

Dialect levelling and language attitudes in a rural Basque town: Intergenerational change meets subjective factors*

Azler Garcia-Palomino

University of the Basque Country

azler.garcia@ehu.eus

Sociolinguists assume that supralocal variants are rapidly gaining influence in the linguistic repertoires of post-industrial societies (Auer 1998; Kerswill 2002; Hernández-Campoy 2003; Pooley 2012). The outcome of this process, typically referred to as dialect levelling, is a gradual loss of regionally marked forms and increased homogenization in young speech due to contact and accommodation between mutually intelligible varieties (Trudgill 1986; Britain 2010). Relatively recently, as Unamuno and Aurrekoetxea (2013) suggest, dialect levelling has become widespread in Basque-speaking areas as well, arguably because of the greater geographical mobility across the Basque Country and the consolidation of Standard Basque in education and the media. This study investigates the patterns of variation in one phonological variable in a small, rural Basque town, with an emphasis on language attitudes as a predictor of linguistic behavior. Significant effects of age group and gender are observed, but when the solidarity index is included in the statistical model, it emerges as the only significant factor. Moreover, the data show that adult females behave most conservatively with respect to the local variant, whereas young females appear to be leading the change into supralocalization. Further support for a change in progress is provided by the fact that intergenerational stability in males seems to be only apparent, with high degrees of heterogeneity in young males. These trends, coupled with current and future scenarios of accommodation and outward orientation, reinforce a hypothesis of regional dialect levelling in Basque LVA despite the strong correlation between the incidence of local forms and positive attitudes towards the town and its vernacular.

Keywords: language attitudes, dialect levelling, Basque, Low Vowel Assimilation

1. Introduction

A widespread phenomenon in the linguistic repertoires of post-industrial societies is a movement away from regionally marked, minority variants in both rural and urban areas and into forms with supralocal currency (Auer 1998:1; Kerswill 2002:187; 2003:224; Kerswill & Williams

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2002:180; Hernández-Campoy 2003:27; Pooley 2012:40). And the Basque language is no exception, having undergone rapid convergence with the standard across several varieties since its recent standardization in the 80s (Zuazo 1998:229; Haddican 2005:117; Unamuno & Aurrekoetxea 2013:154-5). This is typically referred to as dialect levelling, and is now becoming more noticeable in younger speech in the case of Basque (e.g. Aurrekoetxea 2006:141-2; Ariztimuño 2010:83; Ensunza 2019:21; see also Perez Landa 2006:59-63; Lujanbio 2016:203; Gaminde et al. 2018:38-9 for evidence that the first signs of levelling occurred in what today are adult speakers). Dialect levelling, as Trudgill (1986:54-60) and Britain (2010:196) posit, operates on the basis of contact between mutually intelligible varieties, which in Basque takes the form of Basque-medium education, media, and increased geographical mobility (Hualde & Zuazo 2007:161-2; Unamuno & Aurrekoetxea 2013:155). This is further accentuated by the decline in the intergenerational transmission of the language and the relatively low degree of socialization in Basque outside the household (cf. Kulick 1992:160-7; Fellin 2001:89-94; Howard 2012:74-6 for other languages).

The paper presented here aims to be a preliminary examination of the linguistic correlates of social organization in two generations of Basque speakers from Lezama (see Figure 1 for an overview of the locations mentioned throughout the paper), a rural Biscayan town within the north-western Western Basque area (Zuazo & Goiti 2016:12). The variable under study is phonological: Low Vowel Assimilation (hereafter LVA). According to Aurrekoetxea (2006:147), this vernacular feature seems to have started to recede in favor of the non-assimilated, standard variant in territories where LVA had previously been remarkably prominent. Therefore, in line with Dorleijn and Nortier (2013:36), catching what apparently is a change in progress “red handed [may] shed light on which social, communicative, interactional patterns and processes are at work in the creation of” levelled varieties. Additional to such a variationist study of Basque is the consideration of language attitudes and their contested role in predicting the directionality of language change (Torgersen & Kerswill 2004:24). This empirical contribution will, then, provide further insight into the sociolinguistics of understudied minority languages (Stanford & Preston 2009; Stanford 2016; Smakman 2015) by exploring such a common sociolinguistic process as dialect levelling in an indigenous language from Europe.

2. Background

2.1. Dialect levelling in Basque

Varieties of Basque have recently started to level out not only under the pressure of Standard Basque, but also because of speakers’ hierarchical interactions and increased mobility (Zuazo 1998:194-5; Unamuno & Aurrekoetxea 2013:154). In accordance with Trudgill (1986:25) and

Williams and Kerswill (1999:150), geographical mobility is linked to dialect levelling as mobile populations are more prone to engage in both feature diffusion and accommodation to interlocutors, resulting in the generalized avoidance of variants which are regionally or socially restricted and/or lesser used. However, the influence of geographical mobility and demographic movements over patterns of dialect levelling in Basque is still an understudied, and perhaps unappreciated, field of enquiry to the point that, to my knowledge, only Haddican (2007:680-7) evaluates how local socio-economic developments may have caused demographic, and thus, (prospective) linguistic and ideological changes in Oiartzun.

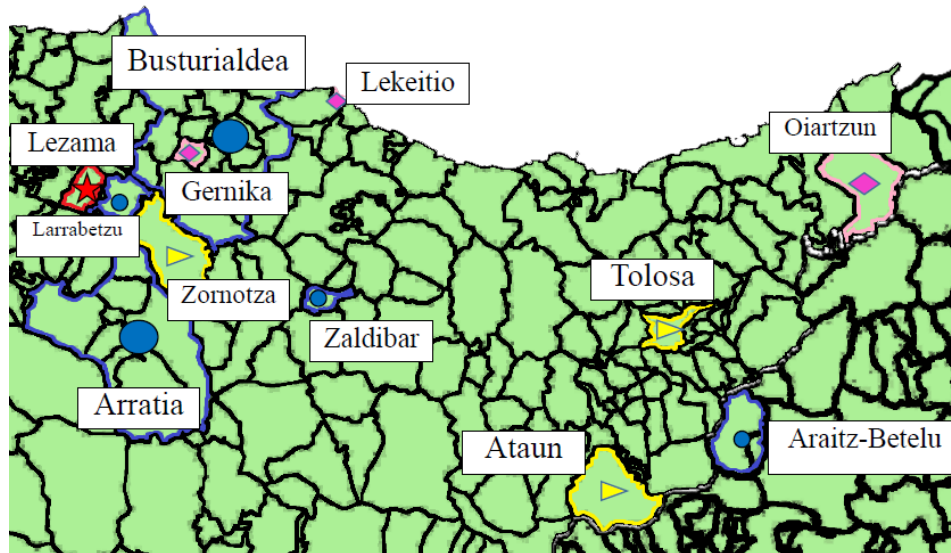


Figure 1. Map of locations in the study (star: fieldwork site; circle: LVA studies; diamond: studies mentioned in section 2.1.; triangle: studies mentioned in section 2.3.) (adapted from Theklan 2006)

Even though Auer and Hinskens (1996:6) note that dialect levelling may occur either vertically, in the direction of the standard, or horizontally, towards another vernacular, younger varieties of Basque appear to be diverging from what Bellmann (1998:23) labels “base dialect” and progressively converging with standard-like forms. Most often, these new levelled varieties have been described as “standardized local Basques”¹ (Zelaieta 2004:229, my translation), reminiscent of Auer’s (1998:2) “regional standard”. Homogenization notwithstanding, they show variable degrees of convergence depending on the language level: Basque phonology, particularly segmental phonology, seems to be most resistant to levelling forces (Aurrekoetxea 2004:53; 2006:114; Lujanbio 2012:88-9). I identify two possible reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, Oñederra (2016:132) says that Basque standardization processes have focused on grammatical and lexical aspects of written language, as is typical of academic trends (J. Milroy & L. Milroy 1999:55). And secondly, sociolinguistic studies (cf. Boberg 2004:266) emphasize that post-acquisition change is generally rarer in the more abstract language levels

¹ Some notable counterexamples to vertical trends are found in Haddican (2003:28) and Lujanbio (2016), both reporting an increasing adoption of Central Basque forms in traditionally Navarrese Basque-speaking areas.

like phonology and syntax. Haddican (2007:699), in line with later contact studies (Erker 2017a:15-6; Erker 2017b:73-4; Troncoso-Ruiz & Elordieta 2017:12), also argues that the salience of a variant may help to prevent levelling.

