Peer-to-peer endangered language transmission among adults

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Abstract

Without proficient adult speakers there can be no intergenerational language transmission, either in schools or in the family. Developing fluency among adults is a vital element of effective language planning, if language revitalisation is to be more than symbolic. This chapter investigates how adults wishing to develop fluency in a highly endangered language, Guernesiais (Guernsey, Channel Islands), attempt to move from being learners or latent speakers to becoming new speakers. On the way they navigate challenges such as work and family commitments, gender stereotypes, societal and community ideologies. The analysis is based on interviews with nearly 40 participants, as well as participant and non-participant observation of initiatives that promote language transmission among adults: both formal lessons and less formal activities. The chapter challenges the common focus of language revitalisation on teaching children, and argues that adult to adult language transmission is both essential as a strategy, and a valid aim in its own right.

Keywords

Adult language learning; new speakers; Guernesiais; language acquisition; minority languages; endangered languages; language revitalisation

1. Introduction and Literature Review

Measures of language vitality usually focus on intergenerational transmission as their key descriptor. According to the most influential assessment scales (Fishman 1991; Moseley 2010; Lewis & Simons 2010), languages are described as endangered when the parental generation – especially young adults – does not use the language in the home or community. Thus, a common definition of an endangered language is that it is not being passed on to children in the home or community.

Given this disciplinary emphasis on intergenerational transmission, it is hardly surprising that the majority of language revitalisation programmes foreground the teaching of languages to children, usually via formal education. Immersion education is a frequently chosen model (Pine & Turin 2017), but it requires teachers who are proficient in both language and curriculum content. In a highly endangered language context, where the language is used only by the (great-)grandparent generation, such teachers may not be readily available. Fishman (1991; 2001) identifies the 'home-family-neighbourhood-community' nexus as crucial for language maintenance. For this too, proficient adults are essential: 'if there are no efforts undertaken to teach parents of child-bearing age the threatened language as an active [threatened language as a second language], then parents … will not be able to transmit that language as a mother tongue to their children' (Fishman 2001: 15). Baker et al. (2011) agree that 'Given that language planning … requires the acquisition of a threatened language by children, … adult language learning enables such acquisition'. Thus, without proficient adult speakers, there can be no intergenerational language transmission, either in schools or in the family. It follows that development of

proficient new speakers, together with language teaching skills, should be a priority for language planning in endangered language contexts. Regarding Scottish Gaelic, Smith-Christmas and Armstrong (2014: 312) argue that 'in order to best maximise Gaelic education as means to RLS [reversing language shift], the education of adult heritage learners needs to be seen as a complementary strategy to childhood education, not as a secondary (and often lower priority) tactic to ensuring the vitality of the language'.

However, this chapter argues that children are not necessarily the most effective target population sector for language revitalisation to succeed. Romaine (2006) points out that many language planners ignore Fishman's advice to focus on the home and community, and instead invest in the relatively resource-heavy strategy of teaching minority languages through schools to each cohort afresh. In several parts of the world, endangered languages such as Welsh, Breton, or Māori have been taught in language nests and immersion schools since the 1950s, but this has not secured the widespread re-establishment of intergenerational transmission in the family or community (Edwards and Newcombe 2005; Pacific Policy Research Centre 2010).

The substantial financial and human resources needed for immersion education are not available for revitalisation of Guernesiais, the local language of Guernsey, Channel Islands. As will be described in section 2, Guernesiais has very low vitality, i.e. few speakers below the age of 80. Delays in political recognition have meant that there are no schoolteachers trained to teach Guernesiais; in order for revitalisation to progress, it is therefore necessary to develop proficient adult speakers and teachers.

This chapter will examine the experiences of adult learners of Guernesiais, as they seek to move beyond beginner and elementary levels. It will also discuss and evaluate some initiatives that encourage peer-to-peer language transmission among adults: both individual efforts and organised activities. I will argue that for highly endangered languages at least, peer-to-peer adult transmission, as a crucial element of developing new speakers, may be a more realistic strategy for revitalisation than the traditional focus on intergenerational transmission through the schools or family.

