

Who is a legitimate French speaker? The Senegalese in Paris and the crossing of linguistic and social borders

Abstract

Just as the distinction between “French” and “Francophone” has implications in French literary studies, the boundaries that position certain groups as outsiders also exist in French society at large, where just because one speaks French, one is not necessarily a legitimate French speaker. For instance, while linguistic legislation in France stipulates that one must demonstrate a certain level of language proficiency in order to be granted citizenship as a means to foster social integration, experiences of discrimination and exclusion evoked in interviews with 24 Senegalese immigrants and French citizens of Senegalese origin call into question the link between proficiency and acceptance. Through an Applied Linguistics perspective, this article demonstrates that linguistic competence is often determined by more than just one’s ability to use a language; one’s linguistic competence depends on the ability to prove cultural legitimacy, which is directly tied to understandings of race, nationality, and language ownership.

Key words

linguistic legislation, language ownership, postcolonialism, French national identity, integration, social exclusion, cultural legitimacy, racism

Introduction

As seen in contemporary literary debates concerning *La Francophonie*, the terms “French speaker” or “French writer” are anything but neutral. In the world of French literature, Francophone literature represents a distinct, if disputed sub-genre. For instance, one question that has attracted a great deal of critical attention is the issue of whether literatures called “Francophone”—which may include *both* writing by French immigrants and writing from France’s former colonies—should be considered as occupying the same space as “French” literature, or whether these categories are obsolete altogether.¹ The boundaries that position certain groups as outsiders in “French” literary culture parallels the boundaries that seem to apply in French society at large, in which there is evidence to suggest that just because one speaks French, one is not necessarily a legitimate French speaker. By approaching the topic of legitimacy through the perspective of Applied Linguistics, an interdisciplinary field whose branches include second language acquisition, language policy, discourse analysis, and identity studies, among others, and whose purpose is to investigate real-life linguistic issues in social, cultural, and political contexts, this article explores the complexities of language ownership. In particular, it investigates how Senegalese immigrants and French citizens of Senegalese origin conceptualize and understand racial and national identity claims with regards to linguistic legitimacy. This approach attempts to lend a more qualitative and detailed picture to discussions concerning language, citizenship, and inclusion.

Legislating French Linguistic Identity

In December of 2009, Michel Aubouin, from the Direction de l'accueil, de l'intégration et de la citoyenneté (DAIC), gave the opening remarks at a teaching conference in Paris, in which he bemoaned the fact that only a small percentage of immigrants attend French language classes.² He argued that learning the national language is essential to being granted French citizenship. However, his views were not shared by the majority of language teachers and second language researchers in attendance. Véronique Laurens from CIMADE, a non-governmental agency that helps asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants, countered Aubouin's claims, contending that requiring immigrants to prove they have a certain competence in French for obtaining citizenship is not only exclusionary but may actually impede language acquisition. Her comment, receiving applause from the vast majority of the audience, suggests that while on the surface, identity markers such as race and language ability may seem to be independent entities, they are actually inextricably linked to one another. This relationship is particularly problematic when linguistic legislation, whose main purpose is to promote the societal integration of immigrants, fails to question the link between linguistic competence and general acceptance in society.

Linguistic legislation in France reflects societal attitudes concerning the value placed on the French language, in particular, a standardized norm. According to Posner, "the standard language is viewed in the French tradition as a *trésor*, a *patrimoine*—an institution, which has been elaborated and perfected over time" (11). This view is in line with *l'exception française*, a notion that the way the French conceive of their language and have a relationship with their language is unparalleled in any other country. Coppel discussed this phenomenon by highlighting not only a love for the French language but for a French linguistic norm: "l'exception française, c'était l'extraordinaire attachement des Français non pas tant à leur langue – il n'y a rien d'extraordinaire à aimer sa langue – mais à la norme linguistique" (161).

A standardized norm has historically been important in France as a marker of societal cohesion. Haugen argued that in all countries, but particularly in France, "the process of standardization was intimately tied to the history of the nation itself. As the people developed a sense of cohesion around a common government, their language became a vehicle and a symbol of their unity" (930). Even though the French language had been on the road to standardization for centuries, the French Revolution marked the moment in French history when there was a concerted effort to have language unite the people.³ At this time, only a small portion of people in France spoke French with the majority of the country speaking regional languages or dialects.⁴ If French citizens learned to speak French it was seen as a sign of loyalty to the nation.

