

**Perceptions of Macro
and Meso level Linguistic Policy in Occitan France:
A Comparative Analysis of Montpellier and Toulouse**

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Introduction

For a number of years UNESCO has listed the Occitan language within France as ranging from definitely to severely endangered (UNESCO, 2012). This is due in large part to the macro level linguistic policies that have been pursued by the French State since the 16th Century. While the main goal of these policies and related legislation has been the unification of the country through French and the subsequent protection of French from external linguistic influences, they have also had a significant impact upon the regional languages of France, including Occitan. However, in recent years there has been an increased interest in the revitalization of Occitan at the regional or meso level, with some regional councils formulating linguistic policies and language planning strategies for the language. This article aims to analyse what impact, if any, both the policy and non-policy of neighbouring regions in Occitan-speaking France may have upon the revitalization of the language. This will be done through an examination of the linguistic policy and planning documents published by the relevant authorities, as well as through analysis and discussion of data collected from Occitan speakers within the respective regions.

Language policies at the macro and meso levels

France has a long established tradition of language policy and planning, with the aim of unifying the country through the French language. This has, ultimately, been successful, but to the detriment of the regional languages found within the country. The macro level policy and planning has consisted of the establishment of French as the language of the judiciary and administration (Édit de Villers-Cotterêts in 1539) through to enshrining it as the sole language of the Republic (Art. 2, Constitution

française, 1992), with various pieces of supporting legislation (Loi Toubon, 1994) to ensure that it remains as protected as possible from external linguistic influences.

However, in recent decades there has been renewed interest in the regional languages on the part of the regional authorities in France. Several of those found in Occitan France have recognised the importance of the language to their local heritage and cultural identity and have sought to revitalize the language in some form or other. In the Languedoc Roussillon (LR) region this took place from the 1960s to the 1980s before tapering off. Inversely, it is now the region of Midi-Pyrénées (MP), which has come to the fore in terms of Occitan policy and planning in recent years. The current language planning and policy initiatives of both regions as well as how these are perceived by members of the Occitan community are the subject of analysis in this paper. Though before discussing them, the issues of macro vs. meso level policy and how each of them relates to endangered languages such as Occitan will be examined.

As stated above, the language policies of the French State are clearly defined in both legislation and the constitution. According to Spolsky's model (2004), which combines elements from both Lambert (1999) and Fishman (1971), France is a Type 1 country in that it's language attitude is "one language is associated with the national identity; others are marginalized" (Spolsky, 2004: 60), it's ideology is monolingual and it has engaged in all types of language planning (corpus, acquisition and status) at various points in time. As the position of French as the sole national language has been solidified, the government now tends to focus on corpus planning, through the Commission générale de terminologie et de néologie. The aim of this commission is to create French neologisms to prevent the spread of foreign linguistic terminology, in particular that from English, in the French language. Supported by various other offices and committees, France has created a bureaucratic and legislative network of top-down protection for French, about which Spolsky (2004: 67) states "The size of the enterprise and its complexity are impressive. No other national language has developed the same elaborate and well-financed network of government and semi-government agencies".

Ager (2001) in his model of motivations for language policy and planning found the motivations of identity, image and insecurity to be relevant in the case of France. He

credits France with the creation of the nation state and states that it has consistently followed policies of political, social, cultural and linguistic unification (Ager, 2001: 15)

The French language is therefore seen as a tool and symbol of that unification, one which keeps the country together,

“Most French citizens nonetheless agree that the only way of maintaining the nation-state is through a process of assimilation to the Republic and its values [...] the identity of France hence becomes all-embracing: one language, one culture, one territory, one political conception. There is no room for the ‘particularism’ of other identities, whether regional or immigrant, and certainly not for any language other than that which unites”, (Ager, 2001: 19)

In terms of image, Ager (1996) refers to the need to create a positive image on the international stage, using language to achieve this. Spolsky (2004: 73) comments that the diffusion of French abroad is “the paradigmatic example of a method to attempt to restore the prestige of empire”. The final motivation for French linguistic policy according to Ager is that of linguistic insecurity – the fear that the language is not adequate for social needs. This feeling of insecurity was aroused by the increasing spread of English as an international language and the continued incorporation of anglicisms into French. French policy adapted to this with the creation of the aforementioned terminology committees. These issues, then, are keys to an understanding of why France has pursued such language policy and planning methods over the course of several centuries and why it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

