

New Speaker Workshop at the Sociolinguistics Summer School 7

22nd June 2016
Université de Lyon, France

Event report

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the activities taken by the participants of the New Speakers Workshop on 22nd June 2016 in the Université de Lyon as part of the Sociolinguistics Summer School 7 (SSS7). This SSS7 brought together 20 doctoral students from 11 different countries and four professors during four days. The main idea of this event was to offer doctoral students useful tools and concepts in sociolinguistics, as well as to discover new insights for their research. Three days were each dedicated to a specific theme - language policies, new speakers, endangered languages – while the last day consisted in a round table on data collection and analysis. This report was prepared by Kevin Petit in his capacity as the rapporteur as well as the member of the organizing committee.

The main purpose of the New Speakers workshop

The idea was to offer doctoral students working on sociolinguistics the opportunity to familiarize with the recent concept of “new speakers” and to get a flavour of the opportunities offered by it in contemporary sociolinguistics research. As a matter of fact, most participants did not have previous knowledge of the concept, which rendered the initiative all the more pertinent.

The format that was proposed was a one-hour plenary followed by a two hour workshop conducted by Pr Bernadette O’Rourke. The title proposed by Pr O’Rourke was *Shifting paradigms - towards a sociolinguistics of the (new)speaker*. In the afternoon, three participants presented their doctoral research and discussed it with the audience.

An overview of the running of the day

Pr Bernadette O'Rourke started the day with a one-hour talk to introduce students to the concept of "new speakers" and to illustrate its usefulness in contemporary sociolinguistics research. After a quick overview of past research on multilingualism, Pr O'Rourke taped into her own research on Galician and Irish to illustrate how globalization, increased mobility and transnational networking have dramatically changed the linguistic ecologies of contemporary societies. The limits of traditional concepts such as "native/non-native speakers" and "L2 speakers" were considered and the concept of "new speakers" was proposed as an alternative. She detailed how the concept emerged in the different research projects and talks she has had with other sociolinguists from different contexts who found themselves limited in the same way by pre-existing categories detailed above. What it means for people to engage with a language or languages other than their "native" or "national" language(s) and the challenges involved in crossing social boundaries were considered. Pr O'Rourke then explained how the concept of new speakers could help understand how speakers evaluate their own levels of linguistic competence and structure their social practices as they adapt to new linguistic spaces, but also how language is mobilized in the reproduction of power relations and social inequalities across different multilingual contexts. Two case studies of minoritized languages served as the main illustration: Irish and Galician. The talk ended with an overview of the possibilities offered by the lens of new speakers in the contexts of migration and transnational movements. As a whole, Pr. O'Rourke made the point that this research moved away from the language to the speaker, focusing on the "socio", rather than the "linguistics" of sociolinguistics.

Participants then had the opportunity to ask questions to Pr O'Rourke during 15 minutes, and the main novelty to participants seemed to be the assumption by Pennycook that "language doesn't exist" and how this shifts the focus from the language to the speaker and deconstructs the notion of the ideal native speaker. Many participants expressed the new possibilities the lens of new speakers could offer to their research. Finally, the benefits of presenting new perspectives on language and speakers to stakeholders, especially regarding language teaching, were considered.

The talk was followed by a two-hour workshop on the analysis of interviews, and more specifically linguistic autobiographies. Pr O'Rourke quickly introduced the main issues raised by such interviews (collecting, transcribing oral narratives, analysing language choice, analysing content, analysing context and analysing the form), before presenting the results of some of her own analysis, and giving participants some tips. An extract of an interview was then handed over to the participants, who were invited to discuss emerging themes and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The lunch break was a good opportunity for participants to talk to Pr O'Rourke in a more relaxed atmosphere, and also to network with other participants.

In the afternoon, three participants presented their doctoral research. Each of the twenty-minute presentations was followed by ten minutes of questions. Even though only one presentation

focused specifically on new speakers, it was interesting for the other participants to reflect on their presentations using what had been said in the morning.

Concluding remarks

The organising committee is convinced that participants benefited from this New Speaker workshop. It allowed them to familiarize with this new concept, to understand where it comes from and the new challenges in sociolinguistics research, and finally to reflect on their own research. It allowed disseminating the concept and many participants acknowledged it offered new insights for their own doctoral research. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to discuss it with a leading researcher in the field and to share their views with her. They were also handed over very practical tips on how to conduct interviews in a hands-on workshop. Finally they got to know the New Speakers Network and were offered the possibility to apply for membership.

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