

Basque language – A history of translation

In brief



 **SPA** [*Euskera - historia de la traducción*](#) **EUS** [*Euskara - Itzulpenaren historia*](#)

origins

[Basque language](#) (cf. French '[Basque](#)') is the term for the official name ('Euskara') of the vernacular language of the [Basque Country](#). It is also used to name the speakers of that language and the citizens of the country.

other names

It can be also used the Basque name for the language: Euskera or Euskara.

abstract

This entry contains the history of translation referring to the Basque language, or Euskera, divided into several sections. After an introduction that provides some information on the sociolinguistic situation of the Basque-speaking territories, the broadest section is devoted to literary translation into Basque, which in turn has two subsections: translations from the 16th century until the unification of the language (1968), and translations from that date to the present. The first period is mainly a catalog of translations of religious and didactic works, at least well into the 20th century. Later, the unified or standard language, [Euskera Batua](#), was the tool that made possible the modernization of Basque literature and the systematic translation of a good number of philosophical and literary works, thanks to both public and private initiative. In this effort, it must also be considered the importance of the work of the association of translators, [EIZIE](#) (Association of translators, correctors and interpreters of Basque language).

The second section deals with literary translations from Basque into other languages. It is a short section, since literature in Basque began to be translated into other languages in the last decade of the 20th century. The two most remarkable features are self-translation and the mediation of Spanish as a means of internationalization. Finally, the third section refers to non-literary translation, in which news is offered on the activity of translation and interpretation in local and regional administrations, on translation in the field of private companies and on audiovisual translation.

 **record** José Manuel López Gaseni 2022 López Gaseni, José Manuel. 2022. "Basque language - A history of translation" @ *ENTI (Encyclopedia of translation & interpreting)*. AIETI. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6363292> https://www.aieti.eu/enti/basque_ENG

Entry

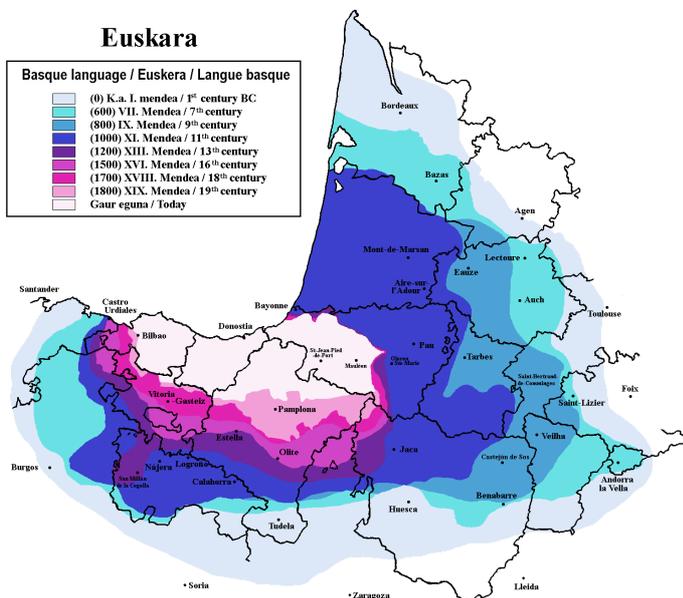


 **SPA** [Euskera - historia de la traducción](#) **EUS** [Euskara - Itzulpenaren historia](#)

contents

[Introduction](#) | [Literary translation into Basque \(1571-1968\)](#) | [The Reformation and the beginnings of literary translation](#) | [The Counter-Reformation and the translation of religious texts](#) | [The Age of Enlightenment and didactic literature](#) | [The Romanticism and conservative militant literature](#) | [“Euskal Pizkundea” or the Basque Renaissance](#) | [Translation under the dictatorship](#) | [Spanish transition to democracy and the golden age of Basque translation](#) | [Non-literary translation](#) | [Basque literature translated into other languages](#) | [Research potential](#)

Introduction



Language area of Basque in the last 2,000 years. [Wikimedia commons](#)

names in the northern third of the Iberian Peninsula. Euskal Herria (Basque-speaking people) is a cultural concept that comprises the territories of the [Basque Autonomous Community](#) and the Foral Community of [Navarra](#), in Spain, and the [French Basque Country](#) (historical territories of Labourd, Basse-Navarre and Soule). Authors such as

The present history of the translation into the Basque language is a descriptive summary of those texts that were considered literary ones in the target system, and were rendered into Basque from the 16th century to the present.

The Basque language, or Euskera, is the vernacular of the Basque Country or Euskal Herria. It is a pre-Indo-European language of unknown origin that had a much greater extension than the current one, considering the onomastics of various Aquitaine funerary inscriptions from Roman times, as well as a large number of place

Juaristi (2013) prefer the unusual cultism Vasconia to name the territory that has historically been inhabited by the Basques from both sides of the Pyrenees. At present, this territory has just over three million inhabitants, around 43% of whom use, know or understand the Basque language (around 1.5 million Basques). Of these, it is estimated that about 750,000 people use it regularly in the Basque Autonomous Community, about 85,000 in Navarra, and about 54,000 on the French side (VI Encuesta Sociolingüística, [2016](#)).

The percentage of works translated into Basque is around 20% of total literary production (from 1545 to the present), although in ancient literature it reached almost 50%. Around a thousand books have been translated into Basque, 40% of which were translated in the 1990s, the decade with the highest translation activity. In the case of [children's literature](#), the rate is three times higher and becomes two-thirds of the sector's production (López Gaseni [2002](#), 2009).

