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# Trans-border communities in Europe and the emergence of “new” languages : From “Francoprovençal patois” to “Arpitan” and “Arpitania”

Natalia Bichurina

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BERGAMO



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

UNIVERSITÉ  
PERPIGNAN  
VIA  
DOMITIA



Natalia Bichurina

# Trans-border communities in Europe and the emergence of “new” languages: From “Francoprovençal patois” to “Arpitan” and “Arpitania”

Doctoral degree dissertation

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at the *Institut Franco-Català Transfronterer, Casa dels Països Catalans,*

University of Perpignan via Domitia

2016

## Declaration of good academic conduct

I Natalia Bichurina, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 148 512 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All sentences or passages quoted in this dissertation from other people's work (with or without trivial changes) have been placed within quotation marks, and specifically acknowledged by reference to author, work and page. I understand that plagiarism – the unacknowledged use of such passages – will be considered grounds for failure in this dissertation and in the degree programme as a whole. I also affirm that, with the exception of the specific acknowledgements, the following dissertation is entirely my own work.

Signature of candidate

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Natalia Bichurina', followed by a horizontal line.

## Abstracts

### **Trans-border communities in Europe and the emergence of “new” languages: From “Francoprovençal patois” to “Arpitan” and “Arpitanian”**

The thesis examines the current phenomena of the emergence of “new” languages and trans-border proto-national communities in Europe. It is demonstrated how a set of idioms on the borderland between France, Italy and Switzerland, which had been considered as *patois*, became recognised as a unique “language”: the Francoprovençal language, and the trans-border linguistic space became identified as Arpitanian. Conceived as cross-disciplinary, the study combines methods of anthropology and sociolinguistics, drawing more particularly on critical discourse analysis and studies on nationalism. The findings are based on extensive fieldwork in which priority was given to the ethnographic method of participant observation (five months-stay in the Francoprovençal-speaking areas of France, 10 months in those in both Switzerland and Italy). The observation was combined with in-depth sociolinguistic interviews (60 interviews of 1-3 hours in length). Besides, the study includes analysis of written discourse: scientific and journalistic printed sources, manifestos, internet blogs, etc.

Key words: minority languages, Francoprovençal, Arpitan, Arpitanian, trans-border communities, nationalism, language policy, critical discourse analysis

### **Communautés transfrontalières et émergence de "nouvelles" langues : des patois francoprovençaux à l'arpitan et à l'Arpitanian**

La thèse porte sur les processus d'émergence de nouvelles langues et des communautés transfrontalières proto-nationales fondées sur ces langues dans l'Europe occidentale d'aujourd'hui. L'analyse se centre sur le francoprovençal (ou arpitan), parlé entre la France, l'Italie et la Suisse : dans « l'espace autour du Mont Blanc », ainsi que l'identifient ses locuteurs eux-mêmes. Epistémologiquement, il s'agit de la dernière-née des langues gallo-romanes, qui vient s'ajouter à l'opposition traditionnelle langue d'oc vs. langue d'oïl, et qui est en train d'être reconnue comme langue à part entière dans les législations régionales, nationales et européenne. Conçue au croisement de la

sociolinguistique et l'anthropologie, la thèse privilégie les approches de l'analyse critique du discours et celles des études sur le nationalisme. La méthode ethnographique de l'observation participante (le vécu dans les trois pays de la zone francoprovençale) a été complétée par 60 entretiens approfondis d'une durée de 1-3h et un corpus des textes écrits (manifestes, blogs etc.) L'étude met en évidence un fossé entre les pratiques communicatives quotidiennes, avec les sens sociaux qui leur sont attribués, et l'idéologie linguistique et politique.

Mots clés : langues minoritaires, francoprovençal, arpitan, Arpitania, communautés transfrontalières, nationalisme, politique linguistique, analyse critique du discours

Yo vwi pamay cantei  
li voce e li berjei  
li fiur di montanyete  
li tendre amorete  
la ney e li glasei  
li jwa' de l'iforei.

Yo vwi pitoht cantei  
li trihte drooleri,  
li kondixon pourete  
de tan de jovinet,  
li plavro e li pleyzi  
di jen di joor de wei.

CANSON DROOLA

---

<sup>1</sup> "Strange Song," written in 1976 by Jozé Harrieta for Luis de Jyaryot's disc *La Noëla Tradixon* ("The New Tradition," 1978):

I do not want to sing anymore  
Of cows and shepherds,  
Of mountain flowers  
And tender love affairs,  
Of the snow and the glacier,  
And the games of the spring.

I rather want to sing  
Of sad drooleries,  
About the poor conditions  
Of so many young people,  
About the tears and pleasures  
Of people of today.

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## General Introduction: How do languages and nations emerge?

Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses. Aucun citoyen français ne sait s'il est Burgonde, Alain, Taïfale, Visigoth; tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié la Saint-Barthélemy, les massacres du Midi au XIIIe siècle.

Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*

(1882)

“The essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things. No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgund, an Alain, a Taifala, or a Visigoth. Every French citizen has forgotten St. Bartholomew's Day and the 13-century massacres in the Midi.” – Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?* (1882)<sup>2</sup>

The title of this introduction may seem strange. Today, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, when discussing the contemporary world situation, it is usually assumed that languages “die” as opposed to being “born.” Moreover, the very language this study deals with is generally considered to be endangered – indeed dead, as far as many of its varieties are concerned – but in no way emerging. However, these two processes do not exclude each other, although the metaphors that would traditionally describe them make them seem contradictory. One of the central arguments of my study lies in the fact that today the spread of discourse on “linguistic diversity,” “endangered languages” and “language death,” and the corresponding language policies at both European and national levels are transforming what used to be considered *patois* into “minority languages,” while actual communication practices in these “languages” are disappearing. Accordingly, what I am

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<sup>2</sup>Translated by Ethan Rundell: [http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf)

interested in is not how idioms “die,” but how they become established as *languages* in their own right.

Most languages we know today – such as English, French, Russian, etc. – became established as distinct languages so long ago that the common representation is that they have always existed. Today new *languages* are emerging right before our eyes, which allows us to examine how this process takes place. Studying the process allows us to understand what it means today for an idiom to be a *language*, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The emergence of languages often coincides with the emergence of nations. Thus, contrary to what Ernest Renan maintained in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in his famous lecture on the nature of the nation (Renan 1882, see the epigraph to this introduction), today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, French citizens have suddenly “recalled” who they “really are.”<sup>3</sup> It should be emphasised that this is essentially a modern process which is brought about by today’s issues and needs to be inscribed within the contemporary context. As O’Reilly underlines: “The rise of ethnicity is not a “return” to the atavistic, but rather a concept that has been developed and applied in particular ways during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century” (O’Reilly 2001: 3).

This dissertation is focused on the emergence of the concepts of the Francoprovençal or Arpitan language and Arpitania. When selecting this specific case study I was guided by the following three criteria. Firstly, the chosen research problem dictates that the idiom the study is focused on should have been either traditionally considered as a dialect, or a set of dialects of a national language, or not singled out of the linguistic continuum at all, in order to acquire the status of a language in its own right today. This is the case of Francoprovençal, which is, as will be shown, the lastborn of the Gallo-Romance languages in terms of its becoming a named part of a linguistic continuum and an object of language policy. Traditionally, the Gallo-Romance continuum had been divided into two languages: the language of *Oïl*, or French, and the language of *Oc*, or Occitan (formerly generally referred to as Provençal). It was only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that a third language situated between the two, hence Francoprovençal, first “intruded” into

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<sup>3</sup> Namely Renan, when speaking of the massacre that took place in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the south of what was to become France, referred to as the Albigensian Crusade. Today’s Occitan activists also refer to it in their discourse.

this dichotomy. Its first political recognition, as a minority or regional language (depending on the country), dates only to the beginning of the 2000s.

Secondly, I was specifically interested in trans-border idioms, i.e. those spoken in several countries at once. There are two reasons that make the border issue of essence. On the one hand, it allows us to consider the question of what proves to be more important in the present-day European context for speakers of minority languages: national affiliation within a specific country or a regional and trans-border identity in which national borders, all but disappearing physically within the European Union, lose their significance; whether these two types of identity are mutually exclusive or able to coexist. On the other hand, studying trans-border languages allows the consideration of whether the linguistic situation of a given idiom would change according to the sociopolitical and economical context of a specific country, and whether the representation of and discourse about the language would be the same or different. The Francoprovençal language is spoken in three countries:

- **in France:** in the southeast of the country (the *départements* of the Ain, Isère, Loire, Rhône, Savoie, Haute-Savoie, and the Metropolis of Lyon in the ex-Rhône-Alpes region, now the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region as of January 2016).

- **in Switzerland:** in the cantons of Vaud, Geneva, Fribourg, Valais, and Neuchâtel, i.e. the entire French-speaking part of Switzerland except Jura.

- **in Italy:** in the northwest of the country (the Autonomous Region of the Aosta Valley, hereafter VDA, and some of the alpine valleys of Piedmont). It is also spoken in an enclave in Apulia, namely in the municipalities of Faeto and Celle, but these are beyond the scope of this dissertation, as the enclave does not participate in the sociolinguistic dynamics of the main Alpine trans-border area.

(See Figure 1).

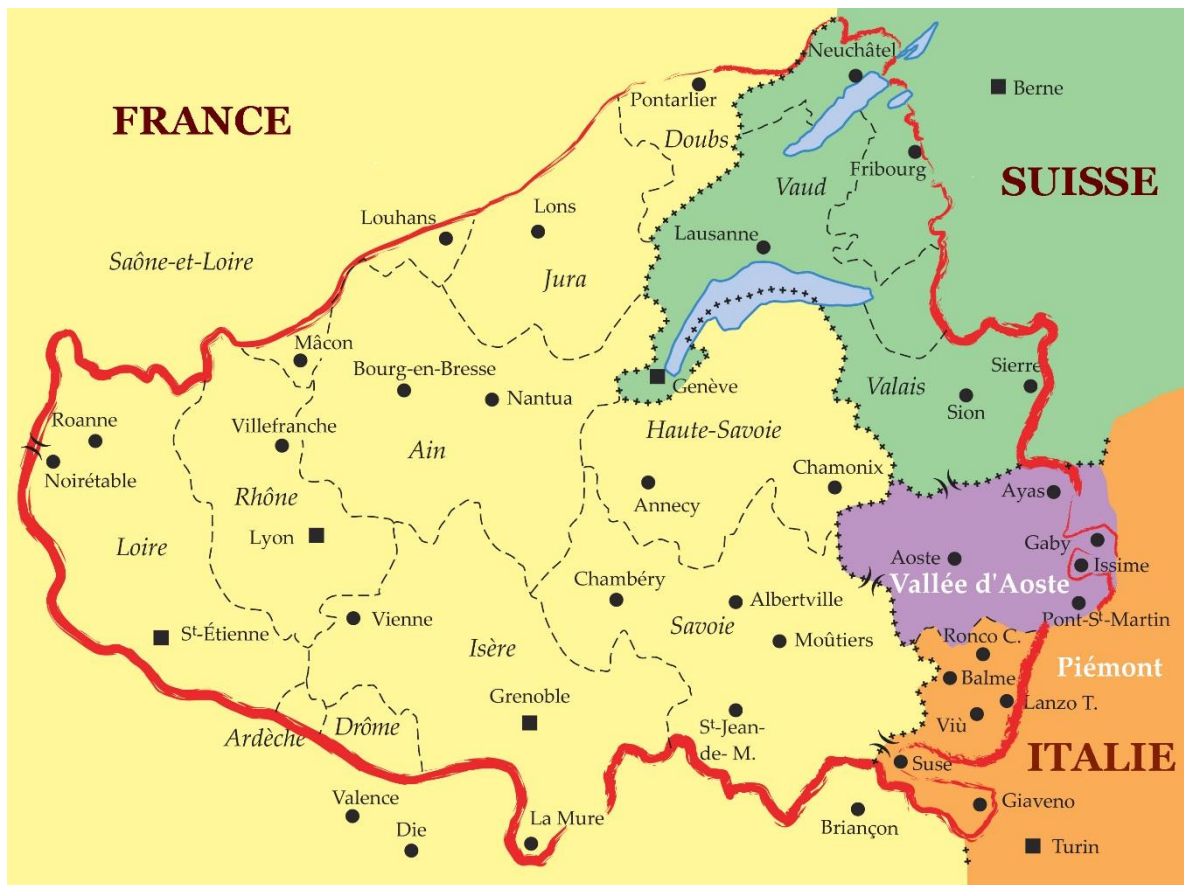


Figure 1. The Francoprovençal linguistic area. Source: Centre d'études francoprovençales « René Willien »

The three countries where Francoprovençal is spoken seem crucially different in terms of their sociopolitical and sociocultural organisation. France is a nation-state *par excellence*, traditionally seen as monolingual and monocultural. Having a different language and a different culture, or an identity coexisting with the French, is more or less unthinkable in the opinion of the majority. Italy, on the contrary, is known for its outstanding linguistic and cultural diversity, while Switzerland is known for its official multilingualism. At the same time, Switzerland is a confederation featuring cantons with extensive autonomy; France is its exact opposite, a highly centralised state. Italy is somewhat in between, as it copied the French nation-state model, and yet the main Francoprovençal-speaking area there, the Aosta Valley, is an autonomous region. All this makes a comparison pertinent: will these differences have an impact on the way the language is perceived; will they influence the linguistic situation and in what way?

In the course of this study, I will compare the Francoprovençal situation with those of other languages in the world. Special attention will be paid to the Occitan case. First of



all, the Occitan example serves as a model for Francoprovençal language advocates in their attempts to make a “language” out of a set of “patois.” Besides, comparing the situations of both languages and related movements is instructive, *inter alia*, due to significant differences between the two. Occitan (the language of *Oc*) was first singled out as a language in the Middle Ages; the distinction was also studied by Dante (namely in *De vulgari eloquentia*, around 1303-1304). Francoprovençal was first identified as a distinct linguistic type half a millennium later, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Oc* language revival movement is one of the oldest in Europe: namely, the *Félibrige* movement was founded in 1854 by a group of Provençal poets, among whom was the future Nobel laureate Frédéric Mistral. The Francoprovençal movement is one of the youngest: it first appears in the aftermath of May 1968, but it has existed in its present-day version only since the early 2000s, without any direct affiliation between the two. In this respect, as will be shown in this dissertation, many phenomena that are emerging now in the Francoprovençal language revitalisation movement are largely similar to what has already happened in the case of Occitan. At the same time, significant differences can also be seen as to the availability of various arguments that would serve for an idiom to be considered a language: especially, the existence of a highly prestigious literary tradition in Occitan (the oeuvre of medieval troubadours and that of the Nobel Prize winner Mistral and the *Félibrige*) vs. a mostly unknown literature written in Francoprovençal.

Finally, the third criterion for my choice of a particular case study concerned working on Romance idioms spoken in France, the country initially meant to be central to my research. This was not an arbitrary choice, either objectively or subjectively. Objectively, as mentioned above, France is known as an example of a nation-state *par excellence*. This is a country where a single official language – French – has existed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and more importantly, where ever since the revolution of 1789 a single idiom has been permitted the title of *a language* (the French language), while all the rest are considered to be various *patois*. Today France remains one of the few countries that refuses to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages or adopt a nation-level law on regional or minority languages. Finally, this is the country where, within this context, a revolutionary event took place in 2008 pertaining to linguistic policy and language ideology. Namely, an amendment was introduced to the country’s constitution to address the issue of the so-called “regional languages” that “belong to the Republic’s cultural heritage” (Constitution of the French Republic, article 75-1): suddenly it stipulated that, in addition to “the French language,” other languages do exist in the land.

Hence my belief that France can serve as an interesting case study for the research problem of the emergence of languages.

There are also personal reasons behind the choice of France. I was well acquainted with French culture and politics before I started this study, namely thanks to my work for the French diplomatic services in St. Petersburg (2006 to 2012), including as Assistant Cultural Attaché of France to the Russian Federation and as a coordinator of the *Institut Français's* cultural projects in St. Petersburg and northwest Russia in preparation for and holding the France-Russia Year 2010, a year of cultural exchange between the two states. As part of that work I also participated in the French Foreign Ministry's traineeship programmes for French cultural agents abroad. This allows me to combine the views found on fieldwork sites with an insider's view of cultural policy-makers.

### **Vignette: the shadows of regional languages in the world of French cultural diplomacy**

In the world of “high” and highly institutionalised French culture, such as seen and promoted by the Parisian authorities, regional languages and cultures have never been “in focus.” Yet they have always been there, as a reality which does not fit the official image of a “single and indivisible nation” (as though “indivisible” meant “homogenous”), which nevertheless does exist. Hidden most of the time, they would reemerge at most unexpected moments and in the most unforeseen manners.<sup>4</sup>

In one of my first months in charge of cultural projects of the Institut Français, a famous artist, in his late thirties, based in Paris, came to St. Petersburg on a preliminary visit to prepare his exhibition in the city. We were walking in a deserted old factory, which was in the process of being transformed into a contemporary art centre. In one small room the walls were painted white. In the exterior wall two small holes – smaller than you would expect windows to be – had been made, who knows for what purpose. It was one of the rare sunny days in St. Petersburg, so the sun penetrated through the holes, producing the effect of a *camera obscura*: on a white wall the building in front of the one where we were was projected inverted, with the sky on the level of our feet, and the ground near the ceiling. The effect was breathtaking. As a somewhat subversive response to the extensive

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<sup>4</sup> What I am concerned with here is not the official policy, but my personal encounters with the regional languages in the milieu of “high” culture and cultural diplomacy.

modern use of technology, in artistic installations and beyond, the artist had then imagined an “installation” in which the projection would actually be made by nature itself. It was only about adjusting the holes in the exterior wall to get the maximal effect. I agreed that the conception was beautiful; the only inconvenience was that statistically there are but 72 sunny days a year in the city, spread throughout the calendar. Shocked by the idea, the artist mentioned that he had been born in Perpignan, where it was sunny nearly all the time. At this point, I said something about Catalan and, right as we were walking in that abandoned half-ruined factory, he started recalling songs in Catalan, which his grandmother from Villefranche-de-Conflant, a mountain town near Perpignan, would sing to him when he was a child. As I learnt from him later, he had actually spent most of his childhood and teenage years in Savoie, but he would prefer to mention his Catalan background instead, since, as he thought, it was better to be seen to be a Catalan than a Savoyard.

Soon after this first “appearance” of regional languages in my professional life, the head of one of the most important Parisian museums, in his early fifties, told me how he had been appointed as a head of a museum in Marseille. Once, shortly after his arrival in Marseille, he was in a traffic jam at the old port. The windows in his car were closed, so he could not hear what fishermen were talking about to each other. He was observing their gestures, and he realised that he was unable to “read” them: the meaning of the gestures was completely unclear to him. Later in his museum’s archives he found some 18<sup>th</sup>- or 19<sup>th</sup>-century drawings by unknown and not-so-talented artists who had made sketches of fishermen and bakers with exactly the same gestures. His conclusion was that the Occitan language that had disappeared verbally (in his opinion), lived on as body language. Later, I found myself at a small internal reception talking to a colleague from the Consulate General of France in St. Petersburg, who recited me some popular poetry in this presumably “dead” Occitan. He happened to know it because as a child he would spend his summers in a castle near Toulouse, and people in the surrounding village would speak Occitan. Then another ex-colleague of mine was appointed as head of the castle of Carcassonne. He revealed to me that his staff would often speak Occitan to each other, which was for them a kind of voluntary recuperation of a “forgotten” language, presumed to have once been “theirs.” Some of them also had their children in a *calandreta*, an Occitan immersive school. There was also a cineaste from Brittany who spoke Breton to his brother on the phone in my presence, since he came from the countryside and Breton had been the language they used when they were children.

The examples were later multiplied, although Francoprovençal was never mentioned. These were small drops of this otherwise hardly noticeable reality, hidden behind the official discourse of the French language as an instrument and the embodiment of national cohesion – and, of course, that of French as an instrument of “civilising” other peoples. One might think of the famous expressions like “*rayonnement de la langue/de la culture française*” (“the radiance of the French language/culture”), “*diffusion de la langue et de la civilisation française*” (“the spread of the French language and civilisation”) and other concepts that originated in the colonial era and are still in use by many French diplomats throughout the world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – although luckily exceptions are now becoming numerous too, and the official discourse, according to Parisian regulations, is now supposed to be about “bilateral cooperation,” “dialogue” and “exchange,” rather than about unilateral “promotion.”

### **Ethical considerations; relevance and novelty of the study**

I will introduce my approach to the field, to the fieldwork and analysis in a perhaps somewhat unconventional way. Once, when I was starting this PhD programme, I was listening more or less randomly to a Russian political analytical radio broadcast. The subject of the broadcast itself had strictly nothing to do with my research. Yet, at some point the journalist dropped a phrase which I found thought-provoking (or rather, she simply put in an explicit way something that responded to the reflections I had at that time). She was musing on why there were no Chinese activists in Greenpeace. It appeared that, according to the journalist, a Chinese militant, known as the “fearless hero,” did in fact work for the organisation, but he fought for the ecology of the Great Barrier Reef. Whether it is true or not is not my concern here, just like the broadcast was not about ecology either. The conclusion was important though: “There are too many ‘fearless heroes’ in the world today, who leave Beijing polluted with smog to defend the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.” The journalist was implying the sphere of civic activism and perhaps journalism. Yet I believe that this observation and especially its implications can also be extrapolated to academic research in social sciences and humanities. It is not only literally about choosing the field, socio-geographically speaking, but also, and especially, about choosing the main concern in this field. It is about going beyond the comfort zone of both the researcher and – sometimes – of the informants, to uncover tensions in today’s

society, problematic issues that are of universal concern, not just those that are the concern of a small community or of a small circle of specialists.

The “transformation” processes in which territorial dialects turn into languages in their own right are typical of numerous European and world countries today. In this context, this study provides an analysis of a particular case within a global trend. As far as the field of nationalism and linguistically-based (at least, at the discursive level) separatism is concerned, the Francoprovençal case is far from the most acute today. Yet it is an overwhelmingly understudied one, although it concerns three countries in the middle of Western Europe. Besides, studying this case allows us to address, at an early stage, the same processes that can be found in a more acute phase elsewhere.

Scholarly literature has traditionally described Francoprovençal from the point of view of structural linguistics in the framework of French dialectology. Apart from major dialectological studies such as Schüle, Schüle, Telmon, Tuailon (1978), Tuailon (1983, 2007), or Martin (2005, 2011, 2014), Diémoz and Kristol (2006), Diemoz, Aquino-Weber, Grüner and Reusser-Elzingre (2014), the vast majority of studies have concerned one very particular and very locally-circumscribed linguistic aspect. Thus the vast majority of books written on Francoprovençal are of the type “The toponymy of the municipality X,” or “The names of plants of the municipality Y.” It would be no exaggeration to say that these works often substitute analysis with data collection: in other words, the data collected are represented there as results. The same tendency can be seen in anthropological and ethnographic works. These are mostly limited to the types “The alpine buildings of the municipality of X,” “The traditional healing practices of the municipality of Y,” etc. The studies in history mostly concern the life of personalities, like the Dukes of Savoy, or those of Aosta, or global political processes, e.g. the accession of Savoy to France. In other words, research in the Francoprovençal field has mostly been concerned with “comfortable,” “nice” issues that are pleasurable to study, discuss and read about. The study of contemporary society in the Francoprovençal area, of its problems, tensions and actual practices – including linguistic ones – are virtually non-existent.

Namely, if we look from a historical perspective at the process of a set of *patois* becoming a language, to start with, no study has been yet done that would analyse the emergence of Ascoli’s concept of “Francoprovençal” in the relevant socio-historical and academic context (Italy in the direct aftermath of unification). No scholarly research at all exists on the Arpitania movement of the 1970s, the first to claim that the Francoprovençal

“linguistic type” was a language in its own right and moreover the language of a single nation (Arpitanian). The only, but notable, existing study of this period is a documentary by Ch. Dunoyer called *Harpitany, la ferveur d’une idée* (2012). Finally, no research has considered today’s Arpitan movement. The criticism of Arpitanism found in professional papers is no more than just an incidental aside (often put in footnotes). The Arpitanist stance itself is based on the research by the linguist Dominique Stich (in particular, on the supra-dialectal orthography he has developed for the language, [Stich 1998, 2003]), but Stich himself does not mention the “Arpitan language” and, much like other scholars working in the Francoprovençal context, keeps his distance with respect to the subject of his study. The few sociolinguistic studies of Francoprovençal that have appeared in recent years have been focused on the so-called *groupes patoisants* (“patois-speaking groups”), seeing them as though representing the whole linguistic community, probably as a legacy of a long dialectological tradition (see e.g. the recent PhD dissertation by B. Pivot, which provides important insights into the *groupes patoisants* around Lyon, in France, but which is *de facto exclusively* about these, although the data is then extrapolated to the whole Francoprovençal area and all types of speakers). If the studies would not consider the new speakers of Francoprovençal, at the same time researchers also had surprisingly little contact with speakers of Francoprovençal who simply speak the language without being an activist of whatever kind. Indeed, these are generally considered either non-existent or “phantom speakers” (on the notion of “phantom speakers” of Francoprovençal see Bert et al. 2009: 38-43). Among the only exceptions to this general rule are an article by R. Maître and M. Matthey (2007) on the municipality of Evolène in Switzerland, an issue of the *Revue transatlantique d’études suisses* on Francoprovençal in Switzerland edited by M. Matthey and M. Meune (2012), an article by M. Meune on the Arpitan Cultural Alliance (2014), and studies by Ch. Dunoyer on the new speakers of Francoprovençal in the Aosta Valley (2010). In the spirit of studying all the existent profiles of speakers (native speakers, “late speakers” in the *groupes patoisants* and “new speakers”) a study on Francoprovençal in Savoy was conducted in 2015 (Bichurina, Dunoyer, forthcoming).

It can also be noticed that the existing studies consider Francoprovençal to be an endangered language (or even a dead language); I study it as an *emerging* language. Of course, I do not deny that Francoprovençal is rarely spoken in many places in the respective linguistic area, although I also do believe that its actual linguistic vitality has been largely underestimated (see more details on this in Part III of the present dissertation and also, in the example of the case of Savoy, in Bichurina, Dunoyer, forthcoming).

Nevertheless, as stated above, I argue that as the respective communicative practices disappear, Francoprovençal emerges as a *language*: a bounded and legally acknowledged object of reality, a concept, and a codified system with its ascribed name and standard orthography. In other words, an idiom becomes referred to as a *language* when local linguistic practices vanish from everyday use. It will be shown altogether how, in accordance with modern linguistic ideologies, such languages-as-concepts/languages-as-policy-objects eclipse actual linguistic practices, and the alleged needs of a language overshadow the actual needs of its speakers (as if phonemes or graphemes could have needs of their own).

### On critical studies in the Francoprovençal context

Until now studies of Francoprovençal have been carried out within a research paradigm that is totally different from the one adopted for studying other minority languages spoken in the same countries.<sup>5</sup> Thus, so-called *Occitan-Catalan, peripheral*, or else *local scholars'* (*dels cercaires natius*) sociolinguistics (see e.g. Lafont 1971, 1984, 1997) aims to study societal issues and namely the relations of domination existing in the society (on the emergence of this approach and its socio-political and socio-cultural roots see Lagarde 2012, Còsta 2016). As Lafont argued for the Occitan studies, the objective was “not so much to reconquer speaking Occitan for itself, as to free a speech that is socially condemned” (“non pas tant reconquérir l’occitanophonie pour elle-même que libérer une parole condamnée socialement,” Lafont 1971: 99), referring to the famous slogan of 1968: *Òme d’oc, as dreit a la paraula, parla!* (“Man of Oc, you have the right to speak, speak!”) Besides, the fundamental research ethics principle of these studies is that the researcher is to be engaged.<sup>6</sup> Nothing similar has yet been developed for Francoprovençal studies.

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<sup>5</sup> On certain aspects of difference between the Francoprovençal and Occitan research paradigms see also Bichurina 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Sociolinguistic studies are perceived as a “weapon”: “la sociolinguistique est une arme de désaliénation d’abord, de mobilisation ensuite en faveur de la *normalisation* de la langue jusqu’alors dominée” (“sociolinguistics is a weapon, first of disalienation, then of mobilisation in favour of the *normalisation* of a language at present dominated.” Boyer 2012: 81, italics in original). A sociolinguist is encouraged to “refuser une fausse neutralité en se portant à l’avant-garde de la contestation militante du conflit et de la résistance organisée en faveur de la langue menacée de substitution” (“reject false neutrality by placing themselves in the vanguard of militant protest against [diaglossic] conflict and of organised resistance in favour of a language in danger of a language shift.” *Op. cit.*: 83). Those opposing the Occitanist vision and namely insisting on Provençal being a language in its own right among the languages of *Oc*, like Ph. Blanchet

Why this approach did not emerge in the Francoprovençal-speaking area when it did elsewhere is another question. Probably the answer is to be found in the fact that, as in many small societies (be it the one of Valle d’Aosta, or an aboriginal community in Australia), the elites are a small group made up of the same people who, once become active, perform various roles in the society. In the case of the VDA, until very recently the same people embodied the legislative authorities (the ruling party, which furthermore has remained unchanged ever since the region gained its autonomy in 1946), the government body dealing with – or at least in a position to deal with – language policy related to Francoprovençal (BREL, *Bureau régional pour l’ethnologie et la linguistique*), a research centre and a cultural centre of Francoprovençal and Alpine ethnology (*Centre d’études francoprovençales “René Willien”*), and also the *Valdôtain* association of audio archives (AVAS, *Association valdôtaine des archives sonores*), the *Valdôtain* Federation of Popular Theatres (*Fédérachón Valdonténa di Téatro Populéro*, FVTP) and so forth. Hence, when in the 1960s-1970s research studying the minority languages from the angle of the relations of social domination emerged elsewhere (for Occitan this was initiated in 1962 with the coal miners’ strike in Decazeville, see Lagarde 2012), it naturally could not be adopted to Francoprovençal: researchers who themselves represented local power most certainly could not study power relations, especially not from the point of view of the dominated groups. Therefore, the research on Francoprovençal would always be restricted to collecting testimonies of various *patois* destined to die, ignoring or neglecting all the social issues at stake. The approach linking minority language issues to the concepts of social dominance did emerge, at the beginning of the seventies, as, like any widely-discussed idea, it eventually found fertile ground – but it emerged among activists (the Arpitan movement). The fact of being rejected by official science (for the reasons explained above) eventually became the strength of these theories: from that moment activists’ publications on Francoprovençal, renamed Arpitan, became what we may call the “linguistics of resentment” (to borrow the term of P. Sériot [see Sériot et al. 2008]). It had at once hundreds of adepts, as it proposed to look at society from an angle that local intellectuals had kept purposefully concealed (as an informant says, *l’ire la folia, tcheu le dzovenno l’iran Arpitan, “it was craziness, all the young people were Arpitans”*). Initially radical, it preached physical violence as the means of the Francoprovençal-speaking people’s liberation from the dominance of the French- and eventually Italian-speaking

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(Blanchet 1992, 2002, 2004) support the principle of an engaged researcher similarly to their Occitanist opponents: “Social intervention is the most important task of the ‘conscientious science’ in general and of sociolinguistic studies in particular” (Blanchet 2004: 32).



bourgeoisie (as will be shown in Part I). Most obviously too, a movement preaching violence of which the elites would be the targets could not possibly be accepted by the elites. The story has now become part of history, but it created a scientific tradition that has lasted until today, according to which speaking about any social issues linked to language use, or merely pronouncing the name of *Arpitan*, is a *mauvais ton* in Francoprovençal scholarly circles.

It is not anecdotal to point out that the Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta was, until 2015, one of the richest regions of Europe, with an average income amounting to 137%, if the European average is taken for 100% (Decime, Vernetto 2007: 22). Hence, most publications by Gaston Tuillon, the major French scholar who worked on Francoprovençal, were issued in Valle d'Aosta with the financial, logistic and intellectual support of the region. In other words, it may be suggested that critical studies on Francoprovençal never emerged in France either because the academic careers of researchers working on Francoprovençal in France were *de facto* closely linked to Valle d'Aosta's political and scholarly circles (which, as it was argued, were largely the same). In Switzerland, in its turn, many of the social issues that were pressing elsewhere were simply non-existent, Swiss Francoprovençal-speaking farmers having all the legal means to speak for themselves.

Whatever the reasons, the long tradition of ignoring social issues linked to the language in scholarly studies, together with that of not speaking about any problematic issues, which exists as a cultural tradition in the society, resulted in studies of Francoprovençal somehow missing the development that happened in the studies of other minority language issues in the last half-century. By this I obviously do not mean to diminish the importance of dialectological studies, but to emphasise the fact that the dialectological data produced about the language as a system was not complemented with (sociolinguistic or anthropological) knowledge about the society that uses this language. Today, when the above-mentioned constraints are largely a thing of the past, this lack of serious research on modern Francoprovençal society still creates favourable grounds for all sorts of pseudo-scientific or parascientific stances that, having no rivals, may seem attractive.

## Data collection methods

Conceived as cross-disciplinary<sup>7</sup>, the study combined methods of anthropology and sociolinguistics. The findings are based on extensive fieldwork in which priority was given to the ethnographic method of participant observation. Apart from short stays, I lived in total for five months in the Francoprovençal-speaking areas of France, for 10 months in those in Switzerland, and for 10 months in those in Italy. The observation was combined with in-depth sociolinguistic interviews (60 interviews of 1-3 hours in length, see Figures 2-5), with speakers of different profiles (see Part III for details): 34 native speakers born between 1920 and 1975; 10 “late speakers” born between 1930 and 1945; 11 “new speakers” born between 1950 and 1992, and 5 passive speakers born between 1940 and 1970. The interviews were held mostly in FP, unless preferred otherwise by the informant, which allowed, apart from a greater proximity to the interlocutor, for the comparison of representations about the language (in discourse) with actual language use (during the interview). Besides, the study includes analysis of written discourse: scientific and journalistic printed sources, manifestos, internet blogs, etc.

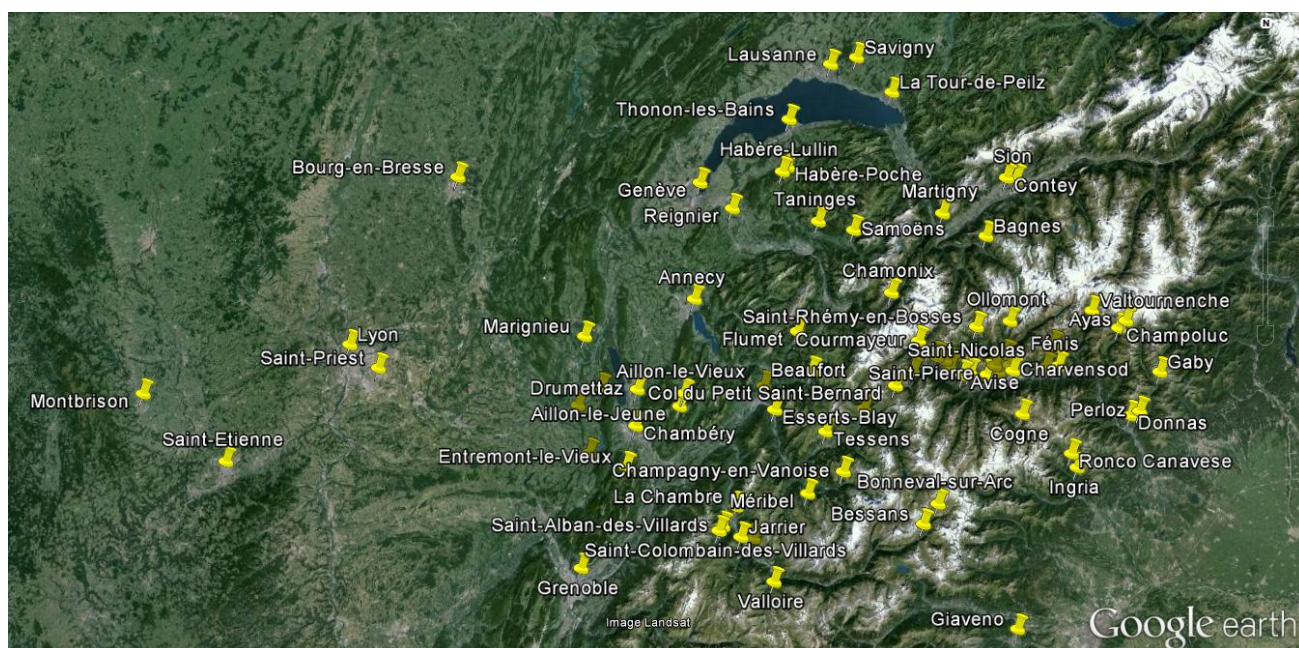


Figure 2. Map of fieldwork sites (Places where recorded interviews or substantial informal conversations reported in the field journal were held are indicated.)

<sup>7</sup> Which should be possible to realise thanks to my academic background (MA in general linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics and anthropology) together with my professional background in cultural diplomacy.

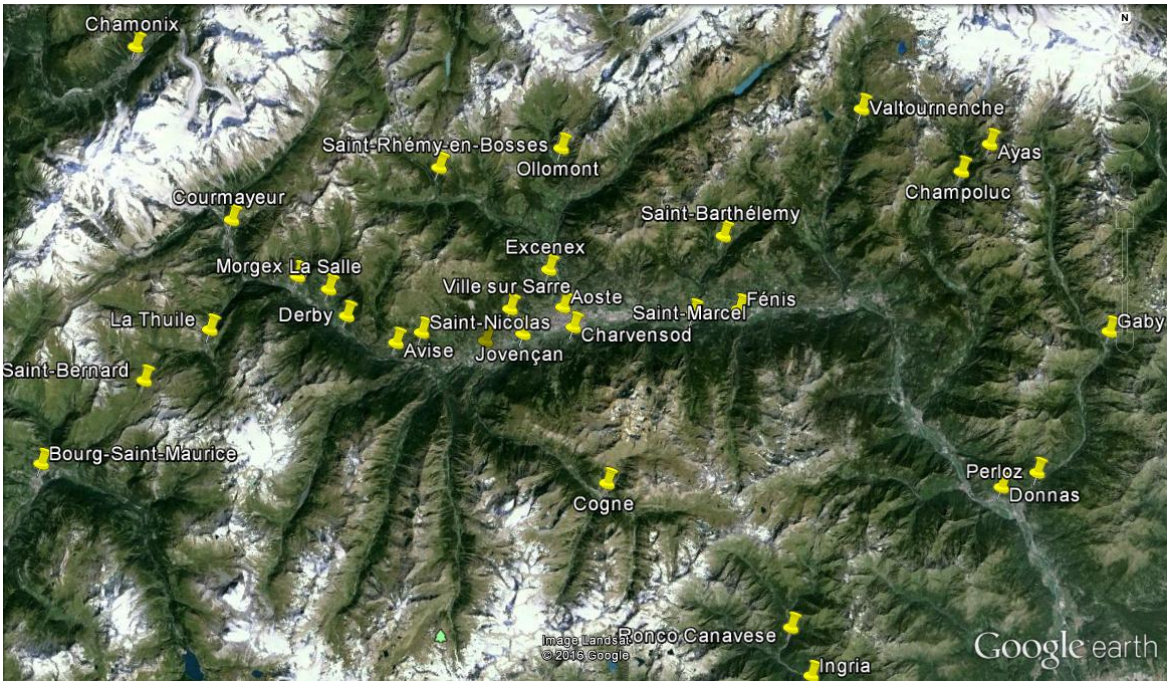


Figure 3. Fragment: fieldwork sites in the Aosta Valley

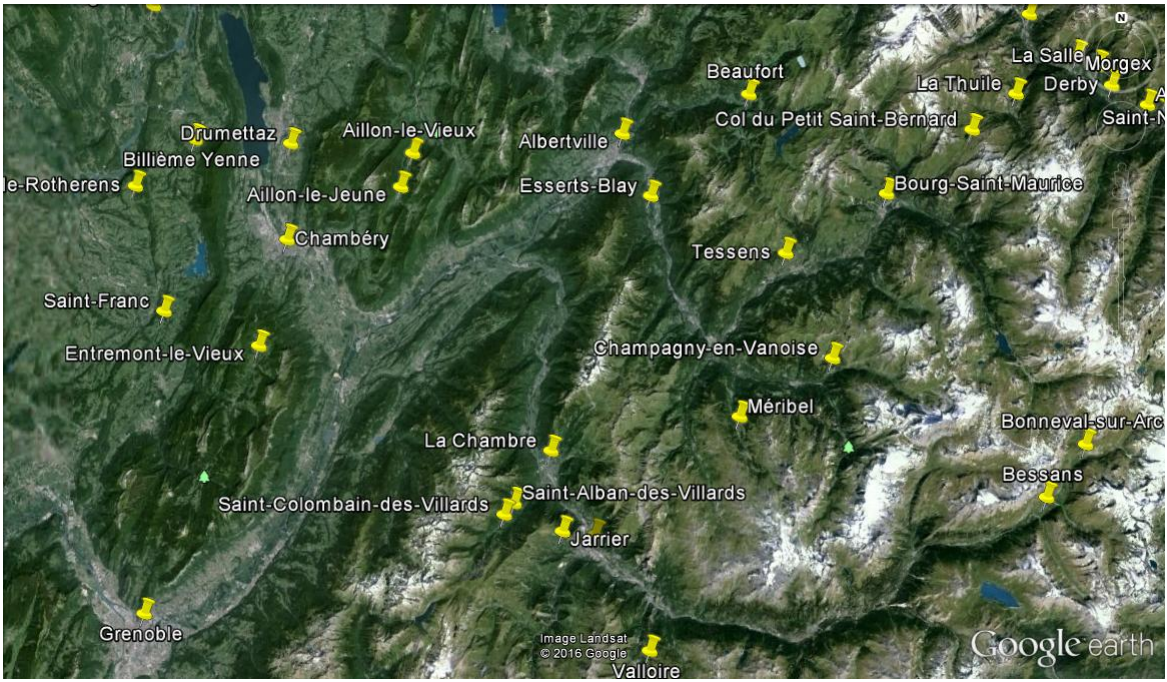


Figure 4. Fragment: fieldwork sites in the Savoie

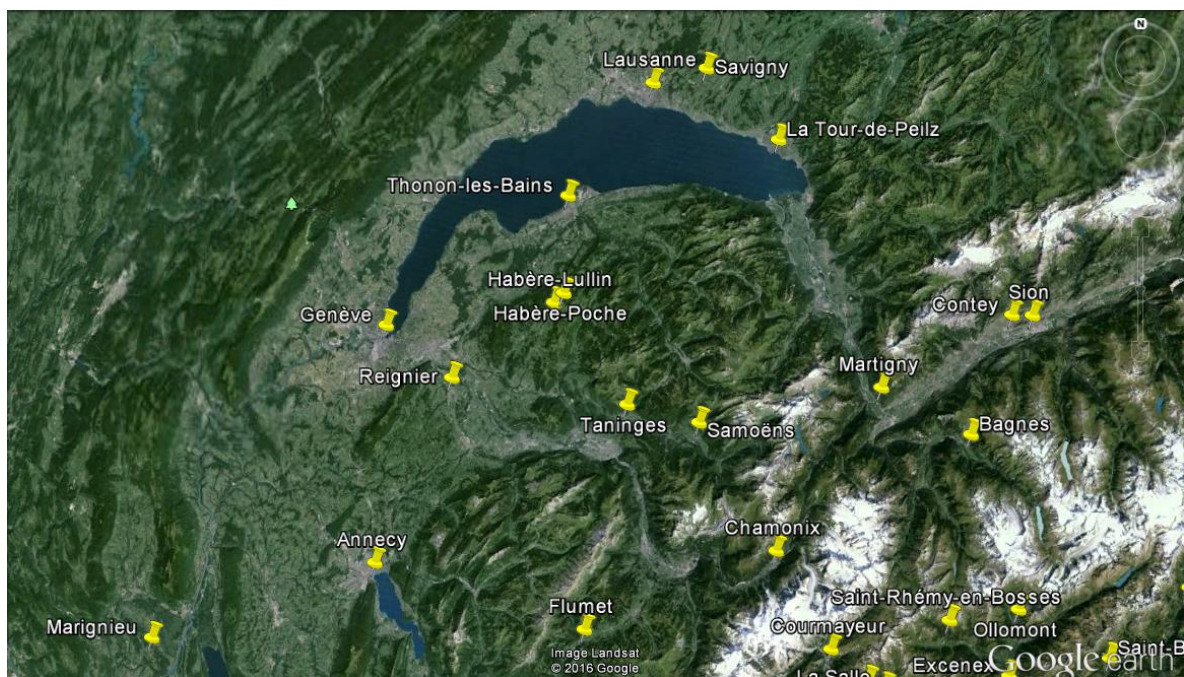


Figure 5. Fragment: fieldwork sites in the Haute-Savoie and Switzerland

Generally, a discourse not directed at the researcher or in any case not initiated by the researcher was preferred, be it spontaneous daily conversations, association meetings or “ordinary” people’s informal gatherings, festivals and celebrations, or written communication in blogs, manifestos and other texts published by activists. I suppose I should add conferences to the list too, strange as it might seem to see them among fieldwork sites: it is nevertheless true that many trends in the linguistic community are revealed at the conferences that take place in the Francoprovençal region itself and which are attended by linguistic community members.

This methodological choice is based on the assumption that it is discourse of this type that reveals the problems that exist inside the community: it raises questions that are significant to the community itself, or to part of it, rather than imported from without by the researcher. Thus, some topics I had not initially planned to consider in this dissertation would emerge in the course of such conversations and prove to be especially significant to the community as they would appear time and again in different conversations or blog posts. The issue of relations between activists and linguists turned out to be one of the topics of this type, and one that was acutely felt by the activists. This is why the discourse on linguists has an important place in the final text of my study, even though initially it had not been considered worthy of special attention.

These sorts of spontaneous conversations and public texts were complemented by interviews, or more focused conversations in which I took the lead in proposing topics. This allowed me better to define the informant's point of view on a subject that they would have brought up before, as well as to ask a number of questions that, while of interest to the community and therefore to this study, are not usually discussed.

I consider the points of view of all sorts of social actors participating in the process of establishment of Francoprovençal as a language: linguists, activists, political authorities. The discourse of these social actors is compared on the one hand to that of "ordinary" speakers, and on the other hand, to the actual linguistic practices in the region. A special place is reserved for the study of language activists' discourse, namely young urban middle-class speakers, the so-called "new speakers," as far as the present day is concerned, or that of the militants of Arpitania in the past (the 1970s). Two out of three parts of this dissertation (Parts I and II) are dedicated to these, while the last part (Part III) is concerned with profiling today's speakers. This interest is due to the fact that these are the people who influence changes in the linguistic situation and the legal status of the language. Of course, when one mentions *speakers of endangered languages*, one usually means senior village-dwellers rather than those who have only learned the language recently. However, it is the latter who typically act (purportedly) on behalf or in the name of the former.

The chosen research methods imply certain limitations. Language activists are few, compared with the general population of the respective regions. As for the Arpitan activists specifically, their number is especially small, even in comparison with the total number of Francoprovençal language advocates (mostly the so-called *groupes patoisants*). Therefore a question may arise as to where the *anthropology* and *sociology* of language ends and the *psychology* begins: where is the limit up to which one may call the selection to be representative and maintain that one is dealing with modern linguistic ideologies rather than the fancies of one or two leaders and a small circle of enthusiasts gathered around them? Sociology describes psychological phenomena typical of a significant number of people: e.g. the classical study of suicides by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1897). Suicides are, however, more numerous than those who undertake the revitalising or creation of a language. Nevertheless, I suggest that the phenomenon I consider here is important in spite of these limitations because:

- it makes a particular case of what is currently being observed all over the world and in this respect has no aspect of a minority movement in quantitative terms;

– as will be seen, the discourse of representatives of different, indeed mutually opposing, trends is largely based on the same premises, which makes it clear that the underlying language ideology is the same, although different movements articulate the needs of different social groups;

– finally, as suggested above, the importance of studying activist ideologies lies in that they contribute to idioms becoming languages. Indeed, the study of language advocates' discourse concerns small groups of people, but language policy is not a referendum, it is not done by large numbers. To give but one example, in the discourse produced by a personality like Joseph Henriet, the author of the terms *Arpitania*, *the Arpitans* and *the Arpitan language*, much is linked to his profile of a charismatic leader, and perhaps to aspects of his personal biography. Yet it greatly influenced the representations of the language, the discourse on it, and ultimately, to a certain extent, the linguistic situation for at least 50 years that followed – both in terms of imagining the set of what used to be considered “patois” as a language in its own right and imagining a trans-border community by some of the speakers, and in the practical impossibility of speaking *patois* in public or writing it as the response of the élites and the majority to this failed struggle.

Once one of the *Valdôtains* dropped a phrase in our conversation, saying that one cannot work on Francoprovençal and pretend that they are counting the petals of a daisy. He was implicitly referring to the research that has existed until today that is only concerned with the strictly linguistic features of the language, excluding from its scope all the social issues of the actual use of the language. Indeed, as will be shown through the chapters of this dissertation, working on this language, for both language activists and researchers, has always had a socio-political meaning and implications. The same interlocutor of mine also pointed out that while of course the situation is not explosive at the moment, this does not mean that tensions do not exist. He then specified that he meant “explosive” in a metaphorical sense. And later another qualification: “No, I give this precision because you never know,” implicitly referring to some periods in the past when there had been reason to fear a direct a more direct meaning of this. An anecdotal conversation with another *Valdôtain* was quite thought-provoking to me too. We were going from Valle d’Aosta to Piedmont by car, so we had some hours of road ahead to talk about various things. At some moment I told him how when I was 20 years old and preparing my second MA, in sociology, another girl enrolled in the same MA course chose to study the journalists working in Chechnya. At that time an armed conflict was ongoing

there, labelled as either a war or an anti-terrorist operation (depending on who was speaking). The subject implied several fieldwork trips to the conflict zone. As she explained her project, I asked her whether she truly believed that an MA dissertation (that no one would probably read apart from the supervisors) was worth risking her life for.<sup>8</sup> At the time I was working on linguistic minorities in Eastern Ukraine, where a civil war is now underway: certain tensions were already present in society, but the region was nevertheless a safe place to stay, though somewhat lacking in comfort. When I told this story to the *Valdôtain* informant of mine, he remained thoughtful for quite a long while, and then asked: “Do you really believe that what you are doing now is so different from what you were criticising?” He eventually agreed that perhaps at this particular historical moment it was. Although I still do believe that the two settings are hardly comparable (if at all), that the idea of me working on Arpitan could provoke such a feeling, at least in some parts of the area where it is spoken, is eloquent testimony that despite the outward calm, the situation is not as quiet as it might seem.

At some point during my fieldwork, the discourse around “dangerous people” emerged in my private conversations in the Arpitanist milieu. Namely some people would tell me that I would only encounter “dangerous people,” implying that I would mostly meet all sorts of separatists from various periods from the last 40 years or so. If that was indeed the case at that stage of my fieldwork, I found it crucial to meet these individuals in order to uncover the complex ideologies that existed in the society and informed the present-day situation. At the same time, the experience of living in the Francoprovençal area of the three countries gave me daily opportunities to meet “ordinary people,” talk to them, and get to know and understand them without having to conduct interviews with them (I nevertheless did conduct interviews with them too). Indeed, the third part of this thesis is dedicated mostly to “ordinary people” in order to underline the gap between ideologies and actual practices. Yet most interviews quoted in this dissertation concern the so-called “dangerous people.” So let us return to those. As to these people being “dangerous,” the question arises: to whom? Partly they are so to other language advocates who wish to pretend that these issues have never existed or at least are non-existent today. This being said, I should also make a note: I never sought specifically to meet these “dangerous people.” In all cases, either *they* would contact me (because they had read my articles, because they had heard others speak about me, etc.), or I would meet them accidentally,

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<sup>8</sup> She explained that she was not intending to do that fieldwork in order to get her degree, but was doing the degree in order to be able to carry out the field study. In other words, the degree was a socially acceptable way of legitimising this otherwise suspicious and in any case rather suicidal curiosity.

while doing another type of research.<sup>9</sup> The latter alone suggests that they are significantly more numerous than one might think.

In any case, what is true is that the society that speaks Francoprovençal is a society that tends to avoid conflicts at all cost (the culture of “avoiding conflict” is often referred to by informants from different parts of the Francoprovençal zone), and which therefore tends to avoid potentially conflictual discussions as well. It is a society that is always extremely welcoming and that seems extremely happy and healthy<sup>10</sup>, but that nevertheless hides certain tensions that are tacit but for this reason even more acute. For indeed, avoiding social issues does not make them non-existent: even though they are never discussed, forming societal *non-dits*, they inform attitudes (language attitudes, interpersonal attitudes etc.) and create a particular linguistic and socio-political reality. With a past that haunts the present, these non-admitted tensions create a “background noise” that is always present, although never in focus.

How to study issues that, according to a long cultural tradition, are never spoken about, how to investigate a past experience that some would like to pretend never existed, is another methodological question. My approach in this respect has two main aspects: being an outsider and speaking the language.

### **An outsider’s approach**

My methodological approach is an outsider’s approach. As such, it corresponds to what E. Said called an “intellectual exile” as a metaphorical condition necessary for any research:

The pattern that sets the course for the intellectual as outsider is best exemplified by the condition of exile, the state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives, so to speak, tending to avoid and

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. while conducting fieldwork in Savoy in summer 2015 I was looking especially to meet those who simply speak the language because this is their first language, without being engaged in any language association. And yet, even among those a significant number turned out to be Savoyard independentists.

<sup>10</sup> And yet, e.g., of all the regions in Italy, Valle d’Aosta regularly has the highest suicide rate proportional to the number of inhabitants (the latest figures being 11.0 per 100,000 inhabitants, the Italian average being 7.2 per 100,000, see *Osservatorio Nazionale sulla Salute nelle Regioni Italiane: Sanità e salute* <http://www.istat.it/it/files/2015/12/C04.pdf>, p. 147).



even dislike the trappings of accommodation and national well-being. (Said 1993: 117)

This means de-familiarising oneself with certain national ideological issues that sometimes weigh on analyses, and thus liberating the analysis from its socio-political context of enunciation. On the one hand, everything that locals would write on the subject may be (and often is) interpreted as a political act, precisely because they are locals (“*citoyens comme les autres*,” “citizens like any others” to quote one of my informants), whereas this is not the case for an “outsider.” On the other hand, the situation that I study is not charged with any particular significance not only in Russia where I come from, but also in the universities within which my research is carried out: just the same way as these universities do not enjoy any particular connotations in the eyes of my informants. Although one of them is in Italy (Bergamo) and another one in France (Perpignan), they are not the ones that are seen both as references and as “enemies” by the community (as will be shown in the analysis as far as research centers with a tradition of studies on Francoprovençal and researchers from the Francoprovençal area itself are concerned). The “exotic” one, the University of Sydney, turned out only to amplify the importance of what my Russian background had already conveyed to the community: for the speakers of Francoprovençal it was a positive sign of a worldwide interest in their language and culture.

Besides, I come from a majority culture, and I speak the most standard variety of the Russian language that can be spoken (standard Russian being the language of St. Petersburg intellectuals), which is thus all the more contrary to speaking *patois*. This majority culture is nevertheless not the one that is dominant in the area that I study (I am from neither Paris nor Rome). I have learnt 14 languages at various times in my life, yet until the age of seven (when I started learning my first foreign language at school) I was perfectly monolingual, and this is the contrary of the condition of those who are multilingual from early childhood (like some children in Valle d’Aosta who speak from two to six languages). Finally, I have lived in six different countries, without counting regions and cities there, I am mobile and live “in-between” (countries and cultures), in the “interzones” (to borrow the name of the PhD programme), and in that respect I am completely unlike my informants, who are local and connected to their land.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This can be illustrated by a random conversation with a *Valldôtain*:

However despite being an outsider, I still came from a cultural context that is comparable to the one under study, which made me a legitimate other: legitimate because culturally close.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, regular comparisons with Russia in my conversations and interviews proved to be of particular importance. Ultimately, I think I was able to learn all the crucial things about the most intimate, sometimes traumatising, and in any case, normally hidden representations about language and society while talking about Russia. It was also while speaking about the Republic of Karelia, part of the Russian Federation, that I first heard a complete explanation of why the concept of Francoprovençal as a language in its own right was taboo in Valle d’Aosta (see Part I Chapter 1); it was while speaking about minority languages in Russia that I could see how *patois* was not seen as anything akin to a “language” in France or Switzerland, and in most cases in Valle d’Aosta and Piedmont either.

The outsider’s position is also advantageous in that it invites local interlocutors to disclose things that would never be put in an explicit way to another local: information that is tacit, that is always presupposed, the knowledge that all the locals are supposed to share, even though there might be a crucial difference in the way they understand it and in what they actually think about it.

The transformation of my own place within the group is something that is necessarily typical for any such type of research that involves extensive participant observation. Later, once it had already happened to me, I read in A. Jaffe’s book on Corsica:

I did not feel, for example, that I had an unlimited warrant to poke my nose into some of the affairs which I became a part of without making some sort of contribution, without revealing myself in the way I was asking (forcing?) Corsicans

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NB: I could live anywhere where I have an interesting job.

A *Valldôtain*: I could do any job provided that I stay in my valley.

<sup>12</sup> It is close in many ways, as my daily experience showed: namely in aspects that most of the time are not reflected upon, but which at the same time constitute the basis of everyday life in a society. At times throughout my fieldwork remarks were made on these similarities. This includes the basic skills for daily activities: thus coming from a place with cold and snowy winters, I was well acquainted with using the snow shovel etc. It includes the culture of not disclosing too much of one’s inner world and not being verbally over-excited: e.g. in either culture, Russian or Francoprovençal, no one would normally answer the question: “How are you?” with something like “Very well” (I will return to this particularity in Part III). It also includes a woman being self-sufficient and strong, not seeking to be taken care of in any particular way (and projecting this identity and not that of being weak and dependent on male attention), etc.

to reveal themselves to me. I do not mean to say that I abandoned all efforts to be neutral ... [but] I was not a passive collector of opinions; I had them, shared them, argued them. The intellectuals I studied were not exotic creatures, they were who I would be if I were Corsican. (Jaffe 1999: 5)

To a large extent I should admit that, as to the nature of my involvement with the group, something similar happened in my case. It remains however true that speaking about other minority contexts that I know and have worked on (in northwest Russia, in eastern Ukraine where I have worked on several linguistic minorities before, even my experience in Australia during this PhD programme) does provide a unique possibility to be active in expressing opinions without suggesting any opinion on the situation that I am studying. I will not claim that I consciously chose it as a methodological tool, but with my fieldwork progressing I realised that being honest about complicated and emotionally challenging issues in one's own country implies, as an effect, getting an honest answer in return about the hidden tensions in the interlocutor's situation – the one that I was studying.

At the same time, it should be emphasised that being an outsider does not mean not having access to an insider's view. Thus I could participate in all sorts of meetings of various associations or of their boards, in the work of the municipal halls in some municipalities where I stayed, and most of all, in the everyday life of the places where I lived. For despite me being essentially an outsider, I was integrated in the local community from the very first days of my stay, wherever this was throughout the Francoprovençal area, and accepted there as being *di noutré*, “one of us.” This might be due to my sharing with the community social practices like *corvée* (a day of unpaid common labor in a community), *dezarpa* (festivities around the descent of the cows from alpine pastures), grape harvest or patrons' days. Yet especially, this was largely due to my speaking the local (Francoprovençal) language.

### Speaking the language

This is the first research on Francoprovençal carried out mostly in Francoprovençal (together with another one conducted in 2015, concurrently with this one [Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming]). This might seem normal for today's research on minority languages – on any languages for that matter – anywhere in the world, but somehow it has

not been the case for Francoprovençal. It should be specified here that the existing studies of Francoprovençal presume a particular positioning of the researcher outside of the community. Distancing oneself from the subject under study is maintained to be a necessary condition of an objective study. Up to now, none of the Francoprovençal researchers has positioned themselves as a language speaker.

At the same time, when I started this study I noticed a lack of similarity between the representations of the linguistic situation in France and Switzerland with regard to Francoprovençal by researchers on the one hand and by speakers from other Francoprovençal regions on the other hand. Researchers would claim that nearly no one speaks the language there any more, at least not in daily interactions: they would speak of “phantom speakers” who would hide and deny their linguistic competence (Bert et al. 2009) or of Francoprovençal as a “postvernacular” language in all the areas where it is spoken, where the mere fact that something is said in Francoprovençal is more important than what is being said (Pivot 2014). At the same time, many language speakers from the Aosta Valley in Italy or from Switzerland told me that when they would go to Savoie and Haute-Savoie in France they would always find some people with whom they could speak Francoprovençal. Another conversation was thought-provoking too. A coffee trader from the Aosta Valley who speaks Francoprovençal as his first language was at a coffee counter at an international festival of Francoprovençal in Courmayeur (Valle d’Aosta). I asked him afterwards what language he had been speaking to customers from France. He answered: “I *tried* to speak Francoprovençal. Often they would reply in French. But you know, anyway, *it’s certainly not among the associations that you would find [Francoprovençal] speakers in France!*”

Hence, the major differences in the two sources of testimonies on the Francoprovençal linguistic situation lie in the fact that the studies do not approach the same type of people (working mostly with the *groupes patoisants*), and that researchers do not speak the language (one might think of a social group difference too, yet among those who told me that they would always find speakers there was a Swiss TV presenter who in “ordinary” speakers’ eyes must belong to the same social group as the researchers). Researchers might begin with a pre-existing idea that Francoprovençal is no longer spoken, so they do not learn it and therefore people would talk to them in French in an effort to be polite. This seems to confirm the initial hypothesis, which brings them to say that the language is no longer spoken (hence there is no need to think about its transmission, one

may only think of a valorisation of a language that has once existed). The linguistic reality thus remains unknown: how is the language actually spoken, by whom, about what, for which purposes and with what motivations? Another crucial issue is that trust can hardly be earned by a researcher who does not speak the language, which will have an effect even on the chances of being provided with completely extralinguistic information. Taking the trouble of learning the language implies a true interest in the subject and respect for the community, while not doing so is too often interpreted as studying it merely for financial reward, as I witnessed on numerous occasions in private conversations with “ordinary” speakers and activists.

### **Data analysis method: critical discourse analysis**

One of the classics of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes, once noted: “some social research seems incredibly to assume that what there is to find out can be found out by asking” (Hymes 1981: 84). Thus, interviews are only data, not results. That is, one has to understand why the informants said, or wrote, what they did, where and when they did, to root the discourse in its social setting of enunciation in order to understand the issues at stake.

The main data analysis method used in this study is the critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA). As van Dijk (2001) suggests, CDA’s roots are mainly to be found in critical linguistics, such as developed in the UK and Australia (Fowler et al. 1979). Today CDA is a method combining the approaches of several academic disciplines: “it requires true multidisciplinary, and an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture” (van Dijk 1993: 253). Namely, the disciplines concerned are critical sociolinguistics, social sciences and anthropology, sometimes psychology.

The fundamental principles of CDA were developed and presented by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak using the example of their analysis of a Margaret Thatcher radio interview (Fairclough, Wodak 2010 [1997]). One can distinguish several basic concepts of CDA that are of importance to this study. Firstly, language or language use are not considered separately or for their own sake but as a part of social, cultural, and political processes: “...the key claim of CDA is that major social and political processes and movements ... have a partly linguistic-discursive character” (*Op. cit.*: 101). CDA

emphasises the discursive nature of power relations in modern society: power relations are built and “negotiated” within discourse. Each speech act reproduces and/or transforms certain notions as to the structure of the world, society, and culture; discourse reflects particular linguistic ideologies. Fairclough and Wodak provide the following definition of ideologies: “Ideologies are often (though not necessarily) false or ungrounded constructions of society (for example, gender ideologies that represent women as less emotionally stable than men)” (*Op. cit.*: 105). Ideologies reflect both the notion of reality and, at the same time, the construction of identity. It concerns in particular the collective identity: that of a *people*, of a *nation*, of a certain group.

Besides, according to the CDA approach, “discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking the context into consideration” (*Op. cit.*: 106). The notion of context contains two main components. The first is socio-cultural knowledge. The interpretation of a discourse, just as discourse generation, is not carried out via a *tabula rasa*: the listener/reader interprets the discourse according to their feelings, preferences, and knowledge (*Op. cit.*: 108). The second important component of the discourse content is its intertextuality, its relation to another discourse, be it a precedent, concurrent, or following one.

CDA aims at bridging the “gap” between the micro and macrolevels of the social order, bringing together language use, discourse and verbal interaction, which traditionally belong to the microlevel of analysis, with the issues of social groups, power and dominance, which are traditionally studied at the microlevel of analysis (van Dijk 2001: 354). “In everyday interaction and experience the macro- and microlevel (and the intermediate “mesolevels”) form one unified whole” (*Ibid.*).

Finally, CAD is primarily interested in the actual social issues. At the same time,

unlike politicians and activists, critical discourse analysts go beyond the immediate, serious or pressing issues of the day. Their structural understanding presupposes more general insights, and sometimes indirect and long-term analyses of fundamental causes, conditions and consequences of such issues. (van Dijk 1993: 253)

## Main theoretical premises of the study

The conceptual framework for specific parts of my analysis will be explained in the respective chapters of this dissertation. However, two crucial issues need to be discussed beforehand: what is understood here as a “language” and what is understood as a “nation.” Volumes of academic literature have been dedicated to these much-debated questions, and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review all the existing approaches. However the approach informing my analysis needs to be specified. I will first start with the term “language” and then move on towards the “nation.”

### 1. What is a language?

#### Language vs. dialect

In what has long been regarded as classic research, Einar Haugen points out that the taxonomy of linguistic descriptions is made complicated by the ambiguity and vagueness of the terms *language* and *dialect*:

The simple truth is that there is no answer to these questions, or at least none that will stand up to closer scrutiny. ... it is inherent in the very terms themselves that no answer can be given. They represent a simple dichotomy in a situation that is almost infinitely complex. ... The use of these terms has imposed a division in what is often a continuum, giving what appears to be a neat opposition when in fact the edges are extremely ragged and uncertain. (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 97)

Indeed, in sociolinguistics, a *dialect* is usually understood as a variety of a language: geographical (a regional dialect), social (a sociolect), or ethnic (an ethnolect). A *language* then represents the sum of its dialects. However, a practical application of this theory raises the problem of delimitation between languages and dialects (two dialects of the same language vs. two different languages). While determining the border between two standard languages does not present any difficulty, establishing limits within a continuum of non-standardised – most often, spoken – varieties is always problematic. One may recall the example provided by Uriel Weinreich: it is easy to say where standard Dutch ends and standard German begins, but it is impossible to determine unequivocally where regional Dutch dialects end and regional German dialects begin (Weinreich 1972 [1954]: 315). The same can be said about the Romance linguistic continuum.

### A structural approach to the language vs. dialect delimitation

Traditionally, dialectologists would study isoglosses to establish dialect boundaries: they would select either an isogloss considered to be especially significant, or sufficiently dense isogloss clusters to draw a border between two dialects. Nevertheless, Uriel Weinreich labelled such research methods as belonging to the past as early as 1954: “It is evident that no unambiguous concept of dialect could emerge ... any more than a society can be exhaustively and uniquely divided into ‘groups’.” He also stipulated: “Classificatory procedures of this type are today virtually passé. Dialectologists have generally switched to extra-structural criteria for dividing the folk-language continuum” (Weinreich 1972 (1954): 316). The “extra-structural criteria” are purported to mean peculiar geographical (such as mountains/plains), climatic, or historical features; lexical differences may also be added to the “traditional” phonetic ones. Finally, statistical methods may be used. I should note here that although the quoted paper was written over half a century ago, not only has the method of “the most significant isoglosses” been traditionally used to define Francoprovençal since the moment it was first identified as a distinctive linguistic type by Ascoli in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it also remains the main method up to now (as discussed more in detail in Part II).

### A functional approach to the language vs. dialect delimitation

In addition to the structural dimension of the delimitation between *language* and *dialect*, which is what linguists and dialectologists deal with, a functional or sociolinguistic dimension can also be distinguished. Haugen notes that in fact, the modern use of the term *dialect* presupposes either a rural speech or that of a lower social class. Thus, one can speak about a *Lancashire dialect* or an *Irish dialect* – but never about a *London dialect* or a *Bostonian dialect* unless it is the dialect of London or Boston working classes that is meant: “As a social norm, then, a dialect is a language that is excluded from polite society” (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 100). In other words, a dialect is “a language that ‘did not succeed’” (*Ibid.*, quoted from Auguste Brun, personal communication).

Besides, according to one of the possible meanings, a dialect is seen as an “underdeveloped language”: “It is a language that no one has taken the trouble to develop into what is often referred to as a ‘standard language’” (*Op. cit.*: 103). In reality, as Haugen emphasises, an idiom’s being *underdeveloped* only means that it is not used to perform all the functions that a language can perform. To jump ahead, note that this is precisely the



role assumed by today's language activists and by some of the linguists: making a *language* out of a *patois* or a *dialect* by developing its functions.

### **A synchronic vs. diachronic approach: dialects becoming languages**

A *language* can be defined either in a synchronic or in a diachronic sense:

In a descriptive, synchronic sense “language” can refer either to a SINGLE linguistic norm, or to a GROUP of related norms. In a historical, diachronic sense “language” can either be a common language on its way to dissolution, or a common language resulting from unification. A “dialect” is then any one of the related norms comprised under the general name “language,” historically the result of either divergence or convergence. (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 99)

Modern linguistic ideologies relate the existence of nations and nation-states to the existence of *national languages*: “Every self-respecting nation has to have a language. Not just a medium of communication, a “vernacular” or a “dialect,” but a fully developed language. Anything less marks it as underdeveloped” (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 103). The development of a *dialect* into a *language* proves to be closely related to the development of literacy and the rise of nationalism and is, consequently, perceived as a threat to a nation-state. Haugen specifically mentions France, which is known for its rigid language policy. The post-revolutionary ban on the use of local idioms or today's proclamation of the question about one's native language in population censuses to be “anti-constitutional” are particularly connected to the danger that the emergence of other languages beside French poses to the French Republic: “The dialects, at least if they threaten to become languages, are potentially disruptive forces in a unified nation...” (*Op. cit.*: 104) It is namely on such *dialects* that “threaten to become languages” – or, more precisely, are in the process of establishing themselves as languages – that this dissertation is focused.

### **Language as an object of policy and education**

In a work titled *What is a language?* (Le Page 1997 [1988]), Le Page stipulates that language as an object of policy and education is essentially a “written artefact” (*Op. cit.*: 24). Different countries' political ideologies turn out to be quite similar to each other and amount essentially to the following postulates:

- that it is essential to impose national unity through the sole recognition of a homogeneous national language;
- that the precise form of that language – the rule-system, its grammar, vocabulary, and orthography – can be legislated for; and
- that its homogeneous use can be achieved through the education system (*Op. cit.*: 24).

Le Page notes that “French seems to be among the most clearly reified, totemised and institutionalised of languages” (*Ibid.*: 24). The stereotype of the standard French language plays the same role in France as the monarchy plays in Britain (*Ibid.*, according to Jean-Michel Carpentier, personal communication). Nevertheless, the *French language* is specifically a “social stereotype which has been felt to be essential to national unity” (*Op. cit.*: 25). In fact, the *French language* is only used (or strived to be used) by highly educated citizens on formal occasions; undereducated or provincial people are considered to be speaking a *regional dialect/language*. In the same way, e.g. the *Italian language* can be defined as “a standard language in search of speakers” (*Op. cit.*: 27): when it was first proclaimed the national language at the time of the Unification of Italy in 1861, it was the written language of 2.5% of the country’s population, but even these people did not use it for oral communication.

In more recent history, the creation of the European Union and the process of European integration played an important part for minority language policies, proposing a multilingual model instead of the traditional monolingual one:

The EU has come out strongly in support of multilingualism, paradoxically *because of the* strong monolingualism of its member states. It is the great importance that EU member states attach to their national languages which has necessitated the linguistic pluralism of the EU. Whatever the original motivation, the emphasis on linguistic and cultural diversity has provided an opening for minority language groups to make their case. (O’Reilly 2001: 13)

Thus the European Union has provided a new discourse favourable to minority languages, new institutional structures through which minority language groups can make their claims and also new possibilities for trans-border collaboration, which is namely an important development for divided communities like the Francoprovençal one. Laitin (1997) argues that a future European state will have multiple cultural identities, where a sense of

Europeanness will coexist with regional/ethnic and state/national identities. Simultaneously language competence will grow, according to Laitin, towards a  $2 \pm 1$  model as a norm (mother tongue + English, or mother tongue + State language + English for the speakers of minority languages).

### **Subjective approach: language as a fiction**

The problem of delimitation between *languages* and *dialects*, or between two languages, may also be considered from a completely different angle: not starting from abstract systems that would exist as if outside of their speakers, but from what speakers actually use to communicate and how they perceive these linguistic means. Out of convenience I will call this approach based on speakers' representations *subjective* – as opposed to the *objective* structural approach. On the one hand, as noted by N.B. Vakhtin based on his research in northeast Russia, when a linguistic choice functions especially as an identity marker in comparison with other language functions, “a language variety may have but minimal divergence from another, while perceived by language speakers as a ‘separate language’” (Vakhtin 2001b: 285). On the other hand, speakers who use several idioms can fail to distinguish where the borders between the idioms lie: this may be the case even with idioms structurally belonging to different language groups or families, let alone that of closely related idioms within the same linguistic continuum (Le Page, Tabouret-Keller 1985).

Opposing himself to notions of the idealised speaker-listener in a homogenous community and of closed and finite rule-systems that allow the generation of an infinite number of phrases, Le Page states: “It is not in the nature of human language for such objects to exist” (Le Page 1997 [1988]: 32). And he proposes an alternative approach:

But suppose we start, not from reified discrete systems like “English” and “French” but from observable human beings using language, is it possible to create and preserve a theoretical framework for talking about language, about “bilingualism” or “diglossia” or “languages in contact” which, while not denying the force of these cultural stereotypes, nevertheless preserves intact the fact that the individual is the sole existential locus of language, and that the only universal source of differentiation, of discreteness in linguistic systems, lies between one individual and another? (Le Page 1998 [1992]: 71)

In this study I compare the discourse about a language and its emergence as an object of policy-making (Parts I and II) with the actual linguistic practices observed and the way they are subjectively perceived by the speakers (Part III).

### **Discussion: languages, legitimising instances and language policy**

As we have seen, the category of “language” is used by both linguists and laymen, by politicians and language activists (who, in turn, can either be linguists or not) in order to divide the linguistic, socio-political and geographic continuum, according to the principles that they find relevant. Depending on the legitimising instance, these principles can differ. Dialectologists used to prefer the “objective” principle of isoglosses, although such a division can be irrelevant for speakers themselves. This was precisely the case of the borderlands of the Francoprovençal area in both Italy and France (the borders between Francoprovençal and Occitan), as delimited by dialectologists: speakers would speak in *patois* with their friends from neighbouring villages, although dialectologically-speaking, they were speaking varieties of another language, Occitan (see also Bert, Costa 2014 on the situation in France). At the same time, poets in Francoprovençal areas of all the three countries, France, Italy and Switzerland, were members of *Félibrige*: for them their idiom was just another variety of Provençal.<sup>13</sup> Some political authorities, in their turn, prefer the “subjective” principle of communities’ self-identification (self-ascription), although sometimes this has strictly nothing to do with the observable linguistic behaviour in the respective communities. An eloquent case which is of direct interest for this study is that of Piedmont in Italy, which will be discussed in the following section.

## **2. Language policy in the Francoprovençal area**

### **Language policy in Italy and the status of Francoprovençal**

While Italy is known for its linguistic diversity, ever since the Unification of Italy (1861) only one idiom, Italian, has been considered to be a “language,” with others being seen as “dialects.” After the Second World War, three border regions, among others, –

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<sup>13</sup> There is also a letter (signed Maillane, April 6, 1907) that F. Mistral addressed to Octave Chambaz, a poet from the Swiss canton of Vaud (hence, from the Francoprovençal area), in which Mistral refers to the variety spoken in Vaud as “cette langue romande qui vous lie à la Provence” (“this Romance language that binds you to Provence”).

Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia – obtained a degree of autonomy that allowed them, *inter alia*, the use of another co-official language (French in the case of Valle d'Aosta). However, a crucial change in national language ideologies occurred with the law on minority languages adopted in 1999 (Law 482/1999), which recognised 12 “languages and cultures” on Italy’s national territory: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene, Croatian, French, Francoprovençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sard. This much controversial law was met with a lot of enthusiasm in some communities, but with scepticism by many scholars and with anger by several communities speaking non-recognised varieties, like Venetian and Piedmontese (Dal Negro 2005: 115). Indeed, according to the law, only idioms that do not belong to the Italo-Romance linguistic group were considered to be “minority languages,” while those belonging to the group were seen merely as local “dialects.” Besides, the purpose of the language policy is not clear, as underlined by Dal Negro:

Whether it is meant to allow citizens to use their native language in all domains (emphasis on democratic issues), to protect minority languages from decay and eventually from extinction (emphasis on linguistic issues), or to recognise officially the existence of the historical linguistic diversity of Italy (emphasis on political opportunity). (Dal Negro 2005: 123)

According to Dal Negro, the last goal is the most probable: “the insistence on the couplet ‘language and culture’ allows many communities in which a minority language or dialect has ceased to be spoken decades ago to take part in this language policy and thus obtain support to promote the study of traditions” (*Ibid.*). Besides, promoting mostly written, essentially symbolic use of the language, “this policy is especially compatible with tourism and economic development while it is least threatening to the political ideology of an idealised national unity” (*Ibid.*) (on Law 482/1999 see also Perta 2008; Toso 2006: 64-74).

However, the discrepancies between political recognition of a “minority language” and its actual use go beyond situations in which the idiom has ceased to be spoken. In many cases, it has never really been spoken by the respective community at all. Indeed, another particularity of the law lies precisely in the definition of communities as speaking these minority languages: it is based *exclusively* on the municipal authorities’ self-declaration. Hence, a comparison of a political map of the minority languages and a dialectological map shows that a lack of correspondence is typical. Figure 6 presents such a comparison for the case of Francoprovençal in Piedmont.

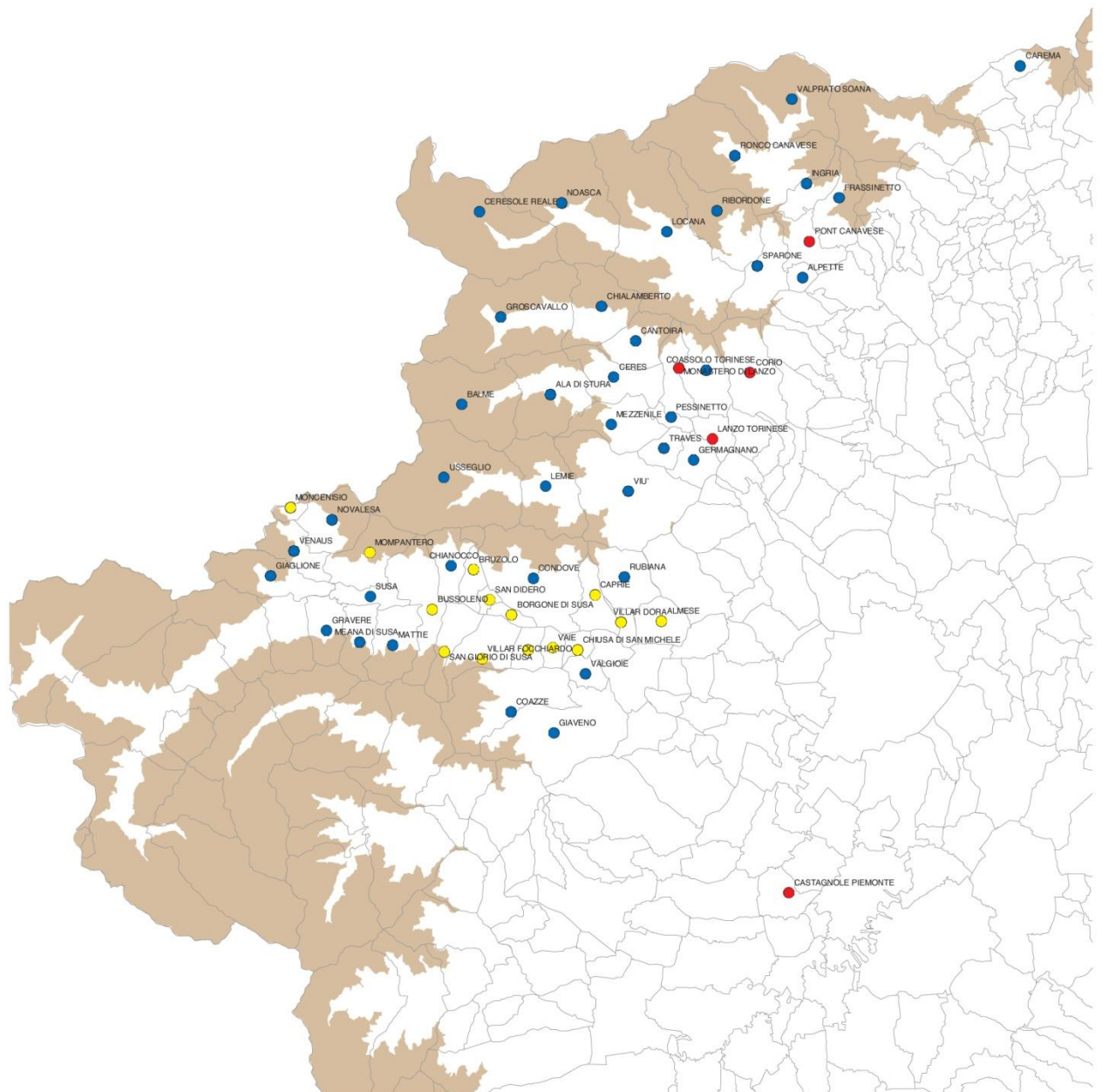


Figure 6. Francoprovençal in Piedmont (based on Allasino et al. 2007: 28). Municipalities:

- Speaking & declared
- Speaking & not declared
- Not speaking & declared
- Municipalities' boundaries
- Mountains

Far from being a case of Francoprovençal alone, the situation is typical for all the “minority languages” thus defined. Namely, in Piedmont four “minority languages” were

recognised: Francoprovençal, Occitan, Walser and French. To compare, let us see the situation with “Occitan,” “Walser” and “French.”

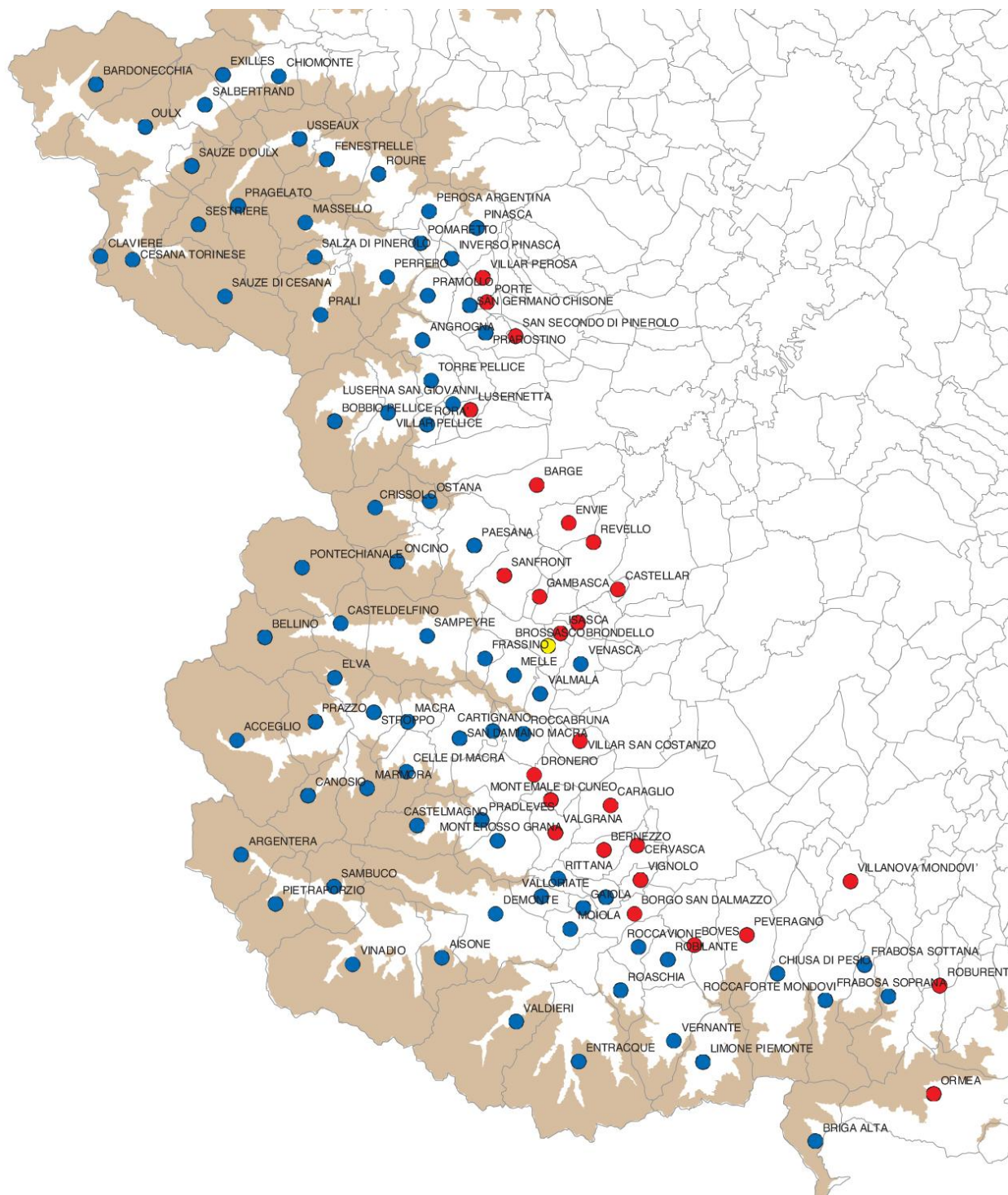


Figure 7. Occitan in Piedmont (based on Allasino et al. 2007: 29). Legend as above.

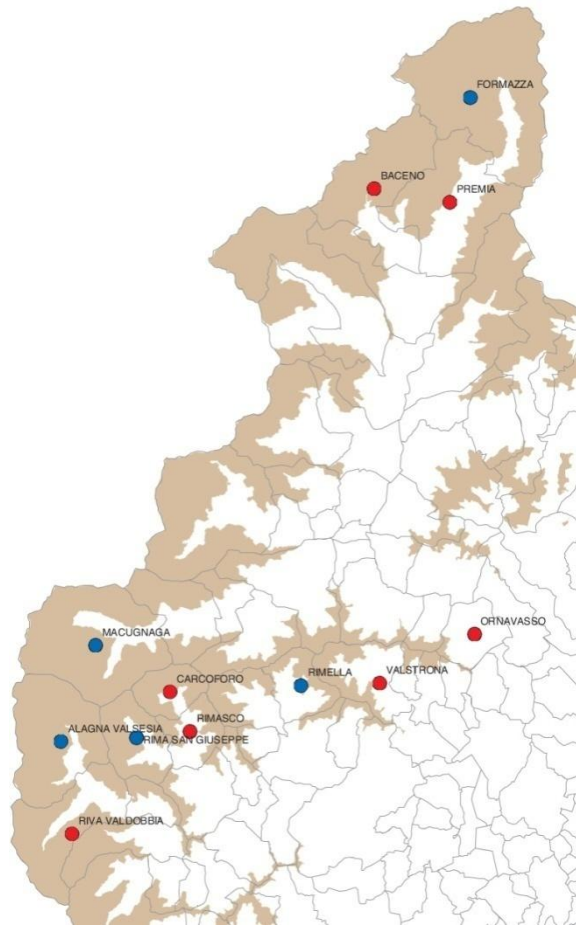


Figure 8. Walser in Piedmont (based on Allasino et al. 2007: 27). Legend as above.

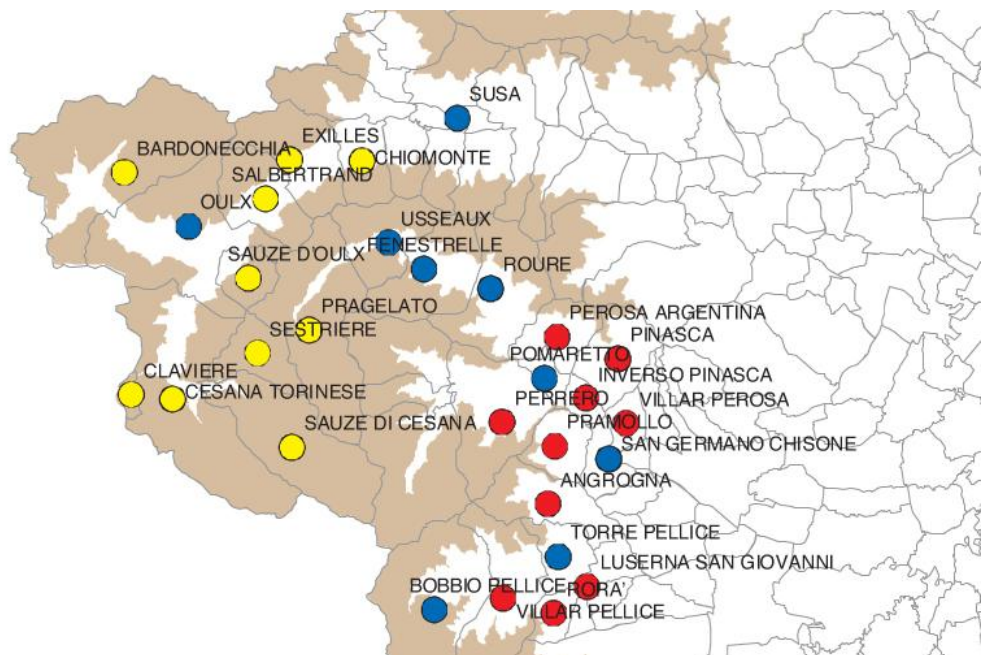


Figure 9. French in Piedmont (based on Allasino et al. 2007: 30). Legend as above.



The data can be summarised in the following table (see Table 1).

Table 1. “Minority languages” in Piedmont according to Law 482/1999. Based on figures in Allasino et al. (2007: 31).

Municipalities where the respective minority language is...	<b>Francoprovençal</b>	Occitan	Walser	French	<i>Total</i>
spoken according to dialectologists	52	81	5	19	157
declared to be spoken (and therefore they are politically recognised as minority languages)	42	103	12	15	172 <sup>14</sup>
spoken but not declared	15	3	0	10	28
declared but not spoken	5	25	7	6	43

Several observations can be made. The most obvious and the most important one for this discussion is that a “minority language” as an object of policy and discourse may be something completely different from a “minority language” as an actual observable practice. Another suggestion would be that the discrepancy depends on the prestige ascribed to this “language”: something labelled as “Occitan” conjures up more positive connotations (one might think of an outstanding literary history from the troubadours onwards) than something labelled as “Francoprovençal” (which, as a matter of fact, did not mean anything outside linguistic circles before the law was adopted). Hence, only three municipalities where Occitan is actually spoken did not declare it, whereas 25 of those where it is not, declared themselves to belong to the Occitan minority. On the contrary, the respective figures for Francoprovençal are 15 and five (the reverse tendency).<sup>15</sup> Speaking *patois*, implying being rural, poor and backward, instead of relatively wealthy, urban and progressive, appears to be more important in the Francoprovençal context than whatever positive financial outcomes of speaking a “minority language” labelled “Francoprovençal” may have. Walser is the only language in Piedmont for which the category “spoken but not

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<sup>14</sup> Data for April 2005. From 2005 to 2015 the municipalities self-declared as Francoprovençal reached 50 and those self-declared as Occitan reached 109 (Mas, Giordano 2015).

<sup>15</sup> On the application of this policy within the work of the local linguistic services (*sportelli linguistiche*) for Francoprovençal and Occitan see the comparative study by Mas and Pons (forthcoming).

declared” is non-existent: this is probably due to the linguistic discontinuity that makes the difference particularly remarkable. Thus it is the only non-Romance (Germanic) idiom, surrounded by Romance varieties (Italian, Piedmontese and the three above-mentioned – Francoprovençal, Occitan and French).

Another observation can be made when comparing the situation in Piedmont and in Valle d’Aosta. In Piedmont, road signs were installed in accordance with Law 482/1999, welcoming drivers to the “Francoprovençal” Valleys (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. “Welcome to the ‘Francoprovençal’ Valleys.” Road sign in Piedmont (Italy).

In contrast, in the Aosta Valley, the autonomous region of Italy where Francoprovençal is spoken by the majority of the population (in 2001 67.35% of the regional population declared themselves as speaking Francoprovençal, see Fondation Chanoux 2003; Cavalli 2003) not a single road sign like this has been made. Indeed, the regional identity is constructed there by now nearly disappeared French-speaking practices, rather than by speaking the *patois* recently rebranded as “Francoprovençal” (more details on the socio-political reasons for such a choice will be given in the analysis throughout the dissertation). At the same time, in many of the valleys identified as “Francoprovençal” in Piedmont this language is no longer, or simply not, spoken (although there are also those with a high level of linguistic vitality, namely the Lanzo, Orco and Soana valleys<sup>16</sup>). Thus there is no

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<sup>16</sup> See also Mas, Giordano 2015: 35 on the difference of linguistic vitality of Francoprovençal in Piedmont.

correlation between the language as a part of a recognised local cultural heritage and a language as a practice.

Finally, as far as the Francoprovençal language policy in Italy is concerned, a particular case of the “Francoprovençal” insular varieties in Apulia can be mentioned. According to Law 482/1999, the language is spoken there in two municipalities: Faeto and Celle. Traditionally local speakers would call their language Provençal and identify themselves with the Provence region in France, instead of the Alpine trans-border region (Puolato 2013: 183 - 184). The 1999 law brought the name Francoprovençal to the community, together with the idea that local varieties linguistically belonged to the alpine zone between Italy, France and Switzerland – and with obvious implications as to the “ontology” of the group (a medieval migration from the Alps).<sup>17</sup> Puolato (2013) states that in the aftermath of the 1999 law, the local varieties started being considered a “language,” not just a mere “dialect.” As one of her informants underlines: “dialetto? lingua minoritaria!” (“Dialect? A minority language!”, *op. cit.*: 184). Similarly an informant from Celle (71 years old) says: “parliamo l’italiano dialettale ... con tutti gli altri paesi che *non hanno una lingua*” (“we speak in dialectal Italian ... with all the other parts who *do not have a language*,” emphasis mine, *op. cit.*: 186, footnote 8). Thus a legislative act, simply by calling the local varieties a “language,” seems to have considerably augmented their prestige in the eyes of their speakers. A new desire to transmit the idiom to children is directly linked to this new idea of possessing a “language,” as opposed to others who only have “dialects” (*op. cit.*: 184). Other excerpts of interviews provided (*op. cit.*: 186, footnotes) show that today speakers would also say “(parlo, esprimo) in lingua”/“la nostra lingua”/“la mia lingua” (“I speak in the language/in our language/in my language”), the word “lingua” (“language”) thus functioning as a substitute for the glottonyme.

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<sup>17</sup> However, according to Puolato (2013 : 181), even today:

...les autres locuteurs du francoprovençal ... ne jouissent d’ailleurs d’aucun rôle dans l’imaginaire linguistique de nos locuteurs. Les minorités apuliennes ne s’insèrent donc pas dans un système d’échanges culturels et linguistique susceptible de générer une conscience identitaire plus dilatée et un sentiment d’appartenance à un univers de traditions proprement francoprovençales.

...other speakers of Francoprovençal ... do not play any role in the linguistic imagination of our speakers. The Apulian minorities do not fit into a network of cultural and linguistic exchanges that could generate a more dilated identity consciousness and a feeling of belonging to a universe of traditions that are truly Francoprovençal.

## Language policy of France and the status of Francoprovençal

Contrary to Italy, which is known as a particularly linguistically diverse country, France is known for its rigid monolingualism. Indeed, it is known as a nation-state *par excellence*. Much has been written on the famous one language-one nation republican model and the quasi-sacred role attributed by the state ideology to the French language (see in particular Lodge 1993 and 2004; see also Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming, on its impact on the Francoprovençal-speaking area in historical perspective). In this section I will only draw on the most recent developments of the language policy in France.

French remains the only official language of the country. In this sense, similar regulations have existed in France for nearly 500 years, since the French language – that is, at the time, that of Île-de-France, the region surrounding Paris – was established as the single national language by the Royal Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539. In present-day law, the same provision is expressed in Article 2 of the Constitution of the French Republic:

Article 2 : La langue de la République est le français.

The language of the Republic is French.

The phrase was introduced into the French Constitution in 1992. In the same year, the Council of Europe adopted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.<sup>18</sup> The Charter seeks to protect and develop the European cultural heritage, language diversity being recognised as one of its key elements. Since the language situation varies substantially between European countries, the Charter allows the countries significant flexibility in the implementation of its provisions. Thus, each country may select the provisions of the Charter it is ready to implement (provided that they make at least 35 out of a total of 68 obligations). It was presumed that member states of the Council of Europe would gradually, over a period of several years, determine the lists of their regional languages, ratify the Charter, and start implementing it in their respective territories (for an analysis of the Charter's provisions see Tabouret-Keller 1991). In France, Bernard Cerquiglini, the director of the National Institute for the French Language, produced in 1999 a report to the Minister of National Education, Research, and Technologies and the

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<sup>18</sup> The English text of the Charter can be found at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm>

Minister of Culture and Communication, in which he proposed a list of 75 “languages of France” (Cerquiglini 1999)<sup>19</sup>. Based on the report, the Charter was signed but the Constitutional Council declined to ratify it, citing the conflict between the Charter and Article 2 of the French Constitution.

The largest number of regional and minority languages among European countries was at the time recognised by Germany and Croatia: seven languages each. Against this background, and given the general context of France’s language policy, the proposal to recognise 75 languages seemed excessively radical. Besides, according to a reservation made in the Cerquiglini report, the Charter provides for a territorial delimitation of languages, which “contradicts the French Republican principles, according to which a language as an element of culture belongs to national heritage; thus, the Corsican language is the property of the nation rather than of the region of Corsica” (*“s’oppose ... aux principes républicains français, qui tiennent que la langue, élément culturel, appartient au patrimoine national ; le corse n’est pas propriété de la région de Corse, mais de la Nation.”* Cerquiglini 1999). The territorial principle is held to be obsolete, “stemming from the German Romanticism that used to inspire linguistics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (*“issue du romantisme allemand qui inspira la linguistique du XIXe siècle”*): it contradicts, on the one hand, linguistic science, since all languages existing in France, including French, are of foreign origin, and “the true territory of a language is in the brain of its speakers” (*“le vrai territoire d’une langue est le cerveau de ceux qui la parlent”*), and on the other hand, the sociolinguistic reality (as, due to social mobility, *regional* languages are spoken everywhere). Therefore, Cerquiglini advised signing the Chapter while “reducing the tendency towards territorialisation” (*“en minorant la tendance à la territorialisation”*), and “to recall that only French, the language of the Republic, is the language of all, all other languages ... being therefore those of minorities” (*“rappeler enfin que seul le français, langue de la République, est la langue de tous et que toute autre langue [...] est, de fait, minoritaire.”* Ibid.)

Among the 75 languages, the Cerquiglini report lists “Francoprovençal.” He also lists “Occitan,” and this case is interesting as it gives us insights into the procedures by which languages are delimited. Indeed, unlike other languages whose existence is merely acknowledged by the researcher, he provides an extensive explanation of singling out Occitan, comparing the linguistic situation of *Oc* in the South of France with that of the

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<sup>19</sup> See also Cerquiglini 2003.

languages of *Oïl* in the north. According to Cerquiglini, *Oïl* idioms such as Franc-Comtois, Walloon, Picard, etc. are now so different from standard French that they can no longer be considered its dialects.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to this situation, “Occitan is a sum of its varieties ... even if internal divisions can be distinguished in it” (*l’occitan [est] la somme de ses varieties ... même si une diversité interne est perceptible.*” Cerquiglini 1999). This statement provoked a heated debate and an acutely negative reaction from supporters of the recognition of Provençal as a separate language within the *Oc* language group.

In spite of the Constitutional Council’s ban on the Charter’s ratification, the report and the signing of the Charter had an effect (albeit minimal) on the situation of regional languages. Thus, the General Delegation for the French Language *and the Languages of France* (*Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France, DGLFLF*) was created in 2001 under the Ministry of Culture and Communication to replace the former General Delegation for the French Language.<sup>21</sup> In May 2008, nine years after Cerquiglini had presented his study, the National Assembly discussed introducing an amendment to Article 1 of the Constitution, which would take into account the existence of regional languages in France (“Regional languages belong to France’s cultural heritage”). The French Academy vehemently opposed it: a declaration unanimously adopted by all its members and published on June 12, 2008 notes that “For over five centuries, the French language has forged France” (“*Depuis plus de cinq siècles, la langue française a forgé la France*”) and urge the National Assembly to revoke “this text, which does not belong in the Constitution, although its excellent intentions may and should be expressed elsewhere” (“*ce texte dont les excellentes intentions peuvent et doivent s’exprimer ailleurs, mais qui n’a pas sa place dans la Constitution.*” *Déclaration de l’Académie française*, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/la-langue-de-la-republique-est-le-francais>). Later on, on July 23, 2008, the amendment was adopted, but it was to Article 75-1 rather than the Article 1 of the Constitution:

Article 75-1 : Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France.

