

Locating Variation in French

1 Introduction

Uniformisation... and variation?

Armstrong & Pooley (2010: 6): ‘the social–regional dialect pattern in France has been levelled to a large extent already [...]. In contrast to what is happening elsewhere, we appear to be witnessing, in French pronunciation, particularly in France, a process of modified change from above and below that sees the standard, or more neutrally, the supralocal variety, supplanting most of the others, to the point where the social patterning manifested elsewhere in variable pronunciation appears to be shifting to the grammar and lexicon.’

Chambers (2009: 247, citing Kroch 1978: 18): ‘the standard dialect inhibits “many of the low-level, variable processes of phonetic conditioning that characterise spoken language and that underlie regular phonological change” whereas other dialects do not’.

2 Case study: word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion (WFPOLD)

WFPOLD: the variable deletion of the liquids /l/ and /R/ in word-final post-obstruent position, as in *table*, realised [tabl] or [tab], and *quatre*, pronounced [katR] or [kat] (Word-Final Post-Obstruent Liquid Deletion)

2.1 Regional patterns

Study	Corpus	/l/		/R/	
		N	%	N	%
Laks 1983	Young WC males in Paris	--	--	?	76.7
Armstrong 1993	Adolescents in Dieuze (Lorraine)	189	50.8	905	74.4
Pooley 1996	WC speakers in Lille	493	62	2289	71
		/l/ and /R/ together			
		N		%	
Hornsby 2006	WC speakers in Avion (Pas-de-Calais)	654		80	
Villeneuve 2009	Adults (25–54) and ‘Elders’ (55+) in Vimeu (Picardy)	821		61 (74 for ‘Elders’) (/R/ 64, /l/ 50)	
Kemp et al. 1980	UMC speakers in Montreal	718		72	

Table 1: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion rates found in previous studies in France (and Canada)

NB: Sobotta/Pustka (2006, 2007) found radically different results for a group of informants from the Aveyron (*Aveyronnais* 6% (N 694), *Aveyronnais de Paris* 22% (N 870)).

	MALE		FEMALE	
AGE	WC	MC	WC	MC
16–25 (Y)	8 YWM	8 YMM	8 YWF	8 YMF
40–60 (O)	8 OWM	8 OMM	8 OWF	8 OMF

Key: YWM = Younger Working-Class Male, OMF = Older Middle-Class Female, etc., where W = manual/blue-collar and M = non-manual/white-collar

Table 2: Size and structure of speaker sample in the Nancy–Rennes corpus

Semi-structured interviews

Interview Style, Reading Passage Style, Word List Style (IS, RPS, WLS)

Data for 32 speakers analysed; IS; N = 1, 494 (706 Nancy, 788 Rennes)

Variants: ‘liquid present’ or ‘liquid absent’

[Excluded collocations (N = 107): /R/ categorically conserved in *quatre-vingts*, *centre-ville*, *quatre ans* and *quatre heures*; categorically deleted in *quatre ou cinq* and *quatre, cinq*]

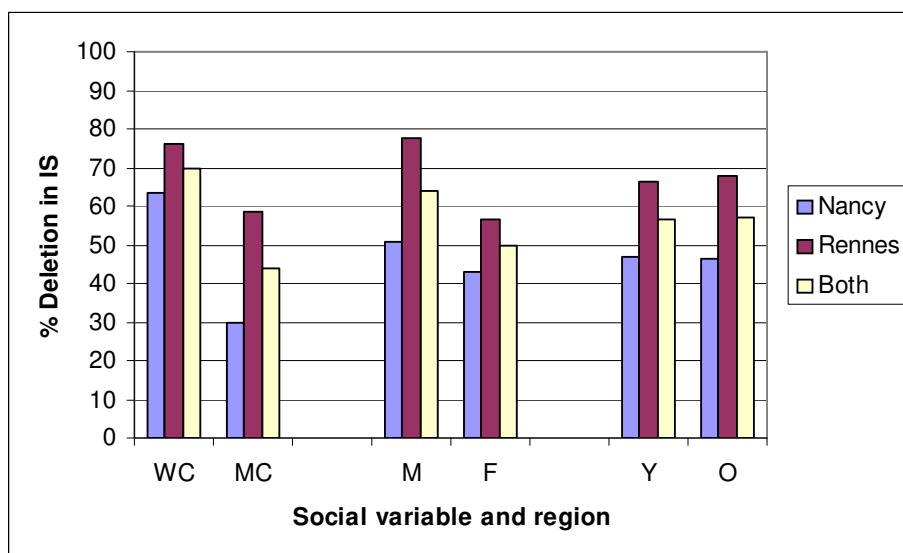


Figure 1: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion by social class, gender and age in the Nancy–Rennes corpus

	IS % del.	RPS % del.	WLS % del.
Nancy	46.7 (N = 706)	28.6 (N = 7)	6.3 (N = 4)
Rennes	67.3 (N = 788)	49.3 (N = 7)	10 (N = 5)

