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New speakers of Minderico: Dynamics and tensions in the revitalization process

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From the sixteenth century on, the blankets of Minde, a small village in the center of Portugal, became famous all over the country. The wool combers, blanket producers, and traders of Minde began to use Minderico in order to protect their business from "intruders". Later, this secret language extended to all social and professional groups and became the main means of communication in the village. During this process, Minderico turned into a full-fledged language with a very characteristic intonation and a complex morphosyntax, differentiating itself from Portuguese. However, the number of speakers declined drastically during the last 50 years. Minderico is now actively spoken by 150 speakers, but only 23 of them are fluent speakers. More than half of the fluent speakers are new speakers of the language. New speakerness is a relatively new phenomenon in the Minderico speaking community and a direct result of the revitalization process which was initiated in 2009. This paper examines the role of the new speakers in the revitalization of Minderico, considering issues of authenticity and socio-linguistic legitimacy.

1. Introduction. With the increase in popularity of the blankets of Minde since the sixteenth century, the wool combers, blanket producers, and merchants of village began to use Minderico in order to protect their business from "intruders". Later, this "secret variety" extended to all social and professional groups in Minde and became the main means of communication in the village. During this process, Minderico turned into a full-fledged language with a characteristic intonation and a complex morphosyntax. Today Minderico risks becoming extinct, more than ever before in its history. Due to economic, social, and educational reasons, the number of speakers declined drastically during the last 50 years. This situation led to a revitalization process, which started in 2009 inspired by a DoBeS project to document Minderico, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

The phenomenon of new speakers as described by O'Rourke & Ramallo (2011), O'Rourke & Pujolar (2015), O'Rourke et al. (2015), Jaffe (2015) or Hornsby (2015b) and, in the case of Minderico and many other minority language communities, a direct result of the revitalization process, is thus relatively new for the Minderico speech community. Six years of continuous revitalization activities are not enough to draw clear conclusions. However, there are some tendencies that can already be observed, for instance a discrete increase in the number of active speakers (among them several new speakers) and the emergence of a (de-)legitimization discourse, which opposes on the one hand, different generations of

speakers and, on the other, "traditional speakers" (Grinevald & Bert 2011: 49) and "new speakers" (O'Rourke et al. 2015: 1).

After a description of the history and development of Minderico, focusing on the linguistic peculiarities that detach it from Portuguese, on the second part of the paper I will present a characterization of Minderico new speakers and discuss the tensions that are emerging within the speech community as a result of this new linguistic constellation.

2. MINDERICO: FROM SECRET LANGUAGE TO EVERYDAY LANGUAGE TO ENDANGERED LANGUAGE. Minderico (ISO code /drc/), locally known as *piação* and *piação dos charales do Ninhou*, is an Ibero-Romance language spoken mainly in Minde (Portugal) by a community of 150 active speakers (a group composed by "fluent speakers", "semi-speakers" and "neo-speakers" following the terminology by Grinevald & Bert (2011: 50)) and approximately 1,000 passive speakers (those who understand the language but do not speak it – "terminal speakers", "rememberers" and "ghost speakers" in Grinevald & Bert (2011: 50–51) terms).

2.1. GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXTUALIZATION. Minde, the village of Minderico, is a small town in the center of Portugal which belongs to the municipality of Alcanena, district of Santarém, and lies 115 Km north from Lisbon and 240 Km south from Oporto. But Minderico was originally not only confined to Minde. Due to private, economic, and professional relations, Minderico extended also to two adjacent villages: Serra de Santo António where the language is already extinct and Mira de Aire where there are still four speakers with almost only passive knowledge of the language. Both villages worked on the same economic branch as Minde – textile production and commercialization. Moreover, Mira de Aire belonged administratively to Minde until 1709 and Serra de Santo António until 1918 (Martins 2010: 37). The three villages where also connected administratively, contributing to the dissemination of the language.

