**NEW SPEAKERS IN A MULTILINGUAL EUROPE:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

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**ACTIVITY OF WORKING GROUP 1: REPORT ON CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF
NEW SPEAKERNESS IN THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS MINORITY LANGUAGES**

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One of the agreed outputs of Working Group 1 was a synthesis report on the concepts of 'new speaker' and 'new speakerness'. At our meeting in Edinburgh in March 2014, it was decided that members of the Group would submit short reports containing their views on the matter, based on their previous experience and ongoing fieldwork. The purpose of the report was to collate the views of members and provide a succinct text which would be of use both to researchers and to those with a general interest in the topic.

Based on members' contributions, we believe it is important that the core concept of 'new speaker' (or 'new signer' in the case of deaf communities) is sufficiently focussed to be useful as an analytical tool but broad enough to capture the diversity, complexity and heterogeneity of the contexts, practices and ideologies which we study.

Many of the contributions underline the challenges faced when defining the concept of 'new speaker' and ask whether we should understand this primarily as an analytical concept or as a tool for categorising speakers, raising concerns over how or whether to define boundaries between 'old' and 'new' speakers and between 'new' speakers and 'learners'. The term 'new speaker' is viewed by many Working Group members as an improvement on existing labels such as 'learners', 'L2 speakers' or 'non-native speakers', because it is does not characterise such speech as a deficit version of native speech. However, like all labels it is not without its problems: if a 'new speaker' has learned the target language to full proficiency and is indistinguishable from a traditional speaker, when does he or she cease to be 'new'? Are traditional native speakers who use post-traditional features themselves 'new speakers'? Several contributors have suggested viewing 'new speakerness' as a research focus or area of investigation into the contemporary dynamics of minority language communities, rather than a precise concept which can be used to typologise highly complex social groups. 'New speakerness' as a process for the individual or as a continuum of different profiles of new speakers becomes part of a wider conceptualisation for all types of speakers (traditional, new, other).

With this in mind, and drawing on the work of scholars such as Eleanor Rosch (1978) and John Taylor, we therefore suggest that concepts can be fuzzy and hence that categories may have fuzzy borders (Taylor, 2008: 43). Membership in a category is not a clear-cut, all-or-nothing matter but instead similar to family resemblance as category members to varying degrees share attributes associated with a category. For the category 'new speaker', a central attribute seems to be that they have acquired the minority or indigenous language in an institutional setting. If we operate with absolute and delimiting categories, this attribute would exclude speakers who have been passive bilinguals and have started to actively use language through everyday interactions. 'A person who has learned a language in an institutional setting' might be seen as a prototypical member of the category 'new speaker', but within a framework which views the borders of categories as fuzzy, other types of speakers would be included in the category 'new speaker' if they share other attributes of the category, cf. the overview of 'core' elements listed below.

We have identified the following as the 'core' elements or characteristics of 'new speakerness':

- The majority of new speakers of minority languages begin to acquire the target language outside the home, usually within the education system or in a semi-formal learning situation.
- There are also new speakers who acquired passive or active competence in a minority language through informal language socialisation, e.g. in the home, often in a setting where the minority language is not dominant socially. As a consequence, their speech may differ (considerably) from traditional speech.
- Some new speakers may come from traditional speaker backgrounds, that is to say they were exposed to their parents, grandparents or close entourage who spoke the language 'traditionally' but did not pass it on, at least in the speakers' childhood. Such speakers may present a complex mixed model of revivalist and maintenance strategies.
- New speakers often acquire the target language to a significant degree of competence (for instance at level B2 (independent user) or higher of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and usually make active use of the language in their lives. Understandings of 'significant competence' may vary and opportunities to be an 'active' user may be constrained by sociolinguistic circumstances.
- The concept of 'new signer' may be applied to sign language users who are deaf children of hearing adults, hearing parents and siblings of deaf children, hearing spouses of deaf adults and hearing individuals with no familial tie to a deaf person. Similar to the 'native speaker ideology' in linguistics generally, such categories unsettle the authority of the 'native signer' ideology present in deaf communities where legitimacy as a native signer requires an individual to be both deaf and know sign language.
- A key element of the concept relates to the incorporation of the new language into active language use. Many new speakers aim to improve their active competence in the target language in one or more domains outside of (semi-)formal language learning. This may involve an overt stigmatisation of multilingual practices such as code-switching or sustained attention to acquiring a native-like accent and/or idiom.
- Some new speakers have lower levels of competence but employ the linguistic resources which they possess by different means and for different purposes depending on the context and domain of use. Such contexts may be outside more traditional domains such as formal education (for instance, social media) or limited to occasional social activities (such as conversation circles for adults).
- In some communities, the terms for traditional and new speakers are deeply rooted and naturalised categories (for instance 'euskaldun zaharra' and 'euskaldun berria' in Basque or 'neofalante' in Galician). In other communities there are no explicit labels for the new

speaker although both new and traditional speakers tend to be aware of tensions about each other's legitimacy and terms such as 'learners' or 'second language speakers' may abound.

- The ongoing experiences of new speakers may be viewed as a learning trajectory continuing and/or changing through the life cycle. This trajectory may be characterised by critical junctures leading to greater or lesser use of the target language.

- New speakers tend to become members of communities of practice or to form such communities.

- Many new speakers make an active decision to acquire competence in the target language as an act of identity or for political reasons and hence experience a transition into new speakerness. There is often an element of *rites de passage* in becoming a new speaker as there is a life event that influences/triggers the wish to learn/use the minority language (see, for instance, discussion about linguistic *mudes* (Walsh & O'Rourke, 2014; Pujolar & Gonzàlez, 2013) or the stages of the 'career of a new speaker' (Pentecouteau, 2002: 105-6).

- However, there are some new speakers who acquire the target language for instrumental reasons or out of necessity (due, for instance, to in-migration into an area where the minority language is spoken or to minority language policies within domains such as public administration or the media) and not necessarily due to an ideological motivation to the language. Such new speakers may revert to their original language if their circumstances or location change. This creates another potential category of dormant new speakers, formerly competent but who do not engage in social use of the language any more.

- New speakers may be perceived by others (and sometimes by themselves) as having insufficient and/or a different type of linguistic competence. Therefore issues of authenticity, legitimacy, hierarchies and power relations are often at the heart of new speakerness.

- Such tensions may be linked to the extent to which new speakers are perceived to represent critical mass in a language, particularly among weaker minority language communities. They may see themselves (or be seen) as playing a role in stabilising the language.

- There is no clear dichotomy between 'new' and 'traditional' speakers and the promotion of the 'new speaker' concept does not intend to perpetuate such a simplistic linguistic or cultural distinction. The reality is probably more nebulous and opaque. The sociolinguistic environments in which young speakers are being raised with the minority language are radically different from previous generations. Such speakers often straddle the threshold between traditional and new speaker classifications.

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