

**Oliver Currie**Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana  
Slovenia

oliver.currie@ff.uni-lj.si

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## **“PRÉSENTER AUX LECTEURS FRANÇAIS LA LITTÉRATURE ORALE TELLE QU’ELLE SORTAIT DE LA BOUCHE DES PAYSANS”: FOLKLORE COLLECTION AND THE STATUS OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN 19TH CENTURY FRANCE**

### **1 NATION-BUILDING AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FRANCE**

The concept of the French Republic as “one and indivisible” (“*La France est une République indivisible*”), enshrined in the first clause of the current French constitution (Conseil constitutionnel, *Constitution du 4 octobre 1958*) and originating from the revolutionary constitution of 1791 (Conseil constitutionnel, *Constitution de 1791*; Gründler, 2007: 445), is understood as embodying the linguistic just as much as the official legal and political identity of France: only one language, French, is recognised as the national language of the French nation, which in turn is considered to represent a unitary people.<sup>1</sup> The French Constitutional Court cited this principle of unity and indivisibility in determining in a 1999 decision that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which seeks to protect the languages used by indigenous national minorities in EU member states including France, was contrary to the French constitution and therefore could not be ratified (Gründler, 2007). While the one-language-one nation-identity of the modern French nation state is today a deeply entrenched reality, it is a relatively recent phenomenon and reflects to a large extent the result of nation-building processes – ideological, political, economic and cultural – in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the Revolution to World War I.

Linguistic uniformity, whereby all citizens of the new French Republic would understand and speak French, was a key means for achieving the French revolutionaries’ goal of national political unity and equality between the Republic’s citizens, yet at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century France was characterised by linguistic diversity, with only a minority of the population able to speak French fluently and the majority speaking other, regional languages and dialects as their mother (and often only) tongue (McCain,

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2018: 1-3).<sup>2</sup> Abbé Grégoire's report on his linguistic survey of France carried out between 1790 and 1794, revealingly and ominously entitled "*Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française*", characterises France as a babel where no less than 30 different *patois* are spoken (Grégoire and Convention nationale, [1794]: 4). Grégoire states that French is spoken exclusively in only 15 (out of 83) *départements* and "purely" by only three million people, while six million in the countryside have no knowledge of French and further six million do not know enough French to hold a proper conversation in the language. As Lodge (1993: 199) has observed, Grégoire's figures are incomplete and may have also been exaggerated for effect. Out of an estimated French population of 26 million at the time, Grégoire accounts for only 15 million (58%), leaving what Lodge (1993: 199) surmises to be some 11 million people (42%) with an intermediate knowledge of French, but for whom it was still a second language.

On the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, French was the politically and socially dominant language but at the same time an alien language for the majority rural population or peasantry. The 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Weber (1976: 485-496), represented a key turning point in the fortunes of the regional languages and the peasant culture with which they were to a large extent associated. The knowledge and use of French spread throughout France at a much faster pace and to a greater extent than in previous centuries, aided not only by the active state promotion of French in official administration, military service and above all through the introduction of compulsory schooling in French from 1882, but also by the economic development of the French regions, which led to increasing urbanization and migration from the countryside to towns and cities. The closer integration of the French regions into a national economy centred on Paris was further enhanced by the construction of national road and railway networks. As a result of such far-reaching economic and social change, the previously largely self-contained world of the French peasant, where the use of regional languages and dialects and local traditional cultural practices had prevailed, was increasingly being subsumed into a French-speaking national culture and identity. It should nevertheless be stressed that despite a lack of official support and despite at times official hostility, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also a period of growth and to an extent cultural renewal for regional languages. They too participated in the general expansion of publishing and the press; the number of books published for example in Occitan (Martel, 2001) and Breton (Le Berre, 1994; Le Dù and Le Berre,

2 The term "regional languages" is here used in a broad sense to refer both to:

- the indigenous non-French languages of France and their dialects – Alsatian in Alsace, Basque in the French Basque Country, Breton in Lower Brittany, Catalan in Roussillon, Corsican on the island of Corsica, Flemish in French Flanders, Franco-Provençal in east-central France, Occitan (in several main dialects: Auvergnat, Alpo-Vivarine, Gascon, Languedocien, Limousin and Provençal) throughout most of the south of France;
- and to the *langues d'oïl*, the Gallo-romance dialect continuum from which modern standard French itself originates, but which also includes other varieties significantly different from and not necessarily mutually intelligible with standard French such as Gallo in Upper Brittany, Normand in Normandy, Picard in Picardy and Lorrain in Lorraine.

