NEW SPEAKERS OF MINORITY LANGUAGES

Linguistic Ideologies & Practices

Edited by
Cassie Smith-Christmas, Noel P. Ó Murchadha,
Michael Hornsby & Máiréad Moriarty

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Editors

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Contents

1 New Speakers, Familiar Concepts? 1
Noel P. Ó Murchadha, Michael Hornsby, Cassie Smith-Christmas, and Máiréad Moriarty
New Speakers and the Dynamics of Late Modern Society 1
Defining the 'New Speaker' 4
Authority, Authenticity, and the New Speaker 5
New Speakers and Minority Languages 7
Structure of the Volume 12
References 17

2 New Gaelic Speakers, New Gaels? Ideologies and Ethnolinguistic Continuity in Contemporary Scotland 23
Stuart Dunmore
Introduction: Theoretical Approaches to Language Revitalisation and Bilingual Education 23
Research Context: GME and Gaelic in Twenty-First-Century Scotland 26
Method 29
Gàidheil ùra: 'New Gaels'? 31
New Speakers: Domains of Use? 33

New Speakers of Gaelic: (New) Gaels? 35
Discussion: Gaels and 'Xians' in Twenty-First-Century Scotland 38
Conclusions 39
References 41

3 'We're Not Fully Welsh': Hierarchies of Belonging and 'New' Speakers of Welsh 45
Charlotte Selleck
Introduction 45
Welsh Language Policy 47
The Research Context 51
Language Policy in the English School: 'Flexible Bilingualism' 54
Complications, Contradictions, and Contestation 55
Conclusion 60
References 63

4 'We Don't Say It Like That': Language Ownership and (De)Legitimising the New Speaker 67
Julia Sallabank and Yan Marquis
Introduction and Background 67
Language Ideologies in Guernsey 72
Creating a 'New Speaker' Community 78
Conclusions 83
References 87

5 Identities and New Speakers of Minority Languages: A Focus on Galician 91
Bernadette O'Rourke and Fernando Ramallo
Introduction 91
New Speakers of Galician 93
Identities 96
New Speakers Versus Native Speaker Identities 100
References 106

6 **Double New Speakers? Language Ideologies of Immigrant Students in Galicia** 111
Nicola Bermingham
Introduction: Situating Immigrant New Speakers of Galician 111
Socio-Historical Context of Language Planning in Galicia 113
Research Site: As Rocas 115
Spanish as a Prestigious and Universal Language 117
Issues of Authenticity and Anonymity 121
Conclusions 124
Appendix: Transcription Conventions 126
References 127

7 **Land, Language and Migration: World War II Evacuees as New Speakers of Scottish Gaelic** 131
Cassie Smith-Christmas
Land and Language: A Powerful Metaphor 131
Land, Language, and Migration in a Scottish Gaelic Context 133
What Constitutes a 'Gaelic-Speaking Area'? 135
Interviews 137
Evacuees Marked as Non-native Speakers 137
Language and the Experience of Place 143
Transcription Conventions 145
References 146

8 **The Ideological Construction of Boundaries Between Speakers, and Their Varieties** 151
Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin
Language Ideologies 151
At This Juncture of Time and Space 153
Space and Place 154
Porous and Impermeable Boundaries 157
Rights of Speakers 161
The Traditional Language and the New Speaker 162
References 163

9 New Basques and Code-Switching: Purist Tendencies, Social Pressures 165
Hanna Lantto
Introduction 165
Basque Revitalisation and New Basques 166
Data and Methods 168
Results: New Basques' CS 169
Code-Switching Patterns in New Basques' Spontaneous Speech Data 174
Discussion: CS and Speaker Trajectories 181
References 184

10 New Speakers and Language in the Media: Audience Design in Breton and Irish Broadcast Media 189
Stefan Moal, Noel P. Ó Murchadha, and John Walsh
Introduction 189
Irish-Medium Radio: *RíRá ar RnaG* 191
Post-traditional Speech in Irish 192
RíRá ar RnaG: A Cultural and Linguistic Outlier on Raidió na Gaeltachta 193
Breton-Medium Radio: Tud deus ar Vro and Breizh O Pluriel 197
Breton Radio: A Site of Interaction Between Traditional and Post-traditional Speech Practices 199
Discussion 205
Conclusion 208
References 210

11 Linguistic Innovation Among Glasgow Gaelic New Speakers 213
Claire Nance
Introduction 213
Analysis 215
Discussion and Conclusions 223
References 226

