



INDIANA UNIVERSITY
BLOOMINGTON

PERCEPTIONS OF GERMANIC REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN FRANCE

Contrasting Alsatian and French Flemish

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Outline of presentation

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Introduction

- 16 regional languages of Metropolitan France (Cerquiglini 1999)
- Modern French emerged when Francien was standardized and codified as the language of France, supplanting other regional varieties and undermining their status.
- Today, while French language policy is biased against all regional languages, institutional support and revitalization efforts tend to favor those that are clearly distinct from French (e.g. Breton vs Gallo).



Figure 1. Regional languages according to the French Ministry of National Education.

Language attitudes

- Language attitudes are “evaluative reactions to language” (Dragojevic et al. 2021).
- Attitudes toward minority languages greatly affect revitalization efforts and language maintenance (Bradley 2002).
- The matched guised technique pioneered in Lambert et al. (1960) led to the development of “indirect” methodologies in language attitudes studies, which gather data on speakers’ attitudes in a more subtle way than asking them outright.

Linguistic distance

- 3 main ways of measuring distance between languages (Feleke et al. 2020):
 - Structure-based: Phonetic, lexical, syntactic similarity
 - Intelligibility-based: Inherent and acquired intelligibility
 - Perception-based: Based on perceptions of speakers
- In a matched guise study, Welsh-accented English was rated more negatively than both Received Pronunciation and Welsh language guises, suggesting that “in-between” varieties may invoke negative attitudes (Price et al. 1983 in Hoare 2001)
- Previous studies have investigated the intersection of perceived distance and intelligibility (Beijering et al. 2008) or intelligibility and language attitudes (Schüppert et al. 2015), but not the correlation between perceived distance and attitudes

Research questions

As perceived distance from French increases, do French speakers' attitudes toward regional languages become more positive?

Does perceived distance from French affect French speakers' attitudes toward Alsatian and French Flemish?

Methodology

- Indirect approach (Garrett 2010)
- Recordings sourced from Boula de Mareüil et al.'s (2017) speaking atlas of the regional languages of France (<https://atlas.limsi.fr/>)
- Recordings of 12 regional language speakers (all females middle aged and older)

