

## Mikel Zarate: Cautious Creator of Unified Basque

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### RESUMEN LABURPENA ABSTRACT

El vizcaíno Mikel Zarate, nacido en Lezama, fue uno de los escritores más destacados de la segunda mitad del s. XX. En este artículo presentamos algunos detalles de su vida y un sencillo análisis de algunas de sus obras. Asimismo, mostramos un deseo ferviente de su corazón: la unificación de la lengua vasca y la supervivencia del dialecto vizcaíno.

*XX. mendeko bigarren zatian, Bizkaian jaio ziren euskal idazleen artean, one-netariko bat izan zen Lezamako Mikel Zarate. Lantxo honetan haren bizitzako zertzelada batzuk eta lan batzuen azterketa xumea aurkezten ditugu. Baita ere erakusten dugu haren bihotzeko gurari sakon bat: euskararen batasuna eta Bizkaiko euskalkiaren iraupena.*

Mikel Zarate, born in Lezama (Biscay), was one of the most notable writers of the second half of the XX century. In this article we present some details of his life and an brief analysis of some of his works. Likewise, we show one of his most ardent wishes: the unification of the Basque language and the survival of the Biscayan dialect.

### PALABRAS CLAVE GAKO-HITZAK KEY WORDS

*Literatura vasca, dialecto vizcaíno, vascuence unificado, País Vasco, Academia de la Lengua Vasca*  
*Euskal Literatura, Bizkaiko euskalkia, euskara batua, Euskal Herria, Euskaltzaindia*  
Basque literature, Bizkaian dialect, unified Basque, Basque Country, Basque Academy

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All deaths are sad because they imply loss and separation, but when the departed is a young artist, it is also a loss to the culture of his country. During the twentieth century many writers have died young. We could fill a long list with the names of such artists, but among those who have been lost to Basque letters, a few have been especially missed: “Loramendi” (1907-1933), dead at twenty-six; G. Aresti (1933-1975), especially famous for his social poetry; “Lizardi” (1896-1933), considered to be one of the greatest lyric poets in the history of Basque literature; and M. Zarate (1933-1979), who died suddenly in his literary prime.

This article is about Zarate, one of the best Bizkaian writers of the century. His unexpected death was one of the most deeply felt losses among lovers of Basque literature especially in Bizkaia. The fourteen books that he wrote in just a few short years are a demonstration of the exceptional abilities of a writer who was one of the most popular authors of the postwar period. Zarate’s multifaceted talent extended to poetry, the fable, the short story, the novel, the essay, literary criticism, and linguistics.

Because of his importance in the unification of the Basque language, I will divide this article in two parts. In the first part, I will provide a brief biography and describe his personality, then analyze the themes and style of his work of prose and poetry in more depth. The second part will be dedicated exclusively to the study of his contribution to the unification of the Basque language. In the midst of linguistic battles that have divided the family of Basque writers, this Bizkaian reveals himself as a cautious pioneer, a vigilant prophet of Basque’s linguistic future, and a careful builder of the unification of popular Basque using the dialects as a departure point.

M. Zarate was born in the little Bizkaian village of Lezama. At the age of twenty he entered the Derio Seminary in Bizkaia where he pursued studies in humanities, philosophy, and theology. During his years as a seminarian, he deepened his knowledge of the Basque language, and in fact was able to translate the book *Gure Meza Deuna* (1960)<sup>1</sup> (Our Holy Mass) in a single day.

In 1964 he was ordained as a priest and assigned to the small Bizkaian village of Gerena, where he became even more involved in his native language. As a result of his intensive work during this period, he publi-

## 1. LIFE

shed his second book *Gure salbaziño egintza* (1967)<sup>2</sup> (The fact of our salvation). In 1966 he was named professor of the Derio Seminary, and in 1970 he began to teach Basque language and literature in the Derio Summer School. He held both posts until his death. He wrote five books as textbook material for his summer courses: *Bizkaiko euskal idazleak* (1970)<sup>3</sup> (Basque writers of Bizkaia); *Euskal deklinabidea* (1975)<sup>4</sup> (Basque Declensions); *Euskal literatura* (1977)<sup>5</sup> (Basque literature); *Euskal Literatura II* (1978)<sup>6</sup>; and *Euskal ortografia* (1978)<sup>7</sup> (Basque orthography).

Without setting aside his obligations as professor, Zarate dedicated four years (1970 to 1974) to pursuing his Licenciatura degree in Romance languages at the University of Deusto in Bilbao. His thesis was *Influencias del vascuence en la lengua castellana* (1976)<sup>8</sup> (Influence of the Basque language on Castilian). During his university career he wrote the novel *Haurgintza minetan* (1973)<sup>9</sup> (In labor), which won him the first prize in the “Txomin Agirre” novel writing competition. He became famous in the world of Basque literature through such literary competitions. In 1975 he published what many considered his best book, *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak*<sup>10</sup> (Bitter fables in the guise of stories). With this work, he won first prize in the “Resurrección María de Azkue” short-story competition.

In 1976 he was named professor of Basque Language and Literature in the “Escuela Oficial de Idiomas” in Bilbao. For class materials, he prepared a book that was published after his death under the title *Bilbo Irribarrez* (1980)<sup>11</sup> (Bilbao with a smile). For a few years he stopped writing in prose to dedicate himself to poetry. His book of poems *Higidura berdez* (1977)<sup>12</sup> (With green movement) won first prize in the “Ciudad de Irún” competition.

In 1978 he was appointed professor of Basque philology at the University of Deusto. During this time he wrote two more books of poetry,

2. M. Zarate. *Gure salbaziño egintza*. Bilbao. A. S. C. E. A. 1967.

3. M. Zarate. *Bizkaiko euskal idazleak*. Bilbao. Seminario de Derio. 1970.

4. M. Zarate. *Euskal deklinabidea*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1975.

5. M. Zarate. *Euskal Literatura*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1977.

6. M. Zarate. *Euskal Literatura*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1978.

7. M. Zarate. *Euskal Ortografia*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1978.

8. M. Zarate. *Influencias del Vascuence en la Lengua Castellana*. Bilbao. La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca. 1976.

9. M. Zarate. *Haurgintza minetan*. San Sebastián. Etor. 1973.

10. M. Zarate. *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1975.

11. M. Zarate. *Bilbo Irribarrez*. Galdakao. Bizkargi. 1980.

12. M. Zarate. *Higidura Berdez*. San Sebastián. Caja de Ahorros Provincial de Guipúzcoa. 1977.

*Bizipenen bultzadaz* (1978)<sup>13</sup> (At the urging of life) and *Etorriaren zorabioz*<sup>14</sup> (With the dizziness of the future) with the latter, he won first prize for poetry in the “Felipe Arrese Beitia” competition of Euskaltzaindia. All of this activity resulted in a great deal of stress for Zarate. On April 10, 1979, he died on his farm “Lejarrene” in Lezama. After his death a book of prose and poetry was published under the title *Utopiaren fantasian* (1979)<sup>15</sup> (In the fantasy of Utopia). A short novel, *Hizunigu*,<sup>16</sup> was left unpublished, and a literary anthology was left unfinished. It was dedicated to Basque writers who wrote in Unified Basque during the decade between 1968 and 1978.

