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Responding to sociolinguistic change: New speakers and variationist sociolinguistics

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Abstract

Aims: The goal of this special issue is to anchor an understanding of language variation and change in a relatively newly adopted framework for researching 'new speakers' of minoritized languages.
Approach: This paper first reviews basic principles of variationist sociolinguistics as they apply to new-speaker contexts before critically engaging with the notion of speakerhood.
Conclusions: We frame our discussion of new speakers as mobile bilinguals in contexts of sociolinguistics change. We call into question traditional ideals of speakerhood that have been couched in studies of bilingualism and language variation and change, and we emphasize the need to understand variation as part of the new social conditions that these speakers must navigate. This approach enriches approaches to measuring key factors in bilingualism (e.g. input, peer identity, language dominance), that are better adapted to the sociolinguistic ecologies of new speakers.
Originality: This is the first special issue dedicated to the bi-/multilingual repertoires of minoritized language speakers that more readily encapsulates both a new speaker framework and standard principles of language variation and change. This introduction discusses important theoretical and methodological advancements in the field.

Keywords
New speakers, minoritized languages, language variation, bilingualism, language revitalization

Introduction

In a recent contemplation of sociolinguistic theory, Coupland (2016) encourages us to consider the notion of *sociolinguistic change*, which, for him, can be defined as "*consequential change over time in language-society relations*" [emphasis in original] (p. 433). As he suggests, a view of sociolin-

guistic change “liberates the field to look beyond ‘language change,’” inviting into focus in addition questions “about what other sorts of change are then in question” (Coupland, 2016, p. 433), especially as they relate to social change. We believe it is pertinent to open the discussion here by invoking this notion of *sociolinguistic change* because variationist sociolinguistics—the dominant paradigm for modeling language variation and change (a quintessential *language–society relation*)—depends fundamentally on “suppressing considerations of social change” (Coupland, 2016, p. 436). In arguing this view, Coupland cites Labov’s own generalizations about the social basis of language change and the driving forces involved: “[i]n one form or another, they [the driving forces] involve the association of social attributes with the more advanced forms of a change in progress: local identity, membership of communities of practice, social class, age or gender” (Labov, 2010, p. 368). Thus, to explain language change in the classic variationist approach, Coupland (2016) argues that we are encouraged “to assume that the social and cultural ‘factors’ that [we] recognise to be the driving forces of change *do not themselves change*” [emphasis in original] (p. 436). According to this view, language change is interpreted narrowly to be the chang- ing linguistic patterns of an identified social group over time, “on the assumption that the group has a social profile that does not change over time [. . .] social structure and the social constitution of social categories endure” (Coupland, 2016, p. 436). While this is certainly not the view of all socio- linguists, or indeed the view of all variationists, assumptions about the relative stability of the social structures or categories have undoubtedly been central to variationist modeling, at least for rationalizing quantification procedures. This observation is by no means novel.

Although it has often been left to social theory to point to multiple types of social change, including changes in the meaning of social categories such as social class, gender on which socio- linguistic modeling in variationism depends, we would stress here that sociolinguistics has at the very least paid due attention to changes in the meaning of *speaker* itself. In an earlier accompany- ing chapter to the same volume *Sociolinguistics: theoretical debates*, Johnstone (2016, p. 425) cites studies by McEwan-Fujita (2010) and O’Rourke and Ramallo (2013) as important scholarly junctures in reevaluating the notion of speakerhood. Works such as these in sociolinguistics are noteworthy for our purposes here because “what it means to be a speaker” of a language has tradi- tionally fallen out of the scope of variationist discourse, too. This is evident in the field’s predomi- nant focus (in studies typically labeled as first- and second-wave in particular) on monolingual speakers in Western urban metropolises.[1] It is noteworthy too that Johnstone cites two papers that focus specifically on minoritized or endangered-language settings, as these are very typically sites of (often rapid) social *and* linguistic change, wrapped up in dynamic processes of language revitalization and language shift.