12 Verbal Lenition Among Young Speakers of Breton: Acquisition and Maintenance 231
Holly J. Kennard
Breton: Decline and Revitalisation 231
The Study 236
Use of Mutation 238
Discussion 246
Conclusions 248
References 249

13 New Speakers, Potential New Speakers, and Their Experiences and Abilities in Scottish Gaelic 253
Nicola Carty
Introduction 253
Issues in 'New Speakerness' and L2 Proficiency 254
Study Design 255
Frequency, Type of Use, and Learning Trajectories 258
Proficiency 259
Discussion and Conclusion 263
Appendix 1: Communicative Adequacy Scale 265
Appendix 2: Spearman's Rho Results for D and CAF Measures and Communicative Adequacy 267
References 267

14 New Speakers and Linguistic Practices: Contexts, Definitions, and Issues 271
David Atkinson
Contextualising Studies of New Speaker Practices 272
Definitions and Ascription 274
'Deficit': (In)Competence, (In)Authenticity, Ownership, and Indexicality 277
Future Directions 280
References 281

15 Reflections on New Speaker Research and Future Trajectories 283
Cassie Smith-Christmas and Noel P. Ó Murchadha
References 288

Index 289

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List of Figures

Fig. 11.1	*Left panel*: Sample spectrograms and waveform from the dataset showing a Glaswegian 'rise plateau' contour. *Right panel*: Results of the intonational coding	218
Fig. 11.2	Vowel plots showing the formant values for each speaker group	220
Fig. 11.3	F2-F1 values for each lateral in each speaker group	221
Fig. 12.1	Children's lenition by verb	243

List of Tables

Table 11.1	Total participants in this study	216
Table 12.1	Linguistic features of Neo-Breton	233
Table 12.2	Lenition in Breton (IPA)	235
Table 12.3	Children's use of verbal lenition (percentage with n in parentheses) presented speaker by speaker	240
Table 13.1	New speakers and their linguistic practices	256
Table 13.2	Potentials and their linguistic practices	257
Table 13.3	Raters' comments focusing on new speakers	262
Table 13.4	Raters' comments focusing on potentials	262

1

New Speakers, Familiar Concepts?

Noel P. Ó Murchadha, Michael Hornsby, Cassie Smith-Christmas, and Máiréad Moriarty

New Speakers and the Dynamics of Late Modern Society

It seems appropriate to begin this volume by stating that the ‘new speaker’ is not a newly discovered linguistic species. New speakers have existed for as long as speakers of different languages have been in contact with each other—in other words, their presence has spanned the millennia

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(e.g., Lim and Ansaldo 2016; Matras 2009; Thomason 2001). Currently, there are many millions of new speakers worldwide and unsurprisingly, in light of its ubiquity, as well as the fact that becoming a new speaker is often a by-product of migration, what we refer to as the 'new speaker phenomenon' has been the subject of much academic research and public discourses alike. In January 2016, for example, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron declared that Muslim women must 'improve' their English within two and a half years of moving to the United Kingdom or face possible deportation. Thus, in extreme cases, becoming a 'new speaker' of English may be a matter of life and death for some of these women, depending on the circumstances in the countries which they have left. They are not alone; as the world now finds itself in the midst of a refugee crisis, it is abundantly clear that the primary forces underlying migration are war, starvation, and lack of employment. As becoming a new speaker of a particular language may make the difference between the right to remain and being deported, new speakerhood can literally be a matter of life and death.

less dramatically, in terms of academic research, a vast body of literature on new speaker issues has emanated from many interwoven branches of general linguistics: applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, language psychology, social psychology of language, ethnography of language, and linguistic anthropology, to name a few. However, the majority of this research has not used the term 'new speaker'. Instead, researchers have tended to operationalise terms such as 'second language', 'L2', 'learner', 'non-native', or 'non-mother tongue' as oppositional constructs to terms such as 'native', 'mother tongue', 'first language', 'L1', and 'primary language'. By now, these terms are well-established, enduring emic and etic designations used to distinguish different types of speakers and different ways of using language. Despite its establishment in the various fields of linguistics, however, this binary categorisation of speakers can be problematic. As O'Rourke et al. (2015) write in the introduction to the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* special issue on new speakers, these terms imply a hierarchy and a deficit model, suggesting an evaluative paradigm that privileges 'native' speakers and 'native' speech, and marginalises 'non-native' speakers and their practices. In the important article, 'Who, if

anyone, is a native speaker?', Ingrid Piller (2001, p. 117), for example, challenges the concept of the valorised native speaker by posing a number of important rhetorical questions:

> Does the native speaker's early acquisition lead to privileged access to the language? Is the linguistic competence of native speakers somehow fundamentally different from that of non-native speakers (who have acquired the language at a later point in their lives)? Is the speech of native speakers for instance less error-prone than that of non-native speakers? Does that capacity make them the sole arbiters of correct usage…?

