# How to be authentic on Instagram

## Self-presentation and language choice of Basque university students in a multi-scalar context

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This paper analyses the way young people negotiate their 'real' identity on Instagram, and how self-presentation can be developed by means of language choice. We draw our data from the corpus of the *Gaztesare* project. It contains the Instagram production of Basque university students who draw on an inventory of multilingual resources in their interactions. We consider Instagram to be a multi-scalar context in which different orders of indexicality converge (Blommaert 2010). The study analyses, from this multi-scalar perspective, the place of Basque in the language choices the students make in order to belong, to be authentic as someone or something (Varis and Wang 2011). It concludes that local Basque dialects are tools for self-positioning as an 'authentic' voice in Instagram chat, but standard *Batua,* is empowering at a higher scale on Timelines, in which the same speakers use it for a more credible translocal voice.

**Keywords:** authenticity, Instagram, Basque, indexicality, scale, normativity, social media

## 1.    Introduction

(1)   I would say yes I am a little different. When I use Euskara Batua, I see a more serious Maite, a Maite who can become more important in front of people, because she expresses herself with greater intensity… And when I speak in Biscayan, I don't think this image is that serious, but rather [that] of a person who is closer to others. And that's the real 'me'.

> (Maite, 4th year student of Audio-visual Communication at the University of the Basque Country)

The relationship between self-presentation, or the 'real me' as expressed by Maite in this excerpt, and the language choices made on Instagram in order to achieve

that 'real' or 'authentic' identity is the main focus of this paper. In this example, Maite was asked why she always used her Biscayan dialect in her chat interactions on Instagram, no matter the Basque variety used by the person who interacts with her. In the interviews, we showed her some examples of her own messages in which she was chatting in 'Directs' with people from other areas of the Basque Country, or in a group chat that includes new speakers of Basque. Maite's answer reveals that the Biscayan dialect evokes for her realness and authenticity and, consequently, she considers it as the appropriate Basque in her self-presentation in an informal interactional context such as Instagram Directs. In other words, Biscayan dialect resources are considered the appropriate tools for the self-positioning of an informal and authentic voice. We also asked her if it were possible for her to use standard Basque or *Euskara Batua* in that same context, and what would that change in her self-presentation. Her reply was that, in a chat context, *Euskara Batua* [*Batua*] is considered 'fake', 'too academic' or 'too serious' by young people. It is not the 'everyday spoken language' they use in chats, in which, Maite adds, "we write the way we speak".

Such metalinguistic reflections constitute the ethnolinguistic corpus from which we draw the data of the research reported upon in this paper, which in turn grew out of a broader study developed within the Gaztesare research project in 2019 (Elordui et al. 2020). This research is based on individual interviews and one focus group with five Basque university students aged between 18 and 25.

Herein, we focus on what counts as authentic language for self-presentation on Instagram and on young Basque speakers as agents who draw on linguistic resources for purposes of identity management (Bucholtz 2003; Bucholtz and Hall 2005), always within the context of a prevailing normativity. In fact, what counts as authentic is generated in social actions and constructed by speakers in everyday communication, primarily through stylistic language choices (Irvine 2001, 22); and in our case, through stylistic language choices in a social media platform such as Instagram.

We developed a methodology aimed at exploring the styliser positioning of those five students in depth, based on a corpus of their written production on Instagram's Timelines and Directs from 2013 to 2019. But we also analyse the perception they have about their own stylistic choices through interviews and discussion groups in which we presented them with examples found in their own Instagram accounts. We focus on (i) how such stylistic choices may be shaped by a desire to project a 'real' or 'authentic' identity as well as whether choosing Basque is considered appropriate for that goal and why, and (ii) if so, which resources from Basque they consider to be the better tools in order to achieve that goal. Furthermore, we explore whether (iii) Basque varieties evoke different indexicality

with respect to authenticity across different Instagram contexts or scale-levels; for instance, across chats and Timelines.

Sociolinguistic authenticity is often generated locally and indicates a *value system* that is able to anchor local social and cultural identities (Coupland 2001, 2003). Maite's stylistic choices, for instance, are a clear reflection of a local value system among Basque youth, in which local dialects are linked with genuineness and authenticity, as Urla et al. (2016, 2018) explain in detail. In our study, we ask the students in the Gaztesare project about their stylistic choices outside that face-to-face local context, in translocal social networks such as Instagram in which the negotiation of authenticity often shifts from close and familiar interactions to translocal and even global communication. In fact, the core question in our research is whether what counts as 'authentic', 'real' and 'credible' among these young Basque speakers fluctuates according to Instagram's scale-levels or not.

As Blommaert explains for other translocal and global contexts (Blommaert 2010, 35), on Instagram young people jump from individual chat interactions to more collective and oftentimes translocal interactions in Timelines, and from temporally situated chat interactions to trans-temporal communication. Authenticity in these social networks needs to be understood "as developing at several different scale-levels where different orders of indexicality dominate, resulting in a polycentric 'context'" (Blommaert 2010, 42). In this polycentric context, as the analysis of the corpus of Gaztesare shows, authenticity can take many forms and values, and even the linguistic resources a young person in the sample might consider 'authentic' or 'fake' may vary significantly from one scale to another. In the Basque case we analyse in this paper, for instance, we see that while local Basque dialects are tools for self-positioning as an 'authentic' voice in Instagram chat; standard *Batua,* on the other hand, is empowering at a higher scale on Timelines, in which the same speakers use it for a more credible translocal voice.

