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# Attitudes Toward Anglicisms in Montpellier, France: A Study on Linguistic Purism and Americanization

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Erratum

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# Attitudes Toward Anglicisms in Montpellier, France: A Study on Linguistic Purism and Americanization

## Brianna Riggio

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## ABSTRACT

France is known for its attitudes of linguistic purism; not only are there institutional and legal measures in place to protect the language, but many travelers report experiencing cold treatment if they do not speak French. All of this has been compounded by the sharp increase of anglicisms that accompanies the spread of American music, TV, and pop culture via the internet. As it becomes "trendy" to include English words or phrases in their media and advertisements, and as certain concepts originating in English do not always receive a French translation of equally popular usage, French preservation institutions such as the Académie Française attempt to prevent the influx of English use from encroaching upon French language and culture. As a French major studying abroad in Montpellier, I was interested to see how I would encounter these purist attitudes and whether or not the average person considers the French language to be compromised by the use of anglicisms. I conducted a series of interviews with students and professors from my university examining their views on anglicisms and protecting the French language. I was also interested in observing whether or not there was a marked generational divide on the issue.

In our increasingly connected global society, France is one of many countries to experience an influx of economic and cultural influence from the United States—and perhaps its most controversial export has been the English language. In their traditionally purist society, leaders and scholars of France have historically regarded cultural and linguistic borrowings with great suspicion, viewing such influential societies as a threat to the consummate society of France. However, leaders and scholars represent a minority of French speakers; the nation's reception of foreign influences is materially driven, instead, by its majority of ordinary citizens. The United States had ties with France from

the very beginning, but its international influence has grown the most during the last 130 years, during which it became the largest global economy and modern forms of technology progressively increased the speed, and intimacy, of connection between countries. Now, with global internet connections, average citizens from many different countries can naturally brush shoulders on many internet platforms, no longer waiting for a newspaper or radio presenter to act as interlocutor. We have created endless spots at a table that used to be occupied only by leaders and certain professionals; as a result, regulating cultural and linguistic exchange has become more unfeasible than ever before.

As an American student studying abroad in France, I was curious to see how the citizens of France felt about anglicisms and the public discourse surrounding them. Would they share in concern among the elites that the cultural identity of France is at risk, or were their own lives detached from this dialogue? In this study, I conducted an interview series with French citizens in order to better understand how the spread of American culture and English loanwords is affecting French society at the individual level.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Language Ideologies

Language ideologies are beliefs about languages, speakers, and discourse that speakers develop, often unintentionally, as they attempt to "construe [their] language's role in a social and cultural world" (Irvine, 2012). Yet language ideologies extend far beyond opinion; Simpson and colleagues (2018) outline how language ideologies interact with social institutions such as the church, the legal system, and the family to determine what type of discourse is appropriate, or *legitimate*, in different settings (p. 4). For example, speaking with relevancy is pertinent in professional settings—such as a board meeting where off-topic comments are viewed as inappropriate or *delegitimate*—whereas it is generally acceptable to change topics in a conversation with a friend. Language ideologies often carry some form of value judgment about speech actions or even entire dialects; for example, in the United States, using African American Vernacular English has historically been discouraged in school settings because of a negative stereotype that AAVE is "uneducated" or "unprofessional" speech. Clearly, well-established linguistic ideologies can have material consequences for many individuals.

In *Oxford Bibliographies*, Irvine (2012) describes that linguistic ideologies proceed from "the nexus of language, culture, and politics;" as such, the initial, mainly political, definition from Michael Silverstein in 1979 of "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" has expanded to include a greater sociocultural focus as well. Yet his original framework is quite useful to understand that language ideologies cannot escape the surrounding structures of power. Because language is caught in an arena of

soft power in society, Avineri et al. (2019) contend that "language is neither a neutral communicative medium nor a passive way or referring to things in the world, but rather a crucial form of social action in itself" ( p. 2). When we consider that language never functions outside of these systems of power, nor does the system allow for a truly neutral position, the influence of linguistic ideologies becomes more apparent.

## Linguistic Purism

Linguistic purism is the ideology that one form of the language should be protected and standardized in favor over others. In many ways, linguistic purism is a testament to the influence of institutions over language use, particularly in the process of legitimizing certain forms of language while delegitimizing others. Linguistic purism is often connected to patterns of colonialism or the political elite in a state, but it can also be a reaction to outside forces of power. Björn Jernudd conceptualizes purism as "a linguistic effort to protect 'Self' from 'Others' in times of conflict or 'an articulation of changes in relations to Self and Others' in [conflict's] absence" (Eastman, 2020, p. 177). Linguistic purism is contingent on the ideas of separation and cultural boundaries, but such sequestration is impossible to enforce without formal measures. Often, the extent of a society's ability to enforce linguistic purism calls back to the idea of institutions; language can be controlled by designating certain language practices as legitimate through defining the language parameters of education, the legal system, and industry, among others. The idea of purism also carries a double-edged aesthetic and moral value that is used to justify the need to codify the standard variety. In other words, the standard form is held up as the most beautiful and well-educated form of the language, and the one that should be preserved.

## Neologisms and Loanwords

The objective of keeping a language pure, however, is made complicated by the natural processes of neology and language borrowing. In the most basic sense, neology is the process of adding new words to the lexicon of a language—but this process is nuanced by the fact that words often enter the language informally in everyday speech before being formally added to dictionaries or officially recognized (Jamet, 2018). Maria Ryskina and her collaborators describe that the process of neology can be understood through supply and demand; neologisms emerge to supply words for semantic gaps, and groups of related neologisms reveal an increased societal demand surrounding a topic (Ryskina, 2020). In their book *Les Néologismes*, linguists Jean Pruvost and Jean-François Sablayrolles posit that neologisms are simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, "a natural phenomenon of language and communication… [that is] essential for the life of a language" and "a process which leaves no one indifferent and even involves a judgment on the usage" (Pruvost & Sablayrolles, 2003, p. 6-9, translation mine). While neologisms and other forms of language innovation are generally considered to be signs of a healthy language, Pruvost and Sablayrolles note that newspapers, scholarly institutions, and dictionaries have a significant role in accepting, rejecting, or attempting to replace words that naturally result from daily

life (Pruvost & Sablayrolles, 2003). In France, neologisms are also vetted by several legislative bodies: the Académie Française, the Ministry of Culture, and its associated General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France (*Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France*, or the DGLFLF).

Though some neologisms naturally evolve with the language, a major source of new words are linguistic borrowing or loanwords. In many cases, a language gap stems from industrial or technological development in another country, in which case there is already extensive vocabulary on the topic in another language. One of the more obvious examples is that the prototype of the Internet—as well as some of the most widely used websites such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter—were all invented in the United States. Because of this, English loanwords, or *anglicisms*, spread everywhere that the Internet was spreading. Neologisms often follow social shifts as well, such as civil rights movements, new organizations, and the development of subcultures.

When neologisms begin as loanwords, the borrowings are often closely patterned off of the source language, which may contrast with the standards of the recipient language. The progression of assimilation for loanwords has been a topic of controversy among certain linguists, some of which hold that a loanword begins as a *code-switch*—or a brief alternation into a second language—and then gradually become more similar to the recipient language (Poplack & Dion, 2012). However, in a real-time study of English loanword assimilation in Québec over 61 years, researchers Shana Poplack and Nathalie Dion found that, from the time of their introduction, loanwords were produced already following the French standards for sound system, plural rules, determiners, and gendered forms. They concluded that borrowed words are, instead, integrated with the borrowers' language immediately:

> …when speakers access a lone other-language item, they make an instantaneous decision about whether to treat it as a borrowing or a code-switch. If they opt to borrow it, they produce it with all the requisite recipient-language morphosyntactic trappings…Based on the criterion of retaining donor-language grammar, speakers apparently do not [code-switch] with respect to lone other-language items. (Poplack, 2012, p. 296)

Yet, even if the borrowed words are produced following the structures of the recipient language, they are unlikely to completely conform due to features retained from the donor language.

## A Brief History of Linguistic Purism in France

The history of linguistic purism in France can be traced back to the mid-1500s, when French initially began to be recognized as an official language rather than a Latin vernacular and began to replace it in political and judicial spheres. Within a hundred years, the French concept of "le génie de la langue française" (the genius of the French language) arose, claiming that French was superior to Latin and all of the other Euro-

pean vernaculars because it afforded an unparalleled clarity of expression (Vigouroux, 2013, p. 385). In 1783, the Berlin Royal Academy held an essay contest with the prompt "What makes French the universal language of Europe?"—it was, by this point, an elite language spoken in many European courts—and one of the winning essays made the case that French was not just the language of Europe, but the "human language" and the only true source of language clarity (Vigouroux, 2013, p. 385).

This alleged perfection was threatened by the increasing separation between social classes, as the Parisian upper-class variety became the legitimized version whereas the "patois" of lower classes was seen as jeopardizing the integrity of France, to which standardization was perceived as the cure. The imperial status of French was threatened during the Renaissance when Italian gained more status in the royal courts, during which Henri Estienne wrote a satirical book, *Deux Dialogues Du Nouveau Langage François Italianizé* (1578), criticizing the linguistic mixing with Italian (Hornsby, 1998). Centuries later, René Étiemble would produce a similar satire titled *Parlez-vous franglais?* (1964) criticizing the mixing of English and French.

