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Where are France's *Geordie*, *Scouse* and *Cockney*?

In Hornsby (2006), I argued that as France's traditional local dialects or patois die out, they are being replaced, in the industrial north, with new urban regional French varieties which are emerging from contact. The book further suggested that what was true for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais might also be true for other urban areas, and that the belated emergence of city-based regional accents, comparable to those of the UK, might be a fruitful focus for future research. Since then, a chorus of evidence from Durand, Pooley, Armstrong and others has dashed this optimism, suggesting in fact that regional dialect levelling (RDL) of a very radical kind continues apace, with localized features receding almost everywhere. Even the traditionally conservative phonology of the south appears under threat: one commentator has noted the 'near perfect Parisian accents' of young méridionaux. Urban informants in perception tests prove consistently unable to recognize regional accents, even those of their own city.

Why have France and the UK, two countries of comparable population, seen such different outcomes? And what is happening (or rather not happening) in France's cities? Traditional explanations for RDL in France, which focus too narrowly on the ideology of the standard and the importance of Paris in a highly centralized state, prove unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Using the Milroys' (1985) network-based model of linguistic change, I will argue that a better explanation can be found in the social organization of France's major cities, which may yet engender new local vernaculars in unexpected places. The peculiarities of France's urban arrangements may also shed some light on the generally lukewarm reception which the Labovian paradigm has received among French linguists.

References

Hornsby, D. (2006) *Redefining Regional French: Koinéization and Dialect Levelling in Northern France*. (Oxford: Legenda).

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