

Chapter 2

Assessing change in a Gallo-Romance regional minority language: 1PL verbal morphology and referential restriction in Picard

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This paper examines the possible change from 1PL to 3SG forms when referring to a group that includes the speaker in Picard, a Gallo-Romance language of Northern France. Using older and contemporary Picard written data, as well as contemporary oral data, we show that, even though Picard and colloquial French use the two forms, the two languages differ. Contrary to colloquial French, where 1PL usage has become marginal, 1PL remains widely used in Picard. Our analysis of semantic reference (restricted, specific unrestricted, or general unrestricted group) indicates that 3SG is primarily associated with general unrestricted reference in Picard and is barely used to refer to restricted groups. Most interestingly, the relative frequency of the two variants remains stable over time. Our analysis demonstrates the importance of considering linguistic conditioning through the comparative method for assessing language change in typologically related varieties, especially when testing claims that a minority language is converging toward its dominant counterpart.

1 Introduction

The debate over whether a given linguistic variety constitutes an autonomous language or a dialect of another variety is typically of little interest to formal linguists; what matters to us is that the system analyzed is coherent and that its linguistic forms are generated by the same mental grammar. However, such



a question may have far-reaching consequences for endangered Romance languages, especially in the European sociopolitical context, as only languages that are “different from the official language(s) of that State” may be recognized and protected under the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (Council of Europe 1992). Thus, while varieties like Catalan, Franco provençal and Occitan differ sufficiently from Spanish, Italian or French to unequivocally qualify for official recognition and support, regional varieties whose language-versus-dialect status is the object of debate do not benefit from the same protections. For instance, the Gallo-Romance varieties spoken in Northern France (e.g., Norman, Picard), although formally listed as “regional languages of France” in a 2013 report from the French Ministry of Culture and Communication (DGLFLF 2013), continue to be perceived by many in the greater public as “bad”, “corrupt”, or, more neutrally, regional varieties of the national language, Continental (or Hexagonal) French¹ (Éloy 1997a). Such a perception has contributed to the stigmatization and lack of transmission of these varieties, as well as to their continued exclusion from official school curricula, even though such an inclusion is allowed, for example, by the Deixonne law and the more recent Lang initiative (Éloy 1997b), and more generally, to the refusal to grant them official recognition and protection at the national and European levels. In these situations, comparative sociolinguistic research, through its careful examination of variation patterns that focus on both the distribution of variants and the linguistic conditioning behind variant selection, can be of service to language policy makers. Specifically, it can serve as a tool for assessing whether the linguistic distance between two closely related varieties may be sufficient to call them “different languages” such that they can be recognized and protected under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

The status of Picard, an endangered Gallo-Romance language of Northern France, is the object of considerable debate. While scholars recognize that the two varieties’ phonology and lexicon differ considerably, Éloy (1997b: 137) argues that Picard’s morphosyntax does not significantly differ from that of colloquial French. Evidence against Éloy’s position is provided by detailed analyses of specific constructions. For example, Burnett & Auger (2018) have shown that negation in Picard is realized through two different elements, *point* and *mie*, and that the latter serves to negate presuppositions and express emphasis. Auger (2020) has shown that the Vimeu variety of Picard possesses two different subject neuter clitics, *a* and *ch*, whose distribution depends on the type of predicate

¹We use “Continental French” to refer to the variety of European French spoken in Continental France.

that they combine with. Thus, whereas French uses the same neuter pronoun, *ce* (and its colloquial variation, *ça*) with nominal and adjectival predicates (e.g., *C'est mon ami* 'it is my friend' and *C'est beau* 'it is beautiful'), Picard uses different pronouns: *Ch'est un gros fermieu* 'it is an important farmer' and *a n'est mie bieu* 'it is not beautiful'). For negation and neuter pronouns, the grammatical difference between Picard and (colloquial) French is clear. However, for the numerous morphosyntactic structures that are shared by the varieties, the difference is less clear. In these cases, we suspected that refusals to recognize the grammatical autonomy of Picard rely on superficial comparisons. In order to test this suspicion, we have carefully analyzed data collected from a bilingual Picard–French community of practice located in rural Picardie to determine how much Picard and French morphosyntax truly differ. This work has shown that shared morphosyntactic structures function differently in Picard and in colloquial French. This is the case, for example, for subject doubling and *ne* deletion: whereas the co-occurrence of subject doubling and *ne* presence is marginal in French, due to the opposite stylistic values of the two forms, this combination is the most commonly attested in Picard (Villeneuve & Auger 2013).