In Serra de Santo António and Mira de Aire, Minderico developed particular lexical and phonetic features. Following the strategies of vocabulary development in Minderico (cf. Section 2.2), some lexemes were adapted to the social reality of these two villages. For instance, in Minde *francisco vaz* is the most frequent lexeme for "priest" which derived from the name of one of the most important priests in the village in the eighteenth century. In Mira de Aire, the word *raso* (a Portuguese-based word meaning "full") is used instead, because the priest in Mira de Aire was known in the community for being almost always drunk, i.e. "full with alcohol". On a phonetic level, the closeness of vowels and monophthongization are some of the features that characterize the Minderico variety of Mira de Aire (Minde *terraizinha* vs. Mira de Aire *tirrazinha* "girl, little girl"). However, it was in Minde where Minderico developed most and maintained the status of language of everyday communication until today, although with less prominence and much fewer speakers.

Minde was (and still is) a monoindustrial village of textile and wool artifacts (Martins & Nogueira 2001: 147–159, Martins 2010: 86–90). Due to its strong and prosperous textile industry, Minde had more than 7,000 inhabitants until the end of the 1970s. According to the census undertaken in 2011, the population decreased considerably, to 3,293. One of the main reasons for the accentuated decrease was the crisis in the textile industry: Several people had to leave the village in order to look for job opportunities in the Portuguese urban centers (Lisbon and Oporto) but also abroad (mainly United States, Canada, France, Germany, and Switzerland). As expected, this socio-economic development had also a clear impact on the vitality of the language and its use, as we will see in Section 2.3.

It must be emphasized that the development and maintenance of Minderico in Minde is also intrinsically related to and can be explained by the geographic position and the geological features of the village. Minde lies in a close depression between the plateau of Santo António and the plateau of São Mamede. On the west side, the village is surrounded by a *polje* (a large flat plain in karst territory that inundates during rainy winters and spring seasons). Therefore, the access to Minde was till recently very difficult (Martins & Nogueira 2002: 213–214). The geographical isolation not only contributed to the evolution and preservation of Minderico but also reinforced its development as an independent language with its own system and particularities, unintelligible to Portuguese speakers (cf. Section 2.2).

The coat of arms of Minde (Figure 1) reflects the intrinsic relation between the geological features, the economic activity, and the language – three elements that strongly formed the identity of what can be called the Minderico community. The green nest on the top of the coat of arms metaphorically represents the geological depression in which Minde lies and, simultaneously, the autochthone name of the village - *Ninhou* ("big nest"), an augmentative derivation of the Portuguese word *ninho* "nest". The needles with wool in the middle show the importance of the textile industry and the blue waves at the bottom are again related to the geological specificities of the village, representing the *polje*.

FIGURE 1: Coat of arms of Minde (photo by Vera Ferreira)

2.2. FROM SECRET LANGUAGE TO EVERYDAY LANGUAGE. In order to protect their business from intruders in the markets they visited all over Portugal, the wool combers, blanket producers, and merchants of Minde created a special language, based mainly on Portuguese. It allowed them to negotiate the prices for the blankets among each other in front of strangers and/or customers in an unintelligible way.
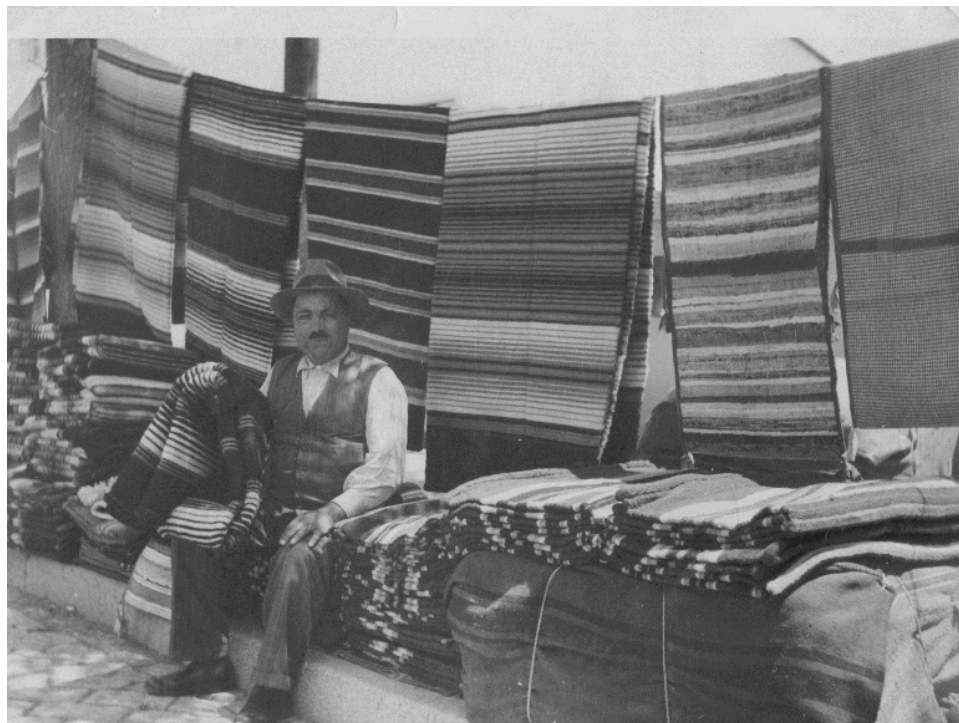