Many so-called language revitalisation activities such as festivals or signage are effectively emblematic in nature, since they focus on language promotion rather than acquisition (e.g. Shandler 2006; Sallabank 2011). If such activities are to form part of integrated language planning for revitalisation, they need to be linked to effective language acquisition and status planning strategies. In order to produce, for example, signage in a local language, or learning materials, there needs to be a core of proficient speakers with enough skills to provide the required resource (e.g. literacy in the local language; translation skills; digital expertise; pedagogical knowledge). As argued in a blog post on Scottish Gaelic: 'Just seeing a language pictured [on road signs] does little to help us learn it; we need to actively use a language to accomplish this and, perhaps more importantly, continue to use it' (Mattschey 2020).

Learning and teaching a small, highly endangered language differ in many ways to a major national or international language. An endangered language has lower visibility and audibility than a major one. There are often few learning resources. Standard descriptors and goals designed for larger languages (e.g. in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2020) are not applicable when there is very little target language in the

media or linguistic landscape. Where most fluent speakers are aged 80 or over and their number is declining rapidly, there are few interlocutors for prospective new speakers, and the traditional speaker community is fragmenting. For many minority languages there is no full language description, standardised writing system, or reliable pedagogical/reference materials. As will be seen in section 2.2, Guernesiais learners would particularly welcome more opportunities to hear and speak in a non-formal environment. This echoes the findings of Mitchell (2020) regarding adult learners of Inuktitut as a second language: whether in a classroom setting or not, the most effective learning activity was practice in speaking Inuktitut, especially with Elders and advanced learners as interlocutors: the latter were seen as effective mentors and a source of inspiration. Keegan (2020) examined the effect of the Covid-19 lockdown on Māori language learning; a key finding was the realisation that one-to-one interaction was a fundamental need for learners – the provision of online content was not sufficient. Prospective new speakers of Guernesiais find it difficult to progress beyond beginner level because of the lack of opportunities and resources, including a shortage of teachers and of lessons beyond low-intermediate level. But the key hindrance to developing fluency identified by participants in the research reported in this chapter was a lack of opportunities to practise outside formal classes. As noted in a blog post on learning minority languages, 'if you're learning a minority language your main problem may not be the grammar and vocab but finding some native speakers to practise with' (Popkins 2020).

Nguyen and Hamid (2020) link individuals' minority language use to language policy outcomes using Grin's (2003) framework, which outlines three key conditions for language use:

1) *capacity* – people's competence and ability to use the language
2) *opportunity* – their chances for language use in a favourable environment
3) *desire* – their willingness or motivation to use the language.

Nguyen and Hamid go on to stress that

> Grin argues that policies aiming to maintain regional or minority languages need to consider enhancing people's linguistic capacity, facilitating their language use opportunities and motivating their desire to use these languages for language maintenance and revitalisation to occur (Nguyen and Hamid 2020: 4).

In this framework, peer interaction in a minority language is key for language maintenance, and therefore capacity and opportunity to do so should be promoted through language policies. These conclusions are supported by a review of adult learning of Welsh; moreover, 'Language acquisition planning depends on such learners moving to fluency in the language, and thereby to daily language use' (Baker et al. 2011:41).

As many endangered languages are under-described and not taught in mainstream education, there is rarely an official measure of language proficiency. As noted above, 'can-do' descriptors such as those used in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages are not applicable when many of the 'can-do' activities are unavailable in the target language. This chapter uses a provisional descriptor to assess conversational fluency in a lesser-used language: 'able to hold a *sustained*, *impromptu* conversation on a *range of topics*'. These criteria enable a researcher to

distinguish proficient speakers from people who can understand but not reply at length, or whose language is largely formulaic, or who use a restricted range of structures and vocabulary, or who use the language mainly in rehearsed situations such as recitals – or even classrooms.

1.1 New speakers and the *muda*

In a highly endangered language context, the heritage language is no longer the main language of the wider community: it is *post-*vernacular (Shandler 2006). Most fluent speakers are from the great-grandparent generation; fewer and fewer native speakers are active outside their homes, and their numbers are reducing due to age and attrition. In such contexts, language survival depends on the emergence of a new speaker community, which learners need to build for themselves through proactive effort and peer interaction. In doing so they may invest time, energy and part of their identity into the target heritage/minority language (Norton 2013; Ayres-Bennett and Fisher 2021). The research discussed in this chapter benefited from participation in a network of researchers focusing on the dynamics involved in becoming a *new speaker* of a language in the context of a multilingual Europe.[1] Researchers active in this network developed not only the concept of new speaker, but also that of *muda*: 'a critical juncture in the life cycle where a speaker changes linguistic practice in favour of the target language' (Walsh and O'Rourke 2014: 68). Walsh and O'Rourke identify a number of stages at which learners may develop a *muda*, based on experience in minoritized languages such as Catalan, Galician or Irish, where there are several opportunities

