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# The “new” and “traditional” speaker dichotomy: bridging the gap

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the tensions and dynamics which exist between “new” speakers and other speakers, such as traditional or native speakers of minority languages (MLs), in an attempt to discover just how much of a barrier to communication are the (perceived) differences which are purported to exist between them. The dynamics between “new” and native speakers seem to be complex and nuanced, and “(in)authenticity” can be indexed through accent, the lexicon and grammatical structures, both by local users and more widely by researchers and other interested third parties, reflecting a wide range of ideological stances. Using a critical sociolinguistic framework, these differences are examined from the perspective of the power differentials among and between various ML speakers/users in two situations of language endangerment, Breton and Yiddish. The reproduction of “symbolic violence”, as described by Bourdieu (1991), which results from such differentials can hinder language revitalization projects and can run counter to the interests of the language community in question. Both settings appear to share a commonality of experience that is wider than just the two language communities under scrutiny here and possible ways of reconciling such differences are examined toward the end of the article.

**Keywords:** Breton, Yiddish, minority, authenticity, speakerhood


DOI 10.1515/ijsl-2014-0034

## 1 Introduction

What it means to “speak” a language, and to be a “speaker” of a particular language or languages appears to be changing as the 21st century progresses. Boundaries are breaking down and fluidity marks much of what were once considered straightforward and, to many commentators, “common sense” categories. This has changed with greater emphasis being placed on inclusivity and with many

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Download Date | 11/23/17 3:08 AM

sociolinguists questioning the inherent ideologies that are often concealed behind such categories. If this is true for major languages, such as English (the English as a Lingua Franca [ELF] approach being a case in point), it is as true, if not more so, for minority and lesser-used languages, which are afforded far less protection of their boundaries than majority languages, due to lower prestige, a smaller demographic mass and inherited ideologies of “contempt” (Grillo 1989) and of the “etiquette of accommodation” (McEwan-Fujita 2010: 27). In a chapter in a volume dedicated to endangered languages, Grinevald and Bert discuss categories of speakers, and produce a seven-fold typology: fluent, semi-speaker, terminal speaker, rememberer, “ghost” speaker, neo-speaker and last speaker (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 49–52). As the authors point out, the neo-speaker has not yet been referenced in the literature (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 51), something the present issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* will go some way to rectifying. Such speakers are “central to language revitalization” (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 51) and very often may represent the only viable form of future transmission for an endangered language, as has been claimed for languages such as Breton (Timm 2003: 34). In this article, I examine this category of speaker, analysing the tensions and dynamics which exist between neo-speakers and other speakers of minority languages (MLs), with the aim of discovering just how much of a barrier to communication the (perceived) differences which are purported to exist between them actually are.

The category of the neo- or “new” speaker stands apart from all the other categories mentioned above in three distinct ways – transmission, attitude and origin. Unlike all the other categories, where acquisition of the endangered language has been possible because of intergenerational and/or community transmission, a “new” speaker has acquired (or is in the process of acquiring) the language in a formal, education setting; he/she is positively disposed to the language being learned; and, in some cases, the “new” speaker might not originate from the ethno-linguistic group in question. This can cause tensions in interactions with speakers from the other categories mentioned, and it is these tensions that are under investigation in the present article. The conflicts mentioned here are to be found in many, if not all, situations of language minoritization, as is attested through the present issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. Examples for the present article will be drawn from two minority languages: Breton and Yiddish. The example of Yiddish provides us with useful examples from a non-territorial language par excellence, but demonstrating, nonetheless, exactly the same issues which are to be found in clearly territorially defined languages such as Breton (and, by extension, other regionally-based languages). From a L2 point of view as well, Yiddish provides examples of non-conventional transmission, as the majority of people who currently use Yiddish outside an

Ultra-Orthodox setting (as the main setting where intergenerational transmission still occurs in significant numbers) are by definition, “new” speakers: “Every successive generation of secular Yiddishists must acquire Yiddish as a second language, ultimately acquiring it imperfectly from a prior generation that had also acquired it imperfectly” (Fishman 2001: 85). Tensions over “imperfect acquisition” and other such issues are examined here through a critical sociolinguistic lens (Heller 2002), which is a framework capable of taking into account power relations and stakes underlying language use, issues of collective and individual identity, and the link between representations and social behaviour. Phenomena which are examined in particular to answer these questions include linguistic differences (such as phonological, lexical and syntactic) and examples of power differentials, centring on language ownership and usership in the two language communities in question.

