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From minoritized to digitalized: Assessing the digital realm's influence on preexisting language ideologies

The case of Galician

Master's Thesis

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Aos meus pais e avós,
por terme dado esta língua
que me fixo como son

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Abstract

By focusing on Galician language online content creators, this thesis explores how language ideologies on minoritized languages have been reshaped by their inclusion into the digital realm. This has been pursued through a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis on a corpus of semi-structured interviews. The contribution of this piece is twofold: at the empirical level, it is centered on a novel phenomenon in the field of sociolinguistics and minoritized languages -that of the Internet-; at the theoretical level, it aims at deepening the understanding of how communicative structures can transform linguistic ideologies. By analyzing the role of digital platforms, this research contributes to the field of sociolinguistics, highlighting the dynamic relationship between technology and language. The results indicate that social media has facilitated access to content and creation for speakers of minoritized languages, challenging hegemonic linguistic ideologies -despite the lack of resources and institutional support- thus improving the perception of Galician as modern, useful and relevant. The study also concludes that, although digital platforms cannot be considered "breathing spaces" due to the lack of complete security on the internet, these act as spaces of normalization. Yet, although polarization breeds extreme negative attitudes, these tend to generate solidarity by diverse audiences, thus increasing the visibility of Galician as a language. In short, the digital environment, despite its challenges, moderates the relationship between linguistic attitudes and ideologies, favoring a normalizing trend for minoritized languages and acting as a catalyst for linguistic reflection and awareness.

Key words: *Language ideologies; Minoritized languages; Content creation; Digital realm; Linguistic normalization*

Introduction

"If there is a reason why all Galician language content creators are attacked for, it's language. It will always be the nexus, (...) it doesn't matter whether you create beauty [content], music [content] (...), whether you do makeup (...), or whether you do humor (...). Always."

This previous quote, which is drawn from the corpus of interviews conducted as part of this study, provides an insightful start to this work, as it serves to exemplify the complex reality in which this piece of research is inscribed into. These words by a lifestyle vlogger, influencer and content creator that uses Galician as her working language, showcases an uncomfortable yet revealing reality: on the one hand, the linguistic prejudices surrounding the use of minoritized languages, in this case Galician, are still found within new communicative domains, namely, social media and the internet. However, just a few years ago, this interview would not have been possible, insofar as the creation of content and the figure of the influencer in a minoritized language remains an emerging and ever-growing cultural phenomenon.

The digital era has bred new spaces that have been thought to offer unique transformative opportunities to voices who have otherwise been historically marginalized (Castells, 2015), such as feminist and LGTBQIA+ advocacy groups, democracy and human rights activists and climate change campaigners, amidst many others. However, the ubiquity of the Internet has also implied considerable challenges for these very voices. As more societal sectors become integrated into cyberspace, in a logic that remains parallel to that of globalization, tensions are revealed amidst the long-promised drive towards a digital democratization, on the one hand, and the reproduction of long-standing and pre-existing social and political power structures, on the other (Lambach, 2020). Digitalization, far from behaving as an insurer of social justice, has been known to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. This has raised critical questions and concerns on who benefits and who is being left behind in this constantly evolving digital landscape (Slavina & Brym, 2020). As early as 1968, at the dawn of computer science, researchers were beginning to wonder; "For the society, the impact will be good or bad, depending mainly on the question: Will "to be online" be a privilege or a right?" (Licklider & Taylor, 1968, p. 2). In this ambivalent context, academia has been developing and continuous to develop a drive to explore how opportunities and challenges in the digital age affect those who aim at challenging and transforming conventional power hierarchies.

As societies move towards greater online interconnectedness, it is essential to understand how power dynamics, present in both virtual and physical realities, affect human groups whose

languages are considered to be minoritized. It is not simply a matter of translating offline realities into online ones, but rather a matter of understanding how language ideologies, which are present in both virtual and physical realities, affect communities, and to what extent have communicational structures affected these very same linguistic ideologies.

This study delves into the intersection of minoritized languages and the cyberspace, recognizing that the promise of digital democratization coexists with many intrinsic challenges, such as the "captive nature" of all online informational monopolies (White, 2022, p. 482), the widespread consequences of the existence of algorithmic biases (Braña, 2022, p. 221), as well as the digital divide's impact on the quality of life of communities across the globe (Bartikowski et al, 2018, pp. 377-378). Through a critical lens, this paper seeks to unravel the complexities of minoritized language communities' practices on the Internet and their role in the construction and reproduction of language ideologies, therefore contributing to the field of sociolinguistic studies -located at the crossroads of linguistics, sociology and political sciences- by addressing both theoretical and empirical gaps on the matter at hand. To do so, this work aims at shedding light upon the following research question: *to what extent and how including minoritized language communities into the online realm have shaped and reshaped their pre-existing language ideologies?* Furthermore, and being that so: *what are the specific factors that contribute to such changes upon language ideologies?*

The field of sociolinguistics has produced numerous definitions of the concept of minoritized language that are, however, identified by certain common constitutive features (Gal, 2018). Firstly, around minoritized languages there exist certain, either formal and informal, social norms of a restrictive nature in relation to the social functions for which they are understood as legitimate in their use, as opposed to the expansive norms that characterize the dominant language with which they share social, geographic, political or economic spaces (Calaforra, 2003). Consequently, widespread unilateral bilingualization occurs within the minoritized speaker community, where the latter tend to hold both their own language and the dominant language within their linguistic repertoire, as opposed to the natives of the dominant language, who tend to either be or behave monolingually. A paradigmatic illustration of the latter is the pervasive argument of language uses and labor mobility, which has led many native speakers of languages such as Catalan (Torres, 2005), Sicilian (Alfonzetti, 2014), Frisian (Buczek, 2019), Mayan (Yamasaki, 2019) or Cantonese (Cheng & Tang, 2014) to exclude these when it comes to educating and raising their children. As a result of these processes, the minoritized

language community perceives itself as a subset of the dominant one, and thus being perceived in this way by the rest of the world. Ultimately, these attitudes and usages are embedded into a system of beliefs concerning the languages in question. These belief systems are what will be labeled, going forward, as language ideologies.

To answer this study's research questions, a research design is put forward which involves performing thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017) of a corpus produced through semi-structured interviews conducted with eight professional and semi-professional content creators and influencers who use Galician language on their social media platforms. This approach allows us to explore in depth the perceptions, attitudes and linguistic practices of individuals in relation to the prestige and valuation of language use. By scrutinizing their experiences and insights through the lens of some key conceptual tools -primarily, that of language ideology and attitudes-, this thesis aims at generating a better theoretical understanding of the ideological and sociocultural dynamics that influence the use and promotion of minoritized languages in the digital realm, whilst addressing some key empirical shortcomings that exist in the research field at stake.

Literature Review

This section aims to engage with the literature on language ideologies on minoritized language communities and, specifically, on how academia has so far tackled the way in which communicational structures affect the latter. From here, the section points at both a theoretical and an empirical contribution seeking to advance knowledge on the matter.

Academic scholarship on linguistic attitudes and ideology has long been interested in the formation of communities based on linguistic practices and communicative interaction and communicative spaces, -mostly offline, but also online-, as well as on the specific impact of the latter regarding minoritized languages. Many authors have had an interest on how language uses are related to social polarization and community building. Thoma (2022) highlights, as a consequence of having studied biographical perspectives on language ideologies in educational contexts, how the predominant monolingual orientation in universities contributes to the perpetuation of linguistic inequalities among students, especially those who are linguistically minoritized. This monolingual approach reinforces the divide between those considered "native speakers" and those labeled "non-native speakers," disproportionately impacting minoritized speaker students, and thus promoting clique-styled behaviors within such institutions. This points

out at how not only discourses are important for linguistic ideologies to permeate and evolve, but so are material reality and informational structures. Linguist Tse (2003) has pointed out in his work, in which he analyzed discourses around Mandarin Chinese, how there has been a broad re-signification and global social revaluation of this language, resulting from the country's industrial revolution and China's pathway towards becoming a global superpower in the recent decades. In addition, author Razfar (2012) concluded from ethnographic and discourse-critical work with Latino students in the United States that changes in academic curricula in relation to minoritized languages -that being the case of Spanish in the context of American society-, as well as a shift towards an empowering educational approach, have positively contributed to these students' views on whether or not gaining competences in their native language is to be considered worthwhile.