¶ Literary translation into Basque (1571-1968)

**LINGVAE VASCONVM PRIM.
tiz per Dominum Bernardum Dechepare
Rectorem sancti michaelis veteris.**



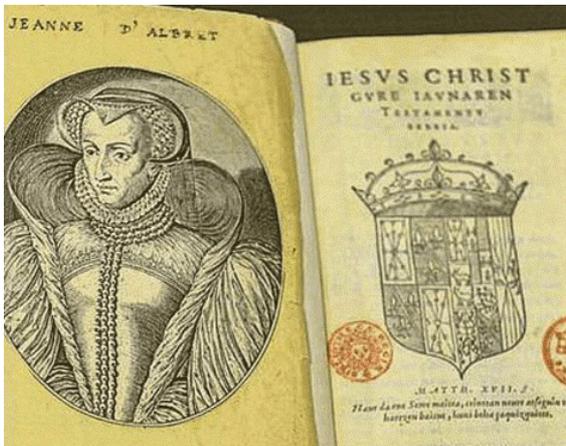
From the point of view of the Polysystems Studies (Even-Zohar [1990](#)), the Basque literary system should be considered as both a young system (due to its relatively late beginnings) and weak (in the sense that throughout its history has lacked many repertoires, some of which have been integrated through translation). In fact, according to the very known quantitative research by Sarasola (1982), ancient Basque literature, between 1545 (date of the [first book in Euskera](#)) and 1879 (date of the abolition of the Basque charters), a total of 194 works were published, of which 101 were translations and only 12 were considered non-religious original works. These figures, although they have been revised and adjusted later, clearly show that slightly more than half of the Basque literary production of the period was translated, and that a large part of it was religious.

[back to top](#)

The first book published in Basque, Linguae vasconum primitiae, by [Bernard Etxepare](#), in 1545. [[Wikipedia](#)]

¶ The Reformation and the

beginnings of literary translation



Cover of the first translation of the New Testament, which includes a portrait of the queen of Navarre.

The first translations into Basque (and at the same time the first prose texts of its literature) are the work of [Joanes Leizarraga](#), born in Briscous (Labourd), in the context of the [Reformation](#) initiated by [Luther](#) in Germany and continued by [Calvin](#) in France and Switzerland. At the Synod of Pau (1563), the queen of Navarre [Jeanne III d'Albret](#) ordered the translation of some reformist texts into the languages of her territories, Basque and Béarnese. The task of translating into Basque was entitled to Leizarraga, and resulted in the publication, in 1571, of three works:

[Iesus Christ Gure Jaunaren Testamentu Berria](#) [New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ], accompanied by various appendices; ABC edo Christinoan

Instruktionea othoitz eguiteco formarequin [ABC or

Instruction of the Christian in the manner of praying], version of the Calvinist Catechism of 1542; and Kalendrera [Calendar], a perpetual lunar almanac to find Easter and other worship feasts. The most important of the three books, the translation of the New Testament, based on the Greek and Latin version by [Erasmus](#) and on the French version by [Olivetan](#), was subjected to three relevant decisive constrictions: on the one hand, the total absence of previous narrative models in Basque language; secondly, the strict fidelity to the sacred texts and, lastly, the accessibility of the text to a few or little cultivated recipients and belonging different dialects of Basque. Leizarraga solved it by means of a text based on the Lapurdian dialect, in which he integrated lexical and morphological elements from the other two French Basque dialects, along with the use of literary structures taken from Latin (Michelena 1988). The resulting model, much studied and praised today, was ostracized with the arrival of the [Counter-Reformation](#).

[back to top](#)

¶ The Counter-Reformation and the translation of religious texts

The well-known conversion to Catholicism that brought Juana de Albret's son, Henry III of Navarre, to the French throne as [Henry IV of France](#), and the extension of the prescriptive severity imposed by the [Council of Trent](#) brought with them, over the next two centuries, a good number of translations and reeditions of some of the most popular religious texts of the time.

The first of them is exceptional, since it is the work of a translator from Álava, [Juan Pérez de Betolaza](#), and an important document in the Western dialect of Basque. It is

the translation of the Catechism by the Jesuit [Jerónimo Ripalda](#), published in a bilingual edition with the title of *Doctrina Christiana en Romance y Basquence* (1569).

The most translated work was the prayer book *De imitatione Christi* (1427), attributed to the German priest [Thomas à Kempis](#), of which at least five versions are known in Basque. The first two are by two members of the group of writers known as “[School of Sara](#)”: *Iesusen Imitacionea*, by Silvain Pouvreau, written in the 1660s, although it remained unpublished until the 20th century; and *Jesu Christoren imitacionea* (1684), translation of books III and IV, by Jean d’Arambillaga. In the 18th century, translations by Michel Chourio (*Jesu-Christoren Imitacionea*, 1720) and Martin Maister (*Iesu-Kristen Imitacionia*, 1757) are documented. In the 19th century, the translator and collaborator of Prince Bonaparte, Jean Pierre [Duvoisin](#), left incomplete the version entitled *Jesu Kristoren imitacionea*, completed and published later in 1896 by Haristoy.

Throughout the 17th century other religious works were translated. The aforementioned Silvain Pouvreau translated into Basque the Catechism *Instruction du Chrétien* (1621), by [Richelieu](#), under the title of *Guiristionoaren Dotrina* (1656); *Introduction à la vie dévote* (1608), by Saint [Francis de Sales](#), as *Philotea* (1664); and *Combattimento spirituale* (1589), by [Lorenzo Scupoli](#), entitled in Basque as *Gudu Espirituala* (1665). Cristobal Harizmendi, another member of the “School of Sara”, adapted the Offices of the Virgin into a Basque-Latin version, under the title of *Ama Virginaren hirur officioac latinean bezala escaraz* (1660).

