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***Neofalantes* as an active minority:  
understanding language practices and  
motivations for change amongst new  
speakers of Galician**

**Abstract:** In this article we use Moscovici's (1976) notion of active minorities as a framework to explain the linguistic practices and motivations behind linguistic change amongst new speakers of Galician. Revitalization policies since the 1980s brought about changes in the symbolic and economic value of Galician on the linguistic market. However, this has not been significant enough to change the rules of social mobility and Spanish has continued to be the language of prestige. Despite this, *neofalantes* 'new speakers of Galician' have opted for linguistic change and engage in the process of majority language displacement. We argue that this displacement can at least in part be explained by a move away from functionalist models of language contact and shift and towards an understanding of these processes from a language conflict perspective. This allows us to explain the practices of *neofalantes* as not simply deviations from the sociolinguistic "status quo" but as reactions to it and as proponents of social change. To explore the behavioural styles and practices of *neofalantes* as an active minority, we analyse the discourses which emerge from discussion groups involving twelve new speakers of Galician about their sociolinguistic practices.

**Keywords:** new speakers, active minority, Galician, minority languages

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## 1 Introduction

As in other minority language contexts, the profile of new speakers of Galician constitutes a sociolinguistically diverse group. This profile includes Spanish-

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speaking migrants from other parts of Spain, immigrants from outside of Spain who acquire Galician as an additional language, as well as returning migrants from the Galician diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Of most significance, however, in terms of their overall size and visibility are new speakers who were born and raised in Galicia. In this article we will focus specifically on this category of speakers, a category which has acquired the generic label *neofalantes* (literally neo-speakers) in some academic and popular discourse. This label refers to individuals for whom Spanish was their language of primary socialization, but who at some stage in their lives (usually early to late-adolescence) have adopted Galician language practices and on occasions displaced Spanish all together (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011).

This article explores the process of and motivations behind *majority language displacement* (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013) in which many Galician new speakers are seen to engage. Majority language displacement, in difference to the more widely studied phenomenon of *minority language displacement* does not tend to affect the formal structure of the language being displaced. Nor does it usually lead to “any reduction in paradigms, simplifications and loss of the language’s own features, and, ultimately language shift and loss”, something which is frequently characteristic of minority language speakers who adopt majority language practices (Aikhenvald 2012: 77). In the case of majority language displacement, therefore, the process tends to be of a functional nature. Here we will argue that this displacement can at least in part be explained by looking at language contact from a language conflict perspective. To do so, we draw on Moscovici’s (1976) notion of *active minorities* as a framework to explain the linguistic practices and motivations for linguistic change amongst new speakers of Galician.

## 2 *Neofalantes* and majority language displacement

*Neofalantes* constitute a relatively new sociolinguistic profile in Galicia. They share a set of common linguistic trajectories, but with different social and ideological backgrounds. They constitute a profile of speaker which began to emerge

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<sup>1</sup> The number of new speakers with such profiles is however relatively small, particularly compared with corresponding numbers in Catalonia and the Basque Country where migratory trends have been more significant. Galicia’s economically and geographically isolated position in the north-western corner of Spain did not attract the waves of Spanish-speaking workers to other regions. Similarly, in a more contemporary context, Galicia has not experienced the same levels of immigration from outside of Spain experienced by some of Spain’s outer autonomous communities. Conversely, Galicia has a long history of out migration and emigration to Europe and South America.

in the 1960s. This profile was consolidated in the context of socio-political changes in Galicia since the 1980s and to a certain extent more favourable language policies for some of the other languages of Spain (including Galician, Basque and Catalan) in the context of Spain's transition to democracy. *Neofalantes* are essentially the product of the bilingual education policies in place in Galicia since the 1980s and which have brought recent generations of young Galicians into contact with the Galician language in a formal setting. For many of this younger generation, particularly those residing in Galicia's main urban centres, Spanish is the language of the home. According to most recent sociolinguistic data on Galician, less than 30 percent within the under twenty-five age cohort had acquired Galician as their first language. This compares with sixty-five percent in the over fifties age category. Figures are even more acute amongst Galicia's urban youth, with only eleven percent reporting Galician as their first language (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2008). It thus follows that for a younger generation of Galicians, the education system has come to be their primary agent for the production of the language.

