

## **The traditional/neo-speaker problem in Breton: what degree of aporia?**

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Breton, as the language of traditional native speakers, is in steep decline, and has been so since the 1940s and 1950s; the end of the traditional native-speaker community is now in sight. At the same time, especially since the 1970s and 1980s, the initial small circles of militant learner activists have expanded to become at first still a relatively marginal, but politically more average group, and more recently, a significant mainstream minority which keeps growing. However, the majority of learners use an artificial standard with essentially French pronunciation, but a puristic lexicon; word order is either calqued on French, or French word order is studiously avoided even when it would be natural in Breton. Idiom is entirely French. While no one aspect of these discrepancies (with the possible exception of excessive use of neologisms) actually impedes communication between traditional native speakers and learners, the cumulative effect is to make such communication laborious at best. Traditional speakers, having trouble understanding neo-speakers, tend to reply in French, and neo-speakers, not understanding traditional Breton easily, conclude that (1) traditional Breton is so corrupt as not to be worth saving; (2) their neo-version is superior; and (3) traditional speakers are “against the language”. Sincere attempts at bridging the gap are few. While this is something of a caricature (there are some excellent learners, and there are also a few literate traditional speakers among the activists), it is not inaccurate with respect to the majority, and the situation is not improving. This presentation encompasses the history and background of the language, the problems of orthography and standardization, basic statistics on bilingualism and Breton in schools, and traditional attitudes of French-speakers, native Breton-speakers and learners, as observed over more than 40 years of committed involvement with Breton.