

Maintaining & challenging the standard:

Grassroots online public language policing as a biopower in Finnish language discussion groups

(De)standardiseerimine keeles ja kasutuses, 24. aprill 2025

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Content

- I. Language policing as a biopower
- II. Language policing in Finnish
Facebook language discussion
groups
- III. Conclusions



(Museovirasto, 1939–1944)

I Language policing as a biopower

Language policing (1/2)

- A regulatory process of language
 - ”– – the notion of ‘policing’ in the domain of language in this sense: as **the production of ‘order’**—normatively organised and policed conduct—which is infinitely detailed and regulated by a variety of actors.” (Blommaert et al., 2009, p. 203)
- Traditionally institution-led and statutory
- Policies typically include mechanisms which monitor, control, and regulate language use (Cushing et al., 2021)
- Language ideologically motivated

Language policing (2/2)

- The exclusive power held by institutional actors to drive sociolinguistic change has been challenged by critique on language policy (e.g., Shohamy, 2006) and language-ideological research (e.g., Blommaert, 2019)
- Not solely a top-down, overt-covert mechanism but practiced by multiple actors and in non-traditional domains
- Power in the context of language is widely distributed and consistently reproduced

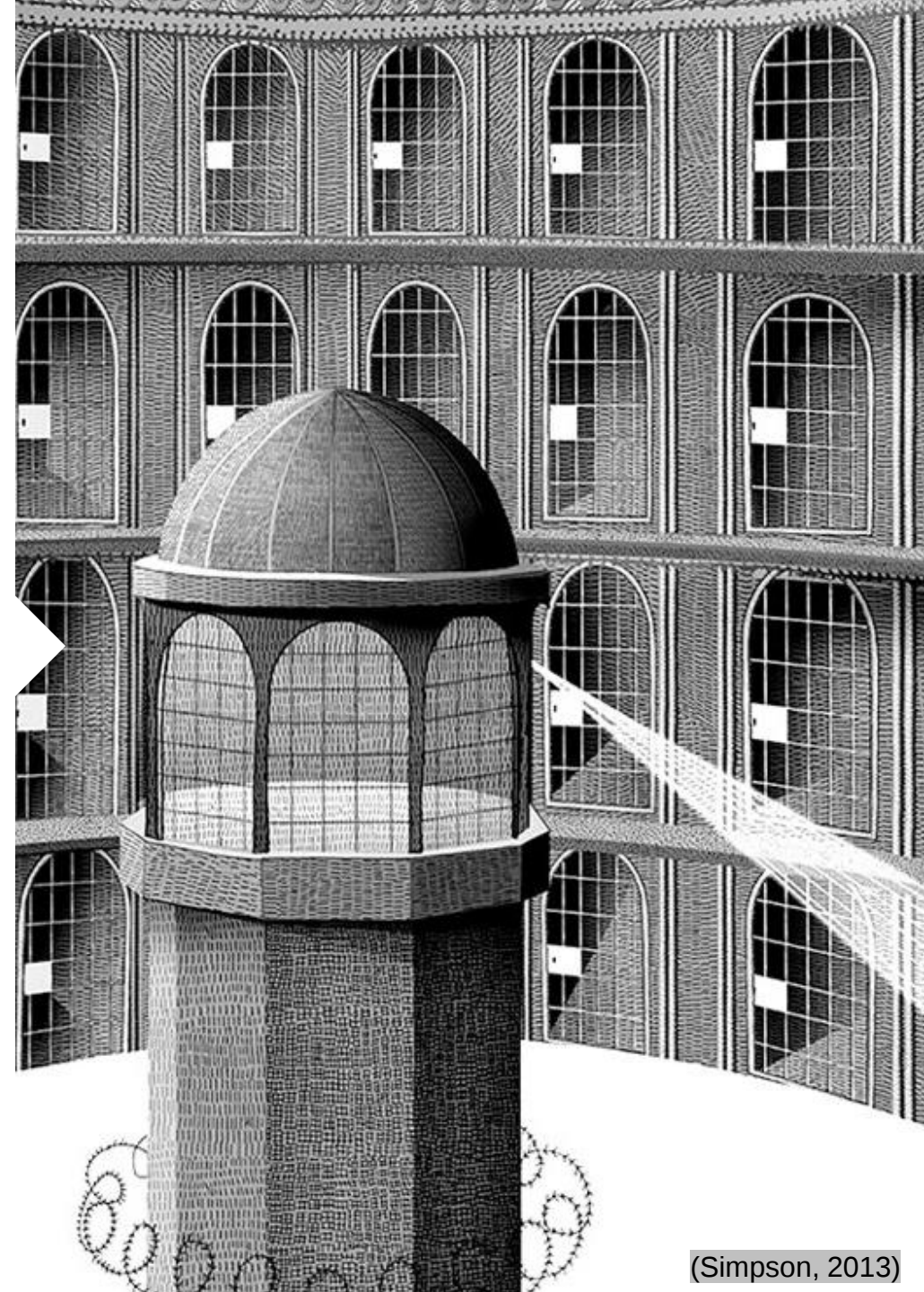


Alternative lens to power and language (1/2)

- Foucault's (1980) **biopower** offers a concept of power that operates through surveillance, discipline, and normalization
- The goals of intervening, controlling, and regulating human life
- Works through **norms** which are used to measure and appraise life and behavior