But not only offline settings have been a focus of sociolinguistic scholarship. Similarly, Cassell and Tversky (2005) explored, through a content analysis mixed-methods approach, how young people from diverse backgrounds form a collective voice and common linguistic style and practices in online communities, suggesting the existence of a deterritorialized process of convergence and agreement in the choice of conversational topics and group goals throughout time. Similarly, Al Zidjali (2019) and Androutsopoulos (2006) have argued that the digital age has brought with it new forms of identity and community building, emphasizing the need to develop new and more accurate sociolinguistic theories and methodologies in line with this context, based on the revisiting of concepts such as globalization, community, identity, within the field. Their perspective also highlights human agency and creativity in shaping sociolinguistic dynamics on digital platforms and points out at research innovation as one of the main challenges for the study of language and society in the digital era. This aligns closely with Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes' study (2011), which aimed at a longitudinal tracing of language policies, both public and private, regarding the creation of audiovisual content in minoritized languages. By looking at the cases of both Sámi and Irish Gaelic, they found a significant shift in agency toward individuals and communities since the turn of the century. This turn, which has been theorized to be tightly linked to the spread of the internet, has resulted in the emergence of a grassroots or community based cultural drive that behaves independently from the institutionalized constraints that are embedded in traditional audiovisual industries, such as film, television, or music production companies.

Nonetheless, scholars have pointed out at the limitations of individual action and their

transformative extent regarding language ideologies and language attitudes. Irvine (2018) examined the relationship between linguistic ideologies, social position, and the interpretation of linguistic practices, evidencing how differences in ideology and social position influence the interpretation of such practices. This analysis, which is based on examples from ethnographic fieldwork in Senegal, concluded that the condition of language as a widely accepted status-signifier amidst some multilingual communities affects the extent to which messages and linguistic practices that convey potential for language normalization are ideologically interpreted by the audience. In the work of Belmas and Glass (2019), in which they examined through qualitative content analysis how minoritized language Facebook groups' dynamics lead the latter to function as both "communities of practice", when opportunities for interaction in the tongue at hand become scarce, as well as "breathing spaces", namely, environments were an otherwise minoritized language is prone to be used normally, thus avoiding discrimination. Nonetheless, Pérez Lago's work (2022), which focused on analyzing, not only posts, but rather comments and other social media interactions in Galician language TikTok accounts, questions the notion of these spaces as having such "breathing" nature, due to the widespread presence of normativizing speech, as well as hate speech, that perpetuates offline ideological assumptions in regard to language. Similarly, Vincze et al. (2021) investigated through questionnaires the impact of identity and other coping strategies on attitudes and language use among ethnic Hungarian high schoolers in southern Slovakia, identifying both pre-existing ethnolinguistic identity and perceived language vitality as good predictors for higher levels of normalized language use. This study has, on the other hand, signaled English' widespread internet use as having a negative impact towards young minority-language speakers' attitudes vis-a-vis their first language.

As we have seen, available research has examined the *status quo* of minoritized languages. Nonetheless, many avenues for inquiry remain open to this day for several compelling reasons. On the one hand, there is a clear empirical gap regarding the role of the internet more broadly, and social media more specifically. Although the democratization of cultural production has allowed greater accessibility and decentralization, most existing research has focused on the analysis of language policies and offline communicative practices, without adequately considering the central role that the online realm currently plays. Beyond the limited academic production, the constantly changing online environment means that the few and far apart existing studies are not long in becoming outdated with respect to the factual reality of, not only Galician and its speakers within the online realm, but that of many other similar linguistic communities. This study aims at closing such gap by means of investigating the role of active contributors to

the breeding of these virtual spaces, in particular media creators, as they represent a recent and understudied phenomenon. Media creators are not only participating, but also playing a pivotal role in both their shaping and nurturing. In doing so, they contribute significantly to the momentum and dynamism of these digitally bred linguistic ecosystems. Their creative output not only mirrors linguistic practices within these communities, but also influences language use patterns and other cultural expressions, changing the nature of communicative spaces themselves. Understanding the motivations, strategies and impact of media creators in minoritized linguistic spaces such as that of Galician on social media platforms is crucial to develop a comprehensive view of the contemporary dynamics of linguistic vitality and cultural resilience.

At the theoretical level, not only the lack of consensus, but rather the lack of theoretical formulations concerning the impact of internet on linguistic ideologies, showcase how this remains a new and understudied phenomenon. Stressing the transformative potential of online linguistic communities as a consequence of the internet-rooted communicative dynamics broadly builds upon ideas that, despite having been known for decades, concern a broader body of discourses on ideological shifts that focus on communicative interaction as a good proxy for change in belief systems, and that have yet not been transposed to the field at hand. For instance, Cultural Hegemony theory, as elucidated by Antonio Gramsci (1981), underscores the power dynamics in society, highlighting the dissemination of dominant ideologies through media and cultural discourses. Habermas (2004), on the other hand, proposes a communicative model where consensus and respect stem from ideal speech situations, contingent upon overcoming communicative inequalities. In such theoretical model, dissensus and polarization are rooted on the very nature of communicative structures. The same could be argued regarding postmodernism or Social Identity Theory, amidst other schools of thought[1]. Overall, and despite methodological and theoretical differences, these perspectives converge on the transformative role of discourse and communicative structures in ideological change. Being that said, there is a notable gap in the way these approaches have been -or, rather, have not been- applied to the field of sociolinguistics when it comes to minoritized languages.

The scarce existing studies on minoritized languages and the internet to date largely tend to generate descriptive and static images of their online status quo, rather than analyzing how digital media may be dynamically transforming these linguistic communities and the ideologies that, in

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[1] See *ANNEX I* for a more detailed account on the focus that this schools have had on the transformative potential of communicational structures.

turn, constitute them. While some scholars, such as Irvin or Pérez Lago, have described how the internet has exacerbated polarization by creating echo chambers and amplifying ideological differences, others, such as Belmas and Glass or Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes, have shown how it has enabled the diversification of voices and perspectives, challenging dominant narratives and empowering marginalized groups. In addition, processes of deterritorialization, involving the dissolution of geographic boundaries and the creation of transnational virtual spaces, raise questions about how these changes affect the very concept of online identities and communities. Overall, this lack of consensus and conceptual clarity leaves a gap in our understanding of the role of these new online interactions in the ever-evolving nature of language ideologies and linguistic attitudes, not only towards minoritized languages, but also in a more overarching way. This is, therefore, the second gap that this paper aims to address.

Theoretical Framework

Minoritized languages and the realities faced by their speakers have long been an object of study at the intersection amidst linguistics, sociology and other social sciences, as it has been already discussed. Moreover, within sociolinguistic studies, greater importance has been given to the Internet and its impact on communicative processes. However, gaining a thorough understanding of the dynamics of language ideologies surrounding minoritized languages entails exploring the complex interplay between the latter and language attitudes and behaviors, and the particularities that online environments pose to such variable interdependence.

In this section, attention will be drawn upon this work's main key conceptual tools (these being language ideologies, language attitudes and the online realm) and the relation that exist amongst these very concepts. This conceptual framework centers on language ideologies, illustrating their reciprocal relationship with language attitudes and behaviors within the context of the online realm. The online realm functions as a moderating variable, influencing the way in which such relationship is shaped. Factors such as polarization dynamics, types of digital content and content creators, and platform algorithms and interfaces (later discussed) are thought to play a crucial role in this interaction. This framework aims at highlighting the significant impact of communication structures (in this case, digital communication environments) on language ideologies and their resulting attitudes and behaviors, and vice versa.
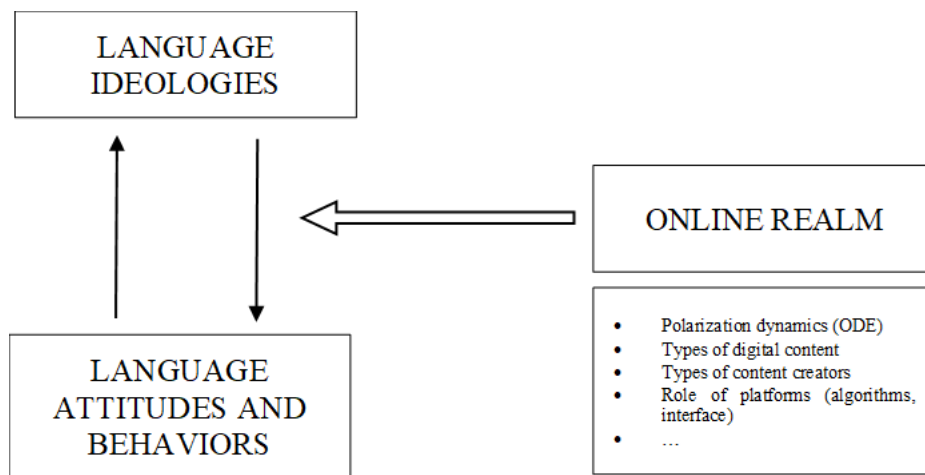
Language ideologies and linguistic attitudes

Firstly, language ideologies, which encompass beliefs and values related to the use of a language (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994), play an essential role in the vitality of minoritized languages. The study of linguistic ideologies reveals the intersection between forms of expression and the identities of speakers in their social contexts. Approaching these from an academic perspective does not limit the researcher to the realm of language, on the contrary, it allows to embrace other conceptual systems relevant to the speakers and institutions under examination. Historically, the analysis of linguistic ideologies has maintained two approaches: one that focuses on explicit and propositional content, and another that identifies ideological patterns implicit in various linguistic and ritual practices (Brown, 2005). For the case in question, both the implicit values inscribed in the corpus under analysis, as well as the explicit evaluations of beliefs, prejudices or evaluations of Galician, its uses, and its social positionality, will be considered.

