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A STUDY OF REGIONAL LANGUAGE  
AND IDENTITIES IN A SMALL OCCITAN VILLAGE

by

PATRICK P. SACLEUX  
B.A. University of Central Florida, 2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term  
2009

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## ABSTRACT

This exploratory study utilized qualitative methods to approach regional language abilities of local respondents and how it affects their regional identity. The theoretical framework of this study explored some of the tenets of symbolic interaction emphasizing on identity theory and how the flexible aspect of face-to-face interaction can define the self and someone's regional identity as it relates to their regional language use. Data for this study were collected in a small Occitan village in Southern France. In particular, the study explored the link between an individual residential setting, his/her age and his/her ability to speak the regional language. The results indicate that the ability to speak the specific regional or even sub regional language does not greatly affect an individual's regional identity, thus potentially contributing to the continuing decline of that language in the region. Furthermore, that future studies are merited to explore whether these results are specific or if they can more broadly be applied to other Occitan regions or elsewhere where regional languages are spoken.

This paper is dedicated to Sophie P. who exemplifies regional integration and assimilation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not be underway without the criticism that I received from Dr. Gay from the very beginning, when I spoke of doing this sort of study, and his ability to talk to me in a language that was without restraints, without fluff, and that I mostly needed to hear in order to avoid being complacent. I owe him also the vision of assigning me a thesis chairman that would calm my temper, would channel my creative energy into useful sociological terms and could relate to me as someone whose English is not the first language, that is in the person of Dr Rivera.

Dr Jasinski and her infinite wisdom and thorough knowledge of the universities procedures have saved my behind quite a few times and though sometimes things came down to the wire, as it is expected from students, some or most of the times; I should thank her dearly as well for leading me through my Master's path to write this thesis and believing in me when sometimes, not knowing it, she was the only one doing so.

Tonya Walker, the graduate program coordinator is to be thanked for being able to supply me at the last minute forms and answer my odd questions at a moment's notice.

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My sister's wedding, whose story is added as an appendix at the end of this paper, inspired me to pursue this type of research.

On the ground, in France, Sophie P., who became so much more than an impromptu key informant, at times, and a true friend, has allowed me to meet the kind of people that I needed to meet and has made it possible for me to open doors that, in light of what I discovered, would have been quite difficult to open without her. She should be acknowledged also for her insightful understanding of what I was looking for even if sometimes it was clear in my head but came out abstractly out of my mouth. The way she presented me and my research to some of the respondent has allow them to answer me more candidly and truthfully than they would have done to a complete outsider, though French, nonetheless outsider to the region.

One of the respondents, who identity has been kept confidential and who was pseudo named Carlos is to be acknowledge not only for his love and knowledge of the region but also for driving me around to introduce me to some additional rural respondents that I would never have been able to reach (due to limited transportation and knowledge of the rural areas) without his intervention.

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and understand fully without comprehending completely theirs sense of cultural identity spanning from the United States to France.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Whether in France, in the United States or in any other industrialized country large enough to have provinces, language has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of an individual's identity (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999, Fiol 2002, Gade 2003, Henze and Davis 1999, Trépanier 1991, Trosset 1986).

The purpose of this exploratory study and thesis is to measure the regional language skills of inhabitants of a small Occitan village, in a region where Languedocian (a derivative of Occitan regional language, *see Ethnologue.com*) is utilized. Previous studies, as exemplified in the next chapter, have led us to believe that the older and the more rural people are, the more likely they are to communicate fluently in patois. At the onset of this study, this belief was placed in question. The study explores the communicative factors of patois. It also measures how those factors influence the respondents' regional identity. It is believed that the more they speak a regional language, the stronger they feel about their regional identity. Both of these questions are measured, along with the reasons behind such abilities and such feelings, regarding language and regional identity respectively. Throughout the research several topics are evolved from the open coding process developed by Strauss and Corbin (2008). This process involves utilizing main topics taken from the guiding questionnaire, and then extracting data from each interview and analyzing this data. Upon analysis of the data, explicit themes emerged that placed relative emphasis on the initial topics, allowing the researcher to develop several sociological constructs. The initial topics in question were regional identity, patois, regional attachment and regional social capital. The study intended to measure the influence of age, gender and residential setting on local respondents, in order to understand the association between the factors aforementioned,

a regional language assessment is particularly useful (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999) to define the perimeters of what is a rural (living outside the village within a range of 30 kilometers), an urban (living within the limits of the village) and a semi urban (living on the fringe and outskirts of the village) region.

Furthermore, some studies have looked at the association between regional identity and regional language skills in various regions of the world such as the Basque country (Echeverria 2003), a small town of the province of Quebec and a small town in the Catalonian region (Gade 2003). Additionally, other studies have looked at these issues in Brittany, Western France (Hoare 2000), and Alaska (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999). Overall, these studies suggest that the ability of its local inhabitants to speak the regional language/dialect has an influence on their sense of regional identity. It is interesting to note how the sociolinguistic patterns of many world languages are becoming extinct, and how they are shaping individual and collective identity upon the loss of that language. Even with these threats, some languages have been revitalized (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999, Echeverria 2003), mainly due to political and individual will.

No one had ever done this type of research in a small remote village of Southern France in the Occitan region. Because of its unique location and the fact that Occitan is more or less spoken and understood in the Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon and Massif Central regions, the study was limited to a specific perimeter outside of that particular village, which happened to be the focal point of three different sub regions. A derivative of Occitan (a.k.a Languedocien), called patois, is spoken semi distinctly in those three different sub regions. I was interested initially in finding out why a respondent would or would not speak patois. That interest stemmed

from the fact that Langue d'Oc (a.k.a Languedocian, or Occitan) is spoken in the south, and Langue d'Oil is spoken in the north. Both languages are part of the origin of the French language, yet Occitan is on a dying path. I also wanted to explore if regional identity was strong due to regional language abilities as expressed by Echeverria (2003) in the study of the Basque regional identity, and to what extent face-to-face interaction would influence that regional identity and regional language skills.

Previous studies in Basque country, in Catalonia, in Quebec and rural Alaska found that language was tied to regional identity. I wanted to know why this would hold true in the Occitan region. When the interviews started, from the first one, it was found that Occitan should not be used as the language of reference, but patois should be. Occitan is regarded more as an academic language than patois. Within a 30-kilometer radius there are three different patois spoken and understood. All are derivatives of Occitan, and were used as the language of reference. It is the language that local inhabitants identify with and refer to in their responses.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The industrial age has greatly influenced the ability to communicate (Echeverria 2003, Gade 2003). The movements of people from rural, self-sufficient lives (Gade 2003) have created an increased need to learn more languages (Gade 2003, Trosset 1986). Technology has also facilitated the acquisition of new languages in order to become more global and that is perhaps the reason behind the fact that many regional and indigenous languages/dialects are becoming extinct (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999). The global phenomena have also hampered people's identities, and have resulted in the need to acquire new social identities (Trosset 1986). It may also have contributed to shifts from regional or indigenous heritage to modern, global identities. Indeed, human identities have been redefined (Smedley 1998). With the advent of technology and the loss of agriculture in rural areas, natives of indigenous regions have lost a sense of conviviality and the ability to communicate directly face-to-face. In the past, national origin, native language, and occupation were strong influencers of individual identity (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999, Fiol 2002, Gade 2003, Henze and Davis 1999, Trosset 1986). There are other influences such as race (particularly in the United States) that have become strong social identity criterions alongside regional accent and vernacular. Nonetheless, there remain strong cultural and regional differences impeding social mobility (Henze and Davis 1999, Trosset 1986).

In order to understand the association between language and identity the definition of the concepts is merited. Nowak (2000) reports, "For some linguists there is compelling evidence that language is not a cultural invention but an innate instinct" (p.1615). Furthermore, "a language is of adaptive value and contributes to biological fitness" of society (Nowak 2000,

p.1617) and children acquire language as a form of inheritance from their parents (Nowak 2000). A language is the best way to communicate among people of the same cultural and national background (Greenberg 1971). Language is an integral part of an individual's identity; therefore identity is essential for self-awareness and self-identification as Fiol (2002) exemplifies it in the following narrative:

“Identities do and sometimes must change; they are highly resistant to change at individual and organizational levels. Individual identities are more resistant to change (Gioia 1998, quoted by Fiol, 2002, p.653). It builds on what we know about the nature of individual members' social identities (beliefs about who we are as defined by our membership in the organization”. (Fiol 2002, p.653)

The sense of belonging has become an important part of collective and individual identity. It is true whether the organization is a community or a company of culturally similar people (Fiol 2002). The process of identification is conducted primarily with language (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999, Fiol 2002, Gade 2003, Henze and Davis 1999, Trosset 1986). Fiol's research shows that language plays a critical role in reflecting and shaping the process of identification and her research demonstrates that people can evolve with new social identities according to certain situations (e.g. geographical settings) (Fiol, 2002). These identities remain tentative until confirmed through verification of how they fit within the newly assimilated or integrated social structures. Thus someone from the southern regions of France with a southern regional accent may feel like an outsider in these newly assimilated or integrated social settings, such as it could be the case if he/she would settle in Paris, for example. It is most likely that his/her regional



identity has been somewhat subdued and replaced with the newly acquired social identity to fit the social circles that a different region may require (Smedley 1998).

Language can strengthen or weaken identity (Fiol 2002), specifically if this language is different from an individual's native language, as individuals feel better about themselves if they identify with organizations (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Language can also facilitate inclusion or differentiations between certain social groups (Hogg and Terry 2000, Brewer and Pickett 1999). Social identity allows people to become better societal elements (Hogg and Terry 2000).

Consequently social identity, and its theory, is also based on trust and a common or shared identity (Fiol 2002), or what is sometimes mentioned as collective identity. Identity can be used as a form of exclusion. For example, French society is largely centralized in Paris, anything and anyone coming from outside Paris is somewhat stigmatized for not being "from Paris", thus impeding their ability to attain a certain social and professional status; because they sound like they're "from the countryside". This form of regional discrimination shapes the way people interact within French society and describe their personal and collective identity (Poletta and Jasper 2001).

France defines its individual regional identity based on regional origins (including but not limited to the sound of a regional accent) and also the ability to speak the regional language such as Breton (Hoare 2000) in her study. Language continues to cast a strong influence on identity (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999).

## **Review of Cajun Regional Identity and more perspectives**

French speaking Louisiana is among the oldest regional language enclaves in the United States and a good example of how regional identity is formed. Historically the association with the Cajun identity was not always highly regarded, but thanks to government involvement and a commitment from the people of French Louisiana, the local government was not only able to uplift its image but also helped preserve the French speaking sections of Louisiana (Trépanier, 1991).

Creole and Cajun were associated with Louisiana. To be Creole was to be native of Louisiana and to speak French with all its traditions associated with Louisiana and although the original Acadians were more in favor of Creole, people of Louisiana have widely accepted the Cajun identity because it allowed a unification of Louisiana's regional identity. Creole held a positive image among Blacks and Whites of Louisiana. The efforts of the local officials made the word Cajun directly and positively associated with Louisiana, Previously Cajun was synonymous with rural, backward and uneducated (much like someone from outside of Paris is viewed by Parisians). Thanks to the efforts and positive promotional campaigns, the change in image associated with the Cajun identity was remarkably fast.

Research notes that in 1978 "being Cajun was defined much more by a way of either being or a way of life than by where one came from" (Trépanier 1991, p.166). This has now changed by meaning primarily that one is from Louisiana. The way identity has evolved shows that Blacks identify more with the Creole identity and Whites with the Cajun one (or the "new" Cajun identity). This may be a way to validate racial differences within the state of Louisiana or a way to retain a higher identity on one racial side versus another. When outside of Louisiana, all

will readily identify as Cajun, but inside Louisiana, natives will readily be more specific in validating their identity as either Cajun or Creole (Trépanier 1991).

