



Basque Writing 12

Found In Translation



Literary translation is a two way street: it is used to bring home what is international and to take abroad what is local. It is a passage, but it is not foolish or aseptic. According to **Maria Colera**, *"when translating small languages, the question is what literary system makes the decisions: are they in the hands of the small language or the metropolis? We receive most of the philosophical paradigms from imperial languages, and that is why I think that it is important to translate also from our non-hegemonic languages, to be able to think and question the main world view from different perspectives"*.

Translation is absolutely necessary for Basque literature. Firstly, it brings universal literature within reach of Basque speakers. Secondly, because this language that has no linguistic family and so needs to build bridges to other languages.

We want to believe that our language can be **Found in translation**, instead of *Lost in translation*.

Translators **Iñaki Mendiguren** and **Sarah Turtle** compare translating to bridge-building; bridges to connect each other, to enrich each other, to learn from each other. They think that Basque literature has a difficult time ahead, but not more difficult than Spanish and French literatures have.

Garazi Arrula is a member of EIZIE's (Association of Translators, Correctors and Interpreters of Basque Language) managerial staff. The association is composed of 400 professionals for whom the word is their tool of their trade, "it's the dearest thing for some, and a tool, a treasure or a skill for others". She highlights the importance of the effort that the association makes to translate

from other languages into Basque and from Basque into other languages.

Translator and professor **Elizabete Manterola** has created The Catalogue of Basque Literature, which shows that Basque books can be now read in 40 target languages. The success of children and young adult literature is particularly remarkable, as a lot of works of that kind are translated, mainly into Spanish. Bernardo Atxaga is the most translated author, and in most cases, the books have been directly translated from Basque into the target language. However, there have been times when the translations have been carried out through a third language, even though it is not advisable.

Aiora Jaka is also a translator, as well as being a professor. She compares translators to hauliers: they carry the merchandise, but never touch it. However, reality tells her that every single translation is subjective, biased and adapted according to vested interests. If power relationships are unbalanced, manipulation appears between the source

language and the target language. Colonialist countries used to translate European texts into indigenous languages to subdue the crowds and vice versa. When they translated indigenous works, they transmitted the native's savage and uncultured image into the colonial language, since texts are always rewritten from a hegemonic position. Translating is never a neutral activity.

In an interview with the German translator **Petra Elser**, who also works with Basque language, she mentions the importance of theorising, and how theory can help professionals in practice. Elser complains about the lack of appreciation of some publishing houses towards translators, as they still do not write the translators' names on the covers of their books.

Publishers **Henrike Olasolo** and **Cristina Richarte** publish literature that has been written in Basque in Amsterdam, because they think that small nations understand each other very well. Nevertheless, they admit that it is extremely hard to publish translated literature and even harder in a place where the source language does not have a prestigious reputation and where there is no community that speaks it.



Laura Mintegi

Euskal PEN-eko leibendakari obia



Traduttore, traditore...

(but we are needed!)

"Without language diversity we would be intellectually impoverished, and with it we are enriched. But without translators to interpret and bridge that diversity we would remain ignorant and isolated, locked each of us in our own native tongues' limited worldview." (K. David Harrison, PhD, Swarthmore College and National Geographic Society)

It is a widely used metaphor, but as K. David Harrison reminds us, it is as well to bear in mind that translation is about building bridges and we translators are the bridge builders, so our activity seeks to facilitate relations between two languages and therefore between two countries or cultures. What for? So that we can get to know each other, enrich each other, learn from each other, etc. And frequently so that we can buy something from or sell something to each other.

On the whole, we do not think there would be many people today who would dispute the need to translate past and present foreign literature into Basque, or the other way round, to spread our literature abroad.

Foreign literature (in particular that in the most common languages) is translated into Basque without any major problems. What is more, there is usually an opportunity for selecting quality works that function well in other countries, and translating them into Basque. What is more difficult is to spread abroad what is produced in Basque and it is something that takes place to a lesser extent. And the truth is, in this respect we ought to be fully aware of our limitations so as to avoid disappointments.