Regional languages and dialects were commonly termed *patois* in contemporary usage. See Cerquiglini (2003) for a presentation of the different languages of France.

1997) increased markedly. There was also a major literary revival in Occitan – the Félibrige (Martel, 2010); Occitan had indeed, like Catalan, itself been an official language and enjoyed considerable prestige as a literary language in the Middle Ages (Lafont and Anatole, 1970: 35-45, 125-135). At the end of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, notwithstanding the inexorable spread of French, Weber (1976: 73) estimated using the evidence of language surveys and testimony from the time that French was still not the mother tongue of most French citizens even as late as World War I.

## 2 FOLKLORE COLLECTION, THE NATION STATE AND NATIONAL MINORITIES

Folklore collection offers a particularly interesting perspective on the status of regional languages in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, at a crucial time both for the formation of the national cultural identity of the modern French nation and the development of folklore as an international discipline. The burgeoning interest in folklore in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – alongside the related disciplines of anthropology and ethnography – was in part driven by a belief that folklore preserved aspects of a universal human culture. Besides collecting folklore to save this precious common human heritage from the oblivion threatened by social and economic progress, the systematic comparison of the folklore of disparate cultures could, it was believed, provide insights into the origins of human culture. However, folklore collection could at the same time also serve national and nationalist ends. The collection of folklore was often organised and sponsored at a national level, in particular in France. The French Minister of Public Instruction Hippolyte Fortoul, for example, established in 1852 a commission to coordinate the collection of folk poetry and folksongs (Berthou-Bécam and Bécam, 2010: 15-53) and the Ministry of Public Instruction also funded missions to collect folktales, such as those by the Breton collector François-Marie Luzel (Morvan, 1999: 196-197, 208-209). Further, since folklore preserved what were believed to be ancient popular traditions handed down the generations and associated with the territory of the nation state, folklore itself could be used as a defining feature of national identity. Folklore collections thus represented a national cultural treasure, whether expressed in a hegemonic national language such as French or in the languages of national minorities, and the wealth and diversity of national folklore collections was compared, favourably or unfavourably, with those of rival nations (Sébillot, 1884: v; X, 1885: 179). However, in the case of multilingual nation states like France, the flip side of a rich and diverse folklore collection was that the collection of folklore of national minorities, especially in their native languages, could be used to underline their cultural distinctiveness and further regionalist or separatist ends (Ó Giolláin, 2000: 63-93; Hopkin, 2019).

While the relationship between nation-building, nationalism and folklore has in general been widely researched (Thiesse, 1999: 161-173; Ó Giolláin, 2000: 63-93; Mélonio,

2001: 254-261; Hopkin and Baycroft, 2012), the linguistic dimension of this question, in particular the language of publication of the folklore of minoritised languages and cultures in multilingual nation states less so. This article explores two paradoxes in relation to the 19<sup>th</sup> century collection and publication of the folklore of regional or minoritised languages in France. The first paradox is that while regional languages and dialects generally had a subordinate sociolinguistic status compared to standard French, in the domain of folklore the roles were reversed. Peasant cultures speaking regional languages and dialects were considered to be the main repository of folklore, as they were thought to have preserved oral and folk traditions better than the French-speaking regions and communities of France. The second paradox is that although regional languages and cultures were the source of much of the folklore collected in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, the folklore, especially the folktales as opposed to the folksongs, of regional languages was often, but not always, published first or only in translation in French. In such cases the folklore was not fully, if at all, recognised specifically as the cultural heritage of the regional languages, but came to be appropriated, whether intentionally or not, as French national and French language cultural heritage. However, there were also notable cases where folklore was published in regional languages, often but not exclusively in bilingual editions, whether on the grounds of authenticity, to preserve the folklore in the original, or out of a conscious decision to cultivate regional languages.

