"Go shag a horse!": The 17th–18th century Basque-Icelandic Glossaries Revisited

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Abstract - This paper takes a fresh look at what is known about the 17th–18th century Basque-Icelandic glossaries and re-assesses their historical importance from a cultural perspective. These anonymous glossaries have been published a number of times since Deen's first publication (1937) and attracted some interest in the 1980s because of the few Basque pidgin sentences included in the second glossary. I maintain that their importance goes well beyond the undoubtedly interesting pidgin section of glossary II. To prove this point, I sketch a brief history of the context in which Basques and Icelanders came together, and analyze some of the words in the glossaries to offer an explanation of some obscure terms, as well as to re-assess the origin of the informants and the circumstances that gave rise to these unique documents.

Introduction

The 17th-century Basque-Icelandic glossaries undoubtedly attracted some attention in the 1980s, especially thanks to two linguists' interest in the pidgin sentences at the end of the second glossary (e.g., Bakker 1986; Hualde 1984, 1991a, 1991b). They are known in the Basque Country[1] and have been recently mentioned in the first conference on contacts between Basques and Icelanders held in the Icelandic West Fjords in June 2006.[2]

However, while known, the glossaries do not seem to have received the attention they deserve among Basque philologists or even Icelandic historians. Since the elicited Basque words were written down phonetically, so to speak, by a compiling Icelander that knew no Basque, they provide substantial evidence for 17th/18th-century pronunciation—at least of those Basque dialect(s) represented in the texts. After careful perusal of the manuscripts, as well as of Deen's (1937) printed version of the glossaries, I found that the nature of the glossaries themselves—the words contained therein, including swearwords and nonsensical bilingual Icelandic-Basque verse, and the fact that there have been at least three independent glossaries from this time period—demand a new assessment of these documents.

In this paper, I will comment briefly on the ideas about the glossaries present in Icelandic publications, and revise some of them concerning the origin of the informants and the nature of contacts between Icelanders and Basque whalers. Informants are usually said to be from the northern Basque provinces, currently under French administration, and the contacts between the two populations have been described as sporadic and based on common commercial interests or needs; hence the existence of a Basque-based pidgin language. I maintain that informants were multiple and of mixed origin, offer an explanation for some obscure words, analyze possible elicitation methods, and finally suggest that these documents bear witness to a different type of contact than that brought about by mere commercial interest: they are rather the result of cultural curiosity on the part of the Icelanders for people from mainland Europe with a markedly different language and customs. Corroborated by Edvardsson and Rafnsson's (2005) archeo-historical research, my analysis of the glossaries stresses the importance of these documents, not only from a philological point of view, but also from a cultural-historical one.

The Glossaries

The glossaries are anonymous; the first and second are contained in manuscript AM 987 4to at the Institute Árni Magnusson in Reykjavík, the third is a loose page contained in JS 284 8vo at the Manuscripts Department of the National Library of Iceland. The most accessible version of the glossaries is Deen's 1937 edition, and although he talks about two glossaries, it would be more appropriate, as Guðmundsson (1979) pointed out, to talk about three glossaries (henceforth I, II, and III).

The glossary I is titled *Vocabula Gallica*, or "French words," suggesting a possible French Basque origin of the source (Fig. 1). It comprises 517 words, phrases, or short sentences, and 46 numerals and was found among the documents Jón Helgason was researching for his doctoral dissertation on Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (1705–1779), a learned Icelander with a degree in theology and multifaceted interests, who wrote treatises on science, language, and history among many other things (Grímsdóttir 1994, 1999, 2001). He spent most of his life working in Copenhagen, first copying manuscripts for Árni Magnússon and later working in research and writing his own books. The glossary is anonymous and the calligraphy suggests that it was written in the second part of the 17th century or around 1700. Apart from being the most exhaustive list that has

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survived till today, it sometimes suggests alternative words for the same concept (I 266 *brosia – borjarn* "drill" or *gimbalita*) or alternative spellings, which no doubt are intended to point to differences in pronunciation (I 1 *gisona – madur* "hombre" or *gizuna*, 270 *oratsa – näl* "nail" or *orotsa*). Words and phrases are grouped together according to semantic fields, although it is a principle that is followed loosely at best. Perhaps "semantic association" might be a better way to characterize the author's organizational patterns. For instance, it starts with general names (man, woman), moving on to names of posts on a ship (skipper, cook), but then goes on from "mast" to "schnapps" (I 19 and 20 respectively), from types of wine to water, and from water to sea and pack ice. The Icelandic glosses are always indefinite, whereas most Basque nouns (and some adjectives) are in the citation form, which in Basque consists of the noun followed by the suffixed definite article –a.[3]