Regional languages belong to France’s cultural heritage.

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<sup>20</sup> In Cerquiglini’s opinion, this holds true whether standard French is, as is commonly believed, a Francien dialect that overcame other dialects or a supra-dialectal or trans-dialectal language that was initially created as a written one (according to the proposition put forward in Cerquiglini’s own work: see Cerquiglini 1991)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.dgflf.culture.gouv.fr/>

Thus *regional language* became a constitutionally recognised legal term in France. It is important to emphasise that French society perceived this step to be revolutionary. In the ensuing years, the necessity of a national-level law on regional languages that would regulate their use in various spheres was discussed, but never voted for. However, the 2008 amendment to the constitution and the announcement of a language bill being prepared initiated or significantly increased interest towards regional languages in France. Research programmes were launched; regional authorities started mentioning regional languages in their publications, tourist information booklets, etc. In July 2009, one year after the constitution had been amended, the Rhône-Alpes region formally recognised two idioms, Occitan and Francoprovençal, as its *regional languages* (*Rapport n° 09.11.450 Culture*). Neither idiom had been recognised by the regional authorities before. The decision was made based on a study initiated by the region to address requests from activists belonging to the Occitan and Francoprovençal language associations and carried out in 2006-2009. The results of the study were formally presented in July 2009 (Bert et al. 2009), and Occitan and Francoprovençal were recognised as *regional languages* at the level of the Rhône-Alpes regional administration (Deliberation 2009). Thus, the regional-level recognition of Francoprovençal (and Occitan) as a language in its own right proved to a large extent to be a result of the work of language activists. This was legitimised by a scientific study and, consequently, by a regional regulatory act. One should note that at the same time, when linguists came to interview speakers of the two languages they would explain that they were carrying out their study on behalf of the regional government in view of a possible adoption of a law on regional languages. Therefore, the very fact of carrying out the study created expectations that either had not existed before or had not seemed realistic. This provoked an outburst of activity by language associations as well as the appearance of new publications in regional languages.<sup>22</sup> Yet in the Rhône-Alpes region the number of speakers of either language, Francoprovençal or Occitan, represents less than 1% of the regional population (Bert et al. 2009). It is not by chance that the language policy in favour of these languages is most actively developed in the places where the issues at stake are mostly symbolic, potentially touristic and economic (compare with the Aosta Valley where, as mentioned above, over 67% of population declared themselves as speakers of Francoprovençal, and yet no regular language policy exists).

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<sup>22</sup> It is symptomatic that in autumn/winter of 2009 when I first started working on Francoprovençal (and on Occitan) none of my informants from the Rhône-Alpes region failed to mention the study of Bert et al. (2009) in their interviews.

## Language policy in Switzerland and the status of Francoprovençal

There is not much to be said about Switzerland in terms of language policy relevant for the Francoprovençal case. Despite the Confederation's official multilingualism, the country's being multilingual does not imply that its citizens should be multilingual too. Indeed, language policy is legislated for at the level of cantons. Historically, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland imitated the language policy of France, banning the use of *patois* at school. Today only the canton of Valais provides a certain assistance for activities involving Francoprovençal ("patois"), namely for its teaching and publishing, yet it does not have any official status. As for the federal level, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was signed and ratified by the Confederation. However, Francoprovençal is not included.

It is often argued that in Switzerland the word "patois" does not have negative connotations. Although it is true that its connotations are generally somewhat less pejorative than in France, it is nevertheless also true that *patois* is seen as a "non-language" as opposed to French, which is a "language" (and to other "languages": German, Italian and Romansh). Thus the explanation given by the Swiss authorities when refusing to protect Francoprovençal under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is particularly eloquent, as it stipulates: "*La promotion des dialectes n'est pas une tâche de la Confédération*" ("The promotion of dialects is not among the Confederation's tasks") (Réponses de l'Office fédéral de la culture à vos questions<sup>23</sup>). Francoprovençal is thus but a dialect of French. Let us look at some excerpts from the official reply in more detail:

Aux termes de l'article 4 de la Constitution fédérale, l'allemand, le français, l'italien et le romanche sont *les langues nationales* de la Suisse. Cet article part d'une *conception générale et globale de la notion de langue nationale*: on entend par là *l'ensemble des formes* des 4 langues susmentionnées, écrites et orales, y compris leurs différents idiomes et dialectes. L'art. 70 qui énonce les grandes orientations de la politique fédérale dans le domaine se réfère aux *formes standard* de ces langues.

According to the terms of Article 4 of the Federal Constitution, German, French, Italian and Romansh are the national languages of Switzerland. This article is based on a general and global

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.patwe.ch/data/files/Interpellation%20de%20M.%20Couchepin/Mounier%2012.5.07\\_FR.doc](http://www.patwe.ch/data/files/Interpellation%20de%20M.%20Couchepin/Mounier%2012.5.07_FR.doc)  
(Accessed on 25-06-2015)



conception of the notion of language: it means all the forms of the four abovementioned languages, written and oral, including their different idioms and dialects. Article 70, which stipulates the general direction of federal policy in this field, refers to the standard forms of these languages.

La question de la promotion des *patois romands* n'a jamais fait l'objet de débat au plan fédéral ...

The question of the promotion of the Romand patois has never been subject to debate at the federal level ...

La Confédération considère que tous les *dialectes* parlés dans notre pays représentent une partie essentielle de notre patrimoine linguistique et culturel. Il est certainement regrettable que *les patois romands* aient été systématiquement étouffés parce que les politiques d'éducation des 19<sup>e</sup> et 20<sup>e</sup> siècles les considéraient comme un obstacle à la bonne maîtrise *du français écrit*. (Italics mine).

The Confederation considers that all the dialects spoken in our country represent an essential part of our linguistic and cultural heritage. It is certainly regrettable that the Romand patois have been systematically stifled because the educational policies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries considered them an obstacle to proficiency in written French.

Thus “*the Romand patois*” (“*les patois romands*”), a denomination implying Francoprovençal, are opposed to the “*written French*.” They are but a particular case in a general policy line in which “*various idioms and dialects*” of “*national languages*” are contrasted with their “*standard forms*.” Nevertheless, as suggested by the experts committee from the Council of Europe, a commission is presently working on analysing the case of Francoprovençal, to see whether it should be considered as a language of Switzerland worthy of protection.

### 3. Imagined communities and communities of practice

Tracing the boundaries between “languages” participates in creating social difference. Often these linguistic boundaries are then naturalised, made into ethnic

boundaries and serve to delimit what starts to be seen as nations and potential political entities (nation-states). Thus language revitalisation movements are often linked to a form of nationalist or proto-nationalist discourse (among the most prominent examples today are Catalonia or Corsica. See Jaffe 1999 on how speaking Corsican indexes a nationalist political position), although this is not always the case. In a similar way, speaking Francoprovençal in some contexts is seen to index a nationalist (more precisely separatist) position, as will be discussed in the following chapters (Parts I and III). Therefore it is important to discuss the understanding of nations and nationalism adopted in this dissertation.

In this section, I present different theoretical views that one may adopt to approach a community like the one under study here. These different visions are traditionally separated between their respective disciplines: *imagined communities* appear in studies of nations and nationalism, mostly in political sciences, social anthropology and sociology; *speech community* and *community of practice* are notions used in sociolinguistics when studying the speech behaviour of specific groups. For me, both approaches are relevant, the first one for studying the discourse produced by social groups, and the second one for studying the actual social practices (including the linguistic ones) of the same groups.

In the studies of nations and nationalism several approaches have been distinguished, mainly the primordialist (connecting ethnic ties with kinship ties), instrumentalist (ethnicity as a resource) and constructivist approaches. What I am mostly interested in here is the latter and namely the famous definition of the nation as an *imagined community* by Benedict Anderson: “It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006 [1983]: 6). Thus, the nation is imagined, and moreover, it is imagined as a community:

...it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (*op. cit.*: 32)

Today two types of nationalism are distinguished: the civic and the ethnic. At the same time, as O'Reilly (2001: 1) emphasises:

the power of nationalist ideology derives at least in part from the potent combination of the ideal of popular sovereignty and universal citizenship (the civic element), and the ideal of shared culture as an agent of political legitimisation and mark of authenticity (the ethnic element). Although often portrayed as ideal types, the two work in combination in real world situations.

This is precisely the case that is to be found in the Arpitanist political ideology (see Part I Chapters 2 and 3), although at different periods different components would prevail.

The *imagined* character of the nation is not to be understood as falseness since, according to Anderson's concept, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (*op. cit.*: 6). They only differ in the manner in which they are imagined, in what makes the basis of the notion of community. Anderson gives the example of the French *ancien régime* aristocracy, which can now be represented as a class: "but surely it was imagined this way only very late. To the question 'Who is the Comte de X?' the normal answer would have been, not 'a member of the aristocracy,' but 'the lord of X,' 'the uncle of the Baronne de Y,' or 'a client of the Duc de Z'" (*op. cit.*: 32). Just as being imagined does not mean being false, in a similar way, though ethnicity can be and often is a political resource, this instrumentalist vision of it should not hide the fact that it may still have, and often does, identity implications that are felt as crucial for members of the ethnic group:

The cultural features that are chosen to mark boundaries between ethnic groups often have fundamental, persistent and deep meanings for the people concerned, and cannot be brushed aside as mere manipulation to serve the aims of elites. ... It is true that ethnic identity can be politicised; indeed, it can be consciously created for expressly political purposes in some instances (Hanf 1995), but this does not necessarily mean that ethnic identity is shallow or without significance for members of the group in question. (O'Reilly 2001: 4)

Thus, although in the following parts of this dissertation special attention will be paid to how ethnicity/nationhood is constructed and instrumentalised, it should not be forgotten that these questions often provoke deep personal emotions or drama, as many of my interviews and conversations with language advocates have shown.

In the recent years, the development of the EU, which played an important part for the minority languages policy, as discussed above, has also had an impact on divided nations:

The claim that the European single market has softened borders throughout its territory, particularly within the Schengen countries and the Eurozone, is, of course, relatively uncontroversial. The passage of goods and people has become far easier (with service sectors less flexible thus far). This in turn has made it easier for individual members of divided nations to mix with each other.<sup>24</sup> (Mabry et al. 2013: 351)

Since the beginning of the 1990s trans-border cooperation has been intensified. This holds true for the trans-border alpine region between France, Italy and Switzerland (“Arpitanian”).

It should be noted that, out of the three states under consideration, the nationalist ideology is mostly relevant for the Italian case. It does exist in France too, and especially has been very present in Savoie and Haute-Savoie ever since the beginning of the 1970s. However it may be seen as marginal when measured against the total number of Francoprovençal speakers in France. As Friend (2012: 154) argues,

None of the minority regions in France has been able to build a strong positive identity based on its history or mythology, and all have been affected by past association with right-wing ideas – or worse, association with France’s enemies, or with recent violence. The mythology and reality of French centralisation has instead prevailed. The steadily dwindling number of speakers of non-French languages has not destroyed regional identities, but those identities are cultural rather than political.

As for Switzerland, minority language-based nationalist ideologies are nearly absent there.

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<sup>24</sup> Although, at the same time, “the softening of borders has not always been positive for divided nations” (*op. cit.*: 352), as the case of the Basque country suggests. Namely, “some French Basques fear that softer borders will facilitate economic domination by Spanish entrepreneurs or the import of Basque ‘nationalist extremism’” (*Ibid.*).

Barth (1969: 33) describes three strategies that can be adopted by the local elites in polycultural or polyethnic societies, and their organisational implications for ethnic boundaries.

In their pursuit of participation in wider social systems to obtain new forms of value they can choose between the following basic strategies: (i) they may attempt to pass and become incorporated in the pre-established industrial society and cultural group; (ii) they may accept a “minority” status, accommodate to and seek to reduce their minority disabilities by encapsulating all cultural differentiae in sectors of non-articulation, while participating in the larger system of the industrialised group in the other sectors of activity; (iii) they may choose to emphasise ethnic identity, using it to develop new positions and patterns to organise activities in those sectors formerly not found in their society, or inadequately developed for the new purposes.

In the Francoprovençal case the actual choice of local elites throughout the Francoprovençal area has always been the first one. Its consequences were very much those predicted by Barth:

If the cultural innovators are successful in the first strategy, their ethnic group will be denuded of its source of internal diversification and will probably remain as a culturally conservative, low-articulating ethnic group with low rank in the larger social system. (*Ibid.*)

This might explain why the Francoprovençal situation developed in a different way with respect to the other minority situations in Europe. To compare, in the Catalan case of the Generalitat de Catalunya (that today’s Arpitans often envy), it was the third strategy of emphasising the Catalan identity that was chosen by the local elites. According to Barth: “The third strategy generates many of the interesting movements that can be observed today, from nativism to new states” (*Ibid.*). In the most recent years, the start of a shift towards this third strategy may be observed in the Francoprovençal area as well, if the young Arpitan activists are to be considered representatives of new elites.

Nationalist (or proto-nationalist) movements are organised discursively as if expressing the will of the whole imagined community. However they essentially express the interests of one particular group of population, sometimes one social class, the

“national outfit” masking real societal tensions. Criticising “the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed” (Brubaker 2004: 35), R. Brubaker argues that agency, just like boundedness, coherence and interest, belongs to organisations (*op. cit.*: 41). Hence, “the chief protagonists of ethnic conflicts ... are not ethnic groups as such but various kinds of organisations, broadly understood, and their empowered and authorised incumbents” (*op. cit.*: 41). Brubaker suggests that “by invoking groups, they [the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs] seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being” (*op. cit.*: 37). In other words, defining the ethnic groups, the leaders of ethnic movements “contribute to producing what they apparently describe or designate” (*op. cit.*: 37). This point, linked to Bourdieu’s argument on naming practices of groups, languages and regions (Bourdieu 1980), is, in my sense, of primary importance. Therefore a whole part of this dissertation (Part II) is dedicated to the way the groups and languages come into being in the process of their geographical delimitation, naming and creating a unique writing system for them. At the same time, studying these processes of tracing the ethnic boundaries (in the sense of Barth 1969), it is essential to see not only *how* they are traced, but also and especially *why*:

By the close of the tumultuous and often violent twentieth century, it was clear that ethnicity and nationalism had become the primary political idioms, displacing class and overshadowing other issues and other possible modes of political organisation. During the last 100 years we have become all too familiar with the destructive potential of ethnic nationalism, and while the politics of ethnicity and identity have been a liberating force in some cases, they have also been used *to mask or deny relations of power and ideology which underpin inequality and conflict in much of the world.* (O’Reilly 2001: 1, Italics mine)

It is therefore important to uncover the actual issues hidden behind an ethnic nationalistic discourse. At the same time, just as in the case of the “language” there can be two understandings of the community under study. In the two first parts of this dissertation where a discourse on language and nation is concerned, the notion of a “nation” is more relevant. At the same time, I believe that the description of language practices and the norms of linguistic behaviour can be built more efficiently *not* by considering speakers of a language as a *linguistic minority* or as members of a single *ethnic group* or *nation* as they often tend to represent themselves, but rather by representing them as members of a single *speech community* or a *community of practice*, without any ethnic or national connotations.

Indeed, as will be shown in Part III, which addresses actual Francoprovençal practices, it is barely possible to speak of a single Francoprovençal community, despite the structural unity of the language.

Penelope Eckert (Eckert 2006) emphasises that from the point of view of sociolinguistics, the value of the notion of *community of practice* lies in the fact that it aggregates groups not based on general abstract characteristics such as social class, gender, etc. (I would also add ethnicity or nationality to this list) or the simple fact of presence in the same place (neighbours, coworkers), but based on a common activity, or *shared practice*. In situations that are of interest to this study, it is a common activity (aiming to “safeguard,” to “maintain,” or to “revitalise” an idiom) that unites activists into a consolidated community. Eckert notes that in the course of their common activities, members of such a community develop certain common views, values, and, notably, speech communication methods that they may or may not accept according to their place in the community and the place of the community in a wider social context. Inside such communities, linguistic customs are formed. “The importance of the community of practice lies in the recognition that identity is not fixed, that convention does not pre-exist use, and that language use is a continual process of learning” (Eckert 2006: 684-685).

## Dissertation plan

The first part of this dissertation studies the process of a set of “patois” becoming a “language” in a historical perspective. Namely, it provides an analysis of discourse on Francoprovençal at three major periods in this process (the 1870s, 1970s and 2000s-2010s). The second part focuses on today’s concurrent models of division of the linguistic and socio-political continuum in the Francoprovençal area: the notions of the “Francoprovençal language,” the “Arpitan language,” the “Savoyard language,” the respective geographical reference areas and orthographies ascribed to these. Finally, the third part describes actual linguistic practices in the Francoprovençal area, to demonstrate the gap between language as an object of policy and discourse (as studied in Parts I and II) and language as a social practice (Part III).

## Notation

When analysing the data, I use the terms preferred by respective informants under discussion (the “emic” description). In general descriptions of linguistic situations, for the sake of convenience, I use the term *Francoprovençal* due to its being so far the only one accepted in scholarly literature.

Quoted informants are identified with their conventional initials, an approximate or exact year of birth, and, when appropriate, their allegiance to a specific view of the linguistic situation. The following abbreviations are used:

*Arp* – Arpitan

*Fp* – Francoprovençal

*Pat* - Patois

*Sav* – Savoyard

Other notations used when quoting excerpts from the interviews are as follows:

– a shorter pause

. a longer pause

? a question

! an exclamation

           an emphasis

... a lacuna

*Italics*, unless explicitly stated otherwise, are used to accentuate the parts of a statement that are especially important for my analysis.



## **Part I. From a “Francoprovençal linguistic type” to the “Arpitan nation” in the discourse of linguists and activists**

Francoprovençal is the youngest among the Gallo-Romance languages and one of the youngest Romance languages: not from an “ontological” perspective, but in terms of its becoming a named part of a Romance linguistic continuum, an object of study and discourse. The argument that the idioms spoken on the borderland between Italy, France and Switzerland form a specific “linguistic type” was first pronounced in 1870s by the Italian linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli; the argument that this “linguistic type” is a Romance language in its own right, and that it forms a particular nation, is yet much more recent, dating to the 1970s. In Part I I will trace the history of the notion of “Francoprovençal” and study the evolution of metalinguistic discourse about it in order to see how a group of linguistic varieties that before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had never been distinguished as either a particular “linguistic group,” or a “dialect,” or a “language,” ended up becoming a “language” at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Namely, I will study the metalinguistic discourse about Francoprovençal during three major periods of its “becoming a language”:

- 1870s: Ascoli’s research in the newly created Kingdom of Italy and the emergence of the notion of the “Franco-Provençal linguistic type”;
- 1970s: The renaming of the idiom as Harpitan/Arpitan and its promotion as a language in its own right, together with the idea of Arpitanian and the Arpitan people, by a separatist named Joseph Henriot in the Aosta Valley;
- 2000s: The recognition of “Francoprovençal” as a “minority” or “regional” language by the political authorities in Italy, France and Switzerland (as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation). The creation of a trans-border Arpitan Cultural Alliance in Switzerland in 2004 and the emergence of a new trans-border Arpitan political movement in 2013-2014.

I will examine for each period how the discourse about Francoprovençal is influenced by both scientific paradigms of the moment and linguistic and socio-political ideologies; why this discourse appears when it does and how it is used afterwards. I will also study how the discourse on language is never really about language, and how language activists’ movements and language conflicts reflect deeper conflicts of a socio-economic and political nature.

As far as the first period is concerned, the identification of Francoprovençal by Ascoli has never been considered within the socio-political context of its enunciation. However, I will argue that understanding the underlying socio-political motivations of the different parties involved is crucial for our understanding of why the identification of Francoprovençal was rejected on both sides of the Alps, and why a century had to pass before the notion of Francoprovençal could start to become more and more accepted.

As for the second period, the study is based upon the texts of that time, including rare materials that were made available to me thanks to J. Henriet himself, and also thanks to Ch. Dunoyer, as well as on two in-depth interviews with Henriet held in February 2014 (each three hours long, one registered and another one reported in the field diary), completed by an informal meeting with him in 2016 and by a number of informal meetings with other former members of the Harpitanya movement. It should be noticed here that Henriet had never given any interviews of this kind before. This material allows us to clarify the intents and ideology of the movement.

More importantly, perhaps, the study of these two first periods in the development of the Francoprovençal/Arpitan concept allows us to explain the consequences of these earlier ideologies for today's situation. Thus it helps us to understand, for example, why speaking about Francoprovençal as a distinct language and speaking about the necessity of its standardisation was taboo in the Aosta Valley up until recent years, and why its standardisation still remains a highly sensitive topic today (which is translated in a specific language policy in the VDA, proscribing 71 variants of norms for the VDA alone in an attempt to avoid standardisation). Apart from investigating the emergence of a new "language" as such, the interest of its history is therefore in clarifying the tacit conflicts that cross the community today.

Finally, the analysis of today's discourse on Francoprovençal is based upon interviews with language advocates held in the three countries and extensive fieldwork in the Francoprovençal area (see details in the Introduction).

## Chapter 1. The 1870s: Graziadio I. Ascoli and the birth of ‘Franco-Provenzale’

The argument about a particular “Franco-Provençal linguistic type” was first pronounced by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829 – 1907)<sup>25</sup>, one of the major scholars in the field of Romance studies, who is now seen as the founder of Italian dialectology and Italian linguistics. Research on Francoprovençal has never, it seems, questioned the conditions within which the idea of Francoprovençal first emerged. By the term “conditions,” I mean here both the intellectual (scholarly) and socio-political contexts which brought about the very interest in such studies and had an impact on the way Francoprovençal was defined. On the other hand, scholars (nearly exclusively Italian ones) working on Ascoli’s studies, whether in the framework of the history of Italian dialectology or of that of Italian linguistics or Romance studies, would rarely mention Ascoli’s work on Francoprovençal. Yet science is always made at a specific moment. Not only does it reflect scientific paradigms, but also the socio-political preoccupations and assumptions of that particular period of time. Therefore, for our understanding of how a group of idioms became a “language” it seems crucial to investigate the period of its initial identification in detail.

### 1.1 Ascoli’s theory of language and nation

#### 1.1.1 ‘A national interest, grand and practical’: a new nation-state in need of a nation and a national language

The argument of “Francoprovençal” was announced in 1874 (Ascoli 1878 [1874]), in the aftermath of Italian unification (*Risorgimento*). Thus on March 17, 1861 the creation of the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed, followed by a series of annexations in the mid-1860s; in October 1870 Rome became part of the kingdom and in 1871 by becoming the capital symbolically accomplished the process of Italian unification (even though today’s Italian borders only date back to the end of World War I). It is worth mentioning here that the capital was initially Turin, then Florence from 1864, before being definitively transferred to Rome in 1871. The initial choice of Turin as capital of the new kingdom

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<sup>25</sup> “Isaia” or “G.I.” was what the scholar himself referred to as a literary pseudonym, whereas his official name was Graziadio Ascoli (cf. Lucchini 2008: VIII).

underlined the continuity of the new Italian dynasty with that of Savoy.<sup>26</sup> As for Florence, the city will be recurrent in the debates that we will study in this chapter.

The famous aphorism of the period (ascribed to either Massimo D’Azeglio or Cavour) was the following: “*Abbiamo fatto l’Italia, ora dobbiamo fare gli italiani*” (“We have made Italy, now we have to make the Italians”). A political entity was created, and the new and urgent task was to create the nation<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, following the models of other European nation-states (and more specifically France as a nation-state *par excellence*<sup>28</sup>), in order to make the Italians there was a need to create an Italian language. Two major questions then imposed: which idiom should become the language of the new nation-state and, subsequently, how it should be made into such a language.

The first question was not itself new: the debates on what should be the Italian language had continued for centuries. However, at that moment it obtained a new – practical and political – dimension. In 1868 a commission was formed by the Ministry of Public Education in order to define the measures for a common knowledge of a “good language and good pronunciation” (“*della buona lingua e della buona pronunzia*”). The president of the commission, Alessandro Manzoni, prepared a report “On the Unity of the Language and on the Means of Disseminating It” (“*Dell’unità della lingua e dei mezzi di diffonderla*”, published in *La Perseveranza*, on March 5 1868, and in *Nuova Antologia*, VII, pp. 425-441). Manzoni proposed to choose the contemporary idiom of educated Florentines as the Italian language and to impose it as a national language for the entire nation, the same way as, in his opinion, the idiom of Paris had become the French language<sup>29</sup>. In his report he wrote:

Una nazione dove siano in vigore vari idiomi, e la quale aspiri ad avere una lingua in commune, trova naturalmente in questa varietà un primo e potente ostacolo al suo intento. (Manzoni 1868)

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<sup>26</sup> As does the name of King Victor Emmanuel II: called *the second*, thus marking the continuity of the Savoy dynasty, and not *the first*, as he could have been called, being the first King of Italy.

<sup>27</sup> See Barbour, Carmichael 2000.

<sup>28</sup> See Lodge 1993.

<sup>29</sup> On the emergence of the French language see Lodge 1993 and Lodge 2004.

A nation where several idioms coexist, and which aspires to have a language in common, naturally finds in this variety the first and powerful obstacle to its intention.

The variety of “idioms” is thus opposed to a “language in common,” and is seen as an obstacle to be destroyed. By speaking about variety and uniformity Manzoni means first of all the oral language, which is the main novelty of the debate on the Italian language: a debate which had started with Dante, but which had ever since concerned the written language in particular.

Another crucial novelty of the debate is the socio-political significance ascribed to the question of the unity of language: thus Manzoni thanks the minister Broglio for having “substituted the social and national question for a bunch of literary ones” (“*ha sostituita la questione sociale e nazionale a un fascio di questioni letterarie,*” *Ibid.*). He proposes a set of practical solutions: to send teachers from Tuscany to all the regions of Italy, to arrange trips to Florence for the best students, who are supposed to become teachers themselves later on, to arrange for books to be written or, at least, reviewed by Tuscan authors, and finally to publish a dictionary of the Italian language (*op. cit.*: 440).

The dictionary was indeed published in 1870, edited by Giovan Battista Giorgini (Manzoni’s son-in-law and disciple) and Emilio Broglio (Minister of Public Education): *Nòvo vocabolario della lingua italiana secondo l’uso di Firenze* (*The new dictionary of the Italian language according to the use of Florence*). In total four volumes were issued between 1870 and 1897. The Italian dialectologist Grassi underlines the main novelty of Manzoni’s work, which corresponds to the innovation underlined by Manzoni himself (see above):

...per la prima volta, nella dibattutissima e plurisecolare questione della lingua italiana, si teneva conto delle *esigenze pratiche di un’intera nazione giunta all’unità politica*, e non soltanto di quelle relative al “bello stile” e alla norma grammaticale di una ristretta cerchia di letterati. (Grassi 1975: XII. Italics mine)

...for the first time in the much-debated and centuries-old question of the Italian language were taken into account the *practical needs of an entire nation come to political unity*, and not only the needs of “*bello stile*” [lit. “beautiful style”] and of a grammatical norm of a restricted literary circle.

This is the time when Ascoli entered the debate, creating, in 1873, his review *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* (AGI, the *Italian Glottological Archive*), in which he would define two “new” Romance “linguistic types”: “*Ladino*” (Ascoli 1873) and “*Franco-*

*provenzale*” (Ascoli 1878 [1874]). In the *Preface* to the AGI (“*Proemio*”, dated Milan September 10, 1872, Ascoli 2008 [1873]: 3 – 44), which became the most famous part of it, Ascoli explains his views on language and studies of language with respect to the Italian linguistic and socio-political situation of his time. Since the *Proemio* constitutes a general introduction and an explication of the *raison d’être* of the review in which Francoprovençal was described, I found it crucial to study it in further detail here (although scholars working on Francoprovençal would only refer to the article on Francoprovençal itself): indeed, I will argue that the emergence of the concept of Francoprovençal can be understood only with respect to its context of enunciation.

Ascoli starts the *Proemio* by referring implicitly to the *Nòvo vocabolario* (“A dictionary that has been published in Florence under the most glorious auspices” – “*Un vocabolario che si viene stampando in Firenze sotto auspicj gloriossimi...*”, *op. cit.*: 5-6), and remarks that it is called *nòvo* instead of *nuovo*, thus reproducing the modern Florentine pronunciation that it proposes to impose as a norm for the whole of Italy. Thus from the first phrase it becomes clear who Ascoli’s imagined opponent is (Manzoni, although never named, and his disciples<sup>30</sup>) and what the debate is on (the question of what should be considered the Italian language and how it should become the language of the Italians). Ascoli points out specifically that, for the authors of the *Nòvo vocabolario*, the issue under question is far from being a linguistic one – instead, the whole debate is essentially political:

Ma questi principj, e quindi l’opera sua, risguardano, egli pensa, *ben altro e tutt’altro che non sia la storia o la filosofia della lingua. Si tratta di un interesse nazionale, grande e pratico ... Si tratta di dare all’Italia una lingua, poiché ancora non l’ha ...* (Ascoli 2008 [1873]: 10. Italics mine)

However those principles and therefore his work concerns, as he thinks, *something other, and completely other, than the history or the philosophy of language. It is about a national interest, grand and practical ... It is about giving to Italy a language, since it does not have one yet ...*

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<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Ascoli’s criticisms do not always concern Manzoni himself but his disciples’ interpretation of Manzoni’s ideas, to which “the Master” (“il Maestro”) is often explicitly opposed in the Preface: e.g. cf. *op. cit.*: 29-31 for a reflexion on “maestri”/“il Maestro” (masters or the Master) and “discepoli” (disciples).

### 1.1.2 ‘The most solid and powerful unity of language that has ever resonated on earth’

The debate reveals the complex linguistic ideologies of its participants.<sup>31</sup> First of all, Ascoli agrees that Italy needs a common language:

Ora il dialettologo non nega di certo il male, cioè la mancanza dell’unità di lingua fra gli Italiani, e se ne risente, per ragioni che non monta confessare, più di quanto altri mai possa; né, per conseguenza, egli sa immaginare opera più meritoria di quella che valga a minorare questo male od a sanarlo. (Ascoli, *op. cit.*: 11)

Now the dialectologist certainly does not deny the pain, i.e. the lack of unity of language for the Italians, and he is himself affected by it, for reasons that he cannot manage to confess, more than others could ever be; nor could he, consequently, imagine a more meritorious work than the one that serves to diminish or to cure this pain.

And also later on:

...è chiaro che l’Italia non abbia l’unità de lingua, perché le son mancate le condizioni fra le quali s’ebbe altrove, e insieme è chiaro che il non averla debba molto dolore agl’Italiani ... (Ascoli, *op. cit.*: 29)

...it is clear that Italy does not have the unity of language, because it missed the conditions which made it possible elsewhere, and it is altogether clear that not having this unity causes the Italians much hurt ...

Thus, at first glance, as in the creation of other western nation-states after the French model, the linguistic ideology lying behind this assumption is: one state – one nation – one language, where a common language is supposed to consolidate the nation and is therefore perceived as a key element in the building of the state. Yet Ascoli’s position is much more nuanced than that. Ascoli studies the examples of French and German: the languages of two neighbouring and powerful states that have just been at war with one another, and with

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<sup>31</sup> Born and raised in Gorizia, then an Italian-speaking part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ascoli was Italian by choice – or so it seems according to his notes. Thus in September 1848, in the aftermath of a failed revolution, in a political article entitled *Gorizia italiana, tollerante, concorde. Verità e speranze nell’Austria del 1848* (*Italian Gorizia, tolerant, harmonious. Truth and hopes in the Austria of 1848*), he explained the separatist tendencies in Lombardo-Veneto, yet limiting his own claims to those of a linguistic autonomy. In his personal notes in May 1848 he was more categorical: “The political events upset my soul ... Why am I Italian? Because I feel the rightness of the Italian side. Why do I desire for Gorizia to become Italian? ... Because I see the German part show not a German soul, but a mean and mocking one ...” (“Gli avvenimenti politici mi sconvolgono l’animo ... Perché son io italiano? Perché sento il diritto della parte italiana. Perché desidero che Gorizia italiana diventi? ... Perché veggo il partito tedesco mostrar non animo tedesco, ma vile e beffardo ...”). Quoted in Lucchini 2008: XIV).

each of which he has close ties. His question is why these two states both have “a solid unity of language” (*‘salda unità della lingua’*), whereas Italy does not, and whether their models could be used for Italy.

He starts with the example of France: the obvious one, since it has served as an ideal of nation-state building for many (see Barbour and Carmichael 2000), including his Italian opponents. Ascoli rejects Manzoni’s Florentine solution: for him, the dialect of contemporary Florence could not become the Italian language in the same way as the language of Paris became the French language, because 19<sup>th</sup>-century Florence lacked the intellectual and cultural prestige that Paris had in France. The crucial distinction between a “language” and a “dialect” in this context lies in the presence or absence of a cultural prestige that it would obtain as a result of a social group’s self-determination at a specific historical moment. And, Ascoli argues, had Florence been able to become “Paris,” its language would have most certainly changed too:

Se Firenze fosse potuta diventare Parigi, tutti i culti italiani oggi avrebbero sicuramente l’identico linguaggio dei fiorentini; ma è altrettanto sicuro, che il linguaggio di siffatta capitale dell’Italia non sarebbe il fiorentino odierno, e forse non si potrebbe pur dire un dialetto toscano. (*op. cit.*: 13)

If Florence had been able to become Paris, today all the educated Italians would certainly have the same language as the Florentines; but it is also certain that the language of this capital of Italy would not have been the Florentine of today, and perhaps not even a Tuscan dialect.

Instead of the French example, Ascoli proposes to follow the German one, since the German socio-political situation seems closer to the Italian:

La Germania, alla sua volta, non ha mai avuto *un centro monarchico o civile* da potersi pur lontanamente paragonare con Parigi; è *stata scissa, nell’ordine politico*, malgrado le apparenze di unità, in modo non meno barbaro di quello che fosse l’Italia; mantenne inoltre, e in parte ancora mantiene, tal *disgregamento fra i ceti diversi della sua società civile*, che di certo l’Italia non conobbe o conosce il suo uguale; subì per giunta la *separazione delle chiese*, alla quale l’Italia ha avuto la fortuna o la sfortuna di sottrarsi; e pur possiede, malgrado *l’infinita varietà de’ suoi dialetti*, la *più salda e potente unità di linguaggio che abbia mai risonato sulla terra*. (*op. cit.*: 14. Italics mine).



Germany, in its turn, has never had a *monarchical or civil centre* that could even remotely be compared to Paris; it was *split, in the political order*, despite appearances of unity, in a no less barbaric way than Italy was; besides, it maintained, and partly still maintains, such a *disintegration among the various classes of its civil society*, that Italy certainly did not and does not know; moreover it suffered the *separation of churches*, which Italy had the fortune or misfortune of having escaped; and yet it has, despite the *infinite variety of its dialects, the most solid and powerful unity of language that has ever resonated on earth*.

Thus, on a political level, Italy, like Germany, historically did not have a centre, whereas on a societal level, in terms of social stratification and religious divisions, the Italian situation seemed even more favourable than the German one. But of equal importance for the preference of the German way, besides the similarity of the existing socio-political and cultural situation, was a crucial difference between the German and the French solutions, although not put explicitly: the French language was imposed *at the expense of other varieties* spoken in France (see Lodge 1993), whereas the German language was disseminated *in addition to other varieties*. As we can see in the quotation above, in this ideal example the “variety of dialects” does not contradict a “unity of language”: the argument is even stronger than this, an “infinite variety of dialects” can coexist with “the most solid and powerful unity of language that has ever resonated on earth.”

### 1.1.3. The pen and the region of thought

In the German case the unity of language and unity of the intellectual space, as we may call it, were initially due, as it is well known, to Luther’s translation of the Bible. Ascoli argues:

Il genio di Lutero, signoreggiato un idioma aulico, greggio ed instabile, ne plasmò quella miracolosa versione della Bibbia, che ruppe l’unità della fede e creò *l’unità della nazione* (*op. cit.*: 15. Italics mine).

The genius of Luther, having ennobled the language of the court, crude and instable, formed out of it that miraculous version of the Bible, which broke the unity of faith and created *the unity of the nation*.

“The unity of nation” is thus precisely the unity of intellectual thought, beyond all the differences of views that could exist (including those brought about by the Reformation

in the German case, see the allusion in the previous quotation). Ascoli argues that the unity of a written language gives the possibility for every useful study, every important thought to be disseminated in the whole nation, that, in its turn, is created precisely because of the existence of the “density of thought.” Thanks to this common written language and common intellectual space, “[the Germans] have all become citizens of a city that does not exist” (“*[i tedeschi] son tutti diventati cittadini di una città che non esiste,*” *op. cit.*: 16).<sup>32</sup>

Opposing himself to the authors of the *Nòvo vocabolario*, Ascoli argues that it is true that a national language can appear in interactions, like those authors suggest, however:

l’organo dello scambio non è sempre necessario che sia la glottide; può anche essere la penna, purché si sappia scrivere; e quando milioni di menti agitano o hanno agitato la penna operosa, lo scambio si fa così rapido, complesso, nobile ed efficace, la suppellettile messa in comune si allarga, si affina, si afforza così mirabilmente, che l’agglomerazione o associazione di uomini, tra cui lo scambio avviene, può innalzarsi di fase in fase *nella regione del pensiero* (che non è poi una regione artificiale). (*op. cit.*: 16. Italics mine)

the organ of exchange should not necessarily always be the glottis; it can also be the pen, as long as one knows how to write; and when millions of minds agitate or have agitated the laborious pen, the exchange becomes so rapid, complex, noble and effective, the instruments put in common use expand, get refined, get stronger in such an admirable way, that the agglomeration or association of men between whom the exchange takes place can grow from phase to phase in *the region of thought* (which is not an artificial region).

In the case of Italy, in Ascoli’s views, the genius writer (“*scrittore di genio*”), like Luther was for Germany, was Dante, and the model of the Italian language by right of *chef d’oeuvre* should thus be that of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. It is important to underline here that the right of *chef d’oeuvre* should be understood far beyond the strictly literary importance of the *Comedy*: its spiritual (religious) importance and its link to the

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<sup>32</sup> In Italy, beside the “low density of culture” (“*la scarsa densità della cultura,*” *op. cit.*: 29), one of the main obstacles for achieving a unity of language was, according to Ascoli, an “excessive preoccupation with form” (“*l’eccessiva preoccupazione della forma,*” *Ibid.*), which led to the “cancer of rhetoric” (“*cancri della retorica,*” *op. cit.*: 31).

Catholic Church (mentioned several times by Ascoli throughout the *Proemio* as a unifying factor for the Italian nation) makes it comparable in this respect to Luther's translation of the Bible.

Opposing himself to the Manzonian solution, Ascoli takes the example of the Alpine regions (the regions that he will work on in particular):

[Chiede] che di Toscana, o da Firenze, debbano a furia farsi uscire *legioni* intiere di maestri elementari, i quali si spargano a educar tutta l'Italia; egli vuole alle Alpi un *apostolo* qualunque della *pronuncia* e della *frase fiorentina*, laddove l'Europa dice, che *l'Italia politica e pensante* debba piuttosto far calare gli Alpigiani nel circondario di Firenze, a diffondervi *la lingua della penna*. (*op. cit.*: 33. Italics mine).

[Manzoni/ "the Master" asks] that from Tuscany, or from Florence, should burst entire legions of primary school teachers, disseminated in order to educate the whole of Italy; he wants in the Alps some *apostle* of the *Florentine pronunciation or phraseology*, whereas Europe says that *the political and thinking Italy* should rather make the Alpine people go down to the district of Florence in order to defend there the *language of the pen*.

Thus the opposition here is the pronunciation or the syntax of the oral language of the modern Florentine dialect vs. the written standard used by the elites. Another criticism though concerns here the "legions" of teachers imposing the language of Florence: the use of both military ("legions") and religious ("apostle") vocabulary underlining the criticism of the forced way of teaching a variety and teaching it as the only acceptable variety.

#### 1.1.4. 'Natural selection'

For Ascoli, a national language could not be imposed but should emerge as a result of a long process of "natural selection" (a vision clearly inspired by Darwin's theory). Thus he speaks of a "process of intellectual fusion, and therefore linguistic and civil fusion" ("*un processo di fusione intellettuale, e quindi idiomatica e civile,*" *op. cit.*: 19) that Italy can have if it follows the German example: primacy is given here to the creation of a common intellectual space, to a cultural development that must come prior to the creation of the language and the civil society or the nation, and that should bring about the latter. Later on he criticises his opponents:

L'Arte, che crede aver pronta una forma squisita, non può di certo aspettare, che la progredita cultura rifaccia la nazione, e poi surga un teatro, non veneziano o piemontese o fiorentino, ma di lingua parlata che sia propriamente italiana; vuole la comedia prima della nazione; intende il linguaggio, non come una cute che sia il portato dell'intiero organismo della vita nazionale, ma come una nuova manica da infilare ... (*op. cit.*: 34)

Art, which believes in having ready an exquisite form, certainly cannot wait until the progressed culture could remake the nation, and until a theatre emerges which would be not the Venetian or Piedmontese or Florentine, but that of the spoken language that would be properly Italian; *it wants the comedy before the nation*; it imagines the language not as a skin that is the fruit of the whole organism of national life, but as a new sleeve to put on ...

Once again, we find here the idea of a necessary cultural development in order for the language and nation to evolve, instead of imposing a “prepared” language to have the nation “ready” at once.

### 1.1.5 Monolingualism vs. bilingualism

As it was discussed earlier, the ideal model for Ascoli – that of Germany – supposes a coexistence of a “variety of dialects” and a “unity of language.” Indeed, in his opinion the best option for Italy is bilingualism, as opposed to Manzoni’s monolingual ideal:

Così ci parlano dei *gran danno* che sia il mantenere i nostri figliuoli *quasi bilingui*, lasciando loro cioè il *dialetto materno* e costringendoli a studiare, al modo che si fa d'un *idioma estraneo, la lingua che si dice nostra*, con tanto spreco, aggiungono, delle loro *intelligenze*, e in tanto bisogno di far tesoro di ogni più piccol briciolo delle *facoltà mentali della nazione*; come se la scienza e l'esperienza non dimostrassero in cento maniere, che è anzi una *condizione privilegiata, nell'ordine dell'intelligenza*, questa dei *figliuoli bilingui*, e come se in casa nostra fosse affatto chiaro che *l'incremento della cultura* stia in ragion diretta della *prossimità o della maggior vicinanza fra parola parlata e parola scritta*, laddove il vero è precisamente l'opposto. (*op. cit.*: 31. Italics mine).

Thus they [Manzoni's disciples] tell us about the great harm of keeping our children *almost bilingual*, i.e. leaving them their *maternal dialect* and forcing them to study, the same way as is done for a *foreign language*, the *language that they declare ours*, with so much waste, they add, of their intelligence, and in such a need of making a treasure out of every little crumb of the *mental faculties* of the *nation*; as if science and experience had not demonstrated in a hundred ways that being bilingual for children is indeed a *privileged position for their intelligence*, and as if in our place it had been absolutely clear that the *development of culture* depends directly on a *proximity* or *greater affinity between the spoken language and the written language*, whereas the truth is exactly the opposite.

Thus, according to Ascoli, and contrary to the most common views of his time (which largely persist today) not only is being bilingual not an obstacle, but it also contributes to the development of children's mental capacities. Bilingualism in this case supposes speaking two codes, one of which is "the maternal dialect" and another "the Italian language," the distance between the two being profitable for the development of culture, which is the ultimate goal.

The last important opposition to clarify is precisely the one between a "dialect" and a "language."

#### 1.1.6 'Language' vs. 'dialect'

Ascoli's main objection to the proposed linguistic policy of Italy does not concern the Florentine dialect as such: he positions himself against the introduction of any institutionalised hierarchy of contemporary Italian dialects, and Florentine is, for him, in no way better than any other existing variety.

I would argue that the coexistence of "dialects" and a "language" was possible in Ascoli's opinion precisely because "dialects" and "language" in his vision must not be confused (contrary to Manzoni's view of a language as a dialect that succeeds): dialects would be suitable for domestic (affective) use whereas a language would serve for critical thinking, and especially that of a "modern nation," with its multiple social groups and a large number of non-native members. Thus Ascoli argues that dialects are good for the intimacy of conversations at home or in a municipality, yet any text by Humboldt translated into a dialect would seem ridiculous (*op. cit.*: 23).

The opposition between “dialects” and a “language” is linked to the one between “instincts” and “reflection,” between the “almost infantile age” (“*età quasi infantile*”) of the nation and its “age of reflection” (“*età della riflessione*”):

Di certo, gli idiotismi, i tratti popolarmente vividi, non possono e non devono mancare ad alcuna letteratura, o lingua scritta che dir si voglia; ma parte risalgono a *quel primo fondo dialettale* che servì a mettere in comune il lavoro intellettuale della nazione, cioè spettano all’*età quasi infantile*, all’età del cieco assorbimento, all’età meramente mnemonica della nazione rinnovata; parte ne inocula più tardi o ne infonde irresistibilmente la virtù sovrana dell’Arte o il giovanile ribollimento di un’attività comune; ma sempre si tratta di fenomeno come *istintivo*, e *l’istinto* tanto può meno quanto più la *riflessione* può, né alcuno forse aveva prima d’ora mai immaginato che un vocabolario [i.e. *Nòvo vocabolario*] avesse a sfidar la riflessione e a inocular l’istinto. (*op. cit.*: 23-24. Italics mine)

Certainly, idioms, traits that are alive in popular culture, cannot and should not be missing in any literature, or written language, if you prefer; but they come partly from that *primary dialectal fund* which has served to put together the intellectual work of the nation, i.e. they belong to *the age which is almost infantile*, to the age of blind consumption, the merely mnemonic age of the renewed nation; in part they later inoculate or irresistibly inspire Art’s sovereign virtue or the youthful bubbling of a common activity; but it is always a *somewhat instinctive phenomenon*, and *instinct* cannot do as much as *reflection* can, and none have perhaps ever imagined that a dictionary [i.e. *Nòvo vocabolario*] would have to stand against reflection and to inoculate the instinct.

Thus what Ascoli proposes is what we would call today diglossia (Fergusson 1959, Fishman 1967): with the Italian language (that of Dante) as the “high” (mostly written) variety, and local dialects (like the one of Florence, or else, like Alpine varieties that he will identify in his *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* – “Ladin” and “Franco-Provençal”) as the “low” varieties, especially oral and linked to everyday life and the private sphere. National unity should be brought about by the existence of a common “high” standard and a unity of intellectual space, with which “dialects” have little to do.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Similarly later, in “Dall’Italia dialettale” (1882-85), Ascoli wrote:

[Manzoni] aspira a quell’assoluta naturalezza del linguaggio letterario, a quell’assoluta identità tra il linguaggio della conversazione e quello dei libri, che la generalità degl’Italiani non potrebbe conseguire e mantenere se non connaturandosi la viva favella dell’odierna Firenze (Ascoli 2008 [1882-85]: 60).  
[Manzoni] aspires to that absolute naturalness of literary language, to that absolute identity between the language of conversation and that of books, which the majority of the Italians could not achieve and maintain if not making natural for themselves the living speech of modern Florence.

## 1.2. The identification of ‘Franco-provenzale’

### 1.2.1 ‘Particular combination’ and the dialect continuum

It is considered in the Italian dialectological tradition that Italian dialectology itself emerges with Ascoli’s first volume of the *Archivio Glottologico Italiano (AGI)* in 1873. “Glottology” (“*glottologia*”) in the name of the review refers to a science having as its objective a complex study of language, of which Ascoli is considered to be the founder<sup>34</sup>.

The *AGI* was especially aimed at studying the contemporary dialects of Italy: since they were both available for direct empirical research and had a common and known source (Latin), their study was expected to contribute to a better understanding of the development of human language in general. Within the scope of elaborating this new general linguistic science called “*glottologia*,” Ascoli describes two linguistic groups that had never been identified before: first, the Ladin one (“*saggi ladini*,” Ascoli 1873) and then Francoprovençal (“*schizzi franco-provenzali*,” Ascoli 1878 [1874]). The main intellectual objective of the “discovery” of Francoprovençal is thus the creation of a scholarly study of language.

Ascoli defines Francoprovençal in the following way:

Chiamo franco-provenzale un *tipo idiomático*, il quale insieme riunisce, con alcuni suoi caratteri specifici, più altri *caratteri*, che *parte son comuni al francese, parte lo sono al provenzale*, e non proviene già da una tarda confluenza di elementi diversi, ma bensì attesta la sua *propria indipendenza storica*, non guari dissimile da quella per cui tra di loro si distinguono gli altri principali tipi neo-latini (Ascoli 1878 [1874]: 61. Italics mine).

I call Franco-Provençal a *linguistic type*, which brings together, with some of its own specific characteristics, other characteristics, which are *partly common to French*, and *partly to Provençal*, and which *does not come from a late confluence of different elements*, but rather testifies to its own *historical independence*, not at all different from the one that distinguishes other principal neo-Latin types among themselves.

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<sup>34</sup> A Greek-rooted translation of the German term (*Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft*, later translated by Ferdinand de Saussure with a Latin-rooted one: *Linguistique générale* (General linguistics).

Francoprovençal is thus defined as a *linguistic type (tipo idiomático)* characterised by the co-existence of linguistic features belonging to French and those belonging to the Provençal idioms, this coexistence not being a product of late linguistic interferences, but part of its initial linguistic system. It should be noticed that such a coexistence should refer to what later became known in (socio-)linguistic theory as the *language (or dialect) continuum* (Bloomfield 1935).

Ascoli defines Francoprovençal's territory as the borderland of three states, Italy, France and Switzerland, where this "Francoprovençal" is spoken, specifying however that for a rigorous geographical definition further studies are needed. For him, despite an "ample multitude of dialects" (*"l'ampia distesa dei dialetti"*) that constitute Francoprovençal, one can still speak about a single "linguistic type," since they form "a continuum" (*"un tutto continuo"*) (*Ibid.*) The terms used in order to refer to his object of study are: "linguistic type" (*"tipo idiomático"*) or "Francoprovençal type" (*"tipo franco-provenzale,"* p. 74), "Francoprovençal complex" (*"complesso franco-provenzale,"* p. 61, 63), "linguistic family" (*"famiglia d'idiomi,"* p. 62, 63 etc.), "series of vernaculars" (*"serie di vernacoli,"* p. 61); for its varieties: "Francoprovençal vernaculars" (*"vernacoli franco-provenzali,"* p. 63, 73 etc.), "dialects" (*"i dialetti,"* p. 61 etc.) or "the Romance dialects" (*"i dialetti romanzi,"* p. 62). Ascoli never refers to Francoprovençal as a "language," since, as we have seen, a "language" is for him something completely different.

He suggests that, even though the parallels between different *patois* had been noticed (like those of Savoy and of Switzerland, or those of Valle d'Aosta and of Val Soana), no one had conceived a whole Francoprovençal linguistic zone. Based on existing scholarly and literary sources on various *patois* and his own fieldwork data collected in Valle d'Aosta, he observes how idioms gradually change, starting from Gascony in France and moving through the *Oc* linguistic zone towards that of *Oïl* to arrive as far as Wallonia in Belgium. This detailed linguistic journey allows him to define a zone where the features of two linguistic groups, *Oc* and *Oïl*, coexist.

In order to distinguish the Francoprovençal "linguistic type," Ascoli uses a method of "particular combination": he considers the "particular combination" of two linguistic traits, one of which cannot belong to the *langue d'oïl* (but which exists in the *langue d'oc*), and another that cannot belong to the *langue d'oc* (but exists in the *langue d'oïl*). Namely, the criterion used for comparison is the evolution of Latin "A," since for him:



L'antitesi più decisiva, tra idioma provenzale e idioma francese, si manifesta nei riflessi dell'A latino, così in accento, come fuori di accento (*op. cit.: 70*)

The most decisive antithesis between the Provençal and French idioms is manifested in the reflections of the Latin "A", both stressed and non-stressed.

The definition of Francoprovençal is based on the following observations:

- in a non-stressed position the Latin "A" became *e* in French, but remained *a* in Provençal (*aimer, aimée* vs. *amar, amada*); at the end of the word "A" being non-stressed, it became mute in French, but remains in Provençal (pronounced as *o* in most of its contemporary varieties: *couronne, aimée, chantes* vs. *corona, amada, cantas*) (*op. cit.: 70*);

- in a stressed position when positioned after a palatalised consonant it became the diphthongs *ie* or *e* in French, but remained *a* in Provençal (*chien, amitié, moitié* vs. *can, amistat, mitat*) (*op. cit.: 71-72*; the Occitan analogues in this example are *mine*);

- in Francoprovençal in a non-stressed position the Latin "A" remained *a* as in Provençal, including in the non-stressed last syllables; in a stressed position it either became the diphthong *ie*, or *i*, or *e*, as in French, when positioned after a palatalised consonant, or it remained *a* as in Provençal, in all other linguistic contexts. Ascoli does not provide examples for this rule. If we take a *Valdôtain* variety of the Ascolian period (since Ascoli did his fieldwork in Valle d'Aosta), i.e. the *Dictionnaire du Patois valdôtain précédé de la Petite Grammaire* by Abbé Jean-Baptiste Cerlogne (Cerlogne 1907, written over a period of 50 years beginning in the 1850s, the only written source we have on the *Valdôtain* varieties of that period), the translations for the Ascolian examples are the following : (1) FR *aimer, aimée* vs. PROV *amar, amada* vs. Francoprovençal *amé, amàye* (*amà* for the masculine); (2) FR *couronne, aimée, chantes* vs. PROV *corona, amada, cantas* vs. Francoprovençal *corona, amàye, tsante* (*Op. cit.: 32*); FR *chien, moitié* vs. PROV *can, mitat* vs. FP *tsin, meitsà*. We can see that the Ascolian rule does not work regularly in these cases (which must be linked to the extensive linguistic variation in the Francoprovençal area: several features can be observed in some varieties, but be absent in some others).

As the Austrian linguist Hans Goebel (Goebel 2010) suggests, the epistemological (typological) tradition which Ascoli's method follows should be traced back to that of two natural sciences: biology and geography. Namely in biology it is that of Charles Linné (1707-1778) and Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-1788), and in geography that of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and Carl Ritter (1779-1859) (Goebel 2010: 148 – 149). Thus the method of "*particular combinazione*," i.e. of particular combination of selected features, used to define both "linguistic types," Ladin and Francoprovençal, corresponds exactly to the geotypological method, as Goebel qualifies it, used by Ritter, which the latter calls '*synchorische Vereinigung*' (the "synchronic combination" of selected geographical attributes).<sup>35</sup>

Ritter's classification is a polythetic and quantitative one, based upon a number of empirically obtained attributes. Ascoli's method has the same characteristics: "In Ascoli's thought the inductive construct of the 'type' was always a quantitative one and had a finely graduated structure" ("*Nel pensiero dell'Ascoli il costrutto induttivo del tipo era sempre di stampo quantitativo e disponeva di una struttura finemente graduata*," Goebel 2010: 151). I should underline however that this kind of description of linguistic types does not at all mean for Ascoli that "dialects" exist as separate entities with clear-cut boundaries. In *An Introduction to Romance Philology*, Lorenzo Renzi (Renzi 1992) summarises Ascoli's impact on Romance studies, and more largely on linguistics, by saying:

Ma il dato più inquietante che emerge dagli studi dell'Ascoli, e dagli studi dialettologici in generale, è il modo sfumato con cui le parlate si differenziano le une dalle altre, *senza confini netti*. Davanti alla rappresentazione dialettologica concreta, *l'idea di lingua può sembrare un'astrazione*. *Dove sta l'italiano, dove sta il francese, lo spagnolo?* Davanti a noi c'è un *continuum dialettale* che si differenzia via via (Renzi 1992: 64. Italics mine).

However the most unsettling finding that emerges from Ascoli's studies and dialectological studies in general is the blurred way in which idioms (*parlate*) differ from each other, *with no clear boundaries*. Confronted with concrete dialectological data, the idea of language may seem an abstraction. *Where is the Italian, where is the French, where is the Spanish?* In front of us there is a *dialect continuum* with gradual differences.

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<sup>35</sup> Goebel suggests that Ritter's method became known to Ascoli through his colleague from the Academy of Milan, the geographer and ethnographer Bartolomeo Malfatti (1828-1892), who, in his own research, would use Ritter's method.

Thus the most important finding and concept attributed to Ascoli is that of the linguistic continuum (an idea that would later on become one of the key ideas of sociolinguistics). There are no clear-cut boundaries between idioms that are actually being spoken, there is no clearly-defined Italian or French. In this context, studying the border idioms like Francoprovençal, and more particularly, the name given to the idiom, *Franco-Provenzale*, can underline the idea of a continuum: it is neither French, nor Provençal, but has features of both. Whereas today, as we will see further (Part II, Chapter 3.2), both researchers and activists point out that the name that was originally given to the language is not a good one, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the name does not suit today's objectives – to promote the idiom as a “language” – precisely because these were not Ascoli's objectives.

### 1.2.2 Academic reaction to the invention of ‘Francoprovençal’ and implications for France

While the reaction to the concept of “Ladin” appeared only after Ascoli's death in 1907 (criticism by Italian researchers), as far as the definition of Francoprovençal is concerned, criticisms of Ascoli's method appeared right after the *Schizzi franco-provenzali* were published. The criticisms came from France, and first of all from Paul Meyer, professor at the École des Chartes and editor-in-chief of the review *Romania*. Speaking about the “discovery” of Francoprovençal, Meyer opposes himself to Ascoli's method of delimitation of linguistic types in general:

A mon sens, aucun groupe de dialectes, de quelque façon qu'il soit formé, ne saurait constituer *une famille naturelle*, par la raison que *le dialecte (qui représente l'espèce) n'est lui-même qu'une conception assez arbitraire de notre esprit ...* C'est que les phénomènes linguistiques que nous observons en un pays ne s'accordent point entre eux pour couvrir la même superficie géographique. Ils s'enchevêtrent et s'entrecoupent à ce point *qu'on n'arriverait jamais à déterminer une circonscription dialectale, si on ne se prenait le parti de la fixer arbitrairement. ...* C'est pourquoi je suis convaincu que le meilleur moyen de faire apparaître sous son vrai jour la variété du roman consiste non pas à tracer des circonscriptions marquées par tel ou tel fait linguistique, mais à indiquer sur quel espace de terrain règne chaque fait. (Meyer 1875. Italics mine).

In my view, no group of dialects, no matter how it is formed, could constitute a *natural family*, for the reason that *the dialect (which represents a species) is itself but a rather arbitrary conception of our mind ...* It is that the linguistic phenomena that we observe in a country do not correspond to the same geographical area. They intertwine and intersect to the point that *we could never come to determine a dialectal division, if we did not take the decision to fix it arbitrarily. ...* This is why I am convinced that the best way to truly represent a variety of Roman is not to draw circumscriptions marked by one linguistic fact or another, but to indicate in which area each fact reigns.

Thus, for Meyer a “dialect” (be it Francoprovençal or another) is not a “natural species,” but an “artificial” one, a product of dialectologists’ minds. In this respect he refuses the scientific paradigm that would regard languages and dialects as similar to animal or vegetable species and that would use the same methods for identifying both sets of phenomena. For Meyer “Francoprovençal” is a *definitio nominis* as opposed to a *definitio rei* (a “definition of the name” and not a “definition of the thing”).

Some years later Gaston Paris, professor at the Collège de France, supported Meyer’s approach: “We should make a geography not of dialects, but of linguistic features!” (“*Il faut faire la géographie non des dialectes, mais des traits linguistiques!*” Paris 1881: 606). The position of those two most influential linguists of France of that time is based upon the empirical fact that diverse isoglosses rarely coincide, so that the idea of a “dialect” seems an abstraction.

Ascoli reproduces Meyer’s criticisms in his new volume of the *AGI*, answering them:

Un tipo qualunque, – e sia il tipo di un dialetto, di una lingua, di un complesso di dialetti o di lingue, di piante, di animali, e via dicendo, – un tipo qualunque si ottiene mercè *un determinato complesso* di caratteri, che viene a distinguerlo dagli altri tipi. Fra i caratteri può darsene uno o più d’uno che gli sia esclusivamente proprio; ma questo non è punto una condizione necessaria, e manca moltissime volte. I singoli caratteri di un dato tipo si ritrovano naturalmente, o tutti o per la maggior parte, ripartiti in varia misura fra i tipi congeneri; ma il distintivo necessario del determinato tipo sta appunto nella *simultanea presenza* o nella *particolar combinazione di quei caratteri* (Ascoli 1876: 387. Italics mine).

Whatever type, – be it the type of a dialect, of a language, of a complex of dialects or languages, of plants, animals, and so on, – whatever type is obtained thanks to a *determinate complex* of characters, which come to distinguish it from other types. Among the characters there may be one,

or more than one, that belong exclusively to this type; but this is not at all a necessary condition, and it is often lacking. The single characters of a given type are naturally found, either all of them or most of them, shared to varying degrees by congeneric types; but the necessary distinction of a given type is precisely in the *simultaneous presence* or in the *particular combination* of these characters.<sup>36</sup>

Thus reassuming the approach to the classification of dialects and languages as similar to that of plants or animals, Ascoli agrees that there is a continuum of linguistic features, but their “particular combination” creates definite linguistic types.

Ascoli argues that the criticisms are superficial (“una critica d’ordine *estrinseco*”), meaning that they are based merely on theoretical assumptions, without going into the linguistic (dialectological) details of his study. Indeed, the heart of the typological debate is ultimately, once again, political – or, at least, preferences in terms of classifications of linguistic realities are informed by political preferences.

In his reply to Meyer, Ascoli argues:

...in quanto a geografia, il signor Meyer dice proprio che manchi nel caso mio ogni unità geografica (le nouveau groupe n’offre aucune unité géographique); e quindi non lascia neppur luogo a credere che egli volesse allegare la mancanza d’unità politica; il che, del resto, come ognuno vede, se sarebbe stato cosa vera, era però tal verità che nel caso nostro non importava niente affatto. (Ascoli 1876: 390-391)

...as for geography, Mr. Meyer says precisely that in my case any geographical unity is missing (le nouveau groupe n’offre aucune unité géographique); and thus he does not leave doubt to believe that he would want to add the lack of a political unity too; which, after all, would have been true, as anyone can see, yet this is a kind of truth that in our case does not matter at all.

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<sup>36</sup> A similar distinction was given by Hugo Schuchardt in 1870 in his classification of Romance dialects (published only in 1900): “Demnach besteht der Charakter eines Dialektes weniger in der Art seiner Abänderungen als in der Wahl derselben. Nun werden Mundarten, je näher sie sich räumlich stehen, desto mehr Abänderungen gemein haben.” (“Thus, the character of a dialect consists less in the quality of its attributes than in their selection. The closer dialects are geographically, the more attributes they will have in common.” Schuchardt 1900 [1870]: 184). We can also add that Ascoli refers to Schuchardt as to the one who “was ready to make himself the discovery [of Francoprovençal]”: “*Lo Schuchardt, finalmente, che era preparato, in così mirabil modo, a farla lui la scoperta [del gruppo franco-provenzale], si compiace, da buon collega, che l’abbia fatto io...*” (“At last, Schuchardt, who was prepared in such a marvellous way to make the discovery [of Francoprovençal] himself, greets me, as a good colleague, for having done it... ” Ascoli 1876: 395) In *Schizzi franco-provenzali* Ascoli also cites Schuchardt (Hugo Schuchardt, *Ueber einige Fälle bedingten Lautwandels im Churwälschen*, Perthes, 1870) as far as Romance Switzerland is concerned: “...das gebiet [*sic*] der schweitzer patois [*sic*] ..., welche, untereinander durch gewisse [*sic*] charakteristische merkmale [*sic*] eng verbunden, die französischen mit den provenzalischen mundarten vermitteln” (“...the area of Swiss patois... which, being closely connected among themselves by certain characteristic features, are between the French and Provençal dialects,” cited in Ascoli 1878 [1874]: 62).

If the question of a political unity that would be attached to a linguistic one did not matter at all for Ascoli, as he asserts, the idea of a coincidence of a political entity and a linguistic one certainly did inform the discourse of Meyer. Before going any further, let us see how the French linguistic ideology was formed.

### 1.2.3 French linguistic ideology

After the French Revolution of 1789 the concept of a French nation emerges, represented as a just, equal brotherhood (as suggested in the motto “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*”). The ideology of this new French nation, “one and indivisible,” was based upon the idea of a coincidence of the political, linguistic and national spaces (“*langue une, nation une,*” “one language, one nation”) (see Lodge 1993). Hence, in 1790, immediately after the revolution, a study of idioms of France was undertaken by the Abbot Henri-Baptiste Grégoire, a delegate of the National Convention. The results of the study were presented in 1794 in the *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française* (*Report on the Necessity and Means to Annihilate the Patois and to Universalise the Use of the French Language*, Grégoire 1794). The report launched the policy of eradication of the *patois* – all “feudal idioms,” “the last remnants of the annihilated feudalism” on French soil – and that of imposing French as a language of the nation, the only one to have thenceforth the right to be called a language.

Abbé Grégoire notes that while French is used by “tyrants and courts” everywhere, far beyond the limits of European countries, even in Canada and on the shores of the Mississippi, and while it is this language in which for instance the peace treaty between Turkey and Russia had recently been made, at the same time, a large part of France’s own population does not speak it. “It is only in about 15 inland *départements* [out of 83] that French is spoken exclusively” (*Il n’y a qu’environ quinze départements de l’intérieur où la langue française soit exclusivement parlée*), and even in those, large phonetic and lexical discrepancies are to be observed (such as distorted “pronunciation of words” and “the use of inappropriate and obsolete terms”). According to Grégoire’s calculation, at least 6 million Frenchmen could not speak French, and about as many more were not able to carry on a conversation in it. The number of speakers of the language did not exceed 3 million; that of those able to write in it was smaller still. The language situation in France according to Grégoire’s data is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Language situation in France in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century

Speaking French	3 million	20%
Speaking French very poorly (habitually speaking <i>patois</i> )	6 million	40%
Not speaking French (only speaking <i>patois</i> )	6 million	40%
Total	15 million	100%

Out of 30 *patois*, those of the border territories that are of interest to this study attract the special attention of Abbé Grégoire (Grégoire 1794: *s.p.*):

C'est surtout vers nos frontières que les dialectes, communs aux peuples des limites opposées, établissent avec nos ennemis des relations dangereuses, tandis que dans l'étendue de la République tant de jargons sont autant de barrières qui gênent les mouvements du commerce, & atténuent les relations sociales. Par l'influence respective des mœurs sur le langage, du langage sur les mœurs ; ils empêchent l'amalgame politique, & d'un seul peuple en font trente.

Especially near the borders, dialects that are shared with neighbouring regions establish dangerous relations with our enemies, while within the Republic such numerous jargons raise obstacles to commerce and weaken social connections. Due to the influence that mores exert on language and language upon mores, they obstruct political amalgamation and make 30 peoples out of a single one.

The abbot's report pays special attention to Occitan as an obvious and potentially dangerous rival of French:

Penserez-vous, m'a-t-on dit, que les Français méridionaux se résoudront facilement à quitter un langage qu'ils chérissent par habitude & par sentiment ? Leurs dialectes, appropriés au génie d'un peuple qui pense vivement & s'exprime de même, ont une syntaxe où l'on rencontre moins d'anomalie que dans notre langue. Par leurs richesses & leurs prosodies éclatantes, ils rivalisent avec la douceur de l'italien & la gravité de l'espagnol : & probablement, au lieu de la langue des Trouvères, nous parlerions celle des Troubadours, si Paris, le centre du gouvernement, avoit été situé sur la rive gauche de la Loire.

Do you think, I was told, that the southern Frenchmen would easily consent to abandon the *vernacular* they cherish out of habit and sentiment? Their *dialects*, fitting the genius of a people that thinks deeply and expresses itself in the same way, have a syntax containing fewer anomalies than *our language*. Their richness and their resonant prosodies rival the softness of Italian and the forcefulness of Spanish; we could quite possibly speak the language of the *Troubadours* instead of

that of the *Trouvères* had only Paris, the centre of government, been located on the left bank of the Loire (*Ibid.*, my italics).

Of course, the name of the idiom – *Occitan* or *the language of Oc* – is never used in the report; along with all other idioms, except French, it does not get to have a proper name. It is however symptomatic that the term *patois*, used to denote all other idioms of France except French, is not applied to it either: it is called *vernacular (langage)*, *dialect*, and finally, *language*. In the original, the demonstrative pronoun *celle* is used to replace *la langue* (the language): the idiom enters the traditional opposition of “the language of *Trouvères*” vs. “the language of the *Troubadours*,” i.e. the language of the north vs. that of the south, with a border running along the Loire river, although the traditional antithesis of “language of *Oc*” vs. “language of *Oïl*” is never explicitly referred to. This is the only instance where the notion of *language* is used (apparently inadvertently – and only replaced with a pronoun) to denote an idiom other than French. Besides, its speakers are assumed to constitute a separate “people,” having moreover a developed culture (the dialects “fit the genius of a people...”) Further on, Abbé Grégoire refutes this possible critique when he states that it represents an insult to them: “they have condemned and overcome political federalism; they shall apply the same energy to overcoming the federalism of idioms” (“*ils ont abjuré & combattu le fédéralisme politique; ils combattront avec la même énergie celui des idioms*”).<sup>37</sup>

In a France thus formed on the idea of French as the only language of the Frenchmen, with a particular suspicion of the border (and trans-border) idioms and a particular sensitivity to the *Oc* vs. *Oïl* distinction, the notion of *Francoprovençal* had little chance to be welcomed (one may also recall that two decades after the annexation of Savoy compulsory school education was introduced, which played an important part in imposing the French language at the expense of *patois*, or in “annihilating the *patois*,” to borrow Grégoire’s expression<sup>38</sup>).

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<sup>37</sup> As for the special place reserved for Occitan, the French linguist Jean Sibille calls Occitan the “Iron Mask”: it is, in a certain way, a hidden twin of French, “a hidden face of Latin heritage in France, the ‘Iron Mask’ of the French language” (Sibille 2007: 2).

<sup>38</sup> Its role is not to be overestimated either. For a critical analysis of the impact of Jules Ferry’s compulsory school education on the vitality of *patois* see Lodge 1993.



## 1.2.4 The reception of 'Francoprovençal' in the north vs. the south of France

In her recent PhD dissertation, B. Pivot argues:

...la proposition de l'italien Ascoli en 1873, de nommer une «nouvelle» entité linguistique distincte du français et de l'occitan sur le territoire national juste après la défaite avec la Prusse qui aura fait «perdre l'Alsace et la Lorraine» à la France, *est en soi une provocation* qui va engendrer un discours donnant «naissance» au francoprovençal. Une naissance scientifique, puis une naissance sociale. (Pivot 2014: 207. Italics are mine)

...the proposal of the Italian Ascoli in 1873 to name a “new” linguistic entity distinct from French and Occitan on the national territory right after the defeat with Prussia, which would have made France “lose Alsace and Lorraine” *is in itself a provocation* that will generate a discourse giving “birth” to Francoprovençal. A scientific birth, then a social birth.

Langue inconnue, elle sera nommée par *un linguiste italien* en 1873 *dans un contexte* où les débats sur l'existence, ou non, d'une nouvelle entité linguistique entre la langue d'oïl et celle d'oc, à l'Est de la France, *reflètent les conflits autour de l'hégémonie du français sur le territoire national.* (*op. cit.*: 209)

An unknown language, it will be named by an Italian linguist in 1873 within a context where the debates on the existence, or not, of a new linguistic entity between the language of Oïl and that of Oc in the east of France reflect the conflicts over the hegemony of French on the national territory.

Such a vision may be French- or France-centred, and seeing the “discovery” of Francoprovençal as a “provocation” would be ascribing it the wrong political context: i.e. Ascoli did not mean it as a provocation, and the political context which brought about his discourse on Francoprovençal was the Italian one, which he explicitly refers to at length in his works, as we have seen. It is nevertheless true that this was the prism through which the discovery was seen by French scholars, and, if we reformulate the statement, had Parisian scholars followed Ascoli's views, this could have been seen as a provocation<sup>39</sup>. Indeed, France had just lost Alsace and Lorraine in the war with Prussia, their annexation being legitimated politically by their German-speaking practices: a situation that brought about

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<sup>39</sup> One might also think of Ascoli's philogermanism in this respect (see above on his seeing Germany as an ideal example).

debates on the nature of the nation between Ernest Renan and David Friedrich Strauß, which can be seen as prototypical for two constructions of the “nation,” a subjective and objective one (see also Sériot 1997: 188).

As Goebel reminds us, “the professors Meyer and Paris represented, at that period, the culmination of French philological and literary intellectual circles and were outstanding representatives of the contemporary French patriotism” (“*i professori Meyer e Paris rappresentavano, in quell’epoca, il culmine dell’intellettualità filologico-letteraria francese ed erano insigni rappresentanti del patriottismo francese contemporaneo*,” Goebel 2010: 154). The political importance of dialectological divisions is clear in the famous statement by Gaston Paris of 1888:

Et comment, je le demande, s’expliquerait cette étrange frontière qui de l’ouest à l’est couperait la France en deux en passant par des points absolument fortuits? Cette *muraille imaginaire*, la science, aujourd’hui mieux armée, la renverse, et nous apprend qu’il n’y a pas deux Frances, qu’*aucune limite réelle* ne sépare les Français du nord de ceux du midi, et que d’un bout à l’autre du sol national nos parlars populaires étendent une vaste tapisserie, dont les couleurs variées se fondent sur tous les points en nuances insensiblement dégradées. (Paris 1888: 435-436. Italics mine)

And how, I ask, would we explain this strange border which would cut France in two from west to east, passing through absolutely incidental points? Science, better armed today, denies this imaginary wall and teaches us that there are not two Frances, that no real limit separates the Frenchmen from the north from those from the south, and that from one end of the national territory to the other our popular vernaculars extend a vast tapestry whose varied colours blend at all the points in imperceptibly degraded nuances.

Both Meyer and Paris argue against any delimitation of dialect inside the Romance continuum, so that linguistic boundaries could not contradict the political ones. Thus in France, or more precisely in Paris, among the centralist elites, the “discovery” of Francoprovençal contradicted the ideology of a “one and indivisible nation” (“*nation une et indivisible*”). An allusion to this can also be seen in another of Ascoli’s statements, as far as the acceptance of his discovery in France is concerned:

Pure, non è forse affatto superfluo il notare, come la povera scoperta del “franco-provenzale” sia andata incontro anch’essa a quella bizzarra varietà di sentenze, cui

sogliono andare incontro e le scoperte minute e grandi. La Francia meridionale me ne remeritò con una medaglia d'oro; e dalla Francia del Nord me ne viene un giudizio, che si ritorce un po' convulsamente in sè medesimo, arrivando a determinarsi nella curiosa proposizione negativa : “che debba sin parere non gran fatto utile che la tesi si dimostri.” (Ascoli 1876: 394)

Perhaps, it is not at all superfluous to notice how the poor discovery of “Franco-Provenzale” was received and that bizarre variety of assessments that meet small and big discoveries. Southern France awarded me with a gold medal for it; and from Northern France comes to me a judgement, which turns somewhat convulsively around itself, ultimately determining itself in a curious negative proposition: “that it would not be at all useful that the thesis should be demonstrated.”

Indeed, in 1875 Ascoli received a *médaille d'or* of the *Société des Langues Romanes* of Montpellier for his article “*schizzi francoprovenzali*.” Thus this medal comes to negotiate the place (or the very existence) of varieties or languages other than French on French territory: for the scholars of Montpellier, the studies of Francoprovençal could especially legitimise the place of the *Langue d'oc*. Goebel argues that contrary to Meyer and Paris,

i loro oppositori militano, con argomenti geolinguistici tipofili, in favore di una certa autonomia *simbolica* delle loro province: Joseph-Pierre Durand (de Gros) e Charles de Tourtoulon per il Meridione nonché Charles Joret (1839-1914), il noto filologo di origine normanna, per la Normandia. (Goebel 2010: 156)

their opponents militate, with geolinguistic typophilic arguments, in favour of a certain symbolic autonomy for their provinces: Joseph-Pierre Durand (de Gros) and Charles de Tourtoulon for the South, whilst Charles Joret (1839-1914), the famous philologist of Norman origin, for Normandy.

The view articulated by Meyer and Paris remained dominant for the century to come. Nearly 100 years later, in 1969, at a conference on Francoprovençal dialectology in Neuchâtel, Helmut Lüdtke asserted that “Francoprovençal simply does not exist” (“Le francoprovençal tout court n'existe pas”), explaining:

Le terme de francoprovençal ne désigne pas une donnée (ou un ensemble de données) mais plutôt une notion. Cela veut dire que le francoprovençal a les frontières qu'on lui assigne à titre de définition. (qtd. in Tuailon 2007: 9)

The term Francoprovençal does not denote any data (or a set of data), but rather a notion. This means that Francoprovençal has the borders that have been assigned to it as a definition.

This assumption perfectly corresponds to that formulated by Meyer a century earlier. Simultaneously, other dialectologists tried to delimitate Francoprovençal as a linguistic entity in a particular geographical space, refining the linguistic criteria used as significant for such delimitations. They would refer to Ascoli as to the one who first “discovered” Francoprovençal, yet “forgetting” all the context of that discovery and the philosophy (or ideology) behind it. As for the Francoprovençal speakers, the name “Francoprovençal” together with the idea of a certain linguistic unity of the Francoprovençal zone first appears only in contact with dialectologists in the 1970s, and, as we will see, even now is not shared by everyone.

### 1.2.5 Implications for the Aosta Valley (Italy)

In Italy explicit contemporary scholarly critics of Ascoli’s work on Francoprovençal were non-existent. However the idea of Francoprovençal was no more welcomed there than in France, for different, yet also essentially political, reasons. The main political issue of the moment when the notion of “Francoprovençal” was announced, as we have seen, was the creation of an Italian nation-state: a nation-state largely based on an essentialised vision of a “nation” as a unity of language. In that context the French-speaking tradition of the Aosta Valley represented an obstacle to the creation of the Italian nation. Three major historical facts should be remembered at this point: first, in 1860 the Duchy of Savoy and the County of Nice were transferred to France precisely for the reason that these were French-speaking territories, i.e. their French-speaking tradition was used – at an ideological level – in order to legitimise the annexation that had been promised to France in 1858 as a compensation for the help given by Napoleon III to the Savoy dynasty (*Maison de Savoie*) on their way to becoming Kings of Italy (namely for conquering Lombardy – Veneto, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The historian Celi (2004) explains the motivations of the Savoy dynasty:

au niveau politique, les domaines transalpins constituaient un poids pour une dynastie désormais totalement vouée à la conquête de l’Italie ; au niveau idéologique, l’idée romantique et jacobine de l’unité «di lingua... di sangue e di cuor» (de langue... de sang et du cœur) concevait mal un Royaume où

cohabiteraient deux langues riches de traditions et de littérature, comme l'étaient justement l'italien et le français... (Celi 2004: 71)

at the political level, the transalpine domains constituted a weight for a dynasty that from that moment totally dedicated itself to the conquest of Italy; at the ideological level, the romantic and Jacobin idea of the unity “di lingua... di sangue e di cuor” (of language... of blood and of heart) could hardly conceive a Kingdom where two languages rich in traditions and in literature would cohabit, as was precisely the case for Italian and French...

The second fact in the political context of Ascoli's studies is the one already mentioned above: in 1870 Alsace and Lorraine were annexed from France to Prussia precisely for the same reason of their population's speaking another language: in their case, German and not French. Finally, the third fact was that the Unification of Italy itself was achieved as a result of a series of annexations legitimised ideologically by the unity of language and culture. Hence, whatever way was to be chosen in order to, proverbially, “make the Italians” – whether the Manzonian way, or the Ascolian one<sup>40</sup> – in any case, one borderland region in the new Kingdom of Italy did not fit the model: the language of the Aosta Valley was French. Conducting studies precisely in this region and declaring that, in the reality, its idiom was not French, but “Francoprovençal” could be seen as a way to relativise, or to deny, the role of the French language and thus to make illegitimate any potential claims by the neighbouring French state on this territory.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> i.e. by imposing one Italian dialect as a standard language at the expense of all other dialects, or by establishing diglossic situations with the Italian language as a written variety, the variety of “thought” and reasoning, and “dialects” as oral varieties, those of “instinct” and everyday life (see the beginning of this chapter).

<sup>41</sup> To provide a parallel to this reading of the “invention” of Francoprovençal, we can think of the “invention” of the “Karelian language” in the USSR under Stalin: a group of linguistic varieties on the borderland between the USSR and Finland had been considered dialects of Finnish until the 1930s, when, as war between the USSR and Finland loomed, a new concept of “the Karelian language,” distinct from Finnish, emerged (Bubrikh 1932, Anttikoski 2006, Austin 1992). Anecdotally, once answering a question from a Francoprovençal/Arpitan activist in the VDA about the linguistic situation in my region of origin (in northwest Russia in and around St. Petersburg) I told him about the Karelian case. My informant's reaction was that this was precisely for the same reason that speaking about “the Francoprovençal language” in the VDA was taboo up until recently (until the beginning of the 2000s): the reply would always be that speaking about the “Francoprovençal language” would be a danger for the region, since its autonomy is based on

From the moment the VDA became part of the newly created Kingdom of Italy, in which it represented only an insignificant percentage of the national population, the political elites of the VDA tried to play the “French card” in order to obtain more power. The region’s Statute of Autonomy, dating back to 1948 and granting extensive political, economic and fiscal autonomy to the region, is explicitly based upon the French-speaking practices in the region. In other words, “Francoprovençal” (as a concept, not as a practice) was seen as a danger by the regional élites since it did not have any army behind it, whereas French did: not in the famous metaphorical sense, but in the most direct one. It should be underlined that Ascoli never mentions those tensions or intentions, yet these were possible political implications of his findings. This was probably why they remained purposely unnoticed in the region until a new discourse emerged in the 1970s and then in the 2000s.

Therefore those advocating the idea of Francoprovençal as a language different from French would belong to the most powerless groups of society and be separatists, opposed to both central power and regional political élites. The first to insist that Francoprovençal, renamed Arpitan, was a language in its own right was the *Mouvement Harpitanya*, initially an extreme left-wing separatist movement. Making “a language of culture” out of Francoprovençal was linked directly in its discourse to the social struggle of the “oppressed classes” (peasants speaking Francoprovençal) against the “oppressors” (bourgeoisie speaking French and eventually Italian) (see Edur-Kar 1973, Harrieta 1976). This movement, claiming the local *patois* to be a “language,” and moreover *the* language (the only true one) of the whole Francoprovençal zone, only appeared at the beginning of the 1970s, 100 years after Ascoli’s research. The ideology of this Arpitan movement will be studied in the next chapter, yet it is worth mentioning here the academic reaction to it, because it might help us understand the reasons of the non-acceptance of Ascoli’s “discovery” of Francoprovençal in the VDA. This reaction can be illustrated by an article

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French, and that Ascoli was a “fascist.” The term “fascist” in that reported discourse is obviously misused, since Ascoli died in 1907, before the National Fascist Party was even created. Yet the misuse of the term is not in itself anything new (Orwell wrote as early as in 1944: “...as used, the word ‘Fascism’ is almost entirely meaningless”; “By ‘Fascist’ they mean, roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal and anti-working-class.” See also: “...if you examine the press you will find that there is almost no set of people — certainly no political party or organised body of any kind — which has not been denounced as Fascist during the past 10 years” (Orwell 1944)). The use of this term shows however the highest degree of the refusal of the notion of Francoprovençal by the *Valdôtain* intellectual elite.

by Alexis Bétemps, then Head of the *Centre d'études francoprovençales R. Willen* of Saint-Nicolas, dated 1977 and published in 1981. His conclusion is eloquent:

Les journaux italiens aussi s'intéressent à leurs théories [des Arpitans]. Cela ne leur semble pas vrai que, finalement, des Valdôtains aient épousé ces théories qu'eux-mêmes avaient inspirées au cours de ce dernier siècle.

Ces journaux mettent en évidence le fait que des Valdôtains ne considèrent plus le français comme leur langue maternelle et ils ironisent sur la nation arpitanne indépendante qui est la conséquence logique des prémisses linguistiques. Le plus souvent, ils préfèrent ignorer ce deuxième point du programme arpitan.

The Italian newspapers are also interested in their [the Arpitans'] theories. It does not seem true to them that, finally, the *Valdôtains* have espoused these theories that they themselves have inspired during the course of the last century.

These newspapers highlight the fact that the *Valdôtains* do not consider French to be their mother tongue any more, and they are ironic about the independent Arpitan nation, which is the logical consequence of the linguistic premises. Most often, they prefer to ignore this second point of the Arpitan programme.

Thus from the autonomist perspective of the author<sup>42</sup>, apparently advocating the *status quo*, setting *patois*, under the name of Francoprovençal or Arpitan, against French, is seen as a threat to autonomy and a long-desired benefit for the central power.

## Chapter 2. The 1970s: Arpitania and the Arpitan language

One hundred years after Ascoli's research, in 1972-1973, a new discourse on Francoprovençal emerged. It had two main novelties: on the one hand, the idiom was re-baptised as Harpitan (Arpitan in 1976); on the other hand, for the first time the idea of a certain linguistic unity of the territory on the borderland between three European states was used in order to claim for this unity to be a "language" in its own right, and to claim altogether, for the sake of this "language," political rights of self-determination for the respective linguistic community on its respective trans-border territory. This new discourse

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<sup>42</sup> Bétemps was also president of the *Union valdôtaine*, the ruling party of the VDA ever since its autonomy.

was produced in Valle d'Aosta by Joseph Henriët (also signed José Harriet, J. Harrieta or Edur-Kar<sup>43</sup>). After a series of articles and booklets written in French between 1973 and 1975 (Edur-Kar 1973, Harriet 1974 & 1975), he exposed his theory in detail in his 1976 book (Harrieta 1976), written in Italian and entitled *La lingua arpitana – The Arpitan Language*.

I will start this chapter with the political context of the emergence of the Arpitan movement. I will then move on exploring the objectives of the main innovations proposed by the movement, such as the new name for the language, the discursive construction of a trans-border community called Arpitanìa after the language, and its linguistic standardisation.

## 2.1. Political roots of the Arpitan movement

The socio-political and cultural context within which the emergence of the Arpitan movement became possible in Valle d'Aosta should be essentially looked for in France, namely in the student demonstrations in Paris in May 1968. Bétemps (1981) argues that “1968 is a starting point for the recent history of the autonomist idea in Valle d'Aosta” (“1968 est un point de départ pour l'histoire récente de l'idée autonomiste valdôtaine,” Bétemps 1981: 26). More broadly, the intellectual climate of that period, an “intellectual feast” (according to P. Sériot, personal communication), was created by a series of events that produced a new political reality: the end of the war in Algeria in 1962; student demonstrations in Paris in May 1968; the end of the “*trente glorieuses*” (“the 30 glorious years” of constant economic growth in France) with the considerable growth of oil prices known as the “oil shock” in 1973; the Cold War, and the belief in the possibility of a communist revolution in France (with two out of three main parties there being left-wing, namely the socialist and the communist ones). The demonstrations in Paris opened a new debate on national groups within multinational states. The concept of “internal colonialism” emerged (cf. R. Lafont: *La révolution régionaliste* (1967), *Sur la France* (1968), *Décoloniser en France: les régions face à l'Europe* (1971), etc. ; see also Lagarde 2012). The struggle of various such groups within European states (as well as around the

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<sup>43</sup> Henriët explains that “Edur-Kar” means “the snow on the mountain” in the language of the Salassi (“*nella lingua dei Salassi significa 'la neve sulla montagna'*,” Henriët, personal communication)



world) became more acute: especially the Basques and the Irish, but also that of the Jurassiens, Occitans, Corsicans, and Bretons, to mention but a few in Europe.

Starting from the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s the press in the VDA would often relate these struggles. As Bétemps suggests (1981: 26), the French debates did not penetrate the VDA directly from France (although the region had traditionally had close ties with the neighbouring country), but passed through (and were reinterpreted by) the Italian universities of Turin and Milan. Simultaneously, the Italian media changed their discourse on minorities: “*terroristi baschi*” (“Basque terrorists”) became “*membri dell’ETA*” (“members of ETA”) and so on, and gradually ethnic minorities “became fashionable” (“*les minorités ethniques’ deviennent à la mode,*” *Ibid.*). In the VDA, especially from 1973 onwards, intellectuals and political parties started to address the “ethnic question.” The “fashion” expanded from urban to rural areas, where cultural centres appeared, which tried to renew their ties with Savoy in France and Valais in Switzerland. At the same time, as in France, the Italy of the beginning of the 1970s underwent an economic crisis that followed the “*miracolo economico*” (“economic miracle”) of the 1960s: the economic crisis which, in turn, brought about a political crisis of state institutions. The “intellectual feast” then gained the VDA, with a spread in round tables and political debates, including or centred on the cultural and linguistic particularities of the VDA (e.g. *I partiti politici e la questione linguistica valdostana, Gruppo di Ricerca in sociolinguistica di Aosta*, December 22, 1973). In this context the idea of the “Arpitan language” and “Arpitanian” was first pronounced.

Henriet’s very first source of inspiration was a secessionist movement in the Swiss Jura at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. Henriet was then a primary school teacher in Jura and could closely observe the “fight for liberation of the Jurassian people” in Switzerland, as he refers to it (in an interview he gave me in 2014). Namely, he worked there beyond the pivotal moment when the claims of independence had started being based – at a discursive level – on linguistic particularity: the French-speaking parts as opposed to the German-speaking parts of the Canton of Bern. Indeed, from the beginning of the struggle at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the right for independence was motivated in Jura by a common history, separate from the rest of Bern, together with the confessional difference: Catholic Jura vs. the Protestant rest of the Canton of Bern. However in 1959 a plebiscite on independence and the creation of a new canton was held in six districts of the

historic Jura, then all parts of the Canton of Bern; its results showed that the three German-speaking districts were largely against independence, while the three French-speaking ones were for it (Godat [s.a.]: 3). This forced the separatists (namely the *Rassemblement Jurassien*) to adjust their discourse and retrace the “ethnic” boundaries so that these coincided not with the historical borders, but with the linguistic ones (*op. cit.*: 7). A few years later, this struggle led to a plebiscite on the question of independence, on June 23, 1974, and subsequently to the creation of the Republic and Canton of Jura (*la République et Canton du Jura*) on January 1, 1979 (on the so-called “Jurassian question” see also Bassand 1976).

For Henriët, the same type of linguistic particularity could become the basis for a secessionist movement in the VDA: French-speaking as opposed to the Italian-speaking rest of the state. In an interview taken in February 2014 he explained to me:

J’ai compris, certainement la seule façon quand on va pas d’accord, quand y a des contradictions, ben [c’est] la séparation ... et pourquoi en Val d’Aoste on ne se sépare pas de l’Italie, il y a personne qui prêche la nécessité de se séparer de l’Italie pour vraiment pouvoir défendre la francophonie du Val d’Aoste...

I understood that the separation is certainly the only way when there is a disagreement, when there are contradictions ... so why wouldn’t the Aosta Valley separate from Italy, why there is no one speaking about the necessity of separating from Italy in order *to truly defend Francophony* in the Aosta Valley...

Thus initially there was no question of Francoprovençal – the same way that in Jura at that time there was no question of Franc-Comtois (a local variety of *Oïl*, or a local language of *Oïl*, depending on the perspective), which emerged much later. In both political contexts, the claims of particularity and therefore of independence were based on the opposition of two “languages of culture” and education (French vs. German in Jura; French vs. Italian in the VDA). The first movement was then formed in the VDA: ALPA (*Action de Libération des Populations Alpines*). It aimed at the creation of a state comprising the VDA, Savoy and Valais, with French as its official language.

Yet, a few years afterwards, Henriët “discovered that in the VDA French was an imposed language, the same way that Latin had been before and Italian afterwards” (“J’ai découvert que le français en Val d’Aoste était une langue – a été une langue imposée, comme le latin avant et puis l’italien ensuite...” interview 2014), and that the true language

of its inhabitants (“notre langue à nous” – “our very own language”) was Francoprovençal. This lack of awareness of Francoprovençal is noteworthy. It was then the first language of the vast majority of the VDA population, yet a metadiscourse on it was (nearly) non-existent. The locals would speak it, but they would not speak *about* it. This “discovery” and Henriët’s subsequent theory of Francoprovençal re-baptised as “Harpitan” was due to his acquaintance with Federico Sagredo (also known as Krutwig, De Sagredo, Fernando Sarrailh de Ihartza, Serailh or Arno de Mandiguri): a leader of ETA and a writer advocating the unification of the Basque language, who at that time had spent a year hiding from the Spanish and international authorities in the VDA. Sagredo became Henriët’s close friend and a sort of a mentor:

Il m’a, si tu veux, illuminé, il m’a [prêté] – des arguments – pour bâtir ce mouvement - politique qui devait s’occuper aussi de la langue.

He enlightened me, if you like, he gave me arguments for building this movement – a political movement that was to deal with the language as well.

This collaboration gave birth to Henriët’s (initially extreme-left) secessionist movement called *Movement Harpitanya* and to a new theory of a language called “Harpitan.” Starting from 1972, Harpitan became opposed to French.

Before studying the linguistic part of the Harpitanya movement, let us consider its socio-political basis: as is argued here throughout the dissertation, any linguistic debates cover deeper conflicts of a completely extralinguistic nature. Rather than proposing a detailed and constructive project for the future, Harpitanya was essentially against:

Contre la classe dirigeante de l’époque, contre le stato-nationalisme, contre la bourgeoisie valdôtaine considérée comme francophile et conservatrice, contre les partis autonomistes au pouvoir identifiés comme l’expression de cette bourgeoisie, contre le clergé accusé d’avoir trahi le peuple en abandonnant la lutte, contre les partis nationaux, qu’ils soient de gauche ou de droite, contre l’élitisme culturel et social, contre le conservatisme de la classe au pouvoir, contre la colonisation culturelle, linguistique, économique, contre l’oppression du peuple entendu comme

classe dominée, prolétariat urbain et prolétariat des campagnes confondu, contre sa dépersonnalisation. (Dunoyer 2010: s.p.)<sup>44</sup>

Against the ruling class of its time, against stato-nationalism, against the *Valdôtain* bourgeoisie, considered to be Francophile and conservative, against the autonomist parties in power identified as the embodiment of that bourgeoisie, against the clergy accused of having betrayed the people because of having abandoned the struggle, against the national parties, be they left-wing or right-wing, against cultural and social elitism, against the conservatism of the class in power, against colonisation, cultural, linguistic and economic, against the oppression of the people seen as the dominated class, be it the urban proletariat or rural proletariat, against its depersonalisation.

Being against, the Harpitanists “impose themselves with a wilderness and the relentless determination of the oppressed, of those who have nothing to lose” (“s’imposent avec la sauvagerie et l’implacable détermination des opprimés, de ceux qui n’ont rien à perdre,” *Ibid.*). Their voice is often anonymous but very present throughout the valley:

HARPITANYA, on voyait écrit sur les murs et les rochers de notre Vallée, mais aussi VAL D’AOHTA LIBRA, LIBERAXON, de gros traits irréguliers, sur un fond de rochers abrupts, tracés à la peinture blanche, une graphie insolite qui épousait la sensation de mystère due au fait qu’on ignorait qui étaient les mains qui avaient guidé ces pinceaux. (*Ibid.*)

HARPITANYA could be seen on the walls and the rocks of our Valley, and also VAL D’AOHTA LIBRA [free Valle d’Aosta] and LIBERAXON [liberation], written with huge irregular lines, on the steep rocks, with white pigment, an insolent writing that inspired the feeling of a mystery because no one knew whose hands had directed the brush.

The general (extralinguistic) problematic issues addressed by Harpitanya are not explicitly present in Harpitanya’s programmatic texts (books or articles), but can be found clearly articulated elsewhere, e.g. in its songs. Namely, in the songs by the Harpitanist bard Luis de Jyaryot (a pseudonym of Luigi Fosson), the “troubadour” of the Harpitan revolution to come, as he says in one of his songs, reproducing a text that had been written by an anonymous *Valdôtain* writer in 1942: “Chaque révolution // A eu son troubadour // Je suis un troubadour // J’attends ma révolution” (“Every revolution // Has had its troubadour // I am a troubadour // I am waiting for my revolution.” – “*Je rêve: 1942*”, in a home-published collection of songs called *Li canson de nohtro peplo*, “*The Songs of Our People*”). He became an idol of the contemporary youth, his first album, *La Noëla*

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<sup>44</sup> From a booklet accompanying the documentary film *Harpitanya, la ferveur d’une idée*.

*Tradixon* (“*The New Tradition*,” 1978), having marked a whole generation of *Valdôtains*. The title itself is eloquent: it was about a total rupture with the ways of life that had existed before and creating a new society and a new “tradition.” It portrays all the multiple facets of the contemporary *Valdôtain* society, providing a sometimes humorous but always direct, and in that often violent, socio-political critique. The songs were written in 1976-78: 30 years after the VDA had become an autonomous region. Hence, among other societal issues, the songs attack the party in power, which had remained unchanged for 30 years (as it is still the case today), the corruption that had evolved, and the new bourgeoisie that had appeared:

Ma faat cyantà i trent’an d’otonomie	We have to sing of the thirty years of autonomy
Ke i an feyt da Valduhta ün bon teren	That made out of Valle d’Aosta a good ground
Pe tüt ci ke i ahon voya de robà,	For all those who wish to rob
So ‘i ehpaale di “roecyo” travayoer.	On the shoulders of “rich” workers.
No faat cyantà i trent’an d’otonomie	We have to sing of the thirty years of autonomy
Ki noz an alevà ‘na bourzywazie ...	That brought up for us a bourgeoisie ...

(L. de Jyaryot, “Trent’an d’otonomie” [“Thirty Years of Autonomy”]. In *La Noëla Tradixon*)

Another song, written by Henriët himself, criticising, among other things, “la popo-poleteka // l’eterna repebleka” (“the pop-politics // the eternal Republic”), may imply the practice of buying electoral votes by the party (-ies) in power:

Yo canto li partì	I sing of the parties
Ke a twite li elexon	Who, at every election,
Ant sü trovei mwayen	Knew how to find ways
De todzor fahe lo pyen	To always fill the house

(J. Harriet, “Canson droola” [“The Strange Song”]. In *La Noëla Tradixon*)

Among the main societal issues, the issue of saving vs. selling the land: the poor peasants selling their land, which generations had cultivated, to rich foreigners who come

to buy it without any intent to cultivate. Echoing the words of his contemporary agricultural workers, L. de Jyaryot sings:

Ke vout te mai j'ant trop patì	What do you want, they have suffered too much
E l'et pà jest k'o fasen no	And it is not fair that we should do the same
Ora ke j'et pien de monsiè	Now that there are plenty of sirs ["Messieurs"]
Carjà de sot	Full of money

(L. de Jyaryot, "La tera" ["The Land"]) <sup>45</sup>

Hence, he portrays the agricultural workers who sell their land, ignoring the inner voice that tells them not to do so: "...sensa ehkotà // La voes ke te sentei deden te // Ke te dit 'a tera na!! vend-la pa.'" <sup>46</sup> ("...without listening // to the voice that you hear inside of you // which tells you: 'the land, no!! don't sell it!'" "La tera" ["The Land"]).

Another major concern was the development of the tertiary sector at the expense of the primary one:

Merci Bon Dieu	Thank you good Lord
Te nos at fait la Roja	You made us the Mont Rose
E la vendein	And we sell it
A bokon i "messieurs"	By pieces to "Messieurs"

(L. de Jyaryot, "Merci Bon Dieu" ["Thank You Good Lord"]) <sup>47</sup>

The recurrent reference to the "Messieurs" (which is not itself an invention of Harpitanya, but a ubiquitous expression in everyday language) also pictures the eternal struggle of peasants vs. the bourgeoisie ("*li graas kapitalista*," "the fat capitalists," as Henriët puts it in a Marxist way in the "Canson droola"), the oppressed vs. the oppressors.

<sup>45</sup> Reproduced here from the collection of songs *Li canson de nohtro peplo*. It is written in a slightly different orthography on the 1978 album cover: "Ke voy-toe may y'an trop patì, // e l'et pa jyoext ke o facan noey, // ora ke y'et pyen de "monsyoë"// cyarjyà de soot."

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*, on the 1978 album cover: "...sensa ehkuta // ca vwè ke te sentix devenc te, // ke te doet 'a tera na! venla pa!"

<sup>47</sup> *Idem*, on the 1978 album cover: "Mersi bon Dyoe; te noz ye feyt la Ruzya // e la venden a bokon i 'mosyoë'!"

