The Digital Language

Diversity Project

Basque — a digital language?

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Imprint

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1. Overview

How does the linguistic diversity of Europe reflect in the new media? Do regional and minority languages contribute to EU digital language diversity, and to what extent? Is it possible for regional or minority language speakers to have a digital life in those languages?

In this report we present the results of the first survey about the actual needs of European minority language speakers regarding digital opportunities. The survey is part of the work carried out by the Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP), a three-year Erasmus+ project started in September 2015.

The goal of the DLDP is to help minority language speakers in the acquisition of intellectual and practical skills to create, share, and re-use online digital content, and, at the same time, defining general guidelines and best practices for the promotion of minority languages with poor digital representation. This lack of digital presence further prevents their usability on digital media and devices.

The focus of the project is on four European minority languages at different stages of digital development (Basque, Breton, Karelian and Sardinian). This focus enables a comparison on the role of the availability of digital content for the promotion of digital usage of these languages and the development of language-based digital applications.

With the aim of understanding the specific needs and the particular behaviour of speakers of these languages, during the spring of 2016 we conducted a survey focused on gathering information about their personal digital use of the language and about any known digital resource and services that make use of the language. We received feedback from almost 2,000 speakers and we are now in the position of showing the results for future actions.

The survey was launched on the Internet, using social media in particular; thus, the profile of the respondent belongs to a person who makes at least a minimal digital use of the language in their everyday life. This fact must be taken into account by the reader.

the
Digital **L**anguage
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2. Basque, a Brief Profile

The Basque language (Euskara) is the only non-Indo-European language in Western Europe, and as a language isolate has no known relationship with any other language. The most widely accepted classification distinguishes the following dialects from the east to the west of the Basque Country: Biscayan, Gipuzkoan, Lapurdian, Upper Navarrese, Lower Navarrese and Zuberoan (Souletin) (Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003).

Work to establish a standard began in the 1960s and the first decisions of the Royal Academy of the Basque Language (Euskaltzaindia) were published in 1968 (Arantzazu Conference). From then on the standardization process took place very rapidly. Despite the fact that some difficulties arose at the beginning of the process, this new standard has been successful. It is considered as well established and mostly accepted by Basque society (Hualde & Zuazo, 2007).

The Basque language is spoken by a population of around 800,000 speakers on both sides of the western Pyrenees: in four provinces (Araba, Biscay, Gipuzkoa and Navarre) of the Southern Basque Country in the north of Spain, and in the three historical territories (Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule) in the Northern Basque Country in the southwest of France. These seven provinces are called Euskal Herria (the Basque Country).

Today, Basque is co-official with Spanish in the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC), which comprises the provinces of Araba, Biscay and Gipuzkoa. It also has a more restricted official status in Navarre. Basque has no official status in the Northern Basque Country.

According to the UN, Basque is in a weak position in the BAC and especially in Navarre; it is at severely endangered in the French part. It would appear to be making some progress in the BAC where its survival seems to be assured.

Regarding education, the situation is very different depending on the area (Gardner & Zalbide, 2005). While the majority of schoolchildren in the BAC and in northern Navarre are being educated either in Basque or in bilingual Spanish-Basque programmes, in the southern part of Navarre and in the French part fewer pupils are being taught in Basque.

At university level the situation is quite similar. It differs from one area to another and depends on the specific university. In the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), for example, students can study partially or totally in Basque, but in other universities the courses in Basque offered to students are far fewer than the ones offered in Spanish or in French, even though an important effort is being made to change this situation.

The presence of Basque in the media in the Basque Country is still quite restricted. There is a single newspaper in Basque, Berria, that is distributed throughout the Basque Country as well as many other local Basque language newspapers which are published daily. There are also some weekly and various specialised magazines that publish their content only in Basque. Of note is the increasing number of digital newspapers that have emerged in the last years.

There are currently two public radio stations which broadcast exclusively in Basque for the Basque Country as a whole (Euskadi Irratia and Euskadi Gaztea). However, at the same time, there is a significant number of territorial, regional and municipal radio stations which broadcast in Basque.

Basque is not extensively used on television. There are three main channels that broadcast exclusively in Basque: ETB1, ETB3 and Hamaika Telebista. There are also some local TV channels in Basque.

Regarding language technology, there are a number of products, technologies and resources made for Basque. There are several digital dictionaries, corpora, and application tools for speech synthesis, speech recognition, spell-checkers or grammar checking tools. Automatic translation tools have been developed for Spanish and Basque (Hernáez et al., 2012).

3. Speakers' Identities: Gender, Age and Provenance

For the analysis of the Basque language, we received 428 replies. Most of the people were contacted through Twitter. The data confirms the presence of a lively Basque speaker community on Twitter, as further statistics (see fig. 21 and fig. 22) can show.

The sample is quite varied and balanced with respect to age groups, with the three most numerous groups being 30-39, 40-49, 50-59. This implies that the percentage of respondents below 30 is around 22%.

In terms of gender, we have a quite balanced dataset, with a small predominance of male speakers (52.7%).

Concerning activism, the majority of respondents (63.5%) define themselves as activists for the language, they take part in revitalisation activities such as language nests, cultural initiatives etc. 39.3% of those who are activists declare not to have any kind of professional involvement with Basque. Therefore, a high percentage of respondents helping in the revitalization of Basque are professionals.

Concerning provenance, in fig. 1 the geographical distribution of respondents to this survey shows the geographical distribution of places of birth, while fig. 2 shows the distribution of places of residence.
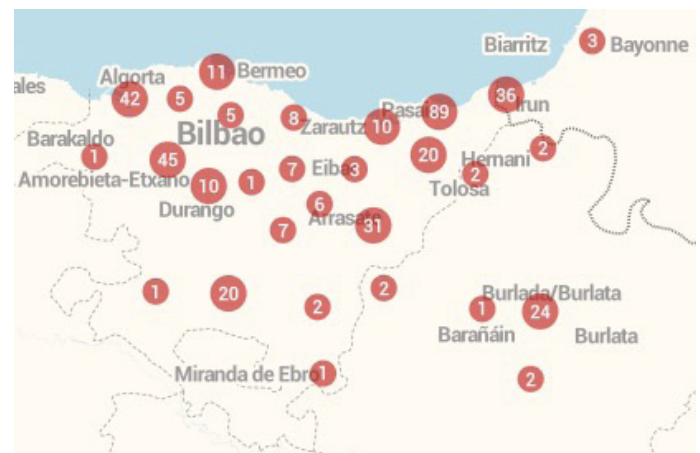

Fig. 1 - Distribution of places of birth

Fig. 2 - Distribution of places of residence
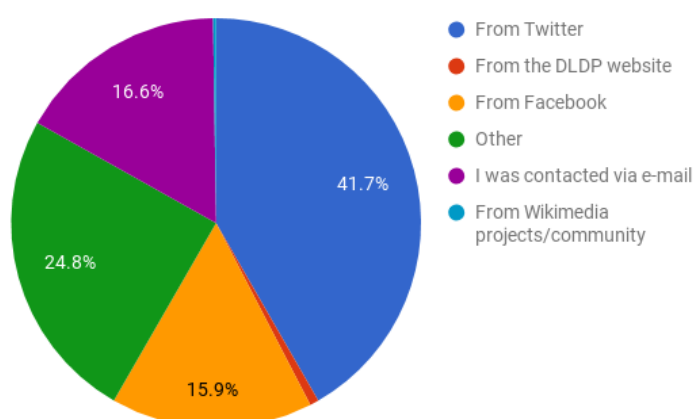
How did you learn about this survey?