### **3 THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN FRENCH FOLKLORE COLLECTION**

The centrality of peasant culture to 19<sup>th</sup> century folklore collection is reflected in contemporary definitions of the discipline of folklore itself. Folklore was perceived as the traditional culture (or “lore”) not of the people (or “folk”) in general, but specifically of the least educated strata of society, the working or peasant classes in Europe or “savages” in less developed nations, both of whom, by virtue of “having shared least in progress” (in the English folklorist’s Andrew Lang’s words), were believed to have best preserved ancient “legends, beliefs and customs”:

“There is a form of study, Folklore, which collects and compares the similar but immaterial relics of old races, the surviving superstitions and stories, the ideas, which are in our time but not of it. Properly speaking, folklore is only concerned with the legends, customs, beliefs, of the Folk, of the people, of the classes which have least been altered by education, which have shared least in progress. [...] The student of folklore is thus led to examine the usages, myths, and ideas of savages, which are still retained, in rude enough shape by the European peasantry.” (Lang, 1884: 11)

In the French folklore tradition, the object of folklore study was similarly considered to be the working classes (*classes populaires*) or specifically the peasantry (*paysans*). The folklorist Paul Sébillot, for example, defined the discipline of folklore as the study of the “*traditions, des croyances et des coutumes des classes populaires ou des nations peu avancées en évolution*” (Sébillot, 1886: 293), while the anonymous reviewer of Sébillot’s 1884 anthology of French folktales *Contes des provinces de France* (X, 1885: 179) refers to folklore as “*la littérature orale telle qu’elle sortait de la bouche des paysans*” – “oral literature just as it is told by **peasants**” (my emphasis).

The French peasantry or *classes populaires* at the time spoke largely regional languages or dialects, and the importance of regional languages to the national folklore collection effort, as well as the fact that their heritage was considered to belong to the French nation, is explicitly acknowledged in the Fortoul Committee’s guidelines for the collection of folksongs, which stressed the necessity of collecting material in all the languages spoken in France, listing the various languages in question (Ampère, 1853: 3). In the case of folktale collection, the important contribution of the “peripheral regions” of France (“*les pays éloignés du centre*”) to the national collection effort is highlighted in the review which appeared in 1885 of Paul Sébillot’s 1884 anthology of French folktales (Sébillot, 1884). The anonymous reviewer (X, 1885: 179) laments the fact that France had only recently begun to collect and “make available to French readers oral literature just as it is told by peasants” (“*présenter aux lecteurs la littérature orale telle qu’elle sortait de la bouche des paysans*”), much later than other nations, but that thanks to a series of recent collections – all from the peripheral regions of France – it had made up the gap in the space of ten years. To illustrate the point, the reviewer lists the names of the collectors and the number of tales in their collections. From traditionally non-French speaking regions, the reviewer mentions François-Marie Luzel’s collection from Breton-speaking Lower Brittany (Luzel, 1881), Jean-François Cerquand’s (Cerquand, 1875-1882) and Wentworth Webster’s (Webster, 1877) collections from the Basque country, Frédéric Ortoli’s from Corsica (Ortoli, 1883) and Jean-François Bladé’s from Gascony. The other collections listed are all from regions where langues d’oïl significantly different from standard French were spoken: Sébillot’s collection from Gallo-speaking Upper Brittany, Fleury’s from Normandy, Cosquin’s from Lorraine and Carnoy’s from Picardy (Carnoy, 1883). The reviewer, like Sébillot himself (Sébillot, 1884: v), refers to the folktale collections as a French national treasure (“*son trésor légendaire*”), which the French nation can compare with pride to that of neighbouring countries. However, the reviewer does not once mention France’s linguistic diversity and the fact that the regions where most folktales were collected traditionally spoke languages other than French. Moreover, the reviewer does not mention the language of collection and publication: that is what language the tales were traditionally narrated in, what language they were collected and published in and whether, from what languages and how the folktales may have been translated.

#### 4 THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLICATION OF THE FOLKLORE OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES

Sébillot's reviewer's comments highlight a second, wider paradox concerning the actual status of French regional languages in folktale collection and publication. Despite their central importance as a valuable repository of folklore, regional languages often did not benefit fully from being the focus of folklore collection activities, since in many cases their folktales were published first only in translation and only many years later, if at all, in the original. In France, the publication of folktales originating from regional languages and cultures only in French was a widespread phenomenon, in particular because major folklore publishers – Maisonneuve which issued the folklore book series *Les Littératures populaires de toutes les nations*, Ernest Leroux which issued the series *Collection de contes et chansons populaires*, and the specialist folklore journals *Méhusine* and *Revue des Traditions Populaires* – tended to publish folktales from the French regions only in French. Examples of such publications are:

