A sociolinguistic model for electronically mediating language revitalization

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We describe #FPGlobal, a digital platform for revitalizing Francoprovençal, a threatened and underdocumented language. This platform connects speakers and learners of Francoprovençal varieties in three European and two North American countries. Its community-developed, sociolinguistically informed, and electronically mediated approach fosters communication that is less likely to trigger essentialist language ideologies common to language endangerment contexts. Early uptake of the platform illustrates how it encourages language users to share multimodal responses to prompts, archives these responses, and develops corpora of speech and text with potential utility for both pedagogy and research. Our participatory framework increases cross-variety and intergenerational language use, introduces Francoprovençal into new domains, fosters a new generation of linguists, and offers data for investigating developing writing systems and variation patterns.*

Keywords: sociolinguistics, sustainability, electronically mediated communication, EMC, language revitalization, Francoprovençal, citizen science

1. Introduction. This article introduces and motivates the platform #FPGlobal (http://www.fpglobal.ca/), a language revitalization project that is co-created and managed by a transnational team of speakers, learners, and linguists. Following recent efforts to incorporate variation into the documentation of languages (see Childs et al. 2014, Drager et al. 2017, Mansfield & Stanford 2017, Meyerhoff 2017, 2019, Meyerhoff & Nagy 2008, Nagy 2009, Stanford 2016, Stanford & Preston 2007), our approach to the project is sociolinguistic in method and intent. Methodologically, we adapt a DIGITAL FIELD STATION model of language revitalization (on field stations per se, see Polinsky 2019) that takes the form of an electronically mediated communication (EMC) platform. In envisioning this platform as a tool for language users, we embrace the existence of variable patterns in the language, possibly indicating influence indexed by social characteristics such as age and gender, regional variation, and/or the effects of contact with different majority languages. Such variation is intended to flourish in communications within this platform and thus be included in language descriptions based on the data it collects, in order to provide more complete information for language learners, users, and researchers.

We describe how such a model can be used to support speakers, learners, and linguists in efforts to revitalize and document one severely endangered language[1]—Francoprovençal—that has varieties spoken in three European and two North American countries, while at the same time producing material for teaching and, potentially, research.

* The authors represent a broader group developing the #FPGlobal platform. We gratefully acknowledge here the contributions of the rest of the team, and the interest in and dedication to the Francoprovençal language of many community members and associations. We are also grateful for financial support from the School of Arts and Science at the University of Toronto, the Centre d'études francoprovençales, and the Leverhulme Trust (ECF 2017-584). Hilary Walton provided excellent editorial support.

[1] The authors acknowledge that understanding language endangerment primarily through the prism of language 'loss' or, worse still, 'death' is characteristic of a Western-centric endangerment discourse, often rejected by speakers of threatened languages, and that other epistemologies exist, for example, those that consider such cases in terms of dormancy (see Zuckermann 2020). We endorse Leonard's (2023) view here that 'refusing' this dominant narrative of language endangerment, which does not pay attention to nefarious and systemic forms of oppression that can give rise to language endangerment, should form part of the response to this global crisis. We use the term to describe the status of Francoprovençal, however, following the lead of community members.

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The article is structured as follows: we first briefly describe the #FPGlobal platform (§2) and synthesize recent work that informs the present article (§3). Section 4 then gives an overview of the linguistic context, and §5 describes the EMC approach envisioned for this platform. Motivation for the project is provided in §6, and technical details and examples of the platform are given in §7. Section 8 examines first usage of the platform and looks forward to what could come next.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW. The ongoing undertaking described here began in 2019, when a group of Francoprovençal speakers, language documentarians, university professors, language activists, and ethnographers entered into discussions with one another and with other members of Francoprovençal communities in France, Switzerland, Italy, and Canada to better understand the language revitalization goals of these communities and to propose a joint venture for longer-term collaboration. From these discussions emerged an overarching aim to digitally bridge Francoprovençal communities across Europe, and across the Atlantic, by designing, disseminating, and supporting a novel EMC social media platform. To unite language users in a shared community of practice, centered on active use of Francoprovençal, this platform supports the use and documentation of Francoprovençal across communities (communities that do not necessarily share cultural practices). The partnership and the platform support the large-scale collection of samples of naturalistic speech and writing as a form of preservation for the communities and for research. The current version of the platform serves as a proof of concept. Community members began to use the platform in July 2024 after several years of consultation, conceptualization, and design.

Users see challenges regularly posted by other users online (see Figure 1) or in a WhatsApp feed and are encouraged to exchange messages in response (see Figure 2, and Figures 3 and 4 in §7 below). The example illustrated here is described in further detail in §7.



FIGURE 1. Challenge posted on the #FPGlobal platform, in an Aostan variety of Francoprovençal. Translation: 'Challenge: Eating. What is your favorite traditional dish? Post a message on WhatsApp with the hashtags #food and #valledaosta or the hashtag of your region, for example #aosta. Your post will appear below. (Posts must be public to appear in the feed.)'

As stated above, this platform is analogous in digital form to the field stations model for linguistic research. A field station is 'a centralized facility that coordinates scientific research by providing (i) research infrastructure, (ii) access to specific social, biological,

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FIGURE 2. WhatsApp post on the #FPGlobal website from a Faetar speaker responding to the '#food' challenge. Translation: 'Eating a fine pizza #apulia #favouritefood'.

or ecological systems that are not immediately available otherwise, (iii) training for students at the graduate and undergraduate levels, and (iv) access to local communities with the goal of obtaining data from them as well as training local specialists' (Polinsky 2019:e327). In a similar vein, we are advocating for (a) a pooling of resources including research infrastructure (see Pérez Báez et al. 2019), (b) training for students (Franco-provençal speakers and learners) in our respective communities and institutions, and (c) shared goal development in any research that might follow. We see such an approach as one further way of democratizing linguistic knowledge while also ensuring that the process of language documentation and revitalization remains inclusive and relevant to the communities with whom we work—qualities Fitzgerald advocates for in her programmatic paper for this section of *Language* (Fitzgerald 2021:e3).

The positionality of the authors is thus relevant to the description of this project. The project we describe could only have developed with a diverse team offering clear understanding of the community's perspective through ongoing dialogue. While a larger

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group of community members, learners, and speakers have contributed to the conception and development of #FPGlobal, three of us coauthored this paper.

One coauthor, Christiane Dunoyer, lives in a Francoprovençal-speaking community in Aosta, is a native speaker of Francoprovençal, and directs Aosta's Centre d'études francoprovençales. She has documented sociocultural and linguistic practices in western Europe's Alpine region and has actively sought to collaborate with academics and institutions outside of the traditionally-recognized Francoprovençal-speaking region in order to further revitalization efforts. She pursued studies in anthropology to support her cultural maintenance efforts.

The other two authors are Francoprovençal learners and academic sociolinguists. While not born and raised in Francoprovençal areas, they have dedicated much of their careers as linguists to working with such communities. A substantive body of this work has focused on Francoprovençal-speaking communities in Europe and Canada, and the ties fostered by this work have enabled them to offer outsider perspectives on the overall community's concerns and actions. Jonathan Kasstan lives in the UK and has conducted fieldwork with speakers of Francoprovençal, written academic papers about the language, and contributed to language maintenance efforts in Francoprovençal regions in France and Switzerland. Naomi Nagy began learning from and working with Francoprovençal speakers in the early 1990s, when she was a Ph.D. student in linguistics and a community member requested her help in documenting his family's language, which he viewed as nearing extinction. As a result, she has made extended stays in Faeto and maintains contact with Francoprovençal speakers and scholars in several countries. In addition to academic publications and a Ph.D. dissertation describing variation in Francoprovençal, she has contributed to efforts to create materials for use by Francoprovençal speakers and learners, including grammars that were co-created with students and teachers in Apulia. Although she has no ancestry from the Alpine cradle of Francoprovençal, some community members identify her as 'the little American who speaks Faetar'. She is currently a professor and department chair at the University of Toronto, whose linguistics department actively contributes to language documentation and revitalization activities on five continents. In Faeto, Francoprovençal speakers see her as an ally and friend.

