

Contrastive grammar in the Renaissance

The subtle presence of Greek in Jean Pillot's French grammar (1550/1561)

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This paper focuses on how Jean Pillot, author of the most popular French grammar of the sixteenth century in terms of editions, took efforts to contrast his native language with Greek. His *Gallicæ linguæ institutio* (1550/1561), although written in Latin, contains numerous passages where Pillot subtly confronted French with Greek, surveyed in Section 2, in order to give his audience of educated German speakers a clearer view of the idiosyncrasies of French. In Section 3, I analyze why he preferred Greek to the other languages he knew in quite a number of cases, arguing that this subtle contrastive endeavor bore an indirect pedagogical and ideological load. Section 4 discusses the terminological means Pillot used to confront Greek with French, and their origins. In Section 5, I frame Pillot's appropriation of Greek grammar in the long history of contrastive language studies, with special reference to the pivotal role of sixteenth-century linguistic analysis.

Keywords: long history of contrastive linguistics, sixteenth century, Jean Pillot, French/Greek

1. Introduction

Εἰ μὴ φυλάσσεις μικρὰ ἀπολεῖς τὰ μέζονα.¹

If you do not cherish the little things, you will lose the greater ones.

This Greek adage from Menander adorns the titlepage of Jean Pillot's (c.1515–1592) *Gallicæ linguæ institutio*, *Latino sermone conscripta* 'Institution of the French language, written in the Latin tongue.' The proverb draws the reader's attention

1. Pillot (1561: titlepage). As a rule, I cite the 1561 edition, the reference text of Colombat (2003a). I will, however, record significant differences with the 1550 edition. All English translations are my own.



to an important detail of his grammar book first published in 1550, the most popular French language manual of the sixteenth century in terms of publications: at least fourteen editions appeared according to the online Universal Short Title Catalogue. Even though the title only mentions that French will be grammatically described using Latin as a metalanguage, the adage on the titlepage makes the reader assume that Greek might play a role, too. And indeed, French phenomena are not only confronted with their Latin counterparts, common in the sixteenth century, but they are regularly also compared with features of the Ancient Greek tongue, and occasionally also Hebrew. This classical trilingual frame, to which Pillot repeatedly referred in his grammar, was no doubt procured by the Collège royal in Paris, where Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, the three so-called sacred languages, were taught side by side, at the instigation of the humanist Guillaume Budé. Additionally, Pillot had an audience of German intellectuals in mind, not surprisingly since he was active in the border areas between the kingdom of France and the Holy Roman Empire. He eventually settled in Pfalzburg (present-day Phalsbourg), a city newly founded in 1570 by his pupil George John I (1544–1592), the Duke of Veldenz, as a home for reformed refugees (Colombat, 2003b: 78–79). As such, his manual served in the first place practical purposes, providing a guide for educated German natives to learn French through Latin. In this sense, Pillot's handbook was a proto-contrastive work composed out of didactic considerations. The contrast with Greek thus served pedagogical purposes, although the French-Greek pairing bore an ideological load as well, closely linking both languages socio-culturally. As such, the French-Greek focus meets Gast's (2012) conception of contrastive linguistics, since both languages were "used by a considerable number of bi- or multilingual speakers", albeit mainly very educated ones, and there is "a substantial amount of 'linguistic output'" that is "translated from one language into the other", although sometimes through the intermediary of Latin.

Gast (2012) makes a compelling case for not restricting contrastive linguistics to language pairs, a view Jean Pillot seems to have shared. Indeed, Pillot's linguistic approach resulted in an early contrastive laboratory involving five languages in total, three classical plus two vernacular languages, thus forming an interesting case of multilingualism. With Swiggers *et al.* (2018: 181–182) I call this a combination of vertical and horizontal multilingualism, where 'vertical' refers to the coexistence of vernacular and classical languages, and 'horizontal' to the usage of multiple vernacular languages in a community. In terms of grammatical theory, however, the confrontation of French with Latin, on the one hand, and Greek, on the other, is most interesting, since this involved comparing French to two slightly differing models of linguistic description, from which Pillot made eclectic use – or to put it with his own words: "Partim Græcos, partim Latinos, pro loci & reru[m]

commoditate, sum imitatus [...]” (Pillot, 1561:7).² Even though Pillot (1561:31) refrained from defining grammatical concepts, for which he referred to works on Latin, Greek, and Hebrew grammar, his terminological usage is revealing. In this paper, I will highlight the importance of this triangular contrast between French, Latin, and Greek, especially the French-Greek side, as well as of the terminology Pillot employed for the early history of contrastive language studies.