A simpler way to approach a typology of leaders of Basque dialect levelling may be to look at the more general macrosocial categories like age and gender as studied in other languages. Sayers (2009:138-146) underscores the importance of geographical mobility to place young speakers and women in the vanguard of dialect levelling in Britain. This is in keeping with sociolinguistic assumptions that adult speech is characterized by conservatism whereas the youth are more advanced in their use of innovations (Clarke 1982:102; Eckert 1997:164; Denis et al. 2019:46-8). Females have also been found to lead supralocally diffusing changes (Dubois & Horvath 1999:299; Maclagan, Gordon & Lewis 1999:31-3; Labov 2001:274; Cheshire 2002:430; L. Milroy & Gordon 2003:103). Nevertheless, gender does not seem to be a reliable predictor of dialect levelling in Basque. Young males are leading the adoption of incoming Central Basque vernacular features in Oiartzun (Haddican 2003:31), but they appear to be more resistant to the change in palatalization in Gernika (Ensunza 2016:88). Although Haddican (2007:693) reports no significant gender effect for palatalization, two very diverging trends are found within approximately 20 km of each other: while Gernika adult females are advancing the loss of palatalization (Ensunza 2016:84), males in Lekeitio generally adhere less to palatalised variants than do females (Zubillaga & Gaminde 2010:7). Following Camino (2009:300), such dissimilar behaviors across and within regions may reveal the different status associations that language forms have in each community, which may now have been altered due to the abrupt availability of Standard Basque forms in recent years.

2.2. Low Vowel Assimilation in the context of dialect levelling

LVA is a cross-dialectally common phonological phenomenon in Basque, which Hualde (1991:23) describes as follows: $a \rightarrow e^2 / V[+high](C)_.$ Representative of this process is, for instance, *laguna* > *lagune* ‘the friend’ but never *sagarra* > **sagarre* ‘the apple’, so that [a]-type variants are in complementary distribution with [e]-type variants in certain morphological contexts depending on the height of the preceding vowel. In general, LVA results in the neutralization of /a/ and /e/, as in the pair *izan/izen* ‘to be/name’ (Hualde 1991:26). Diachronically, LVA appears to

² Even though it has been generally assumed that the acoustic properties of the assimilated vowel are those of true-mid /e/ (Hualde 1991:26; Flemming 1995:40; deCastro-Arrazola et al. 2015:150; Ensunza 2015:68-9), I will here refer to the result of LVA as /e/ throughout the paper for reasons of convenience. However, I thank Ander Egurtzegi for pointing out that a recent study has found that, of 8 speakers of Zaldibar Basque, 2 exhibit an unsystematic intermediate category for LVA (Egurtzegi & San Martin 2021). Because this work is still under review and the speakers producing these intermediate variants belong in different age and gender groups, the data presented here will be based on auditory transcriptions only (see section 4.2.).

be a polygenetic innovation from the 17th century documented to have originated in south-western Biscay to later diffuse eastwards across rural areas (Zuloaga 2017:174-5; 2019:477-8). And in fact, in keeping with Zuazo (2014:182), it is in the Western Basque area that LVA is most productive today. However, as Hualde (1991:Chapter 2) shows, morphological constraints on the applicability of LVA vary from area to area, with the most favorable context being the singular determiner *-a* (Hualde 1991:27; deCastro-Arazola et al. 2015:150).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, little is known about LVA other than that it has a non-standard status. The assimilation is not represented in standard spelling, and Oñederra (2019) describes it as “good to use at a pub” (my translation), but not in more formal settings. Aurrekoetxea (2006:147) points to LVA as a traditional feature that is now showing signs of recession due to supralocalization. Similarly, despite the intergenerational stability found in Arratia (Eguskiza 2019:86-90), Ensunza (2015:151-2) and Lujanbio (2016:159) identify a significant change into supralocal [a] in Busturialdea youth and Araitz-Betelu adults respectively. A more comprehensive sample is used in a study of Larrabetzu LVA (Gaminde et al. 2018:38-9), which finds that, while LVA occurs systematically in a number of morphological contexts in speakers born before 1940, the decline is apparent in later generations.

All of these studies, except for Lujanbio (2016), focus on varieties within or structurally close to the western Western Basque area. What is more, Larrabetzu (Gaminde et al. 2018) is Lezama’s – the fieldwork site – neighboring town to the east in the Txorierri county. Nonetheless, the data in these studies are based on elicited production tasks, which have been reported to elicit more formal speech (Dollinger 2015:250; Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2016:198-200; Boberg 2017:136-7; Hawkey 2020:25), and may not consist of sizeable token occurrences per speaker. For example, Eguskiza (2019:86-90) collects two tokens per speaker in a total of seven morphological contexts. Therefore, more robust datasets of unmonitored, naturalistic speech are still needed to better understand the social mechanisms underlying a possible change in progress in LVA.

2.3. Language attitudes in variationist studies

Following Oppenheim (1982:39) and Eagly and Chaiken (1993:1), language attitudes may be defined as abstract, speaker-internal tendencies through which evaluations of favor and disfavor towards particular linguistic conceptualizations are expressed directly or indirectly. Although some (see Watt 2000:93-6; 2002:53-6; L. Milroy 2002:4; Marshall 2004:217-21; Auer & Hinskens 2005:356) describe language attitudes as factors to be considered in explaining language variation, Torgersen and Kerswill (2004:25) claim that it is still unclear what role attitudes may play in the direction of variation. Ladegaard (2000:228), for instance, cautions against interpreting the attitude-behavior correlation as one of causation, and Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003:9) and Wang (2017:14-5)

concede that other socio-psychological factors at work in social interactions and the amount of exposure to other varieties may interfere considerably with teasing apart the exact effects of attitudes on linguistic behavior.

Attitudes are agreed to operate through a so-called tripartite model, which emphasizes the three integrative components of attitudes: cognition, affect, and behavior (see Garrett, Coupland & Williams 2003:3-4 for further discussion). Thus, a successful method of attitude elicitation should include all three of these components in order to obtain individual responses that make attitudes observable. Attitudes may be overt or covert, depending on whether they have been elicited through direct/indirect approaches or offered consciously/unconsciously (Garrett 2010:37-52; Llamas & Watt 2014:610-2). Kristiansen (2009:187-9; 2015:110-2) advocates the exclusivity of covert, as opposed to overt, attitudes as a driving force of language change, and therefore, linguistic behavior after his investigations of multiple Nordic societies. By contrast, more recent studies validate the effectiveness of the direct method, demonstrating that individual linguistic behavior is motivated by overt language attitudes (e.g. Otheguy & Zentella 2012:110; Wang 2017:153; Hawkey 2020:27-8; Monka, Quist & Skovse 2020:189-92; Elordieta & Romera 2021:290 for a number of languages and sociolinguistic situations).

