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978-1-107-12388-5 - Sociolinguistics from the Periphery: Small Languages in New Circumstances

Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Alexandra Jaffe and Nikolas Coupland

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Sociolinguistics from the Periphery

This leading team of scholars presents a fascinating book about change: shifting political, economic and cultural conditions; ephemeral, sometimes even seasonal, multilingualism; altered imaginaries for minority and indigenous languages and their users. The authors refer to this network of interlinked changes as the new conditions surrounding small languages (Sámi, Corsican, Irish and Welsh) in peripheral sites. Starting from the conviction that peripheral sites can and should inform the sociolinguistics of globalisation, the book explores how new modes of reflexivity, more transactional frames for authenticity, commodification of peripheral resources and boundary transgression with humour all carry forward change. These types of change articulate a blurring of binary oppositions between centre and periphery, old and new, and standard and non-standard. Such research is particularly urgent in multilingual small language contexts, where different conceptualisations of language(s), boundaries and speakers impact individuals' social, cultural and economic capital and opportunities.

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Small Languages in New Circumstances

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Contents

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| <i>List of figures</i> | <i>page</i> vii |
| <i>List of tables</i> | viii |
| <i>Preface</i> | ix |
| 1 Small languages in new circumstances? | 1 |
| 1.1 Small languages | 3 |
| 1.2 Old circumstances and enduring contexts | 9 |
| 1.3 New circumstances | 23 |
| 1.4 Dynamic peripheries | 27 |
| 2 Reflexivity and small languages: the ‘meta’ imperative in late modernity | 32 |
| 2.1 De-traditionalisation and the ‘reflexive imperative’ | 33 |
| 2.2 Metaculture and metalanguage | 35 |
| 2.3 Heightened reflexivity and sociolinguistic discontinuity | 40 |
| 2.4 Metacultural motifs in Welsh linguistic landscaping | 43 |
| 2.5 Materiality and changing discourses of Sáminess | 51 |
| 2.6 Corsican metacultural representation as a project of the self | 59 |
| 2.7 ‘Sexy Irish’: mediated representations of Irish speakers | 63 |
| 2.8 Sociolinguistic consequences of reflexivity | 68 |
| 3 Conventional and transactional authenticities in small-culture tourism | 70 |
| 3.1 Searching for authenticity | 72 |
| 3.2 Conventional and transactional authenticities | 74 |
| 3.3 Authentication and time: fixed and fluid | 79 |
| 3.4 Place as an authenticating resource | 84 |
| 3.5 Authentic products: the local as source and site of transformation or trope | 89 |
| 3.6 Authenticity, person and performance | 94 |
| 3.7 Authenticity as assemblage: the interplay of the conventional and the transactional | 102 |
| 4 Expanding possibilities for commodification: luxury, mobility, visibility | 108 |
| 4.1 Commodification and small languages | 109 |
| 4.2 Multimodal discourse of Sámi commodification | 119 |
| | v |

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12388-5 - Sociolinguistics from the Periphery: Small Languages in New Circumstances
Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Alexandra Jaffe and Nikolas Coupland
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| vi | Contents | |
| 4.3 | Cwtch and Halen Môn | 127 |
| 4.4 | Commodifying place names and spaces in Corsica | 135 |
| 4.5 | Small languages and body commodification: the case of Irish language tattoos | 144 |
| 4.6 | From enclaving to luxury | 150 |
| 5 | Transgression, small languages and changing boundaries | 152 |
| 5.1 | Transgression, multilingualism and small languages | 154 |
| 5.2 | Pushing boundaries with parody | 156 |
| 5.3 | Transgressing the Sámi centre: the case of <i>Märät Säpikkääit/Njuoska Bittut</i> | 157 |
| 5.4 | Transgressing media norms for Welsh: Madamrygbi | 166 |
| 5.5 | Transgressing the norms of Irish in the commercial domain | 176 |
| 5.6 | Transgressing the taboo against mocking Corsican nationalism: the case of Canistrelli Clandestini | 181 |
| 5.7 | Transgression and maturing processes | 191 |
| 6 | A view from the periphery: sociolinguistics, small languages and change | 194 |
| 6.1 | Small languages: reconsidering centres and peripheries | 194 |
| 6.2 | Small languages, peripheral contexts, big concepts | 198 |
| 6.3 | A peripheral vision? | 205 |
| | <i>References</i> | 208 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 226 |