Ultimately, the movement merges the ethnic struggle (with the ideal of “etnokratka,” “ethnocratics,” i.e. the ethnic group’s self-government) with the social struggle (with an ideal of a socialist state where the classes that are now dominated will be in power): in the same way as happened in the socialist revolution in Russia in 1917<sup>48</sup>. Hence, in that period, the oppressed classes were also those speaking Francoprovençal (as opposed to the French- or Italian-speaking bourgeoisie).

## 2.2. Renaming Francoprovençal and a new identity construction: a pre-Indo-European language spoken by prehistoric people

In one of Henriët’s first texts introducing the notion of “Harpitan,” the latter is defined through that of “Franco-Provençal”:

La langue ethnique de l’Harpitanie est le franco-provençal que nous nommerons aussi désormais “harpitan” (Henriët 1974: 7).

The ethnic language of Harpitanie is Franco-Provençal, which from now on we will also call “Harpitan.”

Thus “Harpitan” would be a new signifier for the same referent – the Francoprovençal linguistic unity. The new term served to build an “ethnic (and therefore national) language” (“*langue ethnique (et donc nationale)*,” *op. cit.*: 8), that of Harpitan, which would thus unite an ethnic group and a nation, also called Harpitan, related to the country called Harpitanie. In other words, the main objective of this re-naming was to relate linguistic particularities described by dialectologists to notions of ethnicity and nationhood, thus reproducing the romantic naturalistic model of European nation-state building (see Barbour, Carmichael 2000).

The two terms, Harpitanie (Harpitanie, Harpitanie) and Harpitan, were originally written with an initial H-, the subsequent omission of which probably began with Henriët’s book *La lingua arpitana*, published in 1976. One of the possible considerations for this change is the visual association: the language of the Alps – Arpitan – Arpitanie. Among other considerations, an anecdotal and very practical one was that terms with “H,” and especially the iconic form for the related political claims – a big “H” – turned out to be a

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<sup>48</sup> The latter resulted in a system of a socialist ethnic federalism as a basis for the construction of the Soviet Union.

bad “marketing tool,” so to speak: according to several testimonies, the sign of a big “H” in open public spaces would be taken for a helicopter landing pad. The “rebranding” of the language being largely a communication tool, such miscommunication could hardly be tolerated.

The name of the language was seen as a crucial issue: Henriët starts his book (Harrieta 1976) by pointing at pejorative connotations of the term “patois”:

E’ necessario, al più presto, abolire l’uso del termine “patois” e preferirgli, quando si fanno discorsi sulla lingua, le seguenti parole: parlata, francoprovenzale o arpitano, lingua arpitana (Harrieta 1976: 5).

It is necessary to eliminate as soon as possible the use of the term “patois” and to prefer to it, when one produces a discourse on the language, the following words: *parlata* (vernacular), *francoprovenzale* (Francoprovençal) or *arpitano* (Arpitan), *lingua arpitana* (the Arpitan language).

The term *parlata* refers to the idiom of a particular locality (e.g. “*parlata di Courmayeur*,” Courmayeur’s vernacular), whereas to refer to the language as a whole Henriët introduces the name “Arpitan.”

“Harpitanyia”/“Arpitanian” is defined as “a vast region around Mont Blanc” (“*une vaste région autour du Mont Blanc*,” Harriët 1974: 7), a definition that becomes recurrent in Henriët’s own texts and that has survived until today, as we will see. Henriët specifies the region: “Savoy, Valais, the north-western valleys of Piedmont, the Aosta Valley...” (“*Savoie, Valais, Vallées nord-occidentales du Piémont, Val d’Aoste...*”, *Ibid.*). Thus it does not encompass the whole Francoprovençal linguistic area, but only its mountainous regions. The same particularity is seen on the flag of Arpitanian that Henriët also created (see Figure 11). The flag is red and black, which are the colours of the Aosta Valley, and has the Savoy cross in the centre, representing Arpitanian in its historical link to the House of Savoy. Three stars represent the three main Arpitan regions: the Aosta Valley, Savoy and Valais. Indeed, the contrast of the high mountains vs. the valley is crucial in almost any discourse on Francoprovençal/Arpitan, as it is assumed that in the mountains the linguistic and cultural, or ethnic, particularity is better preserved.



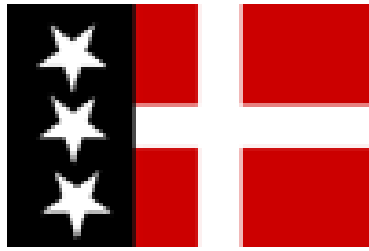


Figure 11. The flag of Harpitanya (Arpitania)

An allusion to the new flag and its ideological content can be found in one of the songs by L. de Jariot, in *Li canson de nohtro peplo* (see Figure 12).

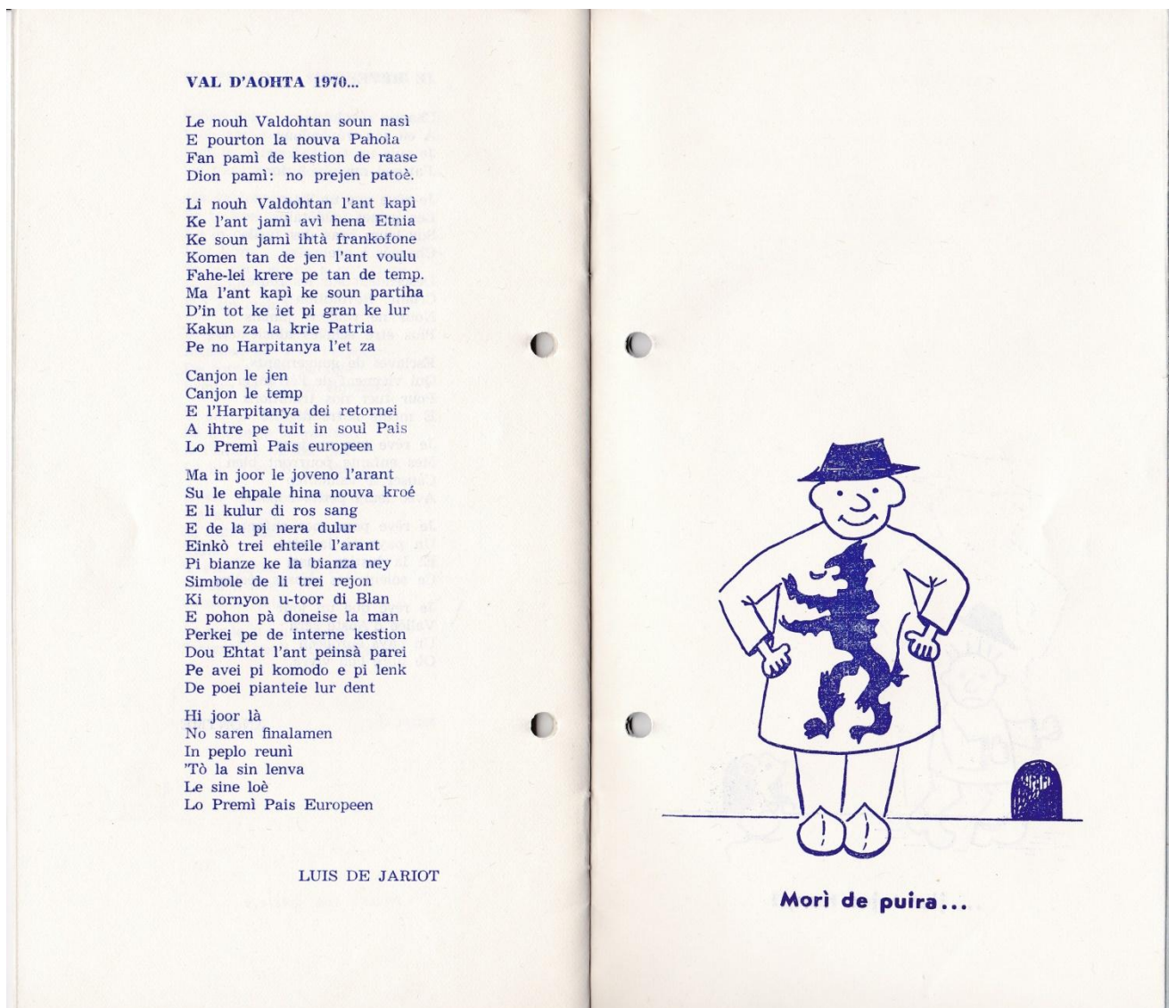


Figure 12. Luis de Jariot “Val d’Aohta 1970...” in *Li canson de nohtro peplo* (undated, around mid-1970s).

The lyrics are as follows:

The new *Valdôtains* are born  
And they bring the new Word  
They no longer speak about the race  
They no longer say: we speak *patois*.

The new *Valdôtains* have understood  
That they have never been an ethnic group,  
That they have never been French-speaking  
As so many people  
Have wished to make them believe for so long.  
They have understood that they are part  
Of a whole that is bigger than them  
Someone already calls it Fatherland  
For us Harpitanya already exists.

People change  
Times change  
And Harpitanya should come back  
Being for everyone only one country  
The first European country.

But one day the young people will bear  
On their shoulders a new cross,  
And the colours of red blood,  
And of the blackest of pains,  
They will also have three stars,  
Whiter than the white snow,  
Symbol of the three regions  
That turn around Mont Blanc  
Without a possibility to give hands to each other,  
Because for the sake of their internal issues  
Two States decided this way  
So that it is easier [for them]  
To put there their teeth.

That day  
We will finally be  
One reunited people  
With its language,  
With its laws,  
The first European country.

The song is written stylistically as a prophecy, and also uses the religious vocabulary (“they bring the new Word,” the reference to the cross that the new *Valdôtains* will bear on their shoulders, etc.). Many Arpitanist ideas are articulated here: the rejection of the French language as an imposed one, the refusal to take what the Harpitans speak for a “patois” (vs. “its language” at the end of the song) and the idea of Valle d’Aosta being

part of a trans-border whole called Harpitanya. “The new *Valdôtains* have understood // That they never were an ethnic group” should refer to Henriët’s ideas, laid out in his 1974 article entitled: “L’ethnie valdôtaine n’a jamais existé... elle n’est que partie de l’ethnie harpitane” (Harriet 1974), and is a revolutionary rupture with the ideology that had existed until that day. The same rupture is iconically represented in the picture: a man wearing a traditional *Valdôtain* costume, with a part of the VDA’s coat of arms on it, who is “dead from fear” (as the writing on the drawing stipulates). Finally, as in the case of any “invented traditions” (see Hobsbawm 1983), Harpitanya is represented here as something that has always existed: “And Harpitanya should come back // Being for everyone only one country” (historically, indeed, Valle d’Aosta and Savoy used to belong to the same state, ruled by the House of Savoy; yet its territory, on the one hand, went far beyond Valle d’Aosta and Savoy – all the way to Sardinia at some periods in time – and on the other hand, never encompassed the Swiss canton of Valais). The Harpitan people is thus essentially a singular people, which has been separated by exterior powers and needs to be “reunited.”

Borrowing from the discourse on the Basque language, Henriët indicates that the name Harpitan derives from “an old local language, a pre-Indo-European language” (Harriet 1974). The latter, which would be a common ancestor of (H)arpitan and Basque, is called in his other texts “Garalditan” (Harrieta 1976, 1977). Referring to F. Krutwig (his mentor in independentism, as mentioned above), Henriët explains that “Garalditan” are “Pre-Indo-European languages, living or dead, linked to the agricultural revolution of the Neolithic period” (“propone di chiamare ‘garalditane’ le lingue pre-indoeuropee, viventi o morte, legate alla rivoluzione agricola del periodo neolitico,” Harrieta 1976: 44). The word comes from *gara* – “mountain,” *aldi* – “region,” *ea* – feminine article (“*la*”), which form *Garaldea* – “mountain region(s)”; *Garalditan* derives from *Garaldea* (*op. cit.*: 57). Henriët quotes Krutwig who wrote, while staying in the VDA, that the primitive population of the valley had belonged to the same pre-Indo-European group as the Basque one (Krutwig, “Les noms pré-indoeuropéens en Val d’Aoste,” *Le Flambeau* No4 1973, cited in: Harrieta 1976: 54). In a table of “Garalditan elements” in “the Arpitan language” (*Op. cit.*: 58-62) we can find, *inter alia*, the root that was used in naming the language (*op. cit.*: 58):

-AR

[Senso] “pietra, roccia.”

[Esempi] Arpa/sotto le pietre (nome che si dà ai pascoli di montagna);

... dezARpa (giorno di discesa degli armenti);

ARpian/abitante dell'alpe (nome che si dà ai montanari che lavorano nell'alpeggio).

...

Il radicale AR, trasformato in AL, si ritrova nel nome stesso della più importante catena montuosa d'Europa: le ALpi.

-AR

[Meaning] “stone, rock.”

[Examples] ARPA/under the stone (a name given to the mountain pastures);

... DezARpa (day of the descent of herds);

ARpian/inhabitant of the Alpa (the name given to the mountain people who work in the pastures).

...

The radical AR, transformed into AL, is to be found in the name of the most important mountain chain of Europe: The Alps.

The word “Harpitan” is then composed of the alleged pre-Indo-European: HARPE “under the rocks” + TAN “inhabitant.” Henriet had never done any linguistic studies and the theory is based not on linguistics work, etymological or any others, but on his and Sagredo's reflections – based upon observed similarities between Francoprovençal and

Basque. The similarity of phonetics and semantics in a number of words is supposed to prove a common “ontology,” i.e. the existence of a common pre-Indo-European source.<sup>49</sup>

Thus two key elements are central in defining the language and the community: the first one is the semantics of the *mountain*, linked to the symbol of Mont Blanc; the second is the idea of a continuity between the Harpitan language and the respective linguistic community, on the one hand, and the language(s) and the area’s Neolithic inhabitants on the other. In Henriët’s book *La lingua arpitana* (1976), a photograph of petroglyphs from the Neolithic Age on the front cover of the book works as an iconic sign suggesting both associations: the rocks or mountains, and a link between the prehistoric peoples and those speaking this *lingua arpitana* – the so-called Arpitan language (see Figure 13).

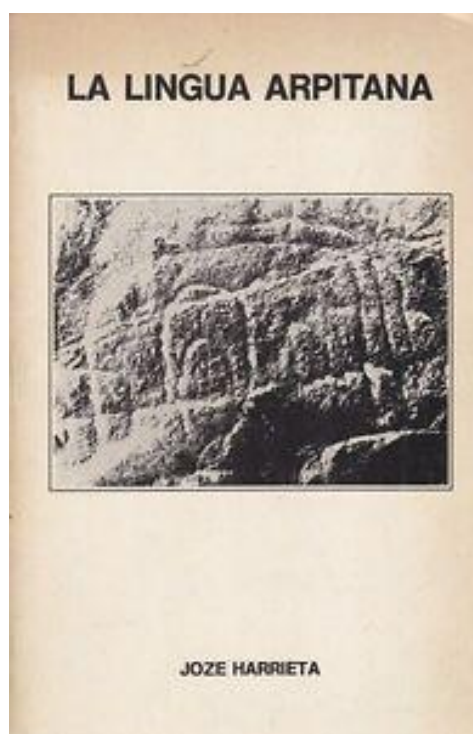


Figure 13. The front cover of *La lingua arpitana* (1976)

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<sup>49</sup>At the same time, Sagredo, for his part, restrains himself from exaggerating the importance of this alleged common pre-Indo-European source. For him, “Harpetan” is a language that is more than two thirds part of the “Occitano-Catalano-Gascon” group (as he refers to it) and one third that of *Oïl* and of the dialect group of Val Padana (Sagredo de Ihartza 1976: 51). These linguistic particularities have a number of implications: namely, the obvious one is the French language imposed in France and the French-speaking tradition of the bourgeoisie of Valle d’Aosta; a less obvious one concerns Occitan: “Aujourd’hui les ‘nationalistes occitans’ tâchent de s’annexer les provinces harpétanes et pour ce faire commencent à nier l’existence de l’ethnie harpétane. Cependant l’ethnie harpétane est dans son ensemble plus vivante que l’ethnie provençale.” (“Today ‘the Occitan nationalists’ are trying to annexe the Harpetan provinces and in order to do so start to deny the existence of the Harpetan ethnos. However the Harpetan ethnos is, globally, more lively than the Provençal ethnos.” *Ibid.*)

The metonymic – and mythogenic – function of the new name is to provide a summary of the (alleged) ontology of the ethnic group or/and the nation, with reference to:

- a unique geographical space (the mountains around Mont Blanc);
- a traditional lifestyle (in Arpitan “arpian” means “shepherd”);
- mythological ancestors (the prehistoric people - the Garalditans);
- as well as to the uniqueness of the language itself (a pre-Indo-European language) to which this name refers.

### 2.3. The main goals of the (H)arpitan movement: language as a ‘pillar’ for a new polity

In Henriët’s view, the language is seen as closely connected to the cultural, economic and social development of the respective linguistic community:

la rinascita sociale, economica e politica di un popolo passa attraverso il ricupero e la rivalorizzazione della propria lingua; lingua che i dominatori considerano e obbligano a considerare indegna del nome di «lingua», incapace di esprimere contenuti moderni, impossibile da fissare nello scritto, condannata a morire... (Harrieta 1976: 7-8)

*the social, economic and political revival of a people passes through the recovery and revalorisation of their own language; the language that the oppressors consider and oblige to consider unworthy of the title of "language," unable to express modern content, impossible to be fixated in a written form, sentenced to die...*<sup>50</sup>

We can see here the typical idea of a primordial link between language and people, inspired by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism: later Henriët argues that for the Arpitans (*gli arpitan*) “their only and true language is the Arpitan language” (“*la loro sola e vera*

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<sup>50</sup> Henriët insists on this idea several times in the text. See also: “The function of the language is thus essential for the revival of the people” (“Essenziale è dunque la funzione della lingua nella rinascita di un popolo,” op. cit.: 6); “The cultural, economic and social revival of a dominated people happens only with the recovery of its language” (“La rinascita culturale, economica e sociale di un popolo dominato avviene solo nel ricupero della lingua propria,” op. cit.: 10).

*lingua*,” Harrieta 1976: 10) – even though one might notice that he somehow contradicts his own statement, since his own book is written in the Italian language.

In Henrieta’s view, an idiom will not die if the three following conditions are fulfilled:

- the status of a distinct “language”;
- the existence of a written form;
- the existence of a modern (modernised) lexicon, able to describe contemporary life.

At the same time, all of those, and the language itself, are not seen as important for themselves, but for the “revival” of a “people” that speaks this language. As far as the first two conditions are concerned, Henrieta refers to some “linguists” (without naming them) who would consider Francoprovençal to be a language like French or Italian (*op. cit.*: 9) and gives examples of texts written in Francoprovençal (*Ibid.*). As for being (or rather becoming) able to describe modern reality and being (becoming) a living (*una lingua viva*) and efficient language, this condition is considered to be missing (I will come back to this issue in the next section). Interestingly, this kind of “language,” unified and appropriate to speak about contemporary reality, is designed to “serve the Arpitan people” (*servire al popolo arpitano*) in a particular way:

gli servirà, in modo particolare, a legger lo attuale mondo circostante, condizione essenziale questa, per capire la realtà, metterci ordine, immaginare, dirigere, cambiare : far politica, cioè. (*op. cit.*: 11)

it [the Arpitan language] will serve [the Arpitan people], particularly, for reading the surrounding contemporary world, which is an essential condition in order to understand reality, to put oneself in order, to imagine, to govern, to change: that is, to make politics.

Here the main issue is, once again, politics<sup>51</sup>. At the same time, the arguments are all based upon the linguistic relativity hypothesis<sup>52</sup>, whether Henrieta had read it in its

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<sup>51</sup> In 2014, in the interview that I took with him, he agreed that his main goal was a political one :

NB: Pour vous le but était avant tout politique, avant d’être linguistique? (Was your goal first and foremost political before linguistic?)

JH: Oui oui oui bien sûr bien sûr (Yes yes yes of course of course)

<sup>52</sup> Compare with Sapir and Whorf’s studies:

original – scholarly – version or (most probably) acquired it as a general idea that language models a way of thinking, and (an appropriate) language should model an appropriate understanding of reality. The latter nuance conjures up altogether the way in which totalitarian regimes function, which might be not without relevance here, as Henriët's views were influenced (at least, to a certain extent) by the communist and Maoist ideologies (in 1974 he translated into Arpitan two of Mao's works). The idea of a language as a vehicle for a particular ideology was put even more explicitly in Henriët's first text about Arpitan (in that version, Harpeitan), signed Edur-Kar:

*Les révolutionnaires qui travaillent pour un monde de nouvelle démocratie, doivent obligatoirement imaginer des systèmes linguistiques qui seront les piliers de l'organisation politique future [...] la langue harpeitane devra être une langue de Nouvelle Démocratie. (Edur-Kar 1973: 28. Italics in the original)*

*The revolutionaries who work for a world of new democracy should necessarily imagine linguistic systems that will be the pillars of the future political organisation [...] the Harpeitan language should be a language of New Democracy.*

*De ces parlers [francoprovençaux] sortira la langue harpeitane qui sera le moyen de libération du peuple harpeitan, et sa future langue, base de culture. La langue harpeitane accompagnera la renationalisation et la repersonnalisation des harpeitans et elle sera la langue porteuse de l'idéologie de la libération de l'Harpeitanie. (Ibid. Italics in the original)*

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Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Sapir 1958: 69)

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organise it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organisation and classification of data which the agreement decrees. (Whorf 1940: 213-214)



*Out of these [Francoprovençal] idioms will emerge the Harpeitan language that will be the means for the liberation of the Harpeitan people, and its future language, a basis for its culture. The Harpeitan language will accompany the renationalisation and the repersonalisation of the Harpeitans and will be the carrier of the ideology of the liberation of Harpeitanie.*

This function of the Arpitan (Harpeitan) language conjures up the Orwellian Newspeak (George Orwell 1984), created and controlled by a fictional Party in order to control citizens' thoughts and make them conform to the ideologies of the Party, so that other worldviews become literally unthinkable.<sup>53</sup> Besides, the language is again a *means* for the liberation of a community (and not an end in itself).

#### 2.4. Linguistic standardisation: 'linguistic metabolism' and 'assassins disguised as doctors'

The relation between the terms "Arpitan" and "Francoprovençal" is not a very clear one. At first, Henriët proposed "to substitute the term 'Francoprovençal' with the new one, 'Arpitan,' which derives from Francoprovençal itself and means literally an inhabitant of the Alps or of mountains" ("Propongo di sostituire il termine 'francoprovenzale' con la nuova parola, 'arpitano,' parola che deriva dal francoprovenzale stesso e che letteralmente significa abitante dell' 'alpe' o della montagna," Harrieta 1976: 6). Arpitan is then defined as the language spoken by the inhabitants of the north-western Alps. Yet the term "Arpitan language" – *la lingua arpitana* – has a very specific meaning:

*La lingua arpitana indica la koinè delle parlate arpitane (Ibid).*

The Arpitan language indicates the koinè of Arpitan vernaculars.

Indeed, the necessity of linguistic modernisation, according to Henriët, is complemented by another goal: that of linguistic unification, as the existing varieties (*parlate arpitane*) are not mutually intelligible. At the same time, the writing system of

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<sup>53</sup> Namely, in "The Principles of Newspeak" we read:

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc [English Socialism], but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of IngSoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. (George Orwell 1948: an appendix to 1984)

Arpitan should be different from those of French and Occitan (its two linguistically closest neighbours, to which the academic name “Francoprovençal” refers):

*...un travail de personnification de l’alphabet s’impose. L’harpeitan se servira d’une graphie indépendante tant de la graphie française que de la graphie de l’occitan.* (Edur-Kar 1973: 30; Italics in the original)

*... a work on a personification of the alphabet is imperative. Harpeitan will use a written form that will be independent from either that of French or that of Occitan.*

The koinè should be based, in Henriët’s view, on the idioms of the Lower Aosta Valley (namely those of Montjovet, Evason, Issogne and Arnaz). He explains this choice by referring to the Aosta Valley as “the stronghold of the Arpitan linguistic area” (*la roccaforte linguistica dell’area arpitana*), implying that in other traditionally Francoprovençal areas the idiom is no longer spoken by such a considerable part of population in everyday life:

Questo fatto conferisce senz’altro alle parlate arpitane della Val d’Aosta il diritto di diventare la base della futura lingua arpitana unificata (ibid.).

This fact certainly confers upon the Arpitan idioms of the Aosta Valley the right to become the basis for the future unified Arpitan language.

Such a representation of the Francoprovençal linguistic situation was not in itself new. Namely, dialectologists made similar statements at the same period – see, for instance, Gaston Tuaillon (1978: 12):

la Vallée d’Aoste constitue, en 1978, la seule grande région du domaine francoprovençal dont le dialecte pourra survivre longtemps encore, malgré la rage de détruire le passé qui a accompagné la modernisation galopante du XXe siècle.

The Aosta Valley constitutes, in 1978, the only large region of the Francoprovençal area whose dialect will be able to survive for a long time, despite the rage to destroy the past that has accompanied the rapid modernisation of the 20th century.

The novelty in Henriët’s theory was the assumption that this commonly agreed upon linguistic situation should give certain “rights,” namely the one to impose the idiom still largely spoken upon the rest of a linguistic area where it had never actually been used. In an interview that he gave me in 2014 he explained his position in the 1970s:

ma proposition [était] de prendre les parlers de la basse Vallée ... ce sont les variétés les plus archaïques ... et puis de les choisir et puis de l'imposer comme la langue, un peu comme le florentin a été imposé, le parisien a été imposé.

my suggestion [was] to take the idioms of the lower valley ... [because] those are the most archaic varieties ... and then to choose them and to impose it as a language, the same way as the Florentine was imposed, as the Parisian was imposed.

The same way that the *patois* of Florence or *patois* of Paris (*op. cit.*: 12) became “languages” through loans from the Greek and Latin languages, in order for Arpitan to become a “language,” the *patois* of Arpitanian should absorb, according to Henriët, words from other languages. Henriët distinguishes various types of sources for loans (*op. cit.*: 13-15):

- “synchronic loans” (“prestito sincronico”):
  - o vertical (from the two dominant languages: Italian and French)
  - o or horizontal (from the languages that are not dominant in Arpitanian: Spanish, German, English);
- “diachronic prestige” (“prestito diacronico”) – “the loans from the dead languages that had a certain role in the formation of the Arpitan language” (“prestito dalle lingue morte che hanno avuto un ruolo nella formazione della lingua arpitaniana,” *op. cit.*: 14):
  - o Garalditan (*la lingua garalditana*) of which Basque is a “living” example
  - o Greek and Latin for most modern cultural terms.

Using a metaphor from the human body, Henriët introduces the term of “linguistic metabolism”:

L'uomo, ogni giorno, fabbrica nel suo corpo cellule nuove, nutrendosi di animali e di vegetali; non gli passa nemmeno per la testa l'idea di dover rifiutare le nuove cellule, essenziali alla vita, sotto pretesto che, provenendo esse da un “corpo straniero,” non siano degne di allinearsi con le prime...

Simile deve essere l'atteggiamento dell'arpitanista che si pone come obiettivo la lotta per la sopravvivenza della propria lingua. (*Op. cit.*: 13)

Every day the man produces new cells in his body, feeding himself with animals and plants; and it never occurs to him to have to reject new cells, essential to his life, under the pretext that they come from a “foreign body,” and are not worthy of aligning with the first ones...

This should be the attitude of the Arpitanist who has as his objective the struggle for the survival of his own language.

Beside a common idea of a similitude between a language and a biological organism, we can find here what later became one of the reasons for a conflict pitting Henriët and his Arpitanist followers on one side against the *patoisants* and – perhaps especially – the dialectologists (“purists” in Henriët’s view) on the other side. For the two latter groups the “survival” of one’s language means the maintenance of its varieties of a given community (the so-called “pure patois” of the municipality X or Y), and not its replacement by a supra-dialectal and modernised standard that is seen as “artificial.” In contrast, for Henriët, “the Arpitan patois will be saved only if the Arpitan language emerges from them” (“...i ‘patois’ arpitani si salverranno solo se da essi uscirà la lingua arpitana,” *op. cit.*: 14). The “purists” become therefore “the worst enemies of our language” (*op. cit.*: 16: “i peggior nemici della nostra lingua”), since their (linguistic and metalinguistic) behaviour leads to its death:

Impedendo il processo di metabolismo linguistico ... i puristi perseguono la morte della lingua di cui vogliono apparire come dei difensori illuminati. (*op. cit.*: 15)

By preventing the process of metabolism ... linguistic purists pursue the death of the language of which they want to appear as enlightened defenders.

The expression “enlightened defenders” shows that the discourse refers mainly to the researchers working on Francoprovençal. The same idea can be found in another of Henriët’s texts:

Les théoriciens du maintien du “particularisme” de chaque patois et qui se présentent comme les défenseurs de notre langue, sont dans les faits des assassins déguisés en docteurs: ils s’opposent au métabolisme essentiel pour la vie des langues et ils sont, par conséquent, les pires ennemis de notre langue et aussi du peuple qui doit s’en servir. (Harriet 1975: 66-67)

The theoreticians of the maintenance of the “particularity” of each *patois*, who present themselves as defenders of our language, are, in fact, assassins disguised as doctors: they oppose themselves to the

metabolism essential for the life of languages and, consequently, they are the worst enemies of our language and also of people who have to use it.

As suggested in the introduction to this paper, from this time onwards, Arpitan linguistics becomes what we may call *the linguistics of resentment* (I borrow the term from Patrick Sériot, see Sériot et al. 2008), i.e. one opposed to the official science, and legitimising itself precisely by the fact of this opposition:

Les promoteurs de ce qu'on peut appeler une *linguistique du ressentiment* se sentent rejetés par la «science officielle», ce qui renforce en eux la théorie du complot du silence et le sentiment que, si leurs idées sont repoussées, c'est la preuve qu'elles sont vraies. (Sériot et al. 2008: 151)

The advocates of what one may call the *linguistics of resentment* feel themselves rejected by the “official science,” which reinforces in their eyes the theory of a conspiracy of silence and the feeling that if their ideas are denied it is the proof that these ideas are true.

Indeed, the idea of researchers' responsibility for language death reemerges in the Arpitanist discourse today, as we will see in Part II.

Linguistic standardisation was seen as possible only “as a result of the revolutionary practice of the (H)arpitan popular movement” (1974: 8) with, as its ultimate goal, the creation of an (H)arpitan federation in the area around Mont Blanc. This “revolutionary movement” was organised, following the Basque model, as a secret organisation made up of small groups not knowing each other, federated by single individuals who knew them all. With 300 members throughout Valle d'Aosta (according to the person in charge of federating the efforts, personal communication 2016) and a large network of regularly maintained contacts “from Bastia to Belfast” (*idem.*), this marked a whole generation of *Valdôtains*.

Un mouvement dont personne n'a par la suite revendiqué l'héritage, dont un vaste monde murmure l'appartenance, comme un charmant péché de jeunesse, à moitié entre la nostalgie et la moquerie, souvent passé sous silence voire lourdement sanctionné. Il est de bon ton d'être contre Harpitanya. (Dunoyer 2012: s.p.)

A movement of which no one later claimed the heritage, to which a large population whispers about their belonging, like a charming sin of youth, half-way between nostalgia and mockery, often ignored or heavily sanctioned. It is a “*bon ton*” to be against Harpitanya.

Although unsuccessful (“because of the majority’s lack of courage to make changes,” according to the Arpitanists), it also influenced, in a certain way, the development of the linguistic situation in the VDA for 50 years to come, as will be shown in Part II and III. Finally, once imagined by Henriët as a language in its own right, Francoprovençal kept this status in the minds of several activists until becoming officially recognised as such at the turn of the new millennium.

## **Chapter 3. The new millennium**

### **3.1. The Arpitan Cultural Alliance, a new identity and proto-national symbols**

At the beginning of the new millennium, the spread of discourse on “linguistic diversity,” “endangered languages” and “language death,” and the corresponding language policies at both European and national levels are transforming what used to be considered “patois” into “minority languages.” As was shown in the introduction to this dissertation, at the European level, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, signed and ratified by Switzerland, and signed but yet not ratified by Italy and France, provides a framework for a potential language policy in favour of Francoprovençal; and so at national levels do the 1999 law on “linguistic minorities” in Italy and the constitutional amendment of 2008 inscribing “regional languages” in the French Constitution (article 75-1). In the aftermath of this change, language policy has been evolving at regional levels: the one started by the VDA and Piedmont in Italy in the early 2000s, by the canton of Valais in Switzerland in 2008, and by the Rhone-Alpes region in France in 2009. More specifically, the discourse on “linguistic diversity” and “endangered languages,” which became legitimised by scholarly research and subsequently by European language policy, was made available to be adopted by activists in the early 2000s (on the contrary, the specific “embodiment” of this discourse, i.e. the actual implementation of these declarations in legislature and legal practices at regional levels in specific countries was largely influenced by activists’ actions).

Founded in Lausanne in 2004, the Arpitan Cultural Alliance (*Aliance Culturèla Arpitana*, hereafter ACA or the Alliance) includes representatives from three countries: Switzerland, Italy, and France. Currently most active in France, the association is an essentially linguistic and cultural association working on Arpitan's promotion in status, a goal it supposes can be achieved by promoting a unique name for the language ("Arpitan") and an orthographic standard (called Reference Orthography B, ORB). Thus the ACA borrows from the *Movement Arpitania* the terms "Arpitan" and "Arpitania," as well as part of its arguments, namely, the definition of the linguistic community via the symbol of Mont Blanc (as demonstrated below in this section). The Alliance's goals also appear to largely coincide with those of the *Movement Arpitania*. They include promoting the Arpitan language as a language of culture, and for this, developing a standard orthography, as already noted, and modern-day lexis (the Alliance publishes books and graphic novels in Arpitan). As one of the ACA activists summarised its activities to me:

lo problema l'e de evolué la lenva, e de l'évolué dedeun la realità di dzor de oui, pas dedeun la realità de cent ans fé. Voilà cen que l'è l'Aliance culturèla arpitana, l'è eun enstrumen que ballièn a – les arpitan, a cice qui predzon arpitan de evolué.

The problem is to develop the language and to develop it in the reality of today, not in the reality of one hundred years ago. This is what the Arpitan cultural alliance is all about, it is an instrument that we give – to the Arpitans, to those who speak Arpitan, in order to evolve.

The cardinal difference between the Alliance and its Aosta Valley predecessor lies in waiving any political content in the term "Arpitan" and, therefore, in Arpitanist activities. The ACA's discourse will be studied in details in Part II. For the moment, I will only draw on some "side activity" of ACA's members, which has political consequences.

The ACA's activists always claim that their movement is nothing but cultural and linguistic. Nevertheless, as linguistically-oriented as the Alliance could be, "Arpitania" is paradoxically imagined within its project as a nation, with all the proto-national, or proto-nationalistic, symbols, such as a flag and an anthem. Both are newly created. The flag represents *la rodzeta*, a symbol often found in the Alps as a rock drawing and therefore seen as particular to a millennia-old alpine culture. It appears on a red and white background: the colours of the House of Savoy. The *rodzeta* is surrounded by the European stars, thus inscribing the movement into the process of European integration and interregional cooperation, suggesting perhaps that regions and the EU can coexist, beyond

and without the nation-state. The flag thus brings together the pre-historic element and modernity, the ethnic and the civic (see Figure 14).



Figure 14. The Arpitan flag (2000s)

At the same time, the flag borrowed from Henriët's 1970s movement is sometimes used too (see Chapter 2), but now, as the geography of reference has expanded, the three stars are seen to represent Italy, France and Switzerland (instead of the Aosta Valley, Savoy and Valais).

Hobsbawm traces the appearance of flags and anthems back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century as part of the national movements that resulted in the appearance of nation-states:

...entirely new symbols and devices came into existence as part of national movements and states, such as the national anthem (of which the British in 1740 seems to be the earliest), the national flag (still largely a variation on the French revolutionary tricolour, evolved 1790-4), or the personification of the "nation" in symbol or image... (Hobsbawm 1983: 7)

A language, in order to be spoken, and even in order to be recognised (if one thinks about a politically and institutionally-oriented revitalisation approach), hardly needs a flag or an anthem. Political institutions, in the process of the official recognition of a language, might require a non-ambiguous name of that language or a writing system and a literary tradition, as it is indeed the case in France (as we will see in Part II Chapter 3). Yet they would not expect a language to have a flag or an anthem. Nation-states have these; multinational states have these too (e.g. if we think of states like Switzerland or the Russian Federation, where the flag refers to the state and its citizens, but not to any of their many languages); stateless nations have these too, especially if they aspire to become nation-states (if we think, for example, of Corsica or of Brittany, where the flag refers precisely to Brittany,



but neither to the Breton, nor to the Gallo languages). Languages do not have flags or anthems. There is not one single flag which could represent the French language (the one of France, Switzerland, Canada...?) or the English language (British, American, Australian...?)<sup>54</sup> In contrast, in the case of Arpitan, Arpitanists do not speak of the Arpitan of France, the Arpitan of Italy or the Arpitan of Switzerland, the flag is always the same for the whole language – or, more precisely, for the whole of Arpitania. The content of the Arpitan anthem, created in April 2012, is also eloquent: it refers to Arpitania and the Arpitans, not to the language:

Arpitania, Arpitania,		Arpitania, Arpitania,
Nos sens tuès des Arpitans, des Arpitans		We are all Arpitans, Arpitans
Arpitania, Arpitania,		Arpitania, Arpitania,
Tot u tôrn du Mont Blanc		All around Mont Blanc
<i>Himno Arpitan (Aliance Curturèla Arpitana, www.arpitania.eu)</i>		

Hobsbawm underlines the novelty and importance of flags, anthems and personifications of the “nation”: “The crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club” (*op. cit.*: 11). Similarly, what it actually means to be an Arpitan remains unclear, since no cultural, historic or other references are used in the anthem, or explicitly given elsewhere. The only reference that is actually used is the geographic one: “All around Mont Blanc,” which could eventually function as a symbolic one too, with a quasi-sacred mountain uniting the community.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> If we take an IT example, when one switches the keyboard settings on a computer, one can choose between the French settings of France, the French settings of Switzerland or the French settings of Canada, etc., and the little flag that will appear will then be French in the first case, Swiss in the second and Canadian in the third, whereas the language will always remain French.

<sup>55</sup> In recent history, the sacralisation of Mont Blanc as a geographic, cultural and ethnic centre, but also as a refuge space from the dangers of modernity, started, most probably, with the novel by Saint-Loup *La République du Mont Blanc* (“*The Republic of Mont Blanc*,” Saint-Loup 1982).

In the novel, as a response to an excessive immigration from the African countries seen as an African and Muslim “invasion,” and the financial imperialism of some petrol powers, a group of several hundred separatists from Savoy, Valais and the Aosta Valley are gathered by those from Chamonix under the slogan “*La Savoie aux Savoyards!*” (“Savoy for the Savoyards!” implying the ex-subjects of the *Duché de Savoie*).

Eventually, after committing a series of terrorist attacks, they escape to an altitude over 3,500 m (beyond the altimetric level of the surrounding states’ borders) where they create an independent, ethnically-homogenous

As far as anthems are concerned, it can be noted that the anthem of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, *Cé qu'è lainô*, composed around 1603<sup>56</sup> and relating the Escalade of 1602, is apparently the oldest in Europe (contrary to what Hobsbawn suggested, see quotation above) and it is written in Francoprovençal. It relates a failed attack on Geneva by the troops of the Duke of Savoy in 1602. The Savoyard defeat is celebrated annually in Geneva on December 11. These two characteristics, being the oldest and in Francoprovençal, could have served for it to be borrowed by other parts of “Arpitanian,” but this did not happen. Perhaps this is because the project of Arpitanian is all about constructing new realities (a new geographical representation of community, new names, a new orthography, a new flag, a new anthem); or, because Savoyards are inconveniently represented as “bad” in the Geneva anthem. In Figure 15, we can see a self-criticising parody of the Arpitan discourse by one of the Arpitanists, posted in the Arpitanist Facebook group *Arpitanian abada*.




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Republic of Mont Blanc. While in the valley the “end of Europe” is on its way, they struggle to survive in their new free state.

One part of the Mont Blanc massif has a particularly symbolic meaning: Mont Dolent, the peak where lies the border between the three states: France, Italy and Switzerland. It was for this reason that the Summits of Mont Dolent (*Sommets du Mont Dolent*) were organised by the MRS (Mouvement Région Savoie, the Savoy autonomist movement) and ALPE (the Autonomie-Liberté-Participation-Ecologie Movement from Valle d’Aosta) in 2010 and 2011. The second one had Francoprovençal as its major discussion topic (together with that of trans-border transport).

<sup>56</sup> <http://athena.unige.ch/athena/helvetia/cqlaino.html> (Accessed on 30/04/15)

Figure 15. Reinterpreting history: The Savoy dynasty as Arpitan's new mythological ancestors vs. the Savoy dynasty as the enemy in the past as celebrated in the Republic and Canton of Geneva

Lionel tells Sara and his other friends the whole truth about the Escalade battle of 1602

Sara: Tell us all the truth about the Escalade Battle of 1602

Lionel: Well the Savoyards were not such cretins... Those who climbed the ladders were all Spanish soldiers. There were no Savoyards there...

It must be underlined that this tendency of reinterpreting history does not actually exist in the ACA's discourse, which is probably why the author of the parody paints himself as a new Arpitan producing this new "truth." Nevertheless, he proposes here a logical development of Arpitanist ideas: making the Savoy dynasty into the mythological ancestors of the Arpitans could potentially create a conflict with the Genevan mythologised past in which the Savoyards are represented as enemies.

Working on language, but reproducing the ideology of nation-states in both the discourse and the creation of proto-national symbols, Arpitanists from the ACA prepared the ground for the emergence of a new political (separatist) Movement Arpitanian in 2013-2014.

### 3.2. 2013-2014: 'Arpitanian' reframed

The Arpitan *political* movement saw its second birth in December 2013, when Joseph Henriot put the idea of Arpitanian as a sovereign federal state back on the political agenda. 2013-2014 was a period marked by a number of referendums on independence throughout Europe, challenging a Europe of nation-states. There were those much anticipated, like in Scotland or in Catalonia, which both took place in autumn 2014, or unexpected, like the one in Crimea in March 2014, and those in Donetsk and Lugansk, which followed it, or the one in Veneto shortly afterwards. The last one was not strictly speaking a referendum, but an electronic plebiscite. In case of the others too, the similarity

of procedure concealed crucial differences in terms of the factors that brought them about and their legitimacy. However, the more legitimate ones served to legitimise others and make the idea of independence itself (relatively) socially acceptable. In this context<sup>57</sup>, in December 2013, a *Charter for the Arpitan Independence (Carta de l'Independence Arpitana/Carta dell'Indipendenza arpitana*, hereafter “the Charter”) was written and a new Movement for the Independence of Arpitania (*Movimento per l'Indipendenza dell'Arpitania*) created.

### 3.2.1. 'Arpitania' and the 'Arpitans' in 2013-2014

The discourse of the Charter refers to the same notions of the “Arpitan language,” “Arpitan people” and “Arpitania,” promoted by the ACA; besides, in its Arpitan version, the Charter is written using the supra-dialectal orthography promoted by the ACA, *ORB*, in a slightly altered version. The latter is ironically referred to by one of its authors in our conversation as *ORC*, thus inscribing this text in the logic of gradual improvement of the supradialectal orthography, created by Stich as *ORA – Orthographe de référence A* – and then further elaborated by him into *ORB, Orthographe de référence B*. The other languages of the Charter are Italian, French and German, i.e. the actual languages used by the majority of population in the region to which the Charter refers.

Yet the meaning of the terms “Arpitan” and “Arpitania” has changed, compared to the one in the ACA’s discourse, as well as to the one in Henriët’s own 1970s texts. Indeed, for the ACA, Arpitania is the territory where the Arpitan language is spoken, and the Arpitans are the inhabitants of this territory, i.e. either actual or potential speakers. The primary criterion for the definition is the linguistic one. For Henriët in the 1970s, it was also the linguistic criterion, but closely connected to that of social class. The Arpitanist claims were then based on Marxist ideology, setting local peasants and workers, who were the speakers of the local idioms, against the French- and Italian-speaking bourgeoisie. Hence, being Arpitan was speaking Arpitan and being altogether a representative of the local “oppressed class.” Nowadays, the society of the regions referred to as Arpitania has

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<sup>57</sup> The relevance of these contexts for the new independentist movements in the region referred to as Arpitania (be it the new Movement Arpitania or other emerging independentist movements) may be seen in the references to these referendums in their discourse, as well as in the personal connections that the advocates of independence from the region have with their colleagues, at least, in Catalonia and in Veneto (while those have their connections in Scotland and in both Russia and Ukraine, to give but some examples).

changed, both in terms of its social composition and its linguistic practices. Thus, on the one hand, the society of the VDA includes today a large number of migrants from other parts of Italy and, to a lesser extent, from abroad. On the other hand, *patois* is less used in everyday communication, and at the same time its promotion in status has crucially changed the social profiles of its speakers, in such a way that today it can be used by representatives of any social or ethnic group (the linguistic situation will be studied in detail in Part III). Therefore the meaning of the term “Arpitan” has also changed.

Henriet had already re-thought his constructions of “Arpitanìa” and the “Arpitans” in his 1996 book (*Noi Saraceni delle Alpi*, Henriet 1996). There he gives the following definitions of these terms:

Arpitanìa (from HARPE “sotto le rocce” [“under the rocks”] + TAN “abitante” [“inhabitant”]) – “l’insieme geo-antropologico delle valle alpine” (“a geo-anthropological ensemble of alpine valleys”) (Henriet 1996: 5)

Arpitans (*arpitani*) – “gli attuali abitanti delle Alpi che parlano varietà linguistiche indoeuropee: neolatine o germaniche” (“today’s inhabitants of the Alps who speak Indoeuropean linguistic varieties: Neolatin or German”).

Henriet explicitly specifies that instead of referring to the region around Mont Blanc, as had been the case in his earlier works, the term “Arpitanìa” now refers to all the Alps, whereas the part of the Alps around Mont Blanc is now called *Graia*. As for the “Arpitans,” as we can see in the quotation above, the term now goes beyond an either ethnic or linguistic definition: “Arpitans” are defined on merely geographical ground as the inhabitants of the Alps. Henriet also refers to them as “*le comunità montanare*” (“the mountain communities,” *op. cit.*: 7).

Elaborating further this new vision of Arpitanìa, the Charter distinguishes “la Granta Arpitanìa” (“Greater Arpitanìa”) vs. “la Hota Arpitanìa” (“High Arpitanìa”). It can be assumed, even though it is not put explicitly, that the first one corresponds to the Francoprovençal linguistic area. In contrast, the second one, “High Arpitanìa,” refers to the high mountain regions, i.e. to the part of “Greater Arpitanìa” around Mont Blanc, “which history has maintained more culturally unified and homogenous, and which from this moment we will simply call *Arpitanìa*” (“que l’histouere at mantenua culturelament ples unia et homoena et que dès ora nos apeleront simplament *Arpitanìa*”). It is argued in the

Charter that political activity should be restricted to that second region, at least, in the beginning. It appears that not only does the criterion of cultural homogeneity exclude a considerable part of the Francoprovençal area, but also it includes an area that is not Romance-speaking, namely, Oberllystal, “of German language and culture” (“de lengoua et de cultura germanica”).

There is no longer a discourse on Arpitan ethnicity or nationhood:

Lo Mouvement por l’Independence s’adrece a tos los *habitents de la societât arpitana*, a tos los *habitents de noutra Nacion*, sens distinccion de race, de lengoua, de religion, de provenyance geografica, d’apartenance politica ou de posicion economica et o les envite a aderar u projet independentisto.

Lo Mouvement por l’Independence est formâ per *totes les persones que vivont sur lo territouero arpitan ...*

The Movement for Independence is addressed to all the *inhabitants of the Arpitan society*, to all the *inhabitants of our Nation*, without the distinction of race, language, religion, geographical background, political belonging or economic position, and invites them to adhere to the independentist project.

The Movement for Independence is formed by *all those who live on the Arpitan territory ...*

The unusual expression “inhabitants of a Nation” assumes that the nation is constructed exclusively on geographical grounds, as is explicitly stated later. Besides, the use of a parallel syntactic construction (“to all the inhabitants of the Arpitan society, to all the inhabitants of our Nation”) suggests that “the Nation” is identical to “the society.” This “nation-society” is explicitly not based on any distinctions of either cultural (linguistic or religious), or political and economic nature.

In fact, the Charter is very pragmatic in the way it is open to the largest possible parts of the population, since it has a very pragmatic goal:

la necessitat de rejuendre majoritat sociala necessera por obtenir la possibilitat de lancier lo Referendom...

the necessity to gain the social majority, necessary in order to obtain the possibility of holding the Referendum...

Hence, everyone in the electorate is Arpitan. A similar argument can be found in one of the heated discussions, in which I participated in 2014, among Henriët (JH) and a *Valdôtain* secessionist (DL), one of the leaders of an independentist movement in the VDA in the 1990s. The cultural and somewhat ethicist position of the latter, close to Henriët's own views of the 1970s, is opposed to Henriët's new political and pragmatic vision of *Valdôtains* and Arpitans as all of those who have the right to vote:

JH : Qui son le valdotèn ? ... Le trenta meulla calabrotte que son inque ? ... Son tcheu le valdotèn ou pa ?

DL: Pe me na!

JH: E portan son inque! E l'an lo pouvoér decijionel e voton! E voton ! E alour son de valdoten ! ... ivrade le joué !

D: Pe me na!

JH: "Pe me na!" Ideologico! Valdotèn nel senso que son inque [beuche su la tabla], e que voton! E que l'an lo pouvoér decijionel co leur ... Ma svegliati, svegliati ... Fa aveitché la réalitoù come l'èt.

JH: Who are the *Valdôtains*? ... The thirty thousand Calabrese who are here? ... Are they all *Valdôtains* or not?

DL: For me they are not!

JH: And yet, they are here! And *they have the decision-making power and they vote! And they vote!* So they are *Valdôtain!* ... Open your eyes!

DL: For me they are not!

JH: "For me they are not!" An ideologue! [They are] *Valdôtains* in the sense that *they are here* [knocks on the table] *and they vote!* And that they too, they have the *decision-making power* ... Wake up, wake up! ... One should see the reality as it is.

The mention of Calabrese here questions an ethnic choice: the Calabrese form the most numerous migrant group in the VDA (hence the number indicated in JH's discourse).

He opposes his “realistic” view to the “ideological” and (in other parts of the conversation) “idealistic” view of his opponents. Those imply seeing the world as they wish it to be instead of seeing it as it is, i.e. substituting the new reality of a multiethnic, and corrupted, society with the image of a no longer existent mono-ethnic one, idealistically imagined as fair. Multiethnic, in its turn, implies multilingual. In another part of the same conversation, Henriët also suggests that an instrumental use of Francoprovençal in the elections campaign (as was done in the VDA in the 1998 elections by the independentist party of the VDA) would be a “schizophrenic” idea, one that could occur only to those who live in the world of their “illusions,” mixing up their dreams with reality, the reality being that today’s people in the VDA speak Italian<sup>58</sup>.

Another elaboration of the new meaning of being Arpitan can be found in a discussion among the same participants, together with FC, an Arpitan writer and activist:

JH : Tè pou itre arpitan efficace ou mouèn efficace.

D : Predzo arpitan, va pas mal ! Na, l’e pas eun atout?

F: Va pa bien.

D: Gnenca predzé arpitan, conta pocca?

JH: Ma oué, diyo pa que va mal, ma...

F: Te pou pa pa lo itre.

JH: Te pou pa pa lo itre.

D [de NB]: E llye pourré itre arpitana?

JH: Certo!

F: Certo!

JH: Se se étàbliya inque, pe prende la residensa inque.

D: Na, euna residensa!

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<sup>58</sup> About the same campaign, JH: “Mais moi aussi je voudrais aller sur la Lune! Mais je comprends tout de suite que c’est stupidé!” (“Me too, I would love to go to the Moon! But I realise at once that it’s stupid!”)



JH : Baste! Baste! Baste! Baste! Dedeun mon projé baste! [A NB] Tè tè pou adhèrì, être abadista. Abadista c'est un néologisme que nous avons élaboré, pour signifier indépendantiste. Ça dérive d'une expression savoyarde. Itre a l'abada, être déchaîné, libre. Abadiste. [A DL] Adonc tè, t'é pa euncor eun abadisto, t'é eun arpitan! ... arpitan perque restade inque, dedeun ceutta societù, e no nos adressèn a tcheu vosatre ... pe adhèrì a noutre projé endipendentiste. L'è d'euna finesse ensuperabla!

JH: You can be an efficient or a less efficient Arpitan.

D: I speak Arpitan, it's not bad! No, isn't it a strength?

F: It doesn't matter.

D: Even speaking Arpitan counts for little?

JH: Well yes, I'm not saying that it's bad but...

F: You cannot not be one [an Arpitan].

JH: You cannot not be one [an Arpitan].

DL [about NB]: And her, could she be Arpitan?

JH: Of course!

FC: Of course!

JH: If she moves here, to take residence here.

DL: No, a residence!

JH: Enough! Enough! Enough! Enough! In my project it's enough! [To NB] You can adhere, to be *abadista*. *Abadista* is a neologism that we have elaborated, to define an independentist. It derives from a Savoyard expression. *Itre a l'abada*, to be unbridled, free. [To DL] So you are not an *abadisto* yet, you are Arpitan. ... Arpitan because you live here, in this society, and we are addressing all of you ... to adhere to our independentist project. It is of an unequalled finesse!

Here the key-element about being an Arpitan is once again the residence, i.e. the right to vote and the decision-making power. Remarkably, speaking the language only

counts a little, if at all. Simultaneously, a distinction is made between “Arpitan,” which is an ascribed identity (“You cannot not be one” if you live in “Arpitanía”), and “abadist,” which refers to an individual’s political choice of being an independentist. The use of the word “abada” (and its derivatives “abadisto”/“abadista”) is a reminder, probably purposely, of the ACA’s slogan “Arpitanía abada” (also used as the name of the ACA’s Facebook group), thus creating an apparent continuity between the ACA’s activities and those of the new Movement Arpitanía.

### 3.2.2. Global and local

The Charter is addressed to the Arpitans of Italy and France, thus excluding those from Switzerland – the latter are mentioned as being already independent. Most probably, this change to Henriët’s previous project of an Arpitan confederation is due to an understanding that it is not realistic to imagine the Arpitans from Switzerland being willing to ask for independence for themselves. The Arpitan’s “enemy” is embodied in the two nation-states and more commonly in “the Great world and globalising Powers of Finance and Economy” (“*Grants Povers mundials et globalisent de la Finance et de l’Economia*”). The local needs and local security of the Alpine region are thus contrasted with the insecurity caused by globalisation. This is a typical motive in today’s discourse of endangerment (see e.g. Bichurina, Costa 2016, and Costa 2012 on modern Provençalist discourse). Switzerland remains the ideal model with its “true direct Democracy” (“*la veretabla Democracia directa*”) and “a local administration that is fair, sane and clear” (“*una administracion locala justa, sana et clyara*”). Thus a shift from a predominantly ethnic to a civic nationalism can be noticed.

The main objective of the Charter and of the Movement is clearly a political and not a cultural or linguistic one. In his interview Henriët explained to me:

JH: adon su lo documan, su la charta n’è spleucoù perque l’è necessió arreuvé a l’endépendanse. ... L’endépendanse l’è l’actualisachón de l’otonomi. Se devan bastave itre otonome ... voué lo dzor l’endépendentisme a tcheu le peuple d’Europa l’è euna бага necessia. L’endépendentisme européo.

So, in the document, in the Charter, I explained why it is necessary to come to independence ... Independence is the actualisation of autonomy. If before it was enough to be autonomous ... today independence is a necessary thing for all the people of Europe. The European independentism.

NB: C'est quoi votre but principal?

JH: *Nouvelle Europe! Restructuration de l'Europe* – sur la base de – des communautés, des peuples, ah ben c'est une vieille idée, mais de toute façon – des *peuples, des communautés, des sociétés, des groupements sociaux*, qui aient une certaine unité culturelle, linguistique, culturelle, voilà – sur l'exemple de la Suisse où l'on puisse pratiquer la *démocratie directe*, celle que l'on pratique en Suisse. Voilà, l'idée, c'est celle-là.

NB : What is your main objective?

JH: New Europe! Restructuring Europe – on the basis of – of communities, of peoples, oh this is an old idea, but anyway – of peoples, of communities, of societies, of social groups, which have a certain cultural unity, linguistic, cultural – following the example of Switzerland where one can practise direct democracy, the one that is practised in Switzerland. This is the idea.

It is noteworthy that a social unity that is seeking independence is not clearly determined (community/people/society/social group...)

### 3.2.3. The role of the Arpitan language

The role of the Arpitan language in the movement is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Arpitan is defined in the Charter through the language and the Charter is written in Arpitan. On the other hand, paradoxically, the place of the Arpitan language in the future Federation is uncertain:

JH: L'important l'è de travaillé pe l'endependensa et pa pe la cultura!<sup>59</sup> Lo but premiè l'è l'endependensa! Adon voilà la cultura, eh! Euna masturbachón mentala!... Tote ceutte bague, queunta lenva, lenva officiella, queun typo de età ...

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<sup>59</sup> The same statement was reiterated twice in our private conversations in 2016, as the basis for any actions. Thus working on the language without working on independence is seen as useless unless “*perque la consciensa fisse tranquilla*” (“for keeping one’s consciousness calm”).

son-poué de bague que decidon-poué cice i pouvouér quand sen-poué independen, quan veugnon-poué élu dou peuplo! Son-poué lor que decidon! ... L'e pa a no aya de fissé lo programma.

JH: The important thing is to work for independence and not for culture! The first goal is independence! And so, culture, oh! Mental masturbation! ... All these things, which language, the official language, which type of state ... will be the things that will be decided upon by those in power, once we are independent, by those who will be elected by the people! It will be up to them to decide! ... It is not up to us, now, to fix a programme.

The claims for the independence of “Arpitanian” are thus legitimised by the existence of the “Arpitan language,” yet the language might have no place in the future independent state. It might also have one, but under the condition that the existing *patois* be elaborated into a “modern language” (implying the elaboration in both form and status, if one refers to it in Haugen’s terms [Haugen 1966]):

JH : Bien probablement de toute façon ce seront – les langues de la fédération ce seront alors le français, bien sûr, parce que la Savoie est complètement francisée; l’italien, le Val d’Aoste est complètement italianisé; et puis si ces gens-là, ces messieurs-là qui défendent la – qui défendent les patois *seront à même de faire une langue moderne*, pour le moment ce sera certainement une des langues nationales. Avec l’allemand.

JH: Anyway, quite probably, the languages of the federation will be French, of course, because Savoy is completely French-speaking; Italian, since the Valle d’Aosta is completely Italian-speaking; and then if these people here, these gentlemen who defend the – who defend the patois will be able to create a modern language, then it will certainly become one of the national languages. Together with German.

Ultimately, the necessity of making the claims appealing to as many people as possible is understandable, as long as the goal is to collect voices for and at the eventual referendum. Yet why the referendum could be legitimised in this new vision of Arpitanian remains unclear:

JH: La charte de l’indépendance est une chose très – très efficace, je crois, très ouverte, on prend pas de position ethnique. D’ailleurs, l’ethnie arpitanne, francoprovençale, ici on parlait de l’ethnie valdôtaine, ça n’existe pas.

NB: Mais dans ce cas-là le mouvement est arpitan dans quel sens? Parce que c'est pas la langue, c'est pas l'ethnie-

JH: Autour du Mont Blanc y a encore – et on le dit dans la charte – il y a des gens, des habitants qui ont une certaine – unité culturelle. On fait la bataille des vaches, on a le triangle de l'amitié, on se considère cousins, donc voilà y a encore – tout étant de l'autre côté complètement francisés, et nous italianisés – il y a quand même cette unité culturelle qui n'est pas due à la langue, mais à d'autres facteurs, mémoire sociale, mémoire historique, je ne sais pas, voilà. Je crois que c'est une vision de la réalité très vraie, c'est pas de l'idéologie.

JH: The charter of independence is very – very effective, I think, it's very open, it doesn't take an ethnic position. Besides, the Arpitan ethnos, the Francoprovençal one, here they spoke about the *Valdôtain* one, it does not exist.

NB: But in this case, in what sense is the movement Arpitan? Because it is not about language, it is not about ethnicity-

JH: Around Mont Blanc there still are – and we say it in the Charter – there are people, who have some – cultural unity. We organise cow battles, we have the triangle of friendship, we consider ourselves cousins, so there are still – despite being completely Francicised on the other side and Italianised as far as we are concerned – there is still this cultural unity which is not due to the language, but to other factors, [such as] a social memory, a historical memory, I don't know. I think it is a very true vision of reality, it is not an ideology.

Hence, the Charter refers to the “International right of self-determination” (“lo Drouet Enternacional d'Otodeterminacion”), but a contradiction can be noticed. According to modern dominant political ideologies, peoples, i.e. ethno-linguistic groups, have this right; regions do not, and sharing cow battle experiences or an unspecified collective memory could hardly be seen as legitimate grounds for claiming this right, as important as they could be for the local culture (or cultures).

### 3.3 From language to nation: two Arpitan movements in the 2010s

The existence of (at least) two movements using the name of “Arpitan” and “Arpitania,” the Arpitan Cultural Alliance and the reframed Movement Arpitania, may provoke confusion. This becomes the growing concern for the ACA, which claims even more arduously than ever the total absence of any political content in its agenda, explaining that Henriët “represents only himself” (personal communication). The explanations though are hardly convincing, since Henriët is not some badly informed Internet user who would not have understood the “real” meaning of the term “Arpitan” that the ACA promotes and started misusing it: he is actually the author of the term. To put it plainly, what happened is that in the early 2000s young enthusiasts of language revitalisation borrowed a word dating back to the 1970s, which seemed to them a good promotion tool. They either preferred not to know, or to forget<sup>60</sup> what the name had initially been used for, insisting on its inner form and on the meaning directly linked to it: the root “Arp-,” its etymological link to the Alps and hence the definition of the language as the language of the Alps – certainly more attractive and more “proud” than the definition of it as Franco-Provençal, which sounds like a mixture of two other languages. The 1970s were far away, the charismatic leader who had coined the term had retired to his house in the middle of the mountains, shepherding his 60 goats in harmony with nature and disconnected from the world of politics, and the term seemed therefore available for any use. The founders of the ACA took the name, promoted it using the latest information technologies, made it known and accepted, if not by dialectologists working on Francoprovençal, at least by linguists working on other regional languages (Occitan, Catalan etc.) and especially by the general public, thus contributing to the promotion of the status of the language. They also elaborated a standard orthography, which any standard language, or even any language worth of being considered as such, must have according to

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<sup>60</sup> Several members of the new generation of Arpitan advocates underline the use of the word “Harpitan” with “H” in Henriët’s early writings, in contrast to their own use of the word “Arpitan” without an “H,” in order to distance themselves from Henriët’s political ideology. They claim that their use of the term without an “H” proves that the word had been heard by them and not read in Henriët’s writings. Yet Henriët himself started omitting the H as early as in the mid-70s. More importantly, as for an oral transmission of the term, initially heard from some *Valdôtains*, “ordinary” people in the VDA refer to the local idiom as “patois”; the term “Arpitan” is used in the VDA exclusively by separatists, and only by some of those (those oriented towards trans-border cooperation, rather than towards the independence of the VDA only). Hence, speaking about the local language with local separatists at a separatist meeting can hardly be seen as a neutral occasion (while personal contacts in the VDA should have made clear to the new Arpitanists from the ACA the exclusive use of the term “Arpitan” by some very particular groups). Therefore, even though Henriët’s books and his political activity may have indeed been initially unknown to the young Arpitanists, it is about willingly preferring not to know, and choosing the most convenient meaning of the word.

today's dominant language ideologies. However, borrowing a term as if it were neutral is an awkward act. As we know from Saussure, signs have their signifier and signified. The latter cannot be restricted to the inner form of the word, and even less so if the term was coined specifically for political purposes.<sup>61</sup> Yet Arpitanists from the ACA went even further in their inventions. They partly adopted, partly elaborated the proto-national (or proto-nationalistic) symbols that necessarily accompany nations in search of becoming nation-states: a map with clearly defined borders of Arpitania, a flag and an anthem (the elaboration of the symbol of Mont Blanc might be also added to the list). This activity, motivated as it was by linguistic and more largely cultural concerns, thus prepared fertile ground for a new political movement. Hence Henriët, who had thought that the introduction of the term of "Arpitan" had failed, together with the struggle it had been used for, realised that it had been given a second chance and that this was the moment to be seized.

Indeed, in the interviews that Henriët gave me at the time of the creation of his new movement, replying to my questions as to why, after all these years, he was returning with a new political movement, he mentioned three main arguments. The first argument was the recognition that the word "Arpitan" had gained thanks to the ACA's activities:

Alors le mot Arpitania a survécu merci à [pointing at Florent Corradin, an Arpitan writer, member of both movements]. Moi je croyais qu'il avait disparu et lui [FC] par rapport à la langue lui il n'a fait que le combat linguistique, n'est-ce pas? Culturel, linguistique, il a compris la nécessité d'arriver à cette unification, langue unifiée, supradialectale, et tout ça. ... Et maintenant il est un terme académique, reconnu. ... Moi j'étais dans les bois jusqu'à il y a peu de temps. Le mérite c'est à eux, c'est à lui [pointing at Florent Corradin].

So the word "Arpitania" has survived thanks to [pointing at Florent Corradin, an Arpitan writer, member of both movements]. I thought it had disappeared, and him [FC], as far as language is concerned, he did nothing but linguistic combat, isn't that so? A cultural, a linguistic one; he realised the necessity of reaching this unification, a unified, supradialectal language, all this. [...]

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<sup>61</sup> Suppose someone created a movement in Russia aimed at the development of civil society, indeed rather underdeveloped today, and advocated the creation of councils of representatives of civil society. This hypothetical someone would then call the movement "soviet" because the word *soviet* actually means "council"; his opponents or just curious public would suggest that the movement is socialist or communist, and he would get irritated and ask whether they do not know the meaning of the word. The same sort of example could be given with a hypothetical "fascist" movement: this is not to say, of course, that the Arpitan movement has anything to do with either of those, but to remind that naming is a powerful act and arguing that the name has only the meaning inherent to its inner form can hardly be convincing.

And now it is a scholarly term, it is recognised. ... I was in the forest until very recently. The merit is theirs [the ACA's], it's his [FC].

His second argument was that, in order for such a cultural and linguistic project to succeed, like that of the ACA, it needs to be carried out by those who have a political, decision-making power:

Et moi j'insistais toujours en leur disant [to the ACA] toujours, à lui [FC], à ses amis, que le projet langue arpitan s'accomplira uniquement si on aura le pouvoir – un pouvoir décisionnel – donc d'imposer la langue. Sans ça, je crois que jamais ne triomphera l'idée de la langue unifiée. Alors voilà petit à petit on est arrivé maintenant à fonder un mouvement politique indépendantiste.

And I would always insist, telling them [the ACA], him [FC] and his friends that the project of the Arpitan language will only succeed if we have the power – the decision-making power – that of imposing the language. Without it, I think the idea of a unified language will never triumph. And thus gradually we came up with the political independentist movement.

Finally, a favourable external factor was the weakness of the states:

Le projet est le même qu'il y a quarante ans – mais cette fois je crois qu'on part pour de bon parce que les Etats dont on fait partie sont en train de désintégrer, ça ne peut pas fonctionner comme – votre Fédération Russe.

The project is the same as 40 years ago – but this time I think it will succeed, because the states to which we belong are disintegrating, it cannot function like – your Russian Federation.

Thus, for him, as European nation-states, with their economic problems, become weaker, regional (or “national”) movements within these states can gain power.

With Henriët's return to the world of politics, his books started circulating again, thus creating the appearance of continuity between the movement of the 1970s and that of the 2010s. At the same time, references to the ACA and more specifically the use of the supra-dialectal orthography it has been promoting, allow him to inscribe the new movement in continuity with the new Arpitanist discourse. Indeed, the Charter for Independence uses the same names (Arpitan, the Arpitans, Arpitania) and (nearly) the same orthography as the ACA does. And as in the case of the orthography (a slight



evolution of ORB), in the same manner the actual content of the movement's programme may seem but an evolution of the ACA's ideas (at least, in order for those who are against the ideas to be against the ACA's activity too). Eventually it turns out to be precisely something Arpitanists from the ACA would always be against – a clearly and essentially political movement – yet on the surface it is inscribed in the continuity of the evolution of Arpitanist ideas from the 1970s (Henriet) through the 2000s (ACA) up to the 2010s (Henriet anew).

In this process, the name “Arpitan” becomes quasi-sacred. This can be illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview:

JH [de DL] : Le mot «arpitan», alors il le place n'importe où !

DL: Mais je le diffuse !

JH: Non!

DL: L'employo pa en négativo.

JH: *Non nominare il nome di Dio invano, c'est un – è un comandamento de la chiesa.*

DL: L'Arpitanìa l'è pa eun Dieu!

JH: Comunque ... quindi sei già *peccatore*.

JH [about DL]: He puts the word “Arpitan” anywhere!

DL: But I promote it!

JH: No!

DL: I don't use it in a negative sense.

JH: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, it's a commandment of the Church.*

DL: Arpitanìa is not a God!

JH: Anyway ... so you are already a *sinner*.

This part of the conversation is largely a joke (all the more so, as Henriët is known not to be Christian), yet even as a joke it is eloquent.<sup>62</sup>

Independence is seen as a sort of magical solution to all the problems. At the same time, why it would be such a remedy remains unclear. An argument would be to say that in today's Italy the VDA is by far the smallest region, representing only around 2% of the national population (128,298 inhabitants<sup>63</sup>, out of 60,808,000 residents in Italy on January 1, 2015<sup>64</sup>), and therefore the impact the *Valdôtains'* opinion can have on the decision-making process at the national level while the VDA remains part of Italy is very faint. Yet most issues mentioned by the advocates of independence concern deeper problems that cannot be legislated for. According to Henriët, for instance, the main benefit as a result of independence is social solidarity: “une solidarité sociale, seulement dans cette situation on peut avoir des conditions nécessaires pour mieux vivre” (“social solidarity, only in this situation can we have the necessary conditions for better living,” interview 7-02-2014). Yet one would imagine that social solidarity is rather a condition necessary for independence to take place, as long as the latter is seen as the result of a referendum, and not as a consequence brought about by the latter. Other advocates of independence mention, for instance, the problems of corruption. However, those inhabitants of the VDA who voted before for those that they knew to be corrupt would most probably continue doing so after eventual independence as well, because it corresponds to their representations of an acceptable social norm. How independence could be instrumental in changing these representations remains unclear. Thus, what is argued is the legitimacy of the right for independence and mechanisms to achieve it, whereas the reason why independence would be the best solution to current problems (and what exactly the current problems are) remains in the realm of presupposition and is never argued explicitly. Perhaps, independence seems such a magical solution because of the spread of independence movements around the world, when movements that are actually crucially different in motivations and goals are made to seem alike (by both their advocates and journalists covering major cases).

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<sup>62</sup> Note, furthermore, that the use of religious vocabulary is accompanied by switching to Italian.

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default\\_i.aspx](http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default_i.aspx)

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.istat.it/en/archive/149007> (Accessed on 01/05/2015)

## Discussion

The main trends of each period, which we have seen in this chapter, can be represented in the following table (see Table 3):

Table 3. From a “linguistic type” to a “language” and a “nation”

<i>When?</i>	<b>1873</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2014</b>
<i>Where?</i>	<b>Italy</b> after unification	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Switzerland, France, Italy</b>	<b>Italy, France</b> (Switzerland)
<i>Who?</i>	G. I. Ascoli	J. Henriet	ACA (Aliance Culturèla Arpitana)	(J. Henriet)
<i>What?</i>	Francoprovençal linguistic type  ( <i>tipo idiomático franco- provenzale</i> )	<b>The Arpitan language</b>  ( <i>la lingua arpitana / la langue arpitanne</i> )		
<i>Why?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a distinction: <b>dialects of Italy vs. the Italian language;</b></li> <li>• Idea of a <b>dialect continuum</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Independence of Arpitan</b> based on ethno-linguistic criteria (the “one language – one nation” model)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Revitalisation of the Arpitan language;</b></li> <li>• Promotion of its status is seen as a crucial condition</li> </ul>	<p><b>Independence of Arpitan</b> legitimised by linguistic and cultural particularities and serving mostly civic goals</p>

It was highlighted in Part I how Ascoli’s interest was mainly a scholarly one, of identifying “linguistic types” and creating a complex study of language (“glottology”), trying to apply the methodological approaches of natural sciences to the studies of language. While explicitly referring to the political interests of his opponents, be they Italian (Manzoni and his disciples) or French (Meyer), he positioned himself as a

dialectologist dealing with linguistic studies, not with national interests. However, his studies appear at a very particular historical (socio-political) moment, i.e. in Italy that of the creation of a nation-state and in France that of a nation-state in a post-war crisis. While Ascoli made a distinction between a “language” and “dialects,” and “linguistic types” were for him phenomena all different from a “language,” his concept of a “Francoprovençal” linguistic type was somehow transformed by his readers into that of a “Francoprovençal language” that would exist with its clear-cut boundaries (contrary to Ascoli’s idea of a dialect continuum) – which turned out to be unacceptable in both France and Italy: in France for the central power, and in Italy, on the contrary, for the regional autonomist elites.

As far as Francoprovençal speakers themselves are concerned, they learnt about that notion only a century later, in the 1970s. The linguistic unity then brought about the idea of a unity of a nation, colonised and to be liberated. Later, in the 2000s-2010s these theories were reinterpreted, giving birth to two distinct but homonymous (Arpitan) movements: one essentially linguistic and cultural, another one essentially political and civic. Both are based upon an assumption that shared linguistic features would create a unique community; and that this unique community should therefore have a unique policy: be it limited to a language policy (in the first case), or to any policy at all (in the second case), implying possessing a sovereign power. The only problem for both is the name of the language, since the scholarly name of “Francoprovençal” is seen as not convincing enough for an idiom to be considered as a “true language” and a legitimate ground for subsequent claims (hence, both use the name “Arpitan”). The issue of naming appears indeed to be crucial, as will be analysed in the next part of this paper.

## **Part II. Concurring models of linguistic, socio-political and cultural deviations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Francoprovençal/Arpitan/Savoyard language and identity**

What does a “patois” or a “dialect” need to become a “language” today, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In the modern discourse of language activists several main arguments are put forward to substantiate a claim of the idiom being a “language” in its own right. At the same time, it is assumed that without these conditions being jointly fulfilled, no language can exist. There are five conditions:

- 1) the idiom should have a distinctly defined geographic area. Note that properly linguistic criteria that would allow the limits of such an area to be defined are only rarely mentioned explicitly; it mostly happens when the other following arguments are not sufficiently convincing;
- 2) the idiom should have a proper name;
- 3) the idiom should have an orthographical system of its own;

Besides this,

- 4) the idiom should have a literary tradition; and
- 5) the idiom should have a particular history, preferably coinciding with that of a political entity (especially a sovereign state).

The first three criteria prove to be highly debatable, while the last two ones, on the contrary, do not raise any controversies. Therefore, in this section, debates concerning each of the three main arguments (or groups of arguments) are examined each in turn.<sup>65</sup>

### **Chaper 1. Concurring geographic delimitations: ‘wide’ vs. ‘narrow’ models of language and community**

In both language activists’ and linguists’ discourse, the first step to take in defining a separate language is to define its geographical boundaries. There are two reasons why such geographical delimitation turns out to be crucial. On the one hand,

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<sup>65</sup> On literary history see Tuailon (2001); Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming (Chapter 1) with a focus on Savoy. On the linguistic history of the VDA see Bauer (1999, 2008); on that of the Savoy see Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming (Chapter 1).

geography itself becomes an argument in favour of distinguishing the idiom as a language in its own right: whatever such a territory of the “language” may be, it is always being contrasted with the traditional image of a *patois* represented as a local vernacular only used in a specific village and unintelligible outside it. On the other hand, the process implies tracing boundaries in the linguistic continuum and in the sociopolitical world.

Two competing models of language and linguistic community construction can be distinguished nowadays. Let us conveniently label them the “narrow” and the “wide” models (as proposed in Bichurina 2011, 2012, 2013), or micro- and macro-models:

– **The “narrow” (micro) model** is that of a *regional* linguistic community. The names of the idioms correspond here to the historical names of the territories: hence, the “Savoyard language” in Savoy is the most prominent example (compare with the concept of the “Provençal language” in Provence, or the “Niçard language” seen as separate from Provençal, the “Gascon language,” the “Béarnaise language,” the “Limousin language,” etc. within the linguistic group of *Oc*). In the Aosta Valley the idiom is sometimes referred to as *Valdôtain* (*le valdôtain*, *lo valdoten*), however it is most generally perceived as a group of *patois*, rather than the “*Valdôtain* language” in its own right. On the other territories local names would also traditionally be used (*le bressan* in Bresse, *le vaudois* in Vaud, *le gruérien* in Gruyère, etc.), yet also without claiming a status of a “language.” Nevertheless, what is common to all those ideologies is their apprehension of the “wide” model.

– **The “wide” (macro) model** is that of an extended *trans-border* community where regional linguistic varieties (sometimes distinguished as separate languages in the “narrow” model) are represented as so many varieties of a major language, hence “Francoprovençal” or “Arpitan” (compare with “Occitan”).<sup>66</sup>

At a deeper level, the opposition is based on the conflict between two approaches to the definition of language borders: “subjective” (for the “narrow model”) and “objective” (for the “wide model”). Both approaches have been competing with each other within European philosophy and, later on, the linguistic tradition ever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Sériot 1997: 188 on the archetypal opposition of Ernest Renan’s (subjective) approach to David Friedrich Strauss’s (objective) one concerning the status of Alsace after the Franco-

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<sup>66</sup> Note that these “languages” might cover a number of states, but normally, within France, not a number of regions. Thus in the context of the “wide model” Occitan is the only “regional language” in France whose territory extends to several administrative regions. On the contrary, outside France the Francoprovençal area covers various cantons in Switzerland and various regions in Italy.

Prussian War of 1870). The “objective,” or positivist, model presumes it possible to determine language borders based on “linguistic facts” or “forms”: in other words, languages are held to be objects of reality that can be recognised according to a set of scientific criteria. This approach does not take into account the opinions of language speakers, as it is assumed that languages exist independently of the opinion their speakers might have on them, while the speakers are not sufficiently competent in linguistics to be able to determine language borders. In other words, the language only exists because isogloss maps composed by dialectologists confirm its existence (the fact that choosing which isogloss or isogloss cluster is pertinent enough to separate two languages is always an arbitrary procedure is not taken into consideration). According to the rival “subjective approach,” language borders are defined according to the representations of its speakers: in this type of discourse, the “narrow model” that corresponds to the “authentic languages” and the affective preferences of the population is contrasted with the “wide model” along with the artificial, utopian political community, alien to the speakers, which it promotes. In other words, the language exists because such is the opinion of those who live in a given territory.

In the Francoprovençal context the opposition of the two models has never been explicitly discussed until now by either scholars or language activists, even though its pertinence may be clearly seen in my interviews. However, a conflict of the two models, similar in many ways to this one, can be found in another context, the Occitan one, where the argument has been much more explicit (for a comparison of the Occitan and Francoprovençal discourse see also Bichurina 2013).

The “narrow,” Provençalist stance is based on the research by the sociolinguist Philippe Blanchet. In his opinion (Blanchet 2004: 32), categorisation of linguistic varieties and separation of individual languages should not be founded on properly linguistic criteria (typological similarity, mutual intelligibility) but on sociopolitical and/or ethno-cultural criteria. Thus, it is proposed that Arabic is “more of” a single language although it cannot be considered as such from the point of view of mutual intelligibility: the Maghreb Arab would not be understood in the Middle East. Vice versa, in some cases, typologically close and mutually intelligible languages may however be so many distinct languages. Blanchet cites some classical examples, e.g. those of Norwegian vs. Swedish or Luxembourgish vs. German, along with the more controversial cases of Valencian vs. Catalan and Provençal vs. Occitan. According to him, these idioms “work as separate languages,” meaning that

they are “socially perceived and practically used, spontaneously and within the institutional context,” as separate ones (this statement is presumed to be axiomatic). In Blanchet’s opinion, the issue of distinguishing a separate language is an ethical one: it is a problem that ought to be correctly solved “not in a purely intellectual dimension (*creating a clone is an intellectual achievement*), but in that of human, i.e. social, political, cultural, etc., goals (*creating a clone is reprehensible*)” (*Ibid.*) Therefore, the idea of an “Occitan language” turns out to be reprehensible despite the evident typological affinity between the idioms of the *Oc* group. Division into separate languages is considered to be ethically acceptable if it complies with the speakers’ notions:

Il serait pour le moins absurde que les langues ne soient que des artefacts inventés par les linguistes ... sur la base de données produites par eux-mêmes! ... Quand on dit, par exemple, que le valencien est politiquement une langue distincte du catalan mais scientifiquement une sous-variété du catalan, je m’inquiète sur l’éthique, et même sur la méthode, d’une science incapable d’intégrer les paramètres sociaux et des pratiques démocratiques pour analyser des phénomènes sociaux. (Blanchet 2004: 35)

It would be absurd, to say the least, if languages were but artefacts invented by linguists ... based on the data produced by themselves! ... For instance, when Valencian is said to be *politically* a separate language, but *scientifically* a sub-variety of Catalan, I feel uneasy about the ethics, indeed the method of a science that is unable to introduce social parameters and democratic practices into its analysis of social phenomena.

The motive of “double colonisation,” first by the French, then by the Occitanists, is recurrent in the discourse of my informants supporting the “narrow model,” in the Provençal context, expressed roughly as follows: “As if it weren’t enough to have been colonised by the French, now we are being colonised by the Occitanists.”

Simultaneously, the sociolinguist J. Costa notes:

Pour le mouvement occitaniste, c’est la langue qui fonde le territoire. Pour le mouvement provençalo-circonscrit, c’est le territoire, la région actuelle, qui fonde la langue... (Costa 2012)

For the Occitanist movement, it is the language that founds the territory. For the movement circumscribed in Provence (*provençalo-circonscrit*), it is the territory, the present-day region that founds the language...



Indeed, this observation can be extrapolated to the Francoprovençal territory. Within the “narrow” or “subjective” model, the region is primordial with respect to the language: the “Provençal language” exists because Provence exists, and because some (albeit quite indefinite) Provençal people living there speak the local – therefore, Provençal – language. In the same way, the “Savoyard language” exists because so does Savoy (although divided into two *départements*). Contrary to this vision, the “wide” or “objective” model uses a set of “linguistic facts” to define the language: “Occitania” exists because the “Occitan language” exists; “Arpitanian” exists because so does the “Arpitan language.”

Advocates of the “wide” (Francoprovençal/Arpitan) model emphasise the trans-border dimension of the linguistic unity and accuse their opponents of “localism” that, taken in its institutional aspect, can be an obstacle to the recognition of the language. In their turn, the partisans of the “narrow” model contrast the “natural” languages of historical provinces with the “artificial” languages of wider communities linked to political claims, which threaten to kill the “natural” languages, should the “wide model” succeed.

The “wide” model uses the symbolic function of geographical features. In the Arpitanist discourse, the image of Mont Blanc plays an important part (as it has done ever since Henriot’s works, as we have seen in Part I): on the one hand, Mont Blanc is used to refer to the peculiar Arpitan lifestyle as a highland one (that of the *Arpians*, the mountain shepherds); on the other hand, as an image of a quasi-sacred mountain to symbolise the Arpitan identity.<sup>67</sup>

If in the Occitan context this is an open conflict, with both parties publishing manifestoes and signing petitions accusing each other, in the Francoprovençal context, on the contrary, the same conflict is much hidden. Nevertheless this does not make it any less acute.

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<sup>67</sup> The Occitanists also refer to mountains, although the mountains play a somewhat different part in their discourse: following Frédéric Mistral, they describe the area of *Oc* as the space extending “from the Alps to the Pyrenees,” and the reference to these mountain chains, fairly remote from each other, mostly aims to vividly illustrate the extensive territory in which the language is used.

### 1.1. The ‘Francoprovençal language’: the myth of isoglosses

To prove that Francoprovençal or Arpitan (the “wide model”) is a separate language, different from both the *Oc* and *Oïl* languages, a method is used that, following Ascoli’s lead, is called the “particular combination” method (*particular combinazione*). Most of today’s linguistic papers aimed at the general public (such as Martin 2005; Bert et al. 2009) only cite two distinguishing features of the Francoprovençal language. To demonstrate the difference from the language(s) of *Oc*, they use the criterion suggested by Ascoli, emphasising that the evolution of the Latin *A* (both stressed and unstressed) into *i* or *é* after a palatalised consonant resulted in a coexistence of two forms of feminine nouns and two ending patterns for first group verbs. For instance:

Feminine nouns:

femina > [‘fɛna], but filia > [‘fili] (Tuailon 2007: 65).

1st group verbs:

*Fr* porter – *FP* [pu’rta]; *Fr* manger – *FP* [mɛ’ðije] (Tuailon 2007: 65).<sup>68</sup>

The border with French (varieties of *Oïl*) is determined based on a new criterion: the preservation of the unstressed ending vowels ([a], [i], [e], [o], and [ō] – actual realisation varies depending on the geographical region) and, therefore, of the lexical stress, in Francoprovençal (similarly to Occitan). As for this second characteristic of the idiom distinguished today, the scholarly literature notes that in French and other *Oïl* varieties, unstressed final vowels disappeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and even before that, from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, they were all limited to one single realisation ([ə]) (Tuailon 2007a: 15-17):

La difference est donc grande entre oïl et francoprovençal; elle porte sur un trait phonétique fondamental, la place de l’accent de mot. (*op. cit.*: 17)

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<sup>68</sup> The same remark in Stich 1998: *Fr* parler – *FP* parlar; *Fr* laisser (*Old French* laissier) – *FP* lèssiér (Stich 1998: 30)

Therefore, the difference between the language of *Oïl* and Francoprovençal is great; it concerns a fundamental phonetic feature, the location of the stress in a word.

[Ce trait] interdit de dire que le francoprovençal appartient à la langue d’oïl, sinon à la langue de l’époque carolingienne. (*op. cit.*: 17)

[This feature] does not allow it to be said that Francoprovençal is a language of Oïl unless it is to one of the Carolingian age.

The fundamental significance of this feature is due to the fact that in Francoprovençal, a change of stress can alter the meaning of the word (see *op. cit.*: 18). It is this linguistic discourse that is reproduced by Francoprovençal and Arpitan activists (the “wide” model). Note that the recurrent reference to the French and Occitan languages is mostly imposed by the name of “Francoprovençal”: the proof of linguistic autonomy is built on the negation of the idiom being either French or Provençal (Occitan) through diachronic phonological and grammatical analysis.

In academic works, scholars use one more characteristic feature of Francoprovençal seen as crucial to delimit it from the language(s) of *Oc*: the spontaneous diphthongisation of the stressed vowel in open syllables. Tuailon notes that it is also typical for the languages of *Oïl* as well as for all Italo-Romance languages (including the Piedmontese language neighbouring Francoprovençal) but is not to be found in the language(s) of *Oc* (see Table 4).

Table 4. The spontaneous diphthongisation of the stressed vowel in open syllables (according to Tuailon 2007a: 18)<sup>69</sup>

Latin	<i>Oc</i> <sup>70</sup>	Italian	French	Francoprovençal
PĒDEM [ˈpɛde]	Pe (pè) [pɛ]	Piede [ˈpjɛde]	Pied [pje]	[pja], [pi]
CŌR [kɔr]	Cor (còr) [kɔr]	Cuore [ˈkwɔre]	Cœur [kœʁ]	[kø], [kwer]
TĒ [te]	Te [te]	Te [ˈte]	Toi [twa]	[tej]
FLŌREM [flore]	Flor [flur]	Fiore [ˈfjore]	fleur [flœʁ]	[flur]

The lack of diphthongisation in the language of *Oc* is explained by the fact that the Latinisation of Southern Gaul took place before the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD; later on, Southern Gaul

<sup>69</sup> The pronunciation for Occitan, Italian and French is mine (added to the words provided by Tuailon).

<sup>70</sup> For Occitan, after the form provided by Tuailon, in brackets I add the spelling in the “classic” orthography (if different).

was out of contact with the development of colloquial Latin. The rest of Gaul, starting from Lugdunum (future Lyon) and farther north, was not Latinised until much later, hence with a different form of Latin (*op.cit.*: 19). The history of Gaul’s Latinisation (provided in Tuailon 2007a: 21) can be summarised as follows (see Table 5):

Table 5. The linguistic history: language of *Oc* vs. language of *Oïl* & Francoprovençal (according to Tuailon 2007a)

<b>125 BC:</b> The conquest of the South. Latinisation with Republican-period Latin.	
<b>58 to 50 BC:</b> Caesar. Emergence of veteran colonies.	<b>58 to 50 BC:</b> Urban Latinisation with Imperial-period Latin.
	<b>313 AD:</b> Rural Latinisation with Christian Latin.
<b>500 AD</b> (Clovis) and <b>800 AD</b> (Charlemagne): weak German influence.	<b>500 AD</b> (Clovis) and <b>800 AD</b> (Charlemagne): strong German influence.
► Linguistic result: language(s) of <i>Oc</i>	► Linguistic result: language(s) of <i>Oïl</i> and Francoprovençal

Based on this historical analysis, Tuailon concludes that Francoprovençal cannot be ascribed to the *Oc* language group because it neither shares the linguistic history of the rest of the *Oc* area, nor descends from the same form of Latin (*op. cit.*: 19-20). Tuailon gives therefore the following definition of Francoprovençal:

*Le francoprovençal existe et son existence se fonde sur la réalité des faits qui, si on les analyse correctement, permettent de mieux comprendre comment s’est constitué l’ensemble gallo-romain. Le francoprovençal est un produit de la latinisation de la Gaule non méridionale qui, en refusant les innovations linguistiques<sup>71</sup> de l’époque carolingienne, s’est détaché du domaine d’oïl.* (Ibid.: 20, original italics)

*Francoprovençal exists and its existence is based on the reality of facts that, if analysed correctly, allow a better understanding of how the Gallo-romance group is formed. Francoprovençal is a*

<sup>71</sup> As for the reason why, Lodge (1993) demonstrates how the difference in the extent of linguistic change in the north and in the east of what later became France (*Oïl* vs. Francoprovençal) was linked to the difference in the social structure there: namely the persistence of the Roman structures and dense social networks in the Francoprovençal area, together with its maintaining regular contacts with the conservative south, and a less important Germanic migration to these parts than to the north, were the factors that prevented this area from the linguistic change that happened in the north.

*product of the Latinisation of non-Southern Gaul, detached from the domain of Oïl by rejecting the linguistic innovations of the Carolingian period.*

The definition is thus based upon the data of diachronic linguistics.

Scholarly literature also describes a number of other features that allow borders to be drawn with the languages of *Oc* and of *Oïl* (the long vs. short stressed-syllable vowel opposition in Francoprovençal unlike in modern French; the dropping of intervocalic dentals and guttural consonants, unlike in Occitan<sup>72</sup>, etc.) Yet, in contrast to the two above-mentioned “main” differences, other particularities are never found in activist discourse (apparently because they complicate the system of “one difference from French, another one from Occitan”). Activists in France regularly use the dialectological information on the two morpho-phonological features represented as the main ones. For instance, one of the Arpitanists, answering as to why Arpitan constitutes a language in its own right, refers to precisely those linguistic differences:

On explique les différences phonétiques, avec les terminaisons féminines, la palatalisation, certaines locutions qui sont propres.

We explain the phonetic differences, regarding feminine endings, palatalisation, certain expressions that are peculiar to it.

Note the addition of the argument on a lexical level to the system, probably due to its being the most understandable to the general public.

It is however to be specified that this representation of the language by activists does not always mean a vision of languages as autonomous bounded entities objectively existing in reality. Thus, the same informant noted in an informal conversation that the border between the Arpitan area and Auvergne (in the Occitan area) is quite distinct: one can see a “wall” on the isogloss map. On the other hand, there is no sharp border either to the south where the feminine endings change, or to the north where the stress shift is

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<sup>72</sup> Latin	French	Francoprovençal	Occitan
VITA	Vie	Via	Vida
NUDA	Nue	Nua	Nuda, nuza
AMICA	Amie	Amia	Amiga

(Stich 1998: 29).

gradual. It is to be emphasised though, that here once again the activist refers to dialectological data.

## 1.2. The ‘Savoyard language’: one region, one language, one nation

Savoyard activists (the “narrow” model) also refer to linguistic knowledge as they approach the issue of distinguishing a separate language group for Francoprovençal. Nevertheless, their everyday communication experience makes them doubt the linguistic unity of the Francoprovençal language:

PB, 1960, *Sav: L’unité elle a été démontrée par les linguistes* – qui nous ont fait des colloques depuis trente ans en nous expliquant le pourquoi du comment et c’est vrai que dans nos rencontres – ben parfois c’est un peu difficile parce qu’entre les *accents* employés dans certains villages et certains autres, euh on parle même de certains faits linguistiques savoyards. Vous avez posé la question si la langue savoyarde peut être vue d’une façon distincte. On se pose la question parfois, y a des *faits linguistiques indéniables, des mots de vocabulaire, des tournures spécifiques* qu’on n’emploie pas sur Lyon.

*The unity was demonstrated by the linguists* – who have been lecturing us for 30 years to explain to us the why and the how – and frankly, in our meetings – well, it’s sometimes a bit difficult because between the *accents* they use in some villages and some others – er one can even speak about certain Savoyard linguistic facts. So you asked whether Savoyard can be considered a separate language [in fact, I asked no such thing]. Sometimes we ask ourselves the same thing, there are *indisputable linguistic facts, words in the vocabulary, specific expressions* that aren’t used in Lyon.

Thus, on the one hand, the validity of the linguistic view of a unity is being doubted because of the experience of an active language use throughout the area. On the other hand, the arguments remain within the discourse of specificities of the linguistic system, only with an emphasis on the lexical level. It is assumed that examining the lexical level would allow us to distinguish the Savoyard language from other idioms of the Francoprovençal group.

Nevertheless, the Savoyardist approach (the “narrow” model), similarly to the Provençalist one, is also characterised by two more peculiar features that seemingly contradict both the previous one and each other. On the one hand, it is a “subjective”

approach based on the linguistic perceptions of the speakers – as opposed to the “objective” “linguistic facts” of the Francoprovençal proponents. On the other hand, it is a naturalistic, or an essentialist one. Both peculiarities can be vividly illustrated by the explanation given by one of the most prominent Savoyardists:

PB, 1960, *Sav*: C’est vrai qu’en Savoie dire que les Savoyards parlent le savoyard c’est quelque chose beaucoup plus logique et simple.

It is true that in Savoy, it’s much more logical and much simpler to say that Savoyards speak Savoyard.

What seems to be “logical and simple” is the correlation between the region, its inhabitants, and their language, typical of the Western European “one nation – one language” nation model (cf. the slogan of the Collectif Prouvènço advocating the Provençalist model: “*Uno regioun, uno identita, uno lengo*,” i.e. “One region, one identity, one language.”)

The main argument *against* the existence of the Savoyard language is that there exist as many real linguistic discrepancies between different Savoyard varieties as between other Francoprovençal varieties:

LK, 1932, *Fp*: Y a des formes extrêmement différentes selon les vallées, moi je les connais ces formes et alors il y a autant de différence entre deux vallées savoyardes que entre cette vallée et puis le dialecte de Saint-Étienne. Donc c’est une fiction.

There are extremely different forms in different valleys, I know these forms, and there are as many differences between two Savoy valleys as between this valley and, say, the Saint-Étienne dialect. So this is a fiction.

This sort of objectivist (positivist) critique is based on the scientific knowledge of linguistic facts or “forms.”

In fact, as transparent as the name of “the Savoyard language” may seem, its correlation to a separate language or a definite geographic area is not obvious. To quote the website of the Institute of the Savoyard Language:

La langue savoyarde fait partie de l’ensemble linguistique appelé le **Francoprovençal**.

Elle est parlée et écrite dans les pays suivants :

- la France (région Rhône-Alpes)
- la Suisse (région de Genève et jusqu'à Neuchâtel)
- l'Italie (Val d'Aoste, Piémont, Faeto dans les Pouilles)



La langue savoyarde est le francoprovençal parlé en Savoie.

(<http://www.langue-savoyarde.com/la-langue-savoyarde/une-langue-internationale>.

Accessed on 19.04.2015)

The Savoyard language makes part of the linguistic group (*ensemble linguistique*) called the **Francoprovençal**.

It is used in spoken and written forms in the following countries:

- France (the Rhône-Alpes region)
- Switzerland (the Geneva region and up to Neuchâtel)
- Italy (the Aosta Valley, Piedmont, and Faeto in Apulia)

[There follows a map of the “Francoprovençal area” in the three countries]

Savoyard is the Francoprovençal language spoken in Savoy.

Thus, on the one hand, the “Savoyard language” is represented as a part of the “Francoprovençal linguistic group” (in the first and the last sentences of the quoted



excerpt), in the same way the Provençal language would be part of the Languages of *Oc* for its advocates. On the other hand though, the territory of the “Savoyard language” such as defined in the text is exactly the same as that of the “Francoprovençal language” as defined by linguists. Thus it would seem that an alternative name is given for the same “language” as “Francoprovençal.”

Ultimately, it is the credibility of the language *name* – rather than a reference to certain boundaries of the language community – which is prioritised in the Savoyardist approach. The issue of language naming, the next key issue of the language emergence process, is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2. Naming as an act of social magic

### 2.1. The ‘baptism’ of an idiom and its birth as a *language*

Naming an idiom becomes especially important when one considers the division of a linguistic continuum into *languages*. The issue of naming itself is, of course, far from being new. It has traditionally been examined within the framework of language philosophy. It turns out however that it can also be of crucial importance for a sociolinguistic and anthropological analysis: “because to name is to classify, to classify is to distinguish, and to distinguish is to bring into being” (“parce que nommer c’est classer, classer c’est distinguer, distinguer c’est faire être,” Sériot 1997: 167). Patrick Sériot notes that name as a discrete category is opposed to the continuum of reality. The signified seems to be as discrete as the signifier, and “It starts being complicated when the signified is confounded with the referent” (*op. cit.*: 172).

A partir du moment où une langue a un nom, elle devient objet homogène, non plus un ensemble dans un diasystème, mais objet de politique linguistique, d’éducation, enjeu de la constitution d’un Etat-nation. Elle devient aussi, et surtout, objet de discours, qu’il est si facile de confondre avec un objet du monde. (*op. cit.*: 167)

Once a language has a name, it becomes a homogenous object, no longer an aggregate in a diasystem but an object of language policy and education, a goal of a nation-state’s construction. Besides, and most of all, it becomes an object of discourse, all too easily confounded with an object of the real world.

Andrée Tabouret-Keller notes that language polynymy (when a given language has several different names) is a rule rather than an exception (Tabouret-Keller 1997: 9). Three categories of “users” of the name can be distinguished: speakers (with the polynymy that is characteristic of them), linguists (to ascribe a language its place in the language class), and institutes (to distinguish the language as an object of legislation). She notes that a language name can allow the “paving the way for all nationalisms at a reduced price” (“C’est, à peu de frais, faire le lit de tous les nationalisms,” *op. cit.*: 11).

un nom de langue est susceptible de mener une trajectoire indépendante de l’histoire de cette langue, des parlers ainsi désignés dans leur diversité, et des locuteurs qui les parlent et, dans certains cas, manient sa ou ses formes écrites. Le nom d’une langue est ainsi toujours le nom d’une autre réalité, géographique, ethnique, politique, linguistique, institutionnelle, sociolinguistique, et ainsi de suite. (*op. cit.*: 15-16)

a name of a language may have a trajectory independent of the history of this language, of the varieties thus defined in their diversity, and of people who speak them and, in some cases, use their written form(s). Thus the name of a language is always a name of a different reality, geographical, ethnical, political, linguistic, institutional, sociolinguistic, etc.

This is why the debates around the naming of idioms raise questions as to what is hidden behind the preference of one name or another, what extra-linguistic phenomena the name is related to, and what message it carries, from whom and to what purpose.

To refer to the challenges of naming a language and, accordingly, an ethnic group and a territory, I propose to use Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “an act of social magic.” Taking the notion of the “Occitan language,” “Occitans” and “Occitania” as an example, Bourdieu argued back in 1980:

Le fait d’appeler «occitan» la langue que parlent ceux que l’on appelle les «Occitans» parce qu’ils parlent cette langue (que personne ne parle à proprement parler puisqu’elle n’est que la somme d’un très grand nombre de parlers différents) et de nommer «Occitanie», prétendant ainsi à la faire exister comme «région» ou comme «nation» ... la région (au sens d’espace physique) où cette langue est parlée, n’est pas une fiction sans effet. L’acte de magie sociale qui consiste à tenter de produire à l’existence la chose nommée peut réussir si celui qui l’accomplit est capable de faire reconnaître à sa parole le pouvoir qu’elle s’arroge par une

usurpation provisoire ou définitive, celui d'imposer une nouvelle vision et une nouvelle division du monde social... (Bourdieu 1980: 66).