However, De Certeau, Julia, and Revel argue that the Revolution merely set the groundwork for standardization and that it was really mass education and communication that made it possible. In their opinion, the 1882-3 Ferry Laws of the Third Republic that granted free, compulsory and secular schooling, along with military inscription were the real reasons why standard French was able to reach the masses. Furthermore, Weber, whose work focuses on the place of rural populations in the French identity narrative, illustrated how educational policies equated learning of standard French with becoming

civilized: “the vulgar crowd was full of the sort of peasants whose stereotyped image filled current literature: they spoke ungrammatically, used characteristic locutions, mishandled the small vocabulary at their command...The only escape from this was education, which taught order, cleanliness, efficiency, success, and *civilization*” [emphasis in the original] (329). This understanding of the French language as almost a societal duty still manifests itself in linguistic legislation today.

Article 21-24 of the French civil code states that in order to pass the citizenship test an immigrant must have sufficient knowledge of the language, history and culture of French society:

Nul ne peut être naturalisé s'il ne justifie de son assimilation à la communauté française, notamment par une connaissance suffisante, selon sa condition, de la langue, de l'histoire, de la culture et de la société française, dont le niveau et les modalités d'évaluation sont fixés par décret en Conseil d'État, ainsi que par l'adhésion aux principes et aux valeurs essentiels de la République.⁵

The law demonstrates a direct connection between societal assimilation and linguistic and cultural competence. However, requiring immigrants to prove their level of linguistic competence is controversial. Echoing Laurens's fear that the law is exclusionary, Archibald argued that “la France met elle aussi un accent très important sur la langue dans l'évaluation des candidats à la naturalisation dont un pourcentage non négligeable se voit refuser la nationalité française pour des raisons de défaut d'assimilation linguistique” (19).⁶

An Applied Linguistics perspective on competence and inclusion

France obviously places great importance on citizens being able to speak French. This policy suggests that once one can speak French, one will be an integrated member of society, accepted by the greater French community. However, ethnographic research conducted in Paris in the fall of 2009 showed the link between linguistic competence and acceptance in French society to be questionable. During three months of fieldwork, interviews and natural conversations of 24 Senegalese informants between the ages of 18 and 60 in Paris and the surrounding suburbs were recorded.⁷ Some of the informants were French citizens of Senegalese origin, born in France. Others were naturalized after immigrating. Some informants had residency cards, which they found sufficient and were not seeking citizenship. Others were continuing their studies in France on student visas and planned to return to Senegal when finished. Others were in the country illegally. Whatever their legal status, an overwhelming majority expressed an inability to feel completely included or integrated in French society, even if they considered their language skills to be excellent. The concept of the native speaker, as theorized in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition research, can be used to explain the existence of the disconnect between linguistic policy and the reality faced by these French speakers who are positioned as societal outsiders.

The notion of the native speaker is quite contentious because its counterpart, the non-native speaker, is often viewed as having “underdeveloped communicative competence” just by virtue of being non-native (Firth and Wagner 285). Furthermore, Kramsch argued that there is a certain gate-keeping mechanism involved in which those belonging to the in-group have the power to confirm or deny legitimacy: “native speakership...is more than privilege of birth or even education. It is acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and nonnative speakers” (363). While Kramsch focused on gate-keeping, Kubota showed that the accessibility to native speaker status is contingent upon various identity markers, which must match with the image of a legitimate speaker. With regard to native speaker superiority, she contended that it is “not based purely on the linguistic attributes of individual speakers. The question of which category one belongs to is determined by a discourse that produces a certain linguistic and racialized profile as legitimate or illegitimate speakers” (236). In other words, a speaker’s race often takes center stage regardless of actual language ability.

This realization is particularly apparent to Lucie, a 31-year-old French woman of Senegalese origin, who related a story from a parent-teacher conference when she was a teaching intern in Montpellier:

J’expliquais à une mère que sa fille a fait du bon travail mais elle avait quelques petites fautes d’orthographe, et dans ma formulation je ne sais plus ce que j’ai dit mais j’ai dû faire une faute que j’ai corrigée après et la maman m’a dit ‘c’est gênant de la part d’un professeur qui a mal à s’exprimer.’ ... Et après il y avait des attaques, des attaques, des attaques. Donc elle a mis en question toutes mes méthodes, toutes mes façons de travailler ... J’ai analysé plusieurs fois cette faute-là—donc je pense que si je n’avais pas fait cette faute de langage elle n’aurait pas eu l’opportunité de me parler comme ça ... La fin est arrivée et je suis sortie, allée pleurer dans les toilettes. C’était trop fort. Je me suis sentie attaquée. Quand je suis sortie des toilettes j’ai vu mon collègue qui m’a dit ‘Ça va? Tu vas bien? J’ai vu comme madame t’a traitée. C’est pas bien.’ Je lui ai dit ‘Mais d’être noir en France, c’est ça’ (Lucie 11.27.09)

