

Accent Levelling in the Regional French of Alsace

Submitted by Katharine Joanna Pipe, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in French, April 2014

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to investigate the process of accent levelling in the Regional French of Alsace and its relationship with the social variables of age, gender, social class, urban or rural origin of speakers and feelings of regional attachment. Accent levelling, which can be defined as the process of speakers abandoning local phonological forms in favour of supralocal variants, has been the focus of much recent sociolinguistic research on British English, French and other languages. Since knowledge of Alsatian (a Germanic language spoken in Alsace) is decreasing, it is possible that the resulting lack of interference between Alsatian and French is leading to levelling of the traditional accent features of Alsatian Regional French.

In order to provide data for this research project, sociolinguistic interviews were conducted and written questionnaires used in Strasbourg and in the village of Helsheim (a fictional name used for reasons of confidentiality) with 56 informants. The data obtained were then subjected to quantitative analysis with regard to the linguistic variables of aspirate h (which can be realised as a supralocal zero variant or as a regional [h] variant) and the devoicing of canonically voiced plosives and fricatives (for example, *sage* pronounced [saʃ]).

The results of the data analysis revealed that the regional variants of both linguistic variables are used more frequently by older than younger, working class than middle class, rural than urban speakers and that level of regional attachment correlates with use of the linguistic variables, as predicted in the research hypotheses. However, the relationship between levelling and gender proved to be more unexpected, with no clear pattern emerging for the (h) variable and a complex one involving the acquisition of supralocal patterns of sociolinguistic variation as well as the supralocal phonological variant in the case of consonant devoicing.

Key-words: accent levelling, Regional French, Alsace, variationist sociolinguistics

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## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Aims and Questions**

The object of this study is to investigate the process of accent levelling in Alsace and its interaction with the social variables of age, gender, social class, urban or rural origin of speakers and feelings of regional attachment.

Since knowledge of the Alsatian language (a Germanic language of the Alemannic branch) is decreasing, especially amongst young people and in urban areas (Vassberg 1993: 114-116), the question is raised of whether a resulting lack of interference between Alsatian and French is leading to levelling of the phonological features which traditionally characterise the local variety of French spoken in Alsace.

Accent levelling (when speakers abandon local phonological forms in favour of supra-local variants) has been the focus of much recent dialectological work on British English and northern French (Foulkes & Docherty 1999; Armstrong 2001; Armstrong & Blanchet 2006). It has been shown that northern French is undergoing levelling in areas in which a Romance substrate variety was once spoken (Boughton 2003; Boughton 2005; Armstrong & Blanchet 2006). It has been claimed (Pooley 2006) that this levelling is now extending into peripheral areas of northern France where a non-Romance substrate has presumably influenced the phonology of the local French, such as Alsace. Whilst a study (Nicholson in prep) examining this hypothesis is being carried out in western (i.e. non-Romance/Celtic) Brittany, and studies to this effect have also been carried out in southern France (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Taylor 1996) no quantitative survey of levelling in the phonology of local varieties of French spoken in Alsace has been carried out. Previous linguistic studies of Alsace have concentrated on code-switching (Gardner-Chloros 1991) and lexis (Wolf & Fisher 1983) rather than the characteristics of the French spoken there. Those studies which do focus on the phonological characteristics of Alsatian Regional French are generally dialectological observations of the phonology of a very small number of elderly rural speakers rather than variationist sociolinguistic studies of urban areas. The majority of these studies were conducted in the 1980s and none of them investigates levelling (see Chapter 4).

My research project will therefore focus on the following main questions:

- 1.) Can French phonology in Alsace be said to be levelled?
- 2.) Is levelling more advanced in a particular age group?
- 3.) To what extent does degree of levelling depend on gender?
- 4.) How does levelling interact with social class?
- 5.) Is degree of levelling influenced by the urban or rural origin of the speaker?
- 6.) Does the speaker's level of regional attachment affect the degree of phonological levelling of his or her speech?

## **1.2 Hypotheses**

### **1.2.1. Degree of levelling of the phonology of Alsatian Regional French**

The hypothesis of the present study is that the phonology of Alsatian Regional French will be found to be levelled to a certain extent. This means that the phonology of the speaker sample will involve the absence of many highly salient traditional local accent features described in the literature (such as devoicing of word-initial and word-final voiced obstruents), and non-standard features characteristic of casual spoken French throughout France will be present (for example schwa-tagging and word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion).

My reasons for formulating this hypothesis are as follows. Firstly, the researcher observed when living in Alsace that some of the traditional accent features described in the literature on French in Alsace (such as apical [r] and pronunciation of word initial [h] in places other than in the expression *en haut*) were absent from the speech of even the very elderly speakers encountered by the researcher. This impression was corroborated by the comments of the informants interviewed by the researcher for the pilot study she conducted in 2010 as part of her Master of Research dissertation (Pipe 2010). When asked to describe a typical Alsatian accent, the informants described the features of non-standard vowel length, word-initial and word-final devoicing of canonically voiced obstruents, word-initial tonic stress and use of back [ɑ]. They omitted to mention some features mentioned in the literature written twenty or thirty years earlier as being characteristic of Alsatian Regional French, namely apical [r], pharyngeal or devoiced realisations of /R/, pronunciation of word-initial [h], and

the closing of the canonically mid-low vowels /œ/ and /ɔ/ to [ø] and [o] in closed syllables. This seems to provide evidence for the hypothesis that accent levelling is taking place in Alsace. However, there could be other reasons for the differences between the perceptions of the researcher and her informants in the pilot study and the literature. For example, the features not remarked upon by the pilot study informants but present in the literature may be less perceptually or socially salient than those described by both sources. The differing descriptions of Alsatian Regional French by the pilot study informants and previous studies of the Regional French of Alsace may also be due to the fact that the informants in the pilot study were all city-dwellers, whereas the informants whose speech was examined for the purposes of writing the literature were rural speakers. The differences between the two groups may therefore be a result of the differences between urban and rural speech, rather than a product of change in progress between the time when the studies were written and the pilot study in 2010. It would be necessary to carry out a study of present-day rural Alsatian speakers in order to determine whether this is in fact the case. Indeed, one aspect of the present study will be a comparison of the phonology of contemporary urban and rural Alsatian speakers of French.

Secondly, the same socioeconomic factors which have led to levelling elsewhere are also present in Alsace. These factors mainly result from the large-scale social and economic upheavals that have taken place in France, and indeed many other countries, since the end of the Second World War, involving large-scale migration from the countryside to cities, increased social and geographical mobility. This in turn has led to a breakdown of the traditional close-knit, dense social networks that characterised pre-war France, especially amongst working-class communities. Since this type of close-knit networks, and the low social and geographical mobility of speakers which usually accompanies them, act as linguistic norm-enforcement mechanisms, their weakening has led to a corresponding reduction of the influence of local community norms and a corresponding increase in the strength of the influence of supra-local, national varieties, whether standard or non-standard (Milroy 2002: 7). Moreover, increased social and geographical mobility have encouraged extensive contact between speakers of different regional linguistic varieties. This linguistic contact often leads to linguistic convergence and

accommodation between speakers of different varieties, as a result of the accommodation strategies speakers use to facilitate mutual understanding and acceptance on the part of members of different speech communities. Over time and due to prolonged, repeated contact, this accommodation can lead to permanent linguistic convergence, with the most salient and strongly marked local features being eliminated from each variety, often leading to the formation of one levelled variety spoken over a wide area (Trudgill 1986: 39).

### **1.2.2. Gender**

The hypothesis of the present study regarding gender is that levelling in the phonology of Alsatian French is more advanced in the speech of females than in that of males.

The reasons for formulating this hypothesis are as follows. Labov (1990: 205-206) proved that, in general, female speakers use a higher proportion of standard or prestige forms, and a lower proportion of stigmatised non-standard forms than males of the same age and equivalent social status. Since levelling involves the abandonment of local forms which are non-standard and often stigmatised, it could be considered that female speakers are likely to lead in this abandonment of stigmatised local features. This is especially likely to be true in the case of vertical levelling, in which the abandonment of locally marked features coincides with or is due to a movement in the direction of the standard variety.

However, levelling does not always involve a vertical dimension of convergence towards the standard. In horizontal levelling, locally marked variants are eliminated in favour of supra-local variants which may be non-standard. Indeed, this move from the local to the supra-local may in fact involve divergence from the standard, if the supra-local form adopted differs from the standard variant to a greater extent than the localised form which has been abandoned. In this case, we might expect men to be leading in the process of horizontal levelling, since it represents a move away from the standard. However, studies have shown that this is not in fact the case, and that women lead both vertical and horizontal levelling.

An explanation for this apparent contradiction is provided by Milroy et al (1994: 352) who suggest that it is not in fact standard or prestige forms per se which female speakers favour, but supra-local ones. Standard or prestige variants are

usually supra-local, and stigmatised variants are often regionally or locally marked, which may have led to confusion regarding speaker preferences. This would indeed explain why women lead the process of horizontal levelling, in which local variants are replaced by supra-local variants, which may represent convergence towards or divergence from the standard variety. Previous studies of levelling in regions of France other than Alsace (Taylor 1996; Boughton 2003; Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Armstrong & Low 2008) and elsewhere (Williams & Kerswill 1999) have demonstrated that women are leading the levelling process.

### **1.2.3 Age**

The hypothesis of the present study regarding the age variable is that, the younger the speaker, the greater the degree of phonological levelling in his or her speech. The primary reason for formulating this hypothesis is that previous studies of levelling, both in and outside France (Taylor 1996; Boughton 2003; Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Kerswill & Williams 1999) have consistently shown that young speakers are leading the levelling process. Linguistic change in process can be reflected in apparent time in the age distribution of certain linguistic features. When the frequency of use of a feature decreases with age, it can be inferred that this feature is dying out, whereas if use of a feature increases as age decreases, it can be deduced that this is an innovative feature, whose use is increasing with time (Milroy & Gordon 2003). Previous studies of levelling have shown that localised variants are used more frequently as age increases, and that supra-local levelled variants are used more frequently as age decreases. However, caution must be used in interpreting these results, since it is possible that this is a case of age-grading rather than change in progress, with speakers adopting more and more local features as they get older. Real time studies are needed in order to verify that this is indeed a case of change in progress, rather than age-grading.

### **1.2.4 Social Class**

With regard to social class, the present study hypothesises that the working-class informants will be found to use a greater number and frequency of non-standard, regionally marked variants, than the middle-class informants. This means that the phonology of the middle-class informants is levelled to a greater extent than that of the working-class speakers. This hypothesis was developed because studies

such as Trudgill's (1974: 91-93) investigation of the Norwich speech community and Labov's (1972: 113,126) survey of New York have shown that, in general, working-class speakers use a higher number and frequency of non-standard forms than their middle-class counterparts. Sociolinguistic studies of France (Taylor 1996) have shown the same pattern and investigations of levelling in France have demonstrated that middle-class speakers are leading the levelling process in regions of France other than Alsace. A number of reasons for this class pattern have been suggested, such as the fact that members of different social classes tend to have different types of social network. Middle-class speakers tend to have loose social networks in which they have a large number of contacts and acquaintances to whom they are linked in only one way. They are generally more mobile socially and geographically than members of working-class communities, which often consist of dense, multiplex social networks. These close-knit networks consist of speakers linked to one another by multiplex social ties. For example, family members may also be colleagues or neighbours. Such multiplex links are less common amongst the middle classes. It is known that dense, multiplex social networks act as linguistic norm-enforcement mechanisms and perpetuate the use of non-standard and local variants, whereas looser social networks facilitate the spread of linguistic changes such as levelling.

### **1.2.5 Urban or Rural Origin**

The hypothesis of the present study regarding the informants' geographical origin is that the phonology of the urban informants will be found to be levelled to a greater extent than that of the rural informants. The reason for this hypothesis is that urban speakers tend to have loose social networks involving a large number of other speakers, which facilitate the adoption of incoming linguistic variants such as levelled forms, whereas rural speakers typically belong to dense, multiplex social networks which reinforce and protect local speech norms. However, the results of the present study may not show such a straightforward correlation between the informants' urban or rural origin because of the widespread geographical mobility present in today's society, particularly amongst the younger generation. Many young people in Alsace study or work in the large cities of Strasbourg and Mulhouse during the working week and return to small towns and villages at the weekends to spend time with their families. Many Alsatian people have moved from the countryside to the city, or vice versa, during



their lifetimes. This mobility blurs the distinction between urban and rural speakers. Speakers who commute between the city and the countryside may interact within social networks linked by loose ties in their urban weekday environment and function as part of dense, multiplex social networks in the country villages where they spend their weekends. For this reason, not only the informants' rural or urban origin, but also their level of mobility will be taken into account when analysing the results of the present study. As regards both social and geographical mobility, we would expect the phonology of socially and geographically mobile speakers to be levelled to a greater extent than that of non-mobile speakers, since the social networks of mobile speakers are less close-knit and their level of identification with and attachment to the local community are likely to be less strong when compared with non-mobile speakers.

### **1.2.6 Regional Attachment**

Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) studied the effect of regional attachment on phonological levelling in the speech of high school students in the south of France. They found that there is a correlation between the speaker's level of regional attachment and the degree of levelling of his or her phonology. The lower the level of regional attachment, the greater the degree of levelling in the speaker's phonology. Armstrong and Unsworth (1999: 145) measured regional attachment by distributing a questionnaire to informants and assigning a numerical score to each response. The result was a regional attachment index score ranging from 0 to 15, 0 signifying little or no regional attachment, and 15 meaning an extremely high level of regional attachment. The questions asked involved the informant's feelings of satisfaction, or otherwise, with the place where he or she lived, how often the informant travelled outside his or her region, whether the informant had future plans to live and work outside the region, the informants' perceptions of Parisian French phonology and whether or not the informant's friends came from the same region as him or her (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999: 153). Armstrong and Unsworth (1999: 145) found that their female informants had a much lower level of regional attachment than their male counterparts. The female informants also displayed a higher degree of phonological levelling than the male participants. Although this correlation does not necessarily imply causality, the difference in regional attachment between the genders could provide an explanation for the fact that female speakers generally

lead their speech communities in the adoption of levelled forms. However, Armstrong and Unsworth suggest no explanation of the difference in regional attachment between the male and female informants. Although very few studies have been carried out concerning the relationship between regional attachment and phonological levelling in France (indeed, Armstrong and Unsworth's (1999) is the only one of which the researcher is aware), the results of Armstrong and Unsworth's (1999) study will be taken as a basis on which a hypothesis for the present investigation can be constructed. The hypothesis of the present study is therefore that the speech of the Alsatian informants will also show a correlation between regional attachment and degree of phonological levelling, with the speakers with the lowest level of regional attachment having the phonologies levelled to the greatest extent. The researcher also predicts that the female informants in the present study will have a lower level of regional attachment than males of the same age and social class, as found by Armstrong and Unsworth (1999).

### **1.3 Importance of the research project and contribution to the field**

Levelling is a widespread process operating in a number of countries. My research will contribute to an understanding of the levelling process and of the factors that cause, encourage and inhibit it. Although several studies have confirmed that levelling is taking place in the central northern area of France, where a Romance substrate of the Oïl sub-group was once spoken, little sociolinguistic research has been carried out on areas of France where a non-Romance substrate variety was once, and may still be, spoken. Indeed, there are few recent sociolinguistic studies of the variety of French spoken in Alsace. Some studies of the pronunciation of French in Alsace were conducted in the 1980s (Carton et al. 1983; Walter 1982; Philipp 1985), but these were not variationist studies. Rather, they attempted to document the most 'traditional' or 'typical' (i.e. the most strongly regionally marked) Alsatian regional accent and therefore focused on older, non-urban speakers with low geographical and social mobility. In the case of Carton et al. (1983) and Walter (1982), only two speakers were studied, which hardly constitutes a representative sample of the population of Alsace, which numbers over a million inhabitants. Other relatively recent sociolinguistic studies of Alsace have focused on code-switching (Gardner-Chloros 1991) or lexis (Wolf & Fisher 1983) rather than phonology. No

study of levelling in the phonology of Alsatian Regional French has yet been carried out. My study of levelling in Alsace will therefore fill a gap in the sociolinguistic map of France and remedy a lack of sociolinguistic data regarding Alsace.

Alsace is a region located on the border between the Romance and Germanic linguistic areas and as such, is an area where many language contact phenomena can be observed. Research in the field of contact linguistics up to the present has focused mainly on lexis and morpho-syntax, rather than on phonology. By providing a phonological study of French in Alsace, a region where language contact phenomena abound, the present research will make a valuable contribution to research in the area of contact linguistics.

Gender and age are social variables which have been shown to have a significant interaction with and influence on linguistic variation and change in general, and levelling in particular. By testing whether the interaction between phonological variation, age and gender in Alsace follows the expected sociolinguistic pattern (i.e. females and younger speakers leading the change towards a levelled variety), my research will shed further light on the influence of these social variables on the levelling process and on linguistic variation and change in general, and the reasons behind this influence, which in the case of gender are somewhat unclear and the subject of much debate amongst linguists.

#### **1.4 Description and Origins of Variationist Sociolinguistics**

Variationist sociolinguistics, the approach adopted here, was pioneered by William Labov in the 1960s, in contrast to the traditional dialectological methods of linguistic fieldwork and analysis that prevailed at the time. Traditional dialectologists focused on documenting the most 'authentic' or 'pure' form of a particular linguistic variety, namely, that spoken by non-mobile, older, rural, usually male speakers (NORMS, henceforth). Their studies often relied on written questionnaires or studies of isolated words rather than long stretches of speech, and the data they used for their dialect descriptions were often based on the speech and responses of one or two informants. Traditional dialectologists believed that it was impossible to observe and analyse linguistic change in progress. In contrast, Labov claimed that it was possible to observe

changes currently taking place in language, and the methods he developed reflect this idea. He also stated, contrary to the accepted belief amongst linguists at the time, that linguistic variation is not random, but patterns according to social variables such as age, gender and socioeconomic status. Rather than simply gathering data on isolated words from a small number of elderly rural informants, Labov used random sampling to select large numbers of participants of both genders of various social class backgrounds and ages. He usually chose to focus on urban rather than rural speakers, with the exception of his study of the Martha's Vineyard community (Labov 1963). Labov carried out tape-recorded interviews lasting between thirty and ninety minutes, in which the informants produced long stretches of speech (Labov 1972: 79-85). He studied stylistic variation and its relationship to sociolinguistic patterns by eliciting a variety of speech styles of varying levels of formality, for example by contrasting spontaneous speech with reading aloud. Labov also developed the concept of the linguistic variable, which can be defined as a linguistic item with two or more semantically equivalent possible forms. Through quantitative analysis of the percentage of each of the possible forms used by particular groups of speakers, Labov discovered correlations between the use of certain linguistic variables and social variables like age, social class and gender. The patterns he found enabled him to learn a great deal about the direction and mechanisms of linguistic changes in progress at the time.

### **1.5 Variationist Sociolinguistics in Metropolitan France**

Variationist sociolinguistic approaches and methods have been much less widely adopted in France than they have been in the USA, the United Kingdom and French-speaking Canada. Indeed, Gadet (1996: 89) states that 'il n'existe à peu près pas à ce jour de sociolinguistique variationniste française' (there is currently almost no French variationist sociolinguistics). Various reasons for this reluctance on the part of French linguists to join this current have been postulated. It may be due to the fact that the sociolinguistic approach was pioneered by William Labov, an American, and is therefore viewed by some French linguists with suspicion. They may consider it to be useful in the USA and other English-speaking countries, but not suitable for France. Another reason for French linguists' reluctance to adopt the sociolinguistic approach may be the exceptionally strong ideology of the standard (Milroy 2001: 530) which prevails in France, where non-

standard speech forms are often viewed as inferior distortions of the standard language and not 'proper' French (as evidenced by the frequently-used expression 'ce n'est pas du français, ça', which describes non-standard language use). Social and regional non-standard variants of French have been historically suppressed and the very existence of variability denied. In France, the written form of the standard variety has traditionally been seen as the 'best' form of French, and spoken varieties have been disparaged and seen as inferior (Blanche-Benveniste & Jeanjean 1986: 2). Oral French is therefore considered unworthy of serious academic study, and Labovian sociolinguistics is mainly concerned with spoken, rather than written language. Moreover, it is far from certain that the fieldwork and analysis methods employed by sociolinguists abroad are equally valid and effective for France. For example, French society is usually seen as being divided into socio-professional categories which do not always map smoothly onto the upper, middle and lower-middle class, and upper, middle and lower working class divisions used in many sociolinguistic studies outside France. Some of the methods that were successfully employed by Labov (1972) in his studies of American English, such as random sampling using an electoral register or telephone directory, and conducting telephone surveys, have been shown to meet with little success in France. Potential informants contacted by complete strangers are far less likely to participate in linguistic studies in France than in the USA, making a random sample unlikely to be representative, since those who refuse to participate may belong to particular social groups. However, since Gadet's statement of the lack of French variationist sociolinguistics, progress has been made in the field, some of it by English-speaking linguists like Taylor (1996) and Armstrong (2001), but also by French native speakers such as Bauvois (2002).

### **1.6 Structure of Following Chapters**

Having expounded the goals of the present study and the questions it aims to answer, as well as the working hypotheses of this research regarding the relationship between the social variables of gender, age, social class, urban or rural origin and regional attachment and levelling, and described the background and broad sociolinguistic framework of this investigation, the next chapter will discuss two key concepts, the understanding of which is vital for the present study, namely, levelling and Regional French. The following chapter will provide

detailed background information on the social variables of age, gender, social class and geographical origin of the informants (urban or rural). The fourth chapter will describe the complex sociolinguistic history of Alsace, and review studies of the phonology of Alsatian Regional French and attitudes towards this variety. Next, this thesis will discuss the fieldwork methods used in the present study, before analysing the data obtained in both quantitative and qualitative ways, one linguistic variable at a time. The final chapter will be a conclusion which summarises the findings of the present research project, discusses the relationship between the research hypotheses and the actual findings, and provides indications for future research directions.

## **Chapter 2 Key Concepts: Dialect Levelling and Regional French**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss two important aspects of the present study, namely, dialect levelling and Regional French. The concept of Regional French is a key aspect of the present study, since the variety of French in which levelling is to be investigated has been defined for the purposes of formulating the research questions as 'Alsatian Regional French'. It is therefore necessary to define exactly what 'Alsatian Regional French' and indeed the term 'Regional French' mean. A deeper understanding of the origins and uses in previous studies of the rather vague and ill-defined concept of Regional French will be achieved by a brief review of key literature on the subject and the ways in which studies of Regional French have evolved over time, from initial descriptive studies of individuals with the most strongly regionally marked speech to be found, to quantitative sociolinguistic research in recent years.

Since this research project aims to discover whether dialect levelling is taking place in Alsace, it is also important to understand exactly what is meant by the term 'levelling', the theoretical background and origins of the concept and the results of previous studies within the framework of levelling theory. Since the study of dialect levelling in the field of sociolinguistics was pioneered by a British linguist (Trudgill 1986) and most studies of levelling to date have focused on British English, a number of research projects involving dialect levelling in the United Kingdom will be discussed before moving on to a review of studies of levelling in France. These studies focus on Metropolitan French rather than the varieties of French spoken in other countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and Canada, and have been conducted almost exclusively by British linguists, perhaps because of the British roots of the concept and the general lack of enthusiasm for variationist sociolinguistics as a whole amongst French linguists.

This chapter will first define the concept of 'Regional French', before discussing the various ways in which other linguists have interpreted the term and providing examples of recent studies of Regional French. The focus will then shift to dialect levelling, beginning with a summary of the theoretical background

of the concept of levelling, followed by a review of selected case studies of levelling in Britain, where research into the levelling process was first conducted, then a section on levelling in France, with initial discussion of the theoretical background preceding case studies of both empirical and perceptual research, followed by a discussion of levelling in southern France, where the situation is somewhat different from more northerly regions.

## **2.2 Regional French**

Regional French can be broadly defined as a variety of French spoken in a geographically delimited area of France or another French-speaking country, which contains distinctive phonological and lexical features not found in the same combination in any other geographical area. These regional differences in French mainly arise from the influence of the various substrate varieties spoken in different places before French became the language of everyday communication there. Some of these varieties are still spoken today alongside French. Regional French varieties are not different languages, but rather varieties of French and are comprehensible (apart from a few isolated words) to native French speakers from other places. Use of Regional French allows speakers to signal their loyalty to and pride in their region, whilst still speaking the national language and avoiding the stigma sometimes attached to speaking a dialect incomprehensible to French people from other regions (see Foulkes & Docherty 1999: 14).

Although there is broad agreement amongst linguists on the points mentioned above, there is also some disagreement about the exact definition of Regional French. Tuailon (1974: 576, cited in Hornsby 2006: 2) describes Regional French as 'ce qui reste du dialecte quand le dialecte a disparu' ('what remains of the dialect when the dialect has disappeared'). Tuailon uses the word *dialecte* to denote the Romance substrate varieties spoken in France before French became the language of everyday communication throughout the country. These dialects continue to influence spoken French today and contribute to its geographical differentiation. These first speakers of French outside the Ile-de-France area were native speakers of other dialects, leading to interference between these dialects and French. According to this point of view,



Regional French is an unstable form intermediate between the regional dialect and Standard French, which will eventually disappear.

However, Tuaille's point of view is questionable for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it only allows for the influence of substrate dialects which are no longer spoken at all and discounts the possibility of Regional French being influenced by currently spoken substrate or adstrate dialects or languages. However, given that many regional dialects and languages still maintain a considerable degree of vitality, and that France shares borders with several other linguistic communities (such as German and Italian in the east), the influence of currently spoken regional varieties and adstrate influence are likely to have played a role in the development of the different varieties of Regional French. Secondly, regional variation in French does not only result from language contact phenomena, but also from the geographical distances between Paris (the centre from which both standard and non-standard supralocal French norms historically emanated, and still do today) and the peripheral regions. Many innovations which have diffused outwards from Paris have never reached some regions distant from the capital. Regional varieties of French therefore contain many archaisms. These are forms which were used throughout France in the past, but now only survive in certain areas outside Paris. On the other hand, regional varieties spoken far from the normative centre of Paris may innovate in ways that are forbidden in Standard French, for example by allocating a new meaning to a word that already exists in the standard variety, or by using suffixes or prefixes to create new words. Furthermore, many features of Regional French varieties originate from the Parisian working-class vernacular known as *français populaire* (popular French). This variety also diffused out from Paris, and some of its features have changed their social significance in a given geographical area, where they are no longer viewed as characteristic of working class speech, but are used by speakers of all social backgrounds (Hornsby 2006: 5). However, it cannot be denied that regional substrate varieties have played a major role in the formation of Regional French varieties.

The concept of Regional French appears to be somewhat vague and ill-defined. In areas where the substrate dialect is a Romance variety, it is often problematic to determine exactly where the boundaries between Standard

French, Regional French and dialect (or *patois*, as French people more commonly call it) lie. Carton (1981: 17, 1987: 30) advances the theory of a typology of four distinct varieties ranging from standardised supralocal French, or 'français commun', to *patois*, with intermediate varieties described as 'français régional' (Regional French) and 'français local ou dialectal' (local or dialectal French). He thus defines Regional French as a variety which contains only minimal markers of regionality, a 'mélange à dominante français commun' (mix dominated by standardised French) and is used over a large geographical area. 'Français dialectal', on the other hand, is limited to a small geographical area, contains more regional morpho-syntactic features which are used more frequently, and is defined as a 'mélange à dominante dialectale' ('mix dominated by dialect'). However, other linguists, such as Pooley (1996: 69) are of the opinion that there is a continuum between supralocal Oïl French and *patois*, with the possibility that a speaker's usage may be located anywhere along this continuum and shift in either direction according to his or her situation and interlocutors. This is undoubtedly the case in speech communities where a Romance variety other than French is spoken. However, it is not easy to imagine a complete linguistic continuum in Alsace, since although the French spoken there may contain more or less regionally marked features and involve lexical borrowing from Alsatian or code-switching, there is nevertheless a clear typological distinction between French and the Germanic substrate variety. According to some linguists, Regional French differs from the standard variety only in phonology, whereas regional dialects also differ from Standard French in morphology and syntax (Hornsby 2006: 6).

Regional French could be seen as a levelled variety, since it results from convergence between various dialects and the supralocal variety. Regional French varieties are now undergoing further levelling, producing very widely used supralocal varieties, one in the northern and one in the southern half of France, with speakers of the southern levelled variety also converging towards the northern supralocal variety in some cases (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999). However, Regional French varieties could also be viewed as a product of standardisation, since they result from the displacement of regional dialects by French, the standard variety (Hornsby 2006: 101, 106). It is the further levelling

now being undergone by Regional French, and Alsatian Regional French in particular, that is the object of the present study.

There was a surge of scholarly interest in Regional French from the post-war period onwards, as more and more speakers adopted French as their language of everyday communication and Regional French varieties developed. Several nationwide studies comparing and contrasting the Regional French of different regions were conducted (Martinet 1945; Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983). This interest appears to have peaked in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s with a large number of academic studies of individual varieties of Regional French (Taverdet & Straka 1977; Tuaille 1977; Warnant 1973, etc.). More recently, academic research into Regional French has taken on a new lease of life, with these varieties being analysed from a quantitative sociolinguistic point of view for the first time (Lefebvre 1991; Pickles 2001; Boughton 2003; Hall 2008). A number of perceptual studies aiming to ascertain speakers' attitudes towards various Regional French varieties have also been carried out (for example Paltridge & Giles 1984; Kuiper 1999; Boughton 2003; Woehrling & Boula de Mareuil 2006). The present study's sociolinguistic analysis of the changes currently taking place in the Regional French of Alsace can therefore be placed within a conceptual framework which is currently being used to investigate varieties spoken throughout France. The *Phonologie du Français Contemporain* (PFC, hereafter) project is also in the process of developing a large-scale survey of the phonology of regional varieties throughout France and the French-speaking world ([www.projet-pfc.net](http://www.projet-pfc.net)).

### **2.3 Theoretical Background to Dialect Levelling**

Although it had been present in European dialectological literature since the early twentieth century, the concept of dialect levelling was first clearly defined and popularised by Trudgill (1986), within the framework of his research on dialects in contact. According to Trudgill, levelling arises from multiple instances of short-term accommodation between speakers of different varieties. These short-term changes gradually become permanent over time as a result of frequent use, and they are passed on to the next generation as its native variety (Trudgill 1986: 39). Trudgill defines the process of dialect levelling as 'the reduction or attrition of marked variants' (Trudgill 1986: 98). This means that the

changes which speakers tend to make as part of the accommodation and levelling processes involve the elimination or reduction of the most salient features of their own native variety. Trudgill sees levelling as one component of the process of koinéisation, by which new supra-local linguistic varieties are formed. This process also involves simplification (a reduction of redundancy and irregularity in the grammatical system) and reallocation (elements which previously had identical meanings and sociolinguistic significance in two separate varieties of the initial dialect mix take on different semantic or sociolinguistic functions in the new levelled variety).

Since Trudgill's initial study, the concept of dialect levelling (also referred to as accent levelling in cases where it concerns only phonological features) has been taken up and its scope extended by a number of linguists. Williams and Kerswill (1999: 149) describe levelling as 'a process whereby differences between regional varieties are reduced, features which make varieties distinctive disappear, and new features emerge and are adopted by speakers over a wide geographical area'.

Whereas Trudgill (1986: 107) describes levelling in a narrow sense as part of the process of koinéization, Williams & Kerswill (1999: 149) use the term levelling in a much broader sense, to describe an independent process. They not only refer to the elimination of highly localised features, but also to the emergence and adoption of new supra-local features not present in the original dialect mix.

Boughton (2005: 235) gives the following definition of levelling: 'a reduction in phonological, morphological or lexical differences between varieties which does not necessarily entail convergence towards the standard'. Thus, another important point is added to the previous definitions of levelling: namely, that the convergence between linguistic varieties produced by the levelling process does not always result in the adoption of variants closer to the standard variety than the original variants present in the individual varieties before contact occurred. For example, in the north-east of England around Newcastle, highly localised varieties are converging to produce a 'pan-northern' variety, which is no closer to 'standard' Received Pronunciation (RP, henceforth) phonology than

were the original local ones (Watt & Milroy 1999). Boughton's definition thus highlights an important point: the difference between the processes of levelling and standardisation.

## **2.4 Standardisation**

Standardisation involves 'the suppression of linguistic variation in response to institutional, "top-down" initiatives' such as education and the mass media (Armstrong 2001: 4), whereas levelling is not an intentional process which is deliberately instigated by institutions, but rather a 'natural' process of sociolinguistic convergence resulting from contact between speakers of different linguistic varieties due to their social and geographical mobility.

Indeed, in the case of standardisation, speakers may be intentionally focused on achieving a target variety, for example RP for British English, or Standard Parisian French, whereas in the case of levelling, speakers are not, consciously or unconsciously, aiming for a standard prestige variety completely devoid of regional features, but are simply replacing very highly localised forms, which may signal allegiance to a single village, with broader regional forms, which still indicate local loyalty, but spread over a larger geographical area.

Standardisation can be seen as a 'vertical' process, whereby standard linguistic forms are imposed from above, in both senses of the term, namely from above the level of speaker awareness, for example through the overt teaching of such forms at school, and in that they tend to be imposed by official institutions, down through society. Levelling, on the other hand, can be viewed as a 'horizontal' process in which innovative forms are passed on between social equals, and as a change 'from below' in the sense that speakers are not necessarily aware of the change taking place.

In practice, levelling and standardisation cannot always be viewed as entirely independent processes, since the influence of the standard variety is present to some extent in almost every speech community, and certainly throughout France (Lodge 2004: 31) where the 'ideology of the standard' (Milroy 2001) is particularly strong. The mechanisms of the levelling process may differ in

different speech communities. For example, levelling can be described as vertical (involving convergence towards the standard) or horizontal (convergence of different regional varieties independently of standard influence). In the United Kingdom, a more horizontal levelling process is leading to the formation of several different regional levelled varieties, whereas in France, where levelling often involves a shift in the direction of the standard, a more vertical type of levelling is leading to the creation of a single nation-wide levelled variety (Hornsby 2007: 77-78) (with the possible exception of the south of France where there is evidence of the emergence of a southern 'regional standard' (Taylor 1996)).

### **2.5 Reasons why levelling occurs**

Foulkes and Docherty (1999) shed light on the possible speaker motivations which might provide an impetus for the levelling process. For example, they state that the removal of the most strongly marked, minority forms allows speakers to show an outward-looking, cosmopolitan mindset, whilst at the same time enabling them to signal a degree of local loyalty by using non-standard forms used throughout a large region (Foulkes & Docherty 1999: 14). For instance, Watt (1998: 7, cited in Foulkes & Docherty 1999: 14) gives the example of young people in Tyneside wanting to 'dispel the "cloth cap and clogs" image' and to 'sound like northerners, but *modern* notherners'. The forms retained in the levelled variety should not be highly localised markers of a region other than the one from which the speaker originates, since this could be construed as regional disloyalty.

There is some uncertainty as to the exact causes which initiate the levelling process in any given speech community, but many linguists suggest that the dramatic social changes and breakdown of traditional close-knit, highly localised social networks, which have occurred since the Second World War are responsible. Increased geographical mobility is also thought to play an important role. Levelling is therefore seen as a process which is occurring not only in a few isolated areas of the United Kingdom, but potentially in any location which has experienced, or is currently experiencing, such social upheavals and increase in geographical mobility.

In conclusion, then, although there is some disagreement amongst linguists as regards the exact definition and scope of levelling, we can broadly define it as the elimination or reduction of the most strongly marked or salient elements from two or more distinct but related varieties due to contact. Levelling is a process of linguistic convergence by which different varieties become more similar to one another and may eventually merge into one widely used, levelled linguistic variety.

Having discussed the theoretical foundations on which studies of dialect levelling are based, some practical considerations of such studies and their results will now be discussed. As well as the research mentioned above, a number of other studies of dialect levelling in British English have been conducted in recent decades, the most significant of which will be reviewed below.

## **2.6 Case Studies of Levelling in British English**

Williams and Kerswill (1999) studied accent levelling in Reading, Hull and Milton Keynes. In Milton Keynes, a 'new town' designated in 1967 which is made up of in-migrants from various dialect areas, mostly in the south east of England, the population is highly geographically and socially mobile, connected by weak, diffuse social network ties. Levelling and focusing of the many varieties initially present in the dialect mix to one single levelled variety could therefore be expected to have occurred rapidly. The authors collected data from children aged 4-12, their caregivers and elderly residents of the area (born in the early years of the twentieth century). They use the example of the MOUTH vowel to illustrate the levelling process in Milton Keynes. This vowel has changed radically and very quickly, with almost no overlap in realisations between the generations. The elderly informants pronounced the MOUTH vowel [ɛʊ] (63.2% of tokens), [ɛɪ] (25.6%), [ɛ:] (9.8%) or [æʊ] (1.2%). The majority variant for these speakers, [ɛʊ], is the local form attested in the Survey of English dialects. The caregivers were mostly first-generation migrants to Milton Keynes, and used a range of variants from their places of origin, namely [ɛ:] (11.7% of tokens), [a:] (17.2%), [æʊ] (38.6%) and [aʊ] (31.5%). Although all the parental variants were

present in the children's speech, especially in that of the youngest children (aged 4), the older children (aged 8-12) appeared to be rejecting the more marked variants used by their parents and adopting [aʊ], which is an RP-like, non-regionally marked form, as their majority variant (65.9% of tokens).

Williams and Kerswill's examination of the GOAT vowel also provides some interesting results. The elderly informants pronounced this vowel [əʊ] or [ɐʊ]. Most members of the parents' generation showed a preference for the [eʊ] variant typical of their places of origin in London and the south east. The older children, however, are moving towards use of [əY], [eY], [əɪ] or [eɪ]. These are new variants, which are characteristic neither of the traditional local dialect, the parents' dialects nor traditional RP speech. These forms are spreading across the whole south east of England, and the older children are participating in this shift towards a supra-local, but non-standard variant.

Hull, in contrast to Milton Keynes, is a city where social and geographical mobility are limited. The informants' families had often lived on the same council estate for two or three generations, and they had dense, multiplex social networks on the estate. Reading shares characteristics with both Hull and Milton Keynes, since it has some stable local communities but also a mobile population of commuters and people who have migrated to Reading for work, and there is more potential for social mobility than in Hull. The authors examine the effects of these different environments on linguistic behaviour by analysing the informants' use of the PRICE vowel. In Hull, the traditional dialectal allophonic distinction between [aɪ] and [a:] is still maintained in all the age groups of the working-class sample, although a merger has occurred in middle-class speech. In Reading, the pronunciation of this vowel has also remained relatively stable, with a number of variants being used at similar percentage rates by the two age groups, although the children, especially the girls, appear to be adopting a new, supra-local variant [aɪ] (2.8% of tokens for girls and 0.6% for boys). We may thus conclude that levelling is taking place in Reading and Hull, but very gradually. In Milton Keynes, on the other hand, there has been a marked shift between the generations, with the elderly informants frequently using [ɑɪ] and [ɔɪ] (24.4% and 56.6% of tokens respectively), and less frequently



[ʌɪ] (15.3%) and [ʌɪ] (3.4%), whereas as the children do not use [ʌɪ] and [ʌɪ] at all, use the older generation's majority variant [ɔɪ] in only a tiny percentage of PRICE tokens (0.5% for girls, 0% for boys), and have introduced two new variants not used at all by the elderly informants, [aɪ] (1% for boys, 25.4% for girls) and [ɑɪ] (44.6% for girls, 38.0% for boys, the new majority variant). In Milton Keynes, the girls are clearly leading the boys in the introduction of the innovative variants.

Despite the relative stability of the PRICE vowel in Reading and Hull, the authors did find some evidence of levelling in the consonantal system of those cities, namely: replacement of non-initial /t/ by a glottal stop, fronting of /θ/ to [f] (e.g. in 'thing') and fronting of /ð/ to [v] (e.g. in 'brother'). These consonant changes were found to follow similar phonological and sociolinguistic distributions in all three fieldwork sites. This is adoption of supra-local non-standard features rather than elimination of locally marked variants from the levelled varieties. These features originate from London but have spread to the speech of young people throughout Britain and appear to no longer have local London connotations, but rather symbolise supra-local British youth identity. Young people in Hull, for example, are therefore able to use these forms to signal identification with youth culture and with their peer group, whilst simultaneously maintaining strong links to their own region by using local variants such as those described for the PRICE vowel above.

Watt (2002, see also Watt & Milroy 1999) studied phonological levelling of the FACE and GOAT vowels in Tyneside English. His sample was composed of 32 speakers of both genders, two age groups (18-25 and 45+) and two social class groups (working class and middle class), defined according to the area of the city where they lived. He conducted and recorded 45 minute conversations with pairs of informants in order to obtain linguistic data for analysis. He analysed the presence of three variants of each vowel in the speech of his informants. In each case, a national (RP, [eɪ] for FACE and [oʊ] for GOAT), a local (Tyneside, [iə] for FACE and [ʊə] for GOAT) and a supralocal (north-east England, [e:] for FACE and [o:] for GOAT) variant were found. Quantitative analysis of his data showed that in the sample as a whole, the supralocal variants were the most

frequent. The local variants were used mainly by males, with only negligible use by the female informants and the national variants were used mainly by middle-class speakers, and then only to a limited extent. Some groups, for example the working class males, did not use them at all. However, they were used more frequently by younger than older middle-class speakers, suggesting that they may be on the increase. They occurred most frequently in word list style, which seems to indicate that they are associated with 'careful' or 'correct' pronunciation. He found that the strongest conditioning factor in use of these variables was gender, although social class and age both proved to be highly significant. There was a decline in use of the local variants from older to younger males in both social classes.

Watt therefore concludes that the 'mainstream' supralocal variants are supplanting the local variants, and that this process is being led by young, middle-class female speakers. This is unsurprising given the previous findings of many quantitative sociolinguistic studies which have shown that women tend to adopt incoming variants more quickly than men. Since the Tyneside accent is highly stigmatised, it also seems natural that the social groups which tend towards the most frequent use of prestige forms (and therefore the least frequent use of stigmatised forms) should be the first to adopt the less stigmatised supralocal variants. However, male speakers are leading in the introduction of a new local variant of GOAT, which Watt suggests symbolises local identity without the archaic connotations of traditional local variants. It is vital to note, as Watt does, that the levelling taking place in Tyneside is not in the direction of, or caused by, RP. Indeed, many inhabitants of Tyneside have an extremely negative view of RP, since it is the variety spoken by southerners and the national authorities whom they perceive as neglecting their interests and marginalising their region. Watt suggests that these speakers would be likely to reject any incoming variant they perceived as 'southern'. Instead, he advances the hypothesis that the levelling of Tyneside phonology is moving in the direction of a putative northern or north-eastern regional standard, which he describes as 'a trade-off between modernity and regional loyalty' (Watt 2002: 57).

Britain (2002) carried out a study of dialect levelling of past tense BE in the Fens, which has resulted in analogous use of *was* in positive contexts (e.g. 'the farms was') and *weren't* in negative contexts (e.g. 'the farm weren't') across various local dialects. He examines levelling as part of a process of koinéization, following Trudgill's (1986) model. In order to obtain data for his study, Britain recorded casual conversations with 80 informants from various locations in Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. These informants fell into two age groups: those born in 1925-1945, and those born in 1960-1975. Britain supplemented these data with archive recordings of speakers born around 1900. He found that throughout the sample, the levelled forms (*was* and *weren't*) constituted more than 60% of all tokens. Whereas *weren't* was the majority variant (85-96%) for all age groups, the informants' use of *was* increased in apparent time, with an especially sharp division between the archive speakers and those born in 1925-1945. *Was* was used by 49% of archive speakers, 92% of 1925-1945 speakers and 91% of 1960-1975 speakers. Britain also noted phonological levelling of the past tense forms of BE, with almost all speakers pronouncing the dominant forms *was* [wɒz] and *weren't* [wɜ:n(?)], and the minority forms *wasn't* [wɒzn?] and *were* [wɜ:]. Only 5 tokens of any other forms were present in the whole sample, despite the wide variety of localised phonological forms attested for the region in the 1950s in the Survey of English dialects. Britain attributes the levelling process which has clearly taken place in the Fens over the last few decades to infrastructural and technological advances, as well as to the New Town and overspill urban developments of the 1960s and 1970s.

Dyer (2002) studied phonological levelling in the Scottish-English community of Corby in Northamptonshire across three generations of speakers. From the 1930s until 1980, Corby grew from a small village to a large city due to the establishment of a steelworks by a Glaswegian company and the resulting immigration of large numbers of Scottish workers and their families. Long-term contact has therefore occurred between the traditional Northamptonshire variety and the variety of English spoken in the Glasgow area. Dyer conducted and recorded informal interviews with 49 speakers divided into three age groups: 14-23, 40-50 and 60-74. She studied six phonological variables that index the contrast between Scottish and East Midland English and found that for each

variable, the cross-generational patterns she discovered showed a tendency towards either the Anglo-English or Scottish English variant and the emergence of a new, mixed dialect. In Scottish English, the LOT and THOUGHT lexical sets are merged, with their vowels pronounced in the same way (in this study as [ɒ]) whereas in Anglo-English, this merger does not occur (with LOT pronounced with [ɒ] and THOUGHT with [ɔ:] in this study). Dyer carried out quantitative analysis of her data in order to discover the extent to which this merger was present in the speech of her informants.

She found that in the older generation, the Scottish-born informants produced a high percentage of mergers (counted as the number of times they pronounced the THOUGHT vowel as [ɒ] rather than [ɔ]), whereas the English-born informants produced none at all. In the middle and younger generations, who were born in Corby, almost no mergers occurred. It therefore seems that these generations tend to favour the established Anglo-English norm and to avoid distinctly Scottish features. This is the result we would expect in a speech community where dialect levelling is taking place, with imported stigmatised variants being eliminated and supra-local non-marked variants being adopted. Dyer's results regarding the GOAT variable appear to contradict this picture, however. Four variants of the GOAT vowel were found in the sample: the traditional Scottish English monophthong [ɔ], a traditional variant of the Midlands, [əʊ], and two innovative variants which are gaining ground in the south east of England, [aɪ] and [æɪ]. Dyer found that in the older generation, the Scottish-born informants had very high rates of the monophthongal variant (85-100%), whereas the English-born informants did not use it at all, but used 100% of the established Anglo-English variant [əʊ]. The middle generation used a combination of the traditional [ɔ] and [əʊ] variants. In the younger generation, the males appeared to be adopting the monophthongal variant, whereas their female counterparts favoured the innovative supra-local [aɪ] and [æɪ] variants. Although the behaviour of the young females is what we would expect to see if dialect levelling were occurring in Corby, the maintenance of the traditionally Scottish variant by the young males appears to be a move in the opposite direction to levelling, since it is a local, stigmatised feature. Their use of this variant appears all the more puzzling in view of the fact that, when interviewed, they stated that they felt no link with Scotland whatsoever. Dyer concludes that

the young males have reallocated the [o] variant as a badge of Corby, rather than Scottish, identity, in order to distinguish themselves from the young people of the neighbouring town of Kettering. It seems therefore that the salient social and linguistic divisions have changed from being ethnic (Scottish versus English) to town community based (Corby versus Kettering). Dyer suggests that the differing use of the GOAT variable by young men and women in Corby stems from the fact that this variable is seen as a symbol of the speaker's orientation to the local community, and that young men tend to be locally oriented, whereas young women tend to be more outwardly oriented in this speech community.

In conclusion, the initially distinct varieties in Corby's dialect mix (Scottish English and the Corby dialect of Anglo-English) appear to have merged in the speech of the younger generation, thus conforming to part of the definition of dialect levelling, namely, that differences between varieties are reduced and some of the stigmatised, locally marked (Scottish English) variants initially present in the dialect mix seem to be dying out. However, Dyer states that the Corby dialect cannot be described as a completely levelled variety, since it is restricted to a relatively small geographical area (the town of Corby) and although some stigmatised Scottish English features (such as the LOT/THOUGHT merger) have been replaced by supra-local ones, others (such as the monophthongal variant of GOAT) are still present in the speech of the younger generation, whose male members appear to be using at least one of them as a badge of local identity.

The studies reviewed above provide valuable evidence regarding levelling in England and the mechanisms by which it proceeds. They show that, generally speaking, the speakers leading the levelling process are young, middle class and female, with gender as the most significant factor. Having examined some case studies of levelling in the British Isles, we will now turn to a review of research more closely related to the present study, namely, a review of studies of levelling in French.

## 2.7 Levelling in French

### 2.7.1 Theoretical Background

Pooley (2006) provides an overview of research into dialect levelling in French. All such work has been conducted by British linguists, perhaps because the concept was popularised and first applied by British linguists in the United Kingdom, and also because such studies have generally been conducted within the framework of variationist sociolinguistics, which has met with a lukewarm reception in France, perhaps because the prescriptive view of language which predominates there views sociolinguistic variation as undesirable and unworthy of study. These studies mainly focus on the Oïl substrate area, namely, the central-northern area of France where a Romance substrate variety closely related to French was once spoken. However, there have been studies of levelling in the south of France (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Mooney 2013) and in Brittany (Nicholson in prep.).