In the following century, the translation of religious texts continued with Joanes Haraneder, who, on the one hand, is the author of new versions of two of the works translated by Pouvreau: *Philotea* (1749) and *Gudu Espirituala* (1750); on the other hand, he translated for the first time the Catholic New Testament from the [Vulgate](#): *Jesu-Christo gure launaren Testament Berria*, a manuscript dated 1740, which was not partially published until 1855. The Protestant pastor Pierre d’Urte was, for his part, translator of *Genesis* and a fragment of *Exodus*. Bernard Larreguy, parish priest of Ustaritze, translated *L’Histoire du Vieux et du Nouveau Testament*, a work signed by M. de Royamount, prior of Sombreval (pseudonym attributed to [Louis-Isaac Le Maistre de Sacy](#), translator of the [Port-Royal Bible](#), different from the present one), under the title of *Testament çaharreco eta berrico historiao* (1775–1777), which contains, in addition to the two testaments, various exempla, lives of saints and sermons. In the Spanish Basque Country, the Jesuit Sebastián Mendiburu adapted [Jean Croisset’s](#) devout work, *La devotion au sacré coeur de Nôtre Seigneur Jesus-Christi* (1732), with the title of *Iesusen Bihotzaren devocioa* (1747), and he is the author of a translation of the [Astete’s](#) Catechism; Another Jesuit, Agustín Cardaveraz, adapted Jerónimo Dutari’s *Vida christiana* (1710), under the title of *Cristauaren bicitza, edo bicitza berria eguiteco bidea, bere amabi pausoquin* (1744). The Franciscan Juan Antonio Ubillos, for his

part, translated the *Catéchisme historique* (1679), by [Claude Fleury](#), under the title of *Christau Doctriñ Berri-ecarlea* (1785).

The non-religious translations amount to only two technical works: a short book on the care of cattle, entitled *Laborarien abissua* (1692), by the Lapurdian translator Mongongo Dassança, an abridged version of *Praedium rusticum* (1554), by the doctor [Charles Estienne](#); and a navigation book, *Liburu hau da ixasoco nabigacioneoa* (1677), a translation by Piarres d'Etcheverry "Dorre" based on Martin de Hoyarzabal's *Les voyages aventureux du capitaine Martin de Hoyarsabal* (1633).

[back to top](#)

¶ The Age of Enlightenment and didactic literature

From the 19th century on, there was a change of trend in publications in Basque. Although works on religious themes were not abandoned, didactic-moralistic literature stood out as a reflection of the spirit of the Enlightenment. This trend is reflected in the corpus of translated works this time from repertoires of classical and neoclassical fables.



Vicenta (or Bizenta) Moguel (1782-1854), translator and first female voice in Basque literature. [Wikipedia](#).

translations of 55 fables by Samaniego, in addition to the first and third eclogues by [Virgil](#). In the

[Juan Antonio Moguel](#) (1745-1804) is known above all for his dialogue *Peru Abarka* (1881), and was [Humboldt](#)'s informant on his visits to the Basque Country. He also wrote a hundred fables and translated [Pascal](#)'s *Pensées* (*Pascalen Gogamenak*, 1899) and the Catechism by Astete (*Cristinauaren jaquinvidea*, 1805). His niece, [Vicenta Moguel](#) (1782-1854), the first female writer in the history of Basque literature, was the author of the first translation of fables, *Ipui onac* [*The Good Tales*] (1804), which contains fifty of Aesop's fables. Another fable translator was the Franciscan Juan Mateo Zabala, who, in his work *Fábulas en dialecto vizcaíno* [*Fables in the Biscayan dialect*], gathered, in addition to twenty-one compositions of his own, other fables by [Aesop](#), [La Fontaine](#), [Samaniego](#) and the aforementioned Juan Antonio Moguel. The Gipuzkoan writer and pedagogue [Agustín Pascual Iturriaga](#) made his contribution to fable translation into Basque in his best-known work: *Fábulas y otras composiciones en verso bascongado* [*Fables and Other Compositions in Bascongado verse*] (1842), which contains

French Basque Country, the translation of fables focused mainly on the work of La Fontaine: [Jean Baptiste Archu](#) published a selection entitled *La Fontainaren aleighia berheziak* (1848) in versified eastern Basque from Soule; and the Labortan priest [Leonce Goyhetché](#), the translation in verse of 150 fables by the French writer, under the title of *Fableac edo aleguiac Lafontainenetariac berechiz hartuac* (1852).

Along with the didactic-moralistic literature, as said above, the activity of translating religious texts continued. On the one hand, two new versions of the Astete's Catechism: the aforementioned version by Juan Antonio Moguel, and another one in the High Navarrese dialect by the Franciscan [Pedro Antonio Añibarro](#) (Cristau Dotriña, 1802-1803). Besides, the Navarrese [Joaquín Lizarraga](#) translated the Gospel by John the Evangelist, into the southern High Navarrese dialect, now disappeared. For his part, the Gipuzkoan doctor Juan José Oteiza was commissioned to translate the Protestant Gospel by Luke the Evangelist: *San Lucasen ebanjelioa* (1838). Other religious translations are the biographies of saints, among which it is worth mentioning the work by the Navarrese [Frantzisko Laphitz](#) *Bi saindu heskualdunen bizia: San Inazio Loiolacoarena eta San Frantzisko Zabierecoarena* [*Life of two Basque saints: Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier*] (1867), translated from several sources (Ribadeneira, Bouhours, Rohrbacher, Daurignac). [Gregorio Arrue](#) is the author of a life of Ignatius of Loyola (*Aita San Ignacio gloriosoaren bicitza*, 1866), but his best known translation was that of the life of Genevieve of Bravant: *Santa Genovevaren vicitza* (1868), based on the work by the German priest [Christoph von Schmid](#) (Genovefa, 1810), intended for children. Arrue is the author of many other translations, such as the *Oración mental* [*Mental Prayer*] by the Jesuit Villacastín; a new version of the Kempis: *Kristoren imitazioa* (1887); *Mariaren Gloriak* [*Glories of Mary*] (1881) by [Alphonsus Liguori](#), etc.

[back to top](#)

¶ The Romanticism and conservative militant literature

Not all religious translations had an evangelizing purpose. The Romantic spirit led various European scholars to take an interest in the Basque Country, its language and its customs. In addition to the aforementioned W. von Humboldt, other are due to be mentioned: [Victor Hugo](#), [Jan Van Eys](#), [Julien Vinson](#), [Hugo Schuchardt](#), [Antoine d'Abbadie](#) and, most especially, [Louis-Lucien Bonaparte](#) (1775-1840), a nephew of Napoleon.