Lucie shows that the language mistake was a pretext for the woman to denigrate her, to demonstrate her annoyance with having someone like Lucie as her child’s teacher. Because of life experience and a shared experience with others like her, she assumes the attack was racially motivated, something that comes with the territory of being black in France.⁸ This anecdote echoes what Lippi-Green argued in her sociolinguistic research on language attitudes and accent, that “the evaluation of language effectiveness – while sometimes quite relevant – is often a covert way of judging not the delivery of the message, but the social identity of the messenger” (17). For Lippi-Green, questioning someone’s linguistic competence is a way to avoid being politically incorrect in places where commentary on other identity markers is socially unacceptable. Lucie wrestles with her grammatical mistake, suggesting that a person who is marked as an Other must be vigilant to never commit an error. They are held to a higher standard.

According to Lucie, she was marked as an Other partially because of her race: “On n’est pas un citoyen comme les autres. Quand tu es noir, tu n’es pas un Français comme les autres. Le Français de base, il est blanc. Il n’est pas noir” (Lucie 11.27.09). Lucie suggests that in the mindset of many people in French society, by virtue of being black she cannot be French; and therefore, she cannot be a native speaker of standard French. The fact that Lucie is French born, grew up in the French educational system, has no discernible foreign accent according to herself, her friends or the interviewer, and French is her only mother tongue demonstrates that the issues of native speaker and of language ownership go much deeper than the ability to speak the national language.⁹ Therefore, while Lucie is a native-speaker of the French language, she is often positioned as not being so because of over-riding identity markers such as race.

The story of Jean-Paul, a 32-year-old Senegalese person who has spent the last eleven years in France, further complicates the notion of competence when he reflects on his language ability and the process of integration. In the following example, he tells of the time that he was talking to a French colleague who remarked that Jean-Paul spoke as if he were reading a dictionary:

... I remember a French colleague, when I say French, I’m thinking of a white person, born of parents both born here for two or three generations, who told me once why I was thinking that much and expressing myself as I if was reading a dictionary. At that point I wasn’t speaking in a formal way. It was just the way I was used to speaking with people.

M: How did that make you feel when he made that comment?

J: Two things. I was thinking warning warning warning, if you want to integrate, and when I say integrate I mean when you are in a certain context you have to be at the level of the people but you can still show your differences as I don’t want to be at the level of the mass. I still keep my proficiency and I’m not going to be like uneducated people just so they can feel better. But in the same way, I was extremely shocked and surprised.¹⁰ (Jean-Paul 11.23.09)

A number of points stand out in this excerpt. First, Jean-Paul gives a description of a French person that is more than just a legal definition. He equates French with the white race. He also indicates that the person’s family must have spent a few generations in France to ensure authenticity. He is essentially describing a *Français de souche*, a ‘real’ French person. Second, Jean-Paul refers to a certain register of French that he does not consider formal but that is not something used by what he considers ‘the masses.’ What is particularly interesting in this excerpt is his response to having his style of speaking scrutinized. He took the critique as a warning sign—evidence that he was not successfully integrating or “blending in.”

Looking at Lucie and Jean-Paul’s experiences together reveals a lot about the nature of linguistic competence. Lucie was positioned by the parent who verbally attacked her as an incompetent speaker based on a mistake in her speech. Meanwhile, Jean-Paul was labeled as incompetent in the eyes of his colleague because while he had great command of the language, his choice of diction was so “high falutin” as to sound

either pretentious or stilted. Neither of them had acceptable French according to their critics. However, judging by how both Lucie and Jean-Paul relate their respective stories, they perceive this unacceptability as not just about language ability but also race. In other words, they both feel the need to transcend a label of ‘the Other’ that is based on their race, but in different ways. Lucie needs to speak in a way that overcomes a racist expectation of incompetence, while Jean Paul needs to sound more authentically French in order to overcome the *Français de souche* expectation of whiteness.

Horenczyk, in looking at identity reconstruction of immigrants during cultural transition, argued that in order to better understand their cultural identity redefinition, one must not only account for “the immigrants’ own attitudes toward acculturation, but also their views regarding the expectations held by the receiving society with respect to their social and cultural integration” (16). Jean-Paul’s racial definition of *Français de souche* and Lucie’s lament that “d’être noir en France, c’est ça” highlight their perceptions of French expectations with regard to race and language and provide insight into why people who are marked as ‘Other’ feel that integrating in society can be so difficult.