The three authors are a subset of a larger group of developers of the platform, which contributes language expertise and social network membership from five countries where Francoprovençal is spoken. One Francoprovençal speaker commented that our 'effort to create a communal space for francoprovenzale speakers to interact is reassuring, as for me being far from Faeto it is important to have the possibility to share about life in Faeto in francoprovenzale. The way you express your interest to keep francoprovenzale alive and seen is amazing and heartwarming' (Livia Marella, p.c., January 8, 2024).

Through group discussion we see that five interrelated issues motivate this project: the role of language attitudes in language maintenance, issues related to languages without a written practice, the relative isolation of many communities that speak Francoprovençal, the important connections between language and other cultural practices, and the need to pool resources to achieve tangible revitalization outcomes. As similar issues affect many minoritized languages, we anticipate that this model can be adapted in other similar language settings. Although the project was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and remains at an early stage, the intention here is to disseminate the work that has been undertaken to date on this severely endangered variety in order to engage

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with other revitalization experts, while being mindful of the utility of sharing what we have learned.

3. CITIZEN SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION. Introduced by Rymes and Leone in 2014 and elaborated in more recent work (see Rymes et al. 2017, Svendsen 2018), CITIZEN SOCIOLINGUISTICS is a framework that relies on collaboration between professionals and nonprofessionals in DOING sociolinguistic research, from project design and development to data collection. In this sense, the concept is not dissimilar from CITIZEN SCIENCE, which has seen success in other fields as a means of engagement between nonprofessional and professional researchers and their institutions for the purpose of conducting research collaboratively and for the benefit of both groups. The approach is characterized by (i) inclusion of laypeople in the scientific process, (ii) knowledge mobilization both in academic and community venues, and (iii) reciprocity between researchers and the public (Svendsen 2018:138). Among the advantages of the framework is the potential for including different kinds of social actors—and therefore different kinds of epistemologies—in the research process, as well as the potential to advance the social impacts OF, and social justice IN, sociolinguistics (see Charity 2008). Including a wide range of participants in the research (including its design) ensures representation of speakers' and learners' views as decisions are made about the approach. In this context, 'the production of knowledge is constructed for, with, and by community members and "is therefore not merely (or primarily) for or by linguists"' (D'Arcy & Bender 2023:55, quoting Czaykowska-Higgins 2009:17). Our goal is to create a context that 'centers community members among the experts and advocates [such] that they [are] "directors of and active partners in the research [and revitalization work], as opposed to being simply empowered research subjects"' (D'Arcy & Bender 2023:56, quoting Czaykowska-Higgins 2009:24–25).

Such an approach contributes also to CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS scholarship (Leeman 2005, 2012, 2018), which adds an important pedagogical dimension. This approach aims to shift power dynamics regarding language description, teaching, and ideology to the language users (both speakers and learners) by developing their critical awareness of how linguistic practices 'are shaped by, and shape, social relationships' (Clark et al. 1990:249). While the original conceptualization of critical language awareness implies a we/they (instructor/student) dichotomy, our framework is intended to foster communicative practices in which community members fill both roles. For language revitalization, a particularly relevant aspect of critical language awareness is the goal of 'unveil[ing] the intrinsic legitimacy of all language varieties, thereby contesting discriminatory practices against minoritized populations while embracing social justice and educational equity' (Beaudrie 2023:1).

We argue that a citizen sociolinguistics framework (Svendsen 2018) is readily adaptable to language revitalization initiatives and brings several advantages. However, use of the term 'citizen' requires a caveat. While originally intended, within the citizen science framework, to refer to people without professional training in a given field (here, linguistics), its more general meaning of a person with 'a right to live in a state and that state cannot refuse them entry or deport them' (Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford 2023) is at odds with the status of speakers of those most threatened varieties.[2] As language revitalization is first and foremost for us a social justice concern, it is important to foreground this fact. This issue notwithstanding, a broad

[2] We appreciate the illuminating remarks of an anonymous referee on this issue.

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term encompassing users of spoken and signed languages, as well as those who hope to develop an ability to use the language, is not readily available. Given that we are focused here on an oral language, we employ the term 'speaker', but it is important to note that the sets of speakers, learners, and linguistic experts partially overlap within this project, among the authors of this article, and in the communities themselves. Other available terms that are more inclusive than 'speaker' include 'language affiliates' (which includes 'partial speakers, language learners, and non-speakers' (Davis 2016:100), but could also include signers), 'metalinguistic community members' (i.e. 'a community of positioned social actors engaged in practices that position language as an object'; Avineri 2019:90), and 'language recognizers' (i.e. those who recognize their linguistic variety as its own language rather than a 'deformed' variety of the national standard; Keller 2021:185–86). In the sections that follow, the term 'speaker' refers to the (anticipated) users of #FPGlobal and includes all categories of users and potential users described above. This supports our aim to weaken the assumption that 'speaker' implies 'fluent speaker' (see also Birkeland et al. 2024).

Concerning language revitalization specifically, the parameters of the citizen science framework resemble the more inclusive approaches to sociolinguistic research that have developed in recent years. For example, Albury (2016:287) has argued for a 'folk linguistic' perspective, that is, the inclusion of local perspectives on understanding what revitalization means in terms of 'the vitality it should deliver … for local purposes with local ideas by examining local knowledge and preferences'. This is an additional application of 'folk linguistics', a term whose use in sociolinguistics can be traced back to Preston 1993. For Albury, this involved surveying participants, including Pākehā and Māori students at the University of Otago from different backgrounds and working in different disciplines, about how language revitalization was understood and defined in the context of the Māori language. This allowed the establishment of what the participants in the sample claimed to know as linguistic facts and logics relevant to the revitalization process. Albury argues that such an approach brings tangible benefits, not least in positioning speakers as experts whose knowledge must be integrated into the research process, and more readily informs policy. A citizen sociolinguistic approach to language revitalization is consistent, then, with the broader trend in the field to diversify scientific knowledge in ensuring that the team includes different actors, asking different but complementary research questions and bringing a variety of epistemologies to a shared goal (Fitzgerald 2021:e7; see also Hilton 2021).

This overlaps with our goals and the direction of scholarship vis-à-vis language revitalization and critical language awareness more generally. In what follows we propose to bridge these areas of inquiry by focusing on a particular endangered-language context, whose sociolinguistic situation we briefly sketch in the next section. As we show below, our project aims to increase Francoprovençal speakers' and learners' awareness of the existence of other Francoprovençal varieties besides their own, and of different possible relationships between Francoprovençal and the majority language of the countries in which the minoritized language is used, related to different ecologies, especially regarding degrees of institutional support.