FIGURE 2: A Minderico man selling the traditional blankets in a Portuguese market at the beginning of the 20th century (Comissão de Festas do Divino Espírito Santo 2000: 48)

The first written documents (mainly personal letters, wills, and church registrations) appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, some of them reporting on histories in the past. Thus, according to the sources available, one can assume that Minderico emerged at the end of the seventeenth century as a sociolect, a secret language of a professional group. This is, in fact, the well-known and most admitted explanation for the emergence of Minderico (Furriel 1996; Martins & Nogueira 2002: 133–136; Martins 2004: 4–6; Martins 2010: 229). Following Ferreira et al. (2015: XIX–XXIII), the lexemes related to textile production and commercialization are, however, almost inexistent in the Minderico lexicon. The only clear reminiscence of this possible sociolectal origin is its high complicated numerical system. Instead, lexemes related to everyday communication and everyday needs (food, drinks, human body, means of transport, animals, etc.) are the most frequent ones. This can be explained by the fact that Minderico, contrary to the normal limited lifespan of secret languages (Siewert 1999, Klepsch 1996, Geipel 1995), has evolved from a secret language to an everyday language, being used not only for commercial reasons but also

and mainly in all daily social contexts, becoming the main means of communication in the village and a unifying identity element.[1]

During this process, Minderico expanded its vocabulary continuously, adapting it to the needs of the community and reflecting simultaneously the technological and socio-cultural developments of the society in which it was integrated. Vocabulary enlargement was (and still is) intimately tied to the socio-cultural experiences of the *xarales* (the inhabitants of Minde). For example, names and nicknames of well-known persons from Minde and the neighboring areas were used as lexemes to express physical or psychological characteristics, as these characteristics were salient for those persons. Being a small and close knit community, where everyone knows each other, this method of vocabulary formation did not represent an obstacle to effective communication.

Thus, apart from loanwords such as *ganau* and *âmbria* from Spanish *hambre* "hunger" and *ganado* "cattle" respectively, *naifa* from English *knife* and *jones* "hat" from the English anthroponym *John*, or French *père* and *mère* (modern forms for *videiro* and *videira*) for "father" and "mother", metaphors and metonymies are the two main recurrent strategies of Minderico vocabulary enlargement (Ferreira & Bouda 2009).[2] The words *piar* "to speak, to talk", *pataeira* "watermelon, breast", and *a do aníbal* "bicycle" are examples thereof. *Piar*, from Portuguese *piar* "to cheep", is based on the metaphorical projection of the sound produced by the birds to the human domain. In *pataeira*, the meaning "watermelon" derives metonymically from the toponym *Pataias*, a place known in the region for its watermelons (the suffix *–eira* reinforces the idea of origin); "breast", on the other hand, is a metaphorical development based on the similarity of form between watermelons and breasts. *A do aníbal* represents a metonymy based on the anthroponym Aníbal which was the name of the owner of the first bicycle repair shop in Minde.

