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Francis Manzano

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2004

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La coïncidence absolue d'un territoire national avec le domaine géographique naturel de sa langue officielle paraît à bien des gens une vérité élémentaire. On a même peine à concevoir que, dans un pays donné, d'autres langues, non moins valables, puissent côtoyer l'idiome national. Il y a là une sorte d'adéquation automatique et inconsciente entre les concepts de langue et de nation, particulièrement patente en France où des siècles d'excessive centralisation en ont fait un véritable truisme. Il n'y a rien de plus symptomatique à cet égard que le malaise, voire la hargne, éprouvée par le Français moyen voyageant en Bretagne, en Pays basque ou en Roussillon, lorsqu'il entend résonner, à sa grande surprise, une langue qui ne lui est pas familière.

(Pierre Bec, *La langue occitane*, 1963)

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Situation and use of Occitan in Languedoc^{1,2}

Abstract

Occitan as we may observe it today in the region of Languedoc or in the neighboring region of Midi-Pyrénées is a language in a very precarious sociolinguistic situation, though the number of speakers seems still important. All the indicators show a fast regression at the grassroots level, where the traditional conditions of reproduction seem disunited. The spoken Occitan of Languedoc, one of the distant and indirect successors of the Limousin or Provençal of the “troubadours,” therefore finds itself today in a fundamentally crucial situation, in spite of the interest in the regional languages that is often displayed. This section emphasizes the existence of some major directions in this case study. First of all, the fact that the theories devoted to “gathering” Langue d’oc failed regularly since more than a century ago, has led to some constrained positions that reflect negatively on oral practice, which thus appear completely detached from militant movements. On the other hand, the long-standing diglossia in this region of France seems to have provoked zones of practice perfectly identified by the speakers. Occitan thus became in the course of the twentieth century a “confidential” language, while French conquered the public space. Finally, in this very negative context, the ways of joining or of reconnecting with some related and neighboring languages (Catalan, other languages of Oc) are generally neglected or rejected, notably in the framework of European integration. Therefore, Occitan seems now headed toward the status of an ecologically marginal and relic language, in spite of many efforts to give it a functional position in French society.

1. Origins and attestations of the terms for “Occitan-Languedocien”

As pointed out in what follows, there exists a real difficulty when it comes to naming the language that is the object of the present study. Indeed, it is

not easy to get around this difficulty, since it is linked to a turbulent sociolinguistic and identity background.

One could speak of “Languedocien,” however, this same term almost automatically limits *Langue d’oc* to its strictly dialectal characteristic (the language then becomes a geographical variant of a more or less recognizable whole). “Languedocien” would then be defined as the local variety of some canton or part of a *département* (French territorial division), hence the equivalence: “Languedocien = a *patois*.” At best and for a few people only, Languedocien is the current representative of the former language of the Troubadours from the County of Toulouse, etc., thus implying historical and literary knowledge that is not commonly shared. This all remains theoretical, though according to some statistics, this term is actually used by only 2% of the people interviewed during a survey carried out in 1991 that will be referred to further on.

The choice of the term “Occitan” accounts for a larger number of people, if only by representing an imposing percentage with approximately ten times more users in the region observed (19% of those polled). Nonetheless, it also leads to oversimplification. As much as the previous term gives priority to the region and the local, the present one rather alludes to the general diasystem or even to utter abstraction (the idea of a unified language which has probably never existed under the form we imagine). In addition, this term conceals the harshness of the terminology’s violent past, a matter which I will come back to later on.

When both terms are aggregated, the result is less critical. Through a compound neologism, I therefore prefer to refer to “Occitan-Languedocien.” This allows us to remain closer to the linguistic typology as such, and so by combining in a rather easy manner the different elements of the common origin (or diasystem of the *Langue d’oc*) as well as those which single out Languedocien in the *Langue d’oc* supraregional group.

Having partly referred to the 1991 survey already, I must make clear that I shall not retain the term “patois,” although used by 36% of those polled, in other words, the most popular term on the ground. The sociolinguistic meaning of this percentage is obviously that people picture regional languages as hyper-rural and village-linked, a strictly local way of self-expression. This point of view however, which we must obviously allow and study sociolinguistically, must also be rejected by the linguist, for the latter may then lose track of the diasystem’s force, in fact, the one upon which “Occitan” emphasizes too strongly.

The term “Occitan” is not very ancient. Its emergence and success only go back a few decades, not a very long period considering the lifespan of a language. We can nevertheless note that educational organizations (with

universities first), as well as different cultural agencies and the media, have been very eager in supporting it on the symbolic level; we will come back to this point later on. Today, the term seems to be widely adopted indeed (not without occasional signs of disapproval) and a large part of the inhabitants of a vast region extending from (to simplify matters), the Haute-Garonne to the Gard and from the Dordogne to the Aude, native speakers like the neo-Languedocians all seem to have accepted the main idea that Occitan may once have been a very homogeneous language, one of a prestigious culture, anterior to French in this region and submerged by the national tongue since the end of the Middle Ages. As emphasized by Etienne Hammel (Hammel and Gardy 1994: 166), in the last part of *L'occitan en Languedoc-Roussillon*, this language's notoriety rate is very high, even if this notoriety "has no link with its degree of mastery and practice."

Also, in the case of "administrative" Languedoc (i.e., the administrative region of the Languedoc-Roussillon which is generally referred to in this paper), the term is accepted without any qualms. The main reason is essentially that Occitan has been deeply linked to the history of the Languedoc, therefore, one almost automatically alludes to the sphere of influence represented by the County of Toulouse, which, from the Gascony to the Rhône and from the central Pyrenees to the Velay, has been the foundation of, genesis of a genuine historical heartland continuously revived by speeches about the official History.

The same is not true for various other regions sometimes called "Occitan regions," slightly farther away from this "heartland" though linguistically close at the same time, the construction of their identity having followed different patterns: the occidental (Gascony territory), the northern (Limousin, Auvergne) and the oriental ones (Provencal territory).

It would be a mistake however to minimize the present "unified" perception of the language that was just mentioned. A century ago, only a handful of the upper social classes of the Languedocien regions seemed to consider that this local tongue, this "patois" that people tried to expurgate or eliminate, could compete with, or at least could have competed with (or even outstripped?), under higher forms, the national language, French. At the end of the nineteenth century, this Occitan-Languedocien was a very common language in day-to-day life indeed, though strongly disadvantaged on the sociolinguistic scale of values, for it was representative of the rural world, first and foremost — that of the illiterate lower social classes. A language "devoid of culture and education" that French and the public school would strike down in the short term. A relic, a hindrance to development, in other words, an insignificant and outmoded way of speaking (a *patois*) that people generally wanted to get rid of as

one would want to get rid of faded worn-out finery, by replacing old clogs with brand-new patent-leather shoes. As Eugen Weber (1998) clearly puts it, in most places during this period, “French represented liberalism and emancipation.”

A century later, before our very own eyes, the issue arises in quite the opposite manner. Henceforth, there is a striking contrast between a generally benevolent attitude in favor of the regional tongue, widespread in the population, and the more and more humble reality of its practice in the different regional and social parts of the Languedoc. Of course, such an assessment is not only true for Occitan alone, the same evolution and risk patterns being shared with different regional languages in France demonstrated (let it be emphasized), by all the sociolinguistic studies of the last two decades.

