

HISTORY AND CONSTITUTION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE

Klein Ludovic

松 山 大 学
言語文化研究 第30卷第2号 (抜刷)
2011年2月

Matsuyama University
Studies in Language and Literature
Vol. 30 No. 2 February 2011

HISTORY AND CONSTITUTION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE

Klein Ludovic

In the modern world, French as a language holds a very specific position. It is present not only in mainland France, but also in every continent : Europe (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxemburg...), America (Canada, Louisiana, French Guyane), Asia (Lebanon, Vietnam), Oceania (New Caledonia, French Polynesia...), and Africa of course (with Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Mali, Benin, Ivory Coast and many more). French can boast a total of approximately 70 countries being part of the Francophone ring, which makes a whole 200.000.000 persons speaking French. The second foreign language taught in the world is French (after English of course), it is also the third Internet language (first place : English, second place : German)¹⁾. There is a network of 200 Alliances Francaises (French learning schools) throughout the whole world. We can also note that 50~60 percent of English words come from French, and a great number of French words came into other languages, even Japanese. It is one of the founding languages of Europe, and a language that a lot of Europeans can speak.

How did French come to occupy such a position ? In this article, we will try to trace back to the origins of French, how it constituted and evolved. To guide us through this journey in history, I propose the following guidelines :

- Ideological and political issues will always arise in the argument.

1) Figures provided by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) : <http://www.francophonie.org/-Reperes-.html>

- The growth of the French language is retrospective with the constitution of the French state
- The French language fought for supremacy with Latin and other regional languages
- What does the purity of a language mean? Is this linked to perfection, immobilization and, or conservatism?
- French language has received the influence of many other languages and regional dialects.
- Which is the more important: the richness, or the exactitude of a language?

I hope the reader will find these guidelines enlightening, and may reflect upon what you have learnt in their own language. All languages have historical sources, which was very often influenced by ideological and political disputes. French, as well as Japanese, didn't appear by themselves, *sui generis*, as a complete system. Both languages derived and were modified as a result of many wars and arguments, often against other languages. Power and language have a close link²⁾.

1) Before Roman occupation

1-1 Before the Indo-Europeans

In the old times, the population of what was not yet France was 10,000 persons, in the age of the Ancient Neolithic period (15000 BC), and 50,000 persons in the age of the New Neolithic period (5000 BC)³⁾. Of the language they spoke

2) Let us take for instance this quote by famous fairytale writer Charles Perrault: « *We couldn't start too early to polish and make perfect a language that obviously tends to be that of all Europe, and even the whole world, without choosing the language of the king Louis XIV* » in *Recueil des harangues prononcées par Messieurs de l'Academie Francaise*, Amsterdam, Aux depens de la Compagnie, 1790, 2 vol., p. 223.

3) COLL., (2007), Alain REY directing, *Mille ans de langue française*, Ed. Perrin, p. 11.

then, almost nothing remains, just a few toponyms and several names of villages still used today. Languages can also die, leaving only a few unnoticed traces in everyday modern life.

1-2 The arrival of the Indo-Europeans

In Kubem (nowadays Ukraine), around 5000 years BC, a new civilization was discovered that ethnologists called Indo-European. The features of this civilization are somewhat similar to the Jomon age in Japan : acclaimed for its pottery, rope patterns, bronze artifacts, use of plows, and riding of horses. This civilization moved and spread all over Europe and Asia around 2200~2000 BC. The Indo-European origin of languages could explain how most of the European languages (as well as several Asian languages like Hindi) have the same origin⁴. This could be the reason why they have a tendency to look the same. A good example here is : the word for mother *mère* in French, in *mutter* German, in *madre*, Spanish and in *mother* English.

1-3 The Gauls

After the Indo-Europeans, further groups affiliated to the Celtic tribes, arrived in France around the 5th century BC. They moved around Europe, leaving remains of standing stones (for instance, Stonehenge). Among these tribes, there were the Gauls. In Latin, it is pronounced *Gallus*, the same word as for *rooster*, *gallus*. So this animal has been associated to the Gauls, provided they were proud, undisciplined and ready to quarrel as a rooster would be. This is the origin of the rooster being the emblem of France, even now⁵.

4) SERGENT Bernard : *Les Indo-Européens - Histoire, langues, mythes*. Payot, Paris, 1995.

5) See PASTOUREAU, Michel. « Le Coq gaulois », *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Pierre NORA.

