The myth of structured obsolescence

DAVID HORNSBY

University of Kent

ABSTRACT

Using data from an obsolescent dialect situation in northern France, this paper
questions the view that dedialectalization is a process of level-by-level attrition
which leaves a linguistic residue in Regional French (the 'Structured Obsolescence
Hypothesis'). Comparison of dialect index scores for a number of variables reveals
significant variation in rates of attrition within levels, with some phonological
and morphological variants showing greater vitality than others, but no consistent
relationship between levels as the model would predict. An alternative model is
proposed, based on the relative learnability of different variants, and it is further
argued that rejection of the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis calls some other
assumptions about Regional French into question, notably the view that it can
be considered an intermediate variety between dialect and standard, and that it is
necessarily ephemeral in nature.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper will question some common beliefs about dialect obsolescence in France,
concerning in particular the transition from traditional dialects (or *patois*) to Re-
gional French (*français régional*), a process strongly associated with increasing urbaniz-
ation. There can be no doubt that France's traditional Romance dialects and *langues
régionales* have been losing ground to the national language for some time. Weber
(1979: 79) and others take the end of the First World War as the watershed in their
fortunes, the shared experience of conscription having raised national consciousness
and underlined for many citizens the value of French as a *lingua franca*. As the national
language has advanced, particularly in urban areas, so new varieties have emerged
from contact between local and national norms. Generally labelled *français régional*
(Regional French: RF), these varieties have received remarkably little attention: 'les
parlers régionaux ont été jusqu'ici laissés dans une pénombre douteuse' (Chaurand,
1985: 5). Because their existence is closely associated with the demise of regional
languages and local dialects, they are not infrequently assumed to be intermediate
between the indigenous or 'substrate' variety and Standard French (SF). Perhaps
for this reason, many commentators are content to define RF in negative terms:

Le français régional n'est pas une langue régionale de plus; ce n'est même pas une
langue à proprement parler.   Tuaillon (1988: 291)

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It is extremely difficult to draw up a definitive map of regional French ... since it is essentially an unstable and unpredictable variety of French.   Offord (1990: 243)

In short, these varieties labelled *français régionaux* could be described as forming an intermediate level in a spectrum of variation which goes from the original, semi-moribund dialect, to the standard language.   Battye and Hintze (1990: 306)

Ni français standard, ni patois.   Cover of Carton and Poulet (1991)

 We shall argue below that if RF is often seen as an ill-defined 'halfway house' between SF and dialect or *patois*, attracting little scholarly interest, this is largely because RF varieties have traditionally been seen through the prism of long-standing but largely untested assumptions about dialect death (or dedialectalization), which now require examination. We shall present evidence in particular that what we shall term the 'Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis' has nurtured the mistaken belief that language change can be viewed in isolation from language users. But since assumptions about obsolescence generally come to light in discussions of RF, it is to these emergent varieties that we turn first in the next section.

2 REGIONAL FRENCH AND THE STRUCTURED OBSOLESCENCE HYPOTHESIS

Since RF varieties undoubtedly emerge from contact between local and national norms, it is axiomatic that they represent a dialect residue: in Tuaillon's words (1974: 576) 'ce qui reste du dialecte quand le dialecte a disparu'.[1] Even Martin (1997: 62), who recognizes the possibility of forms from other sources, sees residual dialect features as 'la source la plus importante des régionalismes'. Yet, while this may seem a commonsense assumption, surprisingly little hard evidence is generally advanced to support it. Even more suprisingly, there is little agreement about the nature of the residual features. For Carton (1981: 18), they are predominantly phonological:

L'observation de Dauzat (1922) se vérifie: ce qui disparaît le plus vite, c'est, dans l'ordre décroissant: le lexique, la morphologie, la syntaxe; le plus tenace, c'est le phonétisme, et surtout la prosodie (rythme, intonation).[2]

For Offord and Martin, however, it is at the lexical level that RF traits predominate:

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[1] Cf. Carton et al (1983: 4):

 A une certaine étape, la plupart des traces morphologiques, syntaxiques et phoniques du parler ancien peuvent avoir **presque** entièrement disparu. Tant que ces traces ne sont pas **complètement** effacées, on parle de **parler régional**, de variantes régionales. Celles de la **prononciation**, que l'on a coutume d'appeler l'**accent**, sont l'objet de la présente étude.

[2] In fact, as we shall see below, although Dauzat shares Carton's level-by-level conception of obsolescence, he suggests a very different order of attrition in a later work.

Because regional French exists mainly by virtue of local words, rather than local accents and syntactical usages – although, as we have seen, these do figure to a small degree – it is not appropriate or practical to study it as a separate, self-contained system.

<div align="right">Offord (1990: 243)</div>

Les régionalismes lexicaux, qui sont de loin les plus nombreux, se subdivisent en deux catégories. Il faut en effet distinguer ceux dont le lexème est régional et ceux dont seul le sens est régional. Martin (1997: 60)

The view that phonology or the lexicon dominates the 'hard core' of residual features in RF seems to stem from a belief that contact-induced dialect obsolescence takes place via successive attrition of linguistic levels in a fixed order. This assumption, which we term the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis, is most clearly expressed by Dauzat (1927: 49-57), who claims that the dialectal lexicon is first affected, followed by phonology, syntax and finally morphology: 'citadelle de la langue, elle se rend la dernière'. It would appear to follow from Dauzat's view that the residual dialect features in RF are primarily morphological, yet given the contradictory claims expressed above that they are mostly lexical (Offord) or phonological (Carton), it seems fair to question whether it is in fact helpful to conceive of RF predominantly in terms of a single linguistic level. Also implicit in Dauzat's 'elle <u>se rend</u> la dernière' is the common assumption that resistance at whatever level to the advance of the national language is only temporary, and that RF varieties therefore represent no more than transitional ephemera: see, for example, Müller (1985: 137):

Là où elles existent encore, les langues régionales sont dans la même situation que les dialectes français : n'ayant pas réussi à s'imposer, elles constituent un substrat sur lequel se sont formés des français régionaux spécifiques, dans un processus de francisation qui aboutira en définitive à la généralisation de la langue zéro.

