

# Language-internal evidence for resisting contact-induced change in Gascon and Languedocien

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# Perception and (historical) sound change

- Sound change can arise via the re-interpretation of secondary phonetic cues as being part of the primary signal (Ohala, 1989; 2003)
  - E.g. Nasal assimilation *souvent* ‘often’ (exercise in F603 with Barbara Vance, Fall 2022)  
Latin: *sobende* → Proto-French: [sovend] → [sovēnd] → Old French: [sovānt] → Middle French: [suvã]
- Some sound changes have yet to be explained via knowledge of synchronic phonetic data
  - The loss of the palatal lateral has been documented in the history of French (Ayres-Bennett, 1996; Lodge, 2004), but phonetic explanations have not been proposed
- **Aim:** Explore possible explanations for loss of /ʎ/, specifically in Occitan
  - Current change in progress
  - Data from Catalan and Spanish have shown loss of /ʎ/ with inconclusive results (Colantoni, 2004; Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)

# Table of Contents

- History and development
- Gascon vs. Languedocien
- /ʎ/ in Gascon and Languedocien
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion

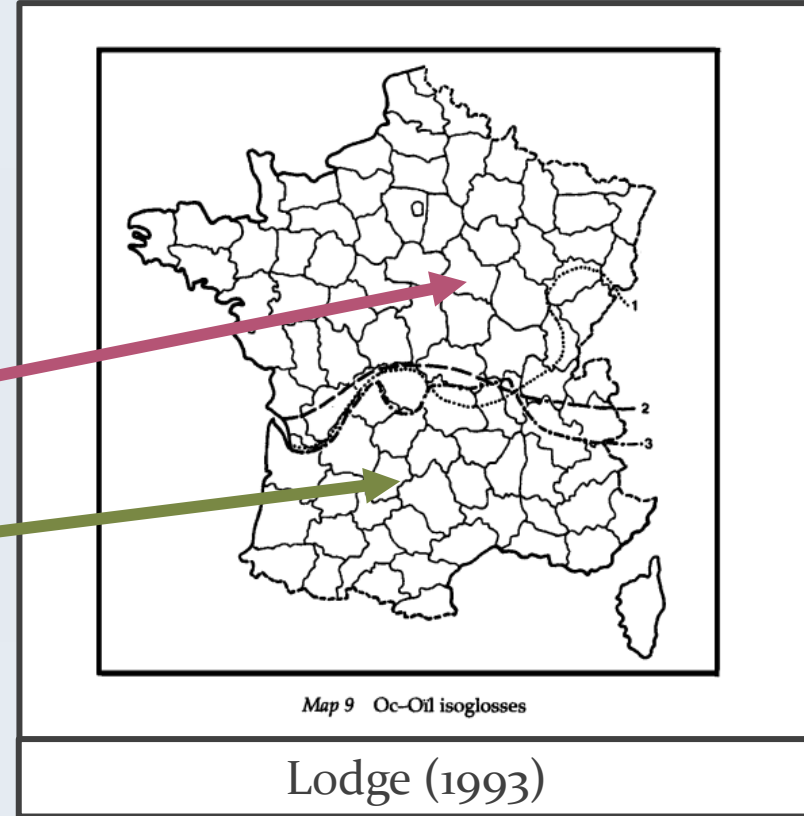
# History and development

- **French** and **Occitan** followed the same patterns of sound change until around the Gallo-Romance period (ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.; Lodge, 1993)

Langue d'oïl

Langue d'oc

- **Occitan's** phonemic inventory retains phonemes that were eventually lost in **French** (e.g. /ʁ/ and /β/)
- **Takeaway:** Information about the phonological development of **French** and evidence of changes in progress for phonemes retained in modern **Occitan** can inform each other





# Gascon vs. Languedocien

History

G vs. L

/k/

RQs

Corpus

Methods

Results

Disc.

Conc.

- **Gascon** (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)
  - Appears to be sensitive to contact induced change from **French**
- **Languedocien** (Bec, 1973)
  - More conservative in retaining **Occitan** phonological features than other dialects

*Given that both dialects have been in intense long-term contact with **French** (see Lodge, 1993) and are low in prestige (Valdman, 1983)...*

**What may account for Languedocien's apparent resistance to change when, like Gascon, it is in intense contact with French?**



# /ʎ/ in Gascon and Languedocien

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- /ʎ/ is retained in modern Occitan (Müller, 2011) in positions where it was lost during the development of modern French (Lodge, 2004)
- Gascon (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)
  - /ʎ/ often realized with an accompanying glide-like segment: [ʎj]
  - /ʎ/ sometimes realized word-medially and word-finally as [j], like in French
- Languedocien (Bec, 1973; Oliviéri and Sauzet, 2016)
  - /ʎ/ depalatalizes to [l] word finally

**Does word position influence whether a palatal lateral segment is produced?**



# Research question #1

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Does /ʎ/ seem to be associated more with the **glide**-like element or the **lateral** element depending on the dialect?

