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Exploring contested authenticity among speakers of a contested language: the case of “Francoprovençal”

Abstract

This paper explores the notion of ‘the authentic speaker’ (*e.g.* Coupland 2003, 418) in the context of obsolescent “Francoprovençal”: a highly fragmented grouping of Romance varieties spoken in parts of France, Italy and Switzerland by less than 1% of the total regional population. While Francoprovençal has long been losing ground to the dominant language(s) with which it is in contact, new speakers have begun to emerge within the context of revitalisation movements and activities geared more favourable language planning policies and increased literacy. The emergence of these new speakers has polarised native speaker communities, and has blurred the lines associated with the traditional view of sociolinguistic authenticity. Through an analysis of qualitative data collected in 2012, this article argues in particular that it may not be sufficient to simply examine contested authenticities from a native-non-native perspective, but rather, it is important to consider how new speakers might themselves form ‘a complex spectrum of speaker-types with new sets of tensions’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, 301) as has been argued elsewhere.

Keywords: Francoprovençal, obsolescence, Arpitan, revitalisation, new speakers

Introduction

The theoretical framework underpinning the present issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* illustrates how the dominant discourse in sociolinguistics overwhelmingly prioritises native speech as representative of “REAL or AUTHENTIC language [most] worthy of investigation” (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, 289). This is most clearly reflected in the variationist paradigm, where studies (particularly in a minority-variety context) “have tended to exclude [...] non-native speakers as well as those who are recent arrivals to the community” (Bucholtz 2003, 404). According to this tradition, then, it is the native speaker who commands the most legitimacy in terms of what constitutes authentic language. The qualities of authenticity that are associated with nativeness can therefore be said to impose a number of obstacles on non-native speakers, especially those speakers who cannot necessarily be said to be from the same community. Native speakers, then, act as gatekeepers to those linguistic markets where authentic language is carefully monitored and maintained:

authenticity [...] requires an infrastructure of expert authenticators, monitors and recorders to establish and defend the status of authentic phenomena, and to ensure the continuing consensus about this within the community (Coupland 2003, 419).

This stance raises interesting questions in relation to those speakers who would be labelled as *non-native*: “if individuals cannot securely inherit authenticity from the social circumstances of their birth and socialization, how can they achieve it?” (Coupland 2003, 428); can the authenticity associated with nativeness be contested? The divisive issues that arise in relation to linguistic authenticity are a theme that will be explored in the present paper, by anchoring the discussion within the context of

language revitalisation efforts geared towards “Francoprovençal”. Like many of the regional or minority languages (henceforth RMLs) spoken in Europe, Francoprovençal has long been undergoing ‘gradual death’ (Campbell and Muntzel 1989, 182-6): speaker numbers have been in terminal decline for some time, as long term language shift in the direction of the dominant language has been taking place. However, the context of Francoprovençal affords a unique opportunity to explore contested authenticity among native and non-native speakers, as, quite unlike the RMLs spoken in proximity to Francoprovençal, this clustering of Romance varieties has itself long been contested as legitimate. Since its introduction into the Romance linguistic literature, there has been significant disagreement over the linguistic borders associated with Francoprovençal, as well as the linguistic criteria employed for demarcation. The label Francoprovençal is also contested, for it suggests – rather confusingly – a French/Provençal mixed variety, rather than a distinct and coherent linguistic unit in its own right. Its official status is equally ambiguous: in the autonomous region of the Aosta Valley (northern Italy), Francoprovençal is protected by Federal law, and enjoys status in the education system and other public spaces such as shops, restaurants and city councils (Josserand 2003, 130). Conversely, across the border, Francoprovençal was only recognised as a “language of France” by the Ministry for Culture and Communication in 1999, and it is not permitted in the national curriculum, unlike Occitan or Breton, varieties that are viewed as clearly defined and sufficiently different from French (Bron 2011, 7). Moreover, in Switzerland, where multilingualism is enshrined in the constitution, Francoprovençal remains absent from Article 70 which accords status to the Confederation’s official languages, including Rumantsch (see Camartin 1985). However, in spite of Francoprovençal’s ambiguous status and dwindling speaker-base, it is also