In what follows, we will first consider the dominant contemporary values and beliefs among Basque youth associated with Basque language variation (Section 2). In Section 3, we will concentrate on the specificities of Instagram from this multi-scalar view of normativity. In Section 4, we will introduce the participants and the methods used for the collection and selection of the Gaztesare corpus. In Section 5, we will explain the most significant results stemming from the analysis of the stylistic choices of the Gaztesare students and their metalinguistic reflections. We will then conclude this work with some remarks on what counts for them as 'authentic' language and what are the effects of translocal mobility on that perception.

## 2.    Authenticity and social meaning of Basque varieties among Basque youth

The historical and sociolinguistic evidence in relation to Basque suggests that, before the 1960s, its use may have been commensurate with not just geographical origin but also with social class. Basque forms were rarely brought into higher-order local play. That higher-order local space of use was occupied by Spanish and French, and Basque was often represented as an index of the past, the uneducated and the illiterate.

After the 1970s, however, the hierarchical discrepancy between Basque and Spanish/French started to reverse, particularly in the educational scaling process. This change was more pronounced in the southern provinces of the Basque Country, with the introduction of Basque into the educational system and the media as part of revitalisation planning carried out by the local, provincial and regional institutions (Urla 2012). This introduction of the formerly marginalised language into educational settings, together with a series of socio-political changes in the Basque Country, motivated the creation and the later development of standard Basque or *Batua* from the late 1960s on. Thereafter, and through that standard variety, Basque people started accessing many new spheres of formal use, particularly in the fields of education and the media. *Batua* was seen as a way to demolish the barriers between speakers of different varieties of Basque. It was also considered "fundamental, a matter of life and death" (Mitxelena 1968, 203) and an urgent need as a means to unify the Basque community in order to survive. 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.

Due to the widespread introduction of Basque into the educational system from the 1970s onward, there has been an appreciable increase in the proportion of young people who know Basque. Today, in the Basque Autonomous Community, 71.4% of people aged between 16 and 24 are Basque speakers (Basque Government 2016, 7). The sociolinguistic profiles of the young community are today very diverse as regards its members' acquisition process and cultural engagement. The emergence of new speakers in recent decades has increased the complexity of the sociolinguistic speaker typology of Basque, in particular among Basque youth. Of those, 53.9% are in the group of new Basque speakers, that is, those who have learnt the language by means other than family transmission, mostly through formal education in standard Basque (Basque Government 2016).

For decades, the local dialects or *euskalkiak*[1] were perceived to lay outside academic spheres. Only since the 2000s, and in particular following a 2005 proposal by Euskaltzaindia (the Academy of the Basque Language) and the Ikastola Confederation of Basque-medium schools (Euskal Herriko Ikastolen Konfederazioa and Euskaltzaindia 2005), did Basque schools start considering the option of including the dialects in the academic system. The proposal, however, contributes to a sociolinguistic stratification effect with 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 and Euskaltzaindia 2005, 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 2018, 2020).

Likewise, the proposal by Euskaltzaindia and the Ikastola Confederation clearly promoted the idea of the 'authentic' nature of *euskalkiak*. In fact, the proposal came after a diagnosis of *Batua* use by Basque youth as 'artificial' and 'non-Basque', and local dialects were seen as the only 'natural' cure that could save *Batua* from artificiality. This has probably had an effect in the view young people have about dialects. Nowadays, *euskalkiak* index casualness and informality, and therefore their use builds a close bond between local dialects and authenticity in the young community, as research on languages attitudes among Basque youth demonstrate (Lantto 2015; Ortega et al. 2015; Urla et al. 2016). These studies also show that among Basque youth there are new tensions around what counts as 'authentic' or 'legitimate' language, which is always linked to who are considered 'authentic' and 'legitimate' speakers. Indeed, new speakers often feel like they are not 'authentic' Basque speakers (Ortega et al. 2015) and they do not feel legitimate when it comes to using *Batua* in informal contexts. Conversely, being a native speaker of Basque from some specific geographical areas of the Basque Country and speaking a local dialect is assumed to confer sociolinguistic authenticity, as Urla et al. (2018) explain in detail.

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**1.** According to Koldo Zuazo's classification (Zuazo 2013), currently there are five main Basque dialects or *euskalkiak*: the Western dialect, spoken in Biscay, Araba and most of the Deba Valley of Guipuscoa; the Central dialect, spoken in most of Guipuscoa and in some western counties of Navarre; the dialect spoken in most of Navarre; the Navarrese-Lapurdian dialect, spoken in Navarrese Lapurdi, Low Navarre, in the High Navarrese and in the northwestern area of Zuberoa; and the Zuberoan (or Souletin) dialect, spoken in most of Zuberoa and in Béarn.

### 3.    Instagram as a multi-scalar context

Through the application of a *scale* metaphor, Blommaert seeks a more precise understanding of the complex 'context' conditions under globalized 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, 36). What *scale* does, according to Blommaert, is express an intersection of scope and value, and 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, 3). Different scales organise different patterns of normativity or *orders of indexicality*, in Blommaert's terms (2010), that is, patterns of communicative conduct that generate recognizability in interaction.