This work, when approaching the study of ideology, builds upon the Althusserian understanding of such, centered on the notion that ideas and beliefs within a society are determined by the dominant social, cultural and economic structures. Althusser (2006) argued that ideology is not simply a set of abstract ideas, but a complex system of representations and practices that maintain and reproduce existing power relations. In his theory, ideology acts as an apparatus of domination that shapes the consciousness of individuals and interpellates them as social subjects. Thus, we affirm the relevance of the intersubjective dimension in the legitimization of ideological apparatuses, beyond reflecting material reality, contributes to its reproduction and legitimization, and vice versa. In any case, this approach allows us to conduct its study whilst assuming its contingent nature and its potential for diversity and change,

focusing not only on what is said, but also on what is suggested, and assuming contradiction and dissonance as an element inherent to all systems of thought.

From this standpoint, studying how moral values regarding, not only linguistic varieties, but other power structures, are precisely transmitted and negotiated through linguistic interaction within a given community, becomes possible. As Woolard rightly stated, the concept of language ideology "is a much-needed bridge between linguistic and social theory, because it relates the microculture of communicative action to political and economic considerations of power (…)" (Woolard, 1994, p. 58). Thus, the intrinsic connection between these and sociopolitical dynamics reveals how perceptions of a minoritized language can be intertwined with broader political and social issues. In short, language ideologies can be synthetically defined as an interrelated system of shared social ideas or beliefs within a linguistic community on the use and value of languages and their varieties, either implicitly or explicitly (Kroskrity, 2000), and that are in turn influenced by the social, political and economic context in which individuals are situated within the given society (Silverstein, 1979).

The consequences of language ideologies vary widely across different societies and spaces. In fact, the concept of minoritized languages is no more than a conceptual tool that allows for the study of a community of speakers that undergoes a process known as language shift, specific to that of a kind of language ideology, known as diglossia. On the one hand, a "language shift" refers to a gradual change in the linguistic preferences and usage of a given community, whereby one language, in this case Galician, gradually loses ground to another, such as Spanish (Loureiro-Rodriguez et al, 2013). On the other, diglossia describes a both ideological and material phenomenon, based on the coexistence of two languages or linguistic varieties in a community, where one of them (language H) has a higher status and is used in formal contexts, while the other (language L) is relegated to informal situations (Fishman, 2006, p. 328). The concept of prestige, understood as the social status associated with a language, which determines its valuation and the functions it occupies in society, plays a key role when tackling the issue of language ideologies. This prestige influences the perception and use of the language, as people may opt not to use it in ordinary ways due to its association with a lower social status or lack of recognition in relevant areas, thus, in turn, contributing to its marginalization and erosion (Williams, 2005).

On the other hand, and due to the indissociable and reciprocal nature of the relationship between ideologically-driven beliefs and assumptions, and the materiality and performative

extent of linguistic practice, both individuals and groups hold the potential for functioning as agents for normalization, either self-consciously or not. These often behave as such over and above institutions, both by seeking -or managing- to preserve, promote or revitalize their language in the face of the domination of others. This can happen, either expressly or tacitly, by the mere use of a minoritized language in contexts for which the intersubjective understanding of its role leads to the questioning of their validity or legitimacy (Haarmann, 1990). Thus, tackling the reciprocal relationship between "normal" language use (that being related to attitudes, behaviors and, overall, *praxis*) and linguistic ideologies (those being socially constructed beliefs and ideas surrounding language) within diglossic societies is central when trying to answer the research question at hand. When speakers challenge these dominant ideologies by using the minoritized variety more prominently and visibly in different social contexts, especially in social functions of which they are not considered customary, they are challenging the underlying assumptions of the dominant ideology. As more individuals and communities adopt this practice of using the minoritized variety more actively and visibly, there is a shift in social norms and cultural perceptions. This gradual change in linguistic attitudes and behaviors -which has come to be labeled as linguistic normalization- contributes to the transformation of dominant linguistic ideologies, and vice versa, eroding the hegemony of the dominant variety and promoting greater linguistic and cultural equity.

The crucial role of the online realm

For the question at hand, the online realm, which we now proceed to discuss and unpack, is thus constituted as a moderating variable between the reciprocal relationship between linguistic ideologies and linguistic attitudes or practices. For such purpose, it is worth considering some key concepts regarding the relevance of social norms within online spaces. This work is rooted in a theoretical outlook in which networks and the Internet are not assumed as an ideologically neutral and level playing fields, but rather venues where the tensions and social dynamics that exist in the offline sphere are not only manifested and dialogued, but also shaped and reconstructed (Rahman, 2020). Algorithms, a fundamental pillar of what we now know as Internet 2.0, and which are based on machine learning, can amplify, modify or reify ideological or moral beliefs (Van Stekelenburg, 2014). These generate their outputs, by means of providing users easy access to content and information, through the integration of micro-level user social interactions which, in turn, constitute complex networks of individuals, whose behaviors comprise numerous beliefs, values and social biases (Karimi et al, 2022). In any case, their

intersubjective nature makes them capable of social contagion of norms and customs, regardless of a lack of deliberate or targeted social engineering.

This conceptualization of digital platforms leads us to tackle two seemingly contradicting tendencies. On the one hand, the internet may serve as an expansive arena where minoritized communities find a niche. As it has been discussed before, some sociolinguistic studies have translated the concept of *breathing spaces* to the online realm, this being a specific approach to the idea of safe spaces (Roestone Collective, 2014) regarding language attitudes. These are commonly conceptualized as environments where an otherwise minoritized language is prone to be used *normally* or *safely* (Fishman, 1991, p. 25). In other words, an arena or space, whether material or imaginary, in which speakers feel safe or protected from negative linguistic attitudes their form of communication is usually a target of. Breathing spaces have been thought to play crucial role in maintaining language use, fostering positive attitudes towards it and its speakers (Cunliffe, 2021), supporting community engagement through empowering tendencies (Bamgbose, 2011; Belmar, 2020), as well as connecting dispersed linguistic minoritized groups and diasporas (Culpepper, 2012). This does nothing but highlight how online environments may act, not only as an obstacle, but rather as a driver on the quest towards linguistic preservation.

Yet, on the other hand, online polarization, which is characterized by the tendency of digital platforms to generate divisions and confrontations (Van Sketelenburg, 2014). This has been explained by concepts such as Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE); which is the tendency for individuals to express themselves more openly or bluntly in online settings as a consequence of some of its intrinsic characteristics -i.e. anonymity and perceived distance, amongst others- (Lapidot-Lefler, 2012, p. 437), adding an additional layer of complexity to the dynamics of minoritized languages in cyberspace. Since digital spaces are too characterized by deep deterritorialization, it must be borne in mind that languages go on to take a translocal presence, and minoritized language speakers often find overwhelming amounts of dominant language contents, users, and platforms. The network-rather-than-bubble-like nature of the web puts the very notion of *breathing spaces* under scrutiny.

The internet's potential for linguistic normalization and revitalization becomes subject to a critical examination. On the one hand, these digital spaces do usually foster language contact across the board (Cunliffe, 2021), which means that the attitudes and behaviors speakers and non-speakers often continue to engage with online remain deeply rooted in preexistent offline

language ideologies, putting the safety and normalizing elements of these into question. The use of non-norm languages in the digital space has triggered a diverse array of responses, including accusations of political motivation and commands for translation, alongside many other hostile attitudes (Axelsson et al, 2003). These dynamics have been proven to result in major hurdles to the vitality of digital minoritized language communities (Dymet, 2019). That is, the Internet, through its ability to connect people with similar backgrounds, may serve as a space of convergence and resistance, where individuals with shared sensibilities find common ground for expression and mobilization. And, yet its universality and public visibility can also magnify language prejudices by amplifying their presence and reach in the digital sphere.

