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Size Matters: The Values Behind Basque Food, Font and Semiotics

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Size Matters: The Values Behind Basque Food, Font and Semiotics

Cover Page Footnote

A great thanks for the support of Cameron Watson and Daniel Montero in helping me revise this article. Additionally, I would like to thank everyone that was part of my fieldwork in the Basque Country and to my fellow panel members with whom this article was presented at the American Anthropological Association (AAA).



**Size Matters:
The Values Behind Basque Food, Font and
Semiotics**

Kerri Lesh, PhD.

“People look for the origin of the wine they consume, they want to link it to the terroir ... they are looking for something more than just the quality of the product, but rather the story behind the wine, the histories that lie behind a glass, and being able to focus in on a particular bodega, on the places where it is cultivated and produced. Because of that, it is important to identify those spaces and give them their due value.” (author’s translation) (Muñoz, 2017).

This quote taken from Bittor Oroz, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Fishing, and Food Policy for the Basque government, expands on the importance of making “place” more visible with a change in font size, as stated in the *Noticias de Alava* (2017). This comment, together with further illustrations below of how Basque semiotics are used to create value, showcase how two pillars of Basque culture—language and food—are intertwined to create cultural, economic, and linguistic value for Basque identity.

Throughout my fieldwork, conducted over the course of 2017, I observed and analyzed various ways in which the Basque language, Euskara, is used alongside local Basque gastronomic products to create economic, cultural, and linguistic value (Lesh, 2019a). In the following examples, I highlight the ways in which various forms of semiotics—the study of signs as “something which stands for something to somebody in some respect or capacity” (Peirce 1931-1958, 2.228) —combine to create value. Through the Peircian framework of icons (signs that signify through resemblance), indexes (signs that signify through contiguity or causality), and symbols (signs that signify through culturally specific conventions) Riley and Cavanaugh (2017) point out that semiotic value is created through the unique authenticating quality of minority languages such as Euskara.

Language is used on signs and drink labels symbolically and communicatively, through the font size and typography. Such language use helps create what Moriarty and Järlehed (2018) describe as the semiofoodscape, a lens through which semiotic landscapes

pertaining to food can be examined (26). In the examples to come, the creation of value will be illustrated by signs as they appear through font size, font style (typeface), and through individual words as well as the communicative use of Basque language in general.

The Evolution of Euskara and Gastronomy

Language and food are two distinguishing features that intertwine in defining a people, at least in the case of the Basques over the last several decades. As the primary site for my fieldwork, which involves examining the relationship between language, food, and culture, the Basque case has been insightful for understanding the significance behind the name a specific culture takes and the place it inhabits in relation to identity formation. Known as Euskal Herria, the Basque Country's name translates as "land of the Basque-speakers" (Morris 2010, 554). The language spoken in the Basque Country is *Euskara*, and the word used to describe someone from this land is *Euskaldun*. The word "euskal+dun," meaning Basque or Basque speaker, literally translates as "one who has the Basque language" (Lantto 2012, 24). To recognize a place and person by the language spoken, as seen in this case, asserts the value of language as a key identifying feature of a culture.

The first wave of Basque nationalism and language revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used language as evidence for the Basques' particular identity based on their origin and distinction from Spanish culture (Urla 2012). In 1918, the creation of the Basque Language Academy and Society of Basque Studies marked a key development for modernizing and unifying Basque culture and language (Watson 2003, 243). After the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and under Francisco Franco's strict regime (1939–1975), attempts were made to exterminate all vestiges of Basque culture, including the use of Euskara (Watson 2003). As a response, the now defunct pro-independence Basque nationalist group, ETA,¹ carried out a campaign of political violence that shaped the image of the Basque Country in the media globally. At the same time, Basqueness gradually became centered on language and culture, as it was transformed from heritage into practice (Urla 2012). Spain transitioned into a democracy after 1975 with a new Constitution that granted more autonomy to the Basque Country and included language rights for Basques.

