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Non-Conditioned, Unconscious Intra-Individual Variation

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Abstract: Far from the uniformity of language and the ideal speaker, it is assumed that language varies even within the same speaker, and that such variation is intrinsic to this speaker. This intra-individual variation has been understood mostly as stylistic variation (Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012) and is becoming increasingly important (Werth et al., 2021) in the scholarly literature. Admitting that stylistic variation exists, I argue that not all intra-individual variation is conditioned and conscious, according to my data. The analysis will be carried out with data from the *Basque linguistic atlas (EHHA)* (Aurrekoetxea & Videgain, 2010–2020), which examines systematically the intra-individual variation of speakers in the elicitation phase. Based on these data, the aim of this paper is to show that there are also non-conditioned and unconscious types of variation, and to give a preliminary outline of a theory that accommodates these types of variation.

Keywords: intra-individual variation; non-conditioned variation; unconscious variation; linguistic theory; Basque

1. Introduction

Linguistic variation has been studied since the beginning of linguistics. It is true that studies were primarily oriented towards inter-dialectal variation and were embedded in what has been called geolinguistics or linguistic geography. The uniformity of language and the ideal speaker–listener advocated by Chomsky (1965, p. 3) as an artefact for the elaboration of his linguistic theory was counterbalanced by the impetus of works in the variationist sociolinguistics framework (Labov, 1969, ff). These works argued in favor of analyzing such variation as conditioned by social factors, and this approach was the focus of much of the work of linguists in the second half of the 20th century (Tagliamonte, 2012; Anderson et al., 2022). We thus move from one theoretical framework which advocates for variation as being produced by geographical factors (variation among localities), to another in which variation is found within the same locality, produced and conditioned by social factors: these are inter-individual and intralocal theories of variation.

Although for decades this local variation, with some exceptions, was conceived as inter-individual variation (IEV), the latter has become increasingly important in recent times (Werth et al., 2021). In the scholarly literature, intra-individual variation (IAV) has been understood mostly as stylistic variation, which is conditioned by contextual factors (cf. Halliday, 1978; Hernández-Campoy & Cutillas-Espinosa, 2012; Ulbrich & Werth, 2021; Büllow & Pfenninger, 2021). Although intra-individual variation has been studied mainly in individuals with knowledge of more than one language, I will apply it here to older speakers who only have a good command of one dialect or variety, with the belief that these data will enrich the study of IAV. Furthermore, Büllow and Pfenninger, in the above-mentioned publication, propose a distinction between intra-speaker and intra-individual naming, a difference which has been adopted in this paper.

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Indeed, the various approaches to IAV have analyzed different types or domains. Ulbrich and Werth (2021) offer a good perspective on the subject. They distinguish four types: the unconditioned, conditioned, functionalized, and mandatory form (Idem: 7–11). They further define unconditioned IAV as variation that 'cannot be attributed to social, situational or psychological factors considered extra-linguistic, nor by factors inherent to the linguistic system such as phonotactics, morphological conditions or syntactic constraints.' (Idem: 7). We fully agree with their contention that "not every observable IAV has to be functionalized or conditioned" (Idem: 8). As far as the relationship between IAV and IEV is concerned, the linguistic inventory of the former must inevitably be integrated into that of the latter. IAV cannot have any feature that does not belong to IEV, but not the other way around, that is, there can be IEV features in a language community that do not appear in the IAV of all the members of this community. At the same time, not all members of a community have the same variation, either qualitatively or quantitatively (some members have more variation than others). This being the case, one of the questions that could be asked is the following: what typology should the members who produce the greatest intra-individual variation have? Presumably, it would not be those who use more standardized forms and are more educated. It may be related to the evidence from variationist sociolinguistics that the upper strata of society are not the most conducive to variation.

Our starting point is the large amount of intra-individual variation that has been collected in the *Euskararen Herri Hizkeren Atlasa-Linguistic Atlas of the Popular Varieties of Basque* (hereafter EHHA). Bearing all this variation in mind, we wonder whether it is conditioned and conscious, or whether, on the contrary, at least a large part of it is neither conditioned nor conscious. And if the latter is true, how could this be explained or what would be the ideal theory to understand it?

In traditional dialectology, there is little option to speak about intra-individual variation. In fact, this theoretical approach has argued for a long time that there is no local variation and, to sustain this idea, advocated in favor of the perfect speaker (NORM speaker, cf. J. K. Chambers & Trudgill, 1998/2004, p. 30) in each locality. This view changed with the advent of the linguistic atlases elaborated in the second half of the 20th century (such as the EHHA), whose objectives included the search for local and even intra-personal variation, together with geographic or inter-location variation. The research on geolinguistic variation has not taken into account intra-individual variation. Instead, it was treated as a part of local variation and analyzed quantitatively in dialectometry (Nerbonne, 2017; Aurrekoetxea et al., 2020, among others).

In regard to the structure of this article, the Section 2 addresses the methodology followed, the Section 3 presents the data, the Section 4 discusses the data, and the Section 5 summarizes the research.

2. Methodology

The analysis will be carried out with data from the *Basque linguistic atlas* (EHHA) (Aurrekoetxea & Videgain, 2010–2020). It is noteworthy that these informants are NORM speakers (J. K. Chambers & Trudgill, 1998/2004, p. 30). This is because, as it was the first atlas on Basque, it was considered of vital importance to collect the oldest stage of the Basque oral language.

The EHHA paid special attention to the intra-individual variation of the informants, trying to collect as much variation as possible at the time of the survey. The directors of the project were sure that, by employing a different elicitation methodology, they would overcome the problem of a single answer to each question (Aurrekoetxea, 2002), which is

associated with traditional atlases (at least the Roman atlases) (Spitzer, 1926; Videgain & Aurrekoetxea, 2015).

2.1. Sociolinguistic Background of the Speakers

It is important to emphasize that the speakers used for elicitation in the EHHA have experienced a diglossic situation (Ferguson, 1967) which can be described as extreme: the Basque language was relegated to family life and to a very narrow circle of friends, in which, for most people, Basque was of no value at all. Spanish and French were considered the only languages of culture and work, and knowledge of them was regarded as a form of subsistence. In any event, this was not only the case of Basque; Galician, Catalan, Asturleonese, and Aragonese are in a similar diglossic situation.

The EHHA surveys began during this difficult time for Basque in the late 1980s when the Basque Language Academy (Euskaltzaindia) was making great efforts to promote the standard variety. Such a diglossic situation can clearly lead to the use of borrowings from languages that are considered to be superior. This may be the reason for so many loanwords in Basque from both Spanish and French. Despite the fact that we are dealing with two languages, Spanish in the southern part of the Pyrenees and French in the northern part, it can be said based on the first available data that the influence of both languages is similar as far as the loans received are concerned (Aurrekoetxea et al., 2024).