This perhaps explains the relative scholarly indifference to RF,[3] but again it rests on an assumption for which little hard evidence is in fact adduced. Indeed, there is no reason in principle, as Müller concedes later in the same work (1985: 155), why RF varieties may not remain stable or even diverge from the national language:

le temps est venu de se demander si certains français régionaux . . . ne marquent pas le début d'une nouvelle dialectalisation, ou plus exactement, vu l'histoire de la langue, s'ils ne continuent pas une dialectalisation qui n'a pas cessé depuis le début du Moyen-Age,

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[3] An exception in this regard is Martin (1997: 67) for whom it is precisely the ephemeral nature of RF varieties which lends them interest:

> La survie de nos parlers régionaux nous donne encore la possibilité d'observer *in vivo* les effets du substrat dont nous ne pouvons sans grande difficulté recueillir les dernières traces. Une telle situation, il faut le souligner, ne s'est pas produite sur notre sol depuis que le latin remplaçait progressivement le gaulois. Nous avons aussi l'avantage de pouvoir encore relever certains traits régionaux qui vont bientôt disparaître en raison de l'uniformisation qui s'accélère.

mais cette fois-ci dans les zones périphériques, à l'encontre de la dédialectalisation du centre.

This possibility is also raised by Chaurand (2000: 662):

Parce qu'elles sont souvent des adaptations d'autres langues ou de dialectes, sont-elles condamnées à n'être que transitoires?

The common conception of RF as an ephemeral residue from substrate dialects would appear, then, to rest heavily on a largely unverified model of dialect obsolescence. It is therefore appropriate to test the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis against findings from a case of dialect death in northern France.

3 DIALECT DEATH IN THE PAS-DE-CALAIS

Data were collected in 1988, in the former mining town of Avion, from 72 speakers[4] aged from 16 to 80 years, using the participant-observer method (see Milroy and Gordon, 2003: 68–72). This involved long-term immersion in the community and participation in local networks, notably via leisure associations, using the 'second-order contact' or 'friend of a friend' approach in the first instance to meet informants (for full details, see Hornsby, forthcoming a: 1.4). All informants were born in the Nord–Pas-de-Calais and had lived in the Lens conurbation, of which Avion forms part, for at least 10 years. Many older informants had a long connection with the mining industry which had been responsible for the town's growth in the early twentieth century, and it was these in particular who still used an urban Picard variety known locally as *Ch'ti* (or more generally *patois*),[5] which had been losing ground to SF[6] for some time. The resilience of Dialect in an urban environment was nonetheless surprising, and could be largely attributed to two factors. Firstly, Avion's relative distance from Paris in a densely populated, nationally peripheral region had to some extent limited the linguistic influence of the capital, which had been particularly keenly felt elsewhere in the *langue d'oïl* area (see Armstrong, 2001: 51–59). Secondly, the peculiarly close-knit nature of the mining communities, established in Avion after waves of in-migration between 1890 and 1920, had acted as a norm-enforcement mechanism for the composite urban Picard variety which emerged (see Hornsby, forthcoming b, section 5). However, post-war industrial decline – most notably the demise of the coal industry in the 1980s – forced Avionnais to look outwards, breaking down dense and multiplex social networks and undermining these focused vernacular norms. By 1988, a clear intergenerational

[4] 'Speaker' here implies an individual recorded in a single speech event. As 16 speakers were recorded more than once, there were in fact 56 different informants in total.

[5] Given the negative associations of the word *patois* in everyday speech, the term preferred here to denote the vernacular variety spoken in Avion will be simply 'Dialect'.

[6] We use the term Standard French (SF) in its broader sense to indicate regionally and socially unmarked varieties, in contrast to normative French, recommended by purists but spoken by a minority of French speakers.

Table 1. *Typology of Varieties (see Carton, 1981: 17)*

			Dialectalité	Marques dialectales		Etendue de l'aire de diffusion
		Variétés		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

shift was evident between older speakers who were variably competent in Dialect, and speakers under the age of about 30, who generally did not use Dialect forms at all. It would be fair to say that the speech of even the broadest Dialect speakers was already strongly influenced by SF and therefore corresponded more closely to *français dialectal* (Variety 3) than to a notionally pure *patois* (Variety 4) in Carton's typology, reproduced in Table 1.

The distinction between Varieties 2 (RF) and 3 (Dialectal French: DF) in Avion turned essentially on two simple criteria: regionally marked forms which showed a strong tendency to co-occur in short stretches of talk, and which were clearly obsolescent (i.e. avoided by younger speakers) were deemed to belong to DF rather than RF. Evidence for the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis, if available, would be found by comparing rates of decay among locally marked variants at different linguistic levels.

4 DIFFERENTIAL ATTRITION OF MARKED VARIANTS

4.1 Morphology

It seems appropriate to begin our investigation of obsolescence patterns in Avion by considering morphology, the level identified by Dauzat as most resistant to the influence of national norms. Table 2 lists 11 binary variables for which a standard (S) and Dialect (D) variant could be identified.[7]

All the D-variants were unambiguously obsolescent: only 17 of 3793 D-tokens were produced by speakers under 30 years of age, and in most cases even these appeared to represent conscious, momentary switches for comic effect. All of the D-variants showed a strong tendency to co-occur, with the exception of the

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[7] Although all of the variables except 3 in Table 2 are represented orthographically as words, their claims to word status on linguistic criteria identified by Bloomfield (1933: 178–189) seem at best dubious (see Harris, 1972), and we have therefore treated them as morphemes.