2. Historical issues and related theories

Whether speaking of Occitan or Languedocien, or of Occitan-Languedocien, as I tend to do, we are dealing with a romance variety sometimes associated with Gallo-Romance (it is then classified as “southern Gallo-Romance”), sometimes classified separately (it then becomes the “Occitano-Romance” as in P. Bec 1973 [1963]). The frame of mind which conditions such taxonomies is obviously not the same, nor does it go without reflecting how the language is perceived and lived.

A study of Occitan-Languedocien should at least take three main factors into consideration in order to really understand what is happening in Languedoc.

2.1. “*Langue d’oc*,” “*Limousin*,” and “*Provençal*”

In the romance studies of the late nineteenth century, the diachronic and comparative works tend to define a group generally described as “Southern Gallo-Roman.” It must immediately be pointed out that this scientific terminology of the Gallo-Romance language contains with it all the elements of a subsequent refutation (particularly from the partisans of “Occitan”). This terminology is actually to be replaced in the setting of a unanimous political ideology rather focused on searching for a linguistic and cultural unity among the different French regions than for possible discontinuities. This ideology is reflected through the thoughts of the great master of romance studies of the time, Gaston Paris (1898: 3):

Aucune limite réelle ne sépare les Français du Nord des Français du Midi; D'un bout à l'autre du sol national, nos parlers populaires étendent une vaste tapisserie dont les couleurs variées se fondent sur tous les points en nuances insensiblement dégradées. ('No real limit separates the Northern Frenchmen from the Southerners; All across the national land, our common speech-forms spread out an impressive tapestry with various colours fading together everywhere with imperceptibly graduated nuances.')

The same can be noticed in a book that has long contributed to form the country's intellectual elite, regarding the whole group of speech-forms in France (Paris and Langlois 1917: xi-8):

Certains traits plus ou moins caractéristiques ont permis de réunir ces parlers divers en deux groupes principaux: au Midi la *langue d'oc*; au Nord la *langue d'oïl*, ainsi nommées d'après les termes oc et oïl, qui exprimaient l'affirmation dans les deux régions. Une ligne vaguement menée de Bordeaux à Lussac, de Lussac à Montluçon, de Montluçon au Sud du département de l'Isère, peut être considérée comme une limite entre les deux groupes. Toutefois cette distinction n'a qu'une valeur de convention; elle n'est réelle que pour les langues littéraires. ('Some more or less characteristic features allow the combination of these various speech forms into two main groups: in the south the *Langue d'oc*; in the north the *Langue d'oïl*, named after the terms oc and oïl, which expresses the word "yes" in both regions. A line drawn approximately from Bordeaux to Lussac, from Lussac to Montluçon, from Montluçon to the south of the département of Isère, can be considered as the border between both groups. However, having a mainly conventional value, this distinction is only real for literary languages alone.')

The term *Langue d'oc* is a recurrent one. It is well-established in literary history and the Italian poet Dante, strongly influenced as are all his peers by the Troubadours' literature, is known to have specifically mentioned the *Lingua d'oco*, one of the elements which generated the later term *Occitan*. The former, alternatively used in our century with *Occitan*, is the traceable origin of the region's name, *Languedoc*. However, it causes a problem of adjustment, like the following terms, which lead some people (see P. Bec's point of view below) to think that the term, albeit less embarrassing than *Limousin* and *Provençal*, is not so perfect after all.

Another old name for these Southern languages is *Limousin*. Without going into the details of this term's origins, one must note that the probable causes of the latter term's relative success is linked to the Saint-Martial (Limoges) monks of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in particular who were very advanced in the literary and legal wording of the new romance language. Two important works of the eleventh century, for in-

stance, *L'Évangile de Saint-Jean* and the *Poème sur Boèce*, are thought to come from this religious sphere of influence. Moreover, the first known Troubadours often came from the north and the northwest of the Langue d'oc lands and expressed themselves in a language long influenced by this geographical origin.

The Troubadours might have been aware of writing in a relatively homogenous literary language that was rather conventional, intelligible from Spain to Italy including the Langue d'oc lands. Though it did not refer to a common country, this language referred to a common literature between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries (De Riquer 1992 [1975]; Lafont and Gardy 1997).

The *Limousin* of the Middle Ages must not be confused with the present one in any way (a “Northern-Occitan” dialect). The term *Limousin*, maybe even more than that of *Provençal*, has delineated a very strong interregional identity with lands that extend from the Massif Central to Catalonia. As an indicator of this common identification, we can point to the fact that until the first quarter of the twentieth century, many Catalanists called themselves (and felt themselves to be) “*Limousins*” by writing in Catalan, before the contemporary assertion of Catalan as such by Pompeu Fabra and the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans*. It is precisely what Bonaventura Carles Aribau (1833, quoted by Germà Colon 1974: 41) does in the following lines:

En llemosí sonà lo meu primer vagit
Quan del murgó matern la dolça llet bevia;
En llemosí el Senyor pregava cada dia
E càntics llemosins somniava cada nit.
(‘Limousin is the language in which I uttered my very first cry
while feeding on mother’s warm milk;
in Limousin, I prayed to God every day,
and dreamt of Limousin songs every night.’)

Another southern romance variety, *Provençal*, also gave its name to the group through the extension of a name that can no longer be accepted (just as with the “Limousin”) for it distorts all proper taxonomy. The Troubadours regularly used this widely attested word, which is therefore applicable to the literary koine as mentioned earlier, not to the dialect of Provence (although several *Provençal* languages were part of the movement).

Nineteenth century linguists would then regularly talk of *Provençal* (or *Old Provençal*) when qualifying the ancient Gallo-Romance texts from the south (e.g. Bourciez 1967 [1910]), particularly the works of the Trou-

badours. But at that time “Provençal” could refer to texts that could have very well been of Provençal origin strictly speaking, as well as from Languedoc, Auvergne, etc.

3. The *Felibrige*: images and consequences

This way of viewing the southern French languages and dialects was both reinforced and weakened by the *Felibrige* action (Roumanille, Aubanel, etc.) and particularly by that of Frédéric Mistral, during the second half of the nineteenth century. As one may recall, the *Felibre* is he or she who chooses to create in Langue d’oc. Hence, the *Felibrige* is the gathering of these modern renaissance activists.

The strength of the *Felibrige* lay in its will to restore the Langue d’oc’s lost nobility, but through a literary renaissance that was based on Provençal dialects from the Bas-Rhône. At the same time, it also seemed obvious that this revival had to be based on the entire group of dialects of the Langue d’oc in order to eventually reflect on them. This can be noticed in the works of Mistral among others, a highly praised and recognized poet who was also committed to a linguistic collection overflowing the geographic borders of Provence. The latter collection included, for example, an excellent dictionary entitled *Trésor du Félibrige*.

The main weakness of the *Felibrige* was situating the core of the Southern linguistic renaissance in a specific area of the Provence and, in contrast, bestowing on the other regions, including the Languedoc, the image of regions with rural languages devoid of any visible literary dynamism.

