THE PICARD LANGUAGE AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF FRENCH LINGUOCULTURE

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Abstract: This article examines Picard as an integral component of French linguoculture, highlighting its historical development, linguistic features, and current sociolinguistic status. Picard, a Romance Oïl language of the Gallo-Romance family, originated from Vulgar Latin in late antiquity and evolved under diverse historical and social influences in northern France and Wallonia (Belgium). The study traces the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical distinctiveness of Picard, including its conjugation patterns and numerals, and demonstrates its influence on French vocabulary in domains such as baking, industry, and coal mining. Despite its rich literary and cultural heritage, Picard faces critical endangerment due to socio-economic shifts, globalization, and language policy. The article also discusses strategies for language revitalization, emphasizing the importance of intergenerational transmission, social prestige, education, and community visibility. By exploring Picard within the broader framework of French linguoculture, this study underscores the essential role of regional languages in preserving cultural identity and linguistic diversity.

Keywords: the Picard language, French linguoculture, regional language, endangered language, language revitalization, Gallo-Romance, phonetics, grammar, sociolinguistics, intergenerational transmission, language prestige

In France, the Picard language is traditionally regarded as a dialect, whereas in Belgium it has long been recognized as a regional language. For this reason, UNESCO has included Picard in its list of endangered languages [UNESCO URL]. Consequently, it is now exceptionally important to devote increased attention to Picard, to raise public interest, and to encourage people

to study it. Such efforts can help prolong its existence, for a language is not merely a means of communication, but also a vessel of culture and history.

Speaking of its history, it is worth beginning with the origins of Picard as a language. It is a Romance language of the Occitan group and belongs to the Gallo-Romance language family.

It is widespread in northern France in the Pas-de-Calais region, where it is called "shty," in Picardy, where it is called "Picard," and in Wallonia (Belgium). The term "patois du Nord" (northern (Picard) patois) is also often used. [Sviridonova 2010].

The Picard language developed on the basis of the Vulgar Latin of Late Antiquity. In the Middle Ages, when France was linguistically divided into two parts the north, dominated by the Oïl languages, and the south, where the Occitan languages were spoken Germanic peoples made up a large portion of Picardy's population. Owing to their high social status and to the fact that they were among the first to acquire the Romance vernacular, the Picard language enjoyed widespread use and considerable prestige in northern France, as well as possessing its own literary form.

Since then, it has undergone numerous changes, has influenced the formation of the French language, and in turn has repeatedly been shaped by it. For instance, French and subsequently Russian adopted such Picard-origin words as *cauchemar* (from Latin *calcare* "to press" + Picard *mare* "night apparition"), meaning "nightmare," and *cabaret* (from Picard *camberet* "small room"), meaning "cabaret."

Notably, French borrowed a number of Picard words in such domains as breadmaking, the wool industry, and coal mining. For example, the French word *boulanger* originally appeared in the form *bolengier*. It likely derives from the Old Picard word *boulenc* ('one who makes round loaves'). The emergence of this term displaced the Old French words *pesteur* ('one who kneads the dough') and *panetier* ('bread-maker'). From the same semantic field comes *craquelin* (a hard, crisp biscuit), which in Belgium refers to a type of milk bread containing crunchy pieces of sugar. The word is of Middle Dutch origin, as are many other terms used in Belgium and northern France.

In the field of construction and manufacturing, one may note the word *usine* ('factory'). Its earliest predecessors, attested in the thirteenth century in northern France, include *oechine*, *oechevine*, and *ouchine*, which designated a brewery; later forms such as *wisine*, *uisine*, and *usine* referred to a mill or a forge situated on a stream. The term is the result of successive transformations of the Latin *officina* ('workshop, manufactory'). Until the eighteenth century, *usine* denoted a production site that used hydraulic machinery, particularly large forges. Only later did the word come to refer to establishments employing equipment for processing raw materials.

Thanks to Émile Zola's novel *Germinal* (1885), the French language acquired the word *coron* in the context of coal mining. This term, used in the northern region to denote miners' houses, originally meant "*extrémité, coin*" (end, corner).

It is also noteworthy that the mining industry contributed the word *rescapé* ("survivor") to French. On March 10, 1906, a terrible disaster occurred in Courrières (Pas-de-Calais), claiming the lives of 1,200 miners. Parisian journalists who arrived at the site heard this Picard verb from local rescuers and subsequently incorporated it into their reports. In this way, the word entered the French language [Bovet 2009: 105–107].