As the language revitalization literature has shown, such contexts are characterized by some sort of "intervention," inasmuch they are often involved language domain expansions, and whereby the minoritized language becomes available to fulfill as many communicative tasks as possible. Of course, the means by which such processes occur vary vastly across communities (e.g., creation of standard forms as in the case of Basque [*Euskara Batua*] or fostering language apprentice pro- grams in many Native American Indigenous communities such as Tunica). In language-shift situ- ations, where at least one threatened variety is found in a contact situation with at least one dominant, superordinate variety. Where the diglossic relationship that underpins language–society relations in such an ecology is unstable, an implicational scale is often readily observable, whereby, at the macro level, the threatened language undergoes domain loss in the community, leading to a general decrease in the number of speakers over time (e.g., Gal, 1978, p. 6). Correspondingly, at the micro level, we also observe substantial variation in linguistic competency over generations, and, as a result, language change. This trajectory is, however, not always a unidirectional one. As O'Rourke et al. (2015) and Jaffe (2015), among others, have argued, in contexts of language endangerment, *new speakers* of such minority languages can also emerge where language revitali- zation strategies are fruitful, and where a new sociolinguistic order, made up of novel linguistic economies (McCarty, 2018; O'Rourke et al., 2015), is carved out. In multilingualism research, this new order of the modern era has been characterized by "new forms of language and new modes of communication" (O'Rourke et al., 2015, p. 2) wherein new sources of linguistic authority are mobilized, challenging the emphasis on "native speakers" as the singular legitimate source of speakerhood. The emergence of "new speakers" has also problematized early models of revitaliza- tion such that of Joshua Fishman's (1991) *Reversing language shift* model, which was primarily concerned with the maintenance or revival of native-speaker communities. It is at this particular juncture where "what it means to be a speaker" (Johnstone, 2016, p. 425) comes into particularly sharp focus.

In this special issue of the *International Journal of Bilingualism*, we foreground an understanding of speakerhood that is situated within such sites of rapid social change, that is, at the intersections of endangerment, shift, revitalization, and reclamation. In these contexts, sociolinguistic issues pertain-ing to bilingualism and/or multilingualism are defined and redefined, in situ, by the societal changes that accompany them. As new forms of revitalization efforts seek to address the needs of their users (see most recently Lewis & McLeod, 2021), these efforts will influence the ways in which speaker-hood will be defined. Thus, we are concerned with advancing an understanding of language variation and change from a bi/multilingualism perspective that takes the question "what it means to be a speaker [of a minoritized language in the 21st century]" (to build on Johnstone's (2016) framing) as its focus in these contexts. In doing so, we also draw on sociolinguistic theory to address germane debates in the field of bi/multilingualism, especially as they relate to how social factors are mani-fested in the development, production, and perception of emergent linguistic systems now being

documented in new-speaker contexts. We therefore also build on previous and long-standing efforts in linguistics to (a) move beyond "monolingual biases" (Davies, 2003; Kachru, 1986; L. Ortega, 2013), particularly in relation to the questioning of diglossic relationships in language contact situa- tions (O'Rourke, 2019), and (b) address calls for a more diverse sources of data in variationist socio-linguistics, as well as more nuanced understandings of language variation and change (Meyerhoff et al., 2020; Stanford, 2016; Stanford & Preston, 2009, inter alia). In what follows, we first provide a brief overview of the notion of the *new speaker* as a sociolinguistic category; we then identify a num-ber of theoretical and methodological implications of working with these populations, before turning our attention to this special issue's contributions.

