



Mooney, D. (2011). Koinéization and Regional French: New-dialect Formation in Béarn . *French Studies Bulletin*, 32(121), 76–82.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/frebul/ktr026>

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KOINÉIZATION AND REGIONAL FRENCH: NEW-DIALECT FORMATION IN BÉARN

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Peter Trudgill has argued that the long-term changes occurring in new dialect contact situations result from short-term, face-to-face, interactions between individual speakers. Such focusing of the linguistic features being accommodated leads to the reduction of the forms available. This occurs via the process of koinéization, the emergence of a new variety in which many of the irregularities of the contributory varieties have been removed.¹ Koinéization comprises the two interdependent linguistic processes of levelling and simplification. Levelling involves the reduction or attrition of marked variants; simplification generally leads to an increase in ‘morphophonemic regularity’.² Based on Trudgill’s koinéization model, David Hornsby’s hypothesis is that France is moving towards a linguistic situation whereby supralocal regional dialects focused upon major urban centres are emerging.³ His study analyses dedialectalization and the emergence of morphological and phonological variables in the Regional French (RF) of Avion, Nord-Pas-de-Calais (NPDC) to determine whether emergent RF varieties are dependent on geography and demography (extra-linguistic factors), and whether the variables selected for analysis exhibit binary opposition, namely that standard (S) and dialect (D) variants can be easily identified.⁴

Having grown from minor village to industrial town, Avion exhibits precisely the conditions that Trudgill outlines for koinéization.⁵ Analysis of its social networks demonstrates that a pattern of extreme diffusion (1890-1930) favouring change moves to close-knit stability (1930-1978) inhibiting change, leading finally to a period of increasing diffusion (1978-present day). For levelling to be the dominant process in the emergence of RF, all D-variants of selected phonological variables would be eliminated in favour of S-variants. This has not however happened in Hornsby’s study, which analyses nine morphological and eight phonological variables emerging from the Dialectal French (DF)/Standard French (SF) contact mix in Avion, NPDC.⁶ The dialect forms attested in the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* (ALF)⁷ confirm both the geographical diffusion of D-variants and that variants present in the initial dialect mix are those with the widest geographical currency. These forms were gradually lost to the SF counterparts (1950-2000), a crucial characteristic of levelling. Absolute simplification results in allophonic reduction and the loss of morphological or lexical variants. However, making a variety more easily ‘learnable’ does not necessarily make it ‘simpler’. The S-variant is said to make more sense in the grammar of the SF speaker in that those forms bearing a regular and predictable relationship with SF will lead to their retention in the emergent koiné. For example, the [ɛ̃]–[ã] *dans* opposition is described by Hornsby as being simplified ‘relative’ to the S-variant [ã].⁸

Hornsby’s data qualify Trudgill’s koinéization model by suggesting that high-contact situations favour simplification, while low-contact situations favour levelling. Promotion of SF is seen to lead to changes spreading out from major urban conurbations as being more likely to be adopted into the emergent koiné than majority variants of local dialects. We may also note that Hornsby’s D-variants are not specific to the substrate Picard dialect, but may be more suitably labelled as non-standard. What this article will now examine are these implications of Hornsby’s methodological framework, based on Regional French in NPDC, on Trudgill’s koinéization model, but with particular reference to phonological variation in the RF emerging from language contact in Béarn, Gascony. We will examine the ‘Langue d’Oc’ substrate language and data from dialect atlases and empirical studies on the RF of

Béarn – in particular the ALF, and the studies of Henriette Walter and and Ferdinand Carton *et al*⁹ – to determine the extent to which emergent RF can be defined as an ‘emerging koiné [...] distinct from Standard French (SF), but nonetheless comprehensible to outsiders in a way that the dialect it is replacing is not’.¹⁰ By indicating that koinéization may be active in an area with a ‘Langue d’Oc’ substrate a contribution will also be made to the debate on the very nature of the linguistic processes leading to the emergence of RF elsewhere in France.

The first task is to identify variation present in SF/Béarnais contact mix, and to account for the emergence of variants in RF. The substrate dialect is Béarnais; it is a sub-dialect of Gascon. The ‘Langue d’Oc’ dialects differ from SF on many levels and are mutually unintelligible with it.¹¹ The variants selected for analysis aim to examine the extent to which variants in emergent RF can be attributed to dialect residue, or whether indeed the processes of koinéization are active, as suggested by Hornsby in Avion. Variables selected are:

1. **Realisation of [h]:** Latin word-initial [f] has become a strongly aspirated glottal fricative [h]¹², FAMES > *hami*.

