WHOSE FRENCH?
AUTHORITY AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN LANGUAGE POLICY DEBATES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In February 2016 a news report in France described the impending adoption – by a series of textbook publishers – of the revised orthography approved in 1990 by Académie française and which had already formed part of the national curriculum. In the ensuing weeks, the discussion of the #RéformeOrthographe was widespread in both news media and on social media, with Twitter users only too happy to participate in a debate concerning the maintenance of the circumflex, among a few other minor orthographic changes. These debates – their goals, participants, and general tone – belie the scope of the *rectifications d'orthographe*, Twitter users throughout France weighed in along with numerous news and current affairs programs. This dissertation seeks to examine the debates with the goal of better understanding the relationships between public discourse and authority in the context of language planning debates. This study is organized around a few related questions:

1. How do speakers of French claim authority over the language – what are the (socio)linguistic correlates of authority, and how are these enacted?
2. How do French speakers enact and interact with the history and myths of France and a particular French? In so doing, what do these speakers say about the *identity* of this particular, idealized French speaker?
3. What effects might these attempts to claim authority over language have on real-world language policy?
4. What can we learn about the relationship of language and public discourse through such debates?

Data are taken from Twitter over a four-month period following the initial televised report, along with televised news reports, debates, and other panels concerning the *rectifications*

d'orthographe. These sources are supplemented by some of the official documents provided by the Académie française and the French Ministry of Education. Analysis of these data generally follows the methods of discourse analysis synthesized and outlined by Wortham and Reyes (2015).

The data reveal a wide range of discursive strategies both in opposition to and support for the *rectifications* in general; moreover, many of the actual details concerning the *rectifications* were mistaken by many of these users, demonstrating a high level of misinformation, particularly among those who opposed the changes. What many of these Twitter users do demonstrate, however, is a type of grassroots prescriptivist activity (following Heyd, 2014; Drackley, 2019). I argue that these Twitter users instead represent speakers who have so successfully internalized the standard language ideologies produced from the top down that, instead of embracing change, they continue to support these ideologies from the bottom-up in face of proposed changes from the top.

These behaviors ultimately have much to say about authority. While authority has often been treated as essentially a corollary to institutional *power*, the data here demonstrate that authority is a far more complex concept, and it is one that arises in a particular interaction. Instead of assuming that authority lies with one party or another, speakers instead constantly claim, reject, and otherwise negotiate authority by various means throughout an interaction.

The means by which speakers may claim authority vary widely; in many cases, the methods used depend on the speaker's social position at the start of the interaction, with those who are assumed to carry more sociopolitical *power* typically also able to assume more authority. However, this does not prevent interlocutors from disputing those claims to authority and answering with their own; these counterclaims may be based on the idea of strength in

numbers (that language belongs to the many), on an alternate claim to institutional power, or by making direct reference to another figure who is widely *perceived* to be authoritative. Speakers also underscore their own positions concerning authority by invoking particular chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981; Agha, 2007), situating their arguments within a broader time-space context and allowing them to draw on existing discourses tied to those time-spaces.

This study also considers the ways in which some kind of French-speaker identity is constructed and maintained through these discourses surrounding language reform and language “ownership”. These, too, are varied, but many of them echo the same methods by which authority is claimed: situating the current discussion within a broader sociohistorical milieu, for example, or by claiming as an authority a figure who was believed to have a privileged place in French historical memory (authors of the established literary canon, for example, and members of the French Resistance during the Second World War). One final factor that cannot be discounted in discussions of French speaker identity is the complex ways in which “the other” fits in – that is, who is French and who is not, which language practices make them *less French*, and how do we account for implicit (or explicit) racist discourses in a society which officially does not recognize race as a salient category?

These data, in demonstrating that authority cannot be assumed to lie solely with powerful institutions, also suggest that language reform efforts in the future may be more complex than those previously, as online activity such as social media use makes all the more apparent the ability of the so-called “average speaker” to reach those in power. While grassroots prescriptivist behaviors are undoubtedly not new, for example, social media is able to amplify these voices to the point where it is more difficult for policymakers to ignore them. While I make no concrete suggestions for policymakers to follow – as every situation has its own complexities – the data

offered here demonstrate that past efforts to reform aspects of language, particularly in places like France with such a strong attachment to their standard language, cannot be reliably assumed to work without problem in the future.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the issue of authority in language in light of the recent case of orthographic reform in France. The Académie française, since its founding in 1635, has made numerous attempts to standardize the French language. These changes have yielded the Standard French spoken today, and yet changes to the language are not met without some controversy (see Académie française, 2016). Such is the case of the most recent changes to French orthography, the *rectifications d'orthographe*, first approved in 1990. These changes, largely ignored for more than two decades after an initial backlash, sparked a vigorous debate both on- and offline following their adoption in 2016 by several textbook publishers (following earlier adoption by the Ministry of Education). This debate, in which members of the *Assemblée nationale*, teachers' unions, the press, and the public have all participated, largely centers around the question of authority: who really "owns" a language, who has the right to change its forms, and how is such an issue situated within the realm of public discourse (that is, both the discourse of the State and its uptake in the media)? As such, the questions I propose to address are as follows: first, how do speakers of French claim authority over the language – what are the (socio)linguistic correlates of authority, and how are these enacted? Second, how do French speakers enact and interact with the history and myths of France and a particular French[1]? Third, how do these attempts to establish authority over language affect and inform real-world language policy? And finally, how can these public debates, post-2016 adoption, inform our understanding of the relationship of language and public discourse?

While corpus planning projects may not often occur on a larger scale concerning a well-positioned language like French, smaller projects occur regularly (see Milroy, 2000; Watts,

[1] That is to say, both mythologies of the standard French (i.e. the French of the bourgeoisie) as well as an ideal *speaker* of this French variety.

2000). The *orthographe rectifiée* arose from one such project, aimed at regularizing otherwise problematic spellings in French. These changes, which comprise 10 new rules, have been cited to affect up to 2,400 words (see Le Hénaff, 2016); this news piece, aired on *TF1* on February 3, 2016, sparked the vigorous debates in other media, both print and televised, and on social media. The furor over these spelling reforms largely mirrors the response to the German spelling reforms of 1996 (see Johnson, 2000; 2002; 2006; 2012). These two situations clearly demonstrate the role that orthography plays for these speakers – as an immediately visible aspect of language proficiency, orthography is linked to the image of an ideal speaker of the language and thus to the image of the ideal citizen of that nation.

These ideological positions are closely tied to the notion that languages and nation-states are tightly linked (Gal, 2006). This concept, which became particularly prominent with the rise of European nation-states in the 17th through 19th centuries, gives rise to the perception of the French language as being both necessary and sufficient to define and unify the French people (the reality of which is, quite obviously, far more complex). As such, any examination of standard language ideologies held by the French must engage with both the history of the language (and changes thereto) and these fundamental myths.

A thorough examination of history and myth also necessitates an examination of particular chronotopes to which speakers orient (see Bakhtin, 1981; Agha, 2007). Orienting to a specific chronotope often constitutes an act of identity; furthermore, the chronotope(s) a speaker invokes not only reveal how that speaker positions him- or herself relative to that history, but also how s/he views that history in itself. The chronotopes to which speakers orient, moreover, are illustrative of broader perceptions groups may have of past events, informing and informed by the foundational myths of the group. Such questions inevitably also call into question

functions of speaker identity. Drawing upon the work of Butler (1990), Cameron (1998), and Bucholtz and Hall (2005), I define identity as performative rather than intrinsic: both individual and group identity are created and maintained in interaction. The interactions at hand, debates concerning language reform, serve to position speakers within ideological frameworks, and the stances speakers take regarding language reform construct a robust lens through which to view the positions French speakers take concerning authority over language. These *acts of identity* (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) may serve to establish the speaker's claim to authority over language, or they may strengthen the claim of a group.

To consider these questions, I examine data from a variety of sources. First, it is important to consider documents released by the Académie française and the French government. These sources provide a baseline understanding of the reforms as they *officially* exist; it is essential to understand how these institutional authorities view both the reforms and their role(s) in promulgating them. These data include documents pertaining to decisions made in 1990 by both the Académie and the Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française (CSLF), an ad-hoc committee organized for the purpose of making the recommendations. A second set of data comes from the mainstream French (news) media: these data include both televised segments (news, current events, debates, etc.) and print journalism. Because the media functions as such a powerful institution in terms of the spread of information, it is essential to consider how the information is ultimately spread. Moreover, these sources allow other public figures to engage in the discussion; these figures include teachers, government officials, and often academics in addition to media personalities. A final set of data is taken from social media – these data represent the range of views of the "average" speaker – because anyone can access social media, these data show perhaps the most diverse range of opinions. Including these three data sets

allows for an examination of not only institutionally sanctioned (i.e. top-down) authority over language but also how other actors claim authority and how individuals may resist these attempts at authority (that is, from the bottom). All have real consequences in terms of public discourse, which ultimately serves to legitimize or destabilize language planning efforts.

1.1 Significance of this project

While discussions of authority in conjunction with language planning projects are not new, this study aims to provide a more well-rounded perspective on the issue as it relates to public discourse. That is, much of the work concerning language planning projects to date focuses primarily on the role(s) of various institutions in proposing, negotiating, or implementing changes (Joseph Errington's discussions of language planning in Indonesia, for example – see Errington [1998; 2008] among others), while other studies focus on public perceptions of language reform (such as Sally Johnson's [2000, etc.] work on orthographic reform in Germany). Comparatively little work, however, has explored these issues as part of a larger discussion of authority in language; this proposed dissertation seeks to fill that gap by examining the interplay between these various scales (see Wortham, 2012; Carr and Lempert, 2016) of public discourse.

As such, the significance of this project lies in its theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions:

Theoretically, this study contributes to the under-studied area of authority as a sociolinguistic construct: while authority is certainly frequently *invoked* (both discursively and meta-discursively), authority is seldom, if ever, really *defined*. Specifically, work to this point has considered authority largely in terms of either its traditional relation to power (especially common in political sciences and philosophy, e.g. the writings of Thomas Hobbes and the Baron

de Montesquieu) or through considerations of its implications (such as Milroy and Milroy's [2012] discussions of standardization and prescriptivism, both of which stem from some concept of authority over language). Instead, I discuss authority not in terms of the end result or its philosophical underpinnings but as a set of dynamic processes that individual speakers may undertake, regardless of their position relative to institutional power. That is, authority is best understood not as something that some actor possesses *a priori* but as something that is negotiated *in interaction*. It would be naïve to assume that agents may not possess *some* amount of presumed authority upon entering a discussion (the Académie française, for example, may be assumed to be *more* authoritative by virtue of its position within French society), but this prior authority cannot explain the dynamic ways in which speakers accept, refute, or otherwise negotiate authority in real time. Authority is thus best understood as something that is relatively fluid and based on a wide range of discursive acts, and that the same speakers may claim authority through differing means and based upon differing premises – in short, authority should not be defined by what it *is* but by how – and by whom – it is claimed in any given interaction.

Moreover, this study has implications for the understanding of the ways in which French identity is linked to the standard language. While making the connection between these two notions is nothing new or controversial (see, for example, Errington's and Johnson's works cited above for examples of the ways these links have played out in language planning projects in Indonesia and Germany), the ways in which these links appear in the present debate are nonetheless interesting and may have implications for planning projects in France in particular. More specifically, these links seem to be made through the invocation of a somewhat arbitrary, wholly ideological "ideal French speaker"; this figure, though it may take different forms, is frequently invoked to justify why one standard is "better" than another (often through historical

or aesthetic considerations). Understanding the ways in which this figure is used may help those involved in language planning projects better approach issues faced by underperforming students, underserved minority groups, and other intended beneficiaries of such language reform projects.

Empirically, this project addresses the role of public discourse in language planning efforts, particularly in a context in which *status* planning is relatively unnecessary. That is, the changes proposed in this context are relatively small (compared to the significant overhaul proposed for German – cf. Johnson [2000; etc.]) and questions of the status of one language over others, and in which contexts to use the language, are not at issue (as opposed to major projects like the ones Errington [2008] discusses in Indonesia). Focusing on a comparatively small reform project (so small that those involved actively oppose the use of the term "reform", preferring "rectification", "correction", or even "revision") allows us to consider the public reaction differently than one might expect of a broader or more complex project.

Methodologically, this study employs a variety of tools to best understand the interaction of various discourses surrounding the *rectifications*. To the discourse-analytic methodology that forms the backbone of this study, I also apply chronotopic and deictic analyses, supplemented by an appraisal-theoretic analysis of social media data. Triangulation of data offered through these varied methods (and over a variety of sources) allows us to consider how wide-spread particular discourses may be; linking these different sources allows us, to an extent, to trace the development of these discourses and the ways they evolve. The data I consider here demonstrate that methods which link different source materials are indeed highly effective at tracing the growth of a particular discourse, as it becomes clear that a discourse that is common in one medium follows more or less directly from a different medium. By blending these different

methodologies, the links across different media become clear and their effects on public discourse more easily traceable; opting to focus on a single method or a single data source will inevitably miss something significant and interesting.

1.2 Research questions

In order to consider authority as a construct and the ways in which it is enacted in public metalinguistic discourse, I am guided by the following questions:

1. How do speakers of French claim authority over the language – what are the (socio)linguistic correlates of authority, and how are these enacted?

    i. Are there particular linguistic forms that arise commonly when claiming authority? What are they?

    ii. What discourses are commonly invoked in order to claim authority or reject another speaker's claims?

2. How do French speakers enact and interact with the history and myths of France and a particular French?

    i. By what means are certain histories and myths invoked? What images are raised?

    ii. How do speakers position *then* and *now* in their arguments, and what does this positioning tell us about that speaker's ideological orientation?

    iii. In so doing, what do these speakers say about the *identity* of a particular, idealized French speaker?

    iv. How does this relate to those speakers who are perceived to deviate from this idealized norm?

3. What effects might these attempts to claim authority over language have on real-world

language policy?

i. What might policy-makers need to consider when suggesting policy that they might not have otherwise considered?

ii. How do these conceptions of authority engage with presuppositions about the authority of institutions like the Académie française?

4. What can we learn about the relationship of language and public discourse through such debates?

1.3 Structure of this dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2: Background

In this chapter I offer an overview of both previous language reform projects in France and a short history of the current instance. I also present a brief discussion of language planning and policy more generally, focusing on the ways in which theorists have understood such projects in the past. Finally, this chapter discusses issues of written language in general, considering differences in ideology concerning written and spoken language and some of the reasons why many speakers react much more strongly to changes in written language.

Chapter 3: Theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents the fundamental theories that drive my analysis. Beginning with a discussion of ideology, power, and authority, I address the ways in which authority in particular has been understood in the past. This is followed by a discussion of chronotope, calibration, and

scale as concepts that deal with the relation of there-and-then with here-and-now; these concepts are useful in understanding the ways in which history and myth are invoked. I also address concepts of authority, focusing primarily on the ways in which group identity can be constructed; this necessarily entails a brief discussion of the links between language and national identity and the ways in which some minority groups are positioned relative to these identities. Finally, this chapter addresses some of the unique considerations of working with media data – how media data can be approached, and why these data are interesting and relevant to a study such as this.

Chapter 4: Methods

This chapter explains the methodologies used for both data collection and data analysis. Here I focus primarily on the selection criteria of the various data sets that I have analyzed and the particulars of the analysis itself. Because these data are so diverse, ethnographic information obtained concerning some speakers is included, when relevant, in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5: Trends and Common Discourses

This chapter serves as a preliminary overview of the data in this study: what patterns have arisen in discourses both within and across data sets? In this chapter, I present some of the most common discourses and the ways in which they appear, offering a foundation for a more detailed analysis in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6: Approaches to Authority

This chapter addresses the question of authority systematically. Here I address previous conceptions of authority and discuss them in the context of my data, suggesting that the previous

picture is incomplete. Instead, I offer an understanding of authority that is based on dynamic discursive processes rather than on *a priori* assumptions.

Chapter 7: History, Mythology, Chronotope

In this chapter I analyze the ways in which different speakers address histories to claim and support their own authoritative statements. These histories, which sometimes deal with the French Republic writ large and at other times address the particular histories of language reform, nonetheless play a significant role in the ways speakers approach authority.

Chapter 8: French language, French identity

This chapter addresses questions raised about the hypothetical "ideal speaker" when discussing French national identity – who is this ideal speaker, and, perhaps more significantly, who is *not*? Here I address certain "shadow conversations" regarding the question of *who is French* that are posed in this discussion of language standards.

Chapter 9: Implications and conclusions

In this chapter I attempt to synthesize these data into a discussion of the ways in which language planning issues may be different in the age of social media, examining the roles that organizations like the Académie française have traditionally played and how they might be approached differently when considering public discourse surrounding such actions. This chapter also offers concluding remarks on this study, including a brief discussion of limitations on this study and suggestions for continuations of this research.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

In this chapter I attempt to provide a thorough (if brief) understanding of the issues surrounding orthographic reform in France. I certainly do not aim to be comprehensive here (such a task would be well beyond the scope of this project) but rather I hope to offer a solid understanding of the essentials. The next section presents the broad strokes of the history of prescriptivism and language reform in France, focusing in particular on the last thirty or so years of reforms – the *rectifications* under question today saw their beginnings with the convocation of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française in 1989. In presenting this history, I introduce some of the key players in the debates that figure into my data and attempt to explain some of the resulting dynamics. Section 2.2 offers a brief explanation of some of the ways scholars talk about language planning and policy; my goal here is to present the reader with a general view of the types of language planning activity that have been undertaken in France in particular.

2.1 A (very brief) history of French standardization and reform

Several bodies within the French government have played significant roles in establishing and maintaining the French standard that we recognize today. Perhaps the best known of these organizations is the Académie française, the oldest of the five member institutions of the Institut de France, and whose members, known informally as *les Immortels* after the institution's motto "*À l'immortalité*", have the final say on what constitutes Standard French. However, the Académie is not the sole government body to regulate language in France; other committees, including the Conseil supérieur de la langue française (CSLF), which proposed the *rectifications* at the heart of the more recent discussions, have been formed when needed. More permanent are bodies like the Autorité de régulation professionnelle de la publicité and the Associations de

défense de la langue française, which are among the groups responsible for the enforcement of language legislation such as the Loi Toubon[2]. Organizations like the Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France and the Commission d'enrichissement de la langue française, are responsible, in conjunction with the Académie, for promoting the language abroad and making it accessible to migrants, and for presenting new French vocabulary; these organizations also run a free online dictionary of these neologisms (available at www.culture.fr/franceterme). Adamson (2007) and Wright (2004) present thorough overviews of the development of these offices and accompanying legislation.

The Académie française was founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu to standardize the French language (see Académie française, 2016); the principal goal of the Académie was to publish an official dictionary, giving it the final word on both lexicon and orthography in the French language. Currently in the process of publishing its ninth full edition (each of which is generally published in separate volumes as the Académie finishes revising them), the Académie has overseen extensive changes to the standard French language. Through these dictionaries, the Académie has proposed numerous orthographic reforms in its nearly four hundred years; many of these have led to the French orthographic standards seen today (see e.g. Cazal and Parussa, 2015). The third and fourth dictionaries, for example, changed the spellings of nearly half of the

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[2] The Loi Toubon, officially the *loi nº 94-665 du 4 août 1994 relative à l'emploi de la langue française* ('Law nº 94-665 of August 4, 1994, relating to the usage of the French language') is the law mandating the usage of French in all government publications and functions, including state-run schools, the courts, and the postal service, as well as all commercial activity, including advertisements, and all broadcasting, with a few exceptions (such as "original language" versions of films, television programs, and music). The law ensures quotas on all non-French language creatives works in broadcast; for example, within a given block of radio broadcasting, a certain percentage must be produced in French. In practice, advertisers, especially in Paris, often find ways to circumvent this law. The law does not apply to private organizations such as academic conferences, especially in the sciences where English is most commonly used. Individual citizens are likewise free to use any language they see fit in normal conversation; these rights have consistently been upheld by the courts in accordance with the French constitution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. See Adamson (2007), Martin (2006), and Wright (2004) for extended discussion of these laws.

words, with innovations such as the standardization of diacritics, including the acute, grave, and circumflex accents: *chasteau* 'castle', *escrire* 'to write', and *fiebvre* 'fever', all of which marked intended pronunciation of the preceding vowel with a silent consonant, became *château*, *écrire*, and *fièvre*. Similarly, the sixth edition progressively adopted of the <ai> digraph to replace the <oi> spellings representing the vowel [ɛ], especially common in conjugated verb forms (such as in *était* [etɛ]). It is, essentially, through these dictionaries that the orthographic standards of modern French are recognized; indeed, the Académie's own spelling in its first dictionary are recognizably different than the spellings French students learn today.

It is also important to note that the acquisition of the standard orthography is viewed as an essential aspect of French education in a way that may seem unusual to those unfamiliar with the system. While spelling bees are not uncommon in the United States – and the National Spelling Bee is conducted yearly – such activities do not typically form a major component of conventional schooling. In France, on the other hand, the *dictée* is a well-established scholastic activity; Portebois (2006), for example, traces the history of the modern *dictée* from the Second Empire, including Mérimée's famous *dictée*; in modern years, the *Dicos d'Or* ('Golden Dictionaries') ran until 2005, frequently hosted by Bernard Pivot. Though some spelling exams proceed in similar manner to those in the United States – primarily by giving words or short phrases in isolation – the *dictée* involves the careful recording of a larger text. Though this exercise necessarily tests understanding of grammar as well as spelling – as many grammatical forms of French verbs, in particular, are evident in written but not spoken form – texts are frequently chosen to incorporate words with tricky spellings. Students can still find dictionaries of frequent orthographic mistakes; Dansel's 1995 *Dictionnaire des Fautes d'Orthographe*, for example, purports to "allow [students] to discover the correct spelling" of these words (trans.

mine)[3]. Proper French orthography is thus something for which students are expected to strive even from an early point in their schooling.

In this spirit of easing some of these difficulties, numerous changes to French orthography were proposed in the latter half of the twentieth century. Cerquiglini (2016) suggests that unsuccessful attempts at modernization in the 1960s and 1970s directly influenced the creation of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française by then-Prime Minister Michel Rocard in 1989 (see also Chansou, 2003); this organization, which comprised members of the Académie, linguists and historians, and other government officials, was given as its mandate the proposition of a revised orthography (not necessarily a wholesale revision of the system). The CSLF, under the leadership of Maurice Druon (also the *secrétaire perpetuel* – the highest-ranking member – of the Académie), examined several propositions for orthographic changes of varying magnitudes and considered changes it felt to be the most useful to language learners, the most internally consistent, and the most respectful of the history and aesthetics of the French language. These changes were intended to rectify some of the oddities of French spelling and thus allow the orthographic standard to evolve with the spoken language; Druon, in his letter to Rocard explaining what the CSLF had decided upon, clearly explained that these changes were not constitutive of a *réforme*, but instead were *améliorations*, *corrections*, or *rectifications*.

These *rectifications* amounted to ten rules; these rules would affect approximately 2400 words (or roughly four percent of all words in the most recent dictionary). Among the changes proposed was the regularization of several diacritics: acute and grave accents were changed in some words to adapt to modern pronunciation, as in *un événement* 'event', which has become *un évènement*, reflective of the pronunciation [ɛ] rather than [e] of the second <e>. Similarly, the

[3] Citation is taken from the publisher's notes on the text, as seen on Amazon.fr: https://www.amazon.fr/DICTIONNAIRE-FAUTES-DORTHOGRAPHE-Michel-Dansel/dp/2268020851

tréma (diaeresis) in words like *ambiguë* 'ambiguous (f.)', which exists primarily to indicate pronunciation of the final vowel [y] (in opposition to the unpronounced final letters of *fatigue*), is moved to the pronounced vowel: *ambigüe*, corresponding to the masculine form *ambigu*. The circumflex is to be removed from < i > and < u > (of which it does not affect pronunciation) in most cases, with a few exceptions preserved to distinguish between homonyms. For example, *maîtresse* 'mistress' becomes *maitresse*; on the other hand, *mûr* 'mature' is unchanged to avoid confusion with *mur* 'wall' and conjugations of the verb *croître* 'grow' maintain the circumflex to distinguish themselves from similar forms of *croire* 'believe'. Other rules address irregular pluralization and hyphenization in compound words, such as *week-end* (now *weekend*). Finally, several irregular spellings have been changed. *Oignon* 'onion', for example, is now *ognon*, removing the unpronounced < i >. *Nénuphar* 'waterlily' has become *nénufar*, reflecting its Persian etymology (rather than Greek, as the Académie stated in its 1925 dictionary). The full list of changes suggested can be seen in the report of the CSLF ("Rectifications de l'Orthographe" 1990).

These changes were proposed to the full Académie française in 1990 by Druon himself; the Académie debated most of the propositions and ultimately voted unanimously to approve them. These changes are already reflected in the Académie's ninth dictionary (which remains incomplete as of the writing of this dissertation; the completed portion, *A* to *sérénissime*, is available online[4]). Members of the Académie believed that these changes should not be considered mandatory; no individual who had already learned the older forms should, in their view, be expected to re-learn the newer spellings (see also Ball, 1999). As such, those parts of the ninth dictionary that have already been completed show all acceptable spellings, much as

[4] https://academie.atilf.fr/9/

previous versions have done when the spelling of a word is disputed. Following these debates within the Académie, the approved *rectifications* were presented to Prime Minister Rocard and ultimately published in the *Journal officiel de la République française*, the register of all laws and decrees made by the French government. Though these changes cannot be considered "law" – as the Académie is not, nor has it ever been, a body with formal legislative power – publication in the *Journal officiel* thus grants the *rectifications* official status as an act of the French Republic.

Though these changes were not "enforced", insofar as they are considered facultative rather than obligatory, their inclusion in the *Journal officiel* meant that the school system, like the dictionary, was free to use either form. Indeed, the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur, et de la Recherche (the Ministry of Education) made recommendations in the early 1990s to move toward the new system, though it recognized that students and teachers alike should be free to continue to use older forms. The official *programmes de collège* (middle-school curricula) of 2008 states that "the instructor should take into account the spelling rectifications proposed in the Report of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approved by the Académie française" (Bulletin de 28 août 2008: 2, trans. mine). This was confirmed in 2015, when the official curriculum began with a simple note that "the texts that follow apply the orthographic rectifications that were proposed by the Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approved by the Académie française, and published by the Journal officiel de la République française on 6 December 1990" (Bulletin spécial de 26 novembre 2015, trans. mine).

The current debate did not, in fact, arise from any announcements by the Ministère d'Éducation or the Académie française but from a textbook publisher. All public schools in

France follow a national standard curriculum (with which textbook publishers must comply if they intend to sell their product to the schools); however, some freedom exists to choose between the texts produced by different publishers. Thus, some publishers, notably Éditions Hatier, already included the *recfitications d'orthographe* in their product (see e.g. Deborde, 2016). However, following the publication of the 2015 curricula, Belin Éditeur, another large textbook producer, announced that its 2016 editions would include the *rectifications*. This announcement went largely unnoticed until February 2016, when several major French news outlets reported the story, most notably a short televised segment by the major Parisian network TF1 on February 3, 2016 (Le Henaff, 2016).

This report, which focused on the number of words affected, included an interview with Jean-Rémi Girard, a vice president of the *Syndicat national des lycées et collèges*, a national teachers' union that is generally considered to be somewhat right-leaning (see e.g. Polony, 2010). This report (which is discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters) largely presents the *rectifications* in a more negative light, focusing on the dissatisfaction of teachers such as Girard. In the days following this story, numerous other pieces were published in print media and presented on television, as various news organizations weighed in on what became a debate. In a February 8 interview in *Le Figaro* (also discussed in subsequent chapters), the current *secrétaire perpetuel* of the Académie, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, argued that the Académie had not approved the changes and that the Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the Minister of Education, had overstepped bounds by adopting these new standards (to which Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem replied with "astonishment" in a subsequent letter published in *Le Monde*). Televised debates including teachers (such as Jean-Rémi Girard) and members of the National Assembly aired during this time, continuing the discussion. It should be noted, however, that the orthographic revisions were

not the top story in either of the major national newspapers (*Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*) during this time.

The initial report likewise sparked a fierce debate on Twitter (and other social media platforms), continued by subsequent reports. During this time, hashtags like #*JeSuisCirconflexe*[5] and #*ReformeOrthographe* trended on Twitter, as thousands of Tweets appeared each day (with well over 100,000 published on 4 February, the day after the *TF1* report). Though it appears that many of these users were not fully aware of the details of the issue (many, for example, assumed that the circumflex would be disappearing completely, while others were under the assumption that the changes were mandatory), Twitter users actively took up both sides of the discussion. Though the number of tweets bearing either of these hashtags fell sharply by the end of February, the first two weeks following the *TF1* report saw fairly active participation online, though it is not possible to know how many users followed the debate without actively participating themselves.

2.2 Language planning and language policy

At this juncture, a brief discussion of language planning and policy is in order. Language planning, generally the domain of the State (or other high-level institutions), is how the standard becomes official, but how exactly this comes to be is not uniform across situations. Discussions of language planning generally begin with two broad types: *status planning* and *corpus planning*. Status planning addresses questions of the language's *function* in society (e.g. Edwards, 1996);

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[5] Hashtags of this type were popularized with #*JeSuisCharlie* 'I am Charlie', a tag used to show solidarity and remembrance after the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris on January 7, 2015. See Pizarro Pedraza and De Cock (2017) and De Cock and Pizarro Pedraza (2018) for a discussion of the varied pragmatic functions of this type of hashtag; the authors show, for example, that these hashtags do not always indicate alignment with the topic, but instead may be used ironically.

this may address issues such as a language's function as an official, local/regional, educational, literary, or religious language, among other possibilities (see also Stewart, 1968). Corpus planning, on the other hand, is concerned with a language's *form* (cf. Ferguson, 1996; Liddicoat, 2005). This might deal with something as seemingly rudimentary as the script a language uses to write (though this may also be decidedly ideological – consider that Croatian and Bosnian, highly similar languages spoken by former Yugoslav states, use, respectively, the Latin and Cyrillic scripts); corpus planning projects also include efforts to standardize and/or modernize a language – France's various terminological commissions fulfill these roles, for example. In some cases (especially in the context of a new political entity or a change in government), an organization such as a language academy may engage in both status and corpus planning; for example, Hualde and Zuazo (2007) explain the processes undertaken by the Euskaltzaindia (Basque Language Academy) following the end of the Franco regime's suppression of regional languages in Spain, wherein the both official function and standardized form of the Basque language were uncertain.

Language planning projects can also be discussed in terms of the goals of the planners. Tollefson (1991) discusses two broad conceptions within this vein, the *neoclassical* and the *historical-structural* approaches (see also Wiley, 1996). The neoclassical approach aims to be ahistorical and apolitical and is often concerned with such things as aesthetics. The historical-cultural approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of history and politics in language planning, paying close attention to sociocultural issues, to questions of class dominance, and to histories of oppression. The *orthographe rectifiée* is, to some extent, part of the latter tradition: the present reforms were proposed largely in order to lessen some of the difficulties many students, especially those not belonging to privileged social classes, face in learning a highly

irregular orthographic system. Furthermore, these changes appear to seriously consider historical factors in spelling changes, often rejecting orthographic forms that exist primarily (or solely) for etymological reasons. Nonetheless, as Shelly (1999) argues, much of the French tradition in language planning has followed a more neoclassical approach, often emphasizing history or the aesthetic value of the language. Even the current *rectifications*, to an extent, are concerned with the aesthetics of the language, as explained in the letters accompanying the proposals ("Rectifications d'orthgraphe", 1990); proposed changes, while attempting to facilitate learning and eliminate some irregularities, nonetheless attempt to maintain the "character" of the French language and its orthography.