Pillot’s indebtedness to the Latin tradition has already received due scholarly attention, starting with Loiseau’s (1866 [1969]:64) monograph on the grammarian:

Notre érudit ne s’isole pas assez des méthodes grecques et latines; il suit le latin, pour ainsi dire, pas à pas, comme étant la seule langue régulièrement constituée, et fait passer le français à sa filière.³

The fact that Latin served as Pillot’s metalanguage and principal descriptive framework can be explained easily enough, especially since the grammarian himself informed his readers why he chose Latin:

[...] præterquam quòd manca sunt & imperfecta, no[n] tam Gallicis ediscendis conferu[n]t, quàm interpretandis Latinis. [...] Habeant sanè isti suum aliquem vsum, sed ad Gallicum sermonem cognoscendum parum iuuant. Adde quòd Gallicis isti verbis vtu[n]tur, vt à suis tantum videri possint, cum meo iudicio, scribentem de aliqua re institutionem, oporteat exterorum & imperitorum præcipuam habere rationem. Neque enim qui Hebræas, Græcas, aut Latinas Grammaticas componunt, Hebraicè, Græcè, aut Latinè scientibus, sed potius scire cupientibus componunt. (Pillot, 1561:5–6)⁴

2. “I have partly imitated the Greeks, partly the Latins, in as far as it fits the place and subject matter”. Cf. Stengel (1890:263).

3. “Our scholar does not distance himself sufficiently from the Greek and Latin methods; he follows Latin, so to say, step by step, as if it were the only language with a regular constitution, and forces French to walk its course”. See e.g. also Stengel (1890); Lagarde (1985) for the pronoun; Demaizière (1988) for the article as mismatch with the Latin model; Swiggers (1998) for the participle; Fournier (2007:18–19) for past tenses. See more generally Colombat (2003a, 2003b, 2013).

4. “Except that [existing works] are defective and imperfect, they do not contribute as much to studying French as they do to translating Latin [...]. Surely, those works may have some use of their own, but they barely help to know the French tongue. Additionally, they use French words so that their works can only be seen by their own folk, even though in my opinion someone writing the principles of a certain subject should take particular notice of strangers and the inexperienced. For those who compose Hebrew, Greek, or Latin grammars, do not compose them for those who know Hebrew, Greek, or Latin, but rather for those who desire to know them”. See also Colombat (2013:§ 32).

In other words, Latin served as the gateway to French for educated nonnative speakers, especially Germans, just like it was the gateway to Hebrew and Greek grammar.

Pillot's resort to Greek as a point of reference has also been acknowledged in passing in modern scholarship, but has not yet been treated in detail.⁵ By extension, the involvement of Greek in vernacular language studies as a whole requires further study, especially in as far as this language provided a full second set of language facts next to Latin and an alternative grammatical model with slight but undeniable deviations from the traditional Latin one. My study of Pillot's grammar seeks to illustrate how such a research endeavor might be set up, and why it is important to investigate this Greek turn in vernacular language studies. I will do so by first surveying the cases where Pillot related French to Greek rather than Latin, German, or Hebrew. Then, I will analyze why he preferred to evoke Greek in these cases, arguing that this subtle contrastive endeavor indirectly bore an ideological load. Finally, I will discuss which terminological means Pillot used to confront Greek with French. In the conclusion, I will frame Pillot's appropriation of Greek grammar in the long history of contrastive language studies, providing in the first place a brief research outlook.

