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'Entre bascophiles'

W.J. van Eys (1825-1914) and the rise of vascolology¹

Jan Noordegraaf

1. Introduction

When we reflect on linguistic research in the twenty-first century, we usually think of groups of well-trained professionals working together within the framework of a project, preferably funded by some prestigious university research institute, and seeking to solve major theoretical or descriptive problems in the field of language study. Yet it is not that long ago that linguistic science was developed and practised to a considerable extent by what we would today describe as 'outsiders', people working outside academia, such as schoolmasters, grammar school teachers, and not to mention wealthy private scholars.

In this paper I would like to draw attention to the *labor eruditus* of one of these outsiders, a somewhat forgotten nineteenth-century representative of the latter category from the Netherlands, who made some interesting contributions to the study of Basque. Perhaps it would be better to say: 'historically interesting' contributions, since from a late twentieth-century point of view his achievements in the field of vascolology seem to be of mainly historical value. I am referring to the Amsterdam-born *jonkbeer* Willem Jan van Eys, and by way of introduction, I would like to quote a well-known vascologist, Larry Trask (1944-2004), who in his *History of Basque* (1997) was never afraid to point out the presence of nonsense and pseudo-linguistics in the field. Trask writes the following of van Eys:

The Dutch linguist W.J. van Eys (...) published a comparative grammar of the [Basque] dialects; he also published (in 1883) the first grammar of [142] Basque to appear in English. Van Eys proposed a number of what appear to be intended as reconstructions of inflected and derived forms (...), but he unfortunately belonged to that school of etymology in which consonants and vowels are to be inserted or deleted arbitrarily,² according to the result required by the analyst, and none of his proposals can be taken seriously (Trask 1997: 56).

However, we must also note that in the late nineteenth century, various scholars assessed van Eys' works more favourably. In a letter to van Eys dated 12 June 1877, the distinguished Oxford linguist A.H. Sayce (1845-1933) mentioned 'the flattering terms in which Pott, the veteran of comparative philology, speaks of your [Basque] grammar [1867]', while the German professor Georg von der Gabelentz (1840-1893) lauded van Eys' 'Scharfsinn' in his celebrated *Die Sprachwissenschaft* (1901: 202). Previously, in his *Die Verwandtschaft des Baskischen mit den Berbersprachen Nord-Africas* (1894), Gabelentz had remarked that van Eys' works 'zum unentbehrlichen Hausrathe eins Jeden gehören, der sich mit der Sprache beschäftigen will' (Gabelentz 1894: 15). Since I am not a vascologist by profession, I prefer to put the question of the diverging opinions on van Eys' scholarly output aside here.³ Moreover, in this paper I am not so much concerned with the development of the study of Basque in the nineteenth

¹ 'Entre bascophiles' is the headline of a letter to the editor written by the vascologist Hugo Schuchardt (1842-1927) and published in the journal *l'Avenir des Pyrénées et des Landes* of 13 January 1898.

² An allusion to (pseudo-)Voltaire's well-known dictum: 'Les voyelles ne font rien, et les consonnes font peu de chose?'

³ Van Eys is duly mentioned in textbooks such as Holger Pedersen, *Linguistic science in the 19th century* (1931), and Bertil Malmberg, *Histoire de la linguistique de Sumer à Saussure* (1991).

century. My particular aim here is to provide some background information and create an impression, partly on the basis of unpublished correspondence and digital archivalia, what was happening behind the scenes in the life of this private scholar.

This paper has a thematic structure. I have selected a number of topics that might be relevant to comprehending the background of van Eys' longstanding involvement with Basque. These topics are presented more or less chronologically. First, I focus on van Eys' somewhat accidental introduction to the language in the early 1860s, his initiation into linguistic studies by a seasoned Dutch field linguist, and his two trips to the Basque country, in the company of his French-born spouse Mathilde. I will then look at his sojourn in London, where he became acquainted with the Oxford scholar A.H. Sayce and where his feud with the vascohistorian Prince L.L. Bonaparte began. For health reasons, van Eys, an individual of independent means, resided in San Remo for many years, an attractive resort on the Italian Riviera. There he continued his Basque studies, publishing until the late 1890s, including in the Berlin journal *Euskara*, and at the same time corresponding with a host of other Basque scholars in Europe, such as his younger compatriot, [143] C.C. Uhlenbeck. As it appears, the small world of Basque scholarship was characterized by many a heated discussion.

It is true to say that 'no es mucho lo se ha escrito sobre la vida de Willem Jan van Eys', as Gómez (2002: 277) notes in his paper on the beginnings of the study of Basque in the Netherlands. So, first of all, I will present some new data about van Eys' background, his marriage, and the beginnings of his study of Basque.⁴

2. 'With a little help from my friends': Amsterdam circles

Willem Jan van Eys (16.4.1825 - 17.4.1914) was born into a well-to-do Amsterdam business and trading milieu. His father had been a member of the garde d'honneur of the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, and his grandfather had been ennobled in 1816 by the Dutch king William I, albeit according to some critical commentator 'without much ground'. Whatever the case may be, the Amsterdam business man van Eys was allowed to add the predicate 'jonkheer' to his family name. As the Dutch vascohistorian C.C. Uhlenbeck (1866-1951) told his French colleague Georges Lacombe in 1922, the protestant van Eys family was counted among the 'meilleurs familles patriciennes', even before van Eys grandpère was ennobled. The family lived at Herengracht 450, a house situated on the so-called 'Gouden Bocht' ('Golden Bend'), the most prestigious part of the Herengracht, home to Amsterdam's richest citizens.

