Word-final Cluster Simplification in Vimeu French: A Preliminary Analysis

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1 Introduction

While many variationist studies have investigated phonological aspects of North American French varieties in the last three decades, few have focused on regional varieties of European French until recently. Today, thanks to an international collaborative project on variation in French phonology (Durand and Lyche 2003), we are gradually gaining insight into variable aspects of French as it is spoken in France, Belgium and elsewhere. Among phonological features of colloquial French, word-final consonant cluster simplification is well suited to the study of linguistic (Armstrong 2001, Côté 2004) as well as social variation (Laks 1977, Pooley 1996). The present study of word-final obstruent-liquid (OL) clusters simplification in French, e.g., *quatre* 'four' and *cycle* 'cycle' realized as [kat] and [sik], focuses on Vimeu, a region of Northern France where French is spoken alongside Picard, a regional Gallo-Roman dialect. Not only does this variety provide us with new data for European French, but it also allows us to examine the influence of Picard, a language in which word-final cluster simplification is widespread (Pooley 1996).

2 Word-final OL Cluster Simplification in French

In French, obstruent-liquid (OL) consonant clusters are allowed in both syllable onset (e.g., *briser* 'to break', *flore* 'flora', *vrai* 'real', *réclamer* 'to claim') and coda positions (*boucle* 'loop', *membre* 'member', *buffle* 'buffalo', *chanvre* 'hemp'). While these OL clusters remain intact word-initially, they may be simplified in word-final position, resulting in realizations such as [buk], [mãb], [buf] and [ʃãv] for *boucle*, *membre*, *buffle* and *chanvre*.

2.1 Phonological Approaches

Phonologists have described this phenomenon in various terms. For Dell (1985), any liquid of a word-final OL cluster is deleted when the following word begins by a consonant, except if the liquid is protected by an epenthetic schwa. For instance, the input /arbrə##puri/ 'rotten tree' could result in two possible outputs, i.e., [arbrəpuri] or [arbpuri], depending on whether the variable EPEN rule has protected the word-final liquid from deletion, as shown in Figure 1.

	/arbrə##puri/ 'rotten tree'	/arbrə##puri/
E-FIN : $\text{ə} \rightarrow \emptyset$ / $VC_0\_\#$	arbr ##puri	arbr ##puri
EPEN : $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{ə}$ / $CC\_\#_1 C$	arbrə##puri	---
LIQUEF : $l \rightarrow \emptyset$ / $O\_\#_1 C$	---	arb ##puri
	[arbrəpuri]	[arbpuri]

Figure 1: Phonological rules and final OL clusters (adapted from Dell 1985).

According to Côté (2004), the liquid of a word-final OL cluster easily deletes to prevent an increase in sonority from the nucleus to the coda, which violates the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP). For instance, the /l/ in *boucle* 'loop' is more sonorous than the preceding stop /k/, resulting in a violation of SSP; the simplification of the OL cluster resolves the issue of rising sonority in the coda.

As for Cornulier (1978:41), he deems acceptable in a 'standard conversation' that a liquid would drop before a consonant or even before a vowel preceded by a pause, but regards OL simplification as stigmatized before a vowel in the absence of a pause. Thus, by opposing word-final OL simplification before consonants and pauses to marked cases of liquid deletion before vowels, he recognizes an added social or stylistic component to the phenomenon.

2.2 Sociolinguistic Studies of European French

While it is pervasive in many North American French varieties (Côté 2004, Pupier and Drapeau 1973), word-final OL cluster simplification appears to be less frequent in European French, where it was said to be restricted to certain phonological contexts (Cornulier 1978, Dell 1985). Several sociolinguistic studies have since shown that, although it is less common and perhaps more marked in these contexts, OL simplification can indeed occur before vowels and pauses (Armstrong 2001, Laks 1977, Pooley 1996). Other factors such as a speaker's social class and sex, the speech style or its level of formality, and a word's frequency have been shown to affect rates of OL cluster simplification in French.

