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New speakers: new linguistic subjects

Joan Pujolar

Abstract: In this chapter, I take up the exercise of analyzing the experience of “new speakers” from the perspective of studies on forms of subjectivity. “New speakers” constitutes a new social category that emerged in the last decades in contexts where regional minority languages were spoken in Europe. The category designates those speakers of the minority language that have acquired it through formal learning and, therefore, are seen as different from the traditional community of native speakers. I argue that studies on subjectivity are relevant to understand the new speakers phenomenon because these perspectives provide a critique of the ideologies of modernity that constituted the category of “native speaker” besides the conventional hierarchies of race, gender and sexuality. As such, the study of speaker identities arguably makes a distinct contribution to intersectionality studies. To develop this argument, I discuss the implications of Thomas Bonfiglio’s (2010) history of the native speaker concept and I point at the connections with the debates on “non-native” speakers and varieties in Applied Linguistics. After this, I bring in some biographies from new speakers of Catalan that experience the process of adopting their new language as being in tension with their other language-based identities. These tensions emerge much more acutely with new speakers who can be constructed as racially different. This shows, I argue, that the processes of subjectification associated with modernity still favor durable and consistent forms of identity in which becoming and hybridity find no space. However, today’s increasing mobility and diversity fills the social landscape with these in-between subjects that must constantly travel across boundaries and categories.

New speakers: new linguistic subjects¹

Joan Pujolar

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics has been a late comer to the debates on subjectivity that have dominated the social sciences at the turn of the millennium. Debates on subjectivity have been central to the literature on gender, sexuality, colonialism or race within the social sciences. These debates concern themselves with how forms of social categorization inform people’s lives and how people respond to them. Although sociolinguists often address the same issues, they draw upon different vocabularies, predominantly focusing on issues of “identity” or on the critique of language ideologies.

Debates on subjectivity have mainly focused on the construction of gender and race (Brah 1993; Butler 1990), but here I will focus specifically on language-based ethnicity. What I see in the literature on subjectivity is a range of analytical tools and procedures of object formation that enable nuanced understandings of how people experience, conform to, or disrupt social

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categorizations. In this chapter, I take up the thread of sociolinguists such as Alison Phipps (2006), Claire Kramsch (2009), Brigitta Busch (2012), Luisa Martín-Rojo (2016) and, more recently, Tim McNamara (2019) to strengthen the case for the incorporation of a subjectivity perspective in work on multilingualism. To do so, I will draw on my current research on new speakers of Catalan.

Work on “new speakers” has recently developed in Europe amongst researchers of regional minority languages (O’Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015). “New speakers”, in its most restrictive sense, refers to non-native speakers, i.e. people who have learned a given language not by family or early socialization, but through other means such as schooling, adult education or other forms of later socialization. In communities such as the Basques, Galicians, Occitans, Irish, Welsh and Bretons, new speakers have become a distinct group in the sense that they are generally identified, characterized, criticized or defended in political debates. In some communities, there are widely known terms to name them: *Euskaldunberri* in the Basque Country, *Neofalantes* in Galicia, *Neo-brétonnants* in Brittany. Sociolinguistic interest on new speakers can be traced to earlier articles by Robert (2009) on Welsh learners, by Moal (2009) on the *nouveaux locuteurs* of Breton, and to the work of O’Rourke and Ramallo (2011; 2013) on the new communities of speakers in Galicia and Ireland. These works basically pointed out that new speakers were perceived as a problematic category, a form of belonging to the speech community that was at odds with received notions of national identity and linguistic authenticity.

New speakers do not constitute a new phenomenon in the sense that there have always been multilingual people. However, it seems relevant to ask why they are salient now as a social category, and what the implications are. I would argue that new speakers emerge as a kind of anomaly within modernist paradigms of linguistic rationality, and this is why interesting connections can be explored with current debates and social movements on gender, sexuality or race. Moreover, attention to language-based identities arguably complements the conversation on intersectionality (Yuval-Davis 2011) by expanding the range of experiences in which axes of power interact in complex ways.

In this chapter, I explore the specific experience of linguistic embodiment of first-language speakers of Spanish who undertake to speak Catalan in their social lives in Catalonia, an officially bilingual region in North-Eastern Spain. I purposely address the experience of people who cannot be differentiated by any feature other than language to explore the specific affordances that language-based categorizations may arguably offer to subjectivity debates. By doing so, I hope to make evident the conditions and processes that make social categorizations both resilient and negotiable in specific contexts. In Catalonia, most Spanish speakers are conversant in Catalan; but their possibilities of *acting* as speakers of Catalan are not proportional to their competence. To become speakers of Catalan *in practice* demands delicate work to circumvent or confront subtle symbolic boundaries.

In the first part of this chapter I put forward a hypothesis on why the category “new speakers” has become salient now. O’Rourke, Pujolar and Ramallo (2015) and Martín-Rojo and Márquez-Reiter (2019) contend that debates on new speakers respond to inherited notions about “native speakers” that have been reproduced by modern nationalism. So, I begin by exploring the genealogy of the concept of the “native speaker” and discuss the connections between the “new speaker” phenomenon and the on-going debates on “non-native speakers” in applied linguistics. My argument is that these debates emerge as a dissonance in the face of nationalist and colonialist understandings that co-naturalize (Rosa 2019) language and culture. As such, they query received understandings about language that are characteristic of modernity, a

condition that they share with the alternative forms of experiencing and politicizing gender, race and sexuality in the current world.

After this, I add a conceptual summary of the ideas that I take from the literature on subjectivity that addresses how subjects confront culturally constructed categories, which I apply in this case to speaker categories. This is where I move on to briefly describe the Catalan context, with a specific focus on how the linguistic categorizations of people have been historically enacted and transformed. I provide examples of narratives of new speakers of Catalan that I analyze by drawing on the language of the subjectivity literature. On this basis, I describe the subtle ways through which speakers confront and circumvent the traditional ethnic boundaries associated to speaking either Catalan or Spanish. I note that visible minorities experience more difficulties to enact these same strategies, and I finally reflect on the fact that the forms of social classification inherited from modernity get increasingly contested in contemporary society.