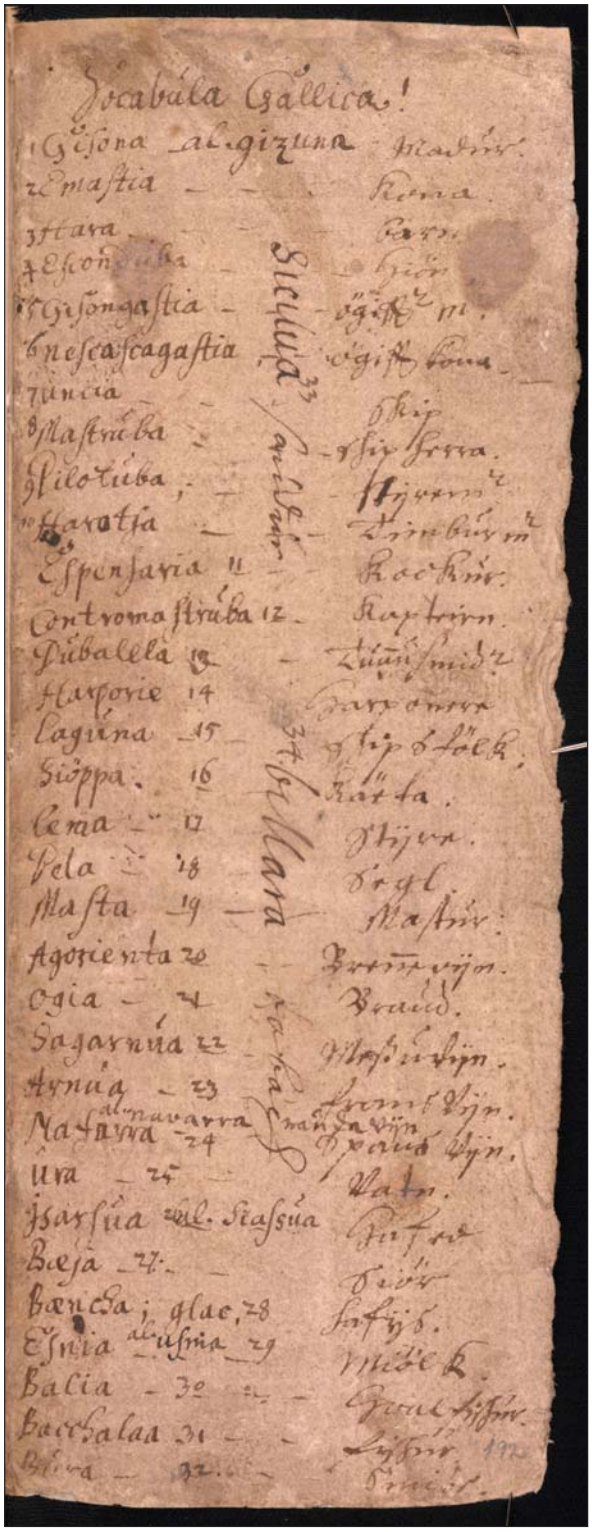

Figure 1. First page of glossary I, dating back to the second half of the 17th century. Its author is anonymous and so is the copy.

The second glossary is less extended: 229 words, phrases, or sentences and 49 numerals; entries are organized along the same loosely respected guidelines according to semantic field. This glossary, titled *Vocabula Biscaica* or "Biscayan words" exists only in the copy made by Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík (Fig. 2), who mentions the glossary in a letter dated 1728 (Grímsdóttir 1999:107). He copied it from an extant source at the time he was writing.[4] That source is now lost to us. Jón Ólafsson also explains in a short preface in Icelandic to the second glossary that he omitted words that were identical in both manuscripts, the first glossary and the one he was copying from, as well as made connections between different forms of the same concept that appear in both glossaries (he put a dash before the Basque words in question and the number of the equivalent forms in I, after the Icelandic gloss in II). It is unclear why Deen (1937:86) would attribute the preface to one *Olgason* (possibly Olgason for Ólafsson).

What is particularly interesting about the second glossary is that entries 193–228 are verbs, phrases, and short sentences in what appears to be a pidgin language used to communicate in Iceland between the Basque whalers and the Icelandic locals. These few phrases and sentences are important from a linguistic point of view even if they bear witness only in a rather rudimentary way to what communication between these two unintelligible languages must have been like. It is also interesting from a historical point of view because it is evidence of extended communication and mutual curiosity between Basques and Icelanders; their relation has not been correctly evaluated in the past and this misconception will reveal itself as more important than previously thought (however, see Einarsson 1987).

Glossary III has been lost, unfortunately, but it was extant until the 19th century, when Sveinbjörn Egilsson[5] described it and copied 11 words that were unintelligible to him and their glosses into Icelandic. The manuscript he had consisted of eight pages in duodecimo format, "followed by two

pages with funny words and glosses." Behind the main manuscript was written "1685. Helga Jónsdóttir." (the manuscript's author? or the owner?). Sveinbjörn's information is to be found on a loose page of blue paper (Fig.3). The note is signed, but it is apparently something he writes for himself, almost as an afterthought at the end of a poem he had copied, which was evidently his main interest. He copies the words just as examples, there is therefore no specific system or logic to them:[6] *passamana – borð* "table;" *cikumuturra – únliður* "wrist;" *brasa – faðmur* "bosom;" *baso rikunja – hægri handleggur* "right arm;" *bushua – handleggur* "arm;" *udula – blóð* "bood;" *estomaka – bringa* "breast;" *silkhua – nafli* "navel;" *sussura – blása þungan* "sigh;" *goetta – þenkja* "reflect, consider;" *tinta – blek* "ink;" and ends with "etc."

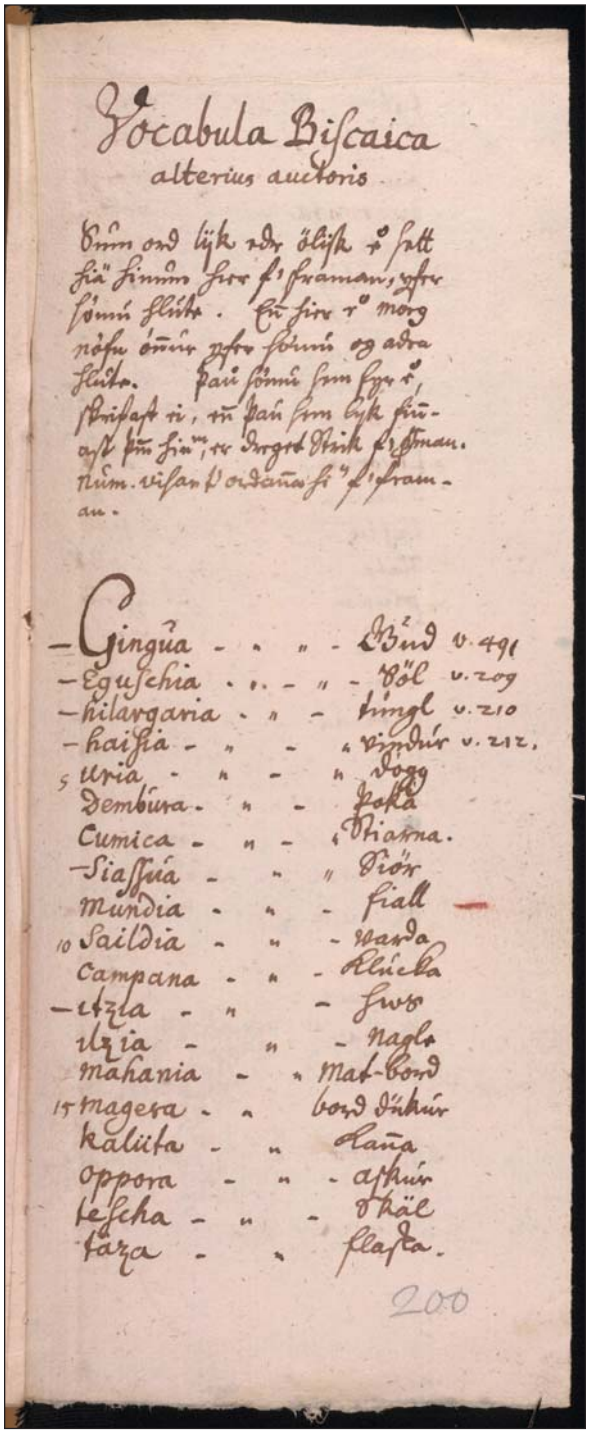

Figure 2. First page of glossary II, dating back to the first quarter of the 18th century. Its author is anonymous, but the copy was made by Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík. The original from which Ólafsson copied it is no longer extant.

