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Damien Mooney, *Southern Regional French: A Linguistic Analysis of Language and Dialect Contact*. London: Legenda, 2016. ix + 158 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-909662-89-6

Review by Paul Cohen, University of Toronto.

In an age of interdisciplinarity, the story of the conversation between linguists and historians has, with rare exceptions, been one of missed opportunity.[1] Given that historians are now beginning to take a serious interest in language as an object of analysis,[2] this is unfortunate. Such a meeting of methodological minds would move historians' work beyond considering language as a symbol of cultural or social identity, an instrument of state or colonial power, or an object of broader cultural preoccupations—all important dimensions of the realm of language, to be sure. A historical approach to language informed by linguistics might open up possibilities for considering the complex, mutually constitutive dynamics which link social organization, cultural forms, politics and power with specifically linguistic features of language.

Sociolinguistics, the branch of linguistics concerned with analyzing linguistic forms in social and political context—with reconstructing how accent, lexical features, dialect, or linguistic register can be understood to function as constitutive elements of social, ethnic, racial, or national difference, as well as how states make languages the targets of language-planning policies—would be the most obvious place for a linguistically-minded historian to start.[3] But there are other arenas of linguistic investigation which could command the fruitful attention of historians. The fiercely debated field of creolistics, for example, investigates the origins of creole languages, tracing the linguistic debts specific creoles owe to the contact languages which gave rise to them, parsing the linguistic dynamics which shape their formal development, and assessing how particular social contexts shaped language genesis.[4] Such methods and materials could easily find a fruitful place in the cultural and social history of the Middle Passage, the slave plantation complex, and cultural exchange in the Atlantic world.

Damien Mooney's new book offers historians of modern and contemporary France such an opportunity to assess how perspectives drawn from linguistics might enrich their own research interests. A revised version of his dissertation in linguistics, this monograph proposes to examine the characteristics and evolution of the various forms of French spoken today in southwestern France. By studying what linguists have come to call "regional French" (or at least one example among the many locally-inflected variants shaped by the coexistence of standard French side by side with a regional language like Occitan or Breton), Mooney wishes to fill a gap in the linguistic literature. Most linguists prefer to study either standard French or regional languages, considering regional French as a transitional phase on the pathway towards regional language death and the dissemination of standard French, and as itself condemned to language death, as successive generations eschew local accents and lexical and syntactic specificities in favor of standard French. Mooney argues rather that regional French needs to be understood on its own terms and that such an approach can reveal something interesting about language and culture in contemporary France.

His book focuses on Béarn, a region of southwestern France marked historically by the coexistence of Occitan and French. Béarnais, the local dialect of Occitan, is still spoken fluently by about 40,000 people, although almost all are over 60 years of age and live in rural areas—a worrying sign of impending language death (p. 15). Béarn offers an interesting case study to examine the dynamics of various languages (French and Occitan) and dialects (standard and regional French; Béarnais and the normalized form of Occitan fashioned and promoted by the *occitaniste* regionalist movement) in contact, and to test hypotheses concerning language obsolescence and death with regards to regional French. To this end, Mooney conducted fieldwork, interviewing a variety of interlocutors to gather sociolinguistic data on their experiences and attitudes towards language, as well as examples of their spoken linguistic expression to submit to acoustic phonetic and auditory analysis (a method known as corpus linguistics).

Mooney divides his book into six chapters. Chapter one sketches the sociolinguistic context in Béarn. Chapter two describes the phonological systems of languages at play: Béarnais, normalized Occitan, and standard as well as local forms of French. In chapter three, Mooney describes his methodology, aimed specifically at tracing phenomena like midvowel shifts and nasal consonants within populations belonging to different age cohorts, in order to plumb language shift over time (an approach known as an “apparent-time study”). In chapter four, he analyzes the dynamics of language contact—that is, the coexistence (among bilingual speakers) of Béarnais and French. Here, Mooney argues against reductive models positing simple “language transfer” from Béarnais to French—which for example would explain the specific phonological features of a bilingual inhabitant of Béarn’s French as features transferred from her Occitan. In its stead, he paints a more complicated picture of back-and-forth linguistic influence, a kind of dynamic feedback loop in which new linguistic features emerge in both idioms.