2. Speakers: a history

Historian Thomas Bonfiglio (2010) has reconstructed the historical contingencies that led to the emergence of the concept of "native speaker" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along with nationalist and evolutionist ideologies that supported the articulation of national states and colonial rule. The term (together with the older "mother tongue") was transferred from the vocabularies of the scientific disciplines into the political discourses and administrative procedures that characterized the new forms of governance. However, it was never critically examined, even when it played a key role in drawing the political map of Europe after the First World War. For many decades, it was also assumed that "normal" native speakers were generally monolingual, as hybridity was considered a moral anomaly. Moreover, both "mother tongue" and "native speaker" presuppose that ancestry and/or biological reproduction are important, and it is not by chance if they were used in the construction of racial and colonial hierarchies. These notions only began to be queried by linguists during the 1980s with the work of Kachru (1982) on the emergence of "new" English-speaking communities in former colonies, and with Paikeday's (1985) original survey about the ideas that leading linguists had (or rather, didn't have) about what constituted the ideal native speaker of generative grammarians. Phillipson (1992) and Pennycook (1994) later contended that the idea of the native speaker was being mobilized in the world of English language teaching in a way that benefitted (largely) white British or American teachers as well as the economic interests of Universities and Publishers from the Anglo-Saxon "core" countries.

This is a short appraisal of a long and intense debate that has, at some points, transcended the boundaries of the English language teaching world and inspired the work of sociolinguists working on migration, race relations or globalized cultural expressions (Doerr 2009; Androustopoulos 2004; Rampton 1990; Creese, Blackledge, and Takhi 2014). As Widdowson (1994) pointed out, this is not so much a linguistic problem but one of "ownership." In Bordieuan terms, it affects the processes of recognition as to what categories of social actor are invested with the right to establish what constitutes appropriate linguistic capital or appropriate linguistic performance. In the world of foreign language teaching, this is not just a conceptual or abstract problem; but one with palpable implications as to who can teach, what curricular targets must be set, what evaluation criteria should be applied, who can publish educational resources or distribute accreditations, and what persons and institutions can act as leaders in the

field. This is why one productive line of inquiry has focused on the pedagogical affordances of “non-native” language teachers (Medgyes 1994; Braine 1999). This line of enquiry has produced comparisons of teaching styles, analyses of perceptions or ideologies of participants and stakeholders in education, of institutional hiring practices, and so on (see Moussu and Llorca 2008 for a detailed review). Much less attention has been paid to professions associated to translation (but see Pokorn 2004; Cronin 2003), or other forms of linguistic boundary crossing, such as translanguistic or multilingual literary writing (Grönstrand, Huss, and Ralf Kauranen 2019).

3. The speaking subject

The concept of "subjectivity" overlaps in multiple ways with that of "identity" and it does not seem prudent to contrast them in their definitions, but rather in the questions and themes addressed (McNamara 2019). It is a conversation that began with Foucault's (1983) works on power, which raise the question of how people can resist or change power relationships. The basic concept of the subject seems to refer to the works of Georg W. F. Hegel, in the idea that no social status can be assumed without the recognition of the other. Master and slave, for example, need each other to assume and enact their status. Foucault focused on the ideas of "normality", which defines what state of affairs is in consonance with the dominant discourse, and that of "abnormality", i.e. its deviations. For Foucault, institutions played an important role in shaping the subject through discourse and disciplinary procedures, to the point that many of his readers have labeled him a radical determinist.

The concept of subjectivity became the axis of three main themes: colonial relations, racial relations and gender relations, which has evolved into “queer theory” and other themes. Edward Said’s (1978) “Orientalism” is seen as post-colonial studies’ seminal work. Said was interested in how specific forms of academic knowledge had participated in the articulation of colonial projects. He attributed an important role to 19th century philologies in the production of modern forms of anti-Semitism and racism. Said, like his predecessor Frantz Fanon (1952), supported his arguments with great doses of introspection, so that the analysis of the phenomenon was unfolding in a very personal key. The same can be said of Butler (1990), who contributed to the appropriation of the concept by social movements linked to gender and sexuality. Butler explored the processes that force a person to assume a gender/sexual identity or, alternatively, provoke their proscription from it. Each society possesses a repertoire of behaviors and ideas associated with being a man or a woman, and with “normal” sexual practice, and persons are either forced to assume these normalities or live with the consequences of abnormality. These identities are crucially inculcated and evaluated through practices and dispositions that get necessarily repeated in daily life, and for this reason they must be continually reaffirmed (or transgressed): how people dress, move, eat, interact. They are *performative* identities in so far as they are embodied in the ways in which people enact their social persona in everyday life (Butler 1990).

From Fanon, through Said and Butler, to Jacques Derrida (1996) with his book *Le monolinguisme de l'autre*, theorists of subjectivity have debated about language and its projection towards both the intimate and the political. Fanon (1952), for example, brought up the question of how the subjects of the colonies, being black, could be recognized as normal people just by adopting the normative ways of speaking and behaving, as well as the educational and professional trajectories, which defined the modern model of the civilized man (and, therefore, of the archetypal French citizen).

Being himself of this profile, Fanon noted that a full recognition was beyond his reach. Among the means he gathered and deployed to achieve and display his desire for recognition, the most prominent was language. Having grown up in Martinique, his social status had largely depended on avoiding speaking Creole and avoiding all traces of Creole in his French. More than any other attribute of the physical, the gestural and associated artifacts, language was the element that more repetitively and insistently inscribed him in what he wanted to be.

Thus, being a specific speaker profile, or performing as such, constitutes a condition that symbolically and morally places people in one or another social category and way of life. Fanon's experience, from this point of view, does not present essential differences with those of new speakers as presented above. Bhabha's (1994) notion of "mimicry" in the colonial relation seems also relevant here. Mimicry refers to the fact that the metropolises typically lend its colonial subjects their own practices, symbology and values, thus setting a model towards which these subjects must refer to and strive to resemble; but which they can never fully achieve. Otherwise, the relation of domination would get dissolved.

This idea seems applicable, as I will try to develop below, not just to Fanon's ambivalent position; but to new speakers as they strive to appropriate models that are by definition unattainable. Despite the fact that linguistics in the early 20th century eventually dispensed with the racial concerns of its 19th century forefathers, or emphasized descriptivism over prescriptivism, language has never ceased to be mobilized in the reproduction of social categories that informed inequalities in terms of class (Bourdieu 1982) or race (Lippi-Green 1997). In these axes of difference, divergence from linguistic norms has remained in a space of ambivalence between the cultural and the biological; and this has allowed the subaltern to be treated both as "natural" speakers and as culturally disabled in different contexts, so that assimilated profiles such as Fanon's could be constructed as unnatural or fake.