In a polycentric context such as that of social media, the user often has to manage simultaneously various differently scoped and valued orders of indexicality (Blommaert 2020, 5). In fact, Instagram is particularly revealing for the study of scale-jumping in normativity that also includes 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 hours – are shared publicly or with pre-approved followers, depending on whether the user's account is public or private.
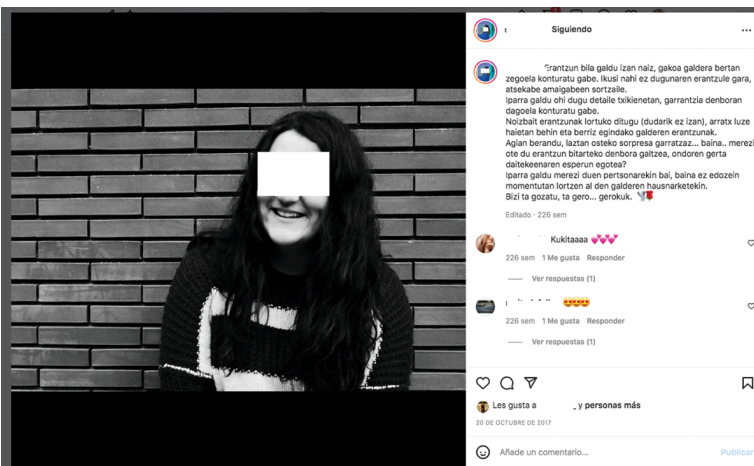


**Figure 1.**  Photo-post on Instagram Timeline

Instagram also includes *Direct messages* or private chat (Figure 2). Users who follow each other can send private messages about the published stories, photos and videos. These 'Directs' are often used for messaging close friends in the audience and also to establish new relationships with less well-known audience members.



**Figure 2.**  An example of Direct messages on Instagram

Instagram users are constantly moving from one context in Timeline posts to another in Direct messages, and such moves involve changes in the contextual features and expectations they contemplate. In Timelines, especially, Instagram brings together users from different geographical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a single network. Instagram Timelines can convene members of various networks that are scattered all over the Internet. That said, although the audience on social media can be diverse, it seems that participants have an audience in mind when they send each message; in other words, they send this message to an imagined audience. There are two main types of audience in this social network: an *abstract audience* and a *targeted audience*. This classification, as explained by Litt and Hargittai (2016) in their research on Facebook and Twitter, can also be helpful when it comes to understanding the audience on Instagram. When students 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', that is, an *abstract audience* in Litt and Hargittai's (2016, 6–7) terms. However, when messaging in Instagram 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 local face-to-face daily life.

In addition to the management related to the constant switching of audiences, Instagram's scale-jump includes another kind of semiotic transformation (Blommaert 2010, 35) users have to challenge in order to create a self-presentation on Instagram: on Timelines, communication is more elaborate, permanent, timeless and collective. Posts in Timelines are a permanent or timeless communication, something that will be always there as a public image. Instagram users are significantly more attentive in their writing because of the permanent nature of those messages. In the case of Instagram, too, we notice that, as Litt and Hargittai (2016, 7) point out for Twitter, "when users had an abstract imagined audience in mind, they at times were more focused on the act of self-presentation and their rationales for sharing the content, rather than on the receiving audience". On the other hand, the Direct messages of the chat are more spontaneous and momentary answers to comments about photos and stories uploaded to Instagram. They are more individual, personal and contextualised messages.

In sum, these young network users on Instagram must manage the audience collapse by addressing more local, translocal and even global audiences. They also have to manage the constant jumping from a more elaborate and timeless Timeline to a more spontaneous and ephemeral or momentary self-presentation in Directs. They continuously switch within the 'norms' that organise distinctions between what is considered 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' in each case. Turning to the Basque case analysed in this work, the values and social meanings local

dialects and *Batua* evoke for those students in the case study can vary as they move across those different orders of indexicality in a social network such as Instagram.

## 4.    Participants, corpus and method

As mentioned in the introduction, this study is part of the wider Gaztesare project in which we examine a corpus of multilingual practices among young Basques on social networks that was collected in 2019 (Elordui et al. 2020). In the Gaztesare project, we are interested in the way young Basque people negotiate their identity in a context such as Instagram; and in how self-presentation and identity construction can be developed by means of stylistic choices at several different scale-levels. In order to be able to compare local and translocal interactions and self-presentations, we selected university students for the study because they usually have a more translocal projection in their social and cultural interactions, and that is the case of the students in Gaztesare project.

A large corpus has been compiled based on the Instagram production, from 2013 to 2019, by 30 university students who agreed to participate in the project. The written corpus comprises around 23,000 Direct messages from Instagram chat and 2,400 Instagram posts. The corpus is organised into a database with a research interface that allows us to compare corpus texts by considering differentiates between the Instagram subgenres (Timeline posts and Directs).

However, as explained in the introduction, Gaztesare also seeks to understand the ideological underpinnings of these young people's language practices. To this end, ethnographic methods have been included in Gaztesare's methodological guidelines; in particular, interviews and discussion groups. The questionnaires prepared for the interviews and the discussion groups avoided asking the subjects directly about what constitutes 'authentic' language. Instead, the goal was for the students to describe their digital self themselves and to speak freely about their stylistic choices by asking questions such as: *Which language / variety do you prefer on the Timeline? Is it different from that which you use in Directs? If so, why is that? Are you a different 'you' by using Batua or your dialect?* But many of the questions in these discussion groups and interviews were based on students' linguistic choices in their own production on Instagram by asking these questions: *You use your own dialect resources in most of your Instagram Directs, is it common in your chat activity? What kind of effect does the dialect give you? As for standard Batua, could you use it in chat activities? Why?*

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. As Eckert (2008) suggests, we consider this *persona style* to be the best level for approaching the meaning of variation and to connect linguistic styles with other stylistic systems such as ideological constructions that speakers share and interpret; in particular, we believe that the *persona style* perspective helps understanding what counts as authentic language tools for these young people. Within this methodological view, we explore the stylistic choices of those five students by analysing and comparing their production in Instagram Direct messages and Timeline publications and also their perception of their own stylistic choices.