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[1] Funded by European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action IS1306 on New Speakers.

for linguistic *mudes* throughout the lifespan (Walsh and O'Rourke 2014; Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015; Puigdevall et al. 2018). But in the case study in this chapter, Guernesiais is less widely spoken and has even less institutional support than these 'medium-sized' minority languages. Given the small size of both the speaker and general populations in Guernsey, it can be difficult for prospective new speakers to make a conscious change to their language practices to use Guernesiais as their main language of communication. There are nevertheless examples of individuals and small groups who have decided consciously to use Guernesiais to converse with other speakers/learners, both informally and at organised activities. As noted by Pujolar and Puigdevall (2015: 167), the study of linguistic *mudes* provides 'a new and productive perspective on how people develop their linguistic repertoire, their attachment to specific languages and the significance of these aspects for social identity'. This chapter interprets *muda* not only in terms of language proficiency, but extends the concept to encompass a mind-set indicating identification with, and attachment to, the heritage language, and a commitment to take active measures to develop fluency.

1.2 Adult learning of a minority language

Many adult language learners are hampered by the belief that adults cannot learn languages well. Research into age factors in second language acquisition generally recognises the existence of a 'critical period', although this has recently been found to last considerably longer than previously thought: 'grammar-learning ability … is preserved almost to the crux of adulthood (17.4 years old)' (Hartshorne et al. 2018: 263), while learners who start after

the age of 20 can attain 'native-like' levels.[2] There is no age limit on vocabulary learning, and adults bring increased life experience and analytical skills, as well as self-motivation, to the task of language learning (Singleton and Ryan 2003). As recognised by Andrew (2012), age is a social construct, and learners' beliefs and expectations play an important role in how they construct their identities as language learners.

In Guernsey, as with many other minority-language contexts, many learners have learnt other languages previously: often French at school, sometimes Spanish, and occasionally German during the Second World War when Guernsey was occupied. Guernesiais is therefore often their third or more language, so they bring experience and memories (positive and negative) of prior language learning (Cenoz 2019).

Very few studies deal specifically with adult learning of minoritised and endangered languages. Belmar et al (2019) investigate the motivations of learners of West Frisian in the Netherlands. Flynn (2020) discusses affective factors (attitude, motivation, and identity) that shape the learning of Irish, which include the social and psychological distance between Irish language learners/new speakers and 'traditional' or 'native' Irish speakers, an issue that also affects learners of Guernesiais (see 2.2). Flynn makes the valuable points that language attainment goals should be based on learners' own aspirations rather than on native-speaker models or on what researchers or pedagogues have deemed the ultimate goal of language learning. However, these studies do not investigate learners' strategies to accomplish their goals. Basham and Fathman (2008) asked the question 'What factors contribute to successful

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[2] However, this study focuses on knowledge of syntax rather than fluency.

language learning by latent speakers?' (see 1.3), but they too focused on motivation; from their two case studies it is impossible to tell whether formal or informal learning was more effective in developing fluency. Cordella and Huang (2016) recommend interaction between older speakers and younger learners of migrant minority languages, akin to Hinton et al's (2002; 2018) Master–Apprentice method for endangered languages (see 2.2).

1.3 Latent speakers and language reactivation

Many gradations of speaker proficiency and characteristics have been identified in endangered languages research (Grinevald and Bert 2011; Flores Farfán and Olko 2020). Those who call themselves native speakers of an endangered language are not necessarily fully fluent. Under the definitions provided by Grinevald and Bert (2011) and Dorian (1977), many 'native speakers' of Guernesiais could be categorised as 'semi-speakers', who 'have not had and do not have regular conversation partners in the endangered language, and operate most of their socio-linguistic lives in the dominant language rather than the endangered language' (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 50). As an 'engaged researcher' (Grinevald, personal communication, 2009) I avoid using the term 'semi-speaker', which can be perceived as insulting and which has overtones of the discredited notion of 'semilingualism' (Edelsky et al. 1983). Basham and Fathman (2008: 578) use the term 'latent speaker' to denote 'an adult raised in an environment where a heritage language is spoken who did not become a fluent speaker of that language'. This describes a cohort who developed receptive competence: they can understand the language and make appropriate responses (often non-verbal) in some contexts, but they did not develop productive proficiency. This is a very common phenomenon in language shift contexts, in some cases covering an entire generation. In Guernsey

latent speakers are typically aged approximately 55–75 at the time of writing.