Lippi-Green’s research, mentioned earlier, illuminates some of the factors impeding successful integration. Focusing primarily on how people’s perceptions of accents influenced interactions between native and non-native speakers, she warned of native-speakers’ tendencies to shirk their communicative duties when speaking to nonnative-speakers. Those interviewed in the present study had frustrating experiences regarding accent as well. For instance, Ngirin, a Senegalese person in his late thirties who has spent seven years in France, and Sandrine, his French wife, relate an experience in which someone made a remark about his accent:

S: Une fois, dans un entretien pour un emploi, ils ont dit que son accent pose un problème.

M: Comment est-ce que tu t’es senti?

N: (laughs) J’étais pas du tout content (laughs).

S: Le mot accent, tout le monde a un accent. Pour un Marseillais, ça ne poserait pas un problème.¹¹ Mais pour un accent africain, là tu dis, ça pose un problème.

M: Parlez-moi plus de ça. C’est intéressant, parce qu’il semble que c’est pas parce qu’il a un accent mais d’où vient cet accent—

N: Oui, exactement, c’est bien ce que tu as dit là.

M: Quelles sont vos opinions sur ça?

S: Je pense que la personne qui dit ça ne se considère pas comme raciste, alors que c’est raciste. La personne qui le dit ne se rend pas compte qu’il est raciste.

M: Tu as mis le mot raciste. Il faut expliquer un peu.

N: Le problème c’est pas l’accent mais d’où vient cet accent parce que ça se voit ici. Tu as des anglophones. Les anglophones américains, ça c’est chic, c’est sexy. L’accent anglophone si tu viens du Ghana, c’est dur. Il parle l’anglais comme l’autre, c’est juste que sa zone géographique est différente. Pour moi, il y a plus de racisme dedans mais ils ne vont pas l’accepter. Tu peux tout le temps trouver des artifices. On dit toujours, mais bon, c’est pas ça.

Une chose que j'ai remarqué ici, parce que moi, je suis très interpellé par ce qui est l'immigration. Dans le sud de la France, même pas dans le sud, ici à Paris quoi, il y a plein d'Américains, Anglais, Irlandais qui viennent, s'installent en France qui ne comprennent pas un mot de français, ils veulent pas parler français... Autre chose. Combien de fois j'ai vu les gens qui entendent bien ce que je dis, je suis sûr qu'ils comprennent mais—mon accent pose un énorme problème... C'est juste un prétexte, c'est faux. (Sandrine and Ngirin 11.21.09)

The experience that Ngirin and Sandrine describe corroborates Lippi-Green's findings. She argued that a 'wrong' accent may cause native-speakers to reject their role in a communicative act. Ngirin produces evidence of this when he tells of instances where people claim to not understand him when he is sure they do.¹² Lippi-Green also contended, however, that having the 'right' accent does not guarantee the end of racism. In this case, the 'right' accent refers to the unmarked accent of native-speakers from the language community in question. For example, she debunked programs promoting accent reduction by questioning the idea that "discrimination is purely a matter of language, and that it is *first and primarily* the right accent which stands between marginalized social groups and a bright new world free of racism" (50). The way that Ngirin and Sandrine dissect Ngirin's story indicates their conviction of racist undertones. They argue that only some types of accents are scrutinized in French society, and these are the accents that correspond with marginalized groups. Lippi-Green came to a similar conclusion: "the process of standardization and language subordination is concerned not so much with an overall homogeneity of language, but with excluding only *certain types* of language and variation, those linked to social differences which make us uncomfortable" (121).

According to Ngirin and Sandrine, people from the United States, England, and Ireland move to France and often refuse to learn the language but are seldom criticized for failing to learn French or for speaking with a foreign accent. Meanwhile, English-speakers from Ghana, who share a common language with those from the United States, England, and Ireland, are held to a different standard. Ngirin and Sandrine contend that the difference in these experiences is due to racism. Lippi-Green, dissecting different ads and articles promoting good accents, showed that this could indeed be true: "Asian, Indian, and Middle Eastern accents and Spanish accents' are not acceptable; apparently French, German, British, Swedish accents are, regardless of the communication difficulties those languages may cause in the learning of English" (146). In other words, these accents do not represent "the Other" in the minds of most Americans who see people coming from these countries as equals. The same can be argued for Americans and British people in France. French society is not threatened by their presence on an individual level; therefore, there is no effort to single them out as different or as people who do not belong.¹³

Because of salient identity markers such as race, those interviewed for the present study are often positioned as outsiders and have, in turn, internalized this positioning. This emphasis on race materializes in most of the recorded discussions of nationality and citizenship. For instance, Karafa, a man in his 50's who has resided in France for around

30 years, remarked that he had never applied for French citizenship because he likes his skin color:

K: Non et je n'ai jamais demandé non plus.