Laks' (1977) study of /r/ deletion in the Parisian neighborhood of Villejuif focused on the speech of six teenagers and two adults, and found relatively low rates of simplification ranging from 6.33% to 22.16%. Simplification was also shown to be inversely proportional to both the level of formality (or speech style) and social status: the more formal the conversation and the higher the speaker's social status, the less likely the deletion of /r/.

Some fifteen years later, in the Lorraine region, Armstrong (1998, 2001) found similar results with respect to speech style: teenagers' rates of /r/ deletion are affected by speech style more than by age or sex, and they vary from 44.9% before vowels to 52.9% in other contexts. Stylistic and lexical variation was found to affect prevocalic environments especially: in formal settings, /r/ deletion before a vowel is stigmatized with 22.1% compared to 55.6% before consonants and pauses. In prevocalic environments, /r/ deletion is limited to a few frequently occurring lexical items: *autre* 'other', *être* '(to) be', *peut-être* 'maybe', *mètre* 'meter' and derived words (*centimètre* 'centimeter', *kilomètre* 'kilometer', etc.), and *mettre* '(to) put'. The same lexical bias applies to /l/ deletion, with 58.6% deletion for *par exemple* 'for example' as opposed to 31.9% in other items.

Based on a corpus collected in the late 1990s in the cities of Nancy (Lorraine) and Rennes (Brittany), Boughton (2008) found that middle class speakers are 25% less likely to delete the liquid of a final OL cluster than their working class counterparts whose deletion rate reaches 70%. She noted that prepausal and prevocalic contexts even exacerbate the social divide: working class speakers simplify about 29% more than their middle class counterparts (compared to a 20% difference before consonants), and men simplify 19% more than women (compared to an 11% difference in preconsonantal contexts). These results appear to support Gadet's (1992:41) claim about the stigmatized nature of OL simplification in these two phonological contexts.

In the region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where Picard, a Gallo-Roman language, was traditionally spoken, phonological context does not appear to play as important a role in OL simplification. In a study of working class French which he conducted in Roubaix in the early 1980s, Pooley (1988, 1996) noted that OL simplification occurs frequently in any environment, i.e., before consonants

(83%), pauses (75%) and vowels (62%). The type of consonants within the OL cluster was also shown to influence liquid deletion. Among obstruents, dentals favor /r/ deletion while labials, after which /r/ is most likely to be retained, are most favorable to /l/ deletion. As for liquids, /r/ was found to delete more frequently than /l/, with 71% deletion for /r/ and only 62% for /l/. Finally, Pooley noted that a word's grammatical category plays a role at least on the simplification of /tr/ clusters: verbs (e.g., *mettre* 'to put') favor deletion while nouns and prepositions (e.g., *fenêtre* 'window', *entre* 'between') favor preservation of the liquid. Hornsby (2006) found similar results for the Pas-de-Calais town of Avion, where the rate of OL simplification was as high as 80%.

3 Word-final OL Cluster Simplification in Picard

The overwhelming absence of liquids in word-final OL clusters is well attested in Picard (Brébion 1907, Cochet 1933, Dauby 1979), as can be seen in (1) and (2).

(1) *J'én té ouès jamoais **appréne** ét **tabe** éd multiplication.*   (Crimbillie, 8)
     'I never see you learning your multiplications'
(2) *Si tu n'as rièn d'**eute** à m'donneu, éj m'in veus m'in r'nalleu doù qu'éj vièns.* (Crimbillie, 30)
     'If you don't have anything else to give me, I will go back to where I'm from'

Although one may argue that the liquid is absent from Picard forms altogether, the fact that it occurs in derived words (Brébion, 1907; Vasseur, 1963), i.e., when a vowel-initial suffix attaches to a base as in (3), indicates that the liquid is present underlyingly in at least some cases. Variation in lexical forms such as *cade* and *cadre* in (3c) is also a sign that word-final OL simplification is not a purely diachronic phenomenon in Picard.

(3) a. *misérabe* 'miserable'   → *misérablémint* 'miserably'   (Vasseur 1963)
     b. *libe* 'free'   → *librémint* 'freely'
     c. *cade*, *cadre* 'frame'   → *cadreu* '(to) frame'

Across word boundaries, however, a following vowel does not restore the liquid, which is overwhelmingly absent before a vowel-initial word, as in (4a) and (5a).