In recent years, though, the government has made some concessions to the regional languages, beginning with the Loi Deixonne of 1951 and most recently with the inclusion of Article 75-1 in the Constitution which states that “Les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France” (Constitution française). Despite the inclusion of this article, many have seen it as an attempt to appease those seeking widespread reforms for the regional languages and as only being a symbolic measure. This view was confirmed in May 2011 when the Conseil Constitutionnel ruled that Article 75-1 does not create “un droit ou une liberté opposable dans le chef des particuliers ou des collectivités territoriales” (Conseil Constitutionnel, 20 mai 2011), giving no further powers or resources to the regional languages as a result of this article. Further setbacks for those wishing to change current macro level linguistic policy came in the form of the decision by the Conseil Constitutionnel in 1999 where

it ruled that France could not ratify the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) as it contravened the French Constitution, “La Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires comporte des clauses contraires à la Constitution” (Journal Officiel, 1999: 71). It would appear that any attempt to gain legal protection or promotion of the regional languages is crushed at every turn. Given that French macro level policy is unlikely to change much in the foreseeable future, it has fallen to those authorities at Meso level to aid the Occitan language in its promotion and preservation as part of both regional and national cultural heritage.

As previously stated, over recent decades a number of regional authorities, at one time or another, have taken an interest in the preservation and promotion of Occitan within their administrative regions for various reasons. While they are still subordinate to national authorities, it is perhaps the municipal authorities who are better positioned to provide such support for Occitan, as noted by Backhaus (2012: 226) they “provide a most important interface between state and citizens. Unlike the higher administrative levels, municipal governments are in daily contact with the general public”. This may lead them to be more in tune with what the local community wants in terms of language policy. Backhaus further notes (2012: 242) that as meso level authorities are the first point of contact between the general public and the government, it is here that day-to-day linguistic problems and issues are encountered. However, he goes on to note that this does not mean that they will be any more capable of developing effective policies and language planning than those at macro level, “language policies, if they exist in some explicit form at all, tend to be chaotic, incongruent and extremely piecemeal. There appear to be very few municipal administrations working with a coherently designed language policy scheme” (Backhaus, 2012: 227). This may be true of the policies instigated by the Occitan regions in France. While designed with the best intentions, there is no cohesive, structured inter-regional language policy in place for the language and those regions that have linguistic planning policies vary from comprehensive policies that cover every aspect of public life to those that simply state their intentions for aiding the language, without setting out specific goals or how they will be achieved. As a result, the sociolinguistic situation of Occitan varies from region to region. This may have a significant impact upon the language’s survival and revitalization in the future. In order to gain a better insight into how such meso level policies are likely to affect this

revitalization and how members of the Occitan community view them, the policies set out by the neighbouring regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées will now be discussed.

Languedoc-Roussillon

Since the 1960s, the region of Languedoc-Roussillon, encouraged by Occitan “militants” has supported the language in way or another, namely financially, culturally, promotionally etc. It was during the 70s, 80s and early 90s that this support for the language appears to have been at its peak, “la grande poussée occitano-catalane des années 1968-1975 provoque des interventions publiques en faveur des langues régionales” (Hammel, 1996: 74). At the beginning of the 1980s, the region established the Office régional de la Culture to aid and promote both Occitan and Catalan within the region. Their most important task was the distribution of the financial resources which had been allocated to the languages from the regional budget. The budget for the regional languages in LR grew steadily. However, it was noted that the region could not be the sole financial provider for the language and so restricted its contribution to 25% of the overall cost, allowing regional partners and Occitan organisations to contribute the rest (Hammel, 1996: 81). Despite this, the region created the position of Chargé de mission in 1985 and from 1987 the regional budget for the languages grew to 5.5 M.F., remaining stable until 1990 (Hammel, 1996: 82). In the years 1991-1992 this budget further increased to 8.5 M.F. and the region employed a second person to work with Occitan and Catalan affairs. Hammel (1996: 94) notes that this increase in resources for Occitan demonstrated “une volonté affirmée et un réel désir de développement”.

Members of the Occitan community within the region pushed for more comprehensive policies including the budget (outlined above), and top-down intervention in the form of professional training in the language, teaching, promotion of the culture, communication in the language and economic initiatives. The motivation behind this was to bring the Occitan language back into everyday life and for the general public to come to accept it as such. The policy of the region during this period thus resulted in the establishment of Occitan immersion schools, Calandretas, the establishment of bilingual French-Occitan street name signs, the support and promotion of various cultural events and the creation and expansion of

Occitan language and cultural organisations. However, since the mid-1990s, while this support, in particular financial support, for the language and culture has continued, there has been no great development in meso level policy within the region. The region has concentrated on surveys and opinion polls to establish the sociolinguistic position of Occitan within its borders but appears not to have acted concretely upon the results. In 1991, the Média-Pluriel survey, *Occitan, pratiques et représentations dans la région Languedoc-Roussillon*, was carried out and looked at the use of Occitan within the region. This study looked at age and gender as the two main sociolinguistic factors in relation to the use of Occitan and found that the older generation (older than 65 years) had the highest proportion of speakers. This study was supplemented and expanded upon by subsequent surveys carried out in 1993 (Euromosaic, 2012).

