

ARTICLE

Picard: a *mal aimé* among regional languages?

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ABSTRACT

Although often seen as a medieval rival to French, Picard has received far less official recognition and support than more celebrated regional languages such as Breton or Occitan. A shared history and high degree of linguistic similarity with the national language appear to have engendered a perception that it is simply ‘bad French’, but for supporters such as Eloy (1997) Picard remains *potentiellement une vraie langue*, worthy and in need of status enhancement initiatives enjoyed by other regional languages. Promotion of language status for Picard, however, is found to be fraught with practical difficulties, not least of which are a lack of territorial unity and major cultural differences between the north and south of the picardophone area. Equally importantly, the discourse of languagehood fosters notions of linguistic purity which ignore the extensive mixing of local, supralocal and national elements that has always been evident in Picard writing and speech. This in turn engenders linguistic insecurity, notably among urban working-class speakers, whose speech can all too easily be caricatured as both ‘bad French’ and ‘bad patois’, with obvious consequences for intergenerational transmission. The well-intentioned promotion of Picard as a regional language may therefore, perversely, be detrimental to the very varieties it serves.

1. INTRODUCTION

A central aim of this *JFLS* Special Issue is to explore contact between European French and substrate varieties which have been either ignored or, all too often, suppressed as a result of Republican language policy. In addition to providing a useful counterweight to the anglocentric focus of much current sociolinguistic research, the case studies in this volume present a number of practical and theoretical challenges. The complexities of France’s *Oil* varieties in particular raise perhaps the most fundamental and intractable question of all: what is a language? The case of Picard, seen by some as a serious medieval rival to French, provides an excellent illustration. While its historical significance in the development of the standard language is widely acknowledged (see for example Cohen, 1967: 88; Lodge, 1993: 113; Rickard, 1995: 45), Picard has been largely ignored in a succession of regional language policy documents and for supporters such as Eloy (1997), its exclusion from the 1951 *loi Deixonne* reflected a wider

Republican ideology which legitimizes only the national standard. The lack of official recognition recalls that of Francoprovençal (see Kasstan and Nagy, 2018), but in the case of Picard a shared history and high degree of similarity to the national language have fostered the perception that Picard varieties are simply ‘bad French’. For this and other reasons, as we shall see, Picard presents difficulties of a very different order from those of the other Romance languages recognized by Deixonne. It is fair to ask, in such circumstances, whether a discourse of languagehood is always helpful in supporting the varieties on behalf of which it is invoked. We first consider Picard in the context of so-called ‘collateral languages’ (section 2), before exploring, in section 3, attempts to resolve the contradiction between popular perception of a *français-picard* or *français-patois* diglossia and the reality of what are often highly mixed outputs. Extensive mixing of national and local/regional elements is a long-established phenomenon, which we attempt to set in historical perspective in section 4; the problems facing activists who seek to promote a Picard language are then discussed in section 5.¹

2. PICARD AS A ‘COLLATERAL’ LANGUAGE

France’s *Oïl* varieties provided the inspiration for a conference and collection of papers (Eloy, 2004a) devoted to *langues collatérales* (‘collateral languages’), whose indeterminate status stems from their linguistic similarity to and shared history with a dominant language, falling somewhere between ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ in public perception (Eloy, 2004b: 6):

La spécificité première de ces langues, qui les différencie d’autres variétés “minorées” est qu’elles sont senties comme “proches” – trop proches, aux yeux de certains – de la langue dominante ou standard (“toit”).

Writing in the same volume, Trudgill views ‘collateral’ languages as a subset of what Kloss (1967) has labelled *ausbau* varieties. Recognized primarily on socio-political or cultural grounds (2004: 70), the status of the latter can alter at any time: from ‘dialect’ to ‘language’ in the case of Letzeburgesch, for example, or from ‘language’ to ‘dialect’ in the case of Scots, Provençal or Low German. By contrast *abstand* languages, in Kloss’ terminology, are separated by a linguistic distance great enough for them to be universally considered different from their dominant competitor – Basque, for example, cannot be grouped together with its Romance neighbours French and Spanish. Authorities may seek to downplay differences between *ausbau* varieties and the dominant language, casting the former (as for example with Catalan in Franco’s Spain) as a dialect of the latter. In *abstand* situations, on the other hand, they may seek to accentuate differences between a minority variety and a dominant language used in a neighbouring state, thereby discouraging contact between speakers of closely related varieties across a national border.

¹I am most grateful to Tim Pooley, to my co-editors Jonathan Kasstan and Damien Hall, and to three anonymous reviewers for their illuminating comments on an earlier version of this article. Any remaining errors or misunderstandings are, of course, my own.

While linguists, Trudgill argues, are no better placed than others to decide questions of minority language rights, or to dictate language policy, they do have the expertise to distinguish linguistic from non-linguistic arguments, and to identify claims falsely made on the basis of political, social or cultural motives, and bolstered by pseudo-linguistic evidence. Picard would seem to be an archetypal collateral language in Eloy's terms, and indeed both a section of the editor's introduction (pp. 20–21), and four other papers in the 2004 collection are devoted to it. Although officially recognized since 1990 (alongside Wallon, Champenois, and Lorrain) as a regional language of Belgium, Picard enjoys no comparable status in France. It was not mentioned in the *loi Deixonne* of 1951,² nor in a succession of government reports on regional language diversity published since the Revolution; Abbé Grégoire's 1794 report to the National Convention *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française* (see De Certeau, Julia and Revel, 2002: 331–51) had barely referenced the *Oïl* varieties at all, viewing them apparently as little more than 'bad French'. Not until Cerquiglini (1999) is Picard mentioned directly as one of 75 'langues de France', in a report received with some suspicion by language activists, who saw in belated official recognition of linguistic diversity little more than an attempt to stymie ratification of the Council of Europe's (1992) Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (CRML), by over-emphasizing the impracticalities of societal multilingualism.³

Structural similarity to another dominant variety need not, however, be an impediment to language status, as we saw above, and would not in itself justify the downgrading of the *langue d'oïl* varieties, such as Picard, in comparison with France's other regional languages. Eloy (1997: 210), in this vein, draws parallels with Corsican, Scandinavian and creole varieties to offer an unequivocal answer to his own question, 'Qu'est-ce que le picard?':

“Le picard” est potentiellement une vraie langue, qui a déjà construit et fixé une autonomie linguistique réelle.

