

# THE REVITALISATION OF FRANCOPROVENÇAL: THE ROLE OF NEW SPEAKERS AND LINGUISTIC POLICY

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the revitalisation efforts of Francoprovençal, a lesser-known regional language spoken in parts of France, Italy, and Switzerland, by examining the influence of linguistic policy and the role of new speakers: those who have acquired Francoprovençal through revitalisation initiatives rather than typical familial transmission. Francoprovençal, characterised by its fragmented dialects, faces a unique challenge due to varying national policies that have impacted its decline differently in different countries. Drawing from extensive literature, including works by Christiane Dunoyer and Jonathan Kasstan, this research highlights the critical role of new speakers in the revitalisation process. However, it also reveals significant tensions between new and native speakers, particularly in France, where the lack of formal education in Francoprovençal exacerbates these challenges.

In Italy's Aosta Valley, the inclusion of Francoprovençal in the school curriculum has shown positive results, supporting the speaker population. The situation in Switzerland, though less documented, suggests a supportive stance from native speakers towards new speakers, but requires further governmental support of these revitalisation efforts.

The study concludes that while Francoprovençal is in a state of terminal decline, particularly in France and Switzerland, the support of new speakers, when adequately backed by local or national policies, could have an impact on its revitalisation, and the implementation of Francoprovençal in educational and social institutions is crucial for sustaining its use. Future research may consider gathering data from both new and native speakers of Francoprovençal across different dialects and countries to better understand their interactions and the potential for greater linguistic vitality.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Francoprovençal, Arpitan, new speakers, revitalisation, regional languages, minority languages, linguistic policy

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# The Revitalisation of Francoprovençal: The Role of New Speakers and Linguistic Policy

Elizabeth Pratt

## 1. Introduction

Following discussions with lecturers at Université Grenoble Alpes, I was made aware of the decline of a lesser-known regional language of France: Francoprovençal. This regional language in particular poses a unique challenge for researchers and speakers alike, as it is spoken across the intersecting areas of France, Italy, and Switzerland. As a result, variations in national linguistic policy have resulted in different dialects of Francoprovençal declining at different rates. This provides the basis for an analysis of the effects of linguistic policy on language decline, as well as the effects it has on the role of new speakers in revitalisation. This study draws on and assembles research sourced from websites and online literature, including research from Christiane Dunoyer, a researcher for the *Centre d'Etudes Francoprovençales* (CEFP), following an extensive conversation on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate the impact of new speakers on the revitalisation of Francoprovençal, and the extent to which linguistic policy can influence this impact.

Section 2 provides a background on Francoprovençal, including where its dialects are spoken and the estimated size of its speaker base. Section 3 then assesses the differences in historical and current linguistic policy across all three countries, bringing to light the rigorous attempts to suppress regional languages in France, compared to those of Italy and Switzerland, and the more recent measures taken by all three, but particularly Italy and the Aosta Valley, to protect Francoprovençal. Section 4 outlines current revitalisation efforts across all three countries. The role of new speakers is best documented in France, where tensions between new and native speakers pose a problem, and the lack of resources accorded to Francoprovençal compared to other regional languages, such as Occitan, is another cause for concern. Studies of Francoprovençal in Italy are frequently, and unsurprisingly, carried out in Italian, and with little knowledge of Italian, my research for this region was unfortunately limited to studies in French and English. This literature did, however, reveal that the tensions between both groups of speakers can exist more or less to the same extent across the border, but the inclusion of Francoprovençal in the school curriculum in the Aosta Valley supports new speakers in their learning. Finding literature for Switzerland posed the largest challenge; this area is perhaps the least documented, although research from Meune (2012) revealed that Swiss native speakers

of Francoprovençal are keen on the education of new speakers supported by constitutional protection on either a local or national level.