Giving the name of “Occitan” to the language spoken by those who are called “the Occitans” because they speak this language (which actually nobody speaks as it is but a sum of a very large number of different varieties), and giving the name of “Occitania” to the region (in the sense of a physical space) where this language is spoken, thus trying to make it exist as a “region” or as a “nation” ... is not a fruitless fiction. The act of social magic that consists of trying to bring the thing being named into existence can be successful if the one who accomplishes it is able to give their word credit for the power which it appropriates by provisional or definite usurpation, the power to impose a new vision and a new division of the social world... (Bourdieu 1980: 66)

It is interesting to quote the definition of “Occitan” Bourdieu provides in 1980 as a footnote to this quotation:

L'adjectif «occitan» et, a fortiori, le substantif «Occitanie» sont des mots *savants* et *récents* (forgés par la *latinisation* de la langue d'oc, *lingua occitana*), destinés à désigner des réalités savantes qui, pour le moment au moins, n'existent que sur le papier (*Ibid.*, original italics).

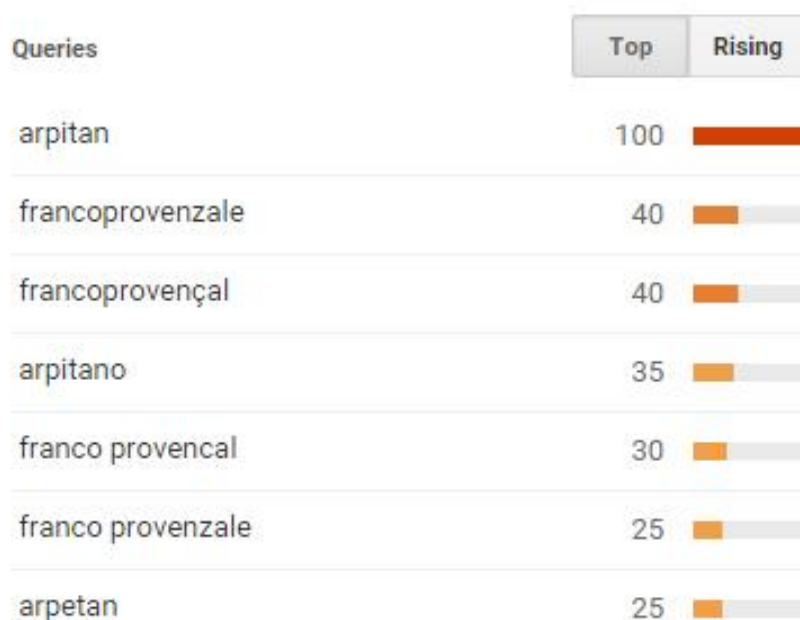
The adjective *Occitan* and, *a fortiori*, the noun *Occitania* are *scholarly* and *recent* words (coined by Latinising *langue d'oc* into *lingua occitana*) purported to denote scientific realities that, as of the present moment at least, have only ever existed on paper.<sup>73</sup>

The debates on a proper name for Francoprovençal have ultimately the same goal: they represent an attempt to implement in reality a given model of division of the linguistic continuum and of the sociopolitical space. The particularity of the Francoprovençal context though is that actors performing this “act of social magic” are no longer scholars but language activists. In the 1970s their attempts at rebaptising the language failed (as we saw in the example of Henriët's *Mouvement Arpitania*, see Part I Chapter 2), because their discourse had no legitimacy to challenge the scientific model, and linguists had the hegemonic power of producing discourse on language; in the 2000s however the situation changed. New technologies (especially internet technologies) and a revolutionary increase of the amount of information being produced and made available, the general democratisation of life and the growth of the power of civic society made these attempts successful at least in some domains of use. Namely, on the internet the term “Arpitan” has become an indisputable leader in comparison to any other denomination of the same

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<sup>73</sup> For more detail on the denominations of Occitan see Bichurina, Costa 2016.

language. E.g. statistic tools by Google Trends provide a following distribution for all the worldwide searches related to the term “Francoprovençal Language” via a Google web search (for 2004-2015, but a statistically significant number of queries on the subject only appear starting from 2007):



Source: Google Trends, <http://www.google.fr/trends/explore?hl=en-US#q=%2Fm%2F02cw59&cmpt=q&tz=> (Accessed on 16/06/2015). Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart: in this topic, it is “Arpitan” (100%).<sup>74</sup> E.g. if 10 people searched for “Arpitan” (100%), only four (40%) searched for “Francoprovençal.”

If we group together different spellings, it is 160 for “Arpitan” (“Arpitano,” “Arpetan”) and 135 for “Francoprovençal.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the term “Arpitan” starts being used by scholars working on minority languages, if they are not working particularly on Francoprovençal. It is also used in resources dedicated to endangered languages, such as the *Ethnologue* (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/frp>, accessed on 03/05/2015). However, “Francoprovençal” remains the only term that is accepted institutionally and

<sup>74</sup> “When you measure interest in a search topic (Tokyo – Capital of Japan) our algorithms count many different search queries that may relate to the same topic (東京, Токио, Tokyuo, Tokkyo, Japan Capital, etc.)” (Google Trends). The chart represents exact search entries related to the topic.

<sup>75</sup> Note that the number of occurrences in the search *results* may be slightly higher for “Francoprovençal” than for “Arpitan,” but this is due to the fact that when speaking about “Arpitan,” it is usually followed by a text in brackets specifying that it can also be called Francoprovençal, which is “a scientific term” for it.

politically (see, for example, the website of the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France*, *DGLFLF*, under the Ministry of Culture and Communication).<sup>76</sup>

In this chapter I will analyse the connotations and purposes of the use of various names for Francoprovençal, and for the corresponding community and territory today.

## 2.2 The stock of names

As we have seen in Part I (Chapter I), the name of “Franco-Provençal” was coined by Ascoli as a linguistic term, and for a century this term had been deemed acceptable by linguists/dialectologists in their studies. The speakers themselves had no name to denote the idiom throughout the trans-border territory of its use; nor did they have linguistic representations according to which the same language would be spoken in all the concerned regions. In most cases, in all three countries, the idiom was called “patois.” Today too, this denomination remains the most popular among the so-called *groupes patoisants* (“patois-speaking groups”) as the very name of such groups clearly suggests. Nevertheless, due to their contacts with dialectologists, the term “Francoprovençal” has also penetrated such groups in France since the 1970s. In Switzerland and in Piedmont<sup>77</sup> it happened much later, in the 2000s, whereas in the Valle d’Aosta the *groupes patoisants* are non-existent.

It is no accident that in France speakers began to show interest in the notion of the “Francoprovençal language” at the very moment when an active discussion of decentralisation and regionalisation of France arose, following the events of May 1968. Yet the name of the language proved to be unsuitable when the issue of political rights arose. Hence, two alternative names of the idiom emerged in activist groups, which have become widespread since the early 2000s:

- “The Savoyard language”: the term initially used by the Savoy Region Movement (*Mouvement région Savoie*, *MRS*) created in 1972 to advocate uniting the *départements* of Savoie and Haute-Savoie to create a region of Savoie

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.dglf.culture.gouv.fr/>

<sup>77</sup> The most common reference to the language in the Francoprovençal-speaking parts of Piedmont would be *a nosta moda* (to speak “in our way”)

(within France). Note that, although the Movement introduced the notion of “the Savoyard language” into its use, the idiom itself never was the focus of its political agenda. Today, the Institute of the Savoyard Language (*Institut de la langue savoyarde*), an association created in 2002, has become the main promoter of the term, whereas the MRS is gradually turning to the term *Arpitan*.

– “The Arpitan language”: the name was coined at the exactly same time in the Aosta Valley in Italy (as discussed in Part I Chapter 2). Today, it is actively promoted by the Arpitan Cultural Alliance (*Aliance Culturèla Arpitana*), a cross-border association founded in 2004.

The early 2000s, the time when the “struggle for a name” for the idiom reached its peak, coincided with a period of (actual or expected) radical changes in linguistic policies for the concerned countries (see Introduction and Part I Chapter 3). Thus, the dating of the different names alone suggests that the institutional and political context is the primary focus of language activists.

### 2.3 From *patois* to a name for a language

In France, to refer to any idiom that is different from standard French, speakers (who are not language advocates) use the word *patois*. In other words, specific names are not used to denote specific idioms: a generalising term is employed as/instead of the glottonym. Both the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland, as well as the Aosta Valley and Piedmont in Italy, have borrowed this French denomination of “patois.” Nevertheless, as was demonstrated in the section dedicated to language policy (see Introduction), a “patois,” as perceived by both speakers and non-speakers, is placed with respect to national languages in the opposition of “language” vs. “non-language.” To quote several definitions of *patois* from major French dictionaries:

Langage rustique, grossier, comme est celui d’un paysan, ou du bas peuple.  
(*Dictionnaire de l’Académie française, quatrième édition, Paris: Ve de Bernard Brunet, 1762. Electronic version: FRBNF39326699*).

Rural, rude speech [langage], as that of peasants or low people.

Parler local, dialecte employé par une population généralement peu nombreuse, souvent rurale, et dont la culture, le niveau de civilisation sont jugés comme inférieurs à ceux du milieu environnant... (*Le Petit Robert*; electronic version: <http://lerobert.demarque.com/fr/>, accessed on 03.05.2015)

A local vernacular, a dialect, used as a rule by an inconsiderable number of people, often rural, whose level of culture and civilisation is evaluated to be lower than those of their environment...

Système linguistique essentiellement oral, utilisé sur une aire réduite et dans une communauté déterminée (généralement rurale), et perçu par ses utilisateurs comme inférieur à la langue officielle. (Larousse, electronic version: <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/patois/58677>, accessed on 03.05.2015)

An essentially oral linguistic system used within a limited territory and a specific (generally rural) community, and perceived by its users as inferior as compared with the official language.

It thus denotes especially a rural and very locally used speech. If we compare the first definition with the two latter ones, we see that the meaning of the term has not undergone any substantial changes since the times of Abbé Grégoire in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

During my fieldwork, comparisons with the linguistic situation in Russia would also clearly indicate that *patois* belongs, in the eyes of its speakers, to the realm of “non-languages.” Thus Francoprovençal speakers would often ask me whether in Russia “there are also *patois*.” I would always give them a similar reply: that there are over 100 various languages, of different linguistic groups and families, which have nothing to do with Russian, whereas Russian itself is almost the same everywhere. My interlocutors’ conclusion would always be the same in the three countries: “So, there are no *patois* in Russia.” Thus an image of a *patois* as an alternative (deformed?) version of a standard language rather than a language in its own right clearly dominates (anecdotally, the only person with the opposite reaction was a railway employee from Naples working in Aosta, who said: “But in Italy the Italian is also the same everywhere!” For him, Francoprovençal, like other *dialects* of Italy, was a separate language). Sometimes the question itself would be formulated in an eloquent way, e.g.: “And in Russia, do people in villages speak Russian correctly, or are there also *patois*?” (a Francoprovençal activist from the Forez

mountains in France). Comparisons with Occitan are also instructive: “Occitan is different, it is almost a language!” (a Francoprovençal speaker in a Lyon neighbourhood).

As the data collected by M. Meune in Switzerland indicates, a third of respondents to a written questionnaire in the cantons of Vaud and Fribourg answered that the “patois” was “a mixture of French and of another language” («mélange de français et d’une autre langue», cf. Meune 2012: 64).

The term *patois* is traditionally used by dialectologists to denote Francoprovençal. However, since the term has such manifested pejorative connotations, language activists find it unsuitable. Starting from the 1970s (in the socio-political context as discussed at the beginning of Part I Chapter II), the idea that languages need to be given a proper name in order to come into existence emerges. Idiom-naming preferences have ever since been subject to heated debates among activists and scholars.

## 2.4 “Francoprovençal”: an insufficiently substantial argument?

Along with activists, linguists also suggest that “Francoprovençal” is an awkward term. Gaston Tuailon, one of the most prominent researchers of that language, noted:

Il est vrai que ce mot ... n’est pas un solide argument pour prouver que l’objet ainsi désigné mérite d’être considéré comme autre chose que du français et du provençal réunis et mélangés. (Tuailon 2007a: 10)

Indeed, the word [Francoprovençal] ... is not an argument substantial enough to prove that the object denoted in this way deserves to be considered anything more than just French and Provençal brought together and mixed up.

The name of the language is thus considered as *an argument* in favour (or not) of its recognition.

Those activists who refer to the idiom as “Francoprovençal” also acknowledge the unfortunate qualities of this name. Comparing it with “Occitan” is symptomatic:

KL, 1932, *Fp*: Les occitanistes c’est un autre esprit. Euh c’est quelque chose de *construit, fier*, ils ont les troubadours, ils ont ceci, ils ont cela. ... Nous on est



quelque chose qui – qui est un peu bâtard ... c'est pas du tout vrai, c'est *le mot qui est trompeur*.

Occitanists, it's a different spirit. It's something *constructed*, something *proud*, they have their Troubadours, they have this, they have that. ... Now us, we're something – something of a bastard. ... It's not at all true, it's just that the *word is misleading*.

Note how the lack of a prestigious cultural (literary) tradition is seen to be linked to the awkwardness of the name of the language. Nevertheless, in spite of the “misleading” and “unsubstantial” character of the name, they adhere to the term because it is perceived as a scientific one. Its use has been legitimised by the dialectological research that had established both the name of the idiom and the geographic limits of its use, together with its characteristic features that serve to trace the boundaries.

## 2.5 'Savoyard': logical and simple?

The term of the “Savoyard language” is introduced as a “more natural” alternative to “Francoprovençal.” Here is how PB, 1960, *Sav*, substantiates the choice of the name of “the Savoyard language”:

PB, 1960, *Sav*: Parce que le mot francoprovençal est *un mot un peu tordu* – parce que ça fait croire que c'est *un peu de français et un peu de provençal*, alors que c'est une langue *authentique* et qui d'ailleurs *pour nous n'est pas compris* – pour nous la Provence c'est Marseille! ... Et comme le mot de savoyard est *attesté depuis très longtemps* ... ce mot qui est *clair pour tout le monde* ... *très naturellement* on demandait ça.

Because Francoprovençal is *sort of a distorted word* – because it makes one think it's a bit of French and a bit of Provençal, whereas it's an *authentic language*, and then again, *we don't get it* – for us, Provence is in Marseille! ... And, since the word “Savoyard” *was first recorded very long ago* ... and this is a word *everybody understands* ... *quite naturally*, it was our demand [for the Savoyard language to be recognised].

The main criterion in the selection of a new name different from that used by dialectologists is its credibility. The name must be credible to two reference groups: the authorities (note the reference to the demands of recognition) and the speakers (expressed here as “us”). It is the reference to the speakers, characteristic of the “narrow model,”

which legitimises the name of “Savoyard” as one that “*everybody understands*” and that is “*quite natural,*” or else “*much more logical and much simpler,*” like in the quotation in the previous chapter. It is also legitimised by its having been “*first recorded very long ago.*” The “Savoyard vernacular” (*langage savoyard*) had indeed a long history of being mentioned: e.g. it is frequently cited in Geneva documents of the 17-19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Kristol 2005: 50); it was however not designated as “the Savoyard *language.*”

It is the special attention to the name of the idiom in itself that results in a third, Arpitan model, being added to the dichotomy between the “wide/objective” and “narrow/subjective” models in the Francoprovençal context.

## 2.6 ‘Arpitan’ vs. ‘Francoprovençal’: political slogan or publicity stunt?

Traditionally, both linguists and activists belonging to other movements would ascribe political connotations to the name of Arpitan. Tuailon attributes the emergence of the term “Arpitan” to the (undated) period of “unrest, more or less revolutionary and in any case highly annoying” (“agissements quelque peu révolutionnaires et en tout cas fort agaçants”) in the Aosta Valley (Tuailon 2007b: 8). In addition to the revolutionary connotation, according to Tuailon, two other specific features of the term can be distinguished. On the one hand, it “has no meaning at all” (“n’a aucun sens,” *op. cit.*: 16) and “adorns meaningless speeches” (“sert à enjoliver les discours vides de sens,” *op. cit.*: 8). Note that this is the attribute that French linguistic, polemic, and political tradition has been ascribing to Communist discourse since the 1970s: a discourse where words were believed to have no referential function (see Sériot 1985: 21-56). The fact that Henriot had translated two of Mao’s texts and had built his theory on Marxist arguments might have served for such a parallel. In any case, it is implicitly suggested that the name of “Francoprovençal,” unlike that of “Arpitan,” does have a meaning or, in other words, relates to a reality – apparently, the linguistic reality as described by dialectologists. On the other hand, in Tuailon’s opinion, the name “Arpitan” is connected to the notion of race:

Même si vous voulez grandir vos rêves sur vos lointains ancêtres, n’employez jamais le mot «Arpitan» ... Plus gravement ce mot fait appel à ce concept qui nous a fait *tant de mal au XXe siècle*, celui de la *race*. Je voudrais vous dissuader de

succomber à ce rêve. Les langues régionales n'ont vraiment pas besoin de cet *horrible ornement*. (Tuailon 2007b: 16. Italics mine).

Even if you want to extend your dreams to your remote ancestors, never use the word “Arpitan” ... More importantly, the word refers to the concept that *brought about so much evil in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*, that of *race*. I would like to warn you against giving in to that dream. In truth, regional languages have no need of this *horrible ornament*.

The name “Arpitan” is thus perceived to be a threat (to humankind) due to its implicit correlation, in Tuailon's opinion, with something that apparently is a fascist ideology. Contrary to the racist connotation of the term “Arpitan,” the term “Francoprovençal” appears to be related, for the dialectologist, to linguistic features only.

Ascribing political connotations to the name “Arpitan” became commonplace in (socio-) linguistic literature. For instance, Elmiger contrasts Francoprovençal with Arpitan as “linguistic vs. political identity” (*sprachliche vs. politische Identität*, Elmiger 2012: 91 – 92). A similar opposition can also be found in the discourse of my informants, for instance, in France:

KL, 1932, *Fp* : L'arpitan, c'est un des noms du francoprovençal, alors Arpitanie, Arpitanie libre etc. fait une espèce de – de *slogan politique*.

Arpitan is one of the names for Francoprovençal, as in Arpitanie, free Arpitanie, etc., it is a sort of – *political slogan*.

Meanwhile, most informants outside of the Aosta Valley are ignorant of the actual history of the term's coining, they only know that it was politically motivated, e.g. for this informant in Lausanne:

RO, 1975, *S, pat*: Il y a quand même le poids historique derrière ... Il a quand même été inventé pendant la période des revendications politiques.

NB: Des indépendantistes au Val d'Aoste ?

RO: Oui, ou en Savoie, je sais pas. C'était dans les années septante. Moi je n'ai pas trop étudié l'histoire, mais je sais qu'il y a des liens avec ça.

RO, 1975, *S, pat*: There is still a historic weight behind [the name “Arpitan”] ... Anyway it was invented during the period of political claims.

NB: Of independentists in the Aosta Valley?

RO: Yes, or in Savoy, I don't know. It was in the 1970s. I haven't studied history much, but I know there are links with this.

In the Aosta Valley, where the 1970s are still present in the memory of, at least, the middle and the older generation, I could witness how, while speaking about my studies, “studying *patois*” would be interpreted as studying linguistic structure, whereas “studying Arpitan” would be interpreted as studying issues of separatism (and “studying Francoprovençal” as almost nothing at all).

As for Arpitanists themselves, they deny the political content of the “neologism” (as they refer to it) Arpitan. Favouring this name is attributed to its being an “*unambiguous communication tool*” (*outil de communication non ambigu*, NV, 1973, *Arp*) or “*the best publicity for our language*” (*la mèlyosa (mèlyora) rèclama por noutra lengoua*, JN, 1970, *Arp*). In other words, the name assumes an instrumental function for the official recognition of the language. The idiom's name also serves to raise its prestige among its own – potential – speakers. The reference groups are thus the same as for the Savoyardist movement. From the point of view of Arpitanists, this is the only way to revitalise the idiom:

NV, 1973, *Arp*: [un nom non-ambigu] est d'ailleurs autant nécessaire pour convaincre le ministère ... que pour la communication avec le grand public ... La récupération du terme pour des questions identitaires ou nationalistes est d'ailleurs extrêmement marginale, la plupart des «pays» traditionnels de l'espace linguistique arpitan préférant continuer à s'auto-catégoriser [selon les régions]. Un des meilleurs exemples en étant la Savoie et “sa langue appelée le savoyard” (cf. “Institut de la Langue Savoyarde”).

An unambiguous name is as necessary ... *to convince the Ministry ... as to communicate with the general public ... Besides, applying the term to identity issues or to nationalist issues is extremely marginal* since most traditional “countries” of the Arpitan linguistic space prefer to go on categorising themselves [region-wise]. One of the best examples is that of Savoy and its language called Savoyard (as in the “Institute of the Savoyard Language”).

The “revolutionary connotation” of the term is acknowledged as a part of history. Today, the name is legitimised by its similarity to that of Occitan: it is Occitanism that is taken to be a reference model:

U comencement ceti mot l'avêve una connotacion rèvolucionèra que l'ât ren més u jôrn de houè. [...] L'ât un ôtro avantâjo: il ressemble u nom "occitan." D'ense ceti nom d'arpitan pôôt transmètre lo messâjo que nos, coment nos cousens du mijôrn, nos volens être recognûs et dèfendre noutra lengoua valyament. (<http://arpitan.ch/spip.php?article139> (12.07.2012), original underscoring)

Initially, the word [Arpitan] had a revolutionary connotation that it no longer has today [...] It has another advantage: it resembles the name of Occitan. In this way, the name of Arpitan can convey the message that we want to be recognised and to bravely defend our language just like our southern cousins.

So, the name's goal is to "convey a message": to announce both the demand of the respective linguistic community ("us") to be recognised and its will to defend its language. The necessity of the term "Arpitan" is emphasised by the critique of the term "Francoprovençal":

NV, 1973, *Arp*: Je pense que c'est un élément clé pour la revitalisation que d'avoir un nom non ambigu, qui donne une identité propre à la langue.

I believe that *it is a key element of revitalisation* to have an unambiguous name that would provide the language with its proper identity.

The idea of interconnection between the name of the idiom and its being acknowledged as a separate language (and therefore its ability to survive) is reiterated throughout the interview with AB, 1983, *Arp*:

Je n'ai jamais aimé le nom «francoprovençal», je trouve que *ça ne veut rien dire*. Non seulement c'est artificiel, mais en plus cela porte à confusion. Les non-connaisseurs, même de la région, même arpitanophones, pensent que notre langue est *un mélange de français et de provençal*. Et c'est d'autant plus *catastrophique* parce qu'*avec ce nom la prise de conscience d'une identité linguistique à part entière est ralentie voire niée*.

I've never liked the name "Francoprovençal," I believe *it means nothing*. Not only is it artificial, it's also confusing. Laypeople, even those who live in the area, even Arpitan speakers, think our language is *a mixture of French and Provençal*. It's all the more *catastrophic* because with this name, the *acknowledgement of our separate linguistic identity slows down or even disappears*.

En Arpitanie ... la prise de conscience est quelque peu freinée par l’usage de différents noms: francoprovençal (confusion), patois (ce n’est pas une langue), savoyard (le patriotisme savoyard...), parler lyonnais, patois vaudois, valaisan, gruérien, etc.

In Arpitanian ... acknowledgement is somewhat slowed down by the use of different names: Francoprovençal (confusion), patois (which isn’t a language), Savoyard (Savoyard patriotism...), the Lyon vernacular, the *patois* of Vaud, of Valais, of Gruyère etc.

With such a crucial importance ascribed to the name of the language, in the Arpitanist discourse, all the opponents of the name “Arpitan” are deemed to be responsible for the inevitable language death – if they persist in their opposition to the neologism. To quote a post in an Arpitan Facebook group concerning one of the opponents of the name “Arpitan,”

Il a le droit d’être contre, comme tous les *conservateurs* qui sont contre par principe, comme ça nous continuerons à *perdre du temps pour la reconnaissance officielle ... A la limite, plus il y a de gens "contre" ..., plus vite la langue aura disparu, et plus vite ils n’auront plus besoin d’être "contre"*. (The Arpitanian abada! Facebook group, post of 11.09.2012, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21904584384/> Italics mine).

He has the right to be against it just like all the *conservatives* who are against as a matter of principle; this way, we go on losing time for official recognition ... *Ultimately, the more people are "against" ... the sooner the language will disappear and the sooner they won’t have to be "against" anymore.*

Following the same logic, the Arpitanist discourse identifies the main “enemy” in the person of the researcher. It concerns local dialectologists or sociolinguists, especially those working in Lyon, Grenoble, or Neuchâtel, i.e. in the centres that study the idiom within its region of use. Note that foreign researchers are, on the contrary, depicted as playing a positive role as symbolic protectors of the idiom.<sup>78</sup> It turns out that the local researcher is by definition a Francoprovençalist or, more precisely, a “Tuillonist” (a proponent of Gaston Tuillon’s ideas); researchers are blamed for using the “scholarly” term Francoprovençal and rejecting the “neologism” Arpitan, which, in its turn, prevents

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<sup>78</sup> Foreign researchers are supposed to be free from prejudices impressed by the official ideology. At the same time, they are seen mostly as a symbol of the worldwide interest in the idiom rather than as actual actors in the ongoing political processes.

the idiom from being officially recognised by the authorities. To quote my first interview with NV, 1973, Arp:

NB: Donc, tu parles francoprovençal?

NV: Oui. Arpitan. ... Francoprovençal c'est un nom technique, scientifique, qui désigne la langue par le nom de ses voisins. Comme si on appelait le catalan «l'occitano-castillan»

NB: So, you speak Francoprovençal?

NV: Yes, Arpitan ... Francoprovençal is a technical, scientific name which defines the language via the names of its neighbours. As if Catalan would be called "Occitano-Castilian."

The mention of the "scientific" character of the name Francoprovençal does not bear here a positive connotation typical of the discourse of the *patoisants* (which would suggest that it is the correct name since it is legitimised by scientific research), but a clearly negative one. Since about mid-2012, the discontent has been growing into a conflict, as indicated by the great number of discussions on linguists in Arpitanist blogs (remarks on linguists have also appeared there before, but not on such a massive scale). Linguists studying Francoprovençal are opposed to both speakers and other scholars:

en science on a parfois aussi des appellations multiples pour des choses récemment découvertes, et les gens se contentent d'utiliser le terme qui leur plait, sans déclencher des *campagnes de calomnie* contre ceux qui ne font pas comme eux ... Là on a *clairement un sérieux problème de politique* avec le mot francoprovençal, le but est évident: empêcher que les *locuteurs* sortent de la logique technocratique dans laquelle on voudrait les enfermer pour qu'ils restent sagement *sous le contrôle des linguistes* (The *Arpitania abada!* Facebook group, post from 11.09.2012, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21904584384/>)

in *science* too, sometimes there are several names for recently discovered things, and people content themselves with using whatever term they like, without launching a campaign of slander against those who do otherwise ... Here, there is *clearly a serious political issue* concerning the word of Francoprovençal; the goal is obvious: to prevent the *speakers* from breaking out of the technocratic logic that they would like to lock them in, so that they obediently remain *controlled by the linguists*.

In this way, Arpitanists invert the widespread idea of a political connotation of the term "Arpitan": it is the linguistic term of Francoprovençal that is represented as politicised. On

the one hand, it sets the interests of linguists against those of the speakers; on the other hand, the attitude of linguists towards a recent scientific discovery, the Arpitan language, is represented to be unscientific, contradicting what is accepted in the scientific community.

The legitimacy of linguists' participation in the debate on the name is in doubt too:

Tuailion se mêle de politique alors qu'il *n'est que linguiste*. ... Les jacobins malheureusement se trouvent aussi parmi les linguistes ou les dialectologues, comme à Neuchâtel, et ce sont *évidemment nos ennemis* (<http://arpitania.forumactif.com/t863-le-mot-arpitan-d-apres-gaston-tuailion>, 01.07.2008).

Tuailion meddles in politics while he's *but a linguist* ... Unfortunately, Jacobins are also to be found among linguists and dialectologists, as in Neuchâtel, and they are *obviously our enemies*.

Thus, the issue of the language name is represented as a political one and, therefore, one that falls out of the competence area of linguists. Once again, as in any Arpitanist discourse since the 1970s, we are dealing here with what we may call “the linguistics of resentment” (see Part I Chapter II), which can only exist under the condition of being against (the official, here linguistic, discourse).

## 2.7 'Arpitan' vs. 'Savoyard' and the legitimacy of Rhône-Alpes

While Arpitanists deny the political connotations of the term “Arpitan” in their own discourse, they note that such connotations may potentially be present in the discourse of others. Thus, the tensions between the partisans of the “wide” Arpitanist and “narrow” Savoyardist models are partly due to the active development of the linguistic policy for the Rhône-Alpes region voted for in 2009 and started in 2010-2011. According to my informants, the regional authorities are increasingly interested in the term “Arpitan.” NV, 1973, *Arp*, says:

Les militants régionalistes en Savoie voient ... l'émergence du mot "arpitan" comme une menace et s'y opposent, car ils pensent que ce terme pourrait donner une légitimité à Rhône-Alpes ... à l'encontre des possibilités d'émancipation d'une région Savoie.



Regional activists in Savoy feel ... threatened by the emergence of the word “Arpitan” and are opposed to it because they believe that the term might give legitimacy to [the region of] Rhône-Alpes ... at the expense of the possibilities of emancipation of the Savoy region.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, the existence of an Arpitan – i.e. “Alpine” – language within the region of Rhône-Alpes potentially legitimises the existence of the region itself, created irrespectively of any cultural or historical unity. This vision competes against the notion of Savoy as a special cultural unity having the Savoyard language as its distinctive marker. It is perceived as an obstacle to forming a separate French/European region of Savoy that would combine two of today’s *départements* of the Rhône-Alpes region, Savoie and Haute-Savoie. Some of the main activists of the Arpitan Cultural Alliance note the irony of the situation lies in the fact that they are Savoyards themselves and, in their fight for the Arpitan language to be recognised for the whole of Arpitanian, they thought mostly about Savoy, yet have become enemies “in their own country.”

Nevertheless, the Savoyard and Arpitan models, mutually exclusive as they appear, in some cases actually turn to be complementary. The most prominent activists affirm that ultimately, the most important goal is to ensure the “survival of the language”:

KL, 1932, *Fp*: Moi personnellement je dirais qu’on peut appeler cette langue n’importe comment pourvu que cette langue existe [rire], pour qu’elle puisse survivre.

Personally, I’d say you can call the language whatever you like, so far as the language exists [laughs] so that it could survive.

AB, 1960, *Sav*: Nous le mot de francoprovençal, ou d’arpitan ou de savoyard, on défend pas particulièrement une dénomination par rapport à l’autre. Mais aucun des trois n’y est [reconnu], voilà, le problème est là.

Whatever the name, Francoprovençal, Arpitan, or Savoyard, we don’t specifically defend one name against another. The problem is, neither of three actually is [recognised].

Arpitanists have an expression that they use as a motto: “(*Herox de*) *ben fère et de lèssiér dére!*” – a rhyming phrase literally meaning “(Happy to) do well, and let people talk!” It is regularly repeated in conversations, including those pertaining to the idiom’s

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Costa & Bert’s analysis of their FORA report’s being used by the Rhône-Alpes region: in particular, on the use of linguistic criteria and the linguistic unity notion as an attempt to naturalise the idea of the Rhône-Alpes region (Costa, Bert 2011).

name and orthography, to mean that all the debates do not matter much to them. This is further confirmed by the fact that the same individuals may be members of several competing associations: for instance, of the Arpitan Cultural Alliance and of the Institute of the Savoyard Language, or else of the Institute of the Savoyard Language and of the International Council for Francoprovençal. Nevertheless, on the one hand, such collaboration does not exclude sometimes violent critique at the discursive level; on the other hand, the alleged indifference towards the naming issue notwithstanding, all spontaneous exchanges between activists, as well as all interviews, inevitably return to it.

## 2.8 Concluding remarks

The preference of the term “Arpitan” correlates with the activists’ social profile and the type of activist work that they carry out. Francoprovençal groups (that mostly use the term *patois* internally) predominantly include retired people; their most represented occupations are teaching and (to a much lesser extent) agriculture. Arpitanists, on the contrary, mostly belong to younger generations and predominantly are white-collar professionals. Unlike the Arpitanists, an overwhelming majority of whom have social network profiles and are extremely active on the internet in general (e.g. think of the Arpitan version of Wikipedia), the activists who prefer the names of Francoprovençal or *patois* rarely use the internet, let alone social networks. For instance, electronic addresses are only rarely provided in the attendance lists of their various associations’ meetings: most participants indicate their street addresses as they do not often use the internet. As a consequence, the term “Arpitan” is more widely represented on the internet than “Francoprovençal,” even though in reality, Arpitanists undoubtedly constitute a minority among the language advocates. The discrepancy is also due to the difference between the goals of their respective movements: Francoprovençal/*patois* groups are mostly meeting places for the aged; they are also places where their participants can pursue personal fulfillment as they find themselves in the new role of the last keepers of traditions instead of the professional social status they lose in their retirement. At the same time, the groups do not pursue the goal of passing the idiom on and do not seek to increase its popularity. Consequently, the need to use the mass media, including the Internet, does not arise. On the contrary, Arpitanists see their immediate goals in the “publicity” for the idiom (the term used by the activists themselves) and in passing it on to successive generations of speakers. Thus one of the Swiss Arpitanists, IR, 1971, *Arp*, says: “Le dilemme est le

suisant: les membres de l'association locale de ma commune parlent «*patois*» et souhaitent le «*maintenir*». Moi, j'ai appris *l'arpitan*, dans sa variante bagnarde, et souhaite le «*revitaliser*»” (“The dilemma is the following: members of the local association in my municipality speak *patois* and seek to ‘*maintain*’ it. Now me, I have learned *Arpitan* in its Bagnes version and want to ‘*revitalize*’ it”). Thus, to borrow a phonological metaphor, it can be stated that the two names, Francoprovençal and Arpitan, find themselves in a complementary distribution relationship. They are used in a different context (in pursuance of different goals), and the activists who use them differ both in their age and in their primary activities.

At the same time, because the Arpitanists are active on the Internet, they are usually seen as an exclusively virtual group. This image is however misleading: they are actively using the Internet because most of them are young urban intellectuals; yet for the very same reason they are particularly mobile. Most (if not all) of them have the experience of living in different regions, if not different countries and on different continents. Thus in the case of the *groupes patoisants* some three kilometers separating two villages are often seen as an obstacle for communication; in the case of the Arpitanists dozens and sometimes hundreds of kilometers between the places where they live are no obstacle to organising face-to-face meetings.

Finally, as of today, “Savoyard” appears to be the least widespread of the names. Geographically, its use is limited to the *départements* of Savoie and Haute-Savoie. On the other hand, while Savoyard associations prefer the term “Savoyard language” for their internal use, they often use the term “Francoprovençal” when dealing with the authorities, as it is recognised both by linguists and by the administration of the Rhône-Alpes region.

### **Chapter 3. The writing system**

#### **3.1 Development of literacy and turning a *dialect* into a *language***

The transformation of a *dialect* into a *language* is typically accompanied by the development of literacy. In this process, the writing system proves to be something significantly more important than a simple speech-recording tool. According to Patrick Sériot:

Qu'une liquide dorso-palatale soit représentée graphiquement par L en latin, par Л en cyrillique, par Λ en grec, ou même par • — •• en morse, cela vaut-il vraiment la peine de descendre dans la rue et de s'affronter aux policiers, comme l'ont fait les étudiants de Chişinău (Кишинев / Кишинев) en 1989, réclamant que leur langue (le moldave? le roumain?) soit transcrite en alphabet latin et non plus cyrillique? Mais si tant de passion peut naître de la question des alphabets, c'est bien que *la représentation graphique de l'oralité n'est pas un simple changement de code, mais quelque chose qui touche à l'ordre identitaire*. (Sériot 2012: 10, italics mine)

Is the issue of whether the sonorant dorsal palatal consonant is to be graphically represented as a Latin L, a Cyrillic Л, a Greek Λ, or even a Morse code • — •• worth taking to the streets to fight the police as Chişinău (Кишинев/Кишинев) students did in 1989, demanding for their language (Moldovan? Romanian?) to be written in the Latin alphabet rather than in Cyrillic? But if the question of alphabets is able to give rise to such passions, it is because *the graphic representation of the oral is not just a change of code but something pertaining to identity issues*.

Le Page notes that many language systems only became discrete when orthographies had been developed for them:

...it seems to me that literacy represents a definite step ... after which focusing both of linguistic behaviour and of linguistic theory is likely to be greatly accelerated, initially for an élite and subsequently, in some societies, for the mass of the people. (Le Page 1997: 32)

In this connection, a remark by Haugen may be recalled, which concerns the specific case of France. Having mentioned that historically, a number of regional written standards or *dialects* had existed in France but later on, the Parisian written dialect overtook them all, he notes: "When the dialects ceased to be written, they became *patois*" (Haugen 1972 [1966]: 99). As the *French Language Dictionary* has it:

Après le XIV siècle, il se forma une langue littéraire et écrite, et les dialectes devinrent patois

After the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a literary and written language was formed, and dialects became *patois* (Littré 1956)

I will demonstrate that an opposite process takes place today: when *patois* get to be written they become *languages*. Note as well that according to Benedict Anderson, the

creation of written (printed, supra-dialectal) languages played a key role in the emergence of language nationalism (Anderson 2001 [1983]).

According to Haugen (1966: 933), in order to make a “dialect” into a “language” (or, in other words, to go from vernacular to standard), four aspects should be developed (see Table 6).

Table 6. Language standardisation according to Haugen’s model (1966: 933)

	<i>Form</i>	<i>Function</i>
<i>Society</i>	Selection	Acceptance
<i>Language</i>	Codification	Elaboration

Chronologically the order would be expected to be the following:

(1) *selection of norm*, i.e. the selection of a model from which the norm can be derived. This stage is almost always problematic, as selecting one variety has important social implications: “To choose any one vernacular as a norm means to favour the group of people speaking that variety. It gives them prestige as norm-bearers and a headstart in the race for power and position.” (*op. cit.*: 932)

(2) *codification of form*

(3) *elaboration of function*: “Any vernacular is presumably adequate at a given moment for the needs of the group that uses it. But for the needs of the much larger society of the nation it is not adequate, and it becomes necessary to supplement its resources to make it into a language.” (*op. cit.*: 931)

As far as steps (2) and (3) are concerned, the famous Haugen formula suggests: “As the ideal goals of a standard language, codification may be defined as *minimal variation in form*, elaboration as *maximal variation in function*.” (*op. cit.*: 931)

(4) *acceptance by the community*, necessary for the language to have a body of users.

It is assumed in the discourse of Francoprovençal language activists that in order for it to become seen as a “language,” apart from a delimited territory and an unambiguous name, it should indeed have its standard orthography. On the one hand, the existence of spelling for the language is opposed to the lay representation of *patois* that it “is not written” (*«le patois ne s’écrit pas»*, i.e. it cannot be written as a matter of principle). Therefore, it is imagined that as soon as an idiom is written, it turns from a *patois* into a *language*. On the other hand, the three elements – the territory, the name and the orthography – are represented as closely connected: thus, e.g., the name Arpitan supposes a trans-border linguistic community and also a unique supradialectal orthography. Criticising one of these elements usually implies criticising the other two as well: criticism of the notion of the *Arpitan language* often turns out to be that of the orthography promoted by the Arpitan Cultural Alliance. Conversely, the choice of the orthography, like that of the name, allows the implementation of a certain system of division of the linguistic continuum, and therefore, of the social world.

This being said, it should also be emphasised that legal constraints may play an important part in a role ascribed to the orthography for language revitalisation. Thus in the case of France a writing system and a literary tradition are explicitly required by the Ministry of Education for Francoprovençal to be admitted in public examinations at secondary schools (the *baccalauréat*).<sup>80</sup> Thus the reply of the National Assembly of 07/10/2014 on the non-recognition of “the Savoyard language” as a “regional language” at the *baccalauréat* stipulates:

Ce cadre de référence [du baccalauréat] réserve une place importante à l’écrit, tant dans sa compréhension que dans son expression et, pour cette raison implique que la passation de ces épreuves s’appuie sur un corpus de textes suffisamment

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<sup>80</sup> Compare though with the Ministry of Education’s reply regarding dialectal Arabic in the *baccalauréat*: « L’épreuve facultative d’arabe dialectal maghrébin n’a, à aucun moment, été supprimée. Toutefois ... cette épreuve sera désormais passée à l’oral, ce qui correspond mieux à *cet ensemble de langues qui sont des langues de tradition orale*. ... » (“The optional test of the Maghrebi Arabic dialect has at no time been annulled. However ... this examination will now be taken orally, which corresponds better to this type of languages that are languages of oral tradition.” <http://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2000/qSEQ000122164.html> Published on 16/03/2000; accessed on 29/03/2016, Italics are mine). Thus in other contexts the Ministry does recognise that there are languages that are essentially oral, and which remain nevertheless “languages.”

nombreux et diversifiés, aux qualités linguistiques et littéraires attestées.  
(<http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q14/14-21123QE.htm>)

This framework [of the baccalaureate] assigns an important role to writing, both in its understanding and expression, and therefore implies that the examination is based on a body of sufficiently numerous and diverse texts, with attested linguistic and literary qualities.

Francoprovençal's transmission being seen as mainly or exclusively a school transmission, the development of a unique writing system for the language is therefore felt as essential by the Francoprovençal language advocates in France.

### 3.2. Orthography and socio-political claims

The first attempt to create a unified Arpitan orthography was undertaken by Joseph Henriet in 1976 (Harrieta 1976), at the same moment when he created the notions of the Arpitan language, the Arpitans and Arpitania (see Part I Chapter II). In March 2013, Henriet described linguists' rejection of his attempts in the Savoyard electronic publication *La Voix des Allobroges*<sup>81</sup>:

#### Le grand anathème de la Trinité linguistique

Quand la Trinité linguistique - Tuailon, Schulé et Grassi – ... a lu mon livre, depuis Toulouse, elle m'a lancé le grand anathème: «*Joseph Henriet n'est pas un linguiste et vous ne devez pas le suivre. Il n'y a que nous qui pouvons parler au nom de la Science et c'est nous que vous devez écouter: continuez à lutter pour la sauvegarde de tous les patois et du français.*» En se comportant ainsi, les trois trahirent leur déontologie et, en passant dans le domaine de la politique, ils révélèrent leur nature servile et certainement pas scientifique de linguistes au service de la culture des dominateurs et ennemis du peuple arpitan. (Henriet 2013)

#### The Great Anathema of the Linguistic Trinity

When the Linguistic Trinity – Tuailon, Schulé, and Grassi – ... read my book, they pronounced the Great Anathema against me: “*Joseph Henriet is not a linguist; you should not follow*

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<sup>81</sup> Henriet Joseph «Comment j'ai créé la koinè», <http://www.lavoixdesallobroges.org/la-voie/601-comment-jai-cree-la-koinè-ou-la-langue-commune-arpitane-de-joseph-henriet> (03.01.2013).

*him. We alone may speak on behalf of the Science, it is to us alone that you must listen: continue your struggle to save all the patois and the French language.*” In this way, the three betrayed their professional ethics and, having transgressed into the domain of politics, revealed their servile and clearly unscientific nature of linguists in the service of the culture of oppressors and enemies of the Arpitan people (Original italics).

The ironic use of the ecclesiastical vocabulary (*Trinity, anathema*), implying that the linguists would take themselves for Gods and Science with a capital “S” for a religion, is an attempt, once again, to contest the role of the scholars. The presumption revealed here is that the linguists’ behaviour is conditioned by political rather than scientific motives. In other words, to estimate the scientific value of an orthography system means dealing with politics rather than linguistics (“transgressed into the domain of politics”). The text relates events that took place in the 1970s, yet one may ask why this article and such a discourse appear almost 40 years later, in 2013. I would argue that the article reflects an idea that is currently in vogue: debates on the role of linguists in language planning have taken place in Arpitan forums on numerous occasions, in particular since mid-2012 – 2013, as was demonstrated when discussing the names of the language (see the previous chapter).

In fact, the failure to implement a standard orthography back in the 1970s was, most probably, mainly due to its being brought up by an extreme left-wing revolutionary movement. As mentioned in the Introduction and in Part I, the *Valdôtain* political and academic élite were probably opposed to the *Mouvement Arpitania* not so much because it proposed to make “a language of culture” out of “patois,” thus giving to Francoprovençal a new place in the *Valdôtain* (and larger, “Arpitan”) society, but because of the social implications of the struggle itself, which was essentially one of peasants and (to a lesser extent) workers against the bourgeoisie (and perhaps altogether because of the physical violence preached as a method of such a struggle). As a side effect of this failed struggle it remained a complete impossibility to speak about the standardisation of Francoprovençal up until the 2000s. Even at the end of the 1990s, writing it (outside of poetry, which was generally linked to the life of the agro-pastoral society) quite unambiguously meant being a “separatist” or even worse. As reported by an informant in the VDA:

[ils] me donnaient de fasciste parce que j’avais envie d’écrire en patois : «Il faut pas écrire en patois, on écrit en français! Un bon valdôtain écrit en français, il n’écrira jamais en patois!» Et ça c’était en nonante cinq ... Il me dit : «Mais non, fasciste, t’es comme le fasciste toi! T’es un danger pour la population valdôtaine». J’avais



seulement envie d'apprendre à écrire patois! Mais on était là et je ne parle pas du Moyen Age.

[they] called me fascist because I wanted to write in patois: "You should not write in patois, we write in French! A good *Valdôtain* writes in French, he will never write in patois!" And that was in '95 ... He told me: "No, you are a fascist! You are like a fascist! You are a danger for the *Valdôtain* population." I only wished to learn to write in patois! But that's what it was, and I'm not speaking about the Middle Ages.

Anything linked to standardisation was thus connoted as revolutionary and therefore condemned (as for the reference to the fascist ideology, see also Part I Chapter I on the fascist allegiance ascribed to Ascoli). Even though the official policy started to change in the 2000s, standardisation still remains a highly sensitive topic in the VDA.<sup>82</sup>

Since in the VDA speaking about standardisation was a taboo, the proposals for this topic came from other parts of the Francoprovençal area, namely from France and Switzerland. More generally, suggestions on any activities implying the whole Francoprovençal area, and all the consolidating and standardising initiatives now originate in these countries, e.g. the International Council for Francoprovençal (*Conseil international du francoprovençal*, created in 2010), or the Romand and Interregional Federation of Patois (*La Fédération Romande et Interrégionale du Patois, FRIP*), which are presided over by respectively a French and a Swiss member and usually hold their meetings either in Savoy, or in Lausanne, in Switzerland; it was also in Lausanne that the trans-border Arpitan Cultural Alliance was created in 2004, whereas the vast majority of its members live in France. Finally, Lyon – a city where Francoprovençal has not been spoken for centuries as an everyday social practice – is today the centre for political initiatives linked to Francoprovençal. On May 28, 2015 the signing of the Charter for Interregional and Trans-border Cooperation for the Development of the Francoprovençal Language (*La Charte de Coopération interregionale et transfrontalière pour le développement de la langue francoprovençale*) took place. Since the Francoprovençal language is no longer spoken there, unlike in the VDA, local policy-makers are starting to see it rather as a source of investment that could bring profit, for instance, in enhancing tourism.

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<sup>82</sup> E.g. when I told some people in the VDA what the topic of the annual conference of the *Centre d'études francoprovençales* would be in 2015 – "The Transmission, Revitalisation and Standardisation of Francoprovençal" – they said, the VDA authorities would rather close the centre down than let such a conference happen. Although this judgment proved to be (rather) false, it shows how standardisation is still seen as a taboo.

Standardisation seems a logical attribute of this consolidation process, especially since it is imagined to give more prestige to the language concerned.

### 3.3. Two approaches to the standardisation of Francoprovençal

The orthography proposed by Henriët was never adopted outside of his own 1970s movements. Later other orthographic norms emerged. Today the *narrow* model of language construction supposes the use of regional orthography standards: for the two *départements* of Savoie and Haute-Savoie it is the so-called Conflans orthography (*la graphie de Conflans*) developed by a research group in Conflans (Savoy) in 1983 to be common for all Savoyard patois. For the Aosta Valley it is that of the *Bureau régional pour l'ethnologie et la linguistique* (known as *la graphie du BREL*), developed in the early 2000s. These orthography systems are commonly called *phonetic orthography* (*graphie phonétique*): they appear to be *natural* and easily understandable, alike the transcription where everything “is pronounced as written.” In fact, they are largely based on French orthography conventions, which, one may notice, definitely do *not* suppose that everything is pronounced as it is written. If one thinks of new speakers of Francoprovençal e.g. in Valle d’Aosta, these mostly come from other Italian regions and not all of them have studied French; this so-called “phonetic” orthography then needs to be studied, like any other. Nevertheless such *phonetic* orthographies, aimed to “use as many French graphic conventions as possible so as not to confuse the reader” (*Quand les savoyards écrivent leurs patois*, 1997: 215), are represented as orthographies “for the masses.” Besides, they emphasise the peculiar phonetic features of an idiom of a specific territory.

Contrary to this approach, the *wide* Arpitan model insists on the use of a unified standard throughout the territory of language use. This would be the “Reference Orthography B” (*Orthographe de référence B*), ORB, developed in 2003 by the linguist Dominique Stich (Stich 2003). His first attempt to create such a supradialectal orthography (Stich 1998) was called ORA (*Orthographe de référence A*, the word also meaning “now” in Francoprovençal, as it is spelled in this orthography), of which the ORB is a further elaborated version. A standard orthography is positioned as a supradialectal norm which, thanks to its spelling conventions, allows “vocalising” a text with any local pronunciation. This norm is explicitly based upon the example of Occitan orthography, generally referred

to as the “classical” one. Therefore, it seems necessary to examine the Occitan example first, before discussing the ORB.

### 3.4. The Occitan example

The standard Occitan orthography commonly called *classical* was developed in the middle of the 1930s by Lois Alibèrt, and was refined and brought into general use by the staff of the Institute of Occitan Studies immediately after it was formed in 1945. Most of the literature printed in Occitan today is published using this orthography.

In the introduction to his *Occitan Grammar according to Languedoc Vernaculars* (Alibèrt 1976 [1935]), Alibèrt admits:

Sabèm que nòstres adversaris objectaràn qu’aquela lenga restaurada serà *artificiala*, *incomprehensibla* e *estrangièra* dins tots los païses lengadocians. (*op.cit.*: XXXVII, original emphasis)

We are aware that our opponents would accuse this reconstructed orthography of being *artificial*, *incomprehensible*, and *foreign* to all countries (païses) of the *Oc* language.

To preempt these reproaches, Alibèrt substantiates the validity of such an orthography by stating that any literary language is partially artificial and archaic: this is for instance the case of French, Italian, and Spanish (thus, the examples he provides pertain to the national language of the countries where Occitan is spoken), and any literary language needs to be learned (implying that a graphic representation of the oral is never an automatic process). One should note the usage of the definition of a *literary language* (*lenga literària*): Alibèrt does not speak of a *standard*, *standardised*, or *normalised* language, as the unifying variants of minority languages are often defined, but specifically of the language of literature. In other words, it is assumed that the main function of the orthography he developed, and of a written language as a whole, is to provide a tool for the creation of works of literature. The need of a common norm is explained by the argument that a language cannot be limited to a single territory and a single time:

Deu essèr la sintèsi dels parlars naturals de tota la nacion e la sintèsi de la lenga dels escrivans ancians e modèrns. (*op. cit.*: XXXVIII)

It must be a synthesis of natural idioms of the entire nation and a synthesis of the language of authors, both ancient and modern.

It is therefore presumed that the created norm encompasses both diatopic and diachronic variations of the language. Once again, a special attention is paid to the “language of authors.” Note the mention of an Occitan *nation*: the fact that the Occitan constitute a separate nation is given in the presupposition of the statement, i.e. is presented as *a priori* knowledge not to be substantiated or contested.

Alibèrt builds his system based on the Catalan orthography developed by Pompeu Fabra, leaving out some specifically Catalan features. The proximity of the two orthographies aims to promote “a better understanding among the Occitan from both sides of the Pyrenees” (“una intercomprenhcion mai aisida entre los Occitans dels dos penjals dels Pirenèus,” *Ibid.*: XXXIV). Thus, establishing trans-border contacts turns out to be another function of the Occitan orthography. Apparently, it specifically concerns contacts with the Catalans rather than those between the Occitans living in France and the Spanish Occitans of the Aran Valley (Alibèrt includes Catalan into a unified Occitan language as a dialect).

In practice, a unified norm is created by following a set of rules. In phonetics, variants that had already been found in the language in the Middle Ages are allowed while those having emerged during the period of decline are excluded. For instance, the forms *nuèch, nuòch, nuèit* (for *night*) known since the medieval period are allowed, unlike the later *nièch, nèch, nioch, nèit; fach, fait* (for *done*, or *fact*) are admitted while *fat, fèit, fèi* are not, etc. When the variation is too wide, only one or two forms are selected for the sake of easier teaching and reading: Alibèrt calls this method “relative uniformisation” (*uniformizacion relativa*). Another fundamental principle is to present words in their “full etymological form,” e.g. *donar* rather than *dunà* (for *to give*), *véser* rather than *bese* (for *to see*), *fuèlh* rather than *fèl* (for *leaf*), etc.

Finally, one of the proclaimed goals is to cleanse the language of Gallicisms: wherever the colloquial speech uses borrowings from French, the standard Occitan prefers *authentic* Occitan words, ideally coming from the Languedocian variant or, if analogues are not to be found in it, “from other Occitan dialects including Catalan and, *in extremis*, from the *ancient language (lenga anciana)*” (implying the language of the medieval manuscripts).

When the *classical* Occitan orthography is used today, the diatopic variation is emphasised. For instance, Robert Lafont, a major Occitan sociolinguist and one of the founders of the Institute of Occitan Studies, starts his memoirs entitled *Pecics de mièg-sègle* (*Bits from Half a Century*) in Provençal and finishes it in Languedocian – while using the *classical orthography* in both cases:

d'un provençal mitonat d'enfança e assaborat de granda literatura felibrenca a un occitan dich central, sens gost ni gusta al culhièr tradicional, mas qu'a gost fin finala d'Occitània possible. (Lafont 1999: 11)

from a Provençal simmered from infancy and seasoned with the great literature of the *Félibres*, to the so-called Central Occitan that has no taste from the traditional spoon, but which finally bears the flavour of a possible Occitania.

One of the Occitanist activists, in his sixties, explained his adherence to the *classical* orthography by comparing it to the so-called *Mistral's* spelling, developed by the *Félibrige* and based on the conventions of French orthography. It turned out that texts spelled in *Mistral's* orthography are like copybooks or primary school textbooks, “for children,” while the *classical* orthography is seen as a “more scientific” one, “intended for grown-ups.” Furthermore, the informant explains that back in the 1970s, when the orthography was spreading, younger people saw it to be more modern, in particular due to its being “closer to Catalonia” (because of its being based on the Catalan example): this orthography allowed the creation of an image of a modern unity, while the Provençal spelling was associated with the traditional language, the peasant speech, the language of the past.

The criticism of the “classical” orthography is summed up by the Provençalist sociolinguist Blanchet:

A partir des années 1950-1970 a aussi été proposée (voire ponctuellement imposée) la graphie occitane, que ses promoteurs appellent “classique”, fondée sur des principes ... comparable à ceux du système français : graphie élitiste, grammaticale et archaïsante, s'appuyant sur des manuscrits médiévaux, un standard central (à base languedocienne), et une visée unifiante – aux connotations nationalitaires – de l'ensemble d'oc. (Blanchet 2002: 118, my italics)

Since the 1950-70s, an Occitan orthography has been proposed (i.e. imposed), called “classical” by its promoters, based on principles ... comparable with those of the French system: an *elitist* orthography, *grammaticalised* and *archaicised*, based on medieval manuscripts; a *central standard* (based on Languedocian) pursuing to *unify* – with *nationalist* connotations – the *Oc* group.

Thus, the “classical” orthography is correlated to the *high culture* comparable to the French one, “elitist,” “archaicised,” centralised – in other words, absolutely alien to *popular culture* (for more details on this see Costa 2010). Additionally, nationalist connotations are ascribed to the choice of the *classical* orthography. It is thus about the fear of the imposition of a non-existent, invented, artificial language that could exterminate the real idiom still preserved by the older rural generation. The two orthographic solutions are correlated, on the one hand, to the opposition between *popular* and *elitist* culture; and on the other hand, to the reference either to the recent past, which appears to be quite real (preserving the disappearing traditions of the forefathers), or to a remote, centuries-old one (recreating long-since-lost, mythologised linguistic practices).

A similar type of conflict is emerging today in the case of the Arpitan orthography.

### 3.5. A referential orthography for Arpitan

#### 3.5.1 The original argument

Dominique Stich begins the presentation of his Francoprovençal orthography (ORB) with the following statement:

A la question: « pourquoi avoir créé une orthographe supradialectale du francoprovençal ? », la réponse est simple : « parce qu’il n’en existe encore aucune ». (Stich 2003: 411)

The answer to the question “Why create a supra-dialectal Francoprovençal orthography?” is simple: “Because none has existed before.”

One notes that the answer is not particularly convincing: the very fact that nobody has ever set this goal before cannot but strengthen one’s doubts about the appropriateness of such an undertaking. Besides, according to Stich, “what best *represents* a language is its orthography” (« ce qui *représente* le mieux une langue, c’est son orthographe », *Ibid.*, original italics). Thus, orthography, along with the name of the idiom, is aimed at allowing

the language to be identified (probably, as a language distinct of its neighbours). Farther on, the need for a unified supra-dialectal orthography is substantiated by the fact that it already exists “for Occitan, Breton, Basque, Catalan...” Note that what Stich cites are precisely the four “regional languages” that are permitted to be taught in French schools (according to the Deixonne Law); he only mentions that the orthography of these languages “is recognised by the educational institutions of some countries” without specifying any further (one recalls also that in Spain, Occitan, Basque, and Catalan are given the status of co-official languages). In the case of these languages, a supra-dialectal orthography “allows learning, in particular, history, geography, sciences, and especially literature in the respective language” (*Ibid.*) We find here the characteristic set of identity components of a (linguistic) community: the name of the idiom and orthography are followed by history, geography, and literature – note that the latter is *especially* present – just as happened in the Occitan discourse.

As for the specific case of Francoprovençal, another argument in favour of the need for a unified orthography is seen in the presence of “numerous testimonials” (unspecified) of the extreme difficulty of reading texts, even those that are written in the Francoprovençal variant that is close to the reader: due to phonetic and lexical discrepancies, due to the absence of grammatical markers, such as the –s ending for plurals, or due to the *strangeness* (*étrangeté*) of the phonetic spelling, etc.

The lack of specificity is typical of the author’s rhetoric. Thus, whereas “a certain member of the French Academy” expressed his contempt for regional languages in 2002, “some Europeans” had been of a different opinion and awarded the 1904 Nobel Prize in Literature to Frédéric Mistral. Mistral’s Nobel Prize as a sign of the highest recognition of a literary oeuvre in a regional language reveals not only the prestige of the Provençal/Occitan language, in which Mistral wrote, but that of Francoprovençal as well. It is also to be noted that the word *language* (*langue*) is printed in boldface on numerous occasions. Such a representation is implicitly opposed to the notion of the *patois* as a non-language.

It is the orthography that will allow the elevation of Francoprovençal to the rank of a *language*:

Pour le hisser au niveau d’une *langue*, il faut lui donner la représentation qu’il mérite, une orthographe qui soit la même pour tout le monde, où chaque mot ne

s'écrive que d'une seule manière, quelle que soit la prononciation de ce mot. (*Ibid.*: 412, original emphasis)

To promote [Francoprovençal] to the level of a *language*, it has to be given the representation it deserves, an orthography that would be the same for all, wherein each word has but a single way to be spelled whatever its pronunciation.

Thus, Stich's method is to present a single form of the word independently of its dialectal variation. This task turns out to be all the more difficult because Francoprovençal is highly fragmented. Stich mentions the "obvious kinship" ("une parenté évidente") of Francoprovençal words despite the great discrepancies in their realisation (*Ibid.*: 412). His approach can be defined as Indo-European comparativism:

Il s'agit donc de retrouver, comme pour toutes les autres langues romanes, la forme déjà différente du latin mais pas encore « émietée » dans les multiples patois d'aujourd'hui. (*Ibid.*)

So, like for all Romance languages, it is necessary to find in today's many *patois* a form already different from Latin but not yet splintered.

Remember this notion of a "pure" state of sorts of a unified Francoprovençal language, as it proves important for the opponents of Stich's approach.

Farther on, phonetic processes common for all Romance languages (with the rare exception of certain Sardinian varieties) are considered. Stich gives the example of palatalisation of the Latin /k/, which was written as *C* in Latin. His argument is built on the fact that despite the varying pronunciation in different Romance languages, all of them kept the *C* in their spelling – except Romansh, which borrowed the German spelling, "which immediately produces the feeling of foreignness with respect to other orthographies" (*Ibid.*: 412). The same applies to the second palatalisation of the Latin /k/, before /a/: despite their different phonetics, various Romance languages denote the result in the same way, with *ch*:

Latin: *CANTARE*

French: *chanter* [ʃɑ̃te]

North Occitan: *chanter* [ʃanta] (Languedoc Occitan: *cantar* [kanta])

Romansh: *chanter* [tçanta]



ORB: *chantar* [tsãta], [Pãtã], [Jãto]

(*Op.cit.*: 413)

In this way, Stich builds the proof of legitimacy of his Francoprovençal orthography on an explanation of the common principles of most Romance language orthographies via a diachronic and diatopic analysis. Other examples concern, on the one hand, other changes of the Latin /k/ in Romance languages – before /w/ and before /l/; and on the other hand, language changes specific to Francoprovençal – in particular, the evolution of the Latin /a/, the most “famous” characteristic of Francoprovençal (see Part II Chapter1).

To solve the language fragmentation problem, Stich *follows the recipes* of “the three regional languages” that are also characterised by a significant dialectal variation: Occitan, Gascon, and Breton (*Ibid.*: 414). Note that according to Stich, Gascon is not part of the Occitan language. Stich first “tried to adapt the (so-called *classical*) Occitan orthography, but was soon to realise that vocalic systems in particular were too different” (*Ibid.*) At the same time, the researcher notes that the *improved* version of the orthography (the ORB after the ORA) was only made possible thanks to the advice of the Occitans and the Gascons (i.e., it should be noted, *non-speakers* of Francoprovençal).

Stich gives the following definition of a supra-dialectal orthography:

Ce n’est pas la description phonétique exacte de tous les parlers, qui ont chacun des particularismes plus ou moins rares. C’est la représentation référentielle, à travers les traits phonétiques dominants du diasystème, mais aussi à travers l’étymologie et la grammaire, d’une langue à travers l’ensemble de ses variétés, aussi bien dans le temps que dans l’espace. (*Ibid.*: 415)

It is not a precise phonetic description of all tongues, each of which has its own, more or less rare, peculiar features. It is a referential representation (*représentation référentielle*) via the features that are dominant in the diasystem, but also via the language’s etymology and grammar, via the diversity of its variants both in time and in space.

Note the idea of diachronic and diatopic variation (“the diversity of its variants both in time and in space”), common with the Occitan discourse and probably borrowed from the latter. It is specified that “the role of this orthography is to provide a connecting link between the *patois* without disrupting their diversity” (“le rôle d’une telle orthographe est

de servir de trait d'union entre les parlers, sans toucher à leur variété," *Ibid*). However, unlike the Occitan idea of recreation of the norm of *written* texts (preserved up to our times in Medieval texts and which might be significantly different from the idioms that were spoken in various places of the *Oc* area), what is presented here is an attempt to recreate a common *oral* norm, a proto-form of the modern language that, according to the author, once existed. The assumption that such a norm has in fact existed at all is not substantiated but is purported to be an obvious stage of language development.

ORB proposes two writing systems: a wide and a narrow spelling (*graphie large* vs. *graphie serrée*). The former represent "supra-phonological" and a "supra-grammatical" (*sur-phonologique, sur-grammatical*) systems, while the latter implies a graphic notation of a maximum number of dialectal features (Stich 2008: 186). Similarly, two pronunciation systems are in fact proposed for this spelling although it is not stated explicitly. The two systems are presented as two different lists in two different parts of the book: in the *Orthoepy* section (pp. 181-185), and in the section entitled *ORB characteristics, letter by letter* (pp. 416-418). The second system is extremely complicated, where up to 10 possible pronunciation variants (implementations of the same phoneme, according to Stich) are presented for each letter. Consider just a single example – the same one that Stich considers in his argument related to other Romance languages:

ch – {c}, realised as [ts], [P], [st], [s], [h], [f], [ʧ], [ʃ]; never as [k]: ècô ("echo")

In addition to the above, pronunciation for *ch*• and *c'h* is provided separately (the latter is used in the *narrow spelling*).

Finally, Stich concedes that:

Une orthographe est faite pour être lue et écrite, ce n'est pas un produit 100% scientifique, puisque les langues n'évoluent pas d'une manière parfaitement régulière... (*op. cit.*: 186)

Orthography is made to be read and written, it is not a 100% scientific product because languages never develop in a perfectly regular way...

### 3.5.2 Researchers' criticisms of the ORB: 'amateurs' vs. 'scientists'

The common criticism of the ORB by researchers is based on the following arguments:

- the orthography is too complicated to be learned. Besides, language learners will tend to read the words as they are written, which will result in the creation of an entirely new, artificial language;
- Francoprovençal has never existed as a unified language that Stich tries to recreate;
- the notion of a single community, be it linguistic, cultural, or political, has never existed in the Francoprovençal linguistic area. In this context, the very idea of a common orthography appears artificial.

These main arguments have been encountered in my exchanges with the researchers of Francoprovençal (see also Matthey, Meune 2012: 107-108).

The critique of ORB in the VDA directly links the idea of a supra-dialectal orthography to that of separatism, following the model: “one orthography = one country = separatism = social peace at a risk.” Thus Bétemps (2015 [2004]) argues that if the objective is to “save [Francoprovençal] in its countless varieties” (“conserver, dans ses innombrables variétés”), then no standard is needed, a “phonetic” writing would be sufficient. The only case where the standard would be needed, according to Bétemps, is the following:

Mais si l'on pense que le Francoprovençal est une langue discriminée, injustement arrachée, que sa récupération est un besoin fondamental des populations qui le parlent encore ou qui l'ont parlé, même si à une époque très reculée, qu'il faut donc lui donner une officialité dans l'usage et l'enseigner pour qu'il redevienne le code linguistique commun de Saint-Etienne à Aoste et de Grenoble à Fribourg; si l'on pense qu'il existe un pays francoprovençal et que ce pays mériterait d'être reconnu, unifié, qu'il aurait le droit de s'autogouverner, et d'avoir sa langue, bien distincte, bien que fort semblable, de celle des voisins, dans ce cas, la koinè n'est pas seulement nécessaire mais indispensable et son établissement devient urgent.

If one thinks that Francoprovençal is a language discriminated against, unjustly ripped out, that its recuperation is a fundamental need of the populations that still speak it or that have once spoken it,

even if in a very remote period, that it should be therefore given an officiality in use and taught, so that it becomes anew a common linguistic code from St. Etienne to Aosta and from Grenoble to Fribourg; if one thinks that there exists a Francoprovençal country and that this country deserves to be recognised, unified, that it would have the right for self-government, and to have its language, clearly distinct, even though very similar to that of the neighbours, in this case a koinè is not only necessary but also indispensable and its establishment becomes urgent.

Thus the need of language “recuperation” and its teaching at school is seen as solely possible in case of imagining one single country, which, in turn, brings about the idea of this country’s self-government. The objective is thus seen as essentially political. As to the feasibility of such a (hypothetical) programme,

Bien sûr, avec un peu de travail politique, l’idée peut trouver des adeptes, surtout autour du Mont-Blanc où la conscience d’une identité commune est assez partagée par la population. Mais comment faire avec Lyon, la capitale, Grenoble, Saint-Etienne, Bourg-en Bresse, Genève, Neuchâtel? Les probabilités de réalisation d’un plan politique de ce genre sont minimales et le coût en terme de paix sociale surtout, seraient énormes.

Of course, with a bit of political work, the idea [of secession] can find its adepts, especially around Mont Blanc where the consciousness of having a common identity is generally shared by the population. But what to do with Lyon, the capital, Grenoble, Saint-Etienne, Bourg-en Bresse, Geneva, Neuchâtel? The probabilities of the realisation of a political programme of this kind are minimal, and the costs, especially in terms of social peace, would be enormous.

In Switzerland, where, unlike in the VDA, there is no long tradition of associating the ideas of orthography for Francoprovençal with those of secessionism, the criticism concerned mostly the lexicographical side of the book by Stich. Let us examine more in detail the review of Stich’s dictionary written by Eric Fluckiger, a professor at the University of Neuchâtel (Fluckiger 2004). It became an ORB critique *par excellence*: it is this paper that is quoted both in scholarly works (e.g. Elmiger 2012: 92) and in the French Wikipedia article on Francoprovençal – in which activist and scientific arguments feature in approximately equal parts, as the article has been edited by both parties (“see Eric Fluckiger’s review (2004) ... for a scientific critical analysis of Stich’s orthography”<sup>83</sup> – note the adjective *scientifique*) – and, consequently, in Arpitanist blogs.

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<sup>83</sup> [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite\\_note-CritiqueStich-32](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite_note-CritiqueStich-32) (03.03.13)

The review's argument is built on an opposition between *amateurs* ("an amateur would be captivated..." – *op. cit.*: 312) and the scientific community. The author thus indicates that:

- "The nomenclature sustained numerous deviations from the *elementary principles* of lexicography" (*La nomenclature a pâti des nombreuses entorses faites aux principes élémentaires de la lexicographie* – *op. cit.*: 313, my italics – N.B.): it concerns separate lexical entries for substantives and adjectives in plural form or for feminine adjectives, etc.;
- "Stich's microstructural formula is *atypical* and *poorly compliant* with the rules of modern lexicography" (*La formule microstructurelle de Stich est atypique et peu conforme aux règles de la lexicographie moderne* – *op. cit.*: 315);
- "Methodological faults are often combined" (*op. cit.*: 313), the lack of e.g. a systematic indication of the grammatical category "goes against customary conventions" (*op. cit.*: 315), etc.

Fluckiger reproaches Stich for his "*artificially* distinguishing" (*distingue artificiellement*) certain words while "*unjustifiably* separating others" (*en sépare indûment les autres*). It is therefore implicitly assumed that there exists – or there may exist – a different classification, which, unlike the "artificial" one in question, would be "natural" and "justifiable." Presumably, Fluckiger sees such classifications in the GPRS (the *Glossary of Patois of Romandie Switzerland*) and the FEW (the *French Etymological Dictionary*),<sup>84</sup> the two sources he regularly uses to compare Stich's suggestions with. Note that the review only provides the acronyms of these publications while all other sources are referenced to by their full bibliographical data. In this way, a border is once again being drawn between the members of the scientific community, those who *understand*, – and the *amateurs*. A Latin phrase used by Fluckiger (*op. cit.*: 313) serves the same purpose.

Due to the dialectological orientation of the review's author, he almost never mentions the two aspects of Stich's work that proved to be fundamental for his Arpitanist followers: the Francoprovençal language planning in general and the development of a supra-dialectal spelling system in particular. Thus, Fluckiger has doubts concerning the appropriacy of neologism-coining: in his opinion, it would require "the agreement of

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<sup>84</sup> GPRS : *Glossaire des Patois de la Suisse Romande*, par L. Gauchat, J. Jeanjaquet, E. Tappolet, avec la collaboration d'E. Muret, Attinger, Neuchâtel et Paris, 1924 ss.  
FEW : W. von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Basel, 1922 ss.

representative instances of the respective linguistic domain” (*le concours d’instances représentatives du domaine linguistique concerné – Ibid.:* 319). He cites the example of the *Lia Rumantscha* organisation in the Swiss canton of Graubünden, which performs the same function concerning the Romansh language. It remains nevertheless unclear what body could claim, if hypothetically, to play a similar part in the Francoprovençal linguistic area. The issue of a supra-dialectal orthography as such is explicitly left aside:

La problématique de la graphie supra-dialectale n’est évoquée ici que pour rappeler qu’il s’agit ... d’un *artefact* qui privilégie l’intercompréhension pan-francoprovençale au détriment de la description des spécificités phonétiques locales. (*op. cit.:* 314)

The problematic of supra-dialectal spelling is only mentioned here to remind that it concerns ... an *artefact* that favours pan-Francoprovençal intelligibility at the expense of the description of local phonetic specificities.

As for Stich’s etymological approach, it is mostly not the etymological principle itself that is criticised, but its implementation: “having failed to rightly identify certain morphemes, the author produces a confusion” (*Op. cit.:* 315). Effacement of “the entire diatopic fullness” (*op. cit.:* 317) is also mentioned. Any doubts in “the appropriateness of such an undertaking” as a whole are only expressed in a footnote. Thus, what the review mostly criticises is not the ORB, even less the idea of a supra-dialectal Francoprovençal spelling as such, but Stich’s lexicographical method, for failing to comply with scientific criteria:

Abstraction faite de la question pendante du bien-fondé d’une koïnè francoprovençale, il nous paraît que la partie lexicographique de l’ouvrage est *dépourvue de toute valeur scientifique*. (*op. cit.:* 319)

Leaving aside the pending issue of the justifiability of a Francoprovençal *koïnè*, we believe that the lexicographical part of this work is *deprived of any scientific value*.

It is the last phrase that is quoted in Arpitanist debates: methodological issues should be of the least interest to Arpitanists, but it does not prevent them from referring to Fluckiger’s review as the quintessential incarnation of a “hostile” point of view.

### 3.5.3 The activist stance: orthography as a political issue

As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, non-Arpitanist activists prefer the so-called *phonetic spelling*. They either ignore Stich's orthography or reject it as too complicated. The ORB is being actively promoted by Arpitanists: they consider the promotion of this supra-dialectal orthography to be one of the main goals of the ACA. Meanwhile, the Arpitanist discourse reveals three main ideas that are also present in Stich's text. Firstly, orthography turns a patois into a language. Like IP, 1950, *Arp* from Lausanne admits: "When I write in the ORB, I feel I am writing in *a language*." Secondly, the function of an orthography is to promote mutual understanding between Arpitans from different parts of Arpitania (the notion of orthography as a *common code*). At the same time, activists, similarly to the linguists who criticise Stich, do mention the paradox that a common linguistic unity is only acknowledged when almost nobody *naturally* speaks the language anymore. This remark is however free of any negative connotation when expressed by activists. Finally, the idea of a supra-dialectal language is mentioned much less frequently. Note that in this case, it is mostly supra-dialectal lexis that is meant rather than supra-dialectal phonetics or grammar. Thus, AW, 1950, *Arp*, concedes that he tries to speak using as few local words, and as many of those used throughout the whole Arpitan territory, as possible – even though the latter may be the least frequent ones. According to him, the language as it used to be, and as it is still marginally preserved today (in all the diversity of variants of different valleys and villages), is doomed to die out soon. The future of Arpitan is seen in a common, unified linguistic form.

Fluckiger's review emerges in a discussion held in the *Arpitania abada!* Facebook group (02.06.2013):<sup>85</sup> the last sentence of the review is quoted (as provided above), followed by comments. To quote three of them:

E.A.: Voilà comment on utilise sa position de linguiste pour faire de la politique.

Here's how a linguist's position is used to make politics.

E.A.: Ils [les dialectologues] comprennent pas qu'ils ne sont pas propriétaires de la langue, et que nous avons besoin d'un code orthographique, peu importe si il ne

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<sup>85</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21904584384/>

colle pas à 100% à tous les dialectes de manière parfaite. ... si seulement ils se contentaient de ne pas intervenir, mais non !!!!!

[The dialectologists] fail to understand that they don't own the language, that we need an orthographic code even if it doesn't perfectly fit with all the dialects to 100% ... if only they could content themselves with abstaining from interfering, but no!!!!

A.F.: Ils disent qu'ils veulent maintenir "pure" la langue et jouent sur les émotions des gens.

They say they want to keep the language "pure" and play upon people's feelings.

Despite the apparent dialogue with the text of the review, the parties mean in fact different issues: the discussion transforms the criticisms of the lexicographic method into those of a supra-dialectal standard as such. It turns out once again that the issue of the orthography is a political rather than a linguistic one, and, therefore, does not belong to linguists (just as was seen above with respect to the issue of naming the language). Similarly, in the day-to-day communication among Arpitanists, linguists are reproached for meddling in issues that lie beyond their expertise. In other words, it is suggested that the business of linguists is to study language variations, whereas language planning belongs to its *speakers* – or to activists acting as their representatives. To cite an anecdotal example, an Arpitan separatist from the Aosta Valley, DT, 1963, *Arp*, borrows criminal vocabulary to speak about dialectologists: as he refers to them, he uses the term *cupola* (*coupole*), usually meant to denote the central controlling and coordinating body of the mafia.

Note that the Arpitanist stance is substantially different in this respect from that of Savoyardists. The latter also blame researchers for the lack of positive changes in the linguistic situation, but their reproaches are of the opposite nature: it is not that linguists meddle in the issues that are of no concern to them, but that those in France do not work on the issues they should be working on:

AB, 1960, *Sav*: Nous on est un peu délaissés parce qu'on voit dès lors qu'on sort frontière, si on va tout de suite au domaine occitan au Sud de la France, ça y est, on a à nouveau toute une armada d'universitaires, on passe en Italie, ils sont là, et même en Suisse! Ils ont un glossaire universitaire à Neuchâtel. Et quand on arrive en France et bien voilà que tout ça disparaît. Donc les parents pauvres à l'intérieur de la France, à l'intérieur du francoprovençal les parents pauvres aussi.



We are somewhat underprivileged because as soon as you cross the border, if you go straight to the Occitan area in the South of France, everything is fine there, there's once again a whole armada of scholars, you go to Italy, they are there, and even in Switzerland! They have a university glossary in Neuchâtel. Now as soon as you get to France, it all disappears. Poor cousins within France, poor cousins within Francoprovençal too.

### 3.5.4 Concluding remarks

To conclude, two major observations can be made:

Firstly, the ORB explicitly departs from the assumption that different Francoprovençal varieties are not mutually intelligible, therefore a common “code” is needed (as it is referred to by language advocates), to be “decoded” locally. This vision has indeed been spread by public authorities and dialectologists in their discourse on the *patois* of a village that would not be understood even three kilometers away. Its objective was to degrade local vernaculars to the level of a “non-language,” as opposed to the national language, which is everywhere the same and ensures wide communication. Paradoxically, language activists who claim to be against nation-state ideologies base their proposed language planning precisely on these. Sociolinguistically speaking, the assumption of a lack of mutual intelligibility between different varieties is wrong. Indeed, in all periods there have been exchanges in the Francoprovençal area that would go far beyond a single village. Thus many informants in the villages in the three countries would tell stories about themselves or else about their (grand-)parents going to the livestock fair on foot, sometimes to other regions and countries. They would speak *patois* everywhere on their way and at the fair itself. The *patois* would change as they proceeded, yet the differences served to identify the interlocutor's geographic background, without ever impeding successful communication (see also Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming on this). Today the *patois* of a village is even more of a myth: with a modern level of mobility, with people having parents from different municipalities and living themselves in yet another one, the occasions for communication between speakers of different varieties are ubiquitous, and “*un grand esprit d'adaptation*” (“a strong spirit of adaptation”), as one of my *Valdôtain* informants once referred to it, is becoming more and more widespread. Hence, if people do indeed say (namely in Savoie and Haute-Savoie) that they find it difficult to *read* a variety from another place, even be it some kilometers away, it is not due to the varieties being not mutually intelligible, but merely to the orthography not being “decodable” (in the vast

majority of cases it is the *Graphie de Conflans*: in its effort to be as close to the phonetics as possible it is often hard for the reader to graphically recognise the words).

Secondly, most of those insisting on ORB are those who do not actually use the language as a means of daily communication. On the contrary, in the whole Valle d'Aosta, the region where the language is spoken on a daily basis by the majority of the population, out of 128,298 inhabitants<sup>86</sup> only two use ORB. Hence, those writing the idiom and thus making it into a “language” and those speaking it are two distinct categories. Once again, we can see here that a language as an object of language planning and a language as a daily practice are two different social phenomena.

Finally, it should be noticed that no properly linguistic study of the ORB has been made yet: one that would analyse the concrete solutions proposed by ORB at various levels of the linguistic system (not only the lexical choice, but also the phonological and morpho-syntactic solutions), and compare it with the actual language system as used by speakers in different parts of the Francoprovençal area. The lack of such studies, in its turn, can be seen to emphasise once again that heated disputes that seemingly are about language are almost always about extralinguistic challenges.

### **Discussion: geography, naming, orthography, and the role of linguists**

Thus, three elements of the discussion become the subject of a heated conflict between different movements:

- geography
- idiom naming
- orthography

It would seem that none of these elements is directly connected to the idiom: one can obviously speak an idiom that has no name or known geographical limits (which is exactly the situation of many oral languages). Nevertheless, the discourse of all participants of the process under study assures that the language (Francoprovençal, Arpitan, or Savoyard) *will exist* if the three corresponding conditions are observed: if its

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<sup>86</sup> On 1/1/2015 [http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default\\_i.aspx](http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default_i.aspx)

geographic limits are defined, if it is named, and if it has an orthography system of its own. The act of naming turns out to be especially significant as it is interpreted as performative: a language will exist if it is named, and it is crucial to name it in the right way. The major differences between the two models are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Narrow vs. wide models of language construction

	“Narrow” model	“Wide” model
<i>Main trend</i>	“subjective”: linguistic borders correspond to today’s speakers’ representations <sup>87</sup> and existing local identities	“Objective”: linguistic borders correspond to objective “linguistic facts” <sup>88</sup>
<i>Geographic borders &amp; linguistic borders</i>	An idiom’s borders are based on the borders of a local administrative entity	A (newly imagined) trans-border territorial space is delimited according to the linguistic features
<i>Names</i>	An idiom’s name corresponds to the name of the territory: “patois of the municipality X”; “the Savoyard language,” “the <i>Valdôtain</i> dialect,” etc.	- The name is based on the linguistic properties of the idiom: “the Francoprovençal language” or - A unique name to delimit a unique object: “the Arpitan language” (also “Savoyard language” in some interpretations)
<i>Orthography</i>	So-called “phonetic” orthographies, specifying all the particularities of local pronunciation	So-called ‘supra-dialectal’ orthography, emphasising common lexical roots (a “common code”)
<i>Implications</i>	- A local variety, often seen as a “non-language” - Aim at preserving linguistic diversity (museification)	- A language in its own right - Aim at language revitalisation and transmission

<sup>87</sup> Such as they evolved historically and under the influence of nation-state ideologies

<sup>88</sup> Chosen as relevant subjectively by scholars

This conflict can be considered under various aspects: as one between *wide* and *narrow* models, or between *objective* and *subjective* ones. At the same time, it ultimately turns out to be also a conflict between the *scientific* model and the *activist* (Arpitan) one. The latter relies on scientific knowledge as well (books by Stich), but the research that legitimises it is extremely marginalised, and most specialists usually consider it to be “unscientific.” Researchers, in their turn, turn out to be “the enemies” of the object of their study in the eyes of activists: in the activists’ discourse, it is the linguist who plays the part of the principal enemy, as well as that of the culprit for the present (dying) and future (dead) states of the idiom under study. At the same time, linguists are denied the right to participate in language planning: their area of expertise is taken to be limited to studying the linguistic properties of the language, whereas the entire responsibility for practical issues should rest on the speakers – or on the activists acting (as if) in their behalf.

The use of language and its representations among the speakers themselves will be studied in Part III.

### Part III. Francoprovençal as a social and cultural practice

In Parts I and II, the discourse on the language was considered; in Part III, I will explore the actual linguistic practices of the Francoprovençal communities. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it was noted, a series of legal acts have transformed what used to be considered a group of “patois” at the borderland of Italy, France and Switzerland into a “minority/regional language”: the Francoprovençal language (hereafter Francoprovençal; see Law 482/1999 for Italy and Deliberation 2009 for France). With the *Charter for interregional and trans-border cooperation for the development of the Francoprovençal language*, signed in May 2015 (Charter 2015)<sup>89</sup>, a trans-border language policy is being developed. So far it has concerned the autonomous region of Valle d’Aosta in Italy and the Rhône-Alpes region in France, but cooperation with Francoprovençal-speaking Swiss cantons is also under discussion. As for civil society, trans-border cooperation is established with the annual international festivals of Francoprovençal organised by the *Romand and interregional federation of “patoisants” (Fédération romande et interrégionale des patoisants, FRIP)*. In 2010 the International Council for Francoprovençal (*Conseil International du Francoprovençal*), including members from the three states, was also created. All of these activities are based on the assumption that a structural unity of Francoprovençal shown by the dialectologists would imply a similarity of the social issues linked to the linguistic practices and of speakers’ needs.

At the same time, although extensive research has been carried out on linguistic features of Francoprovençal (see Tuailon 2007), none of the approaches developed so far have regarded Francoprovençal as it is used in interaction, as far as its main trans-border area is concerned. They have mostly regarded locally circumscribed varieties spoken by individuals seen as monolingual, excluding from their scope the contact phenomena that can be observed in the actual language use, as well as the social meaning and implications of such linguistic behaviour. If this is true for Francoprovençal, it is also a common issue for studies on minority languages. Unlike the issue of the language on its own, as a certain abstraction, the issue of the actual use of minority languages rarely becomes the focus of attention, of either researchers or activists:

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<sup>89</sup> See also the Rhône-Alpes and Valle d’Aosta regions’ press-releases : [http://www.rhonealpes.fr/uploads/Externe/9e/PRE\\_FICHIER\\_1473\\_1432825479.pdf](http://www.rhonealpes.fr/uploads/Externe/9e/PRE_FICHIER_1473_1432825479.pdf) and <http://appweb.regione.vda.it/dbweb/Comunicati.nsf/VediNewsi/5fe0bc9307a81511c1257e69002a0dfc!OpenDocument&Click=>

L'effacement actuel [des locuteurs] permet de se concentrer sur la langue, d'en faire un objet d'étude et de débat, en laissant de côté la question embarrassante des pratiques mixtes, diglossiques, complexes des locuteurs ordinaires. (Costa 2012)

The present-day effacement [of language speakers] allows a focus on the language, making it the object of research and debate, to leave aside the embarrassing issue of mixed, diglossic, complex practices of ordinary speakers.

The central question of this Part III can be therefore formulated roughly as follows: what do people actually do with Francoprovençal and what does using this code instead of any other one mean for them? Studying this will allow us to see the gap between language ideologies and language practices, and help to identify real issues that are problematic for the speakers. It might also clarify what is, more broadly, a minority language at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: not as it has been described “from above” by dialectologists, or defined by politicians, or claimed by certain activists, but as an actual linguistic practice, and a reality existing in its speakers' representations and conditioning its use.

As described in the introduction to this paper, the findings are based on extensive fieldwork in which priority was given to the ethnographic method of participant observation (five months in the Francoprovençal-speaking areas of France, 10 months in both those in Switzerland and in Italy). The observation was combined with in-depth interviews (60 interviews of 1-3 hours in length) held mostly in Francoprovençal.

I will argue that the Francoprovençal space comprises two types of linguistic situations, to which I refer as *diffuse* and *focused*, borrowing the terms from Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985). The first, the diffuse type, is where Francoprovençal is spoken in daily communication. Its borders, be they linguistic or geographical, are uncertain for speakers and interference between Francoprovençal, Italian and French, as well as between varieties of Francoprovençal, occurs regularly, at all levels of the linguistic system. The second, focused type is that in which Francoprovençal is no longer spoken in everyday interactions. Its use is reserved for special occasions, such as communication between language activists. At the same time, when speaking in Francoprovençal, no interference is accepted, and the standardisation of Francoprovençal is seen as a priority.

Considering the socio-historical factors that brought about an uneven evolution of the linguistic situations in the first place (Francoprovençal continued to be spoken in some parts but ceased to in some others) is beyond the scope of this dissertation (for a historical

overview of the evolution of the linguistic situation in the VDA see Bauer 1999, 2008; for that on Savoy see Bichurina, Dunoyer forthcoming). However it is worth reminding how linguistic change correlates to social structure and networks: namely, that “linguistic change is slow to the extent that the relevant populations are well established and bound by strong ties, whereas it is rapid to the extent that weak ties exist in populations” (Milroy and Milroy 1985: 375). My data seems to confirm that factors of density and multiplicity of social networks are also among the most powerful for language shift (see also Bichurina 2015). Indeed, the diffuse type is characteristic of the high mountain regions (except for the ski resorts) of the three states, where close ties between community members are maintained, specifically in most parts of the Aosta Valley (hereafter the VDA) and some municipalities in Piedmont in Italy; also, in some municipalities in Savoie and Haute-Savoie in France as well as some municipalities in the Valais and to a lesser extent, in Fribourg in Switzerland. Close ties exist there within the communities and throughout the whole region “*around Mont Blanc,*” as it is commonly referred to by local inhabitants. The focused type is characteristic of the industrialised lowlands of the three countries, with their high level of social mobility and loose social ties (for the rest of the Francoprovençal area, including cities in the above-mentioned regions, see Figure 16).

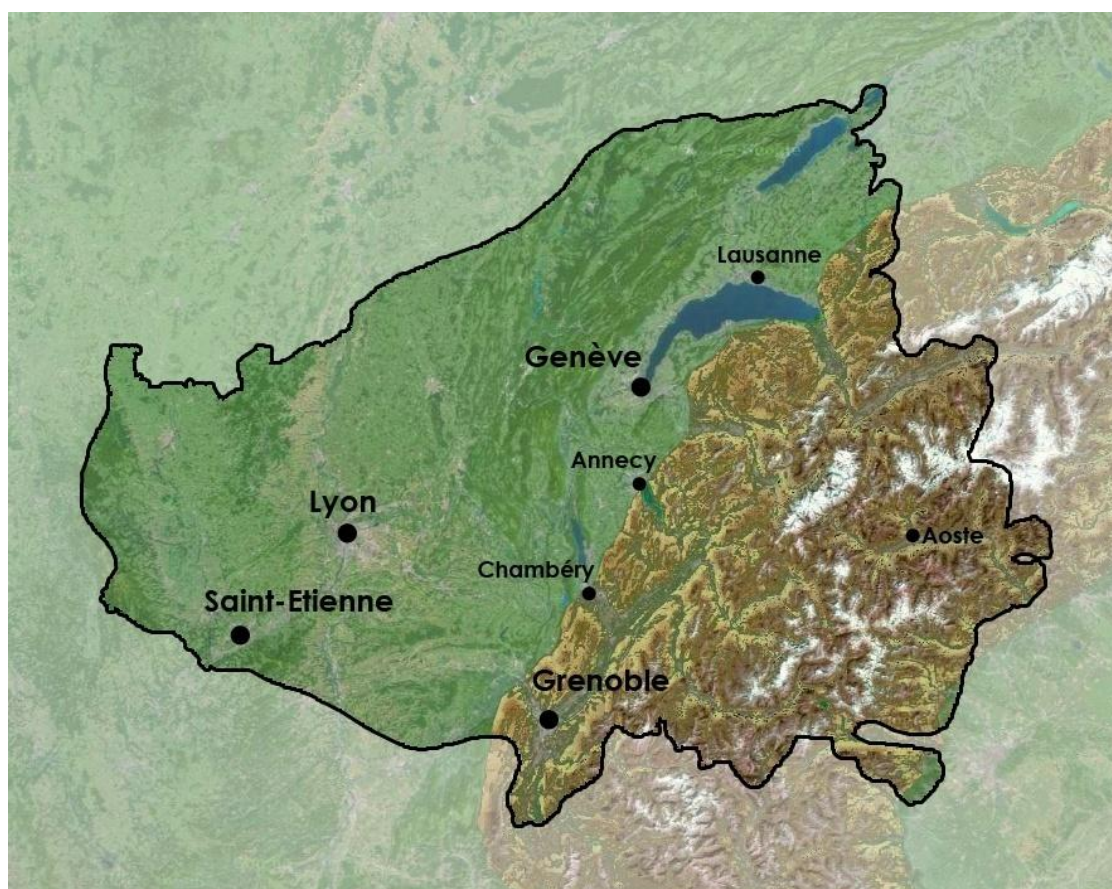


Figure 16. Geographical distribution of Francoprovençal: mountains (diffuse

settings) vs. lowlands (focused settings).

Speakers themselves also make a distinction between the mountains and the lowlands. Anecdotally, once as I was approaching the Francoprovençal valleys in the Piedmont in winter, a *Valdôtain* Arpitanist accompanying me showed me the snowy tops of the mountains, as opposed to their snowless lower parts: “You see, there where there is snow, they speak Arpitan. Where there is not, they speak Piedmontese and Italian.”

This delimitation of two types of social use of Francoprovençal helps us to look at “Francoprovençal” from a different angle. Indeed, as we have seen in Part II, there are two types of representations of Francoprovençal (the “narrow” vs. “large” models); however, it will be demonstrated that neither of those corresponds to the Francoprovençal language as it is constructed in social interactions. I should argue therefore that there is a necessity to go beyond a reified vision of the language as a set of linguistic facts, and to replace language practices – and not language systems – within a broader range of social practices. As language policy on Francoprovençal becomes more and more active today, it is important that as long as such a policy is concerned, it is understood not as an initiative purely for the sake of the language itself, but as one that views a language as a social practice of a particular community: only people have needs; phonemes or lexemes do not. The distinction of the two types of social use of Francoprovençal suggests that the language policy proposals, intended so far as a recipe for the whole Francoprovençal zone (whether coming from politicians or from civil society), can hardly be the same for both settings, as the actual speakers’ needs are different.

I will start with the theoretical framework that my fieldwork data has encouraged me to adopt. I will then consider the linguistic situation first in the diffuse and then in the focused settings and study what happens when the two types of language use meet. The last chapter of Part III will be dedicated to the study of the use of Francoprovençal in the performing arts and at festivals.



## Chapter 1. The conceptual framework

### 1.1 Diffuse and focused settings

A stereotype of a language as an autonomous bounded entity is often incompatible with what we find in the actual linguistic behavior in multilingual communities: “It is not in the nature of human language for such objects to exist” (Le Page 1997 [1988]: 32). When daily practice involves using several languages, their borders and the very notion of language may be unclear. Muysken (2000) suggests that, in the actual linguistic behaviour of bilinguals, apart from *alternation* (of two different systems), and *insertion* (of an element of one system in another system), there are cases where we deal with the realisation of various lexical choices within *one* system, in which new morpho-syntactic models can emerge. The codes then are socially distributed and complimentary, constituting a single system. In a similar way, Grosjean (2008) argues that bilinguals can switch between *monolingual mode* (when necessary, e.g. when addressing a monolingual) and *bilingual mode*. The crucial issue to be taken into consideration here is that bilingualism is something completely different from two monolingualisms, as it has been traditionally represented by both speakers and linguists (see Auer 2007 on the way that the monolingual ideology is linked to nation-state ideology).

To approach the phenomena found in my Francoprovençal fieldwork data I use the conceptual framework developed by R. Le Page and A. Tabouret-Keller (1985) who introduced the notions of *focused* vs. *diffused* languages. A focused language is one whose limits and normative uses are clearly imagined by its speakers; a diffuse language is, by contrast, one in which these are blurry. Thus “French” is a highly-focused concept, as everyone knows what “good French” is; “English” is more diffuse, with the concept of the New (Modern) Englishes presuming the existence of American, British, Australian, etc. forms of the language. These representations are to be distinguished from what speakers actually do with the respective codes. Besides, “the motivation that gives rise to such concepts as discrete, closed, finite rule-systems is to be distinguished from that which drives the need for self-expression and identification and communication, although there is clearly cross-over influence between the two” (Le Page 1997 [1988]: 32).

Based on these theoretical assumptions, I propose to start not from “languages” as reified discrete systems, like in our case “Francoprovençal,” “French” and “Italian” would be, but from the actual language use observed. Three issues need to be studied:

- How individuals use various codes present in their linguistic repertoire;
- How they identify this linguistic production;
- What social meaning is constructed by speaking a code identified as “Francoprovençal” as opposed to “French” or “Italian.”

Thus during one of my first weeks of stay in Saint-Nicolas<sup>90</sup> (in the VDA) a neighbour of mine, a woman in her sixties, told me: “*Se t’a fata, siamo qua*” [If you need [anything], we are here]. From the structural linguistic point of view, *se t’a fata* is Francoprovençal, and *siamo qua* is Italian. It is improbable though that the speaker deliberately *chose* to use both languages in that phrase; besides, it is all part of a vocabulary that does not imply pragmatically the use of one code or another, as a use of a certain term hypothetically might. In her mind she must have been speaking “patois” (as Francoprovençal is commonly called by its speakers), as it was practically the only language choice in our interactions. “Patois” was an index of social inclusion, implying that I was *di noure* “one of ours,” as other community members would say explicitly.

## 1.2 On the ‘life’ and ‘death’ of languages

The discourse around Francoprovençal, whether scholarly, activist or political, is informed by its representation as an *endangered language*. It is therefore worthwhile discussing the issue of so-called *endangered languages* and *language death*, even though it should be underlined that the *endangered languages* approach is not the one adopted in this dissertation.

The theme of *language death* has become especially omnipresent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Academic research of the phenomenon appeared in the late 1970s – early 1990s, including such subsequently classical works as Dorian’s *Language Death: The Life Cycle of a Scottish Gaelic Dialect* (1981), the “Endangered Languages” issue of the *Language* review (Hale et al. 1992), and, later on, the studies by Crystal (2000) and Nettle &

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<sup>90</sup> A municipality at 1,200m above sea level, 16 km away from Aosta.

Romaine (2000). Without going into details on this much studied topic, I would like to consider here only some of the aspects of this issue that are important to this dissertation: namely, the particularities of its spread outside scholarly circles and its ideological foundations.

The issue of language death has become widespread outside the academic world since the early 2000s, as it contrasts the discourse of necessary and soon-to-be-lost language diversity with that of globalisation as a common homogenising force. Debora Cameron notes that *language endangerment* is represented by the media as something calling for a moral response: “if not panic, then certainly indignation ... from the imagined community of right-thinking people” (Cameron 2007: 270). Moreover, this representation is axiomatic: it is presumed impossible to have diverging opinions on the subject or not to think about it at all:

Not deploring the rapidity with which human languages are apparently being lost once the matter has been brought to your attention would be as odd as not deploring world hunger, the HIV-AIDS epidemic, the destruction of tropical rainforests or the dying out of many animal and plant species (Cameron 2007: 270).

This unambiguous image of the process is additionally supported by the use of such emotionally charged terms as *death*, *endangerment*, *threat*, etc. (*Ibid.*)

The now dominant discourse is based upon the assumptions that in today’s world  $x$  languages exist, and  $y$  per cent of them will die in the nearest  $z$  years (Duchêne, Heller 2007: 3). According to the famous prognosis by Krauss (Krauss 1992), out of 6,000 languages that exist in the present-day world, only 600 will remain in 100 years, i.e. 90% of the languages will die. Nevertheless, it is not at all obvious what to count as a language (see the Introduction), nor is it clear what the statement maintaining that these *languages* will *die* actually means. Concerning the last remark, as emphasised by N.B. Vakhtin, a language may no longer function as a vehicle for communication in day-to-day conversational practice in a given community, but it can still continue to exist as a symbol, as an identity marker for the community members (Vakhtin 2001b). Whether such a language should be considered as *dead* or still *alive* remains unclear. In a similar way, in several communities in eastern Ukraine that I studied the use of the local language (be it Urum or Albanian) might be limited to several words and yet it could be enough to consider a person using them as a speaker. Let me give a brief example of an Albanian-

speaking village in eastern Ukraine (Georgievka) where I conducted sociolinguistic fieldwork in 2005 and 2006 (see Bichurina 2006, 2013). The local inhabitants are the descendents of a group of orthodox Albanians that left the Balkans in the 15th century. Today they speak an archaic version of Albanian, with Slavic and Turkish interferences at all levels of the linguistic system (see Morozova 2012). A language shift occurred with the generation born in the 1950-60s, who decided to speak to their children in the dominant Russian language. The young generation speaks almost exclusively in Russian. However, the use of several local terms of kinship by some children is sufficient for a child to be identified as Albanian-speaking. Namely, a distinction that is felt to be crucial in the local Albanian community is that of *male*: the father's mother ("the only legitimate grandmother," as one of my informants referred to it). In contrast, in Russian both grandmothers, be they from the paternal or the maternal side, are called the same way ("*babushka*"). Hence, a child using this specific word *male* would be identified as 'speaking like us' ("*zallahit si neve*") and therefore being "one of us" ("*ga tantë*"), a member of the (ethnic) group.