Eloy is at pains to emphasize the word 'potentiellement', and does not pretend that conditions are currently propitious. Even for its own speakers to recognize Picard as a language alongside French would require what he terms a 'démarche identitaire forte' (*ibid.*). Though the precise nature of this *démarche* is unspecified, it is likely to face some very significant obstacles. Historical evidence for an identifiable Picard language rests on shaky ground (see section 4), and the label 'Picard' itself has little resonance in much of the picardophone area identified by linguists (section 5). Perhaps more significantly, a binary French-Picard model,

²Repealed in favour of the *loi Toubon* of 1994; many of its provisions were incorporated into the *Code de l'éducation*.

³Ratification of the CRML, a campaign promise of Presidential candidate François Hollande in 2012, was formally rejected by the Senate in 2015. For full text of Charter see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/text-of-the-charter> (accessed 19.4.2018). The French Culture Ministry now brackets Picard alongside eight other *langues d'oïl* in its alphabetical list of 'langues de France', without proposing specific measures for its maintenance. See <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Langue-francaise-et-langues-de-France> (accessed 1.5.2018).

which is not, and probably never has been, reflective of actual usage may even have been detrimental to maintenance of Picard varieties.

3. MODELLING PICARD USAGE

Evidence suggests that speakers within the picardophone area (see section 5) see language variation in terms of a diglossic model which contrasts *français* and either *picard* or *patois*. This was evident from metalinguistic comments by my own informants in Avion (see Hornsby, 2006a), who used the term ‘patois’ to denote a set of forms (which might vary between localities) with local rather than national currency; the diglossic model also underpins Carton’s (1981) typology, discussed below. Support for this model comes from compelling evidence of discrete differences between Picard and French at the grammatical level (see Auger, 2010; Auger and Villeneuve, 2008; Villeneuve and Auger, 2013;⁴ Auger and Villeneuve, this volume), and in phonology (Auger and Villeneuve, 2014; Hendrickson, 2014). But the perception of discrete varieties is often belied by the reality of highly heterogeneous outputs. In the example below, recorded in Avion, Pas-de-Calais (see Hornsby, 2007: 77), French elements (underlined) are mixed in the same turn as corresponding Picard forms (**bold**), which are geographically restricted and trigger identification of speech as ‘patois’ among Avionnais themselves (e.g. *tu/té; une/enne; dans/dins*). The bulk of the lexicon can be taken to be either French, or common to both French and Picard:

(1) ben la bière **alle** perd tout son goût... ben...j’ai mis j’ai mis de la mousse...la mousse **alle** tombe, ben tu mets ça dans un... dans une chope de grès ben la mousse **alle** reste ..et **té** vas voir **enne** différence de boire **dins** **enne** chope de grès que de boire...euh...et pi **té** sais question de bière je peux parler hein... **mi** j’aime boire **enne** bière hein....alors... je veux pas tellement tout ça bon ben j’en bois mais...**ch**’est pas **min** fort, hein

Mixing of Picard, French and shared elements is evident in the speech of Eloy’s Amiénois picardophone informant Maurice Boucher (1997: 145–174), and is also reported by Villeneuve and Auger (2013) in Vimeu, where language mixing has acquired the term ‘dravie’. The latter distinguish regional French (2) from Franco-Picard (3) on the basis of a greater proportion of French forms for which Picard equivalents are available in (2) than in (3), where the matrix language appears to be Picard (Villeneuve and Auger, 2013: 115). Vimeu speakers perceive (2) to be French and (3) Picard, but nonetheless, as the authors point out, marked Picard forms (**bold**) are embedded in (2) and French ones (underlined) in (3):

(2) l’français est // il est plutôt euh...il est = // on dit que quand on cause euh // picard // pis qu’on mélange du français avant, on fait **d’od**’dravie hein. Bon ben

⁴The authors stress (2013: 112) that their findings in Vimeu, where a relatively ‘pure’ variety of Picard has been maintained, do not necessarily hold for dialectal varieties spoken elsewhere in the Picard zone, notably in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais.

là e-ch'français c'est **d'ol'**dravie aussi hein. // Parce que là y = y a quand même un = un mélange. Et tous les ans dans **chés** dictionnaires, // eh beh ils rajoutent des mots mais c'est des mots // anglais hein.

(3) pour travailler pour des grandes surfaces, i feut...éq cha aille vite pis qu'cha fuche bien foait. Mais ch'est difficile éd concilier chés deux in même temps, hein.

(‘to work for superstores, it needs...to go fast and to be well done. But it’s hard to do both at the same time’: Authors’ translation.)

Such heterogeneity at the level of the speech turn might, of course, be a reflection of conversational code-switching and belie greater homogeneity over shorter sequences of talk. To investigate this possibility, clause and turn-level co-occurrence for a number of binary Picard/French morphological variables in the Avion data were examined by Author (2006: 58–64). For each variable pairing, ‘cohesion scores’, based on the percentage co-occurrence of ‘like’ variants (French+French or Picard+Picard) were indeed found to increase significantly as the unit of analysis was reduced, but were noticeably lower for Picard+Picard than for corresponding French+French pairings, and fell away sharply at turn level. Picard speakers in Avion, in other words, sustained fairly homogeneous output in what they would term *patois* only over short stretches of talk; over longer sequences mixed output was normal. Switches to patois were signalled primarily through (inconsistent) use of Picard morphology and some high-frequency Picard lexical items. Such behaviour recalls young Londoners’ targetting of ‘London Jamaican’, as reported by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985: 180):

Speakers behave as if there were a language called ‘Jamaican’, but often all they do (perhaps all they *know how* to do) is to make gestures in the direction of certain tokens associated with Jamaican Creole which have a stereotypical value. In other words, the ‘idealized’ London Jamaican is a language close to the ‘deepest’ form of Jamaican Creole, and is identified as such by all those features above the level of awareness which distinguish Jamaican Creole from Standard English (with minor exceptions, noted below). In practice, most speakers cannot achieve the ideal. The result is a variety of speech which is (a) highly variable from speaker to speaker, (b) highly variable internally (c) tends to ‘revert’ to London English – i.e. speakers often seem to find difficulty maintaining London Jamaican over long stretches.