Some new speakers, however, are not vulnerable to racialization or class categorizations, and therefore they point to the ways in which language is specifically inscribed in the production of otherness.²

In the following paragraphs, I will review the literature on how people can or cannot become speakers of some European minority languages. Later, I focus on the Catalan context, one which provides added layers of complexity. Generally, these considerations bring the issue of subjectivity into the terrain of language and ethnicity. Ethnicity issues have important continuities with issues of race. In this exploration, however, I have willfully excluded race from the data to appreciate how ethnicity gets mobilized even when bodies cannot provide perceptible articulations for boundary making.

4. New speakers: the vampire in the mirror

Josep-Anton Fernández (2008) argues that Catalan identity is constitutively queer because it leads an existence outside the institutional logic of the nation state and its forms of legitimization. In the procedures that are institutionally and publicly devised to reflect back their image and contours (the mirror), Catalans do not see any reflection of themselves. This psychoanalytic language is applicable to any speaker of a minority language, and probably to many other forms of subalternity.

New speakers can arguably be presented in similar ways, as they have no legitimate space or position within the traditional and predominant conceptions of what language communities are. Between 2013 and 2017 a large network of European sociolinguists addressed these “new speakers”, citizens who, by engaging with languages other than their “native” or “national” language(s), need to cross existing social boundaries and adapt to new sociolinguistic spaces (COST 2013). This definition potentially encompasses any type of multilingual, but it was the specific profiles of new speakers amongst regional minority communities that provided the most productive line of work. To my knowledge, the oldest popular denomination of “new speakers” stems from the Basque Country (in northern Spain). Since the 1980s, those who participated in the mass movements to “relearn” Basque in adult schools were called *euskaldun berri* ‘new Bascophone’. The phenomenon, however, was not critically examined as such until more recently (Gatti 2007). O’Rourke and Ramallo (2011) observed that, in Galicia, the term *neofalante* ‘neo-speaker’ was used in opposition to “native speaker” to express the experience of speakers who did not fit with traditional assumptions about these speech communities: i.e. people who had acquired Galician through formal learning rather than conventional family transmission. These people were generally local people who identified with the movement for linguistic revitalization for political and/or sentimental reasons. Most would have some family memory of the language being spoken by grandparents or relatives, and they typically “relearn” the language in adult classes and sought minority language schools for their children.

O’Rourke and Ramallo also studied new speakers of Gaelic in the Irish context. They observed that language planning authorities rarely considered new speakers in their policy design, and they also perceived that there were sometimes tensions between “new” and “native” speakers. Further research in different contexts showed that this was a general trend amongst similar regional minorities in Europe. Native speakers showed implicit or explicit ambivalence towards what they saw as a new specimen of recruit to their communities. More so when these new speakers were becoming the actual majority, as happens in the Basque Country or in Ireland (Ortega et al. 2015; Walsh 2012). In Brittany (McDonald 1994; Hornsby 2009; Timm, Ball, and Müller 2010) and Occitania (Costa 2010a, 2010b), “old” and new speakers are arguably in open conflict. In Scotland, Gaelic-medium educated adults often do not identify with the original Gaelic speaking community and still regard native speakers as backward (Dunmore 2016). Both in Scotland and Ireland, new speakers often complain of being excluded by native speakers, who often refuse to speak in Gaelic to them (McEwan-Fujita 2010; O’Rourke and Walsh 2015).

Most of these minority settings exemplify what Gal and Woolard (2001) characterize as struggles over “authenticity”, whereby different voices compete “as the embodiment of a particular community” (Ibid., 7). This competition has two main focal value sources: “authenticity”, as those practices that claim a bond to place, rurality and tradition; and “anonymity”, as when the language is presented as a widely accessible means of communication. New speakers usually learn the standard language that by definition avoids local or particularistic forms of expression, and hence may come across as placeless or anonymous. The speech (or literacy) of new speakers is often treated or experienced as a problem in those terms, or because it displays interference features from the majority language. Galician “*neofalantes*”, for instance, consider that the speech of native speakers is more authentic than their own (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013). The same may happen amongst new speakers of Basque or Irish, who may even actively pursue to learn local dialects (Ortega et al. 2014; Lantto 2016; Urla 2012;

O'Rourke and Walsh 2015). Paradoxically, however, traditional speakers of Galician reportedly express high regard for new speakers because they are literate in the language and come across as more educated (Ramallo and O'Rourke 2014). Traditional native speakers can present a genuineness associated with the display of fluency and spontaneity, as well as the use of idiomatic expressions (Lantto 2016; Urla et al. 2017), while new speakers may obtain legitimacy from their mastery of the "standard language", which have their own claims to genuineness substantiated by expert linguists. In some contexts, relations may become more strained: in Brittany and Occitania, either group even orient to separate linguistic standards (McDonald 1994; Costa 2010a).

One key factor of (mostly) implicit differentiation between old and new speakers is socioeconomic background. New speaker communities mostly stem from middle class urban families who engage in movements to "relearn" or "reclaim" the minority language. Most of them may be descendants of native speakers who performed language shift in the past, typically rural migrants to cities; but these descendants now possess significant symbolic and economic capital. They are multilingual and socially mobile. As such, they embody the modernization of the community, but also the disengagement of the minority with the values of authenticity, and with the specific bonds with the land and its sublimated heritage that traditional speakers represented. From this angle, the significance of class in these controversies seems clear, and hence the need to interpret the phenomenon from an intersectional perspective.

There is however a paradox in the way that new speakers emerge as a result of a process of modernization while they embody at the same time a break with the conception of nationality inscribed in modernity. Most of these minorities suffered from industrialization and nation-state formation. The former brought about migration to urban centers and a gradual incorporation into the industrial workforce; the latter imposed the dominant languages through universal schooling, conscription, bureaucracy and even political repression. Thus, native speakers of these languages were until recently associated with people in the peripheries in every sense of the word: political, geographic, economic (employed in primary sectors) and cultural, as possessors of devalued forms of cultural capital (Grillo 1989; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2013). The later part of the 20th century saw the development of policies of linguistic revitalization after the so-called "ethnic revival" of the 1960s, with many European states following the proposals of the Council of Europe's Charter of Regional and Minority Languages. The spread of minority language schooling, bilingual or immersion schools was the most visible result of these policies, which are largely responsible for the formation of new speaker communities. This is why the division between native speakers and new speakers disorients the managers of linguistic policies that were based on the assumption that minority language communities needed access to the resources of modernity: schools, institutions, media, cultural industries and ... a standard language with no ostensible connection to locality.