(a) **Gascon** speakers will associate /ʎ/ with neither the **glide**-like element, nor the **lateral** element

*Tokens of [ʎj] do not have longer [j] segments in Gascon (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)*

(b) **Languedocien** speakers will associate it more with the **lateral** element

*/ʎ/ depalatalizes to [l] word finally in Languedocien, and it is generally more conservative than other Occitan dialects in retaining phonological features (Bec, 1973)*



## Research question #2

Are some word positions more likely to retain palatal lateral segments, [ʎ][ʎj], depending on the dialect?

(a) More likely to remain word-initially in **Gascon**

*[j]* is attested word-medially and word-finally in **Gascon** (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)

(b) Likely to remain word-initially and word-medially in **Languedocien**

*/ʎ/ depalatalizes to [l]* word finally in **Languedocien** (Bec, 1973; Oliviéri and Sauzet, 2016)

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# OcOr: a Corpus of Occitan Oral Narratives

History

G vs. L

/s/

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Conc.

- Three types of narratives:
  - Written and traditional
  - Oral and traditional
  - Oral and contemporary
- Target: Oral and contemporary
  - 12 recordings of storytellers at a festival in Toulouse
    - Anywhere from ~6 to ~19 minutes in length
    - Average length of ~11 minutes
    - About 2 hours and 16 minutes in total
  - 4 speakers
    - 2 **Gascon** speakers (1 man, 1 woman)
    - 2 **Languedocien** speakers (1 man, 1 woman)
    - All speak both **French** and **Occitan**

October 8, 2018

Dataset [Open Access](#)

## OcOr : a Corpus of Occitan Oral Narratives

Marianne Vergez-Couret; Janice Carruthers

Contact person(s)

Marianne Vergez-Couret

Researcher(s)

Janice Carruthers



# Methodology - extraction

History

G vs. L

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1. **Transcriptions provided in *OcOr Corpus***  
(Vergez-Couret & Carruthers, 2018)

2. **Found all instances of /ʎ/**  
Used automated methods

**181 tokens**



# Methodology - coding

- History
- G vs. L
- /ʎ/
- RQs
- Corpus
- Methods
- Results
- Disc.
- Conc.

## Dialect

Gascon

Languedocien

## Position

Final

Medial

Initial

## Variant

[ʎ]

[ʎj]

[j]

[l]

## Duration

lateral and glide segments in [ʎj]





# Methodology - statistical analysis #1

Does /ʎ/ seem to be associated more with a glide-like element or the lateral element depending on the dialect?

## Mixed-effects linear regression

Dependent: Duration in tokens of [ʎj]

Factors: (1) Segment, (2) Dialect,  
(3) Interaction between Segment and Dialect

Random intercepts: Speaker & Word



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G vs. L

/ʎ/

RQs

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Conc.



# Methodology - statistical analysis #2

Are some word positions more likely to retain palatal lateral segments, [ʎ][ʎj], depending on the dialect?

## Mixed-effects logistic regression

Dependent: Presence of palatal lateral

Factors: (1) Position, (2) Dialect,  
(3) Interaction between Position and Dialect

Random intercepts: Speaker & Word



History

G vs. L

/ʎ/

RQs

Corpus

Methods

Results

Disc.

Conc.



# Results – overview

History

G vs. L

/ʎ/

RQs

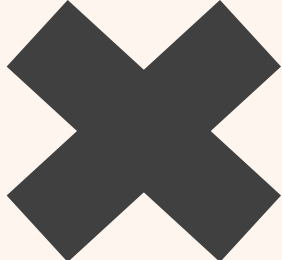
Corpus

Methods

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	Word final	Word initial	Word medial
<b>Gascon</b> (86 tokens)			
<b>Languedocien</b> (95 tokens)	[j] = 2 [l] = 28 [ʎj] = 5		[j] = 2 [ʎj] = 57 [ʎ] = 1