Carton’s (1981) model of variation in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais represents an attempt to resolve the contradiction between speakers’ perception of a two variety (*français-patois*) model on the one hand, and the reality of highly mixed usage on the other, through appeal to what Carton calls *dialectalité*, i.e. the variety targetted by the speaker him/herself, irrespective of actual output. The four-term typology he offers bears some similarities with post-Creole continua described by Bailey (1973), Bickerton (1975) and others, in so far as an ‘acrolectal’ Variety 1 (*français général*) betrays no regional marking at all, while at the other extreme ‘basilectal’

Variety 4 (*patois*) represents a pure Picard variety showing no influence at all from French. Here and elsewhere Carton is clear that Variety 4 is a notional construct, which no longer corresponds to any speaker's actual output, if indeed it ever did: 'Le "pur picard", s'il a existé, n'existe plus. Mais la "picardité" est bien vivante' (Carton and Lebègue, 1989: Introduction).⁵ The 'mesolectal' Varieties 2 and 3 represent intended French (*français d'intention*) and intended patois (*patois d'intention*) on the part of the speaker. While both mix regional and national forms, the former are more localized and greater in number in Variety 3 (see (2) and (3) above):

While the model is not unproblematic (see Hornsby, 2006b), Carton's insistence (1981: 17) that his Varieties should be seen as a reference points in a continuum ('il n'y a aucune solution de continuité entre ces variétés') frees us from the reductive fiction of a binary model and allows for a wide range of behaviours in which local, supralocal and national features are mixed.

It was notable that Picard forms were not used at all in Avion by informants under 30 years of age, and further evidence of declining competence in Picard is presented in Pooley's (2004) research among younger speakers in the Lille conurbation. Pooley's informants showed low levels of lexical recognition in Picard and even lower levels of active competence in a translation test, where less than 10 per cent of informants on average could correctly render French items in Picard. Pooley concluded that there was 'very little latent competence in Picard' (2004: 487) among young Lillois. Low rates of intergenerational transmission would seem to be a classic symptom of language death, and Picard would appear, on Fishman's (1991) GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), to be close to the highest level of attrition, level 8 ('most vestigial users of Xish are socially isolated old folks'). Certainly, as Pooley (2004: 576) points out, the view that contemporary northern *patois* are varieties which emerged from a respectable medieval language called Picard but have 'fallen from grace' through contact with French is well established in the education system. A case could certainly therefore be made that Picard is an obsolescent heritage regional language worthy (and in urgent need) of at least the support afforded to, for example, Breton or Corsican, a view arguably bolstered by belated recognition of language status in the Cerquiglini Report. Seductive though this narrative might appear, it is not supported by the historical evidence, which suggests that parallels with France's other regional languages are of limited value.

4. PICARD AND FRENCH IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

There is a long-standing divide in French dialectology between 'separatists' such as Remacle, Gossen and Chaurand, who argue for discrete dialects in France's Gallo-Roman patchwork – Gaston Paris's 'immense bigarrure' – and 'continuator' such as Paris himself, Meyer, Gilliéron, Brunot and Tuailon who view such divisions of the Romance continuum as arbitrary, and potentially a distortion of the linguistic facts. Divisions of the *langue d'Oïl* area are particularly controversial given the prolonged contact, and extensive similarities, between these varieties and French.

⁵Villeneuve and Auger (2013: 114) do however find speech approximating to Variety 4, at least over short sequences, from their Vimeu data.

What is not disputed is that there is little evidence of differentiation within the *Oil* zone before the ninth century (see Delbouille, 1970; Eloy, 1997: 54–55), though it should be emphasized that there was very little vernacular writing at this stage, and written documents are in any case a notoriously unreliable indicator of spoken norms, to which we have no access.

While local differences do become evident from the ninth century, medieval texts such as the *Serments de Strasbourg* and the *Séquence de Sainte-Eulalie* (see Ayres-Bennett, 1996) are highly mixed, as scribes often selected forms of wide currency at the expense of less familiar local ones. The consensus view among French historical linguists (see e.g. Delbouille, 1970; Gossen, 1970: 30–31; Carton, 1992: 33) is that early *Oil* texts are written in what amounts to a pan-regional koiné ('On a le droit de parler de la littérature d'oui en ancien français comme d'un tout.': Cohen, 1967: 84), leavened with a proportion of local forms according to the origin of the writer. However, Picard forms associated with prosperous northern mercantile centres such as Arras figure strongly enough alongside *francien* items for some to posit a medieval *scripta franco-picarde*, i.e. a de facto *Oil* written standard in which French and Picard predominate (a claim rejected by Dees 1980, 1985), or even to suggest that Picard was a serious medieval rival to French in terms of prestige – see for example Wartburg (1946: 87):

La part que la Picardie a prise dans la création d'une littérature française est très grande. L'épopée nationale, les chansons de geste ont été rédigées en grande partie dans cette région. (...) Tous les genres littéraires un peu populaires ont eu leur centre dans ce pays: les fabliaux, la comédie, l'épopée satirique qui se groupe autour de Renart. Au 13^e siècle, la vie littéraire en Picardie est supérieure à celle de Paris.

