



Language attitudes, vitality awareness, and identity in France: The case of Picard/Ch'ti in the Hauts-de-France

LOUIS COEYMAN 

ARTICLE



ABSTRACT

Most regional languages in France are now endangered, as speaker numbers have been declining for decades. One such language is Picard (also called Ch'ti), a minority language spoken in the Hauts-de-France region. This research investigates the social perception of Picard, its place in the modern world, and its importance to the identity of those living in the Picardophone area. The study also suggests that making questionnaire respondents aware of a language's endangered status has an impact on the language attitudes respondents express. Two versions of the same online questionnaire were used, only one of which included a short introduction presenting Picard as a "severely endangered language". These questionnaires were answered by 586 people living in the Hauts-de-France. The results differ by age and by whether the respondent was informed/reminded of the loss of the language. Attitudes towards Picard cannot be considered negative, but rather mixed or positive. Nevertheless, respondents remain for the most part unwilling to use Picard in most domains where French is used. I argue that current approaches to language planning and policy in France are not helpful for the future of this language.

RÉSUMÉ

La plupart des langues régionales de France sont aujourd'hui en danger car leur nombre de locuteurs diminue depuis des décennies. L'une de ces langues est le picard (aussi appelé ch'ti), langue minoritaire parlée dans la région des Hauts-de-France. Cette recherche interroge la perception sociale du picard, sa place dans le monde moderne et son importance pour l'identité des personnes. Cette étude suggère également que sensibiliser les personnes répondants au questionnaire au statut en danger d'une langue a un impact sur les attitudes linguistiques exprimées par les participants. Deux versions d'un même questionnaire en ligne furent utilisées, où l'une comportait une courte introduction présentant le picard comme une «langue sérieusement en danger». 586 personnes habitants les Hauts-de-France ont répondu à ces questionnaires. Les résultats diffèrent selon l'âge et en fonction de si les participants sont informés/rappelés ou non de la perte de la langue. Les attitudes envers le picard ne peuvent être considérées comme négatives, mais plutôt mitigées ou positives.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Louis Coeyman

University of Glasgow, UK

l.coeyman.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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Néanmoins, les personnes interrogées restent pour la plupart réticentes à utiliser le picard dans la plupart des domaines où le français est utilisé. Je soutiens que les approches actuelles de la planification et de la politique linguistique en France ne contribuent pas à aider l’avenir de cette langue.

RACOURCHE

L’pupart ed ches langues régionales ed France is sont achteure in danger pasqué leu nombe ed déviseus i dminue edpu des disannes d’ennées. Emmi ches langues-lo ny-o l’picard (auchi aplé ch’ti), ene langue minoritaire qu’in dvide din l’région des Heuts-d’France, qu’i sro el sujet d’ echl’artique-chi. Aavec ch’manque ed données chocholinwistique, echl’ercache-chi ale explore el percepcion sociale du picard, es plache din ch’monde moderne pi s’n importance pou chl’idintité des gins. Pou miu comprinde el situacion d’achteure, 586 gins dmorant din ches Heuts-d’France is ont répondu à des questions in lène. Ches résultots is amoutte eq ches attitudes au garde d’el variété-lo is n’ peutte pon ête ravisées comme négatiuses, mais puto interdeus o bin positiuses. In pusse, l’picard i est important pou chl’idintité des gins au nivieu personnel pi étou au nivieu régional. Chl’ analyse ale amoute auchi ene diférinche d’attitude/d’idintité slon chl’age pi slon qu’in est infourmé/ramintuvé d’el perte du picard, mais ch’ginre i n’a pon d’impake su ches réponses. Chpindant, ches gins is restte pou l’pupart conte l’idée d’es servir du picard din l’pupart des domaines dù qu’in s’ sert du francés. J’oupène qu’in canjmint i est nécessaire din l’planificacion pi l’politique linwistique achteure in France pou aidier à warandir in avnir à l’ langue-lo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language attitudes have an important role to play in “assessing the chances of success of revitalisation efforts for endangered languages” (Sallabank 2013a: i). However, considering that many endangered languages are also minority languages, speakers’ attitudes are not always taken into consideration in language planning and policy. Furthermore, since language planning is typically funded by the majority community, a certain degree of acceptance of the minority language is necessary if it is to be invested in financially (Sallabank 2013b).