# Results – overview

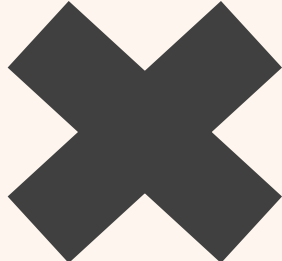
- History
- G vs. L
- /ʎ/
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- Corpus
- Methods
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	Word final	Word initial	Word medial
<b>Gascon</b> (86 tokens)	[j] = 5		[j] = 10
<b>Languedocien</b> (95 tokens)	[j] = 2 [l] = 28 [ʎj] = 5		[j] = 2 [ʎj] = 57 [ʎ] = 1



# Results – overview

- History
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	Word final	Word initial	Word medial
Gascon (86 tokens)	[j] = 5		[j] = 10
Languedocien (95 tokens)	[j] = 2 [ɫ] = 28 [ʎj] = 5		[j] = 2 [ʎj] = 57 [ʎ] = 1





# Results – overview

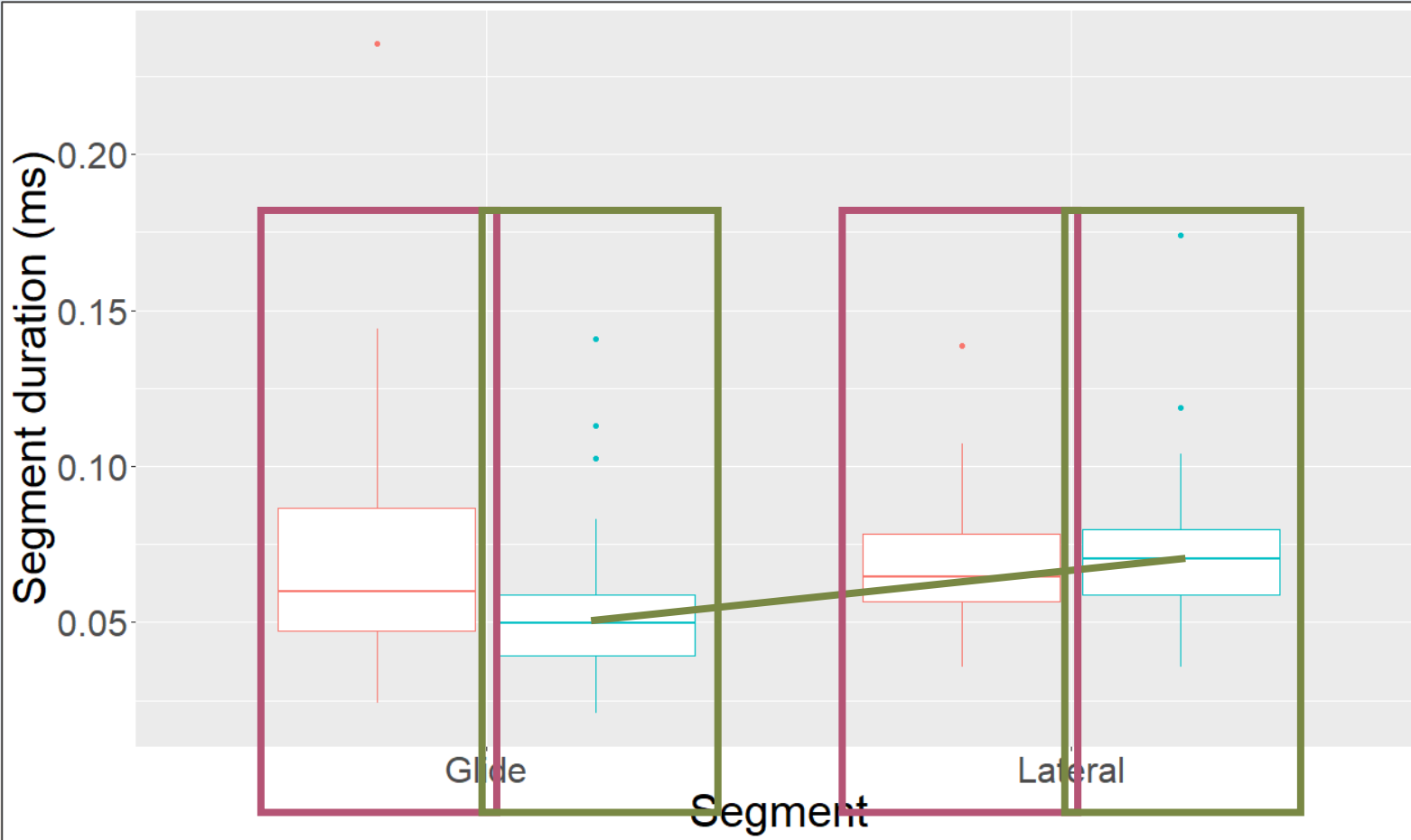
- History
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	Word final	Word initial	Word medial
<b>Gascon</b> (86 tokens)	$[j] = 5$ $[ʎj] = 4$	$[ʎj] = 8$	$[j] = 10$ $[ʎj] = 59$
<b>Languedocien</b> (95 tokens)	$[j] = 2$ $[l] = 28$ $[ʎj] = 5$		$[j] = 2$ $[ʎj] = 57$ $[ʎ] = 1$