History of Basque Whaling and the Icelandic Connection

Interactions between men and whales are lost in time. Some of the more ancient encounters are recorded in the petroglyphs of northern Norway and go back 9000–10000 years, others from Alaska go back at least 6000, if not 8000 years ago (Ægisson et al. 1997:5) (Fig.4). The Basques have an ancient tradition of fishing—at least coastal, shallow-water fishing—judging from the findings of bone harpoons

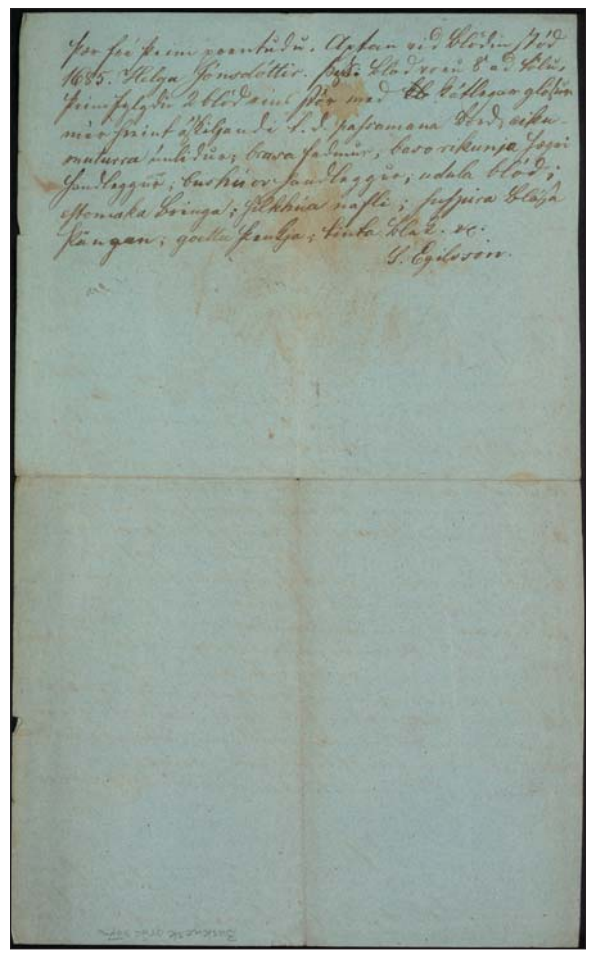

Figure 3. Verso of the loose page signed by Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1791–1852), which reproduces eleven words from glossary III, originally contained in a ten-page manuscript that is now lost.

in caves, such as the Lumentxa cave by Leikeitio, that go back at least to the Magdalenian period around 13,000 years ago.

The beginning of Basque maritime activity is certainly shrouded in the mists of time. However, as Caro Baroja (2001:217) points out, Basque fishing and navigation on a more advanced scale seem to have begun almost *ex nihilo* and very suddenly around the 9th or 10th century. Caro Baroja suggests that the inception of Basque fishing and the settlement of the northwestern French coast by the Normans in the 9th century cannot have been fortuitous and unrelated events. It is possible, therefore, that the Normans, equipped with better shipbuilding techniques that they brought with them from Scandinavia, taught the Basques both shipbuilding and fishing techniques. If this is true, maybe the Normans also instructed them in whaling techniques (Jenkins 1971:59–60 and sources cited therein), but recent scholarship convincingly argues that collaborative efforts between Normans and Basques cannot be dated earlier than the 11th century (Campos Santacana and Peñalba Otaduy 1997) (Fig. 5). Regardless of where the Basques learned how to fish for whales, it is clear they had over time refined the techniques that made them the masters of whaling until well into the 17th century (Fig. 6).

Figure 4. Drawing of a blue whale from an Icelandic 17th-century manuscript with observations on nature by Jón Guðmundsson "the Learned" (1574–1658).

The Basque whale-hunting tradition can be traced back to early medieval times, possibly to the 10th century and certainly since the 12th century (Yraola 1983:27). The importance of this activity is clearly laid out by Michael Barkham (2006, also

Figure 5. Reproduction of a medieval coat of arms from the municipality of Getaria, Gipuzkoa, showing a harpooned whale, and attesting to the importance of whale hunting along the Basque coasts from the Middle Ages onwards.

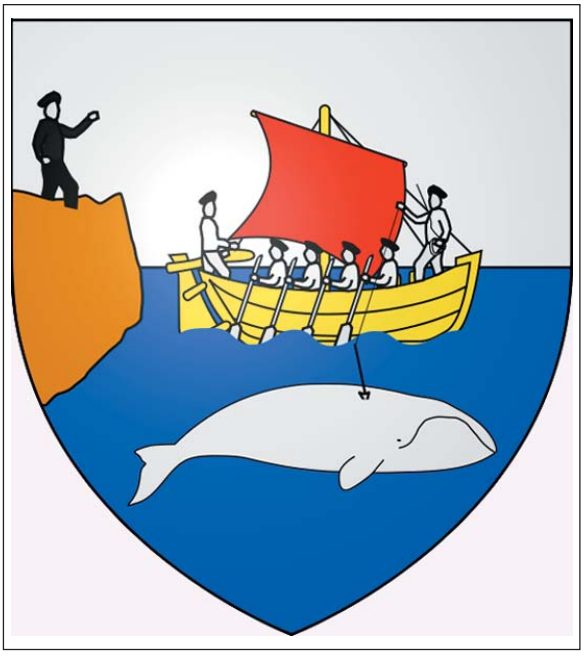

Figure 6. Modern rendition of the Getaria coat of arms.

sources cited therein) and symbolically attested by the coat of arms of numerous Basque coastal communities, such as Biarritz, Getaria, Hendaia, Hondarribia, Mutriku, Bermeo, and Lekeitio[7] (Fig. 7). Most famous is probably that of Biarritz from 1351, portraying five fishermen, including a man with a harpoon and an oarsman in a typical Basque *txalupa* approaching a whale (Yraola 1983:28; Itsas Begia, no date). Documentation and archeological finds attest to the numerous lookout points (*talaiak*), from which sentinels would warn of approaching whales and the hunters would get in their rowing boats and either circle the whales and push them to beach on the shore, or harpoon them at sea and let the wounded animal drag the boat towards the shore. In fact, Baiona seems to have requested a monopoly on selling whale meat as early as 1059, and there are legal documents from Donostia referring to taxes and regulations on the sale of baleens from 1181 (Azkarate 1992:20).