Prince Bonaparte was an indirect promoter of the translation activity, by commissioning translations of the same text from a series of collaborators, in order to study the Basque dialects and establish their limits. The texts that appear the most repeated are the *Gospel* according to Matthew, the *Song of Songs*, the *Apocalypse*, the complete *Bible*

and the Astete's Catechism. The translators at his service were [Intxauspe](#) for the Souletin dialect, [Uriarte](#) for Biscayan and Gipuzoan, [Etxenike](#) for the one from Baztan, [Salaberri](#) for the Navarro-Lapurdian, [Otaegui](#) for the Gipuzcoan and the Upper Navarrese, [Mendigatxa](#) for the Roncalese and [Jean-Pierre Duvoisin](#) for Lapurdian. The latter turned out to be the most prominent of them, thanks to his magnificent translation of the Bible, *Bible Saindua edo Testament Zahar eta Berria*, published between 1859 and 1865, in London, where Bonaparte had usually the works under his patronage printed.

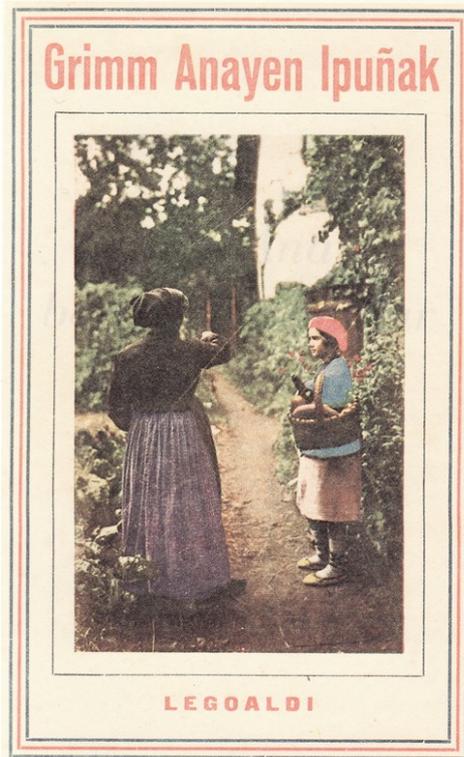
On the other hand, the end of the century witnessed a series of translations related to the conservative militant literature of the time. Specifically, that of French writers opposing to liberal ideas, who expressed their opposition by means of booklets and brochures. [Laurent Diharassarry](#) is the author of the translation *Aphezen dretchoac eta eguinbideac eletzioetan* [*Rights and duties of priests in election*] (1890). [Michel Elissamburu](#) performed the translations *Zer izan diren eta zer diren orain Framazonak munduan* [*What have been and what continue to be the Freemasons in the world*] (1890) and *Framazonak, bigarren edizioa, eta Frantziako hirur Errepubliken istorioa laburzqui* [*The Freemasons, second edition, and a brief history of the three Republics in France*] (1891). In the Spanish Basque Country, the Jesuit [José Ignacio Arana](#) adapted *El liberalismo es pecado* [*Liberalism is sin*] (1884), by the fundamentalist [Félix Sardà y Salvany](#) in two volumes, under the titles of *Liberalen dotrina pecatu da* [*The doctrine of liberals is sin*] (1887) and *Bai, pecatu da liberalquerija* [*Yes, liberalism is sin*] (1896).

To complete the account of this period, we should mention the translation of [José Colá y Goiti](#)'s work, *La emigración vasco-navarra* [*Basque-Navarre emigration*] (1882), a chronicle of the exodus of thousands of Basque young people to America, translated by the playwright [Marcelino Soroa](#), born in San Sebastian: *Euskal Naparren joaera edo emigrazioa* (1885).

[back to top](#)

¶ “Euskal Pizkundea” or the Basque Renaissance

Sociopolitical crises are often the spur of cultural activity. In the Basque case, the definitive abolition of the Basque charters in 1876 marked the beginning of an important literary renaissance. In addition to cultural promoters and linguists, the most brilliant generation of writers known to date was born, in which the poets [Lauaxeta](#) and [Lizardi](#) stand out. In this scene, an untiring cultural promoter, Nicolás



Cover of Legoadi's translation (1929).

Ormaetxea [Orixe](#), was also a very active translator: in 1928 he won a translation contest in Pamplona, which consisted of the translation of the ninth chapter of *Don Quixote*. The following year his translation of [Lazarillo de Tormes](#) (*Tormes'ko itsu-mutilla*) was published. In 1930, he published the translation of *Mirèio*, by [Frédéric Mistral](#). Even after the Civil War he continued his translation work, now with versions of religious texts such as the bilingual Latin-Basque missal and vesper book *Urte Guziko Meza-Bezperak* (1949); a version of the *Confessions* by [Augustine of Hippo](#): *Agustin Gurenaren aitorkizunak* (1956); or a translation of the New Testament: *Itun Berria* (1967).

Besides Orixe's, in the prewar period there were other interesting contributions in the field of literary translation. In 1927, Joseba Arregui [Txingudi](#) published a translation of poems by [Heine](#), *Heine'ren Olerkiak* and [Joseba Altuna](#) collected several short