Another line of inquiry is to see, as suggested by Trépanier (1991), if some of the resurgence of Cajun identity was designed to serve the tourism trade, thus underlining the uniqueness of the Cajun identity in order to appear more “exotic” to the tourists (and if that could apply to Languedocian). This has also been done thanks to festivals and other Cajun-associated venues that have become popular among the tourists. “Regional identification has an undeniable impact on the geographical unification of the culture region” (Trépanier 1991). Research has demonstrated that the more removed you are from a region, the more you adhere to its cultural monolithic regional reference, in its stagnating form, thus losing sight of its potential evolution (Trépanier 1991). Regional consciousness and language define regional identity (Trépanier 1991). For the purpose of this study it will be interesting to explore if that is validated in the case of the Languedocian language.

Language is part of a complex web of culture and identity (Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999). A government intervention may be well intended; the decision to maintain or renew a regional or indigenous language must come from within (from the people that are most affected by this decision) (Henze and Davis 1999). We also know from this article that languages of the world’s indigenous people are on the brink of extinction even though culture and identity are essentially expressed through language, which is a resource that should be maintained and developed (Henze and Davis 1999). Their previous research shows that speech and language are associated with regional identity (Henze and Davis 1999). A language is alive. It needs to be

learned with interaction of other people within a community of a similar language (Trosset 1986).

### **Review of comparison between Quebec and Catalanian regional identity**

Gade's (2003) study, conducted in the province of Quebec and in Catalonia, emphasizes that "the main basis of the identity of distinctive regions" (p.429) is the fact that when there is a territorial minority, people seek cultural affirmation in order to validate their individual identity. The author also measures the portrayal of language in the surrounding majority and how people speak a different vernacular (Gade 2003). Language identity is considered as socially constructed within a certain region. It affects people's sense of belonging to that region. For example it was noted that there was a paradox in the Quebec region where most people spoke French but most signs were displayed in English (Gade 2003). The paradox potentially forces people to assimilate more with their French language identity in order to resist the change or transition into speaking English. To this day, this paradox continues thanks to a governmental mandate to "bilingualize" Canadian society, particularly in the use of visual displays. Gade's (2003) research suggests that both regions have been able to take advantage of government legislation that was in favor of making the local language more independent. Paradoxically it was found that it was illegal to publish books and newspapers in Catalanian (Gade 2003). It also showed that many people had little incentive to learn to read their regional mother tongue. This in contrast of what is found in the Occitan region, where there are several newspapers and radio programs that can be found in

Occitan language. If this is the case, then why, so few people remain speakers of Languedocian language, if a wider segment of the population has access to it?

### **Review of the Basque regional identity**

It was believed, in the past, that regional identity was strong among people of the Basque region. Echeverria, in her 2003 study, set out to analyze it by interviewing residents of that region. The study suggested that regional identity is established by the ability of its residents to speak the regional language/vernacular. The author argues that schools offering regional language in a compulsory manner or as an elective can contribute to a “recursive language ideology, linking “authentic” ethnic identity, “naturalness”, and solidarity with vernacular language. Initially the Basque identity was based on nationalism rather than language, gradually the identity evolved with a focus on language. Language was used to readily identify with the Basque identity, from the Spanish and French speaking government. By 1985 61% of people living in Basque country considered themselves Basque (Echeverria, 2003). It brings an interesting perspective to verify if the same will hold true in the Occitan region, where the research will be conducted.

Echeverria’s (2003) study shows that language can be associated with prestige when it is used (as suggested by Bourdieu in 1991) in public institutions. When the state imposes a given language, it becomes predominant. And if that language is properly spoken it largely allows someone to achieve social mobility (Echeverria, 2003), which explains why people may choose to forego speaking their regional language in order to assimilate with a different region. Learning

a foreign language gives entrance to different social circles and this process leads to an adaptation to the new social structure that might transform the language identity (Bourdieu 1991).

Furthermore it might lead to the non-recognition of the importance of regional language or attachment to one particular region. Although Basque, thanks to the will of its inhabitants and certain government mandates is better placed now than it has ever been, it is noted by Basque people that if they want to do business in their region, their ability to speak Spanish is much more critical (Echeverria 2003). Therefore people of Occitan region could potentially be reluctant to learn, maintain or renew their ability to speak Occitan or Languedocian if there is no other incentive than maintaining a strong regional identity to the detriment of their social mobility. So what would motivate anyone from that region to perpetuate the regional language, even if it is associated strongly with their regional identity, if they do not see an immediate or foreseeable social advantage?

As a model of symbolic interactionism and as suggested by identity theory; which explains that the self is related to role behaviors and their interaction within social structure; the will of the Basque institutions has not been to underline the utility of Basque speaking in a professional way, but an effort to interact with people of Basque country (Echeverria 2003). Although most Basque speakers do not come from prestigious positions, the language has been paired in prestige with Spanish (in northern Spain), thanks to this attitudinal goal for interaction. Language, nation and gender are also part of the construct of personal identities (Echeverria 2003). “The link between ethno cultural identity and its associated language is more socially constructed than natural and automatic” (Echeverria 2003, p.408). In certain regions where

regional nationalism is strong, speaking the regional language is a way to legitimate claims of local politicians and “enhance” their social and political clout.

### **Regional Identity from Brittany (Western France)**

Other studies (Hoare, 2000), examining some regions of France indicate that movement away from a strong regional identity region is often associated with higher social status attainment. It is of interest to understand how this movement affects regional heritage and overall regional identity.

The focus of this exploratory study is on the southern region of France known as Occitania (Mark, 1987) or simply Occitan region. It is located at the confluent of three major regions known as Midi-Pyrénées (southwest of the village), Languedoc-Roussillon (south, southeast of the village) and Auvergne (the old volcanic region, to the north of the village), in a sub region called Aubrac (See map in Appendix A). It has never been a state, or a defined country with borders, but has had a strong identity among its residents for more than a thousand years (Mark, 1987). A king called Aragon ruled the region, which once spread south beyond the current French/Spanish borders, and spread as far north as the Rhone region near the German border (Mark, 1987). For the purpose of this research, a brief look will be taken at the social history of the region and how it has shaped the regional identity (see Appendix B).

## **What is it to be Languedocian?**

Although the actual name of the village where the research was conducted was not given, it is important for the purpose of this research to define the region and what the local regional language represents and who typically speaks it. Languedocian (also known as Langue d'Oc) is part of the broader Occitan language and region. The derivatives of Languedocian are Bas-Languedocien, Languedocien Moyen, Haut Languedocien, and Guyennais and are also a separate language from Provençal. It is situated in the Languedoc Province, from Montpellier to Toulouse, Rodez and Albi (see Map in Appendix A). According to the UNESCO (which is known as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), Languedocian (Langue d'Oc) is classified as being severely endangered of disappearance. (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00206>)

It is estimated that about 5,000 people still speak fluently the language and it is labeled by the UNESCO as a language on the verge of extinction. The website contents of Ethologue.com (recognized by many cultural anthropologists as the main source of identification of a dialect or regional language) claim that mainly family and close friends in rural communities speak it, by all ages (which would differ from the initial hypothesis of this research). One of the reasons for its demise is due to several attempts of standardizing Languedocien for all languages of southern France that have not been accepted by speakers of those languages. Regional attitudes are strong and differ about how the different Langue d'Oc varieties are from one another. In its vocal and literal form Languedocien resembles Middle Occitan used by street performers (troubadours) in the middle Ages. In this region everyone speaks French as first or second language, although



increasingly as first language. It is still found in written form mainly in roman script and in poetry, newspaper and certain bible portions. ([www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)).

### **Research questions: Premise for the research**

The research for this thesis took place in a specific region of southern France, where the regional dialect Langue D'Oc (Languedocian) is slowly dying away by lack of generational transmission or compulsory teaching in local schools and other social institutions of education. The researcher found, through conversations with people native of the region, that there still were radio programs offered in that dialect on a national radio station (*Ràdio País*), television programs shown in that dialect at the regional level and local regional magazines (*Papagai, Plumalhon and Setmana, El País*) as well. This prevalence of cultural programming seems to be governmentally associated with the tourist trade in an effort to maintain a strong regional identity, and it appears to be benefiting from displaying local street signs and other seasonal events hosted in the dialect. The regional language has increasingly disappeared among the town's inhabitants and the regional youth, but seems to be maintained mainly in more rural areas, where societal interaction is minimized among the older generation.

The data were collected through interviews of natives (who will remain anonymous and for whom anonymity was guaranteed) of that region, which helped determine the link between regional identity and their ability to speak the regional language.

## CHAPTER THREE: KEY CONCEPTS AND THEORY

### **Symbolic Interaction and Identity Theory**

The questions raised in this research reside in the way people feel about speaking Occitan (or Languedocian/patois, as it will be referred throughout this research) versus their perception to be associated with the region.

Identity theory (e.g. Stryker 1968; Burke 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978) distinguishes itself from social identity theory (Hogg and Abrams 1988) in that it “sets out to explain individual’s role-related behaviors within a certain social structure” (Hogg, Terry and White 1995, p.255). Identity theory is closely linked to the symbolic interaction theory framework demonstrating that society affects social behavior through its influence on self (p.256) (Mead 1934 in Hogg, Terry and White 1995, also see Blumer 1969). This theory directly pertains to the purpose of the current study as it identifies the process of how regional identity shapes social interaction and also influences participant’s behaviors and outcomes. That is to say that a local resident with a stronger social identity and established roots in the region will be better integrated within the local social circles than an outsider would. Additionally, identity theory claims that society is differentiated yet organized, which rejects the symbolic interaction view that society is somewhat undifferentiated (Stryker and Serpe 1982).

Identity theory does not address, however, the importance of face-to-face interaction in shaping regional identity, maintaining and renewing regional vernacular (Echeverria 2003). This

face-to-face interaction seems to be important, regardless of the social structure or organizational level of society. Symbolic interaction theory recognizes an individual ability to assess his/her self, the flexibility in adopting a particular role behavior according to a specific situation, and the fact that the role outcomes are not predetermined or fixed, but open to negotiation (Mutran and Reitzes 1984, p.117). Stryker's (1968) theory of identity agrees that part of the self can be a multifaceted and organized construct (Hogg, Terry and White 1995). Multiple components of the self can make up regional and personal identities. Furthermore, Stryker (1968) differentiated himself from Blumer when he mentioned that the notion of self was multifaceted within a wider social structure (Burke 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978 in Hogg, Terry and White 1995). Although identities can change, specifically when acquiring a new language, and assimilating to a new social circle; Stryker (1968) believed that identities are stable, and once an individual's identity has been shaped, the core of that identity will not change, though evolution of that identity is possible.

Rosenberg (1981) suggests that identity theorists had previously largely focused on individual consequences of processes related to identity. But as much as an individual knows who he or she is, his or her identity is also shaped by his or her cultural heritage. That individual may or may not choose to hide his/her heritage according to the type of interaction within different social circles. The core of the self, which constitutes an individual's identity, remains intact. It is someone's ability to adapt and assimilate to different social settings or circles that allows them to enjoy some level of social mobility. Another distinct feature of identity theory that Stryker mentions is role identities (Stryker 1968, 1980, also see Burke 1980, Stryker and Serpe 1982). Each person has different role identities that he or she develops over time (e.g.

father, mother), or identities related to occupation. Each of these identities can also be complimentary. Role identities can also be shaped by regional identity and provide meaning of self; an individual can take on different roles in order to adjust to certain social circles. Burkes (1980) argues that through social interaction these identities actually acquire self-meaning. This concept of identity is critical to linking social structure with individual action, because as Stryker mentioned in 1980, the self creates actively its own social behavior. Overall, role identities are imbedded within the identity theory framework. It is worth mentioning that role identity is very much a part of other social attributes like race, ethnicity and gender. Although in the present research, race and ethnicity do not play a pivotal part, gender was included to see its association with regional identity. Identity theory plays on the salience of a particular identity and is largely determined with how someone is committed to a specific role. That commitment is not only going to define and validate one's identity, but identity theorists claim that the self is constructed by a collection of identities a derived from role positions (Hogg, Terry and White 1995).

The central representations of identity theory can be summarized into four major points: 1) social psychological model of self seen as being defined by social factors, 2) role positions contribute to the social nature of self, 3) role identities vary according to their level of identity salience (the stronger the role, the more salient it will be) and 4) there is a reciprocal link between the self and society where individualism of the outcomes is central to the identity-related processes (Hogg, Terry and White 1995).

