Ne-deletion in Picard and in regional French: Evidence for distinct grammars

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Ne-deletion is arguably the best studied variable in French. This phenomenon has been investigated in many native varieties of Canadian and European French (e.g., Ashby 1976, 1981; Sankoff & Vincent 1977; Pooley 1996; Armstrong 2001; Coveney 2002), as well as in the speech of French learners (e.g., Regan 1996; Rehner & Mougeon 1999; Dewaele 2004). Even though these studies have revealed considerable differences in overall rates of deletion, they have also shown that the linguistic and social factors that govern deletion pattern very similarly in all varieties.

While there might seem to be little need for yet another study of *ne* deletion, the comparative perspective adopted in our research aims at providing elements of response to a question of a much more general nature: is Picard a regional variety of French, as claimed by Poignant in a report submitted to the French government in 1998, or is it a language distinct from French, as stated in another report submitted by Bernard Cerquiglini to the French prime minister in 1999? Our study will show that while the variety of French that is spoken in the area treats *ne* deletion very similarly to other varieties of French, *ne* in Picard behaves very differently from French *ne,* both with respect to the frequency of deletion and in the influence of linguistic factors. Our research compares the patterns of *ne*-deletion in three speakers for whom we have both written and oral Picard, as well spoken French. We also compare their French patterns with those of monolingual French speakers from the region.

Preliminary analysis confirms Vasseur's (1996:88) observation that *ne* deletion is very rare in written Picard (7% in the first 25 letters in *Lettes à min cousin Polyte*); however, contrary to what is reported by Vasseur, it reveals that the only context in which *ne* deletion is frequent is *ch'est* 'it is' rather than clauses containing the clitics *l* '3sg.acc' and *lé* '3pl.acc; (1)-(2). In spoken French, *ne* deletion occurs in 61% of the cases (Villeneuve 2006). While it is quasi-categorical in *c'est* 'it is'; (3), it is very frequent with other frequent phrases as well and is favored, as is the case in other varieties of French, by the presence of object clitics; (4). *Ne* deletion in spoken Picard reveals a hybrid system: while its frequency is much higher than in written Picard (39%), its linguistic conditioning resembles more what we have observed in Picard than what characterizes French: 57% of deleted *ne*'s involve the structure *ch'est* and 71% of them contain the verb *éte* 'to be.

(1)	*jé n' zé connouos po coére*	(Lettes 012)
	'I don't know them yet'	
(2)	*ch'est mie dob- base ét crapeud*	(Lettes 008)
	'it's not toad's spittle'	
(3)	*c'est pas très loin*	(JL, 7/2/06)
	'it's not very far'	
(4)	*Je l'suis plus mais...*	(JL, 7/2/06)
	'I am not anymore but...'	

Our research contributes additional linguistic evidence for the claim that Picard and French are distinct languages (Auger & Villeneuve in press).

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