4. The occitanist theory

The *Felibrige* not only included Provençal natives who naturally felt concerned, but also many people from Languedoc. At the turn of the twentieth century, the regionalist elite of Languedoc seemed to consider the *Felibrige* as the only reliable Langue d’oc restoration organization. Leading writers like Prosper Estieu (1860–1939) or Antonin Perbosc (1861–1944) began their works and gained worthiness within or around the edges of this movement. This Renaissance spirit and way of thinking that one must replace in its own time, is witnessed by Joan Amades (1907: 91–92), who, after visiting Mistral, established a parallel between the latter and a Catalan poet, J. Verdaguer:

Mistral et Verdaguer! Voilà deux noms qui resteront attachés pour toujours l'un à l'autre. Si le poète catalan fut d'une nature plus rêveuse et comme plus concentrée, et si le poète provençal semble plus débordant de passion humaine, ces deux âmes communièrent pourtant dans la même foi, dans le même enthousiasme poétique, comme la terre catalane, un peu âpre et rebelle par endroits, et la terre provençale, souvent plus généreuse et plus féconde, tressaillent toutes deux sous les mêmes rayons de soleil et se laissent baigner mollement par la même mer bleue aux flots sonores.

La Provence et la Catalogne, n'est-ce pas au fond le même pays sous des aspects différents? et ces deux poètes ne chantent-ils pas dans les dialectes de la même langue? (Mistral and Verdaguer! Here are two names that will remain attached to one another for ever. The Catalan poet may be more of a dreamer and seem more concentrated while the Provençal poet may appear to be more brimming with human passion; nonetheless, these two souls share the same faith, with the same poetic enthusiasm. Like the Catalan land, slightly harsh and rebellious in places, and the Provençal land, often more generous and fertile, both vibrate to the same sunrays and both idly yield to the echoing tides of the same blue sea. Don't Provence and Catalonia both actually represent the same country under different aspects? And don't these two poets sing in different dialects of the same language?)

As already pointed out, however, the flaws (the "Provençal-inclined" linguistic options of the Felibrige, the indications indirectly considering Languedocien as rural, etc.) stimulated public awareness and a turn-around that led to the elaboration of the occitanist theory. The *Escola Occitana* was established in 1919, the *Institut d'Etudes Occitanes* in 1945.

I shall not lay much stress here on the polemical aspects that this theory and school may present, without minimizing them, for according to me, several current issues concerning the Occitan-Languedocien can reasonably be related to this polemic. In particular, the somehow simplistic theory that leads people to consider the "Occitan world" as colonized, exploited, and fragmented by France from the fifteenth century onward, certainly gathers more opponents than partisans at the grass roots. The weak support offered by contemporary speakers of Occitan-Languedocien to a normalization project which has now been operating for several decades, should without a doubt give warnings about how unconvincing the valorizing procedures for the "Occitan language" were.

Objectively and simply, it can be said that from a strictly linguistic point of view, the occitanist theory was established as a reaction against the two previous main movements. It firstly rejects a good part of the Mistralian action, and one can partially understand why: the ambiguity of the term *Provençal*, *Langue d'oc* being focused on an area of Provence only, etc. On another level, the theory also reacts to the centralizing

Gallo-romance option which is expressed through G. Paris' comments as quoted above. Such an opinion, downgrading the typological and political originality of Langue d'oc, is the type of threat to which the occitanist theory generally responded, especially in the Occitano-romance option illustrated by Pierre Bec (1973 [1963]). After having declared the terms *Provençal* and *Langue d'oc* to be both unsatisfying (for ambiguous), Bec (1973 [1963]: 66–67) defends the term *Occitan* in the following lines:

C'est pour cela que le terme plus adéquat d'occitan pour désigner l'ensemble des parlers méridionaux, se répand de plus en plus: les noms des différents dialectes subsistent ainsi avec leurs sens précis. C'est d'ailleurs l'administration royale elle-même qui, dès le XIV^e siècle, l'a consacré en reconnaissant à tous les fiefs méridionaux une spécificité qui en faisait un monde à part dans le Royaume. On parla donc de *lingua occitana*, de *patria*, de *respublica occitana*, de *patria linguae occitanae*, comme on parlait d'*Occitania*, opposant ainsi la *lingua occitana* à la *lingua gallica* qui désignait le français. ('That is why the most convenient expression *Occitan*, to refer to all the Southern dialects, is more and more popular: the names of different dialects thereby remain with their specific meanings. In fact, the Royal administration itself honoured this term, as early as the fourteenth century, by recognizing in all the southern fiefs, a characteristic that distinguished each one from the rest of the Kingdom. It would then be a question of *lingua occitana*, of *patria*, of *respublica occitana*, of *patria linguae occitanae*, as one spoke of *Occitania*, thus opposing the *lingua occitana* to the *lingua gallica*, which represented the French language.')

A new Romance group subsuming the geographical (and historical) "Occitan" varieties on the one hand and the Catalan ones on the other hand was then necessary. One of Bec's comments brings us back to the issue of what he calls *Middle Occitan*. As he puts it (Bec 1973 [1963]: 50):

Il est difficile en outre de séparer le catalan de l'occitan si l'on n'accorde pas le même sort au gascon qui, nous venons de le voir, présente une originalité vraiment remarquable. Il semblerait même que le catalan (littéraire du moins) soit plus directement accessible à un Occitan moyen que certains parlers gascons comme ceux des Landes ou des Pyrénées. . . . Le plus simple serait peut-être d'admettre un ensemble occitano-roman, intermédiaire entre le gallo-roman proprement dit et l'ibéro-roman, ensemble qui comprendrait donc, comme nous venons de le montrer: l'occitan méridional, le nord-occitan, le gascon et le catalan. ('Moreover, it is difficult to separate Catalan from Occitan, if the same is not done to Gascon, which as we have just seen, presents a very striking original aspect. It seems that Catalan (the literary one at least) would be more directly accessible to middle Occitan than to some Gascon dialects such as those of the Landes or the Pyrenees. . . . It would be much simpler to establish an Occitano-romance group,

an intermediary one between Gallo-romance strictly speaking and Ibero-romance, therefore including, as we have just pointed out: southern Occitan, northern Occitan, Gascon, and Catalan.’)

First and foremost, we must note that this theory suddenly changes the core of the issue once again by breaking a major political frontier and by de facto placing the *Languedocien* at the very centre of this linguistic group. Bec’s comments are backed up by a strong dialectological line of argument, but it must be emphasized that this analysis is more or less inseparable from a will to normalize Occitan through the Languedoc dialects, themes structuring Louis Alibert’s works, a great figure of the occitanist renaissance, a specialist of the dialects of the department called “Aude” in the region of Languedoc and author of a *Gramatica Occitana segons los parlars lengadocians* (1935) and of a *Dictionnaire Occitan-Français d’après les parlars languedociens* (1966), among others. This normalization which, by definition, was aimed at the entire “Occitan varieties” (without completely succeeding) took in many respects its inspiration from the Catalan normalization process within the *Institut d’Estudis Catalans* of Barcelona, as already mentioned.