This paper examines first person plural verbal morphology (henceforth 1PL), a variable which, superficially, seems to support Éloy's convergence claim. As we see in Table 1, French makes use of 1PL and 3SG indefinite pronouns to refer to a group that includes the speaker whereas Picard makes use of a homophonic pronoun that shares the same form for 1PL and indefinite 3SG reference: *oz*². In the case of Picard, verbal morphology distinguishes the two persons: an *-ons* ending for 1PL in most tenses and the absence of overt marking for 3SG.

²*O*s is also used as a 2PL subject pronoun. Once again, verbal morphology distinguishes 2PL from 3SG.indefinite and 1PL, as we can see below::

- (i) a. *os* *cante*
 one/we/you.PL sing
 'one sings'
- b. *os* *cant-ons*
 one/we/you.PL sing
 'we sing'
- c. *os* *cant-eu*
 one/we/you.PL sing
 'you.PL sing'

The 1PL and 2PL pronouns result from the loss of the initial consonants in *nos* and *vos*, respectively. 3SG *os* results from the denasalization of *on* 'one' in unstressed position (Hrkal 1910: 260–261). All three pronouns are pronounced [o] before a consonant and [oz] before a vowel.

Table 1: 1PL and 3SG verbs in French and in Picard

	French	Picard
1PL forms	mais nous all-i-ons but we go-PST-1PL au lycée at.the.sg lycée 'but we went to high school'	oz all-ons rpèler we go-1PL talk.again 'we are going to talk again'
3SG forms	on va essayer one go.3SG try 'we are going to try'	o va pas revnir one go.3SG not come.back 'we are not going to come back'

Previous variationist work has shown that the use of *nous* has become marginal in many varieties of colloquial French (e.g., 1.6% in Montréal, Laberge 1977: 132; 4.4% in Picardie, Coveney 2000: 466; see also King et al. 2011). To this day, no comparable analyses have been undertaken for Picard. Thus, in this paper, we seek to determine whether the replacement of 1PL by an indefinite 3SG pronoun is observable in Picard and to establish whether the constraints that favor the selection of person operate similarly to what has been described for colloquial French.

2 1PL verbal morphology in French and Picard

The variation between *nous -ons* and *on + 3SG* in French has received considerable attention from linguists and sociolinguists. Because, throughout much of the history of French, 1PL has involved the pronoun *nous* followed by a verb suffixed with *-ons*, we might think that the use of *on* with a 3SG verb form and the concomitant reduced occurrence of *nous -ons* reflects a gradual replacement of the latter form by the former. However, there are reasons to question such a scenario. Indeed, while *nous* as a subject pronoun is widely attested in written documentation produced by literate speakers of French ever since Old French³, some scholars have raised doubts concerning its use in the speech of lower-class speakers. Citing Coveney (2000) and Lodge (2004), King et al. (2011) invoke the widespread

³We thank Barbara Vance for confirming this information.

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use of *je -ons* (cf. 1a) forms and the rarity of *nous -ons* forms (cf. 1b) in representations of lower-class speech from the 16th through 18th centuries. Thus, the question remains whether the near-categorical use of 3SG *on* in Québec (Laberge 1977), Picardie (Coveney 2000), and Switzerland (Fonseca-Greber & Waugh 2003) results from the replacement of *nous* by *on* or from the disappearance of the *je -ons* form. Additional support for the latter hypothesis is found in Flikeid & Péronnet's (1989) analysis of 1PL pronouns and verbs in *Atlas linguistique de la France*, which confirms the rarity of *nous -ons* forms in the northwestern parts of France, with the exception of the former Somme and Pas-de-Calais *départements*, where *os -ons* forms dominate.⁴

(1) 1PL forms in 17th century French (adapted from King et al. 2011: 471)

a. *Moi et le gros Lucas, et je nous amus-i-ons à bâtifoler*
 me and the.M big Lucas and I us enjoy-PST-1PL to fool.around
avec des mottes de tarre (*Don Juan*, Act II, scene 1, 1665)
 with some clumps of dirt

'Me and big fat Lucas, and we were having fun fooling around with clumps of dirt'

b. *qu'il aille au diable avec son mulet! ... nous ir-ons*
 the he go at.the.M devil with his mule! we go.FUT-1PL
devant les juges (*Les Fourberies de Scapin*, Act I, scene 1, 1671)
 before the.PL judges