- From Twitter
- From the DLDP website
- From Facebook
- Other
- I was contacted via e-mail
- From Wikimedia projects/community

41.7%
15.9%
24.8%
16.6%

Fig. 3 - Source of information on this survey

Age distribution of respondents

- 50 - 59
- < 20
- 30 - 39
- 40 - 49
- 21 - 29
- 60 - 69
- > 70

20.1%
4.9%
29.7%
25.5%
17.3%
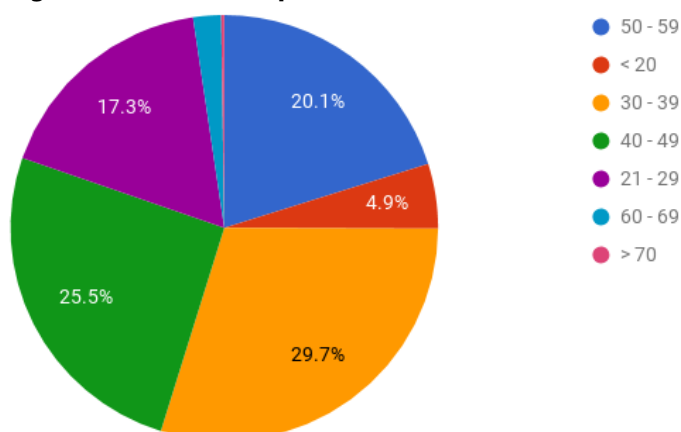
Fig. 4 - Age of respondents

Gender

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to specify

52.7%
46.1%
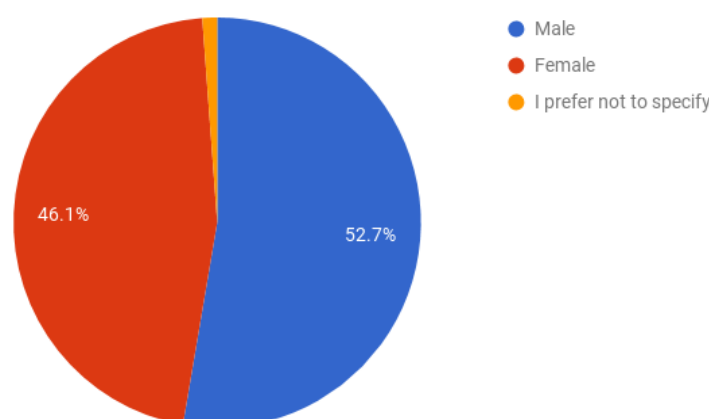
Fig. 5 - Gender

Do you take part in any revitalization or protection activity related to Basque?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

65.3%
31.1%
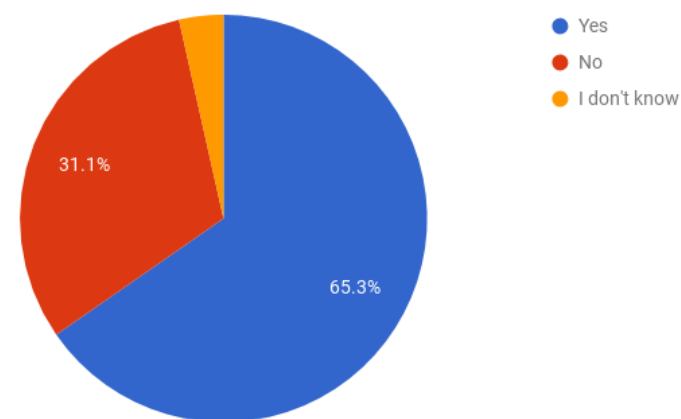
Fig. 6 - Basque revitalization activities

Are you professionally involved with Basque?

- Yes, as a member of local/national association
- No
- Yes, as a public officer or an organisation for the promotion of Basque
- Yes, as a linguist
- Yes, as an educator of the public of private sector
- Yes, as a member of a speaker community
- Other

4.4%
39.3%
22.2%
10.8%
17.1%

Fig. 7 - Professional involvement with Basque

4. Self-Evaluation of Competence in Basque

Of all respondents, 40.7% describe themselves as native language speakers of Basque, while 35.4% are bilingual from childhood. 24% are Spanish native speakers, while few respondents have French as their mother language.
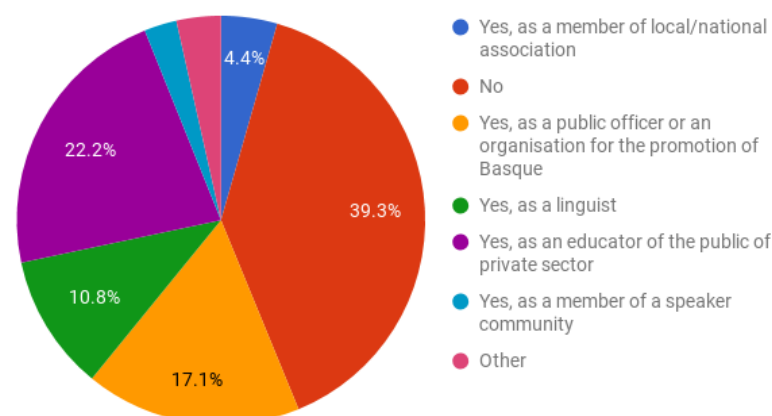
As far as competence in Basque is concerned, the majority of respondents declare a very good knowledge of the language, especially regarding passive skills.

In terms of use in and outside institutional contexts, the profile is generally very active. Most respondents listen and speak the language every day, with almost the same frequency in the two contexts; only written use is a bit less common in non-institutionalized contexts, which would be expected from the different characteristics of both registers. Accordingly, the number of speakers reporting to use Basque rarely or never is very little.

Therefore, we can see that the majority of users present a high profile both in terms of language competence and use of the language.

From the point of view of the relationship with Spanish, how would you describe yourself?

- Spanish native speaker
- Bilingual
- Basque native speaker
- Other
- French native speaker

23.0%
40.7%
35.4%

Fig. 8 - Native language

Concerning the values system, the strongest values attributed to the language are the first and the third ones, that is those that have the closest relation with the history of the country and with personal identity. It is remarkable that the value assigned to Basque as a tool for communication is not far from them and that the instrumental value, even though it is the least agreed-upon one, does not have a negligible level of agreement.

How would you evaluate your own knowledge of Basque?