5. What is the present situation and future of Occitan-Languedocien?

5.1. Occitan-Languedocien at the end of the twentieth century

The 1991 survey cannot be qualified as without flaws, at least not in its published forms. To my mind, one of the major problems with this type of survey is that it fails to account for the diversity of the local situations: for example, on the geographic, economic, and cultural levels. As noted by Philippe Martel in the foreword of Hammel and Gardy’s book (1994), Occitan is obviously not spoken (when spoken) in the town of Montpellier as it is in Nasbinals (village of Aubrac), but this is unfortunately undermined by the survey’s procedure. Some Occitan “protectorates” do exist though, and here I will cite a personal experience with one of them (the Oriental Corbières and the Hautes Corbières) so as to assess the outcome of the survey. Also, in order to make the most of them, the answers 3 to 58 (classification, opinions, judgments) to the regional (questions 1 and 2) and social (question 59 and the following) identification of those surveyed should have been interchangeable. Along with the reservations I have just pointed out, we shall see how this type of survey regularly puts us in an ambiguous position, when not bordering on caricature: see for example my personal assessment of question 13.

For the sake of convenience, I have defined four main factors that bring together the different types of information provided by the survey, that is, useful data for our purpose. Since the survey follows an embedded organization, the number of those polled varies depending on the question, which brings out another difficulty. This is why the numeric variability of the number of answers is indicated before each main axis or question.

5.2. *Identification of the language (axis 1)*

Question 3 (1626). *Aside from French, are there any other languages spoken in the Languedoc-Roussillon?* The answer *Patois* (36%) comes first, likely reflecting the image of an extremely local (peasant) variety of simplistic, restricted, residual practice, in any case, apparently something that can hardly be qualified as a *language*. Something that cannot be compared to French on the one hand, nor to several other languages present here, foreign indeed, but worthier of the term *language* to the eyes to those polled: Latin-derived languages (Spanish, Italian), Arabic, etc. (around 20% of the quotations).

The term *Langue d'oc* is much less used (4%), so is that of *Languedocien*, as we have already noted (2%). That of *Provençal* (4%) is more enigmatic. Having no further details, it is quite probable that these terms were recorded in the Gard (neighboring the Provence). This point immediately alludes to the degree of uncertainty that hangs over such data.

Less than a dozen respondents referred to an explicitly local or regional denomination (such as *Cévenol*, *Audois*, *Sétois*, etc.). A positive analysis can be constructed from the latter phenomenon: the local variation is put aside for a movement focused on the centre of the language (*Langue d'oc*, *Occitan*). I think it is more likely a sign of disintegration regarding the local linguistic web, which has to be related to the major quotation correlative to the term *Patois*.

Finally, the term *Occitan* is relatively frequent (19%), thus proving, as I mentioned in the first part, that the “Occitan-oriented” activism did bear some fruit.³ Though we may still ignore what this term precisely refers to, today it is used fairly often.

Question 5 (993). *What about here, where the survey is taking place, is there a local dialect?* *Patois* (44%), *Dialect* (2%), *Languedocien* (2%), *Langue d'oc* (3%), *Provençal* (2%), *Occitan* (9%), *none* (28%). Once again, the evanescent aspect of *Occitan* is emphasized, probably in the urban zones in priority.

Question 6 (939). *Do the different local dialects [from the previous questions] ... belong to the same family?* 38% said *yes* and 21% said *no* (no answers: 10%). Most of those polled therefore seem to see a certain unity in the Languedoc dialects, even though we cannot exactly determine at which level. One fifth of the population see a breach rather than a convergence.

Question 7 (642). *How would you prefer to name this family?* *Occitan* (39%), *Languè d'oc* (22%), *Languedocien* (19%), *Provençal* (12%). When it comes to finding an overall term, it is once again noted that *Occitan* is quite common in everyday speech, though closely followed by *Languè d'oc* and *Languedocien*. It would also be very interesting to find out who refers to *Provençal*. The related 12% has two possible interpretations: either we think in terms of *Felibre*, either we belong to the northwest Languedoc and thus clearly see a possible typological relation with eastern Languè d'oc, and therefore to Provence, or maybe to both at once.

This focus lays stress on the difficulties concerning identification and unification of Occitan-Languedocien. Altogether, the terms with a unifying propensity, no matter the origin (*Languè d'oc*, *Provençal*, or *Occitan*) only include a single proportion of linguistic territory of Languedoc. It all happens as if the “gathering” theories developed since the nineteenth century (see section 1 above) are not precisely able to unify the language. Since *Occitan-Languedocien* is also widely considered a *patois*, the overall image is finally that of a fragmented language, which seems to have lost the key aspects of its unity, that is, if it had one at all in the past.

5.3. *Uses of the language and judgments (axis 2)*

Questions 9–34 (Q.9–11: 939; Q.12: 690; Q.13: 268; Q.14: 404; Q.15: 490; Q.16: 249; Q.17: 252; Q.18: 268; Q.19–20: 209; Q.21: 54; Q.22: 268; Q.23: 324; Q.24–25: 690; Q.26: 498; Q.27: 251; Q.28: 253; Q.29: 939; Q.30: 1010; Q.31: 969; Q.32: 960; Q.33–34: 939). The questions and answers are not all worth being explained in details. Here are a few samples:

Question 9. *Today, do you think that the practical use of the Occitan language is increasing or decreasing?* For 66%, it *decreases*, for 13% it *increases*, for 16% it's *stable*. A similar question is dealt with a bit further on, with question 22 (268) submitted to “Occitan” speakers, but regarding their own practice of the language. Here, 43% estimate that their personal practice is decreasing while it is said to be increasing for 7%; 49% think that it has not significantly changed.

Questions 10–13 (quantification of the use of Occitan). Question 10 aims at determining the feelings of the informants, who describe them-

selves as fairly or strongly attached to this language in 46% cases. The others consider themselves to be a little attached (13%), or not at all (10%), and indifferent (11%) or having no relation whatsoever with this language (18%). Question 11 deals with the ability to understand Occitan: 33% of those polled declare that they “quite easily” or “perfectly” understand it. Question 12 tries to evaluate their speaking aptitudes. Here, a discrepancy appears with 22% considering they “speak well.” 17% say they can hold a short conversation or can “speak a bit.” A total of 62% therefore remains, with levels ranging from those who admit having once spoken (and so having “forgotten” the language) to those who had never heard of Occitan (32%). The thesis behind question 13 is perhaps to reveal another possible gap between knowing how to speak and having the opportunity of speaking. Those who declared knowing how to speak Occitan are then asked how often they speak it: never or rarely (30%), from time to time (37%), often (15%), on a daily basis (18%).

In the twentieth century, the Languedoc-Roussillon region has one of France’s highest levels of immigration, traditionally of Mediterranean provenance (Spain, north Africa, Italy) and, today, Nordic (Northern Europe in particular). Considering this renewal, the feeling of attachment to the ancestral language is all the stronger and is hardly to be questioned, knowing that half of the regional population declares itself to be attached to the regional language. We can presume that if the question is submitted to natives of Languedoc exclusively (two or three generations back), it might have revealed an even stronger feeling of attachment. However, some can feel attached to the regional language and still see its decrease and extinction as nonetheless inevitable, the very same position as the majority of those surveyed.

In the answers to question 13, the last category (those who declare speaking it *on a daily basis*) needs to be, to say the least, moderated. Firstly, the interpretation according to which one imagines people communicating in Occitan only, and therefore, seven days a week, is to be immediately dismissed. Except in artificial exclusive communities, albeit activist, or even with individuals who are marginal for various reasons (isolation, sickness, etc.), today, Occitan is a language that must be observed in places where it is really spoken. The survey does not allow informants to indicate whether they speak Occitan more often (not even if usually alternated), at such moments, in such places, and in such relatively few situations.