M: Vous ne pouvez pas ou vous ne voulez pas?

K: Je ne veux pas parce que moi j'aime bien la couleur de ma peau. (Karafa 11.26.09)

His reasoning suggests that being French and being black are mutually exclusive; he is perpetuating a racial restriction on Frenchness, using skin color as the main criterion. Exclusion can thus be a two way street, driven by strong feelings about race. Karafa, who is a permanent resident but also a Senegalese citizen, has the luxury of refusing French citizenship and/or identity on the basis of skin color if he so chooses. But for those people born in France who know no other home but France, a sense of nationality or "belonging" can be more problematic. Many of those interviewed have expressed resentment or sadness that the *Français de souche* will never see them as being French or as legitimate French-speakers.

Lucie expresses her frustration in the following example:

L: Moi, je vais te dire que pendant toute mon adolescence, je ne me sentais pas française, pas forcément. Les gens me disaient que j'étais sénégalaise. Même pas sénégalaise, africaine. Je suis noire, donc je suis africaine. Je ne peux pas être noire et française. C'est trop surréaliste. Notre président Sarkozy, il est né, son père était encore hongrois. Moi, je suis née de parenté française mais ce que je trouve extraordinaire, lui, il est blanc. Moi, je suis noire.

M: Comment est-ce que tu te sens?

L: Je me sentais rejetée, quoi. Tout le monde me disait que je suis étrangère donc je le sentais. Mais moi, je ne connaissais pas le Sénégal. Je ne suis pas comme les gens qui se sentent algériens, sénégalais, parce qu'ils ont l'habitude de visiter ces pays. Moi, non. Donc j'étais entre les deux ...C'est quand j'allais au Sénégal qu'ils me disaient que je suis française. J'ai un passeport français, je vis en France, je ne parle pas de langue sénégalaise. (Lucie 11.27.09)

For Lucie, the feeling of belonging is contingent upon skin color, advancing the argument that language can never be the main factor in proving nationality or in feeling a sense of belonging. She brings up the case of President Sarkozy to highlight the place that race has in the discussion and conceptualization of nationality. Sarkozy was mentioned a significant number of times in the interviews, with most people finding it unjust that the nationality of someone of Hungarian descent goes unquestioned, while someone of Senegalese descent is never acknowledged as French. Lucie's commentary elucidates the particularly difficult and frustrating position that she and others like her occupy. She has realized that the identity she has tried to appropriate, that of a Senegalese person, is also beyond her reach because her experiences are different from theirs. Lucie's predicament is common for many French of Senegalese origin. She has grown up in the French educational system, an institution that supposedly teaches French citizens how to be French. She is even a teacher herself. She speaks what she considers standard French. For

all intents and purposes, she is integrated into French society, having done what is expected of her as a French citizen; and yet, she does not feel French. People do not assume she is French. People actually question her Frenchness.

Faatu, also born in France, relates a similar experience. She highlights the precarious nature of not having a homeland and feeling like a stranger everywhere:

F: En fait, en France nous sommes des immigrés mais au Sénégal nous sommes des immigrés aussi...C'est pas comment [les Français] nous classent mais comment ils nous perçoivent, c'est comme si nous sommes des immigrés. Ils parlent d'intégration mais l'intégration n'est pas totale...

M: Où est chez toi dans ton esprit?

F: Moi, dans mon esprit, Sénégal. Même si je suis née ici... ils ont l'impression que je suis née là-bas.

M: Même si tu parles parfaitement français? Mais pourquoi?

F: Parce que c'est ma manière d'être, ma manière de parler de l'Afrique, la culture, les traditions...Moi, je ne me sens pas du tout—je sais que je suis d'origine africaine, sénégalaise, casamançaise.¹⁴ C'est vrai qu'on vit en France mais moi je ne m'identifie pas française. (Faatu 12.03.09)

Faatu demonstrates that this inability to self-identify as French is deeper than race or skin color. While many of the informants feel they are reduced by the *Français de souche* to a color, quite a few informants underline that there is also a sense of cultural belonging tied to Africa that limits their ability to feel French. For example, Oumou, a 45-year-old woman who has spent more than half her life in France, explains her detachment from the French language through highlighting her Africanness: “Je suis africaine. C'est pas ma langue. Je suis africaine” (Oumou 10.04.09).¹⁵ Meanwhile, others cite their familial education with all the customs and mores that accompany it for making them less French. Duudu's perspective seems to imply that he is almost impersonating a “French” person when performing certain European customs:

Si quelqu'un me demandait d'où je viens, je serais tellement content, très fier de lui dire que je suis un Africain qui vient du Sénégal, qui est né au Sénégal, qui a les racines sénégalaises qui vit en France, qui est obligé maintenant d'avoir certaines habitudes européennes pour rester dans le pays. Mais dans ma tête je suis toujours africain. Je suis toujours sénégalais. (Duudu 10.03.09)

While Duudu speaks of African mores and customs, others consider religious identity and its effect on integration. In the following excerpt, Sébastien argues that the accepted mode of integration in France is assimilation and that people like him are not really able to be assimilated:

Par exemple, je suis croyant musulman et quand les gens l'apprennent, ils disent ‘mais je ne savais pas que tu étais encore aussi proche de ta culture d'origine.’ ...Je trouve ça drôle, en fait ça me rappelle le modèle d'intégration française et le modèle d'assimilation...Je pense que c'est à l'échec parce que je ne peux jamais assimiler la couleur de peau. Pourquoi les immigrés italiens,

polonais, espagnoles peuvent être intégrés à la population? C'est parce qu'ils sont tellement assimilables. C'est-à-dire, même tu peux franciser ton nom mais tu ne peux pas devenir blanc.
(Sébastien 11.08.09)

What is intriguing here is that during his discussion of assimilation Sébastien goes from talking about his religious identity as a Muslim to a racial identity in one fell swoop, again highlighting the centralized position that race/skin color holds in the minds of many immigrants. This excerpt can be deconstructed further in terms of how the *Français de souche* view him ambiguously. Sébastien grew up speaking French as his mother tongue in Senegal, and he talks about how people in France always remark on his lack of accent or other linguistic features that would distinguish him as a foreigner. Therefore, when people learn he is a practicing Muslim, he does not fit into their notion of a Catholic or secular French citizen. Meanwhile, his religious status seems less important than his skin color in his assimilation from the way that he moves effortlessly from talking about religion to skin color. He has much more to say about skin color arguably because it is more a factor in his day to day life. It is not obvious that he is Muslim. It is obvious that he is black.

Jean-Paul also reflected on his racial and religious identity and how those markers play into his positioning in society:

It's known that most of the people with a foreign background, and as I say, what I was saying earlier, if you were white and Christian, after one generation you can be seen as a French...Being black and Catholic doesn't change. I know because I'm Catholic. It's not an or, it's an and. (Jean-Paul 11.23.09)

According to many of the informants, if one is to truly assimilate, one has to completely fit into the model of a French person that has been imagined by the "rightful" members of the French nation. Unfortunately for those people who want to be accepted in their adopted country, there is no way to successfully imitate this model because one cannot transform skin color and one does not want to give up religious beliefs and customs. In addition, the discourse surrounding immigrants makes it almost impossible for immigrants to shed the stigma associated with them. For instance, Van Der Valk analyzed the language of parliamentary debates on immigration in France and found the following:

Assimilation apparently implies inclusion. The research reported in this article shows, however, that the discourse of the Right on immigration and nationality is characterized by major exclusive features. Similar to the right-extremist *Front National*, the mainstream Right uses strategies of positive self- and negative other-presentation, associates immigrants with problematic social phenomena and expresses fear about the decline of the French civilization. (310-11)

Therefore, while it is often argued that race/ethnicity do not enter into the equation in determining who a French person is, the repetition of positive self- and negative other-images reinforce stereotypes and cause people to associate problems with the non-white Other. For instance, many of the informants who have mentioned the designation

d'origine view it negatively because of the implied in-group/out-group dichotomy. Nyambi conveys the following experience:

Quand ils parlent des étrangers ils disent tu es d'origine. Ça n'est pas bon. Tu es d'origine sénégalaise ou algérienne ou gabonaise. Il faut qu'ils arrêtent ça. Si tu es français, tu es français. Et ça on dit toujours à la télé. Quand quelqu'un est champion, il est français; quand il a des problèmes, il est d'origine, quoi. (Nyambi 10.8.09)

Nyambi demonstrates how the label given to you can mark inclusion or exclusion. The nation is happy to include you if you are valuable in some way. If you are depicted in a negative light, you are labeled as *d'origine*. This phenomenon was particularly evident when comparing the media treatment of the French football teams in 1998 and 2010. When they won the World Cup in 1998 the *France multiculturelle* was celebrated.¹⁶ However, when they lost in the first round of 2010, disgraced and embattled, the multicultural team was demonized for not extolling French values and for not representing France as they should have. The nation questioned its national identity. Discussions about the riots in the *banlieues* throughout the past decade resurfaced, drawing connections between the infighting on the team and the civil unrest by marginalized sectors of the population. *Tu es d'origine?* is code for 'your presence is problematic.' And when something such as skin-color automatically evokes questions of origin, the 'best' French or proof of citizenship is not enough to achieve legitimacy.