- The Gascon folktales collected by Jean-François Bladé (Joan-Francés Bladèr in Gascon) published by Maisonneuve only in French (Bladé, 1886) and published 80 years later in Gascon (Bladèr, 2010 [1966], 1976, 1990). Bladé states that he transcribed the tales in the original Gascon and translated them “avec un parti pris de fidélité brutale” (Bladé, 1886: xxxv-xxxvi).
- The Breton folktales collected by François-Marie Luzel (Fañch an Uhel in Breton) in Lower Brittany published by Maisonneuve only in French (Luzel, 1881, 1887) and more than 50 years later in Breton (Luzel, 1939; An Uhel, 1984-1994). Luzel states that he collected and recorded his tales in Breton, then translated them literally into French (Luzel, 1879: viii-ix).
- The Corsican folktales collected by Frédéric Ortoli published by Maisonneuve only in French (Ortoli, 1883). Ortoli does not disclose his collection methodology, though recurring Corsican language elements (tale titles, words and expressions, short poems) suggest that they derive from Corsican language sources.
- The Basque folktales collected by Julien Vinson published only in French (Vinson, 1883). Vinson (1883: xiv) states that he translated his texts from Basque.
- The Ligurian folktales collected on the French and Italian coast between Menton and Genoa by James Bruyn Andrews published in French by Ernest Leroux (Andrews, 1892). Andrews (1892: i) states that he would also like to have published the original (Mentonasc and Ligurian) dialect texts at the same time but that “le travail aurait été long et pénible et, après tout, d'un intérêt très restreint”.

While it may seem logical for practical and commercial reasons to publish folktales in French in order to reach a much larger national or indeed international readership, publishing exclusively in French was by no means an automatic choice. We also find

numerous exceptions where folktales – and above all folksongs and poetry – were published in regional languages, usually by regional publishers and often in bilingual but also monolingual editions. Most strikingly, we find variation in the language of publication not only between individual regional languages but also within them, even for the same collector and within the same publication. While folktales were largely published only in French in most non-French speaking regions (as well as in the langue d'oïl regions), Provence stood out as exception where publication in the local language predominated. Here, the use of Provençal in folklore collection appears to have been part of the wider contemporary Félibrige cultural movement promoting Provençal (and Occitan) language and literature. Frédéric Mistral, whose folktales were initially published monolingually in Provençal in the Provençal language magazines *Armana Provençau* and *Aioli*, and Joseph Roumanille, whose folktales were published bilingually in Provençal and French (Roumanille, 1884), were both leading Provençal writers and members of the Félibrige.

There were also significant folktale collections in other regional languages. In the case of Basque, Jean-François Cerquand published a substantial bilingual collection in Basque and French (Cerquand, 1875-1882) with a regional publisher. For Breton, besides his French-only folktale collection with Maisonneuve, Luzel also published a partially bilingual collection with a Breton publisher (Luzel, 1870) as well as individual tales in Breton and French translation in the scholarly Celtic studies journal *Revue Celtique*. Luzel's Breton folksong collections were also issued in bilingual editions with Breton publishers (Luzel, 1868; Luzel and Le Braz, 1890). In addition, Amable-Emmanuel Troude and Gabriel Milin published a fully bilingual Breton and French folktale collection with a Breton publisher (Troude and Milin, 1870). In the case of Gascon, before his main French-only folktale collection with Maisonneuve, Bladé published a Gascon-only folktale collection (Bladé, 1867) and a bilingual collection (Bladé, 1874), both with other Paris-based publishers, as well as a short bilingual collection containing only three tales with a regional publisher (Bladé, 1877). In addition, Félix Arnaudin published a bilingual collection of tales from the Landes in the Grand-landais dialect of Gascon and French (Arnaudin, 1887).

The fact that there was a real choice of language is underlined by the contrasting fortunes of folktales and folksongs. The major folklore publishers in France – the Paris-based publishers Maisonneuve and Ernest Leroux and the journals *Mélu-sine* and *Revue des Traditions Populaires* – tended to publish folktales only in French, but folksongs bilingually in French and in regional languages. For example, Maisonneuve published Bladé's three volumes of Gascon folktales in French only (Bladé, 1886), but his three volume collection of Gascon folksongs bilingually in Gascon and French (Bladé, 1881-1882). Similarly, Maisonneuve published Ortoli's Corsican folktales only in French (Ortoli, 1883), but Ernest Leroux published his Corsican folksongs bilingually in Corsican and French (Ortoli, 1887). Vinson's Basque folklore collection published by Maisonneuve (Vinson, 1883) is a particularly striking case, since we find the variation within a single volume:

the folktales are published only in French, whereas the folksongs, proverbs and riddles are published bilingually in Basque and French. Folktales also sometimes contain short poems and rhymes within them, often at the beginning and end, and these were frequently retained in the original (e.g. in Breton, Gascon, Corsican) as well as being translated, while the body of the folktale was published only in French. The apparently consistent publishing of regional French folktales only in French, but folksongs and poetry in the original regional languages seems to be suggestive of an editorial policy, though this would need to be confirmed by further research.