(4) a. *Deux **eutes** éfants d'tchœur i portoait't éch grand pénieu in osieu*   (Crimbillie, 62)
     'Two other altar boys carried the big wicker basket'
     b. *I n'mé résté pu qu'à dire ém priére, [...] **eutrémint**, o sonme tchuits* (Crimbillie, 46)
     'All I have left to do is pray; otherwise, our goose is cooked'
(5) a. *i s'met à tapeu su sin piot fiu, in l'traitant d'**prope** à rièn*   (Crimbillie, 91)
     'he starts hitting his grandson, telling him he is good for nothing'
     b. *habillè coér asseu souvint **proprémint***   (Crimbillie, 41)
     'still often dressed nicely'

Given that word-final OL clusters may be simplified in all varieties of French and that the phenomenon applies more categorically in Picard, a study of Picardy French may allow us to investigate the extent to which an endangered regional language still plays a role on French as it is spoken in the area.

4 Word-final OL Cluster Simplification in Vimeu French

Because the Picard linguistic area of northern France and southern Belgium is characterized by considerable regional variation, even though shared features outnumber differences (Dawson 2003:2), the study presented below focuses on the Vimeu region of Picardy. Located in the westernmost part of the Somme department in France, with more than half of its population residing in rural areas, this region is home to many elderly Picard speakers and a non-negligible number of younger residents who speak Picard fluently. Because it has been claimed to have greater Picard vitality than other areas which were more severely affected by World War I (Carton 1981), Vimeu is a perfect location for the study of regional French among French monolinguals and Picard-French bilinguals.

The present study of word-final OL cluster simplification attempts to answer the following research questions: What regulates the variable simplification of word-final OL clusters in Vimeu French, i.e., what are the linguistic and social factors at play? Is there a possible influence of Picard on regional varieties of French? In other words, has prolonged contact between Picard and French given rise to a rate of OL simplification higher than in other regions of France, and has the phenomenon been generalized to prevocalic and prepausal environments? Do Picard-French bilingual speakers show similar tendencies as their French monolingual counterparts? Finally, does OL simplification in Vimeu French behave the same as in the Picard-speaking region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais or does it follow patterns found in other regions of France?

4.1 Corpus

The following study is based on a corpus of spoken Vimeu French we collected in 2006 and 2007 through informal 60- to 90-minute interviews with native Vimeu French speakers. Topics discussed during these interviews range from childhood and family life to local traditions and Picard language use. From the larger corpus, ten subjects distributed evenly between bilingual Picard-French and monolingual French speakers were selected for this study, as shown in Table 1.

	Bilinguals (Pic.-Fr.)	Monolinguals (Fr.)
Adults (25-54 years old)	Catherine F.	Annick M.
	Thomas S.	Stéphane P.
Elders (55 years and older)	Françoise D.	Fabienne A.; Béatrice D.
	Joseph L.; Joel G.	Guy D.

Table 1: Distribution of Vimeu French speakers.

The preliminary analysis presented below is based on approximately 40 minutes of conversation per subject, for a total of 389 minutes.

4.2 Methods

All instances of an OL-final word were targeted in the data, with the exception of potentially ambiguous O*r* + /r/ and O*l* + /l/ cases, e.g., *pour être rapide* 'to be quick' and *par exemple les chasseurs* 'hunters for example', where a following word-initial liquid could be mistaken for the second member of a word-final OL cluster. All tokens of *quatre-vingt(s)*, invariably uttered as

[katʁəvɛ̃], were also excluded from the analysis, since this lexical item behaves as a compound word in which *quatre* is word-internal rather -final.

All tokens were coded for the presence or absence of the liquid in the OL cluster, as well as for a variety of linguistic and social factors. Data were then submitted to multivariate analysis. Linguistic coding consisted of the following factor groups: preceding segment, obstruent features (voicing, place and manner of articulation), liquid identity (/r/ or /l/), and the word's grammatical category and frequency of occurrence within the corpus. The following phonological environment was also coded for, as shown in Table 2.