The way people interpret the meaning of language is grounded in symbolic interactionism theory (Blumer 1969). The role of language identity is such that Irish language became a symbol of the Irish identity although schooling in that language did not increase (Echeverria 2003). A

new language identity has resulted, in positively switching the image of Irishmen and women (at a time when being Irish meant being in a country riddled with violence and unemployment), showing that speaking Irish indicated an increased pride in Irish identity.

The way people express themselves is directly linked to their ability to advance socially and professionally within our society, but mainly how they fit within their regional social circles. Communication is at the center of this study and people of the perceived dominant class (mostly *Parisians*, in France) view regional accents, whether observed academically or outside academia, as an impeding factor of social advancement. Symbolic interactions and identity theories encompass the conceptual framework of this research to analyze the links between a strong regional identity to the age, gender, residential setting and person's ability to speak the regional language.

## CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### **Data, Procedure and Sample**

An exploratory study of a local regional village, through interviews of native residents was conducted to examine the claim that regional identity is linked to regional language (Hoare, 2000) as it relates to age and residential setting.

From the moment I arrived in the village, there was a need of several days of adaptation and casual conversations with local residents in order to, unofficially, gauge the interest and participation potential of those respondents. Previous qualitative studies have shown that convenient sampling technique is, by definition, convenient but can be unreliable, at times, as a researcher cannot be sure of the quality of the selected respondents (Marshall, 1996). However those studies also show that key informant sampling technique is much more reliable so long as the key informant and the researcher have had some time to define the type of respondents needed for the study (Marshall, 1996). These creative sampling techniques reflected also the temporal, spatial and situational influences of the settings with the mindset to meet gender and residential settings parity. It is in that frame of mind that the initial selection of respondents was made. After spending some time in the village, I found, in Sophie, a good key informant. I met Sophie, incidentally, at the same café where most of the interviewed were conducted. She lived nearby and she was friends' with an acquaintance who I was speaking to when I met her. She was a native of a neighboring region, had poor communicative skills in patois but understood its cultural relevance. She had settled in the region some ten years earlier and was quite connected

with local residents. She and I started drafting a list of potential respondents based on their gender, their age and believed residential setting, in order to form parity for the purpose of the study sample. Sophie directed me to a respondent named Carlos (pseudonym) who, because of his connection to local rural residents was able to direct me to some respondents that I would not, otherwise, have been able to interview. The convenience sampling technique came into play at that point as I found myself having to be ready, at a moment's notice, with (and on a couple occasions, without) the guide questionnaire and recording device, in order to interview respondents when available. Thanks to Sophie, the key informant sampling technique was used as the dominant one. The list she and I had made together allowed me to either meet the respondents or interview them when they were available or set up a better time and location to do that.

The interviews were mostly conducted at the terrace of a nearby café, or near it, around lunchtime, as respondents had a little more time and were more likely to be less intoxicated than after 6pm (after work and before dinner). Sometimes I, using the convenient sampling technique, simply took advantage of an opportunity. I interviewed a respondent near a parking lot, after she had parked her car, simply because she fit the demographics and briefly answered that she was native and had a few minutes to spare, for an interview. Other times, respondents would be stopped in their daily routine of chores (such as shopping at the farmer's market) and asked to sit near a fountain or on a bench on a sidewalk to answer questions. These few times were possible thanks to the quick wit, persuasive abilities, and friendly connections that Sophie had.

The research was completed over the course of 2 weeks in July 2009, 33 respondents were interviewed which resulted in 92 pages of transcription to guarantee and anonymity of the respondents and the confidentiality of their responses.

Thirteen out of 33 interviews were conducted, at various times, at a local café that was convenient to study participants. It was a focal point in the village and happened to be near my place of residence, as well as near Sophie's place of residence. It was also the café of choice of most respondents. Because I could easily isolate myself, in a corner of the terrace, or in a nearby park, it was easy to conduct the interviews with relative calm. Six out of 33 interviews were conducted at respondent's residence while 9 out of 33 were done at their place of work, if it was more convenient for them. Yet another one was done in a car, or 2 others on the side of road, and one in a relative's workplace and one in a nightclub. Although it was mentioned earlier that most respondents were chosen thanks to the key informant sampling technique, often the location was chosen out of convenience for the respondents at a time when they were available for a few minutes.

In order to preserve the anonymity of its residents and the tranquility of the village, the actual name of the village has been changed and will be referred to as LACOURGE (a pseudonym). Though its location on the map provided is fairly accurate, the map scale is undefined and lacking details, so as to avoid locating the village exactly, thus keeping its location confidential.

Regional identity was used as the principal theme (collected through the open coding technique developed by Strauss and Corbin 2008) along with patois, the ability with which patois can remain sustainable and what makes people come back or simply stay in the selected region.

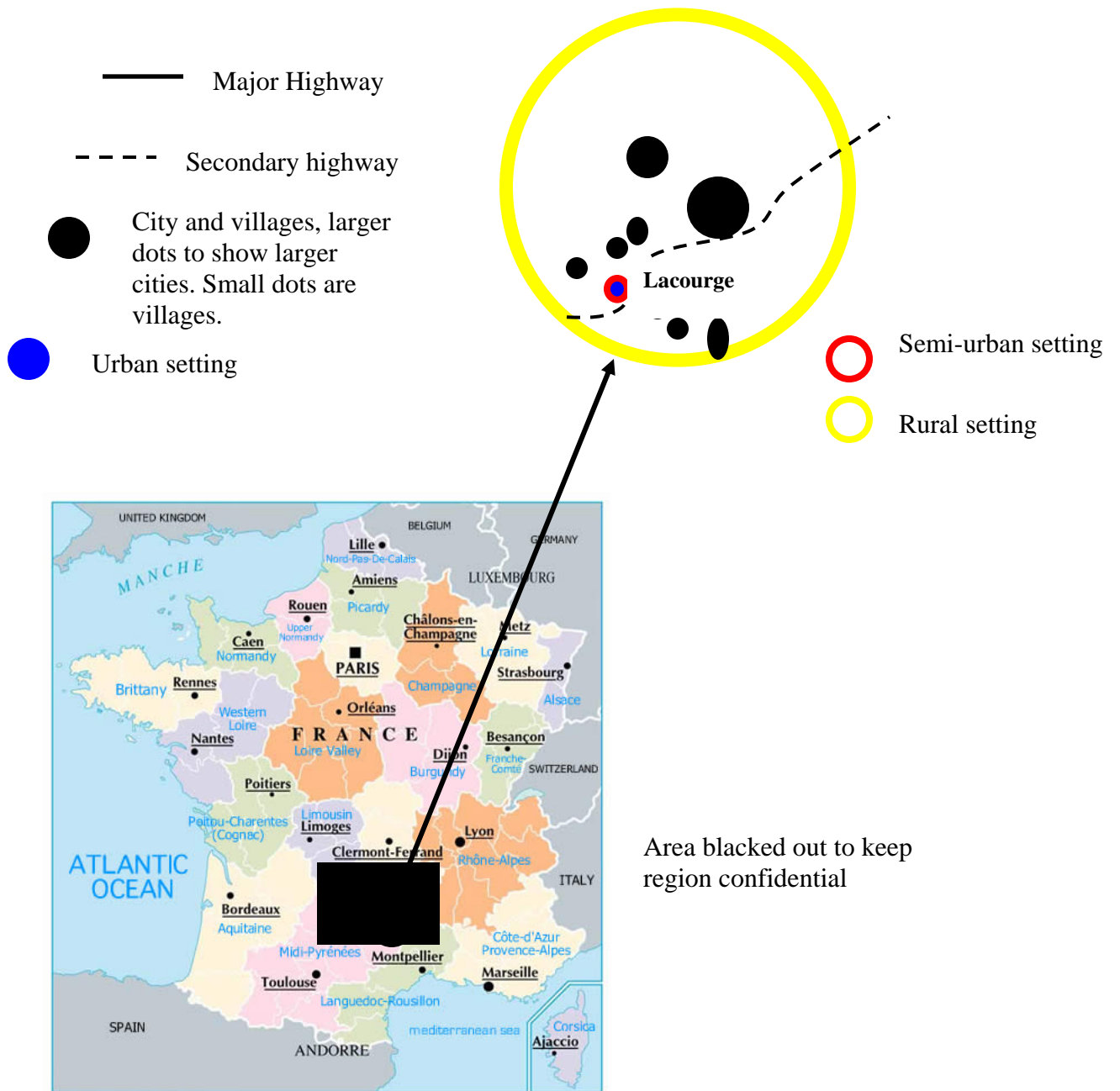


Narratives related to age, gender and interview locations are used independently or concurrently with the topics in question.

### **Lesson learned from the interview process**

It was initially thought that the days could be planned in relative order, until I found out that I needed to be as flexible with time as I would find available respondents willing to answer questions. As the interviews went on I found that I needed to be flexible so as to be, at a moment's notice, ready to begin interviewing. I found that flexibility and the ability to adapt to questioning respondents anywhere played a big role in being able to conduct all interviews in a span of just two weeks. Once the first interview was conducted the questions were adjusted (slightly) in order to accommodate the respondents and to measure the average interview time to about ten minutes so that they would know whether or not they would have time to answer those questions. At times, if a respondent did not grasp a question (for example regarding regional identity), for the purpose of the study the research would cite a personal example in order to make them relate to it. He would state that, as a Paris native living abroad for almost 20 years, he still identified as a Parisian. Though it would appear to make the regional identity question somewhat biased, it often worked to make them understand what regional identity meant, more easily. It would have been better to have prepared an alternative definition of regional identity, instead of asking "what does it mean to be from your region?" or "what defines you, in relations to your region?", but it gave a portion of unanticipated feel to the research that should be

expected when dealing with an exploratory study. By definition such study is done to explore, as opposed to really measure against a known hypothesis. In future research, it is intended to define, and fine-tune the questions in order to give less personal information about the research so as not to make a question appear biased and also to enhance the understanding of the question by the respondent. Because I didn't know most of the respondents before the interviews, I don't believe that their answers were biased, but I sometimes wonder the extent with which I would have been able to interview them had it not been for Sophie. So in that regards, I think there was a slight bias in the willingness to respond, or the length of some responses, as if they were doing her a favor, by agreeing to answer to my questions.



Adapted from Link Paris [www.linkparis.com/france-map.htm](http://www.linkparis.com/france-map.htm)

Figure 1: Map of France and study area

A scale was used to define the degree of urban, rural, semi-urban setting according to the city center, within a radius of not more than 30 kilometers. (See Figure 1 and Table 1 for definition)

Table 1: Residential Setting Scale

<b>URBAN (10 respondents)</b>	<b>SEMI-URBAN (10 respondents)</b>	<b>RURAL (13 respondents)</b>
Within village limits	Bordering village limits, extending no more than 1 kilometer outside the village limits.	Any residence that is more than 1 kilometer outside the village limits.

Echeverria (2003) cited in her study that women tend to associate themselves with more sophisticated languages than men. After analysis of the data, I created a table (Appendix B) of patois fluency according to gender types. This was done to observe if there were many differences of fluency levels. Another theme that is explored is patois, as the ability to speak the regional language and another scale was created to measure the degree of fluency.

Because each respondent, although chosen within the village, has to be native of the village or the immediate surrounding area, focus was placed on their residential location/setting as opposed to their place of work. In order to maintain anonymity the profession of the participants was removed from the study results. For the purpose of the research place of residence would determine their setting as urban, semi-urban or, rural. Education, marital status were initially recorded after a few interviews, but will not be reported as it did not have any salience to the purpose of the study. Some respondents stated voluntarily their marital status;

others seemed to be unwilling to discuss it and yet for others it seemed like the subject were too personal. So I made a conscious decision to remove the marital status from the interview process.

An exploratory study with qualitative research method was used, as quantitative methods of research do not provide adequate direct respondents input (Marshall, 1996). A base questionnaire was developed with the main topics, from which emerged main themes after data analysis (see Figure 2): 1) regional identity, 2) patois, 3) maintenance of regional language, 4) leaving the region to better come back, 5) regional activities. Within each theme, the idea of age and residential setting came into consideration but was analyzed separately within each theme. (See Appendix D for the complete questionnaire). At the beginning of the interview each participant was told the basic purpose of the study. Participants were assured that their participation was strictly voluntary and the researcher assured the confidentiality of their participation. Participant consent was asked for before each interview was recorded. The name of the respondent was made into a pseudonym at the time of the transcription.