New speakers and variationist theory

In their programmatic paper, O'Rourke et al. (2015, p. 1) propose that the sociolinguistic cate- gory "new speaker" can refer to "individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education pro- grams, revitalization projects or as adult language learners."[2] As the authors argue, this category is not limited exclusively to language revitalization contexts per se (O'Rourke et al., 2015, p. 1). Indeed, this sociolinguistic category has also been adopted in disparate settings, for example, migrant language-learner contexts, refugee status, workplace multilingualism (e.g., Smith- Christmas et al., 2018). However, it has been most frequently and fruitfully applied to the study of dynamics in language endangerment, particularly within qualitative sociolinguistics, but with a growing body of work that adopts quantitative reasoning too (see Kasstan, 2017; Kasstan & Rodríguez-Ordóñez, forthcoming, for recent summaries).

The category *new speaker* overlaps with the now widely studied category of *heritage* speaker in terms of the political status of the languages spoken, and often operationalized in terms of age of onset, language dominance, proficiency, acquisition trajectories, or ethnic and ancestral ties to the language (Aalberse et al., 2019, pp. 10–11 for a recent discussion). In a number of ways, heritage speakers have also been referred, albeit in passing, to speakers of national minority languages or indigenous/aboriginal languages (Montrul, 2016, p. 15) and in a broader sense, to endangered-language speakers (Polinsky, 2018). Despite the fact that new speakers and heritage speakers will often speak of a minoritized language of some sort, we believe that there are two fundamental dif-ferences that theoretically justify this new category of speakerhood. First, the idea of "newness" as a speaker of a minoritized language has long existed in minoritized contexts without theoretical scrutiny (O'Rourke et al., 2015, p. 3). Second, this "newness" in many cases has been a byproduct of some sort of language mobilization or revitalization in that speakers' initial acquisitional access to the language has been by some means other than family transmission, a level of social distinction that has

become pertinent as a way of describing members of those speech communities who have "relearned" the language after language shift has taken place (see McCarty, 2013). With these issues in mind, the papers in this volume showcase two important social realities regarding minority language speakerhood: (a) both heritage speakers and new speakers may co-exist within the same speech community and that (b) speakers may even change categories of speakerhood across their lifespan. Together, these two points empathize with Coupland's (2016) understanding of soci- olinguistic change inasmuch as the linguistic aspects of a particular category of speakerhood are subject to the sociolinguistic changes in which these categories operate.

In line with research on heritage speakers, the main goal of the framework that has developed from the recognition of "new speakers" as a sociolinguistic category is to critically examine ques- tions regarding speakerhood; to move away from evaluative models of language users and to for- mulate a better understanding of the social competences, contexts, as well as the motives behind becoming a speaker of minoritized language (O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020). This largely qualitative body of work addressing issues pertaining to new speakerhood has tended to focus on concerns such as speakers "legitimacy" and "authenticity" (see Woolard, 2008). Although this work has repeatedly shown these social actors to be perceived of as "illegitimate" speakers of their chosen target language in most cases, there is nonetheless significant variation in the way these individuals mobilize within their wider sociolinguistic ecologies (Costa et al., 2018; Smith-Christmas et al., 2018). For instance, in the Scottish Gaelic context, Nance et al. (2016) have shown that new speak- ers do not necessarily move on traditional speakers' norms, but rather demonstrate more variabil- ity, which the authors peg specifically to personae construction. In the Basque context, it has been shown, too, that new categories of speakerhood are emerging, challenging the new/traditional speaker dichotomy, as well as the ideologies that govern them (A. Ortega et al., 2015). These speakers, for instance, lay claim to heightened proficiency for having expanded their social repertoires beyond the classroom, and provide evidence that, indeed, speaker authenticity constitutes a continual process of legitimation through social practice (Bucholtz, 2003; Urla et al., 2018). Thus, the theme of sociolinguistic change as Coupland has described it (above) looms large.