'he can go to hell with his mule! ... we shall go before a judge'

c. *je ne sais pas quand on verra finir ce galimatias*
 I NEG know not when one will.see.3SG finish this.M gobbledygook
(Sganarelle, scene 22, 1660)

'I don't know when we will see the end of such gobbledygook'

The prevalence of *os -ons* forms for 1PL is attested since at least Middle Picard for the western parts of the Picard-speaking area and the 17th century for the southern portions of the Picard-speaking area (Flutre 1970: 140, 147). Monographs from the turn of the 20th century, such as Edmont (1897/1980), Ledieu (1909/2003), and Hrkal (1910), provide support for the results from the ALF. Vasseur (1996) confirms the prevalence of the *os -ons* construction in Vimeu Picard, while Picard textbooks mention only this form for 1PL (Debrie 1983, Dawson & Smirnova 2020:

⁴Our consultation of all relevant ALF maps for 1PL on the Symila website (<http://symila.univ-tlse2.fr/>) confirms Flikeid & Péronnet's (1989) generalization based on 3 maps.

86). No description of Picard mentions the use of 3SG *os* as a competing form for 1PL inclusive reference.

As we have already mentioned, considerably more is known about 1PL variation in French than in Picard. Coveney (2000) and Fonseca-Greber & Waugh (2003) show that use of subject *nous* is very infrequent in Continental and Swiss French varieties. The results compiled from other studies by King et al. (2011: 501) reveal frequencies of *nous* varying between 0.25% and 2.6% in Québec and Ontario French. For Acadian French, their compilation indicates variation between *je -ons* and 3SG *on*, with no tokens of *nous*. As for Louisiana French, the pattern differs based on the location investigated: for the Cajun varieties of the coastal marshes, Rottet (2001: 197) reports the gradual loss of 3SG *on* to the profit of disjunctive *nous-autres*, while Dajko (2009: 148) observes an overwhelming preference for 3SG *on* in Lafourche Parish, along with very low frequencies for null pronouns, *nous-autres on*, and *nous-autres*.

The historical and variationist analyses of the variation between *nous -ons* and 3SG *on* also inform us on the factors that favor the two variants and, consequently, on the path taken by the grammaticalization process by which the latter replaces the former as 1PL. King et al. (2011) coded for the linguistic factors that influence the grammaticalization of *a gente* as a 1PL pronoun in Brazilian Portuguese (Zilles 2005), namely verb tense, verb class, clause type, and referential restriction. Of the four factors considered, only the last one, referential restriction, was found to play a significant role in their French data. Given that *on* has historically expressed indefinite reference, it is not surprising that its use is most strongly favored for unrestricted groups whose membership includes individuals who do not belong to a speaker's network.

Twentieth century varieties of Modern French fail to provide appropriate data for testing the grammaticalization process whereby subject *nous* gives way to *on*, either because *nous* is so marginal that a quantitative analysis is impossible or because the variation that persists involves different variants (*je -ons* vs. *on* in Acadian French; *nous -ons* vs. *on* in Continental, Swiss, and Québec French). Additionally, uncertainty remains concerning the use of *nous -ons* forms by lower-class speakers in previous centuries, which makes it difficult to evaluate the factors that have influenced the rise of 3SG in French. Consequently, we believe that Picard provides the perfect testing ground for gaining a better understanding of the gradual replacement of 1PL forms by 3SG ones. Indeed, the frequent use of 1PL subject pronoun and verbal morphology that characterizes western dialects of Picard, along with the possibility of an increase in the use of 3SG variants as seen in our preliminary analyses, provides the type of data that will allow us to

determine the effect played by referential restriction (see below) on the choice between traditional 1PL *oz -ons* and innovative 3SG *oz*.

3 Methodology

Our recent work assesses the degree of structural morphosyntactic convergence and divergence between French and Picard by analyzing data from the Vimeu area, located in rural Picardie, France. In continuity with our previous work, we examine three types of data: contemporary oral data for French and Picard, contemporary written Picard, and older written Picard data from the 1940s to the 1960s. Our Vimeu Picard and French contemporary oral data are extracted from sociolinguistic interviews with four Picard–French bilingual men and supplemented by Vimeu French oral data from a control group of four French monolingual men (see Villeneuve & Auger 2013 for a detailed description); in this paper, we focus on the bilingual data described in Table 2.⁵

Table 2: Oral Picard and French corpus, bilingual speakers' demographic information (adapted from Villeneuve & Auger 2013: 119)