However, it was not until the mid-2000s that the Region built upon these findings. In 2005, in the context of establishing a policy for Occitan, the Region carried out interviews and meetings with more than 500 people and Occitan organisations in order to understand any thoughts, doubts, expectations, and their needs for Occitan and what ideas they had for projects for the language and culture (Languedoc-Roussillon/Jo Raimondi, 2005: 3). It was termed “la Consulta” and formed the basis of a policy document which was published in November of that year. This document presents the history of the Occitan language and traces its roots back to the days of the Troubadours. It discusses the decline of the language, before going on to present CIRDOC and the work which it has carried out as a mediatheque and documentation resource centre for Occitan. Furthermore, it outlines the budget which has been allocated to both Occitan and Catalan by the region in recent year, increasing from €1.4M in 2001 to €1.5 in 2005. From this alone, it can be seen that the region has continued to provide important financial resources for the language since the 1970s and that the amount allocated increases year on year.

In later parts of the document, the region identifies the motivations for the creation of the policy:

“Dans un contexte de mondialisation et de crainte d’uniformisation, l’intervention politique en faveur de l’occitan (langue et culture) répond à la nécessité de proposer des repères et d’envisager une société pluriculturelle qui repose sur des valeurs progressistes d’ouverture et de partage” (Raimondi, 2005: 14)

It goes on to state that the region will act in favour of Occitan at three levels:

“Les Territoires (départements, pays, communautés de communes, agglomérations)
Le niveau interrégional de proximité (les autres régions occitanes, l’Espace Occitano-Catalan en développement que d’aucuns appellent de leurs vœux)
Le niveau européen, parce que la civilisation occitane recoupe la France, l’Italie, l’Espagne et concerne de nombreux pays” (Raimondi, 2005: 14)

In the document, Raimondi (who was charged with its compilation for the region) outlines the areas in which the Conseil régional will work and intervene in order to engage in status and acquisition planning for Occitan. The areas listed are numerous and so will not be discussed in detail here, instead a brief outline of each will be given. Firstly, Occitan is seen as an economic catalyst which can be used either formally or informally by organisations and businesses within the region. The language will then also form part of social life through its use in traditional sports and festivals. LR will use CIRDOC to promote the language at regional, inter-regional and European level in order to engage in status or prestige planning. Utilisation of the language and culture for tourism purposes is also outlined, including “sensibilisation” for new comers as regards the language. The region will also engage in the development of Occitan culture as an economic tool whereby those working within the language will be encouraged in their professions, such as artists, technicians, those working in the media etc. In addition to this, the use of Occitan as a marketing strategy will also be developed, in particular for use on regional products. In relation to the artistic sphere, there will be a development of training in Occitan language, literature and animation. The domain of communication is also addressed with the region aiming to provide access to the language and culture for everyone, with everyone being able to read, speak, hear or understand Occitan language and culture. This will be achieved through training, internships and seminars on communication in the language, in partnership with the Université Paul Valéry, journalism schools and the CNFPT/ENACT.

Media is also a domain which is identified as needing further development for the language. The focus of this section is on use of Occitan on the radio, with increased subventions being allocated to Occitan radio stations and those broadcasting on the web. It is also envisaged that within five years of the report, there would be an Occitan radio network covering Carcassonne, Castelnaudry, Béziers, Nîmes, Montpellier, Mende and Perpignan, which would be further extended and available

worldwide via the internet within the following five years. The expansion of use of Occitan on television, and in particular on web TV, is also targeted as an objective of the region.

Finally, the remaining two sections of the documents, the region states that its objective is for citizens to be able to use and speak the language, and to be proud of their culture (Raimondi, 2005: 31). In order to achieve this, the regional council will provide a multilingual telephone service, a minimum level of linguistic training for employees and the creation of a section whose purpose is to diffuse information about Occitan and to promote it. They also seek to actively engage in status planning for the language, in valuing Occitan language and culture in all acts of public life (p. 33), developing education in the language in all its forms and in creating inter-regional cooperation with other Occitan regions.