Alternative lens to power and language (2/2)

- **Normation** is a disciplinary technique enforcing existing norms
- **Normalization** establishes the norm by studying the “normal curves” of a society
- As norms are internalized, biopower operates as universal surveillance
- Power structures shifted to less visible forms



Internet as a norm enforcer (1)

- Internet and social media have become tools and platforms for many forms of regulation
- Norms are the primary social control mechanism online, and internet and social media have changed the way norm regulation is done (Klonick, 2016)
- Online spaces are used to leverage biopower over others (Cagle, 2019), i.e., tracking behavior, punishing deviations
- When the target is language, leads to **online public language policing**

Online language policing research (1)

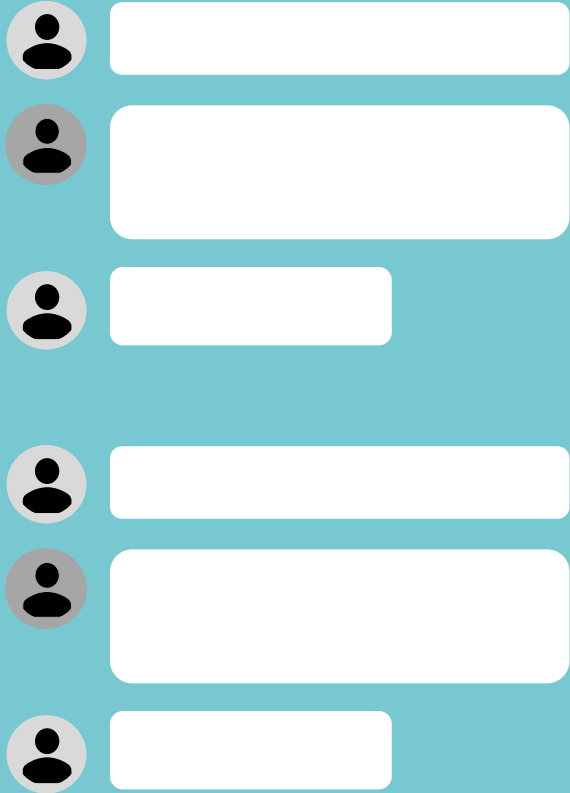
- Prior studies have examined “Grammar Nazi” Facebook groups, Jodel messages, forum threads (Sherman & Švelch, 2014; Heuman, 2020; Reyes & Bonnin, 2016)
- Consistent findings: prioritization of standard norms and dominant language ideologies
- Language policing as a way to put language-ideological beliefs into practice



Standard Finnish & its ideologies (1)

- Similarly to other (Western) standard languages, Standard Finnish carries symbolic capital, economic, and social rewards and serves as a marker of status and social bonds
- Although current language policy trends towards de-standardization, Standard Finnish remains dominant in public life
- Dominant, underlying ideologies include standard language ideology, monolingualism, and linguistic purism (e.g., Kalliokoski et al., 2018; Pajunen, 2023; Rintala, 1998)