This paper investigates the current language attitudes towards Picard (also called Ch’ti, as discussed below), a minority and endangered language of France, and the identity of the wider Picardophone community. The study’s target group was people above the age of 18 who have previously lived or are living in the Hauts-de-France, the traditional Picard-speaking area of France, whether they speak Picard or not. Two versions of the same online questionnaire were used, the first of which included no introductory material about the language, and the second of which had a short introduction presenting Picard/Ch’ti as a “severely endangered language”. One of the aims was to see if presenting participants with the information that Picard is endangered had any influence on their identification with and attitudes towards the code. To my knowledge, no similar study using two versions of the same questionnaire has been conducted in the past in order to see if being informed (or reminded) about the endangered status of a language had an impact. The results suggest that presenting Picard as an “endangered language” could have a positive impact on its revitalisation.

While there have been some previous studies of attitudes towards Picard (see Pooley 1998, 2004, 2014; Smirnova 2016), no study has extensively focused on people’s degree of identification with and attitudes towards Picard in the general population of the Picardophone area whether they speak the language or not. The fact that so few studies have been conducted on Picard could be attributed to the belief of many linguists and non-linguists that the Oil varieties spoken in France have already ceased to be spoken (Auger & Villeneuve 2008).¹ As data about language attitudes

¹ The Oil language group includes Picard, French, Norman, and other closely related varieties. They are grouped as “Oil languages” in reference to the word *oil* ‘yes’ that they shared, which would become *oui*.

towards Picard remain limited, there is “a lot left to do about Picard and other Oil languages in the field of linguistic ideologies” (Eloy 2017: 164; my translation). Keeping this in mind, this study was developed to better understand how Picard is perceived in the region. What do people consider to be its place in the modern world, and how important is it to people’s identity? The data were obtained using questionnaires and analysed according to the independent variables of age, gender, and awareness of language vitality (so as to investigate if presenting participants with the information that Picard is an endangered language has an influence on expressed attitudes). Note that the “speaker vs. non-speaker” dichotomy was not a variable in this study, given the many potential interpretations of the term “speaker” and the blurry lines between Picard, French spoken with a northern accent, and “standard” French, which could have affected respondents’ ability to meaningfully report whether they speak Picard.

2. BACKGROUND ON PICARD

Picard is a Romance language belonging to the Oil languages. It is traditionally spoken in the Hainaut province of Belgium and in France in the Hauts-de-France, the northernmost region of the country (Dawson 2012). The Hauts-de-France was formed in 2016 by the fusion of the former administrative regions of Picardy, which included the departments of Aisne, Oise, and Somme, and Nord-Pas-de-Calais, which included the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais (see Figures 1 and 2). In 1999, 27% of the Somme residents declared an ability to speak or understand Picard, while this number was 22% in the Pas-de-Calais and 10% in the Nord (Blot et al. 2004).

