1   **New speakers: challenges and opportunities for variationist sociolinguistics**

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3   *Abstract*:

4   While the field of variationist sociolinguistics has advanced rapidly since Labov (1966),

5   it remains the case that a socially informed theory of language change continues to be

6   influenced by only very few languages, typically English and a handful other dominant

7   European languages. This article considers recent work on the emergence of *new*

8   *speakers* in (severely) endangered-language communities, and what they might have to

9   offer variationist theory. Although definitions can vary, it has become convention to

10   describe new speakers as individuals 'with little or no home or community exposure to

11   a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual

12   education programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners' (O'Rourke *et*

13   *al*. 2015: 1). There is now a wealth of literature available on new speakers in

14   typologically dissimilar language contexts, though, so far, very little work has adopted

15   the variationist paradigm. The article will argue that new speakers can figure

16   prominently in variationist models of diffusion and change, taking the classic

17   sociolinguistic factor of social networks as an example. The article ends by proposing

18   a manifesto of potential research trajectories, based on current gaps in the literature.

19

20   *1. Introduction*

21   Since Labov (1966)'s seminal work in New York City, variationist sociolinguistics has

22   sought to develop a socially accountable theory of linguistic diffusion and change,

23   thereby positioning the field firmly 'against the idealisms of the Chomskyan paradigm'

24   (Bucholtz 2003: 398), which marked an important break with descriptivist

25   methodologies, and moved instead towards – what Chomsky had interpreted as – the

26 linguist's primary goal: generating all and only the grammatical sentences of a language

27 (Chomsky 1957: 13). However, in spite of this ambition to develop a theory of language

28 change, Nagy and Meyerhoff (2008), Smakman (2015) and Stanford (2016) have all

29 highlighted that non-English languages have continued to play only a very marginal

30 influential role in this process. Their surveying of the variationist sociolinguistic

31 literature reveals a surprising dearth of geolinguistic diversity in leading variationist

32 venues; language variation and change, then, continues to be the preserve of English

33 and a handful of other dominant European languages. Although the picture is slowly

34 changing, such observations have important implications for the development of a

35 generalisable, cross-linguistic sociolinguistic theory. Moreover, as Stanford points out,

36 non-English language communities can offer 'fresh viewpoints' on established

37 theoretical and methodological frameworks (2016: 526). To evidence this, the present

38 article will consider one classic sociolinguistic factor: social networks. Variationist

39 studies that employ a social network methodology have demonstrated that close-knit

40 ties support highly localised linguistic norms and intercommunity distinctiveness in a

41 unilingual context, whereas weak ties promote susceptibility to processes of levelling

42 and innovation diffusion (*e.g.* Milroy and Milroy 1985). These findings are now well-

43 documented in monolingual English-speaking communities (*e.g.* Milroy 1980 in

44 Belfast, Kerswill and Williams 2000 in Milton Keynes). In bi/multilingual

45 communities, social network theory has also been deployed to try to account for

46 processes contributing towards language obsolescence, where loose-knit ties have been

47 argued to bring about language shift (*e.g.* Li and Milroy 1995 on Chinese communities

48 in Tyneside). However, Milroy maintains that, while of considerable theoretical

49 interest, in such under-studied contexts, it is much less clear how the parameters of

50 social networks can be adequately operationalised to account for socially and

51   geographically mobile speakers, whose ties are considered 'weak' in the traditional

52   sense (2004: 562). Further, while only a very small number of studies have attempted

53   to apply this model to account for variation and change in minority variety speech

54   communities in contact with English (*e.g.* Matsumoto 2010), much less attention still

55   has been paid to non-English contexts altogether.[1]

56   In response to Stanford (2016)'s 'call for more diverse sources of data […] in

57   non-English contexts', this article considers recent work on the emergence of *new*

58   *speakers* in (severely) endangered-language communities, and what this work might

59   have to offer variationist theory. Although definitions can vary, it has become

60   convention to describe new speakers as individuals 'with little or no home or

61   community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through

62   immersion or bilingual education programs, revitalisation projects or as adult language

63   learners' (O'Rourke *et al.* 2015: 1). There is now a wealth of literature available on new

64   speakers of typologically dissimilar languages, though, so far, few of these studies have

65   adopted the variationist paradigm. Instead, the bulk of the work on new speakers has

66   tended to be qualitative in nature, focusing on interaction-level analysis, with

67   ideological themes oscillating around sociolinguistic authenticity in endangered-

68   language communities (*e.g.* native speakers as gate keepers and authenticators of

69   language), legitimacy of new speakers (*e.g.* as community members) and power

70   relations with other speaker types (*e.g.* their role in language revitalisation efforts). That

71   said, some new-speaker studies have also recognised that the speech of new speakers

72   can be far removed from community norms (or at least perceived as such). Although

73   few of these studies are devoted to quantitative methods, they can (and, it will be

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[1] Gal (1978; 1979), Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) and Lippi-Green (1989) are perhaps the best-known of these network-based studies.

