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Dossier “New speakers of minority languages: belonging and legitimacy”

Profiles of new speakers of Galician

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Abstract

Although the phenomenon began much earlier – at least since the beginnings of the linguistic revival process of the mid-20th century – a distinctive feature of the Galicia's current sociolinguistic reality is the presence of new speakers of Galician. With the introduction of Galician into new areas of use, in particular, the educational system, part of the population that socialised primarily in Spanish have relegated Spanish to a secondary position and become conscious and committed speakers of Galician. In this paper, we examine the general profiles of new speakers of Galician using the *intensity of use of the learned language* criterion. Thus, we differentiate between *essential*, *functional*, *occasional* and *potential* new speakers. While for academic sociolinguistics and the social imaginary of the Galician population, the new speaker is limited to what we define as an “essential” new speaker, from a less restrictive view, functional new speakers and, to a lesser extent, occasional new speakers both meet the profile of persons with L1 Spanish who incorporate Galician into their practices. Potential new speakers are a different case as in them we see the conditions required for the change even though such a change has yet to take place.

Keywords

new speakers, Galician language, active minority

Perfiles de neohablantes de gallego

Resumen

Aunque el fenómeno es muy anterior, al menos desde los inicios del proceso de recuperación lingüística de mediados del siglo xx, un rasgo definitorio de la realidad sociolingüística gallega actual es la presencia de neohablantes de gallego. Con la introducción de este idioma en nuevos ámbitos de uso, particularmente en el sistema educativo, una parte de la población que había tenido su primera socialización en español desplaza esta lengua a un lugar secundario y se hace hablante consciente y comprometido de gallego. En este trabajo, presentamos una aproximación a los perfiles generales de neohablantes de gallego, a partir del criterio intensidad de uso del idioma aprendido. Así, diferenciamos entre neohablantes esenciales, neohablantes funcionales, neohablantes ocasionales y neohablantes potenciales. Aunque para la sociolingüística académica y para el imaginario social de la población gallega la persona neohablante se limita al tipo que denominamos «esencial», desde una visión menos restrictiva tanto los neohablantes funcionales y, en menor medida, los neohablantes ocasionales cumplen con el perfil de personas con L1 español que incorporan el gallego a sus prácticas. Los neohablantes potenciales constituyen un grupo de índole diferente al darse en ellos algunas de las condiciones necesarias para el cambio, aunque tal cambio no ha tenido lugar.

Palabras clave

neohablantes, lengua gallega, minoría activa



Introduction

Since the latter third of the 20th century, a particularly important transformation has taken place in the complex sociolinguistic situation in Galicia. This period has seen some significant sociolinguistic changes with consequences of certain repercussion in the ideological, cultural and economic domains; all related to, in one way or another, the coexistence, confrontational or not, of different linguistic groups. As has occurred in other contemporary societies, these changes that have affected Galician society in recent decades have given rise to a change in the traditional sociolinguistic order, which is in crisis and being replaced, to a large extent owing to the emergence of new players, new challenges and new policies that, with positives and negatives, have contributed to the aforementioned complexity (Martin-Jones *et al.*, 2012). The social action is transformed as a result of new regulations, which, on the one hand, have helped to make the Galician language more visible but, at the same time, have been unable to halt the process of language substitution. In short, Galician has come to occupy formal spaces traditionally reserved exclusively for Spanish and has diminished in areas in which it had been maintained over centuries, particularly in the family (Ramallo, 2012).

One of the most relevant sociolinguistic changes in the recent social history of Galicia is the emergence of the new speakers who speak Galician as a priority although it is not their mother tongue and/or family language (O'Rourke and Ramallo, 2013b). Obviously this characterisation leaves out a large group of people who speak Galician after learning it in their secondary socialisation. This is because in our definition of the new speaker of Galician, the expression "as a priority" is very important in terms of sociolinguistic practices. It is, therefore, a purposely restrictive construction. However, as explained in the following pages, other profiles exist that can be integrated into a theoretical categorisation of the new speakers of Galician.

The emergence of the new speakers is a consequence of the recent transformations that characterise Galicia today (Ramallo, 2013). With the new political framework brought in when the monarchy was reinstated, Galicia officially became an autonomous community with significant legislative capacity, even with regard to linguistic aspects, once the constitutional restrictions imposed on the various Spanish languages are assumed. Thus, since the 1980s, Galicians have witnessed continued political intervention in the languages in competition with consequences for status, legitimacy and social visibility. This intervention has also affected the ideological conception that, with respect to the languages, underlies society and is subject to constant public debate and political confrontation.