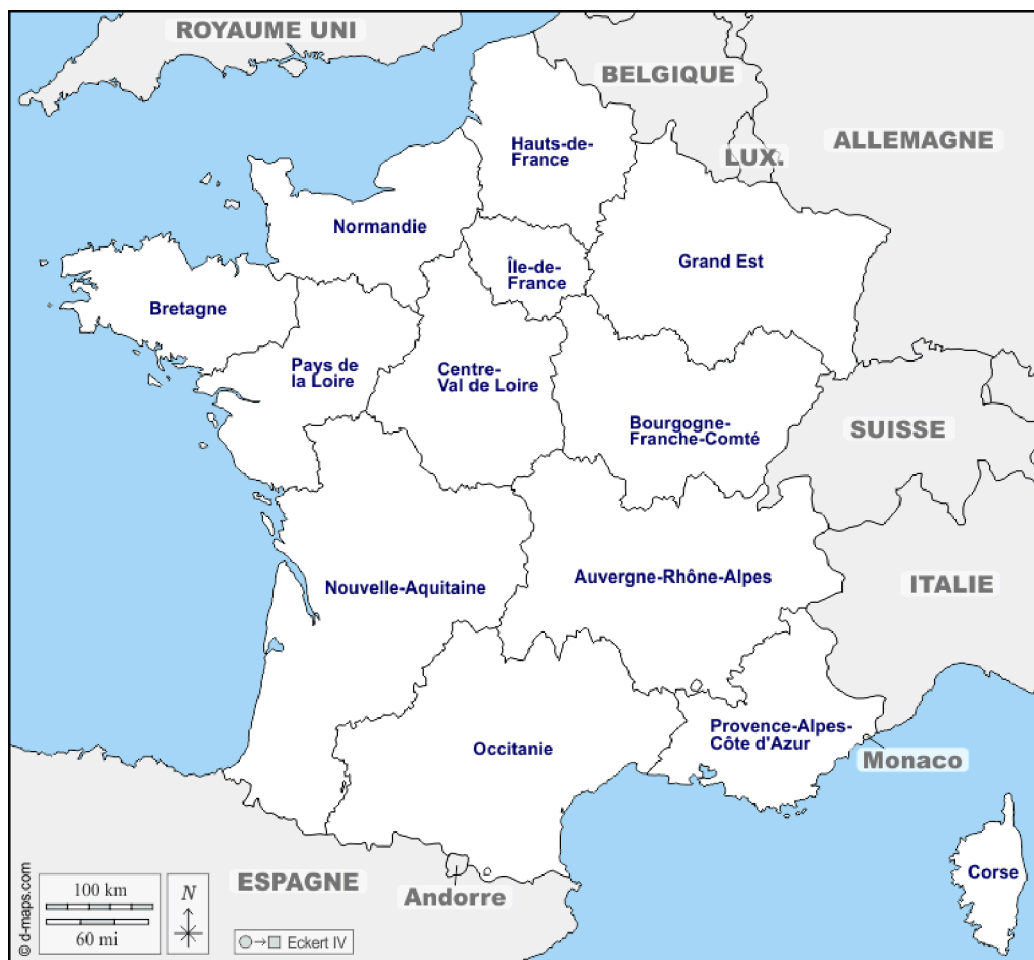


Figure 1 The location of France in Western Europe showing Hauts-de-France, the northernmost region of the country.

From d-maps.com: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=2826&lang=en.



Figure 2 The departments of the Hauts-de-France region, where Picard is traditionally spoken.

From d-maps.com: https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=167424&lang=en.

Despite the relatively high proportion of speakers in the population, Picard is classified as a “severely endangered language” (Moseley 2010; Salminen 2007). This classification is justified in part by the low rates of transmission across generations, and in part by the lack of government support. It should be noted that Picard is known locally under different names: the language is called “Picard” in Picardy and in Hainaut, but it is commonly called “Ch’ti” in Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The name difference is significant given that referring to the language as “Picard” or as “Ch’ti” will not have the same effect if used in an area where it is known by another name.

In France, regional varieties are generally not well perceived, and this is particularly true in the case of Picard/Ch’ti due to its many similarities with the official language of the country, French, as the next section of this paper will reveal.

2.1 LANGUAGE POLICY IN FRANCE

As far back as the end of the 13th century, Picard/Ch’ti started falling in status relative to the French of Paris (Eloy 1997). For a long time, France was a multilingual state, but due to continuously harsh language policies since the 17th century, the country had become mostly monolingual by the 20th century (Bourhis 1997). Abbé Grégoire, a Catholic priest and proponent of universalised French in the 18th and 19th centuries, conducted a study in 1794 to determine how many people in France

could speak French, finding that only three million out of the country's 23 million inhabitants could speak it (German 2007). As a result, Grégoire expressed “the outlines of a language policy that has ever since been applied in France”: that is, the use of the same language for all French people, or in other words, the idea of one nation, one language (Raible 2005: 117). Language policies in France have influenced attitudes towards French and other languages, since in addition to promoting the Parisian regional dialect as the French prestige standard, the government has also legislated against all languages other than French. Bourhis (1997) points out that the prestige standard status achieved by French should not be thought of as a cultural accident, but as the product of centuries of effort to enforce the use of one code and exclude all others.