It is no surprise, then, to find out that one of van Eys' childhood friends was jonkheer Jan Pieter Six (1824-1899), a distinguished numismatist who also lived on the Herengracht. Six was born to an established patrician family. He was a descendant of the noted art collector and Amsterdam mayor Jan Six (1618-1700), who was immortalized by Rembrandt's famous portrait. Six's descendant Jan Pieter was not only a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, but he was also one of the founding fathers of the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap ('Royal Dutch Antiquarian Society'), established in 1858; van Eys, too, became a member of this society in 1866. Their friendship lasted many years. Having been appointed professor of Sanskrit at the Municipal University of Amsterdam in 1892, C.C. Uhlenbeck met 'old Mr. Six' on various occasions. In 1893, [144] the latter explicitly asked

⁴ In this paper, a sequel to my 2009 article on the Dutch linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck, many references are made to letters from the George Lacombe collection – property of the Olaso Dorrea Foundation – in the Azkue Bibliotheka of the Euskaltzaindia in Bilbao. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Pruden Gartzia, Director of the Azkue Bibliotheka, for his hospitality and his kind permission to view the correspondence in question during my visit to the Basque Academy in March 2008. Unless otherwise stated, the letters quoted or referred to in this article are to be found in the Azkue Bibliotheka. All quotations in Dutch have been translated into English.

him to send his greetings to Uhlenbeck's correspondent van Eys, who had been residing in San Remo, Italy, since 1875.

On Thursday 1 June 1865, jonkheer Willem Jan van Eys, forty years old by that point, was married to Mathilde Kleinmann, born at Ingouville, Seine-Maritime, France, in 1836. Her father, a German business man, had been naturalized as a Frenchman in 1848, while her mother was of French origin; one of her grandfathers was a protestant minister at Wurtemberg in Germany (cf. van Eys-Kleinmann 1927a: 12). Mathilde was lady-in-waiting to Louisa Willet-Holthuysen (1824-1895), the wife of the wealthy Amsterdam art collector Abraham ('Bram') Willet (1825-1888) who used to play an active part in local cultural life. As a young man, Willem van Eys regularly visited the country house of the Willet family, so we may assume that he was well-acquainted with Bram Willet. Mathilde's wedding day started in the monumental Willet residence situated at Herengracht 605 in Amsterdam, which is nowadays a magnificent museum. Bram Willet was one of the witnesses at the wedding. His wife must have liked Mathilde very much as she bequeathed to her the considerable sum of 3000 Dutch guilders in her will. The newlyweds also settled on the Herengracht.

Mrs. van Eys accompanied her husband when he conducted field work in the Basque country, both in 1866 and in 1868. Many years later, she sent her 'souvenirs' to the French vascologist Georges Lacombe (1879-1947), who had come to see van Eys and his wife in San Remo in 1913. It was Lacombe who published Mathilde's informative travel journals in 1927, a few years after her demise in 1921. As Gómez (2002: 278) rightly attests: 'La lectura de estos relatos resulta francamente deliciosa' – reading these stories is really delightful. It is certainly no cliché when I note now that a sensible woman such as Mrs. van Eys must have exerted some influence from behind the scenes on the course of the study of Basque in the nineteenth century.

Mathilde's former employer, Lousia Willet, was a passionate art collector, who was in close contact with the renowned Amsterdam publisher and dealer in works of arts, Cornelis Maria van Gogh (1824-1908), an uncle of the painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). In 1865, 'C.M.' as he was called, published the first, anonymous edition of van Eys' *Essai de grammaire de la langue basque*. Following van Eys' first field trip to the Basque country in the summer of 1866, a 'deuxième édition revue et augmentée' appeared in 1867 from the same publishing house. It may safely be assumed that it was van Eys himself who provided the required funds for the publication of these books.⁵ [145]

In July 1868 van Eys received a sympathetic letter from the distinguished German linguist August F. Pott (1802-1887) in connection with the second edition of the *Essai*. Pott wished to compliment him on his 'vortreffliches Werk' on Basque and a number of years later, van Eys was to send professor Pott a copy of his 1873 *Dictionnaire Basque-Français*.⁶

I would like to emphasize that the study of Basque was virtually non-existent in the Netherlands at that time, as young C.C. Uhlenbeck was to experience as late as 1888, when seeking to prepare a doctoral thesis on Basque in Leiden. One may wonder, then, how in the early 1860s a well-to-do Amsterdam *jonkheer* became captivated by the intricacies of the Basque grammar.

Van Eys' linguistic turn

As van Eys himself once explained to his French correspondent Georges Lacombe, it was completely by chance that he started to occupy himself with the Euskara, the Basque language. 'Chargé par un ami de rechercher de la musique basque, il eut l'idée d'essayer de traduire les paroles jointes aux mélodies qu'il s'était procurées: à cet effet, il consulta les livres indispensables et c'est ainsi que prit naissance, si

⁵ A detailed analysis of the differences between the two editions can be found in Gómez 2002.