4. Language context: francoprovençal. The glottonym 'Francoprovençal' is used by linguists to refer to a grouping of Romance varieties spoken in Europe across French, Italian, and Swiss borders (Hall 1949). For discussion of the status of the language in different locales, see Kasstan & Nagy 2018a and Zulato et al. 2018. While this transnational space is widely regarded as 'Francoprovençal-speaking', it does not

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constitute a single political unit. The language varieties in this Alpine area are variously referred to as 'patois' and 'Arpitan' by speakers. Some 800 years ago, Francoprovençal speakers from France (most likely the Isère River valley) migrated to Apulia, a region in southern Italy. They settled there in two isolated mountaintop villages, Faeto and Celle San Vito (Nagy 2000:5–6 and citations therein, 2024:1–2). Most inhabitants of these Apulian villages still speak Francoprovençal. Francoprovençal is also spoken as a heritage language in parts of the US and Canada, with documented speakers having families from Faeto and Celle San Vito. Francoprovençal is endangered in all sites where it is found (for an overview, see Kasstan & Nagy 2018a). In Europe, the language is spoken across a vast space of some 50,000 km^2 which includes, on the one hand, flat, densely populated, often urban terrain and, on the other, more sparsely populated mountain terrain. This has consequences for the distribution of speakers and their practices. The former has seen much greater population movement than the latter, and it is in the cities that the language has lost substantial ground to the dominant contact languages. That is, where overall population is dense, it is more difficult for Francoprovençal speakers to find each other, while in more rural areas, this is much less the case. In practice, what has emerged is a pattern of tight multiplex network ties outside of built-up areas and cities, in contrast to very loose ties with few speakers in cities (Bichurina 2019, Menapace 2001).

Francoprovençal was once a dominant vernacular that formed part of a larger linguistic repertoire in the region (brief historical accounts can be found in e.g. Josserand 2003 and Zulato et al. 2018). Over the past century there has been a significant shift to national languages, and intergenerational transmission has largely ceased, but this varies by region (Meune 2021). Further, speakers by and large do not embrace any sense of a larger, unified linguistic space that linguists refer to as 'Francoprovençal-speaking'. Instead, ideologies of language are locally focused. In North America, while the language is still spoken in diasporas that come from Faeto and Celle San Vito, it is decreasingly the language of wider daily communication, despite valiant efforts to reverse language shift among the remaining speakers, all of whom are adults and most of whom are elderly (Zulato et al. 2018). In contrast, Faetar (our glottonym for the Apulian variety) is spoken by virtually everyone in the villages of Faeto and Celle San Vito, though this constitutes only around 500 people.

While gradual language shift has long been taking place, Francoprovençal community members generally maintain positive attitudes toward the language. For example, in those parts of southern Italy where Francoprovençal is spoken, like Faeto, surveys have shown that speakers still value the local variety: it continues to be spoken in most public and private domains, and intergenerational transmission continues. In the autonomous region of the Aosta Valley (northern Italy), where Francoprovençal is most vital and increasingly seen as an emblem of regional identity, speakers have been slowly but surely pushing the language into new domains of usage. Today, it is not unusual to find speakers in all sectors of the economy (Dunoyer 2010). This can be compared to the sociolinguistic context on the French side of the border, where the language is becoming dormant even in the most intimate domains of usage (i.e. the home; see Bichurina 2019, Zulato et al. 2018).

In the wider region, speakers and learners generally express an interest in preserving and revitalizing Francoprovençal, even if they disagree on how this should be achieved (e.g. Hawkey & Kasstan 2015). Due in part to the fact that the language is spoken across national borders, revitalization initiatives have been largely piecemeal, are highly

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localized, and tend to take the form of small-scale pedagogy-oriented initiatives (such as language classes run by communities) or cultural activities (e.g. theater performances in the target language that are often geared toward traditional practices that resonate with older speakers). Francoprovençal lacks a standard orthography, although several distinct regional norms have been proposed. Attempts at supralocal orthographic normalization (Stich 2001, 2003) have been widely rejected by some influential linguists working on Francoprovençal (who often do not themselves support revitalization work),[3] by revitalization centers (who consult closely with linguists harboring strong views on orthography), and by some speakers who have taken to writing in Francoprovençal (and who tend to prefer instead local phonetic spelling systems; see Tuaillon 2004). However, such initiatives remain popular among a small number of—largely younger—language activists, and there is increasing recognition of a pressing need for wider communication among Francoprovençal speakers (Bichurina et al. 2018), which has recently motivated the design of a new, simplified orthography (Martin 2020).

Speakers have an active social media presence: contributions in Francoprovençal can be found on Facebook pages, in WhatsApp groups, and in at least one online podcast,[4] although such platforms cater to users who already benefit from some fluency in the language.[5] Indeed, Nagy was invited to document Francoprovençal by a community member who was frustrated by the fact that he—in his words—'was not a speaker' and did not have access to resources to learn the language (albeit in 1992, prior to the rise of such social media platforms). That descendant of Faetar speakers was unaware of the related varieties spoken elsewhere. Nagy has remained motivated to work on Francoprovençal in the intervening thirty-plus years by similar queries regularly landing on her desk. The sociolinguistic context of Francoprovençal is indicative of a language in terminal decline for most Francoprovençal-speaking regions. However, the push to introduce Francoprovençal into new domains of usage by different kinds of social actors in a concerted way could, we suggest, offset the trend. Such projects call for collaborative design and execution to achieve successful language revitalization, that is, research with and by community members (see Cameron et al. 1992, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Tsikewa 2021, as discussed in D'Arcy & Bender 2023). These projects also bring the promise of connecting speakers internationally. Our transnational team, each with networks within different communities, provides a unique opportunity to develop awareness of and connections among the communities. This networking constitutes a distinctive way for scholars to contribute to revitalization efforts (see further discussion in §6.4, and §2 above).

We close this section by acknowledging that the situation of Francoprovençal differs from that of many other contexts where revitalization initiatives are desired.[6] This limits

[3] For example, linguist Tullio Telmon (2016:19) indicates that the act of writing down a traditionally oral language creates 'una norma astratta o di un impasto delle diverse varietà … di qualche cosa che nulla ha a che fare con quella lingua naturale umana' [an abstract norm or a mixture of different varieties … that has nothing to do with that natural human language]. He further suggests that it is better to rely on transmission of natural human languages that is 'libera e naturale' [free and natural], which, incidentally, he describes as depending on acquisition in traditionally male-dominated environments such as taverns (pp. 22–23).

[4] Other noteworthy initiatives include a pedagogical app with recorded pronunciations for an extensive word list from a Francoprovençal variety spoken in Savièse, Valais (Switzerland): http://fondationbretzheritier.ch/patois/application-mobile-patois-saviese/. These resources are listed on the #FPGlobal website.

[5] Published research on social media usage in these communities remains scarce (though see Kasstan 2019): these observations are based on one author's fieldwork.

[6] We thank an anonymous referee for suggesting the content of this paragraph.

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the extent to which aspects of this undertaking are widely transferable. Francoprovençal communities operate within the constraints of modern nation-states, a fact that informs language ideologies on the ground. Speakers of Francoprovençal belong to societies where near-universal literacy (in some language) is the norm and written texts (in some language) exist. Francoprovençal is a western European language, which provides familiarity with an orthography based on a Roman alphabet that already dominates in the digital space. There are universities and speaker-linguists in the Francoprovençal region. Thus, Francoprovençal communities enjoy particular benefits (as do many other communities with threatened varieties in similar situations) that may make them particularly predisposed to this initiative.

5. The #FPGlobal initiative: overview and context. #FPGlobal is a novel EMC social media platform designed to digitally bridge Francoprovençal communities across Europe and the Atlantic.[7] It links not just a set of related language varieties, but those communities that still speak these varieties. Our challenge is to create a broader language community, which does not currently exist, and to appeal to the differing language ecologies described in §4. The possibilities of sharing and creating a community will be based on rather different elements if we consider cross-Atlantic connections as opposed to those geographically closer, yet politically divided, Alpine communities. This platform introduces new linguistic practices and linguistic and cultural representations and, we hope, a broader sense of community.

