

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

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7        *Abstract:*

8        While the field of variationist sociolinguistics has advanced rapidly since Labov  
9        (1966), it remains the case that a socially informed theory of language change  
10       continues to be influenced by only very few languages, typically English and a  
11       handful other dominant European languages. This article considers recent work on the  
12       emergence of *new speakers* in (severely) endangered or minority language  
13       communities, and what they might have to offer variationist theory. Although  
14       definitions can vary, it has become convention to describe new speakers as  
15       individuals ‘with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but  
16       who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education programs,  
17       revitalization projects or as adult language learners’ (O’Rourke *et al.* 2015: 1). There  
18       is now a wealth of literature available on new speakers in typologically dissimilar  
19       language contexts, though, so far, very little work has adopted the variationist  
20       paradigm. This article will argue that new speakers can figure prominently in  
21       variationist models of diffusion and change, taking the classic sociolinguistic factor of  
22       social networks as an example. The article ends by proposing a manifesto of potential  
23       research trajectories, based on current gaps in the literature.

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26 *1. Introduction*

27 Since Labov (1966)'s seminal work in New York City, variationist sociolinguistics  
28 has sought to develop a socially accountable theory of linguistic diffusion and change.  
29 However, as Nagy and Meyerhoff (2008), Smakman (2015) and Stanford (2016)  
30 have all highlighted, non-English languages continue to play only a very marginal  
31 influential role in the process. Their surveying of the variationist-sociolinguistic  
32 literature reveals a surprising dearth of geolinguistic diversity in leading variationist  
33 venues; language variation and change, then, continues to be the preserve of English  
34 and a handful of other dominant European languages. Although the picture is slowly  
35 changing, such observations have important implications for the development of a  
36 generalisable, cross-linguistic sociolinguistic theory. Moreover, as Stanford points  
37 out, non-English language communities can offer 'fresh viewpoints' on established  
38 theoretical and methodological frameworks (2016: 526). To evidence this, the present  
39 article will consider one classic sociolinguistic factor: social networks. Variationist  
40 studies that employ a social network methodology have demonstrated that close-knit  
41 ties support highly localised linguistic norms and intercommunity distinctiveness in a  
42 unilingual context, whereas weak ties promote susceptibility to processes of levelling  
43 and innovation diffusion (*e.g.* Milroy and Milroy 1985). These findings are now well-  
44 documented in monolingual English-speaking communities (*e.g.* Milroy 1980 in  
45 Belfast, Kerswill and Williams 2000 in Milton Keynes). In bi/multilingual  
46 communities, social network theory has also been deployed to try to account for  
47 processes contributing towards language obsolescence, where loose-knit ties have  
48 been argued to bring about language shift (*e.g.* Li and Milroy 1995 on Chinese  
49 communities in Tyneside). However, Milroy maintains that, while of considerable  
50 theoretical interest, in such under-studied contexts, it is much less clear how the

51 parameters of social networks can be adequately operationalised to account for  
52 socially and geographically mobile speakers, whose ties are considered ‘weak’ in the  
53 traditional sense (2004: 562). Further, while only a very small number of studies have  
54 attempted to apply this model to account for variation and change in minority variety  
55 speech communities in contact with English (*e.g.* Matsumoto 2010), much less  
56 attention still has been paid to non-English contexts altogether.<sup>1</sup>

57 In response to Stanford (2016)’s ‘call for more diverse sources of data [...] in  
58 non-English contexts’, this article considers recent work on the emergence of *new*  
59 *speakers* in (severely) endangered or minority language communities, and what this  
60 work might have to offer variationist theory. Although definitions can vary, it has  
61 become convention to describe new speakers as individuals ‘with little or no home or  
62 community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through  
63 immersion or bilingual education programs, revitalization projects or as adult  
64 language learners’ (O’Rourke *et al.* 2015: 1). There is now a wealth of literature  
65 available on new speakers of typologically dissimilar languages, though, so far, few  
66 of these studies have adopted the variationist paradigm. Instead, the bulk of the work  
67 on new speakers has tended to be qualitative in nature, focusing on interaction-level  
68 analysis, with ideological themes oscillating around sociolinguistic authenticity in  
69 endangered-language communities (*e.g.* native speakers as gate keepers and  
70 authenticators of language), legitimacy of new speakers (*e.g.* as community members)  
71 and power relations with other speaker types (*e.g.* their role in language revitalisation  
72 efforts). That said, some new-speaker studies have also recognised that the speech of  
73 new speakers can be far removed from community norms (or at least perceived as  
74 such). Although few of these studies are devoted to quantitative methods, they can

