

The linguistic assimilation of Flemish immigrants in Lille (1800–1914)

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ABSTRACT

Using evidence from a variety of sources (dialectological and sociolinguistic studies, written and oral history and works of literature), this study seeks to describe how, in a period of rapid industrial expansion to which immigrant labour was a crucial contributing factor, large numbers of Belgian migrant workers (the majority of whom were Flemish-speaking) were assimilated into the local Romance-speaking community. In an area often characterised as diglossic (French–Picard), the influx of large numbers of Flemish speakers gave rise to a three-way language-contact situation. While charting some of the most important changes in the vernaculars of Lille, the study seeks to explain why an alloctonous group of such significant proportions living so close to their homeland apparently assimilated so readily.

I INTRODUCTION

Lying close to the north-western limit of the Romance-speaking areas of Europe, the present-day metropolitan area of Lille–Métropole, (Figure 1) has, since its humble beginnings dating back to the 7th century, always been a cultural and linguistic contact zone between speakers of Germanic and Romance varieties. The intensity of such contact has varied over the centuries, plausibly, at least in broad-brush terms, according to the political regimes to which the city was subject. Until the 17th century, L’Isle-en-Flandre, as it was most generally known, was a Romance-speaking city at the southern end of a culturally and linguistically hybrid political entity, Flanders, overseen according to the vagaries of international conflicts and alliances by the Counts of Flanders (from the 9th century to 1304), the French Crown (1304–69), the Burgundians (1369–1482), the Habsburgs (1482–1555) and Spain (1555–1667). From the time of annexation by Louis XIV (1667), the city was quickly expanded and transformed into a northern outpost of the French kingdom lying to the south. Although at first the Lillois might be said to have become French ‘malgré eux’ (Guignet, 1999: 73), they were, within a few decades, during the Anglo-Dutch occupation (1708–13), to prove unswervingly loyal to the country into which their city had been incorporated. From the 1670s onwards therefore, contact with speakers from other parts of France increased, triggered most directly by significant numbers of occupying troops and more indirectly by



Figure 1. *Lille-Métropole* (adapted from SDDU, 1998).

improved southerly oriented infrastructure connections (roads and canalisation of waterways). In other parts of the present-day Lille-Métropole (Figure 1), particularly to the north, it seems reasonable to suppose that contacts were facilitated through improvements in communications and that most such contacts were transited via Lille. The *communes* of the Lys valley (Figure 1) which straddled the river, marking a considerable stretch of the national frontier, were still home to a fair proportion of Flemish speakers. During the Revolutionary period and the First Empire (1794–1814), the whole of present-day Belgium came under French dominion. The Napoleonic regime pursued policies favouring economic development in Belgium, in particular the woollen industry in Verviers and cotton in the Flemish city of Ghent (Luykx, 1966: 179).

After 1815, however, international trade agreements between France and Great Britain proved highly detrimental to the fledgling industries of Flanders, since under the Dutch regime (1815–30) they had restricted access to international markets. Even after Belgium gained independence in 1830, Flemish industries could not regain their international competitiveness and French factory owners bought up plant and started to exploit the seemingly inexhaustible supply of labour with lower aspirations as regards pay and working conditions, and which was both exempt from military service and excluded from any political process, including until late in the 19th century, trade-union membership. Workers from Ghent, of which there were many, brought the additional advantage of experience of working in large workshops. Over the course of the 19th century, the three largest towns in the present-day Lille-Métropole, Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing built up significant Belgian minorities, most of whom were of Flemish background. This considerable influx of Flemish workers into an area deemed by some (e.g. Gueunier, Genouvrier and Khomsi, 1978; Lefebvre, 1988) to be diglossic (French-Picard) even into the second half of the 20th century gave way to what Landrecies (2001) labels as a ‘triangulaire inédite’ i.e. an unprecedented three-way contact situation between French, Picard and Flemish speakers. What may be claimed to be different from anything that had previously occurred, at least since the Frankish invasions, was the sheer mass of Germanic speakers crossing the linguistic border into the Romance-speaking area.

The aim of this article therefore is to weave together the various strands of available evidence to build up as complete a picture as possible of the sociolinguistic consequences of this period of rapid change and intensified contact between speakers of French, Picard and Flemish in the second most economically productive area of France at the time (after Paris). Beginning with a brief overview of Flemish immigration in the Lille-Métropole area (Section 2), I move on in Section 3 to present the sources of linguistic evidence on local vernaculars provided by researchers working within the paradigms of traditional dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics. In Sections 4 and 5, I present the changes occurring in a number of crucial phonological variables using speech-based evidence from speakers born between 1850 and 1980. These analyses of behaviour are contrasted with analysis of perceptions of various categories of observer in Section 6: historians, creative writers and ordinary speakers. In the concluding section, I attempt to draw together these various threads of evidence to evaluate the sociolinguistic consequences of the events described.

2 BELGIAN IMMIGRATION IN LILLE AND IN FRANCE (1800–1914)

Since the creation of the Communauté Urbaine de Lille (CUDL) (now known as Lille-Métropole Communauté Urbaine – LMCU) in 1968, the ongoing and highly successful process of metropolisation has brought together over the last four decades 86, and if extended to what is called the *arrondissement de Lille*, 125 *communes* with a total population of 1,182,026 (1999 census) shown in Figure 1.¹ This relatively

¹ On this basis, Lille is the fourth largest city in France.



Figure 2. *Lille in 1900.*

high degree of unity under the label, Lille, contrasts markedly with the situation in the 19th century, when the region, although significantly more urbanised than France as a whole, was characterised by a considerable number of urbanised zones sometimes in close proximity to, but largely independent of, Lille (Figure 2).

While Lille has since the early Middle Ages been the largest city in the region now known as the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the fortifications constructed around it immediately after the French conquest between 1667 and 1670 severely limited its capacity for expansion, particularly during the first phase of the Industrial