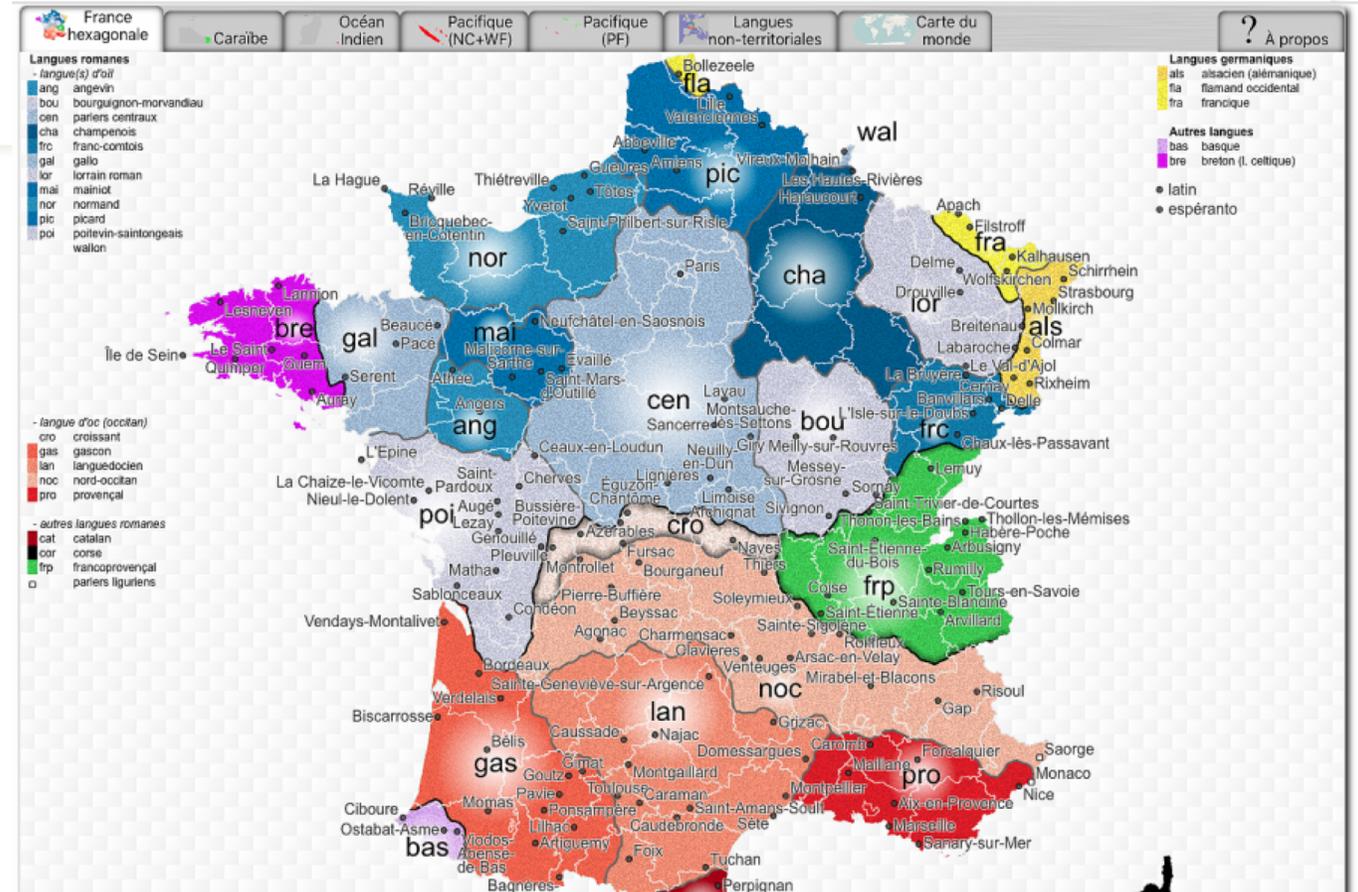


Figure 2. Atlas sonore des langues régionales de France.

Methodology (cont.)

12 regional languages (following Cerquiglini 1999; further specified with Bec 1970's Oil language zones):

- Alsatian
- Basque
- Breton
- Catalan
- Corsican
- French Flemish
- Franco-Provençal
- Occitan (Languedocien)
- Picard (Bec's Frankish zone)
- Bourguignon-Morvandiau (Bec's Burgundian zone)
- Gallo (Bec's Armorican zone)
- Poitevin-Saintongeais (Bec's Poitevin-Saintongeais zone)