As well as producing Galician speakers, the inclusion of the language in the education system has instilled a greater sense of sociolinguistic awareness amongst this younger generation. This has in turn eliminated many of the prejudicial beliefs historically associated with the language, linking it to backwardness and poverty. Over the past three decades, attitudes to Galician have changed significantly, particularly amongst a younger generation (González González 2011; Bouzada-Fernández 2003; O'Rourke 2011; Observatorio da Cultura Galega 2011). Reading and writing skills in the language are also highest amongst younger age groups, while nonetheless remaining below the corresponding standards acquired in Spanish (Silva Valdibia 2010).

While the inclusion of Galician in the education system plays an important role in raising the status of the language, it does not however guarantee increased levels of language use at a societal level. As Hornberger (2008: 1) and many others have shown, "schools alone are not enough to do the job". While almost ninety percent of those under twenty-five say they can speak Galician "well", only forty-five percent report active use of the language. This figure drops to twenty percent amongst young people living in urban contexts (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2008). Despite increased institutional support for Galician, intergenerational transmission continues to decline. Over the last twenty years, the percentage of mother-tongue speakers of Galician fell from sixty to forty-seven percent (Ramallo 2012).

However, these figures conceal some of the more positive changes which have taken place at other levels (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011). Over the past three decades, there has been a notable increase in bilingual practices. Fifty-seven percent of Galicians under the age of twenty-five report bilingual behaviour in both Gali-

cian and Spanish, with thirty-three percent reporting “more Spanish than Galician” and twenty-two percent “more Galician than Spanish” (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2008).<sup>2</sup> The use of Galician amongst first language speakers of Spanish is also shown to change over the life-cycle of the individual. Seven percent report increased bilingual behaviour with a leaning toward predominant use of Galician and a further two percent report abandoning Spanish altogether in favour of monolingual practices in Galician (Instituto Galego de Estatística 2008). In most cases, this change is down to “personal” reasons as opposed to “work-rated” motivations. Comparatively, first language speakers of Galician who report shifts to Spanish seem to be more driven by its perceived value in instrumental as opposed to integrative terms (Monteagudo 2012). This would seem to imply a more ethno-cultural or identity-based frame for new speakers of Galician, as opposed to any inherent value awarded the language as a form of economic capital.

While language policy in Galicia has to a certain degree increased the symbolic and economic value of Galician on the linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991), this has not been sufficient to bring about a reversal of language shift. In the last 30 years, Galician became a requisite for access to public sector employment. As a result certain niche markets emerged within the new Galician public administration including jobs in the public media, education and local and regional administrative bodies, giving employment to those who could show formal skills in the language. However, while the status of the language has been enhanced since the 1980s, Spanish remains the language of prestige and social mobility. We can thus repeat the question that Ryan (1979) asked several decades ago about the persistence of low-prestige languages. What prompts speakers of a dominant language such as Spanish to adopt a non-prestige language such as Galician and to engage in the process of *majority language displacement* (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013)?

Here, we wish to argue that this displacement can at least in part be explained by looking at language groups which come into contact from a language conflict perspective. Existing models of language groups in contact have, as Williams (1992: 121) highlights, tended to involve typologies and approaches that limit what can be said about the inherent conflict between such groups.<sup>3</sup> This, he

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<sup>2</sup> In language surveys carried out by Instituto Galego de Estatística, language use is measured on a four point scale ranging from “Galician only” to “Spanish only”. Between these categories are two other categories which include “more Galician than Spanish” and “more Spanish than Galician”. These latter two categories capture varying degrees of reported bilingual linguistic practices amongst Galicians.

<sup>3</sup> Language conflict models have been studied at great length in Catalan and Occitan Sociolinguistics. See, for example, Aracil (1965), Ninyoles (1975) and Gardy and Lafont (1981).

argues, marginalizes minority languages and at the same time makes it virtually impossible to express anger and frustration by those faced with the process of language shift, sentiments which, as we will see later, come across in new speaker discourses. Williams suggests that the main reason for this is that there has been a tendency to view the process of language shift from a functionalist perspective and therefore as consensual. This in turn plays down the potential for conflict and ignores power relations. Therefore, within existing models we have been unable to account for apparent deviations from the sociolinguistic “status quo” such as is revealed in the behaviour of new speakers.

In this context, Moscovici’s (1976) notion of *active minorities* through which he put forward a dynamic perspective in the analysis of social reality and the understanding of social change (and subsequent developments of the notion, see for example, Moscovici et al. [1985], Moscovici et al. [1994] and Martin and Hewstone [2010]) provides a particularly useful framework within which to understand the linguistic practices and motivations for linguistic change amongst new speakers.