Pooley begins by providing an overview of accounts of regional variation in the French of France dating from 1945 and from the 1980s, before describing the main features of the levelled variety that he terms Oïl French (also called *français moyen* or *français standardisé*) which diverge from traditional Standard French. He includes the following characteristics in this description: neutralisation of the following phonological vowel oppositions: /a/~ɑ/, /e/~ɛ/ (in open syllables only), /ø/~œ/ (in closed syllables only), /œ/~ɛ̃/, maintenance of the /ɔ/~o/ opposition in closed syllables (e.g. *hotte* [ɔt] versus *ôte* [ot]), the realisation of the semi-vowels /j/, /ɥ/ and /w/ as glides after a consonant, word-final post-obstruent liquid deletion (WFOLD) (e.g. *table* pronounced [tab]) and the realisation of /R/ (never as apical [r], usually the uvular fricative [ʁ] but with considerable variation tolerated).

Pooley then examines France one region at a time in search of Oïl-divergent features, that is, resistance to the levelling process and signs of regional differentiation. He finds that there are undoubtedly still some regional phonological features that diverge from the supra-local variety in the Oïl area, although these are mainly used by speakers aged over 65. Finally, he

investigates the spread of Oïl French into the non-Oïl substrate areas of France, and finds that considerable phonological levelling and convergence towards Oïl French has taken place in the northern part of the Oc substrate area in southern France (Auvergne and Puy-de-Dôme). Moving further south, he discovers that there is some evidence that younger speakers in the extreme south of France are starting to be influenced by the Oïl variety and to use levelled forms, although regional features such as the southern schwa distribution and weak vowel nasalisation are still flourishing.

He also observes that regional phonological features in the Nord region and the city of Lille still show great vitality and that the varieties of French spoken there cannot yet be described as levelled. However, he advances the theory that in future, regional levelled forms may diffuse out from Lille and become widely used throughout the Nord region. Pooley also implies that levelling may be taking place in the Flemish-speaking Westhoek area and Celtophone Brittany, although he does not provide any data to support this hypothesis.

Most importantly for the present study, Pooley found from his investigation of accounts of Alsatian Regional French that regional phonological features still have a high degree of vitality in Alsace. He attributes this to the vibrancy of cities such as Strasbourg, which act as cultural centres, and to the frequent, widespread use of the Germanic substrate variety. However, he does nuance this claim by admitting that the accounts of French phonology in Alsace which he has examined (Carton et al 1983 and Walter 1982) are neither very recent nor representative of the whole Alsatian population since each of these studies only focuses on two speakers and deliberately sought out older speakers with strongly marked speech in terms of regional accent. These studies, and therefore Pooley who bases his comments on Alsace on them, provide a 'maximalist' account of French in Alsace in the 1980s, which exaggerates the prevalence of strongly marked regional features in use in Alsace at the time.

Pooley concludes by stating that France is unique in western Europe for the extent to which the phonology of the national language has been levelled, both in terms of the very low level of regional differentiation within the Oïl variety and the extent of the geographical area it covers (approximately two-thirds of

French-speaking Europe). He advances the hypothesis that levelled Oil French has the potential to spread still further, into regions of France where the historical substrate is not a Romance variety (such as Alsace) and into French-speaking Belgium and Switzerland. This article mentions some regions of France, such as Corsica, only briefly, perhaps because of a lack of recent studies of the variety of French spoken there, so no conclusion can be drawn from this paper as to whether or not levelling is also occurring there.

Pooley points out that there is one major exception to the process of homogenisation that the phonology of metropolitan French is undergoing, namely, the *accent des banlieues*, the phonology of the variety of French spoken in deprived areas on the outskirts of large French cities, which appears to be diverging from the standard variety. However, this variety does not seem to be regionally differentiated and therefore does not counteract the increasing aregionality of metropolitan French. Indeed, the emergence and diffusion of new supra-local non-standard forms is one of the features of levelling described by Williams and Kerwill (1999).

Armstrong and Blanchet (2006) discuss the theory of levelling in France, and suggest the term 'standardisations partielles' ('partial standardisations') rather than 'nivellement' ('levelling') to translate this concept into French, since 'nivellement' implies the elimination of all differences, including social variation such as class-motivated or gender-based differences. The term 'nivellement' is therefore not viewed as portraying the levelling process and its results accurately. However, it is not only the name of this process that cannot be translated directly from English into French, but the levelling process itself seems to differ in France and Britain. The linguistic convergence between different geographical areas taking place in France can suitably be described as *standardisations partielles* because the levelling that is occurring in France has an element of convergence towards the standard variety. The highly localised accent features eliminated by the levelling process are replaced by standard French variants, or with features closer to the standard variety than those they replace. In Britain, however, this vertical dimension is absent from the levelling process, and although supralocal features are adopted in place of highly localised variants, the new supralocal traits may diverge from the standard



variety to a greater extent than those they replace. Armstrong and Blanchet also note that the supralocal Oïl variety of French seems to be levelled socially as well as regionally, since it contains remarkably little accent divergence between different social groups across class, age and gender divisions when compared with other linguistic varieties.

Armstrong (2005) compares the processes of levelling in British English and Metropolitan French. He indicates that there are important differences between the changes occurring in the two countries. For example, two major levelled varieties are being formed as the product of levelling in England, namely 'Estuary English' in the south and a widespread, generalised northern variety. The levelling process in England often involves changes away from the direction of the standard variety, and could be described as change from below the level of conscious awareness rather than change imposed from above by institutions. In Section 2.1 above, it was observed that levelling in Britain takes place along a horizontal, rather than a vertical dimension. However, Armstrong is of the opinion that levelling in England could be described as vertical, but that it involves divergence from RP and convergence with non-standard working-class varieties. Phonological features which were originally used only by working-class speakers are now diffusing up the social hierarchy and being adopted into the standard variety. The linguistic variables involved in phonological variation in Britain are generally instances of arbitrary variation (i.e. the variants involved have no inherent social or stylistic meaning, but this significance is attributed to them by speakers) rather than ease of articulation processes.

In contrast, only one levelled variety, Oïl French, is emerging in France (with this possible exception of Southern France, where there is some evidence that levelling is a two-way process, which consists of both levelling in the direction of the supra-local variety originating from the Oïl substrate area, and of levelling between the different southern French varieties to form what has been termed a 'regional standard' (Taylor 1996)). This variety originates from the central-northern area of France around Paris and is spreading throughout the country. Vertical levelling is also occurring in France, but in the opposite direction on the vertical axis from the levelling process in Britain, producing convergence with

Standard French. This situation could therefore be classified as change from above. The type and number of phonological features involved in variation in Oïl French and levelled varieties of British English also differ. Whereas British English contains a large number of linguistically arbitrary phonological variables, levelled Oïl French only includes a limited amount of variation in pronunciation, and several of the small number of phonological variables available to Oïl French speakers are 'natural' variables involved in ease of articulation processes, such as the deletion of /R/ and // in a word-final post-consonantal environment (WFPOLD) and the deletion of schwa. It seems logical for the rate of ease of articulation variants such as these to be greater in casual styles where less attention is paid to speech.

In spite of all this, there are some similarities in the sociolinguistic situations of the two countries. In both France and Britain, society has been undergoing a general process of 'informalisation' over the last sixty years or so, which has led to a decline in the influence and usage of the national standard varieties, especially RP, and of the most formal speech styles of both languages. In both countries, levelling has been triggered by similar social changes, namely the large-scale social upheavals that have occurred since the Second World War and increased social and geographical mobility leading to the breakdown of traditional close-knit communities with dense, multiplex social networks that act as linguistic norm-enforcement mechanisms and maintain local speech forms in the face of standardising pressures. In both France and Britain, levelling appears to follow similar patterns of interaction with age and gender, with younger speakers and women leading the levelling process. Armstrong also puts forward the hypothesis that levelling is taking place not only in the Oïl substrate area of central-northern France but also in the south and provides some examples of studies that support this claim.

## **2.7.2 Case Studies of Levelling in French**

### **2.7.2.1 Evidence from Empirical Studies**

Pooley (1996) carried out a study of the Regional French of Lille, investigating the loss of the following regional variables: regional realisation of /ã/ as [ɛ̃], of

/aR/ as /æR/ and of /s/ as [ʃ], word-final consonant devoicing, the /a~/a/ opposition, as well as the acquisition of supralocal non-standard features such as word-final post-obstruent liquid dropping (WFOLD). He found that the regional features were used more frequently by older speakers with a lower level of education and by males. Pooley carried out a real-time study, following up his initial fieldwork with a second study of teenagers twelve years later. In the latter study, he found that the regional [æR] variant and word-final consonant devoicing occurred much less frequently than in the former. These regional forms did occur in the speech of the Rouges-Barres teenagers, but only marginally. However, the supralocal non-standard WFOLD forms did not decrease in frequency between the two studies. These results show that levelling is indeed taking place in the Lille conurbation, with the elimination of regionally marked non-standard forms and adoption of supralocal non-standard features.

Taylor (1996) studied schwa deletion, schwa tagging, the mid vowels and vowel nasality in Aix-en-Provence. Her results show the emergence of a Regional Standard which is very similar to Standard French but still retains a slight regional influence. For example, regionally marked features such as the [ɒ] realisation of /O/ are being eliminated, but the regional pronunciation of word-final syllables in *-ait* or *-ais* with [e] rather than [ɛ] is being maintained (84% [e] in Aix as opposed to 100% [ɛ] in Paris). In this speech community, the Regional Standard is the prestige variety. Standard French has negative connotations such as lack of humour, unfriendliness and dishonesty and is not seen as a desirable target variety. However, Taylor is of the opinion that further levelling in the direction of Standard French may take place in future, as young people become more mobile and open to incoming forms from outside the region. She notes some interesting gender patterns in her data, for example in the use of [ŋ], the consonantal appendage used word-finally after canonically nasal vowels which in the regional variety are only weakly nasalised. [ŋ] is at the same time a stigmatised non-standard form and an emotionally cherished symbol of regional identity. This regionally marked feature is avoided by women but used with pride by men, for whom it seems to carry a certain amount of covert prestige. It seems that they can express their masculinity by using such regionally marked variants. This evidence provides support for the hypothesis of the present study

that it is women who will be found to be leading in the elimination of regionally marked variants in Alsace.

Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) conducted a study of accent levelling which involved analysing the schwa deletion rates and patterns of sixteen young people aged 16-25 from the Languedoc region in the far south of France. The data analysed were obtained by means of interviews with the informants conducted and recorded by Unsworth. The analysis of these data showed that the informants had a relatively high schwa deletion rate, and thus appeared to be moving closer to the levelled northern French schwa deletion pattern than the participants in previous studies of southern regional French varieties (such as Carton et al. 1983). These results suggest that levelling and convergence towards the supralocal Oïl variety which originated in Paris are now taking place not only in the Oïl substrate area, but also in the Oc substrate area in the south of France. The authors found that the female informants approximated much more closely to northern French schwa deletion patterns than their male counterparts in casual speech style. This implies that female speakers are leading the levelling process. The findings of this study therefore provide support for the hypothesis of the present study regarding the interaction between levelling and gender in Alsace: namely, that female speakers will be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace. In addition to studying the effect of gender on the speakers' schwa deletion patterns, the authors also investigated and quantified the participants' level of regional attachment using a multiple choice questionnaire. They found that the male informants had much higher levels of regional attachment than their female counterparts, and that there was a correlation between schwa deletion rates and regional attachment index score. The lower the informant's level of regional attachment, the higher his or her schwa deletion rate was. This may shed some light on the leading role played by female speakers in the levelling process, since their lower levels of regional attachment may mean that they feel less inclined to signal regional loyalty by their speech than males. In addition to these valuable findings regarding gender and regional attachment, Armstrong and Unsworth also examined the relationship between social class and schwa deletion rates. However, the difference in schwa deletion rates between social class groups was found to be very slight. This may be due to the age of the informants, who

were not yet in employment. Although this study demonstrates a clear correlation between speaker gender, regional attachment and levelling, it would be unwise to generalise on the basis of this research, since a sample of only sixteen speakers is far from representative of the population of southern France as a whole. More speakers from various age groups are needed to provide further supporting data.

Pickles (2001) conducted a study of the phonology of teenagers in Perpignan, which he compared with the speech of an adult male in his mid-30s judged by Pickles and other acquaintances of the informant to have a 'typical' Perpignan accent. Pickles' findings showed that the teenagers used considerably lower rates of the regional variants of weak vowel nasalisation, schwa retention and the realisation of /R/ as a voiceless uvular fricative [χ] than the adult informant, which appears to indicate that levelling is taking place. Indeed, none of the three regional variants occurred consistently in the speech of any of the informants. Word-final schwa was used in approximately two thirds of possible contexts overall, vowel + nasal consonant realisations of canonically nasal vowels occurred in approximately 25% of possible cases, and use of [χ] was less than 10% for most informants. Pickles also found that gender had a role to play in the proportion of regional variants used by the informants, with the males consistently using a higher frequency of [χ] than their female counterparts, but girls using higher rates of vowel + nasal consonant realisations of canonically nasal vowels and of word-final schwa retention. This is somewhat surprising given that we would expect the girls to be leading in the adoption of supralocal variants. 'Ethnolinguistic background', the other social variable investigated by Pickles, was also found to be influential in the use of regional variants, with speakers of 'Hispanic' or 'Catalan' origin using a significantly greater proportion of regional forms than 'Non-meridional' or 'Maghrebine', with the exception of [χ], for which the 'Maghrebine' informants score highest.

Temple (2001) studied patterns of the devoicing of /b/, /d/ and /g/ in Lille and Bordeaux. Word-final consonant devoicing is a traditional Regional French feature in Lille due to the influence of the substrate variety, whereas this is not the case in Bordeaux. Somewhat surprisingly, Temple's findings revealed that

word-final consonant devoicing was completely absent from the speech of her Lille informants, whereas their counterparts from Bordeaux devoiced 12% of word-final consonants. The loss of the regional feature of word-final consonant devoicing from the Lille informants' speech appears to indicate that accent levelling has taken place in Lille, but it seems that the informants have 'over-levelled' their phonology in response to the stigma attached to devoicing as a *patois*-related feature in Lille. This stigma is absent in Bordeaux, and thus the Bordeaux informants have retained a small degree of devoicing due to connected speech processes, which the Lille informants avoid.

Hornsby (2006) conducted research into accent levelling and koinéisation (following Trudgill's (1986) model of dialects in contact) in the town of Avion in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region. He views levelling in Avion as a bi-directional process, with the influence of Standard French leading to change from above the level of conscious awareness and convergence with *français populaire* leading to change from below the level of conscious awareness. The author divides the levelling process in Avion into two historical stages. The first of these stages occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of great in-migration to the town, mainly from the Nord region of France. This led to contact between various Northern varieties, then to levelling and the creation of a single variety spoken over a large area, which nevertheless retained a distinctly northern character and many regional features. This regional levelled variety stabilised as close-knit social networks formed within mining communities.

The second wave of levelling, on a national rather than a regional scale this time, began in the late twentieth century, when the Avion mines were closed down and the dense, multiplex social networks which had acted as linguistic norm-enforcement mechanisms started to loosen and break down. The variety of French spoken in Avion began to lose its specific regional features and to converge with the supralocal Oïl variety spoken throughout much of France. Hornsby's data reveal a striking difference in the use of several linguistic variables between the middle (aged 30-59) and younger (aged 29 and younger) generations, with his younger informants using fewer regionally marked variants, and using local forms less frequently, than speakers in the middle and

senior (aged over 60) age groups. An example of this levelling in apparent time can be seen in the patterns of use of the (EN), (Ç) and word-final consonant devoicing variables. The younger informants used only the supralocal standard [õ], [s] and voiced consonant variants, whereas all the members of the middle and older age groups used the regional [ɛ̃], [ʃ] and voiceless regional variants to some extent.

However, Hornsby puts forward the hypothesis that the process of koinéisation taking place in Avion may in fact be a product of simplification rather than levelling. He defines simplification as not only increased morphophonemic regularity, but also in terms of ease of learnability from the point of view of the dominant variety (in this case French). The convergence of the Northern Regional French spoken in Avion with the supralocal Oïl variety could therefore be attributed to the fact that some of its more strongly marked regional features (i.e. the very ones which would be eliminated by levelling) are extremely different from the regionally unmarked variety and difficult for outsiders to acquire. Thus, outsiders would not use these features when accommodating to speakers of the northern variety and they would not be present in the final koiné. Hornsby observes that, although Trudgill (1986) presents levelling and simplification as separate processes, they may in fact overlap to a considerable extent, and that it is difficult to determine exactly which individual instances of the elimination of regionally marked variants result from levelling and which from simplification.

In addition to his findings with regard to the interaction between age and levelling, Hornsby's results also show a significant gender difference in the use of some variables, such as (ɛ/\_R), for which none of his female informants at all used the regional raised variant of pre-rhotic /e/ even once, whereas 47 of the male participants used the raised form. This gender difference supports the findings of other studies which claim that women have a strong preference for supralocal linguistic variants, whereas men prefer localised forms, and that women are therefore leading the levelling process. The hypothesis of the present study that women will be found to be leading levelling in Alsace is therefore strengthened by Hornsby's results.

Although the variety of French spoken in Avion has undergone some degree of levelling, this process is far from complete and the French of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in general still has a distinct regional character. Hornsby attributes this continued linguistic distinctiveness to a strong sense of local identity and to geographical distance from the capital from which the supralocal norm emanates (Paris). He hypothesises a future further regionalisation of French in areas distant from Paris with a strong local identity. The present study will make it possible to determine whether or not this is indeed the case in Alsace, which is geographically distant from the capital and possesses a distinctive regional identity and culture.

Pooley (2007) and Armstrong and Pooley (2010) provide a broad overview of traditional accounts of the different varieties of Regional French spoken in the Oc substrate area, before addressing the question of whether convergence between these varieties has taken place, leading to a levelled, pan-southern variety of southern French. They take as a starting point accounts of the phonological systems of rural speakers born between 1900 and 1950, as reported in Walter (1982) and Carton et al. (1983), then compare them with accounts of urban speakers from Marseille (Brun 1931) and Toulouse (Séguy 1951) of a similar age. Comparison of the urban and rural groups reveals that levelling influences appear to have already been at work in the twentieth century.

These early accounts are then compared with recent studies by Taylor (1996) and Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) and with various results of the PFC project from southern fieldwork sites. From this comparison, a clear disappearance of many of the most locally marked variants used only in a relatively small area of the south mentioned in the older accounts emerges. Such variants include word-final consonant devoicing (attested by Séguy (1951) cited in Armstrong & Pooley 2010, in Toulouse and by Walter (1982) in Gers) and word-initial [h] (attested in the Basque Country by Walter (1982) and by Séguy (1951) in Toulouse). The considerable degree of variability according to region regarding the realisation of the mid-vowels described by Walter (1982) and Carton et al. (1983) has been reduced to what Pooley (2007: 42) calls the Dominant Southern Pattern (DSP) (along with a single low vowel, /a/, a weakly nasalised



four nasal vowel system and a high rate of schwa realisation) consisting of the same oral vowels as Standard French, but with the *loi de position* (law of position) applied to /œ/ and /ø/ in all contexts, and to /O/ in open word-final syllables, where it is always close. The nasal appendage which follows a canonically nasal vowel in southern varieties traditionally varies in quality in word-final pre-pausal position, with a velar generally used in Provence and Gascony (e.g. *pain* [pɛɛ̃ŋ]) but a bilabial or dental in Languedoc (e.g. *pain* [pɛɛ̃<sup>m</sup>] or *mettons* [metɔ̃<sup>n</sup>]).

It could be argued that the elimination of highly localised variants may be the result of convergence to either the southern regional standard or the northern supralocal variety. However, some variants once widespread throughout the south are now being replaced by their supralocal counterparts, such as apical /r/, the vowel + nasal consonant realisation of canonically nasal vowels and schwa retention. Pooley (2007: 61) describes the DSP as ‘markedly recessive’ due to the levelling influence of the supralocal variety. Despite the influence of the levelling process, some pan-southern variants, such as the four nasal vowel system with an operative /ɛ̃/-/œ̃/ contrast and the *loi de position* remain firmly entrenched.

Armstrong and Low (2008) investigate the fronting of /ɔ/ to [œ] or [ə] in Roanne in central-eastern France (in the Rhône-Alpes region). /ɔ/-fronting was originally a working-class Parisian feature, but it now appears to have become socially prestigious and has spread throughout the northern half of France to become a characteristic feature of the supralocal levelled Oïl variety. The findings of Armstrong and Low’s study show that young females constitute the social group which has the highest /ɔ/-fronting rate, which appears to confirm that young women lead in the adoption of linguistic innovations, even if they constitute a move away from the standard, prestige variety, such as the adoption of this historically working-class feature by the middle classes. The authors suggest that it is precisely the adoption of /ɔ/-fronting by female speakers which has led to its transfer from a working-class form to a prestige variant.

Nicholson (in preparation) is currently conducting research into accent levelling in western Brittany, where a Celtic substrate variety (Breton) may have

influenced the phonology of the regional variety of French. She has found that the phonology of her younger informants (especially the young middle-class females) is levelled to a much greater extent than that of her older participants. Indeed, at least one of her younger middle-class female informants appeared to use no regional phonological features at all.

Violin-Wigent (2009) conducted a study of levelling in Briançon in the Franco-Provençal substrate area, involving the realisation of the mid-vowels /E/, /œ/ and /O/, in contexts where the law of position and Standard French phonology are in conflict. The law of position applies in all contexts in southern French varieties (i.e. open vowels occur in closed syllables and close vowels in open syllables). An example of a conflict between Standard French and law of position can be found in the word *paume*, which is traditionally realised as [pɔm] in the Regional French of Briançon, as opposed to [pom] in the standard variety. 25 informants were asked to read a questionnaire consisting of a list of Regional French words, each of which was followed by a sentence in which the word was used. The informants were also asked to list the colours of the rainbow and seven types of flower. The linguistic behaviour of the informants was examined in relation to their gender and age, according to four age groups: under 20, 20-40, 41-60 and over 60 years of age. The results were analysed in terms of the proportion of deviations from the local norm of law of position. Overall, there was 0.6% deviation for /E/, 27.6% for /œ/ and 23.7% for /O/ (Violin-Wigent 2009: 102). It therefore seems that, although the Standard French variants are present in Briançon, they are not the majority variants and that the levelling process has made relatively little headway with regard to the mid-vowels. Violin-Wigent's analysis of mid-vowel realisations according to age produced the following pattern.

Age	Percentage deviation for /E/	Percentage deviation for /œ/	Percentage deviation for /O/
61+	0	10	25.5
41-60	0.8	25	25.5
20-40	0	20	2.9
Under 20	1.6	66.66	37.8

*Table 2.1 Deviation from local norm of /E/, /œ/ and /O/ (adapted from Violin-Wigent 2009: 104-107)*

Table 2.1 shows that, for all three mid-vowels, there is a clear increase in the proportion of deviations from the local norm from the oldest to the youngest generations, which appears to indicate levelling in the direction of the northern supralocal variety, which is very similar to Standard French in terms of the realisation of the mid-vowels. Violin-Wigent explains the dip in rates of deviation from the 41-60 to the 20-40 age groups by observing that, from the 1960s, when the 20-40s were growing up, there was a revival of regional language and dialects in France, which may have created a climate more tolerant of regional variation than that in which the 41-60 and 60+ generations grew up. The high proportion of deviations produced by the youngest age group appears to be a move in the opposite direction as a result of levelling rather than negative attitudes towards the regional variants. In addition, the speakers aged 20-40 chose to return to live and work in Briançon after their studies, which demonstrates a high level of regional attachment, which may in turn influence their linguistic behaviour by causing them to produce a higher proportion of regional variants.

Tarrier (2010: 72-75) conducted a study of the presence of phonetic [h], a traditional feature of Basque Regional French phonology, in the small town of St Jean Pied de Port in the Basque region. The participants consisted of three women, from three generations of the same family, and their results show a clear disappearance of the voiceless glottal fricative /h/ over time. The fieldwork was conducted as part of the PFC project, and in the standard PFC reading passage, in the phrase 'le hasard', only the oldest informant, aged 92, pronounced [h]. Her daughter, aged 65, and her granddaughter, aged 38, did

not use [h] either in this phrase nor in any other context. In addition, the oldest speaker realised the final /R/ of 'le hasard' as a traditionally southern apical [r], whereas her daughter realised it as [χ] and her granddaughter used the supralocal [ʁ] variant. The loss of both the local feature of phonetic [h] and the pan-southern traditional apical [r] suggest that levelling is indeed at work in the south of France, both as regards convergence between southern varieties (elimination of [h]) and a shift in the direction of supralocal Oil French (loss of apical [r]). A similar generational shift was found for the palatal lateral /ʎ/, which was used in the word *étriller* by the oldest informant and her daughter, but not by her granddaughter, who pronounced the supralocal [j] variant.

Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013) evaluate the evidence for levelling arising from the results of the PFC fieldwork, using the same data as Tarrier (2010). With regard to the consonantal system, their analysis has revealed that 'phonemes which were attested in southern varieties of French but were not part of Reference French [...] are either absent or totally recessive'. They provide evidence to support this claim from a PFC study of twelve speakers from Biarritz, whose results showed the erosion of the traditional local phonological features /h/ (as in *hasard*) and /ʎ/ (as in *étriller*). In this survey /h/ was used only by one informant, aged 92, and /ʎ/ by only two informants. The traditionally southern apical [r] was used only by one speaker, the 92-year-old, who used it variably with a uvular realisation.

A similar tendency can be found in the PFC survey of the rural area of Douzens in Languedoc, where the apical variants [r] and [r̥] are used only by the older informants. Indeed, the PFC research shows the gradual elimination of apical [r] throughout France. The Languedoc survey also reveals that the simplification of consonant clusters such as word-final /kt/ in words such as *infect* or *intact* found in the conservative French of this area is being eliminated. A clear age distribution shows the older informants reducing /kt/ to /k/ either categorically or variably, whereas many of the younger participants use /kt/ categorically. A similar pattern is apparent for the simplification of /ks/ to /s/ in words such as *explosion* and *extraordinaire*.

The authors provide evidence from the PFC southern survey points of Douzens and Lacaune in Languedoc, the Aix-Marseille urban area, central Marseille and Biarritz in the Basque Country in order to examine the extent to which schwa is retained in contexts where it would not be realised in the supralocal variety. On the basis of their results, and the age distribution shown by the schwa variable (with rates of non-standard schwa retention decreasing as the speaker's age decreases) they claim that 'as far as schwa is concerned, southern towns are progressively moving closer to the northern standard'. The rate of word-final schwa retention for speakers over 40 is 64.4%, whereas it is only 30.3% for the informants under 40.

Mooney (2013) is in the process of studying accent levelling in the southern French *département* of Béarn in south-western France, where the substrate is a Romance variety, but of the Oc rather than the Oïl group. His research focuses on variation in the articulation of the mid-vowels and nasal vowels and his speaker sample consists of ten bilingual speakers of French and Béarnais aged over 65 and ten secondary school pupils aged 16-18. He has found that the nasal vowel /ã/ is undergoing a process of backing, from the regional front variant [ã] in the direction of the supralocal variant [ɑ̃], with the change being led by younger speakers and females. In the older generation, only the male speakers used the front variant to a considerable extent and the younger generation of speakers of both genders used 100% [ɑ̃]. It thus seems that /ã/ is participating in a process of levelling. However, conflicting results emerge upon examination of the /ɛ̃/-/œ̃/ opposition, which has been neutralised in supralocal northern French. This merger appears to have taken place amongst Mooney's older informants, but to be re-emerging in the younger age group, where the two vowels are qualitatively different. Mooney concludes that this is a change from below towards the reinstatement of a four nasal vowel system, and notes that it appears to be led by young females. This use of a non-standard, regional system which is not present in the speech of the older generation appears to be a change in the opposite direction from levelling and is therefore somewhat surprising given the large amount of evidence in favour of levelling in different varieties of French. Further discussion of the exceptions to the levelling tendency in French will be presented in Section 2.8. Mooney explains the contradictory patterns of change found for the /ã/ and /ɛ̃/-/œ̃/ variables by

hypothesising that, whilst replacing some regionally marked variants with supralocal forms, his younger informants also retain some regional forms, 'in order to sound like southerners, but *modern* southerners' (cf. Watt (1998: 7), cited in Foulkes & Docherty (1999: 14)).

### **2.7.2.2 Evidence from Perceptual Studies**

Boughton (2006) carried out two perceptual tests in order to determine the degree to which levelling had occurred in the French of Nancy and Rennes. In the first test, forty native French speakers from Rennes were asked to listen to one-minute recordings of eight speakers from Nancy of both genders and different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. The listeners then responded to a questionnaire regarding the accent of the Nancy speakers. The answers to the questions revealed that, although the listeners were generally able to identify the speakers' social origins correctly, they were unable to identify the regional provenance of the speakers correctly and some of the listeners even classified the Nancy speakers as coming from Rennes, which shows that they perceived no difference between the speech of Nancy and Rennes. The speakers in the older age group were the most frequently designated as having an accent, which fits in with the results of other studies of levelling in French and confirms the hypothesis of the present study that levelling in Alsace is being led by the younger generation.

The Nancy men were more frequently classified as having an accent than their female counterparts of equivalent age and social class (apart from the somewhat anomalous older middle-class speaker), in conformity with the general sociolinguistic pattern of women leading men in linguistic changes and having a stronger preference for supralocal linguistic forms than men. This is also in accordance with the results of behavioural studies that show women to be at the forefront of the levelling process in French. Again, this result corroborates and strengthens the research hypothesis for this study, which posits that the speech of young women will be found to be levelled to a greater extent than that of young men. There was a correlation between social class and perceived strength of accent, which indicates that middle-class speakers approximate more closely to standard phonology than their working-class

counterparts. This pattern has been found in many other sociolinguistic studies. Since the phonology of middle-class speakers is closer to the norm, it could be inferred that levelling is more advanced in the speech of middle-class than working-class speakers.

Boughton carried out a second perceptual study in which thirty-two native French speakers from Pays de La Loire in north-western France listened to recordings of thirty-two of Boughton's Nancy and Rennes informants, sixteen from each city. The recordings involved each informant reading an identical prose passage lasting 24.53 seconds on average. The listeners were told only that the speakers were from the northern half of France, then were asked to fill in a form containing questions about the speaker's region of origin and urban or rural background. In 20% of cases, the Nancy speakers were correctly identified as from the east of France (although only 4.2% of respondents mentioned Nancy). The percentage of correct identifications was higher for the working-class than the middle-class Nancy speakers (27.2% and 12.85% respectively). This indicates that levelling may be more advanced amongst middle-class than working-class speakers. The Rennes speakers were correctly identified as from the west of France in 29.7% of cases. The higher rate of correct identification for the Rennes speakers may be due to annexation (since the listeners were also from the west of France, they may have attributed any speech they found similar to their own levelled variety to western France. This would imply that the speech of Rennes is levelled to a greater degree than that of Nancy). Only 4.3% of respondents mentioned Rennes. Boughton's results demonstrate that the Pays de La Loire informants were to some extent able to distinguish between the speech of informants from Nancy and Rennes. The listeners associated non-standard accents with the North and East of France, and standard phonology with the West, Centre and Paris. The speakers of working-class origin were more likely to be classified as rural, whereas their middle-class counterparts were more commonly perceived as urban. This suggests a connection between both working-class and rural speakers and non-standard phonology. Although the listeners did to some extent perceive a degree of difference between eastern and western French phonology, they were not particularly successful at identifying the correct geographical provenance of the Nancy speakers. For example, although in 20% of cases the listeners correctly

identified the Nancy speakers as from eastern France, in 26.7% of cases they classified them as from western France. Boughton concludes that stereotypes and annexation led the listeners to classify the speakers into two broad categories: northern or eastern, rural (or urban *banlieue*) speakers characterised by a non-standard accent and central, Parisian or western urban speakers characterised by standard phonology. There were therefore considerable differences between the listeners' perceptions and the speakers' actual regional origins. The data also suggest that social class differences appear to be greater than regional differences in the phonology of metropolitan French.

Woerhling and Boula de Mareüil (2006) conducted a perceptual study of French regional accents, involving 72 samples of recorded speech from informants from Normandy, the Vendée, Languedoc, Provence, the Basque Country and French-speaking Switzerland, which were listened to by 25 participants from Paris and Marseille. The findings of this study showed that the listeners were able to identify the regional origin of the older speakers more accurately than that of their younger counterparts. This suggests that regional accent levelling is taking place, with younger speakers at the forefront of this change. However, it seems that the levelling process was not yet complete amongst the younger speakers, since the correct accent recognition rate for this age group (aged 16-25) was still 37.8%. Even when the listeners did not correctly identify the regions of origin of the speakers, they were still able to classify them as coming from northern or southern France, or Switzerland. This suggests that accent levelling may be occurring independently in the north and the south, producing both a pan-northern and a pan-southern levelled variety (although the latter also appears to be converging towards the northern model to some extent; see Armstrong & Unsworth 1999).

Having examined the evidence in favour of the progress of levelling throughout France, we will now proceed to a discussion of the counter-evidence.



## 2.8 Evidence of counter-levelling

Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013) argue that, although it is undeniable that some degree of levelling is taking place throughout France, this process is by no means complete and there is still a great deal of regional variation in European French. They cite the example of the *loi de position* mid-vowel system, which involves the use of open vowels in closed syllables and close vowels in open syllables. They point out that the *loi de position* cannot be attributed to an Occitan substrate and has been extending its range of application in southern France, where PFC surveys show that it is used across various regions and all generations. The results of PFC investigations in northern France outside Paris appear to show that *loi de position* is also gaining ground in these areas, although there is a great deal of variability with regard to mid-vowel realisations, in contrast to the homogeneity often assumed in discussions of the Oïl substrate area. Recent PFC studies show that the *loi de position*, which originated in southern France, appears to be making inroads into Paris itself, where Hansen (2012) surveyed nine Parisians aged 18-26 and found fewer exceptions to the *loi de position* than those noted in earlier studies, especially regarding the front vowel /E/, and that inter- and intra-speaker variation were present. Since the increase in use of *loi de position* is a change away from the standard variety, and does not originate from Paris, Durand, Eychenne and Lyche assume that it is therefore contrary to the levelling process.

However, this is not necessarily the case. Although the supralocal levelled variety originates from Paris, it may well come to include features originating from other regions, such as the *loi de position*. Since *loi de position* is spreading throughout France, we might argue that it is a supralocal feature which constitutes part of the levelling process. It does not appear to be a case of counter-levelling in the sense of regional fragmentation rather than convergence between varieties, since it seems to be spreading throughout France. Furthermore, although *loi de position* is not a feature of conservative *Standard French*, this is not the same thing as the supralocal levelled variety, which may well contain non-standard features as long as they are not strongly regionally marked. In addition, the levelling process will not necessarily achieve total

homogenisation of all regional variation in French, but is more a case of the elimination of the most salient, locally or regionally marked features, which are often stigmatised. This may not be the case for the realisation of the mid-vowels. The levelling process in France may not include all the variables involved in regional phonological variation. That there is still a great deal of variability as regards the mid-vowels, and that further research is needed in order to fully comprehend the current state of affairs, is undeniable, but we must not assume that, because regional variation in the mid-vowels is present to a great extent at the present time, that this will always be the case.

Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013) also provide counter-evidence for levelling by citing the PFC results with regard to the realisation of schwa. They point out that, although there does appear to be a certain degree of convergence to northern schwa deletion patterns in the south, deletion is blocked in some contexts by the fact that it is realised as a full rounded vowel in conservative southern French in words such as *secouer*, *demander*, *allemand* or *hanneton*, and that although changes are occurring in monosyllables and in word-initial syllables in polysyllabic words, schwa retention rates are still very high (ranging from 76.6% to 95.4% for the five southern fieldwork locations listed above). The authors also observe that schwa deletion word-finally and in some cases word-medially can be explained structurally without reference to levelling. Furthermore, the PFC data show a considerable amount of variability in schwa realisation rates in northern France.

The PFC surveys of Belgian and Swiss varieties have revealed substantial differences from metropolitan French, not only in segmental features but also in intonation and rhythmic patterns. These differences are present in all generations, and it thus seems that the levelling process has not yet spread beyond the borders of hexagonal French to any great extent.

The authors also claim that the widely-held assumption that new regional vernaculars are not emerging in France may not necessarily be valid throughout the country. They cite Gasquet-Cyrus (2009), who describes the emergence of a new type of accent in Marseille, known as the 'quartiers nord' accent, which

does not just replicate the traditional regional accent but also contains innovative features.

Overall, although the PFC data clearly show that there are still considerable differences between northern and southern varieties of French, especially as regards the *loi de position* and the maintenance of schwa, there appears to be no very compelling evidence from metropolitan France to challenge the levelling hypothesis or to contradict the results of a considerable number of studies showing convergence between various regional varieties of French and the supralocal norm. However, the situation outside France seems to be rather different, since the PFC data show very little evidence of convergence with hexagonal French norms in Switzerland and Belgium. However, Hambye (2005) does provide some evidence of convergence with the French of France in Tournai, a Belgian town close to the border with France whose inhabitants have regular contact with French nationals.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In the light of the research reviewed above, we may conclude that there is ample evidence that levelling is indeed taking place in many regions of France, including some which do not have an Oïl substrate variety, such as the langue d'Oc substrate area and celtophone Brittany. These studies have demonstrated the importance of the speaker's age and gender in determining the extent to which he or she participates in accent levelling. Young, middle-class female speakers have been shown to be leading the levelling process in a number of areas (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Boughton 2006; Taylor 1996; Armstrong & Low 2008), lending weight to the research hypothesis of the present study, namely that speakers of this social background will be found to be at the forefront of the levelling process in Alsace. The various social variables which may be influencing the linguistic behaviour of speakers involved in the levelling process in Alsace, and in the light of which the results of the present study will be analysed, will be examined in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Social Variables**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Following the discussion in Chapter 2 above of the key theoretical concepts which contributed to the formulation of the research questions, we will now discuss the social variables which are mentioned in the research hypotheses. This chapter will discuss the key social variables of age and gender, before moving on to a discussion of the speaker's social position as defined by his or her socioeconomic status and urban or rural place of residence. For each of these social variables, the theoretical background will first be discussed, followed by some case studies and specific examination of the French context. Finally, the conclusion of this chapter will summarise the findings of the detailed discussion present in each section in relation to the research hypotheses.

### **3.2 Age**

One of the working hypotheses of this research project is that younger speakers are leading the levelling process in Alsace, and will therefore be found to use a lower proportion of regional forms than members of the older generation. The basis for this hypothesis is the fact that sociolinguistic studies have consistently shown that, in the case of a linguistic change in progress, younger speakers tend to lead the change. An example of younger speakers leading linguistic change is the correlation found by Labov (1963) between informants' age and their use of the (aw) and (ay) variables on the American island of Martha's Vineyard. Labov found that the centralisation of the onsets of (aw) and (ay) increased as the informants' age decreased (excepting the 14-30 age group). This suggests that younger speakers were leading change in the direction of centralisation of the onsets of these diphthongs.

Younger speakers have also been shown to be leading the levelling process. For example, Watt and Milroy (1999: 44) discovered that, for the vowel in FACE words, younger speakers in Tyneside used the supra-local [eɪ] form, which is common throughout England, and the pan-northern [e:] variant, more frequently than older speakers of the same gender and social class. The older age group used a higher frequency of the highly localised [ɪə] variant. Younger speakers also used the supralocal [oʊ] variant of the GOAT variable more frequently and

a lower proportion of the highly localised [ʊə] variant compared with older speakers of the same gender and comparable socioeconomic status.

Age differences in use of linguistic variables which reveal change in progress can be discovered by comparing the index scores of speakers of different age groups for a given linguistic variable and this is the approach which will be adopted by the present study. If younger speakers use a particular variant more frequently than speakers in the oldest age group (usually aged 65 and over), it can be deduced that change is occurring, with the variant favoured by the oldest speakers becoming obsolete and the form preferred by younger speakers as the incoming variant. If, on the other hand, comparison of the index scores reveals no differences between age groups for a given linguistic variable, it can be concluded that this variable is not currently involved in change.

However, different use of a variable by speakers of different ages does not necessarily indicate that change is taking place. This type of age distribution may also result from age-grading (when use of a linguistic variable changes with age following the same pattern in every generation over a considerable period of time) (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 35-36). It is therefore important to conduct real-time studies (in which the same speech community is studied at two different points in time) in addition to apparent time investigations. For the purposes of the present study, an apparent time investigation will be conducted by comparing the use of linguistic variables by speakers aged between 18 and 100, divided into three age groups (18-30, 31-60 and 61+). The real time dimension will be studied by comparing the results of the fieldwork for the present study with earlier accounts of the phonology of Alsatian Regional French present in the literature.

### **3.3 Gender**

#### **3.3.1 Theoretical Background**

One of the key variables of many variationist sociolinguistic studies, and one which appears to play an important role in the levelling process, is gender. Although certain tendencies regarding the interaction between gender and linguistic behaviour have been observed by sociolinguists, the reasons for these trends still remain the subject of much debate. Indeed, the results of the present study show that the interpretation of the relationship between gender and

language is often far from simple. It was therefore decided to include speaker gender as one of the core sociolinguistic variables examined in the present study, in order to discover whether the findings of previous studies would be echoed in the gender patterns found in Alsace and to search for insight into the causes of patterns of linguistic variation according to gender in general.

When discussing the interaction of linguistic variation and change with gender, it is necessary to define the term gender and to differentiate between gender and sex. The term sex refers to the biological differences between males and females, which are present from before birth. Gender, however, is a social construct, and therefore gender roles and characteristics can be different and are more or less rigidly defined in different societies. Both gender and sex affect speech. Sex is responsible for men having larger, thicker vocal cords than women's, which vibrate more slowly, leading to men's voices being lower-pitched than women's (Chambers 1995: 106-107). Gender, on the other hand, leads to differences such as the fact that women have often been observed to use a linguistic variety closer to the standard form than men in the case of stable linguistic variables which are not currently undergoing change (Labov 1990: 205-206). This thesis will focus on the socially motivated differences between men's and women's speech, rather than those caused by biological factors, and therefore the term 'gender' has been deemed more appropriate than 'sex' for the discussion which follows.

Sociolinguistic studies have revealed what Fasold (1990: 92) calls the 'sociolinguistic gender pattern'. Labov (1990: 205) describes this pattern by means of two principles. His first principle is that, for stable sociolinguistic variables, men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women. Labov's second principle is that, in the case of most linguistic variables involved in change, women use a higher frequency of the incoming variant than men.

One aspect of the sociolinguistic gender pattern which is particularly relevant for the study of dialect levelling, is the fact that women usually lead in linguistic change, even if it involves movement away from the standard variety. Labov (2001) calls this the 'sociolinguistic gender paradox'. In order to explain the fact that women seem to favour standard variants in some cases and non-standard variants in others, Milroy et al. (1994: 352) suggest that women actually favour supralocal and incoming, rather than prestige variants, whilst men tend to use

more localised variants. Standard variants are inherently supralocal, and highly localised variants are by definition non-standard, and this may have led linguists to the false perception that women favour standard forms to a greater extent than men. Some linguists even suggest that prestige variants become prestigious because they are used by women (Armstrong & Low 2008: 450), although they do not explain why this should be so, nor provide specific evidence in support of this theory. This argument appears to be somewhat circular, with both claims that women use linguistic variants because they are prestigious, and that linguistic forms become prestigious because they are used by women.

Various explanations for women's tendency to use standard forms to a greater extent than men have been put forward, but no one explanation appears to be conclusive. There is still a great deal of debate on the subject and it is likely that this pattern results from a combination of factors (Cheshire 2002: 427).

Suggested explanations for the sociolinguistic gender pattern include the following.

Trudgill (1972: 182-183), Key (1975) and Fasold (1990: 99) are of the opinion that in the past, women may have used language to compensate for their lower social status. Since women cannot use their occupation to indicate their social status, they signal their social position by other means, such as their physical appearance and linguistic behaviour. However true these theories may have been in the 1970s, they seem somewhat out of date in today's Western societies, where women can access achieve high status due to their own professions and have access to occupations formerly restricted to men. However, a more recent study (Eckert 1998) also concludes that male speakers tend to affirm their social status by means of real (economic) capital, whereas female speakers tend to display their social position using symbolic means such as clothing and linguistic behaviour. However, she does not state (as Trudgill does) that women are unable to indicate their social status by means of their occupation, but merely that they prefer to use symbolic means, for an unknown reason. Also, this theory implies that all women, whatever their profession and social background, share a common aspiration to belong to a higher social class than the one to which they actually belong. This in turn implies that gender differentiation in language can be explained in terms of class (Bauvois 2002: 63;

James 1996). However, Trudgill's theory does receive some measure of support from the fact that, in some societies in which there is gender equality, little or no gender differentiation in language has been found (Dorian 1994; Salami 1991).

A related theory is that women's more normative usage is due to the fact that they have greater social ambition and desire for upward mobility than men (Labov 1983, 1990; Bourdieu 1983), a characteristic which they share with middle class speakers. However, no explanation is provided as to why this should be this case, unless it is a reaction on the part of women against the fact that they have a lower social status and greater social insecurity than men (Eckert 1989), a view which may be somewhat dated.

Women's social insecurity is also evoked in the hypothesis that women have more normative usage than men because they suffer from a higher level of linguistic insecurity (Bauvois 2002: 59). However, no reasons have been suggested for women's tendency to be more linguistically insecure than men other than women's greater social insecurity and greater sensitivity to the social value of language, which do not directly account for women's negative perception of their own usage.

Trudgill (1983) claims that young working-class men 'exaggerate' certain non-standard features associated with working-class culture and masculine solidarity due to the covert prestige that they carry for this social group. Women's tendency to avoid such features may therefore be a way of avoiding sounding 'masculine' (Bauvois 2002: 55). Gordon and Heath (1998) state that use of these stereotypically working class, masculine features by women is associated with promiscuity and therefore avoided by women who do not want to be seen as promiscuous.

Women's role in bringing up children has also been evoked (Chambers 1995: 128; Bauvois 2002: 71; Labov 1972: 301-304; Trudgill 1972), since it is often assumed that mothers wish to pass on prestigious ways of speaking to their offspring in order to favour their social and educational advancement. Biological explanations for the differences in men's and women's linguistic usage have also been put forward. Chambers (1992, 1995) states that women have a greater linguistic ability than men due to a lesser imbalance between the



different halves of the brain in women's bodies, based on the fact that language acquisition takes place earlier for female than for male speakers. However, it is unknown whether this difference continues into adulthood and accounts for women's preference for normative variants (Bauvois 2002: 51), although greater ability on the part of women would lead them to adapt their speech to a greater extent than men to the norm of the communication situation, which may explain why women in some speech communities tend to display a wider range of stylistic variation than men (Trudgill 1998). However, in some speech communities there is no significant difference between the stylistic ranges of male and female speakers. Another biological theory which has been used to explain gender differences in language is that of Gordon and Heath (1998), who posit that the difference in length of vocal cords between men and women leads to an attraction to different types of sounds. According to Gordon and Heath, women therefore lead changes which lead to greater use of high front vowels such as /i/, which are symbolically associated with smallness and gentleness, and therefore considered to be typically feminine. However, this theory does not take into account the influence of social factors in linguistic variation and change (Bauvois 2002: 52).

Deuchar (1987) claims that the gender differences which appear in the work of early sociolinguists such as Labov and Trudgill are not in fact empirical differences in speech, but merely an artefact of the methodologies used for classifying women into social class groups. In these studies, the majority of female informants did not work, and were therefore classified according to their husband's or father's occupation. However, it is unlikely that classifying women incorrectly would consistently have had the effect of making their linguistic usage seem more normative than men's in so many studies, since there would have been women who were allocated to categories both higher and lower than those where they would have been placed had they been classified according to different criteria, such as their own occupation (if they had one). For an error in placing women in the correct social class groups to consistently place all women into a group lower than that which they should actually occupy, therefore falsely making their linguistic usage appear more normative than that of men of equivalent social status, would be extremely unlikely. Trudgill (1998: 47) points out that, had the women been classified according to their own

occupations, many of them would have been in the lower working class rather than the upper working class group, which would have made the difference between men's and women's usage appear even sharper. Nowadays, it should be possible to classify women according to their own occupation, rather than that of their husband or father, with the exception of those in full-time education or who are housewives.

Another possible explanation for the differences between male and female linguistic behaviour is provided by the theory that men and women interact differently with the linguistic markets of which they are members. The concept of linguistic market was originally developed by Bourdieu and Boltanski (1975) and Bourdieu (1982) and was adapted by Sankoff and Laberge (1978), who used it in a linguistic survey of Montreal, where the informants were assigned a Linguistic Market Index score based on their need for the standard variety.

