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1. Introduction

Contemporary Urban Vernacular (CUV) French is a way of speaking that is strongly associated with the banlieues of major French cities. It contains a number of non-standard linguistic features and is heavily influenced both by the multilingual setting in which it has emerged and by the individual and community multilingualism of its users. This chapter focuses less on a description of the features of CUV French per se (which has been widely explored elsewhere)¹ than on listeners’ perceptions of the ‘social meaning’ of these features, whether in relation to macro-social categories such as speakers’ regional origin, gender, linguistic background or socio-economic status, or in terms of evoking the speech style of particular groups of speakers (or both). We are particularly interested in the perceptions of listeners who, like most of the French population, are non-users of CUV French, as we know relatively little from previous research about the views of this group. A corpus of CUV French will act as the basis of our investigation (the Paris-Marseille corpus: McAuley, 2017) and focus groups will be used to explore listeners’ perceptions of social meanings in relation to identity. We will draw on ‘indexicality theory’ which can, we will argue, shed new light on the capacity of individual linguistic traits, and of broader collections of those traits in authentic CUV French, to index particular social-semiotic values, including those related to multilingualism.²

The chapter begins (Section 2) with an outline of the definition of CUV French, the context in which it operates (notably in terms of language policy and urban multilingualism in France) and a brief summary of key phonetic features. Section 3 offers a discussion of ‘indexicality’ and its suitability as an approach to perceptions of CUV French, ending with the research questions that will underpin our analysis. Section 4 will outline briefly our methodology for

² For a discussion of ‘indexicality’, see below, Section 3.
exploring social meaning as perceived by outsiders to the CUV speaker group. The core of the chapter (Section 5) will discuss in detail listeners’ perceptions in relation to specific linguistic features and combinations of features, responding to the research questions outlined in Section 3. Section 6 draws our findings together, before a final comment in Section 7 on CUV French, language and identity in contemporary France.

2. CUV French

2.1 Multilingualism and Identity in France: the Supremacy of French in Language Policy

The wider linguistic setting for CUV French is one where the value of the national language is affirmed and underscored in multiple ways. A revision in 1992 to Article 2 of the French Constitution (1958) states unequivocally that ‘La langue de la République est le français’ (‘The language of the Republic is French’). Official monolingualism is reflected in the education system, the channel through which French has been taught since the advent of free and compulsory education in the nineteenth century, and in all aspects of public life. The national language is thus a unifying force which is absolutely central to Republican values. This is evident in the long tradition of purism with respect to standard French (Walsh, 2016) and in the fate of the regional languages of France which, despite some interventions (both through legislation [Loi Deixonne 1951] and a 1988 article in the Constitution acknowledging the role of regional languages in France’s heritage), have been in sharp decline through the 19th and 20th centuries. Linguistic protectionism is also embedded in legislation against the widespread use of lexical borrowings from other languages, i.e. the Loi Bas Lauriol (1975) and the Loi Toubon (1996). Moreover, in relation to immigrant communities, France has a policy of providing intensive language tuition in French in the first year after arrival in the country. Although provision in fact varies considerably across different regions (Escafré-Dublet, 2014), there is a clear desire to produce high levels of fluency as quickly as possible and to integrate pupils into mainstream classes rapidly. Policy on language requirements for adult migrants has been progressively more formalised by the French state since the 1970s (Adami, 2012). Those seeking long-term residence in France must sign a Contrat d’Intégration Républicaine which includes language requirements and is usually valid for no longer than a year. They must undergo a language placement test, and if they do not meet the criteria of CEFR A1, they will be
obliged to take up to 600 hours of language instruction, organised by the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII).

2.2 What is CUV French?

CUV French is a way of speaking that has emerged in multi-ethnic and often multilingual communities on the peripheries of major French urban settlements. These are sites of intensive and sustained contact between French (the vehicular and national language) and several migrant languages (most notably dialectal Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, various sub-Saharan African languages) as well as local regional languages (e.g. Provençal in Marseille). Clear influence of this language contact can be seen in lexical borrowing, which is very prominent: e.g. the common Romani borrowing narvalo, meaning ‘mad, foolish’ is imported with the same meaning and little phonetic adaptation, and the Provençal word dégun (‘no-one’) forms part of the regionally-specific vocabulary adopted by CUV French users in Marseille. However, the influence of language contact on the morphosyntax and the phonetics of CUV French is less clearly defined; features are often shared across other styles and varieties of metropolitan French (see Conein and Gadet, 1998), a factor to which we shall return.

Both academic and lay naming practices for CUV French have tended to focus on specific social properties of the supposed speaker group: e.g. parler des jeunes ‘youth speech’, parler des cités ‘tower-block speech’, parler rebeu, ‘Arab speech’, parler or accent des banlieues ‘suburban speech or accent’ (Boyer, 1997; Trimaille and Billiez, 2007; Fagyal, 2010; Gadet and Guerin, 2016; Gadet, 2017). This proliferation of terms is also found across research on different languages (e.g. youth language, (multi)ethnolect etc.)3 and none of these, including CUV, seems to reflect the phenomenon adequately. The social significance of the word banlieue in contemporary France is important for this study in that it is normally heavily stigmatized; it is associated with high levels of migrant settlement, social deprivation, disaffection and civil unrest, as events since the widespread 2005 banlieue riots suggest and as media portrayals reinforce, e.g. films such as La Haine (1995), Bande de filles (2014), Divines (2016) and media coverage of revenge killings in Marseille (see for example

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3 See Rampton (2011) for a review of this terminological debate.
Véronique (2018) or Le Point (2019)). These naming practices therefore tend to reflect representations of CUV users as a monolithic speaker group with a particular social background. Much speaker-focused research on CUV French has centred on its use in particular urban areas and has therefore tended to consider it as a set of local, socially marked varieties that can be circumscribed. However, as we shall see, salient features of CUV French may carry other social meanings. They are available for use by a range of speakers and may be the object of both stigmatization and covert prestige, which is why Conein and Gadet (1998) speak of both continuity and innovation in CUV French.