⁶ Pott did not fail to notice that van Eys was 'mehrfach in Polemik mit seinen vorgängern' (cf. Pott 1974 [1887]: 12). In a letter of 12 June 1877, van Eys' London friend, A.H. Sayce, drew attention to 'the flattering terms in which Pott, the veteran of comparative philology, speaks of your grammar in his latest publication'.

l'on me passe le terme, sa vocation' (Lacombe 1914-1917: 386). Was it his dear friend, Jan Pieter Six, who encouraged Willem van Eys to delve into this rather obscure subject? At any rate, 'un peu après 1860' van Eys started to study Basque (Lacombe 1914-1917: 387). It took him several years to compose his concise *Essai*, which numbered 78 pages. In 1866, this book was briefly announced in a Dutch weekly magazine, *De Nederlandsche Spectator*. Its second edition (1867) was favourably reviewed by the same author in the same weekly, namely in an extensive article on the latest developments in contemporary linguistics in the Netherlands. This instructive review article appeared in early January 1868. Note that its author, the classical scholar and Amsterdam teacher Dr Willem Doorenbos (1820-1906), had first of all praised a recently published grammar of the Toba Batak language, composed by a good friend of his, viz. the legendary Dutch linguist Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk. In particular, Doorenbos (cf. Keerom 1868) lauded van der Tuuk's strictly following of 'the right method in linguistics', i.e. a purely descriptive, non-philosophical approach, without any a priori assumptions.

Van Eys' publications on Basque attracted the attention of some influential Dutch linguists and in 1870 he was appointed as a member of the well-respected Leiden Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde ('Society for the study of Dutch language, [146] literature and history'), founded in 1766. The archives show that van Eys had been recommended by, amongst others, the renowned Sanskrit scholar Henri Kern (1833-1917), the mahaguru ('great master') of Leiden, and Matthias de Vries (1820-1892), professor of the Dutch language at the same university.⁷ Mathilde noted that it was Herman van der Tuuk who had on this occasion sent them the newspaper cutting in which the appointment was announced. It was this *linguiste chevronné*, later to be characterized as 'a prince among Dutch linguists', who helped van Eys find his way in linguistics, as will become clear in the following.

Probably towards the end of the 1850s, van Eys became acquainted with Dr Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk (1824-1894), who had been sent by the Dutch Bible Society to Sumatra in the late 1840s to study the Toba Batak language. Having spent many years in the Dutch colonial empire, van der Tuuk returned to the Netherlands in the autumn of 1857 in order to write up the notes he had gathered in Sumatra and prepare a fully-fledged grammar of Toba Batak. He stayed over in patria for some eleven years, publishing not only his translation of seven books of the Bible and his two-volume grammar, but also immersing himself in comparative linguistics. It has been argued that he laid the foundations for the truly scholarly comparative study of the Indonesian languages (Teeuw 1971: xvii). In doing so, he became engaged in many a fierce polemic.

Among the so-called 'linguistic representatives' of the Dutch Bible Society, the gifted van der Tuuk was without any doubt the most remarkable personality. He was an unconventional and eccentric character, who loathed all kinds of formality. When the Frenchman F. du Bois happened to meet him in Bali on 9 April 1891, he later reported in the *Revue des deux mondes* that he had visited 'un vieux savant hollandais, M. van der Tück [...]. Européen, paraît-il, converti aux moeurs balinaises. Ce savant adore son île [...]. Nous trouvons celui-ci en sarrong et pieds nus' (cf. Groeneboer 2002: 877).

Be this as it may, when residing in Amsterdam, the generally troublesome van der Tuuk became friendly with the patrician van Eys family, and in 1916, Mathilde van Eys vividly recalled van der Tuuk as 'un savant très original *qui venait souvent chez nous à Amsterdam*, il était la grande autorité pour les langues polynésiennes et au service du gouvernement hollandais pour l'étude des différents 'dialectes' (1927b: 540; italics added). We may assume that after dinner at the van Eys' residence on the Herengracht, matters linguistic were also discussed, and that van der Tuuk helped to shape van Eys' views on linguistics. Van der Tuuk followed the methods of historical-comparative trend; his approach has been characterized as typically *pre-junggrammatisch*. [147] As mentioned before, he rejected a 'philosophical' approach in linguistics: to his mind, the history of the study of language

⁷ In the 1882 transactions of the Maatschappij, it was strangely enough announced that van Eys had passed away that year.

showed that one cannot penetrate deeply into a language using a philosophical method. Among his heroes were Franz Bopp (1791-1867) and Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), whereas he considered Wilhelm von Humboldt to be merely ‘a dabbler in linguistics’. His sources included the works of August Schleicher (1821-1868) and Max Müller (1823-1900).

Van Eys never forgot his friend’s reservations about Humboldt, the ‘célèbre philologue allemand’: ‘Un des nos amis, M.N. van der Tuuk, un des juges les plus compétents en fait de langues polynésiennes, nous écrit: ‘La grammaire Kawi de Humboldt fourmille de fautes’’ (van Eys 1879: 8). And in an earlier paper in the *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée* of 1874, which includes a critique of some of Humboldt’s Basque etymologies,⁸ van Eys regrets the fact that the late great German linguist August Schleicher (1821-1868) had not sought to ‘se familiariser avec cette langue (sc. Basque) et donner sa propre opinion au lieu de répéter’⁹ les paroles de Humboldt’. If he had done so, ‘qui sait où en seraient aujourd’hui les études de la langue basque?’ (1874: 4).¹⁰

As I have remarked before, in July 1866, van Eys and his wife left for Zaruaz, not far from San Sebastian and nowadays a popular place for surfing. Having returned to Amsterdam, van Eys started work on a second, enlarged and revised edition of his *Essai de grammaire de la langue Basque*. I suppose that it was van der Tuuk, who was after all an experienced field linguist, that had advised his friend van Eys to travel to the Basque country in order to study how the language was actually spoken, so that he could improve upon the 1865 version of the *Essai*, which had been subject to serious criticism from various quarters. In 1868, van der Tuuk left for the Dutch East Indies and he was never to see his fatherland again. Before leaving Amsterdam he deposited a number of books in ‘two suit-cases (...) at Mr. Van Eijs’ house’ (Groeneboer 2002: 725). Among the van der Tuuk legacy in the University library of Leiden, I discovered a number of books on Basque. They are marked with the label ‘Ex legato viri doctissimi H. Neubronner van der Tuuk’ and include a personal dedication from W.J. van Eys.

