

# In favour of the Basque gendered address form: Why assume the risk of having a sexist language?



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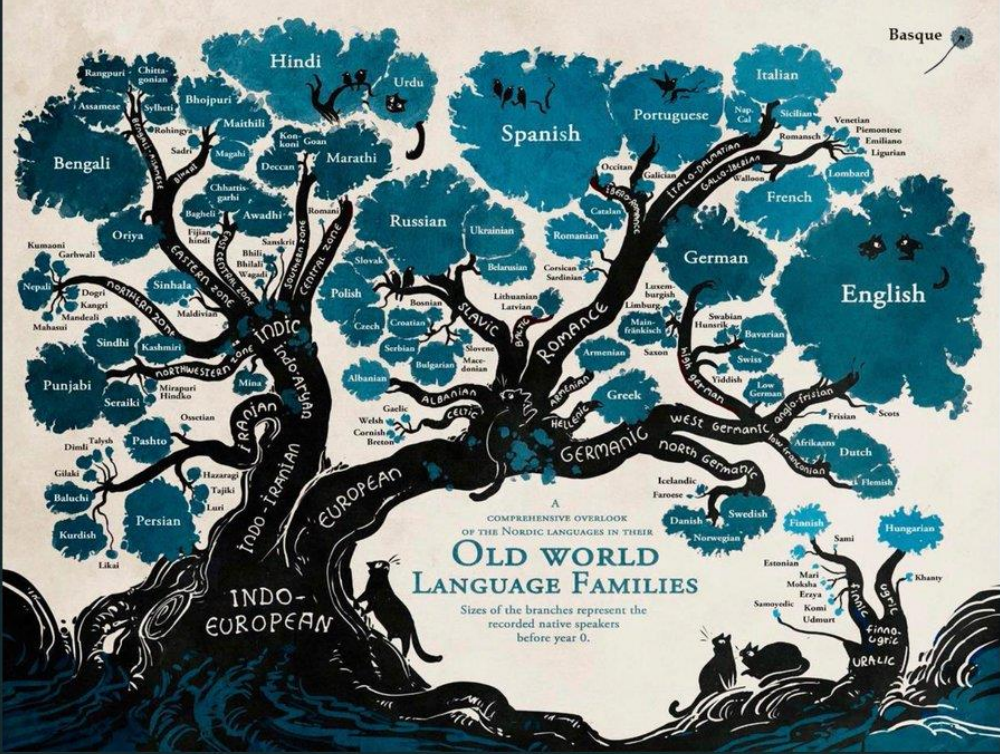
# CONTRADICTION?

The reality behind this apparent paradox

## INFORMAL FORM OF ADDRESS

Context

# BASQUE language



# HIKA, the Basque informal form of address

	FORMAL	INFORMAL
Spanish	<i>usted</i>	<i>tú</i>
French	<i>vous</i>	<i>tu</i>
Basque	<i>zu</i>	<i>hi</i>

## Linguistic characteristics:

- There is no grammatical gender in Basque, except for the second-person familiar pronoun, *hi*.
- The verbal form varies depending on the addressee's gender (even not being an argument in the sentence).

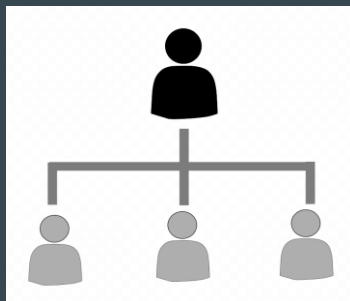
**Table 1.** Examples of the forms of address *zuka* (formal) and *hika* (informal).

I gave you a present. (non-allocutive)	Opari bat eman <b>dizut.</b>	(Zuka)
	Opari bat eman <b>dinat.</b>	(Hika, with a female addressee)
	Opari bat eman <b>diat.</b>	(Hika, with a male addressee)
They gave me a present. (allocutive)	Opari bat eman <b>didate.</b>	(Zuka)
	Opari bat eman <b>zidaten.</b>	(Hika, with a female addressee)
	Opari bat eman <b>zidatek.</b>	(Hika, with a male addressee)

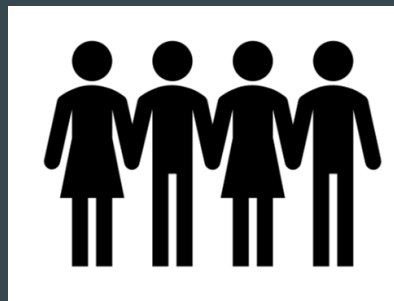
# *Hika*, the Basque informal form of address