Firstly, an affirmation: nowadays we believe that it is indispensable, in industry for instance, that we Basques should export, but we are much more reluctant when it comes to production of a cultural nature. Sometimes we give the impression that we lack faith in ourselves, that we lack sufficient self-esteem and confidence in our creative works. And there is no doubt that after a selection process has been made, we do in fact have good pieces of work that can be exported; works that are on a par with the greatest works of literature, in literature for adults as well as for children and teenagers, including the work of our illustrators.

But it is also true that the more one gets involved in the bigger markets, the more difficult it is to stand out among the rest, but that is not exclusively our problem. Does a person who writes in Spanish or French –and who is not well known in the world of literature at least– find it easier to get his or her work published than we Basques do? And does he or she find it easier to see his or her work translated into English, for example?

There are some writers who maintain that they are not concerned about seeing their creative

works translated into other languages, and that they write for Basque speakers, above all. OK. That is understandable, but one thing doesn't rule out the other. It is fine to give priority to the views of Basque readers, but in no way is it bad practice either to translate works produced in Basque into other languages and get the response or feedback of other readers.

The first advantage of this, and which is worth considering, is the need for writers to set their sights higher. From our experience (when translating samples of literature for the EIE-Association of Writers in the Basque Language) it seemed to us on more than one occasion that some Basque writers engage in navel-gazing and write for themselves without devoting much thought to the potential readers. And if writing stuff that is too light in the quest for sales is a poor alternative for literature, writing incomprehensible works that are too elitist or obscure could serve to satisfy the writer's ego, but little more. That is something poets in particular should take into consideration.

Apart from the above reasons, it goes without saying that there are more translators in the Basque Country able to translate into Basque from foreign languages, from the most common languages in particular, but far fewer in a position to translate texts in Basque into these languages.

If Basque publishing houses find themselves out of their depth on the markets for international literature, the help of the Government of the Basque Autonomous Community, the Government of Navarre and the cultural organisations in the Continental Basque Country will most likely be needed; and if writers, publishers, institutions, etc. work together through the "embassies" or other representatives we have abroad, we ought to be capable of making known and selling our own culture (including Basque literature, which is not the only product but one of the main ones) and not just our gastronomy, tourism and industrial products.

The obstacles notwithstanding, today factors in favour also exist. And one of them has to do with the new technologies. At one time, books had to be printed on paper and transported physically elsewhere, which seriously hampered distribution. Today, without printing a single word, and without writers and readers going very far from home, our works can be spread across the world with the minimum of infrastructure. However, translators will always be needed... and good ones so that nothing gets lost in the translation and the final result enables us to meet and understand each other. So be it.

Iñaki Mendiguren eta Sarah J. Turtle

FACT SHEET

Iñaki Mendiguren was born in Ezkio (Gipuzkoa) in 1954. He is a History graduate; he translates mainly from Spanish and English into Basque.

He has translated many books, including the whole *"Harry Potter"* series, with the help of Sarah-Jane Turtle. He has received the **Euskadi Award for Translation** twice.



FACT SHEET

Sarah-Jane Turtle was born in Croydon (England) in 1952. She graduated in Modern Languages at Bradford University. She translates from Basque and Spanish into English.

In 2013, together with Iñaki Mendiguren she won the **Euskadi Award for Translation**.



EIZIE, the voice of the translators



Euskal Itzultzaile, Zuzentzaile eta Interpreteen
Elkartea

We often read and we are often told that our language is a minority language; sometimes we are proud, other times embarrassed. We often complain that we have to live, or survive, according to some, with two major dominant languages. By contrast, we often listen to those who prefer to discuss the distinctive features and essence of the language as if they were an insurance against something. Neither are there few voices in favour of stopping turning it into an object and making it invisible and ordinary in speech. So, for some it is their beloved language, and for others a tool, a treasure or a skill. All these views, attitudes and suspicions come together in EIZIE, the Association of Basque Translators, Correctors and Interpreters; indeed, the translations, interpreting and correction work from Basque or into Basque done unites the members of the association, no matter where they live, whatever their vices may be, and whatever bonds they may have with the language.