The questionnaire (See Appendix D) was tailored to fit the available time that each respondent had to answer, making sure that the principal themes of the study were covered. Some did not have much time, while others chose to participate when the opportunity presented itself (see Table 2). The average length of each interview was measured at 11 minutes. Each interview was collected in French. The principal investigator (a French native, who has lived for 17 years in the United States who is also a French teacher and a free-lance translator) translated each interview into English.

## **Analytic Strategy**

Data were collected from 33 respondents, which represent about 1.1% of the total population of the village. The interviews were collected and recorded in French. They were later transcribed in French, and the data extracted from them was recorded directly in English. Then, each interview was analyzed based on topics utilizing the open coding technique developed by Strauss and Corbin (2008). Open coding technique allows for the development of five main elements based on one or two initial questions. Once the interviews were collected and transcribed, they were then read without coding to allow for familiarization of the data. Thus, I objectively identified specific characteristics of each interview and extracted information and narratives from them. That reading generated “working” themes through the analysis of blocks of texts and those themes were then pulled. I defined explicit themes that placed relative emphasis on the initial topics that were in the questions guide (i.e. regional identity, regional attachment, patois, etc...). Once the themes were pulled, the interviews were compiled and blocks of texts were coded according to those themes, and each theme was then counted across the width of all the interviews. From that moment, I put together some sociological constructs. I noticed at that point some differences by age and gender. Upon the creation of those themes, it became clear that certain analytic tables were going to need to be created in order to report results according to core content that the themes inspired: interview locations, gender, patois fluency, and age of respondent. Figure 1 was designed to understand the residential settings within the research area. After this process was done, the blocks were compiled and each theme was developed as reported in Chapter 5 (Strauss and Corbin 2008).

## **A look at qualitative methods**

The qualitative method was selected for this research, as it is a more humanistic approach to research than quantitative studies provide and it allows more flexibility for the researcher (Marshall, 1996). The qualitative method also allows for the development of research to conduct an exploratory study such as this one. It also would be very difficult to quantify such questions as “do you speak patois? Why and why not?” or “how would you define your regional identity? In other words, what makes you, you?” The qualitative method also provided more flexibility to the researcher and a more naturalistic approach (Marshall, 1996), which was anticipated to be used for this study in order to take on more adaptive roles by the key informant and myself, to gather the necessary data.

Considering the present exploratory study, I went about the research in the village of Lacourge, knowing that I would learn to adapt and adjust, according to field notes and observations collected in earlier interviews. As with any other exploratory studies, the qualitative method stands out as the method of choice, as it is difficult to measure with any quantifiable, rigid statistics this type of research. Qualitative methods allow a researcher to not only take a snapshot of the responding population selected through differentiated methods of sampling but also for a discussion and summative conclusion based on direct results of that study (Berg, 1998), thus limiting its result specifically to the population sampled as opposed to be making a general conclusive statement to a broader population as it is typically the case in quantitative methods. But it is more appropriate for an exploratory study to gauge initial results from a small village, before considering the expansion of research on a larger scale.

Part of the analysis of the results shown in Chapter 5 was to explore the narratives extracted from the interviews. Those narratives exemplify how the respondents view their regional identity as it relates to their ability and inability to communicate in patois. They are reflected in themes taken directly from the initial guide questionnaire and resulting interview analysis. I wanted to not only report, through the use of these narratives, certain examples of how they felt about regional identity and what defined their regional identity. I also wanted to show; through the use of additional narratives what they felt about their communicative abilities in patois. The other part of the analysis was about what they mentioned regarding their ability to speak patois is also shown in Chapter 5 and thanks to the fluency scale in Appendix B. I reported the results to demonstrate that age and residential setting did have an impact on their ability to communicate in patois, but also that it was related to their gender.



## CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The main focus of this exploratory study was to gauge the respondents' ability or inability to communicate in patois based on their residential setting and their age, and whether that influenced their regional identity. Throughout the interviewing process, I found several native respondents who mentioned that they believed patois was lost due to the advent of technology, the introduction of television and the loss of conviviality that ensued. The loss of that face-to-face interaction contributed to the decline of communication in patois. People no longer got together during harvest season as the number of farmers declined. They no longer shared a drink at the local café, as they would go home to watch television when the workday was over. People, gradually, stopped talking to one another on a regular basis.

Results will be divided into main themes. Outside from the principal themes: 1) regional identity, 2) patois, 3) maintenance of the regional language and its sustainability, 4) regional attachment, 5) regional activities. They are represented in Figure 2.

### **Demographics**

Table 2 displays the demographic information of the study participants. In order to protect the participants' identity and to maintain confidentiality each respondent's name was given a pseudonym chosen by the primary investigator (not communicated on this table). Most respondents were born in the region where the research took place. Only three of them (2 men

and 1 woman) were born outside of it. Two older respondents were born outside of the researched region because, at the time of their birth, there was no hospital in the region where newborns could be delivered.

Table 2 indicates also age categories in order to indicate the age parity necessary for the sampling of the respondents. Eighteen women and 15 men were interviewed. In an effort to keep a balanced sample of residential settings among the respondents, it was found that as indicated in Table 1, that 10 respondents lived in an urban setting, another 10 lived in a semi-urban setting and the remaining 13 respondents lived in a rural setting, accounting for all gender together. Among the urban residents 6 were men and 4 were women, within the semi-urban residents 7 were women and 3 were men and 7 women lived in rural areas while 6 of men did. These results show an overall relative parity among all residential setting and across gender lines. Although all respondents spoke French, Appendix B describes their level of patois fluency according to their gender and residential settings.

The age range of the respondents, regardless of their gender could be divided in the following categories: Under 25 (1): 4 respondents, 25 to 45 (2): 17 respondents, 45 to 65 (3): 6 respondents, 65 to 90 (4): 66 respondents, regardless of gender. The respondent's gender is detailed in Table 2 for a better understanding of the demographics of the studied population.

Although there is clear majority of respondents within the age category of 25 to 45 years, all of them actively working, there is a significant amount of respondents in other age categories to create parity in order to gather the data.

It should be noted as it was earlier pointed out that interview locations varied greatly according to the availability of the respondents as indicated in Table 2. Out of 33 respondents there were 18 women and 15 men, thus representing relative gender parity.

Table 2: Demographics

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age Cat.</b>	<b>Residential Setting</b>	<b>Interview Location</b>	<b>Patois Spoken</b>	<b>Patois Understood</b>
F	3	Semi-urban	Home	No	Yes
M	2	Rural	Work	No	Yes
M	4	Rural	Car	Yes	Yes
M	4	Rural	Home	Yes	Yes
M	2	Rural	Work	No	No
M	3	Semi-urban	Work	No	Yes
F	2	Semi-urban	Home	No	No
M	2	Urban	Café	No	No
M	4	Urban	Home	No	No
M	2	Rural	Café	No	No
F	2	Urban	Café	No	No
F	3	Urban	Café	No	Yes
F	2	Rural	Café	No	No
M	1	Urban	Work	No	No
F	2	Rural	Roadside	No	Yes
M	2	Urban	Home	No	No
F	3	Semi-urban	Work	No	Yes
F	2	Rural	Café	No	No
F	2	Rural	Café	No	No
F	2	Semi-urban	Café	No	No
F	4	Urban	Home	Yes	Yes and for reading too
F	1	Rural	Café	No	No
F	3	Urban	Work	No	Yes
M	1	Urban	Café	No	Yes
F	2	Rural	Work	No	No
F	2	Semi urban	Café	No	No
M	2	Rural	Café	No	Yes
F	2	Rural	Café	No	No
M	4	Semi urban	Other	Yes	Yes
F	1	Semi-urban	Roadside	No	No
M	3	Semi-urban	Work	No	Yes
F	2	Semi-urban	Nightclub	No	No
M	4	Urban	Work	No	No

*Patois spoken and Patois understood: respondents on a scale from 1 to 10 measured the regional language fluency level. Although their fluency level is analyzed in the results section of this paper, for the purpose of this table, a simple answer of yes and no was used. Yes was given if their self-assessment scored 5 or better and no if it scored less than 5. This allows, at a glance, for a better understanding of the patois fluency level of the respondents. Regional Language Fluency: score given by respondent (self-reported) on a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being most fluent)*

Table 2 reflects that the median age of respondents is about 45 years old. It also shows that the median age of male respondents is slightly older at almost 51 years of age. One explanation for that is that the number of male respondents is slightly smaller than that of female respondents. The male respondents represented a group with more participants in the category of age 70 and above than for the female group. The female respondents' average age is 38 years old as can be conversely explain by the fact that only one of them was 80 years of age.

It would noteworthy to explore in future studies of similar nature if this prevalence can be repeated. There is a slight majority of men who answered interviews from their work location, which is the second most popular location for interviews. Other locations can be largely attributed to locations of opportunity thus resulting in smaller percentage of respondents. These age brackets, gender and interview locations are going to be utilized to comment on the results of this exploratory study in the themes that follow:

Each theme was selected following the process of open coding (Strauss and Corbin 2008) and the following themes emerged from the main initial topics, as displayed in the nodes shown in Figure 2:

Regional Identity: shows how respondents relate to their sense of regional identity and how their ability or inability to speak patois has influenced that identity. It also shows what makes them

who they are. The analysis of the interviews showed also that some of the words, in French, that they used regularly, showed a representation of their regional identity along with what they defined proudly as being the social capital of the region. Regional identity was also believed to be directly linked to the ability of speaking patois, thus interrelated to patois. Regional attachment is defined closely to regional identity as most respondents left the region at some point in their life; they found themselves drawn back to it and eager to stay in the region. They were asked to explain what made them stay in the region. Although it seemed clear that regional activities should influence regional identity, most respondents, unexpectedly, explained that they thought those activities were designed for tourists, but the way those activities were organized in the past was reflected, somewhat, their sense of regional identity as in their display of regional pride. Patois displayed each respondent's measure of fluency in patois and their perception of health of this sub regional language. Their general view is that patois is an old language utilized only by the elders, though beautiful and important for the respondents' cultural heritage is destined to disappear. Responses were different according to each respondent as to what needed to be done to maintain the language and keep it alive; albeit patois or Occitan, sometimes being blended as almost similar languages, although one is a derivative of the (more academic) other. Each theme is developed below and punctuated with narratives from the respondent to thoroughly explore the results of this study

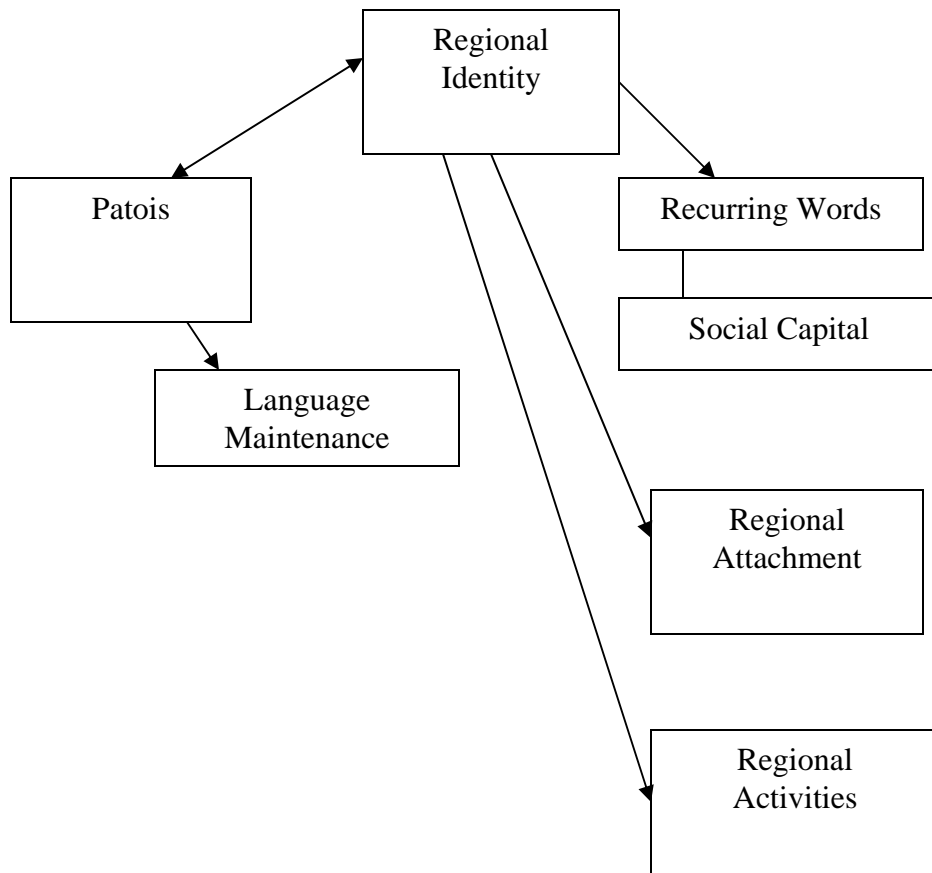


Figure 2: Major Themes in Study

It must be noted that within each theme listed in Figure 2, the main research questions are being addressed. Respondents' residential settings, age and sub regional language proficiency, which is the mechanisms of this thesis, is being examined and discussed within regional identity and patois framework. Moreover, the thesis does address, within the focus of answering the research questions regarding residential settings, age and sub regional language, the maintenance and sustainability of patois, the respondent's regional attachment and regional activities. All these themes represent an integral part of the respondents' regional identity and remain at the core of what the relationship between age, residential setting and the ability to speak patois in the way that it affected their perception of their regional identity.