## Sociolinguistics:

- Social rules: different from Spanish and French



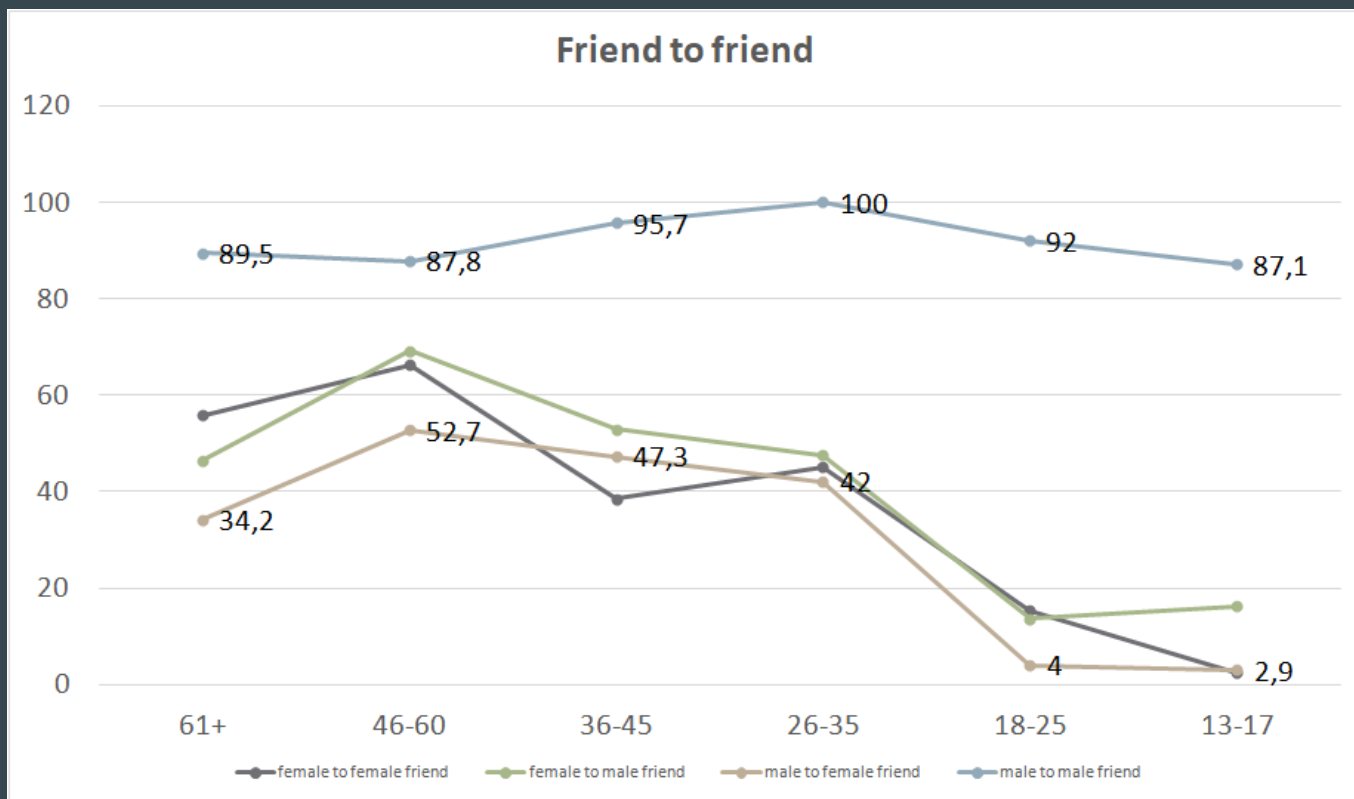
Authority relationships  
(parents, elders...)



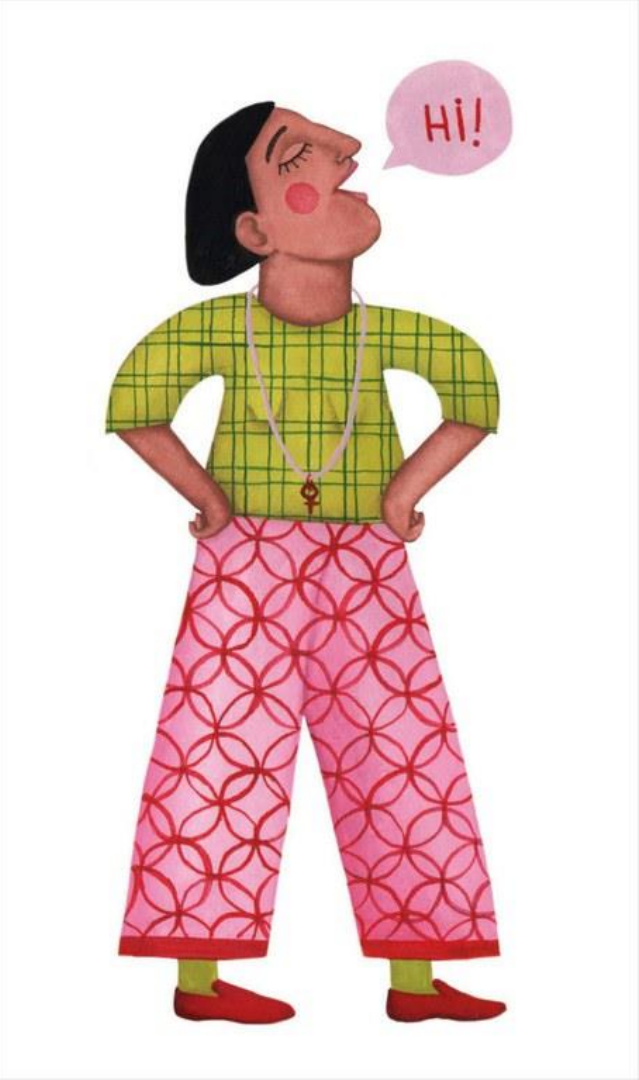
Peer relationships  
(friends, siblings...)