For some it is their bread and butter, for others a hobby; for some freelance work, for others a salary. Whatever it may be, about 400 professionals currently belong to the association, the highest number since it was founded in 1987. Besides being a space for consultation, contact and training, many plans and projects have been carried out over the years, and some with a considerable dose of ambition. A case in point here is the Collection of Universal Literature (LU). With the help of the Government of the Basque Autonomous Community, the work to publish works of universal literature into Basque commenced in 1990, and over 150 books have been translated since. This is done by putting the work out for public tender every year, more or less, and that is how the translations and translators are chosen. Given that the first one hundred titles in the LU collection

are now out of print and can no longer be obtained at bookshops, the EIZIE embarked on a plan in 2010 to have these books republished. Initially, an assortment of twenty titles were chosen to be reprinted over the coming years in the *Urrezko Biblioteka* (Golden Library) collection.

Yet we learnt long ago that it was no use being involved in translating into Basque without ever taking any step in the opposite direction, because languages are in some way an expression of giving and taking. So, the association has taken steps to translate what is produced in Basque into other languages; in this respect, the EIZIE has since 2004 been organising every year a translation workshop "The Writer-Translator Workshop" in an effort to boost the translating of literature from Basque into other languages. Along the same lines, EIZIE is also a member of the CEATL and FIT associations in a bid to deepen, participate and enrich that giving and taking. And naturally it has links with many other players, such as the PEN Club.

The community of translators, correctors and interpreters who work with Basque may continue to be diverse and broad or it may not; because these are, among other things, the characteristics of this profession or hobby. In the future, too, the EIZIE will continue to be the mouthpiece and support of that diversity, as it is aware of the strength in terms of creativity and grandeur that the speakers have, rather than our language.

Garazi Arrula

FACT SHEET

Garazi Arrula-Ruiz was born in Tafalla (Navarre) in 1987. She is a **member of the governing board** of the EIZIE (Association of Basque Translators, Correctors and Interpreters).

She is currently writing up her PhD thesis in the field of self-translation. She translates from four languages (Basque, French, Spanish and English) into Spanish and, in particular, into Basque. She has translated literature for children, essays and narratives into Basque, including

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Plazeraren gau ilunekoak" (original "**Tender is the Night**").
- Anaïs Nis, "Venusen delta" (original title, "**Delta of Venus**").





Translating from Basque

There is no denying that our literature fills a small corner on the edge of the world system of literature. Indeed, when speaking about Basque literature, adjectives such as small, minority, young and similar ones occur to us. We certainly have something to offer despite the fact that our literature has had a short history and limited production. The reason is that the worldview, nature and identity of each culture are not insignificant issues in the exchange between cultures.

Even though the first book in Basque was published in the 16th century (Bernard Etxepare's *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae*), the development of Basque-language literature did not materialise until the latter part of the 20th century. There was an important flowering of Basque-language productions at the start of the 20th century, but the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the dictatorship that followed put a total stop to that flowering. Today, the system can be said to be fairly stable and translation has played a significant role in this. For Basque literature to develop, it was essential to bring works from literatures in the vicinity and to translate the works of well-known and lesser-known authors into Basque. That helped to create a written tradition, and also to encourage children and adults to read in Basque. With the growth in Basque-language productions and bearing in mind the quality of the works of our writers, translation in the opposite direction has also developed over the last few years, and little by little we have been exporting works in Basque in many other languages. Although one may come across the occasional translation into French or Spanish before the 20th century, one could say that the first steps to translate from Basque into other languages gradually began to be taken in the 1970s and 1980s, and productions have seen an increase since the 1990s. What is more, production grew at the turn of this century.

The list of languages into which works have been translated from Basque is long, and works translated from Basque can be found in nearly 40 target languages. Languages close to us and others further afield: into Japanese, Turkish, Russian and Quechuan in addition to Catalan, Galician, French or English. Nevertheless, translations from Basque are mostly done into Spanish. When one looks at all the other target languages, on the one hand, one can come across the other minority languages of the Spanish State that live in circumstances similar to those of ours (Catalan and Galician), and on the other hand, other major languages of Europe as well, such as English, French, Italian and German.