## **5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLICATION OF FOLKLORE**

Folklore collection and publication was both an individual effort undertaken by independent collectors and at times centrally coordinated. The choice of language of publication was in turn the result of individual decisions by collectors and also, it seems, at times constrained by editorial policies. However, the widespread nature of the phenomenon of publishing the folktales of regional languages in translation only seems to suggest that these individual choices were influenced by a wider cultural context. The choice whether to publish folklore in French or regional languages was, of course, part of a wider sociolinguistic and cultural question whether to use or write in regional languages. The attraction of writing in a central as opposed to a minoritised language may seem obvious, indeed many writers who had regional languages as their mother tongue may have been educated only in French and identified more strongly, culturally and intellectually with it, to the point where they may not have even considered there to have been a language question. There was a crucial difference with folklore, however, since folklore was already expressed and culturally embedded in regional languages and dialects.

There seem to have been two major reasons for publishing folktales exclusively or primarily in translation in central languages. First, the folktale collections were intended for larger, national and international audiences – in other words, the published folktales were of the people (folk), but not for the people that created them. Second, the content of folktales, which was considered to a large extent to reflect a universal human heritage rather than the literary tradition and creation of specific cultures, was deemed to be more important than their linguistic form and the cultural context in which they were preserved and performed. This may explain at least in part the observed differences in the language of publication between folktales, on the one hand, and folksongs, on the other. Folksongs appear to have been perceived as more culturally specific and their linguistic form – linked as it was to their musical accompaniment, which was often published alongside the texts – also appears to have been perceived as more important and worthy of preservation. Folksongs (as well as proverbs and riddles) were also shorter, so the bilingual publication



of folksongs was easier from a practical and commercial perspective for publishers in contrast to folktales, where a key aim seems to have been to publish a large collection as possible for each culture, comprising a wide range of tale types and motifs, to contribute ultimately to a global inventory of universal tale types and motifs. The universal interest of folktales is reflected in the definitions of folklore quoted above, as well as in the introductions and notes in individual folktale collections, where the cross-cultural comparison and origin of folktales is often the subject of detailed discussion (Cosquin, 1886; Bladé, 1886; Luzel, 1887). However, the collection of folklore was also motivated in many cases by an interest and pride in local heritage and desire to conserve it; as Hopkin (2012: 379-388; 2019) has noted, for some collectors – for example Félix Arnaud, Achille Millien, Antonin Perbosc and Léon Pineau – folklore was part of a wider engagement in local and regional projects. Folktales were also published, though less frequently, for local readerships in regional languages as works of literature and for entertainment. This is particularly the case where periodicals existed in local languages, as for example most notably in Provence, though in general the number of periodicals in regional languages increased towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are also examples of book collections of folktales aimed at a local audience, such as Troude and Milin's bilingual Breton-French collection of Breton tales (Troude and Milin, 1870) and Joseph Roumanille's bilingual Provençal-French collection of tales from Provence (Roumanille, 1884).

Even where the intended audience was a wider national or international one and the motivation for publishing folktales was scholarly, there was still a potentially compelling argument for publishing the original tales in regional languages, at least bilingually. This was authenticity: if folklore was published only in translation, the authenticity of the texts and the collection methodology could be challenged. The authenticity of oral literature and the problem of publishing translations without originals were also a topical issue after the relatively recent Ossian literary scandal. James MacPherson had published some hundred years earlier English prose "translations" of what he claimed were ancient Scottish Gaelic epic poems attributed to a third-century poet Ossian, which he had collected orally in the Highlands of Scotland. Macpherson's "translations" were a literary sensation in Britain and beyond, but also a source of a major controversy, as the authenticity of his texts was questioned in large part because he had not been able to provide convincing original sources in Scottish Gaelic (Thomson, 1998). The Ossian scandal clearly influenced John-Francis Campbell's decision to publish in both Scottish Gaelic and English his substantial and influential collection of folktales from Gaelic Scotland; he explicitly stated "without printed Gaelic I feel sure that I should now be enjoying the blame of another MacPherson" (Campbell, 1860-1862: Vol. IV, 359). The Breton folklorist, François-Marie Luzel, was similarly embroiled in a controversy with his compatriot Hersart de la Villemarqué over the authenticity of the Breton folk ballads (*Barzaz Breiz*) which Villemarqué had published. Although Villemarqué published his Breton texts alongside the French translations, Luzel questioned the authenticity of the Breton