2) The arrival of Latin

2-1 Julius Caesar against the Gauls

Julius Caesar (100 BC–44 BC) decided to take control over the Gauls. His main adversary was Vercingétorix (c. 82 BC–46 BC), the Gaul general. They resisted as they could, but finally surrendered in 52 BC at the battle of Alésia : the Gaul became Latinised.

2-2 The expansion of Latin

As Gaul was being occupied, Latin began to become the main language used. The following are possible factors which may have influenced the progression of Latin among the people⁶⁾ :

- The army, the merchants, and the government officials would use only Latin
- The Latin culture spread from the big cities to the whole country
- The Latin culture was bright enough to seduce people and be adopted free willingly
- To become a citizen, the mastering of Latin was necessary.
- The peace in the Roman Empire (*pax romana*) for 250 years was a great factor in stabilising the use of Latin among the ordinary people.
- Schools were established, where Latin became the dominant language of tuition.
- The roman alphabet was introduced, overwhelming the ancient use of sacred runes that only a few initiated druids would secretly know (they refused to teach this knowledge, causing the traditional way of writing of the Gaul to disappear).

6) COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 23-28.

2-3 Extinction of Gaul language

When the Roman Empire became Christian, the former pantheist religion of the Gaul was declared a heresy, and as so, persecuted. As previously mentioned, the druids refused to transmit the secret of the runes, thus accelerating the end of the Gaul culture⁷⁾. As a result of which, by the 5th century, Gaul language disappeared. Only 50 gaulic words passed into French⁸⁾.

3) The barbarian invasions and the decay of latin

3-1 The barbarian invasions

From 192 to 284, came multiple attacks against the Roman Empire, coming from the north of France. Within these attack came hoards of invaders, one of which was the Franks (meaning the Freeman). So it appeared that when the Franks occupied their new territory, they originally gave it the name “the country of Frank”, the old name for France. So the word *Frank* was first an ethnic group, then a region, and finally a country, *France*.

3-2 The immense influence of the language of the Franks

The Frank language is part of the German languages. As so, it had a huge influence of the pronunciation of the popular Latin spoken then. The Frank language provided a lot of words, particularly in the military field. Finally, it had a huge impact on pronunciation.

7) COLL., *op. cit.*, « In the religious domain, Gaul language quickly disappear from official foundation writings and only subsist in popular or esoteric magic acts, as curses or medicine charms » p.36.

8) For instance : miel (honey), alouette (lark), moutton (sheep), crème (cream)...

Fig. 1: Evolution of the language under the Frank language influence⁹⁾

	Latin	French
/j/ becomes /ʒ/	ivstvs /justus/	juste /ʒyst/
/w/ becomes /v/	videre /widere/	voir /vwar/
Some intermediary sounds disappear	frater /frater/	frère /frɛr/
The accentuation on the last syllable disappear	tabvlam /tabulam/	table /tabl/
/k/ becomes /s/ in front of /i/ and /e/	civitas /kiwitas/	cit� /site/
/k/ becomes /ʃ/ in front of /a/, /o/ and /u/	canis /kanis/	chien /ʃj�/

The most spectacular change concerns the pronunciation of the final accentuation. As other languages related to Latin kept the final vowel, in French it falls down and is replaced with a silent /e/. For instance, « door » in Spanish *puerta* /pwerta/, in Italian *porta* /porta/, in French became *porte* /port/. The final vowel is no longer pronounced. This feature gives French very specific linguistic characteristics. It can be said that French is the unique product of a mix between Latin inheritance and the influence of Germanic written discourse.

3-3 The process of Christianisation

The Christians were persecuted by the Romans during the Roman Empire, but what was an underground and marginal religious movement came for the first time when Emperor Constantin (306-337) decided to convert to Christianity. He later became the first official Christian of the Empire. Clovis (c. 466-511) was the first Frankonian king to be Christian. All his subjects had to convert to the new religion

9) JAFFREDO S bastien, *Histoire de la langue fran aise : le vocabulaire par l' tymologie*, 日仏学院講座.

of the king, with Christianity spreading wider over France. It produced a tremendous change in the equilibrium of power, but also on more domestic matters by permitting the introduction of many Latin words taken from the Bible¹⁰.

3-4 A new political and geographical reality

During the 5th century, great migrations occurred, as cause and consequence of a great deal of change: the fall of the Roman Empire. The central Roman government collapsed, and many little *fiefdoms* (local lord's territories) were created, causing great chaos and disorder, as for the most part they were fighting against each other. This was the beginning of the Middle-Ages. Amongst these newly founded territories, only one would prevail. Amongst these new nobles, one would take over them all: the king of France.