# Results – segments in [ʎj] tokens (RQ #1)

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Lateral segments are longer than glide segments in Languedocien (p=0.0009)

Dialect  
 Gascon  
 Languedocien

A separate analysis showed lateral segment durations in Languedocien are not significantly different from those in Gascon



# Results – word position (RQ #2)

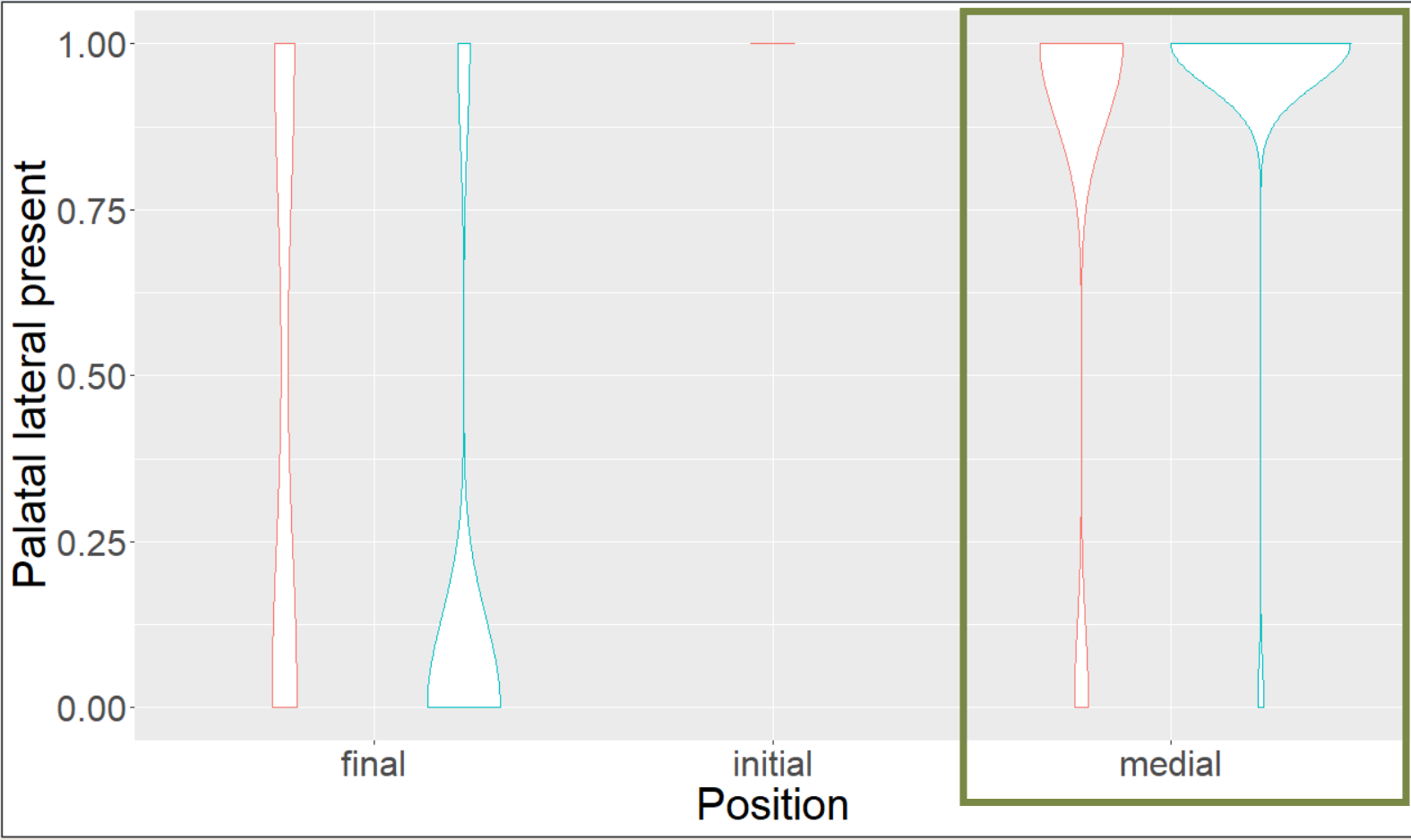
Palatal lateral segments are realized more frequently when in word medial positions in Gascon (p=0.0048) and Languedocien (p=0.0495)

[ɲj]

[ɲ]

[j]

[l]



Dialect

- Gascon
- Languedocien



# Discussion – RQ #1

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Does /ʎ/ seem to be associated more with the **glide**-like element or the **lateral** element depending on the dialect?