It is concluded that, currently, the overall picture is one of terminal decline for Francoprovençal. The impact of new speakers is simply not significant enough, particularly due to tensions between new and native speakers, and an unwillingness of native speakers to transmit the language to these groups. New speakers, would, however, likely have a larger impact if more strongly supported by either local or national linguistic policy, including the implementation of Francoprovençal in school curriculums and social spaces.

## 2. Background

Originating as a Gallo-Romance variety of Latin, Francoprovençal, also known as *Arpitan* or *Romand* (Switzerland), is a “highly-fragmented” collection of Romance varieties spoken across intersecting areas of France, Italy, and Switzerland (Kasstan, 2019: 2). Francoprovençal is first attested in 12<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts, but, according to Bec (1971) may have emerged as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of Francoprovençal speakers reside within the region of Rhone Alpes, the Aosta Valley, and the western cantons of Switzerland (Moseley and Nicolas, 2010).

The Linguasphere Observatory identifies six main dialectal groups of Francoprovençal, within which various other dialects exist. In France, they identify *Lyonnais*, spoken in the surrounding areas of Lyon, *Dauphinois*, spoken in Dauphiné, and *Savoyard* in Savoie and Haute-Savoie. *Franc-Comtois* is spoken across the Swiss-French border in Jura, and *Vaudois* in Vaud. In Italy, the *Valdôtain*, *Faetar-Cigliàje*, and *Piedmont* dialects are spoken in the Aosta Valley, Foggia, and Piedmont, respectively (Dalby, 2000).

Today, whilst many exist in France and Switzerland, most native speakers of Francoprovençal can be found in the Aosta Valley (Ethnologue, 2022). The regional dialect known as *patoué valdotèn* (Valdôtain) is the main dialect of Francoprovençal in Italy, spoken in the Aosta Valley. According to a sociolinguistic survey conducted by the *Fondation Émile Chanoux* in 2001, approximately 68,000 residents of the Aosta Valley, constituting about 58% of the population, speak it as either their primary or secondary language. The numbers in France and Switzerland are more difficult to estimate. Francoprovençal was not recognised as a language of France by the Ministry for Culture and Communication until 1999, and France does not collect census data on its regional languages (Kasstan, 2019). In 1989, Kloss et al. estimated a total of just 30,000 Francoprovençal speakers in France, whereas nearly 20 years

later in 2007, Moseley estimated 35,000 in just Savoie and Haute-Savoie alone. Figures for Switzerland aren't much clearer. Francoprovençal is absent from Article 70 of Switzerland's constitution, which recognises and grants status to the country's regional languages. According to UNESCO, Francoprovençal is endangered in Switzerland and France, and potentially endangered in Italy (Moseley and Nicolas, 2010). Given Francoprovençal's endangered status in Switzerland, and its smaller population, it is likely that the figures for Switzerland are lower than those of France. There is no certain number of total speakers across the three countries, but the most optimistic figures estimate between 120,000-200,000 which, at the lower end, would account for less than 0.1% of the total populations of Italy, France, and Switzerland combined (Salminen, 2007).

### **3. Review of Linguistic Policy**

The first political attempt for linguistic unity in France was the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts, signed by King Francois I in 1539. Articles 110 and 111, the only ones still in use today, mandated the use of French over Latin in all public documents (Trudeau, 1983). It wasn't, however, until nearly 250 years later that minority languages in France faced their first real threat. On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1794, the Abbé Grégoire, a French Catholic priest, presented his *Rapport sur la Nécessité et les Moyens d'Anéantir les Patois et d'Universaliser l'Usage de la Langue Française* (Report on the Necessity and Means to Annihilate the Patois and to Universalise the Use of the French Language) to the National Convention. Over a period of four years, the Abbé conducted a nationwide survey on regional languages in France, the results of which revealed that the majority of French people spoke one of 33 different dialects, which, he argued, needed to be eradicated, on the grounds that it excluded the lower classes from elite circles, who predominantly spoke in French (Grégoire, 1794). While these opinions were not unique to the Abbé, it was this report, in calling attention to the 'problems' posed by the linguistic diversity of the country, that acted as a catalyst for the decline of the regional languages of France (Dubray, 2017). In 1882, the Jules Ferry Laws established free, secular education throughout France, whilst prohibiting the use of regional languages in schools. As a result, even children within specific regional language communities spoke predominantly in French with their peers. Thus began the loss of regional languages as a means of communication outside the home (Singer, 1975). On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1994, a constitutional amendment, *La Loi Toubon* (The Toubon Law), was enacted, mandating the use of the French language in a wide range of areas. These included all workplaces, advertisements, government publications, commercial contracts, and broadcast audiovisual programs (Devine, 2019). While