Questions 14–17 (sociological expression of the practices and motivations). It should be noted that from here on, the informants will be far less numerous, for we will deal with speakers and connoisseurs of Occitan (25% of the total surveyed) in particular. Therefore, the percentages must

not be related to the entire population of Languedoc-Roussillon. The answers to question 14 show, as one may have expected, that Occitan is absent from all official public fields (the bank, the post, administration, 0%). It is very poorly represented at work (5%), in the shops (4%) and only a bit (but represented all the same) in the local markets (7%). The best scores come from the countryside or from villages (15%), cafés and other places meant for social activities (21%), and at home (21%). Question 15 corroborates and restricts once more the field of spoken Occitan, for it is said to be generally spoken with friends (30%) or family (27%) and with the elderly (24%). It is rarely spoken at work (4%), never used with the authorities (doctor, priest, lawyer, etc.) or with teachers. It also appears as a possible language with peasants (9%). French is definitely the most widely spoken language in France today, including in the peasant world, Occitan's presumed stronghold.

The answers to questions 16 and 17 show that in general, the non-practice of Occitan is rather due to incapacity (partial or total) than to refusal. When spoken, Occitan is also said to be used because being the region's very own language, it cannot be ignored. Interest in the language itself plays a minor role (14%). Finally, Occitan is hardly ever said to be spoken in the aim of professional or social integration in the region (9%).

This part of the survey confirms a major local sociolinguistic feature and more widely, that of French regional languages: their "confidentiality." Occitan is only spoken with well identified speakers (within the village or canton, with relations, etc.), and rarely with strangers, should they be Occitan speakers themselves, for in all these cases, the required language of communication is indisputably French. Should Occitan appear, it will come last. Occitan-Languedocien is a network language indeed, "triggered," if one may say so, when all the elements of the network are actually in place, thus referring back to those "well-identified" speakers. The public field is overwhelmingly deserted by Occitan of course, for it is where French alone exists and is to exist alone. Besides, we better understand how and why Occitan-Languedocien continues to lose ground today. Indeed, both public and confidential spheres are perfectly integrated by the speakers. For them, should Occitan intervene, it almost does so exclusively in the confidential sphere, hence a better explanation for why today's spontaneous Occitan speakers do not generally approve of the "interference projects" involving Occitan and the public sphere. Several centuries of gradual and forcible diglossia (especially in the past century) have thereby strongly affected the speakers' way of thinking. Moreover, it would be interesting to discover how things really happen in a household. A too powerful sociological body acts in favor of

French (housewives' positions, more or less exclusively French-speaking children, etc.).

Finally, these different answers confirm that Occitan-Languedocien is not seen as a language of public socialization. Its remaining fields are therefore those of memory and identity.

Questions 18–34 (reading, writing, and learning). In the Occitan speakers' group, reading doesn't seem to be very easy (question 18). Less than half of them (45%) declare to read well or without much difficulty. Most speakers therefore have trouble with written Occitan, among them, 22% admit they cannot read it at all. People scarcely read in Occitan (question 19), indeed, only 12% of those who know how to read in Occitan say they often or daily do so. On the other side, 21% say they never read in this language. 74% of the surveyed say they cannot write in Occitan, while 25% can (question 20), and among the latter, only 35% really do so (question 21). Few are those (7%) think that their use of Occitan is increasing (question 22). It is more widely believed to decrease (43%) or to be more or less stable (49%). The knowledge-transmission procedure of Occitan (questions 23–24) is essentially carried out by the family and community circle (86%). School plays a tiny role (2%). Let's note that 5% say having learned Occitan "by themselves." Consequently, 95% of the sample do not have the impression they have "learned" Occitan. It need also be added that those polled seem to find the training offers quite poor. 85% say they did not get the opportunity to learn Occitan (question 28). But at the same time (question 29), 74% don't wish to follow any courses or to improve their level, whereas 24% say they would like to. Later on, we shall see how the situation differs when it comes to their own children. Regarding the origin of the practices, questions 31 and 32 show that parents (fathers and mothers) of a sample of around 960 people (here we are closer to the general population) spoke Occitan (or Catalan) in 40% to 45% of the cases and a foreign language in 15% of the cases. When it comes to the grandparents (paternal or maternal, questions 33 and 34), the rate is slightly higher, with 48% of the declared Occitan speakers.

Reading in Occitan is therefore quite rare and difficult, for basically half the speakers declare having trouble to read or cannot read Occitan at all. And when they do know how to read, they actually have little determination or opportunities to do so. Compared to all the inhabitants of the Languedoc-Roussillon, reading in Occitan in the end concerns very few people.

Why is that so? A frequently shared opinion among the native and effective speakers is that they barely recognize their own language in the written productions that circulate around them. This discrepancy between speaking and reading or writing, very often emphasized, could cause

disturbing effects, and even suppress any vague desire to go further with the written language. It joins, in many respects, the suspicions regarding the occitanist literary and university renaissance, without which the contrast (not to say the contradiction) between the answers to questions 28 and 29 would remain unexplained. Likewise, the role played by schools is seen as very minor. To this day, the survival of Occitan therefore seems to be mainly related to the sociolinguistic and identity environment and to a routine form of transmission, even if this transmission might well be threatened. An overwhelming majority thus see themselves as the heirs of this language, voluntarism (and therefore activism) is carried out on very restricted effects.

5.4. *Occitan in the media (axis 3)*

Questions 35–50 (Q.35-38: 939; Q.39 to 41: 443; Q.42: 939; Q.43(MPLR): 808; Q.44: 245; Q.45: 129; Q.46 (PACA): 54; Q.47–49: 299; Q.50: 641).

Questions 38–41. Regarding television, Occitan's space is immediately identified. It is obviously that of the public regional channel, France 3 (FR3). As soon as the questioning becomes more precise however, the surveyed no longer recall the specific schedules (days and time) of programs broadcast in the regional language. Question 41 almost directly mentions a program with a very emblematic title, *Viure al país*.⁴ Only 14% mention it, and 3% mention *Vaquí*, a successful FR3 program that is broadcast in Provençal in the neighboring region (Provence–Alpes–Côte d'Azur). An even greater matter to worry about (question 43) is that the Sunday program in Occitan is regularly followed by only 4% of those polled, 9% watching it once a month. Moreover, approximately 80% never watch the program, albeit once in their lifetime.

By and large, the public seems quite satisfied with what is offered on television (questions 46, 47, and 49), as if the introduction of the regional language in the media (particularly on television) was judged to be symbolically satisfying, but without causing any real enthusiasm. Question 49 simply implies that around 30% of the surveyed would like to see the economic and social life, the arts and culture domains gain more ground. Altogether, this section reveals an impact of televised programs that is hard to assess. And yet, figures that come directly from France 3 services and relating to the audience ratings of regional-language programs show that a real audience in fact exists. If a single series of figures were to be quoted, let it be noted that during the summer of 2001, the program earlier mentioned, *Viure al país*, reached an average audience rating of 12,6% (around noon), compared to a national average of 17,1% for FR3.