A hierarchy of stigmatisation of regional languages emerged as a consequence of these policies. As discussed by Pooley (2004), the least stigmatised languages are the distinctive Occitan varieties along with the non-Romance varieties such as Basque or Alsatian, while the most stigmatised are the Oïl and Francoprovençal varieties. All these codes can also be called *patois* in French, a term used to refer to all regional language varieties other than French in France, from the related Oïl languages to distant relatives such as Breton, and even to the genealogically unrelated Basque language (Marr & Pooley 2011). Although *patois* may seem dismissive, Picard/Ch'ti was traditionally known by this name; thus, *patois* does not automatically carry negative connotations locally (Pooley 2014). For all these reasons, the relationship between French and Picard/Ch'ti may be understood as diglossic (Smirnova & Dawson 2019), with French the High variety, since it is the official language, language of education, and vehicle for opportunity, and Picard/Ch'ti the Low variety, since it bears no official status and is used with family and friends. Considering the relation between French and Picard/Ch'ti in diglossic terms contributes to the understanding of the language attitudes reported on later in the paper. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Picard/Ch'ti has a presence in domains traditionally associated with High-variety languages, such as cultural events and literature, and is now very rarely acquired and used at home.

2.2 SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF PICARD

In her research comparing Picard/Ch'ti with Mari, a minority language spoken in Russia, Smirnova (2016) mentions that when foreigners visit Lille or Amiens, the two largest cities of the Hauts-de-France, they detect no sign of Picard's existence, since it is neither visible nor audible. This is in strong contrast to what is shown in the 2008 movie *Bienvenue chez les Ch'ti*, the highest-grossing French film in France that had more than 20 million views. In this comedy, which takes place in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, many seem to be able to speak Picard/Ch'ti. But this does not reflect the actual situation in the region. The rare manifestations of Picard/Ch'ti one in fact currently finds in the linguistic landscape include some business names on signs, the presence of the word “Ch'ti” on some products (such as beers and sauces), a few books in Picard, a few newspapers, some Picard/Ch'ti time slots on the regional radio, and some bilingual town signs. Clear assertion of a regional Picard/Ch'ti identity in the linguistic landscape through features like bilingual signs and newspapers remains uncommon (Smirnova 2016). Picard/Ch'ti language planning and policy simultaneously follows two approaches: a top-down approach at the institutional level, and a bottom-up approach at the level of civil society. For an example of the top-down approach, the former *Conseil Régional de Picardie* (the regional Picardy council) included Picard/Ch'ti in its cultural policies and provided financial support to the *Agence pour le Picard* as well as to the *Université de Picardie Jules Verne* to fund research projects related to Picard/Ch'ti (Smirnova 2016). Even so, the former *Conseil Régional du Nord-Pas-de-Calais* never took actions to support the code (Smirnova 2016). In 2016, the two regions were merged into the Hauts-de-France, unifying the Picardophone area. The *Pacte Linguistique* signed in December 2020 aims to increase support for regional languages, but it is too soon to know how effective this will be. In any event, unification does not ensure the future of the code, and this may have been forgotten by the new *Conseil Régional des Hauts-de-France*, since in May 2020 they published an article titled *Le Picard, une langue régionale d'une belle vitalité* (see *Région Hauts-de-France* 2020) stating that the language was *en pleine forme!* ‘in a very good shape!’ and that ‘young people ensure the continuity of the language’ (my translations), suggesting a lack of awareness of the current situation at the institutional level.

As it does not have any real official support, Picard/Ch'ti primarily has a place in the Hauts-de-France thanks to grassroots initiatives such as the *Picardisants du Ponthieu et du Vimeu*, a group of writers who meet every month to read their work, and *Achteure*, a musical group (Smirnova 2016). There are certainly other groups which have in common the aim to keep Picard/Ch'ti culture and language alive. However, as noted by Smirnova, the bottom-up approach alone is not likely to be effective. To help Picard effectively, a strong support is needed at both top-down and bottom-up levels, and the current top-down support is too weak.

A qualitative study conducted by Smirnova (2016) showed that the stigmatisation of Picard/Ch'ti has been widely internalised by the population. Indeed, when asked why they do not want to reveal their skills in the language, interviewees mentioned that they were afraid to be laughed at by the Parisians, or to look like they come from an underprivileged social background, as Picard/Ch'ti is the language of labourers. Picard/Ch'ti may be in a diglossic relation with French, but Picard and Ch'ti can also be said to be in a “*diglossie enchâssée*”: a situation of double overlapping diglossia given that the terms “Picard” (the label used in Picardy to refer to the code) and “Ch'ti” (the label used in Nord-Pas-de-Calais) carry different connotations, since Ch'ti is not viewed as a regional language but tends to be regarded as an accent or a *patois* with a derogatory meaning (Smirnova & Dawson 2019). This diglossia between Picard and Ch'ti can also be seen in activist associations, such as the *Comité Régional Picard* which stated “as for ‘Ch'timi’, it is not a variety of Picard, but a vulgar jargon. French slang mixed with *patois*. This pseudo-patois has engendered an artificial folklore, a real dog’s breakfast that sullies and offends the eminent dignity of the Picards” (Pooley 2004: 644; Pooley’s translation). As Smirnova & Dawson’s study shows, this gives some of those they interviewed a sense of linguistic insecurity: their Ch'ti is not perceived as a real language, and they do not have the feeling that they speak like “real speakers of *patois*” (2019: 100).