74 argued, should) appeal to the variationist paradigm, which – for fifty years now – has

75 sought to understand the social significance of language variation, and the mechanisms

76 that drive linguistic change. These fundamental tenets of the field (as proposed by

77 Weinreich *et al.* 1969) will carry important implications for contexts of (extreme)

78 language shift, such as those offered by many of the new-speaker studies surveyed

79 below. Therefore, this article attempts to bridge these two areas of inquiry. To do so, it

80 will first be necessary to present an overview of the recent literature on new speakers

81 in sociolinguistics. In Section 2, a number of studies are reviewed to illustrate how new

82 speakers have been characterised as social actors; how they can differ from typical

83 second-language learners; and what observations have been made where new speakers

84 emerge in (severely) endangered-language communities. In Section 3, focus is given to

85 the very few existing quantitative production studies that include samples of new

86 speakers, where the evidence presented illustrates how new speakers can be conceived

87 of as agents of sociolinguistic change in variationist terms. Then, using the classic

88 micro-level factor of social networks as a case study, Section 4 exemplifies how new

89 speakers can figure prominently in variationist models of diffusion and change. Owing

90 to the largely qualitative nature of new-speaker studies to date, Section 5 concludes

91 with some suggestions for future research trajectories, based on current gaps in the

92 literature.

93

94 *2. On 'new speakers'*

95 The *new speaker* label is one of recent prominence in the language endangerment

96 literature. While regional or minority language communities in many parts of the world

97 continue to undergo an extreme kind of attrition, particularly in the face of increased

98 urbanisation and globalisation (see *e.g.* Amano *et al.* 2014), new speakers are

99   nonetheless emerging as a result of revitalisation efforts and increasingly favourable

100 language policies. These new speakers have often had little or no community/home

101 exposure to the target variety, which they typically acquire in a purely educational

102 context. In the simplest terms, then, they are qualitatively different from native

103 speakers, who acquire the language via intergenerational transmission, and other types

104 of learners who may be exposed to the target in day-to-day life. However, as O'Rourke

105 and Ramallo (2013: 288) note, a variety of different labels exist in the literature that

106 can also refer to the new speaker phenomenon: 'L2 speaker', 'learner', 'heritage

107 speaker' etc. are common in Applied Linguistics, TESOL, and Multilingualism studies.

108 That said, there are important levels of distinction that can be delineated between new

109 speakers and other types of second-language learners in socio-political terms. For

110 instance, given that the target being acquired can be characterised in most cases as

111 minorised, and obsolescent or moribund, new speakers tend to play a significant

112 influential role by comparison with most other L2 contexts. In cases where severe

113 endangerment is coupled with embryonic revitalisation efforts, new speakers not only

114 represent an important proportion of the total speakers of the language, but they are

115 also influential arbiters in emergent normative practices. They can therefore 'occupy

116 greater positions of authority in the language's social hierarchy than many second

117 language users would do' (Nance *et al.* 2016: 168). Moreover, labels such as 'L2

118 speaker' or 'learner' are increasingly contested, mostly because they imply some

119 deviation from an implicit native-speaker norm, as has been detailed extensively in the

120 Applied Linguistics literature (see *e.g.* Firth and Wagner 1997). Owing to these

121 observations, and under the guise of the EU COST Action research network 'New

122 speakers in Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges', O'Rourke and

123 Ramallo (2013) and Walsh and Lane (2014) have proposed the notion of *new*

124 *speakerness*. New speakerness implies a dynamic rather than fixed state: it 'can include

125 a continuum of speaker types, ranging from second language learners with limited

126 competence […] right up to expert L2 users' (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013: 288). It can

127 also refer to 'a stance or subject position that becomes available to social actors' (Jaffe

128 2015: 43) throughout the life-span, particularly in endangered-language contexts,

129 where there is often no implicit, hierarchical, or standard norm.

130 It should be stressed, however, that, while *new speakerness* is a novel

131 sociolinguistic notion, speakers that today might be labelled *new* have been the focus

132 of scholarly attention in endangered-language studies since at least the 1980s. Trosset

133 for instance highlighted that, at the time, 'no systematic study [had] been undertaken of

134 people attempting to learn a dying language' (1986: 167) – a void that she was

135 attempting to fill. Trosset foregrounds in particular the challenges faced by new

136 speakers of Welsh entering an increasingly dwindling community of native speakers.