Basham and Fathman (2008) stress the potential of latent speakers to re-learn their heritage language. Grinevald and Bert use the term 'rememberer' for people with a lower level of language knowledge: those who heard the language when young but did not acquire receptive competence. Nevertheless, the term 'rememberer' 'evokes the possibility that such speakers may regain or reacquire some partial active use of the language' (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 51). As will be seen in 2.3, some Guernesiais language supporters from this cohort have re-appropriated the term 'rememberer' and are making efforts to re-activate their language knowledge as part of their identity construction: in effect, a *muda*. In language acquisition or psycholinguistic research terms (e.g. Scovel, 1998), this involves converting ability to understand a language, or 'competence' (sometimes called passive knowledge) into active 'performance' (overt production) and requires careful encouragement and support as well as commitment and opportunity.

Language attrition and latency are not confined to native speakers (i.e. those who were brought up in a home where the language in question was (one of) the language(s) of socialization). Dunmore (2019) points out that it is not uncommon among alumni of immersion education. As immersion pupils do not generally make the decision themselves to be educated through a minority language (Costa 2014), they need both opportunities to use the language, and motivation or commitment, to continue speaking it into adulthood – one of the categories of *muda* described by Walsh and O'Rourke (2014).

2 Becoming a new speaker of Guernesiais

2.1 The research context

Guernsey is the second largest of the Channel Islands, an archipelago close to the coast of Normandy, France, but with political ties with the UK.[3] The traditional heritage vernacular language is Guernesiais, a variety of Norman which has been spoken there for over a thousand years. Gradual shift to English has been under way since the eighteenth century, but has accelerated since the end of the Second World War. According to recent research by local language teacher and researcher Yan Marquis (Guernsey Museums and Galleries 2020), there are now fewer than 100 fluent speakers of Guernesiais; most are aged 80 or over. The author estimates that there are fewer than ten people under the age of 65 who fulfil the definition of fluency in section 1 above. The UNESCO Atlas of Endangered Languages (Moseley 2010) categorised the languages of the Channel Islands as 'severely endangered', i.e. intergenerational transmission has ceased. However, according to current estimates a more accurate UNESCO classification for Guernesiais would be 'critically endangered': 'the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently' (Moseley 2010).

At the time of writing there is no training for teachers specifically to teach Guernesiais; as noted, there are very few proficient adults of working age. Guernesiais is not part of the mainstream school curriculum, although there are extra-curricular language clubs in

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[3] The islands are Crown Dependencies: they are semi-autonomous with their own parliaments and are not part of the United Kingdom, but have the British monarch as Head of State. They control their own internal policies but are dependent on the UK for defence.

some primary schools, run mainly by retired native or latent speakers. There are evening or lunchtime language classes for adults, with capacity for 30-40 learners at any one time. The lessons are mainly aimed at beginners, and there are none above lower-intermediate level.

On 20th August 2020 the Guernsey parliament (States) voted to support Guernesiais through a Language Commission with a small budget, and to recognise Guernesiais as an official language alongside English and French. The Commission's remit is broad and policy details remain to be seen. Previous language revitalisation and support activities have remained largely at the symbolic level (Sallabank 2011), e.g. language festivals and some public signage. A Guernesiais translation service is sponsored by a local jewellery firm; its popularity indicates widespread interest in Guernesiais as an identity marker.

2.2 Learners' experiences and needs

This chapter reports on interviews carried out in 2020[4] with nine 'new speakers' of Guernesiais, both second language (L2) learners and latent (re-activating) speakers, aged 25-80, and participant observation of language activities over the previous ten years. It also builds and draws on earlier research (other aspects of which were reported in Sallabank and Marquis 2018) to investigate the motivations, goals and needs of adult learners of Guernesiais,[5] which included interviews with 30 current and former learners. It also draws on Sallabank's PhD research (Sallabank 2007).

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[4] Because of Covid-19 the interviews were conducted via video link or telephone.