4) Middle-Ages

4-1 The transformation of Latin into local dialects

Latin as a language had not progressed equally in every region: the south of France was more influenced than the north. Moreover, it mixed with pre-existing languages. All this resulted in the birth of dialects, all over France. During the great invasions of the 5th century, the use of written Latin quickly declined. The combination of these two factors was the transformation of Latin on a completely distinct language, separated from the original language used by the Roman Empire.

Therefore, at the beginning of the Middle-Ages, France was divided geographically into many regions, and linguistically with many dialects.

10) For instance, *ecclesia* (church), *apostolicus* (apostle), *catholicus* (catholic), *honorificare* (to honor)... cf. COLL., *op. cit.*, p 43.

4-2 From Latin to French

From the 6th century to the 8th century, due to political and economic strife, many schools closed. Consequently, the use of (and the ability to use) writing materials steadily declined. The study of Latin persisted only in monasteries. Latin became the language of the scholars, and French as well as other dialects, the language of the people. This divide had enormous political, ideological and social consequences.

4-3 The Emperor Charlemagne

The Emperor Charlemagne (742-814 AD) built an empire that lasted only a short time, but left an important mark on the history of the country. He was later crowned the emperor in 800 AD. He and Napoléon were the two emperors that ruled over France. He was the first to make the reflection that Latin was only used by priests, and that another language was used by his ordinary subjects. A reform to go back to a purer Latin was attempted, but it failed: even the Latin priests used was too different from the original Latin spoken by the ancient Romans. After his death, his kingdom was divided into 3 by his sons. The Occidental part would become France.

4-4 The first written text in French

In 842 AD, 2 sons of Charlemagne, Charles and Louis vowed an oath not to attack each other but to concentrate their strength in order to stop Lothaire, the 3rd son, whose ambition threatened the two others. Since the oath (renowned as the Serment of Strasbourg¹¹⁾) were to be taken in a language that everybody would understand, it was sworn in phonetic vulgar French language, which was the first

11) A transcription can be found at http://www.orbilat.com/Languages/French/Texts/Period_02/0842-Le_Serment_de_Strasbourg.htm

time ever French was written down on a document. Some linguists said the Serment of Strasbourg really marks the birth of French language officially¹²⁾.

In the Middle Ages, French had to overcome *two different kinds of linguistic domination* : the domination of the different dialects in the surface of the country, competing with French, and the domination of Latin, considered as a sacred and pure language.

4-5 The development of dialects

Let's start with the development of the dialects. At the time, 3 major languages were spoken in France : the *Oil* language, in the North part, that would become the modern French language ; the *Oc* language, in the South ; and finally the Franco-Provençal, spoken in the Alps region. The Oil and Oc language were named after the way of saying yes (*oui*) in both regions : people would say « *oc* » in the North, and « *oil* » in the South.

We can list three major causes for the bursting of the ancient Latin in three different language zones, themselves divided into smaller dialectal zones¹³⁾ :

- At that time, the land was covered by deep forests, with few ways of contact, thus isolating small linguistic communities
- There was a great deal of little fiefdoms, with seldom communal contact
- The basic unit for a given linguistic community was the village : since there was almost no travelling, even neighbouring villages would speak a different version of the dialect.

As a consequence of which, the dialects became a deeply-enrooted part of the French cultural landscape. The resolution to make every person on the surface of

12) See CERQUIGLINI Bernard, *La naissance du français*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1991 (Que-sais-je ?).

13) COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 119-125.

the country use French as a Native Language took many centuries.

4-6 Latin versus French

The oppositions between French and Latin can be regrouped into the following figure (fig. 2) :

Latin	French
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sacred language – Language of the scholars = Language of the priests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Profane language – Language of the ordinary people = Vulgar language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> = Latin was used for literature, justice, science, philosophy and diplomacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> = French was used only for everyday life ; few written traces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> = Language expressing the power of the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> = Language of the people, and also of the court and king

The result of this conflicting relationship is a long-lasting inferiority complex of the French language towards Latin, always perceived as superior. The great task for the affirmation of French was assuming the functions previously occupied by Latin. It took eventually centuries to overcome Latin.

4-7 The birth of a literature in French

In the Noble's court, a new literary genre in French appeared : the Roman Courtois¹⁴⁾. The main figures were the knight, always noble and pious, and the princess, pure and waiting for the knight to accomplish tasks so that they could love each other. Of course, no *villain* (non-noble) would be seen in these stories. It was the literature of Aristocrats for the Aristocrats. The elitism of this literature aimed at promoting the specific Noble values : in terms of society (the Noble is

14) See BALADIER, Charles, *Aventure et discours dans l'amour courtois*, Editions Hermann, 2010.

superior), the style and language (always refined), as well as values. Therefore it had no connection with the real use of French in everyday life.