M. Zarate’s character and personality were reflected in his books. My personal experience as his student in Basque language and literature gave me the opportunity to know him on a much more personal bases. He was a whole person, a man, a Basque, a priest, a friend, and a writer. From childhood on he was familiar with sorrow in his personal life, in his family, and in his beloved Basque Country. From an early age he lived in a political atmosphere of violence, injustice, and suffering. He realized early on that being Basque brought with it many vexations.

As we will see later when we discuss the themes of his works, one of Zarate’s most well-known characteristics is his political tendency. In the poem “Haurra izan nintzen baina”... (I was a child but...), he tells us of the pain of his childhood in a Spanish school, the suffering at home because his father was a prisoner in Franco’s jails, and the terror of the bombing of Gernika by Nazi planes:

“Haurra izan nintzen, / haurra;/ baina begietan... / dituk irakiten / oroimenaren hotsetan / egun gorri haiek. (I was a child, a child; but in my eyes...those bloody days are relived in my memories.)”

Abioi zabarren abiada geldia / bonben burrunbada... / Aita Kartzelan, / Segovian... / bizi-alargun ama, hara ta ona / laguntza eske behin eta berriz / fusilamenduen dardara larriz. (The slow march of the planes, the bombs... Father in jail in Segovia.... Mother like a widow going to and fro asking for help over and over, fearing that father will be shot.)

“Ni.../ nintzen erori, / ta maisuaren / hatzaparpetan / “En pie, flecha de España”... / nuen ikasi ... (“Tú no te llamas Mikel, / tú te llamas Miguel”. “¡Oye, tú, aldeano, / habla en cristiano!”...<sup>17</sup> / Franco, Fran-

13. M. Zarate. *Bizipenen bultzadaz*. Durango. L. Zugaza. 1978.

14. M. Zarate. *Etorriaren Zorabioz*.

15. M. Zarate. *Utopiaren Fantasian*. Donostia. Hanburu-Altuna. 1979.

16. M. Zarate. *Hizunigu*.

17. In this context the word “aldeano” means crude or ignorant and has a pejorative connotation. “Hablar en cristiano” means to speak Spanish.

Franco..., / ez nintzena izaten / irakatsi zidaten.<sup>18</sup> (I fell under the teacher's claws. I learned... "Stand up, arrow of Spain..." "Your name is not Mikel, your name is Miguel". "Hey! you, dummy, speak Spanish!" Franco, Franco, Franco..., they taught me to be what I was not.)

In spite of the suffering of his childhood, he always maintained the good-heartedness of a child. He was a man who enjoyed dialogue, a humanist in the broadest sense of the word, a lover of life. At times he dreamed of a Utopian world where everyone was happy, with no injustice or class struggle, a world without malice, like the small world he lived in as a fighting Christian. His impetuous temperament and preoccupation with the problems of man sometimes led him into arguments, but he never closed the door on dialogue. He loved liberty and never sold out to a group or a slogan. Although he did not reject communal work, he preferred to work alone on his writing. Occasionally he discussed with literary personalities such as G. Aresti, but he was a man who avoided hatred and hard feelings. Zarate was a person who attracted people with his childlike good-heartedness:

"Nik bai, zuk ez,  
ez nik, bai zuk...  
orain hoguei urte  
Arantzazun"<sup>19</sup>.

(I said yes, you said no, I said no, you said yes, twenty years ago in Arantzazu.)

## 2. THEMES AND WORKS

The most common themes in Zarate's literary works were either political, cultural, or social ones. Political oppression and the economy of Euskal Herria show up repeatedly in his work. He was obsessed with the loss of the Basque language and the need for unification. He condemned native Basques who always expressed themselves in Spanish in spite of possessing long Basque surnames. Another permanent fixture in his literature was the harmful influence of Spanish television on Basque culture, especially on the language, and the equally harmful influence of the excesses of a consumer society. He was also very concerned by ecological and social problems such as the contamination of the rivers and the environment, and the crowding in poor housing tenements. His great faith in the Basque youth gave his literature an optimistic tone. He regarded young people as the hope for the future of the Basque language.

18. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 18-20.

19. Higidura berdez: 36.

If we delve deeper into these ideas, we see Zarate's constant preoccupation with the destruction of Euskal Herria by absorption under Madrid's centralism and by the iron-fisted dictatorship that lasted nearly forty years. Using historical similes such as the Vesuvius volcano and the ancient city of Pompeii, the poet describes his fear that his beloved Basque Country will disappear under Spanish oppression.

"Pompei zahar, hiri mindu ta mingarri... /Tragediaren egiazko antzeztoki, / museoturik bizi zaren hiri-hobi! / Nire herria irudimen itunean, / Vesubioren beldur naiz zu ikustean"<sup>20</sup>. (Old Pompeii, hurtful and hurting city...A true theater of tragedy, a city-tomb that lives on as a museum. I see my people in my saddened imagination, and I am afraid of Vesuvius.)

The year 1960 was full of hope for Zarate. While he was still a seminarian, the famous letter from 339 Basque priests denouncing the genocide of the Basque Country before the world and Franco's Spanish Church was published<sup>21</sup>. He celebrated the event as the arrival of a portentous spring that would bring new life. His poem "Ardiak eta txakurra" (The sheep and the dog) is dedicated to that group of priests who denounced Franco's dictatorship to the world. The herd of sheep represents the Basque people and the dog symbolizes Franco: "Ta ardi otzanak Patxiren larran / haserre daude, haserre... / -"Ezin gaitezke, ezin honela / hemen bizi, txakur jauna! / Non dira gure eskubideak? / Non gure askatasuna?..."<sup>22</sup>. (And the meek sheep are angry in Franco's meadow. Mister Dog, it can't be, we can't live like this. Where are our rights? Where is our freedom?).

It is not surprising, then, that he dedicated a humorous poem to the date of November 20, 1975, the day Franco died. Humor was never lacking in his books, not even when death was involved. This particular poem was inspired by popular poetry. The people and the oral literature of the bertsolariak or Basque troubadours influenced Zarate's work a great deal. The Basque troubadour always saved the "kolpe" or most important idea for the last line of his verse. He makes use of this technique by treating his poem like a nineteenth-century bertsopapera,<sup>23</sup> an improvised verse that was later written down. The day of the Spanish dictator's death is considered to be the start of a new life, the dawn of liberty for the Basques. The poem is written in the Bizkaian dialect in

20. Ibid.:100.

21. This letter had international repercussions due largely to the reactionary position taken by the bishops of the Basque diocese who were supported by the then Papal Nuncio H. Antoniu-tti. The priests who signed the letter were branded pernicious, and some of them were denied passports or prevented from crossing the French border for more than a decade.

22. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 28-30.