evidently presenting a threat to regional languages, the main purpose of this law was to protect the French language from the ever-growing threat of anglicisation (Frath, 2014). However, at this moment in time, it resulted in the prohibition of regional languages in many social areas. French was now mandatory in schools, workplaces, and in many media spaces. As a result, it is unsurprising that many speakers of regional and minority languages in France are unable to maintain even the home as a space in which their languages can thrive, which, according to Romaine (2000: 189) “has been an important deciding factor in language shift”.

In 2008, however, as part of an effort to modernise the French constitution, Article 75, which recognised that the country’s regional languages form part of its constitutional heritage, was enacted, marking a significant step forward in acknowledging the linguistic diversity within France and understanding its cultural significance (Oakes, 2011). Constitutional recognition, however, does not reverse the decline of the languages it acknowledges. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages in enabling speakers to use them in both public and private life, was signed by France in 1999, but to this day has not been ratified. One suggested reason for this is the sheer number of regional languages spoken in France, it’s likely that over 70 languages would need to be covered, resulting in a complex implementation of the treaty (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 2024). France cannot therefore be said to be making a significant effort, at least on a political level, to protect or revitalise its regional languages.

Italy’s history of linguistic policy began relatively more recently. Italian was first declared the sole official language of Italy in 1925, and in 1934, Minister Ercole went one step further by excluding all languages but Italian from the national school curriculum (DeMartini, 2010). In 1947, however, Article 6 of The Constitution of the Italian Republic declared that: “The republic safeguards linguistic minorities by means of appropriate measures” (Constitution of The Republic, n.d.). Furthermore, after World War II, the Aosta Valley was awarded special autonomous status, providing the region with the power to make certain decisions, including linguistic policy, leading to local economic and population growth, according to Coluzzi (2007). In 1991, Francoprovençal was protected by a presidential decree, and in 1999, a national law was passed, requiring the protection and recognition of Francoprovençal as one of the official languages of the Aosta Valley, alongside Italian and French (Coluzzi, 2007). Furthermore, the Aosta government mandates that educators actively incorporate the Franco-Provençal language and culture into school curriculums, which in turn encourages the local

cultural groups, including libraries and theatre companies, to use and promote Valdôtain dialect (EUROPA, 2005).

In a 2012 study, Blackwood and Tufi analyse the differences between Italian and French linguistic policies. They begin by stating that bilingualism is no foreign concept to Italians, the majority of whom, they argue, speak at least two different languages or dialects in different contexts. France, on the other hand, is argued to be “one of the most striking examples of a modern nation state which seeks to enact [...] a language policy focused squarely on establishing and then maintaining France as a monolingual entity” (Spolsky, 2003: 63). Unlike France, which has consistently made political efforts to eradicate regional languages and protect and promote the French language, the Italianisation of Italy is, for the most part, a result of neglect of regional languages, rather than active attempts at suppression (Blackwood and Tufi, 2012).