The five students are aged between 18 and 25 and are studying at the Leioa Campus of the University of the Basque Country. Four of them study Communication and would like to work eventually in the field of written and audio-visual communication. The fifth studies Nursing. The participants all studied *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)[2] and uses Basque (mainly *Batua*) almost exclusively in the academic context. Basque is the home language, alongside Spanish, of the other four (Maite, Aizpea, Miren and Ainara). Maite and Aizpea speak different varieties of the Wester Biscayan dialect at home and in their respective peer groups, Miren speaks a Navarrese variety and, finally, Ainara speaks a Guipuscoan variety. The last four are active users of Basque in peer group communication and that was one of the reasons for selecting them for this study. We prioritise participants who use Basque in their peer groups in order to be able to compare the use of dialectal variety and *Batua* in their Instagram accounts. But as we shall see in the analysis, Silvia's contribution is relevant to understanding what counts as 'authentic language' among these young Basques.

We also selected these participants because they completed all the phases of our methodology in Gaztesare 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. As for gender, the selected students are all women. Indeed, the methodology employed by Gaztesare considered it essential that people took part voluntarily, and only one of the 30 volunteer students was male.[3]

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2. In order to maintain the anonymity of these students, we will use fictitious names when referring to them.

3. We are aware of this gap in our study, and we will incorporate this gender perspective in future research.

## 5.   'Real me' on Instagram constructed through language choices at different scales

As noted, we are trying to explore how personal styles, the 'real digital I's, are constructed through language choices, and what the role of Basque is in the ideology constructions of authenticity those choices are based on. Having a 'real' identity plays an important role in the identity construction of any individual on social media and also on Instagram: with regard to Twitter, Marwick and boyd (2011, 16) contend that communication in social networks in general "has a presumption of personal authenticity and connection". This is also true for the five students in our study. The interviews and discussion groups clearly showed that being 'natural', 'real', 'credible' and 'authentic' is one of the main goals in their identity construction in that social network. These are the values that they underlined most when asked about who they are and what they want to be in social networks.

We analyse what language tools they consider appropriate to construct that 'real' self-identity on Instagram. As such, in this paper, we will consider in particular the indexical values and beliefs they associate with Basque and Basque varieties in relation to (in)authenticity, through their stylistic practice and their metalinguistic reflections in the ethnolinguistic study. We also address different layered scale-levels on Instagram, focusing on their perception of what is genuine and credible in those scales. The stylistic choices of the students in Gaztesare in Timelines and Directs are mainly in line with what they tell us in interviews and focus groups; when they are not, they also reveal covert ideologies that can lead us to important conclusions.

### 5.1   This is the 'real' me on Instagram: The 'authentic/inauthentic' indexical meaning of Basque

All the students in the corpus associated 'realness' and 'authenticity' on Instagram with their local network of social relations, and also with their home language. The students mostly invoked values such as *nativeness* and *localness* when talking about 'being real' on Instagram. The students who use Basque in close relationships feel most comfortable using Basque in social networks, and this language evokes 'authenticity' to them in those digital networks: Miren, Ainara, Aizpea and Maite express statements like "When using Basque, I feel like at home" and "I'm the real me in my home language" when asked about their use of Basque on Instagram.

Basque is Maite's family language and the most widely used language at home, although she admits to using increasingly more Spanish within her family. Maite claims that she feels nearly equally comfortable when communicating in any of

the languages she commands: Basque, Spanish and English. However, she associates her 'authentic' identity with 'her mother tongue' – "My image is built with the Basque language" – and she believes that she transmits this image in general: according to her, 'Maite', her name, is automatically connected to the Basque language:

(2)    Basque feels like 'home' to me. I feel very comfortable, after all it's my mother tongue. When I use Basque, I feel like I'm expanding… or that I see myself.

As in all cases in our corpus, we can see that a conscious stylistic positioning on the part of the informants does not in general reflect the accommodation requirements of their familiar or informal street environment. For instance, in the case of Maite, when interviewed, she explained that in her town's sociolinguistic context, Spanish is the main language. She admits to using mostly Spanish with her close village friends in face-to-face relationships. The choice of Basque for self-presentation on Instagram is an ideological one; when she talks about feeling 'at home' and 'real', her local Basque is evoking that 'authentic' Maite she is, or she wants to be.

This is the case of Miren too. She was born in a small Basque-speaking town near the border with France and received Basque and Spanish at home; her mother is not Basque-speaking, and they frequently speak Spanish at home, but Miren considers Basque as her (as she puts it) "father tongue". Despite this complex sociolinguistic background, Miren made it clear, both in the interview and in the group discussion, that Basque is the language she identifies with and, according to her, the 'real me' she projects in her Instagram is constructed by Basque. Likewise, Ainara, who comes from a family that is half Galician and half Basque in which Spanish has always been present, argued that Basque is her preferred language for Instagram because she feels more herself, as if she were closer to her close family and local friends.

Choosing Basque is considered by them most appropriate for being their 'genuine selves', as opposed to languages which are more widely used and expected, such as Spanish or English. Ainara, for instance, associates her 'authentic' identity with the Basque language. Indeed, she presents Basque, unlike Spanish, as a conscious choice related to feeling like herself:

(3)    There is no other way, there is no other way I would feel more comfortable, to feel as I am, than through Basque. I am bilingual […] Or it could be said that I know three languages, but there is one which is always on top of the rest, and in my case, because I want to and because it is so, that language is Basque.

