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14 Orthography Creation for Postvernacular Languages: Case Studies of Rama and Francoprovençal Revitalization

Bénédicte Pivot and Michel Bert

1 Introduction

This chapter considers the place of orthographic creations in the process of revitalization of languages that we consider to be ‘postvernacular’ and questions the role that writing fulfils and its usefulness in such context, according to the actual practices of writing of its different users. Our study is based on the analysis of two glotto-political situations of revitalization. The first one is that of the Rama language in Nicaragua, and the second that of Francoprovençal (hereafter, FP) in France. The two languages are both considered highly endangered according to the vitality criteria of UNESCO (Moseley 2010). In both cases, the last native speakers are elderly, there is no more family transmission or public use of the language (except for some rare, official events), and spontaneous uses in the private sphere are infrequent. These two principally oral languages were first written down by linguists. Even though the populations involved are obviously very different – one is Amerindian and at the bottom of the social ladder of the poorest area of Central America, and the other is neither ethnically nor socially distinguishable and blends into French society – both are characterized by socio-political authorities as ‘linguistic communities’ and often considered as still forming ‘communities of practice’. They are also both the object of linguistic projects in favour of language revitalization, which aim to maintain a certain level of knowledge of the language within the community involved and even to foster language transmission.

These situations have been described in recent research as being ‘postvernacular’ (Pivot 2014), a notion coined by Shandler (2006). This chapter begins by introducing this notion, since it highlights some disagreements between the various actors of revitalization. The chapter then goes on to describe the vitality of both languages and the reasons why they should be considered as postvernacular. Finally, it introduces the writing practices of different actors and their choice of orthography, while situating them in their respective contexts – contexts which

clearly differ in each case in terms of the social constructs linked to the notion of written form and norm. The chapter demonstrates that both contexts fit into ideological and pragmatic approaches which influence orthography creation strategies (Milroy 2001).

2 Postvernacular Languages

The term ‘postvernacular language’ was coined by Shandler to refer to the social and linguistic practice of Yiddish in New York. It will be used in this chapter to describe the sociolinguistic status of both FP in France and Rama in Nicaragua. Our choice of this term is based on the observation and analysis of speech and linguistic habits in both countries, where it was found that social praxis surrounding the linguistic issues of Rama and FP fell under functions that did not belong to those expected of everyday communication. Claims made about their revitalization by local actors did not correspond to the demands of the re-vernacularization of those languages either. The notion of postvernacularity does not define the state of a language that would appear once it is no longer vernacular, but rather refers to dynamics of social practices when the semiotic symbolic function of language prevails over its semiotic-communication function, as Shandler (2006:4) explains:

In semiotic terms, the language’s primary level of signification – that is, its instrumental value as a vehicle for communicating information, opinions, feelings, ideas – is narrowing in scope. At the same time its secondary, or meta-level of signification – the symbolic value invested in the language apart from the semantic value of any given utterance in it – is expanding. This privileging of the secondary level of signification of Yiddish over its primary level constitutes a distinctive mode of engagement with the language that I term postvernacular Yiddish. In the postvernacular mode, familiar cultural practices – reading, performing, studying, and even speaking – are profoundly altered. Though it often appears to be the same as vernacular use, postvernacularity is in fact something fundamentally different in its nature and intent.

Postvernacular languages are thus characterized primarily by social dynamics in a context of decline of language practice in the language for communication functions in public, educational, and private spheres. The social praxis that develops around a language in a context of decline is what Shandler (2006:4) calls a ‘mode of engagement’ – in other words, a voluntary act with varying degrees of consciousness, realized through an ‘elective act’ and a ‘performing act’ (Shandler 2006:24) that does not aim at the re-vernacularization of the language. Traditionally, in the literature on endangered languages, revitalization is understood as actions that aim to reverse language shift (cf. Costa 2010; Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus 2013; Costa 2013 for a critical analysis of such ideas), but it should be noted here that postvernacular dynamics do not aim at reversing language shift, nor to a return to the everyday use of the language in public