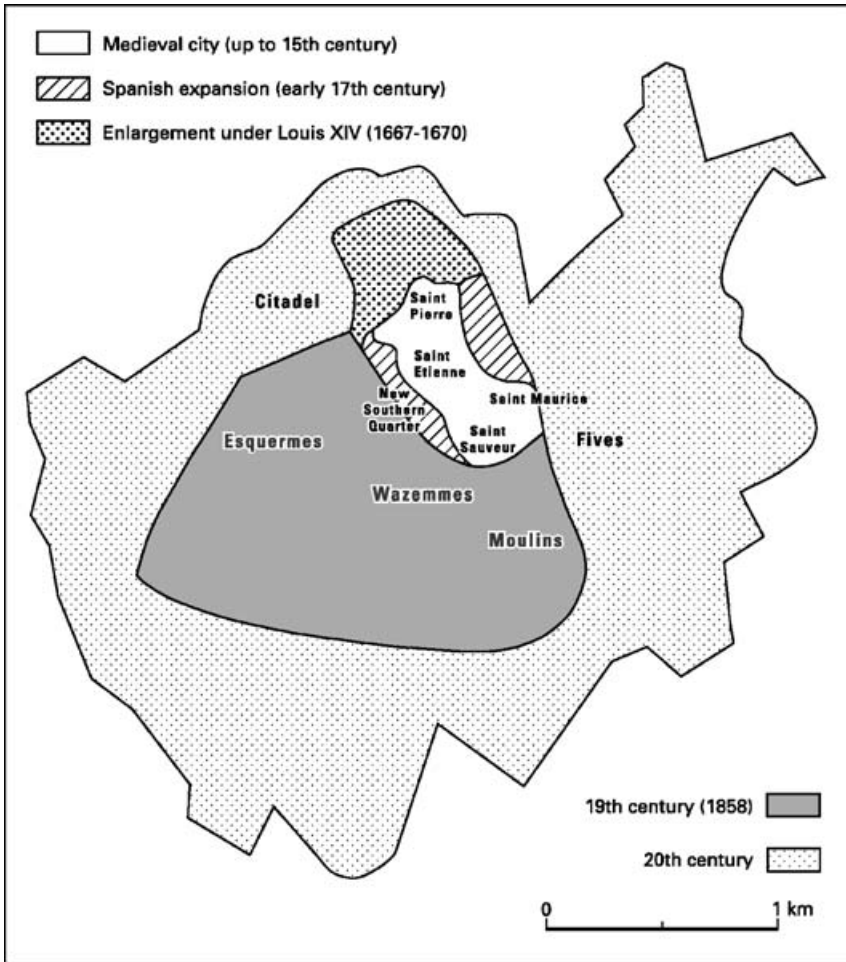


Figure 3. *The growth of Lille through the centuries (adapted from Vanneufville, 1997).*

Revolution in the early 19th century. This enabled the nearby, and historically rival, cloth-making towns of Tourcoing and Roubaix to exploit their (at the time) abundance of available land and greater proximity to the Belgian border to build up their combined industrial capacity and become the equal of the regional capital by the eve of the First World War. To be sure, an imperial decree of 1858 authorising the incorporation into Lille of the neighbouring *communes* of Esquermes, Moulins, and Wazemmes (Figure 3) increased its surface area three and a half times, thus allowing considerable room for expansion, although by that time successful industries had become firmly established in towns geographically close to, but eager to assert their autonomy from, Lille.

Table 1. *Growth of the population of France (1851–1921) (based on Reardon, 1977: 22; Gastaut, 1999)*

Year	Total	Foreigners + Naturalised	% Foreigners
1851	35, 783, 170	392, 814	1.1
1861	37, 386, 313	521, 640	1.4
1872	36, 102, 921	755, 971	2.1
1881	37, 672, 048	1, 078, 136	2.9
1891	38, 342, 948	1, 300, 915	3.4
1901	38, 961, 945	1, 255, 655	3.2
1921	38, 962, 000	1, 786, 000	3.9

Table 2. *Distribution of most numerous foreign nationalities in France (1851–1901) (based on Reardon, 1977: 26)*

	1851		1872		1901	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Belgian	128, 103	33.8%	347, 558	46.9%	323, 390	31.3%
Italian	63, 307	16.7%	112, 579	15.2%	330, 465	32%
German	57, 061	15%	109, 280	14.8%	101, 502	9.8%

Table 3. *Growth of the population of Lille (1800–1913) (Pierrard, 1965)*

	Population	% Increase	Belgians
1800	52, 324		
1851	75, 000	43.3	
1861	131, 735	75.6	21, 237 (16%)
1866	150, 938	14.6	33, 193 (22%)
1872	158, 117	4.8	47, 846 (30%)
1881	170, 000	7.5	52, 500 (31%)
1901	201, 000	18.2	
1913	217, 000	8.0	

The demographic expansion of Lille, and the second and third largest urban areas in the Nord, Roubaix and Tourcoing, may be attributed in no small part to the influx of Belgian workers. To some degree, this reflects the situation in France as a whole, where a decline in the birth rate was partially compensated by immigration (Table 1). For much of the second half of the 19th century, the Belgians constituted the largest group of foreigners and these were overwhelmingly concentrated in the *département* of the Nord which had the largest grouping of foreign nationals of the major urban areas of France (Table 2).

The speed of the demographic expansion in the Lille conurbation shown by Tables 3 and 4 is difficult to overstate, particularly in comparison to the slow rates of increase on a national level (Table 1). The population of Lille increased fourfold

Table 4. Growth of the populations of Roubaix and Tourcoing (1800–1901) (based on Hilaire, 1984; Lottin, 1986; Reardon, 1977)

	Roubaix	Increase	Belgians	Tourcoing	Increase	Belgians
1800	8, 302			11, 380		
1851	34, 656	317%	37%	27, 615	143%	25%
1872	75, 987	119%	55%	43, 322	56.8%	
1901	124, 635	64%	29%	79, 468	83.4%	

over the course of the 19th century, doubling in the 15 years between 1851 and 1866. That of Roubaix was 14 times greater around 1900 than it had been around the turn of the previous century. While the expansion of Tourcoing was more measured than that of its near neighbour (cf. Pooley, 2004: 124), the population rose more than sevenfold over the course of the century. Although it is difficult to trace the evolution of the proportion of Belgians in all three towns over the whole period, Lottin (1986: 153) states that the proportion in Tourcoing was 25% mid-century and evidence presented by Pierrard (1965) shows that it rose to over 30% in Lille around 20 years later. In the 1870s more than half the population of Roubaix was of Belgian origin (Reardon, 1977: 81; Hilaire, 1984: 171), of whom 88% were of Flemish extraction (Landrecies, 2001: 28). By the end of the century, such high proportions had begun to drop significantly as a result of the naturalisation law of 1889.

In addition to its tertiary role as the regional capital, Lille offered a more varied industrial base than its rivals. While Roubaix and Tourcoing concentrated increasingly on wool as the century unfolded, Lille developed its cotton mills, while accumulating an increasing share of the national market in linen (80% of French production in 1890), and engineering, particularly the huge *Compagnie de Fives* works established in the 1860s in the eponymous nearby suburb (Vanneufville, 1997: 170) (Figure 3). More crucially for this study, however, immigration patterns showed appreciable differences. In the north-eastern corner of the conurbation, it is more difficult to point to particular areas where there were high concentrations of Flemings. Moreover, the greater accessibility of Roubaix and Tourcoing to Belgian Flanders made commuting on a daily or weekly basis perfectly feasible, whether on foot or from the 1880s by rail or from 1902 by tram. Although daily commuting to Lille by public transport was not possible until well into the 20th century, it remained advantageous for workers living in Belgium to work in France until the 1960s, since which time the advantages began to flow mostly in the opposite direction.

In 19th century Lille, on the other hand, the *communes* incorporated into the regional capital in 1858 and certain nearby suburbs, particularly Wazemmes and Fives, were perceived to have high concentrations of Flemish-speaking migrants. Lille also retained a traditional working-class quarter, Saint-Sauveur, which was at once less attractive than the newly urbanised areas and probably too overcrowded to house significant numbers of new arrivals. Saint-Sauveur was the centre of the



Figure 4. *Roubaix in the late 19th Century* (adapted from Leroux and Guillemin (1997)).

traditional linen trade until the 1860s. For decades linen was to prove less amenable to mechanisation than wool or cotton, and hence less productive and less well paid. Nonetheless, the pre-eminent position attained by Lille in this sector could not have been achieved without the contribution of Wazemmes. Considerable rivalry, sometimes far from friendly, developed between the two areas with ethnically based gangs vying for domination (Vanneufville, 1997: 177). There are arguably two areas of Roubaix where greater concentrations of Flemings could be observed in the 1870s, l'Epeule and the rue des Longues Haies (Reardon, 1977: 241) (Figure 4). Part of the reason why these areas had high concentrations of Belgians was that they

contained many *courées* (scullery-style housing built behind street frontage), which constituted the cheapest, although least congenial, form of housing available.

