

## Book Reviews

identity, rejected by older working-class residents. Thierry Bulot (151–161) investigates the use of Gallo (a regional language traditionally viewed as an obsolescent rural variety) in an urban context. The hypothesis that urban dwellers lack clear perceptions about Gallo is not borne out in questionnaire data: Rennes is viewed by many as Gallo-speaking, especially among younger respondents. In the final contribution to Part II, Françoise Gadet (162–173) explores findings from the MLE-MPF project on so-called ‘youth language’. First she looks at the theoretical implications associated with the handling of non-standard corpus data; second, she asks how Third Wave variationist theory can be applied to socially constructed categories in *banlieue* spaces.

Two *renvois*, one by Robert Gibb and Paul Lambert (174–189), the other by Tim Pooley (190–210), highlight the common themes emerging from the volume and suggest avenues for future research. Both underscore the relative unexceptionalism of French social structure, notwithstanding compelling evidence from sociolinguistics that phenomena such as levelling do appear exceptional.

From a variationist’s perspective, this is an insightful volume, methodical in its approach to the subject matter, and careful to consider existing research from across the social sciences. Its overarching aims are very well addressed, and the proposals outlined by the contributors will undoubtedly form an important part of future research on Metropolitan French. The volume’s undoubted strength and significant contribution comes from the break in the ‘reciprocal ignorance pact’ (Fishman 1991) that characterises the relationship between sociology and sociolinguistics. As Pooley rightly suggests (209), it is this break in tradition that must now spearhead new avenues of research.

## REFERENCES

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Jonathan R. Kasstan  
 Department of Linguistics  
 School of Languages, Linguistics and Film  
 Queen Mary University of London  
 London E1 4NS  
 UK  
[j.kasstan@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:j.kasstan@qmul.ac.uk)

Tristram Anna, *Variation and Change in French Morphosyntax: The Case of Collective Nouns*. (Research Monographs in French Studies, 40.) Oxford: Legenda, 2014, x + 178 pp. 978 1 907975 95 0 (hardback)  
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Collective nouns are a fascinating topic for sociolinguistic study. This is because they respond to quite complex linguistic constraints and are of course variable by their nature, being singular in form but referring to a group of individuals or entities. From a social point of view, this latter attribute makes them a target for the tidy-minded, or those

anxious to show that they can count up to two. Even in the populist UK, some people are capable of getting upset over a headline like ‘England suffer heavy defeat’, and the US grammar checker doesn’t like it either; so what on earth are the standardising French likely to do?

The book under review is largely based on a speaker survey investigating the linguistic and social factors that influence variable use of verb agreement after some French collective nouns. The nouns selected for analysis were *partie*, *foule*, *minorité* and *majorité*. Variation after nouns of this type has been the object of codification since the time of Vaugelas (he thought, with surprising tolerance, that *une infinitude de personnes* should have plural agreement), and variation attracts the fury of prescriptivists to this day. After an introductory chapter (5–14) setting out the scope of the study, the second chapter (15–44) considers the linguistic constraints capable of influencing variation. Since verb forms vary, it goes without saying that French morphosyntax is involved; so is semantics, since lexical items inevitably convey meaning. Relevant semantic features include ‘(in)definite’, ‘animate’ and ‘abstract’. Syntactic factors, on the other hand, mostly concern the nature and position of the post-modifier, as in *une foule de* + plural noun. There is a semantic dimension to the latter sequence as well, of course: the presence of a post-modifier tends strongly to encourage plural agreement. But this is not the entire story, since reference to the wider textual context can also be relevant.

Chapter three (45–67) describes the methodology used to gather and analyse data. Tokens of individual words are much less frequent than variants in phonology, but the author circumvented this by asking her speaker sample to fill in a cloze or gap-fill test to supplement the more usual interviews. Speakers (from Normandy) were sampled in three age groups (ranging from 15 to 84), and by gender and educational level, the latter on the reasoning that more time spent in education might induce respondents to approximate standard norms more closely. Similarly, it was rightly thought worthwhile to test the usual sociolinguistic assumptions about the influence of age and gender in the still under-researched French context.