The second field trip was conducted in August and September 1868; van Eys and his wife returned to Amsterdam in early October. When in Bayonne, van Eys paid a visit to the young *inspecteur des eaux et des forêts* [148] Julien Vinson (1843-1926), who used to dedicate his spare time to linguistic study and who lived at rue Bourgneuf 34 at the time. As a linguist, Vinson was to become known for, amongst other things, his studies on Basque. He became deeply involved in the *Revue de linguistique et de philologie comparée*, a journal that appeared during the period 1867-1916.¹¹ Whereas van Eys published only three times in the *Revue*, viz. in 1873 and 1874, Vinson wrote 237 contributions, starting with a ‘Coup d’œil sur l’étude de la langue basque’. It was his very first article on Basque, and it was published in the *Revue* in April 1868, just a few months before van Eys’ arrival in the Basque country. Its title must have intrigued and pleased the budding Dutch basquisant. Vinson deemed the second edition of van Eys’ *Essai* ‘le traité le plus scientifiquement fait que je connaisse sur la langue Basque, le plus intéressant sans contredit et le plus simple. L’auteur a complété et développé les aperçus de Humboldt. Son ouvrage n’est qu’un essai, mais on sent qu’il pourra faire la vraie grammaire complète de basque’ (cf. Gómez 2002: 295). No wonder that van Eys was eager to visit this reviewer. Thus, on Monday 10 August 1868, Mathilde noted in her journal: ‘mon mari est allé chez Mr. Vinson’, and on Wednesday 2 September it reads: ‘Mr. Vinson est venu dîner chez nous’. On Thursday 24 September, Julien Vinson,

⁸ In a letter of 23 September 1874, the Oxford professor A.H. Sayce complimented van Eys on having exposed ‘Humboldt’s etymological speculations’.

⁹ Viz. in his *Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Übersicht* (Bonn 1850, 104-112).

¹⁰ However friendly he was with van Eys, A.F. Pott (1974 [1887]: 13) defended his revered guiding star in linguistics against the critical comments of the Dutch basquisant: ‘Das Hauptergebnis HUMBOLDTS (...) wird dadurch nicht umgestoßen’.

¹¹ Cf. Desmet 1996 for a thorough analysis of this journal. Note that a number of contributors tended to espouse a Schleicherian, naturalistic view of language (Koerner 1989: 331).

‘qui m’a beaucoup plu par ses manières simples et sa conversation sérieuse’, had again dinner with van Eys and his wife.

Many years later, however, van Eys (1890: 3) counted the prolific but rather recalcitrant Vinson, along with the austere and equally prolific vasculogist Prince Louis-Lucien Bonaparte (1813–1891), explicitly among his ‘adversaires’.¹² It is interesting to note that van Eys and Bonaparte may also have met personally, as both were living in London at a certain point. Their written exchange of opinions on the grammatical description of complicated phenomena of the Basque language was certainly never characterized by its cordiality or collegiality. We will look more closely at this matter in the next section.

3. ‘Your friend the Reverend Sayce’: from the London years

In the years 1871-1875, Willem Jan van Eys and his wife lived in the United Kingdom, viz. 13 Stanley Gardens, Notting Hill, in West London. In [149] spring 1874 they moved to number 14, in spite of van Eys’ ‘horreur de déménagement’, as he told Vinson. It is not yet clear to me why van Eys moved from Amsterdam to London.

In the year 1873, van Eys came to make the acquaintance of a multi-talented scholar, the Reverend Archibald Henry Sayce (1846-1933) of Queen’s College, Oxford. Professor Sayce was a most prolific author, who saw over 770 works published. He was a British linguist whose many contributions to ancient Middle Eastern linguistic research included the first grammar of Assyrian in English. Due to his poor health, his teaching in Oxford was in fact a part-time job; and he would spend over half his time in a warmer climate (cf. Davis 1978: 340). Sayce and van Eys corresponded for some twenty years. The first of the 26 of Sayce’s letters that are preserved, dates from 1 October 1873, and the last from 1 July 1893. Van Eys’ long-time Amsterdam friend, Jan Pieter Six, concluded in a letter of 9 June 1874 to his ‘Amice’ that although Sayce did not know much about Basque, it was always convenient to stay in contact with ‘your friend the Reverend Sayce’, a scholar, from whom one could learn so much.

‘To a philologist Basque is one of the most interesting languages of the world’, Sayce (1923: 42-43) observed in his *Reminiscences* of 1923. Unsurprisingly, then, he appears to have been acquainted with the works of van Eys. He referred to van Eys in his *Introduction to the science of language* (1900 4th ed., 1880 1st. ed). Moreover, in the learned journal *The Academy* of 6 December 1879, he published a favourable review of van Eys’ *Grammaire comparée des dialectes Basques*. In a private letter (23 November 1879), Sayce added that it was an ‘admirable’ work. Be this as it may, van Eys is not mentioned in Sayce’s *Reminiscences*, although the two did meet personally, albeit after some delay apparently. As Sayce once remarked in one of his letters, it is always very pleasant to meet scholars whom you have hitherto known only by name.