Successive Galician governments have devoted much of the linguistic policy and planning to education and have established a bilingual educational model that has oscillated over the different

political periods. This model, not without improvisation and rarely assessed, hardly takes into account the unequal starting point of the two languages. Thus, its effect on maintaining Galician is doubtful, although some positive consequences have resulted (Lorenzo Suárez 2005; Fernández Paz *et al.*, 2008; Silva Valdivia *et al.*, 2010, 2011). In terms of the focus of this paper, the presence of the Galician language in the educational system has helped to increase the number of new speakers who while having different life trajectories, expectations and social demands, are more similar with regard to linguistic praxis and ideology. In this sense, the educational system has given rise to a potential increase in Castilian speakers who change their linguistic practice to speak Galician, especially in the larger cities.

New speaker profiles

In Galicia, the fact that Galician and Spanish are structurally very close gives rise to a sociolinguistic situation of certain complexity. On the one hand, the entire population has a very good receptive competence of the community's minority language (Consello da Cultura Galega, 2011). This competence is not necessarily the result of formal learning. In fact, the main means of access to communicative competence in Galicia is environmental acquisition, not from school. On the other hand, there is a broad range of types of Galician speakers, which includes traditional native speakers and new speakers. Lastly, with respect to linguistic ideologies, there is permanent tension between the emancipating ideology of Galician, which in some cases extends to arguing for Galician monolingualism, and an ideology that wants to see a greater Castilianisation of Galicia. This tension is played out via two major discourses with regard to linguistic policy in Galicia: the Spanish-centralist and the Galician models of linguistic policy (De Nieves, 2011), which has similarities with the other historically bilingual territories in Spain (Ramallo, 2013b).

In our investigation, as mentioned above, we use a restrictive characterisation of the new speaker, which coincides with the most common use of this label in the Galician case (Ramallo, 2013). In other words, people who learn Galician at school (or at work, or with friends) and who, at some point in their lives, turn their back on their mother tongue (Spanish) and start only or mainly speaking Galician (O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; Ramallo 2010, 2013). This restrictive characterisation is not without its criticisms. In fact, in other minority language contexts, more lax profiles are included to also cover people who learn the minority language as an L2 but are not (necessarily) predominate speakers of this L2. In other words, under the "new speaker" definition, different speaker profiles are included, with differences both in the formal resources mastered and in the areas of use in which the language is spoken (O'Rourke *et al.*, forthcoming, 2015).



Taking into account the “intensity of use of Galician”, we propose an elemental classification of Galician new speakers with four profiles: *essential* new speaker, *functional* new speaker, *occasional* new speaker and *potential* new speaker. This criterion is based upon the quantification of the use of languages in Galicia according to surveys done by the Instituto Galego de Estatística (IGE, 2008).

Essential new speakers are people who have relegated their mother tongue to a secondary role. They are habitual speakers of Galician who, in prototypical cases (the majority), only speak this language. As a result, the essential new speakers use Galician in all their interactions, even with people who prefer to express themselves in Spanish. This group is very dynamic, not only regarding language use but also in their activism in linguistic revitalisation. This makes them an active, innovative and progressive minority (Ramallo, 2013; O'Rourke & Ramallo, 2015).

Functional new speakers use Galician in informal interactions or institutional contexts in which Galician is the predominant language but also use Spanish in their daily lives. In some cases, each language has well-defined domains (work, family, friends, etc.); in others, the linguistic choice in each interaction is more varied and complex.

Occasional new speakers use the Galician they learned on a limited basis, generally in reaction to interaction stimuli. In other words, such use is less conscious and more adaptive. It is often a highly ritualised behaviour linked with communicative spaces in which Galician predominates as the vehicle language. The profile of the speakers is extremely varied, although they are usually people with a weaker formal command of Galician (Ramallo, 2010).

Lastly, *potential* new speakers make up most of the population. This is particularly the case in the Castilian-speaking population under 50 because, in this age group, the necessary (although not sufficient) condition of being bilingual receivers with a very high self-perception of their ability to speak Galician is satisfied. It is widely recognised that just about the entire Galician population is bilingual, at least if we understand by this being able to interact in communicative encounters in which both languages, Galician and Spanish, are present. Studies undertaken in recent years have found that over 95% of the population can understand spoken Galician. Furthermore, the percentage who state they can speak “a lot” or “sufficient” Galician is over 85% (Consello da Cultura Galega, 2011).

Potential new speakers meet the elemental requirements for being new speakers. However, for a wide range of reasons, the

necessary change has not taken place. It is, without a doubt, an extremely heterogeneous category on which research needs to be done to understand the reasons and ideologies behind its practices. The future of the language may also be in their hands.