This is what gives rise to contradictions such as the one observed by Jaffe (2015) in the Corsican context. The learners of Corsican that she observed came from very diverse backgrounds (newcomers from France or abroad, spouses of locals, or both) and, although most identified with the value of Corsican as heritage or even as a national symbol, this need not necessarily mean that they saw it as part of their own cultural heritage. This had an important implication in terms of the model for language learning enacted in schools or in adult classes. Corsica has a long tradition of a "polynomic" standard that allows for regional variation to resolve tensions between different dialect

areas. However, many learners of Corsican were not interested in these local forms of the language and reportedly preferred to learn a unified variety (Jaffe 1999).

If new speakers stick out within some minority communities, this is because community leaders have traditionally drawn on classical nationalism to make sense of their situation. Most of these communities project historical narratives of national oppression and draw from the same ideologies about language, nation, identity and territory that established nation-states drew from the works of Herder and Humboldt (Heller 1999). Consequently, they fully concur with the above-mentioned, biologically-inspired conceptions of the national body. Within this frame, new speakers have no meaningful place, as national belonging is and has always been implicitly inherited, not learned.

Even when they may subscribe to conventional nationalist ideas about language and nation, new speakers bring in a different form of consciousness and engagement with language and tradition from that of native speakers. As Costa (2015) observes in relation to communities of young Occitanists who create rock bands, folk fusion bands, or organize running events and the like, these are “post-traditional speakers” associated with new lifestyles and forms of consumption who re-invent traditions in ways not unlike those identified by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Hobsbawm and Ranger’s collection reviews a number of cases in which specific forms of ritual, celebration or performance were developed in the 19th Century as representations of national traditions in public life. Although these practices were often presented as immemorial, they were also to a large extent (re)created as new rituals of collective representation and recognition. New speakers, according to Costa, are actually producing reenactments of local identity by associating this identity with contemporary forms of leisure.

The contradictions that new speakers bring to the surface suggest that minority speakers have no positions from which to claim full legitimacy, be it because native speakers must inevitably stay locked in a traditional niche inscribed in peripherality, or because those who emerge from outside this niche are constructed as impostors. Thus, provided that current discourses on cultural diversity enable some form of visibility to minorities, it still seems that minority speakers cannot hope to obtain from their mirrors figures other than either puppets or monsters. It is these seemingly intractable tensions that I try to address by drawing on the literature on subjectivity. The situation of new speakers recalls Bhabha’s (1994) notion of “mimicry”, of the colonial subject that pursues a legitimacy that she or he cannot hope to attain.

5. New speakers of Catalan

My characterization of new speakers of minority languages so far has been purposely restrictive, as it does not fully reflect the experience of a few minority contexts such as Catalonia, Flanders or Quebec. These contexts cannot be characterized as so categorically peripheral. They are mid-way between regional minorities and nation-state language communities. In addition to their larger demographics, their speakers historically retained important footholds in the economy and in political institutions, and hence a substantial presence amongst the urban lower and middle classes. They did not experience massive language shift to the dominant language. They were not successfully dubbed as backward and rural for centuries (although some nation states tried to present them as such), and they do not display today the same internal ambivalences towards modernity.

Catalan speakers, however, have a subaltern status within the Spanish state after 300 hundred years of political exclusion. In an ethnography conducted at the end of the 1970s, Woolard (1985) considered it exceptional that the community still “recruited” speakers given the demographic superiority of Spanish and after 40 years of Francoist persecution. She claimed that this was because Catalan was locally associated with social mobility and that the language had played an important role in anti-Francoist political mobilization. However, both being and becoming a speaker of Catalan at the turn of the 1980s was not an easy task. For decades, Catalan speakers had withdrawn from using the language publicly but had kept speaking it amongst themselves. Speakers of Spanish were generally military personnel, bureaucrats or migrant workers (by far the most numerous), all from other parts of Spain. Thus, speaking Catalan and *being* Catalan, a member of the local group, became intimately associated, bearing in mind that other differences in terms of race or religion were not present. Even when most Spanish speakers could understand the language, “Catalans” would speak Spanish to any of these “outsiders”; but they would strictly adhere to Catalan amongst themselves, sometimes through subtle skills that foreigners often found bemusing, such as people switching languages as they moved their gaze from one participant to another of the audience (see Woolard 1989: 64).

Woolard characterized this pattern of language use as a marker of ethnicity, that is, as behavior that signaled belonging to the Catalan group and that defined its boundaries strictly: Catalans were those who spoke Catalan amongst themselves.

At the time, however, important political changes were to push for change: Catalan became a co-official language and the main language of instruction in schools. This was accompanied by a local autonomous administration that associated Catalan with a national identity, one that was not necessarily incompatible with Spanish identity, but often in tension with it. As Catalan nationalists took the wheel of the official administration, they treated the *whole* population as “Catalan”, not just a part of it. The fact that so many were unable to speak Catalan was seen as an anomaly. So, the new administration mobilized education in the production of Catalan nationals through language, like any other nation-state (although it did not address the ambivalence derived from people’s accompanying adscription to Spanish national identity).

Sociolinguistic studies in the early 1990s attested to the momentous changes in the country’s sociolinguistic structure. Basically, the whole school population was growing up bilingual, not just first-language Catalan speakers anymore (Woolard and Gahng 1990; Boix 1993; Vila 1996; Pujolar 1997). Moreover, all these studies were ascertaining that first-language speakers of the two languages were socializing together, that their language choices were less categorical than earlier, and that their predisposition to speak each other’s language had improved. Woolard and Gahng (1990) demonstrated through a matched-guise experiment that, in contrast with the results of an earlier study (Woolard 1989), young adolescents did not evaluate negatively anymore the speakers of either language that were using their *other* language.

