

“You’re an enemy of Catalan” : an examination of authority positioning in language policing on Catalan social media

LPP research has steadily shifted from focussing on policy documents to a more actor-centred approach, considering the actions of particularly influential individuals on the management of language within specific contexts. Such research frequently occurs within educational, family and institutional contexts, often utilising the theoretical lenses of “language policing” (Blommaert et al., 2009) and “language policy arbiters” (Johnson & Johnson, 2015). However, little analogous research exists within the context of social media: examining the actual “language police”, and the nature, extent and conditions of the authority that they claim, are ascribed, or are expected to possess.

Presenting data from an ongoing project, this paper examines moments of conflict that emerge from instances of language policing within several Catalan-language groups on Facebook, specifically dedicated to defending and “purifying” of the Catalan language. During this conflict, the authority of the “corrector”, the appropriateness of their “corrections” and their motivations thereof, are often openly debated.

Using positioning theory, I analyse this conflict with a view to determining how group users self- or other-position as possessing or lacking the authority to police others: the criteria by which this authority is ascribed or denied, and the key limitations and conditions of this authority. Initial findings indicate that authoritative positions are often granted/withheld on the basis of:

- the groups’ declared mission
- users’ knowledge and education
- users’ origins and linguistic ownership
- users’ perceived (in)fallibility and status as model language users
- users’ dedication and passion they are perceived to have
- opinions regarding the role of language policing in defending the Catalan language

Furthermore, policing is often contested based on its frequency and the manner in which it is conducted – whether with humility or rudeness – as well as beliefs regarding the inevitability of linguistic diversity and language change.

It is hoped that this research will provide insight into issues of power and authority in language policy in its relatively novel arena, social media.