Regardless of the *nature* of language planning efforts, the fact remains that these are still top-down, institution-driven efforts at standardization. It is also traditionally held that such policy decisions are closed-door projects to which members of the general public are not privy. These efforts may or may not involve *public intellectuals* as a group (see Ahearne, 2006, for an overview of the complicated role such intellectuals have played in modern France); rather, policy makers are generally appointed by the state (though they may, as in the case of many members of the CSLF, be trained as linguists).

It is important, however, to consider the role of the media in public policy debates. Technological advances of the New Media (especially in terms of social media) lead to different assumptions about the availability of such discussions; thanks to video platforms such as YouTube and the ubiquity (and speed) of such utilities as Twitter, debates can reach wider audiences. Branstetter (2011) highlights some of the issues politicians have faced in terms of the New Media – he discusses in particular a gaffe made by former French president Nicolas Sarkozy that was filmed by a reporter and immediately available on YouTube. He argues that the

more public nature of such platforms is a reality to which policymakers must orient themselves; to fail to do so would be to ignore an avenue of public discourse that is unlikely to disappear. Indeed, such platforms as Twitter give the "average person" far easier means to address politicians (including otherwise obscure ones, such as the Minister of Education); moreover, as recent years in the United States clearly demonstrate, Twitter allows almost unprecedented access to the thoughts of the politicians themselves. In characterizing public discourse, therefore, it is essential to consider all these avenues, as these media demonstrate that the previous assumptions of policy discussions existing in closed-door settings can no longer be taken for granted. I further address some of the constraints on these new media (and some of the issues faced in social media research) in section 3.4.

2.3 Written language, prescriptivist views, and issues facing orthographic reform

While many fields of linguistic research have traditionally viewed orthography (and writing in general) as merely incidental to spoken language phenomena, Sebba (1998) argues that orthographic practices in fact have a decidedly ideological bent. He cites the example of debates in Haitian Creole surrounding the representation of the sound [k] as either <c>, <qu>, or <k>; preference for either of the first two forms may suggest stronger ties to the French which forms the basis of Haitian Creole, while preference for <k> may index a preference for English as a global language, or a willingness to downplay the language's connections to the French of their former colonizers, or any number of other ideological positions. Strong attachment to the circumflex among French speakers is thus likely just as ideologically driven; because the diacritic serves no phonological purpose in the cases where it is deleted, those speakers who prefer to maintain it must thus be responding to something else entirely.

Cameron (1995) and Johnson (2002) discuss orthographic reform in terms of issues of language standardization. The standard variety is assumed to be the default form of a language; thus, speakers do not necessarily think about their orthographic choices. Cameron argues that preference for standard orthographic forms may be beyond debate (ibid.); that is, the average speaker is not only unlikely to consider using anything but a standard form (errors notwithstanding) but equally unlikely to consider *why* that form is preferable (see also Milroy and Milroy, 2012). Moreover, written language tends to be viewed as more stable than spoken language, so changes to written forms occurs much more slowly than changes to the spoken forms. Johnson (2002) suggests that these tendencies explain why such vigorous debates occur when orthographic reforms are proposed.

One noteworthy modern example of problems faced for proposed orthographic reforms is the German orthographic reform first proposed in 1996 (Johnson, 2000; 2002; 2006; 2012). The German federal government announced in 1996 that it had passed a measure to simplify what it saw as "a complex and inconsistent set of orthographic rules that were causing unnecessary problems for language users of all ages, but in particular young schoolchildren" (Johnson, 2000: 106)[6]. Vigorous debates followed, as some citizens accused the government of unnecessary meddling in their private affairs; others questioned whether it was necessary to add new spelling forms for children to learn. Though the scale and precise nature of this reform differs from the *orthographe rectifiée*, many of these objections have been raised concerning French orthography. Furthermore, in both cases, the question of *who* has the authority to determine the proper forms has been quite complex (and ultimately undetermined).

[6] A similar rhetoric is often invoked in the long-running debates over traditional vs. simplified characters in Mandarin – see "The Chinese Language" (2009) for some of these viewpoints. Questions of language rights have also been invoked in debates concerning Portuguese orthographic reform (see Melo-Pfeifer, 2016).

The cumulative effect of such issues is a strongly prescriptivist linguistic culture. Prescriptivism ultimately determines what is "correct" in a language, and those who do not follow these notions are criticized or sanctioned in some way (see Beal, 2008; Lippi-Green, 1997). One of the ways in which this process occurs is through language policing. Blommaert (2009), Blommaert et al. (2009), and Moschonas and Spitzmüller (2010) suggest that this is not a simple top-down process, but rather that language policing (which is closer to the notion of *normativity* than to *policy* per se) is best considered in terms of levels. Thus, we can examine institutions as macro-level agents of language policing (i.e. language academies, schools), the media as a meso-level agent, and individuals as micro-level agents. It is also important to note that these prescriptivist ideologies reproduce themselves at all levels: Heyd (2014) discusses the notion of *grassroots prescriptivism*, wherein individuals perpetuate these prescriptivist ideologies in their interactions with one another, and those who do not follow prescriptive language use are criticized. These micro-level processes ultimately mean that an individual may be exposed to ideologies concerning the "standard" variety at all levels; they may also lead to a greater feeling of control over one's language. I have also discussed this in published work; in Drackley (2019) I argue that prescriptivist ideologies, while traditionally top-down in nature, are primarily reproduced in a bottom-up manner in this case, as individual speakers, particularly on Twitter, overwhelmingly adopt a linguistically conservative viewpoint.

Similarly, Milroy and Milroy (2012) discuss the issue of language policing and standardization (which, they emphasize, is more of a *process* than a *product*) in terms of the *complaint tradition*: that is, the long history of linguistic complaints about the nature or status of the "standard" English. While in earlier days these complaints were generally concerned with the status of English *vis-à-vis* French (and, in some specialized fields, Latin or Greek), since the 18th

Century, these complaints have largely concerned usage. That is, authors have complained about errors, general lack of precision, unnecessarily elaborated lexicon, and a great many other aspects of language (though, it is worth noting, many of these complaints have focused on *written* language). Such complaints may come from a variety of sources but are interesting in that they not only characterize prescriptivist traditions in language, but they also inform our understanding of issues of language planning.

In many cases, the *rectifications* follow a fairly standard format among language planning projects: a problem is identified, changes are proposed, and a debate ensues. What makes this case unusual is the dynamic *between* the actors here: *who* is linguistically conservative and who is not, the roles played by the Ministry of Education (especially *vis-à-vis* the Académie française) and the publishing industry, and the highly public nature of debates on social media. This case, then, offers an interesting look at contemporary language planning and what it can tell us about the ways ideology and history intertwine and who can claim authority over language. In the next chapter I address important theoretical considerations; the issues I have presented thus far should be kept in mind as I discuss power and authority, history and myth, identity and nationalism, and other such issues.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Bearing in mind the specific context of this study, as addressed in the previous chapter, here I present an overview of several relevant theories that provide the basis for my analysis. In section 3.1, I address notions of power and authority as theoretical constructs; these concepts are fundamental notions to this study and concepts whose very definitions I will be returning to throughout this dissertation. Section 3.2 offers an evaluation of *chronotope* and *calibration/scaling* as processes through which history and myth become and remain relevant to speakers; here I digress briefly to address narrative and reported speech and their functions in processes like calibration. I move on to notions of language and identity in section 3.3: how is identity created through interaction, how group identities arise from individual acts of identity, and how particular figures of personhood become associated with particular linguistic practices. I supplement this discussion with a brief discussion of some of the ways in which language comes to be wrapped up with national identities and nationalistic discourses (particularly within France) and a short discussion of language and race in France. Finally, section 3.4 addresses some of the unique issues that arise when conducting media research, focusing in particular on the ways in which researchers engage with social media.

3.1 Power and authority: whose language is it anyway?

When discussing such questions as authority, it is important to remember that one is considering language through the lens of *ideology* rather than any kind of structure *inherent* to the language. Language ideologies, following Silverstein (1979, 1998), Gal and Irvine (1995), and Blommaert (2005), are deeply held (and often largely subconscious) beliefs individuals within a society hold that concern their linguistic reality. Although discussions of ideology often focus on individual

beliefs, it is important, too, to consider the social functions of ideologies: van Dijk (2006: 116) argues that "ideologies consist of social representations that define the social identity of the group … its shared belief about its fundamental conditions" (see also Eagleton, 1991, for a discussion of the uses of ideologies in conditioning group identities and behavior). As such, when discussing language ideologies, it is important to consider the how the group in question constructs its social reality – *how* they believe language should be used in a particular context, *who* should have the right to use the language, and who should have the right to *change* that language. In the context of this study, then, French speakers in France constitute a particular group which shares certain aspects of its *social identity* – that is, they are French speakers who have a sense of shared history in French society and similar understandings of the forms and functions of the French language.

One set of ideologies some speakers have about their language is thus tied to the question of *authority*: who has the power to determine when and how a language is used, and what form(s) it takes? Discussions of power, especially with regard to ideology, are often framed within the Marxian cultural philosophy of thinkers such as Gramsci and Althusser, and others in the same tradition. In Gramsci's (1971) terms, authority over aspects of social life is not necessarily derived through force but through the notion of *cultural hegemony*: that the values of the bourgeoisie become the "common sense" view and thus a sort of cultural unmarked form. Authority is thus not necessarily actively coercive, nor does it require physical force; rather, it is power that is instead asserted and maintained through ideology. Indeed, as Fairclough [1989: 85] argues, dominant ideologies "[are] most effective when [their] workings are least visible". Althusser (1971) extends this notion through his discussion of the Ideological State Apparatus, which maintains power through cultural institutions such as the church or the schools. The

school, Althusser argues, is the primary means through which the dominant social class maintains its power, wherein students are taught that education allows them to become productive members of society. Such ideas, specifically as they pertain to language, are especially clear in the love the French bear for the *dictée* (see Portebois, 2006), an exercise that tests students' comprehension primarily of orthography but also of grammatical and stylistic rules.

The effects of this ideological power on language are perhaps most clearly articulated by Bourdieu (1991). Here, he addresses the notion of *symbolic domination*, which he describes as an effort to constrain what one *does* through an assertion of what one *is*:

> "The power of suggestion which is exerted through things and persons and which, instead of telling the child what he must do, tells him what he is, and thus leads him to become durably what he has to be, is the condition for the effectiveness of all kinds of symbolic power that will subsequently be able to operate on a habitus predisposed to respond to them." (p. 52)

Thus, the maintenance of one group's authority over language is linked to that group's (ideological) control over the prestigious variety: though the form that is most prestigious may be defined historically, the *influence* of that form, which serves to benefit the powerful class, is evident through this *symbolic power*. Such is the importance of institutions like the Académie française: by elevating the standard form of the language, and by placing such a high premium on, and payoff for, learning to use that form (what Bourdieu terms *symbolic capital* – see also Bourdieu, 1990), these institutions ensure that they maintain power over the language. Indeed, continued debates over the proper form of the language serve primarily to reinforce that standard; Bourdieu argues that, simply by seeking to be considered *part of* the legitimate

language, a speaker reinforces the notion that a legitimate language exists (ibid.) This effect, for Bourdieu, is an inevitable extension of the power of these ideological apparatuses over language[7]. Fairclough (1989:33) echoes this notion, arguing that institutional practices about which we do not think often support existing power structures, that ideological power is "the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense'". Moreover, as Barthes (1957) argues, this ideological power feeds into the *myths* powerful classes perpetuate: the rhetoric of power obscures contradictions in logic and the specific social context feeding these ideologies, yet the ideologies remain, and individuals thus believe in the myths without comprehending their background.

These philosophical arguments center largely around the concept of the standard language. Milroy (2000), Watts (2000), Rissanen (2000), and others explain how a particular variety becomes the standard (indeed, Bourdieu [1991] and Lodge [1991] outline the development of Standard French from the dialect of the French *élites* and the subsequent delegitimization of other dialects). The development of a standard language demonstrates that ideologies themselves cannot be entirely divorced from time; as Bhatt (2002) argues, the history of a language variety is often used by those with privileged access to power in order to reinforce (and perpetuate) that power[8]. Thus, histories of the English language often begin with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the British Isles in the 5th Century, and histories of the Romance languages will trace their lineages from Classical Latin (see Milroy, 2000), despite the range of language forms that existed in intervening years and the fact that Old English (that of the Anglo-

[7] This could also be considered in terms of Foucault's (1966) discussion of the *episteme*: all knowledge that can be gained within a particular era is constrained by the dominant paradigm of that era, and thus all understanding of a particular phenomenon is necessarily constrained by that paradigm. In this view, *all* knowledge is inherently ideological (to varying degrees).

[8] This is especially apparent *vis-à-vis* post-colonial "non-standard" language varieties. In the French case, such a question may be especially prevalent with the influx of North African French speakers in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Saxons) bears no more resemblance to Modern English than does Classical Latin to Modern French or Italian. History thereby becomes a powerful tool to enhance the legitimacy of a single language variety (see section 3.2 for a discussion of how speakers invoke histories and/or myths).

It is important to note, in any discussion of the power of the standard language, that these language varieties are closely linked to the relatively modern concept of the nation-state. Milroy (2000) explains that histories of English dating to the earliest days of Old English stem largely from a period of Germanic purism in the English language (and corresponding distaste for Latinate vocabulary) in the 18th Century, a time when England and France were at odds with one another as often as not. Similarly, Johnson (2006) highlights the importance of language as a unifying object in fledgling nations, including the newly unified Germany under Bismarck. Abbé Grégoire's attempts, following the French Revolution, to unify France through a single language (and subsequent erasure of other regional languages) is another example of the influence of the nation-state over language: proficiency in the French of Paris, which had been a necessity for participation in the court of the *ancien régime* (Morin, 2000) and for any upward mobility within that society (Lodge, 1991), was likewise essential for participation in post-revolutionary democratic processes (see Higonnet, 1980; Grillo, 1989; Rebourcet, 2008).

The result of any language standardization effort (regardless of historical reasons) is the impression that the standard variety is a form from nowhere that belongs to no one in particular (for example, if Standard French is the variety one is expected to speak throughout France, can one argue that it is *still* the French of Paris, or is it equally the French of Rennes, or Strasbourg, or Marseille?). The logical extension of this notion is that, if one form is spoken everywhere, it is no longer sufficient to identify speakers of subgroups. This functional anonymity of speakers,

however, has some strong effects when discussing authority: as Johnson (2006; 2012) argues, speakers of a language derive authority over that language *through* their anonymity (see also Gal, 2019). The standard variety of a language thus belongs simultaneously to no one and everyone – Johnson describes this as a reciprocal relationship between the primacy of the standard language and the anonymity of its speakers.

3.1.1 Authority and power: is there a difference?

In a more general sense, especially within the realm of politics, the notions of power and authority are closely linked, if not essentially synonymous. That is to say, one can discuss the *authority* of the State to take a given action in terms of the *power* granted to it by its constitution; one could likewise discuss the *authority* of the governing party or coalition in the state's legislature in terms of that group's *political power* (many political philosophers, from Thomas Hobbes and the Baron de Montesquieu to Carl Joachim Friedrich and Hannah Arendt, have written extensively about these dynamics – see, for example, Hobbes, 2010; de Secondat, 1989; Friedrich, 1963; 1972; Arendt, 1968; 2006). In Western democracies such as France and the United States, this power (both the power of the majority party and the power vested in the Constitution) is claimed to come from the will of the people – thus, collective will dictates where power lies[9]. In this vein, the *rectifications d'orthographe* provide an interesting challenge to the notion of authority, which I attempt to address in subsequent chapters: if authority is synonymous with political power, which is itself derived through the consent of the governed – a

[9] This notion is obviously somewhat problematic in practice, as numerous examples exist wherein the will of the governed does not translate directly into political power; complaints concerning the Electoral College system and gerrymandered political districts in the United States, for example, demonstrate that there is not necessarily a perfect relationship between the two. Such a discussion of political power is better approached from the realms of political sciences and philosophy and are thus well beyond the scope of this project.

notion that famously appears in documents like the United States Declaration of Independence and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights – how can such stark differences between governmental agencies (and the decisions they make) and the voice of the people be explained?

Questions of authority in language standardization do not necessarily rely on political power. Milroy and Milroy (2012), in their comprehensive text *Authority in Language*, provide several examples of ways in which those actors with prescriptivist goals derive authority over the standard language, including analogical and etymological arguments and the "observed usage of the 'best people' at that time" (p. 17; see also Lodge, 1991). Many English grammarians of the 18th century, for example, sought to select a single acceptable variant for a given form; in the Milroys' example of *different to* vs. *different from* (or *different than,* a common variant in American English), many such grammarians drew on analogy to Latin (as a supposedly enlightened or ideal language) to decide in favor of one form or another. This is also the case in the well-known example of split-infinitives; because Latin does not allow split infinitives (notwithstanding the fact that such a structure is not *possible* in Latin, which does not mark infinitives with a discrete particle like "to"), nor should English. I discuss prescriptivism more specifically in subsequent sections, but these examples demonstrate that authority to dictate language forms has, in some cases, drawn not from actual usage by the common citizen, but from the power of the social elite or from the prestige given to a language like Latin. A result of such discussions is that, once a language becomes codified (as English did around this same time), books reflect these "correct" standards, and many speakers subsequently accept these as the authority on acceptable use rather than the communicative competences of the speakers who use that language daily, perhaps including themselves (ibid: 27).

Milroy and Milroy (2012) also discuss the notion of language academies as major standardizing forces; the power of these institutions, generally backed by the State[10], is what is assumed to give them the authority to dictate the acceptable forms and functions of the language. Thus, an institution like the Académie française is granted the right, through their charter, to determine the accepted standard forms of the language; this right was reaffirmed with the establishment of the Institut de France following the Revolution, when the Académie was reinstated as an officially recognized agency of the French government. It should not be claimed that State backing of such institutions necessarily means that these institutions have true political power (in the sense that a Senate or National Assembly might); Milroy and Milroy make no such claims, and as discussed in the previous chapter, the Académie française is not a legislative institution. Such institutions are nonetheless politically influential and draw their authority largely from the power of the state.

Despite these discussions, it should be stated that the Milroys do not themselves define authority in its relation to power; rather, authority is largely left undefined in this work, which instead is focused primarily on prescriptivism and standardization. To this understanding of authority as an extension of State-sponsored language arbiters, Milroy and Milroy counter with the example of language standardization and linguistic attitudes in the United Kingdom (the context in which they primarily work). As no similar language academy exists for the English language (in any of the nations in which English is a dominant language), authority can plainly not be said to exist solely as a function of institutional power. Rather, authority seems to be derived through a variety of other means. This is not to say that authority over language form and

[10] Even academies for smaller regional languages (i.e. other than the official State language) may be supported by the State, as in the Euskaltzaindia in the Basque Country in Spain, which is an official Royal Academy under the patronage of the Spanish monarchy, although the Spanish government under Franco actively suppressed regional languages like Basque and Catalan.

function *cannot* derive through institutional power (the social prestige of many of these language academies, particularly in Europe, suggests otherwise). Rather, this demonstrates the lack of a coherent examination of authority *itself* – numerous works address the question of power (as discussed in the previous section), while others, including Milroy and Milroy (2012), focus instead on the causes and consequences of *standardization* and the resulting *prescriptivism*; still others might consider, from a historical perspective, the ties between the creation of the standard language and the judicial or legislative systems of the State (e.g. Kibbee, 2002). This project thus aims to bridge some of these gaps by addressing authority itself, not simply as a derivative of institutional power.

3.2 History and myth through chronotopes and calibration

As we have seen, historical discourses can play a significant role in establishing the importance of a standard language variety; likewise, historical justifications can serve to maintain the power of the dominant class(es) or institution(s). How these histories are invoked, however, may change depending on the nature of the interaction, the goals of the speaker, and that speaker's relationship with the past. The invocation of such history and myth is best discussed through the theoretical notions of *chronotope* and the closely related concepts of *scale* and *calibration*.

First arising in the literary studies of Bakhtin (1981), the concept of *chronotope* has gained currency in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (cf. Silverstein, 2005; Agha, 2007). Chronotopes, recognizable configurations of space, time, and personhood, offer the analyst tidy packages through which to discuss the social environment to which a speaker is orienting. More specifically, though an interaction takes place *within* a given time-space, that discourse often orients to many different time-spaces; these alternate time-spaces become just as

relevant to participants in the interaction as they filter their understandings of the current engagement through the lens of the alternate chronotope. This notion functions as a shorthand for a particular social reality (Agha's *cultural chronotope*), and chronotopes are thus useful ways of categorizing language ideologies, which form the unspoken basis of any individual's (or group's) linguistic behaviors and are always conditioned by their social reality as defined through time, space, and personhood.

Because chronotopes are, effectively, shorthand for particular social realities, they are extremely useful tools in examining social positioning. In her interactions with non-migrants in Mexico, Dick (2010) uncovers two relevant chronotopes: a *modernist* and a *traditionalist* chronotope. The modernist chronotope is especially relevant to those individuals who want to immigrate to the United States: the U.S. is seen as a place of progress and opportunity. Conversely, those individuals who had little desire to relocate oriented primarily to the traditionalist chronotope: though Mexico may not provide as many economic opportunities, it is there that they may maintain their family values and traditions, and that the U.S. is an empty land that provides economic but not spiritual stability. Similarly, Blommaert and De Fina (2017) discuss the ways in which chronotopes can condition individual identities (by positioning them within recognizable time-spaces) and that linguistic practices are likewise conditioned by the influence of certain chronotopes. In both cases, the stances individuals take and the behaviors through which they do so can be easily understood by examining the chronotopes to which those individuals orient.

Much like language ideologies themselves, some chronotopes appear to have more social influence than others. Karimzad and Catedral (2018) argue that certain chronotopes may carry more weight than others (for historical or socio-political reasons), and that these chronotopes

thus do more to constrain the social reality and sociolinguistic practices of individuals than do weaker chronotopes. Citing the preference for maintaining discrete languages among Iranian Azeri and Uzbek migrant participants, they argue that chronotopes which condition nationalistic linguistic behaviors (and which privilege dominant languages) are strong enough to override an individual's natural linguistic behaviors – that the lived reality of these speakers, wherein it is perfectly possible to utilize resources from their multiple languages as needed, is subverted by these stronger chronotopes that privilege the link between Nation and Language. A speaker's chronotopic organization is thus reflective (and reconstitutive) of dominant linguistic ideologies; speakers orient to these more powerful chronotopes when two or more are in competition, and weaker chronotopes (often those conditioned by personal experience rather than social pressure) are ignored.

These distinctions in relative power of chronotopes underscore Blommaert's (2015) discussion of scale, which defines the scope of a chronotope. Moving between different scales is not as simple as moving from *micro* to *macro*, but rather shifting perspective from one time-space to another. These time-spaces may be of more or less broad scope, but, crucially, they must be understood as occupying a different space *and* time; that is, simply looking at "global" and "local" misses the reality that events in time are perceived differently at these levels as well. Moreover, moving discursively between different scales, or scaling (Catedral, 2017), is a dynamic process that allows participants in an interaction to help define their social reality – how differently-scaled chronotopes are brought into the discussion and linked to one another can in fact reveal a participant's positioning relative to any of those scales. Goebel and Manns (2020) describe a similar process which they (after Carr and Lempert, 2016) call *scale-making* by which "social actors accept and/or contest the kinds of chronotopic formulations that get invoked in

conversation" (p.7). The processes of scaling/scale-making in which these participants engage serve to reveal (and emphasize) their understandings of their social reality (their *cultural chronotope*) while simultaneously helping to create it; furthermore, these processes can have real consequences when related to issues of language planning and policy (Hult, 2010; Canagarajah and De Costa, 2016; Gal, 2019).

These acts of scaling can also be understood through the similar notion of calibration (Silverstein, 1993). *Calibration* refers to the means by which speakers link the current interaction to other time-spaces (Silverstein, 1993; Eisenlohr, 2004; 2006; Koven, 2016 all provide examples of these processes). Silverstein discusses three different types of calibration: reflexive, reportive, and nomic. Koven (2016:20) explains them most concisely:

> In *reflexive calibration*, participants produce an emergent model that contextualizes the current interaction … in *reportive calibration*, participants link distinct "there-and-then" speech events with the current situation … in *nomic calibration*, participants may link a separate "timeless" realm (such as that invoked in ritual, proverbs, or pronouncements that assert general truths) with the current interaction.

Chronotopes may thus be invoked through calibration (much like the process of *scaling*); this may be through clear narration of past events (as one might see in reportive calibration) or through the construction of a more generic (possibly hypothetical) model through nomic calibration. Eisenlohr (2004; 2006) discusses how an image of a shared Hindu past is nomically calibrated by religious pilgrims in Mauritius – by invoking the image of the pilgrimage to the Ganges (both through ritual and through the discourses that surround the activities) these pilgrims are bringing this shared past into the present interaction in a way that becomes very real for them. Images of a shared past (through national myths, for example) may be nomically

calibrated for French speakers in similar ways.

One of the ways in which these sorts of calibration or scaling occur is through strategic use of deictics. Silverstein (1976) argues that deictics (which he calls shifters) are useful not only to establish referential meaning but also to generate social meaning (see also Levinson, 1983). That is, aside from the traditional function of deictics as providing reference (picking out an addressee, an object, or specifying a time, etc.), deictics can define social relationships (especially in terms of pronoun usage, as in languages with a T/V distinction). Likewise, deictics can be helpful in discussing chronotopes: since many lexical and/or grammatical forms used to describe time and space are inherently deictic (and thus only meaningful in comparison to an established here-and-now), the deictics a speaker uses to discuss there-and-then events can be illustrative of how the speaker perceives those events. Davidson (2007), for example, discusses how her informants in Germany use there-and-then deictics to invoke particular time-spaces of life in East Germany (as opposed to the here-and-now of life in a unified Germany). Though deictic forms are not the only means of orienting to one chronotope or another, they are nonetheless among the most easily accessible and highly visible.

3.2.1 Narrative, genre, and reported speech

At their core, debates like the one I discuss here are instances of narrative: each participant presents a particular narrative, and the individual who can present the most convincing narrative stands the best chance of persuading the most viewers. In this vein, it is essential to note that narratives necessarily reveal the ideologies of the speaker (and the chronotope(s) to which they orient). Indeed, as Bauman and Briggs (1990) argue, no narrative is ever free of the speaker's ideologies; though a speaker may purport to be presenting a neutral or unemotional recounting of

fact, the way the speaker narrates will likely be constrained by the speaker's chronotopic organization (that is, to which chronotope(s) the speaker orients and the relationship(s) among those chronotopes; see Karimzad and Catedral, 2018; Karimzad, 2020). This may be especially true when discussing a past event; different chronotopic organizations (and the different ideological positionings these entail) will likely determine what the speaker chooses to include or omit. Similarly, as Koven (2002) notes, speakers will be inhabiting more than one role when engaging in such storytelling activities – that is, in addition to narrating a story they may be author and subject as well – and thus the storyteller's relationship to the material they recount may very well be more complex than an assumption that they are "merely" recounting a series of events.

Likewise, it is essential to remember that the circumstances of the interaction will affect the narrative that is presented (Briggs 1986); in the context of a debate, each participant necessarily presents a narrative designed to preempt alternative understandings from other participants: individuals present the argument(s) they believe to be the most convincing. Moreover, listeners who understand the context of a debate will be anticipating this structure, and they will (presumably) understand that each participant will be choosing arguments in a way that will appeal to the audience. The moderator of a debate, too, is understood to affect the progression of the interview; as Briggs (1986) argues, it would be naïve to assume that such interactions as debates and interviews are not influenced by the supposedly neutral moderator or interviewer. Rather, the presence of this individual constrains the interaction to a particular type, and other participants are unlikely to be speaking in the same way as they might during a casual interaction with friends, etc.

Consistent with Brigg's (1986) understanding of the constraints of the interaction,

Clayman and Heritage (2002) and Bovet (2009) note that, in much of the interaction in a televised news or current affairs setting such as the one I discuss in this paper, participants must always negotiate the intentions of the other participants to be able to respond. The perceived (non-)neutrality of the interviewer or debate host is one of these intentions to be acknowledged; Laurier (2017), states that, although the general goal of an interviewer is to approach a guest neutrally, many are also "skilled at shifting stance by using the reported speech of others as representative of 'the public', which allows them to occupy a more clearly critical stance" (p. 116; see also Clayman, 2006; Clift, 2006). Bovet (2009), furthermore, discusses the unequal weight given to different participants in televised debates in francophone Switzerland; not all participants will be treated equally by the hosts, even in subtle ways. In conjunction with the findings of Bastien and Dumouchel (2013) concerning the types of questioning in interviews, this indicates that hosts or moderators may believe they are interacting equally with all participants when in fact they may be subtly aligning more strongly with one individual (or group) over other(s). It should also be noted, following Rosette (2011), that French media do not so rigidly separate news and commentary as do media in the Anglophone world; the French may not view subjectivity in their reporters in the same way as British and American news viewers (thus also potentially aligning more strongly with one participant than another). Thus, it would not be entirely unexpected for the host of a French debate program to make their own ideological positioning clear to both the participants and to the audience. Indeed, such positioning may be reflective of the nature of the language ideologies and the chronotopes to which speakers orient.

3.3 Stance and identity

Much scholarship in the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology has emphasized

questions of identity – specifically, what constitutes identity and how identity is expressed. Instead of viewing identity as an *a priori*, static construct, it is, instead, useful to view identity as something that is instead negotiated *in interaction*, a property of identity that Bucholtz and Hall (2005) call the principle of *emergence*. Identity can thus be discussed in Le Page and Tabouret-Keller's (1985) terms, through *acts of identity*, whereby a speaker's linguistic choices (and, indeed, other behaviors) contribute to the construction and expression of their identity. These choices operate both on the level of the individual and of the group; as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller argue, "the identity of a group lies within the projections individuals make of the concepts each has about the group" (ibid, p. 2). That is, while individual acts of identity may primarily constitute a single speaker's identity, a group is defined by the ideologies each member of that group may possess concerning that group's nature or function. This understanding of the constitution of a group can be extended to the *community of practice* (see e.g. Bucholtz, 1999; Eckert, 2006): collective understanding of the nature and role of the French language in France may be defined by the collection of individual French speakers (though the precise nature of this relationship is one of the central questions of this study).

Following Bucholtz and Hall's (2004a; 2004b; 2005) framework, identity is largely constructed in relation to some *other*: identity, as discussed, is emergent, and it comes to be through a series of processes that they call "tactics of intersubjectivity". This means that a speaker's identity (and, by extension, that of the group – cf. van Dijk, 2006) is determined largely through comparison with this *other*. Group identity may be defined especially through the processes of *adequation* and *distinction*, whereby members of the group emphasize the traits they share while downplaying what is different among them (and delimit the group by emphasizing what is different between their group and another group). The processes of *authorization* and

illegitimation are also relevant when discussing power over language: such debates inevitably involve one or more participants determining whether others do or do not have the authority to make these decisions. While authorization and illegitimation typically concern some form of institutional power, the exact relationship in this case remains to be seen. The final pair of processes, *authentication* and *denaturalization*, deals with whether an identity is perceived as "real" or not; such a discussion is relevant when considering debates concerning the "real" French or "real" speakers.