Pseudonym	Year of Birth	Occupation
Joseph L.	1931	retired teacher
G�rard D.	1945	factory worker, artist
Jo�l T.	1946	marketing agent, inn host
Thomas S.	1960	teacher

Because of the methodological challenge that the assessment of morphosyntactic variation in regional minority languages represents, due, for instance, to limited amounts of oral data on which to perform quantitative analyses (see Auger & Villeneuve 2017: 552), we compare our contemporary Picard oral data from bilinguals with contemporary and older written data from three Picard authors born between 1904 and 1959, as shown in Table 3.⁶ Vasseur's and Dulphy's data come

⁵The absence of women in our corpus stems from the gender imbalance in the number of regional minority language speakers and in their daily use of the language (Pooley 2003). It is therefore difficult to find a reliable, balanced sample of female Picard speakers.

⁶Given that Picard is strongly associated with orality, it may seem somewhat ironic to seek linguistic data from written texts. However, thanks to the relatively large amount of such texts and to the fact that written Picard faithfully mirrors the spoken language (Auger 2002, 2003), we are confident that this approach can help us determine whether Picard 1PL verbal morphology is changing and, if so, whether it is converging toward French.

from weekly columns published in newspapers. Leclercq’s text is a novel that tells the story of a young Picard man in the 1950s. This three-way comparison allows us to assess the degree of similarity between bilinguals’ French and Picard production, measure the distance between the written and oral community norms, and assess diachronic change based on written data.

Table 3: Written Picard corpus over three generations of authors (adapted from Auger & Villeneuve 2019: 218)

Generation	Author	Lifespan	Text & publication year
1	Gaston Vasseur	1904–1971	<i>Lettes à min cousin Polyte</i> (1938–1971)
2	Jean Leclercq	1931–2021	<i>Chl’autocar du Bourq-Éd-Eut</i> (1996)
3	Jacques Dulphy	1959	<i>Ch’Dur et pi ch’Mo</i> , Tome III (2011)

We extracted all instances of unambiguous 1PL reference from our Picard and French corpora. As is customary, our data collection excluded contexts where no variation is possible, such as fixed expressions (e.g., *o diroit qu’* ‘it seems like’, *conme o dit* ‘as we say’). Each token was subsequently coded for the binary dependent variable, i.e., 1PL or 3SG verbal morphology, and for a variety of independent variables: verb tense, the presence or absence of an overt semantic reference expression (see 2a–2b), as well as restriction and specificity of the 1PL semantic reference. In this paper, we follow the example of King et al. (2011) and focus on referential restriction.

- (2) a. Quoè qu’ oz all-ons dévnr, mi pi chol Dure? (DurMo 418)
 what that we go-1PL become me and the.F Dure
 ‘What are we going to become, me and the Dure [my wife]?’
- b. Oz é-r-ons eune armée forte pour pu avoér la
 we have.FUT-1PL an.F army strong for no.longer have the.F
 djerre (Lettes 1945, 165)
 war
 ‘We [implied: all French citizens] will have a strong army to no longer have war’

Our coding for referential restriction followed Boutet’s (1986) ternary distinction based on restriction and specificity, as operationalized in Rehner et al. (2003)

and King et al. (2011: 482). Specifically, we distinguished between a restricted group which is specific and includes only people known to the speaker, such as members of their family (see 3a), a specific unrestricted group of individuals, some of whom may not be known by the speaker, such as employees of a large factory or all French people (see 3b), and a general unrestricted group – humankind, people in general – which includes the speaker (see 3c).⁷ Our overall data set includes 61 tokens of unambiguous 1PL for which the discursive context did not allow us to reliably determine whether the group being referenced was restricted and/or specific; these were coded as “ambiguous” for semantic reference.⁸

(3) French

- a. *c'est pour ça qu' nous av-ons appelé notre fille [Marie].*
 it is for that that we have-1PL called our daughter Marie
 (Jérôme D.)
 'this is why we [my wife and I] called our daughter Marie'
- b. *on n' sait pas pour qui on travaille.* (Joël T.)
 one NEG know.3SG not for who one work.3SG
 'we [my coworkers and I] don't know who we work for'
- c. *au bout d' un certain temps, on a beau être*
 at.the.SG end of a.M some time one have.3SG beautiful be
catholique [...] y a... certaines vertus qui prennent le dessus.
 Catholic there is certain.F.PL virtues that take.3PL the top
 (Jérôme D.)
 'at some point, one may be Catholic [but] some behaviours take over'

Although King et al. (2011: 482) “did not include reference to humankind as a whole in the unrestricted group due to the difficulty of distinguishing such utterances from indefinite reference”, the rich discursive context of our written data allows us to expand on their work by further distinguishing references to general unrestricted groups that include the speaker and all of humanity, i.e. general 1PL

⁷General unrestricted references include examples that include all of humanity at a past time; e.g., *Au XVI^e siècle, on mourait beaucoup plus jeune* ‘In the 16th century, one died much younger’.

