

The art of bertsolaritza

Oral expression has acquired an importance that is crucial for the communication processes that form part of what is known as the Information Society.

One of the most genuine forms of oral expression, the improvised singing of Basque *bertsolaris* or verse singers, has shown an ability to adapt to the new circumstances and make itself an alternative information circuit which currently enjoys an important presence in the media and great prestige socially.

This book is about the complex reality of this phenomenon of oral improvisation which we call *bertsolaritza*. It opens with a critical appraisal of the sociocultural features of current bertsolaritza and outlines the challenges thrown up and the opportunities afforded by its adaptation to new winds of change. Following on from this, there is a detailed description of the mental processes involved in the creation of the improvised *bertso* and of the strategies and limitations therein.

Finally, after outlining the inadequacies of current theoretical approaches to bertsolaritza as an oral art and the consequent need for a differentiated analytical methodology for improvised bertsolaritza, an argument is made for the use of classical rhetoric as an appropriate theoretical framework for this improvised art form.

The art of bertsolaritza > Joxerra Garzia | Jon Sarasua | Andoni Egaña



Bertsozale
Elkartea



Bertsolari
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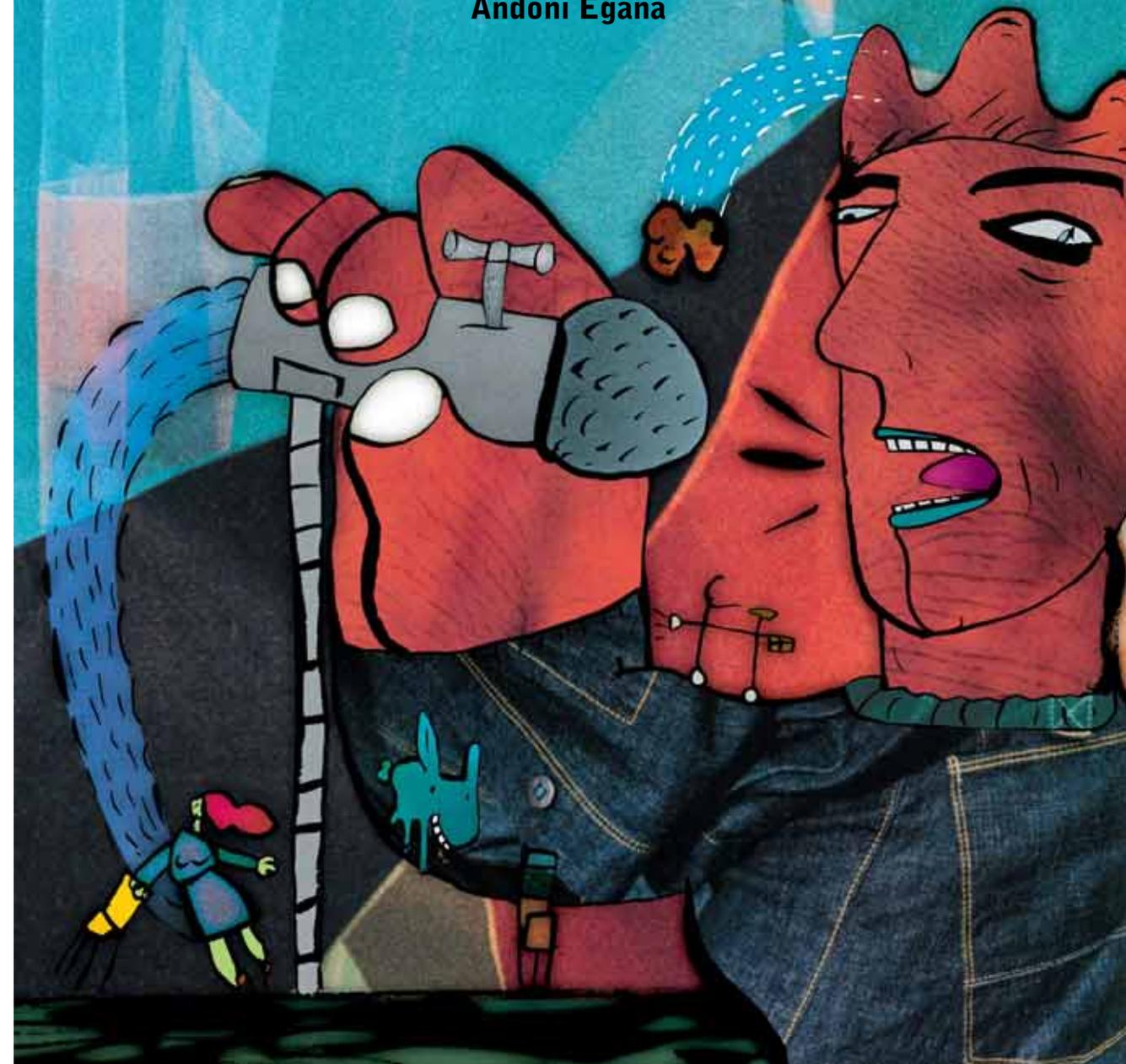
The art of bertsolaritza

Improvised basque verse singing

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Improvised Basque verse singing

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Editor: Joxerra Garzia

The art of bertsoaritza

Improvised Basque verse singing



Bertsozale Elkartea



BERTSOLARI liburuak

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...

INTRODUCTION

To date, and almost without exception, bertsolaritza has been considered as a sub-genre of Basque popular literature. Basque literature, as such, also referred to as written or Basque literary culture, is, or at least has been until the beginnings of the XX century, scant and seen as anachronistic and purely secondary.

| ...On the other hand, as Luis Michelena well points out, Basque popular literature, essentially oral, is probably as rich and varied as that of any other people¹.

Nevertheless, the title “Basque popular literature” is a form of pigeonholing of anything that has not fitted into the classification of written literature². Basque popular literature is thus identified by the heterogeneity of genres and expressions which it manifests.

In the first place, heterogeneity of genres, the popular literature taking in poetry, theatre, narrative and other, not so easily classifiable genres such as refrains and idioms.

¹ MICHELENA, Luis. *Historia de la Literatura Vasca*. San Sebastián: Erein, 1988, p. 13.

² One of the most exhaustive and referential of classifications: LEKUONA, Juan Mari. *Ahozko euskal Literatura*. San Sebastián: Erein, 1982, p. 34.

Secondly, heterogeneity regarding artistic work. Specifically, the level of oracy in Basque popular literature varies greatly from one manifestation thereof to another. The fact that Basque popular literature is “essentially oral” clearly does not mean that only oral literature is popular literature although, in colloquial use, both meanings are often interchangeable. Even Juan Mari Lekuona, on presenting his work, called it “Classification of Basque **oral** literature”. It is clear, however, given that their production and reception are in written form, genres such as popular novels or autobiographies are only oral in as much as the communicative strategies used, that is, in their structure. There are written manifestations which are produced orally (street theatre, pastorales, probably many pieces of ornamental poetry and, of course, nearly all the anthology of songs, both traditional and modern)³.

Finally, there is great heterogeneity in the aesthetic (literary, artistic) meaning amongst all the manifestations of Basque popular literature. Idioms —and, to a great extent, proverbs, too— derive only and exclusively from the linguistic competence of the speakers, without any conscious awareness of their aesthetic value.

Given such a heterogeneous panorama, it is clear that it is almost impossible to establish a single valid method of analysis for all the manifestations of Basque popular literature. As is well known, research proceeds in a manner which increasingly fragments its targets of analysis, and it would be no bad thing to take this into account when taking on the research into Basque popular literature. Not to proceed in this way would result in dif-

³ Distinguishing between oracy and production/reception on the one hand, and oracy in its structure, on the other, we partly coincide with Wolfgang Raible, who differentiates between medial aspects and conceptual aspects in the texts. For Raible, however, a text is conceptually oral when it is not structured or planned. We cannot agree with him on this point, whether or not the view is common amongst the experts on oracy. For a concise exposition of Raible’s views, see RAIBLE, Wolfgang. *Oracy and Literacy. On their Medial and Conceptual Aspects. Oracy, Literacy and Modern Media*. Columbia/USA: Camden House, 1996, p 17-27. Particularly pp. 18-20.

ficulties in a full understanding of the meaning and the value of each one of the various manifestations which make up Basque popular literature.

This book attempts to be nothing other than a thorough exposition of improvised bertsolaritza and a first step in the drawing up of a suitable method for its analysis, given the fact that current models are inadequate for the understanding of the specific complexity of this extempore artistic activity. This is precisely why we expressly do not analyse non-improvised bertsolaritza, not because we consider this unimportant but, as we believe it to be a radically different genre and, as such, requiring another method for analysis.

1 Historical antecedents. Myth or reality in improvised bertsolaritza

As Joxe Azurmendi points out⁴,

| A curious contradiction arises. On the one hand, a myth surrounding the origins of bertsolaritza has been gratuitously created, trying to date it from time immemorial; on the other, in these dizzy times where all myths are opposed with such ardour, a counter-myth, just as gratuitous as the myth it claims to combat, has arisen: that bertsolaritza in the Basque Country is a phenomenon more-or-less modern, with its origins about the beginnings of the XIX century.⁵

According to Azurmendi, the myth of the immemorial origin of bertsolaritza comes from Manuel Lekuona, the first real scholar of bertsolaritza

⁴ AZURMENDI, Joxe. Bertsolaritzaren estudiorako, *Jakin*. April-September, 1980, n° 14-15, p. 139-164. This entire section on the origins of bertsolaritza is directly based on the work of Azurmendi.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 143.

and of other manifestations of Basque popular literature. In Manuel Lekuona's work, we find a number of references to the "neolithic" or "prehistoric" character of the artistic activity. According to Lekuona, the origins of bertsolaritza have to be looked for in the times of pastoral farming. Azurmendi states that all subsequent references to the remote origins of bertsolaritza owe a debt to the position held by Manuel Lekuona. And Azurmendi produces some evidence in the form of quotes, which can give us an idea of the tone of the arguments over the remote origin of bertsolaritza. So, for example, it is stated that, "All Basques sing; the whole people sing... from the earliest times which prehistoric science managed to penetrate, the Basque have shown examples of their poetic activity"⁶. Another formula on the same theme is the claim that, "bertsolaritza is as old as Euskara, itself"⁷.

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The counter-myth, at the same time, has a considerable tradition amongst us. On the one hand, the list of those expressing their reticence—or even their scorn—towards bertsolaritza is well stocked with famous names: Federico Krutwig, the Aranistas, Carmelo Echegaray, Orixe, himself or, more recently, Luis Mari Mujika or Matias Mujika, to mention but the most illustrious.

The thing is, when the first recorded mention of bertsolaritza occurs (towards the end of the XVIII century), it is referred to as a phenomenon of considerable age and, what is more important, the documents clearly treat bertsolaritza as a cultural expression which has a high degree of maturity in its forms and in its social roots, judging by the references to the verbal combats between bertsolaris and the social importance that the *ad hoc*-composed bertsos appeared to have had at the time.

⁶ GOROSTIAGA, J. *Antología de la poesía popular vasca*. San Sebastian: Biblioteca de los Amigos del País, 1957.

⁷ For example, JAUREGI, Luis "JAUTARKOL". *Xenpelar bertsolaria: bizitza ta bertsoak*. Zarautz: Itxaropena, 1958, p. 13. Kuliska sorta, 25-26. and also ONAINDIA, S. *Euskal Literatura I*. Bilboa: [Etor], 1972, p. 58.

Luis Michelena, distancing himself equidistantly from the two extremes, states that:

| The tradition [of the bertsolaris] is very old, and dates at least from the damas improvisadoras (improvvistraces) of XV century verse which Garibay talks about⁸.

J.M. Leizaola and other scholars have also held the same opinion. Azurmendi's work on this is of great importance as it involves two references from the Ancient Charter for Vizcaya and put down on paper in 1452. These are undoubtedly the oldest written record about bertsolaritza and irrefutable proof that, as early as the mid XV century, improvised verse singing, or some manifestation thereof, was as common and rooted such as to merit its express banning. Firstly, Title 35, Charter Law VI:

| ...hereafter, when one wishes to mourn for a defunct person in Vizcaya or outside the same, by sea or on land, no person in any part of Vizcaya, in town or village, shall dare make lamentations, pull their hair or scratch their head, nor shall they make singing lamentations ... under pain of payment of one thousand coins for each person acting in contrary and every time.

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Apart from these "mourners", there is a second mention in the Ancient Charter for Vizcaya, even more significant, about sung improvisation of the period. It appears in Title 8, Law I:

| Regarding those cases where arrests can be made without delinquents seeking sanctuary under the Tree of Guernica. Firstly, they say: there are Common Law rights ... sanctuary ... and as regards the Women, known for being shameful, and agitators of peoples, they make couplets and songs in an infamous and libellous manner.

⁸ MICHELENA, Luis, *Historia de la Literatura Vasca*, 1960, p. 25.

The Charter Law refers to these women as “profanesses” who, in all probability, can be regarded as the direct ancestors of modern-day bertsolaris.

Despite this record, the reality of these ad-libbing women is that we can do little more than confirm their existence. To find a corpus of bertsolaristic literature of any substance we have to wait until the end of the XVIII. The XIX century is better documented, both regarding names and biographical data as well as regarding preserved pieces (bertsos). Nevertheless, these refer more to non-improvised, written bertsos (*bertso jarriak*). It is known, from cross-references, that the bertsolaris who wrote these verses were also used to improvisation, but the number of bertsos (entire improvised sung poems) which we have knowledge of is quite scant and we can say little about their characteristics.

Not until the mid-XX century does the use of recording technologies become widespread, thus allowing the guaranteed preservation —and a subsequent faithful transcription— of the bertsos improvised by the bertsolaris in town square and at village crossroads. If we subscribe to the point of view of Michelena, Leizaola and Azurmendi about the origins of improvised bertsolaritza and, it is true, on researching the forms used and the end-product of the *ad hoc* bertsolari improvisers, we can see that, only from the 1960’s on, do we have a corpus of improvised bertsos worthy of the name. Before that time, what we have is a collection of fragments and anecdotes which do not provide sufficient material to base a thorough research on. Those considered “classical” bertsolaris (Etxahun, Xenpelar and Bilintx in the XIX century; Kepa Enbeita, Txirrita, Pello Errota, Udarregi and others between the XIX and XX) were, according to all accounts, great improvisers. But the status which they enjoy within the world of bertsolaritza is almost entirely due to the written —or dictated—, in any case, not improvised, bertsos. The fact that the bertsos which make up most of the creative corpus of these classical bertsolaris are “conceptually” oral (some of those quoted did not know

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how to write) should not blind us to the fact that, given the forms of reproduction, these bertsos belong to a genre more akin to ballad sheet culture than to improvised bertsolaritza.

2 The transformation of bertsolaritza in the XX century: the dominance of the improvised bertso

However it may have come about, the reality is that, throughout the XX century, bertsolaritza underwent a progressive and radical change. Although the name is the same, bertsolaritza at the beginning of the XX century has little to do with that at the end. Far from being a superficial change, it has affected practically every aspect of the artistic activity.

Amongst other things, written bertsolaritza, the most important format at the beginning of the century, ceded primacy to the improvised form. At the end of the XX century, it is the person improvising their bertsos before the public that is seen as the bertsolari.

When, at the beginning of the century, Gorosabel’s famous compilation, *Noticia de las Cosas Memorables de Guipúzcoa*, appeared, the last volume is seized upon by Carmelo de Echeagaray, then Official Chronicler of the Basque provinces, to launch an “anathema” —according to Antonio Zavala— against bersolarismo:

| Village gossip, ridiculous parish-pump rivalry merited popular honours for singing. The majority of times, the names of the authors of such spawning were forgotten... and it is no bad thing, given that, in this way, their artistic inability is not perpetuated.

The prosaic character of the topics, the immorality of their treatment, crude descriptions, the language plagued with Spanish-isms... bertsolaritza

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was the synthesis of all vulgar virtues. It would be better if it disappeared forever. Echegaray was not alone in thinking like this: in reality, his words were no more than a reflection of a state of mind. The little appreciation of the poetic artistic activity came from outside: Francisque Michel, the first great ethnographer to study us Basques, wrote the following in 1857:

| You ask yourselves if perhaps the Basques do not possess popular verses as occurs in most nations, although they be scant and of little interest. Well, they are certainly not bereft of songs, ballads or couplets; but these pieces do not have any character that could merit the name of poetry.⁹

The learned Frenchman describes us as a singing, not a poetic, people. What saves us, apparently, is this simple verse of the *kopla zahar* (old couplet) type:

| Itsasoak urak handi
Ez du hondorik ageri;
Pasako nintzake ni handik
Maitea ikusteagatik.

(*Great waters of the sea / the bottom cannot be seen; / through them I would venture / my great love to see.*)

To this old view of the artistic activity, we can now add moral purism and, to a much greater extent, linguistic purism. Today it seems incredibly contradictory the attitude of those intellectuals who criticised in Spanish the bad *Euskara* (Basque) of their compatriots, but being unable to demonstrate a “correct” model to follow. And literature produced in Sabinian-style Basque (Sabino Arano, founder of Basque nationalism), plagued with absurd neologisms, did not reach the people; they did not understand them. It was logical, therefore, that the distance between the mass of the people and their intellectual class, at least to put it one way,

⁹ MICHEL, F. (1981).

the most *Bizkaitarra* (from Vizcaya) amongst them, became impossibly greater. But not everyone thought the same. In Gipuzkoa voices were raised in favour of the reviled person of the bertsolari.

In 1919 father Donostia, a cultured, scholarly person who, we imagine, given his vocational calling, was little inclined to moral frivolity, stated his admiration for our form of cultural expression:

| The bertsolari sessions leave an indelible memory on those who have but once been present. What grace and humour in the responses, what genius in “taking the ball” from the opponent and throwing it back into his court! There is no match to match them! The repertoire of the extempore rascal is inexhaustible when wishing to make fun of, for example, the neighbour’s horse – skinny to the point of transparency; the Daughters of Mary who are not perfect models of behaviour; the priest who neither leads an irreproachable life... With words, more or less veiled, more or less transparent allusions, the bertsolaris, the popular poets manage to express, to insinuate all that they wish to.¹⁰

A young priest from Oiartzun, Manuel Lekuona had been publishing pieces in *Eusko Folklore* for a number of years when, in 1930 in Bergara, he was introduced at the V Congress of Basque Studies. He spoke of popular poetry, gave examples, systemised the mechanics of bertsolaritza, classified its genres... In short, he gave a masterly lecture which laid the foundation for the scientific study of the artistic activity. The following are some of the elements which he pointed out as characteristic of the traditional poetry of the famous couplets known as the *kopla zaharrak*:

- Perfection of form
- Rapidity of movement of images
- Elisions and constructions pregnant with meaning

¹⁰ Fragments of a conference speech given in 1919.

- Obviousness of linking elements
- Special logical and chronological order
- Supra-logic cohesion of poetic images
- Rhythmic skill

We can imagine that, just like us on reading Lekuona's work today, the intellectuals of the time, on listening to his historic delivery, may have captured all that beauty encapsulated in those "trivialities":

| Hau haizearen epela!
 Airean dabil orbela...
 Etxe hontako jende leialak,
 gabon Jainkoak diela.¹¹

(*What a soft wind! / Leaves swirling in the air... / May God grant good night / to the noble people under this roof.*)

There were many more poems that Francisque Michel would have liked - many more than anyone would think. Apart from involving most of the features of *rondas* (street ballad singing), Lekuona pointed out certain specific qualities of the bertso of the bertsolari:

- The final or "punch" line (*azken puntua*) at the end of each bertso ("The sting in the tail").
- Strong sense of rhythm (the bertsolari is practically incapable of improvising without the help of a melody).
- Metered verse of four, five and even nine consonances or rhymes (*puntus*).

Many years later, perhaps taking on a duty of self-criticism in the name of a certain Basque intellectual class of the past, Jorge de Oteiza ventures to declare that the Basque that does not feel something of a bertsola-

¹¹ LEKUONA, Manuel (1964).

ri in his interior is a poor one. This may have been just some sort of outburst, but it did not prevent him writing some beautiful words on the "Basque way of thinking", based on Lekuona's work:

| "It is this Basque way of thinking (which we may appreciate in the bertsolari and with all its complex naturalness) is a style like a thawing of the intra-consciousness, that is, as if it were a return journey (from sedimentation outward) in which, irrationally, the awareness of life, of the word, of the phrase reappear. It has its own technique. The technique of the authentic bertsolari is to clearly retrace (bit by bit and from here and there) that path on which past events have been obscured by their reality and their ideas, and which obscurity (of time, of the forgotten) has been holding on to. The technique of the bertsolari is that he is ahead of everyone else and disappears into his interior reality. I like to say it is like leaving yourself go, submerged in a river (the river providing your interior vision).¹²



Txitxirita sitting with his stick on the day of the tribute to him (1936) Source: XDZ

¹² OTEIZA, Jorge (1971).

Unfortunately, the contribution of Manuel Lekuona has not been followed up but his analyses continue to be a reference today. It is reasonable to believe that his theorising on couplets, as it is still referred to nowadays, is correct. Another thing, however, is improvised bertsolaritza.

At the beginning of the XXI century, it is impossible to ignore the contributions of the new rhetoric, pragmatism, anthropology, the oralists and, above all, the protagonists, themselves, of the art we are attempting to analyse. All these disciplines point to improvised bertsolaritza as being a differentiated genre of art which requires a different and specific approach in its analysis.

It is difficult to determine the point of inflexion where the two forms of bertsolaritza met, one on the way up, the other descending. Nevertheless, some of the causes for the change can be outlined:

- The defence of oral poetry by Manuel Lekuona in Bergara in 1930, produced a change in the way in which the Basque intelligentsia evaluated the phenomenon of improvised bertsolaritza. As a consequence of this, what we can consider to be the first bertsolari championship was held in 1935, a contest which was repeated the following year. The organisation of both competitions was the responsibility of *Euskaltzaleak*, close to Basque political nationalism.
- After the war period and the harshest years of Franco's dictatorship, the Academy of Basque Letters, the *Euskaltzaindia*, took up the organisation for the third championship in 1960, with great results. There followed three more: in 1962, 1965 and in 1967.
- The massive implantation of radio as a means of communication and the attention that a few broadcasting stations afforded the artistic activity from the start, provided almost the only form of the Basque language not prohibited at the time.
- After the death of General Franco, the Academy reorganised and,

in 1980, a new bertsolari championship was initiated in 1980 with the intention of holding it biennially. Effectively, the following was held in 1982.

- The 1985 competition proved to be a heated improvised oral confrontation between the organisers and the group of bertsolaris (at least, the most active among them), which resulted in the creation of the Association of Bertsolaris of the Basque Country¹³. It was left to this association to organise thenceforth the championships on a four-yearly basis; the 1985 contest was held (finally) in 1986 and, since then, three more have taken place: in 1989, 1993 and 1997. Moreover, each of the seven provinces (four in peninsular Euskal Herria and three in continental Basque Country) holds their own championships, and there is no dearth of school and youth events. Self-managed within the Association of Aficionados of Bertsolaritza, the oral artistic activity became a touchstone for other aspects of Basque culture
- The improvised bertsoes in the championships were recorded, both in writing and in audio-visual format. The transcriptions of the bertsoes of the 1935 and 1936 championships are still precarious but, from 1960 on, each contest (at least the final) had its own recorded edition. We have, therefore, for the first time in the history of bertsolaritza, a corpus of improvised bertsoes.
- In 1989, the Association published a book with an anthology of the improvised bertsoes from the various events held during 1988, with the title, *Bapatean 88*. This book was the first of a series uninterrupted to date. Eleven books, thus, with the most outstanding of improvised bertsolaristic events, including the championships. Through the *Xenpelar*

¹³ Euskal Herriko Bertsolari Elkarte. The Association changed its name in 1996, since when it has been known as Euskal Herriko Bertsozale Elkarte (Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza). With the change of name the idea was to better reflect the reality of the Association, in which the number of actual bertsolaris was no greater than 15% of the total membership. Hereafter, we refer to this association as the Bertsozale Elkarte, or with its initials, EHBE. For a wider perspective of what the association really is, see title 4.3 in chapter II.

Archive Centre, the Bertsozale Elkarte carries out on-going archiving and cataloguing of all this corpus of material, which is at the disposal of any interested researcher. The Centre's new webpage will make accessibility to the archives that much easier and quicker.

- In 1988 the programme, *Hitetik Hortzera*, made its appearance on the first (exclusively Basque language) channel of the autonomous Euskal Telebista broadcasting corporation. Consisting basically of an anthology of bertsolari events around the country, it coincided with the boom in popularity in bertso, the high point of which can be situated in 1991. The audience for the recordings of the extempore performances reached levels which, until then, were unknown and unthinkable.

- Festivals and events of all kinds multiplied, particularly from the 90's onwards. The topics became more diverse and more concrete. In order to acquit oneself well at a difficult verbal juncture, the bertsolari had to be aware of what was happening in the world. The references to fictional persons, the cinema, literature, everything and anything is susceptible to being the object or the butt of this improvised singing. Not only the content but also the dynamic imposed by the presenter or the opponent became more and more diverse, sophisticated and, consequently, more difficult. Just one example amongst the many that could be given: a bertsolari is asked to improvise two personages, one for each microphone and so the extempore singer has to predict what each one would say in response to the other on the topic imposed - and imitate the register in the way that each one would do! It is clear that we are far from meeting the definition of the features that experts point out as being universal in oral poetry.

- The bertsolari at the end of the XX century are young, mostly university students or graduates and are also involved in written literary creation in all its forms. At the beginning of the new millennium, the presence of the woman bertsolari, on par with their brothers, is a reality.

- For the first time in history, it is the very bertsolari, themselves, that provide the most novel and interesting reflections on the art which they perform. Even though these thoughts might be, in principle, merely intuitive, they have, nevertheless, established that it is wise to treat improvised bertso as an (oral) literary genre out on its own.

3 Objectives of this book

The main aim of this book is no other than to show improvised bertso as being a specific and differentiated oral genre of literature. It has to be said that this realisation and appreciation demands, amongst other things:

- A **critical appraisal** of the principal socio-cultural characteristics of improvised bertso as it is practised today in a developed western society, as is Basque society. Critical appraisal means that, together with the supply of data and essential procedures so the reader gets an exact idea of what we are trying to analyse, we have included constant references to (a) on the one hand, the challenges posed and the risks run by bertso in the face of the demands of an essentially Information Society and (b) on the other, the advantages that suitable adaptation can inject into bertso and back into society as such. And all this at a time when the link between the local and the global seems to be one of the fundamental pillars of philosophical and cultural thinking.

- An **illustrated description** of the procedures for creation of improvised bertso, its techniques, the mechanics of the thought processes behind it and the limits that extempore performance places on the bertsolari. Luckily, two of the authors of this book are practising bertsolari, such that the description herein offered is, first and foremost, derived from critical self-observation of what it takes to successfully practise

improvised bertsolaritza over many years¹⁴

■ Finally, we propose a new **theoretical framework** which will allow us —we trust— to analyse and research this phenomenon of improvised bertsolaritza in a suitable manner. What is novel about the theoretical framework we suggest is relative, as it fundamentally deals with an adaptation of the canons of classical rhetoric, up-dated with the hindsight of different contemporary pragmatic approaches. The novelty is, thus, not so much in the theoretical framework in itself, as in its application to a phenomenon which, to date, has been exclusively studied from the perspective of written poetry.

In any case, the theoretical framework we propose is the result, not the starting point, of our investigations into improvised bertsolaritza. Over nearly two decades, the in situ observation of the three authors of improvised bertsolaritza has thrown up a number of questions which have remained unanswered using current methodologies¹⁵. It is this necessity for a full understanding of the communicative phenomenon in which we are participants that has encouraged us to look for more suitable theoretical references. We have not held back in adapting to our convenience elements of the most diverse origin, always when these elements facilitate us in synthesising the communicative forms in which we are immersed and to which we are committed.

¹⁴ Regarding this, the authors recognise their debt to improvisers from other cultures which they have had the good fortune to know, given that the contrasting of their art and that of bertsolaritza has helped us better understand our own mode of improvisation. We also recognise the importance of the contribution of a number of studies on Hispano-American oral improvisation amongst which we can quote works by Maximiano Trapero, Domingo Blanco and Elena Llamas. Special mention should go to the work of Alexis Diaz Pimenta, *Teoría de la Improvisación* (Primeras páginas para el estudio del repentismo. Oiartzun. Sendoa, 1998. Antropología y Literatura.). Pimenta is a Cuban improviser, poet and novelist who, in this work, for the first time ever, analysed sung improvisation from the perspective of internal parameters. We would also like to mention Gorra Aulestia and his *Bertsolarismo*, sponsored by the Bizkaia Provincial Government, an English version of which exists, as well as “Bertsolarism. Improvisational Poetry from the Basque Country”. Translated by Lisa Corcostegui and Linda White, Reno, Nevada University Press.

The theoretical framework proposed here enjoys widespread support, particularly amongst the people involved in the research work promoted by the Association of the Friends of Bertsolaritza. To date, this theoretical framework has proved its validity and usefulness at all levels, both theoretical and practical. Amongst other things, the new theoretical framework has allowed us to **reformulate and to order** the questions and problems thrown up by improvised bertsolaritza. These problems and questions, which previously appeared in an unconnected manner and with merely intuitive descriptions, now make up a species of general map of this form of oral literature, and in which each has a meaningful place in the overall picture.

¹⁵ The principal literary sources in this process of theorising around questions arising from the participation of the three authors in bertsolaristic activity are: EGAÑA, Andoni and SARASUA, Jon. *Zozoak beleari*. Irun: Alberdania, 1997. ; GARZIA, Joxerra. *Jon Sarasua berso ispiluan barrena*. Irun: Alberdania, 1998. Zerberri. and GARZIA, Joxerra. *Gaur egungo bertsolarien baliabide poetiko-erretorikoak*. Leioa: UPV, 2000. Doctoral theses. In Spanish can be consulted, GARZIA, Joxerra. *El bertsolaritza, del siglo XIX al XXI. Historia de la literatura vasca*. Madrid: UNED, 2000, p. 402-479. It should be pointed out that the joint research work of the three authors did not commence with this book, but well before. The framework for this joint research is, on the one hand, bertsolaristic activity itself - the numerous performances in which they have participated, two of us as practising extempore poets and the third as presenter and judge of themes to be sung and as director of the TV programme Hitzetik Hortzera from 1988 to 1994. At a more formal level, the three of us have been involved in various senior posts of responsibility in the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza, which, amongst other research activity, has organised a number of congresses about bertsolaritza (*Bertsolarimintza I and Bertsolarimintza II*), in which the three authors have also taken part. Finally, two of the authors are developing, for the Association and with the collaboration of the Dept. of Applied Teaching of the Education Faculty at the Basque University, a method to encourage oracy in schools with a methodology directly derived from the theoretical premises of bertsolaritza explained in this book.

I

**THE SOCIOCULTURAL
REALITY OF PRESENT-DAY
BERTSOLARITZA**

1 The environment in which bertsolaritza finds itself: the Basque-speaking (*euskaldun*) community

Bertsolaritza is a cultural expression with its own specific consumption within the Euskaldun culture¹⁶. To understand bertsolaritza, we have to provide some data about the Euskaldun linguistic community.

The Euskaldun community is a linguistic community of some 600,000 speakers¹⁷ spread over four provinces inside the Spanish State and three

16 On dealing with our cultural reality, we have opted not to define it with political territorial boundaries and, so, it is inadequate to talk about a Basque culture, as such. One analysis approximating to this reality involves taking into account the existence of a number of linguistic communities around which most literary/cultural reproduction centres and considering that, although this coexistence is within co-ordinates of space and time as well as political and social ones, there also exist a myriad of inter-relations, hybrids and fields which are difficult to define. In any case, it is analytically dysfunctional to mix, within the terms of Basque cultural identity, the cultural reality of one of the oldest linguistic communities on the planet (and one of the smallest, fighting for its survival) with the surrounding reality of two languages (Spanish and French) spoken by millions in a number of continents. Thus, to talk of Basque literature, taking physical territory as a reference, for example, is very forced. The cultural universe of Euskara reveals its own essential conditions, develops its own strategies and has its own balancing mechanisms such as that regarding oral expression/writing, has its own market parameters and critical population, and even generates, in part, its own thinking.

17 A linguistic community (in this case that of the Euskaldun or Basque-speaking peoples) is a continuum which encompasses the total speaker and the person who has not acquired knowledge of the language (Sanchez Carrion, 1986) but, for our purposes, we compute those speakers who have a level of the language which enables them to communicate with ease.

within the French Republic. The total population in this Basque territory is about three million. We are, therefore, a community of speakers who are a minority in their native land.

It is also a linguistic community with a long and great history. The latest research in a number of scientific disciplines would appear to confirm its pre-Indo-European origin, and current data shows it to be one of the oldest linguistic communities in Europe and in the world. It is important to be aware of the key steps in its evolution; key moments, events and activities involved in a resistance to the disappearance of its roots; to be aware of its adaptation in a myriad of epochs, of invasions, empires and other contexts, all this and continuing to be what it was. These keys and intuitions also impregnate the way in which we face the future of bertsoaritzza, as they reappear in our struggle to assure the Euskaldun linguistic community that future as a cultural community.

So, bertsoaritzza has had a remarkable trajectory of survival and adaptation in a small community, but it faces a serious challenge for the future. A challenge of survival as, in some areas, it is on the point of extinction and is seriously threatened by novel forms of cultural and linguistic uniformity. It is a challenge, nevertheless, which the wide spectrum of people who support the art are taking on more and more in the activist and entertaining sense of the term than in its negative or dramatic one.

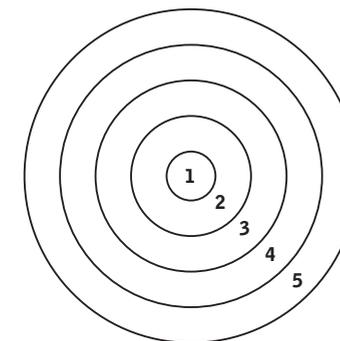
2 Sociocultural relevance of bertsoaritzza within this Basque-speaking community

Bertsoaritzza is a living art form within the cultural activity of the Basque language. The sociological analysis carried out in 1993¹⁸ provide an over-

¹⁸ Study carried out by SIADECO, commissioned by Bertsozale Elkartea.

rall view of the reality of bertsoaritzza and of its place in our linguistic community: 15% of Basque speakers class themselves as great lovers of bertsoaritzza, 35% say they are aficionados and 28% state they are attracted to the artistic activity in some way – a total of 78%. Even though the sociological study was carried out at a crucial moment in the popularity of bertsoaritzza, it is useful as a barometer for the widespread social acceptance of the artistic activity.

The study concludes that this passion for bertsoaritzza, reflected by the survey, can be represented by three concentric circles at the centre of which is a strong nucleus which guarantees future generations of people actively involved (bertsoaris, theme-presenters, critics, judges, teachers, organisers, aficionados) for the future of this expression of oral culture.



Enthusiasm for bertsoaritzza amongst the Basque-speaking linguistic community. Data from the sociological study carried out by SIADECO in 1993.

- 1.- Enthusiasts
- 2.- Moderate devotees
- 3.- Occasional fans
- 4.- Critical and indifferent
- 5.- Non-Basque-speakers

This solidity of what bertsoaritzza actually means within society is not due to chance happening. It has, on the one hand, a historical base, given that bertsoaritzza has played an important part in Basque cultural activity. But, on the other, it is due to the efforts of renewal carried out over the past 20 years by the bertsoaris, and through their socio-cultural stra-

The environment in which bertsoaritzza finds itself: the Basque-speaking (euskaldun) community

Sociocultural relevance of bertsoaritzza within this Basque-speaking community

tegy in which a whole generation of bertsolaris, aficionados and organisers who have collectively guided the artistic activity over the past 12 years.

3 Bertsolaritza today

Bertsolaritza is currently developing in a number of manners and in various fields. We will present an overall perspective of them in order to get a better idea of it as a current sociocultural phenomenon. Firstly, we can divide present-day bertsolaritza into five principal manifestations:

- a) Spectacle or public performance
- b) Contests and championships
- c) Group entertainment activity at an informal level: bertsolari workshops or schools
- d) Bertsolaritza in its content and as an exercise for use in statutory schooling
- e) Sub-genre in the media

Sociocultural relevance of bertsolaritza within this Basque-speaking community

3.1 Spectacle or public performance

The most important level of current bertsolaritza, the most central, is its expression as a cultural spectacle. This occurs both in open and in closed arenas with some 1,200 contracted performances every year. These events have different levels of rules and regulations, from a performance in a capital city cinema or theatre to those in the town square or village hall, within the programme of the local fiestas, not overlooking the recitals in the *frontones* (the Basque pelota ball courts) or the oral artistic activity as post-prandial entertainment in restaurants, cider-farms or gastronomic societies. The organisers of these performances contract a minimum of two and a maximum of eight bertsolaris out of a pool of about one

hundred practising artists (although there are a regular twenty who are more often called up).