4-8 The extension of the Royal domain

The Royal domain where the original form of French was spoken knew great changes from the year 1000 AD to the year 1500 : it expanded considerably, thus widening the use of French. 1066 AD was the year of the occupation of England by William the Conqueror, (c. 1027-1087) which had a great influence on English. From 1204 to 1208, Normandy and Loire Valley was incorporated into the Royal domain. In 1213, Auvergne was conquered. From 1208 to 1255, the crusade against the Cathar heresy took place, the result of which was the incorporation of the then independent South under the Northern (and therefore Royal domain) sphere of influence. In 1371, Limousin was conquered. Then in 1453, the region of Bordeaux and Provence fell under the influence of the Royal domain. All these dramatic changes in the geopolitics of France led to a slight empowerment of French as a communication language, thus preparing the great progress of French in every domain during the Renaissance.

5) Renaissance and the progress of French

5-1 The 15th century : the end of the Middle-Ages

The 15th century was a time of flourishing for the French culture, and consequently language :

- The global French population grew to 20.000.000, which made it the most populated country in Europe.
- A lot of immigrants came, mostly in order to study : from England, Sicilia. Also, the Crusades helped the contact between France and the rest of the world.

For instance, the university of Paris constituted of 30 percent exchange students

- International business grew moderately, and international business fairs were a common sight in some places, especially Champagne region in the North of France. At the time, France played an important role in the constitution of a European culture.

5-2 The expansion of writing

Simultaneously, the number of literate people steadily increased. As the number of functionaries increased due to the growing place left to administration, the need of written matter increased too. Another significant factor was reading without speaking. Before this period, reading was a social practice, and used to be performed in public gatherings (for instance, the court). It slowly moved to a more personal practice, and reading without speaking or without being in the presence of others gradually attained popularity .

Another spectacular innovation was the invention of paper, instead of old parchemine, which was made of goat skin (it took no less than 10 goats to make 8 pages). Together with the invention of press impression by Gutemberg in 1455 had a dramatic impact on the relationship with printed matter: books became way cheaper, easier to read and to reproduce. The making of books became a hundred times quicker than before. Therefore, meeting with this new demand, in 1522, came the first translation of the Bible in German, paving the way for Protestantism, as well as for other translations in other languages. It is without saying that the Church condemned firmly these attempts to translate the Book in the commoner's language¹⁵⁾.

15) For instance, in 1533, the priest of Condé-sur-Sarthe, who was advocating the use of the Bible in French, was condemned to be burnt by bonfire (in COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 483)

5-3 A decisive decision by François Premier

In 1530, Francois Premier (1494-1547), then king of France, decided to publish the decree of Villers-Cotterêt¹⁶⁾ (1539), which ordered that the language of justice “would be only French¹⁷⁾”, and not Latin as before. His decision was motivated by the fact that justice seemed hard to understand for the commoner, since the defence, accusation and judgement were delivered in Latin. But this decision was also very symbolic : for the first time, French was meant to occupy a function (justice) previously held by Latin : this was the first step towards the domination of French over areas where formerly only Latin was used. The decree was decided by the one who was considered the first king of the Renaissance in France (who built, among others, the gigantic castle of Chambord and also was a friend of the arts, including Leonardo Da Vinci).

5-4 The incredible boom of French in the 16th century

In 1549, the poet Du Bellay (1522-1560) published his *Defence and Illustration of the French Language*¹⁸⁾, which aimed at two goals : ending the long-lasting inferiority complex of French towards Latin, and promoting immediate inspiration to make poems instead of copying old-style poems. In other words : make the French flourish. Following his ideas, a lot of poets decided to use and to craft brand-new words, inspired by Latin, Italian, dialects, words fallen into disuse, scientific words... This also brought rise to the publishing of the first French dictionary, as well as the first French grammar books.

16) Original text in French : http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Ordonnance_de_Villers-Cotter%C3%AAts

17) COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 463.

18) DUBELLAY, Joachim : *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise*, éd. Francis Goyet et Olivier Millet, Paris, Champion, 2003.

6) 17th century : Classical French

6-1 The counter-attack of grammarians

Malherbe (1555-1628) is considered as one of the first French grammarians. He realised how much French had become a language with no rules, mixing words from every language. He decided to simplify the whole language. In this spirit, from 1606 he started to suppress unnecessary words, and under his influence he made the global number of words in French to decrease. He established, for the first time, rules to be obeyed in French, which was at the time somewhat a revolution.