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and private spheres. They correspond to a functional shift, a change of social status for the language through actions aiming to keep the language alive¹ rather than actions perceived as a re-establishment of those language practices that are considered as missing: ‘we don’t speak any more’.²

3 **Rama and Francoprovençal: Two Postvernacular Languages**

3.1 *Rama in Nicaragua*

The description of the sociolinguistic status of the Rama language, its vitality, and its revitalization began in 1986 (for detailed information, see Grinevald and Pivot 2013; Pivot 2014). Rama is the ‘ethnic language’ of an Amerindian population of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and a ‘very endangered’ language according to the UNESCO Atlas. Indeed, this primarily oral language has not been transmitted to children for three generations. Language shift started at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the dominant language now an English Creole that is linguistically close to Miskitu Coast Creole (hereafter, MCC)³ (Grinevald 2005).

As a consequence, the language of first socialization of the members of the Rama ethnic community is MCC, and the Rama language has lost its everyday communication function. Out of a native population of about three thousand, there was only one Rama monolingual couple left by 2013, and they lived quite isolated, in the tropical forest. Less than 1 per cent of the population can be considered as fluent in Rama. Stigmatized and denigrated by Moravian missionaries from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, the language had become, for most of the community, a ‘tiger language’ (a language spoken by savages). Indeed, many young Rama adults only discovered the Rama language during workshops organized by the Rama Language Project (hereafter, RLP), as part of a revitalization plan.

RLP was initiated as a response to an official request made by the community chief to the Sandinista government for aid in rescuing the Rama language in the context of peace negotiations during the war between the Sandinistas and the Contra (Pivot 2014). At the beginning of the project, the members of the community were quite hostile and sceptical and did not support the revitalization of Rama. Speakers denied the fact that they spoke the language or that they knew any words of it. In contrast, today children going to the community school and young adults are proud to say that they can speak Rama because they know ‘some words’. They have learned these words in Rama classes first taught by an illiterate (female) semi-speaker for ten years (1987–1997), then by a native speaker up to 2012, and finally by a few teachers who are not speakers of Rama but were involved in the revitalization project and use resources produced by it. This knowledge does not make the young learners linguistically

competent in terms of conversational skills, but they do know lists of words such as the names of animals and colours, and they can count up to ten. The attitudes of the members of the community have also evolved positively towards Rama. They do not call it a ‘tiger language’ any more, but rather their ‘treasure language’ (Grinevald and Pivot 2013). Even though they do not have highly developed conversational skills and their linguistic competence is not the same as that of fluent speakers, for most of them the language has a symbolic value. It is linked to their identity, making them ‘one people’, and ‘one nation’.⁴ The recognition of Rama by official authorities as an ethnic language enables them to wave their language as a flag, legitimizing their ethnicity, their territoriality, and their social difference.

Functionally and socially, being able to say a few words in Rama (especially in public) and being able to identify Rama as ‘our language’ has become evident since the first decade of the twenty-first century. This ‘staging’ of the language is a specific characteristic of postvernacular languages.

3.2 *Francoprovençal in France*

FP is a Gallo-Romance language spoken in France, Switzerland, and Italy. Its status and vitality vary in each of these three countries. This chapter focuses on the case of FP in France, and especially in the Rhône-Alpes region.

3.2.1 An Evaluation of the Vitality of Francoprovençal The *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* estimates the number of speakers of FP as some ten thousand and describes it as ‘definitely endangered’. However, this estimate must be considered in the context of its level of vitality in France, where it has not been transmitted as a mother tongue for several generations. Such lack of transmission could already be noted several centuries ago in a few cities such as Lyon, and by the end of the Second World War, the use of the vernacular among children had almost totally ceased. In the Valle d’Aosta in Italy, however, some children are still raised speaking FP today. The number of native speakers in France is very low nowadays. According to the results of a survey conducted in 2007–2009 in the Rhône-Alpes region (Bert and Costa 2009), the number of native speakers of FP can be estimated at forty thousand – that is to say, much less than 1 per cent of the population. People with some knowledge of FP are generally older than 60 and are mainly semi-speakers or rememberers.