### **Regional Identity**

The results indicated that some limitations could have been in the respondents' unwillingness to speak to an outsider of their region. Had I not been helped by my key informant, those with a stronger regional identity could have been much more reluctant than those with the lesser regional identity to participate. Some of the responses are in total contradiction with popular and research-based beliefs; that language holds the key to regional identity, as previously stated in this paper. People understood regional identity as I defined it for them if they did not seem to react to the question. When asked to define a man or a woman like them from that region, some would answer quickly in a very opinionated manner, while others



would not know what to say. One even told me that he had never questioned his regional identity. When they did not answer, I would had that after living abroad for almost 20 years, as a native of Paris, I still defined myself as a Parisian (more liberal, art and environmentally conscious, non-religious, divorced, culturally open-minded). Some 26 respondents felt that it was not necessary to speak patois to hold a good grasp on their regional identity, yet they felt that it was important to retain patois, though they did not speak it. Furthermore 23 of them did not show interest to learn patois in order to preserve the link to regional identity [because they did not feel that it was key to their regional identity].

It seems that more respondents felt that their regional identity was about their way of life in the region they were born in, rather than an ascribed status in that region. Sandra, who was a middle-aged woman living in a semi-urban setting gave a thoughtful definition of what it means to be from that region as it relates to patois and said:

*Le patois c'est plus qu'un langage régional, plus qu'un dialecte, c'est un sentiment qui transcende la compréhension.* (Patois is more than a regional language, more than a dialect; it is a feeling that transcends understanding)

One could study it, as an ethnographer, but until he/she would be able to experience it firsthand there would not be a way to really get a grasp as to what it is sociologically, linguistically and anthropologically to be from that region. Living in the region, experiencing nature, the beautiful weather in the summer, the harsh winters and dealing with the living conditions then (and the rurality of the region); seeing the differences in the way people dress according to the season, how they act, and being an integral part, not an invasive part, of their natural surroundings and local environment; make up their regional identity much more than any

kind of describable feeling they could exchange with any outsider. A respondent made such a representative comment: “*being from here, is living here*”. Another relevant narrative was:

*Ceux qui sont plus proches de la terre ne s’en soucie pas autant et comment ils s’identifient avec. Si tu es né ici, tu es d’ici, c’est tout.* (Those who are closer to the land worry less about it and how to identify with it. If you are born here, you simply belong here, that’s all).

For the purpose of clarity in this thesis, all subsequent quotes will be given directly in English.

The next narrative explained why the younger generation did not speak patois, but also why she (the respondent) chose to live in the researched region.

*It’s a simple life that suits me, there are seasons, there are beautiful landscapes, and it’s beautiful!*

Regional identity, after interview analysis, is the theme that generated the most responses ranging from indifference of regional language capacity for 23 respondents, to absolute importance as validating regional identity for 3 of them, to one respondent having the responses that one could associated to a Basque or a Corsican separatist with very passionate answers, yet with a very limited knowledge, paradoxically, of the regional language. The following respondent was the only one to feel so strongly about regional identity and to have given so much thought to the question:

*At the level of local identity, this is the most representative of local identity, just look at the Catalans, the Basques, the Corsicans; it is through their language that they identify themselves.*

Developed from this theme, which gathered several questions that were related to regional identity it could be deduced that respondents, for 26 of them, did not view their ability to speak patois as influencing their feeling of regional identity. Twenty-five respondents understood the cultural importance of keeping the language alive as a way to perpetuate a cultural heritage. Yet 31 of them were, very matter-of-factly, aware of their regional identity as to them it meant being born in the region. They never had to question or wonder anything about their regional identity. Seven of them stated Brittany or Basque or even Catalan regions as examples of very strong regional identity linked to regional language (which is in complete paradox with the previous statement). Two of them even spoke of the “fierce” regional identity that Corsican held (without thoughts of terrorism or civil disobedience as Corsican separatists are known for). “Regional generation” (age of regionally established respondents) and residential setting dictated language and 25 felt that patois belonged to a foregone generation, thus destined to pass and lose itself much like other social habits would be lost. Five respondents felt that the advent of technology and the decline of farming along with the development of television were to blame for a loss of conviviality in order to maintain the practice of patois.

The following respondent was trying to explain how different farming life was now, from his days as a farmer, and how much easier it had become for present-day farmers:

*Today if you can drive a combine harvester and wear a suit, and get out of it to go to some party.*

Twenty respondents were aware that the different versions of patois spoken throughout the region may have contributed to its decline, yet only 3 of them regretted the way society had

evolved into an individualistic fashion, in pursuit of material wealth, thus contributing to a decline of conviviality among regional residents, urban and rural alike.

When asked to describe something that would typify the regional identity, 15 agreed that someone born in the region would likely be harsh, like the winter weather, somewhat rural in his/her temperament and fairly closed to change and outsiders. The following narrative is taken in the context that newcomers must get involved in order to get integrated to the regional environment:

*You must invest yourself with everyone and especially with nature here.*

Below is a typical description of regional identity of people, viewed by one of the respondents:

*I would say that in Lacourge things are a little sectarian. Even if one tries to adapt, to integrate other locals' life, they look at that person's name, that person's family, if they know that person for a while or not, they can be very wary, because they're very « homebodies » and it's as if it dates back to the Medieval Times. The pure people from this region are very boorish.*

Most narratives that were collected were taken from the context of answering, the meaning of being from this region, which reflected the regional identity of the respondents, as demonstrated below:

*A newcomer, like you, maybe you have a hard time getting acclimated here, because someone who comes from far away, everybody watches him, he is not necessarily going to be interested by anyone in particular, but everyone is going to be watching him and catalog him, label him quickly, he is not used to it and does not adjust to it as he is not from here, nobody is going to help him, to find*

*work.*

This research made all the respondents give some thoughts to the subject of regional identity. Thoughts they had not considered before.

Fifteen agreed that it was a very difficult environment to integrate and assimilate in, for an outsider. This comment was mentioned after answering the question of what it meant to be from this region. But only one said that it contributed somewhat to the relative continued isolation of the region, in contrast with other regions of France. Thirty-one respondents agreed with this assessment of their regional identity. It was found that 32 appreciated the advantages of rural life: such as lack of traffic, lack of overcrowded public transportation and lack of crime, which largely places them in a “unique and pristine” situation. This sentiment is exemplified in the narrative below:

*For me a week in the city ok, but after 15 days I start to gasp for air (laughs), I need my freedom, my air).*

This respondent identifies so much more with the rural life of this region than with a big city life.

## **Recurring Words**

Throughout the interviews the same words came back on a regular basis, without coaching from me but marking a unique trait of each respondent’s regional identity. These words are featured and explored below:

“*La nature*” (nature): as the least populated and one of the most rural regions of France, it is well known for its pristine outdoors quality. Someone born in the region must not only love nature but hearty and natural food as well. Thirty-two respondents agreed that they were also there for the

quality of the natural and preserved environment. One respondent even went as far as saying that local residents live in osmosis with nature. Seventeen respondents used the actual word in their specific response. This respondent, below, also exemplified the general feeling of regional identity and what keeps the respondents in this region:

*I think it's my roots, simply, nature. I love to be near nature. The city asphyxiates me. I'm better here, it's the advantage of being here, and it's the nature.*

“*Forcément*” (inevitably): this word exemplified their feeling about the state of patois. Although 20 agreed that it should be preserved, 27 were also predicting that it was inevitable that it would disappear one day. As if to throw their hands up in the air and claim that nothing much could be done to preserve it. They felt that many other values had disappeared in a modern and technologically advanced world, so would patois. Initially it was thought that a lot of respondents used this word, but after a careful observation, it was found that only 4 of them actually used it.

“*La qualité de la vie*” (quality of life): All agreed that they lived in a pristine region with a quality of life that used to be pejoratively judged by “city folks” as backwards and rural as mentioned by one of the respondents. It is now considered to be a privileged region without pollution, without the stress of a big city life and with the safety that rural and small town arena provides. They all felt very lucky to be in a region that is now envied by many, but achieved by few. Six used this precise expression in their response. Below is another quote taken in order to get an answer to the question: what makes you stay here?

*{Being from here} the tranquility is key and the region, but then I don't worry about all that.*

The following narrative reflected one of the many advantages of living in this region:

*What is nice is that we are near everything, with good road access, so that we can leave for a couple days, to go get a « bowl of crowd » and come back.*

“Pays” (country): Ten respondents used this word. It did not refer to a nation as a state but to the wholesomeness of the region. Their region was so unique that it could be considered a country in it of itself. Though only 2 of those 10 would use this word more in the sense of seeking independence as with typical separatism, all used it to refer to the uniqueness of the region. All respondents that used this word were displaying great pride, while saying it, thus reinforcing their regional identity. It was through similar subtleties that the researcher could also measure the respondents’ degree of regional identity.

“Les anciens” (the elders, the ancient ones): when it was first heard this word could have been considered as a harsh, somewhat pejorative and a little insulting definition of the older generation. It quickly became a reference point to designate the rural older generation. That generation that is almost venerated for holding the knowledge patois (fluently). Thirty six percent of respondents used the following definition:

*We are always a little bit limited, just like when we go in a foreign country without speaking the language we always feel a bit limited.*

Regional identity was seen, as exemplified above, also as a way to, linguistically, challenge oneself when dealing with the older generation. That generation is greatly respected and the ability to communicate, even succinctly with an older individual, in patois was seen as a gateway to making that person feel better. Even though communication would be limited, it allowed the younger person to feel closer to the older one, thus regain a sense of regional pride. It was also seen as a tool to preserve the regional heritage.

## Social Capital

All respondents agreed that this region was unique and, as the least populated and least polluted region in France, it offered some distinctive environmental advantages not found anywhere else nationally. Because of its exclusive location, residents are not too far from mountains, from the beach and live in an unspoiled countryside environment. The following narrative displays a typical response linking residents to their regional attachment. These residents would typically leave in straight out of high school and return shortly after. In their responses they would say that they were in love with their region and its natural environment:

*There is some chemistry here, that's it. I was happy to leave, because when someone is a teenager he/she needs to see other things, but when there is a need to be close to the family or to start a family, it's an ideal atmosphere to do that.*

Reflecting on their regional identity they felt in complete osmosis with nature. They felt that it offered an environmental closeness such as hunting, trekking, walking, mushroom picking. Meanwhile, thanks to nearby flawless interstate and train systems; they felt proximity to other bigger size cities with cheaper and more diverse shopping. They all felt that they could experience the advantages of modern, technologically advanced life without the inconvenient of pollution, lack of safety that big cities tend to carry. One similarity to with large cities was found in the perception of drug use, as one respondent put it:

*Drugs, there are as many here as in a big city, you won't take that away.*



## **Patois**

Patois (the sub regional language studied in this research) is more than a regional language, more than a dialect; it is often a feeling that transcends understanding itself.