While this policy document is encouraging in so far as it recognizes the need for further intervention by regional authorities to preserve and promote Occitan, it reads much more like a résumé of the findings of the Consulta, budgetary allocations and intentions rather than providing many concrete examples of what action will be taken within each of the domains outlined above. The timeframe of 5 -10 years for the implementation of such efforts is feasible, though it is not given in great detail, at least in this document. From this policy outline, Backhaus' statement that meso level policies are chaotic and incongruent appears to hold true. The region can be seen to be trying to cover several areas of public life and domains of use without having any concrete measures to put in place. In terms of how Occitan speakers perceive these policies and their impact upon revitalization of the Occitan language, such an incoherent policy may not have the desired effect in the long term. Data collected in both Montpellier and Toulouse will be examined later to ascertain what level of support is present within the cities for these policies and indeed how many speakers are actually aware of its existence.

Midi-Pyrénées

In contrast to Languedoc-Roussillon, the neighbouring region of Midi-Pyrénées has only implemented concrete measures of support for Occitan in the last decade. While meso level support for the language was at its peak in the 70s, 80s and 90s in Montpellier and its region, Toulouse has only recently begun to develop a strategy for

the promotion and revitalization of the language. At the same time as the policy above was being designed, the Conseil régional of Midi-Pyrénées was also conducting a study into the use of Occitan within its regional borders. As a result of the findings of that report, the *Schéma régional de développement de l'Occitan* came about in 2007. In setting out the objectives of the scheme, the council highlights its awareness of the precarious situation of Occitan and its desire to remedy the situation, much as Languedoc-Roussillon did in the introduction to their policy:

“Ils visent à accroître le nombre de locuteurs, la qualité de l’expression écrite et orale et renforcer les pratiques culturelles d’expression occitane pour permettre, à terme, le renouvellement naturel de la langue (30% de locuteurs d’une classe d’âge sur un territoire donnée Occitan en Midi-Pyrénées. [...] ils visent à renforcer la cohésion sociale et la personnalité régionale autour des valeurs de la culture occitane qui participent du dynamisme de la singularité et de l’ouverture de Midi-Pyrénées” (Midi-Pyrénées, 2007: 3)

Importantly, MP has identified the need for natural revitalization of the language, through the increase in speaker numbers, something which is absent from the policy put forth by the LR region. While LR acknowledges the importance and need for inter-regional cooperation, MP outlines their intention to enter into partnership with the Préfecture, Education nationale, DRAC and the eight conseils généraux of the region as well as the various communes. In addition, the scheme advocates engaging in dialogue and policy development with the seven other regional councils of Occitanie as well as the Conseil Général d’Aran and the Generalitat de Catalogne and the Piemonte region. While LR sets out similar goals, they only indicate the need for inter-regional and inter-country cooperation and do not name any specific councils or offices with whom they will engage.

As with the policy of LR, the Schéma sets out various areas in which Occitan needs to be reinforced and developed. Once again, these areas are numerous and detailed and so shall not be discussed in depth there, though an overview will be given.

The first section deals with education and training. The policy sets out in detail the goals it wishes to achieve such as increasing the number of Calandretas opened each year, extending the teaching of the language to all schools within the region and to increase the number of Occitan classes for adults. It also sets out plans for the development of pedagogical tools as well as the creation of a qualification for the language. Courses for job seekers will be created as well as internships in Occitan. Cultural classes are also proposed to promote Occitan dance and dramatic arts.

The media section of the scheme, like that of LR, acknowledges that Occitan is severely lacking in its presence within the media. Again, as with that of LR, this scheme aims to utilise modern technologies to further develop Occitan-language media and to create an internet-based TV channel. Journalists will be provided with training in the language in the hopes of increasing the presence of Occitan within existing media.

The scheme goes on to discuss status and prestige planning. Publicity campaigns to raise awareness of the language and its role in the region's history will be undertaken and the use of the language by local businesses will be encouraged. This section also deals with the issue of intergenerational transmission. It encourages the natural passing on of Occitan within a family and it is envisaged that workshops will be established, aimed at parents, grandparents and future parents, to show how this can be done. Pedagogical materials will be developed to support this. Finally, in order to further raise awareness of the language among the general public, the use of bilingual road signs and toponymy will be used.

Artistic and cultural events in Occitan will also be developed and supported by the region. Finally, the scheme advocates further sociolinguistic research on Occitan in order to better understand the language and elevate its image within society.

Comparison of Meso Level Policies

While there are many elements which are common to the policies of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées such as utilising the language for economic benefit, expanding domains of use, raising the level of visibility and understanding of the language, it is the way in which each region sets out to do this that sets them apart. The layout of the documents alone indicates the differences in policies. While LR gives a résumé of the history of Occitan within the region and how it has supported it over the years, it appears very much to be a mish-mash of previous actions for the language and future intentions. They diagnose the problems facing Occitan at the time of writing (based on the findings of the Consulta) and indicate how the region can intervene in each of these in order to aid the language. However, they do not set out any concrete actions by which they will achieve this. This is in contrast to the detailed structure of the MP schéma. Here each issue is clearly identified, an objective or goal is set and the means by which this will be achieved is given. It is done so in a much

more detailed and structured manner with clear indications of when each action will be carried out and what resources will be necessary to achieve it. Overall, the policy outlined by MP is much more coherent and comprehensive, especially in that it identifies the need to support and encourage inter-generational transmission of Occitan, which it acknowledges as vital to its survival, something which LR has failed to do.