3 EVIDENCE FROM DIALECTOLOGY AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

To characterise the three-way contact situation between Picard, French and Flemish in the period under scrutiny, a number of sources are of relevance. For Picard, no fewer than eight field sites within the present-day Lille-Métropole are mapped either in the *Atlas linguistique de la France (ALF)* (Gilliéron and Edmont, 1902–10) or the *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique picard (ALPic)* (Carton and Lebègue, 1989, 1998). A monograph on the patois of Gondécourt (Cochet, 1933) shows a highly conservative form of Picard which stands out even in Flutre's (1977) wide-ranging overview as markedly conservative, particularly in the way that virtually every vowel is strongly diphthongised.

While these studies focus on rural or now periurban parts of Lille-Métropole, evidence for the larger towns, where Flemish immigration was largely concentrated, is provided for Roubaix by Viez (1910) and for Lille and Tourcoing by Carton (1972). While, as is usually the case in dialectological studies including that of Viez, French-influenced forms were largely sifted out, Carton's work is based on recordings of speakers born between 1874 and 1896, which were re-analysed for the purpose of this study. The speech produced covers a wide range of diaphasic variation from local *patois* to regionally marked forms of French, some of which are remarkably similar to the model samples of regional French selected for Carton *et al.* (1983).

The studies of Lefebvre (1991) and Pooley (1996), both conducted within a Labovian framework, provide a wide-ranging sample of how French was pronounced in Lille in the 20th century, with a total of 179 speakers born between the 1890s and the 1980s. While Lefebvre's study covers a full spectrum of social strata, Pooley concentrates on working-class subjects (equivalent to Point 4 or 3 on the French Education Ministry's four-point scale predicting academic success according to parents' profession: Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, <http://www.education.gouv.fr/ival>). The output recorded differs significantly in its dialectality. Lefebvre (1991: 48) differentiates the French of her own subjects from those of Carton (1972) whose output is dialectally marked and perceived (by Lefebvre at least) to be virtually as distinctive as traditional *patois*. The Pooley data, on the other hand, display a greater diaphasic range and a rather fuzzier distinction between French and Picard features.

Two other sets of data were gathered with a view to analysing perceptions. Firstly, a series of 26 interviews conducted by David, Guillemain and Waret (undated) between 1990 and 1995 with informants from Roubaix, born in the first two decades of the 20th century, some of whom were children of primo-immigrants of Flemish descent and others recounting less direct memories of linguistic diversity in that period. Secondly, this evidence of collective cultural memory may be supplemented by contemporary-speaker perceptions expressed in sociolinguistic

Table 5. *Items of Flemish origin cited by Landrecies (2001: 57)*

Item	Gloss
<i>betche</i>	'a little'
<i>cotche</i>	'shelter' or 'room under the stairs'
<i>couquebake</i>	'pancake' from <i>koek</i> 'cake' and <i>bake</i> 'bake'
<i>potjevlees</i>	'cooked meat in jelly' from <i>potje</i> and <i>vlees</i> 'meat'
<i>stockfish</i>	'dried fish'
<i>zoetepape</i>	'kind of soup'

interviews conducted between 1995 and 1999 with 172 school students from various parts of Lille as well as a survey of schools inspectors carried out in 2001 (Pooley, 2004).

Other sources contribute to the image of cultural memory regarding the use of Picard and the effect of the significant Flemish presence in the major towns of the area: firstly, the historians Pierrard (1965), and Vanneufville (1997); secondly, the memoirs of a man of Flemish extraction recounting his youth in Wazemmes during the interwar years (Vindevogel, 1984); finally, the literary narrative of events in *La Courée*, a popular trilogy by Marie-Paule Armand (1990–92) and the best known work by the most distinguished Roubaisian literary figure Maxence van der Meersch (1907–51), *Quand les sirènes se taisent* (1933), which describes conditions in the rue des Longues Haies (Figure 4) in the interwar period.

4 CHRONICLING LINGUISTIC CHANGES

Perhaps the first point to note is the perhaps surprising lack of any Flemish 'adstratum effect' on local vernaculars, whether it be in terms of accent or lexis, that can be specifically attributed to the period chosen for study. Landrecies (2001: 57) lists a mere half a dozen items of Flemish origin used in the Nord but not in other parts of France, none of which may be claimed to be particularly frequent (Table 5). Yet even this brief list may be pared down. Two of the items quoted, *couquebache*, *stockfisch*, are listed in a glossary completed a quarter of a century earlier in a closely related variety, Rouchi (spoken in the Valenciennois) (Hécart, 1834).

A small number of phonological variants might have been favoured by the considerable Flemish presence, e.g. word-final consonant devoicing (Pooley, 1994) and pre-rhotic raised *a*. As these features are analysed in Section 5, suffice it to say, for now, that on the basis of available evidence, the Flemish lexical adstratum resulting from these decades of massive immigration is at most minimal. Moreover, Flemish speakers appear to have been assimilated quickly into French society. As Landrecies has it, 'Il n'y a pas eu brassage français-picard-flamand mais assimilation rapide du flamand' (Landrecies, 2001: 59) and their presence, although numerically significant for decades, seems to have left French and indeed Picard varieties remarkably unaffected.

Table 6. Selected Lillois vernacular features

Item	Example
a) Unambiguously Picard features	
1) diphthongisation of close <i>o</i>	[k i̯ e b ^o o] ‘qu’il est beau’ cf. French [k i̯ e bo]
2) Picard [ʃ] corresponding to French [s]	[garʃɔ̃] ‘garçon’ cf. French [garsɔ̃]
3) Picard disjunctive pronouns	<i>mi, ti, li</i> cf. French ‘moi, toi, lui’
b) Redistributed features	
4) word-final consonant devoicing (WFCD)	[sa] ‘sage’ cf. French [saʒ]
5) pre-rhotic raised <i>a</i> [æɾ]	[tæɾ] ‘tard’ cf. French [tar]
6) unvocalised <i>l</i> [Vl]	[fil] ‘fille’ cf. French [fiʝ]
c) Regional French feature	
7) Back [ɑ] in open word-final syllables	[sa] ‘ça’ cf. More generally [sa]

5 PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL VARIATION AND CHANGE

Over the century and a half covered by the various corpora, features of Lillois vernaculars may be sub-divided as follows:

- 1) Historical Picard features generally perceived as such;
- 2) Sociolinguistically ambiguous features that may have been redistributed from i) French to Picard; ii) Picard to French;
- 3) Regional French variants that remain widely used by young people despite virtually complete depicardisation of other aspects of their vernacular.

Examples of each of these categories are given in Table 6 and an overview of their occurrence in the various corpora in Table 7.

Diphthongisation is only attested in varieties of Picard that are clearly differentiated from French and most consistently among speakers born in the 19th century. While Viez’ (1910) depiction of the vernaculars of Roubaix, Tourcoing and Wattrelos indicates that diphthongisation occurred over a wider range of vowels and lexical items than in Lille, the diphthongs concerned were characterised by weak secondary elements indicated by the superscript in the transcription, amounting to what might be called vowel colouring, in contrast to the full-blown diphthongal realisations noted in Gondecourt by Cochet (1933). According to Pouchain (1998: 45) this village lying to the south of Lille appears have been unaffected by the first wave of industrialisation, thus remaining for much of the 19th century in relative social and economic isolation, compared to some of its neighbours. Moreover, Viez noted that since Roubaix and Tourcoing had become heavily urbanised, such traditional forms were being replaced by monophthongs, making these vernaculars more isomorphic with French. Comparison of the data that are merely transcribed by contemporary observers with those recorded later shows the latter to be significantly poorer in their range of diphthongs. [ɛ̃o] is the most frequent in Carton (1972). The contrast of [ɛ̃ bo lif] ‘un beau livre’ in non-group-final position and [ki̯e b^oo] ‘qu’il est beau!’ is noted by Viez.