Conclusion

These excerpts demonstrate how conceptualizations of French identity can be expressed through attitudes about language, race, and other cultural markers. These understandings of identity, in turn, establish shifting boundaries that can lead to a sense of exclusion, whether imposed by the dominant culture or self-imposed by those who have internalized this "otherness." Identity construction is therefore problematized by both *Français de souche* and 'Othered' French people in a way that makes successful sociolinguistic integration more difficult. The hardship that people in this study have with crossing these social and linguistic borders mirror the problem of Francophone authors writing in the language of the colonizers. For the 44 signatories of the *Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français* manifesto that circulated in *Le Monde* in 2007, the term Francophone connotes a lower status in French-language literature, and so they suggest the new term *littérature-monde* to replace the old binary. In addition, the Vietnamese-born writer Anna Moï, a signatory of the manifesto, has highlighted the racial dimension in the term Francophone by which the literature of white non-French authors (eg. Beckett, Kundera, and Cioran) is classified as French while the literature by black or Asian authors in French is called Francophone.¹⁷ This subtle distinction between French and Francophone suggests that just because they write in French, it does not mean that others, whether in France or their home countries, completely accept their claim on the language. Linguistic competence, therefore, is often determined by more than just one's ability to use a language; one's linguistic competence depends on the ability to prove cultural legitimacy, whether one is a well-known writer or the average immigrant from a former colony. This claim on legitimacy extends beyond language to include nationality,

ethnicity, race, religion, and the color of one's skin. It is through both sociolinguistic and literary studies that we can explore this complicated crossing of borders.

¹ See *Transnational French Studies: Post-colonialism and littérature-monde* (2010) or *Pour une littérature-monde* (2007) for scholarly debates on the evolving terminology for French-language writing. The article will return to these debates in the conclusion.

² The conference was specifically on the teaching of French to migrants and was held by the Association pour l'Enseignement et la Formation des Travailleurs Immigrés et de leurs familles (AEFTI).

³ Lodge (1993) argues that as early as the 15th century "the French 'nation' (i.e. the Paris region) had come to dominate many of the other 'nations' of Gaul. The centralizing power led to the assimilation of the dominated provinces to the French 'nation' and in this process the dominant group began to see their language as a symbol of a new national identity" (131).

⁴ Abbé Gregoire's report (1790-94) claimed that 46% of the 26 million people had no ability to speak French and that only 11% had complete control of the language (see Lodge 1993).

⁵ Secrétariat général à l'immigration et à l'intégration. "Réforme du contrôle de la connaissance de la langue française par les candidats à la nationalité."

⁶ The required level of language competence is B1. Language competency levels have been put forth by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR): "niveau de fin de scolarité obligatoire. Peut comprendre des phrases formulées dans un langage clair ou standard. Peut se débrouiller dans le pays où l'on parle la langue. Peut raconter, en terme simple, un événement qui le concerne" (Reforme du contrôle de la connaissance de la langue française par les candidats à la nationalité).

⁷ All names of the informants have been changed to ensure anonymity.

⁸ She has already discussed in her interview how she felt rejected as an adolescent because her skin color signified that she was not French: "Je me sentais rejetée, quoi. Tout le monde me dit que je suis étrangère donc je le sentais."

⁹ Lucie is currently learning Wolof in order to feel more connected to the country of her ancestors.

¹⁰ Jean-Paul insisted on being interviewed in English in order to practice.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that Lucie, who comes from Marseille, also had to contend with negative attitudes about her Marseillais accent when she began teaching near Paris: "Je dirais qu'à Paris, il faut essayer de pas parler avec un accent parce qu'à Paris, c'est la capitale et quand on remarque que tu as un accent, il y a le côté parisien supérieur aux provinces. Donc tu es inférieur aux Parisiens. Souvent parmi mes collègues au lycée, il y a quelques-uns qui cachent leur accent. Moi, j'ai essayé au début parce que je ne voulais pas que mes élèves sachent que je viens du sud" (Lucie 11.27.09). In work done by Paltridge and Giles (1984) on regional accents in France, the accent from Provence is seen as the most accented but comes second after the Parisian dialect in a hierarchy concerning positive attitudes about regional variation. Meanwhile, Kuiper (2005) has found that Parisians ranked speakers from Provence twentieth out of 24 regions for correctness but first for pleasantness (36).