PROVINCES	Festivals	Free recital	Post-prandial	Contests	Conferences	Other events	Special format	Championships	Educational	Others	Total
GIPUZKOA	80	147	241	15	9	31	88	3	16	18	648
BIZKAIA	62	66	60	8	1	14	55	24	5	2	297
NAVARRRE	11	22	57	4	0	12	7	8	1	0	122
ARABA	9	6	15	6	2	3	8	3	3	0	55
IPARRALDEA	8	15	26	2	0	10	7	2	19	1	90
TOTAL	170	256	399	35	12	70	165	40	44	21	1212

Bertsolaristic events organised in the year 2000

Bertsolaritza today



Performance in a theatre Photo: N. Moreno y A. Unamuno / Source: XDZ



Performance in a public square Photo: E. Koch / Source: Bertsolari aldizkaria

Bertsolaritza today



Post-prandial performance Photo: A. Elozegi / Source: XDZ

The age of the bertsolaris is between 25 (Maialen Lujanbio) and 69 (Joxe Agirre). The nucleus is made up of the generation that is between 30 and 45 years old at the time of writing.



Joxe Agirre Photo: A. Elozegi / Source: XDZ



Maialen Lujanbio Photo: A. E. / Source: XDZ

Bertsolaritza today

We can differentiate, within this first section referring to the public performance of bertsoes, a number of events:

- Recital¹⁹ directed by a presenter (*gai-jartzailea*) who decides the topic(s) on which the bertsolaris have to improvise. Spectacle organised in theatres, frontons or in the open air.
- Free recital run by two or three bertsolaris, they deciding on what to perform with no recourse to a presenter of themes.
- Dinner-table recital. Post-prandial performances, after street-party style (“popular”) lunches or dinners, organised expressly for such events.

¹⁹ Recital always refers to sung performances.

- Complementary performances at other events: funerals, inaugurations, weddings, political events, tributes, social occasions, and so on.
- Novel formats: *bertso-trama* (bertso-plot) (improvised performance on a theatrical quasi-script which the presenter introduces); experimental performances (monographic on a theme, with a single bertsolari, etc.).

3.2 Contests and championships

The public competitions between bertsolaris are a particularly important manifestation of the art, where the improvisers compete before a jury which grants prizes on points (the champion being bedecked with a large Basque beret or *txapela*). These contests are held at infant, juvenile, area and provincial levels and culminate in the All Euskal Herria Championships, held every four years.

Certamen	Territorio	Edad	Frecuencia
National Bertsolari Championship	Euskal Herria	> 18 years	Every 4 years
Provincial Championship	Bizkaia	> 16 years	Biannual
Classification for National Championship	Gipuzkoa	> 18 years	Every 4 years
Provincial Championship	Araba	> 16 years	Annual
Interprovincial Championship	Iparralde and Navarre	> 16 years	Annual
Inter-schools Championship	Provincial & then national	< 18 years	Annual
Promotion Championship			
- Osinalde (Gipuzkoa)	Area	< 25 years	Annual
- BBK (Bizkaia)	Provincial	< 25 years	Annual
- Berriatua (Bizkaia)	National	< 20 years	Annual
- Xalto (Nafarroa)	Provincial	< 20 years	Annual
- Lizardi (Gipuzkoa)	National	< 25 years	Annual
- Mael Lekuona (Gipuzkoa)	Area	< 20 years	Annual
- Orixe (Gipuzkoa)	National	< 25 years	Biannual
- Xenpelar (Gipuzkoa)	National	< 25 years	Biannual

Table of bertsolaritza championships and contests



Final of the Bertsolaritza Championship in Anoeta 14-12-1997

Photo: A. Gonzalez de Kintana / Source: Bertsolari Aldizkaria

Bertsolaritza today

3.3 Group entertainment at an informal level: bertsolaritza workshops or schools

Yet another expression of bertsolaritza is its use as entertainment, oral literary fun in the *bertso-eskolak* or 'workshop-schools' at local level or among groups of friends. A more informal tradition is the event held in the cider-farms, taverns and farmhouses which today is generally organised by groups of friends and aficionados from the city or town. It is the most spontaneous expression of bertsolaritza, and should provide new generations of talent from which future artists will come.

The bertsolari workshops are varied: some are more informal, others put more emphasis on the training of promising young artists. In any case, and distinguishing them from the teaching of bertsolaritza within statutory schooling, we are talking about nuclei where the know-how and skills of improvising bertsos are passed on, where the many aspects of the

extempore art is practised in group but, in any case, outside the sphere of statutory education.

Territory	Bertso-eskola	Average N° pupils
Araba	12	70
Bizkaia	22	178
Gipuzkoa	52	478
Navarre	6	45
Iparralde	10	69

Table of the *bertso-eskolas*

3.4 Bertsolaritza: its content and its practice in statutory education

Bertsolaritza was introduced, timidly at first, at the beginning of the 80's and has gone from strength to strength in the last 15 years, as a complementary element in primary and secondary education. It is not completely widespread though the use of the artistic activity in its content and as a complement for language and literature as a school subject exists.

There has been two decades of experimentation in this field. Some projects have been organised by teachers on their own initiative and others by teachers specifically involved in co-ordination within the Federation of Ikastolas. A considerable amount of teaching material has already been published (both in *ad hoc* booklets and on cassette, or as content and complementary exercises in language texts). At the moment, some new pedagogical projects are being developed on the contribution by bertsolaritza in education at school, focused, above all, on redressing the shortfalls in linguistic acuity (particularly at an oral level) which can be detected amongst the new generations.

In any case, an overall review of the potential of the contribution of bertsolaritza to school education and how it links up with the Core Curricu-

lum is still under way. However, in this publication, we can give a preview of some of the aspects thereof.

A | *Development of personal skills*

- Positive attitude towards, and abilities for, improvisation
 - Self confidence and self-esteem
 - Creative outlook
- Organisational skills in communication
 - Handling of the variable factors in communication
 - . Perception of the characteristics and determining factors of the recipient
 - . Experience in and management of feedback
 - . Awareness of the conditioning factors of the surroundings
 - Development of the contents to be passed on
 - Treatment of the contents on the level of:
 - . The entertainment aspect: humour, irony, satire etc.
 - . Strategies for impact on the sensibility of the listener
 - . Aesthetic aspects of the formulation: sounds, rhymes, rhythms
 - Abilities for relation with others
 - A co-operative approach; an approach present at the core of dialectic in bertsolaritza.
 - Development of the memory.

B | *Engagement of pupils with their cultural heritage*

- Knowledge of oral improvisation as a universal cultural expression which develops certain human faculties.
- Knowledge about a living Basque cultural reality and enhanced prospects for the possibility of participating in this.
- Engagement in our cultural heritage via sung memory.
- Complementary use of the cultural heritage of bertsolaritza as a means of getting closer to the events, points of view on, and other aspects of our history.

C | *Complementary enhancement of linguistic competence*

- Additional training in resources for oral expression.
- Additional training in the entertainment dimension of the language.

D | *Complementary enhancement of musical competence*

- Familiarisation (conocimiento) with the heritage of Basque melodies contained in the wide-ranging repertoire in bertsolaritza.
- Familiarisation (adquisición) with attitudes and capacities for song by way of the melodies.

3.5 Sub-genre in the media

Bertsolaritza also operates as a sub-genre in the audio-visual media with specific reference to television and radio programmes. These are weekly programmes which operate, above all, using recorded compilations of bertsolaris' performances, accompanied by discussions and comment. This activity is already quite a veteran on radio (bertsos have been broadcast on radio for more than thirty years). Television began to experiment with bertsolaritza ten years ago. Nowadays, the weekly bertsolaritza programme *Hitzetik Hortzera* is a classic programme on Basque television.

Media	Frequency	N° of programmes	N° de hours in a year
ETB (Television in Euskera)	weekly	1	30
Radios at national level	weekly	3	115
Radios at regional level	weekly	3	98
Radios at local level	weekly	7	280

Data relative to 2000

In 1998, Bertsozale Elkarteak defined the aims which bertsolaritza should have for its diffusion as a sub-genre in the media as follows:

- To disseminate the artistic activity of bertsolaritza
- Bearing in mind the saturation point of bertsos on TV.

—Maintaining the priority of live performances without succumbing to the supremacy of the televisual.

- To deepen the enthusiasm for bertsolaritza
- Develop critical awareness of the performances through the intervention of commentators and critics
- Achieving with this a form of instruction for the bertsolaritza enthusiast
- To reflect bertsolaritza in all its diversity
- Diversity as regards territoriality
- Diversity as regards different levels of ability (not solely reflecting the activity of the bertsolaris elite) and as regards styles
- Diversity as regards generations
- Thematic diversity treated by the improvisers (without censorship of any of the political or satirical dimensions)
- To promote the appeal and prestige of bertsolaritza
- With this in mind, taking care over the quality of the broadcasts and of the bertsos chosen for the compilations.
- To reflect the sociocultural movement of bertsolaritza by
- Devoting coverage to the reality of the situation of the bertso-eskolas
- Presenting a televised form of Bertsozale Elkarteak's sociocultural project
- Giving coverage to the written production of bertsos
- Affording room also for the history of bertsolaritza
- To experiment with the relationship between bertsolaritza and the audio-visual media, remaining conscious that we find ourselves before a field which is just opening up and that formulae must be tried out and possibilities tested.

II

**ACHIEVING A BALANCE
AMONGST THE CHALLENGES
FACING BERTSOLARITZA**
Keys to the creativity of the
tradition

1 Some revealing features

The current development of bertsolaritza has, as a cultural expression, features which contrast sharply with some of the main tendencies present in the mass culture. We will look at some of them we believe to be specially significant.

1.1 Total absence of mass production

Mass production on a grand scale is one of the bases of modern production and the modern market. Products which in previous historical eras were manufactured in an individualised way and which were therefore unrepeatable in their exact form, are today produced on a mass scale. This mass-production affects the whole gamut of products from a chocolate-flavoured custard to a record or a pair of trousers.

A large part of the consumption of what we call “culture” is based on these reproductions. Both the most typical cultural products (books, records, videos, films) and those other products which operate using the new communications technology, have, as their basis —at an increasingly global level and with ever-fewer barriers—, the reproduction of some original

creation and normally produced at a great distance, in a different context, and at another time.

Somewhat different is the case of the cultural creation which is produced live before the public. But even in these cultural expressions, in the majority of cases there is still a certain degree of reproduction. While a live song never sounds exactly the same as on its previous airing, this does not stop it from being the umpteenth reproduction of a piece created at another time. The same thing happens in stage art and other cultural expressions.

Bertsolaritza is —and herein lie both its value and its limitations— one of the rare cultural expressions before the public which is not based on any form of mass production. A bertsolari's performance stands out on its own precisely for not reproducing any previously produced ad hoc creation: at its core are improvisation and the total originality of every time and place. The creation in bertsolaritza is unrepeatable: it is the capacity for mental poise and the ability to create in response to a fleeting moment that which stamps character on this creation. It is in that inexorable fleetingness, in that recess of the improviser's mind that the bertso acquires sense and meaning, where is discovered the banality of the straw and the sublimity of the grain.

1.2 Public participation and the vital importance of feedback

In chapter III we set out the various expressions of bertsolaritza: as a public spectacle; as a group entertainment activity; as a school activity; as a sub-genre in the media. It is not difficult to imagine a highly participatory activity in the expression of bertsolaritza when referring to group entertainment activity and school activity. But it is also important to underline the special participatory character of bertsolaritza in its expression as public spectacle.

Some revealing
features

Some revealing
features

The public during the performances



Photo: A. Elozegi / Source: XDZ



Photo: N. Moreno / Source: XDZ



Photo: N. Moreno y A. Unamuno / Source: XDZ

In fact, a public performance of bertsolaris in a town square, theatre or pelota court, is a performance in which public feedback plays a very important role. The importance of the public response or feedback is self-evident in any public spectacle. However, when this spectacle is based on improvisation, on the unrepeatable nature of the time and place, the relationship between creator and public acquires a special importance. In the case of bertsolaritza the reactions of the public—their eyes, their applause, their laughter, their silences—are inputs of primary importance for the improviser. That is, they influence the creative stream itself as a consequence of its improvised nature.

This confers on the bertsolari's performance a high degree of public participation in its outcome: the response of the public has considerable repercussions on the development of the creation. After all, the context in a recital of bertsos is an essentially creative element.

1.3 The nature of live performance in a public area and group participation.

Bertsolaritza, in common with many other cultural expressions, operates principally as a live event requiring the public to attend and participate in a collective act.

In present day mass culture a large part of the cultural consumption is conducted individually and in private: it is in individual houses, in solitude, when the majority of products of what we call “culture”, such as books, records, videos and web pages, are digested. Although the new technologies open up scope for inter-communication and mitigate the effects of the one-way flow of the contents which are transmitted, it is important to recognise that the vast majority of the cultural products consumed by the modern day western citizen are consumed at one remove, in private and with little chance of collective participation and interaction.

Like many other art forms on stage, musicals, etc, bertsolaritza gets peo-

ple out on the street. For the enthusiast, attendance at a bertsolaris performance involves:

- 1 | Going from home to some other town square, pelota court or theatre.
- 2 | Participating in a manner which is to a certain extent interactive, in the development of the improvisation, an act which in itself entails a subtle sensation of participating in a collective event along with the other members of the public. This collective participation is more marked when dealing with a postprandial recital, where a lunch or dinner is specially organised in order to listen to two bertsolaris. In these cases, the collective sense of participation is even greater.

This live collective street element is inherent in bertsolaritza and provides the favourable environment in which reciprocity between creator and audience is possible and which is a key element for the improvised creation of the bertsolari.

1.4 Integrated nature of the audience

The bertsolaritza audience is not made up of a well-defined age-group or a particular type of Euskaldun. It could be said that bertsolaritza embraces a cross-section of the Basque cultural community and that at a typical performance a public can be found which reflects quite a wide range as regards ages, cultural sophistication, occupation and so on.

This contrasts, to a certain degree, with the tendency which exists in cultural consumption towards the sectionalisation of the population where those who listen to a certain type of teenage music, the followers of a particular rock group and those who attend the opera are quite well-defined and generally far removed from each other. In general, every cultural expression, indeed every individual group or artist has, to a large extent, a definite audience profile. This does not mean that in each of them there isn't room for a wide range of types but, normally, not within the main

Some revealing
features

Some revealing
features

body of the audience. There are some cultural expressions, such as the cinema, where the cross-generational and cross-class nature of the audience is self-evident.

In the case of bertsolaritza, it has gone from being an almost exclusively rural expression to being a cultural offering which has developed in an industrial or post-industrial society. Curiously, it would seem singing for the community in response to some type of popular or community need, still makes some sense within the Basque-speaking community. There isn't so great a division by age, class or social status as exist in other types of performance or cultural consumption. In many bertsolaritza performances the audience make-up suggests a certain sense of community or sense of fiesta as a symbolic encounter where people of all types participate. This is something which varies place from place and which it would be necessary to qualify, given that we live in a society in transition and in tension between many tendencies, but it is an element which is still, to a certain degree, valid in bertsolaritza.

Some revealing
features



Photo: N. Moreno y A. Unamuno / Source: XDZ

1.5 Accessibility of the bertsolari: economic self-sufficiency and modesty

In bertsolaritza the creator, the artist, is more or less an ordinary person belonging to the social environment in which he performs: he doesn't acquire a special social or economic status, nor is he distanced from his natural environment, physically, symbolically or economically. The bertsolari elite at the moment consists of two teachers, three students, an electrician, a journalist, a salesman, a university professor, a farm labourer and only the occasional one whose principal source of income (excluding students) is the performance of bertsos. This makes it an economically modest activity which self-regulates its supply and demand without any external intervention and therefore with zero dependence on commercial agents or public sponsorship.

On the other hand, this implies a large degree of social accessibility on the part of bertsolaris. Accessibility which is both economic and personal. To give an example, the most prestigious bertsolari in the Basque community enjoys, on the one hand, a social prestige comparable to that of the Basque Country's best writer or musician, but on the other hand is accessible to any person who cares to ring him to ask him to sing at their wedding, or to propose a charity recital for the ikastola, or some other popular body or movement. This availability or easy access is a legacy which the present day bertsolaris maintain, although for some of them this can sometimes mean a furious rate of public performances (there are some bertsolaris who take part in between 150 and 200 performances a year). All this makes the bertsolari a curious figure who stands somewhere between enjoying a general camaraderie with the public and attaining media stardom.

Some revealing
features

2 What does the bertsolari sing?

One of the key factors in the social response which bertsolarimo arouses in a modern society such as the Basque-speaking one is the fact that the

bertsolari sings forms and contents which connect with a wide cross-section of the audience. A public which is primarily urban, in an industrial society, with university-educated youth, widely travelled and so on. A wide and changing audience. What does the bertsolari sing which allows him, with a degree of success, to connect with the present-day audience?

In principle at least, the bertsolari addresses every aspect of social and personal life. This is one of the important points in the topicality of bertsolaritza: the bertsolari sings of life. It is not just that he doesn't rule out as a theme any ambit of life, but rather that he makes an express effort to make every aspect of life singable, dealt with through improvisation.

Obviously, many aspects of life do escape him: if the subject matter is of little interest for the times or it represents a subconscious taboo in the society of the day, then the same is true for it in the bertsos. But all those areas which, to put it at its crudest, are discussed at the kitchen table, in the bar or on the radio talk shows, can also be dealt with in the performance of the bertsolari. Indeed, we could go so far as to say that subjects which receive little attention in everyday circles *are* reflected in bertsolarimo, due to the eagerness and zeal for new subjects and approaches which have been manifest in bertsolari performances in recent years.

List of subjects employed in the final of the most recent championship.

Below we have brought together some of the themes to which improvised verse singing in Basque alludes to in confrontation format or by the individual bertsolari responding to the theme-prompter. That is to say, we are not here transcribing the whole theme proposed (it often has a longer formulation with a giving out of parts in imaginary, concrete, etc., situations), but we are providing key references to them.

| Social customs regarding alcohol
NGO's and co-operative development

Matrimony or couples and division of labour
Problems related to university education in Basque
Mother-daughter relationship regarding nights out
Reaction to being in Cuba
Father-son relationships
Dispute between mayor and rock group
Antimilitarism
Spatial Aeronautics
Biological cooking
The life of missionaries
The viability of village schools
Father-daughter relationship over a letter
Immigration and Basque culture
Himalayan mountaineering
Retirement and free time
The political conflicts in Euskal Herria and in Ireland
Representation of Christmas
Relation between lesbians
Mobile toilet
Relationship between San Pedro and a recent death
Operation for phimosis
Circus and accident
Sheep-farming
The 35-hour working week
Cancer and cure
Models and obesity
Memory of war.
Pick-pocketing and corruption.

Key words in special exercises proposed for that day:

Kitchen
Desperation

What does the
bertsolari sing?

What does the
bertsolari sing?

What does the
bertsolari sing?

Letter
Broom
Change of century
Prison
Head
Christmas and consumerism
Monday
Forest
Euro
Moon
Computer/PC
Guggenheim,
Loneliness
Street
Basque pelota-player
Sweat
Window
Anniversary of the Burgos trial
Faith
Tie
Key

Bertsolaritza is a type of alternative communication circuit where (at times in ironic tone, at others in humorous voice or in poetic register) national, state, local or international current affairs are ruminated on.

The verb ruminare is suggestive in this context. The cow regurgitates the unchewed grass previously introduced to her stomach and she quietly masticates it, only to gulp it down once again, now mixed with her own juices. The average, modern western citizen gulps down mass-media information to saturation point and the inability to digest all that information is one of the characteristics of (post)-modern man. Bertsolarimo affords a small opportunity to ruminare on part of that information in a

humorous, personal or poetic way, doing so in an artistic, participatory and collective activity.

One might question the intellectual value of the bertsolari's improvisation on a topic of the day or a universal question. It could be argued that it is very insignificant given that intellectual contribution requires learned scientific treatises or long literary works. There are, however, those who see significant contributions in improvisation. In any case, the bertsolaris ruminare, mixing, via poetic and entertaining extemporisation, various strands of information which they introduce, entertain themselves with and, when they get it right, cause others to be entertained.

The contribution of the bertsolari, if they do contribute anything to these subjects, is precisely in this mixture, the mixture of levels, the treatment of current social, political, sexual, cultural and local affairs together with references to the situation of their audience, all impregnated with personal allusions and in discord with the messages of their fellow improvisers. It is in that blend of levels (in that juxtaposition of comment about sheep-cloning with a remark about the theme-prompter's ears, the incongruity of talk of a death or the E.T.A. truce alongside comment on his companion's emotions) wherein the originality of the improvisation operates, and where, from time to time, memorable pieces arise.

In this alternative circuit of rumination on social and personal information, the bertsolari plays a role somewhere between the social and the poetic, between leader and fool, between columnist and satiric newspaper cartoonist, while at the same time remaining an ordinary member of his social milieu. The bertsolaritza performances, which, as was indicated in section I-3.a, exceed a thousand a year, the significant audience numbers, and the inherent complicity in this type of communication all go to make the bertsolari a figure of reference on social opinion of no little importance within the Basque-speaking community.

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3 Achieving a balance amongst the challenges. What are roots for?

The wide-ranging group of people which is the driving force behind bertsolaritza has had, in the last two decades some intuitively derived guidelines which have served to steer bertsolaritza amongst the challenges presented by the modern age. Intuitive guidelines which have been able to give bertsolaritza a dynamic balance to develop within modern culture without leaving behind any of its fundamental nature. These can be summarised in the following way:

3.1 Appreciation of what is of value in one's own tradition

In section 1 of this chapter we noted some revealing features of bertsolaritza:

- The absence of mass-production
- Its participatory nature
- The vital importance of feedback
- The direct, collective sense
- The popular and accessible nature of the artist

These features can be, and often are, understood as valuable by the protagonists of this cultural expression. They are values, modest ones perhaps, of the cultural phenomenon that is bertsolaritza. They are values which mass culture might, some day, wish to recover. Or perhaps not. In any case, the people interested in the development of bertsolaritza asks themselves if these worthwhile features come anywhere near what should be that collection of human activities which our society labels as culture, if they contribute anything to a humanising cultural activity.

A critical view of mass culture tells us that commercialised society of spectacle only sees in a positive light those end-products which can move or be moved at great speed, even if it makes no sense or is lacking

in content. Using the concepts of this criticism, we might say that the agents of bertsolaritza ask themselves if the art form, while perhaps not capable of circulating at great speed, makes any sense, or if it transmits any content.

It could be said that, the answer being affirmative, the people concerned with bertsolaritza have decided to lend it speed to allow this cultural expression to circulate in modern-day society. Not the standard speed of circulation of the fleetingly successful goods of modern culture, but rather the speed with which the people involved dare to advance. Speed, in the end, is necessary to survive, live and develop. Survive and live that is, in the spectacular commercial society that it perhaps criticises, but in which modern bertsolaritza is inevitably involved.

3.2 Choosing to survive through adaptation

This approach by the world of bertsolaritza does not consist in judging that all the options adopted by mass culture are contemptible and that all the “idyllic” features of bertsolaritza must be preserved. That has not been the attitude underlying the survival of Euskera and its culture into this millennium. With such closed-minded attitudes in the face of the new, surely neither Euskera nor bertsolaritza would be alive today. Rather, they have opted to live in the world of the present and of the future.

Is it possible to establish a balance between operating amongst the dominant tendencies and conditioning factors while still remaining true to oneself? Where is the balance between adaptation and identity?

It is a never-ending question and one which always arises in the case of cultural realities with deep roots and of minority outlook. The answer to this question on the point of balance between adaptation and identity throws up an interesting intuitive solution: the creative outlook. The key to facing up to this difficult balancing act is the creative tension that

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emanates from love of the tradition in question and the opening up to the present. It would seem bertsolaritza intuitively understands it in this way.

The significant features mentioned in section 1 of this chapter, and also other features of bertsolaritza which have not been mentioned, form a valuable legacy that bertsolaritza cultural heritage has inherited and which this association has chosen to adopt, develop and modernise. Development and modernisation, however, imply adapting and changing in order to continue making sense and grow (not an unfeeling growth) within a changing cultural panorama with manifold influences and challenges.

3.3 Daring to evolve

The bertsolaris, and in general all those involved in the movement, have opted for trying out new spaces and forms, for getting into television, for looking for forms and dimensions hitherto unknown to bertsolaritza.

This has given rise to certain contradictions, dangers and distortions. The predominant approach has been to remain alert to these distortions. For example, bertsolaritza's entry into television with a weekly programme of anthology and enjoying a considerable audience, has been a major force for boosting interest in bertsolaritza. But bertsolaritza is aware that it works in a similar fashion to nuclear energy: it can give rise to great dangers, above all if its use isn't correctly managed. The large viewing public might make television the principal medium for regulating prestige and renewal of the bertsolaris. Or mean that it changes the perception of bertsolaritza according to the conditioning factors under which this audiovisual medium operates in making its compilations. Or that the interesting features of bertsolaritza such as direct communication, essential feedback or the collective and participatory nature lose their importance. The objections are many and worrying.

While remaining aware of these dangers, those involved in bertsolaritza seem to believe that this is the important battlefield. They put their trust in continuing with bertsolaritza, facing up to the changes that the new trends generate, but maintaining and developing even more deeply the essence of sung improvisation with all its demands of simplicity, starkness and authenticity in improvisation.

Amid all the doubts and contradictions, it can be stated that the reality of bertsolaritza in the year 2001 is interesting and vigorous on all its different levels: quantity and quality of performances, authenticity in the improvisation, organisational level, social acceptance, regeneration of young creators and introduction into the schools.

4 Three keys for development

How can we continue to develop what is the essence of bertsolaritza — an expression of improvised singing— within the mass culture of the XXI century? How does one maintain, adapt and improve on its social acceptance and its cultural, intellectual and entertainment value in Basque society?

The bertsolaritza movement is looking for and experimenting with the answers. Perhaps some of the keys along the road already taken can be highlighted. In the three following sections we will examine three distinct elements in the development of bertsolaritza in the current socio-cultural context:

- . attitudes of self-confidence
- . determination in transmission from generation to generation
- . organisational self-management

4.1 Attitudes of self-confidence

Self-confidence is a necessary attitude in the improviser, in the extempore poet, in the bertsolari. Improvisation, extempore art as a metaphor for an attitude to and of life, is a fascinating theme, although this is not the time or place to go into it. The bertsolari creates bertsos, (s)he improvises. But the people encouraging bertsolaritza are also, in a way, *creating* the artistic activity, they are improvising the route maps for this cultural heritage on a road dominated by mass culture. It behoves us to take this road, and to some extent we already have, with that confident attitude of the improviser. A self-confidence which manifests itself at a number of levels. This can be well illustrated by a text fragment from the presentation by the bertsolaritza representative in the VI Latin-American *Décima* and Improvised Verse Festival²⁰:

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- | “—A self-confident attitude about what we are and what we want to be. A self-confidence despite the difficult but vital challenge facing our language and Basque culture in general.
- A self-confident attitude to bertsolaritza where we do not have any great external references to copy or guide us.
- Self-confidence in the face of political pressures from different directions, within this long and hard political and social situation which our people are currently going through and which also influences our creators in their cultural projects.
- Self-confidence in the face of members of the literary *intelligentsia* who point the finger at us for hypertrophy in oracy or mediocrity in written work. An attitude of self-esteem in the face of the fact what is oral art appears to be something unusual or abnormal (not part of the surrounding *norm*) compared to the powerful cultures that envelope our own, wherein we believe we do not have to imitate canons and mecha-

²⁰ Speech entitled, “Bertsolaritza: the challenge for improvisation in modern culture” presented in the Canary Islands in 1998 in the mentioned Festival.

nisms of others, although they might be stronger in their power to expand. An attitude, in the final analysis, of confidence in that which serves us as persons and creators, and in those values which we intuitively share with that oral art we have inherited.

—Self-confidence in the face of the dangers and distortions which plague our means of transmission and communication (television, new technologies, new formats...). This confidence transforms itself into a belief that we can face and deal with these dangers and that it is worth taking risks in forging ahead, being quite aware that what we are talking about here is not conservation, but creation; the question is not one of surviving, but of living. And it is through creating and living that we make sense of and give sense to our tradition’.

4.2 Transmission from generation to generation

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The bertsolaritza movement, having made a significant mark in these past 20 years, has come down firmly in favour of promoting the passing on of the oral tradition from generation to generation. The encouragement of values amongst young people has been close to the heart with all promoters of the artistic activity.

The on-going work over these two decades has involved the introduction of bertsolaritza into the schools. Workshop-schools for new bertsolaris have been encouraged. Above all, special attention has been given to promoting up-and-coming young people who show promise. All this has also afforded a consolidation of a youth following who see bertsolaris (some as young as themselves) articulating their disquiets and their tastes. We can safely say that the seed sown is bearing fruit.

Participants in the Euskal Herria Championship, 2001. Ages and relationship with school-workshops

Bertsolaria	Bertso-eskola	Age
Amaia Agirre	Tolosa Bertso-eskola	24
Unai Agirre	Hernani Bertso-eskola	26
Ainhoa Agirreazaldegi	Leintz Bertso-eskola	23
Estitxu Arozena	Bortziri Bertso-eskola	26
Amets Arzallus	Hendaia Bertso-eskola	18
Andoni Egaña		40
Bittor Elizagoien		40
Igor Elortza	Durango Bertso-eskola	26
Nerea Elustondo	Legazpi Bertso-eskola	20
Oihane Enbeita	Muxika Garriko Bertso-eskola	23
Arkaitz Estiballes	Santutxu Bertso-eskola	24
Arkaitz Goikoetxea	Oiartzun Bertso-eskola	28
Ekaitz Goikoetxea	Goierri Gipuzkoa Bertso-eskola	21
Bixente Gorostidi	Tolosa Bertso-eskola	28
Iratxe Ibarra	Markina-Xemein Bertso-eskola	27
Jexux Mari Irazu	Hernani Bertso-eskola	29
Unai Iturriaga	Durango Bertso-eskola	27
Sustrai Kolina	Hendaia Bertso-eskola	19
Aritz Lopategi	Gernika Bertso-eskola	32
Maialen Lujanbio	Hernani B Bertso-eskola	25
Jon Maia	Zumaia Bertso-eskola	29
Aitor Mendiluze	Hernani Bertso-eskola	26
Mikel Mendizabal		45
Joxe Munduate	Goierri Gipuzkoa Bertso-eskola	29
Igor Muniategi	Gernika Bertso-eskola	19
Iñaki Murua		45
Iñigo Olaetxea	Bortziri Bertso-eskola	26
Asier Otamendi	Gastéis Bertso-eskola	30
Fredi Paia	Algorta Bertso-eskola	20

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Bertsolaria	Bertso-eskola	Age
Juanjo Respaldiza		37
Ruben Santxez	Gastéis Bertso-eskola	26
Aitor Sarriegi	Goierri Gipuzkoa Bertso-eskola	25
Xabier Silveira	Bortziri Bertso-eskola	25
Jokin Sorozabal		34
Arkaitz Ugartetxea	Mallabia Bertso-eskola	23
Iñaki Zelaia	Hernani Bertso-eskola	28
Aritz Zerain	Hernani Bertso-eskola	28

The generation gap is quite a common element in cultural expressions and neither is bertsolaritza free of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the case of bertsolaritza, transmission prevails over rupture; bertsolaris of all ages have to share the same stage, the same controversy and co-operate in the improvisation. In this, the experience of the older ones is of great value to the younger artists. Amongst the bertsolaris, there is patent respect for the veterans of the art who act as a reference for the younger bertsolaris. Amongst these creators there is an interesting fluidity of inter-generational communication.

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development

X.Zeberio, A.Sarriegi, J.Munduate and Mañukorta Source: XDZ

4.3 Organisational self-management: Bertsozale Elkarte

The key figure which has made all this possible as well as a great deal of the reality described in this book is Bertsozale Elkarte, as the body which has brought together all the movement of and initiatives for bertsolaritza at every level.

In 1986 the bertsolaritza movement opted to organise itself in a self-managed way. Since then, it has worked to create a participatory organisation which has brought together all that which has wished to contribute to this cultural project. A socio-cultural project which consists in placing the foundations for the future of bertsolaritza. This is, in essence, the Bertsozale Elkarte.

A | *General characteristics of the organisation*

The Bertsozale Elkarte has 1,400 members, most of which are individuals: almost all the bertsolaris and the other active members in the world of bertsolaritza. Bertsozale Elkarte is decentralised throughout the Basque Country, with an associated federation in each of the historic territories. The Association thus brings together those active in the expression of the oral art (bertsolaris, writers of bertsos, theme-prompters, juries, teachers, organisers, aficionados) in order to collectively map out strategies and organise activities in a number of areas: creation and management of the Archive Centre, negotiations with the media and public administration, organisation of championships and other special events, monitoring and co-ordination of schools, research, publications, international relations and so on.

Over these fifteen years, little by little, a cultural project has been developed and the foundations have been established to enable great strides to be made in a clear and purposeful manner. This project, the work of the organisation, is based on three fundamental elements: the transmis-

sion of the art from generation to generation, management of growth, and archiving-research. It has also had an all-embracing reality which encapsulates the three elements: territoriality, with the aim of developing all these three aspects throughout the Basque-speaking territories and without leaving aside those zones therein where the language and its culture is going through a critical moment.

Since the creation of the Association in 1986 it was quite clear that it was not simply an association of bertsolaris. A large part of the organisational impetus of the Association has come from persons who are not oral artists as such but aficionados of bertsolaritza. This being the case from a qualitative point of view, it is even more so the case from a quantitative perspective: 1,400 members of which about 200 are practising bertsolaris, with the top artists amongst them hovering about the twenty mark. However, Basque society perceived the association, at the beginning, as one of bertsolaris. Even its name, *Bertsolari Elkarte*-Association of Bertsolaris, indicated as such. To put an end to the disjuncture between name and reality, in 1996 the title was changed to *Bertsozale Elkarte* (which can be translated as the Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza).



The Bertsozale Elkarte logo, donated to the association by Jorge Oteiza

B | *Bertsogintza and bertsolaritza: The artistic approach and the organisational approach*

Two aspects in the trajectory of the bertsolaritza movement have been particularly important. The concept of *bertsogintza* is used to mean the artistic activity of the bertsolaris which they produce and develop as creators. This aspect relates directly to the bertsolaris, who develop it as free

creators, not subject to any organisational interests. So, the Bertsozale Elkarteak does not play a part at this creative level and neither does it intrude on matters which are solely of concern to the circle of bertsolaris. Fortunately, bertsolaritza, in its public expression, is an economic activity which is self-regulated which neither needs nor longs for big grants and so, does not depend on organisations in order to achieve public patronage. This means that the trajectory of their artistic activity is quite natural and spontaneous, guided more by internal (artistic) mechanisms than by the interventions of external bodies.

The term, *bertsolaritza* is used to designate, in a more ample way, the cultural project being encouraged around this creative oral activity. This socio-cultural project consists of guaranteeing the transmission of the art, investigating its contribution to schooling, establishing fields for research into it, encouraging forms of getting the message across, co-ordinating, deciding on a policy of dissemination and extending international relations, amongst others in a series of functions.

The cultural project that is bertsolaritza is in the hands of Bertsozale Elkarteak and, over the last 15 years of experience, it has taken shape with its trials, arguments, deliberations, crises and important achievements. It is a project, therefore, that has been fermenting step by step, in a participatory manner and with contributions from the different Basque territorial realities, a project with a long-term vision

C | *The foundations of bertsolaritza as a cultural project*

That initial zeal to “encourage bertsolaritza” in the first years of the organisation, has, little by little, solidified into a project with three fundamental pillars, as pointed out in part (a) above: transmission, dissemination and archiving-research. Apart from these three, the socio-cultural project that is bertsolaritza has a nature that is immutable: territoriality.