nevertheless experiencing a resurgence in efforts to reverse language shift. While native speakers have long quietly lamented the demise of their local varieties, new speakers are now emerging who militate in favour of greater recognition, more favourable language planning policies, and wider literacy. The introduction of such a movement made up predominantly of new speakers has polarised traditional speech communities, and has led to a flux in conventional linguistic practices, pushing Francoprovençal into new domains of usage, primarily through the use of the Internet. This article considers what effect this has had in terms of what constitutes authenticity as a speaker of Francoprovençal, and how such practices are linked to identity construction: might we for example expect new speakers to produce speech that they themselves view as authentic? Or is authenticity rejected as a deliberate distancing strategy from native speakers, as has been posited elsewhere (*e.g.* Hornsby 2015a, 111). By exploring qualitative data that come from a larger study into variation and change in Francoprovençal (Kasstan 2015), this article suggests in particular that it may not be sufficient to simply examine contested authenticity from a native-non-native perspective, but rather, it is also important to consider how new speakers might themselves form a ‘a complex spectrum of speaker-types with new sets of tensions’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, 301) all of their own. Owing to the fact that Francoprovençal is very much understudied in the sociolinguistic literature, the article begins by outlining the specific linguistic context, before introducing the data that forms the basis of the discussion on contested sociolinguistic authenticity.

On Francoprovençal and obsolescence

Francoprovençal is a highly fragmented grouping of Romance varieties spoken traditionally in parts of France, Italy and Switzerland, with heritage speakers also reported to reside in Canada and the United States (Nagy 2011, Kasstan and Nagy

2018). The grouping is made up of a very large number of varieties with highly localised phonological, morpho-syntactic, and lexical forms. However, a number of internal groupings are also traditionally recognised, such as Lyonnais or Savoyard in France, and Valaisan or Fribougeois in Switzerland (see Figure 1, below).

[Figure 1 here]

(adapted from Kasstan and Nagy 2018)

The Francoprovençal region has never known any political or linguistic unity: no one dialect has traditionally held sufficient regional prestige for a dominant variety to emerge, and there is no ‘standard’ Francoprovençal. In terms of its origins, Francoprovençal as a distinctive grouping was first proposed by Ascoli (1874; republished 1878) who attempted to demarcate the south-eastern varieties in France that he saw as distinct from northern *Oïl* French, and the southern Occitan varieties. However, the definition given for this division was rejected by many in the linguistic community at the time, for it relied principally on just one phonological feature: the change in vocalic quality of Latin tonic free A, as in (1) and (2), below:

- (1) PRATUM > /p□e/ (Standard French), /p□a/ (Francoprovençal), where /a/ is maintained as either [a], [□] or [□] following a non-palatal consonant;
- (2) Where a palatal consonant is introduced, /a/ is raised to [i], e.g. VACCAM > [□vaka] (Occitan), [□va□i] (Francoprovençal).

As a result of this narrow definition, the demarcation of these varieties has long been contested in the traditional literature: ‘Le nouveau groupement proposé ... n’offre aucune unité géographique’ [This newly proposed dialect grouping ... does not form a discrete unit] (Meyer 1878, 295); ‘Le francoprovençal tout court n’existe

pas’ [In short, the Francoprovençal language does not exist] (Lüdtke 1971, 69); ‘Le francoprovençal existe-t-il ?’ [Does the Francoprovençal language exist?] (Tuailleon 2007, 9). Among linguists, then, historically there has been little overall consensus that Francoprovençal constitutes a discrete set of varieties (see Martin 1990 for a detailed overview).