Unlike the rest of the students in the sample, Silvia constructs her digital self mainly through Spanish. When we asked her why, her answer referred to native-

ness and local peer groups' links. Spanish is her home language, which she also speaks with her close local friends. She explained that, despite her hometown being relatively Basque-speaking, she communicates in Spanish with her friends, most of whom also have Spanish as their family language. She has always associated Basque with studies or the academic world:

(4)  I don't feel that comfortable in Basque. My wall is very private to me, the stories not that much, so I might use Basque in the stories, but I wouldn't publish in Basque in my wall, because it's personal, and, I don't know, I feel more comfortable writing or sharing something in Spanish. So I'll always write in Spanish.

Not being comfortable using Basque on Instagram does not seem to be related to Silvia's lack of ability in the language. Silvia has full competence in Basque, as she showed during the interview and the focus group. It has more to do with the place that languages have in the construction of her authentic image on Instagram, always according to her words: "If I use Basque on social networks, I see myself as false, I see that I am not like that". But that 'false' identity is also related to the fact that Silvia considers Basque to be too marked an option in social networks in general, and on Instagram in particular. In that sense, she cannot imagine anyone thinking of Basque as a 'natural' or 'real' option on Instagram. She views languages like English and Spanish as the 'natural' option in social networks in which the main references are, in her opinion, linked to stylistics options of influencers and popular people:

(5)  I don't know if it's because of the format of social media or why, but I think Basque is not so widespread on social media, and that's why I feel it is a little fake, and then I don't know if social media are the proper format to use Euskara. [...] well, I'd love it, but I can't imagine that.

## 5.2    This is the 'real' me on Instagram: Basque varieties and authenticity/ inauthenticity indexical meanings

Among the students in the study that chose to use Basque on Instagram, local Basque dialects are anchors for *solidarity* and *local affiliation*, with connections to local origins and family and friends. All those who use Basque in the local peer groups use dialects in Instagram chat, as we will explain in the next section. Students feel their 'real selves' when they use the dialects, and consider users of dialects on Instagram 'authentic'. This is the case of Maite. When using Basque in Instagram chat, she almost always uses her local dialect. An analysis of Maite's chats reveals that the use of the dialect is not related to an accommodation strategy with people close to her. She uses it even if the differences between standard

*Batua* and the local Biscayan may definitely present some problems when it comes to intelligibility. There are examples in the corpus in which she is chatting with people from other areas of the Basque Country and with some others who use standard *Batua* with her, as we can see in the next chat interaction. The forms in the Biscayan dialect are in bold:

(6)   *df476555. Gu ez dugu ezta zuhaitza jartzen jajajajajaj*
      *1c84ffe2. Que poco espíritu navideño ajajaja niri me encanta eta zuhaitza beti* **ifinten dogu** *ajjaja*
      df476555. We don't even put a tree up hahahahahah
      1c84ffe2. How little Christmas spirit hahahaha, I love them, and **we always put** a tree up hahaha

Maite makes such stylistic choice in a very conscious way, because "batua ez jata urteten" (*Batua* doesn't come naturally). She associates Basque with comfort and closeness, localness and solidarity, and she also finds it fun. However, these indexical values, as well as *naturalness*, go hand in hand with the Biscayan dialect.

(7)   [Using standard Basque on Instagram] Never. It doesn't come naturally. And I have a lot of people who communicate with me in standard Basque, but I know that they understand me when I answer them in my dialect, and then I'm OK with that, and I continue in Biscayan.

This is also Miren's view. She speaks Basque with local friends and at university and she believes that, to a certain extent, two different Mirens emerge in social networks when she uses her home dialect and the standard *Batua:* the first is the real, 'old Miren', fun and open. By using the local dialect, Miren identifies herself with a 'real' and 'natural' persona but also with someone who is fun and enjoyable, in contrast to a serious Miren associated with academic *Batua*:

(8)   Through the dialect, surfaces 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 which everyone can understand. [...] The standard gives that point of seriousness to one type of Miren.

As mentioned before, local Basque vernaculars index *casualness* and *informality*, which in turn relate to authenticity in the young community. This pairing also prevails for the new speaker in our corpus. Silvia uses standard Basque with constant stylistic switches to the Biscayan dialect in the interview, and the stylistic analysis of the written corpus confirms that, in Instagram posts, she often includes parts of song lyrics in local dialects; as in the following examples from songs by the rock group Gatibu, which sings in the Biscayan dialect.

(9)  *Balio daben momentuetagaitik gora kopak' #BT :)*
     *Atera dekozun enkantue*⭐🙆
     For the moments worth living, cheers' #BT :)
     Reveal your charm⭐🙆

Everyday' language is as far away as possible from the academic Basque in which young people are educated at school, and that makes it very difficult for new speakers like Silvia to choose Basque in such an informal context. In that crossing (Rampton 2005) in which Silvia uses features of a local variety that are not generally considered to belong to her, we can infer that she is looking for a passport to a prized authenticity in local social networks, as Urla et al. (2018, 38) contend for face-to-face relationships. When we asked Silvia about the use of Basque dialects on Instagram, she claimed that she did not use them. In the discussion group, however, Silvia admitted that she would use the dialects if she could, and also that she is learning the local Guipuscoan variety with her classmate Ainara, with that goal in mind.