Switzerland is the only of the three countries to ratify its regional languages, including Francoprovençal (or Romand), in the ECRML. It does not, however, recognise Francoprovençal as one of its official languages. Francoprovençal is spoken in the western cantons where Swiss French predominates, and dialects are typically spoken as a second language (Watts, 1988). Similarly to France and Italy, multilingualism is recognised by the Swiss constitution, although Francoprovençal remains absent from Article 70, which grants status to the country’s official languages, including those with smaller speakers bases, such as Romansch (Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, 1999). While there is no national effort to protect Switzerland’s regional languages, efforts exist on a cantonal level, particularly in the Canton of Valais, where the largest number of Swiss Francoprovençal speakers live. This includes the promotion of Francoprovençal in the media and social spaces (Diémoz, 2018).

#### **4. Revitalisation Efforts and New Speakers**

##### **4.1 New Speakers and Revitalisation Efforts in France**

The term most frequently used by linguists to refer to the language is *Francoprovençal*, but for most native speakers the language is often referred to as *patois*. New speakers typically refer to Francoprovençal as *Arpitan* (*arp* being a Francoprovençal word for *alp*). This glottonym was coined by Joseph Henriët, a schoolteacher living in the Aosta Valley in the 1970s, who also referred to the region in which the language was spoken as *Arpitanie* (Lecuyer, 2013). Despite *patois* being a popular glottonym for native speakers, it is important to note that the word itself,

originally meaning ‘vulgar gibberish’, was once a popular derogatory term to refer to any non-standard dialect in France and French-speaking Switzerland (OED, 2017). Even popular contemporary French dictionaries define patois as “perçu par ses utilisateurs comme inférieur à la langue officielle” (perceived by its own speakers as inferior to standard French) (Larousse, 2024). McDonald (1989: 53), however, observes that what were once universally referred to as 'patois' are now acknowledged as 'minority' and 'regional' languages, which, she argues, demonstrates a general shift towards more favourable perceptions of regional languages, recognising them as integral components of cultural heritage.

Extensive research into the landscape of France’s regional languages generally suggests that these languages are experiencing a state of irreversible decline (Hornsby 2009: 158). France is not alone in this, however. Further literature demonstrates that this phenomenon in France mirrors a larger global trend of language endangerment (Grenoble and Whaley, 1999, 2006). Nevertheless, amidst this decline, there has been a notable surge in interest in language revitalisation, including websites, academic acknowledgment of minority language decline, novel international organisations, and publications addressing language endangerment (Urla, 2012: 5).

The case of Francoprovençal is particularly challenging. Research shows little-to no evidence of mother tongue transmission (Bert et al., 2009: 75). It’s for this reason that Judge (2007: 105) argues that “Franco-Provençal is the most endangered of the French [regional languages]”. The presence of the Alps in these regions results in communities of speakers that are generally isolated from one another. As a result, various dialects exist within Francoprovençal that differ vastly from region to region (Kasstan, 2019: 3). Kasstan argues that this isolation of individual speaker groups has caused a lack of sense of belonging or membership to the wider community, but despite this fragmentation, revitalisation efforts are on the rise, and the name *Arpitan* is one feature that unites new speakers across the French, Swiss and Italian borders.

New speakers can be defined as individuals who acquire a language through immersion, bilingual education programs, revitalisation projects, and often as adult learners, with little-to no exposure to a minority language within the community or home (O’Rourke et al., 2015: 1). Native speakers, or traditional speakers, on the other hand, are fluent speakers who acquire the language at a young age from members of the speaker community (Hornsby, 2015). According to Bert et al., however, fewer and fewer organisations are offering adult Francoprovençal

classes, despite these groups having been an important space in which Francoprovençal maintains symbolic status (2009: 69). These associations have served as significant venues for Francoprovençal practice amongst learners, although Swiss researcher Andres Kristol believes there to be no more than “a few dozen” of these speakers, despite there being no current existing figures for new speakers of Francoprovençal (2016: 350). Nevertheless, current revitalisation efforts in France might suggest otherwise. These efforts include communal online spaces such as ‘Arpitania.eu’ which promotes events, articles, and workshops within the Rhone-Alpes region such as ‘Gag’arpitan’ in Saint Etienne, as well as also promoting ‘Radio Arpitania’, a radio programme hosted in Francoprovençal, all of which demonstrate a clear and collective effort to promote the language (Aliance Culturela Arpitania, n.d.). These efforts alone suggest a growing number of new speakers in France, or at least non-traditional speakers who wish to improve their language skills, as traditional speakers do not typically use the term ‘Arpitan’.