Figures

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 2.1 | A West Wales bilingual road marking | <i>page</i> 45 |
| 2.2 | A bilingual sign on entering Tyddewi | 46 |
| 2.3 | A Traeth T-shirt display | 48 |
| 2.4 | A Llanfairpwll railway station sign | 50 |
| 2.5 | The Sajos name-sign in Finnish, English, Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi | 53 |
| 3.1 | A display panel at Oriel Y Parc Visitor Centre in St Davids/Tyddewi | 81 |
| 3.2 | I Chjostri: chestnut storage | 88 |
| 3.3 | Y Fargen/The Bargain by Aneurin Jones | 95 |
| 3.4 | An illustration of a rural Corsican figure on the chestnut trail | 96 |
| 3.5 | Corsican Shepherd today | 97 |
| 3.6 | Ghjuvan' Andria Culioli | 98 |
| 4.1 | The hotel billboard | 122 |
| 4.2 | The sign for the Aanaar restaurant in Inari, Finland | 124 |
| 4.3 | Cwtch Restaurant's St David's Day menu, 2012 | 130 |
| 4.4 | Packet of Halen Môn Salt | 136 |
| 4.5 | Creation/redesignation of two regions | 138 |
| 4.6 | The Route of the Authentic Senses | 141 |
| 4.7 | Roadside 'Gateway' Sign to 'Corsica Livantina' | 142 |
| 5.1 | The SuperSámi standing by a river, holding a volume of poetry by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää | 161 |
| 5.2 | Rhian Madamrygbi Davies: a promotional image | 170 |
| 5.3 | 'I'll be back' – The Terminator | 179 |
| 5.4 | Canistrelli Clandestini on a bin | 182 |
| 5.5 | Canistrelli Clandestini on a road sign | 183 |
| 5.6 | 'Yes We Can. . . istrelli!' | 184 |
| 5.7 | Traditional Corsican iconography | 185 |
| 5.8 | 'Oh Mother, Speak Corsican to me!' | 186 |
| 5.9 | 'Oh Mother, I don't want any more Pepitos!' | 187 |

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12388-5 - Sociolinguistics from the Periphery: Small Languages in New Circumstances
Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Alexandra Jaffe and Nikolas Coupland
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Tables

| | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| 3.1 | Conventional vs transactional authenticities | <i>page 75</i> |
| 4.1 | Designations of Corsican regions: touristic vs ‘local’ labelling | 137 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-12388-5 - Sociolinguistics from the Periphery: Small Languages in New Circumstances
Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Alexandra Jaffe and Nikolas Coupland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book has emerged out of our collaboration in *Peripheral Multilingualism: A Sociolinguistic Ethnography of Contestation and Innovation in Multilingual Minority Language Sites*, a four-year research project funded by the Academy of Finland in 2011. We are grateful to the Academy of Finland for providing us with this opportunity to pursue research. We started the project with the aim of examining contestation and innovation in multilingual minority language sites. Our initial premise, based on our own and others' previous research, was that language boundaries can show both fixity and fluidity and that the negotiability of such boundaries can be studied empirically as an emergent property of discourse and social interaction. We have brought this perspective to bear not only on the tensions that arise from complex and changing multilingual processes, practices and experiences in Sámi, Corsican, Irish and Welsh language contexts but also on the creative acts and activities that are an important part of dealing with these tensions in the four research sites.

