

# Basque in Instagram: A scalar approach to vernacularisation and normativity

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## Abstract

This article analyses vernacularisation as a sociolinguistic change that brings with it an ideological fracturing of previous standard/vernacular indexical relations. It considers this ideological shift in the polycentric environment of social networks as mediated spaces where the values and functions of languages and varieties are re-evaluated and brought together. We argue that Instagram is a fertile space to study the hierarchies among Basque varieties which could reveal a sociolinguistic change among the Basque youth. In our stylistic and ethnographic research, we draw the data from the corpus of the Gaztesare project that contains the production in Instagram of 30 Basque university students. The discussion highlights the difficulty to give a simple answer to the question of what ‘best’ language is, and it underlines the importance of a multi-scalar perspective to explore the complex and multidimensional ideological schemes of the Basque youth and to detect new values and hierarchies among Basque varieties.

## KEYWORDS

Basque, indexical orders, Instagram, scale-level, social media, standard language ideology, vernacularisation

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### Abstract

Artikulu honek bernakulizazioa aztertzen du behin-lako estandar/bernakulu erlazio indexikalen urraketa ideologikoa dakarren aldaketa soziolinguistiko gisa. Sare sozialen ingurune polizentrikoan arakutzen du lerratze ideologiko hori, sareok hizkuntzen eta aldaeren balioak eta funtzioak birkokatzen eta batzen diren espazio mediatizatuak direnez gero. Lanean argudiatzen dugu Instagram espazio emankorra dela euskararen aldaeren arteko hierarkiak aztertzeko, eta azterketa horrek agerian jarlitzakeela euskaldun gazteen artean gertatzen ari diren aldaketa soziolinguistikoak. Gure ikerketa estilistiko eta etnografikoan, unibertsitateko 30 euskal ikasleren Instagrameko ekoizpena jasotzen duen Gaztesare proiektuaren corpusetik atera ditugu datuak. Eztatidan nabarmentzen dugu zaila dela ‘hizkuntza onena’ zein den galderari erantzun soil bat ematea, eta eskala anitzeko perspektibaren errebantzia nabarmentzen dugu euskaldun gazteen eskema ideologiko konplexu eta multidimentsionalak aztertzeko, baita euskararen aldaeretan balio eta hierarkia berriak hautemateko ere.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Vernacularisation is a sociolinguistic change that brings with it a reordering in the ideological loading of linguistic varieties; and more specifically, a shift towards a more positive valorisation of vernaculars, as well as a weakening of standard language ideology (Coupland, 2014). Standard language ideology, as explained by Milroy and Milroy (1985) (Milroy, 2005), leads to a general intolerance towards linguistic variation. Milroy talks about the ‘good news’ and the ‘bad news’ of standardisation, and he makes the point that there are social advantages in the process of standardisation: ‘The availability of a standard variety is in fact highly functional in human affairs’ (Milroy, 2005, p. 134). But, at the same time, he critiques the restrictive and discriminatory aspects of standard-language cultures that relate standard varieties to ‘correctness’ and to the concept of ‘best language’.

‘Correct’ language is linked to an educated written form which is considered the voice of progress. It likewise serves to create close ties between standardisation and notions of modernity, including in minority contexts (Gal 2006, 2018; Heller, 2006). According to Spotti (2011, p. 31), modernist language ideologies revolve around two main tenets: ‘the establishment of a standard or norm for language behaviour that is common to all inhabitants of a nation-state, and the rejection of hybridity and ambivalence in any form of linguistic behaviour’. In both cases, the values of unity and homogeneity lie behind the concept of ‘best language’. Standardisation is an ideological drive towards uniformity that leads the standard to be considered ‘the voice of everyone’, the *anonymous* voice (Gal & Woolard, 2001).

Vernacularisation, on the other hand, refers to a resistance to such linguistic uniformity and also to the idea of only one 'good' way of talking. It is an ideological drive towards plurality and difference that, according to Coupland (2010), has gained ground in the new socio-historical conditions of Late Modernity. Through the example of social change in Britain, Coupland makes a tendentious list of the kinds of changes that have happened since the 1960s in many European societies. He includes, among other factors: the proliferation of communication technologies, the increasing mediation of culture, the blurring of the distinction between private and public, the huge growth in geographical mobility and the fact that national boundaries are becoming more permeable in a globalised world (Coupland 2010, p. 58).

Coupland (2010) goes on to argue that such social changes have brought with them important ideological changes that affect the 'standard language culture' and he proposes studying them under the term *vernacularisation*. The use of vernaculars itself would not necessarily amount to evidence that vernacularisation as sociolinguistic change has occurred. Likewise, the mere use of the standard language does not mean that the standard-language culture Milroy and Milroy (1985) talk about is still in force. Coupland makes the point that, in the case of English in Britain, it is difficult to point to any one emerging vernacular being treated as 'the best way of speaking'. But he adds that, 'also there is informal evidence of RP [Received Pronunciation] increasingly failing to unquestioningly attract attributions of power, status and authority, and the results is indeed a sort of democratisation' (Coupland, 2010, p. 74). Vernacularisation, then, implies an ideological fracturing of previous standard/vernacular indexical relations, through which new relations between language varieties and society are being constructed (Coupland, 2014, p. 86).

In this study, we approach vernacularisation among Basque youth and we focus on the aforementioned standard/vernacular indexical relations. Early signs of vernacularisation among youth-produced Basque media was pointed to in Urla's (2012) work on free radio and community magazines from the nineties. But we ground interpretations of such ideological reordering in the detailed analysis of language use on the Instagram social network, one of the mediatised cultural spaces in which vernacular writing occupies unprecedented space and visibility. On social networks such as Instagram, Basque varieties compete in a new scenario in which we can observe a reconfiguration of written language norms and the emergence of new indexical orders (Androutsopoulos, 2010, p. 155). The study of vernacularisation in such a mediatised context, as in any other sociolinguistic phenomena in a globalised context, 'need[s] to be understood as developing at several different scale-levels where different orders of indexicality dominate' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 42). The linguistic resources a person takes into account, together with the evaluating authority or 'centres' (Blommaert, 2007a) he or she behaves with reference to, may vary significantly from one of those scale-levels to the other, as well as with regard to the perceived appropriateness criteria. Instagram, as we will try to show here, is particularly interesting in the study of such scale-jumping in normativity (Blommaert, 2010, p. 35). In Instagram, language users are constantly switching from a local to a translocal context, but also from more elaborate to more spontaneous and personal self-presentation. For that reason, Instagram is a fertile space to study the hierarchies among Basque varieties that could reveal a sociolinguistic change among Basque youth.