Apart from the diglossic situation described above, older speakers experienced a diaglossic situation (Bellmann, 1998; Aurrekoetxea, 2006) with respect to the unified variety, which, by this time, could be heard on Basque public television and radio, was taught in the *ikastolas* (schools teaching entirely in Basque), and was beginning to be taught in public schools. Any accurate interpretation must bear in mind that the difference between the standard variety and the dialects is quite large in some varieties. Moreover, the difference between varieties is such that they become incomprehensible to unfamiliar speakers in almost all cases, with these speakers having to use Spanish or French to understand each other when the varieties are so far apart. In addition, the Basque language was considered worthless, and its speech was not even thought to be good enough to be used outside the home, with these older speakers not being able to express themselves in Batua (standard Basque).

This dual diglossic and diaglossic situation experienced by the generation used as informants constituted a very favorable environment for the appearance of intra-individual variation. At the same time, however, it was clear to us that responses induced by field workers should not be accepted. We had to make sure that only those terms and linguistic features considered by the informants as their own would be treated as valid responses during the research; and among these responses, only those that were not due to linguistic or sociolinguistic factors were regarded as cases of 'un-conditioned variation'.

2.2. Methodology Used in EHHA

In such an environment, the project fieldworkers had to be very empathetic with the informants, and their first task was to try to give prestige to their speech. It was very important for the informants to be clear that what the fieldworkers were looking for was their variety, the traditional 'good' Basque which they preserved, and not the modern 'new' one. In this attempt to collect the informants' habitual way of speaking, surveys were carried out in their homes, and, more specifically, in their kitchens; this was the key location in which their way of speaking had been sheltered, where they were safest to be found speaking in their native variety. It should be added that the EHHA surveys (conducted from 1987 to 2002) were not carried out in a day, but lasted about a month in each locality,

with sometimes weekly and sometimes daily surveys, in which the fieldworker gained the trust of the informant, to some extent at least.

Furthermore, the interview was not limited to the question–answer format, but the fieldworker had the "obligation" to ascertain the linguistic and conversational environment and context in which a particular word was used, for what purpose, in what situation, etc., even collecting stories, tales, passages, and experiences related to the concept. This provided them with an opportunity for a real conversation about all aspects of the family and the working and social life of the informants who were already elderly (over 65 years old and in some cases close to 80 years old). It should be noted that all interviews were recorded without interruption and that all the recorded material has been preserved. As a final characteristic of the informants, almost all of them were diglossic; in addition to Basque, they had a greater or lesser knowledge of Spanish (in the Spanish area) or French (in the French area), although there was more than one who was unable to understand French or Spanish TV. The interviews began by pressing the record button on the tape recorder and the recording did not stop until the end of the interview (a couple of hours in each case). This allowed for an interview that was very close to the natural spontaneous language of the informants and very close to a spontaneous interaction between the fieldworker and the interviewee.

In every interview, once the task of 'centring' the informants had been completed, the fieldworkers had two objectives:

(a) to obtain the words or phrase types that corresponded to the individual elements in the survey, either by means of a question, a sentence, a circumlocution, a photograph, a drawing, and so on. Once the corresponding word or characteristic had been obtained, other words or grammatical characteristics were suggested (for the survey methodology, see Aurrekoetxea, 1986) that could be used in the locality (fieldworkers were asked to systematically use the proposals found in their survey notebook). For this purpose, the fieldworker had a list of words/grammatical characteristics arranged by region (they had guidelines for systematically implementing these suggestions or proposals). And after securing the right word or words, they would ask about details relating to the answer: size, function, material, ways to achieve goals, etc.

(b) Once the appropriate word(s) had been found, the informant had to provide a new answer with the suitable grammatical context to pronounce it in the grammatical absolutive indeterminate case (in the case of nouns and adjectives), in order to obtain a word free of grammatical suffixes (in most cases in structures such as "three/five-").

In this context, within a very short time and in the same interview with the same fieldworker, on the same topic of conversation, and with apparently no different sociolinguistic factors, a large amount of data have been collected which corroborate intra-individual variation, without any linguistic intentionality and in a way that is unconsciously (at least without any external indication to the contrary) produced, in phonetics, morphology, syntax, and lexicon.[1]

This research did not take into account all the data collected in the EHHA, but, rather, only those relating to the semantic field of the 'partition of time', making up a total of 71 questions.[2] Localities in which more than one person was interviewed were not taken into account (because in most cases there could be influences between them); thus, only the answers collected in localities with only one informant were used (this makes 58 out of the 145 localities that make up the network of survey points) (see Figure 1). A further restriction was that only answers given by informants on their own initiative were taken into account; proposals made by the fieldworker and accepted by the informant were discarded. Finally, answers that differ between the indefinite form and the singular form

(e.g., [aʂ'teaske'na] (det.)/[aʂ'teas'ken] for 'Wednesday' in EHHA t.2, 10040) have not been taken into account either.

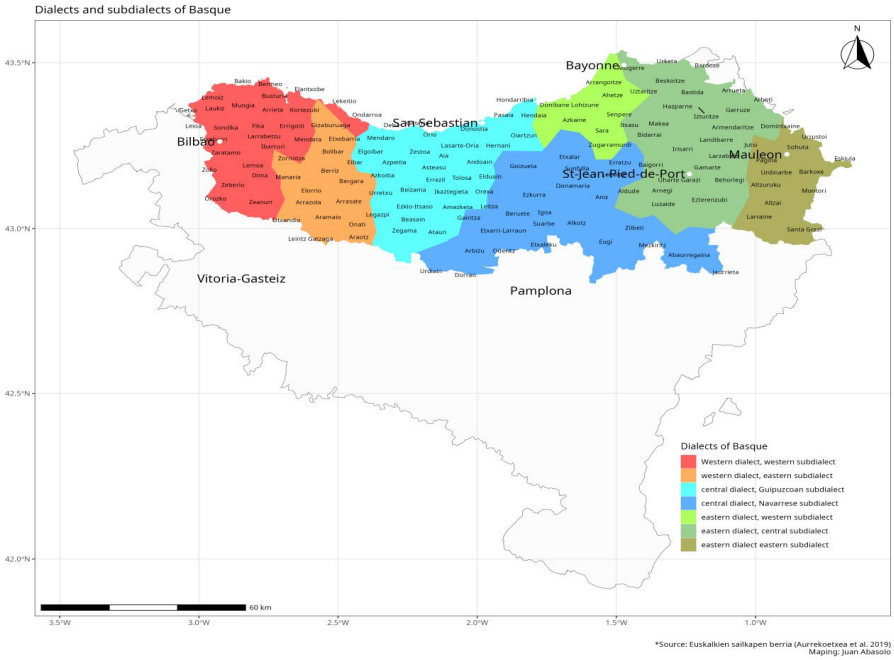

Figure 1. Map of the Basque dialects and subdialects with the 145 EHHA locations.

