important to consider that Miami has one of the largest concentrations of Hispanics in the USA, of which 50% is Cuban (López Morales, 2003). Moreover, the Cubans living in Miami are educated (70% have completed high school and 20% college studies), enjoy a good economic situation (50% earn annual incomes of \$35,000 or more) and are white collar (Porcel, 2006). Moreover, Miami has an important network of bilingual schools and Cubans have access to numerous mass media resources, three television channels among them.

Despite these favourable conditions, López Morales (2003) points out that the majority of second generation Cuban immigrants are English-dominant bilinguals, in contrast to a minority in the first generation. Porcel completed a study among Miami Cubans and also reached the same conclusion. His findings led him to conclude that school has a crucial role to play and that there should be a reconsideration of bilingual programmes, wherein Spanish instruction should be boosted. This author underlines that not only the Spanish side of the language dynamic should be analysed, but also that of the English language, 'the language with more resources devoted to its promotion than any other language in the world' (Porcel, 2006: 107).

In another research study undertaken in an English-speaking country, namely the UK (the West Midlands), Mills (2005) analysed the connection between identity, language and diaspora. Her objective was to compare government and media views on citizenship, language and identity with the perspectives of a group of second generation mothers and third generation children of Pakistani heritage who were fluent speakers of English and had varying fluency in what they termed their mother tongues (Urdu, Punjabi and Mirpuri). Mills reports on examples in which the majority language (English) is associated with modernity and progress and the minority languages with obsolescence (May, 2001), or on broadsheet press and television news in which Asian families were criticised for failing to speak English in the home. Thus, the examined documents 'link language and identity with concern for the role

spoken English plays in participation in a "common culture" and in promoting community cohesion' (Mills, 2005: 256). The author points out, however, that other studies demonstrate that there is not such a simple correspondence between English proficiency and identification with majority society, and quotes Hoffman's (1989) study, where Iranians living in the USA had little identification with the US society despite of their English proficiency and considerable assimilation.

Mills investigated the participants' perceptions with regards to the terms 'bilingual' and 'bilingual education', as well as their attitudes to their own and their family's bilingualism. Mills observed that the participants' mother tongues played a very subtle and complex role not only in their lives but also in their group identity. On the other hand, English was regarded as essential for educational success, while it was the language mainly spoken at home between the mothers and fathers, but especially among their children. They all described their acquisition of English as a simple process, although they had also maintained their mother tongue to different levels of fluency. Mills argues that symbolically dominated groups may value official languages above their own ones, a situation that is encapsulated in the following comment by one of her respondents:

When my parents came to this country, I was about seven years old and I was put into mainstream school with no language other than English. I was expected to use English and I had to pick up whatever English was going. When I arrived home my mom would speak to me in our home language, which is Punjabi, and over the years, I find that I am more fluent in English now than I am in my mother tongue. But I can still communicate because when I was married all my in-laws spoke Punjabi. But now my children speak very little Punjabi because I can communicate to them in English, and they prefer English because it's easier ... My husband is a fluent English speaker and we also may times when we are alone, we even speak English with one another. (Mills, 2005: 265)

One of the most outstanding results of this study had to do with the fact that all the respondents highlighted the role of all languages in their repertoire as crucial connectors to real and imagined communities. When dealing with imagined communities and the origins of national consciousness, Anderson (1991) argues that the expansion of the book market contributed to the vernacularisation of languages and this enabled speakers of different languages to become aware of the existence of others who share their nation and language and who consume the same cultural products.

The connection between Basque language and identity has also been studied in the Basque Country. The official Basque nationalist discourse equates the two, but other authors such as Echeverria (2003) have demonstrated that the relationship between Basque identity and language can be understood in different ways. Thus, this author compared Basque-medium (schools where Basque is the language of instruction) and Spanish-medium (schools where Spanish is the vehicle language and Basque is only taught 4–5 hours per week as a subject) students and observed that the former considered the Basque language to be a crucial part of Basque identity, whereas the latter

claimed 'biethnic' identity and rooted their claims in territory rather than language. These results coincide with Woolard's statement (1998), that simply using language is not what forms social groups, identities or relations, but it is rather ideological interpretations of such uses of language which mediate these effects.

With the research studies reviewed in this section in mind, the objective of this paper is thus to analyse the linguistic situation of Basque–Americans living in the West of the USA, as the literature on diasporas has paid little attention to linguistic diversity (Androutsopoulos, 2006; Porcel, 2006). Most of the few studies tackling the linguistic issue among the Basque diaspora have focused on the Basque language, whereas we will also consider their other languages, namely Spanish or French (depending on the side of the Pyrenees their ancestry stems from) and English. Thus, two main aspects will be analysed:

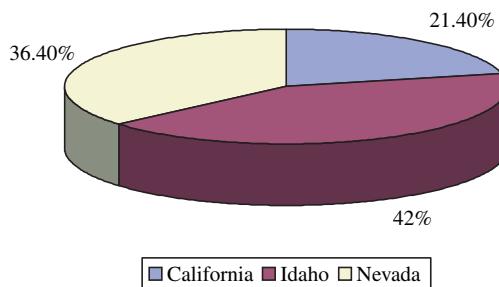
- (1) The Basque–Americans' linguistic competence in their different languages (Basque, Spanish or French and English).
- (2) Their attitudes towards their different languages.