It is relevant to note the demographics of the participants. An effort was made to seek out younger adults and women, as initially the sample was dominated by middle-aged men (40-60 years). Men outnumbered women in language classes by approximately two to one, and middle-aged male learners demonstrated longer-term commitment than women or younger learners, and were attaining higher levels, while more women than men had given up learning Guernesiais. This may reflect gender issues such as caregiving commitments, but may also be related to views on legitimacy (Sallabank and Marquis 2018). During my PhD research some older people, especially men, expressed surprise that I, as a younger woman, would want to speak a low-status language variety such as Guernesiais. It is a common finding in sociolinguistic studies for women to aspire to higher-status ways of speaking (e.g. Gal 1978; Lindgren 1984; Williamson 1991). Gender issues can also impede language practice: women are more constrained by domestic responsibilities, and female language learners can feel uncomfortable meeting male classmates in informal settings.

Key themes which emerged from the interviews with L2 learners centred on ways to achieve more fluency, resources needed, language and identity, and issues of authenticity and legitimacy in language. The theme of language and identity is the subject of a separate paper (Sallabank and King 2021), while authenticity and legitimacy have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Sallabank 2017; Sallabank and Marquis 2018), so these will only be touched on here where relevant. Approximately a third of the learners attending lessons were not of local origin, but still expressed a desire to (re)connect with Guernsey culture. Beliefs about the supposed inherent difficulty of adult language learning (see 1.2) were compounded by an ideological view that Guernesiais is 'too hard'

for L2 learners; this is reinforced by, and in turn influences, lack of effectiveness in learning and teaching Guernesiais.

Adult learners of working and parental age have busy lives, and many find it difficult to fit in language learning, especially in the daytime:
- It's difficult to concentrate after 11 hours at work – I hit a brick wall, I'm frazzled.
- It's important to speak with people at the same stage, but I can't meet every day.

Both less proficient L2 learners and some Rememberers (see 2.3) report finding it tiring to speak Guernesiais for more than 45–60 minutes, as they need to concentrate to speak Guernesiais, especially at the end of a day.

Many prospective new speakers expressed a desire to experience more Guernesiais, especially as used by native speakers:

- I would love to just sit and listen and be completely immersed
- I'd like to be able to have a conversation and understand what comes back … get past hello and the weather
- I've done the beginners' class a couple of times but there's no opportunity to use it, I never get beyond beginner stage.

Learners would like to become fluent enough to join a speaker community for social interaction:

- to be able to have a conversation and understand replies
- to talk about everyday things
- to converse on all types of subjects

- to exchange pleasantries
- to be able to generate language spontaneously
- to get to the stage where lots of people have a grounding [i.e. a critical mass of proficient speakers for social interaction to be facilitated].

One interviewee commented that lessons provided a good foundation and provided inspiration to continue learning independently. However, due to language endangerment, natural opportunities for immersion are decreasing, and the perception of the vitality of Guernesiais is higher than it is in reality. Several learners mentioned that they wanted 'to be able to talk to old guys on the shore / leaning on the sea wall'; but these older men, who epitomise a stereotype of Guernesiais speakers, are no longer there (as noted at the beginning of this section, few native speakers are now socially active). Several learners expressed a desire for more opportunities to practise ('We need a support structure with mentors or a network of support'), but it has to be said that few had actually taken steps to find interlocutors themselves. A frequent complaint of L2 learners is that they do not know any native speakers and are unable to find fluent interlocutors. Paradoxically, loneliness and boredom are increasingly common among elderly speakers as their family and friends are passing away. One learner had put their name down for an initiative to find language buddies with native speakers, 'but nothing came of it'.

Organised activities to promote interaction in Guernesiais are available. They are usually held in informal locations such as pubs or community centres, and attempt to bring together newer and

older speakers. One of the most popular is 'Speed Patois'[6], informal sessions held every couple of months, based on a 'speed dating' format of short interactions, which are well attended by speakers and learners of all ages and abilities (Guernsey Language Commission 2016). Due to this format conversations rarely extend beyond basic phrases, although at one session in which I participated, where more sustained conversations developed, it was noticeable that after half an hour or so, less fluent latent speakers gained appreciably in confidence. Meanwhile, some more fluent speakers find these sessions frustrating, so the organisers added a supplementary initiative, 'Pure Patois', to provide an opportunity to socialise in Guernesiais for people who consider themselves fluent. This too is popular, but in practice few L2 learners attend the Pure Patois sessions due to (self-)perceived lack of proficiency; one interviewee also complained that they are not frequent enough to support sustained learning. The organiser commented that venues have to be chosen with care: good acoustics are necessary for older speakers who may have hearing issues. A female interviewee noted that the majority of people attending were male (especially at first), and wondered why.