A systematic survey of the data has been carried out, question by question, locality by locality. The hypothesis (as yet untested) is that notions with great variety in the total Basque language area as a whole will also be more prone to intra-personal variation and that those using short words and very clear notions will have less variation.

3. Results

As mentioned above, our interest in the topic stems from the data collected in the EHHA, for which a huge amount of intralocal variation and intra-individual variation was collected (Figure 2). We always understand multiple responses (MRs) as cases of local variation, whether they are inter- or intra-individual types of variation or whether they are produced by two speakers or by the same speaker. In locations where only one informant was used, we understand the responses as clear cases of intra-individual variation.

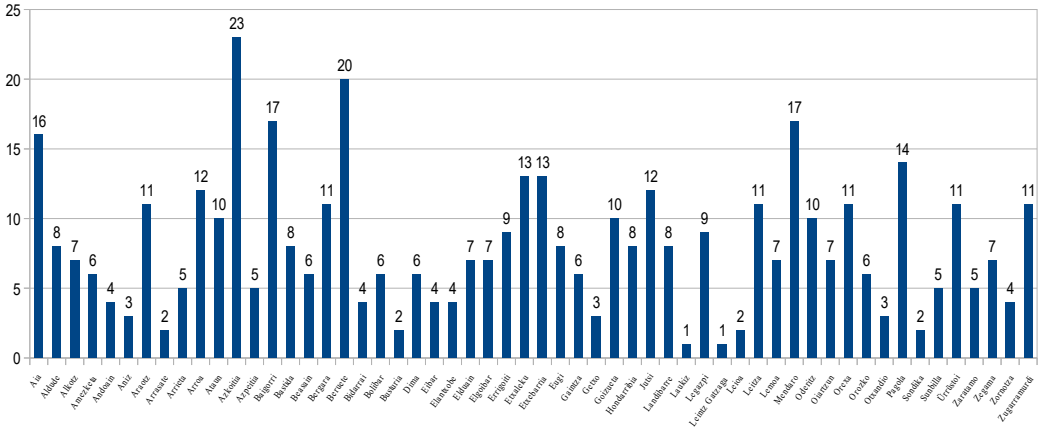

Figure 2. Number of questions with intra-individual variation in localities analyzed and questions.

As mentioned in Section 2, an exhaustive analysis of the semantic field of time partitioning was carried out in the locations where a single informant was used and which contain more than one response. The results are overwhelming because of the large amount of personal variation obtained from informants. This indicates that the individual is the primary focus of linguistic variation, not the community. The problem is how to capture all this variation. Moreover, there is a big difference between localities. For example, in Aia (first locality in Figure 2), there are 16 questions with MRs, while in Azkoitia, there are 23. Although in most of these localities there are two answers, there are cases in which up to four and five different answers are given, as will be seen below. Why is there so much variation in some places and less in others? Or perhaps one could ask why some places have achieved more variation and others have achieved less variation? These are questions that remain unanswered. Indeed, we believe that the amount of variation collected depends on the semantic field; there are semantic fields in which more variation has been collected than in others and there are localities in which more responses have been collected (which in some cases may be due to the work of the fieldworker). Another side issue is whether border localities are more prone to intra-individual variation or not. In the data presented, all the localities that have more than 10 questions with intra-individual variation (16 localities out of 58 analyzed) and with intra-dialectal variation are border localities or very close to such places. This indicates that there is some correlation between variation and dialectal border.

In order not to misread the data in Figure 2, we add that not all of the variation expressed therein corresponds to unconditioned and unconscious intra-individual variation. However, all of it does correspond to responses given by people of their own accord, without any response conditioned by the fieldworker, by the informant in the same survey, to the same fieldworker and in the same or very similar survey circumstances.

All this local variation (which in many cases was intra-individual) clashed head-on with the information collected in the first linguistic atlases, at least in the Romance area (the practice of the 'premier jet' that Gillieron instilled in his ALF is well known and had a considerable influence on a whole generation of Romance linguistic atlases; see Pop, 1950, p. 119). This clearly reflected that geolinguistic variation was not based solely on variation between localities, but on variation within the same locality. At the same time, we saw that this variation was not only within the same locality, but even within the same informant.

When it came to selecting intra-individual variation, we chose questions relating to the partitioning of time. There are two restrictions, though, to this approach: On the one hand, only questions with intra-individual variation have been selected (37 questions of 71). On the other hand, the localities (56 in total) in which only one informant was used were analyzed. Intra-individual variation data have been classified into different sections: phonological, phonetic, lexical and morphological data.

As far as Basque background information is concerned, in phonology and pronunciation there is no specific norm for standard Basque; in morphology, syntax, and lexicon, the standard forms are codified (https://www.euskaltzaindia.eus/hizkuntza-baliabideak, accessed on 13 June 2024). The informants used in the EHHA project are NORM informants, as has already been specified elsewhere, and correspond to the spectrum that is furthest away from the standard variety, which in most cases is totally unknown to them.

3.1. Phonological Variation

First of all, each fieldworker immediately transcribed the recordings of their data in their office using only their hearing ability, without any automated transcription tools. This is a subjective transcription which does not guarantee 100 percent accuracy, but which we consider to be highly reliable, since a very detailed phonetic alphabet was not used.

This sub-section will show examples of variation due to phonological rules which may or may not have restrictions. These phonological rules may have a greater or lesser geographical spread and/or may have greater or lesser force. One of the most common cases at this level is the loss of a voiced plosive in the intervocalic position (-b-, -d-, -g- > Ø). This rule is very common in the central area (both on the southern and northern slopes of the Pyrenees), but much more sporadic in the western and eastern areas. What is more, it affects more commonly used words than those that appear more rarely in everyday conversations.

There are countless examples throughout Basque. Just two of them will be presented: that referring to the word *egun* 'day' (EHHA, vol. II, map 269) in examples (1a,b,c) and *ostegun* 'Thurday' (1d).