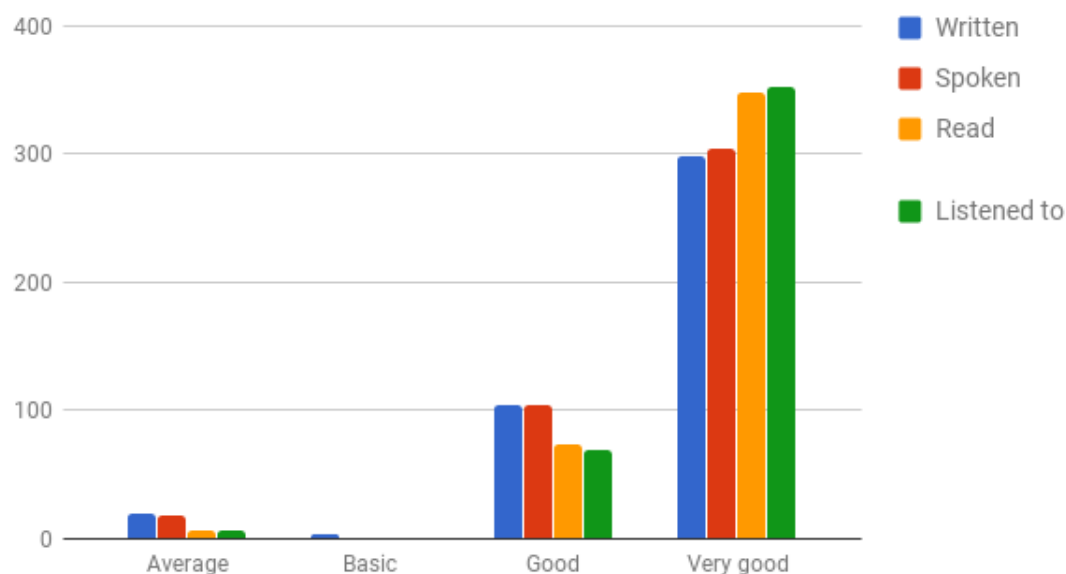- Written
- Spoken
- Read
- Listened to

Fig. 9 - Knowledge of Basque

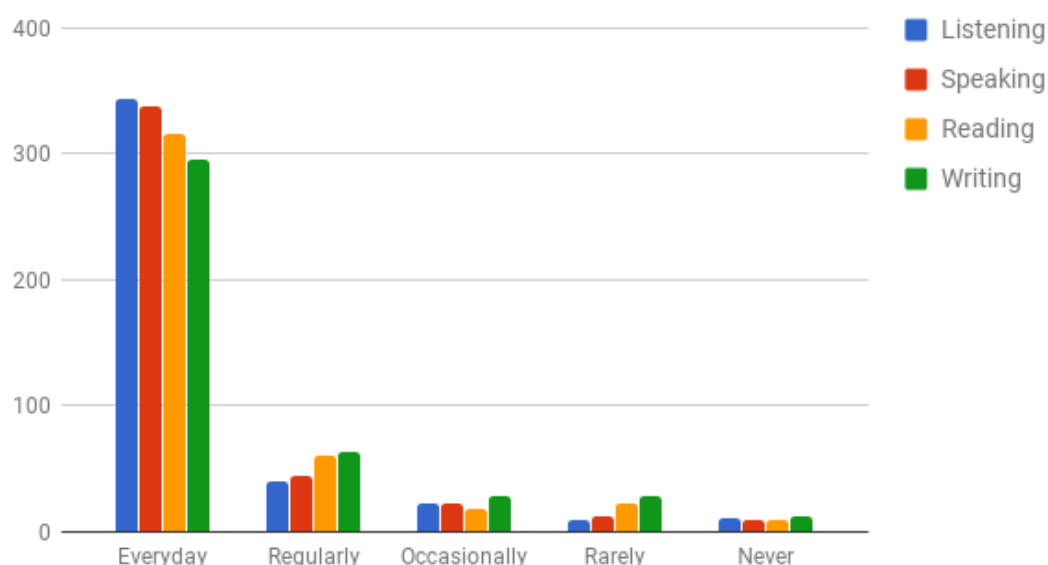**How and how often do you use Basque in an institutional setting?**

Fig. 10 - Use of Basque in an institutional setting

How and how often do you use Basque outside an institutional setting?
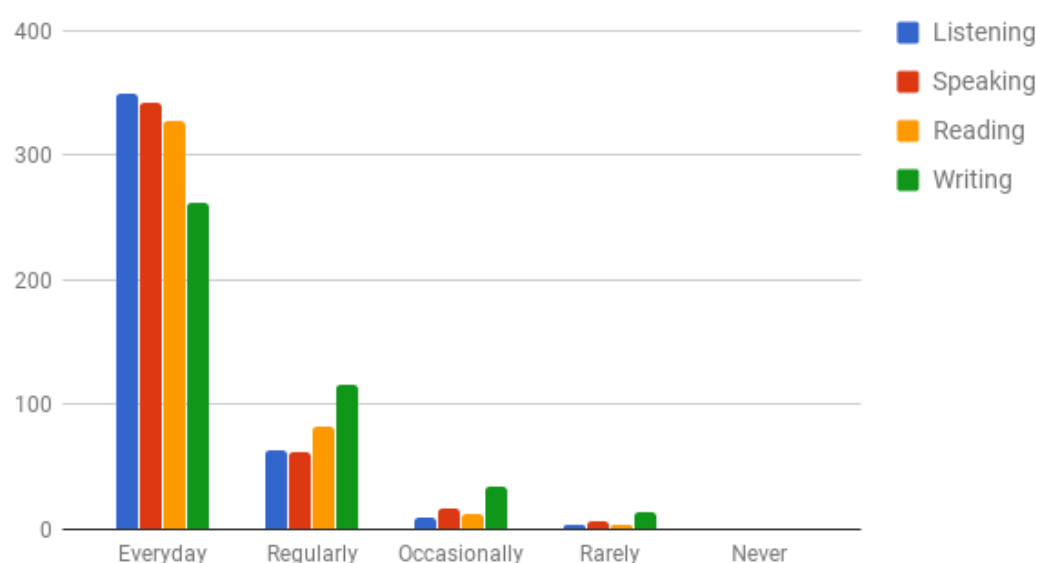
Fig. 11 - Use of Basque outside an institutional setting

Basque is important because...

1) ...it embodies the history and culture of the region/country.
2) ...it is the language of my childhood/my parents/grandparents.
3) ...it gives me a sense of who I am and where I belong.
4) ...it is a tool for communicating with the people of the community I belong to.
5) ...it provides access to opportunities (work, studies, access to information).

Fig. 12 - Importance of Basque

5. Digital Use of Basque

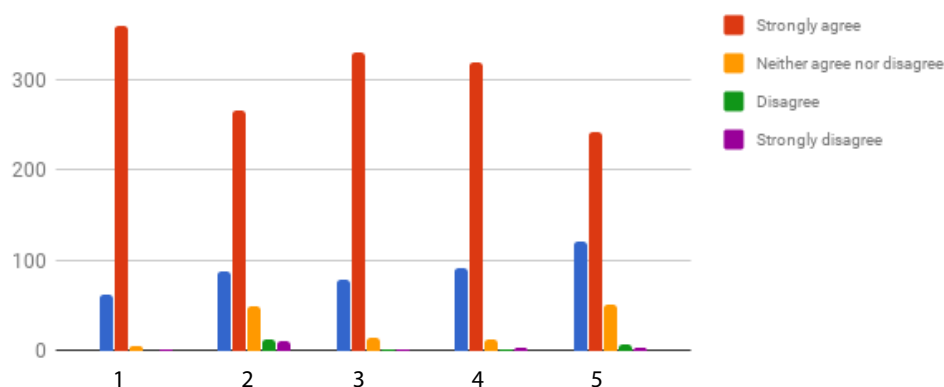Basque appears to be actively used for electronic communication (97%) among the respondents of the survey. It is used for writing e-mails, texting, chatting or using other instant messaging such as Whatsapp, Google Chat, Snapchat, Skype, and Facebook Messenger. The amount of respondents who declared to have their own blog is quite remarkable.

Instant messaging applications appear to be the most used instruments for e-communication, followed by regular e-mail and texting/SMS.