6-2 The birth of L'académie Française

The concern about giving the French language fixed rules spread so much that it ended in the creation of the Académie Française under the patronage of Louis XIII (1601-1643), in 1634 (and it still exists nowadays). The main idea was to protect, describe, and to put in order the French language by ordering rules¹⁹⁾. In 1694, the first dictionary was published, more than 50 years after the first amateur's dictionaries were published.

6-3 A perfect language ?

From 1660, the inferiority complex of French over Latin seemed long gone. The global opinion of scholars was that compared to Latin, French was clearer, more logical and easier to understand. They sincerely thought that no change would occur to the language. It was also the birth of the political idea of French : French as a power and a means to achieve diplomatic goals. In this sense, the

19) Status of l'Académie Française : <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/role/index.html>

common opinion was that French was the perfect language²⁰⁾. As so, in order to protect this perfection, more of the scholars became reactionary towards the rules of their own language. The acme of this position was reached when the Académie Française published its first dictionary: the number of words were slightly low, only the words belonging without doubt to French were selected²¹⁾. All the words not « pure » and suspected to be of foreign or dialectal origin were suppressed. At the same time the rules of grammar and expression became more and more severe, restraining as the result the free inspiration of poets and writers, leading to a stereotyped kind of expression. The censorship was harsh too, and critics were fanatic over the « impurity » of new works. It even led in 1660 Corneille (1606-1684) to rewrite the entirety of his production in order to make it sound more « French²²⁾ ». Racine (1639-1699), his great rival, was correcting every manuscript by appointed grammarians²³⁾. It appeared though, through this state of perfection, that French has grown poor: the language was unable to convey new realities or concepts.

7) 18th century : le Siècle des Lumières

7-1 A new language for a new modernity

A burst of sciences at the beginning of the 18th century challenged the ability of French to be an effective language. From 1704, Newton (1642 *or* 1643-1727)

20) For instance, «let no one say that our language can change: it is now and forever » said Alemand in *Nouvelles Remarques de Vaugelas*, 1690, preface. See also: The French language has something extraordinary that protects it from the corruption that other languages know » said Eugène quoted by BOUHOURS, *Entretiens*, ed. B. Beugnot et G. Declercq, Champion, 2003, p. 152.

21) 17,500 for the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, against 26,000 for Furetière's *dictionnaire*. In COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 736.

22) COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 723.

23) For instance, Bouhours. COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 693.

operated a revolution not only in science, but also in the perception of language : for the first time, he preferred English over Latin for spreading his new theories. Thus this started a movement of using one's own language to expose and explain science. The traditional grammarians were hunting for synonyms in order to erase them from the dictionary²⁴⁾, but one of them, Girard, stated that synonyms were the richness of French and should be accepted as they are²⁵⁾. He helped raising a « synonymic » movement. We can truly say that, in reaction to the Classical French, Modern French as a linguistic constituted system was born under the action of those avant-garde grammarians between the year 1710 and 1720. The rules of French were also precise in comprehensive grammar. French flourished also in philosophic salons under the influence of Lumière philosophers such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot, leading in the creation of the first *café*, *Le Procope*, in Paris in 1686, where philosophic matters were discussed in French.

7-2 the Worldwide expansion of French

From the year 1730 to 1780, under the influence of the Lumière Philosophers, French was extremely popular in all the courts of Europe, especially in Germany, Sweden, and Russia. The « French language madness » pushed kings and emperors through Europe to learn French, and even write letters and make speeches in French. At the same time, less glamorously, the expansion of many colonies began. In Canada, Louisiana, the Caribbean sea and the Indian ocean, colons came together with slaves, which soon made new types of mixed French to appear (creoles²⁶⁾),

24) COLL., *op. cit.*, "At the end of the XVIIth century, the ideal was to name every object, every feeling, every action, by one single word » p. 774.

25) COLL>, *op. cit.*, « [His aim] was to persuade that there no synonyms, but that each word had its own meaning » p. 776.

26) About the creoles and the process of creolisation : <http://www.tfq.ulaval.ca/axl/amsudant/creole.htm>

especially in the Caribbeans.

7-3 The expansion of written French

During the course of the 18th century, with the progress of literacy, written French came to concern not only the mere noble world, but every citizen. Some spontaneous attempts to write stories and autobiographies were made by semi-literate citizens²⁷⁾. At the same time, new popular genres appeared: adventures, horror and erotic novels were common, to the point that during a police persecution at the servant's quarter of the Royal Palace, the police discovered that almost every servant was hiding an erotic novel under their pillow²⁸⁾. It was also the age of the first publishing of newspapers, starting in 1631 from Théophraste Renaudot and his *Gazette*, the first ever made.