Fieldwork in Brittany involved data collection for my PhD thesis (Southampton University, 2009) between 2003–2007 (some eight visits) and also in 2009 (one visit), consisting of reflexive participant observation during Breton language courses aimed at adults and a traditional Breton song course (each generally of one week’s duration), and approximately ten semi-structured interviews and “ethnographic conversations” with *néo-bretonnants* (“new” speakers of Breton) attending these courses. The majority of these courses were held in the central and south-western areas of the traditional Breton-speaking region; there was, however, little contact with “traditional” speakers in these areas during the courses. The majority of teachers on the courses were “new” speakers themselves (with one or two exceptions). Data have been presented elsewhere (e.g. Hornsby 2009, 2010) mainly in the form of “vignettes”. Fieldwork among “new” Yiddish speakers took place in 2010, 2011 and 2012 during summer courses for adults in Warsaw, Brussels and London. This consisted of semi-structured interviews with a dozen individuals focusing on variation within the Yiddish language. A major difference with the collection of data in Brittany was the increased contact with native speakers of Yiddish in these settings. At least half of the teachers were “traditional” speakers of (Polish) Yiddish, and a number of the course participants, in Brussels and London at least, might be deemed “semi-speakers”<sup>1</sup> of Yiddish, in that they had grown up with Yiddish as a child, but were unable to speak it fluently as an adult. A small number of other participants were fluent, L1 speakers who were taking advantage of an increasingly rare opportunity to speak the language outside of a family setting.<sup>2</sup>

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1 The term “semi-speaker” as used here follows Ó Giollagáin (2004: 74) to mean active, rather than passive, users of the ML, the definition originally proposed by Dorian (1981) and Fishman (1977).

2 Barry Davies, personal communication (12 September 2012).

## 2 Linguistic differences

### 2.1 Phonology

One of the most obvious differences that is often remarked upon between “traditional” and “new” speakers of MLs is that the latter tend to have non-native-like accents when speaking the language. This can jar on the ears of native speakers and, as the phonology tends to be borrowed from the majority languages (English and French in most cases here) which both “new” and “traditional” (or fluent) minority language speakers have in common, this can cause the “traditional” speaker to switch to the majority language. Two themes emerge as a result, both centred on the attitudes towards the “authenticity” of accent. Native (traditional) speakers can construct particular phonological features of “new” or L2 speakers as “inadequate”, whereas the “new” speakers can resist adopting specific features of the native speakers, either consciously or subconsciously.

In Brittany, fieldwork (July 2009) indicated that such differences existed between “traditional” and “new” speakers of Breton in the perception of the speakers themselves. One “traditional” speaker reported: “No-one would say to me: ‘You learned your Breton from books’.” Having thus established his credentials as an “authentic” speaker, he mentioned those features of “new” speakers that distinguished them from traditional speakers: “Sometimes Diwan [immersion] school children are taught ‘*brezhonég*’, with the accent on the final syllable, as in French, and not on the penultimate syllable as in Breton.” As a point of reference, he stated: “My mother always spoke French like that”, i.e. with a strong Breton accent that stressed the penultimate syllable (my translation). Similarly, during three separate periods of fieldwork with Yiddish speakers (2010, 2011 and 2012), data were collected which confirm that the traditional forms with which the participants had been brought up were considered more ‘authentic’ than the standardized Yiddish they were currently being taught.

- (1) Our teachers speak absolutely correctly ... more correct than I do, but it hasn’t got the *teym* (טײַם), it hasn’t got the taste ... And I find that I’m very stubborn about moving on from my Polish Yiddish, even though it’s considered crackpot and old fashioned now.  
(Female, 60+, London, August 2010)
- (2) I remember once a woman from my class ... we did a little reading, and she said, in English, “That’s not Yiddish.” “It is Yiddish.” “Oh no, that’s not Yiddish, my mother didn’t speak like that.” “Perhaps your mother didn’t speak like that, but this is known as *klal* [standard] Yiddish.” (My translation.)  
(Male, 60+, London, July 2012)

Standardized Yiddish, then, does not fulfil the criteria of “authentic” Yiddish for the two semi-speakers described here on a very personal level. For them, to speak Yiddish is to recreate the “voice” of Yiddish that they would have heard growing up in a Yiddish-speaking household. That “modern” voices do not sound the same for them can conflict with their sense of acceptable (and “authentic”) language.