## The Study

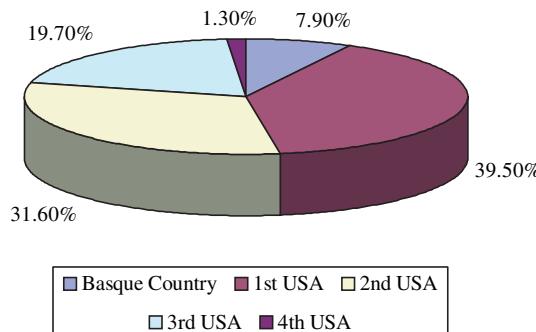
In this section the sample and the instrument used to gather the data will be analysed.

### The sample

The participants in the study were 80 Basque–Americans from Carson City, Elko and Reno (Nevada), San Francisco (California) and Boise (Idaho) (Figure 1). Their mean age was 28, but three out of four were younger than 35, whereas just ten subjects (12.9% of the sample) were older than 50. Therefore the sample was basically made up of young people, as they represent the future of the Basque–American community. As for gender, 31.6% were male and 68.4% female. The higher number of female respondents was due to the fact that the data were gathered in Basque Centers, and mainly among the members of three different dancing groups, where there is usually a larger presence of women.



**Figure 1** Geographic origin of the participants



**Figure 2** Generation to which the participants belonged

**Table 2** L1 of the participants

Mother tongue	Number	Percentage
English	34	42.5
Basque & English	15	18.8
Spanish & English	13	16.3
Basque	6	7.5
French & English	6	7.5
Spanish	2	2.5
Basque & French	2	2.5
Basque & Spanish	1	1.3
French, English & Farsi	1	1.3
Total	80	100.0

Regarding the generation (Figure 2), they were divided into five categories: the immigrant generation born in the Basque Country ('Basque Country' in the graph), the first generation of Basque Americans born in the USA ('1st USA'), the second ('2nd USA'), third ('3rd USA') and fourth ('4th USA') generations born in the USA.

Just six of the survey participants (7.9%) had emigrated from the Basque Country, whereas the vast majority of them (92.1%) were born in the USA. Seventy-one percent belonged to the first and second generations, whereas just one subject (1.3%) was fourth generation.

The informants' mother tongue can be observed in Table 2. The most habitual L1 is English, as four out of ten have this language as their mother tongue, followed by English and Basque as L1 (18.8%) and both English and Spanish (16.3%). Curiously enough, three families managed to keep Basque as the only L1 of their children, despite living in an English-speaking context far away from the homeland; the other three participants who had Basque as L1

were immigrants born in the Basque Country. Although 86.4% had English as L1 (on its own or together with another language), it is striking that almost a third (30.1%) of the informants had Basque as L1 (on its own or together with another language). Seventy-four percent came from the Spanish Basque Country, 20% from the French Basque Country and the remaining 5.6% were of mixed origin.

### **The instrument**

The participants were invited to complete a questionnaire aimed at examining their linguistic competence and attitudes towards the different languages spoken by the Basque–American community in the USA. This questionnaire – based on Baker's (1992) – had already been used in the Basque Country and in some other European bilingual contexts (Lasagabaster, 2003; Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007) and was only slightly adapted to fit the American context. Thus, the use of the same questionnaire will allow us to compare the present results with those of other contexts. This questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first one dealt with personal information, such as age, parental occupation, gender, province of origin, identity or L1 (37 items). In the second section the participants were asked to provide information about their language competence (9 items), and the third one focused on language attitudes by means of 30 items on a five-point Likert scale. As far as language competence is concerned, participants' self-ratings were chosen, on the grounds that previous research studies revealed 'a near normal distribution of responses and a variable with construct and predictive validity' (Baker, 1992: 54).

The suitability of structured questionnaires to study language attitudes has been questioned, but we agree with Porcel (2006: 97) when he states that:

Critics argue that because the instrument is the construct of a researcher it does not afford the participant any space for ideas, since the individual is obliged to respond only to the topics presented and within the specific frame set by the options for response. As a result, the instrument occludes themes and nuances that can be relevant. In my opinion, this objection does not invalidate the method as such, but rather supports the consideration of complementary methodologies.

Although limited by space constraints, this is the reason why in this study we will also make reference to the data gathered through interviews with 30 of the participants and whose comments will help us to delve into the results obtained by means of the questionnaire. The interviews were aimed at allowing the participants to pinpoint aspects which were not dealt with in the quantitative instrument or which they considered to have played a paramount role as regards the development of their language competence and attitudes. In this way they had the opportunity to elaborate on the questions tackled in the questionnaire.