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

75 (and, it will be argued, should) appeal to the variationist paradigm, which – for fifty  
76 years now – has sought to understand the social significance of language variation,  
77 and the mechanisms that drive linguistic change. These fundamental tenets of the field  
78 (as proposed by Weinreich *et al.* 1969) will carry important implications for contexts  
79 of (extreme) language shift, such as those offered by many of the new-speaker studies  
80 surveyed below. Therefore, this article attempts to bridge these two areas of inquiry.  
81 To do so, it will first be necessary to present an overview of the recent literature on  
82 new speakers in sociolinguistics. In Section 2, a number of studies are reviewed to  
83 illustrate how new speakers have been characterised as social actors; how they can  
84 differ from typical second-language learners; and what observations have been made  
85 where new speakers emerge in communities with fluctuating sociolinguistic  
86 practices.<sup>2</sup> In Section 3, focus is given to the very few existing quantitative production  
87 studies that include samples of new speakers, where the evidence presented illustrates  
88 how new speakers can be conceived of as agents of sociolinguistic change in  
89 variationist terms. Then, using the classic micro-level factor of social networks as a  
90 case study, Section 4 exemplifies how new speakers can figure prominently in  
91 variationist models of diffusion and change. Owing to the largely qualitative nature of  
92 new-speaker studies to date, Section 5 concludes with some suggestions for future  
93 research trajectories, based on current gaps in the literature.

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## 95 2. On ‘new speakers’

96 The *new speaker* label is one of recent prominence in the language endangerment  
97 literature. While regional or minority language communities in many parts of the

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<sup>2</sup> While this article provides a comprehensive overview of sites where new speakers have been the object of study, it should be noted that the vast majority of these studies converge on minority European varieties. This article is therefore inherently Eurocentric, though, where available, research on new speakers of non-European varieties is also discussed.

98 world continue to undergo an extreme kind of attrition, particularly in the face of  
99 increased urbanisation and globalisation (see *e.g.* Amano *et al.* 2014), new speakers  
100 are nonetheless emerging as a result of revitalisation efforts and increasingly  
101 favourable language policies. These new speakers have often had little or no  
102 community/home exposure to the target variety, which they typically acquire in a  
103 purely educational context. In the simplest terms, then, they are qualitatively different  
104 from native speakers, who acquire the language via intergenerational transmission,  
105 and other types of learners who may be exposed to the target in day-to-day life.  
106 However, as O'Rourke and Ramallo (2013: 288) note, a variety of different labels  
107 exist in the literature that can also refer to the new speaker phenomenon: 'L2  
108 speaker', 'learner', 'heritage speaker' etc. are common in Applied Linguistics,  
109 TESOL, and Multilingualism studies. That said, there are important levels of  
110 distinction that can be delineated between new speakers and other types of second-  
111 language learners in socio-political terms. For instance, given that the target being  
112 acquired can be characterised in most cases as minorised, and obsolescent or  
113 moribund, new speakers tend to play a significant influential role by comparison with  
114 most other L2 contexts. In cases where severe endangerment is coupled with  
115 embryonic revitalisation efforts, new speakers not only represent an important  
116 proportion of the total speakers of the language, but they are also influential arbiters  
117 in emergent normative practices. They can therefore 'occupy greater positions of  
118 authority in the language's social hierarchy than many second language users would  
119 do' (Nance *et al.* 2016: 168). Moreover, labels such as 'L2 speaker' or 'learner' are  
120 increasingly contested, mostly because they imply some deviation from an implicit  
121 native-speaker norm, as has been detailed extensively in the Applied Linguistics  
122 literature (see *e.g.* Firth and Wagner 1997). Owing to these observations, and under

123 the guise of the EU COST Action research network ‘New speakers in Multilingual  
124 Europe: Opportunities and Challenges’, O’Rourke and Ramallo (2013) and Walsh and  
125 Lane (2014) have proposed the notion of *new speakerness*. New speakerness implies a  
126 dynamic rather than fixed state: it ‘can include a continuum of speaker types, ranging  
127 from second language learners with limited competence [...] right up to expert L2  
128 users’ (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013: 288). It can also refer to ‘a stance or subject  
129 position that becomes available to social actors’ (Jaffe 2015: 43) throughout the life-  
130 span, particularly in endangered-language contexts, where there is often no implicit,  
131 hierarchical, or standard norm.