The struggle between French and English began in 1731 with a British bill banning French from the courts, which until that time had allowed multiple languages (Vigouroux, 2013). As France lost power over its North American territories in the coming years, culminating with Louisiana, it had officially lost a major foothold in the New World: "The increasing use of English as the language of science and technology, diplomacy, and international trade appears to have lessened the international prestige of French, especially in the European Union," says Cécile Vigouroux (2013, p. 387). Vigouroux sums up that "La Francophonie," or the global French-speaking community and its related ideologies, "cannot be separated from worries about the vitality, or, more specifically, rather, the endangerment of French as an imperial language in the face of the spread of English" (2013, p. 380). As France continued to lose political powers from its colonial era, it became more anxious to encourage and enforce the use of French worldwide.

## Académie Française

In order to protect and standardize the French language, the Académie Française was founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, Chief Minister to King Louis XIII. The values of the Académie were shaped by the Enlightenment ideals of symmetry, rationalism, and order, which the Académie tried to apply to the French language. Its forty members, known as the *immortels*, are stringently selected and hold their seats for life. The Académie was charged with writing and maintaining the official French dictionary, the first edition of which took 56 years (Reginato, 2018). They are expected to begin a new edition after each one is published, roughly every half-century. However, Craig Smith (2005) of the *New York Times* describes their current predicament:

> …as science and technology push more and more French and non-French words into common usage, the immortals…are struggling to keep up

their Sisyphean task. The academy has been toiling for 70 years on the dictionary's ninth edition and has reached only the letter P.

Maurice Druon, a famous *immortel* until his death in 2009, suggested that they first fell off pace because of World War II (Smith, 2005). Yet, as the earlier parts of this edition are already out of date, they have resorted to releasing it in volumes by sections of the alphabet (Smith, 2005).

Though other dictionaries may be published in France, the Académie Française has the final say on which words have been formally accepted into the French language, which has become an especially contentious question in recent decades as more and more anglicisms are taken up by French speakers. In every ministry in France—which represent different sectors such as the armed forces, education, culture, and the economy—certain individuals are responsible for identifying foreign words that are being used professionally and sending them to the Ministry of Culture's General Commissariat of Terminology and Neology, which consults with the Académie on options for replacement (Smith, 2005). The Académie has been known to approve words and phrases that many deem too stilted for public use, however, such as "*toile d'araignée mondiale*" for World Wide Web, which translates literally to "Web of the Global Spider" (Smith, 2005). Even so, their role as the language authority is firmly cemented.

On their website, the Académie also regularly updates a blog series titled "*Dire, Ne Pas Dire*" ("To Say, Not to Say"); researcher Gina Caruso describes that it was "designed to highlight errors and idiosyncrasies in modern language use, and is broken down into several subgroups or sections to make more specific recommendation for accurate language use" (Caruso, 2012, p. 27). One of these such subgroups is an entire section for "Neologisms & anglicisms." In one recent entry from May 7, 2020, the Académie criticizes the use of the anglicism "follower," which they claim is "essentially used in French to designate those who, by an electronic medium, signal that they adhere to the thoughts or actions of such and such, the value of the latter seemingly being indexed by their number of followers" (Académie Française, 2020, translation mine). This explanation alone might be considered unnecessarily pretentious for a fairly simple term, but even more surprisingly, the post runs through several synonyms such as "disciple," "partisan," and "admirer" before finally settling on a recommendation to revive an archaic religious term, which was also a borrowing:

> If the French terms mentioned above were not enough, perhaps we can add to this list by reviving the use of the noun *acolyte*, borrowed from the Greek *akolouthos*, "follower, companion, servant"…In the Catholic hierarchy, it is the title above exorcist, but today, it rather has [another] sense…this seems to be the equivalent of our modern follower" (Académie Française, 2020, translation mine).

In the end, however, they most effectively exert their influence over other institutions in France seeking terms for official use. Less certain is the extent of their influence over causal speech.

The Académie Française has gained attention throughout the centuries for its impenetrable bourgeois culture and notorious choosiness regarding new members, the vast majority of whom are white men over the age of sixty. New *immortels* are selected stringently and expected to raise over $200,000 for custom-made robes and swords upon induction, by some member reports (Reginato, 2018). Their process of choosing new members has long been mysterious; they send prospective nominees an invitation to apply to them and then reject most of the applicants, often leaving vacancies for years until they can decide. Even the great writer Victor Hugo was only narrowly accepted after multiple attempts. "It is something of a running joke in France that the highlight of the academy's long history is its habit of systematically excluding most of the country's greatest writers, instead filling its seats with those from the second rank," says Adam Nossiter of the *New York Times* (Nossiter, 2019b). Amin Maalouf, a Lebanese writer and *immortel*, attributes its recent hesitation to select new members to a larger trend: "We're the reflection of the society, and it's a society that's questioning itself" (Nossiter, 2019a). Some of the staunchly conservative members of the Académie have, perhaps, begun to see a need for modernizing their values to best serve their present society. Even so, many members of the Académie openly prefer its era of extreme exclusivity and upper-class luxuries such as lavish dinner parties, which is slowly becoming a thing of the past: "The bourgeoisie is dying," *immortel* Mr. Rouart laments (Nossiter, 2019b).

In addition to its luxurious culture, the Académie has come under criticism for its limited inclusion of women and people of color; there are only five women and one Black man among the *immortels* (Nossiter, 2019b). Furthermore, they have been accused of upholding sexism by refusing to budge on many traditional gendered nouns. In French, all nouns and adjectives are gendered, but many words have a male and female spelling with different pronunciations. A significant amount of profession nouns, however, still have only one form—a doctor or professor must always use the masculine spelling and articles "*le médecin*" and "*le professeur*" while a housemaid must always be the feminine "*la femme de chambre*." In recent decades, many have called for all profession nouns to be given male and female forms, an initiative referred to as the "feminization of the language," rather than uphold the assumptions that these professions are gender-specific by having only one form. The Académie aroused ire from feminists in 2017 with its strong rejection of calls for gender inclusive versions of profession nouns, in which they responded that gender inclusion "[will] lead to a fragmented language, disparate in its expression, creating confusion that borders on being unreadable" and claimed that "faced with the 'inclusive' aberration, the French language is in mortal danger" (Reginato, 2018). The Académie has retained its prestigious place in society, as well as much of its funding, despite such complaints.

## Americanization

Though French elites have long been diligent to protect their language from foreign influence, the ascent of the United States into a global economic and technological superpower created ample opportunity for English loanwords to enter the language.

The United States surpassed Britain to become the largest global economy in the decades following the US Civil War, often referred to as the Gilded Age—more than a century ago ("Gilded Age," 2020). It has since maintained a widespread socioeconomic influence and remains the leading economy in terms of nominal GDP and net wealth ("Economy of the US," 2020). This socioeconomic influence further expanded throughout the last century, during which advances in technology have resulted in unprecedented levels of cultural mixing and the rise of a global culture. Technology such as television, radio, and the internet made it possible for the internationally popular United States culture to influence individuals worldwide in their own homes. With the diffusion of American brands, music, cinematography, and celebrities came the resounding force of the English language; it has catapulted to a status of the most studied language in the world with 1.5 billion learners, despite having only 527 million native speakers (Noack, 2015). English far surpasses the second-most studied language, French, which has 82 million learners worldwide.

In response to the growing strength of the English language, Vigouroux claims, French scholars have often disparaged globalization as "Americanization"—or even as "Mc-Donaldization" in the example of French linguist Claude Hagège—accusing the US of "making the world more and more uniform, both culturally and therefore linguistically" (Vigouroux, 2013, p. 388). Michael Gueldry argues in "The Americanization of France" that the US exports "certain economic practices to which one must adapt in order to survive," but that the other cultural values and practices are engaged in voluntarily: "No one is forced to eat at McDonald's, watch *Desperate Housewives*, or play with Barbie" (Gueldry, 2009, p. 38). Even so, Gueldry (2009) recognizes that the US has had a profound cultural impact on Europe:

> …the only common culture to all of Europe today is the American commercial-media culture. Its *lingua franca* would be "Globish," a global English that is a repertoire of several hundred words shared by a large number of Europeans (and by the world), allowing one to travel, conduct business, and communicate across cultures. (p. 44)

Gueldry's description of "Globish" makes it clear why French leaders would feel threatened if they seek to retain the status of French as an imperial language; no language can compete globally with the spread of English and American culture to this extent. He attributes the increase of Americanization in France during the last thirty years to increased connectedness between the US and the world—achieved through a decentralized system of production along with new technologies—as well as an improvement in the infrastructure of France where culture spread more easily throughout the whole country and not just in major cities (Gueldry, 2009). Whatever the cause, the impact on French television, music, film, fashion, industry, and language use has been profound.