While both documents are statements of policy, only that of Midi-Pyrénées could genuinely be classed as one of language planning as well according to Sallabank (2011: 278) who states that policy comprises positions, principles, decisions and strategy, while planning involves concrete measures and practices. It is true that some results from the policy outlined by LR have been seen, such as the convention with the Académie in relation to the teaching of Occitan in schools, the use of the language on regional products, the support and development of Occitan cultural events and the significant development of Occitan-language radio, they have not followed a consistent path of implementation. Results can also be seen from the implementation of MP's schéma, and these are much more widespread, with an increase in the number of adult language courses, the establishment of bilingual street signs throughout Toulouse, the use of Occitan on the city's metro and awareness campaigns to highlight the language to the general public, there is a sense that it is being done in a far more structured and consistent fashion.

Both regions aim, in their documents, to engage in status or prestige planning for the language, though this seems to have only been successful in MP. When I conducted my research in both cities, I noticed that there was a much higher level of knowledge about the language in MP than in LR, owing in large part to the visibility of the language within the city. A survey of the linguistic landscape of both cities found that Toulouse had a significantly higher rate of bilingual French-Occitan signage than Montpellier, and this presence was bolstered by the use of bilingual station announcements on the Toulouse metro. As Sallabank (2011: 280) notes, "recognition of a minority language in public services is often symbolic rather than functional". It would appear that while LR is making efforts to promote and revitalize Occitan, most of the aims outlined in their document remain largely symbolic, and those of MP lie closer to the functional end of the scale.

While LR appears to have concentrated its efforts on bringing Occitan into the education system and developing Occitan media, MP has focused more on image planning (Ager, 2005) for the language. Domain expansion and use of the language in the public sphere has led to an observable increase in positive attitudes towards the language. Baker (1992) notes that language planning and revitalization efforts are dependent on the assumption that attitudes can change. This is supported by Sallabank (2011: 286) who states that for “language maintenance and revitalization measures to gain the support [...] they need to be accepted by the majority community. Prestige planning, or public relations efforts to raise awareness and interest in endangered languages therefore need to focus on majority populations too”. In engaging in image planning, MP can be seen to be trying to reverse previously held negative attitudes towards Occitan and educate the wider public as to its link to the region’s history. Negative attitudes can hasten the decline of endangered languages (Crystal, 2000) and as such perhaps the incorporation of image planning into a linguistic policy may aid in increasing intergenerational transmission as it is looked upon more favourably by speakers. Though, it should be noted, this is only one aspect to take into account when seeking to revitalize a language.

In order to further examine how both the macro and meso level policies are perceived by members of the Occitan speaking community, research was carried out in the cities of Montpellier and Toulouse.

Methodology

The research methodology used consisted of mixed method data collection involving a qualitative-quantitative questionnaire and a number of focus group interviews in each city. The questionnaire phase of the research aimed to gather data from a large number of Occitan speakers on topics relating to existing linguistic policies, both at national and regional level and to ascertain what changes, if any, speakers would like to see made to both the policies. The aim of the focus group interviews was to open up the topics from the phase one questionnaire to wider discussion among members of the Occitan community and gain a more in-depth study of the issues which were included in the questionnaire. It was hoped that this would allow for a greater insight

into how individuals collectively make sense of the linguistic policies in place and of language revitalization efforts.

The research focused on the urban environments of Montpellier and Toulouse for several reasons. Firstly, it is in the city that speakers or learners of a language have easier access to language resources and classes and the opportunity to meet other speakers and to use the language. Secondly, urban environments provide the opportunity to see how linguistic policies and revitalization measures are put in place, such as the use, or lack thereof, of Occitan in the public space, on public transport, the provision of language classes and language centres etc. Finally, as the research used convenience sampling, Montpellier and Toulouse allowed for a greater number of participants, as there were Occitan language classes found in both cities and the universities in each city provide Occitan degrees, thus allowing for greater access to possible participants.