In any case, it is obvious that the ability to speak a language, in this case, Galician, is not sufficient to motivate a person to make such an important transformation in their life such as changing their language. Indeed, other variables are required, although this depends largely on each person. Along with a formal command of the language, a series of determining factors facilitate the change. For instance, a person with greater motivation is more likely to change language. The linguistic security of each learner of a new language, their linguistic competence and the social norms governing the speaking communities are also important. But linguistic ideologies and the construction of identity linked to languages are also important. Therefore, given the complexity of the process, it should be of no surprise that in absolute terms few people have changed their linguistic practice in Galicia.

A characteristic shared by many new speakers is the combining of elements of both languages, sometimes as a conscious mechanism of identity expression, but on other occasions as a consequence of an emerging practice as part of the initial steps towards conversion. From the hybridisation paradigm, this is seen as the use of the pragmatic competence by the speaker to situate themselves in different social linguistic spaces by breaking the rules of the linguistic systems of their repertoire that acts, in turn, against a purist ideology (Gugenberger, 2013, pp. 30-31).

It is not easy to determine how many people fit each of these profiles today in Galicia owing to the lack of quantitative studies on new speakers. However, some conclusions can be drawn from the databases of the Instituto Galego de Estatística (2008).¹ Table 1 shows the percentages for each of the profiles defined above (essential, functional, occasional and potential new speakers) for the population over 14 years of age. People in all the groups have Spanish as their L1 and can speak Galician well or very well. The second column is the estimate of the total number of people who meet the requirements set out above. The third column shows the percentage of these people over 14 years old who meet the other two requirements (L1 Spanish and can speak Galician well or very well). The fourth column shows the percentage of over 14-year-olds, in this case, without the established requirements, i.e., without taking into consideration L1 or command of spoken Galician.

1. The statistical data comes from a survey form specifically on language included in the *Enquisa de Condicións de Vida das Familias* survey done by the Instituto Galego de Estatística (IGE) in 2008. For this survey, a representative sample of 27,542 interviewees was designed. The technical details of the methodology and the design of the sample are available at: http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/metodoloxias/met_ecv_2009_ga.pdf. The questionnaire used is available at http://www.ige.eu/estatico/pdfs/s3/cuestionarios/Cuestionario_galego_2008.pdf.



Table 1. Estimate of new speakers in each of the profiles based on self-perception of linguistic practices.

Type	Approximate number of people over 14	% of the over-14 population with L1 Spanish	% of the over-14 population
Essential	11 000	2	0.5
Functional	44 000	7	2
Occasional	193 000	31	8
Potential	175 000	28	7.5
TOTAL	423 000	68	18

68% of the population meeting the requirements (over 14 years old + L1 Spanish + command of spoken Galician) fall into one of our categories. 28% are potential new speakers and 31% are occasional new speakers. As can be seen, the percentage of essential new speakers is very low, which is to be expected given the highly restrictive conditions used for this characterisation. Together, essential and functional new speakers make up 9% of over fourteen-year-olds with L1 Spanish who can speak Galician well or very well. With respect to the entire Galician population over fourteen, 18% come under one of the proposed categories, predominantly, the occasional new speakers (8%) and the potential new speakers (7.5%).

The sociodemographic profile varies significantly from type to type, as is shown in Table 2. Significantly, essential new speakers are not mainly urban dwellers, in contrast to the functional, occasional and potential new speakers.

Table 2. Profile of over fourteen-year-old new speakers based on self-perception of linguistic practices.

Essential	Functional	Occasional	Potential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% urban dwellers • 36% university students • 55% > 40 years old • 83% personal motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 56% urban dwellers • 32% university students • 58% > 40 years old • 64% personal motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74% urban dwellers • 41% university students • 40% > 40 years old • 54% personal motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 73% urban dwellers • 42% university students • 36% > 40 years old

There are also differences according to age. Essential and functional new speakers tend to be older than occasional and

potential new speakers. Furthermore, with respect to motivation for speaking Galician, for essential new speakers, personal motivation is the reason in 80% of the cases. This percentage decreases for functional and occasional new speakers. This coincides with the results of qualitative research on new speakers in Galicia we have undertaken in recent years.