In this section we provide a brief overview of the platform in order to contextualize the discussion in §6 of the issues that motivated it. We then provide details and examples of this platform in its test phase in §7. Interested readers can explore the platform at https://fpglobal.ca/.[8]

#FPGlobal serves five revitalization aims that encourage language use in new domains, produce materials to serve pedagogical needs, and support research on variation and change in small and less-standardized language varieties for speaker-linguists and the wider research community. These interlocking aims have driven the following objectives:

(i) Design, build, and deliver a social media aggregating platform through which Francoprovençal speakers in different countries can exchange messages multimodally via voice, text, and video over several existing social media platforms;
(ii) Build a tagged archive of this content, including translations across the target language (Francoprovençal) and the contact languages (French, Italian, English), as well as translations across oral, visual, and textual modalities;
(iii) Design and build into the platform language-learning and language-practice modules to facilitate content creation;
(iv) Offer the platform as an open source model for adaptation to other language settings, and improve it as options for so doing reveal themselves.
(v) Develop a mutually beneficial research agenda to include sociolinguistic analysis of the contributions to the platform, including observations of (a) whether and

[7] The composition of the hashtag #FPGlobal merges the glottonym's initials with the modifier <global>, which was chosen since, orthographically, it is very similar in form to both the attested Francoprovençal noun *globo* 'globe' and its French, Italian, and English equivalents.

[8] This article was submitted prior to active use of the platform, which was launched in July 2024. We revised the paper to reflect usage as of January 2025.

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how consensus builds over how to write in Francoprovençal, (b) whether or not revitalization efforts of this kind can engender changes in speakers' language attitudes and practices, and (c) how socially meaningful variation emerges multimodally as speakers from different varieties come into contact with each other.

Current usage contributes to the first four objectives. The fifth may be initiated after the development of further infrastructure, and with ethics approval.

Linguistic scholarship has come to acknowledge that the advent of EMC may redefine communicative interactions around the world as including 'translocal and transtemporal' uptake (Blommaert 2019:113; see also Belmar & Glass 2019:2). Indeed, as Jones et al. (2013) and Soria et al. (2016), among others, have pointed out, one way for minoritized-language communities such as those speaking Francoprovençal to be successful in the long term is to build and maintain an online presence. There are multiple reasons for this. First, EMC can foster virtual language communities in which speaker errors and innovations are less likely to trigger essentialist, standard-language ideologies (as acknowledged in Holton 2011). This is pertinent to the Francoprovençal context, as in other analogous settings, since it is not uncommon to observe generational divides between younger, less proficient speakers and older, fluent speakers, a situation described in some European minority language settings as engendering 'social and linguistic incompatib[ility]' (O'Rourke & Ramallo 2011:139). Indeed, that Francoprovençal is now used in such online spaces is a testament to the fact that long-held purist attitudes around language use (see Kasstan 2018) have become more flexible. This may indicate that concerns around the use of particular orthographic conventions, reflecting particular ways of speaking, can be suspended and interaction can be encouraged. Indeed, for larger languages, it has been observed that online writing genres encourage the 'creep' of informal styles into formal writing (Purcell et al. 2013:35), and we see this as an advantage in making written communication in Francoprovençal more visible and accessible through this platform.

Second, the approach we propose here is intended to connect and bring together speakers of Francoprovençal in Italy, France, Switzerland, and North America, supporting their shared cultural and linguistic heritage. A language's digital presence can raise awareness of linguistic diversity among the wider public, and in so doing can contribute to the fostering of a more 'modern' image of the minority language (Belmar & Glass 2019), increasing the language's usage and status. This conforms to the goal of critical language awareness to enable language learners and speakers to 'value and appreciate all linguistic varieties, and to defend their own uses of [the minoritized language] in their communities' (Beaudrie 2023:1). We note that, while this 'lumper' vs. 'splitter' mentality may afford economies to develop support for speakers of related but distinct varieties and encompasses the view that embracing variation (including contact-induced change) may forestall language dormancy, it is at odds with some views in decolonializing communities. In such contexts (e.g. Indigenous communities in North America, which often aim to rebuild relations to specific lands and contexts in response to the ruptures and displacements of colonization), de-localizing may be considered negative.

However, as we describe in §7, users of this platform are encouraged to maintain a sense of local identity by foregrounding their own Francoprovençal varieties through the use of features such as geolocation ('place') hashtags (at their preferred level of granularity, from village to nation).[9] Moreover, we do not propose here that technology

[9] We thank associate editor Wesley Leonard for encouraging us to grapple with this ethical concern.

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is an ANTIDOTE to language shift on its own. Indeed, such an assumption would mask common processes of 'language oppression' (Roche 2020) that give rise to language shift. However, grassroots efforts are increasingly adopting EMC platforms as part of wider revitalization initiatives. For example, Zuckermann 2020:234–39 describes the success and symbolism of what he calls 'talknology' for Barnagarla Aboriginal language reclamation.

Researchers can engage with such interest in digital revitalization efforts when the community accepts this as an ethically compelling and appropriate approach. We see advantages in adopting EMC strategies in the Francoprovençal context specifically. First, as we have seen, Francoprovençal is a highly fragmented language spoken transnationally in quite different ecologies (for discussion, see Kasstan & Nagy 2018b, and particularly Zulato et al. 2018). However, even in those regions where Francoprovençal is most vital, EMC platforms can play an important role in language maintenance, particularly in terms of socializing younger community members, which may act as a channel of socialization similar to the norms learned via social media. If EMC is more readily adopted by those speakers with higher fluency rates, then they too might become just as motivated and productive in using EMC as those community members who seek out occasional use to nurture interest or curiosity in the language. Third, and perhaps most significantly, an EMC platform might well play a decisive role in language use across borders—where mutual intelligibility is not necessarily guaranteed—given that where the language is most vital, speakers tend to be much younger and therefore also more mobile (Bichurina & Dunoyer 2019). Whether fluency, age, and access to the internet correlate with the use of this platform are testable hypotheses within our framework. Indeed, such investigations that help us understand the relationships among these factors would directly benefit future revitalization efforts.

Having presented a preliminary overview, we next describe and motivate the novel EMC platform for Francoprovençal, which we then connect with broader issues in the areas of language documentation, revitalization, and sociolinguistics.

6. MOTIVATION FOR #FPGLOBAL. Four interrelated issues motivate this project and influence the design of the #FPGlobal platform:

- the role of language attitudes in language maintenance;
- issues related to languages without a widely accepted written orthography;
- the relative isolation of many communities that speak Francoprovençal; and
- the need to pool resources to achieve tangible revitalization outcomes.

As similar issues affect many other minoritized languages, we anticipate that this model can be adapted for other languages if they face similar threats. Details in §4 about the language context specific to this project will allow others to pinpoint similarities to and differences from other communities.

6.1. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES. It is well established that speakers of minoritized languages often harbor a deficit view of their language (Keller 2021:184, Nagy 2000:7–8). Speakers may think of these languages as broken, inappropriate for many activities, or inferior to their national language(s), as a result of a lack of institutional support and the prestige they are accorded, or through many years of systemic oppression and marginalization (see Roche 2020). However, 'sociolinguistic understanding of nonmainstream dialects … [can] not only question but also change the ways that language attitudes uphold … forms of discrimination' (Godley & Reaser 2018:21). As language attitudes can be a strong predictor of language maintenance (see Kasstan

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et al. 2018), one aim of this project is to assess the extent to which such a platform can engender a change in linguistic practices and attitudes toward Francoprovençal. We suggest that over time the ongoing development of an innovative social media platform will bring more people, particularly younger people and learners, into this communicative practice. We anticipate that the more connections between language and culture that can be developed here (via communicating about culturally relevant topics), the more motivated speakers (who already value their culture) will be to maintain their language.