The discourse surrounding Francoprovençal’s status has, however, never really involved speakers on the ground. Further, it has been reported that traditional native-speaking communities of Francoprovençal have never knowingly felt to belong to this linguistic unit, however defined (see Matthey and Meune 2012, 108; Grinevald and Bert 2013, 278). Moreover, they have never known their language by the label ‘Francoprovençal’ (Sériot 1997, 183); this academic label, which implies ‘une langue mixte’ [a mixed language] (Walter 2003, vii), means little if anything to native speakers. Instead, it is entirely common for native speakers to refer to their varieties as ‘patois’, where emphasis is placed instead on where it is spoken: *e.g.* ‘patois savoyard’, ‘patois bressan’ (Costa 2011, 6). There is therefore a focus not on the wider language, but on local practice, where highly localised variation is the “obsessive interest” (Dorian 1982, 31) of the native speaker. Thus, the sociolinguistic authenticity associated with and commanded by native speakers is anchored to a specific community with a distinctive local identity. However, these native speakers are now few and far between, as gradual language shift in the direction of the dominant language has been taking place for some time. In terms of speaker numbers, between 120,000 and 150,000 are thought to be left transnationally, or less than one per cent of the total regional population (see Bert et al 2009; Martin 2002; Salminen 2007, Zulato et al 2018). This terminal decline in the native speaker-base problematises the traditional view of sociolinguistic authenticity, for it has been

argued elsewhere that authenticity is ‘destabilised by the death of traditional speakers’ (Costa 2015, 129). If authenticity in these declining RML contexts can therefore enter into a state of flux, it might then be pertinent to ask if sociolinguistic authenticity can be contested by other types of speakers.

Francoprovençal, Arpitan, and revitalisation

While Francoprovençal has long been in decline, it is nevertheless also experiencing a resurgence, as new speakers now begin to emerge ‘in the context of revitalization programmes and activities’ (Grinevald and Bert 2011, 52). These speakers exhibit many of the same characteristics as described in studies on, for example, new speakers of Breton (Adkins 2015), Galician (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013) or Occitan (Costa 2013). Quite unlike native speakers of Francoprovençal, new speakers tend to be middle-class, well educated (often to university level), and highly politicised. In nearly all cases, the target variety is acquired as an intellectual exercise, rather than via the traditional route of intergenerational mother-tongue transmission. New speakers of Francoprovençal also tend to be concentrated in areas that may be very different in socio-economic terms from the traditional rural communities, and, as will be shown, owing to underlying sociolinguistic differences, these groups can perceive themselves as being ‘socially and linguistically incompatible’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011, 139).

In particular, new speakers of Francoprovençal have sprung up out of a revitalisation movement with a number of goals orientated towards more favorable language planning policies, which they believe they will achieve by propagating a pan-regional – Alpine – linguistic identity. Central to this identity is the alternative glottonym ‘Arpitan’, which, they argue, is less confusing than the concurrent ‘Francoprovençal’. The label ‘Arpitan’ (derived from *arp-* meaning ‘alpine pasture’,

see Kasstan 2016) has been borrowed and adapted from the *Harpitanie* movement, a 1970s Marxist group from the Aosta Valley, whose manifesto also foregrounded linguistic unification for largely political goals:

La langue ethnique ... de la région ... est la langue franco-provençale qui ... existe sous forme de nombreux parlers ... L'unification de ces parlers sera le but du mouvement populaire harpitan ... de la fusion entre les langues, sortira une langue 'nouvelle' : la LANGUE HARPITANE [emphasis in original] (Harriet 1974, 65-7).¹

[The ethnic language ... of the region ... is the Francoprovençal language which ... exists in the form of a number of varieties ... The unification of these varieties will be the goal of the Harpitan movement ... A 'new' language will emerge from this unification called the HARPITAN LANGUAGE].