### 3 Active minorities: a theoretical view

Moscovici’s theory of active minorities looks at the conflict which takes place in society, allowing a reflection on the motivations for action, decision-making and change such as those evidenced in new speaker practices. Up until the 1970s, the study of social influence was devoted mainly to the experimental analysis of conformity within a group. Sherif (1936) and Asch (1952) related social influence to the power of majorities and to the desire of the individual to share the same perspective with the group. For them social influence was mainly understood through a *functionalist* point of view, which insisted that conflict was avoided, thus lending itself to a harmonious society. From a functionalist perspective, individuals were seen to conform to existing rules and norms, and more specifically to the rules of the majority.

Active minorities can be defined as individuals or groups who through their behaviour attempt to influence both the attitudes and practices of the majority and in doing so, bring about social change. Some examples of active minorities include environmentalists, squatters, feminist and nationalist movements and, in our case here, *neofalantismo* (literally neo-speakerism or a new speakerist movement). In his discussion of active minorities, Moscovici (1976) stressed innovation as the most important idea in his theory of social change. According to him, social change arises from “the power of minorities” and such change takes place on the one hand because of conflict and on the other as a result of certain

behavioural styles which are displayed by the active minority including *consistency*, *rigidity*, *equality*, *investment* and *autonomy*. Consistency, Moscovici proposes, is manifested through the repetition of the same message over time while the behavioural style of rigidity forces the majority to understand the influence of the minority. Equality emphasises the desire of the minority to establish reciprocal relations with the majority. There is frequently also an investment of time, money and energy in a particular cause, underscoring the minority's capacity of sacrifice. Finally, an active minority often displays autonomy or independence in judgement and thus a will to act according to its own principles. Subsequently, extremism is often seen to become an element of autonomy because of its tendency to emphasise a consistent and strict attitude. Of these behavioural styles, however, consistency is probably the most important in terms of social influence, although in and of itself is not sufficient as a means of explaining social change (Mugny and Papastamou 1982). Through these behavioural styles, the minority thus creates conflict between itself and the majority by insisting on its individual point of view and in doing so generates a polarisation within society. This can in turn prompt action on the part of the majority either to conform to the ideas of the minority or conversely, to react against them by adopting a series of strategies to curb the success of the minority. These strategies can involve the downgrading and censuring of the active minority, something which is often manifested by negating the validity of their position and by emphasising their apparent absurdity and incoherence. The majority can also engage in the process of psychologization whereby arguments are used to discredit the minority and those in the group.

### 3.1 New speakers as an active minority

The emergence of an active minority of new speakers of Galician can be set within Galicia's broader socio-political context. This in turn must be set against the ideological basis on which thirty years of language policies in Galicia has been framed. Language policy in Galicia can be described as largely non-interventionist and cautionary (Lorenzo 2005), reflecting the lukewarm levels of support for the promotion of the language through the predominant conservative and centralist policies of Galician branches of Spain's centre-right Popular Party. Their handling of the language question reflects an ideological position, which sought to maintain the linguistic (and consequently social) "status quo" in Galicia. In doing so it aimed to reassure the dominant (albeit numerically smaller) Spanish-speaking sectors of the population that their existing positions of power would remain unchanged. This approach, which was a consequence of neo-liberal principles, promoted (although implicitly) the idea of "harmonious" bilingualism, and more

recently “friendly” (*cordial*) bilingualism, that is the non-conflictive co-existence of Castilian and Galician within the community (see Regueiro Tenreiro [1999] for a fuller discussion of the concept). Their approach to the language question contrasts with that proposed by the Galician Nationalist Party (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*) which views the language contact situation between Galician and Spanish as conflictive and as one in which Galician speakers still remain in a dominated socio-economic position. There has been a simultaneous undermining of each others’ linguistic ideologies by both sides with the link between speaking Galician and the more radical elements of nationalism emerging as one of the outcomes of this political confrontation, thus replacing former social stigmas associated with the language – such as rurality and poverty – with newer ones such as the link with nationalism (Bouzada- Fernández 2003; Recalde Fernández 2000; Santamarina 2000). The promotion of “harmonious” bilingualism by previous Galician Administrations and their criticism of the “language conflict” paradigm have, it could be argued, made the majority of Galicians less consciously defensive about language issues in Galicia and subsequently more accepting of Spanish as the seemingly value-neutral language (O’Rourke 2011). At the same time, we suggest that such policies have unsettled the mood of an active minority and as such contributed to the process of majority language displacement amongst new speakers of Galician (O’Rourke 2014). Since the 1980s, other types of active minorities have also come into existence, partly as a reaction to pro-Galician groups such as *neofalantes*. These anti-Galician groups strongly oppose the process of Galician language revitalization (see Regueira 2009), constructing a discourse around the imposition of Galician and the subsequent injustices they perceive to endure as Spanish speakers.