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Table 2. *Morphological Variables in Avion*

Variable		n	S-variant	n	D–variant	n	D%
1.	ELLE	865	ɛl	325	al, a	540	**62**
2.	DISJ	968	mwa, twa, lɥi	564	mi, ti, li	404	**42**
3a.	IMPF	2023	–ɛ, –e	1429	–o, –ɔt	594	**29**
3b.	COND	209	–ɛ, –e	133	–o, –ɔt	76	**36**
4.	LA	1001	la	768	l	233	**23**
5a.	ÇA	1304	sa	930	ʃa	374	**29**
5b.	C'EST	2352	sɛ, se	1662	ʃe	690	**29**
6.	ON	1114	ɔ̃	808	ɛ̃	306	**27**
7.	UNE	586	yn	331	ɛ̃n	255	**44**
8.	MPOSS	427	mɔ̃, tɔ̃, sɔ̃	222	mɛ̃, tɛ̃, sɛ̃	205	**48**
9.	FPOSS	254	ma, ta, sa	138	m, t, s	116	**46**
Total		11103		7310		3793	**34**

Table 3. *(IMPF): third person forms*

	n	Standard form [ɛ/e]	Dialect forms [o, ɔt]	D%
All users: all subjects	62	1449	594	29
(IMPF-D) users: all subjects	36	869	594	41
(IMPF-D) users: singular subjects	36	747	550	42
(IMPF-D) users: plural subjects	25	122	44	27

(ELLE-D) form *alle* [al], which even at clause level was found to co-occur almost as freely with S- as with D-forms (for details see Hornsby, forthcoming a: ch. 4). This suggested that, for older speakers at least, *alle* is not an exclusively Dialectal form like the (DISJ-D) variants *mi*, *ti*, and *li*, but rather one which is felt to be acceptable in French as well. For this reason, the D-score for (ELLE) is by some margin the highest of all the variables. Collectively, then, Variables 1–9 offer scant evidence for Dauzat's morphological 'citadelle de la langue': all of these D-forms are obsolescent and only one appears to have survived the transition from DF to RF, even among older speakers. A more serious problem for the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis, however, lies in the idiosyncratic behaviour of (ELLE), which suggests that attrition of morphological variants has not happened at an even rate, as the model would predict. Examination of other morphological variables suggests, moreover, that (ELLE) is not an isolated exception to a general trend.

Let us next examine Variable 3a (IMPF) more closely. Regular Picard present and imperfect tense forms differ from SF by distinguishing third person singular and plural forms, marking the latter with a -[t] suffix, e.g. *il donne* [idɔn]/*ils donntent* [idɔnt] (present); *il donnot* [idɔno]/*ils donnottent* [idɔnɔt] (imperfect). Table 3 presents a breakdown of third person imperfect forms (a) for the 62 informants

Table 4. *(EN): 33 speakers*

	(n)	Tokens	Standard	Dialect	D%
(r)en-/(r)em-	11	130	93	37	28
–ment	9	119	94	25	28
en	15	206	150	56	27
dans	21	172	67	105	61
Other lexemes	25	883	716	167	19
Total	33	1510	1120	390	26

(n): number of speakers using the D-variant

for whom tokens of (IMPF) are available, (b) only for those 36 informants who use (IMPF-D) at all and finally (c) for the 25 (IMPF-D) users who use (IMPF) with plural subjects in our data.[8]

Those speakers who use (IMPF-D) do so in 41% of cases, but this figure disguises a sharp difference between D-scores for singular (42%) and plural subjects (27%). Since there is no evidence from our corpus that the singular –[o] suffix is used with plural subjects, it seems fair to conclude that for many speakers the plural forms constitute a 'hot spot' which generally triggers a switch to SF. We consider why this may be the case below. But first we turn to another set of morphemes, all of which offer potential variation between SF /ɑ̃/ and Picard /ɛ̃/. Some examples are given below:

SF	**Picard**
engueuler	*ingueuler* [ɛ̃gøle]
emporter	*importer* [ɛ̃pɔʀte]
renforcer	*rinforcher* [ʀɛ̃fɔʀʃe]
doucement	*douch'mint* [duʃmɛ̃]
en	*in* [ɛ̃]
dans	*dins* [dɛ̃]

As can be seen above, Picard /ɛ̃/ corresponds to SF /ɑ̃/ in the verbal prefix *(r)en/(r)em-*, in the adverbial and nominal suffix *-ment*, and in a number of other isolated lexemes. Table 4 shows D-scores for those speakers only who use the (EN-D) variant /ɛ̃/ in a range of morphological environments. For our purposes all SF *(r)en-/(r)em-* and *-ment* affixes have been taken as potential loci of variation; other lexemes have been included in the input for this variable where listed in either of the two post-war urban dialect glossaries for the Nord–Pas-de-Calais region (Lateur, 1951; Dauby, 1979).[9]

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[8] We have omitted data for Variable 3b (COND), for which the variants are identical, on account of low plural token numbers.

[9] The precise lexical distibution within these categories is open to debate: on this point see Landrecies (1992) and Pooley (1996: 99–103). Although Pooley attempts to list the lexical input for ɑ̃/ɛ̃ variation on an item-by-item basis, his criteria (taken from Viez, 1910) in fact allow for loan words from French to be assimilated into the Picard /ɛ̃/ set, with the implication that potentially any SF /ɑ̃/ could be realized as /ɛ̃/ in Picard.

Note firstly that D-scores for the two lexical formatives *(r)en-/(r)em-* and *–ment* are identical at 28%, considerably lower than the average score for the grammatical morphemes in Table 2 above, even though non-users of D-forms are excluded here, but higher than the D-score for this variant in other lexemes (19%). But the really striking figure is that for the preposition *dans*, where these speakers use the D-form *dins* [dɛ̃] in 61% of cases, well over twice the D-score for any other morphological environment. A single variable phonological feature, therefore, betrays vastly different behaviour in a range of morphological environments.

Our findings thus far suggest huge variation even within a single linguistic level. Grammatical morphemes have generally fared rather better than lexical formatives, but at least one grammatical form, the Picard plural -[t] ending, appears to cause difficulties and trigger a 'play safe' strategy of switching to SF. Isolated D-forms such as *dins*, on the other hand, can have surprisingly high D-scores.[10] These differences cast serious doubt on the view that dedialectalization within a single linguistic level occurs at an even rate, as the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis would lead us to expect. They do not in themselves, however, invalidate the broader claim that dialect obsolescence is a process of level-by-level attrition. For comparison, therefore, let us now examine variation at the phonological level.