The research reported upon in this paper grew out of a broader study that looked into the stylistic choices of 30 Basque-speaking university students, aged between 18 and 25 years, which was collected as part of the Gaztesare research project in 2019 (Elordui et al., 2020). In Gaztesare project, we are interested in the way Basque young people negotiate their identity in a context such as Instagram, and on how self-presentation and identity construction can be developed by means of stylistic choices at several different scale-levels. The corpus of Gaztesare is made up of the written production on Instagram's Timelines and chats by those voluntary university students from 2013 to 2019. The study also includes an ethnographic analysis about the stylistic choices of the students who accepted to take part

in interviews and discussion groups, mainly based on examples of their own production in Instagram. We find particularly pertinent to focus our study on university students. Indeed, they are supposed to be the main users of the standard variety among young people, and they also have a greater translocal projection in their everyday life. Both aspects make them especially interesting in a study that tries to explore sociolinguistic changes in normativity and in particular a phenomenon like vernacularisation that we address in this paper.

The core data of the analysis in this paper are based on the written production and the metalinguistic reflections of five students. We have focused on a few participants in order to explore in depth their stylistic positioning and their perception on their stylistic choices. We selected participants who completed all the phases of our methodology and provided us with their whole production in Timelines and chats. Moreover, our five participants show different sociolinguistic and cultural histories that to a large extent reflect the linguistic-cultural diversity of young Basque speakers.<sup>1</sup>

Following this introduction (Section 1), we will first provide an overview of the development of Basque standardisation, in order to contextualise the ideological schemes that the young students in the survey received from authority centres such as school and the media (Section 2). In Section 3, we will focus on Instagram as a digital space in which there is jumping across different scales of normativity. In Section 4, we will briefly introduce the participants, as well as the methods used for the collection and selection of the Gaztesare corpus. Then, in Section 5, we will explain the most significant results stemming from our analysis. This will be done by taking a close look at the indexical values students associate with standard Basque and with local vernaculars or dialects of Basque and exploring the potential ideological shift associated with vernacularisation. We will conclude by discussing the findings (Section 6) and presenting our final considerations (Section 7).

## 2 | OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BASQUE STANDARDISATION: *BATUA* AND LOCAL DIALECTS COEXISTING FROM THE 1960S ONWARDS

From the 1960s onwards, a series of socio-political changes in the Basque Country gave the definitive push for the creation of the written standard which the academy of the Basque language, Euskaltzaindia, had been debating for decades. One fundamental factor was the creation of *ikastolas*, or Basque-medium schools (Zuazo 2005, 2019). *Ortografia*, the report presented by Koldo Mitxelena (Euskaltzaindia, 1968) to the Basque academy in 1968, established the bases for the written standard Basque, later called *Euskara Batua* or 'Unified Basque'. The modernist principles explained by Spotti (2011) were the main guidelines for the standardisation process from the beginning: the establishment of a standard supra-local written norm that would ensure the linguistic homogeneity and unity of the Basque-speaking community. One of the main arguments in favour of unified Basque was historical: Mitxelena argued the existence of an ancient unified Basque prior to the emergence of dialects, which were considered to have brought about the division of the language (Mitxelena, 1968; Villasante, 1994). *Batua* was also seen as a way to demolish that division and the barriers between speakers of different varieties of Basque of that time. 'Fundamental, a matter of life and death' (Mitxelena, 1968, p. 203) were Mitxelena's words to explain the urgent need to standardise Basque for this unifying goal, especially in the field of education. For many others, *Batua* was also a symbol of the unified Basque nation (Urla 2012). In fact, as Hualde and Zuazo (2007) explain, 'the rapid acceptance of the new standard within Basque society is undoubtedly related to the strength of Basque nationalistic feelings at the time of its adoption' (Hualde & Zuazo, 2007, p. 14). Such a view of unity could be seen in the proposals made for Basque schools by the academy of the Basque language at that time (Euskaltzaindia, 1979),

and also in the language policy of the Basque institutional media in the 1980s: linguistic homogeneity and unity were the guiding linguistic ideological principles in state-media such as EITB (Euskal Irrati Telebista 'Basque Radio and Television'), and the newly created *Batua* was prioritised in the name of the unity of Basque community.

The rejection of hybridity that Spotti (2011) considers the second tenet of modernist language ideology has become an important topic in the standardisation of Basque. There are clear examples of what Milroy (2005) calls *genetic purism*, that is, a purist proposal based on the assumption that 'the alleged corruptions result exclusively from the effect of other languages' (Milroy, 2005, p. 326). We find more examples of this type of purism after the implementation of *Batua* in the education system and as a result of a diagnosis of language use among Basque youth that led Euskaltzaindia member Pello Salaburu to state that 'here what is at stake is not unity, but the language itself' (Salaburu, 1994, p. 682). In the 1990s, hybridisation became one of the most deplored phenomena on the part of the Basque academy, as reflected in its new regulations concerning the language in which delimiting the grammatical boundaries of Basque has been a main issue.

But one thing that stands out in the discourse of Basque standardisation is the acceptance of geographical variability: dialectal forms have been consistently evaluated as 'correct' within that discourse and have been seen as contributions in the formation of the Basque standard. *Batua* has not been conceived as a monolithic standard norm. There are almost no examples of what Milroy (2005) calls *sanitary purism* with respect to local dialects' resources in the discourse of Basque's standardisation, and very few in which non-standard forms are considered 'vulgar' or incorrect.