2. **Intervocalic [n]:** The number of words that drop Latin intervocalic n in Béarnais by comparison with Occitan is salient¹³, LUNA > luna (Occitan) and LUNA > lue (Béarnais).

3. **Vowel length:** Long vowels in syllables closed by SF lengthening obstruents [R, vR, z, ʒ, v] may be short in Béarnais and the RF of Béarn.¹⁴

4. **Allophonic variation SF /ã/:** the realisation of the SF nasal vowel [ã] as oral vowels with a nasal consonant appendix [aN], *chambre* [ʃãbʁ] (SF) ~ [ʃambrə] (RF).

Linguistic data from the ALF and the *Atlas Linguistique et Ethnographique de la Gascogne* (ALG) (1954)¹⁵ were examined for each of the variables 1-4 to trace the realisations in the hypothesized emergent koiné over the course of the twentieth century (See *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* below for data points). The data have been compared to those of Walter and Carton *et al.* in order to trace the variables at four synchronic points. This diachronic approach describes numerically the relevant reduction or promotion processes active in the RF of Gascony and Béarn (See *Table 1* and *Table 2* below). In both dialect atlases, [h] never occurs in words with graphic initial h in SF (e.g. *hirondelle*). However, realisations of [h] are notably high (73-99%) for lexical items with word-initial [f] in SF (See *Table 1*). This realisation even seems to rise by 13% between 1902 and 1954. This variable appears relatively stable in the dialect mix for the first half of the twentieth century but has 50% realisation in Walter’s study and is totally absent from Carton *et al.*. Walter states that only three of six informants produced [h] word-initially.¹⁶ Carton *et al.* mention the realization of aspirated /h/ in contexts where word-initial /f/ would generally be expected in the substrate but do not mention it as a variant characteristic of Gascony RF.¹⁷ No evidence suggests that /h/ was ever an allophonic variant of /f/ in RF.

In addition, Atlas data shows that intervocalic [n] is rarely retained throughout the six Gascon *départements* analyzed. This reduction of intervocalic [n] is dominant from 1902-1954 and seems to increase by 31%. The data for Béarn and its contiguous regions are also strikingly high with 98% of data points (See *Table 2*) showing no realisation of intervocalic [n] e.g. *lune* [ly] (See *Figure 1* and *2* points: 539, 744, 788). However, in Walter’s study, all

informants have a [n] phoneme in their inventory thus showing that the deletion of intervocalic [n] has not been retained in the RF of Béarn, or indeed of Gascony.¹⁸

Moreover, Carton *et al.* state that the lengthening obstruents of SF: [R], [z], [v], [ʒ] do not lengthen preceding vowels in Gascon.¹⁹ Marchal and Moreux analysed vowel length in the RF of Béarn according to the nature of the following consonant.²⁰ Vowel lengthening was not phonemic but the only obstruent that did not result in vowel lengthening was /R/. The analysis of vowel length is limited to contexts before word-final /R/. Though the ALF marks vowel length, the ALG does not, making diachronic comparisons difficult.

Over the 52 years considered, both the ALF and ALG show that SF /ã/ is realised almost invariably as a nasalised vowel followed by a nasal consonant. However, the data do show considerable variability in terms of the vowel's exact realization. For example, *tempe*, SF [tãp] is realised as [tãm] across all *départements*, [têm] in Béarn and [tõm] in Landes. Finally, Carton *et al.* and Walter state that the RF of Gascony has four nasal vowels, realised as a partially nasalised low front vowel [ã] plus (an optional) nasal consonant appendix, as in [ãⁿ].

The loss or retention of Béarnais variants in RF over time as outlined above must be further explained in the light of extra-linguistic factors, such as the evolution of social networks in the region. The dominant process observed in the reduction of [h] realisations in Gascony is simplification. Levelling initially favoured the spread of pan-Gascon forms. This concurs with Hornsby's findings in Avion. However, [h] realisations do not bear a regular relationship with SF, leading to what Hornsby terms 'relative' simplification, relative to the SF paradigm.²¹ For intervocalic [n], the non-standard variant is dominant in Béarn. As in Avion, we see the promotion of the non-standard variant via the process of levelling. The loss of this variant from the dialect mix and the lack of retention in the emergent koiné is due to the aforementioned process of relative simplification. Indeed, Alain Marchal and Bernard Moreux show that French-Béarnais bilinguals rarely lengthen vowels before word-final /R/.²² This general view provides little explanation, however. It is possible that this feature is not marked enough to be accommodated to since vowel lengthening is transparent from a SF perspective. The status of [ãⁿ] as a variant of the SF nasal vowel is a pan-Occitan phenomenon, so its retention in Gascony and Béarn is not surprising. This form bears a regular and predictable relationship with SF [ã] and is diffused over an expansive geographical area (one third of France). The contemporary vitality of such 'regionally' specific variants in emerging urban koinés is attested by Hornsby in NPDC.²³