137 In the late 1980s, Woolard made use of the label 'new Catalans' (1989: 44) to describe

138 L2 Catalan speakers who come to adopt bilingual practices, seeing themselves as both

139 Catalan and Spanish – a designation that, Woolard reports, very few native Catalonians

140 would accept. Similarly, Urla distinguishes between *euskaldun zaharrak* ('old

141 Basques'), who she describes as 'native Basque speakers who tend to be primarily from

142 farming and fishing communities', and *euskaldun berriak* ('new Basques'), comprised

143 of 'urban professionals, civil servants, and teachers who have mastered Standardised

144 Basque' (1993: 830).[2] In these studies, then, early conceptualisations of new speakers

145 are sketched out: in the context of Basque, for instance, they are described by Urla

146 (1993) as middle-class urban dwellers, characteristics not typically associated with

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[2] See more recently Ortega *et al.* on *euskaldunberria*, or more specifically 'new speaker' (2015: 93).

147 native speakers of minority varieties such as Basque or Occitan, traditionally viewed as

148 overwhelmingly rural and working class (see *e.g.* Blanchet and Armstrong 2006).

149 Moreover, the new Catalonians make use of different constructions of self that do not

150 align clearly with community norms. Such descriptions are also very typical of Breton

151 new speakers (Jones 1995; 1998a; 1998b).[3] Unlike Catalan or Basque, Breton serves as

152 a typical example of a language undergoing 'gradual death' (Campbell and Muntzel

153 1989: 182): native-speaker numbers have been dwindling for some time, and the

154 conventional domains of usage have been eroded. However, attempts to revitalise

155 Breton have led to the development of a learner variety (*néo-Breton*) which is reified

156 predominantly by new speakers (or *néo-Bretonnants*). Jones describes these speakers

157 as an urban *intelligentsia*, in that they are predominantly middle-class, urban-dwelling,

158 well educated and highly politicised (1998a: 129). Moreover, in sharp contrast to native

159 speakers, these new speakers typically acquire Breton as an academic exercise. As a

160 result, they speak a standardised, pan-Brittany variety of Breton, which she reports to

161 be unintelligible to native speakers. For example, to render Breton functional in

162 additional domains, the *néo-Bretonnants* have consciously innovated neologisms as

163 opposed to borrowing from French, as is the norm for the vast majority of native

164 speakers, and their lexicon is typically purged of any borrowings. In spite of these

165 common 'distanciation strategies' (Thiers 1985), which are said to be ideologically

166 motivated (see Hornsby 2013), Jones reports that their grammar shows considerable

167 influence from Standard French.[4] In many cases, new speakers of Breton are not

168 community-insiders in the traditional sense. For instance, Hornsby (2015: 54-59)

169 outlines how some speakers in his sample moved from areas far outside of Brittany into

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[3] See most recently a special issue by Hornsby and Vigers (2013).

[4] It is noteworthy that recent production studies among young children in *Diwan* (*néo-Breton*) schools do not necessarily support this observation (*cf.* Kennard and Lahiri 2017).

170   Breton-speaking heartlands, thereafter choosing to identify as a *brezhonegerez* ('Breton

171   speaker'). Although these speakers self-identify as *bretonnant*, other members of the

172   community, who are typically more deeply rooted, can and do contest their status. As

173   a result, Jones (1998b), Adkins (2013) and Hornsby (2013) also discuss the level of

174   linguistic insecurity that is felt by both native speakers and new speakers where contact

175   between the two occurs, and where issues pertaining to *sociolinguistic authenticity* (*e.g.*

176   Coupland 2003) are foregrounded. Therefore, while Breton new speakers are seen as

177   peripheral community members by those older and more established central members,

178   it is clear that there is at least some overlap in terms of their respective networks.[5]

179   Moreover, their language use has been equated in the literature in some cases as

180   approximating that of a 'xenolect', representing 'the pre-terminal stage of some dying

181   languages' (Jones 1998b: 323), rather than toeing communal norms.