Linguistic Market Index score showed a strong correlation with use of linguistic variables. The higher the speaker's score, the more likely he or she was to use the standard variant. The concept of the linguistic market is related to gender differences in language because it is based on the speaker's occupation, and men and women tend to occupy different kinds of jobs. For example, women often have low status jobs which nevertheless require a great deal of contact with the public and a good command of the standard linguistic variety (for example, secretary, receptionist, primary school teacher, air hostess) and are therefore part of a different symbolic market from men, in which use of the norm is not linked to having a high prestige occupation or high level of education.

The differences in linguistic behaviour between men and women have also been attributed to the different natures of their social networks (Chambers 1995: 128; Armstrong, Bauvois & Beeching 2001: 12). Milroy (1980) used the concept of social network to carry out a linguistic survey of three working-class areas of Belfast. She measured network using the criteria of density (number of the informant's contacts who know each other) and multiplexity (number of links between the informant and his or her contacts, in particular whether the informant's family members and colleagues live in the same neighbourhood as the informant, whether the informant and his or her colleagues share leisure activities and whether the informant works with family members). In the Ballymacarett area, the men's social networks were very dense and multiplex,

since most of them worked in the area where they lived. The women had much less dense, multiplex networks, since they usually worked outside the Ballymacarett area where they lived. Since dense, multiplex social networks act as norm-enforcement mechanisms which often lead their members to maintain local or non-standard linguistic features, and innovations and supra-local or standard features usually spread through loose-knit networks (Milroy 1980), the Ballymacarett men use a higher frequency of non-standard local features than women, who use more supra-local features. However, it is not always the case that men in a given social group have denser, more multiplex social networks than the women in the same group, especially for middle class speakers. In the case of many middle-class, mobile speakers, both men and women have loose-knit, uniplex networks.

Despite the large number of theories which have been formulated regarding the reasons for women's preference for standard forms and the fact that men favour non-standard forms, no one unifying explanation for gender differences in linguistic usage has emerged. This may be because gender differences have different meanings in different speech communities (Cheshire 2002: 427).

Having discussed possible explanations for the fact that in the case of stable sociolinguistic variables, women generally use a higher frequency of standard linguistic variants than men, this thesis will now examine the causes of women's tendency to lead in linguistic change.

One reason that has been suggested is that women have different types of social network from men. As discussed above, in some communities (such as Ballymacarett in Belfast as documented by Milroy (1980)) women have much less dense, multiplex social networks than men, because men tend to work locally and spend their leisure time with colleagues, whereas women tend to work outside the area where they live. In other communities, this may not be the case but women are still thought to have less dense, multiplex networks because they come into contact with a larger number of people, from a wider range of social backgrounds because they deal with many people with whom they are not well acquainted or closely linked, such as shop workers and school teachers. In interactions with interlocutors with whom the speaker is not well acquainted, a formal style tends to be used. This large volume of formal interactions (which tend to require a more standard linguistic variety than

informal conversations with friends, family or colleagues) may lead to the formation of a habit of using standard variants on the part of women. Women's interactions with large numbers of interlocutors from many different social groups means that they come into contact with new, innovative linguistic variants more frequently than men, and are therefore more likely to use these variants themselves and introduce them to their own communities. Furthermore, it is thought (Milroy & Milroy 1978) that innovations (linguistic or otherwise) spread more easily via networks linked by loose, uniplex ties rather than dense, multiplex ones. Dense, multiplex networks act as norm-enforcement mechanisms and exert pressure on their members not to adopt linguistic changes, so changes tend to enter these groups through marginal members who have loose links with this group and also with other groups. Since women tend to have less dense, multiplex networks than men, they are more likely to use innovative variants and introduce them to their communities. However, it is not necessarily true that women have less dense, multiplex networks than men in every speech community.

A related theory is that women are more mobile than men, both socially and geographically, and therefore come into contact with large numbers of people from different social backgrounds. However, this is unlikely to be true in all communities. Women may also have greater mobility in principle, which means that they feel less attached to and more willing to leave their current community (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999) and therefore less attached to its linguistic norms, making it easier for them to adopt linguistic innovations from outside the community. This greater mobility in principle may also mean that women use a higher proportion of non-local, standard variants than men, since this linguistic usage enables them to integrate more easily into new communities than the particular local usage of their own community.

Women's role in bringing up children may also have an effect on their speech, since innovative variants are generally used at a higher rate by younger speakers. Since mothers spend a great deal of time with their children, they may accommodate to their speech by using a high frequency of innovative variants and may initially pick up incoming features from their children.

As mentioned above, some linguists believe that women have greater social and linguistic sensitivity than men, and that they may therefore be more aware of incoming variants and more likely to adopt them earlier than men.

### **3.3.2 Language and Gender in French**

Having discussed the relationship between language and gender in general, we will now focus more specifically on this relationship in the French language, especially in metropolitan France, and on the way in which previous findings tie in with the hypotheses and results of this research project.

Bauvois (2002: 39-45) provides a detailed examination of language and gender in French, and concludes that although numerous studies of French confirm the tendencies shown in founding sociolinguistic studies of English, there are a considerable number of exceptions.

Lennig's (1979) study of Parisian French revealed that the /a/-/ɑ/ opposition had been almost completely neutralised for all social groups except for working-class men. This provides support for the hypothesis of the present study that the tendency for women to lead linguistic changes is present in French, and is therefore also likely to be found in the French of Alsace.

Lefebvre's (1991) survey of the French of Lille showed that women were more likely than men to use French oppositions that do not exist in Picard, such as the /o/-/ɔ/ and /œ/-/ø/ pairs, and that women used locally marked phonological features, such as back realisations of /a/ (for example *là* pronounced [la]) much less frequently than men. Again, these results appear to strengthen our research hypothesis that French women favour supra-local, standard variants to a greater extent than men, and that this tendency may also be found in Alsatian Regional French.

Ashby's (1981) study of *ne* deletion in Paris showed that, whilst older women conformed to a greater extent to the prestige norm by maintaining a higher proportion of the negative particle than males of the same age, younger women deleted more *ne* than their male counterparts. This higher deletion rate on the part of the younger women may be interpreted as evidence that female speakers are leading the change in the direction of *ne* deletion. This study shows that linguistic variables can interact with gender in different ways in

different age groups, and that the variables of age and gender can be interdependent. This will prove to be a valuable point in interpreting the patterns of gender variation found in Alsace by this research project, which are discussed in particular in Chapter 8.

Armstrong's (1996) quantitative study of the speech of high school pupils in Dieuze, Lorraine, provides further evidence that French tends to conform to the gender patterns revealed by sociolinguistic studies of English. As regards word-final post-consonantal liquid deletion (WFOLD, hereafter), for example of /l/ in *table* or /R/ in *quatre*, the male informants have higher deletion rates than the females. The speech of the girls, which contains less of these non-standard forms, is therefore closer to the prestige norm than that of the boys. This again provides support for the hypothesis that female speakers in Alsace, which is adjacent to Lorraine, will be found to conform more closely to supralocal prestige norms than males of the same age. However, the case of WFOLD differs from the variables studied in this thesis in that both the standard and non-standard variants are supra-local.

As a result of the considerable body of evidence showing that French appears to follow similar sociolinguistic patterns to English as regards gender variation, and also based on the results of her own study of French in Poitou, Houdebine (1979: 23, 25) concludes that women play the same role in French as in English, acting both as guarantors of the prestige norm and as leaders of change, reinforcing yet further the hypothesis that this tendency may also hold good in Alsatian French.

However, Bauvois (2002: 43) reminds us that there are also numerous exceptions, which usually take the form of a lack of significant gender variation. For example, Lefebvre (1991) found no significant gender variation in the use of consonantal oppositions in the French of Lille. Similar results were obtained by Coveney (1996) in Picardy regarding *ne* deletion and by Taylor (1996) regarding vowel nasalisation in Aix-en-Provence. Jacques Durand (personal communication) observes that the PFC survey has conducted quantitative analysis of liaison in a sample of over 600 speakers, but no significant gender variation for this variable has emerged.

Bauvois (2001, 2002) conducted a quantitative study of Belgian French, and found that, of the twelve linguistic variables she studied, only six are subject to gender variation. However, where gender variation was present, it was always in the expected direction, with the female informants using a higher proportion of standard variants than the males (although for all six variables, gender variation was less significant than variation according to either style or social class).

These studies showing little or no significant gender variation in French fit in with, and may help to shed some light on, some of the unexpected gender patterns found in Alsatian Regional French, which are discussed in Chapters 6 and 8.

As well as studies which show no gender differentiation, there are examples of atypical gender patterns. For example, Pooley's (1996) survey of Roubaix in the Nord-Pas de Calais region demonstrated that his female informants born in or before 1938 used higher rates than males of all ages of the regional variants of word-final consonant devoicing (for example, *sage* pronounced [saʃ]) and non-palatalisation of /l/ in words such as *travail* (realised as [tRaval]). However, this pattern was reversed in speakers born after 1938, amongst whom the classic sociolinguistic pattern of men using regional non-standard variants more frequently than women was present. Pooley explains this in terms of the fact that many of the women born in or before 1938 were employed in textile mills, where they came into contact with a large number of Flemish-speaking immigrants from Belgium, who had much higher devoicing rates in French than members of the existing local community. This led to accommodation, resulting in the surprisingly high rates of devoicing on the part of the local women. In the generation born after 1938, the possibility of working at the textile mills was no longer available due to their closure, so the close proximity with a high concentration of Belgian immigrants ceased and the classic pattern of men using a higher rate of vernacular variants than women reasserted itself. Another possible contributory factor to the older women's relatively high devoicing rates and lack of palatalisation is that, in the early twentieth century, these variants were viewed as 'French' as opposed to 'Picard', and therefore the women who grew up during this period continued to conform to the pattern of women adopting variants perceived as representing a non-local variety. Today,

however, language attitudes have changed, resulting in these features being viewed as regional as opposed to supralocal and therefore being used more frequently by male than female speakers (Armstrong & Pooley 2010: 256). These results highlight the importance of taking into account the interaction between age and gender, as well as the specific local context, in sociolinguistic studies of French, including the present one in Alsace.

Pooley's (1996, see also Armstrong & Pooley 2010: 256-257) research in the Marcq-en-Barœul area of the Lille conurbation also revealed some gender patterns which could be interpreted as a reversal of the sociolinguistic gender pattern. These data involve Maghrebian high school pupils aged 14-15 at the time of the fieldwork. In this group, the girls use a back realisation of /a/ in word-final open syllables (for example *ça* pronounced [sq]) more frequently than their male counterparts. On closer examination, it was found that the Maghrebian girls used almost exactly the same proportion of backed /a/ as their French classmates. Pooley explains this in terms of social network factors, observing that the Maghrebian girls had been at the school for over two years, and had thus had time to become part of the school community, form close ties with classmates of French origin and accommodate to their linguistic behaviour, whereas the Maghrebian boys had been at the school for only a few months and thus were not yet fully integrated into the speech community it constituted.

This list of examples is by no means exhaustive, and Bauvois (2002: 44) cites several others. Indeed, she goes on to claim that, although studies of French which show the classic sociolinguistic tendencies of women conforming to a greater extent than men to the prestige norm are far more numerous than those which do not, 'nombreuses sont les recherches sur le français, comparativement à celles portant sur l'anglais, qui ne montrent pas de différence d'usage entre les sexes' ('studies of French which show no gender differentiation are more numerous than equivalent studies of English') (Bauvois 2002: 45). However, this is offset by the fact that there have been very few sociolinguistic studies of gender in French, compared to the number of available studies on English (Bauvois 2001: 8). Müller (1985) claims that this lack of gender variation shown by many studies is due to the fact that women and men in France are social equals. However, this does not address the question of why some variables show gender variation and some do not, even within the same



speech community (for example in Lefebvre's (1991) Lille study), or of why variables not subject to gender variation appear to be more common in French than English (this obviously cannot be explained simply by claiming that women in English-speaking countries are 'less equal' than those from French-speaking communities). It also reduces gender variation in language to the dimension of social inequality between men and women, whilst in fact the expression of gender identities through language is far more complex.

### **3.3.3 Levelling and Gender**

Given the fact that women generally lead in linguistic change and tend to prefer supralocal, less stigmatised forms, we would expect them to lead in the levelling process, which involves the elimination of marked or minority forms (for example, highly localised features).

We will now examine a number of case studies of levelling in French to see whether they fulfil this hypothesis.

Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) studied levelling in the southern French region of Languedoc and discovered that young women were leading the levelling process in this region regarding the adoption of schwa deletion, which is a feature of northern levelled French, thus lending support to the theory that similar patterns may well be found in Alsace.

Hornsby's (2006) study of levelling in the northern French town of Avion also shows a link between levelling and gender. The variables of the affrication of [dj] and [tj] to [tʃ] and [dʒ] respectively, of devoicing of word-final /R/, of the raising of pre-rhotic /ɛ/ and backing of /a/ all show that men use a higher proportion than women of highly localised variants such as [tʃ], [dʒ], [R̥], [ɑ] and [ɛ], and that women use a higher proportion of the corresponding supralocal variants such as [tj], [dj], [R], [a] and [ɛ] (Hornsby 2006: 76). This supports the hypothesis that women are leading the levelling process in France in general, and perhaps also in Alsace in particular.

The perceptual study conducted by Boughton (2006) revealed that men from Nancy were more frequently classified as having an accent than female speakers of equivalent age and social class, thus furnishing indirect evidence for the leading role of women in the levelling of French.

Armstrong and Low (2008) investigated the fronting of /ɔ/ to [ə] or [œ] in Roanne in central-eastern France, which is a feature of supralocal levelled French amongst the middle classes, and found that young female speakers are leading in the adoption of this feature.

The overall results of Pooley's (1996) research in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais also tend to confirm this point of view. Pooley found that male speakers used the regionally marked or non-standard variant significantly more than females for four phonological variables, namely optional liaison, backing of /a/ to [ɑ], raising of /a/ to [æ] before /R/ and deletion of /l/ word-finally after an obstruent. There was also a marginally significant difference for WFOLD overall. However, as well as the atypical gender patterns as regards /l/-palatalisation and word-final consonant devoicing described in Section 3.5.5, four of the linguistic variables investigated showed no significant gender differentiation. These included the two most strongly regionally marked features typical of the local *patois*, /s/ realised as [ʃ] and /ã/ realised as [ẽ]. Both genders avoid these features, which are used at very low rates. The other features which showed no significant gender differentiation were the use of [ɔ] in contexts where the standard variety uses [ɒ] and WFOLD involving /R/. These two features are present in other regions of France and their age distributions show that they are stable sociolinguistic variables, not involved in a process of change such as levelling.

Taylor (1996)'s study of the mid-vowels, nasal vowels and schwa retention in Aix-en-Provence also provides a more nuanced picture of the interaction between gender and levelling in French. She found that her male informants did use a higher frequency of the regional nasal appendage [ŋ] and the regional realisation of /O/ as [ɔ] in word-final open syllables and of /E/ as [e] in word-final open syllables in *-ais* or *-ait* than their female counterparts. However, there was no clear relationship between the degree of nasalisation of canonically nasal vowels, or schwa retention, and gender. However, when use of these variables was correlated with gender and occupation, some significant patterns emerged. For example, middle-class housewives tended to use regional variants at a relatively high frequency, which is explained by Taylor in terms of network factors such as the fact that they have more contact with speakers with strong regional accents than speakers of the same age who are in employment. Men

who are in the army and thus spend much of their time in a mainly male environment have a particularly high rate of use of regional variants. Gender thus has only an indirect influence on the use of regional accent features, as stated by Bauvois (2001: 34) who claims that 'le sexe serait donc un facteur de variation qui n'aurait pas d'existence en tant que tel, mais qui se modèlerait en fonction de l'interlocuteur, du contexte, de la profession, et sans doute d'autres empreintes liées au rôle social de l'individu et à la façon dont il a appris à exprimer son identité sexuelle tout au long de sa vie' ('gender seems to be a factor in variation which does not appear to exist in itself, but which is modelled according to the interlocutor, the context, the profession and probably other factors linked to the individual's social role and the way in which he or she has learned to express his or her gender identity throughout his or her life').

One notable exception to the tendency of female speakers to lead the levelling process in France is the speech of teenagers in Perpignan as observed by Pickles (2001). For all the linguistic variables studied, his female informants consistently used higher rates of the regional variants for two of the three variables studied than their male classmates. The linguistic variables investigated were word-final schwa retention, vowel nasalisation and realisation of /R/ (as a supralocal voiced variant or a regional voiceless variant [χ]). The girls had higher rates of schwa retention and the oral vowel + nasal consonant realisation of canonically nasal vowels. However, the male informants used [χ] more frequently than the females. Pickles does not provide much explanation for these results which run counter to the tendency observed in most previous studies of French. It is possible that they are the result of social network factors, or of an indirect relationship between gender and other social variables such as the different ethnolinguistic groups into which Pickles divided his informants.

From the results of these studies, we may conclude that there is evidence for the theory that women are leading the levelling process in France, despite a number of exceptions. Previous research thus appears to provide support for the research hypothesis that women will be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace. However, there are some exceptions to this tendency, which will provide valuable insight into the sociolinguistic gender patterns found in Alsace, which are discussed in Chapters 6 and 8.

### **3.4 Language and Social Class**

The study of the social class dimension of language variation was first drawn to the attention of linguistic researchers by Labov (1972). Since then, the concept of social stratification and its relationship to language has been the subject of endless debate amongst sociolinguists and has led to the development of many different theories and methods for measuring social class differentiation in language. Social class was chosen as one of the independent variables to be examined in the present study because previous research had shown it to play an important role in the levelling process. The general tendency appears to be for middle-class speakers to lead the levelling process, and the research hypothesis for this project was that levelling in Alsatian Regional French would be found to follow a similar pattern.

#### **3.4.1 Language and Social Class in France**

Although France is an industrialised western democracy, it is by no means identical to the United States or Britain, the countries in which most studies of the relationship between socioeconomic status and linguistic behaviour have been conducted. It is therefore clear that studies of French should not simply replicate the index scales or classifications used to divide informants into social class groups in previous sociolinguistic studies conducted elsewhere.

Marceau (1977: 8) believes that the INSEE provides ‘the most comprehensive and accessible data on the social and economic conditions of France’. Since 1954, the INSEE ([www.insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr)) has divided French society into six ‘socio-professional categories’ based on occupation. These categories (as presented on the INSEE website in alphabetical order in French rather than in any kind of class classification) are: 1) farmers; 2) artisans, shopkeepers, managers of small businesses; 3) executives (*cadres*) and the liberal and ‘higher intellectual’ professions (*professions intellectuelles supérieures*); 4) intermediate professions; 5) white-collar workers (*employés*) and 6) manual workers (including farm labourers). These categories are sub-divided into 37 sub-categories. It would be impractical to use all 37 of these categories for a doctoral research project such as the present study, and indeed for a quantitative sociolinguistic survey in general, since if a minimum of four speakers per cell of the sampling grid were maintained, the speaker sample

would be very large, and the data would therefore be costly and time-consuming to collect and analyse. Moreover, it is by no means proven that linguistic variation according to occupation is fine-grained enough to warrant such detailed analysis.

There is a precedent for using six socioeconomic categories to analyse linguistic variation (Trudgill 1974), but many sociolinguistic studies tend to simply divide speakers into middle and working class. Following Marceau (1977: 8), the INSEE categories could be grouped into three broad classes, with (3) as the upper class (or '*bourgeoisie*', to use a term more commonly employed in France), (2), (4) and (5) as the middle class and categories (1) and (6) as the working class. Since only one category is present in the upper class division, and since few speakers from this socio-professional category were included in the sample of the present study, it was felt that collapsing the upper and middle class categories was justified. The majority of recent sociolinguistic studies of French which focus on social class and indeed of those which investigate levelling (such as Boughton 2003) have used such a two-way division based on varying criteria, and have achieved results suggesting that dividing informants into middle and working-class categories is indeed meaningful in terms of linguistic variation, although the informants may not describe themselves in such terms. It should be noted that education, as well as occupation, plays a crucial role in an individual's socioeconomic status within French society. Marceau (1977: 11) describes the French education system as 'the crucial legitimating mechanism' and a 'mechanism for the transition of privileges' in French society. This is included to some extent in the INSEE categories, because in order to conduct a particular profession in France, it is necessary to have the appropriate diploma and often to take a written examination.

In general, studies of sociolinguistic variation in French have shown the same tendencies as the founding sociolinguistic studies of English, with working-class speakers using a higher proportion of non-standard and stigmatised forms than those of middle-class origin.

### **3.4.2 Social Class and Levelling in France**

Overall, studies of levelling have shown that, where a class effect is present, it is middle-class speakers who are leading in the adoption of supralocal forms.

This is unsurprising considering that the regional forms being eliminated are often socially stigmatised, and that middle-class speakers tend to be more geographically mobile and often to have weaker social network ties than their working-class counterparts. They thus have more opportunities of coming into contact with, and accommodating to, the varieties of French spoken outside their own region.

The levelling process in France appears to show the same tendencies as elsewhere, with middle-class speakers leading in the elimination of regionally marked variants and adoption of supralocal forms.

Boughton's (2003, 2006) study of French accent perception in Nancy and Rennes used a two-way division of informants into working class (manual workers) and middle class (non-manual workers). The working-class informants were both more frequently perceived as having an accent, and actually used non-standard phonological forms such as WFOLD more frequently than their middle-class counterparts. This provides support for the hypothesis that middle-class speakers will be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace.

Pooley (1996) found that in Roubaix, the use of regional features was more frequent amongst speakers with a lower level of education, and workers in the textile industry, who could be described as working class, used a higher proportion of regional variants than those employed elsewhere. These results also appear to confirm the tendency for middle-class speakers to be at the forefront of levelling in French, a pattern which may well extend to the Regional French of Alsace.

However, Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) found only a slight social class difference in rates of schwa retention amongst high school pupils and university students in Languedoc. The social class of the pupils was determined on the basis of the occupation of the head of their household. The small difference in rates of use of the regional variant may be due to the fact that they had not yet entered the professional world, achieving an occupational ranking of their own, and that there was no difference in level of education between students of the same age, since all the informants were still in full-time education.

### **3.5 The Urban/Rural Divide**

Despite the fact that variationist sociolinguistics is partly descended from the discipline of dialectology, which tended to focus on rural speech as the most conservative linguistic variety, there have been very few recent variationist studies of language in rural speech communities. A major innovation in the development of sociolinguistics was the shift from the dialectological observation of NORMS (Chambers & Trudgill 1980) to urban studies. No previous study of levelling in French has included rural informants, since researchers have been keen to gather information on the urban areas at the forefront of the levelling process. However, valuable linguistic data can be collected from rural communities, especially when they are compared with large urban centres. The present study will conduct one such comparison, in order to establish the relationship between urban or rural origin and phonological levelling in French. Since rural communities are traditionally considered as bastions of conservative and regionally marked linguistic forms and thus likely to be the last to be affected by levelling influences, investigating the extent to which phonological levelling has occurred in such a place will provide valuable information regarding the levelling process in France and the way in which linguistic innovations spread from urban to rural speech communities in general.

Gauchat's (1905) study of the local variety spoken in the rural area of Charmey in French-speaking Switzerland is possibly the first example of research on sociolinguistic variation in a rural speech community. Gauchat investigated the influence of age and gender on pronunciation, concluding that 'l'unité du patois de Charmey, après un examen plus attentif, est nulle' ('the unity of the Charmey dialect, after careful examination, is non-existent') (Gauchat 1905: 48). He divided his informants into three age groups: under 30, 31-60 and 61-90. He found a number of examples of variation according to age, which he took as indicative of change in progress. One such example is that of the palatal lateral approximant /ʎ/, which was progressively being replaced by /j/, a change which was also ongoing in French at the time. He found that the older generation used [ʎ] almost categorically, the middle generation used [ʎ] and [j] variably, and the younger generation used [j] categorically. He found that the men of the oldest age group used [ʎ] categorically but that the women of the same age were already using [j] to a considerable extent, showing them to be early adopters of

innovative variants. These age and gender patterns were replicated for a number of other variables, with categorical or near-categorical use of one variant by the older and younger generations, and variable use on the part of the middle generation, with women appearing to be a generation ahead of men in their adoption of the incoming variants. Gauchat concludes that 'les femmes accueillirent avec empressement toute nouveauté linguistique' ('women eagerly welcomed all linguistic novelties') (Gauchat 1905: 51). It is remarkable that, decades before Labov's founding variationist studies and with a sample of only nine informants, Gauchat was able to discern sociolinguistic tendencies which were later confirmed by large-scale urban studies.

Outside the French context, Lippi-Green (1989) conducted research into linguistic variation and change in the Germanic dialect of the Alpine village of Grossdorf in Austria. She found that traditional categories of sociolinguistic analysis such as occupation and level of education had limited applicability to this community and its linguistic behaviour, and therefore opted for a social network approach. She found that a speaker's position in the village hierarchy was determined not by occupation but by level of integration into established village networks, so that a farmer might have higher status locally than a civil servant. This social pattern was reflected in the informants' linguistic behaviour.

Another more recent study of a rural community was conducted by Dorian (1994) in Gaelic-speaking former fishing villages in Sutherland, Scotland. As well as variation according to age, geographical location, origin (fishing or non-fishing family) and proficiency, she found patterns of sociolinguistic variation which do not constitute free variation since they show inter-speaker variation, but which do not appear to be associated with socioeconomic status, gender, social network, style, age, or any other social factor commonly evoked in sociolinguistic studies. She calls this 'personal pattern variation' and observes that it does not appear to be subject to social evaluation or speaker awareness. Although her ability to provide an explanation for this type of variation is limited, she mentions the diverse geographical origins of the migrants who populated the villages in the nineteenth century, individual personal style and the lack of an accessible prestige norm which may lead to competing community-specific norms. The context of obsolescence may also have a role to play in the explanation of these patterns.



Comparisons of rural and urban speech communities have been conducted by Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) and Hall (2008). Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) studied the linguistic behaviour of rural speakers of the Caipira dialect of Portuguese when they migrated to Br zlandia, a satellite town of Brasilia. She found the expected convergence of the rural dialects towards urban varieties regarding the vocalisation of the palatal lateral /ʎ/, the reduction of final rising diphthongs and subject-verb agreement in the first and third persons plural. However, the rate at which the migrants adopted the urban variants varied according to the individual speaker, but only fitted traditional sociolinguistic categories such as gender, age, occupation, level of education and length of residence in the city to a very limited extent. Bortoni-Ricardo therefore adopted a social network approach, differentiating between migrants with an insulated social network (comprised mainly of the migrant's extended family and pre-migration acquaintances and neighbours) and those with an integrated network which was more heterogeneous. She found that the migrants' use of regional or urban variants correlated to a great extent with the insularity or integration of their social networks. However, she did find some gender variation which existed independently of social network. Although the women tended not to work outside the home and therefore to have very insular social networks, they still adopted the urban variant of /ʎ/ at the same rate as men whose networks were in transition from insular to integrated, and led these men in the reduction of final rising diphthongs. This study shows the limited viability of traditional sociolinguistic categories such as social class in rural communities and provides an example of the necessity of studying the community in question in depth in order to discover which social distinctions are valid in this kind of place. It also demonstrates the importance of not neglecting speakers of rural origin in sociolinguistic studies of change in progress, especially in the case of the convergence of highly localised rural varieties with more widely spoken urban varieties closer to the standard, which is the case both in Bortoni-Ricardo's research and the present study of accent levelling in Alsace.

Hall's (2008) study of phonological variation in Normandy involved a comparison of the urban area of Darn tal in the Rouen conurbation in Upper Normandy and the rural community of La Bonneville in Lower Normandy. His results show a clear difference between the two communities, with the

supralocal /a/-/a/ merger being more frequent in Darnétal than La Bonneville. This pattern of geographical variation confirms the typical pattern and research hypothesis. The /e/-/ɛ/ merger also shows notable differences between the two fieldwork sites. In La Bonneville, the merged form shows a gender pattern which is not apparent in Darnétal, with females using a considerably greater proportion of merged forms than their male counterparts. In La Bonneville, the proportion of merged forms decreases in apparent time, since the merger is perceived as a stigmatised rural form. In Darnétal however, the proportion of merged forms increases in apparent time, since they are viewed as a prestige form due to the use of such forms in Paris. Differences between the two communities also emerged regarding syntax, whereby the rural speakers considered that 32% of the non-standard sentences involving *où que*, *quand que*, *comment que*, *qui que* and *pourquoi que* with which they were presented were acceptable, whereas the urban speakers considered that only 23% of such sentences were acceptable. Further differences became apparent upon examination of language attitudes in the two communities, with 80% of rural speakers stating that the local accent was 'a good way to speak' as opposed to only 30% of the urban sample. The data show that comparison of rural and urban communities can shed valuable light on the process of linguistic changes such as levelling.

The studies reviewed above show that comparison of rural and urban speech communities has proved useful in understanding the mechanisms of linguistic variation and change in ways which cannot always be achieved by urban samples alone. The present study will thus select informants from two fieldwork sites, the large city of Strasbourg and the small village of Helsing<sup>1</sup>, in order to gain the maximum level of insight into the levelling process in Alsace. The research into sociolinguistic variation in rural communities discussed above also highlights a number of important methodological considerations. These include the importance of a long-term ethnographic approach in order to gain access to informants and fully understand the particular social structures of the community in question, the limited relevance of traditional social categories such as social class in conditioning linguistic behaviour in small rural communities where a social network approach may be more effective, and the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a fictional name used in order to protect the confidentiality of the informants.

investigating community-specific social factors and patterns of variation. These methodological considerations will be taken into account when conducting the data collection and analysis in the present study.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The discussion of the social variables relevant to this study provided above has enabled us to review the ways in which they have interacted with accent levelling, as well as linguistic variation and change more generally, in previous studies. This review provides valuable information regarding the research hypotheses which will prove useful in interpreting the results of the present study. Having examined the social variables which may have an influence on levelling in Alsace, we will now proceed to an in-depth investigation of the factors specific to the region in question which may influence linguistic behaviour there and of the sociolinguistic situation of Alsace in Chapter 4.

## **4 Alsace**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Having examined in detail the social variables which tend to influence linguistic variation and change in general, we will now turn our attention to the social factors specific to the region of Alsace which may influence the linguistic behaviour of the informants in the present study, and to the socio-historical background which needs to be understood in order to gain a complete picture of the current sociolinguistic situation in the region.

This chapter will first provide an overview of Alsace's chequered history and its linguistic consequences, then discuss the current sociolinguistic situation of the region with particular emphasis on the language shift from Alsatian (a Germanic variety) to French which is now in progress and on the strong sense of linguistic insecurity which is so pervasive in this area, before providing an in-depth review of previous studies of Alsatian Regional French phonology, from the historical prescriptive, modern scientific and very recent 'tourist manual' points of view.

### **4.2 History of Alsace and its linguistic consequences**

The political history of Alsace is far from tranquil, since it has been frequently swapped between France and Germany for the last three and a half centuries, and these socio-political upheavals are reflected in the region's linguistic history and current sociolinguistic situation.

Until 1648, when Louis XIV claimed Alsace for France, it was part of the Holy Roman Empire, with a great deal of freedom (Strasbourg was a 'free city' under Imperial rule) and a high level of cultural influence far beyond its borders. Great works of literature in both the local Germanic variety and High German were produced there, notably the collection of satirical poems *Das Narrenschiff* by Sebastian Brant, published in 1494, and Gottfried von Strassburg's courtly romance *Tristan*, written c1210. These authors and their works are still revered in Alsace today, albeit in French translation, and Strasbourg boasts a café and large street dedicated to Brant. Strasbourg also played an important cultural role as the point via which French ideas entered the Germanic-speaking world. The city achieved considerable diplomatic prestige and a reputation as a seat of learning. Although the sociolinguistic situation at the time was one of diglossia

between High German and the local Germanic variety, the Alsatian elites did take some notice of their neighbour and many of them learned French and sent their children to France to study the language as early as the eleventh century (Lévy 1929a: 147).

Following the French conquest of 1648, aside from the sharp drop-off in the production of High German literature, there was little immediate linguistic change, as the monarch seemed to be indifferent as to whether or not Alsatians spoke French provided they did not cause any political trouble (Lévy 1929a: 292, 300). Despite this *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the regime, however, an increasing knowledge of French did filter through to the population, due to economic necessity and immigration from France, although this was almost exclusively the province of the aristocracy and of merchants wishing to trade with other areas of France. The mother tongue of all Alsatians, and the only linguistic variety spoken by the vast majority of the population, remained the local Germanic one. Indeed, Lévy (1929a: 271) describes the linguistic effect of the transfer to France as 'presque imperceptible' ('almost imperceptible').

In 1789, however, the French Revolution exploded in Alsace with all the force of a linguistic bomb. Suddenly, the tolerance of the *ancien régime* had vanished and the use of regional languages as opposed to French had become tantamount to treason, as illustrated by the comments of Barère (1794) that

les langues allemande et italienne ont perpetué le règne du fanatisme et de la superstition, assuré la domination des prêtres, des nobles et des praticiens, empêché la révolution de pénétrer dans neuf départements importants, et peuvent favoriser les ennemis de la France.

(German and Italian have perpetuated the reign of fanaticism and superstition, ensured the domination of priests, nobles and practitioners, prevented the Revolution from entering nine important areas and might favour France's enemies)

and also:

dans les départements du Haut et du Bas-Rhin, qui a donc appelé, de concert avec les traîtres, le Prussien et l'Autrichien sur nos frontières envahies ? L'habitant des campagnes qui parle la même langue que nos

ennemis, et qui se croit ainsi bien plus leur frère et leur concitoyen que le frère et le concitoyen des Français qui lui parlent une autre langue et ont d'autres habitudes.

(In the Haut and Bas Rhin areas [Alsace], who, along with traitors, called the Prussians and Austrians to our invaded borders? The inhabitant of the countryside who speaks the same language as our enemies, and who therefore sees himself as far more their brother and fellow citizen than the brother and fellow citizen of the French who speak another language and have other customs).

He also makes the observation that 20 000 Alsatians had left Revolutionary France for Germany, which he believed was because of their Germanic language and culture, in addition to his famous quotation:

Le fédéralisme et la superstition parlent bas-breton ; l'émigration et la haine de la République parlent allemand ; la contre-révolution parle l'italien, et le fanatisme parle le basque. Brisons ces instruments de dommage et d'erreur.

(Federalism and superstition speak Breton, emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German; the counter-revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque. Let us break these instruments of damage and error).

German street signs were replaced with French ones, some place names were Gallicised (for example, Bockenheim became Sarre-Union), and a law was made in 1794 that only French should be used in official documents (although this law was not obeyed in Alsace). Alsatians were conscripted into the army alongside recruits from other areas of France, secular state schools were established and ordered to teach exclusively in French and propaganda in favour of the French language was published. However, these measures met with very limited success (Lévy 1929b: 20-59).

The majority of observers at the time, and indeed Alsatians themselves, did not make a distinction between 'German' and 'Alsatian' but merely regarded their speech as a corrupt version of High German. As tensions between France and Prussia increased following the Revolution and then later German Romanticism

began to publish claims that Alsace should be part of Germany because it spoke German, in the lead-up to the Franco-Prussian War, not only the use of Germanic linguistic varieties, but also French spoken with an Alsatian accent reminiscent of German, became anathema to the authorities. It is in this context that D'Hauteville (1852) published one of the first prescriptive pronunciation manuals for Alsatians desirous of speaking 'proper' French, using highly negative descriptions of the Alsatian accent such as 'laid avorton d'un langage imparfait' ('ugly stunted effort at imperfect language', D'Hauteville 1852: 68), 'un monstre' ('a monster', D'Hauteville 1852: 59) and 'il nous fait honte' ('it makes us ashamed', D'Hauteville 1852: 2). However, despite the central government's best efforts to impose French as the universal language, resources such as school teachers with a good knowledge of French, and indeed often the will to learn or teach it, were sadly lacking and the national language made only limited progress (Lévy 1929b: 111, 117).

In 1870 the Franco-Prussian War broke out and following Napoleon III's defeat at Sedan, Alsace was ceded to Germany. Any attempts at 'francisation' thus ceased and High German was imposed as the official language. However, the population chafed under strict German rule and spoke French as a means of protest. In the run-up to the First World War, French claims to Alsace became more and more insistent and 'correct' French without an Alsatian accent was again urged on the population (De Dietrich 1917). At the end of the First World War, Alsace once again became French and French troops were greeted by cheering crowds in the streets. However, the Alsatian population's joy at their return to France was short-lived once they realised that the French inhabitants of other regions viewed them with suspicion, and their pronunciation of French was yet again subject to virulent criticism and attempts to 'correct' it (Lévy 1929b: 503; Suiter 1920).

Between the two world wars, the French language made considerable progress, but was still very little spoken by the rural agricultural masses, whose language of choice remained uncompromisingly Alsatian. Lévy (1929b: 161) observed that many Alsatians were still almost completely ignorant of French in 1929. In addition, an anti-French Alsatian autonomist movement was gaining strength and encouraging the population to continue to speak Alsatian and German (Meyer 2008: 359-63). As soon as French had begun to gain a foothold in these

areas, all its achievements were more than reversed following the outbreak of World War II and the annexation of Alsace by Nazi Germany in 1940. Initially, following the declaration of war, all the Alsatians living close to the Maginot Line, a fortified area along the border between Alsace and Germany, including almost all the inhabitants of Strasbourg, were evacuated to other areas of France, especially the Dordogne. This evacuation had unintended linguistic consequences, since many Alsatians came into contact for the first time with speakers of another variety of French from their own, with whom they could not communicate in Alsatian or High German. The Alsatian evacuees thus began to learn French, which many of them could not speak at all prior to evacuation, stimulated by the mockeries of the locals who referred to them as 'les yaya' because they constantly said 'ja, ja' (Alsatian for 'yes') as well as more malevolent appellations implying they were German such as 'les boches'. However, before the acquisition of French by the evacuees could really take hold, they were told it was safe for them to return home after only one year, since Germany had annexed Alsace and it was no longer a battleground.

The returnees initially received a favourable impression of their conquerors due to their economic largesse, but this soon turned to strong disfavour on the part of many when their civil liberties were severely curtailed and a large proportion of the male population conscripted into the German army (on pain of their families being shot if they resisted or deserted). Use of French was strictly forbidden, even including the use of established French loan-words in Alsatian, such as 'bonjour', as was wearing a beret, both of which constituted offences punishable by being sent to a concentration camp. One such camp was established on Alsatian soil, and this and the use of Alsatian conscripts as 'cannon fodder' on the Russian front where they were often captured and interned in gulags, decimated the population (see Philipps 1975: 223-239; Meyer 2008: 373; Hoffet 1951: 88).

Although many Alsatians loathed the Nazi regime and actively participated in the French Resistance, after the region was liberated by the American army in 1945, the other inhabitants of France again viewed Alsatians with extreme suspicion, and the French authorities proved not to be at all understanding of the issues of conscription on pain of death for the whole family and compulsory membership of the Hitler Youth for minors. Those who were forcibly conscripted



were known in Alsace as 'les malgré-nous' (see Meyer 2008: 385). A trial for such Alsatian 'collaborators' who had been forced to shoot French civilians in the village of Oradour-sur-Glane was held in Bordeaux in 1953 and the Alsatian population responded with a vehement protest by means of a silent mass street demonstration. The Bordeaux trial was dismissed from court, but only a few years after they had been overwhelmed with joy to return to France, Alsations were already beginning to realise that they were still perceived as Nazi traitors by many. The trauma undergone during and immediately following World War II are still very present in Alsace today, especially in the minds of the older generation, and have had a profound impact on the current linguistic situation. In particular, in the aftermath of the war, the local Germanic variety and the Germanic accent of Alsations when speaking French were directly associated in the minds of many, including the French authorities, with Nazism, and Alsations thus began to try to adopt the French language and Standard French pronunciation, becoming filled with self-loathing when they did not succeed in eliminating their 'Alsatian accent'. Use of Alsatian in schools was strictly forbidden in the post-war years and was punished in school playgrounds by means of a wooden object hung around the neck of any child who spoke Alsatian. The child would then have to keep the object until he or she found another child speaking Alsatian and passed the object on to the guilty party. Government propaganda also encouraged Alsations to speak French, and the slogan 'il est chic de parler français' was ubiquitous in Strasbourg (see Hoffet 1951: 97). The profound sense of linguistic insecurity regarding the Alsatian accent which was born in the nineteenth century reached almost pathological levels following the Second World War. Indeed, Hoffet (1951: 93), writing in the aftermath of World War II, admonishes his readers on the subject of Alsations: 'mais surtout, gardez-vous de relever son accent! Il n'est pas un domaine où il se montre plus susceptible! Il vous en voudra moins de l'accuser d'avoir tué sa mère, que de noter les germanismes dont son parler reste farci ou même simplement de relever la mélodie étrangère de sa phrase' ('but above all, do not mention his accent! There is no more sensitive subject! He will be less angry with you for accusing him of killing his mother than for noting the Germanisms of which his speech remains full, or even simply remarking on the foreign intonation of his sentence'). This linguistic insecurity is still an omnipresent element of the Alsatian sociolinguistic landscape today, although it appears to

be decreasing amongst the younger generation for whom it no longer has negative political associations.

### **4.3 Current situation in Alsace**

Since 1945, when Alsace was restored to France, the French language has spread rapidly due to education and other social changes, and we may now say with confidence that there are no longer any Alsatians with no knowledge of French. However, Alsatian is still widely spoken, especially by the older generation and in rural areas, although recent surveys show it to be declining. The most recent INSEE statistics on regional language use, based on a survey accompanying the 1999 census (Duey 2002), show that Alsatian is spoken by 39% of the adult population of Alsace, making it the second most widely spoken regional language of France. These 39% constitute approximately 500,000 speakers. However, the figures also show that knowledge of Alsatian and parent-child transmission of this variety are decreasing. At the beginning of the twentieth century, 90% of children learned Alsatian from their parents. By the 1970s, this had declined to less than 50% and the transmission rate is now approximately 25%. Furthermore, only 10% of children habitually speak Alsatian with their parents, as opposed to 80% in the 1940s. Alsatian is subject to a high degree of geographical variation and possesses no standardised written form, although it is possible to take classes in Alsatian and written documents such as magazine articles and children's books in Alsatian do exist. As well as Alsatian, the INSEE survey also revealed that 16.2% of the population of Alsace, or approximately 200,000 people, speak Standard German (a far higher percentage than any other foreign language including English).

The increase in the number of French speakers over the last few decades has led to a renewed consciousness of the Alsatian accent, since a large number of people have become aware for the first time of the pronunciation norms of Standard French, a variety which they frequently hear spoken in the French national media. Alsatians have a high level of awareness of regional phonological features, which are highly stigmatised and it is considered the height of impoliteness to notice the Alsatian accent of one's interlocutor, and a great compliment to say that he or she does not have the Alsatian accent. As

mentioned in Section 4.2, Alsatians are subject to a high level of linguistic insecurity.

Code-switching between French and Alsatian is a phenomenon that frequently occurs in Alsace, especially in a group where the various speakers have different levels of proficiency in French and Alsatian and are trying to accommodate to one another. Detailed investigations of code-switching and language choice in Alsace have been conducted by Gardner-Chloros (1991), Vassberg (1993) and Vajta (2004). This is left aside here as it is not the focus of the present study.

Having discussed the sociolinguistic situation of Alsace in general, we will now turn our attention to a detailed examination of the phonological features of Alsatian Regional French in particular, as attested in textbooks and previous studies.

#### **4.4 Review of studies of Alsatian Regional French phonology**

##### **4.4.1 Prescriptive Manuals**

The first currently available attestations of the phonological characteristics of the Regional French of Alsace appear in D’Hauteville (1852) in the mid-nineteenth century and take the form of a prescriptive manual intended to ‘correct’ Alsatians’ pronunciation of French.

The following accent features are targeted by D’Hauteville: the lack of a voicing opposition in plosives and fricatives, with devoicing of canonically voiced and voicing of canonically voiceless consonants (this is the main object of his criticism), <au> in *autre*, *cause* pronounced like the final vowel in *jabot*, *sabot* (although it is unclear why this is criticised as it appears to be a feature of Standard French), /u/ realised as [y] (e.g. in *pouce*), confusion of /õ/ and /ã/ (e.g. *savant* pronounced like *savon*), <eu> pronounced [y] (e.g. in Eugène), /ɛ/ realised as /ø/ (e.g. *beignets* pronounced ‘beugnets’, *cuiller* pronounced ‘keulière’ and ‘h aspiré’ wrongly used instead of ‘h muet’ in words such as *hameçon* and *hectare*. D’Hauteville heaps ridicule and scorn on the Alsatian

accent, using phrases such as ‘malheur alors, si quelque mot étrange, laid avorton d’un langage imparfait vient me choquer par son burlesque effet’ (‘how horrible, then, if some strange word, ugly stunted effort at imperfect language shocks me by its burlesque effect’, D’Hauteville 1852: 68), ‘blessant partout l’oreille’ (D’Hauteville 1852: 11) and ‘il nous fait honte’ (‘it makes us ashamed’, D’Hauteville 1852: 2) and ‘ignorez-vous le ridicule immense dont ce défaut vous couvrirait en France?’ (‘do you not know what immense ridicule this defect would cover you with in France?’ D’Hauteville 1852: 8). He constantly connects the Alsatian accent to German and Germany, beginning his book with the sentence ‘l’âme est peinte dans le langage’ (‘language reflects the soul’, D’Hauteville 1852: 1), which implies that people who speak with an Alsatian accent are loyal to Germany in their hearts, and ending it with the phrase ‘aux Allemands renvoyez baragouin’ (‘send gibberish back to the Germans’, D’Hauteville 1852: 69).

In 1871, Alsace became part of Germany as a result of the 1870-1871 Franco-Prussian war, with German as its official language. During the First World War, when French patriots wished for Alsace to be restored to their country, a prescriptive pronunciation manual for Alsatians again surfaced (De Dietrich 1917), inciting the latter to cast off the Germanic accent features which linked them to the enemy and allowed Germans to claim that Alsace belonged to them. De Dietrich urges Alsatians to eliminate the following long list of features from their pronunciation: /ɑ/ pronounced ‘too close’, so that it approaches French open /ɔ/, confusion between /ɑ/ and /ɑ:/, /i/ and /y/, /e/ and /ø/, /ɔ/ and /o:/ (e.g. in *Paul* pronounced with [o:]), /e/ and /ɛ/, /œ:/ and /ø/ (e.g. in *aveugle* pronounced with [ø]), ‘des modulations en mineur et un ton traînard’ (‘minor intonations and a drawling tone’, De Dietrich 1917: 7), /i/ pronounced in a way that approaches /ɛ/ (e.g. *histoire* pronounced ‘estoire’), non-standard schwa elision patterns (e.g. elision of either none of or all the schwas in *je te le dis*), inversion of obstruent plus liquid clusters (e.g. *noblement* pronounced ‘nobelment’, *être* pronounced ‘êter’), pronunciation of orthographic <h> as [h], aspiration of voiceless plosives, devoicing of /R/ to produce a sound like German <ch> in *hoch*, <gn> pronounced [n], <ill> pronounced [l] (the two latter features are attributed to bad teaching of spelling pronunciation), excessive variation in pitch, stressing consonants rather than vowels in stressed syllables,

excessive lengthening of /A/, tonic stress too strong and often placed on the wrong syllable and weak nasalisation of canonically nasal vowels. De Dietrich emphasises the fact that the Alsatian accent is perceived very negatively outside Alsace, where it is associated with Germany (for example, he describes the lack of opposition between voiced and voiceless consonants in the following way: ‘elle rend ridicule et enlaidit le français d’une façon impardonnable’ (‘it renders French ridiculous and ugly in an unpardonable way’, De Dietrich 1917: 87). However, he does indicate that the Alsatian accent enjoys a certain amount of covert prestige within the region, since he says that an Alsatian who tried to speak like a Parisian at home would be ridiculed, for example for pronouncing *Georges* with [ʒ] rather than regional [ʒʒ] and describes the local intonation as ‘ces modulations que je condamne mais que j’aime’ (‘these modulations that I condemn but I like’, De Dietrich 1917: 6). He associates speaking French with a Germanic accent with disloyalty to France, stating that ‘le français mal parlé rend suspect à cette heure’ (‘badly spoken French makes you suspicious at this time’, De Dietrich 1917: 5).