As for the values associated with the *anonymous/authentic* pair explained by Gal and Woolard (2001), the standardisation of Basque shows an example of what Gal calls a *fractally recursive move*, which she has proposed for other minority languages (Gal, 2006, 2018): 'It does not question standardization as part of the modernist axis and its configuration of values, but rather subdivides the authenticity/emplaced/particular side of the modernist axis into yet another anonymous/authentic pair, recreating at a more limited scale the very same contrast' (Gal, 2018, p. 235). In the Basque case, the idea to use the framework of authenticity/anonymity with regard to *Batua* and dialect was first presented in Urla et al. (2016) in their extended discussion of the enregisterment of *Batua* and dialect. In this regard, there has been a clear intent to make *Batua* become an anonymous variety, 'the voice of everyone because there is the voice of no one in particular' (Gal, 2018, p. 233) as well as the universal variety for all Basque speakers, to be used throughout the whole Basque community. At the same time, *Batua* has been conceived as a way to scale up in order to reverse the increasingly extended view of Basque as an index of past, an uneducated and illiterate language: the cultivation of writing, Mitxelena contended (Euskaltzaindia, 1968), could raise the prestige Basque needed to end the stigma many Basque speakers lived with. Written Basque, moreover, could help curb the abandonment of the language and its growing lack of transmission. From the 1980s on, *Batua* has been the central axis around which Basque language revival policy has revolved in the educational system from elementary school to the university level, and it is used in the vast majority of all written production.<sup>2</sup>

For decades, the dialects or *euskalkiak* were perceived to lay outside those cultural spheres. Only since the 2000s, and in particular following a 2005 proposal by Euskaltzaindia and the Ikastola Confederation (Euskal Herriko Ikastolen Konfederazioa & Euskaltzaindia, 2005), did Basque schools start considering the option of including the dialects in the academic system. But this proposal was also made on the basis of evoking the 'authentic' nature of local dialects, the other side of the modernist axis in which, according to Gal, non-standard resources acquire values linked to genuineness and authenticity (Gal, 2018, p. 233). In fact, the proposal came, once again, after a diagnosis of *Batua* use by Basque youth as 'artificial' and 'non-Basque'. In this case, the diagnosis was conducted by the Advisory Council of Basque (2004), but was also based on Koldo Zuazo's influential essay, *Euskararen Sendabelarrak*

(2000). Zuazo (2000) considered the dialects the only medicinal herb that could save *Batua* from artificiality (p. 154), and as the only antidote against the corruption and the degeneration of a language at risk (p. 155). In Zuazo's work, *historicity* is a key concept that is closely linked to correctness and the legitimacy of the language. Dialectal usage has been promoted especially on the basis of this historical pedigree, in which we can still perceive the *genetic purism* of Milroy (2005).

Despite their historical value, the confinement of local dialectal forms to areas of informal use is still evident in the proposal for schools by the Ikastola Confederation and Euskaltzaindia, a proposal that clearly contributes to a sociolinguistic stratification effect in regard to the Basque linguistic variants: 'Colloquial speech, or the speech used in informal situations, is based on the dialect or subdialect, whereas cultivated speech is based on *Batua* or on the cultivated speech of the dialect' (Euskal Herriko Ikastolen Konfederazioa & Euskaltzaindia, 2005, p. 38). Alongside the school environment, the state media company EITB has also promoted this hierarchical scheme for decades. The use of the standard form has been, until very recently, associated with the voices of 'serious' news readers, whilst 'non-standardness' has been ideologically confined to the media voices of a few comedians and vox pop street interviews (Elordui, 2020).

However, from the 2000's on, and particularly in the last decade, we have been able to observe new language practices and values emerging that could be related to that ideological change that Coupland (2010) includes in Late Modern life. That is particularly evident in the case of the Basque media, in which technological changes have brought about more of 'bottom-up' activity. This includes initiatives being developed by the users themselves and by media makers that we can consider grass-roots media creators (Elordui, 2020). The language policies of these new media professionals are very far removed from a standard-only policy view that characterised the first paradigms of the Basque media. They make use of the whole multilingual and heteroglossic repertoires of that target they aim for, and local dialects are taking up a significant place in their digital linguistic design. These new practices are also provoking changes in the institutional media that have to compete in that media ecology. Gaztea, the young people's web-radio at the state-media EITB, is a good example of an heteroglossic language policy in which local dialects have an important place (Elordui, 2018).

### 3 | INSTAGRAM, JUMPING ACROSS SCALES OF NORMATIVITY

In this work, we will consider the ideological shift of vernacularisation among Basque youth. Yet we do so in the polycentric environment of social networks, mediated spaces where the values and functions of languages and varieties are re-evaluated and brought together. In these digital spaces, new hierarchical orderings can develop across local and translocal scales of normativity (Androutsopoulos, 2014). The idea of sociolinguistic scales, as explained by Blommaert (2005, 2007b, 2010, 2020), points towards the non-unified and non-uniformed nature of global and translocal communication. Through the application of a *scale* metaphor, Blommaert aims to have a more precise understanding of the complex 'context' conditions under globalised communication: 'Scales need to be understood as levels or dimensions at which particular forms of normativity, patterns of language use and expectations thereof are organized' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 36) but also as 'a metaphor that suggests that we have to imagine things that are of a *different order*, that are hierarchically ranked and stratified' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 33).

Blommaert argues that the term *scale* contains a productive ambivalence that helps to go beyond the traditional sociolinguistic *register* dominated by horizontal spatial metaphors: 'It refers to what we could call scope of communicability, which is, if you wish, a horizontal image spread, dimension, degree; but it refers simultaneously to value, distinction, quality in the sociolinguistic field, which

is a vertical image of stratification'. And he adds: 'What *scale* does, is to express an intersection of scope and value, and this is why the ambivalence is productive' (Blommaert, 2020, p. 1). Scope and value go hand in hand, Blommaert explains: the value of resources in interaction is often tied to their scope of deployment, to their affordance to include or exclude interlocutors, topics and communication practices (Blommaert, 2020, p. 3). In other words, those language resources or varieties have different scale affordances that reveal differences at the intersection of scope and value (Blommaert, 2020, p. 2).

Different scales organise different patterns of normativity, and in a context such as that of social media, the user often has to manage simultaneously various differently scoped and valued orders of indexicality, 'as emic regulators of meaning-making' (Blommaert, 2020, p. 5). As we said in the introduction, Instagram is particularly interesting in the study of such scale-jumping in normativity 'from the individual to the collective, the temporally situated to the trans-temporal, the unique to the common, the token to the type, the specific to the general' (Blommaert, 2010, p. 35) and also including a constant change in the authority references considered.

Instagram is a photo and video sharing social network. But Instagram photo-posts on Instagram Timeline also include short written texts in captions, in which there are comments related to the photo and sometimes hashtags (#) to help users discover both photos and also each other (Figure 1). The posts and the stories – as well as photos and short videos that expire after 24 h – are shared publicly or with pre-approved followers, depending on whether the user's account is public or private.

Instagram also includes Direct Messages (Figure 2). Users who follow each other can send private messages about the published stories, photos and videos. Often, those Directs are used for messaging close friends in the audience, while sometimes they are also employed to establish new relationships with less well-known audience members.