182   Such observations are not unique to Europe. Alaskan Athabascan is an

183   analogous North American example. All eleven recognised varieties of Athabascan are

184   considered to be moribund, as English has largely supplanted each of them in all but

185   the most intimate functional domains, and children are no longer raised with

186   Athabascan as a mother-tongue. Much like the Breton example, language revitalisation

187   strategies undertaken mostly by new speakers have led to linguistic variants that differ

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[5] A conceptual question might be raised here as to whether or not new and native speakers can be considered part of the same *speech community* (Labov 1972). While acknowledging the considerable attention that has been paid to problematising this notion in (variationist) sociolinguistics (*e.g.* Romain 1982), the present article follows Milroy (1980: 14), (Dorian 1982: 29), and Bortoni-Ricardo (1985: 80), in adopting instead Hymes (1974: 51)'s definition in terms of 'common locality' and 'primary interaction'. Dorian (1982) in particular has shown why it is important that peripheral members with – what Hymes called – communicative competence (see Section 3) should not be excluded from any definition of speech community. Moreover, as Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) has shown, a network analysis can provide the appropriate means for assessing both common locality and primary interaction. It is also worth recalling Sankoff and Labov's perspective, who argued that 'every speaker is a member of many nested and intersecting speech communities' (1979: 202). This has also been interpreted to mean 'many different integrated networks' (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985: 80).

188   from native-speaker norms. As a result, these new-speaker forms are generally not

189   accepted as authentic Athabascan variants by older speakers, who are documented as

190   'laughing mercilessly' (Holton 2009: 248) at their grandchildren's efforts to learn,

191   which in turn brings about a deep sense of social and linguistic insecurity.[6] Further,

192   given the vast geographical space that is considered Athabascan-speaking,

193   opportunities for learners and native speakers to come together and interact are rare,

194   and so the learners have taken to the Internet, which serves as a forum to exchange and

195   interact in the minority variety. Since these Athabascan internauts are almost

196   exclusively new speakers, Holton (2009) remarks that the web provides them with a

197   virtual space in which to use their new-speaker varieties, free from native-speaker

198   authentication. This hostility towards new speakerness provides a further important

199   level of distinction between new speakers and other types of second-language learner

200   contexts, and similar criticism of new-speaker practices are now also documented

201   elsewhere (*e.g.* O'Rourke and Ramallo [2011] on Irish and Galician, Kasstan

202   [forthcoming] on Francoprovençal). The above – largely qualitative – research on new

203   speakers of endangered languages reveals then a native/non-native divide, where

204   speakers on both sides are reported to be 'socially and linguistically incompatible'

205   (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011: 139): new speakers are seen as peripheral members of

206   the community, and new-speaker practices are described deviant from communal

207   norms. These findings are not limited to the cases explored above. Indeed, in recent

208   years, an increasing number of papers in typologically dissimilar contexts have revealed

209   many common themes and findings. New-speaker studies are now available on

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[6] It should be noted that attitudes can sometimes change at the 'tip' (Dorian 1981:51), as noted in the context of Tlingit (southeastern Alaska), with fewer than 200 speakers left. Here, elders are said to embrace language emersion retreats, designed to create new spaces for the use of Tlingit among both native speakers and new speakers (see Mitchell 2005).

Baseldytsch (Del Percio 2016), Belarusian (Woolhiser 2013), Catalan (Pujolar and

Puigdevall 2015), Cornish (Sayers 2012, Sayers and Renkó-Michelsén 2015), Corsican

(Jaffe 2015), Francoprovençal (Kasstan 2015, Bichurina 2018, Kasstan and Müller

2018), Galician (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013, Tomé Lourido and Evans 2015; 2016),

Irish (Walsh 2013, O'Rourke and Walsh 2015), Lemko (Hornsby 2015), Louisiana

Creole (Mayeux 2015), Manx (Ó hIfearnáin 2015), Occitan (Costa 2013), Scottish

Gaelic (McLeod and O'Rourke 2015, Nance 2015, Nance *et al.* 2016), Welsh (Robert

2009, Morris 2014), and Yiddish (Hornsby 2015). Owing to the observations set out

above that new speakers are frequently characterised as employing linguistic variants

that differ from traditional norms, it is surprising that so few studies have made use of

quantitative variationist methods to better understand the social significance of this

variation, or to connect variation in production with broader questions of linguistic

diffusion and change. However, some recent studies have begun to focus on these areas

of inquiry, appealing in particular to variationist sociolinguistics.

3. New speakers and linguistic variation

In reference to the Corsican context for instance, Jaffe suggests that new speakers '[…]

acquire a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence and practice

in the minority language' (2015: 25). Jaffe refers here not only to the level of linguistic

competency that can be acquired by new speakers, but also to communicative

competency (*i.e.* acquisition of sociolinguistic variation). While acquisition of variation

(so-called 'Type 2 variation', following 'Type 1' or linguistic competence, Mougeon

et al. 2004) among learners is not novel in the literature (see *e.g.* Drummond 2011 on

Polish speakers and (t)-glottaling), recent studies reveal Type 2 variation to convey

234 important social work among minority-variety new speakers, too, in spite of a cline of

235 linguistic competency.