4.2 Phonology

Our discussion of (EN) in the previous section suggested that the vitality of the phonological variant /ɛ̃/ in competition with SF /ɑ̃/ was largely dependent on its distribution in a range of different morphemes. In this section we shall survey the fortunes of a number of other geolinguistically marked phonological variants. At this level too, evidence suggests uneven rates of attrition, with some marked forms noticeably more resistant to pressure from SF than others. Non-standard (NS) phonological variants in Avion can in fact be classified into four groups, arranged in ascending order of vitality in Table 5.

The variants in Group A all have what Trudgill (1999) terms 'vestigial' status in our data, i.e. they are used only by a few elderly speakers in numbers too small for meaningful quantification. In the case of 'linking *d*', for example (variant iv), reported as 'an extremely restricted phenomenon' by Pooley (2002: 44) among his speakers in Roubaix, we have only a single token from our oldest speaker in the sequence *ils en ont* [ĩdɔ̃]. Likewise only a handful of tokens of the front rounded lax variants (i) and (ii) were found, although the unrounded equivalent [ɪ] in this environment (e.g. in *ville* [vɪl]) had clearly survived rather better, transferring like *alle* to the RF of older speakers.

The variants in Group B appear healthier, but are nonetheless obsolescent: they are not used at all by younger speakers in our corpus, and show strong patterns

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[10] Similar findings were observed for the Dialect form *ichi* [iʃi] (SF *ici*), whose D-score of 67% far exceeded that of other lexemes containing the Picard /ʃ/ form: see Hornsby (forthcoming a: 4.2).

Table 5. *Non-standard phonological variants*

	Variant S	Variant NS	Examples
Group A			
(i) closed syllable lax /u/	[u]	[ʊ]	*boule* [bʊl]
(ii) closed syllable lax /y/	[y]	[ʏ]	*minute* [mɪnʏt]
(iii) Prevocalic /j/	[ø]	[j]	*bieau* [bjo] (SF *beau*)
(iv) 'Linking *d*'	[n]	[d]	*ils in d'ont* [ĩdɔ̃] (SF *ils en ont*)
Group B			
(v)	[ʃ]	[k]	*carbon* [kaʁbɔ̃] (SF *charbon*)
(vi)	[s]	[ʃ]	*ch'est* [ʃe] (SF *c'est*)
(vii)	[ɑ̃]	[ɛ̃]	*sintir* [sɛ̃tiʁ] (SF *sentir*)
(viii)	[g]	[w]	*warder* [waʁde] (SF *garder*)
Group C			
(ix) 'Picard *l*'	[j]	[l]	*traval* [tʁaval] (SF *travail*)
(x) Word-final consonant devoicing (WFCD)	C[+voice]	C[-voice]	*vasse* [vas]; *chauffe* [ʃof]; *barpe* [baʁp] (SF *vase, chauve, barbe*)
Group D			
(xi) Velarized final /a/	[a]	[ɔ,o]	*candidat* [kɑ̃didɔ/kɑ̃dido]
(xii) Pre-rhotic /a/-raising	[a]	[æ,ɛ]	*voir* [vwæʁ]
(x) Pre-rhotic /ɛ/-raising	[ɛ]	[e]	*cher* [ʃeʁ]
(ix) Affrication	[tj]	[tʃ]	*métier* [metʃe]
(x) Affrication	[dj]	[dʒ]	*radio* [ʁadʒo]

of co-occurrence with other D-variants. In this respect, they differ from the two non-standard variants in Group C, which co-occur freely in the speech of some older speakers with both D- and S- variants. Their behaviour thus recalls that of the (ELLE-D) *alle* variant discussed in the previous session, which could not be considered a purely Dialectal form. A prominent local politician consistently used such forms as *traval* [tʁaval] and *boutelle* [butɛl] (Variant (ix): SF *travail, bouteille*), in public speaking in French and, in spite of its evident obsolescence, this variant is used in our corpus (albeit only once) by a speaker in the Young group, without this appearing to represent a conscious switch or attracting overt comment from the other participants in the interaction. Of similar indeterminate status is Variant (x) WFCD: locally marked and clearly obsolescent but, as this comment by an older informant below plainly indicates, not perceived by all speakers to be a Dialectal phenomenon:

On entend dire 'enne chaisse' – 'chaisse' [ʃɛs] qui est français, pi 'enne' [ɛ̃n] qui est patois

The same ambiguity of status was observed by Pooley (1994; 2002: 43) in Roubaix, where WFCD appeared to have transferred to the RF of older speakers, but was rejected as 'not French' by younger informants. WFCD is also listed as a Nord–Picardie RF feature by Carton et al. (1983: 24).

Table 6. *Three Group D variables by age and sex*

Variable	Age Group	Male	Female
xi: (a)	Young	100	24
	Middle	124	113
	Senior	107	117
xii: (a/_ʀ)	Young	61	14
	Middle	79	68
	Senior	63	62
x: (ɛ/_ʀ)	Young	47	0
	Middle	61	35
	Senior	75	39

Alone among the four Groups, the Group D variants show no sign of obsolescence (see Hornsby, 2002), and are all in Pooley's (2001: 165) terms 'redolent of the "accent du nord" '. They are perceived locally to be *français* rather than *patois* forms, are used by all age groups and co-occur freely with D and S forms, and among younger speakers in particular betray the classic sociolinguistic correlations with class, style and sex seen in most urban studies since the 1960s. Clear evidence of a style continuum was observed in a pilot study (Hornsby, 1987) and, as can be seen in Table 6, a familiar pattern of males having higher vernacular index scores for all regional variables was particularly evident among younger speakers. That RF is an emergent norm is possibly indicated by the fact that sex differentiation for all three variables is less clearly marked in the older informant groups, with Variable xi even reversing the predicted pattern for the Senior informants.