As stated by Marwick and Boyd (2011) in regard to Twitter, so in Instagram, *context collapse* occurs in the network structures created. Instagram brings together users from different geographical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a single network, in particular in Timelines; that is, Instagram can muster members of various networks that are completely scattered outside the Internet. Yet although social media users can be diverse, it seems that participants have an audience in mind when they send each other messages; in other words, they send the message to an imagined audience. This is what Litt and Hargittai (2016) show in a study with 119 participants on Facebook and Twitter in which they differentiate two main types of audience: an abstract audience and a targeted audience. Such a classification can also be helpful to understand the audience on Instagram. In fact, Instagram users are constantly adapting their messages to different audiences: when they post photos on Instagram, they interact with a more unknown and general audience: 'everyone'/'everybody', 'the general public', 'the world' or 'whoever came across it' is an abstract audience in Litt and Hargittai's terms (Litt & Hargittai, 2016, pp. 6–7). However, when messaging in Instagram's chat, in the Directs, they have a target audience in mind: a homogeneous audience group, often their family and group of friends, or classmates and colleagues; an audience closer to the local and face to face of daily life.

In addition to such management, which is related to the constant switch of audiences, Instagram's scale-jump includes another kind of semiotic transformation (Blommaert, 2010, p. 35) users have to challenge in order to create a self-presentation: in Timelines, communication is more elaborate, permanent, timeless and collective. When working on one's own image, communication is significantly more attentive in the case of abstract audiences (Litt & Hargittai, 2016, p. 7). The Direct Messages of the chat, however, are more spontaneous and include momentary answers to comments about the photos and stories uploaded to Instagram. They are more individual, personal and contextualised messages.

In sum, the network user must manage the audience collapse by addressing more local, translocal or even global audiences. He/she also has to manage the constant jumping from a more elaborate and

4G signal icons, notification icons, and social media icons

🕒 76% 🔋 12:27

the best memories 🍷

Ver los 4 comentarios

13 de mayo de 2018 • Ver traducción



[Redacted name]

Groningen, Netherlands



Les gusta a [Redacted] y otras personas

[Redacted] Munduak ahazten banau, lur honek askatzen banau...

Ver los 15 comentarios

[Redacted] @ [Redacted] oso! 🍌



[Redacted] @ [Redacted] kuku 🍌



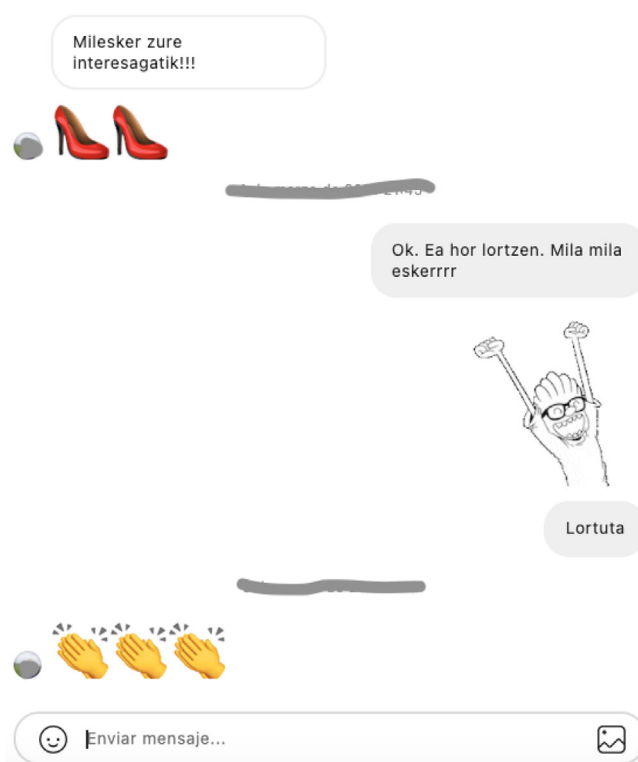
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FIGURE 1 Photo-post in Instagram timeline



**FIGURE 2** An example of Direct Messages in Instagram



timeless Timeline to a more spontaneous and ephemeral or momentary self-presentation in Directs. People continuously need to switch within the ‘norms’ or orders of indexicality that organise distinctions between what is a ‘good’ and ‘normal’ or ‘appropriate’ and ‘acceptable’ on one hand, and what is ‘deviant’ and ‘abnormal’ on the other. Turning to the Basque case analysed in this work, the values local dialects and *Batua* evoke for those students in the case study can vary as they move across different orders of indexicality. The impact of certain centres of authority will also vary along similar lines. As Blommaert explains, those authorities we behave with reference to have names, faces and a reality in their own (Blommaert, 2010, p. 39). In the case of the Basque students we analyse in this work, for instance, those centres can be individuals (parents, teachers, a class leader...), collectives (the ‘in-group’ of young local friends, group images of an ‘Instagrammer’, an ‘influencer’, a singer...), institutions (Euskaltzaindia, school, media) or abstract entities (the Basque Community, the Basque nation).

#### 4 | PARTICIPANTS, CORPUS AND METHOD

As mentioned in the introduction, this study is part of the wider Gaztesare project. In the project, a large corpus was compiled, based on the Instagram posts productions between 2013 and 2019 by 30 university students who agreed to participate in the project. Due to the personal sensitive material included in our corpus, it was considered essential for the participants to voluntarily take part in each phase of our study. Some of the participants declined to provide their Direct Messages from Instagram chats. Overall, the written corpus comprises around 2400 Instagram posts and 23,000 Direct Messages,

and it is organised into a database with a research interface that allows us to compare the language choices made by the sample students in the Timelines and in the chat.

Gaztesare also seeks to understand the ideological underpinnings of these young people's language practices. To this end, the ethnographic methods proposed in Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2008) have been included in Gaztesare's methodological guidelines. Gaztesare comprises an ethnographic study that includes 20 interviews and five focus groups in which students were questioned about stylistic choices based on examples drawn from the corpus. One of the main goals has been for students to describe their digital self themselves and to speak freely about their stylistic choices by answering questions such as: Which language/variety do you prefer in the Timeline? Is it different from what you use in Directs. Why is that? Are you a different 'you' by using *Batua* or your dialect? Many of the questions in these discussion groups and interviews were based on students' linguistic choices in the Gaztesare corpus, such as: You use your own dialect resources in most of your Instagram Directs, is it common in your chat activity? What kind of tone does the dialect give to you? As for standard *Batua*, could you use it in chat activities? Why?

