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## Introduction

# New Speakers of Minority Languages: Belonging and Legitimacy

**Maite Puigdevall Serralvo**

Lecturer, Arts and Humanities Department, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.  
mpuigdevallse@uoc.edu

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This *Digithum* dossier devoted to the so-called new speakers of minority languages features four articles from presentations given at the “New Speakers: A Concept under Construction” international conference. This open conference took place in Barcelona from 9 to 11 December 2013 and was organized by the *Llengua, cultura i identitat en l'era global (Identi.cat)* research group. The aim of the conference was to disseminate the work being done in the research project “*Nuevos hablantes, nuevas identidades: prácticas e ideologías en la era post-nacional*” (acr. NEOPHON) Ref. FFI2011-24781 [New Speakers, New Identities: Practices and Ideologies in the Post-National Era], which receives funding as part of the *National Research, Development and Innovation Plan 2008-2011* programme of the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. The contents presented here have also benefited from the debates on “new speakers” that have taken place in the scope of the COST European network, specifically, through Action IS1306 New Speakers in a “*Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges*”.<sup>1</sup>

The general aim of the project is to investigate the new paradigms for constructing the relationship between language and identity in new speakers. New speakers are non-native speakers of languages or local varieties in different contexts, i.e., languages the speakers did not learn at home but rather in the course of their life in a secondary socialization, either in formal or educational contexts and/or informally in the community. In many contexts,

it is immigration that increases linguistic diversity as immigrants are incorporated as new speakers of the language or languages of their adopted communities. In many minority language contexts, many speakers learn these languages via classes for adults or in the community, and they end up incorporating these languages in their linguistic repertoire alongside or sometimes even replacing the original languages they spoke. In these contexts, the amount of “traditional” or native speakers may be decreasing, and the new speakers can support the continuity of the linguistic community in question. Likewise, the situation generates many questions on how to incorporate these speakers into the new languages and what the consequences are for them and also the traditional or native speakers.

Thus, we pose the following questions: who are the new speakers (types) in the various contexts studied? How, when and why do they learn these languages? How do they deal with their linguistic legitimacy and authority as members of the community they live in, both from their point of view and the point of view of the community receiving them? Do they consider themselves and are they considered “authentic” speakers of the new language they have acquired? What implications does this process have on access to symbolic and economic capital linked to the new language or variety? Lastly, what stance do the new speakers take with respect to the ethnic-nationalist identity discourses in which language is considered an essential element that defines belonging to a national community?

1 Articles on this topic have already been published, resulting from either this project or previous ones that began exploring the case of the new speakers. These works include: O'Rourke, Bernadette & Ramallo, Fernando, 2011. “The Native-non-native Dichotomy in Minority Language Contexts. Comparisons between Irish and Galician”, *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 35 (2), 139–59; O'Rourke, Bernadette & Pujolar, Joan, 2013. “From Native Speakers to ‘New Speakers’ - Problematizing Nativeness in Language Revitalisation Contexts”, *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 35 (2), 47–67 and O'Rourke, Bernadette, Pujolar, Joan & Ramallo, Fernando (eds.), in press. “Special Issue on New Speakers of Minority Languages”. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 231.



<http://digithum.uoc.edu>

New Speakers of Minority Languages: Belonging and Legitimacy

Our hypothesis is that the phenomenon of new speakers questions the dominant linguistic ideologies of early modernity in which the identification between language, culture and territory was the base for legitimate national identities. These ideologies had (and still have) the “native” speaker as the fundamental element that incarnates the existence of the national community and its historical continuity. The concept of the “native” speaker is more an abstract notion or construction than a descriptive concept as it has been regarded in applied linguistics, which is also starting to take into account sociolinguistics. We believe that the new speakers – both in the analytical sense in some contexts and an emic one in others – whether in minority and majority language contexts, is an as yet unexplored way of producing and disseminating new practices and discourses on languages that are emerging with the processes of globalization.

We explore these questions and test our hypothesis comparatively by studying the phenomenon of new speakers both in contexts where discourses on language and identity has historically been important: in the minority language contexts in Europe (Galicia, Catalonia and Ireland); in the Autonomous Community of Madrid as a region that constructs Spanish as a nation-state language; and, lastly, Quebec, which is somewhere between the first two categories as an officially French-speaking province in the nation of Canada where English is clearly predominant.

The methodology used for the research in all these cases is qualitative and based on exploring the biographic trajectories of a broad sample of different profiles of new speakers in each of the contexts studied. Information on the trajectories is compiled via semi-directed interviews, group discussions and, in some contexts, via participant observation. The codification of the interviews was done collaboratively to be able to share categories and subject them to a comparative analysis via the different cases.