The framework developed for new speakers has elaborated a research agenda that resonates, too, with Bell's reclamation of—what Hymes (1974, p. 92) called—a "socially constituted socio- linguistics" (Bell, 2016, p. 393). Hymes emphasized the foundations of linguistic inequalities, and, in an effort to undo them, has advocated for an understanding of language and society that is dia- logically mediated. Research on new speakers has so far advanced our understanding of these dialogues, and the complexities inherent to these communities (in so far as they can be called), especially in terms of power and positionalities (see McCarty, 2018 for a discussion). However, it is the linguistic systems of new speakers that continue to go understudied, especially the means by

which they exploit their multilingual repertories, and the various linguistic resources that they deploy, to navigate the new sociolinguistic order. These gaps are of central concern to variationist sociolinguistics, but connecting new speakers and the variationist paradigm brings with it a number of immediate theoretical and methodological problems. In the remainder of this introductory article, and in an effort to build a clearer pathway for further research, we sketch some of these issues below, outlining some open questions that the contributing authors to this issue address in part or in whole.

Challenging opportunities

First, as the above definition of new speakers makes clear, such individuals have not typically been "socialized in the minority language [. . .] they acquire it outside of the home or local community and learned it at school or through other informal means" (O'Rourke et al., 2015, p. 1; O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020, p. 19). Therefore, common theoretical assumptions in variationism become problematic. For example, Weinreich et al. (1968) conceived of the notions of *embedding* and *evaluation* to track variation and change by establishing how features are socially embedded. Since this requires understanding how communities evaluate variation, Labov (1972) later demonstrated how *attention to speech* taps into these evaluations when speakers style-shift. However, Labov's model rests on the assumption that there is community consensus around the usage of shared norms; this principle underpins the very notion of the *speech community*—an understanding that, while not uncontroversial, remains a bedrock interpretation, especially in terms of the relative stability of a given community's shared norms. Conversely, it is not at all clear that new speakers of minoritized varieties share in, or coalesce around norms in the same way. Indeed, European studies on Basque (Lantto, 2018; Rodríguez-Ordóñez, 2021), Francoprovençal (Kasstan, 2019), and Scottish Gaelic (Nance et al., 2016), for example, demonstrate that there is remarkably little consensus around norms by comparison with variationist studies on speakers of dominant languages in urban centers.

Second, new speakers further differ from typical research participants in variationist studies in that speech styles cannot necessarily be mapped in the same way. A notable assumption associated with the notion of the vernacular as the "most natural" or least-monitored speech style concerns its association (for the most part) with non-standard, or covertly prestigious forms. Conversely, new speakers' most natural speech style may actually be made up of standard forms exclusively, given the medium of acquisition. What therefore does it mean to accord primacy to the vernacular, which—in Labov's (1972) terms—constitutes the style of most interest to linguistic theory (p. 112), that is, the "form that is transmitted from one generation to the next over time" (Labov, 2016, p. 585). Many language policies in Europe are focused on implementing the minoritized language in the most formal contexts and prestigious domains (i.e., to promote language revitalization). While these revitalization initiatives have in some cases been transformational in terms of reversing shift and promoting some form of unmarked societal bilingualism (as has been seen with regard to, for example, Catalan or Basque, Urla et al., 2018; Woolard, 2016), comparatively, little attention has been paid to how norms are fostered for more intimate domains or casual speech styles (vs prescriptively adopting features

appropriate for new, more prestigious domains). Today, variation- ism acknowledges many different approaches to style, but recent work continues to advocate for the primacy of the first-learned style (Sharma, 2018), and the vernacular principle is still foundational to the variationist enterprise. How variationist methods can be fitted to the study of new speakers therefore strikes us as an important empirical question. Relatedly, it is also necessary to stress that new speakers constitute in a number of contexts a sizable minority of the total proportion of speakers (and in some instances the majority language users of the language, as in the case of, for example, Cornish and Manx), and so they will have significant sway over fluctuating or emergent norms.