Unlike the vast majority of traditional native speakers, then, these new speakers see a common unity in the dialects of the region (perhaps influenced by French nation-state ideology that equates language and space), and they campaign actively to diffuse the label 'Arpitan' as widely as possible; the Internet has played a significant role in this endeavour.²

In terms of goals, the Arpitan movement is driven principally by the desire for wider recognition of the language and increased literacy. However, as previously stated, no 'standard' form of Francoprovençal exists, and highly localised phonetic-spelling systems have long been the preferred tool among those native speakers who do produce texts (Tuailon 2004). From the perspective of the revitalisers, adopting phonetic spelling systems for such a highly fragmented grouping of varieties raises a

¹ The omission of word-final <h> in <Arpitan> is likely a deliberate distancing strategy from any extremist political discourse. It also has the dual advantage of forming parallels with a regional success in the revitalisation literature: Occitan.

² 'Arpitan', as a concurrent of 'Francoprovençal', has seen a lot of success online and has now been adopted by Ethnologue, unseating the traditional glottonym.

number of issues for intelligibility pan-regionally (see Stich 1998, 35). There are a few existing regional orthographies that have appeared over the years which do attempt to form some cohesion (*e.g.* Schüle 1980). However, these regional orthographies tend to adhere to the same principle: ‘la prononciation seule détermine l’orthographe, à l’exclusion de toute considération grammaticale ou étymologique’ [it is the pronunciation alone that determines orthographical form at the expense of all other grammatical and etymological considerations] (Martin 2002, 79). Therefore, they cannot take account of dialectal variation beyond the borders where they were devised.

Recognising the problems posed by a phonetic-based approach to orthographical codification, the Arpitan movement has adopted instead an orthographical norm that is very different to those employed by the vast majority of native speakers. The unified multidialectal orthography termed *Reference Orthography B* (or ORB, Stich 1998; 2001, Stich et al 2003), is not based on phonetic form, but instead considers only etymology, and is heavily influenced by Standard French. Among its supporters, it is lauded as a tool that allows for the transcription of local texts for a much wider audience. However, ORB has been heavily criticised by both speakers and linguists for its oversimplification, and arbitrary selection of forms, which often will not represent a large number of Francoprovençal varieties (Flückiger 2004, 312-319; Tuailon 2004, 7-10). Quite unlike conventional models of orthographical codification, ORB is not based on any one prestige variety, nor is it all accepting as prescribed by the concept of ‘polynomie’ (Marcellesi 1989, 170), as tried and tested on the island of Corsica (see Kasstan 2015 for a discussion). Further, it is noteworthy that Arpitan speakers will advocate that they do not seek pan-regional linguistic standardisation, and are happy to tolerate variation, so long as orthographic

conventions are followed. This is despite the fact that, in the very same volume from which ORB is derived, there exists a proposed list of pronunciations for each grapheme that the author considers a ‘Francoprovençal standard’ (Stich 1998, 78). The discussion here on orthography is central to the larger theme on sociolinguistic authenticity, for, as will become clear in the following sections, ORB is contested within the native-speaker community as a representation of authentic speech. However, it is first necessary to outline the methodology design involved in collecting the data for the present article.

Methodology

The qualitative data to be discussed below come from fieldwork conducted between July and September 2012 in the Canton of Valais (henceforth ‘Valais’) in Switzerland. Fieldwork was conducted among thirty-nine participants in nine *communes* across the canton: Bagnes, Évòlène, Fully, Grimisuat, Hérémente, Ollon, Nendaz, Savièse, and Sion. The aim was to collect speech samples from speakers with very different acquisition paths. Speakers in the sample included: traditional native speakers (those speakers who acquired Francoprovençal from birth via mother-tongue transmission); late speakers (those who were born after the cut-off point for transmission of Francoprovençal, and who were raised as French monolinguals, but who began to engage in regular use of the language later in life), and new speakers (those who acquired Francoprovençal as an L2 in a purely educational context). These speaker categories are based on previous typologies of speaker-types for obsolescent-language contexts, as first proposed by Dorian (1981), and expanded for Occitan and Francoprovençal by Bert (2009). Semi-structured sociolinguistic interviews (Labov 1984) and structured elicitation tasks were conducted with all participants. Following Milroy (1980), interviews were conducted with speakers in groups, as well as on a

one-to-one basis. A portion of the sociolinguistic interview involved a questionnaire designed to elicit attitudes towards the language, and towards the emergence of new speakers in Francoprovençal-speaking communities (*e.g.* ‘should patois be taught in school?’; ‘have you heard of Arpitan?’). The questionnaire provided the basis for further discussion. For example, where speakers signalled to the interviewer that they were aware of the label ‘Arpitan’, the interviewer asked speakers to define this term, or describe what they thought it meant.