However, all was not so rosy, particularly for those who expected Catalan to become once again the main national language. Demographic trends expanded the numbers of first-language speakers of Spanish. Today, these make 55% of the whole population

against 31% of self-declared Catalan speakers, 2.4% of “both” and 11.3% of “others”.² Moreover, young Spanish speakers were learning Catalan at school and they were using it successfully for academic purposes; but they generally did not adopt it for everyday ordinary talk. Most of them were geographically concentrated in urban areas where the numbers of Catalan speakers were low. Therefore, by codeswitching between Spanish and Catalan according to context, they were effectively drawing symbolic lines and keeping linguistic spaces separate, like Catalan speakers had done during the years of oppression.

González et al. (2009), in a study based on life history interviews, claimed that it was difficult for many speakers of Spanish to access the conditions where they could practice Catalan even if they actively sought to do so. The first issue was the availability of other practitioners of the language in their own networks of family, friends and colleagues. The second issue, also very important, was that Catalan speakers were not especially collaborative and would often respond to them in Spanish. Despite years of Catalan-dominant schooling, native speakers of Catalan were more fluent in Spanish than the reverse, and most still tended to keep Catalan instinctively to themselves.

There were potential grounds for frustration here, given that Catalan kept important positions for the participation in cultural, economic and political life, to enter and generate trust in valuable local networks. The experience of wanting to speak Catalan, but failing to do so, affected many people (although we do not know how many). The competence was in principle there; but there was no social space to enact it, either because so few Catalan speakers were available, because self-confidence diminished with lack of practice, or because one was already categorized by others as someone to whom Spanish had to be spoken to (González et al. 2009).

6. Linguistic mudes: linguistic appropriations

The González et al. (2009) study was the beginning of the line of work that lead to these considerations (Martínez et al. 2012; Pujolar and González 2013; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). The material reproduced below has been selected out of a total of 87 life history interviews and 18 group discussions centered on people’s experiences of learning and using new languages. I have focused on how Spanish speakers born and raised in Catalonia have developed their relationship with Catalan, which means that linguistic competence can be presupposed, and issues of race or religion are not relevant. Spanish-speakers born in Catalonia may be able to speak and write Catalan in theory, but many of them grow up functionally monolingual in social life because they have little or no opportunities to use the language informally and conversationally.

The excerpts reproduced below corresponded to cases where the respondents had a story on how they managed to include Catalan in their lives. “Linguistic muda” is how some colleagues and myself named this process of staking a claim for recognition of a speaker identity. We drew from the family of meanings of the Catalan verb “*mudar*”, i.e. to change places, or fur or skin for animals, or dress for special occasions (González et al. 2009; Pujolar and González 2013). The main challenge for these potential bilinguals was to escape from a corner demarcated by either a self-categorization or an *other*-categorization (or by both). The self-categorization was active in terms of considering

² Data from the 2013 language survey: *Enquesta d’Usos Lingüístics de la Població*, available on-line at <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=eulp>.

oneself not adept to produce a Catalan-speaking persona, that is, feeling insecure, that one's competence or fluency is inadequate. Other-categorization would correspond to other people rejecting one's own claim to act as a Catalan speaker. Typically, this involved Catalan speakers simply responding in Spanish to statements in Catalan. Given the monolingual hegemonic assumption that conversations must stick to a single language, any address in a given language is functionally a request to respond in that language. The experience of seeing such requests ignored or rejected is common amongst people whose claim to being Catalan speakers is not regarded as solid enough. In everyday conversation, code-switching (dropping Catalan words or even engaging in short impersonations) was common for everybody; but this did not really qualify one as a Catalan speaker. Such code-switches required no reciprocity or continuity. Obtaining recognition as a Catalan-speaking interlocutor required to speak it consistently and durably.

This process, the *muda*, connects with the vast anthropological literature on identity and role transformations in terms of "rites of passage" (Van Gennep 1909), although there is the important qualification that no established rite seems to be available here. Otherwise, the literature on subjectivity and processes of subjectification avail us of a wider toolkit to understand the tribulations of the subject throughout the process of *muda*.

For instance, one of the key issues for new speakers of Catalan is that it is a position that requires reiterated confirmation. Being a Catalan-speaker presupposes a competence and a disposition that is durable and stable, so that any sign that emerges as evidence to the contrary may frustrate the claim to being one. From this perspective, knowledge of biographical details or partial competence may emerge as a threat in need of prevention measures. Alfonso's family was from Chile and he had spoken in Spanish up to his late teens, even though most of his schoolmates spoke Catalan in the Northern town where he lived. At one point, he moved to Barcelona to attend university:

Extract 1

Alfonso: amb el que me'n vaig a viure a Barcelona és amb un dels que vaig conèixer als aiguamolls quan tenia dotze anys i per tant ja parlàvem català i per tant · és molt més fàcil · estic en un entorn que ningú me coneix · que ningú pot decidir quina és la meva llengua o vehicular i quina no · començo a parlar en català i ja està · quan torno a girona ja hi estic acostumat i...

Alfonso: I Shared a flat in Barcelona with one guy I had already met at the moors [an environmental movement] when I was twelve and therefore we were already speaking Catalan and for this reason · it is way easier · I am in a milieu where nobody knows me · no one can decide what my Language, my vehicle, and which it isn't · I start speaking Catalan and that's it. When I go back to Vilagran I have gotten accustomed to it and...

Alfonso's account implies that he had spoken Catalan earlier in the restricted milieu of an environmentalist summer camp, a place separated from his usual social milieu. Separation is a common feature of rites of passage, though here no ritual or visible symbolisms were performed. Now, to follow his plan of becoming a more stable speaker of Catalan, the new separation of moving temporally to Barcelona was used. In my data, language *mudes* tended to be hidden from view: students would use the opportunity of changing to a new school (high school, college) and speak Catalan to

new acquaintances, or act in job interviews (and in the new job environment) as if they had spoken Catalan all their lives.

Alfonso's final point that he had to get "accustomed" to speaking Catalan is also important. He had used the chance to acquire fluency. Fluency was not important just to get his message across comfortably, but crucially to make his Catalan performance convincing: stumbling, stuttering into Spanish, excessive borrowings would potentially lead the audience to switch to Spanish and mar the project. The Barcelona flat, therefore, served the purposes of a refuge, a safe space (Puigdevall, Colombo, and Pujolar 2020), from which Alfonso could train a new identity and also construct for himself a new history.

There are other sides to this assumed continuity of linguistic identity. In Catalonia, it is generally accepted that one can speak different languages to different people; but one must respect each specific personal linguistic history, as Uri discusses in extract 2. Uri and Franc below, who were Catalan speakers, reflected on how difficult it felt for them to speak Catalan to Spanish speakers in certain situations.