One issue likely to have contributed to the decline of Francoprovençal is the lack of a written standard (Martin, 2002). According to Judge (2007), for new speakers of Bréton, or *Néo-Bretonnants*, a standardised form is essential for its survival. The Arpitan movement attempted to fix this issue with *Orthographe de Référence B* (ORB), replacing and improving upon the initial version A (Stich, 1998). This orthographic system is the first multidialectal orthography of Francoprovençal. It is constructed etymologically, relying particularly on French. Dominique Stich proposed this ‘supra-dialectal’ spelling system, as well as a dictionary, in which the proposed orthographic system also encompasses a variety of newly coined terms to describe contemporary concepts (Stich et al., 2003). ORB is prominent online, particularly on websites aimed at protecting Francoprovençal such as ‘Arpitania.eu’. Even literary works such as ‘The Calculus Affair’ (*L’Affaire Tournesol* in French), the 18th volume in the popular ‘Tintin’ series, which predominantly takes place in the Arpitan region, has been translated into Francoprovençal using ORB (*L’Afère Pecârd*), among others (Kasstan, 2019: 12).

Despite evidently having had some success, some linguists remain critical of ORB. Tuailon (2004) argues that the orthographical system is overly simplified; within the Savoyard dialect alone there are at least six different ways to pronounce the word ‘milk’. In Haute-Tarentaise, for example, you’ll find the form ‘lassèl’, but just south of the Isère in Bessans, you’ll find ‘laèl’ or ‘lahèl’ (2004: 2). No speaker, argues Tuailon, will write a form different to their own, nor are they likely to go to the effort of consulting a dictionary. Kasstan agrees,



stating that ORB is rejected by most native speakers (2019: 13). Other linguists criticise the system's overwhelming similarities to standard French (Flükiger, 2006). ORB's vitality appears to remain reliant on new speakers, for whom the orthographical system is understandably beneficial, in order to survive.

It is not uncommon for orthography to cause friction when it comes to language revitalisation, according to Dorian (1994), wherein native speakers frequently prioritise the conservation of traditional language or dialects over the compromise of revitalisation efforts. Furthermore, Tuaille not only criticises Stich's dictionary, but also claims that Stich is 'far removed from reality' as a result of his education at a Grand Ecole, highlighting another, perhaps deeper, factor affecting the revitalisation of Francoprovençal (2004: 2). Kasstan (2019) discusses how an almost complete lack of mother-tongue transmission of Francoprovençal leads to a diminishing speaker base. Not only does a lack of mother-tongue transmission of a language result in a smaller speaker community, but it also causes an aging speaker population. Kasstan thus identifies a vast identity gap between new and traditional speakers. New speakers, he argues, tend to come from middle-class urban backgrounds, as well as being well-educated and highly politicised, often evident in their involvement in language revitalisation efforts. Blanchett and Armstrong (2006) describe native speakers as older, working class, and living in rural areas. O'Rourke et al. find that the differences in speaker profiles poses a large issue for language revitalisation, as new speakers can challenge the overall identity previously set by native speakers regardless of their vital role in language revitalisation (2015). New speakers are therefore found to cause tensions within regional language communities.