132         It should be stressed, however, that, while *new speakerness* is a novel  
133 sociolinguistic notion, speakers that today might be labelled *new* have been the focus  
134 of scholarly attention since at least the 1980s. Trosset for instance highlighted that, at  
135 the time, ‘no systematic study [had] been undertaken of people attempting to learn a  
136 dying language’ (1986: 167) – a void that she was attempting to fill. Trosset  
137 foregrounds in particular the challenges faced by new speakers of Welsh entering an  
138 increasingly dwindling community of native speakers. In the late 1980s, Woolard  
139 made use of the label ‘new Catalans’ (1989: 44) to describe L2 Catalan speakers who  
140 come to adopt bilingual practices, seeing themselves as both Catalan and Spanish – a  
141 designation that, Woolard reports, very few native Catalonians would accept. More  
142 recently, Trenchs-Parera and Newman (2015: 494) identify such attitudes to be  
143 associated with a broader cosmopolitanism, where younger middle-class new  
144 speakers learn Catalan either for professional reasons, or as an academic exercise (see  
145 also Frekko 2013). Similarly, Urla distinguishes between *euskaldun zaharrak* (‘old  
146 Basques’), who she describes as ‘native Basque speakers who tend to be primarily  
147 from farming and fishing communities’, and *euskaldun berriak* (‘new Basques’),

148 comprised of ‘urban professionals, civil servants, and teachers who have mastered  
149 Standardised Basque’ (1993: 830).<sup>3</sup> In these studies, then, early conceptualisations of  
150 new speakers are sketched out: in the context of Basque, for instance, they are  
151 described by Urla (1993) as middle-class urban dwellers, characteristics not typically  
152 associated with native speakers of minority varieties such as Basque or Occitan,  
153 traditionally viewed as overwhelmingly rural and working class (see *e.g.* Blanchet and  
154 Armstrong 2006). Moreover, the new Catalonians make use of different constructions  
155 of self that do not necessarily align clearly with community norms. Such descriptions  
156 are also very typical of Breton new speakers (Jones 1995; 1998a; 1998b).<sup>4</sup> Unlike  
157 Catalan or Basque, Breton serves as a typical example of a language undergoing  
158 ‘gradual death’ (Campbell and Muntzel 1989: 182): native-speaker numbers have  
159 been dwindling for some time, and the conventional domains of usage have been  
160 eroded. However, attempts to revitalise Breton have led to the development of a  
161 learner variety (*néo-Breton*) which is reified predominantly by new speakers (or *néo-*  
162 *Bretonnants*). Jones describes these speakers as an urban *intelligentsia*, in that they  
163 are predominantly middle-class, urban-dwelling, well educated and highly politicised  
164 (1998a: 129). Moreover, in sharp contrast to native speakers, these new speakers  
165 typically acquire Breton as an academic exercise. As a result, they speak a  
166 standardised, pan-Brittany variety of Breton, which she reports to be unintelligible to  
167 native speakers. For example, to render Breton functional in additional domains, the  
168 *néo-Bretonnants* have innovated neologisms as opposed to borrowing from Standard  
169 French, as is the norm for the vast majority of native speakers; *néo-Bretonnant*  
170 lexicon is also typically purged of existing borrowings (see Table 1 for some

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<sup>3</sup> See more recently Ortega *et al.* on *euskaldunberria*, or more specifically ‘new speaker’ (2015: 93).

<sup>4</sup> See most recently a special issue by Hornsby and Vigers (2013).

171 examples). In spite of these common ‘distanciation strategies’ (Thiers 1985), which  
 172 are said to be ideologically motivated (see Hornsby 2013), Jones reports that their  
 173 grammar shows considerable influence from Standard French.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, new  
 174 speakers of Breton are not community-insiders in the traditional sense. For instance,  
 175 Hornsby (2015: 54-59) outlines how some speakers in his sample moved from areas  
 176 far outside of Brittany into Breton-speaking heartlands, thereafter choosing to identify  
 177 as a *brezhoneger* (‘Breton speaker’). Although these speakers self-identify as  
 178 *bretonnant*, other members of the community, who are typically more deeply rooted,  
 179 can and do contest their status. As a result, Jones (1998b), Adkins (2013) and  
 180 Hornsby (2013) also discuss the level of linguistic insecurity that is felt by both native  
 181 speakers and new speakers where contact between the two occurs, and where issues  
 182 pertaining to *sociolinguistic authenticity*<sup>6</sup> (e.g. Coupland 2003) are foregrounded.  
 183 Therefore, while Breton new speakers are seen as peripheral community members by  
 184 those older and more established central members, it is clear that there is at least some  
 185 overlap in terms of their respective networks.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, their language use has been  
 186 equated in the literature in some cases as approximating that of a ‘xenolect’,

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<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> See *contra* Bucholtz (2003) for a critique of this notion.

<sup>7</sup> 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).



187 representing ‘the pre-terminal stage of some dying languages’ (Jones 1998b: 323),  
188 rather than toeing communal norms.