Extract 2

Uri: bueno · no sé · · després també em passa o em passava més abans això típic de què coneixes una persona i- · i has començat parlant-hi en castellà i continua així ···

Franc: costa molt canviar.

Uri: després canviar el xip costa molt · sí que és veritat · amb gent ho he aconseguit i amb altres és que sembla que fem teatre

Uri: Well, I don't know... it also happens or used to happen more before the typical thing that you meet someone and, and you started speaking Castilian (Spanish) and you go on that way...

Franc: It is hard to change.

Uri: It is hard to change gear afterwards. This is certainly true. I have managed to do it with some people and with others it looks as if we are acting [literally: "doing theatre"].

Uri's account attests to the experience that the language chosen with a given person gets inscribed in the performance style that defines the personal relation with this person. He seems to lack the words to describe and justify this obstacle; probably because we are all too saturated by the classical linguistic notion that language simply conveys information. Thus, to change the language in this particular case is felt as incongruent. It seems that all social relations based in actual interaction must gradually enregister their own expressive style inscribed in a specific language choice, so that the relationship is not always readily translatable into other languages.

In short, deciding what language to speak to someone, when such a choice exists, is consequential for an indefinite future. This seems to be true for any speaker, but new speakers experience it in a distinct way, as I will show below. In the following extract, we got the account of Lúdia, born to a Spanish-speaking family in a Catalan-speaking small town. Lúdia spoke Catalan to practically everyone she knew, except for her parents and other close family. I asked her how she reacted in occasions when she found herself speaking in Catalan with someone who she later discovered to be a first language speaker of Spanish like her:

Extract 3

Lídia: no · segueixo català · segueixo català perquè m'estimo més- · · i penso · sort que tots dos hem començat- · · que he començat parlant català · · millor · encara que els dos sabem castellà · no vull · va · ara parlem castellà · · no · parlem català que anem més bé

Lídia: *No, I go on in Catalan. I go on in Catalan because I prefer- · · And I think “it is lucky that we both started- · · that I started speaking Catalan.” · · Much better. Even if we both know Spanish, I don't want “come, let us now speak Castilian.” · · No, we speak Catalan and so much the better.*

New speakers of Catalan must not only perform convincingly and acquire a track record as such but must also decide what to do with some parts of their linguistic life. Lídia's family language still ascribed her to a category of people that could potentially trigger demands to speak Spanish on the basis of this shared feature. Although her close acquaintances knew about her family and this did not unsettle their language choices, she had to prevent the detail from being known to new acquaintances because she preferred to speak Catalan.

Confronting the danger of an undesired categorization can of course get complicated in contexts where the information cannot be isolated or controlled. Judith was born and raised in a big town in which Spanish was the predominant language and did not speak Catalan until she started to study journalism at the university. Extract 4 exemplifies her experience at the office of a Catalan newspaper with old and new colleagues:

Extract 4

Judith: llavors al diari al principi tenia una sèrie de gent molt puntual amb els que tenia amistat que parlàvem castellà · llavors jo notava que quan alguna persona al diari es volia acostar a mi o volia sentir-se més propera · parlaven en castellà · saps? i jo insistia en que- perquè clar · per mi era molt dolent · perquè em sentia com si no sapigués parlar català · no? i jo no- però pel tema com qualsevol- potser ells ho feien més- de dir una via d'aproximació de- eh, podem ser col·legues' o 'no m'importa parlar-te castellà' i jo em sentia molt violenta · no? això sempre m'ha violentat molt. (...) es una cosa que la gent que- la catalanoparlant es pensa que et fa un favor i realment és una putada

Judith: *and then at the newspaper at the beginning there were a few people specific cases that we had been earlier friends and spoke Castilian. Then, I noticed that when somebody at the office wanted to approach me or wanted to feel closer, they would speak in Castilian, you know? And I insisted in the- because of course. For me this was bad, because it felt as if I could not speak Catalan, right? And I didn't- but this is the issue for anyone- maybe they do it rather for- say a way of doing closeness about- “Hey, we can be pals” or “I don't mind speaking in Castilian to you” and I felt very violent, right? This has always felt real violent (...) It's something that Catalan-speaking people think that they are doing you a favor and it is a load of shit.*

Judith attests to the fact that adscriptions are often ambivalent and hence negotiable, but that this does not make them less problematic. Her account suggests that she instinctively reacted in emotionally strong terms to a perceived threat of exclusion,

because accepting an address in Spanish had implications for subsequent interactions and for her whole image about her availability in Catalan in the workplace.

The four extracts show that language competence was a subsidiary condition when it came to explaining language choice amongst Catalan people. What seems important is that the language chosen still involved a claim to act from a given position. The old positionalities of language choice had changed and now there were new ones that seemed more complex and subtle. Catalan-Spanish bilinguals could in principle choose to speak one language or the other; but there were plenty of constraints that determined what were generally regarded as reasonable or acceptable choices.

7. Discussion: subjects on the move

The literature on subjectivity has primarily focused on particularly recalcitrant forms of subjectification affecting gender or race. Subjectification (or subjection) is the term commonly used to describe the process whereby institutions or society in general lead people to adopt specific social positions so that they themselves actively engage in producing and reproducing them. It stems from Butler's (1995) idea that subjection is double sided: it is to yield to the dominant order but also to adopt the position imposed as the basis for one's active engagement in society. As such, it is an approach that leans heavily on how the social order imposes a repertoire of subjects and thereby reproduces itself. This angle is vulnerable to criticisms similar to those that have been directed to Foucault's alleged determinism.

The idea of subjectification is typically applied to processes in which the materiality of the body, namely anatomy, plays a key role. Discourses of gender are anchored in bodily organs and anatomical features constructed as sexual, and those of race rely on phenotypic characteristics. In these constructs, through a metonymic operation, the body is recruited in a way that it is made to constantly signal the positionality of the subject. Social actors are therefore sentenced for life into acting out a sex and a race within their hegemonic configurations, or else they must be constantly responding to this hegemony and hence can never really be fully free from it.