In order to evaluate this score, it must be emphasized that during more or less the same period and at the same time, the first channel (TF1, private) represented 39% of the audience ratings, the second channel (France 2, public) 14,9%, M6 (private) 13,3%. These three national channels were therefore ahead (though sometimes by a very little) of the regional language program of FR3, and so, with much more catchy topics for the general public (game shows, geopolitics, automobile). Moreover, major channels like *Canal Plus*, *La Cinquième*, and more others, were outstripped by *Viure al país*. As we can see, this context is rather positive within an unfavorable global environment for Occitan-Languedocien. Maybe this expresses (instead of that craze I mentioned) a real demand which has not been quite satisfied, and probably not quite properly either.

5.5. *Global identities and the future for Occitan (axis 4)*

Questions 51–58 (939).

(Question 51). *At school, would you like the possibility of learning Occitan to be given to everyone? Yes for 80%. Compared to axes 2 and 3, this figure enables us to draw a parallel between the form of disinterest that was often expressed on the one side, and the hope laid upon schools, on the other side. Only 13% do not wish to see Occitan taught there. (Question 52). Nearly half of those surveyed (48%), if such a possibility existed, would like their children (or would have liked them) to learn Occitan, and 5% say it is already the case: their children are learning or have learned it. Only 16% refuse, while 27% say they'd rather leave the choice to their children. Part of the limits of this craze for the statutory learning of Occitan, appear in the answers to questions 55 and 56. 64% of the surveyed think that all the same, such learning of Occitan won't be a great factor of integration in the world of work, not more than in everyday life (58%). However, 31% (for work) and 37% (for everyday life) seem to believe that Occitan can be a factor of integration for certain jobs and certain places. Among the symbolic measures in favor of regional languages, bilingual road signs and markings (names of villages, even roads) have become more and more frequent through the last few years, as in other regions of France. The answers to question 53 show that 72% think it is a way of promoting the regional culture. 15% are indifferent, 6% associate this with electioneering demagoguery, and 5% seem to consider that French alone should appear on official signboards. On the other hand, question 54 restrains this enthusiasm. When asked whether it would be *preferable to extend this practice to other supports* (signposts, billboards, shop signs, etc.), 55% answer *yes* and 25% *no*, the others being indifferent or having*

no opinion. This axis remains rather open, but the reticence is firmer than the previous one, regarding an extension of this symbolic visual bilingualism. Question 57 informs us about the perception those surveyed have about, not their probable use of Occitan, but about that of others. 28% think that the speakers are numerous or very numerous, 54% not numerous, and 13% scarce or very scarce.

(Question 58). *Sentimentally, you feel more . . . ? Mediterranean* (22%), *Southerner* (12%), *Languedocien* (12%), *French above all* (12%). These four answers being above the 10% threshold, nearly all add up to half of the answers altogether (48%). Ten other linguistic groups (and their subdivisions) share the remaining 52%. Here, the score varies from 1% to 6%. They correspond to “regional” (*from the Aude, the Gard, etc.*), or to intraregional, or even to linguistic (*Provençal, Cévenol*) divisions. It should be noted that *Occitan* shows one of the lowest scores (1%).

A network of studies and recent research reveal that the intergenerational transmission of Occitan-Languedocien (as for all regional languages) has always been in trouble and has been plummeting throughout the twentieth century. The situation seems to worsen before our very eyes. It is all the more interesting to note that a lot of hope is placed in the agency represented by schools. The very person who speaks Occitan-Languedocien (more likely “patois” by the way) and who does not consider, not even for a second, listening to an “Occitan” singer or taking part in cultural events (courses, conferences, etc.), who shows little interest in activities promoting “Occitan,” that same person can paradoxically wish at the same time that his children or grandchildren learn “Occitan” in school, in the very place where he/she had actually learned to loathe that same “local” language.

This wish has all the appearances of a “cry for help” a very important point if we want to understand what stage the regional language is at today. It is not even a matter of teaching this language in order to level the playing field with French, for it seems quite obvious that Occitan (which could have had social and professional functions, and still partly has in the country) will no longer be so in the future, when the last speakers will probably disappear. Everything happens as if this language had nothing but a fundamental role of memory, a deep-rooted virtue that is no longer or can no longer really be passed on to the young. So, leave that to the schools. The “translation” of the signboards (question 53) appears to be a rearguard action. Focusing on this issue actually proves that we are settling for the wrong one, while the real sociolinguistic problems are not being dealt with, and translated signboards probably wouldn’t even encourage people to learn Occitan anyway. That explains why everyone is likely to approve them — they give the illusion that Occitan is

gaining ground when it is really losing ground, and of course, it clears the French State of duty at little cost, thus enabling the latter to better limit its linguistic policy to this type of gimmick.

6. Conclusion: the future of regional identity

6.1. The identity system

Question 58 completes the survey by bringing us back to the first questions. The most noticeable point is that the hypothesis of an “Occitan identity” is negated, which is not contradictory to the partial recognition of an “Occitan *language’s*” legitimacy. This rejection has several meanings. One of them is that considering oneself as “Occitan” is very different in this region from “being fond of Occitan,” “speaking Occitan,” etc. For this statement tends to classify its sender into the distrusted, misunderstood, even rejected group of activists. The matter is complex indeed, but by mentioning activism, mental separatism (in a very republican-oriented region) is also being pointed at, the same goes for a form of “extremist attitude” that obviously offends the average regional-language speaker. Above all, there might be the revelation of an identity crisis in the whole of the Languedoc, the “language” (originally Occitan-Languedocien) or the core having being completely separated from the ethnic and identity whole. With the “ethnic ideal” consisting of making language and cultural habits tally, we are in the presence of an extremely divided situation. Occitan is mainly seen as a symbolic and historical “shelter” language, an account of the past, and a past identity (see section 6.2 below).

It must be added that the diffusion of French (which has not been dealt with here) is thoroughly carried out everywhere. The Languedoc lands are countries of old written tradition and of lay literacy, which paved the way for French to take over. Thus, local French regularly assumed the main functions played by Occitan-Languedocien, leaving to the latter, for the moment, a few rural or symbolic margins that ensure it a small survival space. Logically, the Languedoc identity system is therefore to eventually tally this component of the local and/or regional French with the global identity of Langue d’oc. But in this probable process, which is only one of the last “Frenchification” mishaps, the role played by Occitan is ambivalent. And therein lies its only chance. For firstly, as long as it exists, it will precisely continue to have an authoritativeness that I would readily call the “soil-and-history authority.” In practical terms, this prevents the Languedoc identity system from moving too far away from this central point. But secondly, since this Occitan-Languedocien is less and

less visible through the facts and is blocked by an instant reputation of archaism and inappropriateness with present-day life, the remaining solution is to pull the system toward a global identity of a French type.

The Languedoc-Roussillon is a region with a high level of immigration. This will precisely lead to a global identity that will be both Regional *and* French. Indeed, we are no longer in the first half of the century, when a mostly rural immigration brought, for example, into the Corbières of the Aude many Spanish people who became both “Occitan” and French speakers at the same time. Today, people immigrate with French, exclusively.

6.2. *Positions of the young and of school*

In spite the lack of longitudinal data to establish valid analyses, this is a crucial element. The 1991 survey only took adults into consideration. That of 1997 (mentioned in the introduction) included teenagers aged fifteen to seventeen, with the apparent consequence of worsening Occitan’s already difficult situation.