texts and their language (Luzel, 1872). Luzel took pains to stress the authenticity of the Breton folksongs and folktales which he collected and published in bilingual editions, emphasizing that he recorded and reproduced his Breton folksongs exactly as he heard them and also translated them as literally as possible (Luzel, 1868: ii-iii). Unlike Campbell, Luzel published most of his Breton folktales only in French, though he stressed that he had collected and recorded his tales in Breton, then translated them literally into French, keeping all his notebooks (Luzel, 1879: viii-ix), which ultimately provided the basis for the later Breton editions (An Uhel, 1984-1994). It seems that Luzel had wished to have a comprehensive bilingual edition of his tales in Breton and French, but was not able to find a publisher willing to undertake the task (Luzel and Morvan, 2007: 48).

Other practical barriers to publishing folklore in regional languages and dialects included a lack of well-established publishing industries, of written literary traditions or indeed standardized orthographies for certain of the regional languages or dialects. These were not insurmountable barriers, however. While for some collectors publishing texts in the original regional languages and dialects represented an unjustified expense and effort (Andrews, 1892: i), for others achieving authenticity necessitated publishing their collections or at least part of them in the original. Félix Arnaudin, for instance, published a bilingual collection of folktales from the Landes in the Grand-Landais dialect and French translation, using an orthography he had developed himself for the original Grand-Landais texts (Arnaudin, 1887). Émile Cosquin similarly used an improvised orthography to publish the folktale “*Peuil & Punce/Pou et Puce*” in Lorrain alongside the French translation (Cosquin, 1886: 202-207). Henry Carnoy, the collector of folktales from Picardy, also founded in 1890 the regional journal *La Revue du Nord de la France*, which published, alongside the majority French language content, stories, anecdotes, poems as well as some folktales in Picard and Walloon (Carnoy and Morvan, 2005: 393).

## 6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLICATION

While the massive collection and translation of folktales in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a crucial achievement in that it contributed to the preservation of much folklore which otherwise may have been completely lost and also facilitated the development of folklore as a discipline, contemporary collection practices had some significant limitations. Folklorists tended to focus on aspects of the content of folktales which they considered to be of greater interest, in part because of their perceived universal dimension – such as tale types and motifs – rather than on the original linguistic form of the tales and their more immediate social and cultural context, which were often not preserved. There was also a lack of transparency in the collection methodology itself. In many cases the fact that folktales had been translated was not disclosed, nor was it clear at what stage the texts

may have been translated in the collection process (before, during or after performance) or by whom (the informant, collector or third party), or indeed to what extent the texts may have been modified in the editing process.

The publication of folktales from regional languages only in translation also resulted in the appropriation, whether intentional or not, of the literary and cultural heritage of regional languages. Not only was a valuable part of the cultural and literary heritage of regional languages lost in such cases, but it became French national and French language cultural heritage as a result of being preserved only in French. Moreover, the fact that the tales had been translated and were part of the cultural heritage of the regional languages was often not even acknowledged, either in the original collections or in subsequent anthologies. For example, Paul Sébillot's anthology of French folktales *Contes des provinces de France* indicates which tales had been translated especially for the anthology, but tales which had previously been translated are not acknowledged as translations (for example the Breton, Corsican, Gascon tales). Sébillot's anthology showcases the wealth and diversity of French national folklore, to which regional languages had made a fundamental contribution, but does not acknowledge the full extent of the linguistic diversity of the French nation. National minorities are thus seen as constituent parts which add wealth and diversity to the cultural identity of the French nation, rather than as having an alternative, distinct cultural and linguistic identity in their own right; as Mélonio (2001: 255) put it, "les différences régionales ne sont légitimes qu'autant qu'elles rehaussent la beauté supérieure de l'Un".