A strong Picard visibility in medieval texts, however, does not amount to a well-defined and clearly delimited norm, and in terms of prestige, Picard soon starts to lose out to its Parisian rival. The presence of Picard forms declines markedly in the thirteenth century with economic decline in the mercantile centres of the north, and French forms soon start to predominate (see Cohen, 1967: 84): Picard forms had all but disappeared in texts by around 1400. Brunot (1966: I, 328–331); Picoche and Marchello-Nizia (1989: 21–22); Lodge (1993: 98–100) and others, moreover, cite evidence that, long before this point, Picard norms were already being compared unfavourably to those of Île-de-France. Some four centuries before a stylized Picard would be used to comic effect by Molière (for example through the character of Nérine in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*), a mocking pastiche of Picard speech appeared in a play dating from 1285, cited by Picoche (1985: 57), who also quotes a mid-thirteenth-century assertion by Barthélémy l'Anglais that Picard 'est idiomatis magis grossi aliarum Gallie nationum' ('is the ugliest tongue of all the peoples of France'). The most celebrated illustration of Picard social inferiority, however, comes earlier still. A number of commentators reference twelfth-century poet Conon de Béthune's annoyance at being mocked, by Queen Alix of Champagne and her son Philippe-Auguste, for his Artesian speech:

La Roine n'a pas fait ke cortoise
 Ki me reprist, ele et ses fueis li Rois
 Encoir ne soit ma parole franchoise,
 Si la puet on bien comprendre en franchois
 Ne chil ne sont bien pris ne cortois
 S'il m'ont repris se j'ai dit mos d'Artois,
 Car je ne fui pas norris a Pontoise
 (Conon de Béthune, *Chansons*, III 8–14, c.1180)

While for Picoche (1985), Conon has been labouring under the misapprehension that Picard and French are social equals, one might equally suggest that his frustration stems rather from the fact that he was already well aware of the gulf in prestige, and had been doing his best to accommodate to his socially elevated guests by attempting to speak French, only to fall back occasionally on Picard forms ('se j'ai dit mots d'Artois'). What does seem clear is that, at least at Conon's social level, convergence with French at this stage was already significant enough to allow mutual comprehensibility ('Si la puet on bien comprendre en franchois'), and that Picard forms are not deemed appropriate in high-status company. It is perhaps also noteworthy that Conon refers not to Picard, but to 'mots d'Artois', suggesting that the former may not yet have any resonance as a glottonym. Gossen (1970: 27) and others cite two references to *langage pickart* in the 1283 *Livre Roisin*, a legal document written in Lille, in a section prescribing use of the local Romance vernacular in preference to Latin (and, almost certainly, to Flemish) for the swearing of oaths. But as Boisier-Michaud (2011: 74) points out, these are the exception rather than the rule, and in so far as direct reference to the vernacular is made at all, the term *roman* is usually preferred in legal documents drafted in the region.

In spite of Holmes and Schutz' (1935: 43) claims for an early thirteenth century 'standard' Picard, which fell from acceptability by the turn of the fourteenth century, standardization in the case of Picard can be described as abortive at best. While it is possible to argue that it was briefly selected to perform some of the H functions previously reserved for Latin, elaboration was minimal and Picard has been neither codified⁶ nor accepted in Haugen's (1966) terms.

Gossen stresses the heterogeneous character of medieval Picard texts ('Ce que nous exposerons au cours des chapitres suivants sera donc l'élément picard de la scripta franco-picarde et non « le dialecte picard du moyen âge »': 1970: 45), contrasting 18 Picard features with 32 other regularly occurring forms which are shared with other dialects (pp. 153–155), while Picoche (1985: 59) argues that even in the most dialectal texts the proportion of unambiguously Picard forms never exceeds 30 per cent. The fourteenth-century historian Froissart, for Pooley (2004: 175) 'the last author of any importance in the French canon to manifest any Picard features', uses the latter to a much greater degree in quoting direct speech

⁶Eloy (1997: 79) cites a 1772 *Grammaire artésienne* printed in Saint Omer as an example of metalinguistic writing about Picard vernacular, but its full title *Grammaire Artésienne, Pour s'instruire, en peu de temps, des fautes qu'on commet contre la Langue Française, principalement dans cette Province d'Artois*, only underscores the perceived inferiority of Picard patois with respect to a now dominant French norm.

than in the main body of his text (Lodge, 1993: 132), again suggesting that Picard forms were already deemed less appropriate for 'serious' writing.

In the absence of a codified, pan-regional standard, later Picard writers and performers made their work accessible over a broader area of what is now northern France in the same manner as medieval scribes had done, by substituting localized forms for those of wider currency, which were often French. In his analysis of seven Picard poets writing between 1710 and 1892, Carton (1992; quoted by Pooley, 2004: 219) finds the proportion of identifiably Picard forms to range between 22.2 and 48 per cent.⁷ Mixing was seen as the normal mode of expression, while attempts to render an overly 'pure' Picard were seen as inauthentic, striking a false note. Referring to the Lillois minstrel François Cottignies ('Brûle-Maison'; 1678–1742), Carton observes (1965: 59): 'une trop grande densité de dialectalismes fait suspecter une chanson de n'être pas vraiment populaire'. A further study by Pierrard of 960 Picard songs from the modern period finds evidence of conscious francification by Desrousseaux, Watteuw and others. The nineteenth-century chansonnier Louis Debuire Du Buc is quite candid about the reasons for this (Pierrard, 1966: 36):

Si j'ai chanté en patois de Lille, j'ai toujours cherché à franciser, et mes confrères, quoi qu'on dise, ont subi le même entraînement. Je l'ai fait remarquer souvent, le patois de Lille se francise de plus en plus; c'est un progrès auquel je m'associe de tout coeur. Aussi, lorsque l'occasion se présente de substituer, sans inconvénient, les mots français aux mots patois, je n'hésite point à le faire, car ils sont de nos jours employés indifféremment dans le langage populaire.