Closely linked to identity, *stance* involves the expression of particular attitudes. In many ways, these stances can be tied to Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) explanation of the *habitus*, the habits, practices, and knowledge that operate below the level of rationalized ideals to form the bases of ideology – language attitudes are not always developed through conscious thought, though they may be based upon ideas the individual has never directly considered. Jaworski and Thurlow argue that

> Stancetaking is the *primary* discursive mechanism by which social identity is realized, through the shifting of footing (i.e. one's alignment to the addressee/audience) … the positioning of self relationally … and taking an orientation toward or affinity with the extralinguistic reality, in other words, the physical, social, and mental referents and their discursive representations. (2009, p. 220, emphasis in original)

As such, expressions of stance are highly socially significant in discussions of identity; indeed, repeated instances of stancetaking by an individual are highly expressive of the *habitus*, which can also be understood as closely related to identity (inasmuch as identity is itself closely linked to the ideologies one has concerning one's social reality). Stance, which can be expressed through a number of different linguistic forms (see e.g. Biber and Finegan, 1989), is perhaps best

defined through Du Bois' (2007) *stance triangle*, which posits a relationship between two subjects and an object; subjects may each evaluate that object and subsequently (dis)align with one another in their assessments of that object. Jaffe (2009a; 2009b) suggests that stance is an inherent part of communication, and Bucholtz (2009) addresses the ways in which stances play into style and other means by which stance helps create identity in a given interaction. Ochs (1993) and Irvine (2009) further argue that stance can, at times, be *attributed to* one subject *by* another; these assumed stances can be used to construct an identity *for* someone else, allowing one to argue against that position. Stance is thus an essential component of any discussion of identity, and the stances individuals take toward another individual's (or group's) authority must be considered when discussing group identity and positionality.

3.3.1 Language, national identity, and nationalism

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the French language has long been closely linked to the concept of the French nation, whether that nation takes the form of a kingdom, an empire, or a republic. From the establishment of French as the language of legal proceedings under the House of Valois, the efforts of Abbé Grégoire and other revolutionaries to raise French above all other languages spoken within French territories, or through reaffirmations of its status in the Constitution of the Fifth (French) Republic, the ties between Language and State have been repeatedly strengthened (see e.g. Higonnet, 1980; Grillo, 1989; Lodge, 1991; Morin, 2000; Rebourcet, 2008, etc.). France is far from alone in this respect; the concept of an official language is something that is understood (if not expected) in most modern nations; indeed, while even the United States has no official language at the Federal level, the English language has deep roots here – such ties are apparent not just through English-Only movements but also

through scholarship in global Englishes (e.g. Kachru, 1986; Phillipson, 1992; etc.) that consider the United States to be one of the most significant exporters of the English language.

Lodge (1991) argues that nations respond differently to the desire for a unified national language. Working with frameworks proposed by Haugen (1966) and Garmadi (1981), he claims that the relationship between spoken norms and the prestige variety called the Standard – the *norme* and the *sur-norme* in Garmadi's terms – tends to vary even among nation-states with close links between language and national identity. Germany, for example, tends to demonstrate greater flexibility in spoken varieties throughout the country; while a distinct standard written German does exist, speakers accept a wider range of forms in speech. Moreover, "the use of non-standard varieties *in the appropriate contexts* is viewed there quite positively" (Lodge, 1991, p. 94, emphasis in original); this emphasis on the importance of the written language may also explain the similar difficulties faced by orthographic reformers in Germany (see e.g. Johnson, 2012). On the other hand, Lodge notes, nations like France and the United Kingdom are far less permissive of spoken variation within the standard; there is thus a less clear distinction between the written and spoken standards. These emphases on standard forms may be more or less explicit; Lodge argues that the British tend to toward covert pressures to conform to a specific standard, whereas this pressure is much more overt in France. This idea of "authority in language", as Lodge calls it, underscores the importance placed on the use the "correct" French to one's membership and social position within the community.

These ties between language and state in France have certainly led to strong cultural assumptions regarding the nature and uses of the language. Some of these assumptions, such as the idea that proficiency in French is necessary for participation in French society (naturalization as a French citizen, for example, requires a demonstration of language skills; see l'Intérieur,

2012), seem to follow logically from the status of French as official language. On the other hand, the gatekeeping functions of the language have been taken farther than this; proficiency in a *very particular* variety of French is often expected, and individuals who have not mastered this variety are often excluded (participation in such a system follows Bourdieu's [1991] concept of *symbolic domination*). This standard, defined by institutions like the Académie française and supported through history and myth, may indeed serve to further restrict participation in society; indeed, even members of the Académie viewed its purpose in standardizing spelling as "[L'Académie] déclare qu'elle désire suivre l'ancienne orthographe qui distingue les gents de lettres d'avec les ignorants et les simples femmes" (*'[The Académie] affirms its desire to follow the old orthography that distinguishes men of letters from the ignorant and the common women'*, trans. mine, from the journals of François-Eudes de Mézeray, historian and an early member of the Académie, cited in Cerquiglini, 2016). While it could be argued that this statement, appearing in a personal journal and not in the *Dictionnaire* itself, was not the official position of the Académie, the opinion was nonetheless present as the dictionary was in production.

A logical extension of these ideologies concerning standardized national languages in many modern nation-states, especially those in the West, is the appearance of purist and monolingual language ideologies (see e.g. Thomas, 1991; Brunstad, 2003). That is, the nation-state, supported by and supportive of a single, "pure" form of the language, promotes the ideal that everyone speaks that language and, by extension, no others. This is the goal of assimilationist language policies, of which French language policy offers a prototypical example (see e.g. König, 2002); Wiley (2000) argues that linguistic assimilation to the ideal standard is generally taken to be both a prerequisite for participation in society and an easy fix for the isolation individuals or speech communities may experience as the "other" (see also Irvine and

Gal, 2000). This takes for granted the assumption that languages exist in a state of competition, a zero-sum game which only the standard can "win" (ibid). In terms of the ideological standard, this means that not only do other *languages* (Arabic in France, for example) not benefit but neither do non-standard varieties of the dominant language.

Indeed, while monolingual ideologies may not accurately represent reality, they may certainly shape it: Cerquiglini (2006: 976) argues that "Ce monolinguisme est certes fictif, mais cette fiction a puissance de mythe, au sens où le mythe dit le sens du monde et rassemble une communauté," ('*This monolingualism is certainly fictitious, but this fiction has the power of a myth, in the sense that the myth states the way of the world and gathers a community'*, trans. mine). This mythical notion of the monolingual society – itself a strongly ideological belief – perpetuates the idea that began with the nationalist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, that the nation-state represents and is represented by a single, communal language.

Such monolingual ideologies in France are compounded by philosophies concerning the written language (and proficiency therein); the *dictée* and similar exercises highlight the status of "proper" spelling as a marker of education and social positioning. Catach (1978; 1988; 1991) wrote extensively on the ways in which Standard French orthography has been debated over the years of the Académie's existence, often focusing on the culture of "fautes d'orthographe" (spelling errors) – with the constant presence of exercises like the *dictée*, it is not uncommon for students to sort themselves essentially along performance lines, that "I *only* made ten errors" might position one student firmly above their peers in this hierarchy (see especially Catach, 1991). Catach was herself part of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française, and as such argued in favor of eliminating a number of irregularities that were especially difficult to teach. As she argued in Catach (1988), French orthography does not follow a single system; rather, it is

in part designed to follow phonetics, whereas other aspects exist to include morphological markers, and still other follow neither, focusing instead on etymology and history. Such a system can be argued to privilege some youth over others; many of the changes included in the *rectifications d'orthographe* were intended to help eliminate some of these scholastic distinctions and class distinctions they might enforce.

3.3.2 Language, race, and ethnicity in France

One of the issues that arises when discussing national identity today (certainly in Western contexts) is the issue of race and/or ethnicity. France is not unique in this regard; immigration (and all its attendant race issues) is certainly a topic that is common in public discourse today (a cursory overview of nearly any French news source will confirm this). What makes France an interesting case in this regard is the Republic's institutional colorblindness – that is, French law deliberately treats race/ethnicity as non-issues (it is illegal, for example, for French censuses to collect data pertaining to race or ethnicity). This, in fact, draws from the constitution of the Fifth Republic, which states that "France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic, guaranteeing that all citizens regardless of their origin, race or religion are treated as equals before the law and respecting all religious beliefs."[11] While such a policy may have had good intentions, in practice this means that no data can be collected pertaining to actual racial or ethnic makeup of the nation (or of particular regions therein), and actions to improve conditions in areas that are composed predominantly of minority groups are limited.

This policy of institutional neutrality where race and ethnicity (and religious practices, which are often bundled into the same package) are concerned has not come without its own

[11] The text of the Constitution, as well as other documents pertaining to secularism (*'laïcité'*) and similar concepts fundamental to the French Republic can be viewed in both French and English at www.gouvernement.fr.

scandals. Among the most heavily publicized internationally are the *affaire du foulard* (a ban on "overt" religious symbols in State-run environments in 2004 that primarily targeted scarves worn by Muslim women – see Hamilton, Simon, and Veniard, 2004). The policy, ostensibly to protect secularism in France (one of the most zealously maintained ideals of the Revolution) and to prevent Muslim women from being *forced* into wearing the hijab, was supported by politicians on both sides of the spectrum. However, the law was criticized for denying the *choice* to these same women; many Muslim women saw the hijab not as a symbol of oppression but a personal choice. The now infamous "burkini" ban in 2016 followed the same logic (see Dearden, 2016) and was likewise criticized for insensitivity to minority rights in the name of "equal protections" under French law.

Though the issue of clothing is, on the surface, far removed from French language policy, these examples nonetheless demonstrate that the French government does not always know how best to handle issues pertaining to minority groups. The same could be said for issues surrounding language use in France; the official expectation of assimilation includes the assumption that all French inhabitants will speak (Standard) French. This, again, follows from the republican ideals of the Constitution; belief that everyone is, first and foremost, French suggests that everyone should *speak* French (and the assumption is, naturally, that it should be the same French). Vigouroux (2013) explains that, within the francophone world but especially within France, the assumption is that racial identities are sublimated by national and linguistic identities; racial issues pertaining to access to the prestige variety are ignored because it is assumed that everyone should *already* have access to that variety. Nonetheless, as Vigouroux (2017) explains, there is a long history of assumptions that francophone Africans (or those of African descent) speak substandard French. Taken together, these ideas could be interpreted in

such a way as to suggest those who do not learn standard French are lazy or inept, since, if everyone has equal potential but some do not meet it, it is likely a failing *on their part*.

Work by Chantal Tetreault (2013; 2015) suggests that many youths in the French *cités* (housing projects in suburbs of the large cities), particularly those of immigrant backgrounds, often feel as though they are isolated from mainstream French society. These youths understand that many aspects of French society serve to limit their own expression of identity; linguistic identity is included within this frame. Many linguistic practices unique (at least at one point) to this group, such as *verlan*, a system of slang in which syllables are inverted (*verlan* is itself a *verlan*-ized version of *l'envers* 'reverse [side]'). These linguistic practices are occasionally mocked and occasionally adopted by other French youth, yet they demonstrate a means of subverting the ideology that all speakers must use standard French in French society. Such acts of linguistic rebellion are also characterized in Vigouroux's (2015) discussion of the popularity of stand-up comedians of African descent in France; as these comedians make strategic use of a variety of languages – Standard and non-standard French, English, Standard Arabic, and Darija (North African Arabic), among others – they are, in effect, playing with the linguistic expectations of their audiences and offering symbolic resistance to the hegemony of standard French.

Ultimately, what cases like this suggest is that the theories proposed by Rosa (2015) and Rosa and Flores (2017) – among many others – bear mentioning here. Specifically, it should be stated that, among speakers whose experiences are influenced by issues of race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and the like, language use will be a culmination of *these same experiences*. As such, it is naïve (at best) to assume that all speakers will have the same set of linguistic resources; moreover, similar linguistic practices will not be treated the same way across all

groups. A systematic examination of these notions is well beyond the scope of this project, but these notions should be addressed, especially in a place with so strong a monolingual ideology as France.

3.4 (Social) Media research in linguistics

As a final note for this chapter, I will address the question of social media research. While it is not, at this point, controversial to discuss media like Twitter or Facebook in academic work, it is worth addressing some of the issues that may be unique to these realms. Scholarly work ranging from Baron's (2009) early examination of online language use to Yus's (2011) work on social media pragmatics, offer a general consensus that online and offline language use differ in systematic ways. Anonymity is often cited as a characteristic that enables some individuals to speak more freely than they might otherwise, especially when speaking ill of another person. This anonymity offers some challenges to a researcher in applying ethnographic methods; rather than focusing on information acquired through traditional ethnographic methods, instead the researcher must examine the identity created online and the ways in which these identities interact. As such, examinations of traditional news media, wherein important individuals are addressed by name and often directly quoted and the author is identified with a byline, will not necessarily follow the same practices as media such as Twitter.

On the other hand, many processes that are familiar in the realm of sociolinguistics play out in much the same way on- and offline. Squires (2010) gives an explanation of the processes of *enregisterment* and the ways in which web users come to recognize particular figures of personhood (cf. Agha, 2007) through repeated exposure to the link between some characteristic practice and that archetype; these same processes develop figures of personhood in the physical

world as well. Likewise, Zappavigna (2014) shows that Twitter users may create "ambient affiliation" wherein constant exposure to other users' thoughts can create a feeling of social closeness, even when these users may not know one another in the physical world, nor even necessarily have much in common other than one or two shared interests that have brought them together online. This can be understood to mirror, in some ways, the functions of small talk offline.

Twitter is an excellent source of data for a project like this due to its wide reach and public nature (see Drackley, 2019). A survey performed by Médiamétrie and reported by eMarketer (both services aimed at providing assistance with market research) suggests that younger users (in both the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups) comprise a larger proportion of Twitter users in France, despite popular conceptions that younger users are moving away from older platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Moreover, these data show that increasingly larger numbers of older users (35-49, 50-plus) access social media regularly, though younger users still dominate the platform (this study also shows a slight rise in active users in general from an earlier eMarketer study in 2013). Data compiled by Statista suggest that women likewise represent a slightly larger share of social media users, though 2013 was the most recent data available for this variable (Statista, 2018). Because information about age and gender is not always equally available, I will make no attempt in this study to characterize users based on these data. Furthermore, the "average" Twitter user – insofar as it is possible to identify such an individual – cannot be assumed to represent the "average" user of any other social media platform, and users of any social media platform cannot be assumed to represent a representative cross-section of ideologies throughout the francophone world. Twitter users in France – as anywhere – represent a particular speech community, and I will therefore make no claim that this speech community is

representative of the French population as a whole.

The functions of Twitter (and similar services) in society may be debated (as evidenced by current debates in the United States and elsewhere over the role of social media in politics), but it cannot be denied that these services play an active role. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role Twitter has played for politicians like Donald Trump cannot be denied, allowing access between the ruling classes and the general population. The role of social media in other realms, like the Arab Spring, are also well documented (see e.g. Willis, 2012). The ease of connections offered by such services is a significant feature of the service that presents itself even in discussions of language policy, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters. In the next chapter I specifically address the ways in which I have collected and analyzed data, including data from Twitter; the theoretical frameworks outlined in this chapter have determined the types of data gathered and how they are analyzed.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

In this chapter I address the methodologies used for data collection and analysis. In the first section, I discuss the types of data that are considered in this project, including their sources and selection criteria. Because data are taken from a variety of sources, I have broken this section into separate portions, each of which outlines one data set. The second half of this chapter outlines the methods I have used to analyze these data; while I have adopted the discourse analytic methods outlined in Wortham and Reyes (2015) as my primary system of analysis, I also explain other methods that have formed part of my approach with some of my data. With this in mind, my research questions bear restating:

1. How do speakers of French claim authority over the language – what are the (socio)linguistic correlates of authority, and how are these enacted?
2. How do French speakers enact and interact with the history and myths of France and a particular French? In so doing, what do these speakers say about the *identity* of this particular, idealized French speaker?
3. What effects might these attempts to claim authority over language have on real-world language policy?
4. What can we learn about the relationship of language and public discourse through such debates?

These questions have guided my selection of data and the methods employed in analysis; subsequent chapters will address these questions in turn.

4.1 Data Collection

Data for this dissertation are taken from several different, though closely related, sources. The

first, smallest set, comprises several documents produced by several bodies within the French government, including the initial document from the CSLF outlining the *rectifications*. The second set of data comprises primarily journalistic productions, from both televised and print media. To accompany the televised media, I have also included the comments posted on YouTube, where available. The final set of data comprises a corpus of 2,000 tweets posted within the weeks following the *TF1* report that sparked online debates.

4.1.1 Government data

The first data set is necessarily the smallest; despite the nature of subsequent debates in news and social media, debates concerning the *rectifications d'orthographe* did not consume an inordinately large amount of government time. This set includes the document produced by the Conseil supérieur de la langue française that proposed the *rectifications*, voted upon by the Académie, as well as the accompanying letter from Maurice Druon to Prime Minister Rocard and Rocard's response (these letters were included in the *Journal officiel* along with summary of the changes included in the *rectifications*). No other entries in the *Journal* deal specifically with orthography; while a search of the *Journal*'s online database yields several pages of documents linked to the keyword "orthographe", the vast majority do not directly deal with orthography. Instead, many of these establish terminological commissions for particular semantic fields (sports, medicine, technology, etc.), while others simply mention, in one line, that a particular commission is responsible for determining the orthographic standard for that topic. All of these are excluded from this study, as are entries pertaining to other language legislation discussed in the historical background above (these laws, in addition to having little to do with orthography *per se*, have been discussed extensively elsewhere, e.g. Adamson, 2007; Wright, 2004).

Instead, I have supplemented the report of the CSLF with a small selection of texts published by the *Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche*. Included in this set are the two most commonly addressed annual curricula (2008, 2015), each of which makes a statement concerning the adoption of the *rectifications.* These documents do not contain a substantial amount of text concerning orthographic standardization; they nonetheless reveal the ways in which the Ministry has dealt with the matter.

As a final point of interest, I have included a small selection of short texts that attempt to present the *rectifications* to the average speaker in an accessible way. The first of these is a brochure published by the Administration Générale de l'Enseignement et de la Recherche scientifique in Belgium; though this does not address the situation in France directly, it provides a good illustration of the ways in which a governmental body might present the information. I have also included a pamphlet produced by the Association pour la nouvelle orthographe, formed as part of the Groupe de modernisation de la langue (including representatives from France and the francophone communities of Belgium and Switzerland). This organization is supported in part by the Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France, an agency of the French Ministry of Culture that serves to support the provisions of the Loi Toubon and works with various terminological commissions to modernize the French language. This pamphlet, likewise published with the support of a government agency, similarly aims to present the "nouvelle orthographe" in a more accessible way and to simultaneously combat misinformation concerning the changes themselves and the enforcement of the revisions.

4.1.2 News media data

This data set comprises three sub-sets. The first of these consists of stories published in major

French daily newspapers. I elected to include only national newspapers; local and regional papers were excluded to ensure that I only selected stories that anyone in France could potentially readily access. To further narrow the selection, I considered circulation data[12]: I considered primarily stories from the most widely read papers. The two papers with the widest circulation are *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*. The next two entries on the list, *L'Équipe* and *Les Échos*, were both excluded as they deal with more specialized topics (sports and business, respectively). As such, I opted to focus on the top two papers, with one exception. Because some stories from *Libération* were widely shared on Twitter (the third data set; see below), I opted to include it as a source as well, though its circulation numbers were considerably lower (*Libération* ranks 7th in circulation for 2017-2018).

These newspapers, all representing respectable, mainstream news sources, represent a wide range of the political spectrum. The big two, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, are both generally considered to represent the middle of the spectrum, with *Le Figaro* leaning to the right and *Le Monde* slightly to the left. *Libération,* originally a more radically left-leaning paper, likewise takes a center-left orientation. As more stories concerning the *rectifications* were published in *Le Figaro* than in either *Le Monde* or *Libération*, inclusion of both left-leaning papers provides a rough parity of political leanings. This was not, at the outset, a major consideration; however, since this study fundamentally deals with political issues, it would be irresponsible not to take the general political leanings of the source material into consideration.

To compile data for this set, I considered all stories published during February 2016 in each of these three newspapers. Any story pertaining to the *rectifications* was included in the data set; this yielded a total of 36 articles. 19 of these were from *Le Figaro* and represent both

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[12] Numbers courtesy of the Alliance pour les Chiffres de la Presse et des Médias: http://www.acpm.fr/

news and opinion pieces (see Rosette [2011] for a discussion of the news/editorial distinction in French news media). *Le Monde* produced a further 12 stories, and *Libération* yielded five, giving a total of 17 pieces from left-leaning sources to 19 from a right-leaning source. All stories were accessed during the summer of 2018 and, thus, we can reasonably assume that they are no longer subject to revisions.

The second subset of data comprises stories taken from televised media. These sources are less cohesive than those from print media, as they include both news reports and programs that, while informative, also serve largely as entertainment. In compiling this data set, I opted to select only videos that were available on YouTube, as these are videos that would have been accessible after initially airing. In doing so, I also opted to include a few videos that were produced specifically for an online audience; these videos would be just as accessible to those who were looking online for information, and these would also have appeared in "related videos" tabs when viewing other stories. In these cases, however, I only included videos from YouTube channels that present information in ways that are comparable to those of televised news: that is, they employ reporters who treat the subject matter in the ways any journalist might; in some cases, these online channels were in some way affiliated with a televised news network. I will discuss some of these cases individually in later chapters. These videos ranged in length from 00:32 to 25:42, though some of the longer clips; many of the shorter videos represent single segments from a program that addressed several different topics, whereas the longer videos are typically those devoted entirely to the present issue.

The only video that was not taken from YouTube was the original *TF1* report. This video was not available on YouTube; as of writing, it is also no longer available from *TF1*'s website. An archived version is still available on the SNALC webpage; the page itself largely presents

SNALC's view on the *rectifications* (especially those of SNALC vice president Jean-Rémi Girard, who is interviewed in the segment), but the video itself is unchanged from the original.

Each of these videos has been downloaded and saved along with information regarding the original poster, date and time, and the description of the video given. Many of these videos, at the time of collection, had disallowed comments; otherwise, I collected up to 50 of the most recent comments. Most videos had fewer than 25 comments, so in most cases this accounted for all comments posted as of collection. Because YouTube posts comments in reverse-chronological order, it is hypothetically possible to trace discussions in the comments, though in practice it is often difficult to determine whether one comment is a direct response to a previous comment. Because comments are not universally available, I have not treated them as a primary source of data; instead, these comments were treated simply as additional repetitions of otherwise common discourses as appropriate (following the method of analysis outlined in section 4.2).

4.1.3 Social Media data

The final data set I consider in this dissertation comprises Twitter[13] posts from the weeks following the story on *TF1.* Twitter was selected because it is generally considered public speech; unless the user opts to make posts private, anyone can read them (even without a Twitter account). Furthermore, Twitter is largely viewed as a democratized platform; anyone can participate, and the medium allows the opportunity to directly engage with other users, regardless of another user's social standing offline (this is largely done through @-mentions, whereby one user can directly address a post to another user by including the intended recipient's username following the @ symbol). Thus, any individual with a Twitter account may "tweet *at*"

[13] Note that, as of July 2023, Twitter has been rebranded as *X*. The majority of this dissertation was produced prior to this rebrand – including data gathered under the name Twitter – and I will therefore retain the previous name.

someone like Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem by including "@najatvb" in the message, allowing any individual to interact with others in a way that is much more difficult offline.

As outlined in Drackley (2019), Twitter users in France are largely on the younger end: a survey performed by Médiamétrie and reported by eMarketer (both services aimed at providing assistance with market research) found that individuals in the 15-24 and 25-34 age ranges make up the largest proportion of French Twitter users. This study also finds that larger numbers of older users (35-49, 50-plus) access various social media regularly, though Twitter was less frequently used by this group than by younger demographics (with a slight rise in active users in general compared to a 2013 eMarketer study). Women seem to represent a slightly larger share of social media users, though 2013 was the most recent data available for this variable (Statista 2018). Because I was not able to get reliable data concerning age or gender of each Twitter user (more details below), I will make no broad statements concerning these variables. Additionally, the "average" Twitter user and the "average" user of Facebook, Instagram, or any other social media service cannot be assumed to be the same, and Twitter users should not be taken to represent an accurate cross-section of the francophone world more broadly (data confirming or refuting either of these assumptions are not readily available). The strongest statement that can be made is that these tweets represent the words of a particular speech community *within* France. It is also worth noting that these tweets likely only represent viewpoints at the extremes of the spectrum of opinions, as it is less likely that someone will tweet that they have no strong opinion.

To compile this set of data, I used social media analytics tools provided by Crimson Hexagon. In doing so, I was able to automatically extract and download all tweets posted between 3 February (the date of the *TF1* report) and 3 June 2016 that contained any of the

commonly used hashtags concerning the *rectifications*. Based on an overview of tweets posted during that time, I found the most common to be *#jesuiscirconflexe* and *#reformeorthographe*. Additional hashtags such as *#jesuisoignon* and *#jesuisnenuphar* also appeared, though only *oignon* appeared with any considerably regularity, and still less commonly than the previous two. As such, I set the search protocols to extract any tweet tagged with *#jesuiscirconflexe*, *#reformeorthographe*, or *#jesuisoignon* within the stated time period. This yielded approximately 278,000 tweets, though many of these were retweets and not original messages.

With these tweets available, I chose to select 2,000 for analysis. To accurately represent the frequency of tweets within this time period, I included more tweets from days on which a larger number were posted; for example, approximately 65% of all tweets gathered were posted on February 4, so approximately 1,300 tweets in my corpus were selected from those tweets. This was done to ensure that later days, when fewer new tweets were appearing, were not over-represented within my corpus relative to the most active days. Tweets were randomized automatically by Crimson Hexagon; to select individual posts for inclusion, I simply selected the first *x* posts for each day (where *x* is the proportion of tweets I would include for a given day). In the event of a duplicate post (such as a retweet), I simply moved to the next original tweet on the list. In this way I was able to include 2,000 original tweets; the downside to this is that, through the automatic randomization from Crimson Hexagon, I was unable to follow longer exchanges between several users, as these tweets were not listed in any order. To avoid any confusion based on this issue, I opted to select 2,000 tweets that did not appear to be interacting directly with any other tweets (that is, although they were *all* interacting with the same general discussion, I tried to avoid selecting a tweet that was a *direct* reply to another user).

When collecting and downloading these tweets, Crimson Hexagon also included any user

metadata that was available. This includes the username, the date and time of posting, geographic coordinates (if the user had location service settings enabled on their devices), and any personal information that the user had included in their profile (gender, age, location, and any “about me” that they had chosen to write). Username and date/time of posting were available for all tweets, but the remaining information was not uniformly available, as it relies on the user’s preferences. Because of this, I cannot make any accurate statements about the overall demographic makeup of the users in this corpus, except that all tweets are in French, so all speakers are French speakers in some capacity. It likewise cannot be assumed that all speakers *are* French (or even that all posts originated in France). Because of the semi-anonymous nature of Twitter, I decided that this ambiguity was acceptable; such personal information online is almost always self-reported (when it is available at all), and as such a study of online-language use should embrace that ambiguity. I address this by focusing on the ways in which individual *tweets* engage with the larger discussion rather than focusing on the users themselves; questions of identity here largely focus on *group* identity rather than *individual* identity.

4.2 Data analysis

Data analysis primarily follows the discourse-analytic methods outlined by Wortham and Reyes (2015), a set of closely related strategies intended to help uncover shared or related discourses across disparate data sets. Designed to work successfully with a wide range of theoretical frameworks, this method allows the analyst to trace similar themes as well as recurring structures. In terms of linguistic features, the authors focus in particular on deictics – these forms (see e.g. Levinson, 1983; Silverstein, 1976) carry substantial information relating the speaker, addressee, and topic within an interaction. As such, this method of analysis places substantial

emphasis on isolating various deictic forms and identifying their functions – this includes referents for pronouns (useful in determining group membership, for example), demonstratives and other forms that pick out place and time, and verb tense and aspect.

One of the main goals of the methods Wortham and Reyes present is the understanding of the relationship between narrating and narrated events – that is, what is the context of the current interaction, how is the topic at hand addressed, and how are those two aspects interrelated? This method, which echoes theoretical notions such as Silverstein's (1976) discussion of deictics as *shifters* and Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *voicing*, emphasizes the ways in which certain events, actions, or ideas (the *narrated event*) can be addressed across different speech events (the *narrating event*). The authors give several examples from different sessions of a high school English class in which different relationships between teachers and students are (re)created through similar means; they also suggest, however, that these same methods can be applied to online language use, to corpus studies, or to many other large arrays of language use. As such, I apply this same method to consider the context of the data sets I have assembled (that is, though all address the same *general* topic – the *rectifications d'orthographe* – they do not all arise from precisely the same social or material contexts): the particular context of the discourse involved is assumed to impact the nature of the discourse itself (this is not a new or particularly compelling point in sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology) and thus the ways in which similar discourses repeat *across* numerous specific contexts highlights the social significance of those discourses. I have thus applied their methods (identifying the narrated/narrating events and the linguistic forms – such as deictics – that make those events clear) to questions of language policy and authority in public discourse.

Focusing on pronoun usage (and the referents to which those pronouns point) is of

particular use in a study that considers group membership and identity. This is especially apparent with first- and second-person pronouns (use of *you*, for example, generally entails the exclusion of the speaker, regardless of number or politeness features); however, third person pronouns (and verb forms, in a language like French with a wider range possible), can also reveal the speaker's orientation toward a particular group. Tracing deictics referring to individuals or groups is a useful exercise across all of the data sets included in this study; such features are present to some degree in all sets, and even in data sets such as government documents, minimal usage of such features may itself be salient.

Temporal deictics are likewise particularly significant, especially in a study that seeks to address historical contextualization of these debates. In some cases, this is done fairly directly through use of adverbials or other expressions that directly indicate date (*hier*, 'yesterday', *il y a vingt-six ans* 'twenty-six years ago', etc.). In other cases, this may be done through tense and aspect features on the verbs. In one televised debate, for example, one speaker consistently used the *passé composé* (structurally similar to the English present perfect but primarily functioning as the simple past tense in Modern French) and other perfect verb forms to indicate the completed nature of past debates, whereas the other participant made routine use of simple present, imperfect, and conditional forms to indicate the opposite. Analysis of these verb forms provides a useful supplement to other temporal expressions and can be useful in identifying a speaker's positioning relative to past events.

Identifying such features is effective as a first step in the analysis (Wortham and Reyes advocate making several passes over each text). As one of the goals of this study is to consider how group identities are used, it is also useful to consider the ways in which speakers identify their group (even if they do not do so in explicit terms) and the "other". In the debate addressed

above, for example, one speaker negated the other's arguments by saying *visiblement vous ne savez pas ce qui s'est passé en '90* 'obviously you don't know what happened in '90': such a characterization of the other speaker's perspective serves not just to invalidate his argument but to invalidate his whole understanding (and, thus, any position of authority that his "side" might claim). Likewise, one Twitter user characterizes those who are complaining about the *rectifications* as *crétins*, while another describes their whole feed (recent tweets from users that user follows) as "like a retirement home" (presumably likening those who complain to the stereotyped irate older person). These characterizations serve to describe not just the individual speaker (or addressee/referent) but the views that speaker has of the group with which they identify.

One of the ways in which the focus on narrated/narrating events becomes useful is in the construction of historical references in these data. Different speakers (or authors, as it were) might choose to frame historical events in a particular way to advance their agendas (echoing Bauman and Briggs' 1990 assessment that narration is rarely free from a storyteller's biases); the language used to recount these events will, it is thus assumed, reflect the speaker's perspective. Consider the debate example given above: one speaker not only directly refutes the other's perspective but also describes the same events using very different linguistic forms (e.g. verb tenses). Thus, although the *narrated event* might be the same, the ways it is addressed in the *narrating event* differ considerably. Noting these differences – in both form and content – allows for a discussion of the way in which events are differently *calibrated* (cf. Silverstein, 1993).

As a final note, because of my interest in the ways in which authority is constructed and enacted, I have also tagged specific incidents in which the speaker makes direct reference to authority it some way (be it the authority of the speaker or of some other actor). While this is not

something that Wortham and Reyes (2015) discuss directly, it is of interest to the current study: who makes these claims, about whom (or on behalf of whom) do they make these claims, and what is the exact nature of these claims? Tagging these events is an important step in identifying both the linguistic correlates of authority and in determining how it comes to be.