In contrast, the examples provided in this chapter did not rely on any kind of anatomical signing. Language choice was clearly inscribed in some kind of ambivalent or negotiable positionality that bore a historical relation with ethnicity and with projects of nation-state construction. There is in modern public life a process of production of linguistic subjects, and hence of linguistic subjectification, that is just as ubiquitous and insistent as any imposition of categories of gender, sexuality or race (see Billig 1995).

All these processes of subjectification share a specific trajectory in the ways in which they have been constructed in the modern period as defining mutually exclusive categories, with institutions constantly applying normativity regimes to maintain the boundaries between genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities and even languages themselves (Martín-Rojo 2016). The critiques of these normativity regimes since the 1960s have had a clear sociolinguistic correlate: the increasing advocacy for, and the social prestige of bilingualism and multilingualism (although some multilingualisms are admittedly more valued than others).

In principle, speaking a language is objectively independent from anatomy. Granted, it is an *embodied* disposition inscribed into the multimodal forms of bodily and machine-mediated communication, one that recruits subtle cognitive, articulatory and aural procedures that operate in refined ways within interpersonal engagements and synchronizations. This is probably why accents acquire a disproportionate significance

as specific traces of these processes of embodiment from which specific trajectories can be hypothesized and thereby loaded with symbolism.

Be that as it may, what the Catalan material suggests is that linguistically-based identities, in the absence of anatomical or phenotypic components, provide a substantial leeway for self-transformations not found in the referred literature on subjectivity. Many current speakers of Catalan do have a past as Spanish-speakers and there is no realistic prospect that their present position is ever set in doubt. To put it bluntly, they are successfully assimilated. Linguistic boundary crossings or transformations are possible, and they happen. The local version of sociolinguistic common sense requires a convincing performance, maybe a minimal Catalan-speaking network too, but not an ascendancy certificate. The old categorical, ethnic, distinctions based on language that Woolard (1989) had identified have barely appeared in the stories that have been collected during the last 15 years (Pujolar and González 2013; Puigdevall et al. 2018; Woolard 2016). The categories “Catalan” and “Castilian” are now very rarely used, as they are considered politically incorrect and descriptively flawed when used in that old sense. Thus, being a native speaker of Catalan does not qualify anymore as defining Catalan-ness, and whatever language(s) a person learnt from their tutors will not be expected –in principle– to determine her language choices or even her accent.

Indeed, the Catalan context is often hailed as one in which national or cultural identity has been substantially pushed away from the traditional essentialisms associated with these constructs (Castells 1997; Cabré 1999; Fuchsel and Martín-Rojo 2003; Guibernau 2004; Woolard 2016). Castells characterizes Catalan nationalism as “based on flexibility and adaptability” and on the recognition of the “variation and interpenetration of cultures”; while Woolard presents Catalan nationalism as a new form of “rooted cosmopolitanism” that seeks to transcend the enlightenment’s dichotomy between modernity and tradition by allowing more negotiable forms of investment around place and language.

And yet, the data shown above also qualifies such categorical remarks and provides a more ambivalent picture. The evidence of assimilation is indeed proof that Catalan identity is accessible (and Alfonso, Lúdia and Judith spoke mostly Catalan in their lives); but not that such in-between positions have ceased to be problematic. All the examples remind us that language choice was anchored in people’s trajectories and that this fact forced individuals to treat their own past as problematic. Uri felt out of place if trying to speak Catalan with people with whom he had been speaking Spanish and Lúdia thought it best not to disclose her family background in certain situations. The knowledge of her background by workmates was creating difficulties for Judith to manage her language choices at the office. I must acknowledge that these circumstances were experienced more as annoyances than significant threats; that is, the participants were not worried about their livelihoods being endangered by linguistic mishaps which, at the end of the day, most people would treat as something about which each person’s wishes could easily be granted. Close acquaintances and workmates, close friends and relatives, would generally accept someone’s option to speak Catalan no matter how much detail of a Spanish-speaking past they were privy to. The experience reported also implies that uncertainties about language choice were common in encounters with strangers or more distant acquaintances. Alfonso’s case provides room for some more detail: he had used the separation from his usual environment in Girona as an opportunity to develop the habit, to train himself. He was not worried about going back to find that people refused to speak Catalan to him. Rather, the implication was that lack

of fluency and a noticeable accent had previously caused his interlocutors to switch to Spanish. One irony here was that in Barcelona the lack of fluency was probably not so visible given that Catalan there bears many more signs of contact with Spanish.

What this evidence suggests, on the whole, is that Catalan was indeed accessible for new speakers; but that the accession was fraught with obstacles and the final stage always open to vulnerabilities. That some new speakers had to hide their past in certain contexts reveals that the classical native speaker construct was still holding some ground. That some had to subtract themselves from their everyday environment to rehearse their vocabulary and grammar (and hence their Catalans-speaking personae) reveals that the “learner” did not have a stable legitimate ground from which to act.

Because the status of the Catalan speaker was expected to be firm and solid, it could not be imagined as a provisional state, in terms of “becoming” (Khan 2018), as something in which the subject can spend a while in transit. This affected both learners and expert new speakers, and this is why they must systematically delete their footprints to prevent their status as speakers to be set in doubt.

This also explains why sociolinguistic research routinely finds, similarly to racial stereotypes, new popular denominations and turns of expression that appear to act as substitutes of the expression that has become politically incorrect. In Catalonia, the term “català-català” ‘Catalan-Catalan’ appears often in interviews to name someone for whom the language is supposed to be deeply imprinted in the family or close social milieu. In youth culture, a context in which categorizations are continually invented, a number of language-based or language-informed categories have been identified: *catalufo* (for “a Catalan”), *indepe* (as for a Catalan independence supporter) or, for Spanish-speakers, “*quillo*” (with negative class connotations) or “*fachas*” (a popular term for a “fascist” or a “Spanish nationalist”). (Sabaté i Dalmau 2009; Woolard 2008; Boix 1993; González et al. 2014).

The connection between these processes and racial political correctness is relevant if we move the focus to what happens to new speakers who are anatomically exposed to racialization. As I was writing these lines in August 2019, the Twitter hashtag #NOEMCANVIISLALLENQUA ‘do not change the language for/to me’ had been rolling for many weeks after a TV documentary (Bassa and Díaz 2019) voiced the concerns of many new speakers who were frustrated because most Catalan-speakers spoke to them in Spanish. The twitter posts featured people with either dark skin, oriental or Latin American features or some other mark of otherness in bearing or dress, such as wearing a hijab, who requested to be spoken to in Catalan. This was the result of the most recent wave of international migration that started in the late 1990s. Thus, even while local language policies and grassroots initiatives were successfully accomplishing the de-ethnicization of the Catalan language, a new trend towards racialization was gathering pace (Pujolar 2009; Rovira et al. 2004). Actually, there were already cases of young people for whom Catalan was in practice a “first language” but who were systematically addressed to in Spanish by Catalan speakers.