(1) a. Azkoitia: [eˈɣun], [ˈewn]
b. Beruete: [iˈun, ˈewn]
c. Leitza: [ˈewn, eˈɣun]
d. Aia: [oʂ̺teˈun, oʂ̺teˈɣun]

In (1a) and (1c) there is a loss of the intervocalic fricative consonant "-g-", which leads to the loss of one syllable ([ˈewn]), because the "u" of the second syllable has become a semivowel in a second phase, since this is an ideal position for a diphthong to occur in Basque. In (1b), apart from the loss of the intervocalic "-g-", the variation is in the pronunciation of one or two syllables and the closure of the vowel "e" > "i" ([ˈewn] > [iˈun]) before diphthongation. It is interesting to note that, while in some localities the variant with the intervocalic "-g-" has been collected in the first place (in Azkoitia, i.e.,), in others it has been in the second place (in Leitza and Aia). In (1d), the same phenomenon occurs as the term is composed of the morphemes "oste + egun" ('after + day'). For an appropriate interpretation, it should be noted that the prestige or standard forms are *egun* and *ostegun*. This means that they are the most commonly used variants in formal speech; however, in informal and careless pronunciation, the two forms can appear indistinctly in places in which the loss of the intervocalic "-g-" is more or less common.

As regards the loss of the alveolar tap "-r-" in the intervocalic position, an example is provided in (2), corresponding to the word *ostiral* 'Friday' (EHHA II, map 274). This rule ([ɾ > Ø / V _ V) is not general in Basque, although it is very common in some areas and varieties. It should be noted that the form with the intervocalic "-r-" corresponds to the following standard form:

(2) a. Aia: [oʂ̺ˈtial, oʂ̺ˈtiɾal]
b. Azkoitia: [oʂ̺ˈtiɾɛl, oʂ̺ˈtiɛl]
c. Beruete: [oʂ̺ˈtjel, oʂ̺ˈte:l]
d. Leitza: [oʂ̺tiˈɾɛl, oʂ̺ˈtiel]

As in the examples in (1), in this case, there is also a loss of the intervocalic "-r-" in the first (in Aia) and second (in Azkoitia and Leitza) elicitation. Interestingly, this loss occurs in both in Beruete (2c).

A third case is that between the vowels "e" and "a" as a product of the assimilation produced by the preceding vowel "u" (a > e/(u, i) (cons.) ___), as is the case in (3) for the concept 'summer' (EHHA II, map 278) and which is well known in the Basque language, especially in the western part of the Basque Country:

(3) Etxebarria: [uðe, ˈuða]

There may also be cases of applying or not applying the phonological rule of an anti-hiatic consonant appearance (Ø > (j, ʒ, ʃ) / i _ a), as in (4), for *bihar* 'tomorrow' (EHHA II, map 303), that is, the appearance of a consonant between the vowels "i" and "a", so that they are pronounced in two syllables, since Basque is averse to rising diphthongs in which the first element is a semivowel and the second is a vowel:

(4) a. Araotz: [biˈar, ˈbiɟar]
b. Eugi: [ˈbier, biɟer]

While in (4a) there is this phonological rule, in (4b) there is also the vowel closure rule (a > e), as shown in (3).

3.2. Phonetic Variation

In the EHHA, there are many cases of intra-individual variation in which no phonological rule is apparent. Some of them will be presented in this section.

The first of these concerns the variation between "-rtz-"/"-st-" as in (5) for the concept *ostegun* 'Thursday' (EHHA II, map 273). This is known as rhotacism and occurs in some words in areas of the central and eastern dialects:

(5) Landibarre: [ort͡seˈɣun, os̻teˈɣun]

The locality of Landibarre (in Lower Navarre) is on the border of this phenomenon: in areas towards the west, there is "-rtz-" and in more eastern areas "-st-", as well as in areas of the western dialect and in more western areas of the central dialect. The speaker produced these variations without realizing it in either case, pronouncing one variant in one case and the other in another, always in the same sociolinguistic situation (the same survey, same fieldworker, in the same conversation, and in a very short interval of time). Looking more deeply into the answers, we cannot be 100 percent certain that the informant did not realize that he/she pronounced the word differently. But the fact that he/she did not make any comment or gesture is a sign (or at least we consider it so) that he/she is unaware of the difference.

The second one is a case of variation occurring between the vowels "i" and "e", as in (6) for the concept 'Friday' (EHHA II, map 274):

(6) Araotz (Oñati): [iˈβwakot͡s, eˈβwakot͡sa] (determinate form)

There is no phonological rule for the change "e > i" in (6), in which the morpheme "egu-" (< egun), seen as a lexeme in (1), can be seen in its primitive form; this change was also seen in (1b). In addition to this change, there is also the passage "-g- > -b-", which is not very common in Basque (although there is more than one case of this), and which does not follow any phonological rule. The final "-a" is the suffix of determination. In this case, there is a double variation which does not follow any phonological rule and is therefore very different from the examples given in both (1) and (2), in which the variation is due to rules of reduction in the number of sounds and therefore in the ease of articulation.

There is the loss of a whole syllable, as in (7) between *larunbata* (determinate term with the article at the end "-a") and *lanbat* 'Saturday' (EHHA II, map 275), as well as in (8c,d) *udazken* 'Autumn' (EHHA II, map 279):

(7) Baigorri: [iβiakojt͡s, lambat, laɾumbata] (det.)

(8) a. Azkoitia: [uˈðasken, uˈðe͡asken]
b. Mendaro: [uˈδasken, uˈδaɣwen]
c. Etxaleku: [ˈuδondoʼa (det.), ˈuδeondoˈa] (det.)
d. Eugi: [laras̻ˈken, laˈreaskeˈna] (det.)

In (7), apart from the word *ibiakoitz*, we have variation between *lanbat* and *larunbat* (the standard variant), with the loss of one syllable. In example (8), various terms are used, the first element of which is *uda* 'summer', and as the second element, different morphemes can be used: *azken* 'last', *goren* 'surpassed', and *ondo* 'last'. There is variation with the loss of one syllable in (8c). In (8b), there is variation between the two terms *udondo* and *udagwen* (<udagoren). In (8d), in which the morphemes *larre* 'pasture' and *azken* 'last' are clearly visible, there is also a loss of one syllable. In this case, there is also variation in the pronunciation of the sibilant: dorsoalveolar [s̻] in the former and apico-alveolar [s] in the latter (the standard form is *larrazken*). In (7), we find different words on the one hand and different pronunciations on the other hand. In (8), meanwhile, we have different suffixes and different pronunciations.