The use of the language in the private sphere is very limited today, and in public it is restricted to the staging of language events such as festivals organized by groups promoting FP. The language is almost non-existent in ‘new media’ such as radio, television, and the Internet. Teaching FP is not officially possible, unlike the situation with most regional languages. Therefore, few children have

any knowledge of it. To date, there exists no educational material published specifically for teaching it, and no common practical orthography has been chosen. An older literature in FP does exist, but it is not very comprehensible to the general public, and speakers are generally unaware of its existence.

The speakers themselves are often ambivalent towards their language. Some of them reject it, having subscribed to the dominant French ideology that denies regional varieties the status of ‘language’ and still being affected by memories of punishment when speaking the language was forbidden in school. Even speakers who are emotionally attached to their language and are involved in local groups promoting FP often doubt the benefits of teaching the language. Indeed, those who are most in favour of teaching FP are often non-native speakers, or people who do not speak the language at all. The case of FP in France thus appears as more fragile than the UNESCO estimate.

3.2.2 The Actors of Revitalization Unlike other regional languages of France – like Breton or Occitan – FP does not have a long-established and organized activist tradition. The language was only identified quite late (Ascoli 1873) as that of a distinctive linguistic area, situated between Occitan in the south and the Oïl languages of the north of France. Its name, which was chosen by linguists, is still unknown by the majority of its speakers and the general public. A feeling of shared belonging to the same linguistic community has never existed.

The first significant action in favour of FP goes back only forty years (Pivot 2014), and the social movement that followed has gathered momentum only in the past ten years. Today, it is led by two main types of actors: local groups and the regional government. In the Rhône-Alpes region, about fifty *patois* groups meet regularly (*patois* being the term they use for their regional languages). Some of these groups have already existed for thirty years, but most are more recent. These local groups almost always cover small areas composed of just a few villages. Territorial anchoring is thus important to the members of these groups, who are almost exclusively retired people and generally semi-speakers whose feeling of linguistic insecurity is relatively high. Native speakers tend not to join these groups, and conversely, some of the most active members do not have much contact at all with FP. The groups generally meet once or twice a month, though activities are suspended during the summer. During the meetings, those participants most comfortable with FP recite stories they have written or read translations. They all sing traditional or more recent songs together and exchange anecdotes and memories. Most do it to honour their elders and to maintain the emotional bond that links them to the language of their childhood. In some cases, meetings are also spent preparing publications: monographs, dictionaries, and life stories/ethnographic texts, or rehearsing plays, sketches, or songs which they then perform in public. The groups also

sometimes organize ‘awareness campaigns’ for adults or children. Volunteers teach children lists of words and conjugations, expressions, and songs. They also talk about times past and the value of local heritage.

Several characteristics show that the social practices of these groups typically correspond to postvernacular dynamics:

- (i) The language of activities during the meetings is almost always French, and the name of the language which is used by those attending is almost exclusively *patois*. The term *Francoprovençal* is only really used in exchanges with ‘outsiders’ such as journalists, the general public, scholars, or politicians. This scholarly term is then used to legitimize the cause promoted by these groups, who insist that FP be given the status of a ‘language’. It is worth noting here, however, that some members remain convinced that their ‘patois’ cannot be considered a ‘true’ language, at least not in the same way as French. They associations do not aim to teach children the language. Sometimes the creation of ‘language classes’ is suggested, but such suggestions often meet with indifference on the part of most of members – and sometimes even actual hostility. And yet a certain type of linguistic transmission does appear to be happening, by ‘immersion’, during the shared activities, especially in the case of those who have been exposed to the language in the past. This kind of transmission is not identified as such by the groups. However, public awareness of FP is clearly something they aim at during their public actions, such as when language is introduced in a class or a library or ‘staged’ at village fairs.
- (ii) The groups often say that they want to ‘make the language live’; in other words, they are trying to give value to the language and to perpetuate its memory, since otherwise it is bound to disappear.
- (iii) Local groups do not hold onto the hope that FP will again become the language of their region. They do not even wish to see it used as an everyday language between the members of the group. For them, the ‘patois’ has a very important symbolic function – namely to link them with the past and with their respective territories. Their desire is not to pass it on, but rather to keep its memory alive. This vision of the language does not match that of the regional Rhône-Alpes government, which has recently become involved in the promotion of regional languages spoken in its territory – FP and Occitan.