## Results

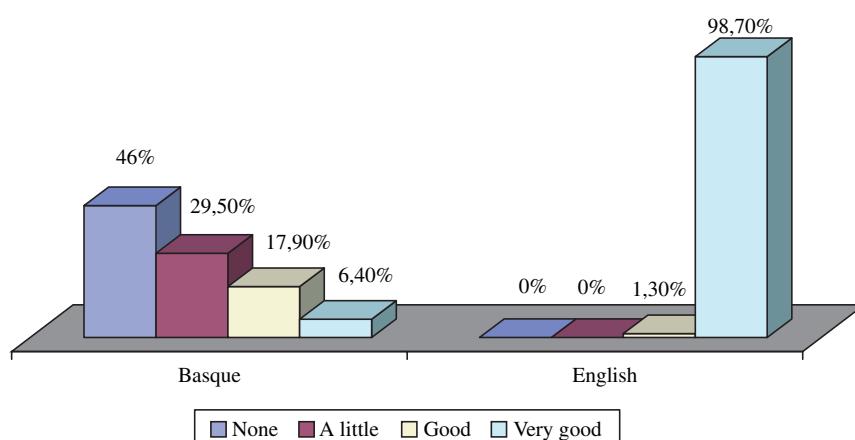
In this section the analyses performed will refer to both Basque–Americans’ competence in their different languages (Basque, Spanish or French, and English) and their attitudes towards all these languages.

### Language competence

Firstly, we will focus on their competence in Basque and English (Figure 3), as these two languages are common to the background of all the respondents, whereas in the case of Spanish and French they will be divided into two groups. One group will be made up of those with Spanish Basque Country ancestry (for whom French is not a possible L1), and the other group of those from the French Basque Country (for whom Spanish is not a possible L1). Those whose origins were mixed were excluded when regarding French or Spanish proficiency, as their categorisation was complex and the predominance of Basque or French at home was more often than not hard to establish (this is a very good case in point of the linguistic complexity which characterises some Basque–American families).

Almost half of the participants (46.2%) had no knowledge of Basque at all, plus 29.4% who could only use a few words or a limited number of sentences to be uttered in very particular contexts (festivities, greetings, etc.). On the other hand, 17.9% considered that they had a good knowledge and five subjects (6.4%) thought their Basque to be very good, which means that just a quarter of them (24.3%) were able to speak Basque (albeit to different degrees). These limitations were even more evident when they were asked about reading and writing skills (Table 3), as those who regarded their competence as good or very good amounted to just 16.9% and 12.9% respectively, which clearly reflects how difficult it is for Basque speakers in the USA to work on these language skills. Of interest, 29.1% considered their speaking ability to be good or very good.

The picture with respect to English language ability is a completely different story, as just one person belonging to the immigrant-generation



**Figure 3** Language competence in Basque and English

**Table 3** Basque competence in the four language skills (in percentages)

<i>Language skill</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>
Reading	61.0	22.1	14.3	2.6
Writing	62.8	24.4	10.3	2.6
Speaking	50.0	25.6	14.1	10.3
Listening	41.8	29.1	15.2	13.9

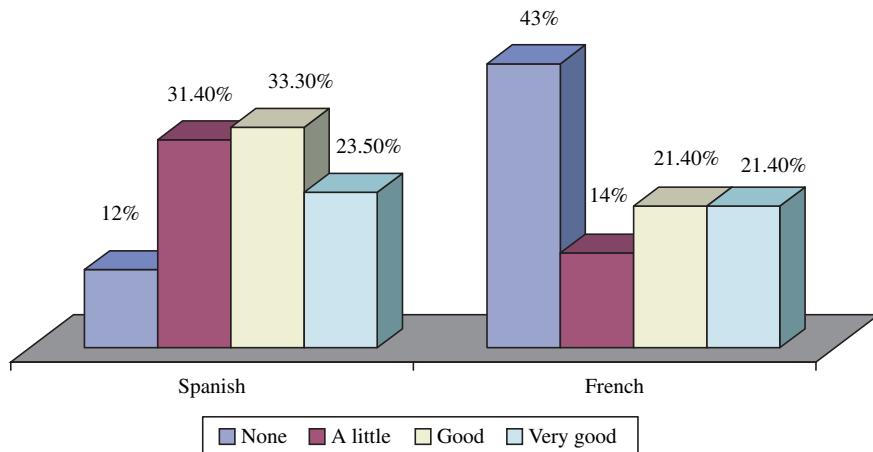
**Table 4** English competence in the four language skills (in percentages)

<i>Language skill</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>
Reading	0	0	1.3	98.7
Writing	0	1.3	1.3	97.5
Speaking	0	0	2.5	97.5
Listening	0	0	1.3	98.7

was thought to have a good command, whereas the rest clearly went for the *very good* option. Furthermore, these percentages are maintained with regard to the four language skills with little variation. These results come as no surprise at all, as all but six of the subjects were born in the USA.

When the four language skills in English are considered (Table 4), the percentages are maintained almost invariably. Therefore, it can be stated that in the case of the participants in this study the English language does not represent any hindrance in their everyday life, in contrast to their ancestors who arrived in the USA in the 19th and first half of the 20th century, for whom a lack of English language competence was more often than not a stumbling block (Douglass & Bilbao, 2005).

Regarding Spanish and French (Figure 4), the first thing that draws our attention is that amongst those coming from the Spanish Basque Country just 12% had no knowledge of Spanish, whereas 56.8% thought their command to be good (33.3%) or very good (23.5%). In the case of French, the percentage of those coming from the French Basque Country who had no knowledge of this language was much higher (43%), although 42.8% believed their general competence to be good (21.4%) or very good (21.4%). When asked about the four language skills (Table 5), in both languages the percentages in the *good* or *very good* options are above 40% in all cases, a percentage much higher than those obtained in the case of Basque. This may be due to the fact that many of our respondents had the opportunity to study these languages at school, as French and especially Spanish are among the most popular foreign languages in the USA.