Our findings for morphology and phonology therefore offer little support for the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis. Not only do we find surprisingly wide disparities in both cases between the rates of attrition of local variants within the same linguistic level, we also find no relationship between phonological and morphological change which would be consistent with the level-by-level obsolescence predicted by the model. Taking morphological D-variants 2-9 from Table 2 as our yardstick, we find non-standard phonological forms whose obsolescence is much further advanced (Group A), or comparable (Group B), others which show considerably greater vitality (Group D), and another group (C) of variants which bear closer comparison with the apparently anomalous (ELLE-D) form, in that they are obsolescent but appear to have transferred from Dialect to RF for many older speakers.

5 AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL: CONTACT AND LEARNABILITY

The evidence reviewed in the previous section suggested serious weaknesses in the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis, with its mechanistic emphasis on level-by-level attrition of marked variants. An alternative explanation for the survival of some regionally marked forms at the expense of others has been sought, notably by Pooley (1996), in the concept of perceptual salience, a notion which is implicit in Carton's *Qualité de Marques* (see Table 1 above):

The dialectal markers that occur in Regional French are generally regarded as being few in number, and are never those features of which speakers are most acutely aware, variously referred to as stereotypical (Labov, 1972) or high-consciousness variants (Johnstone, 1984) – or even those of 'highest perceptual salience' (Hawkins, 1993: 78). In other words, such features are so obvious that even the most amateurish imitator would seize upon them to characterise the variety and be understood by all but the most unaware of listeners, e.g. for Picard /ʃ/ as in /ʃa/ *ça* 'that' or /ɛ̃/ as in /ʒɛ̃/ *gens* 'people'. Tuaillon, enlarging his contention that varieties of Regional French should be comprehensible to any francophone, adds that, if speakers overload their regional French with dialectalisms, there comes a point when one has to say that the variety that they are using is not 'tout à fait français'. Pooley (1996: 56)

Attractive though it may appear, however, an appeal to 'perceptual salience' as an explanation is problematical in a number of respects. Firstly, if salience implies awareness, as in Pooley's definition, it is unclear why RF markers such as velarized word-final /a/, of which *Nordistes* are generally acutely conscious, survive at all in RF, which they clearly do. But a more serious problem is the absence of an independent criterion for salience, without which we are left with what amounts to a circularity: Dialect variants are more perceptually salient because perceptually salient variants are more Dialectal.

One way out of this impasse is offered by Trudgill (1986: 11), who offers four factors which contribute to the salience of particular features:

1. Overt stigmatization, often linked to orthography (e.g. 'h'-dropping in Cockney English).
2. Forms undergoing linguistic change.
3. Variants with radically different phonetics.
4. Involvement in maintenance of phonological contrasts, e.g. /jʉː/-/ʉː/ (*Hugh: who*) in Norwich.

None of these criteria, unfortunately, is unproblematical either (see Kerswill and Williams, 2002: 88–91). The first describes rather than explains or defines the phenomenon, and there is an element of circularity about the second if salience is invoked, as by Pooley, as a factor in linguistic change. Trudgill himself considers factors 3 and 4 to be central to the concept, and certainly the fourth seems particularly promising in our case: the demise of the Group C phonological variants, for example, might not be unconnected to their potential for homonymic conflict (e.g. *sans/saint* [sɛ̃]; *ment/main* [mɛ̃]; *c'est/chez* [ʃe]; *ça/chat* [ʃa]). However, some of the non-obsolescent forms in Group D are similarly affected: the vowels /a/ and /ɛ/ (Variable xii), for example, are subject to merger or near merger before word-final /ʀ/ (see Lefebvre, 1991: 32), as indeed are the vowels in *ça* and *seau*. Furthermore, this factor obviously cannot be invoked for the morphological variants in Table 2. But before we dismiss salience altogether, let us recall the circumstances in which RF varieties emerge. RF, as we noted above, is primarily an urban phenomenon, i.e. it is associated with high-contact situations which tend to bring together speakers of different dialects. Might it not be the case in urban areas such as Avion that the

variants which survive or emerge in RF are those which are least 'salient' in the sense of posing learners with the fewest difficulties? Certainly the problems encountered by learners seem at least an implicit concern in Trudgill's fourth criterion above. Where the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis considers the threatened variety in isolation, Trudgill's (1986) model of koinéization starts from the needs of speakers in a contact situation. Where urban areas bring together large numbers of post-adolescent speakers of different varieties (as for example in planned 'new towns', or burgeoning industrial towns such as Avion before and after the First World War), those newcomers are initially faced with a bewildering array of familiar and unfamiliar forms. In addition to forms from the contributory dialects, the mix will include compromise or 'interdialect' variants (see Trudgill, 1986: 62–65) originally present in none, and for which the 'dialect residue' conception of RF makes no allowance. Some of these forms are likely to be lost over time, while others may emerge in a new focused urban variety. Since post-adolescent speakers are precisely those whom one would expect to find language learning difficult, it seems logical that forms which are more learnable will ultimately prevail over more complex or difficult ones:

It is also, of course, not remarkable that, in a dialect competition situation, forms which are more regular and therefore more learnable actually win out.   Trudgill (1986: 104)

Learnability is, however, a relative concept. As Trudgill points out elsewhere (1983: 106), Spanish may be easier to learn for an English speaker than Chinese, but the reverse may be true for a Thai speaker. What, therefore, might consitute easily learnable forms in the Avion context?

Trudgill argues that reduction of the number of variants in the dialect mix occurs as a result of two processes, collectively termed koinéization. Firstly, it is highly likely that variants present in a majority of the contributory dialects will survive at the expense of minority forms: this process is called levelling. In other cases, variants may be retained where they are, for whatever reason, more regular and thus easier to learn: this process is known as simplification and may, he claims, prevail over levelling in high-contact areas, though the reverse may be true in low-contact areas (see Trudgill, 1989a; Hornsby, 1998).