We are thus left with something of a paradox: speakers' perceptions of a two-variety *français/patois* model seem entirely at odds with an apparently unbroken tradition of mixing Picard and French elements, which extends all the way back to the medieval period.

In the light of historical and contemporary evidence, Eloy concludes that Picard is 'un *idiome* [my emphasis] dont l'autonomie par rapport à un autre est demeurée partielle' (1997: 209), having never enjoyed a concerted enhancement initiative which might have cemented its status as a language in its own right (p.110):

l'idiome comme signe identificateur n'a jamais bénéficié d'une démarche identitaire forte, qui aurait accentué son contraste avec le français, et en retour il n'a pas pu avoir l'effet structurant sur l'identité que permettrait (sans la rendre nécessaire) une autonomie plus grande.

One might suggest that the success of such a *démarche identitaire forte* would depend on at least three elements: codification, acceptance, and territorial unity. All of these present sizeable, and probably insurmountable, obstacles in the case of Picard.

⁷This does not rule out the possibility that some grammatical phenomena common to French and Picard, e.g. *ne* deletion or clitic doubling, may behave differently according to the code targeted by the speaker (see Auger and Villeneuve, this volume).

5. STATUS ENHANCEMENT FOR PICARD

Recognition of 'language' status normally implies use of a codified norm in some H functions, the range of which, in the case of a regional or minority language, may in practice be limited. Certainly it is difficult to envisage the 'effet structurant sur l'identité' envisaged by Eloy where fragmentation of varieties hampers any genuine sense of 'speaking the same language' among speakers themselves, and indeed compromises mutual comprehensibility in some cases for speakers of different varieties. For national languages, the norm selected is what Trudeau (1992: 16 fn.4) has called a *norme spontanée*, which emerges through association with a social elite, often based around a national capital or centre of power. Regional languages are generally denied a *norme spontanée*, not only because by definition they are generally spoken at some distance from centres of power, but also because the very elites whose norms might have been selected are generally the first to abandon the language for a more prestigious rival (in this case French). In the case of ausbau languages such as Picard, the problem is further compounded by difficulties in determining the boundaries of the language with respect to the standard or dominant variety, and with respect to other, neighbouring varieties which form part of the same linguistic continuum.

Using a model developed by Junkovic and Nicolai (1987), Eloy (1997) posits two sets of 'Référentiels normatifs' (RN), i.e. Picard and French, from which speakers may diverge to a greater or lesser degree. The RNs are defined primarily on the basis of morphology, for which distinct Picard and French forms are available; items for which no such formal contrast exists are deemed to be common to both RNs. Thus the usage of Eloy's own informant Maurice Boucher, an Amiénois local radio presenter, is classified as 'Picard' on the basis of fairly consistent use of marked morphological items which contrast with equivalent French forms, even though much of his lexicon is shared with French. In fact, as Pooley (2004: 605–607) points out, much of the *picardité* of Boucher's output can be attributed to frequent use of the imperfect tense, which has the distinct Amiénois Picard ending *-[we]* (sg.)/*-[wet]* (pl.), in his capacity as host of a nostalgic radio programme which invites Picard speakers to reminisce. Even were this not the case, morphology alone seems a poor basis on which to base a claim for languagehood and, in Pooley's words (2004: 608): 'there would be no difficulty in finding examples of related varieties where more sharply contrasting sets of paradigms over a wider area of the grammar are not deemed sufficient for speakers to perceive the two varieties as distinct languages but rather related dialects of the same language'. Unfortunately, the alternative approach adopted by Pooley himself in an earlier work (Pooley, 1996), which requires item-by-item identification of forms as either 'Picard' or 'French', proves no less problematic. The complexities of such an exercise can be seen from Pooley's analysis of French-Picard /*ã*/-/*ɛ̃*/ alternation. The specific phonological set affected is defined as follows (Pooley, 1996: 99; after Viez, 1978 [1910]: 82):

- (i) Items containing *e + n* in Latin in a closed syllable, i.e. followed by another consonant, even when the nasal consonant had been assimilated by the preceding vowel, e.g. *amende* /amɛ̃t/, *charpente* /karpɛ̃t/, *fente* /fɛ̃t/, *tranche* /trɛ̃ʃ/, *ventre* /vɛ̃t/.

(ii) Items containing *e + n* in what became through well attested sound changes (fall of word-final *-um*, muting of word-final consonants, e.g. *argentum* – *argent* – *argen(t)*) – open word-final consonants, e.g. *argent* /arʒɛ̃/, *cent* /ʃɛ̃/, *couvent* /kuvɛ̃/, *dent* /dɛ̃/, and all items ending in *-ment*.

(iii) Loan words from French, e.g. *manger* /mɛ̃ʒe/, *étranger* /etrɛ̃ʒe/, usually spelled with *an*. One example spelled with *en* is *de temps en temps*, pronounced /tɛ̃zɛ̃tɛ̃/ or /tɛ̃zɛ̃tɛ̃/. Landrecies (1992: 72) would include many items in *-ment*.

There is an obvious contradiction here between (ii), which suggests that all *-ment* items are subject to /ɑ̃/-/ɛ̃/ variation and (iii), which implies that only *some* are: category (iii) in fact amounts to a catch-all grouping allowing potentially *any* SF /ɑ̃/ to be realized /ɛ̃/ by some speakers, and raises the problem of what do and do not constitute ‘loan words from French’. Pooley suggests that membership of the *-ment* set should be determined on the basis of citations in early Picard glossaries, providing a checklist of *patois* forms (p.100), which includes for example *rudemint* but not *mélancoliqu’mint*, the latter having been rejected by Landrecies (1992: 72) as a French form ‘[habillé] régionalement à la hâte’. Such decisions appear to turn ultimately on considerations of formality, with higher register terms generally presumed to be unavailable in the Picard form,⁸ but register in French is generally viewed as a continuum (see Offord, 1990: 121) and it is unclear where the threshold for acceptability in Picard might be set. And, of course, it hardly needs saying that the exclusion of ‘learned’ lexical items only weakens the case for Picard as potentially a fully-fledged language fit for a range of H and L functions.