- Gender differences in the use

# The social use of *hika* among different generations



# Revitalization efforts



# Gender-inclusive language: an opposite trend in Basque?

Basque VS *Hika*

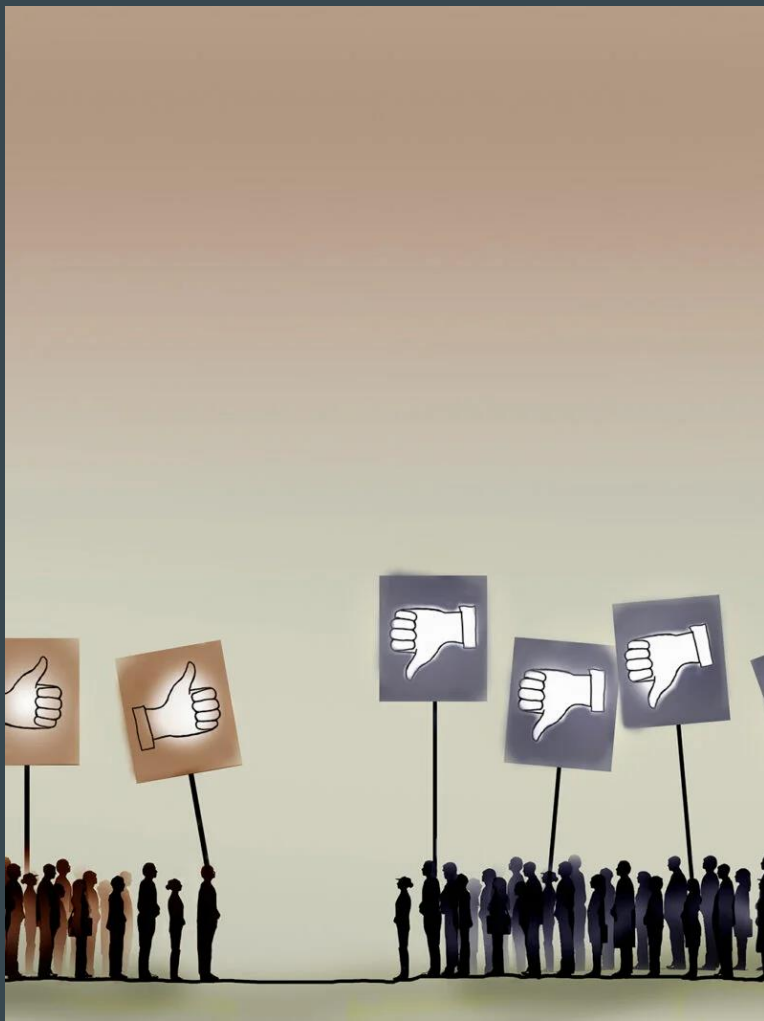
Sommes nous... pour l'écriture inclusive ?

- prêtEs
- prêt.e.s
- prêt·e·s
- prêt-e-s
- prêt(e)s
- prêt/e/s



*Is hika worth it?*  
Having a gendered address form means being NON-gender-inclusive?





”

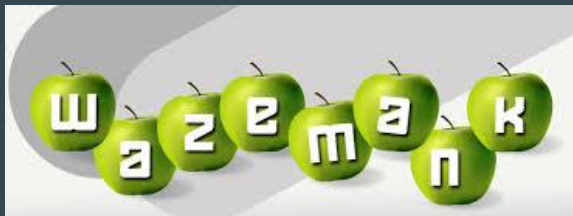
It is very backward. Back then there was no claim for gender equality, there wasn't three different genders and all these things. And then now some conflicts arise, that back then were not present. The most obvious example is that of gender binary. Those who do not identify as a boy or as a girl, what are they supposed to do? If I think about it, I say, what do we need *hika* for?

