

GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL VARIATION IN THE BASQUE LANGUAGE

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Basque language, without its own administration, has evolved divided into dialects over millennia. Although the standard variety has recently been codified, the regional dialects are still alive. In fact, this wide dialectalization is the object of continuous research and gives us the opportunity to research its variability.

The aim of this paper is to examine how geolinguistic variability works in the case of the Basque language. For this purpose, I show some data gathered by using two different procedures. To go deeply into this subject, I focus on the research conducted in two different areas of the Basque language: the first is a study of the geolinguistic structure of the Western dialects, and the second examines the North-Eastern dialects.

2. DATA

2.1. Data of the Basque language of the West

Concerning the research of the Western area, the basic data that I present in this paper is the result that I got in one of my previous studies (Aurrekoetxea 1995). My aim in that research was to analyze the geolinguistic structure of the varieties in this area. First, I decided to try, by dividing the linguistic characteristics that I chose, to analyze different fields (phonology, verb morphology and syntax) and then I tried to put all of them together. I used a multidimensional approach to analyze what happens in the geolinguistic structure.

2.2. Data of the Northern Basque Country

In 2001 a research team from the University of the Basque Country began examining the varieties of the North-East of the Basque Country. The first stage of this research was the publication of 150 Basque texts from the “Parable of the Prodigal Son” collected by Édouard Bourciez in about 1895 (Aurrekoetxea and Videgain 2004). Afterwards, taking into account the data of the texts, we analyzed what the geolinguistic structure of those varieties involves. We also divided the data into different fields: lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic data.

In the research we used multidimensional dialectometry; for that purpose, we used the VDM computer program (Goebel 2003). As you can see, on the one hand, we present studies about the two ends of the area of the Basque language and, on the other hand, we compare grammatical and lexical data among them. Although the basic data of both studies are not contemporary, we undertook the research because we thought that it was useful to measure the parameters of variability in both areas.

3. DATA OF BISCAY: GRAMMATICAL VARIATION

To examine the variability concerning grammar in the Western area we used a dendrogram using Ward's Method.

In verb morphology, if we divide the dendrogram (Figure 1) into two halves, we see eight varieties at the bottom, which form a homogeneous geographic area. However, in the syntax dendrogram (Figure 2), varieties are divided into two balanced parts. The eight varieties that form a cluster in morphology are spread and only four of them appear linked to each other.

Instead, in the dendrogram concerning phonology (Figure 3), we find different results: the group at the bottom of the dendrogram is completed by the varieties that are placed on the left side of the area analyzed. And as for syntax, in spite of the fact that the varieties are gathered in two similar groups, there isn't any geolinguistic coherence.

The syntactical characteristics are the ones that appear most spread over the whole area. Instead, in the Western area of Basque, phonology is what contributes most to the classification of language variability.

Are there any similarities or a universal typology? We can say that there is not any similarity in the three maps: in morphology the first group is formed in the Eastern area, in phonology in the Western area and in syntax there is not any coherent area. Nevertheless, verb morphology offers greater homogeneity because of the fact that the varieties which are in this group also offer a coherent area in terms of geography.

4. GRAMMATICAL DATA OF THE NORTH BASQUE COUNTRY

If we analyse grammatical data of the North-Eastern area from a geolinguistic point of view, the dendrogram and map concerning morphology (Figure 4) appear divided into four areas. The areas are not homogeneous, and, except for the Eastern area (conventional Souletin dialect, corresponding to the bottom of the dendrogram), there isn't any clear area. As for the dendrogram, there is a long distance between the first three groups and the fourth one; the linguistic distance is very long.

If we take a look at syntax data (Figure 5), the clear homogeneous area that appeared on the right side of the map in morphology has disappeared. There isn't any homogeneous area now. In the dendrogram as well, the four groups are gathered in groups of two. The pattern which appears both on the dendrogram and on the map is completely different.