As regards the relationship between attitudes and dialect levelling, Cheshire et al. (1999:9) consider British schoolers' uniform attitudes towards supralocally diffusing variants to be "part of the mechanism of levelling". The opposite also holds true: Labov (1963:304) explains that adherence to local forms in Martha's Vineyard corresponds to speakers' solidarity towards notions of insider/outsider. Likewise, as Muxika-Loitzate (2017:39) reports, Basque-Spanish bilinguals from Zornotza with more positive attitudes towards Basque show a lesser degree of sibilant merger. However, there do not appear to have been (m)any studies that look into connections between variationism and language attitudes to account for non-contact-induced change in vernacular Basque (see Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2020 for attitudes to contact-induced phenomena). As a result, Haddican (2003:32) calls for "a more thorough understanding [...] of speakers' attitudes toward these varieties in order to understand [the] processes of change and dialect contact".

Turning now to what is known about attitudes to Basque³, matched- and verbal-guise experiments reveal that non-standard, vernacular varieties tend to be rated higher on both solidarity and professionalism scales than the standard (Amorrortu 2001:72; Echeverria 2003b:356; 2005:258; Gaminde 2007:13-5). In addition, standard-vernacular hybrids carry

³ In cases of social bilingualism and language revitalization, considerable attention has been paid to new speakers, i.e. "individuals with little-to-no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners" (O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015:1). However, because this speaker typology is not applicable to the sample in this study, only native speakers' attitudes will be discussed here.

stigma as indicators of speaker anonymity rather than legitimacy and authenticity (Amorrortu 2003:160; Woolard 2016:17). In line with Haugen (1966:932), these negative evaluations of the standard are more likely to be found in varieties with greater structural difference (Beola 2013:422-3). For example, Fernández Ulloa (1997:213) observes that the local Basque vernacular is assigned higher prestige in northern Biscay than Standard Basque or Spanish. Moreover, as suggested by Andersen (1988:70) and Fishman (1991:161) and later shown by Monka, Quist, and Skovse (2020:194), this homeward orientation tends to be stronger the more isolated the community arguably because this type of community is often more aware of the social salience of incoming supralocal variants. This may be one of the reasons why Ariztimuño (2010:93), amongst others, finds more localized forms in the less populous Ataun than in the socio-economically dominant Tolosa.

3. Research questions and hypotheses

Two research questions were formulated for this study. Firstly, *is LVA in Lezama Basque undergoing dialect levelling?* Significant change towards supralocal variants is predicted to occur from one generation to the other since LVA has been variously reported to be receding in neighboring rural and urban areas (see Ensunza 2015; Gaminde et al. 2018). However, the lack of more robust sociolinguistic studies and the less naturalistic data used complicate the applicability of previous findings to the present study. And secondly, *what social factors best explain the distribution of the variable?* Although age is hypothesized to be a strong main effect, the exact role of gender in Basque dialect levelling does not seem amenable to predictive generalization given the differing tendencies of innovation and conservatism shown by both Basque males and females (see section 2.1.). Additionally, as a result of the absence of consensus in studies that relate language variation to attitudes or group affiliations through overt methods, there is no formal hypothesis concerning the effects of language attitudes on the use of LVA.

4. Method

4.1. Speakers

A total of 20 lifelong Lezamans were analyzed for this study, divided into four groups consisting of 5 participants each according to age and gender: Adult Females (AFs), Adult Males (AMs), Young Females (YFs), and Young Males (YMs). The younger generation, aged 16-21 (mean = 19.1; standard deviation = 2.08), was schooled in Basque-medium education. Adults, aged 48-55 (mean = 53.2; standard deviation = 2.49), went to school when only Spanish was allowed and were alphabetized in Basque later in life. The two generations acquired Basque at home and socialized

both Basque and Spanish outside the household at similar rates⁴. A breakdown of each speaker's background and coding can be found in Table 1.

Age	Gender	Education	Code
20	Female	Tertiary (completing)	YF1
21	Female	Tertiary (compl.)	YF2
20	Female	Tertiary (compl.)	YF3
17	Female	Post-secondary (compl.)	YF4
16	Female	Post-secondary (compl.)	YF5
21	Male	Tertiary (compl.)	YM1
21	Male	Tertiary (compl.)	YM2
21	Male	Tertiary (compl.)	YM3
17	Male	Post-secondary (compl.)	YM4
17	Male	Post-secondary (compl.)	YM5
55	Female	Post-secondary	AF1
54	Female	Tertiary	AF2
55	Female	Post-secondary	AF3
50	Female	Tertiary	AF4
55	Female	Post-secondary	AF5
52	Male	Tertiary	AM1
55	Male	Post-secondary	AM2
55	Male	Post-secondary	AM3
53	Male	Tertiary	AM4
48	Male	Post-secondary	AM5

Table 1. Speaker groups and coding

The sample of 5 participants per cell represented 1.25% of the larger Basque-speaking population in Lezama (1,600 Basque speakers out of 2,383 inhabitants in the year 2020) – this is in keeping with L. Milroy and Gordon's (2003:28) recommended participant number per speaker category for sample representativeness. All participants were native speakers of the local Basque vernacular⁵; were born, grew up, and lived in Lezama at the time of the interview; and had some (or are completing) post-secondary education. This level of formal education was selected due

⁴ This ensures the condition of continuity in the degree of language socialisation in the speech community that, as Nance (2015:570-3) warns, may weaken the validity of the apparent-time hypothesis (Labov 1994:45-54) in contexts of language shift

⁵ Only native speakers were selected: according to Yrizar (1991:587) and *Euskararen Datu-Basea* (Soziolinguistika Klusterra 2021), 88% and 63.3% of Lezamans were L1 Basque speakers in 1970 and 2001 respectively. Likewise, native Basque speakers have variously been shown to use more Basque outside the household (Soziolinguistika Klusterra 2019:15), which makes them representative agents of prospective language change (Marshall 2004:228-9; Fagyal et al. 2010:2077).

to its representativeness within the community: 51.07% of Lezamans had some level of post-secondary education in 2019, although no age specifications were available (EUSTAT 2021b). In addition, higher educational level and income have nowadays been linked to higher rates of Basque socialization outside the household (Soziolinguistika Klusterra 2019:32). This is important because language socialization with age peers has been deemed central to the vernacular reorganization that promotes ongoing language change (Labov 2001:415; Denis et al. 2019:62).

4.2. Data

The data collection method in this study was twofold. First, semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews in dyads ($N = 12$) were recorded that brought together two participants in the same speaker group in order to elicit what Sankoff (1980:54) calls “everyday speech”. In order to control for inter-speaker differences, one participant in each group had a second interview with another peer. For speaker comparability, only singular determiners after a high vowel were considered provided they were in the accusative, ergative, dative, sociative, and inessive cases⁶. All acoustically unintelligible tokens were excluded from the analysis. With these bounds, the corpus for this study consisted of 1,513 tokens – these were impressionistically annotated by a native speaker of Lezama Basque using ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenberg 2019) in two separate transcription sessions within a month of each other to avoid intra-rater variability. All tokens were transcribed in the same way both times, and two variants were identified: local [e] and supralocal [a].

And second, a language attitude and use questionnaire was administered upon completion of the (last) interview to measure each participant’s solidarity towards the town and the local vernacular in accordance with the tripartite model of attitudes. The questionnaire contained Likert-scale items formulated on a 5-point continuum from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The present study considered 6 items that addressed opinions on a variety of levels (after Odriozola Gonzalez 2014:152-9; Lujanbio 2012:83-4; Hawkey 2018:80-100): the town’s suitability as a place to live in, the degree of delight at being a local, town pride, intentions to stay in town (young groups only), no regret at having stayed in town (adult groups only), the importance of using the local vernacular, and teaching in the local vernacular in school. To calculate the solidarity index, responses to each item were averaged and a value from 0-5 obtained: the higher the value the more positive evaluations of the town and its vernacular; the lower the value the more negative evaluations.

⁶ Further criteria include the exclusion of underlyingly non-high vowels as triggers for LVA and words ending in *-oi/-ai*. According to Zuazo and Goiti (2016:21), the former do not trigger LVA in Lezama Basque, and the latter show variability in terms of triggering LVA.