In the absence of identification with an autochthonous social elite, acceptance in Haugen’s (1966) terms depends on association with a clearly bounded territory with which speakers identify.⁹ This again proves problematic for Picard, given that the Picard area as defined by linguists (see Figure 1), largely but not exclusively on the basis of isoglosses (see Dubois, 1957; Lorient, 1967), is an abstraction which has never corresponded to any historical province or administrative area.

The zone identified in Figure 2 sits rather awkwardly on a contemporary political map, encompassing the entirety of the modern Somme and Pas-de-Calais departments, covering all but the traditionally neerlandophone Westhoek area of Nord, and extending north-west into Belgium to include Tournai and Mons. The southern boundary cuts through the mostly Francien-speaking Aisne and Oise departments. Not surprisingly, this area has no resonance among non-linguists, and is notable for its lack of internal unity in both cultural and linguistic terms. It

⁸Cf Pooley (2004: 237):

Is it possible that forms like *intérinot* (French ‘entérinaît’) would actually occur spontaneously in the Rouchi or Chtimi varieties of Picard? I rather doubt it.

⁹Cf. Pooley (2004: 638):

While it is indeed true that individuals are free to choose their own identities which may indeed change at different points in their life, it seems to me pure sophistry to pretend that autochthonous ethnolinguistic identities (Figure 1.1) can be preserved if the territorial dimension is removed.



Carte établie par René Debrie selon les données de Raymond Dubois, réalisée par Joëlle Désiré pour l'Atlas de Picardie (Amiens, Université Jules Verne, 1985, éditions A.E.C.R.P.)

Figure 1. The Picard linguistic area (from Dawson, 2012: 49, Carte 1).

lacks any ethnographic political or independence movement comparable even with *Le Parti pour la Normandie indépendante* in Normandy. A further complicating factor is the creation in 1982 of an administrative Picardie region encompassing Somme, Aisne and Oise, but not the Nord or Pas-de-Calais; this was replaced in 2016 by the larger 'Hauts de France' administrative region, which includes all five departments but is still not coterminous with linguistic Picardie. The absence of any genuine pan-Picard identity stems in large part from a cultural divide between 'francs picards' (Carton and Poulet, 2006: 114) in the predominantly rural areas south of the Somme and 'Ch'ti(-mi)s' in the traditionally industrial urban north. This divide is significant enough to merit publication of two separate popular works on Picard (albeit with a significant overlap in content) by Alain Dawson: *Le "Chtimi" de Poche* (2002) and *Le Picard de Poche* (2003).

Working-class inhabitants of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais identify as *Nordistes* or *Ch'ti(-mi)s* rather than as *Picards*, and while Pooley's Lillois informants (2004: 665) distinguished 'patois paysans' and 'patois ouvriers', the term 'picard' was hardly ever

	Variétés	Dialectalité	Marques dialectales		Etendue de l'aire de diffusion	
			Quantité	Qualité		
Langue	1	français général	—	absence	—	maximale
Mélange à dominante neutralisée	2	français régional	'français'	minimale	minimale	grande
Mélange à dominante dialectale	3	français local ou dialectal	'patois'	moyenne	moyenne	petite
Patois	4	patois local	patois	maximale	maximale	minimale

Figure 2. Typology of Nord-Picardie Varieties (after Carton, 1981: 17).

used, even by patois associations, and Pooley soon dropped it during fieldwork to avoid confusion. The socio-cultural division within the Picard area between 'deux régions aux mentalités bien distinctes' (Carton and Poulet, 2006: 114) owes much to an accident of geology: industrialization of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais was triggered by the discovery of rich and exploitable coal reserves there in the eighteenth century. Internal variation is not in itself, of course, a barrier to languagehood: major differences between varieties have hardly impeded the success of English, and all of France's *langues régionales* are highly fragmented. Nonetheless, for most of the latter – a notable exception being Corsican (see below) – recognition of *langue régionale* status has gone hand in hand with a measure of codification for a limited range of H functions. Any attempt to codify Picard, however, is likely to be severely hampered by the peculiar demographics of the area in which Picard varieties are spoken. The problem is neatly illustrated by the imperfect ending which was so totemic for Eloy.

Evidence from the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* suggests that a wide range of imperfect tense forms was available within the Picard zone at the turn of the last century (see Author, 2006: 92). These reduced over time to two principal variants, one (-[o] singular/-[ɔt] plural) associated very broadly with the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, the other (-[wɛ]/-[wɛt] used mostly south of the Somme (see Eloy, 1997: 156–157; Flutre, 1977: 89–90). Of these, the northern variant is likely to be the majority form, given that the population of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais is a little more than twice that of Somme, Aisne and Oise combined.¹⁰ Furthermore, given what is known about geographical diffusion, we would expect the form associated with densely populated industrial agglomerations in the north to be more widely

¹⁰Population of Nord-Pas-de-Calais 4,089,016; Picardie 1,934,320. Source: INSEE <https://www.insee.fr/statistiques/1893198>. Accessed 20.4.2018.

adopted than the form used in the less densely populated south. This appears to be borne out by Eloy's informant Maurice Boucher, who mostly uses the *-[we]* form of his native Amiens, but also has some occurrences of *-[o]* (1997: 157); by contrast neither Author (2006) nor Pooley (1996; 2004) report any occurrence at all of *-[we]* in the north. The form which appears to recommend itself as a standard on grounds both of majority usage and diffusion, then, is the one used by speakers who generally do *not* identify their own patois as Picard. Selection of the minority form *-[we]*, on the other hand, would be unlikely to command widespread acceptance given that it is almost unknown in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

It is not hard to imagine a multitude of similar dilemmas, particularly if, as Dawson (2012: 49) suggests, east-west differences within the Picard area are at least as significant as those separating the north and south. For orthography, Carton (2004: 185) neatly summarizes the tension between a desire to respect local differences on the one hand, and the need on the other for an accessible, standardized writing system in the absence of a codified norm: 'Un picard "unifié" est une utopie, mais on a besoin de cette utopie pour progresser.' Abandoning this *utopie* altogether in favour of polynomic model, as proposed by Dawson (2012: 49–50), is unlikely to offer a way out of this impasse. While polynomic communities such as Corsica have no single codified norm, but show wide mutual comprehension between, and tolerance of, different varieties, the model as described for example by Marcellesi *et al.* (2003: 199–306) crucially requires a strong sense of common identity within a clearly bounded territory, both of which are notably absent in the case of Picard.¹¹ Without these, there is no consensus among speakers on what does or does not constitute 'Picard', nor on where the boundaries between it and French or, say, Norman lie (on this point see Pooley, 2004: 17–19).