Phase one of the research was the distribution of the qualitative-quantitative questionnaire to a number of participants in both Montpellier and Toulouse. A total of 123 questionnaires were distributed in Montpellier with a return rate of 29% ($n = 36$), while 120 questionnaires were distributed in Toulouse with a much higher return rate of 55% ($n = 78$). The disparity in the number of respondents from each city may be attributed to various factors. There was a considerable difference in the number of weekly Occitan language classes offered in the two cities. While universities in both cities provide Occitan degree courses, there were only three other adult language classes available in Montpellier compared to the twelve weekly classes provided by the IEO in Toulouse. Furthermore, as previously stated, the level of visibility of Occitan in Toulouse is much higher than that in Montpellier, and this presence may have impacted upon how informed respondents were in regard to the language and therefore whether or not they were likely to respond to the questionnaire. As a result of the difference in response rate from the two cities and the fact that convenience sampling was used, no generalizable statistical conclusions can be drawn from the questionnaire data. However, the results for each city can be analysed in and of themselves. The data collected was analysed using the SPSS statistics program.

Phase two of the research consisted of a number of focus group interviews carried out in each city. Participants for each group were drawn from the same sample as the questionnaire. A total of four focus groups were held, two in each city. Each of the focus groups was conducted in a semi-structured manner with the participants being asked questions relating to current national and regional linguistic policies and to existing and proposed language revitalization measures. The results of the questionnaire data will be discussed with supporting data taken from the focus group interviews.

Results

Participants were questioned as to whether or not they agreed with current macro level linguistic policies. As can be seen from Figure 1, the majority of respondents were against current policies

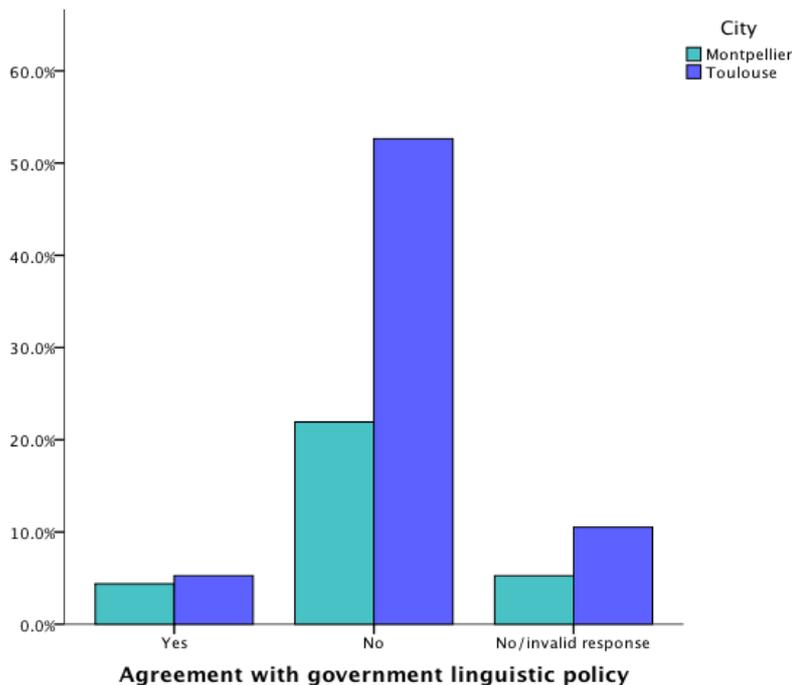


Figure 1

They were then asked if they wished to see changes in these policies and again the majority stated that they did, as can be seen in Figure 2.

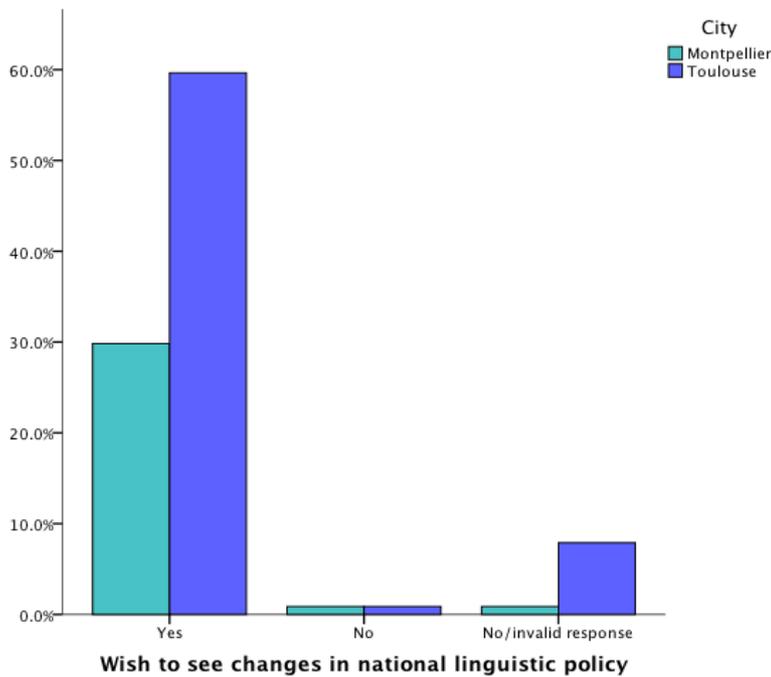


Figure 2

From both figures above, it is clear that members of the Occitan community in both cities are unhappy with the current policies being pursued by the French state as regards the Occitan language.