5. Analysis and results

5.1. Statistical analysis

Two different mixed-effects models were performed using the *glmer* and *lm* functions in the *lme4* package (Bates et al. 2015) in R (R Core Team 2021). For the first model, a generalized linear mixed effects regression (*glmer*) was applied where LVA⁷ was set as the dependent variable, age group, gender and the interaction between the two as fixed factors and speaker as a random factor. A parallel model was computed where age group was substituted by speaker age, but, because both showed similar performances, the simpler model (i.e. the one that considered age group rather than speaker age) was selected. Post hoc within factor contrasts were conducted with estimated marginal means (*emms*), with Tukey-method correction applied to results for multiple comparisons. For the second model, a *glmer* and, complementarily, a linear mixed effects regression (*lmers*) were carried out separately. The former included LVA as the dependent variable, solidarity index and the interaction between age group and gender as fixed factors and speaker as a random factor. The latter set LVA as the dependent and solidarity index as the independent variable.

5.2. Age and gender analysis

Realizations of singular determiners after high vowels are shown in Table 2, with incidence numbers and percentages of both the supralocal variant [a] and the local variant [e] by speaker out of all 1,513 tokens. The occurrences for the two interview sessions in speakers coded *I* in each group are also given. However, in order to analyze the social distribution of LVA, group values are also needed. Table 3 summarizes the mean group values of the local variant along with standard deviation coefficients. AFs exhibit the highest values of [e] (\bar{x} 87.89), while AMs, YMs, and YFs score similar values: \bar{x} 73.06, 72.29, and 71.81, respectively. In addition, both adult groups, AFs and AMs, behave more homogeneously, with smaller standard deviation (σ 4.66 and 9.22, respectively). By contrast, young groups have more dispersed members: the standard deviation values for YFs and YMs are 20.39 and 20.69, respectively.

The data from Table 3 are presented visually in Figure 2, which shows the intergenerational development of use rate of [e]-forms. The square-shaped line represents females, the diamond-shaped line males, and the triangular-shaped line the mean of both genders. A downward trend in favor of [a]-forms is apparent in the direction of the triangular-shaped line, lending further support to the hypothesis that dialect levelling of LVA is underway.

⁷ A more detailed categorisation of linguistic factors (e.g. number and case marker attached to the target of assimilation) was excluded from the present study because it aims to be a preliminary exploration of the social factors conducive to dialect levelling in one linguistic variable in Basque.

A more pronounced decline is observed for females while males are fixed on similar values from one generation to the other.

Speaker	N/%	[a]	[e]	Speaker	N/%	[a]	[e]
AF1a*	N	8	62	YF1a	N	19	64
	%	11.43	88.57		%	22.89	77.11
AF2	N	11	59	YF2	N	40	23
	%	15.71	84.29		%	63.49	36.51
AF1b	N	4	70	YF1b	N	12	54
	%	5.41	94.59		%	18.18	81.81
AF3	N	5	50	YF3	N	22	43
	%	9.09	90.91		%	33.85	66.15
AF4	N	15	64	YF4	N	6	50
	%	18.99	81.01		%	10.71	89.29
AF5	N	4	36	YF5	N	18	64
	%	10	90		%	21.95	78.05
AM1a	N	13	43	YM1a	N	6	52
	%	23.21	76.79		%	10.34	89.66
AM2	N	18	45	YM2	N	32	32
	%	28.57	71.43		%	50	50
AM1b	N	12	47	YM1b	N	4	48
	%	20.43	79.66		%	7.69	92.31
AM3	N	16	50	YM3	N	5	43
	%	22.24	75.76		%	10.42	89.58
AM4	N	25	32	YM4	N	36	34
	%	43.86	56.14		%	51.43	48.57
AM5	N	13	46	YM5	N	14	44
	%	22.03	77.97		%	24.14	75.86

*Codes 1a and 1b indicate first and second interview sessions respectively
 Table 2. Variant realisations in numbers and percentages by speaker

	Adult (A)	Young (Y)
Female (F)	$\bar{x} = 87.89 / \sigma = 4.66$	$\bar{x} = 71.81 / \sigma = 20.39$
Male (M)	$\bar{x} = 73.06 / \sigma = 9.22$	$\bar{x} = 72.29 / \sigma = 20.69$

Table 3. Group values for local [e]

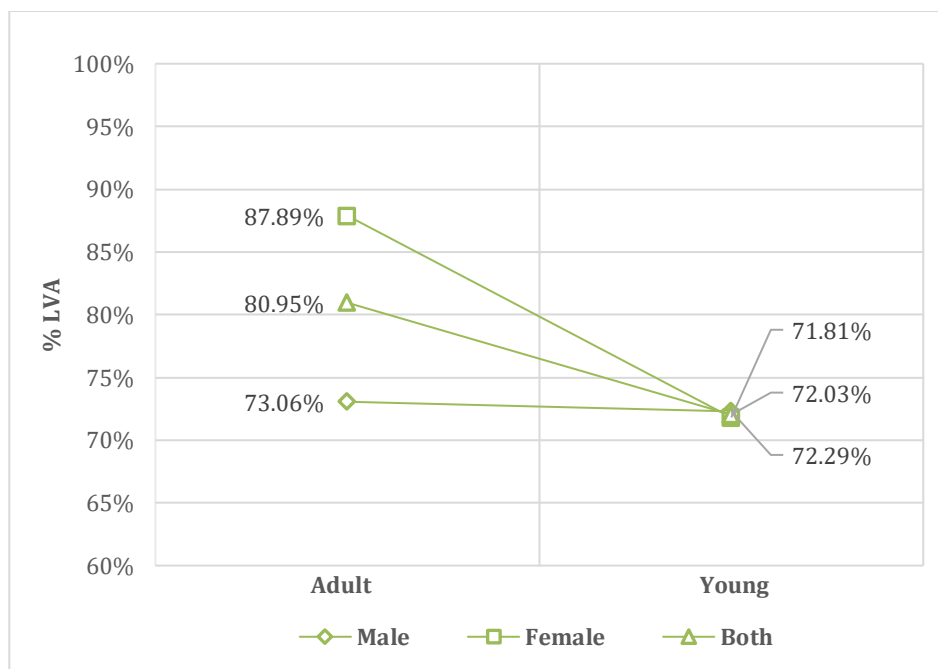


Figure 2. Local [e] by generation and gender

To test these tendencies statistically, a *glmr* model was run as specified in section 5.1., the results of which are indicated in Table 4. The model shows significant effects for both age group and gender ($p < .05$) – this confirms visual patterns and suggests that (i) young speakers and (ii) males in general are more likely to use [a]-forms. However, there are no significant effects for interaction between age group and gender as computed in the model ($p \geq .1$), pointing to a non-significant inclination to [a]-forms in YMs as compared to AMs. Post hoc analyses do not reveal any significant contrasts between any of the groups ($p \geq .1$), as outlined in Table 5.

Fixed effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	2.0239	0.3432	5.898	3.69e-09 ***
Age group: Y	-1.0757	0.4712	-2.283	0.0224 *
Gender: M	-1.0410	0.4711	-2.209	0.0271 *
AgegroupY:GenderM	1.1525	0.6590	1.749	0.0803

Notes: Signif. codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

Table 4. Summary of *glmr* model for LVA, with age group, gender, and the interaction of the two as fixed factors

Contrast	Estimate	SE	df	z.ratio	p.value
AF - YF	1.0757	0.471		2.283	0.1020
AF - AM	1.0410	0.471	Inf	2.209	0.1206
AF - YM	0.9641	0.475	Inf	2.030	0.1769
YF - AM	-0.0347	0.457	Inf	-0.076	0.9998
YF - YM	-0.1116	0.461	Inf	-0.242	0.9950
AM - YM	-0.0768	0.461		-0.167	0.9984

Results are given on the log odds ratio (not the response) scale.