**Figure 4** Language competence in Spanish or French

**Table 5** Spanish or French competence in the four language skills (in percentages)

Language	Language skill	None	A little	Good	Very good
Spanish	Reading	12.0	34.0	36.0	18.0
	Writing	17.6	37.3	33.3	11.8
	Speaking	9.8	39.2	29.4	21.6
	Listening	9.8	33.3	31.4	25.5
French	Reading	42.9	14.3	14.3	28.6
	Writing	42.9	14.3	28.6	14.3
	Speaking	38.5	15.4	15.4	30.8
	Listening	38.5	15.4	15.4	30.8

### Language attitudes

Before examining Basque–Americans’ attitudes towards the different languages in contact, it is necessary to briefly explain how the data gathered through the questionnaire were codified. The final section of the instrument focused on language attitudes by means of the same 10 items on a five-point Likert scale for each of the languages. Their language attitudes were codified in the following way: the option *Strongly Agree* (SA) was recoded as 100, the option *Agree* (A) as 75, *Neither Agree Nor Disagree* (NAND) as 50, *Disagree* (D) as 25 and *Strongly Disagree* (SD) as 0, a procedure already utilised in other studies (Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007). Once the results were codified, the average for the 10 items related to each language was obtained, which allowed us to distinguish three categories: (1) the first one was made up of *Unfavourable*

*attitudes*, that is to say, those between 0.000 and 33.333; (2) the second category comprised *Neutral attitudes*, for those whose scores were between 33.334 and 66.666; and (3) the third one consisted of those students who held *Favourable attitudes*, i.e. those between 66.667 and 100.000. In this way, we had at our disposal a *quantitative* variable (the average score for the ten items) which could also be used as *qualitative* (depending on their favourable, neutral or unfavourable attitudes).

Due to the reasons explained above, our analysis will firstly focus on Basque and English (Figure 5) and secondly on Spanish and French (Figure 6).

Of particular noteworthiness is the total lack of unfavourable attitudes to both Basque and English, a situation which is not repeated in other contexts where different languages are in contact (Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007). Similarly, the high percentage of positive attitudes is striking, not just in the case of English (87.7%), but even more remarkably regarding Basque (63.9%), particularly if it is taken into account that this is a language with very limited presence in the context and which many of the participants do not know (as seen before, 46% have no knowledge and almost 30% just some rudimentary

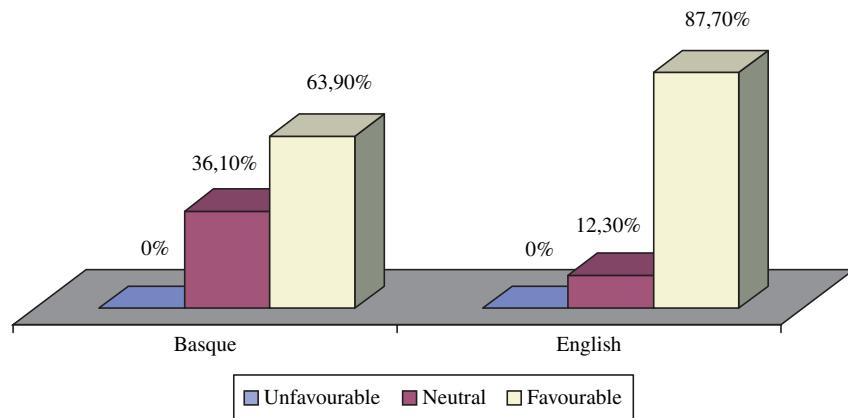


Figure 5 Attitudes towards Basque and English

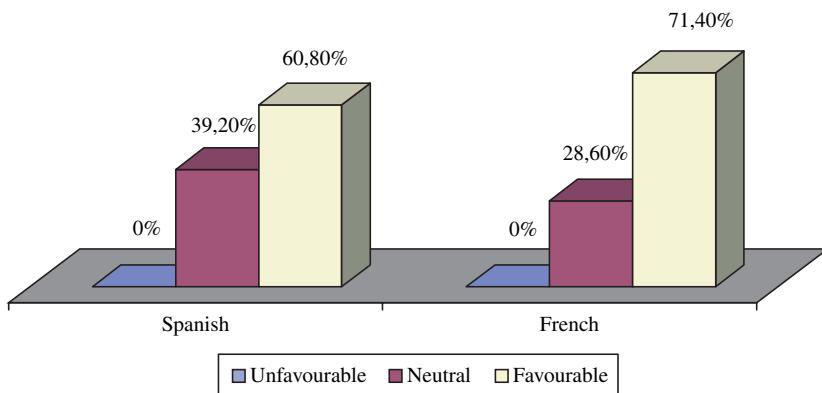


Figure 6 Attitudes towards Spanish or French

command). Therefore, these results lead us to conclude that the Basque language enjoys a very healthy attitudinal condition, as, notwithstanding Basque–Americans' lack of knowledge, they harbour very positive attitudes towards this language.