The respondents express a strong desire to be able to use Basque on the Internet as part of their everyday life. There is a high level of agreement on not considering Basque as a spoken language that cannot be used on the Internet or not worth it. The more varied reply, in terms of agreement, is the one related to the statement that it's easier to use Spanish instead of Basque. Nearly a third part of the respondents feel that using Spanish is easier.
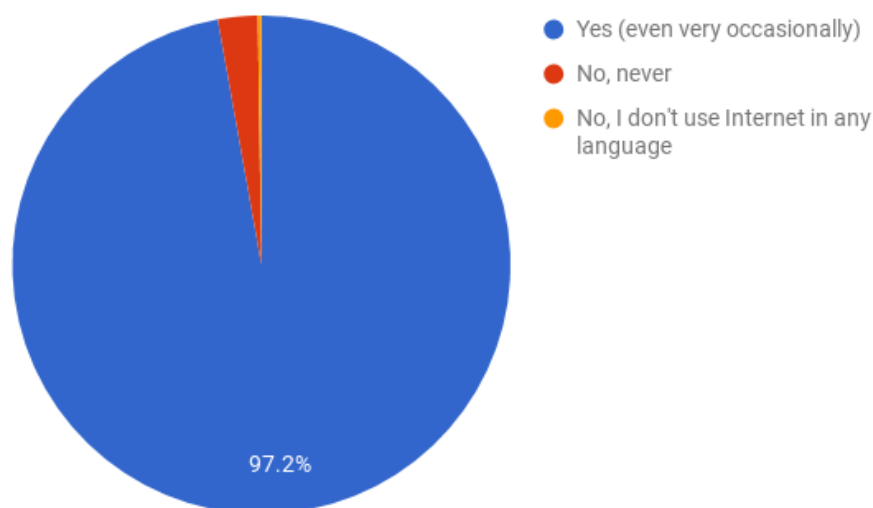
Do you use Basque on the Internet?

Fig. 13 - Use of Basque on the Internet
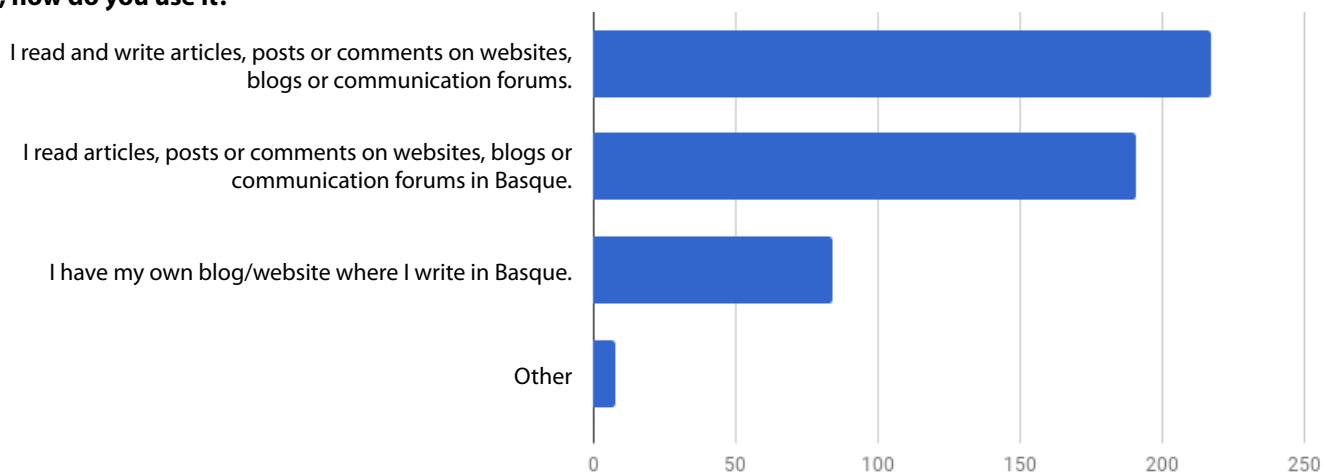
If yes, how do you use it?

Fig. 14 - Basque language activities on the Internet
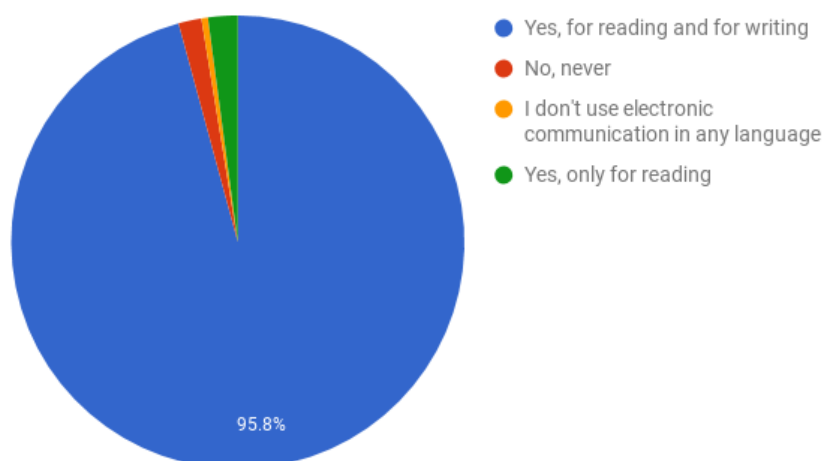
Do you ever use Basque for electronic communication?

Legend:
- Yes, for reading and for writing
- No, never
- I don't use electronic communication in any language
- Yes, only for reading

95.8%

Fig. 15 - Use of Basque for electronic communication

How often do you use Basque for electronic communication?

Legend:
- Everyday
- Regularly
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Categories: e-mail, texting/SMS, chatting/instant messaging
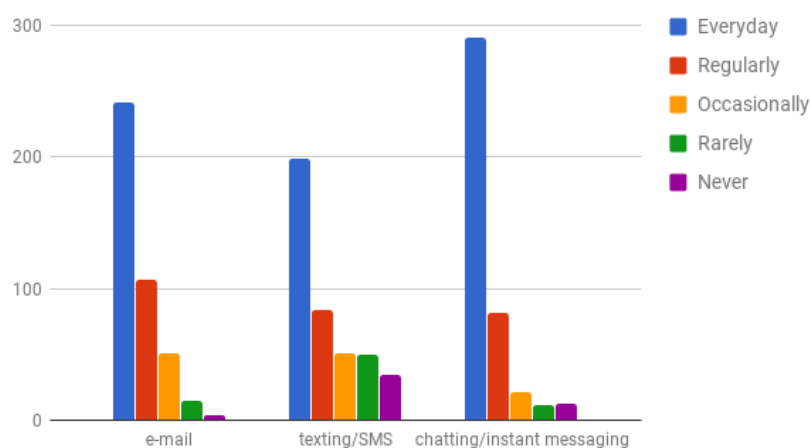
Fig. 16 - Frequency of use of Basque for electronic communication

How much do you agree to the following statements?

Statements:
- I'd like to be able to use Basque in any aspect of life.
- Using Basque on the Internet shows it's part of the contemporary world.
- I think it would make Basque more appealing to young generations.
- I don't think it's worth using Basque on the Internet.
- It's easier to use Spanish or French instead of Basque.
- Basque cannot be used on the Internet.