Cheshire et al.’s work on Multicultural London English (2011) provides a useful conceptual tool for capturing the moving edges of multicultural urban varieties: they apply Mufwene’s (2001) concept of the ‘feature pool’ – a set of characteristic linguistic resources on which speakers can draw (2011: 164) – to their London data. This opens the possibility of a multicultural feature pool which is accessible to speakers of several regional varieties and can be used to suggest similar social identities across those regional divides. Indeed Drummond (2018) talks of a Multicultural Urban British English, which he documents in Manchester but where a number of features are shared with similar speaker groups in other British cities. As will become clear, this is also the case for CUV French which involves a set of features that are available to speakers across regional boundaries. These features can be layered over existing dialectal differences, indicating a particular facet of speakers’ identities as urban, amongst other potential social meanings. This ‘feature pool’ approach has not yet been widely used in work on CUV French, which has tended to focus on particular urban varieties, largely viewed as distinct and comprised of a circumscribed set of features in each region, with the notable exception of Jamin et al. (2006) which highlights some phonetic commonalities. Our hypothesis is that CUV French is not a definite and circumscribed variety, but a way of speaking with more fluidly defined and potentially changing edges, both in terms of the availability of a pool of features across regions and because of the potential of those features to indicate social meanings that are not necessarily associated with the stereotypical CUV speaker group. We will aim in this chapter, through an analysis of listeners’ perceptions, to interrogate the nature of these moving edges.

2.3 Brief Summary of Traits
We have opted in this chapter to focus on phonetic (as opposed to lexical or morpho-syntactic) features identified in the literature as characteristic of CUV French. Much more groundwork would need to be done on morpho-syntactic features (about which we know little) before this type of investigation could be undertaken. Lexical items that are characteristic of CUV French are much more likely to have clear-cut sources, with both sources and semantic properties potentially influencing listeners’ perceptions of the speaker. In the example of the word seum, borrowed from an Arabic word meaning ‘venom’ and signifying ‘anger’ in CUV French (e.g. j’ai le seum), the connection with Arabic may be more or less opaque for different sets of listeners but the semantic properties of this word immediately invite a potentially negative characterization of the speaker as angry. Such direct signals in relation to a speaker’s characterization or identity are much less likely to occur with phonetic features of CUV, many of which also suggest other social meanings (as we shall see in Section 5), making interpretation more complex and subtle than is the case for the lexis.

The following list is a brief summary of the major phonetic features that have been identified in academic literature (footnote 1) as belonging to the ‘feature pool’ of CUV French, as several of these will be important for our analysis:

- the use of heavily palatalized or affricated productions of [d] or [t] before high front vowels and glides e.g. *boutiques* /butik/ as [butʃik], and *perdu* /peudr/ as [peudʒy]
- increased use of back [o], including where /a/ is expected (see 5.1)
- interconsonantal vowel devoicing in closed syllables, e.g. *disparu* and *école*
- *épithèses consonantiques*, i.e. addition of sounds resembling fricative consonants after a final (devoiced) vowel: Fónagy (1989: 247) cites the examples of *merci* and *j’ai vu* as [meʃisi] and [ʒe vɨʃ]
- use of [ɔ] for the phoneme /ɔ/ before [u] and [I] as in *la mort* [ləmor], *la police* [lapol]
- glottalization of pre-pausal [u] and unvoiced realization of [u] in other positions, e.g. *ta mère* [tamɛʁ]
- insertion of a glottal stop as syllable onset before vowels (Fagyal, 2010), e.g. ‘Il n’est jamais ?arrivé ?à l’école’)}
• a distinctive, sharp rise-fall intonation pattern in phrase final position.

3. Development of Sociolinguistic Approaches to Identity: a Move towards Emergence in Discourse and Indexicality

In the light of our contention at the end of 2.2 above that CUV French cannot be circumscribed as a ‘variety’ with a clear-cut set of features, we ask in this section whether indexicality might facilitate an interrogation of how the feature pool operates, allowing us to capture the nature of the moving edges of CUV French.

3.1 From Variables to Indexical Fields

Central to sociolinguistic research is the idea that language use and social identities are linked. Connections between linguistic features and broad speaker categories such as age, gender, socio-economic status and income have been explored since early quantitative variationism in the late 1960s and 1970s (Labov, 1966; 1972). It has been clear since Labov’s early work that questions of stylistic variation interact in complex ways with social categories and subsequent researchers have approached this issue in a range of different ways, both qualitative and quantitative, including work on style-shifting in discourse as well multi-dimensional analysis by scholars such as Biber (Biber and Conrad, 2009). Theory and methodology took a distinctly ethnographic turn with the work of James and Lesley Milroy (Milroy and Milroy 1978; Milroy 1987), which foregrounded the importance of ‘social networks’, such that particular linguistic features could be correlated with the intensity of a speaker’s network in a given community.