23. This type of popular verse was widely accepted, especially in Gipuzkoa, during the nineteenth century, the age of the bertsolari Xenpelar (1835-1869).

very colloquial language: "...Franco nola daukagun / oraintxe defuntu; / Jainkoak eiten badeu / gixontxu au santu, / imini ein daiela / zeruetan altu / eztiten a barriro / mundura bajatu"<sup>24</sup>. (Franco is dead; if God canonizes this little man as a saint, let him place him so high in the heavens that he can never return to Earth.)

In his novel, *Haurgintza minetan*, Zarate narrates for us the Basque nation's struggle against Franco's regime. He tried to write about the present, a modern novel that reflected current reality<sup>25</sup>. The novel was published in 1973, while Franco still lived. Because of that, the author was forced to veil his truths, making use of word distortions. Thus, the novel unfolds in "Ekidazu" which is nothing more than Euzkadi, the name of the Basque nation, with its letters scrambled.

Three generations appear in the novel's struggles. The first or oldest generation is personified by Eskolastika whose name, echoing the Middle Ages, evokes the past for us. The second generation is the postwar generation whose Basque had suffered under the influence of Spanish television since 1960. The character Amaia belongs to this group. She is pregnant, as is suggested by the title of the book *Haurgintza minetan*. Mother and child motivate the action of the novel. The birth of the baby symbolizes the revival of the Basque language. And finally there is the third generation, young revolutionaries who intend to recover and preserve autochthonous Basque values. Many of them are euskaldunberriak, people who learned Basque as a second language<sup>26</sup>. They are fighting to take Unified Basque into the streets and into the university classrooms. Zarate saw in that youthful group the survival and future of the Basque language.

"Lehen euskaldun berri,  
orain euskaldun,  
zuekin Euskal Herri  
piztu dezagun"<sup>27</sup>.

(Before you were new Basques, now you are Basques, with your help we will revive the Basque Country.)

Amidst his desires, dreams, and utopian visions, Zarate hope that the new youth would someday plant Unified Basque in the University, where one could not learn the language of the Basque Country, would one day be converted into a center for the spread of euskera: "Uni-

24. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 48.

25. It is a modern novel, especially because of the themes it deals with. Where technique is concerned, it contributes no great innovations.

26. A term used to designate Basque who learned euskara as a foreign language (not as their mother tongue).

27. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 58.

bersitate zaharreko zemento erdaldundua / arrakalatu egin da gazteria berriaren garraisiz...”<sup>28</sup>. (The Spanish cement of the old university has been cracked by the cries of the new youth.)

The two themes that recur most often in Zarate’s work are politics and the defense of the Basque language. For him euskara was the soul of the Basque Country, and the Basque without the language was a person who lacked an important element of his Basque identity. For that reason he wanted euskara to go out into Europe, in the manner of the great poet Detxepare (sixteenth century)<sup>29</sup>. He was absolutely certain that Euskadi would have a seat among the Europe of Nations. In any case he thought of Europe as a possible escape from the cultural isolation imposed by Franco’s regime: “Gazteen odol berriz / berritu ondoren, / Europaratu hadi, / orain eta hemen, / Europarekin bai dun / betiko iraunen”<sup>30</sup>. (After renewing yourself with the blood of the young go out into Europe here and now for you will last forever with Europe).

In his poetry and his prose, in his short stories and his novels, the idea of spreading the Basque language throughout the Basque Country is constant with Zarate. He wanted to see Basques speaking euskara, the language of their ancestors. Part of his literary production was originated as material to promote the Basque language even in the areas where it was least spoken such as Bilbao. Speaking of *Bilbo Irribarrez*, he says: “Bilbo deseuskaldundua berreuskalduntzeko ahalegin kaxkar bat baino ez da liburu hau”<sup>31</sup>. (This book is nothing but a small attempt to “reBasquify” Bilbao where the Basque language has been lost).

According to Zarate, the enemies of the Basque language were not only the people in Madrid who were anti-Basque, but also the adult Basque of Bilbao who, knowing the language, did not use it among themselves and limited themselves to using it only with their children. The children, with their keen common sense, realised that Basque was not suited for social relations among adults. All of this is made clear in the chapter entitled “Umeen zentzuna” (The children’s common sense) in Zarate’s book *Utopiaren fantasian*<sup>32</sup>. In order to be a good Basque, it’s not enough to have long surnames with a Basque flavor, such as Gerrikaetxebarria and Gabikagogeaskoa. People with Spanish names like Zarzalejos and Cordero who consider themselves Basque and work on behalf of the Basque culture and language are better for the survival of the Basque Country than the type of Basque mentioned above<sup>33</sup>.

28. Utopiaren fantasian: 28.

29. See poems “Kontrapas” and “Sautrela” of this poet.

30. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 65.

31. Bilbo irribarrez: 9.

32. Utopiaren fantasian: 25-32.

33. Ibid.:43.



The most important tool used by the government in Madrid to destroy the Basque language was Spanish television which reached even the remotest Basque farmhouses. The Basques, in turn, were not allowed to have their own television channel at that time. Zarate rejected Spanish television as produced by the hands of a dictatorial regime: “Nik ez dut nahi holako telebisorik... Ez dut nahi holako droga berririk, holako alienaziorik, herria jendetu, masatu egiten duen tramankulu ganorabakorik”<sup>34</sup>. (I don’t want this type of television...I don’t want a drug like this, this kind of alienation, this stupid instrument that makes all the people the same.)

Zarate’s complaints worsened and the language he used against this drug that intoxicated public opinion grew harsher. Only those who suffer under those circumstances can appreciate the lack of objective information and the level of alienation that the Basques were subject to for so many years. A small sample of what appeared on that medium of information includes military marches, the celebration of the anniversaries of victories of the “Glorious National Movement”, sports (soccer, bullfighting, boxing, etc.), and religious ceremonies in which Franco appeared under the pallium next to his bishops. Zarate spoke of the programming with words he did not ordinarily use:

“Hustu gaituzte/ tiroz ta fletxaz,” <sup>35</sup>	They have emptied us with gunshots and arrows
likorez, / putaz, / futbolez, /	with liquor, whores, soccer,
zezenez, / boseoz...” <sup>36</sup>	with bulls, boxing.

He urged the destruction of this instrument of disinformation for Basques and demanded Basque television. He invited the young people to take an active part in this campaign. Fortunately, Franco had already died when *Utopiaren Fantasian* was published:

“Berrogei neska,	Forty girls
hogetamar mutil	thirty boys
kanta kantari,	Singing
dantza dantzari...	dancing...
gure telebista sortzen,	creating our own television
telebista arrotza puskatzen...” <sup>37</sup> .	destroying foreing television.

34. Haurgintza minetan, Zarautz. Etor. 1973: 15.

35. The poet is referring to the arrows that appear on the Falangist emblem, a copy of the Italian fascist emblems.

36. Haurgintza minetan: 135-136.

37. Utopiaren Fantasian: 33.

The Basques wanted only to survive as Basques. They did not want to lose those characteristics peculiar to their race. Like any minority or tiny nation that preserves its dignity, they wanted to maintain their personality. Zarate expresses this desire with similes taken from the animal kingdom: “Erlearen antzera, askatasunez bizi nahi izan zuen...mendi tarteko haize garbitan lorerik lore hegan joan, ezta egin, jolastu...Baina ez zioten, ez diote, herri izaten uzten. Nork? Betikoek, hauzokoek”<sup>38</sup>. (They wanted to live free like the bees... to fly from flower to flower in the clean air of the mountains, making honey, playing... But they would not allow it, they would not allow them to be a nation. Who would not allow it? Like always, the neighbors).