Legend:
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I prefer not to say

Fig. 17 - Statements on Basque

5.1 Basque on Digital Media

Digital media are available in Basque. Websites, blogs, forums, and smartphones apps are those most widespread, while few speakers are aware of the existence of Internet television, streaming audio and video.
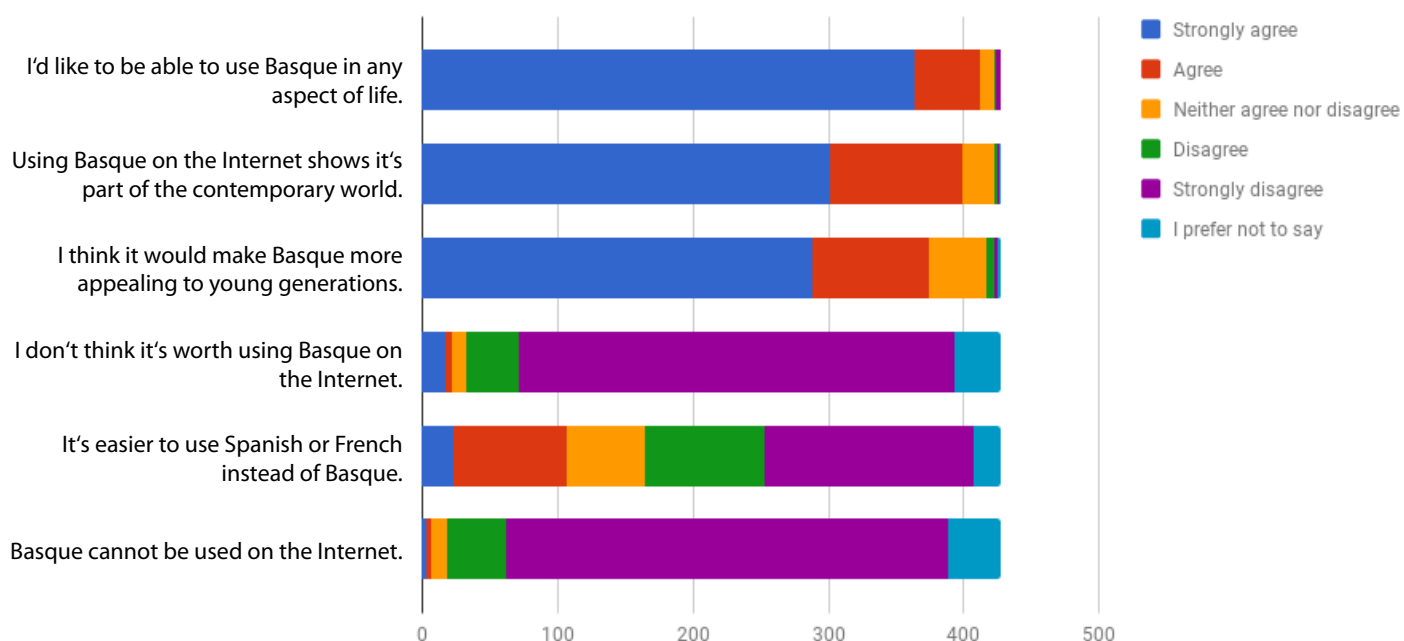
There is a Wikipedia available for Basque and almost all the respondents (97%) are aware of its existence. Only 11% of them are active users and content producers. The majority (81%) browse it while a few of them (8%) do not make any use of it at all.

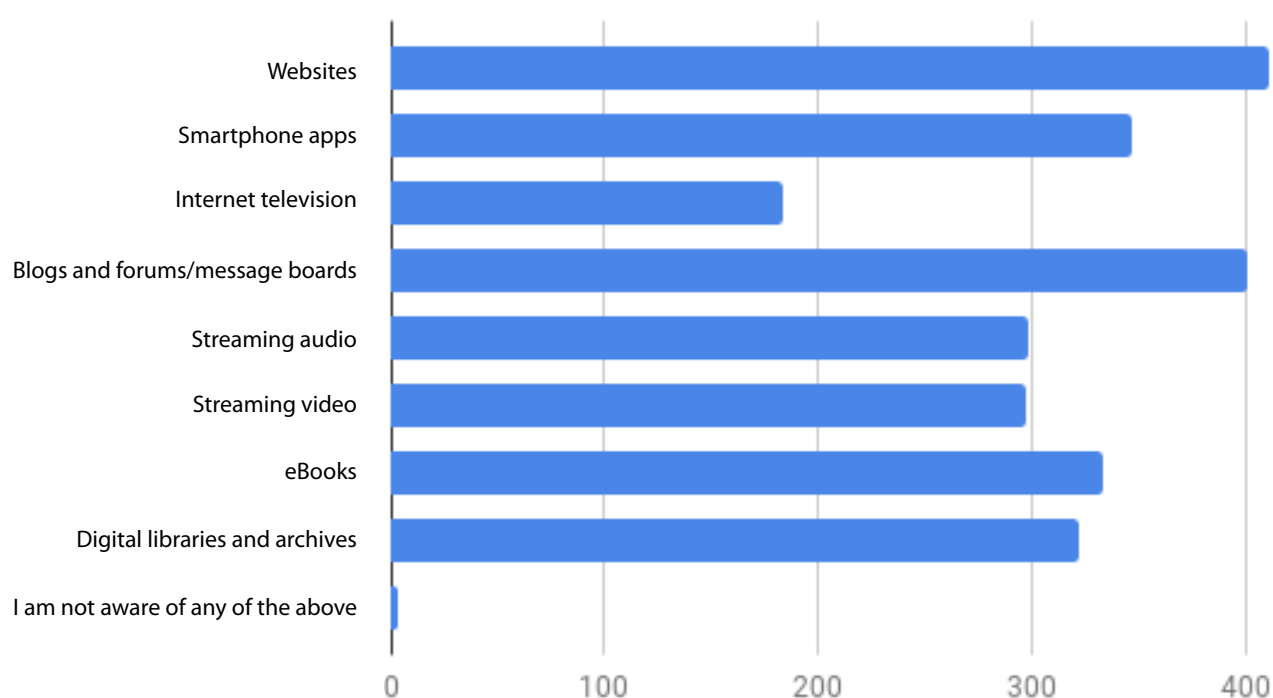**To your best knowledge, which of the following media are available in Basque?**

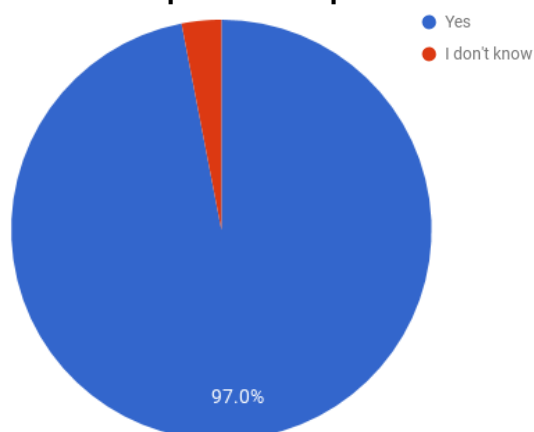Fig. 18 - Existing media in Basque

Is there a Wikipedia for Basque?

Fig. 19 - Existence of Basque Wikipedia

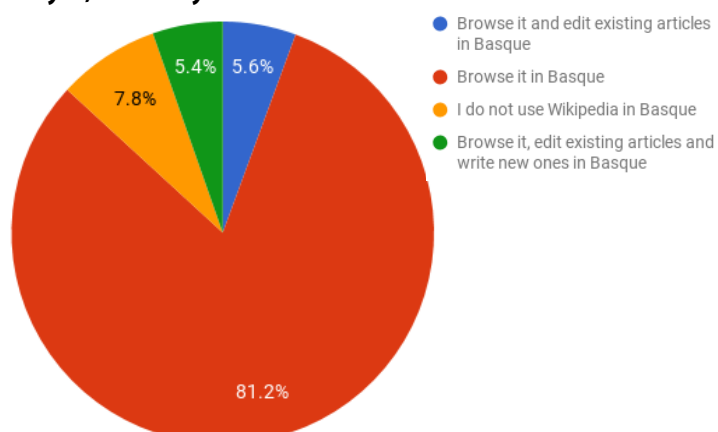**If yes, how do you use it?**

Fig. 20 - Use of Basque Wikipedia

5.2 Basque on Social Networks

Social media are widely used by Basque speakers representing an interesting scenario for written but informal use of the language.