As explained before, in the analysis section of this paper, we will focus on the Instagram Timeline and chat production of five students in the Gaztesare project, and also on the interviews and the focus group in which they took part. The students are aged between 18 and 25 and are studying at the Leioa Campus at the University of the Basque Country. Four of them study communication and would like to work professionally in written and audio-visual communication. The fifth studies nursing. They all studied in *Batua* at school in a context of 'normalisation' or revitalisation, in which *Batua* is the vehicular language. One of them uses Spanish at home (Silvia),<sup>3</sup> the mother tongue of the other four is Basque (Maite, Aizpea, Miren, Ainara), in the last two cases together with Spanish. Maite and Aizpea speak different varieties of the Biscayan dialect, Miren speaks a Navarrese variety and, finally, Ainara speaks a Guipuscoan variety. In those last four cases, Basque is their main language in peer group communication. Silvia, however, uses Basque only in the academic context. They all consume, to some degree, Basque youth media products such as the Gaztea web-radio and Basque music and audio-visual products.

## 5 | SOCIAL MEANING OF BASQUE VARIETIES AT DIFFERENT SCALE-LEVELS

In the interviews, the students explained that, as Instagram users, they are constantly moving from one context in Timeline posts to another in Direct Messages. Their statements reveal that such moves involve changes in the contextual features and expectations they contemplate. We have tried to summarise some of these contrasting contextual features and expectations in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Scale-levels in Instagram

Timeline's posts	Direct Messages
Translocal-widespread	Local, situated
Permanent, Timeless	Ephemeral. Momentary
Attentive	Spontaneous
Impersonal, collective, abstract audience	Personal, individual, targeted audience
Uniformity, homogeneity	Subjectivity, diversity
Decontextualised	Contextualised

When students post photos on Instagram Timelines, they interact with a more unknown and general audience, an abstract audience in Litt and Hargittai's (2016) terms. That is especially the case of those users in the corpus that have a public account. All of them said that they interact with widespread and sometimes *translocal* audiences on Timelines, invoking practices that are valid beyond the here-and-now. However, when messaging in Instagram chat in the Directs, they target mainly *local* and close people, their family and group of friends, or classmates and colleagues. Those messages are considered by students as locally meaningful, in the sense that they are connected to local activities with their peer group.

While important, the audience is not the only parameter to consider in a scale-move. As we said before, an Instagram scale-jump includes another kind of semiotic transformation that users have to consider: the Gaztesare students see the posts in Timelines as a *permanent* or *timeless* communication, 'something that will be always there' and some of them relate Timelines to a public image. Indeed, some even associate them with a professional image in communication. They all admit that they pay more attention to the image or self-presentation they create in Timelines, and that they are significantly more *attentive* in their writing because of the permanent nature of those messages, as Maite explains:

1. 'In Timelines, the things I post are memories or the like ... And if I put a picture, I think a bit more. In the Instastories, they will disappear in 24 hours, and I don't mind what I post, but in the other one [Timeline] I need somehow to keep my aesthetic aspect...'

Miren also notes the importance of paying more attention to the language and the aesthetics in Timelines:

2. 'That's where I would make a distinction. As I mentioned before, in Timeline I do use the standard because I think it's a more formal thing, something that is always going to be there, and in the stories, I don't know, I write *pollita* with two "I"s and that sort of thing, in my dialect, I don't care much about my Basque in the stories'.

They recognise that in Timelines they are sometimes like actors who play a role, that they create tailor-made identities and that some people even construct a totally invented identity, as Silvia underlines:

3. 'There are some people you know, from the village for example, and you see they put pictures of themselves on holidays ... and it looks she's travelling around the globe every day. But she's not like that, neither am I...'

In the Directs, however, they all see themselves as more spontaneous in chatting with closer friends. In the momentary answers to comments about the photos and stories, they elaborate more individual and personal messages that often relate to informal interactions with their peer group.

The stylistic analysis of the production of the selected five students clearly reveals that they make different language choices when they interact in those two Instagram contexts.<sup>4</sup> Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of varieties used by the five students in the sample in Timeline posts and in Direct Messages: most of the students that use Basque in the peer group use local dialects in their chat interactions. However, while not always, most of them chose *Batua* for Timelines. We have highlighted in bold the most common language choices among the students of the survey.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of this distribution, and we will do so by including the students' perceptions. Based on the interviews and the group discussion carried out with them,

TABLE 2 Students' variety choices across Instagram genres

Student	Timeline's posts	Direct Messages
Maite	Standard <i>Batua</i> , Biscayan Dialect	Biscayan Dialect
Miren	Standard <i>Batua</i> , Navarrese Dialect	Navarrese Dialect
Silvia	Standard <i>Batua</i> , Biscayan Dialect	Standard <i>Batua</i> , Biscayan Dialect
Ainara	Standard <i>Batua</i> , Guipuscoan Dialect	Guipuscoan Dialect
Aizpea	Standard <i>Batua</i>	Biscayan Dialect

TABLE 3 Values evoked by Basque varieties

<i>Euskalkia</i> or Basque local dialect	Standard <i>Batua</i>
Local affiliation	Translocal, general
Authentic	Artificial, academic
Fun, comfort and closeness	Seriousness, sobriety
Casual, informal	Elaborate, formal, professional, authoritative
Personal, individual	Impersonal, collective
Subjectivity, diversity	Uniformity, homogeneity

we will first give a general view of the values evoked by Basque varieties. Thereafter, we will focus on the question of whether Basque varieties are perceived differently depending on the scale-level in Timeline and Directs and what are the values they evoke in each case. The main values the students of the survey related with each variety are listed in Table 3.

The students in the study think of Basque local dialects as an anchor by which to generate local affiliation. For instance, Maite associates Basque with comfort and closeness, localness and solidarity. However, those indexical values go hand in hand with the Biscayan dialect: 'And when I speak in Biscayan, I don't think this image is that serious, but of a person who is closer to others. And that's the real me. That is the general pattern among the native speakers in the sample. *Batua*, on the other hand, is the authoritative voice, that linked to a variety of language related to institutions and top-down policies. In that sense, it is perceived as academic and 'imposed' in relation to the local peer group norms. *Batua* also evokes sobriety and seriousness, as we can see in the words of Miren: 'The Standard gives that point of seriousness to one type of Miren'. Maite also believes that, to a certain extent, two different Maite's emerge in social networks when she uses her home dialect and the standard *Batua*:

4. 'I would say yes I am a little different. When I use the Euskara Batua, I see a more serious Maite, a Maite that can gain more importance in front of the public, because she expresses herself with greater intensity...'