In the following examples, we will focus on the variation produced by more than two variants. In the first, we focus on the case of three variants of the same word, in example (9) for the concept 'now' (EHHA II, map 326), corresponding to Etxaleku, located in the northern part of Navarre. This is about the disappearance of the "-r-" and the final "-n". The disappearance of the intervocalic "-r-" is one of the most numerous cases that occur, especially in the central and eastern part of the Basque-speaking area. Even though only Etxaleku is cited here, the loss of the intervocalic "-r-" has been found in this concept in 16 localities:

(9) Etxaleku: [oˈɾaj, oˈɾajn, oˈajn]

Elsewhere, we have two variants with the intervocalic "-r-" and one without it, and one variant without the final "-n" and two with it. Despite being a two-syllable word, three different variants in its pronunciation have been found. Moreover, in the same locality, four different variants have been found for the concept 'yet' (EHHA II, map 330), as shown in (10):

(10) Etxaleku: [ˈo͡aɲiken, oˈɾajɲiˈkan, ˈoɾajndiˈken, ˈoɾajnˈdik]

The form in standard Basque is *oraindik*, which is composed of *orain* 'now' and the suffix of the place genetive *-dik* 'from', while in central dialects, the variant suffix *-dikan* is used. Among the forms governed in this locality, the following is noted:

- In the first response collected, there is a form without the intervocalic "-r-", pronunciation in a single syllable of the first two vowels, the loss of the "-d-" of the suffix *-dikan*, and the assimilation of the "a" due to an "i" in a preceding syllable;
- There is a second response without loss of the intervocalic "-r-" and loss of the "-d-" of the suffix;
- There is a third response without the loss of the intervocalic "-r-" and the assimilation of the "a" into "e" in the suffix;
- There is a fourth response with the suffix *-dik*, while the previous ones have *-dikan*;
- There is, in addition, a loss of the diphthong in the first;
- There is also variation between the palatal [ɲ] and alveolar [n].

Bearing in mind that they were uttered by the same speaker, in the same survey and before the same fieldworker, and in a conversation that is close to a spontaneous interaction taking place over a couple of hours during each survey, it is difficult to find a convincing explanation in which there is a loss of the retention of the intervocalic "-r-"; the use of different variants of the suffix *-dik/-dikan*, the loss of the first sound of this suffix, and the loss of the diphthong and the alveolar or palatal pronunciation of the "n" all have a "logical place" in linguistic theory. It remains unconvincing that all this variation is the result of a phase of linguistic change. It is, similarly, difficult to argue that this speaker or idiolect

has a linguistic system with only one variant for this element and is subject to six different linguistic rules at the same time.

Something similar can be said of the example given in (11), corresponding to Mendaro, located in the north-western part of Guipúzcoa and on the linguistic border between the western and central dialects, where four variants of the same word have been found for the concept 'at once' (EHHA II, map 328).

(11) Mendaro: [ʂeˈit͡ʃuˈan, ʂeˈɣit͡ʃuˈan, ʂeˈɣiðuˈan, ʂeˈɣit͡ʃwan]

These are four variants of the same word (none of them is standard, which is *segituan*), which are grouped in three linguistic changes:

- The loss of the intervocalic "-g-" (in the first variant);
- The palatalization of the intervocalic "-d-" (in the first, second and fourth variants);
- The diphthongization of the "-ua-" sequence of the last syllable (in the fourth variant).

Here, there is a similar situation to example (10), with four variants encompassing three phonological rules. The most convincing explanation from our point of view is that this idiolect has a fluctuating linguistic system, in which at least the rules of the loss of intervocalic "-g-", palatalization of intervocalic "-d-", and diphthongization of the sequence "-ua-" are present.

Another case of triple variation in the same word is found in (12) among the variants of *argiaste* 'dawn' (EHHA II, map 309): consonantal variation (ʂ vs. ʃ) between the first and the other variants, vowel variation between the first two and the remaining two (e vs. i), and loss of the semivowel [j] between the first three and the fourth:

(12) Beruete: [ˈaryjaʃˈte, ˈaryjaʂˈte, ˈaryaʃˈti, ˈaryaʃˈti]

It is a clear example of the continuous vacillation in which the language finds itself and yet it does not prevent understanding between speakers.

3.3. Lexical Variation

It is common knowledge that native speakers with full knowledge of a language usually have (in most cases) more than one way of expressing or communicating their feelings and sending information to their interlocutors. This is true of both grammar and lexis. There are various patterns for expressing the same information differently, but the most recurrent ones of lexical variation in Basque data can be summarized as follows:

(a) geosynonymous terms;
(b) autochthonous vs. borrowed lexicon;
(c) specific lexicon vs. general lexicon or circumlocution.

These different ways of expressing the "same idea" or of indicating "the same notion" are nested in the brain of every speaker, to a greater or lesser extent. Bearing in mind the Basque proverb 'when the peasant speaks, don't pay attention to what he says, but to what he means', the normal speaker (that is, someone who is not educated to speak in public) does not pay attention to how he says something when he/she is speaking in an informal conversation, but, rather, pays attention to the message; he/she even despises more educated expressions. Moreover, speakers express themselves according to their grammar, which is acquired orally through their family and environment. In most cases in casual, informal, and relaxed conversations, the speaker focuses on the message, not on the form, because in this type of conversation it is the message that is important, not the 'how'. In this context, how it is said is not important for the speaker, but only that the message is understood.

3.3.1. Geosynonyms

Geosynonyms occur most naturally in dialect border localities: this kind of variation exists in the notion of 'Sunday' (EHHA II, map 276), as shown in (13):

(13) a. Araotz: [ðoˈmeka, xaj]
b. Beasain: [xaj, ðºmeka, iˈɣande]
c. Elgoibar: [domeka, iˈɣande]
d. Mendaro: [ðomeˈka, xaj]

The four localities are situated on the border between the western and central dialects, in which the word *jai* [xaj] is typical of the place, competing with *domeka*, typical of the western dialect in (13a) and (13d), with this word and the central *igande* in (13b), and between the western *domeka* and central *igande*, but without the autochthonous word in (13c). There is no information on which of the three words is most likely to appear in a sporadic conversation, but the informant considers all three his own, which makes him the maximum emitting exponent of the variation.

As one more example to show intra-individual variation on the border between the central and eastern dialect, there are also two words in (14) for the concept 'today' (EHHA II, map 300):

(14) a. Zugarramurdi: [eˈɣun, gawr]
b. Aldude: [gawr, eˈɣun]

These are localities on the border of the western *gaur* and eastern *egun* dialectal zones.

3.3.2. Autochthonous vs. Loanwords

This is of special importance. It was noted above that the generation surveyed in the EHHA lived through the most dramatic, extreme diglossic situation that the Basque language has ever experienced and is still experiencing. The assumption of borrowings was vital in certain semantic fields. One of them could be the naming of the months of the year. There are a huge number of dual answers in this field, as in (15) for 'January' (EHHA II, map 283):

(15) a. Arrieta: [eˈneɾo, urtaˈriʎ]
b. Azkoitia: [eneˈɾo, ilˈɾɛlts]
c. Bergara: [eˈneɾo, ˈilɾelts]
d. Mendaro: [ilˈ ɛlts, eneˈ o]
e. Oderitz: [ilˈɾɛlts, eneˈɾo]

In this case, the order of the answers and the comments made about these words are interesting: in (15a,b,c), the borrowed word appears first and the autochthonous word appears second; however, in (15d,e), the terms are reversed, but after having elicited both answers to the question of which of the two is more common in the locality in question, the respondents point out that although they use both words (although more easily the loan word), their parents only used the autochthonous form. The risks involved in the survey thus become clear; the guidelines for fieldworkers to collect all possible responses to each question allowed them to elicit two responses in each locality that would otherwise not have been collected. It is clear, moreover, that the previous work of the fieldworker to enhance the prestige of the local variety paid off in these cases.