P value adjustment: Tukey method for comparing a family of 4 estimates

Table 5. Post hoc factor contrasts for speaker groups, with Tukey-method adjustment

5.3. Language attitudes analysis

Table 6 breaks down the individual solidarity index by participant as indicators of attitudes towards the town and its vernacular, and Table 7 gives the mean group values for the solidarity index as well as standard deviation coefficients. Once again, AFs score the highest (\bar{x} 4.94) and have the most homogenous values (σ 0.08). AFs are followed by YMs and then YFs, who score lower solidarity indices (\bar{x} 4.27 and 4.07, respectively) with a higher degree of dispersion (σ 0.62 and 0.75). The AM mean is marginally the lowest (\bar{x} 4.03), although with more individual orientations members (σ 0.29). Overall, these results show strong attachment to local identifications, which become increasingly diffuse in the younger groups.

Speaker	Solidarity index	Speaker	Solidarity index
AF1	5	YF1	4.67
AF2	5	YF2	3
AF3	5	YF3	3.33
AF4	4.83	YF4	4.83
AF5	4.83	YF5	4.5
AM1	4.5	YM1	5
AM2	3.83	YM2	3.5
AM3	4	YM3	5
AM4	3.67	YM4	3.83
AM5	4.17	YM5	4

Table 6. Solidarity index values by participant

The glmr model that added the solidarity index as a factor, as summarized in Table 8, shows that the significant age group and gender effects from Table 4 fade away ($p > .1$) and that, again, there is no significant interaction between age group and gender ($p > .1$). However, the model shows highly significant effects for the solidarity index ($p < .001$), suggesting that when subjective factors are taken into consideration they have greater

explanatory value than macrosocial categories as regards LVA in Lezama Basque. Based on a *lmers*, Figure 3 describes the occurrences of [e]-forms as a function of the solidarity index. A highly positive correlation emerges ($R^2 = 0.818$): the higher the solidarity value, the more [e]-forms on average. Results from these models indicate that each participant's use of the local variant is significantly predicted by the solidarity index obtained from the attitude questionnaire.

	Adult (A)	Young (Y)
Female (F)	$\bar{x} = 4.94 / \sigma = 0.08$	$\bar{x} = 4.07 / \sigma = 0.75$
Male (M)	$\bar{x} = 4.03 / \sigma = 0.29$	$\bar{x} = 4.27 / \sigma = 0.62$

Table 7. Group values for solidarity

Fixed effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	-4.06570	0.78483	-5.180	2.21e-07 ***
Age group: Y	0.02317	0.27710	0.084	0.933
Gender: M	0.08651	0.27421	0.315	0.752
Solidarity	1.22361	0.15474	7.907	2.63e-15 ***
AgegroupY:GenderM	-0.21791	0.35829	-0.608	0.543

Notes: Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Table 8. Summary of glmr model for LVA, with age group, gender, the interaction of the two, and solidarity index as fixed factors

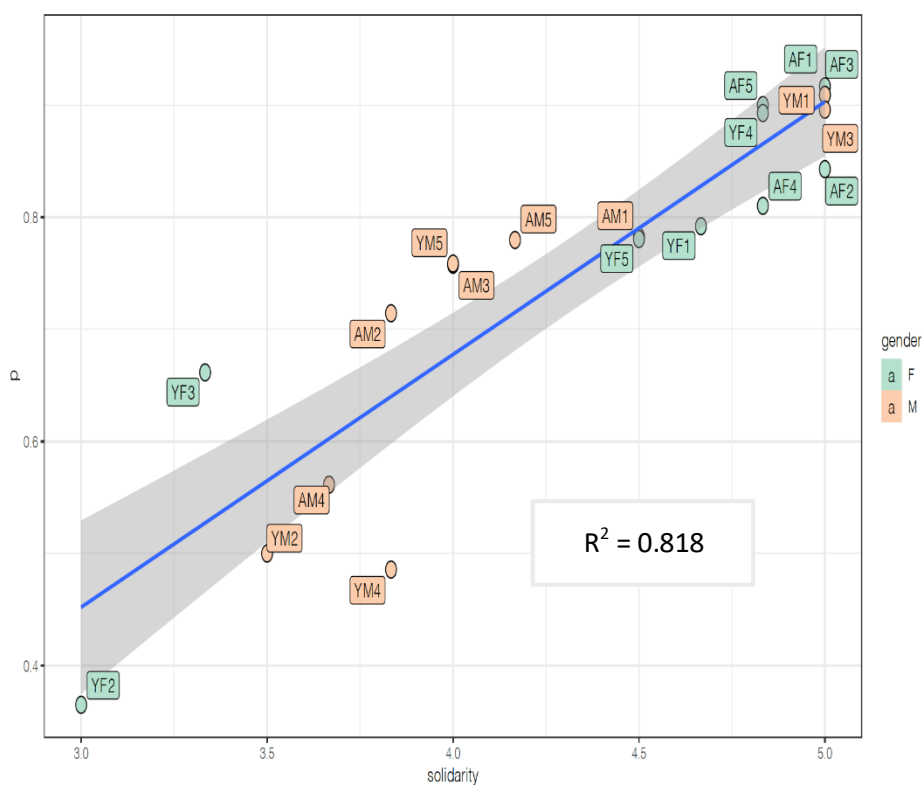


Figure 3. Linear regression between local [e] and solidarity index

6. Discussion

6.1. Age and gender at the crossroads of variation

In line with general trends of innovation and conservatism according to age (Eckert 1997:164; Labov 2001:454; Camino 2009:70), the most advanced use of the supralocal variant is found in the younger generation, although AMs show similar levels. This supports the initial prediction that age is a significant factor in explaining the recession of local variants. Taken together, then, AFs are the most conservative group with respect to resisting the change towards supralocalization, as indicated by the higher z-ratios in contrast comparisons of all groups with AFs (see Table 5). AFs' stronger adherence to the local variant may be accounted for in two complementary ways. Firstly, Basque females have been observed to evaluate the sociolinguistic rules that operate on a local level more positively than males (Fernández Ulloa 1997:213). The youngest of Fernández Ulloa's participants were approximately 48 years old when the data presented here were gathered – roughly equivalent to the youngest speakers in both adult groups in this study. García Mouton (2006:227-31) provides a possible explanation of such patterns: particularly less mobile, rural females may tend to orient themselves towards more local forms since these serve as a framework of prestigious language within the community as well as a status-seeking mechanism. These tendencies are borne out by comparable findings in rural communities (Borrego-Nieto 1981:15-6; Artzelus 2019:184-5; Al-Wer et al. 2020:16).

And secondly, there is the socio-historical aspect to Basque language socialization in the mid-20th century. In rural contexts where Basque remained less threatened by neighboring Romance languages (Fishman 1991:161), poor access to transportation and different social dynamics led to Basque females' confinement to local, domestic spheres (Ibáñez et al. 1994:145-6; Manterola 1994:38-9; Muñoz 2019:7). In addition, when out of town, females would work in service-related occupations that required the language of the urban masses: Spanish or French (Echeverria 2003a:407). By contrast, in accordance with Douglass (1976:52-3), males would find themselves in multiple scenarios of dialect contact such as factories, taverns, sports events, and county government meetings. Thus, it seems unreasonable to believe females would actively participate in promoting the diffusion of supralocal variants arguably because, as Bloomfield (1933:46) puts it, “density of communication” results in the “most important differences of speech”. This view is supported by Camino's (2009:299) observation that those with greater exposure to other varieties (i.e. males in this case) were and are more likely to engage in innovation dissemination. As regards LVA, Gaminde et al. (2018:38-9) confirm Camino's claim as they report that local variants are more used by (older) females than males in Larrabetzu. Similar accounts have been proposed, for instance, for the age-graded distribution of stigmatized

variants in K'iche' Mayan speakers in Western Guatemala: adults seem to refrain from using local forms once they enter the supralocal marketplace in an attempt to avoid stereotyping and status loss (Romero 2009:194-6).