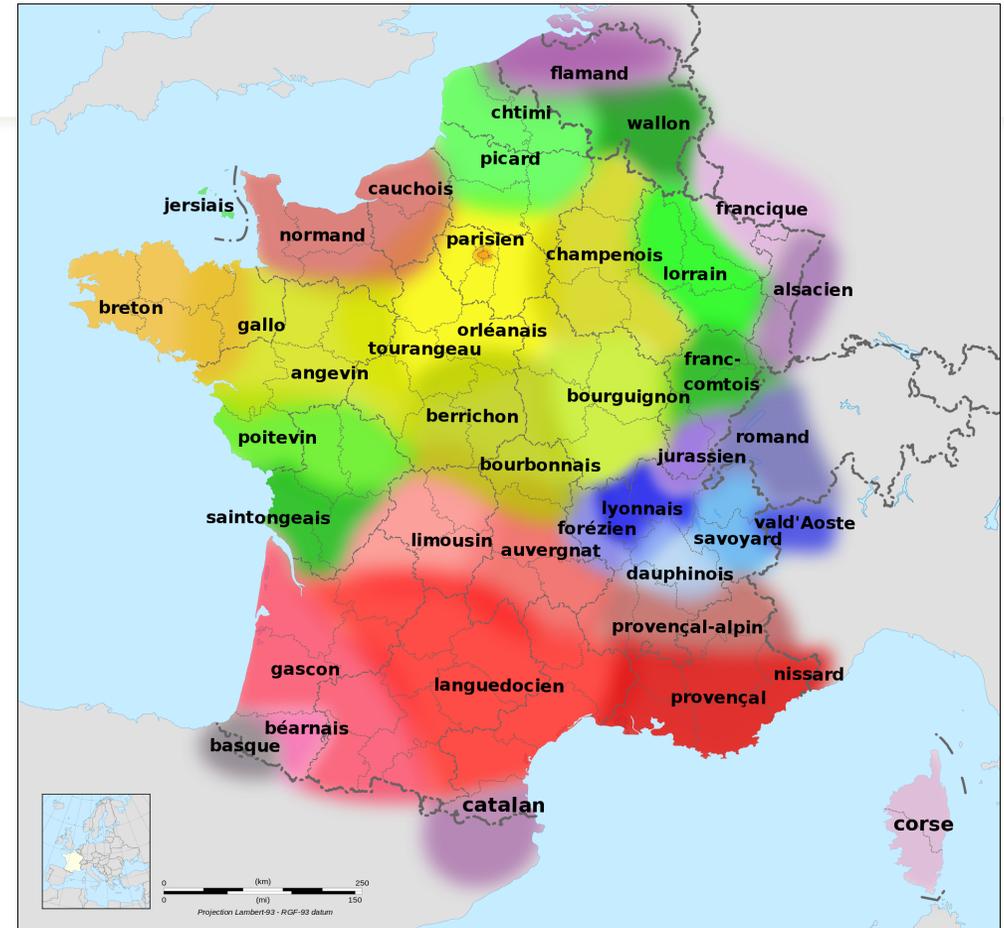


Figure 3. Langues historiques de France.

Methodology (cont.)

LANGUAGE DISTANCE

- 100 French speakers
 - 57% male
 - Between 18-47, avg. 26
 - 81% some university or above
- Rank recordings according to perceived distance from French (following Beijering et al. 2008)
- Provide 2 adjectives to describe each of 5 random recordings

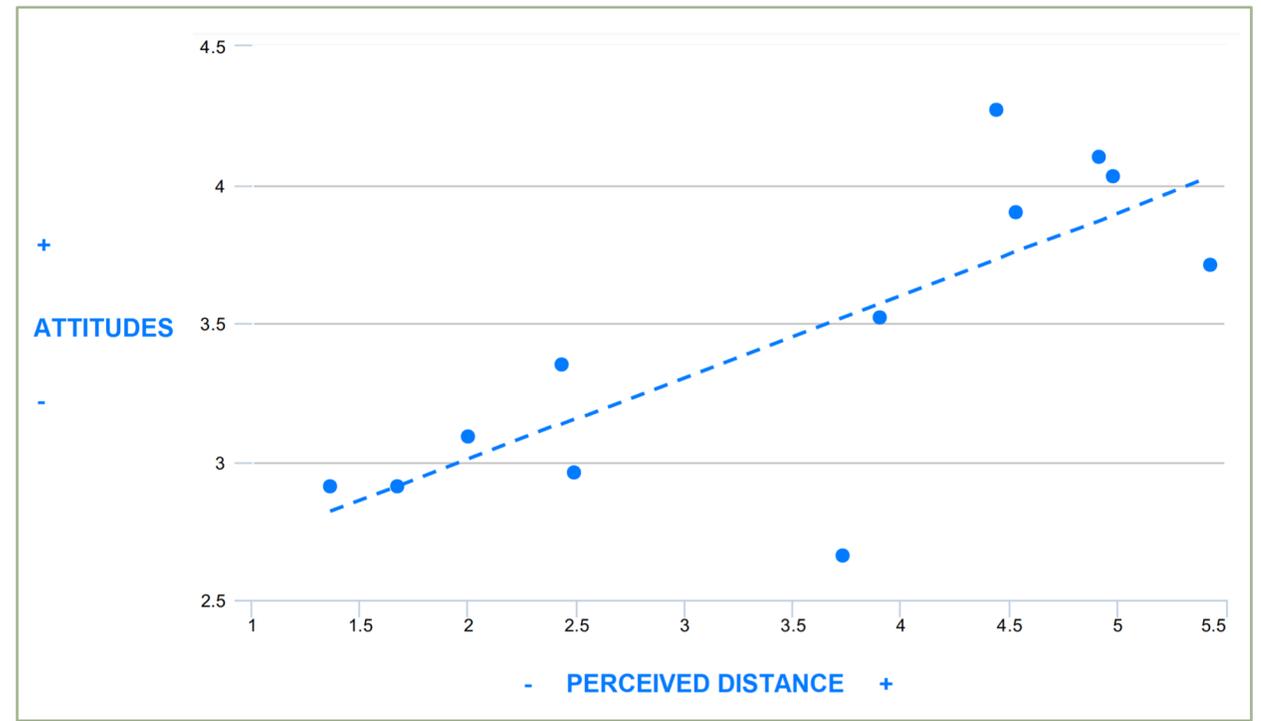
LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

- 100 different French speakers
 - 57% male
 - Between 18-61, avg. 32
 - 89% some university or above
- Rate 6 randomized recordings on semantic differential scales
- Optional qualitative questions about regional languages in France

laid	<input type="radio"/>	beau
incorrect	<input type="radio"/>	correct
désagréable	<input type="radio"/>	agréable
inélégant	<input type="radio"/>	élégant
étrange	<input type="radio"/>	normal
familier	<input type="radio"/>	soutenu