7-4 Writing in French: the issue

Still the problem of French writing remained: there were too many rules, and almost nobody could write French correctly, not even the most cultivated noblemen²⁹⁾. There started an ambitious orthography reform from the Académie Française, but due to internal reasons it was not processed to the end: some written words were reformed, others were not. This explains why the writing of French is so irrational, even until now: why pronounce all the letters in *direct*, and skip the last two consonants in *aspect* and *suspect*? The irregularities were not all corrected, far from that.

27) For instance, JAMEREY-DUVAL, *Mémoires*, ed. J-M Goulemot, Paris, Le Sycomore, 1981, *Pierre Prion, scribe*, Paris, Gallimard-Julliard, « Archives », 1985, and also Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal de ma vie*, Paris, Montalba, 1982.

28) COLL, *op. cit.*

29) Even Diderot's wife wrote letters full of spelling mistakes, as shown in COLL., *op. cit.*, p. 908.

8) The French Revolution and the evolution of French

8-1 The intense liberation of speech during the Revolution

For the first time ever, free speech was given to the people, who were encouraged to use it thus flourished countless publications, pamphlets, *libelles*, public announcements and public posters on city walls. These new types of written documents were all discussing the shape of the political state yet to come. It was accompanied with intense debating activity and discussion in all of society, even in the most distant countryside. At the same time, the need for new words and expressions was deeply felt. This led to :

- The creation of a new calendar, with a 10 day week, with each day given a new patron, basically names of objects of everyday life (before, it was the Catholic Saints) and new names for the months, inspired by the Antiquity and the seasons. This calendar was in use until 1806, when Napoléon decided to suppress it. Anyway, it was not well accepted by the citizens, used to the ancestral catholic calendar and divisions of time.
- Revolution* is one of the new and mass introduction of English words into French. Many of the new words concerned politics, economy, and administration.
- The streets and even the cities were given new Republican names.
- The old measures (foot, mile, ounce, etc.) were abandoned towards new measures such as meter and kilogram, more objective and universal throughout the country.
- The use of *Monsieur* and *Madame* to address someone was proscribed. *Citizen* (coming from *civis*, in Latin, meaning *member of the city*) became the ordinary way of greeting.
- From the Revolution to 1795, it was mandatory to address someone using the

familiar form *tu* instead of *vous*, so as to express the greater equality of citizens, regardless of their grade or social status. However it was hard for the population in general to accept this degradation of politeness.

We can see through this profound reform that the French Revolution was not only a revolution of the state and society, but also a revolution in words and language.

8-2 A national language

The language naturally used by the members of the Parliament to discuss over the laws and politics was of course French. A lot of patriotic societies for the promotion of French were created, for instance the Society of Lovers of the French Language in 1791. The objective was to give people the tools to express their own views, in speech or in writing. French was then seen as the language of the Republic, the language of all citizens. Therefore political measures should be taken to protect and promote the language.

8-3 Fighting the dialects : political measures

In this sense, global defiance was shared against the dialects, seen as remains of the old royal regime, and passive resistance to the ideals of Revolution. It led Abbé Grégoire (1750-1831) in 1793 to make a complete survey of the dialects spoken in France. Surprised by the very few numbers of French citizens that could actually speak French, he decided to promote measures to annihilate dialects. The main reasons for his decision were :

- Protecting equality, which meant equality in language and communication,
- The promotion of the patriotic feeling towards being French
- The problem of having different languages when leading military operations.

The decision was then made to have the education only in French. However

all these measures were too timid and drowned in the turmoil of the Revolution : it is only from the 19th century that they would fully be put into action.

9) Modern times

9-1 The conservative politics of Napoléon

The state finances put off-balance by the needs of his many wars, Napoléon decided to convey the education to priests, and the result was an incredible come-back of outdated Latin in schools and pensions ! It was due to the fact that the teachers knew far better Latin than French. The consequence of this conservative policy was a spectacular decrease in the use of French throughout the Empire.

9-2 Completion of French

In the course of the 19th century, the centralism of the state, the establishment of railroads, as well as the democratization of newspapers, the expressions and pronunciation of Paris' Bourgeois became the norm, and reached every corner of France. At the same time, the rules for writing were definitely adopted, and from this time on, teachers and grammarians tended to be very conservative towards the rules of French. The language thus became standardized, put into a code, and, in a way, sanctified and sacred. By the end of the 19th century, French as it is still used nowadays came to completion, and the rules were once for all constituted.

