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New speakers and processes of new speakerness across time and space


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The theorizing and conceptualization of the new speaker label first emerged from discussions amongst a small group of researchers working on some of Europe's lesser-used languages including Catalan (Pujolar 2007; Pujolar and González 2013), Galician (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011 and O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013) and Irish (O'Rourke 2011). These are languages which were revitalized with some measure of success as a result of more favourable language policies, but which faced the consequent problem of social differentiation between first- and second-language speakers, and tensions over ownership of and legitimate language rights. While these problems have often tended to be unforeseen by language advocates and policymakers, they have been encountered so often in different minority language revitalization contexts, that there came to be an underlying recognition amongst many researchers, that they should be theorized and examined more schematically. This discussion was extended to include other minority languages in Europe such as Breton, Occitan, Manx and Corsican, leading to a full special issue relating to new speakers of minority languages (see O'Rourke et al. 2015). In all these contexts, there was a growing awareness amongst sociolinguists and policy makers that the success of language revitalization initiatives was having contradictory and paradoxical effects within the community. These effects were based on long-held assumptions and ideologies about language, identity and authenticity in which the concept of the "native speaker" played a pivotal role.

The airing of the new speaker label as a research concept at international fora also led to connections with scholars working in other multilingual

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contexts. This included research on immigrant communities where speakers' mother-tongues were different from that of the host community (Alexandre et al. 2013; Márquez-Reiter and Martin Rojo 2014), TEFL scholars who were questioning the centrality traditionally awarded to native speakers in the teaching of English worldwide (Cook 1999; Davies 2003), researchers in translation who were querying the supremacy of translating into one's mother-tongue (Pokorn 2004; Pokorn 2005), researchers who were examining the experience of transnational workers (Roberts 2010) or the linguistic practices of transnational networks connected to youth cultures often associated with the use of international languages such as English, Chinese, French, Spanish (Androutsopoulos 2004). Amongst scholars within these specific sub-disciplines, there was also a questioning of the epistemologies of linguistics, of the ways we think about language and of the emphasis that there has tended to be on "native" speaker models. The formation of a European COST network to examine the opportunities and challenges facing "New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe" has provided the space and the means to develop the connections between regional minority language perspectives and those of non-native speakers, in particular in the context of migration. There has thus been a coming together of researchers working on different multilingual strands to explore the "new speaker" phenomenon from a wider theoretical perspective, shedding new light on the processes of production and reproduction of sociolinguistic difference, ideologies of legitimacy and their implications for social inequalities.

The "new speaker" concept has thus come to constitute a kind of umbrella term and as a means of linking different multilingual strands across a variety of research sub-disciplines. In doing so, it puts forward an alternative linguistic model to help understand the complex profiles of speakers that were seen to be emerging in the twenty-first century multilingual society in which we live. To date, no satisfactory framework had existed within which these profiles could be understood across these different multilingual strands including regional minorities, immigrant groups and transnational workers or students, language learners or transnational online communities. This constitutes a very wide range of profiles, potentially leading to many additional questions beyond those thus far explored by regional minority sociolinguists. In this special issue, we present some of this work which has begun to create a dialogue amongst researchers across different multilingual strands including new speakers in the context of indigenous minority languages, new speakers as immigrants and refugees, and also new dialect speakers.

McLeod and O'Rourke examine the emergence of "new speakers" of Scottish Gaelic who are now becoming more numerous in cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh. This profile of speaker contrasts with the decline of Gaelic in the

“heartland” areas. The authors show how these new speakers have to cope with contradictory ideologies of linguistic authenticity and belonging as they acknowledge that their Gaelic may not be as pure or authentic as that originally spoken in the traditional Gaelic-speaking areas. Nonetheless, these new speakers recognize that the future of the language depends very much on them, as will the degree to which the language will develop and adapt to new set of social and economic conditions. Their study adds to the growing number of indigenous minority contexts in which new speakers have emerged and become the focus of more systematic analysis.

