

## Purism, variation, change and ‘authenticity’: ideological challenges for language revitalisation

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This paper is based on recent research into the small, highly endangered language Giernesiei (Guernsey, Channel Islands).<sup>1</sup> Our documentation has found unexpectedly rich variation and change in Giernesiei usage, not all of which can be accounted for by regional and age-related factors. At the same time, our research into language ideologies and efforts to maintain and revitalise Giernesiei have revealed deep-seated purist or ‘traditionalist’ language attitudes which resist and deny language change. This nostalgic view of language and culture can hyper-valorise ‘authentic’ traditions (arguably reinvented: Johnson 2013) and can lead to reluctance to share Giernesiei effectively with younger generations who might ‘change the language’, despite an overt desire to maintain it. This mismatch between ideologies and practices can be seen at language festivals, in lessons for children, and in the experiences of adult learners who were interviewed as part of a British Academy-funded project. I present a taxonomy of reactions to variation in Giernesiei, which confirms and extends the findings of Jaffe (2008) in Corsica. I also discuss recent revitalisation efforts which try to bring together older and ‘new’ speakers and promote the role of adult learners and ‘re-activating’ semi-speakers. The findings support the view that full evaluation of language vitality should include documenting the processes and ideologies of language revitalisation (Sallabank 2012; Austin and Sallabank 2014, forthcoming).

### References

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<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/ldc/sp03/>; <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/4525>

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