236   Using sociophonetic methods, Tomé Lourido and Evans (2015; 2016) explore

237 speaker variation among *neofalantes* ('new speakers') of Galician in Spain. The new

238 speakers in these studies were raised as Spanish monolinguals who acquire Galician in

239 adulthood, later becoming bilingual, but Galician dominant. Both studies focus on the

240 production of mid-vowels, where mid-high and mid-low contrasts are not present in

241 Spanish, but are in Galician. The results reveal that *neofalantes* vowel production

242 differed from that of Spanish dominants in the study in that at least some of the new

243 speakers had acquired the Galician front and back mid-vowel contrasts. However, the

244 *neofalantes* data suggested that the contrast made in mid vowels was not as great as that

245 of the Galician dominants, who had acquired Galician before critical age. Based on this

246 evidence, the authors identify an emergent hybrid category of vowels that they postulate

247 to be deployed *indexically* (Silverstein 2003) by new speakers to convey speaker

248 identity.[7]

249   Similarly, Nance *et al.* (2016) explore linguistic variation among new speakers

250 of Scottish Gaelic in Glasgow and Edinburgh, where revitalisation initiatives have

251 driven a rise in employment opportunities requiring the language. The study focuses on

252 word-final realisation of rhoticity, where palatalised or alveolar rhotic consonants are

253 constrained by the quality of final vowel. While the native speakers in the sample

254 broadly approximated to palatalised rhotics, the new speakers evidenced substantial

255 variation in their production, with several new speakers preferring weakly rhotic or

256 non-rhotic variants, in spite of high levels of proficiency. The authors present data to

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[7] However, this hybrid category, they argue, is not accompanied by a change in perception. In other words, the new speakers sampled could not distinguish *neofalantes* from Spanish-dominant bilinguals and Galician-dominant bilinguals to a statistically significant extent.

257   suggest that some proficient Gaelic new speakers 'preferred an ideal self that was more

258   oriented towards a new-speaker model and considered a native-speaker target as

259   inauthentic' (2016: 185), and that this was reflected in their production data. In other

260   words, new speakers produce divergent linguistic variants from native speakers and

261   other types of learners, based on alternative constructions of self, that do not necessarily

262   align with community norms. So, while observations made in the context of Gaelic and

263   Galician are similar to those outlined in the case of Breton above, the advantage of the

264   variationist methods adopted in both cases here illustrates the social significance of the

265   variable linguistic behaviour among new speakers.

266   Analogous observations have been made most recently by Kasstan and Müller

267   (2018), who examine production data among new speakers of Francoprovençal – a

268   severely endangered language spoke in parts of France, Switzerland, and Italy. While

269   native speakers broadly evidenced phonological levelling of palatalised lateral

270   approximants in obstruent + lateral onset clusters (a feature of Francoprovençal, but not

271   of Standard French), the data revealed that new speakers can style-shift between highly

272   localised dialectal variants and pan-regional variants in sociolinguistic interviews, with

273   very limited linguistic competency. The authors argue that these pan-regional forms are

274   also deployed indexically to convey membership to a wider language revitalisation

275   movement. This suggests, as has been argued elsewhere, that 'being a new speaker of

276   a minority language does not necessarily require full mastery of that language, and that

277   knowing certain registers or mastering certain genres might be enough for what social

278   actors seek to achieve with the minority language' (Costa 2018). In this case, new

279   speakerness is invoked to signal a very different kind of Francoprovençal identity when

280   compared with native speakers, who openly reject new-speaker practices (see Kasstan

281   forthcoming). Kasstan and Müller further postulate that these new forms might come

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282   to be community norms in the future, following Jaffe: "new" […] "learner" linguistic

283   forms may stand out as "new speaker" indices at one point in a community's

284   sociolinguistic trajectory, but may become the norm at some later date' (2015: 26).[8]

285   Studies such as these clearly illustrate the potential of bridging research on new

286   speakers with variationist sociolinguistic theory, in order to illustrate the social

287   significance of linguistic variation in severely-endangered-language communities, and

288   the parallels that can be drawn with the broader variationist work on English and other

289   dominant languages. New speaker studies also have much to offer the variationist

290   literature on stylisation of speech, and, on the basis of the observations made by Tomé

291   Lourido and Evans (2015; 2016), Nance *et al.* (2016), and Kasstan and Müller (2018),

292   it seems possible to conceive of new speakers as agents of sociolinguistic change, in

293   variationist terms. It will next be argued that a social network analysis can offer a

294   fruitful case study for understanding the social mechanisms that underlie this variation.