The following excerpts are literal transcriptions of six speakers’ responses under interview (see Table 1 for speakers’ demographic details). No attempt has been made to alter the content in any way.

[Table 1 here]

Analysis

Qualitative data on the theme of sociolinguistic authenticity was recurrent in the fieldwork recordings for Valais. For a number of speakers, there was particular anxiety at the thought of the local variety undergoing change as a result of new speakers producing forms that differ from local norms. In the following extract, participant M04-29 stresses the barrier between native speakers and non-native speakers by employing the possessive form ‘notre patois’ [our patois], and emphasising ‘us ... real patois speakers’ as the only social actors capable of commanding authentic speech. There is clearly no space in the linguistic marketplace, according to this participant, for non-native speech.

Native speaker intolerance towards new speaker speech

M04-29: ‘On n’aime pas quelqu’un qui [We don’t like people who speak our
parle notre patois mal on préfère patois badly we prefer to speak with

nous qui sommes de vrais real patois speakers and to speak patoisants qu'on parle français ou either French or our real patois, but alors notre vrai patois mais pas not to massacre the patois]. massacrer le patois'.

This intolerance manifested itself too in group discussions involving native speakers and new speakers: native speakers frequently referred to the lack of 'accent' among the new speakers sampled in the study. This often led to frustration on the part of the new speakers: rather than being encouraged as the next generation of Francoprovençal speakers, they are ridiculed for attempting to speak the language associated with the local community. In the following interaction, participant A08-55 explains, in French, that the 'local accent' has been maintained because it has always been spoken in the home, and, further, he implies that younger new speakers will never master the language in the same way. New speaker J13-26 then retorts, *in Francoprovençal* (and translated into French below), that native speakers can be cruel to learners rather than welcoming.

A08-55: 'Nous on parle patois parce qu'on a [Us we speak patois because toujours parlé patois à la maison we've always spoken patois in the encore ça reste l'accent tandis que home and so we've maintained the les enfants ils essaient de parler'. accent while the youngsters they try to speak].

J13-26: 'Oui ... tu n'est pas doux ... avec les [Yes ... you are not gentle ... with enfants ... qui apprennent ... pour the children ... who try to speak dire non c'est pas juste au lieu de ... but you say no it's not right dire "nous sommes content de vous instead of saying we are happy to

parler” ... quand j’ai commencé à be speaking with you ... when I
 parler tu as dit “tu n’as pas began to speak you said “you
 l’accent”. don’t have the accent”].

This feeling of marginalisation on the part of the new speakers was also recurrent in the interview data. The following excerpt comes from a participant who emphasises the ‘severity’ with which younger learners are scolded by their older reference group:

Learners being marginalised

J14-36: ‘Souvent [les anciens] ils rigolent [Often [the native speakers] they
 si on fait des fautes ... ils sont laugh if we make mistakes ...they are
 sévères ils sont sévères avec nous harsh they are harsh with those of us
 les plus jeunes qui parlons moins who are younger ones who don’t
 bien’. speak as well].