As stated in the research question, it was anticipated that a majority of respondents, regardless of their residential setting, would have limited skills in patois. After careful analysis it turned out that 9 men and 11 women had very limited speaking skills and that 5 men and 5 women had very limited comprehension skills of that sub regional language. Appendix B was created as a patois fluency scale. The guiding questionnaire that was created at the onset of this exploratory study included a question relative to the respondents' ability to communicate in patois. The first few respondents would give me approximate answers as to what they felt their level was in patois (speaking and comprehension skills). Much like Hoare (2000) when she studied Breton communicative skills in the Brittany region, I then decided to create a scale from 1 to 10 to evaluate their patois skill levels and pursue my interviews this way. I then asked the respondent to give me a self-evaluation on that scale from 1 to 10 about their communicative skills in patois. From that scale and based on their answers, I developed five different levels of fluency: Very Basic describes someone who is recognizably incapable of holding a conversation but holds enough knowledge to retain and recognize some words that he/she hears; Basic is someone that has acquired over time a level of fluency that will allow him/her to understand or speak basic conversation without a lot of help; Average designates someone who has had some practice of the language but cannot carry or understand a conversation that is beyond a simple exchange; Above Average is someone who is still struggling but has a very good grasp on the

language; Near Fluent to Fluent designates someone who has either acquired a proficiency that is such that he/she is considered fluent with flawless expression, or someone who has been speaking patois from birth, then learned to speak French.

Upon observation of the fluency scale (Appendix B) it was found those 10 men and 11 women had very basic speaking skills in patois regardless of their age though, paradoxically, 5 men in that category lived in an urban setting whereas 5 women in that skill level lived in a rural setting. 5 men and 5 women fell in that same category of very basic skills regarding their comprehension level of patois. And among that number 4 men lived in an urban setting while 3 women lived in a rural setting which would verify the initial research question that men living in urban areas have a very poor speaking and comprehension skills in patois. However the same holds true for women living in, surprisingly, rural areas. It should be mentioned that the basic (a level with a slight better proficiency than very basic) comprehension level of women was the same as the very basic one and again these women tended to live in rural areas.

On the other end of the speaking and comprehension spectrum, 3 men had a fluent or near fluent speaking level of patois and the majority of these men lived in a rural setting. No women were admittedly recorded to hold such a high level of speech in patois. Five men had acquired a high comprehension level among which almost the same amount lived in a rural area as in a semi urban setting, while only 3 women had acquired that skill level of comprehension but mostly while living in an urban setting.

Among men fluent in patois of them were in the older category, thus verifying the initial research question that the older and the more rural they are the more they are able to speak patois

as shown in the next narrative, in reference to the state of health of patois in rural areas, specifically among the older generation (and collected from an older resident):

*During hunting parties if there are younger people we forget to speak patois, but with the « anciens » we could only speak patois and as soon as the generations increase (meaning people get younger), we tend to speak French.*

However, that initial belief that the more urban a respondent lives in the more likely he is to hold poor communicative skills in patois was refuted concerning, only their comprehension level, as an equal amount was in rural as in semi urban setting. A very young man under the age of 25 who lived in an urban setting was the exception from that result. That may be surmised in the fact that his family came from a very prominent regional family with a very long lineage in the region, and he might have been reminiscent of that, while being adamant that his ability to communicate in patois was directly linked to his regional identity.

When one respondent was then asked why anyone would want to learn patois, she responded the following:

*We feel less of a stranger to them, speaking of using a few words of patois to communicate with the older generation.*

Among the women with a high level of understanding of patois, only one was in the oldest category and the others were middle-aged women. All lived in an urban or semi urban setting but none lived in a rural area. It can be initially concluded from this result that the more women live in a rural area, regardless of their age, the more they tend to speak and understand very little patois. Although this observation is in total contradiction with the premise that rurality is related to patois fluency, it could be explained as a residential preference, for these women, to

enjoy the quality of life of the region without much importance to their regional language ability. But as they get older, they need to live closer to commodities that urban life offers (such as shopping and medical services within walking distance). Their age (over 50) reflected that they were closer to the generation that was believed to hold the knowledge of patois, thus having acquired a certain fluency level in patois.

When mixing age and residential setting we could see that the median age of having a very poor speaking level of patois is 47 years old for men and 34 years old for women, though slightly younger than men, both genders are concurrent with the median age of respondents.

Two exceptions came to light: a young male respondent under 25 years of age residing in the urban section of the research area, though had limited speaking skills, he had a very good grasp in comprehending the language. The second exception was an elderly woman who had always lived in an urban setting and was quite fluent both in speaking and comprehending patois and could read it too. The following exchange represents, below, the personality that local people have and the reminiscence that this older respondent has about her love for patois, concurrent with her generation. The interaction with Sophie (the key informant) typified the way people from Occitan region can relate with one another, in solidarity of similar region, regional language and cultural heritage:

*When it's in your guts, excuse me for this, you're happy to participate, to take part, in the newspapers, like [name of region kept confidential] Nouvelle, each week you can read it, even in Midi Libre, there are articles in patois, it gives a special flavor, just like the Provençal, over there with Mistral (a local*

*newspaper), it has another flavor for those who understand patois, there are words that cannot even be translated, you just feel them.*

Regardless of their sub regional language skills 27 respondents were in consensus with saying that the state of patois was, if not lagging, definitely losing ground. Seven of them were also confused between the state of patois along with its more academic derivative: Occitan. This mixing made it difficult to assess whether they thought one or the other was losing ground but overall made it clear that they had a definite knowledge of the state of health of their native regional language. Four natives thought that patois would never die, as there would always be someone to retain some form of the fluency to ensure that language transmission would occur. And even one of them had really never given any thought about it, thus did not hold any opinion and a respondent had this to say, as stated below:

*My family was a prominent family from the bourgeoisie and we had not spoken patois in a very long time.*

Another one, an older man, really thought that patois was living a renaissance of sort and the next narrative demonstrates it:

*There even used to be people that spoke mainly patois, but it has advanced and now everybody speaks French, but Occitan, and the patois are cultural elements and there is a real interest for theses languages that is taken by people of all ages.*

Only one appeared to be unconcerned with that state for personal reasons, as she did not like the regional language as she viewed it as a somewhat barbaric language. Twenty-five respondents thought that it was important to try to maintain some cognitive level of the regional language, in order to contribute in its preservation as part of their socio-cultural heritage. It

appeared, though, that 7 of them thought that Occitan would thrive thanks to a resurging interest, both intellectually and educationally (being offered in more and more schools), while patois was destined to slowly die once the older generation of fluent patois speakers would die. This is shown in the following narrative:

*Generally we are placing more value on people, once again.*

The following narrative demonstrates a concept that 5 respondents were well aware of. They knew that one of the reasons that patois had declined was its sub regional individuality and relative isolation from its more mainstream derivative: Occitan, through the entire region.

*To each village, each place, one finds a different regional dialect.*

### **Maintenance of the regional language and its sustainability**

In order to preserve patois, one must recognize its assets and benefits. This respondent offered the following narrative in response to that particular thought:

*It is a very beautiful language, because in speaking it, my grandfather who was speaking to us in patois, we didn't understand anything but we laughed a lot, and it's true that actually it belong to some very pleasant memories of my childhood.*

Despite the lack of fluency from the majority of respondents, they felt that it was important to preserve it. The following respondent offered one of the few solutions emitted by 25 respondents that were concerned about the sustainability of patois:

*I think it's a family affair.*

She felt that it needed to be transmitted within each family from one generation to the next.

Some, as stated before that portion was difficult to measure, seemed to be confused or seemed to go back and forth between the survival of the localized patois, while others seemed to refer more to Occitan. The next narrative shows a respondent's blunt, yet insightful response to what is needed to keep patois alive:

*You must get the cows back, you set aside all the sectarian modernity and technology and it will come back, so it's dead, it's dead.*

While their regional identity did not seem affected by the lack of knowledge of patois or Occitan, 25 respondents felt that it should be preserved and 20 of them were referring to school as the number one source of training of the regional or sub regional language. Four respondents were advocating a resurging interest amongst the local population along with the involvement of the older population that holds the knowledge of the regional language in order to motivate and teach the younger population to speak and understand it. Twenty-seven respondents were opposed to make it compulsory in school, should the school option be adopted. They felt that voluntary teaching and learning were the preferred options. Although they did not feel that regional language was critical to holding their regional identity, they all felt that, should patois or Occitan disappear completely, they would lose part of their regional identity and cultural heritage.

### **Regional attachment**

Twenty-eight respondents, regardless of their age, had had to leave the region when they were younger in order to pursue their studies because this region does not have a university nor

does offer any advanced studies opportunities. Twenty-one of them mentioned that they were eager, when young, to leave the region to go and explore other parts of France or go experience the big city life. They defined a big city as a city like Montpellier where 250,000 residents live. While it may seem like a large city for some, for others it hardly qualifies as a metropolis in the scale of Paris or New York. Thus, their « big city » life experience was fairly limited and all were in agreement to say that they felt quickly overwhelmed by the crowd, the sense of insecurity. Though, they did enjoy the cultural entertainment opportunities that they could not find in their rural region. A respondent stating why she left the region and what motivated her to come back offered the following narrative:

*I will come back here, for, I don't know, to raise my children and finish my life, I don't know...*

It is very important to note the conservatism of her answer, and her mentality for a 22 year-old that already had thoughts of children, family and old age and was concerned with perpetuating her roots and regional heritage.

Respondents were also eager to return to their region, to what they knew, to a certain comfort zone. They wanted to be back to an area that defined their regional identity as loving its natural environment, loving the small town atmosphere, while being close to bigger town for shopping needs. They preferred the safety and the natural setting that their region offers.

## **Regional activities**

While regional activities are essentially held in the summer, 10 respondents regretted that



there were not more activities year-round. Thirty-one of those interviewed argued that these regional activities had a touristy feel, as they were not traditional in the cultural and regional sense. Because they were held in the summer months, when tourists are mostly around, they felt that tourists enjoyed those more than locals. Locals were simply taking advantage of the opportunity to attend some of these regional activities. This is expressed in the narrative that follows:

*{Regional activities} are mainly for tourists; I don't necessarily find the regional identity in these sorts of manifestations.*

Not only did this quote reflect the general feeling about regional activities but it also displayed the word “*forcément*” translated here loosely in another form (here meaning necessarily), but used widely by 4 respondents. It was as if their life and the plight of patois were all part of an inevitable socioeconomic destiny. They felt that there should be more traditional activities with cultural heritage flair to them (although only 3 mentioned it). They also felt that there should be more enthusiasm and involvement from the local population to try and get them organized year-round in order to validate their regional identity and put it in the forefront, rather than being held only in the summer. Only one major regional activity/festival is offered (in the summer) in Occitan with a unique regional sense. Others regional activities are generally more in French and in touch with typical summer festivals, designed around music more than cultural tradition. The older population deplored the lack of traditional music and did not feel as close to classical or jazz music as they would be to more regional folkloric music, as regional festivals, of a by-gone era, used to offer.

One respondent mentioned that regional activities were organized to maintain a certain

sense of regional identity and to show other people what it was all about. As such, she felt that as old regional habits were being reintroduced (such as the community bread oven, the washboards by the river {done only through traditional festivals}), other people would gain a renewed sense of regional identity and would be more prone to learn patois. It was commented by another respondent that, through that sense of conviviality and the wealth of traditional meals, that people used to speak patois while waiting for things to get done (at a slower pace of life).

I observed that the respondents who hold a very strong regional identity and sense of regional pride would have been very difficult to approach without the help of an established community member. It seemed that, if their regional identity was not so strong, or if they had a nonchalant attitude about it, they were more approachable.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### **Conclusion**

Data collected from 33 respondents from a small Occitan village in the South of France were utilized to explore the relation between language and regional identity.