However, fishing enterprises of some importance, such as fishing and hunting whales on the high seas, required a certain social, political, and economic infrastructure that was not to be attained until the *Reconquista*[8] was well under way. For instance, as pointed out by Caro Baroja (2001:217), an increase in the importance of the coastal towns, commerce, and the rise of artisans and their guilds, including those of fishermen, implied better roads, an increase in population in the hinterland that would require fish, as well as better means of preserving fish for transportation. The good fortune of fishing towns certainly benefited from the consolidation and expansion of the Northern Christian kingdoms, their political protection, and their need for fish during ritual and prolonged periods of fast such as Fridays or Lent.

Figure 7. Front and back of a 1297 seal of the Municipality of Hondarribia reproduced by painter Javier Sagarzazu.

Depending on how one defines the "apogee" of whale hunting, different centuries are indicated as the golden age of Basque whaling. Jenkins (1971: 61) points to the 12th and 13th century, judging from the number of documents referring to whale hunting in the coastal waters of the Bay of Biscay. At this time, whaling was not subject to any restrictions and whales were still abundant a short way off the coast. It is known that the Church received a voluntary gift of the whales' tongues in this period. By the 13th century, the Church levied a tithe, and the kings of England, as Dukes of Guyenne, also demanded a sum levied on the Basque whale fisheries.

According to Caro Baroja (2001:218), the most prosperous period for whale hunting in the Basque Country must have been the 14th and 15th centuries (see also Barkham 2000). By the 16th century, however, whales had become a rare sight off the coasts of the Gulf of Biscay, and therefore Basque hunters were forced to travel further north to find these animals (Fig. 8). Yraola (1983:29) maintains that

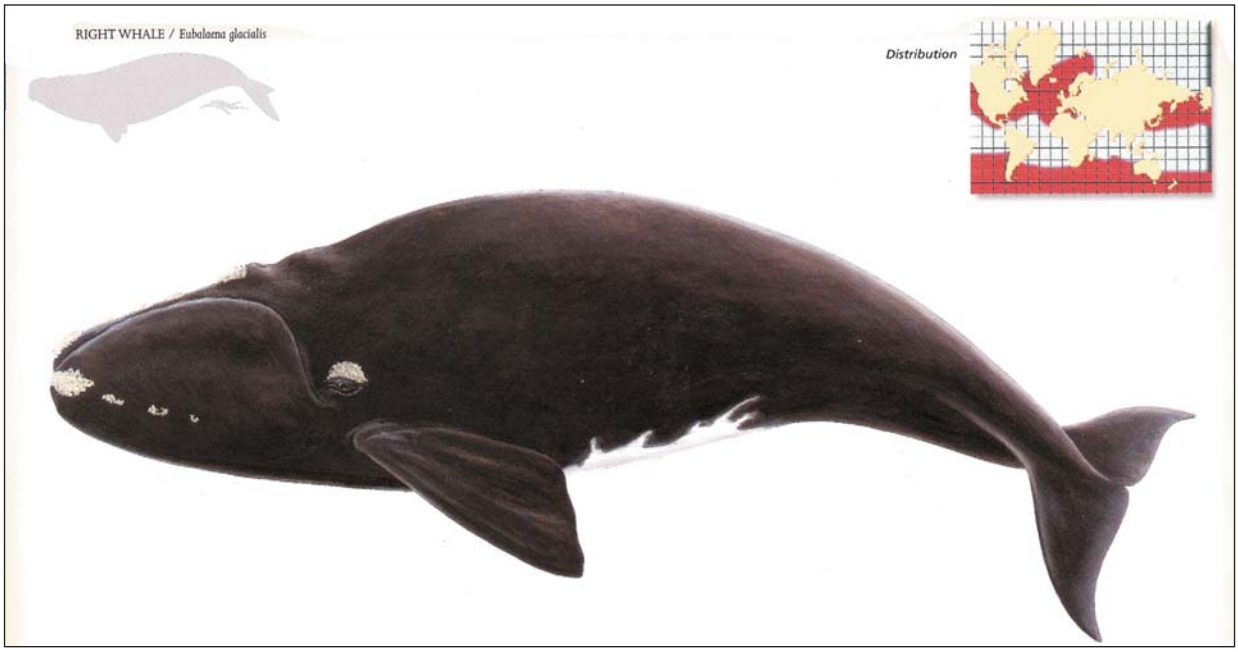

Figure 8. Drawing of right whale and map showing its modern distribution.

Figure 9. Drawing of a right whale from an Icelandic 17th-century manuscript with observations on nature by Jón Guðmundsson "the Learned" (1574–1658).

the golden age of Basque whale fishing and transoceanic expeditions in search of whales took place at the end of the 15th century and beginning of the 16th century. The discrepancy is no doubt due to the fact that Yraola considers transoceanic expeditions as a mark of the heyday of Basque whale hunting, whereas those gruelling and dangerous expeditions were simply brought about by the extinction of the right whale (*Eubalaena* spp.) in coastal waters were they had been initially exploited (Fig. 9).

When can we surmise that Basques began to regularly fish in North Atlantic waters? Various sources cited in Azkarate (1992:24) report of 17th- and 18th-century documents mentioning a date of 1372 for the arrival of Basques in Newfoundland.[9] It may be that by the 15th century, Basques had reached Newfoundland, but unambiguous sources stating their presence in Newfoundland are from 1517 for cod fishing and 1530 for whale hunting (Azkarate 1992:24–25) (Fig. 10). At that time, they set up fat-liquefying stations devoted solely to the processing of whales, although fishing of cod always seems to have gone hand in hand with whale hunting.[10] The 16th century was then a period of apogee in whale hunting at more northern latitudes, and it seems plausible to surmise that by the time they had reached Newfoundland, they would have at least known about the Icelandic coasts too, since one of the routes to reach that part of north America goes by Ireland and turns west just south of Iceland (Bernier and Grenier 2001).