Table 3: Average WFPOLD deletion rates by location and style

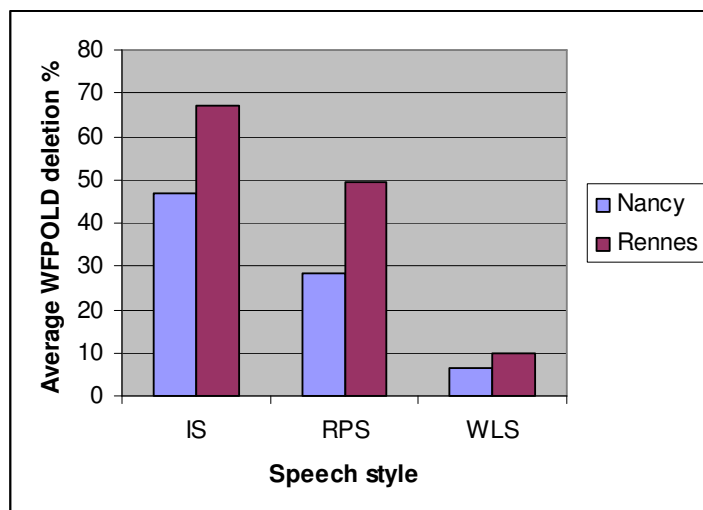


Figure 2: Average WFPOLD deletion rates by location and style

In Alsace, Pipe (2010: 78) found that 'tokens of [traditional] regional variants were so scarce that it did not seem worthwhile to carry out a quantitative analysis of them. For example, there were only three tokens of weak vowel nasalisation in the whole corpus'.

	Number of tokens (N)	% WFPOLD
Male 1	52	25
M 2	35	40
M 3	76	47.4
M 4	73	55
M 5	133	41
<i>Males average</i>	<i>73.8</i>	<i>41.68</i>
Female 1	170	38.5
F 2	39	76
F 3	105	65
F 4	111	40.5
F 5	108	60
<i>Females average</i>	<i>106.6</i>	<i>56</i>
Overall average	90.2	48.84

Table 4: Total numbers (N) and % WFPOLD rates for younger speakers in Strasbourg, Alsace (adapted from Pipe 2010, Table 6.3.1)

Carton et al (1983: 14–17): where final clusters in -tre, -fre, -ble are maintained in standardised French, they undergo metathesis (*interversio*n) in the regional variety e.g. mètre [-tər].

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Boughton 2003	WC and MC speakers in Rennes	788		67.3	
	WC and MC speakers in Nancy	706		46.7	
Pipe 2010	Younger speakers in Strasbourg	902		48.84	

Table 5: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion rates found in studies in northern France, revised

2.2 Social patterns

In French, preconsonantal reduction unremarkable, but impossible where following word has an initial vowel (Walter 1977: 48) — ?

Gadet (1992: 41): prevocalic and prepausal reduction stigmatised as ‘working-class’; preconsonantal simplification informal

	C		V		#		All contexts	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
WC	337	85	150	53	120	53	607	71
MC	483	65	240	23	164	24	887	46
% Diff.	--	20	--	30	--	29	--	25

Table 6: Deletion of /l/ and /R/ by social class and following context, Nancy and Rennes combined

	C		V		#		All contexts	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
M	377	79	175	45	143	46	695	64
F	443	68	215	26	141	27	799	50
% Diff.	--	11	--	19	--	19	--	14

Table 7: Deletion of /l/ and /r/ by gender and following context, Nancy and Rennes combined

	C		V		#		All contexts	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
O	443	71	189	35	173	45	805	57
Y	377	76	201	34	111	23	689	55
% Diff.	--	5	--	1	--	22	--	2

Table 8: Deletion of /l/ and /r/ by age and following context, Nancy and Rennes combined

2.3 Socio-stylistic patterns

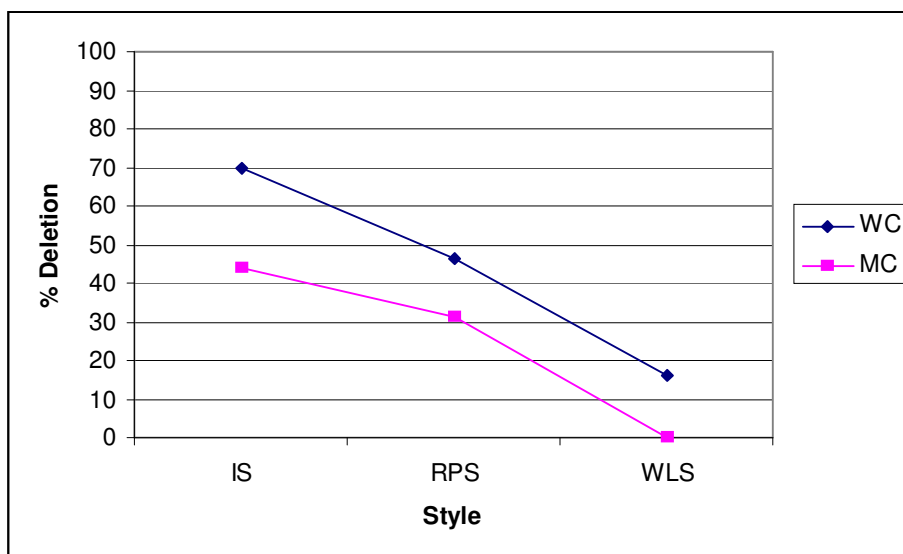


Figure 3: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion by class and style, Nancy and Rennes combined