- **Gascon** does not associate tokens of [ʎj] with the **glide**-like element or the **lateral** element
  - No significant difference between the duration of **lateral** segments and **glide**-like segments
  - Consistent with the results of (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)
- **Languedocien** associates tokens of [ʎj] with the **lateral** element
  - **Lateral** segments are longer than **glide**-like segments
  - May reflect that for **Languedocien** speakers the **lateral** feature is more closely associated with /ʎ/

# ▶▶ /ʎ/ “protected” from change

- Longer durations of /ʎ/ in tokens of [ʎj] may reflect that speakers associate the **lateral** element as the primary signal
  - Thereby “protecting” it from being associated with any other signal, related to the **glide**-like element or otherwise
- **Languedocien** is also known to be more conservative in its retention of **Occitan** phonological features (Bec, 1973)
  - Could be that ideologies exist around the maintenance of this “standard” and that these ideologies prevent such changes from occurring

History

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# Discussion – RQ #2

History

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/ʎ/

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Are some word positions more likely to retain palatal lateral segments, [ʎ][ʎj], depending on the dialect?

- Both **Gascon** and **Languedocien** retain the palatal lateral word-medially
  - Results show that **lateral** segments are realized more frequently when in word-medial positions
  - Additionally...
    - **Gascon** never deleted the **lateral** segment word-initially, and only 14.5% of word-medial tokens were [j]
    - In **Languedocien**, 85.7% of word-final tokens did not contain a palatal lateral
- So...



# Change seems to occur mostly word-finally

- Already attested that /ʎ/ depalatalizes to [l] word finally in **Languedocien** (Bec, 1973; Oliviéri and Sauzet, 2016)
- [j] also occurs word-finally in **Gascon** (Mooney & Hawkey, 2019)
- Given that Mooney & Hawkey (2019) propose /ʎ/ is being lost in **Gascon** due to contact with **French**...

**How did French lose it in the first place?**



# Implications for French sound change

- **French** had palatal laterals in intervocalic and word-final positions which all changed to [j] by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ayres-Bennett, 1996)
  - Word-initial palatal laterals were never formed (Foley, 1979)
- /ʎ/ realized as [ʎ] & [j] throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Lodge, 2004)
  - Let's look at an example of a word in modern French [j] is word-final in a position where there was historically /ʎ/ : *œil* 'eye'

CL	SL	GR	PF	OF	MidF	ModF
oculum	ɔklɔ	uɔʎɔ	wɛʎɛ	wɛʎ	œʎ	œj

- Development of liaison and enchainment (Rickard, 1989)
- *Mon œil est bleu* 'my eye is blue' → [œʎ.jɛ] → lenition/deletion of coda
  - Change would then spread to word-medial positions





# Conclusion

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- Evidence from phonetic changes in progress can inform us about historical sound change (see Ohala, 2003)
  - My data suggest **Languedocien** speakers may resist contact induced change in that **lateral** segments are likely the primary signal
  - Additionally, palatal lateral loss seems to be most prominent word finally
    - Offered a possible analysis of how this could have occurred in the history of **French**
- Limitations and future work
  - Conduct a larger level study with more speakers and more tokens
  - Run a study to determine attitudes towards **Languedocien** vs **Gascon**
  - Explore whether this change seems to be above or below the level of conscious for speakers

# Mercés!

Thanks to Dr. Barbara Vance for a great semester in her course *History of the French Language* in Fall 2022, and to Dr. Liz Hebbard for encouraging and enabling my research on varieties of modern Occitan (and for being just as excited about palatal laterals as I am during Old Occitan reading group)

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# Appendix

- Six varieties of modern Occitan (all endangered)
  - Focus: **Gascon** and **Languedocien** (Languedoc)
  - Limousin, Auvergnat, Provençal, and Vivaro-Alpin
- Around 600,000 fluent speakers while up to 1.6 million are occasional speakers (*Minority Rights Group International*)
- Historical seat of Occitan's cultural, political, and linguistic influence was at **Toulouse** (Lodge, 1993)