Unlike other French regions, such as Brittany and Aquitaine, Rhône-Alpes has only recently established a linguistic policy (in 2009; for details, see Grinevald and Bert 2014). However, the region is promoting a ‘unified’ FP language rather than a set of local languages; it even condemns the use of the term ‘patois’ by local groups. The instructions sent to the local groups, such as ‘Speak your language!’ and ‘Pass it on!’ also reveal a deep misreading of the local situation, to the extent that these recommendations are addressed to people who, for the most

part, do not feel fluent in FP and who suffer from clear linguistic insecurity. Moreover, the regional linguistic policy, promoted by the department of cultural services, does not really promote the daily activities of the local language groups. It tells them to ‘make the language look pretty’ (according to their own criteria based on the conception of a relatively élitist culture) and to be innovative and not old-fashioned. This is the department’s reaction to plays that portray times past, plays in which the hierarchy between languages appears (with dignitaries speaking French and the common people speaking *patois*). Such plays tend to be seen as stigmatizing by officials, whereas the local groups and their audiences enjoy them for their self-deriding humour.

The regional linguistic policy therefore reveals how the non-written nature of FP and its dialectal diversity are negated. The decline of the language is not taken into account, and FP is considered a language that could still be transmitted naturally and could continue to enjoy some everyday communicative functions. The Rhône-Alpes region, influenced by the models applied to ‘big’ regional languages, is therefore in favour of teaching FP in school, whereas the local groups do not prioritize this for the reasons explained earlier.

The dynamics of the local groups are typically postvernacular and, as such, are not understood by policy makers; this misunderstanding has an impact on the role of writing, and hence the choice of orthographic forms

4 On Writing These Languages

4.1 *The Written Form of Rama*

4.1.1 *Creating an Orthography for Rama* Rama is an oral language documented by the linguist Colette Grinevald (then Craig) during the first phase of the RLP in the late 1980s. At that time, the issue of creating an orthography was not considered in the context of the standardization of the Rama language, but rather as a technical process that would enable Craig to describe and transcribe the language. There were no written texts in Rama then, except for a few lexicons or linguistic sketches written at the turn of the twentieth century by a few researchers, none of them with linguistic training (Lehman 1920; Conzemius 1927). The Rama people had never had access to the first writings, and when Craig showed Lehman’s text to the few Rama who were literate, it was agreed by all that the orthographic choices he had made were too complicated. It should be noted that if the Rama could not be literate in Rama because of the absence of a literacy tradition in Rama, the fact of the matter is that in 1986 most were in fact completely illiterate. Indeed, the kind of English-based Creole that is their language of first socialization (a variant of the MCC) was not a written language either, and the Rama people who benefited from an education – which was in the official language, Spanish – were very few. From

the Sandinista revolution onwards, Rama children were schooled in Spanish, a language they master only partially since their teachers are not fluent in it themselves, and people over 40 were, and still are, more or less literate.

The task of creating an orthography for Rama was thus initiated by a professional field linguist working with three main informants, only one of whom was literate. Craig followed the tradition she had established for transcribing the Mayan languages of Guatemala (cf. Grinevald 2002). The choice made was that of ‘practical alphabets’ – namely, alphabets that can be produced easily on the keyboards of Spanish typewriters, as opposed to transcriptions produced in the International Phonetic Alphabet (hereafter, IPA), which uses symbols and complex diacritics not found on a typewriter.