Here we argue that looking at the new speaker phenomenon from the perspective of an active minority can in some way contribute to our understanding of the motivations behind changes in the linguistic behaviour of *neofalantes* and in particular, of their decisions to displace a more socially and economically powerful first language with one which offers less in terms of social mobility and prestige. Becoming a new speaker thus requires innovative action through an appropriation of a new linguistic space as well as a commitment to the transformation of society from below. In doing so, there could be said to be a rejection of the existing status quo, through a shift away from the majority language.

## 4 Methodology

To begin to explore the behavioural styles and practices of *neofalantes* as an active minority, we analysed the discourses which emerged from discussion



groups involving twelve new speakers of Galician about their sociolinguistic practices. Through this technique we sought to re-create a context of informal interaction which could be seen to replicate real situations where ideas and points of view were negotiated (Edley and Litosseliti 2010), thus giving some sense of the salient social representations of new speakers as a collective. The group discussion therefore provided us with a useful technique to tap into the discursive production of new speakers' perceptions of themselves as a social and linguistic group. The respondents chosen for the study ranged in age between 18 and 25 years and consisted of university students and graduates. Spanish was the language in which they were brought up speaking in the home and which they reported using with family and friends for at least the first fifteen years of their lives. More than half of the respondents included in the two focus groups reported passive exposure to Galician in the home and community and came from homes in which parents or grandparents spoke Galician but used Spanish when addressing their children. In our analysis of the data we explored ways in which new speakers manifest behavioural styles and characteristics of active minorities and how they position themselves as such. In the following sections we discuss excerpts<sup>4</sup> from the data which illustrate these styles and positions.

## 5 Motivations for change, perceptions from the majority and behavioural styles

In the discussion groups, new speakers presented the reasons behind changes in their sociolinguistic behaviour and their motivations for adopting what in most cases were predominantly Galician-language practices. The majority of respondents in the two groups seemed to be driven by an awareness of Galicia's sociolinguistic reality. They showed a strong sense of responsibility towards ensuring the future survival of the language, as well as a clear commitment to what they perceived as a situation of social and political injustice. This discourse is in many ways reminiscent of other active minorities such as environmentalists and feminist movements. As we see in Extract 1, Alberto (A) in fact refers explicitly to *neofalangismo*, constructing the idea of a "newspaperist" type movement which he

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<sup>4</sup> The excerpts represented here constitute a literal transcription of the discussion groups and no attempt was made to alter the linguistic quality of individual interventions. In the case of some of the excerpts, the Galician used illustrates interference with Spanish. In places where this occurs, the words appear in roman.



sees as the only way of increasing the number of Galician speakers in a contemporary Galician context:

Extract 1

- A: ... *home eu penso que si, porque é unha forma de gañar falantes que doutro xeito non habería ... pois non atopo outra forma de que incorpore xente galegos ... ou xente da sociedade galega ao emprego da lingua galega se non e así, polo neofalantismo.* ‘... well I think so, because it is one way of getting more speakers as otherwise there wouldn’t be any ... well I can’t think of any other way of incorporating Galicians ... or people in Galician society to use the Galician language other than through *neofalantismo*.’

In Extract 2, Susana (S) talked about the sense of responsibility and even guilt that prompts *neofalantes* to initiate a change in their sociolinguistic behaviour:

Extract 2

- S: *Creo que tamén é importante ese sentimento de responsabilidade o de culpabilidade que senten moitos neofalantes. É dicir, chega un momento que ti ves que tes unha responsabilidade con respecto a túa lingua, que vives nun país que ten, que está vivindo nunhas circunstancias específicas, non, e que ti es responsable diso, entón tamén decides dar o paso, pois creo que é importante motivo ...* ‘I also think that the feeling of responsibility or guilt that many *neofalantes* feel is important. That is to say, you reach a point where you see that you have a responsibility to your language, that you are living in a country which has, that is going through certain conditions, and that you are responsible for that so you also decide to take that step forward, well I think it is an important reason ...’