Current third-wave studies (e.g. Montgomery and Moore, 2018; Zhang, 2005) tend to centre on styles or personae (created from a combination of variables), rather than individual variables as connected to the type of macro-social speaker categories found in analyses in the Labovian tradition. Linguistic variables and their co-occurrences in styles are understood to point towards, or ‘index’, various social meanings in interaction. Moore and Podesva (2009) explain these different levels of social meaning using the example of negative
concord among Detroit high-schoolers in Eckert’s (2000) study. Negative concord (e.g. *They don’t like nothing*) allows speakers to adopt a rebellious stance (a temporary attitudinal position adopted by a speaker), to index a ‘burnout’ style, i.e. an ethnographically relevant local social category, when the feature is combined with other linguistic features and a ‘working-class’ macro-social category. Importantly, several potential categories may be indexed (even simultaneously) by variables or styles and their interpretation is dependent on the context of their use. Eckert talks of this as a variable’s *indexical field* – ‘a constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable’ (2008: 454).

This idea of social meaning as something indexed by the variable use of linguistic traits fits well with the idea of a ‘feature pool’ on which speakers can draw, and a conception of identity as emergent in interaction and as mutable. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) take a view of identity that operates across different social levels. For them, ‘identities encompass (a) macro-level demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles’ (2005: 592). Zhang’s (2005) work on an emergent ‘yuppie’ style among Beijing speakers of Mandarin documents the use of several specific linguistic features in the creation of a new style which makes use of the variants’ established social meanings in existing usage. Her work makes clear, firstly, that the accrual of new social meanings to the indexical fields of existing variants is possible, and secondly, that both speakers and listeners may take an active role in this process, harnessing existing linguistic features and their associated social meanings (e.g. ‘outward looking’, ‘cosmopolitan’) to form a new ‘yuppie’ style using a combination of those variants. This is a clear example of how the social indexicality of features operates at different levels – or ‘orders’ in Silverstein’s (2003) terms. There is an assumption that speakers are at least to some extent aware of the social meanings indexed by each constituent feature of the new style and can therefore have agency in re-purposing the variants and their associations to construct a new identity for themselves.

3.2 Speaker Agency and Outsider Perceptions: Identity is (Also Partly) in the Eye of the Beholder
This recognition of speaker awareness and agency in drawing on the indexical associations of features is welcome and offers a possible approach to CUV French which would allow us to account for the different social meanings attached to variables in the feature pool and their combinations. Some of the core concepts of indexicality already feature in the literature on CUV French. Cheshire (2020), for example, in her comparative work on Multicultural London English and Multicultural Paris French, discusses performances of CUV French as a register that indexes ‘a young urban multiethnic identity’. Precisely how the indexicalities of individual features might relate to this type of interpretation for listeners is not discussed. Where listeners’ perceptions have previously been interrogated, such as in Hansen (2015) and Spini and Trimaille (2017), the focus has been on the associations of individual CUV features in specific regions, or on the perceptions of speakers who are familiar with the varieties, usually because they are from the region or city in question. In short, with regard to listeners’ perceptions of features or combinations of features, there is little research beyond the user group and where indexicality is invoked, it is not central to the analytical approach.

Given the policy context of a national standard language and the stigmatization of CUV French, it is important to shed light on the perceptions of non-users of CUV French who, for the most part, rely only on their existing associations, or stereotypes to evaluate the speech (Montgomery and Moore, 2018). In this chapter we will draw on the notion of indexicality to do this. Previous work in other linguistic contexts on the indexical associations between linguistic variants and particular social meanings has shown that users of variants do not always share the same indexical associations as non-users, and that in fact non-users may be more likely to associate a given variant with a higher-order indexical association (see Johnstone and Kiesling (2008) on /aw/ monophthongization as an index of localness in Pittsburghese.) Since the potential meanings for variables are not fixed, their use in new contexts can allow them to accrue new potential meanings and consistent use in certain contexts can lead to a strengthening of the association between certain features or combinations of features, and particular social meanings. Indeed, this in turn can lead to stereotyping, whereby the linguistic style and the social characteristics that come with it become almost inseparable (Androutsopoulos, 2010). Widespread awareness of second-order indexical associations beyond the speaker group, i.e. amongst non-users of a given
style, allows for ‘performances of local identities’ (Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson, 2006). This is one of the processes by which speakers from groups that are not normally associated with a particular style can temporarily adopt personae and imply a whole set of attendant social categories, through which listeners (even those with little exposure to CUV French) may come to connect specific social characteristics with its features. We take a new approach to the case of CUV French by focusing on non-users’ perceptions and drawing on the theoretical framework of indexicality as a means of accessing the complexity of its use in context, the flexibility of its defining edges and the multiple potential social meanings of its features.

3.3 Research Questions
In the light of the discussion in Sections 2 and 3 above, the research questions underpinning our analysis of listeners’ perceptions are:

- What are the indexical associations for listeners of particular linguistic features and groups of features in CUV French?
- To what extent does the label banlieue or other related terms occur? What are the further associations of a term such as banlieue?
- What other social meanings might these features have (e.g. macro-social categories such as region, age, gender etc., or other indexical meanings such as suggesting particular migration paths or contact with particular languages)?
- How might co-occurrence of more than one feature operate for listeners? Can a feature acquire new social meanings? Do classic CUV features sometimes not index banlieue?
- What happens when indexical associations seem to be contradictory?
- What does our analysis tell us about how indexicality operates?