Facebook is the most used social media, followed very closely by Twitter. It is remarkable that the majority of the respondents use Basque in Facebook and Twitter, and that this use is mostly active. The other social media are clearly less used, but the percentage of use of Basque is, except for LinkedIn, more or less similar. The percentage of respondents not using Basque in LinkedIn is the highest one.

The frequency of use of Basque is high in Facebook and Twitter, with a remarkable everyday use. The use in Instagram and Google+ is less frequent than those mentioned above, while the use of Basque in LinkedIn is mostly occasional or rare.
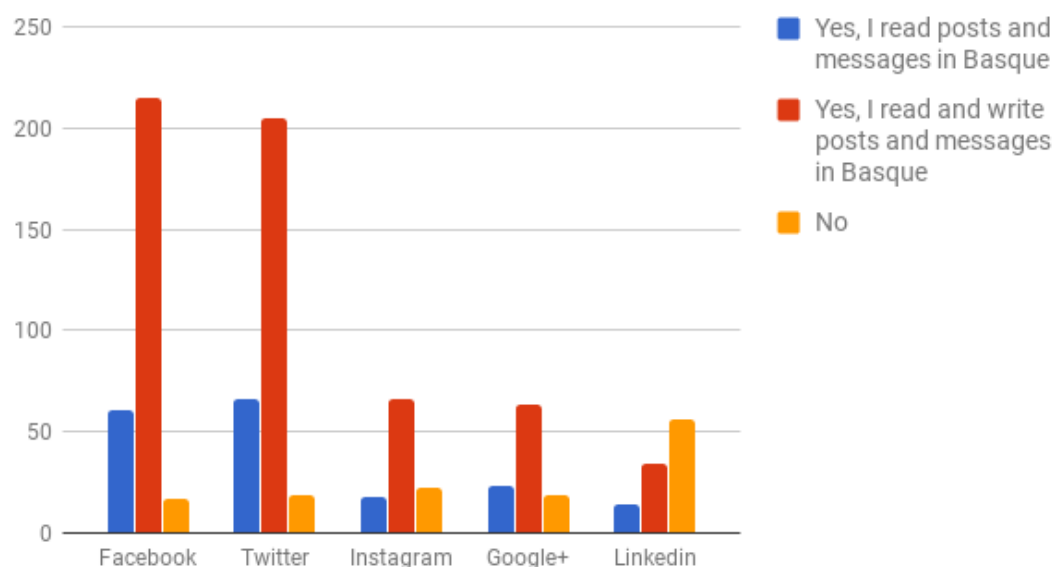
Do you ever use Basque on the following networks?

Fig. 21 – Use of Basque on social networks

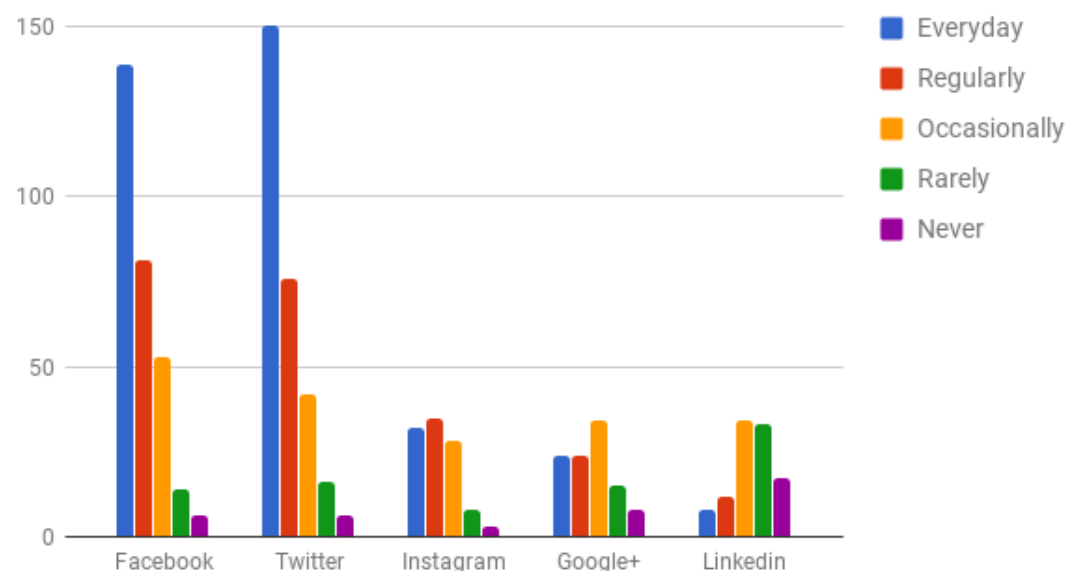**How often do you use Basque on those networks?**

Fig. 22 - Frequency of use of Basque on social networks

5.3 Localised Digital Services/Interfaces for Basque

Most of the Basque speakers know that the services mentioned in this part of the survey are available in Basque. The most known services are online newspapers and news, followed by public administration and eBanking. To the best of the knowledge of the respondents, the least available services in Basque are in the area of e-Commerce.

Regarding operating systems and software, the majority of the respondents answered affirmatively about the existence of Basque versions of Windows, Firefox and Microsoft Office, followed by Android, Linux and LibreOffice. People are less aware of other software in Basque according to the answers of the respondents.

Most of the respondents who answered affirmatively to the question of the existence of these systems in Basque use Firefox and LibreOffice in Basque; all other services are used in Basque by more than the half of the respondents. It is remarkable that MacOSX and iOS are not available in Basque, although some respondents have reported their existence.

Concerning digital resources available in Basque, the majority of the respondents know bilingual and monolingual dictionaries, followed by spelling correctors and machine translation. Some of the respondents are not aware of the existence of pronunciation and language identifier services.

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following services are available in Basque?