This suggest that the level of linguistic insecurity felt by these learners is high, and their exclusion from any sentiments of sociolinguistic authenticity is clearly linked too with language ownership. Not only are native speakers especially recalcitrant to the idea of tolerating learner speech, then, but they participate too in discouraging native and new-speaker interaction. In some cases, new speakers described how native speakers would openly mock them for producing forms perceived as being non-native, even though said forms correspond to the phonotactics of the variety in question:

J13-26: ‘Il me rit au nez il me dit (laughs) [He laughs in my face he says
 “[kul□tu□a] [kul□tu□a] toi tu ne (laughs) “[kul□tu□a]
 sais pas parler patois” parce qu’a [kul□tu□a] you don’t know how
 Savièse ils disent plutôt to speak patois” because in
 “[kyl□ty□]” alors que tous les /y/ Savièse they say “[kyl□ty□]”
 en patois si tu dis “[py□]” tu dis even though all the /y/ sounds in
 “[pu□]”. patois if you say “[py□]” you say
 “[pu□]”].

Native speaker intolerance towards non-native speech in the manner described above is now well-documented in new speaker studies on other RML contexts. For example, Holton in his study on new speakers of Athabascan describes how native speakers ‘laugh mercilessly at their grandchildren’s efforts to learn, and learners in turn become quickly discouraged’ (2009, 248). In attempting to account for this behaviour, J13-26 offers his perspective, suggesting that, as learners never really existed in the community among the previous generations, they have not yet adapted to new speakers taking up the language in the context of learner programmes and revitalisation efforts:

New speakers on native-speaker intolerance

J13-26: ‘En patois soit tu parles [In patois you either speak perfectly
 parfaitement soit tu ne parle pas ... or you don’t speak it at all ... because
 parce que ça n’existait pas des gens it never used to be the case that
 qui se mettaient au patois par des people learnt patois from books ...
 livres ... avant c’était soit c’était before it was a case of either it being

dans la famille et tu le parlais ... in the family and you spoke it ... or it
soit ça n'existait pas'. wasn't spoken at all].

While new speakers in the communities explored here clearly struggle in their interactions with native speakers, they feel no such pressure among themselves. New speakers of Francoprovençal are very active on the Internet, where they practice the language freely on social media sites and digital radio platforms without direct criticism. Such new speaker practices have pushed a traditional low-status vernacular into new domains of usage, and orthography in particular, therefore, has an important role to play in the wider discussion on sociolinguistic authenticity, for ORB has been adopted by these new speakers as the reference orthography of choice. However, as suggested above, ORB has come to be a divisive issue in the community between native speakers and new speakers. As is clear to see from the next excerpt, one native speaker very clearly associates the local variety with the community in which it is spoken. This reiterates Woolard's argument that 'a speech variety must be very much "from somewhere" in a speakers' consciousness, and thus its meaning is profoundly local' (Woolard 2008, 304):

Native speaker discussion on ORB

L18-52: 'Quand j'ai attaqué J13-26 avec sa [When I confronted J13-26 with
façon maintenant de faire du patois his way of writing in patois ...
... parce que ça d'après lui ça doit because in his words it will allow
permettre donc de passer par Internet it to be published online for
et tout ça pour tout le monde ... mais everybody ... but that's a
ça c'est une déformation du patois ça deformation of the patois that ...

... Il faut d'abord maintenir le patois First and foremost we should
 tel qu'il est pas introduire un maintain the patois as it is and not
 nouveau patois parce que l'ancien ne introduce a new patois because the
 va pas se maintenir et alors que est old one won't last but also what's
 ce que ça sert de mettre sur Internet the point of putting a patois on the
 un patois qui ne correspond plus Internet which no longer
 donc au parler de Savièse ?' corresponds to the Savièse
 variety?]

For this participant then, the use of ORB to represent the local variety amounts to a 'deformation' of the language: there is an explicit distinction made between the 'patois as it is' and a 'new patois'. Clear boundaries are delineated here between authentic and non-authentic representations of the language, where 'authentic' in this case is taken to be that form which is most clearly representative of the Savièsan variety.