As in Figure 5, the column which represents unfavourable attitudes – this time towards Spanish and French – is two-dimensional. Once again favourable attitudes are supreme, although the support of those from the French Basque Country towards French is stronger (71.4%) than that of those from the Spanish Basque Country towards Spanish (60.8%). If these percentages are compared with those in Figure 5, it can be observed that the Basque–Americans from the Spanish Basque Country are more favourable towards Basque than Spanish. This is an interesting result, especially if it is considered that *hispanos* and the Spanish language are playing an ever greater role in American society. Nevertheless, it is also true that, notwithstanding the great numbers of Spanish speakers in the south-west, the Spanish spoken in this area is often stigmatised. In fact, the social value ascribed to a language is more important than its number of speakers. In contrast, those originally from the French Basque Country are more favourable to French than to Basque.

In the last part of this section, the effect of different independent variables on Basque–Americans' attitudes towards their languages will be analysed, namely, gender, the fact of having visited the Basque Country or not, size of hometown, their origin (Spanish vs. French), generation, socioeconomic status and educational background.

The variables whose effect was not significant were:

- (1) As for gender, the T-tests performed revealed no significant difference between men's and women's attitudes towards the four languages under scrutiny: Basque (sign. = 0.780), English (sign. = 0.101), Spanish (sign. = 0.345) and French (sign. = 0.363).
- (2) With respect to having visited the Basque Country, the results showed that this variable had no significant effect on their attitudes, as no differences were observed between those who had visited the homeland and those who had not: Basque (sign. = 0.787), Spanish (sign. = 0.746) and French (sign. = 0.297).
- (3) Similarly, the variable size of hometown had no effect and thus those living in towns or villages with less than 100,000 inhabitants and those whose residence was located in towns or cities with over 100,000 inhabitants harboured very similar attitudes towards the four languages: Basque (sign. = 0.092), English (sign. = 0.101), Spanish (sign. = 0.194) and French (sign. = 0.356).
- (4) Their origin (Spanish or French Basque Country) had no influence either on their language attitudes towards Basque (sign. = 0.186) and English (sign. = 0.972).
- (5) And neither did the educational background; in this case the respondents were divided into three groups depending on the primary, secondary or tertiary level degree they held (just 6 subjects had no degree at all and these were not included in the analysis).

Conversely, the socioeconomic status of the participants had an effect on the participants' language attitudes; however, this was so only regarding Basque. No difference was observed between those belonging to the upper and middle classes, but differences arose between the upper class (mean = 68.5) and middle class respondents (mean = 67.7) when compared with the low class group (mean = 75), as the latter held significantly more positive attitudes towards Basque ( $F = 2.277; p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, it could be concluded that the higher the social class, the less favourable attitudes towards Basque are.

When considering the generation to which they belonged, the group of participants born in the Basque Country was not included (they were only 6 subjects) and neither was the only fourth generation participant considered, as the analyses to be performed would not have been representative due to the limited number of subjects in these two groups. ANOVA analyses were carried out to examine whether there was any significant difference between the first, second and third generation USA-born respondents. The results demonstrated that there was no significant difference between the first generation and the second generation groups, nor between the first generation and the third generation groups when the four languages were considered. The only difference found concerned English, as the second generation Basque-Americans (mean = 81.9) harboured more positive attitudes towards English than the third generation ones (mean = 72.8), the more favourable position of the former being statistically significant ( $F = 2485; p > 0.05$ ).

These results would confirm the theory of the third generation effect proposed by Bieter and Bieter (2005), Porcel (2006), Totoricagüena (2003b) and others, according to which the Basque-Americans of this generation already regard themselves as totally integrated in American society and do not feel the need to reaffirm their US character, while at the same time developing a more ample idea of the ethnic motto *proud to be Basque*. However, this has no reflection on a more favourable attitude towards the languages spoken in the Basque Country (Basque, Spanish and French), which could be interpreted as an indication of the secondary role played by these language(s) in their identification with their ethnic roots (Amorrrortu, 1995; Douglass & Bilbao, 1986, 2005; Petrissans, 2003; Totoricagüena, 2002, 2003a).

In fact, the linguistic competence in Basque, French and Spanish of these three generations of Basque-Americans decreases from the previous generation to the next, as can be clearly seen in Table 6.

Whereas those whose command of Basque is good or very good amongst the first generation Basque-Americans amounted to 31%, this percentage plummets to 6.7% in the case of the members of the third generation (and none of them highly competent). The results are very similar in the case of the Spanish language, as those belonging to the first generation who could speak it well or very well were 58.6%, a percentage reduced to 33.4% in the third generation, although the knowledge of Spanish is much more widespread than that of Basque. This trend is maintained when the percentages of the French language are examined, although the reduced number of participants from the French Basque Country leads us to be cautious about these results.