4.2.1 Appraisal Theory

Though Wortham and Reyes's (2015) method of discourse analysis formed the main data analysis method applied in this study, I have also made use of Martin and White's (2005) *Appraisal Theory* in the tagging of the Twitter corpus, specifically through Zappavigna's (2011; 2012) adaptation of Appraisal Theory for social media research. Appraisal Theory (AT) intended to uncover the speaker's positioning relative to some referent (another individual or group, an event or process, an item or artifact, etc.) through a systematic assessment of *Appraisal*, which the authors indicate is formed through *Attitude*, *Engagement*, and *Graduation* (see Figure 4.1). All three components are present when one engages in the process of appraisal (the curly brackets in the diagram below represent components that co-occur, while square brackets represent options that are mutually exclusive). In addition to the features noted in this diagram, tweets were also tagged to indicate the user's general orientation toward the *rectifications* (pro, con, or neither/ambiguous) and any other potentially useful information regarding the understanding of the user's message (such as whether the tweet consisted mainly or solely of a joke of some kind – analysis of which is less clear – or of an advertisement, or if the tweet seemed to use one of these hashtags to gain attention but could not reliably be determined to address the *rectifications*, as occurs in a very small proportion of these tweets).

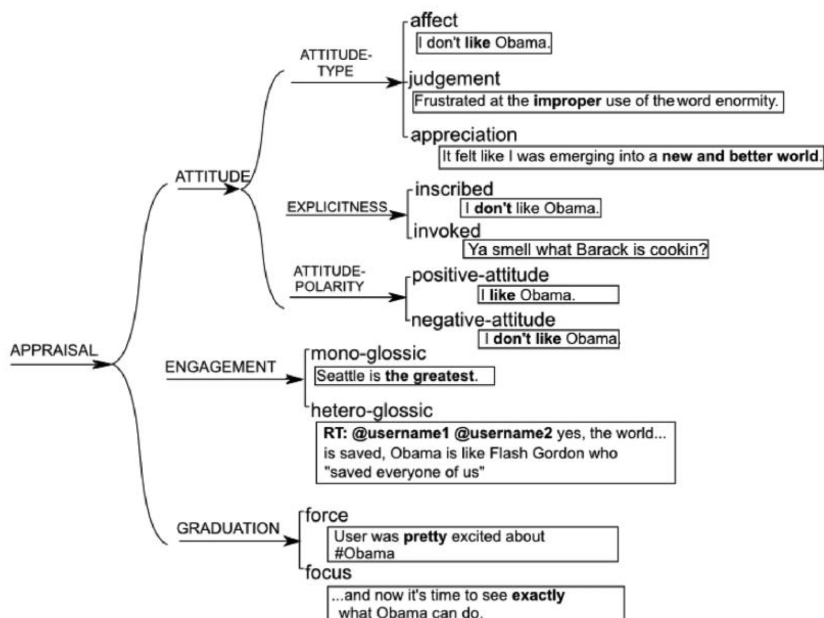

Figure 4.1. The network schematic of Appraisal, with examples from the ObamaWin Corpus (taken from Zappavigna, 2011).

Attitude is generally divided into three categories: *affect*, driven by emotional considerations, *appreciation*, an assessment of an object or process, and *judgement*, the (often moralistic) evaluation of a person or his/her actions. Affective attitudes are those that deal with (un)happiness, (dis)satisfaction, or (dis)inclination; these are not attitudes based on a logical assessment of the worth of something but on the emotional state evoked in the speaker. Appreciation and judgement, on the other hand, consist primarily of assessments of the object of discussion, typically based on some criteria established by the speaker. Appreciation deals with the composition, usefulness, impact, or value of an item, process, or phenomenon; as such, we may expect to see these types of attitudes concerning the *rectifications.* Judgement, on the other hand, deals with the capability, honesty, or propriety of a person or group or of his/her/their actions. I anticipated this type of response in particular when the user was discussing the Académie française or an individual politician.

Assessing attitude type hinges largely on an understanding of the tweet as a whole – there

are specific words that can hint towards one type or the other (for example, "So happy that…" clearly indicates an affect, while saying that "these reforms are worthless" would be best understood as appreciation). However, Appraisal Theory also accounts for the fact that, in addition to the polarity of the opinion (any of these categories can be interpreted both positively and negatively), any opinion can be either inscribed (explicit) or invoked (implicit). Invoked attitudes, in particular, require an understanding of the meaning of the tweet as a whole, and thus may require the analyst to make some inferences. Such inferences were also noted in the Twitter corpus – when the understanding of a tweet was reasonable but not necessarily the *only* possible understanding (as in the case of sarcasm vs. sincerity, for example), this uncertainty was indicated in order to prevent any overly confident assertions about less-certain data.

As the primary goal of this dissertation is to consider ideological positions, I focus on attitude as a means of considering evaluation and affiliation. As such, the other two components of Appraisal Theory – engagement and graduation – largely do not factor into my analysis. Engagement largely concerns the putative addressee(s): a monoglossic statement is one that does not seek to interact with other statements or speakers, whereas a heteroglossic statement is framed in relation to some other viewpoint. Due to the public nature of Twitter, I work with the assumption that the majority of the tweets collected are heteroglossic in nature, and thus this distinction is largely uninformative. Graduation, which deals with the notions of force and focus, concerns the language used, whether the speaker wants to intensify his/her statement or narrow the possible meaning(s). Observations of this nature may be relevant in some cases but less so in others; as such, graduation is mostly excluded from my analysis as well.

The Appraisal-Theoretic analysis of these tweets served as a starting point for a broader discourse-analytic examination. As AT identifies the basic attitude expressed in a tweet and an

imagined audience, the analyst is able to work from there to consider the effects of the tweet in total. As such, the discourse-analytic methods outlined by Wortham and Reyes ultimately for the basis of the analysis here; Appraisal-Theoretic analysis of these tweets was, however, a useful means of organizing a large corpus before attempting to do this.

The Appraisal-Theoretic analysis was useful in arriving at a broad picture of the types of discourses present in the Twitter corpus (which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter); beyond this understanding, I do not refer to it at length. Because Appraisal Theory is intended to be complemented by other discourse analytic methods, I rely mainly on the discourse analysis approaches outlined by Wortham and Reyes (2015) throughout the data I present and discuss in the following chapters. As such, though Appraisal Theory was a substantial component in my initial analysis of Twitter data, the analyses offered in the rest of this dissertation will be primarily addressed in terms of similar rhetoric or overlapping themes rather than the types of detail presented in Figure 4.1.

CHAPTER 5: THE DATA: TRENDS AND COMMON DISCOURSES

In this chapter I offer an overview of some trends that have appeared in the data; these trends, especially in terms of particularly common discourses, will form a major portion of the analysis in subsequent chapters. Data here are organized in broad categories based on their sources; I will begin with a short overview of discourses in official documents, followed by a discussion of print, televised, and social media data. Much of the common rhetoric produced by one group is reproduced by other groups, so the structure of this chapter should not be interpreted as a means of separating these discourses. Additionally, the data sets are discussed here in roughly the order in which they entered the discussion – that is, official sources created the discussion, but news media sources (both print and television) brought the discussion to public attention (reflected in social media data). However, this is not to say that discussions proceeded linearly; the relationship between these three communities (government, media, public) is better understood as circular or reciprocal rather than linear.

5.1 Official media

Official discourses should be broadly understood as belonging to one of two categories: the proceedings in 1990 (that is, the writings of the CSLF and the Académie concerning the *rectifications*) and the subsequent adoption by the Ministry of Education. With regard to the second category, there is little of note to say (except, perhaps, that the statements are noteworthy *because of* their brevity). The *Programmes de l'enseignement de français* (the French language curriculum) published as part of the general *Programmes scolaires* in 2008 explicitly states in a *nota bene* that teachers should consider the *rectifications* of 1990 in their lessons:

(1) Pour l'enseignement de la langue française, le professeur tient compte des rectifications de l'orthographe proposées par le Rapport du Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approuvées par l'Académie française (Journal officiel de la République française du 6 décembre 1990).

For teaching the French language, the instructor should take note of the rectifications d'orthographe proposed in the Report of the Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approved by the Académie française… [14]

No further mention of the *rectifications* is made, and this is the first time they are addressed in the official policy of the Ministry of Education[15]. This is echoed in a similarly brief note provided at the beginning of the 26 November 2015 *Bulletin Officiel*:

(2) Les textes qui suivent appliquent les rectifications orthographiques proposées par le Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approuvées par l'Académie française et publiées par le Journal officiel de la République française le 6 décembre 1990.

The following texts apply the rectifications orthographiques proposed by the Conseil supérieur de la langue française, approved by the Académie française and published by the Journal officiel de la République française on 6 December 1990.

In both cases, the (nearly identical) notes indicate, without fanfare, that these changes now figure into official educational policy. Indeed, the brevity of these notes seems to underscore their power: by simply stating that this is the case, without taking any extended time to explain reasoning (including, for example, why this change was only just occurring eighteen years after

[14] Unless otherwise stated, all examples included in this dissertation have been reproduced faithfully, preserving unusual orthography, grammatical errors, disfluencies, etc. This is particularly noticeable in transcriptions of televised speech and in data from YouTube and Twitter. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[15] It should be noted that this occurred during the center-right Sarkozy administration; the reaffirmation in 2015 took place under the center-left Hollande administration.

the *rectifications* were proposed), these documents suggest that the changes are not subject to debate.

The documents from 1990 take a slightly less direct approach, perhaps because the matter *was* up for debate in this context. For example, in his letter to Prime Minister Michel Rocard, then-Secrétaire perpetuel Maurice Druon gives substantial effort to presenting the *rectifications* as commonsense, logical, and especially minimal changes (not *réformes* but *retouches*, *améliorations*, or *modifications*, all of which suggest less substantial change), describing their goals as

(3) …[de] formuler des propositions claires et précises sur l'orthographe du français, d'y apporter des rectifications utiles et des ajustements afin de résoudre, autant qu'il se peut, les problèmes graphiques, d'éliminer les incertitudes ou contradictions, et de permettre aussi une formation correcte aux mots nouveaux que réclament les sciences et les techniques.

…to formulate clear and precise proposals concerning French orthography, to apply useful corrections and adjustments that resolve, as much as possible, writing problems, to eliminate uncertainties and contradictions, and to allow for an appropriate education in new words required by science and technology.

Several concepts arise in this passage that are repeated throughout the report. One of the most significant – and one that arises repeatedly in some other data sources as well – is the idea that this does *not* amount to a reform in the traditional sense (cf. the reforms in the 18th and 19th centuries, which affected nearly half of the French lexicon). Rather, the term *rectifications* is most often used; use of this term, and others like it, evokes simply the notion that the changes are corrections or improvements. This is underscored by the notion that "les mots affectés par les

modifications, dans une page de roman … se comptaient sur les doigts d'une seule main" ('the words affected by the modifications, on one page in a novel … could be counted on the fingers of only one hand') – in other words, because so few words are involved, this is not an inconvenience for anyone, and thus should be accepted.

Similarly, much of the description of the *rectifications* in these documents emphasizes such terms as "*certitude, clarté, précision, pureté*" ('certainty, clarity, precision, purity); indeed, Druon cites these as qualities of the French language that they hope the *rectifications* will help maintain. The "genie de la langue" ('genius of the language') is something that the Conseil seeks to preserve by allowing the orthographic system to evolve to match the rest of the language; as cited in the example above, the goal is, truly, to *eliminate* issues with the clarity and precision of the language, allowing the French orthographic system to truly represent the apparent "genius" of the French language (a rhetoric that itself has a long history, evident in many aspects of French politics throughout the past several centuries, including the "civilizing mission" that characterized much of France's colonial and imperialist rhetoric – see e.g. Kasuya, 2001). These notions are echoed in Mr. Rocard's response to Mr. Druon, underscoring the shared idea that French is a language of reason and logic, and that changes to the orthographic system are intended to help preserve that fact. Many of these ideas are echoed in other media discourses, though not always in support of the *rectifications*, as addressed below.

5.2 Print media

One of the most common discourses in print media concerning the *rectifications* is the discussion of terminology; this discourse directly echoes statements made in the official documents outlined above. In some cases, this terminological dispute is used to advance one position over another, as

is clear in interviews with Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, then-Secrétaire perpetuel of the Académie. For example, an interview in *Le Figaro* pulls a quote to use as headline: "L'Académie s'oppose à toute réforme de l'orthographe" ('the Académie is opposed to any orthographic reform'). This title is in fact a paraphrase of a longer quote (4):

(4) … la position de l'Académie n'a jamais variée sur ce point: une opposition à toute réforme de l'orthographe, mais un accord conditionnel sur un nombre réduit de simplifications, qui ne soient pas imposées par voie autoritaire et qui soient soumises à l'épreuve du temps.

The position of the Académie has never wavered on this point: opposition to any/all orthographic reform, but a conditional agreement on a reduced number of simplifications that should not be imposed in an authoritarian way but should be submitted to the test of time.

Note that this article does not *explicitly* question the term "réforme"; nonetheless, the terminology is a central argument in the statement here. Rather than accepting that the *rectifications* do not constitute a "reform" (the point advanced by Druon and others), however, this statement seems, on the surface, not to dispute any particular assertions made by the CSLF, *except that* she characterizes the *rectifications* as a reform to which the Académie is opposed. By framing the discussion in such a manner she is allowing the earlier position to remain relevant (and to an extent preventing disputes over the label) while simultaneously allowing today's Académie to distance itself from the decisions 1990's Académie accepted – while the Académie was *always* opposed to a major overhaul of the language in this case (Druon's letter outlines the negotiations that took place to ensure that the *rectifications* met the exact terms Ms. Carrère d'Encausse advances), her argument here allows her a means of arguing that the Académie has

never supported the current changes by framing them as something they are not.

This notion is tied to another common discourse in print media – the need for factual accuracy regarding the entire situation. Many pieces, more so in *Le Monde* than in *Le Figaro*, emphasize the need to clarify some misconceptions regarding the *rectifications* (though it is generally left unsaid whether this is in response to other news media productions or to debates on social media, which may be fairly characterized as largely underinformed as to the particulars, if the data I address in this dissertation are indeed a representation of the whole). A story in *Le Monde,* for example, uses the headline *« Réforme » de l'orthographe: l'Académie comptait bien faire appliquer ses « rectifications » en 1990.* Use of quotations around both "réforme" and "rectifications" highlights the fact that neither term is necessarily neutral; rather, the use of one term over another is still a question of ideology. That this headline is used for a story that traces the events of 1990 (including the Académie's role), this suggests that there is more to the story and that tracing events since 1990 is a worthwhile endeavor in an effort to clarify the situation. This is echoed in other stories, such as an interview with historian Claude Lelièvre in which he states that "l'Académie française est prise en flagrant délit de déni de réalité lorsqu'elle affirme qu'on '*exhume'* aujourd'hui cette réforme" ('the Académie française is caught *in flagrante delicto* of their denial of reality when they claim that one is "exhuming" today this reform'). Use of such strong language ("in flagrante delicto") to describe the Académie's denial of their role in 1990 clearly underscores the notion that it is essential to understand that *facts* surrounding events both in 1990 and in 2016 – if the casual reader does not understand how each player was involved in the past, how is the reader to separate fact from fiction currently?

Also common in print media discourse – and directly referenced in the citation from Hélène Carrère d'Encausse above – is the notion that languages evolve. This statement, which

would be entirely uncontroversial to the average linguist, is nonetheless utilized differently by different people. While the statement does not seem to be disputed in these contexts (no one, for example, has tried to argue that language does *not* evolve), this idea is invoked by both sides in different ways. Many of those writers who do not see a problem with the *rectifications* (a perspective that appears to be more common in left-leaning *Le Monde* than in right-leaning *Le Figaro*), seem to accept this statement at face value and move on: language changes, so naturally the written system should change to reflect that reality. Other perspectives, especially from stories that focus on statements from the Académie, seem instead to focus on a slightly more nebulous idea that any changes to the written standard should be subjected to "the test of time" (to borrow Ms. Carrère d'Encausse's terms). Here, again, it is worth noting that the writers are not arguing that language does not change but that it should *only* be allowed to change on its own (conflating here the written representation of a language with the language itself). This statement raises some interesting questions about both the role and the authority of the Académie française (to be discussed in detail in the next chapter); ultimately, the Académie seems to be presenting itself as ultimately powerless to dictate the forms that the language takes, which is precisely the function it was founded to perform, instead positioning *time* as the ultimate arbiter.

Finally, the question of who *actually* takes issue with the "new" spellings is one that is frequently raised in print media. Several stories from both major newspapers address this notion, though they reach slightly different conclusions. Both papers, however, seem to arrive at the conclusion that *students* do not truly seem bothered by the changes; an interview in *Le Figaro* with a university professor in Paris explains this clearly, arguing that students have largely adapted to many of the changes: "ils éliminent les tirets, écrivent portefeuille, portemanteau. Je vois aussi évènement" ('they eliminate hyphens, write portefeuille, portemanteau [cf. porte-

feuille, porte-manteau]. I also see évènement [cf. événement]'). Bernard Pivot, host of the national *dictée*, similarly states in an interview that he sees teachers to be more bothered by the changes than students. This instead focuses on the notion that there are suddenly "two states" of the language (i.e. the two different spelling standards). This notion, which seems to be anchored around the notion that the old system (with one standard) was *better*, is something I address in particular in chapter 7; however, the difficulties faced by teachers as a result is an argument that is frequently raised by opponents of the *rectifications* in a variety of sources. Otherwise, it is evident from a variety of sources that politicians may be opposed to the *rectifications*; articles in *Le Monde* specifically link this to the political right, quoting right-wing politicians' expressions of distaste, especially the idea that the *rectifications* are an attack on French identity. I will return to this more directly in Chapter 8, but at this point it is important to note that, whatever the actual motivations, there appears to be some difference between those who are opposed to the *rectifications* and who they *claim* to be most negatively affected.

5.3 Televised media

In this data set, too, one of the most common discourses is the debate over the term "reform". For example, in a debate on the all-news channel *LCI*, Bernard Cerquiglini (a linguistics professor at Université Paris-Diderot who was a member of the CSLF) argues that "c'était pas une réforme" ('it was not a reform') and that the words affected amounted to "bien moins que quatre pourcent du lexique" ('less than four percent of the lexicon'), focusing instead on the rationality and logic of the changes. Similarly, in a debate on *France24*, another news network, a representative of the Assemblée nationale argues that:

(5) Il faut être précis sur le terme puisque c'est un débat sur l'orthographe et la langue française donc on (ne) peut pas appliquer 'une réforme' qui n'est pas une réforme.
We must be precise on our terms as this is a debate about spelling and the French language, therefore we shouldn't call 'a reform' what that isn't a reform.

That this same rhetoric appears in all these sources suggests certain things: first, the success of the *rectifications* seems to be tied, at least in the minds of those supporting them, to the refusal of the label *réforme*, which they seem to see as too strong (and/or too polarizing) a term, and second, that the discussions may have moved so far from the original terms that those involved feel obligated to refocus the discussion in terms with which they are more comfortable.

Also common in many of these televised discussions is the notion that the language *is* complicated and that *some* changes are well-intentioned and well-received. This rhetoric is complicated by the fact that *exactly what* deserves to be changed is disputed by different speakers. In an interview with *Europe1*, for example, Bernard Pivot jokes that:

(6) J'imagine que je me présente devant Dieu, et Dieu me dit … "expliquez-moi la règle de participes passés des verbes pronominaux parce que … je n'ai jamais rien compris." Et donc je le répondrai, "…moi non plus, Seigneur", et c'est vrai que c'est une règle extrêmement compliquée.
I imagine that I stand before God, and God says to me … "explain to me the rule for past participles of pronominal verbs because … I've never understood any of it." And to that I'd say, "…me neither, Lord", and it's true that it's an extremely complicated rule.

Pivot is thus able to concede the point that there are some aspects of the language (a grammatical point rather than an orthographic issue in this case) that are extremely complex even to someone who would be expected to understand. This idea, however, is sometimes used to minimize the

utility or the extent of the *rectifications*; in another interview, for example, Ms. Carrère d'Encausse argues that it is beneficial to change the spelling of some "bizarre[16]" words. However, she does not explain, nor give example of, those words she considers "bizarre" enough to be changed, and thus gives herself ample freedom to deny the necessity of the *rectifications*.

This notion is closely linked to another topic that arose frequently, especially in the context of televised debates or roundtable or panel discussions: what is the *actual purpose* of this whole project? Appearing in the same *LCI* debate with Mr. Cerquiglini, Alain Bentolila (a linguistics professor at Université Paris-Décartes[17]) gives an excellent example of this kind of rhetoric as he argues that school is not about learning spelling but about correcting injustices:

(7) La vraie question de l'école, c'est que celui qui est né du mauvais côté du périphérique ne voit son destin scolaire scellé à six ans… désolé, je ne veux pas faire croire nos concitoyens que changer *oignon* de *<o-i>* à *<o>* va donner plus de chance aux enfants fragiles, c'est faux …

The real value of school is that someone who was born on the wrong side of the tracks does not see their scholastic destiny sealed at six years old … sorry, I do not want to make our fellow citizens believe that changing oignon from <o-i> to <o> will afford more opportunities to unfortunate children, that's false…

In Bentolila's terms, the *rectifications* are misguided because they do not address the central issue of schooling, which is to reduce social inequalities. This sets proponents of the *rectifications* at a disadvantage, because disputing this fact may position them *against* reducing

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[16] The French term *bizarre* literally means 'weird', 'odd', 'strange' but makes no mention of *degree* of weirdness. While the use of the term *bizarre* in English frequently seems to indicate a particular weirdness (i.e. that it is a stronger term than simply saying *weird* or *odd*), in French the term does not necessarily refer to anything extraordinarily unusual unless an intensifying adverb is included.

[17] The University of Paris was dissolved in 1970 (following the major student strikes of 1968) and replaced by thirteen separate universities in the Paris region.

inequalities among schoolchildren (it does not seem controversial to state that making underprivileged children *more* underprivileged is not a popular position in many contexts). Regardless of the intentions of Mr. Bentolila, making the case in such a manner ultimately serves to invalidate the *rectifications* by placing the onus of improving the lives of underprivileged children *primarily* (or even *solely*) on improving spelling; while it is certainly the case that the *rectifications* were intended to improve educational outcomes in one small area, it does not follow logically that they are the *single* means of improving these outcomes.

Ultimately, many of these same discourses appear in multiple sources (from more general reporting to panel discussions and debates to interviews) in both televised and print media. These discourses, many of which reflect or reconfigure the discourses apparent official documents, nonetheless seem to inform the debates in social media settings. Many of the discussions on Twitter, for example, focus on the issue of national identity that they might pick up from statements by politicians or from rhetoric concerning the "purity" and "logic" or the aesthetics of the French language. While I address these discourses separately in this chapter, it should be clear that these varied discourses appear and disappear in the various media in the weeks following the initial *TF1* report, and these discussions should be considered together as a sort of give-and-take exchange across media types. The next section thus discusses both similar discourses on social media *and* the overall constitution of the Twitter debate, with the goal of understanding how the "average" speaker has processed and reproduced some of the discourses I have outlined thus far.

5.4 Social media

In considering data from Twitter, several patterns become immediately apparent. Several

patterns were immediately apparent in the data collected. As far as the hashtags involved, the most commonly used was #ReformeOrthographe, perhaps because it can be used more easily in different contexts (both in terms of content and structure). This was followed by #JeSuisCirconflexe, which suggests a stronger alignment with those who oppose the *rectifications*. In general, this second tag appears far more commonly on tweets opposed to the *rectifications* than those in favor (though, due to the ambiguous nature of speaker intent and the possibility of ironic usage, no significant statistical analysis was performed, as ambiguities in the source material make such an analysis unreliable). #ReformeOrthographe, because of its more general nature (it seems to be a primarily descriptive hashtag, rather than one that necessarily indicates some kind of alignment), appears in a wider variety of tweets (in addition to its greater numbers). I do not devote considerable time to the use of these hashtags (as doing so was not a significant aspect of this study's goals and because it is perhaps unsurprising that a hashtag with implicit alignment functions might be used less commonly than a more neutral one); nonetheless, it is worth addressing the overall prevalence of the two as one of these two tags appears in nearly all of the tweets analyzed.

The majority of the tweets collected here take a stance[18] against the reforms by some strategy or another; in this case, approximately 69% of speakers (as represented by individual tweets) position themselves negatively in regard to the *rectifications*. This is not wholly surprising, as perhaps a majority of Twitter users who addressed the *rectifications* were those with strong feelings; furthermore, it is not unreasonable to assume that those who felt strongly negative about the changes were more likely to discuss those feelings online. This stance is taken through a variety of means (see below); broadly speaking, these strategies ranged from attacking

[18] Following DuBois's (2007) definition

the reforms themselves (as pointless, as a waste, etc.) to attacking Mme. Vallaud-Belkacem or the Ministry of Education to condemning the Socialist government and President Hollande.

On the other hand, only 9% of participants conveyed a stance that was either pro-reform or that was explicitly critical of those who complained. Strategies here likewise varied; some Twitter users justified the *rectifications* by appealing to established facts (most commonly relating to the changing nature of living languages), while others attacked the misinformation spreading about the *rectifications*. It should be noted that these stances are not identical; those users who criticize the vocally anti-reform users cannot necessarily be called “pro-reform”. However, as these two stances operate specifically by countering the anti-*rectification* stances, they are categorized together for the purposes of this analysis. The remaining 22% of tweets expressed no clear stance, either by taking a relatively neutral position (most commonly in the form of reporting or making jokes[19]) or by using the hashtags in ways not related to the intended topic (for example in drawing attention to an advertisement).

While an appraisal-theoretic analysis did not figure significantly into my broader analysis in this project, the prior analysis available from previous work offers a means of considering the general *types* of statements made on Twitter. Figure 5.1 (below) shows the proportions of tweets fitting into each attitude type; the most prevalent category is appreciation (41% of the data). This is perhaps to be expected; as appreciation concerns evaluations of *things* (and the *rectifications orthographiques*, as a particular phenomenon, fit Martin and White’s [2005] definition), it is logical that a plurality of these tweets would be concerned with appreciation. That judgement is the second-most common attitude (at 24%) highlights how common were the tweets specifically critical of Mme. Vallaud-Belkacem, M. Hollande, or of the government at large. Like

[19] It should be noted that jokes are not inherently neutral, but the alignment of the speaker is nonetheless difficult to determine, as much depends on the interpretation of the joke, which is not always clear.

appreciation, judgement relies on an evaluative stance (the two are differentiated primarily in consideration of the object of evaluation); while citizens being critical of their government is neither new nor restricted to linguistic debates, it is nonetheless important to note that Twitter users are, by and large, *critical of* institutional bodies legislating language rather than accepting their authority where language is concerned. Tweets marked as primarily affective only amount to 12% of the data; this suggests that, regardless of the emotional underpinning of any user's reaction (which we are unable to address without directly interviewing them), the majority of Twitter users preferred to present arguments based on evaluation than on their own feelings. This raises an interesting question concerning the relationship of emotion to the image these speakers want to project – in the same way that some users seek to project their own image as an "ideal speaker", some users may seek to present an image as a more "rational" (i.e. non-emotional) speaker.[20]

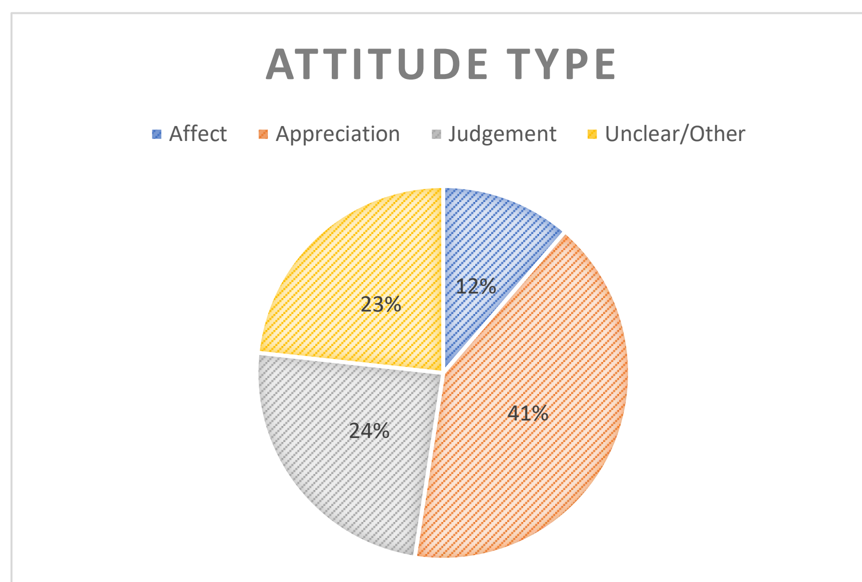

Figure 5.1. Attitude types across all tweets

[20] A full analysis of this notion is beyond the scope of this study (and would require considerably different methods) but is nonetheless an interesting concept to consider when addressing the positioning of speakers in this case.

Twitter users made use of a considerable variety of discourses in expressing their opinions. The remainder of this section highlights some of the more common discursive strategies used; as a majority of the tweets in this corpus take a contrary position to the *rectifications*, it is to be expected that a higher number of these strategies[21] may be used to take this position. Among these are appeals to some kind of authority (when that authority comes from historical or cultural sources; note that I am here addressing *an authority*, as a specific figure, rather than the *concept* of authority, which is disputed, and addressed specifically in Chapter 6), attempts at delegitimization of government officials or of the government itself, deliberately absurd, often slippery-slope statements, usually with alternate orthographies, and self-glorification as "dedicated" French speakers who learned what they needed to learn (the discourse of the "ideal French speaker"). Examples (8) – (13) below demonstrate these various strategies.

Appeals to authority as a method of "preserving" French are seen often, and yet these appeals almost unilaterally invoke historical events or cultural figures of the past. Perhaps because of the source of the reforms, the Académie française is rarely invoked as a means of avoiding the rectifications. This fixation on historical sources follows Milroy's (2000) and Watts' (2000) definitions of standard language ideologies: that these ideologies are inextricably linked to historical sources because they are formed *through* history – such ideologies cannot exist without reference to the community's history, and they are often explicitly linked to a particular identity. Consider the examples in (8) and (9) below:

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[21] I use the term "strategies" here to refer to specific discourses – that is, the broad *types* of commentary Twitter users may make. These are related both to Appraisal-Theoretic considerations (i.e. is this an act of *judgement* or *appreciation*) and to questions of ideology *à la* Eagleton (1991) – that is, how a group may articulate an issue in order to universalize or mythicize it. These discourses/strategies also become apparent through the analysis following Wortham and Reyes (2015).

(8) Stop au nivellement par le bas ! Préservons la richesse de notre langue, celle de nos plus grands auteurs ! #Jesuiscirconflexe

Stop the race to the bottom! Let's preserve the richness of our language, that of our greatest authors! #Jesuiscirconflexe

(9) Parce que nous avons tous l'âme de résistants, nous disons #JeSuisCirconflexe.

Because we all have the heart of the Resistance, we say #JeSuisCirconflexe.

Making a direct appeal to cultural figures of the past, (8) explicitly references "our greatest authors" as examples of the kind of language s/he finds most appropriate. Other users specifically reference Molière, Victor Hugo, or Émile Zola, revealing an assumption that the established (and, one might say, educated) literary canon provides the most appropriate example of the "richness" of the language; we may also note that the authors listed as examples represent *only* the French of metropolitan France. The speaker in (8) is demonstrating a clear negative judgement of those who s/he perceives as "racing to the bottom" (itself a commonly-used expression to describe the *rectifications*). Furthermore, s/he is making an explicit connection between existing orthographic standards and "richness of *our* language", highlighting the close association of spelling forms and national identity (see Sebba, 2012), which can be further underscored by the appropriation of such national figures as Molière and Hugo.