The graphic choice for writing Rama – one such ‘practical alphabet’ used to transcribe the language at a phonological rather than phonetic level – was also coordinated with the graphic choices made for the other languages of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua by a group who called themselves ‘Linguists for Nicaragua’ (hereafter, LFN) that had been working together since the early 1980s. Of those languages, only the dominant indigenous Misquito/Miskitu⁵ language has enjoyed a literacy tradition, established by Moravian missionaries in the nineteenth century. Today, a significant literature in Miskitu is available, as well as material in the other smaller languages, such as the various Sumu languages, Mayangna, and Ulwa. It is clear that by standardizing the orthographic principles used for all the indigenous languages of the region, the linguists helped provide a new social status (that of ‘true’ language) to the smaller ones, by proving that they too could be written and read in the same way that Miskitu was.

The creation of an orthography for Rama has not caused any problems within or outside the community. ‘How it was written’ did not matter; what mattered was the fact that the language could be written and be made visible through writing. Comments were sometimes made, however, about the lexical or phonological choices made, with an illiterate speaker judging them to be ‘korek’ or ‘no korek’.⁶ The issues raised in this context were more to do with the acceptability of the extensive variation found in Rama, rather a judgement on the way in which the orthography was being created.

Members of the Rama community do not generally write in Rama, because they do not need to. However, the fact that Rama is not a language in use also limits the potential uses of writing it down. For example, why does it need to be written down? And for whom?

The answer is that writing in Rama fulfils various functions within language revitalization.

4.1.2 Writings in Rama When writing is used to describe and document a language, the written form has a scientific function. It is a tool used by the RLP team, and it makes it possible to produce linguistic, pedagogical, and

ethnolinguistic materials such as, for example, the encyclopaedic dictionary available on the Turkulka website.⁷ Such a function does not require any adjustment to be made to the existing orthographic system, because users are linguists and the examples provided in Rama are taken from Craig's work rather than new data. The members of the Rama community do not consult this website.

However, the documents produced can sometimes be used to teach Rama – for example, by young teachers trying to pass on the knowledge they have acquired to the children of the community. Little books of ethnographic texts and a few pedagogical books are often the only linguistic sources easily available to teachers. But such resources are few in number, and teachers who are not trained to use them may find them difficult to use. As a consequence, literacy in Rama does not develop within the school context. However, for the Rama community, the fact that such books exist represents proof that Rama is a language like any other – because not only is it written, but it can also be taught in school. Here, the visibility of the language prevails over the use of the object produced: a textbook in Rama is needed, but its content and the teaching methods used are secondary matters.

4.1.3 The Functions of Written Rama In recent years, Rama has appeared on road signs, postcards, and promotional flyers for cultural events, all of which are mainly produced in order to promote the language for outsiders. What is written does not matter – indeed, as has been discussed, hardly any Rama can read and understand what is written. What matters is that outsiders can see that such material is written in Rama (Avanza and Laferté 2005; Pivot 2013; see Figure 14.1).

4.2 *Writing in Francoprovençal*

4.2.1 The Different Orthographic Systems Created for FP From the Middle Ages onwards, FP has been used to write literary texts, but this literature – less abundant and prestigious than that of Occitan – remains unknown to most of its speakers. Scientific analysis of this literary corpus has shown that the orthography of FP has never been standardized; ancient authors generally tried to reproduce local phonetic characteristics using via the orthographic rules of French. For the linguistic analysis of FP, the only orthography that has ever been used is the phonetic alphabet – initially the 'French' version used in the *Atlas linguistique de France* (Linguistic Atlas of France), but more recently the IPA. Both of these clearly remain impenetrable for non-linguists.