Silvia's choice is revelatory, since she lives in a town near Bilbao where local people speak the Biscayan rather than the Guipuscoan dialect. Rather than interacting in her close local networks, in Silvia's case, the dialectal resources seem to be core resources in her negotiation of an 'authentic' image, and she clearly relates authenticity to the dialect used in Guipuscoa. In the discussion group, when talking about using Basque in Instagram's chats, somebody asked Silvia: *Maybe in the future you will use Guipuscoan in your chat, then?* And she answered: "I hope so".

## 5.3  Language choice across scales on Instagram

In the interviews, the students explained that, as users of Instagram, they are constantly adapting the message to different audiences: all of them said that they interact with widespread and sometimes translocal audiences on their Timelines. However, when messaging in Instagram chat, in the Directs, they target close people, their family and group of friends, or classmates and colleagues. In the Directs, they all see themselves as more spontaneous in chatting with closer friends. The posts in Timelines are more elaborate and permanent types of communication and all the students admit that they pay more attention to their image or self-presentation they create therein. They recognise that, on Timelines, they are sometimes like actors who play a role, that they create tailor-made identities and that some people even build a totally invented identity. It seems quite clear that at times they are more focused on the act of self-presentation, like 'posing', as Miren explains when talking about Timelines:

(10)    Usually you don't upload a picture in which you appear sad, but happy, or when you've gone somewhere, I don't know, you show your ideal image, a little bit of a pose... but then reality's not like that, and there's a bit of posturing.

Miren, for instance, notes the importance of paying more attention to Timelines as opposed to stories, based on that permanent nature of Timelines:

(11)    [In Timeline photos] I think a bit more, I don't upload anything that comes to mind... I think well, when it comes to pictures, that they are always going to stay in my account: "This is worth uploading, or not"; in the stories I may put, for example, a friend of mine eating lentils... it's a temporary thing.

The analysis of the production by the five students selected clearly reveals that they make different language choices when they interact in those two Instagram contexts. In this section, we will focus on the choice between varieties of the Basque language. The next table (see Table 1) includes the distribution of the Basque varieties used by the five students in Timeline posts and in Direct messages. The most common language choices are highlighted in bold.

**Table 1.** Students' variety choices across Instagram genres

| Student | Timeline posts | Direct messages |
|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Maite | **Standard** *Batua*, Biscayan dialect | Biscayan dialect |
| Miren | **Standard** *Batua*, Navarrese dialect | Navarrese dialect |
| Silvia | **Standard** *Batua*, Biscayan dialect | **Standard** *Batua*, Biscayan dialect |
| Ainara | **Standard** *Batua*, Guipuscoan dialect | Guipuscoan dialect |
| Aizpea | **Standard** *Batua* | Biscayan dialect |

We can draw several important results from an analysis of this distribution and the reflections on them expressed in the interviews and group discussions. In this section, however, we will focus on the students' perceptions in relation to the following two questions: Are Basque varieties perceived differently depending on the scale-level in Timeline and Directs? Does what counts as 'authentic' among these young Basque speakers fluctuate according to Instagram's scale-levels or not?

As for the question of whether Basque varieties are perceived differently depending on the scale-level on Timelines and in Directs, the answer seems to be yes. In fact, it correlates with students' reasoning in the interviews by which they consider the Basque varieties used with their peer groups in everyday life as the most appropriate language choice when it comes to constructing a 'real' identity in Instagram's peer interaction. For example, the *euskalki* or local dialect is

fundamental in Miren's self-perception as an authentic informal identity on Instagram, which is most obvious in those Instagram chats in which she interacts with her peer group. In those Direct messages, which she considers more intimate and informal settings, Miren feels truer to herself when she uses her dialect. However, Miren considers standard *Batua* to be fake in those chat interactions because she associates it with the academic world, an environment that is far from an informal chatting on Instagram:

(12)    I feel more comfortable, always, with the dialect. Because I know I'm not going to make any mistakes there. I don't have any problems with, say, verbs, you know, but it looks artificial to me. It is not my Basque, it's a type of Basque I relate to the academic field.

*Batua* is also linked to a variety of language which is related to institutions and top-down policies and, in that sense, perceived as 'imposed' and as the opposite to that self-presentation as 'fun', 'open' and 'natural' that Miren wants to build with her peer group on Instagram. Miren emphatically underlines the 'impossibility' for her when it comes to sending even a comment in Timelines in *Batua*: "I use the dialect in my comments, I'm unable to answer in *Batua*".

Ainara was born in a small Basque town and Basque is the main language in her everyday life, both in the village and at university. She speaks Basque with her close friends and in chats and comments in Timelines, and she always uses her Guipuzcoan dialect. Even in the comments added to the photos in Timelines, she considers *Batua* fake and could not even image using it, as she points out in the next statement:

(13)    I can't imagine myself using standard Basque in my comments, unless I complain to a town mayor, and I'm not going to do that, so...

In Timeline posts, however, *Batua* is the most common option for all the students, in line with the main tendency in the corpus in Gaztesare. In fact, contrary to what one might think from everything that has been stated so far, the standard variety is the preferred choice for most students on their Instagram Timeline, despite the fact that not all of them admit it: Maite's case is quite revealing in this sense. In the discussion group, she claimed that she never uses *Batua* in her publications, and she could remember using it only once:

(14)    I have just one picture in *Batua* and I know which one it is, it's a song lyric, and I have it between quotation marks, it's a quote from a song.