Similarly, the speaker in (9), who is himself a respected French historian, makes a direct appeal to French national identity by ascribing to his readers *l'âme de résistants*, evoking the image of the French Resistance Army during the Second World War. A popular image in French cultural history (see Bracher, 2007), the Resistance fighter is a symbol of freedom from tyranny and of French pride; by evoking this image, the speaker frames these debates as a patriotic resistance to an invading force. He establishes solidarity with his readers by saying that "*we all*

have…" and "*we all* say…"; this strategy relies not just on the appeal to history as a rationale, but as a mobilizing force.

Attempts at delegitimization are targeted at both individuals within government and at the government as a larger body. Many users were critical of the government's priorities, suggesting that the government has more important things to do than changing spelling (ignoring the fact that the Ministry of Education is not responsible for fixing problems with unemployment or foreign policy). Such assumptions are clear in the example in (10):

(10) Il est vrai que cette #ReformeOrthographe est primordiale en ces temps de crise, chômage (avec un ^) etc .. Vraiment rien d'autre à faire?

It's true that this #ReformeOrthographe is paramount in these times of crisis, unemployment (with a ^), etc… [Is there] really nothing else to do?

Tweets like this are common: the *rectifications* are to be disregarded because there are other, more serious issues facing society. Furthermore, many tweets like this one place emphasis on the circumflexes on words like *chômage*, which, according to the newer rules, will not lose its circumflex, as the circumflex will not be removed from the letters *a*, *e*, or *o*. Tweets such as (10) thus serve two purposes: delegitimization of the *rectifications* and establishment of solidarity with those who are opposed to the changes through the insistence on the use of the circumflex.

Tweets that directly criticize government officials operate in a similar vein. The most common targets of this criticism are Najat Vallaud-Belkacem and François Hollande; these tweets often focus specifically on negative feelings toward one or the other, as seen in (11):

(11) L'incompétence, l'arrogance, la haine de la culture Française : #NajatVB #College2016 #JeSuisCirconflexe

Incompetence, arrogance, hatred of French culture: #NajatVB #College2016 #JeSuisCirconflexe

Use of the hashtags #NajatVB (possibly intended to be an @-mention[22]) and #College2016 (concerning reforms to the middle-school curriculum) focus this tweet, making it plain to the reader that the text is a negative judgement of Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem (@NajatVB). The user is ascribing to her the qualities of arrogance, incompetence, and hatred for French culture *because of* her part in approving changes to the curriculum (it is also worth noting, to be sure, that Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem is of Moroccan and Algerian heritage, and thus many of the negative comments directed at her specifically may be racially-driven – this is addressed more directly in Chapter 8). This position is further cemented by the use of #JeSuisCirconflexe, which suggests a clear stance against the reforms.

A number of other Twitter users have chosen to mock the spelling reforms through intentional misspellings of their own tweets. As Jaffe (2012) discusses, non-standard orthography can serve a number of purposes, from directly representing specific sounds to deliberately flouting authority. In these cases, users adopt misspellings that represent the sounds of the language while ignoring the traditional orthography (represented in the second line):

(12) ses clère que le frensai ai tro dure poure un servo umin ! Viveman que sa sra simplifiet ! #JeSuisCirconflexe

‘C’est clair que le français est trop dur pour un cerveau humain! Vivement que ça sera simplifié! #JeSuisCirconflexe’

It’s clear that French is too difficult for a human brain! I can’t wait for it to be simplified! #JeSuisCirconflexe

[22] @-mentions are a means on Twitter of directly addressing other users – doing so links their profile (indicated by a username preceded by the @ symbol) and allows them to see that one is addressing them.

The speaker in (12) is making such dramatic spelling "errors" that other readers are likely to understand immediately that they have chosen these spellings intentionally. By extension, it is not unreasonable to assume that the message may be intended non-literally – that is, that the speaker is being ironic in the statement that French is "too difficult for a human brain". In this sense, the most appropriate interpretation is that this speaker is saying something they do not believe, and the reader must understand that they have chosen this orthography intentionally. The speaker is thus clearly trying to achieve something, which can only be another ironic statement about the need for reform, a statement in which the words are echoed by the orthography.

One more common strategy used by those who opposed the reforms is the positioning of the speaker's generation as hard-working, dedicated speakers and the current generation as lazy, as seen in (13):

(13) Cette réforme de merde a été adoptée parce que la génération actuelle est pas foutue d'écrire une phrase correctement. #ReformeOrthographe

This shit reform was adopted because the current generation isn't capable of writing a sentence correctly. #ReformeOrthographe

A variety of tweets of similar meaning demonstrate the notion that those of older generations, who have already finished school, believe they have put in the work to learn proper spelling and future generations are simply lazy. A corollary of this idea is that *trying* to learn to spell (in French) is the mark of a productive member of (French) society, further echoing the ideas that participation in society is contingent upon proficiency in standard French orthography (cf. Higonnet's (1980) discussion of bourgeois attitudes toward Standard French during the Revolution). This thus becomes part of the discourse of the "ideal" French speaker, one who has made the *effort* to learn to spell and who is thus a productive member of society. I address this

notion more specifically in subsequent chapters.

From the other side of the debate, strategies mostly seem to consist of either appeals to facts, generally about the *rectifications* themselves or about the nature of living languages, or direct criticism of those who complain. Many users who seem to favor the reforms have adopted the first strategy, mostly in reaction to those who suggest the language should not change, as in (14) and (15):

(14) 1.La #reformeorthographe ne concerne que le î et le û. 2.Personne ne vous oblige à changer. 3.Et puis la langue évolue. #dealwithit

1. The #reformeorthographe only concerns î and û. 2. No one is making you change. 3. And also language evolves. #dealwithit

(15) Tous les ans le même débat sur la #ReformeOrthographe alors que c'est le propre d'une langue vivante d'évoluer...

Every few years the same debate about the #ReformeOrthographe when it's a characteristic of a living language to evolve…

(16) Ma TL s'est transformée en maison de retraite avec la #ReformeOrthographe. "Les jeunes vont parler N'IMPORTE COMMENT mon français!" #Awkward

My [timeline] has transformed itself into a retirement home with the #ReformeOrthographe. "The young [people] are going to speak my French CARELESSLY!" #Awkward

The example in (15) suggests that the debate is itself a waste of time, as change is an integral part of living languages. Example (14) also addresses this aspect of natural languages, while simultaneously addressing two important facts that are often overlooked in tweets decrying the *rectifications*: not every circumflex will disappear, and these are simply recommendations (the

older spellings will also be retained). Though neither user explicitly favors the *rectifications*, both accept that they are a natural consequence of a living language and suggest that those who complain are wrong to do so.

Example (14) also directly criticizes those who complain about the *rectifications*; while the statement that "no one is making you change" is simultaneously a correction of misinformation, it also serves as a common way of saying "no one is forcing you to do this" (i.e. it is voluntary, so either do or do not, but stop complaining). This additional meaning is underscored by the presence of the English hashtag #dealwithit, an expression that is generally used to invalidate complaints. A similar strategy can be seen in (16), wherein the user compares all the complaints to a "retirement home", playing on the common stereotype of elderly people complaining about social change and what the younger generations do or consider important. In making this comparison, this speaker suggests that anyone complaining about the *rectifications* is behaving similarly, needlessly upset that some aspect of the world is different now. The use of #Awkward underscores this notion as well, suggesting that some aspect of this behavior is uncomfortable or otherwise unwelcome.

These discourses appear frequently across the Twitter corpus, but more importantly, many of them appear in other data sets as well (as addressed above). How these discourses contribute to broader concepts concerning our understanding of authority, of French identity, and of the significance of history are addressed in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 6: APPROACHES TO AUTHORITY

In this chapter, I address authority as a theoretical construct and the ways in which it is understood and invoked in the context of these debates. *Authority*, as it has been understood in the realms of political science and philosophy, is largely a function of institutional, legal, and/or political power[23] (cf. Arendt, 1968, etc., as discussed previously). This understanding is not necessarily problematic, as evidence (from existing work on language and power as well as the data I present here) demonstrate that institutional power *is*, to an extent, a determining factor in establishing authority over language forms; the existence and prestige of so many language academies throughout the world underscores the importance of such institutional power. However, even in works that attempt to address authority in language directly (e.g. Milroy and Milroy, 2012) the focus is instead on issues like standardization and prescriptivism. These issues can largely be discussed in terms of institutional power as well, as the *standard* form of a language is typically determined by some kind of institutional authority, and prescriptivism generally occurs as a means of maintaining the prestige of that standard. What works like these do *not* address, however, is that authority itself seems to be far more complex – that is, we cannot reduce it merely to institutional power, or to the prestige of the standard, or efforts to maintain that prestige.

Instead, data here suggest that authority can be claimed by a wide range of actors, *including those who lack institutional power*. In this way, models of *polycentricity* (e.g. Blommaert, 2010) offer useful comparisons; while this study does not address the same questions as Blommaert does, it is helpful, rather than to simply address authority as a top-down,

[23] This is, necessarily, something of an over-simplification; other fields have also addressed these dynamics, and those scholars – as well as the ones I have addressed here – do so in much greater depth than I do. My point here is to highlight the way that "authority" is discussed more broadly in order to position this study within common understandings of authority.

institutionally-centered *thing*, to consider authority as arising from multiple "centers" (which may be institutional, political, or social organizations, or some other actor), and that what we understand as *authority* is better conceptualized through the interaction of these actors and the ways in which they *claim and negotiate authority*. In the next section, I will address what I mean by these "centers" (i.e. different actors who may claim authority). I will then address some of the ways in which different groups negotiate authority, and how less powerful actors (in the more traditional sense discussed above) may claim their own authority over others.

6.1 "Centers" of authority

In the vein of the political philosophers discussed above, it would not be unreasonable to assume that institutions like the Académie française or the French legislature might possess the greatest authority in such a context. However, as data here suggest, these institutions are not the sole figures of authority. Indeed, whether such organizations even have the strongest claim to authority is debatable; ultimately, these debates center around that exact question – *where does the authority lie?* The answer to this question, in brief, seems to be that *authority can be claimed by (nearly)*[24] *anyone*. In addition to the Académie and the legislature, the Ministry of Education, the Hollande administration, and teachers' groups more broadly have all figured into these debates, whether to claim their own authority or to see their claims disputed or supported. Indeed, as data from Twitter suggest, the mere fact of being a native French speaker seems sufficient to bolster one's claim to authority, though it should be noted that this obviously does not translate to the *power* or *influence* necessary to participate in such actions as policymaking.

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[24] While the data here demonstrate that wide range of individuals/institutions may claim authority, it cannot be stated unconditionally that *anyone* can claim authority; the strongest case that can be made here is that the full range of actors involved in *this* debate can claim and/or negotiate authority in varying contexts.

These disparate voices become, in effect, different "centers" of authority upon which other speakers may base their own claims; authority thus takes on a more interactive nature, one in which speakers have more opportunity to engage in authoritative discourses themselves and to help define the standard to which they orient.

Chief among these centers is the Académie française. Due to its position (and purpose) within French society, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Académie figures so prominently in debates concerning authority; indeed, it would be much more unexpected for the Académie *not* to take an active role in this matter. In terms of authority, one might argue that the Académie largely draws its authority *from* its established position in French society: this is a long-lived, government-funded institution, membership in which is a great honor. This position is evident in many of the Académie's statements on the issue: consider, for example, a statement made by Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, the *Secrétaire perpetuel*, who argued in an interview with *Le Figaro* that

(17) "La position de l'Académie n'a jamais varié sur ce point: une opposition à toute réforme de l'orthographe, mais un accord conditionnel sur un nombre réduit de simplifications, qui ne soient pas imposées par vote autoritaire et qui soient soumises à l'épreuve du temps."

The position of the Académie has never changed on this point: opposition to any orthographic reform, but a conditional agreement to a reduced number of simplifications that should not be imposed by an authoritarian vote but should stand the test of time.

On its face, (17) seems to be a fairly generic position statement – it is clear what the position of the Académie is (and, by extension, her own). Implicit in this statement is the idea that the current *rectifications* do not meet the Académie's criteria for an "appropriate" orthographic

change, and the reader should therefore understand that they should also reject the *rectifications* for this reason. furthermore, the meaning of *jamais* 'never' is somewhat unclear here – presumably she is referring to the Académie *since* 1990, as this is a statement pertaining to decisions made then. However, the strong wording belies the fact that the Académie *has* engaged in orthographic reform in the past – changes in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries are well documented (as discussed in Chapter 2), and Ms. Carrère d'Encausse would certainly know that. Thus, this statement is best interpreted *not* as a statement of fact but as a means of asserting the authority of the Académie: the long history of the Académie is leveraged to establish their authority here, without acknowledging the particulars of that history. This also serves to demonstrate the authority that the Académie can claim by virtue of its social position: the details here are not important since the institution itself has made the statement. Authority is derived not from the *actions* of the Académie but from its own decree.

Statements of position from the Ministry of Education are similarly authoritative and rely on similarly direct statements. Because the Ministry is a government agency, it carries the same sort of institutional authority, bolstered by the political power necessary to make changes. As such, statements from the Ministry (and from Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem) are similarly direct. This is evident from the notes included in their official curricula, though it is important to note that these documents do not exist to convince the general public of any particular point (they exist simply to dictate educational policy). Other statements from Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem, however, often seem to take the same direct tone; in response to the idea that these newer spellings are obligatory and that everyone must learn them, she has stated that

(18) "Ces règles sont une référence mais ne sauraient être imposées, les deux orthographes sont donc justes."

These rules are a reference but will not be imposed, the two spellings are therefore [both] acceptable.

This statement is interesting in its brevity; the information it expresses is not new information (provided one is familiar with the changes as they are intended, not as they have been presented by those opposed to them). However, statements such as (18) demonstrate the assumed authority of such an organization precisely *because* they are so brief and so direct. That is to say, an organization like the Ministry of Education needs do less to convince the listener of its authority; while some may dispute its authority, the Ministry has sufficient institutional power to claim authority with little additional argumentation.

It is worth noting that Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem does not *only* represent the Ministry of Education; as a cabinet minister, she also effectively represents the Hollande administration. This may, on its face, seem like an insignificant distinction; however, many social media users address the Ministry and the Administration separately (and they are, of course, *legally* distinct entities). Nevertheless, the Administration has largely avoided making any statements directly, as the Ministry of Education exists to handle such issues, and because (presumably) the Administration has other concerns. As such, although some discussion on social media may have specifically addressed the Hollande administration, because the Administration itself has not directly engaged in these debates, discussions of Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem's statements will primarily consider her role within the Ministry instead of the Hollande administration more broadly.

Though not officially affiliated with the Ministry of Education, teachers' organizations like SNALC (the Syndicat national des lycées et collèges) also seem to carry some sort of prior authority in discussions such as this. These organizations (of which SNALC is among the largest and most vocal) effectively function as both labor unions and lobbyists; as such, they are familiar

voices in national discussions concerning educational issues, and they carry a certain strength in numbers (as they represent a profession that counts thousands of public employees around the nation). Much of the discussion here is focused on SNALC, because they have been especially willing to participate in the national discussion (the original TF1 report interviewed Jean-Rémi Girard, then-Vice President, who has since been elected President of the organization). SNALC has made its positions on the *rectifications* quite clear, with Girard making statements such as (19):

(19) "C'est bien là l'un des problèmes majeurs de ces recommandations: personne n'est capable de les appliquer sans relire trois fois son texte et faire de fastidieuses vérifications…"
That's one of the major problems with these recommendations: no one is capable of applying them without re-reading the text three times and making fastidious verifications...

Statements such as this, made in lieu of direct positions, nonetheless explain the organization's opinions quite clearly, while simultaneously justifying those same opinions. This particular quote, for example, effectively states that the organization opposes the *rectifications* and does so by explaining a problem with them. As such, Girard (and SNALC, by extension) implicitly claim authority in the discussion; however, they do not seem to rely on the same presumed institutional power, as evident with the provided justification of their positions (note that neither the Académie nor the Ministry needs offer any sort of justification). Girard *does* still make authoritative claims with no support (statements like "no one is capable" are intentionally strong, regardless of whether Girard has data to support his claim), but the justifications he offers seem to be an effective counterbalance to the lack of institutional *power* of his organization relative to

the preceding examples.

Unlike the examples above, individual French speakers in social media contexts do not form a cohesive group. However, these speakers still participate in discussions of authority. While these speakers cannot really be considered a traditionally authoritative "group" (in the sense that they lack any kind of authority that may come from an established group structure or from institutionalized political or social power), these speakers have nonetheless demonstrated a willingness to participate in the debate in such a way that belies this lack of authority. Instead, they may draw authority from their status as French speakers; such a conception of authority necessarily draws from a somewhat populist understanding of ownership of the language – that is, it must be based on the assumption that *any* speaker of the language is effectively an owner of that language (cf. Johnson, 2000; etc.). Consider the following:

(20) #ReformeOrthographe instabilité linguistique, désorganisation de la langue: le plus sûr moyen de saboter la civilisation française...

#ReformeOrthographe linguistic instability, disorganization of the language: the surest way to sabotage French civilization…

(21) On va leur laisser tout détruire ? Sans rien faire ?#ReformeOrthographe

We're going to let them destroy everything? Without doing anything? #ReformeOrthographe

(22) Vous n'avez pas le droit de détruire la langue française ! #JeSuisCirconflexe

You don't have the right to destroy the French language! #JeSuisCirconflexe

While example (20) makes no direct reference to ownership, it clearly states that the "linguistic instability" caused by the introduction of the *rectifications* is directly leading to negative effects on French civilization, suggesting that the actions of the Ministry are undermining the French

people. Examples (21) and (22) are much more direct: there is no question that the Ministry is "destroying" the French language, and the French people must reject that. While (21) implies that the French people *can* do something about it, (22) is quite explicit in its rejection of the authority of the Ministry (or the Académie, the Administration, or someone else – it is not clear to whom the "vous" refers). Though authority is not, in this context, drawn from any kind of institutional power, speakers nonetheless claim *some* kind of authority; rather, it seems that authority here is more of an *agentive* thing – authority over the language is arising from the *act* of claiming authority (or, more specifically, by negating the authority of other actors). Authority is thus something that can arise even in contexts in which *no* institutional or political power exists, underscoring the necessary distinction between the two.

Traditional media represent a final authoritative voice in this debate. While news media may not generally make claims other than to report a story, the distinction between news and commentary is often somewhat blurred (cf. Rosette, 2011). Thus, the news media become both a source of information and an influence on the discussion. Even those stories that purport to tell *only* the facts must choose *which* facts to report and *whom* to interview or cite – these decisions necessarily reflect their own entry into the discussion. Nearly any of the examples presented thus far – from the news media and perhaps even from social media – could be indicative of the position taken by the media (consider also the fact that different media sources are understood to have different political leanings, a fact that would logically be impossible if the media existed *only* to present the facts in a truly neutral way). Thus, while much of the emphasis here will be on the figures presented in these media and their arguments, it is essential to remember that the media itself is a socially powerful institution. Much of the remainder of this chapter will focus on the ways in which authority is asserted and/or disputed by these various actors, but attention will

also be given to the role of the media in *presenting* these views.

6.2 The Académie and its (debated) authority

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of these debates is that the Académie française, despite its official purpose as *the* official word on the structure and usage of Standard French, has been routinely and, at times, vigorously contested by other actors. Interestingly, these criticisms have not been limited to the Académie's authority directly – its *role* in the whole proceeding has been actively debated as well. Much of this discussion, to be fair, is likely an effect of the spread of misinformation; some Twitter users, for example, actively criticize the Académie as in (23) and (24):

(23) Qu'est ce qui ce passe à l'académie, ils sont tombés sur la tête ?! A la recherche du plus bas niveau de médiocrité #JeSuisCirconflexe

What is going on with the académie, did they fall on their heads? In search of an even lower level of mediocrity. #JeSuisCirconflexe

(24) N'empêche si l'académie française a accepté la #ReformeOrthographe c'est que les gens payés pour défendre la langue française sont mauvais

Even though the académie française has accepted the #ReformeOrthographe it's the people who are paid to defend the French language who are bad

Unclear in both these examples is for what, exactly, the Académie is being blamed – are these Twitter users critical of the Académie for proposing the *rectifications* to exist in the first place, for rolling them out now, for simply for allowing them to exist, or perhaps for something entirely different? Given that the first two propositions are factually inaccurate[25], it seems likely that

[25] Recall that the *rectifications* were proposed by the CSLF (though they were approved by the Académie), and the current discussion stems from decisions by the Ministry of Education (first in 2008 and then reiterated in 2015).

many such users are responding more to misinformation that has spread than truly making a reasoned argument about the role of the Académie française here. On the other hand, such tweets clearly demonstrate the willingness of average speakers to question the Académie's authority when they feel it necessary. Indeed, these tweets do not merely assert that the Académie has no authority here: they call into question the Académie's *ability* to make such decisions, whether by asserting incompetence (such as might be caused by a head injury in (23)) or corruption, as suggested by the relatively non-specific *mauvais* 'bad', in (24).

Far from being limited to discussions on Twitter, the debates over the Académie's authority appear across a wide variety of data sets. Indeed, Maurice Druon, the Secrétaire perpétuel of the Académie in 1990, argued in his letter Prime Minister Rocard that:

(25) L'Académie a constaté que les ajustements proposés étaient dans la droite ligne de ceux qu'elle avait pratiqués dans le passé, notamment en 1740, où la graphie d'un mot sur quatre était changé…mais elle n'avait pas, en ces circonstances, l'aide d'un comité d'experts hautement qualifiés, ni non plus le secours de l'informatique.
The Académie has stated that the proposed adjustments are in the direct line of those that it has made in the past, notably in 1740, when the spelling of one word in four was changed … but [the Académie] did not have, in those circumstances, the aid of a committee of highly qualified experts or the assistance of information technology.

While the Académie may have the authority that stems from political or social power, Druon nevertheless makes an attempt to anchor this authority in other facts as well: notably, that this is just the latest in a long line of changes that have made the French orthographic system what it is today (the elided portion of the quote above lists several other major orthographic reforms), and that these changes have been proposed by highly credentialed experts and assisted by technology.

This statement can thus be interpreted as a means of preempting complaints about the *rectifications* that may stem from a belief that the Académie is overreaching. Moreover, the same letter continues to argue that the changes have received positive feedback from other authorities in the francophone world:

(26) Le Conseil [supérieur] de la langue française du Québec et celui de la Communauté française de Belgique ont été tenus informés des travaux auxquels certains de leurs membres ont participé, et ils ont donné des avis positifs, nous assurant donc que ces autorités francophones accueillent favorablement nos propositions.
The [Superior] Council of the French Language of Quebec and that of the French Community of Belgium have been kept informed of the work in which some of their members have participated, and they have expressed positive opinions, assuring us that these francophone authorities receive our proposals favorably.

This passage further serves to bolster the authority of the Académie; in addition to their own "highly qualified experts" (by which Druon is referring to the CSLF), similarly qualified experts in other Francophone countries have approved of the changes, thus adding the weight of further scholarly thought *and* making the changes a global affair. Thus, although one might argue that the political weight of the Académie gives it a certain amount of authority to start, even the Académie engages in processes of claiming authority – authority is clearly something that must be reaffirmed, even if the actor doing so already believes they have sufficient authority.

On the other hand, the Académie in 2016 relies on the same authority to argue a contrary position. Consider their statement made in *Le Figaro* discussed in example (17). This statement is fairly brief and clearly very definite: the Académie has "never wavered" on this decision, and they expect the authority they carry as a function of their sociopolitical role in France to support

that claim. No evidence is offered as to *why* that is the case: the Académie is able to simply assert their authority in this case, and additional support is unnecessary. The second part of this statement (following 'but') is especially interesting, because it does not differ substantially from the claims made about the proposed *rectifications*! This is, in a sense, an example of the process of *grafting* that Gal (2019) describes: a well-established rhetoric is being used to argue a contrary point. By framing their opposition in this sense, the Académie of 2016 not only relies on their implicit authority *as the Académie* but also draws from the authority claimed by their predecessors in 1990.

Despite – and due to – her role as Secrétaire perpetuel of the Académie, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse speaks frequently as an invited guest on a number of these televised programs. These are not merely situations in which she is offering an Official Statement from the Académie but ones where she is speaking more or less casually, and it is frequently difficult to distinguish between her own opinion and the official position of the Académie. That is, while she has been invited as a guest *because of* her status with the Académie, in many of her appearances she offers much more personalized anecdotes. For example, in one round table discussion, she recounts her own childhood experiences learning to read and write in Standard French:

(27) On est parti du principe que l'orthographe est très difficile et qu'il faut pas traumatiser les pauvres petits… j'étais à l'école publique, et j'ai des souvenirs extraordinaires, parce qu'on avait des problèmes… [et puis] on avait de jouissance […] qu'on a dominé le mot…

We start from the principle that spelling is very difficult and that we shouldn't traumatize the poor little ones…. I went to public school, and I have these extraordinary memories, because we had these problems … [and then] we had a feeling of joy […] that we had

dominated the word…

(28) 'Faciliter l'apprentissage de l'orthographe pour les enfants' On a su apprendre à écrire correctement, il [sic] peuvent aussi. #ReformeOrthographe

'Facilitate the teaching of spelling to children' We could learn to write correctly, they can too. #ReformeOrthographe

This same rhetoric – that of working through the difficulties to really *earn* your skill – is one that has also shown up frequently in Twitter data (including in forms such as (28)). In fact, this story would generally be an unremarkable example of someone working to improve an ability were it not for Ms. Carrère d'Encausse's position as a representative of the Académie: she is relying on her established institutional authority to lend weight to this retelling of a personal victory. While a number of speakers have conveyed this sort of idea, Ms. Carrère d'Encausse can expect that her experience, as someone in a position of power, will be considered a good example for others, one that we should be trying to emulate.

This is especially interesting when one compares her description of the "jouissance" of learning to spell a difficult word to the first part of her statement in (27). The first statement is an example of *reportive calibration* (Silverstein, 1993, etc.): by paraphrasing the stated goal of the *rectifications*, she is tying the discussion at that time to the current interaction, and the juxtaposition between "traumatizing" the "poor little ones" and her own feelings of conquering language as a child undercut the premise of the entire project. Moreover, use of more colorful language – *traumatiser* instead of 'frustrate', 'annoy', etc., and *pauvres petits* instead of something more neutral like 'students' or even 'children' – similarly serves to reframe the earlier discussion as something hyperbolic, which is further contrasted by her story of educational victory. Her own victory is offered as evidence that these rules should *not* change, as students

should be able to earn that victory too; she did it – look where she is now!

It is also interesting to note that, despite her role in the Académie, Ms. Carrère d'Encausse offers a wider range of support for her claims when she is speaking spontaneously like this. Though official statements from the Académie française (like the one in (17)) are generally fairly concise and typically rely on the sociopolitical power of the Académie as a source for their authority, statements made by Ms. Carrère d'Encausse as an individual member vary. While she clearly does still rely on her status within the Académie – this is why she is given a platform to speak, after all – she engages in other efforts to bolster her claim to authority. It should be noted, of course, that the nature of televised programs like this encourages more conversational approaches than does an official position statement in a printed article; nonetheless, it is interesting to consider the wider range of strategies Ms. Carrère d'Encausse makes when asserting her own authority than the more straightforward means utilized by the Académie or the Ministry of Education.

6.3 "Legislating" language and the contested authority of the government

The Académie française is, as addressed in Chapter 2, not the sole government agency that works with language, nor does it have any legislative authority. Nonetheless, in many instances speakers will conflate the Académie with the government more generally. This is, perhaps, not especially surprising; the Académie *is* a government institution, and given its long history, it is a well-known arm of the French Republic. Moreover, it is an institution whose stated aim is frequently considered quite conservative; in addition to general critiques of a language academy whose members have only rarely included linguists, many of their positions regarding changes in language usage have met with strong resistance. One noteworthy example of this idea that the

Académie is out of touch is with their refusal to accept the feminine article *la* with grammatically masculine titles when the person holding that title identifies as female; for example, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem would, following Académie rules, still be referred to as *Madame le Ministre*, whereas her peers in Québec and Belgium would be called *Madame la Ministre* (see e.g. Viennot et al., 2016). Concerns like this have raised numerous concerns from French speakers about how important the Académie really is; this may explain the flippancy of the remarks in (23) and (24) above[26].

Because the Académie is well known as an institution of the French government, many speakers describe their efforts here in terms akin to the legislation – that the Académie votes on language issues and these issues then become law. This view is expressed in a number of interviews; in a roundtable discussion on current affairs program *C'est l'actu!*, linguist Alain Bentolila argues that

(29) Sur cette réforme il y a cette idée folle qu'on peut changer la langue par décret…c'est une erreur fondamentale.

On this reform there is this mad idea that one can change language by decree… this is a fundamental error.

Mr. Bentolila is, of course, correct that government decrees cannot change language. It should also be noted that he is speaking in the broader context of the Ministry of Education's need to do more to make education accessible to all children, and that systemic inequalities in the educational system will not be resolved by orthographic reform no matter how well-intentioned.

[26] During a study abroad in Angers, France in 2010, I encountered many French college students who had little, if anything, positive to say about the Académie; in a very informal survey I conducted for a class at the time, I asked a number of young French speakers about their thoughts on the Académie, and most simply saw the Immortals as wagging fingers against the use of any and all anglicisms in French, rather than a voice to be taken seriously.

Nonetheless, this notion that the French language *in se* is being determined by government action is one that has come up a number of times, generally from those who argue against the reforms.

This discussion continues with Mr. Bentolila's assertion that language must be allowed to change as it will, and that spelling frequently catches up (he offers the example of the simplified spelling *nite* in American English). More interesting, however, is the response this statement receives from another co-panelist Bernard Cerquiglini, who was a member of the CSLF, and who argues that this is true *except* in cases like French spelling, where the Académie française "dit le droit" (makes the law). Politically (and legally) speaking, he is correct; the Académie does determine the *standard* variety of French spoken in the Republic. However, this notion again faces the popular conception of the Académie as being out of touch, as Mr. Bentolila replies

(30) À qui parle l'Académie française? À toi? Un peu à moi, peut-être. Certainement pas au peuple. Le peuple s'en fiche de l'Académie française!

To whom does the Académie française speak? To you? A little to me, maybe. Certainly not to the people. The people have had it with the Académie française!

Because of the larger context of Mr. Bentolila's arguments outlined above, it is difficult to determine exactly why he believes the people are fed up with the Académie; it could be due to their role in maintaining the structural inequalities he discusses (as one of the agents the system of *symbolic domination*, in Bourdieu's [1991] terms), or it could be a more general statement about the fact that the average person does not take the Académie seriously. Regardless, this exchange highlights the fact that institutional power does *not* always translate to authority: Mr. Bentolila actively refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Académie. Speakers may thus reject the implicit claim to authority that comes with institutional power and argue that the authority lies somewhere else. Mr. Bentolila does not make it clear *who* he believes has the

authority here – though his final statement seems to suggest that the French people are ultimately the authoritative figure – but even in the absence of a clearly-assigned authority, the authority of the Académie française (and potentially of the government in general) is not accepted.

An interesting twist on this discussion occurs during an episode of France24's program *Le Débat*. The guests in this episode include Alexis Bachelay, *député* of the Assemblée Nationale (the lower house of the French legislature) and Jean-Rémi Girard, vice president of the teachers' union SNALC. Mr. Bachelay and Mr. Girard spend the majority of the program debating the legitimacy of the *rectifications*; a number of arguments are raised during this debate, many of which echo arguments which appear in other instances (and I will address the significance of this interaction in greater detail in Chapter 7). Most pertinent here is a discussion of the nature of voting these changes into law and the authority that carries (pauses and interruptions removed for clarity):

(31) Bachelay: … dans ce pays, on vote des lois, parfois même des modifications assez simples comme celles qui étaient proposées y a vingt-six ans –

Girard: – Mais ça c'est pas un loi, c'était pas votée. C'est pas un loi, c'est même pas

Bachelay: Ça était un décret qui a été publié au journal officiel donc ça a valeur de loi. C'est un acte réglementaire, un acte réglementaire c'est certes pas un loi, ça n'a pas passé au parlement. En revanche, quand le gouvernement fait passer un décret, ça a force de loi…

Girard: Le gouvernement peut pas décider de la langue française.