Similarly, in Extract 3, María (M) talked about a heightened sense of awareness of the sociolinguistic context in Galicia. This sense of awareness was also accompanied by feelings of shame on her part. She felt ashamed that she wasn’t using the language, even though it was a language she knew deep-down that she was able to speak. This realisation caused María certain unease and frustration as she struggled to deal with the belief that she should speak Galician and was in fact using Spanish. It is thus this unresolved tension that leads to a state of dissonance (see Festinger [1957] for a discussion of his theory on cognitive dissonance) and the discomfort attributed to such a state which caused her to take action and, as she put it herself, prompted her to “go ahead” (*adiante*) and to speak Galician:

## Extract 3

M: ... *Pois de que fastidiábame moitísimo falar castelán podendo falar galego, dábame vergonza algunhas veces, e decidín que por que vou ter ... porque non podo. Teño veinticuatro, bueno empecei con vintetrés así a tomar un pouco de conciencia e dixeren bueno pois adiante.*

'... Well what annoyed me very much was that I was speaking Castilian when I knew I was able to speak Galician, I was ashamed at times, and I decided because I was going to be ... why couldn't I. I am twenty-four now, well I started to be more aware when I was twenty-three and I said to myself, well go ahead.'

States of dissonance caused by inconsistencies between the speaker's ideological commitment to Galician and his or her behavioural practices were reported on frequently as a stimulus and motivation for adopting Galician language practices. Marcos (Ma), for example, saw the need to bring his linguistic behaviour in line with an emerging political ideology of support for Galician nationalism. In late adolescence he became a "patriotic nationalist", as he put it himself, a real *abertzale* (a Basque word meaning 'patriot' and generally used to mean Basque nationalist). He built a discourse around the juxtaposition of language and national identity. His use of Spanish thus became inconsistent with such ideologies, prompting him to adopt Galician-language practices. He told of inconsistencies in his friends' behaviour who, on the one hand supported the idea of political independence for Galicia, but on the other, continued to speak Spanish. In comparison, he saw the need to resolve these tensions in his own linguistic behaviour by switching to Galician and studying Galician Philology at University, fulfilling the key ingredients required to fit the often stereotypical image of the Galician *neofalante*. María (M) added a similar comment, linking it more concretely to cultural ties with the language and inconsistencies she perceived between playing the bagpipes (something which has come to constitute a key ethnocultural symbol of Galicianness) but at the same time continuing to speak Spanish:

## Extract 4

M: *O meu foi decisión puramente política. (Risas).*

'Mine was a purely political decision' (laughs)

Ma: *Eu aos dezaioito era un abertzale do copón e era totalmente incoherente que falara castelá. Eu tiña muitos amigos, que si o independentismo, non sei que, eran ..., todos falaban castelán, a min parecíame incohe-*

'At eighteen I was a real *abertzale* and it was totally contradictory that I should be speaking Castilian. I have a lot of friends who say they are pro-independence, or whatever, they were ..., they all used to speak

*rente del todo, por eso tamén escollín filoloxía galega, pa estudar, e foi totalmente político. Compromiso cultural o como queiras, pero realmente foi por política, o sea porque era incoherente con mi ideario político ...*

M: *Si, si de compromiso cultural*

Ma: *Si*

M: *A mi dábame vergonza tocar a gaita e falar castelán (risas). Queda moi mal.*

Castilian, it seemed completely incoherent to me, this is also why I chose to study Galician Philology and it was totally political. A cultural commitment or whatever you'd like to call it, but really it was politically motivated, I mean because it was inconsistent with my political ideals ...'

'Yes, yes a cultural commitment'

'Yes'

'I was embarrassed that I was playing the bagpipes and at the same time speaking Castilian. (laughs). It looks bad.'

Interestingly, and despite the widely-held stereotypical image of the new speaker as a supporter of Galician nationalism (Iglesias and Ramallo 2003; González González 2003; O'Rourke 2011), Marcos (Ma) was the only person who matched this profile. However, even Marcos (perhaps in line with a general disapproval for these political ideologies amongst others in the group), was careful to separate out his use of Galician from nationalist ideologies. Sandra (Sa) for example vehemently rejected the patriotic nationalism which seemed to have influenced Marcos' linguistic transformation and instead moved beyond regional or national politics, positioning her reasons for change within a discourse of linguistic human rights:

Extract 5

Sa: *Xa, joder! Pero non política abertzale, independentismo galego, senón política, é dicir, política no sentido de joder!, unha lingua forma parte das persoas e se defendes as persoas hai que defender tamén as linguas. Non sei, máis política non tan galega, senón política en xeral co mundo, non sei.*

[...]