Simplification may manifest itself in a preference for semantically transparent rather than opaque forms (thus German *Blindheit*, which derives from *blind+heit* seems more readily comprehensible than its French counterpart *cécité*, which bears no relation to *aveugle*), and the loss of complex morphology (e.g. case marking, personal verbal suffixes) in favour of more regularized or analytical structures. Trudgill also suggests that high-contact situations favour reduced redundancy (1989b: 248). In such circumstances, one might expect local lexical items to lose out in competition with forms of wider currency, particularly if the latter are associated with an aggressively promoted national standard, as in France. Precisely this development is observed in Avion, where regionally marked lexemes have generally given way to their SF or *français populaire* equivalents. While some items referring to local realities (e.g. *galibots, bennes*, and *chevalets* from the register of coal

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mining), and a handful of words such as *wassingue* (SF *serpillière*) and *ducasse* (SF *fête foraine*), which may originally have had local connotations have been retained, the truly distinct local items listed in Lateur's (1951) *Lexique*, or Carton and Poulet's (1991) *Dictionnaire du français régional du Pas-de-Calais* are for the most part no longer used or even understood in Avion. Dauzat's claim that the dialect lexicon is the earliest casualty of contact with the prestige standard (see also Pooley 1996: 71) is largely borne out by our data, for the simple reason that a multiplicity of lexemes with the same referent places too great a burden on memory, favouring retention of the most widely diffused forms.

When we consider the variable rates of attrition among the non-standard variants in section 4, it seems equally clear that it is not their status *per se* as phonological or morphological forms which determines their vitality, but rather their relative accessibility from a learner's perspective. As Avion drew in large numbers of workers during the early expansion of the coal industry, the focused vernacular described by Lateur (1951) which emerged from the dialect mix was composed primarily of majority northern forms, particularly those used by workers from the Nord coalfields, recruited in large numbers to the newer Pas-de-Calais mines at the turn of the last century. In Trudgill's terms, levelling appears to have been the dominant reduction process. In the longer term, however, as contact with the outside has increased, the forms which have prospered are mainly those favoured by simplification, i.e. those which pose fewest problems to learners in the contact situation and, conversely, those which do not impede communication with outsiders by Avionnais themselves. Given the existence of a powerfully diffused *lingua franca* in SF, it is unsurprising that this has generally meant forms which are most transparent from the perspective of the national language.

All the phonological variants in Group A present particular complications for the learner working from an SF model. In the cases of (i) and (ii), allomorphic simplification has resulted in the loss of lax closed syllable allophones, [ʊ] and [ʏ], which are not present in the SF inventory, while variable (iii) 'linking *d*' is highly idiosyncratic from the perspective of SF, which does not use /d/ as a liaison consonant. According to Pooley (2002: 44) this vestigial variant has seen a significant distributional reduction, and now occurs only in sequences of *en* + part of the verb *avoir*. As we have argued elsewhere (Hornsby, 2002), the key difference between the Group B variants, which are obsolescent, and those in Group D, which are not, lies in their lexical distribution. Although the variants in Group B (unlike variants (i) and (ii)) are all phonemes in the SF inventory, their distribution with respect to SF is idiosyncratic and unpredictable: there is no obvious reason, for example, why Dialectal /ɛ̃/ corresponds to /ɑ̃/ in *dins*, *implir*, *attindu* (SF *dans*, *emplir*, *attendu*), but to /ɔ̃/ in *in*, *min*, *sin* (SF *on*, *mon*, *son*), while *canter*, *andoulle*, *gampe* (SF *chanter, andouille, jambe*), have the same vowel as in SF. The post-adolescent learner is therefore forced to learn superficially unmotivated phonolexical sets to understand their distribution. No such complexities beset the non-standard forms in Group D, for all of which a learner working from an SF model can assimilate a simple, exceptionless rule which applies across the lexicon, e.g. for Variable (xi) 'back, raise

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(and round) /a/ in word-final position', as in (1) below:

(1)   /a/ → [ɔ, o] / _ ##

The indeterminate status of the Group B variants – obsolescent, but co-occurring with both D- and S- forms and not associated exclusively with Dialect by older speakers – also becomes comprehensible when one considers the learner's perspective. On the one hand, they are not subject to the phonolexical restrictions which apply to Group C, and a learner working from an SF model can again deduce a simple rule, without exceptions, in both cases:

(2)   WFCD $C_{[+voice]}$ → $C_{[-voice]}$/_ ##

(3)   Picard *l*   Vj → Vl/ _ #

These two local variants would, therefore, appear eminently learnable, but they have nonetheless not survived in the RF of younger Avionnais. A likely inhibiting factor which may have contributed to their demise is a high potential incidence of homonymic conflict (cf. Trudgill's fourth 'salience' criterion above). The acceptability of both voiced and unvoiced segments in word-final position in SF makes for conflicts of the *ride/rite; base/basse; chauve/chauffe; bague/bac; rab/râpe* and *cage/cache* kind, impeding comprehensibility between SF and Dialect speakers; the same can be said in the case of Picard *l* for pairs such as *rail/râle; baille/bal;* and *souille/saôule*. Even where homonyms are not an issue, the acceptablity in SF of /l/ in word-final position could lead to misunderstandings in the case of Dialect lexemes such as *guernoulle* (SF *grenouille*), or *troulle* (SF *trouille*), which might be taken to be unfamiliar local lexemes[11] rather than variants of SF ones. One might expect such difficulties to be ironed out at an early stage via inter-speaker accommodation, with wider currency forms again tending to prevail.

All of the morphological variants discussed in 4.1 are obsolescent, but showed considerable variation in their rates of attrition. Again, the forms which show greatest vitality are those which are easiest to learn from the perspective of an SF model. Thus frequently occurring, closed set grammatical morphemes such as those listed in Table 2 have survived rather better than lexical formatives such as *-ment* or *en-*, which generally occur in lower frequency open-set items. The latter are additionally constrained by register: while *tell'mint* [tɛlmɛ̃] for SF *tellement* might be acceptable in Dialect, as Lateur (1951) suggests, use of the Picard -[mɛ̃] suffix in a more elevated or technical adverb (e.g. *surhumainement, typographiquement*) might well not be. It was noteworthy too that in the case of the (IMPF) variable, the singular form -[o], which maps neatly onto an SF equivalent, has fared better than a plural marker without a consistent counterpart in SF.