Bachelay: … in this country, we vote on laws, sometimes even some fairly simple modifications that were proposed twenty-six years ago –

Girard: – but it isn't a law, it wasn't voted on. It's not a law, it's really not.

Bachelay: It was a decree that was published in the official journal [of the French Republic], therefore it has the status of a law. It's a regulatory act, a regulatory act that's certainly not a law, it hasn't passed to parliament. On the other hand, when the government passes a decree it has the force of law.

Girard: The government can't determine [what is] the French language.

In this case, the speaker who opposes the *rectifications* – Mr. Girard – is the one insisting that the proposed changes do not constitute a law. While Mr. Bachelay agrees, he is quick to argue that the fact that it was published in an official *government* journal (wherein all proceedings of the French Government are recorded) this gives it the same weight as a law. Mr. Bachelay is thus not simply arguing that the government *does* have authority, presumably due to the same assumed power structures discussed above, but also that the act of *recording* the decision gives it authority. On the other hand, Mr. Girard explicitly denies Mr. Bachelay's claim to authority in his last line; much like Mr. Bentolila's final statement in the previous example, it does not appear to be necessary to indicate who *can* claim authority in order to deny the authority of a different center.

One thing many of these discourses share is a shift over time in the dominant ideology concerning authority. This is especially apparent considering Ms. Carrère d'Encausse's statements in (17); why is it that the same decisions of 1990, in which the Académie and the CSLF are clearly positioned as the authoritative figures, is suddenly questioned *by the Académie itself*? This is a difficult question to answer, as we can neither inhabit the mindset of the current académiciens nor confidently sort through the myriad political issues tied to this debate (e.g. problems with the Hollande administration, shift in political orientation more generally, or even simple opportunism in sensing that the *rectifications* are unpopular now). We likewise cannot say

for certain whether public opinion on the Académie in general has shifted between 1990 and 2016. What we *can* conclude, however, is that the relationship between government input and the *rectifications* is not inherently a sign of authority; while the Académie explicitly anchors its authority in both its sociopolitical role *and* its history (as evidenced, for example, by the statement that the Académie has "never changed its position" in (17)), clearly others see this authority as uncertain.

6.4 The shifting position of the Minister of Education

In addition to the Académie, one particular government figure seems to be frequently addressed in this story. As Minister of Education under the Hollande administration, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem would routinely oversee updates to the national curriculum[27]; thus, the curriculum of 2015, whose recommitment to the *rectifications d'orthographe* indirectly sparked the debate, was released under her leadership. Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem is therefore in a position similar to that of the Académie: she simultaneously benefits from the authority implicit in her sociopolitical position, yet her authority is frequently challenged by other actors. Her statement in (18), cited here to demonstrate the implied authority of the Ministry, by extension also suggests individual authority for Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem as minister. Thus, she likewise makes little additional effort, in such a statement, to justify her authority.

On the other hand, Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem's authority is frequently challenged by those who disagree with the *rectifications*. Once again, precisely *why* they disapprove, and how they express that disapproval, may vary, but other actors do not seem to hesitate to refuse her

[27] French public schools are all subordinate directly to the national Ministry of Education; thus, all public schools throughout the French Republic follow the same general structure. The French Ministry of Education thus fills the roles that both state and federal Departments of Education do in the United States.

authority. In the same interview during which Ms. Carrère d'Encausse stated her opposition to the *rectifications* in (17), she also stated that

(32) Je suis stupéfaite d'entendre dire que l'Académie française aurait inventé cette réforme de l'orthographe, ou l'aurait soutenue.

I am stupefied to hear talk that the Académie française would have invented this orthographic reform or supported it.

It is unclear what, precisely, she means, as the available documentation shows that the "*réforme*" she is describing is precisely what she advocates in (17); moreover, she also reaffirms, in this same passage, that

(33) Cette position est clairement exprimée dans la déclaration de l'Académie votée à l'unanimité dans la séance du 16 Novembre 1989…

This position is clearly expressed in the declaration of the Académie approved unanimously in the session on 16 November 1989…

It would thus seem that Ms. Carrère d'Encausse is arguing in *support* of the *rectifications*, given that those adopted by the Ministry of Education are the same changes outlined in the declaration she mentions. The Académie is again asserting its authority; the fact that it is doing so *at the expense of* another government institution that is arguing in favor of the same results is curious. This does raise some questions regarding the *rationale* for debating authority; these questions are beyond the scope of the current study, but they do bear addressing in future work.

It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem would make an attempt to reassert her authority by expressing surprise at Ms. Carrère d'Encausse's remarks. In an open letter to Ms. Carrère d'Encausse published in both *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, the minister expresses her surprise at the reception of the new curriculum:

(34) C'est avec intérêt mais également un certain étonnement que j'ai pris connaissance de votre réaction publique aux nouveaux programmes de scolarité obligatoire, publiés le 26 Novembre 2015 – vous critiquez notamment la référence, pourtant identique à celle de 2008, aux rectifications proposées par le Conseil supérieur de la langue française… étonnement renforcé par le fait que ces rectifications sont intégrées dans la neuvième édition du Dictionnaire de l'Académie française et que l'académie, pourtant contactée par le Conseil supérieur des programmes cet été, n'a pas fait de remarque quant à la présence de cette référence.

It is with interest but equally some surprise that I have learned of your public reaction to the new curricula, published 26 November 2015 – you notably criticize the reference, however identical to the one from 2008, to the rectifications *proposed by the Conseil supérieur de la langue française… [a] surprise reinforced by the fact that the* rectifications *are included in the ninth edition of the Dictionary of the Académie française and that the Académie, despite [being] contacted by the Conseil supérieur des programmes this summer, made no remark as to the presence of this reference.*

By politely expressing her surprise at the Secrétaire perpetuel's remarks, Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem is expressing that *something is unusual here* – though we cannot guess what she believes to be the cause of this strangeness, by calling attention to the strangeness, Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem is attempting to negate the claimed authority of Ms. Carrère d'Encausse. She likewise attempts to reassert her own authority by reminding the *current* Académie that it was with the blessings of a *former* Académie that her ministry has moved forward. The fact that she is using the Académie's own history against them to reclaim authority in the situation similarly echoes the concept of calibration – though both officials cite the same historical events, they make very different use of

them; the same history can be cited by different actors with different motivations.

6.5 Authority through grassroots action

Two final groups bear mention as we discuss the means by which authority is claimed, both of which rely less (or not at all) on institutional power as the source of their authority.

The first of these groups is the teachers who form unions like SNALC. While all public school teachers in France are employees of the State, one cannot argue that any individual teacher can expect to claim the same degree of authority as do government ministers and high-ranking members of the Institut de France. On the other hand, union activity, in France as elsewhere, allows individual workers to collectively work toward desired outcomes, and SNALC, though not the only teachers' union, is one of the largest. Thus, SNALC – and in particular its officers – are in a unique position to accept or reject the authority of these other government institutions in ways individuals could not accomplish. This is not necessarily grassroots prescriptivism in the sense that Heyd (2014) and Drackley (2019) discuss, but it nonetheless represents reclamation of authority from the bottom up.

This is especially apparent in the numerous media appearances – both print and television – by Jean-Rémi Girard of SNALC. By actively participating in these discussions, Mr. Girard ensures that the perspective of the teachers he represents is known. He is therefore, in a sense, claiming authority by virtue of numbers: individually, he does not presuppose any institutionally determined authority, but by virtue of his position as a representative of thousands of public employees, he can make the claim that he represents that collective will, and this representation gives him an obvious discourse through which to claim authority. This is, in a sense, a similar notion to the political ideal of government by consent of the governed; he can claim authority

because the consent of those he represents gives him the means and the will to do so (it is also a notion echoed in Johnson [2000; etc.] on the subject of orthographic reform in Germany). Mr. Girard demonstrates his willingness to claim authority in his final line of example (29): by explicitly arguing *against* the right of the government to dictate the forms of Standard French, he is instead making available the possibility of claiming authority himself.

In a similar vein, individual French speakers may not be easily able to claim authority, but here we *do* see grassroots prescriptivism at work. As defined by Heyd (2014), grassroots prescriptivism involves bottom-up pressures to maintain a standard form (in structure, meaning, appropriate forms of discourse, etc.); in Drackley (2019), I demonstrate how these bottom-up pressures likely result from the internalization among individual speakers of the top-down, institutionally driven standards. As a result, when the top-down forces attempt to make a change, these changes are resisted by those bottom-up forces who now support the previous standard. This is particularly apparent in Twitter data; examples (20) – (24) in this chapter, as well as numerous examples from Chapter 5, demonstrate users actively rejecting the authority of the institutional powers. Taken together instead, these voices suggest that authority can be claimed by virtue of greater number without respect to institutional or political power.

6.6 On Authority

In an attempt to conclude this chapter, I ask simply *what is authority*? As the examples here suggest, there is no simple answer to that question. In more general terms, however, these data demonstrate that authority is *not* merely synonymous with any single other sociolinguistic concept, be that power, agency, etc. Instead, authority seems to be best characterized as an ongoing process; because authority does not rest, unchallenged, with a single individual in any

single interaction, it is not illogical to discuss *claims of authority*, as a noun, or something like *negotiating authority* as a verb.

By making this suggestion, I do not criticize published works dealing with authority (e.g. Milroy & Milroy, 2000); nothing in my data suggests that understanding of authority like the Milroys' – as it must exist in the processes of language standardization and prescriptivism – is inaccurate. Rather, I argue these data suggest that all of these pieces fit together to form a much larger picture: authority is something to claim, to reject, to negotiate and renegotiate, and it necessarily includes some elements of power (e.g. Fairclough, 1989) and agency (e.g. Ahearn, 1999; Arnold, 2015). Power, in general, does offer a comparatively easy means of claiming authority; as the data above show, individuals who enter an interaction with a larger amount of power (however that is defined) may use that power to *presuppose* authority in a way that those with comparatively less power cannot. Claiming authority is, likewise, an agentive action in a way that is overlooked when one assumes authority is static or exists *a priori*. It is thus important to reiterate that these earlier conceptions of authority are not *wrong*; rather, authority is frequently treated merely as a byproduct rather than as a moving target in any given interaction.

As for linguistic markers of authority, it is difficult to point to concrete examples; with the exception of statements of dis/agreement that indicate a speaker's dis/alignment with another, there are few lexical items or grammatical forms that indicate an attempt at agency. Rather, like much that we encounter in interactional sociolinguistics and anthropological studies of language, context is the primary means of determining which linguistic forms and discourse strategies we use. Consider, for example, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse's direct statement as Secrétaire perpétuel with her more personalized story of childhood academic achievement: the first uses straightforward, reasonably formal language (when speaking in a position from which authority

is easy to claim). On the other hand, when she is speaking more colloquially and cannot rely as heavily on the institutional power behind her, she uses more descriptive language that evokes stronger emotional responses from her listeners; use of this language, in fact, allows her to reclaim some authority by both trivializing the *rectifications* (e.g. talking about “traumatizing” the “poor little ones”) and negating their claim through her tale of success.

This, while it is difficult to claim any sort of overarching linguistic correlate of authority, it is nonetheless possible to identify certain discursive strategies that appear alongside different means of claiming authority. Some of these are also medium-specific (as, for example, one might expect less polite language from anonymous Twitter uses than from televised news anchors) or socially constrained (many Twitter users felt free to attack Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem for her race or gender, as I address in greater detail in Chapter 8). I continue in Chapter 7 with a discussion of the ways history and myth are invoked to claim authority; more of these linguistic and discursive strategies will be highlighted in the coming discussion.

CHAPTER 7: HISTORY, MYTHOLOGY, CHRONOTOPE

In this chapter I approach questions of history and myths and how these are pressed into service to create some kind of French speaker identity. This type of identity is not necessarily a stable one; I will make no claim that there is a monolithic "French Speaker" identity that appears uniformly across all individuals who might claim it, nor that this is the most salient identity for any of these speakers. There is, nevertheless, a kind of recognizable identity that is enacted by many of the speakers in this discussion, particularly in the context of those speakers who are critical of language reform projects. Moreover, many of the same strategies used by these speakers to bolster claims of being a "good" French speaker – or, relatedly, that someone else is a "bad" speaker – are used in service of claiming authority in similar ways as those described in the previous chapter. As such, many of the examples in this chapter represent not only the creation of a particular type of speaker identity but also their potential use as a means of claiming an authoritative voice in an interaction. This chapter focuses primarily on the ways in which these discourses are used; a more in-depth discussion of identity itself follows in Chapter 8.

Much as the examples in the previous two chapters demonstrate a wide range of discursive strategies, speakers similarly make use of a wide range when situating these debates within a broader historical context or when invoking a (sometimes mythologized) past. I focus especially on the notion of *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1981; Agha, 2007; etc.) to discuss the ways in which these alternate time-spaces are invoked. Indeed, much of the data here suggest that speakers tend to orient to one of two broad chronotopes, which I have called a *chronotope of nostalgia* and a *chronotope of progress* (Drackley, 2020)[28]. The *chronotope of nostalgia* is, as the name suggests, one that inherently looks backward to some idealized past, regardless of whether

[28] Much of this chapter has been published as Drackley (2020).

that past actually existed as the speaker cites it. This chronotope is frequently cited by those who oppose the *rectifications*, though precisely how the chronotope is invoked varies. On the other hand, the *chronotope of progress*[29] is one that tends to look forward; instead of orienting to some idealized past, speakers who invoke this chronotope instead embrace the idea that change is inevitable, and that society (and language) must move forward. Speakers similarly orient to this chronotope in a variety of ways; moreover, some speakers do not clearly orient to one of these chronotopes while simultaneously *rejecting* the other.

In the next sections I will address these two chronotopes in more detail, in particular in the context of a televised debate in which each participant clearly orients to one or the other. Following this analysis, I present a brief overview of some of the more specific historical references that have been frequently invoked, often to the point of national myth. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the ways in which these discourses are utilized to bolster claims to authority.

7.1 *Le Débat* as an example of competing chronotopes

Because participants enter the interaction with clearly defined roles, debates are an interesting and useful format when considering the ways in which these chronotopes are invoked. In an effort to consider how both pro- and anti-*rectification* perspectives are framed, particular attention is given to the 17 February 2016 episode[30] of France 24's current affairs program *Le Débat*. Established in 2006 to be a 24-hour, internationally focused news network akin to CNN or Al Jazeera, France 24 airs a wide range of news and analysis programs; as a state-owned

[29] It should be noted here that I use the term "progress" relatively neutrally – the idea here is not necessarily that the future is inherently *better* (although some speakers do make that claim) but that society constantly changes.
[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4BWXCDtPYU

network, France 24 officially has no political slant, though individuals may reveal their own orientation toward a particular story in the course of a televised program. *Le Débat*, which continues to air on weeknights, was hosted from 2012-2016 by Vanessa Burggraf[31]. The program, which airs debates on one or two issues each episode, blends news and commentary (cf. Bovet, 2009; Rosette, 2011; Bastien and Dumouchel, 2013), and frequently addresses contentious issues. Debates are frequently lively – perhaps heated – and the host does not necessarily act as a neutral moderator but frequently participates in the debate as well. Ms. Burggraf was particularly well known for her active participation in discussions; she has also gained a reputation as being occasionally combative or condescending in her televised appearances[32].

This episode, which aired approximately two weeks after the initial TF1 report on the *rectifications* marks the entry of *Le Débat* into the discussion, with Ms. Burggraf as host. This segment was selected as an example of the types of debates that took place in the French media in part because of the positions of the two debaters – a politician and a member of a teachers' union – and in part because the structure of an organized debate allows for a clear understanding of the two positions. How the two men involved position themselves, the organizations they represent, and the ways in which they articulate their arguments provide evidence of some of the ways in which the debate proceeds, though I make no claims that this *particular* episode is representative of all aspects of the broader debates.

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[31] Ms. Burggraf left France 24 in 2016 for a year, as a co-host of France 2's talk show *On n'est pas couché*. She returned shortly afterward and is now the director of France 24. Currently, *Le Débat* is hosted by Stéphanie Antoine.
[32] Pop culture magazine *VSD* links her departure from *On n'est pas couché* to her combative nature, as supported by several interviews with other France 2 executives and journalists: https://web.archive.org/web/20170904020106/http://www.vsd.fr/loisirs/onpc-vanessa-burggraf-sur-la-sellette-sa-remplacante-pourrait-etre-20382

This episode's two invited guests are Jean-Rémi Girard, vice president of SNALC, and Alexis Bachelay, a Socialist party delegate in the Assemblée Nationale (note that these are the same two individuals cited in (29) in the previous chapter). Mr. Girard, in addition to his positions with SNALC, is a middle school teacher in the Yvelines *département*, a comparatively wealthy region of the Parisian suburbs centered around the city of Versailles. In his capacity as a vice president of the Syndicat national des lycées et collèges (SNALC), he was interviewed in the original TF1 report, and he represents the position taken by SNALC against what the organization sees as unnecessary reforms that do not address the actual needs of students[33]. It is important to note that SNALC, like many of the other educational organizations in France, does push for broader reforms in the education system, which it considers to be in the best interests of the public[34]. SNALC is generally viewed as slightly right-leaning, though they identify as apolitical and maintain a strict adherence to the secular ideals of the French Republic[35]. As part of its goal of reorganizing national public education, SNALC considers the current *rectifications* unnecessary and in many ways confusing; Mr. Girard argues, in his position paper for SNALC, that the new system creates just as many exceptions as it attempts to eliminate. Instead, SNALC advocates for greater emphasis placed on teaching grammar, which Mr. Girard argues is generally discouraged and is in far greater need of improvement.

Mr. Bachelay was, at the time this episode aired, one of 13 *députés* representing the Hauts-de-Seine *département*, one of the wealthiest in France[36], centered around such prosperous

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[33] https://www.snalc.fr/national/article/2114/
[34] https://www.snalc.fr/national/article/333/
[35] *Laïcité* 'secularism' has been an important aspect of French public life since the Revolution. In its current form, *laïcité* draws its authority from the *loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Églises et de l'État*, the law that formally separates Church and State in the French Republic.
[36] https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2109644

suburbs as Neuilly-sur-Seine and Nanterre and housing France's largest business district, La Défense. Elected in 2012 for his only term, Mr. Bachelay was most actively involved in issues surrounding immigration reform, recognition of Palestine as a sovereign state, and other questions of international relations. As a member of the Socialist Party, Mr. Bachelay represented the same general political positions as the Hollande administration, including Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. Mr. Bachelay thus takes the position that these *rectifications* are generally beneficial, though they may fall short of the full spectrum of reforms needed.

Though I focus less on her role in the interaction, Ms. Burggraf is effectively a third participant in this debate; as noted above, the news-commentary distinction is frequently blurred in French media, and her participation here is no exception. Rather, her opinion on the *rectifications* is made quite clear throughout the program; she at times serves to demonstrate how strongly many French people feel about their language, openly taking Mr. Girard's anti-*rectification* side. Ms. Burggraf has also faced some criticism for her antagonism toward Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem; this primarily occurred during her run on *On n'est pas couché* in 2017, so I do not address it here[37]. Nonetheless, it is perhaps useful to understand how Ms. Burggraf has positioned herself relative to this topic, though I focus less on her participation in this debate than on the contributions of Mr. Girard and Mr. Bachelay.

Before we examine how each of these speakers invokes a particular chronotope, it is important to consider how each speaker represents past events; neither participant in this debate – both fairly young men – were involved in the original process of developing the *rectifications*, 26 years prior to this episode of *Le Débat*. Nonetheless, each speaker re-narrates the events in his

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[37] A summary of the interactions between Ms. Burggraf and Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem can be found at https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/ps/najat-vallaud-belkacem/reforme-de-l-orthographe-la-polemique-entre-najat-vallaud-belkacem-et-vanessa-burggraf-en-trois-actes_2202882.html

own way and for his own purposes; the ways in which these same events are narrated help to reveal each speaker's ideological positioning *toward* those events (cf. Bauman and Briggs, 1990) and invoke different chronotopes. This is not to say, of course, that the two speakers cannot agree on the basic sequence of events in the past, as the process itself was well-documented. Rather, Mr. Bachelay and Mr. Girard do not agree on the *significance* of past events, and they are thus engaged in different scale-making activities as each contests the chronotope to which the other orients.

7.2 Chronotopes of nostalgia

What I have called the *chronotope of nostalgia* is perhaps a familiar one; it is in many ways similar, for example, to the *traditionalist chronotope* described in Dick (2010). Chronotopes of this type tend to valorize past behaviors or circumstances; in Dick's example, non-migrants in Mexico invoke the traditionalist chronotope to position their home as a place of familial and cultural roots and strong morals, despite its lack of opportunity compared to the United States. Chronotopes of nostalgia are not uncommon in political discourse more generally; slogans like "Make America great again" presuppose that there was some (generally undefined) point in the past in which society was ideal or, at minimum, better than it is *now*. In the context of political discussion, these chronotopes may be more frequently invoked from a conservative position (as conservative politics, by definition, aim to promote and preserve traditional societal values and structures); as this study is not primarily political in nature, I do not make significant claims about the political orientations of the speakers involved.

Mr. Girard's position against the *rectifications* largely derives from this notion. As part of his opening statement on the program, he explains that the changes are not beneficial because the

addition of a new standard actually makes spelling *more* complicated, and thus, by refusing to accept the *rectifications*, he advocates a return to a simpler past:

(35) [Ce sont des recommandations] qui n'ont jamais étaient appliqués sérieusement depuis, euh, vingt-six ans, et en fait elle ne simplifie pas du tout les choses parce qu'elle crée deux états de la langue concurrents et simultanés et qu'on ne s'y retrouve plus puisque ce qu'on veut faire enseigner à l'école ne correspond pas à tous ce qui existe dans le reste de la société. C'est-à-dire que, cette orthographe rénovée, les élèves la verraient dans leurs manuels, mais en fait ls ne la verraient nulle part ailleurs, c'est-à-dire ni à la télé, ni dans les livres, ni dans les magazines …

[They are recommendations] that have never been applied seriously in twenty-six years, and in fact it doesn't simplify things at all, because it creates two states of the language concurrently and simultaneously and the two don't meet up because what they want us to teach in school doesn't correspond to what exists in the rest of society. That is to say, this new spelling students would see here in their textbooks, but in fact they would see it nowhere else, that is to say not on TV, not in books, not in magazines …

Allowing the changes proposed in 1990 into the curriculum, Mr. Girard argues, essentially creates a parallel form that would *only* exist in scholastic settings; because students would never see these forms in the wild – that is to say, in situations outside of school – these forms are not only useless but also likely to be a source of confusion. Moreover, the older forms are treated as the *authentic* ones, which represent the "real French", as they are the ones that exist in real-world situations like television and print media.

In arguing this point, Mr. Girard frequently uses language that emphasizes the break between past and future he attributes to the *rectifications*, as evidenced by the underlined

segments in the example above. This statement is made, generally speaking, in response to the notion that the *rectifications* are good because they simplify confusing orthography (implicitly arguing that the new system *will be* better for students, which invokes a chronotope of progress). Thus, while Mr. Girard does not invoke the chronotope of nostalgia as explicitly as does a statement like “make America great again”, his refusal to accept the premise implicit in the chronotope of progress suggests that he is indeed looking back to a “better” – simpler – past with only a single standard orthography. In this idealized past reality, the spelling standards that students see in their textbooks are the ones they see on television and in books, and this is *better* for them.

Mr. Girard also uses this statement to trivialize the *rectifications* more generally. Stating that they have “never been applied seriously” can be understood to refer to the time that passed between the initial vote on the *rectifications* – in 1990 – and the two Ministry curricula that acknowledged them, in 2008 and 2015, during which they were not brought into use. On the other hand, use of the word *sérieusement* – that they have “never been applied seriously” – also implies that the whole process is something that is not to be taken seriously. That is, Mr. Girard is effectively arguing that, if these changes were indeed ones that needed to be made, why have we not accepted them until now, and does that mean they are not actually that important? He does not explicitly link the fact that they have not, in his view, been treated seriously with the fact that they make spelling education more complicated, but the fact that he links those two ideas in this same statement suggests that he likely does not view them as unrelated ideas. Indeed, by combining these two ideas, Mr. Girard suggests that the *rectifications* simply do not need to be adopted – because they are not likely to be useful – and that doing so would move us *away from* the better system that has already existed.

Mr. Girard calibrates these alternate time-spaces in a few different ways. Both participants *reportively* calibrate the events of 1990: by retelling these events through their own perspectives, they make it clear how those past events are relevant to the arguments they each make. By emphasizing their lack of real use, Mr. Girard primarily invokes the *debates* leading to the adoption of the *orthographe rectifiée* – by emphasizing process over product, he argues that the important thing to consider *now* is that the matter is not settled. Rather, because they were "never applied seriously", he is licensed to continue that debate and is under no obligation to treat the *rectifications* as a settled matter. Also of note is the nomically-calibrated "other world" – in which there are two spelling standards – which Mr. Girard explicitly rejects. Nomic calibration is often discussed in terms of its use to make relevant a kind of "timeless" past (e.g. Eisenlohr, 2004; Koven, 2016), which is frequently done in order to invoke a chronotope of nostalgia. On the other hand, this example demonstrates a use of nomic calibration to preemptively deny the invocation of a chronotope of progress. Mr. Girard thus allows himself to invoke a chronotope of nostalgia, in part, through the explicit rejection of its opposing chronotope.

While there are no linguistic features that *automatically* point to invocation of one chronotope or another – these are, after all, discursive rather than lexical-grammatical ones – a few linguistic structures appear with some frequency. Mr. Girard primarily uses the narrative present tense to discuss these past events; in conjunction with verb forms like the imperfect and the conditional, this emphasizes his view of the debates as ongoing. This equally apparent in a rebuttal directed at Mr. Bachelay later in the debate[38]:

[38] Interjections from other participants, overlapping speech, and vocal pauses have been removed from this excerpt for ease of understanding. The full interaction is discussed in Drackley (2020).

(36) …visiblement, vous savez pas ce qui s'est passé en '90… ça ressort maintenant parce que, aujourd'hui, pour la première fois, on a des programmes scolaires qui doivent entrer en vigueur à la rentrée prochaine qui sont rédigés dans cette orthographe […] jusqu'à présent, tous les manuels scolaires, y compris celui de primaire de 2008, qui disait dans un *nota bene* très bien caché que cette orthographe était la référence, même celui-là n'était pas rédigé en orthographe révisée, donc vous imaginez un texte qui vous dit « enseignez l'orthographe révisée » mais qui lui-même ne l'applique pas, et bien il n'est pas appliqué.

... clearly, you don't know what happened in '90 ... this comes back now because, today, for the first time, we have curricula which should come into effect at the next return [to school] that are produced with this orthography […] until now, all the textbooks, including the one for primary schools from 2008, which said in a very well-hidden nota bene *that this spelling was the reference, but which itself wasn't produced using the revised spelling, thus you can imagine a text that tells you "teach the revised spelling" but which doesn't itself apply [that spelling], and so it wasn't applied.*

Here, too, Mr. Girard emphasizes that the changes here are incomplete – the heavy use of present tense serves to underscore the idea that the debate continues. Similarly, many of the past events Mr. Girard describes in his statements make heavy use of the imperfect instead of the *passé composé*, reinforcing the idea that Mr. Girard is rejecting the notion that these debates are complete; the lack of completeness in these debates makes it even easier for him to reject the *orthographe rectifiée*, as if he is simply continuing the discussions that led to their approval in 1990.

Interestingly, Mr. Girard also makes a *direct* claim that Mr. Bachelay does not know what

happened in 1990. Because both men have been invited to appear on this program, presumably as experts in some capacity, one can reasonably assume that they both understand the general sequence of events that led to the publication of the *rectifications*. As such, Mr. Girard is most likely not saying Mr. Bachelay is *factually* incorrect in his assessment of those events. Rather, he is arguing against Mr. Bachelay's interpretation of the significance of those events: the two men have reportively calibrated these same events in different ways, and Mr. Girard is explicitly stating that his is the correct understanding.

A chronotope of nostalgia is apparent in many of the other anti-*rectification* examples presented in the previous chapters as well; it is implicit in tweets like those in (8) and (9) in Chapter 5, for example, which cite historical figures as evidence of the superiority of the past. Similarly, the tweet in (14) makes oblique reference to this chronotope, as it is overtly critical of the backward-looking ideologies that make that user's Twitter timeline "look like a retirement home". Thus, even those speakers who do not orient to this chronotope are aware of its weight; arguments in favor of the *rectifications* may rely just as heavily on refusal to orient to a chronotope of nostalgia as they do to orienting to a chronotope of progress.

7.3 Chronotopes of progress

A counterpoint to the chronotope of nostalgia, the chronotope of progress is based on the notion that society continues to move forward and that change is constant and inevitable. Instead of focusing on an idealized past, which may or may not have ever truly existed, those who orient toward this chronotope tend to emphasize the past as just that. Rather, since this chronotopic formulation is predicated on the notion that change is continuous, those who orient to this chronotope tend to emphasize what is happening in the present and how that will (potentially)

offer benefits in the future. This is not, naturally, to argue that all change is beneficial or that the world is always improving; rather, this chronotope simply emphasizes the inevitability of change, and those speakers who invoke this chronotope tend to do so in a way that looks for the best possible outcome of that change. The various instantiations of this chronotope are thus somewhat less cohesive than those of the chronotope of nostalgia; in many ways, this chronotope is similar to the *modernist chronotope* Dick (2010) describes, through which migrants to the United States from Mexico position the U.S. as a land of opportunity, even if they must forego the connections to home, family, and strong morals they see back in Mexico. Thus, speakers who orient to a modernist chronotope or a chronotope of progress look to potential growth in the future rather than focusing on the ways in which the past may have been better.

Of the two participants in this episode of *Le Débat*, Mr. Bachelay, arguing in favor of the *rectifications*, more often orients to this chronotope. This is most evident in the ways he reportively calibrates the events of 1990; rather than focusing on the debates themselves, he emphasizes the final result: the CSLF produced a concrete proposal, the Académie française ratified that proposal, and it was subsequently published in the *Journal officiel* and was thus publicly available. Mr. Bachelay makes this clear from his opening statement:

(37) On peut pas appliquer « une réforme » qui n'est pas une réforme, et un sujet qui <u>a été traité</u> il y a, donc, maintenant vingt-sept ans [sic], en 1990, qui s'appelait l'orthographe révisée, et <u>à l'époque</u> le Conseil supérieur de la langue française <u>avait proposé</u>, et le gouvernement <u>à l'époque l'avait validé</u>, une modification de quelques centaines de mots dans le sens d'une simplification de la langue française, … parce que c'est une révision <u>qui date de vingt-six ans,</u> elle <u>a été publiée</u> au journal officiel donc en réalité elle <u>a été déjà en vigueur</u>.

> *We shouldn't attach [the term] "reform" to [something that] isn't a reform, and a subject that <u>was raised</u>, it's been, now, twenty-seven years [sic], in 1990, that was called revised orthography, and <u>at that time</u> the Superior Council of the French Language <u>proposed</u>, and the government <u>at that time validated</u> it, a modification of some hundreds of words, in the sense of a simplification of the French language … because this is a revision <u>that dates back twenty-six years</u>, it <u>was published</u> in the official journal and therefore in reality <u>it was already in effect</u>.*

In contrast to Mr. Girard's statements, Mr. Bachelay makes heavy use of the *passé composé* and the pluperfect, both of which emphasize the completeness of past events. This is further highlighted by the use of the expression *déjà en vigueur* 'already in effect'; the adverb *déjà* firmly situates these events in the past, such that they should not be treated as ongoing. In this sense, Mr. Bachelay reportively calibrates the *result* of the debates in 1990 rather than the debates themselves (unlike Mr. Girard). The *rectifications* are thus a *fait accompli* – instead of holding onto the past, Mr. Bachelay argues that the present is *already* different, and we must therefore move forward from that perspective. Furthermore, unlike Mr. Girard's nomically calibrated "other world" in which two separate standards exist, Mr. Bachelay does not orient to any particular alternate reality; any distinction between the *current* reality and some hypothetical *other* are entirely missing from his statement. This distinction is highlighted by his use of the phrase *en réalité*: the changes he describes *are* our reality; there is no sense in comparing this to some imaginary "other world".