When answered in the affirmative, these questions point to the various ideological assumptions people may have about language. To paraphrase Ben Rampton (1990, p. 2), much of what is assumed about 'native' and 'non-native' speech spuriously emphasises the biological ahead of the social, conflating language as an instrument for communication on the one hand with language as a symbol of social identification on the other. Linguists have long argued that there is no linguistic evidence to support the hierarchical classification of what are considered different languages or of different language varieties and styles (e.g., Trudgill 1975, p. 26). The same logic can be extended to include new speakers and their practices. Although frequently fundamental to social actors' engagement with language and society, the concepts of the native speaker and the non-native speaker are merely socially constructed categorisations (Cook 1999, 2015; Eckert 2003), in the same way that concepts such as authenticity (Bucholtz 2003; Coupland 2003; Eckert 2003) and standard language (Coupland 2003; Coupland and Kristiansen 2011; Milroy 2001; Lippi-Green 2012) represent reified abstractions. Dichotomising speakers and ways of using language is unhelpful for linguists who seek to describe different categories of language users (Rampton 1990). As Ferguson (1983, p. vii) suggests, the mystique of the native speaker and the mother tongue should be jettisoned from the linguist's set of myths about language (cited in Davies 2000, p. 92). In view of this, it is germane to reconsider how we conceive of language and how folk and academic conceptualisations of different types of speakers feed into broader projects that ostensibly seek to promote multilingual societies, as well as social and linguistic cohesion. The term 'new

speaker' has thus been proposed (and accepted by many) as an alternative to the deficit model implicit in more established terms like 'second language', 'L2', 'non-native', and 'learner' (e.g., O'Rourke et al. 2015; Hornsby 2015a, b; Ortega et al. 2015, Walsh et al. 2015b).

Defining the 'New Speaker'

At its most basic level, the designation 'new speaker' refers to social actors who use and claim ownership of a language that is not, for whatever reason, typically perceived as belonging to them, or to 'people like them'. The new speaker label has been used to describe language users with a wide range of language competences. These competences range along a continuum from emergent speakers (see García and Kleifgen 2010) or what Carty (Chap. 13, this volume) terms 'potentials'—that is, speakers with limited linguistic repertoires—through to expert language users (see Piller 2001; Rampton 1990) often with 'native-like' language proficiency. Similarly, the new speaker designation has been applied to a number of disparate contexts. An immigrant who acquires an additional language in their new environment, for instance, can be labelled a new speaker (e.g., Bermingham, Chap. 6, this volume; Duchêne et al. 2013; Márquez Reiter and Martin Rojo 2014). Likewise, individuals who have learnt a language other than the home or community language through immersion, bilingual, or subject-only educational programmes have been classified as new speakers (Walsh et al. 2015b; Dunmore, Chap. 2 this volume). Owing to the reliance of many minoritised languages on education for their sociolinguistic vitality, the literature on minoritised languages abounds with descriptions of language users who have acquired their proficiency, at least partially, as a result of schooling (e.g., Robert 2009; Hill and May 2011; Jaffe 2003; King and Leeman 2014; Ó hIfearnáin 2015; Morris 2014; Dunmore 2015; Nance 2015; Nic Fhlannchadha and Hickey 2016; Kennard, Chap. 12, this volume; O' Rourke and Ramallo, Chap. 5, this volume; Selleck, Chap. 3, this volume).

