Just over one-fourth of young people in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country speak Basque as much as or more than Spanish when interacting with friends

Although the knowledge of Basque has increased among young people, its use among friends has remained at the same level as in previous years

On the occasion of the International Day of the Basque Language, which is held on 3 December, the Basque Youth Observatory is publishing a brief analysis of how many young people use the Basque language to interact with their friends.

According to data obtained from a survey of 1500 young people aged 15 to 29 at the beginning of this year, 2016, 26.4 % of youth in the 15 to 29 age group use Basque as often as or more than Spanish to interact with their friends (they speak all or almost all the time in Basque, more often in Basque than in Spanish or equally in both languages).

This value has remained stable since 2004 when 26.9 % stated they used Basque as much as or more than Spanish when interacting with friends.

This lack of change is paradoxical given that the percentage of young people who say they speak Basque well has increased between the said years (from 55.5 % in 2004 to 69.3 % in 2016).

In any case, the percentage of young people who say they speak Basque with their friends (26.9 %) is higher than the average for the general population of the Basque Country. Among the total population over the age of 16, the percentage of people who use Basque when speaking with friends stands at 21.4 %, according to data published by the Vice-Chancellor of Linguistic Policy of the Basque Government in the 6th Sociolinguistic Survey also prepared year.
What are the differences in the various territories?

Gipuzkoa is the province where more young people use Basque when relating with other people. In 2016, 45.7 % of youth from Gipuzkoa claim to speak Basque as often as or more than Spanish when speaking to friends. In Bizkaia, this percentage falls to 18.5 % and in Álava to 10.8 %.

It is also true that the percentage of young people who say they speak Basque fluently is greater in Gipuzkoa than in the other provinces: 78.9 % in Gipuzkoa, 68.3 % in Bizkaia and 51.4 % in Álava. However, the different levels of fluency are not proportional to the differences in use.

To show that the differences between the provinces regarding the use of the Basque language is not only due to different levels of fluency, we shall only take into consideration bilingual youths (i.e. those who say they speak Basque fluently), and we shall calculate the percentage of those who are fluent in Basque and use it when speaking to friends. Based on the results, we can see that the differences between provinces are still significant. More than half of Basque-speaking youths in Gipuzkoa, 57.9 %, use Basque to speak to friends, while only 27.1 % of young people who are fluent in Basque do so in Bizkaia and even fewer in Álava, where only 21.1 % of the Basque-speaking youths use the language to speak to friends.

Are there differences based on the age of young people?

The lower the age, the higher the fluency in Basque is among young people. Thus, in the 15 to 19 age group, 81.3 % say they are fluent in Basque. This percentage decreases to 69.5 % among people in the 20 to 24 age group and to 59.1 % among people aged 25 to 29.

However, the percentage of people who use the Basque Language with friends is similar in the three age groups: 27.6 % among people aged 15 to 19, 26.7 % in the 20 to 24 age group and 25.2 % among people aged 25 to 29.
This is of particular concern given that we would expect that greater fluency would result in greater use, but this is not the case. The youngest group seems to be the least aware regarding the use of the Basque language; thus, if we focus only on the people who say they speak Basque fluently (as we have done previously to analyse the differences between provinces) we find that one one-third of the bilingual members of the 15 to 19 age group (33.9 %) speak to their friends mainly in Basque or equally in Basque and Spanish. In the 20 to 24 age group, the percentage of bilingual members who choose to speak with friends in Basque increases slightly to 38.4 %. Finally, in the 25 to 29 age group, the figure rises (without reaching a majority) to 42.6 % of Basque speakers who use Basque to speak to friends.

Source: Basque Youth Observatory (preview of data from the "Basque Youth 2016" study)