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Let us briefly examine these key elements which make up the work of the Bertsozale Elkarteak:

- **Transmission.** In order to ensure the transmission of bertsolaritza to new generations, there are two levels: on the one hand, how bertsolaritza is handled in primary and secondary schools and, on the other, the bertsolaritza workshops. One of the tasks here is to examine the contribution of the art in the compulsory school sector and develop materials and teaching programmes. On the other hand, as the Bertsozale Schools are spreading throughout the Basque Country, their co-ordination is a major task, as these school-workshops and groups form the “social base” of the whole bertsolaritza movement.
- **Dissemination.** The aim here is to encourage the dissemination of bertsolaritza in a balanced manner. It does not behove to propagate the artistic activity in any old way or with the attitude, “the more the better”, but to promote it in a sustainable manner. In order to achieve this, a number of fronts have been opened up, taking great care of any presence bertsolaritza might have in the media, encouraging the artistic activity throughout the different territories by organising special events, championships, publications, and, in general, all initiatives regarding the dissemination and promotion of this artistic activity.
- **Archiving and research.** The third pillar consists of promoting the keeping of records and encouraging research. This involves the systematic collection of bertsolaristic creation and concomitantly, the promotion of thinking and university research in the field. The star resource here is the Xepelar Archives Centre which, in its ten years of existence, has had three professionals working exclusively to document some 20,745 records in storage/retrieval systems. Xepelar collects improvised bertsos from all over the Basque territories, although not all in their totality, it does so in a systematic way and, is generally creating a centre for all and any kind of documented records on improvised singing. The strategy

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development

of the Bertsozale Elkartea for the past ten years has been, with a great deal of organisational and budgetary effort, to create and maintain the Xenpelar Centre. Since 1997, a number of Basque public administrations have co-participated in its financing by means of agreements signed with the Bertsozale Elkartea. This Centre is also a platform for establishing relations and co-operation with other centres round the world and share experiences and records about oral literary culture and improvisation from all over the planet. Besides Xenpelar, this third pillar of the Bertsozale Elkartea project is involved in drawing up an overall policy for research into bertsolaritza. Seminars and symposia, such as Bertsolamintza, are organised as well as participation in a number of university forums, summer courses and so on.

■ **The sense of territoriality.** The territory of bertsolaritza is delimited only by Euskara, by the Basque language. From its birth, Bertsozale Elkartea has been a decentralised association, which is currently constituted in a federation of territorial associations. There is, thus, an association in each of the historic Basque territories: Bizkaia, Alava, Navarre, Iparralde (the continental Basque Country, in French territory) and Gipuzkoa make up the Bertsozale Elkartea in a federated way. Territoriality is always present, not only in the decentralised organisation but also in those very aims of its work in the three fundamental pillars: Bertsozale Elkartea targets its special efforts and impetus in those zones where the health of Euskara and, thereby, of bertsolaritza, shows signs of most weakness.

D | *Self-management of bertsolaritza: a model for social action in cultural initiatives*

The people grouped round bertsolaritza have come down firmly in favour of the management of its own affairs. The key elements in this self-organisation, all developed intuitively, may be described in the following way:

- Voluntary participation of those involved

- Absence of ideological barriers: recognition of internal diversity. Everyone who identifies with the aim of encouraging bertsolaritza and with the project directed to that end, has a place in the organisation.
- Participatory and democratic organisation
- Principle of the subsidiary: the primacy of territorial and functional decentralisation in decision-taking, as opposed to democratic centralism
- Development of the culture of improvised oral confrontation and of different positions. The culture of a consensus worked at and for, opposed to the game of majorities and minorities.
- Combination of voluntary and professional work. Remuneration for work at the market level

E | *Opening up to the outside world*

Bertsozale Elkartea is an association open to all types of relations both within Basque language culture (such as Basque public administration and other bodies) as well as with international organisations. It has good relations with other social groups which are involved in Basque culture, with the Basque public administration, political parties, social movements, and private bodies within Basque society as well as with artists experiences in improvised singing at an international level.

Regarding public administration bodies, the Bertsozale Elkartea requests help from and offers help to them involving those projects deemed to be of public interest. The socio-cultural project of bertsolaritza has a significant degree of autonomy with respect to the political administration, given that the artistic activity (bertsogintza) in which it is based is quite self-sufficient economically in a modest way and so does not have to depend on public government purse-strings. Nevertheless, it is true that, regarding the pillars of the Bertsozale Elkartea (transmission, dissemination and archiving-research) there is a significant area of co-operation with the public authorities.

Given all this, the Bertsozale Elkarte has survived ups and downs with government bodies and, at times, has expressed its manifest disagreement with certain of their policies. In fact, and as a civil social movement, Bertsozale Elkarte has always reserved the right and viewed as an obligation to assess the actions of public bodies and to give its opinion on cultural policy. Linked with this, the Association sees it as a democratic right and an obligation to inform society about the ins and outs with these public bodies (whether negative or positive), even though this may, at times, entail rows and the sacrifice of some grant or other.

To finish up with relations further afield: in recent years Bertsozale Elkarte is particularly interested in cultivating international relations by participating in international meetings on improvised singing, currently centred in Latin America and the Iberian peninsula. A network of contacts is being created with the view to forming links and channelling the organisation of international networks and events which bring together all the experiences of sung improvisation on the planet.

**Three keys for
development**

III

THE PROCESS OF CREATING IMPROVISED *BERTSOS*

Improvised verse is, above all, and as its name indicates, an act of improvisation.

“Improvise” is a verb the pejorative sense of which is often transmitted in present-day society. Used in this sense, it is the last recourse of those who are unable to plan or build on what might have been planned; it is a last minute “everyone for themselves” desperation, the result of which is always imperfect and ephemeral.

The perception of a positive side to “improvisation”, on the other hand, abounds in the sporting context, when such-and-such a super sports-person has been capable of improvising a move here or a strike there, or such-and-such a manager has been able to solve a problem on the spot, undoubtedly due to his great capacity and genius for “improvisation”.

As far as bertsolaris are concerned, the act of improvisation has nothing to do with either of these phenomena. The bertsolari does not improvise for lack of ability to plan; nor because (s)he is necessarily an extremely talented person. For the bertsolari improvisation is a way of expressing her/his ideas and feelings, a form of cultural manifestation which goes way back in time and is part of the cultural heritage which the bertsola-

ri has been immersed from childhood. For bertsolaris, improvisation is a pre-established framework of entertainment wherein their relationship with themselves and their surroundings can be resolved dialectically.

The improvised *bertso* has something magical about it and, although it is in no magic, this is what the public expects, waiting in expectation for the white rabbit to appear, knowing full well that the top hat does not have a false bottom, unless it is the linguistic and dialectic skill of the bertsolari. Improvising bertsos is neither trickery, on the one hand, nor is it necessarily the fruit of an extraordinary genius.

It may seem paradoxical, but improvisation for the bertsolaris is very much a thought-out act. They have continuously lived out and practised situations analogous to those they may have to face, at any given moment, on the stage of their extempore art. They have learnt to work the oral and mental skills of this art form within the rules of improvised bertsolaritza (the given musical airs, rhyme, meter...) in such a way that the restrictions are not so for them, but an aid to improvise more freely. They have become used to soaking up all what may, at some time later, opportunely come in handy for the moment of improvisation.

It is a labour of management and logistics. The idea is to keep the store well filled and then put everything in order so that, at the right moment, the most complete and attractive presentation can be given. It is known that pure improvisation does not exist; that nobody improvises anything starting from scratch. So where does the beauty of improvised bertsolaritza lie? It comes from the fact that it is one of the few cultural expressions wherein the moment of artistic creation and that of its exposition to the public are one and the same. The bertsolari improvises and, as (s)he does, the public listens.

When the interspersing of certain English words into everyday conversa-

tion was the fashion, the term “performance” caught our attention quite powerfully. This must be something very unusual, something very innovative, very... Until we realised that it was not anything more or anything less than what we, improvising bertsolaris, had been doing for years and years.

1 Formal aspects

To construct an improvised bertso there are a number of formal aspects to be considered. The bertso consists of a **sung, rhymed and measured** discourse. Thus, independently of the content of such discourse, the **air**, the **rhyme**, and the **metre** are inseparable elements of improvised bertso singing. We can say that the person who can sing and construct the bertso with the chosen metre and rhyme, has the minimum skills of the improvising bertsolari. But this is just the technical aspect of the profession. The quality of the bertso depends on the dialectic, rhetorical and poetic values of the constructed verse.

1.1 The melodies

Unlike other improvisers (Cubans, Mexicans, Mallorcans, Colombians...) the improvising bertsolari always performs without musical accompaniment; but her/his discourse is always a sung one.

The melodies used are generally traditional airs, the majority being anonymous and which have survived through time. Other tunes used by the bertsolari are modern ones composed by Basque or foreign songwriters whose compositions have coincided with the metre normally used for improvisation, or airs composed by musicians at the specific request of the bertsolaris themselves. Thus, there are three sources which the bertsolari uses as a supply store of melodies:

- traditional melodies
- modern melodies coincidental in metre
- melodies expressly commissioned

Regarding the number of existing melodies, we can say that Juanito Dorronsoro, the main researcher on the theme, has managed to collect the very admirable number of 2.775 tunes, although the truth is the actual number of airs used in public performances is much less, each period using those melodies that are the favourites for the time.

In a discourse with no musical accompaniment whatsoever, the voice of the bertsolari is primordial on communicating the content of the discourse. Up to the mid-XX century, it was a necessary condition for the bertsolari to have a potent, as well as graceful, voice so as to be heard in any open-air space. With the advent of the microphone, this requisite became a secondary consideration.

Nowadays, more than having a potent voice or a perfectly modulated one, the bertsolari has to have the ability to sing in a way that is in harmony with the subject matter of the moment. The success or failure of the communicative act depends greatly on the choice of a suitable melody more than on the quality of the voice of such-and such a bertsolari.

It is amongst these 2.775 melodies mentioned that some are more suitable for transmitting the feelings associated with an epic poem; others are more suitable for narration; yet others are pertinent to drama; and others to the purely descriptive ... The pertinent choice of melody is an important factor in the successful communication of this art.

1.2 Metre

Bertsolaris compose their bertsos accommodating them to a definite metre or, to be more exact, metres.

Each verse contains a pre-established number of puntus and these, in turn, consist of a particular number of syllables. We are not going to go into the interesting improvised oral debate about whether or not bertso-laris hold the same concept of what is a syllable. As Luis Michelena said:

Leaving aside the oldest singing, with its irregular metre, later verse making, as in the case of the clerical canto of the Middle Ages, was normally based on the number of syllables and rhymes.²¹

Although there have been studies questioning the syllabic character of Basque verse, most subscribe to Michelena's thesis, a thesis confirmed by bertso-laris themselves. It is certainly true that the bertsolari never spends time counting syllables while improvising. It would be hard work and, moreover, a waste of time. The bertsolari knows perfectly well which metre the melody chosen to improvise on belongs to. If (s)he sings without forcing the melody, it is clear that the artist is complying with the rules regarding the pertinent number of syllables. If, on the other hand, the tune is forced by cutting it short or prolonging it, it is clear that the rules of metre for the verse in question are not being complied with.

The question of METRE is one the biggest headaches facing the improviser. Though melody and rhyme are questions of maxima and minima (one can sing or rhyme badly, very badly, acceptably well, well or sublimely) but there are no variations acceptable or allowable regarding the metre. It is either correct or incorrect with no grey area in between, although there are a few melodies where the usual 7/6 has evolved into 8/6 through usage.

Moreover, it is metre that is the most difficult element facing the bertso-

²¹ MICHELENA, Luis. *Historia de la Literatura Vasca*. Madrid: Minotauro, 1960, p. 64.

lari when preparing for a performance. While rhyme, melodies, lexicon and even content of distinct subject matter may be ciphered and stored with the aim of retrieval at a future opportune moment, the bertsolari always has to accommodate to the metre. And, although constant use and practice provides great self-confidence, the act of improvisation is always given to metrical slip-ups which stain any composition, no matter how ingenious it may be.

The metres most used in bertsolaritza are the following:

Zortziko handia

```

----- 10
----- 8 A
----- 10
----- 8 A.
```

Formal aspects

The Zortziko Handia is, thus, a composition of four *puntuak* in which the odd lines have ten syllables and the even ones eight; it is these even lines, moreover, that have to rhyme with each other. The rhyming is always of the same family.

It is striking the coincidence in the use of the eighth syllable by improvisers from other cultures that we know. Those from the Alpujarra (Granada), like those from the Canary Islands and Cubans ... , improvise in *décimas* which, as is well known, are ten verses of eight syllables each.

Hamarreko handia

Is the same structure but with an added puntu (transcribed, except in Iparralde, as a pair of lines) and, as such, has a fifth puntu added, with

all the difficulty that this entails. It is, perhaps, a paradigm appropriate for more elaborate discourses than the previous one, given the greater space for the text.

```

----- 10
----- 8 A
----- 10
----- 8 A.
```

Formal aspects

Zortziko txikia

In the Zortziko Txikia the structure of four *puntuak* transcribed in eight lines is kept as is the rule of rhyming at the end of the even lines, but the number of syllables in each verse is modified. Given the fewer syllables and the more compact discourse, this type of metre and its corresponding melodies are more given to humorous situations, of pure dialectic and less to the epic or dramatic discourses, although this last observation by no means is an immutable rule.

```

----- 7
----- 6 A
----- 7
----- 6 A
----- 7
----- 6 A
----- 7
----- 6 A.
```

Hamarreko txikia

Identical to the previous with the addition of an extra *puntu* or rhyming verse.

```

----- 7
----- 6 A
----- 7
----- 6 A.
```

Formal aspects

Other paradigms

There are paradigms other than the four previously mentioned. They are generally shorter or longer than the four mentioned above but co-incident with the number of syllables in a *puntu* and in the fact that the even-numbered lines *puntu*

Thus we have the KOPLAK, used for centuries for creating popular sung ballads of many kinds and the origin of which lies in the medieval romantic ballads. Its structure is:

. Kopla handia

```

----- 10
----- 8 A
----- 10
----- 8 A.
```

Or it can also be:

. Kopla txikia

```

----- 7
----- 6 A
----- 7
----- 6 A.
```

These are, thus, just the half of a Zortziko Handia and half of a Zortziko Txikia respectively.

There are also much more recently created metres, often created by the bertsolaris themselves with the view to success in a championship. This is even more complicated. The greater the number of *puntu*, the greater the number of rhyming words... and the greater danger of falling, without a safety net, and the greater the success if the bertso is rounded off in a victorious manner. And, not only that. It is a response to a modern tendency wherein the improviser needs sufficient textual terrain in order to demonstrate her/his originality, the complexity of the argument, the distance from the proposed theme... Nowadays, the context not being so agglutinative as before, it is the text which bears the weight of communicative success to the greatest extent. And this is why the trend is for the text to get longer.

Here are some examples:

Formal aspects

. Zazpi puntukoa

----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A.

Formal aspects

. Naufragoarena

----- 10 A
 ----- 10 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A (repeat)
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A (repeat).

. Bederatzi puntukoa

----- 7
 ----- 6 A
 ----- 7
 ----- 5 A
 ----- 7
 ----- 6 A
 ----- 7
 ----- 6 A
 ----- 7
 ----- 5 A.

Formal aspects

Apart from these, there are other paradigms that we could cite, but the ones in hand will do to illustrate some general principles:

- Except occasionally —we will deal with that later on—, the puntu is always of the same group (A) and always has consonance. The difficulty lies, therefore, in finding the right number of words which rhyme together, without repetition. If the rhyming word or foot is repeated, it is said that the bertsolari has committed POTO, the technical error most penalised by both the public and the jury.
- The metre may vary but the oral segments must always be very similar: 10 syllables, or eight or seven, or six or five... This means that the improviser has to fit her or his thoughts into the segments of 10 syllables, eight, seven six... and not to any others, greater or smaller.
- The greater the number of puntus, normally the longer the text. The desire to take risks in Championships has encouraged the proliferation of bertsolaris who venture forth with bertso of difficult and long paradigms.

Not always is the risk worthwhile. The sails of the text have to be trimmed to the discourse and the discourse to the idea created from the proposed topic. An improviser who, having no idea what to sing, is always anxious to complete the chosen long paradigm that (s)he has started. And, even despite technically managing to find a good way out, the equilibrium of the constructed text is not the ideal one and, as a result, the communicative performance suffers.

The only paradigms where bertsolaris are obliged to combine different kinds of rhymes are those which involve a particular melody. They are, thereby, rare exceptions in improvisation, e.g.

. *Iparragirre*

----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 7 B
 ----- 7 B
 ----- 8 A
 ----- 10
 ----- 8 A.

Formal aspects

. *Juana Bixenta*

----- 10 A
 ----- 11 A
 ----- 10 B
 ----- 10 B
 ----- 5 C
 ----- 10 C
 ----- 10 C.

In conclusion, we can say, with reference to metre, that approximately

90% of the art normally produced in bertsolaritza limits itself to those paradigms outlined at the beginning: the Zortziko Handia and Zortziko Txikia and the Hamarreko Handia and Hamarreko Txikia.

The *kopla* are usually used for singing round the streets, and in the other paradigms in championships and festivals.

Finally, in reference to the rules for the use of metre, the use of caesura must be highlighted. In the segments of ten syllables, the line has to be constructed, as a rule, in a 5 + 5 syllables combination and not in any other. This has an additional difficulty to it: it is not good enough to fit an idea to a metre of 10/8 syllables but to one of (5 + 5)/8. And, as on many other occasions, for the experienced improviser, this limitation provides a kind of advantage. Deep in the artist's mind, (s)he is used to thinking in this metre and all that which does not fit in with it, apart from being technically damaging, is an obstacle in the thought processes to such an extent that a failed caesura can bring the whole structure of the bertso tumbling down.

Formal aspects

An example of caesura correctly carried out:

| Gure etxean(5)/ bizi garenak(5)
 aita, ama ta lau ume (8).

An example of incorrect caesura:

| Gure etxeraino (6)/ heldu ziren(4)
 Aita, ama ta lau ume (8).

1.2 Rhyme

For many, rhyme the formal quid of a bertso. Without rhyme there is no bertso. If we rhyme (though the quality may not be excessively rich) we are constructing a bertso.

The rhyme (*puntu*), as we have seen, is always of the same family or group and its level of consonance is greatly valued. We can appreciate that, for example *burua* (head) *puntus* with *ordua* (hour or time). But this consonance is relative, limited as it is to the last two syllable-vowels of each word and, thus, regarded as a poor rhyme. *Elizan* (in the church) and *gerizan* (sheltered) make up a better quality of rhyming: the suffix (-an) and the preceding fricative (z-) rhyme as does the vowel preceding this fricative (-i-) and even the vowel forming the first syllable in each word. (-e-).

So, from the classical point of view of distinguishing between rich and poor rhymes based on their consonance, we would have to say:

Burua / ordua is a poor rhyme

Elizan / gerizan, on the other hand, is a rhyme of quality.

Nevertheless, the level or quality of consonance is not the only factor when considering rhyme. Perhaps rhyme is an aspect beyond the merely formal for the improviser when (s) he is constructing a bertso. It may seem that both metre and rhyme are technical difficulties, formal laws to be abided by and which restrict the bertsolari. And indeed they are. But this does not mean that the improviser could construct better texts, with improved content, greater reasoning and so on if (s)he did not have such constraints. Moreover, due to force of habit and mental training, what is a restriction for a non-improviser, is an advantage for the improviser. The improviser creates using these rules. And the bertsolari feels more comfortable when constructing her or his discourse corseted by the rules of the game than with a vacuum created by a total lack of norms.

So the bertsolari, in one sense, never says what (s)he wants to say but what is permitted by the metre and the rhyming words which the artist has stored and can, at the opportune moment, retrieve. There does not

Formal aspects

exist a bertsolari who utters what they want to say at the same time as rhyming and using a metre though there are bertsolaris who rhyme and use metre and, at times of great lucidity, come close to it.

From this viewpoint, rhymes are not poor or of quality only as regards their level of consonance. On commencing the construction of the bertso, the improviser tries to pertinently choose the final rhyming word (*azken punta*) with which they are going to wind up the discourse. This is because the artist has to find, in that mental store, others of the same rhyming family and have, on the tip of the tongue, a sufficient reserve of suitable responses on the theme that has been proposed.

Moreover, the *puntus*, apart from being formally poor, half-good, rich or of quality, are elements which have to do with the very discourse, itself. The bertsolari fits the content of what (s)he is going to say around the available rhyming words. Thus, the work of storing, ordering and retrieval in the memory of such elements is primordial.

Bertsolaris may have X number of words from this or that group in their heads. For example, they have twenty terms which end in INA. But if they have them in an unordered fashion, they cannot use them in the most effective way for one type of discourse or another.

For example: *sorgina* (witch) *egina* (done), *ahalegina* (attempt), *grina* (passion), *ezina* (impossibility), *panpina* (doll), *zina* (oath), *osina* (nettle), *kriskitina* (crackle), *okina* (baker), *jakina* (evident), *bina* (two for one), *zezina* (a dried meat), *erregina* (queen), *mina* (pain), *arina* (light), *dotrina* (doctrine), *irina* (flour), *latina* (Latin), and *pinpirina* (coquette).

In principle, there appears to be more than a sufficient number of rhyming words available for any metre given that, as we have seen, mostly only four or five rhyming words are used, being extremely rare the use of a composition with nine.

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And it is true that, with this number (20) of rhyming terminations, nearly everything, if not everything, can be said. But the quality of the composition is greater when the rhyming words used are optimum to the theme which is being sung.

So, an efficiently ordered group of puntus will result in a more exact and effective discourse. The aforementioned “totus revolutus” requires ordering.

All bertsolaris carry out this mental ordering, in a personal way, consciously or unconsciously. Each bertsolari has their ordered place for each rhyming word, although with time, this may change, either because some have been forgotten or because those rhyming words most used in one period are not those used in another.

Formal aspects

A form of ordering, not the only nor necessarily the best, may consist of several factors:

- Frequency of use
- Polyvalent nature of certain word-rhymes
- Division into grammatical categories
- Greater or lesser level of consonance
- Loan words from other languages

If we take into account all the above-mentioned factors, the mental ordering of the rhyming words in each group may be seen in the form of a daisy in which we store the most used words and those of greatest polyvalence at the central nucleus, and then we arrange the rest of the words on different petals according to their semantic or grammatical value or to their origin, etc.

An example of mental ordering with the group of words ending in “ina” could be the following:

1
Grina
Ahalegina
Egina
Ezina
Atsegina

2
Panpina
Erregina
Sorgina
Krabelina
Pinpirina

3
Arina
Duina
Fina

4
Dotrina
Latina
Jakina

5
Zina
Osina
Zezina

6
Liftina
Puentina
Pierzina

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7
Mina
Samina
Sumina

8
Kriskitina
Irina
Okina

In this way, the improviser knows that the most used and polyvalent rhyming words are those in group 1; group 2 has a series of substantives very easy with which to associate adjectives; group 3 contains only adjectives; 4 has words of the same semantic field; 5 of words with a great consonance amongst them; on petal 6 there are loan words from Spanish, English, etc.

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What the bertsolari does is to alternatively combine words from one petal with those from another. Starting by rhyming “mina” from petal 7, continue with “puentina” from petal 6, then use “jakina” from 4 and finally, take up “atsegina” and “egina” from petal 1.

Another example: puntu ending in “ana”.

1
Plana
Lana
Afana
Dana
Norengana

2
Laztana
Bakana

3
Iragana
Joana

4
Portzelana
Aduana
Patxarana
Diana
Porlana

5
Dama
Fama
Xarma
Narama
Zarama

6
Harremana
Esana
Izana

Formal aspects

The ordering of the rhyming words gives a methodological and practical advantage. It is methodological because, on combining words from different grammatical categories, the oral structures needed to finish using them will be different and will give the constructed text more life. It will ensure variety and avoid monotonous discourse.

Practical because it makes it easier not to repeat a rhyming word. Remember this is one of the technical faults (POTO) most penalised, both by the public in general and by the juries in contests in particular. POTO is simply the repetition of a rhyming word in the same bertso (in

the same discursive unit). Given that in bertsolaritza all the puntus are of the same family (A), the skill of the bertsolari consists of looking for many words from this group, but without repeating any of them. The POTO can occur due to carelessness or to reflexes insufficiently fast to be able to hit upon, in a split-second, the appropriate rhyming word from that mental store that every bertsolari carries around with her/him. The above-explained ordering minimises the risk of carelessness and facilitates the coming to the surface of the improviser's mind of those pre-fixed puntus.

Regarding the POTO, we should point out that it is not considered as such if the repeated rhyming word is polysemic and takes on different meanings in each of its uses. This bertso by Florentino Goiburu is well known, in this respect:

Formal aspects

| Leitzan jaio ta Orion
bizi dana HERRIZ;
parekorikan ez du
rimaz eta NEURRIZ.
Denok txoratzten gaitu
bere bertso BERRIZ;
Aho sapai ederra,
eztitsua BERRIZ
ez dakit holakorik
sortuko dan BERRIZ.

(Born in Leiza and Orio / his domiciled town; / an equal to nobody / in puntu and metre; / all of us are mesmerised by him / with his bertso IMPROVISED; / His lovely voice, / is honey, MOREOVER; / I will never see a bertsolari / like this AGAIN.)

At first glance, it would seem that the bertsolari is committing double “poto” with the repetition of the rhyming word, *BERRIZ*, twice. Nevertheless, the accepted meanings in the three uses are clearly different with

the first *BERRIZ* in “bertso-berriz” translating as “IMPROVISED BERTSOS”, the second as “MOREOVER” and the third as “AGAIN”.

Florentino Goiburu has cleverly taken advantage of the polysemy of *BERRIZ* so as to, without falling into the trap of POTO, achieve a full consonance.

So, MELODY, METRE and PUNTU constitute the formal aspect of the bertso. The person who sings, rhymes and constructs the puntus round the chosen metre is constructing a bertso. Although, as in football, it is a long way from being able to kick a ball to being a footballer.

In the bertsolari's case, the technical skill is no more than this: technical skill. It is the content transmitted which is the primordial factor in connecting with the people. And, when this subject matter is being constructed, each bertsolari is a world unto herself or himself. It is true that with a greater cultural and linguistic corpus, it should be easier for the artist to find suitable subject matter for the proposed theme. But the analysis of content takes us into a field difficult to research.

Formal aspects

What all bertsolaris do have in common is a strategy to get their message across to the public. Our aim, in the following pages, is to explain this strategy.

2 Principal strategy in the construction of the improvised bertso

The sung bertso lasts for approximately 20 seconds (koplá) or one minute (bederatzi puntukoa), which can always vary somewhat, depending on the bertsolari.

Thus, for both the transmitter and the recipient, these are small doses of

discourse in time. Both identify the bertso as the unit of discourse. In other words, in each bertso of approximately 40 seconds, the transmitter has to be able to create a text which is self-sufficient and which manages to connect with the heart and soul of the recipient with its grace, its depth, its brilliant dialectic deduction, and so on.

The principal way the bertsolari carries out his art is through the mode of improvised oral confrontation, the verbal duel with another. One defends their role or their person with their own arguments and tries to rebut those of the opponent. In strict turn, they interchange a set of three, four, six or ten bertsos in order to achieve a more plausible argument than the opponent. Each bertso, nevertheless, stands on its own as a complete discursive unit.

When the bertsolari sings alone on such-and such a theme, the same happens. If the artist sings three bertsos, for example, it is important to maintain the common thread of the discourse in such a way that one bertso does not contradict the content of the previous one. Even so, it is the individual bertso that has to be perceived by both creator and the listener as the principal discursive unit.

Principal strategy in the construction of the improvised bertso



Photo: E. Koch / Source: Bertsolari aldizkaria

2.1 General Strategy: the sting in the tail

The essence of the problem lies in how the artist can manage, in 40 seconds, to attract the attention of the recipient and keep the listener glued to the bertso. To this end, the bertsolari has a basic strategy which is used in a systematic way: think up the end first.

It may seem a platitude, but maybe it is not. How many times have we witnessed discourses of various kinds where there has been no connection with the audience because the content transmitted was not organised in a suitable form? The bertsolari, on hearing a proposed theme, turns on her or his mental machinery. And this is carried out within parameters that are very close to those of classical rhetoric, as we will attempt to show in chapter IV. The bertsolaris think about what they are going to say and intuitively plan in which order they are going to say it, keeping the most potent and elaborate verbal strategy for the end. The artist starts to sing and, as (s)he goes along, tries to express the subject matter in a poetic, dramatic, epic or whatever form optimum for the situation. And all this supported by memory to ensure that the oral punch line at the end (thought up at the beginning) has not been forgotten and to ensure that the content is transmitted to the audience with the greatest impact.

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This fundamental strategy in keeping what was thought up at the beginning for the final discourse gives the artist two advantages:

- Methodological. If the bertsolari knows, from the start, where and how the bertso is going to end, the path that has to be followed to get there is that much clearer.
- Communicative. A well rounded-off discourse is synonymous with success in any performance. It is better to start lamely and finish off reasonably well than the other way round. Moreover, the audience perceives the bertso in an inverse manner to that in which the bertsolari conceives

it, the artist knowing how the bertso is going to end but the audience only starting to hear it, logically, from the beginning. They are waiting, expectantly and anxiously, for the end. It is not magic but they feel as if it is. The co-incident of attention of the transmitter and of the recipient should be avoided. The bertsolari's mind, on opening the mouth, is focused on the final lines of the bertso while the audience is concentrating on the first words uttered by the artist. This is why they are so joyfully surprised when the bertsolari constructs a text that rises in crescendo to the potent finishing touch, the sharp punch line which the bertsolari has thought up before uttering even a word.

Methodologically, the bertsolari, before starting to sing, in the few seconds elapsing between the theme being proposed and the recital of the discourse, thinks out a rational ideological and verbal plan, chooses a melody and fits the plan around the chosen metre and melody. Or, alternatively, the artist chooses a melody of a specific paradigm as (s)he has fitted the plan to a concrete number of syllables.

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This always the first step. The bertsolari has already constructed the plan for the end of the bertso and has fitted it around a specific number of syllables.

2.2 Practical example-1: "The dilemma of designer drugs"

Let us take the case of the following topic: "A good friend of yours has offered you some pills which will guarantee you better performance on many fronts. You are hesitating about taking them...". This was proposed to Aitor Mendiluze in a festival in Elgoibar in 1997. His task was to construct three bertsos by himself. We will now look at the process of this creation for the first bertso.

Aitor, on hearing the theme proposed, looked for an argument which reflected his own opinion about designer drugs.

The first argument to enter his head was the following: "hobetuko naiz, baina neu izan gabe" (I would be better, but I would not be me).

He then mentally fitted this idea and sentence around a metre of 10/8 syllables.

	Hobetuko naiz, baina orduan	10
	ni izan gabe ordea!!!	8 A.

(*I would be better, but I would not be me*).

It should be taken into account that, on fitting this argument around this number and arrangement of syllables, Aitor had other possibilities open to him to say the same but in a different way. For example:

	Hobetuko naiz, baina tamalez	10
	neu izateai utzita.	8 A

Or

	Hobetuko naiz baina orduan	10
	ni neroni izan gabe.	8 A

He had many other alternatives to choose from linguistically but Aitor chose what he did for its impact and knowing that a group of words end-rhyming in EA has a sufficient and suitable lexicon in order to construct a discourse which will take him and his bertsos to the successful conclusion that he had decided upon at the start. If he had had a different intuition, he would have had to change the formulation and adopt one of the other alternative bertso lines.

So, Aitor has found his thesis-argument. He has fitted it around a specific metrical formula and he has fashioned the phrase in such a way that the final puntu gives him room to manoeuvre with enough rhyming words, and he has chosen the melody that he is going to use on the basis of the

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metre to which the final puntu and the type of subject matter to be transmitted are moulded.

Some 15 or 20 seconds have passed since the theme was proposed. The public waits in anticipation, not knowing what is going on inside Aitor's head during these seconds. Aitor starts to sing ... He knows where he has to get to and how. He knows that he has to look for rhyming words in his mental store. He knows what path he has to follow until reaching the final which he had thought up at the start...

Aitor, half a second before starting to sing and in a moment of inspirational lucidity, remembered the word "hobea" (better). It will serve him well in keeping up the common thread of the argument in the final sentence. And he starts to sing, "Ene laguna..." (My friend...). From this moment on, all his discourse, until reaching the (end) part previously worked out, will be purely improvisation.

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```
Ene laguna- - - - - 10
- - - - -      8 A
- - - - -      10
- - - - -      8 A
- - - - -      10
- - - - -      8 A
- - - - -      8 A
- - - - -      8 A
- - - - -      10
- - - - - hobea    8 A
hobetuko naiz baina orduan 10
ni izan gabe ordea!!! 8 A
```

The part of the discourse constructed by Aitor before starting to sing approximates to that which appear as words in the foregoing. The part

constructed as he actually sings corresponds to the part marked with discontinuous lines.

Aitor knows what he is going to sing at the end. But to arrive at that point he has to travel the road and construct the greater part of the discourse in such a way that the final puntu makes sense and has the maximum impact.

He starts to search his storage-retrieval system or "daisy" of rhyming words and he finds the word NOBLEA (honest). It works for him. He starts to sing...

```
|           Ene laguna uste zintudan,
           jatorra eta noblea...
(My friend, I believed you / to be faithful and honest...)
```

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The audience remains in expectation. Aitor has opted to talk directly to this imaginary friend of his, who has suggested taking the tablets. What will he decide to do? in which direction is he going? Aitor knows. The public does not. At most they can make a guess.

The next rhyming word which Aitor trawls from the store is GORDEA (kept hidden). It is not bad. It comes in useful to continue constructing the discourse.