189         Such observations are not unique to Europe. Alaskan Athabascan is an  
190 analogous North American example. All eleven recognised varieties of Athabascan  
191 are considered to be moribund, as English has largely supplanted each of them in all  
192 but the most intimate functional domains, and children are no longer raised with  
193 Athabascan as a mother-tongue. Much like the Breton example, language  
194 revitalisation strategies undertaken mostly by new speakers have led to linguistic  
195 variants that differ from native-speaker norms. As a result, these new-speaker forms  
196 are generally not accepted as authentic Athabascan variants by older speakers, who  
197 are documented as ‘laughing mercilessly’ (Holton 2009: 248) at their grandchildren’s  
198 efforts to learn, which in turn brings about a deep sense of social and linguistic  
199 insecurity.<sup>8</sup> Further, given the vast geographical space that is considered Athabascan-  
200 speaking, opportunities for learners and native speakers to come together and interact  
201 are rare, and so the learners have taken to the Internet, which serves as a forum to  
202 exchange and interact in the minority variety. Since these Athabascan internauts are  
203 almost exclusively new speakers, Holton (2009) remarks that the web provides them  
204 with a virtual space in which to use their new-speaker varieties, free from native-  
205 speaker authentication. This hostility towards new speakerness provides a further  
206 important level of distinction between new speakers and other types of second-  
207 language learner contexts, and similar criticism of new-speaker practices are now also  
208 documented elsewhere (*e.g.* O’Rourke and Ramallo [2011] on Irish and Galician,  
209 Kasstan [2018] on Francoprovençal). The above – largely qualitative – research on

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<sup>8</sup> 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).

210 new speakers of endangered languages reveals then a native/non-native divide, where  
211 speakers on both sides are reported to be ‘socially and linguistically incompatible’  
212 (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2011: 139): new speakers are seen as peripheral members of  
213 the community, and new-speaker practices are described deviant from communal  
214 norms. These findings are not limited to the cases explored above. Indeed, in recent  
215 years, an increasing number of papers in typologically dissimilar contexts have  
216 revealed many common themes and findings. New-speaker studies are now available  
217 on Baseldytsh (Del Percio 2016), Belarusian (Woolhiser 2013), Catalan (Frekko  
218 2013, Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015), Cornish (Sayers 2012, Sayers and Renkó-  
219 Michelsén 2015), Corsican (Jaffe 2015), Francoprovençal (Kasstan 2015, Bichurina  
220 2018, Kasstan and Müller 2018), Galician (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013, Tomé  
221 Lourido and Evans 2015; 2016), Giernesiei and Jèrriais (Wilson *et al.* 2015, Sallabank  
222 and Marquis 2018), Irish (Walsh 2013, O’Rourke and Walsh 2015), Lemko (Hornsby  
223 2015), Louisiana Creole (Mayeux 2015), Manx (Ó hIfearnáin 2015), Occitan (Costa  
224 2013), Scottish Gaelic (McLeod and O’Rourke 2015, Nance 2015, Nance *et al.* 2016),  
225 Welsh (Robert 2009, Morris 2014), Western Armenian (Manoukian 2017), and  
226 Yiddish (Hornsby 2015). Owing to the observations set out above that new speakers  
227 are frequently characterised as employing linguistic variants that differ from  
228 traditional norms, it is surprising that so few studies have made use of quantitative  
229 variationist methods to better understand the social significance of this variation, or to  
230 connect variation in production with broader questions of linguistic diffusion and  
231 change. However, some recent studies have begun to focus on these areas of inquiry,  
232 appealing in particular to variationist sociolinguistics.

233

234 *3. New speakers and linguistic variation*

235 In reference to the Corsican context for instance, Jaffe suggests that new speakers  
236 ‘[...] acquire a socially and communicatively consequential level of competence and  
237 practice in the minority language’ (2015: 25). Jaffe refers here not only to the level of  
238 linguistic competency that can be acquired by new speakers, but also to  
239 communicative competency (*i.e.* acquisition of sociolinguistic variation). While  
240 acquisition of variation (so-called ‘Type 2 variation’, following ‘Type 1’ or linguistic  
241 competence, Mougeon *et al.* 2004) among learners is not novel in the literature (see  
242 *e.g.* Drummond 2011 on Polish speakers and (t)-glottaling), recent studies reveal  
243 Type 2 variation to convey important social work among minority-variety new  
244 speakers, too, in spite of a cline of linguistic competency.