This generation (born in the early 1980s), brought up by parents who were thoroughly frenchified themselves and showing an increasingly obvious disinterest in Occitan, can but widen up the gap of direct non-transmission. But it is also one of the first generations to have received regular information on the regional language through the main occitanist filter and the linguistic policy for Occitan in the Languedoc-Roussillon. Moreover, it is the only generation to really have taken advantage of educational possibilities, in both public schools from primary to the baccalaureate (optional instruction of Occitan language and literature, or even bilingual classes) and private or associative schools, with the *Calandretas* schools.

It can be considered for the moment as negative that this teaching, based on voluntary work, has a very limited place in the global system of primary and secondary tuition in public schools (with an average of one to two hours per year), where bilingual sites are developing however. In addition, offering Occitan only affects a few schoolchildren. But outside the bilingual experimentations, instruction restricted to a few hours almost inevitably leads to a “consciousness raising” regarding languages and cultures of southern France. One may even wonder if this does not end up by negatively affecting the very language that such teaching is supposed to support (see below).

What is positive on the other hand is the fact that the number of pupils who choose Occitan options, or even the occitanist schools, while still

being in the minority, has continued to increase from the 1980s onward. And this is so, in Languedoc-Roussillon as well as in the Midi-Pyrenees (another region indirectly concerned by our study). Thus, the increase goes from six *Calandretas* in 1982 to 34 in 1999. During the same period, the number of pupils goes from 66 to 1607, and the different courses from about 10 to 89. We are therefore dealing with a steadily rising statistical graph. As for the neighboring region (Midi-Pyrenees), Mercadier (1996: 173–174) reminds us that in public schools, the number of pupils studying one way or another Occitan has gone from 12,712 (primary and secondary put together) in 1981–82 to 33,142 in 1993–94. The increase is more significant in primary than in secondary schools where the profile is split up.

The survey conducted by Marie-Jeanne Verny (2002) invited pupils of fifth year of secondary school (the average age therefore between sixteen and seventeen) to take a stand on the language issue (national, regional, immigrants' languages, etc.).

6.2.1. *The designation of languages.* Probably more than with adults, the identity of regional languages such as Occitan or Catalan are immediately recognized today. The identification of a patois or of local varieties comes second, unlike with the adults of 1991. It is certainly a trace of Occitan's symbolic rise, already mentioned several times here. Hence the rather confident comments uttered by the young such as:

Beaucoup de gens du sud de la France utilisent des mots occitans dans le langage familier ... ('Many people from the south of France use Occitan words in informal speech ...')

Je n'ai entendu que très peu de gens parler l'occitan "officiel" ... ('I have heard very few people speak the "official" Occitan ...')

Il s'agit du patois, du provençal ... Oui car le patois utilisé est du patois littéraire, de l'occitan ... ('That's a patois, that's Provençal ... Yes it is, for the patois spoken is a literary patois, Occitan ...')

L'occitan est une langue morte qui ne sert à rien ... Le catalan [est une] langue plus dynamique parlée par beaucoup de gens ... Le catalan lui a une telle ampleur qu'il est utilisé par tout le monde en Catalogne et est utilisé dans toutes les circonstances ... ('Occitan is a useless dead language ... Catalan [is a] more dynamic language spoken by a lot of people ... Catalan grew to such an extent that everybody in Catalonia speaks it, and so, in all situations ...')

6.2.2. *Images and representations.* A second axis of comments pinpoints (and sometimes stigmatizes) Occitan's residual characteristic. The readability of this language in school therefore comes with a clear isolation of Occitan, put aside out of hand into a sort of sociolinguistic ghetto,

even though some may actually be psychologically favorable to this regional language. Occitan is associated with old age and death in 58% of the cases. It appears to be a rural and local language, when not seen as a language of the most stereotyped folklore in 26% of the cases. Hence the paltry remaining 16% that can be considered as favorable opinions. Here, mainly patrimonial values are referred to, as well as references to their roots, family, childhood, or to the beauty and harmony of this language (around 10% give this type of representation):

L'occitan nous fait revenir en arrière, au temps où nos arrière-grands-parents étaient jeunes. L'occitan représente la France d'avant ... ('Occitan brings us back to the past, to the times when our great-grandparents were young. Occitan represents the France of the old days ...')

L'occitan [est] la langue des couches populaires de la société ... la langue parlée par les paysans. ('Occitan [is] the language of the lower social classes ... the language spoken by peasants.')

Image vague et caricaturale de cette langue parlée grossièrement par des hommes vieux et dodus jouant à la pétanque et faisant la sieste dans les villages de campagne du sud de la France ... ('A vague and caricatured image of this language, rudely spoken by fat old men who play the petanque and take naps in the country villages of the south of France ...')

[C'est une langue] chaleureuse, entraînante, elle résonne comme une musique avec ses intonations graves ou aiguës ... ('[It is a] heart-warming, jolly [language] that rings out like musical notes with its low and high-pitched intonations ...')

6.2.3. *Adaptation of the language.* Occitan is seen as the language of conviviality and private life in 22% of the cases, the language of the southern societies' cultural heritage in 28% of the cases and the possible language of public life in only 6% of the cases. Occitan therefore remains for the young (for the elderly alike) the language of the country (vs. the city), of a local extent (vs. national and international) and of old age (vs. nowadays) in 44% of the cases.

C'est une façon de se distinguer, de rendre hommage à nos racines anciennes ... ('It is a way of distinguishing oneself, of honouring our old roots ...')

[C'est une langue qui donne] une certaine identité régionale, sans être nationaliste je pense que les gens connaissant la langue de leur région sont plus proches de leurs racines ... [It is a language that gives] some kind of a regional identity, without being a nationalist, I think that people who know the language of their region are closer to their roots ...')

Je vois les temps anciens dans les Cévennes: les gens qui se parlent des dernières nouvelles, les entraides ... ('I see the old days in the Cévennes: people who used to exchange the latest news, mutual aid ...')

... Ni adapté ni adaptable à l'actualité et à la technologie ... De plus, ce serait une hérésie de créer des mots nouveaux (expérience déjà réalisée: ordinateur: "computadou") ... (Neither adapted nor adaptable to nowadays' lifestyle and technology ... What's more, it would be a heresy to create new words [an already attempted experiment: computer: "computadou"] ...)

6.3. *Speakers, representations, and activism*

It would not be reasonable to prognosticate whatsoever from data like the above. But one cannot help being struck by a sort of distribution or regulation that seems to have taken place in the collective sociolinguistic consciousness of Languedoc. Firstly, people are strongly attached to this language, and one might even wonder whether seeing it disappear at this speed at the end of the twentieth century (and being aware of this) does not rather strengthen this attachment, or deep affection even, being relatively theoretical all the same. Occitan's loss of ground did not really traumatize the community in the 1950s and 1960s, even though it was already beginning to be quite noticeable. But probably for many, the situation was not yet very alarming, and in any case it was "in the nature of things." However, now that the situation really is alarming (a question of survival and of transmission in the short term), regrets and heartbreaks are numerous, especially for those who do not have or no longer control the language and feel dispossessed of something, of those much talked-about roots that everyone would like to rediscover today. This movement does not relate to that of activism, however. The young informant who wrote above that "without being a nationalist, I think that people who know the language of their region are closer to their roots," seems to express this widespread option, through which people wish to be differentiated from the ultra-activist options or political separatists. This attachment to the language does belong to the *confidential* side of the language. Indeed, all tends to show that for most of the speakers, Occitan is not a language of public space and cannot claim to be one, at least not a language that can compete with French, or with any other national or international language of course.