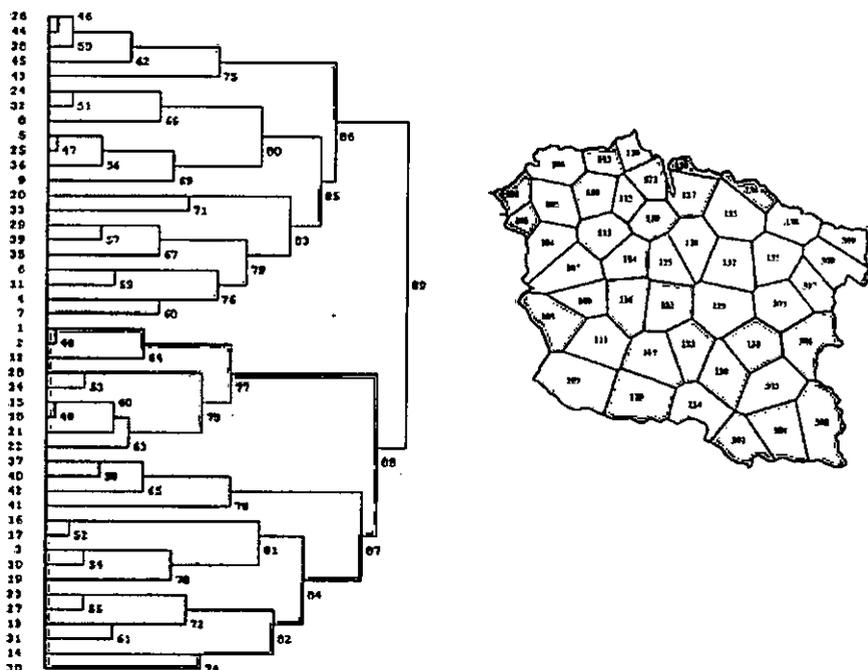


FIGURE 3
Phonology dendrogram

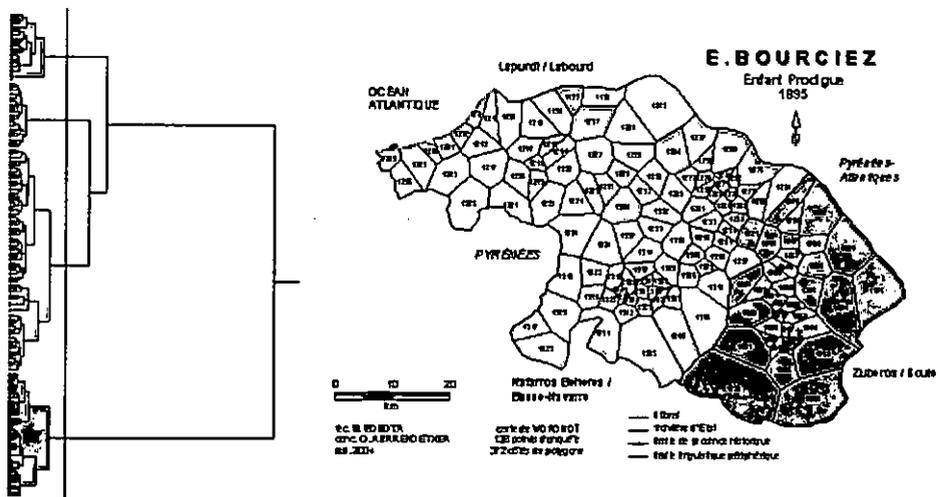


FIGURE 4
Morphology dendrogram

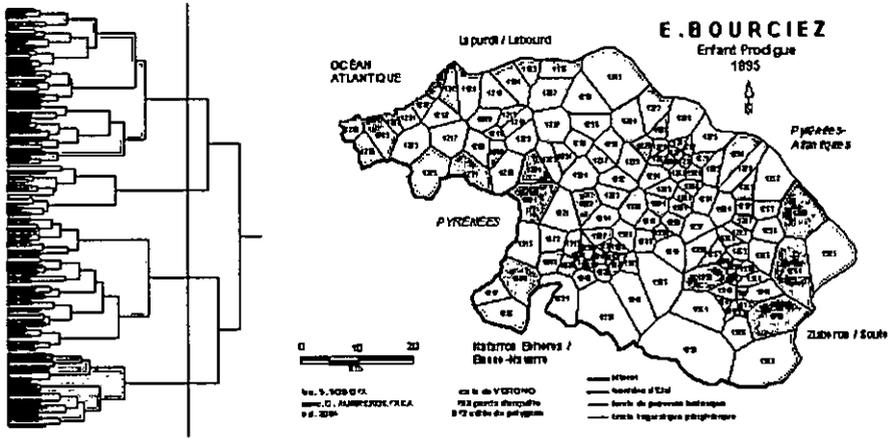


FIGURE 5
Syntax dendrogram

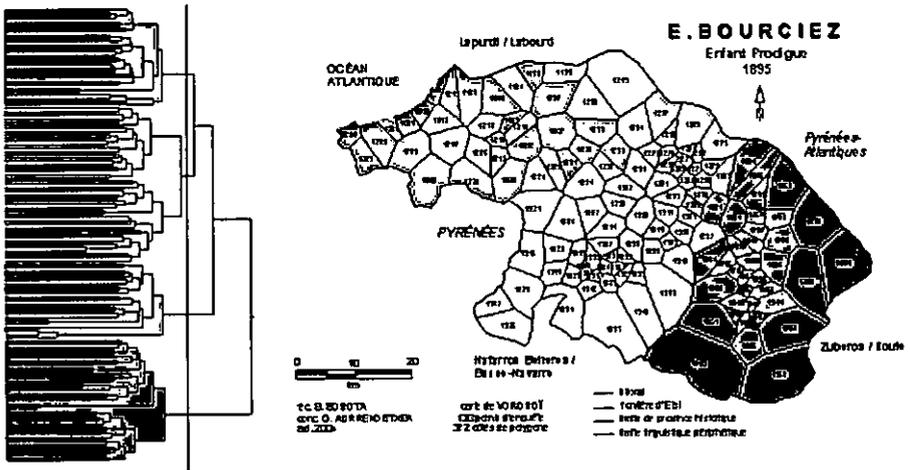


FIGURE 6
Lexical variation dendrogram

5. LEXICAL VARIATION

The only useful data to study lexical variation are those gathered in the already mentioned “Bourciez” collection. As we can see in Figure 6, the classification of the varieties shows a geolinguistic structure in four well-distinguished groups.

This map shows a very united area but there is one exception: the area corresponding to the top of the dendrogram. This area shows a different configuration and it has no precise and clear border. The homogeneity of the area corresponding to the bottom of the dendrogram is amazing. In this area, there are lots of similarities between the map based on morphological characteristics and this one.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, concerning the data we used in this research, we can say that the diatopic variability does not show any universal typology. In addition, although the lexical data cause few problems to classify different varieties, grammar data and especially syntactic data are difficult to reflect in the maps because they have a more complicated geolinguistic structure.

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