When asked what specific changes they would like to see made to macro level policies, the responses were numerous and varied. The most called for changes was for greater respect or recognition by the government for the language and its importance to France’s heritage, followed by the availability of Occitan classes at all levels of education, promotion of the regional languages and their cultures, a higher level of Occitan within the media and for the language to be official recognised. From this it can be seen that Occitan speakers feel that their language is undervalued by the state which, despite the inclusion of article 75-1 of the constitution, do not show enough recognition and respect for Occitan and the role it plays in France’s cultural heritage.

This data is further supported by data gathered in the focus group interviews where participants stated that they were unhappy with the way Occitan was viewed by national authorities,

GT1: parce qu'il y a une hostilité [...] c'est une hostilité traditionnelle de l'État français à l'égard des- des langues dites régionales (Toulouse)

PM1: parce qu'en France c'est la République une et indivisible et ça [support for regional languages] fera du communautarisme (Montpellier)

The data shown here thus reflects how unhappy Occitan speakers are with national policies and how they feel that they could be changed, with the emphasis being put on greater respect and recognition for the language. While a number of respondents call for official recognition in the form of legislation or equality with French, the majority wish simply for more respect for the language, for it to be recognised as a living language with value and not simply as a "patois".

Turning to the meso level policies, participants were again asked if they agreed with the policies currently being pursued by their respective regions.

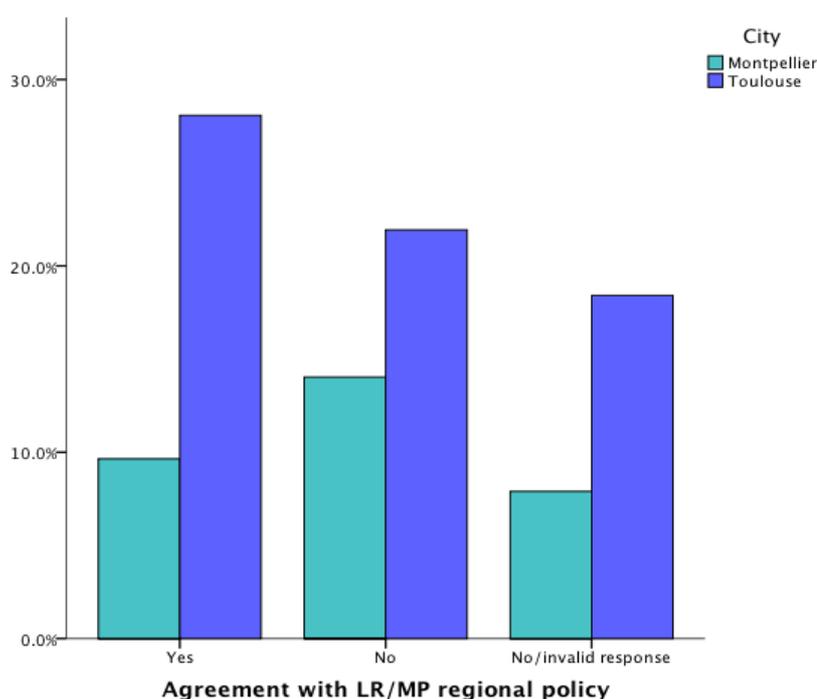


Figure 3

As can be seen from Figure 3, the majority of those surveyed in Toulouse were happy with the linguistic policies currently in place in Midi-Pyrénées, while respondents in Montpellier were mainly unhappy with their region's approach to Occitan. Noting though that over 20% of respondents in Toulouse were not happy with their region's current policy, this may be explained by the fact that

just fewer than 50% of them wanted a change to the policy, as illustrated by Figure 4. The focus group data relating to this topic indicates that this is less to do with a lack of agreement and more from a desire to see the MP continue their efforts and expand upon them.

GT1: oui je pense que le conseil régional euh est vraiment sensibilisé [...] il y a vraiment des politiques qui sont menées notamment sur le plan culturel (Toulouse)

BT3: oui c'est certain [...] c'est visible [...] elle soutient l'Occitania officielle sur la culture occitane (Toulouse)

When subsequently questioned as to whether they would like to see changes made to their region's policies, the majority of respondents in both cities stated that they would.