The very name *Ch'ti* (also written *ch'ti*, *chti*, *ch'timi*, or *chtimi*) originated during the First World War. Soldiers serving in the north, who came from other regions of France, used it to refer to their comrades from Pas-de-Calais and Picardy. The word is onomatopoeic, created through the repetition of the phoneme /ʃ/ (ch) and the phonetic sequence /ʃti/ (chti) by speakers. In Picard, *Ch'ti* means "*celui*" ("the one who"): for example, *Ch'est chti qui a fait cha* ("C'est lui qui a fait ça; He is the one who did it") and *Ch'est ti? — Ch'est mi* ("C'est toi? — C'est moi; Is it you? — It's me").

Many consider Picard to be a derivative of French, but this is not the case. In a 1999 report, Bernard Cerquiglini, Director of the National Institute of the French Language, noted the growing divergence between French, Picard, and a number of other regional languages often regarded as dialects [Cerquiglini 1999]. At the same time, in cities such as Amiens, Lille, or Calais, different varieties of Picard can be heard. This implies that a native of Lille speaking Ch'ti would be able to understand a speaker from Amiens. However, the reverse comprehension by French speakers remains uncertain, due to the increasing divergence between the French language and the Picard dialect.

They differ not only in phonetics and vocabulary but also in grammar. First and foremost, the most obvious distinctions should be noted: in their speech, northern inhabitants replace the French /ts/ sound "c" with /tʃ/ "ch" (e.g., *ichi* for *ici*, *chuque* for *sucre*), and the French /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ sounds correspondingly with /k/ and /g/ (e.g., *caud* for *chaud*).

Picard numerals differ from their French counterparts only in certaines cases : *tros – trois*, *quate – quatre*, *chinq – cinq*, *dix/diche – dix*, *onse – onze*, *dousse – douze*, *treisse – treize*, *quatorse – quatorze*, *quinse – quinze*, *seisse – seize*, *chinquante – cinquante*, *chint – cent*.

he individuality of Ch'ti is particularly evident in verb conjugation, which is considered one of the most complex grammatical aspects of the French language. To begin with, Picard lacks five entire tenses: in the indicative mood (*l'indicatif*), these are *le passé simple*, *le passé antérieur*,

191

and *le conditionnel passé, 2nd form*; in the subjunctive (*le subjonctif*), they are *l'imparfait* and *le plus-que-parfait*.

Conjugation groups in Ch'ti also differ. In the first group, changes are almost imperceptible:

- In the present indicative (*le présent de l'indicatif*), the endings are added as *e, es, e, ons, ez, e'te*;

- In the imperfect (*l'imparfait*), the endings are *oais, oais, oait, oème, oète, oai'te*;

- In the future (*le futur*), they are *erai, eras, era, erons, erez, eront*;

- In the conditional (*le conditionnel*), *erais, erais, erait, eroème, eroète, eroai'te*;

- In the subjunctive (*le subjonctif*), *e, es, e, onche, èche, e'te*;

- In the imperative (*l'impératif*), *e, ons, ez*;

- In participles (*les participes*), *ant, é*.

The second group appears more autonomous:

- Present indicative (*présent de l'indicatif*): *s, s, t, chons, chez, 'te*;

- Imperfect (*l'imparfait*): *choais, choais, choait, choème, choète, choai'te*;

- Future (*le futur*): *rai, ras, ra, rons, rez, ront*;

- Conditional (*le conditionnel*): *rais, rais, rait, roème, roète, roai'te*;

- Subjunctive (*le subjonctif*): *che, ches, che, chonche, chèche, ch'te*;

- Imperative (*l'impératif*): *s, chons, chez*;

- Present participle (*le participe présent*): *chant*.

The third group, as in French, includes all other verbs not belonging to the first or second conjugation groups. Most of these verbs are characterized by the presence of multiple stems. Nevertheless, certain patterns can still be identified within this group, with the exception of verbs such as *être*, *avoir*, *aller*, *pouvoir*, *savoir*, *valoir*, and *vouloir*. For example, consider the verb *vnir* ("venir"):

1. The same stem is used for the present indicative across all singular persons and the third-person plural (*viens, viens, vient, vien'te*), as well as for the second-person imperative (*viens*).

2. The same stem is used for the imperfect indicative (*vnoais, vnoais, vnoait, vnoème, vnoète, vnoai'te*), the present participle (*vnant*), the first- and second-person plural of the present indicative (*vnons, vnez*), the subjunctive (*vnonche, vnèche*), and the imperative (*vnonz, vnez*).

3. The same stem is used for the future (*varai, varos, varo, varons, varez, varont*) and conditional (*varoais, varoais, varoait, varoème, varoète, varoai'te*).