Results: significance

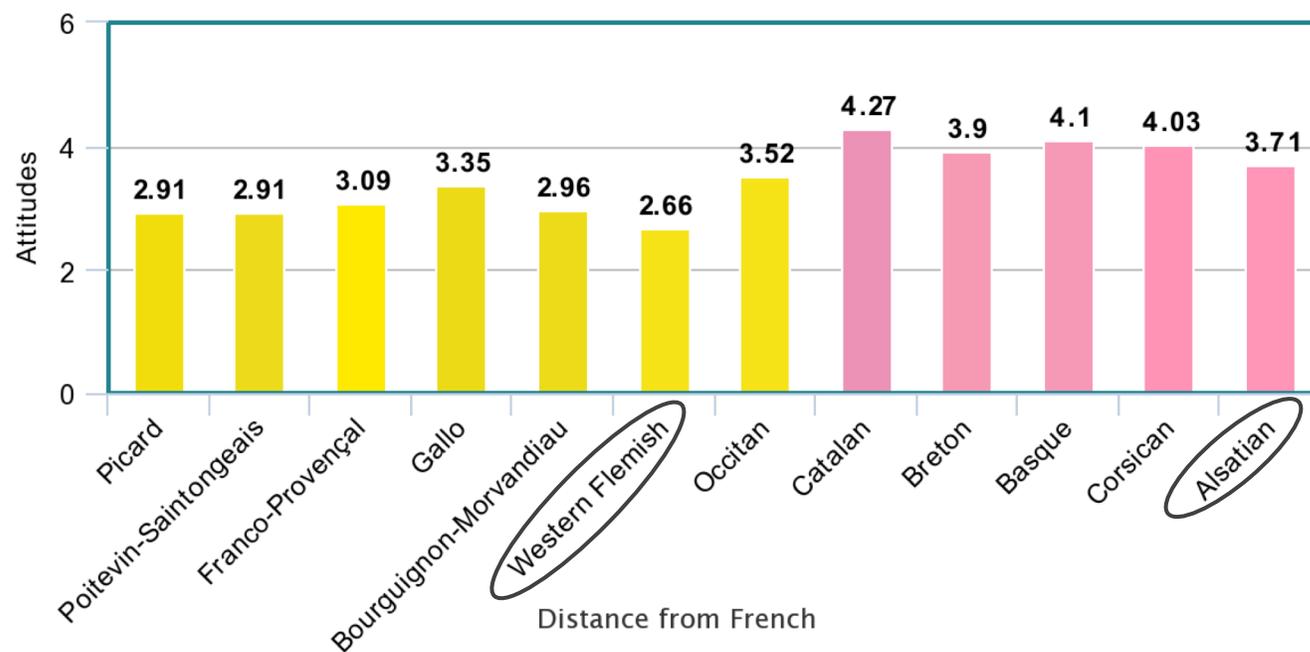
- Our hypothesis was supported
- Perceived distance from French significantly affects speaker attitudes ($p < .01$)
- Attitudes and perceived distance are strongly positively correlated, $r(10) = .77, p = .003$



Results: French-like vs non-French-like

- French's fellow Gallo-Romance languages received significantly lower scores on both the distance and attitudes dimensions than did the non-Gallo-Romance languages, including Alsatian.
- Outlier: French Flemish

Attitudes toward regional languages by perceived distance from French



Germanic languages

- France has two regional Germanic languages: Alsatian (900,000 speakers) and French Flemish (20,000 speakers).
- Both interact with French and an external norm (Dutch or German).
- While Alsatian has been permitted in local schools since 1975, French Flemish will not be permitted until the 2022-23 school year.



Figure 1. Regional languages according to the French Ministry of National Education.



A word cloud for Alsatian. The most prominent words are 'étranger' (yellow), 'incompréhensible' (blue), 'allemand' (green), and 'germanique' (dark green). Other words include 'familier', 'dur', 'saccadé', 'attendrissant', 'clair', 'européen', 'agressif', 'brut', 'posée', 'nordique', 'guttural', 'inélegant', 'voix', 'sérieux', 'lisant', 'langue', 'différente', 'intonation', 'calme', 'amicale', 'fort', 'mélangé', 'disgracieux', 'compréhensible', 'compliqué', 'calme', 'informatif', 'scandinave', 'étrange', 'scolaire', 'pas français', 'distinct', 'intéressant', and 'intense'.