Immediately following the war, Alsatians were still expected to display their loyalty to France by eliminating any Germanic-sounding features from their speech, a point which is made clear by Suiter (1920) in yet another pronunciation manual. Suiter (1920) condemns the confusion of voiced and voiceless fricatives and plosives, and also provides advice on the pronunciation of <h>, on contexts in which <il>, <ille>, <gn> are pronounced as [j] and on how to pronounce obstruent plus liquid clusters, which implies that <h> was sometimes realised as [h], <il> and <ille> with [l] in contexts where [j] occurs in Standard French and that obstruent plus liquid clusters were inverted as discussed in the case studies above (for example, *noble* pronounced [nobəl]). Although Suiter prescriptively condemns some aspects of the Alsatian accent (such as the lack of a voicing opposition in fricatives and plosives), she views it more positively than D’Hauteville (1852) or De Dietrich (1917), probably because at the time of writing, Alsace’s French nationality was not contested or under threat. She explains her attitude in the following way: ‘Mon but n’est pas, certes, de corriger leur accent (il a son charme, et chaque province est fière du sien). Ce que je voudrais, ce serait, tout simplement, les aider à modifier leur fausse prononciation, les empêcher de dire B pour P ou inversement, et à

abandonner les expressions traduites de l'allemand' ('My aim is not to criticise their accent (it has its charm, and every province is proud of its own). What I want is simply to help them modify their incorrect pronunciation, to stop them saying B for P or vice versa, and to abandon expressions translated from German', Suiter 1920: 3).

#### **4.4.2 Scientific Observation**

More recently, there have been attempts to provide accounts which document the phonology of Alsatian Regional French as an object of scientific interest (Philipp 1965; Carton 1983 et al.; Walter 1982). These studies, conducted some decades ago, do not attempt to provide a representative sample of the speech of the population of Alsace, and they do not mention any kind of sociolinguistic information such as the type of speakers who use a given form or the frequency with which the latter occurs. They tend to focus on NORMS in order to obtain the most strongly regionally marked speech sample possible.

Philipp's (1965) research mainly focuses on the variety of Alsatian spoken in the village of Blaesheim, near Strasbourg, but she does provide an account of the ways in which the phonology of the Blaesheim variety of Alsatian influences the phonology of Alsatian Regional French as spoken in the village. She describes the following features. There is a reduction of the opposition of aperture between /e/ and /ɛ/, /ø/ and /œ/, and complete neutralisation of this opposition in the case of /ɔ/ and /o/. /e/, /ø/ and /o/ are pronounced in a more open way than in Standard French, /ɛ/, /œ/ and /ɔ/ in a more close way. The /a/~/ɑ/ opposition is also neutralised, with a single, intermediate /A/, which is less front than /a/ but less back than /ɑ/, being used in all contexts. Canonically nasal vowels are not completely nasalised. In word-final position /ɛ̃/ is realised as [ɛ], so that *lait* and *lin* are both pronounced /lɛ/. Although she does not refer to it directly, Philipp's examples also show devoicing of canonically voiced consonants and voicing of canonically voiceless consonants (e.g. *pré* with [b], *chose* and *berceuse* ending in [s]).

In a later work, Philipp (1985) provides further particulars of Alsatian accent features, drawn from the same initial fieldwork in Blaesheim. She mentions the

features described in her 1965 book, as well as the following additional characteristics. /b/, /d/, /g/, /z/, /v/ and /ʒ/ are devoiced word-finally, so that there is no voicing opposition between these consonants and /p/, /t/, /k/, /s/, /f/ and /ʃ/ in this position. In order to distinguish words which would otherwise become homophonous due to this neutralisation of the voicing opposition, such as *vite* and *vide*, the vowel preceding the canonically voiced consonant is lengthened (e.g. *bague* [pa:k], *laide* [lɛ:t], *robe* [ro:p]). This lengthening of the vowel preceding a canonically voiced consonant which has undergone devoicing also occurs in word-final obstruent plus liquid clusters. These consonant clusters also undergo inversion of the final schwa and liquid, for example *faible* [fɛ:pəl], *coudre* [k<sup>h</sup>u:tər]. Vowels in rhythm-group final syllables are sometimes lengthened. Individual words are stressed on their first syllable and the vowel of the word-initial stressed syllable is lengthened in dissyllabic words (e.g. *maison* [me:su], *pigeon* [p<sup>h</sup>i:ju], *aimer* [ɛ:me]). The intensity of this tonic stress is much stronger than that of Standard French.

According to Philipp, although Blaesheim speakers do not neutralise the voicing opposition between /p/, /t/, /k/ and /b/, /g/, /d/ word-initially, this near-neutralisation is often heard in the Haut Rhin further south (e.g. *un bon pont* [pu p<sup>h</sup>u], *un beau pot* [po p<sup>h</sup>o]). Philipp's transcription of word-initial /b/ as [p] and /p/ as [p<sup>h</sup>] implies that canonically voiceless plosives are aspirated word-initially before a vowel, in order to differentiate them from their devoiced canonically voiced counterparts, although she does not specifically mention this point. (She also provides examples of [k<sup>h</sup>] and [t<sup>h</sup>]: *coudre* [k<sup>h</sup>utər], *tirer* [t<sup>h</sup>ire]). Before a consonant, the voicing opposition is neutralised and there is complete homophony of words such as *classe* and *glace* [klas], *cri* and *gris* [kri]. Philipp also mentions the loss of voicing opposition between /s/ and /z/, /ʒ/ and /ʃ/. She claims that the loss of voicing opposition most widely commented on is that which concerns /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ (e.g. *chou* and *joue* [ju]). The voicing opposition between /f/ and /v/ is maintained word-initially, but not word-finally (e.g. *vive* [vi:f], *chauve* [ʃo:f]). She also mentions in passing the devoicing of canonically voiced consonants word-medially (e.g. *maison* [me:su], *pigeon* [pi:ju]). Her transcription of *pigeon* as [pi:ju] also implies that /ʒ/ may be realised as [u], although Philipp does not explicitly mention this.

Philipp believes that the exact features of the Alsatian accent vary between different parts of Alsace, since the phonology of the substrate variety, Alsatian, is also subject to a considerable amount of geographical variation. She observes that the Alsatian accent is perceived in an extremely negative way by Alsatians, French speakers from other regions of France and even Germans. French speakers from outside Alsace believe that they are somehow 'not really in France' when they hear Alsatians speak French. Philipp states that: 'l'accent alsacien est une sorte de déviation mal acceptée par la communauté de langue française; l'ironie et le mépris du Français cultivé ayant une prononciation soignée à l'égard de l'Alsacien parlant «mal» peuvent être considérés comme une tentative d'amener les déviants à parler comme lui' (Philipp 1985: 24) ('the Alsatian accent is a sort of deviation which is not well received by the French speaking community; the irony and scorn with which a cultivated Frenchman with a standard pronunciation regards the Alsatian who speaks "badly" could be considered an attempt to bring the deviants to speak like himself'). In Alsace, although a strong regional accent is seen as vulgar and ridiculous, the local accent does enjoy a certain amount of covert prestige, since the present author had met some students who claimed they did not want to get rid of their accents, because they were proud to be Alsatian. Parisian Standard French phonology is also looked upon with some disfavour, as Philipp remarks in the following sentence: 'L'Alsacien parlant avec un accent pointu, parisien, jetterait un froid, créerait une distance entre ses interlocuteurs et lui' (Philipp 1985: 22) ('An Alsatian speaking with a refined, Parisian accent would cast a chill, create a distance between his interlocutors and himself') and that 'vouloir effacer son accent signifie que l'on renie son identité alsacienne, ce qui n'est ni nécessaire ni souhaitable' (Philipp 1985: 25) ('desiring to get rid of one's accent means rejecting one's Alsatian identity, which is neither necessary nor desirable').

Walter (1982) describes the attributes of Alsatian Regional French that she observed in the speech of three elderly informants (born between 1913 and 1922), two females and one male. The speakers maintain the opposition between the nasal vowels /*œ̃*/ and /*ɛ̃*/, which has been neutralised in supralocal standardised French. A voiceless glottal fricative, [h], is used in the phrase *en haut*. [ɑ] may occur word-finally, especially after [w]. /R/ may be realised in several different ways, as a voiced uvular fricative, a devoiced uvular fricative, a



voiced apical trill or as [x]. Canonically voiced plosives are sometimes devoiced and voiceless plosives are sometimes aspirated. Word-initial tonic stress is frequent. Walter's informants showed great inter-speaker variability in vowel quality and length. Since Walter's data are drawn from only three informants and little information is given about the phonetic contexts in which the regional variants mentioned occur, it may not be wise to make generalisations about Alsatian Regional French based on this study.

Carton et al. (1983) describe in detail the phonology of two older male speakers from 'Haute Alsace', which is probably the Haut Rhin, the southern department of Alsace. They observe the following vocalic features in the speech of their informants: raising of /i/, /u/ and /y/ to [i], [u] and [y] respectively, /æ/ always realised as [ø], long or tonic /a/ backed to [ɑ], weak nasalisation of canonically nasal vowels, glottalisation of stressed word-initial consonants ('*attaque forte*'), word-final schwa pronounced in contexts where it would be elided in Standard French and weakening or elision of the medial vowel in trisyllabic words (for example, *naturellement* pronounced [natRɛlmõ]). The consonantal system of the informants contains the following regional features: aspiration or partial voicing of canonically voiceless plosives, devoicing of canonically voiced plosives and fricatives, apical or pharyngeal /R/ (with young people tending to use the pharyngeal variant), simplification of consonant clusters (for example, *quelque* pronounced [kɛk]), inversion of word-final obstruent plus liquid clusters (-*tre* [tɛr], -*fle* [fɛl], -*ble* [bɛl]), realisation of word-initial orthographic <h> as [h] and realisation of word-final /j/ as [i]. Vowel length may be different from that of corresponding sounds in Standard French and stress patterns differ from those of the standard variety. Unfortunately, the authors do not provide any information regarding the phonetic contexts in which many of these regional variants occur. For example, they state that canonically voiceless word-initial plosives may be either aspirated or partially voiced, but do not make any observations about the circumstances in which these two variants may be used. The authors use the vague terms '*souvent*' (often) regarding pronunciation of word-final schwa and '*parfois*' (sometimes) to describe weak vowel nasalisation. These descriptions give the reader little idea of the frequency of use of these variants or the contexts in which they may occur.

Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz and Huck (1993) analyse the devoicing of canonically voiced plosives and fricatives, non-standard stress patterns ('*marques accentuelles interférentielles*') and the aspiration of canonically voiceless plosives in the speech of two informants, one male aged 51 and one female aged 49, both of whom also spoke Alsatian and had left school at age 14. The informants were asked to read aloud a 550-word passage and a quantitative study of their use of regional variants was conducted. The two informants aspirated canonically voiceless plosives (25 aspirated tokens for the male informant, 23 for the female) and used non-standard stress patterns (133 tokens for the male informant, 123 for the female). Unfortunately, the authors do not provide the total number of possible occurrences for the aspiration of voiceless plosives or for consonant devoicing, so the rates of use of the regional variants are unknown, although comparison of the two informants is still possible because they both read the same passage. The devoicing of canonically voiceless consonants is the only variable that appears to show a gender difference, with the male participant devoicing 78 tokens and the female only 31. Apparently on the basis of this gender difference, the authors suggest the possibility that '*le marqueur phonétique "régional" le plus sensible est la désonorisation*' ('the most sensitive "regional" phonetic marker is devoicing', Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993: 36). However, it would be very risky to generalise on the basis of data from only two speakers. In addition to the regional phonological variables analysed in their study, the authors also mention several other phonological features specific to Alsace, namely non-standard vowel timbre and length, a voiceless pharyngeal realisation of /R/, modifications in the aperture of the low mid vowels and the voicing of canonically voiceless consonants. They compared their two regional speakers to a control group including Alsatians whom the authors perceived as having no regional accent, but in the end they concluded that '*bien que les productions de ces locuteurs puissent être apparemment dépourvues de toute caractéristique interférentielle ou simplement régionale, une analyse fine met en évidence la persistance de certains traits segmentaux [...] et prosodiques*' ('although the productions of these speakers may seem to be free of any interferential or even regional characteristics, fine-grained analysis reveals the persistence of certain segmental and prosodic features', Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993: 40).

Although Vajta's (2004) research mainly concerns language choice and transmission, she does devote a small amount of space in her book to describing the phonology of Alsatian Regional French. She notes that speakers of Alsatian often realise /b/, /d/ and /g/ as [p], [t] and [k] and that they have a tendency to devoice canonically voiced word-final consonants (e.g. *sud* [syʔ], *village* [vilaʃ]) and that in general the voicing opposition between canonically voiced and voiceless consonants tends to disappear (e.g. *pas* [ba], *coûter* [gute], *jambe* [ʒãpʰ]). Tonic stress is usually placed on word-initial syllables and is more intense than that of Standard French. Vowels are often lengthened before a voiced consonant (e.g. *bague* [pa:k] and *robe* [Ro:pʰ]). Vajta's transcription of *jambe* as [ʒãpʰ] and *robe* as [Ro:pʰ] seems to indicate that voiceless consonants, even if they are not word-initial and are voiced in Standard French, can be aspirated. She remarks that the degree of influence of Alsatian on French varies a great deal from person to person, that the Alsatian accent is subject to geographical variation, and that it is generally socially stigmatised.

Vajta also carried out a study of Alsatians' pronunciation of place names of Germanic origin in Alsace, by asking seventeen informants from three generations of the same family to read aloud a list of eighty such place names. She analysed their pronunciation of the following graphemic sequences which are realised differently in French and Alsatian, or not present at all in Standard French: the diphthongs <au>, <ei>, <eu>; vowel plus nasal consonant in <an>, <am>, <en>, <in>, <im>, <on>, <un>, <ün>; initial <h>; <ch> after a front vowel or <r>; <ch> after a back vowel; <z>; <tz>; <ge>; final <er> and tonic stress. These markers fell into two groups. The first group did not show any French influence in their pronunciation and were realised in the Germanic way in over 90% of cases. This group of resistant markers included <ei>, <en>, <in>, <im>, <un>, <ün>, <ch> after back vowels, <ge> and final <er>. The second group consisted of markers that were less resistant to French influence. These non-resistant markers included <on>, initial <h>, <an>, <am>, <au>, <eu>, <z>, <tz>, <ch> after front vowels or <r> and tonic stress. There was considerable inter- and intra-speaker variation in the realisation of the non-resistant markers, with the proportion of Germanic realisations being as much as 100% for one speaker and as little as 13% for another. Generally speaking, the proportion of

Germanic realisations decreases in apparent time, with the highest rates of use being found in the older and the lowest in the younger generation. This seems to indicate that the use of Germanic accent features in Alsatian French may be decreasing, since the younger generation use less of them than their older counterparts, at least in place names. In the middle generation, the speakers who had the highest proportion of Germanic variants were those who had passed on Alsatian to their children. This suggests that the use of Germanic pronunciation forms in French may be connected to use of and attachment to Alsatian.

#### **4.4.3 Popular Accounts**

As well as prescriptive and objective scientific texts, a third type of account of the Alsatian accent has recently emerged. The latter involves non-scientific, often humorous descriptions of the regional accent in 'guidebooks' for newcomers to the region of Alsace (Winter 2000; Weiss 2004).

Winter (2000) begins the section of her book on the Alsatian accent by affirming that this accent does indeed still exist. She observes that people have always made fun of the Alsatian accent, to such an extent that elderly people sometimes hesitate to speak to non-Alsatians for fear of their accent being laughed at. She warns the reader not to criticise the Alsatian accent, since Alsatian listeners may suspect the person commenting on the accent of making insinuations about his or her 'Frenchness' and become upset and angry. However, she does qualify this by adding that members of the younger generation may be less ashamed of their accent, since they have been educated in French and no longer deem it necessary to have to justify their 'Frenchness'. She mentions the emergence of a mixed *banlieue* and Alsatian accent (which was also noticed by some of the informants in the present study), although she only gives the example 'tu te prends pour un flic, kôônard!' (Winter 2000: 127), which does not appear to contain any phonological features characteristic of *banlieue* speech.

Winter lists the following Alsatian accent features. She begins by noting the differences between tonic stress in Alsatian and Standard French, observing

that in Alsace tonic stress falls on the first or second syllable of the word and is stronger than that of the standard variety of French. Stressed vowels are lengthened, and the author describes this in the following terms: ‘On traîne sur les voyelles, mais on peut avaler un peu le reste’ (‘They drag out the vowels, but they can swallow the rest a bit’, Winter 2000: 128). The ‘swallowing’ of unstressed syllables may be akin to the elision or weakening of the medial syllable in trisyllabic words described by Carton et al. (1983). She gives the examples of *il est pincé* [pẽ:se] and *les syndicats ont défilé* [le sɛ̃:dika ɔ̃ de:file] (where the lengthened syllables are strongly stressed). The author also mentions the confusion of [p] and [b], stating that *beurre* may be heard as or pronounced identically to *peur*. She also observes that /ʒ/ is pronounced as [ʃ], so that *jabot* and *chapeau* become homophones.

Weiss (2004) describes the following Alsatian Regional French accent features: word-initial tonic stress, absence of [ʒ] and [z] from speakers’ phonemic inventory, resulting in the realisation of /ʒ/ and /z/ as [ʃ] and [s], weak nasalisation of canonically nasal vowels, neutralisation of the voicing opposition between /p/ and /b/, /t/ and /g/, /k/ and /g/, producing intermediate forms which give French speakers from outside Alsace the impression that the ‘wrong’ consonant is being pronounced. In monosyllabic words, the opposition between /p/ and /b/, /t/ and /d/, /k/ and /g/ is not completely neutralised. An opposition of vowel length in the preceding vowel replaces the canonical voicing opposition, with a long vowel before a canonically voiced plosive and a short vowel preceding a canonically voiceless one.

#### **4.4.4 Summary**

In conclusion, although a certain number of studies of the phonology of Alsatian Regional French have been conducted, only two of these studies (Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993 and Vajta 2004) have made any attempt to place this variety within a variationist framework, and no large-scale quantitative study of the Regional French of Alsace has yet been carried out. Over time, the accounts of the Alsatian accent progress from prescriptive pronunciation manuals for Alsatians (D’Hauteville 1852; De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920) to objective scientific observations (Philipp 1965; Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983;

Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993; Vajta 2004) and even humorous 'guides' for French speakers who are not from Alsace (Winter 2000; Weiss 2004). Although the different accounts of Alsatian accent features vary slightly, especially with regard to vowels, there is a broad consensus on a certain number of phonological traits that characterise the French of Alsace. These features are summarised in Table 4.1. The authors of all the descriptions of the Alsatian accent are unanimous in their statement that it is perceived extremely negatively both inside and outside Alsace, although it does enjoy a certain amount of covert prestige within the region.

Feature	Authors who mention this feature
Neutralisation of voicing opposition for /p/~/b/, /t/~/d/, /k/~/g/, /f/~/v/, /s/~/z/, /ʃ/~/ʒ/	D'Hauteville 1852; De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920; Philipp 1965; Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993; Winter 2000; Vajta 2004; Weiss 2004
Aspiration of the voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/	Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Vajta 2004; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Orthographic <h> realised as [h]	De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920; Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983
Devoicing and/or pharyngealisation of /R/	De Dietrich 1917, Walter 1982, Carton et al. 1983, Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Apical [r]	Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983
Inversion of obstruent + liquid clusters (e.g. noble [nobəl])	De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985
Use of [ɑ:] (with a close realisation approaching /ɔ/) in contexts where Standard French has [a]	De Dietrich 1917; Philipp 1965; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985
Non-standard schwa deletion and retention patterns	De Dietrich 1917; Carton et al. 1983
Weak nasalisation of canonically nasal vowels	De Dietrich 1917; Philipp 1965; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Weiss 2004
Non-standard tonic stress patterns (usually word-initial stress) and more intense stress than in Standard French	De Dietrich 1917; Walter 1982; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Winter 2000; Vajta 2004; Weiss 2004; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Non-standard vowel lengthening	Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993; Winter 2000; Vajta 2004; Weiss 2004

Non-standard elision of unstressed syllables (e.g. <i>naturellement</i> [[natRɛlma])	Carton et al. 1983; Winter 2000
Non-standard realisations of the /e/-/ɛ/ opposition	De Dietrich 1917; Philipp 1965; Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Non-standard realisations of the /ø/-/œ/ opposition	De Dietrich 1917; Philipp 1965; Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Non-standard realisations of the /o/-/ɔ/ opposition	D’Hauteville 1852; De Dietrich 1917; Philipp 1965; Philipp 1985; Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz & Huck 1993
Orthographic <gn> realised as [n]	De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920
Orthographic <ille> or <il> realised with [l] instead of standard [j]	De Dietrich 1917; Suiter 1920
Maintenance of /œ/-/ɛ/ opposition	Walter 1982
/i/, /u/, /y/ lowered to /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /ʏ/	Carton et al. 1983
Glottalisation of stressed word-initial syllables	Carton et al. 1983
Simplification of consonant clusters (e.g. <i>quelque</i> [kɛk])	Carton et al. 1983
Word-final /j/ realised as [i]	Carton et al. 1983
Neutralisation of /ĩ/-/ã/ opposition	D’Hauteville 1852
Confusion of /i/ and /y/	De Dietrich 1917
Confusion of /e/ and /ø/	De Dietrich 1917
/u/ realised as [y]	D’Hauteville 1852
Confusion of /EU/ and /y/	D’Hauteville 1852
Realisation of /ɛ/ as [ø]	D’Hauteville 1852
Realisation of /i/ as [ɛ]	De Dietrich 1917

Table 4.1: Summary of Alsatian Accent Features



#### **4.5 Language attitudes and perceptions of Alsatian Regional French**

As well as the empirical studies of Alsatian Regional French reviewed in Section 4.3, there is a small body of research on the way the Alsatian accent is perceived by Alsations and by French speakers from other regions of France. As can be seen from the comments of the authors of the descriptions of the Alsatian accent mentioned in Section 4.3, Alsatian regional accent features are stigmatised and viewed in an extremely negative way, both inside and outside the region, although within Alsace they do seem to enjoy a certain level of covert prestige. Philipp (1985) remarks that Alsatian speakers of French do not wish to sound like Parisians and would be laughed at by their peers if they attempted to do so. There are two main perceptual studies of French accents which reveal important facts about the way in which the Alsatian accent is viewed in France: Paltridge and Giles (1984) and Kuiper (2005).

Paltridge and Giles (1984) asked 24 respondents of both genders and various ages from Brittany, Alsace, Provence and Paris to listen to a short recording of a prose passage being read aloud by a young male university student from each of these four regions, and then to evaluate the speakers in terms of professional appeal, social appeal, steadiness, power and accentedness. The study aimed to ascertain whether or not speakers perceive a status hierarchy of French regional accents. The hypothesis was that the Parisian accent would be perceived as the most prestigious and that the Alsatian accent would be viewed most negatively due to its associations in the minds of French people with German and 'foreignness'.

The results showed that the elderly listeners rated the speakers they heard more favourably than their younger counterparts. This could reveal an increasing stigmatisation of regional accents in France today, although it could also be the result of a change in attitudes according to life stage. The expected hierarchy was perceived in terms of professional appeal, with Parisian French receiving the highest and Alsatian Regional French the lowest scores. The speakers from Paris, Provence and Brittany were allocated equal ratings for social appeal, but the Alsatian speakers were again given the lowest score. As regards 'accentedness', the Alsatian speakers described themselves as having

a very strong accent, assigning themselves a much higher score than that attributed to them by the listeners from other regions. This implies that Alsatians are extremely sensitive about their accent and suffer from a high degree of linguistic insecurity, which is perhaps not surprising given the negative perceptions of the Alsatian accent by the speakers from other regions. Overall, the speech of Alsace was the most negatively perceived of all four regions. The authors concluded that the accents were ranked according to their social associations rather than their actual phonological features.

Kuiper (2005) conducted a perceptual study in which he asked native French speakers from Paris and Provence to comment on twenty-four different French accents. They did not listen to recordings of speech from the various regions being studied, but merely completed the questionnaire based on their previous knowledge of regional accents. The informants were asked to rank a number of regional accents according to the criteria of pleasantness, correctness and difference from their own speech. Both the Paris and Provence informants ranked Alsace twenty-second out of twenty-four regions as regarded degree of difference from their own speech, with the only places which ranked lower than Alsace being Belgium and Switzerland, which are separate countries. Degree of difference was measured on a scale of one to four, with one being identical to the respondent's speech and four being incomprehensible. The average degree of difference ratings for Alsace were 3.09 for the Parisian and 2.78 for the Provence informants. A degree of difference score of approximately 3 was described in the questionnaire as 'si le français parlé dans cette région ne ressemble guère à celui que vous parlez' ('if the French in that region hardly resembles the French you speak at all'). This rating suggests that both the Paris and Provence respondents perceived the variety of French spoken in Alsace as extremely different from their own way of speaking. Alsace was again ranked twenty-second out of twenty-four regions by both sets of respondents with regard to pleasantness and only out-ranked by Belgium and Switzerland. Pleasantness was evaluated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being the least and 7 the most pleasant. The Paris and Provençal informants attributed average pleasantness ratings of 3.73 and 4.05 respectively to the Alsatian accent. A scale of 1 to 7 was also used to evaluate correctness, with 1 being the least and 7 the most correct. The Provençal respondents gave Alsace an average

correctness rating of 3.46, ranking it twenty-third out of twenty-four regions, with only Switzerland below it. The Parisian respondents allocated an even lower correctness of score of 3.56 to Alsace, placing it twenty-fourth (i.e. last) in terms of correctness. The informants evoked the 'foreign' sound of the accent and the influence of German on Alsatian Regional French in order to explain why they had consistently allocated such low rankings to Alsace.

The negative perceptions of the Alsatian accent both in and outside Alsace described in the empirical and perceptual studies reviewed above were reflected in the metalinguistic comments of the informants of the present study. In general, the participants perceived Alsations as having a strong accent which they frequently described as 'moche' (ugly) or 'rigolo' (funny). However, there were a few indications of covert prestige, with some younger informants stating that they were not ashamed of their regional accents and made no effort to conceal them, since they were proud to be Alsatian.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The different aspects of the sociolinguistic situation in Alsace discussed above highlight several key points which need to be taken into account when conducting a research project on the Regional French of Alsace such as the present study. The most salient of these points are the high level of speaker awareness of an 'Alsatian accent', the extremely strong stigmatisation to which this accent is subject (although it may carry some covert prestige within the region) and the consequent linguistic insecurity which is rife amongst the Alsatian population. These factors are partly due to the complex and traumatic nature of Alsace's history, which has seen it batted back and forth between France and Germany so many times that, no sooner had the inhabitants begun to adopt one official language than they were being ordered to abandon it and forced to learn another one.

This chapter concludes the review of the theoretical and social background material necessary to the preparation of this study, and the following chapter will move on to the practicalities of the research methodologies used for data collection in this research project.

## **5 Methodology**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the research methodologies of this project will be discussed. This will involve a detailed description of the processes of selection of the fieldwork sites, sampling, the data collection and the ethical considerations involved in these key aspects of this study.

### **5.2 Fieldwork Locations**

The fieldwork for this study was carried out over two periods (June-September 2011 and May-August 2012) at two research sites. Firstly, the main body of the fieldwork was conducted in the city of Strasbourg (including suburbs such as Illkirch and Schiltigheim which are not part of Strasbourg proper but are linked to it by the tram and bus routes and are part of what is known in French as the *agglomération* of Strasbourg, named the *Communauté Urbaine de Strasbourg* (CUS). These areas are culturally very much a part of the city and the majority of their occupants work and spend much of their leisure time in central Strasbourg, where they have friends and colleagues. The Strasbourg *agglomération* constituted the main research site for this study and data were collected from a total of 48 informants from this location.

Secondly, in order to cater for the possibility of significant differences between the degree of levelling in the speech of urban and rural Alsatians and to allow the present study to investigate such potential differences, a smaller sample from a rural environment was also studied. Data were collected from 16 informants from the rural location, the village of Helsheim (this is a fictional name for the village, used in order to safeguard the confidentiality of the informants who live there) in the area of Alsace north of the Forest of Hagenu, commonly referred to as the 'Outre-Fôret'. In order to ensure the comparability of the urban and rural samples, speakers from only 4 cells of the sampling grid were interviewed in the rural setting, namely 4 speakers of each gender from the oldest and youngest age groups, since these are the age groups in which levelling was supposed (according to the research hypothesis) to be least and most advanced respectively, and therefore in which maximal differentiation between the urban and rural settings was likely to occur. This decision was made because within the scope of a three-year doctoral research project, there

would not have been time to interview full samples in both the rural and urban locations (which would have resulted in a sample of 88 informants) and to thoroughly analyse all the resulting linguistic data.

The criteria for selecting the rural location to be studied were as follows. Firstly proximity to Strasbourg was considered (it should be as close to Strasbourg as possible in order to eliminate the possibility of differences between the two research sites being attributable to geographical distance or the research sites being in different substrate dialect areas (since the Germanic variety spoken in the north of Alsace differs considerably to its southern counterpart), without being so close to the city that it was de facto part of the city or *Communauté Urbaine*). Secondly, the size of the speech community was taken into account (it should be as small as possible in order to provide as great a contrast as possible with the urban area of Strasbourg). In the event, the village of Helsingheim was selected as the rural fieldwork site because, in line with the 'friend of a friend' sampling technique used for the urban sample (see section 5.3 below), the researcher had friends of a friend there who agreed that she could stay in their home for two weeks whilst conducting her fieldwork. This provided the opportunity for the researcher to obtain as much insight as possible into the social and linguistic dynamics of the village and to gain acceptance amongst the villagers as a guest of a local family. This was important because, as is clear from the words of the researcher's host in answer to her query about how best to contact local people, it was not always easy to find speakers willing to be interviewed: 'j'essayerai de leur expliquer avant, afin de les rassurer pour qu'ils acceptent quand tu les contacteras car quand l'alsacien ne connaît pas, il se méfiera toujours d'un inconnu. Il y a tellement de gens qui veulent vendre quelque chose que les portes se ferment rapidement' ('I will try to explain to them beforehand, to reassure them so that they will agree when you contact them because when Alsacians don't know someone, they always mistrust strangers. There are so many people trying to sell things that doors are quick to close').

The village had approximately 700 inhabitants and although the majority of them now work in industry or commerce rather than agriculture, most of the villagers originally came from farming families and had kept a few fields around the village where they grew fruit and vegetables. The village had kept its

traditional Alsatian houses, in which many of the families had lived for several generations, and had a relatively large number of cultural associations, including a traditional brass band and a group which dressed in Alsatian costumes and performed folk dances. Several elderly villagers wore the Alsatian costume every day. In the words of the researcher's host again: 'le folklore tient encore une bonne place dans le village et les gens tiennent à leurs traditions' ('folklore still has a place in the village and people are attached to their traditions'). Alsatian was regularly spoken by the villagers to one another, including the younger generation. The village therefore provided a contrast to the city of Strasbourg. Indeed, the Outre-Fôret region was selected for the rural fieldwork site because it had the reputation of being the area of Alsace in which the local dialect and traditions had been preserved to the greatest extent. This could lead to the hypothesis that this is the area of Alsace in which accent levelling is likely to be least advanced, since the Germanic substrate variety is frequently spoken and likely to influence the local variety of French, and since levelling has been associated with a lack of regional attachment (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999), whereas the feelings of regional attachment in Helsingør are obviously very strong.

Although it may seem simple to compare rural and urban speakers of Alsatian Regional French by selecting informants who live in urban and rural areas, the reality is rather different. Nowadays the boundaries between urban and rural society are becoming increasingly blurred, especially in France where it is common for young people to live and work or study in large cities during the week and return to their family homes in the countryside at weekends, and where people who live in small rural communities often work or go to high school in larger towns or cities to which they commute daily due to a lack of availability of educational resources and jobs in the service sector in small villages.

### **5.3 The Sample**

Several sampling methods have been used in previous sociolinguistic studies, the most common of which are random sampling and judgement (or quota) sampling. Random sampling involves randomly selecting informants from a list of the community under investigation such as a telephone directory or electoral register. Although random sampling has the advantage of providing a

statistically representative sample of the population, certain social groups may be left out if they do not have a landline telephone or are not registered to vote. Some of the individuals selected may be unavailable if they have died or moved house, or may refuse to participate (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 25). Random sampling was used by Labov (1972) in his study of New York City.

Judgement sampling (also called quota sampling), on the other hand, involves the researcher choosing informants according to specific social criteria such as age, occupation, gender and area of residence in order to constitute a sample of a given structure determined by the researcher. However, this sampling method can only be considered to be viable if the structure of the sampling frame is based on a valid theoretical framework (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 30). A variant of the judgement sampling method is the 'friend of a friend' or 'network' approach, which involves the researcher drawing on his or her pre-existing network of contacts in the community and then 'snowballing' by asking each informant to recommend other members of the community who might be willing to participate in the study. Obviously this technique works best in the case of ethnographic studies in which the researcher is a member of the speech community under study, but it can also be applied by approaching a member of the local community such as the mayor or a schoolteacher and asking him or her to provide an introduction to community members. Merely mentioning that the researcher and the informant have a mutual acquaintance may be sufficient to alleviate any suspicion of the researcher on the part of the informant, leading to a lower rate of refusal to participate and use of a less formal speech style, which is ideal for the many sociolinguistic studies in which the researcher aims to elicit an informal, vernacular style. However, some sociolinguists believe that it is important that the community member approached initially should not be an authority figure, since this may lead to greater formality and reluctance to discuss certain topics in the interview context. Milroy (1980) used the 'friend of a friend' technique and 'snowballing' approach in her study of working-class Belfast speakers with great success. This sampling method enabled her to carry out research in a troubled community in which people might not otherwise have agreed to participate in her study.

For the present study, a combination of the judgement sampling and 'friend of a friend' techniques was selected. Random sampling was rejected because a

statistically significant representative sample of the population of Alsace (which has over a million inhabitants) would have been too large for the scope of the present study and because of the possibility that some social groups might have been excluded from the sample due to their lack of landline telephone lines (which would tend to exclude younger people who rely on mobile telephones) or their lack of registration to vote (which would probably tend to exclude more working-class than middle-class speakers) or due to refusal to participate (indeed, previous research (Coveney 1996: 5; Blanc & Biggs 1971; Lennig 1978: 9-10) has shown that in France the rate of refusal to participate in studies of this type is relatively high compared with that of other countries such as the United Kingdom when informants are contacted by a stranger with whom they have no mutual acquaintances, and that refusal rates are higher amongst working-class than middle-class speakers). Judgement sampling was used in order to select the desired number of informants for each cell of the sampling grid (a minimum of 4 or 5 speakers per cell is recommended in order to ensure that the differences between cells that emerge are due to the informants' social attributes rather than idiosyncratic differences between individual speakers) (Milroy & Gordon 2003) as defined by age, gender, social class and urban or rural origin. The 'friend of a friend' approach was used to contact informants in order to reduce the risk of refusal to participate and to encourage an informal speaking style during the interviews. It was anticipated that this approach would be relatively easy to implement given the fact that the researcher had spent seven months living in Strasbourg in 2008 and 2009 and returned there for two weeks in order to carry out fieldwork for a pilot study in 2010, and therefore had an extensive ready-made network of contacts on which she could draw for the purposes of recruiting informants. In addition, each informant was asked to recommend other potential informants not previously known to the researcher at the time of the interviews. This sampling technique had proven to work well in the 2010 pilot study that the researcher conducted for her Master of Research dissertation (Pipe 2010).

The urban sample was differentiated according to age, gender and social class (as defined by manual or non-manual occupation). The speakers in the sample were all born in Alsace (preferably on the research site, or at least in the Bas-Rhin *département* which constitutes the northern half of Alsace) or had moved



there before their fifth birthday. Their native language was either French or Alsatian (French for the 18-30 urban group, Alsatian for almost all the others). The rural sample was not differentiated according to social class because this would have made the sample too large for the time constraints of the present study. It was also believed that, in the tight-knit social network of the village, where the majority of the inhabitants were employed in either agriculture or unskilled industrial jobs, there was very little division of the speech community into groups based on occupation or other markers of social status relevant in cities.

The sampling grid planned for use in Strasbourg is shown below.

Age	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC
18-30	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers
31-60	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers
61+	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers
Total	12 speakers	12 speakers	12 speakers	12 speakers

Urban total: 48 speakers

*Table 5.1 Sampling grid used in Strasbourg*

The sampling grid for the rural community is shown below.

Age	Male	Female
18-30	4 speakers	4 speakers
61+	4 speakers	4 speakers
Total	8 speakers	8 speakers

*Table 5.2 Sampling Grid for Rural Community*

Rural total: 16 speakers

Overall total: 64 speakers

In practice, the 'friend of a friend' sampling approach worked less well than expected in Strasbourg. Although this approach was extremely successful in Helsingborg, where all the villagers knew one another and a member of the researcher's host family accompanied her on her first visit to the homes of all

potential informants, and amongst the middle-class informants in Strasbourg, it was not successful in providing the required number of urban working-class informants. The social networks of middle-class and working-class speakers in Strasbourg appear to be relatively separate.

In addition, Strasbourg is a city which does not have a large-working class population and thrives on tourism, the University and the European institutions rather than local industries. Many working-class jobs are occupied by immigrants. The researcher found it much easier to meet working-class speakers in the city of Mulhouse (which has a great deal of industry, including car manufacturing) and in the small towns and villages of the *Outre-Fôret*, where a number of inhabitants worked in agriculture and the majority of others had jobs across the border in German confectionary and car factories. This may reflect a general class divide in France between rural and urban localities, with middle-class speakers tending to settle in cities, whereas working-class speakers are more likely to be found in villages.

The vast majority of the researcher's previous contacts were middle-class speakers and almost all the informants they recommended were also middle-class. The researcher therefore specifically asked her contacts whether they could recommend any working-class speakers ('de classe ouvrière/ des ouvriers'). It emerged that most speakers were confused about which jobs counted as working-class, and since it had been decided only to count manual occupations as working-class and not to include less prestigious but non-manual occupations such as shop assistant (*caissière*), several of the people recommended were not suitable. Most informants declared that they did not know any working-class people. This social separation seems to provide support for the division of speakers into classes based on whether their occupation was manual or non-manual, since these two groups appear to move in quite separate social circles. However, the term 'working class' did not seem very familiar to the informants, who rather than using the term 'classes ouvrières' (working class) preferred to use the description 'de milieu/d'origine modeste' (of modest origin/background). After some weeks of attempting to contact working-class informants and obtaining very few interviews, it was decided that an approach other than the 'friend of a friend' sampling technique was needed. Accordingly, the researcher wrote letters to a large number of

factories, companies which provided cleaning services, trades unions and retirement homes, explaining her research project and asking whether they might be able to put her in contact with people of Alsatian origin who would be willing to participate in the research project. No explicit mention was made of occupation or social class in these letters, but they were targeted at groups which were likely to be composed of a majority of working-class speakers. The researcher received relatively few responses to her letters: none from companies, one from a retirement home and several from trades unions. Once all these contacts had been followed up, it was found that the immense majority of those who volunteered were in fact middle-class speakers. After sending approximately 40 letters, the researcher had obtained interviews with only two informants who could be unequivocally classified as working class. Several informants could have been classified as working-class on the sole basis of their jobs, but their family background and level of education were much more typical of the middle class, so it was decided to exclude them from the working-class sample. By the end of the first fieldwork period (June to September 2011), less than half of the required sample of urban working-class informants had been obtained, whereas the rural and urban middle-class samples were complete. It was therefore deemed necessary to return to Strasbourg at a later date in order to complete the data collection process.

A further period of data collection was therefore undertaken in May to August 2012, and the same network sampling methods as described above for the first period of fieldwork were used, but working-class speakers were specifically targeted. Although this resulted in some further interviews with working-class informants, the desired sample was still not complete at the end of the second fieldwork period. This may be at least partly due to the fact that Strasbourg is a fairly wealthy city with little industry, so the population of manual workers is small (Howiller 2008: 23, 45) and Alsace's industries are concentrated in Mulhouse (Howiller 2008: 121). Interestingly, it proved much harder to recruit female working-class informants than male ones. Due to time constraints, it was decided that the data analysis would be carried out on the partial sample already obtained, with due circumspection as to the limited possibilities of generalising on the basis of results drawn from an incomplete sample. The final composition of the urban sample is shown below.

Age	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC
18-30	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers	1 speaker
31-60	4 speakers	4 speakers	4 speakers	0 speakers
61+	4 speakers	4 speakers	3 speakers	4 speakers
Total	12 speakers	12 speakers	11 speakers	5 speakers

Urban sample total = 40 speakers

*Table 5.3 Framework for Urban Sample*

## **5.4 Fieldwork Methods**

### **5.4.1 The Sociolinguistic Interviews**

The data collected for the present study consist of both one-to-one sociolinguistic interviews, and of interviews in pairs conducted by the researcher. The sociolinguistic interviews took the form of a relatively informal conversation, usually in the informant's home and occasionally at his or her workplace. In order to ensure the comparability of the linguistic data, the same topic of conversation was proposed for each interview, namely, Alsatian cultural and linguistic practices. This had the advantage of placing the interviewer in the position of a learner and the informant in the position of a teacher, which has been recommended as a technique for eliciting the vernacular by redressing the balance of power in interview situations. It also meant that the informants were willing to talk at length whilst the researcher listened, and that valuable data on language attitudes and perceptions of Alsatian Regional French could be obtained in the course of the interview. A list of the exact topics of conversation and approximate questions asked by the interviewer can be found in Appendix 1 below.

The researcher simply told the informants that she was studying the cultural and linguistic behaviour of Alsations today, without specifying the exact object of her dissertation, in order to minimise the effect of the Observer's Paradox, since when people know that their pronunciation is being monitored, they may change their pronunciation in order to produce forms which they think of as more 'correct' or

prestigious, or, conversely, produce the forms they imagine the researcher wants to hear, which in this case would be strongly marked Alsatian regional variants. In addition, the question of the pronunciation of French in Alsace is an extremely sensitive one and if the researcher had fully revealed the object of her research to her informants, the vast majority of them would almost certainly have refused to participate (with the exception of the youngest age group). Studies have shown a high degree of linguistic insecurity amongst Alsatians regarding their accent when speaking French (Paltridge & Giles 1984; Kuiper 2005). These studies have also revealed that the pronunciation of Alsatian Regional French is highly stigmatised throughout France. Numerous comments from informants during the interviews show a high level of consciousness of the 'accent alsacien' and many older speakers stated that they did not speak French well and even apologised for their accents. The pronunciation of French by Alsatians has subjected them to ridicule, scorn and accusations of betraying their country since the mid-nineteenth century (see Suiter 1920; D'Hauteville 1852; De Dietrich 1917).

As mentioned above, the shame Alsatians feel regarding their accent became especially pronounced during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, when speaking French with an Alsatian accent was associated with being German and therefore a Nazi sympathiser, leading to suspicion and stigmatization of the individuals concerned. Elderly Alsatians still feel that they are suspected of not being fully French and many informants had tales to tell of being labelled 'yayas' or 'boches' or travelling to the south of France and being told 'vous parlez bien français pour des Allemands' ('you speak French well for Germans'). Indeed, when former French president Nicholas Sarkozy visited Truchtersheim in Alsace on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2011 and declared during his speech that he was in Germany, he caused a great deal of public outrage in the region.

The sociolinguistic interviews conducted did not fully follow the Labovian model, since the interviewer did not attempt to elicit different speech styles by asking the informants to read a passage or a list of words. It was felt that, within the scope and time limits of the present study, there would not be sufficient time to examine in depth the style variable and that the spontaneous speech style would provide ample data for the analysis of the informants' use of linguistic variables according to their social characteristics.

The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder with a plug in microphone which was placed on a table facing the informant.

#### **5.4.2 The Regional Attachment Questionnaire**

At the end of the interviews, the informants were asked to fill in two questionnaires. One asked for demographic details such as their date of birth, place of origin, parents' place of origin and profession (this questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 2). The second questionnaire aimed to quantify the respondents' level of regional attachment and was adapted from Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) by kind permission of the authors. This questionnaire was made up of multiple choice questions regarding the informant's mobility, social contacts, desire to remain in Alsace or go elsewhere and linguistic attitude, and a score was assigned to each response. The score to be assigned to each response was removed from the version of the questionnaire completed by the informants in order to avoid this influencing their responses. An additional question not used by Armstrong and Unsworth (1999) was added regarding the informant's competence in the Alsatian language. This questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 3 and the results are analysed in Table 5.4, which shows the average regional attachment scores (from 0-15, 0 being the lowest, 15 the highest level of regional attachment) for each cell of the sampling grid.

Age & Gender	Urban Middle Class	Urban Working Class	Rural Sample
	Regional Attachment Score	Regional Attachment Score	Regional Attachment Score
Male 18-30	5.25	5	6.75
Male 31-60	5	6	N/A
Male 61+	5.5	7.5	8
Female 18-30	5.75	5	6.25
Female 31-60	5	N/A	N/A
Female 61 +	5.25	5	9
Average	5.29	5.7	6

*Table 5.4 Mean Regional Attachment Score by Social Status*

The average regional attachment score increased very slightly from the middle class (5.29) to the working class (5.7) to the rural (6) sample. The expected increase can be observed, but it is very slight. The average score for the 18-30 age group was 5.67, that of the 31-60 age group was 5.33 and that of the 61+ group was 6.71. The score for the older age group is higher than that of the middle and younger groups. This is in line with the behaviour of these informants in their use of the linguistic variables studied, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 8 below. The older rural speakers have a particularly high average rate of regional attachment (8.5). The average score for the male informants was 6.13, that of the female speakers 5.89. This difference reflects that found by Armstrong and Unsworth (1999), with the male informants having a higher score than the females, although the difference in this case is smaller than that found by Armstrong and Unsworth (1999).

#### **5.4.3 The Participant Observer Approach**

In addition to the sociolinguistic interviews, data were collected by means of an ethnographic, or participant observer approach (Johnstone 2000: 81-92). This involved the researcher entering the speech community and becoming a member of it, thereby gaining access to a wide range of different situations and speech styles, including the most informal, relaxed register labelled 'the vernacular', which has often been the desired object of sociolinguistic studies, since it is thought to be more regular and 'natural' than the speech produced in more formal speech events, in which the informant pays close attention to his or her speech and tries to 'correct' it. The researcher noted down observations of the speech heard in her day-to-day interactions with members of the speech communities and attempted to gain insight into the linguistic attitudes and behaviour of the community. This was facilitated by the fact that the researcher was in fact to some extent already a member of the local community in Strasbourg, where she previously lived for seven months whilst working as an English teaching assistant at the University. She had therefore already developed a network of contacts with whom she could spend extended periods of time without arousing suspicion or discomfort, in a variety of situations ranging from the formality of a church sermon or University lecture to the relaxed setting of the family at home or a dinner with close friends.

At the rural fieldwork site, the researcher stayed with a local family who introduced her personally to every informant at their initial meeting. During the initial meeting, a date was set for the interview and the researcher spent some time chatting with the informant in order to build trust and rapport. Initially, the researcher found that the older rural informants were not very talkative, speaking slowly, using a great deal of Alsatian, making it clear that they did not feel comfortable with using French and even on some occasions claiming not to be able to speak French at all. However, as the informants got to know the researcher and became interested in communicating with her, they became less self-conscious and their French became more and more fluent. The researcher felt that a turning point in her relationship with the villagers came when she attended a parish celebration (*fête paroissiale*) involving a meal, traditional music, Alsatian comedy and games, at which all the older inhabitants of the village were present. After that, whenever she met an elderly person in the village, they told her that they recognised her from the parish celebration and were much happier to chat with her. The researcher also built a rapport with the older informants by reassuring them that French was not her native language and that she would not criticise their level of French at all, and that she attended a Protestant church (the village was of Protestant tradition and in Alsace, there has been bitter conflict between Catholics and Protestants and even today for elderly people, being Catholic or Protestant constitutes an important part of one's identity).

The reason for using multiple data collection methods is that complementary methods have different advantages and disadvantages which may balance each other out. For example, whilst individual sociolinguistic interviews have the advantage of providing a large amount of good quality data from one speaker, the Observer's Paradox (the fact that sociolinguists aim to observe the way people speak when they are not being observed, Labov 1972) means that the participants in individual interviews may be very conscious of the fact that their speech is being observed and recorded, and modify it accordingly, especially by introducing more formal variants or variants that they perceive to be more 'correct' than those which they habitually use.

Interviews in pairs were therefore carried out where possible in order to elicit a speech style in which informants spoke in a less self-conscious, formal way, since it has been demonstrated that in the situation of a group recording session, the



group dynamics and norms which prevail amongst group members in their daily lives will overrule the effect of being recorded. It is therefore important that the group members be well acquainted with one another before the recording session. However, group recording sessions do have their disadvantages. In the course of group interviews, less data is collected for each speaker compared with the individual interview method. In a pair, one informant may dominate the conversation whilst the other remains largely silent. Indeed, this proved to be the case in the present study for some groups of informants. The smaller quantity of data collected when compared with individual interviews can be addressed by conducting lengthy group sessions of up to two hours. However, it may be difficult to persuade informants to give up so much of their time for the purposes of the interview. Initially, the researcher planned to record some conversations between pairs of informants in her absence. However, she quickly realised that, with the exception of some members of the youngest age group, this method would not produce the required data, since the most relaxed speech of the majority of the informants, in the absence of a non-Alsatian, would automatically be in Alsatian rather than in French. Indeed, during some of the interviews conducted in pairs, especially with the older informants, there was a great deal of communication in Alsatian and the researcher's intervention was needed to bring about a switch back to French. The researcher therefore decided to be present whenever a recording was being made.

