**Lexical variation in ‘néo’-Breton: A corpus-based approach**

The field of minority language sociolinguistics has recently seen much work on ‘new speakers’, particularly in the last five years as a result of the work of the COST New Speakers Network (www.nspk.org.uk). Definitions of the new speaker have varied depending on the context of study, although they are typically defined with reference to “transmission, attitude and origin” (Hornsby, 2015:108). New speakers thus do not acquire the language as a result of uninterrupted intergenerational transmission, instead often doing so through education; they have a positive attitude towards the language; and they need not originate from the traditional speaker community, i.e. the community of those who acquired the language intergenerationally.

While in general terms the ‘new speaker’ category has emerged only recently, as a development of the ‘néo-speaker’ theorised by Grinevald and Bert (2011:51), language-specific new speaker categories are more established in academic discourse. One example is the category of the ‘néo-bretonnant’, or new speaker of Breton. This first came to prominence in the work of Maryon McDonald (1989), who identified a group of “militant” speakers, and was further examined by Mari Jones (1995; 1998). Since then, the body of work dealing with the ‘néo-bretonnant’ has grown. With this longer-established position in academic discourse, ‘néo-bretonnants’ have become associated with various attributes: among these, it is claimed that they are typically young, well-educated, mobile, literate in Breton, and highly motivated by the desire to express Breton identity and even political activism, and that they wish to use Breton in as many domains as possible (Jones, 1995:428; Hornsby and Quentel, 2013:75; Rottet, 2014:213). These definitions put them at odds with traditional speakers, who are characterised as older, rurally located, and unable to read and write Breton, and are said to restrict their use of the language to the home and local community (Adkins, 2013:59; ibid:63; Hornsby and Quentel, 2013:75). The language of new speakers has similarly been assigned certain attributes in the literature: it is portrayed as highly standardised and non-dialectal, and while said to be similar to French in terms of its deep linguistic structure, i.e. phonology and morphosyntax, it is also characterised as having an artificially ‘purified’ lexicon, which makes use of Celtic-based neologisms rather than French borrowings, despite the latter being prevalent in the language of traditional speakers (Hewitt, 2016). These characterisations contribute to the perception of a large linguistic and ideological distance between new and traditional speakers of Breton.

Work on new speakers has generally tended to focus on attitudes and perceptions, often based on interviews and ethnographic techniques. This has been no less the case for Breton, the empirical research carried out by Holly Kennard (2014; 2018) being a rare exception. This work, however, found that new and traditional speaker syntax do not notably differ from each other. Similarly, Ó hIfearnáin (2013) noted that some traditional speakers are well-educated and literate in Breton, and can take up influential positions in Breton language planning, while Adkins (2014) found that adult education classes seek to teach partially dialectal varieties of Breton appropriate to their geographical location, rather than a supradialectal standard. All these findings point to a situation where the gap between new and traditional speakers, and their respective language varieties, may not be as large as is commonly reported.

My work aims to contribute more empirical research to the field in order to investigate this further. This paper presents results of a quantitative analysis of data gathered from Breton-language media, a context associated with new speakers, given their supposed literacy in Breton and greater motivation to speak the language in non-traditional domains, contrasting with traditional speakers. Based on data gathered in 2016–2017 from radio programmes, magazines, and posts on Facebook, this paper focuses on the lexicon, investigating quantities of French borrowings and neo-Celticisms and the presence of dialectal or other non-standard vocabulary, taking into account factors such as stage of entry into the language and morphological integration, and highlighting some ways in which the lexicon displays variation across the media contexts examined. Such variation attests the heterogeneous nature of Breton in the media, undermining some of the stereotypes about new speakers and their language, particularly the claim that new speakers use only a ‘pure’, non-dialectal variety.

This paper concludes with an assessment of what such variation could mean for portrayals of Breton in academic discourse and in language policy, stressing the importance of accounting for the multiple motivations and ideologies that operate in contexts where new speakers are present, in order to ensure greater success and sustainability for language maintenance in the future.

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