In short, the intersection between ideologies, social norms and linguistic attitudes, and the online realm, is a highly relevant and complex topic when it comes to tackling issues related to oppressed groups, such as minoritized language communities. Understanding these dynamics remains critical when addressing the challenges of inclusion, equity and diversity in cyberspace, and to promoting a fairer and more representative digital environment for all voices and communities. From this perspective, the Internet is to be understood as a space where social tensions and inequalities play a big role, which underscores the need to address these issues from a critical standpoint, questioning not only the content that is to be found online, but the role played by the informational infrastructures themselves.

Methodology

Within the framework of this research, we seek to comprehensively understand how the dynamics of linguistic contact in online spaces directly distribute the social functions and status of the Galician language in the virtual environment. It is emphasized that the ultimate goal of this inquiry lies in a broader understanding of how linguistic ideologies are shaped and reshaped by online communicative structures, especially within minoritized language digital communities. Against this background, this section undertakes a detailed discussion of the methodological choices adopted, highlighting the relevance of each decision regarding the achievement of the stated objectives.

Research design and case selection

Case studies are fundamental tools in research, particularly so when there is a lack of dominant theory or when theories are still under development (Toshkov, 2016). In this specific case, where one of the gaps is theoretical, a research design around a single case provides the

opportunity to conduct a thorough and in-depth analysis, extracting valuable insights and ideas in an inductive manner. By examining individual cases in detail, researchers can gain a fuller and richer understanding of complex phenomena. Although generalization may be limited, their value lies precisely in their ability to provide a detailed understanding of a specific phenomenon, thus contributing to the construction of a more robust body of theory and the development of new perspectives in the field of study namely, in this case, sociolinguistics. Thus, the case selection procedure for the work at hand has aimed "the intensive (…) analysis of a single unit (…) [that allows] the understanding of a larger class of similar units" (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 299), namely, minoritized language communities. The information gathered from a diagnostic case study can also have a significant impact on confirming, refuting or revising a previously established and contesting theories. In this context, the selection of a crucial case reveals possible measurement errors, faulty scoping conditions, causal heterogeneity, confounding factors, or flaws in the underlying causal mechanisms that have so far been laid down by academia (Gerring, 2007). By identifying these shortcomings, the validity of the existing theoretical approaches is questioned, and the door is opened for a more critical and detailed evaluation of the conceptual foundations upon which it is built. In the specific case of linguistic ideologies and their relationship to new communicative spheres, a crucial case study could shed light on how these ideologies are affected by emerging dynamics in digital platforms and social networks. In short, case studies are particularly useful in this context, as they offer a way to address theoretical gaps and explore complex phenomena in detail (Gerring & Cojocaru, 2016).

The case of Galician, a minoritized language, but one with a widespread use and co-official status with Spanish, has been chosen as it offers an adequate sociolinguistic backdrop for the purposes of this research. About 2.4 million people speak Galician, mainly in the autonomous community of Galicia, located in northwestern Spain, where it coexists with Spanish. In addition to its presence in Galicia, there are Galician-speaking communities in other bordering regions of Spain and in various parts of the world, particularly among the Galician diasporas. Galician becomes a suitable case study when talking about the effects of the Internet on language, since, despite its minoritized status, it lies among the 30 most used languages in the cyberspace (RAG, 2021). For instance, the Galician edition of Wikipedia ranks 36th in number of articles, and 33rd when it comes to the ratio of articles per number of speakers. All in all, and despite its co-official status and its use in education, Galician is subject to persistent prejudice and stereotypes (Loureiro-Rodriguez et al, 2013), and the region is amidst a clear

language shift, as previously discussed. In the context of Galicia, Spanish and Galician function respectively as dominant and minoritized language. As society undergoes economic, social and cultural changes, the dominant language (or language H), in this case Spanish, tends to gain more prominence in various fields, such as higher education, the media and public administration, as well as urban areas and economic powerhouses (Mussa Juane et al, 2019). This may be due to factors such as labor mobility, the influence of the national media, and the perception that Spanish offers greater social and economic opportunities. That is to say, the distribution of language social functionalities responds to preexisting power structures that are in turn linked to specific language ideologies (Fishman, 2020), whilst also reinforcing the latter as these functionalities become assumed in a process of reification.

A further major contextual feature is the debate surrounding the relationship of Galician to the Portuguese language. Some scholars and linguists argue that Galician and Portuguese are variants of the same language, which has led to discussions about whether they should be considered two independent languages or rather "part of [a same] dialectal continuum" (Henderson, 2020, p. 241). This question adds an interesting nuance to the sociolinguistic analysis at hand, as it influences the perception and identity of Galician in relation to other languages other than Spanish in the region -and the cyberspace. In any case, the intelligibility -in both written and spoken form- amongst the two, does nothing but add nuance to the debate on the status of Galician. Nonetheless, often it is observed that minoritized languages are placed in a subordinate status, not only with respect to one, but also to multiple languages with which they interact (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006).

All in all, Galician emerges as a relevant and representative case study in the academic field of minoritized languages. Even though it remains a minoritized language, Galician has a legal recognition and an institutional presence that support its vitality. Moreover, on digital platforms, there is a growing activity in Galician, both in user-generated and professional content. The incipient professionalization in the production of Galician content in digital media suggests a growing interest in its promotion and dissemination. This combination of factors positions Galician as a relevant case for the study of the sociolinguistic and communicative dynamics of minoritized languages in digital environments. Findings derived from research on Galician can offer generalizable insights for other similar linguistic communities facing similar challenges and opportunities in the digital realm, thus providing a basis for understanding and addressing contemporary sociolinguistic dynamics more broadly.

Sampling and data collection

The use of semi-structured interviews has constituted the most important data-collection technique for the case study at hand. This choice is based on the abductive nature of qualitative analysis (Diefenbach, 2009), which seeks to effectively capture emerging themes and perspectives (Belina, 2023), in this case from the standpoint of Galician media creators. This approach proves to be particularly suited to explore the richness and diversity of the perceptions and experiences of these creators in the digital context of Galician.

In adopting semi-structured interviews, this work seeks to provide a flexible space that allows interviewees to express their experiences in an open-ended manner, while, at the same time, maintaining a basic common structure that allows for the operationalization of the concepts that inform the research question that drives this study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). This approach falls in line with the notion of co-creation, where interviewees are not only considered as sources of data, but also as co-creators of the knowledge generated in the study. Hence, this methodology allows us to construct research topics upon the "diverse subjectivities" (Westmarland, 2001) of the respondents, recognizing the importance of their individual experiences in the configuration of linguistic practices and the online representation of minoritized languages. In the end, the semi-structured interview methodology shows itself to be a useful and contextually aware instrument to thoroughly examine the linguistic dynamics and developing ideologies in Galician online communities, enabling a deeper comprehension of the mechanisms behind the production and distribution power relations through online content. This stays crucial, as "good qualitative research examines participants' lives as they experience them as meaningful and complex" (Reich, 2021, p. 4).

To ensure a wide array of perspectives, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted that prioritizes the inclusion of media creators from a diverse range of backgrounds. Initially, a selection of prominent influencers and creators in various social media networks (namely, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok) were contacted, including creators that touch upon topics such as language learning, vlogs, humor, music, literature, and LGBTQIA+ issues. After the sampling and contacting process, eight interviews were finally arranged with a few of the preselected participants. These happened between December 17th 2023 and May 4th 2024. Even though thirteen participants were initially contacted, only the aforementioned interviews could be conducted due to scheduling difficulties in two cases, and lack of response as for the remaining cases.

It is important to note as well that, during this qualitative-driven analysis, focused on personal experiences and subjectivities, representativeness is not a primary concern. The exploratory nature of the study focuses on understanding individual experiences, which, in turn, undermines the centrality of the representativeness issue. Hence, an "assurance that the site and unit of investigation are suitable for the type(s) of problem(s)" under scrutiny remains the most pressing issue regarding qualitative generalizability (Diefenbach, 2009, p. 879). It is worth mentioning that the interviews were conducted in Galician, and therefore the excerpts of the answers included in the 'findings and discussion' section further below correspond to the author's own translations. Overall, these constraints are intrinsic to qualitative research and reinforce the importance of transparency in the methodological process.