Factor groups	Factors	Examples
Following environment	vowel	*Pour **apprendre à l'école**, c'était en français.* 'Learning at school was done in French.'
	consonant	*On va **vendre notre** maison.* 'We will sell our house.'
	pause	*On habitait tous **ensemble**.* 'We all lived together.'
Following vowel	hesitation	*J'avais pas du tout envie d'**être euh**... conseillère municipale.* 'I really didn't want to be... a city council member.'
	discourse marker	*Y a beaucoup d'précautions à **prendre hein**.* 'There are lots of precautions to take.'
	other vowels	*On était des petits **diables aussi**.* 'We were little devils too.

Table 2: Factor groups pertaining to the following phonological environment.

Social factors included the speaker's sex, bilingual versus monolingual status, and age group (25-54 or 55 and older). Fifty-five years old was chosen as the cut-off for the elders' age group because of a 1959 French law raising the age limit for obligatory schooling to 16 years old. In other words, people younger than 55 years old and at the time of the interview, who were born after 1953, attended school until at least the age of 16, while elders may have had less schooling. Close contact with Picard was also much more limited for most adults born after 1953, despite the fact that they may have occasionally heard the language, especially from their grandparents.

5 Results

The analysis of all tokens extracted shows a global rate of OL simplification of 58% (N=821) in Vimeu French. However, this figure rises to 61% (N=763) after excluding two categorical lexical items: *entre* 'between', which always remains intact[1] as [ɑ̃tʁ] (N=47), and *par contre* 'however', which always undergoes OL simplification (N=11), i.e., [paʁkɔ̃t], unlike the homophonous preposition *contre* 'against' which is simplified in only one of all eight cases (12%).

Table 3, which presents the results of a multivariate analysis performed on the entire data set, reflects the order in which the significant factor groups were selected. The input value of .600, a global measure of the rate at which the rule applies, shows the overall probability that OL clusters will be simplified in Vimeu French, based on the data at hand. Factor weights of .500 and higher

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[1]The categorical presence of the liquid in the Vimeu Picard cognate preposition *intre* 'between' may have favored its preservation in Vimeu French.

indicate a favoring effect on OL simplification. Percentages represent rates of word-final OL cluster simplification or liquid deletion.

Factors	Weight	% simpl.	N	*p*
Following vowel				≤.005
other vowels	.545	49	169	
hesitation (*euh*)	.541	53	43	
discourse marker (*hein*)	.077	6	15	
RANGE	*466*			
Following environment				≤.001
consonant	.631	74	409	
vowel	.356	47	227	
pause	.338	43	126	
RANGE	*286*			
Word frequency				≤.001
21 tokens or more	.598	72	376	
6-20 tokens	.472	54	203	
5 tokens or fewer	.335	45	184	
RANGE	*237*			
Obstruent manner of articulation				≤.001
stop	.514	63	714	
fricative	.303	36	49	
RANGE	*233*			

Table 3: Linguistic factors affecting OL simplification in Vimeu French.

The effect of both the following environment and word frequency noted in previous studies is replicated in our data. While consonants favor cluster simplification, vowels and pauses have a disfavoring effect in Vimeu French. The effect of a following vowel on OL simplification is also selected as significant. Out of all following vowel-initial elements, the discourse marker *hein* 'huh' is the only one with a strongly disfavoring effect. There is also a correlation between word frequency and cluster simplification. For instance, frequent lexical items such as *autre* 'other', *par exemple* 'for example' and *être* 'to be' have particularly high rates of reduction (72%); as frequency decreases, so does cluster simplification.

Types of consonants within the cluster also play a role on this variable. Within an OL cluster, fricatives disfavor the deletion of the following liquid while stops have a slight favoring effect. Although not selected in the multivariate analysis, the difference between /r/ deletion (64%) and /l/ deletion (50%) is nonetheless significant. Significant differences between the two age groups and between bilingual speakers and French monolinguals emerge from the analysis of social factors, shown in Table 4. The difference between males (63%) and females (59%) is not significant.