The gastronomic fame of the Basque Country is a comparatively recent phenomenon. One could trace the impetus for this fame to the *nueva cocina vasca* (New Basque Cuisine) that

¹ ETA is the Basque acronym for "*Euzkadi (later Euskadi) ta Askatasuna*," meaning "Basque Country and Freedom." They were an organization that eventually employed armed struggle in the name of Basque nationalism, internationally portrayed as terrorists.

started to gain momentum in the 1980s. Since then, the growing global renown of its gastronomy has ultimately led to the Basque Country being government-branded as “The Culinary Nation” (Lesh 2019b). By the time I was conducting my own research in 2017, San Sebastián had been named one of the two 2016 Cultural Capitals of Europe and Basque Michelin-starred restaurants were making headlines on the “The World’s 50 Best Restaurants” list. In 2018, the Basque Country hosted the World’s 50 Best Restaurants awards in addition to having two restaurants listed within the Top 10 restaurants worldwide (Price, 2017). In addition, an increase in ecotourism and the opportunities to try the local Basque beverages mentioned below, such as txakoli (Järlehed and Moriarty 2018) and those from Rioja Alavesa, have in recent years transformed the Basque Country from a nation associated with political violence to one touted for its gastronomic fame. This nation branding occurred as I was leaving the Basque Country at the end of 2017, and by 2018, signs in English publicizing its gastronomic fame welcomed all incoming tourists and locals alike in the Bilbao airport. This recent evolution and growth of gastronomic sectors has attracted interest from outsiders, which has had an impact on linguistic and cultural practices (Lesh 2019b).

It is the unique, authenticating quality of minority languages that give them their semiotic value, as Riley and Cavanaugh (2017) point out. Through the Peircian framework of icons (signs that signify through resemblance), indexes (signs that signify through contiguity or causality), and symbols (signs that signify through culturally specific conventions), I will now focus on the last category.

As discussed by Cavanaugh and Shankar (2014) and Duchene and Heller (2012), we know that commodification of minoritized languages occurs in various ways through language materiality (Cavanaugh & Shankar, 2017). Shankar and Cavanaugh see the “language of everyday life as material practice: embedded with structures of history and power, including class relations and markets, but also having physical presence” (2017, 1). Their goal is to combine language and materiality together to shed light on the processes of meaning-making and value production, and to show how incorporating materiality into linguistic analysis can ground “distinctive material processes” (1) within social, cultural, political, and economic structures of power. Part of viewing language materiality is to view it as a material presence with physical and metaphysical properties, embedded in these political economic structures. The goal is to view the materiality of language rather than conceptualizing materiality alongside but distinct from language (1).

The commodification of language within the authenticating processes of the “foodie” culture, a culture made up of people described by Merriam Webster as “having an avid interest in the latest food fads” (Merriam Webster, 2019) encourages distinction through knowledge of food, which creates cultural capital. As Duchene and Heller (2012) point out,

economic value is produced individually with each language and food, as well as jointly when the two value systems are combined (3). In addition to conducting interviews and focus groups with food producers, I also collected photos and drink labels that illustrated the use of Euskara, or the use of Euskara alongside translations. I focused particularly on milk, wine, and cider labels from the southern part of the Basque Country, Hegoalde, to find out how common and in which contexts such beverage marketing took place. I use this information to share the perceptions producers had regarding the use of language on their product label and the marketing found in the linguistic landscape.

Preferences such as these demonstrate the very complicated history of Euskara. It was once a powerful marker taken up as a form of resistance by young Basques and learned clandestinely during the Franco dictatorship in order to assert culture against a fierce linguistic repression. It has now come to represent a range of values to different viewers, from local Basques, to non-Basque speaking Basques, and from Spaniards to international tourists and neighboring Spanish consumers. The use of Euskara or other Basque symbols can devalue food products because of their perceived association with independence movements and the political violence previously carried out by the now defunct Basque nationalist group, ETA. One Basque-speaking informant asserted that they could never consider using Euskara to market their wine in other parts of Spain because of these negative associations.

Locals and tourists can find various semiotic uses on food labels as markers of Basque authenticity. For local Basques, the value derived from using Euskara to market foodstuffs depends on previously mentioned factors such as their own personal linguistic practices and where they live (that is, whether in a more, or less, Basque-speaking area), in addition to a stigma that links the Basque language and its products to an overly folkloric past.

Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Euskara

Attitudes toward Basque and Spanish have been addressed by various studies to determine the values associated with each language. Studies from the 1980s (Echano, 1989) measured attitudes across the two dimensions of social solidarity and status. In the case of minority languages, it is common for socially stigmatized groups to be often perceived by the in-group negatively (less competent) along the status dimension, but positively (more friendly) along the solidarity dimension (Amorrortu 2003, 74). According to studies conducted among bilingual Basque university students, somewhat surprisingly the Basque language was evaluated as being equal to Spanish along the solidarity dimension (Amorrortu, 74–76).

As an outsider, however, I found an additional valorization from Basques for being able to communicate in Euskara over Spanish. This appreciation is relevant and perhaps even, in part, a consequence of the more recent increase in gastronomic tourism and the number of foreign visitors who may *not* be able to speak Spanish, let alone Euskara. The increased visibility of English has created apprehension for many Basques who now worry that Euskara is now minoritized by both the local dominant language of Spanish and the lingua franca, English. However, I illustrate several cases in which the Basque language is being used to create value for the language itself as well as the gastronomic products.

Perhaps it is the link between food and language as identifying features of a culture that gives this pairing even more effectiveness in creating value—be it economic, cultural, or linguistic. By looking at use of language through semiotic images such as symbols, fonts, and typography, we can appreciate the extent to which Basque language and food products gain or lose value via processes of commodification. Often, such value is dependent on the viewer or consumer’s set of beliefs and the attitudes or perceptions they have toward the culture responsible for food and language production. For example, in my dissertation chapter (Lesh 2019a: 105) that covers a “war of milk” between two brands of milk, some Basques who valued the use of Euskara preferred buying a particular brand of milk—Euskal Herria Esnea—which was solely marketed in Basque. Others decided to take it a step further by boycotting the opposing brand of milk, Kaiku, because of its perceived commercial interests in filing a complaint against Euskal Herria Esnea marketing its product solely in Basque (Konpañon and Angulo 2012). This example shows how linguistic values can influence how consumers spend their money, thereby contributing to economic value. It also shows the power given to the consumer to support the visibility of a minoritized language over a dominant one. Meanwhile, Basques living in Rioja Alavesa—a winemaking zone with few Basque speakers—would not likely have the same values toward Basque, preferring to buy goods marketed mainly in Spanish.

For example, the traditionally-made wine Txakolina is still thought of by many locals as being of poor quality despite it having evolved and improved over the last couple of decades.² This traditionally homemade wine based on local grape varieties was often produced in or around the Basque baserri or farmstead. The basic methods of production

² Txakolina or Txakoli is the name that was traditionally used for a house-made wine. Historically, this wine has been made with various grape varieties that were available at the time and place of production, but is now primarily made from the indigenous and now signature varieties, Hondarribi Zuri and Hondarribi Beltza. The methods of production have produced wines that were previously perceived as poor quality and likely to give the drinker “*buruko mina*,” or headaches. The taste profile was typically acidic and rather bitter, illustrating the conditions of the local *terroir*. Depending on the *Denominación de Origen*’s regulations for making the wine, methods now sometimes involve the integration of other varieties and aging the wine on the lees. These modifications have changed the taste profile of Txakolina over the last decade or so, producing wines that can be labeled “Berezia” (“special”) to denote these newer methods of production.

produced a wine that, as many told me, would give you “*buruko mina*” or a headache. Using Euskara as the sole language to promote such products is only considered legal by Spain if the food product itself is deemed “traditional.” The association of Euskara as a language only to be used alongside “traditional” products prevents many from seeing it as a language of modern day use, and consequently, prevents consumers from seeing products marketed in the language as having evolved from their previous associations. Using Euskara, in this case, may be more valuable to tourists seeking an authentic product, and less valuable to Basques who tether a “traditional” language to negative associations of a “traditional” product.