295

296   *4. A social network approach to analysing new-speaker variation*

297   In Milroy (1980)'s classic Belfast study, she argued that that close-knit, dense and

298   multiplex network ties foster intra-community cohesion and norm enforcement,

299   whereas sparse and uniplex network ties are hospitable conduits for variability and

300   innovation diffusion. Her analysis was based on a network-strength scale, which

301   examined the relationship between the variable strength of network ties to an *ego* (the

302   central member), and variation in language behaviour. This approach was designed

303   principally to test the effect of strong ties among monolingual speakers within a tightly

304   defined geographical area. Milroy's general observations on network structure and

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[8] The end-result of which is probably best exemplified by the case of reconstructed Cornish (*e.g.* Sayers and Renkó-Michelsén 2015).

305 language variation have since been replicated too in big urban centres with rapidly

306 changing social landscapes, as evidenced in Milton Keynes (Kerswill and Williams

307 2000) and London (Cheshire *et al*. 2008). Further, a small number of important studies

308 have attested to these outcomes in non-English contexts, too. For instance, Bortoni-

309 Ricardo recognised the social network paradigm 'as an effective analytical tool to tackle

310 the issue of variation, especially in fluid settings undergoing rapid change' (1985: 69)

311 in her study on language variation and change among rural Caipira speakers moving

312 into urban Brazilian centres. Broadly, she observed that, in the rural-to-urban transition,

313 typical low-status Caipira features decreased and that categorical non-standard rules of

314 Caipira speakers' repertoires became variable where strong networks were weakened,

315 exposing these speakers to prestige norms (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985: 239-241).

316   It is propose here that a social network approach can also be adopted to elucidate

317 the social mechanisms underpinning new-speaker behaviour described in Section 3. As

318 Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) and others have argued, the social network paradigm is perhaps

319 best suited to analysing variation in communities undergoing rapid change, with

320 fluctuating sociolinguistic norms. These descriptors also are also clearly characteristic

321 of the (severely) endangered-language communities that have been illustrated above,

322 where dwindling native-speaker bases have galvanised revitalisation efforts, which in

323 turn have led to emergent new-speaker practices in communities often lacking

324 hierarchical or standard norms. New speakers have in particular been described above

325 as peripheral members in their endangered-language communities: owing to their

326 linguistic practices that do not toe community norms, their status is contested by native

327 speakers, and they are in some cases chastised for their practices. These attributes are

328 not dissimilar from those used to describe sociolinguistic 'Lames' (*e.g.* Labov 1973,

329 Edwards 1992), *i.e.* peripheral group members who are less familiar with the norms of

330   more central members in the vernacular peer-group. However, unlike 'Lames', new

331   speakers make up a significant proportion of the total speaker numbers in their

332   communities, and, as has been argued, this grants them power and prestige as arbiters

333   in fluctuating normative practices. It is therefore unclear what the determinants of

334   *strong* and *weak* ties might mean in such contexts. That said, a social network analysis

335   can still be operationalised to fit the relevant research questions for new-speaker

336   studies. In particular, the absence of an overtly prestigious norm presents at least one

337   important research question: if – as has been proposed above – new speakers are agents

338   of change, then are they responsible for the diffusion of new vernacular forms in

339   (severely) endangered-language communities, as postulated by Jaffe (2015) and

340   Kasstan & Müller (2018)? Do these new forms then penetrate native-speaker networks?

341   While further research is needed to systematically test this hypothesis, some evidence

342   from the new-speaker literature suggests that such diffusion can (and does) happen. For

343   instance, on the basis of a subset of Francoprovençal lexical variables, Kasstan (2013)

344   has shown that, in a minority of cases, some native speakers can produce new-speaker

345   variants in structured elicitation tasks. Similarly, Hornsby (2013) identifies in his

346   sample a small number of native Breton speakers who not necessarily perceive

347   neologised new-speaker variants negatively. A social network analysis therefore lends

348   itself nicely to testing these sorts of hypotheses, though the framework would need to

349   be altered to account for the new-speaker context.

350   Following Matsumoto (2010)'s study on the island of Palau, a social network

351   analysis based on *active* and *passive* ties may be best suited to such a context. Under

352   this framework, first proposed by Milardo (1988), and adapted by Li and Milroy (1995)

353   and Matsumoto (2010), *active* ties consist of *exchange* and *interactive* networks:

354   *exchange* networks constitute members such as friends, with whom the ego not only

355 interacts routinely, but also exchanges symbolic resources, such as direct advice,

356 criticism, support and interference (Milardo 1988: 23); Matsumoto (2010: 140),

357 following Li and Milroy (1995), identifies such networks as constituting *strong* ties in

358 the traditional sense. Conversely, *interactive* networks constitute members with whom

359 the ego interacts with frequently, but on whom the ego does not rely for the sorts of

360 symbolic resources that define the *exchange* network. Such ties, which are

361 characteristically *weak*, might consist of work colleagues or neighbours, for instance.