If we want to know what kinds of works have been translated, firstly we would have to look at the original production in Basque. In today's Basque literature, the largest is LCYA in terms of quantity, and is followed by narrative works for adults. Works of poetry, essay and drama and many other genres are very marginal ones. A similar thing happens when it comes to exporting: LCYA works are the main ones followed by works for adults. Nevertheless, works for children and young adults are mainly published in the Spanish State and are translated into Spanish, Catalan and Galician. In some way, there is a circuit between these literature systems, which is encouraged above all through agreements between publishing houses. Among works for adults, by contrast, we can come across works that have been highly successful and have been translated into many languages. Bernardo Atxaga is without doubt the most translated Basque writer, both in terms of the number of translations and also the number of target languages. He is the best-known Basque writer beyond our frontiers, and in the list of the ten most translated books the main ones are Atxaga's: *Obabakoak* (*Individuals and Things of*

Obaba), *Gizona bere bakardadean* (*The Lone Man*), *Soinujolearen semea* (*The Accordionist's Son*) or *Zeru horiek* (*The Lone Woman*). Nevertheless, the books of many other writers can also be found in various languages, such as those of Unai Elorriaga, Ramon Saizarbitoria or Kirmen Uribe.

The centre of Basque literature is currently located in the Peninsular Basque Country. Both Basque and Spanish are official in this part of the Basque Country, and the power relationship between the languages clearly emerges in the translation. As regards the exporting of Basque literature, the Spanish literature system is the main goal as well as intermediary, because translations into Spanish often open up doors for us for many other languages. What is more, among the most translated authors and works, mention should be made of the importance of the Spanish National Prize for Literature. Through this prize the writers who have achieved success have been able to speed up the means for making their works known and have achieved considerable opportunities for export. This is the case, for example, of Atxaga, Elorriaga or Uribe. In some way, too, these writers are positioned within the sphere of the Spanish system for foreign readers.

As they are bilingual, Basque writers can choose to write in two languages, or to write in one language and translate their work into the other. Indeed, a Basque writer often translates his/her own work into Spanish either for economic or literary reasons. Even if the choice of translating his/her own

FACT SHEET

Elizabete Manterola was born in Orio (Gipuzkoa) in 1982. She graduated in Translation and Interpretation at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB).

Today, she lectures at the UPV/EHU-University of the Basque Country. In 2012 she submitted her PhD thesis at the UPV/EHU entitled "Basque literature translated into other languages. Comparison of the types of translations of Atxaga's works".

She was responsible for producing the **Catalogue of Translated Basque Literature (ELI)**.





work has to be understood as an individual decision, because it is usually a very personal one, writers in minority languages often find themselves having to do their own translations. And self-translation turns into a widespread activity rather than an individual phenomenon in such cases. In the direction from Basque into Spanish, the presence of self-translation is quite considerable, because it is around 40%. In many cases, the translator's name does not appear in the credits and the percentage may of course be higher.

The translation into Spanish is often the basis for those into the other languages. Pivot translations are used to make the connection between two distant languages, and in that respect they are an indispensable tool for minority writers and translators. But it has to be remembered that two steps are taken instead of one in that intermediary process, and if something is always lost in translation, twice as much will be lost in such cases. That being the case, and as we have the tendency to prioritise direct translation today, an effort is made whenever possible to encourage direct translations, and that is exactly what happens when exporting Basque-language literature, too. There are programmes for training translators (*Idazlea itzultzailearen lantegia*-The writer in the translator's workplace organised by the EIZIE, or the *Itzultzaile berriak*-New Translators promoted by the DSS2016 foundation and the Etxepare Institute, for example) and I would say that, on the whole, direct translations are encouraged.

There is no denying that translations into foreign languages have become important here over the last few years. Indeed, resources for working in this direction have been created: grants to fund translations, travel grants, and the Laboral-Etxepare translation prize, too. There still remains much to be done, but the effort needs to be kept up if progress is to be made. It is important for literature to be exchanged in both directions, to offer translations as well as receive them. It goes without saying that in the case of minority literatures like ours, it is in the interests of the survival and development of the literature itself.