II Online public language policing in Finnish Facebook discussion groups



Data (1)

- Collected from three public Facebook groups dedicated to Finnish linguistic problems
- From December 2022 to February 2023
- Includes 150 Facebook posts and 1,767 comments
- Usually screenshots or photos of (perceived) norm deviations
- Anonymization of the data due to the nature of the groups being a “personal public”

Method (1)

- Theory-driven content analysis
- Based on Murumaa-Mengel and Muuli's (2021) shaming categorization (denunciatory, pedagogic, recreational, participative and reflective)
- Added a sixth category (normalizing)

Misogynist content exposé pages on Instagram: Five types of shamings, moderators and audience members

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to explore the audience and moderator types on Instagram's misogynist content exposé pages (MCEPs) - where people share and shame screenshots depicting gendered online hate, harassment, and men's sexual entitlement. We have framed our study with concepts like refracted publics, imagined audiences, and shaming as a social practice, and we set out to look for communicative shaming practices beyond the theoretically well-established reintegrative/disintegrative distinction. Analysis of qualitative online interviews with the moderators of MCEPs (n = 6), combined with both qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the posts' captions (n = 100) and comments (n = 1325) helps us understand the mechanisms, types, and aims of online shamings and dive deeper into understanding the different roles people take in these communicative practices.

Results of this study present five main types of shamings and the linked moderator and audience types: pedagogic shaming (moderators as Educators, audiences as Instructors), denunciatory shaming (Judges and Angry Mobbers), recreational shaming (Entertainers and Jokesters), participative shaming (Community Builders and Support Squadders) and reflective shaming (Looking Glasses and Mirrors). Theoretical types can be combined and modified in practice, based on the strategies the moderators are using, aims of communication, and specific constellations of audiences.

Keywords: misogyny, gendered online hate, vigilantism, online sexual harassment, Instagram, online shaming, audiences, moderators

What and whose language is policed? (1/2)

- Focuses mainly on Standard Finnish (138 posts) and rarely on non-Standard Finnish (12), such as colloquial language or jargon
- Targets public language, e.g., news (83), ads (17), announcements (16) etc.
- Targets are rarely individual, named persons, but instead organizations, newspapers, and "job titles"