Something similar happens in the notion of 'spring', in which the autochthonous word and the borrowing also coexist, as in (16a,b) (EHHA II, map 281):

(16) a. Orexa: [ˈprimaˈβeɾa, uˈðaβɛri]
b. Alkotz: [primaˈβeɾa, uðaˈlena] (det.)
c. Pagola: [beˈðat̪͡se, primaˈðea]

In (a) and (b), this is the case with the autochthonous terms *udaberri* and *udalena* alongside the loan from Spanish *primabera* (<primavera), as well as in (c) with the loan from Gascon *primabère*.

3.3.3. Specific Lexis vs. General Lexis or Circumlocution

Another case to analyze is the loss of a specific and rarely used word, which is replaced by a more general word or a circumlocution, as in (17) for the notion of 'the day after tomorrow' (EHHA II, map 304):

(17) a. Beasain: [biˈarko̞a paˈs̪awtaˈkon, et̪͡si]
biar ko a pasautakon
tomorrow of the passed
b. Zugarramurdi: [ˈet̪͡si, biˈjar pas̪tuˈta]
c. Baigorri: [ˈet̪͡si, biˈaR paas̪ˈtu eta]

The term *etzi* is specific for this notion, which is being replaced by this circumlocution expressing 'the day after tomorrow' in all three cases.

A final case is that of the concept 'last night' (EHHA II, map 308), as set out in (18). In some varieties, *bart* has lost its specificity and there is a need for another word meaning 'night', such as *gabien* or another variant:

(18) a. Elantxobe: [gaˈßien, bart]
b. Zornotza: [gaˈßien, bart]
c. Aia: [bart aˈrat̪͡sian, bart, bart araˈt̪͡sa]
d. Amezketa: [bart, bart gawˈße, bar gawˈe]
e. Andoain: [bar ɣaˈßian, bart]
f. Arroa: [bart, bar ˈɣaßian, bart aˈrat̪͡ʃian]
g. Bergara: [ˈat̪͡so ɣaˈßian, bart]

In (18a) and (18b), the specific word *bart* appears in the conversation after *gabien* 'night', which is more general, but not as specific. In the other cases, although it may appear on its own, in most cases, it is accompanied by the general word meaning 'night', which could be translated as 'last night at night' [bar ˈɣaßian/bart aˈrat̪͡ʃian].

3.4. Intra-Individual Variation in Nominal and Verbal Morphology

To conclude with data, a couple of examples are presented here, both from nominal and verbal morphology.

The example of nominal morphology refers to the singular absolutive of the declension of voices ending in "-o" (<-o + -a>) (EHHA V, map 1067), as presented in (19). In this case, the fieldworker's first choice was to use the word *asto* 'donkey', and as a second choice *zulo* 'hole', among others.

(19) a. Etxalar: [as̪ˈtua, ʃiˈluu, ˈurβeˈɾu]
Goizueta: [as̪ˈtoa, leˈpoo, ˈboro, as̪ˈto]

As far as (19a) is concerned (*astúa* 'the donkey', *xilúu* 'the hole', *úrberú* 'the hot water'), both the first and the third variants are well known in Basque dialectology, but the second is not so well attested. As for (19b), four forms have been collected: *astóa* 'the donkey', *lepóo* 'the neck', *borro*, and *astó*, from the most canonical form to the form with the least

spatial distribution. The problem with both (19a) and (19b) is whether it is possible for any linguistic system known to date to withstand so much fluctuation.

As far as verbal morphology is concerned, among the countless cases of more than one answer, the one corresponding to the second person singular indicative of the verb *izan* 'to be' (EHHA VI, map 1277) has been chosen and is presented in (19):

(20) Hendaia: [saˈɾe, siˈɾa, ˈse]

The three registered forms are also known in relatively nearby localities, with a greater or lesser degree of occurrence. On the basis of known studies on dialectal variation in the surrounding area, the first two forms have a known and accepted explanation. The third form, however, which is very simplified, is more difficult to accept as stemming from the usual phonological rules.

4. Discussion

We are aware that the elicitation methodology in the EHHA has been focused from the outset on collecting as much intra-individual variation as possible and intralocal variation when more than one informant is used in the locality. This methodology has paid off, so that the project database has become an impressive repository of variation, which is still largely under-exploited.

In this section, we will first argue that intra-individual variation is not socially conditioned and that it is unconscious. Secondly, an attempt will be made to create a theoretical environment which goes some way towards explaining this variation.

4.1. Non-Conditioned and Unconscious Intra-Individual Variation

The data collected in this project are of great value because, among other things, they gives us an opportunity to analyze the oral Basque language in a more natural state than the data collected in any previous project. The investment of time and work in searching for this variation that may be hidden among our informants has led to splendid results.

The fact that, in the same interview, and within a short space of time, the speaker randomly (at least apparently) uses variants of the same word or different words without noticing it and without realizing it (or at least without expressing or implying that he/she is in some way using different forms to express the same thing) leads us to think of variation as something personal to this speaker. This variation in turn may or may not be conditioned and may or may not be conscious.

For variation to be conditioned, there must be underlying conditioning social or linguistic factors: either a person or a situation or an environment of production. In the first case, I understand that a person outside his or her everyday environment (family, neighborhood or friendship) can cause intra-individual variation simply because of his or her "unfamiliar" status to the speaker, i.e., what is termed stylistic variation. In this respect, the fieldworker in the EHHA project falls squarely within this "unfamiliar" status. However, when the fieldworker comes again and again and again to "chat" with the informant, he or she gradually becomes "familiar". The informant gets on well with the fieldworker, tells him or her about aspects of his or her family life and even more intimate aspects, and becomes someone close, someone that does not make him or her "think" about how to express himself or herself. This is even more the case when the survey becomes a directed conversation in which the fieldworker does not take any notes and the microphone is placed to one side, and in which, sometimes, the informant even percusses the discussion when trying to explain certain things with the help of his or her hands. Moreover, this is also true when the fieldworker tries to use his or her language, trying to imitate as much as possible the informant's speech.