In the process of becoming the everyday language in Minde, Minderico not only enlarged its vocabulary but turned into a full-fledged language with a special intonation and a complex morphosyntax, a language with a system of its own, unintelligible for Portuguese speakers. This development (from secret language to everyday language) is not unknown to linguists and is well discussed in the literature on secret languages.[3] In this context, for instance, Heinz Kloss (1967: 29) talked about *Abstandsprache* or *language by distance* ("the reference being of course not to geographical but to intrinsic distance").

Minderico belongs without doubt to the group of Ibero-Romance languages. It is diachronically related to Portuguese, a fact that obviously determined its structures which show clear Ibero-Romance characteristics (Ferreira & Bouda 2009: 100–101). However, it also developed features that detached it clearly from Portuguese.

For instance, in the domain of morphology, "elliptical partitive constructions" (Ferreira 2011, Ferreira & Bouda, Ferreira et al. 2015), exemplified in (1) *os do noé* "animals"

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[1] The work by Ferreira et al. (2015) opens up a new hypothesis for the origin of Minderico, which questions its sociolectal background and needs further research. Maybe the language existed in Minde before the boom in the textile industry and was already used at that time for everyday communication in the village, a fact that could be easily explained through the geographic isolation of the village and corroborated by Mozarabic influences in the lexicon (Ferreira et al. 2015). Its subsequent use for business protection could be seen, therefore, as a logical consequence, considering the unintelligibility of Minderico outside of Minde. Because of the lost of communicative domains over time, its business function remained prominent in the memory of the community, which may have influenced the explanation of its origin.

[2] A study I carried out in 2008 and presented in Ferreira & Bouda (2009: 103) shows that more than 60% of the Minderico vocabulary is based on metaphors and metonymies.

[3] For an overview see Ferreira & Bouda 2009: 97–98, Ferreira 2011: 154–155.

(lit. "the [M.PL][4] of Noah"), (2) *o do padre faria* "parrot" (lit. "the [M.SG] of priest Faria"), and (3) *a da morcela* "parsley" (lit. "the [F.SG] of the blood sausage"), could be mentioned as a typical and active morphological strategy for noun formation in Minderico. I called them elliptical because after the article (*os, o, as*) one expects a noun that is actually missing. The missing noun is essential for the meaning of the construction. We could easily reconstruct (1) as "the animals of Noah", but the reconstruction is not always so straightforward and most of the time it depends on a profound knowledge of the socio-cultural, economic, gastronomic, and political traditions in Minde. We are not able to reconstruct (2) as "the parrot of priest Faria", if we did not know that the priest Faria, who lived in Mira de Aire, was known for having a parrot in the balcony of his house. The same happens to (3). Its meaning is only comprehensible if we consider that blood sausage in Minde is always prepared with parsley.

Contrary to Portuguese and other Romance languages, Minderico shows traits of nominal incorporation, as it is described by Mithun (1984, 1986) and Mithun & Corbett (1999), a phenomenon which has effects on verb valence and syntactic structure. Verbal constructions with nominal incorporation comprise a light verb, empty of meaning or with a very general meaning, and a nominal element which lost referentiality. The noun is integrated into the light verb and builds with it an indivisible unit, specifying its meaning. In Minderico, there are three light verbs – *gâmbiar* "to do something with the hands", *pôr* "to put", and *jordar* "to do, take, bring, go, …", being the latter the most frequent one.

(4)   *Ali*   *o*   *covano* *jord-a*   *as do mestre-grosso* *a-s*
      there DART.M.SG man   LV-3SG.PRES cloth.F.PL   DART.F-PL

     perneira-s
     sock-PL

    "He puts on the socks" (lit. "There the man clothes-puts the socks")

In example (4),[5] the noun *as do mestre-grosso* "clothes" is part of the verb *jordar*, specifying its meaning to "to dress". It is not possible to add any other word between the light verb and the nominal element without losing the original meaning, nor can *as do mestre-grosso* be pronominalized – *Ali o covano jorda-as as perneiras* would mean "he take/bring/throw them, the socks" in which *as perneiras* would be simply a reiteration for emphatic purposes of the pronominalized direct object of *jordar*. *As do mestre-grosso* is, thus, an intrinsic part of the verbal complex, which as a whole shows a transitive pattern.[6]