¹² Rubin's (1992) study showed how listeners' perceptions of a speaker's ethnicity can influence listening comprehension. In this study, 62 American undergraduate students listened to a four-minute pre-recorded lecture by a native English speaker from Ohio. Half the group was shown a picture of an Asian woman and told the voice belonged to her while the other half was shown a picture of a Caucasian woman. Not only did questionnaires show that the students thought the Caucasian woman was easier to understand, they also performed better on a listening comprehension test, even though all students listened to the exact same recording.

¹³ This is not to say that sectors of the French population are not worried about the influence of the English Language. For instance, The Toubon Law, also called loi n° 94-665 du 4 août 1994, (which can be found in its entirety at

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000005616341&dateTexte=vig>), requires the use of French in official governmental publications, advertisements, workplaces, government-financed schools and other contexts. Many scholars, such as Belluzzi (1995), have suggested that this law was particularly aimed at English and its influence on French language and culture. Ager (1999) has written a whole chapter on Americanophobia. While many negative attitudes exist about the English language's

influence in France, these attitudes seem restricted to the language. When it comes to negative attitudes about the people who speak English, expats from England or America do not seem to pose a threat to French society on an individual level.

¹⁴ Casamançaise refers to the Casamance region in the South of Senegal.

¹⁵ Using personal deixis, Oumou simultaneously flags her affiliation to the Wolof language and echews any connection to the French language: “Avec quelqu’un qui est wolof, je ne veux pas parler français. Je parle ma langue” (Oumou 10.04.09). While it makes sense for someone to want to use the language with which they are most comfortable, especially if the interlocutor has the same relationship to the language in question, substituting “ma langue” for “Wolof” creates a non-neutral statement. The possessive “ma” suggests an emphasis on language ownership. Arguably, she feels she has the right to speak Wolof because it belongs to her.

¹⁶ According to Dubois (2000), “In the summer of 1998, in the midst of the euphoria surrounding France’s World Cup victory, won by a team that symbolized the multicultural mix of France...it seemed possible that the Republic might achieve tolerance and coexistence among the different groups that now make up its population. The ‘multicoloured’ nature of the French team, and the fact that the youth of the *banlieue* saw themselves reflected in the team, was noted by observers. Many repeated the idea that in winning the World Cup, the French team had issued a powerful blow against Le Pen’s *Front National* and its restricted vision of France. One commentator wrote: ‘Through the World Cup, the French are discovering, in the faces of their team, what they have become, a *République métissée*, and that it works, that we can love one another and we can win’ (Castro, 1998).” (p. 29)

¹⁷ The term *littérature-monde* and the manifesto are polemical for many reasons. The complexities in deciding on new terminology are discussed in texts such as those found in *Transnational French Studies: Post-colonialism and littérature-monde* (2010). It is important to note that these authors’ attitudes toward legitimacy as speakers of French reflect the concerns expressed by the informants in this study.

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Appendix

Senegalese Informants quoted

No	Name	Age	Date	Sex	Maternal Language	Additional Languages Spoken	Education	Yrs in France
.								
1	Lucie	31	11/27/09	F	French	~Wolof	Licence	Born
2	Jean-Paul	32	11/23/09	M	French	English, Wolof, ~German	Maitrise	11
3	Ngirin w/ Sandrine	38	11/21/09	M	Wolof	French, ~English	Bac	7
4	Karafa	50s	11/26/09	M	Wolof	French, Mandinka, Pulaar, Diola, Portuguese, ~Spanish, ~English	Licence	30
5	Faatu	28	12/03/09	F	Diola	French, ~English, ~Spanish	Licence	Born
6	Oumou	45	10/4/09	F	Wolof	French	Secondaire	25
7	Duudu	54	10/2/09	M	Pulaar	French, Wolof, Arab	Bac+2	18
8	Sébastien*	28	11/8/09	M	French	Wolof, Spanish, English, ~German	Licence	8
9	Nyambi	50s	10/8/09	M	Wolof	French, ~English	Secondaire	26

Demographic breakdown of all Senegalese informants in Paris

15 males, 9 females

aged 22-54

mean age: 32

12 in their twenties, 5 in their thirties, 3 in their forties, 4 in their fifties

maternal languages spoken: French, Wolof, Pulaar, Sereer, Diola, Mandinka, Soninke

Transcription conventions

- . The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence
- ? The question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
- , The comma indicates ‘continuing’ intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
- A Hyphen after a word or a part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption.
- ~ A tilde indicates non-fluency in the language.