Selected as the highest ranking social factor, age shows that older Vimeu French speakers disfavor simplification while younger adults favor the preservation of the liquid. Bilingualism also appears to increase the likelihood of OL simplification, although the gap between bilinguals and monolinguals is not as wide.

Factors		Weight	% simpl.	N	*p*
Age group					≤.001
elders (55 +)		.567	67	476	
adults (25-54)		.389	50	287	
	RANGE	178			
Language					≤.001
bilinguals		.568	67	383	
monolinguals		.431	54	380	
	RANGE	137			

Table 4: Social factors affecting OL simplification in Vimeu French.

5.1 Age and OL Simplification

To help determine whether the linguistic system presented in Table 3 holds true for both adults and elders, data from each age group were analyzed separately. Results are presented in Table 5.

The input values of .700 and .505, for elders and adults respectively, reflect the fact that the OL simplification rule is stronger for older speakers. Adults also tend to pattern as a homogenous group regardless of their bilingualism status, while the difference between bilingual and monolingual elders is selected as the only significant social factor. There is no statistical difference between the rate at which elders without Picard proficiency reduce word-final OL clusters (61%) and that of younger bilinguals (56%), but monolinguals elders and bilingual adults considered together are significantly different from both bilingual elders and monolingual adults. In other words, a continuum emerges with respect to rates of simplification: bilingual elders at the highest end of the spectrum, followed by monolingual elders and bilingual adults, and monolingual adults who are the least likely to simplify OL clusters, as shown in Figure 2. Considering that Picard overwhelmingly lacks intact OL clusters, these rates differences may be an indirect indication that Picard linguistic influence on French was maximal for bilingual elders, moderate for the intermediate group and limited for younger monolinguals.

Less OL simplification (French-like) ⟷ **More OL simplification (Picard-like)**

monolingual adults > bilingual adults and monolingual elders > bilingual elders
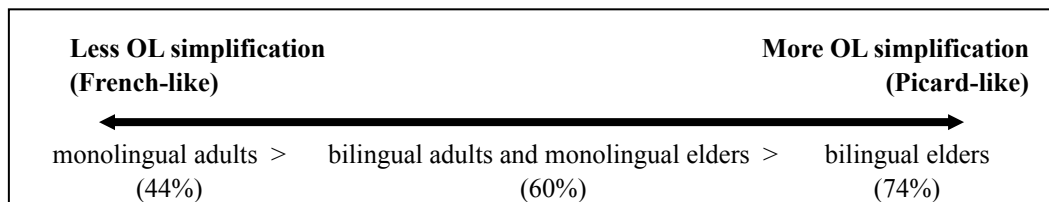(44%)   (60%)   (74%)

Figure 2: Picard influence and rates of OL simplification.

However, the ranking of constraints indicates slight differences between the linguistic systems of elders and that of adult speakers. For elders, only two linguistic factors are selected as significant: word frequency and following phonological environment. These two factors are shared by adult speakers, for whom frequent words and a following consonant favor liquid deletion. There are, however, two notable differences between the two systems. First, while a following pause or vowel disfavors simplification for both age groups, the relative ranking is different. For adults, clusters are the least likely to be simplified before vowels, as was noted in the literature (Armstrong 2001, Cornulier 1978, Pooley 1996). However, in the elders' system, vowels have less

of a disfavoring effect and a significantly higher rate of simplification than pauses.

The second difference is the presence of additional factor groups in the adults' constraint hierarchy: the obstruent's place of articulation and the preceding phonological environment. Clusters whose first member is a dental obstruent are more likely to be reduced than any others. Note, however, that dentals constitute the largest group (N=198); it is therefore possible that the