In May 1874, Sayce writes that he is delighted to hear that the Dutchman will come to see him in Oxford. Van Eys, however, appears to have caught a cold, so the visit had to be postponed. In December 1874, Mrs van Eys fell ill, so that Sayce was again ‘deprived of the pleasure of seeing you’. At any rate, from the correspondence it can be established that van Eys must have visited Queen’s College in Oxford at least once, viz. in spring 1875. The month of October 1875, however, finds Mr. and Mrs. Van Eys in Hotel Victoria in San Remo. Later on, they decided to settle there permanently.

Strangely enough, the widely-travelled ‘tiny clergyman’ (Davis 1978: 340) never managed to visit van Eys in San Remo; their correspondence, however, continued for two decades. It deals first and

¹² ‘One of nature’s antagonists, he took issue with everybody on everything, and his writings are characterized by a hostility that borders on violence. He conducted public arguments with van Eys, (...) and (...) even with Schuchardt’ (Trask 1997: 61). On Vinson’s position in linguistics see Desmet 1996: 397-434, Oyharçabal 2007 and 2008, Baggioni 2009.

foremost with professional affairs such as Basque studies, although in his ever sympathetic letters the Oxford scholar never omits to inquire after Mrs. van Eys' state of health. [150]

The controversy with Bonaparte

As I mentioned previously, at that time, another very famous vascoologist was residing in London, Prince Louis-Lucien Bonaparte. As is well-known, Bonaparte – a gentleman of some means, who bore 'a strong family resemblance' to his uncle, the 'Great Emperor' (cf. Sayce 1923: 136-137), – was born in England. He spent his youth, however, in Italy; and did not visit France until 1848, when he served two brief terms in the Assembly as representative for Corsica (1848) and for the Seine *département* (1849) before moving to London in 1861, where he spent most of the remainder of his life. According to Michena (1973: 125), Bonaparte's work on Basque was of great importance, but he 'n'était au fond qu'un amateur'. Moreover, Georges Lacombe (1907: 163) noted that Bonaparte 'n'aimait guère la contradiction': his extensive knowledge of Basque, gave him perhaps 'une trop grande confiance en lui-même'. In 1874, van Eys received three letters from Bonaparte, who was then living at 6 Norfolk Terrace, Bayswater, in which a number of details concerning Basque are discussed, requesting a rectification from van Eys. On occasion of van Eys' *Étude sur l'origine et la formation des verbes auxiliaires basques* (1875), the angry Frenchman published a provocative article in the journal *The Academy* of 4 September 1875. He judged that he had been quoted in that study in an incomplete and equivocal manner, or not at all. Van Eys, who apparently had already left for San Remo at the time, responded one month later, in a brief and cool letter to the editor. Bonaparte, however, appeared not at all convinced by van Eys' arguments. He wrote a lengthy and formal response, closing his piece in the following manner:

I regret having been obliged to trespass so much on the valuable space of the ACADEMY, but if, on the one hand, the provocations of Mr. Van Eys have necessitated my doing so, on the other hand, both his incompetency on the subject and the unfairness of his proceedings determine my resolution of discontinuing the present argument with him (*The Academy* 1985, 20 November 1875, 529).

The year 1882 saw a similar clash between the two basquistants, this time on the subject of Bonaparte's ideas on 'The Basque singular suffix -k', which were published in *The Academy* (502, 17 December 1881, 457). In March 1882, an annoyed Bonaparte decided – again – that he would 'avoid in future any further discussion with Mr. Van Eys'. In 1889, however, they crossed swords again, this time in the journal of the Baskische Gesellschaft in Berlin. Their feud only ended when Bonaparte died in Italy in 1891.

One may wonder whether van Eys really enjoyed all these sometimes rather prolonged polemics. In this regard, I can only refer to a passage in the memoirs of Mathilde where she relates that in 1868 [151]

La grammaire basque de mon mari avait été vivement attaquée par le Capitaine Duvoisin de Bayonne.¹³ La vengeance personnelle lui avait tenu plus à coeur que la critique scientifique. C'était injurieux et destiné uniquement à faire du tort à l'ouvrage (...). Nous avons longuement discuté (...) sur la manière dont il faudrait traiter Mr. Duvoisin et il a été décidé de lui répondre sur le terrain scientifique et personnel, mais d'être plus poli que lui (van Eys-Kleinmann 1927b: 528-529).

Georges Lacombe, earnest as ever, annotates:

¹³ Jean Pierre Duvoisin (1810-1891) was the author of *Étude sur la déclinaison basque* (Paris 1866), 'une toute petite brochure', as an annoyed van Eys 1873 [1868]: xxxiv sneered, 'sur laquelle nous avons fait plusieurs observations dans l'introduction de notre *Essai*, nous regrettons que l'auteur n'ait pas répondu un seul mot à nos remarques, maintenant que l'occasion s'en présentait'.