'Right, but damn it! I'm not talking about the politics of Basque nationalism, Galician separatism, but rather of politics, I mean, politics in the sense of damn it!, a language forms part of a people and if you defend people you have also to defend languages. I don't know, not so much Galician politics, but politics of the world in general, I don't know.'

New speakers frequently talked about a perceived downgrading and censuring of their linguistic practices where their use of Galician was seen to be interpreted as deviant and out of place. There thus seemed to be a process of psychologization on the part of the majority, taken at least from the way new speakers reported the arguments used to discredit them. Their behaviour was classified as obsessive and dogmatic and was often disqualified through their stereotyping as nationalist and by default as radical and unwilling to compromise:

Extract 6

Ma: *i e un problema para a propia lingua ademais. Digo que (risas) falar galego ou ser neofalante teña sempre ou casi sempre connotacións ... . Eu das primeiras veces que saíndo por aí falei galego, que fumos de camping, nos dixeron: “ah sois de Cangas o del Bloque<sup>5</sup>?”*

‘and it is a problem for the language also. I would say that (laughs) speaking Galician or being a new speaker always has connotations ... . When I first started speaking Galician, we went camping, they said to us “ah are you from Cangas or the Bloque?”’

M: *(risas)* (laughs)

Mo: *¡Claro!, pero esa é unha percepción social que está en todas partes ...*  
[...]

‘Sure! But this social perception is everywhere ...’

M: *Sobre todo nas cidades é iso identifican falar galego con afiliación política que moitas veces non é así. Teño unha amiga miña é neofalante y me di ela agora, pois ten certa afiliación, e me di, eu primeiro falei galego y despois o outro impuxéronme. (risas).*

‘Especially in the cities and that’s what they identify with speaking Galician with a particular political affiliation which on a lot of occasions it is not that at all. I have a friend who is a new speaker and she now says, well she is affiliated [politically] in some way, and she says, I spoke Galician first and the other was pushed on me (laughs).’

As well as having to counteract a stereotypical image of new speakers as supporters of Galician nationalism, new speakers highlighted a variety of other situations in which their sociolinguistic behaviour was marked, sometimes deviant

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<sup>5</sup> Cangas is a small coastal town close to the city of Vigo with a more strongly supportive pro-independence population. The *Bloque* refers here to the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego*, one of Galicia’s nationalist parties.

or simply out of place. Monica (Mo) talked about the hostile and even “vicious” (*virulenta*) reaction from certain people when she changed her sociolinguistic behaviour to Galician, coupled with accusations of showing off and trying to be different:

## Extract 7

Mo: ... *unha reacción absolutamente virulenta nese sentido, mui virulenta. “Dime, ti por que falas?, y ¿ahora de que vas?, y te haces la interesante” y ..., y era ..., era complicado.* ‘... a vicious reaction, very vicious. “Tell me, why are you speaking Galician? And what the hell are you doing? And you are showing off ...”, and it was ..., very complicated.’

In turn, María (M) complained that her decision to become a Galician speaker was something which she constantly needed to justify, something which often led to unpleasant situations:

## Extract 8

M: ... *xente que non vía facía moito tempo era como constantemente terte que justificar, non, e entón atoparme situacións bastante desagradables non, tanto de xente ... de xente da miña idade como de xente maior ...* [...] ‘... people who I hadn’t seen in a while it was like you constantly had to justify yourself to them, and so I used to find myself in fairly unpleasant situations, both with people ... people of my own age and older people ...’

According to Marcial (Mc), his decision to use Galician to write his school examinations was seen as deviant. He claimed that because of his insistent use of Galician for this purpose, he was given lower grades in his exams. In theory, and in line with policy changes since the 1980s, Galician speakers have the legal right to use the language in institutional contexts such as the educational context referred to here. However, in practice this is not always possible. While the link between Marcial’s lower grade in his exam and the fact that he used Galician may be an exaggerated claim, it nonetheless highlighted new speakers’ negative perceptions about other people’s reactions to the use of Galician:

## Extract 9

Mc: *Home eu ... tiven unha experiencia con unha profesora que considero ... non? que prexudicou nas calificacións da ... da instituto por facer os exames* ‘Well I ... I had an experience with a teacher who I consider ... right? who had a prejudice when it came to giving grades ... in secondary school

*en galego, por falarlle en galego, é dicir non o podo demostrar hoxe en día, non, vale a profesora non era galega porque era de Zamora ou por aí, y é dicir, e xente coas mesmas calificacións que a min púsolle unha nota, xente con ..., e a min pois púxome outra entonces considero que puido ser por iso.*

for doing exams in Galician, for speaking in Galician, I mean I can't prove it now, right? Ok the teacher was not Galician because she was from Zamora or around there, and I mean, they had the same grades as me and she gave them one grade people with ..., and she gave me another so I think it could be because of that.