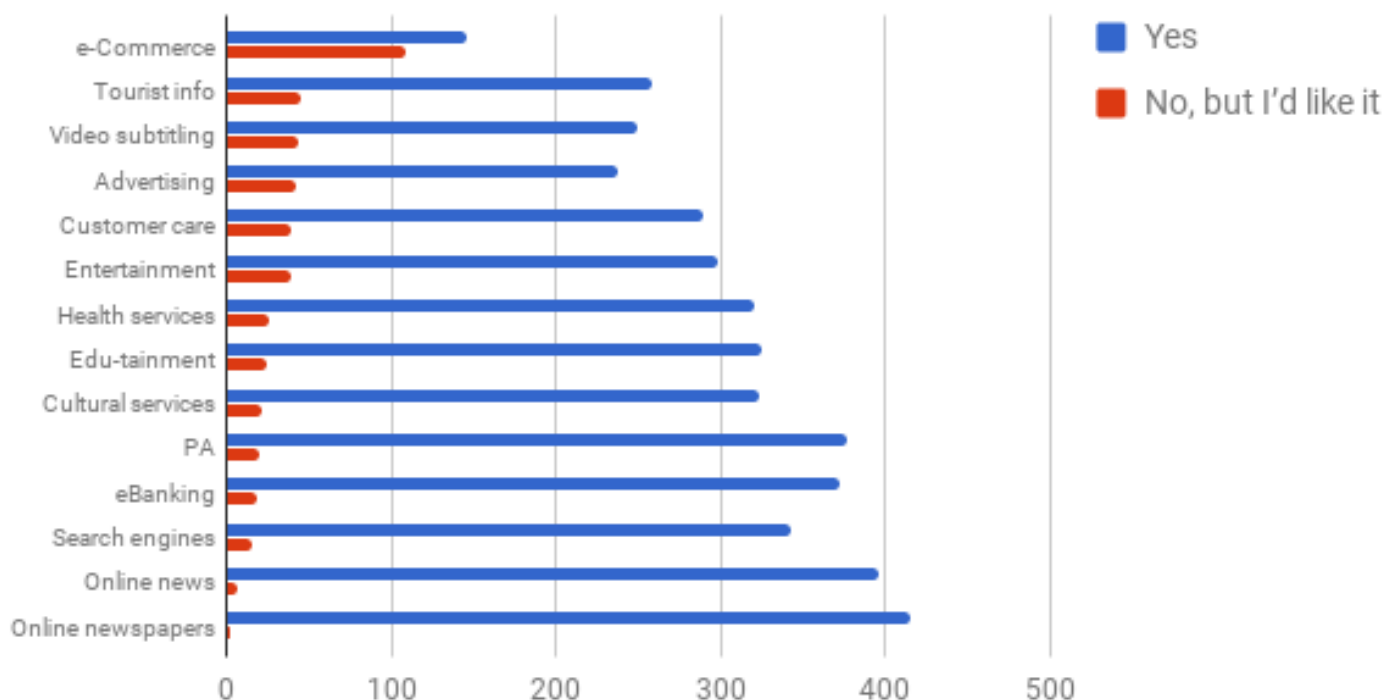Fig. 23 - Existence of Basque internet services

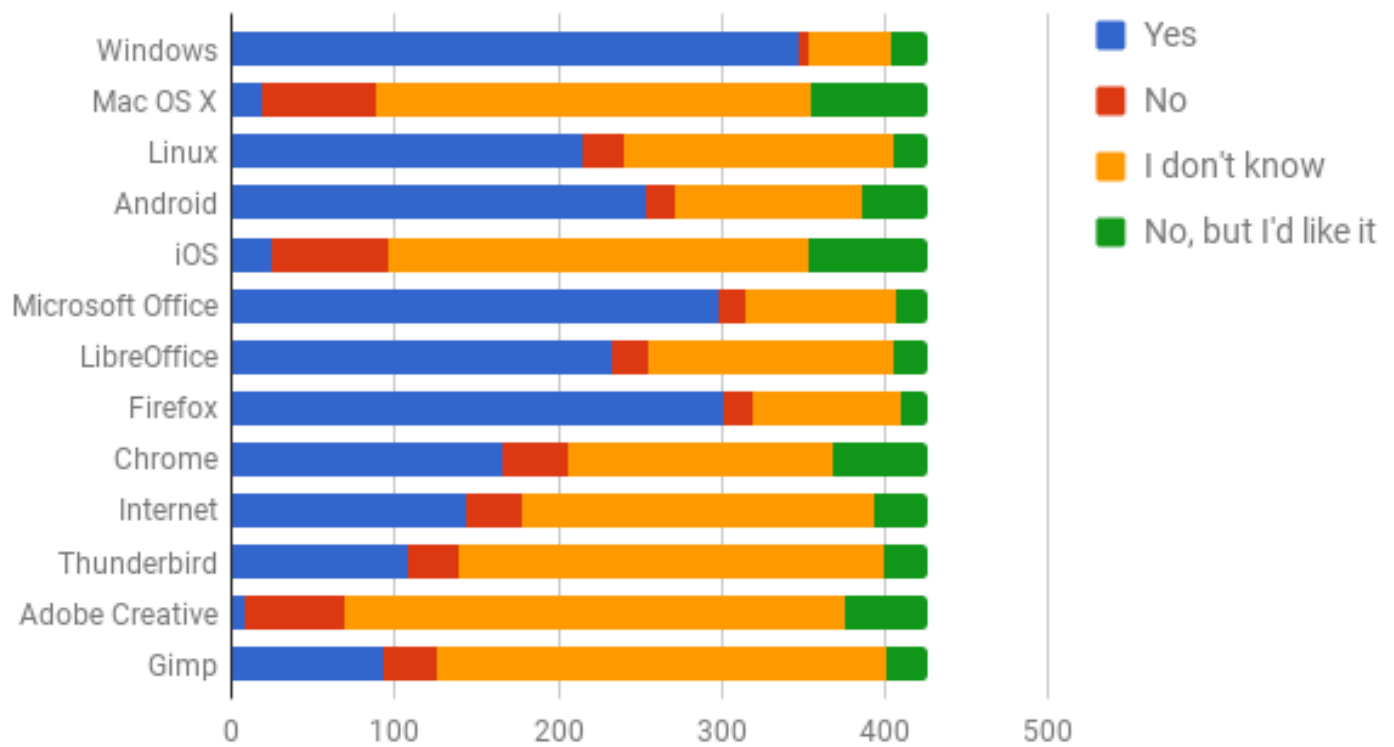**Do you know if any of the following software can be set to Basque?**

Fig. 24 - Software in Basque

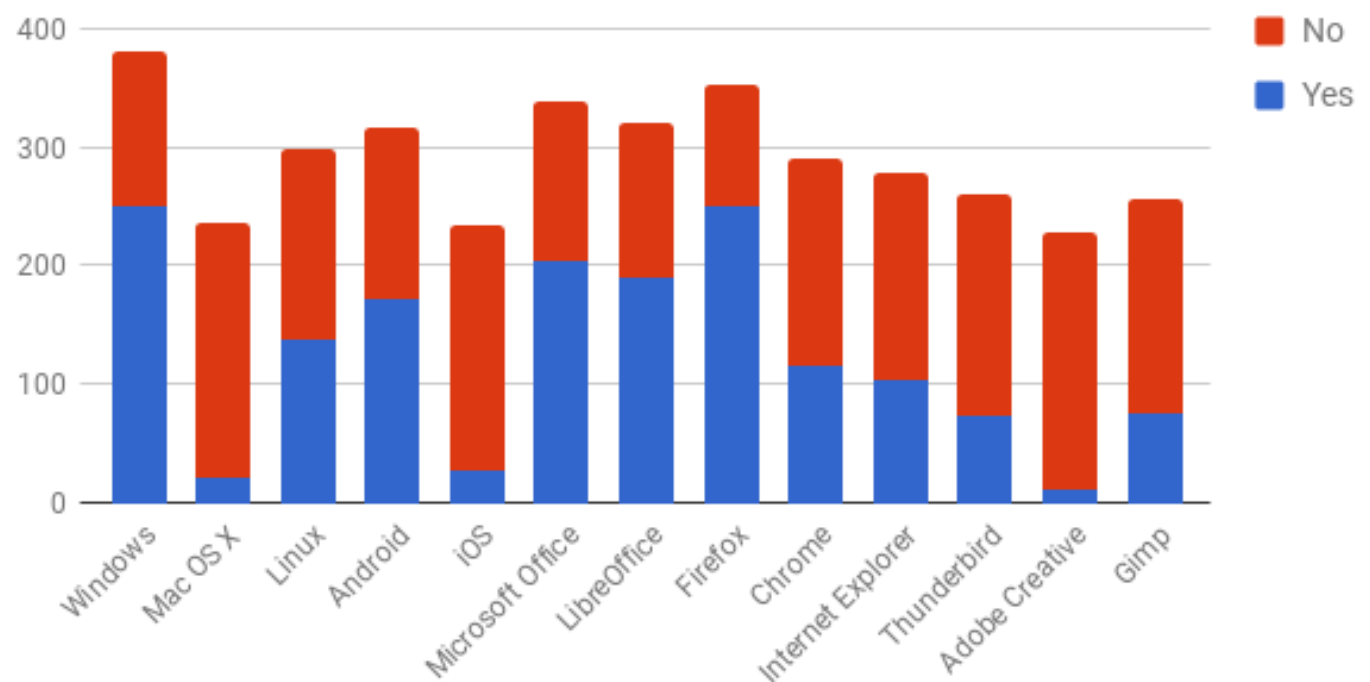**If yes, did you select Basque as first in the list?**