There are further theoretical and methodological problems associated with these fundamental concerns. Consider the *Uniformitarian principle* (Labov, 1972), which, simply put, assumes that the same types, range, and distribution of linguistic structures and changes observable in the pre- sent existed in the past. Among the theoretical assumptions underpinning the Uniformitarian principle is that an adult's linguistic system is faithful to the state of the language at some critical period in acquisition; an assumption central, too, to the *apparent-time* construct (for details, see Labov, 1994).[3] Yet, in the case of new speakers, with their very disparate acquisition paths, the pre-existing state of the target variety may well not—or in most cases very likely will not—represent a prior state that the community would recognize. Such quandaries call into question other key concepts, central to the variationist enterprise, such as the working understanding of the *speech community*, and whether or not the *apparent-time* construct can usefully be adopted as a canonical model of linguistic change, at least in situations where traditional intergenerational transmission has been stop-started (cf. Nance, 2015, 2021). There are long-standing critiques of such concepts, of course (e.g., Romaine, 1989; Takano, 2010). Most recently, Gal (2018), too, has questioned the notion of the speech community as understood in terms of shared evaluative norms in evaluating patterns of language and change (particularly in contexts where minoritized-language standardization pro- cesses are underway, and where norms are in constant flux). These concerns are relevant to our discussion, as detailed ethnographic work has shown that new speakers can deviate from estab- lished norms to create hybrid forms that better represent lived sociolinguistic experiences (Kasstan & Rodríguez-Ordóñez, forthcoming; Lantto, 2021; O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020). How such forms are perceived remains a further empirical question.

While studies on new speakers continue to offer nuances to a narrowly specified, socially informed theory of linguistic variation and change, the heterogeneous experiences of these social actors in acquiring a minoritized language also shed light on pressing issues in bi/multilingualism research. The "new-speaker" category can encompass a wide range of types of bi/multilinguals: early to late acquirers, acquiring according to different socialization patterns, with variable access to opportunities,

from specific or particular functions to spread bilingualism, who are motivated to acquire for different reasons, and so on. To take a specific example, it is clear from the literature that the role played by the home language in the development of linguistic structure remains salient to studies in bi/multilingualism. In the acquisition literature, this factor is often operationalized in terms of quantity and/or quality of input, and its effects not only interact with age but they are domain-specific, too (e.g., Unsworth, 2016). In new-speaker contexts, where home language is operationalized as an independent variable, we observe a variety of outcomes. For example, Antonievic et al. (2020) show that children (ages 3–6;4) exposed to Irish at home faithfully repli- cate the variation from their caregivers. Such findings are also reported among young children in Nance's (2020) study on Scottish Gaelic. However, this study further demonstrates that these initial input differences are leveled out by the end of primary school, suggesting that a new educational Gaelic norm may be emerging within the Gaelic Medium Education (GME) system. Conversely, in the Welsh context, Morris (2013; this issue) shows that home input effects on Welsh acquirers are actually mediated by the type of community-level language dominance in which new speakers are socialized (i.e., whether Welsh acquirers are socialized in a Welsh-dominant or English- dominant community). Although these two studies show that peer group pressure dominates the acquisition of variation (as predicted by Labov, 2007), they highlight that the effects of home language (or input per se) cannot be understood as a stand-alone factor that affects the individual. Rather, home language is very likely going to interact with other social factors, including, but not limited to, supra-local ideologies. This work not only contributes to research on the role of input as it co-varies with other factors (e.g., *age*), but emphasizes the need to better understand socially and locally informed patterns of socialization.

Variationism and sociolinguistic change: individual case studies

The seven case studies included in this issue, and summarized below, all engage with the open questions and theoretical debates summarized above. Each paper presents a quantitative analysis of new-speaker production and/or perception patterns, at different levels of linguistic description, and across disparate minority-language sites, including Scottish Gaelic (Nance and Moran), Welsh (Morris), Irish (Ó Murchadha, Kavanagh, and Flynn), Navajo (Palakurthy), Chukchi (Kantavorich), and Basque (Lantto, Rodríguez-Ordóñez).