## The Toubon Law

In response to the influx of English loanwords from American commerce, technology, and culture, the Toubon Law was passed in 1994, updated from the similar Bas-Lauriol Law of 1975 to once again guard the French language against infiltration by other languages. However, the French Minister of Culture after which the law was named, Jacques Toubon, discouraged citizens from viewing it as an anti-American crusade: "It is merely France's attempt to protect itself from cultural encroachment, or, as the legislation says, to allow France 'to better assume its responsibility regarding a language of which it is the source, and which nearly 50 countries… share'" (Waxman, 1994, p. 2). The law tightened security around the accumulating anglicisms, reinforcing that "all advertising, contracts, job offers, internal regulations, official memos, public documents, and scientific meetings and colloquia must be purged of foreign terms when a French term or expression of the same meaning exists" (Waxman, 1994, p. 1). Any documents that include other languages must include a French translation in the same font and size to avoid heavy fines. The law is designed to protect the right to speak French exclusively, if so chosen.

The Toubon Law was met with frustration by many; one such Richard Maroko criticized: "No law, no decree will ever keep anyone from using the words they want to…People will talk as they want. You can't force people to use another word for weekend. Weekend is weekend; it's part of the cultural mutation of a language" (Waxman, 1994, p. 2). Perhaps the strongest response was the Young Socialist Movement's creation of the "European League Against Toubonien Fanaticism," through which the group produced a statement written in English, Spanish, German and French accusing Toubon of "trying to turn French into a dead language" (Waxman, 1994, p. 2). Even so, it could just as easily be said that the Toubon Law was neither surprising nor extreme in the long history of language legislation in France, especially coming after its 1975 predecessor.

## Terminological Planning in France

To enforce legislation such as the Toubon Law, the French government must have its own solution for proposing acceptable French terminology for any linguistic gaps, and that it does. In 1966, President De Gaulle and Prime Minister Pompidou created the Haut Comité de la Langue Française (High Committee of the French Language), whose purpose was to recommend measures to defend and expand the French language (Thogmartin, 1991). In 1972, the Haut Comité and Prime Minister Chaban-Delmas set up a framework of committees to enact this terminological planning: each government ministry would appoint a commission of part civil servants from their ministry and part outside experts to identify gaps in the language and propose "terms necessary either to describe a new phenomenon, or to replace undesirable borrowings from foreign languages" (Munday, 1985, p. 221). Munday describes that the major complaints against anglicisms were "their dissonance, their frequent failure to comply with received linguistic canons and their tendency to jar with the traditional rhythms and patterns of the French language" (1985, p. 228). To avoid these issues,

the committees often attempt to base their suggestions off of existing French words, or at least prefer to borrow from ancient languages such as Greek and Latin. After being approved by the Académie Française and the relevant ministers, the new terms are placed in an official journal and become the standard vocabulary for all government materials (Munday, 1985).

Even at the time of one 1979 survey, pre-Internet Era, the French efforts at terminological planning were somewhat unpopular with actual French speakers, with "30% of those surveyed characterizing the government's language directives as 'useless' and 15% as 'ridiculous'…only about 10% found them 'realistic'" (Thogmartin, 1991, p. 1001). 70% of the participants also perceived the legislation as "primarily directed against the spread of Anglicisms" (Thogmartin, 1991, p. 1001). Of the twelve pairs of anglicisms and French neologisms that they surveyed, the French word was preferred in only six cases and tied for a seventh (Thogmartin, 1991). Despite the initial unfavorable public sentiment, these institutions have continued to shape and standardize the French language over the past fifty years.

The Haut Comité was replaced with several different organizations over the years before finally settling on the current administration in 1993, La Délégation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France (The General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France), which calls itself the "indirect heir" of the Haut Comité (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.b). This delegation was integrated with the Ministry of Culture in 1996, where it currently functions. The end of the title "and the Languages of France" was added in 2001 in an uncharacteristic nod toward the linguistic diversity of the country. Among the DGLFLF seven missions are objectives to guarantee the use and spread of French, enrich the French language, innovate in digital language technology, and "make French everyone's business" (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.a).

Despite how their methods might appear, the DGLFLF maintains that their purpose is not ridding French of loanwords: "The legal framework is not intended to preserve the purity of French by driving out foreign words; it is concerned with the presence of French and not its content" (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.c.). Rather, the DGLFLF emphasizes that they protect the "Right to French" by enabling their citizens "to have access to information in French in their daily life, at work, for access to knowledge and culture, in order to ensure particularly their safety and health" (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.c.).

## The Controversy of Dialects in France

Though the DGLFLF claims to be inclusive to the diversity of French languages now, some scholars feel that little has changed in the stigmatization of nonstandard dialects. The French concept of *dialecte* differs from its English use in connotation, French researchers Philippe Blanchet and Nigel Armstrong posit: it refers to a second-class language that is not truly a *langue* (language) in their hierarchy, but still more

formal than a *patois* (Blanchet & Armstrong, 2006). Blanchet and Armstrong explain the ideology behind this distinction:

> French is regarded as the reference and almost the sacred *langue*: in this frame of reference the pejorative word *dialecte* simply cannot be applied to it. Worse, this ideology remains generally unconscious, since most French people are not aware of the element of social or ethnic prejudice inherent in this view of *langue* as opposed to *dialecte* or *patois*. (2006, p. 252)

Metropolitan France does in fact have many dialects, however, in the English sense of the word; the Institut Français des Alpes outlines that there are as many as twenty-eight different accents of which to be aware (IFALPES, 2019). Yet, only Parisian French is considered to be the standard which is appropriate for school instruction or professional use. Blanchet and Armstrong describe:

> The "ideology of the standard" is particularly strong in France, so that schoolchildren are taught to see these "dialects" as inferior varieties of French replete with errors…They feel a genuine linguistic insecurity…, as they think they speak a more or less stigmatized variety of French but cannot exactly identify what is good and what is bad in it, nor for what reason. (2006, p. 255)

Because of this perpetual emphasis on standardization, regional characteristics tend to be more apparent in the speech of farmers or other members of the working class, while upper class individuals often attempt to imitate the Parisian standard in order to distinguish themselves as more sophisticated (Blanchet & Armstrong, 2006).

Historically, this dynamic first developed because French began as the language of the upper class and the central administration, while those in lower classes were later taught French in school in order for it to become the standard language. Despite the intention of the upper class to create a monolingual country by replacing all of the regional dialects, most regions continued to be bilingual with their regional dialects for several generations, after which those dialects were absorbed into French—along with some of their unique characteristics (Blanchet & Armstrong, 2006). Hundreds of years later, those regional differences still do not have acceptance because the French are taught to view non-standard regional and social forms as uneducated, lower-class speech. "The French were also taught not to notice the true diversity of French," Blanchet and Armstrong claim, "because French is the symbol of the national unity." As one of Blanchet's interview subjects phrased it, "There can't be any regional French because French is our *national* language" (Blanchet & Armstrong, 2006, p. 263).

## An Emerging Southern Standard

Despite the longevity of the language ideology that Parisian French is the only true standard, in the last several generations, Southern French has begun to be viewed as a similarly legitimate dialect. Blanchet and Armstrong describe that contrasts between

the north and south "created and continue to maintain specific [southern] cultural identities, partly built up in opposition to the northern one(s)" (Blanchet, 2006, p. 263). This Southern standard is based on the Provençal accent from the region of Provence, the location of Marseille, the second-largest city in France. Within the region, an uncharacteristic local pride has developed around the southern culture and dialect, where many consider themselves to be *Marseillais* above French. The dialect is also internationally recognizable—one study showed that students from Milan, Italy, could recognize it 50% more often than Québec French—and so distinct that the expression *avoir l'accent* (to have an accent) has come to refer exclusively to the southern pronunciation (Blanchet, 2006, p. 265).

In a study asking participants which varieties of French were appropriate for formal situations, researchers found that the top three were Standard (Parisian) French (96.4 %), Southern French (70%) and Parisian working-class French (52.8%)—with Southern French being more acceptable than the working class Parisian French and significantly higher than other non-standard dialects (Blanchet, 2006). However, Blanchet and Armstrong note, "Provençal has a double status: it is at the same time considered as 'a real *langue*,' a symbol of a rich culture and literature, and 'a second-class language' that is inferior to French (or worse still, a *patois*…)" (Blanchet, 2006, p. 267). In my home city of Montpellier, a couple hours from Marseille, we spoke with the Languedoc regional accent, which Blanchet and Armstrong describe as an intermediate scenario between the acceptance of the Provençal accent and the general stigma of most regional dialects. It contains many similarities to the neighboring Provençal French, but the differences that do exist mean that it is still one step removed from the Southern standard.

# Methodology

To hear from real French people on their opinions about anglicisms in French, I designed a two-part interview series: a poll where they could rate their agreement with common language ideologies about anglicisms and Americanization, and a set of short answer questions where they could expand on their opinions with more context. My original subjects were students and professors from the Université Paul Valéry Montpellier III, the university I attended in Montpellier. The eight-largest city in France, Montpellier is the third-largest French city situated along the Mediterranean coast. Up to a third of its population are students of the major universities in the city. The regional dialect in the area is Languedocien, which is considered to be one step removed from the Southern (semi-)standard dialect of Provençal, and in direct contrast to the Parisian standard.

My intention was to find a roughly equal sample size from the two categories of student and professor, around 4-6 participants from each group, in order to be able to discuss whether or not I experienced a generational divide in opinions at this small scale. I connected with my first subjects through convenience sampling, beginning with my professors and a French student who I was tutoring in English. I then ex-

panded my student subjects through snowball sampling; I asked other students from the friend group which she had introduced to me. My study was limited in scope by my short timeline of a five-month semester, so I chose to focus on a small number of personal interviews including the poll rather than putting all of my focus into circulating the poll without in-depth explanations. However, I later decided to share the poll on a wider basis, which gave me different sample groups for the two parts of the interview series.