⁸An anonymous reviewer asks how we have coded the semantic reference of examples such as *Alors, on se promène?* ‘So, one’s taking a walk?’, where *on* refers to a neighbor that the speaker would pass on the sidewalk. Such examples are excluded from our analysis, as they do not meet the definition for our variable, that is, a pronoun that refers to a group of speakers that includes the speaker.

semantic reference, from 3SG indefinite reference. For instance, the French *on* in (4) unambiguously refers to an indefinite 3SG – the speaker was a child during the war and did not participate in the violence described – and the Picard *o* in (5) unambiguously excludes the speaker who is instead included in the object pronoun *no*. While both studies exclude examples of this type from the variationist analysis of 1PL, our analysis includes utterances like (6), where the discursive context, which explicitly refers to the time when the letter’s author and his addressee were young, makes it clear that the unrestricted general group includes the speaker. This methodological decision allows for a more fine-grained data set on which to test the role of semantic specificity on the incursion of 3SG into 1PL domain.

(4) French
on fais-ait sauter leur maison ou bien on les tu-ait. (Joseph L.)
one made-3SG burst their.F house or one them kill-3SG
‘their houses would get bombed or they would get killed’

(5) Picard
J’ai idée [...] qu’ o no prind pour des coéchons
I have idea [...] that one us take.3SG for some.M pigs
(*Lettes* 1946, 152)
‘I think [...] that we are taken for pigs’

(6) Picard
O din-ouot à trouos heures, t’ in souviens -tu ?
we lunch-IPFV at three hours you.REFL of-it recall you
(*Lettes* 1956, 638)
‘we used to have lunch at 3 o’clock, do you remember?’

4 Results

Let us now turn to the results of our quantitative analysis. First, our contemporary oral data reported in Figure 1 show a clear dominance of the innovative French-like 3SG form in our oral data: use of the 1PL form is marginal in both oral French (1.9%, N = 368) and oral Picard (15.1%, N = 338). This pattern stands in sharp contrast with our contemporary and older written data, where 3SG is far from generalized (54.6%, N = 1,304). Unsurprisingly, texts appear more conservative than spontaneous speech.

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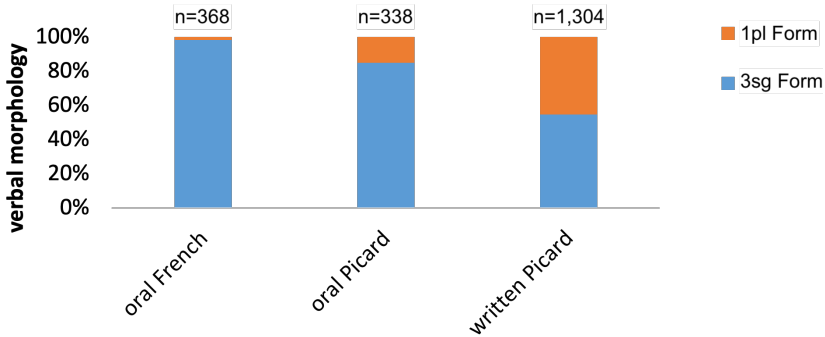


Figure 1: 1PL in Vimeu French and Picard

The high proportion of 3SG forms in interviews could be interpreted as evidence that oral Picard is converging toward French, a language where the change from 1PL pronoun and inflectional morphology to 3SG morphology is quite advanced. In fact, a similar pattern emerged from a previous analysis of verbal negation in the same oral corpus (Villeneuve & Auger 2013). However, a closer examination of linguistic factors reveals that a large proportion of the 1PL forms found in our oral data refers to specific restricted groups, as exemplified in (7) where the 1PL verbs refer to the participants in a specific hunting event, despite the fact that 3SG is also attested in these semantic contexts (see 8); where the 1PL and 3SG verbs refer to the speaker and his fellow students.