James Costa (2017) carried out a study in Provence in which he, too, identified that new speakers represented a different demographic to native speakers, often being younger, urban, and middle-class. Costa claims that the French term 'néo-locuteur' meaning 'new speaker', while often used by academics, can carry both neutral and derogatory meanings. New speakers are, as a result, often categorised completely differently, and are argued by some to speak a completely different language, e.g. 'néo-breton'. Costa's study focuses particularly on language revitalisation in educational settings, observing children being taught in an immersive Occitan school. In this instance, children are taught explicitly in Occitan, and standard French is permitted only during periods of recess. In discussions with pupils, Costa finds that children had the most respect for the native speaker, particularly the monolinguals, holding them as the "arch-legitimate speaker" (2017: 156). Furthermore, Costa emphasises the importance of

recognising that traditional speakers might not always immediately dismiss new speaker varieties as invalid. Conversely, they might regard them as highly legitimate in academic circles, sometimes even labelling them as the authentic form of the language, in contrast to their own dialect, which they may perceive as inferior or colloquial (Costa, 2017: 156). Costa makes it clear that the issue at hand is not ‘proper Provençal’ vs. ‘neo-Provençal’, but instead ‘old vs. new’, and a case of accepting change, but perhaps something easier said than done (2017: 155).

Costa’s study demonstrates that relations between traditional and new speakers in France cannot always be reduced to ‘tense’. Some young new speakers of Occitan evidently hold their native speaker teachers in high regard, and these native speakers do appear to often respect more ‘standardised’ forms of Occitan. Costa does make it clear, however, that these tensions do exist, and will likely continue in many areas.

Unfortunately, unlike Bréton and Occitan, Francoprovençal is not afforded national education privileges, often considered to be too similar to French (Bron, 2011). The lack of Francoprovençal in the education system may pose a large problem. Costa’s (2017) study highlighted the benefits of building the relationships between new and native speakers, and these environments are the only opportunity for immersive learning available to many new speakers, as even in the home, Francoprovençal is rarely employed over French (Kasstan, 2019).

#### 4.2 New Speakers in Italy and Switzerland

Of new speakers of Francoprovençal in Italy, Christiane Dunoyer writes that new speakers of Francoprovençal are beginning to arrive on the scene in an act of resistance to language decline (2010). These speakers, she argues, begin with an interest in what is being said about them by the Francoprovençal speakers around them. This evolves into an interest into the language itself, and finally a motivation to be able to speak and be understood in Francoprovençal. These motivations, Dunoyer argues, can be lost along the way, often depending on the context, including language courses required for professional activity. Furthermore, all new speakers have concerns about the perception of native speakers, and native speakers willing to transmit the language are difficult to find in the Aosta Valley (Dunoyer, 2010).

The outside perception of choosing to study Francoprovençal poses a significant challenge for new speakers: any student, according to Dunoyer, inevitably wonders how others perceive them, and can be highly vocal about this (2010). New speakers report that they very much rely on the approval, and sometimes the support and encouragement, of other speakers. However, the reluctance of these speakers to transmit the language poses a problem. Dunoyer claims that native speakers are more than willing to explain words or provide translations when new speakers lack the appropriate term, but admit that they find it difficult to speak Franco-Provençal to someone perceived as “outside the circle” of speakers, especially if the new speaker still relies on another language for part of the conversation (2010: 21).

The CEFP, an organisation based in the Aosta Valley which aims to promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of Francoprovençal, is a large preservation effort that exists in the Aosta Valley, as well as the *Aliance Culturèla Arpitanna*. This aims to not only promote cultural projects linked to the Arpitan region but to also promote the language and increase accessibility to the public in promoting a standard orthography (*Aliance Culturèla Arpitanna*, n.d.). The greater speaker base in the Aosta Valley seems to allow for larger-scale efforts than possible in France. The autonomy of the region triggered a network of associations and activists in the 1970s, drawing on a large number of new speakers in an attempt to compensate for the decline of Francoprovençal as a result of the influence of French and Italian within the region (Jablonka, 2002).