Fig. 25 - Use of software in Basque

6. Conclusion

The results of the survey show that Basque is a digitally fit language and that it is actively used. The respondents have a high linguistic competence and a good knowledge of the existing digital tools and resources. Nevertheless, as pointed out at the beginning of the survey, the profile of the respondents does not fully reflect the different sociolinguistic profiles of speakers. Regarding the age of the respondents, most of them are over 30. The range between 15-34 years is supposed to be the most active population in the digital world , and, thus, we cannot dismiss the possibility that this group might be under represented in this survey.

There are a high amount of respondents who state that they use Basque regularly on the Internet (websites, e-communication, blogs, Wikipedia, etc.). This applies also to social media, especially to Facebook and Twitter, which shows significant activity in Basque. Being that these types of networks are mostly associated with informal registers, this supports the vision of Basque as a language both used and useful for everyday spoken and written online communication, an undeniable sign of vitality. This is an important factor for the digital survival of a language. In contrast, Basque is less used in LinkedIn, the business and employment-oriented social networking service. This may reflect the situation of the Basque language, where use has grown in the familiar and informal settings, but where more work needs to be done within professional and formal contexts.

Concerning localised digital services and interfaces for Basque, it is of note that the majority of the respondents know about the existence of Basque versions of the mentioned services. Nevertheless, despite knowing about their existence, some of the respondents are not using Basque in their devices, applications or software. There may be many reasons for that, but this survey gives us an insight into Basque speaker's digital habits considering that: nearly a third of respondents feel that using Spanish tools is easier; the way of finding and installing software in Basque is not as easy as it is in other languages, and, as a result of that, the user has to make an extra effort.

Some of the respondents are calling for a site where all available resources in Basque are listed and ready to download for the users. In addition, it has been mentioned that there is the need to disseminate information about the existing services and interfaces in Basque, especially among young people.

Finally, we would like to mention that there is a demand for more entertainment products in Basque and especially for young people. Most people are consuming computer or mobile games in other languages because finding them in Basque is a bit harder for them.

7. List of Relevant Websites

Most frequently mentioned Facebook accounts:

Berria
Argia
Naiz
Elhuyar
ZuZeu
Sustatu
EiTB
UEU-Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea
EHE-Euskal Herrian Euskaraz
Azkue Fundazioa
AEK
Berri Txarrak
Topatu
ehbildu
Mr Euskaldun
Donostiako piratak
Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua
UPV/EHU
Euskararen Lagunak

Most frequently mentioned Twitter accounts:

Berria.eus
ARGIA
zuzeu
Sustatu Albisteak
naiz:
Elhuyar
Gorka Bereziartua
UEU
P.Huarte Larraburu
EH Bildu
Azkue Fundazioa
Elhuyar Hizkuntza

Luistxo Fernandez
Maite Goñi Eizmendi
esaerak
Zientzia Kaiera
Lander Arbelaitz
eitb.eus
lander garro
Gorka Julio

Most frequently mentioned communication forums:

Sustatu
ZUZEU

Most frequently mentioned digital services

Berria
Laboral Kutxa
Osakidetza
Kutxabank
Argia
Google
Azpitituluak euskaraz
Sustatu
Irekia: Eusko Jaurlaritza - Gobierno Vasco
naiz:
EiTB
euskadi.eus
Orain Gipuzkoa
Hezkuntza Saila - Eusko Jaurlaritza
ZUZEU
Badok
Vueling
YouTube
Donostia Kultura
Eroski

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Hualde, J.I. & Ortiz de Urbina, J. (eds.) (2003). *A grammar of Basque*. (Mouton Grammar library, 9.) Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hualde, J.I. & Zuazo, K. (2007). The standardization of the Basque language. *In Language Problems and Language Planning*. 31(2):142-168.

Soziolinguistika Klusterra (2011). Nerabeak, Interneteko Sare Sozialak eta Euskara.

Some Comments from Respondents

Irakaslea naiz eta gazteek baliabide asko ez dituzte ezagutzen. Hedapen premia handia dago hauenean.

I'm a teacher and young people do not know about all of the resources available. It is necessary to spread the information on them.

Euskara irakasle edo euskaldun zahar askok ez dituzte kutxazaina, mugikorra, ordenagailua... euskaraz erabiltzen. Askok euskara aldarrikatzen dute eta haren aldekoak direla esaten dute, baina gero ez dute interes handirik jartzen eguneroko kontuak euskaratzen. Horrek eragina du, enpresek, egiten den erabilera eskasa ikusita, ez dituztelako euren kabuz euskaraz zerbitzuak eskaintzen.

Many Basque teachers or Basque native speakers don't use cash dispensers, mobile phones, computers... in Basque. Many of them are asking for tools and sites in Basque, but they do not pay much attention to translating everyday tools into Basque. This behaviour has a negative influence, because companies by themselves, seeing a poor use of the tools that are offered, do not offer their services in Basque.

Aisialdirako orriak beharko dira EUSKARAZ baita jokoak ere.

More online entertainment is needed in Basque, games too.

Nerabeentzako modernitate gehiagoko ekintzak, aplikazinoan, telesaioak etab. behar doguz, „saltzen" deutsien guztia gaztelaniaz edo ingelesez dagoalako.

We need more up to date apps, TV programmes, and so on for teenagers, because all the stuff they consume at the moment is in Spanish or English.

iOS eta mac OS euskaraz mesedez!

Please, iOS and MacOS in Basque!

Erabili izan ahal ditudan azken Android bertsioetan ez dut euskara topatu. Honek kezkatzen nau gehien, mugikorrek (eta tabletek ere) pisu handia baitute gaur egungo gizatean, batez ere gazteen egunerokoan, eta horrelako euskarrietan euskara ez edukitzea oso kaltegarria iruditzen zait hizkuntzaren normalizaziorako bidean.

In the Android versions that I have recently used I have not found the Basque language. This is what worries me most, because nowadays mobiles (and also tablets) are very common devices, especially in teenagers' everyday life. Not having Basque versions to be used in such devices is in my opinion very risky for the normalization process of the Basque language.

Hizkuntza gizartearen beharretara egokitu behar da eta teknologiak eta mundu digitalak hainbesteko indarra duen horretan euskara ere muturra sartzen ari da eta garapen horretan jarraitu behar dugu.

A language has to be adapted to the needs of the society. Nowadays the power of technology and the digital world is evident. The Basque language is also being introduced in that world and we have to continue developing it more and more.