stories by [Oscar Wilde](#) under the title *Ipuñak* [Stories]. Two years later, in 1929, Altuna himself published a translation of fourteen tales by the [Brothers Grimm](#), again under the title of *Ipuñak* and J. A. Larrakoetxea [Legoadi](#), another one of fifty tales by the German compilers, Grimm Anaien Berrogeitamar Ume-Ipuin. Mention should also be made of the adaptation of [Charles Dickens](#)' novella *A Christmas Carol*, published in the San Sebastian newspaper *El Día* by Ander Arzelus [Luzear](#), as Eguarri Abestia (1931). Drama in the Basque language received a great boost between 1934 and 1936, including the translation and performance of classical and contemporary works. [Toribio Alzaga](#) staged *Macbeth*, under the title of *Irritza* (1926); [Jokin Zaitegi](#), *Antigone* (1933), by [Sophocles](#); [Bonifacio de Atun](#) translated *Amal* (1934), by R. [Tagore](#); [Iñaki Goenaga](#) published in installments, in the years 1934-1935, a translation of *Wilhelm Tell*, by F. [Schiller](#); and Joseba Altuna made versions of two works by the Biscayan patron [Manuel Sota](#), with the titles *Buruzagijak* (1935) and *Urretxindorra* (1934). In addition, the *Antzerti* magazine published plays translated from Spanish, French and German.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the Jesuit [Raimundo Olabide](#), translator of the New Testament, *Itun Berria* (1931), and the complete Bible, *Itun Zar eta Berria* (1958), in addition to the Spiritual Exercises by Ignatius of Loyola, *Loyola-tar Eneko Deunaren Gogo- Iñarkunak* (1914), and the Kempis, *Josu-Kristoren Antzbidea* (1920).

[back to top](#)

¶ Translation under the dictatorship

The [Spanish Civil War](#) and the subsequent dictatorship marked the end of the preceding literary movement, and many authors were forced to work from American exile. In this period, literary translation was mainly nourished by works of classical authors. In addition to the aforementioned work of Orixe, the “Kulixka” collection should be highlighted, whose first title was a translation by the Jesuit [Plazido Mugica](#): *Noni eta Mani. Islandiar mutiko biren gertaldiak* (1952) from the German text *Nonni und Manni* (1914), by the Icelandic Jesuit [Jon Svensson](#). Other translations published in this collection were *Itxasoa laño dago* (1959) [*Las inquietudes de Shanti Andia*, [Pio Baroja](#)], by [Jon Etxaide](#), or *Agurea ta itxasoa* (1963) [*The Old Man and the Sea*, E. [Hemingway](#)], by [Anjel Goenaga](#).

The most prolific translator of this period was the Biscayan priest and teacher Juan Anjel Etxebarria (1934-1996). He translated the classical poets [Catullus](#), [Horace](#) and [Martial](#); several Catalan poets, tales by [Perrault](#), fables by [Phaedrus](#) and [Aesop](#), and various religious works. The Carmelite [Santiago Onaindia](#) translated Virgilio’s complete works, in collaboration with [Ibinagabeitia](#), *Horacio’s Odes*, three poems by R. Tagore, [Dante’s Divine Comedy](#) and, already in 1985, [Homer’s Odyssey](#). The Jesuit [Gaizka Barandiaran](#) is the author of a translation of *Homer’s Iliad: Iliarena* (1956). Another religious, Koldobika Jauregi [Jautarkol](#), translated *The Family of Pascual Duarte: Pascual Duarte’ren sendia*, by [Camilo José Cela](#).

As for literary activity in exile, mention must be made of the Jesuit poet, essayist and translator Jokin Zaitegui (1906-1979), already referred to in connection with his translation of *Antigone before the war*. After the war, he went into exile in various countries. In 1945 he published *Ebanjeline* [*Evangeline*, H. W. [Longfellow](#)], which poses a situation of war and exile, in line with other prewar translations, such as *Mirèio* or *Wilhelm Tell*. He also translated the tragedies of Sophocles, published in 1946 and 1958; *Medeia* (1963), by [Euripides](#) and, back in the Basque Country, [Plato’s](#) works between 1975 and 1979. Another translator of the American exile was the Biscayan Andima Ibinagabeitia. A contributor to the *Euzko-Gogoa* magazine (created by Zaitegui in 1950, in Guatemala), he published there the translation of Virgilio’s *Eclogues* (*Bergili’ren Unai-Kantak*, 1954) which, later, together with the translation of the *Georgics* (*Alor-Kantak*), would be added to S. Onaindia’s translation of the *Aeneid* for publication in 1966 as *Birgili’ren idazlanak osorik* [*Complete Works of Virgil*]. He is the author of other translations, such as *Maitebidea* (1952), a translation of *Ars amandi*, by [Ovid](#), and the play *Abere-indarra* (1953) [*La Fuerza Bruta*, [Jacinto Benavente](#)]. The priest Bedita Larrakoetxea, the younger brother of translator of tales of Grimm nicknamed Legoadi, went through exile in England and South America, and translated

Shakespearean plays. Back in the Basque Country, he published, between 1974 and 1976, the translation of Shakespeare's complete drama work. The Biscayan politician Bingen Amezaga, exiled in England, Argentina and Venezuela, was also a translator of a Shakespearean play, *Hamlet. Danemark'eko Erregegaya* (1952), in addition to translating [Juan Ramón Jiménez](#), [Pliny](#), [Aeschylus](#), [Cicero](#), Wilde, [Goethe](#) and others.

A wide variety of short-form literary translations provided supplementary materials for the few magazines published in Basque in this period, especially two of them. The aforementioned *Euzko-Gogoia* (1950-1959), edited first in Guatemala and later in Bayonne, published translations by [48 authors](#), by Basque writers such as Jon Mirande, Andima Ibinagabeitia or Gabriel Aresti, among others. The magazine *Egan* (1948-1987), edited in the Basque Country as a periodical of the [Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country](#), published works of [108 authors](#), translated into Basque by 46 translators. This translating activity would continue in later literary magazines, such as *Ustela*, *Pott*, *Oh! Euzkadi*, *Susa* and many others that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

[back to top](#)

¶ Spanish transition to democracy and the golden age of Basque translation

The standardisation of the Basque language, approved by [Euskaltzaindia](#) in 1968, was decisive for the subsequent socio-cultural development of Basque. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the popular movement of the [ikastolas](#) reappeared, and led to an increase in demand for reading materials in Basque for children and young people, to which it was impossible to respond only with original texts. As a result, translated literature gained great importance in a still very weak literary system. The Biscayan publishing house Gero-Mensajero published works by [Verne](#) and [Melville](#) for young people, along with reissues of the translations by Plazido Mujika Noni eta Mani and Mendiko Argia. The publishing house Hordago also published a large number of classical works for young people: [Twain](#), [Carroll](#), [London](#), [Stevenson](#), [Scott](#), [Salgari](#), [Stowe](#), [Baum](#), Longfellow... Elkar did the same, and added other authors to the previous list of names, such as [Kipling](#), [Rodari](#), [Orwell](#), [Gosciny](#), [Härtling](#), [Kästner](#), etc. The vast majority of these works were translated by means of versions previously abridged into Spanish, in which many structural aspects and syntactic and rhetorical complexities were simplified (López Gaseni [2002](#)).