We locate this project within a general conceptual framework that we call *peripheral multilingualism* because it attempts to highlight changing centre–periphery dynamics in what sociolinguists have referred to as minority language communities. In particular, we wanted to explore and develop a hypothesis that emerged in our previous work and was articulated in Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013), namely that examining small languages by adopting a peripherality perspective in relation to mainstream sociolinguistic theory highlights the dynamics and reciprocity of sociolinguistic change. In the same way that geographical, economic, political and cultural centres and peripheries are constantly being reconfigured, language and identity categories are also dynamic. Both 'peripheries' and 'centres' are mutually constitutive: that is, they are discursively constructed in opposition to one another. For this reason, centre–periphery discourses can illuminate both majority and minority experiences and the ideologies of language, territory and identity that accompany them. Moreover, movement between peripheries and centres is marked as experientially and culturally consequential for all social actors (whether they are 'locals' or different kinds of 'visitors' in these rather mobile environments) and is often the subject of explicit discourses in which issues of identity and

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Sari Pietikäinen, Helen Kelly-Holmes, Alexandra Jaffe and Nikolas Coupland

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x Preface

language are foregrounded. To this extent, peripheral spaces throw contemporary globalisation processes and changing economic conditions into relief.

As a research strategy, we have adopted the methodology of multi-sited ethnography, which allows us to identify and explore linguistic, social and ideological characteristics of peripheral multilingualism present across our four minority language contexts. In this way the project and this book have brought together our own trajectories and perspectives as researchers in these sites and have allowed us to both test and develop our ways of thinking, researching and writing about these processes. We have not taken a strictly comparative approach to field research in our four national contexts, but rather we have identified shared sites and domains of interests, examining them through four different theoretical lenses: reflexivity, authenticity, commodification and transgression. We believe that these four concepts ultimately feed into each other and, as a composite, allow us to capture important aspects of the dynamics of multilingual and small language practices that we have taken as data. This has enabled us to link, compare and contrast the processes through which language practices are enacted, attributed, contested and potentially changed across the particular sites. In an attempt to acknowledge the fluid and dynamic nature of the linguistic data that we encountered throughout the project, we have opted not to use italics or inverted commas, or any other conventional means for demarcating languages in this book.

The book is not just the product of our own joint collaboration; it has also emerged out of a series of discussions that we were fortunate to have in different moments of time and in different locations. First of all, we wish to thank sincerely those individuals who volunteered their time to talk to us in interviews and many less structured encounters and who allowed us to observe and participate in some of their activities, to represent their activities and perspectives in our writing, and to display examples of the texts and artefacts that they work with and, in some cases, produce. Neither the project nor this book would have been possible without their valuable collaboration and generous assistance. Nikolas Coupland would like to acknowledge the support of Eirlys Bellin, Eifion Griffiths and Aneurin Jones in particular in this regard.

A very important source of constant support and fruitful conversations has been the Peripheral Multilingualism research team members, Sarah Compton, Kati Dlaske, Emanuel da Silva, Anu Karjalainen, Reetta Karjalainen and Máiréad Moriarty, and our international collaborators Monica Heller, Leena Huss, Adam Jaworski, Mireille McLaughlin and Joan Pujolar. We warmly thank them all. We would also like to thank Sini Lemmetty, the research assistant for the project, for her patience and diligence in helping us to prepare this manuscript. We are very grateful to Angharad Hodgson and Charlotte Selleck, who energetically and resourcefully helped to collect data of various sorts in Wales, and to Petru Pasqualini for his work in Corsica.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xi

The ideas and insights of many colleagues and friends have also significantly contributed to this book and the thinking behind it, in particular those of David Atkinson, Alexandre Duchêne, Francis Hult, Outi Korpilähde, Patricia Lamarre and Anne Pitkänen-Huhta. We are also grateful for the research support of the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney, and for the guidance provided by Cambridge University Press, especially Andrew Winnard.