However, the stylistic analysis of her Timeline posts reveals that *Batua* is also the main option in her case. We asked her about this variety switch in the interview and she showed some surprise but accepted the fact that, while *Batua* is fake in

close and spontaneous interactions, she associates it with more translocal audiences, with anyone who can understand Basque, with the whole Basque Country and the Basque community. Moreover, in contrast to other languages such as Spanish or English, she considers those posts in *Batua* to be part of herself and of a more translocal self-voice nature.

Miren also explains in the interview that she relates *Batua* to that more *translocal* and *professional* self-identity. She perceives *Batua* as more appropriate for a professional media voice with which she identifies, and she associates this elaborate self-presentation with Instagram Timelines. *Batua* also evokes a more *attentive* and *permanent* self-presentation there.

(15)    That's where I would make a distinction. As I mentioned before, on 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 "l"s and that sort of thing, in my dialect, I don't care much about my Basque in the stories.

The case of Aizpea is also quite significant in this sense. Aizpea uses the Biscayan dialect in most of her interactions with her peer group in the chat, but she always resorts to using the standard *Batua* on her Timeline. Aizpea considers that standard *Batua* is the variety associated with a 'refined' manner of self-presentation on Timelines.

In sum, a stylistic analysis of these students' Timelines and chats shows the subtle ways they navigate among available varieties and try to perform a coherent representation of a distinctive self in each Instagram context, "a self that may be in turn subdividable into a differentiated system of aspects-of-self" (Irvine 2001, 31). For that more informal and fun self-image projected in chat interactions, the *euskalkiak* are the only possible option. The standard variety signals for all the students an artificial and false style in those informal contexts, as not a 'real me'. *Batua* in not considered appropriate to construct 'a real informal identity' in an Instagram chat. The student who lacks a Basque dialect, Silvia, does not use Basque in Direct messages on Instagram. She uses it very seldomly; only for greetings or congratulations, or in brief interactions with her classmates. In such interactions, Silvia uses *Batua* with constants stylistic switches to a dialect.

The values that *Batua* and the dialects evoke, according to the students in the interviews and the discussion group, demonstrate a distinctive contrast that is displayed on Instagram: *Batua* evokes for them a translocal, attentive and refined self they consider appropriate for a public self-image on Instagram Timelines; *euskalkiak*, in contrast, are linked to social meanings such as informality, fun, openness and naturalness that they associate with their interactions in the chat or in the Timeline comments; a space in which, moreover, they could not even

imagine using *Batua*. The informality and naturalness evoked by the local dialect is related to what counts as 'authentic', 'real' and 'credible', and is associated with the ideology of *linguistic mundaneness* (Bucholtz 2003). We can, therefore, also see that the most authentic language for young people is this "unremarkable, commonplace, everyday" language (Bucholtz 2003, 405).

Yet, at the same time, in a translocal context such as Timelines, *Batua* can be 'authentic' as a sing of *distinctiveness* (Irvine 2001) in relation to other languages such as Spanish and English, which are 'normal', 'neutral' and 'expected' in social networks. Spanish chiefly attains the indexical values associated with *anonymity* (Woolard 2008). In the discussion group, all the students agreed that Spanish is the expected language in a social network such as Instagram: "Spanish is neutral, it is what you expect to find", says Sylvia in the discussion, and all the rest nod in agreement. They also emphasised the universal and global character of these languages, in particular that of English, as in, for instance, Maite's explanation when talking about the use of English on Instagram Timelines: "I put it in English, so that everyone can understand, because English is 'the universal language'".

According to the students' narratives when asked about this use of *Batua* in Timelines, they see it as a 'translocal us', as a 'Basque for everyone to understand' and a 'Basque for all Basque speakers'. From the students' words, we can conclude that, in Timelines, they do not consider *Batua* fake at all and also that, when using it there, they identify with a more collective identity which they extend to all Basque speakers. *Batua* takes on a different meaning as an expression of an authentic belonging that seems to go beyond oneself and appeals to a whole community. In this sense, it also evokes values associated with the ideology of authenticity that Coupland (2014) relates to staying true to one's own language, culture and tradition. In fact, literacy allows *Batua* to move up and across spaces in the world and across social spheres and scales (Blommaert 2010, 46). This is because of the option for translation that Instagram users have in the Timelines, an option that is only possible when using standard *Batua*. As Miren explains, the "Translate" button provides you with the possibility to use more Basque in the Timelines.

(16)   I have around 600 followers and not all of them understand Basque, but I don't care… They can use the "Translate" button or they can ask what the sentence means, or simply they won't care…

*Batua* on public Timelines gains prestige to the extent that it allows the students to move across boundaries while still using Basque and to acquire a certain marker of social status which they link to a 'refined' and professional mediatized world.

## 6.   Discussion

Varis and Wang (2011, 81) claim that "the semiotic we employ in order to belong –
to be authentic as someone or something – is a normative process: a procedure
that involves orienting towards several centres and orders of indexicality", and in
the Gaztesare corpus we have observed some examples of this kind of normative
process. The students in the study who engage in local activities with their peer
group in Basque lean towards those peer groups' normative centres and consider
Basque resources as the only tools for 'being themselves' in chatting with close
friends; Basque suggests solidarity and friendliness and Basque resources are the
proper tools for social networks to create a self-image they connect with the local
community. For others, however, using Basque in social networks makes them
feel fake and they do not consider Basque resources to be good tools with which
to create a digital self, or to become a 'popular person' in closer relations in that
social network in which they feel more credible in Spanish, as is the case of Silvia.