4. Methods: Using Focus Groups to Identify Social Meaning in CUV French
Since we are interested in exploring the perceptions of non-users of CUV French, we have asked listeners from regions less associated with CUV French to comment on examples from both Paris and Marseille. In order to encourage dialogue around these perceptions, our principal methodology involved focus groups in which participants listened to a set of ten
authentic clips of CUV French extracted from the Paris-Marseille corpus, each containing at least one instance of the phonetic traits from the feature pool listed in 2.3 above. Clips were chosen to exclude lexical items that are clearly associated with CUV, as these would obviously strongly influence listeners’ interpretation. The clips featured five male and five female speakers; eight were native speakers of French and two were not. Reflecting the wider corpus, most speakers had other languages in their background, as we shall see in Section 5.6

Five focus groups with a total of 22 listeners were convened around Orléans (in the northern half of France) and Toulouse (in the southern half), gathering listeners of different ages (13 under and nine over 30), genders (13 female, nine male) and regional backgrounds: seven spent their entire childhood in northern France, 11 in southern France and four moved between the two during their childhood. Full metadata was recorded on listeners’ professions which deliberately targeted a large range, including mechanics, retired factory workers, students, customer service representatives and medical doctors, amongst others. It is important to note that the objective was not to create a representative stratified sample of listeners for the purposes of quantitative work but rather to ensure a range of varied sociolinguistic profiles since this is what is found in wider society.7 The focus groups were recorded and the recordings confirm that none of the listeners was a regular user of features considered to be characteristic of CUV French (2.3 above).

On the first playback for each clip, listeners were asked to create an initial impression of the speaker, and to note this on a provided handout. This ensured that we collected individual responses for each participant before any possible influence of group discussion. Each clip was played again, after which a group discussion was initiated by the fieldworker on the basis of the initial individual responses. This discussion asked listeners to elaborate on their

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6 In the wider Paris-Marseille corpus of 49 speakers, over half report knowledge of and regular frequent use of at least one and often several languages other than French, the most common of which are varieties of Arabic, a number of West-African languages including, ‘Sénégalais’ (most likely Wolof) and ‘Guinéen’ (most likely Pular), as well as a number of other languages of migration from Africa and current or former overseas territories of France, including Comorian and Martiniquan Creole. Russian, Serbian, Portuguese and Italian are also attested.

7 For full details of the design and running of the focus groups, including a discussion of the use of focus groups in linguistic research, see McAuley and Carruthers (2020).
initial perceptions, allowing us to access listeners’ understandings of the indexical fields of the features used in the context of each clip. On a third playback, listeners were invited to make explicit connections between specific identity categories, characteristics or stances that they had mentioned in the earlier part of the discussion and the linguistic features of the clips. If, for example, the consensus in a group was that the speaker in a given clip was young, they were asked to explain what features of the clip led to that perception. Participants often explained the features they connected with a given reading by imitation of the sound in the clip.

This fieldwork method was designed to give a broad basis for our understanding of the social meanings of CUV French as a style in Eckert’s terms, i.e. comprised of a number of traits, or a ‘register’ (Agha, 2005), a ‘socially recognized’ form of speech, which indexes speaker characteristics. The focus group discussions had the benefit of allowing a forum for non-users of that style to explore the limits of both the set of linguistic features they understood to belong to it and the indexed characteristics of the speakers they understood to make use of it. It is important to be cognisant of the hazards of methodologies of this type, not least the possibility that particular attitudes, including racism, could come to dominate a focus group discussion and thus to reinforce linguistic prejudice. Great care was taken by the fieldworker to mitigate this risk, with all listeners encouraged to elaborate on the thinking processes behind their own initial impressions and to respect the opinion of others. Any tendency towards prejudiced ‘group-think’ was actively discouraged.

5. Social Meaning, Linguistic Traits and Indexicality: Analysis

In this section, we will focus on a small number of CUV phonetic features (5.1) and will use five of the ten corpus clips (5.2 – 5.6) as a springboard for a wider discussion of the research questions posed in Section 3. The examples are selected to illustrate the contextual dynamics of indexical fields rather than as exemplars of how listeners generally interpret particular traits or combinations. Our analysis will allow us to unpack some of the complexities in indexical relationships between individual traits, styles and macro-social categorizations as seen from the perspective of outsiders to the speaker group. Comments on gender and age tend to appear early in the associations for listeners, probably because
these are linked to questions of voice production. Crucially for our purposes, early observations by listeners also include terms relating to social categorization, ethnic and regional origins. Multilingualism is only very rarely mentioned by listeners in their first set of impressions but further into the discussion, it is frequently encountered, often linked to discussion of the linguistic traits associated with terms such as *origines* or *banlieue*.

5.1 Selected Features

The CUV features that appear in the five clips are:

(i) **Glottalized or pre-pausal [u]; or unvoiced [ʁ] in other positions, instead of the French voiced uvular fricative**, e.g. *ta mère* [tamɛʁ̝ʔ]. In the literature on CUV this feature is regularly associated with exposure to Arabic, hence Billiez’s (1992) term, ‘coloration arabe’. In fact, a glottalized or unvoiced [ʁ] is not a direct transfer but Arabic is nonetheless rich in uvular and pharyngeal sounds, both voiced and unvoiced (Watson, 2007: 17-19). This feature is attested in the CUV French of Paris (Jamin, 2005), Perpignan (Pickles, 2011) and Grenoble (Trimaille, 2003) and has no particular other social meanings.