Studies of Picard/Ch'ti use by children, their parents, and their grandparents were conducted by Söhnle in 1994 (cited in Pooley 1998) in an urban area, Tourcoing, and a rural area, Armentières. These studies revealed that children in the rural area understood and spoke Picard/Ch'ti more than the ones in the urban area. However, the language acquisition rate continued to decrease even in the rural area. Children in both areas showed a strong interest in learning Picard, but they did not automatically have the support of their parents: only 45% of parents from the urban area and 75% of parents from the rural area wanted their children to learn the code (Pooley 1998). Söhnle’s research with members of the *Veillées Patoisantes de Tourcoing*, a group dedicated to using the language that met in the evenings, revealed that the code was mostly used with friends, siblings, and partners. Despite a “concentration of fluent and aware Picardophones”, Picard/Ch'ti was rarely used naturally and spontaneously in the *Veillées Patoisantes* (Pooley 2004: 616). This is because those attending the evening groups did not generally know each other very well and did not dare to use a language that they were used to using only in private. Most attendees also wanted their children and grandchildren to learn Picard/Ch'ti, but 43% believed that Picard/Ch'ti would be lost in the future. In addition, it was found that Picard/Ch'ti was regarded as a language by only 39% (Pooley 2004).

3. SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF PICARD

The present study was developed to better comprehend how Picard/Ch'ti is perceived, as no previous study has extensively focused on the degree of identification with and attitudes towards Picard/Ch'ti of the general population of the Picardophone area. What is the language’s place in the modern world, and how important is it to people’s identity? Based on analysis of an online survey, this study adds attitudinal data from the general population, which is useful for understanding Picard’s current profile and for contributing to future language planning efforts.

The survey was carried out in June 2020 through use of an online questionnaire in order to collect large amounts of data without the need of field trips, which would have been complicated given the COVID-19 epidemiological situation. Data were gathered using two versions of the same questionnaire, both of which were in French. One of the questionnaires (“Questionnaire 1”) had no introduction, while the second (“Questionnaire 2”) featured a short introductory paragraph

presenting Picard/Ch'ti as a “severely endangered language”. The questionnaires were shared on Facebook and were published on village and town Facebook pages such as *Tu sais que tu viens d'Albert parce que...* ‘You know you come from Albert because...’ or *Auchy, ma ville* ‘Auchy, my city’ (my translations). Data collection lasted for four weeks and the questionnaires were shared on 15 village and town Facebook pages across the Hauts-de-France, i.e., in both Picardy and Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Some of the respondents shared them further on their own Facebook pages.

The questions were divided into three parts. Each section started with a small paragraph instructing the respondents to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with each questionnaire statement on a Likert scale of one to five. The first part investigated whether people thought Picard and Ch'ti were related or not. The second part investigated aspects of the respondents' linguistic identity with five statements, examining their pride of being from Nord-Pas-de-Calais/Picardy and the importance of Picard/Ch'ti as a code. The third part asked about attitudes towards the place of Picard/Ch'ti in the modern world, including its presence in the linguistic landscape and in schools. The survey questions were partly inspired by the questionnaire used in Sallabank's (2007) study of attitudes towards Guernsey Norman French, and the full list of questionnaire items can be found in the Appendix.

The data from the two questionnaires was analysed using SPSS, a statistical analysis software, taking into account the independent variables of gender, age, and language vitality awareness. Cross tabulations and Chi-square tests were run to determine whether the variables were related or independent, with the results considered significant if the *p*-value was less than 0.05. When the responses were analysed with the gender variable, the participants who preferred not to reveal their gender were excluded from the analysis.