What this new development teaches us is that linguistic ethnicity in Catalonia was not gone but dormant. The accounts of Alfonso, Lúdia and Judith, I would argue, pointed at the ways in which institutional action, grassroots mobilization and individual initiatives had subdued and circumvented the contradictions of linguistic nationalism and created space for new speakers. As such, their trajectories show that it was possible to contest the subjectification to essentialized ethnicity; but that the ideology had not been fully

dismantled. Alfonso, Lídia and Judith had been able to assert their status as Catalan speakers partly by erasing their trajectory as Spanish speakers or having their acquaintances suspend the relevance of their past. Alfonso had managed this even while he maintained the use of the Spanish form of his name (“Alfonso” rather than “Alfons”), which is unusual. However, most newly arrived new speakers had their trajectories, their otherness, imprinted in their bodies. This means that their encounters in public spaces could not rely on the ambivalences that former new speakers could exploit.

8. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I undertook to explore how people managed linguistically-defined ethnicities in Catalonia in daily life and what this told us on how linguistic categorizations get mobilized in the construction of social difference in contemporary societies. I suggested that the experience of Catalan speakers could productively draw from the literature on subjectivity, given the rich debates that this literature contains on how social subjects are produced through the operation of institutions but also through the multifarious forms of inclusion and exclusion that operate in other social settings. As the empirical basis, I took the experience of “new speakers” of Catalan as the embodiment of the model of a speaker that was potentially dissonant with inherited notions about how language embodied national identity through its native speakers.

To argue the potential relevance of subjectivity debates and their primary foci on gender and race, I posited the modernist genealogy of the native speaker concept within linguistics and in nationalist politics. I also reviewed how this dichotomy had played out in the political contentions around non-native speakers of English and new speakers of minority languages. Thus, as with debates on gender and race, I argued that linguistically-defined identities had arrived to us in the forms in which they had been articulated with ideologies of colonialism and nationalism, as part and parcel of the conceptualization of modern subjects under the operation of normalizing institutions and specific forms of knowledge. This was a trajectory that these non-canonical speaker identities arguably shared with gendered and racialized identities. These ideologies were instrumental in the production and reproduction of symbolic hierarchies that legitimized the cultural and economic hierarchies of modern capitalism and colonial/national governance.

As we know, these ideologies have all come under criticism in the last decades and important changes have taken place in how institutions and expert knowledges participate in their reproduction. However, they also appear to be very resilient in different contexts of society as they continue to be mobilized to reproduce inequalities. The Catalan experience of the last forty years provides an interesting case to appreciate the resilience of old ideologies about what constitutes a legitimate speaker. First language speakers of Spanish grew up with the competence to speak Catalan but often without the opportunities and the legitimacy to act out this competence in social life, where first language speakers of Catalan still associated the language with very specific social trajectories. Thus, new speakers of Catalan must constantly be aware that their language choice could be contested when the dissonant aspects of their trajectories was made available, such as accent or family history. Despite these obstacles, however, many first language Spanish speakers were in practice able to speak Catalan in their everyday life with the support of their closer acquaintances.

The arrival of new immigrants in the last two decades has revived the logic of linguistic boundary making as Catalan speakers treat visible minorities as linguistic others, and

hence speak Spanish to them. Again, these new “new speakers” can also fight their way into recognition, and they are likely to find many allies to do so; but this shows us that language seems to always be available as a resource to create difference.

I pointed out earlier that, particularly for small regional minorities, new speakers brought up important contradictions within nationalist frameworks of understanding of linguistic revitalization. They embodied the ideal of a modernized community even as they undermined the standing of the native speakers that modernity had idealized as emblems of identity and tradition. A similar paradox can be identified in relation to the so-called “non-native” speakers of English, both the sign of success of colonial cultural agendas and the source of contention about what constitutes the English-speaking community. New speakers of Catalan present a similar challenge in that they are the product of the policies of linguistic nationalization, but this is a project that is hardly viable if the Catalan-speaking community is not redefined as a multiracial and multilingual space.

The parallels in the genealogy and crises of modern conceptions of gender, sexuality, race, class or disability have been amply documented in the literature on intersectionality. In this chapter, I have presented arguments that support the notion that linguistic identities could well be added to the list, particularly as language is commonly mobilized to signal these contested positionalities. All these modes of identification are contested as social movements advocate for more flexible boundaries or for the possibility of multiple belongings and hybridities; but the old frameworks appear to be fairly resilient for reasons that are still to be convincingly explained. The Catalan material shows that it is possible to cross boundaries but not so much to live in these boundaries, that new speakers repeatedly face expectations that linguistic identities must be durable and cohesive. The management of linguistic classifications remains within parameters in which hybridity and ambivalence are still treated as problems to be resolved, not as positions from where to speak. These latest new speakers of Catalan have to confront racialization head on, and assume a situation in which they are seen as “mimickers” in Bhabha’s sense, which is arguably what happens to most racialized migrants in Europe and North-America as is attested in the recent debate on raciolinguistics (Rosa 2019). Undoing linguistic ethnicity, according to the evidence examined, seems to be as complex and paradoxical as undoing gender (Butler 2004).

And yet, against the current experience of increasing mobility and diversity in our societies, how long can such expectations last? As Appadurai (1996) observes, modernity is “at large” and it is through these multiple forms of appropriation that a different order seems to emerge in which the old North-Atlantic hegemony is gradually displaced. Thus, as new speakers and “non-native” speakers become the overwhelming majority in their respective linguistic markets, it may well be that identities “*in becoming*” constitute the rule rather than the exception.

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² For reasons of space, I chose not to discuss the specific position of gender categorization with regard to linguistic normativity. See Cameron (1992) for a discussion of the debates in the 1980s between the "difference" and the "power" approaches. Through this discussion, we can appreciate how, since women speech was not vulnerable from the viewpoint of linguistic normativity, alternative criteria of evaluation were developed to "naturalize" male dominance.