When FP started to be of interest to non-linguists, a proposal relating to orthography was proposed by the Savoy region, following the model of

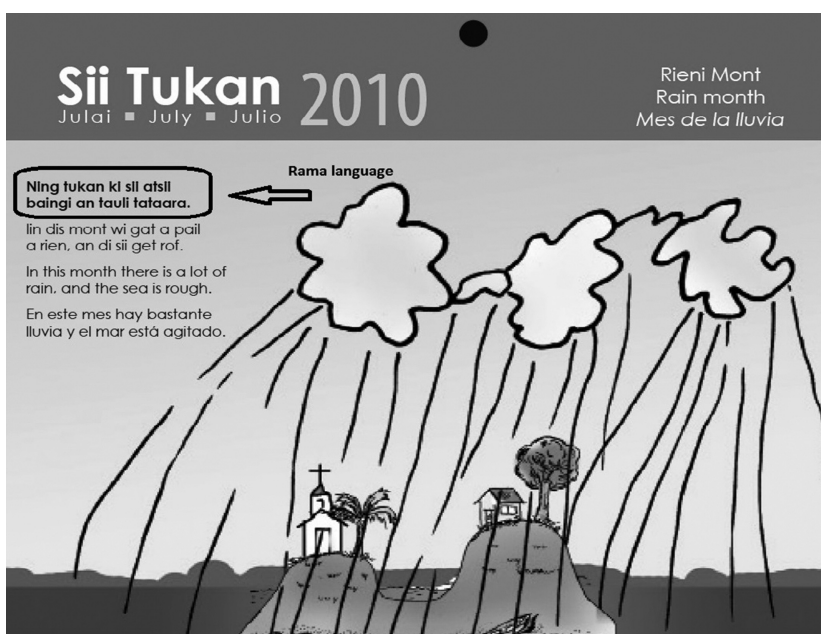


Figure 14.1 Rama features alongside Creole and Spanish in Bluefields' calendar (2010).

the orthographies developed in French-speaking Switzerland and in Italy. This so-called 'Conflans' orthography is phonetically based and aims to reproduce local pronunciation. However, writings in Conflans are not very accessible to people who are not speakers of the local language that has been transcribed. More recently, Stich recommended the creation of a unified, supradialectal orthography for FP (Stich 2003; cf. Martin 2005).

4.2.2 Issues Surrounding Writing in Francoprovençal The use of a written form of FP is quite rare today. Very few members of local focus groups can write in the language, and for most, even reading FP is difficult. The way in which local groups write in FP depends very much on why they are writing it. Private writings, such as notes on which to base stories or anecdotes to be told during meetings, are usually written in a member's idiosyncratic spelling system; indeed, the authors themselves sometimes struggle to decipher what they have written. Collective writing (such as song lyrics and plays) are generally more standardized, with the group agreeing on a few general principles but also allowing geographic variation to be reflected in the spelling used.

This means, of course, that one word may be written in many different ways, even within the same text. As these writings are principally a prompt for speech, such variation does not generally cause any problems of comprehension (see Figure 14.2).

This kind of orthography is also used in activities that aim to increase awareness of FP among the general public. The members of one focus group reported how, when they tell children that ‘patois has no orthography’, the children respond that they love that. In the French context, where the pressures exerted by the orthographic norm are very heavy and, consequently, orthographic insecurity very evident, writing in FP seems to represent a ‘liberation’ from the normative constraints that weigh on the French language. The FP texts that appear on the Internet often exhibit orthographic variation, a sign that the Internet is also considered as a space which is less subjected to the norms of a standard written form. However, standardization is deemed necessary for texts that are intended for publication – such as monographs, dictionaries, or ethnographic texts, whose main function is to make the language visible rather than understood (this is demonstrated by the fact that publications of this kind always include a translation in French). These texts are endowed with the prestige of ‘published writing’, in which orthographic variation does not seem permissible. Indeed, the very existence of an FP supradialectal orthography project contributes to the feeling of linguistic insecurity, as speakers generally feel that if FP were to have an orthography, that orthography should then be respected by all.