There were 586 people who took part in the study. All of them had lived or were currently living in the traditional Picardophone area of France. Among the 586 respondents, 49.1% (288) answered Questionnaire 1, without the introductory paragraph, and 50.9% (298) answered Questionnaire 2, with the paragraph. 72% (422) were women, 27.7% (163) men, and 0.2% (1) preferred not to reveal their gender. 41.5% (243) were between 18 and 34 years old, 36.2% (212) were between 35 and 54 years old, and 22.4% (131) were 55 years old or older. Despite the large sample surveyed, it should be noted that participation was from individuals belonging to the social media pages of towns in the Hauts-de-France. Therefore, it is possible that the participants had a stronger interest in Picard/Ch'ti and in regional matters than the overall population of the region. Nevertheless, the large number of respondents may moderate the potential this created for bias in the results.

3.1 LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

The attitudes towards Picard/Ch'ti cannot be straightforwardly described as either negative or positive. The majority of respondents know that Ch'ti and Picard are similar and are both considered to be a dialect of French by the majority. While respondents have mixed attitudes regarding the superiority of the French language over Picard/Ch'ti, few think that they are impoverished versions of French. In addition, few respondents think that speaking Picard/Ch'ti impacts the ability to speak proper French.

Another way to understand the respondents' views of Picard/Ch'ti is to see how they describe this form of speech. The most chosen word to describe both Ch'ti and Picard is the relatively neutral term *unique* ‘unique’ while the least chosen is *mélodieux* ‘melodious’. The most used words freely offered by participants to describe Picard and Ch'ti are shared by both; they are *patrimoine* (similar to ‘shared heritage’ in English), *héritage* ‘heritage’, *racine* ‘roots’, and *tradition* ‘tradition’. Even if Picard and Ch'ti share many descriptors, they differ in other respects: Ch'ti elicited *corons* ‘miner's cottage’ and *mineur* ‘miner’, whereas Picard is described by words such as *campagne* ‘countryside’, *campagnard* ‘rustic’, and *paysan* ‘farmer’. This reflects the mining industry of the former Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and the agricultural sector of the former Picardy region. Overall, Picard and Ch'ti are both described with terms relating to their cultural past, and not with terms linked to the 21st century.

The respondents' regional identity can be described as strong. The vast majority of respondents claim that they are proud of being from Nord-Pas-de-Calais/Picardy and that these regions should maintain their unique identity. Overall, respondents are in favour of using Picard/Ch'ti to maintain the identity of the region. It appears that this is felt to be important for maintaining the respondents' personal heritage, but even more so for maintaining the region's heritage.

It is also important to understand respondents' perception of the language variety's place in the modern world. People care about the existence of Picard/Ch'ti; a majority of respondents say that the code has its place in the modern world (73%) and that it matters if Picard/Ch'ti disappears (86%). On the other hand, attitudes towards the language in the linguistic landscape are mixed: respondents tend to have a neutral opinion about bilingual signs and bilingual announcements. Interestingly, among those respondents whose opinion is not neutral, 43.2% are in favour of bilingual signs but only 26.5% are in favour of bilingual announcements, implying a stronger desire to see Picard/Ch'ti in the environment than to hear it. With regards to learning the language, opinions are mixed, though many say they would like to learn it. Attitudes are also mixed about the teaching of Picard/Ch'ti in school, with no clear majority opinion emerging.

Overall, the data suggest that respondents perceive Picard/Ch'ti as part of their own and their region's heritage. However, while the majority of respondents have a positive attitude towards the idea of Picard/Ch'ti, their attitudes are mixed with regard to the practical ways to bring the code into the linguistic landscape and schools, where French is ubiquitous. This reinforces the idea that there is a diglossic relation between French and Picard/Ch'ti as suggested by Smirnova & Dawson (2019).

3.2 AGE

The oldest group tends to have the most favourable attitudes about Picard/Ch'ti, followed by the middle group and then the youngest group. For example, those 55 years old and older are slightly more likely to know that Picard and Ch'ti are similar despite the different names, followed by the 35–54 age group, and then the 18–34 age group; however, these differences are not statistically significant. The pattern linking favourable attitudes towards Picard/Ch'ti with age can be illustrated by the statement, “The French language is superior to Picard”. 38.2% of the oldest group disagrees or strongly disagrees with this statement, compared to 35.4% for the middle group and 25.9% for the youngest group ($p = 0.011$).