Advocating for culturally sustaining education (see Paris & Alim 2014, 2017) is a key element of the critical language awareness approach we adopt here. One example of how this can be accomplished is a project developed at Newcastle University that highlights the cultural importance of food. *Linguacuisine*[10] asks users to upload language-learning recipes, because, as noted by Paul Seedhouse, one of the project's developers, 'following a recipe brings a new language to life for a student or learner, rather than being something they learn by just sitting in a classroom'.[11] Recognizing this importance of food across cultures, we adopted a similar approach for the #FPGlobal platform via a series of 'challenges' that focus on food and the preparation of food (see Figs. 1 and 2 in §2 above). This first food-related challenge was followed by prompts related to other aspects of culture. Indeed, a successful work session at a summer school organized by the Centre d'études francoprovençales in Aosta (see §6.4) in July 2024 resulted in the impromptu development of a series of such prompts. These were first written in French, then translated into Aostan and Apulian varieties of Francoprovençal, and subsequently into Italian and English. In tandem with developing broader language awareness, we hope to increase mutual recognition of the similarities and differences across communities and cultures that share Francoprovençal by making the platform accessible to community members with any level of fluency in Francoprovençal or the relevant national languages.

6.2. Tensions between orthography, standardization, and variation. While EMC is now highly multimodal, communication within minoritized languages may not be. Indeed, in those digital contexts where such languages are used, platforms may be text-focused, and the benefits of text in EMC do not naturally accrue in communities without codified writing systems (defined as 'allocational harms' in Flores & Rosa 2015). We are not the first to suggest that the timing is apt for tools that facilitate communication online. Concerns around writing 'the wrong way' often impede writing altogether in communities lacking standardized orthographies (Lillehaugen 2019). In the case of Francoprovençal, the folk-linguistic perception among speakers since at least the late nineteenth century has been one of a fragmented oral vernacular tradition (Kasstan & Nagy 2018a:1–2).

As contemporary Francoprovençal revitalization movements emerged in response to language endangerment, attention quickly turned to concerns around standardized orthographic practice. Today, a number of regional standards have been proposed, some of which are adopted locally. Yet there is no widely accepted standard, and literacy in Francoprovençal remains low. We propose that this issue can, in fact, contribute to a solution in revitalization: interactions among speakers with different (or no) orthographies might encourage more active language use, precisely because of the lack of shared

[10] https://linguacuisine.com/
[11] https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/archive/2018/08/linguacuisine/

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norms that might otherwise impede writing efforts.[12] This is a position advocated by Lillehaugen (2016), who notes that interest in using minoritized languages online has grown as a form of activism. Lillehaugen worked with high-school students who spoke Zapotec, but had no experience writing it, to develop writing practices in six varieties of Zapotec. She developed a solution to 'a circular problem' for initiating a tradition of writing in a language:

> Potential writers are reluctant or unmotivated to write in a language that no one can read. But at the same time, why learn to read a language for which there is nothing available to read? … Twitter [now 'X'] can be used effectively to support burgeoning writers of languages for which no current readership exists. (Lillehaugen 2016:356)

Her project resulted in an increase in written Zapotec, an international online network of Zapotec users, and a growing group of high-school students finding new contexts in which to use Zapotec. These demonstrably positive outcomes of an embryonic revitalization initiative adopting an EMC platform remain largely untested in other contexts.

One obstacle that Lillehaugen's project met was that her participants did not know what to write about, because she simply asked students to use the platform to write spontaneously in the target language. For #FPGlobal, in contrast, we propose a structured and layered social-media-friendly platform, based on the 'principled communicative approach' to language teaching (Dörnyei 2009). This approach considers developing language use through a combination of meaningful and relevant task-based activities, functional language use, different kinds of input, and collaboration. In so doing, we provide an environment, not subject to existing norms because of its distinctive modality, in which Francoprovençal speakers and learners can engage in communication and, at the same time, increase exposure to and of the language. Responding to challenges that arose in previous studies, we offer specific prompts to overcome the 'what should I talk about?' problem and encourage exchanges among participants.

This, in turn, may address the low rates of literacy in Francoprovençal. EMC and social media in particular bring liberating benefits in this regard, absent a widely accepted codified norm. For example, Belmar and Glass (2019:9) adopt Cenoz and Gorter's (2017:909) model targeting Basque to offer five 'guiding principles for sustainable translanguaging', which prioritize translanguaging practices for a more inclusive space that is not exclusively for highly competent speakers. These are:

1. Design functional 'breathing spaces' for using the minority language;
2. Develop the need to use the minority language through translanguaging;
3. Use emergent multilinguals' resources to reinforce all languages by developing metalinguistic awareness;
4. Enhance language awareness;
5. Link spontaneous translanguaging to pedagogical activities.

These principles summarize the intent of encouraging translanguaging practices. Running contrary to most fluent speakers' attitudes around target language use (see Kasstan 2018 for the case of Francoprovençal), the theoretical underpinning of their model is that translanguaging, or the fluid combining of multiple language varieties, can have a positive impact on revitalization. This is because translanguaging, as a theoretical framework (see García & Kleyn 2016), is concerned principally with the erasure of language hierarchies and boundaries: it understands multilingualism to be the norm and

[12] This may not be appropriate to all contexts, as discussed for Mongolian (Baioud & Khuanuud 2022).

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focuses on speakers' strategies in achieving communicative ends, and how those strategies are structured (see García & Wei 2014). In other words, it understands language practice in a different way from how it is traditionally understood by most older fluent speakers of minoritized languages in Western nation-states, at least as traditionally described in language endangerment discourse around purism (see Dorian 1994).

Many examples of this emerged in the first days of use of #FPGlobal for exchanging messages between communities (among strangers who did not know each other). Joining #FPGlobal was first encouraged in Aosta, where participants were excited at the prospect of reaching out to and connecting with people in the much smaller Apulian communities. However, when one of the authors then encouraged reciprocal use in Apulia, she initially encountered resistance. Several stages were repeated by different actors. First, an Apulian would reject the feasibility of communicating with an Aostan 'who didn't speak the same language'. Second, upon encouragement to try to understand one of the Aostan posts, they would realize that they could understand but would immediately (and disdainfully) point out 'spelling errors'. Such puristic attitudes betray wider ideologies toward Aostans: some Apulians seemed pleased to see errors emanating from a community that is viewed as benefiting from better institutional support of their language. This author then gently reminded them that these might not be errors but simply evidence of a different orthographic system, developed in a different community. This led to a third stage, where participants developed an interest in comparing the varieties, strong enough to encourage them to write back, to see if the comprehension was mutual. At this point, intervariety and intercommunity communication was established, meeting #FPGlobal's goal of bridging the communities. The very differences that exist across the language varieties are serving to bring speakers together into communication.

6.3. Turning isolation on its head. As Francoprovençal emerged in Alpine geography, most speakers live in relative isolation or in small enclaves, in small towns or in mountainous terrain distant from large cities. The minimal contact across these regions supports the perception of there being limited speakers of the language. As noted by Lillihaugen's Zapotec writers (§6.2), knowing few other speakers can limit motivation for using and revitalizing a language. For some decades, heritage speakers of Francoprovençal in North America sustained organizations that fostered networking and communication among speakers. However, most Francoprovençal-oriented clubs in Toronto, for example, have ceased activities in the past decade, closing off this type of connection. Other factors contributing to community-level language shift have been engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic: most Francoprovençal speakers (who reside in France, Switzerland, and Canada and are of an increasingly elderly interwar generation) would ordinarily rely on face-to-face contact, but social interaction was heavily curtailed by disease transmission risk, with far-reaching consequences. The ensuing increased engagement in online modalities means that speakers are no longer limited to communicating with people in their immediate vicinity, people with whom they may have relationships that engender certain linguistic norms and practices.