The difficulties in acquiring a native-like accent in a L2 are well documented; see, for example, Adamson (1988), Beebe (1988), Ellis (1999) and Tarone (1988, 1990). This does not appear to be a fixed feature, however, and variable interlanguage research has shown that learners’ alternations between native and non-native usages evolve over time, and as learners make progress in acquiring the L2, their language can become more complex and/or closer to that of the target language (Mougeon et al. 2010: 5). A barrier to acquiring a full native-like accent may however lie in the L2 speaker’s own subconscious – she/he may not actually want to sound like a “full native speaker”, since this might mean a shift in how his/her own identity is perceived both by the “new” speakers and by others. As Trosset puts it: “To become a fluent speaker of another language is in a sense to become another person. The fear of losing one’s identity sets up a strong resistance against the completely successful acquisition of the new language” (Trosset 1986: 185). This has been discussed more recently with regard to English with Levon (2006) demonstrating that language learners can diverge from the target speech community accent in order to show loyalty to their home identity.

During the above-mentioned fieldwork in Brittany, when asked for his impressions on these differences, the younger research participant (the “new” speaker) tended to agree that differences did indeed exist between himself and his peers and traditional speakers, *especially* at the level of the accent: “It’s just the accent, since the words are the more or less the same. It’s just the accent which is different” (my translation). Thus for one new speaker at least, the recognition that his accent was different from older speakers did not cause him any apparent concern. This is echoed in another context, where Fader (2009: 95) reports that “[i]n Hasidic Yiddish there are certain Yiddish vowels and consonants that are applied to English regularly in order to Yiddishize. These include a flapped [ɾ] ... the pronunciation of initial /w/ with [v] rather than [w] ... and the substitution of the vowel [ɛ] rather than [æ]”; thus in a Yiddish sentence the place names Boro Park and Williamsburg would sound [bɔɾapark] and [viljamsburg] respectively. This applies not only for place names – “food processor” and “mixer” would be pronounced according to Yiddish phonology as well (Fader 2009: 97). It is unlikely that such phonological shifts in English words would be found in the speech of “new” (English L1) speakers of Yiddish. So in a similar way to older, traditional speakers constructing difference as problematic, younger, “new”

speakers can legitimize their own speech through the apparent lack of need to sound like a native speaker. Their way of speaking is “good enough” as a result. This certainly is echoed in research on interlanguage, and Kasper and Schmidt (1996: 157) comment that “total convergence to [native speaker] norms many not be desirable either from the [‘new’ speakers’] or the [native speakers’] point of view”.

Thus the non-traditional nature of some “new” speakers’ accents can be perceived as a barrier to communication since it can make the speech of these speakers harder to understand. Furthermore native speakers can be sensitive to non-native accented speech, and are quick to use it as a signal that the speaker is an out-group member. This conjures up stereotypes about outsiders, which promote prejudice that could impact the credibility of the speaker (see, for example, Dixon et al. 2002) and could, in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, rob the interlocutor of “legitimacy”. Communication accommodation theory (CAT) suggests this is due to divergence, i.e. the boundary marking of linguistic and ethnic distinction on the part of the native speaker (Giles et al. 1991) and may in fact reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, unfamiliarity with “new” speakers as a fairly recent phenomenon in ML situations. If, as Frazer (2006: 138) points out, “Quebeckers have had twenty five years to learn what English-speaking North Americans have had 150 years to absorb: how to hear their language spoken with a[n] [non-native] accent”, how much less time have speakers of MLs had to adjust to their languages being spoken in a non-traditional way? Greater familiarity with current linguistic divergence among ML speakers will become more widespread as the number of “new” speakers increases, but whether this will result in greater acceptability remains to be seen.