Table 7. Occurrence of the seven features in the various corpora

Corpus	Birth date of subjects	[^o o]	[f]	<i>mi, ti</i>	WFCD	[æR]	Vl	[ɑ]
1) Viez (1910) Roubaix	1850–60	+	+	+	+	– ^m	+	– ^m
2) Carton (1972) Tourcoing	1874–91	±	+	+	±	±	+ ^d	±
3) Carton (1972) Lille	1892–96	– ^m	±	±	±	±	±	+
4) Carton <i>et al.</i> (1983) Roubaix	1911	–	–	–	±	+	±	+
5) Lefebvre (1991) Pooley (1996)* LMCU	pre- 1938	–	±	±	±	±	±	±
6) Lefebvre (1991) Pooley (1996)* LMCU	1939–1952	–	±	– ^m	±	±	– ^m	±
7) Lefebvre (1991) Pooley (1996)* LMCU	1953–1965	–	– ^m	–	±	±	–	±
8) Pooley (1996) Marcq-en-Barœul	1979–1981	–	–	–	– ^m	– ^m	–	±

+ = Picard variant used systematically; – = French variant used systematically; ± = variable; –^m = Picard variant used marginally;

*only [æR] and [ɑ] are studied by Lefebvre (1991).

The two other unambiguously Picard features selected are the [f] variant and a morphological feature, the Picard singular disjunctive pronouns *mi, ti, li* equivalent to French *moi, toi, lui*. These two features may be considered emblematic, if not stereotypical, since they occur in the term Chti or Chtimi, which may be used to refer either to the vernaculars of Lille and the adjacent areas of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais such as Lens, or as an ethnic label for the inhabitants of the area. Speakers from Roubaix–Tourcoing born in the 19th century use them consistently, in contrast to their variable occurrence in the speech of the Lillois informants. Although neither variant is used in the examples of regional French selected by Carton *et al.* (1983), they were not necessarily perceived as being totally incompatible with what Carton (1981: 17) calls ‘français d’intention’ (Table 7, Rows 2 and 3), since they are minority variants in the speech of the subjects born before 1938 in the 1983 corpus (Row 4). They become marginal in the usage of speakers born during and immediately after World War Two and are not used by any subject born in the second half of the 20th century (Rows 7 and 8; Figure 6).

Two of the features which undergo redistribution between French and Picard, word-final consonant devoicing (WFCD) and pre-rhotic raised *a* [æR] are variable in both the Carton and Pooley data until well into the 20th century but appear to be becoming marginalised in the speech of the most recent generations. Both WFCD and the third redistributed feature, the non-vocalisation of *l* [Vj]:[VI], are

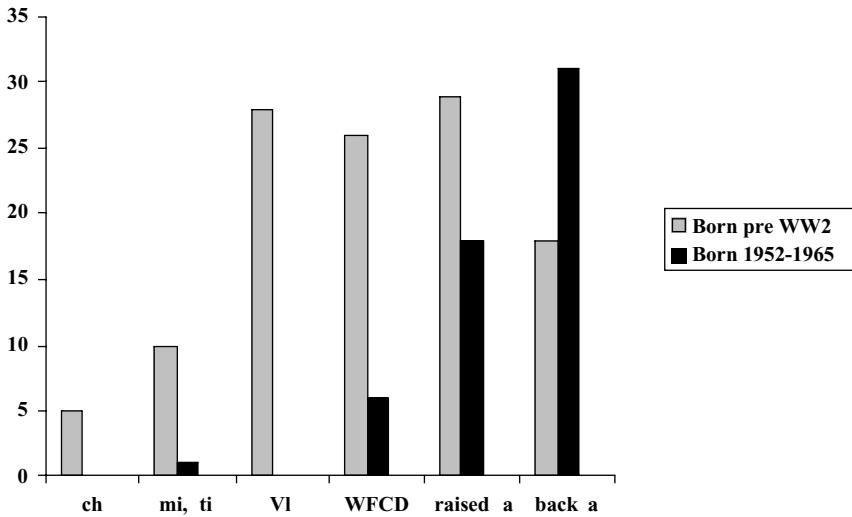


Figure 5. Use of selected variants – speakers born before and after World War Two.

historically Picard features used consistently in Viez but becoming variable among subsequent generations and perceived to be French in the first half of the 20th century. Among speakers born after 1938 both features lose favour very rapidly, especially [fil] ‘fille’ type forms which are not used by anyone born after 1953. WFCD shows greater resistance but the difference in frequency of use between speakers born before and after 1938 is significant (Figure 5).

In contrast to WFCD and [Vj]:[Vj], pre-rhotic raised *a* is, according to Viez’ observations, marginal and used only in indisputably French items such as the street name ‘rue des Arts’ [rydezæR]. Although a long attested feature of Parisian vernacular (Gadet, 1992), pre-rhotic raised *a* is also prominent in northern vernaculars such as those of Lille and Lens (Hornsby, 1996). All three features are uncontroversially part of the ‘model’ varieties of regional French presented in Carton *et al.* (1983). Attested hyperdialectalisms show some WFCD forms to have been re-picardised as in [eglij] ‘église’ in which [ʃ] corresponds to a ‘French’ [s] resulting from the devoicing of the final consonant of the French form [egliz]. Cochet (1933) cites [ʃit] ‘cidre’ as typical of the French-influenced Picard spoken in Seclin, the nearest sizeable town to Gondécourt (Figure 1). Among the youngest informants, (the 1980s generation) however, a speaker who used [vinek] ‘vinaigre’ was corrected and told to speak French.

That the non-vocalisation of *l* was perceived as French is lent credence by one of the informants in the 1983 corpus who gave [butɛl] ‘bouteille’ as a French gloss of a *patois* word and by a president of a *patois* association who dismissed the form [fotø] ‘fauteuil’ as pseudo-Picard. Unlike pre-rhotic raised *a*, neither WFCD nor the non-vocalisation of *l* are attested in Parisian or generalised vernacular French.

Given that [æR] remained buoyant for several decades longer, it is at least plausible that this feature was perceived to be part of a more generalised vernacular French, the adoption of which was accelerated in Lille by the significant movements and mixing of population caused by World War Two.