(ii) **Palatalized or affricated [t] and [d] (or sometimes [k] or [g]) before high front vowels and glides** e.g. *boutiques* [butik] as [butʃik], and *perdu* [peʃdy] as [peʃdʒɪ]. This feature in isolation is known to give rise to different indexical associations for speakers in different French regions (Jamin et al., 2006; Spini and Trimaille, 2017). For example, Jamin and Trimaille (2008) argue that in Paris it is attested more frequently in young speakers of north-African origins than other speakers. However, Hansen (2015) argues that it largely goes unnoticed in her study of Parisian listeners and that it is more likely to index ‘*cité/origine sociale modeste*’ (‘tower block/low income’) if co-occurring with other more marked *banlieue* features. In Marseille, this feature has a strong association with the *banlieue* (*quartiers nord*) both in terms of usage (Jamin et al., 2006) and perceptions (Spini and Trimaille, 2017). It is also attested and indeed stigmatized in the regional French of Marseille where, according to Spini and Trimaille (2017), its roots are in the Provençal substratum.

(iii) **Strong presence of back [o]**. In theory, the French phonemic system has both a
front [a] (as in *pattes*) and a back [o] (as in *pâtes*), although the former is much more frequent in the lexis. The distinction has largely disappeared in the southern half of France, usually in favour of front [a] or a mid position which is nonetheless fronted relative to [a] (Coquillon and Turcsan, 2012: 110; Berns, 2015: 334). In non-southern French this distinction is increasingly neutralized in a similar way but some speakers of non-southern French retain it and some recognize it in listener tests (Hansen, 2012). It is also important to note that the retention of a distinctive and extremely back (sometimes raised) variant was also regarded as characteristic of ‘working class Parisian’ speech in the last century (Conein and Gadet, 1998; Lodge, 2004). In his work on the CUV French of *La Courneuve*, Jamin (2005) argues that there is wider use of back [o] by males of North-African origin and it is thus possible that this might be a resurgence of back [o] as marker of social exclusion. He further argues that back [o] can be used as the merged phoneme as well as front [a] in his data, i.e. as allophones of one merged phoneme. Back [o] can therefore occur in a range of contexts in CUV French and given the high levels of merger, production of a back [o], even in cases where it might be expected in standard French (e.g. *pâte*), is nonetheless a potential marker of *banlieue* speech (Jamin, 2005: 189-211).

(iv) The *banlieue* intonation curve. This is a distinctive, sharp rise-fall intonation pattern in phrase final position (Paternostro, 2016: 37-40; Fagyal, 2010), differing from the more standard French phrasal intonation for declaratives which involves a broad rise-fall pattern across the phrase and in particular a fall at the end of the phrase (Stewart, 2012).

5.2 Example 1: the Link Between Features and Specific Languages or Migration Paths
There is only one clip where listeners in the focus groups make a direct association between a linguistic feature and a specific language and migration path. It concerns the glottalized [ʁ] at the end of the word ‘air’ in the phrase ‘moi je voudrais... soit être dans la police... soit faire hôtesse de l’aïr’ (‘me I’d like... either to be a police officer... or an air hostess’). The most common immediate written response to this clip relates to ethnicity, with phrases such as ‘française avec des origines nord-africaines’ (‘French with North-African roots’) and ‘origines... magrébine, africaine, turque...’ (‘of Maghrebi, African or Turkish origin’). In the detailed discussion this was explicitly linked to [ʁ] production: the dominant understanding of the speaker’s origins is as African or specifically North-African, and although she is said to
speak French well, it is not understood by listeners to be her home language (hence the label ‘foreign’):

(1) **TOF3:** c’est vrai que ça fait étranger oui

**TOM3:** ça fait un peu maghrébin qui voilà qui a appris le français mais qui dans la formulation voilà il y a des sons qu’elle prononce pas – de l’air [imitating production in clip][...] il y a des sons qui marchent pas quoi

**TOF3:** it’s true that that sounds foreign

**TOM3:** it sounds a bit Maghrebi who has learnt French but in the formulation there are sounds that she doesn’t pronounce – de l’air [...] like there are sounds that don’t work

(2) **OYM1:** ça me fait penser à une personne qui venait d’Afrique peut-être

**OYM1:** it makes me think of someone who came from Africa maybe

(3) **BOM1:** personne non-française ou africaine [...] façon de rouler les R

**BOM1:** a non-French or African person [...] the way they roll their Rs

(4) **BYM2:** le français n’est pas la langue de la maison, des parents

**BYF1:** et le français elle l’a appris tout autour à l’école

**BYM2:** French isn’t the home language, or the parents’ language

**BYF1:** and she learned French all around her at school

In fact, the speaker in this clip does have one of the most multilingual profiles in the Paris-Marseille corpus. She is a regular user of two distinct dialects of (middle-eastern) Arabic as well as Comorien and Malgasy with close family. She was born in France and speaks French daily, having acquired French in childhood. It is therefore possible that there is some identifiable non-French influence in her speech, specifically in her production of [ʁ]. Participants did have some trouble in identifying what it was that prompted them to think that she was of African origin but settled on her [ʁ] production as an indicator of that social meaning, although opinions are split between Maghrebi and (sub-Saharan) African associations. In this case, no listeners mentioned the *banlieue*: this is primarily an association with a particular migration pathway and a particular language, although in this