We never forgot the "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1966). There is always a risk of this, even though we always kept this risk in mind both during the preparation phase of the surveys and during the time they lasted. We will not say that it has been 100% overcome, but neither can we say that all the variation collected has been caused by it. In this context, although this risk should not be underestimated, we think that, for the most part, the intra-individual variation collected is not conditioned by the presence of the fieldworker (aware that the risk of linguistic accommodation is always latent, the fieldworker was mandated to accommodate his or her speech to that of the locality. Despite this, we did not consider ourselves safe from this possibility). This leads us to think that the variation collected is mainly non-conditioned by the fieldworker.

As for the production situation, as mentioned above, the variation analyzed occurs in the same survey unit, with the same persons and in the same question, without any hint from the fieldworker about other ways of pronunciation and other words, i.e., the environment has not changed at all. The same applies to the linguistic context: some changes are caused by the linguistic context or the phonological rule, but they do not appear in the first pronunciation or in the second, but, rather, indistinctly, although most of the variants cannot be explained by the linguistic context. This leads us to think that different forms and pronunciations coexist in the spoken language. Moreover, it seems that spoken speech is a mass in which each element or feature has a margin of fluctuation. In this situation, certain features gain prestige, become fashionable, and others disappear. What the written language does is to select one form from among several, in most cases, according to specific criteria.

We are aware that there are many factors that can influence individual variation (e.g., speech rate, energy loss, fatigue, etc.), but in these data we do not seemingly see any influence of them, although these factors can cause the type of variation we study here.

As to whether the collected intra-individual variation is conscious or unconscious, it has to be said that, apart from what has been stated above, the non-specialist speakers have no training in language, especially not those of earlier generations that enjoyed only a very basic literacy and normally in a non-native language such as French or Spanish. To put it simply, they have no knowledge of what a "verb" is in their language; indeed, they even have no knowledge of that term. They know, however, that they do not use the same terms among family members as they do when communicating with a doctor, to give a very common example. However, many speakers of that generation were not able to differentiate their way of speaking among friends and to a doctor or a priest, ignoring certain greeting formulas and some other simple words.

The EHHA surveys were conducted in a fluid way, encouraging flowing conversations at a normal pace in which the topic changed gradually, without breaks, and slowly. The fieldworker tried to carry on the conversation as if it were spontaneous and "casual", without stopping to ask about the next question in the survey. The four responses obtained in examples (10), (11), and (12) indicate that there is a fluctuation in the speaker's grammar: sometimes he/she pronounces one variant, then another, and, on the third occurrence, he/she may repeat one of the two or pronounce a third form. Phonetic and phonological fluctuation in this case does not prevent correct understanding between people who have the same grammar references. As there are no phonological rules to explain all the forms collected, we could argue that this linguistic system has fluctuation and that there is, therefore, variation in the linguistic forms.

Our hypothesis that the border dialect areas are more prone to variation than the central areas seems to be confirmed by the few samples that have been presented. The three words in example (13b) fully confirm this. Three words are used to designate an object or a notion and they are not in used in all localities; indeed, this is not typical, and one

should say that it is exceptional. The transition from one dialectal zone to another, when it is not an abrupt border, may facilitate this kind of variation. However, we are convinced that speakers are not aware of whether or not they belong to a border zone, linguistically speaking. They know or have a mental map of where they speak "the same" or similarly and where they speak "differently" from those around them. Yet, in terms or grammatical forms they use on a daily basis, they consider them as their own and are often unaware of how far these forms may be extended.

With regard to the unconsciousness of the variation we are dealing with, it is not easy to know for sure that, in all cases without exception, this variation is clearly unconscious. But one of the premises for it to be so is that the informant does not give it away, that is, he/she does not confirm it. If he/she makes no reference to the fact that he/she pronounced a trait differently, then this is (at least initial and not definitive) proof of unconsciousness. Admittedly, there is no conclusive and definitive proof of this. In my honest opinion, I think we should assume that this is strong evidence that the variation is unconscious.

4.2. Framework to Analyze Intra-Individual Variation

If we assume the axiom of the phoneticians that, "On the articulatory and the acoustic level of speech production, no single utterance is exactly the same as another" (Ulbrich & Werth, 2021, p. 2), we would contend that language is in a permanently fluctuating and unsteady state. Therefore, as a general idea, one could say that language lives only in variation, or, rather, in fluctuation, but nevertheless, speakers of a language variety understand each other. As a second general idea, it must be considered that the types of variation known up to now (diachronic, diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic) do not, in our view, explain all the variation.

Starting from these two ideas and taking into consideration the various theoretical frameworks that have studied and theorized variation, there has been a great advance, not only in the study of inter-speakers but also in the study of intra-individual variation. Undoubtedly, much of the variation studied here has already been analyzed by different frameworks, especially those based on language use, e.g., (1), (2), (3), (4), and (8): the loss of the intervocalic "-r-" in (2a,b,d), the phonological rule "(a > e/(u, i) (cons.) ___)" in (3), etc. These can be considered cases conditioned by the linguistic context; therefore, they can be considered unlikely to be examples of conditioned IAV.

However, in my view, one type of variation scarcely finds a successful place in these theories, e.g., with regard to examples (9), (10), (11), (12), and (18). These latter examples are intriguing and have prompted this reflection. In other words, there are many variants which coexist in the same speaker, and this is not an obstacle to the correct flow of information in his/her daily communication. This is an indication that the linguistic system of these speakers is fluctuating or vacillating. This linguistic reality, with innumerable variants that have not been detected in previous theories, leads us to consider the representativeness of the linguistic data used so far. It seems that we have been able to elicit only a part of the variation and, thus, only that part of the variation has been taken into account, that is, not all the variation contained in the speakers' linguistic system.

In the search for the correct framework with which to approach the topic, we have seen that there have been different theoretical approaches to the study of intra-individual variation (Ulbrich & Werth, 2021, p. 10). One of them is the structuralist notion of "free variation" (Clark et al., 2007, pp. 116–118); Parrott (2009) proposes the apparent time framework; Eide and Åfarli (2020) argue between the use of "individual multilingualism" or "subgrammatics" to demonstrate the use of different systems by the same speaker (something similar to the proposal of polylect grammar in the 1970s by Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1973, and so on). It may be difficult to apply this in the case under consideration here, in

which we are dealing with the production of NORM speakers, that is, the speakers least likely to have sufficient knowledge about other dialects or languages. Rule-based accounts, such as Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky, 1993/2002), only include linguistically conditioned variation (Ulbrich & Werth, 2021, p. 10) and therefore do not fit our data. This framework cannot be advocated because some cases of the EHHA variation presented here are not linguistically conditioned in our view.