(7) Picard

Oz ons veillé ein tchot molé pi **oz ons** fini pér nos
 we have.1PL stay.up one.M little bit and we have.1PL finish by us
 adoveu (Joël T.,320)
 doze.off

‘we stayed up a bit and we ended up dozing off’

(8) Picard

Mais nous, **o sav-o-ème** bien, à l’ école normale que,
 but us we knew-PST-1PL well at the.F school teacher.training that
 quand **oz ét-o-ème** avec éch’ professeur **o dis-o-ait** « pluriel »,
 when we were-PST-1PL with the.M professor we said.3SG pluriel
 mais quand **oz ét-o-ait** intré nous, **o dis-ou-ot** « pluriel ».
 but when we were.3SG between us we said.3SG pluriel
 (Joseph L., 51)

‘But we knew well, at teacher training school that when we were with the professor we said “pluriel”, but when we were among us, we said “pluriél”’

The frequency with which the 1PL form is still used in written Picard can shed light on the mechanism behind similar morphological changes in Romance languages. Specifically, our 592 tokens of 1PL *o-ons* forms (or 45.4% of our written data), carefully coded for referential restriction, represent a valuable data set with which to test the effect of referential restriction on 1PL morphology. Indeed a detailed analysis of 1PL semantic reference indicates that the innovative French-like 3SG form is still primarily associated with unrestricted general reference in written Picard (91.9%, N = 678 vs 15.3%, N = 626 in other contexts) and is barely used to refer to restricted groups, as we can see in Figure 2.

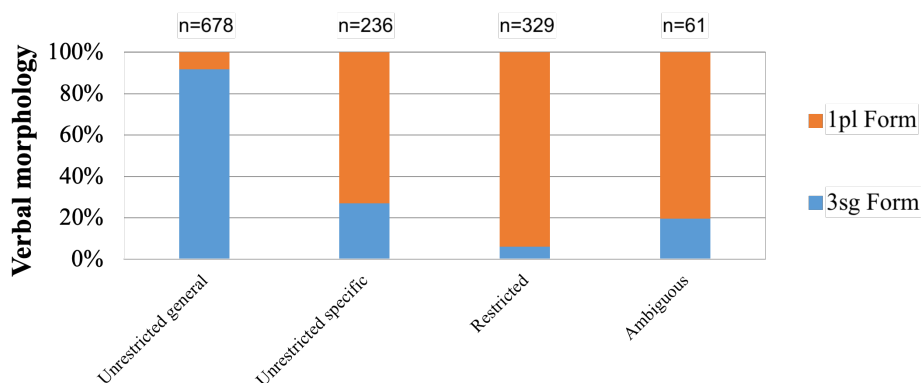


Figure 2: 1PL and semantic reference in written Picard

Although the use of the 1PL form remains much more frequent in written than in oral Picard, there is a possibility that its frequency may be gradually decreasing over time. One piece of data that suggests such a decrease comes from a real-time analysis of the chronicles in Vasseur’s *Lettes*. Since these chronicles were published over a period of 33 years, we can compare the rate of use of 1PL over time for an individual author. This comparison reveals an apparent decrease in 1PL use across this portion of Vasseur’s lifespan, from 44.7% in the 1940s to 35.6% in 1960s.

In order to test the possibility of a change in progress in the Vimeu Picard community more broadly, i.e., the gradual replacement of 1PL by 3SG, we turn to our data from three different authors who represent more distant time periods: the

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Table 4: Frequency of 1pl. per author

Author	1pl/total	% 1pl
Vasseur	171/547	31.3%
Leclercq	170/294	57.5%
Dulphy	195/402	48.5%

1940s–the 1960s, the 1990s, and the 2000s. As we can see in Table 4, the overall frequencies of 1PL do not suggest a gradual loss of 1PL, as the lowest frequency is found in the older data from Vasseur and the highest occurs in Leclercq’s data. What these numbers do not tell us, however, is whether the 1PL and 3SG verbs used by the three authors have similar semantic distributions. Indeed, the greater use of 1PL in Leclercq’s data may be attributable, at least in part, to the fact that his novel tells the story of a young man in the 1950s, a genre that may result in a higher number of restricted references than Vasseur’s chronicles, which take the form of letters and postcards that discuss past and current events and relate them to the personal lives of their author and his addressee, or Dulphy’s chronicles, which consist of conversations on current events between two men. In order to tease out the possibility that the different rates of 1PL in the three texts might be due to an uneven distribution of the data across semantic references rather than to change in progress, we now break down our data for each author by semantic category. Table 5 confirms that the distribution of semantic values differs greatly across texts, and that this difference provides a plausible explanation for the frequencies of 1PL. Indeed, Vasseur’s text, which features the largest frequency of 3SG, has by far the largest proportion of unrestricted general referents, a context known to favour the innovative 3SG, while the one that has the highest propor-