Orthographical normalisation in RML contexts is widely reported to be divisive in the language obsolescence literature (*e.g.* Jones 1998 on Breton; Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus 2012 on Occitan), and similar confrontational lines are borne out in the data here too. Unlike the Breton and Occitan context however, revitalisation efforts geared towards Francoprovençal – in Switzerland at least – are much more embryonic, and so the debate over ORB was incipient in the communities explored in 2012 (Kasstan 2014, 23-28). Among the few speakers interviewed who were aware of ORB, it was invariably described as 'une forme très moyenne' [very much a middle ground] or even 'an Esperanto', and was generally viewed as some deformation of the local variety. However, it was not just native speakers who harboured such views: the data also revealed that some new speakers within the community had very different

views on what it means to be a speaker of Francoprovençal. While some new speakers referred to their variety as Arpitan, believed in a pan-regional linguistic identity, and favoured the use of a unified orthographical norm, others were instead only interested in producing and representing the local dialect in the most locally authentic way possible, and demonstrated no interest in varieties outside of their immediate community. The following excerpt is from C08-63, a new speaker who acquired Francoprovençal in the form of introductory courses offered by a local association. As is clear to see, there is a desire only to speak the variety local to her own *commune*, and there is also a clear distrust for what this speaker has interpreted as some ‘other’ encroaching variety, which she understands to be Arpitan. In many ways then this speaker echoes the attitudes of the native speakers sampled in the study: authenticity is clearly linked with the local variety only, which for these individuals indexes at the same time identity and locality:

Disparate new-speaker practices

C08-63: ‘Fin c’est comme je dirais à J13-26 [It’s like I’d say to J13-26 this
ça m’intéresse pas du tout ce truc [Arpitan] thing doesn’t interest me
parce que moi c’est le patois de at all because for me all that
Savièse point barre il y a rien d’autre counts is the patois spoken in
je ne veux pas mélanger avec Savièse full stop and there’s
d’autres choses ... je ne vais pas aller nothing else I don’t want to mix it
chercher quelqu’un dans la rue là with anything else ... I won’t go
puis je vais lui dire “tiens on va and find people in the street and
apprendre le patois” c’est pas then say “hey let’s go and learn
possible parce que t’as pas la culture patois” it’s not worth it because

qui va avec.

you won't then have the culture to
go with it].

The qualitative data reveal, then, a multifaceted context surrounding sociolinguistic authenticity that extends beyond the native/non-native dichotomy, and evidences instead underlying tensions *within* the new speaker category. In some cases it seems that new speakers too can belong and adhere to the wider “infrastructure of expect authenticators” (Coupland 2003, 419). For example, a section of the wordlist elicitation task built into the methodology was designed to elicit lexical items in Francoprovençal for new concepts (*i.e.* technological innovations), including items such as ‘Internet’, ‘recycling’, ‘shuttle bus’.³ In the following excerpt the interviewer asks C08-63 how a speaker might say ‘shuttle bus’ in Francoprovençal:

JK: ‘Tu dis comment “les navettes [How do you say “shuttle buses”]
de transport”?’

C08-63: ‘Non mais ça n’existait pas à [But that didn’t exist at the time
l’époque (laughs)’ (laughs)]

JK: ‘Non mais toi tu dirais ça [No sure but how would you say it?]
comment ?’

C08-63: ‘Tu dis pas ... ce qui n’existait [You don’t say it ... if it didn’t exist
pas tu dis pas !’ you don’t say it!]

This participant’s attitude towards neologisms is therefore very similar to that of the vast majority of native speakers interviewed: in most cases, speakers expressed

³ ORB-derived neologisms have been proposed for these concepts (Stich et al 2003), and the questionnaire was designed to ascertain how diffuse such forms were in the community.

amusement at the thought of ‘using the dialect for such things’ (in one participant’s terms).⁴ Conversely, among those new speakers who aligned themselves most clearly with the Arpitan agenda, this was viewed as counter-productive, where instead neologising was argued as essential if the language is to have any future at all:

- J02-68: ‘Pour maintenir le patois il faut [To keep the dialect going we need to inventer quelque chose’ come up with something]
- J13.26: ‘Oui oui [e pa□□la d□ [Yes yes we can speak of Internet and w□nt□□□n□:t e pw□j d□ television and iPhone] tewevi□□j□wn d□ wi□f□wnə]’
- J02-68 ‘Il n’y a pas de mot pour ça’ [There isn’t a word for that]
- J13-26 ‘[e tewe□□□□je e: [and downloading and connection] konek□sj□wn]’
- J02-68 ‘(laughs) [konek□sj□wn]’ [(laughs) “connection”]
- J13-26 ‘[m□ □po□ke □p□]’. [Well why not!]