Example (4) also shows another clear difference between Minderico and Portuguese, namely in the pronominal system. The personal pronouns in Minderico are based on proximal (*aqui*), medial (*aí*), and distal (*ali*) deictic adverbs which are combined with the nouns *covana* "woman" and *covano* "man"[7] for feminine and masculine: *aqui a covana/o covano* "1SG.F/M", *aí a covana/o covano* "2SG.F/M", *ali a covana/o covano* "3SG.F/M", *aqui as covanas/os covanos* "1PL.F/M", *aí as covanas/os covanos* "2PL.F/M", and *ali as covanas/os covanos* "3PL.F/M".

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[4] Abbreviations: DART – definite article; M – masculine; F – feminine; SG – singular; PL – plural; 1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; LV – light verb; PRES – present.

[5] See note 4.

[6] See Ferreira & Bouda 2009 and Ferreira forthcoming(a) for a further discussion on nominal incorporation in Minderico.

[7] Or *a charal/o charal* with the same meaning but only used by and for people who were born in Minde.

2.3. MINDERICO TODAY. As mentioned before, the number of speakers of Minderico declined drastically during the last 50 years and Minderico risks becoming extinct more than ever before in its history. Intergenerational transmission was interrupted and Minderico is no longer passed to children at home. All speakers of Minderico are and were always bilingual, speaking Portuguese along with Minderico. Minderico is almost only used in familiar contexts (when talking to older members of the family and to friends), but even in this context the pressure of Portuguese as the language of education, administration, economy, etc. is clear. Thus, bilingualism with clear diglossia characterizes the speech community.

Moreover, the knowledge of Minderico is not homogeneous among its speakers. Currently, there are 150 active speakers, but only 23 of them are fluent speakers. Curiously, 15 of the fluent speakers are new speakers, i.e. they did not learn the language at home but through the revitalization process or through the contact with other fluent speakers; they learnt it in a later period in their lives, by their own decision. Moreover, Minderico has about 1,000 passive speakers, who understand the language but have very limited productive skills reflected for instance in some frozen expressions. Intensive code switching between Portuguese and Minderico characterizes the speech of the majority of active speakers.

Additionally, the almost inexistent presence of Minderico in the media and in new digital domains, together with the lack of official recognition as a minority language and the consequent lack of official support and prestige, contribute to its current endangered status.

The Volkswagen Foundation in the framework of the DoBeS program,[8] funded a documentation project[9] which allowed the collection of data[10] necessary for the production of Minderico teaching materials that had previously been non-existent. Thus, in 2009, a group of members of the community, with the support of CIDLeS – Interdisciplinary Centre for Social and Language Documentation,[11] developed and initiated a long-term revitalization process. The activities that are being carried out are varied and target a large audience, not only the younger generation, aiming at the involvement and commitment of the whole speech community, in different domains of its everyday life (see Ferreira forthcoming(b)).

Six years of continuous revitalization activities are not enough to draw clear conclusions. However, there are developments and tendencies that can be observed already, namely more digital writing in the language (SMS, E-mails, blog entries, etc.) and a discrete increase in the number of active speakers (almost all new speakers of the language). Simultaneously, a (de-)legitimation discourse unknown before the beginning of the revitalization is also emerging. It opposes on the one hand different generations of speakers and, on the other, traditional speakers and new speakers, a topic that will be discussed in the next section.

3. NEW SPEAKERS OF MINDERICO. The category of "new speaker" is not new and, of course, not only confined to minority language contexts. In the literature, it is commonly examined under labels such as "non-native speaker", "second language speaker", "foreign language speaker", "L2" speaker or "learner". However, these labels focus more on language proficiency and the assumed / expected quality of the linguistic knowledge. "New

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[8] Documentation of Endangered Languages, http://dobes.mpi.nl (15 December, 2015).

[9] *Minderico - An endangered language in Portugal* (2008-2012).

[10] Cf. https://corpus1.mpi.nl/ds/asv/?1&openpath=node:994815 (15 December, 2015).