Table 5: Frequency of semantic reference type per author

Author	Unrestricted general		Unrestricted specific		Restricted group		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
	Vasseur	362	66.2%	120	21.9%	65	
Leclercq	120	40.8%	31	10.5%	143	48.6%	294
Dullphy	196	40.8%	85	21.1%	121	30.1%	402

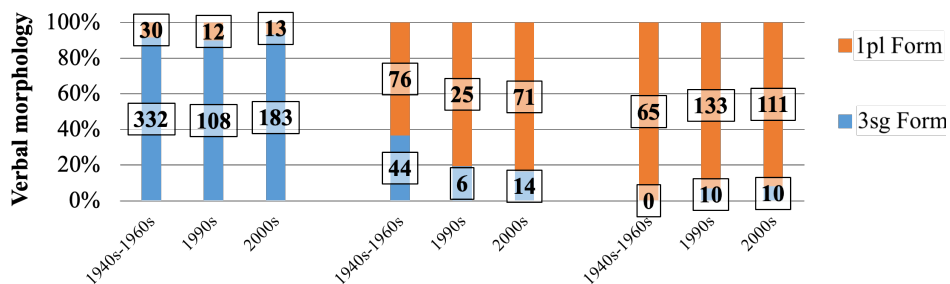


Figure 3: 1PL and semantic reference in written Picard

tion of 1PL, Leclercq’s, contains the largest number of restricted group referents, a context resistant to the incursion of 3SG into 1PL domain.

We can now attempt to determine whether use of 3SG is really spreading over time in written Picard by breaking down our data by author and semantic reference, as shown in Figure 3. This nuanced breakdown reveals considerable stability over time. For general unrestricted referents, 3SG strongly dominates in all three authors, with an average frequency of 91.9%. For specific unrestricted and restricted groups, 1PL dominates in the data from all three authors. However, signs of opposite trends separate the more recent data (1990s and 2000s) from those from the mid-20th century. Surprisingly, use of 3SG decreases over time for specific unrestricted referents. But, most interestingly, use of 3SG, which was not attested in Vasseur’s data, makes an appearance in the 1990s and 2000s data. Examples (9–11) attest to the variation between 1PL and 3SG in all three semantic contexts, namely unrestricted general (9), unrestricted specific (10), and restricted groups (11).

(9) Picard

- a. **o n’ porr-ons** pu vive su la terre (Lettes 1956, 644)
 we NEG can-FUT-1PL anymore live on the.F earth
 ‘we won’t be able to live on the land’
- b. **o n’ laiche** mie mourir parsonne (Lettes 1946, 168)
 one NEG let not die anybody
 ‘we don’t let anyone die’

(10) Picard

- a. o n-n av-ons connu deux d' djerres [...], o sav-ons ch qu'
 we of-it have-1PL known two of wars we know-1PL that that
 i n-n est (Lettes 1956, 655)
 it of-it is

'we have gone through two wars, we know what it is'

- b. o s' plaint souvint in France qu' oz est d' trop boin [...]
 one self complain often in France that one is of too good
 (Lettes 1966, 1180)

'we often complain in France that we're too good'

(11) Picard

- a. Nous deux mn' honme, o n' é-r-o-éme pu qu' à
 us two my.M man we NEG have-FUT-IPFV-1PL anymore that to
 mingier (Chl'autocar 1996, 20)
 eat

'My husband and I, we'd only need eat'

- b. oz est quate chonq camarades à l' école insanne
 one is four five buddies at the.F school together
 (Chl'autocar 1996, 59)

'we're four or five buddies in school together'