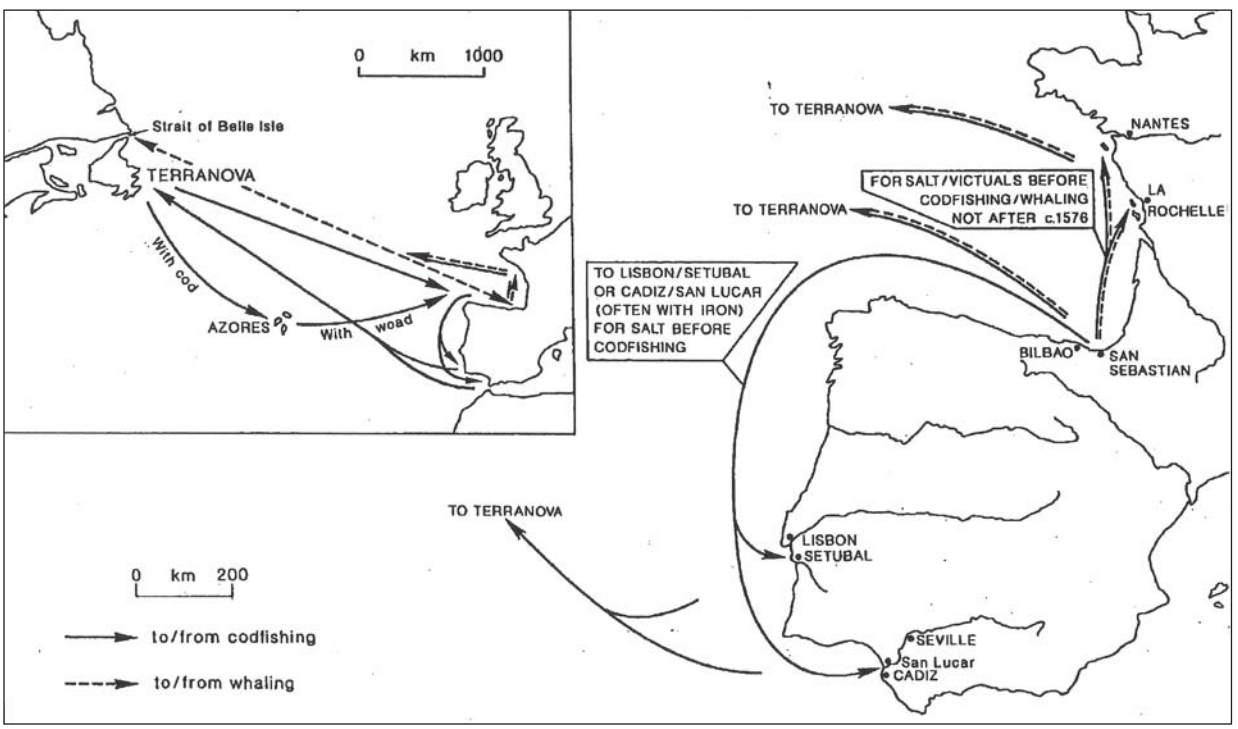

Figure 10. This map (from Barkham 1991) shows some of the usual routes taken by Basque mariners to reach the Newfoundland fishing grounds and fisheries in the 16th and 17th centuries. The arrows showing routes are only indicative. It should be noticed that M. Barkham (pers. comm.) maintains that "there is no firm evidence of Basques in the 16th century having sailed further north than Ireland or coming from Terra Nova,"

If the Basques did not experiment with Iceland at this point, it may have been due to the abundance of whales and cod off the coasts of Newfoundland that made it unnecessary to try anywhere else.

According to the Association for Basque Maritime Activities, *Itsas Begia*, there is an Icelandic chronicle dated 1412 that places twenty Basque vessels off the coasts of Iceland to hunt for whales (Itsas Begia, no date; but see Einarsson 1987 fn.1 for the original references—Einarsson thinks that this interpretation is a misunderstanding and the ships in question were English). Yraola (1983:37) states that Basques were coming to Icelandic shores at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century. It is more likely that Icelandic waters would start being exploited by whale hunters once Newfoundland waters had stopped being productive because of overfishing around 1600, as suggested in Edvardsson and Rafnsson (2005:6). Certain records of Basque presence in Iceland date, in fact, from the beginning of the 17th century: Guðmundsson argues convincingly that a first Basque ship came to Iceland in 1604, based on the report by Jón Ólafsson Indíafari (1593–1679) in his biography (Guðmundsson 1979: 77). Certainly the most vivid records of encounters and confrontations on Icelandic soil and waters are about the year 1615, when Basque sailors were shipwrecked and subsequently killed by the local population in the West Fjords of Iceland, an action probably orchestrated by the local governor Ari from Ögur (Guðmundsson 1979:77–80, Huxley 1987).

During the 16th century, however, we can surmise that Basque whaling is already in decline, since we have numerous records that Basque expertise in whale hunting is being farmed out to foreign countries such as Holland and Great Britain, or even Denmark. At this time, big commercial enterprises, such as the British Muscovy Company, have gotten wind of the lucrative whale hunting business and are imposing embargoes endorsed by local governors and sovereigns to other companies or nations, prohibiting anyone else to participate in independent whale hunting. As a last resource, Basque hunters find employment on English or Dutch ships and have to teach these other nations the highly specialized tasks involved in whale hunting and in the processing of the carcasses. The declining whale stocks required going further and further to find these animals (as far as the Svalbards), as well as considerable investments.[11] Economic reasons, the considerable danger of running afoul of pirates, and the monopolies imposed by foreign nations all contribute to explain the decline of whale hunting in the Basque Country.

In the 17th century, therefore, we find Basque whalers mostly employed as harpooners by Dutch and English companies; some, however, still went independently as far as the Svalbards from St. Jean de Luz, such as the ships captained by de Haristeguy and d'Etchepare in 1613. In the 1630s, a partnership between French and Danes brought the Biscayan Basques back to the Svalbard fisheries. However, soon Danes and French parted ways, and incidents with the Danes and Dutch made French whaling in Svalbard problematic. In 1636, fourteen French ships were captured by the Spaniards upon their return from the Svalbards, when these sacked St. Jean de Luz and other Basque coastal towns (Jenkins 1971). In this light, it is understandable to surmise that fishing for cod and whales in the waters around Iceland may have been less sought after, and consequently less dangerous.

The 17th century is, therefore, the most important period of interaction between Basques and Icelanders. It is not surprising that Glossary I was produced in this century. The importance of facilitating communication with the Basque fishermen that came for whales and cod is still felt at the beginning of the 18th century, when Glossary II is copied. I believe that previous scholarship has somewhat underestimated the importance of the interactions between these two groups on Icelandic soil, as some of the recent archeological scholarship is setting out to prove. In this light, the research carried out by Edvardsson and Rafnsson (2005) is very important and sheds light on the subject. According to these authors, in fact, the ruins found in Strákatanga in the bay of Hveravík in the Icelandic West Fjords are to be interpreted as ruins of a Basque whaling station, comparable to those unearthed at Red Bay in Newfoundland (Azkarate 1992). If true, this interpretation would prove that the Basques fishermen that came to Iceland actually came ashore and must have interacted with the local population, something that was previously discounted, as it was believed that the catch would be processed on board the ships (Edvardsson and Rafnsson 2005).