Within the discourse on language death, linguistic variety is as a rule represented either as identical to biological varieties, or as a part of cultural heritage. The biological (or "biologised") version of the discourse on *endangered languages* is based on organic metaphors whose roots go back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the term *endangered languages* is borrowed from the discourse on *endangered biological species* (Cameron 1995, 2007). Therefore, one is dealing with a conceptual metaphor representing a language as a biological species, where linguistic diversity is equaled to biological diversity. In fact, however, the extinction mechanisms are entirely different in those two cases (Cameron 2007). While the extinction of biological species can be related to climate changes and disruptions of reproductive capabilities, in the case of languages it is connected with the cultural processes of language shift and language assimilation. As James Milroy reminds us: "Of course, it is not true that language is a living thing (any more than swimming, or birdsong, is a living thing): it is a vehicle for communication between living things, namely human beings" (Milroy 1992: 23). The *biologised* discourse results in the marginalisation of language speakers, who melt into the background or completely disappear from the sight of scholars or journalists. Instead of studying the speakers' motivations, be they social, economic, political, etc., language is discussed as an abstraction that is born, lives, and dies as though on its own (Duchêne, Heller 2007). Or, to borrow Cameron's expression,

“culture becomes a branch of nature, and local political interests are subsumed into a global celebration of ‘diversity’” (Cameron 2007: 284).

The cultural version of the discourse on *language death* (which is not mutually exclusive from the biological one) is built on a metonymy: language substitutes all of the culture, history, knowledge accumulated by a given people, and the loss of language is supposed to mean the death of all of these (Cameron 2007: 273). This notion is based on the reification of culture: it is represented as immutable and intrinsically homogenous (with no possibility of inner conflict). Additionally, it is based on the idea of an organic connection between *being A* and *speaking A*, where losing the ancestors’ language causes a catastrophic loss of identity (*op. cit.*: 278).

Finally, as far as prognoses of “death” are concerned, the situation in which a language has been promised a quick and inevitable death for many decennia if not centuries, while it stubbornly remains alive, is typical:

В течение как минимум сотни лет люди, занимающиеся языками и культурами Севера, повторяют, словно сговорившись, одни и те же магические формулы и «заклинания», одинаково описывают языковую и культурную ситуацию: народы вырождаются, хиреют и вымирают, языки находятся на грани исчезновения, культуры разрушаются, теряются и заменяются унифицированной «цивилизацией», и вообще языковое и культурное разнообразие постепенно превращается в унылый однородный сплав. ... Станным образом культуры и языки оказываются гораздо более живучими, чем ожидалось: 100 лет им пророчат гибель, и 100 лет они каким-то образом оказываются из года в год живы. (Vakhtin 2001a: 268)

For at least hundreds of years, those studying the languages and cultures of the north [of Russia] keep repeating, as though in concert with each other, the same magic formulae or “spells,” giving the same description of the linguistic and cultural situation: peoples degenerate, decay, and die off; languages stand on the brink of extinction; cultures get destroyed, are lost and replaced with a leveled-out “civilisation”; and all in all, linguistic and cultural variety is gradually transformed into a bleak, uniform alloy. ... Strangely enough, cultures and languages prove to be much more resilient than expected: for 100 years, their doom has been prophesied, and yet for 100 years, they somehow manage to remain alive year after year.

This is also the case with Francoprovençal. A Swiss dialectologist named L. Favrat wrote in 1866:

nos patois seront bientôt de l'histoire: ils se modifient et s'altèrent de plus en plus sous l'influence du français qui envahit peu à peu les campagnes. Et cela est si vrai que, dans mainte localité, les hommes qui savent encore parler le pur et franc patois de leurs pères, sont en général des vieillards, tandis que la jeune génération, tout en comprenant l'ancien idiome, ne parle plus guère que le français. (Favrat 1866 : VI)

Our patois will soon be history: they are being modified and altered more and more under the influence of French, which is little by little invading our countryside. And this is so true that in many localities those who still speak their fathers' pure and sincere *patois* are generally old men, while the young generation, though understanding the ancient idiom, speaks nothing but French.

Indeed, according to dialectological research, in Swiss protestant cities like Lausanne, Geneva and Neuchâtel the local Francoprovençal idiom disappeared as early as in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kristol [1999] 2013). As for the rural areas:

Dans le canton de Neuchâtel, c'est en 1904 que les enquêteurs des *Tableaux phonétiques* ont pu interroger les derniers dialectophones septua- et octogénaires. La campagne genevoise ... a conservé ses dialectes au-delà de la première guerre mondiale; les derniers dialectophones genevois ont disparu dans les années 1930 (ibid.)

In the canton of Neuchâtel it was in 1904 that the researchers of the Phonetic Tables could take interviews with the last dialect speakers, aged 70 and 80. The Geneva country ... could maintain its dialects after the First World War; the last dialect speakers disappeared in 1930s.<sup>91</sup>

However today, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are still those claiming to be the speakers of this “long-dead” idiom. Their position is somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand, the dominant discourse on language endangerment and death makes their Francoprovençal-based activities possible, financially and ideologically; on the other hand, their legitimacy as speakers is contested by the virtue of the same idea of language death, as will be shown in the following chapters.

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<sup>91</sup> See also Tuaille (199: 52): “The Savoyard patois is already dead, in the whole canton of Geneva, in the Pays de Gex and in the Savoy itself, in most cities, some towns and even in numerous villages.” (“Le patois savoyard est déjà mort, dans tout le canton de Genève, dans le pays de Gex et, en Savoie même, dans la plupart des villes, dans quelques bourgs et même dans de nombreux villages.”)

## Chapter 2. Francoprovençal in diffuse settings

### 2.1 Diffuse language practices

Language use in a diffuse setting can be illustrated by the data from the VDA, commonly seen as a “paradise” of Francoprovençal in the rest of the linguistic area. This autonomous region of Italy with its 128,298 inhabitants (on 1/1/2015)<sup>92</sup> is one of the highest in the Alps, located at an average altitude of 2,106 m. In 2001 67.35% of the regional population declared themselves as speakers of Francoprovençal; only 5.65% declared themselves as speaking only Italian and 19.99% declared it was impossible to live in VDA knowing only Italian, while 14.07% declared it was possible to live in the VDA knowing only Francoprovençal (Fondation Chanoux 2003; Cavalli 2003). If we exclude the regional capital Aosta and municipalities on the border with Piedmont, the vast majority of population uses Francoprovençal, alone or with Italian, as everyday practice: when talking to neighbours, going to shops, cafés, the municipal hall, etc.<sup>93</sup>

The linguistic repertoire of most speakers is made up of three “languages”: Italian and French, co-official in the region, and Francoprovençal. It seems that Italian is the most focused as people are able to speak Italian alone (at school, in the closest cities Milan or Turin etc.), though interferences happen, e.g. *Fermami la porta* for “close the door for me” (French *fermer* and Francoprovençal *frémé/frémà* “to close” vs. Italian *fermare* “to stop” but *chiudere* “to close”). French is less focused: thus the same interference *fermer/fermare* can happen in the opposite direction: *Tu peux fermer ici?* for “Could you stop here?” Most transfer into French is from Francoprovençal: lexical, e.g. *vite* meaning “early” instead of “quickly” in French (Francoprovençal *vito* “early”), *guider la voiture/la machine* instead of *conduire la voiture* for “to drive the car” (Francoprovençal *gueuddà/gueuddé la machina*); morphological, e.g. *Où tu es neissù?* instead of *Où tu es né?* “Where were you born?” (past participle from Francoprovençal); syntactic; and phonetic if we consider that the phonetics of regional French is influenced by Francoprovençal. A recurring trauma for school pupils (according to testimonies in informal conversations) is caused by the use of

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<sup>92</sup> [http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default\\_i.aspx](http://www.regione.vda.it/cartaidentita/default_i.aspx)

<sup>93</sup> Thus, when two months after my arrival in St. Nicolas I was provided with an official paper for my residence permit, written in Italian, the employee of the municipal hall asked me whether I actually spoke Italian. The use of Francoprovençal was so common in St. Nicolas that my very capacity for speaking the national language was unknown to people, who would however regularly communicate with me.

Francoprovençal words in a French language lesson: the teacher then corrects the pupil and the rest of the class laughs at him/her. Indeed, a stereotype of French as an autonomous closed system exists, but there is a linguistic insecurity as to its actual use.

Francoprovençal is the most diffuse, as in everyday life there are no social contexts that would impose the use of Francoprovençal alone. Short stretches of speech in everyday interactions are often impossible to ascribe with any certainty to one “language” or another: like in the above-mentioned *Se t’a fata, siamo qua*, or else, e.g. *Rechì appena?* “Just awoken?” addressed in a bar by one of the visitors to the bartender’s baby – *rechì* “awaken” from the structural linguistic point of view would be Francoprovençal and *appena* “just” Italian. However, similar to the case of French, such diffuse language use comes into conflict with the stereotype of what a “language” should be: a bounded entity, as taught at school about Italian and French. Thus some of the newcomers who have settled in the VDA and learnt Francoprovençal are said to speak it “better” than local native speakers because they do not insert Italian words into their Francoprovençal sentences (with loans from French seen as more legitimate). The conflict sometimes produces linguistic insecurity, and the inability to speak “a good patois” may lead to a failure of its family transmission. However, by thinking their linguistic behaviour “wrong” these individuals seem to forget that the reference models, the “good Italian” and the “good French” mostly exist as stereotypes and are used but in a limited number of practices, such as news reports on TV etc. At the same time what *is* a “good *patois*” as a set of linguistic forms remains unclear and Francoprovençal speakers are generally hostile to the idea of a standard because they imagine that it would “kill” the existing varieties. The apparent paradox can be explained by the same idea of a language as a bounded and homogenous entity.<sup>94</sup>

Let us consider an interview with a *Valdôtain* farmer in his fifties:

**Da** pitchouè mè predzoo patoué, italien, la mema бага. Avoué mon **nonno** predzoo patoué, avoué ma mamma predzoo italien, avoué mon papa predzoo italien ... **Però** lo veuzeun que l’è valdoten predzave patoué, **adon** todzor predzoo patoué ... E **anche** a l’écoula se prèdzoe italien, **ma** antre no se prèdzoe patoué. ... Na, l’è vrei,

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<sup>94</sup> To complete the picture, there are also parts of the VDA where some speakers’ repertoire is composed of six “languages”: three local languages used in these parts, Francoprovençal, Walser and Piedmontese, and three “languages of culture,” Italian, French and German.



un cou dijóon que fallié predzé italien a l'écoula, **invece**, na, ara penso que **da** pitchoù pi de lenve t'appren miou l'èt.

When I was small, I spoke patois, Italian, the same thing. With my grandfather I would speak patois, with my mother I would speak Italian, with my father I would speak Italian ... But the neighbour who is *Valdôtain* spoke patois, so I would always speak patois ... And also at school Italian was spoken, but among ourselves we would speak patois. ... No, that's true, once they would say that at school Italian had to be spoken, now, on the contrary, I think, the more languages you learn from childhood, the better it is.

Here the logical structure of the narrative is mostly formed by the Italian conjunctions (in bold) (*però* “but”, *e anche* “and also”, *ma* “but”, *invece* “on the contrary”) and a Francoprovençal one (*adon* “so, hence”). This is a typical feature of discourse “in patois.” *Da pitchoù* (literally “from small” for “when I was small”) is apparently a transfer of structure from Italian *da piccolo*. Besides, in the speech of the same informant we find different morphemes for the same grammatical meaning. Thus the 3rd person SG of the imperfect indicative: *predzave/prèdzóe* (*lo veuzeun predzave patoué* “the neighbour would speak patois”; *a l'ecoula se prèdzóe italien* “at school they would speak [impersonal 3 SG] Italian”).

Another example is that of a spontaneous conversation at dinner: a former school teacher, now in his seventies, is replying to a coffee trader and former teacher of Francoprovençal for adults, in his early fifties:

A, te savè pas sen que l'è [Facebook] ! **Aggiornate!** [a'dʒɔrnate] E l'aura que te entrisse dedeun lo ten moderne! E pa a vivre de *illusions du passé!* *Mythifié!*  
**Comunque**, n'i mandoùlo [su Facebook].

Oh, you didn't know what it [Facebook] is! Keep yourself updated! It is time you entered the modern era! And not live under the illusions of the past! Mythified! Anyway, I've sent it [on Facebook].

If we wished to define this speech excerpt in terms of “languages,” we would probably have to attribute the parts in bold to Italian, those in italic to French and the rest to Francoprovençal. The attribution to Italian would though cause some problems for *aggiornate!* [a'dʒɔrnate]: in Italian the 2<sup>nd</sup> SG imperative of the verb *aggiornarsi* is *aggiornati*, hence -te in *aggiornate* is from Francoprovençal; it could have been qualified as a lexical loan from Italian to Francoprovençal, but the phoneme [dʒ] is not

typical for it (cf. *giorno* – *dzor* [dzɔr]). *E l'aoura* would be Francoprovençal, but with a grammar calqued from Italian (*e l'ora* vs. Francoprovençal *l'è l'oura* “it is time”). It is at the word *illusion* that we would realise that it is French (vs. *illujón* in Francoprovençal); however the whole sentence could then be attributed to French pronounced with local *Valdôtain* phonetics and should be spelt as: *Et pas à vivre des illusions du passé*.

However this excerpt might also be seen as a single – diffuse – code. The number of elements from Francoprovençal suggests that the speech as a whole is perceived to be (mostly) in Francoprovençal, with all of the social and identity implications present.<sup>95</sup> The presence of French elements must be due to the fact that both interlocutors belong to the social group of local intellectuals: other society groups would most often only use elements from Francoprovençal and Italian, as we have seen in the previous example (although all of them learn French at school from the age of three). Arguably, the use of elements from the three languages creates a sense of complicity, of sharing the same linguistic repertoire with the interlocutor, and in this way participates in the construction of meaning of being *di noultre*.

Finally, examples can be taken from short interactions that are happening as I am writing this dissertation, sitting outside in Saint Nicolas with my laptop. An old neighbour in his sixties passes by and says: “*Te pren lo sole?*” “Are you taking the sun?” He is certainly speaking “patois,” yet “sole,” not “soleil,” from the structural linguistic point of view would be attributed to Italian. Then two local men aged around 40 run by, keeping fit. A short conversation occurred between one of them and me while they kept running:

1 Ragazza!	1 Girl!
2 (NB) Ciao!	2 (NB) Hi!
3 Te pren lo soleil?	3 Taking the sun?
4 (NB) Ouè, travaiillo chèca inque.	4 (NB) Yes, I'm working here for a while.
5 Brava, brava, dai!	5 Good, good!

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<sup>95</sup> In a documentary by Christiane Dunoyer (2010) one hears an informant say: *Lo patoué l'è to sen que l'è pa l'italien, to sen que l'è pa fransè* [Patois is everything that is not Italian, everything that is not French]. From a structural linguistic point of view this is not true; yet from an identity perspective this seems to be true for most Valdostan speakers.

The conversation was undoubtedly identified as being in “patois” too: not only would this person never speak to me in Italian, but also, when introducing me, he would tell others that they should talk to me in patois, as I also speak it. Yet, from a structural linguistic point of view only turns 3 and 4 (one turn from each side) would be attributed to Francoprovençal; the rest could have been as well a conversation in Italian. In fact, people often do say “*ciao*,” “*brava*,” “*dai*” etc. when speaking “patois.” As in the previous examples, all these heterogeneous elements can be seen as constituting one single code shared by the interlocutors.

One can hardly speak about code-switching in these examples.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, analysing it in terms of code-switching supposes that, for example, if speakers have two codes in their repertoire, code A and code B (that we, as researchers, would identify according to a set of objective criteria), every part of conversation could be identified as being said in either A or B. Later other questions could then be addressed: as to why the code-switching occurs, and what is its interactional meaning. Hence, the difficulty in applying the code-switching paradigm on this material lies in that in many cases this procedure proves to be impossible: in the above examples, in what language is “*aggiornate*” being said? It is not Italian, as it has a morphological feature that does not belong to Italian. It is not Francoprovençal, as it has phonetics that are not Francoprovençal (without saying that lexically it does not belong to Francoprovençal either, structurally-linguistically speaking). “*Ciao*” in the last example could be Italian, because this word exists in Italian. Yet it is most certainly not identified as “Italian” by the speakers. Some features of such communication seem to be regular: e.g. the logical structure of relatively long monologues being formed by Italian conjunctions (as in the first example). At the same time, however, one can hardly maintain that this is a system where the grammatical elements would regularly come from one language, and lexical elements from another.

Arguably, the social meaning is constructed not by the fact that one part of conversation is pronounced in one “language” and another one in “another language”: instead, it is sharing this unique code that constructs the social meaning of being “one of us.”

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<sup>96</sup> There exists a substantial corpus of scholarly literature on code-switching. For the first (“classical”) elaborations of the theory see: Gumperz (1982), Gal (1978), Gardner-Chloros (1985). For more recent developments see: Auer (1999), Gardner-Chloros, Edwards (2004), Myers-Scotton (2002).

## 2.2 Construction of social meaning

As mentioned above, the most basic and most important social meaning of speaking a code identified as Francoprovençal (however mixed it may be in its actual linguistic form) in a diffuse setting is the one of being *di noutre*, “one of ours,” an index of social solidarity and inclusion. This is also the reason why newcomers in these settings often become “new speakers.” Contrary to the image of “uselessness” of “patois” shared by its L1 speakers, they find themselves bound to learn Francoprovençal in order to become a fully legitimate member of their new community (see also Dunoyer 2010). The additional sociopolitical meanings are complex and need to be considered in a historical perspective.

### 2.2.1 Political connotations

As we have seen in detail in Part I, the concept of Francoprovençal was first developed by the Italian linguist Ascoli (1878 [1874]) in the direct aftermath of the unification of Italy. Ever since that moment, “Francoprovençal” (as a concept, not as a practice) was seen as a danger for the the VDA’s autonomy by the regional élites. Therefore those advocating the idea of Francoprovençal as a language different from French would belong to the most powerless groups of society and be separatists, opposed to both central power and regional political élites: indeed, as has been described, the first to insist that Francoprovençal, renamed Arpitan, was a language in its own right was *the Mouvement Harpitanya*, initially an extreme left-wing separatist movement. The failed social struggle ended in the complete impossibility of using Francoprovençal in public in the VDA up until the 2000s. As one informant suggests:

On est arrivé au moment où parler patois publiquement c’était provocateur, voire presque irrédentiste. Presque indépendantiste. Par contre, le français c’est toujours marqué [comme] l’identité valdôtaine mais dans le respect des règles, du gouvernement, de la démocratie.

We reached a moment when speaking publicly in patois was provocative, that is, almost irredentist. Almost independentist. On the contrary, speaking French is marked as a *Valdôtain* identity but with respect to the rules, to the government, to democracy.

Attempts to write in Francoprovençal were condemned for the same reason (regarding writing the language see Part II Chapter 3).

### 2.2.2 Social connotations

Socially, as mentioned above, Francoprovençal was traditionally the language of local peasants, as opposed to French as the language of the bourgeoisie. Both were opposed to Italian, the language of the state (often seen as an oppressor state, the anti-fascist struggle vivid in people's memory) and that of immigrants (including Italians from other regions). At the same time, a functional distribution exists in common representations:

Le patois c'est la langue du cœur et le français la langue de la raison en Vallée d'Aoste. ... On peut pas délier. Même si le cœur a des raisons que la raison ne comprend pas, comme disait Pascal. Et l'italien c'est plutôt la langue de travail, de la nécessité.

Patois is the language of heart and French is the language of reason in Valle d'Aosta. ... One cannot separate them, even though the heart has reasons that reason does not understand, like Pascal said. And the Italian is rather the language of work, of necessity.

What is pictured here is a seemingly non-conflictual diglossic model with clear functional distribution between different codes of repertoire. However, in reality, the use of French today is limited to that of school subject and to institutional purposes (texts written by the regional administration). To give but one example, in December 2014 I interviewed a *Valdôtain* journalist and writer. He was 91, and he died shortly afterwards. He would always speak French to everyone. When I asked him what he would speak when he would just go for a coffee in a bar, he said, with a lot of dignity in his intonation: “*I speak French, my language.*” I then asked him how people would react, and he replied with the same intonation: “*Well, they think I am a tourist.*” The situation is striking because a “tourist” is to be found at the very extreme edge in a scale of social of inclusion/exclusion. He is not even an “immigrant,” who is not completely a community member (those who *are* fully accepted as members are never referred to as “immigrants”; they may be said to be “originally from...”), but not completely outside either. A “tourist,” in turn, is a complete outsider. In that case however it referred to someone who had been born in the VDA and,

furthermore, back in the 1940s had actively participated in some of the events that became historical for the Valley.

On the other hand, those who speak Francoprovençal can no longer be associated with only one social class, or only one cultural or ethnic background. The drastic modification of economy with the development of the tertiary sector and the reduction of the primary one has created a new group of city inhabitants who are no longer occupied with agro-pastoral activities, but with parents and other family members speaking Francoprovençal, speak it too (often they did not speak Italian before school). Indeed, today the agricultural workers represent only 4.1% of the regional population<sup>97</sup> – compare this with the 67.35% who claim to speak Francoprovençal. Besides, there are migrants who learn Francoprovençal for the sake of social integration, thanks to the evening language courses provided by the region. Therefore Francoprovençal is no longer the language of local peasants, since its speakers are often neither peasants nor locals (see Figure 17: the advertising of the 2015-2016 *patois* courses by the regional administration).



Figure 17. The advertising of 2015-2016 courses in *patois* by the regional administration of the Valle d’Aosta. A new speaker’s new image: the young urban middle class of both sexes from various ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>97</sup> Data for 2007 (Decime, Vernetto 2007: 20).

With the disappearance of French from daily use and the legal recognition of Francoprovençal at the national level (Law 482/1999) Francoprovençal could gain the role of a local identity marker as opposed to Italian. Yet in line with a long diglossic tradition it should be a “language of culture,” and Francoprovençal is not one, as it lacks what “languages of culture” should have according to the dominant ideology, e.g. a normative way of speaking it, a written standard, etc. Besides, restricted to only one social class and to some particular situations of language use, Francoprovençal has never had the function of an identity marker for the whole community. Hence, its social role is now unclear, but its change passes unnoticed. “Patois” is still seen mostly as a (often low prestigious) ancient/rural/oral form of local French closely linked to the daily life of an agro-pastoral society.

### 2.3 ‘New speakers’ in a diffuse setting

In this context, language learners can be seen as a litmus test allowing the vitality of the language to be indicated and also a societal change that otherwise passes unnoticed. It may be argued altogether that they became identified (to a certain extent) in the society as a distinct category of speakers precisely because they started being so different socially from the traditional perception of what a *patoisant* is imagined to be. Among today’s new speakers many belong to the wealthy urban class, coming from big Italian cities like Turin, and they may have prestigious occupations – for example a judge: one of the stereotypical examples that many would give when telling me about new speakers (“And there is even a judge!”). The surprise of the local population should not be misleading. In fact, it only bears witness to their own unawareness of the actual linguistic situation today. For if the newcomers become new speakers, it is mostly due to the fact that they feel it a necessity in order for them to fully become new members of the host community (for a detailed account on various new speakers’ motivations see Dunoyer 2010).

Let us take the example of a woman in her late thirties who came from Turin to settle in the VDA and owns a fashion boutique in the city of Aosta. Her social profile is the complete opposite of that of a stereotypical *patoisant*: she is a non-local young urban upper-middle class woman (vs. NORM as non-mobile older rural males, see Chambers,

Trudgill 1998: 29). As soon as she arrived in the VDA, she realized that speaking “patois” was there an important linguistic and social practice (“*Fin dell’inizio subito ho sentito parlare in patois in Val d’Aosta, ho sentito che era veramente un – un dialetto molto diffuso*” – “From the very beginning I immediately heard people speaking patois in the Aosta Valley, I heard that it was really a – a very widespread dialect”). Then for three years she took an evening course in Francoprovençal, provided by the regional administration at the *Ecole populaire du patois*. According to her, the interpersonal relations would deeply change once one would start speaking with the locals “in their dialect”: “*Ti fa sentire molto più vicino al tuo interlocutore*” (“You feel much closer to your interlocutor”); “*E accomuna, secondo me, unisce*” (“And it unites, in my opinion”). Today her interlocutors in patois include those from work, both clients (“*C’è successo già diverse volte [che] qualcuno entrasse qua e mi dicesse: ‘Predzede patoué?’*,” “It has already happened many times that someone would enter here [the shop] and say to me: ‘Do you speak patois?’”) and partners, like those who supply wool for clothing:

Per esempio abbiamo anche de rapporti con gli allevatori ... e molti di questi allevatori sono Valdostani, quindi anche loro chiaramente parlano patois. Certo che hanno imparato tutti l’italiano. Però ogni tanto capita magari qualche cosa in patois. E mi fa piacere veramente soprattutto poter capire, anche quando magari si parlano fra di loro! [laughs]

For instance, we have relations with shepherds ... and many of them are *Valdôtain*, so clearly they also speak patois. Of course, they have learnt Italian. But every now and then something happens in patois. And it really pleases me especially to be able to understand, even when they may be talking among themselves! [laughs]

Other interlocutors include personal friends or an old neighbour, a more than 80-year-old woman, who, from the first day, would only talk to my informant in “patois”:

E io non capivo veramente niente. Poi arrivando al punto di riuscire a parlare con lei in patois per me è stato carinissimo.

And I would really understand nothing. Then getting to the point when I was able to speak to her in patois for me was the nicest moment.

The link between speaking patois and social inclusion can also be demonstrated by an episode from my personal experience. It occurred in a restaurant in Aosta when a Russian friend of mine came to visit me. She spoke Italian to the waitress; then the



waitress spoke Italian to me. Then all of a sudden she realised her “mistake” and started excusing herself in Francoprovençal, saying how sorry she was for having spoken Italian to me who “*predze come no*” (“*speaks like us*”). When she left, my friend asked me what had just happened. I translated what the waitress had said, to which she objected that she had understood that, but the question was different: “What is the problem? You do speak Italian!” Hence, the issue was not about the ability of understanding the primary meaning of the message: it was about being or not (seen as) a member of a certain community. Speaking Italian is having a polite talk to an outsider; speaking Francoprovençal, in its turn, is an index of being “one of us” and considering the interlocutor to be “one of us” too: in this sense, “*predzé come no*” (“to speak like us”) and “*itre di noutre*” (“to be one of us”) are synonyms.<sup>98</sup>

Although a newcomer speaking “patois” is generally seen as an exception, someone who does not learn it is often judged. For example, once I observed in a bar a Romanian migrant worker who wanted to join a general discussion at a table. The discussion was in “patois,” and he asked his question in Italian. The only answer he got was: “*se te vou predzé avoué no, predze-no patoué!*” (“If you want to talk to us, talk to us in *patois!*”) – said in Francoprovençal. On the boundary of exclusion and inclusion, this reaction could still be interpreted as a sign of a possibility of inclusion. In fact, today in a diffuse setting like the VDA no one considers that only locals can speak “patois,” or pretend to use it exclusively as an in-group code. On the contrary, they suggest that anyone can learn it and with learning it become fully a member of the community.<sup>99</sup>

Linguistically, for the new speakers Francoprovençal is more focused than for its L1 speakers: since they add it to their focused mother tongue (generally Italian) and often

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<sup>98</sup> Anecdotally, the VDA was the first place in the world where I would not be identified as Russian: eventually someone might mention that I was “of Russian origin”, but specifying at once that I was nevertheless “*di noutre*” or that I spoke “*come no*” (the same way at events where people would calculate how many people from different regions or countries were present they would count me among the Valdostans). It did not depend on how long I had actually lived there, as they started considering me so from the very first weeks of my stay. Indeed, when it is about speaking a standard language, foreigners are expected to learn it, so when they do so, they still remain foreigners, even though compliments can be made as to how well they speak the language – precisely because they are nevertheless considered as outsiders. It does not seem to be country-specific, or, at least, based on personal experience once again, for me it was the same situation in France and in Switzerland for French, in the UK and Australia for English, in Italy (in a non-minority context, in the city of Bergamo) for Italian. On the contrary, in a minority language setting speaking the minority language is strongly associated with group membership and solidarity.

<sup>99</sup> The Romanian himself, in our subsequent conversation, had an opposite interpretation of the event, qualifying the *Valdôtains* as being “racists” because of their talking to him in patois.

learn it on a language course. At the same time though the high degree of variability of Francoprovençal can be an aid for them to overcome the language barrier. The same informant from Aosta tells me:

Ancora adesso ci sono delle difficoltà! Assolutamente! Un po' di timidezza, parlando con le altre persone, la paura di sbagliare, sicuramente. Però poi ho capito che bisogna come per tutte le cose lasciarsi andare. Io penso che è anche talmente vasto, ce ne sono più di settanta, Diego dice “*te predze lo dzen patoué de te,*” e quindi [laughs] alla fine dico questo è il mio patois ... Ne ho fatto uno in più! [laughs]

Even now I still have difficulties [speaking patois]! Absolutely! A bit of shyness when speaking with other people, a fear of making an error, for sure. But then I realised that like for any other thing one just needs to let oneself go. I also think it is so vast, there are over 70 [varieties], Diego [the teacher] says “you should speak the beautiful *patois* of yours,” and so [laughs] finally I say this is my *patois* ... I've invented one more of them! [laughs]

Thus the reference to making errors presupposes the existence of a norm; yet this norm is later relativised, given that it is seen not as *the* norm, but as one of a number of possible norms.

### Chapter 3. Language use in a focused setting

In studying focused settings we are obliged to start with the ideology, as ideology precedes in these settings the use of language for speakers themselves. Indeed, in a diffuse setting for native speakers the question of why to learn a language is irrelevant: it is simply the first language acquired, often the only language a person spoke before going to school. Later the choice of this particular code from a set of possible codes in the linguistic repertoire is motivated by personal, socio-cultural and political reasons, as studied in Chapter 2. On the contrary, the focused practice of Francoprovençal is typical of those who do not speak it as L1. The situation is typical of France and protestant cantons of Switzerland, but is also to be found in some parts of Piedmont in Italy.

The language policy of France and Switzerland prohibiting the speaking of *patois*, together with the countries' general social and economical situation, including urban population growth at the expense of the number of farmers, has affected the use of local

idioms. Behind the official statistics figures of “speakers” of “regional languages” stand speakers most of whom are substantially different from those who typically speak more widespread languages. Locally two groups of those are distinguished: “late speakers” (*locuteurs tardifs*) and “new speakers” (literally “neo-speakers,” *néo-locuteurs*). The distinction was made for the Francoprovençal context in a report on the linguistic situation of the Rhône-Alpes region of France (Bert et al. 2009), which allowed the initiation of a minority language policy in the region (Deliberation 2009). The terms from the report were then interiorised by activists from language-oriented associations, the “academic” distinction allowing them to create a hierarchy of legitimate speakers, where the “late speakers” would be associated with more authenticity and enjoy therefore greater authority in expressing themselves on language issues than the “new speakers,” as will be demonstrated in this chapter. This authenticity is apparently based on linguistic community exposure, yet the latter should be nuanced. In this chapter I will study linguistic biographies and language practices, first those of the so-called “late speakers” and then of the “new speakers.”

### 3.1 ‘Late speakers’

#### 3.1.1 Linguistic biography of the ‘late speakers’: school and the language of the animals

The first group’s sociolinguistic biography is linked to the social equation between speaking Francoprovençal and being a peasant. As an informant from Savoy explains: *Été euna vargogne de parlà patuè, même être agriculteur été euna vargogne* (“It was a shame to speak *patois*, even to be agricultural worker was a shame”). To specify, it was not “even” but precisely “because” being a peasant was seen in a negative light by the society that speaking “patois” was shameful (see the linguistic inferiority principle, Wolfram 1998).<sup>100</sup>

Informants unanimously blame the state and, most of all, the school as an implementation tool for its policy, for the lack of intergenerational transmission of the language within the family in these contexts. Thus the theme of the banning and mockery of the use of the language at school is reproduced in the discourse of my informants

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<sup>100</sup> “According to this principle, the speech of a socially subordinate group will always be interpreted as inadequate by comparison with the socially dominant group” (Wolfram 1998: 104).

throughout France, including far beyond the Francoprovençal area. In Northern Catalonia, for instance, I was shown photos of school hall posters: *Soyez propres, parlez français* (“Be proper, speak French”) and *Il est défendu de parler catalan et de cracher à terre* (“No speaking Catalan or spitting on the floor”). Similar posters have also been implicitly referred to in Brittany (e.g. by a married couple from Brest, aged 55. Wife: “It was forbidden to speak Breton at school.” – Husband: “That’s right, to speak Breton and to spit on the floor”) (cf. also Vakhtin 2001a: 218-220 for a similar delegation of guilt at school in the USSR). It is emphasised in the informants’ discourse that these school bans prevented a generation of native speakers of the local language from passing it on to their children. The informants talk *inter alia* about a token (*signal*) which could be given to a child who “spoke patois” at school: it could be a handkerchief, a piece of wood, a pendant, etc. The child could in their turn give the token to someone else as soon as they heard them speaking “patois.” The pupil who was left with the token at the end of the day was punished (see also Martel 2007 for a discussion of the Occitan language bans at school).

However, as important as these bans and punishments could psychologically be for the pupils concerned, they do not explain the choice of speaking *nothing but* the dominant language, including outside of school. In fact, the decrease in the number of Francoprovençal speakers, as well as these of any other “regional” language, is closely linked to the modification of economy: urbanisation, industrialisation, the growth of the national market and as a consequence the increase of the urban and mobile population at the expense of the rural population (see also Lodge 1993). Similarly, sociolinguist and activist Robert Lafont wrote as he summarised the 50 years of Occitanist activities:

Ara i a pas pus de païsans, mas tres per cent d’entreprenèires agricòlas. Pas pus de classa obrièra, mas de salariats e de caumaires o marginalisatz en ocean. Pensi qu’aurai viscut ensems la fin de çò que se disiá tradicionalament lo pòble d’òc e la fin dels treballadors. Es la lei de l’evolucion. (Lafont 1999: 96)

Today, there are no more peasants, just three per cent of agricultural entrepreneurs. No more working class, just salaried employees or unemployed and marginals in the ocean. I believe we have lived together through the end of what was once called the people of Oc and through the end of workers. Such is the law of evolution.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> He also suggests that already by the end of the 1980s:

The same trend is remarked by the Francoprovençal informants:

LK, 1932, *Fp*: Puis y a un aspect aussi civilisationnel c'est-à-dire que le patois est lié à la petite entreprise rurale. Tout au moins dans nos régions. Donc dans la ferme on entendait, si y avait encore des petites fermes, je sais pas si ça existe, ça doit plus exister, où y a deux vaches, trois cochons etc., eh bien si ça existait encore on entendrait le patois, mais seulement ça n'existe plus.

Then there also is a civilisational aspect meaning that *patois* is linked to small-scale rural enterprise. In our region at least. So on the farm, one could hear [Francoprovençal]; if there were still small farms – I don't know if they exist now, they probably don't exist anymore, where they have a couple of cows, a couple of pigs, etc. Well, if they still existed one could hear the *patois* there, only they don't exist anymore.

As is typical in many other places in the world, for the sake of their social promotion – and schooling as the first step towards it – the parents of these late speakers *chose* to speak to them in the dominant language, and the dominant language alone. Rarely would these children stay in the village after school and then later, as teenagers, they would start to use Francoprovençal to a limited extent when participating in agricultural work with adults. Namely, a recurrent situation of use of Francoprovençal is communication with animals:

HT, 1935: Dans le temps on parlait aux vaches en patois! Quand on les appelait, même les chiens–

FT, 1935: Les vaches quand elles étaient dans les champs quand on les appelait pour les traire.

HT, 1935: Back in the day, one spoke to cows in patois! When one would call them, or even dogs–

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S'èra tombat a un 3% d'agricultors, totes inserits dins un malhum de modernizacion technical e d'ocupacion del mercat. Aquò vòl dire que la resèrve linguistica sus laquala d'èra fach fons tot lo temps del Felibritge, e al nom de laquala los Grands Rhetoricaires de 1968-81 parlavan apassionadament, aviá desaparegut. (*Op.cit.*: 110)

The number of agricultural workers went down to 3%, all of whom were integrated into the network of technological modernisation and market development. It means that the linguistic reserve which the entire era of Félibrige was founded on, and in which name the “Big Rhetoricians” of 1968-81 passionately spoke, had disappeared.

FT, 1935: When the cows were out in the field and one would call them in to milk them.<sup>102</sup>

Communication with animals proves to be a typical setting for learning the language in farming families: while parents decided not to pass the local idiom on to their children, they continued to use it in their work including pasturage. Consequently, it was in the local idiom that all the commands the animals understood were issued. Similarly, in the Occitan context in the same region of France IS, 1930 answers the question about the way he learned Occitan: “*I would shepherd the herd! And the animals would only understand Occitan*” (he became interested in the language much later, in his thirties). Another informant, MN, 1960, one generation younger, also states that he had to start speaking Occitan to communicate with farm animals: he lives in a suburb of Lyon but as a child, would always spend three months of the summer holidays in a village in Ardèche where his mother had been born, minding the herd. Beside such limited use of the idiom in addressing animals, this informant, similarly to all others, did not begin to actively use the language until much later. Informants in both linguistic contexts mentioned a sort of a “side effect” of this language situation: a widespread assumption that Francoprovençal or Occitan is not a “proper language” (i.e. not a human language at all) since “even animals understand it.”

More often, however, children would leave their home village to work in a city. Namely a considerable part of the today’s “late speakers” used to work as school teachers. Once retired, they would come back to their village where they could witness that Francoprovençal was (almost) no longer spoken. “Recollecting it” from their childhood memories, as spoken around them (but never addressed to them), they would then find themselves in the new social role of its last “keepers” (*mainteneurs de patois*: the role is socially established and those were even given diplomas or pin badges by dialectologists or associations). Negative social connotations linked to “patois” were no longer applicable to them. As an informant from Savoy argues:

Au moment de l’exode rural parler patois c’était un peu dire d’où l’on venait, on était de la campagne, on était des paysans, on n’était pas des gens bien. Puis, maintenant on revendique un peu notre appartenance à ce milieu-là parce qu’on en est sorti.

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<sup>102</sup> Today, the couple speak French to their dog but, significantly, they teach Francoprovençal in two agricultural schools.

At the time of the rural exodus speaking *patois* was a bit like saying where we came from, that we were from the countryside, that we were peasants, that we were not good. Then today we claim a little our membership in this milieu because we have left it.

### 3.1.2 The ‘treasure hunt’: keeping an unknown language and culture

As former agents of the state in their role of teachers, they have interiorised what we may call after Lodge the standard ideology:<sup>103</sup> “(1) the ideal state of language is one of uniformity, (2) the most valid form of the language is to be found in writing, (3) the standard variety is inherently better (i.e. more elegant, clearer, more logical, etc.) than other varieties” (Lodge 2004: 206). A highly variable code which exists almost exclusively in oral form, like Francoprovençal, is therefore a “non-language” for them. Hence, attempts to write Francoprovençal, and in doing so, to use a standard orthographic principle (*Graphie de Conflans* for Savoie and Haute-Savoie, local orthographies for cantons in Switzerland) is seen as a priority. Since they used to be teachers, their interest in the language is often philological. A former teacher of German and Latin says:

LK, 1932, *Fp*: *Moi j’ai commencé dans mon village en 93, et je croyais que la langue était morte avec ma grand-mère avec laquelle je parlais toujours cette langue-là, elle était morte depuis longtemps et puis j’ai découvert que les gens savaient la parler ... moi j’étais motivé linguistiquement ... j’ai été saisi par la parenté de cette langue avec le latin, je connaissais l’occitan théoriquement, et tout à coup j’ai découvert que le francoprovençal avait des choses plus conservatrices, plus proches du latin. Et donc ça m’a fasciné, de ma grand-mère je tirais tout ce que je pouvais jusqu’à sa mort.*

I started [working on Francoprovençal] in my village in [19]93, and *I thought the [Francoprovençal] language had died along with my grandmother*. I had always spoken it with her, but she had died long ago, and then I found out people could speak it ... I was motivated *from the linguistic point of view* ... I was impressed by *the kinship between this language and Latin*, I knew Occitan theoretically, and then I suddenly discovered that Francoprovençal has even *more conservative* elements, even *closer to Latin*. So I was fascinated, and I took all I could from my grandmother, up to her death.

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<sup>103</sup> See also the notion of “the standard language ideology” (Milroy, Milroy 1998).

Thus his interest in Francoprovençal is in its specifically linguistic features: the idiom was seen as a fragment of Latin, miraculously preserved and surviving up to the present day (albeit dying right before one's eyes along with the seemingly last speaker).<sup>104</sup>

The late speakers imagine a language as a formula – “grammar + vocabulary” – and their interest in the language is often restricted to collecting lists of words (especially linked to the agro-pastoral past) and grammar paradigms. As a result, their language competence may be relatively high, but they lack communicative competence (Hymes 1972a, b). Thus, according to Hymes:

We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their

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<sup>104</sup> Another possible motivation might be linked to the very defence of speaking Francoprovençal and its eventual use as a secret language by adults in the families. The idiom interests “late speakers” as a forbidden fruit of sorts. This use of Francoprovençal as a secret language is often found in interviews. Yet the fact that this has given rise to the willingness to speak Francoprovençal is never explicitly acknowledged. At the same time, I found it explicit in a socially very similar case of Occitan in the same region of France. Thus, for instance, the informant MN, 1960, *Oc*, talks about his aunt, who was the youngest of five siblings and only spoken to in French, while her brothers and sisters were spoken to in Occitan:

MN, 1960, *Oc*: Et elle disait moi on me parle pas patois, c'est le mot qu'on utilisait à l'époque on parle pas patois c'est parce que je suis trop petite. Quand je serai grande, quand je serai plus grande je pourrai parler patois – et puis on lui a fait comprendre que non elle ne parlera pas.

She said, they don't speak in *patois* to me, this was the word they used at the time, they don't speak in *patois* to me because I'm too young. When I grow up, when I'm older I will be able to speak *patois* – and then they made her understand she'd never speak it.

This was the ban on the use of the idiom that left the mixed feeling of insult and curiosity. Years later, when she was already an aged woman, she took Occitan lessons taught by her nephew, MN: “It was so deeply rooted in her that she speaks it very well, she tells fairy tales in Occita,” he said. Another activist, the Occitanist RM, 1970, *Oc*, says that Occitan was the native language of his grandfather and his father, but “it was a peasant language at the time,” and they wanted their children to get out of this environment: “I wasn't allowed to be spoken to in Occitan, which is why I've always been interested.” The informant learned Occitan on a language training course in 1998 and started teaching it at school; now he supervises Occitan teaching in the region's schools.



accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other code of communicative conduct. (Hymes 1972b)

As the “late speakers” were never addressed in Francoprovençal, they could not acquire any communicative competence, which often leads to cultural miscommunication and a gap between these groups and the remaining community of native Francoprovençal speakers. It is thus a communicative norm in Francoprovençal to avoid verbal excess in judgments: someone who is seriously ill would be referred to as being “not so well” (*lèi va pa tan*) or someone nearly dying might be said to be “not in a good shape” (*pa fran en forma*). In Savoy and Bresse similar communicative norms exist in regional French: someone can be said to be “*un peu fatigué(e)*,” “a bit tired,” when he or she is ill. In a similar way, to the question “how are you?” no one among the Francoprovençal L1 speakers would reply “very well” or “fine.” Usual replies would include “not that bad” (*pa pi mal que cèn*) or even “still here” (*sen sellia*). However, being unaware of this particular norm, due to the lack of transmission of language and culture, and being unprepared for the very existence of a different norm due to having been brought up following the republican ideology of monolingual and monocultural society, the “late speakers” accuse the native speakers of Francoprovençal (both Savoyards and *Valdôtains*) of a complete lack of empathy. Even a light divergence in the ways of speaking and saying things is ascribed a negative psychological meaning: like the ubiquitous example of the expression *la pourta de (de)foura* or *la pourta dè diyo*, recurrent in late speakers’ discourse in Savoy. Literally it means “the outside door,” as opposed to the French *la porte d’entrée*, “the entrance door,” and is used to prove that the Savoyards are unwelcoming and reserved (whereas in reality it should be motivated by where the speaking subject places himself in relation to the house; besides, in the mountains outside it is often cold, so the “outside door” is contrasted to any other door in the house as the one to be cautious to close).

The “late speakers” form the vast majority of members of the so-called *groupes patoisants* – patois-speaking groups. The part relating to “speaking” in this self-definition has however a particular meaning. Informants within the “groupes patoisants” in France and in Switzerland admit that occasions to speak Francoprovençal in everyday life are marginal or even completely non-existent. Language use is virtually limited to

communication with other activists within their activist work. If they speak in Francoprovençal it is always because they decide to do so, and it mostly concerns reading texts, either their own or written by someone else. At the same time, a notable particularity of these groups is the use of French even within the groups: the discourse is about Francoprovençal but it is almost never in Francoprovençal. Let us illustrate this by examples from the Swiss city of Lausanne. Lausanne has local *patoisant* groups, but it is also the meeting place of various Francoprovençal federations operating for the whole of the Francoprovençal trans-border area. Perhaps it is not by chance that the city chosen for these purposes is the one in which, as it has been noted above, like in other protestant cities of Switzerland, Francoprovençal disappeared from daily practice as early as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Kristol 2013 [1999]). At international Francoprovençal meetings it would seem justified to use Francoprovençal, the language common for representatives of different countries in the trans-border cooperation context, all the more so since the participants have different first languages (although French, along with Italian, is one of the official languages in the Aosta Valley, it is not the L1 for the majority of its population, and it is even less so in Piedmont). Yet these are held in French. For instance, there exists an International Federation of Francoprovençal, Savoyard, or Franc-Comtois Speakers (*Fédération internationale des locuteurs du francoprovençal, savoyard ou Franc-Comtois*). Note the ambiguity of listing both Francoprovençal and Savoyard in the title: it is not quite clear whether they are meant to be two different languages or two names for the same one. Besides, the presence of “Franc-Comtois” in the same federation is curious: indeed, Franc-Comtois, spoken in the Canton of Jura, belongs to a different language group, that of languages of *oïl*. Its presence in the Federation can only be attributed to the fact that, similarly to Francoprovençal, it is spoken as a minority language – referred to as *patois* – in the French-speaking part of Switzerland: in other words, these languages are brought together based on their being spoken in a territory characterised by a predominant use of *French* – as opposed to the German- and Italian-speaking cantons. At this federation’s meetings phrases could be heard such as: *Le patois a été et restera la langue qui unit notre Fédération* (“The *patois* has been and will remain the language that unites our Federation”); *[L’objectif de la Fédération est de] parler et faire parler la langue de nos ancêtres dans nos régions respectives* (“[The Federation’s objective is] to speak and promote speaking the language of our ancestors in our respective regions”); the task consists in *la défense et promotion de la place de la langue* (“the defense and promotion of the place of the language”) etc. A subversion of meaning then occurs: the language in which things are said contradicts what is being said.

The particularity of local groups' meetings can be illustrated by the very first such meeting that I could observe in December 2009. The meeting, which is held once every two weeks in the village of Montbrison near Saint-Étienne, in France, was attended by some 150 to 200 people of retirement age (beside the villagers, many came down from the Forez mountains). At the beginning of the meeting, a film screened in a Forez mountain village in 1950 was shown. The film was silent, but during the projection, both the moderator and the audience commented on it in "patois." Then, photographs of village life from the 1930-50s were shown. Each photograph was meticulously commented on: discussion of a single photograph could take about 10 minutes, with participants' comments ranging from one word in Francoprovençal, such as "cows" or "a girl," up to developed explanations of what was depicted in the photograph, and about the way certain objects photographed had been used at the time – essentially, how the world functioned during the period captured in the photographs. As I could witness later, these meetings are an exception to the general rule, as most (although not all) participants spoke in Francoprovençal, albeit saying a single word. However, just as at other meetings of local Francoprovençal associations, for them the idiom was exclusively connected to the past and the realities of the bygone agro-pastoral lifestyle. Archaic lexis, no longer used in everyday life since its denotations have fallen out of use, is reverently preserved as so many fragments of the bygone world.

Thus, two phenomena can be distinguished as far as *groupes patoisants* are concerned. On the one hand, at the level of large-scale associations included in international federations, Francoprovençal is being proclaimed to be important in the modern world (confirmed by the idea of the necessity of its "promotion") – while it is not actually used in the activities of the same associations and federations. On the other hand, at the local level, the notion is revealed of a close connection between the idiom and the past, a world that has already disappeared, and the very memory of which is doomed to be erased when the last speakers are gone. The "last speakers" of Francoprovençal take it for granted that this language is bound to vanish just as the world it used to describe has vanished.

## 3.2 ‘New speakers’

### 3.2.1 Linguistic biography and motivations for learning Francoprovençal

The second group (locally called “new speakers”) consists of young representatives of the urban middle class. Born in the cities, they never knew the agro-pastoral lifestyle of their ancestors, and even though they might have had someone in their family who spoke Francoprovençal (e.g. a grandfather they would see during school breaks), they had to learn Francoprovençal in adulthood. They interiorised the discourse on endangered languages, connected with ideas about preserving cultural and biodiversity and a moral obligation linked to this (cf. Duchêne and Heller 2007; Cameron 2007). For them Francoprovençal is no longer a peasants’ language, but part of the world’s intangible cultural heritage. Their references are other minority languages, especially those standardised and (to a different extent) recognised politically like Catalan and Occitan. Like in these other contexts, speaking the language for them is a necessary condition for working on promoting its status and its subsequent transmission through education.

Their personal history and motivations for learning Francoprovençal may be different. Curiously, unlike the “late speakers” for whom “patois” is deprived of any sentimental role, often their interest for Francoprovençal is closely tied to the emotional load linked with speaking this language. Thus a recurrent thread in interviews with the new speakers concerns speaking Francoprovençal with their grandparents and thus finding a stronger family bond. Therefore, even though for new speakers it is a language learnt in adulthood it is nevertheless identified in a focused setting as the “language of heart” (*langue de cœur*).

JF 1987: Quan mon gran-pare i ère a l’opital, i ère a la fan de sa via ... avé comprèi que lo patué è la lenga de cœur, de la mòre, dou paï. E i ère lo moman que ou parlave to lo ten en patué. Mè avoué fierta!

When my grandfather was in hospital, he was at the end of his life ... and he understood that *patois* was his language of heart, of his mother, of his country. And this was the moment when he would speak nothing but *patois* all the time. But with pride!

Quan ire a l'opital, ou l'avé comprì que i èra la lenga de sa mòre, adon ou l'a coumenchà a mè predzé en patuè.

When he was in hospital, he understood that it was the language of his mother, so he started to talk to me in *patois*.

Other motivations for learning Francoprovençal can be linked to episodes of personal history not related to intimate family relations, but, on the contrary, concerning the perception by “others.” Thus learning the language is in some cases a reaction against one’s being perceived as a second-rate citizen of sorts by (other) French people. Gellner (1983) notes that at later stages of the development of industrial society (after World War II), nationalism emerges as a response to daily experience: when a person belonging to culture A is dealing with co-nationals belonging to culture B while facing economic or bureaucratic issues, and namely issues linked to labour migration towards cities, sometimes they have to face mockery or humiliation from the representatives of culture B. “This very concrete experience taught them to be aware of their culture, and to love it (or, indeed, to wish to be rid of it)” (Gellner 1983: 61). Often they hesitate between two strategies: either nationalism (implying making their “low” culture into a new “high” culture), or assimilation. It is such everyday experience that is cited by the activist NV, 1973, *Arp*, as an impetus that drove him to learn Arpitan:

NV, 1973, *Arp*: J’aurais pu ne jamais l’apprendre [l’arpitan] vraiment si je n’avais été à Paris pour ma thèse de doctorat. À Paris on s’est tellement moqué de moi que *j’ai compris que j’étais savoyard* avant d’être français. Disons que *j’ai découvert* à Paris *que j’étais savoyard* ... Du coup en rentrant j’ai décidé de me mettre sérieusement au patois.

I might have never really learnt it [Arpitan] had I not gone to Paris for my PhD studies [in electromagnetism]. In Paris, they made so much fun of me that *I understood I was Savoyard* before being French. Let’s say, in Paris *I discovered I was Savoyard* ... So when I came back I decided to get into the *patois* in earnest.

When asked as to what was the difference with respect to Parisians, the informant replies:

Je sais pas si il y en avait une, mais en tout cas on me faisait sentir que je *n’étais pas* «*standard*». Tu connais notre *français régional* de Rhône-Alpes ? ... On a beaucoup de formes locales. Elles viennent pour la plupart de l’arpitan. Par exemple j’y sais, j’y fais. Que j’utilisais sans complexes à Paris. Indirectement ça

venait du patois. Je ne le savais pas encore à ce moment là. À partir de 2001, je me suis intéressé à l'étymologie, l'histoire, les langues régionales.

I don't know if there was a difference but anyway, they made me feel that *I wasn't "standard."* Do you know our regional French in the Rhône-Alpes? ... We have a lot of local forms. They mostly come from Arpitan. For example, *j'y sais, j'y fais* [instead of standard French *je le sais, je le fais* for "I know it," "I do it"]. Which I used in Paris without any embarrassment. It came indirectly from *patois*. I didn't know that at the time. From 2001 [having completed the PhD studies] onwards, I became interested in etymology, history, regional languages.<sup>105</sup>

Curiously, according to the informant, his then 12-year-old daughter also had to appeal to her Arpitan identity while living in Paris with her (Parisian) mother, although the situation was entirely different for her. She was at a school with many immigrant children: nearly every child had "a language of their own," Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, etc. In these circumstances, the informant's daughter and another girl from Savoy began to speak Arpitan with each other: knowing several Arpitan words, seemingly having *a language of their own* too, that they could use to discuss something so that their schoolmates could not understand them, proved to be a decisive factor in maintaining their status in the peer group.

### 3.2.2 'New speakers' and language acquisition

In fact, the major difference between "new speakers" and "late speakers" does not lie in their linguistic community exposure in their childhood or the presence or absence of family members that spoke the language (this may be the same for both categories), but in what they do with the language and how they perceive it. The late speakers think that, on

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<sup>105</sup> Note that the same informant also speaks about a second possible strategy (according to Gellner's theory), suggesting that the Savoyards generally have a strong sense of identity, they know exactly who they are; yet they were left with an acute feeling of having been abandoned by their own authorities during the annexation, so now many of them do everything they can in order to become more French than the French, and to destroy their heritage, both material and linguistic. I could argue though that, in fact, from what interviews have shown, in most cases this attitude – in fact a common one – is due not so much to the ancient history of annexation, but to the much more recent image of Savoyards as poor peasants from underdeveloped parts of France. Hence, they try to get rid of being associated with "peasants" much more than of the image of being a nation abandoned by its king.

the one hand, they already *know* the language, since they heard it in the past (albeit addressed to someone else), so they only need to *remember* it; on the other hand, for them it is a language to speak about the agro-pastoral life of the past, a language spoken by a social category, that of peasants, that no longer exists. Therefore, even had they wished to ameliorate their language skills, this would not be possible, since for them the speakers are all dead. Finally, sometimes they do know some (“last”) speakers, but only contact them in order to ask for some words. Most often though they consider themselves to be the “last speakers.” New speakers, in their turn, start from the idea that they do not know the language, but that there still are those who can teach it. As no adult classes or learning materials exist in these settings, and they could not rely on their childhood memories (because of their fragmented character or the absence of those) the way the “late speakers” did, they had to learn Francoprovençal with native speakers in their ancestors’ villages. Later they integrated into the existing Francoprovençal communication networks (reduced as these might be there). Therefore in this second case there is no gap between the “new speakers” and the community of native speakers.

Accordingly, those locally referred to as new speakers are substantially different from what is usually understood by the term: “individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programmes, revitalisation projects or as adult language learners” (O’Rourke et al. 2015: 1). Indeed, in the Francoprovençal area the only places where regular language courses and language learning materials (reduced as they are) exist are the VDA and Valais, where Francoprovençal is an everyday practice, so linguistic community exposure is a prerequisite for the existence of language learners there. In other words, in a diffuse setting, most people would go to these courses precisely *because* the language is spoken in everyday life, because they are sometimes being spoken to in that language and because they have a practical need to use it in their turn. Therefore, there is no gap between classes and “real life”: they are immersed in the Francoprovençal-speaking environment. In contrast, in regions where Francoprovençal is no longer used in everyday life regular educational programmes or learning materials do not exist, language acquisition has to pass through community exposure.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the gap is non-existent there as well. Thus I would argue that the term “new speaker” when used for the Francoprovençal context must be understood as referring to a social phenomenon of a very

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<sup>106</sup> Thus the “new speakers” *par excellence* in the eyes of the “*patoisants*” are members of the Arpitan Cultural Alliance. Hence, among all these Arpitanists, only one individual undertook language classes (provided by a “late speaker” in Lyon).

particular nature, different from the cases of other regional languages. The phenomenon from the Francoprovençal linguistic situation that seems to be the closest to what is generally understood under the “new speaker” label are in fact the so-called “late speakers.”

The “new speakers” usually have a high level of communicative competence, although their linguistic competence might be inferior to that of the “late speakers.” This group does use Francoprovençal in their interactions, but often poetic and symbolic functions are more important than a communicative one: a *côté cabinet de curiosités* – “cabinet of curiosities aspect,” as one Swiss Francoprovençal speaker referred to it. This curiosity can be indulged and linguistic insecurity compensated for by the use of dictionaries and grammar books. No French interference is tolerated. Besides, the “new speakers” often use Francoprovençal in written, Internet-mediated communication (Facebook or blogs). Actually, the majority of situations of their communication in Francoprovençal involves Internet communication: what may be categorised as *selective socialisation*. Consider two excerpts from Arpitanist texts:

AR: *Enqu'hoê [Hoê, Av'hoê] j'è parlâ avoêc lo grope indigèno de la Sèrra de lo Roncador ... J'è devesâ [discutâ] avoê yèlos sur lyor travaly de dèfènsi de la lèngua et de la cultura de lyor Sèrra. ... La discussion ehtyèt [era] passionanta! Nos avèns tant de choses comunes!*

*Today, I've spoken to a group of locals from Serra do Roncador ... I discussed with them their work of defending the language and the culture of their Serra ... The discussion was exciting! We have so much in common! (The italics mark the words for which the original gives multiple versions)*

JM: Nos sens por lo mot "arpitan" por cen que l'est la *mèlyosa (mèlyora)* rèclama por noutra lengoua. "Francoprovençal" l'est “oficièl” mas l'est pas clar *una bréca (una chousa, du tot)*. "Patoués" l'est adrèt prôd "pèjoratif" et il fèt pas la difèrençe entre les “patoués” de la bise, du mi(é)-jorn, et du méten de la France.

We support the word “Arpitan” because it makes the *best* publicity of our language. “Francoprovençal” is official but it isn't clear *at all*. “Patois” is quite “pejorative,” and it does not distinguish between the “patois” of the north, the *south*, and the middle of France.

What is interesting for us here is not *what* is said but *how* it is said. Using multiple variants for the same word is typical of the written communication of Arpitanists. Those may be:



- either different lexemes:

*Enqu'hoê* [*Hoê*, *Av'hoê*] – today

*J'è devesâ* [*discutâ*] – I discussed

(*pas*) *una bréca* [*una chousa*, *du tot*] – (not) at all

- or different grammatical forms:

*ehtyèt* [*era*] – was (2<sup>nd</sup> person SG of imperfect)

- sometimes, different phonetic realisations are also involved:

*mèlyosa* (*mèlyora*), *mi(é)-jorn*.

It would appear that this principle is the result of the high degree of variability of Francoprovençal: in other words, it is caused by a striving to ensure a successful communication in any region of the Francoprovençal (Arpitan) linguistic area. A lack of assurance of such an understanding seems to correlate with the meager (and recent) experience of communication with speakers from different regions. In comparison, native speakers do not feel any need to provide synonyms when talking outside of their village – this does not put successful communication at risk. At the same time, it is an attempt to forge a common language out of a continuum of different varieties, by including lexical, grammatical and phonetic forms of different geographical origins. Indeed, most speakers of this type (though not all of them) are Arpitanists, and they adhere to a supradialectal standard orthography, ORB (see Part II Chapter 3). Unlike late speakers, the Arpitanists tend to be oriented towards the future rather than the past. However, according to their notions, this future can only be made possible by the death of the past: only with the disappearance of the “last speakers” of Arpitan who see it as a highly fragmented language (the speakers who are “no longer of any help [to us],” who can be no more than “a source of inspiration,” to quote one of the informants) – only then will the existence of a unified Arpitan language as a language of “high culture” be made possible.

They often actively participate in language policy-making on regional or local levels. It is thus especially with this last group of speakers that Francoprovençal, no longer transmitted nor part of daily social practice, appears as “language,” i.e. a reified autonomous closed system and an object of discourse and policy.

### 3.3 The concurrency of legitimacy between different types of speakers

The very existence of the concepts of “late speakers” and “new speakers,” as widely-used and interiorised by the whole linguistic community, can only exist in a situation where the language is imagined by the community of its speakers as endangered. No such classification exists in diffuse settings. In the VDA there are speakers and non-speakers of “patois,” or else “good *patoisants*” and “bad *patoisants*.” The latter does not depend on any criteria such as social class, geographical background or time of language acquisition. It only depends on the speaker’s actual language proficiency. According to common representations, there can be “good speakers” who come from other regions or countries, and “bad speakers” who were born locally, and whose whole family speaks the language. Similarly, as the anthropologist Christiane Dunoyer notes in her book on the *new patoisants* (“*nouveaux patoisants*”) in the Aosta Valley,

personne ne nous a dit qu’un patoisant serait quelqu’un qui a le patois comme langue maternelle ... D’après nos informateurs, tout le monde peut donc devenir patoisant dès qu’il apprend les bases de la langue. (Dunoyer 2010: 52-53)

nobody told us that a *patois* speaker is someone for whom *patois* is their mother tongue ... According to our informants, anyone can become a *patois* speaker as soon as they learn the basics of the language.

Furthermore, in the course of her research, she has never encountered a negative attitude towards those who learn the language (Dunoyer 2010: 26-30). Indeed, the very term of *new speaker* does not exist in the VDA, much as there is no such concept with respect to e.g. French or English, languages that are *actually* spoken. I would argue therefore that the categorisation of speakers in the focused setting is directly linked to the image of the language as being “dying,” where the legitimacy of being a speaker implies the legitimacy of representing the language as a whole (with the assumption that speakers are few) and consequently, and more importantly, the community as whole.

### 3.3.1 Language true and false: the language of the people and the language of young intellectuals

In focused settings the discourse of aged speakers of Francoprovençal, both “native” and “late,” contrasts the language of those who spoke Francoprovençal *naturally* (themselves or their grandparents), to that of young *intellectuals* belonging to the urban middle class. Language variation across the social scale (the difference of sociolects) and through time (variation according to speaker’s age), is, of course, a normal feature of any language. Nevertheless, in the context of endangered languages this difference is perceived as that between a *real* language and an *artificial* one: as though the peasants of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century spoke a *true* language, while the modern *intellectuals* speak an *invented* one.

The differences concern all levels of the linguistic system: phonetic and prosodic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical. Thus the new speakers “speak *with a wrong intonation, in a wrong manner*,” “*there is a little something in the pronunciation that they don’t get*” (according to native and late speakers). Besides, they are sometimes accused of replacing the *authentic* syntax with the French one. Thus, a native speaker from Haute-Savoie accuses “the young Arpitans” of using French syntax in the *patois*, whereas she, according to her own perception, would use the syntax of “patois” in her French. She hastens however to add: “I reproach them although it’s not their fault: they have never heard how it should be spoken properly!” Finally, as the young urban middle class activists expand the situations of language use beyond the domains where it would be used by its *last speakers*, i.e. the peasants, an obvious need to enlarge the vocabulary emerges. Moreover, some of them tend to try to exclude all words resembling French from the variety they speak (which is not necessarily limited to borrowings), to create a language as different from French as possible. The latter is characteristic of language revitalisation movements in general. Some informants among the Francoprovençal native speakers criticised a teacher of the Savoyard “language” for rooting out words in centuries-old texts: “they suit him because they are not French, although nobody speaks like that in real life.” However most criticism concerns the phonetics.

All the criticisms mentioned are especially relevant with respect to the Arpitanists. At the same time, often they do not concern real people that the informant would have met,

but the image that the group produces (in contrast, in face-to-face communication with individuals no such problems arise). This appears to be mostly caused by the ACA's promotion of the standard ORB orthography (see Part II Chapter 3): orthography is then confused with transcription, as it is a rule in other writing systems for patois that everything is read "as it is written." Additionally, in the standard grammar book by Stich there is indeed a section suggesting a "supra-dialectal pronunciation" (the section titled "*Orthoépie*" in Stich 2003: 181-185). As a matter of fact, none of the Arpitanists insists on the latter: all of them, apart from one single exception, have learnt one particular local variety or another, so that the variety they speak can generally easily be localised to a particular village. However, the misunderstanding results in latent conflicts.

On their side, some Arpitanists admit that the idiom in the form(s) in which it existed before is bound to die along with its native speakers, since the older generation of speakers who have learnt it in their families have not transmitted it to their children and do not intend to do so now, as far as the younger generation curious to learn it is concerned. They can be nothing but a source of inspiration." At the same time, the Arpitanists criticise the fact that this is the opinion of the "patois speakers" (*patoisants*), which is taken into account when language policy is being developed – in particular, that of the Rhône-Alpes region:

NV 1973: C'est bien tout le paradoxe de vouloir interroger ces groupes [patoisants] à propos d'une politique régionale de revitalisation, on peut se demander quelle légitimité a leur parole sur le sujet quand eux-mêmes ayant toutes les clés en main n'ont rien fait pour.

It's paradoxical to ask those groups [of *patois speakers*] about the regional [language] revitalisation policy. One wonders of what legitimacy their word on the subject can be when they had all the keys in their hands and did nothing for it.

Thus, the older generation's status of (*rightful, true*) language speakers is contested as they are reproached for failing to pass the language on to the younger generations of their families, as well as of neglecting the everyday use of the language. It can however be seen from the above quotation that the issue is in fact about what legitimises the opinion of an individual or a group as a basis for legislation and, consequently, of who has the right to take part in policy-making on behalf of the group (see also Bichurina 2014).

The fact that such debates on the subject of “true” and “false” speakers arise around the language there where it is no longer used appears to be the fundamental feature of the conflict. Competition and enmity emerge when the language is transformed from a communication practice into a symbol and, simultaneously, a potential resource of power. When learning the language can no longer be explained by practical necessity (a desire to be fully accepted as a community member, to be included in local networks for a more successful career development, or in order to better understand an aged neighbour), it is perceived as trespassing against identity and ethnicity. The late speakers who have acquired the new social role of “tradition keepers” see it as an infringement on the special place that they occupy in the community, which only has a value if it is exclusive.

### 3.3.2 The Arpitan conflict: new speakers and linguists

The main conflict though, as far as “new speakers” are concerned, arises not among these and the “native” (very rarely) or “late” (more often) speakers, but among “new speakers” and linguists. Linguists explain in informal conversations why they are not interested in the Arpitanists: from their point of view, studying “fantasies” belongs to psychologists and psychiatrists, whereas the linguists’ business is to study *natural* languages. A unified supra-dialectal standard for something that had never existed as a linguistic unity in the first place, and has disappeared in most places by now, is seen as an *anachronism* and *fantasising*. The *invented, artificial* language of the Arpitanist *new speakers* is contrasted with the *authentic* language of the *last speakers*, often already dead ones. Thus, for instance, the *Glossaire des patois de la Suisse Romande* (the Glossary of the patois of Romand Switzerland) currently being published in Switzerland (<http://www.gpsr.ch/>) is based on field data collected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This point of view is not explicitly represented in scholarly literature, but it is reflected in two ways: on the one hand, in the existence of a special term for *new speakers* (*néo-locuteurs*), thus distinguishing them as a special category among other speakers; on the other hand, in the absence of research focused on these *new speakers*. Both points are duly noted by the Arpitanists:

NV, 1973, *Arp*: Le terme *néo-locuteur* c’est un mot carrément *diabolique!!!* Pas vraiment locuteurs, mais pas vraiment exclus de la catégorie non plus, la différenciation permet tout simplement de *les éliminer des études*, comme on

élimine des points gênants dans une série de mesures parce qu'ils contredisent la théorie et qu'on n'a pas envie d'en élaborer une plus complète. ... Et en l'occurrence ici, la théorie dit depuis 100 ans que le francoprovençal va disparaître rapidement ("la prophétie").

The term *new speaker* is an outright *diabolical* word!!! Not really speakers, but not really excluded from that category either; the distinction simply allows *for them to be eliminated from the study* like *embarrassing points are eliminated from a series of measurements because they contradict the theory*, and because one does not feel like developing a more comprehensive one ... In this case, the theory has been affirming for 100 years now that Francoprovençal will soon disappear ("the prophecy").

The same opinion is expressed in the series of jokes on linguists and dialectologists in the Arpitanists' Facebook group:

EA: Comment est-ce qu'un linguiste appelle un jeune qui se met à apprendre et parler la langue de ses grands-parents ?

– UN MÉCRÉANT!!! Enfin non, un *militant*!!! Enfin non, [prendre une bouche pincée] un *néo-locuteur*... Enfin bref, un mec qui *n'est pas censé exister* et qui n'est là que pour t'emmerder et essayer de niquer la réalisation DE LA PROPHÉTIE!!!! (*Arpitania abada!* 01.24.2013)

What does a linguist call a young person who sets about learning and speaking the language of their grandparents?

– A MISCREANT!!! Well no, an *activist*!!! Well no, [curling one's lip] a *new speaker*... Anyway, a guy who *shouldn't exist* and who's only there to piss you off and to try to fuck the fulfillment OF THE PROPHECY!!!!

EA: Ils se pressent autour du gisant pour recueillir son dernier souffle et pouvoir s'enorgueillir d'avoir été celui qui à "enregistré le dernier patoisant." Alors nous avec nos "néo-locuteurs" on les fait chier. (*Arpitania abada!* 01.24.2013)

They are crowding around the dying in order to take in his last breath and to be able to claim the honor of "recording the last speaker of the *patois*." So with our *new speakers*, we get under their skin.

The ironic use of the ecclesiastical lexis (*prophecy*, *miscreant*; the *diabolical word* can also be read in this context as carrying an ecclesiastical connotation) contrasts a faith-

based “pseudoscience” with what the *true* science should be like. This approach allows the authority of the research to be doubted (or completely rejected). It appears from this discourse on seeing the *new speakers* as an inconvenient fact that contradicts theory that in the opinion of the Arpitanists, the behaviour of linguists is conditioned by a sort of a professional arrogance, careerism, or even plain laziness. Further study reveals however that the motives ascribed to the linguists have a much more substantial basis:

NV, 1973: L’habile terme de «néo-locuteur» masque justement une manière d’exclure des études ceux que l’ont estime *politiquement impropre* à rentrer dans la catégorie de “ceux qui parlent la langue.” Il y a les *bons locuteurs*, patoisants de naissance, et les *mauvais locuteurs, actifs politiquement*: les néo-locuteurs. Quand bien même le *niveau de maîtrise* de la langue d’un néo-locuteur pourrait dépasser celui d’un patoisant de naissance...

Voilà comment de leur côté les linguistes, par ailleurs citoyens comme les autres, instrumentalisent leur position à des *fins politiques* dans le sujet des langues régionales.

The handy term of *new speaker* masks a way to exclude from one’s studies people who are believed to be *politically improper* to be included in the category of “those who speak the language.” There are *good speakers*, native *patois* speakers, and *bad speakers* who are *politically active*: the *new speakers*. Even though the language *proficiency level* of a new speaker can be higher than that of a patois speaker.

This is how the linguists, who are furthermore citizens like everyone else, turn their position into a *politically charged* tool in the domain of regional language.

This argument is connected to the preceding postulate: according to all forecasts, the so-called *regional languages* should die off rather than develop, and the *new speakers* disrupt this trend. The significant development of this idea is that in addition to the linguists’ psychological or pragmatic need to comply with their own prognosis, the idea of political drive emerges. Indeed, linguists in general and dialectologists in particular do use – and have always used – the opposition of the *good speakers* vs. the *bad ones*. For the linguist, *good* speakers are aged (especially male) individuals, for whom the idiom is their L1, typically living in the countryside and, preferably, never having left their native place, who have had a minimum of contact with the outside world (the so-called *NORMs* – non-mobile older rural males, see Chambers, Trudgill 1998: 29). These speakers are presumed to have preserved the idiom intact. Speakers belonging to the mobile urban population and

speaking several languages are classified as *bad speakers*, or more precisely *non-authentic* and therefore useless for research. In the Arpitanist discourse however, the dichotomy of *good/bad* speakers is ascribed entirely different grounds: political ones. *New speakers* turn out to be *bad speakers* because of their being “politically active”; to consider them as normal speakers would be *politically improper* and would contradict the *political goals*. The political goal is meant to be the creation of “one and indivisible nation” as it is vividly expressed in another statement (in our private written discussion) of one of the Arpitanists: “...*coupables que nous sommes de parler ENCORE une langue anti-républicaine en 2013*” (“guilty as we are of STILL speaking an anti-republican language in 2013”). This transfer of the debate from the properly linguistic plane to the political one allows the sensitive issue of the quality of the *new speakers’* language to be avoided. The linguistic issue of a language of a different nature (*invented, artificial, new language of new speakers, new speakers’ newspeak*) is substituted by the political question of legitimacy of speaking a regional language today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a question that is much more easily answered in the present-day context. The legitimacy of this language is proved by reference to the presently widespread ideas of biological and cultural diversity (which, incidentally, dialectologists have never rejected, as the essence of their work has been to study this diversity – specifically in a linguistic sense). Symptomatically, what is mentioned is not the “language” as such but the “language proficiency level,” which presupposes that the difference is quantitative rather than qualitative (much as the proficiency in a standard language can be discussed e.g. as measured by the European scale, from A1 to C2). Moreover, such a quantitative difference turns out to be – in some cases at least – in favour of the new speakers.

The accusations of Arpitan being an *artificial* language are not discussed explicitly, but a response to them is also expressed in the discussions:

AF: Ils [les linguistes] disent qu’ils *veulent maintenir «pure» la langue et jouent sur les émotions des gens*. En même temps, ils ... *l’attachent au folklore, et suivent un chemin qui mène à rien que la mort de la langue*. ... De toute façon, vu la position actuelle de notre langue (en forte baisse), je pense que notre génération ne doit pas/plus écouter ces gens là sur un sujet pareil. (*Arpitania abada!* 02.26.2013)

They [the linguists] say they want to *keep the language “pure” and play on people’s feelings*. At the same time, they ... *attach [the patois] to folklore and follow a road that can only bring about the*



*death of the language* ... Anyway, with the actual (steeply declining) condition of our language, I think our generation should not (any longer) listen to these people on such subjects.

Mentioning the *purity* of the language implicitly addresses the dialectologists' accusations. The quotation marks help to understand however that the idea of a *pure* language is in doubt. An apparent paradox is produced: the linguists "play on people's feelings," trying to "preserve" the (true, pure, etc.) language – while they are also its murderers. The folklorisation killing the idiom refers to the events the linguists help to organise, such as the international festivals of Francoprovençal, which will be discussed in Section 5.2. Once again, the linguists are ultimately blamed for today's depressing linguistic situation, and for this reason they lose all their legitimacy.

Nevertheless, a paradox can be noted: on the one hand, the linguists are explicitly denied a special role in language planning (they must not be listened to); on the other hand, such an abundant discourse on the linguists endows them with a virtually limitless power. It turns out that it is the linguist who shapes the speakers' attitude towards the language, who affects the linguistic situation (or even creates it), and on whom language life or death depends.

### 3.3.3 Speakers and linguists: a concurrency of legitimacy

Ultimately the nature of the conflict can be summarised as follows: traditionally dialectologists would have a monopoly over the authority of pronouncing themselves on linguistic matters. In many places of the Francoprovençal area a distinction between agricultural workers and intellectuals is still felt as socially important, and the latter would have the exclusive right to speak on behalf of the former about their linguistic and other needs. At the same time, the former would traditionally be Francoprovençal speakers, and the latter non-speakers. Dialectologists would always insist on the variation between Francoprovençal idioms: on the one hand, as this is the main goal of any dialectological work, which by definition is focused on variation; on the other hand, as agents of local or central power, they could not insist on Francoprovençal being anything more than a mere "dialect" because its existence as a "language" would either go against the ideal of the "one and indivisible nation" (in France), or against the ideal of French-Francoprovençal diglossia and, ultimately, of regional autonomy (in the VDA). Today, now the linguistic situation has become dramatic in most parts of the Francoprovençal area (in the sense that

the language is no longer spoken in everyday communication) and as the celebration of diversity simultaneously gains more and more weight at the international level, dialectologists realise that studying isoglosses will not help real speakers to maintain/transmit/revitalise their language and measures of another type should be taken. New orientations then start to be taken or considered. However, this is the very moment when activists start challenging the role of dialectologists and linguists. The development of new technologies, and namely of the Internet, the appearance of sources like Wikipedia as an alternative to academic resources, and the general democratisation of knowledge and public speaking gives them the possibility to speak directly for themselves, as well as for an imagined community of language speakers. At the same time, speaking the language ceases to be seen as a mark of belonging to a lower social class (as opposed to the researchers' privileged access to the dominant culture), and becomes a source of legitimacy for speaking *about* the language. "What could they possibly tell us about our language if they do not even speak it?" is a most common objection used to deny linguists' legitimacy.

It should be specified that this does not only concern the younger-generation activists, the Arpitanists who generally set themselves in opposition to the researchers, but also the older-generation Francoprovençal activists among the late speakers. While the attitude of the former is more openly adverse, the latter tend to express it in a more mockingly condescending tone. For instance, LK, 1932, *Fp*, notes:

Ici ce n'est pas secret pour personne, la totalité des chercheurs [du francoprovençal en France] aucun ne parle le francoprovençal. Ils parlent du francoprovençal, ils font des cours, ils sont chercheurs en francoprovençal mais ils parlent pas la langue.

It's no secret for anyone here that of all the researchers [of Francoprovençal in France], not a single one speaks Francoprovençal. They talk about Francoprovençal, they teach, they study Francoprovençal, but they don't speak the language.

He relates that an employee of one of the Francoprovençal research institutes in Lyon admitted to being surprised by the fact that visitors from the Aosta Valley coming to the institute would speak "patois" to each other. After that conversation, the informant brought "a dozen villagers" to the institute, ostensibly to show them in atlases how the patois of different villages differ from each other. He only talked to them in Francoprovençal. According to him, the researchers who witnessed it had quite a shock: "It was like speaking a dead language. As if we talked in Latin" ("*C'est une langue morte alors. On va*

*dire qu'on parle latin*”). Stories like this serve to renegotiate the distribution of power and authority between the élites and the people directly concerned.

Researchers’ linguistic competence is different in the VDA where they do know the language, just as the majority of today’s population does; yet there they are accused of not actually using it. To conclude this section, lyrics from an ironic song by Yvette Bullet released in January 2016 can illustrate this last point:

Bonsoir a tcheut dz’i fa eunna retsertse	Good evening everyone, I’ve done a study
Su la Val d’Outa é bla bla bla	On Valle d’Aosta and bla bla bla
...	...
Bonsoir a tcheut fa diye oué	Good evening everyone, you should say “oué”
E pa «okay» l’ é pa eun patoué	And not “okay,” this is not patois
Pe alléi a la fèira	And when I go to the fair
Beutto dou dzen sabot	I put on nice boots
<i>Deun la tradechón<sup>107</sup> é bla bla bla</i>	<i>According to the tradition and bla bla bla</i>
Ma poi t’incontro per la strada	And then I meet you on the street [Italian]
E de prèidjéi eun patoué	And speaking in patois
Na me la sento pa lèi la féyo pa.	No I don’t feel like it, I don’t do it.

#### **Chapter 4. When interlocutors play different games: diffuse and focused practices in contact**

In this chapter the situations of contact between diffuse and focused practices will be studied. What happens when interlocutors seem (to themselves) to share the same language, but when, in reality, they do not share either representations about the language, or, more particularly, the ways of using it? I propose to consider these issues based on two concrete examples of communication among different types of speakers from my participant observation experience in the Francoprovençal area.

<sup>107</sup> “*Deun la tradechón*”, marked in different colour in the lyrics, might refer to the slogan of the *École populaire du patois*: “*Creitre deun la tradichon*” “Growing up according to the tradition” (see Figure 17 above).

#### 4.1 Example 1: A game of *Qui a deut?*

The event takes place in the small town of Marignieu (*Le Bugey*), in the Alpine foothills of the French *département* of Ain, at the border of Haute-Savoie and Savoie. Twice a year, for three days in December and for five days in March, one of the three local wine-maker families throws a wine fest in its cellars. DD, 1963, a trader from the Aosta Valley, has been coming to the wine fest for over 10 years. He comes to sell his coffee, but also pasta, sauces and liquors. He is assisted by two employees, also from the Aosta Valley: a young woman, FF, 1983, and an elderly man, LL, 1952. All three talk to each other exclusively in Francoprovençal. It is probably due to this that some participants from France also speak Francoprovençal to them. In particular, PP, 1950, a Savoyard musician, almost invariably talks to them in Francoprovençal. At the fest, he plays the accordion and sings Savoyard songs: some of them are in French, some others in Francoprovençal. The degree of mutual intelligibility of different Francoprovençal varieties is high, like in all the encounters of this kind that I could observe, so generally there is no need to ask the interlocutor to repeat or rephrase his sentences.

At a certain moment of the fest, DD 1963, FF 1983, LL 1952, PP 1950, and myself were talking among ourselves in Francoprovençal. LL 1952 used the lexeme *sempre* in his speech. There followed an immediate response from DD:

DD 1963: Qui a deut “sempre”? (Who said [FP] “always” [It?]?)

LL 1952: Je (I [Fr])

[General laughter]

Note that the laughter was mainly due to LL’s confession “*Je*,” which was not only in French (rather than in Francoprovençal), but in broken French: he used the nominative form of the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun, whereas according to the French grammar rules, the strong form *moi* should have been used. Later on, the *Je* became a recurrent joke at the fest. When the laughter subsided, PP, puzzled by what had just happened, admitted to have no idea what the matter was. DD and FF explained that it was a game of sorts where it was not permitted to pronounce words that did not (quite) belong to patois. PP was astounded to hear this explanation, replying that they were simply insane.

Several different layers can be discerned in this game episode. Firstly, it demonstrates the purism of DD and FF. What is the origin of *sempre*: is it a borrowing from Italian or a Latin word that was preserved in parallel in Italian and in Francoprovençal? DD admits that he does not know the answer to this question – but it would be better to exclude the word as suspicious. It is “safer” to use the word *todzor* instead. It may be observed though that, while the latter lexeme is indeed different from the Italian *sempre*, it is at the same time very much like the French *toujours*. One can hypothesise that activists from France, were they given the choice, would prefer *sempre*. In actual fact, DD 1963 and FF 1983 are not just purveyors of coffee and pasta, although many other participants of the fest only know them as such. DD has been one of the leaders of the political movement for independence of the Aosta Valley in the 1990s; then he taught Francoprovençal at the *École populaire de patois* (Popular Patois School) for some 15 years, until the autumn of 2012. His assistant FF also taught Francoprovençal in schools of the VDA. The retired LL is the only one to speak Francoprovençal simply and only because it is his first language: he explains that he speaks only in “patois,” as, according to him, in the Aosta Valley Italian is only spoken to policemen, to customs officials and at the post office, which has to do with the fact that the locals are not allowed to work in the public sector in their own region.

Secondly, the purism certainly does not only apply to the choice of specific lexemes, but also to the very issue of choice, to the notion that it is Francoprovençal and Francoprovençal alone that should be spoken. In fact, however, the “game” is provoked not only by the purism, but by the reaction to others’ purism as well. *Qui a deut...?* (“Who said ...?”) is actually a quotation. In the fall of 2012, two months prior to my observations at the fest, compulsory Francoprovençal training for future teachers was introduced in the VDA. The training programme was about six months long, seven nights a week. Some veteran teachers were exempted from the training but DD was not of their number, and therefore he could no longer teach. Hence, the phrase “*Qui a deut...?*” belongs to a teacher of the training programme, who was selected from among DD’s former colleagues. This is how she corrects her students, future (and often former) teachers themselves, if they start speaking Italian during class. In this context, the “game” acquires a double meaning. It mocks a teacher whose authority is not recognised and mocks the official policy with respect to Francoprovençal. It expresses irony with respect to the idea of an illusion of Francoprovençal monolingualism. Yet at the same time, it reproduces that same idea, since

a joke that lasts for four days (during the preparation and the three days of the fest) is however too long to be merely a joke.

Finally, the layer that is the most important to this study concerns the contact between deliberate linguistic practices, the modelling of Francoprovençal monolingualism, or of Francoprovençal/French or Francoprovençal/Italian/French bi- or trilingualism as coexistent and clearly separated monolingualisms, and spontaneous mixed practices where different idioms are not discerned by the speakers (cf. Le Page, Tabouret-Keller 1985). The Savoyard's response when encountering the element of the "game" reveals the absence of reflection related to the use of *patois*. He does not *try* to speak the *patois* in a particular way: he simply speaks it. Virtually the same can be said about LL: as mentioned above, according to his own statements, he almost never speaks Italian. In reality, however, all three idioms he knows (Francoprovençal, Italian, and French) turn out not to be clearly delimited in his mind. What he considers his mother tongue includes elements of all three, which is exactly why, although he knows the rules of the "game," he invariably loses.

#### 4.2 Example 2. Debating politics

The second situation happened in July 2015 at a meeting of the International Council for Francoprovençal, the *CIF*, which took place in Haute-Savoie. The observation there is of a more personal character. Members present at the meeting included those from the VDA and Piedmont in Italy, from Vaud in Switzerland, and from Haute-Savoie in France. During a pause we went to have a drink with the council members in a café outside. The only working language of the council is Francoprovençal. Therefore during the pause we continued speaking Francoprovençal. As we were outside, conversations started turning around the heat of that particular summer, around choosing a place in the shadow to drink a mint syrup and then eventually about the syrup itself. At this moment in the middle of the small talk of this kind a member from Switzerland mentioned that she had watched a documentary on Chechnya and started telling us about the situation in the restive republic in Russia's North Caucasus region. The conversation thus switched to a discussion of federal power and the authorities of the autonomous republic, and she also gave us her own interpretation of issues of terrorism, and also of the murder of a politician who had recently been killed in Russia. At some point I wanted to question some of her reflections, but as I started to explain my point of view, she interrupted me, objecting that I

was speaking *too quickly*. It did not mean that she had not understood what I had been saying, but that it somehow had not left space for enjoying the language. Then she summed up: “so, you say “*pouvoir*”?” (for the word “power”). “And I say *pouai*.” And she asked other members how they would say the word “power” in their varieties.

Initially, at that very moment, this reaction was perceived by myself as a (quite shocking) lack of tact: in order to simply enjoy speaking the language my interlocutor could have kept speaking about the weather, not about people being killed. However, I had to admit that, for instance, learning a language often does involve speaking about conflictual or traumatising issues (as my experience of both learning or teaching foreign languages shows). Indeed, a language course, and especially, a conversation course, would typically be an occasion to speak about all sorts of issues: these might be rather intimate moments of one’s personal biography, or preoccupying political and social events. To give but some examples, I remember how in an English class at university we spoke about the audience of the *Nord-Ost* musical who were being held as hostages in a theatre hall in Moscow, or how in a French class at secondary school we spoke about demonstrations in the streets in relation to the closing of a private TV channel in Russia. The crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that on these occasions we knew the *game* we were playing: we knew that we were, first of all, trying to improve our foreign language skills, and if a teacher found it necessary to correct us, it would be normal. It would correspond to *the rules of the game*. On the contrary, in that café in Haute-Savoie, different interlocutors were playing different games. Some of us were playing the game of “improving language skills,” or else “maintaining the endangered language,” and some others, including myself, the game of “debating politics.” Hence, within the game I was playing was, my interlocutor’s contribution was completely inappropriate and therefore shocking.

This anecdotal observation might help to understand the low efficiency of the council itself. Indeed, I would argue that its members in their sessions play different games. Or more precisely, the game seems to be the same: “making language politics.” Yet for some members, coming from focused settings, gathering together with members from different states and speaking exclusively in a minority language they are there to protect is a political act *in itself*. For other members, coming from diffuse settings, speaking this language is seen as normal, as this is the one they usually speak in most situations of everyday interaction; in addition, this is the one that the members, who come from different countries, have in common. In this interpretation – but only in this one – making

politics means defining and fulfilling tasks exterior to using the language as a means of internal communication.

## Chapter 5. Arts and festivities

### 5.1. Language and identity in performing arts

The performing arts, especially theatre and music, play a special part in today's language revitalisation movements, including the Francoprovençal one. According to Jean-Baptiste Martin, dialectologist and the Linguistic Councillor of the Rhône-Alpes region of France, the future of Francoprovençal is “on the cultural side, the affective side” (Martin 2015: 35):

Puisque le francoprovençal ne peut pas redevenir la langue ordinaire du quotidien qu'il a été, il faut, si on veut avoir une chance de le conserver, lui donner, je devrai plutôt dire lui redonner, la place qu'aucune autre langue ne peut avoir, celle du cœur en lien avec le terroir et les racines. Pour cela, dans un pays comme la France, cette langue doit être valorisée sur le plan culturel. (Martin 2015: 36)

Since Francoprovençal cannot become again the ordinary language of everyday life that it once was, if we want to have a chance to maintain it, we need to give it, or rather to give it once again, the place that no other language can have, the one of the language of heart, linked to the soil and to the roots. For this, in a country like France, this language should be valorised in the cultural sphere.

“Cultural” here means, first of all, literature and theatre, as he specifies later (*Ibid.*). These are also ascribed a special role in the legislative aspect: thus, for example, the authorities of the Rhône-Alpes region especially mention the necessity to support and develop performing arts. The Regional Deliberation (2009: 16) prescribes “a better taking into account by the Regional directorates of cultural affairs of professional artistic creation [in regional languages] and [its] diffusion (performing arts, editions, cinema, audiovisual...)” («meilleure prise en compte par les DRAC de la création et de la diffusion artistique professionnelle (*Arts et spectacles vivants, éditions, cinémas, audiovisuels...*)»).

In the sphere of performing arts the Occitan case once again plays the role of an ideal example. Thus, as far as theatre is concerned, at a conference on the transmission, standardisation and revitalisation of Francoprovençal (organised by the *Centre d'études*



*francoprovençales* in Saint-Nicolas, VDA, on November 7, 2015), J.-B. Martin gave the example of the Occitan theatre company *La Rampa a Tio* as the one to follow in the Francoprovençal revitalisation movement. Similarly, earlier, at the 33<sup>rd</sup> International Fest of Francoprovençal in Bourg-en-Bresse (September 2012), at a conference organised on that occasion around *Writing, Playing, and Singing in Francoprovençal in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, representatives of the very same Occitan company La Rampa a Tio were invited as experts to share their experience. As for other performing arts, and especially music, the example *par excellence* is the *Estivada*, an Occitan festival held annually in Rodez (France): it was admired as a somewhat ideal model in both above-mentioned discussions, that of 2015 and that of 2012, but also, for instance, at a conference on Savoyard music held during the International Fest of Francoprovençal in September 2015 (Reignier, Haute-Savoie). The figures serve to underline the significance of the festival: it is said to bring every year some 100,000 spectators to a town whose population is less than 30,000 (see e.g. Martin 2015: 39). The creation of an analogical event for Francoprovençal is being discussed with the Rhône-Alpes region. However, when seen more closely, these seemingly perfect examples hide many problematic issues and tensions. Therefore, before going back to the Francoprovençal case, we should examine this proposed “ideal” model in detail, focusing namely on theatre.

### 5.1.1 The Occitan model

While Francoprovençal theatre is exclusively amateur in all the countries in the Francoprovençal area, professional Occitan theatre has existed in France since the 1970s (namely La Rampa a Tio is one of the professional companies). Before discussing it any further, it should be made clear that being professional in performing arts in the context of France means having the status of *intermittent du spectacle*: this means the participants are paid by the state during the staging and rehearsal period, when there are no performance honorary fees. Additionally, the *professional* status provides a possibility to receive grants for productions on French territory from the Ministry of Culture and for foreign tours from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (via a structure that used to be called *Culturesfrance* and is now called *Institut français*). The two ministries only provide subsidies to professional companies; amateur groups cannot benefit from their funding. The fact of being professional then gives very concrete advantages in financial terms. The advantages in cultural terms though are more doubtful. By cultural I do not mean here the purely

aesthetic value of theatrical productions. What is more important, if seen from a language revitalisation perspective, is their content and namely the image of language that these productions project.

One of the most prominent Occitan authors and playwrights, Max Rouquette (Roqueta in the Occitanised version, 1908-2005) wrote that, in order to “restore the dignity of a language in the eyes of its people” (*restituer une langue dans sa dignité, au regard de son peuple*), it should be provided with the entire range of varied means of expression (Rouquette 2001: 304). According to Rouquette,

...dans le domaine des arts, la forme la plus adaptée et la plus proche de cette préoccupation devrait être le théâtre, et tous ses masques. Le moyen le plus sûr de remettre en circulation des formes de langage, habituellement délaissées, au profit des facilités de la farce ou de la comédie. (*op. cit.*: 305)

...in the domain of fine arts, the form the best adapted for and the closest to this goal should be the theatre, along with all its masks. The most reliable means of reintroducing into usage the language forms habitually discarded in favour of the easiness of farce or comedy.

Thus the theatre could provide a model for a possible way for the existence of the language, in the entire variety of situations, genres, and communication registers. However, Rouquette also notes the “miserabilism in the attachment to the language” (*misérabilisme dans l’attachement à la langue* – *op. cit.*: 283) among the Occitanists, criticising their limited vision of their own culture, both in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and “up to the present day” (i.e. 2001). This limitedness is manifested in reducing the entire culture and the entire language to a single sphere – essentially that of everyday communication within the undereducated rural society – under the pretext that the last speakers of the language were peasants (*op. cit.*: 292). Moreover, all that is preserved from the peasant culture is but an appearance, a set of the most stereotypical images of it. Thus the Occitan theatre has traditionally been – and remains – limited to just two genres: comedy and farce, and thus, according to Rouquette, it identifies the entire language with a single negative, despised role. On a purely linguistic plane, this trend corresponds to an extremely limited use of lexis, typical not only of the theatre but also of all sorts of language use by local *patoisants*:

Tel mot, telle formule, qu’ils répètent en souriant, jouant d’eux entre leurs lèvres, comme d’un délicieux bonbon, ou le plus parfumé des noyaux de cerise. Mais là

s'arrêtent leurs délices. Restant en deçà des vertus et des pouvoirs de leur langue, ils n'en retenaient que des attendrissements sur un passé perdu. Comme on va pleurer sur une tombe: jusqu'à, dans un an, le prochain jour des Morts. (Rouquette 2001: 282).

Such word, such expression that they repeat with a smile, playing with it between their lips as with a delicious sweet or the most perfumed of cherry stones. But this where their delights stop. Remaining short of the virtues and the powers of their language, all they retain of it is a fondness for a lost past. Just as one comes to a tomb to shed a tear: until the next All Souls' day a year after.

Between the 1940s and early 2000s, Rouquette himself developed the entire variety of theatre genres in Occitan. However, as he recalls in his autobiography, when he attempted to provide Occitan with different genres and, respectively, different domains of language use, he was met with a “silence. Complete and chilling” (“*silence. Absolu et glacé.*” Rouquette 2001: 310). Indeed, all Rouquette's plays were originally written in Occitan but the lot of their French translations was always incomparably happier than that of the Occitan originals. In French translation they were awarded numerous high-profile theatre prizes, produced by the most prominent theatre companies and at the best known theatre festivals, and even included in the repertoire of the Comédie-Française; in Occitan they were ignored. Let us consider three examples. *The Doctor of Cucugnan* (*Lo Metge de Cucunhan – Le Médecin de Cucugnan*), a one-act play written during World War II, was published in the high-profile Parisian theatre magazine *L'Avant-scène*, then re-printed in the special issue of the same magazine dedicated to the one-act plays most demanded by theatre companies. Rouquette's name stands there along those of Faulkner and Cocteau. The play is being performed by various companies all over the world – except the Occitan ones. *The Glossary* (*Lo Glossari – Le Glossaire ou l'étrange univers du savant Mòssieur Pluche*) was staged in French translation at the Comédie-Française and has become part of its permanent repertoire; it has never, to my knowledge, been performed in the original Occitan version. Finally, probably the best known of Rouquette's plays, *Medea* (*Medelha – Médée*), was first staged in French in 2003. In 2008, Magnard, a major French publishing house for educational literature, publishes *Medea* in its *Classics & Contemporaries* collection (Rouquette 2008<sup>108</sup>). As of today, *Medea* is being performed in two French-language productions but has never been produced in Occitan, in any case, by any of the professional companies. Certain small and unknown amateur groups did perform Rouquette's plays. However the professional Occitan theatre, well known in the language

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<sup>108</sup>Rouquette Max, *Médée*, *Classiques & Contemporains*, n°94 2008

activist milieu both inside and outside of the Occitanist circles, would consistently discard them, opting for the “good old days” village-life sketches. For example, the large virtual exhibition *Jòga!* (“Play!”) of the Interregional Center of Occitan Language (CIRDOC) created in the spring 2013 on the history and the modern state of Occitan theatre<sup>109</sup> did not mention Max Rouquette at all (except in one quotation from Lafont).

Robert Lafont (Robèrt Lafont in the occitanised version), another prominent Occitan author and sociolinguist, also started writing for theatre as well in the mid-1940s. Just like Rouquette, he was then oriented towards a serious theatre of an international level. His first play was also staged in French translation (in 1960). Lafont speaks about the “fundamental ambiguity” (ambiguïté fondamentale) of that period:

...j’ècrivais en oc dans une impossibilitat totala puishqu’il n’y avait pas d’acteurs, pas de metteurs en scèna, pas de public per un teatre en lenga d’oc. Il n’y avait que des autors. J’avais decidat de metre fin a la traduccion de mes oeuvres dramaticas en francés, or las necessitats etaiant francesas. ... C’est au moment où j’ai commecat a escrire que le teatre a ete ainsi, per moi, impossible. (Lafont 2003)<sup>110</sup>

...I was writing in Oc in a total impossibility because there were no actors, no directors, no audience for a theatre in the Oc language. There were but authors. I decided to put an end to the translation of my theatre pieces into French, but the demand was French ... It was at the moment when I started writing that the theatre was impossible for me.

Unlike Rouquette, Lafont completely gave up writing theatre plays for a long period, as he was unwilling to translate them from Occitan into French.

Both authors note that in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when they started writing in Occitan, all actors and directors were self-taught amateurs. Today, over half a century later, nothing has changed.<sup>111</sup> There is, of course, a “professional” Occitan theatre, but today’s *professionals* are yesterday’s autodidacts without any drama school training. They

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<sup>109</sup> <http://occitanica.eu/omeka/exhibits/show/expojoga/j--ga-un-teatre-politic>

<sup>110</sup> Robert Lafont, *Un impossible théâtre? Auteurs en scène*, Les Presses du Languedoc, 2003 (qtd. in <http://occitanica.eu/omeka/exhibits/show/expojoga/j--ga-un-teatre-politic>)

<sup>111</sup> Observations were made during two editions of the Occitan festival Estivada in Rodez, in 2012 and 2014, my position of volunteer for the organising committee allowing me to see all sides of theatre productions, as well as those of concerts, and at one edition of the Total Festum festival in Montpellier.

are *professionals* per their official status of *intermittent du spectacle*. Not to digress from the issues directly related to the language, note only that as far as plots are concerned, this theatre remains limited to comic sketches with villagers as protagonists – just as it was the case in the theatre criticised by Rouquette.

What is of a primary interest though when considering today's Occitan theatre is the question of the tastes of Occitan theatre workers and audience, of what is and is not in demand in modern Occitan (or Occitanist) society, and how these demands reflect and shape modern language ideologies. If the theatre is supposed to present a sort of mirror in which modern society – the Occitan one in this case – is reflected, then it would appear that this society keeps seeing itself as uneducated and rural, using the language in a limited range of situations. Thus, a radical discrepancy is revealed between activists' claims of the Occitan language as that of a "great culture," a language that exists in the entire range of its functions, and the actual denial of the legitimacy of its existence in any form except that related to rural speech.