## 2.2 Lexicon

In a similar way to the problems posed by non-traditional phonology, unfamiliarity with current linguistic variation in a number of MLs can lead to perceived difficulties of communication between different types of speaker. The problem that ML speakers face with regard to modernization processes, such as terminological elaboration, is the pressure to switch into the majority language in order to access an appropriate term. The ML speaker is thus placed in a difficult situation. To an outsider, these “translanguaging” (García 2009; Blackledge and Creese 2010) or “polylanguaging” (Møller 2008; Jørgensen 2010) processes can sound like incomplete acquisition of the ML and can lead to ridicule (Trosset 1986); on the other hand, the use of non-institutionalized neologisms in the ML language can lead to alienation with other ML speakers. Among Breton speakers, debates exist over

which “borrowings” are acceptable – massive use of French lexicon in a variety known as *brezhoneg beleg* ‘priest’s Breton’ (in reference to translations of catechisms full of French calques) is contested by some “new” speakers, who consider Celtic-based coinages as necessary and desirable, whereas the native speakers are unable to make use of these coinages to the same extent, even if they do recognise their necessity. A third position is occupied by other L2 speakers who display “inverted purism”, defending the cause of native Breton speakers as “authentic” (see Abalain 2004: 78).<sup>3</sup>

As far as Yiddish is concerned, neologisms were predominantly coined from High German sources, especially in science and technology, but since the Second World War, this has been the case to a much lesser extent, for obvious reasons. Neologisms are currently being developed by educators of Yiddish in secular settings, the process being termed “lexical de-Germanization” by Fishman (2011: 356), since the source language is now English, and not High German.

Fader (2009: 93), in a L1 (ultra-orthodox) context, reports that “[i]n contrast to many other bi- and multilingual contexts, parents never corrected or complained about simultaneities in girls’ efforts to speak English. As Rifky said to me, ‘I’m so happy when my girls speak Yiddish that I would never [quibble] about an English word here or there.’” The same linguistic repertoire among secular, “new” speakers, however, is described as “replete with Anglicisms and Germanisms” since these speakers “curiously reject that which lives and is growing while they cleave to that which is admittedly wilting before their very eyes and is patently beyond their ability to revernacularise” (Fishman 2001: 89), clearly demonstrating the huge divide between the ultra-orthodox and the secularists in linguistic terms alone. This divide appears to be based on religious terms – whereas intergenerational transmission is occurring among religious, ultra-Orthodox (Hasidic) communities (Katz 2004: 385) this is very much not the case for secular speakers of Yiddish, who apart from a number of notable exceptions, are increasingly “new” speakers. Numbers of secular, native speakers of Yiddish are very much on the decline and are confined in their vast majority to the older generations. During fieldwork (2010), the attendance at a Yiddish summer school of two families with small children being brought up in Yiddish was a matter of considerable comment. There is little likelihood that a “new” speaker of Yiddish will be produced among the Ultra-Orthodox, as these communities tend to be closed; it has been noted that those groups of Hasidim who do accept outsiders (such as the Lubavitch) are shifting in the direction of English, since newcomers tend not

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3 See Hornsby and Quentel (2013) for more details.

to be Yiddish-speaking, nor do they assimilate linguistically into the Yiddish-speaking milieu (Fader 2009: 11).

In the case of Breton, then, familiarity with new terms will increase among those younger speakers educated through the immersion and bilingual school systems in Brittany, even as the number of speakers continues to shrink, to the extent that at some point in the future, “new” speakers will make up the majority of all Breton speakers (see Broudic [2009] for further details on Breton demographics). As far as Yiddish terminology is concerned, the trajectories of secular and religious Yiddish speakers will continue to diverge, since the ideologies (and lack of contact between ideologies) of each group of speakers mean that a common approach to lexicalisation is neither sought nor desired.

### 2.3 Syntax

The category of syntax is placed last since, I would argue, non-traditional features of word order seem to be less frequent (and therefore less noticeable) than non-traditional phonological and lexical traits. This is not to detract from the impact such characteristics might have upon “traditional” speakers when hearing them, merely that they possibly stand out less prominently than the other two categories of features mentioned above. Such impressions need to be backed up with empirical research, of course, but observations I have made in the fieldwork reported here seem to point to this; research participants rarely mentioned this area, if at all, during semi-structured interviews and ethnographic conversations.

To take the example of Breton, the language appears to show a verbal shift when it is used by “new” speakers. In one text book for learners of the language (*Brezhoneg, méthode de breton, hentenn oulpan*), the author, having explained traditional and normative syntax throughout most of the book, mentions towards the end that aberrant forms do exist:

It is not beyond the realms of possibility to hear people ‘transgress’ the normal syntax of Breton, which requires that the conjugated verb be located in second position. ... Current usage and the written standard avoid this construction as much as possible, but songs, certain neo-speakers and some local dialects are fond of it. (Davalan 2000 [2003]: 165, my translation)

Note that this phenomenon does not appear to be the influence of L1 (French) on the speech of these “*néo-bretonnants*”, since such constructions would be unusual in French as well. The examples given are as follows:

*Alies, ma zud a ev dour.* ‘My family always drinks water.’  
*Bemdez, Bob a gomz saozneg.* ‘Bob speaks English everyday.’