There appears to have been only limited criticism at the time of the failure to publish folktales in the original in addition to the translations, in particular in contemporary reviews of folktale collections. A noteworthy exception is Stanislaw Prato's detailed review in Italian in the journal *Romania* of Ortoli's Corsican folktales, which criticised the lack of the original texts in Corsican on the grounds that no translation, no matter how literal, could capture the subtleties of the folk's thoughts and expression, and that the dialect in which the folklore was transmitted was itself a subject worthy of interest (Prato, 1884: 169). Later, however, the failure to publish folktales in the original languages became a matter of considerable controversy. In 1966, when the Gascon version of Bladè's Gascon folktales was published 80 years after they first appeared in French only in Maissonneuve's folklore series, Max Rouquette states emphatically in his introduction to the Gascon edition that the failure to publish the tales in the original Gascon (or Occitan) was nothing less than a scandal. It is worth repeating his words:

"L'edicion en gascon d'aquel premier libre dels Contes de Bladèr, aquò es, enfin, lo premier cop de sapa dins un escandal qu'es malaürosament l'escandal de la sola vertat. Escandal qu'un 'corpus' tan monumental, tant essencial, tan consubstancial a l'engèni dau pòble d'òc siá pas jamai estat publicat dins son escritura originala." (Bladèr, 2010 [1966]: 5)

“This edition in Gascon of the first volume of Bladé’s folktales is finally the first step in rectifying a scandal which unfortunately is a scandal of the truth alone. It is a scandal that a corpus which is so important, so monumental and represents the very essence and spirit of Occitan culture was never published in its original language.” (My translation)

The effect of publishing primarily in French the bulk of Bladé’s Gascon folktale collection, which also became the canonical Gascon collection by virtue of its publication in Maisonneuve’s folklore series, was that instead of being recognised as a monument of Occitan literature alongside the medieval lyric poetry of the Troubadours and the contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century works of Mistral and the Félibrige Occitan renaissance, Bladé’s tales effectively came to be appropriated as part of French national and French language folklore.

## 7 CONCLUSION

In the long 19<sup>th</sup> century following the French Revolution, the knowledge and use of French spread more pervasively throughout France at the expense of regional languages than at any time in the preceding centuries and a one-nation-one-language French-speaking ideology not only became established politically and constitutionally, but also took root as a key element of the cultural identity of the modern French nation. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was also the golden age of folklore collection and when folklore emerged as an international discipline. Since folklore was associated with antiquity and tradition as well as with the land and territory of the nations where it was preserved, it was considered to be an important part of their cultural heritage and became a significant component of the cultural nation-building process. Paradoxically, on the one hand the regional languages of France had a subordinate sociolinguistic status vis-à-vis French and the peasant cultures with which they were largely associated an inferior social status, yet on the other hand they had preserved a richer and more vibrant folklore heritage than the elite French-speaking culture, and this folklore heritage was, moreover, valuable to the elite national culture. A large proportion – possibly the majority – of the folklore collected and published in 19<sup>th</sup> century France in fact came from areas which traditionally spoke regional languages.

Studying the language of publication of folklore provides a particularly interesting – and underresearched – perspective on the sociolinguistic history of regional languages in 19<sup>th</sup> century France as well as on the wider cultural context of folklore collection. Folktale collections, in particular in the national oral and folk literature series published by Maisonneuve and Ernest Leroux as well as in the folklore journals *Méluſine* and *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, were often published first or only in French translation, while folksongs (as well as proverbs and sayings) were more frequently published bilingually in French and regional languages. The decision to publish the folktales of regional

languages and cultures primarily or exclusively in French translation reflects in part the hegemonic position of French – politically, socially and as the language of scholarship – but it also sheds light on the contemporary perception of folktales. The primary interest of folktales was perceived to be in their content, in particular tale types and motifs, while their linguistic form and immediate sociocultural context (for example their embeddedness in a regional language-speaking culture) seems to have been at best of secondary importance. The essence of the folktales could thus be published and preserved in translation without the original, and folktale publications were more often aimed in any case at a wider national or international rather than a local readership. The interest in the universal dimension of folktale types and motifs, which recurred across different cultures present and past, seems to have contributed to this focus on the content at the expense of the form of folktales and also impinged on the perception of the cultural “ownership” of folktales (Haase, 2019). Since folktale types and motifs could be seen to recur cross-culturally, folktales could be perceived primarily as a universal human cultural inheritance rather than as the literary heritage of specific cultures. Nevertheless, the publication of folktales in French only was by no means automatic. The fact that some folktale and above all folk-song collections were also published in the original regional languages, often bilingually together with French, shows that there was a genuine choice of language of publication. Moreover, the publication of folktales only in translation was controversial, first because the lack of original texts – as well as at times a lack of transparency concerning the collection and translation process – potentially undermined the authenticity of the published folklore, and second because it resulted in the loss of an important part of the culture of the regional languages and its effective appropriation as French national and French language cultural heritage. The language of publication of folklore was thus also nationalist issue, not only in the sense that folklore collection contributed to French nation-building, but also in that it reflected a tension between competing cultural nationalisms within a multinational and multilingual nation state: the hegemonic French and monolingual French-speaking nationalism of the nation state, on the one hand, and the multilingual and regional language-speaking nationalisms of the national minorities subsumed within the French nation state, on the other.