In many cases in the corpus, though, Basque is a common tool for students'
public and translocal digital identity. They engage in translocal activities and
identify Basque with a credible public self-presentation on Instagram, for example
on Timelines, in which they imagine a translocal audience that extends to the
whole Basque Country, and often to a more global audience too. At that level, such
a language choice matches the goal of a unified Basque community that some stu-
dents in the corpus point out; but also a youth and popular culture that, particu-
larly in the case of music, they share in a translocal context which extends to the
whole Basque community.

Related to that engagement is the fact that students in the study, as Instagram
users, are constantly pointing towards different social and cultural norms; in
other words, they move towards different centres and orders of indexicality, and
an analysis of the Gaztesare corpus demonstrates some examples of that *polycen-
tricity* (Blommaert 2010, 39): The students in the corpus who use Basque when
they are chatting use mostly local dialects, and they explained that they perceived
dialects as the only credible Basque forms to be used in that friendly and infor-
mal context. They pointed out the importance of the peer group's norms in such
stylistic choice. Such a stylistic choice is consistent with what students tell us in
interviews about the standard *Batua*. The standard variety signals an artificial and
false style, not the 'real me', as explained above in the context of face-to-face inter-
actions (Urla et al. 2016). Standard *Batua* is not considered appropriate when it
comes to constructing 'a real informal identity' in an Instagram chat.

Yet different norms are operating on the same individuals in a more general
and translocal context on Timelines. Standard *Batua* is seen in relation to other
languages as a tool for self-presentation in a more translocal context. This proba-

bly fits with the ideological scheme that relates *per se* authentic Basque resources to interaction with a more abstract audience, in contrast to those of Spanish and English that are more *anonymous* (Woolard 2008), as Urla (2012) explains in detail; but also because of the perception of *Batua* as evoking a credible identity in a translocal context that, according to students, takes the whole Basque Country into account. Moreover, it may be related with other contextual features of the Timelines that make the students lean towards other normativity centres and orders of indexicality. According to students' statements, behind the authentication effort in Timelines lies an elaboration of a carefully crafted profile that leads them to manoeuvre themselves to normative centres such as the school setting or Euskaltzaindia, that is, the academy of the Basque language.

The local dialect is not a 'more real' option in this public context. According to the students, not everyone understands it and it seems to be too casual for a self-presentation in Timelines. From the students' statements, we can deduce that the place Basque dialects have had in school and media may have had the effect of them being perceived as 'substandard' varieties that invoke a low educational level and a lack of cultural and intellectual sophistication. In all likelihood, some of these inferable associative and stereotypical meanings still prevail today, but more research needs to be done in this regard.

## 7.    Conclusions

Basque is a common tool for four of the students in our sample students' public digital identity, in their performative self-presentation on Timelines. It is used to answer a desire to present oneself in relation to values such as natural, fresh and fun, that is, according to an *authenticity of freshness and creativity* in Coupland's terms (Coupland 2014, 31). It is also an emblem of originality and authenticity on Instagram, an index of *distinctiveness* (Irvine 2001) related to this authenticity, in a context in which English and Spanish are thought of as the *anonymous* choice (Woolard 2008). Basque (and even more so when it comes to the local Basque dialects) also evokes values associated with staying true to one's own language, culture and tradition, an ideology of authenticity that Coupland explains as *authenticity of continuity* (Coupland 2014, 31).

As for the resources from Basque that students consider the better tools in order to achieve an 'authentic' voice, an analysis of the Gaztesare corpus reveals that what counts as authentic language use for them varies according to different scale-levels on Instagram. Dialects are tools for self-positioning as an 'authentic' voice in Instagram chat, no matter the Basque variety used by the person who interacts with the students. Instead of being considered a mere 'dialect', a first

order index of geographical place of one's mother tongue origin, *euskalkiak* have become a tool for the cultural self-positioning of an authentic informal voice or stance (Silverstein 2014, 183). This kind of switch in the values of local dialects has been generated locally (Urla et al. 2016) and transferred to their informal interactions on Instagram. *Batua*, however, seems to be disempowering at a lower scale-level in Directs, in which it is considered fake, too serious and artificial. But due to translocal mobility, linguistic resources take on a different indexicality with respect to authenticity too. Discourse resources of the standard *Batua*, for instance, are empowering at the higher scale on Timelines, in which the same speakers use it for a more credible public and translocal voice.

The ideology of the *authenticity of continuity* (Coupland 2014, 31) is evident in any scale-level, and also when talking about local varieties as part of their authentic historical identity. But it is even more common when they explain the use of Basque in public, in Timelines and in hashtags. In those Instagram contexts, the narratives of *historicity* and *distinctiveness* related to Basque contrast with those of an *anonymous* choice of Spanish or English. *Batua* is seen as a tool for continuity, a view that underpinned the creation of the standard variety by the Basque language academy and that students have received in the school context. *Batua* is seen by Gaztesare students as a way to demolish the barriers between speakers of different varieties of Basque and, in that sense, as a tool for the survival of Basque.

Values of *the authenticity of freshness and creativity* (Coupland 2014, 31) that relate Basque with natural, fun, fresh talk and that link the authenticity of Basque to localness, solidarity, comfort and closeness are closely linked to the local dialects. In turn, they are mostly invoked by the students in the interviews when talking about their chat interactions and similar informal genres such as comments in Timelines. In sum, what counts as 'authentic' among these young Basque speakers, then, fluctuates according to Instagram's scale-levels in a polycentric normativity in which different systems of values and different ideologies of authenticities prevail.

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