This wider social network simultaneously introduces a greater degree of variability into the language to which each participant is exposed and virtually increases their community of practice. Indeed, it is our observation that the pandemic has changed social praxis through limiting mobility in the region. For example, in Aosta, younger university students forced to remain home for months at a time have rediscovered—and now engage with—a local identity they would not have otherwise adopted (Dunoyer 2021). Moreover, at least in Apulia and Valais, older speakers are increasingly represented on social media platforms such as WhatsApp (personal observations of two authors).

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More recent work has already called for the need to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped, and will continue to shape, language revitalization work in the long term, so that communities can more effectively respond (see Chew 2021). #FPGlobal may therefore have a significant role to play in nurturing these new roots as mobility picks up, given that digital social media is replacing many face-to-face interactions, a trend catalyzed by the global pandemic (Abtahian et al. 2022, Chew 2021). The resources that this project is developing, as well as the work of developing them, thus promote community resilience and interconnectivity. In the first month since the #FPGlobal platform was publicized, it gained more than fifty members living in five countries, a not inconsiderable number for such a small language.

6.4. Pooling resources to support multiple objectives. It has been over thirty years since the publication of a landmark collection of essays in *Language* that called attention to the unprecedented decline in global linguistic diversity, a phenomenon—linked to a much larger process of loss of cultural and intellectual diversity (Hale et al. 1992)—that Krauss 1992:7 described as 'catastrophic destruction'. Massive declines in both the range of contexts in which many languages are used and their number of speakers remains a global crisis, a fact recognized not least in UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) declaration making 2022–2032 a 'decade of action for indigenous languages'. While language revitalization initiatives have grown in response, recent research points to an unequal distribution of such initiatives and associated resources around the world. Thus, increased transnational and international collaboration should be more urgently considered as a means of driving successful revitalization initiatives where communities actively seek outside help.

To this end, a central pillar of the work reported here is the partnership that brings together people who are part of each community where Francoprovençal is spoken. Following the tenets of the citizen science (see §3) and field station frameworks (see §2), we bring together linguists, a speaker-anthropologist, and cultural institutions to provide language and technical training to community members and students, and to build a research program examining the developing communication strategies related to the platform. The team includes speakers, linguists who have dedicated decades of work to documenting and describing geographically separated varieties of Francoprovençal, experts in developing digital technology to support learning in remote communities, a Francoprovençal language teaching and research center, students, and a museum committed to revitalizing languages. The team includes members in Italy, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Canada, connecting scholars and language users from:

- two universities that support language documentation and revitalization;
- the Centre d'études francoprovençales (Center for Francoprovençal Studies) in the Aosta Valley (an autonomous region in northwestern Italy), a nonprofit cultural center that develops—among other initiatives—technology for educational applications that promote storytelling, health, well-being, and growth with rural communities;
- multiple *sportelli linguistici*, informal linguistic research clubs organized by local Italian government representatives; and
- the Canadian Language Museum (https://languagemuseum.ca/), which promotes the appreciation and understanding of languages spoken in Canada.

These organizations all engage in linguistic documentation and revitalization, but vary in approaches, skills, and motivations. Different countries and regions have different institutional structures (for details, see Zulato et al. 2018). Collaboration is therefore

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baked in, as no single institution can provide all of the necessary resources and skills. Our regular schedule of engagement around the project allows all participants to capitalize on sustained contact with and across the regional varieties of Francoprovençal.

One significant consideration that arises from the participatory framework adopted here is the extent to which possible power asymmetries between members of the team are accounted for. While a significant body of research in collaborative and community-based methods has grappled with how best to establish more equitable divisions of power and responsibility (see notably Dobrin 2005), challenges and opportunities are very often dependent on the context of the study. In this ongoing work we adopt Stenzel's (2014:296) ethos that all are involved in the 'nitty gritty activities' of the project as far as is possible, to the extent that we do not exploit collaborators and that we can remunerate them for their time. However, certain power dynamics emerge as the financial and computational resources to build and support the platform are provided by academic team members. Thus, it falls to them to schedule most organizational activities, and this must be done in keeping with institutional and financial constraints. In this context, however, regular consultation within the team ensures that as the platform develops it remains appropriate and relevant to users' needs. The approach adopted here also has much in common with other initiatives, such as the NETOLNEW research partnership at the University of Victoria, which promotes technology-supported language learning and knowledge exchange, and which also has a strong commitment to pooling resources to support a broader set of communities.[13] We welcome further collaboration.

As the field station framework (Polinsky 2019) advocates for sustained, long-term collaboration, sharing resources, and training, it is essential that partners receive well-aligned training in the goals, use, and potential research purposes of the platform, the database archiving contributions to it (see §7.2), and our methodology. This enables partners to use it independently as well as collaboratively. Currently, organizational communications take place in English, French, and Italian, the national languages with which Francoprovençal is in contact, due to a range of expectations about the intercomprehensibility of varieties and the learner status of some of the developers. While our goal is to conduct as much of the project in Francoprovençal as possible, this is, for now, restricted to oral communication, due to the very lack of a shared writing system that motivates the project. Translation therefore plays an important role in the development of materials for the platform itself (e.g. instructions, prompts, links to resources) and for all materials developed for the project (e.g. meeting agendas, minutes, reports, instructions). At the time of writing, platform content is available in one Aostan (written) and one Apulian (audio-recorded) Francoprovençal variety, and in French, Italian, and English. WhatsApp messages have been posted in all of these varieties and more.

University students contribute to many aspects of the project: building (programming), testing, and documenting the platform, transcribing and translating language samples, and preparing related documentation. Students benefit from training in skills for linguistic research, soft skills that support community engagement, and technical skills transferable to a range of employment opportunities. Linguistic analysis (e.g. word-by-word glossing, metadata tagging, and analysis of the messages) develops analytic skills, and work between community members and linguists-in-training who are not fluent in Francoprovençal develops communication and strategic problem-solving skills.

In addition to learning hard skills like website scraping, incorporating application programming interfaces (APIs), and multilanguage web development, computer

[13] https://netolnew.ca/; we thank an anonymous referee for bringing this organization to our attention.

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science students are introduced to several components that encourage equity, diversity, and inclusion as they work with multilingual, globally dispersed partners. This experience is valuable, as many sectors of the economy aligned with so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines lack the 'human' element: developers are often removed from the communities who are the end-users of their products. Students learn to document their product, with consideration for end-users lacking technical backgrounds. This reciprocal cycle enables different groups of people to gain experience in working with and for speakers of marginalized languages in developing processes of language revitalization and documentation.

7. #FPGlobal design. Having motivated the goals for this project and the framework for developing it, we now describe the tool itself in more detail. Our design decisions are guided by considerations of user-friendliness, costs, replicability, and use of readily accessible and/or open source tools.

7.1. #FPGlobal platform. In the current phase, the #FPGlobal platform consists of a WhatsApp group (FPGlobal) and a website (http://www.fpglobal.ca), linked by an API[14] (Periskope; https://periskope.app/) that organizes the flow of messages from the group to the site. This platform thus:

- Broadcasts audiovisual and text stimuli in Francoprovençal via WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (e.g. 'questions of the day' challenges, quizzes, images, videoclips, etc.) and prompts users to respond (by text, audio, or video) (see Figs. 1 and 2 above);
- Displays audio and text versions of responses (submitted either directly to the #FPGlobal website or via social media (WhatsApp is currently implemented). These may be 'translated' between oral and written modalities (see Figure 3);
- Aggregates, archives, and tags the responses (and their translations) by speaker location and topic (tags are illustrated in Figs. 1–4 and utilized to plot the map in Fig. 5);
- Provides baseline data for future automated transcription of audio contributions; and
- Links to language-support resources (e.g. online dictionaries, lessons, writing guides).
- A forthcoming feature is the display of usage statistics to support friendly interregional gamification as a means to encourage participation (see Fig. 4).