Mme van Eys prend peut-être ici trop vivement la défense de son mari. L'article de Duvoisin, quoique assez sévère, n'était pas 'injurieux' car la 2e édition de *l'Essai de Grammaire* [1867], d'ailleurs très sensiblement supérieure à la première, contenait, encore un assez grand nombre d'erreurs. Cet article parut dans le *Courrier de Bayonne* du 9 février 1868. Il fut reproduit en une brochure (...) intitulée *Quelques mots à propos de l'Essai de grammaire de la langue basque de M. W. J. van Eys* (Bayonne, Lamaignère 1868). Ni le *Courrier* du 9 février ni la brochure ne furent adressés à van Eys et ce n'est qu'après six mois que le bascologue hollandais connu chez Maison neuve le compte-rendu critique dont son livre avait été l'objet.

Both Duvoisin's critique and van Eys' anti-critique of the latter's 'aménités', written in Guéthary on 14 August 1868, were reprinted in van Eys' *Dictionnaire Basque-Français* (1873). To van Eys, it meant the start of a never ending debate on the correct description of the Basque language.

I think we may conclude that, in general, van Eys was indeed 'plus poli' than his adversaries and that he was certainly not afraid to responding to criticism. But we may also conclude that the small world of vasculogy was densely populated with obstinate people, who sought only to promote their own sometimes peculiar ideas, a fact which annoyed not only van Eys, but also his younger compatriot, C.C. Uhlenbeck, very much, as we shall see.

4. San Remo

From Sayce's letters and van Eys' letters to Vinson, it becomes clear that both Willem Jan van Eys and Mathilde Kleinmann had their share of health problems to contend with. In a letter from Zürich, dated 14 July 1871, van Eys complains to Vinson about 'ma misérable vie nomade et ma santé toujours ébranlée', which definitely had to do with 'la vie d'hôtel'. In 1872, he relates how his health was completely ruined. It was Mathilde, in particular, who had difficulty with the English climate. Hopefully, you won't have to leave England, Sayce remarks in one of his letters. However, because of [152] van Eys's persistent 'cough', the month of October 1875 found van Eys in Hotel Victoria at San Remo, an attractive resort on the Italian Riviera for the rich and the famous of the time. Sayce kindly suggests (31.12.1875) that van Eys should move on to the Hôtel de Londres, which was a much better hotel, he had been told: the visitors are mainly English and it is very quiet, whereas at the Victoria the visitors are mostly Germans.

Evidently, van Eys and his wife decided to enjoy the warm Mediterranean climate for a much longer period. Nearly forty years later, viz. Saturday 18 April 1914, Mme Van Eys announced the demise of her husband. The funeral card tells us that the 'cortège' was to leave the 'Villa van Eys' at three o'clock in the afternoon for the Église de St. Jean Baptiste, at the Via Regina Margarita in San Remo, where a 'service religieux' was to take place.

It can be assumed that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century van Eys travelled a great deal throughout Europe, but from the way he undersigned the prefaces of his books and papers we may conclude that he did quite a lot of paperwork behind his desk in his villa at San Remo. Amongst other things, he composed *Outlines of Basque grammar* (1883), and *Aperçu de la grammaire hollandaise* (1890).

Now I will discuss two instances of his other activities.

Euskara (1886-1896)

The 1880s saw an upsurge of interest in Basque studies in Germany. A 'Baskische Gesellschaft' was formed in Berlin in February 1886, and it published a magazine, entitled *Euskara*, 'Organ für die Interessen der Baskischen Gesellschaft'. It was edited by the German philologists Karl Hannemann and Theodor Linschmann. Van Eys appears to have been a 'Mitbegründer' a founding member, of this Baskische Gesellschaft. As far as I can see, he duly paid the annual fee of 10 Marks, sometimes sending more than this amount from San Remo to Berlin. It is interesting to note that the first paper of the first

volume of *Euskara* was written by the Dutch *jonkbeer*, who continued publishing in the journal until its bitter end, in July 1896, when following the early death of Karl Hannemann, *Euskara* was discontinued by the surviving editor, Th. Linschmann. In total, the journal extended to seventeen issues, 144 pages.

Prince Louis-Lucien Bonaparte, a honorary member of the Gesellschaft, also published various papers in *Euskara*. Again, Bonaparte did not refrain from crossing swords with van Eys in the society's magazine. In June 1890, van Eys published his article 'Nouvelles corrections des "nouvelles notes" du Prince Bonaparte' (*Euskara* 8, 63- 64), deciding that this was his last word in this lingering and to his mind fruitless discussion. 'Wir billigen dies um so lieber, als wir den karig bemessen Raum unserer Zeitschrift [153] gern anderweitig verwertet sehen möchten', the undoubtedly relieved editors commented. In a booklet published in the same year, van Eys (1890: 3) could not prevent himself from accusing Bonaparte of a complete lack of method, a 'négation de methode'. It is evident that van Eys, who was after all a loyal member of the Baskische Gesellschaft, was deeply concerned about the scholarly level of some of the papers that appeared in the society's journal. Rather unexpectedly, he found a congenial partner in his compatriot, the talented young linguist C.C. Uhlenbeck. Van Eys was eager to announce Uhlenbeck's *Baskische Studien* (1891) in *Euskara*, thus strategically introducing his new ally into the world of Basque scholarship:

Tous ceux qui s'occupent d'étude de la langue basque seront sans doute heureux d'apprendre qu'un nouveau Basquisant s'est fait connaitre par une brochure tres intéressante (...). L'auteur en est M. C.C.Uhlenbeck, appelé il y a peu de temps à remplir la chaire de philologie comparée à Amsterdam. Nous pouvons nous féliciter de voir entrer dans notre rang un homme rompu aux études philologiques, et qui contribue à maintenir les études basques *sur le vrai terrain scientifique* (*Euskara* 13, March 1893, 112; italics added).