On the contrary, YFs have started to distance themselves from their adult counterparts relatively rapidly, though non-significantly. This suggests that YFs have started to conform to general trends of leading supralocalizing patterns with regard to LVA (Labov 2001:274; Cheshire 2002:430; L. Milroy & Gordon 2003:103). In fact, the most relevant societal change from one generation to another has been the emergence of Standard Basque, and with it, the consolidation of Basque in (primarily public) institutions and the marketplace after the 90s. In the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), nearly 10% of private job positions required Basque whereas English was demanded in 57% of the posts at the turn of the century (Gardner 2000:36). Conversely, Basque has now been hypothesized to be increasingly important in the form of language proficiency certificates (Echeverria 2005:250), and it is regarded as a tool of “upward social mobility” which “marks academic community-belonging” (Pérez-Izaguirre 2018:14). An overall increase of 13.5% in Basque use at the workplace in the period 1991-2011 attests to this (Basque Government 2013:251). This, in conjunction with more frequent mobility patterns, has resulted in more contact of small towns like Lezama with other speakers who may apply LVA to differing degrees or may not apply it at all, both orally and in writing. One such example is that, according to Cenoz (2001:49), 80% of the bilingual children in the BAC watched television in Basque in the year 2000, with most probably no trace of LVA.

Under such circumstances, one may predict, following Trudgill (1986:98), that the now socially marked LVA would lose out to the absence thereof. This outcome is particularly likely given that (i) Basque has a fairly phonetic spelling with stable sound-to-graph correspondences (Cenoz & Bereziartua 2016:1235) and (ii) reading the only standard-spelling alternative ⟨a⟩ may prime speakers to abandon local [e]-pronunciations (Hernández-Campoy 2003:26; Sayers 2009:48-51; Artzelus 2020:75). However, only YFs, not YMs, appear to be influenced by these changes. Therefore, potential explanations may be found, I suggest, in females' overall tendencies of greater linguistic accommodation in face-to-face interaction as compared to males (E. Jones et al. 1999:148-9; Mulac et al. 2013:27-9; Van Hofwegen 2015:41; see Palomares et al. 2016:131-5 for cases of similar accommodative patterns in males and females). Many socio-psychological studies (D. Jones 1980:196; Seale 2006:352-3) have shown that female speech tends to be more co-operative and listener-oriented and that females generally build relationships around the objectives of showing solidarity and providing support. That is, these are the very same conditions that bring about linguistic accommodation in contact situations that characterize female speech conduct (see section 6.3.).

As a consequence, if, as has been demonstrated, the general tendency is towards the increase in [a]-forms, then YFs appear to be more prone to lead the change and the process of levelling out [e]-forms now that prestige orientations have been more clearly established (J. Milroy et al. 1994:329; Labov 2001:274; Cheshire 2002:426). Little is known about the social evaluations of LVA in the past: whereas LVA was treated as a “linguistic corruption” (Zuloaga 2019:603, my translation) in the literary tradition, it seems possible that ordinary speakers would be relatively unaware of the stigma (Zuloaga personal communication October 20, 2020; Ensunza personal communication December 2, 2020). Further evidence for socio-psychological accommodation in females rather than males is to be found, on a more global level, in the audience shares of popular radio stations. As Del Amo Castro (2019:26) informs, the majority of *Gaztea* listeners are Gipuzkoan and Biscayan females aged 14-19 and 25-34. This may be a source of non-LVA forms towards which YFs may want to orient due to the associations of modern and dynamic youth culture with the radio station (Elordui 2016:36; see also Maegaard et al. 2013:27; Stuart-Smith et al. 2013:528-30 for a discussion on media influence on language change). Whether proliferation of supralocal forms correlates with media influence would be worth investigating in future work.

Additionally, according to a large-scale survey of primarily Basque-speaking areas (Soziolinguistika Klusterra 2017:46-7), more females than males use Basque in the street in all age groups but old people, with differences of 6% and 2.7% in young and adult people respectively. Children score the highest overall frequencies as 3 out of 4 children in the selected areas use Basque as the main language for socialization. If these socialization practices are kept relatively constant, I argue, the majority of females (as well as males) in the future will be active Basque speakers, and by extension, likely linguistic accommodators. Similarly, on a more local level, Larrabetzu – Lezama was not sampled in the survey – shows more telling results: 60.10% of females speak Basque in the street while only 49.50% of males choose Basque. In state-run *euskaltegis* (i.e. extracurricular Basque-language schools for adults) in Txorierrri, the majority of students have been female (64.08% on average and 71.61% in C1 courses, the highest level on offer⁸) for the last 5 years. Therefore, local females in Lezama appear to be more aware of the socio-economic benefits of mastering Standard Basque, if only for academic purposes.

With this information in mind, it may come as a surprise that, as shown in Figure 2, the gender difference decreases remarkably in the young groups: “as the new forms become more widespread and speakers become consciously aware of them, sex differentiation becomes more marked” (Cheshire 2002:427). This is most probably the result of a shift in the socio-evaluative framework associated with LVA after the implementation of Standard Basque: gender differentiation is present between AMs and AFs due to what may be a continuation of the patterns of very gender-segregated older generations (see Cameron 2005:25-6;

⁸ These data were kindly provided by the Txorierrri County Council secretaries.

Mehta & Strough 2009:204-7), but YMs and YFs are caught in the middle of reversing adult dynamics. This may also explain why the distribution of Lezama LVA does not conform to Cameron's (2005:42-8) contention that gender differences in linguistic behavior are still prominent in late adolescence and young adulthood as the effects of the teenage peak of gender-segregated activities and relationships weaken into the less segregated social spheres of middle age. Of course, it is not certain whether YMs and YFs will continue to behave as shown in the data, but that seems to be the most likely outcome. Interestingly enough, the fading away of gender differences in the young speakers is noteworthy in view of the parallel distributions observed for other variables in new speakers of Basque (Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2016:200; 2019:136). However, to my knowledge, no study to date has specifically reported on the neutralization of gender-differential patterns in both old and new speakers of Basque. Such patterns have also been found for (native) speakers of Middleborough English, which has sometimes been interpreted as females' attempt to converge with male speech (Llamas 2007:595). Despite this, Llamas goes on to remark that, as appears to be the case with the Lezama data, an overall increase in supralocal variants may simply illustrate easier adoption of supralocally diffusing forms.

Another aspect that remains unresolved derives from the relative male stability. The male resistance to levelling trends resonates with gender differences in the distribution of other phonological variables in English (e.g. Clarke 1991:115; Watt 2000:95; Llamas 2007:592; Jansen 2017:11-3). As Cheshire (2002:427) asks, however, are YMs refraining from using [a]-variants more because they identify them as feminine or non-local, or are they truly an instance of generational stability? Higher standard deviation coefficients in YMs than AMs (Table 3) suggest that no pure stability is taking place, but instead some YMs behave more locally than others, even to the point that they equal AFs⁹. This contrasts with Lujanbio's (2016:161) data, where males in the youngest group are in the vanguard of the movement into [a]-forms in Araitz-Betelu. However, Araitz-Betelu falls within the Navarrese dialect area, away from Western Basque, where most studies of LVA have been conducted (e.g. Aurrekoetxea 2006; Ensunza 2015; Gaminde et al. 2018; Eguskiza 2019); and it is in direct contact with other vernaculars with no LVA or more restricted domains of applicability of LVA. Likewise, research into Navarrese varieties shows that other prestige identifications may be in effect that place males in the lead of convergence with neighboring vernaculars (Haddican 2003:31; Lujanbio 2012:91-2).