ALSATIAN



A word cloud for French Flemish. The most prominent words are 'incompréhensible' (blue), 'germanique' (dark blue), 'étrange' (blue), and 'bizarre' (yellow). Other words include 'vieux', 'lent', 'mort', 'effrayant', 'ancien', 'maladroit', 'laborieux', 'créole', 'mélangé', 'inconnu', 'voix claire', 'exigeant', 'français', 'francophone', 'haché', 'rond', 'lourd', 'affirme', 'peu clair', 'complexe', 'dur', 'archaïque', 'germanophone', 'nordique', 'difficile', 'rural', 'allemand', 'distinct', 'hésitante', 'guttural', 'froid', 'anglo-saxon', 'non familier', 'nasillard', 'lingual', 'saccadé', 'confus', and 'étonnant'.

FRENCH FLEMISH

The “uncanny valley” effect

- Uncanny valley: the relationship between a person’s emotional response to an object and its perceived resemblance to a human being
- Developed by a researcher in robotics (Mori 2012), but later applied to animation, virtual reality, game design and general popular culture

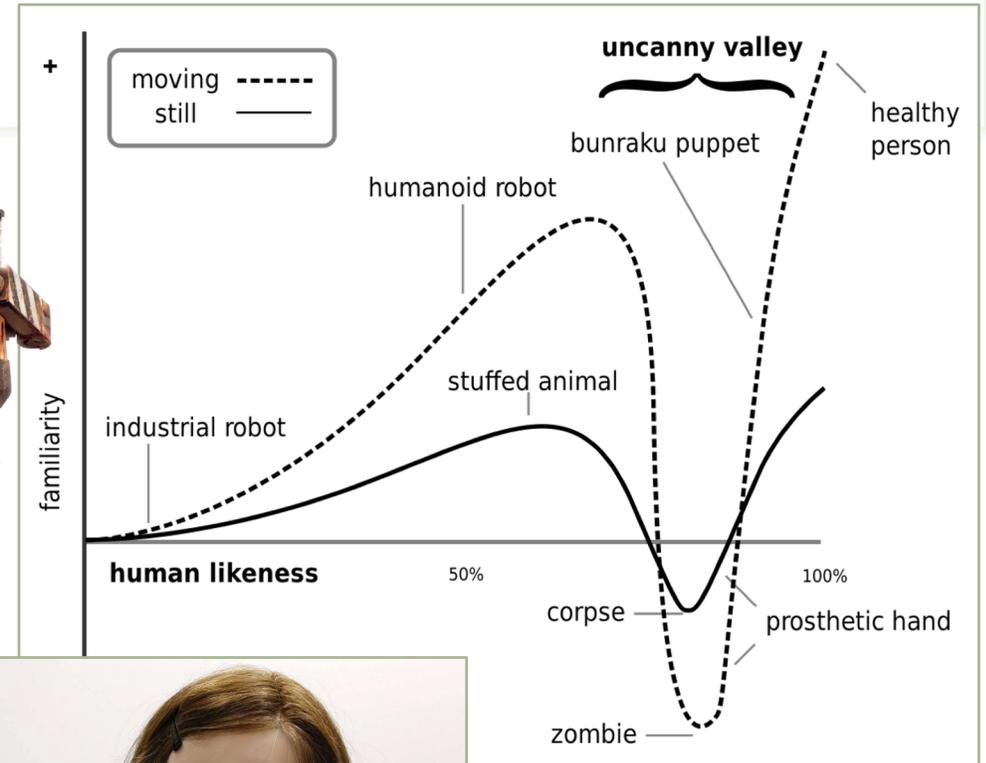


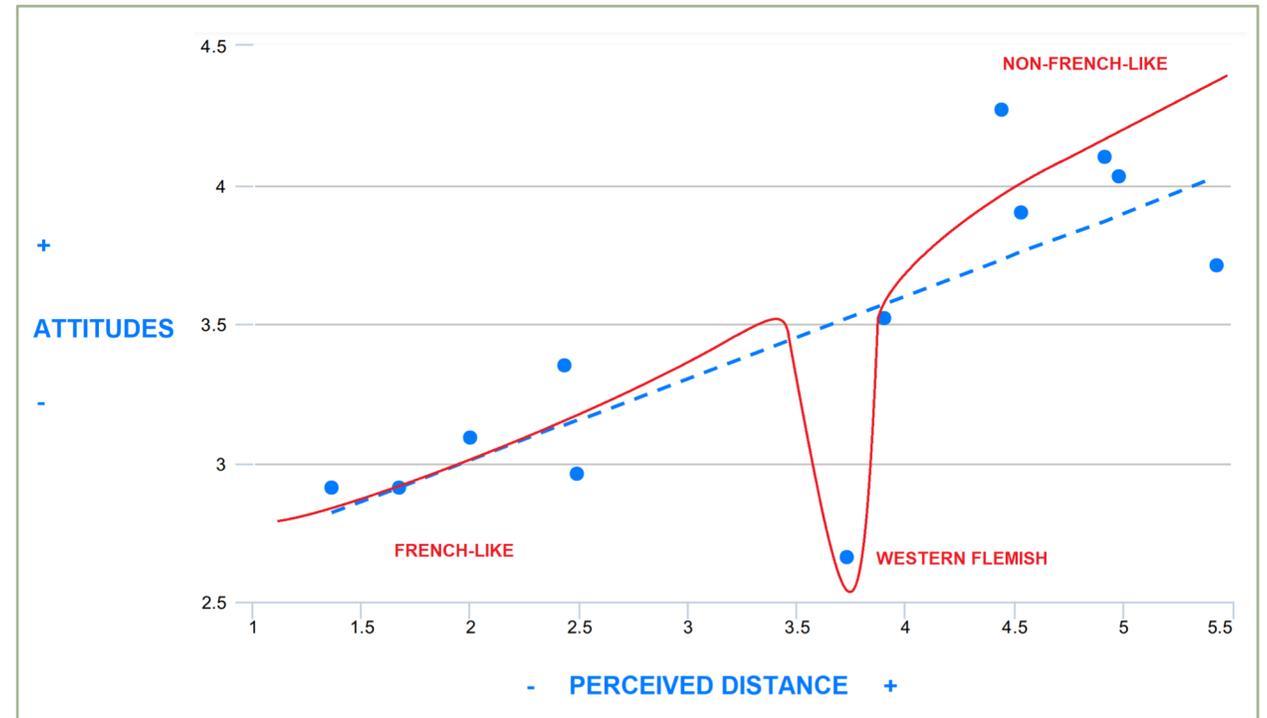
Figure 4. The uncanny valley effect.

Figure 5. Object in the uncanny valley.

Figure 6. Wall-E.

The “uncanny valley” effect (cont.)

- Could French Flemish lie in a sort of uncanny valley between French-like and non-French-like languages, shedding light on participants’ negative attitudes?
- Possible explanations:
 - Phonology/prosody of French Flemish
 - Lack of certain “Germanic-sounding” phonemes such as the velar fricatives [x, ɣ]
 - Age of speaker



Conclusion

- As perceived distance from French increases, French speakers' attitudes toward regional languages become more positive
- Alsatian (perceived as distant from French) receives more positive attitudes scores than French Flemish (perceived as similar to French)