According to Traversa (1994), Francoprovençal continues to be a central point around which the identity and sense of belonging of many of the residents of the Aosta Valley feeling of belonging revolve. Traversa argues, however, that the majority of these people live in more remote communities in the mountains, resulting in isolated speaker groups with little community transmission. Meune (2012) states that the family home is frequently the only real place of transmission, when schools and other outside efforts cannot guarantee the survival of Francoprovençal, the home is where a child first learns to appreciate the language. Another educational attempt to involve young Italians in the Aosta Valley in the learning of Francoprovençal is the *Concours Cerlogne* (Cerlogne Competition). This competition, run by the CEFP since 1967, was first imagined by René Willien in 1962 with the goal of getting schoolchildren involved in Francoprovençal language and culture. Every year, the CEFP provide a theme, and students, with the help of their teachers, run a research project that typically involves observation, intergenerational dialogue, and conversations with locals in order to discover more about the local beliefs, practices and knowledge about the region. The

winner is named following presentations at the end of the competition (Centre d'Etudes Francoprovençales, n.d.).

There is far less literature when it comes to the role of new speakers and revitalisation efforts in Switzerland. When data was collected for the lexico-graphic project of the *Glossaire des Patois de la Suisse Romande* (The Glossary of Swiss Francoprovençal) from 1899 to 1924, the documentation of many areas proved a challenge (Gauchat, 1942). It was only in Valais, northern Jura, and Ajoie that the founder of the Glossary, Louis Gauchat, was able to observe any vitality of the language (Gauchat 1942: 2). Elsewhere, Francoprovençal was primarily used by older speakers. Interestingly, however, in Vaud, where Francoprovençal is very rarely spoken, literary activities have still been popular (Bickel and Schläpfer, 2000: 159). Folkloric associations, which promote the language through plays and literary competitions in the inter-war period, operate at local and regional levels (Fluckiger, 2004).

According to Grunert (2018) radio has played a significant role in raising public awareness of Francoprovençal, and an archive of programmes both in and about the language, broadcast from the 1950s to the present, is available online. Furthermore, in 1954, (renamed in 1991), the umbrella organisation *Fédération Romande et Interrégionale des Patoisants* (French-Speaking and Inter-regional Federation of Patois Speakers) (FRIP) was formed, organising competitions every four years since 1961, as well as festivals in association with the Aosta Valley, Piedmont, Savoy, and Franche-Comté (Grunert, 2018).

As part of a study into the Francoprovençal dialect of Vaudois in Vaud, Meune (2012) asked 48 native speakers, aged between 60 and 91, what they felt was the best way to prevent the decline of the language. The participants gave mixed responses. A considerable number, however, did appear to favour revitalisation through education, and thus believed that transmission to new speakers was the most effective route (29%). Others believed more activity from local organisations was most vital (25.4%), while others favoured local constitutional protection within their canton (21.8%). Familial intergenerational transmission was rarely mentioned (12.7%), thought to be almost impossible to re-establish once interrupted, and only 10.9% believed that constitutional protection on a national level would be most productive. All participants, however, agreed that the complete disappearance of Francoprovençal would be sad, and over 50% of respondents admitted that it would cause “*beaucoup de tristesse*” (a lot of sadness) (Meune, 2012: 23).

It's clear that Swiss efforts for revitalisation put a lot of emphasis on the importance of community and group activity alongside the more typical routes of education and linguistic policy. Swiss Francoprovençal speakers favour local efforts, including legislation on a cantonal, rather than national, level. While there is a general lack of evidence for significant numbers of new speakers in Switzerland, the suggestion that the education of such speakers is vital for the language's revitalisation is a positive signal that many native speakers in Switzerland would support this effort.