In direct contrast to the statements made by Mr. Girard, Mr. Bachelay makes repeated reference to authoritative figures such as the CSLF and the Académie. This is perhaps unsurprising as Mr. Bachelay represents the French government; in particular, since he was

invited to this program specifically *as a representative* of the government, he can reasonably be expected to cite government agencies as authoritative. It is interesting to note that this does seem to be an exception to the pattern noted in the previous chapter, wherein those who start from positions *perceived* as more authoritative tend to make less overt attempts at claiming authority; compare this to Mr. Girard's statements, which do not cite any particular figure of authority, but rather rely on denying the authority of the official curricula and textbooks. On the other hand, it is important to note that this episode of *Le Débat* aired two weeks after the initial TF1 report; as noted in previous chapters, early opinions regarding the *rectifications* and the administration were generally negative, so it is not unreasonable to assume that Mr. Bachelay did not expect his position with the government to lend him much authority. If this is indeed the case, then it follows that Mr. Bachelay started the debate in a position of *less* authority than Mr. Girard: working from the assumption that his perspective would be taken less seriously – and that he would therefore need to try that much harder to claim authority – it is unsurprising to see Mr. Bachelay make a more concerted effort to establish his authority than is typical of those with institutional power to support their claims.

The statements in (37) clearly show Mr. Bachelay's refusal to orient to a chronotope of nostalgia; his orientation to a chronotope of progress is primarily marked by his assertion that progress has already occurred. This is in keeping with the notion that a chronotope of progress chiefly emphasizes the continuous nature of societal change; in this example, he does not even argue that change *is happening*, because he takes it as a given that it has *already happened*. At other points during this exchange, however, he is much more overt in his orientation to a chronotope of progress. Consider, for example, his statement that

(38) Je refuse que notre langue soit figée dans un marbre éternel

I refuse [to believe] that our language should be set in stone forever

In his refusal to accept the notion that language should be "set in stone", Mr. Bachelay is affirming his understanding that language changes, and that it *must* change, as society also changes. Indeed, following his assertion that change has *already* happened, this is an unsurprising position to take; in his view, the language that Mr. Girard and others are arguing should be preserved is one that *no longer exists*. This is, perhaps, one of the clearest demonstrations of the incompatibility of these two chronotopes: while those orienting to the chronotope of nostalgia generally seek to preserve some (possibly imaginary) idealized past, those orienting to the chronotope of progress see that idealized past, if it ever existed, as a sort of archaism. To preserve that language standard is to exhume a norm that has ceased to exist.

The chronotope of progress is similarly evident in a number of other examples, again chiefly from those who argue in support of the *rectifications*. The notion cited previously that these changes will make it easier for students to learn a complex orthographic system itself embraces a concept of progress; rather than preserving an older form – whether for aesthetic or identity purposes or because it is simply what has always been – those involved in the developing the *orthographe rectifiée* instead see the increased ease of acquisition as the desirable outcome. Even Ms. Carrère d'Encausse acknowledges this motivation (though she does so in order to argue it is unnecessary) in her statement about "traumatizing the poor little ones". Thus, while not everyone agrees that such changes are *necessary*, it is clear that this notion is directly representative of the idea of progress to which speakers like Mr. Bachelay orient.

Similarly common among discourses that clearly orient to the notion of progress is the idea that language changes; this notion, while generally uncontroversial to those who study

language, is conveniently ignored by those who argue against the *rectifications*. On the other hand, this discourse appears not only in official and mainstream media sources but also on Twitter, as with these examples (also cited in Chapter 5):

(39) 1.La #reformeorthographe ne concerne que le î et le û. 2.Personne ne vous oblige à changer. 3.Et puis la langue évolue. #dealwithit

1. The #reformeorthographe only concerns î and û. 2. No one is making you change. 3. And also language evolves. #dealwithit

(40) Tous les ans le même débat sur la #ReformeOrthographe alors que c'est le propre d'une langue vivante d'évoluer...

Every few years the same debate about the #ReformeOrthographe when it's a characteristic of a living language to evolve…

Tweets like these, while simultaneously serving to correct some obviously incorrect ideas about the *rectifications*, also demonstrate an orientation to the chronotope of progress by emphasizing the fact that a living language *always* changes – it is, as the speaker in (40) emphasizes, a fundamental property of any living language.

One common discourse, primarily among those who oppose the *rectifications*, somewhat complicates the clear division between these two chronotopes. In several cases, most notably Ms. Carrère d'Encausse's statement as Secrétaire perpetuel, the idea appears that any changes to French should pass *l'épreuve du temps* 'the test of time'. On the surface, this statement does seem like it would indicate orientation to a chronotope of progress; after all, one might expect that structures which survive regular language change would be the ones that people value. On the other hand, historical linguistics as a field has demonstrated that this is not always the case; considering only semantic change, for example, Blank (1999) and others have demonstrated that

change can occur for many reasons and to many different linguistic forms, including some frequently used items (a frequently-cited example of this pattern is the myriad meanings of the word ‘nice’ throughout the history of English). Thus, from a purely linguistic standpoint it is difficult to understand the logic behind this argument; instead, it seems to be an argument against any kind of corpus planning, which, somewhat counterintuitively, is the primary purpose of institutions like the Académie française. Viewed from this perspective, the idea that changes should “stand the test of time” is less of an indicator of orientation toward a chronotope of progress as a means of acknowledging that language changes while simultaneously rejecting the notion that institutionally driven change can be valid. This rhetoric similarly disregards the fact that spelling – as a component of writing – is not something that changes as quickly or as automatically as does spoken language; this conflation of written and spoken language is also common in opposition to the *rectifications*.

7.4 Literature, literacy, and the blurred division between writing and speech

Though uncontroversial among those who study language, the idea that writing should not be approached in the same way as spoken language is often overlooked, particularly among those who argue against the *rectifications*. I cite the example of the “test of time” notion above – which implies that speech and writing change in similar ways and, presumably, at similar rates – but this is far from the only example of the ways in which written French is treated as equivalent to the spoken language. Given the magnitude of the reaction to a comparatively small orthographic revision, it is perhaps unsurprising that many participants in this larger discussion would conflate the two; nonetheless, this demonstrates that, at least among non-specialists, written French is viewed as just as much a part of the language as are spoken features. Following the observations

of Lodge (1991) and Johnson (2000; etc.), it is not unusual that speakers might consider the standard variety to be less malleable in written than in spoken form, and the data here generally support those observations.

Whether written French is actually the same thing as the French language at large seems to be debated along similar lines as the two chronotopes I outline above. That is, strategies adopted by those opposed to the *rectifications* are more likely to cite the effects of changing written norms on the language more broadly, whereas those in support are more likely to address the fact that written standards and spoken norms are different. In an interview with francophone Belgian academics Arnaud Hoedt and Jérôme Piron on the subject of a book to be released, the authors state that:

(41) On confound la langue et l'orthographe et le problème, la base du problème, vient de là. C'est que l'orthographe, c'est l'écriture de la langue, ce n'est pas la langue elle-même et que modifier le code graphique qui permet de transmettre cette langue, ça n'est pas nécessairement modifier la langue elle-même, et donc on peut imaginer certaines formes soient améliorées pour favoriser l'accès à la langue.

One confuses the language and its orthography and the problem, the root of the problem, comes from there. It's that the orthography is the writing of the language, it isn't the language itself, and modifying the written code that permits transmission of that language is not necessarily the same as modifying the language itself, and therefore one can imagine that certain forms might be improved to privilege access to that language.

Mr. Hoedt and Mr. Piron address an idea that, once again, is quite common among those who study language: that a writing system is little more than a means of transmitting a language graphically, and that changes to that system do not inherently mean changes to the language. In

making this claim, they counter the idea, not uncommon among those opposed to the *orthographe rectifiée*, that revised spelling is some kind of attack on the French language itself. Instead, these authors argue, there are frequently social reasons to modify the written code of a language; the comparative ease of acquisition cited by the Ministry of Education in their statements is one example of this. It would also follow that the ease of acquisition of written Standard French, while far from a panacea, would likely make some (though admittedly minor) progress in helping to ameliorate some of the inequalities addressed by scholars like Bentolila, as cited in previous chapters.

This last idea is especially relevant when considering the way acquisition of proper written French – and correct spelling in particular – is viewed as a means of identifying "good" students from the others; Hoedt, in the same interview, explains that

(42) …l'orthographe devient un critère de sélection pour les instituteurs, et qu'on a aussi, dans la bourgeoisie montante, la nécessité d'une identification … c'est la naissance du nationalisme, en fait, la langue en danger identitaire.

… spelling becomes a criterion of selection for instructors, and one also sees, among the upwardly mobile middle class, the necessity of [a kind of] identification …it's the birth of a nationalism, in fact, the language in existential danger.

The acquisition of correct French orthography is, as Mr. Hoedt explains, not simply a means for teachers to sort through their students but also a marker of those who have more social prestige; as such, maintaining this difficult standard serves the upper classes by ensuring that they have a distinguishing feature, and in losing these features the bourgeoisie risks losing the those features that differentiate them from lower classes. This idea is echoed by some Twitter users:

(43) #JeSuisCirconflexe la réforme introduit un joli marqueur social: les recruteurs sauront identifier les candidats qui manient les ph et ^ . ☺

#JeSuisCirconflexe the reform introduces a nice social marker: recruiters will be able to identify those candidates who use the ph and ^. ☺

This user explicitly relates the maintenance of the circumflex and the <ph>, presumably of *nénuphar*, to the likelihood that one will find a job: that hiring managers, recruiters, and the like will be able to identify a good candidate simply by the fact that they choose to maintain the older orthographic forms. This conflation of literacy skills and *language* skills more generally emphasizes the existence of some classist ideologies in the acquisition of Standard French; by insisting on using the older forms, which are presented as more erudite, speakers like this one attempt to present themselves as higher class. While this statement is not obviously situated within the chronotope of nostalgia, it nonetheless portrays older forms as those worthy of maintenance and can be categorized among those who stake the authority of their claims on an idealized past.

It is for these reasons that Mr. Hoedt and Mr. Piron call the ways French spelling is approached *dogme* 'dogma'[39]. That is, the popular idea that French orthography should be untouchable is not based on any sort of linguistic merit but on the ways in which spelling has come to represent some aspect of French identity. Indeed, they explicitly argue that the emphasis on certain forms, when attempting to make any changes to the written standard, and on the idea of who has the right to make these changes, and when, obscures the fact that such a focus *at all* is essentially dogma:

[39] They later reaffirm this claim in a 2019 TED talk, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YO7Vg1ByA8

(44) Maintenant, ce qui est intéressant, c'est de voir que, quand on tente de modifier, justement, aujourd'hui, ou d'améliorer telle ou telle partie, ce n'est pas sur les formes dont on parle, q'on débat, c'est l'idée même de pouvoir y toucher.
Now, what is interesting is to see that when one tries to modify, rightly, today, or to improve this or that part, it's not about the forms that we talk, we debate, it's the very idea that we could touch them.

The difficulty Mr. Piron describes here in discussing specific forms emphasizes the fact that, for many French speakers, *written* French is just as much a part of one's national identity as is spoken French. It is nigh impossible to make changes to the written standard precisely *because* it is taken as representative of the language as a whole, and discussions of authority then preclude any meaningful attempt to look critically at the orthographic standard. The fact that literacy in standard French is presented as representative of French language proficiency more generally complicates the possibility of making any meaningful change to the system.

This is further complicated by the fact that, for many speakers, *literary* production, also an example of the idealized past version of French, is often conflated with *literacy* in French. Many Twitter users cite authors of the established French literary canon as examples of the French we should be trying to emulate; Molière, Voltaire, and Victor Hugo, are among the authors offered as evidence of the type of French we should be trying to preserve. The fact that literary language frequently differs quite substantially from casual speech – and even from other written genres – does not seem to matter in these cases, nor does the fact that most of these French speakers likely do not use this sort of language themselves. It similarly seems unimportant that these authors wrote in very different varieties of French, as is particularly the case of the two cited in (45):

(45) Je suis choqué et outré ! #ReformeOrthographe Molière et Baudelaire etc. doivent se retourner dans leur tombe

I'm shocked and outraged! #ReformeOrthographe Molière and Baudelaire etc. must be rolling over in their graves.

Molière, writing in the 17th century, and Baudelaire, writing two centuries later, would not have used identical forms, as the Académie made numerous reforms – to the standards of both written *and* spoken French – in the intervening years; Voltaire would likely have used still another written standard! This variation clearly emphasizes the fact that it is not the particulars of the language that people care for, it is the *image* of a certain type of French, and the nostalgia to which we attach that variety, that is significant. It is also interesting to note, as Mr. Piron and Mr. Hoedt highlight in the same interview, that Voltaire actually advocated for a *more* transparent orthographic system, whereas the early Académie pushed for a more deliberately erudite spelling. In short, the linguistic particulars of these cases matter less than the mythologized figures that represent a particular language and its associated identity (this topic is explored in greater depth in the following chapter).

7.5 Chronotopes and authority

In closing this chapter, I return to the concept of authority and the ways in which it is enacted. A speaker's chronotopic orientation, as these data suggest, may determine the strategies adopted in order to claim or contest authority. While these are generally situationally determined, there seems to be at sort a reciprocal relationship between those strategies for claiming authority and the chronotope(s) to which a speaker orients. For example, when a more or less average French speaker (such as one might find on any social media platform) seeks to deny the authority of a

socially powerful group like the Académie française, they are likely to invoke a chronotope of nostalgia, looking back to a somehow *better* past before the Académie enacted any changes. To do so, this speaker might invoke *other* figures who are perceived to be authoritative; an author whose works are taught as a fundamental part of their education, such as Molière or Hugo, is a figure whose influence on the French language – through its literature – is one who is mythologized as a Great French Speaker to the point where he[40] is no longer viewed as subordinate to the dictates of organizations like the Académie.

To reiterate, no obvious one-to-one relationship seems to exist between strategies for claiming authority and invoked chronotopes. However, the past itself is frequently cited as a reason to deny the authority of the Académie or the Ministry of Education; the notion that "we have always done it this way" is a common enough rhetorical device – in *many* circumstances – that this is perhaps unsurprising. In cases like this, the fact that the speaker is orienting to a chronotope of nostalgia, and that idealized past they are invoking must somehow be *better than* the present or the hypothetical future, is itself a means of contesting another speaker's authority. Thus, while chronotopes do not necessarily presuppose one strategy or another for claiming authority, examining the chronotopic orientation of a speaker is useful in understanding the way(s) in which that speaker may choose to claim or contest authority.

Much of the analysis offered in this chapter also touches on the notion that one's proficiency in a certain variety of French is tied to one's position in French society; this is a worthwhile discussion on its own, and one that I will take up in the next chapter. Indeed, the ways in which national identity, and individual identity as *part of* that nation, are constructed are frequently affected by the ways in which one invokes alternate time-spaces; understanding the

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[40] The vast majority of the authors cited here are white men writing in the 17th-19th centuries; while I cannot say that *no* women or people of color are cited as authoritative figures, they do not appear in the data I have collected.

ways in which different chronotopes are invoked here – both as means of claiming authority and as means of identifying oneself – is an important base for any discussion of the links between standard language and national identity, as well as who is viewed as “deserving” that identity. These are all topics that are addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8: FRENCH LANGUAGE, FRENCH IDENTITY

Language is certainly not the only domain to involve questions of Frenchness – as is the case in many modern states, the rhetoric surrounding a particular national identity and those who "belong" covers a much wider range of topics. The use of a particular variety of French is, nonetheless, closely linked to the concept of French national identity in ways that may or may not differ from similar relationships between language and state in other societies[41]. Thus, while the matter of who, precisely, can be considered French is a much broader question than we can hope to address in this dissertation, the role of language in that topic cannot be ignored. Instead, I argue that this question is typically addressed in one of a few prominent themes – most typically by invoking historically significant French individuals or by emphasizing fundamental ideologies of the French Republic.

In this sense, many of the same chronotopes discussed in the previous chapter are again invoked; chronotopes of nostalgia, in particular, are frequently significant points of orientation in the discourse from those speakers who want to emphasize French-ness through ties to an idealized French language. These chronotopes are frequently invoked by reference to particular historical figures or events that, in effect, become shorthand for their particular period – consider authors like Molière and Hugo – and thus represent the idealized *language* that the speaker believes to be associated with that time period. These likewise appear with less concrete figures who are nonetheless strongly associated with French national memory, like the French Resistance during World War II. By invoking figures such as these, speakers can position

[41] Anecdotally, many English speakers express surprise at the ways French is codified (e.g. by the Académie française) and linked to the French State; though the use of English is certainly closely tied to the state in the United Kingdom (see e.g. Lodge, 1991), and it does factor into nationalist ideologies in some anglophone societies – for example, the English-Only movement in the United States – the *form* of English is less rigidly controlled than we see with languages like French.

themselves on the side of the “right” French language and/or identity; any critical analysis of the actual, historically documented contributions of those figures or their language is entirely secondary to the image that the speaker seeks to convey. Instead, such discussion is preempted by the notion that questioning this ideology is effectively destroying the “roots” of French society – that, by allowing society to move farther from the ideals set by these figures, we are creating a new society far removed from the ideals of old.

While invocation of chronotopes through references to figures like these is a common strategy among those who claim to address the concept of “Frenchness”, it is certainly not the only strategy. Other speakers invoke specific ideals of the French Republic – particularly those that surround the ideal of a unified, singular nation with shared ideals and practices. Ideologies favoring monolingualism are not uncommon here; the assimilationist norms so typical of French language policy (cf. König, 2002) actively encourage all French citizens to speak French[42], and proficiency in languages other than French is not necessarily valued. In this sense, even the term *bilingual* can be used pejoratively. Relatedly, the French Republic does not consider race to be a relevant social category, making discussions of racial issues in France difficult (see e.g. LaBreck, 2021). However, this has not prevented racial issues from appearing in the data here, frequently in contexts relating to the perceived “destruction” of a unified national character.

The next section of this chapter addresses the ways in which national history and myth are invoked in order to claim a shared identity through language. The sections that follow will address the ways in which the strong national ideologies discussed above are invoked, particularly in light of recent discussions about race and the ways in which racism appears in French society. I will conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of how these discourses relate

[42] Anyone applying for French citizenship must demonstrate proficiency in the French language; current policy can be found at https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F11926

to the notion of the "ideal French speaker" – and, in turn, its ideologically opposed "bad" French speaker – and how they can inform our understanding of authority.

8.1 The "Great Authors" and French national character

Chronotopes of nostalgia, as discussed in Chapter 7, emphasize a frequently idealized past; data presented in the previous chapter demonstrate that this is certainly the case here. Beyond offering an ideological perspective to which a speaker can orient, however, these chronotopes also help inform our understanding of the ways in which French national identity is constructed. The specific figures cited by speakers, in particular, offer a picture of the highly idealized figures of personhood (Agha, 2007) that inhabit these past time-spaces, with the understanding that these figures are those whom current French speakers should emulate. It is perhaps unsurprising that many of these are literary figures – such as the oft-cited figures of Molière and Hugo demonstrate – as these authors' works represent some of the most visible and celebrated examples of French linguistic creativity. However, the literary *production* of these authors is not necessarily the primary focus; individual French speakers do not necessarily consider whether the language these authors use represents modern French *as it is commonly used* but rather the mere fact that these authors used Standard Written French. This variety is thus mythologized as the language of the "greats" – rather than representing actual usage, it is emblematic of a particular image of France, one to which casual speakers should aspire.

This is, again, especially apparent in references to the "great authors": in citing figures like Molière, a speaker is less interested in the reality of the variety Molière used than in the importance placed on Molière as a representative of France's well-established literary canon. Consider again example (46) from Twitter, as cited in Chapter 7, and other similar tweets:

(46) Je suis choqué et outré ! #ReformeOrthographe Molière et Baudelaire etc. doivent se retourner dans leur tombe

I'm shocked and outraged! #ReformeOrthographe Molière and Baudelaire etc. must be rolling over in their graves.

(47) R.I.P. la langue de Molière #ReformeOrthographe

R.I.P. the language of Molière #ReformeOrthographe

It is worth noting, again, that Molière and Baudelaire were active several centuries apart, and they did not, therefore, use the same written standard. Nonetheless, Molière is generally considered to be a similarly strong influence on Modern French as Shakespeare on Modern English; in citing a figure such as Molière, then, this Twitter user is making a statement less about the kind of French Molière himself used in his plays and more about referencing a figure whose work is now emblematic of the French language overall. That Molière, who was most productive in the decades immediately following the establishment of the Académie française, would not have used the same *orthographic* standards as those used today is ultimately irrelevant: because of his widely accepted status as a Great Author and his influence on Modern French, he represents the ideal of Standard (written) French. As such, the linguistic content of his works matters far less than his image as an important figure in the history of the language.

Statements like this appear frequently, as individuals offer examples of these authors in support of their image of the ideal speaker. They are not necessarily individually named:

(48) Stop au nivellement par le bas ! Préservons la richesse de notre langue, celle de nos plus grands auteurs ! #Jesuiscirconflexe

Stop the race to the bottom! Let's preserve the richness of our language, that of our greatest authors! #Jesuiscirconflexe

This tweet is another example of the ways in which orthography – as a means of *conveying* language – is conflated with language *itself*, as noted in the interview with Mr. Hoedt and Mr. Piron discussed in Chapter 7. The use of #jesuiscirconflexe clearly situates this tweet within the current discussion, so the “richesse de notre langue” this user mentions can only refer to the older, pre-*rectification* orthography. Regardless of whether this is a reasonable position to take *linguistically*, this user holds up the unnamed “greatest authors” as the ultimate authority on the language. The implication here is these unnamed authors should be seen as the authority on what constitutes Standard French, and it is therefore the duty of any good French speaker to defer to their expertise and maintain their standard.

That these speakers consistently cite authors of the well-established literary canon as examples of “good” French also serves to establish their own credentials as educated French speakers. Given the association between proficiency in standard French and membership in French society, it is perhaps unsurprising that those who want to emphasize the image of a particular French as the “right” French would also position themselves as proficient speakers of that French. By emphasizing authors that they would likely have read in school, these same speakers are able to position themselves as good speakers who have done their work. This is evident in examples such as these:

(49) La grenouille 🐸 de #LaFontaine en perd son "Nénuphar " pour un "Nénufar" plus fade...😭😭😭 #JeSuisCirconflexe ...🙀🙀

The frog 🐸 of #LaFontaine loses his “Nénuphar” [lily pad] for a blander “Nénufar” 😭😭😭 #JeSuisCirconflexe ...🙀🙀

(50) En Espagne on fête 400 ans mort de #Cervantes, au RU idem pour #Shakespear [sic], et en France on supprime l’accent circonflexe #JeSuisCirconflexe

In Spain, they're celebrating 400 years since the death of #Cervantes, the same for Shakespeare in the UK, and in France they're eliminating the circumflex #JeSuisCirconflexe

The comparison in (50) is particularly telling here; by contrasting the veneration for Cervantes and Shakespeare in their home countries to the *rectifications*, this speaker is making a similar case for the need to venerate authors such as Molière in France. In so doing, this speaker explicitly juxtaposes the veneration of these Great Authors outside France with current events, specifically positioning the French authorities (in this case the Ministry of Education) on the "wrong" side of the debate instead of treating these celebrated French authors in the same ways France's European neighbors treat their own. The speaker in (49) similarly positions the *rectifications* as something that is fundamentally in opposition to the French literary identity; in addition to being an established part of the French literary canon, fabulist La Fontaine is also responsible for many stories French children might hear[43]. The frog to which this speaker refers is most likely the frog in the La Fontaine story "La grenouille qui se veut faire aussi grosse que le boeuf" (usually simply called "The Frog and the Ox" in English). Interestingly, the word *nénuphar*/*nénufar* does not appear in the actual text of this fable; rather, the speaker here is most likely simply referring to illustrated editions commonly depicting the frog sitting atop a lily pad. In this case, the attachment to this idea is so strong that the speaker is building their argument entirely on an erroneous recollection of a story they read as a child; by citing this example, the speaker is demonstrating the power the specific *idea* of this story holds rather than the reality of the text.

[43] La Fontaine's fables are generally familiar to many children outside the francophone world as well, as his work is largely a collection – and translation into French – of the works of classical fabulists like Aesop and Phaedrus.

These speakers thus demonstrate a particular ideal for French speakers: not merely that these Great Authors represent a particular *variety* of Standard French to which these speakers should aspire but also the role of the *well-educated speaker*. It is important to note that the authors cited here are always well-established parts of the school curriculum; the most recent author cited in any of these tweets is Albert Camus – writing in the mid-20th century – whose works also feature in the scholastic literary canon. As a result, it is not sufficient to say that a speaker is literate in Standard French but that a speaker is familiar with the type of literature that one is exposed to in schools; reading itself is not sufficient, as one must read the *correct* works. This narrow selection of all French-language literary output is effectively a means of gatekeeping: those without access to the same education, for whatever reason, are thus excluded from the image of the "good" French speaker. The ideal of the good French speaker is thus someone who not only uses the correct Standard French – in writing, in this case – but one who has at least a superficial understanding of these Great Authors and their (perceived or actual) impact on the language.

8.2 *La Résistance* as an image of the ideal speaker

Though far less common than appeals to the authority of these "great authors", a similarly historical perspective that has arisen in both Twitter and televised media contexts is the image of the French Resistance (of the World War II era). Though appearing less frequently in the data here, this is a particularly noteworthy example because it is an that is firmly rooted in French national consciousness (cf. Moran and Waldron, 2002). To understand why this image holds such impact for French speakers, it is important to remember that France was not merely occupied by Nazi German forces starting in 1940 but that much of the country – particularly the southern and

southeastern parts – was led by the collaborationist Vichy regime. In the years following the end of the war, France, like many European nations, had to grapple with the role collaborationist factions; emphasizing the role of the *Résistance* (including such figures as Charles de Gaulle and Jean Moulin as well as groups like the *maquis* – essentially guerilla fighters – and de Gaulle's Free French forces) has become one way to distance the current French Fifth Republic and its immediate predecessor from the Vichy-based *État français* established after the fall of the Third Republic in 1940. In the years since then, the *Résistance* has remained a common symbol of French national pride, invoked for a wide range of purposes, so long as the goal is to emphasize a positive kind of national identity (but particularly as a continuation of the fight for *liberté* that began with the Revolution).

The *Résistance* is thus frequently invoked to create or maintain the image that one is fighting against tyranny in some form. Given its sociopolitical and historical value, it is perhaps unsurprising that speakers decrying the *rectifications* might invoke this image in order to position themselves as *true* French speakers; by aligning themselves with the *Résistance*, these speakers draw clear parallels between those advocating orthographic change and totalitarian governments. The clearest example of this on Twitter comes from French military historian Éric Anceau, who says:

(51) Parce que nous avons tous l'âme de résistants, nous disons #JeSuisCirconflexe

Because we all have the soul of the Resistance, we say #JeSuisCirconflexe

This tweet, accompanied by an image of the French flag, clearly positions the speaker in opposition to the *rectifications*, but also makes interesting claims about a broader group. It is unclear who Mr. Anceau includes in the *nous* and *tous* 'we all' here; the most reasonable assumption, based on the ways in which the image of the *Résistance* is used, is that he is

including all French citizens. That is, because the *Résistance* is frequently invoked to represent the "soul" of the French people – as those who fight against tyranny – it is likely his goal here is to create the understanding that the majority of French speakers actively oppose the *rectifications*. Moreover, he is fairly explicitly arguing that the "good" French speaker is one who fights *against* the tyranny of the Académie and the Ministry of Education in order to preserve this ideal. Because of Mr. Anceau's position as a public intellectual, he has a sufficiently large Twitter following that this tweet was shared more frequently than many others expressing similar ideas; moreover, his status as a reasonably well-known historian likely had some impact on the way in which this statement was received.

This rhetoric also appears in televised contexts; an episode of the France 5 program *La Grande Librairie* featured authors and *académiciens* Amin Maalouf and Erik Orsenna in discussion of the *rectifications*. During this discussion, Mr. Orsenna offers the term "les résistants du circonflexe" ('the Circumflex Resistance'); this term was apparently sufficiently apt that the official YouTube channel for *La Grande Librairie* offered, as its sole description of this segment[44], the phrase

(52)... Erik Orsenna propose même d'être "les résistants du circonflexe"!

... Erik Orsenna proposes to be "the Circumflex resistance"!

While Mr. Orsenna seems to be joking in his comment – all of the men featured in the video laugh – this is nonetheless a clear example of the ways in which the image of the *Résistance* is used: even in jest, the *Résistance* is a sufficiently potent image that it does not seem strange for him to make the reference. Though it is difficult to say for certain whether there is any sincerity in this otherwise light-hearted comment, the idea that someone might claim to represent the

[44] Video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0q_THeM-2jo

image of the *Résistance* in the context of the *rectifications* is clearly not unexpected. Thus, the positioning of the ideal speaker in these terms is sufficiently comprehensible that, regardless of Mr. Orsenna's intent, his audience understands the meaning and can, presumably, recognize a particular figure in these remarks.

As an extension of the image of the *Résistance* in particular, the idea of the French People determining the acceptable standard – instead of that standard being determined by a particular government body – is also cited directly in several instances. Mr. Girard, in the debate considered in Chapter 7, makes this point explicitly clear when he argues that "le gouvernement peut pas décider de la langue française" ('the [Hollande] administration cannot decide on [what constitutes] the French language'), with the implication that it is the French *people* who determine what is Standard French. This idea, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, is that it is indeed the people who have the authority; interestingly, this notion also echoes popular images in the French Republic, including both the *Résistance* and the Revolutionary ideals of resisting authoritarianism (though, it should be noted, none of the data I collected indicate any overt comparisons between the absolute monarchy of the *Ancien régime* and the power of the Hollande government in adopting the *rectifications*). In short, though this particular rhetoric is not the most common, it is clearly sufficiently powerful – historically and socio-politically – that the use of the *Résistance* to encourage opposition to the *rectifications* is not surprising to other speakers, and it is a clear reference to an idealized image of a good French speaker.

8.3 "Bilingual" as a four-letter word

Specific references to nationally significant figures of the Revolution and the *Résistance* generally play to the French republican ideals of *liberté*, *égalité*, and *fraternité*. Indeed, the ideals

expressed in the official motto of the République française trace directly to the goals of the revolutionaries – from 1789 through the less famous revolutions in the 19th century – and it is easy to see how they might be extended through the *Résistance* as well. However, one ideal that is generally considered to be important without being explicitly stated is the idea of *unité*. The notion of national unity is one that is frequently invoked as a goal in many of France's policy positions; indeed, this concept is clearly embraced in Article I of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, adopted in October 1958[45]:

(53) La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l'égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d'origine, de race ou de religion.

France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion.