(Alberdi-Zumeta, 2019:146)

Not a great concern within social or feminist movements:

- There are other priorities in their agendas
- ZUKA forms available (and generalised)

$$N + K = NK$$



## Jolas bat baino ez dunk

**Lucía Baskaranek**  
Karabeleko fabulazten du

Zirriborroak eta gero  
Gipuzkoako bilduma #2



# Sexist use

Informal (*hika*) to men and formal (*zuka*) to women

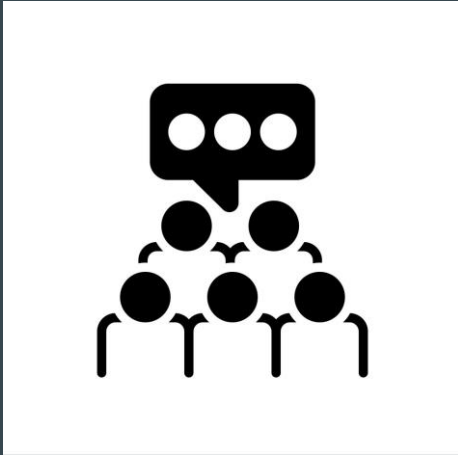
Using male forms as if they were neutral

- Addressing a mixed group of people using male forms
- Addressing a single female interlocutor with male forms

# Research questions

- 1. How does this sexist use of hika that we have just mentioned make people feel and how do they react?*
- 2. What do they think about the unisex combination -NK?*
- 3. Regarding the movement in favour of the recovery of female hika forms, how do participants feel about it?*

**methodology**



10 focus group discussions



3 dyadic interviews

(38 people)

**results**

1. A sexist use of address forms occurs... (3 situations)



## a) *Hika* with boys and *zuka* with girls

WOMAN-21: No. We always use *zuka*, also with my friends. At least when we were kids.

WOMAN-74: It seems that here boys always use *hika*, the young people, but girls use *zuka*.

WOMAN-21: Yes.

WOMAN-74: Yees. In Azpeitia boys completely in *hika* and girls completely in *zuka*.

WOMAN-21: Yes, it's like that. Boys also address girls in *zuka*.



Most people did not show any reaction towards this, as if it was a reality that needs to be accepted.

## b) Using male forms for a mixed audience

WOMAN-43: I was at a meeting recently, both men and women, and he [the speaker] was “well, then we have to do...” [with male forms]. I said, finally I got uncomfortable, like that for two hours... And I felt as if I wasn't there. And I counted us, 19 women and 18 men, more or less. And I said to the guy next to me, “I, I'm leaving, I somehow don't see myself included”. (...) No, I mean, let's use *zuka* in plural, like it should be, when there are many people. Because it's true it can become discriminatory in those contexts, right?

## c) Using male forms to address a woman

WOMAN-39: I'm not sure, but it must've been in 7th or 8th grade, something like that. And we also played that game, you know? Boys always talked to us using male forms, and so we started to talk to them with female forms. A bit like that, you know? In order to... "Hey, what's the matter with you?" [female *hika*]. "Hey, don't you talk to me as if I were a girl..."

MAN-40: Certainly, that bothered them.

WOMAN-39: That did bother them, sure, yeah. And it was then that they started, I think...

MAN-40: Making an effort.

## 2. The -NK issue

# Some against, others in favour (but with restrictions)

MAN-69: Zakilixut made that up.

RESEARCHER: -nk.

(...)

MAN-69: That was, that contribution, that was his best contribution. *Aizank*. [“Hey you”, combined unisex form]

WOMAN-43: Yes.

RESEARCHER: There are people against that. Now, is that useful in practice?

MAN-69: It is possible in written texts, but...

WOMAN-43: It's possible in written texts and besides in short texts. Because, well, if I have to read a novel like that, I get sick, I mean... I would get tired.

### *3. Resignifying female forms of hika*

WOMAN-43: I don't know how you guys experience that, probably what you said: closeness. But with other women I experience that as some sort of sisterhood. Then it seems a tool for empowerment to me. And a space for us (...), it's a space that we feel we still need. If we use *hika* in that space, that is like getting naked and then we can talk openly. It's similar with men, it's true that when I use *hika* with a man of my age or similar, I mean, it gets easier, I don't know how to explain it. I know I can hold his back at ease, when I address him in *hika* it's like holding his back. *Epa hi!* ["Hey you", in *hika*]



WOMAN-36: Yes, I'd say assurance.

WOMAN-29: Me too, as if I spoke with more...

WOMAN-36: Yeah, that's it, with more power.

WOMAN-29: More confidently.

**conclusions**



- What could look like a non-inclusive feature of the language is not perceived as such.
- There are different examples of sexist uses of *hika* and people react against them.



### How to make *hika* more gender-inclusive:

- Avoid sexist uses of *hika*
- Transformation: the will to revitalise female *hika* forms

# eskerrik asko

thank you

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