Also focusing on an indigenous minority language, Walsh and Ní Dhúda examine the profile of “new speakers” of Irish Gaelic in the diaspora, focusing specifically on new speakers of Irish in the United States. Based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out amongst Irish speakers in five locations across the US, the article describes the language backgrounds and motivations of new speakers in these settings and reflects on the connections between linguistic practices and ideologies in a context in which the logic of territorialities is absent.

Moving beyond new speakers of indigenous minority languages, the four remaining articles examine other profiles and contexts in which new speaker categories and new speaker processes emerge. Thissen’s article examines the experience of migrants as they negotiate the use of local dialects in everyday interaction. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a supermarket in the Limburgian city of Roermond (Netherlands), she shows how social actors draw upon “languagecultural” ideologies to produce and legitimize specific conceptions of local belonging. In the process, she shows how the new speaker status is locally produced and negotiated in different ways by different actors in different situations.

Martínez Caglitütüncigil looks at how immigrant women in Spain learn and adopt the local languages (Catalan or Spanish depending on context and situation) in their efforts to participate in the cash economy. In the case of women of African origin, the process of linguistic appropriation is intimately bound up with the transformation of traditional gender roles and the assumption of new forms of agency. The process, however, is made more complex by the diversity in their class origins or the forms of cultural capital these women bring with them. Even as they take on their role as working wives and balance out the power asymmetries within the family, migrant women of middle-class backgrounds, in their new host community their cultural capital is devalued and they are forced to accept the precarious conditions of unskilled labour and employment instability.

Sorgen examines the case of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East who joined conversation clubs organized by local authorities in

England. She argues that the notion of new speaker allows us to set aside the approaches that address the language acquisition and linguistic proficiency of immigrants in isolation from the social conditions in which they are set. Thus, she concentrates on the way in which effective social bonding and participation was created in these clubs by providing a space where refugees could effectively get “heard” or recognized as a legitimate participant in dialogue with both locals and non-locals. Her argument thus points directly to the way in which language learning is implicated in the production of the social subject, and how ideologies of place, belonging and bonding are implicated in these processes.

Del Percio takes us in an eminently new direction through his examination of how linguistic legitimacy and local belonging is negotiated in the entourage of the FC Basel, a Swiss soccer team. Soccer teams provide examples of institutions which were originally conceived as symbolizing local or national allegiances. They now move beyond this in the context of complex global networks where soccer has become linked to markets of businesses, products, workers (players and coaches). In this context, fan groups are becoming more diverse in their membership, which allows Del Percio to explore how Basel's local dialect (*Baseldytsch*) and standard German are constructed as essential to the identity of team fans and how non-locals must then negotiate their access and use of the local varieties.

The six articles therefore develop eminently different perspectives from which new speaker issues can be identified and examined. The focus on local varieties like Limburguese¹ or Baseldytsch, which have historically not been treated as separate languages, point to the fact that the experience of new speakers is not necessarily restricted to the communities in which language forms and boundaries have been institutionalized; but occurs also in contexts where language boundaries are more informally (and probably flexibly and fluidly) managed. Territoriality is also an important issue that, in this case, cuts across all articles, be it because new speakers characteristically emerge in spaces outside of those geographical areas which had come to be associated with traditional native speakers, or as a result of displacement in the case of migrants and refugees. In all these cases, territoriality is a powerful means upon which linguistic ideologies and feelings of belonging continue to be informed. This takes place even in a context in which increased social mobilities prompt us to query these more essentialist ideologies and pushes them the surface. Finally, the collection as a whole provides an interesting overview of how different axes

1 Limburguese has however undergone, as Thyssen shows, important developments recently towards the adoption of a standard orthography and use in educational and institutional settings.

of belonging such as class, ethnicity or gender are couched in socioeconomic processes which are essential to our understanding of the shifting ground upon which new speakers must circulate in order to negotiate linguistic and social boundaries. From this viewpoint, Martínez Caglitütüncigil's effort to articulate an intersectional analysis of new speakers points in a direction in which this line of research can enhance and organize our knowledge of the complexity of the processes studied.

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Bionotes

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