The linguistic results discussed in chapter four (69–95) defy adequate summary in a short review, which is unsurprising in view of the complexity of the situation (as outlined above). However, the very broad social picture that arises conforms to expectations: older respondents resist the trend, while women, as ever, are ahead of the game. Educational level showed an effect in the standard direction, at least in the cloze test, a finding discussed in more depth in chapter six.

Change over time is the topic of chapter five (97–124), which considers patterns that emerge from an array of written texts, the oldest of which go back to around 1600. The general trend is towards pluralisation, but singular verb agreement with *la foule*, for instance, has remained stable at about 95% since 1850. Diachronic findings are of course solid, and some are satisfyingly monochrome: for example, agreement after *la plupart* has changed very neatly over five centuries from singular to plural. On the other hand, unmodified *une partie* continues to show more or less evenly divided variation.

Chapter six (125–137), entitled ‘Explorations of education’, follows up the finding that respondents with a higher level of education supplied a greater number of singular verb forms in the cloze test. A historical survey of what school grammars say on the subject shows that the correlation between education and prescription is not straightforward, as these grammars show a good deal of tolerance and rationality. A qualitative study focuses on those respondents who gave categorical or near-categorical replies in the cloze test, whether singular or plural (the test contained sequences

that invited answers in either direction). The results illustrate through glimpses into individual identity the seemingly anodyne point that educational level is an abstract category to which people respond for often imponderable reasons; ‘seemingly’, because such insights shake sociolinguistics to its foundations, the discipline having no way of analysing these elements of variation.

The book, based on the author’s PhD thesis, is well written and clearly structured, and avoids the postgraduate traps of over-signposting and taking nothing whatsoever for granted. Anyone teaching variation in French will want to talk about the findings and reflections reported in this study. A remarkable amount of ground is covered in a small compass. This is a highly welcome addition to the *Legenda* list, and one must hope that further linguistics titles will be added to it before very long.

Nigel Armstrong  
School of Languages, Cultures and Societies  
University of Leeds  
Leeds LS2 9JT  
UK  
[n.r.armstrong@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:n.r.armstrong@leeds.ac.uk)

Farina Annick et Zotti Valeria (dir.), *La variation lexicale des français: dictionnaires, bases de données, corpus. Hommage à Claude Poirier*. (Lexica: Mots et dictionnaires, 28.) Paris: Honoré Champion, 2014, 368 pp. 978 2 7453 2876 2 (broché)  
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Pionnier de la lexicographie québécoise moderne, Claude Poirier est également l’un des premiers promoteurs de l’étude de la variation linguistique dans l’ensemble de la francophonie. Les dix-sept contributions à ce recueil d’articles rédigés sous la direction d’Annick Farina et Valeria Zotti permettent de découvrir les nombreuses facettes de la variation lexicale dans l’espace francophone; elles ont été rédigées par des linguistes voulant rendre hommage à Claude Poirier en raison de l’importante influence qu’il a eue sur leurs travaux.

C’est notamment grâce aux contributions riches et dynamiques de Poirier que le Québec pèse de plus en plus lourd dans l’univers de la lexicographie moderne en langue française. Présentant quelques importants jalons d’une longue feuille de route, Robert Vézina (17–25) souligne l’héritage que Poirier lègue à la recherche scientifique en lexicologie et lexicographie ainsi que sa contribution à la vulgarisation des résultats de cette recherche auprès du grand public.

Claude Poirier lui-même (27–42) donne un aperçu des perceptions européennes du français québécois, telles qu’il les a observées à travers ses recherches. Il rapporte que les francophones ont pu être surpris et dérangés notamment par les avancées québécoises sur le terrain de la néologie, de la féminisation et de la lexicographie, alors que les italophones reconnaissent sans réticence la variété québécoise.

Mettant en relief le cadre sociolinguistique et socioculturel pluriel et dynamique de l’espace francophone, Chiara Molinari (43–55) explique pourquoi la *Base de données lexicographiques panfrancophone*, par son caractère différentiel et sa structure, est désormais un outil lexicographique incontournable dans la réalité actuelle du français.