245         Using sociophonetic methods, Tomé Lourido and Evans (2015; 2016) explore  
246 speaker variation among *neofalantes* (‘new speakers’) of Galician in Spain. The new  
247 speakers in these studies were raised as Spanish monolinguals who acquire Galician  
248 in adulthood, later becoming bilingual, but Galician dominant. Both studies focus on  
249 the production of mid-vowels, where mid-high and mid-low contrasts are not present  
250 in Spanish, but are in Galician. The results reveal that *neofalantes* vowel production  
251 differed from that of Spanish dominants in the study in that at least some of the new  
252 speakers had acquired the Galician front and back mid-vowel contrasts. However, the  
253 *neofalantes* data suggested that the contrast made in mid vowels was not as great as  
254 that of the Galician dominants, who had acquired Galician before critical age. Based  
255 on this evidence, the authors identify an emergent hybrid category of vowels that they  
256 postulate to be deployed *indexically* (Silverstein 2003) by new speakers to convey  
257 speaker identity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

258           Similarly, Nance *et al.* (2016) explore linguistic variation among new speakers  
259 of Scottish Gaelic in Glasgow and Edinburgh, where revitalisation initiatives have  
260 driven a rise in employment opportunities requiring the language. The study focuses  
261 on word-final realisation of rhoticity, where palatalised or alveolar rhotic consonants  
262 are constrained by the quality of final vowel. While the native speakers in the sample  
263 broadly approximated to palatalised rhotics, the new speakers evidenced substantial  
264 variation in their production, with several new speakers preferring weakly rhotic or  
265 non-rhotic variants, in spite of high levels of proficiency. The authors present data to  
266 suggest that some proficient Gaelic new speakers ‘preferred an ideal self that was  
267 more oriented towards a new-speaker model and considered a native-speaker target as  
268 inauthentic’ (2016: 185), and that this was reflected in their production data. In other  
269 words, new speakers produce divergent linguistic variants from native speakers and  
270 other types of learners, based on alternative constructions of self, that do not  
271 necessarily align with community norms. So, while observations made in the context  
272 of Gaelic and Galician are similar to those outlined in the case of Breton above, the  
273 advantage of the variationist methods adopted in both cases here illustrates the social  
274 significance of the variable linguistic behaviour among new speakers.

275           Analogous observations have been made most recently by Kasstan and Müller  
276 (2018), who examine production data among new speakers of Francoprovençal – a  
277 severely endangered language spoke in parts of France, Switzerland, and Italy. While  
278 native speakers broadly evidenced phonological levelling of palatalised lateral  
279 approximants in obstruent + lateral onset clusters (a feature of Francoprovençal, but  
280 not of Standard French), the data revealed that new speakers can style-shift between  
281 highly localised dialectal variants and pan-regional variants in sociolinguistic  
282 interviews, with very limited linguistic competency. The authors argue that these pan-

283 regional forms are also deployed indexically to convey membership to a wider  
284 language revitalisation movement. This suggests, as has been argued elsewhere, that  
285 ‘being a new speaker of a minority language does not necessarily require full mastery  
286 of that language, and that knowing certain registers or mastering certain genres might  
287 be enough for what social actors seek to achieve with the minority language’ (Costa  
288 2018). In this case, new speakerness is invoked to signal a very different kind of  
289 Francoprovençal identity when compared with native speakers, who can openly reject  
290 new-speaker practices (see Kasstan 2018). Kasstan and Müller further postulate that  
291 these new forms might come to be community norms in the future, following Jaffe:  
292 “new” [...] “learner” linguistic forms may stand out as “new speaker” indices at one  
293 point in a community’s sociolinguistic trajectory, but may become the norm at some  
294 later date’ (2015: 26).<sup>10</sup> Studies such as these clearly illustrate the potential of  
295 bridging research on new speakers with variationist sociolinguistic theory, in order to  
296 illustrate the social significance of linguistic variation in (severely) endangered-  
297 language communities, and the parallels that can be drawn with the broader  
298 variationist work on English and other dominant languages. New speaker studies also  
299 have much to offer the variationist literature on stylisation of speech, and, on the basis  
300 of the observations made by Tomé Lourido and Evans (2015; 2016), Nance *et al.*  
301 (2016), and Kasstan and Müller (2018), it seems possible to conceive of new speakers  
302 as agents of sociolinguistic change in variationist terms. It will next be argued that a  
303 social network analysis can offer a fruitful case study for understanding the social  
304 mechanisms that underpin this variation.

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

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<sup>10</sup> The end-result of which is probably best exemplified by the case of reconstructed Cornish (*e.g.* Sayers and Renkó-Michelsén 2015).