In the very same issue, Uhlenbeck, an angry young man in his late twenties, published a highly critical paper, entitled 'Zur heutigen Baskologie'. It was the kind of paper that Willem Jan van Eys, a founding member of the Gesellschaft and a frequent contributor to *Euskara*, had decided not to submit himself.

In 1896, however, the Baskische Gesellschaft was dissolved and the journal was given up. As the remaining editor, *Pfarrer* Th. Linschmann, noted in bitter tones, this all happened as a result of the lack of interest of the Basque people in their own language and culture:

Als wir im Jahre 1866 unsere Gesellschaft ins Leben riefen, hegten wir die Hoffnung, dass sie von demjenigem Volke, dessen Interessen sie vertrat, mit Freuden begrüsst werden und wenigstens einige seiner Gelehrten unserer Gesellschaft beitreten würden. Diese Hoffnung hat sich leider nicht erfüllt. Es ist traurig, wenn ein Volk nicht einmal soviel Ehrgeiz besitzt, dass es sich für seine eigenen Sprache zu erwärmen vermag und in Stumpfsinn und Gleichgültigkeit dahinlebt. (...) Genug von ihnen (*Euskara* 17, July 1896, 137-138).

C.C. Uhlenbeck¹⁴

'Es más probable que sus obras influyeran en el joven holandés Christianus Cornelius Uhlenbeck (1866-1951)', Gómez (2002: 281) surmises. It is indeed true that van Eys' works on Basque influenced the Dutch scholar [154] C.C. Uhlenbeck, who originally was just a student of the Dutch language. For the young man who matriculated on Thursday 17 September 1885 as a student at Leiden University, already had a large body of somewhat outmoded, romantic poems to his name. A few months previously, at his final exam at the Haarlem gymnasium, he had been awarded high marks for Dutch. It was no surprise,

¹⁴ For a more elaborate discussion of this scholar and some of his works see Noordegraaf 2009 and Bakker 2009.

then, that he had decided to study Dutch language and literature. However, Uhlenbeck was never to become a distinguished teacher of Dutch or a famous poet. How, then, did he become interested in Basque? He explained this in a letter of 17 October 1892 to van Eys, as follows. ‘When I was studying at Leiden,[Professor Matthias] de Vries mentioned during a lecture at a certain point¹⁵ that Basque showed affinity with the native languages of America. As a result, I decided to study Basque’. This occurred during Uhlenbeck’s first year at Leiden, the 1885-1886 academic year. Having acquainted himself with the principles of the language – mainly from the rather antiquated two-volume *Grammaire basque* written in 1826 by Fleury de Lécuse (1774-1845) – he immersed himself in the Basque studies to be found in the literature, including the works by van Eys. On 3 August 1891 he wrote to the latter: ‘The perusal of your extensive writings on this language have aroused in me the desire to add a stone to the edifice whose foundations you have so firmly constructed,’ adding that he expressly counted himself ‘among your students’.¹⁶

This communication with van Eys took place in connection with Uhlenbeck’s publication of his *Baskische Studiën* in 1891, which appeared with the support of his influential teacher Henri Kern and under the aegis of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. The very first phrases of these *Studiën* remind us of the remark once made by Matthias de Vries that had so greatly intrigued the young student-poet:

Das baskische nimmt bekanntlich eine ganz isolierte stelle unter den sprachen der alten welt ein. Vergebens hat man versucht es bei den ägyptosemitischen und uralaltaïschen sprachen einzureihen oder eine nahere verwandtschaft [155] des baskischen mit den ursprünglichen idiomem Amerika’s zu begründen (...) (1891:179).

And, Uhlenbeck proceeds,

Der erste, der *mit wissenschaftlicher methode* die baskische sprache untersucht hat, ist der verdienstvolle gelehrte Jonkheer W.J. van Eys dessen wörterbuch [1873] und vergleichende grammatik [1879] den weg für weitere forschungen geebnet und einen lichtstrahl geworfen haben *in das mystische dunkel, womit die Eskuara umgeben war* (1891: 179-181; italics added).

When van Eys received a complimentary copy of Uhlenbeck’s *Baskische Studiën*, he was ‘bien étonné de recevoir cette brochure de l’auteur *mon pays n’ayant jamais fait de moindre attention aux études basques*’ (italics added). Obviously, young Uhlenbeck was one of the few Dutch language researchers who was really interested in this non-Indo-European language. In October 1892, following van Eys’ laudatory announcement of Uhlenbeck’s *Studiën* in *Euskara* (13 May 1893, page 112), it reads: ‘A major stimulus for me to go on with Basque, is the gentle appraisal that my Bask. *Studiën* found in you’. When he was informed of the demise of the aged *jonker*, Uhlenbeck wrote on 27 April 1914 to Georges Lacombe: ‘Nous lui devons beaucoup et ne l’oublions jamais’.

From their correspondence (1891-1905), one learns how both van Eys and Uhlenbeck were deeply concerned about the course of contemporary Basque studies. ‘For you, the one who has developed this discipline himself, what is now being written must be extremely tiresome ’ (2.1.1892). Van Eys had asked Uhlenbeck to write a paper against the ideas of Hyacinthe comte de Charencey (1832-1916), the author of *Mélanges de linguistique* (1874). Uhlenbeck promptly delivered a critical piece entitled ‘Zur heutigen Baskologie’ (*Euskara* 13 (1893): 101-102). He told van Eys:

¹⁵ Note that de Vries used to review ‘the connection between languages in general’ during his first-year lectures on Dutch language and literature. In this context, he would present a schematic overview of the relationship between all European languages, which students were expected to copy. This overview was based in part on the very clear presentation given in *Die Sprachen Europas in systematischer Übersicht*, a work published in 1850 by August Schleicher. Basque received fairly extensive attention in Schleicher’s book (see pp. 104-112 of that work), so it may be expected that ‘die Euskarische Sprache’ was also covered in de Vries’ Dutch lectures.