Linguistic diffusion models would postulate that the spread of RF innovative forms, emerging via processes of koinéization, would occur via transmission from large urban centres to smaller satellite towns.²⁴ Pau is the capital and major urban centre of Béarn and is potentially influenced by two larger urban centres, Bordeaux and Toulouse. According to Hornsby, changes are likely to be adopted more quickly in geographically central areas than majority variants from local dialects.²⁵ For example, Toulouse is a major urban centre just outside the Gascon dialect area where both realisation of aspirated [h] and deletion of intervocalic [n] are less typical. Therefore Gascon or Béarnais speakers are more likely to accommodate to norms that are transparent from a SF or a pan-Occitan point of view. Pau has undergone similar demographic changes to Avion, linked to the development of 'close-knit' and then 'weak' ties over the course of the twentieth century. The demographic evolution of Pau from 48,000 (1954) to 78,000 (1968) inhabitants indicates high levels of in-migration to Béarn, rising to 84,000 inhabitants in 1982.²⁶ Pau has therefore passed from a low-contact

situation between local varieties to a high-contact one. Where close-knit rural communities favour the koinéization process of levelling, ‘dense and multiplex’ networks act as norm enforcement mechanisms that impede change.²⁷ This may be why many dialect variables remained stable in Béarn from 1902-1954.

Over the course of the twentieth century, most notably since 1954, the main variants which showed vitality in the original dialect mix have given way to SF forms. Another levelling process, linked to the influence of major urban centres and large-scale in-migration since 1950, has led to the association of SF forms with these centres. This switch from the levelling of localised majority forms to levelling in favour of supralocal ‘Langue d’Oc’ and SF norms is also evident in Béarn and Gascony. As in Avion, simplification has led to forms that are most easily ‘learnable’ from an SF point of view being retained in the RF of Béarn. Certain geographical and demographic considerations also come into play in deciding which process will be dominant. Based on the data analysed in this article, there has not been a complete assimilation to national norms. Also, the RF that has emerged from the dialect mix concurs with Hornsby’s hypothesis that RF is emerging as a koiné and not as substrate residue. Attesting the replication elsewhere of these phenomena in areas surrounding urban centres, as indicated here, will provide empirical support to the claim that Hornsby (2006) has, in fact, redefined RF.

¹ Peter Trudgill, *Dialects in Contact* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 98.

² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³ David Hornsby, *Redefining Regional French: Koinéization and Dialect Levelling in Northern France* (Legenda: London, 2006), p. 140.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷ Jules Gilliéron and Edmond Edmont, *Atlas Linguistique de la France*, 9 vol. (Paris: H. Champion, 1902-1910).

⁸ Hornsby, p. 98.

⁹ Henriette Walter, *Enquête Phonologique et Variétés Régionales du français* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), p. 178-180 and Ferdinand Carton, Mario Rossi, Denis Autesserre and Pierre Léon, *Les Accents des Français* (Paris : Hachette, 1983), p. 62-63.

¹⁰ Hornsby, p. 108.

¹¹ See Pierre Bec, *La Langue Occitane* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³ Michel Grosclaude, *La Langue Béarnaise et son Histoire* (Pau: Per Noste, 1986), p. 58.

¹⁴ Alain Marchal and Bernard Moreux, ‘La longueur des voyelles accentuées en béarnais et en français du Béarn’, in *Langues en Béarn*, ed. by Pierre Bordieu and Bernard Moreux, (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1989), p. 257-280.

¹⁵ Jean Séguy and Jacques Allières, *Atlas Linguistique et Ethnographique de la Gascogne*, vols I - VI (Toulouse : Institut d’études méridionales de la Faculté de Lettres, 1954).

¹⁶ Walter, p. 178-180.

¹⁷ Carton *et al.*, p. 62-63.

¹⁸ Walter, p. 178-180.

¹⁹ Carton *et al.*, p. 61.

²⁰ Marchal and Moreux, p. 257-280.

²¹ Hornsby, p. 98.

²² Marchal and Moreux, p. 279.

²³ Hornsby, p. 101.

²⁴ The 'urban hierarchical effect'. Paul Kerswill, 'Dialect levelling and geographical diffusion in British English', in *Social Dialectology*, ed. by David Britain and Jenny Cheshire, (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2003), p. 223-243.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁶ INSEE, *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*, www.insee.fr (consulted December 2009).

²⁷ Hornsby, p. 122.