Elizabete Manterola

2005-2015, Translated from Basque into English

- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2005. *Guillermo's tale* / *Gillermoren abenturak*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition)
- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2008. *The Accordionist's Son*. Harvill Secker, London. Tr. Margaret Jull Costa.
- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2009. *Two Basque Stories*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Nere Lete.
- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2011. *Seven Houses in France*. Harvill Secker, London. Tr. Margaret Jull Costa.
- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2011. *Borrokaria* / *El luchador* / *The fighter*. Etxepare, Donostia. Tr. Amaia Gabantxo. Publication in three languages (Basque, Spanish and English)
- ~Atxaga, Bernardo. 2013. *The Adventures of Shola*. Pushkin Press, London. Tr. Margaret Jull Costa.
- ~Cano, Harkaitz. 2010. *Aitona eta euria* / *Grandad and the rain*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition).
- ~Cano, Harkaitz. 2010. *Blade of Light*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Amaia Gabantxo.
- ~Cano, Harkaitz. 2014. *Malgu da gaua* / *La noche flexible* / *Flexible is the Night*. Etxepare, Donostia. Tr. Kristin Addis. Publication in three languages (Basque, Spanish and English)
- ~Cillero, Javi. 2014. *Hollywood and I and Mad City*. University of Nevada Press. Reno. Tr. Aritz Branton.
- ~Elorriaga, Unai. 2008. *Plants don't drink coffee*. Archipelago, New York. Tr. Amaia Gabantxo.
- ~Etxegoien, Juan Carlos, *Xamar*. 2006. *Orhipean*. The Country of Basque. Pamiela, Iruñea. Tr. Margaret L. Bullen.
- ~Etxepare, Bernard. 2011. *Linguae Vasconum Primitiae*. Euskaltzaindia, Bilbo. Publication in six languages of the first Basque book (Basque, Spanish, French, English, German and Italian)
- ~Igerabide, Juan Kruz. 2005. *Lore hautsa* / *Pollen*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition)
- ~Landa, Mariasun. 2005. *Izar berdea* / *The Green Star*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition)
- ~Landa, Mariasun. 2009. *An original ant* / *Una hormiga original*. Algar, Alzira. Tr. Mar Aranda and Joan Carles Gírbés. (Bilingual edition in English and Spanish)
- ~Lertxundi, Anjel. 2006. *Perfect Happiness*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Amaia Gabantxo.
- ~Lertxundi, Anjel. 2012. *Non omnis moriar*. Etxepare, Donostia. Tr. Amaia Gabantxo. Publication in three languages (Basque, Spanish and English)
- ~Loidi, Jose Antonio. 2014. *Fifteen Days in Urgain*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Nere Lete.
- ~Maia, Jon. 2006. *Beothuk*. *Kondairaren azken txalupa* / *The tale of the last whaleboat*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition)
- ~Mintegi, Laura. 2005. *Nerea and I*. Peter Lang, New York. Tr. Linda White.
- ~Oñederra, Lourdes. 2005. *And the Serpent Said to the Woman*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Kristin Addis.
- ~Saizarbitoria, Ramon. 2005. *Rossetti's Obsession*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Madalen Saizarbitoria.
- ~Sarrionandia, Joseba. 2005. *Harrapatutako txorien hegala* / *Trapped bird's wings*. Baigorri, Bilbo. Tr. Diana Draper. (Bilingual edition)
- ~Uribe, Kirmen. 2006. *Meanwhile, Take my hand*. Graywolf, New York. Tr. Elizabeth Macklin.
- ~Uribe, Kirmen. 2014. *Bilbao-New York-Bilbao*. Seren, Bridgend. Tr. Elizabeth Macklin.
- ~Urretabizkaia, Arantxa. 2009. *The Red Notebook*. University of Nevada Press, Reno. Tr. Kristin Addis.



Translation: a weapon of domination or a tool of resistance?

Among the numerous metaphors used to define translation, the image of transferring is the most widespread across the major cultures and languages of the West: as *translate*, *traduire*, *traducir*, *übersetzen*, *overzetten*, *oversætte* and others suggest, translating involves “transferring” a text in one language into another language. So the translator is a kind of postman/woman, a means of transport that collects something from one place and takes it to another. Just like any postman/woman or truck driver, the translator does not touch the letter or goods in any way and delivers them to the recipient just as they are. He or she is merely an intermediary: a neutral, impartial, objective being.