As happens in every dictatorship there were people in the Basque Country who accepted this alienation. The constant official propaganda, Franco’s use of the Church, the fear of communism,<sup>39</sup> and economic interests kept many people from seeing the alienating reality of the situation. But not everyone was molded by the official propaganda. There remained thousands of Basques, the poet, the *bertsolari* and the tree of Gernika that resisted the Nazi bombing. For him those people were like rocks that hold their ground even when pounded by the waves: “...ba dagoz, zorionez, oraindino, poeta jator eta bete batzuk, herriaren amets, bizi nahi, bihotz ikara, ta asmoak, zirt edo zart, lau haizetara iragartzeko”<sup>40</sup>. (Fortunately there still exist poets with the personality to bravely spread dreams, the desire to live, deepest fears, and schemes everywhere).

After reading Zarate’s complete words one can say with conviction that he was such a writer. The majority of his books were published during a regime where everything was strictly controlled before publication<sup>41</sup>. This raises the question, how was he able to write so many things against the dictatorship? How was he able to encourage so many Basques with his books so clearly when forced to write in such a veiled manner? The answer lies in his style, and his use of symbols, metaphors, idioms, popular songs, refrains, double meanings, contrasts, myths, and the Basque humor that were able to throw the official censor off the track. Because of its importance, we would like to conclude the first part of this article by analyzing his style in poetry and prose.

38. Ibid.:69.

39. Franco made many people believe that Spain was a Communist nation. After his death it was evident through elections that no more than 2% of the Spanish population was communist.

40. Hurgintza minetan: 136-137.

41. For the innocent words sung by groups of young people on the eve of Saint Agueda, had to be translated into Spanish in order to be controlled by the police.

M. Zarate's novel *Haurgintza minetan* takes place in Ekidazu, an anagram of the name Euzkadi or the Basque Country. The action centers around the regions of Botxo (Bilbao), Neguri, and the vally of "Txorierri" (bird country), or Lezama, where the poet was born. The time frame of the novel is one year, beginning at the New Year. The year is 1968, during the Franco regime, when a new world born of political and cultural tensions was coming into being in the Basque Country. The narrator of the novel is not the traditional narrator, but rather an omnipresent dwarf. It is he who signs the prologue as "the dwarf of Ekidazu". From the very first chapter, he defines himself for us, although his definition is a bit vague. At times he is the mirror image of the writer expressing his opinion about literature. "¿Nor naizen? Ekidazuko iratxo bat!"<sup>42</sup> (Who am I? A dwarf from Ekidazu.)

*Haurgintza minetan* is a modern novel because of its timeless themes more so than the techniques used in it. I do not mean this in a negative way, for any technical vacuum is compensated for by a masterful use of similes, synonyms, characters from Basque mythology, popular songs, proverbs, and popular sayings. The simile represents the summit of Zarate's technique. Whatever he was not allowed to say plainly, he expressed with symbols such as the zezenlarru or cowhide, a term used to define the Iberian Peninsula because of its geographic configuration. Other similes, such as txakurra (dog) to represent the Spanish Guardia Civil, are more obvious. Occasionally the author twists his words in order to render the simile even more obscure. Thus the word txifa used to represent the Franquist is nothing more than an anagram of fatxi which is "fascist". He was also very careful when it came to choosing proper names as symbols for a certain reality, as shown in his use of Eskolastika to represent the older generation or Trifón (which sounds like tripón, pot-bellied) to represent capitalists.

Zarate surprises us with a wealth of vocabulary that could create problems for people unaccustomed to reading Basque literature. To avoid this pitfall he uses a lot of synonyms, in the style of the great classical writer P. "Axular" (1556-1644). He believed that any language that was concocted in a laboratory and was not of the people ran the risk of becoming a monument to the dead if it was not a means of every day communication. As we will see in the second part of this article, he felt that Unified Basque would run this risk if it was not handled carefully. Both M. Zarate's pedagogical character and popular nature are evident in all his works. He was born in a small town and wrote for the common people, educated and uneducated alike.

His literary production respects the relationship between writer and reader. The Latin phrase "ad quem" was never far from his mind, refe-

42. *Haurgintza minetan*: 16.

ring to both the educated and uneducated readers for whom his work was intended. In order to achieve a literature for the people, Zarate availed himself of various means. First of all, he used the mythology that is so deeply rooted in the Basque Country. The names of the most important mythological characters, such as Mari of Anboto, the *sorgiñak* or witches, and the *lamiak*<sup>43</sup> imbue his literature with Basque history and give it a popular flavor.

He also made use of Basque folk and popular songs. Some were very old, others were written during the last years of the Franco regime, the products and the weapons of a national struggle. Among the old songs, we find “Pipa hartu ta txoratzen naiz” (I go crazy when I smoke my pipe), “Urte berri” (New Year’s), “Ikusten duzu goizean” (You see in the morning), and “O, Pello, Pello” (Oh, Peter, Peter). Among the modern songs, he used “Gazte gera gazte” (We are young, young) and “Itziaren semea” (The son of Itziar).

Proverbs, popular expressions, and synonyms are other means he used to touch the souls of the common people. They are brief phrases, images filled with color and sound that engrave themselves on the memory and penetrate easily into the mind. The following are examples of expressions and synonyms he used in *Haurgintza minetan*: 1. *gauak begiak beltz, egunak argi.* (p. 45) (The night has black eyes, the day has light ones.) 2. *Neskazarra ta izorra, hori ere ba da lorra.* (p.81) (Unmarried and pregnant, that is truly unfortunate). 3. *Nahi baduzu luzaroan bizi, txoriekin ohera, oiloekin jagi.* (p.170), (If you want to live a long life, go to bed with the birds and get up with the chickens) 4. *Ezkondut? Taxiak dagozen artean, zertarako autoa erosi?* (p. 41) (Get married? Why buy a car while there are taxis available?)

Zarate’s prose is also filled with contrasts that lend it life and spontaneity. For example: “Lehendarrak eta oraindarrak, eskuitarrak eta ezkertarrak, atzelariak eta aurrelariak, zuriak eta gorriak, aberatsak eta pobreak, zaharrak eta gazteak, haundiak eta txikiak...” (p.19).

(Those from before and those of today, the leftists and the rightists, those who look backward and the pioneers, the whites and the reds, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the great and the small.)

He was a master of popular prose. If the prose he used in *Haurgintza minetan* was good, then that he employed in his short stories and fables was exceptional, thanks to its colorful dialogues and brief sentences. He can be considered one of the best fabulists in Basque literature. His best book of fables is *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak* (Bitter fables in the guise of stories), a collection of thirty-six unrelated fables. Ideologically M. Zarate follows the same line as that in his novel *Haurgintza*

176 43. J. Caro Baroja. Los Vascos. Madrid. Minotauro. 1958: 389-391.

