

# DOSEL TRANSLATION WORKSHOP I REPORT



**Bilbao, April 26-30, 2025**

## **Executive Summary**

The DoSEL (Drama of Smaller European Languages) Translation Workshop was successfully held in Bilbao from April 26-30, 2025, hosted by Teatro Arriaga. This five-day event brought together playwrights, translators, and dramaturges to facilitate the translation of theatrical works between Basque and Albanian, two minority European languages. The workshop exemplified the challenges and innovative solutions in translating between smaller European languages, addressing the project's core objective of enhancing cultural exchange through theatrical translation.

This report details the activities, participants, outcomes, and recommendations that emerged from this cultural collaboration.

## Workshop Structure and Activities

### Day 1: Saturday, April 26 - Welcome and Introduction

The workshop commenced with a welcoming session and introduction to the objectives, emphasising the unique focus on translating between Basque and Albanian. Participants introduced themselves and their texts, discussing the cultural contexts informing their work. This opening day established the foundational understanding of the challenges ahead through group sessions exploring initial translation obstacles.

### Day 2: Sunday, April 27 - Focus on Individual Work

The second day was dedicated to collaborative work between translators, authors, and dramaturges. Teams focused specifically on reviewing and depurating the first draft of the translations of Basque text into Albanian and Kosovar text into Basque. The session featured intensive translation work and opportunities for one-on-one consultations between translators and authors to clarify meaning and cultural nuances. Participants later visited the Guggenheim Museum to experience exhibitions by Refik Anadol, Vito Acconci, and Helen Frankenthaler.

### Day 3: Monday, April 28 - Expert Perspectives and Cultural Exchange

Following the pattern established on Day 2, participants continued their individual and paired translation work. The afternoon included a visit to Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao's Society and Contemporary Culture Centre, offering participants a deeper understanding of the local cultural landscape.

### Day 4: Tuesday, April 29 - Refining Translations and Panel Discussion

The morning sessions focused on refining translations, with particular attention to rhythm, idiomatic expressions, and cultural subtleties. Teams presented their challenges and solutions during a peer review session. The afternoon featured a prominent panel discussion on "Challenges and Approaches in Drama Translation in Smaller European Languages," which connected workshop participants with external experts and stakeholders through a hybrid format that included remote

participation from DoSEL partners across Europe and audience members from Iceland and Italy, among other countries.

## Day 5: Wednesday, April 30 - Presentation and Closing

The final day featured comprehensive presentations of the translated works, including discussions of context and challenges encountered. A collective reflection on the workshop and possibilities for future collaborations followed. Participants visited Euskalduna Jauregia, a landmark cultural venue symbolising Bilbao's transformation from industrial centre to cultural hub. The workshop concluded with attendance at the premiere of "MARI-ELI," a zarzuela by Jesús Guridi directed by Calixto Bieito at Teatro Arriaga, followed by a farewell cocktail.



**The workshop provided an excellent context for translating and cultural exchange.**

Photos by Jon Rozadilla



## Participant Selection and Roles

### Selection Process

The selection of playwrights and plays presented by Teatro Arriaga was conducted by its Artistic Director, Calixto Bieito, in collaboration with the production, programming, and international departments. Selection criteria included alignment with DoSEL project objectives, suitability for international dissemination, and English language proficiency to facilitate effective workshop communication.

The translator selection process faced unique challenges due to the scarcity of professionals directly translating between Basque and Albanian. This necessitated a two-step translation approach:

1. **Basque to Albanian path:** Basque → Spanish → Albanian
2. **Albanian to Basque path:** Albanian → Spanish → Basque

With assistance from the Etxepare Basque Institute, the following translators were identified:

- **Bashkim Shehu:** An Albanian writer and translator based in Barcelona with extensive experience translating Basque literature into Albanian, including works by Bernardo Atxaga and Kirmen Uribe.
- **María Rocés González:** One of Spain's few professional Albanian-to-Spanish translators, known for translating works by Ismail Kadare.
- **Izaskun Gracia Quintana:** Selected from the Etxepare Institute's directory of qualified translators for the Spanish-to-Basque translation, also contributing to a more gender-balanced representation.

### Workshop Participants and Their Roles

#### Playwrights and Authors

- **Eneko Sagardoy:** Basque actor and writer who authored the text selected by Teatro Arriaga. His dual experience as actor and translator provided valuable insights into adapting texts for performance, highlighting performative nuances often overlooked in translation.
- **Jeton Neziraj:** Renowned Kosovar playwright and director of Qendra Multimedia, whose plays have been translated into multiple languages and performed internationally. His dramaturgical expertise contributed significantly to refining the Albanian translation of Basque texts, ensuring cultural and contextual accuracy.

#### Translators

- **Bashkim Shehu:** Translated from Spanish to Albanian, bringing refined translation skills that were instrumental in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps.
- **María Rocés González:** Served as a crucial intermediary in the translation process, initially providing a Spanish version of the Kosovar text to facilitate Basque translation. She later

refined her translation through collaborative discussions with the Kosovar author and Albanian translator.