2. French and Greek in contrast: Pillot's data

Which data did Pillot invoke when contrasting French and Greek? In his preface, dated June 29, 1550, and addressed to the young Wolfgang (1526–1569), Count Palatine of Zweibrücken and George John I's cousin, he complained that nobody had accurately described French grammar, a failure with implications for, among other things, the understanding of French tenses:

Quis enim (vt id vno exemplo demonstrem) ex ijs, qui Galliarum oras incolunt, non dico omnium, sed vnus aut alterius verbi prius præteritum perfectu[m] siue indefinitum (quem Græci ἀόριστον appellant) tenet, vel rectè vsurpat.

(Pillot, 1561: 6)⁶

5. E.g. by Loiseau (1866 [1969]: e.g. 88) on the substantivizing of participles; Streuber (1923: 128) on the number of cases; Kukenheim (1932: 117) on the use of the article in French vs. Greek or German; Padley (1988: 423) on the function of the article; and Colombat (2003b: passim).

6. "For who (to illustrate it with one example) among the inhabitants of the French lands has a grasp of, or correctly uses, especially the preterit perfect or indefinite (which the Greeks call *aóristos*) – not of all verbs, I mean, but of some verb or other?"

Between parentheses, Pillot indirectly identified the French *passé simple* – e.g. *je fus* ‘I was’ < *être* ‘to be’ – with the Ancient Greek aorist – e.g. *egenómēn* (ἐγενόμην) ‘I became’ < *gígnesthai* (γίγνεσθαι) ‘to become’. Pillot did not offer any specific examples himself in the preface, but it is clear that he meant the *passé simple* by “preterit perfect or indefinite” from the discussion of French tenses in his chapter on the verb (see the discussion below). By subtly suggesting a profound parallel between the two languages, Pillot stressed their divergence from Latin on this point, his standard point of reference.

Then, in his outline of the French alphabet, consisting of 22 letters according to Pillot, he made repeated reference to Greek sounds. On the diphthong written as <oi>, he remarked:

Oi vel oy, mutuati sumus à veteribus Græcis, quorum priscam & genuinam pronuntiationem, nempe ex o & i prouenie[n]tem etiam nunc retinemus, cum iis qui nunc Græcè loquuntur, præterquam typographis, sonet vt simplex iota.

(Pillot, 1561: 15–16)⁷

Whereas Pillot presented the *passé simple*–aorist identification neutrally, without any historical implications, he claimed here that French had a phonological debt to the ancient Greeks, whose diphthongal pronunciation of <oi> his language had adopted in its original value. As such, he seems to have implied that French had a privileged relationship with Ancient Greek, especially since contemporary Greeks pronounced the diphthong as [i]. The Ancient Greek diphthong <ei>, too, had a sound similar to French <ay>, <ai>, and <ei>, as well as Latin <æ>.⁸

French, claimed Pillot, shared another Greek sound with German, i.e. the [k] value of the letter <c>, which, however, sounded like the sibilant [s] in most cases, especially before the front vowels [e] and [i].⁹ The letter <h> is sometimes preserved after <c> in Latin and Greek words such as *chorde* ‘rope’, from Latin *chorda* ‘rope’, and *cholere* ‘anger’, from Greek *k^holḗ* (χολή) ‘bile’. This usage of

7. “We have borrowed *oi* or *oy* from the ancient Greeks, whose old and genuine pronunciation, i.e. resulting from *o* and *i*, we preserve even now, whereas those who now speak Greek, except for typographers, make it sound as a simple *jota*”.

8. Pillot (1561: 15): “*Ay, ai, & ei* consimilem sonum habent, & eum fermè, quem hæc Latina diphthongus æ vel Græca ει quondam habuit”. Pillot (1561: 18) also notes that the dieresis mark <¨> derived from Greek orthography.