But by taking a multi-scalar view, we can see that other values of the Basque varieties emerge. Even more significantly, the different values take on more or less relevance in students' views depending on the context. In the chat context, for instance, the norms of the group of close friends are prioritised and the value of localness or local affiliation is particularly important. According to students' words in the interviews, in Instagram peer interaction, they feel the 'real themselves' when they use the dialects and consider users of dialects on Instagram 'authentic'. For example, the *euskalki* is fundamental in Miren's self-perception as an authentic informal identity in Instagram chat. In these Direct Messages, which

she considers more intimate and informal settings, Miren feels ‘truer’ when she uses her dialect. That is also the case of Maite. When using Basque in Instagram chat, she almost always uses the Biscayan dialect. An analysis of Maite’s chats shows that the use of the Biscayan dialect is not related to an accommodation strategy with people close to her, her family or her town’s peer group. Maite always uses her Biscayan dialect in chat interactions, whatever the audience is. We find examples in the corpus in which she is chatting with people from other areas of the Basque Country and with others who use standard *Batua* with her, as we can see in the next chat interaction. The forms in the Biscayan dialect are underlined:

5. *1c84ffe2. Bueno bueno, zara un chico ocupado eee ajjaaj Gabonak ospatu ez, baina **gustetan jatzune iten dozu orduen bebai super ondo***

1c84ffe2. Well, well, you are a busy boy! Hahaha, you don’t celebrate Christmas but even then, you do what you like, great.

Maite makes that stylistic choice in a very conscious way, because ‘batua ez jata urteten’ (*Batua* doesn’t come naturally) in those chat interactions, and she adds:

6. ‘I have many friends who write in *Batua*, but I know they understand me when I communicate in Basque with them, so I stand by this and continue in Biscayan’.

That is so in the case of Miren, Maite and Ainara, who use Basque with their peer group and family. But it is also in the case of the new speaker in the study. The academic Basque that Silvia received in school is far from the ‘everyday’ and ‘peer’ language that she needs in chat interactions, and that makes it very difficult for her to choose Basque in that context. When we asked Silvia about the use of Basque dialects on Instagram, she defended the notion of not using them. In the discussion group, however, Silvia admitted that she would use the dialects if she could, and added that she is learning the local variety of Gipuzkoa with Ainara, her classmate, with that goal in mind. It is a revelatory choice, since Silvia lives in a town near Bilbao where local people speak the Biscayan dialect of Basque rather than that of Gipuzkoa. More than for interaction in her close local networks, the dialectal resources of Basque seem to be core assets in the negotiation of an ‘authentic’ image in Basque in Silvia’s case. The stylistic analysis of her written corpus confirms this interpretation. Silvia uses Basque very seldomly, but when she does, we can observe constant stylistic switches to the Biscayan dialect, and on several occasions in Instagram posts, she includes parts of song lyrics in dialectal forms.

The students in the survey consider standard *Batua* artificial when it comes to a chat. Dialects are synonymous of subjectivity, diversity and personal self-presentation. The ‘imposed’ *Batua* is opposite to such self-presentation as ‘fun’, ‘open’ and ‘natural’ that these students want to build with their peer group in Instagram chat. They classify *Batua* as ‘fake’ in those chat interactions because they associate it with the academic world and that is far from an informal chatting situation on Instagram. In Miren’s words:

7. ‘Through the dialect emerges the real, old Miren, the one who is more fun, more open, because in the end I control the dialect and it is my Basque, the one I consider natural. And the Standard is, let’s say imposed ... well, not imposed, but that Basque that everyone can understand. (...)’, ... it looks artificial to me. It is not my Basque, it’s a type of Basque I relate to the academic field’.

The analysis of the students' metalinguistic reflections in the written corpus also reveal that, through breaking the orthographic regulations of the academy, these young people are putting into practice a resistance to authority and, at the same time, negotiating an informal writing style in the vernacular. We can see a clear example of negotiation in the next chat interaction:

8. 40fda639. Aina kontutzen zue kulpaz naigabe bada re "h"-a geoz ta geyo ainazela erabiltzen nazkarriya 😊

f1faf73f. Zeoze txarra izango balitz bezela satezu...

40fda639. Onbre... **Pos ez tut batua z euskaltzaindiak bezela lagunekin itzeiteakuan batua z itzeinai**

f1faf73f. H-ak jartziak ez tu sanahi batua n aizeanik e 😊

40fda639. Bezela

f1faf73f. Aztu

40fda639. Pos bai

f1faf73f. Ala

f1faf73f. A nik batua n iteizut ez?

40fda639. Bezela

f1faf73f. Aio

40fda639. 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊

40fda639. Aina, I blame you for my use of the "h" more and more, you scumbag 😊

f1faf73f. You say it as if it were something bad...

40fda639. Well... **I don't want to talk with friends in Batua like Euskaltzaindia**

f1faf73f. Doesn't putting the letter "h" mean you are using Batua? 😊

40fda639. Kind of

f1faf73f. Forget it

40fda639. It does

f1faf73f. Come on

f1faf73f. So I speak to you in Batua?

40fda639. Kind of

f1faf73f. Bye...

40fda639. 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊

One of the participants is questioning the use of 'h' in the chat, an orthographic norm that she/he relates to the authority of Euskaltzaindia and considers to be absolutely inappropriate when chatting with friends: 'I don't want to talk with friends in *Batua* like Euskaltzaindia'. From the tone of the participant, we can infer that *Batua* is part of a 'posh' style that, according to her/him, breaks down the internal norms of the peer group. The other participant questions the fact that using the letter h in those words means writing in *Batua*: 'Doesn't putting the h mean you are using *Batua*? 😊 From these words, it can be deduced that they consider using *Batua* something inappropriate in a chat.

In those examples, students are clearly questioning the legitimacy of *Batua* in an informal interaction as a chat. However, the same students seem to follow very different norms in the case of Timelines. For instance, in the case of Miren, *Batua* is her most habitual option in Timelines, in line with the main tendency in the Gaztesare corpus. We can see how students prioritised other values in this more translocal and timeliness scale. The Basque standard variety, which is widely considered as fake and only of use for formal interactions, is particularly appreciated when talking about getting more translocal

audiences, when they want to reach anyone who can understand Basque. *Batua* evokes that *uniformity* and *homogeneity* Miren relates with the literacy of *Batua* that makes it understandable to anyone:

9. ‘Then I use a kind of a mixture, trying to get closer to that formality. Indeed, in my dialect we put the words together, and I adapt things a bit for everybody to understand. As for song lyrics, I put them as they are, literally [she makes the inverted commas sign], in *Batua*’.