307 In Milroy (1980)'s classic Belfast study, she argued that that close-knit, dense and  
308 multiplex network ties foster intra-community cohesion and norm enforcement,  
309 whereas sparse and uniplex network ties are hospitable conduits for variability and  
310 innovation diffusion. Her analysis was based on a network-strength scale, which  
311 examined the relationship between the variable strength of network ties to an *ego* (the  
312 central member), and variation in language behaviour. This approach was designed  
313 principally to test the effect of strong ties among monolingual speakers within a  
314 tightly defined geographical area. Milroy's general observations on network structure  
315 and language variation have since been replicated too in big urban centres with  
316 rapidly changing social landscapes, as evidenced in Milton Keynes (Kerswill and  
317 Williams 2000) and London (Cheshire *et al.* 2008). Further, a small number of  
318 important studies have attested to these outcomes in non-English contexts, too. For  
319 instance, Bortoni-Ricardo recognised the social network paradigm 'as an effective  
320 analytical tool to tackle the issue of variation, especially in fluid settings undergoing  
321 rapid change' (1985: 69) in her study on language variation and change among rural  
322 Caipira speakers moving into urban Brazilian centres. Broadly, she observed that, in  
323 the rural-to-urban transition, typical low-status Caipira features decreased and that  
324 categorical non-standard rules of Caipira speakers' repertoires became variable where  
325 strong networks were weakened, exposing these speakers to prestige norms (Bortoni-  
326 Ricardo 1985: 239-241).

327 It is proposed here that a social network approach can also be adopted to  
328 elucidate the social mechanisms underpinning new-speaker behaviour described in  
329 Section 3. As Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) and others have argued, the social network  
330 paradigm is perhaps best suited to analysing variation in communities undergoing  
331 rapid change, with fluctuating sociolinguistic norms. These descriptors also are also

332 clearly characteristic of the (severely) endangered-language communities that have  
333 been illustrated above, where dwindling native-speaker bases have galvanised  
334 revitalisation efforts, which in turn have led to emergent new-speaker practices in  
335 communities often lacking hierarchical or standard norms. New speakers have in  
336 particular been described above as peripheral members in their communities: owing to  
337 their linguistic practices that do not toe community norms, their status is contested by  
338 native speakers, and they are in some cases chastised for their practices. These  
339 attributes are not dissimilar from those used to describe sociolinguistic ‘Lames’ (e.g.  
340 Labov 1973, Edwards 1992), *i.e.* peripheral group members who are less familiar with  
341 the norms of more central members in the vernacular peer-group. However, unlike  
342 ‘Lames’, new speakers make up a significant proportion of the total speaker numbers  
343 in their communities, and, as has been argued, this grants them power and prestige as  
344 arbiters in fluctuating normative practices. It is therefore unclear what the  
345 determinants of *strong* and *weak* ties might mean in such contexts. That said, a social  
346 network analysis can still be operationalised to fit the relevant research questions for  
347 new-speaker studies. In particular, the absence of an overtly prestigious norm presents  
348 at least one important research question: if – as has been proposed above – new  
349 speakers are agents of change, then are they responsible for the diffusion of new  
350 vernacular forms in their communities, as suggested by Jaffe (2015) and Kasstan &  
351 Müller (2018)? Do these new forms then penetrate native-speaker networks? While  
352 further research is needed to systematically test this hypothesis, some evidence from  
353 the new-speaker literature suggests that such diffusion is possible. For instance,  
354 Hornsby (2013) identifies in his sample a small number of native Breton speakers  
355 who do not necessarily harbour negative attitudes towards new-speaker variants.  
356 Similarly, on the basis of a subset of Francoprovençal lexical variables, Kasstan

357 (2013) has shown that, in some cases, native speakers can produce neologised new-  
358 speaker variants in a wordlist translation tasks (see Table 2). However, only 5%  
359 (N=39) of native speakers sampled were able to produce them, all of whom had at  
360 least some contact with new-speaker participants. A social network analysis therefore  
361 lends itself nicely to testing these sorts of hypotheses, though the framework would  
362 need to be altered to account for the new-speaker context.

363         Following Matsumoto (2010)'s study on the island of Palau, a social network  
364 analysis based on *active* and *passive* ties may be best suited to such a context. Under  
365 this framework, first proposed by Milardo (1988), and adapted by Li and Milroy  
366 (1995) and Matsumoto (2010), *active* ties consist of *exchange* and *interactive*  
367 networks: *exchange* networks constitute members such as friends, with whom the ego  
368 not only interacts routinely, but also exchanges symbolic resources, such as direct  
369 advice, criticism, support and interference (Milardo 1988: 23); Matsumoto (2010:  
370 140), following Li and Milroy (1995), identifies such networks as constituting *strong*  
371 ties in the traditional sense. Conversely, *interactive* networks constitute members with  
372 whom the ego interacts with frequently, but on whom the ego does not rely for the  
373 sorts of symbolic resources that define the *exchange* network. Such ties, which are  
374 characteristically *weak*, might consist of work colleagues or neighbours, for instance.  
375 In addition, *passive* ties are identified as entailing an absence of regular contact, but  
376 are nonetheless valued by the ego as a source of influence and moral support.  
377 Matsumoto (2010) suggests that close friends, spread over a large geographical space,  
378 best describes the nature of *passive* ties. While the quality of *passive* ties is  
379 ambiguous in these studies, they can be conceived of for our purposes as *strong*,  
380 given the quality of the relationships. In applying this network analysis, Matsumoto  
381 finds that social networks can best account for both code and choice of linguistic