At the same time, during these years, the work of the publishing house Lur stands out. Founded by [Gabriel Aresti](#), Lur published translations of very diverse works, such as Itxura aldaketa [Die Verwandlung, [Kafka](#)] (1970), by Xabier Kintana and Arantxa

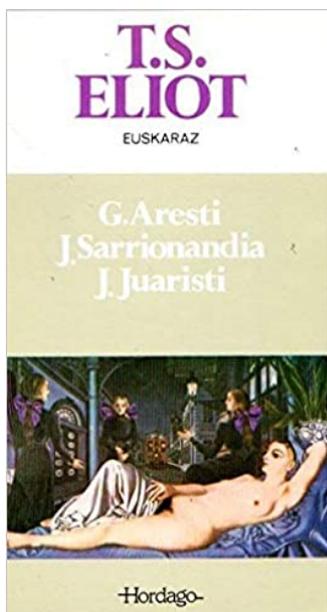
Urretabizkaia; *Bai mundu berria* [*A Brave New World*, [Aldous Huxley](#)] (1971), in Xabier Amuriza's version; *Kandido* (1972), by [Voltaire](#), translated by Ibon Sarasola; or *Lau gartzelak* [*From the Four Prisons*] (1971), by the Turkish poet [Nâzım Hikmet](#), translated by Aresti himself. Along with contemporary ones, classical works continued to be translated, such as [Cervantes'](#) *Don Kixote Mantxa'ko* (1976), by Pedro Maria Berrondo; *Boccaccioren Dekamerone tipi bat* (1979), translated by Aresti; or the already mentioned complete dramatic works of Shakespeare, by Bedita Larrakoetxea.

The Basque Government, which started again in 1980, launched the second period of the Theater Service of the Basque Government, Antzerti, which brought the publication of a good number of drama works, both original and translated, by authors like [Goldoni](#), [Castelao](#), [Sastre](#), [Fo](#), [Sartre](#), [Strindberg](#) or Shakespeare. In the 1990s, the Basque Government launched the annual call for the Euskadi Award for Literary Translation. Regarding translation studies, in 1980 the [Martutene School for Translators](#) was created in Donostia, a springboard for the first streams of professional translators. Later, the translation master's degrees at the University of Deusto (1990) and the University of the Basque Country (1991) would be launched. The [degree](#) of Translation and Interpreting Studies, from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), began in 2000. During the last two decades of the 20th century, Euskaltzaindia intensified its prescriptive task and its lexicographical activity. Both resulted contributions of great importance for the development of translation activity.

The work of systematic translation of classical works of world literature could be carried out in the last years of the 20th century, mainly thanks to two ambitious translation projects: "[Literatura Unibertsala](#)" [Universal Literature] and "[Pentsamenduaren Klasikoak](#)" [Classics of Thought]. The first one, promoted by [EIZIE](#), made possible the translation of one hundred literary works between 1990 and 2002. Its second stage brought the publication of 52 more titles between 2002 and 2010; and a third stage intended to translate another 50 works from 2011. The second of the aforementioned projects began in 1991 with the purpose of translating one hundred titles, in this case belonging to the field of thought, including authors from ancient Greece to the present. The themes of the translated works range from philosophy to economics, through psychology, linguistics, anthropology, history, pedagogy or theology.

Along with these public initiatives, other various collections have contained translated work: the publishing house Elkar incorporated, from 1983, translations by Mercè [Rodoreda](#), [Pavese](#), [Maupassant](#), [Yourcenar](#), [Böll](#), [Laxalt](#), [Gide](#), [Bataille](#), [Poe](#), [Steinbeck](#), [Apollinaire](#), [Golding](#), [Salinger](#), [Dinesen](#), etc. The publishing house Igela, from 1989 specialized in works of detective and crime fiction, and published authors such as [Doyle](#), J. London, James M. [Cain](#), [McCoy](#), Scott [Fitzgerald](#), Truman [Capote](#),

Thompson, Himes, Ballinger, Chandler, Highsmith, Hammett and others. In the new century, Igela has expanded its offer and published works by authors such as S. Márai, N. Ginzburg, A. Baricco, Joseph Roth, etc. In 1991, the publishing house Erein launched the “Bartleby” collection, which offered short and attractive texts that were intended for encouraging the habit of reading translations. It opened with *Bartleby izkribatzailea* [*Bartleby, the Scrivener*], by Melville, and published a dozen titles by authors such as Rimbaud, Le Fanu, J. London, Baudelaire, O. Wilde, E.T.A. Hoffmann, N. Gógol, F. Dürrenmatt, J.W. Polidori or M. Twain. The publishing house Alberdania brought together an interesting group of translators, and published authors such as C. Levi, A. Kristof, S. Zweig, D. Thomas, G. Grass, etc. Among other pioneering translators of this golden age, we should mention Xabier Mendiguren Bereziartu, Josu Zabaleta, Koro Navarro, Juan Garzia Garmendia and Xabier Olarra.



Cover of the translation of Eliot's poems, including Four Quartets and The Waste land (1983).

