

Michael Hornsby (Poznań)

(De)legitimizing minority language group membership: Comment peut-on être breton(nant)?

Minority language communities undergoing revitalization attempts can often be disadvantaged by a lack of ‘prior ideological clarification’ (Fishman, 2001: 17) and thus in many communities, the heritage language is deeply threatened and yet community responses are divided and beset by contradiction. The revitalization process can assume a restoration of previous societal norms within a minoritized community, norms which may no longer actually be held by community members at large and which may actually contradict current societal trends towards modernization and globalization. Debates surrounding the status of so-called ‘new speakers’ in minority language settings (Hornsby, 2015; O’Rourke 2018) seem to focus on shifting and contested boundaries and borders of speech community membership, which is still influenced by the traditional foundations of linguistic nationalism, based on the principles of linguistic homogeneity, nativeness and monolingualism. The social and linguistic practices of “non-canonical” speakers can thus be either ignored or disparaged (O’Rourke and Pujolar, 2013). References to ‘authentic’ and ‘legitimate’ speaker stances are sometimes used to discredit a new speaker status, and the creation of boundaries and borders within a minoritized language community can be frequently instigated not, as might be readily imagined, by L1 speakers of the languages as much as it is by ‘native authenticists’ (Hornsby et al. 2013: 78), who may in fact be new speakers themselves.

This paper explores the presence of ‘new’ borders, in response to ‘new’ speakers in one situation of language revitalization, the Breton-speaking community in France. It shows how ideological stances are taken up by social actors which can reinforce, reject or negotiate such boundaries and which, while they draw on notions of ‘nativeness’, may not be recognisable to actual native speakers.