4. The same stem is used for the subjunctive in all singular persons (*vienche, vienches, vienche*) and the third-person plural (*vienche'te*).

It is remarkable that such a unique language today suffers from such neglect. Worldwide, between 60 and 80% of languages are at risk of extinction, and now more than ever, attention must be paid to these issues, as linguistic diversity is extremely important. Languages serve as vectors of the entirety of human history. They contain the histories of the peoples who speak them and preserve unique knowledge specific to the regions where they are used. They are linked to particular modes of thinking and worldviews that cannot be found in any other language. They reveal the full range of ways in which the human brain can process information, and no single language encompasses all possible ways of perceiving the world. K. David Harrison, one of the most renowned linguists, strongly urges the public to consider that languages that have not achieved social or economic prominence are not inherently inferior. They may be far older, more complex, and at the same time employ far more efficient linguistic constructions than those that enjoy widespread popularity today [Harrison 2007]. Consequently, a significant portion of linguistic research is devoted to the revival and restoration of endangered languages.

Language decline often correlates with a drop in prestige (the level of respect accorded to a language), which is primarily influenced by three factors:

1. Government support, which affects the community's attitude toward the language;
2. The prestige of neighboring languages and the social approval of bilingualism;
3. The attitude of young people.

The latter is especially important, as it is through intergenerational transmission that a language continues to live and flourish. It is also noteworthy that the number of speakers is not the sole indicator of a language's vitality. A widely spoken language can rapidly decline due to political or social events, while a language spoken by fewer than 100 people can thrive over several generations if it is consistently passed on to children.

A language can be considered alive when it is used by people who learned it in childhood as their first (native) language, or by a community large and active enough to allow for the spontaneous evolution of the language. Once a generation ceases to transmit the language to the next, the language can be considered dying. Today, the process of language extinction is accelerating due to intolerant language policies, globalization, and the legacies of colonization. Undoubtedly, the current rate of language loss presents a significant problem both for the communities that speak these languages and for linguistics.

Even in the most rural areas, parents no longer pass Ch'ti on to their children, and young people rarely have the opportunity to hear it. This indicates that Ch'ti is in serious danger. To better understand the scale of the problem, linguists have developed classification systems that allow languages to be categorized according to their level of endangerment. Perhaps the most recent and comprehensive of these is Michael Krauss's system [Krauss 1980]. According to it, all languages can be divided into three main groups:

1. Languages not at risk: these are not only learned by children as a native language but are also expected to continue being transmitted to future generations.

2. Languages at risk of extinction:

1) Stable languages: children still learn them as their native language (these are slightly less secure than those in the first category).

2) Declining languages:

a) Instability and deterioration: some children speak the language.

b) Endangered: the language has passed the main critical threshold of viability; it is no longer taught to children as a native language, and the youngest speakers belong to the parental generation.

c) Critically endangered: the youngest speakers are from the grandparent generation, and they are very few in number.

d) Extinct languages: no one speaks the language anymore, and it is no longer remembered.

Ch'ti is considered critically endangered.

As for the death of a language, it can occur either through the voluntary shift of a language community to another language, or as a result of natural disasters, genocide, or epidemics. The causes can be divided into three main groups: physical, economic and social, and political.

At present, Ch'ti is endangered due to economic and social factors. The rise of the upper social class has devalued traditional occupations and rural life, where the language is most frequently spoken.

Fortunately, there is still an opportunity to rehabilitate Ch'ti. In his book, David Harrison proposes several measures for revitalizing endangered languages and enhancing their prestige [Harrison 2007]:

1. A language gains prestige when it becomes more visible in the community. This visibility can include brief appearances in advertisements and pamphlets from municipal services. The language can also be used in place names, signs, and posters.

2. A language gains prestige when its speakers improve their social status in society. This lends significance and legitimacy to revitalization efforts.

3. A language gains prestige when its speakers know it's written form, allowing it to be used on a broader scale. Once literacy is established, one of the most important avenues that opens is electronic technology.

4. A language gains prestige when it is widely represented in the education system. Programs should be developed for both young students and adults. Educational systems reflect the values of the dominant society, so good representation of the language in schools is crucial.

5. A language gains prestige when bilingualism and multilingualism are highly valued within the language community. This reinforces the idea that one need not choose between an endangered language and the dominant language; both should be respected and actively used.

Finally, it should be emphasized that a language without speakers is merely a collection of words. As they say in Ch'ti : *In-ne langue a n'a mie bzoin d''armée' pi d'drapieu pour vive. Al a bzoin d'gins.* — "No language needs an army or a flag to live. It needs people."

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