9-3 A cultural genocide

In 1831, in a letter, a republican politician made it clear to all the teachers called to teach in Bretagne (where Breton language were mainly spoken at the time) : « Your task is to *kill* Breton ! ». It is a reflect of the severity of the measures taken by the different governments in order to annihilate every dialect

(perceived as the *enemies* of the Republic). In 1842 was published a decree concerning the primary schools, in 21 articles: « during the class break, it is forbidden to speak Breton as well as use vulgar expressions and insults. Books written in Breton were forbidden ». At the same time, signs indicating that « it is forbidden either to speak Breton or to spit on the floor » were a common sight. In total, to destroy dialects and promote French, no less than 12 laws, 20 governmental ordinances, and 40 decrees were issued... In 1881, the law enacting the mandatory education in French in all the schools of the Nation was ordered. Not only would the education be only in French, but any religious influence was banished. This law was the last of many decisive assaults on dialects, which declined little by little.

9-4 The brilliance of literature

Rather than to grammarians, the French language was belonging to the writers and poets of the 19th century! There were no forbidden words³⁰⁾, nor forbidden genres for them to explore. Romanticism, symbolism, historic novels, popular stories: there were the new kind of literature that spread at the time. The first *best-sellers* came out, thanks to a plethoric and mechanized production of books. Let's cite Chateaubriand, Musset, Balzac, Stendhal, Baudelaire, Hugo, Flaubert, Rimbaud and Maupassant as prominent writers of the century.

9-5 New words

In the course of the 19th and 20th century, due to a renewed and intense cultural and intellectual life, many new words appeared. In the scientific field, new words related to new techniques (trains and cars, as well as electric devices) made their

30) Victor Hugo once said: « The word, let it be known, is a living being. (...) the word is the Verb, the word is God » in COLL., *op. cit.*, 997-998.

appearance. New expressions were used among the workers, under the influence of theories like Communism, Anarchism and Socialism. New sciences such as biology and physics crafted their own new expressions for their inventions. Archaeology, palaeontology and ethnology also made their appearance. Publishing of books, newspapers, commercials and publicity (which was totally new) help spread these new expressions and words. At the same time, dictionaries were repeatedly reproduced.

10) Towards the future

10-1 The status of French

In 1992, a change in the Constitution of the 5th Republic was adopted, defining the official status of French: «The language of the Republic is French³¹⁾». According to the government, French represents the unity of the country, the democratic system, and is a symbol of equality between all citizens. It also keeps the cohesion of the society, and is a central element in the integration of immigrants. It is obvious that when it comes to their own language, French are very proud. Here are some examples :

- When a foreigner ask his/her way on the street, before eventually being indicated the way, he/she is first corrected by the French if their expression is incorrect.
- The scientists also tend to write and publish their reports only in French, which represents an obstacle to the international acknowledgement of their work.
- one university decided to have marketing classes in English, causing a great scandal, reaching up to the Ministry of Education.

31) French Constitution, art. 2842.

- In 2006, at the Council of Europe, one of the French participants decided to deliver his speech in English. It angered President Chirac so much that he immediately left the room ! Thereafter he declared : « it is a great shock for me to see French speak English in a work group. I strongly condemn the use of only one language ».

10-2 The status of dialects

Concerning the dialects, there are very few remaining. Only aged people in the most rural areas are still speaking bits of them, together with French of course. But some measures are taken so as to safeguard what tends to be perceived more and more as part of the patrimony :

- In areas where dialects were spoken, the road and street signs are both in French and local dialects.
- As an option, dialects are taught in many universities
- In Britain, there exists schools where the education is both in French and Breton
- The pride of speaking a dialect and being part of a regional history dramatically raised, to the point of terrorism in Corsica !
- In 1999, France signed the Agreement on the Conservation of the Dialects of Europe. Nonetheless in reality almost nothing has changed : neither the political will, nor the global perception of the dialect against the Republic changed. As a result, the dialects will keep declining in France.

10-3 A new enemy : English

Until the 20th century, English had minimally influenced French. However, from the last century, there was an incredible boom, due to the following fields : cinema, merchandising, business, sport, clothing, oil production, computer science,

American industry and science...