*minetan*. He harps on the lack of unity among the Basques, insists on the necessity of a unified language, condemns alienating consumerism (the struggle against abuses of political and economic power) and sings the hymn of liberty. These themes and more are reflected in the fables “Idatz eta mintz” (Write and speak), “Eskoikale, ezkerkale eta erdikale” (The streets of right, left, and center), “Ekidazuko astasendia” (The burro family of Ekidazu), “Sariketa Nagusia” (Final competition), “Arrankarien biurritasuna” (The cleverness of trouts), and “Best gari mota” (Another kind of wheat).

As M. Zarate himself tells us, these fables are written for adults, not for children (p.10). They are intended for those who know how to decipher the message of the symbols and images. Their purpose is to fill a vacuum in Basque literature by filling a gap in the short list of Basque fabulists: “Alegiok egitean, utsune bat bete gura izan dot...Egia esan, egon dira gure artean ere alegilari batzuk...munduko alegilaririk ospetsuenak jarraibidetzat arturik...”<sup>44</sup> (In writing these fables I have wanted to fill a vacuum... To tell the truth, there have also been some Basque fabulists... I have taken the best fabulists in the world as my models.)

All of Zarate’s prose is popular, lively, and full of humor, but his fables are even more humorous than his other works. In spite of their “bitterness” (*mingotsak*), they overflow with a fine sense of humor. The influence of “Kirikiño’s” humor and that of Franciscan of Bizkaia F. Bilbao (1932)<sup>45</sup> are evident in his work, but in a way, his humor is different from the classic peasant humor presented to us by those short-story writers. He realized that the agricultural sector of society no longer had the importance that it once had in Basque Country the farmer, a bastion of the language in bygone years, was no longer vital for its future. It was necessary to reach the great industrial nuclei with the Basque language, for on that stage the future of *euskara* would be play out. Because of this, his humor was somewhat different, as required by his new reading public: “...Barreragile on bat izan nahi neuke, baina bide barriak urratuz. Izan ere, orain arteko idazle barreragileek baserritarren pasadizu barre-garriak bakarrik idatzi izan ditue gehien baten. Huritarrenik, kaletarrenik ez. Ta hutsune handi bat dago gure literatura”<sup>46</sup>. (I would like to be a good humorist, but blaze new trails...Until now, writers of humor have been limited in large part to describing only humorous rural events. But not events involving those who live in cities and urban areas. This is a great lacuna in our literature”).

44. Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak: 12.

45. Abarrak. Bilbao. Gráficas Bilbao.1966 and Ipuin barreka. Bilbao.1959.

46. Bilbo Irribarrez: 9.

Sometimes the humor in M. Zarate's fables generates easy and spontaneous laughter: "...Komunean bardin samarrak izango garala uste dot"<sup>47</sup>. (I think we will be very much alike in the toilet). But this easy humor alternates with a crude realism, revealing the dual aspect of the fable, the bittersweet of its content. The mask of the fable is removed to allow us a glimpse of the sad reality of everyday life. For example: "Amabost urteko neska bat bortxatu dau ogeitamazortziko mutilzaar batek. Diruz erosi dau neska gazte polit bat aberats batek. Pastilla batzuk erosi ditu botika baten andra ezkondu batek bere "maitearengana" joateko. Neskazaar bat bere txakurraz maitemindu da. Neskabila baten sabelean dagoan umetxoa iltzera doa atsozaar bat..."<sup>48</sup> (The thirty-eight-year-old bachelor has raped a fifteen-year-old girl. A rich man has won a young beauty with money. A married woman has bought pills at the drugstore to go to her "lover." An unmarried woman has fallen in love with her dog. An old woman is going to kill the child that grows in the belly of a young girl).

Along with the humor that Zarate used to reach the common people, we also find many proverbs and popular expressions in *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotzak*. The spice of his prose is reflected in his short sentences which are especially important in this book of fables. Earlier we saw examples of proverbs and expressions employed in *Haurgintza minetan*. Here we have samples of those used in *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotzak*: 1. Neu nausi edo musturrak ausi... (p. 33). (Either I win, or I break your jaw.) 2. Pikutara zoaz itz jokookaz (p. 39). (You'll go to hell with those word games) 3. Indarkeriaren indarra, indarbakoan negarra (p. 56). (The cry of the weak is the strength of injustice.) 4. Gu geu gara eta gure geuretasuna geuregan zaindu bear dogu (p. 57) (We are who we are, and we must preserve our identity.) 5. Errementeriaren etxean zotza burduntzi (p.138), (The cobbler's children have no shoes. (Literally) In the smithy's house, a stick serves as a ladle).

I would like to move on now to his poetic style. There have been many arguments over whether this writer from Lezama is a better prose writer than a poet. Personally, I feel that his poetry does not reach the heights of Lizardi's poetry. I believe him to be a better writer of prose than a poet. Even so, I feel that his poetry possesses very valuable literary elements. Within this humble Basque literature, compared by Zarate to a bird in a cage ("Kaiolan dagoen txoriño bat da gure literatura"<sup>49</sup>, his poetry brings with it a breath of fresh air and the energy of the people.

47. *Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak*: 38.

48. *Ibid.*:48.

49. *Utopiaren Fantasia*: 83.

On the other hand, we must say that he does not formally contribute any great innovations to poetry as did “Lizardi”, “Lauaxeta” and J. Mirande in their day. His positive effort to create a popular literature makes M. Zarate’s poetry very clear, extremely easy to understand. It lacks mystery, the element of the unknown that we find in other Basque poets who limit themselves to mere suggestion so that the reader will take an active part in interpreting that poem. He describes reality, and his descriptions are perfect, but his narrative sometimes obscures the lyrical element in his poetry. His free verse comes very close to being poetic prose.

Some of Zarate’s poetry is intentionally shaped into two-part verses scattered even throughout his works in prose.

“Baneu ta banintz, / ezaren irrintz;  
bazendu ta baziña, / ametsaren eziña;  
baleu ta balitz, / mutuaren bi hitz;  
bagendu ta bagiña, / alperreko aalegiña,  
bazendue ta baziñie / egin-nai utsaren adiskide;  
balebe ta balira, / besteen anaiak dira”<sup>50</sup>.

(If I had and I were is the echo of negativity; if you had and you were, is the impossibility of a dream; if he had and were are two words from the mute; if we had and you were, is the useless effort; if you had and you were is the friend of an impractical act; if they had and they were, are brothers of the others).

We should point out an outstanding fact of Zarate’s poetic art, and that is his use of the sonnet. This particular poetic form is not common among Basque writers. His best sonnets appear in the book *Bizipenen bultzadaz* and include the titles: “1937, Apirilak 26” (April 26), “Bu... enas días” (Good morning), “Duda -mudatan” (In alternate doubts), “Bertso Paperak” (Written verses), “Iratzarri nahi nuke” (I would like to wake up ), and “Beste askok bezala”...(Like many others).

Let’s move on now to the second part of the article in which I will analyze Zarate’s position in the establishment of a Unified Basque dialect.

