Resistance from below – new speakers as an ’active minority’

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In this article we use Moscovici’s (1976) notion of active minorities as a framework to explain the linguistic practices and motivations behind linguistic change amongst new speakers of Galician. Revitalization policies since the 1980s brought about changes in the symbolic and economic value of Galician on the linguistic market. However, this has not been significant enough to change the rules of social mobility and Spanish has continued to be the language of prestige. Despite this, neofalantes (new speakers of Galician) have opted for linguistic change and engage in the process of majority language displacement (O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013). We argue that this displacement can at least in part be explained by a move away from functionalist models of language contact and shift and towards an understanding of these processes from a language conflict perspective. This allows us to explain the practices of neofalantes not simply as deviations from the sociolinguistic ”status quo” but as reactions to it and as proponents of social change. In this paper we examine new speakers motivations for linguistic change through an analysis of some twenty in-depth interviews with Galician neofalantes.

Keywords: active minorities, language policy, Galician.