In chapter five, Mooney likewise argues that dialect contact should also not be understood as a simple story of linguistic homogenization in which the French spoken by successive generations of Béarnais is steadily converging towards standard French. To be sure, younger Béarnais adopt many features of standard French, but they also retain some older forms—and, perhaps most interestingly, they invent new ones. Chapter six, entitled “Rethinking Regional French,” links the persistence—indeed, the lively reinvention—of local forms of French by youth in Béarn to forms of contemporary cultural identity. For Mooney, the dynamism of regional French in the southwest is in phase with a kind of postmodern *Zeitgeist*, one characterized by the multiplication of concurrent, superimposed forms of identity. “Modern RF [Regional French],” Mooney writes, “is thus a reaction to profound socio-political change and a means of blurring traditional boundaries between long-standing social constructs” (p. 122). This is less a conclusion drawn from the evidence and analysis presented here and more a working hypothesis that, it is to be hoped, will provide a starting point for future work in linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, sociologists, and cultural history.

Mooney’s book, then, encapsulates both the challenges and the promise of linguistics for history. On the one hand, historians unversed in formal linguistics will find *Southern Regional French* hard going. On the other, the kinds of suggestive connections between linguistic form, social identity, and cultural context traced in chapter six hint at the considerable possibilities for integrating a substantive study of language into cultural history. It is to be hoped that more historians will take up this challenge.

NOTES

[1] Exceptions include Danielle Trudeau, *Les Inventeurs du bon usage:1529-1647* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1992); Wendy Ayres-Bennett, *Sociolinguistic Variation in Seventeenth-Century France: Methodology and Case Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); R. Anthony Lodge, *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Serge Lusignan, *La langue des rois au Moyen Âge: le français en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004); Serge Lusignan, France Martineau, Yves-Charles Morin, and Paul Cohen, eds., *L'introuvable unité du français: contacts et variations linguistiques en Europe et en Nouvelle France (XIIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Québec: Presses de

l'Université Laval, 2011); and Serge Lusignan, *Essai d'histoire sociolinguistique: le français picard au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012).

[2] See for example Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., *The Social History of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Françoise Waquet, *Le Latin ou l'empire d'un signe: XVIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998); Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering, eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas 1492-1800: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Berghahn, 2000); Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500-1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); and Jocelyne Dakhlia, *Lingua franca: Histoire d'une langue métisse en Méditerranée* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008).

[3] See for example Joshua A. Fishman, ed., *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968); Joshua A. Fishman, ed., *Advances in the Sociology of Language*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971-72); J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes, eds., *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Howard Giles, ed., *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1977); Ben G. Blount and Mary Sanches, *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Change* (New York: Academic Press, 1977); R. A. Hudson, *Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); John J. Gumperz, ed., *Language and Social Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Ralph Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984); Joshua A. Fishman et al., eds., *The Rise and Fall of the Ethnic Revival: Perspectives on Language and Ethnicity* (Berlin: Mouton, 1985); John Edwards, *Language, Society, and Identity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Pier Paolo Giglioli, *Language and Social Context: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987); John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds., *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Ralph Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); James R. Dow, ed., *Language and Ethnicity: Focusschrift in Honor of Joshua A. Fishman* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991); William Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994-2010); Florian Coulmas, ed., *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); William Downes, *Language and Society* (1984), 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmar, and Klaus J. Mettheier, eds., *Sociolinguistic, An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society/Soziolinguistik, Ein internationales Handbuch zur Wissenschaft von Sprache und Gesellschaft*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); and J. K. Chambers, *Sociolinguistic Theory: Linguistic Variation and its Social Significance*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[4] See for example Robert A. Hall, Jr., *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Albert Valdman, ed., *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Ian F. Hancock, ed., *Readings in Creole Studies* (Ghent: E. Story-Scientia, 1979); Lambert-Félix Prudent, *Des baragouins à la langue antillaise: analyse historique et sociolinguistique du discours sur le créole* (Paris: Éditions Caribéennes, 1980); Dell Hymes, ed., *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Ellen Woolford and William Washabaugh, eds., *The Social Context of Creolization* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1983); Peter Mühlhäusler, *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (London: Longman, 1988); John A. Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988-89); Gabriel Manessy, *Créoles, pidgins, variétés véhiculaires: procès et genèse* (Paris: CNRS, 1995); Sarah G. Thomason, ed., *Contact Languages: A Wider Perspective* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997); Salikoko S. Mufwene, "Jargons, Pidgins, Creoles, and Koinés: What Are They?" in Arthur K. Spears and Donald Winford, eds. *The Structure and Status of Pidgins and Creoles* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997), pp. 35-70; John McWhorter, *Language Change and Language Contact in Pidgins and Creoles* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000); Norval Smith and Tonjes Veenstra, eds., *Creolization and Contact* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001); Glenn Gilbert, ed., *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

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