There have been authors who, like us, have defended a variation that cannot be attributed to either linguistic or extra-linguistic factors and have conceived it as "non-systematic variability" (Ellis, 1985), "fluctuations" (Labov, 1966; Chambers, 2003, pp. 13–14; Van Geert & van Marijn, 2002, p. 342), or "Free variation" (Kopf & Weber, 2023), among other denominations. In spite of this, and in view of the fact that "there is no coherent theoretical and methodological paradigm dedicated to IAV in a systematic way" (Ulbrich & Werth, 2021, p. 11), the subject presents a greater obstacle than expected. Nevertheless, the fluctuations we have analyzed in the examples presented, especially in (10), (11), (12), and (13b), lead us to argue that the fluctuating character of spoken language in speakers can be defended against other frameworks. Accordingly, we could state that language is a "fluctuating system" in which each sound and feature has a certain space of fluctuation.

In this fluctuating state, each grammatical element and each word would have a margin of pronunciation according to the phonic elements of which they are composed. This would depend on the changes that are taking place in the linguistic system and the elements that are in the process of change would be the most prone to fluctuating states. An example of this would be the loss of the intervocalic "-g-" as demonstrated in (1), the loss of the intervocalic "-r-" in example (2), and the assimilation of "a" into "e" as seen in examples (3,4). In this state of fluctuation, different variants are competing with each other simultaneously and each linguistic unit is supported by several more stable elements (stressed syllables, and so forth), which allows for the easy and rapid identification of the elements in question by the interlocutors. We believe that not all elements fluctuating in a system cause variation. We understand that some are in a latent state and can "survive" in this state for an indeterminate time, as long as various factors allow them to do so.

The likelihood of use or occurrence of each variant in this fluctuating system would be boosted due to a number of personal factors, among which should be included the rhythm of elocution, persuasiveness, emotional situation, lapses, errors, etc. All the emotional and personal aspects of each speaker influence his or her speech and all of them influence it in one way or another. This is the case both in spontaneous conversation, in which there is no special emotional, muscular, or scientific tension, and when there is a conditioning factor, whether external or internal, which stresses linguistic production.

By this, we mean that external factors do not cause but, rather, favor variation. In other words, such variation exists in the oral language of all speakers and is inherent to them. This fluctuating situation of the language is innate in speakers. They do not even realize that they speak differently and even claim that they always speak the same way, even though they never speak the same way.

Language changes by itself, because it is in a permanent state of flux, in which different pronunciations of the same word or expression can coexist. This occurs not only at the phonetic or pronunciation level, but also at the morphological, syntactic, and lexical level; while some forms may be monolexematic or invariant (expressed in a single way throughout the geographical extension of the language. In Basque, the singular absolutive suffix '-a' is an example, which is common to all the varieties), others may have local and/or diatopic variants. In this permanent fluctuating state, extra-linguistic factors favor the appearance of one variant to the detriment of another. This means that there is always some element that produces variation and is in the process of changing. Such an element begins by

producing variation and, in a later state, this variation may produce a change in the system; however, it may also be that this variation is subsequently reduced or disappears without producing any change. However, we consider that not all elements of a language are in a state of flux at all times, but, instead, that there are always a number of elements which produce variation. Moreover, it can be said that very few elements are stable at the level of pronunciation in the spoken language.

What is more, it can be said that the greater the influence of the written language, the less variation there is in the spoken variety. The standard written language provides stability to the system and directly influences the reduction in variability. The laxity in the variability of the spoken language system allows the speaker to accommodate his or her production to personal extra-linguistic factors, which may be derived from intra- or extra-speaker factors. Casual, informal conversation is the ideal situation for producing unconditioned, unconscious variation. Contextual relaxation helps.

We fully agree with Ulbrich and Werth when they state that, "The central aim in usage-based approaches is the detailed description of speaker- and listener-specific variants, more explicitly, the differentiation and detailed observations of speech events as opposed to generalization. The structure of a language is seen to emerge from language use, whereby individuals rely on general cognitive skills" (Ulbrich & Werth, 2021, p. 13). We grasp that not all variation leads to language change, but only that which has spread throughout a society can produce linguistic change. Although linguistic variation is a *sine qua non* of the production of linguistic change, not all variation ends in change. For linguistic change to occur, such variation must encounter linguistic or extra-linguistic factors that facilitate its expansion.

We understand the linguistic system as something that is not inflexible, rigid, and immobile, but, rather, diffuse and flexible with fluctuating elements in which the probability of each individual using one characteristic or another depends on various factors, which may be social, linguistic, or personal (tiredness, euphoria, attention, and so on). This fluctuating system has greater or lesser internal variation, in which changes in characteristics or internal laws occur at different speeds, depending on many factors. If in the same speaker there are cases of compliance with the rule "a > e/(i, u) ___", for example, this does not mean that this speaker has two linguistic systems. We understand that it is more feasible to speak of such a system as being in a phase of decline or loss of force, or in a phase of expansion and gaining more force. Speakers are of course not aware of these fluctuations (only specialists are aware of them). The speaker in a spontaneous conversation chooses one or the other possibility provided by the system unconsciously, because normally his/her attention is concentrated on the message, not on the way in which he/she expresses that message. This is not the case in a formal situation, in which the form of the message is as important as the message itself. Therefore, the linguistic system encompasses variation. With this in mind, one can understand the amount of intra-individual variation in the EHHA data. This is the clearest way to understand all the variation that has been collected in the EHHA project.

5. Conclusions

This paper first presented the methodology of eliciting the data, to show the way and the conditions under which all the intra-individual variation was collected, of which several examples are presented here. This empirical approach underlies the view we infer from the data, namely that unconditioned intra-individual variation exists.

After that, we surveyed different frameworks which study variation to see the possible fit of some of them, and it was concluded that this type of variation does not fit properly in any of them. Taking up the idea of Labov (1966) and C. K. Chambers (2003) (among others), we argue in favor of a "fluctuating system". Therein, different grammatical features

and voices have elements that fluctuate, and the speaker uses one variant or another without the choice being conditioned by any linguistic or social factors; further, the choice is unconscious.

Considering that variation is a prerogative of the idiolect, since it has been shown to be an intra-individual fact, it must be concluded that the linguistic system contains variation, and that variation is a feature of the linguistic system. And from this premise, one can ask how much variation a linguistic system can assume. If it is argued that a speech community uses a linguistic system, this system cannot be rigid, but, rather, fluctuating.

This research should be continued, on the one hand to ascertain and deepen the speaker's fluctuating grammar, and on the other to gather more information and collect more data on intra-individual variation.

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Notes

[1] Notwithstanding the wide variation in the EHHA publications, only some of the information collected has been transcribed and not all of it has been published. I am convinced that there is even more variation in the untranscribed information. Hopefully, the application of automatic transcription will bring all of this to light.

[2] There are more than two reasons for this, but two of them are sufficient here: on the one hand, this study is part of a larger research project on variation in Basque and the field of investigation had to be narrowed down; on the other, only one semantic field was chosen, because we are wary that variation may be greater or lesser depending on semantic fields.

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