Another problem inherent in the interview method, whether it involves individuals or pairs, is that some members of the speech community under investigation may refuse to participate in the interviews. If those who refuse to participate are members of a particular social group, it may be difficult to obtain a representative sample of the population. The refusal rate for participation in this type of study seems to be relatively high in France. Alsations in particular are sensitive to questions and comments regarding their linguistic behaviour and have been shown to have a high degree of linguistic insecurity. In the event, the researcher met with very few refusals to participate, which was probably due to the 'friend of a friend' sampling method used, which meant that the majority of informants were either already known to the researcher or personally introduced to her by a mutual friend or acquaintance. The few refusals that the researcher did have came from working-class speakers, which is consistent with a general trend in sociolinguistic

studies for a much higher refusal rate from working-class than from middle-class speakers.

The participant observation method has the advantage of arousing less suspicion and hostility on the part of the informant. The researcher was a recognised member of the community and in some cases a long-term friend or acquaintance of the informant. If a meeting with an informant does not involve recording, he or she may feel more relaxed and secure than in a recorded interview, and therefore be more talkative and use a less formal style than would be the case in an interview context. This method provides 'authentic' data since the informants are observed going about their business in the 'natural' situations of their daily lives, whereas it has often been objected that the sociolinguistic interview creates an 'artificially constructed' speech event in which informants cannot be expected to produce completely 'natural' speech. Participant observation also means that the fieldworker has the opportunity to hear metalinguistic comments made by the informants in the course of their daily lives which involve opinions or anecdotes they may not have been willing to share in an interview situation. However, there are some drawbacks to the participant observer fieldwork method. The data obtained for different participants may not be strictly comparable, since they involve different types of speech event and different topics of conversation. Participant observation, particularly if recordings are not made, does not lend itself to quantitative data analysis (for which data obtained from sociolinguistic interviews with individuals or pairs is ideal). However, it can provide valuable data for qualitative analysis which can supplement the quantitative analysis of speech data obtained from interviews. Some of the data obtained from the participant observation part of the fieldwork will be analysed in Section 6.6 below.

### **5.5 Ethical Considerations**

When conducting sociolinguistic fieldwork, it is important to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of the informants as far as possible and to ensure that they consent to data regarding them being collected and used for the purposes of the research project. In order to fulfil these conditions in the present study, the following steps were taken. Firstly, the informants were aware that recordings were being made during the interviews, since the digital voice recorder and microphone were always placed on a table in full view of the informant. Although some sociolinguists have used surreptitious recording in order to obtain

data uncontaminated by the effects of the Observer's Paradox, this is generally considered to be unethical (Labov 1972) and may not produce good quality recordings (Milroy & Gordon 2003). Furthermore, every informant was asked to sign a consent form (reproduced in Appendix 4), which the researcher also signed. This form stated that the informant agreed that the researcher could use the data he or she had provided for the purposes of her PhD thesis and other academic research projects, and protected the informant by stipulating that the informant could withdraw from the project at any time and that the researcher would not mention the informant's name, contact details or any information by which he or she could be identified in this thesis or any other publication. The informants were allocated pseudonyms based on their social attributes, for example OWM1 for an older working class male. The consent form was drawn up according to the requirements of the research ethics committee of the College of Humanities at the University of Exeter and submitted by the researcher to this committee for approval. The approval of the ethics committee was granted and their certificate of approval can be found in Appendix 5. As stated above, the informants will remain completely anonymous throughout this thesis. When it is necessary to refer to an individual informant, a pseudonym will be used. A fictional name has also been invented for the rural fieldwork site, since it has a small number of inhabitants and if the real name of the village had been given, it might have been possible to establish the identities of some informants.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Having examined in detail the theoretical and methodological background of the variationist sociolinguistic framework, the selection of the fieldwork sites, the sampling process, data collection methods and ethical considerations, a few key points stood out. These were the importance of the comparison of rural and urban speech communities in shedding light on the mechanism of accent levelling in Alsace, the difficulty of recruiting working class informants in Strasbourg by means of a network sampling approach, the advantages of combining sociolinguistic interviews, some degree of participant observation and written questionnaires, and the necessity for confidentiality and anonymity regarding the data collected.

Following this discussion of the research methods employed, we will now turn our attention to the analysis of the linguistic and qualitative data collected in the ways described above.

## **6 The (h) variable**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The concept of the (socio) linguistic variable was pioneered by Labov (1966) and can be defined as a set of semantically equivalent variants which may have social significance (Fasold 1990). It allows researchers to make quantitative statements about language use. Gumperz (1992: vii) states that sociolinguistic variables are themselves constitutive of social reality and can be treated as part of a more general class of indexical signs which guide and channel the interpretation of intent. Labov notes that, in order for a linguistic variable to usefully serve as a focus for the study of a speech community, it must have three characteristics: it must occur frequently in spontaneous speech, it should be structural (integrated into a larger system of functioning units), and its distribution should be socially stratified (Labov 1972: 8). The linguistic variables discussed below are in keeping with these criteria. Labov (1972: 71) adds that defining a linguistic variable involves stating all the linguistic contexts in which it occurs, defining its phonetic variants and setting up a quantitative index for the measurement of values of the variable. These three aspects of the definition of a variable will be discussed in relation to each of the linguistic variables investigated in this study.

The linguistic variables on which this study focuses are (h) and word-final consonant devoicing. In this section of the thesis, the (h) variable will be defined, the researcher's reasons for choosing it explained and a review of recent studies involving the variable in question presented, before the results of this study are displayed and discussed with regard to the interactions between this linguistic variable and the social variables of age, gender, urban or rural origin and regional attachment. A conclusion summarising the sociolinguistic patterns found in the results of the data analysis will then be drawn.

### **6.2 Literature Review of Studies of Aspirate h in French**

The (h) variable involves the contexts which are referred to in French as *h aspiré* (aspirate h). This context occurs word-initially in a particular lexical set of

words which begin with an orthographic <h> and block elision, liaison, resyllabification to the right (*enchaînement*, as in *les habits* [le.za.bi]) and other such connected speech processes which normally occur in vowel-initial words. Most words which contain this aspirate h are of Germanic origin and are thought to have originally been pronounced with the voiceless glottal fricative [h], although the initial orthographic <h> is no longer pronounced as [h] in Standard French or other supralocal varieties of French. Aspirate h has been described as a ‘zero phoneme’ (Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 169), although this representation is not strictly accurate, since although the [h] sound is no longer pronounced in supralocal French and in some cases this segment appears simply to have been deleted, for some speakers it is replaced by a pause, a glottal stop, insertion of a latent or epenthetic schwa, a shift in tonic stress patterns, insertion of a rhythmic group boundary or a ‘creaky voice’ effect caused by glottal constriction (Green & Hintze 2004: 243, 251; Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 167; Boersma 2007: 1990, 1993). There is much debate amongst linguists regarding the best term to use to describe aspirate h, since the label ‘h’ seems to be an obsolete and misleading representation of the pronunciation of the majority of French people with respect to this unit, although it is still related to orthographic <h> (although not always - some words which do not start with an orthographic <h> nevertheless display ‘aspirate h behaviour’ with regard to connected speech process such as liaison and elision. Two very frequently-occurring examples of such words are the numerals *un* and *onze*). Various labels have been suggested, including a ‘zero consonant’ or ‘zero phoneme’ (Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 169; Boersma 2007: 1991), or an underlying fricative consonant such as [h] or [x], an underlying glottal stop, an underlying syllable boundary, a creaking plosive (represented by a glottal stop with a tilde underneath) or a consonant with no features (Boersma 2007: 1991; Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 169).

Although the [h] sound appears to have been lost from Standard French as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Southworth 1970: 65; Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 164), it persists in a number of Regional French varieties. Armstrong & Pooley (2010: 165) mention that [h] is present in the Regional French varieties of the west of France, Lorraine and Alsace. Green & Hintze (2004: 262) describe the [h] realisation as ‘un trait stigmatisé de certain dialects ou accents régionaux’ (‘a

stigmatised feature of some dialects or regional accents’) and Fouché (1957: 252) states that [h] can be found in the varieties of French spoken in Gascony, Saintonge, Brittany, Lorraine and French-speaking Belgium. Bennett (1988: 2) states that aspirate h is phonemic in French-speaking Belgium and in many regions of France, including Lorraine, Alsace, Normandy, Brittany and Gascony. Maine-Orléans, Poitou, Brittany, Lorraine and Alsace are mentioned by Walter (1982) and Carton et al. (1983) as [h]-realising areas. Coveney (2001: 54) cites Alsace, Lorraine and Quebec as French-speaking places where the [h] realisation of aspirate h can be heard, and mentions the fact that [h] usually occurs in rural varieties of French. Moreover, an underlying [h] appears, to some extent at least, to remain in the minds of speakers of standardised French, since they occasionally pronounce [h] in a few aspirate h exclamations such as *hein* or *hop* (Fouché 1957: 252; Walker 2004: 4). Fouché (1957: 252) also states that aspirate h ‘se prononce avec un souffle’ (‘pronounced with exhalation’), which may or may not be a description of the [h] variant, in the case of expression of violent feelings, for example in ‘je te hais!’ or ‘c’est une honte!’, as well as being used for emphasis and expressivity. Green and Hintze (2004: 247) describe the [h] realisation as ‘rarissime et désuète’ (‘very rare and obsolete’). Léon (1983: 22) includes it in his list of ‘traits des systèmes jugés comme régionaux et exclus du français standardisé’ (‘features considered to be regional and excluded from Standardised French’).

The [h] realisation now appears to be recessive and to be undergoing a process of elimination due to levelling in the Regional French of the Basque Country, as demonstrated by Tarrier (2010: 75) and Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013). These analyses of the PFC data collected in the small town of St Jean Pied de Port in the Basque Country show a clear disappearance of [h] in apparent time. Tarrier (2010: 75) gives the example of the phrase ‘le hasard’ in the PFC reading passage as realised by three women who constitute three generations of the same family. The grandmother, aged 92, pronounced [lə hazar], her daughter, aged 65 [lə azax] and her granddaughter, aged 38 [lə azax]. Tarrier states that the the [h] realisation is only ever used by the grandmother throughout the recorded data for the three women. Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013) stress the fact that the 92-year-old woman discussed by Tarrier

(2010: 75) is in fact the only informant of the twelve in the St Jean Pied de Port sample who uses [h]. This leads us to suppose that [h] is now only a vestigial variant in this speech community and will soon disappear completely. Durand, Eychenne and Lyche (2013) also mention the PFC fieldwork in Normandy, a region which is well-known for using [h] in words like *hasard* and *honte*, but where the PFC data show that only NORMS now use this variant. These results support the research hypothesis of the present study that the rates of use of [h] will be found to be decreasing in apparent time due to levelling in Alsace.

Aspirate h must be distinguished from French 'h muet' (silent h) which is the orthographic <h> present in words of Latin origin and which does not impede liaison, elision or resyllabification to the right (*enchaînement*, for example in *les hommes* [le.zɔm]). It is not realised as a glottal fricative, pause, glottal stop or schwa in any variety of French. This h muet has never been pronounced in French, since the [h] sound was lost from Vulgar Latin before it developed into Gallo-Romance and then the French language (Coveney 2001: 54; Southworth 1970: 64).

The majority of aspirate h words in French are of Germanic origin, and the Germanic substrate and adstrate present in Alsace may have contributed to the maintenance of [h] in the region. [h] could be described as an archaism, especially given that it is maintained in several peripheral regions of France (see above) and not in the central regions close to Paris, which is a characteristic of vestigial variants (Chambers & Trudgill 1980), but since the [h] realisation was excluded from Standard French so long ago (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, according to Southworth (1970: 65) and Gabriel and Meisenburg (2009: 164)), it is unlikely that it would have been maintained in Alsatian Regional French without the supporting substrate and adstrate influence (although some archaisms have been maintained for centuries in Canadian French, for example (Pöll 2001: 122)). Furthermore, at the time when [h] was still pronounced in Standard French, knowledge and use of French were extremely rare in Alsace, and therefore it is probable that the use of [h] in Alsatian Regional French is a regional substrate feature (as stated by Coveney 2001: 54) rather than an archaism that has survived from 15<sup>th</sup> century Standard French. The fact that using the [h] variant allows speakers to clearly differentiate minimal pairs such



as *haut-eau*, *aine-haine*, or *les héros-les zéros* may have contributed to the maintenance of [h] in Alsace, as may a desire to avoid hiatus and to maintain the CV syllable structure toward which French has a strong tendency (Coveney 2004 mentions that some linguists are of the opinion that spoken French has an inherent ‘peur du hiatus’).

### **6.3 Reasons for which the (h) variable was chosen for analysis in this study**

The Alsatian Regional French realisation of the (h) variable as [h] is attested widely in the literature (Carton et al. 1983; Philipp 1965; Armstrong & Pooley 2010: 165; Bennett 1988: 2; Walter 1982; Weiss 2004). However, it is not always specified whether the [h] realisation involves only aspirate h or all orthographic <h>, including *h muet*. The linguistic and sociolinguistic constraints on the use of the [h] variant are not specified, which is not surprising since previous research on the phonology of Alsatian Regional French has contented itself with merely tabulating features which occur in Alsace, and has a dialectological rather than a sociolinguistic focus. It is usually based on a very small number of speakers rather than a representative sample of the population. Although a few studies have been carried out regarding the realisation of aspirate h in Standard French (e.g. Green & Hintze 2004; Moisset 1996; Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009; Boersma 2007), very few quantitative sociolinguistic studies of the regional realisation of [h] have been carried out on the French of Metropolitan France to the author’s knowledge. This study will therefore be one of the first to explore the sociolinguistic significance of the (h) variable with regard to phonological levelling in France. Despite the relative paucity of studies on aspirate h in French (Walker (2004: 9) observes that ‘our knowledge of aspiration in French remains highly fragmentary, based on largely haphazard and unsystematic observations’), it seems that (h) may well have sociolinguistic significance, both in Alsace and elsewhere in France. Green and Hintze (2004: 262) put forward the hypothesis that ‘le h aspiré est un phénomène sociolinguistique dont la saillance va bien au delà de ce à quoi l’on pourrait s’attendre au vu de sa fréquence globale’ (‘aspirate h is a sociolinguistic phenomenon whose salience is much greater than we might expect given its overall frequency’) and speak of ‘le rôle évident du h-aspiré

comme indicateur sociolinguistique' ('the obvious role of aspirate h as a sociolinguistic marker') (Green & Hintze 2004: 241). In Alsace, the (h) variable is above the level of conscious awareness, at least for younger speakers (as evidenced by their comments on it during the interviews and other metalinguistic conversations outside the formal interviews in the present study), and is therefore likely to be stigmatised. Moreover, great interspeaker variability has been noted in the realisation of aspirate h in Standard French (Green & Hintze 2004: 257), but to the author's knowledge, very few attempts have been made to ascertain the structure of this variability according to the sociolinguistic characteristics of speakers or of the linguistic environments in which aspirate h occurs (Green & Hintze 2004: 241).

The researcher's impressionistic observations and ethnographic qualitative analysis of the (h) variable revealed a correlation between speaker's age and use of (h); the older the speaker, the more frequently he or she used the [h] variant. It therefore seems likely that use of [h] is decreasing, perhaps as a result of levelling. The researcher therefore decided to investigate whether this tendency would be borne out through quantitative analysis of the interview data.

#### **6.4 Hypotheses**

Following the general research hypothesis formulated in Chapter 1 above in line with the results of previous variationist studies of phonological levelling in French, it is predicted that young, middle-class females will be found to be leading a change away from the stigmatised, regional [h] variant towards the prestigious, supraregional zero variant, since speakers with these social characteristics have generally been found to be at the forefront of linguistic change, especially when it is in the direction of the standard or supralocal variety, as is the case for the (h) variable. The hypothesis is that males will be found to use [h] more frequently than females, working-class more frequently than middle-class and older more frequently than younger speakers.

## **6.5 Methodological Considerations**

In the present study, two variants of the (h) variable will be distinguished: the supralocal variant, consisting of non-pronunciation of [h], whether this is realised as a silent or creaky pause, glottal stop or schwa insertion, or simply as a blocking of liaison and elision, and the Alsatian regional variant, the voiceless glottal fricative [h]. Although intermediate variants between a simple blocking of connected speech processes and a fully-pronounced [h] may exist (since glottal friction can exist to a greater or lesser degree), a binary distinction for this variable was retained here, for several reasons. The researcher relied on auditory analysis in order to distinguish the different variants and it would have been extremely difficult to ascertain the exact degree of glottal friction present and observe very subtle variations in the articulation of this sound with any degree of accuracy without resorting to instrumental analysis. Moreover, if the researcher, a linguist, could not perceive such subtle gradations, it is unlikely that they are perceived and carry sociolinguistic significance for ordinary speakers of Alsatian Regional French. Any cut-off point in the degree of glottal friction produced along a continuum would in any case have been arbitrary and therefore perhaps lacking in sociolinguistic significance. It was felt that it was the binary distinction between clearly regional, non-standard, stigmatised [h] and supralocal standard lack of [h] that was significant for the purposes of this study (namely, ascertaining the degree to which phonological levelling is occurring in the Regional French of Alsace), rather than a detailed phonetic analysis.

Three occurrences of <huit> realised as [vuit] occurred in the corpus and were all emitted by older working-class speakers. The realisation of aspirate h as [v] was counted with [h] as a regional variant, since it is not part of Standard French phonology and appears to be used only by the urban informants whose speech was most likely to contain non-standard variants, namely, the older working class group. The researcher was not able to find any attestations of aspirate h realised as [v] in previous studies of the variable, so it is unclear whether or not this is an Alsatian regional feature. It could perhaps be likened to the pronunciation of <oui> as [vwi] sometimes used by young French speakers in a humorous way. The frequencies of realisations such as schwa insertions,

glottal stops and a small degree of glottal friction (the ‘creaky voice’ effect) were not analysed, partly because these realisations are in any case part of the standardised, supralocal variety of French and therefore their occurrence would not have implications for the analysis of the regional marking of the informants’ phonology, partly due to time constraints, partly because it would have been difficult in some cases to ascertain whether or not a glottal stop was produced without resorting to instrumental analysis and partly because, again, it was the binary standard vs regional non-standard distinction which was felt to be of significance here, rather than the finer acoustic details of the standard realisation, which have in any case already been studied by a number of linguists (Green & Hintze 2004; Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009; Boersma 2007). Although the Standard French realisation of aspirate h is not always a phonetic zero, the symbol  $\emptyset$  was used to represent this variant, namely the lack of [h] pronunciation, for convenience, since it was necessary to select a symbol to represent the Standard French variant and this would in any case have been an arbitrary choice.

Although at first sight it might seem straightforward to determine which sections of the interviews were tokens of the (h) variable, this was not always the case, for a variety of reasons. Although the words of French origin which start with an aspirate h are mostly a clear-cut lexical set (several linguists have made lists of aspirate h words, for example Walker 2002; Fouché 1957 and dictionaries often provide a guide to whether or not a given word beginning with an orthographic <h> has an aspirate pronunciation) and in any case their possession or otherwise of an aspirate h can be determined by checking whether there is elision in the preceding singular definite article or liaison with a preceding masculine indefinite or plural definite article, there are a few words for which there is fluctuation in their aspirate h status (alternation with *h muet*), sometimes depending on the preceding context, such as *hier* (*de hier* or *d’hier*) (Southworth 1970: 63, 68). For some proper names which occurred in the interviews, there is uncertainty as to whether they belong to the *h aspiré* or *h muet* word class, such as *Henri* (Fouché 1957: 260). Some words which canonically have an aspirate h in Standard French are known to be used as *h muet* words by certain speakers, and it seems that some lexemes are undergoing, or have undergone, a transition from the *h aspiré* word class to the *h muet* one (Walker 2002: 6, 9;

Green & Hintze 2004: 13), which may possibly in the long term lead to the disappearance of the aspirate h word class. An example of a word which appears to be undergoing such a transition is *les haricots* ('beans') (which speakers may realise as [le.za.Ri.ko] or as [le.a.Ri.ko]). In the interviews, there were two tokens of such reanalysis of aspirate h words (*les haricots* [le.za.Ri.ko] and *les Hollandais* [le.zo.lã.dɛ]), so evidence for this type of transition is scarce in the sample. These items were counted as supralocal realisations of the (h) variable, since this reanalysis of aspirate h words is a procedure which is taking place throughout France, rather than being specific to the Alsace region. Words for which there was fluctuation of their aspirate status were counted as aspirate when liaison and elision were blocked preceding them, and as *h muet* when liaison and elision took place before these words. There were very few such tokens in the corpus, so they are extremely unlikely to have skewed the overall results of the analysis.

In addition to the 'franco-French' lexemes containing aspirate h, there were local French words borrowed from Alsatian (such as *le Hanstrapp* (*le père fouettard* in Standard French)), local place names beginning with an orthographic <h>, which are common in Alsace, such as *Haguenau* (and including the name of the rural fieldwork site, which meant that occurrences of this word were relatively frequent in the rural corpus), and local place names containing the suffix <-heim> (such as *Lingolsheim*, *Hoenheim*, *Schiltigheim*, etc.), which are common in Alsace and therefore occur relatively frequently in the corpus. Since liaison and elision are blocked before these words when they start with <h>, and they show variability, sometimes giving a Standard French realisation (i.e absence of [h]) and sometimes the local [h] variant, with this variability appearing to follow the same sociolinguistic patterns as the aspirate h tokens from French words in the corpus, they were counted as tokens of aspirate h. Moreover, Fouché (1957: 262, 264) states that Germanic loan-words in French beginning with orthographic <h> almost always belong to the aspirate h word class. In the case of the <-heim> suffix, although it is not word-initial, it also shows variability in its realisation between a Standard French type variant and the local [h] variant, which seems to follow the same sociolinguistic patterns as the aspirate h tokens in the rest of the corpus, and therefore <-heim> words were included in the analysis. Vajta (2004: 317) examined the way Alsatians

pronounced local place names and found that there was a correlation between realisation of (h) in these toponyms and age, with older speakers using a significantly higher proportion of [h] than their younger counterparts. However, although Alsatian loan-words in French and toponyms were taken into account in the analysis, tokens of (h) when the informant was speaking in Alsatian were not coded for, since they were invariably realised as [h] and in any case, it is exclusively the French language, and not Alsatian which is the object of study here. Occasionally it was not easy to tell which language was being used for a particular token, since the languages have borrowed lexically from one another to a great extent, and some informants (particularly in the oldest age group) switched quite frequently between French and Alsatian. The main difficulty here involved the exclamation *hop-là*, which occurs quite often in both the local Germanic variety and Alsatian Regional French, and may even be realised with [h] by speakers of supralocal French (Fouché 1957: 252; Walker 2002: 4). Tokens which involved this linguistic ambiguity were excluded from the analysis and in any case constituted only a very small number of occurrences.

In this study, only aspirate h contexts were chosen for analysis, since impressionistic and qualitative ethnographic analysis showed that these were the only linguistic contexts in which the [h] sound was pronounced. The [h] realisation never occurred in *h muet* words.

In addition to the difficulties in determining exactly which tokens of aspirate h should be included in the analysis, the study of the (h) variable suffered from the fact that aspirate h occurs relatively infrequently in spontaneous speech (Gabriel & Meisenburg 2009: 166). Green and Hintze (2004: 3) found that in their corpus, a token of (h) occurred on average approximately once every eleven minutes in spontaneous speech (whereas a liaison occurred about once every seven seconds). The frequency of tokens of (h) in the present corpus is slightly higher than that of Green and Hintze's study, partly due to the large number of Alsatian toponyms and Germanic loan-words containing aspirate h used in Alsatian Regional French, and partly due to the relatively frequent occurrence of the words *Hitler* and *hitlerien(ne)* when the informants were speaking about the history of Alsace, and of the name of the Alsatian department *le Haut-Rhin* and its derivative adjective, *haut-rhinois(e)*. Although

there were no informants for whom no token of (h) was elicited, some speakers produced more tokens than others, and the results of the analysis of this variable should therefore be treated with caution, since the number of tokens of (h) was very low for some speakers (the lowest number of tokens for an individual speaker was 4).

## **6.6 The Results: Qualitative Data**

These data were collected by means of an ethnographic, or participant observer approach. The researcher lived in Strasbourg for three months and at the rural fieldwork site for two weeks and kept a journal of the linguistic behaviour and metalinguistic comments of the Alsatian people she encountered. Every time she heard an occurrence of the [h] variant, the researcher made a note of the person who had produced this token, the social context and the word in which it was produced, and of the preceding linguistic context, as soon as possible after the token was produced. The researcher only made notes on the production of [h], rather than of all occurrences of the (h) variable, because a great many tokens of (h) occurred during the fieldwork, of which the majority were realised as a zero variant. [h] was the rarer variant, as well as being the regionally marked one, and therefore it was more practical to note down its occurrences rather than those of the unmarked zero realisation. In Table 6.1, only occurrences of [h] in casual speech (usually in the home, in conversations between friends or family members) outside the formal interviews are given, since the tokens of (h) that occurred in the interviews will be analysed quantitatively. Table 6.1 presents a summary of the tokens of [h] heard and noted down by the researcher outside the interview context during the first week of the fieldwork period.

Word	Preceding Linguistic Context	Speaker's Social Characteristics	Ability to speak Alsatian
En haut [ã ho]	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Young, female, MC	Passive (understands but does not speak)
Haut [ho]	?	Middle age group, female, MC	unknown
Haut (many tokens) [ho]	?	Older, male, MC	fluent
La haine [la hɛn]	Vowel [a]	Middle age group, male MC	fluent
En haut [ã ho]	Nasal vowel [ã]	Older, female, MC	fluent
Le houblon [lə hublɔ̃]	Vowel [ə]	Older, female, MC	fluent
Le haut [lə ho]	Vowel [ə]	Older, female, MC	fluent
Là-haut [la ho]	Vowel [a]	Older, female, MC	fluent
Le hangard [lə hãgaR]	Vowel [ə]	Older, female, MC	fluent
En haut [ã ho]	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Older, male, MC	fluent
Haguenau [hagəno]	?	Older, male, MC	fluent
En haut [ã ho]	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Young, male, unknown	unknown
Haut [ho]	?	Middle age group, female, MC	unknown
Haut [ho]	?	Young (child), unknown	unknown
Cette haine [set hɛn]	Consonant [t]	Middle age group, female, MC	fluent
En haut (many tokens, categorical use) [ã ho]	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Older, female, MC	fluent



Professeur Hamm [pRɔfɛsœR ham]	Consonant [R]	Older, female, MC	fluent
En haut [ã ho] (many tokens, not categorical)	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Middle age group, female, MC, rural	fluent
En haut [ã ho] (many tokens, not categorical)	Nasal Vowel [ã]	Young (child), female, rural	Speaks very little Alsatian

*Table 6.1 Words in which [h] occurred, their linguistic environment, social characteristics and ability to speak Alsatian of the speakers who produced them*

When we look at Table 6.1, it immediately becomes apparent that the majority of occurrences of [h] (10/19) were produced by informants in the older age group, followed by the middle age group (5/19), with the smallest number of occurrences (4/19) being produced by the youngest age group. This is unsurprising given that [h] is a stigmatised, regionally marked feature and seems to confirm the hypothesis that phonological levelling is taking place in the Regional French of Alsace and being led by young speakers. Almost all the tokens (13/19) are produced by fluent speakers of Alsatian, which suggests that [h] in Alsatian Regional French is a feature originating in the influence of the Germanic substrate variety, Alsatian. However, caution is necessary when interpreting this result, since there is a link between age and ability to speak Alsatian, with fluency in Alsatian increasing with age, and therefore the fact that most tokens are produced by fluent Alsatian speakers may simply reflect the fact that it is the elderly who produce the highest number of occurrences of [h] due to the gradual loss of this variant over time. A surprising gender pattern emerges from the results of the qualitative analysis, with 13/19 tokens being produced by females. As regards the preceding linguistic context, the majority of occurrences of [h] occur after a vowel, but this may be simply due to the fact that a high percentage of tokens of (h) occur post-vocally, since aspirate h is word-initial and often preceded by the definite articles *le, la, les*, the partitive article *des* or the prepositions *de* and *à*. A disproportionate number of occurrences of [h] appear to occur in the word *haut*, and indeed Carton et al. (1983) use the phrase *en haut* (in which a number of the tokens of [h]

mentioned in Table 6.1 appear) as an example of a context in which the [h] variant may occur. However, the relatively high proportion of [h] realisations which occur in the word *haut* may be due to the fact that it is the most frequently-occurring aspirate h word in the French language (Green & Hintze 2004) and therefore there are more occurrences of this word overall than of other lexemes containing aspirate h. It is necessary to proceed with caution when interpreting the results of the qualitative analysis, since they represent a very small number of tokens of the (h) variable, and it would be unwise to generalise from these results. However, they do provide a possible point of comparison for the quantitative data, to which we will now turn our attention.

### **6.7 Quantitative Analysis of the Interview Data: Linguistic Factors**

In this section, the tokens of the two variants of (h) produced in the sociolinguistic interviews will be counted and analysed with reference to their linguistic features (stressed or unstressed syllable, preceding linguistic context, lexeme in which they occur).

Overall, 932 tokens of (h) were produced throughout the corpus, of which 415 (44.53%) were realised as [h] and 517 (55.47%) as a supralocal zero variant. The Standard French variant is used more frequently than the Alsatian regional variant, with a difference of 10.94%, or 102 tokens, between the two. These results indicate that the [h] variant is still widely used in Alsace, but that it is less frequent than the Standard French variant, which may be supplanting it. We will now discuss the influence of linguistic factors on the realisation of (h), namely, the preceding linguistic environment, tonic stress and whether a token of (h) occurs in a supralocal French word, or in an Alsatian toponym or Regional French loan-word.

### 6.7.1 Preceding linguistic environment

Post-Vocalic			Post-Consonantal			Post-Pausal			All contexts		
N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]
582	242	41.58	231	98	42.42	119	75	63.03	932	415	44.53

Table 6.2 Realisation of (h) according to preceding linguistic environment

From Table 6.2, it can be seen that the majority of tokens of (h) (582/932 or 62.45%) occur in post-vocalic environments, which is unsurprising given that almost all the tokens of (h) were word-initial (with the exception of the *-heim* suffix), and often nouns (see Green & Hintze 2004), and therefore frequently preceded by the definite articles *le, la, les*, the partitive article *des* or the prepositions *à, en* or *de* (*à* was very frequent before place names). Table 6.2 shows that, whilst the percentages of tokens of the (h) variable realised as [h] in post-vocalic and post-consonantal environments (41.58% and 42.42% respectively) are relatively close to one another and to the percentage of tokens realised as [h] across all linguistic contexts (44.53%), the percentage of tokens realised as [h] following a pause is significantly higher ( $p=0.000$ )<sup>2</sup> at 63.03%. At first sight, there appears to be no obvious reason as to why this should be so. It is possible that speakers have an aversion to beginning a phrase or a rhythmic group with a vowel, and use [h] in order to maintain the CV syllable structure which is prevalent in French. The post-pausal position may be linked to an emphatic use of [h] in exclamations such as *hop!* (see Fouché 1957: 252), which is present even in supraregional French. A sociolinguistic explanation is also possible. Since the post-pausal environment is the one in which [h] has the greatest auditory salience, it may be that speakers desirous of using [h] as a symbol of their regional identity favour the linguistic environment in which it is most salient (i.e. most clearly heard). The possibility of the [h] variant being

<sup>2</sup> Chi squared tests of statistical significance (applied as suggested by Hudson 2004 using the website [http://www.physics.csbsju.edu/stats/contingency\\_NROW\\_NCOLUMN\\_form.html](http://www.physics.csbsju.edu/stats/contingency_NROW_NCOLUMN_form.html) for the calculations) were implemented in order to provide an objective measure of the significance of the results.

used as a symbolic marker of regional identity will be further discussed in Section 6.8.

### **6.7.2 Tonic stress**

The effect of tonic stress (i.e. whether the token of (h) occurs in a stressed or unstressed syllable) will now be examined. If this had been a study of Standard French, then tokens of (h) in stressed syllables would have been rare, since in this linguistic variety, the tonic accent almost always falls on the final syllable of a rhythmic group. In order to qualify as a stressed syllable, a token of (h) would have to occur in the last syllable of a rhythmic group, and in a monosyllabic word, since aspirate h only occurs word-initially in the lexis of Standard French. However, these constraints do not apply to the same extent in Alsatian Regional French, where the tonic stress can be placed on non-rhythm group final syllables and often occurs in the first syllable of polysyllabic words. Stressed tokens of (h) are therefore probably more frequent in Alsatian Regional French than in the Standard variety and careful listening was required in order to distinguish which tokens of (h) occurred in stressed syllables. Table 6.3 shows the effect of tonic stress of the realisation of (h).

Stressed Syllable			Unstressed Syllable			All contexts		
N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]
442	237	53.62	490	178	36.33	932	415	44.53

*Table 6.3 Realisation of (h) in stressed and unstressed syllables*

Table 6.3 reveals a tendency for the [h] variant to be used more in stressed than unstressed syllables. This difference is highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ). This may be linked to the emphatic use of [h] mentioned above, in exclamations such as *hop!*

### **6.7.3 Etymology**

We will now consider the influence of the etymology of the word in which a token of (h) occurs on its realisation. Words which are part of the supraregional

variety of French are here labelled F and words which occur only in Alsace and are either Alsatian toponyms or loan-words from the local Germanic variety into Alsatian Regional French have been labelled A. It could be hypothesised that words in the A category are more likely to be pronounced with the [h] variant than their counterparts in category F, since the influence of the Alsatian substrate variety is likely to be strongest in loan-words from that variety, especially for bilingual speakers who would pronounce these same words with a categorical [h] when speaking Alsatian. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 6.4.

F (French)			A (Alsatian)			All words		
N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]
420	169	40.24	512	246	48.05	932	415	44.53

*Table 6.4 Realisation of (h) according to etymology*

Table 6.4 reveals that the [h] realisation is used slightly more in Alsatian Regional French Germanic loan-words and Alsatian place names (48.05%) than in supralocal French words (40.24%). This difference is statistically significant ( $p=0.017$ ). This result is unsurprising given that, as stated above, it is likely that the local Germanic variety exercises a greater influence on words which are used in both languages and which are categorically pronounced with [h] in Alsatian.

#### **6.7.4 Summary**

To summarise, the post-pausal environment, stressed syllables and an Alsatian (Germanic) etymology seem to favour the use of the [h] variant more than the post-vocalic and post-consonantal environments, unstressed syllables and a supralocal French etymology.

## **6.8 Sociolinguistic Analysis: Correlation between Realisation of (h) and Social Variables**

The social variables in the light of which speakers' use of the (h) variable will be investigated are age, gender, socioeconomic status (based on the speaker's profession and level of formal education), ability to speak Alsatian and regional attachment index score.

### **6.8.1 Age**

The informants were divided into three age groups, which broadly corresponded to life stages (see Chapter 3): 18-30 (corresponding to education and early working life), 31-60 (corresponding to established working and family life) and over 60 (retirement). The hypothesis was that, if phonological levelling were indeed taking place in Alsace, then use of the [h] variant would increase with age (i.e. it would decrease in apparent time).

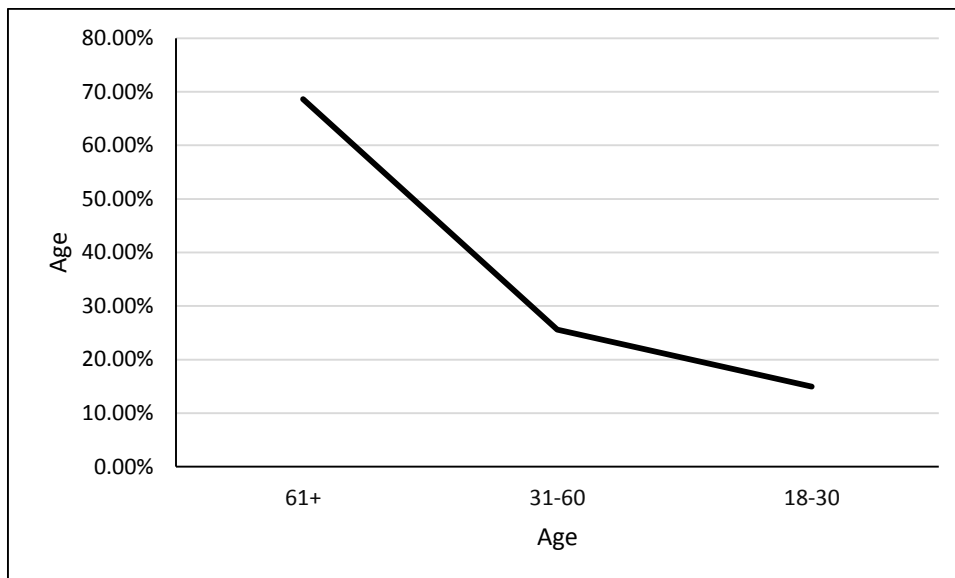
Age group	N	N [h]	% [h]
18-30	281	42	14.95%
31-60	168	43	25.60%
61 +	483	330	68.63%
Total	932	415	44.53%

*Table 6.5 Use of (h) by age*

Table 6.5 shows a very clear differentiation of the sample's use of [h] by age, which is highly statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). These apparent time data appear to indicate a change in progress, with the regional [h] variant being eliminated in favour of the supralocal standard zero variant. As predicted, the older the speaker, the higher the proportion of the [h] variant he or she uses. There is an especially sharp drop in the use of [h] between the oldest (68.63%) and middle (25.60%) age groups. This change in apparent time in the use of the (h) variable suggests that use of the stigmatised, regional [h] variant is declining, giving way to the Standard French, supralocal zero variant, which could be a result of either levelling or top-down standardisation, or both

simultaneously. As geographical mobility increases, speakers of Alsatian Regional French are increasingly likely to come into contact with speakers of [h]-less varieties of French, who may comment unfavourably on their accents, and to accommodate to these speakers of other varieties of French by ‘dropping’ the [h] sound from their speech.

It was noted during the fieldwork that younger speakers in Alsace tend to have a higher level of education than older speakers, many of whom left school at the age of fourteen, especially in the rural sample. This increased period of time spent at school or university, where Standard French pronunciation is encouraged and regional variants such as [h] stigmatised, may be another factor contributing to the decrease of [h].



*Figure 6.1 Use of [h] according to age*

### **6.8.2 Gender**

We will now turn our attention to the social variable of gender, and the way in which it interacts with use of the (h) variable. It was predicted that the female informants would use a smaller proportion of the [h] variant than their male counterparts of equivalent age and socioeconomic background, since previous variationist studies of both French and other languages have shown that female speakers tend to be at the forefront of levelling, and of linguistic changes in

progress more generally, and that they tend to prefer supralocal and overtly prestigious to regional and stigmatised or covertly prestigious linguistic variants, to a greater extent than male speakers.

Gender	N	N [h]	% [h]
Male	497	210	42.25%
Female	435	205	47.13%
Total	932	415	44.53%

*Table 6.6: Use of (h) according to Gender*

Table 6.6 shows the male and female informants using relatively similar rates of the [h] variant (42.25% and 47.13% respectively), which are close to the [h] rate for the corpus as a whole (44.53%). However, the difference in [h] rates between male and female speakers was statistically significant ( $p=0.012$ ). The female informants use a higher proportion of [h] than their male counterparts (a difference of 4.88%), which contradicts the hypothesis formulated above and is puzzling given that female speakers usually tend to have lower rates of stigmatised, regionally marked forms (in this case [h]) than men in their speech, and that women also tend to adopt the incoming variant (in this case zero) to a greater extent than men when a linguistic change is in progress.

We will now examine the interaction of age and gender in order to see whether it can shed any light on this unexpected gender distribution.

Age & Gender	N	N [h]	% [h]
Male 18-30	134	16	11.94%
Male 31-60	123	29	23.58%
Male 61 +	240	165	68.75%
Female 18-30	147	26	17.69%
Female 31-60	45	14	31.11%
Female 61 +	243	165	67.90%
Total	932	415	44.54%

*Table 6.7 Use of (h) according to Age and Gender*



Table 6.7 shows that the gender pattern displayed in Table 6.6 can still be seen in the two younger age groups when we separate out the age groups. In these age groups, the male informants use a lower proportion of [h] variants than their female counterparts. The fact that this gender pattern can be seen in two age groups suggests that it is a genuine sociolinguistic trend rather than an anomaly due to the behaviour of one or two speakers. However, the data so far do not seem to present any observation as to why the sample should display this unexpected gender pattern. It is possible that analysis of the sample according to socioeconomic background, rural or urban background, ability to speak Alsatian and regional attachment index score will shed some light on this tendency. In the oldest age group, the male speakers have a slightly higher rate of [h] than females of the same age. This corresponds to the expected sociolinguistic gender pattern. However, the proportions of [h] used by the older males and females are very similar (165/240 tokens and 164/243 tokens respectively, a difference which is not statistically significant ( $p=0.766$ )), so it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the male and female speakers show similar rates of use of [h] in the oldest age group, indicating a lack of gender differentiation. The difference between the gender groups varies according to age, from 0.85% in the oldest age group, to 7.53% in the middle age group and 5.75 % in the youngest age group. This may be because the level of speaker awareness, and therefore sociolinguistic significance of the variable, has increased with time. This would be expected to lead to an increase in the social stratification of the variable in apparent time. In the oldest age group, the regional variant is commonly used by all speakers, is below the level of speaker awareness and is not stigmatised. The older speakers, who have finished their working lives and thus no longer need to use linguistic variables to signal their social status in the professional arena, may also be less preoccupied with the need to use socially prestigious variants, which may also contribute to the lack of gender differentiation in this group (see Eckert 1997: 164-165). In the middle age group, the regional variant has reached the level of speaker awareness and become stigmatised, so its use has become socially stratified to a greater extent, but not in the expected way. In the younger age group, the regional variant is being eliminated from the speech of all the informants, so there are fewer tokens of [h] and less potential for social stratification, so the gender difference decreases. Information which may prove

or disprove this theory will be provided by an analysis of the data according to the informants' socioeconomic status.

### **6.8.3 Socioeconomic Background**

The informants in the urban sample were divided into two broad socioeconomic groups based on their level of formal education and their profession (see Chapter 3 above), middle class and working class. It was hypothesised that the middle-class informants would show a lower proportion of the [h] variant than their working-class counterparts, since middle-class speakers tend to have a higher level of education (and therefore exposure to the linguistic norm) and of geographical mobility (and therefore exposure to the supralocal speech variety) than working class speakers (see Chapter 3). The relationship between socioeconomic status and use of the (h) variable is presented in Table 6.8.

Socioeconomic Class	N	N [h]	% [h]
Middle Class	294	106	36.05
Working Class	254	108	42.52
Total	548	214	39.05

*Table 6.8: Use of (h) according to Socioeconomic Background in Urban Sample*

From Table 6.8, it seems that urban working-class speakers show higher rates of [h] than their middle-class counterparts (although this difference is not statistically significant). This confirms the research hypothesis for the (h) variable, namely that the working-class informants would use the regional [h] variant more frequently than the middle-class participants. These data fit in with general patterns observed by sociolinguists, whereby speakers of lower socioeconomic status tend to use higher rates of non-standard and regionally marked variants than those belonging to more prestigious social groups (Labov 1972). We may take the lower use of the regional variant by the middle-class informants to mean that these informants are leading in the elimination of regional [h] in favour of the supralocal zero variant, and therefore in the process of phonological levelling in Alsatian Regional French, at least for this variable. However, since the urban sample only consists of 36 informants and 543 tokens

of (h), these data alone cannot be used as a basis for generalisations on the levelling process in a region of more than 1.8 million inhabitants. Furthermore the difference between the two socioeconomic groups is not statistically significant ( $p=0.122$ ), which seems to indicate that this result may be due simply to chance. Further analysis of the data according not only to the informants' socioeconomic position, but also their age and gender, may shed more light on the mechanisms of the linguistic change taking place in Alsace.

Age & Gender	Middle Class			Working Class		
	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]
Male 18-30	45	5	11.11%	28	4	14.29%
Male 31-60	53	16	30.19%	70	13	18.57%
Male 61+	48	24	50.00%	66	41	62.12%
Female 18-30	36	5	13.89%	11	0	0%
Female 31-60	45	14	31.11%	-----	-----	(No data)
Female 61 +	67	42	62.69%	79	50	63.29%
Total	294	106	36.05%	254	108	42.52%

*Table 6.9: Interaction between Age, Gender and Socioeconomic Background in the Urban Sample*

In some of the age and gender groups featured in the table above, the tendency for working class speakers to use higher rates of [h] than their middle class counterparts of the same age and gender shown in Table 6.9 above is borne out. This is the case for the male 18-30, male 61+ and female 61+ groups. There were no data available for female working-class speakers in the 31-60 age group, making class comparisons in this age and gender group impossible. The unexpectedly low rate of [h] for the female working-class 18-30 group can be explained by the fact that the data for this group consist of only 11 tokens of (h), all produced by the same speaker, and therefore constitute too small a data set to provide an accurate picture of this social group. The results for the male 31-60 group still need to be explained. In this group, the middle-class speakers have a substantially higher rate of [h] use than their working-class counterparts (30.19% and 18.57% respectively, a difference of 11.61% which is however not statistically significant ( $p=0.133$ )). This result seems anomalous. The reason why

this should be so, and especially in this age and gender group alone, is not clear. It is possible that it is a result of an anomaly in the data, since this data set represents only eight speakers and 123 tokens of (h), and idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of one speaker could skew the data. However, upon examination of the individual results for this variable, this does not appear to be the case. A sociolinguistic explanation could also be provided. It is possible that the middle-class men in the 31-60 age group are, consciously or unconsciously, using the regional [h] variant as a badge of their social or regional identity, of which they are proud. Indeed, members of this group expressed no shame regarding their regional accent and tended to be very knowledgeable and enthusiastic on the subject of regional language and culture. Speakers in this age group have a fluent grasp of both French and Alsatian. The privilege of using regional accent features as a badge of identity rather than a stigmatised social marker may not be accessible to the working classes, since their use of a variant is not capable of rendering it socially prestigious, whereas the middle-class speakers may have such an ability. This explanation for the puzzling results of the male 31-60 group must at this stage remain merely a theory which cannot be proven. However, the results of the regional attachment questionnaire and their relationship to linguistic behaviour may provide evidence to support or discredit this idea.

As regards gender variation, Table 6.9 shows that, for the majority of age and class groups, the gender pattern observed earlier, whereby female speakers show higher rates of [h] than males of the same age and social class, remains valid. The only exceptions are the female working class 31-60 group, for which no data are available and therefore no comparisons can be made, and the working class 18-30 group, in which the female speakers have a much lower rate of [h] (0%) than their male counterparts (14.29%). However, as stated above, the data for the female working-class 18-30 cell of the sampling grid represent only 11 tokens of (h), all produced by one speaker, and it is therefore possible that a skewing of the data has been produced. In any case, 11 tokens do not constitute a sufficient basis on which a sociolinguistic explanation or theory may be constructed.

#### **6.8.4 Urban or Rural Origin**

It was predicted that the rural informants would use higher rates of [h] than the urban informants, since levelling is generally more advanced in France in urban centres than in rural locations. Linguistic innovations in general tend to hop from one city to another, then diffuse out into smaller towns and villages at a later date (Chambers & Trudgill 1980: 166). Various studies have shown rural speakers to be more linguistically conservative than their urban counterparts.

Origin	N	N [h]	% [h]
Urban	548	214	39.05%
Rural	384	201	52.34%
Total	932	415	44.53%

*Table 6.10 Use of (h) according to Urban or Rural Origin*

Table 6.10 shows that the rural informants have an average rate of use of [h] considerably higher than that of their urban counterparts as a whole (52.34% and 39.05% respectively). This difference is highly statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). This is in accordance with the research hypothesis and provides evidence to support the theory that linguistic innovations, including levelling such as that which involves the loss of [h], begin in cities and later spread to rural villages, which can therefore be described as more linguistically conservative than large urban centres. We will now examine the rural data according to the social characteristics of the speakers involved, namely, their age and gender, and compare them with the results for analogous groups in the urban sample.