9. Pillot (1561: 19): “Aliàs planè conuenit cum *k* Germanorum, vel κ Græcorum”. The <q>, in combination with <u>, is also said to correspond with German <k> and Greek <κ>: “nam *u* planè obmutescit, vel ambæ coniunctæ [i.e. <qu>] æquipollent *k* Germanorum vel κ Græcorum” (Pillot, 1561: 23). The Greek <ζ> is mentioned when Pillot reproaches the Germans for pronouncing <c> and <t> as an affricate sound [ts], which reminded him of the alleged Greek pronunciation of <ζ> as [dz] (Pillot, 1561: 24).

the letter is presented as “the French h” and seemingly compared to the German word *Kerker* ‘dungeon,’ where the stops were aspirated.¹⁰ Did Pillot mean that <ch> reflected the aspirated voiceless guttural sound [k^h] in a word like *colère*, pronounced [k^hɔ.lɛʁ], as in German and Greek? If so, his contrastive perspective would have resulted in an accurate interpretation of the Greek letter <χ>, which in the Erasmian pronunciation was realized as [x] rather than as [k^h], thanks to his contrast of Greek with French and German (cf. Colombat, 2003a: 32 n.74).

A final remark on French orthography in relation to Greek concerns Pillot’s interpretation of the apostrophe in French phrases with an article such as *l’homme* and *d’une femme* as the Greeks’ spiritus lenis <’>, despite the different functions of this orthographic symbol in the two languages.¹¹ In French, the apostrophe indicates the omission of letters, whereas in Greek the spiritus lenis marks smooth breathing. This artificial linking of the two languages, based solely on the form of the symbol, suggests that even a very superficial similarity was suitable to claim a link between French and Greek (cf. Section 3).

Pillot distinguished eight parts of speech for French: article, noun, pronoun, verb, participle, adverb, preposition, and conjunction, incorporating the interjection into the class of adverbs in Greek fashion. Throughout his grammar, he discussed these parts without defining them, since one could read about them in the works of almost all Latin, Greek, and Hebrew grammarians, whose “number is

10. Pillot (1561: 21–22): “*H* est in quadruplici differe[n]tia, neque *ha*, vt Germanis, sed *asch* appellatur, & hunc ipsum sonum retinet quoties literæ *c* adhæret, vt *marcher*, incedere, *chercher*, quærere. Quas dictiones, Gallo dictante, Germanus ita scriberet, *scher<s>cher*, *marscher*, vehementi ore, nimirum sibilo & spiritu maiore quàm conueniat: aut scriptum (vt est vsitatum) sine *s*, legeret *kerker*, *marker*. Hanc tamen Germanicam pronunciationem Gallica spreta, retinet in nonnullis Latinis & Græcis verbis: quæ arbitror posterioribus sæculis Gallica esse facta, vt *une chorde*, chorda. *la cholere*, ἡ χολή bilis: in his enim aspirationem, vel Græcam vel Germanicam imitatur, quemadmodum *c* in color & similibus.” The text in the first edition from 1550 is quite different (Pillot, 1550: 5^R): “*H*, non *ha*, vt Germanis, sed *asch* appellatur & hunc sonum retinet quotiens literæ *c* adiungitur veluti *chercher*, quam dictionem Gallo dictante Germanus sic scriberet, *scherscher*, veheme[n]tiori nimirum spiritu, & sibilo quam oporteat: aut scriptum sine *s* legeret *Kerker*, quam pronunciationem retinet in aliquibus vocabulis latinis & græcis, vt *chorde*, chorda, *la cholere*, ἡ χολή bilis, illud *h* posset co[m]mode appellari gallicum.” The reference to “the French h” is lacking from the 1561 edition in this passage. The term is nonetheless preserved between parentheses in an adjacent passage, but its meaning is no longer clear there.