382 variants in her multilingual community (2010: 160). *Exchange* and *interactive*  
383 networks function in an analogous way to *strong* and *weak* ties in Belfast: *exchange*  
384 networks (both active and passive) promote the maintenance of the vernacular (a local  
385 variety of Japanese) at the expense of the incoming dominant language (English),  
386 whereas *interactive* networks act as conduits for modern Japanese, and the diffusion  
387 of English.

388         Distinguishing between these different network orders is useful for analysing  
389 new-speaker variation, as the framework can account for the behaviour of individuals  
390 whose language patterns may not be like those of their peers, or other members of the  
391 network; ‘they can be shown to have contracted different types of personal network  
392 structures’ (Li and Milroy 1995: 155). To apply this framework to a new-speaker  
393 context, the characteristics of the community under investigation would need to be  
394 properly reflected in the methodology-design. For instance, Kasstan (2015) outlines  
395 how a social network analysis, based on the number and quality of first-order  
396 (exchange) ties is able to account for innovative vernacular forms among a small  
397 number of new speakers of Francoprovençal. However, given (a) the extent to which  
398 some new speakers were ostracised in the community, and (b) the overall size of the  
399 community of new speakers, he found that the distinction between the various  
400 network types employed by Matsumoto (2010) to be too nuanced for his endangered-  
401 language context. Instead Kasstan (2015) adopted an integration index based on that  
402 of Cheshire (1982) and Edwards (1992), where participants are assigned a score  
403 which determines how well-integrated they are into their respective networks. The  
404 challenge for the study was to establish an integration index for two very different  
405 speech communities in France and Switzerland, that was not only sensitive to the  
406 socio-economic factors of each fieldwork area, but which could also account for very

407 different types of speakers, as well as the unique sociolinguistic context of  
408 Francoprovençal (see Kasstan 2015 for details). As Milroy points out, though, each  
409 community will vary, and it is up to the investigator to pursue ‘the most relevant and  
410 easily measurable cultural categories’ (1987: 216).

411         However, it remains to be seen how successfully new speakers might ‘figure  
412 prominently in a socially accountable theory of linguistic diffusion and change’  
413 (Milroy 2004: 563), which has yet to be fully explored. Few new-speaker studies have  
414 attempted to bridge speech production data with these broader concerns. If, as  
415 Kasstan (2015) argues, new speakers maintain characteristically *weak* network ties  
416 with native speakers, then it should be possible to model new speakers into social  
417 network theory as mobile speakers who harbour numerous loose and uniplex  
418 networks.<sup>13</sup> However, little work on new speakers has yet systematically tested this  
419 possibility, even though some studies provide data ripe for a network analysis. Nance  
420 *et al.* (2016), for instance, do not conceive of their sample as a social network, but,  
421 loosely, as a *Community of Practice*, which, in Wenger’s terms, consists of a body of  
422 individuals with a shared repertoire, who come together around mutual engagement in  
423 a jointly negotiated enterprise (1998: 76). This is clearly reflected in Nance *et al.*’s  
424 study, ‘where many speakers use Gaelic in their work and attend a range of social and  
425 cultural events in the expectation that Gaelic will be used and other Gaelic speakers  
426 will be present’ (2016: 168). While the *Community of Practice* model is useful for the  
427 purpose of their analysis, it would not illuminate on the potential spread of new-  
428 speaker variants into the wider Gaelic-speaking networks (as proposed above), and

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<sup>13</sup> 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 or minority languages is needed to confirm this.

429 the associated social significance that any such variants might carry for different  
430 communities of practice; this is where social networks are most useful.

431

#### 432 *5. Trajectories for future research*

433 Research on new speakers, then, has much to offer the variationist paradigm, which  
434 has renewed calls for ‘more diverse sources of data’ (Stanford 2016), and this article  
435 has suggested that social network theory, a still very productive avenue of inquiry in  
436 variationist research, provides a useful bridge for applying variationist theory to an  
437 expanding body of data on new speakers of (severely) endangered or minority  
438 languages. New speakers have been shown to play complex roles in these  
439 communities: they can be ostracised by native speakers for their new-speaker  
440 practices, and, yet, paradoxically, in those contexts where the target variety is  
441 severely endangered, new speakers represent an important proportion of total speaker  
442 numbers. In variationist terms, new speakers maintain peripheral community status,  
443 akin to ‘the working margins’ in Dorian (1982: 29)’s terms, and this article has argued  
444 that they overlap with native-speaker networks. More research is therefore needed in  
445 order to establish the sociolinguistic correlates of these factors.

