

FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS



Resurrección María de Azkue
(1864-1952)

“Afin que personne ne s’étonne du nombre de nos dialectes, il est bon de remarquer: 1^o que, selon Max Müller, l’état naturel d’une langue est de vivre répartie en dialectes, les idiomes littéraires de la Grèce, de Rome, de l’Inde, de l’Italie, de la France et de l’Espagne, n’étant rien plus qu’artificiels; 2^o que le français, aussi bien que l’allemand, l’italien, le grec et l’anglais même, possèdent autant de dialectes que notre langue; 3^o que, si nous en croyons Humboldt dans ses *Corrections et additions au Mithridate*, la multiplicité des dialectes et variétés en ce qui concerne notre langue se base sur la grande extension territoriale qu’autrefois elle renfermait et sur la séparation qui existait entre ceux qui la parlaient; 4^o que, si nous désirons voir notre langue, chenuée, pour ainsi dire, depuis des siècles, recouvrer la vie robuste à laquelle elle a droit, il est absolument nécessaire que l’art et la littérature nous poussent à l’unification, comme elle a eu lieu chez les Indiens, les Grecs, les Allemands, les Anglais, les Italiens, les Français et les Espagnols. Alors nos efforts seront réellement pratiques.” (R. M. de Azkue, *Diccionario vasco-español-francés / Dictionnaire Basque-espagnol-français*, 1905, Bilbao: Dirección del autor / Chez l’Auteur, XXVII-XXVIII.)



Resurrección Maria de Azkue, priest, musician and writer was the first head of the Academy of the Basque Language (Euskaltzaindia in Basque). He made several major contributions to the study of the Basque language and was the first head of Euskaltzaindia.

- 1864, August 5th: Born in Lekeitio (Biscay), Spain.
- Studies: Firstly he made Nautical studies (in his natal Lekeitio, a fishing town of the Bay of Biscay), then baccalaureate (Bilbao).
- 1881-1893: Theology and philosophy studies (Vitoria-Gasteiz, in the seminary; and University of Salamanca).
- 1888: He was ordained priest.
- 1888: He was awarded the chair of Basque Studies in Bilbao, the first chair of Basque Studies. As adversary he had, among others, two famous opponents: The philosopher and writer Miguel de Unamuno and the politician Sabino Arana, creator of the Basque nationalism movement and afterwards the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).
- 1891: He published *Euskal Izkindea* (Basque Grammar)
- 1897: He begun to publish *Euskalzale* (three years later forbidden) and *Ibaizabal* magazines and other influential works.
- 1904-1909: Azkue made three travels to Europe, visiting Tours, Paris, London, Brussels, Cologne, Berlin and Munich. He devoted the stay in Paris, Brussels and Cologne to conclude his musical studies.
- 1905: He published his most popular work: *Diccionario vasco-español-francés*.
- 1905: He was designated as a member of the *Société de Linguistique de Paris*.
- 1909: On return in Bilbao he devoted his efforts to promote the Basque language and the boost of the Academy of the Basque language, which was created in 1918 and was its first head, during 32 years, until his death.
- His main study on Basque morphology (*Morfología Vasca*) and the collection of Basque folks songs (*Cancionero Popular Vasco*) are his major works, together with the dictionary. He also conceived and developed the *Erizkizundi Irukoitza* ('Triple Questionnaire'), a substantial tool to elicit information on vocabulary, morphology and

pronunciation of Basque from local informants, which was fully published in 1984 by Ana M^a Echaide.

- 1922: He was designated as a member of the *Science Academy of Russia*.
- 1925: The Real Academia de la Lengua (Madrid) nominated Azkue as member of the Academy.
- 1935: He published *Euskaleñaren Yakintza*, a 4 volume collection of traditional folk-lore.
- As a musician he published *Urtzuri* (1911) and *Urlo* (1914) operas, among other musical pieces.
- During the Spanish Civil War, the dictator Francisco Franco closed down Euskaltzaindia. But in 1941 he managed to open it again and from then on the Academy of the Basque Language has never been closed until now.
- 1951, November 9th: Azkue died.



Main works

1905: *Diccionario Vasco-Español-Francés* ('Basque-Spanish-French dictionary'). This is the most widely known publication of Azkue. The two main sources used by Azkue for this work: classical literature and his own research, inquiring informants when he was across the largest regions of the Basque Country. That is why, this dictionary is considered a major source of dialectal material.

1922: *Cancionero Popular Vasco* ('Popular Basque son book'), a compilation of popular music and songs gathered by himself. It contains popular music, love songs, Bacchic music, cot songs, dances, lament and elegy songs, wedding songs, children songs, religious and holiday songs, romances and tales, etc. The book contains 1.000 songs.

1923: *Morfología Vasca* ('Basque morphology'). The book deals with Basque affixes (prefixes and suffixes), grammatical categories (idioms, suffixes of subordinate

sentences...), and the verb. This book has been used by many young people in the post war period.

1935-1947: *Euskaleñiaren Yakintza* ('The knowledge of the Basque Country'). This publication (4 books) constituted the major collection of Basque folklore at that time. It contains traditions, believes, tales, proverbs, children language, gobbledygook, popular medicine, popular poems, popular meteorology, children games and songs, riddles, odd prayers, etc. This publication has been published two more times.

1935: *Gipuzkera osotua* ('The enhanced Gipuzkoan dialect'). The book constitutes the Azkue's proposition to create the Standard variety of the Basque. Although it has been cited many times, it was not well received and it fell into oblivion.



The main contribution of R. M. Azkue was the ability to gather Basque grammar elements and vocabulary, and all type of language expressions that Basque people used at that time. For that he visited many localities and he had the ability to count on informants in all Basque regions. He was an inveterate collector of Basque forms.

His publications were the second merit of Azkue; firstly the Basque language lacked a useful dictionary with words of all dialects of Basque. Secondly, it needed a grammar with information of all regions of the Basque territory; the *Morfología Vasca* covers this lack.

It is remarkable his multifaceted side because apart from this cited works, he also wrote and published novels, poems, many musical pieces, etc.

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