In theory, that definition offers a metaphor that is both clear and simple in equal measure. Yet it has become clear in the analysis of translations made between different languages and cultures that all translations are necessarily subjective, biased, and adapted or manipulated according to certain interests. That manipulation does not have to be negative in any way, but it may often have harmful consequences for the target and source cultures, particularly when there is a lack of balance in the power relations between the two cultures involved in the translation. With the aim of exposing these harmful consequences, postcolonial translation theories began to be developed three or four decades ago when many anthropologists and historians became aware that translation had been an essential tool in imperial conquests and occupations.

European conquerors realised right from the start of colonialism that they had to develop an effective means of communicating with the human groups in the lands they wanted to colonise, and of making the colonised peoples tame, obedient and cooperative. After training the translators commissioned to do the interpreting between two languages, they got down right away to translating European texts into the natives’ languages. Through these translations, they were aiming to “civilise” these “savage”, “ignorant”, “uncultured” colonials and “convert” or “transform” them and “turn” them towards European values. These translations were also used to belittle and deform the natives’ languages, as Vicente Rafael showed when analysing the case of the Philippines: when Spanish missionaries translated Christian texts into the Philippine language Tagalog, they restricted Tagalog to the Roman alphabet, and adapted the graphemes of Tagalog into a structure that could be understood by the Spanish; the aim was to produce a target text that could be understood by the natives but at the same time, and above all, to make it function within a structure that was in line with the Spanish worldview.

The translations made in the opposite direction often exerted a tremendous influence, too, when belittling the language, culture and values of the colonised peoples. Spivak, Niranjana and other researchers who have studied the case of India make it very clear that the British conquerors made use of translation to build a manipulated image of India and the “East” and then impose this image in the form of the absolute and unchangeable truth. When translating the ancient Indian laws and literature into English, the British described the Indians as savage, irrational,

childish, effeminate, mystical and passive. As that rewriting or manipulation of the texts was carried out from a hegemonic standpoint, the oppressed culture tended to believe and accept the stereotyped, negative description built by the dominant culture, and that has often helped to prolong the hierarchized power relations between colonists and colonised peoples.

Fortunately, however, among the colonised peoples, too, there have been many writers who have become aware of the power of translation and have used translation as a form of resistance. By harnessing translation for their own interests, they made the voices that had been condemned to silence for many years heard, thus enabling the oppressed peoples themselves to build their identity as they wished.

An example of this is the literary movement about anthropophagy or cannibalism in Brazil. Cannibalism, which in the view of the whites was a cruel, merciless act, was often understood in colonial times by many tribes of Brazil as something positive: they did not eat just anyone, but those they respected and admired in the belief that they could thus acquire their strength, power and talents. Nowadays, many Brazilian writers are proclaiming the need to feed post-colonial Brazilian literature in the same way by “swallowing” the literatures of their colonialists, but at the same time, by adapting –manipulating– them to their needs and traditions to create something new and hybrid at all times. So the Brazilian writer is no longer seen as a copier or slave to the European literary traditions, nor as a revolutionary who will totally reject that tradition. By putting him-/herself between these two standpoints, the Brazilian writer is formed and developed in interaction with the original culture, while feeding off the European tradition and thus create something totally new.

In short, postcolonial theories totally demolish the traditional definition of the translation referred to at the start of this article: translation is not a neutral activity, nor is the translator an impartial intermediary, either. The translation is always produced in accordance with certain interests, and consequently, it is always a manipulated rewriting. Who does that rewriting, who chooses the subject to be translated, who funds the translation, and from which (pivot) languages is the translation made, etc. Such issues are more important than they appear at first sight in the development of any language or literature, not to mention in the evolution of small cultures like ours that have been subdued for centuries.

Aiora Jaka

FACT SHEET

Aiora Jaka-Irizar born in Donostia-San Sebastian (Gipuzkoa) in 1982. She translates into Basque and Spanish from five languages (German, Basque, French, Spanish and English). She has translated three books of children’s literature and another three narrative works into Basque:

- Mo Yan, “Hori da umorea, maisu!”.
- A. Munro, “Zorion handiegia” (original title, “Too Much Happiness”).
- C. Funke, “Reckless - Harrizko haragia” (original title, “Reckless-Steinernes Fleisch”).





‘Translators have to be like chameleons’

Is theorising about translation helpful for the translator? How can reflection about the profession or vocation help?

