

MULTILINGUALISM:

Empowering
Individuals

Transforming
Societies

Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming
Societies

Lexical creativity and new speaker stereotypes among users of Breton on Facebook

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The MEITS project (2016–2020)

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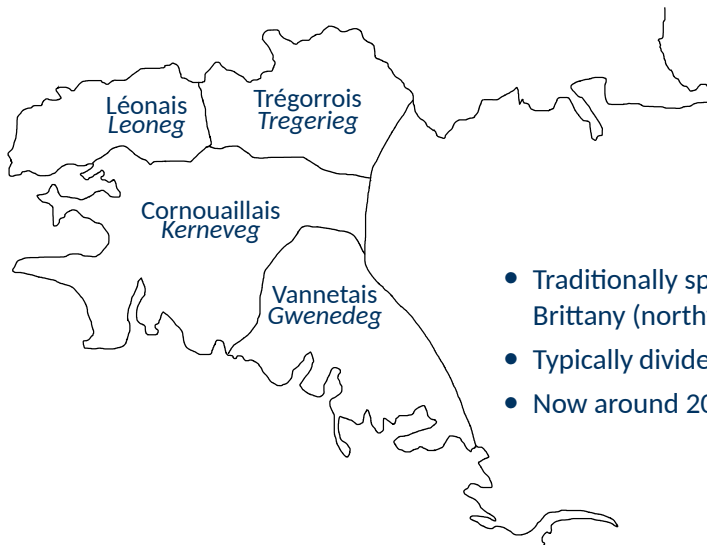
- Part of a collaborative project across 4 universities in the UK, involving 34 researchers
- Broad aim of demonstrating the value of languages in the UK, from multiple perspectives
- My interests: variation in minoritised languages, non-standard varieties of minoritised languages

Breton context

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- Traditionally spoken in western Brittany (northwest France)
- Typically divided into four dialects
- Now around 200,000 speakers



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“Néo-bretonnants”

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- “a new generation of Breton speakers, who represent a radical shift in stance from the mentality described above and who, in many ways, stand apart from the traditional speakers of the language” (Jones 1995:428)
- “the language reformers – both earlier and today – are urban and intellectual. They draw on aspects of culture familiar to them in renovating Breton, aspects which do not resonate with traditional speakers” (Timm 2001:454)
- More recently, and cross-linguistically, work on new speakers (e.g. Hornsby 2015)

“Néo-bretonnants”	Traditional speakers
Younger, middle-class, mobile, well-educated	Older, working-class, usually farmers
Located in larger towns and cities	Located in rural hamlets
Live all over Brittany	Restricted to western Brittany
Acquire Breton as a second language	Acquire Breton through intergenerational transmission
Acquire Breton in formal education	
Use Breton as much as possible	Restrict use of Breton to intimate settings
Militant promotion of Breton	Speak Breton only because of linguistic ability
Literate in Breton	Unable to read and write Breton
Proud of Breton identity	No strong sense of Breton identity
Use standard Breton	Use dialectal Breton
French-influenced linguistic structure	Linguistic structure not influenced by French
Celtic-derived lexicon	French-influenced lexicon

(See e.g. Jones 1995; Hornsby 2005; Timm 2001; German 2007)

Longevity of *néo-breton*

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“it would appear that Breton is simultaneously experiencing language birth and death: the disappearance of the dialects ... is imminent and in their place is left the emerging xenolect, the French-influenced *Néo-breton*, which seems to be the only variety of the language likely to survive into the 21st century” (Jones 1995:437)

Signs of convergence?

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- Some new speakers deliberately aim to speak more traditional varieties of Breton (“native authenticists”, Hornsby and Quentel 2013)
- Certain dictionaries prioritise the lexicon of traditional speakers (Rottet 2014)
- Many courses for adult learners teach local varieties (Adkins 2014)
- Traditional speaker activists are not unknown (Ó hÍfearnáin 2013)
- Children who acquire Breton at school gain a sophisticated understanding of syntax (Kennard 2014)

Aims of the research

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- Language associated with new speakers/“néo-bretonnants”
 - In the media
- Three domains of media language
 - Magazines
 - Radio broadcasts
 - Facebook group posts
- Focusing on lexicon

Facebook e brezhoneg

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- Largest of several Facebook groups dedicated to Breton, with around 10000 members at the time of data collection
- “Open group”: anyone can read and search posts
- Assumed to be made up of new speakers
- Specific bilingual site: competence in French expected but use of it discouraged

Kasit **ho kemenadennoù**

e brezhoneg mar plij

Ha chomit dereat ha doujus

Merci de **rédi**ger

vos messages en breton

et de rester courtois et respectueux

Overview of posts

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- Recurrent subject matters
 - Language (translation requests, etc.)
 - Politics
 - Advertising events
- Sampling method
 - No linguistic subject matter in the original post
 - Main stimulus for conversation must be textual
 - Original post at least 50% in Breton, with a least one top-level response in Breton from a different user
 - Certain words (c. 12%) were tagged for analysis
- 12000-word sample involving 99 users

The lexicon of Breton

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- Identified as prominent feature of new/traditional speaker distinction

	TB	NB	French
'shop'	magazin	stal	<i>magasin</i>
'reason'	rezen	abeg	<i>raison</i>
'bakery'	boulangerezh	baraerezh	<i>boulangerie</i>

adapted from Timm 2001:456

- History of lexicography and corpus planning; a database of recommended terminology is now maintained by *Ofis publik ar brezhoneg*

Lexical variation on Facebook

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- Many non-“official” French borrowings

	Attested	Advised	French
‘cable-car’	teleferik	fungarr	<i>téléphérique</i>
‘sexist’	seksist	revelour	<i>sexiste</i>
‘reptiles’	reptilianed	stlejviled	<i>reptiles</i>
‘flag’	drapo	banniel	<i>drapeau</i>

- International borrowings: *organek*, *TV* (French *bio*, *télé*)
- Dialectal words: often prepositions
- Posts with heavier use of dialect attract dialectal replies

Comparison with other contexts

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- Heteroglossic nature; intermediate register
- More use of neologisms: adherence to “néo-breton”
- Highest use of terms not advised by official terminology database, and highest level of semantic difference from standard dictionaries
- Lots of metalinguistic discourse, and ludic use of language
- Some evidence of translanguaging, and borrowings from multiple languages

Findings

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- The Facebook context features characteristics of both oral and written communication, but is unique
 - Ludic language use and multiple linguistic repertoires: highly performative
- New (?) speakers are not homogeneous in their lexicon or orthography: not all stereotypical “néo-bretonnants”
 - Use of borrowings and neologisms depends on speaker and context
 - Dialectal features sometimes occur and are not stigmatised
- Communication with a geographically diffuse group balanced with the expression of local identity

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