Basque Wine and Cider

These two types of beverages are both alike and distinct in how they help produce value—be it through commoditization into economic value, or through linguistic and cultural value as authenticated luxury products of the semiofoodscape (Järlehed and Moriarty 2018, 27). The two beverages are commonly consumed in the Basque Country, making them easily accessible to observe in the local markets. However, a spectrum of sorts forms when looking at the markets in which they are sold, therefore creating different labeling needs. Basque cider, although enjoyed throughout the Basque Country, was observed to be most heavily consumed in the province of Gipuzkoa, the province in which it was mainly produced. It is distinct in flavor, defined by English descriptors like “Old World funky,” “unfiltered,” or “wild,” due to the use of native yeasts and spontaneous fermentation, large barrel fermentation leaving little oak, and the absence of additional sugars or additives.

Txakoli wine is next on this spectrum being produced and easily available in all three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community, consisting of Álava, Biscay, and Gipuzkoa. Traditionally a white wine grown from a single grape varietal in one Basque town, Getaria, the production methods, grapes used, and general taste has evolved with technological advancements and globalized tastes. This creates what wine experts and global consumers would call a more “palatable” wine than its more traditional predecessors. With the rise in gastronomic tourism, it is also becoming more easily accessible in international markets.

Internationally known for its quality to price ratio, the Rioja Denominación de Origen Calificada (DOCa) is one of only two winemaking regions to receive this prestigious classification that adheres to higher standards of quality than just the Denominación de Origen (DO) geographical indicators. It consists of three zones (previously known as “subzones”)—Rioja Baja, Rioja Alta, and Rioja Alavesa. The last is the only zone that is Basque, being part of the Álava province. The wines from this zone are north of the Ebro

River, on the southern edge of the Basque Country. Traditionally, this region has been a linguistic frontier in which Euskara was not widely used. The wines from any province of Rioja can be found locally, and are also easily found abroad.

As noted from interviews, the quality of Basque products is high, commanding more prestige and value for neighboring Spanish and French consumers compared to their cultural counterparts. In local markets, the use of Basque symbols and language is more commonly found than in national or international markets. Years of being associated with political violence under Franco's rule and beyond has left Basque symbols on the Spanish side to be devalued by other neighboring regions in Spain. This was particularly relevant when speaking with Basque producers in Rioja who chose to market their goods in Spanish over Basque when exporting to other places within Spain. They claimed that consumers still negatively associated Basque symbols with the political violence and independence movements. This was an opinion shared by many food producers, uniquely shaping the marketing strategies of producers from the northern and southern Basque provinces when selling within Spain and France.

Other Basque producers, including those from the northern Basque Country, often used symbols such as the lauburu—a common marker of cultural Basqueness (Järlehed and Moriarty, 2018) or traditional Basque font, or type, (Järlehed, 2015) to advertise. While the number of speakers is fewer for the northern part of the Basque Country, the folkloric use of Basque symbols and images are ubiquitous symbols of Basque language and identity that localize and authenticate Basque products (Järlehed and Moriarty, 2018).



Figures 1, 2, and 3: From left to right, uses of the lauburu and Basque flag (ikurrina)

Font Size for Rioja Alavesa

The winemaking area of the Rioja *Denominación de Origen Calificada* (DOCa), made up of three zones—two Spanish and one Basque—made headlines while conducting my fieldwork in 2017. A new labeling strategy was approved that would shape the way producers from Rioja could market their wine after the 2017 harvest. This decision illustrated the efforts that had been made on behalf of the Asociación de Bodegas de Rioja Alavesa (ABRA) to differentiate the wines of the Basque zone of Rioja Alavesa. This outcome now applies to all producers in the Rioja winemaking Designation of Origen (DOC).

The decision was made by the Regulatory Board of Rioja DOC to allow wines to be labeled by “zona” (zone) and “villa” (town or municipality), as well as “viñedos singulares” or single vineyard wine. This ruling came after more than forty bodegas had been working to develop a new Designation of Origin (DO), called *Viñedos de Álava* or, in Basque, *Arabako Mahastiak*. This latest decision was made to halt the efforts to create the Alavesa label and to allow the DOC of Rioja to follow through with its new agreement.