We have not thus far discussed syntax, which generally receives scant attention in descriptions of Picard and other regional varieties.[12] Although this is identified

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[11] An example of a term without an exact SF equivalent would be *bistoulle*, glossed by Lateur as 'Gloria composé de café, de sucre, et d'un ou plusieurs verres d'alcool'.

[12] Cf. Eloy (1997: 138):

En bref, donc, selon Remacle si la syntaxe apparait (sic) peu dans les descriptions de dialectes, c'est principalement parce qu'il y a peu à remarquer.

by both Dauzat and Carton as the third level to atrophy on contact with SF, there is again no reason to assume that loss of regional syntax occurs at an even rate, nor that it follows a prescribed order with respect to other levels of analysis. For while it is certainly likely that, as speakers accommodate to each other in a contact situation, syntactic complexities are levelled out at an early stage, it is nonetheless the case that constructions which are easily learnable can and do survive in many varieties of RF. Examples include the *passé surcomposé* (see Walter, 1988: 170–172) in southern and central France, and the *j'y comprends* construction, in which *y* replaces SF *le* in the function of indefinite pronoun, in parts of east central France (see Martin, 1997: 61–62). Again, 'easily learnable' generally means transparent from the perspective of an SF model.

The three non-standard syntactic constructions below are all described in the post-war Picard dialect glossaries (Lateur, 1951 and Dauby, 1979):

(a) Acheter du pain pour moi manger
(b) Dépêche-te!
(c) Une femme qu'elle habite près de ma voisine.

The geographical diffusion of these variants is unclear, but only the first appears to be unambiguously northern (Bauche, 1920: 128). All occur freely with either Dialect or SF lexis and morphology, thus for (a) both *pour moi manger* (RF) and *pou mi minger* (Dialect) are heard. Although socially and stylistically marked, none of these constructions is obsolescent and indeed, many *Nordistes* would be unaware that (a) in particular is ill-formed in SF. This construction, which can be analysed semantically and syntactically as a combination of SF *pour moi* and *pour manger*, poses few problems of comprehensibility. Similarly, constructions (b) and (c) merely extend tendencies which are already latent within SF and *français populaire.* *Que* is used in lower register French in most relative pronoun positions, e.g. *la femme qu'il sort avec* (SF *avec qui il sort)* or *l'homme que je connais son fils* (SF *l'homme dont je connais le fils*), and its use in (c) merely extends this usage to subject position.[13] Similarly, while use of the atonic pronouns *te* and *me* in tonic position is unacceptable in SF, their use here regularizes a rule which allows only the third person pronouns *le* and *la* to be used in this position (e.g. *fais-le!* or *ferme-la!*).

6 CONCLUSION

Having looked at differential rates of obsolescence among locally marked variants, it is clear that, in its failure to take proper account of the needs of speakers, the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis offers a poor basis for understanding the transition from Dialect to RF. Long-term accommodation between Dialect speakers and outsiders seems to have favoured those variants at the phonological,

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[13] An intractable analytical problem in our data arises from reduction of *il* to [i], which occurs frequently in most registers and renders *qui* and *que* + *il* sequences homophonous.

morphological and syntactic levels which prove most easily learnable from the perspective of an SF model. Learnability in this context subsumes at least the following three factors:

- *Structural isomorphism with respect to SF.* As we saw in the case of Group D phonological variants in Table 5, forms whose distribution is isomorphic with that of their SF counterparts, or whose distribution is predictable from SF on the basis of simple, exceptionless rules, are more easily learned than those (e.g. the Group A or B forms) which are not. At the morphological level, it was noteworthy that the imperfect/conditional suffix -/o/, which maps neatly onto SF -/ɛ/or/e/ for the singular forms, has survived rather better than the plural marker -[t], which lacks a consistent SF equivalent, while in syntax a regionally marked construction which is structurally and semantically transparent from an SF perspective has transferred freely from Dialect to RF.

- *Absence of homonymic conflict.* Dialect forms which, although simple to learn, provoke frequent homonymic conflict are more likely to cause problems to learners than those which do not. This appears to have sealed the fate of the two Set B variants in Table 5, but perhaps surprisingly not that of variant (xi), which can engender neutralization of the /a/-/o/ opposition in word-final position. This non-standard form appears to have survived for two reasons. Firstly, the velarized northern variant is not always fully raised to [o], and is often realized [ɔ] or [ʌ]. Secondly, the opposition affects relatively few pairs, (e.g. *ça/seau; là/l'eau*), unlike the variants (ix) and (x). This is linked to the final factor:

- *Frequency of occurrence.* Because low-frequency, localized lexical items are difficult to remember, these appear to have been largely levelled out at an early stage, bearing out the predictions of Dauzat and Pooley.[14] Nonetheless, noticeably high scores for some items, notably [dɛ̃] for SF *dans* above, suggested that frequently occurring (and therefore memorable) items can offer greater resistance to dedialectalization, at least in the short term. This may account for a puzzle in our data. While the lax closed syllable allophones [ʊ] and [ʏ] of /u/ and /y/ respectively enjoy only vestigial status among older Dialect users, the unrounded lax allophone [ɪ], although obsolescent, was nonetheless quite common and appeared to transfer quite readily to the RF of older speakers. The greater vitality of this variant might be explained by the rather larger number of higher frequency loci in our data when compared to the lexical input for [ʊ]/[u] and [ʏ]/[y] variation.