Traditionally, these would be rendered:

Alies e ev ma zud dour.  
 Bemdez e komz Bob saozneg.  
 (Davalan 2000 [2003]:162, 165)

Again, there is a push toward placing the subject before the verb, and not after it, the latter being characteristically “Celtic” (this is the usual construction in Welsh and it is a frequent, if not default, construction in Breton).<sup>4</sup> This could be because French (like English), the L1 of the speakers, is a SVO (subject-verb-object) language, or it could merely be because *néo-bretonnants* are operating in a L2, and are making changes which a L1 speaker would instinctively not make.

Similarly to Breton, Yiddish exhibits syntactic changes as well as it becomes a L2 for “new” speakers. A number of students come to Yiddish courses having studied German and the tendency is for such students, if they do not have a family background in Yiddish (and thus cannot access a “Yiddish voice” in their head, as described in 2.1), to make their sentences verb-final, as in German. This does tend to sound unusual for native Yiddish speakers.<sup>5</sup> This runs counter to two tendencies over the past two centuries in Yiddish – first, the desire, expressed in the 19th century, to “distance Yiddish from German and to write it as it is spoken” (Fishman 2011: 354) and then continued into the 20th century in Jewish schools in Eastern Europe where Yiddish was not to be “Germanized in any way, shape or form” (Fishman 2011: 355); and secondly, the de facto lack of language contact between German and Yiddish after the Second World War, which has been effectively replaced by contact with English and modern Hebrew (Fishman 2011: 356). It would thus appear that some “new” speakers of Yiddish may run counter to the de-Germanizing ideologies connected with late 20th century Yiddish linguistic norms.

Fader (2009: 94) reports that “less fluent Yiddish speakers ... often used English word order in Yiddish” and her example of “*OK Malky, yetst di gayst*” ‘OK Malky, now you go’ instead of the more usual “*OK Malky, yetst gaysti*” (i.e. an

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<sup>4</sup> This is known as VSO [verb-subject-object] word-order, and according to this typology, all Celtic languages follow very similar patterns: “Of the five universal features distinct for VSO languages (Universals 3, 6, 12, 16 and 19), the Celtic languages follow faithfully the typological implications. Thus Celtic languages are all prepositional, *have SVO as an alternate order*, have initial interrogative particles, place WH- words before the verb, have the main verb after the auxiliary and have post- head modification as the main format” (Ball and Müller 2010: 13, my emphasis). Celtic languages may indeed have “SVO as an alternate order” but this can be used in very different ways by L1 and L2 speakers.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Beer, personal communication (4 July 2012).

inverted form) demonstrates a non-traditional form used by L1 speakers. Should a L2 speaker of Yiddish use a non-traditional form, however, it would be seen as inauthentic by L1 speakers, since “for Hasidim ... emaciated, artificial, and sterile Yiddish elicits some hilarity” (Katz 2004: 380).

### 3 Power differentials

Much is made of the divide between “traditional” and “new” speakers in the literature on minority languages. Jones says the Breton spoken by “new” speakers is “frequently unintelligible to many of the native Breton speakers from predominantly rural communities” (Jones 1995: 428), and that “although both the obsolescent and reviving varieties are termed ‘Breton’, they are not, strictly speaking, the same language” (Jones 1998: 321). Trosset reports on the near-impossibility of “new” speakers of Welsh to assimilate into the Welsh speech community: “Several second-language speakers reported that even after years of hearing them speak Welsh fluently, some of their Welsh friends seemed incapable of ceasing to speak to them in English” (Trosset 1986: 173). In a Yiddish context, Newman comments on the apparent divide between the speech of native speakers, who are overwhelmingly Hasidim [Ultra-Orthodox Jews], and that of “new” speakers: “The Yiddish spoken by Hasidim is not the same Yiddish that is studied and taught in academic settings and courses aimed at Yiddish learners” (Newman 2010).