The Vice President of ABRA, Carlos Fernández, commented (on the Dastatu Rioja Alavesa blog) that, “This began many years ago with the demand for a font size to acknowledge the distinct subzones of the Rioja DOC.” Up until then, the permitted subzones, now simply called “zones,” had to be displayed using a smaller font size than that of the larger “Rioja” DOC indication. The three zones—Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa, and Rioja Baja (the latter recently changed to *Oriental* or “Eastern”)—can now be listed in a font equal in size to that of the larger designation of “Rioja.” The importance of this new agreement highlights the challenges of selling wine within various markets in such a way that identity and traceability are not lost. This particular use of semiotics is in part driven by the producers’ and consumers’ desire for a unique, traceable, and well-marketed wine.

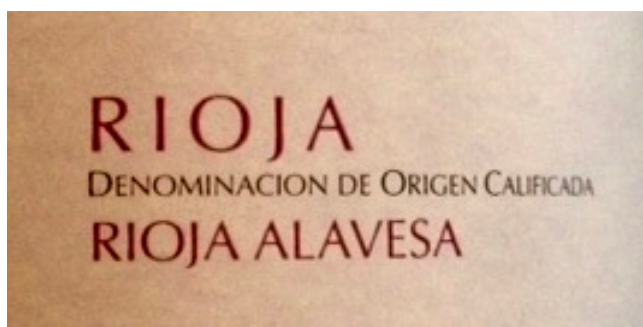


Figure 4

Bottle label from Ostatu displaying the previous font specifications with “Rioja Alavesa” two-thirds the size and below “Rioja”

As noted in the introduction, Bittor Oroz, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Fishing, and Food Policy for the Basque government, further shows the importance of making “place” more visible with a change in font size, as stated in the *Noticias de Alava* (2017):

“People look for the origin of the wine they consume, they want to link it to the terroir ... they are looking for something more than just the quality of the product, but rather the story behind the wine, the histories that lie behind a glass, and being able to focus in on a particular bodega, on the places where it is cultivated and produced. Because of that, it is important to identify those spaces and give them their due value” (author’s translation) (Muñoz, 2017).

While the quality of the food product is established as a necessary component to create identity for producers and their products, Oroz highlights the influence of the market to reinforce the products’ associated value. The unique characteristics of wine depend not only on the processes of production and importance of taste, but the ability to trace the product back to the *terroir*, or the physical and cultural elements associated with place of origin. One way of doing this is by labeling the zones within Rioja from which the product comes. More specific to this case is also the placement and size of the Rioja Alavesa origin within the larger Rioja DOCa.

This compromise, made between the smaller zones and the larger DOCa over the millimeters of a font size, was called a “milestone” due to the value to be gained now that Rioja Alavesa producers could be *seen* on the label as “equal” to the larger Rioja DOCa. However, it is pertinent to mention that this decision also came after potential value was lost in not creating a new Basque *Denominación de Origen* (DO). Seceding from the larger Rioja DOCa would have allowed much more freedom for the Basque winemaking zone of Rioja Alavesa to market their wine as an independent geographical indication. While such marketing freedom may seem, at first, worthwhile considering the distinct cultural differences among zones, the economic repercussions of separating from one of the, if not *the*, most renowned winemaking regions in Spain were seen as too precarious by the majority of Rioja Alavesa wine producers. The compromise to enlarge the font, thus, illustrates the significance of font size when trying to assert a sense of cultural, economic, or even linguistic distinction and identity.

Euskara in Communicative Strategies

Within this geographical location of Rioja Alavesa, where the minoritized Basque language is even more scarce, I was surprised to find what has still been the only bottle that uses the Basque language for communicative purposes on the back label for advertising purposes. While other bodegas may index Basque culture or language—most likely attracting Basques consumers by using words or short phrases in Basque—Compañón is the only producer that I have found to use Euskara as a way to market for communication and textual purposes (Lesh 2019a).