```
|           Ene laguna uste zintudan
           jatorra eta noblea...
           zuk ere alde ilun, triste bat
           nonbait bazendun gordea.
(apparently you, too, / have a hidden, sad side.)
```

So, he has found a way to express in the bertso the contradiction in which he has been placed, constructing the bertso with the chosen metre and

rhyming. He has a bosom buddy he thought to be faithful and honest but this friend has a dark side. And he is telling him just that! The expectation of the public is growing all the time: yes, he has explained the contradiction to his friend. But, what now? What decision will Aitor take?

The next rhyming word rescued from the store is DOTOREA (nice). Given that the word carries with it a great dose of value-judgement, this is exactly what the artist begins to transmit: “Egin didazun eskeintza ez da uste bezain dotorea.” (What you’re offering me is not as nice as it might appear).

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| Ene laguna uste zintudan
jatorra eta noblea
zuk ere alde ilun, triste bat
nonbait zenukan gordea
egin didazun eskeintza ez da
uste bezain dotorea...

The artist has set out the initial contradiction. He has made a value-judgement. The next stage is to reinforce this, by example. And so, he trawls until he finds the rhyming word, UMOREA (mood) and then DOBLEA (double).

They suit him very well in the logic of his discourse.

He sings, “Emango dit umorea” (It will improve my mood) and then, “ta abildade doblea” (and double my skills).

Thus, he manages to arrive at the area where he had initially thought up for the final. He is doing fine. Up to now, the content expressed is the following:

1. I thought you were an honest and faithful friend.

2. But even you have a hidden, dark side.
3. Your offer is not as nice as it might appear.
4. It will put me in a better mood.
5. And I will increase my skills two-fold ...

Aitor has constructed a coherent and interesting discourse. Nobody knows how it is going to end up, though. Except Aitor. His memory is honed to retain the idea initially thought up. And, despite the fact that a lot of mental energy has been expended during the pure improvisation (recalling and retrieving the best rhyming words, placing them in suitable metre, trying not to commit any linguistic error ...), he still remembers the oral segment thought up 40 seconds beforehand.

| Hobetuko naiz, baina orduan
neu izan gabe ordea!

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He knows that, if he can manage to get to this point, success in connecting with the audience with this bertso is assured. He also remembers that he has reserved the rhyming word “HOBEA” (better) for hooking onto the final point of the argument. Only the last puntu is left to construct. It is this HOBEA which will provide him with the opportunity. He sings:

| Hartu ezkerro izan naiteke
naizena baino hobea...

(Once taken, I would be / better than I am)

And the discourse has come to an end. He has told his friend that he thought him loyal. But that he has a dark, hidden side to him. The offer is not as great as it might seem. It will put him in a different state of mind and double his skills, and if he takes the drug, he will be better than he really is ...

What the public has heard up to now is the following:

| Ene laguna uste zintudan
 jatorra eta noblea
 zuk ere alde ilun triste bat
 nonbait zeneukan gordea.
 Egin didazun eskeintza ez da
 uste bezain dotorea...
 Emango dit umorea
 ta abildade doblea...
 Hartu ezkerro izan naiteke
 naizena baino hobea...
 ----- 10 A
 ----- 8 A

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The audience knows just that part of the discourse that the creator did not know on starting to sing. And this public does not know the only part of the discourse that the creator had previously anticipated (and which the privileged reader also knows).

When Aitor concludes with, “hobetuko naiz, baina orduan ni izan gabe, ordeala!”, the act of connecting with the people reaches its climax.

2.3 A number of exceptions

Thinking up the end and starting at the beginning is, thus, the most usual formula that the improviser has when faced with the construction of a bertso. The improvising bertsolari looks for the final argument and, adhering to a plan very close to that of classical rhetoric, continues along the road to the end. But it does not always have to be like this. There are some exceptions to this way of doing things and we have defined these as being due to:

- a) Internal conditions
- b) External conditions

A | *Internal conditions*

- The first exception to the general strategy refers to the impossibility of the improviser to find any idea or argument in a reasonable period of time. The artist has to improvise alone or in improvised oral confrontation with another bertsolari on a theme proposed by the theme-prompter. Seconds pass and the improviser just cannot find a reasonable idea, due to lack of skill or concentration or whatever. Time is running out. The public is impatient. The bertsolari is not capable of finding new ideas nor even repeat old, already used, ones. Time ticks on ... and, although there is no rule about the number of seconds allowed before answering, the improviser knows (s)he has to start. The bertsolari has not got an end, but has to start! A case where the usual strategy does not operate. It is a kind of a leap in the dark. Starting without having a clear idea where one is going.

It is a situation in which all of us, as improvisers, have found ourselves on more than one occasion. The public does not know that the improviser has started without a concrete idea about how the bertso is going to end and will try to construct a bertso sufficiently well to cover up this serious fault. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to come out with flying colours in these conditions. Trying to build without plans always is. Here the improvisation is, without a shadow of doubt, “pure”. But not because the improviser has wanted it like this but because of failing—due to lack of skill or whatever—to hit on a final line before starting the bertso.

- Another exception is when the memory fails. The improviser has thought up the end and has begun to sing in accordance with the rhyme of this final line. The artist knows this and is relatively comfortable. Then, in a split-second, (s)he realises that (s)he does not remember what had been constructed for the final only a few seconds before. The ber-

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tsolari tries to recall it but it is not that easy when you are concentrating on the construction of a bertso. If the forgotten line is not recovered very soon, the artist will be obliged to improvise even the end. And that would be a shame. Because the initial seconds creating a good end-argument will be wasted and now a last-second improvisation will have to be employed and it will not at all be easy to achieve one of the same quality as the first. This is a case of the failure of the usual strategy.

We have outlined two cases in the construction of atypical bertsos. The usual equilibrium between the “thought-up part” and the “improvised part” in both cases is broken for different reasons. But the rupture is always in favour of the “improvised” part. So, in both cases, due to conditions of an internal nature —pertaining to the bertsolari, themselves— there is more improvisation than in the bertsos constructed following the usual strategy.

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■ The contrary case can also apply. The bertsolari constructs the bertso thinking holistically and hardly improvising the delivery at all. This can occur in several situations: greeting ceremonies, presentations, bertsos of praise... In general terms we can say it occurs in those cases where there is sufficient time to “think up” everything.

It could be the case of a young bertsolari who, due to lack of self-confidence, “thinks up” the whole bertso before starting to sing. Or even the professional in an event (Mass, meeting, a tribute, and so on) in which there is more than enough time to construct one or more entire bertsos before appearing before the public.

Here, the “thought up part” is infinitely greater than the “improvised part”. And this is how it is perceived by the public. Logically, the quality of the bertso should be that much greater. But, paradoxically as it may seem, the risks are also that much greater. The bertsolari who, instead of improvising a bertso as (s)he goes along, constructs it her/his mind’s eye and then reproduces it in sung form, is taking big risks. During the moment of the performance, the mental effort is limited to

remembering what has been thought up and the slightest slip-up in memory may bring the entire bertso crashing down. This is because the improviser is not concentrating on resolving the small problems which crop up all the time. As a general rule and as advice usually given, it is said that the best bertso is that made up as one goes along, improvising it as it is being sung.

B | *External conditions*

■ One of the most traditional formulations is that of “puntuari erantzun”, which we can call “imposed start-up”. It is, from the perspective of the construction of the bertso, an absolutely different form from any other. The public may not perceive it as such, but the improviser does. In this form, the theme-prompter starts a bertso and the bertsolari has to finish it. So, both the proposed theme and the puntu to be used are set by someone else and, to make matters worse, the response has to be immediate and pertinent to the subject matter of the theme, both in its form and in its rhyming. The bertsolari does not have sufficient time to think about the final puntu as well as starting to answer the question or suggestion thrown at her/him and having to carry on and on ... and to finish in the most coherent manner possible! In this format, there are no valid strategies. Here also, improvisation is the purest of any branch of bertsolaritza.

■ Another very common format is the “running rhymes” (*puntuka*) where a bertso is constructed between two or more in such a way that each sings a puntu alternatively. Given that the discursive unity is constructed between two or more persons and that one never knows what the other is going to say, again there does not exist one single, valid strategy. It is the reflexes and the capacity for pure improvisation that count here.

Thus, either due to lack of ability in that moment or because of the demands of a different “format”, or whatever reasons, we may again find ourselves with bertsos not constructed according to the usual strategy. Moreover, and to show more clearly what that strategy consists of, we

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have made reference to bertso sung by bertsolaris alone. But in the oral improvisation by bertsolaris, as in other analogous phenomena in oral improvisation, it is the improvised oral confrontation that is the most genuine and frequently performed manifestation.

3 The soul of bertsolaritza - improvised oral confrontation

In improvised oral confrontations, one bertsolari faces another and they weave a performance of a greater or lesser number of bertso between the two of them. It might be that the improvisers have no prompter of themes as such, so the two have to generate the discourse, taking into account the circumstances of the place where they are performing, the day, the audience, the characteristics of each bertsolari, and so on. Or it is possible that a prompter of themes imposes a role for each, in which case each will have to find the optimum arguments to defend her/his characterisation at the same time as attacking the “opponent”.

In the improvised oral confrontation format, the above-described principal strategy is not varied at all: the improviser thinks up her/his argument, keeps it in mind for the end and starts singing from the beginning. Thus, the construction of the bertso is carried out in a manner identical to that when the bertsolari sings alone.

But in improvised oral confrontation, the skilful management of the available time for the improvisation plays a primordial role. When singing solo, the improviser thinks up the end-piece in the least number of seconds possible and then starts to sing. And once a bertso is sung, (s)he immediately does the same: think up the end and start to sing. And so on, successively. Moreover the argumental thread of the discourse is uniquely that of the solo bertsolari, obliging the artist to be that much coherent in what is sung and what is going to be sung.

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Improvised oral confrontation, however, is a thing of two people and, as such, both improvisers singing alternatively, we have two variables which, up to now, have not been considered:

- The arguments of the rival
- The available time to think, while the rival sings their bertso

In improvised oral confrontation, the improviser has to respond to what the rival has said. This is quite obvious. An improviser who does not respond to a well-constructed argument of a rival is not defending the role taken on or the imposed character well. However, it is not enough just to defend oneself: at the same time, one has to go on the attack. And there is a sufficient number of seconds to prepare for this, thinking up the response when it is the rival’s turn to sing their bertso.

We have written “thinking up” and this is the on-the-spot reality. Wasting precious seconds not thinking at all is not a good strategy but, neither is it a good strategy to devise an argument while listening and assimilating the rival’s bertso, and pertinently respond with what may have been prepared seconds before, independently of the content of the rival’s bertso! In many cases, a halfway formula is adopted, with a response to the opponent and adding the argument thought up while the rival sings.

The soul of bertsolaritza. Improvised oral confrontation

3.1 General strategic possibilities in improvised oral confrontation

The format of improvised oral confrontation of defending, attacking, devising an argument and responding to the rival’s one at the same time is not an easy one.

We can say that there are three forms of approaching the problem:

A | Devise an argument while the rival sings and performs, independently of what the rival might say.

B | Wait and listen until the whole of the rival's bertso-discourse is over and then, in a very short time, respond to it

C | Devise an argument while the rival sings, listen to their argument, and opt for mixing what was devised with a response to the rival.

Formula **A** has the big drawback that the thread of the improvised oral confrontation may be lost. If we only say what we want to say, without reference to the line of argument of the rival, the discourse can break up. In bertsolaritza, improvised oral confrontation is, deep down, an act of co-operation, though it may seem the opposite. It is difficult to perform a great work of oral art if the other bertsolari performs badly.

This formula has the advantage that at least we present our arguments with clarity.

Formula **B** has the disadvantage of there being little time to prepare the response. Moreover, when the rival's argument turns out to be weak or faulty and, thus, not susceptible to an answer, we are obliged to depend on our own argument with the added difficulty of having to do so in a precipitate manner. And, if we just limit ourselves to respond to the rival's bertso, we are not contributing much of our own thinking to the improvised oral confrontation. The verbal battle always takes place in the opponent's field.

In any case, one can always fall back on thinking up an argument before hearing out the rival's bertso but then discard it completely in order to respond to it more pertinently, even though this may mean some loss in terms of quality or brilliance. One well-known bertsolari complained about the way another —known for his unusual form of argumentation—performed in improvised oral confrontation. The latter would wander from the point or look for any “sui generis” argument, pertinent or not. The former concluded, “To sing three bertsos with him, one has to think of six!”

Effectively: the three thought up while the other is singing and the other three bertsos —the sung ones— on listening to the rival's arguments.

However, this is the formula which facilitates a greater level of improvised oral confrontation. When two improvisers get entangled in a dialectic where there is a brilliant response to a well-constructed argument, improvised oral confrontation is at its quality best.

Formula **C** is perhaps the most commonly used. Neither are the lines thought up in anticipation sung as such nor does the bertsolari wait until the rival's bertso is finished. Both strategies are combined. While the rival sings, some form of argument is being thought up and then, depending on what the rival has delivered, the reply involves what has been previously thought up but combining it with some form of mini-response at the beginning of the bertso. For the public at large, **C** is the formula which is most similar to **B** but, for the expert or the performer, it is nothing more than a cleverly disguised form of **A**.

Which formula is the best? That is difficult to answer. The purest, without doubt, is **B**. But it has the drawback that rarely do two improvisers get to perform an improvised oral confrontation with this schema (assuming that the performer who starts always does so with the **A** formula, as (s)he does not initially have to respond to anyone).

A schema of the type **A-B-B-B-B-B** would be ideal, but difficult to respond to with only one bertso and this, in turn, is more difficult to follow with an argued reply, and so on.

Although there is no unique valid strategy for all occasions, we would venture to recommend one. In an improvised oral confrontation which has to be sung and, say, there are 4 bertsos for each performer, it would be no bad thing if one bertso was type **A**, another **C** and a couple in **B**. In this way we can be assured that our own argumentation be heard with **A**,

with **B** we are able to respond to the rival's arguments and **C** allows us to do a little of both.

However, it could perfectly well be two **A**'s and two **B**'s; one **A** and three **B**'s... as we said, there is no one, single strategy.

The most difficult thing on taking part in improvised oral confrontation is to decide on the opportune moment to use **A** or **B**. Imagine we have a brilliant idea that has occurred to us while the rival is singing. But the rival's idea has also been brilliant. This obliges us to respond with another idea and discard the first. **A** brilliant bertso ends up not being used and it is possible that there will never be another occasion to use it.

When we have the brilliant idea but the rival does not oblige us to respond in a different manner, then we may introduce **A**. But the decision has to be taken in a split-second. Not always does the improviser opt for the best solution.

Dealing with improvised oral confrontation, we have gone into much technical detail. In reality, the improviser does not work on the lines of **A**, **B** or **C** or with any theoretical "script". (S)he acts according to instinct and to the dialectical skills available and recallable lexicons at the time. Moreover, this species of dissection of the act of improvised oral confrontation applies more to those improvised oral confrontations with a set theme (Championships, festivals, and so on) than for those without a proposed topic.

3.2 Practical example -2: "The worker and the housewife"

The imposed theme is the following: **X** is a housewife who has called in **Y** to carry out a small repair job in the kitchen. He is already a week in **X**'s house and the work is not progressing as it should be. The housewife, **X**, begins to sing and each has to deliver four bertso.

|X: Nahiz ta faktura pasa
handi ta astuna
ez da lanean asko
mugitzen zaiguna.
Dexente motela da
honexen jarduna
nere gonai begira
pasatzen du eguna.

(Though it'll be some bill / heavy and detailed / This one does not / kill himself working / Fairly slow / this way of working / He spends the day / looking up my skirt!)

X has constructed a type **A** bertso. She has thought her argument out and has done so in such a way to express her fear of the excessive bill from a worker who is clearly swinging the lead, spending the day watching her instead of his plumb line. It was obligatory to do a type **A** bertso, as she started the improvised oral confrontation.

|Y: Aizu, señora itxoin
pare bat segundo,
zer diozu zuk gona
eta gonakondo?
Horrelakorik ez dut
egin nik egundo...
Nik lana egiten dut
mantxo baina ondo!

(Just a minute / Lady / What is all this / about skirts and all that? / That sort of caper / I have never done... / I do my work / slowly but surely!)

Y does a type **C** or mixed bertso. He has thought up the end line (slowly but surely) but the accusation by the woman (looking up her skirt) is too pointed not to respond to. What **Y** does is to use the first three rhyming

verses to answer and the fourth and final one to add the idea thought up while his rival was singing. This bertso has the merit of responding to the accusation of being a voyeur but the demerit of the third and final puntus being too off the point from a logical perspective.

X continues, with her second bertso:

|X: Hola konsuelorik
 ez dago neretzat
 ez dira oso nabarmen
 obraren emaitzak.
 Etxekoandrerek ez du
 honek hartzen aintzat
 neuri obratxoren bat
 egidazu behintzat!

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(That doesn't give me / any consolation / The results of the work / are not very noticeable / This housewife is not at all / being considered by this lad / He could do a little "job" / on me at least!)

X opts for another **A** bertso, ignoring **Y**'s response, going her own way and expressing what she had thought up while her opponent replied to the accusation about the skirt, maliciously playing on the word "job".

Her merit is in hitting on this play on words. The demerit lies in the excessively brusque logical jump in the behaviour of the housewife. **A** minute ago she was complaining about him looking up her skirt and now she is inviting him to do a "job" on her!

Y's second bertso follows:

|Y: Ustegabe atera
 hainbeste istori
 sexu aldetik nonbait
 ez zabiltza lodi
 nik horretan badaukat
 nahiko kategori
 bestea baino lehen
 egingo dut hori.

(What's all this / all of a sudden? / On the sex side / you're not getting enough / In these matters / I have quite a level / I'll do that job/quicker than the other.)

This is an example of bertso **B**. We do not know what **Y** was thinking while **X** sang. But, whatever it was, he had to react to the direct and surprising invitation by **X**. So, he will have discarded the pre-prepared phrase and responded with an entire bertso. This is his main merit. But the response could have been even more robust if, instead of "In these matters I have quite a level", he had sung, "on those jobs, I am quite skilled". Thus the audience would have realised more clearly that the response was direct and improvised at the last minute.

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It is **X**'s turn with her third bertso:

|X: Hemen egin itzazu
 zuk obra majuak
 ta ez ikusi nere
 goi eta bajuak
 Titiak dizkidazu
 begiz ondo juak
 baina ez doaz zuzen
 horko azulejuak.

(Get on with your work / and do it well / And stop looking at me / up and

down / My breasts have been / well-scrutinised by you / But that row of tiles / is not very straight.)

X does a type **A** bertso again. She has realised that she went too far in her second bertso and that her opponent responded robustly. She has had to pull in sails. The main merit of the bertso lies in its “visual” character. We can practically “see” the worker leering lasciviously at the woman, while putting a crooked row of tiles in place.

Y, in turn, responds with his third bertso:

|Y: Honek adarra jotzen
badauka eskola
barrutikan ez dakit,
ederra eskola.
Bietatik bakar bat
hautatu, potxola...
biak egiterikan
ez daukat inola!

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(This one, for the pulling of the leg / has great learning / On the inside I don't know / she looks fine on the outside / One or the other / choose, my chubbyone! / Do both jobs? / No way!)

This is bertso type **B**. And **Y**, having to listen to **X**'s bertso, does not know what to hold on to. First the woman's “job”. Then the complaint about the crooked line of tiles! What is she driving at?

It is **X**'s turn. Her last bertso:

|X: Ez zara ondo ari
igeltsero gazte...
besteek azkarrago
egiten dituzte.
Hor bi lan doaztenik
ez zazula uste...
zuk ez duzu egiten
ez bat ta ez beste!

(You're not doing too well/young man / Other builders/ do the job quicker / Two jobs, you say/I don't believe it / You have done/ neither one nor the other!)

X uses his last bertso to construct a **B**. She responds to **Y** with her final response. She waited for the builder to finish his answer and then she came back with a thumping reply: What do you mean two jobs? Sure, you're doing neither!

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If **Y**'s previous answer to **X**'s idle chat was unmistakable, then the woman's reply was obstinate.

Finally, it is **Y**'s turn with his last bertso:

|Y: Andre hau mintzatzen da
sorginen modura
titiak direla ta
a zer kalentura!
Ez dut lanik galdu nahi
nik honen kontura...
korreetik pasako
dut lanen faktura.

(This woman talks / like a witch / She's really turned on / all that about her breasts! / It's more than my job's worth / with this one / I'll send you the bill / through the post!)

Y finishes with a type **A** bertso. He could not think of anything to answer the woman's last accusation (useless for either job), and sings what he had thought up beforehand. He makes out he is backing off and, with the excuse of not wanting to lose his job, he takes his leave of the "man-eater". At least, in this way, the cycle of improvised oral confrontation is closed. They started with reference to the bill in the first puntu and they finished likewise.

Schematically, the improvised oral confrontation was:

X---- Bertso 1 **A** Bertso 3 **A** Bertso 5 **A** Bertso 7 **B**
 Y---- Bertso 2 **C** Bertso 4 **B** Bertso 6 **B** Bertso 8 **A**

We can say that, in general, **X**'s function has been to look for arguments and **Y**'s to answer these, one by one. At the end, however, these functions were reversed and **X** was able to answer a bertso of **Y**'s so trenchantly that the latter could not find the wherewithal to respond to the woman's last comment and had to look for a more elusive final of his own.

The sequence **B-A-B-B** from bertsos four to seven in the improvised oral confrontation between both bertsolaris (both taking on their respective roles in this case), is a fine example of the ideal development for any improvised oral confrontation of bertsos.

3.3 Practical example 3: "The debate about wind farms"

The theme imposed on Lujambio and Peñagarikano to improvised oral confrontation was the following: Lujambio is a hill walker who has walked the surrounding hills for many years. In the knowledge that a wind farm is to be shortly installed on Elgea mountain, she takes to the hills for one last time before the change. She walks up and starts chatting to Peñagarikano while they are having their packed lunches. Until she realises that he is no other than the chief engineer of the wind farm project.



AM. Peñagarikano Source: XDZ



M. Lujambio Source: XDZ

Lujambio starts to sing:

Ez nuen uste, a ze sorpresa
 holakoa zinenikan!
 diru mordo bat ta proiektu bat
 ei dezu zure patrikan;
 Bizi guztian mendirik mendi
 gabiltzanak hain pozikan,
 ez degu ulertzen, ta ez degu nahi
 burdinezko zuhaitzikan.

(I don't believe this is happening! This is too much! / You with a wad of banknotes and a blueprint / in your pocket / Those of us who have happily / walked these hills all our lives / Don't understand and don't want / trees made of iron!)

Lujambio constructs an **A**-type bertso. She has to, as she has started the improvised oral confrontation and is not replying to anyone. She does so in an evocative manner, pertinently comparing the wind towers with “trees of iron”.

It is Peñagarikano, “the engineer”’s turn:

| Aizu neskato, postura hortan
hizketan ez zaitetz hasi;
honek pagoa eta haritza
ezin bait ditu berezi.
Eolikoak jarriko dira,
inork ezin galerazi...
edertasunik ez du galduko
ta gauza asko irabazi.

(Hey! Lassie! / Don't give us that patter / (She can't tell / a beech from an oak) / Nobody is going to stop / the installation of wind farms / Natural beauty won't be lost / and there is much is to be gained).

Peñagarikano opts for a bertso of type **C**. He answers Lujambio’s argument in his first two puntus and he does so in a sui generis manner: by means of hyperbolic demeaning of this lover of Nature (“You cannot distinguish between a beech and an oak”). Then he reveals, in the final puntu of the bertso, what he had thought up while his opponent was singing (“Natural beauty won’t be lost/and there is much is to be gained”).

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Lujambio replies with the following:

| Itxuraz gure mendi kaskotan
mila errota egoteak
utziko ditu gutxi batzuren
patrikak ondo beteak.
Gogoan daukat ze amets zitun
La Manchako arloteak...
amets gutxi ta interes asko
oraingo Don Quijoteak!!!

(With our mountains covered / with thousands of towers / The pockets of a few / will be filled with a lot / It reminds me of the so many dreams / of that poor Man from La Mancha / Today's Don Quixotes / have few dreams and many interests!.)

Lujambio once again sings a type **A** bertso. With the idea she had in mind, it was not worth considering another type. She knows that her new idea is not really suitable for answering her opponent point by point. She has the idea of comparing the wind towers and their builders with Don Quixote and his windmills. Antonomasia plays an important role here. When she talks of the poor man of La Mancha, we all know who is being referred to. And we all know the main attribute of Cervantes’ character: that of the altruistic dreamer.

The linking of so many ideas is not easy but Lujambio does it in a brilliant manner, using contrast at various moments in the bertso:

- A few (people)/a lot (of money)

- Don Quixote: many dreams/... Today’s Quixotes (the engineers): many interests/few dreams.

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Peñagarikano:

| Ekolojista omen zara zu
eta guztiz nabarmena
inolaz ere ez duzu onartzen
eoliko ta antena.
Ni Quijotekin parekatu nahi
horrek ematen dit pena...
ni Quijote bat izan ninteke
baina Panzaik ez duena.

(It seems you are / all of an ecologist / You won't ever accept / wind towers / Your trying to compare me with Don Quixote / hurts me somewhat / I could be a Quixote / but without a Panza.)

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Peñagarikano makes a type **B** bertso, answering Lujambio's parting shot with his own final puntu. That verbal blow from his opponent was such that he was left with no other choice. And he does so with what is a very common ruse in oral improvised oral confrontation: mixing the character-role with the person of the bertsolari..

Peñagarikano the person is known for his extreme thinness and is stereotyped as such in the public mind. He uses this circumstance to the full to turn the argument (Lujambio's) around; in normal situations, unbeatable.

The engineer represented by Peñagarikano fits perfectly into his own persona. And the polysemy of the word (Don Quixote's servant, on the one hand but also a term meaning beer-belly) comes in handy to proclaim the integrity of his work. He is not an engineer that has grown fat at the expense of Mother Nature.

Lujambio:

| Don Quijotea zarela esan det
itxuraz Panzarik gabe,
Panza beharrik ez daukazu zuk,
ederki beteta zaude!
Holako gizon interesdunik
maiz izan det parez pare
dirua atera nahi liokeena,
baita haizeari ere!

(I said you were Don Quixote / by the look of things without a Panza / Neither do you need one / you're full enough as it is / I've known plenty of cute ones / with interests like yourself / Able to extract money / even from the air, itself!.)

Lujambio constructs a bertso of type **C**. She answers her opponent in the first two puntus. Then she adds a new idea to show, in a hyperbolic way, the love of money of the engineer (capable of getting money, even out of the air).

A new idea has been introduced and one that is brilliant and difficult to counter.

Peñagarikano:

| Txakurrarekin ibiltzen zara
sarri hona eta hara
ta txakurrari eman diozu
hemen kristoren pasada;
Ta diozunez hondatu leike
mendi hontako patxada
Aizu! papel hoi jaso lurretik
hain garbizale bazara.

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(With this dog here and there / you're all over the place / And the poor animal / is knackered / You say the tranquillity of these hills / will be upset / Hey! Pick that litter up from the ground / if you're such a lover of Nature).

Peñagarikano's bertso is type **A**. Lujambio's argument is so difficult to counter that he has had to look for an escape route. He invents the figure of the dog subjected to the whim of his owner. And he invents the litter on the floor in order to test the true love of the hill-walker for Nature.

Lujambio:

| Bere morala ukitu det ta
harrotu egin da berriz,
proiektuaren defentsan ozen
hitzegin du mila aldiz.
Orain papera jaso dezadan
harrosko egiten dit hitz
asko esan gabe jasoko zuen
bilete bat baldin balitz!

(I've touched a raw nerve / and he's gone all haughty again / He hasn't stopped talking / in favour of his project / He now haughtily tells me / to pick up that paper / He would have picked it up, himself, without saying anything to me / if it had been a banknote.)

It is a bertso **B**. Lujambio does not limit herself just to answering the new theme introduced by her opponent, but disarms his argument by reaffirming her view that she has held from the beginning, that the engineer is tight-fisted. It is strategy of using the force of the opponent's argument in order to, by a half-turn more of the screw, one can win out in the dialectic improvised oral confrontation.

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Peñagarikano:

| Zuk diozunez lasaitasuna
laister izango da murriz
ta ez omen da hemen izango
ez pago eta ez haritz;
Ta orain berriz hain lotsagabe
zergatik egin dezu hitz?
berak lurrera ez zun botako
biletea izan balitz!

(According to you / soon tranquillity will be lost / Nothing will be the same / no beech no oak / And now, once again, so brazenly / you go on, Why? / You would never have thrown the paper on the ground / had it been a banknote!)

The last bertso of the improvised oral confrontation is also type **B**. Peñagarikano withstands the onslaught from Lujambio and sets the improvised oral confrontation in the terrain of the money note. But only to claim that it was the mountaineer who dropped the paper because, if it had been money, she would never have done so.

To reinforce the fact that he has withstood the attack, he uses the same of group of puntus and some of the rhyming words from Lujambio's bertso.

The schema of the improvised oral confrontation, referring to the bertso paradigm, is:

A-C-A-B-C-A-B-B.

The skill of both improvisers to play their roles is, perhaps, significant. At first sight, Lujambio plays a more pleasant character, the mountaineer having a thousand reasons to oppose the installation of the wind farm on the mountain. Peñagarikano, the engineer, does not have it so easy; it is difficult, in his situation (on the mountain and eating a snack beside

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the hill-walker) to find good reasons to justify the project. And the improvised oral confrontation meets the expectations raised. Lujambio finds brilliant arguments to oppose the wind farm. Peñagarikano finds sufficient excuses to withstand the weight of such arguments.

Not all improvised oral confrontations, however, are dialectic and where it is important to put down the opponent on the basis of the quality of one's own arguments. In bertsolaritza, there are often improvised oral confrontations of a collaborative kind where the primordial is to create an attractive and coherent discourse between two bertsolaris, without one having to out-do the other.

3.4 Improvised oral confrontations without an imposed theme

In these improvised oral confrontations without an imposed theme, the two improvisers mount the stage to weave together a performance on a theme not imposed from the outside. The extempore artists, themselves, have to “look for” different topics of improvised oral confrontation according to the place, the day, the reason for the event and the characteristics of the audience.

It is in this modality that the work of co-operation of an improvised sung improvised oral confrontation can best be appreciated. After stepping down from the stage, one will not hear a bertoslari commenting that (s)he had performed well. Whether sung badly or well, whether it has managed to transmit the message or not, it is done as a team. Either the two do well or neither does well.

For a good performance it is important for both bertsolaris to pre-arrange a route to follow for the next —or— of an hour of the performance. They talk with each other and fix a schema. For example, we'll start talking about the town, then we can talk about the Saint's day and then we can introduce the current municipal problems affecting the listeners ...

Then, changing the melody, we will go on to the political situation, then have a go at each other and, finally, changing the air again, I'll send you up about your approaching wedding day.

It is a schema which, evidently, can vary from place to place and bertsolari to bertsolari. The more experienced the bertsolari, given the great number of engagements and performances, the less time they may have to construct a minimum schema and, at times, they may go up on stage without an idea in their head as to how to start. Only their skills and experience give them the wherewithal to be able to make it up as they go along.

The division of functions between bertsolaris is normally primordial. One of them will take the responsibility for putting up arguments for the improvised oral confrontation: looking for themes, opening up new ideas, changing the melody. The other tries to follow the “script”, and sticking to it, its theme, its arguments and its airs, tries to respond accordingly and to the best of her/his ability, always remembering that the most arduous work is that of his companion.

Experience comes in a lot here. Maybe there are no themes, but there are always motives for singing. It is a question of having the eyes well-peeled and the ears well-tuned. Knowing what theme to bring up, when the public is enjoying this or that theme, when a theme has spent itself and when to move on, when to get stuck in to a companion so that the joint effort will be that much better. Knowing... many things more than just merely how to construct a bertso.

In these collaborative improvised oral confrontations, the discursive value of each bertso loses importance. It is the performance, itself, in its totality (–hour, –hour or a whole hour) that is important. That is why it is possible for a bertsolari to “sacrifice” the quality of a bertso in order to keep focused on the way ahead in order to achieve the end-result.

IV

PROPOSALS FOR A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After the **critical appraisal** of the principal socio-cultural characteristics of improvised bertsolaritza (chapters I and II) and the **description with examples** of the procedures for the creation of this oral art form, of its techniques, its cognitive mechanisms and the limits that improvisation places on the bertsolari (chapter III), this chapter is an outline of the main features of a new theoretical framework which we have been developing over the last two decades as participating observers in the world of improvised bertsolaristic activity.

As we mentioned in the introduction, the need to draw up a suitable theoretical framework has arisen from the observation that the methodologies in use are inadequate to explain so specific a phenomenon as the improvised oral art of the bertsolaris. It is this inability of current theories to describe, in a thorough manner, the reality of improvised bertsolaritza which has pushed us to draw up the theoretical framework which we present here and not our predilection for a specific theoretical school.

It would therefore be wise to start the presentation of our proposed theoretical framework with a review of the main methods of analysis which have continually and systematically clashed with the reality of modern-

day improvised bertsolaritza and which we have been obliged to discard, at least in part.

1 The dead-end analysis of oral art in terms of written poetics

It is not difficult, in studies of bertsolaritza, to find references to the specificity of the art form, specially regarding its oral and improvised character. The following two quotes suffice to exemplify:

| Indeed, the aspect that most powerfully attracts one's attention in Basque oral literature is the improvised manifestation thereof. An improvisation perfect in its procedure, on the one hand and, on the other, frankly splendid in its vivacity, both in term of its territorial dissemination and of the great esteem in which the people hold their local improviser of their oral tradition.²¹

The improvising bertsolari, as well as poet and singer is also orator. This rhetoric technique is essential for the improvised song. The most impressive thing is that the improvising bertsolari executes all the rhetoric exercises –inventing the arguments, arranging them in a suitable order and formulating them in a beautiful way- simultaneously in the few seconds at his disposal.²²

Despite these and other statements, what tends to happen in studies of improvised bertsolaritza, is the same as Rainer Friedrich's comments about Albert Lord in reference to Homeric rhetoric:

| After proclaiming their belief in the oral Homer, Homerists would proceed to interpret Homer applying the canon of traditional literary criticism. This prompted Lord to warn that unless Homerists were willing "to understand oral poetics" and "learn from the experience of other oral

traditional poetics... 'oral' is only an empty label and 'traditionally' is devoid of sense. Together they form merely a façade behind which scholarship can continue to apply the poetics of written literature"²³.

Effectively, despite abundant statements to the effect that the oral and improvised character of bertsolaritza is important, the fact is that most studies of the subject have been carried out from the perspective of written poetics theory.

The result is always the same: the improvised bertso is rarely deemed to be a piece of value. The majority of improvised bertsos are, judged from the viewpoint of written poetry, of a low poetic level.

1.1 Text as a pretext

The most radical posture in this respect is that of Matías Mujika who, in a libel (as he calls it, himself) which appeared on Internet in the Autumn of 1997²⁴, uses just one bertso to rubbish Basque culture as a whole.

Mujika starts, with no explanation, by introducing the bertso in question (more precisely, its translation into Spanish):

| Una paloma blanca se me ha acercado
esta mañana al amanecer
¡Qué alegría me han producido,
queridos señores, sus palabras!
Y yo ahora estoy ante ustedes
lleno de contento.
Lo primero, buenos oyentes,
buenos días a todos de corazón.

²³ FRIEDRIECH, Rainer (1991), "The Problem of an Oral Poetics", in *Oralité et littérature/Orality and Literature. Proceedings of the XIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (Paris, August, 1985), New York, Peter Lang, 19-28; quote from p. 22.*

²⁴ MUJIKA, Matias (1997), "La Cultura Vasca. Libelo", on the Internet.

²¹ LEKUONA, Manuel (1978), *Idazlan guztiak I: Ahozko literatura*, Tolosa, Gráficas ESET-Seminario de Vitoria, Kardaberaz bilduma, 22, p. 270.

²² LEKUONA, Juan Mari (1982), *Ahozko Euskal Literatura*, Donostia, Erein, p. 125.

(A white dove came to me / this morning at dawn / What joy they gave me / those words, dear sirs! / And now I stand before you / full of happiness / Firstly, dear listeners / Good day to you from the bottom of my heart.)