446 A synthesis of the literature on new speakers reveals a number of other  
447 avenues of inquiry, too. First, as has been discussed, new-speaker studies have  
448 evidenced many common cross-linguistic findings. However, most of these studies  
449 have been undertaken independently: there is now a need for greater comparative-  
450 sociolinguistic work on new speakers. Some comparative work does already exist. For  
451 instance, O’Rourke *et al.* (2015) comprises a special issue dedicated to new speakers  
452 of minority varieties, though the contributions address various different themes across  
453 disparate methodological frameworks (none of which adopt variationist

454 sociolinguistic methods). Hornsby (2015) is a comparative linguistic ethnographic  
455 study of Breton, Lemko, and Yiddish. Although rich in qualitative detail, the study  
456 offers little in terms of speech production data, which is outside the scope of the  
457 volume. Adopting the comparative-sociolinguistic methods that have evolved from  
458 the variationist paradigm into new-speaker research would elucidate our  
459 understanding of language variation across contexts, as such methods cross-compare  
460 conditioning effects on sociolinguistic variation.<sup>14</sup> Comparative-sociolinguistic  
461 endeavours could consider emerging minority-language new speakers in heritage-  
462 language contexts, such as those brought to light most recently by McEwan (2015) in  
463 the context of Gaelic spoken in Nova Scotia. No quantitative work has yet compared  
464 new speakers of homeland and heritage Gaelic. Potential research questions here  
465 might include, for example, asking whether or not different patterns of language use  
466 emerge among new speakers in homeland and heritage Gaelic (*cf.* Nagy *et al.* 2018  
467 for an analogous context of homeland and heritage Francoprovençal varieties).

468         Secondly, there is little work that implicates new speakers in well-known  
469 instances of language change. In general, we maintain a very poor formal  
470 understanding of how linguistic innovations have been introduced by multilingual  
471 speakers as contact-induced language change. This begs a number of potentially  
472 interesting theoretical questions: what is the role that non-dominant bi-/multilingual  
473 speakers play in language change? What types of innovations do they tend to  
474 introduce into the language(s) in which they are not dominant? Are specific aspects of  
475 linguistic structure particularly vulnerable to such innovations? New speakers as a  
476 novel category therefore offers new ground for historical linguistics.

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<sup>14</sup> Tagliamonte (2012) for instance highlights the contribution made by comparative sociolinguistics to research on African American Vernacular English

477           Thirdly, there is equally little evidence of any work currently being  
478 undertaken on new speakers of endangered languages in cognitive linguistics, despite  
479 the fact that there are some potentially very important implications for our  
480 understanding of language acquisition. For instance, acquisition research has  
481 evidenced the significant role played by speakers' L1 on L2 phonological  
482 categorisation in minority-variety contexts where English is the target (*e.g.* McCarthy  
483 *et al.* 2014). What then are the implications for new speakers acquiring a minorised  
484 variety? There are fruitful avenues of inquiry to be explored, here.

485           Lastly, it is incumbent on future research initiatives that there be meaningful  
486 social impact emanating from new-speaker research. The above synthesis outlines  
487 significant hurdles faced by new speakers entering (severely) endangered-language  
488 communities (*e.g.* sentiments of social and linguistic incompatibility between new  
489 speakers and native speakers). Bridging this native/new-speaker divide must be  
490 addressed, though no clear avenues reveal themselves. As new-speaker practices, and  
491 linguistic innovations in particular, might be posited to contribute towards this divide  
492 (see Kasstan 2018), the development of a 'positive framework' (Meyerhoff 2015: 78)  
493 for speakers to evaluate language change might be a suitable point of departure.

494

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500

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**Table 1. Lexical variation in (néo-)Breton (adapted from Jones 1995, 1998b)**

néo-Breton	French borrowings	Standard French	English gloss
luc’hskeudennerezh	fotografiezh	photographie	photography
kaotigell	konfitur	confiture	jam
dibab	choaz	choisir	choose
trugarez	mersi	merci	thank you

**Table 2. Lexical variation in Francoprovençal (taken from Kasstan 2013)**

Neologised	French borrowings	Standard French	English gloss
new-speaker	into		
variants	Francoprovençal		
enversenc	setentriono	septentrional	northern
tela	Intèrnèt	Internet	Internet
yo-que-tè	portoble, natel	téléphone portable	mobile phone
frustrapot	armonika	harmonica	harmonica