### 5.1.2 Alternative models: a 'real' self vs. a 'rural' self

The artistic use of bilingual and diaglossic practices can potentially be varied. For example, A. Jaffe relates how the Corsican theatre "makes use of the diglossic relationship between Corsican and French as a vehicle for the description of character's stances, personalities and relationships" (Jaffe 1999: 261). Thus in one play, a character speaks both Corsican and French: "His 'real' self is expressed in Corsican, which is the 'language of emotion' in the play" (*Ibid.*)

A very similar use of diaglossic situation was made earlier in classical Russian literature, written for and about French-Russian bilingual society. One might think, for instance, of *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy, where Russian is shown as the language of intimacy and of sincerity, while French is formal, cold and, to a certain extent, unnatural. Hence, the use of languages measures personal distance. For example, in a dialogue where Anna addresses her lover Alexei Vronsky in Russian, and he replies in French, the use of French in intimate relations is used by the author to portray a looming conflict in their relationship: the use of a High-variety in a Low-domain is intended to be interpreted by – perfectly bilingual – readers as a lack of sincerity. In a similar way, when Anna's husband

speaks Russian to her after finding out that she has been cheating on him, she feels it as inappropriately intimate and therefore irritating<sup>112</sup>.

In the VDA the distinction between Francoprovençal and French/Italian in common linguistic representations is very close to the one just mentioned: it is *langue de cœur* (language of heart) vs. *langue de raison* (language of reason) (see Part III Section 2.2.2). It is the same distinction that is proposed as a future for Francoprovençal in France (see the beginning of this chapter). Therefore this sort of use of Francoprovençal might have also been expected. Yet as we will see in the next sections, it never occurs. As in the Occitan case, the distinction between two codes, as used artistically, is not on the scale of formality, but one of social belonging: speaking Francoprovençal, in both diffuse and focused settings, is not expressing a “real” self, but mostly a “rural” self.

### 5.1.3 Francoprovençal performing arts

As has already been noted, unlike in the Occitan context, there are no professional theatre companies playing in Francoprovençal. However, the modern history of the theatre in Francoprovençal has developed simultaneously with that in Occitan, influenced by the same political events and ideology. Namely it is an important social phenomenon in the VDA and in Savoy (especially Haute-Savoie).

In the VDA the theatre in Francoprovençal first appeared after the First World War, in 1927 (*Lo pion a la feira*, “A Drunk at a Fair” by Jules-Ange Negri). Yet it became a regular and well established practice after the Second World War and the fall of the fascist regime. *Le Comité des traditions valdôtaines* (the Committee of Valdôtain Traditions) was created shortly after the war, in 1947. The first theatre group, *lo Charaban*, was founded in 1958. A large expansion of this phenomenon of theatre in Francoprovençal occurred 10 years later, after 1968 when *Centres culturels* (Cultural Centres) opened everywhere in the VDA, bringing about theatre groups made of young people. In 1979 la *Fédérachón Valdonténa di Téatro Populéro*, FVTP (the Valdôtain Federation of Popular Theatre) was created. Today it unites 22 amateur companies, which perform all together once a year at

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<sup>112</sup> “‘I am very grateful for your confidence in me.’ He repeated gently in Russian the phrase he had said in Betsy’s presence in French, and sat down beside her. When he spoke to her in Russian, using the Russian ‘thou’ of intimacy and affection, it was insufferably irritating to Anna.” (Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Chapter 20. English version: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1399>)

the cultural event called *Printemps Théâtral*, the Theatre Spring (on the history of theatre in the VDA see Bétemps 2014).

In Haute-Savoie, theatre in *patois* first appeared in the aftermath of 1968, which created a new wave of interest in regional languages. The first one appears in Reignier. Like in the VDA, the creation of the *MJC, Maisons des Jeunes et de la Culture* (the local Houses of Youth and Culture, analogues of the *Valdôtain Cultural Centres*) considerably contributed to the development of theatrical expression in regional languages. Additionally, in these years the MJC organised meetings (*veillées*) in Viuz-en-Sallaz where the elder generation told the young people about their past experiences. Thanks to the opening of the Mont Blanc tunnel in 1965 exchanges with the Aosta Valley also became possible, namely with *Lo Charaban*. Today the *Lou Rbiolon* Federation of Savoyard Theatres unites 22 amateur companies from both *départements* of Savoie and Haute-Savoie.

After this brief historical overview, let us focus on today's functioning of the theatre. I will first start with the focused context of France and Switzerland and then analyse the diffuse one of the VDA.

#### 5.1.4 Theatre in Francoprovençal in focused settings

Francoprovençal language activists apparently share the Occitan authors' vision of the theatre as "The most reliable means to reintroduce into usage [various] language forms" ("*le moyen le plus sûr de remettre en circulation des formes de langage*," Rouquette 2001: 305), and even insist on it more often than the Occitanists do. In the focused setting, theatre is a rare and special place where Francoprovençal continues to be actually spoken. For the Arpitanist EF, 1983, *Arp*, one of the founders of the ACA, his interest in the Arpitan language is closely related to the theatre: as he told me in an interview, his nurse, a native Arpitan speaker, would take him to watch Arpitan plays in Thonon-les-Bains (a town in Savoy, on the shore of Lake Geneva). They were often accompanied by his grandmother (who spoke a "strongly Arpitanised French," knew Arpitan songs and would tell Arpitan tales) and an aged neighbour who was also considered a family member. The theatre thus becomes a place that unites the family (more

precisely, its older generation with the addition of the child) around an idiom that is no longer used in everyday family practices. The Savoyardist AB, 1960, *Sav*, also mentions the Thonon theatre as a unique place where the language is still “alive.”

Indeed, every year before Christmas the *Lou Rbiolon* Federation of Savoyard Theatres organizes “Savoyard evenings” (*veillées*) in Thonon-les-Bains. Various amateur companies give performances in Savoyard after or during a lunch or a dinner. For instance, in 2012 when I made my observations there, the show was about three and a half hours long; performances were given for three nights in a row, and the house, seating about 200 was full to capacity each time.

The informants agree that producing theatre plays offers one of the main opportunities of language transmission to the younger generation who act in them. LK, 1932, *Fp* from the Lyon area, told me about a performance he directed in a private school for 12-13 year-old children. The first part mostly consisted of “songs representing the traditional life they didn’t know” (*des chansons qui représentent la vie traditionnelle qu’ils n’ont pas connue*); the second one, of modern-life sketches including mobile-phone communication in Francoprovençal (the mobile phone is called there *yo que tè*, a neologism literally translated as “where are you?”) Participation in the Thonon festival is felt to be the summit of success: “When it’s well done, well finished, in a year or two, we’ll go to Savoy or to Italy with other kids, to make a little theatre festival” (*Quand ça sera bien fait, bien fini dans un an ou deux nous irons en Savoie ou en Italie avec d’autres jeunes pour faire un petit festival de théâtre*). Italy implies here the Aosta Valley. The plot of the above-mentioned play reveals that in the Francoprovençal context, just as in the Occitan, a special place is given to the recreation of “the lost ways of life.” The common feature of an overwhelming majority of plays is the combination of *the traditional ways* and *the modern times*. The opposition between *the city* and *the country* is implemented at the language level as an opposition between French and *patois*. While the audience’s affection is supposed to be for the peasants, the comic nature of the situations assumes – to a considerable degree – the public to be laughing at them. Directors and actors of Francoprovençal plays confine their characters to the limits of the clichéd image of uneducated villagers. This theatrical image fits perfectly with the stereotyped notion of the *patois* as a language of peasants and a language of the past. If we remember that language choice in a multilingual setting is “an act of identity” (Le Page, Tabouret-Keller 1985), here the choice of Francoprovençal is associated with the identity of a peasant,



undereducated and not at ease with modernity: definitely not the most attractive image for the young urban generation to be identified with. This apart, on a purely linguistic plane, the only register that is thus transmitted (albeit potentially) is that of an informal conversation with a neighbour or a family member in a village setting.

As the Savoyard theatre keeps its amateur status, it also retains another specific function: it is a place where communication can take place, not only before and after but – mainly – during the show. It would seem that the ultimate essence of this theatrical activity today is the one of (re-)creating (from a real or imagined past) an ambience of hospitality and solidarity (*convivialité*): this idea is embodied in long meals taken at long tables – a ritual of sorts that makes an indispensable part of any such event. The audience sit at long common tables, eat and communicate during the performance, and sometimes move around the theatre to meet other spectators. Most members of this audience are not language activists but aged (active or passive) speakers and their children. The latter do not speak Francoprovençal themselves but have heard their parents speak it and are mostly able to grasp the general meaning of conversation. They are little (if at all) aware of the discourse of a common “Francoprovençal language” (as well as of the *Savoyard* or *Arpitan language*). Thus, for instance, two elderly ladies from Haute-Savoie were surprised to hear that their tablemate came from across Lake Geneva, from Lausanne, whereas the variety she spoke was quite similar to theirs. The language of communication at the table is almost exclusively French. One of the Savoyard actors told me that sometimes, strangers would address him in *patois* in the streets of Thonon as they had seen him on stage. Nevertheless, such a distribution of language practices outside the theatre hall appears to be limited.

In Switzerland the success of the theatre seems more limited. However when organised, the plays also bring in a full house several nights in a row. Let us take as example performances organised in the Swiss canton of Valais, in the village of Erde near Sion (November 13-15 and 20-21, 2015). The play was called *Aosta por no* (“*Aosta for Us*”), thus introducing the notion of a certain linguistic and cultural unity for the two regions, Valais and the VDA. As the playwright explained to me, he had originally hesitated whether to focus on Savoy or the VDA, but, as one of the actors added half-joking, “we don’t like French people.” As much of a joke as it was, it is still noteworthy that the inhabitants of Savoy are referred to as French people, even though Savoy was taken into consideration in the first place precisely because of its linguistic and cultural

proximity to the Valais (the “triangle of friendship” Savoy – Valais – VDA, as it is often referred to in conversations). The same ambiguity was seen in the final choice of the VDA.

To start with, in the name of the play, “Aosta” is in fact the Italian name of the city. In Francoprovençal it is called in most cases la Veulla (literally “the city”), on some occasions specifying la Veulla d’Outa (d’Ouhta/d’Ousta and other realisations). In French, co-official in the region, the name is Aoste (pronounced as [ost]). The choice of *Aosta* thus stressed an Italian identity for the city. This Italian identity was amplified throughout the whole event. In the entrance hall the spectators would find themselves surrounded by Italian tricolours. Then, moving towards the stage, one would notice the stage design. The scenographic choice was clearly dictated by a stereotypical image of Italy: a pizza shop called “33 pizzas,” decorated with red peppers (in the reality typical of southern Italian regions, like Calabria) and a painted cook with black moustache (also southern-looking) (see Figures 18 and 19).



Figures 18 and 19. Elements of stage design of the play *Aosta por no* (Erde, Switzerland, A *Cobva* theatre group)

As the play starts, we meet the characters working in the pizzeria: Marcello and Mario, with typical Italian (non-*Valdôtain*) names. They would reply “*si*” to say “yes” (Italian vs. French “*oui*,” Francoprovençal of la Veulla “*oué*”) and drink campari and chianti (Italian drinks from outside the VDA). Thus only several kilometers away from the border the Francoprovençal speakers from Valais would have stereotypical image of *Valdôtains* as Italians, informed by nation-state ideologies.

Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the aesthetic value of theatre productions, it may be noted that it was staged, acted and sung at a high, nearly professional level. The plot was entertaining, the jokes made all the audience laugh. Yet, when it came to Francoprovençal and the place reserved for it, once again it was represented as the language of a rural past. The scenes of the French-Italian speaking present of people from Valais who, according to the plot of the play, have settled in Aosta, would give way to other scenes in which the same characters would (according to the plot) rehearse small theatre pieces on the rural life of the “good old days”: these pieces were in Francoprovençal (with a French translation provided in subtitles). The humour was based on the mispronunciation of modern-day lexis (like “Facebook” etc.) and misinterpretation of modern-day phenomena (e.g. once again social networks) by peasants. The show also featured songs in Francoprovençal with lyrics about mountains and cows.

Thus on the one hand, one of the affirmed functions of the theatre in Francoprovençal is to transmit the language to younger generations; on the other hand though, one may wonder if such an image of the language could be at all attractive for them and inspire them to learn it. Indeed, as the play itself made explicitly clear, it was about “keeping the souvenir” (*garder le souvenir*) – that of “the time of our parents and grandparents” (*du temps de nos parents et grands-parents*): it did not suppose any place for the language in the future.

However, language transmission can still occur. During the conversations at tables in the entrance hall before and after the play everyone spoke French, including when talking to my *Valdôtain* group and to myself, at first taken for a *Valdôtain* as well. The only, but notable, exception was a young man in his twenties who started off talking to us in Francoprovençal. It had been only two years since he had learnt the language, and he had done so precisely while acting in the theatre. Yet apparently he is now “playing a different game”: for him speaking the language is not about the celebration of his ancestors’ rural past. Francoprovençal is for him a language that people can speak in their

daily life, today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and he grasps every opportunity to do so: hence talking to *Valdôtains*. Perhaps in such cases the language competence acquired in theatre could be later used in other types of communication.

### 5.1.5 Theatre in Francoprovençal in diffuse settings

#### 5.1.5.1 La Veulla: theatre in the city

In a diffuse context, like the VDA, the role of theatre as a means of language transmission to younger generations is less present in common discourse. In a focused setting, actors learn Francoprovençal from plays: they take the written text as a somewhat normative way of saying things and learn it by heart, to produce on stage but also eventually to reproduce some parts of it in everyday life as ready-made phrases. In a diffuse setting, in contrast, actors take the text proposed by the playwright and modify it, bringing into it features of their own linguistic varieties, their personal ways of speaking, eventually also adding some jokes.

Among the VDA theatre companies, *Lo Charaban* remains today by far the most prominent. Every year at the end of November it gives one whole week of performances in a theatre in the city of Aosta. A much anticipated event of the year for many *Valdôtains*, the performances are always fully booked within hours of tickets going on sale, and many start queuing hours earlier.

For the first years after the foundation of *Lo Charaban*, scripts for the company were written by its creators René Willien and Pierre Vietti (known under the pseudonym of *Batezar*) in the variety of the city of Aosta (*patoué de la Veulla*) and learnt as they were by the actors. However today actors accord to themselves the right to modify a proposed script as they work on it, everyone speaking their own varieties. On the one hand, the high degree of linguistic variation is, according to the actors, what makes the valley “incredible” (“*a 4-5 km tsandzon dza le bague*” – “in 4-5 km things already change,” one of the actors told me in an interview). Besides, speaking their own varieties seems to be more authentic to the actors than reproducing the dramatist’s variety (including that of the city of Aosta, as was previously the case). As one actor puts it:

se l'on predze lo seun patoué dou seun paí l'è euna baga, e se te predze lo patoué- se te dèi apprendre lo patoué, pe lo teatro, de Veulla que gnon- chica de dzen comprendon...

if one speaks their own patois of their own country it's one thing, but if you speak- if you need to learn for the theatre the patois of Aosta that nobody- few people understand...

The end of the statement refers to the decrease in the number of speakers of Francoprovençal in the city.

The change of linguistic situation and the general societal change over the last half-century have also conditioned the role ascribed to the theatre. In an interview (14.11.2014) the director of Lo Charaban explains to me:

Lo Charaban l'è neissí quase pe ríe. L'an [19]58. ... Se l'an comenchà pe ríe, apré l'è venía euna baga – pe sovegardé lo patoué, le tradichón.

Lo Charaban was born almost for a laugh. In 1958. ... But if they started it for a laugh, later it became something – for maintaining the patois, the traditions.<sup>113</sup>

The change seems to be conditioned not so much by the fact itself that Francoprovençal is less spoken today than it used to be at the end of the 1950s, but by a change of language attitudes that are underway in the society:

Les an 60 70 paéi qui predzave patoué l'ire quase chica creteun. Ou eun que enseignave lo patoué i meinoù. L'ire considerù chica come eun creteun. ... Aprí n'ayé torna eun retor, pe les an novanta, aya l'enseignon iz écoula.

Around the 1960s – 1970s those who spoke patois were almost cretins. Or someone who would teach it to children. He would be considered a bit like a cretin. ... Then there was a return [to patois] in the 1990s, and now it is taught in schools.

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<sup>113</sup> Bétemps (2014: 91) also cites Willien and Vietti (undated) on these kinds of goals:

...empêcher que la langue de nos ancêtres soit inexorablement submergée par d'autres langues qui ne se sont pas formées dans notre Région et qui peuvent nuire à notre ethnie.

...prevent our ancestors' language from being inexorably subsumed by other languages that have not been formed in our Region and can harm our ethnic group.

Thus the recent official valorisation of Francoprovençal as a minority language has brought about new sensitivities around the language (note that some actors call the language “Francoprovençal” and not “patois” as it is commonly called in the VDA).

Additionally, some actors admit that public tastes might have changed too:

n’at lo peubleucco pi acculturù que magari l’apprecié pa tan. En ri ma – prefíe de bague pi – suttili, rafinei.

There are some audiences, more acculturated, that perhaps do not appreciate it [the comic side] all that much. They laugh, but – prefer things that are more subtle, more refined.

Yet so far these latter considerations have had no impact on the selection of plays, as I could witness at the rehearsals of the 2014 show, and also as stated by the actors themselves:

- Le piece son quase tot de la via de to le dzor. Aprè pousson predjí de travaille
- De burocrací
- De burocrací, ma sempre de bague de la via de to le dzor
  
- Almost all of the plays are about everyday life. Then they can speak about work
- About bureaucracy
- About bureaucracy, but always about everyday life

Even while moving away from certain stereotypes of agro-pastoral life and switching to more “urban” subjects, they still remain restricted to the comical episodes of everyday routine: “*toujour tsersen de fée ríe perque l’è neissí pe fée ríe lo teatro*” (“we always try to make [people] laugh because the theatre was born in order to make [one] laugh”).

#### 5.1.5.2 Village theatres

Village theatres present some particularities as both social and linguistic phenomenon: on the one hand, they were stronger socially-oriented from the beginning (rather than being focused on the artistic expression itself); on the other hand, and directly tied to the first consideration, they adopted from the beginning very local linguistic

varieties. An informant who back at the beginning of the 1970s was among the creators of the first Cultural Centre, tells how this bottom-up initiative appeared:

Centre culturel pratiquement c'est quelque chose qui est né ici à Saint-Nicolas et c'était le groupe d'étudiants ... qui se sont dit pourquoi nous ne créons pas un centre où nous retrouver, où étudier ensemble. Alors moi j'avais terminé mes études, donc j'étais plus libre et je suis allé parler à la commune, la commune a accepté cette idée, a fait une délibération officielle – dans laquelle elle créait ces centres culturels. En nous donnant deux locaux où on avait une bibliothèque et une salle pour se trouver. ... la région a accepté cette chose et nous donnait de l'argent pour la bibliothèque, pour tout, alors au fur et à mesure je trouvais des amis et disais mais pourquoi vous faites pas un centre comme ça ? Et depuis ce moment ils ont créé des centres un peu partout. Et au même moment que les centres sont nés aussi les théâtres. Une des activités des centres c'était le théâtre. Le Théâtre en patois. Et ça a commencé et puis explosé un peu partout.

Practically, a cultural centre is something that was born here in Saint Nicolas, and it was a group of students ... who thought why not create a centre where we can gather together and study together. I had already finished my studies so I had more time, so I went to speak to the municipal hall, and they accepted this idea, they made an official deliberation – where these cultural centres were created. And they gave us two locations for a library and a meeting hall. ... the region accepted that and started financing the library, everything, so then I would find friends and say: “why don't you create a centre like that?” And they created centres a bit everywhere. And at the same moment as the centres were born, theatres were born. One of the centres' activities was theatre. Theatre in patois. It started and then exploded a little everywhere.

According to him, “*les théâtres populaires des villages sont beaucoup plus savoureux*” (“popular theatres in the villages are much tastier”) than the “nearly professional” Charaban. This was also linked to the local variety of *patois* they started to use from the very beginning. Recollecting one of the first plays staged:

Alors on a créé ensemble, chacun disait sa phrase ... chacun de nous disait comment il voyait la chose. Et c'était très beau. ... Et tout en patois évidemment. Qu'on a bâti au fur et à mesure que la chose avançait. ... On a fait des variantes. Par exemple, *fenitra* on dit *feniha*. Alors évidemment on écrit *feniha*.

So we created together, everyone would say his phrase ... everyone would say how he saw things. And that was amazing. ... Everything in patois, obviously. Which we built while the thing was

developing. ... We created varieties. For example, for *fenitra* [“window” in the Aosta variety] we say *feniha*. So obviously we write *feniha*.

Local pronunciation is thus preferred to the one felt as “standard” (in the variety of Aosta, *patois de la Veulla*). “Creating” varieties actually refers to using the existing varieties, as they are spoken locally, in public speech from the stage and in writing (the texts of the plays).

An initiative worth being mentioned as an example dates back to the 1980s. Miranda Glarey, who worked at the municipal hall in Champorcher, decided to establish theatre as a social initiative in order to work with old people. They told her stories that they had heard in their childhood, then she wrote a play relating these, in which the old people themselves would later act (Miranda Glarey, *Lou devèndrou di Temporre*, undated manuscript). When I asked an acquaintance of hers who first told me the story why she had chosen to do this in Francoprovençal, he simply answered: «*Teatro deun lo velladzo l'a lo sens se l'è en patoué*» (“Village theatre only makes sense if it is in patois”). Indeed, it was simply the first language of the actors and that of (the majority of) their public.

## 5.2 The International Fest of Francoprovençal

In the Francoprovençal context *La Fête internationale des patois (du francoprovençal)*, the International Fest of Patois (of Francoprovençal)<sup>114</sup>, is a meeting place *par excellence* for all those interested in the language. Organised annually, it takes place in one of the Francoprovençal countries (by turns in Italy, France, and Switzerland) and unites activists and language speakers from the different regions of its use.

Participant observation was held at the *Fête* which took place in Bourg-en-Bresse (France) in September 2012, at the meetings of the Organising Committee for the *Fête* in Bulle (in the canton of Fribourg, Switzerland) of August 2013, at the *Fête* in Courmayeur (Aosta Valley, Italy) in September 2014 and at that in Reignier (Haute-Savoie, France) in September 2015. As I will show in this section, a trend towards a considerable change in language attitudes and use has been noticed over the last years.

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<sup>114</sup> Organisers prefer either the term “patois” or “Francoprovençal” depending on the place where the fest is held.



The *Fête* traditionally spans two days, a Saturday and a Sunday. The programme of the first day, Saturday, can change from one year to another, but generally includes a conference, a common dinner and a concert. The second day, Sunday, is, on the contrary, ritualised: it always begins with a Mass celebrated in Francoprovençal (completely or, more often, in parts), followed by a parade of representatives of different Francoprovençal regions dressed in (supposedly) traditional costumes, some of them carrying farming tools and group flags with coats of arms. The parade is followed by a common meal accompanied by performances of folk music and dance. Each year, the *Fête* is attended by about 1,000 to 1,500 people. Most participants are of retirement age, although in 2015 in Reignier there were also many families with small children.

The *Fête* is a unique event that brings together physically the imagined community<sup>115</sup> formed by Francoprovençal speakers: a community that never had an image of being such until recently, as we have seen in the previous chapters, and that does not share, within its linguistic limits, either common history or cultural features other than the language. Paradoxically though the language, the *raison d'être* of the event and of this particular trans-border community as such, played a purely symbolic part at the festival until its last edition. Its use as a language of communication was extremely marginal. The Mass, proclaimed to be in Francoprovençal, would actually be celebrated in two languages (the sermon in particular would be read in French). The participants would mostly talk to each other in French; the use of Arpitan was only typical of Arpitanists belonging to the middle and younger generations (in Bourg-en-Bresse, the first *Fête* that I observed, there were but 10 of them, aged between 25 and 45). Even this limited use of the language was noticed then as a change: according to one of the participants from the Aosta Valley, 10 or even five years before that, no *patois* at all could be heard at the festival dedicated to it. Other participants agreed that even when someone did talk in Francoprovençal at the *Fête*, it was “on the quiet to one’s neighbour,” and even so only very rarely. In this context, even a minimal use of the language was perceived as an achievement for the activists.

The fact that the language is not used at the very event organised to celebrate it can be indicative of two issues: either the activists are unable to use it as a language of everyday communication (an insufficient level of linguistic and communicative competence), or they are not ready to embrace this kind of linguistic behaviour for other reasons. Namely, the language might still be perceived as a low-prestige variety. It seems

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<sup>115</sup> See Anderson 1983.

that both reasons were present in 2012: the former concerns those who had not heard the idiom as a child, the latter those who, on the contrary, had heard it in their family (the above description of speaking “on the quiet to one’s neighbour” in particular testifies to a low prestige of the language in the eyes of some of its speakers). A third reason to add is that interest in the language is of a kind that does not imply its actual use in interactions (the “cabinet of curiosities aspect” that was mentioned in the previous chapters, quoting one of the informants).

Indeed, the central event of the *Fête* in Switzerland – as was discussed at the Organising Committee meeting for the 2013 *Fête* – was the official appointment of the *Maintainers of the Patois* (*Mainteneurs du patois*). The Maintainers are members of local associations (federations of associations from each region submit their lists of candidates to the Organising Committee) who are recognised for their “contribution to the preservation and, especially, the spreading of the language of our ancestors” (according to one of the organisers). Thus, from the point of view of the festival organisers, the main value is the *preservation* of the idiom. The Maintainers’ insignia was a pin badge in the shape of an edelweiss flower: thus the idiom was once again represented via Alpine symbolism (compare with the name of *Arpitan* and the use of Mont Blanc as the Arpitanist symbol).

Hence, apart from being a meeting place for those speaking or interested in Francoprovençal, the *Fête* was also and especially a place of the museification and folklorisation of the Francoprovençal culture and language. The latter would often be criticised by the Arpitanists. Thus one of the younger Arpitanists, then in his late twenties, explained (on the *Arpitanian Abada!* Facebook page) that he had not come to the 2012 edition of the festival because he did not wish to assist at a yearly “funeral of the language” (“*l’entèrrament de la lengoua*”). The metaphor of a funeral of the language (compare with the quotation by Rouquette above in Section 5.1.1) was also borrowed by the Arpitanists who did come. Emphasising the fact that the same participants would come every year, dressed in the same costumes, they would frequently return to the idea of the folklorisation’s being perilous to the language. Linguists also participate in the festival. Accordingly, the motive of the language-related activities of linguists (along with that of the folk groups), like the folklorisation that is bound to kill the idiom, would be recurrent in the Arpitanist discourse. Consider for example two utterings taken from the discussions in an Arpitan blog:

EA: *Quelle est la différence entre un dialectologue et un taxidermiste? – Le dialectologue il n’empaille que la langue. (Arpitania abada! 24. 01. 2013).*

What’s the difference between a dialectologist and a taxidermist? – The dialectologist only stuffs the tongue.

JB: L’arpitan? massacré par les instituteurs, disséqué par les dialectologues et empailé par les groupes folkloriques (*Arpitania abada! 24. 01. 2013*).

Arpitan? Massacred by schoolteachers, dissected by dialectologists, and stuffed by folk music groups.

However, the *Fête* of 2015 witnessed a visible beginning of considerable change in language use. The event started with the assembly of the CIF, the International Council for Francoprovençal (*Conseil international du francoprovençal*), held exclusively in Francoprovençal. The audience was regularly invited to react, and, since the presidium used Francoprovençal as the only language of communication, so did the audience. Later during the two days of the *Fête* the Arpitanists would speak Francoprovençal between them, and also with the public at their stand where they were selling books and souvenirs such as T-shirts or cups. The event was thus reorganised as a space where speaking in Francoprovençal is seen as “normal” and even “meeting expectations.” As a 22-year-old Arpitanist, originally from South Africa, argued in our interview the day of the *Fête*:

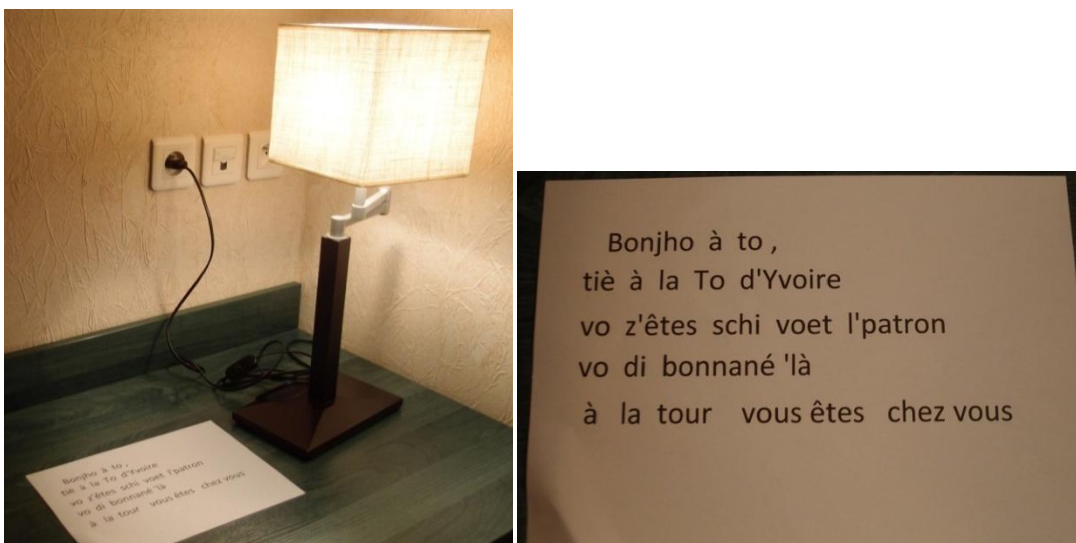
L’è lo seul moment onte la lengoua pe dèfò l’è lo patoué. Lo patoué arpitan. A la via l’è lo franséi. ... Itsi te pou alâ a un omo e dére “bonzhor” e l’è fran normal! I a cen que è bravo. Perque la lengoua èt en via.

This [the fest] is the only time where the default language is patois. The Arpitan patois. In daily life it is French. ... Here you can go to someone and say “bonzhor” [“hello” in Francoprovençal] and it is quite normal! This is the nice thing. Because the language is alive.

This apart, it has become somewhat prestigious to speak in Francoprovençal during the *Fête*, and participants are expected if not to speak, at least to understand it. This evolution is mainly due to the fact that recently groups have emerged – like the CIF – or gained more members, like the ACA. These do not share the same type of language attitudes as *groupes patoisants* and use the language as their main or only means of communication. These groups are particularly visible in the festival’s public space. The development of these, in its turn, followed the change in language policy in France in 2008

and in Rhône-Alpes in 2009. Since then it has taken some years for the groups to gain legitimacy and visibility, and for their members to acquire a sufficient level of linguistic competence to be able to speak exclusively in Francoprovençal, and we are now observing the results of this process.

Following the same dynamics, language was also used in written form throughout the town. Shops put on their doors and windows inscriptions like “*Pè lo corti*” (“For the garden”), “*Pè vi bè*” (“To see well” for an optician) or names like “*shodron*” (“Carline”), whereas the hotel where the festival’s participants were housed met them with a welcome in Francoprovençal (see Figures 20 and 21).



Figures 20 and 21. Welcome in Francoprovençal at a hotel for the International Fest of Francoprovençal. “[in Francoprovençal] Hello everyone, here at the Tour d’Yvoire you can feel at home and the host wishes you good night. [In French] here at the Tour you can feel at home.”

## Discussion: diffuse vs. focused settings of Francoprovençal

The principle differences between the diffuse and focused situations of Francoprovençal discussed in Part III can be summarised as follows (see Table 8).

Table 8. Diffuse vs. focused Francoprovençal language use

Type of linguistic situation	DIFFUSE	FOCUSED
	<p>The language is a social practice,</p> <p>with blurry linguistic boundaries,</p> <p>in a variable socio-geographical space,</p> <p>with interference at all the levels of the linguistic system</p>	<p>The language is a reified object,</p> <p>with precise linguistic boundaries,</p> <p>in a specified geographical space (as delimited on dialectological maps),</p> <p>with no interference tolerated</p>
Typical speaker's profile	Francoprovençal as L1	Francoprovençal as L2
Type of transmission	Family and community transmission	<p>Family and community transmission absent</p> <p>⇒ Need of school transmission</p> <p>⇒ Therefore need for official recognition of a "language"</p> <p>⇒ Therefore need for a standard</p>
Social meaning of language use	<p>Language is a means of communication</p> <p>Additional sense:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social networks and solidarity</li> <li>- Local identity</li> <li>- Eventual political (separatist) connotations, if used in public or written</li> </ul>	<p>Language is a symbol :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family or local heritage</li> <li>- Identity marker</li> <li>- Power resource</li> </ul>
Mutual intelligibility of varieties	<p>In use: sufficient, as it exists as a social practice</p> <p>As imagined: complicated or</p>	<p>In use: problematic due to lack of practice</p> <p>As imagined: possible as it is</p>

	impossible because there are different <i>patois</i>	the same language
<b>Typical oral use</b>	Spontaneous conversations	(Prepared) short speeches, reading of written texts for “late speakers”;  Spontaneous conversations for “new speakers”
<b>Typical written use</b>	Text messages, chats, short emails	Long emails, poetry, novels
<b>Representations of linguistic autonomy</b>	A (local, oral, older) variety of French (?)	A language in its own right
<b>Source of legitimacy of “good” use</b>	Speaker himself or elder generation of the same locality	Grammar books and dictionaries
<b>Reference space</b>	Village + a space determined by personal contacts	Village + trans-border imagined community with borders as determined by linguists

We have seen that, despite the persisting image of Francoprovençal as a *patois* spoken by peasants, economic and demographic change throughout the Francoprovençal area have brought about a new social reality. New social groups are starting to speak the language, although their motivation, type of language acquisition and type and social meaning of language use are different in different types of settings. The problematic issues are crucially different too: in a diffuse setting they mostly concern the low prestige of the language in the eyes of its speakers and outdated negative sociopolitical connotations of its use; in a focused setting it concerns the lack of active use and transmission of the language.

The study in this part of the dissertation also shows that “minority languages” appear when actual linguistic practices disappear. First, from a diffuse social practice that everyone can participate in, it becomes a “language” as a reified object belonging exclusively to a particular social group (the *groupes patoisants*). Later its place is re-negotiated by the “new speakers”: it is still seen as a bounded autonomous system, but a system to share. In diffuse settings where Francoprovençal is spoken in daily interactions it is not referred to as a language and its borders, be they linguistic, geographical, or social, are blurry. In contrast, in focused settings, since most of those who embodied the legitimacy of its use there are now dead, it is becoming possible to proceed towards its standardisation, with a unique name, an orthography and a clearly delimited geographical

space. Francoprovençal is emerging in that context, discursively and politically, as a language in its own right.

It is also in the focused settings that Francoprovençal, as used, is emerging as an autonomous closed system: the heterogeneous diffuse practices are ceding their place to a bilingualism made of two clearly separated codes, and where one of the codes (Francoprovençal) is rarely used. At the same time, a discursive category of speaker may not refer to someone who actually uses the language: thus an author of a dictionary who only collected words may still be seen by “late speakers” as a speaker of the language. Having disappeared from daily use, the language is put on stage: either literary, in theatre productions where speaking *patois* indexes being rural, rude and in conflict with modernity; or more metaphorically, at the meetings of the *groups patoisants* where speaking the language mainly supposes reading pre-written texts. However, the most recent developments of the last years, namely due to the activities of the “new speakers,” have reintroduced it as a language of communication in focused settings too. The domains of its use have changed, and instead of being a language of daily routine it is becoming a language of policy-making. Hence, from an exclusively L-variety it is thus becoming an exclusively H-variety.

## General discussion and conclusions

### Discussion

Que no hablan idiomas, sino dialectos.  
Que no profesan religiones, sino supersticiones.

Que no hacen arte, sino artesanía.  
Que no practican cultura, sino folklore.

... Los nadies, que cuestan menos que la bala que los mata.

*Eduardo Galeano, "Los Nadies"*<sup>116</sup>

Those that speak not languages, but dialects.

That profess not religions, but superstitions.

That create not art, but crafts.

That practice not culture, but folklore.

... The nobodies that cost less than the bullet that kills them.

One rainy day I was walking along the street in a mountain village in Haute-Savoie with one of my Arpitanist informants. As we were passing a bar, the bartender addressed my interlocutor with an annoyed: "Will you stop it already!" And before I could understand what it was all about, he added: "What is this rain?" Later the informant explained to me that he had generations of "witches" on both sides of his family, some of them burnt as such in that village, so he was still taken for someone who could conjure the rain. In reality, magic practices had not been transmitted to him by elder generations, yet he was interested in them. Having learned them mostly from books, he did not practice precisely what had been practised by his ancestors (i.e. conscious dreaming, as opposed to the use of local medical plants). Something very similar happened in his case to the language: not transmitted by grandparents, it was later learnt mostly from books.

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<sup>116</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Los Nadies*, in *El libro de los abrazos*, Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1989, p. 59 (my translation).



The above epigraph, taken from the Uruguayan writer Galeano, is here as a reminder that the central question of this thesis is by no means restricted to the alpine region around Mont Blanc. It also reminds us that all these issues – language, culture, or magical practices – are interconnected, that language is but a part of many cultural practices, even though the role ascribed to it often is (and this is the case with Francoprovençal) by far the most important. A renewed interest in language is accompanied by a new interest in other parts of the local culture. As far as the magic is concerned, we can see in Valle d’Aosta how renewed interest towards its various forms (incantations, portions, healing with hands etc.) has brought about the creation of a museum<sup>117</sup> in the village of Jovençan (*La Maison des Anciens Remèdes*<sup>118</sup>) and a whole series of books on traditional medicine, names of healing plants etc., which are being printed in Valle d’Aosta.

Like the traditional medicine on the museum shelves, no longer used for healing, but for demonstrating the world of yesterday, now almost entirely gone, other cultural forms are being museified too, such as dance, music or theatre. Yesterday’s clothes have become costumes, dances are put on stage and showed as an example of a lost world. They would function as a link between the community members, everyone holding hands, making rounds, constantly changing partners so as to embrace the whole community, building a physical bond between the community members and embodying a sense of horizontal brotherhood<sup>119</sup>. Today, from a social practice they have become a cultural artefact, having shifted in a continuum between everyday movement and a purely theatrical form from the former to the latter. When they were still practised as a social activity, they were unlikely to have any aesthetic function at all, since the position of the viewer was non-existent: who was there to judge whether they were beautiful or not and to take an aesthetic pleasure in watching? Today these dances are nothing but a museified example of the past and a yet another element for the celebration of identity, deprived of all their social functions except for that of nostalgia. The same concerns language, in most parts of the Francoprovençal zone. It is becoming reified, restricted to a list of words in a dictionary. It is *put on stage*, either literally, in theatrical plays in *patois*, or else, at the meetings of

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<sup>117</sup> The names of plants and the testimonies by the healers in the museum are presented in Francoprovençal.

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.anciensremedesjovencan.it/> and <http://www.lovevda.it/en/database/8/museums/jovencan/la-maison-des-anciens-remedes-centre-for-the-use-of-traditional-herbal-remedies/1478>

<sup>119</sup> In a similar way, in some Catholic traditions at some moment during Mass people embrace or shake hands with all those who happen to be near.

language activist associations. What is said in “patois” (Francoprovençal) at those meetings is generally prepared in advance, and, if it is a new text, it has been written and checked with dictionaries and grammar books; most often it is a reading of someone else’s text from the past: from a time when the language was still spoken in everyday life. Yet other linguistic situations remain in the Francoprovençal area, in places where Francoprovençal is the language of daily interactions, often the most common one.

Finally, and especially, the epigraph reminds us that, ultimately, conflicts articulated around cultural issues are not about the language, or the dance, or the magic, but about the community in its relations of power and domination with other communities. Issues about language are ultimately and essentially issues about society, and the legitimacy of a language is a legitimacy of its speakers (and never that of its linguistic features).

Robert Lafont, an Occitan sociolinguist, author, and the central figure of the Occitanist movement, relates in his autobiography how he used to go to villages to “spy on” (*espïar d’amagat*) old people sitting on the banks in front of their homes and talking about the weather in Occitan:

Partissi d’un Montpelhièr tot afrancimandit ont pr’aquò l’existéncia de l’occitan es admesa d’opinion comuna, e arribi en cò de gents que parlan plan, mas an pas ausit parlar de res. Passan al francés quand me veson venir, per costuma vièlha de diglòssia.

I leave a Montpellier that is completely Francicised, where, for this reason, the existence of Occitan is accepted in the public opinion, and come to people who do speak [the Occitan language] but have never heard it to be spoken about in any way. They switch to French when they see me by virtue of an old habit of diglossia. (Lafont 1999: 113-114)<sup>120</sup>

Thus, the idiom gets to be talked *about* when and where nobody speaks *in* it in a natural setting anymore. This holds true with respect to both Occitan and Francoprovençal. When those for whom the idiom was their first language disappear, a new category of speakers emerges: urban middle-class intellectuals who have learned this language at a

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<sup>120</sup> When he speaks about it, he complains that the revitalisation of the Occitan language is the work of intellectuals, and that there has been no connection whatsoever between Occitanist intellectuals and language speakers.

mature age. They join the ranks of language activists playing a significant part in the transformation of a set of *patois* into a *language*. They work on the revitalisation of this language for various reasons. These include both the circumstances of individual biographies (such as classical cases of feeling like a “second-rate citizen” in a capital city, etc.) and sociopolitical and economic conditions: the emergence of structures that potentially provide an alternative to the nation-state (even though in reality, they are so far complementary to it) such as the supranational structures of the European Union and regional cross-border structures like Euroregions, as well as the general democratisation of knowledge and the development of civil society and the political activity of associations. At the same time, with the discourse on the *dying* of languages and the urgent necessity to save global linguistic and cultural diversity, a favourable climate is being created for the *emergence* of languages.

Of course, this climate is never acknowledged to be favourable: on the contrary, it is always said that France, for instance, has the worst possible conditions for the survival of regional languages, and that if nothing is done today, at this very moment, the “train of history” will leave, and the languages are bound to die. A pivotal moment, past which it will be too late or simply impossible to take any helpful measures, is incessantly expected, much like a doomsday, long since awaited but never arrived. Be it a bill on the responsibility of regions or on school education, regional elections, parliamentary elections, or presidential elections with the formation of a new government, anything can be imagined to be the infamous point of no return. For instance, in the autumn of 2010, a proposed reform concerning the sphere of responsibility of regional authorities was discussed in France. One of the Arpitanists wrote to me then with respect to it:

La réforme doit bientôt être votée, c’est une course contre la montre que nous risquons fort de perdre. ... nous risquons de manquer le train de l’Histoire si la région ne demande pas au ministère de reconnaître la langue avant la réforme, et si elle ne met pas en place les contrats avec les rectorats de Lyon et Grenoble...

The reform is to be voted soon, it’s a race against the clock, and we are at a great risk of losing it ... we risk missing the train of history if the region doesn’t request the Ministry to recognise the [Arpitan/ Francoprovençal] language before the reform, and if it doesn’t sign contracts with the administration of Lyon and Grenoble universities...

Since in most cases a *language* is only officially recognised at the same time as it disappears from everyday use, it primarily functions as a symbol. The prevailing discourse

is of language as an abstract system, purportedly existing irrespectively of its speakers, apart from them, language as an object of education and policy, language as a named object. Behind this discourse, which is always visible, always accessible if not imposed, the issue of language as a set of real practices belonging to real people fades into the background or completely vanishes from the sight. The main arguments in any discussion on a *language*, be it “Francoprovençal,” “Arpitan,” or “Savoyard,” have little to do with the language as such. More precisely, they have no direct relation whatsoever to it. Heated conflicts between competing movements are centred on three issues: the name of the idiom, the geography of its use, and its orthography system. It is of course perfectly possible to speak an idiom that has no name, is never written, and does not have borders clearly defined in the mind of its speakers. As a matter of fact, this was precisely the case of numerous idioms of France, Switzerland or Italy. All these issues emerge at the moment when an attempt is made to turn a *patois* into a *language* – and it is by solving these issues that the transformation is carried out. The linguistic characteristics of idioms in themselves do not raise any controversies, let alone conflicts. The only question related to them is what significance should be ascribed to them: whether the structural traits of an idiom are important to distinguish it as a language in its own right (the *objective model*), or extra-linguistic parameters, such as speakers’ identity, are more significant (the *subjective model*). It transpires in all cases – in all existing revitalisation movements – that in order to be considered a *language* in its own right an idiom should have a proper name, be written in a single appropriate way, and have clearly defined borders. Preferably it should also be able to present a prestigious literary tradition and a history dating back many centuries to prove that it is even closer to the original source (Latin) than the dominant language (French), or even older than Latin (a pre-Indo-European language). Finally, a *language* should correlate with the particular identity of its speakers.

The uncompromising clashes centered on the name, the orthographic norm, and the geographical limits of the *language* mask various conflicts. On the one hand, there is the legitimacy conflict: who may define what a language is? Who may participate in the elaboration of a language policy? Who has the right to determine what is the best for the population of a specific territorial entity? This is a conflict between the *scientific* (Francoprovençal) and the *activist* (Arpitan) models: who is to have the last word, the *scientific community* or the *civic society*? The language as a symbol, as an object of language policy, ultimately as a political resource, has little in common with the language as a daily practice of people, be they “ordinary speakers” or language advocates. Namely, a

typical feature of Francoprovençal language activism is the coexistence of an abundant discourse on the language with a minimal use of the language itself. When an idiom is used, what is being said often turns out to be much less significant than the fact that it is being said in the idiom. Ultimately, an idiom can even be legally established as a language in its own right and protected or promoted as such where it has never been used at all, as the Piedmontese case demonstrates.

On the other hand, according to the notion of a natural connection between the language, the territory, and the nation, inherited from German Romanticism, it is assumed that the limits of a linguistic community should coincide with the borders of a political entity. Such a political entity is not necessarily a sovereign state: for instance, an *Arpitan language*, a language of the Alps, could legitimise the existence of the Rhône-Alpes region (which became the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in 2016, its definitive name to be chosen by July 1, 2016 and ratified by October 1, 2016<sup>121</sup>), whereas a *Savoyard language* could lend legitimacy to the intentions of the *départements* of Savoie and Haute-Savoie striving to secede from this region to create a separate region of Savoy (Savoie). Finally, although rather marginal, separatist movements do exist today as well.

In his classic study on nations and nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1983) asks what makes it possible “for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” as nations, and “what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices” (Anderson 1983: 32). Yet it is one thing dying for a nation that had been imagined one or two centuries ago, whose existence one learnt at school and internalised as something “natural” that has always existed. It is another thing when the “nation” was imagined by one’s neighbour just some years ago: when one knows exactly who its author is and why, under which circumstances, this author came up with such an extravagant idea – as was the case of Joseph Henriet’s *Arpitania*. Indeed, in the Aosta Valley “Arpitania” and “Geppino” (Henriet’s nickname) are indivisible in people’s mind (at least, as far as the middle and the

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<sup>121</sup> See <http://www.auvergnerhonealpes.eu/78-votez-pour-le-nom.htm>

older generations are concerned).<sup>122</sup> Why would people be ready to die for *this* kind of recent imagining?

Language advocates – at least, those of them who are Arpitanists – do not believe in the reality of language borders. One of them, for instance, told me a story of someone who lived in Piedmont at the alleged border between “Francoprovençal” and “Occitan.” He would always speak *patois* to a friend of his from the neighbouring village, and then one day he read in a dialectological book by Tuailon (2007) that they allegedly spoke two different languages. The story was told as a joke, thus questioning the scientific knowledge. Similar stories are told about the Francoprovençal-Occitan border in France. And yet these people who do not believe in borders, and therefore in languages as autonomous bounded entities, give their time (and were sometimes in different periods in the past ready to give up their lives or freedom) for one of these alleged “languages” to be officially recognised as such. They do not believe in romantic nationalist myths like “one language – one people – one country,” criticising either Jacobins or Fascists depending on the country they live in for imposing these myths. And yet, they promote the triptych “the Arpitan language – the Arpitans – Arpitania” and create for this language a flag and an anthem, even though they admit that a language does not need an anthem in order to be spoken: historically *nations* needed anthems on their way to becoming nation-states. They also know that they were not born Arpitans – or, at least, they did not identify themselves this way, and no one in their families had ever identified oneself this way either. Yet now they believe that this is what they truly are and try to convince others of this “truth.”

They do not have too many elements at their disposal to build a national myth, and all the elements used are somewhat approximate. They have the Alps and Mont Blanc as a symbolic centre of the area, but inconveniently many parts of the Francoprovençal-speaking area are in the lowlands. They have the millenarian history of the House of Savoy, one of the oldest dynasties in Europe, but some Francoprovençal-speaking territories were never under its rule. Besides, the dynasty discredited itself in the eyes of many first *vis-à-vis* Savoy, abandoning it to France, and then collaborating with the fascists in its remaining territory in Italy. They have literature too, but Marguerite d’Oingt<sup>123</sup> can

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<sup>122</sup> Thus if when introducing me someone would say that I work on *patois*, our Valdôtain interlocutors would think that I study the language, whereas if one would say that I work on “Arpitan” they would interpret it as me working on nationalism and secessionism.

<sup>123</sup> The author of the first known written text in Francoprovençal (end of 13<sup>th</sup> century). Cf. Marguerite d’Oingt. *Expériences mystiques et récits édifiants. Textes rédigés en francoprovençal et en latin par une moniale du XIIIe siècle*, Edition bilingue (francoprovençal/latin - français). Lyon : Edition EMCC, 2012.

hardly be compared to literary phenomena like the troubadours, just like Cerlogne<sup>124</sup> does not have the prestige of Mistral. To continue with the Occitan example, it is thus easier to be proud of being a descendant of the noble Occitan people, who created an outstanding culture, than to be an Arpitan. Besides, we know that the distinction between *Oc* and *Oïl* goes back to the Middle Ages, and one can think of Dante who also made that distinction, whereas the identification of *la lenga arpitana*, and that of the Arpitans, goes back to a quite eccentric local personality (*lo personnadzo*, like they would say, meaning a personality but with a connotation of a “weirdo”). Or, at the earliest, to Ascoli, if one wants to ascribe to him the identification of a new language in its own right, even though Ascoli only spoke of a particular linguistic type.

Why make sacrifices in this situation? No one actually dies for *a language*. The idea is not itself new but is worth being underlined, since today many people, including journalists, regularly stipulate this<sup>125</sup>. Observations can provide some elements to answer the question as to what are the real motivations, and whether a language is but a superficial discursive element, or anything more than that.

### ***Vignette on protecting one's land and language***

A *Valdôtain*, a former leader of an independentist movement of the late 1990s, was sitting on the grass, feeling the warmth going up from the ground, smelling the larch in the autumn sun and watching the small carlines in the grass (as he told me, they say in Valle d'Aosta that carlines – “*l'étsardón*” – can predict the weather). He felt a material bond with this land: not an idealised one, not a dissected one as the ecologists would see it, as he once told me, but the very material land, his land. The land he had wanted to protect for himself, for his (then) future children and for his “people.” He wanted to live securely here, feeling at home, as had always been the case in the Valley. He told me once about a man that he would see as a child when he would go down to the city with his father on the market day. “He once stole a sausage,” his father explained to him, “so now everyone crosses the street when they see him. And we will do the same.” He would never lock the doors of his car because there was no need, no car had ever been stolen (“we are not like these people from Milan,” he told me only one or two years ago, “who come here and the

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<sup>124</sup> The best known Valdôtain poet (1826 - 1910), author of the first poetry in Francoprovençal in Valle d'Aosta and the first dictionary and grammar of Francoprovençal of Valle d'Aosta.

<sup>125</sup> One might think of the media discourse around Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014, to give but one example.

first thing they do is to lock their cars!”) No one would lock the doors of their houses either in the Valley. Recently, at the end of 2015, his neighbour was robbed by some of the immigrants, for the second time in the last couple of months. During the robbery, the neighbour took a gun and shot one of the robbers, injuring him. He was fined 90,000 euros for that – “for protecting his property,” my informant said. And then, he dreamt of a society which would be fair, self-governing, with no corruption, where the government is able to fully accomplish its functions without being criminally substituted, and where an individual, a *citizen*, has his/her say and can influence the decision-making process in a way that suits his/her interests. He wanted to live here, speaking his language, the one that had always been spoken in his family or in any neighbouring families. Today school-age children play with each other in Italian: “the language of fascists” he says, pointing at children, that of those who had burnt villages here.

I see “*Maîtres chez nous*” (“Masters of our place”) written on a rock, as he drives me home in the rain, and then on the next curve as we climb up: “*Val d’Outa libra*” (“Free Valle d’Aosta”). A leftover from the mid-90s, this graffiti was written with a pigment that was specially developed by a member of an independentist group for the occasion: the pigment can only be clearly seen when it is wet and is almost impossible to erase. “*Maîtres chez nous*” was a slogan used in Valle d’Aosta during World War II when fighting the fascists. Revived in the mid-90s, it has gained a new sense today in 2015-2016.<sup>126</sup> As the lyrics of a song released in January 2016 say:

E se v`èide oublià la rézistanse,	And if you forgot the resistance,
E se v`èide oublià le nouuse revanche	And if you forgot our revanche
Rappellade-vo-zé no n`oublièn jamé	Remember that we never forget
Que son lo fouà dézó le seudre de mon péi	That there is a fire under the ashes of my country

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<sup>126</sup> Back in the mid-90s independentists would climb the high vertical rocks in the night, leaving there gigantic messages of this kind. As for the tradition of writing gigantic political messages on the rocks, those by the Movement Harpitanya of the 1970s (see Part I Chapter 2) remain an example *par excellence*, if not a reference model, even today.



E que n'on vècù la rëzistansè	And that we've lived the resistance
E que n'on sondjà a l'eundependansè	And that we've dreamt of independence
Pouade lèi crèye no continuèn a reustéi	Believe me that we continue to stay
«Maîtres chez nous» ier comme vouéi.	“ <i>Maîtres chez nous</i> ” yesterday like today.

(Yvette Buillet, «*Eundrumia valdoténa*», 2016)

He is now in his early fifties, but he feels that his time has already passed, his valley changed. When he becomes old, will he also be seen in his homeland as a tourist because he speaks a “foreign” language, like the one of the previous generation was while speaking *his* mother-tongue, French (see Part III Section 2.2.2)? Like some children in the city already are today when they speak Francoprovençal, according to one of my informants with children (not yet “tourists,” since they go to school regularly, but “immigrants”).<sup>127</sup>

The desire to “protect the land” thus comes from a traumatising everyday experience (cf. Gellner 1983). Yet, in order for it to be heard, to be seen as legitimate, it is “dressed” in the discourse in line with today’s ideologies. It seems that according to those, in order for it to be legitimate it has to be based on ethnic or ethnicised principles. Indeed, today only ethnic groups can have the right of self-determination, others cannot.

Why put the old-fashioned ethnic dress onto claims that have nothing essentially ethnic about them? Probably because it is felt to be the only way to make them sound legitimate, as suggested above, or else because this is the only tool language activists possess in order to articulate their problems and insecurities. Nevertheless, this ethnicising

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<sup>127</sup> This creates a feeling of the uselessness of Francoprovençal:

Ils [les enfants] sont insérés dans une école [à Aoste] où il y a à peu près cent enfants et ils sont les uniques qui le parlent [francoprovençal]. Le premier quand il est rentré à la maison, il m’a dit maman, pourquoi tu me parles une langue que personne ne parle? Donc ils ont le sentiment de parler une langue qui est morte, qui ne sert à rien.

They are at a school [in Aosta] where there are about a hundred children, and they are the only ones who speak it [Francoprovençal]. The first one, when he came back home he told me: “Mum, why do you talk to me in a language that nobody speaks?” So they have a feeling of speaking a language that is dead, that serves for nothing.

discourse masks the real problematic issues under the cover of doubtful slogans or universal truths. It makes it complicated to address real issues; moreover, the same discourse actually masks issues that are largely different depending on the country and region concerned, and the way to address them might be different too if the real problems were articulated.

The economic crisis of 2008, the wars and revolutions in African countries and in Syria and the influx of immigrants as their consequence, together with the old problems of corruption, is what is felt as worrying today in Valle d'Aosta. France is facing similar problems, although with the difference that Francoprovençal-speaking parts of France have never had any autonomy, so in this respect they have nothing to lose, just like those in Piedmont in Italy. The situation in Switzerland seems more stable, so Swiss preoccupations linked to Francoprovençal are almost exclusively cultural. The problem of corruption, for instance, central for many in Valle d'Aosta, does not exist in Switzerland, and neither does the lack of individual weight in the political decision-making process. Indeed, Switzerland functions as an ideal model for the others in terms of its political organisation, with its direct democracy and also with its cantons' large autonomy. On the contrary, the problem of re-appropriating the language of their grandparents that they feel essential for their cultural identity in Switzerland does not exist in most places in the Aosta Valley, where the language is still spoken in everyday life and family transmission has never stopped. Examples of differences can be multiplied, and it should be stressed that these differentiating issues are not an accessory but essential.

There are today several Arpitan movements that it would be a mistake to mix up and confuse, as it is generally the case in both public and scholarly opinion. The fact that people use the same name for what they believe/claim to be their language (in some cases it really is the first language they learnt, in some others they discovered its very existence when they were adults) does not mean they all represent the same social phenomenon. There are those for whom being an Arpitan and an Arpitanist is about being an independentist; there are others for whom it is about trying to transmit the language of their grandparents to their (or someone else's) children; there might be some others too. As for the term itself, it has been appropriated by different groups to refer to so many different things that perhaps, at this point of history, we should accept that "Arpitan" has become just another name for the language, which no longer indexes any particular socio-political vision at all.

## Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to study the current phenomena of the emergence of new trans-border languages and communities. It was demonstrated how a set of idioms on the borderland between France, Italy and Switzerland, which had been considered as *patois*, became recognised as a unique “language”: the Francoprovençal language, today more often called the Arpitan language. As has been shown (in Part I), the study of this language has always been informed not only by the scientific paradigms of that particular time, but also by the ongoing socio-political processes. This holds true whatever the instance that produces the metalinguistic discourse: be it a scholar like Ascoli, in the 1870s, whose studies gave birth to a new science of language in Italy (“glottologia”) and the very notion of “Francoprovençal,” or an activist like Henriët, in the 1970s, whose writings created a sort of a popular science, which I referred to as the “linguistics of resentment” (which coined the notions of the “Arpitan language”). The existence of this language brought about the idea of the existence of a unique trans-border community, sometimes referred to as a nation (“the Arpitans” and “Arpitania”). Today the institutionalisation of “linguistic minorities” is seen as giving these groups special collective rights: these are seen to go beyond the mere right of language acquisition, or the right to enjoy public services in that language to the group’s (of real or potential language speakers) self-government, fiscal autonomy, or even self-determination.

As has been shown, linguistically-based nationalism first emerged in the 1970s in the Aosta Valley in Italy, where the language was spoken as the main means of daily communication by the most powerless groups of society, and also in Savoie and Haute-Savoie in France, which largely share similar tendencies. Language was then used as a symbol of socio-ethnic difference in order to articulate claims of a completely different nature, of independence in the first case and of autonomy in the second. It was shown how today a shift from “ethnic” and linguistic nationalism to “civic” and economic nationalism can be observed in these settings (namely from the perspective of electoral policies or referendums). Yet the most active groups of advocates for the language are to be found today in France and Switzerland, where the language has disappeared from everyday use. There the language becomes an end in itself, seen as an important part of cultural (and

personal) heritage to be preserved.<sup>128</sup> At the level of language policy, it is in France too, the most monolingual of the three countries concerned, that one finds today the most active language policy in favour of Francoprovençal. Another region where the language is actively promoted is Piedmont in Italy. Both are essentially places where the language has stopped being transmitted. Thus the celebration of diversity becomes possible because of the actual linguistic uniformity: since there are no social issues involved, language can be used as a symbol of authenticity.<sup>129</sup>

Competing linguistic theories produce today competing divisions of the trans-border space, in both geographical and socio-political terms (as demonstrated in Part II). Namely, two models of language and community construction have been distinguished (for convenience called in this dissertation the “narrow” and the “wide” models). The ongoing heated debates on the name of the language (Francoprovençal, Arpitan, Savoyard...) and its orthography (a “phonetic” one, a “supradialectal” one...), ultimately, participate in the same divisions of space. Additionally, these debates serve to negotiate what is the legitimating instance to make pronouncements about language speakers and on their behalf: the academic community or the language activists from the linguistic community itself.

Today the structure of the Francoprovençal-speaking society has changed in a crucial way economically, socially and ethnically; the socioeconomic disparities between groups speaking Francoprovençal and other groups of society have disappeared. Hence, even though the image of “patois” as the local peasants’ idiom still persists, shared by both speakers and non-speakers, in reality, today’s speakers are often neither local, nor peasants. Therefore speaking the language no longer indexes social and ethnic background, it participates in the new dynamics in the society that the linguistic community is aware of only to little extent. At the same time, it was demonstrated how speaking the language has strong socio-political connotations, a legacy from the past, which has previously not been reported.

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<sup>128</sup>At the same time, with the global celebration of diversity and the renewed interest to everything that is “local,” “genuine” and “authentic,” local (linguistic) cultures become seen by other social actors as available to be sold, as an attractive (tourist) brand. One might think of a cheese called “Arpitan” that has recently appeared in Switzerland, or of a group called Arpitanian Synchro Masters that was created in 2012 in Romand Switzerland, uniting masters of synchronised swimming across the cantons’ borders, to mention but a few examples.

<sup>129</sup>In other words, it costs less to put up a bilingual road sign than e.g. to introduce school education *in* the language, thus taking into account real speakers’ needs.

At the same time, as long as the language is understood as a social practice, the fieldwork data led me to distinguish two types of Francoprovençal linguistic situations that were shown to be crucially different (Part III). One is typical of small high-mountain communities with close social ties in the centre of the Francoprovençal area, where Francoprovençal is still the common language of daily interactions, functioning as a symbol of social solidarity and inclusion. Another one is to be found on the lowland urban “peripheries” of the linguistic area, and is typical of mobile urban middle-class intellectuals who learnt the language in their adulthood as a language of their “roots” and as a family heritage that, although not transmitted to them, is seen as *theirs*. Indeed, family language transmission stopped there several generations ago; the language is mostly used for the purposes of language activism. Thus spontaneous diffuse multilingual practices, where language boundaries are blurry (in the first, “diffuse” setting) are opposed to focused practices of a language as a bounded closed reified system, used on purpose (in the second, “focused” setting). Accordingly, several types of today’s speakers of Francoprovençal were analysed (locally called “native” speakers, “late” speakers and “new speakers”). The communities of these two types, diffuse and focused, share neither linguistic practices, nor linguistic representations and the social meaning conveyed by choosing Francoprovençal instead of any other code. The needs of these communities that a language policy could (should) address are therefore crucially different.

This thesis could not cover all the particularities of actual linguistic practices: in this respect it only aimed at distinguishing two main types of linguistic situations and the main characteristics of each of them. As virtually nothing has been done in this field so far, many issues need to be studied further and clarified. Namely future research could be done in the following areas which have proven to be under-studied:

- (1) accommodation strategies and mechanisms, both at the level of communities and at individual level, that ensure the mutual intelligibility of linguistic varieties used in interaction and successful communication (which is all the contrary to the widely diffused myth of *patois* of a municipality being completely unintelligible outside of this municipality). Thus e.g. the “pure” variety of Fénis, dialectologically speaking, is probably indeed unintelligible to someone who speaks a “pure” variety of La Salle. Yet in the actual communication as it is practised by today’s society no one would

speak the linguistic variety spoken *inside* the community of Fénis to someone coming from outside, adapting instead his linguistic behaviour to use a more neutral variety close to the one of Aosta (the so-called *patoué de la Veulla*). Speaking a very local variety is sometimes referred to as speaking “narrow” (*serré*), and as normally one uses special names for the exceptions, it suggests that this behaviour is seen as exceptional, whereas accommodation is seen in the community as a norm (as the first reflection on this see Bichurina 2015);

- (2) intercultural communication and mediation. Communicative norms and components of communicative competence in Francoprovençal; the interaction of two cultures, a minority (Francoprovençal) one and a majority (Italian or French one) where the second is unaware of the very existence of the first as a different culture. Indeed as observations show, uneasiness and miscommunication due to these differences seem very present in today’s society, composed of members from various backgrounds.
- (3) using codes in interaction: my preliminary observations showed e.g. that often one interlocutor would speak Italian and another one would reply in Francoprovençal for many turns if the first one was a local (yet not active speaker of Francoprovençal), which is rather different from communication strategies found in diglossic situations elsewhere;

At the same time, today as a trans-border discussion on the necessity of elaborating a common orthography standard for the whole Francoprovençal area has been initiated<sup>130</sup>, a modern description of the Francoprovençal linguistic system, seen globally for the language as a whole (and not merely that of one level of linguistic system of one municipality) seems necessary.

Finally, as the socio-political and economic situation is constantly changing, the future development of metalinguistic or eventual nationalistic discourse, of language activism or other forms of civic activism, and of trans-border language and cultural policies, will need to be studied.

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<sup>130</sup>The first meeting on this so-called “historic” orthography was held on April 13 2016 in Haute-Savoie in France, reuniting both members of the academic community and presidents of language associations from the three countries.

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#### **PREMIÈRE PARTIE. Du « type linguistique francoprovençal » à « la nation arpitaine » dans le discours des linguistes et des militants**

A paraître, « ‘Le francoprovençal’ et ‘la langue arpitaine’ : aux origines des divisions concurrentes de l’espace linguistique et sociopolitique », in E. Simonato, S. Moret (éds.) *Cinquante nuances du temps et de l’espace dans les théories linguistiques, Cahiers de l’ILSL*, Lausanne, 2016.

#### **DEUXIÈME PARTIE. Modèles concurrents des divisions linguistiques, sociopolitiques et culturelles**

A paraître, « Baptêmes d’une langue ou un peu de magie sociale (‘Francoprovençal’ - ‘Arpitan’ - ‘Savoyard’) », in E. Velmezova (éd.) *Cahiers de l’ILSL*, Lausanne, 2016.

2013 : « Le linguiste face aux minorités linguistiques : sauveur ou ennemi de son objet d’étude ? (Les cas de l’occitan et du francoprovençal) », in C. Alén Garabato (éd.) *Gestion des minorités linguistiques dans l’Europe du XXIe siècle*, Limoges : Lambert-Lucas. Pp. 291 – 302.

#### **TROISIÈME PARTIE. Le francoprovençal comme pratique sociale**

2014 : La “mort” des langues et les “néo-locuteurs” : le cas de “l’arpitan” en Suisse. In Romain Colonna (ed.), *Les locuteurs et les langues : pouvoirs, non-pouvoirs, contre-pouvoirs*, 243 – 253. Limoges: Lambert-Lucas.

2015 : Le francoprovençal entre la France, la Suisse et l’Italie : langue diffuse, langue focalisée et enjeux de normalisation. *Nouvelles du Centre d’Études Francoprovençales René Willien*, 71 2015. 7 – 24. <http://www.centre-etudes-francoprovencales.eu/cef/bollettini/nouvelles-centre-71-2015-1080.pdf?r=0.636428180352>

A paraître, « Le francoprovençal comme pratique sociale : Quels enjeux d'aménagement linguistique en 2016 ? », in *Transmission, revitalisation et normalisation, actes de la conférence annuelle sur l'activité scientifique du centre d'études francoprovençales, Saint-Nicolas, le 7 novembre 2015*. Région autonome Vallée d'Aoste, Assessorat de l'éducation et de la culture, 2016. 85 – 94.

Sans présenter la totalité des résultats de recherche de doctorat, cette sélection permet néanmoins d'avoir un aperçu général des problématiques traitées dans la thèse.

### **Communautés transfrontalières et émergence de "nouvelles" langues : des patois francoprovençaux à l'arpitan et à l'Arpitanìa**

La thèse porte sur les processus d'émergence de nouvelles langues et des communautés transfrontalières proto-nationales fondées sur ces langues dans l'Europe occidentale d'aujourd'hui. L'analyse se centre sur le francoprovençal (ou arpitan), parlé entre la France, l'Italie et la Suisse : dans « l'espace autour du Mont Blanc », ainsi que l'identifient ses locuteurs eux-mêmes. Epistémologiquement, il s'agit de la dernière-née des langues gallo-romanes, qui vient s'ajouter à l'opposition traditionnelle langue d'oc vs. langue d'oïl, et qui est en train d'être reconnue comme langue à part entière dans les législations régionales, nationales et européenne.

Conçue au croisement de la sociolinguistique et l'anthropologie, la thèse privilégie les approches de l'analyse critique du discours et celles des études sur le nationalisme. La méthode ethnographique de l'observation participante (le vécu dans les trois pays de la zone francoprovençale) a été complétée par 60 entretiens approfondis d'une durée de 1 à 3h et un corpus des textes écrits (manifestes, blogs etc.)

L'étude met en évidence un fossé entre les pratiques communicatives quotidiennes, avec les sens sociaux qui leur sont attribués, et l'idéologie linguistique et politique.

La première partie de la thèse aborde la problématique de l'émergence de la notion du « francoprovençal », et ensuite de « la langue arpitaine », dans une perspective historique. Il s'agit d'analyser trois grandes périodes de ce processus:

- Les années 1870 et la première identification du « type linguistique francoprovençal » par le linguiste Ascoli dans le contexte de l'Unité de l'Italie, proclamée et en train d'être instaurée, et au lendemain de l'annexion de la Savoie par la France. Simultanément, pour Ascoli, il s'agit de créer une nouvelle science de langage qu'il a nommé « la glottologie ».
- Les années 1970 quand, pour la première fois, le « type linguistique » défini par Ascoli est interprété comme étant une langue à part entière, « la langue arpitaine », par un indépendantiste valdôtain Henriet, au lendemain de mai 1968. Henriet est à l'origine des études sur la langue arpitaine que l'on peut qualifier de contre-science, de « linguistique de ressentiment ». L'existence d'une langue transfrontalière est alors utilisée afin d'appuyer les théories du colonialisme intérieur, l'idée de l'existence d'une nation (arpitaine) divisée entre trois Etats, et d'un Etat souverain potentiel autour du Mont Blanc.
- Enfin, les années 2010, où la prise de conscience des enjeux de « la mort des langues » au niveau européen a rendu les activités autour du francoprovençal possibles, sur le plan idéologique et financier, et où cet idiome est en train de devenir légalement une langue à part entière (dans les législations européenne, nationales et régionales).

Il est démontré comment tout discours sur la langue, ainsi que sa réception, quelle que soit l'instance qui le produit et le reçoit (académique ou militante), est informé par des idéologies sociopolitiques et motivé par des enjeux politiques du moment.

La deuxième partie de la thèse analyse les modèles concurrents de la construction linguistique et identitaire qui partagent le monde francoprovençal aujourd'hui, en ce début de XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Notamment, deux modèles sont distingués, nommés, par convenance, modèle « large » (une langue et une communauté transfrontalières) et modèle « étroit » (du patois du village à la langue d'une région). Les descriptions linguistiques, les débats virulents sur le nom de la langue et sur l'orthographe participent, *in fine*, aux divisions de l'espace, linguistique, social et politique. Il s'agit, par ailleurs, de négocier dans ces débats qui a le pouvoir de se prononcer sur les langues en danger et de s'occuper de la politique



linguistique : la communauté scientifique ou les militants issus de la communauté linguistique même.

La troisième partie de la thèse considère la langue non plus comme l'objet de discours et de politique, mais comme l'ensemble de pratiques sociales. Il est démontré comment l'espace francoprovençal comprend deux situations linguistiques différentes que nous appelons « diffuse » et « focalisée » :

- La première, *diffuse*, est typique des régions de montagne des trois pays, où le francoprovençal est parlé au quotidien, et où la fonction communicative prime sur toute autre. Les frontières linguistiques n'y sont pas nettes pour les locuteurs, les différents codes (francoprovençal, français, italien) formant un seul répertoire linguistique partagé par la communauté ;

- La seconde, *focalisée*, est typique des zones moins élevées, notamment des grandes villes, où l'usage du francoprovençal est limité aux fonctions symboliques. Les limites linguistiques sont nettes pour les locuteurs, aucune interférence n'étant admise dans la production linguistique.

Dans ces deux types de contextes, les locuteurs ne partagent ni les biographies linguistiques (moment et type d'apprentissage de la langue), ni les pratiques linguistiques, ni les représentations autour de la langue. Par conséquent, ils ne partagent pas, non plus, les besoins liés à la langue. Aussi ces résultats de l'enquête peuvent-ils avoir des implications importantes pour la politique linguistique, si celle-ci est éventuellement fondée sur la diversité des besoins réels des locuteurs, et non pas sur l'unité structurelle de la langue.

Comme noté ci-dessus, dans cette annexe nous proposons une sélection des articles écrits en langue française au cours du travail sur cette thèse (trois articles déjà publiés et trois à paraître).

## PREMIÈRE PARTIE. Du «type linguistique francoprovençal » à « la nation arpitaine » dans le discours des linguistes et des militants

### « Le francoprovençal » et « la langue arpitaine » : aux origines des divisions concurrentes de l'espace linguistique et sociopolitique<sup>131</sup>

Dans cette contribution il s'agira de comprendre comment, à travers le temps, les idées linguistiques ont servi à instaurer de nouvelles divisions de l'espace, géographique ainsi que culturel et sociopolitique, pourquoi, pour qui et dans quels buts. Les langues, vues comme des entités délimitées et clairement circonscrites, et dont l'existence est liée dans l'imaginaire collectif depuis le romantisme à l'existence des nations, sont des moyens de diviser le continuum du réel. Cette étude de cas portera sur la langue « francoprovençale » ou « arpitaine ». En effet, depuis quelques années on peut trouver sur des cartes des langues européennes « la langue arpitaine », située à la frontière entre la Suisse, la France et l'Italie : comme, par exemple, sur les cartes publiées par l'Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/frp>, 27.04.2016, voir Images 1 et 2).

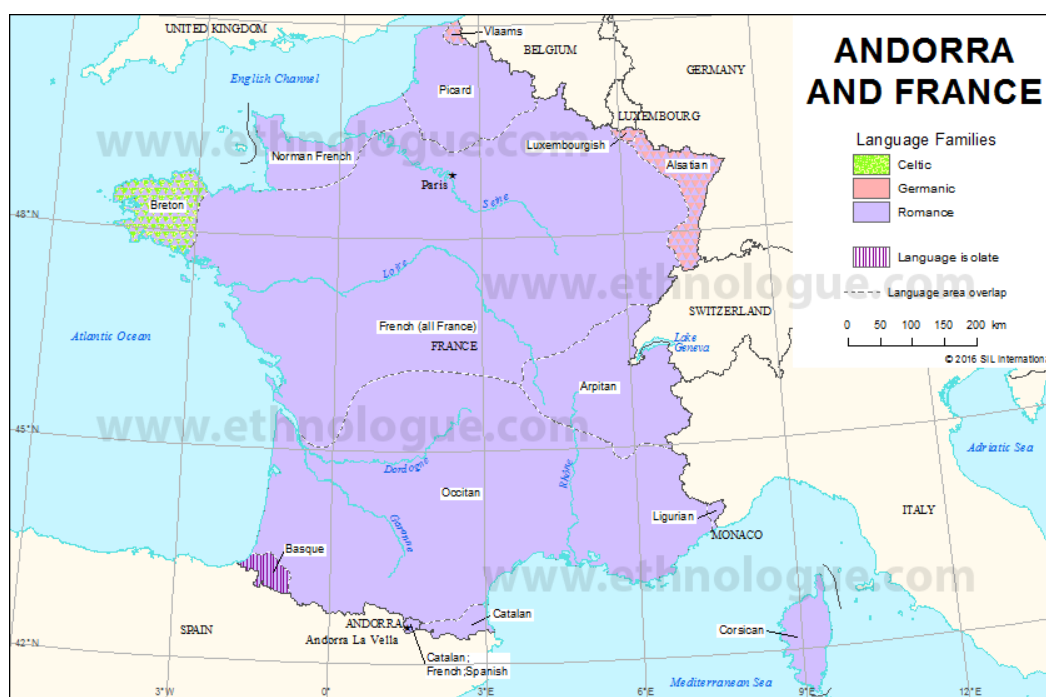


Image 1. « L'arpitan » sur la carte de la France par l'Ethnologue, 2016.

<sup>131</sup> La première version de l'article à paraître dans : E. Simonato, S. Moret (éds.) *Cinquante nuances du temps et de l'espace dans les théories linguistiques*. Cahiers de l'ILSL, Lausanne, 2016.

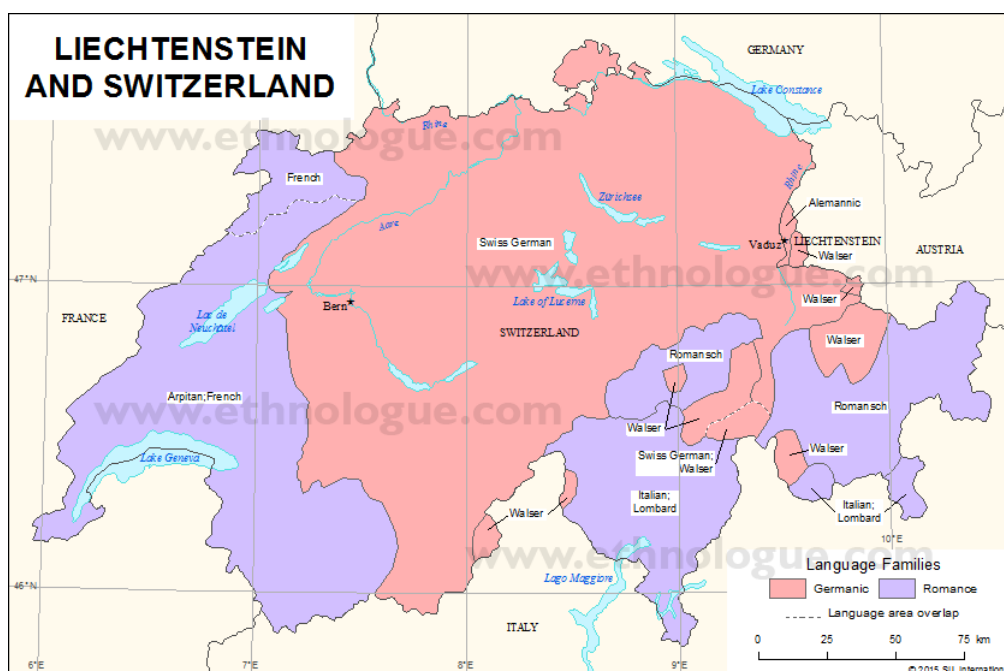


Image 2. « L'arpitan » sur la carte de la Suisse par l'*Ethnologue*, 2016.

L'existence de cette langue amène à imaginer, par conséquent, une « minorité linguistique arpitanne » et une « Arpitania ».

Nous analyserons le discours métalinguistique lors de deux grandes périodes : celle de la première identification parmi les idiomes romans du « type linguistique francoprovençal » par le linguiste Ascoli dans les années 1870 et celle où pour la première fois une unité linguistique a été interprétée comme une langue à part entière et, comme telle, formant une nation, par un indépendantiste Henriot dans les années 1970. Pour chaque période nous explorerons l'interconnexion des éléments suivants : le contexte historique ; le discours sur la langue, les paradigmes scientifiques qui l'informent et ses enjeux sociopolitiques ; et la division de l'espace géographique et socioculturel que la distinction linguistique sert à produire. Ascoli crée une nouvelle science du langage, s'inscrivant dans une tradition académique ; Henriot crée une sorte de contre-science, la linguistique populaire que l'on peut qualifier de « linguistique de ressentiment » (en empruntant le terme de P. Sériot, cf. Sériot et al. 2008). Ces deux modèles existent encore aujourd'hui, l'affrontement de leurs adeptes créant des conflits aussi violent que superficiels (superficiels parce qu'ils ne portent au niveau discursif que sur les apparences,

notamment sur le nom de la langue ou sa graphie<sup>132</sup>, alors qu'une langue, pour être parlée, n'a besoin ni de l'un, ni de l'autre ; et qu'ils cachent des conflits plus profonds de nature extralinguistique). Le premier suppose aujourd'hui l'existence d'une unité francoprovençale rassemblant les divers « patois de village », vus comme restreints aux villages respectifs et incompréhensibles au-delà de quelques kilomètres de distance. Partant d'une tradition dialectologique, cette approche met en avant les différences linguistiques. Le second suppose aujourd'hui l'existence d'une langue transfrontalière arpitaine, englobant le domaine francoprovençal de la France, la Suisse et l'Italie. Issue d'une tradition militante visant les peuples opprimés et dénonçant le colonialisme intérieur, cette approche met en avant les traits linguistiques communs de l'ensemble. D'habitude, le premier est vu comme « neutre » et le second comme « motivé politiquement ». Cependant, comme nous le verrons, tout discours sur la langue, quelle que soit l'instance qui le produit, est motivée par des idéologies linguistiques et sociopolitiques.

L'histoire de ces courants reste largement méconnue. Aucune étude n'a considéré l'émergence de la notion du francoprovençal dans le contexte sociopolitique respectif (l'Italie le lendemain de son Unité) ; aucune étude n'a été faite sur le mouvement Harpitanya d'Henriet, avec la seule exception du documentaire de Ch. Dunoyer (2012). Si les documents sur le premier sont existants et accessibles, il est bien plus problématique de trouver ceux sur le second. Or, pour ce qui concerne la seconde période, cette étude est basée sur les interviews et les rencontres informelles que nous avons menées entre 2014 et 2016 avec le fondateur et les membres du mouvement Harpitanya et les documents de l'époque (des années 1970) qui ont été mis à notre disposition par Henriet lui-même<sup>133</sup>. Enfin, l'étude de ces deux périodes nous permettra de comprendre la raison pour laquelle ces deux approches n'ont jamais trouvé un point de contact, à savoir pourquoi une science engagée et visant les aspects sociaux liés aux usages linguistiques n'a jamais vu le jour dans le domaine francoprovençal, alors que cela a été le cas pour d'autres langues minoritaires dans les mêmes pays. Il convient de souligner qu'il ne s'agit pas ici de préférer une approche ou une autre, mais de comprendre comment cela se fait que les études du francoprovençal ont ainsi manqué l'évolution que les études des autres langues minoritaires ont connue depuis un demi-siècle.

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<sup>132</sup> Sur le nom voir Bichurina, à paraître ; sur l'orthographe voir Matthey et Meune 2012, Bichurina 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Nous remercions aussi Ch. Dunoyer pour la mise à disposition de certains documents rares.

## 1. Les années 1870 : le franco-provençal

Le francoprovençal apparaît comme la dernière-née des langues gallo-romanes : non pas du point de vue « ontologique » (de l'évolution de la langue), mais en tant que partie délimitée et nommée du continuum linguistique. En 1874, le linguiste italien G. I. Ascoli (Ascoli 1878 [1874]) propose d'ajouter à la distinction classique *langue d'oïl* (français) vs. *langue d'oc* (provençal)<sup>134</sup>, connue depuis le Moyen Âge<sup>135</sup>, un « type linguistique » de transition qu'il a nommé « franco-provençal » :

J'appelle franco-provençal un type linguistique qui rassemble, avec ses traits spécifiques, d'autres traits, qui en partie sont communs avec le français, et en partie avec le provençal, et qui ne vient pas d'un mélange tardif d'éléments différents, mais atteste sa propre indépendance historique qui n'est guère différente de celle pour laquelle les autres types néo-latins se distinguent entre eux. (Ascoli 1878 [1874]: 61)<sup>136</sup>

Les paradigmes scientifiques qui informent ce discours sont ceux des sciences naturelles, et notamment de la biologie de Charles Linné et Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon, et de la géographie d'Alexander von Humboldt et Carl Ritter (Goebel 2010: 148 – 149). Ainsi la méthode de “*particular combinazione*” (“combinaison particulière” des traits linguistiques sélectionnés comme distinctifs) qu'Ascoli utilise pour la délimitation du francoprovençal correspond à “*synchorische Vereinigung*” (“combinaison synchronique” des attributs géographiques sélectionnés) de Ritter. Comme pour celui-là, « dans la pensée d'Ascoli la construction inductive du type était toujours quantitative et avait une structure finement graduée » (Goebel 2010: 151).<sup>137</sup> En effet, Ascoli est connu comme l'un des premiers chercheurs à énoncer l'idée de continuum linguistique (Renzi 1992 : 64). Dans ce contexte, le nom qu'il a donné au nouvel ensemble linguistique pouvait servir à souligner l'idée d'un continuum : le francoprovençal est une combinaison particulière des traits du

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<sup>134</sup> Le nom *provençal* était utilisé à l'époque pour l'ensemble du domaine d'*oc*.

<sup>135</sup> Dante en parle notamment dans *De vulgari eloquentia*, vers 1303-1304.

<sup>136</sup> “Chiamo franco-provenzale un tipo idiomatico, il quale insieme riunisce, con alcuni suoi caratteri specifici, più altri caratteri, che parte son comuni al francese, parte lo sono al provenzale, e non proviene già da una tarda confluenza di elementi diversi, ma bensì attesta la sua propria indipendenza storica, non guari dissimile da quella per cui tra di loro si distinguono gli altri principali tipi neo-latini.”

<sup>137</sup> “Nel pensiero dell'Ascoli il costrutto induttivo del tipo era sempre di stampo quantitativo e disponeva di una struttura finemente graduata.”

français et de ceux du provençal, sans pour autant être un mélange tardif de ces deux langues, mais un type linguistique à part entière.

Les paradigmes sociopolitiques qui informent le discours d'Ascoli autour du « francoprovençal » sont complexes et méritent une analyse détaillée. Une grande partie du domaine connu aujourd'hui comme francoprovençal se trouvait, depuis le Moyen Âge, sous le règne des États de Savoie ; en 1860, une partie a été annexée par la France où elle est devenue départements de Savoie et Haute Savoie, et une autre (la Vallée d'Aoste et les vallées francoprovençales du Piémont) a intégré l'année suivante le Royaume d'Italie. Plus important pour Ascoli même, en tant que linguiste italien, est qu'en 1861 l'Unité d'Italie a été déclarée, achevée symboliquement en 1871 lorsque Rome est devenu sa capitale (le territoire actuel de l'Italie datant de la fin de la Première guerre mondiale). Le fameux aphorisme de l'époque, attribué à Massimo D'Azeglio ou à Cavour, disait: "*Nous avons fait l'Italie, maintenant nous devons faire les Italiens*" ("*Abbiamo fatto l'Italia, ora dobbiamo fare gli italiani*"). Or, selon le modèle romantique « une langue – une nation », pour faire les Italiens il fallait faire la langue italienne. C'est dans ce contexte politique qu'Ascoli publie, en 1873, son *Archivio glottologico italiano* (AGI, Archive glottologique<sup>138</sup> italien) où il identifiera le francoprovençal.

Ascoli commence le Préface à l'AGI en insistant sur le fait que les débats linguistiques dans le nouveau Royaume d'Italie sont essentiellement politiques: ils concernent « toute autre chose que l'histoire ou la philosophie de la langue. Il s'agit d'un intérêt national, grand et pratique » (Ascoli 2008 [1873]: 10).<sup>139</sup> Au lieu du modèle français, proposé dans le discours officiel de l'époque, où une langue serait imposée au dépens des autres (en l'occurrence, le parler moderne des milieux cultivés de Florence au dépens des autres « dialectes » d'Italie)<sup>140</sup>, Ascoli propose le modèle de l'Allemagne qui, « malgré la variété infinie de ses dialectes, possède la plus solide et la plus puissante unité

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<sup>138</sup> « Glottologie » est le nom qu'Ascoli a donné à une nouvelle science qu'il créait avec l'AGI et qui devait s'occuper des études linguistiques : une traduction du terme allemand (*Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft*, qui a ensuite été traduit par F. de Saussure comme *Linguistique générale* (avec la racine latine, au lieu de celle grecque préférée par Ascoli).

<sup>139</sup> "ben altro e tutt'altro che non sia la storia o la filosofia della lingua. Si tratta di un interesse nazionale, grande e pratico..."

<sup>140</sup> Cf. le rapport d'Alessandro Manzoni, président d'une commission linguistique auprès du Ministère de l'éducation populaire, "*Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi di diffonderla*" (« *De l'unité de la langue et des moyens de la diffuser* »), in *La Perseveranza* du 5 mars 1868, et in *Nuova Antologia*, VII, pp. 425-441.

du langage qui ait jamais résonné sur la terre » (*Op. cit.*: 14)<sup>141</sup>. Notamment, il s'agit pour lui d'instaurer en Italie ce que l'on appellerait aujourd'hui la diglossie : la langue nationale comme variété « haute » (qui serait celle de Dante, de la même manière que celle de Luther a créé, selon lui, la nation allemande : par droit de chef d'œuvre, et aussi grâce à l'importance religieuse des deux œuvres) et les dialectes comme variétés « basses ». Cela permettrait de créer un nouvel espace national qui serait l'espace de la pensée :

l'organe de l'échange n'est pas toujours nécessairement la glotte ; il pourrait aussi être le stylo si l'on sait écrire ; et quand des millions des cerveaux agitent ou ont agité le stylo laborieux, l'échange devient si rapide, complexe, noble et efficace ... que de l'agglomération ou l'association des hommes entre qui l'échange se produit peut naître, pas à pas, une région de pensée (qui n'est pas une région artificielle). (*Op. cit.*: 16)<sup>142</sup>

Ainsi une nouvelle langue nationale, italienne, servirait aux échanges intellectuels, par écrit, tandis que les dialectes resteraient pour les usages familiers. Or, une région dans la zone frontalière du Royaume d'Italie ne rentrait pas dans ce modèle : la langue de la Vallée d'Aoste était le français, une autre « langue de culture », rivale à l'italien. Dans ce contexte travailler sur les idiomes de la Vallée d'Aoste et annoncer que ce n'est pas du français, mais du « francoprovençal » équivalait à rendre cette région compatible avec la norme italienne, où l'on parlerait « un dialecte » comme tout autre, et où la langue italienne pourrait remplir les fonctions de la variété « haute ». Dans ce sens, paradoxalement au premier égard, la définition du « francoprovençal » pouvait servir à créer un territoire national italien : à savoir, une « région de pensée » aux frontières géopolitiques du Royaume d'Italie.

La notion du « francoprovençal » est tout de suite critiquée de l'autre côté des Alpes. En France, la Savoie venait d'être annexée sous prétexte justement de ses pratiques francophones ; par ailleurs, lorsque l'article d'Ascoli est sorti, la France venait de perdre l'Alsace et la Lorraine sous prétexte de leurs pratiques germanophones. Dire dans ces

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<sup>141</sup> “possiede, malgrado l'infinita varietà de' suoi dialetti, la più salda e potente unità di linguaggio che abbia mai risonato sulla terra”

<sup>142</sup> “l'organo dello scambio non è sempre necessario che sia la glottide; può anche essere la penna, purché si sappia scrivere ...; e quando milioni di menti agitano o hanno agitato la penna operosa, lo scambio si fa così rapido, complesso, nobile ed efficace ... che l'agglomerazione o associazione di uomini, tra cui lo scambio avviene, può innalzarsi di fase in fase *nella regione del pensiero* (che non è poi una regione artificiale).”

conditions que la langue de Savoie n'était pas française était inacceptable pour le pouvoir central. Les enjeux politiques français ont provoqué une critique des travaux d'Ascoli par l'élite intellectuelle parisienne, dont notamment Paul Meyer (Meyer 1875), professeur à l'École des Chartes et éditeur de la revue *Romania*, qui se montre contraire à la distinction des dialectes au sein du continuum roman. Les débats ne concernent pas les traits linguistiques mêmes distingués par Ascoli, mais bien une nouvelle division de l'espace que l'importance attribuée à ces traits impliquerait. De son côté, Ascoli remarque :

Pour ce qui est de la géographie, M. Meyer dit que dans mon cas “le groupe n'offre aucune unité géographique”; ainsi il laisse croire qu'il voudrait joindre aussi le manque de l'unité politique; ce qui, pour le reste, comme chacun peut le voir, serait vrai, sauf que c'est une vérité qui dans notre cas n'a vraiment aucune importance. (Ascoli 1876: 390-391)<sup>143</sup>

Si une éventuelle unité politique de ce nouvel espace n'avait « aucune importance » pour Ascoli, elle en avait sûrement pour ses adversaires. Ascoli remarque, par ailleurs :

Il n'est, peut-être, pas superflu de remarquer comment la pauvre découverte du « franco-provençal » a reçu cette bizarre variété de jugements ... La France méridionale m'a récompensé par une médaille d'or, tandis que de la France du Nord me vient une accusation, qui tourne un peu convulsivement autour de soi-même pour se déterminer dans une curieuse phrase négative : « qu'il ne serait guère utile que la thèse soit démontrée ». (Ascoli 1876: 394)<sup>144</sup>

En effet, en 1875 Ascoli a reçu une médaille d'or de la Société des Langues Romanes de Montpellier pour son article sur le francoprovençal. Pour les chercheurs de Montpellier travaillant sur l'occitan, cette médaille a eu la fonction symbolique de négocier en France l'existence des langues autres que le français.

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<sup>143</sup> “...in quanto a geografia, il signor Meyer dice proprio che manchi nel caso mio ogni unità geografica (le nouveau groupe n'offre aucune unité géographique); e quindi non lascia neppur luogo a credere che egli volesse allegare la mancanza d'unità politica; il che, del resto, come ognuno vede, se sarebbe stato cosa vera, era però tal verità che nel caso nostro non importava niente affatto.”

<sup>144</sup> “Pure, non è forse affatto superfluo il notare, come la povera scoperta del « franco-provenzale » sia andata incontro anch'essa a quella bizzarra varietà di sentenze ... La Francia meridionale me ne remeritò con una medaglia d'oro; e dalla Francia del Nord me ne viene un giudizio, che si ritorce un po' convulsamente in sè medesimo, arrivando a determinarsi nella curiosa proposizione negativa : « che debba sin parere non gran fatto utile che la tesi si dimostri » . ”



En Italie la notion du « francoprovençal » n'est pas bienvenue non plus, sauf que là-bas les critiques viennent de la communauté linguistique même, ou, plus précisément, de ses élites. Dès l'Unité d'Italie, les usages du français ont servi à l'élite politique valdôtaine pour légitimer la revendication d'un statut d'autonomie pour la région, ou le duché, au niveau politique, économique et fiscal. Plus tard, le Statut d'autonomie de la Vallée d'Aoste de 1948 a explicitement été basé sur les pratiques du français dans la région. Dans ces conditions, dire que « le vrai » idiome de la Vallée est « le francoprovençal » et non pas le français, était inacceptable : à la différence du français, le francoprovençal n'avait pas d'État derrière lui qui aurait pu revendiquer ce territoire (autrement dit, pas d'armée non pas dans le fameux sens métaphorique, mais dans le sens direct), ni le prestige de la langue française, ni le statut de langue, donc la région pouvait perdre ses privilèges. C'est la raison pour laquelle ceux qui ont éventuellement commencé à utiliser la notion du francoprovençal, vu désormais comme langue à part entière (contrairement à ce que proposait Ascoli) et rebaptisé harpitan (puis arpitan), étaient les couches les plus défavorisées de la population valdôtaine, opposés au pouvoir régional comme au pouvoir central : les séparatistes.

## 2. Les années 1970 : la langue arpitan

Il a fallu attendre un siècle après l'article d'Ascoli pour que les discussions autour du francoprovençal se renouvellent. En France, le climat intellectuel de l'époque s'est caractérisé par un ensemble d'événements : la fin de la guerre en Algérie en 1962 ; les manifestations étudiantes en mai 1968 ; le « choc de pétrole » de 1973 qui a marqué la fin de la période de l'expansion économique constante connue comme les « trente glorieuses » ; la guerre froide et l'espoir d'une révolution communiste en France (dont deux des trois partis majeurs de l'époque étaient ceux de gauche, PS et PC). On voit alors émerger en France un nouveau débat sur le « colonialisme intérieur »<sup>145</sup> et la régionalisation, avec l'intensification des tensions chez certains groupes régionaux, tels que les Basques, les Occitans, les Corses et les Bretons. Les débats qui surgissent en France se répandent aussi en Italie. Comme en France, le début des années 1970 marque en Italie la fin du « *miracolo economico* » (miracle économique) des années 1960, ce qui met

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<sup>145</sup> Cf. R. Lafont : *La révolution régionaliste* (1967), *Sur la France* (1968), *Décoloniser en France : les régions face à l'Europe* (1971), etc. ; voir aussi Lagarde 2012.

en crise les institutions d'État. Le discours portant sur le « colonialisme intérieur » s'y répand et « 'les minorités ethniques' deviennent à la mode » (Bétemps 1981).

C'est le moment où, dans les études des langues minoritaires, on voit émerger l'approche qui vise à étudier les pratiques linguistiques dans leur globalité, comme pratiques sociales et parties intégrales des processus sociétaux contemporains : et non pas uniquement sur le plan structurel de la langue, dans l'expression des « derniers locuteurs » devant le dialectologue (soulignons que dans le domaine académique il ne s'agit pas d'opposition des deux approches, mais de leur complémentarité). Notamment, la sociolinguistique dite occitano-catalane, périphérique, ou *dels cercaires natius* (des chercheurs natifs) se développe, qui vise à étudier les rapports de pouvoir et de domination dans la société (voir Lafont 1971, 1984, 1997 ; sur l'émergence de cette approche et ses racines sociopolitiques et socioculturelles cf. Lagarde 2012, Còsta 2016). Ces études visent “non pas tant reconquérir l'occitanophonie pour elle-même que libérer une parole condamnée socialement” (Lafont 1971: 99, en faisant référence au fameux slogan de 1968: *Òme d'oc, as dreit a la paraula, parla!* “Homme d'Oc, tu as droit à la parole, parle !”) Par ailleurs, le chercheur est explicitement *impliqué* (« Le sociolinguiste occitan se trouve dans la nécessité ... d'affirmer son *implication dénonciatrice* dans le processus » [Lafont 1984 : 8]). Rien de semblable n'a jamais émergé dans les études du francoprovençal.<sup>146</sup>

Si l'on essaye de savoir pourquoi, la réponse est probablement à trouver en Vallée d'Aoste. En effet, comme dans plusieurs petites communautés, en Vallée d'Aoste les élites étaient un petit groupe composé des mêmes individus ayant plusieurs rôles dans la société. Ainsi les mêmes personnes avaient le pouvoir législatif (le parti au pouvoir, le même depuis l'Autonomie de la Région en 1946) ; le pouvoir exécutif chargé de la langue (BREL, *Bureau régional d'ethnologie et de linguistique*), et étaient en tête d'une association scientifique travaillant sur le francoprovençal et l'ethnologie alpine (*Centre d'études francoprovençales René Willien*), ainsi que, par exemple, de l'*Association valdôtaine des archives sonores*, de la *Fédérachón Valdonténa di Téatro Populéro* (Fédération valdôtaine du théâtre populaire) etc. Or, les études des rapports de domination dans la société ne pouvaient pas émerger là où les chercheurs incarnaient eux-mêmes le pouvoir et la domination. Les études scientifiques sur le francoprovençal sont donc restées limitées à la collecte des données sur les « patois » destinés à disparaître.

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<sup>146</sup> Pour une comparaison des paradigmes des études occitanes vs. francoprovençales cf. aussi Bichurina 2013.

Simultanément, la Vallée d'Aoste étant une des régions les plus riches de l'Europe<sup>147</sup>, les carrières académiques des chercheurs travaillant sur le francoprovençal en France étaient liées aux élites valdôtaines<sup>148</sup>. Quant à la Suisse, plusieurs problèmes sociétaux existant ailleurs dans le domaine francoprovençal y étaient simplement inexistantes, les fermiers suisses ayant toutes les possibilités de parler pour eux-mêmes.

Cependant, les idées « en l'air » sur le colonialisme intérieur et les rapports de domination dans la société ont trouvé un sol fertile dans le domaine francoprovençal. Ne pouvant pas être abordées par la communauté scientifique, elles ont été intériorisées par les groupes dominés mêmes. Dès ce moment, à côté de la science officielle apparaît « la linguistique de ressentiment » :

Les promoteurs de ce qu'on peut appeler une *linguistique du ressentiment* se sentent rejetés par la « science officielle », ce qui renforce en eux la théorie du complot du silence et le sentiment que, si leurs idées sont repoussées, c'est la preuve qu'elles sont vraies. (Sériot et al. 2008 : 151)

En effet, en ce moment-là des groupes militants s'intéressent au francoprovençal. En France le Mouvement Région Savoie créé en 1972 parle de « *la langue savoyarde* » dans le cadre des revendications de la création d'une région Savoie, regroupant les départements de la Savoie et de l'Haute-Savoie, que l'existence de cette langue pourrait légitimer davantage (la langue n'a pourtant jamais été au centre de ses revendications).<sup>149</sup> Pourtant, l'innovation majeure apparaît de l'autre côté des Alpes avec la notion de « *la langue arpitanne* », un autre nom pour se référer à l'ensemble du domaine francoprovençal. Dans ces mouvements des années 1970, pour la première fois, l'idée d'une unité linguistique francoprovençale a été utilisée afin de revendiquer pour ces parlers le statut d'une langue à part entière. Ces revendications linguistiques s'accompagnaient de revendications de droits politiques d'auto-détermination pour les membres de la communauté linguistique que l'existence de cette langue devait légitimer. Les enjeux de

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<sup>147</sup> Par exemple, dans la période plus récente, en 2007 le revenu moyen valdôtain s'élevait à 137%, si l'on prend la moyenne européenne pour 100% (Decimo, Vernetto 2007: 22).