- This study lays the groundwork for future studies combining language attitudes and perceived linguistic distance, which could have implications for regional language revitalization



Figure 7. Manifestation pour le flamand occidental.

Sources

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Images

- Figure 1. Regional languages according to the French Ministry of National Education. Adapted from “Les langues régionales en France” by Éducation nationale, 2012. <https://www.education.gouv.fr/>
- Figure 2. Atlas sonore des langues régionales de France. Adapted from “Atlas sonore des langues régionales de France” by Boula de Mareüil et al., 2017. <https://atlas.limsi.fr/>
- Figure 3. Langues historiques de France. Adapted from “Carte linguistique de la France” by Xavier Nègre, 2010, Lexilogos. https://www.lexilogos.com/france_carte_dialectes.htm
- Figure 4. The uncanny valley effect. Adapted from “Mori Uncanny Valley” by Smurrayinchester, 2007, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Uncanny_valley#/media/File:Mori_Uncanny_Valley.svg
- Figure 5. Object in the uncanny valley. Adapted from “The uncanny valley of food” by Jeff Nobbs, 2021. <https://www.jeffnobbs.com/posts/uncanny-valley-of-food>
- Figure 6. Wall-E. <https://img1.pnghut.com/0/8/21/FHcK9d7b13/pixar-machine-walle-technology-eve.jpg>
- Figure 7. Manifestation pour le flamand occidental. Adapted from “Le flamand de nouveau enseigné à partir de septembre, ses défenseurs saluent des échanges ‘constructifs’” by Gaël Autier, 2021, Flandre Presse. <https://flandrepresse.fr/actualites/le-flamand-de-nouveau-enseigne-a-partir-de-septembre-ses-defenseurs-saluent-des-echanges-constructifs/>