The Guernsey Song Project in 2014 was an initiative which brought together singer-songwriters and speakers of Guernesiais. A database of speakers who volunteered to be contacted was set up to enable song writers to meet up with speakers to help write and translate songs. This network was called 'Ley Bouti', 'the buddies', and a secondary aim was to encourage mentoring partnerships

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[6] The term 'patois' is controversial and some language supporters dislike it, since it is French for 'dialect', with negative connotations. However, many Guernsey people do not see *patois* as derogatory or know its connotations in French; for many it is simply how the language is referred to.

along the lines of 'Master–Apprentice' schemes in other endangered language communities (epitomised by Hinton, Vera and Steele 2002). According to the Guernsey Song Project guidelines:

> These 'buddy systems' have worked well in other minority languages and we would be delighted if these friendships through Ley Bouti were extended through the project and beyond. (p. 3)

While the project was successful in raising awareness and in creating new language content in non-traditional musical genres, ultimately no mentoring partnerships were sustained long-term. Nevertheless, there have been examples of productive private, informal mentoring relationships, which have been particularly effective in improving new speakers' proficiency and fluency. One interviewee mentioned that 'it's handy to have a boyfriend who speaks Guernesiais', noting that there is a generational gap in both age and attitudes between learners and native speakers. Peer interaction, especially on a day-to-day basis, is recognised as ideal for developing language skills; additionally, 'pillow talk' or intimate language is not only motivating but essential if family language use is to be re-established.

Almost all the learners expressed a desire for more practice, but many found that more fluent speakers were unable, or unwilling, to adapt or slow down their speech for comprehensible input (Krashen 1987).

– No-one knows how to talk at a level a learner can manage. Normal conversation goes way over my head.

- Nobody [at Speed Patois] said 'you're a learner, can I help you?'
- They're pleased to see us there, but they don't have the skills to 'dumb down' the conversation.

In return for participation in this research, I have found myself providing conversation practice for learners in this situation.

A Rememberer pointed out that a mentor or buddy does not have to be completely fluent to help or teach; latent speakers can help each other with words that others have forgotten.

Several learners and Rememberers expressed a lack of confidence in using Guernesiais, especially with more fluent speakers.

- I need more conversation sessions with native speakers, but helpful ones
- I find people too quick to correct – as learners we're only at toddler stage
- I don't like speaking in front of people who are really good for fear of making mistakes.

Older speakers are frequently critical of learners' output: they find it difficult to encourage fluency rather than accuracy. Some former learners reported having given up because of such discouragement and criticism (see also Sallabank and Marquis 2018). One new speaker who does interact with several older speakers noted that speakers do not all agree on usage, and that it is necessary to learn to accommodate to the preferences of different interlocutors.

Learners would therefore prefer opportunities for peer interaction/buddying, more frequent than 'Speed Patois' and 'Pure Patois' mentioned above, where learners can converse 'without worrying about making mistakes' 'because we're all in the same situation':

- – I almost need a conversation partner for coffee to practise what we've done in class.

Unfortunately, the small number of learners, especially those who have reached a level where they can construct sentences and express ideas, means that it has not been possible to organise such groups yet. Small group or one-to-one conversations are preferred by some learners, as group dynamics mean that 'stronger characters' can dominate the conversation.

Some learners have boosted their confidence, and absorbed more advanced language, by learning passages for recitation at festivals (and in some cases, getting involved in the organisation, which adds legitimacy to their participation). One commented that learners can be creative with language, even if they are not so good at it. Taking part in such events can also be enjoyable, as the atmosphere is supportive.