On the other hand, several Basque authors have been involved in literary translation, in order to search and create repertoires for the enrichment of literary language, and as a form of rewriting their cult works. For example, Gabriel Aresti, Jon Juaristi and Joseba Sarrionandia put together in one volume their versions of the poetic work of T. S. Eliot (*Eliot euskaraz*, 1983). Sarrionandia translated Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (*Marinel zaharraren balada*, 1995), as well as poems by Brazilian Manuel Bandeira (*Antologia*, 1999). Previously, he published a selection of poems by his favorite authors under the title *Izkiriaturik aurkitu ditudan ene poemak* [*Poems of mine that I have already found written*] (1985), in addition to the drama by Pessoa *Marinela* (1985). Mikel Lasa translated Rimbaud (*Denboraldi bat infernuan*, 1991; *Poemak*, 1993), J.-P. Sartre (*Paretaren kontra*, 1980), Marcel Schwob (*Mimoak*, 1985) and Alfonso Sastre (*Bazterrean utzitako panpinaren ixtorioa*, 1984). Another Basque poet, Koldo Izagirre, did the same with several works by Castelao (*Zirtzilak. Kristalezko begia*, 1986), Uxío Novoneyra (*Bazterrak / Os Eidos*, 1988), Maiakovski (*Poemak*, 1993), Salvat-Papasseit (*Antologia*, 1995) and Victor Hugo (*Idi orgaren karranka*, 2002). In the field of narrative, Joxe Austin Arrieta translated M. Yourcenar (*Hadrianoren oroitzapenak*, 1985), Jaume Fuster (*Beirazko giltzak*, 1997), William Golding (*Eulien ugazaba*, 1990) and Max Frisch (*Homo Faber*, 2001).

Juan Kruz Igerabide translated Baudelaire (*La Fanfarlo*, 1991), as well as being the author of abridged versions of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Homer's *Odyssey*.

In the new century, since 2002, a grant named after the translator Jokin Zaitegui is annually called for the translation of a work by the corresponding Nobel Prize-winning author. Thanks to it they have been translated works such as *Fateless*, by Kertesz; *Snow*, by Pamuk; *The Grass in Singing*, by Lessing; *Desert*, by Le Clézio; *War's Unwomanly face*, by Aleksievich; or *The Remains of the Day*, by Ishiguro, among others. In the field of poetry, in 2014 the collection “Munduko Poesia Kaierak” [*World*

Poetry Notebooks] was launched, and since then it offers anthologies by authors such as Georg [Trakl](#), Maria Mercè [Marçal](#), Aimé [Césaire](#), Emily [Dickinson](#), Carlos [Drummond de Andrade](#), Miguel [Hernández](#), Anne [Sexton](#), Paul [Celan](#), Miroslav [Holub](#), etc. Finally, it is noteworthy the dynamism shown for translating peripheral genres, such as [children's and young people's literature](#). In this sector, translated literature exceeds two thirds of its total production. Likewise, there is a children's literature translation contest into Basque, called annually by the Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council.

[back to top](#)

¶ Non-literary translation

With the arrival of democracy and the new organization of Spain in autonomous regions, in 1979 the [Statute of Autonomy](#) for the Basque Country was passed and, in 1982, the autonomy for [Navarre](#). These communities enacted some laws for the recovery and normalization of Basque language: decrees on bilingualism, introduction of Basque in the educational system, public radio and television in the Basque language ([EITB](#)), organizations for teaching Basque to adults, etc. The local and regional institutions were provided translators and interpreters, who were responsible, among other things, for the translation of official bulletins, minutes and other documentation generated in each institution, as well as for interpreting oral speech in town halls, General Councils and Parliaments.

Around EITB, in the early 1980s, a Radio and Television School and a film dubbing center (FIBIZE) were created, both short-lived, which soon gave way to several audiovisual translation, dubbing and subtitling companies. These companies depended practically one hundred percent on the television consortium and were at the mercy of the political and linguistic criteria of each management. Currently, the sector has been rationalized and has been forced to diversify its supply (Barambones et al. [2012](#)). On the other hand, since 1987 the Basque Government has allocated a yearly budget for dubbing audiovisual productions.

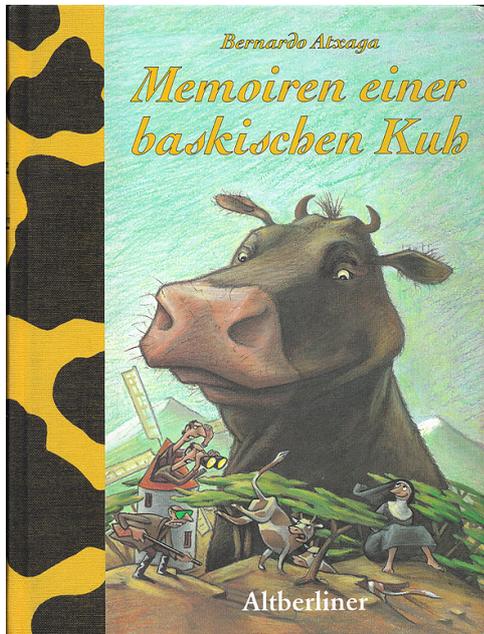
In the 1980s, the association of Basque translators, [EIZIE](#), was also born, which brings together translators, correctors and interpreters in the Basque language belonging to several areas (literature, administration, business, audiovisual production, etc.). It carries out training, dissemination, visibility and legal advice for its members, by means of discussion forums, courses, publications... It is affiliated to [FIT](#), [CEATL](#) and [Red Vértice](#).

Linguistic normalization in Basque has been spreading to all areas. In the world of science, dictionaries for different areas have been published, as well as many reference books mainly oriented to university lecturing. Mention should be made of the

popular science collection [ZIO](#) (Science for everyone), promoted by the University of the Basque Country, which since 2003 has published about twenty interesting titles in careful translations.

[back to top](#)

¶ Basque literature translated into other languages



Cover of the German translation of Behi euskaldun baten memoriak, by B. Atxaga.

Translations of Basque literature into other languages, with a few exceptions, began to appear with a certain volume in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Previously, a couple of bilingual editions had appeared in the 17th century, about twenty translations in the 19th (collections of proverbs, songs, legends, religious books) and some more than thirty until 1979. The last two decades of the 20th brought 301 translations and the first of the 21st, 562. These are, however, quite modest numbers, which reflect the relative scarce interest that Basque literature arouses.