The establishment of a regional policy to promote the creation of a unified orthography could possibly encompass a certain degree of orthographic variation (although the principles that would then allow such an orthography to be used for teaching have yet to be established). The implementation of such a project, however, would inevitably meet with several hurdles in Switzerland and Italy, where orthographic models already exist, and particularly since the Rhône-Alpes region has taken the first steps towards creating an international FP charter that it would like both of these countries to sign. This charter would, among other things, call for a committee to be established which could monitor the ‘quality’ of the language, an institution that typifies the French vision of what a written language should be – namely, with an academy in charge of promulgating an established and accepted norm. Such a charter could therefore, paradoxically, weaken the position of local focus groups when searching for financial support for their publications. It is easy to imagine how tensions could arise if the manuscripts of these groups were deemed to contain too many traces of borrowing and obsolescent features which might be seen to fall beneath the standard normally expected of a ‘language’.⁸

Jusé: - Ouah ! Ouah ! Peuye po allo pli vite que la musique, é peu mon piti orté me fa mo, je peuye à peine supporto mu z'équieu !

Mile : - Oh ! A te passero avin quâ me reprenne !

Tatave arrive avec un fé d'herbes, il se prend les pieds et étale tout parterre

Mile : Ah ! Bonjou de bonjou é po possible d'être si maladré, te n'a foutu plein la quisine. Allez bougue de branquignol ramassa mé qué baza

Il s'active dans un joyeux désordre et repart coiffé de brindille en cahotant de ci de là

Mile : - Qu'ina bande de bras casso !!!

Le lever du Granpa

Mile : - Bonjou, vous z'alove bian, vous ove bian deurmî?

Granpa: - Woua, coume de coutime, tré mô ; jé mo de pretou ; fa po bon deveni vié, leu chambe veule pli me pourto.

M : - Oh vous z'o bian fa votre tims !

Gp: - Di, to qu'a nou métre dian la bouite yeure, a sara fini !

Mile (en aparté au public) - Inqueu loi, va po mo, mé la viéille quôta groube !

Le lever de la Granma

Fanny : - Bonjou la ma, te sio coume lou pa, to mâ deurmî,

Gm : - Oh woua ! Ton pa a viro toute la na, iqueu ayé penible, é pé u l'a carcavelo la méta d'o tims, coume té feu fore pre dormi ?

Mile (en aparté au public) - T'o qu'a po te coucha, t'évitera bian de te levo, sala bétieu

Gm : - Di Fanny, te vo alto eu marché aujourd'a ?

F : - Woua, woua

Gm : - A feudra acheto 4 ou 5 poules, a n'ya que sian po jouénes !

Gp : - Lou chantâ eussé, u l'é vié, feudra n'adure in'eutre !

M : - Sé a feu changeo tout iqueu qué vié, n'ya queuque z'in que serian plu itié depé po mo de tims !

Le lever des enfants

Le Mile : - Bon a feudri beyeu levo lu matrus !

La Fanny : - Wouah ! y van être en retâ après !

Figure 14.2 The different ways of writing 'yes' by the Francoprovençal association of Anneyron.

5 Conclusions

The different positions taken by different actors with respect to the role of writing, and therefore to the selection of an orthographic form, can be explained by analysing the different meanings that those actors give to the concept of ‘revitalization’. For example, Huss (2008:12) claims that

revitalization is commonly understood as giving new life and vigor to a language which has been steadily decreasing in use. It can be seen as a reversal of an ongoing language shift (cf. Fishman 1991), or it can be regarded as ‘positive language shift’, denoting the process of reclaiming an endangered language by its speakers.

This process of revitalization, with the aim of recovering all the prior communicative functions of a language, is based on the linguistic ideologies that the ‘institutional actors’ – the élite or the decision makers – of both the Rama and the FP speech communities share. As they negotiate the recognition of the endangered language as a ‘true’ language, they assert its need to acquire the same functions and characteristics as the dominant languages.

Within this ideology, the written form is one of the elements that legitimizes a linguistic variety as a ‘true’ language, since writing fulfils the prestigious function of providing a literary and cultural basis for the élites. For these élites, therefore, it is important that the endangered language be written and that this is facilitated and supported via the development and transmission of a standardized orthography, cleansed of the variation typical of oral languages. The need for a standardized orthography is also seen as essential before an endangered language can be taught effectively – and of course many ‘big’ world languages are essentially taught via their written form. Moreover, standardized orthographies are seen by many contemporary Western societies as essential for the creation of a literature. Finally, a postvernacular language needs an orthography because of its function as a marker of identity for its speakers.