And this suffices to justify a denigration of all bertsolaritza as such and, by extrapolation, all Basque literary work and culture. He claims, firstly, that “this bertso is one of the most admired compositions of bertsolaritza this century”, and not a marginal piece chosen *ad hoc* for its poor poetic worth. On this premise he goes on to build an argument that it shows: “the awful mediocrity in which official bertsolaritza has been and still is immersed”. As a conclusion, he claims it is impossible that pieces of this nature could, in any way, arouse pleasure: “the fundamental, physiological, direct and honest pleasure does not exist. It is pure pantomime”²⁵.

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The position of the author of the libel may seem extremist, but it is in no way unusual. The tendency to analyse and judge works of oral art within the parameters of a written culture may be acting in bad faith, but such bad faith as the author of the libel is not called for. Simply by ignoring the oralists’ contributions, the theory of speaking performance, pragmatics and the new rhetoric that has analysed oral communication, one can come to the same conclusion as did Matias Mujika in his libel. If one demands of the improvised bertso something that it does not pretend to be or to have, the result can hardly be otherwise.

However, the researcher who acts in good faith, even the aficionado of bertsolaritza, always has the way out of finding those improvised bertsos which do have textual quality, poetically and hold them up high. This, however, is getting away from the point and, in any case, most improvised bertsos do not stand up to the test.

For example, going back to the bertso quoted by Matías Mujika, one has

²⁵ Ibidem.

to admit that its text is nothing to write home about. According to the principal axiom of written poetry, any text capable of producing poetic emotion in the recipient must have poetic quality in the text (i.e. it must be a text that encompasses some intensity of poetic-rhetorical resources). If we accept this axiom to apply to improvised oral bertsolaritza, the conclusion can be no other than that of Mujika.

Nevertheless, to extrapolate from this that the “fundamental, physiological, direct and honest joy” that a bertso such as the one in hand may arouse, is a “pantomime” is a great leap of logic. Being clear the inability of his theory to fully explain the emotion the text appeared to have produced, the author of the libel nevertheless sticks to his guns, denying the emotion aroused in the audience by the bertso. We, on the other hand, having passionately perceived —and continue perceiving— the emotion that similar bertso texts have produced in us, have had no other option but to conclude that poetics theory is inadequate for the analysis of improvised bertsolaritza.

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We can say then, that the analysis of improvised bertsolaritza from the perspective of written poetics theory, even in those cases where there are the best of intentions, shows at least the following deficiencies:

- It reduces the improvised bertso to mere text. That is, it ignores the prosodic paralinguistic, extralinguistic and musical aspects of the pieces in play in a bertso, uprooting it from the **context** in which and for which it was created, and does not consider the bertso as a whole. In the example quoted in the libel, leaving aside the quality of the translation, it is difficult in any case to translate the vocal and musical quality of the bertsolari on to paper but, as a minimum, the circumstances in which the bertso was performed and heard have to be taken into account. This bertso was sung at a tournament in San Sebastián on 20 January 1935, the city’s patron saint day. The Poxpolin theatre was full. There were twenty

bertsolaris on the list and, bertsolaritza until then having been a marginalised art form for the village squares and cider-farms, it was the first time in a theatre for many of them. The bertsolari who delivered the bertso in question was Iñaki Eizmendi, *Basarri*, a young man of 20, wearing a tie and totally different from the stereotype of the poor country yokel which was the bertsolari at the time. But, amongst the audience, for the first time, was the cream of the Basque intellectual society who, after years of looking down on improvised bertsolaritza, now looked to it as the mainstay of their cultural existence. In this context, in this situation, it is clear that those attending the performance were aware of the transcendence of the event: the presence of the intellectual class and that of a young bertsolari seemed to guarantee the survival of the art form. Moreover, it was the Basque language, itself, that seemed to be undergoing a rebirth and a rising, in that moment, from its ashes. If these data are ignored—or hidden—, one is reducing the improvised bertso to just a small part—its textual component— of what it really is. Little text was needed that day to catalyse the emotions of those present – their mere presence was enough.

- It adulterates the very purpose of improvised bertso, judging it from a perspective of literary beauty which the improviser does not pretend to achieve. The aim of the improvising bertsolari is not necessarily to produce texts of grand poetic quality although, if this occurs, the satisfaction is double. What are, then, the objectives which bertsolaris have set for themselves? Jon Sarasua has made it quite clear:

| This is the question: how do you approach the performance, where do you start from, how do you surprise the listeners, where are you going, how do you perceive the world of your listeners and what do you have to do to reach them. ... To this end, you do not have to sing poetically top quality bertsos; it is the performance as a whole that matters.²⁶

²⁶ Jon Sarasua, in GARZIA, Joxerra (1998) *Jon Sarasua bertso-ispiluan barrena*, Irun, Alberdania, p. 61. The translation is that of the authors.

1.2 The text in context: co-text and situation

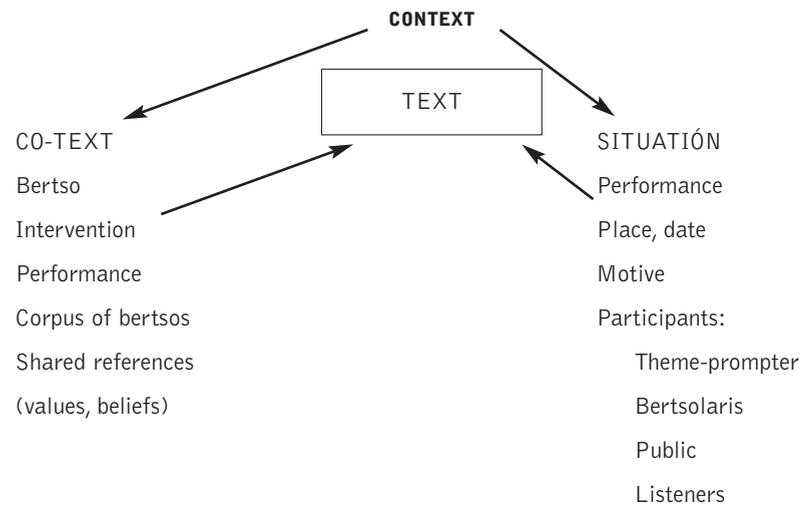
There is nothing strange in this statement. After all, the essential peculiarity of improvised bertsolaritza lies in the fact that the construction of bertsos, their emission and their reception are carried out at the same time in a place which is physically shared between oral artist and audience. The text, which in written literature is practically the only link between creator and recipient, is but one more element that bertsolaris have at their disposal in order to achieve the end-result of inducing emotion amongst the listeners. The importance of the text in improvised bertsolaritza is inversely proportional to the degree of cohesion of the context shared between bertsolari and audience.

The different textual strategies have been identified, analysed and catalogued with great meticulousness. Nevertheless, the non-textual elements which are of such importance in improvisation, have been very little studied to date, at least in the analysis of improvised bertsolaritza. The imbalance is clear. The concept of “context”, in which the totality of all non-textual elements of the bertso is included, turns out to be too generic to be applied.

Thus, given what has been said, we have to introduce some methodological pointers which will allow us to better define our analysis.

We use “text” to designate the transcribable part of the bertso, although, on doing so, we are discarding the definition accepted in certain fields such as Text Sciences. We call “context”, as we have done up to now, the totality of non-textual elements which improvised bertsolaritza involves. Finally, we differentiate, within this context, two components: the “co-text” and the “situation”, which can be described in the following manner²⁷:

²⁷ For a more detailed and reasoned exposition of this and other aspects of the theoretical framework, see: GARZIA, Joxerra 2000, *Gaur egungo bertsolarien baliabide poético-erretorikoak. Marko teorikoa eta aplikazio didaktikoa*, Leioa, UPV/doctoral theses.



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The contextual factors (both co-textual and situational) are a prime source of resources for the improvising bertsolari. Excluding or minimising these factors is only to adulterate the very nature of the object one is trying to analyse.

Certainly the contextual elements are important whatever the nature of the communicative act. And they are so even in those formats where the transmitter and the recipient are more distant in time and space (as in written literature, for example). The difference with improvised bertsolaritza is in the pivotal role of these factors, as reflected in the following diagrams:

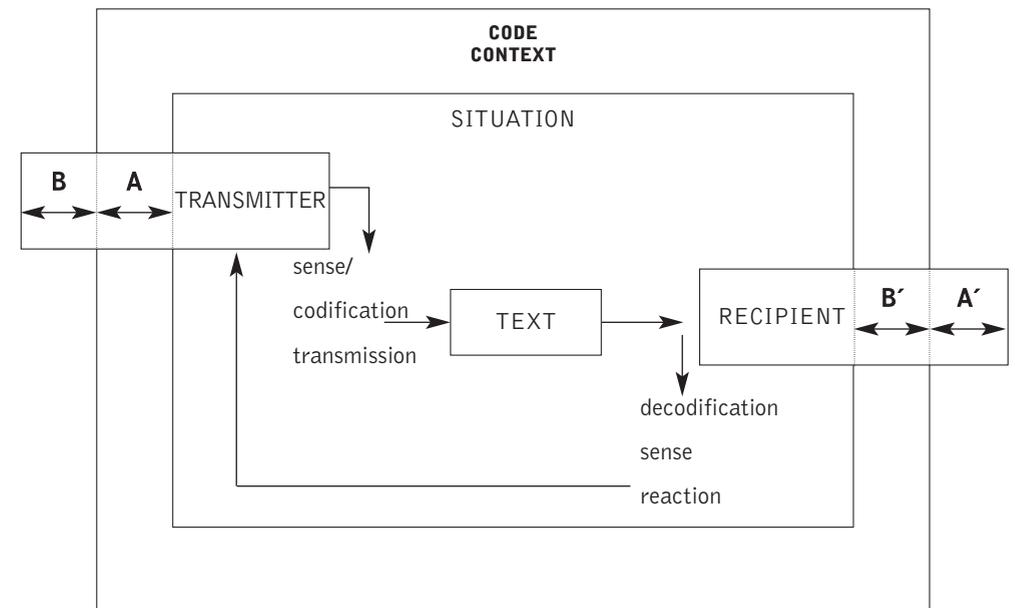
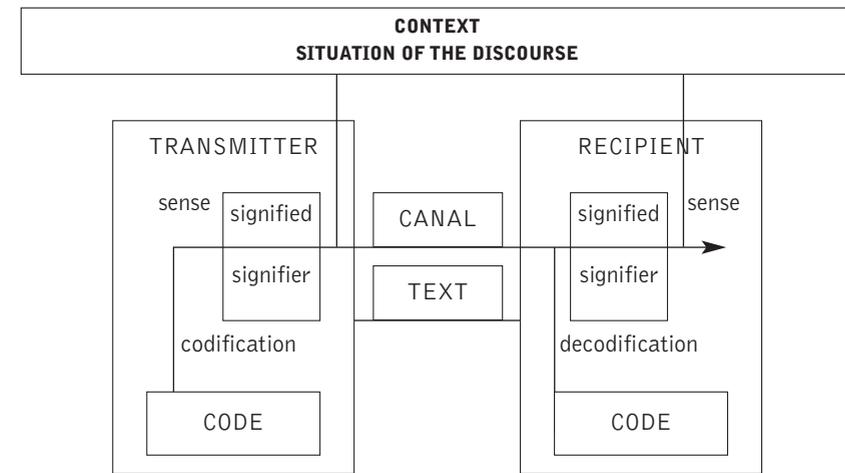


Diagram of non-improvised communication²⁸

28 GUTIERREZ ORDOÑEZ, Salvador (1992), *Introducción a la Semántica Funcional*, Madrid, Síntesis.

As can be seen, and unlike other communication types, the transmitter and recipient form part of the situation, they are immersed in it. A performance is unrepeatable and the allusions to the different situational elements strengthen the bond between bertsolari and listeners, creating a positive feed-back for the oral artist.

A | *Co-textual factors*

The level of cohesion of the co-text is a key factor in the creation of the improvised bertso, and this is how, as we shall see, good criteria can be established for the suitable periodisation of improvised bertsolaritza. Unlike what happens with the situation, the level with which the bertsolari and the audience enjoy a shared context changes as a function of a number of historical, social, cultural and educational variables. This level is represented in the diagram of improvised oral communication by the segments A (in the case of the bertsolari) and A' (in the case of the listener). The segments B and B', on the other hand, represent the totality of non-shared values and the references of the bertsolari and the listener respectively and separately.

In specific historic-social circumstances, the segments B and B' tend to be insignificant. That is to say, the referential worlds of the bertsolari and audience coincide almost fully. We can then say that we are dealing with a homogenous-context bertsolaritza. At the other extreme, there are occasions in which the shared references are much less. We then talk about heterogeneous-context bertsolaritza.

The more homogenous the co-text, the less text the bertsolari needs to arouse emotion in her/his audience:

| When the public is homogenous, it is much easier to improvise bertsos, at least in a certain sense. What this is saying is that there are strongly shared feelings, and it is sufficient for just one of these to touch the heart

and/or the soul of the people. The bertso has many elements, some merely technical, such as metre and puntu. But, in the final analysis, what is important is sparking emotions. And emotions can be aroused with the mere mention of a feeling that you know is strongly shared; you do not need any elaborate devices to achieve your aim.²⁹

The principal factors that determine the level of homogeneity or co-textual cohesion are the following:

- Socio-political-cultural situation. Limiting ourselves to the recent history of bertsolaritza, it is clear, and a number of bertsolaris have repeatedly pointed this out, that during Franco's dictatorship, the collective nature of bertsolaritza (bertsolaris, the public and others) was a strongly cohesive one, unlike what happens today. In this sense, it is often said that, "improvising bertsos in Franco's time was easier —or cosier— than it is today".
- Size of the audience. The greater the number, the less homogeneity.
- Level of academic education of both bertsolaris and the public. The greater the level, the greater the variety of references and, so the less the homogeneity.

These three are not of course, fixed, immutable factors. This is what Jon Sarasua means when he compares bertsolaritza under the dictatorship with the present:

| What has happened to our current bertsolaris? Well, that homogeneity of bertsolaritza's public has been broken, and not only because historical circumstances have changed. Due to our determination and efforts to renew bertsolaritza, many new people have entered its world. Our public is more plural than ever. Amongst our listeners are political nuances to suit all tastes; there are young and old listeners; there are university gra-

²⁹ Jon Sarasua, in GARZIA, Joxerra (1998), *Jon Sarasua bertso-ispiluan barrera*, Irun, Alberdania p. 50.

duates; people from the country and from the city ... We now have a public or, rather, several publics. Before, we did not. Before, bertsolaris improvised for the people.³⁰

Taking into account that improvised bertsolaritza prior to 1960 was reduced to a pile of anecdotes and a few bertsos, we believe it would be suitable to consider all that happened before this date as prehistory of improvised bertsolaritza. From 1960 on, when bertsolaritza has a true history, it is possible to distinguish two great periods:

A) Homogeneous co-text bertsolaritza (1960-1979)

- Bertsolaritza of survival (1960-1973), with Basarri and Uztapide as principal references.
- Bertsolaritza of resistance (1973-1979), with Jon Lopategi and Azpillaga as the prime exponents.

Other famous bertsolaris of this time are Lazkao Txiki, Xalbador, Lasarte, Joxe Lizaso, Joxe Agirre, Lazkano, Mitxelena, Gorrotxategi, Mattin, Garmendia and Arozamena, amongst others.

B) Heterogeneous co-text bertsolarism (1980-2000)

- Bertsolaritza of renewal (1980-1990), when Xabier Amuriza was its high priest. The bertsolaris of the previous period still have a role to play but, after the winds of change brought about by Amuriza, a new generation of oral improvisation artists emerge in the Basque Country, to be the protagonists of the next phase.
- The phase of bertso mania (1991-1998). With the generation led by Andoni Egaña, bertsolaritza breaks into the communication media, particularly television, creating audience levels previously unthinkable. Other notable bertsolaris are Sebastian Lizaso, Peñagarikano, Jon Sarasua, Euzkitze.
- Multipolar bertsolaritza (1998- ?). The presence of woman amongst the

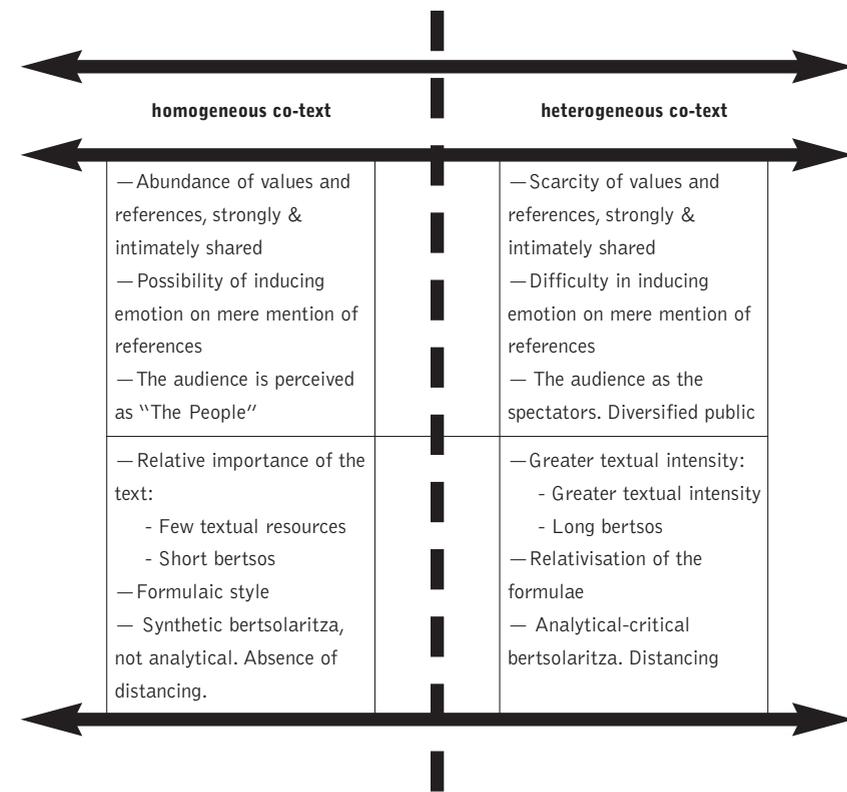
³⁰ Ibidem.

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elite of bertsolaritza is now taken as normal. Maialen Lujanbio, Igor Elortza, Unai Iturriaga and Jesus Mari Irazu are the most notable names of the new generation, the evolution of whom is still to be seen.

Even when taking into account the different periods, each one of these phases represents a differentiated type of bertsolaritza, if only because both the homogeneity of the co-text and the kind of bertsolaritza that each period developed, have to be considered as poles along a single continuum, which can be represented, in outline, in the following manner:



Bertsolaritza according to the homogeneity of the co-text

A good example of homogenous-context bertsolaritza is the bertso improvised by Manuel Uztapide (champion bertsolari in the years 1962, 65 and 67) in the 1962 championship. The topic of his performance, impo-

sed by the organisers, was: “Mother”.

This was the first bertso sung by Uztapide:

| Hauxe da lan polita
orain neregana
alboko lagunendik
etorri zaidana.
Bertsoak bota behar
dira hiru bana
hortan emango nuke
nik nahitasun dana:
beste ze-esanik ez da
esatian “ama”³¹.

(Nice theme here / given to me now / From my companion / it has come / We have to sing, so / three bertsoes each, / About it I could say / all the things I want / but there’s nothing left to say / on saying, “mother”.)

Clearly, the mere text, itself, would not easily excite anybody. Nor would the bertso-poem, sung in its entirety to the audience, if it had not been for the fact that the “Mother” was one of the values most strongly shared by the bertsolari and the listeners, in fact, a whole archetype in the Basque popular imagination. In reality, Uztapide only had to mention the theme imposed and he generated pathos with the audience. As is seen, he uses the remaining syllables to refer to various elements in the communicational situation. The mother about whom Uztapide is singing, is any mother, the mother as the archetype and as a value strongly shared by all there present. Nowadays, however, no bertsolari would dare use the strategy that Uztapide used. But this does not give us licence or the right to discredit the bertso, nor to dispatch the emotion produced that day as pantomime or farce. We can be quite sure that a more sophisticated ber-

³¹ *Bertsolari txapelketa 1962-XII-30, Tolosa*, Auspoa, 22, 1963, p. 145.

tso text would not have produced such emotion. We have to conclude, therefore, that we have an excellent bertso, even though, according to the protocols of the theory of written poetry, it was nothing great.

Let us now consider a similar theme, but within the heterogeneous context. We are at the bertsolari championships of 1980. The topic this time is “Father”. The bertsolari who is performing alone is Xabier Amuriza, who we may consider as the father of current bertsolaritza.

| Aita izena kanta beharrak
jarri dit bihotza bero,
aukera eder hau izango zenik
ez nuen asko espero;
preso nengoen Zamoran eta
han gelditu ia ero,
joan nintzen ta bertan nengola
aita hil zitzaidan gero,
nahiago nuke edozer baino
hemen bizirik balego³².

(On having to sing to the name of my father / my heart burned / This fine opportunity never / occurred to me before / When I was prisoner in Zamora / almost driven mad / and there I was / when my father died on me / There’s nothing I would wish for more / than to have him here alive.)

And that was just how it happened: Amuriza’s father had died while the bertsolari was in Zamora penitentiary. But that was not all. Amuriza knew perfectly well that, to spark the emotions of his audience, the mere mention of the word, “father” was not sufficient. Something more was needed and this something more meant more rhetorical elaboration. In the first place, he discards the idea of the archetype and presents us with a father who can only be his father. This thinking, this greater rhetorical elaboration

³² *Bertsolari txapelketa nagusia (Donostia, 1980-I-6)*, Tolosa, Auspoa, p. 141, 1980, 97.

tion requires a bertso which is more ample (hamarreko handia). The melody is also a rhetorical resource. Amuriza had composed his own airs and he employed one of these, the one that he knew best would fit the register in which he wished to perform.

In the second bertso, perhaps the best in the series, he enters more deeply into the figure of his father, declaring that his relationship with him went beyond that of the father-son. He is talking about his father but also his teacher, because it was he who inculcated in him his love for bertsolaritza. In this way, Amuriza unites his personal and sentimental past with the present improvisation, both in place and in time:

| Aita nuen nik umoretsua,
inoiz geza ta gazia,
harek agertu zidan bidea
baitzen bertsoz ikasia;
oi, nere aita, nire egunak
ere aurrera doaz ia,
baina zugandik hartua baitut
bertsotarako grazia,
nik egingo dut arbola haundi
zuk emandako hazia.³³

(I had a father with a great sense of humour / never sad or bitter / He showed me the way / as he knew about bertsolaritza / Dear father, my days / are catching up on me, too, / But given my debt to you / for my skills as a bertsolari / I will make a great tree / from the seed you gave me.)

In the third and final bertso the formulaic strategy reappears. Although it is directed at his father, he directly involves the listeners, inviting them to applaud him. The principal strategy of the bertso is its direct connection to the situation of the session:

³³ Ibidem.

| Gai hau kolpera jarriko zenik
ia ametsa dirudi;
baserri hartan izan genduen
hainbat harri eta euri;
zu, aita, zinen hain on niretzat,
ez gogorra, baizik guri;
Euskalerrria nola dagoen
orain Donostin ageri,
niri jotako txalo guztiak
bidaltzen dizkizut zuri.³⁴

(As I have touched on this theme / it's almost like a dream / In that farmhouse we lived / so much (hail)stone and rain / You father, who were so good to me / not hard, but soft / Now that all the Basque People / are here in San Sebastian / All the applause that might be for me / I give it to you.)

We perceive one of Amuriza's other great skills in this last bertso: his capacity for drama, his masterly weaving together of the planes and times in which the performance is taking place with the fiction which he is improvising on the spot. Who will the public applaud at the end of the session? The bertsolari? His father? Both? This moment was, in any case, one of the most emotional of the whole final. This last bertso, nevertheless, is the weakest, from a mere textual viewpoint, of the three. Regarding rhetorical strategy, however, it is, if not the best, at least the most effective.

As can be seen, both in the case of Uztapide with the mother theme and in that of Amuriza with the father topic, they handle the same elements: text, co-text, situation. What differs is the management of these and the relative importance given to them in the improvised communication as a whole.

³⁴ Ibidem.



Bidebarrieta library in Bilbao, 12-12-1997: J.Kortazar, M.Trapero, F.Munar, D.Blanco and JR.Garzia
Photo: J. Manterola / Source: XDZ

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B | *Situational factors*

It has to be taken into account, however, that the situational cohesion can, whatever the historical situation may be, re-establish the communicative homogeneity. Even at those times when social division was at its height, in the last decade of the XX century, when ideological-political confrontation was clearly reflected in the audiences at bertsolaritza events (including amongst the bertsolaris themselves), those performances most free and informal (without theme-prompter, imposed topics or a specific public) were the ones which did not need texts of great poetic intensity. It was enough to mention, to point out at the opportune moment, the situational elements in order to arouse the desired emotional reaction amongst the listeners.

The improvised bertsos at these kinds of events are not easily transplan-

table to the mass media, as they are then stripped of their situational references from which the forceful communicative elements and emotions are sourced. With a few exceptions, they are thus totally anodyne (re)productions for those perceiving the event through the communication medium and outside the situation in which and for which the bertsos were created in the first place. As much as TV may do its best in presenting the chef who the bertsolaris are trying to send up, the viewer will find it very difficult to have a _ part of the hilarity from the bertso as was aroused at the live event. And it is greatly this shared emotion, at the live event between oral artist and listeners and under the same roof and that can never be substituted by a video or other insert.

We should say in passing that the tendency – in one way natural and understandable – for the media to prioritise those bertsos with greater textual punch results in a certain distortion. The football viewer, used to seeing repetitions of the best moments of play of the matches, may become bored at the stadium itself because of the lack of intensity in the game. In the same way, the “second hand listeners”, effectively those who hear bertsos on the radio or TV, get used to being listeners who expect and demand a high level of intensity (and textual excellence) from each bertso performed. Most probably, on attending a bertsolaritza in person, the expectations of such a listener are frustrated, particularly if the performance is free of an imposed theme or it is a post-prandial event.

Although it is not a sufficiently analysed theme, it can be intuitively appreciated that the character of the discursive unit of each bertso appears to wane considerably in these kinds of events. Not having a pre-determined number of bertsos to improvise to, the bertsolari tends to go for longer discursive unit, often sacrificing the forcefulness of each improvised piece. Even so, as has been said before, the mode of production of the improvised bertso is such that it always conserves the character of the

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discursive unit that the bertsolari has had to construct.

Underlining the central importance of the situational elements in the most informal formats of bertsolaritza performance does not take away from the importance that these have in the other performances. The bertsos of Uztapide and Amuriza we cited above were improvised in the most formal of formats that exist (the championships) but which, as we have seen, are full of referential situations. As in almost all communication, the situational cohesion works as a continuum.

If we take those criteria of assessment for improvised bertsos used by the juries in championships, we can only conclude that the use of situational strategies in the championships by the bertsolaris is indicative of poor creativity. The bertsolari, as they say, has to “stick to” the topic on which it has been his luck to improvise and to develop it with cohesion and coherence. Everything else is to “get away from the point”. This viewpoint, which fortunately appears to have begun to correct itself in the assessment criteria drawn up for the 2001 championship, reflects clearly to what extent written poetry has been the predominant framework for analysis in improvised bertsolaritza. Indeed, to “stick to the point” is nothing more than to “stick to the mere text”, and the situational references, rather than “getting off the point”, is “getting off the text”, which could only be a punishable offence for those who consider improvised bertsolaritza from the reductionist perspective of written poetry.

There is no lack of people who claim that Uztapide’s bertso on the mother is one of scant value given that, as we have seen, his principal argument is the cut and dried mention of the imposed theme and that the discursive development to get to this point is no more than an accumulation of situational references. That is to say: Uztapide does not develop the topic. It goes without saying that we do not share this

view. In improvised bertsolaritza, the situational references, if pertinent and efficacious, have the same category and the same value as textual arguments.

Uztapide improvised that bertso in the 1962 championship. Thirty years later, the polemic lives on. In the 1997 championship, Unai Iturriaga and Jon Maia (both young men) verbally duelled in an improvised oral confrontation (hamarreko txikia) over the following theme: “You are two girls and you have always been very close in friendship. Now, you are beginning to realise that yours is something more than just being good friends”.

Unai Iturriaga opened the improvised oral confrontation, making it clear that he was going to treat the topic with total normality:

| Eskolatik batera
gabiltz pausuz-pausu,
toki beretan topo
egin dugu usu.
Baina zerbait arraro
darabilgu, aizu!
Lagun gisa gehiago
neri ez eman musu,
titi-muturrak tente
jartzen dizkidazu.

(We went to school / always together / We did everything / together / But something strange is happening to us. Hey! / Don't kiss me anymore / just as a friend / you make my nipples / stand up erect.)

On hearing this there were murmurs and giggles from the audience. Some had reacted to the theme as a joke, although not the majority. It was the turn of Jon Maia:

| Batetik muxua ta
bestetik fereka,
berotzen ari gara
gu biok uneka:
ni ez naiz harrituko
normala da eta.
Gaia esandakoan
hara zer iseka!
ez dakit zertan hasi
zareten barreka!³⁵

(A kiss here / a caress there / we're working ourselves up / very quickly / I'm not amazed by it / it's perfectly normal / Just the mention of the topic / and you people jeered / I really don't see / what the fuss is.)

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Jon Maia's bertso provoked a reaction from the public some of whom declared that it deserved a punishment from the jury as it had got away from the theme. Part of the jury thought the same and Maia got 17.5 points compared to 20 for Iturriaga's bertso. It goes without saying that we do not at all share this viewpoint: the situational "witticism" of Jon Maia is, for us, at least as brilliant as the textual "witicism" by Iturriaga with the reference to nipples. The text, we insist, is but one of the elements the bertsolari has at her/his disposal to carry out the labour of rhetoric. Denying the improviser the possibility of exploiting the situational elements is to radically adulterate the very nature of this improvised oral art.

Lately, a species of "specialised" events have been organised: events with a plot or monographic performances (erotica, black humour, alternative youth culture, rockers...). This kind of performance is usually organised by the youngest bertsolaris in smaller premises and with a select public.

³⁵ *Bertsolari Txapelketa Nagusia 97, Donostia, EHBE-Elkarlanean, 1998, p. 279.*

Although it is a recent phenomenon, we believe that, behind these initiatives, there is a desire by the bertsolaris to develop otherwise unlikely themes and styles before a wider, more heterogeneous public.

2 Enchantment by .but lack of charm of the oralist theory

We said above that, on analysing bertsolaritza, its oral character is often ignored. We have tried to show how such an approach lacking in rigour results in dysfunctions.

Given the inability of written poetry to describe bertsolaritza, some analysts have tried to see, in the oralist theory, the only valid method for its analysis. By "oralist theory" here, we understand the overall research derived directly or indirectly from Homeric studies. The origin of the theory as such goes back to 1928 when Milman Parry began to publish his studies on Homer.

Party to this oralist theory, more or less in an orthodox manner, there are investigators from the widest range of disciplines, the most outstanding names being Adam Parry, Lord, Notopoulos, Havelock, Ong, Zumthor, Finnegan, amongst others.

Regarding studies of Basque popular literature, it should be pointed out that the most direct and influential reference is, undoubtedly, Walter J. Ong, whose work has been repeatedly quoted and paraphrased by almost all analysts. Next to this main influence and also from the French anthropological tradition, Marcel Jousse enjoys great standing amongst the analysts of Basque popular literature, particularly through Ives Beaupérin, disciple of the great French anthropologist.

The enchantment induced by the oralist theory in the person who,

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coming from the written tradition, discovers it for the first time is, without doubt, quite understandable. This discovery is also essential and beneficial in that it illustrates for us the existence and the differentiated character of orality.

Beyond this discovery, the orality theory shows itself as an insufficient instrument for investigation, due to several dysfunctions, some of which we can deal with now.

In the first place, and as several authors have shown, the opposition between orality and writing is not so radical as the oralist theorists would have it:

| “...the differences between oral and literate expression, although considerable, are not so profound as is widely assumed.³⁶

| ...there is no clear-cut line between oral and written literature, and when one tries to differentiate between them —as has often been attempted— it becomes clear that there are constant overlaps’’.³⁷

From our research experience into improvised bertsolaritza, we can only endorse the cogency of this viewpoint. Orality and writing are not two mutually exclusive realities, as the oralists would have it, but they live together, at least in modern societies, and in continuous interaction.

The presentation of orality and writing as a black and white duality is seen as inadequate when one subjects an object to concrete study. As Scheunemann pointed out:

| The construction — primary orality, written and print culture, secondary orality— takes on an almost biblical configuration. I am afraid, that —

³⁶ KIRK, GS, *Homer and Oral Tradition*, p. 69.

³⁷ FINNEGAN, Ruth (1992), *Oral Poetry*, Cambridge, University Press, p. 2.

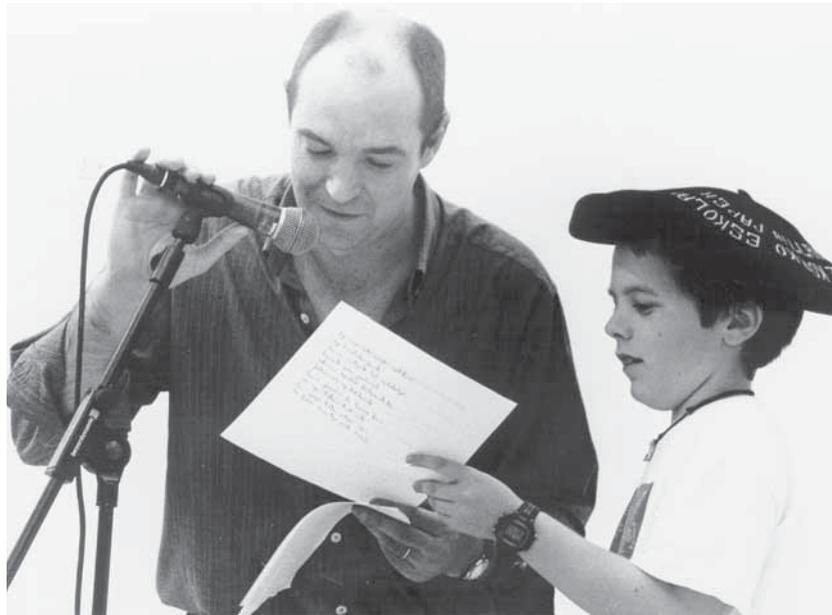
apart from the narrow focus of the description of the age of secondary orality— it is precisely this configuration which causes particular weaknesses in the formula.³⁸

Apart from this quasi-biblical character of the oralist theory in general, it has to be pointed out that its application to different manifestations of oral literature has been carried out many times without reference to the specificity of each one of these oral manifestations:

| So we encounter concepts of orality and literacy which have been worked out in **too rigid a fashion** and polarized in the form of ideal types which inevitably adds to the despair of everyone who tries to apply the set of categories to any concrete work or area of study. There is also no doubt that the qualities and effects ascribed to the different modes of cultural expression —whether the wisdom of the storyteller in oral cultures or the emergence of individualism and nationalism as a consequence of writing— very often remain global assumptions lacking contextual investigation which might disclose the range of other factors which, along with dominant communicative forms, give shape to cultural study.³⁹

³⁸ SCHEUNEMANN, Dietrich, “Collecting Shells in the Age of Technological Reproduction: On Storytelling, Writing and the Film” SCHEUNEMANN, Dietrich (1996), *Orality, Literacy and Modern Media*, Columbia, Camden House, pp. 79-95, quote on p.81.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 79.



Champions giving each other advice Photo: J. Gallego / Source: Ikastolen Elkartea

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2.1 Orality in writing

Prior to Milman Parry's thesis becoming known, a number of authors had already looked at the topic of the conflicting relationship between orality and writing. It is curious to observe that the most interesting contributions come from written literature, specifically the novel, which, at the beginning of the XX century, found itself immersed in a deep crisis, partly due to the social changes and terrible historical events of the period, and also due to the challenge presented it by the new medium of representing reality, the cinema. Alfred Döblin pointed to the writing on the wall:

| Döblin had on his part made it clear that in his view the time of the traditional novel with its focus on the hopes and despairs of an individual (possibly attempting to write a novel or spending his time in the seclusion of a magic mountain) had run out. A depiction of the experiences which

many face in modern urban environments required a different style of writing, possibly a different genre altogether⁴⁰.

Curiously, in its search for a new narrative form suitable to the new reality at the beginning of the XX century, the novel discovers the similarity between the two extremes which, on the surface, have nothing to do with each other, such as the Homeric epic on the one hand and, on the other, cinematographic technique:

| Not accidentally had he therefore called for a modern epic and had named his Berlin Alexanderplatz an epic work. This implied several things at once: a reference to oral storytelling and the high proportion of oral composition which Döblin developed, a method of composing his work in a paratactic, episodic fashion. Homer was one of the examples he referred to as a model of his construction principle. The first impetus, however, that initiated the discovery of this principle, came from the cinema⁴¹.

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Regarding the theoretical aspects of the novel at the beginning of the XX century, the most interesting contributions are those of Walter Benjamin. It is no coincidence that he was the author of a brief but highly interesting introduction to *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Döblin in 1930 (i.e. almost at the same time as Milman Parry's theses became known). Nevertheless, Walter Benjamin had already (in 1913) introduced into his literary theory, the concepts of "cinematographic style" and "montage", understanding this to mean paratactical organisation of previously prepared elements.

In a parallel manner, the formalist critic, Boris Eikhenbaum, introduced the term *skaz*, in an article about Gogol, published in 1919. In a later article, Eikhenbaum defined *skaz* in the following way:

| By *skaz* I mean that form of narrative prose which in its vocabulary, syn-

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 88.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

tax and choice of speech rhythm displays an orientation towards the narrator's oral speech.⁴²

Unfortunately, this manner of understanding the relationships between orality and writing did not have the same echo amongst us as did the formulations, much less varied and valuable, of oralist theory.

Although the object of study in this book is improvised bertsolaritza, we should not be unaware that the work of Benjamin, Eikhenbaum and others are invaluable to us for the analysis of non-improvised bertsolaritza, i.e. that written bertsolaritza of the bertso-paperak, our own, particular written popular literature.

It would be absurd to think that, in the work of these and other authors, we are likely to find all the answers to fathom a genre which proclaims itself oral, although its public expression is in the written medium, what it consists of and how it works. Dealing with written modes of expression of an oral literature and ignoring what has been written about the theme is nothing but a waste of time discovering what has already been discovered in the past.

2.2 Literature in orality

In the preceding section we saw how the reductionist idea of orality theory prevents us from capturing the influence of orality in written format. Much more interesting, on the other hand, is the obverse side of the coin.

Effectively, the theory of orality, at least in the canonical formulations by Notopoulos and Ong, establish a radical distinction between the oral and written modes of production.

⁴² Quoted in FRANCE, Rose, "The speaking author: skaz in Mikhail Zoshchenko's Sentimental Tales", in SCHEUNEMANN, Dietrich (1996), *Orality, Literacy and Modern Media*, Columbia, Camden House 62-78; quote on p. 62.

It is categorically stated that, as a consequence of oral thinking or mental process deriving therefrom, oral expressions are necessarily:

- Accumulative rather than subordinate
- Accumulative rather than analytical
- Superfluous or verbose
- Conservative and traditionalist
- Close to essence of the human world
- Tones of anguish
- Empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distant
- Homeostatic
- Situational rather than abstract

If one tries, as we have done, to see how these nine features are reflected in current improvised bertsolaritza, one will very soon give the task up: effectively, one will discover the same G.S. Kirk found in Homer, that:

| ...the oral epic, at least at the unmatched level of Homer, can display some of the supposedly distinctive subtleties of written poetry.⁴³

So, if in the previous section we discovered the relevance of the oral strategies in certain written texts, we now find ourselves with some oral texts that can be ascribed a similar subtlety as that of written poetry.

Which, evidently, does not mean that the achievement of such subtlety is the be-all and end-all of oral literature. It means, and only means, that one cannot discard out of hand the possibility that such poetic excellence might be expressed in oral texts, a feasibility rejected by oral theorists, it would seem.

When written poetics criteria are applied to oral literature, written poetry is, Notopoulos denounces, a kind of Procustean bed in which oral litera-

⁴³ KIRK, GS, *Homer and Oral Tradition*, p. 69.

ture rarely comes up to scratch. At the other extreme, oral theory, applied strictly, turns out to be too small a bed. This is what happens, according to Rainer Friedrich, when oral theory is applied to Homeric art:

| Here it is well to remember that the notorious Procustes was the happy owner of two beds. Could it be that an oral poetics, when applied to the Homeric epic, has the effect of Procustes' short bed?

The same thing happens, we believe, although for different reasons, when an attempt is made to use the oralist theory as the unique instrument of analysis of bertsolaritza, at least of current improvised bertsolaritza.

We cannot here go into to what extent each and every one of the characteristics which Ong attributes to oral expression actually coincides with reality. We can only say that, taking it to its ultimate consequences, the oralist theory gives us a reductionist perspective of improvised bertsolaritza. We will now look at some of the reasons for this.

A | *Formulas in present-day bertsolaritza*

Improvised bertsolaritza is no longer “accumulative rather than analytical”. The accumulative rather than analytical character of oral expression is, according to Ong, due to the creation of texts based on a formulaic procedure i.e., according to the oralist theory, the oral poet composes her/his pieces based on pre-designed units which Ong, in line with Parry, refer to as “formulae”. Parry defines formula in the following way:

| A group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.⁴⁴

It is undeniable that the bertsolari, in his improvisation, manipulates

⁴⁴ PARRY, Milman (1932), “Studies in the Epic: Technique of Oral Verse-Making II. The Homeric Language as the Language of Oral Poetry”, *HSCP* 43, p. 31.

units previously created to fit into a given metrical structure. This has been said by, amongst others, Jon Sarasua, although he does not use the expression, “formula”, rather the more metaphorical “snippets”. Whatever, the bertsolari of today does not have a limited repertory of formulae, given that the variety of themes that has to be covered make such a repertory unfeasible. In fact, the employment of a repertory of formulae is only relevant when:

- the communicative situation is archetypal: bertsos of greetings, funeral rites, etc., or
- the theme or role is imposed.

As we have seen in section 2 of chapter II, the themes or roles that bertsolaris have to deal with are not at all archetypal.

The fundamental thing about the bertsolari is not the formulaic repertory, but the capacity to continually create new formulae, i.e. the capacity to fit any cognitive content, however new or complex, within the most common metrical structures, currently those of 5-5/8 syllables and 7/6. Part of this work of fitting together may be carried out prior to the improvisation, but as was made clear in chapter III, a large part of this work of fitting together the bertso is carried out by means of pure improvisation.

Understood in this way, the formulaic nature of bertsolaritza does not, in any way, impede capacity for analysis and, in fact, acts as a tool thereof. In reality, the task of the improvising bertsolari is basically one of a double formulaic skill. On the one hand, one has to be able to improvise convincing and suitable formulae as one goes along. Secondly, the bertsolari has to astutely manage the rhetoric of the formulae that have been mentally constructed previously.

The prior and conscious construction of formulae to be used seconds or minutes later in the sung improvisation is, perhaps, one of the distin-

guishing aspects of present-day bertsolaritza with respect to the art practised in the past. Another is the rhetorical use that the modern bertsolari makes of these more-or-less pre-constructed formulae.

In this last aspect, as in so many others, the case of Xabier Amuriza is paradigmatic. Far from using formulae as mere technique to help express platitudinous situations or values, Amuriza charges them with a great sense of poetry and rhetoric, whereby the formulae acquire great communicative importance in the bertsos when sung, and are used to reinforce ideas and content which are in no way platitudinous or commonplace.

Outstanding are his solo performances, when the event is totally, as it were, under his control. In the final of the 1980 championship when it was his luck to have the theme: “bihotzean min dut” (my heart aches), Amuriza improvised three bertsos, two of which (the first two) we quote here.

We have seen how bertsolaris are accustomed to placing the key of their rhetorical strategy, the most coherent reason they have been able to think up, at the very end. And it is precisely here that Amuriza places his formulae, full of expressive force. The formula is frequently a direct appeal to the public:

| Sentimentua sartu zitzaidan
bihotzeraino umetan,