*Batua* also indexes a more *attentive* and *permanent* self-presentation that Miren develops in her Timeline, and we believe that this is a quite generally held belief among the students in the corpus. The case of Aizpea is also quite significant in that sense: she uses the Biscayan dialect in most of her interactions with her peer group in the chat, but she always uses the resources of standard *Batua* in the Timeline. Aizpea believes that standard *Batua* is the variety associated with a more attentive and elaborate self-presentation in that context. This is also so in Miren’s case. She explains in the interview that she relates *Batua* to a more elaborate identity in Timelines. *Batua* is also perceived by Miren as more appropriate for a media *professional* voice she identifies with, and she relates that elaborate self-presentation to Instagram Timelines, as we have seen in Example 2.

In the interviews and focus groups, the students never use the expression ‘more correct’ to refer to *Batua* but always relate compliance with the orthographic regulations of *Batua* to that public image in which they find that they are not allowed to depart from the norm: ‘When it is public yes, but not in private messages, WhatsApp and the like’. All the students in the sample agree with that view, as we can see in the case of Ainara. She defends the use of ‘h’ and the grammaticality of the text, in particular in the more public and refined scales she relates with Timelines:

10. ‘But I know very well, maybe because I’ve been using it all my life, where the ergative should go, and I do give importance to that. Or to the letter “h”, a word is not the same without the “h”...’

## 6 | DISCUSSION

Kristiansen (2016, p. 94) suggests that the sociolinguistic change affecting the standard language ideology that Coupland (2014) terms vernacularisation is nowadays more evident in European countries which have been politically independent for centuries, and may be less pertinent in contexts in which issues of standardisation still figure on the agenda of revitalisation planning. This could be the case of Basque in recent decades. We agree in part with that view: evidently, the vernacularisation process of Basque may differ in many senses from those of English or Danish. Yet, at the same time, it is undeniable that in recent decades, Basque speakers and policy framing institutions have shared the sociocultural conditions of Late Modernity explained by Coupland (2010) with speakers of other European languages. As Coupland (2010, p. 59; 2014) explains for the British case, ‘it is inconceivable that language use and language ideologies have not been reshaped by it’. We would add that it is even more inconceivable in the case of the Basque youngest generations, and in particular of those who are immersed in an heteroglossic media context such as that in Basque.

More research would be needed, but we would venture to say that those sociocultural facts, together with the ongoing standardisation process of Basque, have surely influenced the models and values of the standardisation agents and, therefore, the values that the students in our study received from centres of authority such as school or the media. The Gaztesare students do not consider *Batua* the ‘only good’ way of talking, and that could be explained in part by the tolerance towards dialectal variation which informed the social movement behind standardisation (Urla et al., 2018, p. 41), concurrently

with the conscious attempt by the academic and institutional actors of Basque standardisation 'to insist that *Batua* was not a better or more correct form of Basque'. In that vein, local non-vernacular forms have not in the main been regarded as 'undesirable', 'incorrect' or 'deviant' in the Basque standardisation discourse. But it should also be considered that corpus policy of *Batua*, which is widely based on genetic purism, has promoted, especially in the fields of education and the media, a concept of correctness that is linked strictly to respect for the boundaries between Basque and Spanish/French. The *euskalkiak* or local dialects, as well as their speakers, have rarely suffered such scrutiny. This is probably due to the fact that they have not traditionally been present in such academic and media environments.

Yet we perceive among the students in our study other values towards *Batua* that could be related to such 'correctness' that Milroy and Milroy (1985) relate with a 'careful' standard, and those values are clearly more evident in the statements of the native students of our study. As we said before, neither of them uses the term 'correct' in their statements, but when talking about *Batua*, they use 'attentive', 'serious', 'written' and 'literary'. All these values are seen in the corpus as closely linked to a careful public image and show us that *Batua* 'is enregistered in public awareness as indexical of speaker's class and level of education' (Agha, 2007, p. 191)

As for the modernist value contracts contained in the *anonymous/authentic* pair (Gal & Woolard, 2001; Gal, 2018), in the results of this study we can see that the intent to make *Batua* an *anonymous* variety has been successful in several ways. In the sample analysed, *Batua* has acquired values related with 'the voice of everyone ... the voice of no one in particular' (Gal, 2018, p. 233). The students explain that they use *Batua* to aim at the abstract audience in social networks, since they consider it the most adequate form when they send their message to 'everyone', 'the general public' or 'whoever knows Basque'. None of the students in our interviews related *Batua* to a nation-state construction. This is in all likelihood another example of a post-national discourse (Pujolar, 2007) among Basque youth. But *Batua* is, according to all of them, the variety of all Basque speakers. It is used when talking to the whole Basque community. Behind the students' words, we can hear the echoes of the idea of unity and uniformity in relation to *Batua*. They see it as a supralocal variety, which Agha clearly related to the emergence of a standard (Agha, 2007).

On the other side of the modernist axis (Gal, 2018), dialects have acquired values linked with genuineness and authenticity, as evidenced in research on attitudes among Basque youth (Urla et al., 2016). Those who use Basque when they are chatting mostly do so in local dialects and, as shown in the interviews, they perceive dialects as the only 'credible' Basque forms to be used in friendly and informal interactions. The students who lack a Basque dialect do not use Basque in Direct Messages on Instagram, or they use it very seldom; only for greetings or congratulations, or in brief interactions with their classmates. Such a stylistic choice is consistent with what students told us in interviews about *Batua*. The standard variety signals for all the students an artificial and false style in informal contexts, as not a 'real me'. *Batua* is not considered appropriate to construct 'a real informal identity' in an Instagram chat. Even new speakers, such as Silvia, use *Batua* with stylistic switches to a dialect. On the basis of such crossing strategies (Rampton, 1995), we can thus deduce that she looks for a passport to a prized authenticity in local social networks, as proposed by Urla et al. (2016).

From those multi-scalar lenses proposed by Blommaert (2010) to analyse communication in a globalisation context, the *anonymous/authentic* binary pair of Gal and Woolard (2001) becomes more blurred. Moreover, it is even more difficult to give a simple answer to the question of what is the 'best' language for these Basque students. That is in part because, as Blommaert (2007b, 2010) explains, in those globalised communicational contexts, a complex of processes are evolving simultaneously at a variety of scales and in reference to a variety of centres of norms. First of all, language resources receive different values according to the scale. *Batua* is considered 'fake', 'posh' and artificial' in chat



interactions, but in higher scales, it affords a mobile voice, in the sense that it is valued as meaningful across entirely different time-spaces. In fact, we have seen that in the translocal and even global sphere of Timelines, literacy allows *Batua* to move up and across spaces in the world and across social spheres and scales: ‘to move to adjacent places where people speak similar dialects, as well as across social spaces, into the elite’ (Blommaert, 2010, p. 46). In that higher scale, it gains prestige, to the extent that it allows the students to move across boundaries and to get to a certain marker of social status which they link to the professional mediated world.