A corollary of the Structured Obsolescence Hypothesis, namely that RF represents merely a dialect residue, is also refuted by our data. In fact, paradoxically from that perspective, the regionally marked variants which show greatest vitality in Avion, i.e. the Group D phonological forms, are barely attested among northern

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[14] Chambers' first Principle of Dialect Acquisition states that 'Lexical replacements are acquired faster than pronunciation and phonological variants' (1992: 677).

dialects in the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* (ALF: Gilliéron and Edmont, 1902–10; for full details see Hornsby, forthcoming a: Ch.5). Word-final /a/ velarization (Variant xi) for example, the marker most closely associated with RF in the north, is in fact attested only at a handful of ALF reference points, mostly in central Pas-de-Calais and all at some distance from the coal fields in which Avion is situated. A substrate dialect explanation for its evident vitality in RF therefore seems implausible. When the learner's perspective is considered, however, it becomes clear that a number of factors have worked in favour of velarization. Firstly, Pooley (1996: 129) has suggested plausibly that rounded back variants may be interdialect forms, emerging from contact between speakers using a set of Picard forms ending in -[o] and those using their SF counterparts in -[wa]:

Picard	SF	RF
bos [bo]	bois [bwa]	[bwo, bwɔ]
té vos [tevo]	tu vois [tyvwa]	[tyvwo, tyvwɔ]
fos [fo]	fois [fwa]	[fwo, fwɔ]

Use of word-final [ɔ,o] could then have been generalized to other SF lexemes ending in /a/ or /ɑ/. As we saw above, ALF evidence suggests that at least some speakers coming to Avion from elsewhere in the Pas-de-Calais probably had generalized velarization in this context before their arrival; certainly others would have been familiar with -/ɔ/ in this context as a *français populaire* variant, diffusing outwards from Paris (see Delattre, 1966: 209).[15] As frequently occurring and, from an SF perspective, non-phonolexically restricted variants which pose few problems of homonymic conflict, they could, moreover, be easily learned. It is this confluence of favourable factors, rather than a strong presence in substrate northern dialects, which has ensured that, in Martinet's (1991: VI) words:

c'est le plus souvent, par le caractère postérieur, voire légèrement arrondi, de ses a finals, que se trahit le Nordiste.

Rejection of the 'dialect residue' model entails recognition that RF represents not merely an ephemeral variety of minimal interest, but an emergent set of independent vernacular norms. This would in turn imply that RF and DF should no longer, as on Carton's model (see Table 1 above), be viewed in terms of a single hierarchy, there being no reason in principle why variants which do not necessarily derive

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[15] Bauche's claim (1920: 183) that:

Le français populaire de Paris est, avec quelques différences sans grande importance, le français populaire de toute la France, de la France, du moins, qui parle français.

is problematical in that it fails to allow for purely Parisian vernacular forms. But given what Armstrong (2001: 45) terms the 'hypercephalic' demography of France, dominated by a single central conurbation of around 9 m people, it would be surprising if Parisian vernacular features did not quickly diffuse outwards to other smaller urban centres (see Trudgill, 1983: 72–78).

Variety 1   Variety 2

Standard French (SF)   Regional French (RF)

Variety 3

Dialectal French (DF)

Figure 1. *SF, RF and DF: 2-dimensional model.*

from substrate dialects should mirror the behaviour of those which do. Carton presents an essentially uni-dimensional view of variation, in which the number and frequency of regional markers increases as one descends the hierarchy. This would imply, for example, that a shift from RF (Variety 2) to DF (Variety 3; Dialect in our terms) would be accompanied by increased use of RF variants. An alternative two-dimensional model, however, would allow RF and Dialect variables to vary independently of each other, as in Figure 1.

A number of incremental pieces of evidence do in fact tend to support a two-dimensional model over a single hierarchy of varieties. Firstly, we noted above that, while morphological D-variants showed a strong tendency towards cohesion (i.e. co-occurrence with other D-forms), RF forms such as those in Groups C or D co-occurred fairly freely with S- and D-variants. But perhaps most importantly, scores for RF and DF variables do not appear to move in tandem as Carton's model would predict. Pooley (1996: 135) finds that in Roubaix the highest users of pre-rhotic /a/-raising (RF Variant xii above), for example, were not normally the most strongly Dialectal speakers, a finding echoed in Avion for the Group D variables in Table 5 above (see Hornsby, forthcoming a: 6.1). Furthermore, two Avionnais informants recorded on two separate occasions, in which they had used a high and a low proportion of D-variants (hereafter the 'D' and the 'S' contexts) were found against expectations to have increased their use of some RF variants in the S context, as can be seen in Figure 2 below. While it would be dangerous to draw hasty conclusions from small amounts of data, cumulatively our evidence does suggest that the traditional hierarchical model of varieties in obsolescent dialect communities needs to be reconsidered.
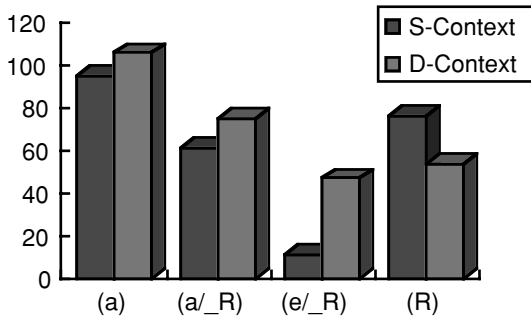
Géraldine
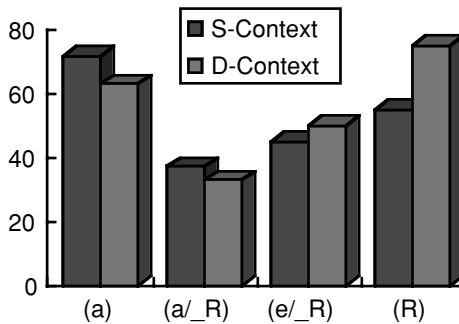
Éliane

Figure 2. *RF variables: 2 speakers in 2 contexts.*

We have argued in this paper that much of the ignorance of and scholarly indifference towards RF as a concept stems from a flawed model of dialect obsolescence which has passed unchallenged for too long. Freed from its shackles, linguists may now be able to shed new light on linguistic change and emergent varieties in modern francophone Europe.

Author's address:
David Hornsby
School of European Culture and Languages
Cornwallis Building
University of Kent
Canterbury
CT2 7NF
e-mail: D.C.Hornsby@kent.ac.uk

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