geroztik hainbat gauza mingarri
ikusi mundu honetan.
Euskalerriaz batera nago
bihotz barneko penetan;
anaiak alkar hartu ezinik,
etsaiak su eta ketan,
esan dudana gezurra bada
urka nazazue bertan. (bis)

(Emotions entered / my heart as a lad / Since then, I've seen much suffering / in this world / My heart goes out to / that of the Basque Country / We can't be as brothers / as the enemy beats us black and blue / If what I say is a lie, hang me here and now.)

At other times, an emotional reinforcement of something previously said:

| Sentimentua nola dugun guk
haize hotzeko orbela,
mingainetikan bihotz barnera
doa herriko kordela;
esperantza dut zerbait hoberik
bearbada datorrela,
mundu hontara sortu zen bati
bizitzea ere zor dela;
bihur bekizkit hesteak harri
hori ez bada horrela (bis)⁴⁵.

(Our emotions are like ... leaves in the cold wind / The thread of our people runs / from the tongue to the bottom of the heart / I like to think / better times are coming / That which has come into this world / deserves a life as well / May my guts turn to stone / if this not be true.)

It seems clear that these last two lines of the bertso could well have been prepared by Amuriza before the start of the championship. In effect, they are applicable to any theme with epic/tragedy in mind. Their function is not to develop the theme but to reinforce what has been stated beforehand. This, far from being a demerit, is perhaps Amuriza's greatest virtue. It involves, amongst other things, the conscious use of rhetorical strategies. Amuriza does no more than make use to the maximum of the most typically oral resources, adapting them to

⁴⁵ Txapelketa Nagusia 1980: *Bertsolari txapelketa nagusia* (Donostia, 1980-1-6), Tolosa, Auspoa, 141, 1980, 36.

the new expressive needs.

Another example of modern formulaic use, applied in this case to a much more playful and less serious theme, is this bertso of Andoni Egaña, improvised in one of those new-style exercises or assignments; in this case, each bertsolari having to imagine what the infancy of the other was like. One of the other artists was Mañukorta, a bertsolari whose public image is that of the eternal bachelor and with a natural sense of humour which does not precisely come from schooling:

| Mañu eskolan ikusten det nik
sarri ezin erantzunda:
eme ta **a, ma**; **eme** ta **i, mi**;
letzen ikasi nahi zun-da.
Eme ta **i, mi**; **eme** ta **o, mo**;
arrotz zitzaion burrunda;
mu bakarrikan ikasi zuen
etxeko behiei entzunda⁴⁶.

(*I can see Mañu at school now / unable to answer the questions / **eme** with **a, ma**, **eme** with **i, mi**; / as Mañu wanted to learn / **eme** with **i, mi**, **eme** with **o, mo**; / fit all sounded strange; / the only one he learnt was **mu**, / he had heard it at home from the cows.*)

It would seem evident that, in order to improvise this bertso, Andoni Egaña would have had to experiment with the names of the letters beforehand, trying to fit them in to groups of 5 syllables. There is no problem whatsoever in accepting the formulaic character of this kind of bertso, always remembering that the nature and the management of these newly-coined formulae are radically different from what oralist theory says about them. To mention only the obvious, the undoubted analytical skill of the bertso in question is undeniable.

⁴⁶ *Bapatean* 97, Donostia, EHBE, 1998, 101.

B | *Intellectual experimentation*

Ong denies oral expression the capacity for intellectual experimentation. This is why he states that oral expressions are conservative and traditional. However, as has been seen in the first chapters of this book —and in some of the bertsos quoted as examples—, intellectual experimentation is one of the key aspects of current bertsoaritzza.

The corpus of improvised bertsoaritzza from over the past twenty years is full of pieces which are witness to the tendency of modern bertsolaris for intellectual experimentation. One example here will suffice.

On the instruction of the theme-prompter, the bertsolari Egaña is the philosopher Plato. Sarasua is his 14-year-old disciple who must only question his master. The session is to be in bertsos of only two rhymes and the metre is of 10/8 syllables (*handia*). The stanza of two rhyming lines (each transcribed, except in Iparralde, into two lines) is known as a *kopla*. So, therefore, they are *kopla handiak*. The improvised oral confrontation is too long to be reproduced here in its totality but we have selected some of the rhymes, the last two selected also being the last two of their whole performance:

|*Sarasua*: Beste zalantzak ere baditut,
eman zaidazu laguntza;
pentsatzen nago gaur maitasuna
ez ote dugun hitz hutsa.

(*My doubts innumerable, / ¡help me, please! I feel that love today, / is but an empty word.*)

|*Egaña*: Ai, ikaslea, gaxtea baina
bide onean zaude zu,
maitasun pixkat badadukazu
duda egiten baduzu.

(My dear disciple, you're young but / you are on the right road: / you may well know something of love / if you are in doubt.)

|Sarasua: Aspaldi hontan buelta ta buelta
ia ez det hartu lorik,
ta erantzunik ez det aurkitzen:
ba ote dago Jainkorik?

(This has been going round and round for some time / and I lose sleep over it, / and I can't find an answer: / Does God really exist?)

|Egaña: Zuk botatako galdera hori
ez da hutsaren hurrena,
Jainko asko da, garrantzitsuna
nor berangan dagoena.

(The question you raise / is not an easy one: / there are many gods, / but the most important / is the one right here inside of us.)

|Sarasua: Baina bizitzak zentzu gutxi du,
gero eta gutxiago,
ni neuz aparte beste Jainkorik
inon ere ez badago.

(But life has little meaning / less so as time goes by, / if, apart from the God in me / there is no other.)

|Egaña: Aspaldi baten galdera entzun nun,
aho dotore batetik,
ia bizitzak existitzen dun
heriotzaren aurretik.

(This one I heard before, / from a wordsmith: / it is whether life exists / before death.)

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|Sarasua: Ondorio bat aterea det,
Platon maitea, adizu:
zuk hitz gehiago dakizu baina
nik bezain gutxi dakizu.

(I've come to a conclusion, / Dear Plato, listen here: / you are wiser in number of words, / but you are just as ignorant as I.)

|Egaña: Ni erdi tonto bilakatu nau
ondo erantzun ezinak,
ta zu jakintsu bihurtu zaitu
duda eta jakinminak⁴⁷.

(The fact I don't have a good answer / has turned me into a semi-idiot / You, however, have been made wise / by doubts and by a thirst for knowledge.)

C | Distancing

Stating that oral expressions cannot be “objectively separable” or are inseparably “homeostatic” is the same as denying any possibility of the distancing of the artist from such utterances of oral art. Now, without distancing there is neither personal style nor literature as such. But, in fact, it is this distancing that is precisely the principal feature of today's improvised bertsolaritza.

In the championship where Egaña was declared champion for his first time, he had to play the part of a father who had lost his young son, his only child, through illness. In contrast to the dead child's mother (played by Jon Enbeita), who found some consolation in her religious faith, the father (Egaña) is afflicted with all kinds of doubt:

⁴⁷ Bapatean 98, Donostia, EHBE, 1999, 118.

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| Bizitzaren merkatua...
nago neka-nekatua;
ez zen handia, inola ere,
haurran pekatua.
Zein puta degun patua:
gure ume sagratua...
lotan al zeunden, ene Jaungoiko
madarikatua?⁴⁸

(Life is but a market place ... / I can't go on; / so great / was the child's sin? / Fate is a damned joke; / .. our adorable child! / ¿Were you sleeping when it happened / Damned God?)

This is the bertso that starts the improvised oral confrontation. And this is Egaña's third and last bertso:

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oralist theory**

| Sinimentsu dago ama,
haurra lurpean etzana;
nola arraio kendu digute
hain haurtxo otsana?
Hossana eta hossana,
hainbat alditan esana!
Damu bat daukat: garai batean
fededun izana!⁴⁹

(The mother persists in her faith, / the child lies buried below; / Why the hell did you take / our innocent child? / "Hosana, hosana!" / so many times intoned / I now regret/having once been a believer!)

It might be thought that the distancing in religious themes is due to the general relaxing in society regarding religion. But neither is bertsolaritza free of thoughts unthinkable (or unutterable) only a few decades ago. The

⁴⁸ Campeonato-1993, 223.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

following are two bertsos improvised by Sarasua and Egaña at a dinner in Arantza (Navarre) in 1992. Egaña is defending the need to continue singing until the listeners say stop. Sarasua is trying to finish the session as soon as possible. Sarasua sings first:

| Honek jarraitu egin nahi luke
ene, hau da martingala!
Aitortzen dizut azken-aurreko
nere bertsoa dedala.
Ta honek berriz eman nahi luke
oraindik joku zabala,
hau begiratzuz gaur erizten dut
lehen beldur nintzen bezala,
bertsolaria ta prostituta
antzerakoak dirala⁵⁰.

(This one wants to go on, / my, what a to-do here! / I'm telling you this is my last bertso but one. / And this one wants to carry on / dragging out the improvised oral confrontation, / When I see him now I'm confirmed / in what I feared from the beginning / that the bertsolari and the prostitute / are similar.)

**Enchantment by .but
lack of charm of the
oralist theory**

| Sarasuaren aldetik dator
ez dakit zenbat atake,
errez salduko naizela eta
hor ari zaigu jo ta ke;
lantegi honek berekin dauka
hainbat izerdi ta neke,
bertsoalriek ta prostitutek
sufritzen dakite fuerte,
baina gustora dauden unean
gozatu egiten dute.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Bapatean* 92, Donostia, EHBE, 1993, 216

⁵¹ Ibidem.

(You see that Sarasua / doesn't stop attacking me / Maybe he thinks / I'm easily bribed. / In this art of ours/there is sweat and tears; / both bertsolaris and prostitutes / know what suffering is / but they also have moments / of great satisfaction.)

In 1994 Egaña improvised in Aretxabaleta the following bersto on the death, presumed suicide of the cyclist Luis Ocaña. This bertso is also a good example of the strategic complexity of bertsos with more than five rhymes:

| Geure buruen txontxongillo ta
sarri besteren titere,
ustez antuxun ginanak ere
bihurtzen gara titare;
Luis Ocaña hor joana zaigu
isilik bezin suabe:
pistola bat parez pare,
zigilurik jarri gabe,
ez lore ta ez aldare;
baina inortxo ez asaldatu,
egin zazute mesede,
askatasunak mugarik ez du
heriotz orduan ere.⁵²

(At times we are but marionettes / at others, puppets pulled by others' whims / Even those who thoughtourselves vessels / became mere thimbles / Luis Ocaña has gone from us, / discretely saying nothing: / a pistol to the temple, / the safety catch off, / not a flower, not an altar; / But let nobody be scandalised, / do me this favour, / freedom has no limits / not even at the moment of death.)

It would not be particularly useful to give more examples. We can say, as

⁵² *Bapatean 94*, Donostia, EHBE, 1995, 216

a conclusion, that the distancing which oral theory regards as exclusive to written literature, is the prime characteristic of improvised bertsolaritza as has been practised since the 80's: a distancing with respect to the co-textual values, untouchable to date, but also it is a distancing regarding situational elements, as we saw in the improvised oral confrontation between Iturriaga and Maia on the theme of lesbian friends.

D | *Performance*

Without a doubt the most valuable contributions to the oralist theory is the central concept of *performance*, a term popularised principally by the North American folklorists (Abrahams, Dundes, Lomax...). The most satisfactory definition regarding this is perhaps that of Paul Zumthor:

| ... *performance* can be considered as an element and, at the same time, as the principal constituent factor of this oral poetry. Demanding full achievement, performance determines all the other formal elements which, related to it, are hardly more than virtualities... The conventions, rules and regulations which govern oral poetry range, from one end of the text to another, its occasion, its audiences, the person transmitting and their short-term objective.⁵³

Zumthor mentions, on presenting the definition we have quoted, the case of the singers of African dirges who, apparently, are incapable of repeating their poetic laments outside the actual funerals.

If the *performance* is, as Zumthor has defined it, “the principal constituent factor” in this oral poetry, much more so will it be in bertsolaritza which, moreover, is improvised. To say the same thing using the terminology of Zumthor, bertsolaritza, being improvised, is much more “circumstantial” than any other form of oral poetry.

⁵³ ZUMTHOR, Paul (1991), *Introducción a la poesía oral*, Madrid, Taurus, p.155.

So, rather than the term, itself, we are concerned with the fact of the central nature of the communicative act and the fact that, regarding the performance, all the other formal elements, including the text, are hardly more than virtualities.

3 A new theoretical framework for improvised bertsolaritza

3.1 Improvised bertsolaritza as a rhetorical genre

From what we have dealt with up to now, we can deduce that improvised bertsolaritza is a genre which is:

- oral
- sung
- improvised
- not specifically literary (its aim is to arouse specific emotions amongst the audience) but definitely close to literature (capable of producing texts subject to literary analysis).

This last feature makes bertsolaritza a genre closer to rhetoric than literature. Thus, Aristotle defines rhetoric as:

| ... the faculty for considering, in each case, all that is necessary in order to persuade.⁵⁴

Two millennia have gone by since Aristotle formulated this definition of rhetoric and it might seem strange to today's reader his idea of rhetoric and persuasion being the same. This is specially so given that the accepted meanings of both terms have changed so radically over this long

⁵⁴ ARISTOTELES (1971), *Retórica I*, 2, 1355 b/25-26. Also Plato, in *Gorgiasen*, (*Gorgias*, 453 a, in PLATON 1972, p. 361.): "If I do not understand incorrectly, you say that rhetoric is skill of persuasion and that all its activity is to that end".

period. Particularly in its use as an adjective ("rhetorical") it has come to mean "empty and misleading verbosity". The expression, "persuasion" is today almost exclusively used in the sphere of advertising and propaganda.

George A. Kennedy, perhaps the most prestigious researcher of classical rhetoric as art of persuasion, gives us a much more descriptive description of rhetoric than that of Aristotle, and one that should be taken into account:

| Rhetorike in Greek specifically denotes the civic art of public speaking as it developed in deliberative assemblies, law courts and other formal occasions under constitutional government in the Greek cities, especially the Athenian democracy. As such, it is a specific cultural subset of a more general concept of the power of words and their potential to affect a situation in which they are used or received.⁵⁵

As is well-known, there are three rhetorical genres, according to the aim and the type of persuasion in each case: judicial, deliberative and epideictic. The judicial and deliberative genres were clearly practical and were used to practice a type of direct persuasion in the currently accepted sense of the word. The idea was to win over the agreement of the audience to the theses of the orator; theses which, in the case of the judicial genre, dealt with past events, and, in the deliberative genre, with future themes.

| In the epideictic genre, on the other hand, "persuasion" has a different meaning:

Perhaps epideictic rhetoric is best regarded as any discourse that does not aim at a specific action but is intended to influence the values and beliefs of the audience.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ KENNEDY, *A new history of classical Rhetoric*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press., p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p.4.

We have stated that the main aim of the bertsolari is to “arouse emotions” amongst the listeners. Maybe it is not the best formulation, but it should suffice to recall Jon Sarasua’s words to illustrate that “arouse emotions” and “to influence values and beliefs” in the audience are two sides of the same coin:

| This is the question: how to approach the performance, where to start, how to surprise the audience, where the argument is going, how you perceive the world of your listeners and what you do to become involved therein...⁵⁷

If there remains any doubt about the pertinence of improvised bertsolaritza belonging to the epideictic genre of rhetoric, here we have the description of the same by Chaïm Perelman, the main driving force behind the reinstatement of rhetoric in the middle of the XX century:

| It is to do with a funeral eulogy or an elegy of a city before the citizens, with a theme bereft of current usage, as in the praise of a virtue or a divinity while the listeners, according to the experts, only play the part of mere spectators. After listening to the orator, they do nothing more than applaud and leave. These discourses were, as well, a select attraction in those festivals where people from one place or more regularly met. And the most obvious result was to make the author of these verses famous.⁵⁸

It seems undeniable that improvised bertsolaritza, by its nature and aims, fits in better with this description than with any other literary genre, oral or written.

It remains to be seen if the epideictic genre of rhetoric turns out to be a bed of *Procuete*, too short for improvised bertsolaritza. In other words, may not the assimilation of bertsolaritza into the genre of rhetoric impe-

⁵⁷ Jon Sarasua, in GARZIA, Joxerra (1998), p. 61.

⁵⁸ PERELMAN, C., and OLBRECHTS-TYTECA, L. (1976 [1958]), *Traité de l’argumentation: La nouvelle rhétorique*, Bruxelles, Editions de l’Institut de Sociologie (Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles), p. 63

de the appreciation of a literary excellence which, in some cases, the bertsolari achieves? Nevertheless, the analysis of bertsolaritza as a genre of rhetoric does not have to involve the uprooting, as a principle, of its literary character even though this character does not constitute an end in itself. As Perelman well makes clear:

| It is in the epideictic that all the procedures of literary art are admissible, given that it makes possible all that enhances the communion between artist and audience. It is the only genre which makes one think immediately of literature, the only one which could be comparable to the libretto of a cantata, which thus is most likely to become recitative, to become rhetorical, in the pejorative and habitual sense of the word.⁵⁹

We can state, thus, that it is rhetoric and more specifically its epideictic genre, which is the natural framework for a full understanding of the phenomenon of improvised bertsolaritza. Now, the assimilation of bertsolaritza into this rhetorical genre should not be mechanistic, but it behoves us to fit rhetorical doctrine to the differentiated characteristics of improvised bertsolaritza which, unlike other manifestations of epideictic rhetoric, is a sung and improvised genre.

We can, therefore, refine our definition of improvised bertsolaritza offered at the beginning of this section, stating that **bertsolaritza is a rhetorical genre of an epideictic, oral, sung and improvised nature.**

3.2 Bertsolaritza and the five canons of rhetoric

Classical rhetoric, more than a purely theoretical construction, is a critical and meticulous description of the mechanisms and procedures of the orators of the time. As we have said above, we are not trying to apply these instruments and procedures in a mechanistic way to improvised ber-

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 67.

tsolaritza. It is more a case of constructing our own critical description from the direct observation of the tasks undertaken by today's bertsolaris. It is here that classical rhetoric can offer us a methodology which has admirably proved itself to be fruitful and efficacious. Although:

| The study of rhetoric, most seem to agree, is essentially the study of rhetoric's five canons... They provide a structure that allows rhetors and rhetoricians to analyze and study separately the various parts of a complete rhetorical system.⁶⁰

These five canons (also called parts, faculties, functions, categories or divisions) of rhetoric are generally known by their Latin names:

- *Invention*. The search for and creation of suitable arguments
- *Arrangement*. Articulation of the arguments in a suitable order. Structuring of the discourse.
- *Style*. Suitable formulation of the arguments
- *Memory*. Retention in the memory of the arguments, suitably ordered and formulated. (The discourses were prepared to be put down into writing, and they had to be memorised as such)
- *Delivery*. The delivery of the discourse, the performance.

These five canons of classical rhetoric make up a first class analytical model, the validity of which has lasted to our time:

| In classical rhetoric, the canons represented the process followed by rhetors as they composed pieces of discourse... In modern rhetoric, they represent the aspect of composing which work together in a recursive, synergistic, mutually dependent relationship.⁶¹

⁶⁰ REYNOLDS, J.F., "Memory Issues in Composition Studies", in REYNOLDS, J.F. (edit.) (1993), *Rhetorical memory and delivery. Classical Concepts for Contemporary Composition and Communication*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 2.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

Regarding its application to bertsolaritza, it is better to interpret the five canons just as they were understood in antiquity, as they allow us to analyse the process that bertsolaris follow when they compose pieces for discourse, i.e., when they improvise their bertsos, and establish differences between this and the creative process of other genres.

From the critical description of the mechanisms for the construction of the improvised bertso, outlined in chapter III, it can be followed that the bertsolari, on improvising the bertso, carries out, more or less consciously, the five tasks corresponding to the five canons of rhetoric. We pointed out in that chapter that, for the improviser, each bertso is a "rhetorical unit" which (s)he has to suitably organise. The bertsolari faces each bertso as if it were an independent discourse, even though it may, at times, form part of a longer discursive unit (a performance or a whole event). In any case, each bertso makes up an independent discursive unit and it is in each bertso that we have to look for and analyse which elements from each of the five canons of rhetoric are adopted in the improvised bertsolaritza.

3.3 Invention in improvised bertsolaritza

Invention is the search for and/or creation of suitable arguments.

By "argument" it should be taken to understood all the content and reference that the bertsolari can use for the achievement of the desired end (arouse emotions in the audience, score points off the opponent, reinforce one's own, and so on).

"Suitable", in turn, is, like everything in rhetoric, a value relative to the audience in each case. Given a specific audience, suitable is that argument which that audience accepts as such. Which does not mean that the improviser has to always renounce his point of view, but only that he has to take into account the initial position of the listeners before starting to

sing. In bertsolaritza involving homogenous co-text it is rare that any conflict arises, as the bertsolari and audience share points of view to a great extent. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, the tension between what the bertsolari really thinks and what (s)he intuitively believes has to be sung in order to “get to” the listeners, is one of the central problems:

| As a bertsolari, you try to influence the audience before you by whatever means, by hook or by crook. The tension between what you have to offer and the capacity of the audience to receive it is the essence of a bertso and, at the same time, the management of which is the most difficult task of bertsolaritza... If you are too much into your own thing, you do not communicate; if you bend too much to your listeners, you cannot contribute anything of interest.⁶²

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As with any other genre, improvised bertsolaritza sets its own framework of references. So, for example, arguments which in real life or in another genre might be far-fetched and unacceptable can be perfectly suitable for improvised bertsolaritza. We have defined this oral art form as a genre of epideictic rhetoric, which means that the artistic dimension in bertsolaritza is more relevant than, say, in ecclesiastic, parliamentary or judicial oratory. In other words, even in performances without a theme-prompter, the bertsolari “plays” a role. The function of bertsolaritza is not so directly one of persuasion compared to other rhetorical genres but is mediated by the artistic and recreational characterisation of the genre. Some years ago, particularly in certain specific performance formats, this mediation was such that the bertsolari rarely had an opportunity to make her/his own voice heard, whereupon the tension mentioned by Sarasua could disappear, with the consequent risk that the performance became spectacle and only that. After a number of years when festivals involving bertsolaritza were prestigious and all the rage, there had been a tendency

⁶² Jon Sarasua, in GARZIA, Joxerra (1998), p. 48.

to claim back those formats in which the bertsolaris feel less mediated (free performance, after dinner events, etc.).

Aristotele, Perelman and others have offered an exhaustive analysis of the different kinds of arguments, as well as their mental organisation and accessibility. The theory of invention seems linked to “common places”, a species of “formal argumental schema” from which concrete arguments are taken:

| When one is dealing with hierarchical values or with reinforcing the intensity of cohesion with what these are based on, one can link them to other values or hierarchies in order to consolidate them. But, at the same time, one can also turn to more generalised premises which we call *topoi*, from which we get the term, topics or the sacred themes of rhetorical dialectics.⁶³

These “common places” (*topoi* in Greek) present a bipolar antithetic structure, and each historical period tends to prioritise one or other of the two extremes. Romanticism, for example, unlike other periods, tended to the ephemeral and the unrepeatable in detriment to the lasting or the constant. A catalogue of the options taken up in each epoch would constitute, according to Perelman, an excellent description or cosmic vision of the period which would:

| Provide the possibility of characterising societies, not only for the particular values that had preference, but also for the intensity of agreement which these societies display for one or other member of the pair in the antithetic place.⁶⁴

From these common places the raw material of the argumentation is extracted, the premises on which subsequent articulation is based, explicit or implicitly in a number of argumental structures which Perelman

⁶³ PERELMAN, C., and OLBRECHTS-TYTECA, L. (1976 [1958]), P. 112.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, P. 114.

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and others have described excellently.

As far as bertsolaritza is concerned, such a study is pending. Amongst the few and unconnected observations that exist, can be mentioned the preference, normal in a country like ours, of the small to the grand. Against the enthymeme, “we have greater numbers, so we will win” (Perelman quoting a French leader), is the typical argument of the bertsolari: “we are not right because we are few”. Little else has been written on this theme: the argumental skill of the bertsolari appears to be thought of as something innate which either one has or not, a question of mere natural genius. Even in the bertso workshops, it is this aspect which is left to the innate ability of each participant while the workshops concentrate on the technical aspects of the bertso, on the mechanics of its construction. In reality, improvised bertsolaritza has hardly been studied at all, somewhat strange in a country which, apart from having its own university, boasts more philologists and communicators than readers!

This research wanting, intuition tells us, nevertheless, that the keys to improvised bertsolaritza can be found in invention, in the procedures and argumental resources of the bertsolaris, when performing solo and, above all, when in improvised oral confrontation.

After witnessing the bertsolaris championship of 1997, in live session, and invited by the Bertsozale Elkarte association, Maximiano Trape-ro, the highest authority in sung improvisation by decimistas and tro-veros, admirably encapsulated the essentially argumental character of bertsolaritza:

| ... the art of the bertsolaris lies more with the argumentation within than with an elaborate wordiness of the poem, such that one has to wait until the end of each bertso to fully perceive the poetic achievements of the improvisation. The themes which they are given demand the sensibility of a

poet, but no less a requirement of logical, argued reasoning in which, the more daring it is, the more original and surprising it is.⁶⁵

If this enormous deficit in research into improvised bertsolaritza is to be remedied, then it would not be a bad idea to start precisely with this aspect of invention, of the argumental strategies of the bertsolaris, given that it is here that the essence of the improvising art of the bertsolaris appears to lie. In this, too, lies the main difference between bertsolaritza and other manifestations of improvisation, such as the Latin American decimistas and troveros.

Apart from this, we can say that, unlike the ancient orators and the majority of modern communicators, the bertsolari improviser has very few seconds to find and construct suitable arguments.

Nevertheless, this form of being under pressure is compensated by the possibility of using arguments that would be employed in non-improvised genres with difficulty. We refer, of course, to all those extra-textual elements which form part of the communicative act of bertsolaritza. So the bertsolari can use as arguments things as different as:

- The situational references (fellow bertsolaris, the public, place and time of the event...).
- The tunes employed, most of which are associated, in the minds of the listeners, with a specific text. The use of a suitable air evokes this associated text and allows the bertsolari to say more than is actually said textually: the melody assures the presence, in the minds of the audience, of a text which the bertsolari is not going to utter. From here on, there are two possibilities. One is to use the evocation as a mere reinforcement of the explicitly sung discourse (using, for example, a tune associated with a nursery rhyme in a theme where the improviser is a parent who has to

⁶⁵ TRAPERRO, Maximiano (1998) “Un campeonato de bertsolaris”, *Las Provincias*, 98-1-1. p 37.

tell a bed-time story). The second possibility, more in tune with the distancing character of current bertsolaritza, is using the evocation as contrast, as antithesis of the explicitly sung discourse (using, for example, the same air when the theme demands the characterisation of a politician at the hustings).

- The different cadences in singing, the intensity of the voice, rhythm.
- Gestures and body language.

As can be seen, it is not easy to isolate the tasks inherent in invention from the corresponding ones in style. In fact, later, when we deal with style and delivery, we will have to repeat some of the comments made here. This is not at all unusual, as the distinction between the five canons of rhetoric is, as said before, merely a methodological one which allows the “analysis and study, separately, of what are just parts of a single rhetoric totality”. If it is true that, in any other genre of rhetoric, the five canons develop and interact simultaneously and continually, it is even more true for improvised bertsolaritza, in which the bertsolari is under pressure to carry out his labour of rhetoric in a question of seconds.

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Mañukorta and I. Elortza Source: XDZ

3.4 Arrangement and improvised bertsolaritza

Arrangement is the ordering of the arguments in a suitable manner in order to achieve the desired end.

As regards improvised bertsolaritza, two levels of application of *arrangement* can be identified. As we have seen, each bersto always constitutes a discursive unit, and this is the first level for consideration: arrangement applied to a single bertso. On occasions, the arrangement can also be applied to larger (a performance or even longer units). In any case, whether or not there is a more ample discursive unit, each bertso still maintains its unitary discursive character.

A | *Arrangement in discourses of a single bertso*

As we saw in chapter III, the intrinsic conditions of improvisation bear upon the bertsolari to abide by, in general, a more or less unalterable discursive structure. The main argument, the one the bertsolari considers most effective, is positioned, once suitably formulated and fitted into the corresponding metrical mould, at the end of the bertso.

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In general, the formulation of the main argument usually includes, at least in the “long” (*handia*) metre (5-5/8 syllables), the last puntu of the bertso. When dealing with the “short” (*txikia*) metre, it is not unusual to find arguments which embrace the last two puntus.

If the bertso is short⁶⁶, the rest of the bertso, which is fashioned through pure improvisation, can be reduced to a mere preamble, whose function is none other than to ensure and highlight, whether by canalisation or by

⁶⁶ The difference between long and short bertsos is obvious at its extremes. Bertsos of four or fewer rhymes are short bertsos, and those of more than five rhymes are long. The problem lies, as always when limits are established, in the bordering zones. In this case, it is not easy to decide if the bertsos of five rhymes are, for rhetorical effect, long or short. The problem is that the bertsos of five rhymes are, followed by those of four, the most used by far by bertsolaris.

antithesis, the effect of the final argument. Although they don't furnish new arguments, if it is properly done, it works. A good example of this is the bertso by Lazkao Txiki, in which the bertsolari - a confirmed and paradigmatic bachelor in real life - finds himself, by grace of his fiction, offering a prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe (in Hondarribia):

| Lehenago ere nere denboran
errezo asko eginda,
aspaldi hontan aurkitutzen naiz
andrerik hartu ezinda.
Nik neskazar bat eskatzen dizut,
egongo zera jakinda,
baina zarrikan ez badaukazu
gaztea ere berdin da.⁶⁷

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(*I, who through the course of my life / Have always prayed and prayed, / Lately cannot find / A woman, my love to aid. / You know only too well my request: / I want a nice old maid, / But if there isn't an old one handy / Of a young one I won't be afraid.*)

In the longer bertsos, on the other hand, it is not easy to achieve your end if everything that you sing is specifically directed at preparing for the finale, as it proves difficult to hold the listener's attention over the time that this type of bertso demands. The longer bertso requires, as a result of its complexity, a greater variety of strategies and a greater internal tension, as we will see below.

From a technical point of view, the bertsolari, on formulating her/his main argument, not only has to take care over the number of syllables employed, but also has to try to ensure that the final puntu imposed by the last word opens up a sufficiently wide range (or daisy) of suitable

⁶⁷ LAZKAO TXIKI "Amabirjinari andregai eske", in DORRONSORO, Joanito (1988), *Bertsotan II*, 1936-1980, Donostia, Gipuzkoako Ikastolen Elkarte, p. 133.

puntus for him to complete the bertso. From there, the arguments with which (s)he will complete, through pure improvisation, the bertso, will have to be executed according to the word rhymes (s)he selects. In this way, the choice of the main argument (invention) determines its formulation (style) but this formulation determines, in turn, the rest of the line of argument (invention) and the structure of the bertso (arrangement). In the few seconds which the bertsolaris have at their disposal for improvising a bertso before they begin to sing, they:

1. choose, from among those arguments which occur to them, that which seems most appropriate according to the theme, the position or role that corresponds to them, and to the audience before which they are singing. *Invention.*

2. formulate it in a suitable way, that is: (a) they fit the argument to the chosen metrical format, (b) make sure that the last word belongs to a family of rhymes which will permit them to select a sufficient number of rhyming words and lines, and (c) they formulate it, within these conditioning factors, in the manner they consider most suitable for the chosen argument to be developed in all its communicative potential. *Style.*

3. choose from the puntus which might have occurred to them, those which intuitively seem most suitable for elaborating the bertso ending which has been previously decided. *Invention.*

4. mentally arrange the chosen puntus in the order considered most appropriate for stringing together the most coherent and cohesive discourse possible, always remembering that the bertsolari already knows the denouement or finale of the discourse. This act of ordering and structuring of the bertso may be executed in its entirety before starting to sing, or might be only partially completed (with the adoption of the final puntu) trusting the rest to pure improvisation. *Arrangement.*

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5. fix in their memory (a) the denouement of the bertso now suitably formulated and (b) the basic discursive scheme afforded by the chosen and arranged rhyming words.

It is then that the bertsolari begins to sing, completing the bertso in the most suitable manner for the finale which (s)he has worked out to be as effective as possible. In order to arrive at the final destination, the bertsolari travels the road (the bertso) in stages (puntos), always endeavouring never to lose sight of the journey in both its denouement and its entirety. Each puntu is, to a certain extent, a mini discourse, a sub-discourse in which the bertsolari has to repeat, in miniature, the whole rhetorical process.

The task of arrangement which the bertsolari develops in each bertso is executed in two stages:

- During the preliminary stage (before the bertsolari begins to sing) the exercise of arrangement is, in effect, that described, in points (3) and (4) above.
- During the stage of pure improvisation, however, the operation of arrangement revolves, above all, around avoiding the repetition of the same rhyming word, a repetition referred to as “poto” and usually considered an absolute disaster to be avoided at all costs. In fact, very often in their effort to avoid a “poto”, bertsolari commit errors which, to our minds are much more serious than the supposed disaster they are trying to avoid. The most common of these disasters is the asyntactic —if not ungrammatical or without meaning— insertion of the rhyming word at the end of the corresponding rhyming line.

During this stage of pure improvisation, bertsolari have to resolve other, perhaps more pressing problems. In particular, they have to focus on (a) finding, on the spur of the moment, arguments with which to suitably

complete the bertsos, (b) fitting the arguments to the metrical pattern and (c) getting the suitable formulation right in each case. It is not therefore advisable that the bertsolari should devote too much energy and attention to the job of arrangement. The more structured the bertso has been in the preliminary stage, the less energy and attention needed to dedicate to the task of arrangement in the stage of pure improvisation. In this way, energy and all the attention can be devoted to the improvisation of arguments and formulations required to complete the bertso.

This is especially so in the case of the long bertsos. In effect, the structuring in the short bertsos can be resolved in the course of the bertso itself. The memory of the bertsolari, together with their training and experience, allows them to store those puntos intended for use in the mind, while maintaining a running count of those which have already been used – a task which proves much more difficult when dealing with bertsos of more than five puntos (unless the bertsolari has strategies available which permit the ordering and rationalisation of the improvised part of his work of arrangement).

The use of long bertsos in improvised bertso is a recent phenomenon. The tendency to use long bertsos appeared around 1980 and has increased progressively in the decades of the 80s and 90s. In the 1967 championship and in those previous to it, the bertsolari always used bertsos of four puntos unless the organising body obliged them to use longer bertsos, and when this happened, they performed them reluctantly. A good example of this is the 1959 Gipuzkoa championship held in Eibar on the 8th of November. At one point the organisers required the bertsolari to improvise a bederatziko txikia, a bertso of nine puntos and of short metre. Uztapide, who later went on to win three national championships, flatly refused to do so. The other bertsolari followed his example, all save one, Mitxelena, who agreed to improvise in the said bertso form. The following day in his weekly report, Basarri, who hadn't

participated in this particular championship, came out in defence of the “renegades”:

| Knowing, as we do, the complicated mechanism of the bertso of nine puntus, nowhere is this requirement fitting. Only one bertsolari sang the nine puntus without any obligation to do so given that the jury had revoked the order and announced that they sang bertsos of four puntus.

And the only one who did risk the bertso of nine puntus - well, he began it and he finished it, but without mentioning the compulsory theme and without any effective content.⁶⁸

It is from 1980 that the bertsolaris began, on their own initiative, to employ longer bertsos. In the championship of that year, in the exercises or assignments in which the bertsolari had free choice over the bertso form, almost all the bertsolaris opted for bertsos of five puntus. In the 1993 championship the most used bertso was that of seven puntus and nor were there absent those who risked the *bederatziko txikia* which Basarri had reviled years before.

The reason for this about-turn is to be found once more in the rhetorical conditions of the new age. This wasn't just a mere whim on the part of the bertsolaris. As bertsolaritza gains adepts and the political situation fragments, the co-text in which the bertsolari has to develop her/his activity becomes more heterogeneous and the bertsolari has to make up for, via the text, the progressive loss of common references. In this way the text acquires a greater relevance, it becomes more complex and the bertsolari feels the need to use longer bertsos to embrace this complexity.

However, in the case of bertsos of more than five puntus, to trust all the work of *disposito* to pure improvisation is, as we have seen, ill advised.

⁶⁸ ETXEZARRETA, J.M. (1993), *Bertsolarien desafioak, guduak eta txapelketak*, Oiartzun, Ausporen Sail Nagusia, Sendoa. P.161

Modern bertsolaris, accustomed to using this type of bertso, develop conscious strategies which allow them to acquit themselves well during these difficult moments. These strategies are part of the bertsolari's work of arrangement. Their use represents one of the main differences between present-day bertsolaritza and bertsolaritza prior to 1980.

It is not just a question of avoiding the “poto”. It is also a matter, as we saw in chapter III, of avoiding monotony in the formulations and the loss of attention and interest on the part of the audience during the course of the bertso.

The main strategies which the modern-day bertsolari employs in this type of bertso are the following:

- Hierarchical mental organisation of the different puntus (a daisy of puntus, see chapter III).