The analysis also shows how Basque varieties that have a high value at a local scale in which local dialects gain usefulness and prestige when writing in chats, almost to the extent that not being able to use them may even deny the students the possibility of participating in Basque in such interactions. But those local varieties can easily lose such value by moving into another ‘field of force’ (Blommaert, 2016, p. 250) in a translocal writing context. In that higher sociolinguistic system in which Basque is in competition with Spanish and English, *Batua* can be considered sufficiently ‘credible’ or ‘genuine’, not a fake. This is probably because Basque resources are ‘authentic’ per se when interacting with a more abstract audience, in contrast to those resources of Spanish and English that are the anonymous languages for such translocal or global communication.

The multi-scalar analysis reveals that what counts as an adequate or ‘best’ language or variety fluctuates according to the scale, and this is related to the values that are prioritised on that scale. For instance, the discourse resources of *Batua* are empowering at that higher scale in Timelines, where the same speakers use it for a more credible public and translocal voice and also a more elaborate, professional and serious public image. However, in chats, all those values associated with *linguistic mundaneness* (Bucholtz, 2003) and authenticity, with the ‘unremarkable, commonplace, everyday’ language (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 405) are more meaningful. In this regard, the sample students consider local dialects appropriate tools for that self-positioning of an informal voice, no matter the Basque variety used by the person who interacts with them. These values of local dialects have been generated locally (Urla et al., 2016) and transferred to their informal interactions on Instagram. *Batua* seems to be disempowering at that lower scale-level in Directs, where it is considered fake, too academic, serious and artificial.

The Gaztesare students act according to different norm centres in different Instagram contexts. In the chat, the norms or indexical orders of the local peer group are what determine the values of the varieties and the stylistic choice. In that scale, it is inappropriate to follow the orthographic conventions of the Basque academy or schools, and may even border on ridicule. However, different norms are operating on the same individuals in a more general and translocal context in Timelines: in such a translocal context, *Batua* evokes a ‘credible’ identity that, according to students, takes an abstract entity like the Basque Community into account and helps to create an elaborate and permanent public image.

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS

*Batua* is gaining the values needed to be considered a model variant in the public imagery and, thus, it is taking steps towards firmly establishing itself as a translocal standard in Agha’s (2007) terms. Those values evoked by the standard, which Gal relates to the anonymity/authenticity pair of modernity, are very present in the discourse of these young people. In particular, these are values such as ‘unified’ ‘elaborate’, ‘serious’, ‘literate’ and ‘formal’ that *Batua* evokes according to the students in the study. But, at the same time, in the corpus we find that there is a clear shift towards a more positive valorisation of vernaculars in written production. Such positive valorisation of dialects comes from the fact that dialects index authenticity, informality, emotion and personal style and all those values, according

to the students of Gaztesare project, take on great significance in writing in Instagram (see Elordui & Aiestaran, 2022). They defend that having a ‘real’ identity plays a relevant role in their identity construction in that social media.

But that modernist value contrasting scheme explained by Gal (2018) coexists with emerging new values that evidence a greater questioning of the principles of the standard-ideology culture: starting from the fact that *Batua* is considered ‘fake’ and also ‘posh’ in the ideological scheme of these students. As Coupland (2010, p. 66) points out, ‘Posh cuts way the ideological underpinning of the concept of “standard”’ and in the Basque case, it points to a breaking of indexical orders that could have still been in force in the 1990s and even 2000s, in which *Batua* was conceived as a variety of writing and culture. Such orders have given way to newer ones in which speakers are laid open to ridicule by using *Batua* in a chat.

But probably the greatest indicator of an ideological reordering that Coupland (2010, 2014) related to vernacularisation is the idea that there is not only one ‘good’ way of talking which relates standard varieties to the concept of ‘best language’. In that sense, such vernacularisation process should not be imagined as a growing linear process where vernaculars take the domains and prestige of standards. As Coupland defends, it is more an ideological process in which educated people considers vernacular or dialectal varieties the ‘best language’ for them in many contexts, in our case in particular in some written digital contexts. The students of Gaztesare are people that Coupland defines as ‘sociolinguistically “omnivorous”, ... in their willingness to “consume” (to accept and possibly even positively value) a wide range of language varieties’ (Coupland 2010, p. 136) and they follow complex and multidimensional ideological that resemble those explained by Kristiansen (2004, 2016) and Coupland (2010, 2014) for Danish and English in which a range of varieties are accepted and ‘contextual factors impinge crucially on which social meaning are attributed to linguistic varieties’ (Coupland, 2010, p. 62).

The multi-scalar perspective we have taken in this research has allowed us to explore the ideological reordering within the multidimensional complexity of social networks in a more comprehensive way. The analysis shows that the values attributed by the participants in our study to those varieties can change depending on the scale they are using, which in turn affects to what counts as an adequate or ‘best’ language. The analysis also reveals that the significance of the values themselves can vary depending on the scope in which the communication takes place: for instance, according to students’ explanations, to be ‘correct’ seems to be a fundamental value in a public environment like Timelines; however, the ‘non-correct’ can be the ‘best language’ for many students in their chat interactions, as a way to construct an informal image they want to project. In other words, in their view, the correct language is not always the ‘best’ language.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> As for gender, the selected students are all women. Indeed, as the participants to be volunteers was considered essential in Gaztesare’s methodology, and only one of the 30 volunteer students was male. We are aware of this gap in our research, and we are incorporating this gender perspective in future research lines.

<sup>2</sup>Although the use of *Batua* in education and written production is very much general, other varieties are also used in some particular contexts, such as *Bizkaiera landua* (Standard Biscayan) in some educational institutions and a kind of unified Iparralde variety, even *Zuberera*, in the northern Basque Country.

<sup>3</sup>In order to maintain the anonymity of these students, we will use fictitious names when referring to them.

<sup>4</sup>Translanguaging practices are very wide-spread among the Basque-speaking youth in colloquial registers and they are probably the most relevant feature of the Gaztesare corpus. This article shows some examples of them. We are also exploring these practices in current research, and results will be published in short.

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