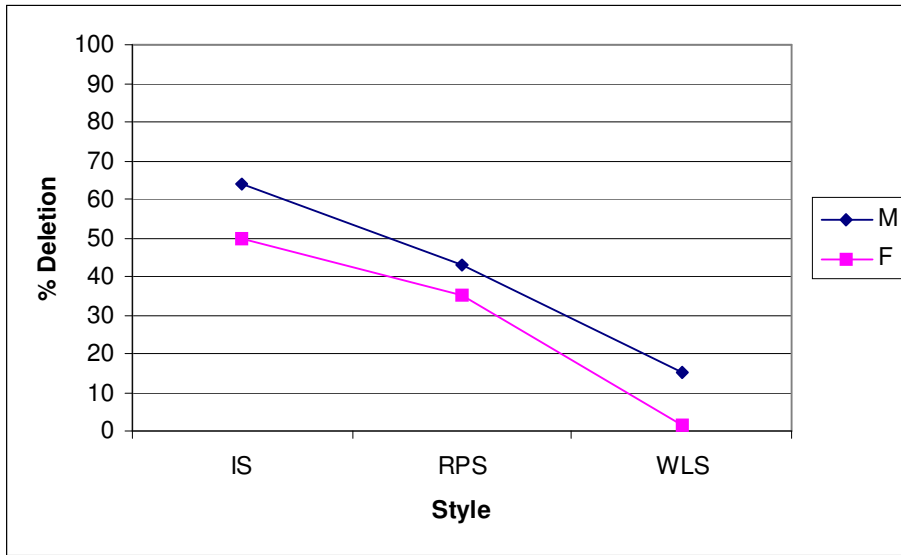


Figure 4: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion by gender and style, Nancy and Rennes combined

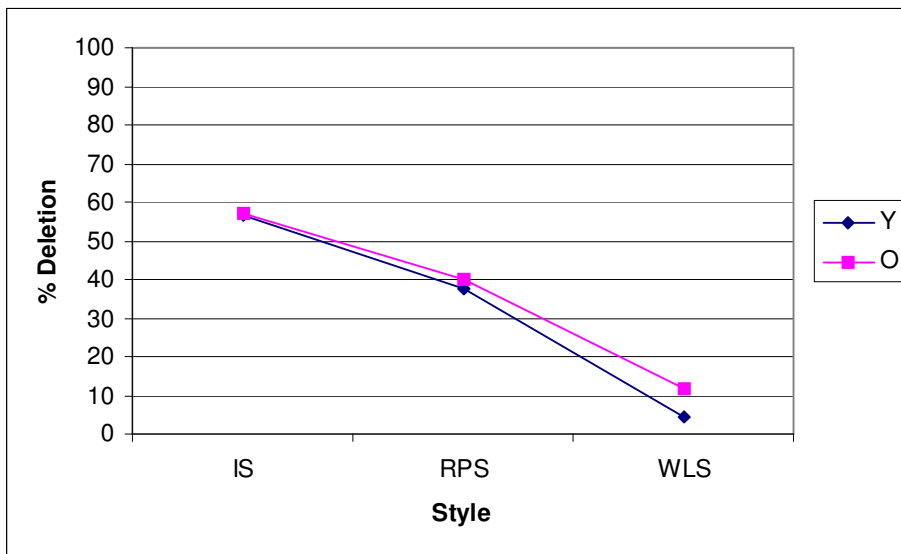


Figure 5: Word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion by age and style, Nancy and Rennes combined

- Result = a stable sociolinguistic marker

	M						F					
	Y			O			Y			O		
	IS	RPS	WLS	IS	RPS	WLS	IS	RPS	WLS	IS	RPS	WLS
WC	85.5	50	10	84.1	78.6	60	71.1	28.6	0	63.9	64.3	10
MC	70.8	71.4	0	70.7	42.9	0	38.7	8.4	0	53.4	50	0

Table 9: WFPOLD across styles by class, gender and age; Rennes only

(Bell's Style Axiom: 'Variation on the style dimension within the speech of a single speaker derives from and echoes the variation which exists between speakers on the 'social' dimension.' 2001: 145)

Hyperstyle?

3 Conclusions and perspectives

- Results are never simple
- Where is the variation?
- Other promising avenues of exploration? Rural/urban
- Urban communities are more likely to be 'exocentric, where attitudinal factors favour selecting external norms' (Kerswill 2009); but innovation resulting in age-grading, or change?

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