For this dossier, we have chosen four cases: Galician, Irish, Catalan and Basque. The Basque case is not formally part of the NEOPHON project but is the result of research done as part of the Bizkailab project run by the University of Deusto in Bilbao and commissioned and sponsored by the Bizkaia Local Government and the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. The researchers have also been simultaneously working on the project run by the UOC and also form part of the COST network. The articles are preliminary studies of the data compiled during the first year of these projects and already present the main ideas on the phenomenon of the new speakers in these contexts.

The article by researchers Ane Ortega, Estibaliz Amorrortu, Jone Goirigolzarri, Jacqueline Urla and Belen Uranga present to us their article “New Basque speakers: linguistic identity and legitimacy” focuses on *euskaldunberris*, literally, new speakers of Basque, a strategically very important group for the future of the Basque linguistic community but which has not been studied in detail until now. The article analyses the linguistic identity of the

new speakers of Basque using three main categories, which are also emic concepts, used within the Basque linguistic community: *euskaldun zaharra* (native speaker), *euskaldunberri* (new speaker) and *euskaldun* (Basque speaker). The authors put forward that these categories index identities that represent a continuum of authenticity and show how the speakers consider themselves to be legitimate Basque speakers or not.

Fernando Ramallo and Bernadette O’Rourke’s article “Profiles of New Speakers of Galician” examines the general profiles of the speakers of Galician based on the concept of intensity of use of the learned language. In the case of Galician, the concept of *neofalante* is a local term and emic category for new speakers of Galician - referred to by the authors as “essential speakers” - who have consciously adopted the language as adults, are committed to the language and have almost completely abandoned using Spanish. In this article, the two authors open the focus of this category to identify further profiles of Galician speakers who were also originally Spanish speakers and who have adopted Galician in their practices with varying intensities. Also of note is the study of the profile of the potential new speakers of Galician, defined as those who appear to meet the conditions for being able to speak Galician but who do not.

In their article “Becoming a New Speaker of Irish: Linguistic *Mudes* Throughout the Life Cycle”, John Walsh and Bernadette O’Rourke examine the linguistic *mudes* of new speakers of Irish. Linguistic *mudes* are the language changes experienced by speakers at given moments of their life that often take place alongside other changes they experience, such as the transition from school to university, starting a new job or getting married and having children. Therefore, the focus here is on the processes of change, i.e., when, how and what does it mean for the individuals to become Irish speakers. In the article, the authors look especially at those who have become competent speakers of the language and are often confused as or pass as native speakers.

Lastly, Tulay Martínez’s article “Constructing Inequalities in Bilingual Spaces: Teaching Catalan to Female Immigrants” presents the author’s research on a community of Moroccan women living in a village in the north of the province of Barcelona who attend free Catalan classes organized by the local council. Martínez focuses on how these women learn Catalan but in particular what it means for them to be able to speak this language in terms of access to symbolic capital. In their case, Catalan does not empower them as their distribution via these classes does not allow them to present themselves as legitimate speakers while, on the other hand, they gain their legitimacy as Spanish speakers, which contradicts the linguistic policies promoting the use of Catalan.

As explained above, the articles forming this dossier are a small part of the research still in progress on the subject of new speakers and, therefore, represent only a glimpse at the issues attracting our attention. We believe this research approach, which focuses more on the speaker than the language, better



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explains how the discourses generated by the new speakers constitute factors of change that should also be reflected in the discourses of some sectors – especially those linked to linguistic policy – which should shift towards calling for greater inclusion and consensus. These new discourses also produce

the balance required between hegemonic ideologies based on indigeneity, authenticity and monolingualism that very often constitute obstacles to certain social conditions that facilitate or impede the participation of individuals in a specific linguistic community.

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

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### Maite Puigdevall Serralvo

Lecturer, Arts and Humanities Department, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.  
 mpuigdevallse@uoc.edu

Maite Puigdevall has a degree in Catalan Language and Literature from the University of Girona (1995) and a master's degree in Welsh Ethnological Studies (1998) and a PhD from Cardiff University, Wales (2006). Since 2008, she has been a lecturer in the Arts and Humanities Department at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. Her areas of interest are sociolinguistics and linguistic planning and policy, in particular, language and identity, language and tourism, language and immigration, new speakers of minority languages, and comparative linguistic policies. She is currently participating in the NEOPHON project.