Anonymity was maintained within the village and also outside of the village, by making sure that each respondent was interviewed in a neutral setting and his/her name was not used. Respondents were referred to by pseudonyms, for the purpose of data recognition. There was not any limitation on time, so long as I was proactive in explaining to the respondent that the interview process would not take more than 15 minutes. The strength of the data collected was to reflect upon the Languedocian regional identity. However, due to the nature of the region and the location where the data was collected, and the fact that this did represent an exploratory study, it is not anticipated to reflect the views of all people residing in the Occitan region, being limited in scope and range.

This exploratory study was designed to find out if people spoke patois or not, and to find out the reasons for their skills (or lack thereof). People who spoke patois were older and had learned as children, although historically, the school would forbid them to speak patois outside the home (specifically after World War II). People that did not speak patois explained that it was not part of their daily life, although they understood that it was part of the cultural heritage of the region. This region, as explained previously, is located at the confluence of several distinct sub regions and is quite isolated, thus contributing to the decline of the use of patois, but also

contributing to the maintenance of regional pride and identity. The study expected to reveal that regional identity was strongly attached to the ability to speak patois, rather than to verify any specific hypothesis. Although it is not the purpose of an exploratory study to set hypotheses or very rigid expectations, I thought that the regional identity of the people of that region would be linked, like in other regions, to their patois abilities. But before I started the research, I did not know that three different patois were spoken within the research area. I also had not realized that the 30-kilometer radius stood at the confluence of three distinct sub regions (i.e. Midi-Pyrenees, Auvergne, and Languedoc-Roussillon). I believe, as it was also stated by the last respondent (an elected official), that these sub regions and the way people interact within them and outside of them have a great deal of influence on the native's regional identity. This explains why language (i.e. patois) seems to be largely unimportant, and does not affect their regional identity.

At the onset of this paper, and due to the narratives found in literature review, it was thought that regional language would hold the key to the respondents' regional identity. As aforementioned, regional language is normally a strong predictor of identity, but in the case of this exploratory study, it was found that, as the regional (Occitan) or sub regional language (patois) dies, the identity of local respondents remains strong. It was found that older men living in rural areas, as anticipated, were more likely to speak patois and that the men that had mediocre skills in patois were younger and lived in a more urban environment. However, this question did not meet expectations from the women's perspective, as the younger they were and the more rural the setting they lived in, the less likely they were to be fluent in patois. Inversely, the older those women were, and the more urban they were, the more likely they were to be fluent in patois. One explanation for this conclusion was that some of these women had grown up in rural

settings, where they learned patois, and later moved to a more urban environment. Another explanation would be that as World War II widowed these women, they moved to a more urban setting with the knowledge of patois, in order to improve their professional opportunities and enter new social circles.

Among the respondents, there were not major differences in responses according to profession; it was then decided to withhold profession from the study results. It seemed that, as an individual did not have the ability to speak or understand patois fluently, he/she felt that regional language was not a key part of their perception of regional identity; this was also the case even if he/she communicated fluently in patois.

This particular regional identity was defined by the natural and preserved environment and by the specific location in which people were born. They live in harmony with their environment, defined by this trait more so than by their regional language. Their regional identity is also defined by their ability to adjust to the living conditions that rurality imposes, and by their desire to communicate with outsiders; they are careful in the process of letting outsiders enter their local social circles. Their regional identity also rested on the quality of the air, the quality of the food found and the safety that their community provides to residents, along with a certain serene quality of life.

From these results, it can be concluded that the link between residential setting and the ability to communicate in patois is gender-based in the area studied. Firstly, it was found that the residential setting for men was a strong indicator of the ability to speak patois, but the same was not true for women. More men who had poor communicative skills in patois lived in urban than rural areas, regardless of their age. In contrast, the majority of the men over the age of 70 who

spoke patois fluently lived in a rural setting, thus validating that portion of the initial research question in a gender-specific manner: the older and the more rural a respondent is, the more likely he is to speak patois. However, this premise was refuted for women, as the portion of them that had a very basic to a basic level of patois were equal, and the majority were living in rural areas, regardless of their age. Also, it should be noted that the majority of older women (average age of 61) who had fluent communicative abilities in patois lived in an urban setting.

The second main question was to see if that ability to speak the regional language was affecting the respondents' regional identity. Previous studies have shown (as was demonstrated in the literature review section of this paper) that regional identity is closely linked to the language spoken; however, in the present study, it was not. As stated previously, the majority of respondents did not feel that patois was part of their regional identity, though they agreed that it was part of their cultural heritage: thus, language was unimportant to their regional identity. They felt that being born in the region and living in the region were strong enough attributes to describe or validate their regional identity. It was also found that respondents did not have the need to question their regional identity. They viewed this question as being an "outsider's" issue. The way they passionately answered some of the questions and the way they described their attachment to the region did indeed reflect a strong regional identity. Secondly, it was verified that, regardless of their ability to speak the language, only 7 respondents felt that it was an important factor of their regional identity, while 26 did not think that this was the case. This was clearly in contrast with the expected outcome of this exploratory study. It was verified, however, that symbolic interaction was linked to the loss of the ability to speak patois, as the loss of conviviality, and thus interaction, is contributing to the loss of patois.

In conclusion, it was found that, regardless of gender and age, the majority of respondents did not have a very good grasp of the regional language, but this did not influence their regional identity. This directly contradicts other studies, such as the one from the Quebec and Catalonia regions and the one conducted in the Basque region, which have indicated that language is a strong predictor of regional identity (Trepanier, 1991 and Echeverria, 2003). As some respondents explained, they did not view their regional language as important (as in some other regions, such as Basque or Catalanian) in influencing their regional identity. It can be explained that, since in this area respondents are not affected in their day-to-day interaction by their lack of ability to communicate in patois, they do not see it as integral to their regional identity. Patois is also largely considered to be a language without the convivial nature that it once held, as less and less people speak it and their face-to-face interaction occurs more in French than in patois. It is viewed as a language of a bygone era unimportant to daily interactions, thus validating some of the tenets of the symbolic interaction theory. Such tenets indicate that the self is defined and constructed by a process of interaction within social structure, as role behaviors are adapted to specific situations. The face-to-face interaction with others allows for those role behaviors to be flexible and open for negotiation. The following discussion section explored other studies' options in order to better understand the outcomes of this particular exploratory study and try to explain if these results are specific to the region or general to the entire Occitan territory. Further research is encouraged both on a broader regional level, within France, but also on the national level in regions where each local dialect is verifiably disappearing from mainstream linguistic habits. Second-language acquisition research could certainly contribute greatly to general issues linked to linguistic and cultural studies (Trosset,

1986, Lambert, et al, 1963). Consequently, it would be advised to recommend maintenance and renewal of the Languedocian language and to conduct further, long-term studies to see its influence on the salience of the identity of the regional residents. As seen in the Basque article, when all regional people are involved (regardless of their gender), the regional identity, enhanced by the ability to speak the regional language, allows the language to emerge with a renewed sense of regional pride, thus potentially providing a good root to renew the regional language fluency and its identity (Echeverria, 2003).

In Europe and in France, as people are erasing frontiers, there is a feeling that people want to “cocoon” their regional roots. A respondent, through the following narrative, posed an interesting question:

*People envy our natural setting and tranquility. Is it times and society that has changed or us that have aged and are more longing for serenity?*

Facing the reality of the difficulties of living and leading a life of rurality creates strong bonds among a common regional people. In cities, or even in the south of France, people can be very superficial, as suggested by one of the respondents. In the region where this study was conducted, it takes time to be integrated within the local population, but once you are, you are part of the family. This inclusion is priceless, as you are then assimilated into to the rural traditional heritage that natives enjoy. Regional identity may allow individuals to go back to the root of cultural identity, and may possibly solve their social isolation by claiming to be different in a world where homogeneity seems to be the easy way of a new symbolic interaction.



## Discussion

Such exploratory study allowed for initial results related to the region's identity and patois. It would merit exploring on a larger scale a more extensive research. That research could be conducted as a doctoral dissertation project. Expanded research throughout the Occitan territory could verify, on a broader scale, to what extent technological advancements have played the role on regional identity and social interaction.

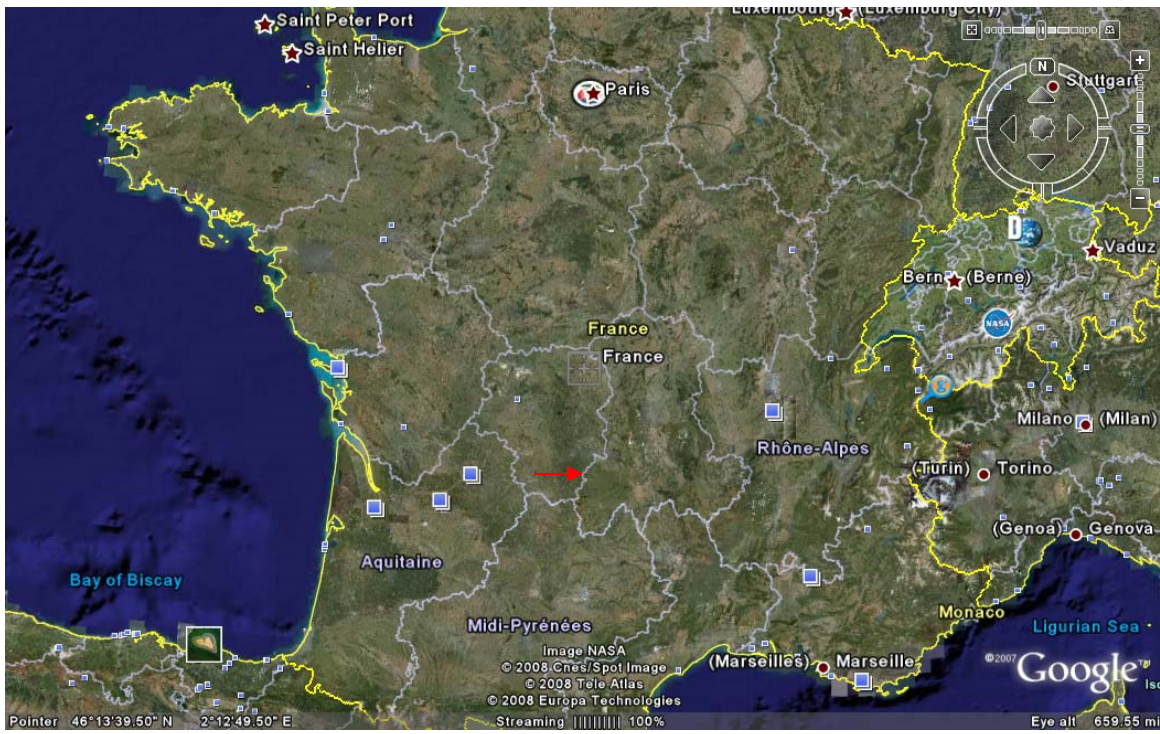
In future studies, it would be worthwhile to measure the evolution of symbolic interactionism as it relates to new technology (such as online social networks) and how many distinct selves (Hogg, Terry and White 1995) people have been able to build in order to gain acceptance within virtual social circles globally. Is it necessary to know oneself really well and be able to define one's identity with great specificity in order to adapt to interaction with others in a virtual world? Or does an individual simply need to recognize the malleability of the self and not be so diligent in preserving a personal identity, be it regional, cultural or human? Is the future of regional languages directly linked to symbolic interaction, i.e. face-to-face interaction? Is technology removing the conviviality component that face-to-face interaction holds, thus contributing to the decline of the use of regional languages in France and beyond? These are some questions reserved for future studies as sociologists and anthropologists look at the evolution of symbolic interaction theory in the "global virtual world" that we, collectively, seem to be building for ourselves. That sociological concept can be applied to any industrialized country facing the differences between regional and national identity, i.e. if someone were born in Texas, does he or she consider him or herself Texan first, or American first, and why? The extent of this study could be done at a dissertation level to find out if what holds true in one

region holds true in other regions of France, and, if that is the case, in other industrialized countries. The extent to which perceived regional identity influences social attainment needs to be studied: are people forced to move out of their region and renounce somewhat their regional identities in order to reach an elevated social status? Are we moving towards a world of linguistic and social homogeneity, or are people going to hold on to regional language to maintain a certain cultural heritage, even though it does not seem to affect their regional identity?