All in all, the main driving force for what appears to be a change from above (Labov 2001:272-5) is, I suggest, the shifting status identifications that have resulted from the socio-economic advantages of adopting forms from Standard Basque. In addition, the fact that it is YFs with at least post-secondary education that are leading the levelling out of local variants

⁹ Although high standard deviation coefficients are also found in YFs, individually only YF4 scores as high as AFs and the most local YMs.

reaffirms previous knowledge on the social mechanism of supralocally diffusing change from above (Labov 2001:356; Regan 2020:181). Therefore, considering the rapid recession of LVA across many Western Basque areas (Aurrekoetxea 2006; Ensunza 2015; Gaminde et al. 2018), it seems that the most fitting interpretation for LVA in Lezama Basque is one of participation in the broader process of regional dialect levelling (Kerswill 2002:187). Another factor to consider in explaining the motivation of the emerging supralocalization of [a]-forms is expansion diffusion, in the sense of Britain (2004:623), from the speech of those who have already adopted a number of innovative, supralocal variants in other influential areas to those who are predisposed to adopt them in Lezama (i.e. YFs).

Based on data from casual conversations, this study provides further insight into speculations over the possible socio-stylistic reallocation of [a]- and [e]-variants (see Britain & Trudgill 1999:247-50 for an overview). Previous studies show a decline in [e]-forms in Spanish-to-Basque translation tasks, but do not comment on findings from casual speech (Ensunza personal communication December 2, 2020). Comparisons between elicited data from Busturialdea (Ensunza 2015:151-2) and Larrabetzu (Gaminde et al. 2018:38-9) and unmonitored data in the present study reveal stark differences in the loss of the local variant¹⁰, suggesting the possibility of young speakers refunctionalizing the competing variants according to perceived communication style and/or local identification (see section 6.2. below). In line with Dyer (2002:112) and Moore and Carter (2017:276-7), this tentative hypothesis is supported by the remarkable degree of heterogeneity in linguistic behavior that matches speakers' attitudinal data. This may also attest to the social salience of the variable in terms of identity indexation (cf. Rącz 2013:37; Auer 2014:10); nevertheless, further study is needed to better understand the awareness and social meaning of variants that are undergoing what seems to be the initial stages of dialect levelling.

6.2. Attitudes vis-à-vis supralocalisation of LVA

As Table 8 shows, the effects of the solidarity index were found to be the most significant in explaining the variability of LVA in Lezama Basque. This finding contributes to previous studies that have demonstrated that overt language attitudes collected through self-report, direct methods are likely to predict linguistic behavior (Otheguy & Zentella 2012; Wang 2017; Hawkey 2020; Monka, Quist & Skovse 2020; Elordieta & Romera 2021), and it also provides more solid grounding for future hypotheses of attitudinal factors as motivators of linguistic behavior in Basque. As a result, one tentative conclusion to be drawn from these data is that language attitudes to the town and its vernacular are tightly connected with the direction of the regional dialect levelling that LVA is undergoing.

¹⁰ On most occasions, the intergenerational recession of LVA is statistically significant in Larrabetzu and various locations in Busturialdea, with some younger speakers exhibiting categorical use of the supralocal variant.

Whether attitudes may help, more or less effectively, in explaining diffusion patterns of other linguistic variables in Basque remains understudied, at least to the extent presented here (cf. Lujanbio 2012:88). These results invite further exploration of attitudinal factors in language variation that ties in with recent approaches to conceptualizing place belonging as both fixed and dynamic in spatio-temporal terms (Marshall 2004:217-21; Britain 2016:218; Monka, Quist & Skovse 2020:174-6).

Higher heterogeneity rates found in the solidarity index of young speakers (Table 7) may be a response to their substantial degree of exposure to more variability in Basque, especially stylistic and geographical, which has been facilitated by the emergence of Basque schooling and media in the last decades. However, it should be borne in mind that Standard Basque pronunciation has yet to reach social acceptance arguably under the threat of a perceived loss of the local vernacular (Martínez de Luna & Azurmendi 2005:87; Oñederra 2016:134-6). Instead, the model for pronouncing Standard Basque that has become most widespread integrates features from both the local vernacular and spelling pronunciation (Urla 2012:94-101; Ensunza 2016:87). Although these accounts are complementary with the overt prestige associated with various vernacular Basque forms and the lack of standard-vernacular hybrids (Amorrortu 2001; 2003; Gaminde 2007), the Lezama data suggest that an opposing trend is underway: standard variants are being increasingly integrated into speech alongside local variants.

In line with Andersen (1988:74-5), some young Lezamans (YF2, YF3, YM2, and YM4) appear to have started to engage in an attitudinal shift from endocentric to exocentric, which matches their linguistic shift in the same direction. Other such examples include the Lumbee community in North Carolina, where the adoption of supralocal monophthongal (ay) is casting out local raised realizations (Schilling-Estes 2000:166), and the Danish locality of Vollsmose, where speakers with an outward orientation are more likely to adopt multiethnic forms from Copenhagen (Monka, Quist & Skovse 2020:194-5). Overall, relatively high solidarity indices vis-à-vis YFs' movement away from local forms and a mismatch between what (older) studies say about evaluations of Standard Basque forms and which forms Lezama youths are using may indicate that linguistic exocentrism precedes ideological, attitudinal exocentrism in the case of LVA. This reinforces the idea put forward earlier that Lezama LVA is likely to recede in the future. Moreover, the strong correlation between attitudes and LVA appears to exclude the possibility that the exocentric shift in linguistic behavior has proceeded with little "potential signaling of disloyalty to local norms" (Foulkes & Docherty 1999:14).

6.3. Future prospects of dialect levelling in Basque

In order to evaluate which short- and long-term sociolinguistic situations Basque vernaculars are likely to be facing, a more comprehensive mechanical approach needs to be adopted that considers the socio-

psychological processes and frequency of interaction as causes of change in the linguistic output (Trudgill 1986:39-42; Niedzielski & Giles 1996:338; Labov 2001:506; Torgersen & Kerswill 2004:25). Although Auer and Hinskens (2005:344-51) do not find sufficient evidence to confirm claims that short-term accommodation relates directly to dialect levelling, findings in later studies (Fagyal et al. 2010:2076-7; Schwenter & Waltereit 2010:94-5; Maegaard et al. 2013:28; Nilsson 2015:12-4) point to the role of interpersonal accommodation in explaining the direction of language change.

As explained in section 6.1., females tend to have a more prominent role in speech accommodation to interlocutors. They have also been described as pioneering dialect levelling in England (Sayers 2009:141-6) in connection with assumptions that mobile speakers with a higher number of contacts with outsiders participate more profusely in diffusing levelled or incoming variants (Trudgill 1986:57; Kerswill 2003:225). Along with females' tendency to speak Basque outside domestic spheres more often, a young female lead in the use of [a]-forms in the data presented here gives the general impression that these claims may be applicable to the context of Lezama, especially in the long run. Likewise, occupations and activities which are more susceptible to verbal communication have been observed to favor levelled speech (Kerswill 1987:28; Holmes 1997:199; Chambers 2002:195). Therefore, if it turns out that this group of speakers consists primarily of females in the Lezama area, they reasonably become more likely targets to “bring about short-term accommodation [...], which in turn can then lead to long-term accommodation, accent convergence and change” (Altendorf & Watt 2004:184).

In the 2015-2020 period, women have been increasingly occupying the majority of posts in public administration in the BAC, where high command of Basque is required (see Appendix 1 below). There are considerably more females in all areas but local bodies and the University of the Basque Country; and even so, differences in these two areas have come to even out in the last years. Concerning Txorierrri, figures in Appendix 2 show the number of new contracts in 2020 in areas involving verbal communication¹¹ by gender according to classifications by different employment regulations (data for each contract type have been excluded for clarity). Females are in the lead in most areas, which suggests a multiplicity of scenarios for interpersonal accommodation especially on females' part. Following Sayers (2009:145), these circumstances prompt females to be more sensitive to their ‘audience’ and reduce localism, which in turn is reminiscent of Moonwomon's (1989:244) contention that the linguistic behavior, especially, of females “is interpretable within the social and economic possibilities of their own communities”.