Origin and Nature of the Glossaries

It seems very likely that all glossaries, both the extant ones, as well as the ones that have not come down to us, were all produced in the West Fjords of Iceland, since to my knowledge there are no records of Basque whaling or fishing ships in other parts of Iceland for the period considered, except perhaps for Snæfellsness (Einarsson 1987:288). Guðmundsson (1979:76) quite rightly deduces that the lack of cross-referencing among the three glossaries and their being known from one manuscript only, points to the fact that there may have been either more copies of the same glossaries, or even other unrelated glossaries, given how many Icelandic manuscripts were lost throughout the centuries.

I would add that the fact that in no contemporary source is any of them mentioned (as something extraordinary or otherwise) means that they were either common in that part of Iceland, or that they were hidden from common knowledge, or possibly both. If the former is true, this would point to the existence of a certain cultural interest on the part of the Icelanders towards the Basque language and culture, which in turn would require more than occasional, chance encounters between the two peoples.

Although the glossaries are anonymous, two people have been suggested as the author of one or the other glossary (see, for instance, Guðmundsson 1979:85–6, Edvardsson and Rafnsson 2005:7). I would like to further assess their choice as to whom could have had an interest and the capacity to produce the glossaries. The first one, which was written by an older hand, could have been made by Jón Ólafsson Indíafari (1593–1679), the most widely travelled Icelander in his day (his nickname, *Indíafari*, means "who travelled to India"). He wrote about his many adventures and travels in his autobiography and produced an Icelandic-Tamil glossary. He had had contacts with Basques in 1627 in Iceland as well as on a whaling expedition to Svalbard (Edvardsson and Rafnsson 2005:7). The second one could have been written by Jón Guðmundsson *hinn lærði* "the Learned" (1574–1658), a talented man from the West Fjords, who had no formal schooling, but was well read and wrote a number of works, copied manuscripts, composed verses, as well as practiced medicine. He was ahead of his time in condemning contemporary superstition; he was in fact accused of sorcery, for which he was condemned and exiled. His friendship with the Basque fishermen was well known. He composed verses remembering the Slaying of the Spaniards (*Spánverjavígin*) in 1615, and was the only one who openly condemned it, something that pitched him against the local governor Ari from Ögur and undoubtedly contributed to his condemnation as a sorcerer, as well as his exile.

Both these men would have had the curiosity and interest in a different culture, as well as close contacts with native informants that could have produced the glossaries. Rafnsson also supports this idea about the authorship of the glossaries; however, I disagree with his statement that "[because of the surmised French Basque origin of the glossaries] it is unlikely that Jón lærði had anything to do with them, since the Basques that he had contacts with were unambiguously from Spain" (in Edvardsson and Rafnsson 2005:7).

After reading the glossaries carefully, I found that there are many Basque entries of Spanish origin. In I, 107 words of 517 are Spanish, not counting the Basque entries with Latin roots that are probably older loanwords (such as I 36 *elisa* "church" or I 38 *rege* "king"). Fewer words (15) are clearly of French origin, such as *glac* "pack ice" from Fr. *glace*, and 14 could be either Spanish or French loans (*rida* "ligas" from Sp. *brida* or Fr. *bride*, *bala* "weight" from Sp. *bala* or Fr. *balle*). The same is true of the second glossary (51 of 228 entries are of Spanish origin), such as II 90 *boca* "mouth", and II 91 *lingua* "tongue," as already noticed by Hualde (1991). The many loans from Spanish[12] point to Southern (Spanish) Basque informants, not solely from north of the Pyrenees as maintained by Michelena (1961:172, esp. fn. 10) and implied by Deen (1937:1–2). Thus, the origin of the Basque informants would not preclude Jón lærði as a possible author of one of the glossaries.

Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, who copied the second manuscript and wrote a brief preface to it, asks his uncle, pastor Ormur, to send him "my Biscayan glosses" in 1728 (Grímsdóttir 1999:107). He was fostered and schooled in the home of Páll Vídalín, an important political and cultural figure in his time. Jón Ólafsson also worked for Páll Vídalín copying manuscripts from a very early age and had great respect and admiration for Vídalín's mother, Hildur Arngrímsdóttir. Given that Jón Guðmundsson lærði was Hildur's grandfather (Grímsdóttir 1994: 11), as well as a friend of the Basques, I find it likely that he could have written the second glossary that ended up in Jón Ólafsson's hands.

From the third glossary, we have 11 words that were copied during the first half of the 19th century from a manuscript that bore the writing *Helga Jónsdóttir 1685* (Deen 1937:106 and Fig. 3). She was most probably the owner of the manuscript and she was Kristín Magnúsdóttir's aunt; the two women belonged to an important family in the West Fjords that counted two bishops among its members. We know from Jón Ólafsson that this Kristín was very interested in languages and culture in general and that she spoke Danish and German well, and some English, Dutch, Spanish, and Basque (which he calls "Biscayan"), since "in that period those peoples came often to the West Fjords" (Pétursson 2004: 131–2). It is only appropriate and likely that her knowledge of this language would have benefited from the existence of the glossary among the family books, although it is also possible that she composed the glossary and gave the manuscript to her aunt.

Revealing Words

Although this topic will be left for more in-depth philological work, I would like to express some ideas as to how the words were elicited. Hualde (1984:41) states that words were elicited by pointing to objects; however, this seems to be possible only for some, and rather difficult for others (lion

and bear, for instance, or even more so, God and devil). Guðmundsson (1979:85), on the other hand, maintains that while some may have been cases of direct elicitation by pointing to an object (see for instance the amusing explanation for the mysterious II 10 *saildia*), others were probably translations from a tongue commonly understood by informant and interviewer, possibly Latin.

Even if some ships' captain may have indeed known Latin (such as Martín de Villafranca, killed in the *Spánverjavígin* of 1615), it is unlikely that many sailors had access to that language. Moreover, knowledge of Latin in the 16th century was so scarce in Iceland that even many Icelandic bishops knew none (Pétursson 2004), and even if schooling clearly improved at the end of the 16th century and during the 17th century (Pétursson 2004), it is not likely for less important church or administrative figures in the West Fjords to have commonly known Latin.

What is plausible is that another living language would be used as a means of communication between Icelanders and Basques, and I agree with Guðmundsson that there must have been a language used in the composition of the glossaries, as pointing would not have been sufficient. A third language was probably used to elicit a series of adjectives (I 470–476), although it is interesting to notice that those that could have easily been elicited with pointing or mimicry are in the indefinite form ("blind," "mute," "limping," "bald"), but the definite suffix-citation form marker is found in the last three of the series, "naked" (unlikely to be available as an example), "ugly," and "beautiful," all subjective evaluations, and in case they are applied to people, also likely to cause offense, as the case may be.