- **Izaskun Gracia Quintana:** Translated from Spanish to Basque, collaborating closely with Eneko Sagardoy to ensure fidelity and performative suitability of the translation.

### **Panel Discussion Participants (April 29)**

- **Kirmen Uribe:** Distinguished Basque writer and recipient of Spain's National Prize for Literature, who shared insights on working with translators and literary agents, offering valuable perspectives on translating Basque literature.
- **Jure Novak:** Former Director of Prešeren Theatre and DoSEL project initiator, who provided critical insights into the difficulties faced by smaller European languages in drama translation.
- **Irene Larraza:** Director of the Etxepare Basque Institute, who moderated the panel, bringing extensive knowledge of Basque culture and language promotion to facilitate comprehensive discussions.

## **Workshop Outcomes and Achievements**

The DoSEL Translation Workshop successfully achieved its primary objectives:

1. **Effective Text Exchange:** The workshop facilitated the exchange of texts between participating teams, enabling in-depth discussions on cultural, geopolitical, and funding contexts influencing each participant's work.
2. **Collaborative Translation Process:** The workshop exemplified the benefits of a collaborative approach to translation. For instance, translator Bashkim Shehu, while initially expecting to work with Kosovar actors, instead collaborated with playwright Jeton Neziraj to refine the Albanian translation, enhancing its dramaturgical quality. Shehu also contributed to reviewing María Rocés González's Spanish translation, offering insights into linguistic nuances and context.
3. **Addressing Translation Challenges:** The workshop effectively highlighted and addressed the practical difficulties of facilitating high-quality translations between smaller European languages. The Basque–Albanian language pair exemplified the scarcity of direct translation resources, demonstrating the need for innovative approaches.
4. **Cultural Exchange:** Beyond translation, the workshop fostered meaningful cultural exchange through visits to significant cultural institutions in Bilbao and attendance at the premiere of "MARI-ELI," enhancing participants' understanding of Basque culture and arts.
5. **Knowledge Sharing:** The panel discussion brought together experts from various fields, creating a valuable platform for sharing insights and strategies for drama translation in smaller European languages, with participation extending beyond physical attendees to include remote DoSEL partners and other stakeholders.

## Challenges and Solutions

### Language Pair Complexity

The lack of direct translation resources between Basque and Albanian necessitated a multi-step translation process through Spanish as an intermediary language. This approach, while complex, proved effective through the collaborative environment established during the workshop.

### Cultural Context Translation

Participants faced challenges in conveying cultural nuances and context-specific references across languages. One-on-one sessions between authors and translators were particularly valuable in addressing these challenges, allowing for in-depth discussions about cultural significance and intended meaning.

### Balancing Fidelity and Performability

The presence of both authors and translators with theatrical experience facilitated valuable discussions on maintaining performative qualities while ensuring translation accuracy. Eneko Sagardoy's dual perspective as both author and actor provided particularly insightful contributions to this aspect of the translation process.

## Recommendations for Future Workshops

Based on participant feedback and workshop experiences, the following recommendations are proposed for future DoSEL translation workshops:

- 1. Incorporate Public Readings:** Participants expressed strong interest in integrating public sharing of translated texts through staged readings or performances. This would allow translators and authors to observe audience reception, providing valuable feedback on translation effectiveness and clarity.
- 2. Enhance Collaboration with Actors:** Translators highlighted the benefits of working directly with actors to fine-tune rhythm, tone, and performative elements. Engaging actors in the translation process would help ensure that translated texts maintain their intended impact when performed, addressing "speakability" concerns.
- 3. Extend Collaborative Sessions:** The collaborative environment proved invaluable for a deeper understanding of source materials and nuanced translations. Future workshops should continue to foster such collaborative spaces,
- 4. Maintain Generous Timeframes:** Participants appreciated the workshop's relaxed pace, which provided sufficient time for reflection and iterative refinement. Allocating ample time in future workshops will support thoughtful translation practices and reduce pressure that can hinder creative processes.
- 5. Expand Remote Participation Options:** The successful hybrid format of the panel discussion suggests potential for expanding remote participation opportunities in future workshops, enhancing inclusivity and broadening the diversity of perspectives.

## Conclusion

The DoSEL Translation Workshop in Bilbao effectively addressed its core objective of facilitating high-quality translations between smaller European languages while highlighting the challenges inherent in such endeavours. The workshop's success stemmed from its collaborative approach, bringing together authors, translators, and dramaturges in a supportive environment that fostered meaningful cultural exchange.

The Basque-Albanian translation initiative exemplified the project's commitment to highlighting practical difficulties in translating between minority languages, while also demonstrating innovative solutions through intermediary languages and collaborative processes. The workshop not only produced valuable translations but also generated insights and recommendations that will inform future DoSEL activities.

By embracing the complexity of translating between smaller European languages, the workshop contributed significantly to the broader mission of enhancing fair representation and dissemination of minority language theatrical works within the European cultural landscape. The connections established and knowledge shared during this event will continue to benefit participants and the wider European theatrical community.



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