Figure 3. Mock-up of how posts might appear with translation(s) and audio recordings in a future iteration of the #FPGlobal website.

[14] An API is an application programming interface, or software that connects two (or more) applications.

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Figure 1 above illustrates a challenge prompt posted on the #FPGlobal platform. This version is in an Aostan variety of Francoprovençal, but users may choose from five (so far) language varieties. Figure 2 then shows one user's response to this prompt, answering the question multimodally with image and text. It includes the hashtag '#puglia' to identify their place or variety of Francoprovençal and the hashtag '#favouritefood' to identify the topic or, specifically, the challenge the post answers. Figure 3 shows a mock-up of a future iteration. Here, the user contributed the first sentence in Francoprovençal from Faeto, describing her preference by both recording her voice and transcribing her response. A project member added the translations into another Francoprovençal variety, French, Italian, and English. The response includes hashtags that indicate that it is a response to the #favouritefood or #dish challenge and that the responder is from Faeto. Figure 4 is a screenshot of the #FPGlobal website where viewers can see the most recent responses that contain any (combination of) hashtags. Here, the most recent (at the moment of capture) posts responding to the #favouritefood challenge are included. In this back-and-forth conversation, the first and third posts are from a user writing in a Savièse (Swiss) Francoprovençal variety, while the second is from a speaker of Aostan Francoprovençal.



FIGURE 4. Recent responses to the '#favouritefood' challenge as posted on the #FPGlobal website. Translations: post 1: 'Reblochon is very, very good! #savièse #fpglobal #favouritefood'; post 2: 'I forgot the hashtag #favouritefood for my response about Beaufort. Then I forgot the hashtag #Aosta! #FPGlobal'; post 3: 'A little party: Hello to everyone. Are you well? Have a good day and a good week! Happy to see you this evening at 7:30 at The Brasserie! Bye! It will be a great pleasure. #nendaz #valais #savièse #favouritefood'.

Figure 5 is a map on the website showing the counts of posts from different varieties. Such analytics are intended to foster friendly competition and would support gamification or rewarding frequent users (individuals or communities). These usage statistics also provide feedback to support learner investment in the platform and in using Francoprovençal and further allow the project team to assess usage rates.

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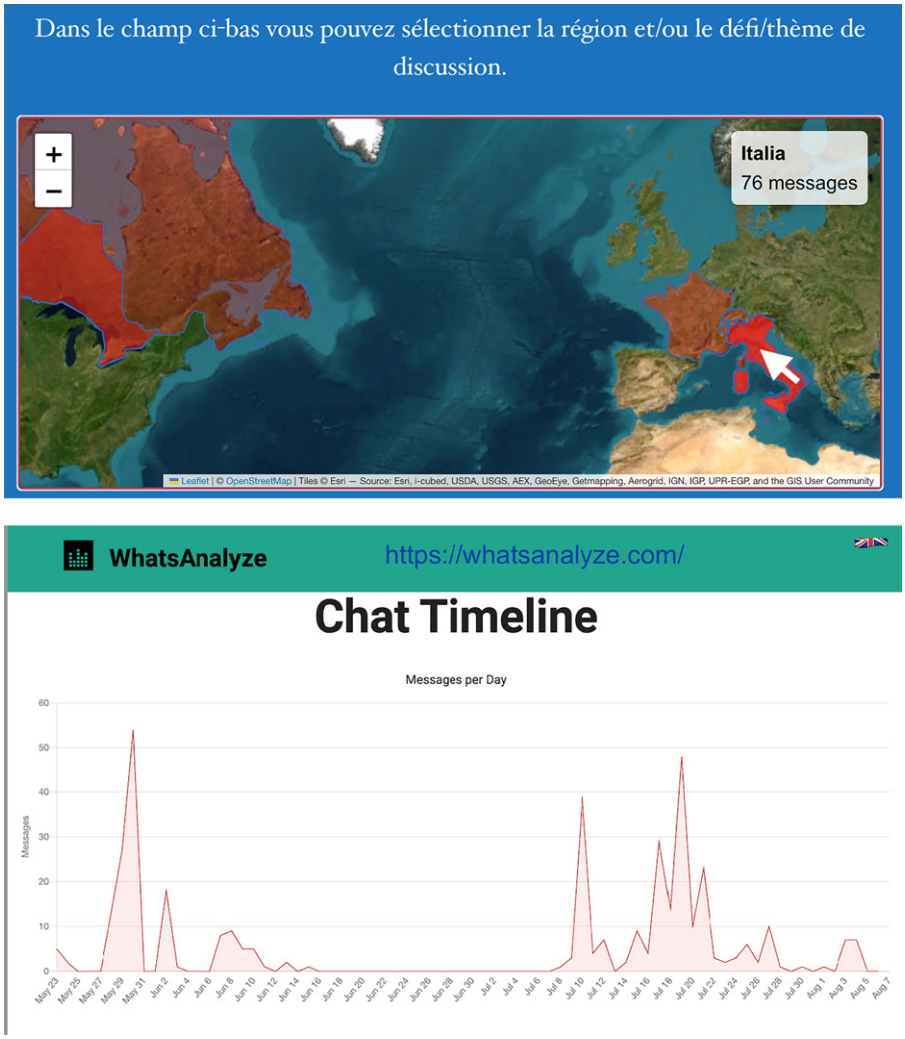


FIGURE 5. Top: gamification of #FPGlobal website content with pop-ups showing usage statistics for any selected variety of Francoprovençal. Bottom: usage statistics from WhatsApp group during development in summer 2024.

This platform differs from existing tools for Francoprovençal (e.g. the Parlanne Faetar website, or the Patois Savièse vocabulary app) in that usage simultaneously (a) supports language practice, (b) expands the domains for using the language, and (c) provides data for potential research. It also differs from increasingly frequent TikTok/Instagram/Facebook tools that are essentially animated flashcards offering isolated words or phrases to repeat, in that actual communicative practices are integrated. More complex existing tools employ forced-choice tasks, but still with less spontaneous language production. Such language-practice tools do not tag and archive responses and so are not research-friendly. Links to resources that support Francoprovençal language study are included in a growing list on the platform (http://www.fpglobal.ca/Resources). Another important innovation is that this platform aims to aggregate and share contributions originating from different and widely used social media platforms, helping to normalize

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the use of Francoprovençal in these genres (in the current test phase only WhatsApp is available). Cross-platform aggregation more quickly builds a corpus of usage examples by scraping from multiple platforms and from groups with different demographic profiles. For example, Facebook is used more by older speakers and Instagram by younger speakers, and our corpus will represent both groups.

Tagging responses (via user-selected hashtags included in their messages) structures them for language learning and linguistic analysis. These transcribed recordings can form the basis for innovative tools for improving writing or speaking skills and may eventually feed automated Francoprovençal text-to-speech and speech-to-text apps, technology typically available only to larger languages, but useful for languages without widespread literacy. This is an important aspect of language revitalization that carries implications for how the language may come to be seen and used. As D'Arcy and Bender suggest, '[w]hen a spellchecker, autocorrect system, voice assistant, or machine translation system does not work for a user's language variety, this sends the message that that variety is inadequate, invalid, or unworthy' (2023:58).