Itxaso Compañón, owner of El Mozo Wines in Rioja Alavesa, creates a value through language materiality when using the labels to communicate the products' physical and cultural origin. In the Basque Country and even more so in the wine-producing region of Rioja Alavesa, the Basque language exists in the periphery of a multilingual setting, where not only Castilian is the majority language, but where English is commonly being used to cater to international tourists. I argue that while Compañón's unique marketing tactics and linguistic resistance leave her in the minority, the value she creates for herself now with her products may continue to grow financially in a region that continues to attract more tourists each year. At the same time, she will still preserve its more personal value for herself, her family, and Basques speakers in Euskadi.

Figure 4 bottle label from Ostatus, represents the little Basque used in the zone, and may not have positive symbolic value within the Spanish state, but does have potential for increased economic value for international travelers looking for a wine that authentically represents the local Basque culture.



Figure 5

The only label in the Basque zone of Rioja Alavesa to feature a counter label with communicative use all in Euskara



Figure 6

A Basque verse or “bertso” on the counter label of txakolina wine

Finding labels for Txakoli in Euskara was not as rare within local markets. This can be attributed to the location of production sites, as the majority are located in provinces in which Basque is more present. Txakoli producers were generally more hesitant to market in Euskara for national and international markets, just as they were in the Basque winemaking region of Rioja Alavesa. The example shown in figure 5, however, was an exception for bottles bound for international destinations. It contained verse in Euskara on the back label that the producers assured me was not to be translated. I shared my opinion that leaving this verse untranslated would create an authentic form of traceability through language to the culture that has become renowned for its gastronomy.

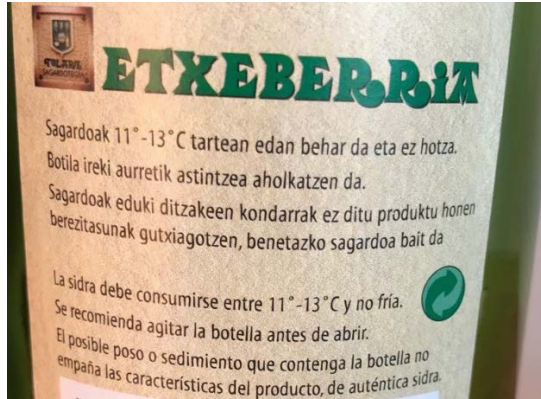


Figure 7

Counter label on a bottle of cider with a translation in Euskara followed by Spanish

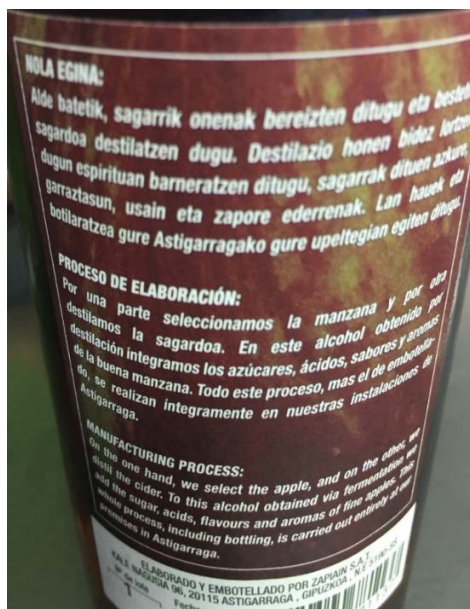


Figure 8

Counter label on a bottle of cider with translations in Euskara, Spanish, and English

These pictures of cider labels provide an example of Scollon & Scollon's (2003, chapter 6) theory on code preference. They explain that, when a text is in multiple codes (two or three language as seen here), there is a system of preference (119–120) that can index the community within which it is being used. The two co-official languages of Basque Country— Euskara and Spanish—are listed, while English occupies the last position. This is a process that crosses over from placement within a frame, to placement in the world (Scollon & Scollon 2003, 124). I argue that while this example was not representative of the localized production and consumption of Basque cider, it will become a more commonly used way to market Basque products as the interest in gastronomy and tourism continue to increase. Additionally, I think that *keeping* the Basque language on labels destined for

international markets will garner more cultural and economic value than those translated into the language in which the product will ultimately be sold.