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## POVZETEK

### "PRÉSENTER AUX LECTEURS FRANÇAIS LA LITTÉRATURE ORALE TELLE QU'ELLE SORTAIT DE LA BOUCHE DES PAYSANS": ZBIranJE SLOVSTVENE FOLKLORE IN STATUS REGIONALNIH JEZIKOV V FRANCIJI V 19. STOLETJU

Ukvarjanje z vprašanjem, v katerem jeziku se je v 19. stoletju objavljala slovstvena folklor, nudi edinstven pogled na sociolingvistično zgodovino regionalnih jezikov v tedanji Franciji pa tudi na širši kulturni kontekst sočasnega zbiranja slovstvene folklore. Regionalni jeziki so bili v svojem sociolingvističnem statusu francoščini podrejeni, čeprav se je v teh jezikih ohranila bogatejša folklorna dediščina, ki je v zlati dobi zbiranja slovstvene folklore veljala tudi za dragocen del francoske nacionalne kulturne dediščine. Dejstvo, da so bile ljudske povesti, izhajajoče iz regionalnih jezikov, objavljene najprej ali zgolj v francoskem prevodu, odraža tako nadvlado francoščine kakor tudi takrat prevladujoče dožemanje ljudskih povesti prvenstveno kot elementa splošne kulturne dediščine človeštva in ne dediščine posameznih kultur. Objave ljudskih povesti so bile običajno namenjene širšemu bralstvu po vsej državi, domnevno univerzalna vsebina – tipi povesti in motivi – pa je veljala za važnejšo od jezikovnega izraza in kulturnega konteksta. Vendar primeri, ko so se ljudske povesti in predvsem ljudske pesmi objavljale tudi v izvirnih regionalnih jezikih, kažejo, da je izbira jezika objave v resnici vseeno obstajala. Objavljanje ljudskih povesti izključno v prevodu je bilo sporno, saj je odsotnost izvirnega besedila – in obenem netransparentnost glede načina zbiranja gradiva in njegovega medjezikovnega prenosa – lahko postavljala pod vprašaj avtentičnost objavljenega. Hkrati je omejevanje objave zgolj na prevod imelo za posledico izgubo pomembnega segmenta kulturne dediščine regionalnih jezikov in njegovo dejansko prisvojitve, kot da gre za del francoske nacionalne in jezikovne kulturne dediščine.

**Ključne besede:** regionalni jeziki v Franciji, izgradnja francoske nacije, zbiranje slovstvene folklore v 19. stoletju, prevajanje slovstvene folklore, pomanjšinjeni jeziki, kulturno prisvajanje, avtentičnost slovstvene folklore, nacionalizem

## ABSTRACT

**“PRÉSENTER AUX LECTEURS FRANÇAIS LA LITTÉRATURE ORALE TELLE QU’ELLE SORTAIT DE LA BOUCHE DES PAYSANS”: FOLKLORE COLLECTION AND THE STATUS OF REGIONAL LANGUAGES IN 19TH CENTURY FRANCE**

The study of the language of publication of folklore offers a unique perspective on the sociolinguistic history of regional languages in 19<sup>th</sup> century France as well as on the wider cultural context of contemporary folklore collection. Regional languages had a subordinate sociolinguistic status vis-à-vis French, yet they had preserved a richer folklore heritage, which, during the golden age of folklore collection, was also considered to be a valuable part of French national cultural heritage. The fact that the folktales of regional languages were often published first or only in French translation reflects both the hegemonic position of French and the prevailing contemporary perception of folktales primarily as a universal human cultural inheritance rather than as the literary heritage of specific cultures; folktale publications were typically aimed at a wider national readership and the perceived universal content – tale types and motifs – was considered more important than the linguistic form and cultural context. However, the fact that folktale and above all folksong collections were also published in the original regional languages shows that there was a genuine choice of language of publication. The publication of folktales only in translation was controversial because the lack of original texts – as well as a lack of transparency concerning the collection process – potentially undermined the authenticity of the published folklore. The publication of folklore only in translation also resulted in the loss of an important part of the cultural heritage of the regional languages and its effective appropriation as French national and French language cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** regional languages in France, minoritised languages, French nation-building, nineteenth century folklore collection, folklore translation, cultural appropriation, authenticity of folklore, nationalism