Factors	Elders				Adults			
	weight	%	N	*p*	weight	%	N	*p*
Frequency				≤.001				≤.001
21 tokens or more	.619	79	233		.630	62	143	
6-20 tokens	.447	61	134		.341	42	69	
5 tokens or fewer	.315	51	109		.400	36	75	
RANGE	304				289			
Following environment				≤.001				≤.001
consonant	.594	77	244		.728	70	165	
vowel	.444	64	138		.177	21	89	
pause	.338	48	93		.317	30	33	
RANGE	256				551			
Preceding segment				n.s.				n.s.
nasal vowel	[ ]	66	121		.692	55	72	
oral vowel	[ ]	67	351		.437	49	207	
consonant	[ ]	100	4		.315	25	8	
RANGE	---				377			
Place of articulation				≤.001				≤.001
dental (/t d/)	[ ]	74	301		.564	58	198	
bilabial (/p b/)	[ ]	59	130		.368	41	63	
labiodental (/f v/)	[ ]	43	32		.273	23	17	
velar (/k g/)	[ ]	61	13		.000	0	9	
RANGE	---				564			
Language				≤.005				n.s.
bilinguals	.578	74	244		[ ]	56	139	
monolinguals	.418	61	232		[ ]	44	148	
RANGE	160				---			
Sex				n.s.				n.s.
females	[ ]	65	253		[ ]	52	208	
males	[ ]	70	223		[ ]	45	79	
RANGE	---				---			

Table 5: Factors affecting OL simplification in two age groups.

favoring effect of dentals is due more to their relative frequency than to phonology per se. Preceding nasal vowels also favor simplification while oral vowels (e.g., *fenêtre* 'window') and consonants (e.g., *flitre* 'filter', *désastre* 'disaster') disfavor it. In fact, the presence of a preceding nasal vowel not only favors liquid deletion, but even leads to the optional nasalization of the obstruent consonant in words like *entendre* [ɑ̃tɑ̃n] 'to hear', *ensemble* [ɑ̃sɑ̃m] 'together', *nombre* [nɔ̃m] 'number' or *éteindre* [etɛ̃n] 'to turn off'. In short, phonological factors appear to play a

more important role in the adults' system than in that of the elders, where word frequency, ranked first in the constraint hierarchy, appears to regulate OL simplification.

5.2 The Simplification of /tr/ Clusters

Finally, an analysis was performed on all words ending in a /tr/ cluster, by far the most frequent group. This analysis allows us to assess the role of the grammatical category noted in Roubaix (Pooley 1996), since the interaction between grammatical category[2] and cluster constitution prevented us from including this factor group in the overall multivariate analysis. Once again, age emerged as significant at the .001 level, with 74% simplification for elders (N=266) and 56% for adults (N=160), and data for adults and elders were run separately.

Factors	Elders				Adults			
	Weight	%	N	p	Weight	%	N	p
Frequency				≤.005				n.s.
21 tokens or more	[ ]	79	188		.567	61	124	
6-20 tokens	[ ]	64	50		.170	31	22	
5 tokens or fewer	[ ]	53	28		.522	57	14	
RANGE	---				397			
Following environment				≤.001				≤.001
consonant	.611	82	155		.753	79	97	
pause	.366	57	33		.207	27	11	
vowel	.339	63	77		.142	21	52	
RANGE	272				611			
Grammatical category				≤.001				≤.01
adverb	.905	97	40		[ ]	77	31	
verb	.567	81	75		[ ]	59	42	
numeral	.522	79	24		[ ]	20	10	
determiner	.472	80	21		[ ]	63	11	
adjective	.287	62	56		[ ]	57	47	
noun	.281	56	44		[ ]	35	17	
preposition	.048	16	6		[ ]	0	2	
RANGE	857				---			

Table 6: Factors affecting /tr/ cluster simplification in two age groups.

Table 6 shows that a following consonant favors the simplification of /tr/ clusters, as was the case for other OL clusters. However, the effect of the following phonological environment is much more robust for adults than for elders, for whom the grammatical category is ranked as the most significant factor group. Two factors may contribute to the effect of word grammatical category. First, there is interaction with word frequency, due to the fact that the adverb *peut-être* 'maybe'

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[2]Inclusion of this factor group in the overall analysis revealed a strong degree of interaction, especially for determiners (*notre* 'our' and *votre* 'your') and numerals (*quatre* 'four') which all end in a /tr/ cluster. This factor group was excluded from the analysis presented in Tables 3 and 5.