The poll was given first via a Google Form on my laptop, and then it was followed with a recorded in-person interview. I conducted the interviews at the UPV-3 campus in the professors' offices, the library, or empty classrooms. At the start, I asked the participants to mark their age group as either 18-24 or 24+ to see if I noticed a generational divide in opinions. The following poll consisted of ten statements related to anglicisms, Americanization, and language ideologies in France regarding English loanwords. For each statement, participants ranked the idea as "Never True," "Sometimes True," "Often True," or "Always True" based on their personal opinions and experiences. The poll was designed to last 5-10 minutes and give the participants an opportunity to connect the topic to their own lives before broaching more complex issues. It also provided an opportunity for me to collect quantitative data, which would make it more feasible to identify trends in the responses. Here are the translated statements (see Appendix 2 for original French version of poll):

- I am aware of using anglicisms in my daily life.
- I consume American or British television, music, and movies.
- I associate anglicisms with slang and pop culture.
- I think that using anglicisms is fun and cool.
- I prefer to use anglicisms when they are shorter than the proposed French equivalent (such as "webpage" compared to "page sur l'étoile").
- When I know that a word is an anglicism, I try to avoid using it.
- I use anglicisms less often in formal or professional environments
- As a French speaker, I feel guilty for choosing an anglicism over a French word.
- I worry that the spread of anglicisms and American culture will weaken French culture.
- The work of the Académie Française is necessary to protect and regulate the French language.

After the poll, my participants had an audio-recorded interview with me where they had the opportunity to respond to more complex topics and expand upon their views. In the interview portion, I also delved into topics such as the Toubon law and the homogeneity in age, ethnic background, and gender of the Académie Française *immortels*. The interview portion was designed to last 10-20 minutes, and its focus was

more political than the poll. This was the portion of the interview that was meant to target my research questions about the Académie Française and the response of policymakers. The participants had the opportunity to consent to participating in the study, sharing their names and age groups, and taking an audio recording for my future reference. The translated questions are as follows:

- France has a reputation for carefully guarding their language from outside influences, which can be described as "linguistic purism." This goal is evident in the existence of organizations such as the Académie Française. How has your attitude toward anglicisms been affected by the national discourse about protecting the French language?

- The average age of the Academic Français members is over 70 years old, and over 80% of its members are white males. It sometimes faces criticism for not representing the diverse demographics in France. How might this homogeneity affect the ability of the Académie Français to represent the needs of the country?

- As more English words enter French, we have seen more attempts to control and reverse the spread of anglicisms. Some institutions propose French words to substitute for a concept that began in English, like the phrase "page sur la toile" to replace the anglicism "webpage." Have you ever experienced a word being replaced? How did you feel about it?

- In 1994, the current version of the Toubon Law was established. This law mandates the use of French in government publications, advertisements, workplaces, commercial contracts, government-financed schools, and several other contexts. Ignoring the law can lead to heavy fines. What might be some positive and negative results of enforcing language use with legal action?

- While some claim that English words pollute the integrity of the French language, others believe that changes in the language are a natural part of globalization. Are you inclined to agree with either of these sides, or do you think the truth is somewhere in between?

The equipment that I brought to my interviews was only my laptop for the interview materials, my phone for audio recordings, a pen, and consent forms. I used the laptop to administer the Google Forms poll and then to read off my interview questions. I used my phone to take audio recordings in the Voice Memos app. After the interviews, I saved the voice memo files with the name of my participant. The files were finger-print protected on my iPhone, and the Google Forms responses were only accessible through my personal Google log-in.

After the initial interview series, my methods of data collection had to be adjusted to account for an unexpected mishap: shortly shortly after my return to the United States, my phone was stolen before I had the opportunity to transcribe the interviews, and I had not copied the files yet. Thankfully, my surveys were backed up through

the Google account. In order to preserve as much of my initial format as possible, I reached out to the same participants and asked them to provide written answers to the short answer questions from the interview. Though I would have preferred to preserve the original interviews, which provided more opportunity for spontaneous thoughts and comments, the written versions that I received functioned well for my current purpose of a written study because they were already structured in written form and avoided the possibility of listening errors.

In the end, I had seven participants for the full interview: three professors and four students. Coincidentally, for my interview group all of the professors were male and all of the students were female. After transitioning to email interviews, most of my participants from each category provided new written responses, but one of the professors did not. The transition to online interviews gave me the opportunity to significantly expand my poll results, however, because one of my French friends decided to share the poll with many of her contacts. This introduced a wider group of French students and young adults mainly from Paris and Montpellier, as well as a much more even gender distribution for the quantitative results, for a total of 54 responses. My new groups are best explained as Students (18-24) and Working Professionals (24+), though in retrospect I would have preferred to ask these categories directly on the survey instead of by age group to have a clearer picture of my respondent demographics.

After collecting my expanded poll data through Google Forms, I exported the data to Google Sheets and performed a difference of means test for each of the ten question results to compare the two age groups' responses. Though my sample size was still relatively small, this analysis helped me determine which responses showed a notable contrast between the two age groups versus which statements had similar responses across the generational divide. I evaluated my data sets by mean, median, and mode as well to assess potential explanations for the trends.

# FINDINGS AND RESULTS

## The Poll

To interpret the results of my poll, I first organized my responses into two data sets separated by age group and arranged this data on stacked bar graphs in order to easily observe both the overall trend of responses and the two distinct data sets per statement. In order to compare the verbal results quantitatively, I assigned the four options a number value from least agreement with the statement to greatest agreement: "Never True" (1), "Sometimes True" (2), "Often True" (3), "Always True" (4). For each of the ten statements, I assessed the mean, median, and mode for both data sets, which I considered to be the most descriptive statistical changes per statement. I determined that a mean response between 1.0 and 1.9 would indicate strong disagreement with the statement, whereas a mean between 2.1 and 2.4 would show moderate disagreement. A mean between 3.0 and 4.0 would indicate strong agreement, and a mean between 2.5 and 2.9 would show moderate agreement. In discussing the modes,

it is also useful to mention the percentage of participants in each data set that chose the mode response.

With my larger sample size after the online participants joined, there were 32 participants in the 18-24 group and 22 in the 24+ group—an unequal sample size from the two sets, but one that still produced observable patterns. In order to mitigate the potential confusion of comparing numerical values from two sets of different sizes, I also performed a difference of means test on the data using Google Sheets. This test is designed to help determine whether or not the difference between the two groups is statistically significant—simply, is age group actually a solid predictor of the participants' choices on a topic, or were the participants likely to respond similarly regardless of age group? Without adjusting for the different sample sizes, this question is not as easily answered by interpreting the graphs.

The difference of means test is structured around the concept of the *null hypothesis* in statistics, which is the default position that there is no significant difference between the two populations, or in our case, that age group did not affect participant responses. The result of each difference of means test is a probability between 0 and 1, with a P-value of 0 meaning that the null hypothesis is absolutely false (so there is a difference between the sets) and a P-value of 1 meaning that the null hypothesis is
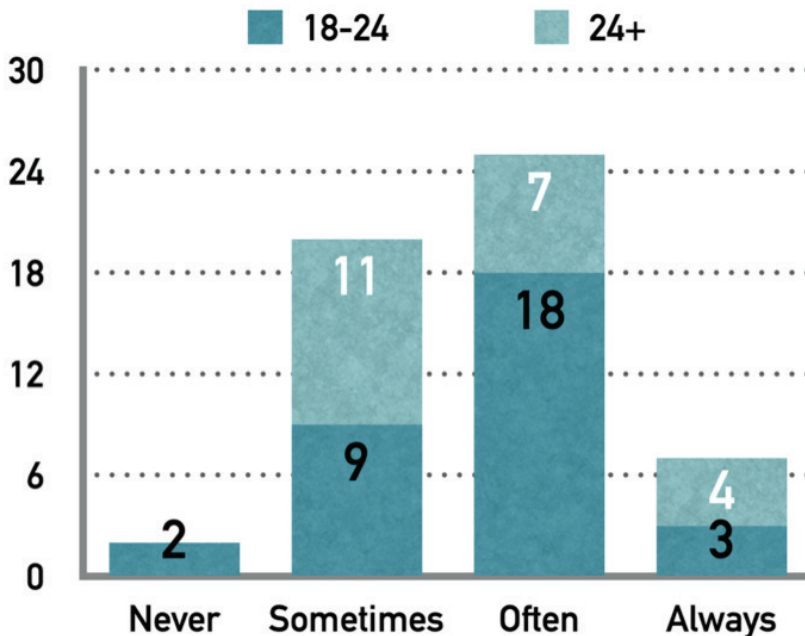


*Statement 1: I am aware of using anglicisms in my daily life.*

absolutely true (there is no difference between the sets). For our purposes, we will consider P-values < 0.05 to mean that the null hypothesis is disproved and the results are statistically significant, and P-values >0.05 to mean that the null hypothesis cannot be

disproved and the data may not be statistically significant. Including the probability of statistical significance in the discussion provides a valuable opportunity for deeper interpretation—we can discuss with greater insight whether or not a certain view is changing across generations.