In this kind of field, it is easy to note that the activist poles and the last group of real Occitan-Languedocien speakers often share diametrically opposed opinions and ways of action. I did not say much about activists, who, in some respects, have done a lot for Occitan's striking symbolic rise. The trouble is, however, that this action got progressively cut off from those for whom it should have first been intended, resulting in aberrations which, ambiguously, help "Occitan" (or the symbolic

representation of Occitan) but which at the same time may very well cause immediate harm at the actual grassroots level. The worst is that many spontaneous or potential Languedocien speakers may turn away from their language, put off by the political and publicity-grabbing exposure of “Occitan,” negatively associating the language itself with the manipulations that take place about and around the language. Among the Web sites related to Occitan, which are now quite numerous, there is *Ciutat City* (Toulouse) for instance. A lot of information is available, such as details of Occitan radio and TV programs (station by station), a point briefly dealt with in the 1991 survey. It also provides a description of how the very accurate, unifying, and strongly activist representation of Langue d’oc was established. Coming from an activist core of Toulouse, the site thus presents a quite typical architecture: alignment with “central” Occitan, presentations of Louis Alibert’s theories, junction between the “Occitan” identity and the Cathar schism of the Middle Ages, etc. The Web site also offers several Occitan courses, given by the *Ecole occitane pour Adultes (L’Escòla Occitana pels Adults)*, still located in Toulouse. The tone is always very representative of an occitanist activist sphere of influence. I will share one example only, regarding a radio station that no longer broadcasts in Occitan, after having done so (my emphasis): “Radio Occitania Narbona disappeared prematurely, *or more likely defected to the French-speaking world*, only Radio Occitania Tolosa remains. . . .” It can easily be noted that the Occitan cause is stylistically replaced in a warlike, anticolonial context, where battalions openly betray and “defect” to the enemy’s side, while resistance fighters carry on the struggle.

These strategies and others of the same kind, quite current since the last three decades (without directly referring to a political Occitan movement strictly speaking⁵), are therefore radically opposed to the majority’s attitude. As a matter of fact, this explains why majority speeches so often underline Occitan’s inappropriateness for modernity and professional relations, for changes as well. Just as if there were contained in it a message, very regularly sent and more and more precisely, destined for activists: a sectarian, monolithic, sometimes brutal standardization, is not the right way. In any case, this method has never found its way to the speakers, only vaguely concerned and even more often reluctant regarding it. Consequently, for many, almost fifty years after its creation, it is like an unrealistic logorrhea where all is not false, but which certainly can’t represent the entire Occitan-Languedocien sociolinguistic community.

Is this way of thinking well-founded? Several elements do prove that we are dealing with the order of representations. It only takes a glimpse over at Spain’s Catalan neighbor to understand that for mechanical reasons, a

regional language is not in itself condemned to the confidential and identity sphere. But the same example also reveals, in spite of the apparent success of Catalan beyond the Pyrenees, a sort of limitation to the activists' standardization initiative after many years of experimentation. For example, Luis Vicent Aracil, in a discourse in Barcelona, analysed the social and cultural roots of catalan regression in the near future (Tudela 1986: 36–40).

6.4. *Evolution patterns*

The sociolinguistic system for which the outlines were sketched above is certainly in a crucial phase of its evolution. It could very well be, according to what we have seen, the terminal phase. But in the middle term, no type of evolution can be prognosticated, for besides the proven phenomena, other nonvisible ones also affect the system and can always make it swerve in unpredictable directions. The future simply always has surprises in store for mankind, as well as for sociolinguists, of course, who are almost always wrong in their predictions. And this is for the better, because without it, life and science would be very boring.

Regarding Occitan-Languedocien, I cannot be blamed for having given a particularly negative reading. I would be the first to understand the annoyance and even the anger of those who fiercely defend this language with sincerity. And I find it immensely saddening that linguists (like me through force of circumstance) end up talking about a thousand-year-old language like crumbs remaining on the field. Indeed, this language shared the birth, life, and death of millions of people, who experienced happiness or sadness with it, who shed tears, who laughed, swore, and prayed with words of this language.

At first hand, the data are murderous. Admittedly, epilinguistic surveys (and so is the case for most of the surveys available) do not only present representations and trends. Globally though, they refer to realities that cannot be ignored and that can be witnessed with honesty in one's backyard. In my village of the Corbières, I was able to notice this decline for over more than twenty years. I may not have a survey to provide, but I distinctly watch as those who used to speak the local language disappear one after the other. In the 1980s, the "patois" echoed under the watering place's awning, or on the around the petanque grounds. Since we always passed by sooner or later we could see ten to fifteen men spontaneously meet there in the afternoon, or in the evening after supper. Occitan could still be heard there, in the surrounding polyphony. Today, routine brings men to the same places, but they are no longer more than two or three now, or five at the very most. And Occitan is hardly heard any more. It

has now become the language of private meetings, or flies through a French-speaking conversation like a comet. So appears Occitan-Languedocien's public reality in one of those "protective" regions where it is still presumed to be spoken. Following the disappearing elders come a few men, in the prime of life. If they happen to speak Occitan, it is literally broken Occitan, and most of the time they no longer speak it (or no longer wish to) but understand it.

As for schools, they apparently arrive too late and, the programs seem truly inappropriate anyway, on the whole as well as in the content. Even the learners themselves, in the majority, globally see "Occitan" as out of the race.

There remains the European perspective, indeed, a novelty. Would it enable regional language poles to be established? Would there be a greater rapprochement between Occitan and Catalan? Would that be desirable and most of all realizable? What are the intentions? We might as well say that this option, although positive, brings more questions than answers, which all depend on the community's general assent. There is also the fact that the European policy of opening up, in spite of the frequently declared well-intended actions concerning regional languages, might toughen the competition between the lingua franca, and for the time being, it is hard to see how that could be favorable to so-called "minority" languages.

Finally, the only space in where Occitan survives today is almost certainly an "ecological" one as such. This is the same idea that seems to take shape among the youth (probably not all though): prevent this language from disappearing with all the chapters of its story. Protect it, meaning withdrawing it from the competitive sociolinguistic system (where it hardly has any chance of surviving), structure through schools and various educational actions, a last group of speakers who will keep the flame burning in spite the difficulties, in order to replace the real speakers, who will never come back.

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Notes

1. In French, the term *Languedoc* (in one word) is the name of a region, the term *langue d'oc* (in three words literally meaning "language of oc") is the possible name of a language or a group of languages, somewhat synonymous to the term *Occitan*.
2. We would like to thank warmly Elatiana Vaillant (researcher in sociolinguistics, CREDILIF, Université de Haute Bretagne) for translating this paper into English (F.M., Ph. B., and H. S).

3. From here on, I will not deal with the answers related to Catalan naturally quoted in the answers, but not of a direct concern to us in this part of the paper.
4. Or *Vivre au pays* ('Living in the country'), which used to be a famous slogan in the 1970s, especially in the "du Larzac" affair. This program also concerns the television region of the Midi-Pyrenees (region of Toulouse) and that of the Languedoc-Roussillon (region of Montpellier). All in all, it is a reference program of the Languedoc.
5. For instance, the *Partit Occitan*, which distributes a separatist periodical, *Occitania*, and which obtains a few thousands votes in most suffrages.

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