We close this section with a discussion of two examples drawn from newspaper chronicles that mix comments on current events and events from the personal lives of the characters that they feature and that were written and published 60 years apart. The first example (12), published in 1946, features four tokens of 3SG and one token of 1PL. The first instance of 3SG occurs in a frozen phrase (*oz a bieu dire*) in which the subject has unrestricted general reference. While the last two do not occur in frozen phrases, they also have unrestricted reference. The second token, *oz étouot pétête gramint moins riches* refers to the unrestricted but specific group of people who lived in the author's village and surrounding area. As for the only 1PL token, it refers specifically to the letter's author and his addressee. This short passage illustrates that, for Gaston Vasseur, 3SG and 1PL still have distinct meanings. Published in 2006, the second example (13) features four tokens: three 3SG and one 1PL. The first token illustrates the exclusive reference for which use of 1PL is excluded. The next two tokens of 3SG clearly refer to the two protagonists and are coreferential with the 1PL token, as the last sentence,

which lists the people present at the *réveillon*, shows. Thus, even though use of 3SG for restricted reference remains infrequent in our most recent Picard data, this example provides evidence for a possible incipient change similar to the one that has taken place in French.

(12) Older written Picard (1946)

Mais, **oz** a bieu dire, Polyte, **oz étouot** pététe gramint moins
 but one has beautiful say Polyte one was maybe a-lot less
 riche du temps qu' **oz alloémes** au djignel, **oz**
 rich of-the.M.SG time that we go-IPFV-1P to-the.M.SG guignole one
étouot moins riche, mais **oz étouot** moins bête, moins mawais d'
 was less rich but one was less mean less bad of
 l' un à l' eute.
 the.SG one.M to the.SG other

'But, it is all very well, we were maybe much less rich when we used to
alleu au djignel (go door to door and ask for apples on December 24), we
 were less rich, but we were less stupid, less mean toward each other.'
 [Lettes, 169]

(13) Contemporary written Picard (2000s)

a. Ch'Dur

ch' est point pasqu' o n' o point pérèle d' nous qu' o
 it is not because one NEG has not spoken of us that one
 n' s' a point vus. Ti point vrai, ch'Mo?
 NEG REFL has not seen.PL INT not true, ch'Mo
 'it's not because they haven't talked about us that we haven't seen
 each other. Right, ch'Mo?

b. Ch'Mo

Pour seur! O s' a meume vu, et pi rvu. Oz ons
 for sure one REFL has even seen and seen-again we have.1PL
 meume rinvillonnè insanne. À vo moéson, qu' a s' a
 even celebrated together. At your house that it REFL has
 passé. Y avoait mi pi chol Molle, ti pi chol
 happened. there was me and the.FEM Molle you.SG and the.FEM
 Dure, és mère, et pi Niflette no bétail dé tchiénne...
 Dure her mother and Niflette our animal of bitch
 For sure! We have even seen and seen each other, again and again.
 We have celebrated Christmas together. At your house, it was. There

was me and chol Molle, you and chol Dure, her mother, Dorine, and Niflette our dog' [*Dur Mo*, 411]

5 Conclusion

The grammaticalization of pronouns and determiner phrases previously used to refer to indefinite referents into 1PL in French and in Brazilian Portuguese has received considerable attention from linguists. While previous studies have identified linguistic and social factors that favor this process, its analysis in contemporary French has suffered from two important limitations: the marginal use of the *nous* pronoun and the uncertainty concerning the specific 1PL form that has undergone replacement. The Picard data from the Vimeu region that we have analyzed in this paper circumvent both limitations, as use of *os -ons* is well documented historically and this form remains solidly implanted in contemporary usage. Our diachronic analysis of written data spanning from the 1940s until the 2000s reveals a Gallo-Romance variety that remains largely unaffected by the changes that have taken place in colloquial French and in oral Picard, and where the choice between 1PL and 3SG is strongly correlated with referential restriction. While unrestricted general referents strongly favor 3SG and show marginal use of 1PL, 1PL remains the almost exclusive variant for specific referents but shows some signs of incipient change. Interestingly, the semantic category that would be expected to serve as a gateway for the innovative uses of 3SG, namely unrestricted specific referents, appears to increasingly favor 1PL pronouns. Analysis of a larger corpus of written data from different genres and produced by a variety of authors will be necessary in order to confirm or disconfirm the results from our preliminary analysis.

In short, our examination of this variable demonstrates the importance of carefully considering linguistic conditioning through the comparative method when assessing language change in two typologically related varieties, especially when testing popular claims that a minority language is converging toward its dominant counterpart in a bilingual community. It also shows the importance of analyzing multiple linguistic features. Indeed, the conservative character of 1PL in Picard mirrors what has been reported for *ne* deletion, while contrasting with this variety's innovative character with respect to subject doubling and the generalization of a single auxiliary, *avoér* 'have' (Auger & Villeneuve 2017, 2019, Villeneuve & Auger 2013).

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