### 3. ZARATE’S THOUGHTS ON HOW TO UNIFY BASQUE

Since its inception in 1918, Euskaltzaindia, or the Academy of the Basque Language, has struggled with the thorny problem of unification of the Basque language. Even before the Academy, there was no lack of

50. Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak: 139.



attempts at unifying the various dialects, both those from the north and the south of Euskal Herria, but unfortunately those attempts failed<sup>51</sup>.

I will not describe here the history of the process of unifying the Basque language, but will limit myself to expounding on the thoughts of our Bizkaian author Zarate concerning *euskara batua* or Unified Basque deals with how to unify Basque, written and read by him at the 1978 meeting of the Academy of the Basque Language in Bergara. Since M. Zarate died the following year, I consider this document to be his final testament toward the language. I will also refer to four of his best books that reflect his thoughts on the problem<sup>52</sup> and citations whenever necessary to clarify his point of view.

During the period between the founding of Euskaltzaindia and the Spanish Civil War (1918-1936) there many attempts to unify the Basque language. But those were years when Bascophiles in general were more concerned with the purity of the language than with its unification. The decade of the 1940s suffered from cultural strangulation, thanks to Franco's dictatorship. However, during the following two decades, 1950-1970, many important meetings were held to solve the problem of unification. Among the most important meetings were those held at Arantzazu in 1956, Bilbao in 1958, Bayonne in 1964, Ermua (Bizkaia) in 1968, and especially the 1968 gathering at Arantzazu (Gipuzkoa). This last had special significance because some conclusions regarding unification were passed in spite of the atmosphere of tension that surrounded the conference<sup>53</sup>. One such conclusion resulted in the introduction of the letter h in the peninsular literature of Euskal Herria.

The president of Euskaltzaindia at that time, M. Lekuona (1894-1987), publicly announced the need to unify Basque in order to avoid its extinction: "Euskera biziko bada, batu egin bear... bizitza dezan, eta ugariago dezan"<sup>54</sup>. (If Basque is to survive, we must unify it so that it might spread).

Ten years later at the Congress of Bergara, Zarate recognized the progress that had been made. Academy members had chosen the path to unification and were still on it in 1978. This caused him great optimism. In spite of the fact that much remained to be done and that the Academy

51. In 1901 in Hendaye there was an attempt to create a group of *euskatzaleak*, or people fond of the Basque language, but in 1902 Basques from the two regions could not reach an agreement. One group formed "Euskalzaleen Biltzarra" and the other became "Euskal Esnalea".

52. "Euskera batua ta euskalkiak", in *Euskera*, 1978-2 and *Haurgintza minetan*, Bizipenen bultzadaz, Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak, Higidura berdez.

53. One of the attendees shouted: "Zaharrak etxera". (Old folks, go home). This meeting took place on Euskaltzaindia's fiftieth anniversary.

54. *Euskera*, XIII, 1968, Bilbao: 141.



had occasionally stumbled blindly toward reform, more had been achieved than many had thought possible. No language in the world had ever been unified within a space of ten years. But in Euskal Herria a collective consciousness in favor of unification had been created, especially among the young people. They wanted to replace euskeratxo, or the local Basque. Moreover, many groups of young people were looking for a kind of “urban Basque”, and used Unified Basque in their university classrooms and the streets and cities of the Basque Country. According to him never had such a major push been dedicated to the language in the Basque Country. If all Basques demonstrated the same interest, in another ten or twenty years unification might become a reality. Moreover, the majority of Basque nationalists supported the reform and none of them were openly against the idea of unification.

However, just as the plan was coming to fruition, problems and differing opinions arose. The first problem was the illiteracy of many Basques in their own language. According to M. Zarate, before talking of unification, it was necessary to talk about literacy. That thousand-year-old lack of education had to be eliminated through literacy campaigns that even the commonest people. A large part of his literary production is based on this premise<sup>55</sup>.

The second problem to surface was the fact that knowledge of just one dialect was insufficient to make oneself understood by the rest of the Basque people. How could a Bermeo Bizkaian be understood in Zuberoa or an Aterratze Zuberoan in Bizkaia, no matter how well they spoke their respective dialects, if they did not have recourse to a unified Basque? Zarate was not the enemy of a wealth of dialects, but when that abundance transformed itself into an impenetrable forest, he urged that a choice be made, at least as far as written Basque was concerned. For example, the concept “to the men” can be correctly translated into Basque in three different ways, depending on the dialect: gizoneri (Labourdian); gizoner (Low Navarrese); gizonei (Unified Basque)

The same phenomenon happens with many words in Basque, the most extreme being the word(s) for “butterfly”. In P. Mujika’s dictionary twenty one forms are listed for butterfly, and, Zarate, in his book *Haurgintza minetan*,<sup>56</sup> used forty-seven different ways to say butterfly in Basque. In his poem “Ondasuntegi naskagarria (sic)” from *Higidura berdez* (1977) (With green movement), pursued this same idea, using archaic and complicated verb forms to add a touch of humor:

Pinu gehiegiz / pinuturiko / pinudi...

55. Zarate began to write and translate religious booklets for the use of the common people. Among his first titles were *Gure Meza Deuna*, *Meza-liburu txikia* and *Gure salbaziño egintza*.

56. *Haurgintza minetan*: 106.

Bageniezazu / bageniezazkizu  
 Hau larria! / Gaizki dut eztarria.  
 Ziñatekete, / lekizkizueke...  
 Aditz / bortitz / madarikatua!...  
 Armiarma sare / alua!  
 Ez irten ez sartu,  
 Ezin arnasarik hartu.  
 Gintzaizkizuekeen,  
 geniezazkizuekeen ...  
 Hainbeste era... / zertarako?  
 Zuka, hika (to ta no)...  
 Hau amets iguingarri!..  
 “Zer da hori “?  
 Traste zaharren museoa, /aitonen mausoleo...  
 Kanposantua ?/ Mutuaren kantua?...  
 Egin / nirekin /  
 presaka /entresaka,  
 bizi nadin<sup>57</sup>.

(Pine forest planted with too many pines...Bageniezazu...lekizkizue-  
 ke. What a mess! My throat hurts. Zinatekete, lekizkizueke...Blasted  
 synthetic veb! no entrance, no exit, unable to breathe. Gintzaizkizue-  
 keen,geniezaizkizuekeen /. So many ways...for what? Formal you,  
 familiar you, to (for a man), no (for a woman...) / What a disgusting  
 dream! what is this? A museum of antiquities, our ancestors’ mauso-  
 leum... A cemetery? The Song of the mute? ... Quickly help me thin out  
 the forest for me to live).

In addition to these and other linguistic problems, there were pro-  
 blems caused by the different positions taken by two groups, positions  
 that had even caused personal problems in the past.