[11] Cf. http://www.cidles.eu (15 December, 2015).

speaker", instead, is more neutral, focusing less on the linguistic knowledge and more on the social elements and motivations behind communicative practices (Costa 2015: 128).[12]

Thus, the characterization of Minderico new speakers proposed in this section follows the definition developed by the researchers of the COST Action *New Speakers in a Multilingual Europe: Opportunities and Challenges*[13] and further specified for the context of minority languages, namely

> *The "new speaker" label is used (. . .) to describe individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners.* (O'Rourke et al. 2015: 1)

Considering that the revitalization of Minderico started six years ago, it is important to highlight that the characterization of Minderico new speakers aimed at in this paper represents the first approach to the topic in the Minderico context.

The phenomenon of new speakerness is relatively new for the Minderico speech community and was mainly fostered by the revitalization process. In this sense, three groups of new speakers can be distinguished according to speakers' backgrounds and relation to the language:

1. People who came to Minde at some point in their lives for personal (marriage) and/or economic reasons and only got acquainted with the language as they moved to the village – this is the most prominent group;

2. People who always lived in Minde but were not exposed to Minderico in traditional familiar language acquisition contexts – this group comprises almost all passive speakers and the children learning Minderico at school now;

3. People who do not live in Minde but in some way (mainly though their ancestors) feel connected to the village and its culture.

In face of the shrinking number of speakers, the "incapacity" of the "traditional" speech community to reverse language shift, and the highly endangered status of the language, members of these three groups have acquired an extremely important role in the revitalization process, mainly because they are the ones that foster it. For the new speakers of Minderico, learning and using the language is a way not only of preserving a cultural identity with which they identify, but also of (re)integration in a community to which they now actively belong (or in some way belonged before). One can undoubtedly affirm that the future of Minderico clearly depends on its new speakers and their positive attitude towards the language.

3.1. OBSERVABLE TENSIONS. The emergence of new speakers brought, in turn, some tensions within the speech community. To understand them and the reasons behind them, it is important to remember that the Minderico community is, in general, a very closed one

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[12] For the history and theorization of the "new speaker" concept and its application to different European minority language contexts see among others Hornsby (2015b) for Breton, Yiddish, and Lemko contexts and the issue no. 231 of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, which is a special volume on *New speakers of minority languages: the challenging opportunity* edited by Bernadette O'Rourke, Joan Pujolar, and Fernando Ramallo in 2015.

[13] Cf. http://www.nspk.org.uk (15 December, 2015).

in which it is really difficult to get in and be accepted as "one of them". The semantic differentiation between *xarales* (people who were born in Minde and may or may not live in village) and *covanos* (people who were not born in Minde but moved to the village – this category applies even to the children of the incomers who were already born in Minde) corroborates the social characteristics mentioned above. Consequently, *charales* have more (implicit) legitimacy over all communitarian societal aspects (language, culture, traditions, etc.) than *covanos*.

In this context, two different types of tensions could be observed: a) between different generations of speakers and b) between "traditional" speakers and "new speakers".

Intergenerational tensions that oppose old and young speakers, and which are in fact common to all other languages, in the case of Minderico go in opposing directions and are related to shifts in authority and language legitimacy. On the one hand, the older speakers do not accept easily the way the younger generation speaks Minderico, mentioning that they speak a kind of "modern Minderico" and not "pure Minderico", delegitimating at the same time their knowledge of the language by classifying what the young people speak as "invented, artificial language".[14] They are very critical above all about the enlargement of Minderico vocabulary to modern contexts of daily life, such as contexts related to new technologies, mainly because for them "authentic Minderico" is connected to a concrete (difficult) period in their lifetime (when they went to the markets to sell the blankets) and characterized by communicative practices with clearly delimited diglossic boundaries.[15] They do not associate Minderico with modern life – for them, this role is played by Portuguese. This attitude obviously influences the way the younger generation uses or decides not to use Minderico. Some of them feel that they are not proficient enough and do not feel confident in using the language in the presence of elders – a fact that sometimes leads to avoiding the language at all.