It is important to note, however, that we cannot use the term *statically significant* in a strictly formal sense because the 24+ group does not meet the standard minimum boundary of 32 participants. I continue to use this term for the sake of clarity, but the reliability of these statistics is limited by the smaller sample size. Even so, the statistical framework is a useful tool to interpret patterns and observable trends in the data sets, bearing in mind that we could achieve even more clarity with a larger sample size. In the following discussion, I included graphs in which the results were significant or most interesting; additional graphs can be found in Appendix 1.

## Poll Results

This statement showed the greatest overall similarity between the two age groups; it is the only one for which both age groups had an equal mean at 2.68 each, representing a moderate agreement with the statement across the board. At first glance, a difference between the two groups might seem to be observed in the modes; 11/22 (50%) participants in the 24+ group responded 2 ("Sometimes"), whereas 18/32 (56%) participants in the 18-24 group responded 3 ("Often"), suggesting that the younger group has a slightly greater awareness of anglicisms in their daily lives. However, after performing the difference of means test, the difference between the two means was very far from statistically significant, with a surprisingly high P-value of 0.9787, all but confirming the null hypothesis. As such, a more likely conclusion would be that age group was not a strong predictor of the participants' responses. Rather, the shared median of 2.68 tells the clearest story: the majority of participants moderately agreed that they were aware of using anglicisms in their daily lives. I included this statement at the beginning because it provides some much needed context on whether or not anglicisms are noticed by native French speakers, because it would be difficult to have opinions or intentions surrounding anglicisms if they are not usually recognized. Though my responses showed that most of the participants recognize anglicisms on a regular basis, the fact that their agreement was only moderate also implied that many felt unsure about how often they were using anglicisms.

Statement 2: *I consume American or British television, music, and movies.* For this statement, the mean responses were 3.06 (18-24) and 2.59 (24+), showing that the 18-24 group agreed with the statement strongly whereas the 24+ group agreed moderately. However, the difference of means test could not disprove the null hypothesis—though its probability was fairly low (P = 0.0855)—so it is uncertain whether or not age group was a strong predictor of response. The two groups shared a mode of 3 ("Often"), with 15/32 participants from the 18-24 group and 9/22 participants from the 24+ group selecting this option. A notable outlier was the all five responses of 1 ("Never") came from participants in the 24+ group, whereas the 18-24 group had a

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larger representation in 4 ("Always"). Therefore, most of the French participants indicated that they are consuming media in English to varying degrees, and it is possible that a larger data set would have revealed a stronger propensity to do so among the
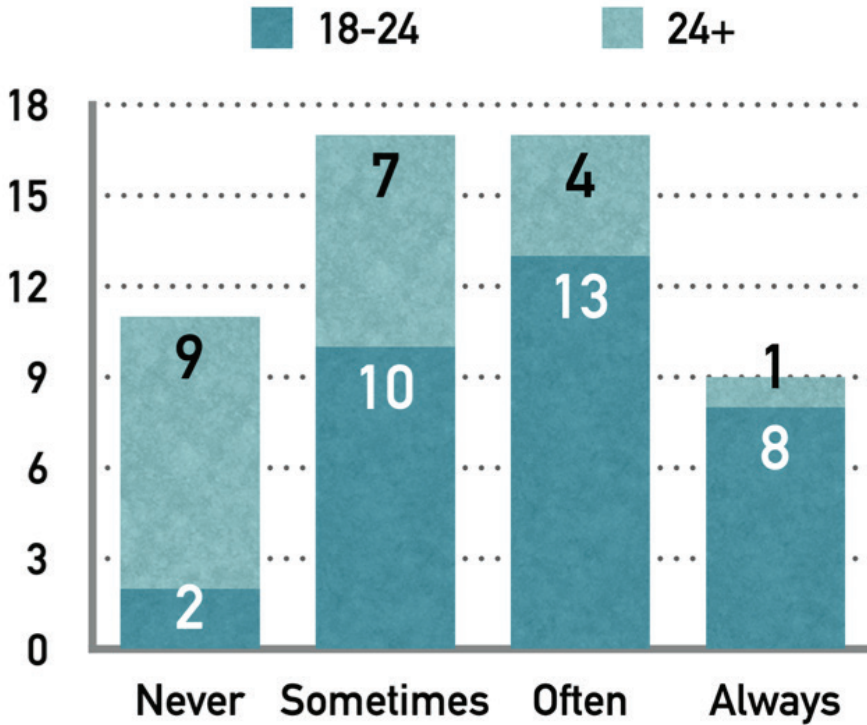


*Statement 4: I think that using anglicisms is fun and cool.*

18-24 group, though my current results are limited. My results suggest that the action of consuming media in English is quite common, with all but five participants doing so, despite differences in frequency.

Statement 3: *I associate anglicisms with slang and pop culture.* The responses for this statement definitely showed some contrast between generational opinions, but there was not a statistically significant difference between them because we could not reject the null hypothesis (P = 0.2156). The means were 2.03 (18-24) and 1.77 (24+), suggesting that the 18-24 participants moderately disagreed with this statement while the 24+ participants strongly disagreed. In both groups, the mode was 2 ("Sometimes"), which was populated by 15/32 (47%) participants in the 18-24 group and 12/22 (55%) participants in the 24+ group, and another 30% of the participants responded 1 ("Never"). However, it was interesting to note that only two outliers in the 24+ group responded "Often" (1/22) or "Always" (1/22), whereas 28% of the 18-24 group (9/32) responded "Often." We can infer from these results that the participants do not necessarily associate anglicisms with slang and pop culture, but there may be a greater

association among some participants, mostly in the 18-24 group—perhaps those who have been exposed to more English in pop culture contexts.

This statement was the first to show statistical significance between the responses of the two demographics with a strikingly low P-value of 0.0007; an interesting future direction would be to see if this trend is replicated in a larger sample size. The means of 2.81 (18-24) and 1.91 (24+) show that the 18-24 participants moderately agreed with the statement, whereas the 24+ participants strongly disagreed. However, the most striking contrast was in the modes: 13/32 (41%) of the 18-24 participants responded 3 ("Often"), while 9/22 (41%) of the 24+ participants responded 1 ("Never"). Only 5% (1/22) of the 24+ participants responded that anglicisms are "Always" fun and cool, compared to 25% of the 18-24 participants. Thus, the younger age group was significantly more likely than the older age group to agree with the statement that anglicisms are fun and cool. This development provided some insight into why each group might choose anglicisms in conversation and which type of words might be used; for the 18-24 group, trends of pop culture and relevancy might have bigger influences than they do for the 24+ group.

Statement 5: *I prefer to use anglicisms when they are shorter than the proposed French*
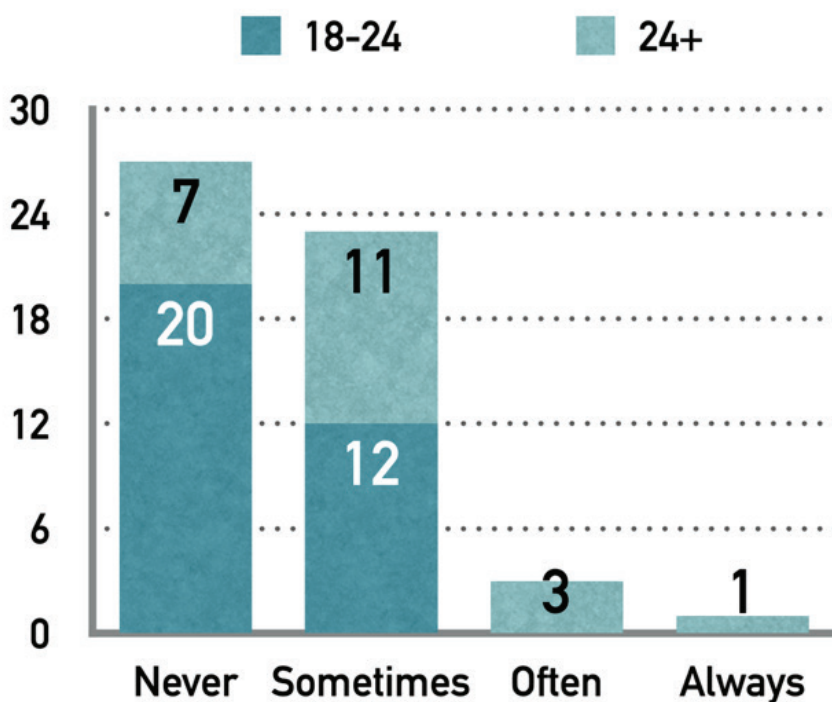