Despite these situations, new speakers continued to be committed to using Galician and invested time and energy in the process. As Alberto (A) pointed out, ideological commitment such as that described by these new speakers explains why someone would decide and commit to becoming a Galician speaker, given the difficulties that he and others in the group said this involved. Rather than opening doors, he described speaking Galician as creating insurmountable barriers. In practical terms, life was thus seen to be inherently easier in Spanish, with less conflict and less friction:

#### Extract 10

A: *De todos modos penso que si que ten un grado de conciencia, igual non político pero si un pouco ideolóxico porque por pragmatismo non che leva a falar galego, é dicir, o único, dende un punto de vista meramente pragmático o galego o que che levanta é barreiras, é dicir unha persoa que non teña ningún tipo de conciencia di "mellor cantas menos linguas mellor, temos menos que aprender, menos polo que cuidarme, menos polo que atoparme xente con a que igual teño roces" Estupendo! eu por falar, por falar castelán ninguén ..., bueno igual si, pero moita menos xente vaime criticar, pero por falar galego hai xente que vaime dicir: "¡ay yo no te*

'At any rate I think that if someone has a degree of awareness, not necessarily political but sort of ideological because for pragmatic reasons you are not going to speak Galician, what I mean is that, the only thing, from a merely pragmatic point of view all Galician does is create barriers what I mean is that a person who is not [linguistically] aware will say "perhaps the less languages the better, we have less to learn, less to look out for, less chance of running into people with whom I may have a run in". Great! I am going to speak, speaking Castilian nobody ..., well perhaps yes, fewer people are going to criticize me, but if I speak Galician

entiendo, háblame castellano!”, *non sei que ...* there are people who will say to me – “Ah, I don’t understand, speak to me in Castilian!”, or I don’t know what ...’

The behavioural styles of investment and consistency identified in Moscovici’s classification of active minorities frequently emerged in discussions with *neofalantes*. Investment, for example, can be seen very clearly in the way new speakers talked about their new linguistic practices and the effort they claimed to have made in order to change their linguistic behaviour. This involved a process of conscious decision-making and constant sacrifice which was required to endure what they perceived as a stigmatization of their linguistic behaviour. Despite this stigmatization, they nonetheless reported consistency in their linguistic behaviour, refusing to fold to perceived pressures from the majority and therefore prompting them to continue to use Galician despite the odds.

In Extract 11, Marcial, for example pointed to the difficulties involved in becoming a Galician speaker, emphasising the investment of time that was required in mastering the language. He also talked about being made fun of for his more hybridized way of speaking, where it was labelled as *castrapo* (literally the ‘rag of Castilian’). *Castrapo* is a pejorative term used to describe both Galician and Spanish speakers who try and are seen to fail to speak either language “correctly”. Despite these difficulties, Marcial nonetheless reported consistency in his behaviour and showed clear determination to continue speaking Galician. The position of sacrifice was, as we see in Extract 8 above, reinforced in Marcial’s (Mc) claim that he was discriminated against for taking his exams in Galician, something which in theory is permitted in line with Galicia’s bilingual policies but which in practice can sometimes be seen as deviant behaviour. He insisted that he had to endure being made fun of in class for using Galician. All of this made the transition to becoming a Galician speaker “somewhat difficult” (*algo duro*). Yet, despite these criticisms, there was consistency in his behaviour and he remained committed to using Galician:

#### Extract 11

Mc: *A min personalmente cústome muito, muita xente se riou de min nese momento, por falar galego e dicían ... “ti falas castrapo”, bueno pssss ..., falo castrapo e seguireino falando y son neofalante hoxe en día polos motivos que sexan, non?, xa sexan políticos de* ‘For me it was very difficult, a lot of people laughed at me for speaking Galician and they would say ... “you are speaking *castrapo*”, well pahhh ..., I speak *castrapo* and I still speak it and I am a new speaker today for whatever reason, right? be they



..., *non sei o porque simplemente me dá a gana ... iso, aguantei moita burla ... a xente pois sorprendeuse un pouco ... y facían burla como dicindo falas castrapo y ... ti dis, bueno pero falarei castrapo pero non sei, ti tampouco falas ben castelán (risas) e non sei. Foi algo duro ao principio.*

linked to the politics of ..., I don't know or simply because I feel like it ... I put up with mockery ... people surprised me a bit ... and they made fun of me as if to say you speak *castrapo* (laughs) and I don't know. It was difficult at the beginning.'