Data analysis[2]

When conducting the data analysis, this research opted for the thematic analysis technique, a methodological choice that accurately aligns with the objectives and the qualitative nature of the research. Thematic analysis offers a robust framework for identifying, analyzing and reporting meaningful patterns within the data collected during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with Galician media creators. This choice is grounded in its ability to explore and make sense of the individual experiences and perspectives expressed by participants. The inherent flexibility of thematic analysis aligns with the exploratory nature of the study, facilitating the identification of emerging themes without imposing predefined restrictions. In addition, the adaptability of this technique allows the richness and diversity of the responses to be captured. In turn, it provides a structured framework that will guide the interpretation of the data, allowing the identification of common patterns, divergences and significant relationships. In this study, and according to what has been previously discussed in both the literature review and the theoretical framework, thematic analysis has been framed within a constructivist perspective (Taylor & Ussher, 2001), where we seek not only the explicit meaning of the data, but also the underlying structures and latent meanings that may influence what is articulated. This approach aligns with the tradition of discourse analysis, specifically forms of thematic discourse analysis, which theorize about the broader assumptions, structures, and meanings underlying what is found in the data. Furthermore, this type of latent thematic allows for a deeper understanding of the ideologies present in the data. As for the transcription of the interviews, it was carried out through appropriate software, whilst the coding process took

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[2] See Annex III: Process of thematic analysis

place in a manual form.

Reflexivity and positionality

This study highlights the importance of reflexivity and positionality in research, being essential to understanding the complexities faced by minoritized languages in the digital environment. The researcher's position as a native speaker of the minoritized language under examination, Galician, implies a constant engagement with awareness of how linguistic and cultural experiences influence the interpretation of data and the development of conclusions (Macbeth 2001). Thus, reflexivity acts both as a tool for deepening knowledge (Berger, 2015), as well as a reality to be actively addressed during the research. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how power dynamics operate in practice and provides a solid foundation for future courses of action to promote linguistic equity and empowerment in cyberspace.

Results

As earlier stated, the process of conducting thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data of the corpus, generating initial codes, organizing these codes into themes, and reviewing and redefining the themes to ensure their internal coherence and external heterogeneity, striving for conceptual refinement. In this study, two major themes (which are further unpacked into several subthemes[3]) were identified in relation to the research question of how the inclusion of minoritized language communities into the digital realm has shaped pre-existing linguistic ideologies; namely: 1) the structure and dynamics of digital platforms and 2) content creation.

THEME 1: Structure and dynamics of digital platforms

The first major identified theme revolves around the very structure of digital platforms, and the consequences these traits pose to linguistic interactions. This theme encompasses elements inherent to the digital realm that, in some way, moderate the relationship between language ideologies and language attitudes. Within this category, three sub-themes have stood out from the corpus: *deterritorialization*, *democratization* and *platform language compatibility*.

On the one hand, *Deterritorialization* refers to the ability of social networks to spread globally, allowing contact between people who would otherwise not interact, in this case, with Galician

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[3] See Annex II: Thematic analysis map

itself as a language, as well as with audiovisual content produced in minoritized languages. All interviewees recurrently pointed out that the universality of social networks has extended the reach of Galician beyond the limits of the speaking community, meaning that "content [in Galician] can go viral in certain spaces that have nothing to do with Galicia, nor with our language, nor our country" (IO). Others pointed out how:

> "By democratizing the internet, we also run the risk of democratizing self-imposed prejudices (...). Before, if you didn't speak Galician in your neighborhood to those who might had seem to be outsiders, on the internet everyone is an outsider, at least at first glance. That is why our work is important" (CV).

Yet, this phenomenon seems to generate diverse responses. On the one hand, interviewees point out that receiving comments that reinforce negative linguistic ideologies towards Galician is common, mainly from people outside the speaker community, but also from within it. However, most interviewees emphasize that their communities of followers act as normalizing agents, by responding to such hostile attitudes. Both Galician speakers and non-Galician speakers, as well as people from other parts of the state, tend to confront these negative discourses:

> "If they say something and I think there is a reasoning behind it I try to refute it (...) But don't you worry, it works for me (...) If I answer publicly, I gain 50 followers, because people, even those outside [Galicia] show solidarity and support for your work. Their prejudices are so big that they encourage others to get rid of theirs" (K).

> "There is a lot of paternalism, even some Galicians tell me: do it in Spanish, that way more people will see it (...). But I feel very supported (...). We create sort of like support networks, many people from outside who, without knowing our reality, comment that the languages of the [Spanish] state are common heritage" (SS).

Both the physical distance and the anonymity inscribed in deterritorialization, traits that were previously discussed as inherent to online spaces in the theoretical framework, are pictured as encouraging when it comes to the expression of values and beliefs when debating and/or commenting in the online realm. Many of the interviewees (IO, CV, SS, MB, NB) discussed how the internet has impacted the way in which beliefs are articulated through explicit opinions more freely:

> "These are (…) often anonymous, [and] start commenting from that point of view and with those mean adjectives (...). We are not going to change how the Internet works; people feel free to talk about everything and anything in social media" (IO).

> "Everyone in social media is less cautious than usual, it's a shame but we have to educate so that it is not like that (...). Yet, it is also true that this is helping us by bringing out their true colors" (CV)

On the other hand, deterritorialization has been signaled to facilitate access to Galician language content to Galician people who, despite knowing the language due to the region's widespread bilingualism, live in mostly Spanish-speaking environments. This facilitates access to cultural and audiovisual products in Galician, therefore increasing its prestige as a language. For instance, one interviewee mentions that:

> "(…) internet is a bridge, in a way, with hegemonic language speakers, that generates an intelligible contact in their day-to-day life, which they do not usually have (...). The first response may be unease, a puzzling feeling, or even rejection, but it is normal, because you break the integrity of their reality, and in doing so also their views of such reality's [integrity]. But if they keep on seeing more and more content (...) suddenly [they realize] Galician can be useful for more things than what they had previously thought" (MB).

Some interviewees discussed the potential of the online realm and digital platforms when it comes to fostering contact with Portuguese-speaking users. One interviewee mentions the current lack of knowledge regarding Galician language within Lusophony, pointing out that it is often the case that for many Portuguese speakers, their content may constitute their first actual contact vis-a-vis Galician. Thus, some, when reached by these accounts, state that "it looks like Portuguese, or that it is a dialect (...), that it's *portunhol*[4]" (MB). Although the interviewee stated that negative comments do not often come from these audiences, these still transpose their offline linguistic ideologies to the online realm by negating Galician's status as a language. This is signaled to be linked to how "for them, [speaking Portuguese] it is a characteristic of citizen zero, they are hegemonic in their own reality, and thus subordinate Galician to such reality" (MB). On the other hand, and despite having mentioned mutual ignorance as an obstacle to the generation of prestige, digital networks are pointed out as potentially transformative when it comes to such linguistic contacts:

> "With Lusophony we have an opportunity (...) [We] reach people who show a lot of interest, but there is a lack of sense of community on both sides, of us consuming more content from other parts of Lusophony and vice versa. Getting used to it would make us see Galician in a better light. And that's the good thing about the Internet, it is now

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[4] According to the Spanish Royal Academy's dictionary: "Portuguese-based speech that incorporates numerous lexical, grammatical and phonetic elements of Spanish". It is often used in a derogatory way, implying Galician is not a language of its own, but rather a transitional speech within a greater dialectical continuum.

more possible than ever" (NB).

Another theme that was identified is the democratizing capacity of social networks and digital platforms, meaning the *democratization* in access to content production and its professionalization, as well as in its consumption. All interviewees agreed that the possibility of creating content from their own regular electronic devices has contributed enormously to the existence of more and better content in Galician language:

> "Something that seems fundamental to me is that networks have democratized content creation to the extent that it allows the creation of new narratives that otherwise did not reach certain non-ideologized sectors" (NB).

> "These spaces are freer (...) because of the very structure of the Internet. Back in the day to produce a record (...) you had to find a record company that would even listen to you (...). There has always been music in Galician, of course, but it has never been so easy to individualize creative work" (K).

Furthermore, interviewees noted that this democratization has an impact on the prestige of the minoritized language in question. One interviewee noted that new audiences are usually struck by the advantages that Galician can offer when building a social media career and that, ultimately, these new behavioral patterns affect their preexisting beliefs on language use. K goes on to say: "(…) before, perhaps, it was seen as something more unattainable, more distant., You know, how am *I* going to end up on TV? And how am I going to do it *in Galician*? Yet now others are doing it, so why not?"

However, all interviewees agreed on the limitations of this self-creation-based system, as well as on the need for increased support from public institutions. This shows how language attitudes and language ideologies, when online, are still greatly influenced by offline dynamics:

> "It is a great moment in the creation of content but with (...) this globalization thing (...) we don't even get things in Spanish; many are in English. We need support from the political powers (...). I see, for example, in Catalonia, things that are done in TV3[5]… they are heavily investing on influencers and content creators in Catalan" (SS).