However, sociolinguists (and others) have rightly problematized such “differences” as being ideologically invested, since the studies and reports mentioned above, as well as many others, both linguistic and sociolinguistic, characteristically focus on the “boundaries” between natives and non-natives. Crucially, this involves a certain academic attachment to categories and to the qualifying adjectives we linguists are prone to put before the term “speaker”. MacCaluim, commenting on this in a Scottish context puts it succinctly: “Works focusing on native speaker/learner divisions have failed to acknowledge that many native Gaelic speakers perceive the situation more in terms of Gaelic speaker/non-Gaelic speaker rather in terms of Gael/non-Gael or whether or not learners belong to the Gaelic community” (MacCaluim 2007: 102). Research which highlights such differences in fact ideologically echoes Bourdieu’s notion of legitimate language (or discourse), in that legitimacy can be accorded in such work to native (or conversely to “new”) speakers and their interlocutors under specific social conditions and conventions of form (Bourdieu 1991). As a consequence, when pointing out variation in a minority language, researchers can unwittingly engage in that symbolic violence if the points of contention are consistently identified as the

boundary between a minority and a majority language; they can thus add to a situation where “dominated speakers, as they strive desperately for correctness ... [are] suddenly dispossessed of their own language” (Bourdieu 1991: 52).

### 3.1 Native speakers and boundary marking

As Kubota points out, very often native speakers are credited with a “perceived superiority of their linguistic competence ... in the areas of accuracy, fluency, range of vocabulary, and knowledge of cultural nuances of language” (Kubota 2009: 234). Who counts as a native speaker in a ML context? Such is the problematic nature of this question that Grineveld and Bert (2011: 49) avoid the issue altogether in their typology of speakers of endangered languages and include instead the category of “fluent speaker” (though they talk of “native speakers” elsewhere in their chapter, without definition). The problem with the term “fluent” (or alternatively “traditional”) speaker is that both “native” and “new” speakers can be “fluent” and both can use “conservative” language (one of Grineveld and Bert’s criteria for being a fluent speaker). In a ML context, a “native” speaker may have less of a command of the language than a “new” speaker and the latter may demonstrate more proficiency in the areas mentioned by Kubota (accuracy, fluency and vocabulary in particular). For example, Le Coadic (2013) points out that modern Breton literature is overwhelmingly written in a standardized form of the language by a “regional intelligentsia which rarely has Breton as its first language” and from which native speakers are excluded “since they are illiterate in their mother tongue” (my translations).

If native speakers are not active in the production of literature in Breton, the same cannot be said to the same extent for Yiddish. However, a divide is still discernible between the *type* of literature produced by native and L2 speakers of Yiddish. Weinstein (2001: 261–262) describes the division thus: “[the] Ultra-Orthodox turn out religious tracks as well as what might be called shlock religious novels ... the output of secular ... Yiddishists tends toward the scholarly and the literary, or the frankly nostalgic”. Whereas writers in the latter category can of course be native speakers of Yiddish, they tend to be older, and of the notable writers from the younger generation (among whom we can number Schaechter-Viswanath, Taub and Matveyev in the USA, Nekrasov in Russia, Wiegand in the UK, Soxberger in Austria, and the prose writers Kotlerman in Israel and Rozier in France), at least half of them have learned Yiddish through formal instruction, rather than through intergenerational transmission.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, any attempts at crossing the

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<sup>6</sup> Khayke Beruriah Wiegand, personal communication (2 March 2013).

divide can be thwarted. Berger (2012) reports that when a more secular type of literature for certain sections of the Hasidim population (“articles on topics from the wider world (science, nature, crime, war, espionage) ... but in Yiddish, of course, and with the seal of approval that marked it safe for Hasidic consumption”) began to appear in New York City, rabbinic pressure caused the magazine to cease production. This divide, though different in nature than that which exists in the Breton literary world because it is religious-based, has produced a similar outcome: native speakers of Hasidic Yiddish produce publications for their own communities, and “new”/secular speakers of Yiddish cater for largely L2, secular audiences. The divide is also manifest in the form of Yiddish used: “new” and/or secular writers employ “klal” (standard) Yiddish, whereas the Ultra-Orthodox “do not follow the radical (and Soviet-inspired) 1937 version of the Yivo [Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut/Institute for Jewish Research] spelling rules, their grammar differs from standard literary Yiddish [and] their Yiddish is not purist and incorporates English words ...” (Katz 2004: 380).