From a novel perspective, in Galicia, in abstract terms, a distinction can be made between two types of essential new speakers. On the one hand, a highly disperse group can be identified whose only interest in common is replacing their L1 with a residual language. On the other hand, a more uniform group exists that attaches a large part of their reasoning to the language, particularly with regard to normative matters. The latter group is predominantly reintegrationists or Lusophiles who defend a normative movement towards Portuguese, fundamentally for written Galician (Sánchez Vidal, 2010; Herrero Valeiro, 2011).²

Both the disperse and the reintegrationist groups are active minorities in the sense that they constitute groups of people who think and act differently and who, in addition, have a *gnomic* position, i.e., a stance that rejects the dominant sociolinguistic order they wish to replace (Doms & Moscovici, 1991). The difference between them is that the reintegrationist group has a heterodox position with respect to the normative rules accepted by most of the population, including the group of disperse new speakers. In this sense, the reintegrationist group is an active minority both with respect to the population in general — in that their objective is to revitalise the language, and to the group of disperse new speakers (the majority of the new speakers) — in that their main short-term demand is to promote a change in the official normative rules. Furthermore, the reintegrationist movement is more and better organised around associations in the major Galician cities

Essential new speakers and the future of the language

For decades, minority language sociolinguistics put a narrative built around the notion of the traditional speaker, who is considered the legitimate speaker, at the centre of the debate on linguistic revival. This made it difficult for linguistic policies to focus on controlling the loss of the intergenerational linguistic transfer and the functional activation of the language through the creating of spaces of use outside of the family. Partly, at least, this stance forms part of an idealised vision whose aim is to return to a past in which the minority language enjoyed certain vitality instead

2. This does not mean that the reintegration movement is a form of linguistic activism whose proponents are necessarily new speakers. Furthermore, within reintegrationism there are various currents. Some propose adopting the international standard of Portuguese, while others envisage a Luso-Galician-Brazilian diasystem as part of a pluricentric proposal, i.e., with normative variants for different solutions (Herrero Valeiro, 2011).



of planning the future of the language by means of effective processes for social change in the speaking community (Romaine, 2006; Jaffe, 2010).

In this narrative, the new speaker is often portrayed as “impure” or artificial, with a limited command of the language that is heavily affected by their L1, who is in constant search of their space, both compared to the traditional speakers, whose “naturalness” and the quality of speech is highlighted, and also compared to the speakers of the dominant language, which the new speakers have decided to replace, Spanish, in the case of Galicia. Furthermore, new speakers are often assigned political identities that do not match their actual ideologies. Therefore, the practices of new speakers are not always accepted by other groups.

In part, this representation of the new speaker makes sense. Indeed, the categorisation itself of the new speaker is not clear-cut, both owing to the diversity discussed here and to the diverse behaviours within each group. The range is broad enough for us to accept that this is an open group in which there are very different positions with respect to the command of pragmatic competence. Furthermore, we know when a person converts to being a new speaker, but we do not know when they stop being one, if such a thing is possible. In other words, after years of speaking the language, many new speakers display features of the traditional syntopic varieties of their place of residence and end up with a prosody and pragmatic competence very close to a native speaker's. Others, however, make little effort to improve their linguistic command.

Despite this, considering the new speaker as a revitalising agent is a diametrically opposed stance as it assumes imagining a sociolinguistic future not necessarily linked to the glorious past in which the language survived over centuries (O'Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015). Thus, in the case of Galician, the essential new speaker is an active minority very committed to making the language visible in all spaces of daily life, including using it in the family. Despite their aforementioned negative social representation, their highly consistent behaviour makes them a reference group for the new linguistic policies related to Galician. Of course, they are a small percentage of the entire population, even of just the Galician speaking population. However, if we accept that the future of the language is closely linked to the dynamics of city spaces, which are the breeding grounds for groups of new speakers, their relevance must be considered for the short- and medium-term future of the Galician language (O'Rourke & Ramallo 2013b).

Conclusion

As we discussed in another paper (Ramallo, 2013a), *neofalantismo* is a social movement found in urban Galicia that, through its practices, contributes to changing the traditional social linguistic

order to the extent that new speakers are being called upon to occupy an important role as essential varieties in the future of the language.

In general, it is not easy to theoretically approach the concept of “minority” given that it depends on our belonging to different reference groups. The same person can simultaneously belong to a different minority and a majority. We can even be part of a minority and a majority with respect to the same reference group, depending on which other groups we make the comparison with. In any case, based on the points discussed, we propose that a double qualitative distinction should underlie the concept of “linguistic minority” in Galicia. On the one hand, there is the classic conception that sees the minority as a group with less or no power. On the other, the minority is an innovative group that seeks social change. In the case at hand, the traditional speakers of Galician are a powerless minority while the new speakers, in particular, the essential new speakers, are an innovative active minority.

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