The participants were also asked to identify themselves as Basques, Americans or Basque-Americans. As the concept of identity is being attached

Table 6 Knowledge of Basque, Spanish or French per generation (in percentages)

	<i>Basque</i>			<i>Spanish</i>			<i>French</i>					
	<i>None</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Very good</i>
First generation	24.1	44.8	27.6	3.4	13.8	27.6	44.8	13.8	8	3.3	10.0	6.7
Second generation	70.8	16.7	12.5	0	25.0	41.7	20.8	12.5	70.8	12.5	12.5	4.2
Third generation	53.3	40.0	6.7	0	26.7	40.0	26.7	6.7	86.7	13.3	0	0

growing importance in multilingual and multicultural situations (Echeverria, 2003; Totoricagüena, 2002, 2003b), special attention was paid to the relationship between the different independent variables, the dependent ones (language competence and attitudes) and identity. The latter variable had no effect on language attitudes: Basque (sign. = 0.785), English (sign. = 0.364), Spanish (sign. = 0.379) and French (sign. = 0.445). Concerning language competence, those who identified themselves as Basques did consider themselves as having a better command of Basque than those who identified as Americans (sign. = 0.015) and Basque–Americans (sign. = 0.020), whereas no significant differences were observed with regards to competence in the other languages. When identity was compared with the other independent variables, the only differences worth mentioning had to do with the participants' L1 and the generation they belonged to. Those who identified themselves as Basques had a higher percentage of L1 = Basque (17.6%) and L1 = Basque and other language (35.3%) individuals than the Americans (12.5% and 12.5 respectively) and the Basque–Americans (3.8% and 18.9%). The generation variable also exerted influence on identity (see Table 7), as those who identified themselves as Basques were mainly born in the Basque Country or USA-first generation (62.4%), whereas this percentage was lower among Americans (37.5%) and Basque–Americans (45.1%; all of them first generation USA-born respondents).

Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn is that identity does not have a significant relationship with language attitudes (which are positive overall), but it does with language competence in Basque.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Basques first entered the American West on a large scale as fortune seekers in the California Gold Rush, but they soon turned to sheep-raising. Nonetheless, the stereotype of the Basque as a shepherd is nowadays just a relic of the past which bears no relation to today's Basque–Americans, who work in a wide range of occupations.

In 1987 William A. Douglass – the founder and former director of the Center for Basque Studies at UNR – stated when making reference to the Basque Clubs that 'Whether or not the clubs will prove to be an antidote to

**Table 7** Relationship between identity and generation (in percentages)

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Basques</i>	<i>Americans<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Basque–Americans</i>
Born in Basque Country	31.2	12.5	0
1st USA-born	31.2	25.0	45.1
2nd USA-born	31.2	37.5	29.4
3rd USA-born	6.3	25.0	23.5
4th USA-born	0	0	2.0

<sup>a</sup>Only 8 subjects identified themselves as Americans and therefore these data should be considered with caution

the assimilatory process exerted by mainstream American culture, or simply a pause in the inevitable process of absorption, remains to be seen'. Almost 20 years later the same question can be asked. In this paper we have endeavoured to analyse this issue from the language perspective.

Our analysis of the linguistic question amongst Basque–Americans has centred on two aspects, namely, language competence and language attitudes. As for language competence, our results show that only 24.3% of Basque–Americans have a (very) good command of Basque, whereas this percentage reaches 42.8% for French and is more than doubled in the case of Spanish (56.8%). Therefore, it can be concluded that knowledge of Basque is not very widespread amongst Basque–Americans, as only one out of four can speak this language.

In this respect it has to be pointed out that Boise, Idaho has the only *Ikastola* or Basque school (where Basque is the language used as a means of instruction) functioning at the moment outside the Basque Country. Unfortunately children can only be enrolled at nursery level, as there is no continuation in primary education. In contrast, French and Spanish can be studied as foreign languages at school, which obviously has an impact on the participants' command of these two international languages. Hence, the possibility of setting up schools in primary education where Basque could be learnt should be considered. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that the most widely supported item in the whole battery was the one which said 'Basque should be taught to all those who want to learn it' (with a mean of 93.6 out of a possible 100). The interviews also brought to light this overwhelming support, as all the interviewees coincided in stressing that, had they had the opportunity to learn Basque, they would have taken advantage of it, which is why they were very favourable to the possibility of having Basque taught in those areas such as Boise, San Francisco, Reno or Elko, where there are numerous Basque communities. As pointed out in the second section of this paper, Porcel (2006), when analysing the linguistic issue among Miami Cubans, also states that the presence of the minority language in the schools is of the utmost importance.

Fishman (1991, 2001a) has recurrently claimed that school and family are key elements when it comes to the intergenerational transmission of a given language. If, for whatever sociolinguistic reasons the family cannot provide their component, the educational system ineluctably becomes the main piece to successfully complete the language puzzle. Regarding the ways in which home and school are related to Basque language and identity, the results obtained by Echeverria (2005) in a study carried out in the Basque Country show that students who attend Basque-medium schools identify Basque as their language more than their counterparts in Spanish-medium schools, and feel more solidarity with Basque speakers. Yet, she claims that her results also demonstrate that 'these positive attitudes toward Basque are correlated with exposure to Basque in both the home and school domains; in this sense, schooling has no *independent* effect on language attitudes' (Echeverria, 2005: 250).