The compounding effects of language dominance, input, and issues of speaker authenticity in the acquisition of phonological features are addressed in the first two studies. Nance and Moran examine the extent to which two groups of young Scottish Gaelic–English bilinguals (ages 13–14), who have been educated through GME, acquire a number of features, including pre-aspiration, phonemic vowel length, and nasalization, as well as other salient features. Their focus is on whether, and to what extent, these speakers acquire previously described variants of Gaelic phonology; whether they produce variants associated with a traditional dialect (specifically that of the Island of Lewis); and the

extent to which young speakers negotiate issues of authenticity with respect to locality and peer group identity. Their findings indicate that the two young groups differ significantly from older more fluent speakers. In particular, younger Lewis speakers produce fewer traditional features, whereas the young pupils from Glasgow produce none. Furthermore, the authors find that home-language-exposure differences are overridden in the school setting, as one might expect given the available body of research now available on language in adolescence. Yet, the implication of these findings as it relates to sociolinguistic change in this particular community is of particular interest, as the authors suggest the potential focusing of a new-speaker variety that is linked to local authenticity. The authors argue that recent socioeconomic opportunities offered in support of revitalization strategies in the educational system (an important sociolinguistic change), along with exposure to a variable repertoire of Gaelic varieties, allow for young Gaelic speakers to construct new (and valorized) patterns of linguistic variation in concurrence with newly emerging and localized Gaelic-speaking identities. Morris presents a cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic analysis of fundamental frequency range (FFR) (or pitch range) among two groups of young Welsh–English bilinguals (ages 16–18), who differ (a) in terms of their primary home language, and (b) whether the region in which the speak- ers inhabit is Welsh- or English-dominant. While the results show that Welsh–English bilinguals do not differ in terms of FFR in their two languages, there was a gender effect. In operationalizing gender as an additional social factor in understanding FFR variability, it is demonstrated that male speakers in the English-dominant town tended to have a greater span, whereas, in the Welsh- dominant town, it was the males from English-speaking homes that also showed greater span. Morris argues that both physiology and peer influence may be conditioning this variation, which he posits might point to an emergent identity marker among male new speakers. Morris' work thus supports evidence from recent advances in how phonetic resources are deployed in the construction of gendered voice (Zimman, 2017). As with Nance and Moran's paper, recourse to sociolinguistic change also looms in this work, for it is further argued that the home effects found in the English-dominant region (but not in the Welsh-dominant region) are possibly due to how local peer groups perceive themselves in their respective communities. The study also demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of new speakers and highlights the importance of grasping the local conditions in research design.

In the early new-speaker literature, much has been made of the role of the teacher as a norm arbiter in language revitalization (see, for example, Jaffe, 2015). However, this work has—to our knowledge—made little (if any) use of quantitative reasoning. In this volume, Ó Murchadha, Kavanagh, and Flynn devise a speaker-evaluation experiment to investigate language ideologies among *new-speaker teachers* of Irish who differ in terms of whether they teach in an Irish-medium or English-medium school. These groups of new-speaker teachers listened to speech samples com- prising three main traditional varieties of Irish (Ulster, Connacht, and Munster) and one post-traditional variety common among new speakers, with features representing these varieties (e.g., initial or non-initial stress, word

final vowel production, and differing palatalization patterns), and they were asked to rate these guises on 7-point scales in two blocs (before receiving the study details and following a briefing on the study). Overall, the results indicate that the three traditional varieties receive more positive ratings than the post-traditional, new-speaker variety. However, language-medium instruction effects were also observed, in that teachers in the Irish-medium school associated the new-speaker variety with a standard, whereas teachers in the English-medium school showed no statistical differences between any of the varieties in terms of an “accuracy” trait. This evidence is interpreted as English-medium teachers appearing to show comparatively more favorable attitudes toward the new-speaker variety. Therefore, while traditional ideologies valorizing particular varieties of Irish may still be present, new speakers, in this case language teachers, may challenge such ideologies, and in so doing they transform the norms governing sociolinguistic authenticity (see also Ó Murchadha & Kavanagh, 2022), as has been shown in other minoritized contexts (Urla et al., 2018).