(N=70) and the verb *être* 'to be' (N=73) are the two most frequent lexical items in the data. If frequency is indeed at play in the elders' data, the disfavoring effect of the frequent adjective *autre* 'other' (N=103) remains to be explained[3]. Second, the effect of the grammatical category may also be related to Picard cognates in which intact /tr/ clusters are rarely found, as shown in Table 7, and which may be affecting the pronunciation of their equivalents in this French variety. Picard influence may also contribute to the categorical preservation of the liquid in *entre* (N=47), cf. Picard *intre*.

Grammatical category	French word	Picard cognate	gloss
Adverbs	peut-être	pétète	'maybe'
Verbs	connaître	connouaite	'to know'
	être	ète	'to be'
	mettre	mètte	'to put'
Adjectives	autre	eute	'other'
	bleuâtre	bleuate	'blue-ish'
Nouns	centimètre	centimète	'centimeter'
	cloître	**clouétre**	'cloister'
	lettre	lette	'letter'
Prepositions	entre	**intre**	'between'
	contre	conte, **contre**	'against'

Table 7: French word-final /tr/ clusters and Picard cognates. Cognates in which the liquid is preserved in Picard are in bold.

6 Conclusions

Overall, findings from the present study parallel results found in other Picard-speaking regions of France, although the rate of simplification is slightly lower than what was found in Nord-Pas-de-Calais (Hornsby 2006, Pooley 1996). The disfavoring effect of a following pause or vowel, found in non Picard-speaking regions, was also replicated in Vimeu. However, like in Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the gap in OL simplification between these two environments and preconsonantal context is not as wide in this Picard-speaking area. This is particularly true for the elders, who show high rates of liquid deletion in all phonological environments, including before vowels (64%) and pauses (48%) where clusters typically remain intact (Armstrong 2001, Boughton, 2008). In our data, like in Roubaix (Pooley 1996), liquid deletion is higher for /r/ than for /l/, and nouns and prepositions have a disfavoring effect on simplification, while dental obstruents favor it. The Vimeu data also confirmed that frequently occurring words tend to favor OL simplification, as was found in the Lorraine region and in Paris (Armstrong 2001, Laks 1977).

With respect to social factors, bilinguals have higher rates of simplification than French monolinguals in each age group, with older bilingual speakers deleting the liquid in 74% of all

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[3]The absence of a major prosodic break after a prenominal adjective such as *autre* (Auger 2000) may affect cluster preservation.

cases. However, the most significant social factor remains age, with higher rates of OL simplification in the over 55 age group. Although this finding initially appeared incompatible with the Picard influence hypothesis, the fact that monolingual speakers older than 55 have rates similar to younger bilinguals' while patterning with bilingual elders in terms of constraint hierarchy offers a partial explanation. In fact, regardless of their active proficiency in Picard, older speakers who grew up in Vimeu had constant exposure to Picard during their formative years. The language was commonly heard at home from grandparents and parents, and even on the elementary school's playground. Therefore, unlike their younger counterparts, monolingual elders are likely to have heard the Picard language on a daily basis, which would favor Picard-like pronunciations including reduced word-final OL clusters, regardless of the following phonological environment. Furthermore, a simplification rate before vowels as high as 64% for monolingual elders appears to indicate that simplification in this environment is not as stigmatized for these speakers as it appears to be for younger adults (21%) or in other regions of France.

At this point, we are unable to tell whether Vimeu French underwent a linguistic change that paralleled the region's slow decline in Picard vitality, or whether the gap between adults and elders is due to age grading. Differences in linguistic conditioning between adults and elders appear to point to the former. While it is not impossible that speakers increasingly simplify OL clusters as they reach retirement age and leave the workforce, a reduction in the gap between prevocalic and preconsonantal environments from adulthood to older age would be more difficult to explain.

While the current results remain preliminary, they appear to indicate that older adults' prolonged exposure to Picard or Picard-like pronunciations has contributed to their increased rate of word-final OL cluster simplification. Further investigations into the role of prosody and socioeconomic class may allow us to refine the analysis presented here.

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