In addition to differences in their levels of competence and circumstances of language acquisition or language learning, the motivations of new speakers can also vary (Dörnyei et al. 2015, Dörnyei and Ushioda

2011; Gardner 1982; Gardner and Lambert 1972). While instrumentality (e.g., gaining employment) is consistently an important motivating factor in acquiring the new language (Ó Riagáin 2007; Murtagh 2009; Walsh et al. 2015b), symbolic motivations also abound as individuals recognise the integrative and identificational potential of language (McCubbin 2010; Sallabank and Marquis, Chap. 4, this volume). Despite the range of linguistic competencies, contexts, and motivations, however, one common feature of 'new speakerhood' is the ability to communicate in a new language and the access it provides to new social, cultural, and economic spheres and markets. Conversely, one of the net results of the presence of new speakers in any language is often the association of 'otherness' with new speaker profiles and practices (Costa 2015; Hornsby 2015a; Moriarty 2015). Idealised sociocultural and linguistic models of language users frequently delegitimise new speakers in a way that places them at the bottom of a socially constructed sociolinguistic hierarchy (Cook 1999, 2015; Costa 2015; Hornsby 2015a, b; Ó Murchadha 2016; Sallabank and Marquis, Chap. 4, this volume). This is because new speakers tend to transgress the sociocultural profiles of an imagined ideal speaker and because they also, and not infrequently, move beyond what is regarded as authentic, legitimate, and correct language usage (Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin forthcoming). In doing so, new speakers, at least implicitly, challenge pervading conceptualisations of what users of a particular language should be like and what shape their linguistic forms and practices should take. As a result of such transgressions, the practices and profiles of what we now call new speakers have frequently been ideologically evaluated as sociolinguistically deviant, since they do not conform to an implicitly agreed model.

Authority, Authenticity, and the New Speaker

Historically, of course, studies in the areas of dialectology and linguistics can be said to have contributed to the perpetuation, reinforcement, or even in the construction of models of the ideal language user—models that often see new speakers and their practices regarded as a bête noire. Chambers and Trudgill (1998, p. 29) remind us, for example, how the pursuit of linguistic 'purity' in traditional dialectological studies led researchers to mainly seek out participants who fitted the mould of

NORMs—nonmobile, older, rural males. The focus on NORMs can be explained as a result of the political and scholarly focus on Romanticism that became common following the Industrial Revolution where rural populations, considered unaffected by urbanity, were seen as the authentic source of traditional cultural knowledge and practice and whose spirit was seen as underpinning the European nation-state (Bucholtz 2003, p. 399). Thus, the language varieties of NORMs often became the yardstick used to establish degrees of linguistic authority and 'authenticity'. Much of the early research in this area was thus confined to the study of the language practices of those seen as most worthy of academic attention. The profiles and practices of NORMs then became 'the norm'. This approach historically established a linguistic hierarchy that privileged the speech varieties and profiles of a particular gendered cohort of speakers and, by corollary, rendered others, such as new speakers, less 'pure' and less 'authentic'.

Of course, linguistic hierarchies neither begin nor end with NORMs. An abundant literature in various academic fields describes (and also reifies) 'standard' language use in various different languages. This, allied with institutional and folk beliefs in the existence of an ideologised standard variety and in its inherent correctness, establishes and sustains certain language varieties as prestige models (Coupland and Kristiansen 2011; Milroy 2001; Lippi-Green 2012). New speaker varieties, as well as many other varieties, do not typically meet the rigours of these language standards (Davies 2000). Many researchers in sociolinguistics, as well as in related fields, have for some time recognised the value of studying language users whose biographies and linguistic experiences are more diverse and nuanced than prototypical 'native speakers', and some have gone so far as to question the efficacy of the native speaker model for language learners and 'non-native' users (e.g., Cook 1999, 2015; Davies 2000). However, valuing speakers in terms of their 'authentic' and 'correct' language use persists within academia, and, importantly, within the language communities themselves. As Sallabank (2013, p. 79) has pointed out: 'Postmodern ideas on the constructed, fluid nature of languages and identity are not well known among "lay" people, so that…respondents tend to have quite traditional, even "essentialist", views on these matters'. Notwithstanding, the fundamental motivations that underlie the poststructuralist study of the practices and ideologies of new speakers is an approach that contributes significantly to our current understanding of both language and society and

forms part of the research mosaic that illustrates how social actors experience and engage with language in contemporary society. Furthermore, and arguably more pertinently, the study of new speakers allows us to further explicate the ways in which language users recruit languages and language varieties in order to understand and negotiate their role in the social order.