Of the three features selected, possible Flemish influence may be hypothesised for WFCD, raised *a* and back *a*. WFCD is systematic in Germanic varieties and has clearly influenced the pronunciation of French speakers in the major Romance-Germanic contact zones, i.e. the Nord-Pas-de-Calais where it is significantly more prevalent in traditional varieties than in more southerly parts of the Picardophone area (cf., Pooley, 1994), Belgium (e.g. Baetens-Beardsmore, 1971; Bauvois, 2001) and Alsace (e.g. Philipp, 1985). As regards the *a* vowels, descriptions of the varieties of Flemish spoken in the Nord (Marteel, 1992) and in Ghent (Taeldeman, 1985) give some grounds for drawing parallels. Both varieties have raised variants of *a* or open variants of *e*. In the Nord [æ] is by no means restricted to pre-rhotic position as it may occur in syllables checked by other consonants e.g. [wæɫ] ‘well’. This variety also has a contrast between short and long *a*, which are close to being in complementary distribution as are front (checked syllables) and back *a* (open, particularly word-final syllables) in Nordiste French. In Ghentish Flemish there is a four-way contrast between front, raised and back *a* and close *o*²: [sta:t] *stout* ‘insolent’; [zæ:tə] *zetten* ‘put’; [za:t] *zat* ‘drunk’ and [zo:t] *zot* ‘fool’ (Taeldeman, 1985). In other respects this variety differs markedly from those spoken in France, in that the three *a* variants occur largely in checked, and hardly if ever in open word-final syllables. Both varieties have apical *r* as did rural varieties of Picard. Indeed, one of Carton’s Tourcoing informants who was born in Belgium shows vestigial traces of [æR] sequences. The change from apical to velar *r* was reported for the Flemish spoken in Ghent around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, possibly under the influence of the resident French-speaking minority (De Gruyter, 1909 quoted in Taeldeman, 1985). In Lille, the adoption of uvular *r* is one of the first documented changes to have occurred after the annexation of 1667 (Carton, personal communication). All this suggests that language contact did have lasting consequences but that French influenced Flemish far more than the reverse.

The Carton and Pooley data suggest two further checks on possible Flemish influence. Firstly, of Carton’s two Lillois informants, one came from the traditional working-class quarter of Saint-Sauveur and the other from the new (in the 19th century) ‘Flemish’ quarter of Wazemmes (Table 8). While both varieties show greater convergence than those spoken in nearby towns to the north-east as regards the use of diphthongs, the Saint-Sauveur speaker generally uses Picard and regional vernacular forms more consistently, except for one feature, the non-vocalisation of

² Unlike the Flemish of Ghent, varieties spoken in the Nord have both open and close *o* with similar phonological distribution to local varieties of French, i.e. [ɔ] in checked syllables and [o] in open syllables, Nordiste French *rôle* [rɔl] *cadeau*, *Roger* [kado] [ro:ʒe]: Nordiste Flemish [zɔt] ‘mad’ a long close [o:] in stressed open syllables [ʃo:lə] ‘school’.

Table 8. Use of selected variants by two Lillois speakers (Carton, 1972)

Place of residence	[°o]	[f]	mi, ti	WFCD	VI	[æR]	[ɑ]
Saint-Sauveur	–	±	+	+	±	+	+
Wazemmes	–	±	±	+	+	?	±

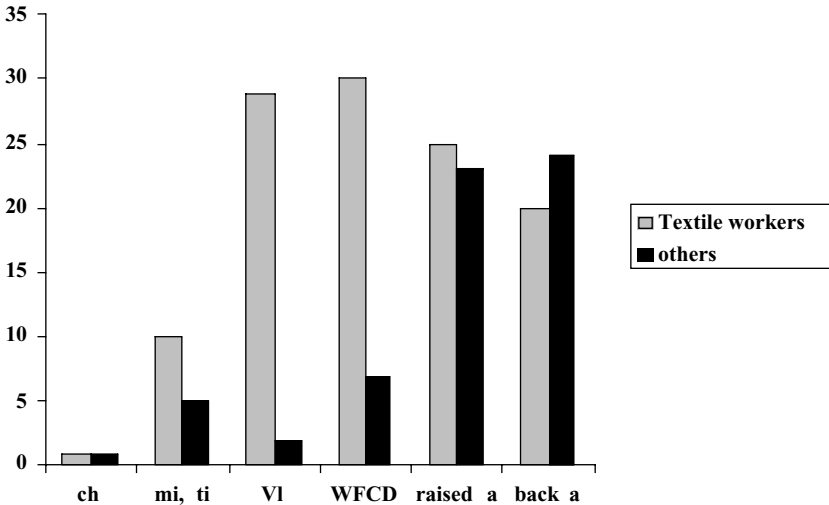


Figure 6. Comparison of textile workers and others for six variants in the 1983 corpus (Pooley, 1996).

l (Vj:VI). As for the three variants that might conceivably be reinforced by Flemish influence, the two speakers are both consistent in their use of WFCD but the Saint-Sauveur speaker is more consistent in his use of *a* vowels.

In the second of the two proposed checks, I contrast the usage of textile workers with other informants in the Roubaix corpus of 1983. As this industry was the principal magnet for Flemish workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it is at least plausible that the patterns of variation occurring might still reflect the high proportions of workers of Flemish origin in the crucial period (Figure 6).

Although all six features are minority variants in the corpus as a whole, textile workers consistently use both unambiguously Picard features and the two redistributed features more frequently in every case where the two categories of speaker may be differentiated. On the other hand, the most marked segmental feature of Nordiste French, the back *a* which shows increased use among younger speakers (Pooley, 2001: 182), occurs to a greater extent in the output of other informants. The two redistributed features WFCD and VI were also for subjects born before 1938 significantly female features, i.e. used more by women than by men. If, as Labov (1990) gives ground for suggesting, WFCD and VI were also incoming features in the early decades of the 20th century, it seems plausible to

propose, given the way in which the variants were then apparently perceived, that women took the lead in adopting variants construed to be characteristic of French at the time. Indeed, VI is the only feature used more by the female Wazemmes informant than the male Saint-Sauveur speaker. The marked change in fortunes of the two features in subsequent generations, i.e. the sudden loss of VI and return to the classic sociolinguistic gender pattern for WFCD, appears to strengthen the argument.

The growth of the conurbation which could not have occurred without the readily available supply of Belgian labour undoubtedly gave rise to conditions favouring koinéisation, which meant effectively the spread of Lillois forms whether in traditional local varieties or in vernacular forms of French. As regards the former, Carton (1972) notes that the ancestral varieties of Roubaix–Tourcoing could be differentiated from those of Lille by affricated forms such as [tʃjɛ̃] as compared to [kjɛ̃] ‘chien’ in Lille and yodless forms such as [bo] and [kartɪ] as compared to Lillois [bjo] ‘beau’ and [kærtje] ‘quartier’ (Pooley, 2004: 302). In the 1983 corpus, speakers born prior to 1938 do not use yodless Picard forms but manifest some degree of alternation between [tʃ] and [k]. Speakers from Roubaix born in the 1940s and 1950s consciously switching to *patois*, e.g. to characterise an older person, made some use of yodful forms such as [bjo] and [jo] ‘eau’ but items like ‘chien’ were realised with an initial velar stop to the exclusion of affricated variants. As for vernacular French forms, the back *a* is always the majority form in word-final open syllables in Lille from the earliest data onwards (Carton, 1972). In Roubaix, on the other hand, it moves from being marginal in the earliest data of Vieux to being a significantly used variant among speakers born in the second half of the 20th century.

If Table 7 appears to depict a story of step-wise change from generation to generation, triggered and even accelerated in part by the arrival of large numbers of non-native speakers, the effect is arguably far less significant than the hiatuses caused by the two German occupations (1914–18; 1940–44). Quite apart from the vast and sudden movements of population that they caused, the two occupations, like the Flemish immigration, led to frequent contacts with Germanic speakers, at least for those that remained, for in addition to day-to-day ‘public’ contact, many were forced to accommodate German personnel. From September 1914, many men of fighting age (18–48) were evacuated, and during the conflict, thousands fled or were deported (Pierrard, 1981: 220; Hilaire, 1984: 213). The populations of all the major towns fell dramatically, with that of Lille dropping from 217,000 in 1914 to 112,000 in 1918.