*Statement 6: When I know that a word is an anglicism, I try to avoid using it.*

equivalent (such as 'webpage' for 'page sur l'étoile'). The mean responses for this statement were 2.72 (18-24) and 2.32 (24+), showing that the 18-24 group moderately

agreed with the statement and the 24+ group moderately disagreed. However, the groups shared a mode of 3 ("Often"), which garnered 17/32 (53%) of the 18-24 responses and 8/22 (36%) of the 24+ responses. Though we could observe that the 24+ group was more strongly represented for "Never" (23% vs 6%) and the 18-24 group was more strongly represented for "Always" (13% vs 9%), the responses across the two data sets were not contrasted enough to disprove the null hypothesis (P = 0.0934). The responses to this statement allow us to reflect on another reason that French speakers would opt to use anglicisms—convenience—and that this purpose had more acceptance among the 18-24 group, though the contrast was limited by our sample size. Even so, the fact that both groups shared a mode of 3 ("Often") reveals that this statement was simply more controversial for the 24+ group, who ended up moderately disagreeing on average despite that the majority moderately agreed. One explanation of the controversy in the 24+ group may be that they have been more strongly impacted by the long-held purist language ideologies, which have lessened
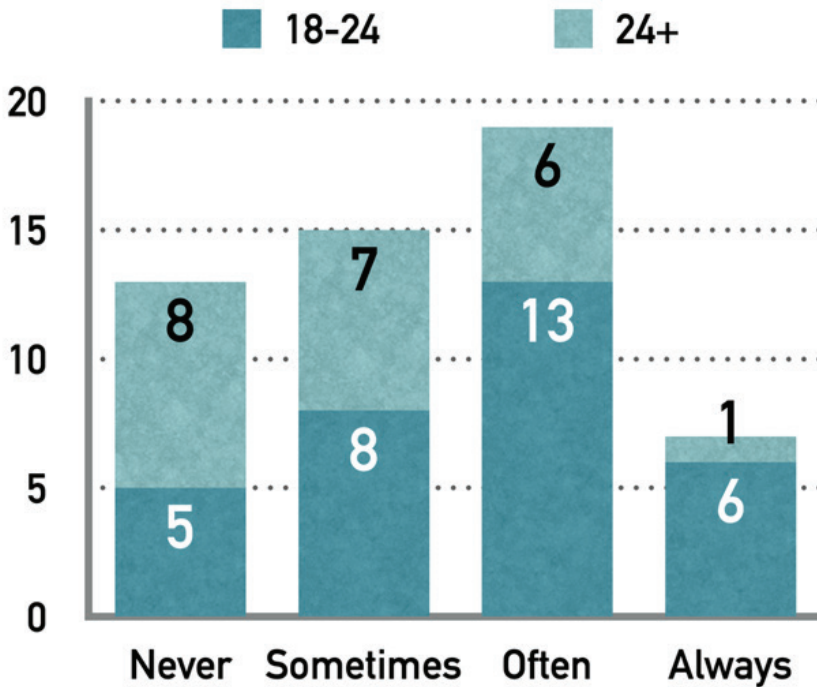


*Statement 7: I use anglicisms less often in formal or professional environments.*

slightly in recent years, and thus some feel ashamed to use English loanwords out of convenience even if they might acknowledge that the phrases tend to be shorter.

The responses to this statement showed strong disagreement from both groups with means of 1.91 (24+) and 1.38 (18-24). Even so, the stronger disagreement from the 18-24 group led to us disproving the null hypothesis in this data set (P = 0.0096),

indicating that age group likely had an influence on participant responses. The differences in distribution can be observed most easily through the modes; the 18-24 group had a mode of 1 ("Never") with 20/32 (63%) selecting this option, whereas the 24+ group had a mode of 2 ("Sometimes") with 11/22 (50%) of participants selecting this option. All of the participants who selected the higher values were also from the 24+ group, though they were somewhat outliers: only three participants selected 3 ("Often") and only one selected 4 ("Always"). Overall, the responses to this question suggest that the 18-24 participants were very unlikely to avoid using anglicisms, whereas the 24+ participants would do so some of the time, or even very frequently for a few participants.

For Statement 7, the 18-24 group moderately agreed with the statement with a mean of 2.63, while the 24+ group moderately disagreed with a mean of 2.00. This was another statement for which we could reject the null hypothesis (P = 0.0258), suggesting that age group did influence participant responses. The modes once again produce a useful contrast, as the 18-24 group had a mode of 3 ("Often"/Moderately Agree) with 13/32 responses (41%) and the 24+ group had a mode of 1 ("Never"/Strongly Disagree) with 8/22 responses (36%). However, the 24+ responses were spread nearly equally among 2 ("Sometimes") with 7/22 (32%) responses and 3 ("Often") with 6/22 (27%) responses. Thus, the statement proved to be controversial for the 24+ group once again, showing a range of agreement between strongly disagree and moderately agree, with only the remaining 1 participant strongly agreeing. One possible explanation is that the 24+ participants who do not feel the need to avoid anglicisms in professional environments use less anglicisms that might be considered "trendy" or "slang," though it is also possible that some of the 24+ group just feel more comfortable using them. As for the 18-24 group who previously indicated that they were unlikely to intentionally avoid using anglicisms, the same group responded to this statement that they would be less likely to use anglicisms in professional environments—a salient distinction. The implication may be that this age group is comfortable using anglicisms in general but aware that they do not have as much acceptance with older generations in professional environments.

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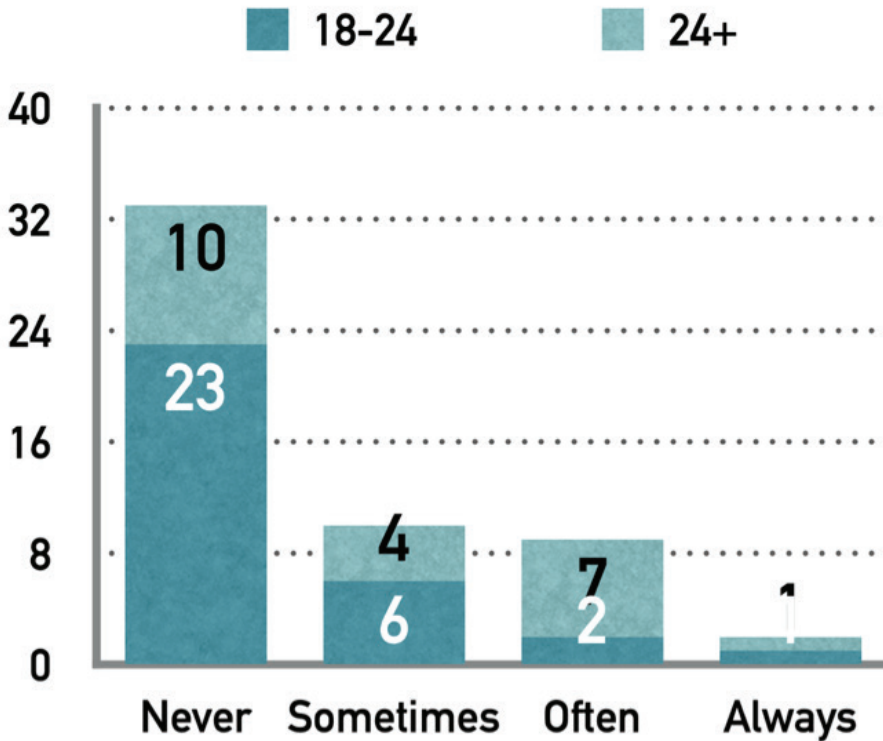
*Statement 8: As a French speaker, I feel guilty for choosing an anglicism over a French word.*

The responses to this statement were both strong disagreement with a mean of 1.41 from the 18-24 group and 1.95 from the 24+ group. The two groups shared a mode of 1 ("Never"), which was chosen by 10/22 (45%) of the 24+ group and 23/32 (72%) of the 18-24 group. Despite these similarities, we were able to disprove the null hypothesis that age group does not affect this opinion (P = 0.0258); rather, age group was an influential factor. The clearest contrast between the two groups, which likely led to this statistical difference, was that the second-most chosen items were 2 ("Sometimes") for 6/32 (19%) of the 18-24 group compared to 3 ("Often") for 7/22 (32%) of the 24+ group. In other words, both groups were most likely to respond that they "Never" felt guilty choosing an anglicism over a French expression, but a notable portion of the 24+ group responded that they "Often" did so. 91% of the 18-24 responses were strong or moderate disagreement and only 9% were strong or moderate agreement, showing that it was fairly unlikely for the younger group to feel guilty preferring a loanword. Yet, in the 24+ group, 64% responded with strong or moderate disagreement while the other 36% of the 24+ responded with strong or moderate agreement, showing that a decent portion of the 24+ participants did feel guilt when preferring a loanword. This data may suggest that the older demographic has been more impacted by the political discourse around anglicisms that discourage French people to use them, and therefore are more likely to feel ashamed by choosing a loanword. It could

also imply that these purist ideologies are gradually losing hold on the younger generation, perhaps as a result of greater cultural mixing in the Internet Era.

Statement 9: *I worry that the spread of anglicisms and American culture will weaken French culture.* This statement showed strong disagreement across the board, with little distinction between the demographics such that the null hypothesis was relatively likely to be true (P = 0.7570). The means were 1.72 for the 18-24 group and 1.64 for the 24+ group, explained by the fact that both groups had a mode of 1 ("Never"). Not only that, but the mode was strongly represented with 14/22 (64%) of 24+ responses and 16/32 (50%) of 18-24 participants. However, an outlier of 3/22 (14%) of 24+ participants selected 4 ("Always"), in addition to 2/32 (6%) of 18-24 participants. It is difficult to draw a single conclusion from the results, but the overall trend was that most participants never worried that Americanization would weaken French culture, or only did so occasionally. This might imply that culture threat is feared more by those in academic and elite circles, such as the Académie Française *immortels* and the Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon. Even so, fewer participants were indeed concerned that French culture was at threat from the influence of American culture and anglicisms.