This is a fairly direct statement: France is an *indivisible* republic, and equality among citizens is one of its most basic principles. The idea of national unity, though not explicitly conveyed, is nonetheless situated as an essential construct; emphasizing any differences that threaten this idea of national unity is generally frowned upon. This can lead to some tension when considering things like the principle of *laïcité* 'secularism', which is a similarly fundamental concept in the French Republic; for example, overt symbols of religious affiliation are generally not tolerated, though in practice this has frequently been directed at garments worn by Muslim women (see, for example, a recent decision[46] banning the burkini, a full-body swim garment worn by some

[45] This is the current constitution of the French Republic; it has been amended many times over the years, but the basis of the text remains unchanged. It should be noted that the National Assembly voted unanimously in 2018 to remove the word "race" from this article (see Bessone, 2021) but this change has not yet reached the point where it is an official part of the text; the most recent official English translation of the Constitution is available at https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/sites/default/files/as/root/bank_mm/anglais/constiution_anglais_oct2009.pdf

[46] https://apnews.com/article/religion-france-government-and-politics-3838c7a4166549b6721cd7cfd29a9a33

Muslim women; see also Dearden, 2016). Though the official reason for these bans is generally the protection of the state and of individual women against particular types of extremist views – which also violate the principles of both unity and *laïcité* – in practice, the bans are often accused of violating the right of these women to freely express their own religion. While the discussion of the so-called burkini ban – and similar events in earlier years – is not directly relevant to the topic at hand, it is an example of the ways individual practices may be condemned in the process of upholding an image of a unified French people.

One of the more relevant ways this appears is in discussions of language practices among individual French people. While bi- and multilingualism do not have any kind of *inherent* morality to them – that is, any value attached to the mere fact of speaking one, two, or many languages does not exist outside of the social structures that encourage one of these systems – some predominantly monolingual societies tend to look differently at those speakers who speak multiple languages because they *choose* to do so than at those who grow up in bilingual environments (see e.g. Rosa, 2015; Rosa and Flores, 2017). In other words, someone who already speaks the dominant local language as their primary language and *chooses* to learn a second (or third, etc.) language is viewed more positively, in many cases, than those speakers who grew up speaking the local language as well as a minority or foreign language, or, especially, who learned the dominant local language as a second language. This is not unique to France; indeed, a widely shared image addressing the language skills of young Princess Charlotte of the United Kingdom comments on this same idea in Figure 8.1:

Figure 8.1 A widely shared Twitter response to the Daily Mirror story about Princess Charlotte (identifying information removed)

Examples like this show not only that those from privileged backgrounds are more frequently celebrated for their multilingual abilities than are those of less privilege; they also demonstrate that this is a fact of which many casual speakers are aware.

To situate this discussion within the broader discussion of France's approach to national cultural unity, it is important to remember that the *sole* official language in France is French. Even in regions – like Alsace, Brittany, or Corsica – that have a distinct local language which has been the subject of varying degrees of revitalization, central government support is minimal. Indeed, while some minority languages – most notably Breton, a language closely related to Welsh and spoken in the region of Bretagne (Brittany) – have seen some support from municipal, departmental, or regional governments, the French State does not actively support *any* languages aside from French. As such, the expectation is that everyone will speak French; as addressed above, any application for naturalization as a French citizen requires moderate-to-high proficiency in French, and the government's interest in an individual's language abilities and practices generally ends there.

In practice, this leads to some interesting discussions of the value of bilingualism. As France is officially a monolingual state with strong ideologies toward a shared national identity,

the same kinds of multilingual practices that are seen as less valuable in other contexts can be treated as an active detriment to French society. This notion appears with some regularity in Twitter comments regarding mono-/ bilingualism; the idea that the people who "need" these spelling changes are those who are bilingual implies that these same speakers somehow lack the intelligence needed to acquire the older standard spelling. This is evident in some tweets like (54), which echo similar ideas to others above:

(54) Deux orthographes ? Celle des pauvres réformée et celle des élites qui conserveront l'ancienne ! #JeSuisCirconflexe #ReformeOrthographe

Two spellings? The reformed one of the poor and that of the elites who will maintain the old [one]! #JeSuisCirconflexe #ReformeOrthographe

This example does not explicitly address the *rectifications* in terms of multiple *languages*, but the speaker does establish a distinct *class* divide among language abilities. This is not an uncommon discourse when addressing the ways different language abilities are treated in France.

For still clearer examples, consider the following:

(55) #RéformeOrthographe Paradoxalement, le français de souche pourra se distinguer en utilisant l'accent circonflexe. #JeSuisCirconflexe #Bilangue

#RéformeOrthographe Paradoxically, the native French will be able to distinguish themselves by using the circumflex. #JeSuisCirconflexe #Bilangue

(56) La #RéformeOrthographe expliquée à ma fille quand Rennes s'écrit R.O.A.Z.H.O.N., merci bien !

Explain the #RéformeOrthographe to my daughter when Rennes is spelled R.O.A.Z.H.O.N., thank you very much!

(57) #ReformeOrthographe je l'ose ? Bientôt "français" étant trop difficile à écrire avec la cédille nous écrirons ... arabe ...

#RéformeOrthographe do I dare? Soon "français" [French], being too difficult to write with the cedilla, we will write …Arabic/Arab…

(58) Najat veut appliquer la #ReformeOrthographe, car elle est nulle. Elle agit pour ses compatriotes binationaux

Najat [Vallaud-Belkacem] wants to enforce the #ReformeOrthographe because she's useless. She's acting for her binational compatriots.

These examples convey a wide range of specific ideas, but they all convey a similar one: that the *rectifications* are more or less equivalent to a new language, and that new language exists at the expense of French. Thus, the ability to use this "new language" is detrimental to French society. Example (55) conveys a similarly classist ideology as does (54); the speaker here suggests that the "real" French people will be able to distinguish themselves by maintaining an old spelling system. In practice, the expression "Français de souche" is not ideologically neutral; while the French Constitution treats all French citizens as equally French, discussions of native versus non-native French people still exist. The *Français de souche* are, in this formulation, the only *real* people, as they are the (white European) people native to France, as opposed to the *Français de papier* or the *Français d'origine étrangère*. The term is especially strongly associated with extreme right-wing politics, which argue in favor of limiting citizenship to those of "true" French heritage (cf. Le Bras, 1998). In making this statement, this Twitter user is not merely asserting that the *language* is now split into two forms, but also that this linguistic division will effectively be a shibboleth for the "real" French people.

Examples (56) and (57) deal instead with existing non-French languages, but they do so

in very different ways. The speaker in (56) makes reference to the status of Breton in Rennes, the capital of Brittany; in Breton, the city is called Roazhon (pronounced [ˈrwɑːõn]). It is difficult to say, without more context, *exactly* what this speaker intends; nonetheless, it strongly appears as though the speaker is citing the "bizarre" (that is, non-French) spelling of the name as an example of something that should be fixed instead of the current *rectifications*. This particular user could reasonably be assumed not to have any personal attachment to Brittany or to the Breton language; in fact, this user's available metadata shows that the tweet comes from Caen, in neighboring Normandy. Note that this does not preclude the possibility that this individual is indeed a Breton speaker and is making a (perhaps well-intentioned) joke about the difficulties in learning to spell Breton – which, as a Celtic language, differs substantially from French in its orthographic standard. On the other hand, the assumption that this speaker, in neighboring region that would be familiar with the use of both French and Breton in official signage, is making a more pejorative statement about the use of non-French languages is equally likely.

The speaker in (57) makes an even more pointed statement; while France's policy toward race is one of official colorblindness (more on this topic in section 8.4), many French people of color indicate that this is not always true in practice (cf. Tetreault, 2015; etc.). Because of its colonial history in North Africa, however, French people of North African and Middle Eastern descent form a large racial/ethnic group in France (precisely how large is uncertain, as French law prohibits data about race from being collected in censuses and the like). This speaker is thus making a clear statement about who they feel to be the real source of the difficulties in learning French; it is possible they are specifically referring to Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem (herself of Moroccan and Algerian descent) or to those of Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) descent in France more generally. It is also unclear, grammatically speaking, whether this speaker is

addressing *language* or *ethnicity/nationality* – or both – in this case, since the word *français* can function as both an adjective (in the same way similar demonyms work in English) or as a noun, in the sense of *le Français* 'the French language', or *les Français* 'the French people'. The same is true of the French word *arabe*, which can be translated to refer to the Arab ethnicity or to the Arabic language; since this tweet is ultimately a metalinguistic commentary, it lacks the normal grammatical features to determine exactly how the speaker is using the terms. Regardless, this tweet demonstrates a clear discursive link between the idea of a "need" for simplified spelling and people of MENA descent.

It is not unusual for language to be used as a proxy for ideas that are considered taboo in polite conversation (see e.g. Lippi-Green, 1997); it is thus possible – perhaps even likely – that the speaker in (57) is actually talking less about the distinction between the French and Arabic languages but rather about the people perceived to use those languages. This is made still clearer in example (58): by explicitly tying Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem to this notion of "binationality", this Twitter user is making a clear statement about *which nations* are considered part of that "binationality". That is, Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem is useless as Minister specifically because she is clearly only trying to make things easier for those like her, of MENA descent, who are thus not *really* French. Her contributions are entirely discounted by the fact that, by working to assist those who are *not sufficiently French* – because they are perceived to be orienting to a different national identity at the same time – she is *herself* not sufficiently French. In this way, the language used to discuss the *rectifications* is a clear proxy for a larger conversation about who is "really French" and who is not.

8.4 Race, "colorblindness", and the "real" French speaker

It is clear, through examples like some of those above, that Lippi-Green's (1997) discussion of language-as-proxy is especially relevant to our purposes here. Though France's official policy regarding race is, essentially, that race does not exist, it is nonetheless evident that a number of French speakers, particularly on Twitter, have no qualms about making implicitly or explicitly racist remarks. This underscores a fundamental issue facing French society, particularly in terms of its national identity: if, ideologically, everyone is first and foremost *French* – rather than using hyphenate terms like Asian American, Afro-Caribbean, or the like – then how does one account for the fact that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds *very clearly* experience life differently than do their white, obviously European fellows? A discussion of the particular racial and ethnic issues at play here is far beyond the scope of this project; indeed, a great many scholars are working to address that question directly (see e.g. Tetreault, 2013; 2015; Bessone, 2021).

What these data *do* show, however, is that the categories of race and ethnicity are still salient in the discussion of language's role in creating a particular national identity *even when* they are not labeled as such. Examples like (57) and (58) above clearly demonstrate this, as the speakers here do not hesitate to make statements directly critical of those of a particular ethnolinguistic background. Once again echoing Lippi-Green (1997), it is clear that language becomes a convenient smokescreen for the "forbidden" topic of race: thus, speakers are able to position presumably racist attitudes toward the *people* who they claim use these language varieties as subordinate to the mere fact that the *language* is the stated problem. By making the aesthetics, purity, or even the very survival of the French language the focus, these speakers position those people with differing language practices outside the category labeled "French".

Because no official numbers exist regarding the percentages of French people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds, individual actors may freely inflate or reduce them in order to accomplish their own goals (see LaBreck, 2021, for a quick overview of the issue in collecting these data). This means, for example, that far-right political movements like the Rassemblement National (*National Rally*, a party currently led by Marine le Pen and formerly known as the Front National) are able to overstate the number of racial minorities in France – without explicitly using racialized terminology – in order to promote generally racist and/or xenophobic viewpoints. Exactly how often this happens is likewise beyond the scope of this project, but the possibility should illustrate the difficulties that arise when one, for whatever reason, ignores a socially relevant category. Indeed, Bessone (2021) offers a discussion of the potential motivations behind removing the word "race" from Article 1 of the Constitution (see (53) above); regardless of the motivation, it ultimately becomes a form of willful ignorance to the fact that race clearly *is* a salient feature.

The examples cited above demonstrate a slightly less overt discussion of race; while it is clear to whom the speaker in (58) refers as *compatriotes binationaux*, the speaker retains some plausible deniability by never explicitly stating who they are criticizing. On the other hand, some speakers make their meaning much more explicit:

(59) Où est le problème : il suffit de s'adapter, hein

Nénuphar => nénufar => rafunén => زنبق الماء. #ReformeOrthographe #Najat

What's the problem: we just need to adapt, eh,

Nénuphar => nénufar => rafunén => زنبق الماء. #ReformeOrthographe #Najat

(60) Pensées aux ayatollah de l'orthographe qui cassent les couilles à tout le monde, pensant avoir l'argument ultime #ReformeOrthographe

Thinking of the ayatollahs of spelling who are breaking everyone's balls thinking they have the ultimate argument #ReformeOrthographe

(61) Voltaire insulté par une Arabe illettrée. #ReformeOrthographe

Voltaire is insulted by an illiterate Arab (f.) #ReformeOrthographe

The first example here, (59), is generally quite similar to the examples in (57) and (58). This speaker is suggesting a direct line between the established *nenuphar* spelling and simply saying 'waterlily' in (pseudo) Arabic[47]. While obviously an example of a slippery-slope argument – in the sense of fallacious logic – the speaker here is clearly trying to suggest that there is a direct link between the change from *ph* to *f* and simply switching to Arabic. This speaker is effectively arguing that this change has been made *exclusively for the benefit of Arabic speakers*; indeed, the final use of the Arabic script is itself sufficient to establish some sort of difference between what this speaker considers "good" (that is, French) and "bad" (not French, but especially Arabic). It is interesting to note the use of *verlan* as a midpoint of this progression; *verlan* is a type of slang, typically, though not exclusively, associated with youth of color in the Parisian suburbs, in which syllables are inverted (*verlan* is itself a *verlan*-ized version of *l'envers,* 'reverse'). By including this step, the speaker in (59) is also tying in groups whose position in French society also vary; *verlan* was first popularized among children born to immigrants *to* Metropolitan France *from* its colonies in North Africa, who have thus expressed a lack of belonging in either culture (see e.g. Tetreault, 2015). By highlighting a "natural progression" between these language practices and forms, this speaker is in fact indicating that both those who primarily speak Arabic (or other languages, presumably) *and* those who were born and raised in France to immigrant parents are part of a perceived problem – that they are the reason why the French language is changing (for

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[47] Note that this may or may not be the proper term in Arabic; Google Translate, for example, also gives الزنبق المائي.

the worse).

Examples (60) and (61) are still more explicit. By calling those advocating the revised spelling *ayatollahs*, the speaker in (60) not only suggests some sort of absolutist rule but firmly situates it in the Middle East. It is not clear whether the speaker is aware of – or cares about – the distinction between Persian and Arabic; the fact that, for many Westerners, the term *ayatollah* has become associated with fundamentalist authoritarianism in the Middle East is sufficient to make this speaker's point. It is also unclear exactly to what this speaker is referring by "the ultimate argument"; this may refer to the stated goal of simplifying a confusing system, or it could potentially refer to something else. The significance of this tweet, however, is the direct link between those in favor of the *rectifications* (presumably including Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem) and the term *ayatollah* – regardless of the speaker's intent in the rest of the statement, it is clear that they see the Ministry as overstepping, and the choice of a Middle Eastern title for the person *leading* that change is likely not an accident. The speaker in (61), meanwhile, makes their point quite clear. Because of France's colonial history in North Africa and its general attitude toward race, "arabe" is a loaded term when applied to a person. Choosing to call Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem (presumably) *une arabe illettrée* is thus disrespectful on several levels. This Twitter user, however, does not hesitate to use this tweet to compare Voltaire (another of the Great Authors) and his influence on the French language to the perceived "illiteracy" of Ms. Vallaud-Belkacem or, by extension, anyone who might otherwise benefit from the adoption of the *rectifications*.

As a final note, some statements involving race do not make explicit reference to any particular racial or ethnic minority but instead rely on more complex sociohistorical references. Consider this final example:

(62) #ReformeOrthographe #PS #décadence nivellement par le bas pour que tout le monde se mette au niveau de la racaille

#ReformeOrthographe #PS #decadence a race to the bottom so that everyone can be at the same level as the riffraff

Indeed, this statement makes no overt reference to race or ethnicity. Rather, it seems more critical of the Socialist Party government (Parti Socialiste, represented here by the hashtag #PS). The "race to the bottom" language is quite familiar too, as that expression has appeared numerous times. What makes this example noteworthy is the use of the word *racaille* – while the term "riffraff" (as it is usually translated into English) may have some vaguely classist undertones, the French term *racaille* is now, for many minority groups in France, explicitly tied the events surrounding the 2005 riots in and around Paris. Future president Nicolas Sarkozy, at that point the Interior Minister, was heavily criticized for his harsh rhetoric concerning the rioters (see Rotman, 2005) – largely disenfranchised youth, mostly of color, and who were living in some of the poorest suburbs of the national capital. Among the terms used was *racaille*; use of this term for these rioters was generally considered inflammatory even at the time, and the term has become linked to the ways Sarkozy and the French police dealt with minority youth in France. Using such a term here recalls Sarkozy's hardline politics in response to civil unrest; regardless of the speaker's intent, it is difficult to separate the use of *racaille* here from the highly publicized events of 2005.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate two things: first, that race and racism clearly *are* something to be discussed in France, and second, that racialized language is a substantial component of the way many of these speakers construct the image of the "bad French speaker". The first issue is, again, somewhat beyond the scope of this paper. On the other hand, the way in

which racialized language is used to define a negative here is quite informative of the ways in which race, even subconsciously, fits into a popular image of a French speaker, and, by extension, who *is French*. That is, given the clear links between language practices and national identity – demonstrated both by the data here and by numerous previous studies concerning French language ideologies – it is rational to conclude that language may be one of the *primary* means of determining who is indeed French (particularly in lieu of the fact that direct discussion of race does not happen in polite French society). Thus, while who actually *is* French may remain a question, Twitter users such as these offer clear illustrations of those who are *not*.

8.5 Racism, "woke" American ideals, and French identity

In the guise of a conclusion, I want to briefly address here a potentially complicating factor in opening direct discussions about the issues of race/ethnicity outlined above. The idea that discussions of race is an "American thing" is not new; Bleich (2001) offers a fairly concise overview of the ways in which France addressed race issues up to that point, and his overview clearly contrasts the French focus on hate *speech* with the more race-conscious policies enacted in places like the United States and Australia. This is not an exhaustive list (and it is clearly not meant to endorse any particular way of approaching race issues), but it demonstrates that the ways in which race is frequently addressed in the United States, for example, are not common in France. Wilson (2023) similarly outlines the difficulties many reporters and academics – particularly Americans – face when trying to address race issues in France.

That discussions of race are considered an "American thing" is an ideology present throughout much of French society. Critical Race Theory has become something of a bugaboo among the political right in the United States; some reactions have become almost comical, as a

Reuters poll recently demonstrated (Kahn, 2021). In this case, among those respondents who claimed familiarity with CRT, only *five percent* of respondents correctly answered all seven questions. This is significant here because CRT is one of several "woke American theories" that many French officials are warning *against* in France; Onishi (2021), for example, quotes French President Emmanuel Macron as warning against "certain social science theories entirely imported from the United States", while current Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer argues that "there's a battle to wage against an intellectual matrix from American universities".

How exactly this will affect discussions of race in France is difficult to say, and such a topic is similarly beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is curious to note the ways in which French leaders are positioning France relative to the United States in this scenario: French intellectual identity is presented as being under attack from American ideals. I instead address this topic for two simple reasons: first, it further explains why addressing the topic of race – in any capacity – is so complex in France. Secondly, it demonstrates another means by which French identity is constructed. In the same ways that French law require a certain amount of French language in advertising, on the radio, etc. (as discussed in Chapter 2) – which is often seen as a direct response to the encroachment of *English* – the perhaps hyperbolic reactions of French leaders to American academic theories and ideologies may also be a way of establishing French identity in the face of (actual or perceived) American dominance in global intellectual affairs. Exactly how this will extend to language studies in particular likewise remains to be seen, but it is nonetheless interesting that these academic notions, many of which the general public cannot define, have come to be seen as such an existential threat.

In short, French identity, particularly in terms of language, seems to rest largely on the creation and maintenance of both ideal figures – to emulate – and those figures' antitheses – to

avoid emulating at all costs. These ideals may be constructed through citation of culturally or socio-politically important figures – the *Résistance*, the great authors of the literary canon, or others. On the other hand, those figures who do not make sufficient effort to position themselves primarily as French speakers are therefore seen to be *bad* French speakers; the "need" for simplified orthography, or the perceived desire to use languages other than French, are thus representative of the anti-ideal. Much of the production of French national-linguistic identity lies in these oppositions.

CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has addressed a number of related topics in an effort to understand authority as a sociolinguistic construct, the ways in which national identity and standard language ideologies affect language reform efforts, and how these topics fit together in the context of public discourse. In an effort to make these links clear, I will return to the research questions elaborated in Chapter 1. These questions include:

1. How do speakers of French claim authority over the language – what are the (socio)linguistic correlates of authority, and how are these enacted?
2. How do French speakers enact and interact with the history and myths of France and a particular French?
3. What effects might these attempts to claim authority over language have on real-world language policy?
4. What can we learn about the relationship of language and public discourse through such debates?

I will thus organize concluding thoughts around these questions in the next sections. The final section will address shortcomings and future directions of research.

9.1 How do we claim authority?

As perhaps the central question of this study, many words have been devoted to this particular topic. Authority, in the context here generally refers to the *license to dictate meaning, sequences of events, and the like*. This is the same meaning that is assumed in many existing studies (e.g. Milroy and Milroy, 2000), but this study differs in its approach to how that authority is apportioned. As the data here demonstrate, authority is best understood as something that is

determined in a given interaction rather than something that exists independently. Authority arises not necessarily from external social influence or political power – though those may help – and although an interaction may *start* with one interlocutor in a position of greater *assumed* authority, this does not presume that authority will not shift during the interaction. Instead, authority is something that is constantly claimed and disputed, negotiated and renegotiated, between those involved in an interaction. This may change as speakers argue who has the requisite *knowledge* or the necessary *moral position* to claim authority over a given topic at a given time, and the center of authority may shift.

As outlined in Chapter 6, there do not appear to be specific linguistic *forms* necessary for claiming authority. That is, because authority is something that arises within the context of a given interaction, the forms involved will vary. Some commonalities do include basic expressions of dis/alignment or of correction (e.g. "obviously you don't know what happened"). On the other hand, because authority may be claimed in very different discursive ways in different interactions, it follows that the linguistic forms involved will depend on the discursive roles enacted.

On the other hand, there are a number of consistent *discourses* that appear as speakers in these interactions claim or contest authority. Data in Chapter 6 suggest that those who may rely on institutional power or social prestige *external to* the interaction at hand (e.g. members of the Académie, government officials) frequently make use of the most direct statements when claiming authority; presumably, those who may invoke that power/prestige may use their elevated position from the start in order to make claims without requiring additional authoritative support[48]. On the other hand, those who do not have the benefit of this external support for their

[48] Not to be confused, naturally, with *evidentiary* support – I assume here that the standards of evidence/proof remain the same regardless of one's authority. Any question to the contrary is beyond the scope of this project.

claims to authority typically offer more justification for their claims to authority; this justification will also vary depending on the claim being made.

Common discursive elements in claiming authority, as I have outlined, frequently involve appeals to *other* perceived sources of authority – influential authors, historically significant figures, or other socially or institutionally powerful voices. Individuals may thus make claims to authority by direct affiliation with other voices who are generally considered authoritative, though it follows logically that the authority of these figures may also be disputed. In a sense, authority of any of these figures only extends as far as the participants in a given interaction are willing to allow – thus, no single figure will *universally* be considered an authoritative voice. It is, however, in dis/aligning with particular figures *perceived* to be authoritative that individual speakers may bolster their claims to authority; when both parties in an interaction recognize this figure as an authoritative one, the speaker aligning with that figure is generally the one with the stronger claim. This is perhaps best exemplified by the status of the Académie française in these debates: despite being a socially prestigious and politically influential organization, many speakers have frequently refused to acknowledge the Académie's claims to authority. By extension, claims to authority based on alignment with the Académie may also be contested, as the other party refuses to recognize the Académie as an authoritative figure.

One other discourse that frequently arises – if obliquely – in this discussion of authority is the of who "owns" a language. This may, at first glance, appear to be the same question, but it ultimately turns on something far more basic, which Johnson (2000; etc.) frequently outlines: if a standard language variety is the variety spoken by no one in particular – and thus is spoken by everyone – does the standard language also *belong* to everyone? This, too, is a much larger question than the data here can adequately address, but it seems that many speakers in these data

base their claims to authority on the idea that the language belongs to its speakers and not to some institutional figure. This is the issue at the root of the grassroots prescriptivism I describe in Chapter 5 and in Drackley (2019); many claims to authority here rest on the idea that any French speaker may claim ownership of the French language.

I make no claim that this list is exhaustive; it is possible that additional means of claiming authority exist in additional data that was excluded from analysis here (i.e. approximately 180,000 additional tweets beyond the 2000 analyzed) or in data that were not collected (due to differing search terms, variations in publication date, etc.). Likewise, similar debates in other settings may reveal entirely different methods of claiming authority; it is not illogical to suggest that many of these are constrained by cultural norms, shared ideologies, and the like. We can, nonetheless, say that authority must be understood as something beyond a synonym for political power or agency; while those concepts certainly relate, the notion of authority is itself far more complex.

9.2 How are history and myth invoked?

The questions posed in the previous section underscore *why* history and myth may be invoked; historical figures and national myths may hold wide enough sway that they become an easy source of authority. In order *to* invoke these historical or mythological elements, speakers generally rely on chronotopes. I have described chronotopes of *nostalgia* and *progress* as two generally opposing, potentially mythologized time-spaces (and the attendant ideologies) to which speakers frequently orient; in situations where two or more speakers are actively disputing or debating the significance or value of a particular idea, speakers frequently invoke opposing chronotopes. This is especially apparent in the debate between Mr. Bachelay and Mr. Girard in

Chapter 7; because each speaker is attempting to claim authority to support *his* understanding of events – and because the two speakers have essentially opposite perspectives on the scenario in question – each speaker orients to a different chronotope.

This chronotopic orientation is significant in understanding how speakers position themselves and their claims – in the present moment – within a broader sociohistorical context. Some speakers will orient toward a backward-looking chronotope, one of nostalgia for some idealized past; this chronotope is most frequently invoked by those seeking to maintain the older orthographic standard, which is emblematic of a "better" past in some way (it should be noted that exactly what constitutes "better" generally depends on the specifics of the situation). On the other hand, other speakers will orient to a chronotope of progress by embracing the inevitability of change: while change is not inherently good, it is unstoppable, and in orienting to a chronotope of progress, speakers may instead express a desire to make the most of that change. This appears more commonly, in these debates, among those who favor the *orthographe révisée.*

Though orienting to more nebulous chronotopes is a very common way to position one's argument in a broader context, speakers may also make more specific references to particular historical figures or events. In the data here, these are generally historical figures who have been significant in French historical memory, such as well-respected authors, war heroes, or figures who have been influential in establishing the French Republic. It is perhaps useful to note that the distinction between history and myth is generally indistinct; many historical figures or events have become such an integral part of national identity that they are mythologized beyond their documented historical significance (though this is not unique to France).

In this regard, it is also important to address the image of the *ideal French speaker*. Though different speakers would likely describe this hypothetical figure in different ways, it is

clearly a salient figure for many. A number of speakers present in the data here use this idealized figure – one who is educated, highly proficient in spoken and written French, and who has made the *effort* to be so proficient – as a means of implying their own behavior to be "good"; for example, making the *effort* to learn to use a difficult standard is frequently presented as a behavior to emulate, whereas "needing" the revised (simplified) orthography is frequently described as a marker of a "bad" French speaker. Similarly, proficiency in languages other than French is only a good thing if French is the language that receives the most emphasis; the implication in these data that bilingualism is a *bad* serves to position those whose language practices do not match this supposed monolingual ideal as non-ideal speakers themselves. This position is most likely to have a negative impact on already marginalized communities.

9.3 How might this affect real-world policy changes?

It is important to note that policy changes are going to differ substantially depending on the national and linguistic context, the scope of the proposed changes, their perceived necessity, and other issues. However, one thing that does seem clear from the data here is that policymakers should not assume that changes they make will pass quietly. This is certainly not unique to this particular case (it has been demonstrated in numerous language policy debates before, e.g. Johnson, 2000), but social media, in particular, necessitates certain acknowledgements from policymakers.

In particular, social media seems to amplify the scope of the debates just as it amplifies the voices of those who might not normally be party to those debates. It is, effectively, a sort of town hall event for those who seek to make language policy decisions. This case is particularly interesting because the changes were initially proposed well before the appearance of social

media; the long gap between the adoption of the *orthographe rectifiée* in 1990 and the data from 2016 here essentially guarantees that some important nuances will be lost over time.

On the other hand, grassroots prescriptivism, as it was originally described by Heyd (2014) is something that largely relies on social media – this kind of widespread refusal to accept institutional authority does not readily occur without the means of reaching many people quickly and easily. This is, therefore, something that future policymakers should consider: given that social media is essentially omnipresent and that it allows anyone the opportunity to speak *directly* to those in power, is it possible to consider the ways a reform will be addressed on social media? Is that something that is *desirable*? The answers to these questions likely also vary by situation, but it is difficult to argue that they are questions worth asking, particularly in light of the ways social media (and Twitter in particular) have influenced politics in the past decade or so. Ultimately, many of these claims will require waiting for additional language planning projects.

9.4 Language ideologies and public discourse

The idea that social media has in some way "contaminated" public discourse is so common by now that it barely needs citation. Consider an entry from NPR in 2019 that called *disinformation* the word of the year[49] – this was based largely on the types of information conveyed across social media. The intervening years have likewise offered examples – in election denial in the United States and elsewhere, general handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the like – of situations in which social media is at least partially responsible for obscuring truth or of oversimplifying enormously complex issues. While this topic is itself far beyond the scope of the

[49] https://www.npr.org/2019/12/30/790144099/disinformation-is-the-word-of-the-year-and-a-sign-of-what-s-to-come

present study, it is nonetheless important to note that the influence of social media is unlikely to fade anytime soon, and platforms like Twitter and Facebook are now an integral part of the public conversation.

On the other hand, this may suggest that the role of the public intellectual – a type of figure strongly associated with France in general through thinkers such as Foucault and Sartre in the 20th century, even to the Enlightenment philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries – may be somewhat lessened. While I have no data to directly support this claim, it is important to note that the understanding of authority outlined here does somewhat complicate the notion of a public intellectual in general: since authority is something that is freely claimed and negotiated, and since social media allows these conversations to occur between speakers that might otherwise never interact, the position of the public intellectual is something that may, in some ways, seem anachronistic. It will be interesting to see how this figure evolves, and how public discourse is reshaped as the dynamics between politicians and media figures, intellectuals and figures in the arts, and the "average speaker" on social media change.

9.5 Limitations, directions for further study, and final notes

Chief among the limitations of this study is something I have thus far alluded to several times in this chapter: this is a study focused entirely on France, which has its own set of cultural norms and expectations. As such, we should not assume that similar reactions to similar language planning activities will occur in different contexts. While this is not a drawback to the present study (as this study proposed only to focus on France), it is nonetheless important to emphasize that the patterns found here do not necessarily replicate in other contexts. While I do believe that the overall conclusions I have drawn here, specifically with regard to authority, likely hold true

in other contexts, the exact means of claiming authority as such are most likely different. Thus, any study that hopes to address these more broadly would require a careful examination of similar corpus planning projects – and the reactions to those projects – in other environments.

It is also important to note that the means of gathering Twitter data necessarily precluded the ability to easily trace threads between users; as data were collected months after the event (and Twitter's API only allows users to search as far back as two weeks, even when using software like R to scrape as much material as possible), following such threads was more or less impossible. As such, I have made no claim about the trajectories of any specific discourses here – that is, when did each appear, when and why did they disappear, etc. – because this is not data available in my current set. It may be possible in the future to sort through the data for some of these additional details; understanding when and how distinct discourses appear and disappear could shed some light on the ways in which these discourses relate to one another and how some are able to become authoritative almost on their own whereas others are discounted.

Finally, it would be beneficial to examine the ways in which the *rectifications* have been taken up in the years since this initial debate – how have they been implemented, do Twitter users ever mention these debates, and when the topic does arise, is authority argued in the same ways? It seems likely that other social issues may be more pressing in the French education system at present – such as the aforementioned panic about American ideologies – such that concerns about the *rectifications* may have faded. Nonetheless, a follow-up study regarding the ways in which these issues have appeared more recently could potentially enhance our understanding of many of the issues outlined here.

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