Embedding this platform within the speaker communities by having community members recruit participants and create and translate the content is intended to foster a new generation of (Francoprovençal-speaking) linguists, supporting sustainability and scalability (per the field station framework). Francoprovençal communities, like those of many languages undergoing shift, suffer generational divides between younger, less-proficient speakers and older, fluent speakers (see Kasstan 2019). Our platform intends to bridge both geographic and generational divides to promote language revitalization. The platform and collaborations associated with the design foster a unifying virtual language community, empowering speakers by co-creating resources that promote community resilience via interconnectivity. As we contribute to the normalization of the practice of using Francoprovençal on social media, we anticipate increased spontaneous use of the language. Indeed, it is a positive development that we are already seeing messages appear on the platform that are not direct responses to the prompts currently available (see e.g. the last post in Fig. 4).

7.2. #FPGlobal archive. We archive the messages that participants contribute through WhatsApp group posts, as well as direct posts to the #FPGlobal website, for future resource development, language-learning activities, and possibly research projects for speakers of this underdocumented language. These posts, and responses to them, form a rich corpus of vernacular language use, ideal for analysis of linguistic variation and change, thus forming a resource for language learners and practitioners. The multiple uses will support important outcomes for learners, practitioners, teachers, and researchers, motivating the pooling of resources. It is one way of meeting community members' requests for documentation of their language (improving on, for example, the static, community-built language-teaching tool, Parlanne Faetare, which has been available since 2005). As is stated on the platform, our goal is to make data widely available for language practice, language teaching, and research on linguistic variation and change and on the development of orthography in communities that lack a shared writing system.

As noted above, the current (2024) version of the platform employs the API Periskope, which is designed to harvest messages from a WhatsApp group and store them in a database with tags indicating the speaker's/writer's variety (as defined by their own variety/place hashtag) and the topic they are writing about (as defined by their challenge/topic hashtag). These messages may be viewed, heard, and sorted by hashtags on the WordPress (https://wordpress.com/) website. Recruitment to the

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platform has been conducted by the team of developers as well as by early adopters, via a range of social media streams (e.g. Instagram reels, Facebook pages, and several other WhatsApp groups, some with hundreds of members). New members to the platform's private WhatsApp group receive a message indicating, in part, that its purpose is 'to bring together people from different places who share the Francoprovençal heritage' and including a link to the website. The website states (in five language varieties): 'This is a preliminary version of a platform that will support and bring together people who want to learn, speak, revitalize, and study varieties of Francoprovençal'. If, in the future, plans for research develop, these messages will be adapted, and data collected after that timepoint will be made available for researchers, pending appropriate community consent and ethical approval. While we are trained to respect the privacy of the recordings we collect, it is noteworthy that, so far, no personal information has been included in posts—people are evidently aware of the public nature of the project and primarily discuss the challenges we post as well as the technical challenges arising as we develop the platform.

From a research perspective, the platform provides a rare opportunity to systematically observe the development of a shared writing system across speakers of a range of un- and less-codified varieties of a language. Analysis of the speech and text contributed to the platform will elaborate a model of how consensus builds around writing practices. With appropriate curation, our data can be used by language planners to develop written materials for Francoprovençal and provide guidance for other underresourced languages, where the lack of codification is common. Lillehaugen (2016) notes the need for such models in the face of the ongoing decline in geolinguistic diversity. These goals also resonate with those of a project developed for te reo Māori. Trye et al. (2022:1229) describe that project's motivations as follows:

- 'it serves as a rich and unique dataset for linguistic analysis of te reo Māori on social media;
- it can be used as training data to develop and augment Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools with robust, real-world Māori-language applications; and
- it will potentially promote awareness of, and encourage positive interaction with, the growing community of Māori tweeters, thereby increasing the use and visibility of te reo Māori in an online environment.'

Efforts to build in sustainability are of various types: as much as possible, we use existing, well-supported, and widely available digital tools rather than custom-built tools. We consult regularly with the communities for whom this platform was created to learn what additions are desired, in the hopes that meeting these requests will encourage enduring usage. Our team includes several major actors in Francoprovençal revitalization activities and planning and makes efforts to communicate with others. Consultations with community members helped us quickly realize the need for diverse granularity in place hashtags to accommodate splitter vs. lumper views of existing varieties of Francoprovençal. Developing equivalencies and hierarchies among the place hashtags promotes speaker agency while accommodating technical limitations (please see https://fpglobal.ca/hashtags/). We anticipate continued further improvements in response to user behavior, feedback, and suggestions.

8. Looking forward. We are excited to witness the first steps in global interaction among members of the Francoprovençal communities as we develop #FPGlobal. To date, the team has designed and tested the structure of the #FPGlobal platform.

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#FPGlobal is a live, interactive e-platform through which people share multimodal responses to challenges via computer, tablet, or phone. The website provides a link (and QR code) for people wishing to join the #FPGlobal WhatsApp group.

Enthusiasm for and engagement with the project are evident in several ways. Approximately 400 messages were posted in the first six weeks. Some fifteen to twenty people attended a lively meeting in Faeto (a village of some 500 residents), announced at short notice by the town's priest to his WhatsApp group (used for daily bulletins of local events). At the meeting, Nagy described the project. In tandem with the priest, she demonstrated how to join the WhatsApp group, post messages, and find and filter others' messages. She had prepared to share this information in Italian, after sharing it in French with a group in Aosta. However, the Faeto community members challenged her to present in Faetar. Her doing so, as a language learner, evidently encouraged more participation, with people being reminded of the feasibility of communication even without full fluency in the language. Working without the usual academic presentation infrastructure, this meeting included Nagy's circulating among attendees with a cell phone to individually share the QR code that facilitates access to the platform. This proved useful as it illustrated to the participants how they would be able to invite their own friends and family to participate in the project. In the first three weeks after introducing additional community members to the project, the platform had attracted over fifty users. A few of these joined without direct prompts from any of the project leaders, indicating that 'friend-of-a-friend' recruitment is taking place.

Similarly, one early adopter in Aosta (not an original member of the team) has been enthusiastically translating webpages, instructions, and challenges into her Francoprovençal variety. She also volunteered to recruit additional participants at cultural events in villages nearby. Four Faetar speakers translated challenges and hashtags into Faetar orally (from Italian) after a team of Canadian research assistants had translated them from English and French into Italian. These research assistants, although not speakers of Francoprovençal themselves, have been enthusiastically translating webpages, instructions, and challenge prompts to support the project. They are students who have learned French and Italian and are motivated by the challenge of working with lesser-studied sister varieties. A young Francoprovençal speaker will continue to post challenges regularly and is learning about ongoing orthography-development initiatives.

The project team is developing methods to harvest and archive the messages contributed to the platform, particularly in response to requests for additional hashtags (representing different granularities of language varieties and naming the challenges in additional languages). These tagged data are available for language practice and language teaching. Research on linguistic variation and change and the development of shared orthography in dialectally diverse communities that lack a shared writing system are some anticipated projects.[15] The platform is envisaged to evolve toward a self-propagating, sustainable virtual community, where orchestrated prompts will become unnecessary for day-to-day multimodal interaction.

We anticipate a number of impacts that will be viewed positively by community members, including revitalization of the language through increased domains for usage, additional opportunities for cross-region and intergenerational communication, and the changes in attitude that accompany expanded domains and support of a language.

[15] Participants will be able to choose whether to contribute their messages to the archive and whether to be recognized or anonymized.

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Assessment of increased usage of Francoprovençal, additional domains in which the language appears, additional pedagogical activities, and an increased number of publications (both community-oriented and academic) will allow us to track engagement and our progress relative to the aims and objectives outlined above. We follow Chew 2021 in understanding revitalization to be an ongoing and multipronged process rather than a finished product or endpoint.

We hope that this article encourages discussion with potential collaborators such as groups supporting indigenous languages and other Francoprovençal-focused organizations as we recognize, along with other linguists, our responsibilities to the communities we work with (see Charity 2008, D'Arcy & Bender 2023, Wolfram et al. 2008).

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