The turning point came in 1989, when Bernardo [Atxaga](#) won the National Literature Prize for Narrative for *Obabakoak* (1988). The translation of this work, first into Spanish and later into many other languages, began to arouse interest for Basque literature abroad.

The focus on this author has remained standing, Atxaga being the most translated author into other languages, followed by Mariasun [Landa](#), Juan Kruz Iguerabide and Patxi [Zubizarreta](#). It must be taken into account that the translations of these last three authors belong to the field of children's literature, the most exported genre. In fifth place, at a considerable distance, Anjel [Lertxundi](#) appears. Among the ten Basque works most translated into other languages, nine are by Atxaga. Unai [Elorriaga](#)'s work *SPrako tranbia* [A tram to SP] ranks sixth. In places 11 to 20, nine of them are occupied by works of children's literature; the tenth, at number 12, is also by Atxaga (*Zazpi etxe Frantzian* [[Seven houses in France](#)]).

Another factor that is worth to be mentioned is the predominance of translations into Spanish (46.6%, which reaches 66.4% by adding translations into the rest of the languages of Spain), and the dependence that this entails, since a high percentage of translations into languages other than Spanish are made through that language. The percentage of works into English actually exported is 2.46% (the rest, up to 8.45%, are bilingual works for children published in the Basque Country and intended for the local

reading public), which are followed by works translated into French, German and Italian. Another remarkable factor, in addition to indirect translation, is the high percentage of self-translated works, which reaches 39.67%. Both phenomena reflect the lack of professionalization in translation from Basque (Manterola 2014).

[back to top](#)

Research potential

Research on translation into Basque has been developing in the new century through doctoral theses on various aspects, such as translation of the work of certain authors, the translation of children's literature, audiovisual translation, the treatment of translation in literary historiographies or translation of Basque literature into other languages.

There are other aspects that are worth to be researched, among which should be outlined self-translation, an exhaustive study of translation norms, the relationships between original and translated literature, the translation of less studied genres such as poetry or dramatic literature.

[back to top](#)

References



*Aldekoa, Iñaki. 2004. *Historia de la literatura vasca*. San Sebastián: Erein. ISBN: 8497462157.

[\[+info\]](#)

Barambones Zubiria, Josu. 2009. *La traducción audiovisual en ETB-1: Estudio descriptivo de la programación infantil y juvenil*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU). Tesis doctoral. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

Even-Zohar, Itamar. 1990. "Polysystem Studies". @ *Poetics Today* 11/1, 1-269. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

Ibarluzea Santisteban, Miren. 2017. "Basque Translation in the Structure of Basque Literary Historiographies". @ *1611, Revista de Historia de las Traducción* 11. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

*Juaristi, Jon. 2013. *Historia mínima del País Vasco*. Madrid: Turner Publicaciones. ISBN: 9788415832140. [\[+info\]](#)

Kortazar, Jon (ed.) 2016. *Contemporary Basque Literature*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies. ISBN: 9781935709541. [\[+info\]](#)

*Lertxundi, Anjel. 2017. *Demagun ehun urte barru*. San Sebastián: EIZIE. ISBN: 9748469723142. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

*López Gaseni, Jose Manuel. 2002. "An analysis of Children's and Young People's Literature translated into Basque: Functions, influences, and strategies". @ *Senez* 24, 121-140. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

López Gaseni, Jose Manuel. 2009. "Euskal itzulpenen inbentario eta azterketa (1976-2008)". @ *Senez* 37, 299-312. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

López Gaseni, Jose Manuel. 2012. "Translated Basque Literature". @ Olaziregi, Mari Jose (ed.) *Basque Literary History*, 311-328. Reno: Center for Basque Studies. ISBN: 9781935709190. [\[+info\]](#)

*Manterola Agirrezabalaga, Elizabete. 2014. *La literatura vasca traducida*. Berna: Peter Lang. ISBN: 9783035196719. [\[+info\]](#)

Mendiguren, Xabier. 2004. "El ámbito de la cultura vasca". @ Lafarga, Francisco & Luis Pegenaute (eds.) 2004. *Historia de la traducción en España*, 791-815. Salamanca: Ambos Mundos. ISBN: 9788474551013. [\[+info\]](#) [\[quod vide\]](#)

Michelena, Luis. 1960. *Historia de la literatura vasca*. San Sebastián: Erein, 1988 (2ª ed.) ISBN: 8475682057. [\[+info\]](#)

[n.n.] (Agencias lingüísticas vasca, navarra y francesa). 2016. *VI Encuesta Sociolingüística del conjunto del territorio del euskera*. [[+info](#)] [[quod vide](#)]

Olaziregi, Mari Jose (ed.) 2012. *Basque Literary History*. Reno: Center for Basque Studies. ISBN: 9781935709190. [[+info](#)]

Ruiz Arzalluz, Íñigo. 1988. "Materiales para una historia de la traducción de los clásicos latinos al euskara". @ *Cuadernos de filología clásica* 21, 269-282.

Villasante, Luis. 1979. *Historia de la literatura vasca*. Burgos: Aránzazu. ISBN: 8472401146. [[+info](#)] [[quod vide](#)]

Sarasola, Ibon. 1982. *Historia social de la literatura vasca*. Madrid: Akal. ISBN: 8473391611. [[+info](#)]

Zuloaga San Román, Eneko. 2020. "Leizarraga, Joanes". @ *Enciclopedia Auñamendi*. [[quod vide](#)]

Credits



José Manuel López Gaseni

Senior lecturer at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). His research has focused on peripheral literary productions, such as Children's Literature or translated literature. Currently he is a member of the research groups LAIDA (Literature and Identity, UPV/EHU) and LITER21 (Children's and Young Adult Literature, USC).



Obra publicada con [Licencia Creative Commons Reconocimiento No comercial 4.0](#)

[Asociación Ibérica de Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación \(AIETI\)](#)