Standardized varieties which have to be constructed from the top down often involve uneasy compromises between dialects, and rarely command widespread acceptance in Haugen's (1966) sense. France's regional languages provide ample evidence of artificial standard languages which command little acceptance among native speakers. In the case of Breton, for example, Jones (1996: 321) highlights the chasm which separates generally middle-class *néo-bretonnants*, who promote a standardized Breton, often learned as a second language, from the mostly poorer and less-educated users of traditional, more localized varieties (see also Kuter, 1989: 85): 'For all their endeavours to arrive at a more "grass roots" type of Breton, the variety spoken by many *néo-bretonnants* is still identifiable as such and remains worlds apart from that of traditional native speakers'.

In such cases, those who see standardization as a route to status enhancement or revitalization are all too often driven by a purist desire to establish a standard variety which is true to its roots, and which maximizes differences from the dominant language, even where this runs counter to the established usage of most speakers. Hornsby and Quentel (2013: 74) for example report the coining of Celtic neologisms in neo-Breton 'by a very small, literate elite whose authority is questioned or simply not recognized by a majority of speakers'. They cite as examples the Welsh calque *poellgor* 'committee', which is preferred to the long-established French loan *komite*, the coining of *kontelezh*

¹¹A polynomic approach has, however, been applied in published Picard translations of *Astérix*.

'county' where *kontad* already exists, and the redefinition of *marc'h houarn* (literally 'iron horse'), already used by some speakers to mean 'locomotive', as an official term for 'bicycle'.

While language-based activism in the picardophone area has a lower profile than in Brittany, similar tendencies can certainly be observed. Pooley notes that *patoisant* gatherings tend to attract people 'who have achieved a degree of upward mobility and a confidence to express themselves in French', and exclude those who feel comfortable in neither French nor Picard.¹² Some of these endeavour to promote a notionally pure but historically inauthentic variety of Picard (2004: 679):

there is a minority of performers and contributors to magazines like *Ch'Lanchron* or *Chés Vints d'Artois* who find themselves free to reconstitute the Picard language as far as they are able, restoring traditional lexical items discovered in dictionaries and glossaries. Among such authors, one often observes a strong normative or purist streak, no doubt inculcated by the French educational tradition, to which Picard must match up in terms of linguistic legitimacy. The result may be considered as something new, a repicardised written Picard for which no historical attestation may be found.

Here, as in Brittany, we see evidence of a social divide between intellectuals promoting a pan-regional norm and generally less educated speakers who use their patois on a daily or sometime basis, for whom it expresses a more localized identity. At worst, the purist tendencies of the former can exclude the very native speakers in whose name they campaign. The *Comité Régional Picard* for example, cited by Pooley (2004: 642), lauds the traditional varieties of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais for their fidelity to a probably mythical Picard norm:

L'Atlas picard montre que les dialectes du Nord-Pas-de-Calais semblent plus archaïques que ceux du sud et mieux conservés car ils ont moins subi le contact du français de l'Île-de-France.

only to dismiss the mixed 'Ch'ti-mi' varieties of the industrial north in highly charged terms (p.644):

Quant au 'ch'timi', ce n'est pas une variété du picard mais un jargon vulgaire, du français argotique patoisé. Ce faux patois génère un faux folklore, une vraie chienlit qui souille et offense l'éminente dignité des Picards.

Ch'ti-mi, then, is not 'pure' Picard, and therefore it is not Picard at all. Such reasoning ignores the fact that, as we have seen, 'pure' Picard in any historical era proves remarkably elusive, and is better viewed, as Carton suggests, as an abstraction which corresponds to no-one's actual usage. Indeed if, as Eloy

¹²Pooley's allusion to fluency in standard French as a *de facto* criterion for acceptance in such circles recalls Bourdieu's reference to the mayor of Pau, whose use of *Béarnais* at the start of his address (1982: 63) is admired rather than denigrated precisely because he is known to be a fluent and proficient French speaker. On this point see Coulangeon (2013: 53).

(1997: 84) contends, 'l'étonnant est que le picard reste aujourd'hui une réalité', this is due in very large measure to those very Franco-Picard *Ch'ti-mi* koinés which emerged with industrialization through contact in the burgeoning towns of the north, and the close-knit social networks which maintained them, from the *corons* of towns such as Avion in the Pas-de-Calais (Author, 2006: 12) to the *courées* of textile workers in Roubaix (see Pooley, 1996: 30–34). To sacrifice such varieties on the altar of linguistic purity is both misguided and perverse.