- Division of the bertso into units greater than the rhyme (*puntu*), assigning to each section a determined rhetoric function.

These strategies can be clearly seen in a bertso which we have quoted previously. This is the improvised bertso of Andoni Egaña in 1994 dealing with the death of Luis Ocaña:

⁸ MICHELENA, Luis. *Historia de la Literatura Vasca*. Madrid: Minotauro, 1960, p. 25.

| Geure buruen txontxongillo ta
sarri besteren **titere**,
ustez antuxun ginanak ere
bihurtzen gara **titare**;
Luis Ocaña hor joana zaigu
isilik bezin suabe:
pistola bat parez pare,
zigilurik jarri gabe,
ez lore ta ez aldare;
baina inortxo ez asaldatu,
egin zazute mesede,
askatasunak mugarik ez du
heriotz orduan ere.⁶⁹

*(We are our own puppets, / When not marionettes in the hands of others./
Even those who thought ourselves vessels / Become thimbles./ Luis Ocaña
has left us, / Discreetly, without saying a word. / Opposite him, a pistol /
With the safety-catch off; / Not a single flower, not a single altar; / But
don't anyone be shocked. / Do me this favour: / Freedom allows no limits
/ Even at the hour of death.)*

In this bertso too, everything works towards the rhetoric totality which culminates in the last puntu but it seems undeniable that the internal distance from the theme is considerably greater in this type of bertso than in the shorter bertsos, such as that of Lazkao Txiki, quoted previously. This distancing is typical and characteristic of present-day bertsolaritza. In Egaña's bertso we can distinguish various rhetoric sections:

- A first section comprised of the first two puntus are used metaphorically. Their function is not so much to channel the ending as to frame it, starting from a considerable distance. The words “puppet” and “marionette” sug-

gest the scant control we have over our own destiny. The word “thimble” reinforces the idea, adding to it the nuance of extreme smallness.

- The second part is comprised of the following four puntus. In these, the bertsolari creates an almost cinematographic description of the scene of the supposed suicide, focusing attention on the details.
- There follows an exclamation, which serves as a direct link between all of the foregoing and the denouement. The bertsolari has reserved the rhyming foot, “mesede” (favour) precisely in order to be able to execute the link with ease.
- The bertso finishes off with the main idea, whose formulation had been decided upon before beginning to sing.

As we have seen in chapter III, there are circumstances in which the bertsolari cannot continue according to the rules because the mechanics of the exercise prevent it. This is the case of the exercise of imposed start-up, running rhymes (*puntuka*) and, to a certain extent, of the improvised oral confrontations.

However, it must be pointed out that in present-day bertsolaritza, even in the absence of the above-mentioned circumstances, a tendency can be observed to break the rule which stipulates that the main argument be encapsulated in the final puntu. We will look at some examples:

- The bertsolari fills the final puntu of the bertso with a rhetoric formula expressly developed to reinforce everything that preceded it. This is the case of the well-known bertsos of Amuriza in the 1980 final on the theme “Man does not live by bread alone”, one of which (the first of the performance) we transcribe below:

⁶⁹ *Bapatean 94*, Donostia, EHBE, 1995, 216

| Gai horrek badu mamia
 baldin ez banago gor;
 hainbat jende gizaseme
 ikusten ari naiz hor.
 Ogiatz gain gizonari
 anitz gauza zaio zor,
 bestela mundu hontara
 hobe ez gaitezen sor.
 Ogiakin justizia
 behar dugu derrigor ...
hau sinisten ez duenik
ba al da hemen inor?⁷⁰

*(This theme has got some stuffing / Unless I'm deaf altogether; / So many lads / see before me. / More than bread alone, Man, / Is owed much more. / If it were not so, it would be better / Never to have been born. / Hand in hand with bread, / We need justice .../ **Is there anyone here / Who doesn't believe this?**)*

- When the melody offers the chance to repeat the final puntu (whether wholly or in part), the present-day bertsolari often takes advantage of what should be a repetition, to fire off an amorous compliment which changes the sense of the foregoing.
- Recently, the classic exercise of imposed start-up has seen a variety which responds to this tendency to annotate the bertso once finished. In effect, in the most recent championships, together with the exercise of imposed start-up, the bertsolaris have had to sing with the penultimate puntu imposed.

B | *Arrangement in discourses of two or more bertsos*

Independently of the rhetoric development of invention and arrangement

⁷⁰ Bertsolari txapelketa nagusia (Donostia, 1980-1-6), Tolosa, Auspoa, 141, p 80.

unavoidable in each bertso (s)he improvises, the bertsolari can, in certain circumstances, rhetorically organise discursive units of more than one bertso. This organisation, on the few occasions on which it is conducted, can give rise to a (macro) discourse in which each bertso, without losing its discursive character, becomes at the same time, a discursive section. Normally, it is the performance in its totality which becomes a macrodiscourse in these cases.

The organisation of these macrodiscourses must be carried out in the few seconds which the bertsolari has at his disposal between hearing the theme and beginning to sing the first bertso. However, the bertsolari cannot devote all his time to organising the structure of the macrodiscourse because the first bertso which he has to sing also requires his time and attention, as we saw in the previous section. It is not surprising then, that in the majority of cases the procedure consists, pure and simple, in organising each one of the bertsos which he has to improvise as he goes along:

| As to the strategies of more than one bertso, the truth is that we don't often possess the lucidity and sangfroid necessary to tread too far into such complicated terrain. Even in those rare cases when we believe ourselves especially lucid and calm, it is not a very advisable strategy as it runs the risk of diminishing the force of each bertso. Moreover, what can happen is that in the course of the exercise we lose track of the idea that we have reserved for the third bertso, with the result that our entire strategy falls through.⁷¹

Despite this, there are times when the bertsolari does venture to develop a macro discourse which embraces two or more bertsos. Apart from the lucidity and sangfroid which Egaña speaks of, it is also necessary the bertsolari enjoy total control over the discourse. That is, he must know,

⁷¹ Andoni Egaña, exclusive interview in GARZIA, Joxerra 2000, *Gaur egungo bertsolarien baliabide poetico-erretorikoak. Marko teorikoa eta aplikazio didaktikoa*, Leioa, UPV/doctoral theses p. 213.

at the very least, the exact number of bertsos which his performance will have, something which happens in one of two cases:

- In the solo thematic performances (if it is not stipulated by the theme prompter then it is the bertsolari who decides the number of bertsos to be improvised), and
- In the improvised oral confrontations in championships, in which the number of bertsos to be improvised is arranged beforehand. In the non-championship improvised oral confrontations it is up to the bertsolaris themselves to decide when to end each contribution of the improvised oral confrontation, with the result that the bertsolari cannot, unless previously agreed, be sure, after singing the argument with which he intends to close his discourse, that his companion isn't going to reply with another bertso, thus obliging him to continue singing, despite possibly having thought his discourse finished.

Even in the championships involving improvised oral confrontations, the bertsolaris who organise their performance as a macro discourse is exposed to the risk that his bertsos don't mesh with those of each other's companion(s), unless the structure of the macro discourse is sufficiently simple and flexible for the one to dovetail with the other.

This is the case in the improvised oral confrontation between Haritz Lopetegi and Andoni Egaña (Algorta, July, 1999). Upon hearing the theme Egaña, who in this appearance was a robot bertsolari invented by Lopetegi, came up with a unifying strategy for his entire contribution. The strategy consisted in beginning each and every one of his bertsos with the sentence "Aizu, jaun Haritz" ("Hey, Mister Haritz!"), with the intention of concluding his appearance in the following way:

| Bikaina dugu jenio honen
programaketa guztia,
baina pena da bertso den-denak
"Aizu, jaun Aritz" hastia.

(It is really admirable all that / This programming genius does, / But it's a shame that all the bertsos / Begin with "Hey, Mister Haritz!.)

The anaphoric structure which Egaña establishes in this improvised oral confrontation is minimal, something which allows him to sustain it with no great problem while at the same time dedicate all his attention and ingenuity to responding, in the rest of the bertso, to the arguments of his opponent. Even so, the danger is obvious: What happens to Egaña if, after singing this final bertso, Lopetegi decides to continue singing?

Things being such, it is not surprising that the appearance of macro discourses in bertsolaristic improvisation is much more the exception than the norm.

3.5 Style: the poetic function in improvised bertsolaritza

Style is the endeavour to formulate the arguments of the rhetoric discourse in a suitable way. That is, it is in style that the element of poetry in the rhetorical activity is located. As we have seen, the importance of style is greater in the epideictic genre in which we have placed improvised bertsolaritza, than in other rhetoric genres.

The disproportionate development of this aspect of rhetoric activity is the reason for rhetoric's historical loss of prestige. Lacking in practical application, reduced to a mere academic exercise, rhetoric lost sight of those aspects relating to invention and to a lesser degree, arrangement, to become a mere device in which the brilliance of the formulations became the sole aim. From this stems the overtones of "vacuous waffle" which the word "rhetoric" has acquired in our times:

Eloquence, closed away in the schools, is reduced to the contrived exhibition of the “declamations” and the study of rhetorical precepts.⁷²

The study of style broke away from the original theoretical branch, lost its orientation towards the exercise of political and judicial eloquence and the exercise of eulogistic (and, following the consolidation of Christianity, predicative) discourses, established ever closer links with poetry, and extended its jurisdiction to all types of discourse in poetry and prose.

The latter component of the binomial term “poetic rhetoric” which is still in use is a true synecdoche, in that it refers to the whole (rhetoric) when it means a part (the theory of *elecutio*).

It is the part, however, which has prevailed and which use and common sense identify with the complete discipline. Or, if you prefer, it is an example of antonomasia: that which is, or was, the object of style is, par excellence, the object of rhetoric.⁷³

It is not surprising that the rehabilitation of rhetoric, started by Perelman, among others, in the middle of the 20th century is, to a large extent, a redemption of rhetoric in its entirety, an attempt to return to invention the lost relevance and to restrict style to its natural limits within the rhetoric totality.

In classifying improvised bertsolaritza as a poetic genre we are falling into the same error which provoked the historical discrediting of rhetoric, reducing bertsolaritza to what is no more than one of its parts: style, the poetic formulation of the arguments and contents.

To state that style is but one of the parts of rhetoric, in the case of ber-

⁷² MEADOR, P.A. (1983), p 162.

⁷³ MORTARA-GARAVELLI, Bice (1991), pp 66-67. The quote appears in just one paragraph in the book. For clarity here, we have divided into three sections.

tsolaritza, doesn't mean denying the importance of the poetic in the art of bertsolaritza. Such importance is, as we have seen, in accordance with the rhetoric circumstances of bertsolaritza in each epoch. The weaker the co-textual homogeneity, the greater the importance that the text acquires and, along with the text, the poetic. We shouldn't then confuse the poetic excellence of the text with the excellence of the bertso itself. In certain circumstances, a textually poor bertso can be an excellent rhetoric piece. If we confuse the two, if we forget that bertsolaritza is a rhetoric genre and we try to analyse it from the purely poetic, whether oral or written, the result will not always be satisfactory even though the analysis be carried out in good faith.

We believe that this is what happens to Juan Mari Lekuona when he analyses the bertsos of Udarregi, an illiterate 19th century bertsolari. To start with, Lekuona begins from an affirmation: Udarregi must be a good bertsolari, given that in his time he was entrusted with the job of providing “bertsolaristic services” in his region. However, the known bertsos of Udarregi (almost all of them dictated bertsos, not strictly speaking improvised) do not seem to be at the level (poetic, textual) of his fame as a great bertsolari:

In no way comparable to the bertsolaritza of Bilintx, all a feast of the imagination; nor to the sensitivity of a P.M. Otaño, with his pure but at the same time popular, Euskera; nor is it so universal as Iparragirre, imbued with the romantic tendencies of the Europe of the time.

The bertsolaritza of Udarregi seems to Lekuona “radically different” from that of the bertsolaris mentioned and as a result he decides as the only possible mode of analysis, to reach for rhetoric:

For this reason, to analyse the bertsolaritza of this bertsolari from Usurbil, it has seemed best to us to analyse his sentences by applying the met-

hod and procedures of rhetoric.⁷⁴

Lekuona had already mentioned the suitability of the rhetoric model for the analysis of bertsolaritza:

| The improvising bertsolari, as well as poet and singer is also orator. This rhetoric technique is essential for the improvised song. The most impressive thing is that the improvising bertsolari executes all the rhetoric exercises –inventing the arguments, arranging them in a suitable order and formulating them in a beautiful way- simultaneously in the few seconds at his disposal.⁷⁵

For all our admiration of Lekuona we believe that he doesn't draw all the consequences of this affirmation of the rhetoric character, an affirmation which we share. The theoretical framework which we present here is, to a certain extent, no more than a coherent development of what Lekuona suggests.

It is not that the bertsolari is orator “as well as poet”, but rather that he is, above all, orator and, like all orators, has to have also a poetic training which he develops more or less according to the rhetoric requirements of each moment. The case of Udarregi, far from being an exception, is the general rule of bertsolaritza. Although not lacking in works of great poetic value, the corpus of bertsolaritza is full of bertsos whose merits are inexplicable from a purely poetic point of view.

Having said this, we should add that it would be opportune to carry out an exhaustive study of the poetic resources of improvised bertsolaritza by epoch and by bertsolari. It seems obvious that such a study would reveal a greater poetic density in the present-day bertsolaris than in the period prior to 1980, barring exceptions like Lazkao Txiki, and above all, Xalbador.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p 382. (Our emphasis).

⁷⁵ LEKUONA, Juan Mari (1982), p 125.

A | *Poetic-rhetorical resources*

Studying a specific poem generally involves a detailed analysis of the poetic resources used in each case, taking into account that it involves more than just cataloguing the identifiable tropes and other figures of speech:

| Currently, the task of rhetoric within the framework of ancient style is no longer (only) taxonomic: no longer is it a question of a name or a place for discursive events through the procedure of infinitely amassing and extending the network of classification. In fact, what is required at present is to explain and simplify⁷⁶

“To explain and simplify” means, in our case, to be aware of the function that poetry has within the totality of rhetoric which is improvised bertsolaritza.⁷⁷

In 1995 we started research, the aim of which was to sift through and catalogue the main poetic-rhetorical resources of improvised bertsolaritza. The research was set in the theoretical parameters of usage and, as a prior step, we decided to catalogue the poetic resources employed in the finals of three championships, separated by lapses of 13 years: 1967, 1980 and 1993.

The research was centred on the textual aspect of the bertsos and based on the following working hypotheses:

- The undeniable communicative success of the analysed bertsos had to

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p.127.

⁷⁷ A paradigmatic example of the type of research needed is GARZIA, Juan, 1997, *Txirritaren Baratz Norteko Trenetik*, Irun, Alberdania, a work in which the author investigates the different procedures that the bertsolari, Txirrita uses in his art form, always taking into account the function of these procedures and resources. However, almost without exception, the bertsos analysed are not improvised, and the analysis of the author is reduced to the mere text.

be a result of the systematic use of textual poetic-rhetorical resources

- The resources used at each stage must have differed both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- An exhaustive catalogue of the resources employed at each period would be the best possible description of bertsolaritza at each stage. The investigation would thus provide us with a profile of three kinds of bertsolaritza, which can be characterised by the personas of the three champions of the three events analysed: Uztapide, Amuriza and Egaña.

This research meant, in reality, the beginning of an awareness of the inadequacy of the theory for the analysis of improvised bertsolaritza was inadequate. Effectively, on sorting through the improvised bertsoes from the final of the 1967 championships, we came to the disagreeable conclusion that almost all of the bertsoes were, from the perspective of textual poetry, totally uninteresting.

Far from confirming the initial hypothesis, this research forced us to review the theoretical framework in its entirety, a task which has taken four years and the result of which we present in this book as a new theoretical framework.⁷⁸ Widening the perspective from the merely textually poetic to the totality of improvised oral rhetoric, the absence of textual poetic resources no longer is a reason for discrediting improvised bertsoes, which now have to be judged as a function of the context in which they were produced.

As the communicative co-text becomes more heterogeneous, the rhyming lines tend to become longer (bertsoes with more syllables in a given metre), and the poetic intensity of the texts grows in a significant manner.

In current bertsolaritza, or at least in its most formal manifestations (fes-

tivals, championships, some with new formats), the poetic intensity of the texts can be quite considerable. The fact that the poetic function is not the be-all and end-all of improvised bertsolaritza does not mean that this aspect is insignificant. On the contrary, it will be necessary to re-open the research in order to sift through, catalogue and explain the poetic-rhetorical resources employed during each period, always assuming such research also includes the non-textual resources in bertsolaritza.

Current improvised bertsolaritza does not exclude, a priori, any poetic-rhetorical textual resource:

| In the same manner that it depends on the same grammar, orality and writing depend on the same rhetoric.

Nevertheless, neither the distribution of usage nor the strategies of expression are the same. Orality has, in this respect, its own tendencies which we are inclined to think universal.⁷⁹

However, these statements, which we share in principle, call for a double clarification:

- On the one hand, improvised oral rhetoric has, apart from its textual resources shared with written ones, those resources derived from the situation. For bertsolaris, these situational resources are not merely complementary aids but, in certain circumstances, they are precisely the main nucleus of their rhetorical strategies.
- Secondly, the oral and improvised nature of bertsolaritza imposes certain restrictions on the exploitation by the bertsolari of these resources. Some of these constrictions are common to all oral manifestations. Others, on the other hand, are exclusive to oral improvisation.

⁷⁸ The basic and rational formulation of this theoretical framework is from: GARZIA, Joxerra 2000, *Gaur egungo bertsolarien baliabide poetico-erretorikoak. Marko teorikoa eta aplikazio didaktikoa*, Leioa, UPV doctoral theses

⁷⁹ ZUMTHOR, Paul (1991 [1983]), p. 143. We will use Zumthor's work as a primary reference in this section on oral rhetoric, as he has been the person who has worked most on the poetic aspects of oracy.

B | *Limits to poetic strategy*

In principle, the limits to the poetic art of the bertsolaris are simply those deriving from the improvised nature of bertsolaritza, itself. Although more detailed research is not available, we can outline here some of the restrictions which the nature of bertsolaritza imposes on the poetic art of its practitioner:

- Taking into account the little time the bertsolari has, which puts great pressure on the oral artist, as well as the variety of tasks to be undertaken in a matter of seconds, it is not reasonable to expect, in principle, very elaborate constructions. The bertsolari can always offset this limitation by previous preparation. That is, the artist can work out the formulations in an anticipatory manner and then fit them into the most commonly used metre. In this sense, there is nothing to stop the bertsolari from using, for example, the most elaborate and profound metaphors. Nevertheless, one has to be extremely careful not to “purple passage” the text as the time restriction affects not only the transmitter of the art or, but also the recipients. An improvised bertso that fails to make itself understood or to arouse emotion from the beginning is not a good improvised bertso, even though the transcribed text, a posteriori, might be so. In that case, it would be a good bertso, excellent even, but not good improvised bertso.
- Certain poetic-rhetorical resources turn out to be very complicated, both in their construction/emission and in their reception, when these two halves of the same communicative act are carried out orally and in a matter of seconds. No matter how much the oralists may insist to the contrary, the improvisation of onomatopoeias is practically impossible, unless prior preparation of a formula or a formulaic “fitting-in” has been carried out. The same thing can be said about metaphors. Naturally, the resources most commonly used by bertsolaris are those which a) do not represent excessive complexity in their construction and management and B) are easily understood by the audience. It is hardly surprising,

then, that the figures of speech such as the antithesis and the anaphora are by far the most used in the texts of the bertsolaris. As regards tropes and notwithstanding research on the subject, we can draw an intuitive conclusion about the relevance of procedures based on metonymy. With metaphors, the majority used in improvisation are mere platitudes or catch-phrases, although the new strategies of rhyme used by present-day bertsolaris can give rise to a certain originality.

- The preference for certain resources is also conditioned by the very nature of the language used. This conditioning is much more accentuated when a considerable part of the art has to be improvised, as in bertsolaritza. It is, thus, inevitable that there occur a prioritisation of resources according to how the language facilitates their use. This is an exciting, but virgin, field of research, so we cannot provide anything more regarding it except a couple of intuitive conclusions derived from praxis. In the case of the Basque language, we can state that, for example, hyperbaton is effectively not viable as is, though for different reasons, antonomasia. Certain puns, on the other hand, turn out to be more easily manageable in Basque than in Spanish or French. “Zu zaitut biderako argi eta argirako bide” / “You are the light of my way and the way to my light”. In this comparison, the syntax in Euskara is such that the resource loses a considerable part of its power to surprise and of its dialectic efficacy. The comparison, “(You) are more dangerous than a piranha in a bidet” would be, in Basque: “Piraña bat bidet batean baino arrisku-tsuagoa haiz hi”, with which the element of surprise and novelty is revealed with the first word, with the rest of the comparison being relatively anodyne. The tendency to use negative emphasis, particularly litotes, seems to be much more common in Basque than in the two surrounding languages. In fact this figure of speech appears to be the principal strategy of irony amongst the bertsolaris, while antithesis and anaphora make up the main resources for the organisation of the discourse. Otherwise, the dialectic skill of the bertsolaritza oral artists involves the

ability to witticisms (“ateraldiak”).

■ A characteristic of current bertsolaritza with respect to the period prior to 1980 is the presence of various narrative voices, as well as the deliberate creation of different registers.

C | *Resources exclusive to bertsolaritza*

Apart from textual poetic-rhetorical resources, the bertsolari has available other kinds of resources which are not viable in other rhetorical genre. Some of these non-textual resources are common to all oral genres, others are exclusive to oral improvisation which is sung.

■ Superposition of literary planes. The bertsolari, when developing a theme, can jump at will from a fictional plane which is being created in the text to a real situation in which the artist is improvising. This resource is not exclusive to bertsolaritza: Spanish religious drama (*auto sacramental*) has systematically exploited it and so has modern theatre and the cinema. An excellent example of its application is a solo performance by Amuriza, in Anoeta, a small village on the outskirts of the town of Tolosa in Gipuzkoa. The theme-prompter (the bertsolari Angel Mari Peñagarikano), told Amuriza he had to tell his daughter, Mirentxu, a bed-time story to get her to sleep. Amuriza improvised these three bertsos, continually jumping from the fictional plane to the real situation in which he was performing:

| Gaur Anoetan kantuz izan naiz
lehendabiziko aldiz aurten;
aizu, Mirentxu, zuk ez dakizu
han zein bihotz fina duten!
Zure izena kantatu eta
denek txalo jotzen zuten,
ia zeloso ipini naute,
nola hain maite zaituzten!

(*Today I'm singing in Anoeta / the first time this year. / Hey, Mirentxu! You can't imagine / what a big heart they have there! / On just mentioning your name / they all clap and cheer, / you almost make me jealous, / to see how much they love you!*)

| Gure Mirentxu neska txikiak
aurten dauzka zazpi urte;
nik hori esanda haren begiek
hola klis-klas egin dute.
“Oi, aita, baina herri horretan
zer magia egin dizute?
Nola txaloa joko didate
ezagutzen ez banaute?”

(*Our little girl, Mirentxu / is seven this year; / when I told her this tale, / her eyes went ‘blinkity-blink’, like this. / Oh, Daddy, but in this place / What sort of magic have they? / ¿How can they clap me / if they don't even know me?*)

| “Zure aita da txit ospetsua
bere lente ta bizarrez;
zu nere haurra izan zintezkeen
ez dute sinesten errez”.
Hitz hoiek esan eta begiak
itxi zaizka berez-berez:
gure Mirentxu ia lo dago,
ez jo txalorik, mesedez.⁸⁰

(*Your father is very famous, / with his glasses and beard; / it wasn't easy to persuade them / that you are my daughter”. / On uttering these words, / Her eyes closed by themselves: / ou r Mirentxu is almost asleep, / nobody applaud, please.*)

⁸⁰ *Bapatean* 97, Donostia, EHBE, 1998, p. 128

■ The musical air as a recourse. In this same example from Amuriza, the choice of one melody or another is not a rhetorically indifferent one. The metre selected by Amuriza in this case is the *zortziko handia*, a metre to which many popular songs, including nursery rhymes, can be fitted. On using one of these melodies, the bertsolari without doubt enhances the emotional impact of his bertso, as the association of the air with the nursery song words ensures, amongst other things, the credibility of the scene being fictionally created. Apart from this associative connotation, current bertsolaris classify the melodies for their optimum appropriateness in developing poetic, narrative or dialectic themes.

■ The modulation of the voice and the singing. Using the same example, the fiction created by Amuriza demands a suitable vocal execution or delivery of the melody. If he sings too powerfully, the credibility of the created fictional scene will be negatively affected. The bertsolari improvises on singing. He sings but he is not a singer. Everything in the way he sings is subjected to the rhetorical requirements imposed by the theme and the situation: the timbre, the key, the intensity, the rhythm, the judicious distribution (the “management”) of the pauses, and so on. Singing while always trying to stick to musical canons is not a good strategy in bertsolaritza. Inflexible interpretations in the transcription of musical notation are never satisfactory when applied to the melodies of the bertsolaris. There is much to be done and researched in this field, too.

■ Body language and gestures are also a very important resource. In the example we are dealing with, Amuriza’s gesture in the second bertso was patent when he sang, “her eyes went ‘blinkity-blink’, like this”. We are left in no doubt that Amuriza, himself, blinked his eyes to lend a histrionic touch to the bertso. This expressiveness can also be achieved by means of hyperbole, metaphor and comparison, but it would be silly to deny the artist non-textual resources to arouse similar or other feelings or to deem such resources as second-rate to the merely textual ones.

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D | *Poetics and rhetoric*

The first component of the binomial “rhetoric and poetics”, and still used, is a true synecdoche, as it names all (rhetoric) to mean a part thereof (the theory of style).

It is the part, nevertheless, which has prevailed, which usage and common sense identifies with the whole discipline, as such. Or, if one prefers, it is an example of antonomasia: that which is, or was, object of style is, par excellence, the object of rhetoric.⁸¹

We once again furnish the quote from Mortara-Garravelli because it illustrates perfectly what has been happening up to now with improvised bertsolaritza: the reduction, in practice, of the totality of the rhetoric that is improvised bertsolaritza to its poetic component, to style.

As we have stated many times, it is essential to put right this reductionism if the essence of improvised bertsolaritza is to be fully understood. To this end, it is necessary to understand that:

- as we have seen in the preceding sections, the poetic resources of improvised bertsolaritza are not limited to and cannot be reduced to merely textual ones, and
- poetics, in improvised bertsolaritza, is always as a function of and in service to rhetoric as a whole.

The veracity of this second statement is shown by the phenomenological description of the creative process of the improvised bertso outlined in chapter III. We will only add here that this statement has two consequences (or two faces) which should be kept in mind:

Firstly, the low poetic intensity of a particular improvised bertso does not

⁸¹ MORTARA-GARAVELLI, Bice (1988/1991), *Manual de retórica*, Madrid, Cátedra, pp. 66-67.

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necessarily imply its poor quality. The poetic intensity of a construction can be measured by the richness of poetic resources and these, in turn, are forms of expression not very different from those regarded as normal. On the contrary, the essence of poetic resources is its capacity to remove what is automatic from the reception of transmitted content. The high poetic intensity of a particular improvised bertso does not necessarily imply its high quality. On the contrary, the accumulation of tropes and other figures of speech, if not carried out judiciously, may end up with a loss of quality in the bertso.

Give the particular mode of construction in improvised bertsolaritza, the segment of the bertso with greatest poetic intensity is, generally, the last puntu as this is what the bertsolari pays most attention to, though be it in a matter of seconds before beginning to sing. This last puntu is also the point of reference for the rest, the purely improvised part, of the bertso. So, those resources which go to enhance the communicative efficacy of the bertso, condensed into its final puntu, are the most suitable ones. On the other hand, those resources which do not enhance this efficacy, because they distract the audience's attention or because they give away clues better hidden or because they do not fit in sufficiently adroitly to the final punch line, are counter-productive resources.

With a will to "simplify and explain" the poetic resources with which the new rhetoric confronts poetics in its style ambit, it would be interesting to go further into Perelman's ideas about the various functions which poetic resources can play within the rhetoric totality which they serve. Perelman distinguishes three:

- Presence. Some resources serve mainly to highlight the presence of some object or content in one's conscience. Hyperbole would be one of these typical presential resources.
- Choice. When the function of the resource is to make the audience

consider the object or content in one's conscience from a particular perspective. Metonymy, in the broadest meaning of the term, would be a typical resource of choice.

- Communion. When the resources are employed above all to connect with the audience and get their sympathy. The rhetorical question is typical of communion.

With all this, as Perelman himself points out, these three functions are only methodologically separable. In practice, all resources play, to a greater or lesser extent, the three functions at the same time. When it is said that such-and-such a resource is fulfilling a certain function, what is meant is that this is its predominant function at the time and not that the resource carries out this function only and exclusively.

Nevertheless, it is not always easy to discern what the predominant function of a certain resource is. The metaphor, in this sense, is the most complex and difficult to pigeon-hole. On the one hand, one or other of the functions can come into play in the same resource, depending on the discourse into which the resource is incorporated. Finally, the resources may also carry out an argumental role. Antithesis, for example, which Perelman considers, not without reason, to be a presential resource, may be nothing less than a form of enthymeme.

In the last analysis, more than classification as such, we are interested in the manner in which Perelman confronts the analysis of poetic resources, whereby he places them clearly within rhetoric discourse. It is a procedure which has turned out to be of great use in its application to improvised bertsolaritza.

E | *Practical example 4: "Hunger in Africa"*

Let us look at an illustrative example. This is a bertso improvised by Jon Sarasua. The theme-prompter gave him the topic in the form of a

question from an imagined younger brother: Why are people in Africa starving?

| Anai txikia, galdera hori
orain erantzun beharko,
telebistatik ikuste'ituzu
gosez hiltzen, flako-flako.
Hori dela-ta sermoi handirik
hemen ez dizut botako,
erantzuntxo hau zeure buruan
gorde zazu gerorako,
haiek goseak hiltzen baitaude
zuk gehiegi duzulako.

(*Little brother, that question / I'll try and answer now; / you have seen on the tele, / people starving to death, skeletons. / I'm not going to preach / a big sermon on this; / keep this little answer in mind / for when you're older: / they are dying of hunger / because you have too much.*)

Sarasua, in the few seconds he has available for the task, tries to find the straight, honest and direct answer to his fictitious younger brother's question. The idea that comes to him is the following: *Third World hunger is due to First World greed*. He then, almost instantly, works out a formulaic construction on the idea, which is too general and abstract or, in other words, the formulation of the idea is not sufficiently poetic. Given its reception will be automatic and the idea perceived as flat and not greatly inductive to arousing emotion, Sarasua decides to use a mnemonic mechanism (although it is not necessary that he knows this term; his linguistic and communicative skills are more than enough for the task. He could have used this other formulation: *They are hungry because we are not...* more concrete and hard-hitting —more poetic— than the previous one. But he decides to turn the screw that little bit more, blaming his younger brother for the plight of the black people: “they are dying of hun-

ger because you have too much”. This formulation removes the automatic from the reception. The listeners should not interpret it literally, but have to discover for themselves the true meaning that Sarasua wants to get across (“it's no use pretending to be free from guilt; we all have guilt for the misery of the Third World, including the most innocent of us”).

Once the construction of the final idea is decided, the bertsolari places it, as is the rule, at the end of his discourse, as the final puntu. In the improvised part of the bertso, the play afforded by the rhyming suffix, -ako, has to be taken advantage of. He looks for metrical rhyming elements that allow a coherent structuring of his discourse, amongst which he finds *flako* (skinny) and *gerorako* (later on in life). However, the construction of this improvised part of the bertso is conditioned by the chosen final, not only just in rhyming. So that all ends well, the bertsolari has to ensure, amongst other things:

- That the plight of black Africans is brought to bear upon the listeners. In other words, paint a mental picture of Third World misery, effected in the second puntu of the bertso, moreover throwing in an allusion to the effect that the misery is but little more than one spectacle more in the television menu.
- Reinforce the innocence of his little brother in case the final attribution of guilt could be taken literally. Sarasua decides that the best way to effect this is to aim the discourse at his sibling, discarding other rhetoric alternatives. The use of diminutives, the *caveat* that he is not going to deliver a sermon are taken by the audience as signs that the interlocutor is really a young child. The last puntu but one emphasises this innocence of the interlocutor as, the utterance of the rhyming word, *gerorako* suggests that his imminent response may not be intelligible and, thus, will have to be kept for when the child is older.
- The melody chosen by Sarasua in this case was “Aita izena”, composed by Amuriza and which also contributes to create a register that lends

more credibility to the addressed fictional character. Sarasua has other tunes available with the same metrical pattern (*hamarreko handia*) but some of which, nonetheless, would have been too frivolous for the discourse. Yet others, on the other hand, would have been too pompous.

The communicative efficacy of the final puntu is thus ensured by the improvised rhetorical labour, reinforcing the antithesis between the patent innocence of the brother, on the one hand, and pointing the finger of guilt at him for misery in black Africa, on the other.

Amongst other resources, we have mentioned **metonymy**, **antithesis** and the **apostrophe**. We have also talked about the register used. However, we have evaluated all these resources on the basis of the function carried out within the rhetoric totality of the bertso analysed and not on the basis of identification or cataloguing. This is the type of analysis we are proposing for the improvised bertso.

F | *Practical example 5: “The scars of war”*

Jesus Mari Irazu became the centre of attraction in the most exciting moment in the 1997 championship. The week before, Basque political groups, which had been previously at loggerheads, had called a united demonstration in San Sebastian for the day prior to the final. It seemed that there was to be a break in the deadlock of discourses, “we democrats” / “the men of violence” or “we, the true Basques” / “they, the enemy of the people”, which had got nowhere. On the day before the demo, an ETA attack was the motive for the initiative to be called off, to the embarrassment of some and the frustration of most.

On the day of the final, hardly anyone talked about it. In the evening, as the session came to a close, Irazu went on stage, solo. He chose one of the two themes offered by the theme-prompter: “When you were young, you fought in the war. Now retired, you contemplate the wounds on your

body”. The seconds passed. Irazu is ten thousand people but only he has the voice. He sways a little while weighing up the jump he has to make to the end of the bertso in order to reach his listeners. He chooses a difficult stanza, entirely made up of eight-syllabic sentences, unusual amongst bertsolaris. Each pause invites an abyss. After singing the first two bertsos, he takes on the third and last:

| Nere desioan kontra
 aberkide haiei tira,
 nork murgildu ninduen ni
 hainbesteko sarraskira?

(*Against my will / I fired on my country people / Who got me involved / in such a massacre?*)

The listener does not know if he is referring to present or past. But, in the political context of the last few days, nobody could not but make the link with the previous week’s events.

Suddenly, he changes tack (not unusual in improvised bertsolaritza, and which gives great drama and vivacity to the performances).

It is the following sentence that transports us from the past war to the present wounds, and wherein anxiety for the future is expressed:

| ...Orain hurreratua naiz
 jubilazio eztira,
 oraindik gogoan daukat
 orduko gauen dizdira;
 halere barru-barruan
 biharko egunan desira,
 begiak itxita goxo
 etorkizunai begira;
 nere zauriak, badakit,
 lurpean itxiko dira,
 ojala herriarenak
 han itxiko ez balira!⁸²

(...Now, in the pleasant hour / of my retirement, / in my lasting memory / is the brightness of those nights, / and the worry about the future / burning inside me. / I close my eyes, sweetly, / to see that future: / I know these wounds / will only cure below the soil. / I just hope that my country's wounds / don't go the same way!)

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This is, then, an outline of our approach to the analysis of the poetic-rhetorical aspects of improvised bertsolaritza. Although there is still a long way to go and many aspects to be clarified, the investigations carried out to date have been fruitful, both in the overall critique, as such, of bertsolaritza as well as in the pedagogical application of this oral art of improvised singing within the school system.

3.6 Memory and improvised bertsolaritza

The final resources on which we have deliberated place us on the borderline between the style and the delivery of bertsolaritza. But, before dealing with the latter, we have to look at the fourth canon of rhetoric, memory which, together with the delivery, is the most relegated of the five canons:

⁸² *Bertsolari Txapelketa Nagusia 97*, Donostia, EHBE-Elkarlanean, 1998., 304.

| ... the tendency has been for modern rhetorical theory to abandon, remove, neglect, ignore, limit, simplify, misrepresent, and/or misunderstand both memory and delivery.⁸³

The reason for this negligence is undoubtedly the fact that the renovation of rhetoric has been preferentially undertaken in genres whose expression is in written form or, if in oral form, aided by the written. So the centre of attention has almost always been the first three canons of rhetoric, of which many very-detailed pages of analysis have been written. Memory and delivery, on the other hand, are despatched with a couple of solemn statements about their great importance, but they are not by any means treated with the importance they deserve or, indeed, with which they are attributed.