From 1940 to 1944, the region was occupied by German troops for a second time, again causing mass displacement of populations. Vast numbers fled all the major towns, maybe as many as 9/10 Lillois (Vanneufville, 1997: 224) and 8/10 Roubaisians (Hilaire, 1984: 250), compensated numerically to a degree by the arrival of tens of thousands of refugees who had taken flight from Holland and Belgium. 20,000 more were taken by force from Lille to work in Germany. Around 7,000 were taken prisoner.

The relative status, however, of the two foreign contact groups was completely different. Unlike the influx of humble factory workers, the presence of an army of invasion gave rise to massive reductions of the population, a not insignificant part of which was the displacement of long-settled populations. Understandably, accounts of the war-time periods pay little heed to the use of local vernaculars. Although such invisibility may be interpreted as suggesting that inhabitants of the Lille conurbation did not commonly resort to the use of Picard as a secret language, it may have been a consequence of nationalistic sentiments, which the occupations unquestionably reinforced and which, in any case, had been stronger in this front-line border region than any distinctive regionalist consciousness in relation to other parts of France. If, then, evidence of the use of Picard in the periods 1914–18 and 1940–44 is well nigh non-existent, Flemish speakers, whether from Belgian or French Flanders, are known to have taken advantage of the fact that by using Flemish they could convince the Germans that they were not French.

Although linguistic evidence from the war years may be scarce, observation of the before and after effects is possible. For the consequences of World War One, one has to be content with saying that Picard speakers born in the 1920s and 1930s can generally confirm the picture built up in Table 8, stating, for instance, that their parents' generation spoke *patois* with a far less French-influenced pronunciation, as indicated, for instance by the loss of diphthongs. While speakers born after the Second World War maintain, as minority variants, a number of features, in particular WFCD, pre-rhotic raised *a*, back *a*, they did so significantly less frequently than speakers born up to 1938 (Figure 5).

6 PERCEPTIONS OF THE PAST

Clearly the huge influx of Belgian workers into the Lille conurbation contributed to urban and industrial expansion and thus to greatly increased contact between speakers of various vernaculars. In the longer run, this reinforced a process in which Lillois and generalised French vernacular forms eventually won out over other locally used alternatives. It is curious, given their numbers, that the Flemish-speaking Belgians appeared so ready to adopt the language of the host country and not maintain that of their nearby homeland. Yet in so doing they appear to have helped along a process, which, given the absence of any significant adstratum attributable to the immigration of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, would probably have happened in a similar fashion, albeit more slowly, without them. As Landrecies (2001: 29–30) points out, the greater tenacity of Picard compared to Flemish is surprising:

‘ténacité du dialecte et volatilisisation de l’idiome étranger . . . Il ne s’agit donc pas du cas relativement simple d’une assimilation du néerlandais au français mais d’une assimilation de dialectes du néerlandais au français dans un contexte dialectal picard’.

It is perhaps all the more surprising given that the areas of Wazemmes and Fives were for a time, according to contemporary observers, so full of Flemish speakers that it

was difficult to believe that one was still in France (Delsalle, 1991). Nonetheless, in terms of rivalry between local gangs, Saint-Sauveur appears to have enjoyed greater sub-cultural capital, both in terms of fighting prowess and linguistic domination (Vanneufville, 1997: 178). According to Pierrard (1965: 45) Saint-Sauveur was the cradle of Lillois *patois*, i.e. it was the area where the variety was perceived as being most spontaneously spoken. The influx of workers both from outlying villages and Flanders caused it to lose its local distinctiveness to such a degree that this *patois* derived from Picard had become 'terriblement abâtardi, sans orthographe, pénétré et déformé par l'argot et le mauvais français' (Pierrard, 1972: 146).

Yet in contrast to observations made at the time or by historians of the 19th century, contemporary popular perceptions now see the 'Flemish' quarters, particularly Wazemmes, as the heartland of Lille *patois*. For instance, during the 1983 fieldwork, some of my informants in Roubaix earnestly recommended that I go to Wazemmes to seek out *patois* speakers. The reason why they did not recommend Saint-Sauveur was that this quarter had by the 1920s become a slum clearance area and had long since been largely rebuilt, currently housing the city hall with its emblematic belfry as well as some important regional administrative buildings. Wazemmes and Fives, on the other hand, have remained working-class areas. These perceptions are confirmed in works of popular literature such as Marie-Paule Armand's *La Courée* in which the heroine, Constance, the teenage daughter of a railway worker from the Compagnie du Nord, whose family has fallen on hard times, is sent to stay with relatives in Fives, who lose no time in informing her that she must pay her way by working in a local textile factory. *Inter alia*, Constance is initially taken aback by the rough manners and *patois* speech of her new workmates (Armand, 1990: 81).

The fictionalised memoirs of Jean Vindevogel (1984) provide greater details of life in Wazemmes in the period 1919 and 1936. Two of the main protagonists Alphonse Demeulemester and Julien Vermeulen, despite patronymics indicative of Flemish descent, view newly arrived Flemings with amusement because of their strange accent (p. 26) and behaviour (p. 69). Moreover, contrary to the assumptions of dialectologists, who sought out Picard informants in the rural areas around Lille, the two youths encounter speakers of the ancestral vernacular well nigh exclusively in Wazemmes. For instance, when on a Sunday afternoon outing the two main characters venture as far as the Seclin canal between Houplin and Gondrecourt (Figure 1), the locals address them in French and only an elderly angler who happened to be out fishing speaks 'le pur patois de Wazemmes' (p. 316). Indeed, the only character not from Wazemmes to speak *patois* is a cinema manager from Roubaix, who upbraids the pianist in the 'savoureux patois de Roubaix-Tourcoing' (p. 269).³

Van der Meersch's (1933) portrayal in *Quand les sirènes se taisent* of a bitter and protracted strike which took place in the early 1930s depicts the quarter of the Rue des Longues Haies in Roubaix (Figure 4) as more or less entirely French,

³ This was still the time of silent films.

while evoking the traditional antagonisms towards the Flemish who commuted or were bussed in from their homeland (e.g. p. 122–123). Since successive French governments granted the factory owners' wishes for protectionist trade policies on manufactured goods and a totally free labour market, Belgian workers, although encouraged to emigrate by their own government, (Reardon, 1977: 122) were resented, particularly if they did not settle in France. Part of the cause of such bitterness was the differential in the cost of living which for many decades made it advantageous for Belgians to earn higher wages in France and spend their money at home. The cross-frontier commuters were given the highly pejorative nickname *pots au beurre* 'butter pots' referring to the vessels in which Belgian workers brought their food for the day or the week. The term acquired a connotation of antipathy towards foreign workers, feeding the perception that they not only took employment opportunities away from the native French, but guaranteed a long-term oversupply of labour which depressed wages. Such animosity was exacerbated when factory owners sought to use the Flemings as strike breakers (Pouchain, 1998: 114). Van der Meersch (1933) portrays the Flemish 'commuters' both as strike-breaking pawns manipulated by factory owners (p. 232) and yokels who neither knew any French nor sought to escape from their linguistic isolation (p. 141).