Given the Basques' extensive travels at northern latitudes and their involvement with British and Dutch whaling enterprises, it is likely that both Dutch and English would be used. These sailors may not have been fluent in either, but could have used words from both.[13] The British had commercial interests in Iceland during the 16th and 17th century, and there are records of the presence of various English-speaking individuals dwelling in Iceland for months and sometimes years at this time, as well as of Icelanders in Britain during the same period (Pétursson 2004). German merchants had kept commercial ties with Iceland until 1602, when the Danish monopoly on commerce forced them little by little to desist from dealings with Iceland. It is also known that affluent families from the West Fjords had cultural and family ties with Hamburg, sent their children to live and study in Germany for periods lasting up to several years (Ari from Ögur was one of them; Pétursson 2004) and would have spoken German, enough that they could have understood if Basques used single Dutch words, phrases, or short sentences.

Two examples of the unintelligible words mentioned by Deen (1937:42) seem in fact to be Dutch words: II 31 *scheidas – blad* "sheet, page" is a form probably related to *scheiden* "separate in different parts." Also for the curious *cavinit* (II 223, in *Cavinit trucka for mi – eckert kaupe eg* "I am not buying anything"), Deen (1937:104) surmises the presence of a Dutch negation *niet*. I would suggest that *cavinit* is the equivalent of modern German emphatic *gar nichts* "nothing at all." Dutch *gaar*, which now means "exhausted," was used as the emphatic negation "not at all" in centuries past.[14]

As stated elsewhere (Miglio 2006), one can expect that the Basque words in the glossaries may have been mangled by the Icelanders that were writing them down and had a limited or no knowledge of Basque. We find for instance III 2 *cikumuturra* for *eskumuturra* "wrist" or III 4 *baso rikunja* for *beso eskuña* "right arm."[15] So that Deen's mystery word I 425 *kikomiciuka – blindesleykur* "blind man's buff" may well be a corrupted form of the Basque equivalent *itsumando* (in its adverbial form *itsumandoka*). What is interesting about this form is that the practical need for a translation of this concept is certainly very limited, and its existence points again to a wider cultural significance of the glossaries.

The first mystery word[16] (I 244) mentioned by Deen (1937:42), *ithecalbua* is translated as "ginger" (*Zingiber officinale*) into Icelandic, but with no explanation for the Basque term. It is possible that the sailor was not familiar with the spice (or its name) and that he tried to give a descriptive name to the shape of the root he was shown, such as *itsiki* (variant of *atxiki*) "to adhere or be glued together" and *arba* "twigs" (or *arbola* "trees"), with the meaning of "little branches stuck together."[17] Apart from the phonetic/grammatical plausibility of the phrase, it should also be remembered that ginger was indeed very popular both as a food ingredient and as a medicine in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but without further research, it is hard to evaluate how familiar a Basque sailor was likely to be with this root.

From the second glossary (II 134), *plamuna*[18] is translated as *flyðra* into Icelandic, or "Atlantic halibut" (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*), the largest of flatfishes, which is rarely found in waters warmer than 8 °C (and never warmer than 15 °C).[19] Given that the temperature of Basque waters fluctuates around 12 °C in the coldest months, and 21 °C in the warmest, the halibut was probably not a familiar fish. Because of its form, *plamuna* may be related to *plama* "a sheet" (as a sheet of metal or paper), that is, something flat (B. *plaun*).

Finally, I would like to draw attention to word I 483 *tampissa*. Deen doesn't offer any gloss or in-

terpretation from modern Basque, but the Icelandic *Surtarbrandz spialld* translates into "lignite tablet." There are two possible (partial) explanations: one is that *tampissa* is a considerably distorted form of *ikatz bizi-a* "coal ember-def.," and the other is that the word is not Basque at all.[20] In the glossaries, we find words of Spanish (I 362 *pissu* < *peso* "weight," corresponding to the Ice. "heavy") or French origin (I 359 *syrota* < *sirop*), as well as from different languages such as Dutch or English; this is not surprising, since sailors would pick up words from people of different origin in their voyages. Given that the word does not conform to a Basque pattern, but could be Romance, it might be ascribed to a different Romance language, such as Gascon, which was also commonly spoken on the coasts of what is now the French part of the Basque Country in the XVII century. As for its interpretation, I have not found a plausible Gascon source, but if it is indeed a Romance word, it could relate to the meaning of "to light (fire)" found in many Northern Italian dialects (cf. Mantuan *impisá*).

Re-assessing Basque-Icelandic Relations through the Glossaries

Helgi Guðmundsson (1979:76) had already paved the way to revise our understanding of the relationship between Basque whalers and Icelanders in the 17th century when he said that the existence of the three (or more) glossaries meant that "it must clearly have been considered quite interesting to talk to the Basques." Recent scholarship reinforces this idea and supports it with convincing historical and archaeological proof (Edvardsson and Rafnsson 2005). The nature of the glossaries also implies a type of relation between Basques and Icelanders quite different from that suggested by the dramatic events of the Slaying of the Spaniards in 1615.

As we have seen, some of the entries are what we would expect if the glossaries served a purely practical function: terminology related to ships, clothing, food, and practical commands such as "give me [something] to drink" (I 187), or "wash me a shirt" (II 196). However, it is hard to see the practical purpose of the words for heaven and hell (I 460 and 461), or even more so of I 425 *Kikomiciuca* "blind man's buff" (a children's game), or the bilingual verse at the end of I.[21] I believe that many entries betray a purely intellectual interest for a different culture.

There is a section devoted to scurrilous words at the end of the second glossary that may have had the purpose of allowing Icelanders to know what the Basques were saying behind their back, so to speak, but that clearly turns into locker-room banter or simply nonsensical expressions or in-jokes (II 215 *Ungetorre Sappelle gorre* "Hello, Red Hat"). Prudish Mr. Deen, who for all other entries provides a German and a Spanish gloss, turns to Latin when it comes to the vulgar expressions: II 209 *fenicha for ju – liggia þig* becomes Lat. *cum te coire*, and II 210 *tricha – ad fara ä* is again *coire*, but rather than "make love to you," as perhaps implied by the neutral Latin word, these seem to be insults (of the "fuck you!" type). I 212 *gianzu caca – jettu skÿt – ede excrementum*, "eat shit" and I 213 *caca hiarinsat*[22] *– et þu skÿt ur rasse* is translated very accurately as *ede excrementum ani* "eat asshole shit" (the Latin is based on the Icelandic gloss, rather than the Basque, which simply means "shit for you," according to Deen). In two cases, Deen cannot decipher the Basque word, even if the Icelandic is very clear: II 214 *jet sat – kyss þu ä Rass* "kiss [my] ass," but *jet sat* remains mysterious. In the colourful expression II 211 *Sickutta Samaria – serda merina* "defile the mare," Deen maybe did not ask some contemporary sailor: *xikotu* is apparently still in use and literally translates "to fuck," or its imperative,[23] so the Basque expression is literally "(go) fuck a horse!" (or a mare)—I will leave it to the anthropologist to decide whether this was an exotic sexual practice or simply an insult.