New Speakers and Minority Languages

As many authors have illustrated (e.g., Austin and Sallabank 2014; Crystal 2000; Dorian 2014; Krauss 1992; Nettle and Romaine 2000; Romaine 2007), the prevailing linguistic trend worldwide has seen the number of languages used throughout the globe reduce dramatically over the past centuries. Whatever the stance adopted in relation to assessments of language vitality and language death (e.g., Grenoble 2016; Huiying Lee and Van Way 2016), it can hardly be refuted that there are far fewer languages actively used today than used to be the case. The social, cultural, economic, and political arrangements that characterise what we might refer to in its various guises as late modernity, late capitalism, or globalisation do not appear to align well with efforts to maintain linguistic heterogeneity (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2010). As these global flows show few signs of abating, it is likely that the trend of language loss is set to continue into the future and that many languages already classified as 'minority languages' will struggle to maintain current levels of vitality (Crystal 2000; Krauss 1992; Nettle and Romaine 2000). Of course, for many of the world's more dominant languages, the pattern of language loss that accompanies the geographic, economic, cultural, and sociolinguistic mobility of globalisation leads to the advent of new speakers of those languages (e.g., Ammon 2010; Blommaert 2005, 2010; Crystal 2003; Mar-Molinero 2010; Mufwene 2010). Conversely, however, these same dynamics can provide the impetus for language shift and can have a profound impact on the vitality of languages with fewer speakers (Crystal 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 2010). As traditional minority language communities undergo language shift, the presence of new speakers can provide an additional avenue for the continued

vitality of the language (Jaffe 2015; Ortega et al. 2015; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). Within this context, the continued active use of minority languages may often be contingent upon new speakers who elect to adopt a language that is not 'their own language' (Ó hIfearnáin 2015).

While the phenomenon of the new speaker is discussed and debated in the sociolinguistics of majority languages in a variety of ways, the new speaker is becoming a key factor in minority language sociolinguistics as well, perhaps because of the aforementioned potential of new speakers to contribute to language vitality. Further, the new speaker of the minority language is indeed a relatively 'new' phenomenon. Typically, the language's minority status is due in part to the language's exclusion from education, and thus the presence of the language in school, as well as a cohort actively willing to learn the language, is the result of ideological clarification (see Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998) and shifting sociohistorical trajectories. It is therefore apt to dedicate an edited volume entirely to the study of new speakers in the context of minority languages. This is all the more fitting since much of the impetus for the new speaker framework emerged from research on autochthonous minority languages. Woolard (1989), for example, used the term 'new Catalans' as far back as the 1980s to refer to Spanish speakers who had learnt Catalan through the education system. Among the earliest appearances of the term 'new speaker' in the academic literature in the English language is in a chapter by Robert (2009) on perceptions of linguistic variation in Welsh. The term has since been embraced in the burgeoning literature on revival speakers in many minority languages, especially in Europe (e.g., Moriarty 2015; Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin forthcoming; Hornsby and Vigers forthcoming). Far from being an academic categorisation, however, the 'new speaker' has for some time been part of the collective consciousness of many minority language communities (Walsh et al. 2015a). As previously mentioned, the new speaker is no new species, and this is reflected in the various labels that we encounter in different contexts; for example, '*neofalante*' in the Galician context (O'Rourke and Ramallo 2011), '*euskaldunberri*' in the Basque language (Ortega et al. 2015), and '*néo-bretonnant*' in Breton (Hornsby 2005, 2015a, b; Jones 1998). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the genesis of the

COST Action on New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges, from which this volume has emerged, is in fact in the study of new speakers of minority languages. From this origin, the new speaker paradigm has since been operationalised in diverse sociolinguistic environments so that one might now encounter investigations of new speakerdom in minoritised contexts alongside new-speaker-based studies in some of the world's most dominant languages. The proliferation of the model, however, does not diminish the relevance to new speaker issues in minority languages but rather lays the groundwork for investigating a number of other important questions about language and identity.

Although the study of new speakers of languages not classified as minority or minoritised languages yields critical insights that enhance our understanding of language and society, a sense of immediacy permeates the study of new speakers of languages with few speakers. As the bulk of research on minority languages seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which language maintenance, revitalisation, and revival take place, the investigation of new speakers of minority languages is a pivotal part of this endeavour. After all, new speakers go against the grain of language shift and in some instances, minority languages owe their very existence to the presence of new speakers of the language. For example, while it is generally accepted that the last 'native' speaker of Manx died in 1974, the language is spoken today by individuals who have acquired proficiency mainly through educational initiatives and through their own personal commitment to the language. Were it not for these new speakers, the Manx language would not exist as a spoken language and the global linguistic palette would subsequently be less diverse. Thus, the contribution of new speakers to the maintenance of minority languages has the potential to be a significant force in halting the decline of individual languages, and it also has the potential to play a role in halting broader processes of linguistic homogenisation worldwide.