In an effort to reorient the new-speaker literature away from a largely European base, Palakurthy expands the notion to the context of Diné Bizaad (Navajo). This apparent-time study examines sound changes among 51 bilingual speakers from different generations (ages 18–75) and language- learning backgrounds (schools vs language programs). Palakurthy’s analysis focuses on two ongo- ing changes in the lateral affricate system (unaspirated /t͡l/ > /kl/ and ejective /t͡ɬ’/ > /k͡ɬ’/). The results indicate that despite younger speakers showing much higher rates of velar onsets than older speakers, new speakers are not participating in this change. Instead, the speech production of new speakers more closely resembles older speakers in the community. Although the category of “new speaker” is not a salient one in this Navajo context (as it is in, say, the Basque, Breton, or Catalan contexts),[4] and while there is no evidence of a distinct or emergent new-speaker variety (as Nance and Moran describe for Gaelic), Palakurthy argues that both literacy and “vertical communication networks” (i.e., interaction in Diné Bizaad predominantly with Elders than with peers) among new speakers may be driving a reversal in the sound change described in the community. In other words, new speakers, who are described as less confident and more self-conscious in their produc- tion, are orienting toward an Elder norm. These findings run contrary to a number of new-speaker studies so far described within the variationist paradigm (see Kasstan, 2017). Unlike in western European contexts whose social networks are more peer-oriented, in Indigenous contexts, com- munal networks (and orientation to those networks) can play an important role in the direction of sound changes. Such observations are generally rare in the variationist literature, which strength- ens the call for further work at this intersection.

Focusing away from western Europe, Kantavorich considers new speakers of Chukchi, an indigenous language spoken in Siberia. She examines the extent to which disparate noun-incorpo- ration

strategies are socially conditioned by the speakers' proficiency and experiences with the language. In doing so, Kantavorich questions the Labovian interpretation of *speech community* (as described above) on two grounds, as applied to Chukchi. First, the author identifies no cohesive physical speech community in existence today. Second, there is little consensus in terms of what prestige language may in fact be (i.e., vernacular forms associated with a prestige variety or a "literary language" developed by linguists). Using novel experimental methods, Kantavorich examines the use of noun incorporation in three groups (ages 20–60) of Chukchi–Russian bilinguals: older more conservative speakers, attriting speakers (who have had their transmission disrupted through schooling), and new speakers. Kantavorich demonstrates that noun incorporation is much less productive among attriting speakers and new speakers by comparison with the older-speaker group. However, despite progressively infrequent use, and a cline of fluency, all speakers do main- tain a shared system of rules governing variable noun incorporation. Moreover, despite the fact that attriting speakers and new speakers do not have any contact with one another, their production data do show similar patterns in their noun-incorporation strategies. Kantavorich appeals to a multiple- causative explanation by attributing these non-trivial similarities to shared societal and linguistic pressures, namely, disruptive acquisition, Russian interference, and language universals.

The issue's final two studies on Basque (Lantto, Rodríguez-Ordóñez) focus their analyses on how speakers' self-claimed authenticity mediates the use of different morphosyntactic variables, either from a stylistic or developmental perspective. Regarding stylistic variation, Lantto combines third-wave variationist approaches with usage-based accounts of language contact in describing new Basque speakers' construction of a colloquial style of Standard Basque. Lantto traces the lin- guistic practices of 47 new speakers of Basque, demonstrating a hierarchy in the adoption and recruitment of linguistic strategies such as feature-switching; the adoption of Spanish discourse markers (e.g., *o sea* "I mean," *es que* "it's that," *bueno* "well"); the adoption of features from regional varieties (auxiliary *zan* "is" instead of *zen*, *be* "also" instead of *ere*). Such practices are argued to be coterminous with their motivation as speakers, as well as their broader involvement in Basque revitalization initiatives. In other words, as new speakers engage more with Basque activism, some consciously recruit analogy-based innovations, alongside borrowings based on similarity in their speech. Lantto's metalinguistic analysis further shows that certain new speakers of Basque are conscious of their linguistic practices, at least with respect to the features examined in the study. These findings (a) contribute to current debates regarding awareness and control in sociolinguistics and (b) question the extent to which conscious patterns of linguistic change are rare (cf. Eckert, 2019; Nycz, 2018). Rodríguez-Ordóñez's study examines the variable production of Basque ergativity among three groups of Basque-Spanish bilinguals, who differ in (a) their acquisition patterns of Basque and (b) their self-claimed identity categories. These categories lie along a continuum of authenticity and legitimacy as Basque speakers, which is not necessarily linked to the amount of Basque that they use,