<sup>148</sup> Ainsi la majorité des publications de G. Tuillon, le chercheur français le plus éminent qui a travaillé sur le francoprovençal, ont été imprimés en VDA, avec l'aide financière, logistique et intellectuelle (mise à disposition du personnel) de la Région.

<sup>149</sup> Soulignons que les expressions « le savoyard » ou « le langage savoyard » (mais pas « la langue savoyarde ») avaient été utilisées bien auparavant, y compris en dehors des départements actuels de la Savoie et Haute Savoie.

nouveaux baptêmes de la langue ont alors été la mise en lien des particularités linguistiques avec les notions de *nation*, en reproduisant le modèle naturaliste romantique de la construction des Etats-Nations européens : la langue savoyarde – les Savoyards – la Savoie; la langue arpitane – les Arpitans – l’Arpitanie. Seulement, le terme « langue savoyarde », qui légitimerait la Savoie unie, visait le territoire limité géographiquement par les deux départements savoyards, tandis que « la langue arpitane » visait l’ensemble du domaine francoprovençal, en insistant surtout sur les régions alpines autour du Mont Blanc : la Vallée d’Aoste, la Savoie et le Valais.<sup>150</sup>

Le nouveau discours sur le francoprovençal qui émerge en Vallée d’Aoste en 1973 est produit par Joseph Henriët (signé aussi Jozé Harriet, Harrieta ou Edur-Kar). Inspiré d’abord par le mouvement séparatiste dans le Jura suisse où Henriët avait travaillé comme instituteur au début des années 1970, il se définit grâce à l’amitié d’Henriët avec Federico Sagredo (connu aussi sous les noms de Krutwig, De Sagredo, Fernando Sarrailh de l’Ihartza, Serailh ou Arno de Mandiguri), leader de l’ETA qui a passé une année à se cacher des autorités internationales en Vallée d’Aoste. Comme l’avoue Henriët : « Il m’a, si tu veux, illuminé, il m’a prêté des arguments pour bâtir ce mouvement politique qui devait s’occuper aussi de la langue ». Ces contacts ont donné naissance au *Movement Harpitanya* et à une nouvelle théorie de la langue, exposée dans une série d’articles parus entre 1973 et 1975 et, dans sa version complète, dans le livre *La lingua arpitana* (Harrieta 1976).

Sur la carte imprimée sur la couverture d’un livre de Sagredo, portant sur le colonialisme intérieur à combattre et une nouvelle Europe à construire, on voit émerger pour la première fois un nouvel espace géopolitique : « Harpitanya ».

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<sup>150</sup> En effet, les cartes dialectologiques de l’ensemble du domaine francoprovençal étaient à l’époque inexistantes ; simultanément les échanges réguliers existaient entre la Vallée d’Aoste, la Savoie et le Valais, mettant en évidence la similitude des pratiques linguistiques et culturelles des trois régions (ces échanges se faisaient en « patois »).



Harpitanya (« Harp. ») dans la nouvelle Europe selon Sagredo. Fragment de couverture de : Sagredo de Ihartz, Heiko, *La Vasconie et l'Europe nouvelle*, 1976.

Le Mouvement Harpitanya était structuré, selon le modèle basque, comme une organisation secrète comprenant les noyaux qui s'ignorent entre eux, avec des hiérarchies parallèles, et un petit centre fédéralisateur. Il comptait 300 membres (selon le chargé de fédéralisation, communication personnelle) parmi les jeunes des couches les plus défavorisées de population (paysans et ouvriers), avec un vaste réseau des contacts « de Bastia à Belfast » (*idem.*) et en passant par les incontournables Pays basque et Jura suisse, organisant des rencontres et des stages communs à travers l'Europe. Harpitanya était essentiellement contre :

Contre la classe dirigeante de l'époque, contre le stato-nationalisme, contre la bourgeoisie valdôtaine considérée comme francophile et conservatrice, contre les partis autonomistes au pouvoir identifiés comme l'expression de cette bourgeoisie, contre le clergé accusé d'avoir trahi le peuple en abandonnant la lutte, contre les partis nationaux, qu'ils soient de gauche ou de droite, contre l'élitisme culturel et social, contre le conservatisme de la classe au pouvoir, contre la colonisation culturelle, linguistique, économique, contre l'oppression du peuple entendu comme classe dominée, prolétariat urbain et prolétariat des campagnes confondu, contre sa dépersonnalisation. (Dunoyer 2012 : s.p.)

En étant contre, les harpitanistes "s'imposent avec la sauvagerie et l'implacable détermination des opprimés, de ceux qui n'ont rien à perdre" (*ibid.*). Des écritures gigantesques anonymes apparaissent dans les nuits sur les rochers de la Vallée: HARPITANYA, VAL D'AOHTA LIBRA ('Val d'Aoste libre'), LIBERAXON

(‘libération’)... Le barde harpitaniste Luis de Jyaryot<sup>151</sup> devient l’idole de la jeunesse valdôtaine (probablement bien au-delà des 300 membres du mouvement). Il est le “troubadour” d’une future révolution harpitane, comme il le chante dans une des chansons, sur les vers d’un auteur valdôtain anonyme de 1942: “Chaque révolution // A eu son troubadour // Je suis un troubadour // J’attends ma révolution” (“*Je rêve: 1942*”, in *Li canson de nohtro peplo*, “Les chansons de notre peuple”). Son premier album “*La Noëla Tradixon*” (“La nouvelle tradition”, 1978), avec un titre provocateur marquant la rupture avec la façon de vivre traditionnelle, propose le panorama critique de tous les domaines de vie de la société valdôtaine contemporaine : de la vie des agriculteurs à la politique, en passant par les problèmes sociétaux, résultats des « trente ans d’autonomie » (titre d’une des chansons) ; de la corruption des partis politiques, des instruits qui font révérence aux politiciens, et des terroristes, aux filles qui quittent leurs familles et sortent avec les carabiniers – les thèmes abordés notamment dans la *Canson droola*, « La chanson étrange », écrite pour Jyaryot par Henriët. Tout en faisant un portrait, verbalement violent, de la société de l’époque, il s’agit aussi d’étendre l’espace social de la langue : vue auparavant comme un patois lié à la vie agro-pastorale, elle est utilisée dans les domaines liés à la vie essentiellement urbaine et moderne. Une autre chanson, écrite par Jyaryot, parue dans son recueil *Li canson de nohtro peplo*, prédit :

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<sup>151</sup> Pseudonyme de Luigi Fosson

**VAL D'AOHTA 1970...**

Le nouh Valdohtan soun nasi  
E pourton la nouva Pahola  
Fan pami de kestion de raase  
Dion pami: no prejen patoè.

Li nouh Valdohtan l'ant kapi  
Ke l'ant jami avi hena Etnia  
Ke soun jami ihtà frankofone  
Komen tan de jen l'ant voulu  
Fahe-lei krere pe tan de temp.  
Ma l'ant kapi ke soun partiha  
D'in tot ke iet pi gran ke lur  
Kakun za la krie Patria  
Pe no Harpitanya l'et za

Canjon le jen  
Canjon le temp  
E l'Harpitanya dei retornei  
A ihtre pe tuit in soul Pais  
Lo Premì Pais europeen

Ma in joor le joveno l'arant  
Su le ehpale hina nouva kroé  
E li kulur di ros sang  
E de la pi nera dulur  
Einkò trei ehteile l'arant  
Pi bianze ke la bianza ney  
Simbole de li trei rejon  
Ki tornyon u-toor di Blan  
E pohn pâ doneise la man  
Perkei pe de interne kestion  
Dou Ehtat l'ant peinsà parei  
Pe avei pi komodo e pi lenk  
De poei planteie lur dent

Hi joor là  
No saren finalamen  
In peplo reuni  
'Tò la sin lenva  
Le sine loè  
Lo Premì Pais Europeen

LUIS DE JARIOT



**Mori de puira...**

Luis de Jariot "Val d'Aohta 1970..." in *Li canson de nohtro peplo* (s.d., vers mi-1970).

Val d'Aoste 1970...

Les nouveaux Valdôtains sont nés  
Et ils portent la nouvelle Parole  
Ils ne font plus question de race  
Ils ne disent plus : nous parlons patois.

Les nouveaux Valdôtains ont compris  
Qu'ils n'ont jamais fait une ethnie,  
Qu'ils n'ont jamais été francophones  
Comme tant de gens ont voulu  
Les faire croire pendant si longtemps.  
Mais ils ont compris qu'ils font partie  
D'un tout qui est plus grand qu'eux.  
Quelqu'un l'appelle déjà la Patrie,  
Pour nous Harpitanya est déjà là.

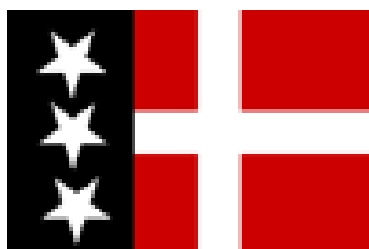
Les jours changent,  
Les temps changent,

Et l'Harpitanya doit redevenir  
Pour tous un seul pays,  
Le premier pays européen.

Mais un jour les jeunes porteront  
Sur leurs épaules une nouvelle croix  
Et les couleurs du sang rouge  
Et de la douleur la plus noire  
Et ils auront trois étoiles  
Plus blanches que la neige blanche  
Symbole des trois régions  
Qui tournent autour du Mont Blanc  
Et ne peuvent pas se donner la main  
Parce que pour des raisons internes  
Deux États ont pensé ainsi  
Pour qu'il soit plus commode pour eux  
D'y pouvoir mettre leurs dents.

Ce jour-là nous serons finalement  
Un peuple réuni  
Avec sa langue  
Avec ses lois,  
Le premier peuple européen.<sup>152</sup>

Stylistiquement entre la prophétie (la partie centrale à partir de « Mais un jour... ») et un récit mythologique (« les jours changent, les temps changent... »), mélangeant le vocabulaire religieux (« portent la Parole », « porteront la croix », les étoiles rappelant l'Apocalypse<sup>153</sup> etc.) avec celui des contes populaires (rouge comme le sang, noire comme la douleur, plus blanches que la neige), la chanson est une provocation, ne dénotant que cela :



Le drapeau de l'Harpitanya (Arpitània)

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<sup>152</sup> Notre traduction, N.B.

<sup>153</sup> « Sa tête et ses cheveux étaient blancs comme de la laine blanche, comme de la neige; ses yeux étaient comme une flamme de feu; ses pieds étaient semblables à de l'airain ardent, comme s'il eût été embrasé dans une fournaise; et sa voix était comme le bruit de grandes eaux. Il avait dans sa main droite sept étoiles. De sa bouche sortait une épée aiguë, à deux tranchants; et son visage était comme le soleil lorsqu'il brille dans sa force. » (Apocalypse 1:14 – 1:16)

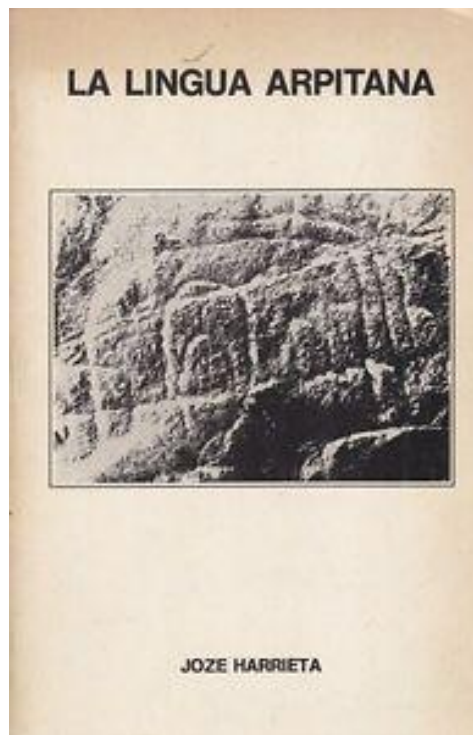


Il s'agit du drapeau harpitaniste<sup>154</sup> : drapeau d'un mouvement révolutionnaire qui est censé rompre avec toute tradition, qu'elle soit ecclésiastique, populaire etc. Notamment, sur l'image sur la page opposée du recueil des chansons on voit un Valdôtain portant un costume traditionnel, avec un élément du blason de la région autonome de la Vallée d'Aoste, qui est décrit comme « mort de peur ». Plusieurs thématiques cruciales pour le mouvement sont ici présentes, dont celle du français comme langue imposée et l'harpitan comme la « vraie langue » du peuple harpitan, et par ailleurs, une langue à part entière et pas un « patois ». La structure parallèle « avec sa langue // avec ses lois » mets en lien le fait d'avoir sa langue avec le droit d'avoir ses lois. Le fait pour la Vallée d'Aoste de ne pas constituer une ethnie fait allusion à l'article d'Henriet paru en 1974 intitulé « L'ethnie valdôtaine n'a jamais existé... elle n'est que partie de l'ethnie harpitane » (Harriet 1974), qui annonce une rupture avec toute la pensée régionaliste valdôtaine. L'espace est donc redivisé : au lieu de la vision d'une Vallée d'Aoste (celle des élites autonomistes), celle-là est affirmée de faire partie « d'un tout plus grand ». La chanson propose ainsi une nouvelle division de l'espace géographique et politique. Comme dans le cas de la plupart, sinon toutes les traditions inventées (dans le sens de Hobsbawm 1983, voire aussi l'intitulé du disc de Jyaryot « La nouvelle tradition »), cette nouvelle division est présentée comme préexistante. Ainsi il s'agit de « redevenir » un seul pays, d'un peuple qui sera « réuni » : autrement dit, celui qui essentiellement, ontologiquement a toujours existé comme un seul peuple et qui, pour cette raison, devait constituer une seule entité politique. Le fait de séparer ce peuple est attribué à l'Autre, à l'Ennemi, en l'occurrence à deux puissances nationales, l'Italie et la France. La chanson fait sûrement allusion à l'annexion de la Savoie par la France en 1860 et l'entrée de la Vallée d'Aoste dans le nouveau Royaume d'Italie en 1861 ; cependant, en le faisant, il s'agit d'oublier qu'à aucune époque historique le territoire des Etats de Savoie n'a coïncidé avec le territoire baptisé l'Harpitanya, et aussi, accessoirement, que la langue officielle de cet Etat était le français.

Sur la couverture du livre d'Henriet *La lingua arpitana* (1976) nous voyons la photo des pétroglyphes, qui suggère deux particularités de cette « *lingua arpitana* » : son lien avec les montagnes, et avec les peuples préhistoriques.

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<sup>154</sup> Hobsbawm souligne l'importance des drapeaux ou des hymnes : « The crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club » (Hobsbawm 1983: 11).



Couverture de : Harrieta, Joze, “*La lingua arpitana*” (1976)

Effectivement, l’« Harpitanie » est définie comme « une vaste région autour du Mont Blanc » (Harriet 1974 : 7). Le mot « harpitan » / « arpitan »<sup>155</sup> dérive, selon son auteur Joseph Henriët, du préindoeuropéen HARPE ‘sous les rochers’ + TAN ‘habitant’. Simultanément, en francoprovençal la racine arp / alp désigne un pâturage dans les montagnes. En empruntant le discours sur la langue basque, Henriët indique que ce nom serait issu d’une « ancienne langue locale, langue pré-indoeuropéenne » (op. cit. : 8), appelé le « garalditan » (Harrieta 1977 ; terme emprunté à Sagredo), qui serait un ancêtre commun de l’harpitan et du basque. Ce constat est basé sur une comparaison des listes des mots en harpitan et en basque : une similitude des signifiés et des signifiants est vue comme suffisante pour en tirer des conclusions quant à la parenté des deux langues. Henriët prône l’unification et la modernisation de la langue. Sur le plan instrumental, la langue harpitane était vue comme moyen d’imposer une idéologie particulière :

*Les révolutionnaires qui travaillent pour un monde de nouvelle démocratie, doivent obligatoirement imaginer des systèmes linguistiques qui seront les piliers de*

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<sup>155</sup> La « H » présente dans les premiers textes du mouvement dans les mots « harpitan » et « Harpitanya » et omise depuis le livre de 1976, pour créer les formes « arpitan » et « Arpitania ». Ces dernières permettent une identification plus facile avec la racine arp-/alp-, commune avec le mot « Alpes ».

*l'organisation politique future ... la langue harpeitane devra être une langue de Nouvelle Démocratie. (Edur-Kar 1973: 28. Emphase dans l'original)*

*De ces parlers [francoprovençaux] sortira la langue harpeitane qui sera le moyen de libération du peuple harpeitan, et sa future langue, base de culture. La langue harpeitane accompagnera la renationalisation et la repersonnalisation des harpeitans et elle sera la langue porteuse de l'idéologie de la libération de l'Harpeitanie. (Ibid.)*

Autrement dit, une unité linguistique impliquerait une unité idéologique (d'une « région de pensée » pour reprendre l'expression d'Ascoli). Basée ainsi sur l'hypothèse de la relativité linguistique<sup>156</sup>, que celle-ci ait été connue d'Henriet dans sa version académique ou dans un résumé, cette fonction de l'harpeitan fait aussi penser à *Newspeak* de George Orwell, une langue créée par un parti politique afin de contrôler les pensées des citoyens et les rendre conformes à l'idéologie du parti, en rendent tous les autres manières de penser impensables.<sup>157</sup>

Henriet crée une koinè basée sur les parlers de la Basse Vallée d'Aoste qu'il propose d'imposer sur le reste du domaine harpitan : la Vallée d'Aoste est choisie en tant que la région où la vitalité de la langue est la plus grande, tandis que les parlers de la Basse Vallée en particulier sont choisis comme les plus archaïques des parlers valdôtains (leur légitimité étant ainsi basée sur le fait d'être plus proches à la langue – garalditane ? – d'origine). Quant à la modernisation, il utilise une métaphore biologique du « métabolisme linguistique » pour favoriser les emprunts aux autres langues. Dans ce contexte les dialectologues qui s'opposent à ces idées sont vus comme « des assassins déguisés en docteurs » et « les pires ennemis de notre langue et aussi du peuple », puisque leur comportement mènerait à la mort de la langue :

Les théoriciens du maintien du “particularisme” de chaque patois et qui se présentent comme les défenseurs de notre langue, sont dans les faits des assassins

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Sapir 1958: 69.

<sup>157</sup> "The Principles of Newspeak", annexe au roman *1984*:

The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of IngSoc [English Socialism], but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Oldspeak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of IngSoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. (George Orwell 1948: an appendix to *1984*)

déguisés en docteurs : ils s'opposent au métabolisme essentiel pour la vie des langues et ils sont, par conséquent, les pires ennemis de notre langue et aussi du peuple qui doit s'en servir. (Harriet 1975: 66-67)

Il s'agit ici encore une fois de la division de l'espace linguistique et politique : les patois de village, donc sans pertinence sur le plan politique (leurs existence n'a pas d'implication pour les divisions géopolitiques) vs. une langue transfrontalière, comme conséquence l'existence d'une nation divisée et donc, la redivision géopolitique présentée comme légitime et indispensable pour rendre la justice sociale.

Selon un Valdôtain, *l'ire la folia, tcheu le dzovenno l'iran Arpitan (c'était la folie, tous les jeunes étaient Arpitans)*. Très évidemment, un mouvement identifiant les élites comme les ennemis et prônant la violence physique contre ces ennemis, ne pouvait pas être accepté par les élites. Le traumatisme a créé une longue tradition scientifique où il est du *mauvais ton*, sinon un tabou, de prononcer le mot « arpitan », mais aussi de parler du francoprovençal comme d'une langue à part entière, ou de tout effort de standardisation que ce soit pour un usage de la langue à l'oral en publique, ou à l'écrit. Selon un informateur valdôtain :

On est arrivé au moment où parler patois publiquement c'était provocateur, voire presque irrédentiste. Presque indépendantiste. Par contre, le français c'est toujours marqué [comme] l'identité valdôtaine, mais dans le respect des règles, du gouvernement, de la démocratie.

S'occuper des problèmes sociétaux liés à l'usage de la langue est aussi du *mauvais ton*. C'est la raison pour laquelle toutes les théories d'une linguistique de ressentiment qui sont les seuls à en parler n'ont aucuns concurrents savants.

## Conclusion

Au début des années 2000, la large diffusion en Europe (et dans le monde) du discours sur la diversité linguistique et la prise de conscience du danger de la perte des langues (comme patrimoine immatériel, comme mémoire vivante de la région, etc...), vient légitimer les activités autour des langues minoritaires. Même s'il n'y a pas de continuité directe entre le mouvement arpitan actuel, culturel et linguistique, et celui des

années 1970, les arpitanistes d'aujourd'hui ont un discours métalinguistique largement identique : la nécessité d'appeler la langue « arpitan », de l'utiliser dans tous les domaines de la vie moderne, d'avoir un standard orthographique... Et surtout, ce discours suppose la même division de l'espace, en y faisant apparaître une communauté transfrontalière (le domaine arpitan d'aujourd'hui englobant tout l'espace francoprovençal). D'ailleurs, cette dernière a désormais un hymne (créé en 2012) et un nouveau drapeau. La communauté académique, quant à elle, y est hostile par vieille tradition, préférant de parler des « patois (francoprovençaux) » de commune X ou Y. Comme à chaque époque, les propos sur la langue masquent d'autres types de conflits (sociétaux et politique). En effet, comme nous avons vu, toute division du continuum du réel a toujours été motivée par des enjeux sociopolitiques pressants. Simultanément, si l'on entendait la langue comme pratique sociale, on verrait que les deux idéologies représentent deux extrêmes, tandis que les contacts sociaux (et donc linguistiques) se font à d'autres niveaux : à des échelles bien plus larges qu'un village, mais bien plus étroites que le domaine linguistique francoprovençal.

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## **DEUXIÈME PARTIE. Modèles concurrents des divisions linguistiques, sociopolitiques et culturelles**

### **I. Baptêmes d'une langue ou un peu de magie sociale (« Francoprovençal » - « Arpitan » - « Savoyard »)<sup>158</sup>**

Aujourd'hui on observe en Europe un changement du statut des idiomes régionaux, où ce qui avait été considéré comme « patois » se voit officiellement reconnu par des autorités nationales ou régionales comme « langue » à part entière. Ainsi en France on peut penser à l'entrée des « langues régionales » dans la Constitution en 2008 et à la politique actuelle de certaines régions visant à promouvoir « leur(s) » « langue(s) régionale(s) », ou bien aux débats actuels sur une loi sur les « langues régionales » et sur la ratification de la Charte européenne des langues régionales et minoritaires.

En effet, le monde roman représente un continuum dialectal où les frontières tracées pour séparer des « langues » sont, comme partout ailleurs, arbitraires. Comme le relève E. Haugen dans son article, devenu classique, par rapport à la taxonomie de la description linguistique et de l'identification des « langues » et des « dialectes » :

The simple truth is that there is no answer to these questions, or at least none that will stand up to closer scrutiny. [...] The use of these terms has imposed a division in what is often a continuum, giving what appears to be a neat opposition when in fact the edges are extremely ragged and uncertain (Haugen 1966: 922).

Dans ce contexte la nomination d'un idiome sert à tracer des frontières au sein du continuum, le nom étant « une catégorie discrète, qui s'oppose au continu du réel » (Sériot 1997 : 172) :

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<sup>158</sup> Article à paraître dans E. Velmezova (éd.) *Cahiers de l'ILSL*, Lausanne, 2016.



A partir du moment où une langue a un nom, elle devient objet homogène, non plus un ensemble dans un diasystème, mais objet de politique linguistique, d'éducation, enjeu de la constitution d'un Etat-nation. Elle devient aussi, et surtout, objet de discours, qu'il est si facile de confondre avec un objet du monde (op. cit. : 167).

Ainsi la nomination des idiomes régionaux suppose / impose une certaine division du continuum linguistique et éventuellement politique. On est aujourd'hui témoins d'un « acte de magie sociale », qui, selon Pierre Bourdieu (1980 : 66), « consiste à tenter de produire à l'existence la chose nommée ».

Nous proposons ici d'analyser le discours sur la nomination d'une « nouvelle » « langue » romane – « francoprovençale », « arpitane » ou « savoyarde » - produit par deux types d'acteurs sociaux : des linguistes et des militants linguistiques<sup>159</sup>. Il s'agit d'étudier le système d'argumentation afin de dégager les idéologies linguistiques et les enjeux sociaux et politiques qui se cachent derrière les nominations concurrentes. Simultanément cette analyse nous permettra de voir sur quels critères se basent les constats qu'un idiome serait une langue à part entière, comment les frontières entre les « langues » sont tracées.

Le « francoprovençal » / « arpitan » / « savoyard » est un idiome transfrontalier. Les trois Etats voisins au sein desquels il est parlé – la France, l'Italie et la Suisse – sont construits selon des modèles extrêmement différents, avec, comme deux pôles opposés, la centralisation très marquée de la République française et le fédéralisme très décentralisé de la Confédération suisse. Aussi l'étude du même idiome dans des Etats différents nous permettra-t-elle d'explorer dans quelle mesure la différence d'organisation politico-étatique détermine la représentation des langues minoritaires dans le discours, en l'occurrence celui sur leur nomination.

L'enquête a été menée selon les méthodes d'entretien, d'analyse des textes écrits (des articles, des blogs des militants, etc.) et d'observation, y compris observation participante. L'étude de terrain a été effectuée dans les départements de Savoie, Haute Savoie, Ain, Loire et Rhône en France, ainsi que dans les cantons de Vaud et de Valais en Suisse et dans la Vallée d'Aoste en Italie.

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<sup>159</sup> Par « militant » nous désignons toute personne qui œuvre pour l'idiome, dans un cadre associatif ou informel.

## 1. L'émergence d'une « nouvelle » « langue » romane

L'idée que les parlers alpins à la frontière entre l'Italie, la France et la Suisse (cf. image 1) formeraient « un type linguistique » (« tipo idiomático ») particulier est relativement récente, énoncée pour la première fois en 1873 par le linguiste italien G. I. Ascoli (Ascoli 1878 [1873]). C'est à Ascoli également que nous devons le nom de cette « nouvelle » langue : « franco-provenzale » (« *franco-provençal* », initialement écrit avec un tiret, supprimé plus tard par des dialectologues). Pendant le siècle suivant, ce terme est resté dans l'usage exclusif des dialectologues (tels que Tuailon 2007a, Martin 1979, 2005).

Le domaine francoprovençal, tel qu'il est défini par ceux-ci, comprendrait :

- en France : extrémité sud du Doubs, sud du Jura, extrémité sud-est de la Saône-et-Loire, Loire, Rhône, Ain, Haute-Savoie, Savoie, Isère (à l'exception de l'extrémité sud), Ardèche (extrémité nord), Drôme (extrémité nord) ;
- en Suisse : tous les cantons de la Suisse romande à l'exception du canton du Jura ;
- en Italie : la Vallée d'Aoste, quelques vallées du Piémont, deux communes dans les Pouilles (Faeto et Celle di San Vito, immigration du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle).

Chez les locuteurs, il n'existait jusqu'aux années 1970 aucun terme pour désigner l'ensemble du domaine linguistique en question, ni d'ailleurs la vision d'un ensemble. Cas typique pour la France ou pour les régions largement influencées par l'idéologie française (comme la Suisse Romande ou la Vallée d'Aoste), le plus souvent ceux-ci se référaient à l'idiome en le nommant « *patois* », utilisant ce terme générique au lieu (en fonction) du glottonyme<sup>160</sup>. Si ce terme est toujours largement utilisé au sein des « groupes patoisants », c'est suite au contact avec les dialectologues que l'on voit le nom « francoprovençal » pénétrer également dans ces groupes dans les années 1970.

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<sup>160</sup> En Suisse à part le terme « patois », le nom « romand » (« roman », « reman », « rommant ») était utilisé, dont la première attestation remonte à 1424 (Kristol 2005 : 50). Cf., par ex., dans l'« Essai statistique du canton de Vaud » (attribué à Philippe-Sirice Bridel), Zurich : Orell Fussli, 1815, p. 224 : « ... dans leur vie domestique et entr'eux, les paysans employent le *patois* qu'ils appellent *Roman* ou *Reman* ; cet idiome antérieur chez nous au *Français* peut être regardé comme une langue ; car il a ses règles générales dont il serait aisé de faire une *Grammaire*. » (Emphase dans l'original). Disponible sur: <http://books.google.com/books?vid=BCUL1092283960>

Simultanément apparaissent au sein des groupes militants deux autres nominations concurrentes, qui verront l'essor de leur utilisation dans les années 2000 :

- « *la langue savoyarde* », terme utilisé par le Mouvement Région Savoie créé en 1972 dans le cadre des revendications de la création d'une région Savoie (départements de la Savoie et de la Haute-Savoie) au sein de l'Etat français (quoique la langue n'ait jamais été au centre de ces revendications)<sup>161</sup>; ce nom est aujourd'hui promu principalement par l'Institut de la langue savoyarde, association créée en 2002 ;

- « *la langue arpitanne* », nom inventé en 1973 en Vallée d'Aoste (voire l'histoire plus bas) et promu aujourd'hui par l'Alliance culturelle arpitanne, créée en 2004.

## 2. Le nom comme *argument* pour la reconnaissance de la langue : modèle « scientifique » et modèle « militant »

### 2.1. « *Le francoprovençal* » : un « *argument léger* » ?

Il se trouve que le terme « franco(-)provençal », inventé dans des buts scientifiques, ne conviendrait pas pour revendiquer un statut politique pour une langue ainsi nommée. G. Tuailleon parle du nom de l'idiome comme d'un « argument » qui pourrait éventuellement « prouver » le statut linguistique de cet idiome : en l'occurrence, le nom « francoprovençal » ne serait pas un « argument » assez solide pour « prouver » que l'objet ainsi désigné mériterait d'être considéré comme une langue à part - et non pas comme « du français et du provençal réunis et mélangés » (Tuailleon, 2007a: 10).

D'une manière identique, les militants francoprovençalistes admettent que le terme est désavantageux. La comparaison avec l'occitan en témoigne :

LK, 1932, F, *fp* <sup>162</sup>: Les occitanistes c'est un autre esprit. Euh c'est quelque chose de *construit*, *fier* [...] Nous on est quelque chose qui est un peu bâtard [...] c'est pas du tout vrai, c'est *le mot qui est trompeur*.

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<sup>161</sup> Notons cependant que l'expression « langage savoyard » est fréquente, par exemple, dans les documents genevois entre le XVIIe et le XIXe siècle (Kristol 2005 : 50).

<sup>162</sup> Dans les extraits d'entretiens cités nous indiquons les initiales fictives des informateurs, l'année (exacte ou approximative) de naissance, le pays (F – France, I – Italie, S – Suisse) et la préférence d'une nomination : fp – « francoprovençal », arp – « arpitan », sav – « savoyard », pat – « patois ». Les italiques dans les textes d'entretiens sont de notre fait.

La définition de l'idiome par ces deux langues voisines paraît avoir encore moins de sens dans les yeux des « patoisants » en Suisse où le voisin pertinent dans l'imaginaire collectif n'est pas l'occitan, mais l'allemand ou/et l'italien. On le remarque dans le discours des « patoisants » :

RO, 1975, S, *pat* : Eh bon on peut dire aussi que c'est pas de l'allemand, c'est pas de l'italien...

ainsi que, par exemple, dans un manuel de patois vaudois (Bossard, Reymond 2010 : 19 - 30), où, en expliquant la phonétique du patois, à part le français, les auteurs ont régulièrement recours à l'allemand, parfois à l'italien, mais jamais à l'occitan - à part une seule référence au « Midi de la France », mais où il s'agirait plutôt du français régional (op. cit. : 22).

## 2.2. « Arpitan » : signifiant nouveau pour l'ancien référent ?

Le terme « harpitan » est inventé au Val d'Aoste en 1973 par Joseph Henriët (signé également José Harriet, Harrieta ou Edur Kar). Inspiré des idées de Federico Krutwig Sagredo - militant basque (à l'époque membre de l'ETA) et écrivain prônant l'unification de la langue basque, - Henriët crée un mouvement politique séparatiste d'extrême gauche qu'il appelle *Movement Harpitanya*.

Dans le texte fondateur de l'arpitanisme, dans le sens où il introduit les termes « (h)arpitan » et « (H)arpitania »<sup>163</sup>, l'« harpitan » est défini à travers le « franco-provençal » : « La langue ethnique de l'Harpitanie est le franco-provençal que nous nommerons aussi désormais « harpitan ». » (Harriet, 1974 : 7)<sup>164</sup>. Ainsi « harpitan » serait un signifiant nouveau pour le même référent : la réalité linguistique (« franco-provençale »). L'enjeu principal de l'invention du nouveau nom serait la mise en relation de cet espace linguistique avec la notion d'*ethnie*, ainsi que de *nation*. Le terme apparaît donc dans la perspective de créer la vision d'une « langue ethnique (et donc nationale) »

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<sup>163</sup> Initialement les deux termes sont inventés avec un H initial ; ils apparaissent sans H à partir de 1976 : Harrieta Jozé, *La lingua arpitana*, Romano Canavese, Ferrero, 1976.

<sup>164</sup> Selon les informations fournies par J. Henriët dans son blog, l'idée d'une « ethnie arpitan » est énoncée pour la première fois en 1973 dans son livre publié en Suisse que l'on ne trouve plus : « Nel lontano 1973, proclamai, sotto lo pseudonimo di EDUR KAR (che nella lingua dei Salassi significa 'la neve sulla montagna'), l'esistenza dell'ETNIA ARPITANA, a cui i valdostani appartengono. Il libricino, stampato in Svizzera, intitolato HARPEITANYA, che proponeva le ricette per difendere l'identità valdostana, non si trova più. » [http://henriet.joseph.blog.tiscali.it/2007/03/20/mao\\_tse\\_toung\\_1200640-shtml/?doing\\_wp\\_cron](http://henriet.joseph.blog.tiscali.it/2007/03/20/mao_tse_toung_1200640-shtml/?doing_wp_cron) (publié le 20.03.2007).

(op. cit. : 8), (h)arpitane, qui unirait, par conséquent, une ethnie ou une nation, (h)arpitane elle aussi, qui correspondrait à un pays baptisé (H)arpitanie. Autrement dit, cette approche reproduit le modèle naturaliste classique de la construction nationale européenne, issu du romantisme allemand.

L'« Harpitanie » est définie comme « une vaste région autour du Mont Blanc » (expression reprise plusieurs fois dans le texte)<sup>165</sup>. En empruntant le discours sur la langue basque, Henriet indique que ce nom serait issu d'une « ancienne langue locale, langue pré-indoeuropéenne » - appelée dans ses autres textes le « garalditan »<sup>166</sup>, - qui serait un ancêtre commun de l'(h)arpitan et du basque. Le mot « (h)arpitan » vient de la racine « arp- » qui signifie dans l'idiome « le pâturage de montagne » (cf. page Wikipedia rédigée majoritairement par l'Alliance culturelle arpitane : « pâturages de montagne où les troupeaux sont conduits et passent l'été »<sup>167</sup>). Simultanément, en basque *harri-pe* signifierait « sous les rochers » : une coïncidence heureuse - ou preuve de parenté, selon Henriet - parce qu'on y trouve aussi la sémantique de la montagne, qui correspond au symbole du Mont Blanc réunissant la communauté linguistique.

Ainsi la fonction métonymique - et mythogène - du nouveau nom est de servir de résumé de l'ontologie du groupe ethnique/ de la nation, faisant référence à un espace unique (les montagnes autour du Mont Blanc), au mode de vie (« arpian » signifie 'berger' dans l'idiome), aux ancêtres mythologiques (les Garalditans), ainsi qu'au caractère unique de la langue même que ce nom désigne (langue pré-indoeuropéenne).

Les buts du *Movement Harpitanya* comprenaient « l'unification de [nombreux] parlars » qui constituent « l'arpitan », ainsi que la « réanimation » de celui-ci (ce qui signifiait « faire de cette langue pauvre et humiliée, liée à un monde agricole et paysan en disparition, *une langue de culture* » (op. cit. : 8, emphase dans l'original). Leur réalisation était présentée comme possible uniquement « comme résultat de [la] pratique

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<sup>165</sup> La première fois avec la précision entre parenthèses : « Savoie, Valais, Vallées nord-occidentales du Piémont, Val d'Aoste... » - ainsi Henriet n'y inclut pas tout le domaine linguistique du francoprovençal, tel qu'il avait été défini par les dialectologues, mais seulement le domaine alpin, notamment les vallées de la haute-montagne.

<sup>166</sup> Terme emprunté directement à Sagredo, cf. Federico C. Krutwig-Sagredo, *Garaldea : sobre el origen de los vascos*, Donostia-San Sebastián: Txertoa : 1978.

<sup>167</sup> [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite\\_ref-9](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite_ref-9) avec une référence à : Bessat Hubert & Claudette Germin, *Lieux en mémoire de l'alpe*, Grenoble, Éd. Ellug, 1993.

révolutionnaire » du « mouvement populaire arpitan », avec comme but final la création d'une fédération (h)arpitane autour du Mont Blanc.

Aujourd'hui ce nom est promu par *l'Aliance Culturèla Arpitana (ACA)*, association regroupant des membres des trois Etats - la France, la Suisse et l'Italie, - fondée en 2004 à Lausanne, mais dont le centre d'activité est (plutôt) en France.

L'ACA reprend les termes « arpitan » et « Arpitania », ainsi qu'une partie de l'argumentation. Notamment elle emprunte la définition de la langue et du peuple à travers le symbole du Mont Blanc - par exemple, dans le refrain de l'hymne arpitan, créé en 2012 :

Himno Arpitan (Aliance Curturèla Arpitana, [www.arpitania.eu](http://www.arpitania.eu))

Arpitania, Arpitania,  
Nos sens tuès des Arpitans, des  
Arpitans

*Arpitania, Arpitania,  
Tot u tôrn du Mont Blanc*

Arpitanie, Arpitanie,  
Nous sommes tous des Arpitans, des  
Arpitans

*Arpitanie, Arpitanie,  
Tout autour du Mont Blanc*

Les buts des activités de l'ACA liées à l'arpitan sont, elles aussi, en général, identiques : la revitalisation linguistique et la promotion d'une orthographe unifiée supradialectale - orthographe de référence B (ORB) - de Dominique Stich (Stich 2003).

En effet, on constate que le nom de l'idiome est souvent représenté comme indissociablement lié à un système d'orthographe : au modèle « francoprovençal » correspondent typiquement plusieurs graphies dites « phonétiques », empruntant en réalité les conventions orthographiques de la langue française, et mettant en avant les particularités de tel ou tel parler local; au modèle « savoyard » - la « Graphie de Conflans » (élaborée par le Groupe de Conflans en 1983), basée également sur l'orthographe du français ; enfin, au modèle « arpitan » - une orthographe supradialectale. Plusieurs critiques de l'arpitanisme sont en réalité des critiques de l'ORB, représentée comme un standard artificiel imposé (concernant le « débat – parfois virulent » sur l'ORB cf. Matthey, Meune 2012 : 107 – 108 ; Bichurina 2013).

### 2.3. « Arpitan » vs. « francoprovençal » : nom « vide de sens », « slogan politique » ou « outil de communication » ?

Il est typique que les dialectologues ainsi que les courants concurrents attribuent au terme « arpitan » des connotations politiques. Ainsi dans le discours de présentation de son livre « Le francoprovençal » un des chercheurs les plus importants ayant travaillé sur le domaine francoprovençal, Gaston Tuaille, liait l'apparition du mot « arpitan » à l'époque des « agissements quelque peu révolutionnaires et en tout cas fort agaçants » par lesquelles la Vallée d'Aoste était « troublée » (Tuaille 2007b : 8) ; aujourd'hui le mot « arpitan » serait utilisé, selon lui, par « quelques esprits échauffés, heureusement peu nombreux mais remuants » aux « croyances bizarres » (op. cit. : 16).

A part cette connotation (plus ou moins) révolutionnaire, le nom « arpitan » aurait deux particularités qui l'on pourrait qualifier de contradictoires. D'un côté, il « n'a aucun sens » (op. cit. : 16) et sert à « enjoliver les discours vides de sens » (op. cit. : 8). On peut remarquer qu'il s'agit ici d'une caractéristique typiquement associée, dans la tradition linguistique, polémique et politique française, à partir des années 1970, au discours communiste – celui où les mots seraient privés de fonction référentielle (cf. à ce sujet Sériot 1985 : 21 – 56). Par opposition, le mot « francoprovençal » se référerait donc à une réalité, voire la réalité linguistique telle qu'elle a été décrite par les dialectologues.

De l'autre côté, le mot « arpitan » serait associé, selon Tuaille, au concept de « race » :

Même si vous voulez grandir vos rêves sur vos lointains ancêtres, n'employez jamais le mot "Arpitan" [...] Plus gravement ce mot fait appel à ce concept qui nous a fait *tant de mal au XXe siècle*, celui de la *race*. Je voudrais vous dissuader de succomber à ce rêve. Les langues régionales n'ont vraiment pas besoin de cet *horrible ornement* (op. cit. : 16, c'est nous qui soulignons, N.B.)

Ainsi l'emploi du nom « arpitan » pour la langue serait un « horrible ornement », une menace, ce qui est dû à l'association implicite, non argumentée, du contenu de ce terme à l'idéologie nazie. Pour ce qui est du « francoprovençal », il semble qu'il s'agisse ainsi, par contraste, de nier toute autre spécificité de l'espace qui y correspond que la spécificité purement linguistique.

Désormais il est devenu lieu commun dans les travaux linguistiques d'associer le nom « arpitan » à un contenu politique, généralement sans l'argumenter (par ex., D. Elmiger oppose « le francoprovençal » / « patois » à « l'arpitan » comme *Sprachliche vs. politische Identität* (identité linguistique vs. politique, 2012 : 91 - 92). Il en va de même pour les membres des associations patoisantes / francoprovençales. Par exemple, en France :

KL, 1932, *F, fp* : l'arpitan, c'est un des noms du francoprovençal, alors Arpitanie, Arpitanie libre etc. fait une espèce de - d'un *slogan politique*

En Suisse le terme « arpitan » paraît peut-être encore plus doté de connotations politiques, qu'en France :

RO, 1975, *S, pat* : Il y a quand même le poids historique derrière [...] il a quand même été inventé pendant la période des revendications politiques

Simultanément, tout discours sur les connotations politiques de l'« arpitan » se limite à un constat général, l'histoire du terme n'étant connue que très vaguement.<sup>168</sup>

Les membres de l'ACA, à leur tour, nient tout contenu politique du terme : selon eux, « la récupération du terme pour des questions identitaires ou nationalistes est ... extrêmement marginale » ; ce nom ne serait qu'un « outil de communication non ambigu » (NV, 1975, *F, arp*) ou « la mèlyosa (mèlyora) rèclama por noutra lengoua » (« la meilleure réclame pour notre langue », LM, 1970, *S, arp*), - autrement dit, un instrument de sa reconnaissance.

La « connotation révolutionnaire » est reconnue, mais comme partie de l'histoire. Par ailleurs, le terme serait légitimé par sa ressemblance au terme « occitan », le modèle occitan servant aujourd'hui de modèle de référence :

U comencement ceti mot l'avêve una connotacion rèvolucionèra que [l'ât ren més u jôrn de houè](#). [...] L'ât un ôtro avantâjo ; il ressemble u nom 'occitan'. D'ense ceti

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<sup>168</sup> Ainsi à la question de précision si ces connotations étaient liées aux revendications en Vallée d'Aoste:

RO, 1975, *S, pat* : Oui, ou en Savoie, je sais pas. C'était dans les années septante. Moi je n'ai pas trop étudié l'histoire, mais je sais qu'il y a des liens avec ça.



nom d'arpitan pôt transmètre lo messâjo que nos, coment nos cousens du mijôrn, nos volens être recognûs et dèfendre noutra lengoua valyament.<sup>169</sup>

<http://arpitan.ch/spip.php?article139> (7/12/12), souligné dans l'original

Le nom a ainsi pour vocation de fonctionner comme un « message » : celui d'une demande de reconnaissance (pour le groupe qui y correspond : « nous ») et du désir de ce groupe de défendre la langue.

Le besoin du terme « arpitan » est souligné par la critique du terme « francoprovençal » :

NV, 1975, F, *arp* : je pense que c'est un élément clé pour la revitalisation que d'avoir un nom non ambigu, qui donne une identité propre à la langue

EF, 1983, F, *arp*:

je n'ai jamais aimé le nom "francoprovençal" [...] Les non-connaisseurs, même de la région, même arpitanophones, pense que notre langue est *un mélange de français et de provençal*. Et c'est d'autant plus *catastrophique* parce qu'avec ce nom la prise de conscience d'une identité linguistique à part entière est ralentie voire niée.

en Arpitanie ... la prise de conscience est quelque peu freinée par l'usage de différents noms: francoprovençal (confusion), patois (ce n'est pas une langue), savoyard (le patriotisme savoyard...), parler lyonnais, patois vaudois, valaisan, gruérien, etc.

Ainsi un bon nom serait « un élément clé pour la revitalisation ». La logique est de dire que sans nom de l'idiome la population concernée n'a pas conscience de constituer une communauté linguistique, sans cette conscience il ne peut pas y avoir de reconnaissance officielle, et sans reconnaissance la communauté même ne peut pas exister, voire la langue ne peut pas exister. Ou, en résumé, sans un bon nom la langue n'existe pas : ainsi le nom a une fonction performative. Menée logiquement jusqu'au bout, ce système d'argumentation suppose que tous ceux qui sont contre le nom « arpitan » soient coupables de la mort imminente de l'idiome. Ainsi, par exemple, en parlant de quelqu'un qui serait contre le mot « arpitan » :

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<sup>169</sup> Au début ce mot avait une connotation révolutionnaire **qu'il n'a plus aujourd'hui**. [...] Il a un autre avantage : il ressemble au nom 'occitan'. Ainsi ce nom d'arpitan peut transmettre le message que nous, comme nos cousins du Midi, nous voulons être reconnus et défendre vaillamment notre langue (notre traduction, N.B.).

Il a le droit d'être contre, comme tous les conservateurs qui sont contre par principe, comme ça nous continuerons à perdre du temps pour la reconnaissance officielle [...] A la limite, plus il y a de gens "contre" [...], plus vite la langue aura disparu, et plus vite ils n'auront plus besoin d'être "contre".

Groupe Facebook « Arpitania abada ! », message du 9.11.2012, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21904584384/>

### 3. Le nom comme division de l'espace socio-politique : modèle « large » et modèle « étroit »

Le discours institutionnel où le nom de l'idiome se trouve directement lié à son éventuelle reconnaissance officielle est surtout typique pour la France. On peut distinguer deux modèles concurrents de la construction linguistique:

- un modèle que l'on peut nommer « *large* » où plusieurs variantes régionales se trouvent regroupées dans une vaste communauté linguistique *transfrontalière* : « langue francoprovençale » ou « langue arpitane » ;
- et un modèle que l'on peut nommer « *étroit* » d'une communauté linguistique *régionale* : « langue savoyarde ».

(Cf. les visions concurrentes, d'un côté, de la « langue occitane » et, de l'autre côté, de la « langue provençale », la « langue gasconne », etc., dans le même cadre français).

L'opposition est basée largement sur l'opposition entre l'approche « objective » (ou positiviste) de la distinction des langues (qui correspond au « modèle large ») et l'approche « subjective » – celle du « modèle étroit ». Notons que ces deux approches concurrentes se disputent dans la tradition philosophique, puis linguistique européenne depuis le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>170</sup>.

La vision « *objective* », ou *positiviste*, de la langue « francoprovençale » ou « arpitane » est basée sur le présupposé que les « langues » existent en tant qu'objets de

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<sup>170</sup> On peut penser à la polémique archétypique entre Ernest Renan et David Friedrich Strauß à l'issue de la guerre franco-prussienne de 1870 (cf. Sériot 2007 : 188).

réalités et peuvent être définies à partir des « faits linguistiques » répertoriés. La légitimité de cette vision est assurée par l'expertise linguistique (dialectologique). Il s'agit notamment d'une argumentation diachronique contrastive, soulignant la différence de l'idiome, d'un côté, du français, et de l'autre, de l'occitan – deux voisins auxquels *le nom même* « francoprovençal » fait référence : ainsi les linguistes et les militants qui reprennent leur discours évoquent, d'un côté, la *conservation* en francoprovençal des voyelles finales atones (l'accentuation paroxytonique), pour tracer la frontière avec le français, et de l'autre côté, la double *évolution* du *a* latin (la transformation du *a* en *é*<sup>171</sup> ou *i* derrière une consonne de type palatal, ce qui résulte notamment à une double conjugaison des verbes du premier groupe issus des verbes latins en -are) pour tracer la frontière avec l'occitan (Martin 2005 : 4 – 5, Stich 1998 : 29 – 30, en même temps que d'autres caractéristiques phonologiques).

Les cartes de l'Arpitanie reproduisent, pour ce qui concerne les limites géographiques de l'espace arpitan, les cartes faites par des dialectologues (cf. images 1 et 2).

La vision concurrente est celle de « la langue savoyarde ». Il convient de préciser que la manière dont cette nomination se référerait à une langue à part entière n'est pas très claire. Sur le site de l'Institut de la langue savoyarde nous lisons :

La langue savoyarde fait partie de l'ensemble linguistique appelé le Francoprovençal.

Elle est parlée et écrite dans les pays suivants :

- la France (région Rhône-Alpes)
- la Suisse (région de Genève et jusqu'à Neuchâtel)
- l'Italie (Val d'Aoste, Piémont, Faeto dans les Pouilles)

[Suit la carte de l'« aire franco(-)provençal » dans les trois pays]

La langue savoyarde est le francoprovençal parlé en Savoie.

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<sup>171</sup> Curieusement dans les textes qui portent sur le francoprovençal (un idiome pourtant majoritairement oral) les chercheurs utilisent ce *graphème* propre au français pour désigner le *phonème* antérieur mi-fermé non arrondi /e/.

Ainsi il s'agirait d'«une langue savojarde» faisant partie d'un ensemble linguistique plus large, francoprovençal (de la même manière que, par exemple, selon le point de vue des «provençalistes» «la langue provençale» ferait partie de l'ensemble «des langues d'oc»). Cependant la description du domaine linguistique, contrairement aux informations fournies directement avant ou directement après, couvre l'ensemble du domaine francoprovençal, en laissant identifier «la langue savojarde» avec tout l'ensemble (plutôt comme le «valencien» sert parfois à désigner l'ensemble du domaine catalan).

Nous qualifions cette approche de «*subjective*» puisque dans ce système d'argumentation le «savojarde» serait une langue à part entière, car telle est la vision des locuteurs (même si les savojardeux parlent également parfois des «faits linguistiques indéniables, des mots de vocabulaire, des tournures spécifiques» - AB, 1960, F, *sav*). Simultanément, cette vision est naturaliste (tout comme le modèle arpitan initial), s'appuyant sur le présupposé d'un lien naturel entre la langue – le peuple – et le territoire.

AB, 1960, F, *sav*: parce que le mot francoprovençal est *un mot un peu tordu* / parce que ça fait croire que c'est *un peu de français et un peu de provençal* alors que c'est une langue *authentique* et qui d'ailleurs *pour nous n'est pas compris* / pour nous la Provence c'est Marseille ! (...) Et comme le mot du savojarde est *attesté depuis très longtemps* (...) ce mot qui est *clair pour tout le monde* (...) très naturellement on demandait ça

c'est vrai qu'en Savoie dire que les Savojardeux parlent le savojarde c'est quelque chose beaucoup plus logique et simple

Nommer la langue «savojarde» serait «très naturel», «logique» et «simple», précisément pour la raison d'identification claire entre le territoire, le peuple et la langue. D'ailleurs, le nom «savojarde» est légitimé par le fait d'être «attesté depuis très longtemps» - à la différence implicite à toute autre nomination qui serait artificielle, que ce soit «le francoprovençal» ou «l'arpitan».

Cette vision est critiquée par les autres courants, qui, même s'ils avouent qu'elle paraît «naturelle», s'opposent aux frontières qu'elle suggère :

LK, 1932, F, *fp*: Y a des *formes extrêmement* différentes selon les vallées [...] il y a autant de différence entre deux vallées savojardeux que entre cette vallée et puis le dialecte de Saint-Etienne // Donc c'est une fiction

Ainsi la polémique glottonymique cache, entre autre, celle de la division du continuum linguistique, ainsi que de l'espace socio-politique.

Dans cette perspective, la rivalité entre le modèle « savoyard » et « arpitan » est liée à la politique actuelle de la région Rhône-Alpes :

NV, 1975, F, *arp* : Les militants régionalistes en Savoie voient ... l'émergence du mot "arpitan" comme une menace et s'y opposent, car ils pensent que ce terme pourrait donner une légitimité à Rhône-Alpes ... à l'encontre des possibilités d'émancipation d'une région Savoie<sup>172</sup>.

Cependant, malgré l'apparence de concurrence entre ces deux modèles, « large » et « étroit », il n'y a pas de vrai conflit. Ainsi on remarque, dans l'exemple cité de AB, 1960, F, *sav*, que les savoyardistes ne contestent pas tant les *frontières* de la langue que son *nom même* : le critère essentiel c'est que le nom soit convaincant : d'un côté, pour les interlocuteurs officiels (il évoque les demandes de reconnaissance auprès du Ministère de l'Education nationale) ; de l'autre côté, pour les locuteurs (dans cet extrait représentés par le « nous ») – donc, pour deux groupes de référence.

Par ailleurs, d'un côté, une personne peut être à la fois membre de l'Alliance culturelle arpitanne et de l'Institut de la langue savoyarde, et une autre - membre de ce dernier et du Conseil international du francoprovençal. De l'autre côté, même si l'on prend des cas extrêmes des séparatistes, les indépendantistes arpitanes (du Val d'Aoste) affirment lors des conversations informelles que l'Etat de Savoie libre, projet butoir des Savoyards, pourrait par la suite faire partie, au même titre que la Vallée d'Aoste, d'une nouvelle fédération Arpitania, construite selon le modèle de la Confédération suisse.

#### 4. L'organisation étatique et les enjeux politiques de la nomination

Ainsi, des trois Etats où l'idiome est parlé, c'est en France que la polémique glottonymique est la plus ardente. Nous lions cette particularité au changement de statut des idiomes régionaux (au niveau national et, en l'occurrence, au niveau de la région

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. Costa, Bert 2011 sur les usages des critères linguistiques (voire de la représentation d'une unité linguistique) dans le discours institutionnel produit par la région Rhône-Alpes comme tentative de naturalisation de l'idée de cette région.

Rhône-Alpes). Dans ce contexte, on voit apparaître des essais d'instrumentalisation du nom de l'idiome.

En Suisse et en Italie, au contraire, les enjeux sociopolitiques de nomination paraissent peu pertinents. Or on se réfère à l'idiome presque exclusivement comme « patois » (ou encore « dialetto » - « dialecte » en Italie), soit sans le nommer, soit en précisant : en Suisse « patois vaudois », « patois valaisan » etc., avec des précisions cantonales ou bien locales<sup>173</sup>; en Italie « patois valdôtain » ou « dialecte valdôtain » etc. (ou encore en utilisant l'expression « nosta moda » – la même qui est utilisée par rapport aux parlers occitans d'Italie)<sup>174</sup>. Il convient de préciser qu'il ne s'agit pas de la même chose que le « modèle étroit », puisqu'il ne s'agit jamais d'une « langue vaudoise », « langue valaisanne » ou « langue valdôtaine ».

Si la critique des noms « francoprovençal » et « arpitan » produite dans ces deux pays n'est pas originale par rapport à la France, ce qui est particulier c'est qu'aucun autre nom n'est proposé : les militants se contentent d'utiliser le terme générique, patois. On peut proposer certaines explications de ce phénomène.

1. Cette différence doit être corrélée avec l'absence en Suisse et en Italie du discours institutionnel qui prévaut en France, où l'avenir de l'idiome dépendrait de sa reconnaissance officielle, à laquelle sa nomination devrait contribuer. En Suisse le système fédéral suppose déjà une autonomie très importante de chaque canton (avec son propre Conseil d'Etat, ses structures de pouvoir), le besoin ne se fait pas sentir d'en demander davantage. De même, en Italie la Vallée d'Aoste jouit du statut de région autonome. Aussi les militants n'ont-ils (généralement) pas besoin d'instrumentaliser le nom de l'idiome.

Il convient néanmoins de préciser qu'il existe bien des mouvements politiques indépendantistes du Val d'Aoste qui, eux, continuent à utiliser les termes « arpitan » et

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<sup>173</sup> Ainsi dans les questionnaires recueillis par M. Meune en Gruyère et sur le canton de Vaud on retrouve les nominations suivantes : « gruyèrien », « gruyérien », « gruèrien », « Grévire » ; « broyard », « couatzo » ; « patois vaudois » ; « patois du Jorat » ; « vaudois », « dzoratâi » ; « vaudois du Gros de Vaud » ; « clli dâo Dzorât » ; « du Jorat » ; « patois vaudois du Jorat » ; « fribourgeois » ; « patois de la Gruyère » ; « patois valaisan » (Meune 2012 : 66).

<sup>174</sup> Dans les Pouilles, un îlot francoprovençal au-delà de la zone transfrontalière, la situation est un peu spécifique : on utilise les appellations « faetano » et « cellese », ainsi que le terme scientifique du « francoprovençal » qu'on y voit apparaître depuis la loi sur les minorités linguistiques de 1999. Par ailleurs, on y trouve la nomination « provençal » qui doit remonter à l'époque où l'origine réelle du groupe était méconnue (Puolato 2013).

« Arpitania » dans leurs discours. De même, une *Pétition pour la reconnaissance de l'arpitan comme langue régionale suisse* a été mise en ligne pour signatures électroniques ([http://www.avaaz.org/fr/petition/La\\_reconnaissance\\_par\\_les\\_autorites\\_suissees\\_de\\_larpitan\\_en\\_tant\\_que\\_langue\\_regionale](http://www.avaaz.org/fr/petition/La_reconnaissance_par_les_autorites_suissees_de_larpitan_en_tant_que_langue_regionale) publiée le 3 mars 2013).

2. Par ailleurs, en Suisse et en Italie le terme « patois » paraît avoir moins de connotations négatives qu'en France - il s'inscrirait plutôt dans la tradition de la mise en valeur du local :

RO, 1975, S, *pat* : et nous on est [...] divisés en cantons, en communes, et cetera c'est fédéral comme Etat, donc utiliser un terme qui a une *connotation de local* ça dérange pas. Parce que c'est *pas un défaut*.

Cependant en France le « défaut » du terme « patois » ne serait pas la « connotation du local », mais celle de ne pas être une langue. En effet, la représentation de l'idiome comme langue à part entière paraît plus fréquente en France. Plusieurs faits en témoignent : d'abord, en France le discours des militants sur la définition des frontières linguistiques reproduit régulièrement celui des linguistes ; en Suisse on ne retrouve pas de discours typique, habituel, mécanique, chacun l'explique à sa manière (par exemple, par l'existence des « caractères dérivés partagés », terme et critère emprunté de la biologie, etc.) Ensuite, si en France l'analyse du discours quotidien révèle la coexistence, dans les représentations des mêmes individus, d'un des modèles « militants » / « scientifique » avec le modèle dominant français, où le « patois » serait du français déformé :

VC, 1940, F, *fp* : En Russie il y a *aussi des patois*? // Le *russe* à Voronezh est différent du *russe* de Saint-Pétersbourg ? // C'est ce qu'on appelle patois.

IR, 1935, F, *fp* : L'occitan c'est différent, l'occitan c'est *presqu'une langue*!

en Suisse et en Italie cette tendance paraît encore plus marquée (cf. Meune 2012 : 64 – en Suisse selon un tiers des répondants *au questionnaire écrit* parmi les membres de l'Association vaudoise des amis du patois et de la Société des patoisants de la Gruyère le « patois » serait un « mélange de français et d'une autre langue »).

3. Finalement, en France on constate les représentations du lien essentiel entre la « langue régionale » et « l'identité régionale », parfois en passant par l'« accent régional ».

En Suisse, si les représentations identiques peuvent exister, l'espace francoprovençal correspond à celui de la Suisse romande (sauf le canton du Jura), ainsi sa distinction par rapport à la Suisse alémanique est déjà marquée par l'usage du français et l'importance du « patois » comme marque symbolique d'appartenance est diminuée, voire inexistante (par ailleurs, les associations patoisantes du domaine francoprovençal travaillent avec les associations jurassiennes – par exemple, dans la Fédération interrégionale des patois).

Il en va de même pour l'Italie où les zones francoprovençales sont caractérisées, en premier lieu, par l'usage du français (comme langue co-officielle avec l'italien) par opposition à la majorité du territoire national qui est italophone ; cf. la citation de René Willien repris en fonction de slogan sur les couvertures des *Nouvelles du Centre d'Etudes Francoprovençales René Willien* de Val d'Aoste :

« Le français et le patois sont complémentaires l'un de l'autre et ils ne pourraient pas vivre séparés dans notre Vallée sans provoquer la rupture définitive de notre particularisme et de notre ethnie » René Willien

## **5. Portrait social des locuteurs et préférences d'une nomination**

Des trois nominations de l'idiome évoquées, le terme « langue savoyarde » paraît le moins utilisé, limité à une partie des militants des départements français de Savoie et Haute Savoie. Simultanément, alors que les nominations « patois » / « patois savoyard » / « savoyard » paraissent les plus utilisés dans les discours au sein de l'Institut de la langue savoyarde, l'association emblématique qui promeut ce terme, dans l'interaction avec les autorités publiques l'ILS a tendance à donner préférence au terme « francoprovençal » ou bien « francoprovençal savoyard » : la langue « francoprovençale » étant officiellement reconnue et institutionnalisée par la région Rhône-Alpes. Quant au Mouvement Région Savoie, on remarque actuellement l'intégration des deux noms, « francoprovençal » et « arpitan », dans son discours (voir <http://www.regionsavoie.org/noutra-lengua.html>).

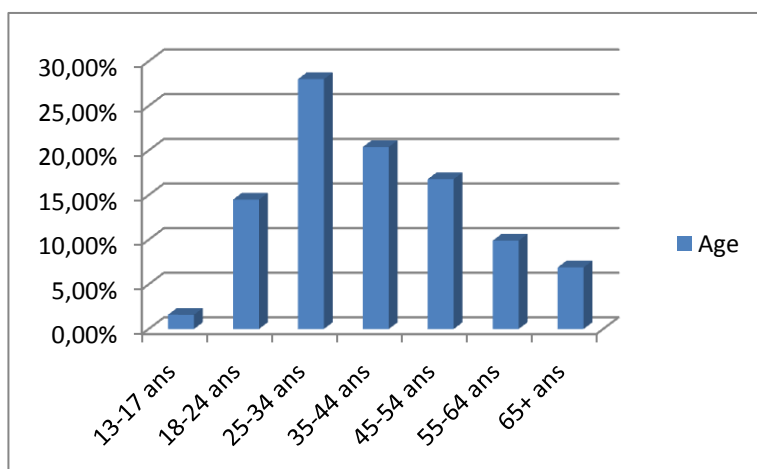
Pour ce qui concerne ces deux autres noms, on pourrait dire, en utilisant une métaphore phonologique, qu'ils sont en distribution complémentaire. En effet, à part la distinction « terme scientifique » vs « terme militant » dont il s'agissait plus haut (qui, elle,



ne peut pas être généralisée), ces termes ne sont utilisés ni par des personnes de même profil social, ni dans des contextes ou des buts identiques.

Les groupes patoisants / francoprovençaux sont majoritairement formés de retraités, leurs professions les plus représentées étant, d'un côté, les agriculteurs et de l'autre, les enseignants <sup>175</sup>. Au contraire, les arpitanistes sont plus jeunes (cf. figure 1) et majoritairement travailleurs intellectuels ou cadres.

**Figure 1. Usages du nom « arpitan » : la répartition d'âge parmi les personnes inscrites à la page Facebook "Arpitan & Arpitania"**



**n = 1001 personnes. Selon les chiffres fournis par l'administrateur du groupe au 28.01.2013.**

Si l'on étudie la figure 1 : la répartition d'âge parmi les 1001 personnes inscrites à la page FB « Arpitan & Arpitania »<sup>176</sup>, il est évident que l'âge relativement jeune des participants n'est pas surprenant, les utilisateurs des réseaux sociaux tendant à appartenir à la jeune génération. Néanmoins ce fait nous paraît représentatif : en effet, les arpitanistes sont caractérisés par l'usage actif des médias, en particulier de l'Internet (Facebook, blogs etc.) ; en l'occurrence, presque tous ont des profils sur Facebook, le groupe en question couvrant la grande majorité des arpitanistes en général.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Bert, Costa, Martin 2009 sur les caractéristiques essentielles des locuteurs et des membres des associations francoprovençales en France ; Meune 2012 : 59 sur les groupes en Suisse (cantons de Vaud et de Fribourg).

<sup>176</sup> Il n'y a pas d'adhérents à l'ACA : « sont considérés "membres" tout ceux qui utilisent l'ORB et qui s'estiment être membres de l'ACA, ce qui représente une trentaine de personnes » (communication personnelle d'un des responsables de l'ACA).

Cette observation nous amène à étudier les contextes des usages des noms. Par opposition aux arpitanistes, la plupart des « patoisants » qui préfèrent l'usage des noms « patois » ou « francoprovençal » n'utilisent l'Internet que très minoritairement, sans parler d'avoir des profils dans des réseaux sociaux : par conséquent, sur Internet le terme « arpitan » paraît plus populaire que « francoprovençal », alors qu'au sein des associations ce serait plutôt le contraire. À part les différences générationnelles et occupationnelles, l'usage plus important du terme « arpitan » sur Internet s'explique largement par la différence des buts de ces mouvements : pour les groupes patoisants / francoprovençaux, il s'agit souvent en priorité d'un lieu de rencontre et de convivialité. Or, s'il ne s'agit pas de transmettre ou de promouvoir l'idiome, il n'y a aucun besoin d'utiliser les médias. Au contraire, les buts de promotion et de transmission sont explicites pour le mouvement arpitan (Cf. IR, 1971, S, *arp* : « Le dilemme est le suivant : les membres de l'association locale de ma commune parlent "patois" et souhaitent le "maintenir". Moi, j'ai appris l'arpitan, dans sa variante bagnarde et souhaite le "revitaliser". »)

## Conclusion

Ainsi les différents noms de l'idiome servent des buts différents : on voit de nouveaux noms s'ajouter à celui utilisé traditionnellement par les linguistes, « francoprovençal », au moment où apparaissent des enjeux nouveaux, notamment ceux de la « promotion » ou « réclame » de l'idiome, visant à contribuer à sa reconnaissance officielle et à sa transmission. Le nom de l'idiome est censé devenir « argument » (pour sa reconnaissance), « outil de communication » (sur cet idiome – pour sa reconnaissance aussi, tout comme pour sa transmission par les locuteurs) ou, éventuellement, pour certains, un « slogan politique ». On assigne au nom une fonction performative : la langue va exister si elle est nommée, et pas n'importe comment. Ce qui nous paraît spécifique au cas étudié ici, c'est l'attention particulière portée au nom même, au signifiant, sans qu'il y ait un désaccord grave quant au référent.

On retrouve cependant une certaine concurrence entre deux visions différentes et divisions de l'espace social et politique, que nous avons appelées « modèle large » - d'une vaste communauté transfrontalière, et « modèle étroit » - d'une communauté linguistique régionale, la première étant légitimée comme objective, et la seconde comme subjective. C'est notamment le cas en France, où les enjeux actuels politiques et identitaires de nomination semblent les plus pertinents. Au contraire, en Suisse et en Italie la nomination

de l'idiome paraît être de moins d'importance aujourd'hui, les régions du domaine francoprovençal ayant à la fois une autonomie politique et une pratique de l'usage du français qui fonctionne déjà, elle, comme marque de différenciation par rapport au reste du pays respectif.

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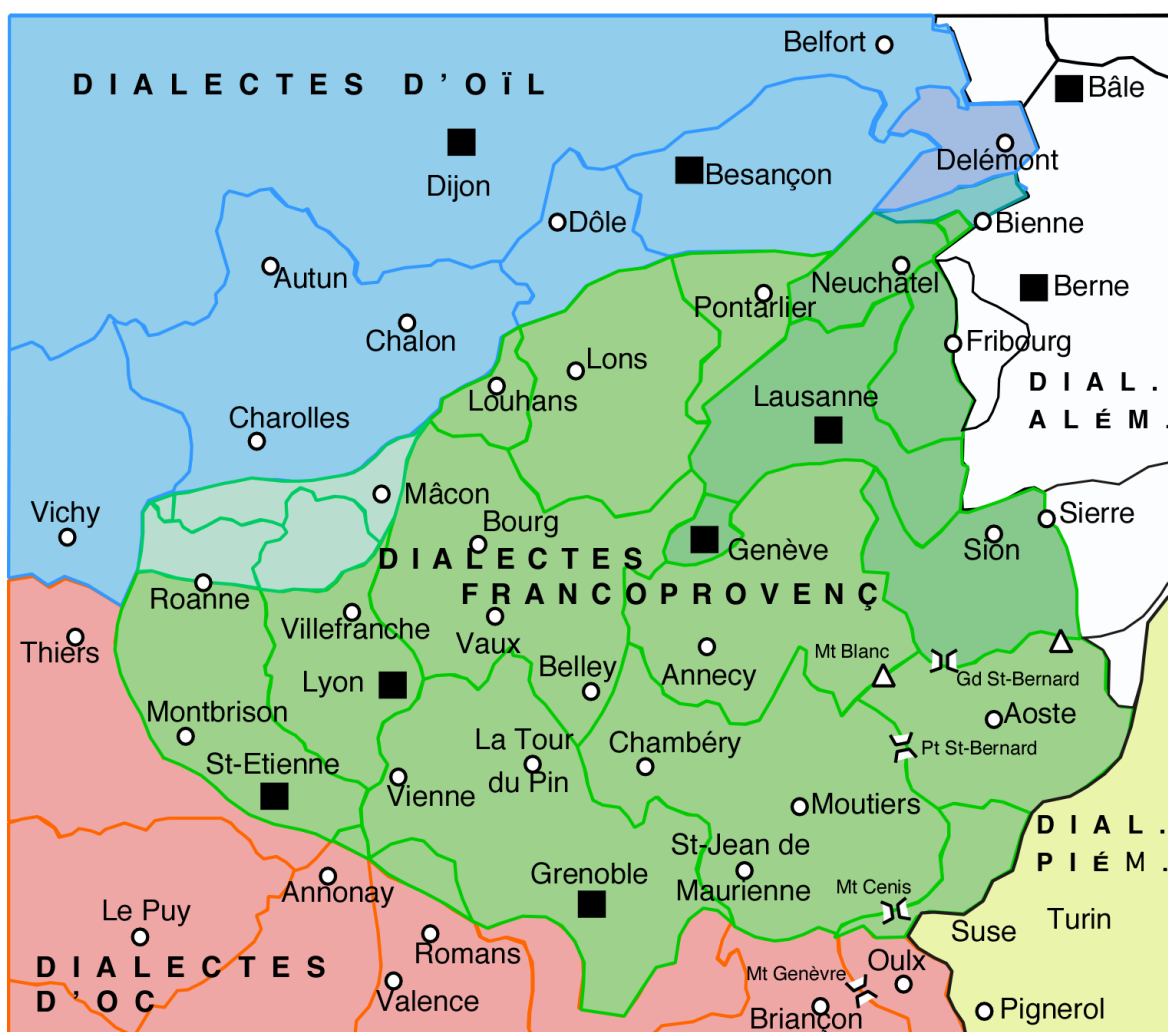
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TUAILLON Gaston, 2007a, *Le francoprovençal, tome premier. Définition et délimitation. Phénomènes remarquables*, (Vallée d'Aoste) : Musuleci éditeur.

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Image 1. L'espace francoprovençal : vision des dialectologues



D'après G. Tuailon, 1972, "Le francoprovençal. Progrès d'une définition", *TraLiLi X*, p. 337. Reprise dans : A. Kristol, à paraître, « Le francoprovençal et l'âge des

fragmentations dialectales des espaces galloromans : le témoignage toponymique », dans : *Actes du 14e Colloque des langues dialectales*, Monaco 24 novembre 2012.

Image 2. Arpitania : vision des militants



Aliance Culturèla Arpitana. [www.arpitania.eu](http://www.arpitania.eu)

## II. Le linguiste face aux minorités linguistiques : sauveur ou ennemi de son objet d'étude ? (Les cas de l'occitan et du francoprovençal)<sup>177</sup>

Aujourd'hui dans la recherche sur les minorités linguistiques on constate un changement crucial du positionnement du chercheur par rapport à son objet d'étude : d'un observateur passif il devient de plus en plus un acteur actif (cf. Grinevald, Bert 2012). Simultanément un autre phénomène émerge : le linguiste, désormais (plus ou moins) engagé, commence à être perçu au sein de la communauté étudiée (par certains locuteurs) comme responsable de la mort imminente de la langue qu'il étudie. Nous proposons ici une réflexion sur ce paradoxe à partir des cas de deux idiomes dans deux Etats :

<sup>177</sup> Paru dans: C. Alén Garabato (éd.) *Gestion des minorités linguistiques dans l'Europe du XXIe siècle*, Limoges : Lambert-Lucas, 2013. Pp. 291 – 302.

l'occitan/provençal en France et le francoprovençal/arpitan en France et en Suisse. Loin de nier la collaboration souvent très fructueuse des chercheurs avec plusieurs associations des locuteurs, nous proposons de nous concentrer dans cet article sur les cas conflictuels. Minoritaires, ces cas ne sont pourtant pas négligeables et nous paraissent symptomatiques du changement actuel des relations « linguiste – communauté ».

### 1. Deux paradigmes scientifiques différents

Les études sur ces deux idiomes s'inscrivent dans des paradigmes scientifiques différents : tant au niveau du champ disciplinaire (sociolinguistique vs. dialectologie) que par rapport au positionnement du chercheur (à l'intérieur vs. à l'extérieur de la communauté étudiée).

Dans la sociolinguistique dite occitano-catalane (périphérique, *dels cercaires natus* - des chercheurs natifs) le chercheur est explicitement *impliqué*. Ainsi selon Robert Lafont : « Le sociolinguiste occitan se trouve dans la nécessité [...] d'affirmer son *implication dénonciatrice* dans le processus » (Lafont 1984 : 8). Désormais les études sociolinguistiques sont représentés comme « une arme » : « la sociolinguistique est une arme de désaliénation d'abord, de mobilisation ensuite en faveur de *normalisation* de la langue jusqu'alors dominée » (Boyer 2012 : 81, emphase dans l'original). Ici « le positionnement interventionniste reste un élément décisif » ; il s'agit pour un « sociolinguiste *impliqué* » de « refuser une fausse neutralité en se portant à l'avant-garde de la contestation militante du conflit et de la résistance organisée en faveur de la langue menacée de substitution » (op. cit. : 83).

Les recherches sur le francoprovençal ont été jusqu'à présent majoritairement dialectologiques ; la sociolinguistique francoprovençale qui apparaît au cours des dernières années est aussi issue de dialectologie. Or, cette tradition suppose un tout autre rapport à son objet d'étude : c'est la distance qui est appréciée vue comme garante d'une objectivité scientifique. Aussi les chercheurs francoprovençalistes ne se sont-ils jamais positionnés ni comme militants, ni comme locuteurs ou membres de la communauté linguistique.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Notons, par exemple, dans le recueil cité (Langues de France 2012) l'absence des résumés en francoprovençal, tandis qu'en occitan, dans ses variantes différentes, ils sont présents pour tous les articles portant sur l'occitan.

Cependant, malgré la différence de ces deux approches, la situation actuelle révèle des tensions semblables dans les relations des chercheurs avec les communautés étudiées. Notamment on les trouve confrontés au même phénomène : d'être vus comme ennemis de leur objet d'étude.

## 2. Occitan/provençal: des « complots » « sous le couvert » des fonctions sociolinguistiques

Dans le contexte occitan, le conflit entre les *occitanistes* et les *provençalistes* ne perd pas d'actualité depuis plus d'un demi-siècle : à savoir, depuis la création de l'*Institut d'Estudis Occitans* en 1945 et la promotion du terme *occitan* et de la graphie supra-dialectale dite *classique*. La position provençaliste est présentée aujourd'hui par le Collectif *Prouvènço*, association créée en 2000. Contrairement à la vision occitaniste d'une langue occitane dont le provençal serait un des dialectes, le Collectif affirme l'existence d'une langue provençale à part entière parmi *les* langues d'oc.

La polémique est basée sur l'opposition - traditionnelle dans la philosophie et linguistique européenne - des approches subjective et objective à la définition des langues. Selon l'approche subjective provençaliste les frontières d'une langue provençale sont définies conformément à la vision des locuteurs :

- le provençal est une langue parlée ou comprise et *identifiée comme telle* par plusieurs centaines de milliers de personnes dans la région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur et au delà dans la «Drôme provençale», la région nîmoise et certaines vallées du Piémont italien ;

- le provençal *est vécu par les Provençaux comme une langue distincte* à part entière [...]

(Manifeste pèr Prouvènço 2012, ici et dans les citations ultérieures c'est nous qui soulignons, N.B.)

La vision concurrente occitaniste est basée sur le présupposé que les langues existent en tant qu'objets de réalités et peuvent être définies à partir des faits linguistiques répertoriés (l'opinion des locuteurs ayant ainsi peu ou pas d'importance).



Afin d'aborder le conflit qui implique les linguistes dans ce contexte<sup>179</sup>, nous allons étudier deux textes :

- « Vers la suppression du Provençal au baccalauréat », publié par le Collectif Prouvènço sur son site le 13 juin 2012 :

<http://www.collectifprovence.com/spip.php?article656>

et la réponse à celui-ci :

- «À propos du fantasme récurrent d'un complot contre le provençal...» publiée sur le site de la Fédération des Enseignants de Langue et Culture d'Oc (FELCO)<sup>180</sup> le 1 juillet 2012 :

[http://www.felco-creo.org/mdoc/detail\\_fr.php?categ=ocques&id=1141](http://www.felco-creo.org/mdoc/detail_fr.php?categ=ocques&id=1141)

Le premier texte est publié au nom d'un mouvement militant ; le second est écrit au nom de la communauté scientifique - mais publié également sur le site associatif, ce qu'on peut noter conforme à la tradition de recherche occitaniste :

Cette prise de position hasardeuse [du Collectif Prouvènço] nous inspire plusieurs remarques, que nous formulons ici au nom des universitaires de Montpellier, mais que nous communiquons sur le site de la FELCO, puisqu'il se trouve que certains de ces fameux universitaires sont « très proches » de la FELCO.

### *2.1. Le texte du collectif*

Le texte du Collectif montre que la vision de celui-ci, tout en étant subjective, est naturaliste, empruntant le modèle classique de la construction des Etats-nations et instaurant un lien naturel entre la langue, le peuple et le territoire. Le slogan du Collectif est éloquent : « uno regioun, uno identita, uno lengo ». Sa position est résumée ainsi :

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<sup>179</sup> Sur d'autres aspects du conflit des occitanistes et provençalistes voir aussi Costa, Gasquet-Cyrus 2013 et Costa 2013.

<sup>180</sup> « Créée en 1987, la Fédération des Enseignants de Langue et Culture d'Oc (F.E.L.C.O.) regroupe les associations régionales d'enseignants d'occitan de l'Education nationale ». [http://www.felco-creo.org/pagesf/presentfelco\\_fr.php](http://www.felco-creo.org/pagesf/presentfelco_fr.php)

... nous insistons sur la pluralité **DES** langues d'oc. Ainsi le provençal mistralien peut garder toute sa place, dans le respect de ses variantes, avec *son nom, son orthographe, sa littérature* et en un mot, ses *référents identitaires*.

Curieusement, la position des adversaires est vue comme complètement identique, sauf avec d'autres frontières de la communauté linguistique :

Au concept de langue unique correspond une *unification linguistique, orthographique et identitaire* pour un *Pays unique* que certains rêvent de créer de Bordeaux à Menton.

Ainsi les éléments clefs de la controverse seraient le nom de la langue (provençal vs. occitan), l'orthographe (dite phonétique/mistralienne/provençale vs. classique/occitane) et l'identité (provençale vs. occitane).

La légitimité de la vision provençaliste est assurée par l'expertise sociolinguistique des deux spécialistes nommés (« avec des sociolinguistes tels que le Corse Jean-Baptiste Marcellesi ou le Provençal Philippe Blanchet »). L'ennemi est personnifié par « les mouvements occitanistes et leurs représentants dans les plus hautes sphères de l'Education Nationale » ainsi que par l'« Académie de Montpellier et ses responsables universitaires, très proches de l'idéologie occitaniste ». Ce qui « menace » la « langue provençale » serait précisément l'activité menée « de manière clandestine » par ceux-ci<sup>181</sup> : ainsi les linguistes (à quelques rares exceptions près, et avec d'autres acteurs associatifs et politiques) se trouvent accusés de la mort menaçante de l'idiome qui fait l'objet de leurs études.

De manière semblable, dans le préambule au « Manifeste pèr Prouvènço » du Collectif, paru en septembre 2012<sup>182</sup>, il est question d'une instrumentalisation de la position scientifique à des buts militants : « ... professeur d'occitan, rédige un rapport, sous le couvert de ses nouvelles fonctions au sein du laboratoire ICAR en sociolinguistique de l'éducation ». Ainsi l'affiliation militante est présentée comme essentialiste (être « professeur d'occitan » semble un attribut naturel, même lorsque les fonctions

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Costa 2013 par rapport au « Manifeste pèr Prouvènço » : « l'argument central porterait sur le fait que la pratique du provençal serait menacée non pas du fait de processus historiques complexes mais du fait de l'action de groupes militants occitanistes. »

<sup>182</sup> [http://www.activism.com/fr\\_FR/petition/manifeste-per-prouvenco/16219](http://www.activism.com/fr_FR/petition/manifeste-per-prouvenco/16219)

d'enseignant ne sont plus exercées), alors que les fonctions sociolinguistiques ne servent que de « couvert ».

## 2.2 La position occitaniste

La position occitaniste repose sur un consensus *scientifique* : (le Collectif) « milite pour la séparation du provençal de l'ensemble d'oc, au mépris [...] du *consensus quasi total de la communauté scientifique internationale* ». L'expertise scientifique suppose notamment la connaissance des *faits* linguistiques :

en vue de faire reconnaître par les pouvoirs publics l'existence distincte de son « provençal », sans s'embarrasser ordinairement de nuances et du respect minimal des *faits*.

Notons que cette argumentation est reprise plus récemment dans le Manifeste du PEN-Club de Lengua d'Oc (Poets', Essayists', Novelists' Club): « cette conception linguistique s'oppose aux faits constatés et au consensus scientifique sur la question »<sup>183</sup>.

Par ailleurs, il s'agit d'une (meilleure) compétence linguistique (et prenant en considération la variation diachronique et diatopique) :

les « universitaires de Montpellier » pratiquent dans leur enseignement et dans la vie courante des formes d'occitan bien plus variées que celles que peuvent pratiquer les membres du Collectif, ceux du moins qui connaissent la langue qu'ils assurent défendre.

Le texte même est construit selon le modèle scientifique (avec les citations précises des sources), explicitement mis-en-avant et opposé à celui du Collectif (« d'un projet, non autrement précisé ni référencé » ; « Nous aimerions que le Collectif cite, de son côté, les textes officiels ou officieux auxquels il se réfère »).

D'emblée on pourrait associer ce conflit au positionnement manifestement impliqué des chercheurs occitanistes. On s'aperçoit cependant que l'idée d'une instrumentalisation

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<sup>183</sup> « Manifeste affirmant le caractère un et divers de la langue et de la culture d'Oc », disponible sur : [http://www.jfbrun.eu/penclub/manifest\\_unitat\\_e\\_diversitat.htm](http://www.jfbrun.eu/penclub/manifest_unitat_e_diversitat.htm)

de la science et d'une menace que présenteraient les linguistes est également prononcée dans un contexte différent jusqu'à l'opposé.

### 3. Francoprovençal/Arpitan : les pâturages et les bergers

En effet, une polémique semblable apparaît aujourd'hui dans le second contexte étudié. Ainsi, d'un côté, l'argumentation est aussi basée sur l'opposition des approches militante<sup>184</sup> et scientifique. De l'autre côté, on y voit figurer les mêmes éléments : le nom de l'idiome (*francoprovençal* vs. *arpitan*, créé par analogie avec *occitan*), l'orthographe (les graphies dites phonétiques vs. une orthographe supra-dialectale, inspirée de la graphie « classique ») et la question des identités régionales et/ou locales vs. d'une identité arpitanne existante à travers les frontières régionales et étatiques.

On remarque cependant deux particularités. Tout d'abord, la délimitation des frontières linguistiques n'est pas remise en cause : les militants reprennent l'argumentation des chercheurs. Ensuite, les rôles sont inversés : ce sont les militants qui prônent le nom *arpitan* pour la langue et la communauté et une orthographe supra-dialectale, tandis que les chercheurs s'y opposent.

#### 3.1. Critiques de « l'arpitan »

La concurrence des deux visions est récente : le nom *arpitan*, inventé dans les années 1970, est promu du moment de la création de l'*Aliance Culturèla Arpitana* (ACA) en 2004 (cf. Bichurina, à paraître) ; il en va de même pour l'orthographe supra-dialectale, dont une première proposition a été faite en 1976 par Joseph Henriët, et la proposition actuelle dite ORB (Orthographe de référence B) de Dominique Stich, promue par l'ACA, date de 2003 (Stich 2003).

Les linguistes (dialectologues) se positionnent majoritairement contre ces innovations. Le terme « arpitan » est critiqué par le dialectologue Gaston Tuailon (Tuailon 2007 : 8, 16) comme doté de connotation politique (voire révolutionnaire). Par

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<sup>184</sup> A la différence du contexte occitan, ici le mot « militant » n'est généralement pas employé par aucuns des acteurs. Nous le reprenons pour désigner toute personne qui œuvre pour l'idiome, dans un cadre associatif ou informel.

ailleurs, il aurait deux particularités : d'une part, il sert à « enjoliver les discours vides de sens » (op. cit. : 8) ; d'autre part, il « fait appel à ce concept qui nous a fait tant de mal au XXe siècle, celui de la race » et serait un « horrible ornement » pour la langue (op. cit. : 16). Pour ce qui est du nom « francoprovençal », employé par les dialectologues, il semble qu'il s'agisse ainsi, par contraste, à la fois, de l'associer à une réalité, voire la réalité des faits linguistiques, et de nier toute autre spécificité de l'espace qui y correspond que cette spécificité purement linguistique.

Pour ce qui est de la critique de l'ORB de Dominique Stich c'est le compte-rendu d'Eric Fluckiger (Fluckiger 2004) sur le dictionnaire de Stich qui semble fonctionner comme une critique par excellence : c'est à cette publication que se réfèrent des articles scientifiques (par ex., Elmiger 2012 : 92), l'article sur le francoprovençal sur Wikipedia – à mi-chemin entre l'argumentation scientifique et militante, puisque rédigée à la fois par les deux parties (« Pour une analyse scientifique critique de la graphie de Stich, voir le compte rendu d'Éric Fluckiger (2004) »<sup>185</sup> – retenons ici l'adjectif « scientifique »), et enfin, par conséquent, les blogs arpitans.

Le compte-rendu est construit sur l'opposition des « amateurs » (« l'amateur sera conquis », 312) et la communauté scientifique. On apprend ainsi que « La nomenclature a pâti des nombreuses entorses faites aux *principes élémentaires* de la lexicographie » (313) ; « La formule microstructurelle de Stich est *atypique et peu conforme* aux règles de la lexicographie moderne » (315), etc. Selon Fluckiger, Stich « distingue *artificiellement* » certains mots et « en sépare *indûment* d'autres » : la critique qui suppose qu'il existerait (ou pourrait exister), opposée à une telle classification « artificielle », une autre qui, elle, serait « naturelle » - et donc légitime. Il semble que celle-ci soit celle du GPRS et du FEW<sup>186</sup>, deux sources avec lesquelles les propositions de Stich sont régulièrement comparées.

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<sup>185</sup> [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite\\_note-CritiqueStich-32](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francoproven%C3%A7al#cite_note-CritiqueStich-32) (Consulté le 03.03.13)

<sup>186</sup> GPRS : *Glossaire des Patois de la Suisse Romande*, par L. Gauchat, J. Jeanjaquet, E. Tappolet, avec la collaboration d'E. Muret, Attinger, Neuchâtel et Paris, 1924 ss.

FEW : *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, par W. von Wartburg, Bâle, 1922 ss.

L'article n'en mentionne que des abréviations, alors que pour d'autres sources, moins connus, figurent des références complètes : ainsi une frontière est tracée entre « nous - ceux qui comprennent » et les « autres », des scientifiques et des « amateurs », - une frontière marquée aussi par une phrase écrite en latin (312).

Conçu dans une perspective dialectologique, le compte-rendu ne mentionne que de passage les aspects de l'entreprise de Stich qui sont fondamentaux pour les arpitanistes : la planification linguistique du francoprovençal/arpitan en général et l'élaboration de l'orthographe supra-dialectale en particulier. Ainsi, un doute quant à la légitimité d'une telle participation à une planification linguistique est exprimé en relation avec la création des néologismes : celle-ci nécessiterait « le concours d'instances représentatives du domaine linguistique concerné » (319). Fluckiger donne l'exemple de Lia Rumantscha dans les Grisons ; on peut se demander quelle instance pourrait prétendre avoir cette fonction dans le domaine francoprovençal. Qu'il s'agisse d'une orthographe supra-dialectale est explicitement mis de côté :

La problématique de la graphie supra-dialectale n'est évoquée ici que pour rappeler qu'il s'agit ... d'un *artefact* qui privilégie l'intercompréhension pan-francoprovençale au détriment de la description des spécificités phonétiques locales. (314)

En note de bas de page le chercheur fait référence aux « certaines réserves » sur « le bien-fondé d'une telle entreprise » émises par d'autres chercheurs. Sinon le démarche « étymologique » est critiquée non pas dans son principe, mais surtout dans la manière dont il est réalisé : « *faute d'avoir justement identifié certains morphèmes*, l'auteur en vient à créer la confusion » (315) ; il s'agit également d'un gommage de « toute l'ampleur diatopique » (317).

Ainsi en réalité bien moins qu'une critique de l'ORB et encore moins de l'idée même d'une orthographe supra-dialectale, le compte-rendu critique la mise-en-forme scientifique du dictionnaire, en laissant de côté des préoccupations des arpitanistes (la méthode lexicographique n'en faisant certainement pas partie) - ce qui ne leur empêche pas de le reprendre dans la polémique, en retenant son idée centrale, résumée dans la dernière phrase :

Abstraction faite de la question pendante du bien-fondé d'une koïnè francoprovençale, il nous paraît que la partie lexicographique de l'ouvrage est *dépourvue de toute valeur scientifique*. (319)



Bourg-en-Bresse (France), 22 septembre 2012. Photo N. Bichurina

### 3.2. Une « idée en l'air »

Le premier essai d'une orthographe arpitaine commune avait été proposé par Joseph Henriet, auteur du glottonyme « arpitan » et de l'idée d'une ethnie arpitaine, dans *La Grammatica della Lingua arpitana* en 1976. En mars 2013 dans un article publié dans une revue savoyarde en ligne, *La Voix des Allobroges*<sup>187</sup>, Henriet parle ainsi de l'opposition des linguistes à son livre :

Le grand anathème de la Trinité linguistique

Quand la Trinité linguistique - Tuailon, Schulé et Grassi – [...] a lu mon livre, depuis Toulouse, elle m'a lancé le grand anathème : « *Joseph Henriet n'est pas un linguiste et vous ne devez pas le suivre. Il n'y a que nous qui pouvons parler au nom de la Science et c'est nous que vous devez écouter : continuez à lutter pour la sauvegarde de tous les patois et du français.* » En se comportant ainsi, les trois trahirent leur déontologie et, en passant dans le domaine de la politique, ils révélèrent leur nature servile et certainement pas scientifique de linguistes au service de la culture des dominateurs et ennemis du peuple arpitan. (Ici italiques dans l'original).

<sup>187</sup> Henriet Joseph « Comment j'ai créé la koinè », <http://www.lavoixdesallobroges.org/la-voie/601-comment-jai-cree-la-koine-ou-la-langue-commune-arpitane-de-joseph-henriet> (01.03.2013).

A part l'usage ironique du vocabulaire religieux pour dénoncer les prétentions des linguistes - suggérant que les linguistes se prendraient pour Dieu et la Science avec une majuscule égalerait à une religion – on voit ici le comportement des linguistes représenté comme contraire aux règles scientifiques et conditionné par la politique : ce qui en fait des « ennemis du peuple arpitan ». S'il s'agit ici des événements datant des années 1970s, on peut se demander pourquoi c'est aujourd'hui, en 2013, qu'on voit apparaître ce type de discours.

Il paraît qu'il s'agit ici d'une « idée en l'air », qui a notamment été remise en question récemment dans des discussions arpitanistes, initiées et alimentées par leur « jeune génération » : par exemple, celles du groupe Facebook « Arpitania abada ! »<sup>188</sup>. En effet, il y apparaît que l'ennemi principal, responsable de l'état actuel (moribond) – et futur (probablement mort) - de la langue est le linguiste local. Dans l'argumentation arpitaniste, le terme « arpitan » apparaît comme réponse à l'ambiguïté du terme « francoprovençal » (laissant croire soit que c'est du provençal, soit qu'il s'agit d'un mélange) : ce nom-ci serait « catastrophique » pour la survie de la langue ; le terme « arpitan » serait, au contraire, non ambigu et permettant une identification de l'idiome comme langue à part entière, et pour cette raison le seul capable de la sauver. Dans ce contexte, en renversant la critique de l'arpitanisme, l'opposition des linguistes au terme « arpitan » est présentée comme conditionnée par des enjeux politiques. Ils sont opposés, d'un côté, aux locuteurs, et, de l'autre côté, aux autres chercheurs, leur comportement par rapport à leur objet d'étude, une découverte scientifique récente, étant non-scientifique :

... en science on a parfois aussi des appellations multiples pour des choses récemment découvertes, et les gens se contentent d'utiliser le terme qui leur plait, sans déclencher des *campagnes de calomnie* contre ceux qui ne font pas comme eux ... Là on a *clairement un sérieux problème de politique* avec le mot francoprovençal, le but est évident : empêcher que les *locuteurs* sortent de la logique technocratique dans laquelle on voudrait les enfermer pour qu'ils restent sagement *sous le contrôle des linguistes* (« Arpitania abada ! » du 9.11.2012).

Le compte-rendu de Fluckiger est aussi remis en question – plus précisément sa dernière phrase (citée plus haut). Citons trois extraits des commentaires (du 26.02.2013) :

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<sup>188</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/21904584384/>



[1] E.A. Voilà comment on utilise sa position de linguiste pour faire de la politique.

[2] E.A. Ils [les dialectologues] comprennent pas qu'ils ne sont pas propriétaires de la langue, et que nous avons besoin d'un code orthographique, peu importe si il ne colle pas à 100% à tous les dialectes de manière parfaite. [...] si seulement ils se contentaient de ne pas intervenir, mais non !!!!!

[3] A.F. Ils disent qu'ils veulent maintenir "pure" la langue et jouent sur les émotions des gens. En même temps, ils "patoisent" les mots français, l'attachent au folklore, et suivent un chemin qui mène à rien que la mort de la langue. [...] De toute façon; vu la position actuelle de notre langue (en forte baisse), je pense que notre génération ne doit pas/plus écouter ces gens là sur un sujet pareil.

On y trouve un motif récurrent des activités des linguistes autour de l'idiome vus comme de la folklorisation, catastrophique pour la langue : de manière similaire, par exemple, l'annuelle Fête internationale du francoprovençal est perçue comme « l'entèrrament de la lengoua »<sup>189</sup> (cf. Boyer 2012 : 81 sur la dénonciation occitaniste « des compensations dérisoires, une sorte d'« accompagnement thérapeutique » de la substitution, de l'ordre du folklore passéiste ou d'une célébration purement symbolique »).

En outre, à part le fait que, malgré l'apparence d'un dialogue (avec le texte du compte-rendu), il ne s'agit point ici de la même question, retenons qu'il n'appartiendrait pas aux linguistes de s'exprimer sur les questions d'orthographe, la question étant politique. En effet, la légitimité de la participation des chercheurs aux débats sur le nom de l'idiome et le système d'orthographe est régulièrement contestée, par exemple :

Tuailon se mêle de politique alors qu'il *n'est que linguiste*. [...] Les jacobins malheureusement se trouvent aussi parmi les linguistes ou les dialectologues, comme à Neuchâtel, et ce sont *évidemment nos ennemis*.

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<sup>189</sup> « L'enterrement de la langue ». Cf. dans « Arpitania abada ! » la discussion du 24 janvier 2013 :

Inventons des blagues sur les linguistes et les dialectologues !

En voilà une : "Quelle est la différence entre un dialectologue et un taxidermiste ? - Le dialectologue il n'empaille que la langue." [...]

Quelle est la différence entre les conquistadores et les linguistes ?

- Il n'y en a pas, une fois qu'ils t'ont ébloui avec la verroterie de leurs graphies phonétiques, qu'ils te l'ont échangé contre l'or de ton savoir, ta culture est ruinée et eux sont au sommet de leur carrière !

<http://arpitania.forumactif.com/t863-le-mot-arpitan-d-apres-gaston-tuailon> (publié le 7.01.2008).

Autrement dit, les responsabilités des linguistes se limiteraient à l'étude de la variation linguistique, la planification linguistique appartenant aux locuteurs (représentés par les militants). On peut le mettre en parallèle avec la rédaction de la version arpitanne de Wikipedia (ou des articles sur l'arpitan en d'autres langues sur ce même site), source de connaissance parascientifique concurrente à la connaissance scientifique.

Dans une conversation informelle pour se référer aux dialectologues un arpitaniste valdôtain utilise la métaphore d'une *coupole* en empruntant ainsi le terme du langage criminel, utilisé normalement par rapport à la mafia pour en désigner l'organe suprême de direction et de coordination.

Simultanément on peut évoquer la conclusion ironique d'un article paru dans le quotidien « Lausanne 24 heures » où son auteur, signé AL. P., parle ainsi du slogan de l'ACA « Arpitania abada » :

En patois, abada désigne un pré où le bétail peut brouter sans surveillance. Sur internet, il équivaut désormais à «liberté».<sup>190</sup>

Curieusement, on y retrouve la même idée, attribuée dans le discours arpitaniste aux linguistes, où les arpitanistes, dans leur Arpitania (donc, *pâturages* – sémantique mentionnée également dans l'article cité) seraient sortis du contrôle, ou de la « surveillance », des bergers, à savoir (apparemment) des linguistes.

### Conclusion

Au moment où les sciences du langage révisent le rôle du linguiste dans l'aménagement linguistique, ce rôle se trouve contesté au sein des communautés respectives. Le linguiste se voit ennemi de son objet d'étude, accusé à la fois de l'état moribond de la langue en question et de sa mort inévitable (si on le laisse faire). Remarquons que souvent les linguistes, de leur côté, perçoivent une telle vision bien

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<sup>190</sup> AL. P. « «Nos ancêtres les Arpitans» font un tabac sur internet », 24 Heures, Lausanne, 2 mai 2009, p. 30. Disponible sur Arpitania.eu.

minoritaire comme un « dérive sectaire » et les travaux des chercheurs qui servent à légitimer cette approche comme non scientifiques.

Ce conflit peut difficilement être expliqué par la position même des linguistes, à la fois parce que souvent le dialogue n'est qu'apparent, et que cette position se diffère largement selon le cas des idiomes. Ainsi dans les cas étudiés, d'un côté, la recherche occitane suppose comme son impératif de base l'engagement du chercheur, tandis que la recherche francoprovençale privilégie la distance par rapport à la langue comme garante d'objectivité. Conformément à ce positionnement, si les débats se passent sur le même terrain dans le cas occitan (les articles sur les sites Internet des associations, les manifestes), ce n'est pas le cas pour le francoprovençal, où les chercheurs se limitent à des revues scientifiques et les militants utilisent les réseaux sociaux et les blogs.

De l'autre côté, alors que la discussion se nourrit des mêmes éléments dans les deux cas (questions du nom, d'orthographe et, dans une moindre mesure, d'identité), la sociolinguistique occitaniste est, par exemple, typiquement associée à la graphie unique promue par l'IEO dont la majorité des chercheurs sont membres (même s'il est vrai que toute autre graphie, dont la graphie provençale est également acceptée) ; les linguistes francoprovençalistes se montrent contre une orthographe unique supra-dialectale (contre la proposition concrète existante, ainsi que, parfois, plus généralement contre l'idée même d'une telle graphie).

Cependant dans les deux cas les linguistes et les militants se contestent la légitimité de la participation à la planification linguistique : à l'époque où l'information est abondante, où chacun peut produire le savoir sur la langue et où les rôles sociaux deviennent flous.