Statement 10: *The work of the Académie Française is necessary to protect and regulate the French language.* For this statement, the 18-24 group had a mean response of 2.69 while the 24+ group had a mean response of 2.90, both of which show moderate agreement. The groups had a modal difference where 15/32 (47%) of the 18-24 group selected 2 ("Sometimes") and 8/22 (36%) of the 24+ group selected 3 ("Often") showing a higher agreement. The 24+ group also had 7/22 (32%) of the participants select 4 ("Always"), overall having a larger representation in the highest two choices. Interestingly enough, the only two respondents who chose 1 ("Never") were both in the 24+ group, despite that the 24+ group overall seemed to agree with the statement. However, the difference of means test did not disprove the null hypothesis (P = 0.3453), so we cannot draw a conclusion about whether or not age group influenced responses in this small sample size. Even so, we know that all of the participants, on average, moderately agreed with the statement and thus found the Académie Française to be an important institution to protect their language.

## The Interview

After adjusting my format to email interviews, six of the seven original participants were able to provide me a written form of their responses. From each question, I selected parts of several responses that I felt gave a good survey of the different opinions. I translated these responses here, but I included the original French responses in Appendix 2 in order to share the direct quotes. Comparing these questions with the poll allowed me to understand the nuances of opinions in my smaller sample size, who ultimately surprised me with very complex and varied responses from such a small group. Like the survey, I found that there was generational consistency on some topics, such as the controversy about whether or not to create French neologisms to

replace English terms, whereas others saw a sharp generational divide, such as the appropriateness of the homogeneity in the Académie Français and how that affects its ability to represent the people. I observed many of the ideas I had heard surrounding this discussion, but I was also interested to see some variation that I did not expect, such as the strongest linguistic conservatism appearing in an 18-24 group student participant instead of a 24+ professor.

**Selected Interview Responses**

**Question 1:** *Linguistic Purism in the National Discourse*

France has a reputation for carefully guarding their language from outside influences, which can be described as "linguistic purism." This goal is evident in the existence of organizations such as the Académie Française. How has your attitude toward anglicisms been affected by the national discourse about protecting the French language?

> The langue is not fixed, and I think that it's normal that it is evolving. Furthermore, anglicisms permit inter-comprehension between the languages. The cultures reflect through each other.  —Sarah, 18-24

> I can say that the purism associated with the French language really influenced me regarding anglicisms. For a long time, I had the impression that the usage of anglicisms was a way to show off or give yourself a "type." But I changed my opinion on the subject while growing up and becoming more open-minded.  —Alizée, 18-24

> Anglicisms are perceived quite negatively in education and all the administrations or official structures…The national discourse tends to urge the public to use French words…but with globalization and the Internet Era, English prevails as the language of influence (economically and culturally) and France's language policy aims to limit the development of the English language in its territory.  —Laura, 18-24

> My opinion on anglicisms is not really affected by the national discourse. I already thought that anglicisms could be useful if they permit [someone] to refer to a referent that cannot already be found in a French word. Otherwise, their usefulness may be disputed.  —M. Dimeck, 24+

The concern that too much prescriptivism will treat French as a dead language first appeared in the responses to Question 1, and this theme continued to present itself in many of the questions. Sarah's contention that the language is not fixed (or, more literally, not "congealed into a solid form") implies imagery of the French language drying up, in a sense, if it did not continue to evolve with the times. Laura also makes a connection to the internet era cementing the economic and cultural power of English, which makes it harder than ever for France to intervene in the changes. Sarah also points out one strength of anglicism use: it gives a speaker greater access to comprehension in English, while also making French more accessible to English speakers.

Several of the participants stated that they were not personally affected by the national discourse, including both in the 24+ group, but all of them were well aware of the controversies. Alizée, on the other hand, describes being deeply affected by the stereotypes that using English was a form of boasting or chasing a certain image for yourself, which caused her to have a negative view of peers who used anglicisms until she grew older. M. Dimeck, on the other hand, did not have a negative view of anglicisms, but believed that they should be used exclusively in cases where a French equivalent did not exist. This opinion appeared at other points in the interview as well, but it contrasted with some others who believed that the French language should always adapt to include new concepts instead of leaning on English to do so.

**Question 2:** *Homogenous Demographics in the Académie Française*

The average age of the Academic Français is over 70 years old, and over 80% of its members are white males. It sometimes faces criticism for not representing the diverse demographics in France. How might this homogeneity affect the ability of the Académie Français to represent the needs of the country?

> This homogeneity is not representative of the actual composition of the French people. Thus the relationship between the French language and [a group of] men over the age of 70 with social and economic privilege, on average, only represents the same demographic of French people. These individuals are a minority. Thus the Académie Français cannot describe the language spoken by the majority of the French, nor respond to its needs. —Isabelle, 18-24

> The inexorable oldness of the members of the Académie Française, as well as the little parity present, demonstrates well the firmness or close-mindedness of this organization regarding changes in the language and its evolution. A language is living, and the rules recommended by the Académie (who does not have authoritative/prescriptive power…) do not correspond with the social objectives of the country. The controversy over representation of the feminine in the language reveals their incapacity to choose to let the French language evolve. —Laura, 18-24

> I think that the homogeneity of Académie Française members is one of the main symptoms of language discrimination in France. Effectively, in France, speaking French is not only communicating but also demonstrating your social status and education. There is a real taboo of "bad French," easily resulting in a negative judgment of your person. The standard (Parisian) French that we know today was imposed on the French after the revolution…a privileged minority decides the correctness of our words on an arbitrary basis. — Alizée, 18-24

> Without doing a thorough scientific study, one can easily imagine that white men of a certain age in the same academy will not be revolutionar-

ies, but more likely conservatives! At the same time, the Académie Français is composed of intellectuals—of people who think and reflect—which may counterbalance this conservatism. Therefore, the homogeneity of the academy members might not be a problem, if it is tempered by their "enlightenment."   —M. Buissière, 24+

In my opinion, this is a false problem. I think that the Académie Française is composed of persons who have a clear view of language and the world. I am certain they are capable of detaching themselves from their particular milieu to take a general look at the "needs of the country."   —M. Dimeck, 24

Though all of the 18-24 group mentioned concerns about representation in the Académie Française, neither of the 24+ participants saw reason for concern; granted, they were both white, educated male professors, whereas the 18-24 group were females from three racial backgrounds. M. Dimeck, in particular, seemed to take a sarcastic tone toward the question by quoting "needs of the country" as if these needs are imagined or exaggerated. The implication from the two professors that education is enough to overcome privilege, rather than something that can perpetuate privilege, formed an interesting contrast to the students' views. This question appeared to be the most controversial of the set, eliciting strong opinions about the role and effectiveness of the Académie Française, as well as the language of the elite on the whole.

Alizée connected the Académie to the historical legitimizing of Parisian French which, by default, declared other dialects to be less valuable or cultured. Since these participants lived in or near Montpellier, a city in Southern France roughly 370 miles away from Paris, none of them spoke with a Parisian French dialect. Her description of speaking French as "demonstrating your social status and education" reflects back to Simpson, Mayr, and Stathan's assertion that "Every time people interact, they enact, reproduce, and sometimes resist (institutional) power relationships through language" (Simpson, 2018, p. 11). Alizée and Isabelle both connect the Académie to the idea of a privileged minority, and Alizée also asserts that their decisions are based on arbitrary ideas of what constitutes correct French.

Laura cited the Académie's resistance to feminine language—referring to the initiative to introduce feminine noun spellings for traditionally male professions—as a proof of their failure to allow the language to evolve to meet the needs of the people other than their own demographic, which was a common concern I found in my research. Laura's example contradicts M. Bussière's opinion that the Académie members are educated enough to put aside their conservatism to address the needs of the people, seeing as they only relented on their point after sharp outcry to their initial rejection.

**Question 3:** *Neologisms as Countermeasure to English Loanwords*

As more English words enter French, we have seen more attempts to control and reverse the spread of anglicisms. Some institutions propose French words to substitute

for a concept that began in English, like the phrase "page sur la toile" to replace the anglicism "webpage." Have you ever experienced a word being replaced? How did you feel about it?