362 In addition, *passive* ties are identified as entailing an absence of regular contact, but are

363 nonetheless valued by the ego as a source of influence and moral support. Matsumoto

364 (2010) suggests that close friends, spread over a large geographical space, best

365 describes the nature of *passive* ties. While the quality of *passive* ties is ambiguous in

366 these studies, they can be conceived of for our purposes as *strong*, given the quality of

367 the relationships. In applying this network analysis, Matsumoto finds that social

368 networks can best account for both code and choice of linguistic variants in her

369 multilingual community (2010: 160). *Exchange* and *interactive* networks function in

370 an analogous way to *strong* and *weak* ties in Belfast: *exchange* networks (both active

371 and passive) promote the maintenance of the vernacular (a local variety of Japanese) at

372 the expense of the incoming dominant language (English), whereas *interactive*

373 networks act as conduits for modern Japanese, and the diffusion of English.

374   Distinguishing between these different network orders is useful for analysing

375 new-speaker variation, as the framework can account for the behaviour of individuals

376 whose language patterns may not be like those of their peers, or other members of the

377 network; 'they can be shown to have contracted different types of personal network

378 structures' (Li and Milroy 1995: 155). To apply this framework to a new-speaker

379 context, the characteristics of the community under investigation would need to be

380   properly reflected in the methodology-design. For instance, Kasstan (2015) outlines

381   how a social network analysis, based on the number and quality of first-order

382   (exchange) ties is able to account for innovative vernacular forms among a small

383   number of new speakers of Francoprovençal. However, given (a) the extent to which

384   some new speakers were ostracised in the community, and (b) the overall size of the

385   community of new speakers, he found that the distinction between the various network

386   types employed by Matsumoto (2010) to be too nuanced for his endangered-language

387   context. Instead Kasstan (2015) adopted an integration index based on that of Cheshire

388   (1982) and Edwards (1992), where participants are assigned a score which determines

389   how well-integrated they are into their respective networks. The challenge for the study

390   was to establish an integration index for two very different speech communities in

391   France and Switzerland, that was not only sensitive to the socio-economic factors of

392   each fieldwork area, but which could also account for very different types of speakers,

393   as well as the unique sociolinguistic context of Francoprovençal (see Kasstan 2015 for

394   details). As Milroy points outs, though, each community will vary, and it is up to the

395   investigator to pursue 'the most relevant and easily measurable cultural categories'

396   (1987: 216).

397   However, it remains to be seen how successfully new speakers might 'figure

398   prominently in a socially accountable theory of linguistic diffusion and change' (Milroy

399   2004: 563), which has yet to be fully explored. Few new-speaker studies have attempted

400   to bridge speech production data with these broader concerns. If, as Kasstan (2015)

401   argues, new speakers maintain characteristically *weak* network ties with native

402   speakers, then it should be possible to model new speakers into social network theory

403   as mobile speakers who harbour numerous loose and uniplex networks.[9] However, little

404   work on new speakers has yet systematically tested this possibility, even though some

405   studies provide data ripe for a network analysis. Nance *et al*. (2016), for instance, do

406   not conceive of their sample as a social network, but, loosely, as a *community of*

407   *practice*, which, in Wenger's terms, consists of a body of individuals with a shared

408   repertoire, who come together around mutual engagement in a jointly negotiated

409   enterprise (1998: 76). This is clearly reflected in Nance *et al*.'s study, 'where many

410   speakers use Gaelic in their work and attend a range of social and cultural events in the

411   expectation that Gaelic will be used and other Gaelic speakers will be present' (2016:

412   168). While the *community of practice* model is useful for the purpose of their analysis,

413   it would not illuminate on the potential spread of new-speaker variants into the wider

414   Gaelic-speaking networks (as postulated above), and the associated social significance

415   that any such variants might carry for different communities of practice; this is where

416   social networks are most useful.