Current teaching methods favour a communicative approach, but some more analytical learners find explanations of patterns in language helpful. As found by Mitchell (2020), more advanced learners and Rememberers would welcome reference materials which explain grammar points (verb tables were mentioned most frequently). There are very few pedagogically oriented materials available for Guernesiais, and no language course with built-in progression. Most materials available give no help with

pronunciation, which learners find one of the most difficult aspects. One new speaker reported that in the absence of learner-oriented materials, language documentary resources such as those deposited by the author and Yan Marquis in the Endangered Languages Archive (Marquis and Sallabank, no date) had been beneficial: listening practice was more useful than books or dictionaries that have no pronunciation guidance. Several interviewees expressed the desire for a multimedia language app to remedy these gaps, but the expertise and resources to build one are lacking.[7]

2.3 Rememberers

The concept of latent speakers was described in section 1.2 above. It is common in language shift contexts for a generational cohort to develop receptive competence but not productive proficiency in a heritage language. In Guernsey latent speakers are typically aged approximately 55–75 at the time of writing. As mentioned in 1.2, some call themselves 'The Rememberers'.

Some of the interviewees in this research were raised in families where adults spoke Guernesiais among themselves but not to the children. Predominant language ideologies, along with their own unhappy experiences at school, led parents to encourage children to speak English at the time, even if they regret this decision later in life:

> – My parents' generation were ashamed of Guernsey French. My parents' first language is Guernesiais. They

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[7] There is also frequently a gap between perceptions of what is desired from an app and what apps can actually provide; Keegan (2020) comments that many Māori language apps are poorly designed.

wanted the children to speak English when they were young, but now they will only speak Guernesiais.

Other participants reported that they spoke Guernesiais at home until starting school, at which point the schools' monolingual ideology made them switch to English. Some reported getting out of practice after marriage, if spouses did not speak Guernesiais (so children were not brought up bilingually); widowhood had prompted some to reconnect with other Guernesiais speakers. Some interviewees had moved to the UK for education or work, and recovering/reclaiming Guernesiais language was part of their general reconnection with the island and their local roots:

> – I've got back into the group of people I knew before I went away … and then I got drawn into the group *La Gaine du Vouest* … It's a lot of fun – when we've been practising a play and as a group of people we jell very well together and it's very – we have a lot of laughs you know, it's really good fun.

Another interviewee said they had not spoken Guernesiais for 50 years, but were now making considerable efforts to find conversation partners; after a couple of years they were able to converse easily, and even run basic lessons. Their *muda* has reached the stage where most social interaction is in Guernesiais (although formal interactions are unavoidably in English, given its societally dominant position).

Another interviewee, who had become a leader in some revitalisation activities, recognised their own role in halting intergenerational transmission:

> – As a teenager I rejected the microcosmic culture that my parents represented – the baby went out with the bathwater … my rebellion included despising Guernsey French – 'it's so Guernsey'.

Rememberers are usually keen to establish their own authenticity and legitimacy as speakers, stressing that their family had a history of speaking Guernesiais, and that it was spoken in the neighbourhood. At the same time, many express a lack of confidence, stating that they forget words or are not as fluent as 'true' native speakers. It is indeed possible to identify differences in usage between speakers in their 80s and those in their 70s or below (see Sallabank and Marquis 2018), but Rememberers have access to cultural knowledge, traditions and idioms that L2 learners have to be taught or discover, and have a more 'authentic' accent. Some Rememberers attend Guernesiais lessons, but the teacher found that it was difficult to teach them in the same class as L2 learners, as Rememberers had a tendency to recall linguistic features unexpectedly, to remember or reactivate receptive knowledge rather than to learn new language, and sometimes to show off in front of other learners (stressing legitimacy through inherited linguistic competence). A separate class was therefore started.

In a concurrent initiative, an informal group calling itself 'The Rememberers' meets on a weekly basis to chat in Guernesiais, with the overt goal of re-activating receptive or latent competence into active use. The sessions are held in informal locations and involve mainly conversation, with some discussion of language points, especially vocabulary and traditional (remembered) usage.

An unexpected finding in this research was that many of the Rememberers and older speakers interviewed seemed to be

unaware of the existence of L2 learners of Guernesiais. One had thought they were the youngest speaker until they met a younger language supporter (also a latent speaker/re-activator).[8] Several Rememberers expressed surprise that people who did not grow up with Guernesiais in their background would want to learn it. For Rememberers, links to family and community are key motivators, so they don't understand the motivations of people without these links:

> – I can't imagine anyone who would want to learn Guernesiais; it's only for people who live in Guernsey, or who are interested in the local dialect.

On the other hand, some expressed optimism at increased interest among younger people:

> – We're like dinosaurs but Guernsey's language won't die since younger people are interested.

'The Rememberers' sessions are generally held on weekday afternoons, which it has been pointed out can preclude people of working age (including some Rememberers). This may go some way towards explaining the disconnect between Rememberers and younger new speakers aspiring to a *muda*.