There is a clear pattern with regards to identity as well: the oldest group has the strongest regional identity and considers Picard/Ch'ti an important part of their regional and personal heritage, followed by the 35–54 age group and the 18–34 age group. The difference can be seen especially in responses to the statement “Picard or Ch'ti is important for your personal heritage”, where 54.2% of those 55 years old and older “strongly agree” compared to only 23.5% of the 18–34 age group. It is also illustrated with the statement “Picard or Ch'ti should be used to maintain the identity of Nord-Pas-de-Calais/Picardy”, where the youngest group is less likely to agree/strongly agree with this statement (62.1% agree/strongly agree, unlike 71.3% for the middle group and 82.5% for the oldest group). These differences are all statistically significant.

The oldest group has the most favourable attitudes towards the place of Picard/Ch'ti in the modern world, in schools, and in the linguistic landscape of Nord-Pas-de-Calais/Picardy, closely followed by the 35–54 age group. But an important difference can be noticed with the 18–34 age group. Only 12.8% of the youngest group strongly agrees that Picard/Ch'ti should be taught in schools, compared to 24.1% of the 35–54 age group and 27.5% of those 55 years old and older. Those most in favour of bilingual signs are the oldest, followed by the middle and youngest groups. These differences are all statistically significant.

These results suggest that variations in attitudes and regional identity can be expected depending on one's age, with respondents born after 1985 (i.e., the 18–34 age group) having a less favourable attitude towards the code compared to those born before that date. This phenomenon could be explained by their lack of intimate exposure to the language, given that “very few people, if any at all, born since 1980 have inherited the language from their parents” (Pooley 2014: 86).

3.3 GENDER

The questionnaire answers from men and women are for the most part similar, but some differences are worth highlighting. Men are more likely than women to know that Ch'ti and Picard are similar (77.9% vs. 69.4%; $p = 0.041$). Men also tend to think of Ch'ti as a language more than women (21.5% and 17.1%, respectively) and the same observation can be made for Picard (30.7% and 20.4%). However, this difference is significant only in the case of Picard ($p = 0.015$), and not with Ch'ti ($p = 0.171$). Men are also more likely to report that it does not matter if Ch'ti or Picard disappears ($p = 0.046$).

Apart from these findings, there are no significant differences between men and women regarding their general attitudes towards the code, its place in the modern world, and its importance for maintaining a distinct regional identity. The results do not support the findings of many sociolinguistic studies that emphasise the preference for high-prestige speech varieties by women more than by men. Unfortunately, uneven participation in the study (72% of respondents were women) limits the interpretability of the results.

3.4 VITALITY AWARENESS

To assess vitality awareness and its effects on respondents, Questionnaire 2 contained a cover page titled "Important information" that only respondents for the second version saw. This page contained a paragraph explaining the current situation of Picard/Ch'ti as follows (my translation): "Picard, also called Ch'ti in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, is a Romance language just like Spanish or Corsican. As the use of this language has decreased considerably, UNESCO has classified Picard/Ch'ti as a 'seriously endangered' language."

Those who answered Questionnaire 2 were more likely to believe that Ch'ti and Picard are similar than those who answered Questionnaire 1, which lacked the introductory paragraph (75.8% in Questionnaire 2, as opposed to Questionnaire 1's 67.7%; $p = 0.029$). Interestingly, the two codes are more often perceived as languages when people are informed (or for some, reminded) of the threat to their vitality and UNESCO's recognition of Picard/Ch'ti as a language: 20.5% of the Questionnaire 2 respondents say that Ch'ti is a language, compared to 16.3% of the Questionnaire 1 respondents. For Picard, the numbers are 26.5% compared to 20.1%. But in neither case is this difference significant.

With regard to questions about regional identity, the difference in results obtained between the two groups is similarly non-significant. However, when asked if the code is important for their personal heritage, Questionnaire 2 respondents were significantly more likely to answer "strongly agree" compared to those who answered Questionnaire 1 (45% and 33.7%, respectively, $p = 0.028$). The same pattern can be noticed for the question asking if the code is important for the region's heritage; 63.1% strongly agree in Questionnaire 2 and 49% in Questionnaire 1 ($p = 0.016$).