Signs and Symbols of Language

As Basque products have increasingly entered the international market, many producers—of both wine and cider—use Basque signs or symbols such as the commonly seen *lauburu*, meaning “four heads,” to denote the product’s origin as Basque. However, I argue that a single word in Euskara functions as its own effective sign and symbol providing authenticity, as well as economic, cultural, and linguistic value. As Scollon and Scollon (2003) mention, signs can create meaning from *indexicality*, the indexical value from objects, and *symbolization*, when a sign makes its meaning by representing something else that is not present, or is metaphorical. The word “*sagardoa*,” used on cider labels that are exported or sold to consumers that do not speak Basque, functions to index authenticity and traceability through the language of origin. It also symbolizes an authentic product by more closely tying cider to the origin through language, and metaphorically shunning previous negative associations with the Basque language, or fears that a minoritized language needs to be translated to meet consumer needs.

When I interviewed producers of Basque cider and wine in 2017, most assumed that labels should be made to target the language spoken in the markets for which they are destined. This was illustrated at the *II Sagardo Forum*, or Second Cider Forum held in 2017 when I asked a group of producers and leaders in the industry about marketing strategies as they had hoped to start exporting their products. That same year, the new Denominación de Origen Euskal Sagardoa (Basque cider origin labeling) had been formed and the goals included professionalization, presence in the market, and using ingredients strictly from the Basque Country. Some thought that the Basque language would be too difficult to pronounce for consumers, and difficult to remember. Others, however, including a bar owner from Chicago, encouraged the use of one word in Euskara—*sagardoa* (cider). Those who agreed claimed that it would be a way to associate the Basque taste of cider with the culture, which is slightly different from the neighboring, and popular, Asturian cider. While I support any use of the Basque language for marketing and linguistic normalization purposes, I find this marketing strategy of using one single Basque word such as *sagardoa* a compromise that is recognizable enough for the consumer, and offers the producer a way to express culture through language.

Ironically, I soon found an example of such language use closer to home the following year. In October of 2018, I visited and interviewed a cider producer—one of few in the United States—in the Columbia River Gorge in the Pacific Northwest. I took particular interest in

his project as he marketed his cider by using the Basque word *sagardo*. He explained that, for him, it was due to a love of the culture and food—the outdoorsiness of the Basques, and the funky taste of the cider. When I asked him about using the Basque word for marketing purposes, he admitted that he thought it would give an added value associated with the culture and food. Not only was he advertising the Basque language to create value for his product, but he was also creating an educational experience for those who were unfamiliar with the word by explaining its compound nature (*sagar+ardoa*, “apple wine”) on a wall onsite. Unprompted, as he served us his cider, he poured it the way one would experience in northern Spain, mimicking the height needed to “break” the cider on the side of the glass.

This performance, I argue, is valued by the customer, giving them a substitution for the lived experience in the Basque Country. The use of the single word “sagardo” for the producer in the United States is an encouraging answer as to how the use of a single, identifying Basque word can create value through authenticating processes, and in turn, create more visibility for the Basque language in local or international markets.



Figure 9

Explanation/Translation of the word "Sagardo"(cider) and the significance of the pour



Figure 10

A translation of the Basque word for "Cider" The word for "cider" in Euskara is often written to include the article "a," which literally means "the" (translated as "a."), which would be written as "sagardoa."



Figure 11

Son of Man owner, "performing" the pour

The Ubiquitous Basque Style Font

While I am still learning to comprehend Euskara, it did not take long to understand the value of the ubiquitous style of the Basque font. Unlike other symbols that were influenced by political and provincial distinctions within the larger Basque Country—such as the Basque flag—the Basque font seemed to be slightly less attached to potentially negative associations. It can be found on restaurant signs, food labels, and government signs

depending on how much Basqueness wanted to be conveyed, and was said to have originated in the Middle Ages, etched into headstones and furniture (Isabel, 2012).

This typography or style of font appears to have evolved over time within the linguistic landscape dependent on a geosemiotic notion that social meaning depends on the material placement of signs. For example, more traditional styles of txakoli, or txakoli producers that want to exude the traditional and more folkloric aspects, will use this Basque font on their labels to denote Coupland's (2003) notion of historicity, in turn strengthening a sense of authenticity.