> "Many times, there are punctual contests and events, (…) but there is no direct collaboration, it is not something sustainable in time (...). TVG[6] itself ends up calling people with more projection who create in Spanish (...). They once called me to collaborate with a show where (...) I would not only record, but also edit and write the

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[5] Catalan public broadcasting corporation
[6] Galician public broadcasting corporation

script of my section, but then they took for granted that I would not be paid for it". (NB) whilst also continuously pointing out at how support varies widely across different public administrations. All respondents mentioned either that "pro-Galician or left-wing parties" (K) or administrations governed by specific political parties -those being BNG or PSdeG[7]- are not only "more aware of the content creation ecosystem that exists in our country" (IO) but also "more sensitive to collaborating with us [Galician language content creators]" (MB). Thus, offline pre-existing political alignments regarding language extend their consequences to the online spaces.

As for the access to the private sector, some interviewees pointed out a recent trend of companies investing in partnerships with content creators in Galician. One influencer that also works in marketing and advertising mentioned that there is a generalized trend on the field by which companies increasingly lead towards hiring micro-influencers, something "(…) that also involves content in co-official languages (...). You have a smaller number of followers, of course, but you have a higher and more localized engagement" (K). This aligns with other respondents' experiences:

> "Obviously, these are private companies that want audiences [for their products], whatever language you speak (...) When I go to High Schools to give talks, I notice that some of the kids are surprised that I get to make ads in Galician with [international fashion and beauty brands] (...). But that's the key, that they see the utility there" (SS).

> "I was invited to a festival in Brussels, all expenses paid (...). You end up in a 5-star hotel just to see a few artists play live, you know? It's this kind of thing that makes people say: if they speak Galician, maybe I could too; and if they don't, they go, hey, this language is also good for these sorts of things" (RM).

However, many interviewees point out that there is still both stigma regarding language and a generational gap in relation to private support and collaborations with companies:

> "When you arrive (...) to a company or institution to offer a paid collaboration and you say, we have in our networks 10 000 followers, and in the last 90 days, over 300 000 visualizations (...). It would be logical for a small or medium-sized Galician company to decide to make some kind of collaboration with you (...) but at the same time these companies pay much more in traditional media [or to influencers who use Spanish]. But the impact on the people they are going to reach is much lower proportionally to the cost (...). There is an entry barrier, and it hurts creators that want to make a living

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[7] Galician Nationalist Block (Left wing nationalist and main opposition party in the region) and Party of the Galician Socialists (Center left, regional wing of the Spanish Socialist Party) respectively

out of it" (IO).

Another common emerging theme addresses the issue of the *linguistic compatibility of digital platforms*, i.e., whether the spaces in the digital domain are sensitive to the minoritized language in question and treat it on an equal footing vis-à-vis any other. This issue is divided into several strands, the first being the issue of interface and software language choice. Interviewees pointed out that platforms play a fundamental role, and that when "the interface is in Galician, as it is on Twitter or Facebook, it is much more attractive for a Galician-speaking person to dare to continue using their language, both to create and to consume (...) You feel a kind of familiarity" (CV). Another element mentioned by the previous interviewee is the relevance of more accurate automatic translation options within social media platforms:

> "On Instagram [texts] can be translated into all languages except Galician, even Basque (...). For example, the Basque actress in Money Heist [Itziar Ituño], posts everything in her language, but her international fans hit a click and they can already understand what she posts (...). Many Galician artists, or actors, post on Instagram in Spanish, apologizing that they have external audiences" (CV).

Similarly, many of the interviewees also mentioned how the inability to add automatic captions to their videos or posts hinders their work and, consequently, their professionalization. For instance, NB states that when he publishes a TikTok, he previously has to "[manually] place subtitles. That takes hours out of my day, and if I were to make the video in English, it's just a click" (NB). This, in turn, is signaled to be linked to how algorithms work, and the very ability of platforms to recognize one's language as such on the first place:

> "Algorithms do not even recognize us as a language, because I (…), when making YouTube videos, hit the automatic subtitle option and it says that I am speaking Spanish, or Italian, or Portuguese (...). And it is no longer just about subtitles, there are languages that have much greater projection capacity due to the ease that the algorithm provides you with by knowing how and whom to promote [you]" (NB).

The use of Galician in e-commerce and digital content creation faces significant challenges due to platform algorithms. According to the interviewees' accounts, Google penalizes websites in Galician, which hinders their visibility in searches. "If I were to advise them, I would tell them to put the default of their website in Spanish. It's the same for us [content creators]. We are not in a level playing field" (CV). This has been signaled to translate into unequal and frustrating competition, especially at the beginning, as their publications in Galician receive less recognition and dissemination, hurdling the digital realm's transformative potential of

language ideologies:

> "On the one hand, I think that algorithms do not reward content in Galician, in the sense that they give it much less diffusion, talking about TikTok, Reels… (...) We are starting to get our content to be consumed by Galician kids who do not speak Galician, but reaching them is tricky" (IO).

In general, interviewees point to the connivance of internet platforms and structures with hegemonic biases as a factor that hinders this access and the subsequent consolidation of content creation in their language:

> "[When compared to local Galician audiences] I reach a lot of people from outside because I do content on language, and I deal with the topic of Lusophony (...) In the end we are on the same plane of otherness if we consider Galician within Portuguese, right? (...) [But] the English-speaking culture is the normality of the human being, after all, all the rest of us exist only in an exoticism in front of the USA. We are all, in the end, otherness within a cultural hegemony that is not in Spain, in any way, no matter how much Spanish or Portuguese people cling to a cultural circle of their own. And that is reflected in how the networks work for Galician and, to a lesser extent, also for the rest" (MB).

THEME 2: Content creation

One of the other recurring themes is related to the *typology of online content* produced by these creators. Despite pointing out at how creating self-referential content is not only common, but also a way of "claiming identity", it is still "essential to overcome the idea that, since we are working in Galician, our topics are somehow predetermined by... societal beliefs" (NB). Consequently, interviewees agree on the normalizing potential of what they referred as either "neutral", "banal", "consumer" or "non-politicized" content:

> "In the briefing of the program (…) the aim was making basically everyone our target audience. Above all, escaping from the *galegueiros[8]* (...). People in Galicia are of different tastes. Talking about common topics allows us to welcome all kinds of audiences (…). There are Spanish speakers that follow us, likely not those with such a strong linguistic prejudice" (CV).

> "If we are asked for more coherence or political responsibility than those who make content in Spanish, then we are just ritualizing [Galician]. I sought to make a consumer product, shallow above all, for you to watch it and forget about your problems. And my

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[8] Derogatory term refering to people that are highly ideologized around language and nationalism in Galicia

audience shows" (SS).

Another factor that was mentioned, besides the subject of the content itself, is the *tone and style* in which this content is articulated. Many interviewees stressed the importance of "avoiding super serious and methodical tone" (MB), even when touching upon serious topics. Consequently, their success amongst the youth is linked to their ability to showcase themselves as "approachable" (RM). They go on to say that:

> "This is how I have reached younger generations who are more distant to Galician language, urban areas and circles, where, despite speaking Spanish, people start to consume cultural products [in Galician]" (RM).

In addition, interviewees hinted at how overly political or self-referential content derives in the crystallization of conscientized cliques and in greater amounts of hatred from people outside the speaking community:

> "If you talk about issues that have to do with language, identity, in an explicit way, there you generate more political conflict, and arouse more animosity (...). At the end you reach the same old people, and you end up going viral in certain sectors, some of them very militant, and you even receive more hatred from the far-right (...). They're watching who they hate and can't stand, talking about what they hate and can't stand" (IO).

> "We have to thank those who have been vindicating, of course (...) [and] I have an ideological baggage and I am positioned, (...) but I think it is more useful and normalizing to make video on a recipe or an unboxing (...). A language is useful for both good and bad things; a language must be used for making shit and for making wonderful stuff" (K).

A second element related to content creation is the *type of creators*, specifically in relation to their identity. Many interviewees mentioned that personal aspects such as gender, race, or ideology, significantly influence the audience's reception of their content, the array of hateful responses and, consequently, their agency for normalization as professionals. RM stated that "within social media there is a lot of misogyny, thus it is much easier to criticize a creator because of speaking Galician when the creator is a woman (...). I am aware of that, let's say, privilege, that I hold", whilst IO mentioned "that [hate comments and online backlash] happens much more to women than to men (...). The types of profiles engaged supporting hateful messages referring to minoritized languages usually share other characteristics of their own, such as racism or xenophobia, sexism or misogyny". Finally, NB pointed out that they "get hateful comments, because of speaking Galician, but (...) 90% (...) are also related to being a

trans person".