6. CONCLUSION

At first blush, Picard, with its long history and medieval rivalry with French, and its relative health until quite recently even in industrial urban areas, would seem to present a strong case for recognition alongside France's more celebrated regional languages, as belatedly acknowledged by the Cerquiglini Report of 1999. But the historical and contemporary evidence attests to a Picard zone which is highly fragmented in linguistic terms, whose territorial boundaries as defined by linguists correspond to no clear administrative, provincial or national area which is at all meaningful to its speakers, and within which there is no sense of shared identity between the north and south. There is little language-based activism at the regional political level, nor consensus among putative Picard speakers on the need to reestablish intergenerational transmission – still less on creating institutions comparable to the *Skolioù Diwan* in Brittany or the *Ikastolak* of the Basque Country which might promote it. Speakers of patois in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais do not even recognize the glottonym 'picard' for their own speech, and *patoisant* associations generally avoid it. The most serious obstacle to the advancement or preservation of Picard varieties, however, may well be the aspiration to Picard languagehood itself. The latter promotes an unhelpful binary *français-picard* discourse which is at odds with the usage of the vast majority, if not the entirety, of Picard speakers, for whom mixing of local, supralocal and national elements is a normal mode of expression. It is not at all outlandish to claim, as does Pooley (2004: 593), that the insistence on 'pure' Picard speech, as measured against a mythical medieval yardstick, only replicates the very normative Republican ideology which regional language activists generally set out to oppose.

Ignoring or marginalizing mixed varieties is misguided for at least three reasons. Firstly, Picard forms are arguably better preserved in the Franco-Picard 'Ch'ti-mi' koinés of the industrial Nord-Pas-de-Calais (see Author, 2006a) than south of the Somme, where rural-urban migration and proximity to the capital have favoured convergence with French. Secondly, a discourse of language death or language revitalization perpetuates a myth of language purity at some undefined point in the past,¹³ which is again at odds with a long tradition of mixed Franco-Picard texts. Written evidence is of course no reliable guide to spoken usage, and it is highly likely that some spoken Picard varieties in the past showed considerably less influence from French than the texts themselves suggest. But it remains the

¹³Or, indeed, at some equally mythical geographical location. During fieldwork for the Avion project (Hornsby, 2006a) the researcher was frequently told of 'le vrai patois', which was spoken somewhere else, without there being any agreement or clear idea where this might be.

case that we have no direct evidence of these, nor of anything resembling a pan-Picard norm, and some evidence that overly ‘pure’ versions of this collateral language are in fact viewed by speakers themselves as inauthentic.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, reinforcement of a binary model leaves many speakers in something of a double bind, as users of what, in the context of a modern nation-state with a highly codified standard language, can all too easily be caricatured simultaneously as both ‘bad French’ and ‘bad patois’. The consequences of this are twofold, and potentially very serious. Firstly, it is entirely unsurprising that those who are made to feel their patois is impure or substandard are choosing not to transmit it to future generations. Equally importantly, such attitudes engender a sense of linguistic insecurity among speakers, which is known to be especially acute in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in particular, prompting the decision by Gueunier *et al.* (1978: 121–123) to select Lille as a fieldwork site for the *Les Français devant la norme* project, as a counterweight to linguistically secure Tours. Comments from working-class Lillois confirm this insecurity and reveal how readily negative public perceptions of regionally marked speech can be assimilated by speakers themselves. The expression ‘coup de pied à la France’, cited by Carton and Poulet (2006: 37) as a northern idiom and glossed as ‘faute de français’, is used repeatedly:

Je sens des barrières de langage en moi. Il y a des gens qui trouvent toujours ce qu’il y a à dire. Mais il est évident qu’on ne parle pas très bien le français dans cette région-ci (...) ça va pas, quoi, y a quelque chose qui cloche. (p. 139)

Nous, les gars du Nord, on fout des coups de pied à la France (...) s’appliquer, on peut y arriver, mais... on n’arrivera jamais à parler français, c’est pas vrai! C’est pas vrai, c’est pas possible! (...) Je pourrai (sic) aller à l’école pendant dix ans, ben j’arriverai jamais à parler le français. (p.157)

The authors explicitly link linguistic insecurity to the persistence of patois even in urban areas (p. 123), and it is noteworthy that some informants perceive themselves to be unable to separate patois from French:

Le patois, j’évite. Mais *je ne peux pas m’en empêcher* quand je suis en colère. Alors là, ça part en patois. [Authors’ emphasis] (p. 155).

Par habitude, on place des mots de patois *sans le vouloir*. [Authors’ emphasis] (p. 155).

The case of Picard highlights the challenges facing *Oil* varieties and collateral languages more generally, and in particular the dangers of a ‘top-down’ approach to language standardization which lays bare the gap between many native speakers on the one hand and intellectuals who – with the best of intentions – define language varieties and campaign on their behalf, on the other. While the dialectologists’ glottonym ‘Picard’ has minimal traction in at least half of the zone in which its varieties are spoken, ‘Ch’ti’ (or ‘Ch’ti-mi’), originally a pejorative term (see Carton and Poulet, 2006: 113–115) and still

disparaged in some quarters, as we saw above, has been embraced and now adorns car stickers, t-shirts and a variety of other merchandise. Used to identify both a speech variety and the inhabitants of a region, and popularized by the success of the 2008 film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, it is probably the only term in general use which is comparable to English 'Geordie', 'Brummie' or 'Scouse', and has similarly become a badge of regional pride. 'Geordie' itself, like Picard, is best seen as a cover term for a group of dialects showing varying degrees of convergence with the national language at the lexical, grammatical and phonological levels. While these are subject to variation and change (see for example Milroy et al., 1994), there is no imminent threat to their diversity in the Tyneside area where they are spoken, nor any serious suggestion that they require the formal status of a 'language' to secure their survival. Local and regional linguistic diversity here and in the Picard area is best served by more positive and inclusive attitudes to non-standard usage than by activism which can all too often engender the very purism it sets out to challenge.

Like many outsiders to northern France, I fell under the charm of Picard varieties and their famously warm and hospitable speakers, and was inspired both to celebrate this regional linguistic diversity and attempt to play a modest role in securing its maintenance. Aspiring to recognize Picard as a fully-fledged language, however – even *potentiellement une vraie langue* – makes maintenance less rather than more likely. We opened with the suggestion that Picard was unloved among France's regional languages. We conclude, with heavy heart and apologies to Shakespeare, that as friends of Picard we may have loved it too well, but not wisely.

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