Yes, it is helpful, and especially with regards to the first question, because there isn't only one truth. It is important to have a free area for reflecting on translation where different theories coexist and can be contrasted with one another. Theory gathers together the collective experience of many translators and it is always helpful to capitalise on it. You do not always have to reinvent the wheel. It is by analysing and studying theories and practices that one finds one's own way.

Form vs idea, original text vs translation... there are always two paths, and the translator thinks it is something that anyone could do if they speak the original language. Some Basque publishing houses still do not even include the translator's name on the book cover.

The quality of texts translated into Basque has improved significantly over the last 25 years. The wide experience that has been gained, the influence of Universities and the work that has been carried out by institutions and associations is very noticeable... and there is indeed, a healthy supply of young people. Awards are partly responsible for that (not for the material prize, but for the recognition), as well as book fairs and literary and translation events. All those things bring prestige and recognition to the translator's work. Apart from that, I also find incomprehensible that some publishing houses only include their translators'

names on the copyright page. After all, a good translator also brings prestige to a publishing house.

Regarding translations that have been carried out from Basque into other languages, direct translations are especially worthy of prestige and priority. Evidently, there isn't a huge amount of people who translate from Basque, but there are actually some people around the world who learn Basque thanks to language assistantships in universities and Basque Clubs (*Euskal Etxeak*). Education and support should systematically be offered to those who are interested in translation in a professional context. The process should not always just be left up to the passion and stubbornness of the individual.

The four books that you have translated from Basque into German have strong links with the Basque Country. What is your selection criterion? What singularities does the Basque language have when it comes to translating into German?

Usually it is not the translator who chooses the titles, but the publishing house. In our case, in order to carry out the project *Zubiak* (*Bridges*), we worked from the beginning in very close cooperation with the Pahl-rugenstein Verlag publishing house (Bonn, Germany). *Zubiak* was created in order to offer as wide a view as possible of contemporary Basque Literature: different genres, different topics and different generations of writers (after Francoism).

When translating from Basque into German, I feel that the word order should be taken into account. The order is not the same in the two languages, but often, it is possible to write in German respecting the word order of the Basque sentence. However, the meaning and importance of some elements could change, and also the fluency. That is why you always keep on looking for the right tone in German. There are also other aspects: repetition is much more common in Basque sentences than in German ones.

To translate Aingeru Epaltza's *Rock'n'Roll*, you were given a grant, and you also had help

from a tutor (Sigrid Vagt). Moreover, you had the opportunity to work on your translation in Straelen Literary Translators' House, which is the oldest translators' house in Europe. Are these opportunities and resources common in your country of origin? Is translated literature well received in Germany? And what about literature translated from Basque?

That was an amazing experience for me: getting the grant, the exceptional teamwork with Sigrid Vagt, and later, my time in the Straelen Literary Translator's House. In Germany, translation and translators do receive more consideration, and more training is provided. In Germany, there is a wide offer of literature translated from other languages, and that's why translators' work is very important. Literary translation associations carry a lot of weight in the German literary world. They gave me that grant because they felt curious about the Basque language and because they wanted to boost a language that, as a literary language, was not very well known in Germany. The extracts that I presented in Germany—*Rock'n'Roll* and *Lagun Izotua*—were very well received, and the same happened on all the visits that we did with the writers. However, the commercial aspect is another story. Big distributors and bookshop chains control the market, and mainly because of their limited marketing and promotion budget, it is almost impossible for small publishing houses to be part of that world.

Petra Elser

Interview: Eleazar Team

FACT SHEET

Petra Elser was born in Frankfurt (Germany) in 1953. She is a translator, interpreter and proofreader of four languages (Basque, French, Spanish and English) into German. She has translated four novels from Basque into German:

- J. Sarrionandia, *Der gefrorene Mann*, in cooperation with Raul Zelik (original, *Lagun Izotua*).
- A. Epaltza, *Rock'n'Roll* (original, *“Rock'n'Roll”*).
- H. Cano, *Pasaia Blues* (original, *Pasaia Blues*).
- E. Jimenez, *Der Lärm der Grillen* (original, *Kilkerren hotsa*).