but, rather, which is pegged to the way that speakers have learned Basque, as well as their socialization patterns (e.g., whether they socialize with speakers of regional varieties or not). The study also focuses on lexical frequency, which can play a role in the production of Basque ergativity. The results provide evidence for mediated lexical-frequency effects among new speakers of Basque, *contra* older speakers, indicating that lexical-frequency effects interact with other linguis- tic factors. It is argued that the greater variability in the production of ergativity among new speak- ers is the result of gradual reallocation of internal constraints, based on these lexical-frequency effects. As with Nance and Moran and Lantto's findings reported in this issue, the results observed here for Basque are consistent with practice-based theories of language variation in that new speak- ers' more disparate socialization patterns override proficiency effects in their production of Basque ergativity. As they "authenticate" themselves by expanding their Basque-speaking social networks, their ergative systems become more alike. These findings have implications for how language variation is acquired and deployed in its social context. They also call into question typical claims in the L2 literature on the limits in what learners can acquire.

Concluding remarks

We have circumscribed two main goals in this special issue: (a) to advance our understanding of speakerhood in contexts of rapid "sociolinguistic change" (Coupland, 2016), and (b) to establish how the linguistic variation observed at this intersection might be modeled in the Labovian para- digm, and what insights there might be for variationist theory. To achieve this, we have focused on new speakers of minoritized languages, and we have attempted to build upon the framing of the question of "what it means to be a speaker" of these languages in the 21st century (Johnstone, 2016; O'Rourke et al., 2015). These scholarly junctures further foster a discussion of sociolinguistics that not only calls into question traditional ideals of speakerhood, as couched in typical discourses of dominant-language ideologies and/or monolingualism, but they emphasize the need to understand variation as part of the new social conditions in which these speakers navigate. As our overview of this issue's contributions demonstrate, the linguistic practices of new speakers (and other emergent social categories of speakerhood, e.g., heritage speakers) can and do reflect the changing social structures of their respective ecologies. In so doing, they illuminate the contradictions often found in minoritized-language settings (e.g., monolingual standards in a plurilingual reality). Further still, the seven case studies presented here problematize well-established (though not entirely uncon- tested), theoretical constructs in variationism (e.g., *speech community, apparent-time construct*, *Uniformitarian principle*). This work therefore clearly demonstrates that patterns of linguistic change need to be understood alongside patters of *sociolinguistic change*, which further enriches our scope of how we measure other factors (e.g., input, peer identity, language dominance) as they intersect with our understanding of speakerhood in bi/multilingual communities. It is our hope that this discussion will facilitate a more comprehensive, socially informed theory of linguistics.

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Authors' note

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Notes

1. Even if the traditional characterization of these spaces as "monolingual" has always been something of a gross generalization to begin with.
2. This characterization of new speakers has been widely adopted, even if the precise wording has been revised in subsequent works (e.g., O'Rourke & Walsh, 2020, p. 19).
3. As Eckert (2012) points out, this makes the vernacular principle even more central a concern (p. 89).
4. In these contexts, new speakers can be identified using particular labels, such as *euskaldun berriak* ("new Basques") or *néo-bretonnants* ("neo Breton speakers").

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