Despite this potential contribution, new speakers tend not to be uncritically accepted as legitimate minority language users (Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin forthcoming; O'Rourke et al. 2015). New speakers of minority languages are frequently vilified and their practices indexed as illegitimate, inauthentic, and lacking authority (Hornsby 2015a; Moriarty

2015; Ó Murchadha 2013; Jones 2015; McEwan-Fujita 2010; Armstrong 2013; O'Rourke and Ramallo 2013, 2015; Smith-Christmas and Armstrong 2014; Sallabank and Marquis, Chap. 4, this volume). While this has already been illustrated more generally in the earlier discussion of 'inauthentic' and 'non-standard' language varieties, the fissure separating traditional and new speaker cohorts can arguably be even more accentuated in minority language contexts than in others. The history of language documentation and language revitalisation in minority languages, for example, reveals a conscious bias towards speakers and speech varieties considered unaffected by language shift and modernisation. Consider, for instance, the quotation from Professor Angus McIntosh, that precedes the Foreword in the *Survey of the Gaelic Dialects of Scotland* (Ó Dochartaigh 1997, p. vi), where the 'native speakers' on whom the research is based are described as 'those indispensable and hitherto all too insufficiently recognised experts who deserve that title in this context by virtue of being in possession of a knowledge of their own everyday dialect'. The purist ideological stance revealed here (and elsewhere, e.g., O'Rahilly 1932, p. 121) is illustrative of a broader pining for 'traditional', 'authentic' practices in minority languages by linguists and non-linguists alike. This also surfaces in efforts to reverse language shift (RLS) in minority languages, as many RLS initiatives have been characterised by a goal to return the language and its users to pre-shift social and linguistic conditions (Hornsby forthcoming; Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin forthcoming; Romaine 2006). Restoration, rather than transformation, has therefore routinely been the explicit goal of much minority language management (Hornsby 2015b; Ó Murchadha and Ó hIfearnáin forthcoming; Ó Murchadha and Migge 2016), even though in many cases, as Bentahila and Davies (1993) have pointed out, transformation has often been the unexpected (and sometimes unwelcome) outcome of language management. To the extent that new speakers are acknowledged in RLS efforts (see Fishman 1991), the predilection for 'traditional', 'authentic' speakers and speech practices confines the role of new speakers to that of 'emulators' of the valorised 'traditional' language users. Despite new speakers' potential contribution to the vitality of minority languages, they thus tend to be relegated to the margins of a sociolinguistic understanding of minority languages.

The marginalisation of the role of new speakers in RLS is compounded by their often peripheral position in traditional minority language communities of practice (e.g., McEwan-Fujita 2010), and there may even be palpable schisms between native and new speaker cohorts in minority languages (e.g., Sallabank and Marquis, Chap. 4, this volume). These divisions may be reflective of new speakers' lack of integration into minority language social networks, and social identities of new speakers are often contested, as are claims to legitimacy, authority, authenticity, and language ownership (see Selleck, Chap. 3, this volume). Moreover, the circumstances through which new speakers acquire their new languages and the linguistic varieties that they practise can be considered deficient by native speakers and even by new speakers themselves. These issues, as well as other factors, can militate against a coherent pool of habitual language users in contexts where languages may already be in a precarious position. Ultimately, discord may preclude efficient language management and may impact transmission and, thus, endanger future language vitality. The negligible recognition traditionally afforded new speakers of minority languages, and their practices in terms of research and language planning, as well as the folk enregisterment of new speakers as sociolinguistically inferior, have served to maintain the status quo. New speakers, despite their potential contribution to the vitality of minority languages, therefore, remain at the bottom of a sociolinguistic hierarchy that primarily values traditional speakers and their practices. To echo Alasdair MacCaluim's (2007) observation on Gaelic learners in Scotland, new speakers have often been confined to the 'periphery of the periphery': they are perceived as 'other' vis-à-vis the native speaker cohort and are thus sometimes marginalised within an already-marginal group. However, as previously mentioned, new speakers of minority languages have a potentially pivotal role to play in RLS and are crucial to a deeper understanding of minority language dynamics more generally. This volume, therefore, seeks to broaden perspectives on the challenges facing new speakers of minority languages and does so by focusing on two main facets of language use in social life: linguistic ideologies and practices.

The focus on ideologies and practices in this volume provides scope for the investigation of a wide range of issues that surface in relation to new speakers of minority languages. We interpret both ideologies and practices