However, I argue that due to political evolution, an effort to find balance between an often advertised "tradition and innovative" cuisine, and an evaluation of which foods would gain from acquiring a more antiquated association, a spectrum has been created to approximate products to desired values. Figures 12-19 offer a potential spectrum for the Basque font, ranging from more pronounced to less pronounced aspects of this typography.



Figure 12 and 13 Variations of Basque typography used on cider and Txakolina labels



<14



<15

Variations of Basque typography used on Irouleguy beer and wine (14), and Txakolina (15)

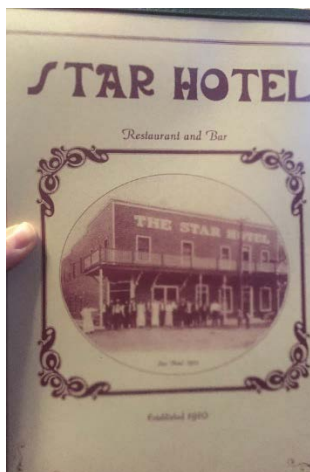


Figure 16. Variations of Basque typography on the menu at the Star Hotel and Restaurant in Elko, Nevada



<17



<18

Figure 17 and 18. Michelin star chef Eneko Atxa, for example, maintains the “hats” on the “A’s,” the lines through the “Z’s”, but does so without the thick block-like lettering. The new DO for Basque cider puts even less emphasis on the thickness of the font, as well as less detailing for the “hats” on the “A’s” and lines through the “Z’s”. I argue that it is through the gradation of Basque font that a product can create the sense of value by associating itself with tradition or modernity, Basqueness, or non-Basqueness, as needed. Interestingly, there are similar fonts found in the United States. Trader Joe’s font has similarities in the thickness of the lettering, the “hats” of the “T.” The “Road Jester Regular” font by Harold Lohner also displays a likeness to the traditional Basque font.

**TRADER
JOE'S®**

Figure 19: Credit: Trader Joe's LinkedIn



Figure 20: credit: Haroldsfonts.com

By taking a semiotic approach to “value,” we can slowly tease out the entanglements connected to the viewer, the relationship with the viewer and the culture producing the object, the taste, as well as economic and political climates that create value within the semiofoodscape. As these dimensions constantly change, so do the semiotic presentations that have the power to simultaneously gain and lose value dependent on what is being indexed.

In this paper, I argue for the increased use of Basque for both purposes of language normalization as well as for economic, political, and linguistic advancements that work toward maintaining minoritized cultures and their languages. The producers, however, have a much more difficult task at hand. While many prefer to use the language spoken at home as the same language on their food labels, the reality is that their livelihoods and culture depend on the economic value given to these multifaceted semiotic systems that include the language in the communicative form, as well as the size and style of font. As

Itxaso Compañon, the producer of the Rioja label in Basque seen above and the newly named vice president representing the Rioja Alavesa bodegas said, “Internationally, I am proud and have no fear... [marketing in Basque], but within Spain, you have to be brave to use Basque on the label” (Lesh, 2019a). In the case of the Basque font, as producers are more selectively using it to avoid overly folkloric, traditional associations of Basqueness, it will be interesting to see which fonts and symbols will take its place. Perhaps the adaptations of newer fonts will equally represent and embrace both Basque and non-Basque speakers of Euskal Herria as uniformly as the Basque font has. I argue that while on one hand this Basque font united Basque and non-Basque speakers alike, the growing absence of the font creates a space for more communicative forms of the language that could aid in language normalization efforts.

Analyzing food consumption and production, this paper proposes a semiotic approach to “value” that draws attention to entanglements between various forms of value and examines the social work through which individuals and groups attempt to create and convert value alongside the promotion of Basque gastronomic products. The semiotic processes and their indexical meanings create and detract value from the language and food alike. By continuing to examine salient features of cultural identities, such as language and food, we shed light on the ways in which linguistic value can be created across geographic regions and communities.

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