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## TROISIÈME PARTIE. Le francoprovençal comme pratique

### sociale

#### I. La « mort » des langues et les « néo-locuteurs » : le cas de « l'arpitan »<sup>191</sup>

##### Introduction

Il y a des langues que les chercheurs avaient condamné à « mort », et qui ont pourtant continué à avoir des locuteurs : toujours « les derniers », depuis des décennies ou des siècles. Tel est le cas du francoprovençal en Suisse, dont L. Favrat écrivait en 1866 :

nos patois seront bientôt de l'histoire : ils se modifient et s'altèrent de plus en plus sous l'influence du français qui envahit peu à peu les campagnes. Et cela est si vrai que, dans mainte localité, les hommes qui savent encore parler le pur et franc patois de leurs pères, sont en général des vieillards, tandis que la jeune génération, tout en comprenant l'ancien idiome, ne parle plus guère que le français (Favrat 1866 : VI).

Selon les études dialectologiques, dans des villes protestantes de la Suisse romande comme Lausanne, Genève et Neuchâtel l'idiome local disparaît dès la première moitié du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle (Kristol [1999] 2013). Pour ce qui est du milieu rural :

Dans le canton de Neuchâtel, c'est en 1904 que les enquêteurs des *Tableaux phonétiques* ont pu interroger les derniers dialectophones septua- et octogénaires. La campagne genevoise [...] a conservé ses dialectes au-delà de la première guerre mondiale ; les derniers dialectophones genevois ont disparu dans les années 1930 (ibid.)<sup>192</sup>.

Cependant, à ce début du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle on trouve encore dans ces cantons ceux qui se veulent « locuteurs » de la langue francoprovençale supposée « morte ».

Nous proposons donc d'explorer des visions concurrentes de légitimité de locuteurs dans le cas d'une langue minoritaire après la substitution linguistique. Nous nous concentrerons sur le cas de la Suisse, et notamment sur les cantons de Vaud et de Genève

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<sup>191</sup> Paru dans : Romain Colonna (ed.), *Les locuteurs et les langues : pouvoirs, non-pouvoirs, contre-pouvoirs*, Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2014. 243 – 253.

<sup>192</sup> Dans les cantons catholiques et plus agricoles, le Valais et le Fribourg, la substitution linguistique est plus récente, avec un cas exceptionnel de la commune d'Evolène dans le Valais où l'idiome local est encore aujourd'hui transmis aux enfants (Matthey 2012).

où l'idiome local est supposé éteint ; cependant, s'agissant d'une langue transfrontalière entre la Suisse, la France et l'Italie, plusieurs problématiques que nous aborderons concernent tout l'espace linguistique francoprovençal. Nous nous appuyons sur nos données de terrain recueillies dans les cantons de Vaud et de Genève entre septembre 2012 et juillet 2013, ainsi qu'en France et en Italie (observation participante des rencontres des associations œuvrant pour le francoprovençal, entretiens oraux et écrits avec leurs membres, analyse des blogs militants sur Internet).<sup>193</sup>

Puisque le terme « locuteur » semble désigner celui qui parle, nous verrons d'abord par qui et dans quelles situations le francoprovençal est parlé. Nous étudierons ensuite comment les catégories de « bons locuteurs » et de « néo-locuteurs » sont construites dans différents discours concurrents.

## 1. Mort ou miracle ? Les pratiques linguistiques actuelles

Dans le canton de Vaud, vu les pronostics de mort déjà anciens, il est souvent affirmé que ce serait un « miracle » que le vaudois<sup>194</sup> soit « encore parlé » :

*Langue survivante, dont on s'étonne qu'elle se pratique encore par une petite tribu d'irréductibles, sa musique étant d'essence latine, elle chante au plus près de la mémoire d'un peuple qui l'ignore* (Pidoux 2006 : s.p. Nous soulignons)

Selon un locuteur de Lausanne (MB 1975)<sup>195</sup>, le vaudois est

[une langue] qui est *morte* / dans la vie de tous les jours dans les pays où elle était parlée, mais qui est une langue *vivante* dans *certaines circonstances* chez un *nombre restreint* de personnes.

S'il est vrai que l'idiome est encore parlé, ce côté « parler » est limité à des situations bien particulières que nous allons étudier. Parmi ceux qui s'affirment

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<sup>193</sup> L'étude de terrain a pu être effectuée grâce à la bourse de recherche de la Confédération suisse (stage de recherche à l'Université de Lausanne).

<sup>194</sup> Pour nommer l'idiome nous utilisons les termes employés par les personnes dont il s'agit, tout comme plus généralement nous utilisons ici les termes émiques (dont « patoisants », « néo-locuteurs » etc.).

<sup>195</sup> Nous indiquons les initiales fictives des informateurs et l'année (exacte ou approximative) de naissance. Les italiques dans les exemples sont de notre fait.

locuteurs, deux catégories sont distinguées par ces locuteurs mêmes : « les patoisants » et « les néo-locuteurs ».

### 1.1. Les patoisants

Les groupes patoisants sont majoritairement formés de retraités, surtout parmi les agriculteurs ou les enseignants issus du milieu rural ou de petites villes. D'habitude, ils ont entendu leurs grands-parents parler patois, mais n'ont commencé à le parler eux-mêmes qu'à la retraite, lorsqu'ils se sont retrouvés dans un nouveau rôle social des « mainteneurs »<sup>196</sup> du patois.

Les patoisants, dans leur majorité, ne parlent pas patois en dehors de leurs rencontres entre eux. Simultanément, le trait caractéristique de ces rencontres est l'usage du français comme langue de communication : le discours *sur* le patois y est central, mais il n'est pas *en* patois. La forme des énoncés subvertit alors leur sens, le signifiant niant le signifié. Ainsi, par exemple, lors de l'Assemblée de la Fédération Internationale des Locuteurs du Francoprovençal, Savoyard ou Franc-Comtois (Lausanne, le 24.11.2012) il est annoncé que l'objectif de la Fédération est de « parler et faire parler la langue de nos ancêtres dans nos régions respectives » ; « Le patois a été et restera la langue qui unit notre Fédération » – mais les affirmations que l'on parlerait le patois sont mises en doute par le fait d'être prononcées en français.

Lors de ce type de rencontres les alternances des tours de parole sont perçues comme celles qui pourraient donner lieu à une alternance codique ; pourtant celle-ci n'arrive jamais. Les débuts des tours de parole :

J'aimerais bien parler en patois, mais ce serait trop difficile !

On est trop pressé pour que je parle en patois.

(Assemblée de l'Association vaudoise des amis de patois, le 10/11/2012)

montrent qu'il n'est pas vraiment considéré comme « normal » de parler français, mais tout le monde le fait. L'usage du patois se limite presque à la *lecture* des histoires préparées d'avance.

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<sup>196</sup> Le « mainteneur » est d'ailleurs un titre officiel : ainsi la nomination des mainteneurs qui recevaient une insigne sous forme de l'edelweiss a été « l'acte principal de la Fête [internationale des patois] » en Suisse en été 2013 (selon son comité d'organisation).

## 1.2. Les néo-locuteurs

À part ces groupes dits patoisants on trouve un autre groupe de locuteurs, dits néo-locuteurs. Parmi ceux-ci le groupe le plus en vue est celui des arpitans<sup>197</sup>. L'Alliance culturelle arpitanne (ACA), créée à Lausanne en 2004, rassemble des membres issus de tous les trois pays de la zone linguistique francoprovençale. Par opposition aux patoisants, ce sont majoritairement des travailleurs intellectuels urbains, âgés d'entre 25 et 45 ans. Ils appellent la langue *arpitan*<sup>198</sup>, promeuvent une orthographe supra-dialectale, dite *ORB* (*orthographe de référence B*), et, au niveau des pratiques, ont tendance à utiliser l'arpitan à côté du français dans leurs interactions.

Au moment où l'idée de la « langue arpitanne » a été énoncée dans la Vallée d'Aoste dans les années 1970 (terme inventé par le militant indépendantiste José Henriët ; sur les enjeux de cette invention voir aussi Bichurina, à paraître), il s'agissait là-bas de la langue véhiculaire et première pour une partie considérable de population. Cette langue était alors utilisée comme instrument ou symbole (marqueur de différence « ethnique ») dans une lutte politique : la fusion des idéologies nationalistes, basée sur la langue arpitanne, et marxiste servait à argumenter la légitimité de l'indépendance de la région transfrontalière dénommée Arpitanie, dont la Vallée d'Aoste ferait partie. Par contraste, au début des années 2000 le centre d'activités autour de l'arpitan se déplace géographiquement vers la Suisse et la France où l'idiome n'est plus parlé que par un groupe extrêmement restreint de population et de la manière que l'on vient de voir. Il nous paraît que dès lors la langue devient un enjeu en soi : ce sont les moyens politiques<sup>199</sup> qui sont instrumentalisés pour une récupération culturelle, autour d'une langue non héritée, en train de disparaître<sup>200</sup>.

En général, l'usage de l'arpitan dans la communication interne (transfrontalière) des Arpitans est encouragé par la présence des Valdôtains qui le parlent comme langue

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<sup>197</sup> D'habitude on se réfère aux promoteurs de l'arpitan comme aux arpitans, même si dans l'idéologie arpitaniste « Arpitan » peut désigner tout habitant de l'espace transfrontalier dénommé Arpitanie.

<sup>198</sup> Le nom vient de la racine alp-/arp- (comme dans « Alpes ») désignant dans l'idiome « le pâturage de montagne ».

<sup>199</sup> Cf., par exemple, la Pétition pour la reconnaissance de l'arpitan en Suisse : [http://www.avaaz.org/fr/petition/La\\_reconnaissance\\_par\\_les\\_autorites\\_suissees\\_de\\_larpitan\\_en\\_tant\\_que\\_langue\\_regionale](http://www.avaaz.org/fr/petition/La_reconnaissance_par_les_autorites_suissees_de_larpitan_en_tant_que_langue_regionale) [consulté le 05/05/14].

<sup>200</sup> En Suisse, en l'occurrence, le côté politique est d'autant plus impertinent en soi que la zone francoprovençale correspond au territoire de la Suisse romande (à part Jura), où les cantons qui le constituent possèdent déjà une autonomie très importante.



maternelle. En dehors de cette communication transfrontalière, et en dehors de la communication exclusivement arpitaniste, on trouve également des initiatives plus localisées. Nous allons en étudier deux en Suisse : un groupe de conversation en vaudois à Lausanne et les prévisions météorologiques arpitanes à Genève.

Il existe à Lausanne un petit groupe animé par une Arpitane et rassemblant d'autres néo-locuteurs, qui a pour objectif de parler vaudois. Cette fois il s'agit effectivement de parler : les conversations se passent presque exclusivement en vaudois. La communication a pourtant une particularité : l'usage régulier des dictionnaires pour vérifier les mots. Cette pratique peut relever d'une insécurité linguistique ou/et d'un perfectionnisme, mais, plus important encore, elle suggère une vision particulière de l'usage de la langue en communication : il s'agit d'une curiosité plus que d'une pratique, d'un désir de savourer les mots plus que de parler. Un membre du groupe (MB 1975) parle du « *côté cabinet de curiosité* » par rapport aux usages de la langue. Les références à une pratique linguistique ou à une langue artificielle sont aussi présentes dans le discours du groupe : il s'agit d'une langue « *littéraire* », « *un peu académique* », on trouve des comparaisons avec *l'esperanto*, le *sanscrit*, *l'indoeuropéen reconstitué* ou encore le *latin*.

Une autre initiative est celle d'un prévisionniste travaillant à la télévision suisse à Genève (des origines valaisanne et savoyarde), qui, en mars 2013, décide de faire les prévisions météo en arpitan / francoprovençal (les deux noms sont alors employés)<sup>201</sup>. Outre qu'il s'agit de son domaine professionnel, la météo est vue comme importante puisqu'elle « crée le lien social » : une explication qui nous a été donnée par le météorologue et qui révèle la vision de la langue comme pratique sociale. Quoique cette vision puisse paraître évidente, elle n'est pourtant pas répandue parmi d'autres types de locuteurs.

Par ailleurs, le météorologue explique :

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<sup>201</sup> Blog en partenariat avec la Tribune de Genève : <http://meteo-en-patois.blog.tdg.ch/> [consulté le 05/05/14]. Une initiative individuelle, elle est initialement en dehors de toute affiliation, qu'elle soit arpitanne, patoisante ou autre. Ainsi l'usage de nom de la langue indexicalise d'habitude l'appartenance à un des mouvements. Or lorsqu'en mars 2013 le prévisionniste explique son initiative, il utilise les noms « franco-provençal », « patois », « arpitan » et parle des « langues régionales savoyarde, valaisanne, vaudoise, neuchâteloise, fribourgeoise, genevoise, mais aussi celles des régions d'Aoste, du Dauphiné, de Lyon, du Forez, de Franche-Comté et du Beaujolais ». Cependant cette initiative devient très vite appropriée par les arpitanes (à travers notamment leurs transcriptions des textes de météo en ORB et leur promotion) et le prévisionniste figure désormais parmi les représentants de l'ACA.

Il m'a semblé nécessaire de pouvoir lire des textes en francoprovençal qui nous *parlent de ce qui se passe aujourd'hui*, mais qui "*animent*" des mots ou des expressions de nos anciens. Le temps, la météo, voilà un thème que nous avons en commun avec la génération francoprovençale qui nous a précédés, et qui restera un thème commun avec les générations suivantes.

Enfin, on dirait qu'ici, contrairement aux pratiques des autres locuteurs, ce qui se dit dans la langue est au moins aussi important que le fait que ce soit dit dans cette langue – pourtant le prévisionniste affirme également :

Le but du bulletin n'est pas de donner une information météorologique fiable, bien que la prévision donnera le temps le plus probable que l'on peut avoir dans ces régions. Le but du bulletin est d'enseigner le francoprovençal, d'avoir *un texte à partager...*

## 2. Les néo-locuteurs et les patoisants : une coopération impossible

La coopération entre les deux groupes des locuteurs est vue comme (presque) impossible des deux côtés. Dans des groupes patoisants l'usage de la langue locale est explicitement annoncé comme souhaitable – et pourtant, ne l'est pas toujours en pratique, en tout cas, pas de toute variante. Donnons un exemple de nos observations : un participant arpitan d'une assemblée de l'Association vaudoise des amis de patois a été le premier à ne pas parler le français (mais l'arpitan) ; or sa présentation de cinq minutes a été suivie par la réponse suivante du président :

J'ai beaucoup apprécié la présentation en valaisan, j'en ai compris à peu près la moitié et *pour les raisons de clarté* je demanderais de refaire la même chose en français.

Une des explications serait de dire que les patoisants se renferment sur le patois de leur propre localité et prennent celui des voisins pour un parler incompréhensible. Cependant cette réaction peut s'expliquer par une autre attitude : selon les patoisants, les néo-locuteurs (Arpitans, en particulier) seraient de faux locuteurs qui parleraient une langue « artificielle » : ils mentionnent des différences à tous les niveaux du système linguistique (phonétique et prosodique, morphosyntaxique et lexique). Cette vision

implique que la langue va mourir avec les patoisants : puisque les nouveaux locuteurs ne sont pas des locuteurs, la transmission intergénérationnelle serait impossible.

Simultanément souvent le contact avec la langue des arpitans se fait à travers la lecture de leurs textes, écrits dans l'orthographe supra-dialectale ORB. Or, la critique de la langue arpitane provient d'une lecture de l'ORB lettre par lettre, à l'instar des graphies patoisantes et contrairement aux règles (pas très bien définies) de l'ORB : le résultat d'une telle lecture ne correspond effectivement à aucune prononciation existante. Ainsi, par exemple, le lien à une page en ORB sur le site des patoisants vaudois provoque les accusations comme quoi l'usage du « jargon arpitan » aurait « trahi les patoisants ». Le mot « jargon » témoigne du fait que l'usage d'une autre graphie est interprété comme l'usage d'une autre variante linguistique (avec des connotations péjoratives).

De même, on voit une certaine hostilité à l'égard du blog météo de la part des patoisants de Genève. Le météorologue même l'explique par un lien identitaire fort avec la langue qui empêche les patoisants d'accepter quelqu'un sur « leur » territoire. De son côté, il remarque une ambiguïté de leur position : ils avaient quitté le village pour s'installer en ville, sont passés au français, et ce n'est qu'à la retraite qu'ils se sont intéressés au patois, tout en restant à Genève.

Certains Arpitans critiquent cette ambiguïté d'une manière plus radicale : la légitimité de la prise en compte des patoisants dans la politique des langues régionales (en l'occurrence, en France) est mise en doute, à cause justement du manque de transmission, voire de pratique linguistique :

NV 1973 : C'est bien tout le paradoxe de vouloir interroger ces groupes [patoisants] à propos d'une politique régionale de revitalisation, on peut se demander quelle légitimité a leur parole sur le sujet quand eux-mêmes ayant toutes les clés en main n'ont rien fait pour.

La question ici est donc celle de l'autorité linguistique et des bases sur lesquelles elle est fondée : la continuité vs la pratique linguistique. Le fait que l'idiome dont les locuteurs se disputent la légitimité, n'est presque plus parlé, ne nous paraît pas un paradoxe, mais bien la condition fondamentale pour ce type de conflit. Ainsi la différence des attitudes à l'égard des néo-locuteurs d'un côté en Suisse et en France, et de l'autre côté en Italie (où, d'ailleurs, le terme est absent) est frappante : l'anthropologue Christiane

Dunoyer constate qu'en Vallée d'Aoste, où le francoprovençal est encore largement parlé, on ne trouve aucune hostilité vis-à-vis des nouveaux locuteurs (Dunoyer 2010 : 26-30). De même :

personne ne nous a dit qu'un patoisant serait quelqu'un qui a le patois comme langue maternelle [...]. D'après nos informateurs, tout le monde peut donc devenir patoisant dès qu'il apprend les bases de la langue (op. cit. : 52-53).

On peut faire une hypothèse que c'est lorsque d'une pratique communicative la langue devient essentiellement un symbole que l'hostilité apparaît. En Vallée d'Aoste l'apprentissage peut être légitimé, dans une certaine mesure, par un besoin pratique : même si tout le monde sait parler italien, certains immigrés nous ont dit qu'ils sentaient le besoin d'apprendre le patois pour devenir membres de la communauté et accéder aux réseaux locaux – par exemple, celui du commerce dans le cas d'un commerçant milanais. Par contre, dans des milieux complètement francophones comme celui de Vaud ou de Genève l'apprentissage du parler local est toujours lié à une prétention identitaire, une recherche des racines. S'affirmer en tant que locuteur est prétendre être membre légitime d'un groupe ; or la légitimité a été refusée aux néo-locuteurs en Suisse, tout comme en France, deux fois : lorsqu'ils étaient petits et que leurs grands-parents n'ont pas voulu leur transmettre l'idiome local, et aujourd'hui, lorsqu'ils l'ont appris autrement. Ce refus doit s'expliquer par les représentations du lien de la langue avec la société agro-pastorale et le passé dont les néo-locuteurs n'ont pas fait partie. En tant qu'enfants ils étaient exclus de ce groupe au profit de leur promotion sociale ; aujourd'hui pour les patoisants la langue fonctionne comme base d'un nouveau rôle social (de « mainteneur du patois ») retrouvé à la retraite, qui n'a de valeur qu'à condition d'exclusivité.

Le rattachement de la langue au passé est une des raisons principales pour lesquelles la coopération avec les patoisants est également vue comme problématique par les arpitans :

JL 1971 : Le dilemme est le suivant : les membres de l'association locale de ma commune parlent "*patois*" et souhaitent le "*maintenir*". Moi, j'ai appris l'*arpitan*, dans sa variante bagnarde, et souhaite le "*revitaliser*".

### 3. Les néo-locuteurs et les linguistes: conflit métadiscursif

La problématique des « néo-locuteurs » n'est pas spécifique au contexte francoprovençal (on pensera, par exemple, aux *néo-bretonnants* ou aux *euskaldunberri*, « nouveaux locuteurs basques »), comme ne l'est évidemment pas celle de la « mort » de langue. Cependant dans ce contexte c'est aujourd'hui qu'on la voit émerger, d'une manière conflictuelle.

Les deux concepts sont empruntés au discours des linguistes et se trouvent contestés par les arpitans :

NV 1973 : le terme *néo-locuteur* c'est un mot carrément *diabolique* !!! Pas vraiment locuteurs, mais pas vraiment exclus de la catégorie non plus, la différenciation permet tout simplement de *les éliminer des études*, comme on élimine *des points gênants dans une série de mesures* parce qu'ils *contredisent la théorie* et qu'on n'a pas envie d'en élaborer une plus complète. [...] Et en l'occurrence ici, la théorie dit depuis 100 ans que le francoprovençal va disparaître rapidement ("la *prophétie*").

EA : Comment est-ce qu'un linguiste appelle un jeune qui se met à apprendre et parler la langue de ses grand-parents ?

- UN MÉCRÉANT !!! Enfin non, un *militant* !!! Enfin non, [prendre une bouche pincée] un *néo-locuteur*... Enfin bref, un mec qui *n'est pas censé exister* et qui n'est là que pour t'emmerder et essayer de niquer la réalisation DE LA PROPHÉTIE !!!! (« Arpitanian abada ! », groupe Facebook, 24/01/2013)

L'usage ironique du lexique religieux (*prophétie*, *mécréant*, peut-être *diabolique*, renvoyant à la malédiction) juxtapose une sorte de pseudoscience francoprovençale et la science telle qu'elle devrait être, ce qui permet de remettre en doute l'autorité des chercheurs. Ce type de discours révèle le conflit majeur des arpitans avec des linguistes. Il s'agit de négocier le rôle des différents acteurs sociaux (linguistes, patoisants, néo-locuteurs) dans la politique linguistique relative au francoprovençal : au moment où celle-ci devient possible grâce au discours désormais dominant au niveau supranational (européen), favorisant la diversité linguistique. Encore une fois il est ici question de l'autorité : l'autorité de se prononcer sur les dialectes a toujours appartenu aux dialectologues, la seule source du savoir légitime quant à leurs limites ou vitalité. Aujourd'hui les acteurs associatifs contestent cette autorité, réduisant le domaine de

compétence des chercheurs à la science et laissant celui de l'action politique à eux-mêmes. L'apparition des technologies de communications modernes ont rendu cette contestation possible : le savoir sur la langue produit par les arpisans est produit surtout sur Internet, la source qui rentre en concurrence avec les livres linguistiques (cf. aussi Bichurina 2013).

On remarque un paradoxe : comme nous allons le voir, d'un côté, au niveau discursif le rôle des linguistes est contesté ; de l'autre côté, l'abondance du discours sur les linguistes leur confère un pouvoir immense. Ainsi c'est le linguiste qui formerait les attitudes des locuteurs, qui influencerait la situation linguistique, c'est de lui que dépendrait finalement la vie ou la mort des langues.

Le refus des linguistes de reconnaître les néo-locuteurs acquiert une dimension politique :

NV 1973 : l'habile terme de « néo-locuteur » masque justement une manière d'exclure des études ceux que l'ont estime *politiquement impropre* à rentrer dans la catégorie de "ceux qui parlent la langue". Il y a les *bons locuteurs*, patoisants de naissance, et les *mauvais locuteurs, actifs politiquement* : les néo-locuteurs. Quand bien même le *niveau de maîtrise* de la langue d'un néo-locuteur pourrait dépasser celui d'un patoisant de naissance...

Voilà comment de leur côté les linguistes [...] instrumentalisent leur position à des *fins politiques* dans le sujet des langues régionales.

Le linguiste est perçu comme agent de l'État – français initialement, le modèle français étant ensuite importé en Suisse romande. En tant que tel, il se trouve en nécessité de faire disparaître les « dialectes » au profit d'une langue nationale (la « prophétie »), tout en recueillant suffisamment de données pour travailler sur les « dialectes » une fois qu'ils auraient disparu.

Dans l'exemple cité il est question de la dichotomie « bons locuteurs » vs « mauvais locuteurs ». En effet, cette dichotomie a toujours existé dans les recherches dialectologiques : les « bons locuteurs » étaient surtout des personnes âgées, vivant dans les lieux ruraux de préférence isolés, y ayant vécu toute leur vie avec le minimum de contacts avec le monde extérieur, qui ont ainsi conservé leur idiome intact (cf. NORM : « non mobile, older, rural males », Chambers & Trudgill 1998 : 29). Les locuteurs urbains et mobiles – et d'autant plus ceux qui n'ont appris l'idiome que tardivement et souvent en

autodidactes, comme les arpitans – seraient des locuteurs non authentiques, et donc « mauvais » pour recueillir des données sur la langue. En l’occurrence, les dialectologues suisses travaillant sur le francoprovençal dans les conversations informelles se réfèrent à l’arpitan comme à une langue « artificielle », « langue des fantaisies », et à un standard supra-dialectal pour les parlers qui n’avaient jamais représenté d’unité linguistique (avant de disparaître) comme à un « anachronisme ». Par contraste, il appartiendrait aux linguistes d’étudier des langues « réelles », celles des « derniers locuteurs » dont la majorité sont déjà morts : ainsi, par exemple, le travail actuel sur le Glossaire des patois de la Suisse romande est effectué à la base des données recueillies entre 1900 et 1910, et complétées entre 1911 et 1924.

Pourtant, dans le discours arpitan la différence entre les « bons » et les « mauvais » locuteurs aurait une autre nature : politique (*politiquement impropre, actifs politiquement, fins politiques*). Ce transfert du débat du côté linguistique (langue « artificielle » à cause du manque de continuité) au côté politique (langue de l’action politique) permet de rendre les pratiques linguistiques politiquement légitimes, lorsque leur légitimité linguistique est contestée. Les Arpitans empruntent le discours sur les « langues en danger », en faisant appel aux idées actuellement largement répandues de la diversité culturelle et de la biodiversité, avec les présupposés d’une obligation morale qui y sont liés (cf. Duchêne & Heller 2007 ; Cameron 2007).

Par ailleurs, il s’agit pour eux de contester la mort de langue à laquelle les activités des linguistes mèneraient :

AF : Ils [les linguistes] disent qu’ils veulent *maintenir "pure" la langue* et *jouent sur les émotions* des gens. En même temps, ils [...] *l’attachent au folklore*, et suivent *un chemin qui mène à rien que la mort de la langue*. [...] De toute façon, vu la position actuelle de notre langue (en forte baisse), je pense que notre génération ne doit pas/plus écouter ces gens là sur un sujet pareil (« Arpitania abada ! », groupe Facebook, 26.02.2013).

Ici le souhait de « maintenir "pure" la langue » se réfère implicitement aux reproches de l’« artificialité » de l’arpitan. On voit donc l’apparence d’un paradoxe : les linguistes « jouent sur les émotions des gens » par rapport à la perte de la langue, alors qu’en réalité ce seraient eux les responsables de sa mort envisagée. Au contraire, pour les Arpitans il s’agit d’une langue d’avenir : lorsque les parlers locaux auront disparu, la

langue arpitaine subsistera sous une forme unifiée, avec son nom, son standard orthographique, son contenu identitaire – tout ce qu’un idiome doit avoir pour devenir « langue », digne d’être reconnue par les pouvoirs publics.

## Conclusion

En 1914 le dialectologue suisse L. Gauchat écrivait :

la Suisse romande a eu une fois une langue à elle, telle qu’elle n’existe nulle part ailleurs. Cette langue, qui était vraiment de chez nous, la Suisse est en train de la perdre (Gauchat 1914 : 4).

Pour les dialectologues c’est le début d’une grande étude sur le francoprovençal, langue vue comme déjà disparue dans la plupart des territoires en Suisse : le travail qui continue jusqu’à ce jour à partir des données recueillies auprès des « derniers locuteurs » au début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Et pourtant, aujourd’hui, un siècle plus tard, différents groupes se disputent le droit d’en être considérés comme locuteurs.

L’incohérence est due aux interprétations différentes, d’un côté, de ce qu’est une langue morte et jusqu’à quel degré des différences structurelles et/ou de continuité historique il s’agit toujours de la même langue ; de l’autre côté, de ce qu’est un locuteur, et si l’on peut l’être sans utiliser l’idiome comme moyen de communication. C’est sur la base de ces questions que l’on voit actuellement émerger un conflit des néo-locuteurs, d’un côté, avec les patoisants, et de l’autre, avec les linguistes.

Le discours sur cette langue est structuré par les dichotomies classiques : langue morte – vivante ; naturelle – artificielle ; réelle – rêvée ; locuteur natif – néo-locuteur ; bon locuteur – mauvais locuteur ; etc. Ainsi, toute langue vivante change, mais ici le changement est vu comme la mort de la langue toute entière, et pas seulement des usages qu’en font les personnes aujourd’hui âgées. La position concurrente veut que, puisque cet idiome va mourir, c’est celui des néo-locuteurs qui deviendra dans l’avenir la seule et donc la vraie langue.

De même, la catégorie discursive du « locuteur » est dissociée de la langue comme pratique sociale. Les locuteurs sont vus comme possesseurs de la langue comme système abstrait, en dehors de ce qu’ils en font. Ainsi, au niveau des pratiques linguistiques, les



« bons locuteurs » ne sont pas vraiment locuteurs, dans le sens où ils n'utilisent pas l'idiome pour communiquer, tandis que les « mauvais locuteurs » sont locuteurs. Simultanément, même pour ces derniers il s'agit parfois de parler pour parler, voire utiliser la langue pour utiliser la langue. Dans ce sens les pratiques linguistiques sont accompagnées d'un sentiment d'artificialité.

Enfin, une telle catégorisation sert à négocier qui – des patoisants, des néo-locuteurs ou des linguistes – aura le droit de se prononcer sur la langue et de participer à la politique linguistique : au moment où la diffusion du discours sur la diversité linguistique et les langues en danger rend une action politique possible.

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## **II. Le francoprovençal entre la France, la Suisse et l'Italie : langue diffuse, langue focalisée et enjeux de normalisation<sup>202</sup>**

### **Introduction. Du « type idiomatique » à la « langue »**

Existe-t-il une unité francoprovençale (linguistique, culturelle, identitaire) au-delà de l'unité structurelle de la langue ? Les activités autour du francoprovençal (FP) en ce début du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle semblent partir du présupposé que la réponse à cette question serait positive. En effet, au cours de la seconde moitié du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle, à partir des années 1970, le « type idiomatique FP », identifié un siècle auparavant par Ascoli, s'est transformé, dans les représentations des linguistes et des locuteurs, en ce qu'on appelle une « langue ». Il est devenu ainsi une des dernières-nées des langues romanes : non pas du point de vue

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« ontologique », mais en tant que partie nommée du continuum linguistique, comme objet d'études, de discours et de politique. Au début des années 2000 le discours sur la nécessité de préserver la « diversité linguistique » et le danger de « la mort des langues », désormais dominant dans le monde occidental, vient légitimer cette « langue FP ». Cela se traduit en politiques régionales, nationales et supranationales (européennes) qui vont fournir un cadre législatif et institutionnel aux activités réalisées autour du FP. L'existence d'une unité structurelle démontrée par les dialectologues suppose alors l'existence d'une communauté linguistique (voire culturelle, voire potentiellement politique) ; cela suppose en pratique des échanges transfrontaliers pour cette communauté partagée entre trois Etats, avec les Fêtes des patois, le Conseil international du FP et autres types de coopération visant l'ensemble du domaine. Cependant, en 2015, y a-t-il effectivement *une* communauté linguistique dans l'espace FP ?

Dans cet article nous essayerons de montrer que l'espace FP comprend deux types de situations linguistiques très différentes, que nos données de terrain nous ont amenée à distinguer. En empruntant les termes de Le Page et Tabouret-Keller (1985), nous appelons l'une des situations « diffuse » et l'autre « focalisée ». La première, « diffuse », est typique des régions de montagne des trois pays, au « centre » du domaine, où le FP est parlé au quotidien, et où les limites entre les « langues » nommées sont floues, tout comme l'idée d'un « bon patois ». La seconde, « focalisée », est typique des zones « périphériques », moins élevées, des grandes villes, des grandes industries, d'un grand nombre d'immigrés, où, puisque le FP n'y est plus parlé au quotidien, que la plupart de ceux qui y incarnaient la légitimité de ses usages sont morts, que le nombre des textes qui nous sont accessibles est restreint (et qu'il s'agit souvent d'une langue écrite), il est possible d'avoir la vision d'un système clos (comme ce serait le cas du latin de Cicéron). Il est possible d'y prescrire des normes, et ensuite de les suivre, vérifiant ce qu'on va dire ou écrire dans des dictionnaires et livres de grammaire. Ainsi « la langue » (telle qu'elle est vue selon les idéologies politiques et scientifiques des Etats-nations modernes) naît lorsque – et parce que – les pratiques linguistiques meurent.

D'un point de vue épistémologique, cette étude permet de questionner la notion de « langue » et ses implications ; d'un point de vue plus appliqué, elle invite à réfléchir à la question de savoir si *une* politique linguistique commune pour l'espace FP est possible et souhaitable.

Notre enquête a été menée en France à partir de 2009 lors de plusieurs séjours de terrain (dans les départements de la Savoie, de la Haute Savoie, de l'Ain, de la Loire et du Rhône) ; en Suisse pendant un séjour de dix mois (septembre 2012 – juillet 2013 dans les cantons de Vaud, du Valais et de Genève), puis lors de courts séjours en 2013 – 2014 ; et enfin dans la Vallée d'Aoste lors d'un court séjour en février 2014 et un séjour de quatre mois entre septembre et décembre 2014, et de courts passages dans le Piémont (février et novembre 2014). Nous avons privilégié les méthodes d'observation participante et d'entretien.

Au cours de l'article, en notes de bas de page, nous essayerons de faire des parallèles avec d'autres situations linguistiques que nous avons pu étudier.

## 1. Langue diffuse et langue focalisée

Nous proposons d'étudier la situation, ou mieux *les* situations, du FP à travers le prisme d'une théorie issue initialement des études des langues créoles : non pas parce que le FP serait proche des langues créoles – les mécanismes de leur apparition sont bien différents – mais parce que cette approche a l'avantage de décrire la situation linguistique à partir des phénomènes observables sur le terrain et des représentations des locuteurs. Ainsi l'approche que nous adoptons ici peut être qualifiée de « subjective », contrairement à l'approche « objective » de la délimitation des « langues » dans le continuum linguistique à partir des isoglosses.

Le créoliste Robert Le Page a été confronté dans ses enquêtes à une situation où l'on ne peut pas attribuer le passage entier d'un discours d'un interviewé à une seule « langue » nommée (en l'occurrence, « créole », « anglais » ou « espagnol »). S'opposant à l'image du « locuteur-auditeur idéal » dans une communauté homogène et d'un système de règles clos et délimité permettant de produire un nombre infini de phrases cohérentes, qui est à la base de la théorie linguistique moderne, il affirme : « Ce n'est pas dans la nature de la langue humaine que des objets de ce genre puissent exister » (Le Page 1997 [1988] : 32. Notre traduction<sup>203</sup>).<sup>204</sup> Pour Le Page, l'image des langues discrètes appartient au monde

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<sup>203</sup> “It is not in the nature of human language for such objects to exist.”

<sup>204</sup> La théorie critiquée est tout d'abord celle de Chomsky et de ses disciples générativistes, mais aussi presque toute théorie linguistique moderne, comme, par exemple, celle qui discute des alternances codiques (*code-switching*), partant ainsi du présupposé qu'il s'agit de deux systèmes distincts.

des stéréotypes occidentaux, motivés politiquement et idéologiquement (ibid. : 21).<sup>205</sup> Dans ce sens, « le français semble être une des langues les plus clairement réifiées, totémisées et institutionnalisées » (ibid.). Mais ces « langues », loin d'être isomorphes avec des pratiques linguistiques réelles, sont surtout des « artefacts écrits ».

Robert Le Page et Andrée Tabouret-Keller (dans *Acts of Identity*, 1985 ; Le Page 1998 [1992]) élaborent les notions de *focalisation* et de *diffusion* de la langue (faisant ainsi usage d'une métaphore cinématographique). La langue française est une langue très focalisée puisque tout le monde sait ce que c'est qu'un « bon français » ; l'anglais serait plus diffus, avec des concepts tels que « l'anglais britannique », « l'anglais américain », « l'anglais australien » etc., ainsi que des « dialectes » au sein de ces « anglais », et des débats autour de ce que c'est qu'un « bon anglais », de quel anglais apprendre à l'école, de quelle orthographe adopter, etc. De même, les groupes (sociaux ou ethniques) peuvent être plus focalisés ou plus diffus. La langue est alors considérée comme un répertoire de codes socialement marqués : le choix du code est un acte symbolique, un « acte d'identité » par lequel l'individu adhère à un groupe qu'il aurait identifié par l'usage de ce code et prend sa distance par rapport à un autre groupe. Ainsi, les groupes et les langues sont des constructions faites par chaque individu dans son interaction sociale ; « la catégorie de langue résulte d'une élaboration, d'une construction qui ne dénote pas un objet naturel » (Tabouret-Keller 1997 : 8).

## 2. Typologie des situations linguistiques francoprovençales

Au début de notre enquête, le cas du FP nous a intéressée puisque les trois Etats voisins au sein desquels il est parlé – la France, la Suisse et l'Italie – sont construits selon des modèles extrêmement différents. La France très centralisée et officiellement

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<sup>205</sup> L'idéologie qui opère derrière ces stéréotypes est largement similaire pour toutes les langues. Elle suppose :

qu'il est essentiel d'imposer l'unité nationale par la seule reconnaissance d'une langue nationale homogène ;

que la forme précise de cette langue - le système de règles, sa grammaire, son vocabulaire et son orthographe – peut être ordonnée par la loi ;

que ses usages homogènes peuvent être mis en place par le système d'éducation (op. cit. : 24).

monolingue, un Etat-Nation par excellence, et la Confédération suisse très décentralisée et officiellement plurilingue<sup>206</sup>, représentent deux pôles opposés. Entre ces deux pôles se trouve l'Italie qui, d'un côté, a adopté le modèle de construction nationale français, mais où, de l'autre côté, la majeure partie du territoire FP – le Val d'Aoste – forme une région autonome plurilingue. Aussi l'étude du même idiome dans des Etats différents permettrait-elle d'explorer dans quelle mesure les idéologies des Etats informent le discours sur la langue et les représentations linguistiques, et, *in fine*, la situation linguistique. Les observations sur le terrain ont cependant révélé que malgré la différence des cadres politiques et idéologiques, on ne peut pas parler de trois situations linguistiques distinctes, que ce soit au niveau des pratiques ou des représentations. Le clivage se fait au niveau des contacts sociaux quotidiens, et la base en est essentiellement économique.

Dans l'espace FP des trois pays, on peut distinguer deux types de situations linguistiques : le premier (type diffus) est essentiellement celui où le FP est pratiqué comme l'une des langues vernaculaires, au moins par une partie de population dans certaines situations d'interactions ; le second (type focalisé) est celui où il a cessé de l'être.

Le type diffus est observable dans les régions de montagne (les grandes stations de ski alpin étant exclues), au « centre » du domaine : la Vallée d'Aoste (VDA) et quelques vallées piémontaises en Italie, quelques communes dans le Valais en Suisse, quelques communes en Savoie et en Haute Savoie en France, c'est à dire la région alpine autour du Mont Blanc, définition qui correspond, notons-le, aux représentations répandues chez les locuteurs. Le type focalisé est celui du reste du domaine FP : « la périphérie », si l'on veut, les régions de plaine, des grandes villes, des populations de diverses origines.

La particularité géographique a déterminé le type des activités économiques. En effet, le manque de grandes villes et de grandes industries dans le type diffus se traduit par la présence d'un petit nombre d'immigrés. Si l'on regarde la VDA, le fameux « paradis » du FP aux yeux du reste du domaine, l'exemple de la ville d'Aoste est éloquent : au fond de la vallée, avec ses industries, et donc des immigrés, elle est très considérablement italianisée, contrairement à la plupart des autres communes valdôtaines. Par ailleurs, jusqu'à présent la communication de ces régions alpines avec d'autres est souvent restée compliquée, au moins pendant les mois d'hiver, ce qui a contribué à maintenir les pratiques

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<sup>206</sup> Il est pourtant à noter qu'en Suisse romande, malgré le plurilinguisme officiel, les conceptions françaises de l'homogénéité linguistique ont largement été reprises.

de la langue locale. Par contraste, par exemple, toujours en VDA, les communes limitrophes avec le Piémont, à la sortie de la vallée, où le passage est aisé, ont connu une substitution linguistique où le FP a cédé sa place au piémontais, langue de plus grand prestige en tant que langue de commerce. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'étudier en détail les raisons pour lesquelles la substitution linguistique a eu lieu dans certains lieux, et non certains autres. Il suffit de dire que les raisons fondamentales en sont largement identiques dans le monde (que l'on pense à l'espace FP ou à l'espace post-soviétique, par exemple) : lorsque l'on aspire – souvent pour ses enfants plutôt que pour soi-même – à une ascension sociale qui se fait à travers l'éducation et l'insertion dans le monde de travail, les deux fonctionnant en langue dominante, on *choisit* de ne pas transmettre la langue locale aux enfants en la regardant, à tort, comme un obstacle ; lorsque, au contraire, il s'agit plutôt de rester au sein de la communauté en héritant le travail de ses parents et grands-parents, c'est la langue locale, celle de la communauté et de la complicité avec les autres qui a toute sa valeur. Autrement dit, on focalise son comportement linguistique en fonction de celui du groupe de référence choisi. En l'occurrence, dans la région qui nous intéresse, ce dernier type de situation est typique des régions de montagne.

On peut penser à ce propos aux explications de la non-transmission du FP qui nous ont été données par un informateur (né en 1932) dans le Lyonnais en France :

On a tellement mis dans l'esprit du public, à l'école et partout, le fait que le patois, c'était une langue de misérables, de paysans... Puis y a un aspect aussi civilisationnel, c'est-à-dire que le patois est lié à la petite entreprise rurale, tout au moins dans nos régions. Donc dans la ferme on entendait, si y avait encore des petites fermes, je sais pas si ça existe, ça doit plus exister, où y a deux vaches, trois cochons etc., eh bien si ça existait encore on entendrait le patois, mais seulement ça n'existe plus.

On y trouve le motif récurrent du rôle de l'école et des institutions de l'Etat, et aussi celui, moins récurrent, de la disparition du monde agro-pastoral comme raisons principales de la disparition des pratiques FP.

Pour compléter ce tableau, il faut dire qu'il existe aussi aujourd'hui un troisième cas dans l'espace FP, un groupe *non-circonscrit* : les Arpitanistes, membres de l'*Aliance culturèla arpitana*. Ce sont surtout des intellectuels urbains, ayant vécu en dehors de leur région d'origine et, pour beaucoup (sinon la plupart), à l'étranger, avec une réflexivité sur

leur propre culture que créent la distance et le contact avec l'autre. Dans le sens des pratiques linguistiques, ils formeraient un sous-type focalisé ou un type à part, où les pratiques sont plus présentes que dans le type focalisé, mais se font majoritairement par écrit. Leur région n'est plus la plaine, ni la montagne, mais les espaces virtuels de l'Internet, où les rapports par écrit remplacent la communication orale face-à-face et créent l'image d'une communauté (voir aussi Meune 2014 sur l'exterritorialité et en même temps la reterritorialisation imaginaire du FP sur Internet). Une ouverture sur le monde et un « déracinement » permettent d'imaginer une communauté idéalisée, englobant tout l'espace FP.

### 3. Etude de cas

#### 3.1 Diffusion

##### 3.1.1 Les pratiques linguistiques

Pour parler du type diffus dans lequel le FP reste dans la pratique linguistique quotidienne, nous nous concentrerons sur les données recueillies en VDA, vue de l'extérieur comme un modèle idéal du monde FP.

Les observations du comportement langagier des locuteurs valdôtains montrent que pour eux, au niveau des pratiques effectives, les limites entre « patois », « italien » et « français » sont (relativement) floues. Regardons trois exemples (nous avons choisi exprès des exemples assez neutres dans le contenu pour que l'on puisse se concentrer sur la forme des énoncés) :

1. **Da** pitchoù mè predzoo patoué, italien, la mema baga. Avoué mon **nonno** predzoo patoué, avoué ma mamma predzoo italien, avoué mon papa predzoo italien... **Però** lo veuzeun que l'è valdoten predzave patoué, adon todzor predzoo patoué... E **anche** a l'écoula se prèdzoe italien, **ma** antre no se prèdzoe patoué... Na, l'è vrei, un cou dijoon que fallié predzé italien a l'écoula, **invece**, na, ara penso que **da** pitchoù pi de lenve t'appren miou l'èt.

Lorsque j'étais petit, je parlais patois ou italien, la même chose. Avec mon grand-père je parlais patois, avec ma maman je parlais italien, avec mon papa je parlais italien... Mais le voisin qui est valdôtain parlait patois, donc je parlais toujours patois... Et aussi à l'école on se parlait italien, mais



entre nous on se parlait patois... Non, c'est vrai, autrefois on disait qu'il fallait parler italien à l'école, par contre, maintenant non, je pense que plus de langues tu parles dès l'enfance, mieux c'est.

On voit que la structure logique du récit est assurée par des conjonctions italiennes (en gras) ou bien, si l'on veut, empruntées à l'italien (*però, e anche, ma, invece*), et, dans la moindre mesure, FP (*adon*) – trait typique du discours en « patois ». « *Da pitchou* » est vraisemblablement une interférence de l'italien (« *da piccolo* »), tout comme « nonno ». D'un autre côté, on trouve chez le même locuteur des formes diverses ayant le même sens grammatical : ici les formes de l'imparfait de l'indicatif pour la 3<sup>ème</sup> personne du singulier : *predzave / prèdzoe* '(il) parlait' (*lo veuzeun predzave patoué ; a l'ecoula se prèdzoe italien*). Cependant, la perméabilité des limites linguistiques va au-delà de ce qui pourrait être catégorisé comme des « emprunts » à l'italien, les plus remarquables par les locuteurs mêmes : les conjonctions *comunque, quindi, anche, anzi, però, invece*, etc., les adverbes comme *ecco* ou *come mai*, ou les structures lexico-grammaticales calquées sur l'italien (*te serve... ; come l'è ?* etc.), ou encore, la coexistence de formes de « patois » différents.

2. - Sé pas sen que l'è Facebook !

- A, te savè pas sen que l'è ! **Aggiornate !** E l'aura que te entrisse dedeun lo ten moderne ! E pa a vivre de *illusions du passé ! Mythifié !* **Comunque**, n'i mandoulo a N. [su Facebook].

- Je ne sais pas ce que c'est le Facebook !

- Ah, tu savais pas ce que c'est ! Mets-toi au courant ! Il est temps que tu entres dans les temps modernes ! Et pas à vivre des *illusions du passé ! Mythifié !* Quand même, je l'ai envoyé à N. [sur Facebook].

Si l'on voulait définir ce passage en terme de « langues », les parties en italique devraient être attribuées au « français » ; les parties en gras, probablement, à « l'italien » ; le reste au « FP ». L'attribution des parties à l'italien est pourtant problématique, en ce qui concerne « *aggiornate !* » (accent tonique sur le o) : ainsi en italien la forme de l'impératif de la 2<sup>ème</sup> personne du singulier du verbe « *aggiornarsi* » est « *aggiornati* », ce qui signifie que le -te dans « *aggiornate !* » provient du FP ; cela pourrait aussi être qualifié d'emprunt lexical de l'italien dans le FP, et la phrase attribuée au FP, mais le phonème [dʒ] n'est pas particulièrement typique du système phonologique du FP (voir *giorno – dzor*, les composés *buongiorno – bondzor* etc.). « E l'aura » serait du « FP », mais avec la grammaire calquée

sur le modèle italien (« e l'ora » vs « l'è l'oura » / « il est temps de... ») : autrement dit, une interférence grammaticale italienne dans le FP. Enfin, c'est au mot « illusion » qu'on comprend que c'est du français (vs « *illujón* » en FP); pourtant toute la phrase pourrait alors être attribuée au français régional avec la phonétique qui lui est propre – et s'écrirait donc comme : « *Et pas à vivre des illusions du passé* ».

### 3. *T'as tout enregistré, to a poste?*

T'as tout enregistré, tout va bien ?

Cette phrase a été prononcée à la fin de mon interview, entièrement en « patois », avec les amis de ce locuteur qu'il m'avait présentés et avec lesquels lui-même parle patois. Le français au début de la phrase s'explique par le fait que l'épouse de ce locuteur est française et non patoisante (bien qu'une partie de sa famille soit de Chamonix, dans le domaine dit FP), et pour cette raison avec elle, et dans leur famille, nous avons l'habitude de parler français. La fin de la phrase est plus intéressante. Vu que toute la conversation précédente (à laquelle ce locuteur n'a presque pas participé, mais à laquelle il a assisté en partie) s'est déroulée en « patois », et qu'en règle générale il ne me parlait pas italien, il faudrait en conclure qu'il s'agit d'un passage (retour) au « patois », sauf avec une interférence italienne (« *a poste* », de l'italien « *a posto* », par ailleurs fréquemment utilisé par les patoisants). Or, dans cette réplique dans la conversation « en patois », le seul fragment que typologiquement on devrait attribuer au FP est « *to* ».

Ainsi au niveau des pratiques, on peut difficilement parler de « langues » distinctes dans le répertoire linguistique des locuteurs. Il faut préciser que la coexistence même d'éléments de codes, ou « langues », différents ne signifie pas toujours que ces « langues » ne soient pas focalisées<sup>207</sup>. Cependant dans le cas valdôtain, il apparaît que parmi les « langues » constituantes le répertoire linguistique des francoprovençalo-phones, alors que

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<sup>207</sup> Ainsi on peut mettre en parallèle ces pratiques linguistiques avec celles du contexte, au premier regard très différent, des services diplomatiques français en Russie, que nous avons pu observer pendant nos cinq années de travail (en tant que chargée de projets culturels) à l'Institut français de Saint-Petersbourg. Dans ce cas les deux langues, le français et le russe, sont très focalisées, d'autant plus que les collaborateurs des services diplomatiques parlent les variantes les plus focalisées que sont le français standard et le russe standard, dans leurs interactions respectivement avec les Français et les Russes, ou bien dans la communication formelle au sein des services ; cependant dans la communication interne informelle de tous les jours, le personnel constitué de Russes francophones et de Français russophones se parle dans un code qui pourrait être qualifié d'un mélange des deux langues que ni un Français non-russophone, ni un Russe non-francophone ne comprendrait. Du point de vue de la linguistique « classique », on dirait qu'il y a des alternances codiques récurrentes et que lorsqu'on parle une langue, il y a beaucoup d'interférences de l'autre, influencées par un nombre de raisons hétérogènes. Ces pratiques linguistiques ont de fait beaucoup en commun avec les pratiques des milieux plurilingues comme celui de la VDA.

« l'italien » est bien focalisé (les gens sont capables de ne parler qu'en italien si l'interlocuteur n'est pas patoisant), « le français » l'est moins (malgré le fait qu'il soit appris en contexte scolaire, et probablement à cause de sa ressemblance avec le patois), tandis que « le patois » est diffus pour la plupart des locuteurs. Dans le documentaire de Christiane Dunoyer « *Les Nouveaux patoisants en Vallée d'Aoste* » (2010), on entend un interviewé dire : « *Lo patoué l'è to sen que l'è pa l'italien, to sen que l'è pa français* » [« Le patois c'est tout ce qui n'est pas de l'italien ou du français »]. Du point de vue linguistique, de la structure de la langue FP, c'est évidemment faux. D'un point de vue identitaire pourtant, cela semble vrai pour de nombreux locuteurs : tout ce qui n'est pas de l'italien ni du français est identifié comme du « patois », avec toutes les répercussions identitaires qui y sont liées.

Enfin, le FP est considérablement plus focalisé chez certains locuteurs que chez certains autres. Avec ceci, il ne semble pas qu'il y ait de relation directe entre la focalisation / diffusion de la langue et les catégories socioprofessionnelles (on pourrait s'attendre à ce que les représentants des professions intellectuelles aient plus de réflexion sur leur production langagière). Ainsi, dans les exemples ci-dessus, le premier locuteur est un éleveur, le deuxième un instituteur retraité et le troisième un menuisier (simultanément en VDA aujourd'hui souvent l'appartenance à une catégorie socioprofessionnelle n'est pas exclusive).

### 3.1.2. Les représentations linguistiques : « le bon patois » ?

Cette réalité des usages se trouve confrontée au stéréotype de ce qu'une « langue » doit être, calqué sur celui du « bon italien » et du « bon français ». La confrontation génère parfois une insécurité linguistique et la peur de ne pas être à même de transmettre « le bon patois », la langue « pure » et « complète », ce qui mène à sa non-transmission. On peut penser, par exemple, à l'attitude de certains parents qui disent que les enfants parlent si mal patois, en le mélangeant tout le temps avec l'italien, qu'il vaut mieux qu'ils parlent italien. De même, certains informateurs ont remarqué (et nous l'avons vu aussi certaines fois) que souvent ce sont ceux qui eux-mêmes n'ont pas transmis le patois à leurs enfants qui critiquent les autres en disant que ceux-là parlent *mal* patois. Ce paradoxe apparent peut aussi s'expliquer par une insécurité linguistique : c'est probablement parce que la personne en question se sentait incapable de transmettre le « bon » ou le « pur » patois, qu'elle a choisi de ne pas le transmettre, et c'est pour cette même raison qu'elle critique les autres.

Autrement dit, c'est parce que le stéréotype sur ce que c'est qu'une « langue », basé sur les idéologies promues par les Etats-Nations modernes, italien et français, ne correspond pas à la réalité observable qu'il devient un danger pour la transmission du FP.<sup>208</sup> On oublie pourtant que ces « bon italien » et « bon français » qui servent de modèles de référence existent surtout en tant que langues écrites, ou bien comme langues des présentateurs des actualités à la télévision nationale (et autres situations de ce genre), et qu'ils sont distincts des pratiques réelles des locuteurs, avec toute la variation géographique et sociale, et toute la variété des genres et des registres qui leur sont propres.

Si l'on est prêt à stigmatiser certains usages linguistiques comme n'étant *pas* du « bon patois », ce qui *est* du « bon patois » n'est pourtant pas imaginé de manière claire. La notion de normes paraît (presque) inexistante. Dans une logique apparemment inverse de ce qui a été décrit plus haut, on imagine typiquement qu'une norme tuerait les usages vivants et imposerait un standard « artificiel ». Pourtant, si on y regarde de plus près, on verra que cette appréhension est due à la même image d'une langue standard homogène, qui appartient de fait au monde des stéréotypes et non pas à la réalité de quelque langue au monde que ce soit (c'est-à-dire qu'on imagine que le standard s'imposerait aux dépens des autres variantes et non pas comme une variante parmi d'autres, réservée aux contextes particuliers).

Quoiqu'il en soit, le « patois » est typiquement circonscrit très localement, au niveau d'une commune. Ainsi les représentations traditionnelles persistent, alors que la réalité a changé. En effet, outre le fait qu'en réalité il peut y avoir plus de proximité entre, par exemple, les parlers de deux localités voisines au fond de la vallée, appartenant à deux communes différentes, qu'entre une de celles-là et une localité de haute montagne appartenant à la même commune, cette vision se base sur des présupposés appartenant désormais au monde « en voie de disparition » (sans que cela ait un sens négatif). Cela

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<sup>208</sup> Nous avons remarqué des attitudes identiques à l'égard de l'occitan en France, où les représentations de ce qu'une langue (en l'occurrence l'occitan) doit être sont calquées sur le modèle du français. Au contraire, il est remarquable que nous n'ayons jamais noté ces attitudes chez les locuteurs des langues minoritaires d'Ukraine orientale durant les études sociolinguistiques de terrain que nous y avons menées entre 2003 et 2006 : probablement parce que les langues dominantes, telles qu'elles sont utilisées dans la vie quotidienne dans la région, ne sont pas elles-mêmes focalisées (il n'est pas clair dans l'imaginaire collectif par où passe la frontière entre « le russe », « l'ukrainien » et le « *suržyk* », ce dernier comprenant des éléments des deux premiers. Souvent on appelle « russe » ce qui n'est pas de l'ukrainien standard, et « ukrainien » ce qui n'est pas du russe standard, tandis que typologiquement dans les deux cas, il s'agit souvent du *suržyk*.

suppose toujours un parler d'une commune « pur », alors qu'avec la mobilité propre à la vie moderne, rares sont ceux qui sont restés isolés dans leur commune, sans contacts avec l'extérieur, sans parler des mariages « mixtes » qui semblent être aujourd'hui plus la règle que l'exception.

Par ailleurs, l'image du patois qui varie d'une commune à l'autre va souvent de pair avec l'idée que l'intercompréhension est impossible. Or, cette dernière dépend largement de la motivation à comprendre, bien plus que des différences structurelles entre « patois ». En VDA lorsque les interlocuteurs parlent deux parlers différents, on peut distinguer deux stratégies de communication : soit on adapte son comportement verbal pour être mieux compris, en passant au langage plus « neutre » sans traits locaux manifestes, soit on parle son patois sans le modifier (dans les représentations des locuteurs on parle dans ce cas un patois « serré » - à noter que dans le cas contraire il n'y a pas de nom partagé par toute la communauté, et puisqu'en règle générale on nomme les exceptions, il en ressort que c'est ce second comportement qui est perçu comme atypique). Les facteurs de préférence pour l'une ou l'autre de ces stratégies peuvent être divers : le rapport de pouvoir entre les communes (celui qui parle le patois d'une commune ayant plus de prestige que l'autre va probablement moins adapter sa façon de parler), la perception des différences de son patois (ainsi les patois des communes comme Fénis ou Cogne sont communément perçus comme très différents et donc peu compréhensibles, et leurs locuteurs auront donc plus l'habitude d'accommodation), etc. Cependant deux facteurs majeurs, à notre avis, sont la plus ou moins grande mobilité de la personne et donc sa capacité, acquise par l'expérience (ou au contraire son incapacité par manque d'expérience) de gérer ses habitudes langagières, et la motivation, comme cela a déjà été noté. Ainsi un commerçant qui se déplace régulièrement dans la Vallée et qui a intérêt à être compris aura plus de souplesse que quelqu'un qui reste tout le temps dans sa commune, et dont le cercle de contacts habituels et d'intérêts principaux est limité géographiquement à sa commune d'origine, ou bien qui, lorsqu'il sort du local, se retrouve dans un milieu alloglotte (d'habitude, italophone).

Ce que parlent ceux qui ont « un grand esprit d'adaptation » (pour citer un des informateurs) est autre chose que le patois de la commune X ou Y, et cette autre chose n'est pas décrite scientifiquement (parce que « impure » du point de vue dialectologique). Or là où une idéologie ne marche pas, ici celle des linguistes, le vide entre la théorie et la pratique a tendance à être rempli par d'autres idéologies. En l'occurrence, l'idéologie de l'Alliance culturelle arpitaine, souvent hostile à celle des études dialectologiques, permet

aux Arpitanistes de remplir ce vide. Un Arpitaniste de Savoie (né en 1987) parle ainsi de son interaction avec un autre Arpitaniste de la VDA et plus généralement entre Arpitanistes :

Quand deux personnes arpitanes se parlent, les deux font des efforts pour se comprendre. Pour se faire comprendre, on ne peut alors pas constamment parler dans son patois du village, on doit faire des concessions: parler plus lentement, mieux articuler les mots, se rapprocher l'un de l'autre pour trouver un juste milieu. Ce juste milieu n'est alors pas un patois propre à un village, ni une koinè. Parler dans ce langage neutre est ce que j'appelle: parler en «arpitan ».

Ce que cet Arpitaniste appelle « parler en arpitan » est ce que font de nombreux locuteurs valdôtains sans l'appeler comme cela (et dans certains cas sans trop réfléchir sur le processus). Il n'en reste pas moins que le vocabulaire scientifique FP d'aujourd'hui manque de nom pour parler de ce phénomène qui, quant à lui, ne manque pas d'être manifeste, et que les noms font bien plus que juste dénoter des objets de la réalité (sur les enjeux des nominations du FP, voir Bichurina, à paraître).

Pour en revenir aux deux types de stratégies (et donc aux deux représentations de la langue), il faut dire que ceux qui ne s'adaptent pas au parler de l'interlocuteur sont aussi ceux qui ont le plus tendance à voir le patois comme « leur patois », appartenant à leur commune, et qui ont le plus de mal à accepter des nouveaux locuteurs. Ce « mal » doit être relativisé, car de notre expérience personnelle il ressort qu'il suffisait d'une réplique ou deux pour être acceptée comme locutrice légitime et membre du groupe. Mais s'il y a un contexte dans lequel les gens ont eu au premier instant une certaine appréhension (en général très peu fréquente en VDA, voir aussi Dunoyer 2010) vis-à-vis d'une Russe qui parle patois, c'était chez ce dernier type de locuteurs. Les stratégies ont alors été différentes : quelqu'un a posé une question, à la fois typique si elle est adressée à un jeune du lieu, mais à laquelle, pour une « étrangère », la réponse était impossible ou plus précisément n'avait pas de sens (« De qui t'è ? », basée sur le fait qu'on connaît les parents de tous les jeunes alentour) ; ou bien quelqu'un a dit une phrase toute faite, destinée à ne pas être comprise hors contexte et à mettre précisément en évidence qu'elle n'est pas comprise (« Tè ou l'ou ? » ('Tu veux un œuf?') dans le contexte inapproprié d'une conversation dans un bar). Il semblerait pourtant que dans ce type de réaction par une blague (qualifions-le ainsi) il s'agissait surtout d'une méfiance par rapport au fait que quelqu'un puisse parler « leur » patois, et qu'une seule réponse assez longue suffisait pour

être acceptée comme étant « *di noure* » (« des nôtres ») et celle qui « *prèdze come no* » (« parle comme nous »).

### 3.1.3. « Une langue » ?

Enfin, il n'y a pas d'unanimité sur le fait de savoir, s'agissant du « patois », si c'est une langue à part entière, comme le français et l'italien, ou bien une variante (locale, orale, plus ancienne...) du français. Pour certains le choix de l'une ou l'autre perception de son statut se trouve lié, entre autres, aux préférences idéologiques : ainsi l'idée que le FP soit une langue à part entière et, en tant que telle, la seule « vraie » langue autochtone de la VDA, a historiquement été avancée par les mouvements séparatistes ; par contre, les défenseurs du maintien du *statu quo* insistent sur le français comme « la langue de culture » qui seule peut faire face à une autre « langue de culture », l'italien (et le patois serait donc une variante « moins noble » du français). Dans cette deuxième perspective, l'autonomie de la région étant basée sur le français, l'insistance sur le patois est vue comme pouvant délégitimer l'autonomie. En effet, historiquement l'autonomie a été due à la peur, de la part d'Italie, de l'annexion de la région par la France sur la base de pratiques francophones ; dans ce sens le FP en tant que « vraie langue locale » n'est pas dangereux pour l'Etat italien, puisqu'il n'a pas d'armée derrière - non pas métaphorique, selon la fameuse formule : « la langue est un dialecte avec une armée et une marine de guerre », mais bien réelle<sup>209</sup>. Il faut pourtant convenir que les représentations de la « langue FP » comme un danger persistent encore, tandis que ce type de prétentions territoriales semblerait relever du passé en Europe occidentale du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle<sup>210</sup>.

De même, le rôle identitaire, dans le sens ethnique ou social, du « patois » n'est pas le même pour tous. Cette question est très vaste et trop importante pour être traitée ici au passage. Pour l'instant soulignons juste que ce rôle a peu à voir avec les propriétés de la

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<sup>209</sup> Pour faire un parallèle historique, de manière similaire, l'administration de Staline a déclaré dans les années 1930, juste avant la guerre entre l'URSS et la Finlande, que les parlers finno-ougriens à la frontière avec la Finlande formaient une langue à part entière, « le carélien », et non pas des dialectes du finnois.

<sup>210</sup> Même si dans d'autres parties d'Europe on a assisté, en 2014, à un cas similaire, dans lequel les pratiques russophones en Crimée ont servi de légitimation pour un référendum et, par la suite, pour l'annexion de la péninsule par la Russie, ou bien sa réunion avec la Russie (dépendant de l'idéologie de celui qui en parle).

langue et ses usages effectifs.<sup>211</sup> Ce hiatus entre le rôle identitaire attribué à la langue et ses usages réels est notamment caractéristique du type focalisé.

### 3.2 Focalisation

Dès qu'il y a plus d'un seul code dans le répertoire linguistique d'un locuteur, le choix du code ajoute un sens supplémentaire au message : sur l'identité que le locuteur veut projeter, que ce soit en termes ethniques ou sociaux (appartenance à une communauté imaginée<sup>212</sup> plutôt qu'à une autre, et construction même de cette communauté par le biais du comportement langagier), ou bien, par exemple, en termes de relations hiérarchiques entre interlocuteurs, registre, etc. Cependant, dans la situation linguistique de type diffus, cette « valeur ajoutée » des usages du FP ne prime pas sur le sens premier de ce qui est dit. La langue y est un moyen de communication et n'a pas besoin d'autres raisons d'être.

Par contraste, dans le type focalisé, le fait que quelque chose soit dit dans une langue plutôt qu'une autre est plus important que ce qui est dit. Il existe plusieurs façons de se référer à une telle situation. On peut l'aborder à partir de la théorie des actes linguistiques d'Austin (1962), comme le font les auteurs du *Profil de la politique linguistique éducative* de la VDA, mais, dans le cas de la VDA, par rapport aux usages du français<sup>213</sup>. On peut penser aussi à l'aphorisme de M. McLuhan «*The medium is the*

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<sup>211</sup> Ainsi, par exemple, nous avons pu voir, lors de nos recherches en Ukraine dans les communautés dites « albanaise » et « grecque » (« urume »), des situations où l'usage des termes de parenté et des formules de salutation en langue locale par un enfant suffisait pour qu'il soit catégorisé comme « locuteur » et, en tant que tel, comme membre du groupe ethnique.

<sup>212</sup> Benedict Anderson définit la nation comme une « communauté imaginée » :

[La nation] est une communauté politique imaginée et imaginée comme intrinsèquement limitée et souveraine. Elle est *imaginée* parce que même les membres de la plus petite des nations ne connaîtront jamais la plupart de leurs concitoyens : jamais ils ne croiseront ni n'entendront parler d'eux, et pourtant dans l'esprit de chacun vit l'image de leur communion. (Anderson 1991 [1983] : 6). [[The nation] is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. – Notre traduction].

<sup>213</sup> Ainsi Decime et Vernetto affirment :

En effet, les situations d'utilisation du français [en VDA] [...] (le contexte scolaire et celui des bureaux de l'administration régionale) représentent sans aucun doute les contextes électifs, par rapport aux attentes [...], et peuvent être considérées comme celles où se vérifient au plus haut degré des conditions communicatives dans lesquelles, à côté du signifié primaire de type *illocutoire* (le but immédiat pour lequel nous produisons un message, par exemple "demander une information") est aussi le «choix»



*message*» (repris par P. Sériot en relation avec les usages linguistiques en Ukraine, avec leur opposition très pertinente aux idéologies du français)<sup>214</sup>. Ou encore, on peut décrire cette situation linguistique comme post-vernaculaire, en empruntant le terme proposé par Shandler (2006) à propos du yiddish<sup>215</sup>. Quel que soit le terme qu'on choisit pour la décrire, cette situation est typique des communautés qui ont vécu une substitution linguistique : ici, le remplacement du FP dans les interactions quotidiennes par le français ou, dans certains lieux en Italie, par le piémontais et l'italien.

Dans ce type de situation, la plupart, sinon tous les locuteurs natifs étant morts, le FP est vu comme « appartenant » en quelque sorte aux groupes dits patoisants. Ces groupes sont majoritairement formés de retraités, surtout parmi les agriculteurs ou les enseignants issus du milieu rural ou de petites villes. Habituellement, ils ont entendu leurs grands-parents parler FP, mais n'ont commencé à le parler eux-mêmes qu'à la retraite, lorsqu'ils se sont retrouvés dans un nouveau rôle social de « mainteneurs du patois ». Ces patoisants, dans leur majorité, ne parlent pas patois en dehors de leurs rencontres entre eux ; simultanément, le trait caractéristique de ces rencontres est l'usage de la langue dominante comme langue de communication : le discours *sur* le patois y est central, mais il n'est pas *en* patois. La forme des énoncés subvertit alors leur sens, le signifiant niant le signifié.

Le FP est alors mis en scène, soit dans le sens direct, le théâtre en patois étant vu comme le lieu privilégié de la pratique de la langue, soit dans le sens plus métaphorique : lors des rencontres de patoisants, les usages du FP sont souvent réservés à la lecture de textes préparés d'avance.

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conscient du code à contribuer de façon substantielle à la définition du message dans sa composante *perlocutoire* (l'effet global produit chez le destinataire). À ce sujet, il est important de noter que les pourcentages les plus bas de l'utilisation du français ont été enregistrés dans les conversations avec le médecin : une situation dans laquelle, au contraire, la force illocutoire du message produit ("décrire un symptôme", "demander des éclaircissements concernant la posologie", etc....) et la clarté *locutoire* doivent précisément dominer sur tout aspect perlocutoire. (Decime, Vernetto 2007 : 30).

<sup>214</sup> Sériot (2005 : 49-50) :

En Ukraine, l'aphorisme de M. McLuhan «The medium is the message» prend un sens tout à fait concret : ce qu'on dit a souvent moins d'importance que la langue dans laquelle on le dit, qui est le signe distinctif de celui qui parle et de son appartenance à une communauté imaginée. [...] Cela implique, là encore, bien des différences avec le discours français sur la langue. L'ukrainien n'est ni «logique» ni «clair» ni même «riche», il est avant tout la langue des Ukrainiens, langue pure du pur ethnos ukrainien. On trouvera peu de propos sur les qualités intrinsèques de l'ukrainien, mais une chose est sûre : il doit être *distinct du russe*, et *pur*, c'est-à-dire sans emprunts extérieurs. Il *doit* être la marque distinctive [...]

<sup>215</sup> B. Pivot, dans sa thèse récente (Pivot 2014), reprend cette notion pour décrire la situation du FP, qui serait, à son avis, post-vernaculaire sur tout son territoire – y compris dans les régions que nous traitons, par contraste, comme appartenant au type diffus.

Simultanément, les limites de la langue FP sont bien définies dans les représentations des locuteurs. Lorsqu'ils *décident* de parler FP, ils veillent à ce que ce soit la seule langue de communication, sans interférences de la langue dominante. L'insécurité linguistique est également présente ici, due cette fois-ci au fait que la langue est apprise tardivement et non pas héritée ; cette insécurité est pourtant compensée par la consultation de dictionnaires et de livres de grammaire, y compris pendant les rencontres, au moment même de la conversation (voir aussi Bichurina 2014 sur ce type des usages du FP en Suisse).

Le statut du FP en tant que « langue » à part entière est souligné : notamment dans le cadre des débats visant à une forme de soutien officiel à la langue, comme, par exemple, son admission au baccalauréat en France, ou son insertion dans la Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires en Suisse (ratifiée par la Confédération, mais sans mention du FP). Simultanément, les arguments principaux de la discussion sur la « langue » ne concernent vraiment ni « la langue » comme système, ni – encore moins – l'ensemble des pratiques langagières (quasi-inexistantes), mais son histoire, sa géographie, sa tradition littéraire. De même, il existe une concurrence des différentes visions de la langue, mais en surface les discussions et les tensions s'articulent autour de deux questions, dont aucune n'est liée au système, ni aux pratiques linguistiques : le nom de la langue (patois, FP, arpitan, savoyard,...) et le système orthographique (système dit phonétique pour chaque endroit, système dit supra-dialectal...) Au fond, il s'agit de la concurrence de légitimité pour se prononcer sur la langue et sur son avenir (culturel et politique) en l'absence de locuteurs natifs.

Par ailleurs, au lieu de l'image de patois propres à une seule commune, ou d'une région avec un nombre de parlers intercompréhensibles, c'est la vision de l'ensemble linguistique FP qui semble s'imposer de plus en plus dans ce type de situations, véhiculée par les cartes du domaine basées sur les données dialectologiques (le savoir scientifique légitimant ainsi l'image d'un ensemble) ou encore par l'organisation de manifestations culturelles comme les Fêtes internationales des patois. Simultanément la connaissance du fait que le domaine FP est relativement large et divers coexiste jusqu'à présent avec la méconnaissance assez générale de ses frontières.

Enfin, en ce qui concerne les locuteurs *en dehors* des groupes patoisants dans ce type de situation linguistique, c'est l'attitude vis-à-vis du patois comme « mon patois », nettement minoritaire dans le type diffus, qui domine ici, de manière plus généralisée et

plus profonde. Lorsque le patois n'est plus vécu comme une pratique quotidienne, comme le langage courant utilisé avec les gens venus des différents coins que l'on rencontre tous les jours dans la vie moderne, mais vu comme un souvenir d'un passé figé, interchangeable (parce que précisément passé), comme un symbole plus que comme une pratique, les individus ont tendance à s'accrocher à leur patois très local, vu comme le seul vrai, et à passer à la langue dominante dès que le parler de l'interlocuteur est légèrement différent, c'est-à-dire dans la plupart des situations de leur vie d'aujourd'hui.

## Conclusion

L'espace FP présente ainsi un paradoxe : là où le gens *parlent* le FP dans leur vie de tous les jours, ils ne parlent pas autant *de* la langue, n'en parlent pas toujours en tant que d'une « langue », et les frontières de cette langue (ou non-langue), tant linguistiques que géographiques, sont floues ; au contraire, là où les pratiques quotidiennes du FP sont désormais inexistantes, le discours *sur* la langue est abondant, et les frontières de toutes sortes sont claires. On voit alors émerger le modèle d'un bilinguisme imaginé comme deux (ou plus) monolinguisms co-existants, avec deux (ou plus) « langues » bien délimitées, séparées dans leurs fonctions, sans qu'aucune interférence soit admissible : un bilinguisme imaginaire, puisqu'une des langues n'est presque jamais parlée, et qui est tout le contraire du langage spontané de tous les jours où les différentes sources du répertoire linguistique ne sont pas toujours repérées par les locuteurs. Autrement dit, les pratiques linguistiques hétérogènes et diffuses cèdent leur place aux langues homogènes et focalisées lorsque la spontanéité de ces pratiques disparaît.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> La situation est, selon nous, typique de toutes les langues dites « en danger ». Ainsi, par exemple, Robert Lafont, sociolinguiste et une des figures majeures du militantisme occitan, écrivait dans son autobiographie :

M'arriba d'anar espiar d'amagat [...] los vièlhs que [...] perseguisson en lenga d'òc la conversa sus las sasons. Partissi d'un Montpelhièr tot afrancimandit ont pr'aquò l'existéncia de l'occitan es admesa d'opinion comuna, e arribi en cò de gents que parlan plan, mas an pas ausit parlar de res. Passan al francés quand me veson venir, per costuma vièlha de diglòssia. (Lafont 1999 : 113 – 114). [Il m'arrive d'aller épier en cachette [...] les vieux qui [...] continuent leurs conversations sur les saisons en langue d'oc. Je pars d'un Montpellier complètement francisé, où, pour cette raison, l'existence de l'occitan est admise dans l'opinion publique, et j'arrive chez les gens qui le parlent bien, mais qui n'ont entendu parler de rien. Ils passent au français lorsqu'ils me voient venir, par vieille habitude de diglossie. – Notre traduction.]

Ce constat étant fait, il n'en ressort point que la standardisation mènerait à la « mort » ou « l'artificialisation » de la langue si l'on se rappelle, comme le démontre l'histoire linguistique des Etats-Nations conçus comme monolingues comme la France et l'Italie, que l'existence d'un standard ne remplace jamais la variation, même si la politique d'un Etat suffisamment puissant visait le contraire, et que, pour toute langue, la langue standard, utile pour ses fins, est tout autre chose que la langue quotidienne des locuteurs, avec sa variation sociale, stylistique et tant d'autres.

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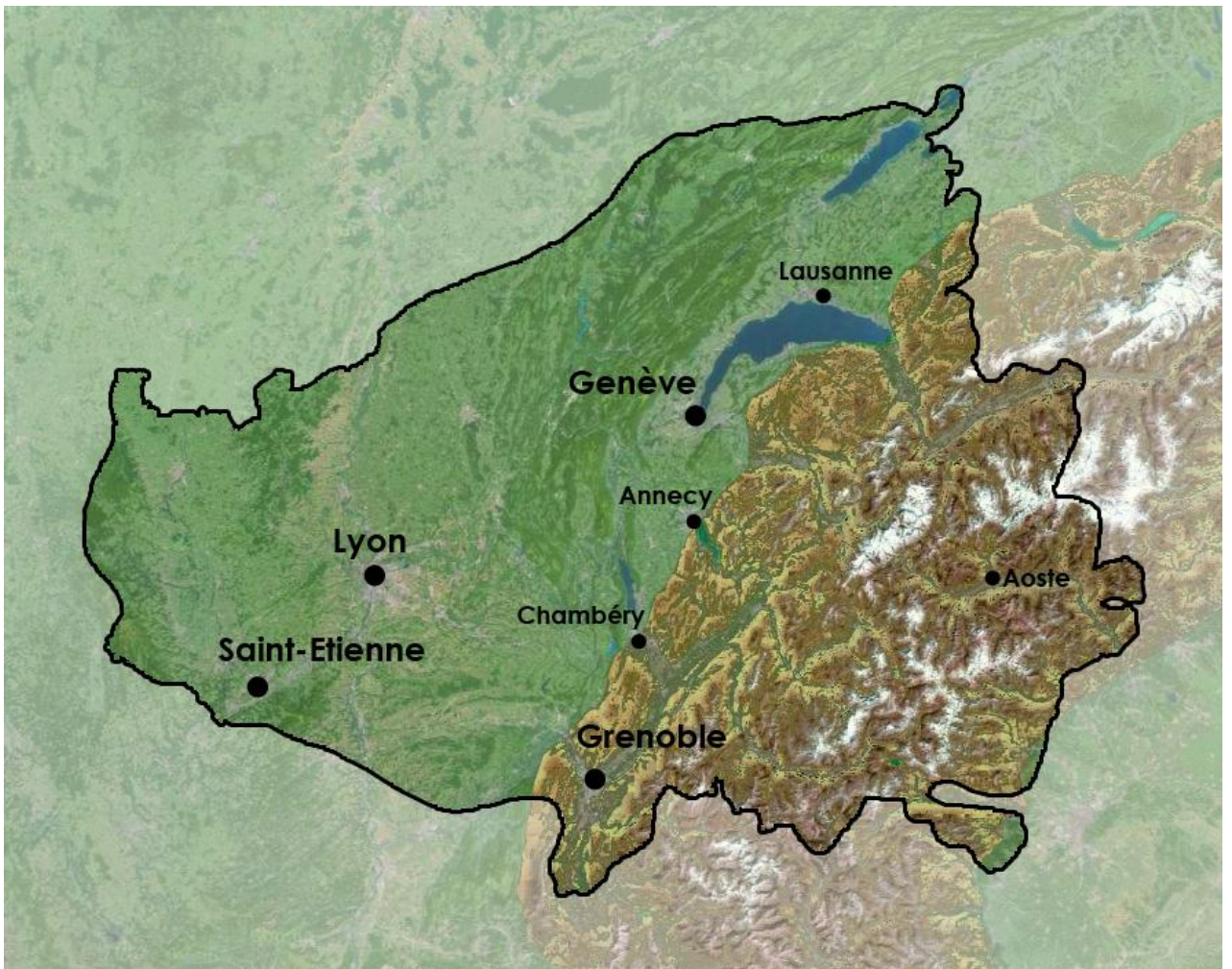
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Figure 1.



Carte du domaine francoprovençal à la base des cartes dialectologiques et de la vue satellite de Google maps. © Natalia Bichurina 2015 <sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Nous remercions Olga Bichurina de son aide dans la réalisation de la carte.

### III. Le francoprovençal comme pratique sociale : Quels enjeux d'aménagement linguistique en 2016 ?<sup>218</sup>



Le Mont Blanc : frontière ou centre ?

La vue sur l'image au-dessus est celle du Mont Blanc : le centre symbolique du domaine francoprovençal. Sommes-nous ici à la *frontière* entre trois pays, l'Italie, la France et la Suisse, le Mont Blanc est-il une *barrière* entre trois (ou plus) communautés francoprovençalophones ? Ou bien, est-il le *centre* qui unie une seule communauté montagnarde qui vie autour ? Les réponses peuvent varier selon les vécus personnels et les idéologies, mais en tout cas, lorsqu'il s'agit de la transmission, la normalisation et la revitalisation de la langue – les thèmes de ce colloque – il est important, à mon sens, de placer l'accent justement sur la *communauté linguistique*, et non pas sur la langue en elle-même et pour elle-même, en tant que structure linguistique. Autrement dit, la langue devrait être comprise comme *pratique sociale*. C'est l'approche que j'essayerai de démontrer dans cette contribution.

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<sup>218</sup> A paraître dans : *Transmission, revitalisation et normalisation, actes de la conférence annuelle sur l'activité scientifique du centre d'études francoprovençales, Saint-Nicolas, le 7 novembre 2015*. Région autonome Vallée d'Aoste, Assessorat de l'éducation et de la culture, 2016. 85 – 94.

Je commencerai par un survol des approches existantes à l'aménagement du francoprovençal qui, aussi concurrentes qu'elles soient, partent toutes de la vision linguistique (structurelle) de la langue. Je proposerai ensuite une approche alternative (« subjective ») qui conçoit la langue comme pratique sociale. Enfin, je discuterai les conséquences d'une telle vision du francoprovençal pour son éventuelle normalisation.

## 1. Approches existantes à l'aménagement du francoprovençal

Historiquement, il y a eu – et il existe toujours – deux visions de la réalité linguistique francoprovençale :

- Les dialectologues ont insisté sur « le patois du village » comme une unité (d'étude) à une cohérence linguistique interne (Tuailon a parlé notamment de l'« unité parfaite » du patois d'une commune – voir, par exemple, son introduction au livre des Derniers patoisants giettois 2009) ;
- Les militants ont insisté sur une langue d'un vaste domaine géographique, qui coïncidait
  - soit avec une région politique (la Vallée d'Aoste, la Savoie, etc.),
  - soit avec la zone autour du Mont-Blanc (Vallée d'Aoste + Savoie + Valais),
  - soit avec tout le domaine francoprovençal.

Les différentes dénominations de la langue démontrent – voire servent à créer – les différentes divisions du monde linguistique et sociopolitique. Ainsi on parle de :

- « patois de la commune » X ou Y ;
- « la langue savoyarde » ou « le patois vaudois », par exemple. Les revendications culturelles ou sociopolitiques sont complètement différentes dans ces cas, mais la tentative de faire coïncider la langue avec une entité politique est identique ;
- et enfin, « la langue francoprovençale » ou « la langue arpitane ».

De même, ces différentes visions se traduisent en différentes approches à la normalisation, notamment à l'écrit, où les deux pôles sont la graphie phonétique pour



chaque « patois de commune » vs la graphie supradialectale, dite l'ORB (Orthographe de référence B, cf. Stich 2003) pour l'ensemble de « la langue arpitaine ».

Cependant ces approches, aussi concurrentes et contraires les unes aux autres qu'elles paraissent, partent toutes d'une représentation de la langue en tant que système linguistique (selon la formule 'phonétique + morpho-syntaxe + lexique', avec une importance inégale attribuée à ces différents composants), qui existerait en dehors de ce que les locuteurs en font. Ainsi l'approche *micro-*, qui vise l'aménagement au niveau local, a pour prémisses la forte variation linguistique interne du francoprovençal ; l'approche concurrente, *macro-*, visant l'ensemble du domaine, part des traits linguistiques communs et donc de l'idée d'une seule langue transfrontalière. Pourtant, déjà dans le sens purement linguistique la cohérence interne du « patois du village » ou de la « langue francoprovençale / arpitaine » est très relative : les formes changent d'un locuteur à l'autre, souvent au sein d'une même famille. Par ailleurs, et surtout, dans le sens social ni le patois du village, ni la langue francoprovençale n'existent pas et n'ont jamais existé : les individus sont amenés à interagir en dehors d'une seule commune, mais pas dans tout l'espace francoprovençal, tel que défini sur les cartes dialectologiques. Ainsi, d'un côté, la mobilité sociale est typique du moment actuel, mais elle existait aussi avant, dans le monde agro-pastoral : on peut penser, par exemple, aux foires au bétail pour lesquelles les éleveurs partaient très loin de leur village, et le francoprovençal était la langue de communication aussi bien sur le chemin qu'aux foires (les récits en sont nombreux chez nos informateurs, et il y en avait, par exemple, ceux qui partaient de la Vallée d'Aoste pour aller en Savoie). De l'autre côté, le seul événement où l'interaction se fait à l'échelle du domaine francoprovençal tout entier est la Fête internationale du patois / du francoprovençal. Pourtant, celle-ci ne regroupe qu'un seul type des locuteurs (ceux des milieux associatifs) et qui restent le plus souvent dans leurs propres groupes avec lesquels ils étaient venus. Au contraire, dans la vie quotidienne, l'interaction se fait à d'autres échelles, au niveau méso-, si l'on veut, et dans celle-ci émergent les stratégies de communication, d'accommodation et d'intercompréhension qui jusqu'à présent ont échappé aux études.

Autrement dit, il semblerait qu'au lieu du schéma qui pourrait être attendu :

Situation linguistique	=>	Problème	=>	Solution (Aménagement linguistique)
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la normalisation est une solution à un problème qui ne provient pas de l'analyse des pratiques linguistiques, mais des idéologies linguistiques. Par exemple : 'c'est une langue parce que [il existe deux paradigmes des verbes du premier groupe etc.], donc il doit y avoir une norme commune'. Ceci en lien avec la formule romantique : 'une langue = une identité = un pays'.

Pourtant la langue n'existe pas en dehors des locuteurs, mais dans leurs interactions.<sup>219</sup> C'est une activité humaine, comme toute autre, comme le rire, par exemple. Or, les gens ont besoin du rire : parce qu'il crée un contact social, un sens de complicité, ou parce qu'il est bon pour le bien-être mental ; mais le rire en soi n'a sûrement besoin de rien, parce qu'il n'existe pas en-dehors des gens qui rient. De même la langue n'a pas de besoins, seuls les locuteurs peuvent en avoir. Avant de proposer des solutions, il faudrait donc comprendre les problèmes, et pour cela il faudrait étudier la réalité de la langue en tant que pratique sociale.

## 2. Langues focalisées et langues diffuses

Je vais aborder cette question à travers la distinction de deux types de situations et de représentations linguistiques : *focalisée* et *diffuse*. Ces notions ont été proposées par Robert Le Page et Andrée Tabouret-Keller dans leurs études des langues créoles (Le Page, Tabouret-Keller 1985). Je tenterai d'appliquer cette théorie sur le cas francoprovençal et de l'élaborer davantage à partir de mes données de terrain.

Pour dire simplement, *la langue focalisée* est celle dont on imagine clairement les limites et les usages normatifs. Le français est un bon exemple d'une langue focalisée : d'habitude, on sait ce qui est du français et ce qui n'est pas du français, on sait ce qui est du bon français et on sait aussi comment le français doit s'écrire. Il faut souligner que ce français focalisé n'existe que dans l'imaginaire, sous forme écrite pour certains genres de textes (les mails, les sms etc. exclus), ou encore à l'oral pour un nombre de situations restreint (les actualités à la télévision, par exemple, ou un colloque comme celui-ci). Au contraire, l'anglais est plus *diffus* : il y a plusieurs anglais (*World Englishes*), britannique, américain, australien etc., et plusieurs variétés au sein de ces anglais. Lequel est le bon

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<sup>219</sup> Tout comme les identités ethniques sont des catégories dont on se sert dans les interactions afin de se catégoriser et de catégoriser les autres (Barth 1969).

anglais ? Cela dépend de la situation d'usage. Ce qui est clair c'est que personne n'aurait l'idée d'apprendre à parler et à écrire l'anglais britannique en habitant aux Etats-Unis ou vice-versa. Tandis qu'on écrira bien le français de Paris sur l'île de la Réunion. Soulignons qu'il s'agit de deux représentations différentes de ce qu'une langue est ou devrait être, sans que cela empêche l'intercompréhension dans la communication réelle dans aucun des deux cas.

Dans la situation de plurilinguisme, les locuteurs ont un répertoire linguistique de différents codes socialement marqués<sup>220</sup>. Cependant les codes pertinents pour les locuteurs ne sont pas toujours identiques à ce que les linguistes auraient identifié comme « langues ». Ainsi ici, à Saint-Nicolas, linguistiquement, le répertoire verbal de la plupart d'habitants est constitué des trois « langues » : le francoprovençal, l'italien et le français. Pourtant, au niveau de représentations la délimitation des trois n'est pas si nette. Par exemple, une voisine à Saint-Nicolas, très accueillante, m'a dit récemment : « *Se t'a fata, siamo qua* » (« si tu as besoin [de quelque chose], on est là »). Linguistiquement, « se t'a fata » est sans doute du francoprovençal, et « siamo qua » est sans doute de l'italien. Néanmoins on peut avoir beaucoup de doutes quant à l'existence de ces langues clairement délimités dans l'esprit de cette locutrice (comme si elle s'était dite : « ce serait trop bien si je commence ma phrase en patois et termine en italien »). Dans son esprit, le plus probablement, elle parlait patois, parce que c'est son choix linguistique typique avec moi. Le francoprovençal est donc pour elle une langue diffuse.

### 3. Le francoprovençal comme pratique sociale

Cette étude comparative est basée sur des données sociolinguistiques et ethnographiques de terrain, recueillies dans les trois pays de l'espace francoprovençal au cours de six dernières années (observation participante et 60 interviews). Si l'on entend la langue comme *pratique sociale*, on s'aperçoit que l'espace francoprovençal comprend ces deux types de situations linguistiques différentes (cf. aussi Bichurina 2015) :

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<sup>220</sup> Le choix du code est un acte symbolique, un « acte d'identité », pour reprendre le terme de Le Page et Tabouret-Keller (op. cit.), par lequel l'individu adhère à un groupe et prend sa distance par rapport à un autre groupe.

- La première, « *diffuse* », est typique des régions de montagne des trois pays, où le francoprovençal est parlé au quotidien, et où la fonction communicative prime sur toute autre ;

- La seconde, « *focalisée* », est typique des zones moins élevées, des grandes villes, où l'usage du francoprovençal est limité aux fonctions symboliques.

Les différences principales entre ces deux types sont présentées dans le tableau ci-dessous.

### Deux types de situations francoprovençales : les différences principales

Type	DIFFUS	FOCALISÉ
	(petites localités de montagne)	(les grandes villes de plaine)
	<i>Surtout en Vallée d'Aoste, en Savoie et dans le Valais</i>	
<b>Profil de locuteur typique</b>	<b>LOCUTEURS NATIFS</b>	<b>LOCUTEURS TARDIFS ET NOUVEAUX LOCUTEURS</b>
<b>Représentations linguistiques générales</b>	<i>La langue est vécue comme pratique changeable, à des frontières linguistiques floues, dans un espace variable et imprécis</i>	<i>La langue est un objet réifié, à des frontières linguistiques nettes, dans un espace précis (délimité par les cartes dialectologiques)</i>
<b>Autonomie linguistique (usages)</b>	<b>Interférences</b> à tous les niveaux du système linguistique	<b>Aucune interférence</b> acceptée
<b>Autonomie linguistique (représentations)</b>	« Patois » ('non-langue' ?) La question ne se pose pas	<b>Langue à part entière</b> Descriptions dialectologiques légitimatrices
<b>Types et motivations des usages linguistiques</b>	<b>Langue comme moyen de communication</b> - Réseaux sociaux - Motivation identitaire	<b>Langue comme symbole</b> - Patrimoine familial et/ou local - Quête identitaire - *Ressource de pouvoir
<b>Légitimité des bons usages</b>	Chez le locuteur même ou des anciens du même village	Dans les livres de grammaire et les dictionnaires

<b>Pays de référence</b>	Village + pays indéterminé	Pour les locuteurs tardifs – leur village natal.  Pour les nouveaux locuteurs – l'espace transfrontalier (trois pays), coexistant avec les Etats-Nations.
<b>La pertinence des frontières</b>	La montagne qui unit	Les frontières d'Etats qui séparent
<b>Usages par écrit</b>	Sms, chat, courts mails...	Longs mails, articles, romans...
<b>Intercompréhension</b>	<b>MEILLEURE</b>  paradoxalement, parce qu'au niveau idéologique des fois elle n'existe pas (il s'agit du patois local)	<b>PIRE</b>  paradoxalement, parce qu'au niveau idéologique elle existe (qu'il s'agit d'une langue commune)

## AMENAGEMENT LINGUISTIQUE

<b>Type de transmission et besoins qui en découlent</b>	<b>Transmission familiale ou dans la communauté</b>	<b>Transmission absente</b>
	Il ne s'agit pas vraiment de revitaliser, mais de ne pas perdre ce qui existe.  ⇒ Besoin d'encourager la transmission (contre l'idée de monolinguisme).	⇒ Besoin de transmettre à travers l'école ; ⇒ Besoin d'une reconnaissance officielle pour l'enseignement ; ⇒ Besoin d'un standard écrit pour la reconnaissance <sup>221</sup> .
<b>Rôle d'un standard éventuel</b>	<b>Réservé pour certaines fonctions</b> (registre officiel, communication à large échelle).  <b>Coexistence avec les normes linguistiques et communicatives locales.</b>	<b>Pour toutes les fonctions.</b>  <b>La seule variété à laquelle les nouveaux locuteurs auront accès.</b>

<sup>221</sup> Ainsi en France l'idéologie linguistique nationale attribue un rôle particulier à l'écrit, ce qui informe le cadre législatif lié aux langues dites régionales. Ainsi dans la réponse récente du Ministère de l'Education Nationale (publiée le 07/10/2014), relative à la non-reconnaissance officielle de l'enseignement du savoyard, nous lisons :

Ce cadre de référence réserve une place importante à l'écrit, tant dans sa compréhension que dans son expression et, pour cette raison implique que la passation de ces épreuves [du baccalauréat] s'appuie sur un corpus de textes suffisamment nombreux et diversifiés, aux qualités linguistiques et littéraires attestées. <http://questions.assemblee-nationale.fr/q14/14-21123QE.htm>

### Quelques commentaires à ce tableau :

Tout d'abord, notons qu'il s'agit ici d'un aperçu des tendances générales les plus typiques. Les situations et les représentations dépendent du vécu de chaque personne et donc varient selon les cas. Par ailleurs, dans le cas focalisé les différences entre les locuteurs tardifs et les nouveaux locuteurs peuvent être significatives pour l'aménagement linguistique, notamment pour ce qui concerne la projection dans l'avenir, de l'importance cruciale pour les nouveaux locuteurs, mais absente dans les cas des locuteurs tardifs, orientés exclusivement vers le passé.

*Dans le type diffus*, on parle la langue francoprovençale parce que c'est la langue première, et parce qu'il y a les réseaux sociaux dont c'est la langue et avec lesquels on veut s'identifier. Simultanément, les interférences y sont nombreuses comme dans l'exemple cité ci-dessus. L'intercompréhension entre différentes variantes est bonne, et ce qu'un des informateurs a appelé « un bon esprit d'adaptation » (autrement dit, l'accommodation) y contribue davantage.

Puisque la langue est encore parlée au quotidien, et qu'avec l'apparition de nouvelles technologies l'écrit suppose la même *simultanéité, spontanéité et simplicité* que l'oral, la langue est de plus en plus utilisée à l'écrit. D'habitude, on écrit à ceux avec qui on a déjà l'habitude de se parler et de se comprendre à l'oral, aussi l'intercompréhension est-elle bonne également à l'écrit.

*Dans le type focalisé*, le francoprovençal n'est pas la langue héritée. Ses usages se limitent typiquement aux fonctions symboliques. Contrairement, à ce qu'il paraît, aux idéologies linguistiques explicites, l'intercompréhension est rendue difficile par manque d'expérience, mais aussi par trop de curiosité pour la forme qui met le contenu du message de l'interlocuteur sur l'arrière-plan de communication. Les mêmes tendances – intercompréhension supposée problématique et curiosité – se retrouvent à l'écrit : ce dont témoigne, notamment l'usage abondant des synonymes dans les textes, comme dans ce blog météorologique (remarquons que la météo en soi est pourtant un sujet toujours en lien direct avec l'actualité)<sup>222</sup> :

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<sup>222</sup> <http://meteo-en-patois.blog.tdg.ch/archive/2015/11/07/du-sole-quasu-tant-qu-u-meten-mektein-du-me-k-de-novembro-271563.html>

Les blogs, en partenariat avec la Tribune de Genève

## Les Blogs

### L'tin shi no - Météo en patois francoprovençal (Arpitan) et bien d'autres sujets en Arpitan

Apprendre le patois francoprovençal (Arpitan) au travers de bulletins météo et d'autres sujets en Arpitan

« Quâque plodze demècrò, mas los âtros zhôr prod chè. | Page d'accueil | A fin de senanna y va bayér de nè(k) [neige] d'avâ 800 - 1000m »

07/11/2015

#### Du solè quasu tant qu'u métèn(mékteïn) du mê(k) de novèmbro

Bonzhô a tuî et totâ,

Sé lù mêk d'ottobrô èro mès frê(k) que de cot(h)umâ, l'èntren du mê(k) du novèmbro charèt èfè/pôt-èthre oun tchikâ/bocon mès tssô/tssâ que d'cot(h)umâ.

Unâ hiotâ prèchon va adé nôs bayér oun tèmps (tin) franc douss et prod/prouk chè atôs du solè quasu tant qu'u métèn/mékteïn du mê(k) de novèmbro.

Adon nos arêns pas unâ gotâ de plodze/plòouzu tant qu'a l'èntren d'a senanna/chenanna du 17 (dij-é-châtt) de novèmbro.

Bâs a planna, chu lo platè Suisso de dezenèva tant qu'a nôchâtè(l), y'arèt des viadzô des tsenevù/brouyâ, surtôt dèns la matenâ.

Adon profitâde bèn de ceta zinta météo !  
Arevère a tuî et totâ et tant qu'a la premîr

#### Revue de Presse

- D'su la gazète d'la "Tribune de Genève" 24.05.2013
- La météo en francoprovençal (Arpitan)
- Le temps chièz nos 24-28 de màrs ORB - Écritura unifiéye arpittana
- Su la gazète la "Tribune de Genève" 05.04.2013
- [tweeter](#)

#### D'âtro chûza que l'patoué

- [Dè bêta Imazhe de G\(z\)eneva](#)
- [Per sleù qu'aman martshî \(pour ceux qui aime marcher\)](#)

#### Bienvenue

Bonjour. Ce blog est édité par **Lionel Fontannaz**. Je vous remercie de votre visite et des commentaires que vous rédigez sous mes billets. Merci de respecter les règles fixées par la Tribune de Genève qui nous héberge; soyez courts, concis et pertinent ! Je me réserve le droit de ne pas publier les commentaires anonymes. Au plaisir de vous lire. Vous pouvez aussi m'atteindre en cliquant [ici](#)



De même, par exemple, dans un échange des mails entre un groupe de (nouveaux) locuteurs vaudois afin de fixer un premier rendez-vous avec moi un des participants a écrit un long message en francoprovençal vaudois, en genre littéraire, suivi d'un résumé en français (pour moi, parce qu'il n'était pas sûr si j'allais comprendre le vaudois). Le résumé contenait deux phrases courtes (la proposition de date et d'heure du rendez-vous), suivi par : « *Le reste n'est que du décor et des circonvolutions de langage juste pour le plaisir de faire sonner le patois.* »

Vu ces différences, si un standard est élaboré, il y aura une différence cruciale dans son application selon le type de situation linguistique. Dans le type diffus, la langue sera probablement parlée comme elle l'est aujourd'hui, l'usage du standard étant limité aux situations qui l'exigent (comme pour toute autre langue parlée au quotidien) : au registre officiel ou dans la communication entre les locuteurs des variétés trop différentes. Au contraire, dans le type focalisé où la transmission familiale n'existe plus, le standard sera probablement la variété de fait parlée et écrite dans toutes les situations par les nouveaux locuteurs, parce qu'elle sera la seule à laquelle ils auront accès (notamment à travers les programmes éducatifs).

## Conclusion

Ce n'est pas parce qu'il y a une variation linguistique entre les villages que les besoins des locuteurs ne seront pas semblables ; ce n'est pas non plus parce que certains traits linguistiques sont partagés sur tout le domaine francoprovençal que les besoins sont partout identiques. Au niveau épistémologique il y a un vide entre la vision très localiste et la vision très internationale (micro- et macro-) ; pourtant dans la réalité des pratiques sociales c'est ce vide qui est rempli.

Etant donné la différence des situations linguistiques réelles, une norme pluricentrique, prenant en compte les communautés de pratique existantes, serait-elle plus appropriée ? Cela serait, peut-être, en effet, une piste possible pour l'aménagement linguistique francoprovençal. Avec ceci, il est important de ne pas oublier que pluricentrique ne veut point dire non-intercompréhensible. L'intercompréhension existe de fait à l'oral, donc rien ne devrait l'empêcher à l'écrit non plus, si l'écrit est bien déchiffrable.

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