11. Pillot (1561: 32): “Pro *le*, *la*, & *de*, frequenter inuenies solam consona[n]tem remota vocali, sed in apice notatam tenui spiritu Græcorum, in hunc modum: *L’homme*, homo. *l’ame*, anima. *d’vng homme*, hominis, *d’vne femme*, fœminæ. Quod fit ad vitandum hiatum duarum vocalium concurre[n]tium [...]”.

greater than the stars in heaven.”¹² Pillot actively sought to bring French and Greek nearer to each other by describing his native tongue in terms of the latter. The fact that he first treated the article is probably also a testimony to Greek inspiration, since in Greek grammars of that time the article was treated first; it was, after all, a part of speech which Latin lacked, an observation that was commonplace in vernacular grammaticography of the time ever since Nebrija’s 1492 grammar of Spanish (see Matthaïos and Van Rooy, 2021: 45–49). Pillot followed this tradition but put his own emphases by fronting the article among the French parts of speech, and especially by insisting on the functional differences between the French and the Greek article in his last two paragraphs on the subject:

Et in hac parte & in aliis non paucis Græcos potiùs, quàm Latinos imitatur. Tametsi enim his quàm illis similiores simus, tamen Strabo refert Græcam linguam priscis Gallis fuisse familiarem. Proinde mirum non est, si supersint aliqua vestigia.

Officium articuli in hac lingua magis est necessarium, quàm vel in Græca vel in Germanica: nos enim casus & genera nequaquam dignoscere possemus sine articulo: illi varietatem casuum habent, nos verò nullam. Nam quodlibet nomen duas duntaxat terminationes habet, vnam omnibus casibus singularis numeri commune, alteram pluralibus: qui discernuntur solo articulo. (Pillot, 1561: 34)¹³

Whereas in previous mentions of Greek the language was aligned with French, this is not the case here. Pillot contrasted the two languages, associating French more closely with Latin than with Greek, but nonetheless suggesting a historical-genealogical link with both classical languages. The Latin character of French could easily be explained by the Roman Empire, which also covered Gaul, an evident given that Pillot did not feel the need to make explicit. He must have felt

12. Pillot (1561: 31): “Partes orationis, siue dictionum species, & differentiæ sunt octo. Articulus, Nomen, Pronomen, Verbum, Participium, Aduerbium, Præpositio, & Coniunctio. Interiectionem ab aduerbio, more Græcorum, non separamus. Harum partiùm definitiones, data opera prætermittimus, sicut etiam alia multa, quæ paßim apud Grammaticos Latinos, Græcos, & Hebræos habentur: ad quos, si qui alicuius verbi descriptionem desiderabunt, remitto”. The “stars” quote is only found in Pillot (1550: 7^R): “[...] omnes ferè grammaticos Latinos, Græcos & Hebræos (quoniam maior est numerus quam stellarum in cælo) [...]”.

13. “And in this part, as in not a few others, we imitate the Greeks rather than the Latins. For even though we are more similar to the latter than the former, Strabo nonetheless records that the Greek language was familiar to the ancient Gauls; accordingly, it is no wonder that there would be some traces left. The function of the article is more necessary in this language than either in the Greek or in the German, as we would not be able to distinguish in any way cases and genders without the article; they have a variety of cases, but we have not. For every noun has only two endings, one common to all cases of the singular number, the other for the plurals, which are distinguished by the article alone”.

that the close kinship link with Greek was far less obvious, for which he invoked the authority of the ancient geographer Strabo, who allegedly recorded that the language was well-known to the inhabitants of Gaul. It is, however, very difficult to pinpoint the exact passage which Pillot had in mind, making the invocation of Strabo's authority rather tentative. Colombat (2003a: 55–56 n.20) suggests that Pillot referred to Strabo's *Geography* 6.1, where mention is made of the Greek founders of the French city of Marseille, while pointing out that the idea of a Greek origin of the Gauls was a common, although contested, hypothesis in sixteenth-century France. It is worthwhile to quote here also the version of the second paragraph in the first edition of 1550, which is quite different:

Officium articuli est potissimum rem certam designare de quo abunde aliquot grammatici græci scripserunt, sed maximè in hac lingua genera & casus discernit. Nam cum singula nomina duas tantum terminationes habeant in omnibus casibus, alteram pro singulari, & alteram pro plurali, neque terminatione possint dignosci, necessario ad id opus est articulis. (Pillot, 1550: 8^v)¹⁴