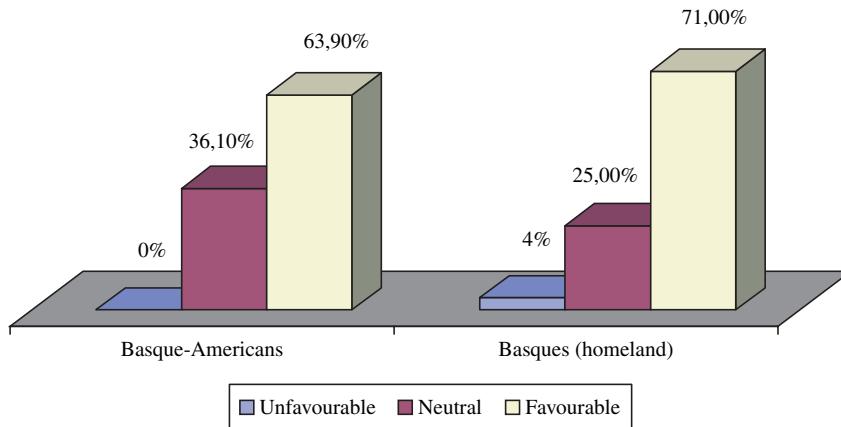
As for language attitudes, Basque–Americans hold very positive attitudes towards all the languages, but the high percentage of favourable attitudes

towards Basque is surprising. It can thus be concluded that there is a mismatch between language competence and language attitudes, at least in the case of Basque. This shows that Basque–Americans place great emphasis on the Basque language as a symbol of their identity (confirmed by their comments during the interviews) and have an attitude that could be labelled as *romantic* towards a language which seven out of ten cannot speak. In any case, 24 out of the 30 interviewed participants do not regard the Basque language as indispensable to be considered Basques (see Lasagabaster, 2006), which may be the reason why no significant relationship was found between identity and language attitudes.

Despite their having no grounding in Basque, and despite our being aware that these Basque communities from which the informants were drawn are vibrant and hold many events and activities (for example, they often bring in performers, handball players and teachers from the Basque Country), their attitudinal stance is strikingly favourable. If these results are compared with those of another study (Lasagabaster & Huguet, 2007), undertaken in the Basque Country itself, this is even more evident. This other study included Basque university students who completed the same questionnaire (only minimum changes were included taking into account the sociolinguistic features of each context), which allows this comparison. Despite the fact that Basque–Americans hardly ever have the chance to use Basque in their everyday life, that their command of this language is much lower (81% of the participants in the study carried out in the Basque Country considered that their general competence in Basque was good or very good), that they have no bilingual programmes (unlike in the Basque Country; see Echevarria, 2003, 2005; Gardner & Zalbide, 2005; or Lasagabaster, 2001), that access to Basque language media is much more complicated and many other obvious socio-linguistic differences between both contexts (to know more about the current sociolinguistic situation in the Basque Country see Aizpurua & Aizpurua, 2005); despite all this, the attitudes of Basque–Americans are not very dissimilar to those of the sample under scrutiny in the Basque Country (see Figure 7).

Although the sample in the Basque Country showed a higher percentage of favourable attitudes (71% vs. 63.9%), there is a small percentage of unfavourable attitudes in the homeland (4%), which is not found among Basque–Americans (0%). This is a question which merits further consideration from the part of those interested in diasporas, as Johnson (2005) has likewise observed the same phenomenon when analysing the Welsh diaspora in the Argentinian province of Chubut, whose members also hold very positive attitudes towards all their languages (Welsh, English and Spanish). These data may indicate that there is some connection between being a member of the diaspora and speaker of a minority language (Basque or Welsh), and positive attitudes towards the different languages in contact. In any case, more research in this field is undoubtedly needed.

Moreover, the attitudes towards Basque of those whose origins are in the Spanish Basque Country are more favourable than their attitudes towards Spanish, which, bearing in mind that the Spanish language and the Hispanic community are playing an ever increasing role in the USA, indicates that



**Figure 7** Comparison of attitudes towards Basque among Basque–Americans and Basques in the homeland

Basque–Americans feel very close to the Basque language. Up to the point that during the interviews several of them expressed their preference for using Basque and avoiding the use of Spanish while at the Basque Center, the place they immediately associate with the Basque language.

Many factors, however, play against Basque's continuing survival (or any other minority language's; see Ureland, 2001) in the USA, because the time, effort and money needed to succeed in its learning do have little reward; in fact, there are few opportunities to use the language in everyday life. However, and although there may be little instrumental reward for speaking Basque in the diaspora, it has to be similarly acknowledged that there may be affective reasons for doing so. In fact, and according to many models of second language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Krashen, 1982; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995), one of the main elements needed to learn an L2 is to have a favourable attitudinal stance, something which our data shows is ensured in the case of Basque–Americans. As Fishman (2001b: 223) points out:

As long as people remember the now unspoken language, value it, yearn for it, weep for it and/or seek to undertake steps in order to re-utilise it, then the language is not dead. Like all aspects of culture, a language is still bound in the bond of the living as long as the living feel a bond to it, in terms of affection, responsibility and motivation. An attitude is a 'tendency to behave' or a 'readiness to behave', rather than the behaviour *per se*, and such readiness or tendencies precede and accompany the requisite behaviours when the circumstances for such behaviours are ripe.