Thus literature styles and associated linguistic formats can mark boundaries in both religious/secular and in traditional/innovative terms, though with perhaps a surprising inversion – Ultra-Orthodox literature, written in a more hybridized form of Yiddish (but dealing with traditional religious themes) is contrasted with secular literature, which is much more conservative linguistically and can be termed nostalgic in nature, whereas “the Hasidim divide Yiddish literature into traditional and modern. But for them ‘traditional’ means worldly [and] ‘modern’ as being like them” (Weinstein 2001: 261). Being a Yiddish consumer of literature, whether as a native or a “new” speaker of the language, means to participate in linguistic boundary marking to a greater or lesser extent.

### 3.2 “New” speakers

Many “new” speakers identify with the need to renew a ML through revitalization projects at a time when “the world is facing a linguistic crisis of unprecedented scale” (Crystal 2000: vi) with “at least one language [dying], on average, every two weeks or so” (Crystal 2000: 19). However, suspicions about such projects can cause traditional speakers of Breton to distance themselves from language revitalization attempts since, according to Pentecouteau (2002b: 176), “people brought up speaking Breton are almost totally excluded from them” (my translation) (cf. also Glaser [2007: 260] on Scotland). Pentecouteau further notes that “new” speakers of Breton rarely seek out native speakers when learning Breton and that, consequently, the Breton language is developing on the margins of native speaker practices (Pentecouteau 2002b: 53). Much of the standardized

nature of “new” speakers’ speech tends to alienate ML speakers (as discussed above) and sometimes this is based on an ideology of the “standard” held by “new” speakers, whereby language standardization is the only way to save the language (Pentecoteau 2002b: 202). Standardizing language ideologies based on Brittany as a homogenized “Breton” region/country in nationalist discourse can cause further alienation among non-Breton speakers, especially among speakers of Brittany’s other minority language, Gallo.

Furthermore, a number of language revitalizers can actively seek to exclude native speakers from revitalization efforts, seeing them as a cumbersome burden. Pentecoteau mentions meeting a number of Breton-language activists who were apparently waiting for the disappearance of the last of the native speakers so that they can get on with the “real” work of revitalizing the language (Pentecoteau 2002a: 175).

In the case of Yiddish, there appears to be little contact between “new” and “traditional” speakers in that “the secular Yiddishist and the ultra-Orthodox Yiddish worlds are both intellectually and physically distant from each other, not knowledgeable about each other and in no way helpful to one another” (Fishman 2001: 90). Fieldwork (2010, 2011) confirms this – teachers instructing L2 Yiddish learners on summer Yiddish courses in Brussels and London were either the last generation in their families to have had the language transmitted intergenerationally to them, or else they were L2 speakers themselves; one of the teachers admitted a great curiosity in the Yiddish spoken by the Hasidim, but was of the opinion that contact with such speakers was nigh-on impossible.

Thus “new” speakers’ (linguistic) behaviour can mark group boundaries in much the same way as native speakers voice their own claims to “authentic speakerhood”. This can happen through the active exclusion of native speakers, as detailed in Pentecoteau’s work above, or through pursuing an ideology of anonymity (mirrored from that of the majority language situation), where a ML speaker attempts to sound as if (s)he is “from nowhere” and use “a common unmarked standard public language” (Woolard 2008: 307), which does not tie in with the traditional ML speaker’s experience – very often, the lack of standardization and pronounced regional variation of a ML is what makes it “authentic” for the native speaker. By way of contrast, a “new” speaker can also *transgress* boundaries (arising out of a situation of linguistic contact with the majority language) which a native speaker might find alienating. For example, Urla reports that in a Basque context, “language play seemed to be more valued than imparting normative or native Basque”, which “differs markedly from the language revival movement’s emphasis on creating a formal, standard Basque” (Urla 2001: 155).