It is clear from this version that Pillot also saw a functional difference between the Greek – and German – article, on the one hand, and the French, on the other. Whereas the Greek article served as a definiteness marker (“rem certam designare”), an insight no doubt adopted from contemporary Greek grammar (Matthaios and Van Rooy, 2021: esp. 39–45), its French counterpart was primarily a case and gender marker.¹⁵

Pillot cautiously suggested a genealogical link between French and Greek, a theory he tried to justify not only by invoking Strabo's authority but also by means of several concrete French-Greek correspondences in terms of orthography, verb tense (see below), and the use of the article. However, the correspondences were not completely one-to-one, which held in particular for the function of the article. The genealogical link also had a strong etymological dimension in sixteenth-century French thought (Demaizière, 1982), but this is only marginally present in Pillot's work. In addition to *cholere*, the only other example is found in his discussion of the degrees of comparison. There, he derives French *très* ‘very’, from Greek *treîs* (τρεῖς) ‘three’, a faulty etymology he probably derived from his predecessor

14. “It is the function of the article in this language to designate a certain object, about which some Greek grammarians have written in abundance, but especially in this language it distinguishes genders and cases. Indeed, since individual nouns have only two endings in all cases, one for the singular, and the other for the plural, and they could not be distinguished by their ending, there is necessarily a need for articles”.

15. Unlike Palsgrave, Pillot did not consider French *un(e)* an article (Colombat, 2003a: 51–52 n.5).

Jacobus Sylvius (Jacques Dubois; 1478–1555), who had published his French grammar in early 1531.¹⁶ Despite this etymological connection, Pillot noticed a formal difference between the French degrees of comparison and their Greek – as well as Latin and German – counterpart: “Græci & Latini, quos etiam Germani imitantur paululum, immutato positio comparatium & superlatium formant: Galli verò vtrumque circumscribunt” (Pillot, 1561: 45–46).¹⁷ Greek was a more synthetic language than French, Pillot seems to have thought, not only because of the way the Greeks formed their degrees of comparison but also because they declined their nouns in cases, whereas French nouns only varied in terms of singular and plural number. Indeed, discussing the different cases of French, Pillot again contrasted the language with Latin and Greek, tying the vernacular closer to Greek than Latin:

Casus numerarunt sex, qui tantum articulis differunt: quandoquidem singulis nominibus tantum duæ sunt terminationes: altera vnius numeri, altera multitudinis. Sed meo iudicio, possemus melius Græcos quam Latinos hac in parte imitari, & quinque casus tantum numerare.

Nominatiuus, Genitiuus, Datiuus, Accusatiuus, Vocatiuus. Quinetiam possumus in quatuor eadem ratione, contrahere, cum accusatiuus sit cum nominatiuo, sicuti ablatiuus cum genitiuo idem, vti patet in articulorum declinatione.

(Pillot, 1561: 40)¹⁸

Indeed, earlier in his grammar, Pillot (1561: 32) had offered the article paradigm with only three cases, since the vocative had no article, only the exclamatory particle *o*, again an idea derived from Greek tradition (Robins, 1993: 76–77). Pillot, in other words, set off the six cases of Latin from the five cases of French and Greek, but his article paradigm suggests that, in the end, he went for the even more reduced number of four cases, which French shared neither with Latin nor

16. Pillot (1561: 46): “Superlatium præposita particula tres à Græca τρεῖς”. See Colombat (2003a: 70 n.60).

17. “The Greeks and Latins, whom the Germans also imitate a little bit, form the comparative and superlative by changing the positive degree, but the French circumscribe both”. This text is again very different from Pillot (1550: 12^R), where German and Greek are not mentioned alongside Latin, and French is aligned with Hebrew: “Latini paululum immutato positio comparatium & superlatiu[m] formant, sed Galli vt Hebræi vtrumque circumscribunt”.