On the other hand, some members of the older generation underestimate their knowledge of Minderico just because they do not speak "modern Minderico" which they inherently associate with higher levels of education, social status, and consequently more prestige – some of the features that characterize the younger speakers of the language.

But the main tensions are the ones that oppose traditional speakers (most of them very old and with a good proficiency) and new speakers. Traditional speakers of Minderico are those that have acquired the language at home, in Minde, and always used it in everyday communication. The new speakers, in turn, as mentioned in Section 3, are mainly people who acquired the language in "artificial" language contexts, during revitalization activities.

Traditional speakers do not recognize the speech of new speakers as authentic Minderico – curiously, this opinion comes inclusively from several passive speakers, the majority of them *charales*. The main argument in this tension is prosody, following, thus, the trends encountered in other minority language communities with similar tensions, as discussed for instance by Hornsby (2015a: 110) and Costa (2015: 133). Traditional speakers argue that new speakers are not able to produce authentic Minderico prosody and accuse them to deteriorate the language by using Portuguese prosody when speaking Minderico – a case of common "blurring of linguistic boundaries" (O'Rourke & Ramallo 2013: 18). They explain the lack of authenticity in the speech of new speakers with the fact that most of them were not born in Minde or are not from Minde or were away from the village for too long. At this point, it is important to emphasize that prosody is one of the most endangered aspects in Minderico; even traditional speakers are losing it, using gradually more Min-

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[14] This attitude is comparable to what Costa (2015) has observed in the Occitan context.

[15] For a comparable study on Breton see Timm 2010.

derico with Portuguese prosody and accentuation, without being conscious of that, which reinforces the fact that much of the differences felt by the speakers are mainly "ideologically invested" (Hornsby 2015a: 116) and based on a socio-cultural discourse centered on locality and subsequently authenticity, legitimacy, and language ownership.

Contrary to traditional speakers, new speakers see Minderico as a necessary element of their modern life and not something related to the past that cannot be "updated". Even though they are aware of their "insufficient" proficiency, they see themselves as the revitalizing forces and are conscious that the future of the language depends on them, a consciousness and recognition also encountered among new speakers of other minority languages in Europe, as for instance among the new speakers of Galician (O'Rourke & Ramallo 2013: 29), Scottish Gaelic (McLeod & O'Rourke 2015: 169, O'Rourke & Pujolar 2015: 147) or Occitan (Costa 2015). They auto-legitimate their speech on another level with the argument that if they do not use the language as they can and transmit it at home, in their families, then it will die out in a very short period of time, an argument very much in the lines of what O'Rourke & Pujolar (2013) describe in "cases of extreme language shift":

> *[I]n cases of "extreme language shift" (. . .) linguistic legitimacy and authenticity can no longer be linked to the seemingly inherent characteristics of its speakers. Instead, legitimacy comes from those who claim authority and construct such legitimacy.* (O'Rourke & Pujolar 2013: 58)

And Costa (2015) adds that "legitimate language is not a given. It is constantly negotiated among users, and what constitutes legitimate language may vary according to the setting in which it is used" (Costa 2015: 129), and the Minderico case is a clear example thereof.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS. The revitalization of Minderico is a recent process. It has started in the year 2009. Despite its limited lifespan, one could already observe the emergence of a new phenomenon within the social structure of the speech community, namely the phenomenon of new speakerness and the connected discourse about locality, authenticity, legitimation, and language ownership that has started to question the position and power commonly ascribed to "traditional speakers" of the language.

Considering the highly endangered status of Minderico which manifests itself not only in the reduced number of speakers, the lack of official recognition, support, and digital presence, but also in the lack of prestige and economic value as well as the prevalence of negative and conservative attitudes towards the language influenced by the Portuguese public and academic opinion, I believe that the maintenance of Minderico really depends on the new speakers and their attitudes towards the language with which they socially and culturally identify. They are in fact playing a decisive role in a process that aims at reversing language shift.

Bearing in mind my experience with the community, the success of that process will depend on the capacity to find the balance between the linguistic, cultural, and historical knowledge of traditional speakers and the energy and engagement of new speakers. That can only be achieved by involving both groups and considering their different needs in the revitalization process.

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