It is a strategy to publish Basque literature in the Netherlands

Zirimiri Press is an independent publishing house based in Amsterdam. We publish Dutch translations of literature written in small nations or in minority languages. Basque literature plays a prominent role in our catalogue. That being said, people might wonder: What is a small nation?

According to **Milan Kundera**, it's not size or population that makes a nation small, but the suspicion that one's people's existence is in danger. Will Basque still be spoken in 100 years time? That's a question that a French person would never ask themselves. Milan used to mention Spain and Poland as examples: two countries that are similar in size and population, but according to Kundera, the former would be big and the latter small.

We founded our publishing house because we had an idea that small nations understand each other very well. We wanted to make a statement like 'All the small nations of the world, unite!'. This approach has yielded some results, however, looking closer to home, we are not completely sure if this country, with its imperialist past, is a big one or a small one. In other words, if we use Kundera's ruler to measure it, we don't know if the Netherlands' size is more similar to Spain's or Poland's.

It's really hard to publish translated literature, and even harder if that literature doesn't have a prestigious reputation. Besides, unlike in Argentina and California, here there is no community of Basque origin. So, this is the question: How can you inform people about an unknown nation, when they have no need of that information?

We immediately outlined the first basis of our strategy: communication is the challenge and persuasion is the only way. We'll use all the means that we have on hand to draw people's attention towards our books, as we are convinced that once we've achieved that, half of the path is walked. The other half corresponds to our authors. But we know for sure that they'll win Dutch critics' respect, and at the same time, unconsciously and bit by bit, just like zirimiri (fine drizzle in Basque), they'll spread the word about Basque literature until the Basque Country drenches the Dutch readers and the critics.

So that's **Zirimiri Press**. *Zirimiri*, as a word, is easy to translate into Dutch and it also brings to mind all those pre-climate-change memories. Besides, we have phonetics on our side, as the Dutch find it impossible to locate this word in any known geographical place or category. 'Are they from Surinam?' or 'I'll call my dog Zirimiri!' as a journalist once told us. People are usually dumbfounded, and that's a good thing when something unknown is about to present itself. The word *zirimiri* has other connotations: it highlights the idea of smallness and recalls an idea of duration. Fine drizzle is slow and *slow publishing* is what we do, which is not only the way we produce, but the way we live. It's

our lifestyle.

That's the second basis of our strategy: **Zirimiri Press** is our lifestyle and that means that almost the whole process is within our control. There is no better way to seduce people than showing commitment. After all is said and done, persuasion is all about mimesis. In this way, we could talk for a long about each book, as we only publish things we really love and have read at least two or three times. We could also speak at length about each of the covers, as we invest long periods of time in them and we see them, if we may say so, as almost 'objects of art'. We see them as some kind of visual translation of the book. We want each of the things that we do to carry our own character, we want people to immediately recognise the books as ours, and as a consequence, to realise that they are more than likely translated from Basque.

That's our strategy. In practice, each book is a new adventure, and with each book you need a different hook to fish for new people. Those who are interested in therapy should read *Sisifo maiteminez...* Those who like cycling, *Han goitik itsasoa ikusten da...* Because, as we said before, we believe that if we manage to reel in people's attention, the rest will follow.

It's incredible how well a Basque writer can be received if you just choose the right time and the right place. 'We have known for a long time that basque people write well and love bicycles. "That's the reason why we enjoyed this fantastic novel", was written recently by a journalist. It has really been a pleasure to see Harkaitz Cano in Rotterdam's Poetry International Festival, perhaps the greatest poetry festival in the world according to a certain Chilean poet. The young Basque poet reminds of when Cernuda took part in that same festival a long time ago.

Maybe that's the way we see our zirimiri-lifestyle: like a big party. We are the hosts. Basque authors and Dutch readers are the guests who meet and become friends. "Why didn't we meet before?" someone even once said, or at least that's what our fantasy wanted us to hear.

Henrike Olasolo and Cristina Richarte



FACT SHEET

Zirimiri Press was created in Amsterdam in 2009. Its founders, **Henrike Olasolo and Cristina Richarte**, left the Basque Country and Catalonia, respectively, to establish themselves in the Netherlands. The publishing house, which is seen as an artistic experiment by its founders, has since then published dozens of books in Dutch. Most of them were originally written in Basque, Catalan, Corsican and in other minority languages.

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