¹¹ The areas excluded were: (CNAE) agriculture, extraction industries, manufacturing, energy and power suppliers, wholesale commerce and repairing, transportation and inventory, real estate and construction, and scientific and technical professionals, non-localised companies; and (CNO) managing, science and intelligence, agriculture and forestry, manufacturing and construction, installation and maintenance, and non-qualified workers.

These trends need to be understood in a wider context of short- and long-term mobility in Lezama. A survey of local movements in Basque-speaking areas reveals that, amongst the active population in Lezama, there has been a decline from 28% to 16.4% of locals who work in town from 2001 to 2011; and of students over 16, the proportion of Lezamans studying in town in 2001 (14.6%) has dropped to 0% in 2011 (Gaindegia 2014:15-8). This already implies several daily contact scenarios for Lezamans irrespective of gender, yet an added condition for contact with other varieties is derived from the issue of housing prices, frequently mentioned by young speakers in the interviews and addressed by Haddican (2007:683-4) in an attempt to find an explanation for his data. Young people transitioning into the job market are facing rising housing prices in Biscay¹²: in 2001-2016, free housing saw an increase of 38.83%, state-subsidized housing one of 119.58%, and rental housing one of 45.33% (EUSTAT 2021a). In the same time period, the average yearly income in Lezama rose from 16,086€ to 23,871€ while that of Biscay rose from 12,321€ to 19,818€. In addition, the housing growth in Lezama in the last decade (3.03%) does not appear to have been enough to accommodate locals' needs for new housing, hence the loss of 3.6% of the town's population. By contrast, housing rates have increased 29.19% in Biscay from 2010 (EUSTAT 2021a; 2021b).

Therefore, young Lezamans are presented with two alternatives: either they stay in their parents' house until they have saved enough money to compete with adults on the housing market or they buy/rent a house outside Lezama, where they can easily find more and cheaper options. For those moving away, sustained contact with native and non-native speakers of Basque is expected, since new speakers have begun to outnumber native speakers in the youngest generations – new speakers constitute 54.3% and 48% of Basque speakers in the 16-24 and 25-35 age groups respectively (Basque Government 2016:40). These tend to be more influenced by supralocal, standard-like forms (Rodríguez-Ordoñez 2016:166; 2019:144) as well as contact-induced forms from Spanish/French (Muxika-Loitzate 2017:39). Additionally, native speakers of Basque with new speaker parents have also been shown to follow these patterns, even against the backdrop of high degrees of Basque language socialization (Eguskiza et al. 2017:114-6). This seems to contrast with the appeal to legitimacy and authenticity associated with vernacularization reported for new speakers (Jaffe 2015:41-2; Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2016:18-20). However, these dynamics may, perhaps, just indicate how salient certain forms are in a given community, as proposed by Rác (2013:148) and Erker (2017a:15-6; 2017b:73-4).

The rapid increase in new speakers of Basque has led to what Wray and Grace (2007:550) label “exoteric communication”, as opposed to “esoteric communication”. According to them, continuous esoteric (i.e. inward-facing and characterized by child acquirers) communication results in

¹² Data for Lezama are not available.

complexification in the linguistic structure, while exoteric (i.e. outward-facing and characterized by adult learners) communication is conducive to simpler structures. These connections have been argued for extensively in the literature (see Trudgill 2011; Nettle 2012), because language varieties which are “customarily learned and used by adult non-native speakers will come under pressure to become more learnable by the adult mind, as contrasted with the child mind” (Wray & Grace 2007:557). This is certainly true of Basque nowadays and may serve as yet another explanation as to why such a complex feature as LVA is likely to level out. As a consequence, if the outcomes of the dialect levelling of LVA are to be understood beyond the social variables studied here, future research will have to look at comparisons between old and new speakers of Basque based on fine-grained descriptions of the complex morphological constraints on LVA.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on an apparent-time study informed by research into dialect levelling and language attitudes, the present investigation has shown that LVA, a panregional non-standard phonological feature, is undergoing a generational movement into supralocal variants in Lezama Basque. This result confirms initial predictions and provides further insight into the study of LVA using naturalistic data from sociolinguistic interviews. Based on evidence from previous studies (Aurrekoetxea 2006; Ensunza 2015; Gaminde et al. 2018), Lezama, too, seems to be participating in the wider process of regional dialect levelling of Western Basque varieties. And although this supralocalization phenomenon is recent in Lezama LVA, the findings presented here would suggest that the local variant is likely to recede soon due to a nascent exocentric shift in language attitudes presumably promoted by, amongst others, sustained contact with Standard Basque in younger generations, social pressures to conform to the standard that influence especially young females, and interpersonal accommodation patterns that favor supralocal speech.

Moreover, this study has found that overt attitudes serve as reliable predictors of linguistic behavior in LVA, in line with Wang (2017), Hawkey (2020) and Elordieta and Romera (2021). This finding is supported by the high correlation observed between the use of local variants and language attitudes obtained through an attitude questionnaire that considers the tripartite model of attitudes (Garrett, Coupland & Williams 2003). This may thus contribute to a more objective operationalization of subjective factors as social motivators of language variation. Of course, more exhaustive tools of attitude elicitation are still needed to generalize the applicability of these claims to a number of variables with social evaluations that are comparable as well as diametrically opposed to those of LVA in Western Basque. This, together with a more detailed examination of (i) the linguistic factors that may condition the incidence of LVA and (ii) a broader participant sample,

would allow for more robust observations on the social meanings and direction of LVA.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Persons employed in the BAC public administration by gender in 2015-2020 (EUSTAT 2021c)

	All	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total		126.740	130.916	132.442	134.925	139.569	139.885
Male		49.046	50.239	50.249	50.464	51.456	51.670
Female		77.694	80.677	82.193	84.461	88.113	88.215
Basque Government							
Total		82.085	85.389	86.405	88.137	90.875	90.374
Male		26.085	27.079	27.022	27.338	27.710	27.814
Female		56.000	58.310	59.383	60.799	63.165	62.560
Provincial Councils							
Total		10.582	10.623	10.842	11.037	11.523	11.708
Male		4.532	4.550	4.677	4.712	4.841	4.867
Female		6.050	6.073	6.165	6.325	6.682	6.841
Local Bodies							
Total		24.943	25.593	25.800	26.114	26.818	27.170
Male		13.706	13.868	13.739	13.703	13.889	13.847
Female		11.237	11.725	12.061	12.411	12.929	13.323
Nonprofit and Foundations							
Total		2.369	2.515	2.594	2.754	3.304	3.555
Male		1.167	1.214	1.251	1.331	1.565	1.704
Female		1.202	1.301	1.343	1.423	1.739	1.851
Others							
Total		369	371	372	373	425	434
Male		171	172	165	170	185	184
Female		198	199	207	203	240	250
University of the Basque Country							
Total		6.392	6.425	6.429	6.510	6.624	6.644
Male		3.385	3.356	3.395	3.210	3.266	3.254
Female		3.007	3.069	3.034	3.300	3.358	3.390

Appendix 2: New contracts in areas that involve high degrees of verbal communication in Txorierra by gender in 2020 (Lanbide 2021)

Area	Total	Male	Female
CNAE classification			
Hotel industry	3766	1016	2750
Information and communication	1028	685	343
Finance and insurance	64	19	45
Administration	3631	1799	1832
Public administration	160	54	106
Education	1202	400	802
Health activities and social services	4519	965	3554
Arts and entertainment	1839	1448	391
Housekeeping and maintenance	225	16	209
CNO classification			
Accountancy, administration workers and other office workers	1927	634	1293
Salespersons and workers in the restaurant business and support services	6326	1978	4348