

Dissertation Abstract: Performance, Place, Language and Identity in Gallo-Speaking Upper Brittany

This dissertation uses ethnographic and discourse analytic methods to explore how speakers' identities are shaped by, and enacted through, discourse in and about Gallo, a regional language of Brittany, France. Historically marginalized with respect not only to French, the national language, but also to Breton, Brittany's more visible regional language, Gallo was traditionally considered an uneducated peasant 'patois.' While French is now the predominant language of daily life for most residents of Brittany, and Breton has wider symbolic currency, Gallo is taught in local schools, performed at cultural festivals, and continues to be spoken. In these contexts, Gallo's traditional links to rurality, localness and past ways of life are not denied, but other elements in these discourse settings often index modernity and a trans-local outlook.

Audio- and video-recorded artistic performances, classroom discourse, interviews and everyday conversations were collected during a year-long field stay in Brittany. Analyses explore how Gallo is used as a resource for identity construction, as individuals engage with circulating ideologies of modernity, place and speakerhood. The data show that while many performers and other enthusiasts consider Gallo to be locally grounded and personally meaningful, they reject an understanding of the language as static or *bounded* by a local past, as they blend sounds and images associated with Gallo with signifiers of modern life, thereby creating models for twenty-first-century Gallo personhood. These models may encounter opposition or reinterpretation or as they circulate among multiple publics – other speakers, others with knowledge of Gallo who do not consider themselves speakers, or those little acquainted with Gallo – but they do introduce ways of 'being Gallo' that are modern as well as traditional, and capable of participating in a globalizing world while remaining anchored in local spaces. Likewise, conversations about Gallo become sites of identity construction when speakers name the language itself. The choice between the labels available ("Gallo" and "patois") cannot be reduced to favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward the variety; rather, choices made in specific interactional moments relate in nuanced ways to ideologies of family and school language transmission, localness and non-localness, rural and urban identities, and tradition and modernity. Different individuals may relate each label to a different configuration of these ideologies, leading to indeterminacy, conflict or accommodation when social actors interpret particular acts of Gallo use, in their relationship to time, place, and speakerhood, in multiple or diverging ways.

This dissertation contributes to sociolinguistic work deconstructing the notion of minority language speakerhood, as it examines how individuals in specific moments reconfigure (or refuse to reconfigure) circulating models of traditional personhood to fit individuals who occupy a variety of roles available to members of late-modern societies. These varied embodiments of speakerhood and non-speakerhood influence the range of viable, valuable and inhabitable Gallo identities which community members can offer. An understanding of these possibilities and limitations will contribute to sociolinguistic knowledge about the place of regional languages – particularly those, like Gallo, which have limited large-scale symbolic currency but significant local resonance – in the identity construction processes of late-modern life.