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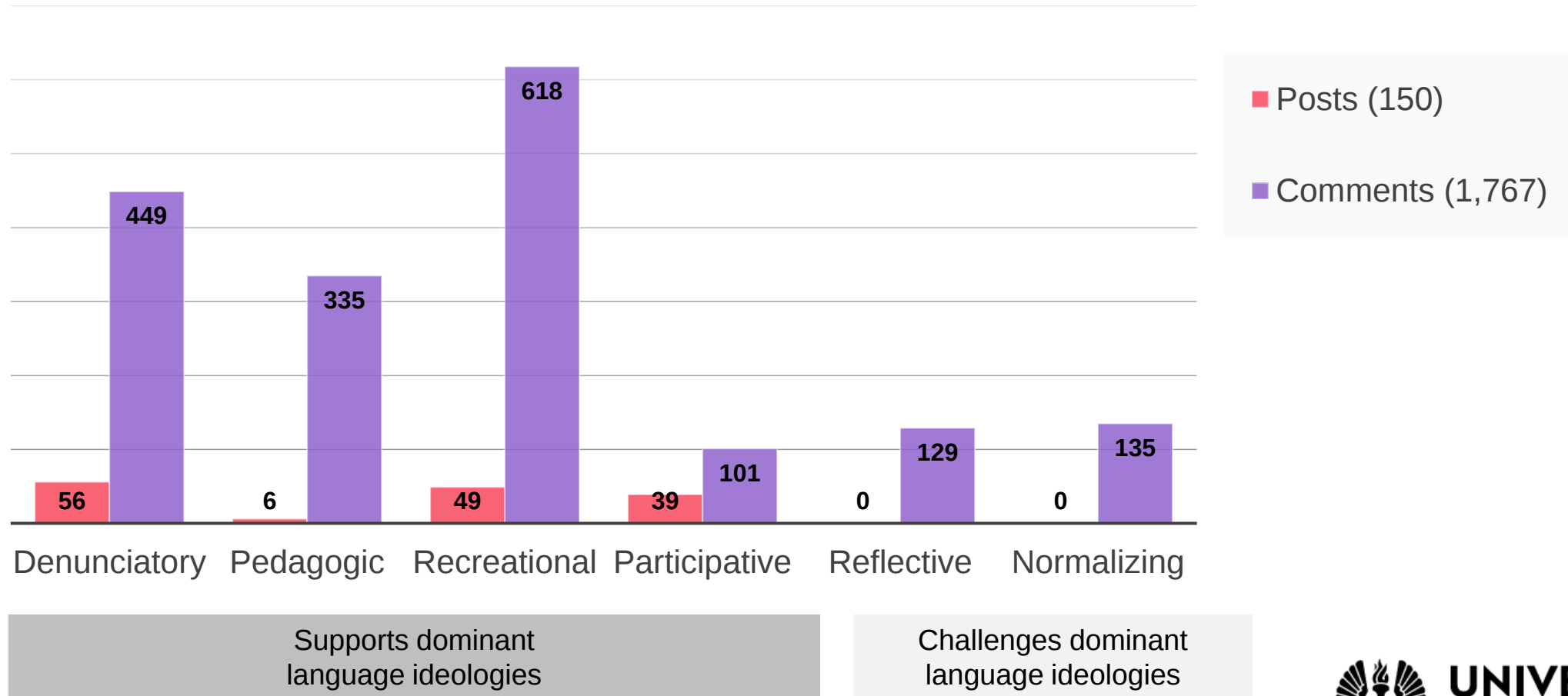
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What and whose language is policed? (2/2)

- Top policed (perceived) norm deviations related to orthography (41), word choice (32), sentence structure (20), compound words (22) etc.
- In third (60) of the posts the policed language did not violate codified Standard norms
- Leans towards hypercorrectness and personal interpretations of Standard Finnish

Language policing categories (1)



Denunciatory language policing (1)

- Informal language shaming
- Denouncements of (perceived) norm deviations, e.g., mockery and insults
- Naming-and-shaming as a tactic to expose and express disapproval over (perceived) violators of Standard Finnish
- The biopower exercised takes on a punitive form



It sounded jarring to me even though I work for the company. Times and language are changing, but in what direction?

'Särähti minun korvaani vaikka olen kyseisessä firmassa töissä. Ajat ja kieli muuttuvat mutta mihin suuntaan?'



Too difficult words for the Instagram section of the magazine

'Liian vaikeita sivistyssanoja toimituksen Instagram-osastolle'



Language rapists

'Kielen raiskaajat'



That [conjugation mistake] is really annoying. Don't they teach or learn about spelling in school.

'Tuo on todella ärsyttävää. Eikö koulussa opeteta tai opita oikeinkirjoitusta.'



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Pedagogic language policing (1)

- Educational and instructive approach
- Posts and comments often include metalinguistic comments with exposed corrections, e.g., a “correct” form is stated with an explanation on how a (perceived) norm deviation should be corrected
- Leaves no room for negotiation: the correction itself carries the standard’s authority (Heuman, 2020)
- Instances of hypercorrection show that the ideal of Standard Finnish is more important than actual proficiency in it



That's quite correct, but the corresponding phrase at the beginning is wrong: it says the strike would affect “10 000 [no inflectional ending] workers”, it should be “10 000 [partitive case inflectional ending] workers”.

’Tuo on ihan korrekti, mutta alussa on vastaava ilmaus väärin: sen mukaan lakko koskisi "10 000 työntekijää", pitäisi olla "10 000:ta työntekijää".’