## 4 Conclusion: an individualistic approach to the speech community

How can these differences be reconciled? First of all, the recognition of native speakers *as* native speakers needs to be guaranteed. Native speakers do not have the same linguistic needs as L2 ones, and too often, as L2 speakers can form the bulk of a ML speech community now, the needs of the majority predominate. An inclusive approach needs to differentiate the needs of the two sets of speakers. After all, native speakers do have the same rights to consideration in language planning as do “new” speakers.<sup>7</sup> Some commentators have highlighted the “lowest common denominator effect”, where the language of native speakers can be affected by the presence of L2 speakers; this has been described by Ó Curnáin (2007: 59) in an Irish context: “Nontraditional peer groups tend to exert an influence of lowest common denominator on the members so that the most extreme instances of reduction or nontraditional usage become prominent; in contrast with norm-enforcement with traditional vernacular.” In an effort to combat this, Hickey describes how one large *naíonra* ‘kindergarten’ has separate sessions for Irish L1 and L2 children, though not without some controversy (Hickey 2002: 1314). In a Canadian context, Mougeon and Beniak (1994) report that many French-medium schools separate English-dominant pupils from French-dominant pupils in the early years of schooling in Ontario, Canada. To take an example from Wales, failure to differentiate between different speakers and their differing needs has caused Estyn, the inspection service for schools in Wales, to criticize the tendency to teach Welsh L1 secondary students as if they were L2 Welsh speakers, which effectively boosts the examination results of the schools involved, but, as the inspectorate points out, “in terms of pupils’ progression in the Welsh language, this is an artificial boost and they receive less of a challenge as a result” (Estyn 2002: 7). Thus L1 minority language pupils’ needs seem to come second, in these situations at least, to the overall goal of producing “new” speakers of the languages in question, but without differentiating the linguistic input in any effective way.

When it comes to the needs of “new” speakers, a personality/identity-based approach seems to resonate more fully for some L2 speakers, than for some groups of native speakers. Those people who use a minority language, to various degrees of fluency, for emotional or other forms of attachment need not be ex-

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7 A greater awareness of the potential native speakers can bring to language revitalization programmes might go some way to alleviating non-complimentary terms, e.g. “bogger Irish” to denote the speech of native speakers from rural Ireland (Ó Giollagáin 2010: 16).

cluded because they were born in the “wrong” place or to the “wrong” parents. Reinforcing or adopting a ML identity does reinforce the demographics of a beleaguered language and a personality approach allows for a sliding scale of usage, where “speakerhood” and “userhood” are not confined to a geographical location. Such speakers have a “vested interest” in being a speaker of the ML in question – they have invested time, money and very often emotional energy into “becoming” a speaker. Le Nevez has suggested that, in the case of Breton, there is a need for “understanding Breton not as a language but as a range of situated social practices [which] will likely lead to initiatives that are not focused on the language but on the language community” (Le Nevez 2013: 98). This holds true for many other MLs as well but requires a shift in thinking for ML speakers and planners alike.

Yiddish presents an interesting case in the world of lesser-used languages, precisely because the boundary marking between different types of speaker is so clearly delineated; sources and criteria of authority appear to be mutually exclusive, in that the use of Yiddish between secular (increasingly “new”, L2) speakers and ultra-Orthodox (native) speakers is a very rare occurrence. This is an area where further research could profitably be carried out, especially in the investigation of those occasional Yiddish speakers from the ultra-Orthodox community who do manage to “bridge the gap” and enter the world of secular Yiddish speakers, but often at a high personal cost. Having said this, the patterns of divergence between “new” and traditional Yiddish speakers have much in common with other MLs, which should not be overlooked.

Crucially, the emphasis which has sometimes been placed on linguistic differences in ML communities by researchers, echoing a language ideology of standardized language (or its rejection) can in fact reinforce or detract from the legitimacy of different speakers in the communities under investigation. This has been suggested previously by other researchers such as Gal (2006: 13) who stresses the need to put “communities and speakers at the centre of attention in order to study the whole range of speakers’ linguistic practices in interaction” rather than *language* itself. Ideally, this would involve optimal rather than total convergence (Giles et al. 1991) between the two speaker varieties in situations of language minoritization and would allow greater recognition of new or hybrid forms of language use and of usership, of a greater awareness of how language practices are legitimized and of how repertoires reinforce or marginalize the power bases of different speakers (Heller 2001: 383). MacCaluim, referred to above, points out that in Scotland, “for many native Gaelic speakers, the fact that a Gaelic learner speaks fluent Gaelic is far more than important than where s/he hails from. This view is not, however, universal” (MacCaluim 2007: 102). This highlights the need for further research among ML speaker attitudes to explore

how the above-mentioned view can become more universal than it currently is. Until then, speakers of MLs will continue to formulate opinions according to the learner/native speaker dichotomy, obscuring individual speaker needs as a result.

**Acknowledgements:** Part of the fieldwork with native speakers of Polish Yiddish was funded within the project *Dziedzictwo językowe Rzeczypospolitej. Baza dokumentacji zagrożonych języków* (“Heritage languages of Poland” – grant no. 11H11 00148 within the framework of the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education’s *Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki*).

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