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8 Note that the participant talks about rolled Rs, which suggests a trill. In the discussion, however, it was clear that the production referred to in this comment was the glottalized version reproduced by TOM3 in their comment.
In a number of cases, multiple CUV features co-occur. We discuss here responses to one such clip, in which three linguistic features of CUV French co-occur, i.e. a marked back [ɔ] in ‘place’, palatization of [ɡ] in ‘garagiste’ and the banlieue intonation curve on the word ‘garagiste’ : ‘c’est pour ça là.. moi je préférerais un.. un truc– au début je voulais faire garagiste... mais il y avait pas de place du coup j’étais obligé de faire ça’ (‘that’s why.. I’d prefer something - to begin with I wanted to be a mechanic... but there was no space so I had to do this’). Responses to this clip are heavily concentrated on the banlieue: initial responses contained a large number of mentions of banlieue, smaller numbers of cité (tower block), quartier (area in town/quarter), and ville (town). This was the case across all the focus groups, both north and south. Additionally, a substantial number of listeners mention milieu/classe defavorisé(e)/populaire (low income/working class area) which may indicate a possible link with the older ‘working class Paris’ associations of back [ɔ] (5.1 above) and certainly suggest stigmatization. Several listeners mention ethnicity, most of whom identify the speaker as Maghrebi while a smaller number mention ‘informality’. In this example with co-occurring features, we can speak of a strong focus on the banlieue and its associations in terms of social class and ethnicity: co-occurrence of more than one CUV feature appears to encourage this reading and the association with informality does not in any way block it. In fact, this is a native speaker of Russian alongside French and also speaks Spanish frequently in his daily life; he has no Maghrebi roots and no direct link with Arabic. In addition to the apparent reinforcement of a banlieue reading when we have more than one feature, this clip further illustrates the point that banlieue features are used by a wide variety of speakers, including those who have no connection with other languages or a
migration path and those who have contact with languages and migration paths other than Arabic and the Maghreb.

5.4 Example 3: Occurrence of a Single Feature which has Indexical Fields Other than CUV
As noted above, some features of CUV French are shared with other varieties and styles. One of our stimulus clips involves the use of back [a] where standard French would normally have a front [a] in both syllables of the word ‘braquage’: ‘bientôt là dans deux semaines là... petit braquage de... de Brinks tu vois’ (‘soon... in two weeks’ time... a little security-van robbery you know’). In this example, banlieue is indexed frequently for listeners, but not as frequently as when back [a] co-occurs with other features from the banlieue feature pool as in example 2. A small number of listeners mention the terms quartier or cité which are less stigmatized than banlieue and a small number also use the term racaille which is a highly derogatory term meaning ‘scum’ (Sarkozy famously called banlieue rioters racaille on a walkabout in Argenteuil in October 2005). Moreover, there is clear mention of ethnicity in the response to this clip, with explicit associations to North Africa through terms such ‘origines maghrébines/arabes/étrangères’ (‘Maghrebi/foreign origins’), ‘parler rebeu mais origines françaises’ (‘Arab speech but French roots’), as well as strong association with particular social groups, notably a ‘milieu/classe défavorisé(e)/bas(se)/populaire’ (‘low income/lower/working class). Informality is also mentioned by a number of listeners.

Responses to this clip come closest in the focus groups to views that are verging on racism, in the combination of language such as ‘scum’ and strong and specific ethnic connotations. It is also important to note that this is the one example where the content (i.e. mention of a robbery) may possibly have encouraged negative associations on the part of listeners.

Responses to this clip would appear to suggest that back [a] alone – without other features in the context - has perhaps now acquired the capacity to index banlieue directly; its markedness may be linked to its current rarity in standard French and there may indeed be a link, in terms of indexing social exclusion, to its previous associations with ‘working class Paris’ speech. In this case there is no link at all between the ethnic or migratory associations of listeners and the actual background of the speaker, who was born in France to monolingual French-speaking parents.
5.5 Example 4: a Classic CUV Feature Does not Appear to Index Banlieue

Other clips present more difficulties for listeners. In one example, six instances of palatalization of [t] occur together: ‘\textit{tu as ta voiture... tu peux sortir o\`u tu veux quand tu veux}’ (‘you have your car... you can go where you want when you want’). In this clip, region is by some way the strongest social meaning mentioned: listeners from all regions interpret the speaker as coming from the south of France, with both Toulouse and Marseille mentioned by both northern and southern listeners. Only one listener (from Toulouse) specifically mentions palatalization as a possible link to Marseille. Several listeners allude to the issue of whether speakers are of rural or urban origin but their views are split and there is little mention of social class and informal register. Crucially, despite six occurrences of a classic CUV feature, there is no mention in the reaction to this clip of either the term \textit{banlieue} or of ethnicity. Other researchers have found clear ethnic and social meanings for such strong occurrence of palatalization on the part of southern speakers and listeners (i.e. a Maghrebi influence or mention of the \textit{quartiers nord} in Marseille), especially listeners from Marseille (Spini and Trimaille, 2017), although Hansen’s (2015) research suggests that palatalization is not stigmatized in Paris.

It is difficult to be certain about what might be happening in terms of our listeners’ reactions in the focus groups. One possibility is that a well-attested regional feature associated with the south of France may be overriding other associations, i.e. the articulation of schwa that would be mute in standard French, i.e., at the end of ‘voiture’. However, the schwa in this recording is not particularly marked and it is not clear whether this would necessarily block a \textit{banlieue} reading: while there is tentative evidence that word-final schwa is perhaps deleted more frequently in urban rather than rural settings and by young males more than other groups, it remains nonetheless a widespread southern feature (Eychenne, 2019). A different possibility is that palatalization is indeed understood as indexing Marseille but that this is articulated by listeners as ‘southern’ more broadly. It is also possible that some speakers (given that we have both northern and southern groups) might be less familiar with the Maghrebi associations or alternatively, that palatalization is only salient as a CUV marker when it occurs with other stigmatized variables (as Hansen’s (2015) research in Paris suggests). In short, this \textit{banlieue} speaker (who also speaks Portuguese) is identified as southern first and foremost and while we can speculate as to why the \textit{banlieue} and ethnicity
are not mentioned, we cannot be certain of the complexities at work in listeners’ interpretations of this particular set of indexicalities.

