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Language attitudes and perception of Berrichon, a regional language in France, inside the language community

This research focuses on Berrichon, a regional *langue d'oïl* spoken in central France. Regional languages in France are in decline (Clanché, 2002), and are often perceived negatively or as being a deformed form of French (Auger & Villeneuve, 2017). In addition, promoting regional languages in France can be seen as a threat to Standard French (Roger, 2018), while in reality Standard French appears to be the main threat to regional languages.

In the case of Berrichon, there is limited information on the language and its current linguistic situation. It is not well documented, and there is limited academic research on the language. In a context where regional languages are disappearing, the language vitality of Berrichon is not well known. The aim of the present study is to better understand the language use and attitudes of the Berrichon language community and investigate their potential impact on the current and future vitality of the language.

A pilot survey was conducted to explore the linguistic situation of Berrichon and investigate the perceptions and attitudes that exist towards the language. The survey included questions (in French) about the participants' proficiency in Berrichon, past and current language use, the importance of teaching Berrichon in schools, and their perception of the language. It was hypothesized that participants would have rather negative perceptions and attitudes towards Berrichon due to the dominance of Standard French and the negative perceptions that exist around regional languages and dialects in France.

Twenty participants aged 25 to 84 years old took part in the pilot survey. The results reveal that Berrichon is in decline and transmission is limited, as older participants have greater competence in the language than younger ones, and the children (under 18) of the survey respondents rarely or never speak the language. Furthermore, participants heard and spoke Berrichon more frequently in the past than they do currently in most contexts (e.g. with friends and family). Contrary to expectations, the results also show that while a minority of participants have some negative perceptions of Berrichon, most of them believe that Berrichon is an important part of the local culture and of their heritage. At the same time, they consider Berrichon to be a language of the past, realizing that it is in decline and predicting that it will disappear in the foreseeable future. Thus, Berrichon may be perceived positively but that does not mean that the language will be preserved and transmitted to future generations. While many participants agreed that Berrichon is an important part of the

local culture, this importance remains limited to being a part of history rather than the future.

One limitation of this survey is that, as part of a pilot study, the participants were not representative of the entire Berrichon community. Instead, they were recruited because of their known interest in the language. In order to fully understand the current linguistic situation of Berrichon it will be important to gather data from both speakers and non-speakers of the language.

References:

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