We may find these expressions surprising, especially if the main use of the glossaries was practical communication, but very often we tend to impose our moral values on past centuries. A comment found in Helgason's book about Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, who copied the second glossary, is enlightening: among Jón Ólafsson's papers, there is an Icelandic primer he had made for a Norwegian pupil of his that was learning Icelandic. In light of very modern, context-based, realistic language teaching, Ólafsson made up a dialogue at the local shop. He set up two situations: one in which the merchant complied and the customer would manage to buy schnapps; the alternative, however, shows what would happen if merchant and customer did not reach an agreement. Helgason (1926:137) is shocked to read the "many, serious insults" exchanged in this scenario, but comments laconically that "that may well have been a true representation of Icelandic commercial relations at that time."

In conclusion, I would like to state once again that the glossaries are invaluable documents not just from a linguistic point of view, something both Bakker (1986) and Hualde (1984) had recognized, but that they are also invaluable snapshots of a period when the Danish monopoly cast a shroud around Icelandic life and forced two centuries of isolation on her inhabitants. Or so we thought. This does not mean that all Basque-Icelandic interactions were positive,[24] but that some were positive, others negative, at times even tragic. In any case, there were

many common encounters and they were of many different kinds. In short, there is so much more that the glossaries can still reveal to us, both from a historical, social, cultural, and of course a linguistic point of view.

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Endnotes

[1] The glossaries have been printed in the Basque Country in *Anuario del Seminario de Filología Vasca Julio de Urquijo/International Journal of Basque Linguistics and Philology*, XXIV-2, 1991, and in *Itsasoa (3) El Mar de Euskalerria. Los Vascos en el Marco Atlántico Norte. Siglos XVI–XVII* edited by Selma Huxley in 1987, where they are introduced by Eneko Oregi, a linguist of the Basque Institute of Public Administration and author of a brief article on the web about them (www.ivap.euskadi.net/contenidos/informacion/admin_euskaraz/eu_3797/adjuntos/36aldizkaria/36BAAL.pdf).

[2] Henrike Knörr presented a paper on "Basque fishermen in Iceland. On the bilingual vocabularies of the 17th century" at the conference *Slaying of Spaniards in the West Fjords in 1615*, Dalbær Snæfjallaströnd, Iceland, June 24–25, 2006.

[3] Clearly, whoever elicited the Basque words had no knowledge of Basque and could not distinguish between root and suffix. Icelandic generally also suffixes the definite article after the noun, but not in the citation form; because the definite article in Basque is usually part of the citation form, the discrepancy between the Basque and Icelandic forms (cf. I 305 *neguba* - i.e., negu+a – *vetur* "winter") is simply a by-product of elicitation (see also Knörr 2006).

[4] In JS 401 4to (Guðmundsson 1979:75).

[5] He was a theologian, poet, and teacher of the Classics, as well as headmaster at Bessastaðaskóli, a higher learning institution.

[6] This is my reading of the actual MS JS 284 8vo, the English translations correspond to the Icelandic glosses.

[7] See Barkham (2000), Itsas Begia (no date), also references in Yraola (1983), and Campos Santacana and Peñalba Otaduy (1997).

[8] The military enterprise led by the Northern Christian reigns of the Iberian peninsula to conquer the territories lost to the Arab invasions of the 8th century. This stage of Iberian history goes from 718–1492.

[9] Azkarate (1992), however, also warns of the lack of rigorous research in the field.

[10] This is not surprising, given that cod shares the same living environment with some whale species and is in fact a food source for some whales, such as the minke whale.

[11] The loss of thousands of pounds sustained by the Muscovy Company in Britain whenever an expedition went wrong (Jenkins 1971:79–84, 131–132) are significant and show what kind of an enterprise whale hunting was becoming in order to be an economically viable activity.

[12] Ricardo Extepare (CNRS/IKER, Baiona, Northern Basque Country [France], pers. comm., 15 September 2006), a linguist as well as a native speaker of Basque, mentions that the native words in the glossaries, not only the loans, seem to be of mixed origin , and do not belong exclusively to Eastern dialects spoken in what is now France.

[13] See clearly English forms in II 225 *for mi*, II 226 *for ju*.

[14] I am indebted to Antonella Baldi for this information, as well as for the etymological research on older meanings of *gaar* (Van Dale, *Groot Wooerdenboek der Nederlandse Taal*, Elfde, herziene druk door prof. dr. G Geerts en dr. C. Kruyskamp Eerste Deel A-I, Utrecht/Antwerpen 1984, p. 803)

[15] An anonymous reviewer points out that the order of arm + right is not appropriate for a head-final language like Basque, but there may have been a pause in the elicitation of the two elements that may justify the unusual word order. There is, I would agree, something strange about this form; for instance, there is no definite article affixed to the noun.

[16] The explanation for some of the following words has appeared in Miglio (2006).

[17] R. Extepare (pers. comm.) indicates that the <ithec> part may rather refer to *isats*/*itsats* "tail" in the sense of little branches or hairs connected at the same point (also used as "broom").

[18] Deen (1937:97) erroneously has *plamua* for this entry .

[19] As noted by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (http://www.gma.org/fogm/Hippoglossus_hippoglossus.htm; accessed 29 November 2006)

[20] Both R. Extepare and an anonymous reviewer point to the implausibility of the phonological derivation from *ikatz bizia*, I would therefore opt for the non-Basque origin of this term.

[21] Teska skäl, enn Tafla fjól/ tinta blek, og Lÿma þjól/ Sanua hüva, Sangua fötur/ Sarra bastua, gamall liötur - which juxtaposes the Basque and the Icelandic word for, respectively, bowl, plank, ink, file, cap, leg, old, and ugly.

[22] An anonymous reviewer suggests that the [h] in this form points to a French Basque origin of the informant.

[23] Many thanks to Ricardo Etxepare for this information.

[24] After all, Icelanders still talk of *gaskónalæti* "ruckus," a compound joining the word for "Basque" (or *Gaskóni*) and the word for (bad) "behaviour, noise."