María (M) talked about the difficulties involved in making the transition from being a Spanish to a Galician speaker but the sacrifice and investment in these efforts were rewarded by her present state of satisfaction which she now claimed to enjoy through her Galician-speaking practices. She said, "I have never felt better" (*Eu nunca me sentín mellor*):

Extract 12

M: ... *Ao principio é duro porque algunhas veces si que cambiar de lingua con xente coa que estás ... que tes un sentimento, quero dicir, un ..., bueno non me sale emmmm como un lazo muy forte sentimental como pode ser unha nai, por exemplo, é duro e algunhas veces pois pero ... Pero tamén máis duro é saber que podes pasar iso nunhas semanas nun mes e ... . Eu nunca me sentín mellor, por exemplo.*

'... At the beginning it was difficult because sometimes with those with whom you have a close relationship, I mean, a ..., I don't know like a strong sentimental link that you might have with a mother, for example, it is difficult and sometimes well but ... But what is more difficult is knowing that you can get over that in a few weeks in a month and ... I never felt better, for example.'

## 6 Concluding comments

The new speaker category is one which until recently has not been given any great deal of attention in the Galician sociolinguistic literature. Analyses of the Galician sociolinguistic context have instead tended to focus on models of intergenerational transmission basing the sometimes pessimistic predictions of linguistic vitality of the language on a decline in its intergenerational transmission in the home and in the reproduction of Galician native speakers. This perspective ignores the potential presented by new profiles of speakers, such as *neofalantes* of Galician.

As a result of language policy changes in Galicia since the 1980s, the symbolic and economic value of Galician on the linguistic market was enhanced, although not significantly enough to change the rules of social mobility. Meanwhile, Spanish has continued to be the language of prestige. Despite this, *neofalantes* opt for linguistic change and engage in the process of majority language displacement. Here we have argued that this displacement can at least in part be explained by a shift in focus away from functionalist models of language contact and shift and towards an understanding of these processes from a language conflict perspective, thus allowing us to explain the practices of *neofalantes* as not simply deviations from the sociolinguistic “status quo” but as reactions to it and as proponents of social change.

Through their linguistic behaviour, we argue, *neofalantes* can be seen to contribute to the transformation of the existing sociolinguistic order. In doing so they are challenging a socially structured and potentially structuring hierarchical model in which Spanish continues to maintain, in Bourdieunian terms (1991), its “legitimate” status and remains a key source of symbolic capital on the Galician linguistic market. *Neofalantes* can, it could be argued, be seen to shed themselves of their linguistic *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991), that is, the Spanish-speaking habits which they learned through childhood and beyond and which conform to the social norms of language use in the urban, middle-class contexts in which such profiles of speakers tend to be found. In doing so they are breaking with structures which as part of their *habitus* are essentially inscribed in their bodies and which up until a certain point in their lives had prompted the automatic use of Spanish. It is this questioning of this automatism and the denaturalizing of their existing linguistic practices which prompts them to adopt Galician-speaking practices. This denaturalization and disembodiment of such practices unsettles what is seen and accepted as most “natural” and “normal”. As we have shown in our data, this makes the transition to becoming a *neofalante* more difficult.

However, we would contend that it is their behavioural styles and motivations for change as an *active minority* that prompts them to maintain their newly adopted Galician language practices. They show both *investment* and *consistency* in their behavioural styles, reflecting behavioural styles identified in Moscovici’s classification of active minorities more generally. New speakers display investment in the way they talked about their new linguistic practices and the effort they claimed to have made to bring about changes in their linguistic behaviour. This in turn involved a certain degree of sacrifice to endure what they perceived as a stigmatization of their new linguistic practices. Despite this stigmatization, they nonetheless displayed consistency, refusing to give in to perceived pressure from the majority. These new speakers seemed to be driven by an awareness of Galicia’s sociolinguistic reality and showed a strong sense of responsibility in

securing the future survival of the language, as well as a clear commitment to what they see as a situation of social and political injustice. Their discourse is thus in many ways reminiscent of other active minorities such as environmentalists and feminist movements in their construction of *neofalantismo* or a “new-speakerist” type movement of their own.

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