This reveals that Questionnaire 2 respondents, those informed/reminded that Picard/Ch'ti is a UNESCO-recognised endangered language, have more favourable attitudes toward the language than Questionnaire 1 respondents. In the last part of the questionnaire, this difference is not statistically significant for two statements ("Picard or Ch'ti does not have its place in the modern world" and "You would like to learn Picard or Ch'ti"). However, for the four remaining questions (attitudes towards Picard/Ch'ti taught in schools, bilingual signs, bilingual announcements, and if it matters whether Picard/Ch'ti disappears or not), the differences are all statistically significant. For example, 42.6% of Questionnaire 2 respondents agree/strongly agree with the statement "Picard or Ch'ti should be taught in school" compared to 34.7% of Questionnaire 1 respondents ($p = 0.005$).

In sum, those informed/reminded of the vitality situation are more likely to describe Picard and Ch'ti as languages compared to those who are not informed/reminded of the situation. It must be borne in mind that the information presented in Questionnaire 2 described Picard/Ch'ti as a seriously endangered language (i.e., the word "language" was used) and mentioned that Picard is also called Ch'ti in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, equating the two, so acquiescence bias should be considered.

Nevertheless, those informed/reminded of the current endangered status of Picard/Ch'ti consider the code more important to their own heritage and to the region's heritage and have more positive attitudes towards the place of the code in the linguistic landscape and in schools compared to those not informed/reminded of the situation. Evidently not everybody knows that Picard/Ch'ti is actually a language and that it is endangered, so reading the informative paragraph in the questionnaire might have led some respondents to realise that the local language could disappear, resulting in more supportive attitudes towards the preservation of Picard/Ch'ti.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study constitute an addition to the existing literature on Picard/Ch'ti and provide new insights to better comprehend its situation in the 21st century. Since “promotion of low-status languages cannot be effective without understanding and addressing attitudes and ideologies” (Sallabank 2015: 45), the study focused on the identity and attitudes of the general population in the Picard-speaking area, rather than on the attitudes of Picard/Ch'ti speakers only. The results also build on existing evidence of a diglossic situation between French and Picard/Ch'ti: despite considering the code to be important for their personal heritage, and for the region's heritage, and despite agreeing that it matters if the code disappears, respondents have mixed attitudes towards using Picard/Ch'ti in the linguistic landscape and in schools where the High variety, French, is traditionally used.

The results also have practical implications for language policy and planning in France. This study shows that people who were presented with information about the current endangered status of Picard have more positive attitudes toward the language and are more in favour of its use in the linguistic landscape and in schools compared to those who were not presented with this information before filling out the questionnaire. Raising awareness about the gradual loss of Picard/Ch'ti seems to work to its advantage; consequently, the publication of articles like the one by the *Conseil Régional des Hauts-de-France* in May 2020 stating that Picard is in very good shape and that young people ensure its continuity is surely not the best option to support this language.

Informing people about the gradual loss of Picard/Ch'ti could be beneficial since the language suffers from a critical lack of visibility. Given the low-prestige status of Picard/Ch'ti, prestige-planning should be a core component of its language planning. Actions that can be taken to improve the prestige of Picard/Ch'ti are increasing the visibility of the code in everyday life and incorporating Picard/Ch'ti into High domains (e.g., in news bulletins and school curricula). This would be a symbolic reversal of the previous longstanding language policies and would also help Picard/Ch'ti to assert its languagehood, thereby further supporting its status. Of course, it is hard to predict if such actions would have the expected outcomes. On one hand, psychological reactance, “the motivation to regain a freedom after it has been lost or threatened”, could lead people to resist learning Picard/Ch'ti if they are obliged or feel forced to do so (Steindl et al. 2015: 205). On the other hand, even if people see their endangered local language as central to their history, and even if attitudes towards it are positive, it does not mean that the language will be revitalised. This can be seen in Ireland (see Hickey 2009), where the Irish language is still classified by the UNESCO as “definitely endangered” despite its importance for the Irish people and systematic use in education. Nonetheless, the opportunities for raising the status of Picard/Ch'ti suggested in this study are in all cases more effective than not taking any action.

ADDITIONAL FILE

The additional file for this article can be found as follows:

- **Appendix.** Questionnaire and Results (Questionnaires 1 & 2 Combined). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25894/lld.322.s1>

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Louis Coeyman  orcid.org/0000-0002-9062-3652
University of Glasgow, UK

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