The interviews conducted by David, Guillemin and Waret (undated) in the 1990s of 26 people from Roubaix born in the first two decades of the 20th century suggest a very different picture. Although three or four of the interviewees gave voice to a degree of hostility towards the Flemish, the majority expressed positive sentiments, albeit in somewhat stereotypical terms, downtoning any conflictual factors in interethnic relations (Landrecies, 2001: 43). While impressionistic accounts from the 1860s and 1870s (e.g. Reybaud, 1867; Delsalle, 1991: 118) and to a much lesser degree the careful street-by-street analysis of Reardon (1977: 241) suggest that certain quarters, most emblematically the rue des Longues Haies, were Belgian 'ghettoes',⁴ this was no longer the case by the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Given the massive influx of Flemish speakers in the 19th century, it is somewhat surprising that Flemish did not survive for longer. While Flemish persisted in the private sphere, it could also be used in public places. Many cafés and other businesses posted *Men spreekt vlaams* notices to attract Flemish-speaking customers, whether they came out of communicative necessity or ethnolinguistic loyalty. Flemish-speaking priests, mainly from French Flanders, were recruited to conduct Church services. Although foreigners were denied trade-union rights in France unless naturalised, workers in Ghent had set up well-organised trade unions who collaborated with labour movements in northern France. From a linguistic perspective, it is interesting to note that during the 1880s and 1890s – difficult times in terms of industrial relations – workers' groups held rallies in the border village of Mont-à-Leux, using French and Flemish on alternate occasions as the language of communication.

⁴ The term is probably not justified since it effectively refers to areas as small as a single *courée* where the proportion of Belgians was 75% in a town where they constituted 55% of the general population at the time.

Flemish immigrants to northern France were at the time leaving one diglossic situation for another. Use of Romance speech in Flanders dates back to Roman times and from the early Middle Ages French had always had at least a share of H functions becoming highly dominant as a result of the periods of French and Dutch rule – any attempt to promote standard Dutch tended to be regarded as back-door ‘hollandisation’ (Swiggers, 2001: 335). As was the case before Belgium was founded as a unitary state with a French-speaking elite, French continued to be the language of upward mobility, often to the point where Flemish speakers, who had successfully acquired French, abandoned their first language. As an L variety, Flemish largely lacked an overarching standard and became subject to dialect fragmentation with the result that not all immigrants to northern France could understand one another. Moreover, as the David *et al.* (undated) interviews indicate, many first-generation immigrants had already acquired some French before going to work in France. As already suggested by reference to Vindevogel, assimilated young people of Flemish origin considered themselves superior to new arrivals by virtue of their Frenchness and made no attempt to valorise or even show awareness of their roots (cf. Landrecies, 2001: 61).

The David *et al.* (undated) interviews also serve as a reminder that the French education system proved to be an effective means of integration for the generations born in France. Primary-school teachers were not particularly harsh in their attitude towards Flemish, since they tended to ignore utterances in that language completely, in stark contrast to a rather more aggressive attitude towards Picard. At the time also, there was an expectation that foreigners should acquire French and give up their own linguistic heritage to become fully accepted. Not surprisingly, as the interviews illustrate, many Flemish-speaking parents chose not to transmit their language to the children, except in cases of communicative necessity, in particular if one or other of the parents spoke no more than limited French. In the early decades of Belgian immigration, French was very much the language of upward social mobility in Flanders (Wilmars, 1966). Moreover, although early expressions of Flemish nationalism can be noted around mid-century (Swiggers, 2001: 338), arguably the first changes with tangible social consequences were not introduced until 1873⁵ (Wilmars, 1966: 51), and would not have significantly altered the outlook of potential emigrants to France, given that the economic circumstances that gave rise to emigration had changed very little and the government legislation that actively encouraged it, not at all.

As already observed, the linguistic situation into which Belgian workers moved was, like the one they left behind, generally characterised as diglossic, with the important difference that, in northern France, the minorised variety was showing signs of convergence towards vernacular forms of the national language. As regards the ‘native French’, a number of observers point to the very clear distinction in their minds between French and *patois*, as they referred to it, both in terms of the

⁵ It became possible to use Flemish to testify in court.

language being used and when to use it. According to one of the subjects in the David *et al.* study:

Rares étaient les ouvriers qui parlaient français. Ça commençait à parler français aux environs du contremaître, du directeur.

Quand ils allaient au bistro boire un coup, faire une manille ou une partie de cartes, «i parlotent patois», évidemment. Si t'allais à la messe ou à une communion, on s'efforçait de parler français. (both quoted in Landrecies, 2001: 30)

It was usual therefore for the working classes to speak *patois* among themselves, but to switch to French when speaking to the foreman or the boss, or in Church. Nor was it usually deemed to be appropriate to address trade-union meetings other than in French (Guillemin, 1995; cf. Van der Meersch, 1933: 121). Prior to the advent of the cinema in the region (from 1907 onwards), puppet theatres were a popular form of entertainment (and means of education) among factory workers (Leroux and Guillemin, 1997). The typical show differentiated sharply between the serious play on a historical theme in French, and the short burlesque endpiece in *patois* known as the *bamboche*. One of the stock characters of the early Roubaix *bamboches* was Jacques Linflé or Gros Jacques, whose heavily foreign-accented French and rustic manners were a source of mirth, apparently even for primo-immigrants of Flemish background, and in no sense an identity marker to be assumed. Moreover by 1900 he had evolved into a shrewd street-wise character who only spoke *patois*. Certain bilingual songwriters, in particular the Roubaisian singer-songwriter Louis Catrice (1850–1907), used French for serious political topics and *patois* for what might be termed 'light entertainment' (Guillemin, 1995). The results of a 'Variety Naming Test' conducted between 1995 and 1999 among contemporary informants suggest strongly that the differences between French and Picard are perceived more sharply by French than non-French informants. This test was administered to 172 Lillois school students from various parts of Lille-Métropole. Subjects were asked to listen to short extracts from a number of Picard varieties ranging from model exemplars of traditional Picard (Saint-Polois, Cambrésis and Belgian Hainaut) to more converged varieties (Lille and Libercourt in the Bassin Minier) and then to select the most appropriate label from a proposed list of four: French, *patois*, foreign (other) language; mixed variety (French-*patois*). One of the most striking results was the difference in the perceptions of Picard/*patois* of subjects whose families had been French since at least the grandparents' generation and those of foreign (mostly Maghrebine) or mixed parentage.

In all cases the non-French subjects showed themselves more likely to perceive the output heard as French. In every case too, the distinction between French and Picard (*patois*) appears to be sharper for the native French students. For all four varieties spoken in France, a majority of the French students chose the label '*patois*' whereas the converged urban varieties were deemed to be French by 50% or more of informants from other backgrounds. Even the most consistent finding of all, that the Belgian variety was overwhelmingly perceived to be a foreign language

was attenuated in the non-French students' perspective. If, as seems reasonable, comparable differences of perception were operating in the 19th century, then the clear diglossia portrayed by Landrecies would have been blurred for non-native speakers who would have been both more accepting of *patois* forms as French and less aware that they might be indicative of another variety. Moreover, most of the 19th century Flemish workers found themselves in working-class areas where the language of everyday communication is often portrayed as Picard, although the evidence presented points to variation in both the range of Picard variants and the consistency with which they were realised, with the vernacular of Lille being significantly more converged towards French even in comparison to those of the next largest towns. It is perhaps worth pointing out that compulsory primary education was not introduced in Belgium until after the First World War, whereas in France the Ferry reforms introducing free, compulsory state primary education, had become law by 1886. Although in both countries many, if not a majority of, people received some education before this legislation was enacted, the shift from Picard to French was already well under way even among the illiterate. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume on the basis of more recent studies of the *norme* in the two countries e.g. Gueunier *et al.* (1978) and Francard, Lambert and Masuy (1993), that those schooled in France would have been subject, albeit indirectly, to greater normative pressures.