In classical rhetoric, on the other hand, things associated with memory have a preferential status, as can be seen from almost all of the works that have come to us. There is nothing strange in this. To begin with, the classical orators delivered their speeches with no paper or written notes. The discourse were written down and then had to be memorised for their subsequent delivery in public.

In any case, as Frances A. Yates has pointed out, the function of memory in classical rhetoric was not limited to the mere memorisation and regurgitation of written discourse⁸⁴. She outlined many and very varied aspects of the art which are related to memory in the art, amongst which are:

- develop the faculty of/for memory
- store contents in the memory
- memorising in order
- having the contents and structures retrievable

⁸³ REYNOLDS, JF (1993), *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 3. This section on memory is entirely based on this work.

⁸⁴ YATES, Frances A. (1966), *The Art of Memory*, Chicago, University of Chicago.

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- retaining them in the memory
- retrieving them from the memory
- executing them at will
- preserving them in the memory

The authoress also states that, in classical rhetoric, memory was considered a fundamental aspect of invention, of arrangement, of style and of delivery. Firstly, memory is the site for Aristotle's *topoi* or common places, i.e., the place where the argumental schema which make invention possible is stored. But memory is much more still. For the author of *The Rhetoric* for Herenium, it is the guardian of the remaining canons; for Quintiliano, the source of the orator's power and, finally, for Aristotle, memory is the key to Invention.

The importance of memory has recently been rediscovered in many spheres, above all in what is known as composition studies, i.e., the education of writers and readers to which so much attention is paid in Anglo-Saxon culture.

If memory is so relevant in a speciality which is largely developed through writing, then how much more so in bertsolaritza, given its oral and improvised nature. Up to now, however, the importance given to memory in bertsolaritza has been insignificant, both by the studies on the theme as by the bertsolaritza workshops, themselves.

A | *Memory: its mnemotechnic nature and function*

The bertsolari, like the classical orators, has to employ certain mnemotechnic techniques in order to remember the structures (rhyme sequences and arguments) as well as concrete words and formulations. These techniques mainly consist of associating the contents and structures of those (s)he wishes to retain with specific physical elements, suitably ordered, as explained both in the works on classical rhetoric and in the

modern guides to memory development and training.

We should be aware that the only application of these mnemotechnic techniques to bertsolaritza is Denis Laborde's interview with the bertsolari, Jean Luis Harinordoki, "Laka", published in the magazine, *Ethnologie Française* in 1990.⁸⁵

The mnemotechnic procedures described by Laka in the interview are of doubtful practical use for bertsolaritza. However, its merit has to be recognised as being the only analytical investigation into memory which otherwise is attributed to the innate skills of each bertsolari, obviating the possibility of the systematic cultivation of the cognitive faculty.

B | *Memory and memorability*

As Ong points out, mnemotechnics is closely related to memorable formulations. Clearly, the memorable is more easily retained than the commonplace. Ong states that this is the basis of the easy recall of formulae. We can state, for our part, that the refrains and idioms are usually particularly memorable expressions, and it is this memorable feature of formulae which ensures their easy retention in the memory.

We see, in this way, that memory is directly related to style, stimulating and guiding it. An expression which holds a brilliant metaphor, a surprising double meaning, a remarkable antithetic structure or a highly evocative hyperbole is easier to retain in the memory than another of similar content but lacking any poetic quality.

The bertsolari, who has to carry out his task in a matter of seconds and with no help from written material, retrieves the formulations required at each moment with more facility when the said formulations are more memorable.

⁸⁵ LABORDE, Denis (1990), "Tout raccorder et tomber juste", *Ethnologie française*, 20, julio-septiembre de 1990, pp. 308-319.

C | *Memory as a data base*

Lacking any other support, the bertsolari has to carry out his labour of rhetoric with the aid only of her/his memory. It is amongst those common places stored in the memory that they have to look for the arguments suitable to each occasion. Memory is, thus, what the bertsolari's whole labour of invention is based on.

Classical rhetoric distinguishes two types of memory, natural and artificial, a distinction which continues to be made, to great advantage, in modern composition studies. The common places, the general references, all the personal background of each bertsolari are the main components of her/his natural memory. The memorisation of the final punch-line of the rhymes and their order, of the optimum formulations, on the other hand, are the essence of her/his artificial memory.

That artificial memory is precisely the most specific task of the bertsolari and the most susceptible to being consciously and systematically enhanced.

Apart from this distinction between natural and artificial memory, the experts distinguish between short and long-term memory. Apparently, short-term memory decisively influences the overall style, while long-term memory plays more a part in the management and organisation of ideas and structures.

Finally, a number of authors have suggested that it would be appropriate to make a third distinction, that between individual memory and collective or cultural memory:

| As the classical rhetoricians devised ways to store and retrieve information from the human memory, the modern rhetorician must also consider ways to retrieve information from books, libraries, and computers ⁸⁶

⁸⁶ REYNOLDS, JF (1993), *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum

D | *Memory and psychology*

After the period in which the be-all and end-all of schooling was learning by rote to the extent of being abusive, the tendency now appears to be to banish memory from the school altogether. What is important is, they say, understanding. Young people do not have to memorise anything, just as long as they comprehend.

If the abusive emphasis placed on learning by rote is reprehensible, so is this other extreme, as has been shown up in modern composition studies. Effectively, it would seem to be amply proved that memory has a direct influence on the psychology of the person, with significant repercussion on cognitive neuropsychology and the development of psychological consciousness.

In his Fedro dialogue (274 –277 B.C.), Plato tells of the myth of Theuth and Thamus. In this passage, Theuth presents his many discoveries, in order to exact the approval of the latter for each and every one and, thereby, its corresponding recompense. According to the story, amongst Theuth's inventions are calculus, geometry, astronomy, the games of draughts and dice and letters. On presenting this last discovery, to Thamus, Theuth argues that writing “will make Egyptians wiser and better able to memorise, as the invention is like a potion for memory and wisdom”. Nevertheless, Thamus, in his response, makes the inventor see that his discovery will have the exact opposite effect to that which Theuth claims: “Because it is forgetfulness that is produced in the souls of those who learn it. This is because, as they depend on the written word, they will reach memory from without and not from within, using alien characters, not from or for themselves”.

The new tools of information and communications technology only has the effect of multiplying a thousand times the risks that the Platonic myth

attributes to writing. The instant availability of all kinds of information, together with the relegation of memory which schools, in general, currently practise, may result in the education of persons lacking in internal memory, individuals, thereby, who are lacking a stable psychological framework.

The first consequences of this deconstructing can already be seen in the style of the younger orators and writers, and in that artistic work, written or audiovisual, seen as most successful by young people. Raffaele Simone, in a work full of interesting ideas, talks about this as a third phase in the history of communication, a phase in which language is represented by being a “non-propositional language”, i.e. a language that is essentially generic, vague and not rooted in either space or time. The characteristic text of this phase would be, as a result, a destructured text, a text which “rejects all structure, both in the hierarchy of its components as in that of syntax and text.”

Simone mentions the work of P. Coelho as a paradigm of this kind of writing, and states that it is precisely this style of writing —the general, vague and destructured style— that makes these works so successful and, in the last analysis, the same style which is predominant amongst youth.

We can say, for our part, that the tendency is observed equally in other spheres. It is enough to look at what kind of journalistic texts enjoy greatest popularity amongst youth (sports magazines, etc.), or the most popular advertising jingles or sound-bites (e.g. the Budweiser “What’s up?” advert.), or the TV series with the biggest audiences or the kind of radio programmes that are most popular. All of these have the same kind of language and texts that Simone deals with, not to mention the characteristic texts of new technologies: Internet chat or the SMS of mobile phones.

Discourse as such, discourse as complex and internally hierarchical, is tending to disappear. In its place we can detect a tendency to deconstruction, towards the mere undifferentiated, vague and general collage.

This deconstructing of discourse corresponds, in our view, to the psychological deconstruction of the individual, amongst the causes of which is, undoubtedly, the poor regard in which memory is held nowadays.

In this sense, the inclusion of bertsolaritza in the school system can help as an apt therapy to at least alleviate some of the drawbacks of our educational system.

3.7 Delivery and improvised bertsolaritza

Delivery is all that is concerned with the effective delivery of the discourse. In classical rhetoric, delivery was where the non-linguistic elements of discourse were analysed: gestures, body language, the intensity of the voice, the management of pauses, and so on. This was a fundamental part of rhetoric, as the discourses were delivered *vive voce*, after being written down and memorised.

When rhetoric involves genres the delivery of which is carried out in writing, those aspects related to delivery are relegated almost wholly. This even happened with those pioneers of the rebirth of rhetoric in the middle of the XX century, despite this *resurgimiento* claiming to represent classical rhetoric in its totality.

Re-establishing the totality of rhetoric means giving equal significance to each and every one of the five canons and putting an end to the abusive predominance of style. In the majority of cases, however, this recovery in its totality is nothing more than a solemn and vain statement. In general this wordy declaration in favour of memory and delivery in the wherewithal of rhetoric is the only mention of the said canons, and the

rest of the work is given over to the detailed analysis of invention, arrangement and style.

In improvised bertsolaritza, the elements related to delivery are of vital importance to the success in communication of the bertsolari. A bertso with excellent text can be perceived as unremarkable if the oral artist fails to sing it in an appropriate manner and style. As we have said before, “singing in an appropriate manner” does not, in bertsolaritza, signify singing according to the norms of singing or of musical notation. The manner of delivery of a bertso is, on the contrary, one more rhetorical resource. The success of the bertsolaris also depends on their skills in suitably delivering carrying out their sung and improvised discourses. This involves a number of aspects which make up the action of bertsolaritza:

- It goes without saying that, as a prior condition, diction has to be clear and the melody sung in a way that it is recognisable as such. There have been some bertsolaris who have had to give up the practice of the art because they were unable to achieve a minimum level of singing in tune. Current bertsolaritza, moreover, is known for the great selection of melodies used, unlike in days gone by.
- The timbre and the intensity of the voice. Each performance needs its timbre and its intensity. Although technological gadgetry make any voice audible, one cannot (or should not) sing with the same intensity at a round-the-dinner table event with 50 people as in the final of a championship before an audience of 10,000. Moreover, different themes require different intensities.
- Rhythm and the management of pauses. The bertsolari improvises by and while singing but (s)he is not a singer. The rhythm of the tune has to fit in to the rhetorical requirements of the piece which is being improvised by the bertsolari at each moment and, thus, itself becomes part of the set of resources which the bertsolari can draw upon for her/his art. As we have said, the transcription to a musical notation of the bertsolaris’

melodies is very different from the way in which they are actually sung. A regular comment amongst bertsolaris is that the artist who sings too well cannot be a good improviser. What they are saying is that bertsolaris cannot allow themselves to be dominated by the intrinsic rhythm of the melody, but it is they who have to impose the rhythm and pauses they consider appropriate to the occasion on to the melody. Rhetorical dominance of rhythm is a good indicator of the artistry of the improvising bertsolari. Inexperienced bertsolaris, after struggling through as best they can the improvised part of the bertso, usually sing the memorised part (the final puntu) with a much more lively rhythm, relieved to have got to the end of their sojourn. The experienced bertsolari, however, takes great care that the public is not aware when (s)he is improvising and when not.

- The bertsolaris improvise singing a *capella*, without any musical accompaniment. There are those who see something lacking in this and to be corrected, particularly when the rich instrumentation adorning other improvisation offers us is considered. On the occasions when we have been able to organise joint performances between bertsolaris and improvisers of other cultures, however, the majority of listeners, although unable to understand the text of the bertsos, have been able to appreciate this musical stylisation in bertsolaritza as an enhancement of the genre and not as a drawback. Experimentation with musical accompaniment in bertsolaritza would appear to be more recommendable, in principle, for the non-improvised format.
- Body language. It is often said that the bertsolari hardly exploits the possibilities of body language at all and there is probably a lot of truth in this. But for a few exceptions, the bertsolari is not for exaggerated gestures of any kind. (S)he stands (or sits) behind the microphone in a more or less static pose. The greatest movement occurs in that lapse of time between the moment the theme is heard and singing is started. They are normally repetitive and mechanical gestures and should be interpreted as nervous tics rather than as expressive mannerisms (stepping on the foot

of the microphone stand, adjusting it to the right height, clearing of the throat, perhaps a little sway prior to starting ... and little more). This rite over, every bertsolari generally takes up a typical posture, in which the most outstanding is the position of the hands. The facial expression is practically insignificant, or it has been up to now. With the onset of televised performances, the oral artists have realised that a particular gesture at an opportune moment can be very effective. In important performances, however, the distance between the bertsolari and the audience makes strategies of mimicry practically useless.

- The setting of the bertsolaritza performances are minimal: on the platform or stage there may be a few chairs, the same number as the performers, two or three mikes and, occasionally, a curtain or banner in the background and some flowers either side. Lately, there has been an obsessive trend to incorporate other elements of stage scenery and even, for better or worse, dramaturgical *mise en scène*. In the experiments carried out to date, it can be seen that the mixing of these elements and the bertso has been complex and problematic. If the dramatic settings are too much, the very exigencies of the script restrict improvisation. Any experimentation is a good thing in principle, we believe, assuming that it is always carried out with a clear idea about what the nature and the conditions required by what is desired with the experiment. Improvised bertsolaritza as a staged art, which it is, has to be aware of new nuances in drama in order to incorporate those elements which are deemed useful to bertsolaritza. In our view, what is useful for improvised bertsolaritza is all that which enhances the act of sung improvisation. If this be the starting point, then all experimentation is welcome. If not, we believe that, in the attempt to improve the art, there is a risk of drowning it.

- Regarding improvised bertsolaritza on television, it should be remembered that, despite the great strides that have been made, we are still a long way away from a completely satisfactory solution to the problems that the televised delivery presents us. We only wish to make it clear that

all the aspects relating to television production and setting have to be considered as part and parcel —an added part, perhaps, but in the last analysis, one part— of that hybrid and complex genre which is televised improvised bertsolaritza. For the time being, and until such time as we have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, we believe the comment above about dramatic staging of performances at least can act as a guideline for the full study of televised improvised bertsolaritza.

3.8 Final point

In recent years there has been an unprecedented confluence between oral and written expressions:

- Television and radio are expressed orally but mainly on the basis of written or prepared discourse
- In the most traditional written formats, such as the book and the press, new technologies have made spectacular development in typography and design possible, to such an extent that graphic design can be seen as the area where the written discourse of the delivery is applied
- Apart from this, some of the new media discourses in written format (electronic mail, chat, SMS, etc.), respond to strategies which up to now have been considered features of and exclusive to orality (simultaneous production and emission, the possibility of interaction, minimum structuring).

So, the clear distinction that the oralists place between oral and written expressions is today more arguable than ever. One of the most polemical points is the identification of oral expression and a lack of structuring which many experts still defend, explicitly or implicitly. As we have already seen, the improvised bertso is a conscious and sufficiently structured discourse, although this structuring has limits imposed by the oral and improvised nature of the genre.

In any case, the non-structuring of the discourse would be a defining character of certain modes of oral expression (informal conversation, live broadcasts of sporting and social events, etc.), but no one format is the definitive feature of all oral expression. Neither is improvisation synonymous with non-structuring. Improvised bertsolaritza, the nature of which we have tried to explain here, is living proof that orality does not necessarily mean non-structured discourse.

The oral or written format of discourse is a valid criterion to typify the various rhetoric genre, but it is not enough. For an adequate typification of the current different modes of rhetoric, the following aspects have to be taken into account, as a minimum:

- Mode of production: oral /written
- Mode of production: improvised /non-improvised
- Level of structuration, above all determined by the genre to which the discourse is initially assigned
- Mode of emission: purely oral/oral aided/write
- Mode of emission: simultaneous/non-simultaneous.

The combination of all these aspects allows us to suitably typify the large number of discourse in circulation today, throwing up the similarities and differences that exist between them.

The improvised bertso, for example, may be typified as an oral production discourse, structured in function of its rhetorical-epideictical character, and simultaneously and orally emitted without written assistance.

This typification allows us to appreciate the complex relationship between improvised bertsolaritza and other formats. Let us have a look at some of the ones closest to bertsolaritza:

- Informal conversation. As in bertsolaritza, it is a type of orally produ-

ced improvised discourse, emitted orally and simultaneously. The greatest difference with regards to bertsolaritza is, apart from the fact that it is an uttered discourse, it is not sung and, undoubtedly due to its lack of rhetorical-persuasive intentionality, it has less structuration.

- Chat. Like bertsolaritza, it is an improvised discourse, of simultaneous production and emission. What is novel is that both the production and the emission are in written form. Technological advances, against all predictions, have allowed the written form to appropriate features of what has been considered to date to be exclusively oral, such as improvisation and the simultaneousness of production and emission. We believe adopting this point of view is far more productive than struggling to pontificate about the oral character of certain texts produced in written format. As regards the level of structuring, chat is more akin to informal conversation than to the improvised bertso.

- SMS. This is a discourse mode very similar to chat with the difference being that, for the moment, the technology only allows using 162 characters. This, to a certain degree, reminds one of the technical restrictions facing the bertsolari. Now, the bertsolari, making a virtue of necessity, exploits the technical constrictions of the art to full advantage. In SMS, on the other hand, the problem of limitation of physical space is resolved by means of strategies which appear merely mechanical (suppression of vowels, reduced orthography, etc.) rather than rhetorical and which threaten to bring us back to an age prior to phonation or to the hieroglyphic writing of Ancient Egypt.

- E-mail. Steve Morris, in a book full of interesting data⁸⁷, states that, in a hypothetical continuum the extremes of which are, at one end, the classic written letter and, at the other, the informal chat over a cup of coffee or tea, the most appropriate style for business e-mails is much closer to the coffee-house than to the typical business letter. Of course, one has to distinguish between the business function of e-mail and its private use,

⁸⁷ MORRIS, Steve (2000), *Perfect E-mail*, London, Random House.

where it more resembles electronic chat. Regarding its more formal use, which is what Morris analyses, we believe the author uses criteria which are self-contradictory. After stating that the appropriate style for business e-mails is more like that of spontaneous conversation than the business letter, the author uses most of his book to analyse the most suitable rhetorical strategies for achieving an effective discursive structuring in business e-mails, taking into account, amongst other aspects, the importance of the letter-heading and the closing formula, the type of linguistic register to use, suggestions about syntax and textual structure. The rhetorical conditions in which these business e-mails have to be drawn up reminds one, to a great extent, of those the improvising bertsolari has to face in her/his art mode: pressure of time, the need to structuralise while practically improvising a structure that works, the use of previously drawn-up elements, etc.

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The voices raised about the galloping impoverishment of discourse are many. We believe that such impoverishment is not inseparable or inevitable but is due, in fact, to a flagrant lack of rhetorical-discursive ability. Compounding the decline of the nuclear family as a conversational school is the manifest inability of the schooling system to remedy the lack of rhetorical-discursive ability amongst younger people. We have already mentioned, in reference to regression to hieroglyphics in SMS, some symptoms, of this rhetorical and communicative inability. We do not wish to leave unmentioned, however, another symptom of this same ailment which afflicts us: we mean the appearance, in chat and e-mail texts, of a more informal register than in the so-called emoticon. By means of these charicatural graphic symbols, we are trying to make up for the lack of appropriate rhetorical strategies. Discourse, in itself, is not capable of arousing emotion in the recipient. It needs a pointer in each paragraph to indicate what the intended reaction of the transmitter is, as in those mediocre TV sitcoms where the canned laughter prompts the viewer

when to force a smile and when to guffaw.

Unlike this communicative dysfunction which we suffer from, the rhetoric skill of the bertsolari consists precisely of improvising a structured oral discourse in a matter of seconds. This is a skill which we feel is highly worthy in ambits other than bertsolaritza, itself, such as in the new ways of connecting people arising from cutting-edge technology. In the art of bertsolaritza, the Basque school system has an unbeatable instrument for encouraging rhetorical skills. To ignore it would be a terrible waste in these times when, it is said, communication is the key to almost everything and to opening almost every door.

...

GLOSSARY

Agurra (hasierako agurra): bertsos of greeting.

Agurra (bukaerako agurra): bertsos of farewell.

Ariketa: Exercise. Any kind of performance in which, apart from the theme, the bertsolari is obliged to follow specific rules. Thus, in those more or less free modes, without a theme-prompter, one cannot talk about an exercise or assignment, as such. Championships, on the other hand, basically consist of a series of exercises where the theme and the rules are imposed. The most common exercises are: confrontation (collaborative or dialectic) in a specific metre, solo performance on an imposed theme, imposed start-up, imposed puntu, imposed final rhyming foot, running rhyming performance.

Bakarka(ko gaia): solo performance on an imposed theme. The bertsolari improvises the bertsos (normally three) on a theme provided by the theme-prompter. These are performances which rarely occur in the formats without a theme-prompter. On the other hand, they are almost obligatory in festivals and championships. The themes provided can be about anything. In recent times, they have reached great levels of subtlety. Thus, it is not unusual for the bertsolari to be given the task of spea-

king into two microphones, alternating two different character representations in front of each or defending two opposing points of view. At other times, the bertsolari has to improvise a bertso about each of her/his fellow-bertsolaris, imagining how they were in their infancy, what they will be like in old age, or comparing each to an animal or, creating a verbal caricature of each.

Berbaldi: see Diskurtso.

Bertsoaldi(a): (each one of the performances of one or more bertsolaris within an event). The themes, characters and viewpoints vary from performance to performance and from event to event and may be real or fictitious. Performance formats are varied, the most common being the duo performance wherein each of two bertsolaris defends the character or viewpoint assigned by the theme-prompter (it is the equivalent to the *controversia* or confrontation of the *decimistas* and other troubadours in Hispanic oral culture). Traditionally we distinguish two sub-formats in these duo performances, according to the level of confrontation intended by the theme: *temakoa* (dialectic confrontation) and *ofiziokoa* (collaborative confrontation). The second most common mode is that of the solo performance, where the bertsolari improvises on a theme proposed by the theme-prompter. The number of bertsos to be improvised at each performance is – except at the championships – variable, but three is considered “normal”, both in the oral confrontation mode (three each one) as well as in the solo events. There are also performances involving three or more bertsolaris but these are really a minority. From 1990 on, thematic variety has combined with a variety of new experimentation (a bertsolari using two mikes, one singing to the rest, garments, disguises, and so on). Another novel feature is the performance of one, single bertso.

Bertso(a): bertso. Each one of the stanzas or group of ten, eight, etc. rhyming verses that the bertsolari improvises during her/his performance. Although the stanza may be part of a longer discursive unit (there is often a performance of three such bertsos on a chosen or imposed theme), given the manner in which it is created, this stanza-bertso is the fundamental discursive unit of improvised bertsolarismo. In effect, the bertsolari faces each bertso-stanza as if it were a discourse in itself, consciously or unconsciously structuring it in line with the canons of classical rhetoric. Such a bertso consists, as a minimum, of two *puntus* or rhymes (see below).

Bertsogintza: bertsolaristic creation.

Bertsolaritza: the bertsolaristic movement as a whole (within the world of bertsolaritza, some differentiate between the art form of bertsolaritza and the organisation thereof). Established around bertsolaristic creation, this is one of the most important movements on the Basque cultural scene. Its main nucleus is the Association of Friends of Bertsolarismo (Euskal Herriko Bertsozale Elkarte, EHBE), a federation of regional associations from each and every one of the Basque-speaking territories. The main thrust of its work is dissemination, transmission and research.

Bertso-afaria/bazkaria: Dinner/lunch with a performance by bertsolaris. See: post-prandial performance

Bertso idatziak: written bertsos. See: bertso jarriak/bertso-paperak.

Bertso-jaialdia: festival (with bertsolaris). This is an event format where bertsolaris (between four and eight) are directed or prompted by a theme-prompter. Either in covered venues or in the open air. It is currently the most common and prestigious form of event.

Bertso jarriak: bertsos for a special occasion.

Bertso molde(a): type of stanza, type of bertso.

Bertso-paperak: “ballad” sheets of bertsos.

Bertso-txapelketa: bertsolaris championship.

Bertso-saio(a): (bertsolaris) event. An event or session is made up of a number of performances, although it is not easy to fix the limits of each of these in those events which have a less regulated format. These informal events do not have a theme-prompter to do the prompting and, in fact, can be regarded as events with a single, prolonged performance.

Betegarriak: “wedges”. These are unconnected words that the bertsolaris use to fit their oral expressions into the metrical pattern that the melody has imposed on them. They are normally words of one or two syllables (*ni, nik, zu, zuk, gaur, hemen, hara, bai...*). The proliferation of wedges produces an uncomfortable feeling of artificiality which the bertsolari has to try to avoid, as it shows a lack of formulaic competence.

Betelana: the fill-in task. When the improviser initiates a bertso, as a general rule, the final rhyming verse has been thought up in the few seconds available from the moment the theme-prompter provides the theme or from the moment the opponent in the oral confrontation finishes their bertso to the moment when singing starts. It is normal for this main rhetorical argument of the bertso to come at the end. So the bertsolari has to “fill in”, by improvising the remaining rhyming verses to complete the bertso. Although the expression “fill-in” may have a pejorative connotation to it, the fact is that the bertsolari’s task is precisely this skill to suitably complete the parts of the bertso that could not be thought up before starting singing. A good final requires an optimum fill-in so as to emphasise its worth. A good fill-in is one which can take us to the final in such a way that its communicative effect is imparted through this improvi-

sed part. From a technical point of view, the less wedges used to fit words into the syllabic structure imposed by the melody, the more and effective is the work of filling in. Wedges are usually vacuous single or two syllable words and their over-use indicates lack of skill by the user.

Bukaera emanda: imposed final. The bertsolari is given (normally in writing) the last puntu of the bertso to be improvised (almost always a *zortziko handia*). This is a format used above all in the championships. In recent years a new variation on this exercise format has appeared whereby it is the penultimate rhyming verse (usually a *hamarreko handia*) that is imposed.

Diskurtso (berbaldi): discourse. A supra-oration rhetorically structured to achieve a specific end. With improvised bertsolaritza, given the creative restrictions placed on the performance by the artist, each of these discourses may be, at the same time, part of a greater macro-discourse (*makrodiskurtsoa, makroberbaldia*).

Doinu(a): melody. The air chosen by the bertsolari and which, in turn, imposes a certain metrical pattern on the sung bertso. In most cases it is the bertsolari who chooses the air in accordance with the expressive needs of the moment. Only occasionally is the tune imposed, either because the format is that of the running rhyme or because it is thus laid down in the rules of some championship or other. Apart from this, the melody is not just a mere appendage to the text of the bertso, but it is one more of the resources the bertsolaris have at their disposal and which can be used to evoke a specific atmosphere or to allude to certain connotations, etc. Most of the melodies form part of the Basque folksong repertoire, particularly those of five or less puntus. Modern bertsolaris use a great variety of tunes, some of which are commissioned. Moreover, the manner in which the

melody is sung is a determining factor in the artist's success in communication. The bertsolari sings, but is not a singer. More than being a good singer, the bertsolari has to be a good rhetorical manager of the melody as, at the end of the day, the air is where the prosodic aspects of bertsolarismo are decided: intensity, rhythm, the judicious management of the pauses, and so on.

Errima: rhyming. In bertsolarismo, rhyming is always one of consonance.

Etena: caesura.

Gai(a): theme or topic.

Gai-jartzailea: theme-prompter (at any of the performance formats given by bertsolaris). The task of theme-prompter is to propose themes about which the bertsolari has to construct their improvised verse. Even the type of metre may be imposed by the theme-prompter who also decides on the format of the performances and their chronological order. Relatively new to the bertsolaritza stage, the theme-prompter has a particularly important task in those events which have great social impact – the festivals. Although it is usually their job to think up and formulate the themes, these may also be collectively prepared (normally by a group consisting of members of the bertsolaris' school to which the theme-prompter also belongs).

Hamarreko handia: Bertso of 5 puntus, and which has the same metrical pattern as the *zortziko handia*, which differs only in that it has one puntu less than the former.

Hamarreko txikia: Bertso of 5 puntus, and which has the same metrical pattern as the *zortziko txikia*, which differs only in that it has one puntu less than the former.

Inguru-egoera: (lit. environmental situation). The set of presential and referential elements which make each performance an unrepeatably event. The English word *performance*, first introduced

by North American anthropologists and applied to oral poetics by Zumthor and others, is apt in this context. The principal elements are the public (the audience), the bertsolaris, the place or arena where the event is being held, the date, the reason for the session, and so on. Understood in this way, the environmental situation is another source of first-class rhetorical resources for the bertsolari.

Inguru-testua: co-text. Set of references and values more or less shared by the bertsolari and the audience. This is a fundamental variable in the history of improvised bertsolarismo in which we can distinguish two great periods: homogeneous co-text bertsolarismo (1960-1979) and heterogeneous co-text bertsolarismo (1979-1999). The principal variables determining the level of homogeneity of bertsolarismo at any particular period are the socio-political circumstances of the moment, the level of school education of both bertsolaris and public and the size of the audience.

Kartzelako lana: (lit. prison work). But means, in fact, that format of performance, very common as part of championships, whereby a number of bertsolaris must improvise on a theme in the order decided by drawing lots. While the first bertsolari (or first pair, trio ...) are on stage waiting for the theme to be prompted, the rest are taken to a room (the "prison cell") adapted so that these cannot hear or see the performer(s) singing. With the first bertsolari(s) finished, the second turn takes place and so on until all the artists have improvised on the topic. They are normally solo performances but can also take place, in the collaborative or dialectical confrontation format, in pairs. It is also usual for the performance to include some other assignment (running rhyming, imposed puntus, imposed final puntu).

Mahai inguruko saio(a): (lit. round-the-table session) post-prandial

session. These are usually free performances, without a theme-prompter, with the bertsolaris (normally a pair) establishing the format and the rhythm of their performance(s). Normally each theme involves far more than the usual three bertsos that are performed in more formal events (festivals, championships, etc.). In this type of after-dinner event, the situation acquires a relevance which would be unthinkable in those more formal and regulated formats to such an extent that it is the centre of attention of and the principal reference for the improvisation, whatever the topic might be. This is why the bertsos of this format are more difficult to extrapolate (on being published or broadcast by radio or TV) than those of the festivals and championships. The continuous allusions to the situational elements confers enhanced artistic value to the improvised verse, an added value which is lost when the listener/spectator is not present at the live performance and, thus, does not form part of the situation. Although this question has not been sufficiently analysed, another consequence of the almost total predominance of situational elements in this type of performance is that the discursive unit tends to be longer than those formats with a theme-prompter. That is to say, the importance each bertso has in the overall plan of things is less without the theme-prompter, and it is this total performance or event which is the true discursive unit, despite the fact that the rhetorical work of the bertsolari is still the successful construction and delivery of each bertso improvised. Nevertheless, of late there has proliferated a kind of performance the rhetorical nature of which is more like that of the festivals and championships than that of the free post-prandial sessions. In both these cases, that of the meal (more often the evening dinner) and the formal events, the organisation is exclusively for one end - the bertso session.

This is what distinguishes this type of post-prandial performance from others where the bertsolari is not the main reason for the event (weddings, funerals, tributes, and so on). This type of performance is usually called bertso-afaria/bazkaria, that is dinner/lunch with performance by bertsolaris.

Oin(a): each of the rhyming words (the termination of each of the rhyming verses in a bertso. Not to be confused with metrical the stressed-unstressed feet in English poetry.

Oinak emanda: imposed rhyming word. This is a form of assignment or exercise common in championships. The bertsolari has to improvise his bertso using the rhyming words (feet) as instructed by the theme-prompter. It is usual to use bertsos of four puntus in short metre although other paradigms are known.

Poto: poto. This is the repetition of the same rhyming foot within the bertso. For aficionados and bertsolaris, poto is, or has been, synonymous with total failure, although fortunately, this extreme seems to be softening in recent times, at least in theory. The truth is, at times, in order not to commit poto, much worse rhetorical disasters than that being avoided can occur (syntactic and semantic incoherence, ungrammatical expressions, etc.). The repetition of the same word with different meanings is not considered poto.

Puntu(a): rhyme: basic unit of the bertso, the rhyming line of verse which carries the chosen (or imposed) rhyming word. Except in Iparralde the puntu is transcribed in two lines,

Puntua emanda: forced (imposed) start-up. The theme-prompter sings the initial puntu of the bertso (normally, zortziko txikia) and the bertsolari must complete the bertso immediately.

Puntuka(ko saioa): running rhymes (session). A performance of two or more bertsolaris who take turns in singing one puntu each. Normally there are three bertsolaris who use stanzas of four

puntus in *txikia* or short metre and so the artist who initiates proceedings also terminates them. Improvisation in this format is quite spontaneous and rarely produces bertsos of great quality. Nevertheless, this format is very popular with the audiences and the theme-prompters usually leave it for the end of the festival. The bertsolaris, on the other hand, usually take the opportunity afforded by this session to ironise on and satirise what has gone on during the event. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for the public popularity of the format is the feeling of complicity afforded to the audiences by the bertsolaris' allusions to these moments of the festival. The artists also take advantage of the running rhymes session to criticise and invert the roles imposed by the theme-prompter during the performance, and may be considered as a form of catharsis both for the bertsolari and for the public.

Testu(a): text. For reasons of clarity and pragmatism, we will use the term *text* in a distinctly different sense—a much more restricted one—to that of other fields. We call text the linguistic component of the bertso, stripped of its prosodic, paralinguistic, extralinguistic, contextual and musical elements. Thus, the text is the part of the bertso which is transcribed.

Testuingurua: context. The set of elements which surrounds the text, as such. Given the importance of the context in improvised bertsolaritza, it would be advisable to redefine its analysis. Thus, we distinguish, within context, the co-text and the situation.

Zortziko handia: bertso of four puntus (rhyming lines of verse), each with 18 syllables generally transcribed in two lines of 10 and 8 syllables respectively. The great majority of melodies composed with this metre (many well-known folk tunes) require a caesura (*etena*) after the fifth syllable of the first line. Thus, the metrical structure of the zortziko handia is made up of four

puntus of 18 syllables each organised into three periods: 5 / 5 // 8A.

Zortziko txikia: bertso of four puntus, each with 13 syllables transcribed in two lines (*bertso lerro*) of 7 and 6 syllables respectively. It is one of the most common metres in the Basque folksong repertoire and, together with the zortziko handia and the two *hamarrekos*, long and short, it is one of the most commonly used by bertsolaris.