## **5. Discussion**

The largest threat facing Francoprovençal is a lack of transmission. This does not merely apply to familial transmission, but the reluctance of many native speakers to support new speakers in their learning. This demurral greatly slows down the process, leaving new speakers to turn elsewhere, which in itself is not easy, due to a significant lack in Francoprovençal linguistic groups or education, particularly in France. The lack of a written standard posed a large problem for speakers of Francoprovençal, as did its eventual arrival in 2003. However, despite ORB's over-simplification and French influence, as pointed about by Tuailon (2004), written standards are a vital tool for new speakers, especially in providing a sense of unification that transcends dialectal borders. Tensions between new and native speakers are best documented in France, and exist not just between speakers of Francoprovençal, but elsewhere, including Occitan and Bréton. Costa's (2017) study in Provence provides hope that through education, barriers between new and native speakers can be broken down, facilitating a respectful relationship between the two. This hope is unfortunately marred by the French government's prevention of Francoprovençal being taught in schools. In the Aosta Valley, on the other hand, the region's autonomy has allowed the language to survive in a way that it likely would not have, if it weren't for the recognition of Francoprovençal as an official language of the region, permitting the inclusion of the Valdôtain dialect in the school curriculum.

This highlights another problem faced by Francoprovençal that is not so significant in other regional languages. The international borders dividing the three areas results in what Kasstan accurately describes as a "highly-fragmented" group (2019: 2), causing varying levels of vitality of dialects across the three countries. This fragmentation is best demonstrated in observing the differences in vitality of Francoprovençal in France and Switzerland compared to Italy. The unique case of Francoprovençal and its international speaker base brings to light how linguistic policy and language vitality are heavily intertwined, particularly when it comes

to the impact of new speakers. Put simply, without support on at least a local level, new speakers do not have sufficient resources to learn the language and help to prevent its decline. It is evident from studies of regional languages in France, and the attitudes of numerous Swiss Francoprovençal speakers that the role of new speakers is important and can be appreciated by many native speakers. As Costa makes clear, the tensions between new and native speakers are a matter of accepting change, which, while not necessarily simple, is something that can be achieved if given help (2017). Furthermore, the evidence seems to favour support on a local level, rather than a national level. The success of Francoprovençal in the Aosta Valley is the work of its residents and local government, rather than national linguistic policy. Meune's (2012) study reveals a similar opinion: of all Vaudois speakers in support of constitutional protection, two thirds would opt for constitutional protection on a cantonal level, rather than on a national level.

## **6. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research**

The future of Francoprovençal depends on the success of new speakers. As things currently stand, the broad picture appears to be one of terminal decline, particularly in France and Switzerland. The impact of new speakers is severely limited by lack of suitable linguistic policy outside of the Aosta Valley at present. Recent efforts from France and Switzerland to ratify the ECRML or recognise regional languages in the constitution come as too little, too late. The decline of Francoprovençal can be attributed to historical attempts at suppression and neglect of regional languages in all three countries, and, despite the greater efforts of the Aosta Valley, many native speakers' unwillingness to transmit their mother tongue suggests that, without stronger political intervention, this trajectory is unlikely to change.

That is not to say that revitalisation efforts are futile. There is still much that can be done to protect, or at least prolong, the vitality of Francoprovençal. While imperfect, ORB can be a useful tool in the promotion and teaching of the language, particularly while native speakers are frequently unwilling to assist with spoken transmission. Furthermore, if their respective countries allowed for region-specific linguistic policies, the regions of Rhone-Alpes and western cantons of Switzerland could accord Francoprovençal the same privileges as they do other languages, such as Romansch or Occitan, and include Francoprovençal within the school curriculum, thus providing new speakers with a higher chance of success. This would perhaps also allow for a greater international effort that does not just protect individual dialects, but the heritage as a whole.

To better support the conclusions of this study, future investigation might consider data collection from both types of speakers across different dialects, particularly across international borders. While difficult in this study, due to limitations on time and resources, collection of quantitative and qualitative data from both native and new speakers of Francoprovençal could help to better estimate the current numbers of new speakers, and the relationship between the two groups, as well as their hopes for the future of the language. This could further highlight the role of language status and policy in affecting attitudes towards the language and its speakers, and thus by extension, the degree to which new speakers can have an impact in the future.

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