In contrast also to present-day perceptions of autochthonous varieties, it was not the case that varieties which can be readily perceived as distinct languages were more highly regarded than those that might be considered to be local forms of French, particularly as converged forms became more prevalent (Pooley, 2003). It has to be borne in mind that such a hierarchy is largely manifested in bilateral contact situations where each of these varieties is in (unequal) competition with French. Among vernacular varieties, forms used in urban areas have for centuries constituted desirable target varieties for potential shift, if for no other reason than they were used by the greatest clusters of population. In 19th century Lille, Romance varieties, as the mother tongues of the host community, carried greater prestige than Germanic varieties. If, as the David *et al.* (undated) subjects observed, urban factory workers who accounted for at least two thirds of the population (Pierrard, 1965; Hilaire, 1984), generally spoke *patois*, then there remained sufficient critical mass to assimilate the immigrants, who in contrast to their present-day counterparts were not obviously distinct in appearance and culture. Moreover, even in Roubaix in the 1870s, the Belgian majority had been building up over several decades and many, who had not gone through the rather tortuous process of naturalisation, may have been linguistically assimilated in sufficient numbers to maintain a Romance-speaking majority. On the basis of the indications provided by the comparison of the Saint-Sauveur and Wazemmes speakers (Table 8) and the Variety Naming Test, a considerable proportion of Flemish-speaking migrants would have been assimilated linguistically through varieties that might (have) be(en) perceived by some as Picard, but which they themselves perceived to be French. Thus, the process of their assimilation contributed to and probably accelerated

convergence, as was clearly the case for two Polish subjects living in Picardie who came to France in the interwar years (Eloy, Blot, Carcassonne and Landrecies, 2003: 41). This latter study suggests too that migrants coming to France around the mid-20th century were more aware of the distinction between French and Picard forms, although comprehension and use of the latter in certain milieux were an unavoidable part of adaptation (p. 127).

These pressures to assimilation experienced in everyday life would have been reinforced in the decades leading up to the First World War by a political climate in which nationalism and xenophobia were openly expressed even by respected intellectuals (MacMaster, 2001: 113). While initially this was largely the prerogative of the Right, politicians from workers' parties realised by the 1880s that to campaign on an internationalist Marxist platform of worker solidarity lacked sufficient electoral appeal even to working-class voters (Judt, 1989: 105). Marxists like the Roubaix *député* Jules Guesde therefore adopted nationalistic discourses about prioritising the rights of French workers (Reardon, 1977: 271–2). As Derfler (1998: 137) puts it:

In the Nord, a frontier region, national feeling ran especially high, and the charges of antipatriotism and treason hurled at the Workers' Party only hardened its patriotic line.

In such a socio-political climate, it is understandable that foreign nationals from a region where the language of social ascension, even superiority, was that of their country of residence, would have been inclined to play down their Germanic roots and assimilate both linguistically and socially to (or at least to what they perceived to be) French.⁶

7 CONCLUSION

Despite their considerable numbers, the influx of Belgian, and mostly Flemish-speaking, workers into Greater Lille in the 19th and early 20th centuries had relatively little impact, at least in terms of a possible adstratum effect, on the Romance vernaculars spoken in the conurbation at the time. These Belgian migrants seem to have been assimilated quickly (largely by the second generation) and, although not altogether painlessly, nonetheless with little prolonged valorisation of the distinctive aspects of their Flemish roots. Indeed, the meagre list of Flemish lexical items used in local/regional varieties of French quoted by Landrecies (2001) and the more chronologically and diaphasically diffuse inventory of Vanneufville (1997) are more plausibly seen as having entered the language as a result of long-term contact in a linguistic border region. Comparable remarks may be made concerning phonological features. To take a feature of local Romance speech that may be plausibly attributable to contact with Germanic varieties – word-final consonant

⁶ Unlike the Italians migrants in Provence (Blanchet, 2003) who were apparently not under such pressure to deny their roots. As many came from Piedmont, they spoke a regional language similar to Provençal and more aspects of their culture, e.g. culinary, were valued and shared by the host community.

devoicing (WFCD) – there are no grounds for believing that the large-scale immigration of Germanic speakers did any more than reinforce a feature that figured more strongly, particularly in the range of consonants affected, in varieties of Picard spoken in the Lille conurbation, than in the ancestral varieties spoken both further south as well as outside the large urban areas. This socio-geographic distribution was further sharpened by the growth of urban areas to which the Belgian immigrants contributed significantly. WFCD, although undoubtedly a feature of northern urban vernaculars, is neither a marker of the most highly differentiated Picard varieties (Cochet, 1933; Carton and Descamps, 1971; Carton, 1981) nor of Parisian or generalised vernacular French (Bauche, 1946; Gadet, 1992). Moreover, this particular variant turned out to be both a significantly female feature among informants born before 1938 and a ‘textile-worker’ feature among those up until the mid-20th century, while reverting to the classic sociolinguistic gender pattern in subsequent generations. It therefore seems plausible to suggest that use of a historically Picard feature perceived as French in the early 20th century was augmented by the fact that many Flemish mother-tongue speakers adopted the Picard and vernacular French forms, to which they had greatest access.

Moreover, a growing population with a steady stream of new arrivals contributed to the erosion of localised varieties and the features that distinguished them. As examples observed by Viez suggest, features which distinguished Roubaix and Tourcoing speakers born in the 1850s had been lost for the generations who had grown up after the two towns formed a continuous built environment from the 1880s onwards. Comparison of the two speakers born in the 1890s from different parts of Lille suggests that the *patois* of the traditional working-class area of Saint-Sauveur was richer in Picard features than that spoken in the ‘new town’ area of Wazemmes. Where koinésation can be shown to have occurred either with Picard features as with the stop or affricate [k]-[tʃ] or yodful forms such as [bjɛt] ‘bête’ or local/regional ones such as back *a*, the Lillois variants won out over rival forms in every case. Outside Lille, forms characteristic of urban areas, such as uvular *r* as opposed to the rural apical variant or WFCD became the dominant forms.

Such a picture is rather different from that depicted in representations of what might be called the collective memory, since many citizens of Lille-Métropole associate certain typical ‘Flemish’ areas of the 19th century with the use of the traditional Romance vernacular. The strongest case can be made for Wazemmes and to a lesser degree Fives in Lille, partly because they have survived as characteristically working-class areas, which is not the case for Saint-Sauveur in Lille and the rue des Longues Haies in Roubaix which have both been demolished and completely rebuilt.

While large-scale immigration of allochthonous speakers up until World War One undoubtedly accelerated the processes of depicardisation and convergence towards French, the population movements generated were more cumulative and less drastic than those caused by both the first and second World Wars, during which significant proportions of the populations were displaced with brutal suddenness. While linguistic evidence from the war years may be scarce, both occupations

caused long hiatuses in normal social relations which brought clear sociolinguistic consequences. The vernacular of the interwar generations was markedly more converged towards French than that of the pre-World War One generations, yet it contained more Picard features which were more consistently used than that of the post-World War Two generations.

While Landrecies (2001) argues that Flemish immigrants were assimilated to a considerable degree into French working-class society through Picard, he perhaps understates the converged character of the varieties through which this was achieved. This scholarly opinion differs markedly from the perceptions of popular memory which present the 'Flemish' areas of the 19th century as those where local Romance patois are/were most spoken. The divergence may be largely explained by the renovation (and hence the embellishment of their image) of some working-class quarters, such as Saint-Sauveur and rue des Longues Haies, in contrast to Wazemmes and Fives which have maintained their 'traditional' working-class character and image.

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