Discussion

The results show that the Internet and social media have facilitated a decentralization and individualization of creative work, making it more accessible to a greater number of minoritized languages speakers. Despite the limitations derived from the lack of resources and support from digital platforms (Karimi et al, 2022), private companies and public entities (a support that would otherwise be crucial in combatting the structural inequalities that persist in digital platforms and to ensure that creators can professionalize their work and make it known), the production and uploading of content in Galician represent, in themselves, a form of linguistic behavioral pattern that challenges assumptions that are constitutive of the hegemonic language ideology at hand; meaning that of a diglossic society.

The structure of social media allows these behaviors, often more limited in scope in offline contexts, to reach wider groups and diverse audiences. This phenomenon has several consequences. Firstly, contents in Galician, especially those with non-self-referential, contemporary and mass-consumption themes, contribute to the process of linguistic normalization by breaking down prejudices associated with Galician, such as its link to rurality, lack of education, conservatism and tradition (Mussa Juane et al, 2019). This impact is also tangible when looking at the ever-growing professionalization of Galician content creators, despite the abovementioned hurdles. These attitudinal and behavioral shifts (such as following accounts that produce content in Galician, as well as consuming or sharing such content) are expected to challenge and modify part of the diglossic society's repertoire of beliefs around the minoritized language at hand.

A salient aspect of the analysis involves how speakers and individuals with neutral or slightly positive views of the Galician language tend to normalize and strengthen their view of the language by observing its usefulness and presence in the digital realm. By seeing content in Galician that is accessible and relevant in everyday contexts, these individuals begin to recognize the practical and cultural value of the language (Razfar, 2012). This has resulted in a significant increase in both the quantity and quality of content, as well as investment by brands and companies inside and outside Galicia. This contributes to improving the perception of Galician, presenting it as a viable and relevant language in modern contexts, positively impacting its prestige. In addition, the use of humor and an accessible tone are effective

strategies to appeal to younger and urban generations, which in turn helps to dismantle certain stereotypes associated with Galician. Yet, it must be mentioned that the identity of the creator also seems to play a relevant role in the reception of the content. Personal aspects such as gender, race and sexual orientation significantly influence how content is received and the amount of hate it receives. Women and trans people, for example, experience higher levels of hostility, which affects their ability to normalize the use of Galician in the digital realm. This finding underscores the intersection between personal identities and linguistic attitudes, and how dynamics of power and prejudice operate at multiple levels.

On another hand, the presence of Galician content on digital platforms also has a polarizing effect, both attitudinal and ideological (Van Sketelenburg, 2014). This phenomenon occurs because the visibility of Galician and its use in spaces previously dominated by Spanish or English provoke both positive and negative extreme reactions. Hate speech in networks has become more common because of phenomena such as the Online Disinhibition Effect and deterritorialization (Pérez Lago, 2022). This calls into question one of the constituent elements of the concept of "breathing spaces" (that of safety) (Cunliffe, 2021; Belmar & Glass, 2019). However, the corpus under analysis also indicates that these negative attitudes motivate a net positive polarization, in which both Galician speakers and non-Galician speakers; both Galician and non-Galician audiences, act in solidarity with content creators. Accordingly, these report a considerable increase in the number of followers, views and collaborations after episodes of online hate.

In summary, and as theorized, the online environment moderates the relationship between linguistic attitudes and ideologies, ultimately resulting in a normalizing trend for minoritized languages. This moderation implies that, although the digital environment presents challenges, it also offers significant opportunities for the revitalization of languages such as Galician. On the one hand, the reach of Galician content to very diverse audiences is normalizing in itself, as it posits Galician as a viable and relevant language in modern and global contexts, thus challenging stereotypes and diglossia. Yet, as noted, the idea of "breathing spaces" on the Internet does not seem to hold up at the empirical level. The notion that the Internet has enabled the existence of safe and hostility-free spaces for minoritized language speakers remains an illusion. While digital spaces may be, in general, normalizing, they do not offer complete protection against radical and hostile responses. However, this lack of security also has a paradoxical effect: it fosters linguistic awareness. By confronting hate and discrimination first-

hand, many users are forced to rethink their relationship to their language and their minoritized status. Exposure to explicit hate speech and linguistic discrimination makes it clear that minoritization is not just a local or superficial problem, but a deep and pervasive one. Through these experiences, the Internet acts as a catalyst for reflection and linguistic awareness.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the question *of to what extent and in what ways the inclusion of minoritized language communities in the digital realm has shaped and reshaped their pre-existing language ideologies*? In addition, we have investigated the *specific factors contributing to such changes in linguistic ideologies*. To answer these questions, a research design based on semi-structured interviews with Galician content creators was conducted, thus allowing us to explore their experiences and perceptions in an in-depth and nuanced manner.

On the one hand, this work has contributed to the sociolinguistics research literature by offering a meaningful empirical contribution through qualitative thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews. Until now, there has been very scarce research on social media and minoritized languages and, in particular, there have been no studies using this sort of research design that implements both data collection through semi-structured interviews and the phenomena of content creation as the object of study. As a result, the approach of the study is innovative in nature, as it brings new perspectives and detailed understandings based on the lived experiences of the interviewees. On the other hand, at the level of theoretical contribution, this study has helped to understand the mechanisms by which the digital domain acts as a variable that influences the relationship between linguistic attitudes, projecting them to wider audiences and ultimately modifying the belief repertoire of linguistic ideologies. Moreover, the thematic iterations have allowed for signaling the elements and dynamics that explain such changes, thus addressing the second element of the research aim. In addition, this work has helped to challenge much of the scarce literature existing to date on speakers of minoritized languages on the Internet, thus broadening our knowledge on how these groups navigate and use the digital space in the quest for linguistic normalization.

It shall be mentioned that this work's design as a case study may have limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, and even though a comparative analysis may have enriched the results, this approach was required because of the lack of theorization in this field, something that has already been tackled earlier within the methodological section. The case study design,

together with the constructivist approach to thematic analysis, inspired by discourse analysis techniques, enabled the process of corpus thematization, as well as the development and discussion of results, to be informed by a deep and situated knowledge of the sociolinguistic, political and economic context of the speaker community being researched.

It is worth mentioning that, although Galician may show parallelisms to other minoritized languages across the world -especially those that hold legal status and/or widespread use, such as Catalan, Basque, Spanish in the United States, or Cantonese, amongst many others-, which may well suggest that our findings could be relevant to other similar contexts, an important limitation to be addressed is the Eurocentric tendency in academic research on linguistic minorities. Most studies tend to focus on Euro-Western contexts and the relationship of minoritized languages versus global languages such as English, Spanish or French, which neglects the experiences and realities of minoritized language communities in other parts of the world, potentially perpetuating biases and inaccurate generalizations about the relevance of, in this case, the impact that the digital realm has on normalization processes and minoritized languages.

Be that as it may, this work's limitations do nothing but showcase the need for future research in the field at hand. On the one hand, it is suggested that comparative analyses should be developed to test this studies' theoretical outputs within other contexts. Another element that could not be explored in depth but emerged in the interviews is institutional support. It would be valuable to investigate the relationship between public and private institutions and social networks in diglossic contexts, as well as the dynamics between these and other types of traditional media. Moreover, the corpus shows how issues of gender, race, class can play a role in the normalizing process. Thus, the inclusion of research designs that take into account an intersectional aspect would contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics generated by social networks vis-à-vis these communities. Also, and as mentioned above, ignoring the experiences of minoritized language communities in non-Euro-Western contexts risk losing valuable information and unique perspectives that could enrich our overall understanding of linguistic diversity both off and online. To address this limitation, it is crucial that future research adopts a more inclusive and global approach, ensuring a more equitable and accurate representation of linguistic dynamics in digital environments, thus promoting a broader and more diverse dialogue. In any case, given the continuously volatile and changing nature of digital environments, it is essential to continue research to maintain an up-to-date understanding of how these changes affect

minoritized languages and their communities, thus avoiding the sparseness and geographical and temporal separation of existing studies.

Overall, the present study has yielded a detailed and nuanced understanding of the influence of the digital domain on the linguistic ideologies of minoritized language communities, providing relevant empirical and theoretical contributions. These have not only broadened our knowledge of the phenomenon under study, but also delineate clear paths for future research in this dynamic and constantly evolving field. It is important to note that the Internet, as a space and object for enquiry, will continue to be characterized by its volatile and ever-evolving nature, one in which both positive and negative dynamics coexist. What really stands out, nonetheless, is the ongoing need to further our understanding of how languages adapt and develop into and across these new communicative structures, thus constituting a highly promising and enriching area for academic production and research.