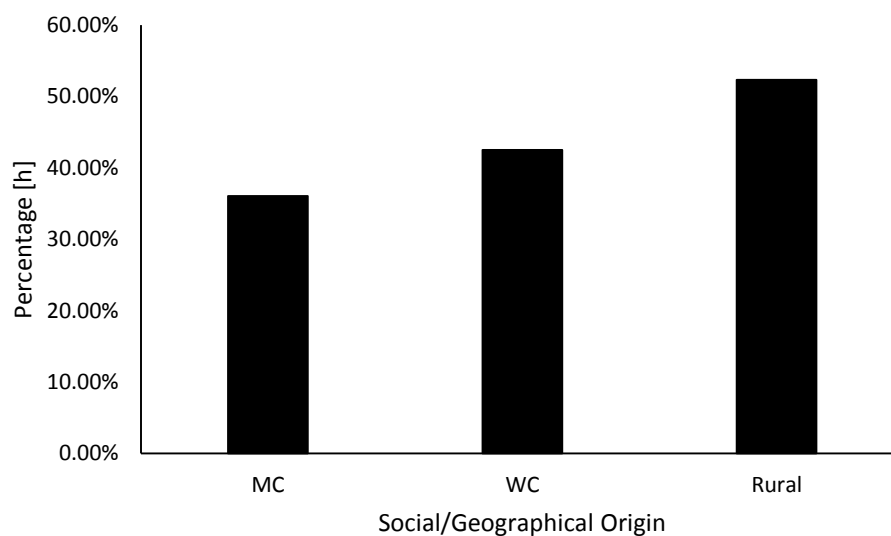
Age & Gender	Urban Middle Class			Urban Working Class			Rural Sample		
	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]	N	N [h]	% [h]
Male 18-30	45	5	<b>11.11</b>	28	4	<b>14.29</b>	61	7	<b>11.46</b>
Male 31-60	53	16	<b>30.19</b>	70	13	<b>18.57</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A
Male 61+	48	24	<b>48.94</b>	66	41	<b>62.12</b>	126	100	<b>79.37</b>
Female 18-30	36	5	<b>13.89</b>	11	0	<b>0</b>	100	21	<b>21.00</b>
Female 31-60	45	14	<b>31.11</b>	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Female 61 +	67	42	<b>63.64</b>	79	50	<b>63.29</b>	97	73	<b>75.26</b>
Total	294	106	<b>36.05</b>	254	108	<b>42.52</b>	384	201	<b>52.34</b>

*Table 6.11 Comparison of Urban Middle Class, Urban Working Class and Rural Samples*

For the majority of the age and gender groups for which data is presented in Table 6.11, the expected tendency of the lowest rates of [h] being found in the urban middle class, followed by the urban working class and finally by the rural informants, is confirmed (see also Figure 6.2). However, the male 18-30 group shows a different pattern, with very similar rates of [h] for the urban middle class and rural informants (11.11% and 11.46% respectively) and a considerably higher [h] rate (14.29%) for the working class informants. The lower rate of use of [h] by the working class 31-60 males than their middle-class counterparts has already been discussed above. Unfortunately no data for this age and gender group are available for the rural sample since it focused exclusively on the 18-30 and 61 + age groups. The 0% [h] rate for the working-class female group has already been discussed above. For all groups except the male 18-30 group, the rural informants use [h] more frequently than urban informants of the same age and gender, whether middle or working class.

In the rural sample, the female 18-30 speakers have higher rates of [h] than their male counterparts, following the pattern shown by the urban sample. The female 61 + informants, however, showed lower rates of [h] than rural males of the same age group, following a classic sociolinguistic pattern. It is not

immediately clear why this should be so. This point will be discussed further in Section 6.9.



*Figure 6.2 Use of [h] according to social and geographical origin*

### **6.8.5 Ability to Speak Alsatian**

The informants were divided into two groups according to their knowledge of Alsatian: those who spoke fluent Alsatian and those who spoke very little Alsatian or had only a passive knowledge of it (i.e. they understood Alsatian at least to some extent but did not speak it), according to their responses to the written questionnaire and to the fieldworker's observations of their linguistic behaviour. No intermediate group was allowed for because the responses to the written questionnaire never fell into such a category. In general, members of the two older age groups spoke Alsatian fluently, as did all the age groups at the rural fieldwork site. The youngest age group in the urban sample invariably spoke little or no Alsatian but had a passive knowledge of it. There therefore seems to have been a sharp decline in the knowledge and use of Alsatian between the middle and youngest generations in the urban sample. None of the informants claimed to have no knowledge of Alsatian whatsoever, so no category was included for this situation.

It was predicted that the fluent Alsatian speakers would have higher [h] rates than the informants who spoke little or no Alsatian, since [h] is a feature used in

the Germanic substrate variety, and there is more likely to be interference between French and Alsatian in the phonology of those who speak Alsatian regularly than of speakers who make little or no use of Alsatian in day-to-day life.

Alsatian	N	N [h]	% [h]
Fluent	773	387	50.06%
Passive/Little	159	28	17.61%
Total	932	415	44.53%

*Table 6.12 Realisation of (h) according to Ability to Speak Alsatian*

In total, the group of fluent Alsatian speakers contained 38 fluent speakers, and there were 14 speakers with little or only passive knowledge of Alsatian. The fluent group consisted of the entire rural sample, the entire 61+ age group, all 4 working-class 31-60 men, 3 of the 4 middle-class 31-60 men and 3 of the 4 middle-class 31-60 women. The group with little or only passive knowledge of Alsatian, on the other hand, included the entire urban 18-30 sample, one middle-class 31-60 man and one middle class 31-60 woman. These data indicate a clear change in progress in apparent time in the urban sample, with 100% of the oldest age group claiming to speak Alsatian fluently, 75% of the middle age group speaking it fluently, and a sharp drop to 0% fluent speakers in the youngest age group, although in all cases some passive knowledge and in most cases a little active knowledge of Alsatian was retained. The rural sample is composed of 100% fluent speakers of Alsatian, but it is possible, and indeed probable, that the change which is occurring in Strasbourg will eventually spread to even Alsace's most remote villages. Indeed, signs of this change are already present in abundance. Whilst living at the rural fieldwork site, the researcher noted that young adults and teenagers tended to speak French to one another, reserving Alsatian for use only with members of the middle and older generations. The fieldworker was also able to observe that young children playing together made exclusive use of French and their parents reported that most of them, with a few exceptions, were monolingual French speakers, despite the efforts of some parents to teach them Alsatian and the German classes they attended at school. It is likely that these children understand



Alsatian due to their constant exposure to it in the village, but they very rarely, if ever, speak it.

The rate of use of [h] amongst the fluent Alsatian speakers was considerably higher than that of those who had little or only passive knowledge of the local Germanic variety. The difference is highly statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). This confirms the research hypothesis for this study, namely that fluent speakers of Alsatian would be more likely to use regional phonological variants, including [h], than those in whose linguistic repertoire Alsatian occupies a much smaller place. This result also provides support for the theory that [h] in Alsatian Regional French originates from the Germanic substrate variety, rather than merely being an archaism, since it appears to be linked to the speaker's use of Alsatian. The fact that rates of [h] are lower amongst non-speakers of Alsatian, and that use and knowledge of Alsatian appear to be decreasing, at least in Strasbourg, may indicate that the [h] variant is destined to disappear in favour of the supralocal zero variant, whether due to levelling or standardisation. This idea is corroborated by the decreasing rates of use of [h] in apparent time shown in Table 6.10. However, caution must be used when interpreting the results in Table 6.10 as evidence for the future disappearance of [h]. The correlation between the informants' ability to speak Alsatian and rates of [h] use does not necessarily indicate causality. The connection between ability to speak Alsatian, age and rural origin may mean that it is actually these social factors which have an influence on the speaker's rate of [h] use, rather than the presence of the Germanic substrate as an active, frequently used variety in his or her linguistic repertoire. In addition, there may be other factors at work which this study has not yet examined. Indeed, it is not only the influence of the substrate variety and the social characteristics of speakers which are important in variation and change in Alsatian Regional French, but the attitudes and perceptions of both speakers and outsiders also play a crucial role. This study will now proceed to examine some aspects of speakers' attitudes to their region and its linguistic features, and the ways in which these can influence linguistic behaviour. The aspects of speaker attitudes to be investigated were elicited and quantified using a regional attachment questionnaire.

### **6.8.6 Regional Attachment**

A regional attachment index score ranging from 0 (lowest level of regional attachment) to 15 (highest level of regional attachment) was attributed to each informant on the basis of his or her responses to the written regional attachment questionnaire (see Section 5.4.2). These scores were then compared with the informants' use of the (h) variable.

It was predicted that the informants with the highest regional attachment index scores would use the highest rates of the [h] variant, and vice versa, since previous studies have shown that speakers who feel high rates of attachment to their region are more likely to use regional linguistic variants than those with low levels of regional attachment, especially if the variant in question acts as a symbolic marker of regional identity (Labov 1972; Armstrong & Unsworth 1999).

Regional Attachment Score	Informants	N	N [h]	% [h]
3	2	18	8	44.44%
4	4	59	23	38.98%
5 or 5.5	12	143	40	27.97%
6 or 6.5	9	162	46	28.40%
7 or 7.5	7	111	52	46.85%
8	6	128	69	53.91%
9	1	4	0	0%
10	2	90	79	87.77%
12	1	20	9	45%

*Table 6.13 Use of (h) according to Regional Attachment Index Score*

No immediate correlation between regional attachment score and use of [h] is apparent from the above table. However, it may be possible to group the results into broader groups in order to reduce the potential skewing effect on the data of individual informants. For example, only one informant obtained a score of 9 for the questionnaire, and his result of 0% [h] is based on only 4 tokens. The number of speakers per score group is far from being equal, with only one

speaker scoring 9 and 12 speakers scoring 5, for example. It was therefore deemed advisable to establish bands of scores with the informants spread as equally as possible between these bands. The results of this grouping are shown in Tables 6.14 and 6.15 below.

Score	Informants	N	N [h]	% [h]
3-4	6	77	31	40.60
5-6	21	305	86	28.20
7-8	13	239	121	50.63
9-12	4	114	88	77.19

*Table 6.14 Use of (h) according to Regional Attachment Score (four bands)*

No scores below 3 or above 12 occurred in the sample, so no such scores were included in the data analysis. It was found to be impossible to constitute score bands of an equal width which also contained an equal number of informants, since certain scores occurred more frequently than others. As can be seen from Table 6.14, fewer informants obtained scores at the extremes (3-4 or 9-12) than in the centre (5-6 and 7-8) of the range of possible scores.

With the exception of the 5-6 band, Table 6.14 shows an increase in use of [h] as regional attachment index score increases. It is not clear why the 5-6 band does not follow the tendency shown by the other bands. The lower than expected percentage score of the 5-6 band is unlikely to be due to an anomaly or to idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of one informant, since this was the band that contained the highest number of informants (21).

If the informants are grouped according to still broader bands of regional attachment score, the unexpected score for the 5-6 band disappears, a statistically highly significant distribution emerges ( $p=0.000$ ) and two broad bands showing a very clear tendency toward a higher rate of use of [h] as regional attachment score increases emerge (see Table 6.15). It may be that, due to the relatively small numbers of informants involved, it is necessary to group them into broader bands in order to see patterns emerge.

Score	Informants	N	N [h]	% [h]
3-6	27	382	117	30.63%
7-12	17	353	209	59.21%

*Table 6.15 Use of (h) according to Regional Attachment Score (2 bands)*

## **6.9 Conclusion**

The results of this study show that (h) is still a relevant sociolinguistic variable in Alsace (as is shown by the overall rate of 44.53% of tokens of (h) realised as [h]), with the regional [h] variant being used by almost all speakers, and being the majority variant for some (62.12% [h] for the older male working class group, 63.29% for the older female working class group, 63.64% for the older female middle class group, 75.26% for the older female rural group and 79.37% for the older male rural group).

As would be expected for a variable which is undergoing levelling, change in apparent time can be seen, with the rate of use of [h] decreasing from the oldest to the middle, and the middle to the youngest generation, in accordance with the research hypothesis for this variable and with the results obtained for this variable elsewhere in France by PFC studies (TARRIER 2010: 75; DURAND, EYCHENNE & LYCHE 2013).

The hypothesis regarding the rural or urban origin of the informants was also confirmed, with [h] being used considerably more frequently in the rural (52.34%) than the urban sample (39.05%).

Overall, the urban working-class sample had a higher rate of use of [h] (42.52%) than the urban middle-class sample (36.05%) (although this difference was not statistically significant), again in accordance with the research hypothesis, which predicted that the working-class speakers would show higher rates of the regional, non-standard variants than their middle-class counterparts, since it is the middle classes who have been shown to be leading the change in the direction of supralocal variants in previous studies of phonological levelling in French (BOUGHTON 2003, 2005).

The informant's ability to speak Alsatian also had a significant influence on his or her use of (h), with the informants able to speak Alsatian fluently using [h] much more frequently (50.06%) than those who spoke only a little Alsatian or had only a passive knowledge of it (17.61%). This seems to indicate that the influence of the Germanic substrate variety may be one of the major causes of the presence of [h] in Alsatian Regional French and in a speaker's idiolect. However, caution is necessary when interpreting this result because of the interaction between ability to speak Alsatian, age and place of origin. Indeed, the group of informants able to speak Alsatian consisted of all the speakers over 60 in the sample, almost all the speakers over 30 and all the rural speakers, whereas the group who had little knowledge, or only a passive knowledge of Alsatian, was made up of the urban speakers aged under 31 and two of the urban speakers aged 31-60. The group of informants able to speak Alsatian fluently was therefore much larger than the group who had no such proficiency. This is also important because it shows the prominence of the local Germanic variety in the linguistic situation in Alsace today.

The scores obtained by the informants for the regional attachment questionnaire also broadly correlated with their rates of use of [h], with the informants who scored 3-6 on the questionnaire having an average [h] rate of 30.63% and those who scored 7-12 having an [h] rate of 59.21%. This striking difference clearly demonstrates that speakers' attitudes towards their region and its language are an important component of the sociolinguistic situation in Alsace and have a concrete influence on linguistic behaviour. They also demonstrate the validity of this questionnaire outside the geographical area (the South of France) and the social group (teenage school pupils) in which it was originally used as an instrument for measuring the attachment felt by speakers to the region where they live (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999).

There was one social variable, however, which did not correlate with the informants' [h] rates as neatly as those mentioned above. The relationship between (h) and gender remains somewhat unclear. The results show that, in the urban middle-class group, for all age groups, the female speakers consistently have higher rates of [h] than their male counterparts. In the working-class group, this is so for the female 31-60 group. (Data for the other

two female working-class age groups are either absent or based on a very small number of tokens from one speaker (see Section 5.5). This is contrary to the research hypothesis, which predicted a higher [h] rate among male than female speakers, since previous studies of phonological levelling in French have often shown females to be leading the change away from non-standard, regional variants towards supralocal, standardised variants (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Pooley 1996; Boughton 2003). In the rural sample, the situation becomes even more puzzling, with the female informants using [h] more frequently than the males in the 18-30 age group, as in the urban sample, but the male informants having higher [h] rates than their female counterparts in the 61+ age group. It is possible that the older rural speakers, whom one would expect to be the most linguistically conservative group in the sample, represent an older sociolinguistic pattern, where men used [h] more frequently than women in all social groups at some time in the past, according to the classic sociolinguistic gender pattern (Labov 1990), but that a change has since taken place, and almost reached completion, in which [h] has become a variant associated more with women than with men. However, it is unclear what the social motivation for such a change would be, since women typically avoid non-standard, regional variants and favour innovative, supralocal, standardised variants. One possible explanation could be that the [h] variant has attained a certain level of prestige due to the presence of an orthographic <h>, which would create an association between use of [h] and the written norm. This could explain why the females of the middle age group show higher rates of [h] than expected, in line with the female tendency to use prestige variants. However, further investigation is needed in order to further elucidate the interaction of (h) with speaker gender, involving a larger speaker sample, a larger number of tokens and a linguistic questionnaire designed to elicit speakers' attitudes towards and awareness of this variable. Such a study could be a project for post-doctoral research.

## Chapter 7- Consonant devoicing

### 7. 1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the consonant devoicing variable, firstly by defining the variable, then by providing a review of several key studies of consonant devoicing in contemporary spoken French in Metropolitan France and Belgium (Pooley 1994; Hornsby 2006; Hambye 2009; Bauvois 2002; Temple 1992; Temple 2000; Goudaillier 1985; Goudaillier 1981), after which the focus will move from consonant devoicing in general to investigating this variable as a feature of Alsatian Regional French in particular, with a review of previous attestations of consonant devoicing. Methodological questions will then be discussed and the results of a pilot study of four speakers presented.

The consonant devoicing variable involves the total or partial devoicing of fricatives and plosives which are canonically voiced in Standard French. The phonemes analysed in this study are /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /z/ and /ʒ/. The nasal consonants /m/, /n/, /ɲ/ and /ŋ/ were excluded from the analysis since no mention of the devoicing of these consonants in Alsatian Regional French could be found in the literature. /R/ was also excluded from the analysis, since the devoicing of /R/ was mentioned in relatively few cases in the literature and never as part of the same variable or phenomenon as the devoicing of the phonemes mentioned above. Moreover, the voiced and devoiced variants of /R/ do not constitute any minimal pairs, and cannot therefore be considered as separate phonemes in French, in contrast to the pairs /b~/~/p/ (*bêche-pêche*), /d~/~/t/ (*vide-vite*), /g~/~/k/ (*bague-bac*), /v~/~/f/ (*vif-vive*), /z~/~/s/ (*bise-bis*) and /ʒ~/~/ʃ/ (*bouge-bouche*) (see Bauvois 2002: 140).

Consonant devoicing can happen due to articulatory constraints, and it can also occur in situations where the phonetic context does not lend itself to devoicing, for example intervocalically, due to its role as a marker of sociolinguistic identity. It occurs in supra-regional levelled French in some situations, for instance as a result of assimilation by a neighbouring voiceless consonant (for example in the word *obstacle*, pronounced [ɔpstakl], the original, historical /b/ has been devoiced and has now become a /p/ phoneme in Modern French due to regressive assimilation by the following voiceless fricative [s]). Consonant devoicing has been attested in the north of France (Picardy) and in Belgium as well as in Alsace,

the area of Lorraine with a Germanic substrate variety and Breton-speaking Brittany (Armstrong & Pooley 2010: 164; Carton et al 1983).

## **7.2 Review of Previous Studies**

A number of studies of the devoicing of canonically voiced plosives and fricatives have been carried out in France and Belgium. A review of some of these studies will now be presented.

In Roubaix in the far north of France, where there are Picard and Flemish substrate varieties which both feature word-final consonant devoicing, Pooley (1994) analysed word-final consonant devoicing in the speech of 60 informants who were part of the French socio-professional categories of 'ouvriers' (manual workers) or 'employés' (employees). The recordings he analysed lasted approximately 30 hours in total. The informants were recorded in groups drawn from the same social network, in order to produce as informal a speech register as possible. Pooley analysed a total of 463 tokens, of which 161 (35%) were devoiced. He found no significant difference in the devoicing rates of the different consonants (the overall rates were 12% for /d/, /z/, /ʒ/ and /b/, 14% for /g/), except for /v/, which had a significantly lower rate of devoicing at 7%.

The most favourable context for word-final consonant devoicing was the pre-pausal position, which is not surprising given that, in this position, the vocal cords may stop vibrating in preparation for the following silence before the production of the sound has completely finished, giving a devoiced sound. The least favourable environment for word-final consonant devoicing was found to be before a voiced consonant, which again is not surprising since there is no reason for the vocal cords to stop vibrating in the middle of a sequence of two voiced sounds and regressive assimilation blocks devoicing. No significant difference in devoicing rates was found between the pre-vocalic and pre-voiceless consonant contexts. This is somewhat unexpected given that one would expect a following vowel to prevent devoicing and a following voiceless consonant to favour it.

Pooley states that there is 'a considerable degree of obsolescence in word-final consonant devoicing (WFCD) usage, as is often the case where a vernacular is



conceding ground to a standard variety' (Pooley 1994: 224). We may therefore conclude that it is Pooley's opinion that the local vernacular variety which features word-consonant devoicing is giving way to the supralocal standard variety and this is leading to the disappearance of word-final consonant devoicing. It is not clear whether the vernacular variety mentioned here is the Picard variety or Regional French, but it seems clear that something akin to phonological dialect levelling is occurring with regard to word-final consonant devoicing in Roubaix. Pooley (1994: 224) also observes that vernacular features such as word-final consonant devoicing tend to be better preserved and survive for a longer time in the most frequently used items and most frequently occurring contexts, and conversely that infrequently occurring items are likely to be the first to be standardised.

As regards the sociolinguistic significance of word-final consonant devoicing, Pooley concludes that it is an unstable and variable phenomenon (Pooley 1994: 218). He found that word-final consonant devoicing was most frequent amongst speakers aged over 45, and amongst less educated speakers, as would be expected for a variant which is becoming obsolete and being replaced by a supra-local standard form. There is a sharp drop in devoicing rates between the over 45 and 31-45 groups, from 26% for the oldest group to 7% for those aged 31-45. The rate of devoicing levels off and seems to stabilise between the middle and youngest age groups. The latter has an average devoicing rate of 6%. An interesting gender pattern is revealed by Pooley's results. In the speaker group aged over 45, female speakers have significantly higher rates of devoicing than their male counterparts. This is contrary to what might be expected, since many sociolinguistic studies and the sociolinguistic gender pattern observed by Labov show women tending to use a higher frequency of supra-local and standard variants than men, and also adopting newly introduced linguistic forms before men. Pooley suggests that this reversal of the classic gender pattern could be explained in terms of social networks, following the theories of Milroy (1980) and Thomas (1989). Many women aged over 45 in Roubaix had worked in the town's textile industry, which led to the construction of dense, multiplex social networks between colleagues and neighbours. Women were involved in this industry to a greater extent than men, and so may have had a type of social network more conducive to the preservation of

regional vernacular speech forms. Moreover, many Flemish-speaking immigrants from Belgium, whose native language contained devoiced word-final consonants, worked in the Roubaix textile industry and frequent, prolonged contact with them may well have influenced the phonology of the local women working there through accommodation.

In the under 45 age group, the expected gender pattern emerges, with male speakers devoicing more than females. In the under 30 age group, men devoice significantly less than women. In apparent time, the linguistic behaviour of the female speakers has undergone a greater change than that of the male informants in terms of loss of word-final consonant devoicing. Younger women seem to be completely eliminating word-final consonant devoicing from their speech. They reported viewing the local *patois* as socially disadvantageous to their children and tried to speak their 'best' French with their children in order to ensure that they did not have problems at school. The correlation between education and rates of devoicing breaks down in the male speakers under 30. In this group, educated speakers devoice more frequently than their counterparts with a lower educational level. Pooley is of the opinion that this may be linked to the development of a new urban vernacular which constitutes an important part of regional identity and in which young males are the leaders.

Pooley concludes that word-final consonant devoicing will probably eventually disappear from the variety of French spoken in Roubaix, since it is a stigmatised feature due to its association with *patois* and its low rates of use by young women, who are the speakers who will pass on their linguistic variety to the next generation.

Hornsby (2006) also studied word-final consonant devoicing in the far north of France, in the mining town of Avion. He analysed the speech of the 33 speakers from his working-class sample who produced at least some tokens of word-final consonant devoicing. These 33 speakers constitute a minority of the original sample, since the majority of Hornsby's informants produced no occurrences of word-final consonant devoicing. The overall average word-final consonant devoicing rate for this sub-sample of 33 speakers was found to be 29%.

As in Pooley's (1994) study, Hornsby found the pre-pausal environment to be the most favourable to devoicing and a following vowel to discourage devoicing, with no significant difference between the voicing rates for the pre-vocalic and pre-voiceless consonant contexts.

The rates of devoicing for individual consonants varied considerably, from 42% for /b/ to 19% for /g/ and /s/. The intermediate values were 40% for /ʒ/, 33% for /v/, and 37% for /d/. Hornsby argues that this wide spread of results for individual consonants differs from Pooley's (1994) results because Hornsby only included in his study the members of his sample who showed some consonant devoicing, whereas Pooley included his whole sample in his analysis, including those speakers who had a devoicing rate of 0%.

Hornsby does not provide an analysis of the devoicing data for these informants according to their sociological characteristics, apart from the fact that all the members of the sample were working-class speakers.

Hambye (2009) analysed word-final consonant devoicing in three towns in the French-speaking area of Belgium, Gembloux (central Belgium), Liège (eastern Belgium) and Tournai (western Belgium, very close to the border with France). He investigated his hypothesis that, although word-final consonant devoicing has traditionally been stigmatised, as have many features of the traditional 'Belgian accent', and continues to be so in France, it may now have acquired a positive social meaning as a marker of regional and social identity in Belgium. Written reproductions of devoicing by speakers show that they are sometimes aware of this linguistic feature, for example 'belge' spelled 'belche' on the Internet. Word-final consonant devoicing in Belgium is generally thought to be due to contact with the substrate varieties of Flemish/Dutch, Wallon and Picard, all of which contain devoiced word-final consonants.

In his data collection procedures, Hambye followed the PFC (Phonologie du Français Contemporain) methodology. For each informant, he recorded both a formal interview, a reading passage and a more or less informal conversation between the informant and an acquaintance of the informant's. In each city, data were collected from twelve informants, six men and six women, divided

into three age groups (over 55, 35-50 and under 30) and three social class groups defined by the speaker's level of education (no post-secondary education, post-secondary education at an institution that is not a university and university education). The first fifteen canonically voiced word-final obstruents produced by each informant were analysed, auditorily and using Praat software.

Hambye found that word-final consonant devoicing was characteristic of older, less-educated speakers in Liège and Gembloux. This follows the expected pattern for a non-standard, local variant which may be in the process of disappearing due to phonological levelling and also corresponds to the findings of Pooley (1994). However, in Tournai, word-final consonant devoicing rates appear not to be influenced by social variables, giving the impression that this may be a stable variable. In Tournai, word-final consonant devoicing occurred only in contexts where it could be a result of phonetic constraints, namely preceding a voiceless consonant and before a pause, whereas in Liège and Gembloux, it also occurred in other environments. This could lead us to believe that in Tournai, devoicing is simply the result of a connected speech process rather than a sociolinguistically significant variant symbolic of local identity. Due to its close contact with France and their geographical proximity, it is possible that accommodation to speakers on the other side of the border has caused the most salient cases of devoicing (namely in cases where the phonetic context does not favour it) to be eliminated from the speech of the Tournai informants. This could be defined as a case of phonological levelling. The Tournai informants tended to devoice fricatives more frequently than plosives, probably because fricatives are, according to Hambye, phonetically more subject to devoicing than plosives, and devoicing appears to be a phonetically conditioned variable in Tournai.

In Tournai and Liège, there was no significant difference between voicing rates in the interview and conversation styles. In Gembloux, the devoicing rates were higher in conversation (52.1%) than in interview style (40.1%). This result can be explained by the fact that speakers tend to use higher rates of non-standard, vernacular variants in informal than formal styles. The lack of stylistic variation in Tournai provides support for the theory that word-final consonant devoicing in Tournai is a phonetically rather than sociolinguistically conditioned variable.

However, it is not clear why there should be stylistic variation in Gembloux but not in Liège. One possible explanation is that word-final consonant devoicing is subject to a greater degree of awareness and stigmatisation in the smaller town of Gembloux than it is in the large conurbation of Liège, whose citizens are known for being proud of their city and thus may not attach a stigma to making their geographical origins known through their speech.

Hambye concludes that the non-standard word-final consonant devoicing patterns observed in Liège and Gembloux cannot be due solely to substrate influence, since if this were so, similar devoicing rates would be found in Liège, Gembloux and Tournai. He deduces that normative pressure and the ideology of the standard have led to the differentiation of the use of devoicing in the three cities, with Tournai especially being affected by the supra-local French norm due to its proximity to and close contacts with France. This conclusion appears to indicate that it is standardisation from above rather than change from below through accommodation across the border leading in the long term to the dialect levelling that is at work in Tournai.

Bauvois (2002) investigated the word-final devoicing of canonically voiced plosives and fricatives in Belgian French. She based her research on 50 minimal pairs which included as many of the sounds of French and their possible distributions as possible. Her 96 informants were divided into four social class groups, each of which contained twelve men and twelve women. She found that, the lower the speaker's level of education, the more frequently he or she devoiced word-final consonants. Surprisingly given the results of Pooley's (1994) study in northern France, where clear gender differentiation patterns were found, Bauvois found no significant gender variation for this variable in her sample. This fits in with Hambye's (2009) results in Belgium, where a lack of gender variation also characterised the word-final consonant devoicing variable. We may conclude from these results that word-final consonant devoicing has different gender distributions in northern France and Belgium, and therefore probably different sociolinguistic meanings.

Temple (1992) examined the devoicing rate of plosives that are canonically voiced in Standard French in the *Atlas Linguistique de la France*, in areas

where a regional Oïl variety was spoken. She studied the effect of phonetic context, region and gender on devoicing. Overall, she found that females devoiced /b/ slightly more frequently than male speakers, with female speakers having an average devoicing rate of 11% and the male informants of 8%. When the gender distribution was examined region by region, however, it became clear that the interaction between gender and devoicing varied greatly according to geographical location. In the Lille/Nord Picardie area, women were found to have a much higher rate of devoicing than men (40.59% versus 23.76% of tokens of /b/ partially or completely devoiced). This confirms Pooley's (1994) findings in this geographical area. However, in all the other Oïl regions, the male and female informants had similar rates of devoicing (for example 38.61% for women and 36.63% for men in the Vosges/Lorraine area). It was found that devoicing was more frequent before a pause, /l/ or a voiceless fricative than before a vowel, /j/ or /r/. These results are similar to those of Hornsby (2006) and Pooley (1994), whose informants showed a tendency to devoice consonants most frequently in a pre-pausal context and least frequently before a voiced consonant. However, both Hornsby and Pooley found no significant difference between the devoicing rates of their informants preceding a voiceless consonant and in pre-vocalic position.

For /d/, Temple found greater overall gender differentiation than for /b/, with female speakers devoicing 26% of tokens and their male counterparts 17%. /d/ was more frequently devoiced than /b/ overall. /g/ was devoiced in 24% of tokens by females and in 12% of tokens by males, thus showing even greater gender differentiation than /b/ and /d/. It is not clear why the three plosives should have such different degrees of gender differentiation. However, the small number of tokens involved may make the differences appear greater than they would be with a larger amount of data. As a matter of fact, tests showed that the gender difference was only significant for /d/. The lack of a significant gender difference for /b/ and /g/ corresponds to the findings of Hambye (2009) and Bauvois (2002) described above, which show no significant gender differentiation in word-final consonant devoicing in Belgian French.

Temple provides a physiological explanation as to why women are more likely to devoice consonants than men. When there is occlusion in the supra-glottal

vocal tract, for example in the production of plosives, pressure accumulates above the glottis and if the occlusion is not released the airflow through the glottis is stopped, so the vocal cords cannot vibrate and voicing ceases. The smaller the vocal tract, the more quickly pressure can build up and therefore the more likely voicing is to cease. Since women have smaller vocal tracts than men, it seems that women are more likely to devoice canonically voiced plosives than men. However, this physiological explanation is clearly not sufficient to account for the fact that older women in Roubaix devoiced more consonants than men, but younger women in the same town had lower devoicing rates than their male counterparts (Pooley 1994), for example, or for the fact that there is gender differentiation in devoicing rates in France, but not in Belgium. There are clearly sociolinguistic, as well as physiological factors at play. Indeed, Temple acknowledges that, although the gender differences in devoicing in French may well have a physiological origin, they have now become sociolinguistically significant (Temple 1992: 357).

Temple also uses this physiological influence on devoicing to explain why some consonants are devoiced more frequently than others, since the supra-glottal cavity is larger for bilabials than dentals and larger for dentals than velars because, the further forward in the mouth occlusion occurs, the larger the supra-glottal cavity and thus the less likely devoicing is to occur. Velars are therefore the type of plosives more likely to be devoiced, followed by dentals, then bilabials.

Temple (2001) later carried out a study of the devoicing of word-initial plosives in contemporary French in order to compare it with the results of her analysis of words drawn from the *Atlas Linguistique de la France*. In the 1990s, she interviewed 30 urban professionals aged 23-42 from the cities of Lille and Bordeaux. The sample consisted of 17 women and 13 men. The informants were asked to read a short text and a series of sentences which contained plosives in various phonetic contexts, and these readings were recorded, then subjected to both auditory and acoustic analysis. 486 word-initial and 348 word-final tokens were analysed.

Temple found non-assimilatory consonant devoicing in the word-initial, word-medial and word-final contexts, with different distributions for different phonemes. This contrasts with her *Atlas Linguistique de la France* data, in which she found non-assimilatory devoicing only in the word-final position. Temple's results revealed much lower devoicing rates for the contemporary speakers than those found in the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* (some of whom had devoicing rates of over 30%). She was surprised to discover that none of the word-final devoiced tokens were produced by speakers from Lille, whereas other contemporary studies of the area around Lille (such as Pooley 1994) had shown word-final consonant devoicing to be persisting as a feature of regional speech. In contrast, the Bordeaux speakers devoiced 12% of word-final tokens on average. For all phonemes in all positions, except word-final /b/, where devoiced tokens were produced, female speakers produced more devoiced tokens than their male counterparts from the same region. This gender variation is similar to that found by Pooley (1994) in speakers aged over 45 in Roubaix.

Temple observes that a change appears to have taken place in the far north-east of France (represented by Lille in this study). Whereas the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* data show high levels of word-final consonant devoicing, the contemporary Lille informants produce none whatsoever, with the results obtained by Pooley (1994) in Roubaix being halfway between the two. The difference in devoicing rates between Pooley's and Temple's speakers could be attributed to the fact that Pooley's informants were all working class speakers (as were the *Atlas Linguistique de la France* informants), whereas Temple's were all from middle class backgrounds. We would therefore expect Temple's informants to use a higher percentage of the supra-local, standard variant than Pooley's, as has proved to be the case. Temple's and Pooley's informants may represent different stages in the process of levelling and elimination of the regional feature of word-final consonant devoicing, with the change having been completed in the speech of the middle classes and still ongoing amongst their working class counterparts.

The Lille speakers may be avoiding devoicing as much as possible, since in their geographical area it is a stigmatised variant associated with *patois*,



whereas in Bordeaux devoicing is subject to no such stigma. This may explain why the Bordeaux speakers show higher rates of devoicing than those from Lille, since they attach no stigma to it, make no effort to avoid it and therefore devoice more 'naturally' than the Lille informants due to connected speech processes, whereas the Lille speakers are making an effort not to allow their consonants to be devoiced. This theory is supported by the fact that, in word-initial position, where devoicing has not traditionally been stigmatised in Lille, the Lille and Bordeaux speakers have similar rates of devoicing (4.5% and 3.5% respectively).

Temple concludes that there has been some levelling between Lille and Bordeaux, with speakers from Lille abandoning their local devoiced variant and adopting a pattern which is closer to the supra-regional norm. She describes this change as a case of 'over-levelling', since the Lille speakers hypercorrect in order to avoid word-final consonant devoicing, thus producing lower rates of word-final consonant devoicing than required by the supra-regional norm as represented by the Bordeaux sample.

Goudaillier (1985) carried out an electrographic study of the devoicing of canonically voiced plosives by 31 children aged 6-10 in the North of France, from Vervins in the Aisne department in 1980-1983. He analysed a total of 2046 tokens. He found variation in voicing as defined in terms of laryngeal vibration times according to the gender and age of the children. The older children (in the CM1 and CM2 classes) had lower percentage rates of devoicing than their younger schoolmates (in the CP and CE1 classes). In all age groups, girls had a higher devoicing rate than boys.

Goudaillier (1981) also carried out a more detailed in-depth study of 11 children from Vervins and from Aix-en-Provence, all aged six or seven. The sample consisted of seven boys and four girls. He found that the overall devoicing rate was much higher in Vervins (26.2%) than in Aix (4.4%), presumably because the Regional French of Vervins was influenced by a substrate variety in which canonically voiced plosives were devoiced, whereas the substrate variety in Aix did not feature such devoicing.

His results showed that /g/ underwent the highest rate of devoicing, followed by /d/, then /b/, in accordance with the hypothesis formulated by Temple (1992: 357) that the smaller the sub-glottal cavity during occlusion, the more likely pressure is to build up to a point where it stops the vocal cords vibrating. He found the highest rates of devoicing in word-initial position after a pause, then word-initially in general, followed by intervocalic consonants. This is not surprising given that it shows an interaction between devoicing and the phonetic features of the previous segment. The devoicing rate is likely to be lower in intervocalic position because the consonant in question is surrounded by sounds which are pronounced with vocal cord vibrations. After a pause, the vibration of the vocal cords may start later than the utterance of the sound.

Goudaillier's instrumental analysis enabled him to determine that the canonically voiced plosives he studied were not qualitatively divided into two separate categories of 'voiced throughout the sound' and 'completely devoiced throughout the sound'. Instead, there were intermediate tokens which could be defined as partially devoiced. Some of the partially devoiced variants which Goudaillier transcribes as [b̥], [d̥] and [g̥] are voiced at the beginning of the consonant's articulation, then there is an absence of voicing at the moment of explosion (when the air which has built up in the vocal tract during occlusion is released). The opposite is also possible, with voicing beginning only after the articulation of a sound has already started. The voice onset time can be positive (if voicing starts after the articulation of a sound has already begun) or negative (in the case of anticipatory voicing of the preceding sound before the phone in question has begun to be articulated) For each phoneme, Goudaillier found three possible variants. For example, for the phoneme /b/, the possible variants were [b], which was fully voiced through the articulation of the sound, [b̥], which was partially devoiced as described above, with either a gap between the beginning of articulation and the onset of voicing (a positive voice onset time) or a consonant whose onset was devoiced but became devoiced at the moment of occlusion due to a build-up of pressure in the vocal tract, and [p] which was totally devoiced throughout articulation. In cases where the latter variant was used, the phonemic differences between /b/ and /p/, /d/ and /t/ and /g/ and /k/ were in some cases preserved by using a greater degree of 'force articulatoire' to pronounce the canonically voiceless consonant. This could be considered

comparable to the aspiration of canonically voiceless consonants in order to maintain this opposition, which is described in the literature as a feature of Alsatian Regional French (Carton et al 1983), for example *boire* (to drink) [pwaR] versus *poire* (pear) [p<sup>h</sup>waR].

### **7.3 Reasons for choosing this variable**

Consonant devoicing was chosen as an object of study for this research project first and foremost because it is mentioned throughout the literature on Alsatian Regional French from the nineteenth century to the present. The researcher heard numerous instances of consonant devoicing during the participant observation phase of her fieldwork. Consonant devoicing appears to be due to the influence of the Germanic substrate variety, and this variety is now facing a crisis, as young people abandon it in favour of French. A quantitative study of consonant devoicing and its use by speakers with different levels of proficiency in the local Germanic variety may shed light on the relationship between accent levelling and the decline of Alsatian. This variable was also chosen because it is above the level of speaker awareness and therefore likely to carry sociolinguistic significance. When the researcher asked informants to describe the Alsatian accent, in a great many cases they mentioned consonant-devoicing. Local jokes such as saying that the ‘SP’ written on firemen’s lorries (which stands for *sapeur-pompier*s, or firemen), in Alsace stands for ‘*sa prûle*’ (as opposed to ‘*ça brûle*’, ‘it is burning’) show that awareness of consonant devoicing as an Alsatian phenomenon is widespread, and that it is considered something to be laughed at. In texts written in imitation of the Alsatian accent, consonant devoicing appears to be by far the most frequently imitated feature, and thus it would seem to be extremely salient, both to outsiders and to Alsatians themselves. This variable has been shown to have sociolinguistic significance in other French-speaking areas, such as the far north of France (Pooley 1994; Hornsby 2006; Temple 1992: 357; Temple 2001: 151) and in Belgium (Hambye 2009: 35, 37; Bauvois: 135). The variable also has the advantage of occurring extremely frequently in spontaneous speech and of being relatively easy to analyse auditorily.

#### **7.4 Review of Attestations of Consonant Devoicing in Alsace**

The first attestation of consonant devoicing in Alsatian Regional French that could be traced by the researcher dates from the mid-nineteenth century, in D'Hauteville's (1852) pronunciation manual for Alsatians. He provides an example of an Alsatian mother speaking to her child in which the only regional pronunciation feature noted is consonant devoicing (D'Hauteville 1852: 3): 'venez percer l'enfant [...] donne seulement encore un paissé à ta maman [...] Les ponnes petites choues!'. This short text (which was invented, not observed by Dautherville and therefore may not be a completely realistic reproduction of the way people spoke at the time) contains examples of the devoicing of /b/ (*bercer* > *percer*, *baiser* > *paissé*, *bonnes* > *ponnes*), of /z/ (*baiser* > *paissé*) and of /ʒ/ (*joues* > *choues*). Not all the possible candidates for devoicing are devoiced (*venez*, *donne*), which may indicate that there was already variation between voiced and voiceless variants at the time. However, it is impossible to make any generalisation based on a fictional short sentence.

D'Hauteville later speaks of the mistakes Alsatians make with 'nos durs et nos doux' (our hard and soft sounds) (D'Hauteville 1852: 4). This is almost certainly a reference to some kind of non-standard voicing patterns. D'Hauteville provides an example of an Alsatian who had written the word '*perché*' (perched) as '*berger*', which seems to indicate a lack of phonemic opposition between /b/ and /p/.

His second invented speech sample from an Alsatian with a regional accent contains the following examples of consonant devoicing: 'Ponchour, Monsieur, comment fous portez-fous? [...] Chai mal au cou; vous criez à l'acteur: piss, piss. [...] che voudrais foir de Neptune la crotte' ('Good morning Sir, how are you? [...] My neck hurts; You shout to the actor: encore, encore [...] I would like to see Neptune's grotto'). This short speech contains examples of the devoicing of /b/ (*bonjour* > *ponchour*, *bis* > *piss*), of /g/ (*grotte* > *crotte*), of /v/ (*vous* > *fous*, *voir* > *foir*) and of /ʒ/ (*bonjour* > *ponchour*, *j'ai* > *chai*, *je* > *che*). Again, not all possible consonants are devoiced (*voudrais*). He also reports a quotation from a minister at the time, which is still famous and has been repeated in many publications since; 'nos brochets sont des truites' (nos projets sont détruits, devoicing of /ʒ/ and voicing of canonically voiceless /p/, indicating a loss of phonemic opposition between /b/ and /p/). The author describes the Alsatian

accent in general, and non-standard devoicing in particular, in an extremely negative way. He describes the devoicing of '*joues*' ('cheeks'), pronounced '*choux*' ('cabbages') as '*blessant partout l'oreille*' ('injuring ears everywhere') (D'Hauteville 1852: 11).

He provides a series of pronunciation exercises for Alsatians to help them learn the differences in pronunciation between /z/ and /s/, /ʒ/ and /ʃ/, /b/ and /p/, /d/ and /t/, /g/ and /k/, with lists of minimal pairs which he recommends reading aloud in order to perfect one's pronunciation, such as *bain/pain*, *joie/choix*, *dent/temps*, *goût/cou*. He describes the speech of those who do not manage to distinguish these pairs 'properly' as '*baragouin*' ('gibberish') (D'Hauteville 1852: 19). He provides sentences in the traditional format of prescriptive grammars and pronunciation manuals, such as: do not say: '*Cartez-vous, leur dit-il, te fentre l'héritache*'; do say '*gardez-vous, dit-il, de vendre l'héritage*' (do not sell your inheritance'). This sentence shows devoicing of plosives and fricatives in word-initial (*de* > *te*, *vendre* > *fentre*, *gardez* > *cartez*, *vous* > *fous*), word-medial (*gardez* > *cartez*, *vendre* > *fentre*) and word-final (*héritage* > *héritache*) contexts.

D'Hauteville (1852: 46) also states that Alsatians sometimes voice canonically voiceless obstruents, for example *en carreaux* pronounced *en gâro*, *cher* pronounced *gerr*. This indicates loss of a phonemic voiced-voiceless opposition. This appears to be a uniquely Alsatian component of the variable under study, since in the studies of consonant devoicing in France and Belgium reviewed above, there was no mention of a corresponding voicing of canonically voiceless obstruents and very little discussion of whether the phonemic opposition between canonically voiced and voiceless obstruents could in some cases be said to have been neutralised.

D'Hauteville reports that an Alsatian who pronounced *détenus* as *têtes-nues* experienced feelings of shame and was laughed at by others. He describes the devoicing of /b/ in *boulet* > *poulet* as '*prononcé à l'allemande*' (pronounced in a German way) (D'Hauteville 1852: 55), which in the hostile climate between France and Germany at the time leading up to the Franco-Prussian war was very far from being a compliment. He also describes the lack of a phonemic opposition between voiced and voiceless obstruents in the following terms, which are obviously extremely negative '*un lutin invisible du bon français est*

l'ennemi terrible [...] un monstre [...] sur la langue agit perfidement' (an invisible goblin is the terrible enemy of good French [...] a monster [...] acts treacherously on the tongue) (D'Hauteville 1852: 59). Thus the lack of a voicing opposition and the devoicing of canonically voiced obstruents appear to have been above the level of speakers' awareness and socially stigmatised as early as the nineteenth century.

The second attestation of consonant devoicing as a feature of Alsatian Regional French found by the researcher occurs in another pronunciation manual, written by De Dietrich (1917), who refers to the difficulty Alsatians have in differentiating between pairs of voiced and voiceless consonants, namely /b/~/p/, /d/~/t/, /g/~/k/, /v/~/f/, /ʒ/~/ʃ/. Like D'Hauteville, De Dietrich views this Regional French feature in an extremely negative way, commenting that 'ils prononcent souvent les consonnes dures douces et inversement les douces dures: ils diront chartin pour jardin, ce qui est du plus vilain effet, mais aussi jôsse pour chose' ('they often pronounce voiced consonants as voiceless and conversely voiceless consonants as voiced, they pronounce *jardin* as *chartin*, which has a horrible effect, but also *jôsse* instead of *chose*') and 'rien n'enlaidit le français comme les consonnes chuintées<sup>3</sup> douces, prononcées dures' ('nothing renders French as ugly as soft (voiced) post-alveolar fricatives pronounced in a hard (voiceless) way'). He describes the non-standard voicing patterns present in Alsace as 'des plus comiques' ('extremely comical'). He considers non-standard consonant devoicing to be the worst feature of the Alsatian accent, writing that 'le défaut capital des Alsaciens est la prononciation dure des consonnes douces, et surtout s pour z and ch pour j' ('Alsatians' main defect is pronouncing voiced consonants in a voiceless way, especially s for z and ch for j') (De Dietrich 1917: 81).

De Dietrich observes that Alsatians' tendency to use non-standard voicing patterns in French is reinforced by a sort of covert prestige, since he reports that Alsatians would be laughed at by their peers if they tried to say *Georges* instead of *Chorche*, for example (De Dietrich 1917: 56).

He remarks that for /f/~/v/ the apparent lack of a phonemic voicing opposition does not seem to result in arbitrary fluctuation between voiced and voiceless

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<sup>3</sup> The French term 'consonnes chuintées' is used to refer to /ʒ/ and /ʃ/.

allophones, or in exclusive use of the devoiced variant, but instead an intermediate timbre, between [f] and [v], is used. This could be interpreted as describing a partially (de)voiced variant (De Dietrich 1917: 65).

De Dietrich (1917: 66) also observes that Alsatians often tend to pronounce the voiceless plosives /t/, /k/, and /p/, as well as the voiceless fricative /f/, with strong aspiration. This trait may differentiate them from /d/, /g/, /b/ and /v/ when a voicing opposition is absent.

Three years after De Dietrich, Suiter (1920) produced yet another pronunciation manual for Alsatians in which she teaches the oppositions between the voiced and voiceless plosive and fricative pairs of Standard French and recommends practising saying minimal pairs involving this opposition aloud. She describes Alsatians as saying /b/ instead of /p/ and vice versa, which again indicates a loss of the voicing opposition in Alsace and a tendency to voice canonically voiceless plosives, and calls this 'leur fausse prononciation' ('their incorrect pronunciation', Suiter 1920: 3).

Philipp (1965: 123-124), in her study of the influence of the Alsatian substrate on the variety of French spoken in Blaesheim, a village that has now become a suburb of Strasbourg, does not mention devoicing a great deal, limiting herself to examples such as *jour* [juR] and *chose* [fos], but does give one example of *pré* pronounced [bre], which indicates voicing of canonically voiceless /p/, and therefore a loss of the voicing opposition for /p/ and /b/.

More recently, Vajta (2004), whilst carrying out a study of linguistic change over three generations in an Alsatian family, observed phonetic interference between Alsatian and French, including the devoicing of canonically voiced consonants in Alsatian Regional French. She states that:

les sons donnant le plus souvent du fil à retordre aux dialectophones sont les consonnes occlusives sourdes, [p, t, k], prenant facilement la place des sonores correspondantes [b, d, g] [...], les consonnes sonores en position finale qui sont désonorisées (sud [syd] devient [syʔ]. Village [vilaʒ] devient [vilaʃ] et, en general, l'opposition entre consonnes sourdes et consonnes sonores qui tend à disparaître (jambe [ʒãb] devient [ʒãpʰ], pas [pa] devient [ba], coûter [kute] devient [gute]).