Fig. 3 : Words imported from English to French, by Century

Century	12th	13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th
Words imported	8	2	11	6	14	67	134	377	2,150

As a reaction to this massive importation of English words, Jacques Toubon (1941-), the Culture Minister, decided in 1994 to make a reform³²⁾ recommending not to use English in public announcements, commercials, radio and TV programs, as well as political speeches. The use of French was on contrary strongly encouraged. The results of this political measure is yet to be observed, but it is interesting to note that at the time it raised severe criticism and sarcasm, resulting in the renaming of the Minister *Toubon* in *All-good* (approximate translation of his name).

10-4 The impossible reform of orthography

Even now, the education of French is extremely conservative. 200 years earlier, a different reform of the writing system was attempted, however they all failed. The ancient and complicated way of writing French remained unchanged until now. The last reform³³⁾ dates back to 1990-1991 when the supporters of the simplification of French were linguists and national as well as international associations of teachers. Those who stood against the reform were writers, journalists, some teacher's associations, and 5 Nobel Prize winners. The government eventually backed away: nothing changed, except that from now on, two spellings (the old one and the reformed one) for certain words coexisted.

32) Text of the law (in French) : <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005616341&dateTexte=vig>

33) Original text of the reform and suggestions of spelling : <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/langue/orthographe/graphies.html>

Conclusion : The decadence of French ?

This is the French paradox : for the first time in history, the number of people speaking French is that high, and French is widely respected and thought of as a « beautiful » language, but in the meantime French speakers tend not to respect the basic rules of writing any longer. There are a lot of errors in modern day written discourse, especially among youngsters. However, one should note this phenomenon is common to all the languages in the world at the beginning of the 21st century. At the same time, such old institutions as l'Académie Française tend to be perceived as an out-of-date organ, unable to cope with new challenges concerning French : nowadays it has all but little authority.

The development of new technologies, mass media, politician discourse, publicity and commercials, Internet and even humorists and TV personalities have taken their toll on French. The force of a slogan or an official political discourse has a tremendous influence over the people's perception. New words are being created almost every day. Instead of a sign of decadence, we can take should take this as a sign of the vitality of French and its capacity to constantly adapt to new situations and ages. Through the centuries, and from now on, the French language will continue to change. The lesson we can learn from the pretention of purity manifested by the grammarians of the Classical French in the 17th century is that when a language does not evolve any more, it means it is dead. French is alive and well, and evolving into new and creative forms. Let's wish this process lasts as long as men are eager to communicate with each other.

Reference Book :

COLL., (2007), Alain REY directing, *Mille ans de langue française*, Ed. Perrin, 1465 pages.

Other books :

- ALEMAND, (1690) *Nouvelles Remarques de Vaugelas*, preface.
- BALADIER, Charles Baladier, *Aventure et discours dans l'amour courtois*, Editions Hermann, 2010.
- BOUHOURS, (2003) *Entretiens*, ed. B. Beugnot et G. Declercq, Champion.
- CERQUIGLINI Bernard, *La naissance du français*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1991 (Que-sais-je ?).
- COLL., (1790) *Recueil des harangues prononcées par Messieurs de l'Académie Française*, Amsterdam, Aux dépens de la Compagnie, 2 vol.
- DUBELLAY, Joachim : *La Deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise*, éd. Francis Goyet et Olivier Millet, Paris, Champion, 2003.
- JAFFREDO Sébastien, *Histoire de la langue française : le vocabulaire par l'étymologie*, 日仏学院講座.
- JAMEREY-DUVAL, *Mémoires*, ed. J-M Goulemot, Paris, Le Sycomore, 1981.
- MENETRA Jacques-Louis (1982), *Journal de ma vie*, Paris, Montalba.
- PASTOUREAU, Michel. « Le Coq gaulois », *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Pierre NORA.
- PRION, Pierre (1985) : *Pierre Prion, scribe*, Paris, Gallimard-Julliard, « Archives ».

Online Ressources :

- Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie : <http://www.francophonie.org/-Reperes-.html>
- SERGEANT Bernard : *Les Indo-Européens - Histoire, langues, mythes*. Payot, Paris, 1995.
http://www.orbilat.com/Languages/French/Texts/Period_02/0842-Le_Serment_de_Strasbourg.htm
Text of the Serment of Strasbourg.
- http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Ordonnance_de_Villers-Cotter%C3%AAts
Text of the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêt.
- <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/role/index.html>
Status of l'Académie Française.
- <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT 000005616341 & dateTexte=vig>
Text of the Loi Toubon.
- <http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl/amsudant/creole.htm>
Article concerning the creoles and the creolisation.
- <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/langue/orthographe/graphies.html>
Text of the orthograph reform.

This paper is based on the research financially supported by Research Institutes of Matsuyama University.