¹⁶ Uhlenbeck to van Eys, 3 August 1891. It may be mentioned that in 1935 Uhlenbeck referred to these studies as containing no more than ‘les rêveries de ma jeunesse (...) il n’y a rien (...) que je pourrais affirmer maintenant sans réserve’ (cf. Lacombe & Lafon 1936: 111).

I hope, that you will not deem the paper too crass: it is not possible for me to express myself in a milder manner without forcing my conscience. I have always taken exception to the fact that someone with no linguistic training like De Charencey¹⁷ pretends to be a serious scholar. To my mind, people such as he cause much evil in this world.

It is a pity that Hannemann is the editor of the journal, for he certainly needs to be reminded that scholarship is a serious matter, and not just arbitrary guesswork. I have quite often considered write a piece against current vasculogy, but I always have postponed this, because I believed that the mouth-piece of the Bask. Gesellschaft would be unwilling to accept such an article in which the truth is frankly set out. But now your authority will suffice to have my — I confess — not very kind article published. [156]

From the correspondence, we learn that van Eys had composed a concise grammar of the San Remo dialect. Unfortunately, this was lost. Uhlenbeck would applaud it if van Eys could ever have published such a description of the dialect (17 Oct. 1892).¹⁸

What Uhlenbeck regretted most, however, was the fact that the sole magazine devoted to the study of Basque was mainly taken up with rather curious articles. Even the editor-in-chief Hannemann often puts forwards rather idiosyncratic opinions, which was most harmful to the discipline. In November 1893, Uhlenbeck told his mentor that he had finished his correspondence with the English vasculogist Edward Spencer Dodgson (1857-1922). Fortunately, he adds, for several times I doubted whether this man was really still *compos mentis*. No wonder then that Uhlenbeck always refused to become a member of the Baskische Gesellschaft.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper has discussed some chapters from the life of an independent nineteenth-century scholar, *jonkbeer* Willem Jan van Eys, an *amateur* who more or less by accident became the first serious Dutch student of Basque at the age of forty. Probably at the suggestion of his friend, the renowned student of Indonesian languages, H.N. van der Tuuk, he made, just like Wilhelm von Humboldt, two trips to the Basque country, both times accompanied by his wife Mathilde, who gave a fine description of their adventures in her journal. Van Eys conducted fieldwork in order to improve upon the first edition of his *Essai de grammaire de la langue basque* (1865) and to prepare his *Dictionnaire Basque-Français* (1873). It appears that van Eys was not much of a theoretician, but like van der Tuuk, he had a preference in matters linguistic, not for Humboldt, but for August Schleicher and Max Müller.

After moving on to London, he became acquainted with the Oxford linguist A.H. Sayce, and with the notorious *basquisant* Prince Louis-Lucien Bonaparte. The former appears to have been a congenial correspondent, as his amiable letters show, whereas the latter turned into a bitter opponent as far as the facts of the Basque language were concerned. Van Eys always proved to be a persistent and pertinent antagonist, when dealing with true or pseudo-basquistants from the late 1860s onwards.

For health reasons, van Eys and his wife settled in the attractive resort of San Remo in 1875, where van Eys continued to work and study until the late 1890s, maintaining up his correspondence with many European scholars. He supported the Berlin ‘Baskisch Gesellschaft’ and its journal, *Euskara*, for as long as they continued to exist. Van Eys’ contact with the young [157] Dutch scholar C.C. Uhlenbeck, who had used his works to become acquainted with the Basque language, must have been a particular pleasure to him in the 1890s. In November 1906, however, van Eys wrote to Lacombe that for a decade he had not published anything and that he had not opened any book on Basque. ‘Je me suis tout rouillé et me ne reconnais plus dans mes propres livres’ (26.11.1906). Van Eys was 81 at that point.

¹⁷ Charles-Félix-Hyacinthe Gouhier comte de Charencey (1832-1916), author of, among other things, *Mélanges sur la langue basque* (1879).

¹⁸ In a letter of 12 June 1877, Sayce also mentions van Eys’ grammar of the San Remo dialect.

It was W.J. van Eys who dared to compose ‘des travaux ensembles’ (Lacombe 1914-1917: 388), a task that other contemporary specialists were afraid to undertake. In doing so, the private scholar van Eys, ‘dem die baskische Sprachwissenschaft so viel zu verdanken hat’, as Hugo Schuchardt noted in 1896,¹⁹ played a catalysing and inspiring role in the rise of vascolology in the years 1865-1900. A more extended investigation of his extensive correspondence will provide us with a clearer insight into the part he played in the Basque linguistic wars of the nineteenth century. [158]

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¹⁹ *Literarisches Centralblatt* No. 16, 18 April 1896, 590. In the Azkue Bibliotheka (Bilbao) and in the Hugo Schuchardt Archiv (Graz) much material can be found with regard to the letters exchanged between van Eys and Schuchardt. In the present paper I have left this correspondence out of consideration.

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