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Annexes

The discussion on ideological shifts has been approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives that focus, in one way or another, on the exercise of communicative interaction. The theory of Cultural Hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci (1981), posits that the dominant groups in society maintain their power through the dissemination of their own ideologies, values and beliefs, which are then assumed by society as a sort of uncontestable shared ethical rationality. Gramsci argued, from a place that could be methodologically labeled as a critical analysis of culture, that ideological changes occur when subordinate groups challenge and eventually overthrow these hegemonic beliefs, leading to a change in the power structure and cultural domination. From a communicative perspective, this theory highlights the importance of media and cultural discourses in understanding how certain ideas and values are perpetuated in society. That is, in the messages underlying or embedded in the ordinary communicative exercise, both public and private.

Similarly, Social Identity Theory, proposed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1986), emphasizes the role of individuals' identification with social groups in the formation of their beliefs and ideologies. Through experimental studies and surveys, Tajfel and Turner found that even minimal and artificial group categories have the potential to generate ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination, suggesting that social identification plays a fundamental role in the formation of intergroup attitudes and relationships. In communicative terms, this theory highlights the influence of group belonging on the construction of intergroup communication, which may have significant implications for the perception of media messages and the dynamics of public opinion.

Moreover, postmodernism, represented by thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard (1992), fundamentally questions the existence of dominant and fixed narratives, highlighting the contingency and plurality of knowledge and truth, squarely confronting the very concept of rationality. Lyotard argued that grand metanarratives are no longer bearable by contemporary society, as a plurality of perspectives and a sense of uncertainty about reality has permeated in the last century. From the communicative level, postmodern thought stresses the importance of the diversity of discourses and the multiplicity of voices in the public space. By means of this

unfettered and open exchange of ideas, alongside an embracement of difference as inherent to human condition, Lyotard theorizes that it is possible to reach agreements that are acceptable to all parties involved, thus strengthening mutual legitimization and promoting the stability of the political system.

Likewise, Habermas (2004) offers a communicative model in which consensus and respect in decision-making or political and public discourse are only possible when structured in a discussion and deliberation characterized by an ideal speech situation. According to the German philosopher, it could be affirmed that there are universal values that are generated through communicative interaction and that, therefore, morality and ethics respond to the communicative dimension of reason -something that sets him apart from postmodernist assumptions. However, for this model to work properly, it is crucial to overcome the inequality of speech. He argues that communicative barriers, derived from factors such as educational level or purchasing power, as well as discursive aspects such as gender identity or racial status, and, for the case at hand, ideologies that give value to different languages and their modalities, must be eliminated. Only in this way will all subjects be able to participate equally in the elaboration and articulation of opinions, as well as in the ability to perceive, understand and question the opinions of others in an objective manner. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives offer a complex understanding of ideological shifts, highlighting different aspects such as power and hegemony, identity, universal ethics, and micronarrative diversity; and despite differing in their methodological, as well as ontological and epistemological approaches and theoretical emphases, they similarly locate the origin of ethical-valuative and ideological change in the transformative capacity of discourse, human interaction and communicational structures.

Annex II. Thematic Analysis Map
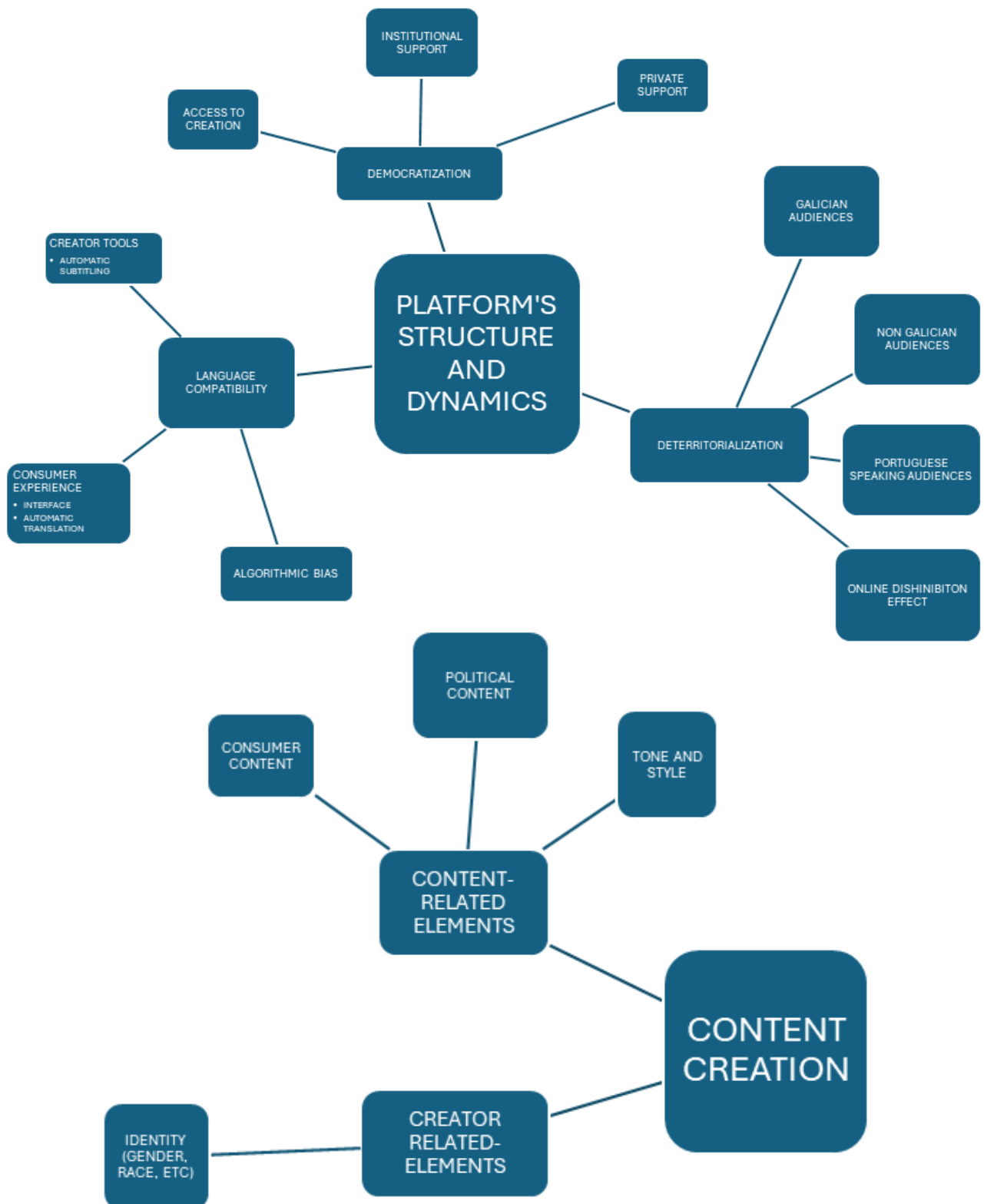
Source: Self elaboration using the data of this present investigation.

Theme	Subtheme	Descriptors	Example quote
Q1. Content Creation	*Q1.1. Content-related elements*	• Type of content and its relation to language ideologies/attitudes • Tone and style and its relation to l. id/att.	"If we are asked for more coherence or political responsibility than those who make content in Spanish, then we are just ritualizing [Galician]. I sought to make a consumer product, shallow above all, for you to watch it and forget about your problems. And my audience shows" (SS).
	Q1.2. Creator-related elements	• Content creator's identity and its relation to l. id/att.	"I know that within social media there is a lot of misogyny, thus it is much easier to criticize a creator because of speaking Galician when the creator is a woman (...). I am aware of that, let's say, privilege, that I hold" (IO).
Q2. Platform's structure and dynamics	*Q2.1. Deterritorialization*	• Ability to reach wider audiences and its relation to l. id/att. • Willingness to express beliefs regarding l. id. due to perceived distance	"These spaces are freer (...) because of the very structure of the Internet. Back in the day to produce a record (...) you had to find a record company that would even listen to you (...). There has always been music in Galician, of course, but it has never been so easy to individualize creative work" (K).
	Q2.2. Democratization	• Access to content creation • Access to support from public/private institutions	"By democratizing the internet, we also run the risk of democratizing self-imposed prejudices (...). Before, if you didn't speak Galician in your neighborhood to those who might had seem to be outsiders, on the internet everyone is an outsider, at least at first glance. That is why our work is important" (CV).
	Q2.3. Language Compatibility	• Consumer experience (Language interfaces, autotranslation) • Creator tools (Automatic subtitling) • Algorithms compatibility with minoritized lang.	"On Instagram [texts] can be translated into all languages except Galician, even Basque (...). For example, the Basque actress in Money Heist [Itziar Ituño], posts everything in her language, but her international fans hit a click and they can already understand what she posts" (CV).

Source: Self elaboration using the data of this present investigation.