The data suggest, then, that these new speakers can contest authenticity in very different ways. While C08-63 legitimises her position ‘through reference to nativeness’ (Hornsby 2015b, 10), J02-68 sees nativeness as a barrier to progression, where native speaker authenticity is linked instead with obsolescence. In the latter case, the terminal decline of speakers is grounds enough for ‘new linguistic regimes [to emerge with] new conditions of legitimacy’ (Costa 2015, 144). These disparate views on linguistic authenticity have therefore engendered competing communities of

⁴ Very similar reactions abound in the language death literature: Kuter for example remarks that ‘the idea that Breton is a language incapable of expressing modern ideas [...] has been commonly accepted by many Bretons (1989, 82).

new speaker practices in the Francoprovençal context. While some strive for distinctively local practice that is authenticated by native speakers, others align themselves instead with a pan-regional linguistic identity that is borne out in the use of new speaker forms. To return to the question first posed at the beginning of this paper, then, perhaps Arpitan new speakers deliberately reject authenticity locally defined, in favour of authenticity broadly defined, and this is achieved by deliberately distancing themselves from local norms. Therefore, if new speakers cannot ‘inherit authenticity’ (Coupland 2003: 428), then they might instead reconstruct authenticity through new practices.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper addresses the theme of contested sociolinguistic authenticity in the context of a contested language. Quite unlike other minority varieties spoken in this region, Francoprovençal has long been denied legitimacy as coherent grouping of varieties by some linguists. Moreover, at the speaker level, there is little overall awareness of the commonalities shared by these varieties among native speakers, where focus is placed instead at the local level. This has fostered an extremely narrow view of what qualifies as an ‘authentic speaker’ (Coupland 2003, 418) among the native-speaker participants sampled in the study. The qualitative data have demonstrated that speakers will demarcate explicit boundaries around practices that align closely with what they have called ‘our patois’ on the one hand, and ‘a new patois’ on the other. In some cases this has fuelled a type of linguistic intolerance for non-native speech that has not gone undocumented in other new-speaker contexts (*e.g.* Holton 2009), and these attitudes have also shown to lead to a sense of linguistic insecurity among new speakers. Instead, some new speakers of Francoprovençal are now found to use (what they term) Arpitan among themselves, and predominantly on

the Internet, away from the criticisms of inauthenticity dispensed by native speakers. It is predominantly here that they employ a unified orthographical norm to further their cause. In particular, these new speakers reject locally defined authenticity for, what has been termed here, broader authenticity. However, ORB is not at all accepted by native speakers, viewing it as a ‘deformation’ of the local variety, perhaps because this would be ‘geographically and linguistically removed’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, 302) from the local norm. This would support Woolard’s (2008, 304) view that authentic speech (in the traditional sense) is necessarily anchored to a particular community, in a particular place. Lastly, this article has identified the emergence of new speakers with very different sociolinguistic profiles: while some support the Arpitan agenda, others reject symbolic unification, instead defending local values and puristic tendencies that might instead be associated with native speakers’ uncompromising view on local norms. This complex and multifaceted view of different speakers in Valais lends further evidence to the claim (raised for example by O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013) that the traditional view of linguistic authenticity needs to be reconsidered to accommodate (what we might call) competing communities of new speaker practices.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

[...] material omitted.

Figures

Figure 1. Francoprovençal spoken in Europe, adapted from Kasstan and Nagy (2018).