> I think that anglicisms allow for the enrichment and evolution of the French language. I understand that some seek to protect it, but I don't understand doing so in excess; creating new expressions to replace an anglicism after it appears seems to me quite useless. However, seeing an anglicism appear when there is already an equivalent French word disturbs me more.  —M. Dimeck, 24+

> It's probably rare that the replacement will work, to begin with, for aesthetic reasons. The speakers find the anglicism more beautiful, and more efficient as well, more fluid…And when anglicisms have success, it bypasses the question of linguistics: the American capitalism-liberalism has been flooding its products and ideology across the Western world for a long time, and the Western world is fond of it. It's logical, therefore, that the words that accompany this overflow reach us as well. The problem is not only linguistic—it is just a consequence—the "problem" is the globalized liberal logic led, symbolized, and defended by the Americans. —M. Buissière, 24+

> I discovered the expression "courrier électronique" to say "e-mail," and I find it perfectly logical, transparent, and comprehensible for all of the French population, every generation included. I find the translation of anglicisms pertinent because it allows for the conservation of the common linguistic code on the territory, where not everyone has the chance to know how to speak English (some also have an insecurity, a complex, about saying English words). This also allows those who do not speak English to continue to practice the French language, their native language in which they are comfortable. —Isabelle, 18-24

> Why change an anglicism that everyone understands? Words like "e-mail" or "spoiler" are anchored in the French language, and I don't see the point of inventing new ones so that they are supposedly more "French."  —Sarah, 18-24

In general, many of the interviewees were against the replacement of anglicisms with French neologisms, but Isabelle was a notable exception. The others who gave examples for this question criticized the replacement words for feeling stilted or unnatural, but Isabelle praised the replacement of "e-mail" with "courrier electronique." Sarah, on the other hand, used the same example to make the opposite case, implying that the replacements are pretentious. While M. Dimeck opposed the creation of French neologisms, however, he shared Isabelle's concern about not wanting anglicisms to supplant existing French words, which he called disturbing.

M. Buissière was more inclined to agree with Sarah, however, describing that there is not public demand for word replacements and the public will be unlikely to use them. His assertion that the anglicisms are preferred for aesthetic reasons, such as their fluid and efficient forms, is line in with the poll results for Statement 5 that showed that the shorter length of anglicisms was a significant factor in their use. Furthermore, M. Buissière identifies the larger pattern of globalization and the spread of American ideologies and culture as the source of this language shift—one in which the Western world is complicit because they are "fond" of the US culture.

**Question 4:** *Mandating French Use with Legal Action*

In 1994, the current version of the Toubon law was established. This law mandates the use of French in government publications, advertisements, workplaces, commercial contracts, government-financed schools, and several other contexts. Ignoring the law can lead to heavy fines. What might be some positive and negative results of enforcing language use with legal action?

> I am not against this law, but I doubt its actual application and efficacy. What fills the lives of people are not administrative documents, but advertisements and works of fiction (movies and television). English is extremely present there, sometimes just for aesthetic reasons (brand slogans in English even though the advertisement is in French and made for the French public). I am obviously not in favor of defending a language by force or punishment. There are methods to defend a language that are much more interesting to imagine and put in place, such as art…and fiction. This is the sense in which we should defend the language. —M. Buissière 24+

> I have a different example: in France there's a law which stipulates that radio stations must play at least 40% French songs. I find this to be positive because if this law did not exist, American music would surely be omnipresent, and the francophone artists also deserve to be recognized. —Sarah 18-24

> The negative points of this law could be that it would prevent language in France from evolving naturally. I think that if there is a need for a law to maintain French in our institutions and our media, this proves that our language is evolving…I consider this evolution natural, and I think that it cannot be stopped by a law because it is the nature of language to vary over time and to be affected by external influences. On the other hand, I think it is still important to preserve French in our media because French music (for example) is listened to mainly in France, while English music is listened to all over the world. —Alizée, 18-24

Sarah and Alizée both identified French music as a usage of French that they are glad has legal protection, whereas M. Buissière suggested that French should be main-

tained with the arts. This recurring theme in their responses exposes a crucial caveat to the resistance expressed against some forms of standardization: they are more concerned with protecting the culture of France than forcing out English. All three of them indicated on the poll that they consume American or British media "Often" or "Always," but they shared here that they want to have the option to participate in both cultures, rather than having the artistic culture of France struggle to compete against American culture. As M. Buissière points out, administrative documents are not what fills their lives; they interact with English mainly in advertisement and media. And it is in this sphere, where English is most obviously present, that they acknowledge the need for protection of their own culture so that both can coexist.

Alizée also presents a concern that the French language cannot evolve naturally if the government tries to keep it separate from outside influences. She views this evolution as a sign of the vitality of the French language because it is versatile and adaptable enough to shift with the changing times. The legal pushback, in her mind, is only a sign that the language is experiencing natural change over time, whereas the actual law is not needed. On the other hand, she does approve of protecting French music, as discussed above.

**Question 5:** *Linguistic Purity and Culture Threat in France*

While some claim that English words pollute the integrity of the French language, others believe that changes in the language are a natural part of globalization. Are you inclined to agree with either of these sides, or do you think the truth is somewhere in between?

> I tend to consider, rather, that French is enriched due to other languages…But, in my opinion, this enrichment is more solid and interesting when it has a linguistic need as its starting point rather than a commercial, or other, need. It would thus not act to enrich the language for the sake of enriching it, but rather to let it live, and to accept that it integrates foreign words into its vocabulary—English or others—to do so.—M. Dimeck, 24+

> A language is living—its speakers make it live. I don't see any problems integrating borrowings into the French dictionary, as well as neologisms for example. It is always a proof of cultural richness to have words from all origins. I think that the phenomenon of anglicisms is also democratizing, compared to the new communication media and other networks, and surely that certain anglicisms are only used by the same type of speaker (young people). The influence of de the Académie Française on debate of spelling simplification debates prove to us that citizens are the "protectors" of the French language…why fear anglicisms?  — Laura, 18-24

> English must enrich the language used in France and not impoverish it…. [We] must already be using French consciously and mastering it. It must

already be a formidable source of inclusive communication. Then, English can be used to bring benefits that French could not give…Some abuse anglicisms when the same concept already exists in French. The anglicisms that cannot be translated into French are the ones that concern me.  — Isabelle, 18-24

Each of these participants expressed that the French language could be enriched by linguistic borrowing, from English or otherwise. Isabelle and M. Dimeck, however, have also shared concerns about English words supplanting existing French terms. Isabelle asserts that the French have a responsibility to master their own language first, implying that this will make it easier for French speakers to be aware of when an English word is really the only translation. In this case, M. Dimeck describes allowing borrowings as "letting the language live," but he still makes the point that he would prefer to see linguistic mixing on cultural basis rather than out of commercialism. The recurring theme of vitality connected to linguistic borrowings, on the other hand, suggests that the participants are more concerned about French becoming an out-moded language due to excessive prescriptivism than about the increase of globalism.

Laura finishes with some interesting topics, here; she comes out in support of neologisms as a form of cultural richness despite previously describing them as feeling un-natural. She also makes an association between anglicisms and youth culture, which I expected to see frequently in the interview, but found it to be a minor topic. It seems that anglicisms are integrated across the generations in France, but that different words may be popular in different groups. Laura also gives a unique counterpoint to the purpose of the Académie Française: the reason there are controversies over spellings, she says, is that the citizens are the true "protectors" of the French language, whereas the Académie tries to control them from a distance. And the speakers do not fear English as the Académie does. "The language is living—its speakers make it live."

# Conclusion

It is not difficult to identify weaknesses in the French approach to maintaining and protecting their language, whether that is the exclusive and untouchable nature of the Académie Française, persistent ideologies of disdain for non-standard dialects, or many examples of stilted  neologisms facing public rejection. However, it is illuminating to consider that, despite their proud facades, the French administrations are likely quite aware that only a certain portion of their replacements will reach public use, but have concluded that any progress is worthwhile. In Clyde Thogmartin's (1991) neologism survey in 1991, for example, we saw that seven of the twelve French terms were widely preferred, while the others were rejected. Many of his participants, even thirty years ago, stated that the French neologisms were "ridiculous" or "useless"—but if over 50% of the terms gained public acceptance, their initiatives clearly had an impact on the language. It is impossible to determine the overall percentage of accepted vs rejected neologisms, but in that small sample size, the French legislation had succeeded in creating seven widely accepted terms. Though these efforts have always been con-

troversial, and indeed seem unnatural to many French speakers as well as to foreigners, there is no way to determine how French might have evolved without any attempts to protect the language by filling semantic gaps otherwise occupied by loanwords.

As such, even if the French administration has garnered criticism for their technological planning and combatted inconsistent results among French speakers, their efforts are deserving of respect. The strict regulation of French is likely to seem excessive to English speakers, as English does not have any language academy regulating it. But in our fast-paced global society, for the French language to modernize amidst instantaneous exchange of ideas, it certainly can benefit from institutional support. Furthermore, as several of my interviewees explained, many French citizens desire a continuation of French culture such as their music and arts, even if they are less concerned with the amount of anglicisms that show up in their speech. The "Right to French" which the DGLFLF seeks to protect was in fact a priority of some of my interviewees, though articulated indirectly. Isabelle, for example, mentioned that she found neology valuable because it "allows those who do not speak English to continue to practice the French language, their native language in which they are comfortable." Similarly, M. Dimeck consistently mentioned that anglicisms should only be used to fill semantic gaps, rather than being in competition with existing French terms. Overall, it may be easy to identify weaknesses in the French language protection strategy, but many of my participants expressed that they appreciated certain facets of the Académie Française and related language legislation. "I love my language," Isabelle expressed to me earnestly during our spoken interview—"I want to speak my language."

## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 contains additional graphs depicting the poll results.

Appendix 2 consists of the original French versions of interview materials and full responses. Note that this appendix is in French.

Both appendices are located in the online edition of Proceedings of GREAT Day 2020, found at https://knightscholar.geneseo.edu/proceedings-of-great-day/vol2020/iss1/17

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