Nevertheless, the knowledge and use of Basque among Basque–Americans (especially in the states of the West analysed in this paper) is higher than that of other communities of the Basque diaspora outside the Basque Country, such as Argentina or Venezuela, where there are also large numbers. This is due to several factors, but the following may be worth mentioning: the more recent

arrival of immigrants when compared to other parts of the world such as South America, the possibility of attending Basque courses in their hometowns and the greater participation of the younger generation in Basque learning programmes organised in the Basque Country. During the interviews the respondents spoke about the options they had had to learn Basque in the Basque Museum in Boise (Idaho), in the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, or in the summer camps organised by NABO; there are not many options, but they can be regarded as numerous when compared to other contexts.

Yet, the interviews show that the main factor in support of the maintenance of the Basque language has to do with their visits to the Basque Country. Although these results may seem to be in conflict with the survey data, they are not, as those respondents who have a better command of Basque happen to be the ones who had spent a longer period in the Basque Country to study the language, and not just a few weeks or days to meet the family and do some sightseeing. As the majority of participants harbour positive attitudes towards Basque, the fact of having visited the Basque Country does not exert such an influence on the (romantic) attitudes dependent variable, whereas their comments during the interviews underline its effect on the actual efforts made to speak Basque, that is to say, on language competence. The visits thus have an impact on their desire to learn the language, as one of our Basque-speaking respondents (who spent a year in the Basque Country to learn Basque) puts it:

I went to the Basque Country in 1996, my Spanish was great. I had studied it for five years and I was getting along with it. But especially with my family and people my age, they were talking to each other in *euskera* (Basque) and say something to me in Spanish. They are very *lekeitiarras* (from Lekeitio, a village on the coast). I wanted to be included and I always identified myself as Basque. But when I went there I realized I really wasn't Basque. You know what I mean?

Mills (2005) also observed among British of Pakistani origin that visits to Pakistan was the most significant factor when it came to developing a sense of belonging, their connection to the community and their minority language(s) allegiance. A different way of linking with their origins for both parents and children of Pakistani origin came through watching satellite television, whereas in the case of the Basque diaspora in the West of the USA this came through the Internet, as pointed out in the interviews. In any case, it seems obvious that the study of new technologies and their effect on diasporic identities is of the utmost importance (Androutsopoulos, 2006), although we are also aware that new technologies cannot substitute face-to-face interaction when it comes to language maintenance and use.

In the present study the picture as regards English is completely different. For 98.7% of them their general competence is very good, a similar percentage to those obtained when they were asked about the four language skills independently. This high level of competence coincides with that of the respondents in the study by Mills (2005), who were all also fluent in English. Furthermore, their attitudes towards English are very favourable, and this

irrespective of their origin, as there is no difference when the attitudes of those from the Spanish Basque Country and those of French origin are compared.

The interviewees expressed that English is their natural language, and despite feeling Basque and very connected to their Basque heritage, for Basque–Americans English also represents a Basque language in the USA. From the homeland, this may seem paradoxical, but analysed from the American West it turns out to be quite understandable. In the interviews they also highlighted the importance of *keeping to the norm*, that is to say, their desire not to stand out from the rest of classmates at school due to linguistic differences, especially throughout adolescence. This makes them embrace English wholeheartedly, which would explain why their attitudes are so positive.

As for Spanish and French, Basque–Americans held very favourable attitudes too. As a matter of fact, not a single subject was included in the unfavourable attitudes category in both languages. The participants also went clearly for the learning of these languages at school and passing it on to their children.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there exist favourable conditions (especially as far as language attitudes are concerned) for the maintenance of Basque, Spanish and French. Nevertheless, these conditions seem not to be sufficient, as our results show that the three languages keep systematically losing speakers to English. This worrying trend needs to be researched, as the members of the Basque diaspora are people who belong to more than one culture, who speak (albeit to very different degrees) more than one language and therefore inhabit more than one identity, or probably it would be better to say, they inhabit a new kind of identity (Woodward, 2002), as the members of the diaspora are in a constant negotiation between identities and cultures. This is the result of their desire to maintain links to the homeland, its language(s) and culture. This idea is nicely summarised in the following statement:

They speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of the other, and thus finding ways of being both the same as and different from the others amongst whom they live ... They represent new kinds of identities. (Hall, in Woodward, 2002: 63)

The current context may seem to favour the maintenance of Basque (a language that is in a more precarious position in its homeland than many other immigrant languages), in the sense that there are different organisations such as the NABO, the Basque Centers in different states of the USA, the Centre for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), or the Government of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, which are willing and ready to support and boost the presence of Basque among the diaspora in the USA. Yet, our results do not coincide with this optimistic diagnosis (i.e. the current context favouring the maintenance of Basque) and demonstrate that there is a need to work in conjunction, so that the oxen – represented by the different efforts made by these institutions – pull the Basque cart in the same direction without breaking the yoke.

In any case, more empirical data are needed, because surveys and studies will allow us to provide insights and to advance in the understanding of the language development of the Basque diaspora in the west of the USA, as well as that of other diasporas.

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### **Correspondence**

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr David Lasagabaster, Dpto. Filología Inglesa y Alemana, University of the Basque Country, Vicerrectorado del Campus de Alava, Vic. de Relaciones Internacionales, c/ Comandante Izarduy 2, 01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain (david.lasagabaster@ehu.es).

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