Several Rememberers expressed strong feelings of personal empowerment and identification through recovering their heritage language. Some felt that a part of themselves was missing if they did not have access to Guernesiais:

> – Without the language I wouldn't be complete.

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[8] 'Younger' is relative – the younger one is now aged 60.

> – When I speak to my brother in Guernesiais I feel a contact … it's a different feeling to when we speak in English. I never felt this way all my life before speaking in Guernesiais … There's a lightness when we talk that isn't there in English – it's *mognifique* [wonderful] – it's worth all the work to read and study.

Discussion

As well as resource-related obstacles and a lack of capacity and opportunity to use their target language, minority language learners also encounter ideological issues such as ongoing negative attitudes towards the indigenous language (both among majority-language speakers, and internalised by the minority-language speaker community). In this research, older speakers frequently expressed surprise that younger people would be interested in learning their language. There is also a pervasive ideology of legitimacy and authenticity in the speech community (not only among native speakers), which holds that new speakers are not necessarily a 'good thing': they can never attain native-like proficiency, and will change the language for the worse (Hinton and Ahlers 1999; Hornsby 2005; Sallabank 2017; Sallabank and Marquis 2018). Participants in this study are aware of societal attitudes towards their language, and wish to challenge discourses of deficit and strengthen heritage culture. Given the scale of challenges they encounter, it is difficult for learners to achieve high levels of proficiency; some show remarkable tenacity and resilience (which successful learning can reinforce).

The disconnect between latent/reactivated and L2 new speakers is all the more poignant since there is overlap in age-range between the majority of L2 learners (40-60) and Rememberers (55-80).

There is also overlap in their proficiency in Guernesiais: especially at the start of their reactivation journey, latent speakers may well be at a lower level than more advanced L2 learners (though their gaps in knowledge are different). When asked about their motivation, Rememberers stressed that enjoyment is central, combined with socialisation with peers. Some learners also mentioned that they enjoyed meeting 'friendly and endearing' people, and becoming 'part of a unique club'. Both types of new speaker aspire to a *muda* in Guernesiais. Given these commonalities, it is worth asking what keeps the groups apart, what is meant by 'peer', and despite the difficulties encountered in formal classes, to encourage interaction between the two groups. As with Master–Apprentice initiatives, a degree of organised training might be necessary to show more fluent speakers how to support learners. As noted by Nguyen and Hamid (2020), capacity and opportunity to facilitate peer interaction – and the resources needed to support it – need to be prioritised by language policy bodies such as the newly reconstituted Guernsey Language Commission.

In Guernsey, despite the vote to support Guernesiais in August 2020, language revitalisation is very low down the political agenda. As well as combating attrition, in such a context adult learners, Rememberers and new speakers have to create their own opportunities for a new speaker community and a *muda*; and it is mainly middle-aged and retired people who have the time and resources to do so. The age range of the majority of participants in this research illustrates that even people who learn a heritage language when young (either at school or in the home) may have to wait until middle age to have the time and leisure to devote to language, culture, personal growth and lifelong learning. A radical solution might be to 'cut out the middleman' of schools, and

promote direct peer to peer acquisition among adults as a more reliable route to language maintenance. Armstrong (2020) and Costa (2016) view language revitalisation as a social movement; it is adults who are at the forefront of this movement, which is experienced in terms of both social and individual identity (Ayres-Bennett and Fisher 2021). Researchers such as Skrodska et al. (2020) and Whalen et al. (2016) are finding correlations between endangered/heritage language maintenance, mental health and wellbeing, and King (2009; 2014) has found that learners of a minority language expect the language to revitalise them as much as they are revitalising the language. Armstrong (2020) asserts that it takes active effort to create new speaker communities, so adults driving language revitalisation are not just hobbyists but network-activists. The motivation of 'enjoyment' can thus be seen not just as learning a 'hobby language', but as a keystone of building a new speaker community, and as contributing to personal and community revitalisation and empowerment.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that for the maintenance of highly endangered languages such as Guernesiais, peer-to-peer adult transmission is a crucial element of developing proficient new speakers. Furthermore, it may be a more effective strategy than the traditional focus on intergenerational transmission through schools or family as essential for language vitality. Not only is adult-to-adult peer language transmission vital as a strategy, it is a valid aim in its own right.

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