5.6 Example 5: Apparently Contradictory Indexicality

Another clip produces responses which highlight possible conflicts in social meaning for listeners. It presents a clear case of palatalization in the word ‘petit’: ‘il y a un truc à la maison c’est le grand... il faut être soit le moyen soit le petit’ (‘if something happens at home it’s the oldest one that did it... you have to be either the middle or the youngest’). It is important to say also that the nasal vowels at the end of ‘maison’ and ‘grand’ are markedly southern in that they are oral vowels with a ‘nasal appendage’, i.e. [ŋ] (Eychenne, 2019). For this clip, region is the dominant social meaning for listeners across the focus groups in all regions, the speaker being clearly identified as southern. Indeed, in some cases - for both northern and southern listeners – he is identified as specifically from Marseille. There is also strong identification as urban, often specified as banlieue, less frequently as cité or quartier. This is explicitly identified by a number of listeners as associated with the palatalized [t] in petit. Several listeners mention ethnicity as ‘origines étrangères/maghribines’ (‘foreign/Maghrebi origins’) or ‘français d’Algérie’ (‘Algerian French’) while a small number of listeners identify the speaker as having ‘parents d’origine étrangère’ (‘parents of foreign origin’) or ‘2ème/3ème génération’ (‘2nd/3rd generation’). There is thus a convergence here of region, banlieue and ethnicity, all of which are compatible social meanings that resonate with the findings of Spini and Trimaille (2017). In this case the speaker is 16 years old, male, living in the quartiers nord (northern suburbs) of Marseille, born in France to parents from Marseille with Arabic in their background: he speaks Arabic daily with family and friends. Perceptions and reality are thus closely aligned for this speaker for the majority of listeners.

However, a group of listeners thought this speaker was of an older age bracket, a macro-social category that blocked the banlieue reading which is strongly associated with young speakers. For these listeners, when the associations of the indexical features were combined, the totality signalled a ‘pied noir’ reading, i.e. someone born in Algeria during the colonial period before independence:

(5) TOF2: Sud-est, même Afrique du Nord, pied-noir [...] quelqu’un de cet âge-là qui aurait l’accent pied-noir c’est compliqué [...] si tu es né en France de parents pied-noir t’as pas l’accident pied-noir
TOM2: ça peut arriver ouais

TOF2: Southeast, even north Africa, pied-noir [...] someone of that age with a pied-noir accent – that’s complicated [...] if you’re born in France to pied-noir parents you don’t have the pied-noir accent

TOM2: it can happen, yeah

Thus in this case, a key difference in association in relation to age has produced two quite different readings for this speaker, the dominant one involving a southern – even Marseille reading –with many other banlieue associations such as ethnicity and contact with Arabic (reflecting reality in fact), and the other a pied-noir reading which, in terms of speaker profile, is incompatible with the banlieue reading.

6. Towards Conclusions: Indexicality and Listeners’ Perceptions of CUV French

Since this is the first study to focus on listeners’ perceptions of multiple features of CUV French, we must be tentative about drawing definitive conclusions on the basis of a small number of examples and cautious about the limitations of using focus groups as a method of testing perceptions. Nonetheless, drawing on indexicality as a means of exploring these perceptions has shed some light on the way in which the dynamic between linguistic features and social meanings operates for non-user listeners. Reactions to the five clips used in Section 5 are indicative of the nature of the focus group discussions across all ten clips used in our fieldwork. They attest to the fluid nature of indexical features: each context is distinctive and the interaction between the occurrence or co-occurrence of (a) particular ‘CUV’ feature(s) in a given example is tightly tied to the other social meanings a feature might have, to the social meanings of other linguistic features in the context (including macro-social features) that may be unconnected to CUV, and of course to the listener’s experiences of any such features (CUV or otherwise) and their own ideologies. Although all five clips were of CUV French, only three of the five were identified as such. In the other two cases (examples 1 and 4), other social meanings dominated the response, notably the indexing of origins/migration path and language (example 1) and regional origin (example 4). In the three other cases, the term banlieue was used by a majority of listeners, albeit in different indexical contexts in terms of how this social meaning interacted with other indexical fields.
Where it occurs, the association with the *banlieue* generally appears early in discussions of the clips. Other social meanings tend to be closely allied to *banlieue*, notably low socio-economic status (examples 2 and 3) and ethnic origins which are Arab in all cases (examples 2, 3 and 5), with specific mention of North Africa or the Maghreb and use of the term *rebeu*. Indeed, even in example 1, where *banlieue* was not indexed, the migration path of North Africa was (wrongly) identified. In example 3, the stigmatization goes further, with listeners using the term *racaille* (‘scum’: see 5.4 above). In terms of multilingualism, where languages other than French are mentioned, the focus is entirely on Arabic, whether the speaker does indeed have close connections with Arabic (example 5) or none (example 3). No other languages are explicitly indexed for listeners, despite the case here (example 3) of a bilingual French/Russian speaker, and in one case where *banlieue* is not indexed, Arabic is nonetheless indexed, although the accompanying origins etc. are incorrectly placed in Africa/the Maghreb rather than the Middle East. There is thus a series of interconnected social meanings (involving ethnicity, language and social class) attached to *banlieue* which may or may not correspond to the profile of individual speakers. Where attested, stigmatization levels vary from negative associations to comments that are, at times, racist.