Last minute update: The French minister of immigration and national identity is launching a large-scale research on French national identity or what it means to be French. This research will be conducted in January and February of 2010 and creates a lot of controversy in France and elsewhere in Europe. It is viewed as being more politically motivated rather than sociologically motivated. It will be interesting to observe for the purpose of expanded regional identity research and its validity as it compares to national identity research findings. The French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, has officially entered that debate in a speech delivered November 12<sup>th</sup> 2009, in which he mentions that an individual identity is always taken for granted like the air we breathe, but that it's only at the moment that we are about to lose it that our consciousness of it emerges. He believes that each culture, each tradition, each regional language has an infinite value that would impoverish the national identity should we let them disappear.

**Transcripts of the research interviews are available upon request.**

## APPENDIX A: MAP OF FRANCE AND RESEARCH LOCATION



## APPENDIX B: FLUENCY SCALE

<i>Patois</i> fluency levels	Men (15) spoken level	Men Residential Setting	Men (15) Comprehension	Men Residential Setting**	Women (18) spoken level	Women Residential Setting	Women (18) Comprehension	Women Residential Setting**
<b>Very basic 0-2</b>	10	U = 5 S = 2 R = 3	5*	U = 4 S = - R = 1	11*	U = 1 S = 5 R = 5	5*	- S = 2 R = 3
<b>Basic 3-4</b>	2	U = 1 S = - R = 1	2*	U = 1 S = - R = 1	6	U = 2 S = 2 R = 2	5	U = 1 S = 1 R = 3
<b>Average 5-7</b>	-	-	3	U = - S = 1 R = 2	-		4	U = 1 S = 3 -
<b>Above average 8</b>	-	-	-	-	1	U = 1	1	R = 1
<b>Near fluent to fluent 9-10</b>	3	U = - S = 1 R = 2	5	U = 1 S = 2 R = 2	-	-	3	U = 2 S = 1

\* Based on the responses of these participants, their level was counted once time in the next level

up.

\*\* U=Urban, S=Semi Urban, R=Rural

APPENDIX C: A BRIEF IDENTITY HISTORY OF THE LANGUAGE AND ITS  
INFLUENCE IN THE REGION WITHIN A SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT  
ON REGIONAL IDENTITIES

This is to understand the attitudinal references given in how the language shapes regional identities in this region.

Historically, the French language emanated from the regrouping of two main regions, Langue d'Oil in the north and Langue D'Oc (Occitan) in the south. Interestingly enough each name: Oil and Oc, meant *oui* (yes) in each dialect (Mark, 1987). Because of its geographical location, the rapid economic expansion of its land and the level of social and intellectual development, the north, yet always viewed as socially unique from the north, with strong regional ties, always sought after the south. Through literature, studies show that regional identity is a combination of birthplace, regional accents, the ability to speak (or not) the local regional dialect (in this case the Languedocian, or Occitan) and the willingness to identify with it (Mark, 1987). Much literature has focused on the development of regional identity (in several French regions) and how it has affected the region's residents in social and economic development (Mark, 1987; Hoare, 2000). At the same time, it has been examined that the political will from the *Parisian* central government to reconcile with identifying as French first and as regional second and how it should affect the cultural and social development of each region (Callois, Schmitt 2005). Although this position started several hundred years ago with the obliteration of the Cathar residents during the Albigensian Crusade (Mark, 1987), the central government saw a need to step away from the regional dialects in favor of the French language after WWI, due to its inability to communicate effectively with the French troops because many rural farmers that were drafted in the war spoke only the regional language. The French government has, since, had a notion of one country, one language (French) to the detriment of



regional dialects. As seen in literature, many youths see the learning of the regional language as a necessary step to maintaining regional identity and cultural heritage but do not favor compulsory learning, and would prefer to learn a foreign language, such as English, for their professional achievement, even if that meant that it would be to the detriment of their regional language, and its potential loss altogether (Hoare, 2000). They see it as being inevitable, as the older, more rural, less materialistic generation dies off, so will eventually the regional dialect (that is to say that we can assume that the French older rural generation is less materialistic than the younger one). The paradox is therefore the willingness to keep the regional identity as part of regional pride and the importance to continue the cultural traditions of a region, but there seems to be an unwillingness to actively participate in maintaining the regional language, which has been shown to be a key component of what defines the regional identity (Hoare, 2000). One of the reasons why so many studies have been done specifically in the Occitan region is because the Langue d'Oc is one of two basic languages that make up the root of the French language. The fact that people of younger generation identify more with being French than their older counterpart, though maintaining, according to them a strong regional identity is alarming for the future of regional languages altogether (Hoare, 2000). Rural sociology circles see the ambivalence between cultural chauvinism and economic development as a dichotomy that is often debated (Lem, 1993).

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Questions:** the guiding questions will be asked after the initial qualifying questions (verifying the birthplace is within the defined 10 mile radius) and will be geared this way:

I will spend some time explaining the purpose of the research so as to guide the respondent and explain what is expected. Before the interview starts it will be important to verify that the respondent is a native of the region.

- How old are you? What is your marital status?
- What part of town do you live in?
- Do you speak the Languedocian? Why or why not? How do you feel about it [the regional language]? Do you feel that it is an integral part of your regional identity (briefly explained by the interviewer)?
- Why are you in this region? What brings you or keeps you here? Is it family, work, quality of life? Do you feel strongly attached to this region? Do you participate in seasonal regional events? What do you think of them?
- Do you rent or own your property? (Verify residential setting) Do you own land? If yes, how much? Why did you choose the living condition that you have? Do you plan to stay here? If yes, how long?
- What is your opinion on the perceived disappearance of the Languedocian? Are you proud to be from this region? Do you consider yourself French first or Languedocian first? What do you think when you see the Languedocian used on street signs or buildings or landmarks, or when it is spoken in the streets? How does this affect you?

- Do you speak any other language than French? Are you interested in learning Languedocian (if no to this question previously)?
- In your opinion, can you retain your regional identity with or without speaking the Languedocian?
- [The following question will be asked only if respondent has more time to devote to the interviewer]: In your opinion, does speaking Languedocian affect your social status (depending on the cognitive level of social status of each respondent an explanation may be needed)?
- How can we revitalize the Languedocian language?
- Can you retain your regional identity if you move to Paris or another region? How will it affect your social status? How do you retain it?
- Is the media form of Languedocian utilized mostly for tourists now? Or to retain regional identity? In your opinion, **who uses it**?
- Do you think it's disappearing? Why are we losing the dialect, why is it disappearing? What's the story?
- Do you think that speaking Languedocian will bring you social or professional opportunities? Why or why not?

## APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Notice of Exempt Review Status

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board**  
**FWA00000351, Exp. 10/8/11, IRB00001138**

To: **Patrick Sacleux**

Date: **May 22, 2009**

IRB Number: **SBE-09-06251**

Study Title: **Regional Social Identity in an Occitan Village**

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol was reviewed by the IRB Chair on 5/22/2009. Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.101, your study has been determined to be **minimal risk for human subjects and exempt** from 45 CFR 46 federal regulations and further IRB review or renewal unless you later wish to add the use of identifiers or change the protocol procedures in a way that might increase risk to participants. Before making any changes to your study, call the IRB office to discuss the changes. **A change which incorporates the use of identifiers may mean the study is no longer exempt, thus requiring the submission of a new application to change the classification to expedited if the risk is still minimal.** Please submit the Termination/Final Report form when the study has been completed. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <https://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

The category for which exempt status has been determined for this protocol is as follows:

2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures, or the observation of public behavior, so long as confidentiality is maintained.
  - (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the subject cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject, **and/or**
  - (ii) Subject's responses, if known outside the research would not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing or employability or reputation.

No consent form used in study.

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/22/2009 09:31:44 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

## APPENDIX F: MY STORY ABOUT THE REASONS FOR THE STUDY

Some years ago my sister got married. She was born in Paris but has lived in western France for more than 20 years and has somewhat forgotten her Parisian roots and assimilated quite well in Brittany's (western France) culture. This is a culture of regional pride, sometimes even regional racism. The Bretons (*Bretons* in French) are known to be proud, enjoying any festive atmosphere, drinking heavily when it's appropriate, ignoring the don't-drink-and-drive laws, celebrating life to the fullest and, once they have achieved a certain social status, they like to show it and share it with friends and family. In that atmosphere, the marriage was bound to be a real celebration and a long one. While I have always considered myself open-minded to other cultures, regional or national, and accepting of them, I, as a *Parisian* have always been somewhat of a snob when it came to anything and anyone that lived and grew up outside Paris, though French. Thinking that French provincial people were a few years behind Parisian people, whether culturally, linguistically (from the evolution of the slang or academic language) or materially (I remember that their mopeds when I was a teenager looked like my grandfather moped, come on!!). I knew that my *Parisian* upbringings made me more liberal, more open-minded, culturally richer, more traveled, and better educated, than they were. To put it mildly, I thought that my *Parisian* friends and family in attendance and I were simply socially superior than were those provincial *Bretons* sitting across from us. Beyond the administrative procedures for the legality of the marriage, the religious ceremony, that I did not attend because of my lack of religious beliefs and my gentle animosity towards the clergy in general, I thought things were going relatively well for a group that was composed of 80% *Bretons* and 20% *Parisians* (a minority to be reckoned with, we thought, one might add). The relocation from the church



grounds to the wedding party grounds went smoothly, located in a hall that could accommodate 100 people, across from a farm. And the drinking started. It promised to be fierce and long and riddled with songs, challenges, all in the collegial atmosphere that a French wedding brings.

After the five-course meal and the many bottles of wine, liquor, beer, local apple cider, and the many speeches and other anecdotal references offered to and about the newlyweds, it was time for the real singing to begin before the official opening of the dance floor. The time was one in the morning and dessert was on the way. Taking advantage that everyone was still seated and still had the strength to sing, the regional majority started singing their regional songs from Brittany. Though well versed and well traveled and feeling culturally superior the *Parisian* minority was at a loss. I looked around the room and while the *Bretons* were singing cheerfully, none of us, supposedly superior *Parisians* knew a single word of those regional lyrics, even though they had given us the honor and respect of not singing in the local dialect (*Breton*). It made me wonder if I were French, if I knew anything about my country, its regional customs and songs and made me wonder if culturally, though all French, how different we all really were. I could not explain why in a country where I grew up, knowing most pagan songs I could not recognize any of “*their*” songs, not even the melody. Before I knew what it meant, the symbolic interactionism of that evening, I thought, was at its peak. At that point I understood that if I went back to school, as intended, I would study for the sole purpose of researching the sociological and linguistic anthropological aspects of regional identities and the make of what gives us regional pride which, in that instant, was much larger than any national pride I had ever encountered.

Fast forward a few years, after the purchase of a house in a small medieval village in the Languedoc region, I'm talking to some natives of that region and while we understand each other, though my accent is quite neutral and theirs influenced with flavors of lavender, regional sausage, goat cheese, organic farming, mountain weather, sheep wool sweaters and the peaceful life of a 3,000-strong village some six hours south of Paris. Our linguistic understanding was cut short by our regional slang. Never mind that they chose (whether they were able to or not is something that I'm going to find out) to speak in French versus their regional dialect *Langued'Oc*, I could not understand some idiomatic expressions that were directly and only used within their region. This is when I chose that this would be the topic of my thesis and I would conduct research directly in that village that had slowly accepted me, although a *Parisian*, maybe because they viewed me as more Americanized than a true and arrogant *Parisian*, that I used to be. I must have assimilated myself to the American culture to be accepted enough in that region where they view Harley-Davidson as the only true motorcycle to be riding (although the closest dealer is some 4 hours away), where Elvis, Presley and Costello are played regular staples on the jukebox of the main café in the village, and where an American visitor is better treated than a *Parisian* one, although most natives have not mastered the English language.

Now if the words *Bretons* and *Parisian* in this story are replaced with *Alabamans* and *New Yorker* there will be an increased understanding of the adequacy of this case study and how it can relate universally among developed countries.

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