”From his car” would be good

””Tämän autosta” olisi hyvä’



*From the New Tricks show

*’Ryhmä Pullman -ohjelmasta’ [instead of Ryhmä Pullman-ohjelmasta]

Recreational language policing (1)

- Humorous posting and entertainment
- Contains comments and posts ridiculing, joking and laughing at (perceived) norm deviations
- Most common humor techniques were absurdity and puns (incongruity theory) as well as irony, repetition, and ridicule (superiority theory)
- Acts as a social corrective with a disciplinary function: target of ridicule is shamed



That made me laugh :D! Funny.
'Toihan sai naurahtamaan :D! Hauska.'



Th is is gre at
'Tä mä on huip pu'



now you're making me choke on laughing!!!
'nyt tukehun kyllä nauruun!!!'



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Participative language policing (1)

- Predominantly positive, community-building aspect
- Characterized by social participation, e.g., seeking help from peers in linguistic problems, sharing personal encounters with funny (perceived) norm deviations, and thanking others for good finds
- Peripheral participation, still motivated by a desire to e.g., listen in or stay updated in matters
- Utilizing the community to surveil one's own linguistic knowledge



Who thinks there is something wrong with the text?

'Ketä on sitä mieltä, että tekstissä on jotain vikaa?'



The word in the quote above sparked a discussion at the breakfast table. What do you group members think: is denegration such a common term that its meaning can be assumed to be familiar to all newspaper's readers?

'Oheinen sitaatissa oleva sana herätti keskustelua aamukahvipöydässä. Mitä mieltä te ryhmäläiset olette: onko degeneraatio niin yleinen termi, että sen merkityksen voidaan olettaa olevan tuttu kaikille sanomalehden lukijoille?'



My doctor's report said: "Piano loss still a goal." There was no piano to lose, but there was weight. [weight 'paino']

'Mun omassa lääkärin tekemässä raportissa luki: "Pianon pudotus edelleen tavoitteena." Pianoo ei ollut pudottaa, painoa sen sijaan oli.'



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Reflective language policing (1)

- Questions the groups' understandings of Standard Finnish and its monolithic nature
- Positioning as a strategy
- Instead of treating (perceived) norm deviations as linguistic incompetence, it explains them with practical reasons (being in a rush or typing on a phone)
- Portraying language policers as overly zealous



It doesn't take much to trigger ya since you're offended by something so small

'No onpa sulla matala ärsyyntymiskynnys kun noin pienestä nokkiisi otat'



I make a lot of mistakes myself when I do a lot of tapping on a small screen!

'Itselläni tulee paljonkin virheitä kun naputtelen paljon pikkuruudulle!'



One s letter came as a typo. Unfortunate, but it doesn't say anything about anyone's writing skills.

'Yksi s-kirjain tullut näppäilyvirheenä. Ikävää, mutta ei kerro mitään kenenkään kirjoitustaidosta.'



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Normalizing language policing (1)

- An admiring and accepting perspective
- Celebrated stylistic and structural non-conformity by e.g., praising innovative wordplay and defending deviations based on colloquial language
- By reinterpreting (perceived) norm deviations as acceptable, norms are positioned as constraints on good and creative language use



I think they were going for a fun play on words – –, and they succeeded.

'Minusta on tavoiteltu hauskaa sanaleikkiä – – ja ihan onnistuttukin.'



This may be sinful but I wouldn't even look at the grammar rules. Good language works and sounds pleasant to the ear.

'Voi olla, että tämä on synnillistä mutta en tuijottaisi edes pilkuntarkkoja kielioppisääntöjä. Hyvä kieli toimii ja sointuu korvaan.'



The forms in your original post have probably become established in the vernacular. Well, no matter, there's nothing you can't understand.'

'Avauksessasi olevat muodot ovat tainneet vakiintua puhekieleen. Eipä siinä mitään, eivät haittaa ymmärtämistä. '



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III *Conclusions*

Findings summarized (1)

- Mundane online interactions maintain Standard Finnish norms via surveillance and norm negotiation
- Most policing (denunciatory, pedagogic, recreational, participative) reinforces codified norms, while reflective and normalizing policing challenge them by legitimizing deviations
- Examined online public language policing aligns more with community empowerment rather than digilantism, i.e., upholding collective norms instead of shaming individuals
- The potential societal impact of habitualized online practices in offline realities

Thank you!

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