And yet another meaning of *revitalization* exists, one in which the linguistic practices and actions that aim to keep an endangered language alive do not aim at re-vernacularization and do not claim to re-establish a language’s prior communicative functions in the public and private spheres: this we term ‘postvernacularity’. In such a situation, the language has a mainly symbolic function, and the written form does not fulfil all the expected functions. The social project organized to promote such a language is based on other linguistic ideologies – namely identification and belonging. Writing becomes an identity marker (cf. Sackett, Hull, and Valdovinos, this volume), and it goes without saying that standardizing the orthography would in some cases deny the expression of such local identity. Writing a postvernacular language is not necessarily linked to its traditional practice, which remains the preserve of

those who keep it alive as an essentially oral language (and therefore not necessarily endowed with prestige). However, making such a variety ‘concrete’ via writing gives it a symbolic and valuable status as a ‘real’ language. Apart from the case of a few actors who find the existence of a standardized orthography useful to support their claims of distinct linguistic identity, creating such an orthography is not generally considered to be one of the main concerns of postvernacular linguistic situations. Indeed, what counts most for local actors is that the orthographic system used to write their language be as phonetically and lexically representative as possible of their local speech (as seen with FP in France) or be capable of endowing it with the status of a ‘true’ language (as seen with Rama in Nicaragua).

The issues that surround the creation of an orthography for an endangered language are often political. When they are associated with justifying the revitalization of such languages, they may even create situations of social discrimination, where those who master the ‘standard’ can create conditions for the legitimization or de-legitimization of the practices and action of other actors. Even when there is an apparent consensus about an orthographic system, the writing practices of ‘non-official’ local actors may be relegated to the margins of ‘legitimate’ practices. And even where the use of idiosyncratic orthographic systems may seem to be encouraged (‘Don’t worry about how you write, just write!’), writings produced by local actors may nonetheless be considered ‘unsuitable’ for literature and teaching, and it is often deemed necessary for them to be re-written in standardized orthography for them to be understood ‘by everyone’. In this way, under the guise of making such writings intelligible to a greater number of people, a gap is created between those who master the standardized orthographic system and those who do not. In the case of languages such as FP in France and Rama in Nicaragua, the great majority of speakers happen to belong to the latter category, and such a course of action could well have an impact on their actions in favour of the language and on their attitudes towards its transmission. It also has the potential to create power struggles in the context of teaching the language, as the fact that teaching is usually associated with (and based on) a standardized writing system can result in illiterate speakers and semi-speakers being de facto excluded – even if they are fully literate in their native language (the dominant language). Contemplating a type of teaching that would be based on orality would require the re-negotiation of dominant models and a re-definition of what a language is and what its functions are.

Notes

1. This expression is used by members of local groups working to promote Francoprovençal to explain their actions on behalf of the language.

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2. Words uttered by the members of activist associations when they talk about their context in relation to FP language practice.
3. MCC is an English-based Creole spoken by the majority Creole population in the southern region of the Atlantic coast (Holm 1978).
4. Words taken from interviews with members of the community during fieldwork conducted by Pivot in 2010.
5. Ideological choice of using the grapheme <k> for the phoneme /k/ rather than <c> or <qu>, which were considered too close to Spanish or to English orthography (cf. Hull, this volume), from which the indigenous communities of Latin America wanted to distance themselves in the 1980s.
6. MCC for 'correct' and 'incorrect'
7. <http://www.turkulka.net/diccionario/> (last accessed 2 July 2015)
8. The writings of local groups show a loss of some traits considered characteristic of FP, such as paroxytonic stressing (which distinguishes FP from Oïl languages) or the double treatment of the Latin A (which distinguishes FP from Occitan).