The first group were followers of S. Arana (1865-1903)<sup>58</sup> and con-  
 demned Unified Basque at the sight of the first h, as if that letter had  
 never been used in Basque literature. They wanted only the garbia or  
 “pure” Basque promoted by S. Arana. They excluded words of foreign  
 origin, even those that were considered Basque by usage and adoption,

57. Higidura berdez: 29-31.

Zarate was a great admirer of S. Arana in many respects, but he did not accept some of his  
 ideas regarding linguistic reform. He divided the history of the literature of Bizkaian authors  
 (*Bizkaiko euskal idazleak*) into four parts. The third part, “Aranatarren giroko idazleak”, is  
 dedicated to writers who were influenced by S. Arana.

such as *eliza* (church), *politika* (politics), tennis. They did not seem to realize that if S. Arana were alive today, he would belong to the radical left where the construction of Unified Basque is concerned (“*ezkertiar batuzale iraultzaile*”). This group ridiculed *batua* for the large number of foreign words it allowed into the Basque language. At times they were heard to say: “*Erdera asko jakin behar da euskera hori ulertzeko*”. (You have to know a lot of Spanish or French to understand that Basque). They intended to create a Unified Basque that was pure, if not a living language, and yet many of them continued to express themselves in Spanish or French when speaking or writing.

In opposition to this first group, there was a second composed of radicals who organized for unification. These promoters of Basque forgot of living Basque language of today, and wanted to impose the sort of Basque used centuries ago; in fact, they attempted this linguistic reform using classical authors like “*Axular*” and *Leizarraga* as the basis for their effort. They ignored their parents’ generation and used their ancestors as the language models. According to *Zarate*, the Basque used by “*Axular*” and *Leizarraga* is useless as a means of communication today in spite of its high quality. Faced with a group as pro-*Axular* as were the majority of Academy members, he had no trouble demonstrating his nonconformity: “*Ni neu behintzat, egia esateko, gogait eginda nago Axularrez ta Leizarragaz*”<sup>59</sup>. (To tell the truth, I, for one, am tired of *Axular* and *Leizarraga*.) *Zarate* felt that other authors who came later would be more appropriate for use as language role models. He mentioned *S. Mendiburu* (1708-1782), *J.B. Agirre* (1742-1823), *J.A. Moguel* (1745-1804), *P.A. Añibarro* (1748-1830), *Tx. Agirre* (1864-1920), “*Kirikiño*” (1866-1929), *J. Etxepare* (1877-1935), and *J. Hiriart-Urruty* (1859-1915).

In fact, he disagreed with both groups and expressed his disagreement in a poem he dedicated to those who were actually making Unified Basque a reality. The title of the poem is “*Bestela ito egingo nauzue, hil*”. (Otherwise you will suffocate me, you will kill me):

“*Ez!.../ Ez dut nahi gure hizkuntzaren / zaharkeriazko kutsaduraren.../ bizi eziñaren/ ezinean bizi.*

*Ez dut nahi lehenaren itzalean / galduriko eukararik... / ustelduriko euskararik.../ hildako euskararik.*

*Ez dut nahi hitz, aditz, hizki / hizkuntza arkaiko ulergaitzik / Ez dut nahi axularkeriarik, / ez dut nahi aranakeriarik.*

*Euskara bizi berri batu gazte bat nahi dut... baserri ta hiriz osotua, ...garbia ta zikiña...,*

59. “*Euskara batua ta euskalkiak*,” in *Euskera*, 1978-2: 561

egunerokoa, edozertarakoa.  
Atera nazazue...kanposantutik ...,  
bestela ito egingo nazue, hil”<sup>60</sup>.

(No!.. I do not want to live the impossible life of our language full of archaic pollution. I do not want a Basque lost out of respect for our ancestors, a dead Basque, a rotten Basque. I do not want old word, verbs, and infixes nor an archaic, incomprehensible language; I do not want excessive influence from “Axular” or S. Arana. I want a living Basque, new, unified, and modern...formed from the Basque farms and cities... pure and polluted for everyday use, for every purpose. Deliver me... from the cemetery...Otherwise you will suffocate me, you will kill me.)

One of the faults that Zarate condemns most strongly in these two groups is their intolerance, their fascist manner of imposing their criteria on others. He refers to that intolerance in his famous phrase: “Neu nausi edo musturak ausi”<sup>61</sup>. (Either I win or I break your face.)

On this point the two groups actually resemble the Spaniards who imposed Castilian on the Basques, Catalans, and Galicians, crushing them with no regard whatsoever. During the struggle against the central power, especially during the Franco regime, many Basques adopted the uncompromising spirit of the Spaniards. Both groups spouted intolerant phrases and demonstrated inflexible attitudes. The Sabinians felt that Unified Basque was nothing but a plot invented by the Spaniards to destroy the Basque language. They would not accept any teacher in their schools who favored *batua* or the use of the letter *h*.

At the other extreme, some defenders of *batua* saw the dialects as the enemy of Unified Basque. When they spoke of Basque they emphasized the adjective “Unified” much more heavily than the noun “Basque”. It was not difficult to propose a unification that would be created like an experiment in a laboratory or like Esperanto was created, nor was it difficult to authoritatively impose Unified Basque on the people. What was difficult was creating a Basque language that would serve as a means of communication for all Basques, a *batua* that respected all the dialects to the greatest extent possible.

M. Zarate cited the words of L. Villasante, former president of Euskaltzaindia, who was already lobbying on behalf of respect for the dialects in 1958: “Literaturak eztu euskera bizia menderatuko...Guri dagokiguna da euskera biziari jarraitzea...erriko euskerarekin artu-eman estuan egotea... Erritik aldendurik dabillen literatura, gezurrezko

60. Bizipenen bultzadaz: 36-37.

61. Ipuin antzeko alegi mingotsak: 33.

zerbait biurtzen da”<sup>62</sup>. (Written literature will not destroy living Basque...Our obligation is to preserve popular euskara and maintain a close relationship with living Basque, for a literature that does not preserve its popular roots is not authentic). According to him, both groups committed the error of mutual exclusion without realizing that Basque’s only enemy is erdera or the foreign languages of Spanish and French.

Being the type of person who was not content merely to point out problems, M. Zarate proposes a third route as a solution. He began by proposing some general rules what would result in detailed resolutions. The objective he offered was a living comprehensible Basque language. In order to reach this objective he proposes a type of Batua that he described as “nire batua edo baturantzako ahalegiñak” (my Unified Basque, or rather my efforts to find it). He felt, as we saw earlier, that it was necessary to begin by educating the Basques, teaching them to read in their native dialect. His twenty years of experience as a professor gave him the pedagogical know-how to reach a reading audience. His pedagogical concerns characterized all of his literary works. His books were not written for an elite group that would, in his opinion, become a “ghetto” of readers. Instead, he tried to reach all Basques.

In order to accomplish this, he recommended departing from the known and venturing into the unknown. Begin by dominating one’s native dialect and later move on to Unified Basque. He gave greatest importance to the Basque language as one spoke it on a daily basis, then suggested learning to write in the native dialect, and finally moving from there on to Unified Basque. These ideas were not exclusively Zarate’s. They were very popular with a group of professors at the Escuela de Derio (Derio Summer School) in Bizkaia where he happened to be the best writer who also put these theories into practice through his abundant literary production. Where “euskaldunberriak” were concerned, he did not apply the stages mention above. In those cases he would begin at once with batua deeply rooted in the dialects.