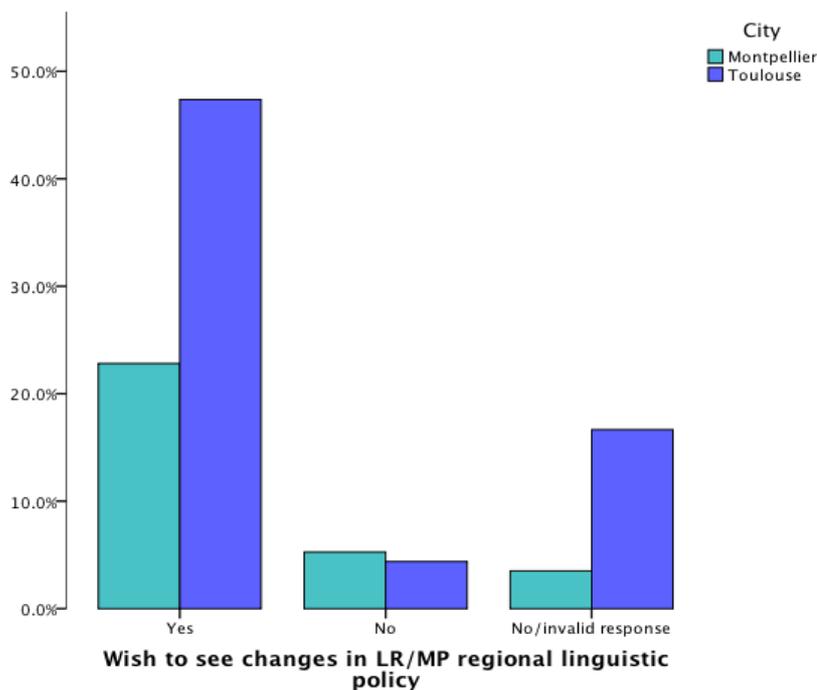


Figure 4

The majority of respondents gave responses that could not be related to any one theme and so were categorised as “other”. The next highest response category was that of wanting a more comprehensive policy for Occitan on the part of the regional authorities, with a higher number of respondents for this category found in Toulouse. This suggests that, while the policy undertaken by MP is more comprehensive, speakers feel that they could go further still in their promotion

of the language. As more of the planning initiatives are implemented, this view may change and it would be interesting to conduct further interviews with speakers at the end of the five-year plan. As expected from Montpellier, where the language is not as present in everyday life, the majority of participants desired changes in current policy, with the highest numbers wanting to see more financial aid given to the language along with the implementation of bilingual road signs.

Conclusions

The preliminary results shown above give a clear indication of how Occitan speakers perceive the linguistic policies currently in place at both Macro and meso levels. While there is widespread agreement among participants that the national government do not do enough for Occitan or the other regional languages, there are mixed views on those in place at municipal level. In terms of Montpellier, respondents appear to feel that the region supports the Occitan culture in the form of cultural events such as Total Festum (indicated by data not presented in this article) but not the language in its entirety. They feel that more could be done in terms of financial aid, despite the LR region having the highest budgetary allocations for Occitan of all the regional authorities in Occitan France, and in particular an increase in the visibility of the language in terms of bilingual road signs would be appreciated by speakers. On the other hand, the majority of respondents in Toulouse were in agreement with current initiatives taken by the local authorities in favour of the language but still feel that these planning efforts could be developed and expanded upon.

What is clear from the data is that Occitan speakers in MP favour their region's policy much more than their counterparts in LR. This may be a result of the fact that while LR states that it continues to support both language and culture, it is a lack of a cohesive and structurally defined policy that has led speakers to feel otherwise. While the policy undertaken by MP is only a first step on the road to revitalization, it would appear that their approach is perceived in a much more positive light by those that it affects most directly. Most importantly though, this analysis has found that both the meso level policies of MP and LR deviate

somewhat from that at macro level. This appears to be a growing trend in the revitalization of regional languages (where it is possible and there is interest on the part of municipal authorities in doing so) as Backhaus (2012: 242) notes “Cities and other smaller administrative bodies therefore may design language policies that both in practice and ideology clearly deviate from what national language planners have in mind”. This is certainly true of the case of Occitan in France. What remains to be seen is if these policies will be successful in revitalizing the language over the medium and long term. If this is to happen, there may be a need for more bottom-up initiatives such as the recommencement of intergenerational transmission coupled with efforts from the top-down level such as those highlighted in this article. A combination of the two would provide for a much more hopeful future for the language.

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