417

418   *5. Trajectories for future research*

419   Research on new speakers, then, has much to offer the variationist paradigm, which has

420   renewed calls for 'more diverse sources of data' (Stanford 2016), and this article has

421   suggested that social network theory, a still very productive avenue of inquiry in

422   variationist research, provides a useful bridge for applying variationist theory to an

423   expanding body of data on (severely) endangered languages. New speakers have been

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[9] The observation that new speakers maintain inherently loose and uniplex ties is based on a long-held tenet of social network theory: 'on the whole, networks in rural areas tend towards density and multiplexity and in urban areas to uniplexity and sparseness' (Milroy and Margrain 1980: 48). As reviewers to this paper have suggested, though, it is worth acknowledging that not all new-speaker networks will be equally loose and uniplex, which may have implications for this revised framework. Further research on new speakers of severely endangered languages is needed to confirm this.

19

424 shown to play complex roles in these communities: they can be ostracised by native

425 speakers for their new-speaker practices, and, yet, paradoxically, in those contexts

426 where the target variety is severely endangered, new speakers represent an important

427 proportion of total speaker numbers. In variationist terms, new speakers maintain

428 peripheral community status, akin to 'the working margins' in Dorian (1982: 29)'s

429 terms, and this article has argued that they overlap with native-speaker networks. More

430 research is therefore needed in order to establish the sociolinguistic correlates of these

431 factors.

432   A synthesis of the literature on new speakers reveals a number of other avenues

433 of inquiry, too. First, as has been discussed, new-speaker studies have evidenced many

434 common cross-linguistic findings. However, most of these studies have been

435 undertaken independently: there is now a need for greater comparative-sociolinguistic

436 work on new speakers. Some comparative work does already exist. For instance,

437 O'Rourke *et al*. (2015) comprises a special issue dedicated to new speakers of minority

438 varieties, though the contributions address various different themes across disparate

439 methodological frameworks (none of which adopt variationist sociolinguistic methods).

440 Hornsby (2015) is a comparative linguistic ethnographic study of Breton, Lemko, and

441 Yiddish. Although rich in qualitative detail, the study offers little in terms of speech

442 production data, which is outside the scope of the volume. Adopting the comparative-

443 sociolinguistic methods that have evolved from the variationist paradigm into new-

444 speaker research would elucidate our understanding of language variation across

445 contexts, as such methods cross-compare conditioning effects on sociolinguistic

446 variation. [10] Comparative-sociolinguistic endeavours could consider emerging

[10] Tagliamonte (2012) for instance highlights the contribution made by comparative sociolinguistics to research on African American Vernacular English

447   minority-language new speakers in heritage-language contexts, such as those brought

448   to light most recently by McEwan (2015) in the context of Gaelic spoken in Nova

449   Scotia. No quantitative work has yet compared new speakers of homeland and heritage

450   Gaelic. Potential research questions here might include, for example, asking whether

451   or not different patterns of language use emerge among new speakers in homeland and

452   heritage Gaelic (*cf*. Nagy *et al*. 2018 for an analogous context of homeland and heritage

453   Francoprovençal varieties).

454   Secondly, there is little work that implicates new speakers in well-known

455   instances of language change. In general, we maintain a very poor formal understanding

456   of how linguistic innovations have been introduced by multilingual speakers as contact-

457   induced language change. This begs a number of potentially interesting theoretical

458   questions: what is the role that non-dominant bi-/multilingual speakers play in language

459   change? What types of innovations do they tend to introduce into the language(s) in

460   which they are not dominant? Are specific aspects of linguistic structure particularly

461   vulnerable to such innovations? New speakers as a novel category therefore offers new

462   ground for historical linguistics.

463   Thirdly, there is equally little evidence of any work currently being undertaken

464   on new speakers of endangered languages in cognitive linguistics, despite the fact that

465   there are some potentially very important implications for our understanding of

466   language acquisition. For instance, acquisition research has evidenced the significant

467   role played by speakers' L1 on L2 phonological categorisation in minority-variety

468   contexts where English is the target (*e.g.* McCarthy *et al*. 2014). What then are the

469   implications for new speakers acquiring a minorised variety? There are fruitful avenues

470   of inquiry to be explored, here.

471   Lastly, it is incumbent on future research initiatives that there be meaningful

472   social impact emanating from new-speaker research. The above synthesis outlines

473   significant hurdles faced by new speakers entering (severely) endangered-language

474   communities (*e.g.* sentiments of social and linguistic incompatibility between new

475   speakers and native speakers). Bridging this native/new speaker divide must be

476   addressed, though no clear avenues reveal themselves. As new-speaker practices, and

477   linguistic innovations in particular, might be posited to contribute towards this divide

478   (see Kasstan forthcoming), the development of a 'positive framework' (Meyerhoff

479   2015: 78) for speakers to evaluate language change might be a suitable point of

480   departure.

481

482   *Acknowledgements*

483   ...

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