Our analysis suggests that CUV French is a ‘style’ in Eckert’s terms or a ‘register’ in Agha’s (Agha, 2005; Eckert, 2008), composed of a combination of linguistic variables where co-occurrence (e.g. example 2) can help reinforce a particular indexical reading (i.e. *banlieue* in this case). Our research suggests that this is not only the case for speakers but also, crucially, for listeners. Moreover, the indexical fields of a linguistic variable that are compatible with a social meaning such as *banlieue* will not block this (e.g. informality in example 2) although they will of course not index *banlieue* in combination with a different set of non-CUV features. Perhaps more significantly, other social meanings in a feature’s indexical field can reinforce a particular interpretation: e.g. speakers using back [ɑ] (widely identified by listeners as a CUV feature) are also described by some listeners as ‘sad’, ‘disappointed’ or ‘frustrated’, terms which suggest a sense of the *banlieue* as a dead end. Similarly, in addition to urban descriptors (e.g. *cité, banlieue, quartier*), the *banlieue* intonation curve indexes the emotion of anger for some listeners, perhaps hinting at the perceived frustration and even violence of the *banlieue*. 
Elsewhere, classic CUV features appear not to index banlieue in certain contexts (e.g. example 4 above) or an example produces two quite different – even conflicting - interpretations for different listeners (example 5). This can happen, for instance, where features have different social meanings in different regions. For example, more broadly in the corpus, palatalization and affrication of [t] and [d] appear to be a salient regional indicator for those listeners who spent most of their lives in the south of France, for whom it largely indicated south-eastern, specifically Marseillais, or even North-African Marseillais identity. For northern listeners, and some younger southerners, this trait was not as clearly discernible. This may reflect the more widespread occurrence of the trait among these populations, where it has not acquired a particular social salience (as suggested by Trimaille et al., 2012). Some participants even commented that they ‘couldn’t hear it’ when others mentioned it. In any case, it is important to bear in mind that our analysis relates to an experimental setting: although methodologically challenging, we would ideally wish to test perceptions as identities are negotiated in actual interaction.

Finally, as Silverstein argues (2003), linguistic features can acquire new second-order social meanings: for example, back [a] is a variable which regularly appears for listeners in our focus groups to suggest a banlieue identity, particularly in response to male speech, whereas previous associations would have suggested primarily social class and regional connotations (see 5.1). What is significant in the case of our listener data is that this second-order association has not occurred through use of, or exposure through interaction to CUV French, as our listeners have only had sporadic interaction with users of CUV French. The focus group discussions revealed that certain associations were at least partly constructed in participants’ minds through exposure to depictions of salient categories (Marseillais, racaille) mediated by public figures: Marseille footballers served as models for typical Marseille speech, comedians’ sketches contributed to the conception of racaille (see the discussion in 3.2 above). There is evidence here of recursivity in the development of these social indices (cf. Androutsopoulos, 2009 on ethnolectal German) - that is, the listener thinks that a speaker must be from the banlieue, because s/he sounds like a parody they have encountered of a person from the banlieue. There also is an indication of ‘stylization’ in this comment, as there is in another remark concerning back [a]: the speaker was said to have a parler rebeu inauthentique ‘an inauthentic Arab speech style’. The suggestions of
role-playing through language use indicate that these respondents can conceive of a target stereotypical rebeu or Marseillais for emulation or parody (cf. Johnstone, 2011). The social meanings they understand in the style may come to form a part of the indexical field of individual variants, as in the case of back [ɑ]: where it occurs (with, for some listeners, its associations with social exclusion) alongside other CUV features, any overlaps in social meaning might encourage a secondary round of indexical associations with the shared category, in this case banlieue.

7. A Final Comment on Language and Identity
The issues around language and identity that are touched upon in this chapter, and in particular the predominantly negative associations of CUV French, are highly relevant to current political discourse around language and identity, especially given the policy context outlined in 2.1 above. In reaction to the actions of left-wing politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon of La France Insoumise, who refused to answer a Southern French journalist whom he chided for her regionally distinctive accent, Laetitia Avia, a member of the French National Assembly for La République en Marche, published a hastily written draft proposal for a law against ‘glottophobie’, a term for linguistic discrimination suggested by Blanchet (2016), via her Twitter account. The proposed law has not been submitted for debate, and Avia has since referred to the move as a ‘jab’ (pique) at Mélenchon, but has noted that the issue remains an important one. Indeed, her justification for the proposed law is of direct relevance to our study since she explicitly makes mention of ‘correcting’ her own CUV French in order to progress socially and politically:

‘J'ai moi-même grandi en Seine-Saint-Denis et je réalise que j'ai aussi corrigé, avec le temps, mon accent dit 'de banlieue' d'abord en entrant à Sciences-Po, puis en devenant avocate. Je connais donc le sujet personnellement’
‘I myself grew up in Seine-Saint-Denis and I realise that I have also, with time, corrected my ‘banlieue’ accent, first by getting into Sciences-Po and then by becoming a lawyer. So I am familiar with this issue at a personal level’ (Feltin-Palas, 2018).
At a recent citizenship ceremony in the Panthéon, President Macron positioned language as central to French identity: ‘devenir français c’est aussi épouser une langue’ (4 September 2020: ‘to become French is also to embrace a language’), citing a range of authors from the French literary canon. In a policy context such as France (see 2.1 above), unpacking the indexical complexities of a stigmatized way of speaking such as CUV French is a crucial step towards understanding the relationship between language practices and perceptions of social categories in contemporary France.

References