(the most difficult sounds for dialect speakers are the voiceless plosives [p, t, k] which easily replace the corresponding voiced sounds [b, d, g] [...] word-final voiced consonants which are devoiced (*sud* [syd] becomes [syʔ]. *Village* [vilaʒ] becomes vilaʃ] and, in general, the opposition between voiceless and voiced consonants which tends to disappear (*jambe* [ʒãb] becomes [ʒãpʰ], *pas* [pa] becomes [ba], *coûter* [kute] becomes [gute]) (Vajta 2004: 110-111).

She also mentions that the vowel preceding a canonically voiced consonant is often lengthened, even when the consonant is devoiced, thus allowing the phonemic opposition to be maintained by means of the length of the preceding vowel. Vajta gives the examples of *robe* ([Rɔb] in Standard French) pronounced [Ro:pʰ] and *bague* [bag] pronounced [pa:k] (Vajta 2004: 111). The fact that Vajta could still observe this loss of the voicing opposition, at least for /p/~b/ and /k/~g/, and word-final consonant devoicing, and thought them worth mentioning only a decade ago in 2004, indicates that consonant devoicing is still very much a part of Alsatian Regional French and therefore worth investigating in the present study. Vajta quotes Bonnot, Bothorel-Witz and Huck (1993: 36, cited in Vajta 2004: 111) as saying that 'le marqueur phonétique régional le plus sensible est la désonorisation' ('the most perceptible/sensitive regional marker is devoicing').

As well as attestations of devoicing in the Regional French of Alsace by linguists, a number of recent 'folk' (i.e. not produced by professional linguists) sources also mention this variable. For example, Winter (2000), in her humorous life manual for newcomers to Alsace, writes of confusion between /b/ and /p/, giving the example of *beurre* pronounced like *peur*, and between /ʒ/ and /j/ (which she writes as j and ch), whereby Alsatians pronounced *jabot* and *chapeau* in exactly the same way. This description shows that word-initial and word-medial devoicing of /b/, and devoicing of word-initial /ʒ/ were still widespread in Alsace at the time of publication in 2000, only 14 years ago. The attestation of these features in a non-linguistic work also shows that they are above the level of speaker awareness, and therefore likely to carry sociolinguistic significance and perhaps to be stigmatised.



## **7.5 The Pilot Study**

A pilot study was first carried out on an interview with an urban older male working class speaker, which lasted one hour and seven minutes. This speaker was chosen for the pilot study for two reasons. Firstly, because the research hypothesis for this linguistic variable was that the rates of consonant devoicing would be higher amongst male than female speakers, higher amongst working class than middle class speakers, and increase in proportion to the informant's age. The pilot study involved auditory analysis of all tokens of /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /z/ and /ʒ/ that occurred during the interview. The relationships between the devoicing rates of these phonemes and their linguistic environment were analysed in terms of tonic stress (stressed or unstressed syllable), the place of the token within the word (word-initial, word-medial or word-final), and the preceding and following segments (pause, vowel, voiced consonant or voiceless consonant). Originally, this kind of detailed analysis of every token of all these phonemes had been planned for the entire speaker sample. However, during the pilot study, the analysis of the data from this single interview took several days to complete and it was therefore felt that it would be too time-consuming to carry out this type of analysis for the whole speaker sample. The pilot study was therefore used to provide preliminary results which could act as a basis for decisions about which phonemes and linguistic environments appear to show interesting patterns of variation and therefore could be worthwhile objects of analysis for all the informants.

In total, 1339 tokens were analysed during the pilot study. 124 of these were tokens of /b/ (9.26%), 461 were tokens of /d/ (34.43%), 62 of /g/ (4.63%), 327 of /v/ (24.42%), 112 of /z/ (8.36%) and 253 of /ʒ/ (18.89%). Of the 1339 tokens, a total of 190 (14.19%) were totally or partially devoiced. Table 7.1 provides a breakdown of the devoicing rates for the individual phonemes.

Phoneme	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
/b/	124	6	4.84
/d/	461	20	4.34
/g/	62	3	0.48
/v/	327	4	1.22
/z/	112	20	17.86
/ʒ/	253	137	54.15
All plosives	647	29	4.48
All fricatives	692	161	23.27
All tokens	1339	190	14.19

*Table 7.1 Devoicing Rates for Individual Phonemes*

Table 7.1 shows considerable variation in rates of devoicing between phonemes, with /ʒ/ having the highest voicing rate at 54.15% and /g/ the lowest at 0.48%. The fricatives had a much higher average rate of devoicing (23.27%) than the plosives (4.48%). This result is surprising since previous studies of consonant devoicing in French have shown very similar rates of devoicing for plosives and fricatives overall. For example, Hornsby's (2006: 72) analysis of word-final consonant devoicing in the speech of 33 northern French informants from Avion yielded overall devoicing rates of 29.33% for plosives and 30.66% for fricatives. Pooley's (1994: 224) results for his Roubaix sample follow a similar pattern, with overall word-final devoicing rates of 9.33% for plosives and 9.08% for fricatives. The discrepancy between the results of the present pilot study and those of Pooley and Hornsby could be attributed to several factors, including the fact that Hornsby and Pooley studied only word-final consonant devoicing, whereas the above table shows devoicing rates for all linguistic contexts. Analysis of devoicing rates according to linguistic context below will show whether this is indeed the case. It is also probable that consonant devoicing does not follow exactly the same patterns in Alsace as in Avion or Roubaix, since Alsace is a considerable distance from the Nord-Pas-de-Calais and has a very different substrate variety. Since the pilot study is only based on the speech of one informant, it is possible that the differences in devoicing rates between fricatives and plosives simply reflect idiosyncratic behaviour on

the part of this speaker. Later analysis of the whole speaker sample may determine whether or not this is the case. Indeed, Foley (1977: 29) elaborates a scale of phonological strength in which labials are 'stronger' than other consonants in that they are less likely to undergo lenition or voicing. Pooley (1994: 226) suggests that this may be taken to mean that plosives are more likely to be devoiced than fricatives. In his Roubaix studies, he found that word-final consonant devoicing was most frequent in coronals, labials and velars in that order (Pooley 1994: 215).

Looking in more detail at the voicing rates for the individual phonemes, it is clear that /ʒ/ has a far higher devoicing rate, at 54.15%, than any of the other phonemes. This may be because the [ʒ] sound does not exist in the Germanic substrate variety, and dialect speakers therefore replace it with the closest equivalent in their phonemic repertoire, /ʃ/. [b], [d], [g], [v] and [z], however, do exist in Alsatian and therefore may feel more 'natural' or 'easier' to dialect speakers. A regional explanation for the exceptionally high rate of devoicing of /ʒ/ is indeed suggested by the fact that this phenomenon does not appear in any other studies of consonant devoicing in French known to the researcher. The relatively low rates of devoicing for /v/ and /g/ compared to the other phonemes correspond to those found by Pooley (1994: 224) in Roubaix, where /v/ had an average devoicing rate of 7%, as opposed to 9.33% for all plosives, and /g/ of 7.5%, as opposed to 9.083% for all fricatives. However, Pooley does not offer any direct explanation for this, although he does state that speakers probably devoice coronal sounds (i.e. any dental, alveolar or post-alveolar consonants, in this study /d/, /z/ and /ʒ/) more frequently than other kinds of consonant simply because coronals are more frequent in speech (Pooley 1994: 226).

Since /ʒ/ showed higher rates of devoicing than the other consonants, it was decided to make it the main focus of the broad study of the whole speaker sample.

### **7.5.1 Linguistic Context**

The linguistic contexts of the tokens were analysed in three ways: according to the position of the token with the word (initial, medial or final), according to the preceding and following phonetic contexts (pause, vowel, voiced consonant or voiceless consonant). Table 7.2 shows the influence of the token's position in the word on devoicing.

Phoneme	Position	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
[b]	Initial	97	5	5.15
	Medial	26	1	3.85
	Final	1	0	0
[d]	Initial	383	13	3.39
	Medial	67	5	7.46
	Final	11	2	18.18
[g]	Initial	49	2	4.08
	Medial	13	1	7.69
	Final	0	0	No data
[v]	Initial	179	3	1.68
	Medial	146	1	0.68
	Final	2	0	0
[z]	Initial	10	2	20
	Medial	59	15	25.42
	Final	43	3	6.98
[ʒ]	Initial	163	82	50.31
	Medial	45	30	66.67
	Final	45	25	55.55
All plosives	Initial	529	20	3.78
	Medial	106	7	6.60
	Final	12	2	16.67
All fricatives	Initial	352	87	24.7
	Medial	250	46	18.40
	Final	90	28	31.11
All tokens	Initial	881	107	12.1
	Medial	356	53	14.89
	Final	102	30	29.41

*Table 7.2 Influence of the Token's Position in the Word on Devoicing*

Overall, the highest rate of devoicing was found word-finally (29.41%), followed by the word-medial (14.89%) and word-initial (12.15%) positions. It is unsurprising that the word-final position is most favourable to devoicing, since

the vocal cords may stop vibrating before the pronunciation of the final sound in a word has finished, anticipating a following pause if the word is at the end of a rhythmic group. In French, most assimilation is regressive, and therefore the voicing of a consonant is likely to depend on the following, rather than the preceding segment. This may help explain the fact that the word-medial tokens, which in many cases occur between two voiced sounds, show a higher rate of devoicing than the word-initial tokens, which are often preceded by a pause, since it is the following, and not the preceding context which influences voicing. In order to determine whether this is indeed the case, the rates of devoicing according first to the preceding, and then the following context of the tokens will now be examined. Table 7.3 shows the interaction between rates of devoicing and preceding phonetic context.

Phoneme	Preceding context	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
/b/	V	62	4	6.45
	VDC	18	0	0
	VLC	1	0	0
	Pause	43	2	4.65
/d/	V	324	16	4.94
	VDC	66	3	4.55
	VLC	23	1	4.35
	Pause	48	0	0
/g/	V	43	3	6.98
	VDC	9	0	0
	VLC	1	0	0
	Pause	9	0	0
/v/	V	281	2	0.71
	VDC	16	0	0
	VLC	5	0	0
	Pause	25	2	8.00
/z/	V	104	19	18.27
	VDC	8	1	12.50
	VLC	0	0	No data
	Pause	0	0	No data
/ʒ/	V	154	81	52.60
	VDC	32	22	68.75
	VLC	2	2	100
	Pause	65	32	49.23
All plosives	V	429	23	5.36
	VDC	93	3	3.23
	VLC	25	1	4.00
	Pause	100	2	2.00
All fricatives	V	539	102	18.92
	VDC	56	23	41.07
	VLC	7	2	28.57
	Pause	90	34	37.78

All tokens	V	968	125	12.91
	VDC	149	26	17.45
	VLC	32	3	9.38
	Pause	190	36	18.95

*Table 7.3 Influence of Preceding Phonetic Context on Consonant Devoicing*

V = vowel

VDC = voiced consonant

VLC = voiceless consonant

The overall results shown in Table 7.3 indicate that the highest rates of devoicing occur before a pause (18.95%), which is to be expected given that during a pause, the vocal cords do not vibrate, and therefore the articulation of a post-pausal sound may begin before the vocal cords start to vibrate, leading to a partially devoiced consonant with a positive voicing onset time. The second highest rate of devoicing occurred after a voiced consonant (17.45%), which is somewhat surprising since one would not expect the vocal cords to stop vibrating in the movement from one voiced sound to another. The third highest rate of devoicing was found after a vowel, and the lowest devoicing rate occurred after a voiceless consonant, which is surprising given that one might expect the articulation of a preceding voiceless sound to favour a positive voice onset time and therefore devoicing. The explanation for these seemingly puzzling results may lie in the fact that French consonants are typically subject to regressive, rather than progressive assimilation, and that it is therefore the following, rather than the preceding phonetic environment which dictates devoicing patterns.

Table 7.4 shows the relationship between consonant devoicing and following phonetic context.



Phoneme	Following Context	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
/b/	V	106	5	4.72
	VDC	16	1	6.25
	VLC	1	0	0
	Pause	1	0	0
/d/	V	436	15	3.44
	VDC	14	1	7.14
	VLC	6	30	20.00
	Pause	5	1	20.00
/g/	V	42	1	2.38
	VDC	20	2	10.00
	VLC	0	0	No data
	Pause	0	0	No data
/v/	V	302	4	1.32
	VDC	23	0	0
	VLC	1	0	0
	Pause	1	0	0
/z/	V	92	17	18.48
	VDC	11	1	9.09
	VLC	1	0	0
	Pause	8	2	25.00
/ʒ/	V	215	114	53.02
	VDC	9	5	55.56
	VLC	6	6	100
	Pause	23	12	52.17
All plosives	V	584	21	3.60
	VDC	50	4	8.00
	VLC	7	3	42.86
	Pause	6	1	16.67
All fricatives	V	609	135	22.17
	VLC	43	6	13.95
	VLC	8	6	75.00
	Pause	32	14	43.75

All tokens	V	1193	156	13.08
	VDC	93	10	10.75
	VLC	15	9	60.00
	Pause	38	15	39.47

*Table 7.4 Influence of Following Context on Consonant Devoicing*

Table 7.4 shows that the highest average rate of devoicing occurs before a voiceless consonant (60%), followed by the post-pausal environment (39.47%), then in the pre-vocalic context (13.08%) and finally the lowest rate of devoicing was found before a voiced consonant (10.75%). These results conform to some extent to the expected pattern, since, before a voiced consonant or a pause, the vocal cords may stop vibrating before the articulation of the consonant has finished, leading to devoicing, whereas they are unlikely to stop vibrating before another voiced sound, whether consonantal or vocalic. However, it is rather unexpected that the rate of devoicing should be higher before a voiceless consonant than before a pause, since in previous studies of consonant devoicing in French, the highest rates of devoicing occurred pre-pausally (Pooley 1994; Bauvois 2002). This difference may be explained by the fact that these previous studies only investigated word-final consonant devoicing, whereas the present pilot study examined consonant devoicing in all positions (word-initially, word-medially and word-finally). We may conclude from these results that following phonetic environment does indeed have an effect on consonant devoicing patterns.

As well as the position of a token within a word, and its preceding and following phonetic contexts, it was thought possible that whether or not a token occurs in a stressed syllable might influence devoicing patterns. The data were therefore examined according to their position in a stressed or unstressed syllable. The results are shown in Table 7.5.

Phoneme	Type of syllable	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
/b/	Stressed	69	2	2.90
	Unstressed	55	4	7.27
/d/	Stressed	54	1	1.85
	Unstressed	407	19	4.67
/g/	Stressed	22	0	0
	Unstressed	40	3	7.5
/v/	Stressed	30	0	0
	Unstressed	297	4	1.35
/z/	Stressed	15	4	26.67
	Unstressed	97	16	16.49
/ʒ/	Stressed	38	21	55.26
	Unstressed	215	116	53.95
All plosives	Stressed	145	3	2.07
	Unstressed	502	26	5.18
All fricatives	Stressed	83	25	30.12
	Unstressed	609	136	22.33
All tokens	Stressed	228	28	12.28
	Unstressed	1111	162	1.46

*Table 7.5 Influence of Tonic Stress on Consonant Devoicing*

For the interview as a whole, the devoicing rate for the stressed tokens (12.28%) was considerably higher than the devoicing rate for the unstressed tokens (1.46%). However, when the results for each individual phoneme are examined, great variability can be seen, with the devoicing rates for stressed and unstressed syllables sometimes being similar (55.26% for stressed and 53.95% for unstressed syllables for /ʒ/, sometimes being higher in stressed than unstressed syllables (26.67% versus 16.49% for /z/) and sometimes being higher in unstressed than stressed syllables (7.27% versus 2.90% for /b/).

In order to shed further light on the tendencies revealed in the pilot study described above, three further pilot studies were carried out, one with an older

working class female and two with young urban middle class speakers, one male and one female. These speakers were selected in order to provide a range of age, gender and social class data for detailed analysis.

### **7.6 Pilot Study 2: Older Working-Class Female**

In total, 2360 tokens were analysed for this speaker, of which only 28 (1.19%) were devoiced. Of these 28 devoiced tokens, 26 were tokens of /ʒ/, one was a token of /b/ and one was a token of /d/. All the devoiced tokens, except for one token of /ʒ/, occurred in environments where they might be devoiced in Standardised French due to regressive assimilation, namely, before a voiceless consonant. The majority of the devoiced tokens occurred in the word *je* on which the schwa was elided, followed by a verb beginning with the voiceless consonants /p/ or /s/.

The above results are surprising given that the speaker is elderly and from a working class background, and could therefore be expected to use a relatively high proportion of the regional devoiced variant. However, this does not appear to be the case, since the informant's usage conforms almost entirely to supralocal patterns. One possible explanation for these results is the fact that the informant lived and worked in Paris for a few years as a young adult, and the resulting contact with speakers of Parisian French may have led to a loss of markedly regional features which continued in the following decades. However, this hypothesis cannot be valid for the (h) variable, since this informant has one of the highest rates of use of the regional [h] variant in the whole sample (31/35 or 88.57% of tokens of the (h) variable were realised as [h]). The contrasting behaviour of the informant regarding the (h) and devoicing variables may indicate that the levelling process has reached a later stage for consonant devoicing than for (h). This, together with contact with speakers of Parisian French may have led the informant to eliminate devoicing, but not use of [h] from her speech, may also suggest that devoicing is stigmatised to a greater extent and more strongly regionally marked than the [h] variant of (h). Indeed, not all accounts of Alsatian Regional French mention the (h) variable, but they all without exception mention the devoicing of plosives and fricatives, often describing the latter in an extremely negative way.

However, it is also possible that, whereas [h] is associated with speakers of both genders, consonant devoicing is primarily associated with males, and that it is for this reason that the older working-class male informant has relatively high devoicing rates, whereas those of his female counterpart are very low. Analysis of the speech of the whole speaker sample is needed in order to determine the social connotations of consonant devoicing.

In order to determine whether or not non-assimilatory consonant devoicing was still present amongst the younger generation and if so, whether or not it follows the patterns shown in the speech of the older informants analysed above, pilot studies of two speakers from the youngest age group were also carried out. These speakers were drawn from the middle-class sample, in order to provide as great a contrast as possible with the older working class speakers on whom the first part of the pilot study was based. In the younger generation, pilot studies of one male and one female speaker were conducted.

### **7.7 Pilot Study Results: Younger Middle-Class Female**

Like the older working-class female, the younger middle-class female has a very low rate of devoicing (56 out of 1107 tokens, or 5.06% of tokens, were devoiced) and she only devoiced consonants which might also undergo this process in supra-local French due to regressive assimilation, namely, consonants which occurred before a voiceless consonant. All the consonants devoiced by this informant except one (word-final /ʒ/) were tokens of /ʒ/ in the word *je*, in which the schwa was elided, following by a verb beginning with the voiceless consonants /s/ or /p/. This absence of the regional variant in the younger speaker suggests that accent levelling may indeed be occurring, or that, as hypothesised above, devoicing may be a variant associated with men.

### **7.8 Pilot Study Results: Younger Middle Class Male**

Like the younger middle class female, her male counterpart has a very low rate of devoicing (30 out of 1461 tokens, or 2.05% of tokens, were devoiced) and he only devoiced consonants which might also undergo this process in supra-local French due to regressive assimilation, namely, consonants which occurred

before a voiceless consonant. All the consonants devoiced by this informant except two (word-final /ʒ/) were tokens of /ʒ/ in the word *je*, in which the schwa was elided, followed by a verb beginning with the voiceless consonants /s/ or /p/. This absence of the regional variant in the younger male speaker suggests that accent levelling may indeed be occurring and invalidates the hypothesis expressed above that the younger female informant had a low rate of devoicing because this regional variant was associated with males. Indeed, the younger middle class male has a lower rate of devoicing than his female counterpart. The contrast between the devoicing rates of the older (23.27%) and younger (2.05%) male speakers is stark and appears to indicate a clear loss of the regional variant in apparent time. However, more data from a larger speaker sample are needed before any such generalisations can safely be made. The data from the whole speaker sample for /ʒ/ are presented in Chapter 8 below. Due to time constraints on the analysis, the effect of stress and preceding phonetic context were omitted and only the /ʒ/ phoneme (which seems subject to devoicing to the greatest extent in the pilot sample) was analysed.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

The results of the pilot study appear to confirm the research hypothesis that accent levelling is taking place in Alsace, since the two older speakers in the pilot study have much higher devoicing rates than their younger counterparts. This age distribution appears to indicate a change in progress. Analysis of the linguistic constraints on devoicing shows that the most frequently devoiced consonant is /ʒ/. Since it was found to be impossible due to the time constraints on this research project to analyse all the canonically voiced consonants throughout the speaker sample, the /ʒ/ phoneme was selected for large scale quantitative analysis. The results of this analysis are presented and discussed in Chapter 8.

## **Chapter 8: Quantitative Analysis of the Devoicing of /ʒ/**

This chapter will present the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the devoicing of /ʒ/ conducted in this study, beginning with the effect of linguistic constraints (position of /ʒ/ within the word). The various social factors which may influence devoicing rates (age, gender, social class, urban or rural origin, ability to speak Alsatian and regional attachment) will then be discussed. Finally, there will be a brief discussion of the voicing of canonically voiceless consonants.

### **8.1 Devoicing of /ʒ/- Linguistic Constraints**

Overall, 12,083 tokens of /ʒ/ were produced throughout the sample, of which 1994 (16.50%) were devoiced. The effect of the token's position in the word (initial, medial or final) and the following phonetic context (voiceless consonant, voiced consonant, vowel or pause) were analysed.

#### **8.1.1 Position**

Context	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Word-initial	8057	1589	19.72
Word-medial	2425	178	7.34
Word-final	1601	227	14.18
Total	12083	1994	16.50

*Table 8.1: Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Position within Word*

Contrary to the results of the pilot study of various consonants shown in Table 7.2, which showed the highest rate of devoicing occurring word-finally, the highest rate of devoicing of /ʒ/ in particular in the overall quantitative study was found in word-initial position, which was to be expected given the high number of occurrences of *je* + verb beginning with voiceless consonant, which appears to be an extremely favourable context for devoicing. The second highest rate of devoicing occurred in word-final position, and the lowest devoicing rate appeared in word-medial position. These results are unsurprising, since word-

final tokens may be followed by a pause, and thus the vibration of the vocal cords may cease before the end of the consonant, in anticipation of the following silence. The word-medial tokens were followed by a vowel in the vast majority of cases, and thus less likely to be devoiced. There is therefore an interaction between the position of the token within a word, and the following phonetic context. The distribution of devoicing rates according to position within the word is statistically significant ( $p=0.000$ ). The effect of the following segment on devoicing will now be investigated.

### **8.1.2 Following Context**

Following Context	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
VLC	2502	1145	45.76
VDC	1426	97	6.80
V	7468	631	8.45
Pause	687	121	17.61
Total	12083	1994	16.50

*Table 8.2 Devoicing of /z/ and Following Context*

As expected, and as shown by the pilot study, the highest rate of devoicing (45.76%) occurred before a voiceless consonant, as a result of regressive assimilation, whereby the vocal cords stop vibrating before the end of the consonant, in anticipation of the following voiceless sound. A similar effect is presumably the reason why the second highest rate of devoicing (17.61%) was found pre-pausally, with the vocal cords ceasing to vibrate before the end of the pronunciation of the fricative in anticipation of the following silence. The rates of devoicing before a vowel (8.45%) and voiced consonant (6.80%) are much lower than those which occur in the pre-pausal context and before a voiceless consonant (45.76%), since a following vowel or voiced consonant requires the vocal cords to keep vibrating, and thus discourages devoicing. The distribution of devoicing rates according to following context is statistically highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ).



Having examined the linguistic factors which influence rates of devoicing, the social and sociological factors which could have an effect on the devoicing of /ʒ/ will now be investigated.

There is a wide range of individual rates of devoicing throughout the sample as a whole (ranging from 3.37% for YMM3 to 81.48% for ORM2) and also within each cell of the sampling grid, making it difficult to immediately see any clear pattern emerge. However, grouping the individual results together into cell groups gives a clearer picture.

	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC	Male rural	Female rural	Total
18-30	11.90	20.55	14.68	21.56	12.67	8.51	13.75
N	1042	954	613	167	829	1058	4663
31-60	7.22	9.77	14.98	No data	No data	No data	10.64
N	984	839	941	No data	No data	No data	2764
61+	12.89	17.97	25.75	23.80	52.90	18.99	22.74
N	892	729	870	899	397	869	4656
Total	10.62	16.22	18.04	23.45	25.69	13.23	16.50
N	2918	2522	2422	1066	122	1927	12083

*Table 8.3 Group Percentages for devoicing of /ʒ/*

The percentage devoicing rates range from 7.22% for the MMM speakers to 52.90% for the ORM group. It is unsurprising that the speakers with the highest rate of the regional variant should be the older rural males and that the group with the lowest rate of devoicing should be urban middle-class speakers.

However, the fact that the latter are not young females, as expected, but males in the middle age group, is somewhat puzzling. The results of the analysis will now be examined in more detail, looking at one independent variable at a time.

## **8.2 Age**

Age	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
18-30	4663	641	13.75
31-60	2764	294	10.64
61+	4656	1059	22.74

*Table 8.4 Devoicing of /z/ and Age*

The decrease in devoicing rates from the oldest (22.74%) to the youngest (13.75%) age groups displays the expected pattern of a variable which is undergoing levelling. However, the increase in devoicing rates from the middle (10.64%) to the youngest (13.75%) age groups is difficult to explain. It may be that the members of the middle age group, who are professionally active and have children whom they wish to bring up to speak 'correctly', have a greater incentive to adhere to the supra-local phonological norm than their younger counterparts, who may still be in education and generally do not yet have children. The fact that there are some empty cells in the the middle age group, due to the fact that this age group was not included in the rural sample, may have skewed the results to some extent. However, this age distribution is statistically highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ), which seems to indicate that it is not merely the result of imperfect sampling techniques.

## **8.3 Gender**

Gender	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Male	6568	1080	16.44
Female	5515	914	16.57
Total	12083	1994	16.50

*Table 8.5 Devoicing of /z/ and Gender*

Very little difference can be found in devoicing rates between the male and female informants, and the difference is not statistically significant ( $p=0.434$ ). This is contrary to the research hypothesis that female speakers would be found

to be leading the levelling process in Alsace, and contradicts the findings of some previous studies of consonant devoicing (Temple 1992, Goudaillier 1985), which found a clear gender difference, with women devoicing to a greater extent than men. However, results analogous to those of the present study can be found in Bauvois (2002), who found no significant gender differentiation in rates of consonant devoicing in Belgium. Closer examination of the relationship between age and gender as regards devoicing may elucidate matters further.

#### **8.4 Age and Gender**

Age	Female	% devoicing	Male	% devoicing	Total	% devoicing
18-30	322/2179	14.78	319/2484	12.84	641/4663	13.75
31-60	82/839	9.77	212/1925	11.01	294/2764	10.64
61+	510/2497	20.42	549/2159	25.43	1059/4656	22.74
Total	914/5515	16.57	1080/6568	16.44	1994/12083	16.50

*Table 8.6 Devoicing of /ʒ/ according to Age and Gender*

When the informants are classified according to their age and gender, the same patterns emerge as those observed when the participants were classified by their age alone or gender alone, with little differentiation between the genders and the highest rates of devoicing being found in the oldest age group, followed by the youngest age group and finally the middle one. Following this analysis of the results according to age and gender, the devoicing rates will now be examined in the light of the two remaining independent variables, socio-economic status and urban or rural origin.

### **8.5 Age, Gender, Social Class and Urban or Rural Origin**

	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC	Male rural	Female rural
18-30	11.90	20.55	14.68	21.56	12.67	8.51
31-60	7.22	9.77	14.98	N/A	N/A	N/A
61+	12.89	17.97	25.75	23.80	52.90	18.99

*Table 8.7 Percentage devoicing of /ʒ/ according to age, gender, class and place of origin*

Contrary to the seeming lack of significant differentiation according to gender when the informants are grouped by age and gender alone, a clearer picture emerges when the results are separated out according to age, gender, social class and urban or rural origin. In Table 8.7, the white cells of the sampling grid are those in which males devoice more than females. The cells in which the text is highlighted in grey are those in which no comparison is possible because no data are available for at least one of the genders. The completely grey cells represent the social groups in which females have a higher devoicing rate than males.

In the rural sample and the older working-class urban sample, the expected sociolinguistic gender pattern emerges, with males using a higher proportion of regional variants than females. In the urban middle class and the young urban working class sample, on the other hand, the opposite holds true, with the female speakers devoicing a greater proportion of tokens than the males. It therefore seems that the speakers whom we would expect to be the most linguistically conservative follow the expected gender pattern, whereas amongst those we would expect to be most innovative the reverse is true. A possible explanation for this can be provided by examining the results of studies of consonant devoicing in other areas of France, such as those conducted by Temple (2001) and Goudaillier (1981, 1985). These studies show women devoicing a higher proportion of tokens than men. As mentioned in Chapter 7, a

biological explanation for this could be given, since women's smaller vocal tracts allow air pressure behind the glottis to increase more quickly and thus lead to a swifter cessation in the vibration of the vocal cords. It seems that the speakers who are leading in the adoption of the supralocal, levelled voiced variant are also leading in the adoption of supralocal French patterns of sociolinguistic variation as regards gender, whereas the more conservative speakers who are resisting the incoming levelled variant to a greater extent are also retaining non-supralocal patterns of gender variation. A twofold levelling process may be taking place, with both the elimination of the devoiced variant and the adoption of supralocal patterns of gender variation.

### **8.6 Social Class in the Urban Sample**

Social Class	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
MC	5440	440	8.09
WC	3490	705	20.20
Total	8930	1145	12.82

*Table 8.8 Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Social Class in the Urban Sample*

As expected, and in conformity with other studies of accent levelling and consonant devoicing, the working class informants devoiced a significantly higher ( $p=0.000$ ) proportion of tokens of /ʒ/ than their middle class counterparts (20.20% vs 8.09%, respectively).

### **8.7 Urban or Rural Origin**

Origin	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Urban	8930	1145	12.82
Rural	3153	570	18.08
Total	12083	1994	16.50

*Table 8.9 Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Urban or Rural Origin*

As with the social class groupings, the devoicing results for the urban and rural samples follow the expected pattern and confirm the research hypothesis in this

respect, with the rural speakers devoicing significantly more ( $p=0.000$ ) than their urban counterparts (18.08% and 12.82% respectively).

### **8.8 Ability to Speak Alsatian**

Alsatian	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Fluent	9000	1505	16.72
Little or Passive	3083	489	15.86
Total	12083	1994	16.50

*Table 8.10 Ability to speak Alsatian and Devoicing of /ʒ/*

Somewhat surprisingly, there is very little difference between the rates of devoicing of fluent speakers of Alsatian and those who speak little Alsatian or have only a passive competence in this variety. The difference is not statistically significant ( $p=0.139$ ). This would appear to indicate that the devoicing of /ʒ/, although it may originally have arisen from the influence of the Germanic substrate variety on French, has now been passed on to the younger generation of speakers who do not have Alsatian as a mother tongue.

## **8.9 Regional Attachment**

Score	Speakers	N devoiced	% devoicing
3	2	12/330	3.63
4	4	359/2123	16.91
5	11	364/2797	13.01
5.5	1	10/134	7.46
6	8	192/2279	8.42
6.5	1	14/343	4.08
7	6	256/1578	16.22
7.5	1	53/224	23.66
8	6	369/900	41.00
9	1	69/407	16.95
10	2	172/290	59.31
12	1	27/285	9.47
None	12	97/393	N/A
Total	56	1994/12083	16.50

*Table 8.11 Regional Attachment Score and Devoicing of /z/ (Individual Scores)*

Table 8.11 shows the percentage rates of /z/ devoicing according to the scores obtained by the informants in the regional attachment questionnaire. There is a wide range of rates of devoicing across the spectrum of regional attachment scores and at first sight, no coherent pattern seems to emerge, although the highest rate of devoicing (59.31%) occurs toward the higher end of the regional attachment scale (10 points out of a possible 15), and the lowest rate of devoicing (3.63%) occurs at the lower end of the scale (3 points out of a possible 15). When the results are grouped into two broad categories (regional attachment scores 3-7 and 7.5-12), a broad pattern emerges, as shown in Table 8.12.

Regional Attachment	Speakers	N devoiced	% devoicing
3-7	33	1207/9584	12.59
7.5-12	11	690/2106	32.78
Total	44	1897/11690	16.23

*Table 8.12 Regional Attachment Score and Devoicing of /ʒ/ (2 bands)*

Table 8.12 shows a highly significant difference ( $p=0.000$ ) between the rates of devoicing for the lower (12.59%) and upper (32.78%) bands of regional attachment score. It would therefore seem that the informant's feelings of regional attachment, as quantified by the questionnaire used for the present study, do to some extent influence his or her linguistic behaviour as regards the devoicing of /ʒ/. The lack of a clear pattern shown for individual regional attachment scores, together with a significant difference in devoicing rates between two broad groups, is present for both the devoicing and the (h) variables. It may be that the questionnaire, which was originally constructed for a different sociolinguistic study in another region of France, is not capable of showing fine-grained differences in the levels of speakers' regional attachment (see Chapter 5), but is still able to reveal broad tendencies in the relationship between accent levelling and regional attachment in Alsace. In each case, the cut-off point between the two categories of regional attachment score was arbitrary, being chosen because it was around the middle of the range of scores obtained and because of the distribution of the devoicing rates for individual scores, in order to reveal as clear a pattern as possible.

### **8.10 Overall Devoicing Conclusion**

Overall, the results for the regional attachment, social class and urban/rural origin variables were as expected according to the research hypothesis, with a higher regional attachment score corresponding to a higher rate of devoicing, (12.59% devoicing for a regional attachment score of 3-7, 32.78% devoicing for a regional attachment score of 7.5-12), working-class speakers devoicing more than their middle-class counterparts (20.20% and 8.09% respectively), and rural



speakers devoicing more than the urban informants (18.08% and 12.82% respectively). All these differences are statistically significant.

However, the distribution of devoicing rates according to gender, age and ability to speak Alsatian do not conform to the research hypothesis and do not seem to be susceptible of a ready explanation. There is no significant difference in devoicing rates between male and female speakers overall (which is similar to the lack of gender differentiation found by Bauvois 2002 and Hambye 2009 in their studies of devoicing in Belgian French), or between those who can speak Alsatian fluently, and those who speak only a little or have only a passive competence. The distribution according to age is still more puzzling, since although the highest rate of devoicing (22.74%) is to be found amongst the oldest speakers as predicted by the research hypothesis, the middle age group had a lower rate of devoicing than the youngest informants (10.64% and 13.75%) and there seemed to be no obvious explanation of this phenomenon, although the empty cells for the middle age group in the rural sample may possibly have had a skewing effect on the results.

### **8.11 Assimilatory and Non-Assimilatory Devoicing**

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher made the impressionistic observation that simply giving the overall rate of devoicing of /ʒ/ for each informant hid a much more complex situation, since some of the devoiced tokens produced were not non-standard variants but examples of the regressive assimilatory devoicing present in supra-local, standardised French (for example, *je sais* pronounced [ʃɛ], whereas others were clearly non-standard, local variants which could not be due to connected speech processes (for example, *jardin* pronounced [ʃaRdɛ̃]). Impressionistically, younger speakers appeared to have the highest rates of supra-local, assimilatory devoicing, and older speakers the highest rates of regional, non-assimilatory devoicing. The younger speakers appeared to be producing *only* the assimilatory type of devoicing. Since the aim of this study is to elucidate the extent and mechanisms of the levelling process in Alsace, the researcher decided to investigate the different social patterns present in assimilatory (as defined by a following voiceless consonant), and non-assimilatory (as defined by a following vowel, voiced

consonant or pause) devoicing, with the main focus on non-assimilatory devoicing as the regionally marked variant.

### **8.12 Assimilatory Devoicing**

The devoicing rates for individual speakers show a great deal of variability, with assimilatory devoicing rates ranging from 0% (ORF1) to 100% (OWM2, ORM4, ORM2). Although no clear sociolinguistic pattern appears to emerge from these individual results, the impressionistic hypothesis expressed above that it is the youngest speakers who appear to have the highest rates of assimilatory devoicing seems to be invalidated, since the highest rates of assimilatory devoicing are found amongst the older rural and older working class speakers (100% for OWM2, ORM2 and ORM4). The assimilatory devoicing rates for various sociolinguistic categories will now be examined in order to ascertain whether or not any sociolinguistic patterns can be discovered.

	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC	Male rural	Female rural	Total
18-30	50.20	55.40	60.81	62.07	50.00	33.09	49.77
N	245	352	148	58	210	269	1282
31-60	38.98	45.81	48.82				45.08
N	177	179	254				610
61+	30.39	33.98	35.58	54.05	77.50	25.33	38.03
N	102	103	104	111	40	150	610
Total	42.56	49.21	49.60	56.80	54.40	30.31	45.76
N	524	634	506	169	250	419	2502

*Table 8.13 Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/: Group Percentages*

The overall percentage rates shown in Table 8.13 show that, as a general rule, it is the younger speakers who have the highest rates of assimilatory devoicing, and that rate of assimilatory devoicing decreases as age increases. This may be because assimilatory devoicing, as a connected speech process, is likely to occur more frequently at a higher speaking rate, and that the younger informants spoke more quickly than their older counterparts. Although the

speech rate of the informants was not registered instrumentally, the researcher made the impressionistic observation that the younger informants tended to speak far more quickly than the informants in the oldest age group. This may be due to the fact that some of the older informants, especially in the rural sample, were more accustomed to speaking Alsatian than French, and that all the older informants had Alsatian rather than French as their mother tongue, whereas the younger speakers in most cases considered French to be their native language, or one of their native languages, and felt completely at ease when speaking French. Indeed, the older rural informants in particular tended to speak very rapidly in Alsatian and very slowly in French. The rate of assimilatory devoicing was also connected to the rate of schwa deletion, since the retention of schwa blocked assimilatory devoicing (for example in *je parle* pronounced [ʒəpaRI] or [[paRI]). The informants' schwa deletion rates were not quantified, but the researcher's impressionistic observation was that the younger informants tended to have higher rates of schwa deletion than their counterparts in the oldest age group, which may also be due to the faster speaking rate of the younger informants.

It is surprising that the highest rate of assimilatory devoicing (77.50%) can be found amongst the older rural males. This may be because these speakers devoice a large proportion of tokens of /ʒ/ in all contexts, whether assimilatory or not.

The overall rate of assimilatory devoicing (45.76%) is much higher than the overall rate of devoicing as a whole (16.50%), which seems to indicate that assimilatory devoicing, as a supra-local rather than a regional variant, is not stigmatised to the same extent as non-assimilatory devoicing.

The fact that rates of assimilatory devoicing appear to increase in apparent time may suggest that it is on the increase. The differences between the age groups are statistically highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ).

Having discussed the effect of age on the informants' rates of assimilatory devoicing, we will now turn to the influence of gender, socioeconomic status and rural or urban origin on this aspect of their linguistic behaviour.

### **8.12.1 Gender**

Gender	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Male	1280	610	47.66
Female	1222	535	43.78
Total	2502	1145	45.76

*Table 8.14 Gender and Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/*

As for overall devoicing, the rates of assimilatory devoicing show little gender differentiation, although there is a statistically significant difference ( $p=0.028$ ). This may show that assimilatory devoicing is a stable linguistic variable, since it does not conform to the sociolinguistic gender pattern described by Labov (1990) for sociolinguistic variables undergoing change. Indeed, it could be argued that this sociolinguistic gender pattern could not be applied to assimilatory devoicing, because neither of the variants under study is stigmatised or non-standard, although it might be reasonable to say that there is a stylistic difference, with assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ tending to occur more frequently in informal speech styles. It would be rare, for example, to hear a politician using *je sais* [ʒ] or *je suis* [ʒi] in a formal televised speech.

### **8.12.2 Social Class**

Social Class	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
MC	1158	535	46.20
WC	675	347	51.41
Total	1833	882	48.12

*Table 8.15 Social Class and Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/ in the Urban Sample*

Table 8.15 shows working class speakers devoicing a slightly higher proportion of tokens of /ʒ/ than their middle class counterparts. This difference is statistically significant ( $p=0.004$ ).

### **8.12.3 Urban or Rural Origin**

Origin	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Urban	1833	882	48.12
Rural	669	263	39.31
Total	2502	1145	45.76

*Table 8.16 Urban or Rural Origin and Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/*

The result shown in Table 8.16, namely, that urban speakers display a significantly higher rate of assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ than their rural counterparts ( $p=0.000$ ), is not susceptible of a ready explanation. The difference may be due to differences in speaking rates, and thus reflect assimilation as a connected speech process, in the speech of the older informants, since the older rural speakers tended to speak very slowly in French.

### **8.12.4 Assimilatory Devoicing: Conclusion**

As for the results of the study of devoicing overall, the investigation of assimilatory devoicing showed little differentiation between the genders, and significant differentiation between the urban and rural, middle class and working class speakers. There was also significant differentiation between the age groups, but in the opposite direction from that expected, with the youngest speakers having the highest, and the oldest the lowest, rates of devoicing (49.77% and 38.03% respectively). The latter difference may be due to the fact the younger speakers tended to speak more quickly than the oldest group, and that the phonology of the younger informants was therefore more subject to connected speech processes, such as assimilatory devoicing, than that of their older counterparts. The overall rate of assimilatory devoicing was 45.76%, much higher than the overall devoicing rate of 16.50%, which may suggest that, since assimilatory devoicing appears to be commoner and more widespread than non-assimilatory devoicing, assimilatory devoicing, a supra-local phenomenon, does not carry the social stigma of the non-assimilatory type, a

phenomenon associated with non-standard pronunciation and the region of Alsace.

Having briefly discussed assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ in the sample and its possible sociolinguistic significance, we will now progress to the examination of non-assimilatory devoicing, which will be the main focus of this chapter, since it is an exclusively regional, non-standard and probably stigmatised variant. The tables below show the rates of non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ for individual informants.

### **8.13 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing**

The devoicing rates for individual informants clearly show that rates of non-assimilatory devoicing increase with age, with almost all the informants in the two younger age groups having a non-assimilatory devoicing rate of 0%, or just above 0%. The only exception to this is MWM2, who has a devoicing rate of 9.72%. It is unclear why this speaker alone in his cell and age group should have such a high rate of devoicing, except perhaps that he is close to the age boundary between the oldest and middle age groups.

In the oldest age group, there is an extremely wide range of non-assimilatory devoicing rates, from 0.37% (ORF4) to 80.62% (ORM2). These results will now be examined with the informants grouped according to their social characteristics, in order to provide a clearer view of the sociolinguistic patterns in the use of this variable.

	Male MC	Female MC	Male WC	Female WC	Male rural	Female rural	Total
18-30	0	0.17	0	0	0	0.13	0.06
N	797	602	465	109	619	789	3381
31-60	0.25	0	2.47	-----	-----	-----	0.88
N	807	660	687	-----	-----	-----	2154
61+	10.63	15.33	24.41	19.54	50.14	17.66	20.44
N	790	626	766	788	357	719	4046
Total	3.59	5.14	10.64	17.17	18.34	8.49	8.85
N	2394	1888	1918	897	976	1508	9581

*Table 8.17 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/: Group Percentages*

The generational difference which appears in the results for individual informants is clearly apparent in Table 8.17, in which the devoicing rates of individual informants are grouped together by their sociological characteristics. The younger and middle age groups display extremely low rates of non-assimilatory devoicing (0.06% and 0.88% respectively). There is a very sharp rise in the non-assimilatory devoicing rate between the middle and oldest age groups (from 0.88% to 20.44%). The difference between the age groups is highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ). This appears to indicate that non-assimilatory devoicing has all but disappeared from the speech of under 60s in Alsace. This could well be due to the process of accent levelling. Since the regionally marked variant only appears to a considerable degree in the oldest age group, it seems that the levelling process is more advanced for the devoicing variable than for the (h) variable, which is still present in the speech of the middle age group to a certain extent (25.60%). This seems to suggest that non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ is socially stigmatised to a greater extent than the use of [h] in Alsace. This may be due to the fact that the [h] variant is present in spelling and may thus have gained a certain amount of prestige due to its association with written Standard French.

The other social variables will be discussed with the aid of individual tables showing the results of the relevant groups.

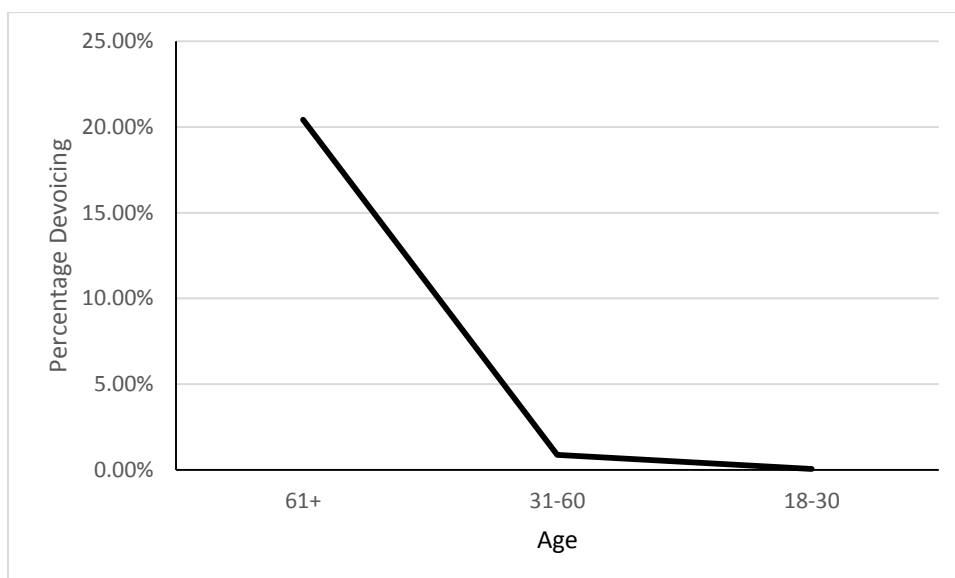


Figure 8.1 Non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ according to age

### **8.13.1 Gender**

Gender	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Male	5288	469	8.87
Female	4293	379	8.83
Total	9581	848	8.85

Table 8.18 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Gender

Like the results for overall devoicing, the results displayed in Table 8.18 show no significant difference ( $p=0.487$ ) between the genders in terms of non-assimilatory devoicing rates.

The overall lack of gender differentiation has echoes in Belgian studies of devoicing by Hambye (2005) and Bauvois (2002). Studies of devoicing in French have shown various different types of gender distribution, and no overall theory accounting for this has yet been developed. Table 8.19 summarises the findings of various other studies of consonant devoicing in French.



Author(s)	Location	Gender Pattern
Goudaillier 1981	Paris & Aix-en-Provence	Females devoice more
Pooley 1994	Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Mixed pattern
Temple 2001	Lille & Bordeaux	Females devoice more
Bauvois 2002	Belgium	No significant differentiation
Hambye 2005	Belgium	No significant differentiation
Hornsby 2006	Nord-Pas-de-Calais	Not studied

*Table 8.19 Previous Studies of Gender and Consonant Devoicing in French*

### **8.13.2 Social Class**

Social Class	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
MC	4282	183	4.27
WC	2815	358	12.72
Total	7097	541	7.62

*Table 8.20 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Social Class in Urban Sample*

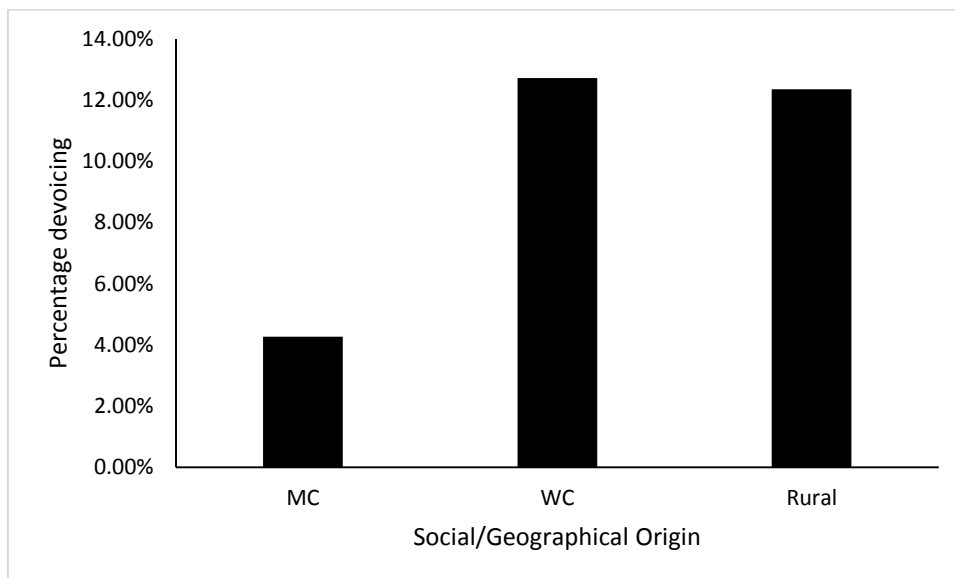
As predicted by the research hypothesis for this study, the working-class speakers have a higher rate of devoicing than their middle-class counterparts. This result is highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ). This seems to indicate that, as in other studies of accent levelling in French, middle-class speakers are leading the levelling process in Alsace.