Zarate did not content himself with these general rules. He got down to specific detail when it came time to carry out the literacy campaign on behalf of unified Basque. Six of his specific points are explained below:

1. The literacy effort should include all adults, and it should vary depending on the peculiarities and necessities of each region and its people. It will be necessary to keep in mind the point of departure in each case, such as the difficult contractions used in the town of Ondarroa: “lotara nu” instead of “lotara noa” (I’m going to sleep),

62. “Euskara batua ta euskalkiak”, *Euskera*, 1978-2: 561.

and other more complicated ones like “baraitx ein bi txune” instead of “badakit egin behar dituena” (I know that he must make them).

2. Where the Basque verb was concerned, Zarate was in favor of dropping the usage of the familiar “you” forms, especially when first studying the language, because they are so difficult for the beginner. Unlike many other languages, the Basque language has no gender for nouns but does express gender through this form of the verb. Thus, for example, the auxiliary verb in the familiar “you” form varies according to whether one is speaking with a man or a woman. “Zer egin duk” (What have you done?), the form used when speaking to a man, becomes “Zer egin dun” when directed at a woman. Zarate was in favor of beginning speakers avoiding these complicated differences.
3. According to Zarate, it would be advisable to establish levels of proficiency in Basque, beginning with the easiest parts of the language and gradually ascending to the most difficult. He felt that many Basque authors wrote without keeping in mind the language capacity of the audience to whom their books were directed.
4. Zarate was in favor of using a unique orthography in all the dialects. The difficulties he experienced during twenty years of teaching Basque and the lack of agreement in spelling drove him to take this position. Basque orthography was actually much simpler than Spanish, and that being so, he posed the question: Why have Basques not mastered it? The only answer to the question lay in the amount of time spent in both languages. Faced with the negligence and illiteracy of many Basques in their own language, he pointed out the 25,000 hours spent by them in learning Spanish or French.

Concerning the letter h, he favored using the list of h words approved the 1968 meeting of Euskaltzaindia in Arantzazu. However, he condemned certain authors who used the h indiscriminately, sprinkling h’s about according to the personal taste, as if they were sprinkling parsley on a sauce.

5. Zarate advocated respect for the dialects. The unity of the Basque language did not have to go against its diversity, especially in the early stages of the reform. The fact that one of the seven dialects was used in the written language did not mean that the other six should be eliminated. He did not share the haste of certain pro-batua radicals for he felt that impatience would destroy the wealth of dialectal variations. For example, among the variations listed below, he felt that the first of each pair should be used in written Basque without eliminating the second from the spoken Basque of the region where it occurred. For example: ondo-ongi (well), baino-baizik (but), nola-zelan (how), bezala-legez (as, like), atze-gibel (behind),

aurre-aitzin (in front of), nahi-gura (to want), and izango-izanen (will be).

When the time came to choose the vocabulary for “Zarate’s” Unified Basque, he used many Bizkaian words, but also chose words rooted in literature from the other dialects. He felt that the best way to carry out the unification of Basque was to conquer one’s native dialect but not to limit oneself to it, rather to enrich one’s speech with the most common words from other dialects. As an example of the validity of his suggestion, it is sufficient to reflect on the different interpretations that could be given for J.B. Elizanburu’s song, “Urrundik”. In the sentence, “Urrundik ikusten dut, ikusten mendia beraren gibelean”... (I see from afar, I see the mountain I see behind it), the word gibelean means “behind” in northern dialects while in the south it means “in the liver”. How would a peninsular Basque who was unfamiliar with the northern meaning of this word translate the phrase? Probably with the absurd line, “From afar I see the mountain in whose liver I see...” From situations such as this springs the need for the mutual enrichment of the dialects.

6. According to Zarate, the greatest problem facing unification is the abundance of variations in the verb. There are many beautiful forms of the Basque verb that are hardly ever used anymore. In his poem “Ondasuntegi naskagarria” (Disgusting treasure) we saw a few examples of these verb forms. What should be done with them if they interfere with communication among Basques? What should be done? For example, with archaic forms such as: zukean instead of the auxiliary verb zuen; sar baledi instead of sartzen bada (if he enters); apur badezat instead of apurtzen badut (if I break it); or dakust instead of ikusten dut (I see).

As R.M. Azkue expressed so well eighty years before: “Todas esas flexiones son normales, bellas, bien sonantes.... Sólo tienen un defecto: el de la vida, pues casi en ningún pueblo son conocidas”<sup>63</sup>. (All of these inflections are normal, beautiful, and pleasant sounding... They have only one defect: that of life, for they are unknown in almost every village.)

This problem of the wealth of verb forms becomes even more complicated when two different forms are used in the same village; for example, deutsudaz and dizkizut, or jatazan and zitzaizkidan). The solution proposed by Zarate is to work carefully, moving gradually until literacy in Basque becomes a norm.

As a conclusion to his report on the status of batua to the 1978 Bergara meeting of Euskaltzaindia, he praised the beauty of the diffe-

63. Ibid.: 567.

rent dialects, pointing out the beauty of Bizkaian syntax, the power of the Gipuzkoan dialect, the sonority of Labourdin, the antiquity of Basse Navarrese, and the charm and aural beauty of Zuberoan. He went on to encourage all the members of the Basque Academy to work on unison toward a living, popular, Unified Basque.

M. Zarate attempted to avoid two dangers; excessive devotion to the dialects and the exaggerated veneration of Unified Basque that would degenerate into the exclusive use of it by a “ghetto” of speakers instead of the public in general. The difficult balance necessary to avoid these two extremes is demonstrated in his literary production. He wrote fourteen books, seven in the Bizkaian dialect and seven in Unified Basque, and not everyone approved of his use of both forms:.. “Niri esan didate ur bitara ari naizela”<sup>64</sup>. (They have told me that I am paddling in two streams

Zarate worked tenaciously on behalf of the dialects at a time when to do so was almost a crime against Unified Basque. On the other hand, he defended *batua* to friends who would never forgive him for fighting in its favor. He was fodder for both sides of the controversy. Unfortunately, he left us when we needed him most, in the prime of his life, at the age of forty-six. He died of a heart attack brought on by his greatest vice, overwork. As he himself said so many times: “Lau liburu inprentan, eta beste hogeï gehiago buruan dantzari”. (Four books in press and another twenty dancing in my head.)

Life did not give him time to be one of the great giants of Basque literature, but we have his works, fourteen books published within the space of a few years. His literary production is enough to declare him one of the Bizkaian writers who did the most with his pen to promote Unified Basque during a turbulent decade without denying his native dialect. Moreover, his Bizkaian is being used as a model by many in that province because it is the living language of the people.

I believe that M. Zarate was a pioneer who did not live long enough to see the mark he left behind. If he had lived a few more years he would have been pleased by two facts: more than 95% percent of today’s literary production in Euskal Herria is written in Unified Basque, and the Academy of the Basque Language is publishing a linguistic Atlas that will gather together the rich variety of the different Basque dialects.