### 8.13.3 Urban vs. Rural Origin

Origin	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Urban	7094	541	7.62
Rural	2484	307	12.36
Total	9581	848	8.85

*Table 8.21 Non- Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Urban vs. Rural Origin*

As the research hypothesis for this study predicted, the rural speakers have a higher rate of devoicing than their urban counterparts (although the devoicing rates for the rural and urban working-class speakers are very similar, at 12.36% and 12.72% respectively). There is a highly significant difference between the urban and rural results ( $p=0.000$ ). This seems to indicate that, as in studies of accent levelling in French conducted elsewhere, urban speakers are leading the levelling process in Alsace.



*Figure 8.2 Non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ according to social and geographical origin*

### **8.13.4 Ability to Speak Alsatian**

Alsatian	N	N devoiced	% devoicing
Fluent	7378	847	11.48
Little or Passive	2203	1	0.05
Total	9581	848	8.85

*Table 8.22 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing of /ʒ/ and Ability to Speak Alsatian*

Table 8.22 clearly reveals the correlation (the difference is highly significant,  $p=0.000$ ) between non-assimilatory devoicing and the possible influence of the Germanic substrate variety. Fluent speakers of Alsatian have a non-assimilatory devoicing rate of 11.48%, whereas the informants who speak a little Alsatian, or who understand it but do not speak it have a negligible non-assimilatory devoicing rate of 0.05%. However clearly these results seem to speak, caution is needed when interpreting them due to the relationship between ability to speak Alsatian, age and rural or urban origin. The speakers in the 'little or passive' category are all urban and almost all aged 18-30, and the speakers in the 'fluent' category are drawn from all three age groups and are of both urban and rural origin. It is therefore possible that the results show a relationship between rate of devoicing and age or place of origin rather than between devoicing and ability to speak Alsatian per se.

### **8.13.5 Regional Attachment Score**

The individual points on the regional attachment scale show a wide range of non-assimilatory devoicing rates, from 0% (score 7.5) to 55.19% (score 10). At first sight, there appears to be no clear correlation between regional attachment score and rate of non-assimilatory devoicing, although the lowest regional attachment score (3) corresponds to the lowest rate of devoicing (0.37%), and the highest rate of devoicing (55.19%) can be found high up on the regional attachment scale (score 10). However, as with the results obtained for the overall devoicing data and for the (h) variable, it is possible to group the results into two broad bands which reveal a link between regional attachment score and non-assimilatory devoicing rate, as shown in Table 8.23.

Regional Attachment	N devoiced	% devoicing
3-7.5	336/7725	4.35
8-12	478/1568	32.65
Total	814/9581	8.50

*Table 8.24 Regional Attachment Score and Non-Assimilatory Devoicing- 2 Bands*

Table 8.23 shows a clear, highly significant difference ( $p=0.000$ ) between the two bands of regional attachment scores. The cut-off point between the two bands is somewhat arbitrary, having been chosen as an approximate mid-point in the range of scores and as the division which produced the greatest difference between the two groups. A similar result was obtained for the relationship between regional attachment score and (h) (see Chapter 6). It therefore seems that there is a positive correlation between regional attachment and the production of regional phonological variants, and that the questionnaire used is capable, at least to some extent, of reflecting the degree of regional attachment of the informants.

#### **8.13.6 Non-Assimilatory Devoicing Conclusion**

The results presented and discussed above appear to broadly confirm the research hypothesis of this study, namely, that phonological levelling is taking place in Alsace. This can be seen in the sharp decline in non-assimilatory devoicing rates between the middle and oldest age groups (0.88% and 20.44% respectively). This difference in apparent time in rates of non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ seems to indicate that the process of accent levelling in Alsace, at least as regards non-assimilatory devoicing, has not yet reached completion, since the regional variant is still present to a considerable degree in the older generation. However, the almost total absence of the regional variant in the youngest and middle age groups shows that the levelling process is well advanced and likely to be completed within the next few decades. The differences found in rates of non-assimilatory devoicing for the two social class groups (4.27% for middle-class and 12.72% for working-class speakers) is in accordance with the research hypothesis for this study, which predicted that

middle-class speakers would be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace. This result is also in line with the findings of other studies of accent levelling in France (Boughton 2003, 2005), and of sociolinguistic studies more generally, whereby working-class speakers tend to use higher rates of regional, non-standard variants than their middle-class counterparts (Labov 1972, Trudgill 1974). The difference in non-assimilatory devoicing rates between the urban and rural samples (7.62% and 12.36% respectively) seems to confirm the research hypothesis that it is urban speakers who are leading the levelling process in Alsace, in accordance with the findings of sociolinguistic studies in France (Hall 2008) and sociolinguistic studies in general, which have found that rural speakers tend to be more linguistically conservative than urbanites, and to use a higher proportion of regionally marked variants (Bortoni-Ricardo 1985). The results of correlating the informants' non-assimilatory devoicing rates with their regional attachment questionnaire scores also produced the expected result, broadly speaking, since when these results were grouped into two bands, a significant ( $p=0.000$ ) difference was found, with speakers who had a regional attachment score of 3-7.5 devoicing 4.35% of tokens and those whose regional attachment score was between 8 and 12 having a non-assimilatory devoicing rate of 32.65%. It therefore appears that the questionnaire used is, to some extent at least, able to reflect the level of attachment of Alsatians to their region, and that regional attachment is probably a determining factor in speakers' linguistic behaviour in Alsace. However, caution is needed when interpreting these results, not only because of the wide spread of non-assimilatory devoicing rates when correlated with individual regional attachment index scores (see Table 8.30), but also because, although there was a wide range of regional attachment scores throughout the speaker sample, there was to some extent a link between regional attachment score and age, with the highest scoring speakers (who scored 10 and 12 respectively) in the older age group, probably due to the high scores elderly informants obtained due to an enforced lack of mobility because of ill health in many cases (one of the questions was 'do you often travel outside your region?') (see Chapter 5 for a full discussion of the results of the regional attachment questionnaire). Ability to speak Alsatian was also revealed to be an important factor in the informants' rates of non-assimilatory devoicing, with fluent speakers of Alsatian devoicing 11.48% of tokens compared to a mere 0.05% for those who spoke little Alsatian

or had only a passive competence. This seems to indicate that, as use of Alsatian declines over time, so will the use of regional phonological features derived from contact with the substrate variety, such as non-assimilatory consonant devoicing. Caution is necessary, however, when interpreting these results, as ability to speak Alsatian is strongly connected to age and place of origin. Indeed, all the speakers in the 'little or passive' group were of urban origin, and all except two were in the 18-30 age group. The difference in devoicing rates may therefore be due to the effect of the informants' age and place of origin rather than their ability to speak Alsatian.

So far, all the results discussed in this section have broadly conformed to the expected outcomes expressed in the research hypotheses for this study. This is not the case, however, for the relationship between non-assimilatory devoicing and gender. There is no significant difference between the non-assimilatory devoicing rates of the male and female speakers (8.87% and 8.83% respectively). This is somewhat surprising in the light of the research hypothesis and of previous studies of accent levelling in France which have tended to show females leading the levelling process (Armstrong & Unsworth 1999; Pooley 1996; Boughton 2003, 2005).

### **8.14 Overall Conclusion**

The analysis presented and discussed above first focused on the devoicing of /ʒ/ throughout the sample, then focused on the supra-local phenomenon of assimilatory devoicing followed by the regional variable of non-assimilatory devoicing. In the sample as a whole, 12,083 tokens of /ʒ/ were produced, of which 1994, or 16.50% were devoiced. The analysis showed that devoicing was most frequent in word-initial position, followed by word-final, then word-medial position. The following phonetic context which most favoured devoicing was a voiceless consonant, followed by a pause, a vowel, then a voiced consonant. Throughout the three types of devoicing analysed (overall, assimilatory and non-assimilatory), some results remained constant. In all three cases, there was little or no significant gender differentiation, the working-class speakers devoiced a greater proportion of tokens than their middle-class counterparts and the urban speakers had a lower devoicing rate than the rural informants. In

the two cases where it was analysed (overall and non-assimilatory devoicing), regional attachment score influenced devoicing, with a score of 7 or 7.5 and under corresponding to a significantly lower devoicing rate than a score of more than 7.5 or 8 and over. The results which differed between the different types of devoicing involved ability to speak Alsatian and age. For overall devoicing, there was no significant relationship between ability to speak Alsatian and devoicing. However, for non-assimilatory devoicing, there was a highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ) difference between the informants who spoke Alsatian fluently and those who spoke a little or had only a passive knowledge of the Germanic dialect. This result appears to show that non-assimilatory devoicing is a feature of Alsatian Regional French which is derived from the Germanic substrate variety. The distribution of devoicing rates according to age was different for each type of devoicing. For overall devoicing, the highest rate was found in the oldest age group as expected, but the middle age group had a lower rate of devoicing than the younger speakers, which seems somewhat puzzling. For assimilatory devoicing, devoicing rate increased as age decreased, which may be because the faster speaking rate of the younger informants allowed a greater proportion of connected speech processes, such as assimilatory devoicing. As regards non-assimilatory devoicing, devoicing rate increased with age, showing the expected apparent time pattern for a linguistic variable undergoing phonological levelling. The contrast between the age groups was striking, with very low rates of devoicing for the 18-30 and 31-60 age groups, and a much higher rate for the 61+ age group. These results seem to indicate that phonological levelling for this variable is well advanced, since only the oldest speaker group uses more than 1% of the regional devoiced variant. This contrasts with the results for the (h) variable, where 14.95% of the regional [h] variant is still used by the middle group and 68.63% by the older group. This may be due to a greater stigmatisation and speaker awareness of non-assimilatory devoicing than for [h], or possibly to speakers using [h] as an emblem of their regional identity.

### **8.15 Voicing of Canonically Voiceless Consonants**

As well as the devoicing of canonically voiced consonants discussed above, the literature is also plentiful in examples of the voicing of canonically voiceless

consonants (see literature review in Section 7.2). Examples of this voicing pattern can be found in D'Hauteville (1852: 46) (*carreaux* [gɑRo], *cher* [ʒɛR]), De Dietrich 1917 (*chose* [ʒos]), Philipp (1965: 123-124) (*pré* [bRe]), Vajta 2004 (*pas* [bɑ], *coûter* [gute]) and Winter 2000 (*chapeau* [ʒabo]). This phenomenon (when not due to assimilation) unlike devoicing, appears to be, in French, unique to Alsace (apart from a similar phenomenon noted by Nicholson (in prep.) in Brittany, including the voicing of the /s/ in *slip* to [zlip]), and to originate from the Germanic substrate variety, which tends to use plosives and fricatives intermediate between the voiced and voiceless equivalents (sometimes termed lenis stops in the case of plosives). Although the voicing of canonically voiceless plosives and fricatives in Alsatian Regional French is widely attested in the literature, no quantitative sociolinguistic study of this variable has yet been carried out. For the purposes of the present study, it was unfortunately not possible to carry out a full-scale, quantitative study of all the tokens of canonically voiceless obstruents throughout the speaker sample. A qualitative study of the tokens of the regional variant present in the sample was therefore carried out. Table 8.34 summarises the sociolinguistic distribution of these tokens, which occurred very infrequently in the sample, with some speakers producing no tokens of the regional voiced variant at all.



Word	Realisation	Informants
apprenait	[abRøne]	ORF1
appris	[abRi]	ORF2
après	[abRe]	OWM1, ORF3, ORM2
centre	[sädR]	OWF3, OWM1
chère	[ʒεR]	MWM2
chœur	[gœR]	OWF4
côté	[gote]	OMM4
encadré	[ägadRe]	YRF4
exemple	[εgzäbl]	MWM2
grand-père	[gRäbεR]	MMM3
Italie	[idali]	OMF2
lycée	[lize]	OWM1
papa	[baba]	OWF4
paroissiens	[paRwazjê]	OWM1
partir	[baRtiR]	OWF2
je pense	[ʒøbäs]	YRF4
père	[bεR]	YWM1
peu	[bø]	YMF4, OWF4
peur	[bœR]	OWF4
pie	[bi]	OWF1
pierres	[bjεR]	ORF3
plus	[bly]	OMM4, ORM1, ORM2
pôles	[bol]	OMM4
préfère	[bRefεR]	OWF4
prennent	[brøn]	ORF1
préparé	[bRepaRe]	MMF4
près	[bRe]	OWF4
presque	[bRεsk]	ORM2
princesses	[pRêsez]	OMM4
temps	[dã]	OMM4
traditions	[dradisjõ]	ORF1, ORM2
train	[dRê]	ORF3
travail	[dRavaj]	ORF1

travailler	[dRavaje]	ORF3, ORM2
trente	[dRät]	ORM2
trois	[dRwa]	ORF1, ORM2
trop	[dro]	ORF1, ORM2

*Table 8.25 Sociolinguistic Distribution of Voicing of Canonically Voiceless Obstruents*

### **8.15.1 Voicing Conclusion**

Although it would be unwise to generalise on the basis of a small amount of qualitative data, the results displayed in Table 8.24 do appear to reveal some tendencies. The voicing of canonically voiceless consonants appears to be favoured in word-initial position, and to a lesser extent by word-medial position, and by a following voiced segment, especially a voiced consonant or /R/, which may indicate that it is a type of assimilatory process. The voicing of canonically voiced consonants mainly concerns /p/ and /t/, and affects /k/ and /ʃ/ to a lesser extent. This voicing phenomenon appears to be mainly the province of older speakers, since it is used by 12 of the speakers in the older age group, as opposed to only 3 in the middle age group and 3 in the younger age band. The older working class and older rural speakers seem to be particularly frequent users of non-standard voicing patterns, whereas the younger, urban, middle class group do not use them at all. However, the small amount of data and the qualitative rather than quantitative nature of the analysis mean that these data do not lend themselves to generalisations and further large-scale, quantitative research is needed in order to shed more light on this phenomenon.

### **8.16 Devoicing and Voicing Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the effect of linguistic constraints (position within word, preceding and following segments) and social variables (age, gender, social class, urban or rural origin, ability to speak Alsatian and regional attachment) on the devoicing of canonically voiced consonants in Alsatian Regional French. It has also discussed the corresponding phenomenon of the voicing of canonically voiceless consonants, focusing in particular on /ʒ/. The

results of the quantitative data analysis showed that devoicing was favoured by word-initial or word-final position within the word and disfavoured by word-medial position. It was most frequent when followed by a voiceless consonant or pause, less so when it precedes a vowel or voiceless consonant. With regard to the social variables, gender appeared to have little or no effect on devoicing when taken alone, although some patterns did emerge when it was taken in conjunction with age, social class and urban or rural origin. Devoicing was found to be more frequent amongst urban than rural speakers, working-class than middle-class speakers, older speakers, those who spoke fluent Alsatian and those who had a high level of regional attachment. These results appear to indicate that levelling is indeed taking place with regard to this linguistic variable, and that it is young, urban, middle-class speakers with a low level of regional attachment and little or no proficiency in Alsatian who are leading this process. The qualitative study of the voicing of canonically voiceless consonants revealed a tendency for word-initial or word-medial position, together with a following voiced segment (especially /R/) to favour voicing. The most commonly voiced phonemes were /p/ and /t/, followed by /k/ and /ʃ/. Voicing seemed to be most common in the oldest age group, especially amongst working-class and rural speakers, which appears to indicate that levelling may also be taking place with respect to the voicing of canonically voiced consonants in Alsace.

Having discussed in detail the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the linguistic variables, we will now proceed to draw some tentative conclusions regarding the levelling process in Alsace and its relationship with various social variables.

## **9 Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

We now come to the final chapter of this thesis, which will recap the research questions and hypotheses, examining the extent to which the research questions have been answered and hypotheses fulfilled. A brief evaluation of the research methods used will ensue, followed by a summary of the main results of this study and a conclusion.

### **9.2 Research Questions, Aims and Hypotheses**

Let us first remind ourselves of the research questions and corresponding hypotheses set out in Chapter 1 above. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Can French phonology in Alsace be said to be levelled?
- 2) Is levelling more advanced in a particular age group?
- 3) To what extent does degree of levelling depend on gender?
- 4) How does levelling interact with social class?
- 5) Is degree of levelling influenced by the urban or rural origin of the speaker?
- 6) Does the speaker's level of regional attachment affect the degree of phonological levelling of his or her speech?

When the research questions were first formulated in Chapter 1, a working hypothesis was also elaborated for each one. We will now examine each research question and corresponding hypothesis in turn.

#### **9.2.1 Can French phonology in Alsace be said to be levelled?**

From the results of this study, which show a clear decrease in apparent time of the regional variants of both linguistic variables, (h) and consonant devoicing, we may claim with a reasonable degree of confidence that phonological levelling is taking place in Alsace. This confirms the research hypothesis, which posited that the levelling process would indeed be found to be at work in this region. However, strictly speaking, it cannot be said that the phonology of Alsatian French is completely levelled, as shown by the continuing use of the

regional variants of both variables by the older generation and, in the case of (h) (and of non-standard voicing as mentioned in Chapter 8), by all three generations. The researcher also observed impressionistically the vitality of other regional phonological and prosodic features, such as back realisations of /a/, non-standard vowel length and word-initial stress. The levelling process appears to have gone further for non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/ than for (h), since the former is only realised as the regional variant to any great extent by the older age group (20.44% as opposed to 0.06% for the younger and 0.88% for the middle age groups), whereas the regional variant of (h) is used in 14.95% of possible occurrences by the younger age group, and is actually the overall majority variant for the oldest age group, who use it in 68.63% of possible cases. The overall rate of use of [h] (44.53%) is much higher than that of non-assimilatory /ʒ/ devoicing (8.85%).

### **9.2.2 Is levelling more advanced in a particular age group?**

The hypothesis for this research question was that the younger generation would be found to be leading the levelling process, so the proportion of regional variants used would decrease as age decreased. This hypothesis was proved to be correct for both linguistic variables. For (h), the highest rate of [h] was used by the older speakers (68.63%), followed by the middle age group (25.60%) then the younger speakers (14.95%). There is a particularly sharp decline in use of [h] between the older and middle generations, and it shifts from being the majority variant to a minority one. This may correspond to a shift in competence in French. In general, the older generation grew up speaking Alsatian, and French is a second language for them, which they use with varying degrees of frequency and ease. The middle generation, on the other hand, are fluent bilinguals and the younger generation more at ease with French than Alsatian. This sharp divide between the older and middle generations is also found for non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/, where the regional devoiced variant is used most frequently by the older speakers (20.44%) and is barely used at all by the middle (0.88%) and younger (0.06%) age groups.

### **9.2.3 To what extent does degree of levelling depend on gender?**

The hypothesis for this research question was that female speakers would be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace. However, this does not appear to be the case, at least for the linguistic variables in question. For (h) the female speakers use a higher proportion of the regional variant than their male counterparts (47.13% and (42.25%) respectively. Although the percentages are relatively close, this difference is statistically significant ( $p=0.012$ ). Examining gender differentiation in each individual age, social class and rural or urban group sheds little light on the matter, since in some cells the female speakers use a higher proportion of [h] than the males, and in other cells this pattern is reversed. The distribution of the social groups according to whether females or males use [h] most frequently appears to be random. However, it is probable that underneath this apparently haphazard sociolinguistic distribution, a pattern does exist, but a larger number of speakers per cell, as well as the full quota of female working-class speakers (which was not obtained) are needed in order to carry out a more thorough investigation.

As regards the non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/, the overall rates of devoicing for male and female speakers were very similar (8.87% and 8.83% respectively) and the difference between them was not statistically significant ( $p=0.487$ ). However, when the gender differentiation patterns according to age, social class and urban or rural origin were examined, a different pattern emerged. In some age and social class groups, men devoiced a greater proportion of tokens than women, whilst in others, the reverse was true. However, the distribution of gender differentiation within these groups did not appear to be haphazard as it did for (h). The groups in which men devoiced more than women were the whole rural sample and the older working-class urban group, namely the speakers whom we would expect to be least subject to levelling influences. The groups in which women devoiced more than men, however, were the whole of the urban middle class sample and the young urban working-class group, that is to say the social groups we would expect to be most subject to levelling. A possible explanation for this lies in the hypothesis that the speakers who are leading in the adoption of the supralocal, levelled voiced variant are also leading in the adoption of supralocal French patterns of sociolinguistic variation as regards gender (studies of French elsewhere, such as Temple 2001 and

Goudaillier 1985, have shown women devoicing a greater proportion of consonants than men), whereas the more conservative speakers who are resisting the incoming levelled variant to a greater extent are also retaining non-supralocal patterns of gender variation. A twofold levelling process may be taking place, with both the elimination of the devoiced variant and the adoption of supralocal patterns of gender variation. However, this is at present merely a theory, and, as with the (h) variable, further research with a main focus on gender variation and a larger number of speakers per cell of the sampling grid is needed in order to elucidate sociolinguistic gender patterning in Alsace. It would also be useful to examine further sociolinguistic variables in order to ascertain whether they behave in a similar way with regard to gender. Indeed, previous evidence has been found of an atypical gender pattern in Alsace (Pipe 2010). This involved the considerably more frequent use of WFOLD by the female informants than by their male counterparts, which is surprising given that previous studies of WFOLD in French have shown males deleting a higher proportion of final post-obstruent liquids than females (Armstrong 2001: 106; Armstrong & Boughton 2009; Armstrong & Pooley 2010: 113; Boughton 2013). Despite the fact that it has now been constantly French for almost 70 years, it is worth pointing out that Alsace still differs from most of the rest of France in the presence of a local Germanic variety as well as Standard German, as well as in many other cultural aspects. This, combined with its distance from the linguistic norm-emitting centre of Paris, may well have contributed to different patterns of sociolinguistic variation than those found elsewhere in France. As well as more extensive research into gender in Alsatian Regional French per se, it might also be enlightening to examine the interaction between gender and some sociolinguistic variables not covered in this study, such as social network, social and geographical mobility. Indeed, geographical mobility may go some way toward explaining why the older rural and working-class women devoiced a lower proportion of /ʒ/ than their male counterparts, whilst the reverse was true for the middle class informants of the same age. In their youth, many of the older rural and working-class women had gone to work in Paris or another area of France as housekeepers known as 'bonnes', 'bonnes alsaciennes' and 'bonnes à tout faire'. Several of these informants commented that they had possessed very little knowledge of French before taking up these positions and had thus learned and experienced French in an environment where Alsatian

regional variants such as non-assimilatory consonant devoicing were not present. The older middle-class women, however, had learned French in Alsace where regional variants were frequently used.

To summarise then, no clear answer to the research question ‘to what extent does degree of levelling depend on gender?’ has really been obtained, and further research taking into account more linguistic and social variables is needed in order to elucidate the nature of the relationship between levelling and gender in Alsatian Regional French.

#### **9.2.4 How does levelling interact with social class?**

With regard to the relationship between levelling and social class, the research hypothesis was that middle-class speakers would be found to be leading the levelling process in Alsace, and therefore to use a lower proportion of regional variants than their working-class counterparts. Broadly speaking, this hypothesis was confirmed by the results of this study. For both linguistic variables, the middle-class informants used a lower proportion of regional variants than the working-class participants. However, the difference between the two social class groups was not significant for (h). For this variable, the rates of use of [h] were quite similar, namely 36.05% for the middle-class speakers and 42.52% for the working-class informants. This difference was not statistically significant. For the non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/, on the other hand, the difference was statistically significant and the gap between the devoicing rates of the two class groups was much wider than for (h), with 4.27% devoicing by the middle-class informants and 12.72% by their working-class counterparts.

#### **9.2.5 Is degree of levelling influenced by the urban or rural origin of the speaker?**

The hypothesis for this research question was that the urban speakers would be found to be leading the rural speakers in the levelling process, and therefore to use a lower proportion of the regionally marked variants than their rural counterparts. This hypothesis was proved to be correct for both linguistic variables, and the difference between the rural and urban groups was statistically significant for both (h) and the non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/. As regards (h),



the [h] variant was used by the urban informants in 39.05% of possible cases and by the rural participants in 52.34% of possible cases. The devoiced variant of /ʒ/ was used in 7.32% of possible cases by the urban speakers and 12.36% by their rural counterparts. The levelling process in Alsace therefore seems to be following the pattern of sociolinguistic change reflected in other studies, namely, that innovative levelled forms are being adopted earlier in urban than in rural areas.

### **9.2.6 Does the speaker's level of regional attachment affect the degree of phonological levelling of his or her speech?**

The hypothesis of this study regarding regional attachment was that, the higher a speaker's regional attachment index score, the more frequently he or she would use the regional variants of both linguistic variables. This hypothesis proved to be broadly correct. For both variables there was no clear correlation between the individual index scores of 3-12 on a scale of 0-15 and use of the linguistic variables. When the scores were grouped into two bands, however, a statistically significant difference between the two groups emerged for both linguistic variables. For (h), the informants who scored 3-6 on the regional attachment questionnaire used [h] in 30.63% of all possible cases, whilst those who scored 7-12 used [h] in 59.21% of all possible cases. As regards non-assimilatory devoicing of /ʒ/, the speakers who had a regional attachment score of 3-7.5 devoiced 4.35% of tokens, whereas those with a regional attachment score of 8-12 devoiced 32.65% of tokens. However, these observations need to be qualified by the possibility of an overlap between regional attachment, age and rural or urban origin.

### **9.2.7 Ability to speak Alsatian**

As well as the linguistic variables discussed above, the relationship between the informants' ability to speak Alsatian and their use of the linguistic variables was also investigated. For both linguistic variables, there was a statistically significant relationship between ability to speak Alsatian and linguistic behaviour. The fluent speakers of Alsatian used the regional variant in 50.06% of possible cases for (h) and 11.48% of possible cases for devoicing. The informants with little or only a passive knowledge of Alsatian used [h] in 17.61% of possible cases and devoiced 0.05% of tokens of /ʒ/. There therefore appears

to be a strong relationship between the ability to speak Alsatian and use of regionally marked phonological variants. However, caution is needed when interpreting these results because the speakers who were fluent in Alsatian consisted of all the speakers aged over 30 except two and the 18-30 rural sample, whereas those who had little or only a passive competence in Alsatian consisted of two middle-class urban informants aged 31-60 and the urban sample aged 18-30. There is therefore a strong relationship between ability to speak Alsatian, age and rural or urban origin. The different rates of use of the linguistic variables according to ability to speak Alsatian may thus be due to the age or place of origin of the informants rather than degree of proficiency in Alsatian.

### **9.3 Reflection on Research Methods and Directions for Future Research**

Overall, the research methodologies used in this project worked reasonably well, since the researcher was successful in obtaining recordings of sociolinguistic interviews lasting approximately one hour each with 56 informants as well as written questionnaire data and ethnographic observation data on linguistic behaviour and language attitudes. The data obtained provided a great deal of valuable information on accent levelling in Alsace and its social correlates. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it has become apparent that there were a number of improvements which could have been made to the research methodologies, especially if more time had been available for conducting the fieldwork and data analysis. One major weakness of the network sampling method employed was that it failed to provide a sufficient number of working-class informants, since the researcher's network contacts were almost exclusively middle class and tended to know those of similar occupations to their own. 'Cold contact' strategies such as contacting companies and trades unions yielded very few informants. In some cases, the researcher managed to contact working-class speakers but they were unwilling to participate in this study, perhaps because they felt the interview was a kind of 'test'. One way of obtaining more working-class informants could have been to shift the main fieldwork site from Strasbourg to a small town or village located close to the border with Germany, or to the city of Mulhouse, where there are many large industrial concerns.

Another weakness of the research methods employed concerns the regional attachment questionnaire. Although the results of the data analysis show that there was a relationship between the regional attachment scores obtained and the use of the linguistic variables, it was felt that the questionnaire, which was written for a study of young students in the south of France, could have been better suited to the Alsatian context and to the fact that the respondents were drawn from a variety of age groups. For example, the question 'Est-ce qu'il vous arrive de voyager en dehors de votre région (l'Alsace)?' ('do you ever travel outside your region (Alsace)?') may not reflect level of regional attachment in the case of an elderly person who travelled extensively in his or her youth but is no longer able to do so. Also, many Alsations make the short trip to Germany to shop or work, but again, it is doubtful whether this reflects in any way their level of attachment to their region. The question 'Est-ce que vous quitteriez la région (par exemple pour travailler) ou est-ce que vous préféreriez rester ici?' ('would you leave the region (for example, for work reasons) or would you prefer to stay here?') may also have limited relevance for this reason. 'Vous avez un nouveau/une nouvelle collègue/camarade de classe qui vient de Paris. Quelles sont vos premières impressions en l'entendant (honnêtement)?' ('you have a new colleague/classmate who comes from Paris. What are your first impressions on hearing her/him (honestly)?') generally caused bewilderment on the part of the informants, perhaps because the question mixed ideas about Parisians (often negative in Alsace) and the way they speak (which is generally viewed positively in the region). Regional attachment in Alsace was often manifested in an extensive knowledge of and interest in the region's history and folklore, the possession of large numbers of books on the subject, attachment to Alsatian and a sense of pride in being trilingual in French, Alsatian and German, and it might perhaps have been beneficial to include some of these factors in the questionnaire.

Another weak point of the research methodologies used for this study was highlighted by the somewhat confusing and unexpected gender patterns which emerged upon analysis of the data. It would perhaps have been beneficial to apply a social network approach or to take geographical and social mobility into account in order to elucidate these puzzling findings. The ethnographic fieldwork approach could also have been more systematically applied and the

results discussed to a greater extent in this thesis were it not for constraints of time and space. Further investigation of language attitudes could also bring to light interesting results.

As regards the analysis of the data, it could have been useful to apply instrumental analysis to the variables in order to gain a fine-grained, detailed description of the different realisations of the regional variants (for example, whether consonants were fully or partially devoiced and the ways in which the devoiced consonants differed from their canonically voiceless counterparts). However, it is doubtful whether instrumental analysis could now be applied to the recordings in question, since they were conducted with a table-top rather than a lavalère microphone, and therefore the sound quality may not be suitable for detailed acoustic analysis.

Furthermore, the present study only examines two main linguistic variables, (h) and consonant devoicing. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the process of accent levelling in Alsace, it is important to investigate other linguistic variables.

Only one contextual style, spontaneous speech within the relatively formal context of a sociolinguistic interview, was studied. It could have been helpful to include other types of speech, such as conversations between friends in the researcher's absence, or reading aloud, in order to investigate stylistic variation.

To summarise, then, future research on accent levelling in Alsace could usefully focus on the relationship between levelling and gender, which remains somewhat unclear. It could also take into account the effect of social network factors, and geographical and social mobility on linguistic behaviour. The data analysis could be extended to other linguistic variables, like back realisations of /a/ such as /ɑ/, and pharyngeal realisations of /R/, in order to shed further light on the sociolinguistic mechanisms of levelling in Alsace. Instrumental analysis could usefully be employed in a fine-grained acoustic analysis of the linguistic variants produced by speakers. Some attempt should also be made to study stylistic variation in Alsatian Regional French.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it appears that accent levelling is indeed taking place in Alsace, and is being led by young, urban, middle-class speakers with a relatively low level of regional attachment as posited in the research hypothesis. However, gender does not play the expected role in the levelling process and the gender patterns revealed need further investigation in order for us to fully comprehend their significance. The results of this study have revealed a great deal about variation and change in Alsatian Regional French. However, they have also highlighted the fact that a great deal of work remains to be done in terms of fully comprehending the complex sociolinguistic patterns present in this variety.

## **Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire**

Note: The '*vous*' form is used throughout the questionnaire although in some interviews the '*tu*' form was used, depending on the number of informants interviewed simultaneously, their age and relationship with the fieldworker.

The form and order of questions varied slightly according to the interviewee. The interviewer conducted the interviews without consulting written documents in order to create a suitable context for an informal conversation. In some cases there was not time for the interviewer to ask all the questions below, since the informant was extremely loquacious. This was especially frequent in the case of the informants in the oldest age group, particularly when answering the question about the history of Alsace, which usually led them to relate their experience of World War II at some length. In the case of less forthcoming informants, who were usually in the youngest age group (perhaps due to less knowledge of Alsatian history and traditions), extra questions were inserted, for example regarding the profession of the informant or topics outside the main framework of the region of Alsace, such as mutual acquaintances of the researcher and informant or recent events of interest (towards the end of the interview, after the questions below had been asked and answered, and often involved the informants asking the interviewer questions). This conversation was not part of the interview proper, although the recorder was still switched on and the informants were aware of the fact. Sometimes questions were not asked because their content had already been covered in the course of the conversation. This was especially common in the case of the topics of the Alsatian language and the regional pronunciation of French.

The topic of Alsatian cultural and linguistic practices was chosen for several reasons: it enabled the interviewer to take on the role of a learner, as recommended by Labov (1972), (cf. Milroy and Gordon 2003), it allowed information about language competence, attitudes and variation as well as the socio-historical context to be collected during the interview, and it was a topic about which most Alsatians have a lot to say, since they are generally proud of their region and many traditions and other aspects of life in Alsace remain specific to the region and different from other regions of France.

In general, the '*est-ce que*' question form was used throughout the interview. It is fairly 'register neutral' in spoken French (although not acceptable in formal written French). This question form was chosen as a kind of mid-point between the simple inversion and intonation question forms. The simple inversion form is quite rarely used in spoken French and is perceived as formal. Since the researcher aimed to elicit as informal a speech style as possible in the interviews, it was considered counterproductive to use the simple inversion question form since this might well have produced formal responses. The intonation without inversion question form was not used in posing the main questions since it might have been perceived as too informal. Also, since the only indication that the utterance is a question is the intonation and the interviewer was a non-native speaker of French whose non-standard intonation patterns might occasionally have led her interlocutor to think that she was making a statement when she was in fact asking a question. The interviewer

also followed her instinct in selecting the *est-ce que* question form, which seemed the most 'natural' for the situation and had the advantage of avoiding ambiguity. However, the intonation question form was used for interjections and short questions with which the interviewer punctuated the narratives of the informants, such as 'c'est vrai?' 'Vous étiez perdu?' 'C'était difficile?' etc.

#### Questions about the informant's life and feelings

Est-ce que vous pouvez d'abord vous présenter?

Est-ce que vous avez toujours vécu en Alsace?

Est-ce que vous aimez bien habiter ici?

Quelles sont les choses que vous aimez ici?

Est-ce qu'il y a des choses que vous aimez pas/moins ici? (Delicacy was necessary in order to avoid giving the impression that the interviewer is criticising or encouraging criticism of the region since its inhabitants are extremely sensitive to criticism of Alsace by outsiders. Most informants replied that there is nothing they dislike in Alsace.)

#### Questions about Alsace

Est-ce que vous pouvez parler un peu de la culture alsacienne? Par exemple des traditions.

Est-ce que vous pouvez parler un peu de l'histoire de l'Alsace? (Some informants, especially the younger ones, often made mistakes when talking about the history of Alsace. The researcher did not correct them since this might make them less loquacious and since the interviewer attempted to take on the role of a learner).

Est-ce que l'Alsace a beaucoup changé depuis votre enfance? (This question was not asked in the case of informants in the youngest age group since their childhood was only a few years ago.)

Est-ce que vous connaissez des légendes ou des histoires alsaciennes?

Est-ce que vous connaissez des blagues alsaciennes?

Est-ce que vous connaissez des proverbes alsaciens?

Comment sont les rapports entre l'Alsace et l'Allemagne? (Care had to be taken not to offend or hurt the informants when discussing this question or the following one since these are sensitive subjects due to WWII and the negative perception of Alsace by many 'Français de l'Intérieur'.)

Comment sont les rapports entre l'Alsace et les autres régions de France? (mention of traditional rivalry between Alsace and Lorraine).

Est-ce que la présence des Institutions européennes a beaucoup changé la vie ici? (Urban sample only, since these institutions have had an impact on Strasbourg but this impact is unlikely to have been felt on the rural fieldwork site.)

Est-ce que vous remarquez beaucoup de différences entre la ville et la campagne en Alsace?

Est-ce qu'il y a beaucoup de différences entre le nord et le sud de l'Alsace (le Bas-Rhin et le Haut-Rhin)?

Est-ce que vous remarquez beaucoup de différences entre les générations ici (les jeunes et les personnes âgées)?

Est-ce qu'il y a un mouvement autonomiste en Alsace? (Care must be taken when discussing the topic with the oldest informants, since the autonomist movement before WWII was linked to Germany and many of its members collaborated with the Nazis. This question may be seen as throwing suspicion on Alsatians' attachment to France and status as 'real French citizens'.)

### Language

Est-ce que vous pouvez parler un peu de la langue alsacienne/du dialecte alsacien? (some informants insisted that Alsatian was a *langue*, others that it was a *dialecte* and were annoyed if the interviewer used the wrong term, but trying to guess which term to use was difficult).

Est-ce que vous-même, vous parlez couramment l'alsacien?

Est-ce que vous parlez plutôt le français ou l'alsacien en famille?

Est-ce que vos parents /grand-parents/enfants parlent alsacien? (The family members enquired about depended on the informant's age.)

Est-ce que vous parlez allemand?

Est-ce que vous avez pris les cours facultatifs de 'Langue et Culture Régionales' à l'école?

Quand ils parlent français, est-ce que les Alsaciens ont des expressions qui ne s'utilisent pas dans d'autres régions de France? (Except in the case of the youngest generation in the urban sample, direct reference to the Alsatian accent or use of expressions which imply that Alsatian Regional French is sub-standard or the only kind of French which differs from the standard variety is quite likely to cause offence. This is the reason why this study is presented as research on Alsatian cultural and linguistic practices in general, with questions about Alsace, since directly telling people that the researcher wished to record and study their pronunciation would most probably result in refusal to participate and feeling that they were being criticised or laughed at.)



## **Appendix 2: Regional Attachment Questionnaire**

1. Est-ce qu'il vous arrive de voyager en dehors de votre région (l'Alsace)?
 

Oui, très souvent	0
Oui, quelquefois	1
Rarement	2
Non, jamais	3
  
2. Est-ce que vous vous plaisez ici?
 

Oui, beaucoup	3
Ça va	2
Sans plus	1
Non, pas du tout	0
  
3. Est-ce que vous quitteriez la région (par exemple pour travailler) ou est-ce que vous préféreriez rester ici?
 

J'aimerais partir	0
Je partirais s'il le fallait	1
Je partirais s'il le fallait mais je préférerais rester	2
J'espère que je ne partirai jamais	3
  
4. Vous avez un nouveau/une nouvelle collègue/camarade de classe qui vient de Paris. Quelles sont vos premières impressions en l'entendant (honnêtement)?
 

Vous vous méfiez	3
Vous vous moquez de lui/d'elle	2
Vous n'aimez pas son accent	1
Vous ne faites pas attention à ses origines	0
Vous aimeriez parler comme lui/elle	0
  
5. Est-ce que vous avez des amis qui ne viennent pas d'Alsace?
 

Oui, beaucoup	0
Oui, quelques un(e)s	1
Non, pas vraiment	2
Non, aucun(e)	3

Adapted from Armstrong & Unsworth 1999

## **Appendix 2: Regional Attachment Questionnaire (English Translation)**

1. Do you often travel outside your region (Alsace)?	
Yes, very often	0
Yes, sometimes	1
Rarely	2
No, never	3
2. Do you like it here?	
Yes, very much	3
It's ok	2
Not that much	1
No, not at all	0
3. Would you leave the region (for example for work) or would you prefer to stay here?	
I would like to leave	0
I would leave if I had to	1
I would leave if I had to but I would prefer to stay	2
I hope I will never leave	3
4. You have a new classmate/colleague from Paris. What is your first impression when you hear him/her?	
You are mistrustful	3
You make fun of him/her	2
You don't like his/her accent	1
You don't pay attention to where he/she is from	0
You would like to speak like him/her	0
5. Do you have friends who aren't from Alsace?	
Yes, a lot	0
Yes, a few	1
No, not really	2
No, none	3

Adapted from Armstrong & Unsworth 1999

**Appendix 3: Letter sent to companies in order to obtain contact details of potential working-class informants**

PIPE, Katharine  
 Address  
 Telephone number  
 Email address

NOM DE LA SOCIETE  
 A l'attention de  
 Adresse de la société

Strasbourg, le mardi 16 mai 2012

Madame, Monsieur,

Je suis une doctorante anglaise qui mène actuellement une enquête sur les pratiques linguistiques et culturelles en Alsace et je vous écris pour vous demander un service. Je cherche des participants à mon enquête et c'est en vue de cela que je vous écris. Je voudrais savoir s'il est possible pour vous de me mettre en contact avec quelques-uns de vos employés pour que je puisse leur demander de participer à mon projet de recherche (s'ils sont d'accord, bien sûr), ou sinon de le leur demander vous même. Je cherche des personnes de différents milieux sociaux et de tous âges, qui sont d'origine alsacienne, qui sont nées dans la région ou sont venues y habiter avant l'âge de 5 ans. Je pourrais venir parler aux employés sur le lieu du travail ou dans un autre endroit voisin comme un café pendant leur pause déjeuner ou après la fin de leur journée de travail. Voici quelques détails sur mon projet. Je demande à chaque participant de faire 2 choses: 1. remplir un petit questionnaire écrit sur leurs usages linguistiques et leur sentiment d'appartenance à la région d'Alsace (s'ils voyagent souvent, s'ils voudraient vivre ailleurs ou plutôt rester ici etc). 2. participer à un interview oral avec moi sur l'Alsace: les traditions culturelles, l'histoire, les différences entre les générations et entre la ville et la campagne, comment l'Alsace a changé depuis leur enfance (pour les personnes plus âgées), le dialecte alsacien. L'interview dure à peu près une heure et je l'enregistre sur un dictaphone. Les enregistrements resteront confidentiels, je serai la seule personne à les écouter et si je cite des phrases prononcées par les participants dans ma thèse, cela sera de façon anonyme. Pour ma thèse je ferai une synthèse de toutes les réponses que j'aurai reçues en comparant les différentes tranches d'âge, les hommes et les femmes. Je peux faire l'interview avec deux personnes en même temps si cela les convient.

Je vous remercie en avance de votre coopération

Je vous prie d'agréer, Madame, Monsieur, mes meilleures salutations.

Mlle Katharine PIPE

## **Appendix 4: Consent Form**

Université d'Exeter  
Faculté de sciences humaines

### **Renseignements et formulaire de consentement pour les projets de recherches**

#### **Enquête sur les pratiques linguistiques et culturelles en Alsace**

##### **Nom de la chercheuse et renseignements sur le projet:**

M<sup>lle</sup> Katharine Pipe vous propose de participer à une enquête dans le cadre de son doctorat, qui examine l'évolution des pratiques culturelles et langagières en Alsace. Une partie importante du travail consiste à enregistrer des conversations avec des Alsaciens au sujet de leurs origines, leur région, leur culture et les langues alsacienne et française. Les enregistrements auront lieu entre le 10 juin et le 20 septembre 2011 et le procès d'analyse des enregistrements et autres données recueillies se terminera en septembre 2013 à la fin du doctorat. Ce projet de recherche est financé par le Arts and Humanities Research Council (Conseil de la Recherche en Lettres et Sciences Humaines du Royaume-Uni).

##### **Définition des participants:**

Les participants seront des personnes ayant le français ou l'alsacien comme langue maternelle nées en Alsace ou qui sont venues y habiter avant l'âge de cinq ans.

##### **Données et renseignements à recueillir et leur usage:**

Les enregistrements seront constitués par des entretiens ou conversations entre Katharine Pipe et une ou deux autres personnes à qui il sera demandé de parler de l'Alsace, de sa culture et de son histoire, et de leurs propres pratiques culturelles et langagières. Chaque personne participera à un ou deux séances d'enregistrement. Il sera également demandé aux participants de remplir par écrit un questionnaire à ce sujet. Chaque enregistrement durera entre 45 minutes et 2 heures. Les enregistrements et d'autres données recueillies seront utilisés (a) d'abord et avant tout pour cette étude. Après l'achèvement du projet ils pourraient être conservés à l'usage possible dans (b) des recherches ultérieures, (c) à des fins d'enseignement et (d) dans des ouvrages érudits (livres, revues, site web etc.), dans lesquelles votre langage pourrait être cité, décrit ou analysé. D'autres matériaux que vous fournissez pourraient aussi être cités, décrits ou analysés. Dans tous les cas, les informations vous concernant seront exploitées de manière anonyme. Vous pourrez par ailleurs avoir accès à toute publication éventuelle si vous en faites la demande, et vous pourrez vous retirer du projet à n'importe quel moment.

##### **Dans quelles circonstances les renseignements fournis par les participants seront-ils conservés?**

Les enregistrements et les transcriptions des enregistrements seront conservés (et protégés par un mot de passe) sur l'ordinateur personnel de la chercheuse dans une pièce fermée à clé afin d'assurer que personne n'y accède sans le consentement des participants. Vos coordonnées et les enregistrements vous concernant seront conservés séparément dans des endroits différents.

**Coordonnées de la chercheuse:**

Si vous souhaitez me contacter, vous pouvez vous servir des coordonnées ci-dessous.

**Si vous ne réussissez pas à obtenir une réponse satisfaisante des personnes citées ci-dessus, veuillez contacter:**

Consentement:

J'accepte de participer à cette enquête dans les conditions énoncées ci-dessus et de permettre l'utilisation des données que j'ai fournies aux fins décrites ci-dessus. Je peux me retirer du projet à n'importe quel moment en contactant la chercheuse.

Nom du participant (en majuscules):.....

Signature du participant: .....

Adresse mail ou numéro de téléphone: .....

Signature de la chercheuse: .....

Date:

***Un exemplaire de ce formulaire sera conservé par la chercheuse, et un deuxième exemplaire sera conservé par le participant***

**Veillez noter que vos coordonnées et l'enregistrement et la transcription de votre entretien seront conservés séparément dans des endroits différents**

## **Appendix 4: Consent form (English translation)**

University of Exeter  
College of Humanities

### **Information and Consent Form for Research Projects**

#### **Investigating the pronunciation of Alsatian Regional French**

##### **Name and title of Researcher, and Details of Project:**

Miss Katharine Pipe requests you to participate in a research project for the purpose of her PhD, which examines the evolution of linguistic and cultural practices in Alsace. A large part of this project involves recording conversations with Alsatian people regarding their origins, region and culture and the Alsatian and French languages. The recordings will be made between 10th June and 20th September 2011 and the analysis of the recordings and other data collected will continue until September 2013, when the researcher will finish her PhD. This research project is financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

The recordings will consist of interviews or conversations between Katharine Pipe and one or two other people, who will be asked to talk about Alsace, its culture and history, and about their own cultural and linguistic practices. The participants will also be asked to fill in a written questionnaire on the same subject. Each recording will last between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Each informant will participate in one or two recording sessions.

##### **Definition of invited participants:**

The participants will be French or Alsatian native speakers who were born in Alsace or moved there before the age of five.

##### **Data or information to be collected, and the use that will be made of it:**

The recordings and other data collected will be used (a) above all for this study. After the end of this project, they may possibly be used for (b) further research (c) for teaching purposes (d) in academic publications (books, journals, websites etc.), in which your speech may be quoted, described or analysed. Other material that you supply may also be quoted, described or analysed. In all the situations mentioned above, all information involving you will be used anonymously. You will be able to access any future publication regarding this research on asking and you can withdraw from the project at any time.

##### **How will the information supplied by participants be stored?**

The recordings and transcripts of the recordings will be kept (and protected by a password) on the researcher's personal computer in a locked room in order to ensure that no-one can gain access to them without the participants' consent. Your personal details and the recordings of you will be kept separately in different places.

**Contact for further questions:**

**Contact in the case of complaint or unsatisfactory response from the above named:**



**Consent:**

I voluntarily agree to participate, and agree to the use of my data for the purposes specified above. I can withdraw consent at any time by contacting the interviewer.

Printed name of participant:.....

Signature of participant: .....

Preferred contact - email or telephone: .....

Signature of researcher: .....

***One signed copy to be retained by the researcher, and one by the participant***

**Please note that your contact details will be kept separately from your interview data.**

**Appendix 5: Certificate of Approval from University of Exeter Ethics Committee**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF EXETER**

**CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

Academic Discipline: Modern Languages

Title of Project: Investigating the pronunciation of Alsatian Regional French

Name(s)/Title(s) of Project Research Team Member(s): Katharine Pipe

Project Researcher's Contact (email and telephone no.):

Tel:

Brief Description of Project: Interviews or conversations between the researcher and one or two other people, who will be asked to talk about Alsace, its culture and history, and about their own cultural and linguistic practices. The participants will also be asked to fill in a written questionnaire on the same subject.

This project has been approved for the period

From: June 2011

To: September 2013

Signature                      Date: 3 June 2011

(College Ethics Officer)

Name/Title of Officer (BLOCK CAPITALS): PROFESSOR GRAHAM LEY

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