18. “[Grammarians] have counted six cases, which only differ in the articles, as each noun has only two endings, one for the singular number, the other for the plural. In my opinion, however, we could better imitate the Greeks than the Latins in this regard, and count only five cases. Nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative. What is more, we can reduce them to four in the same way, since the accusative is the same as the nominative, just like the ablative is the same as the genitive, as transpires from the declension of the articles”.

with Greek, thus contrasting his native vernacular in actual fact with both classical languages while trying to maintain a close relationship with Greek.

Finally, in one passage the comparison between French and Greek is left most implicit, although announced in the preface to his grammar where Pillot had identified the *passé simple* with the Greek aorist tense:

Tempora verborum sunt tantum quinque Latinis, sed Gallis, sex: Duplex est enim praeteritum perfectum in indicatio, quorum prius dici potest, Indefinitum: Nam tempus quidem praeteritum, sed non determinatum, remque diu praeteritam significat [*sic pro* significat]. Posterius verò perfectum magis determinatum tempus notat, & non adeò dudum praeteritum, vt dicimus. *I'ay aujourd'huy leu l'Euangile*. Legi hodie Euangelium *le leuz hier l'Euangile*. Legi heri Euangelium. *I'appris hier l'Epistre*. Didici heri epistolam. Sed quid sit inter duo praeterita discriminis, quantum ad vsum attinet, ediscere potes diligenti eorum obseruatione, qui probè calient linguam Gallicam, potiùs quàm praeceptis. (Pillot, 1561: 72–73)¹⁹

Even though Pillot argued that the difference between the undetermined *passé simple*, referring to an event in the distant past, and the determined *passé composé*, referring to a recent event, should be learned from usage, it is clear from his examples that he had an idea about how to distinguish between both tenses. What is more, the first edition of 1550 offered the example phrases as follows, with a prescription about the usage of the tenses: “*i'ay leu aujourd'huy l'Euangile*, legi hodie Euangelium, *ie leuz hyer l'epistre*, legi heri epistolam, non autem sic loqui licet, *i'ay leu hier*, *ie leuz aujourd'huy*” (Pillot, 1550: 20^v).²⁰ The idea that French had an undetermined tense, expressing an event that occurred at an unknown point in time, was derived from Greek grammar, where the so-called aorist tense was traditionally interpreted in those terms, as opposed to the perfect tense, the so-called *parakeímenos* (παράκειμενος) or ‘adjacent’ tense “refer[ring] to the recent past, which has just been completed, and [...] opposed to a pluperfect (*hupersuntélikos*

19. “The Latins only have five verb tenses, but the French have six. For there is a double preterit perfect in the indicative, of which the former can be called indefinite, as it indeed signifies a past time but not a determined one, and an act long passed. The latter perfect, however, rather denotes a determined time, and one that has not passed so much before, as when we say: *I'ay aujourd'huy leu l'Euangile* ‘I have read the gospel today’. *le leuz hier l'Euangile* ‘I read the gospel yesterday’. *I'appris hier l'Epistre* ‘I received the letter yesterday’. But you can learn by heart the distinction between those two preterits, as far as usage is concerned, by diligent observation of those who have mastered the French language excellently rather than by precepts”. Compare this passage with Pillot (1561: 6), quoted at the outset of Section 2. Ironically, later grammarians have dubbed the *passé simple* the *passé défini* (cf. Fournier, 2007: 23).

20. “*I'ay leu aujourd'huy l'Euangile* ‘I have read the gospel today’, *ie leuz hyer l'epistre* ‘I read the letter yesterday’, but it is not allowed to speak as follows: *i'ay leu hier* ‘I have read yesterday’, *ie leuz aujourd'huy* ‘I read today’”.

[ὑπερσυντέλικος]) which refers to a distant past” (Lallot, 2013). Pillot applied this idea of “quantity of pastness”, as Lallot (2013) calls it, to French, where, however, the *passé simple* was not as undetermined as Pillot wanted his reader to believe. Indeed, the *passé simple* is explicitly said to refer to “an act long passed”, an interpretation going beyond Greek views of the aorist.²¹

References to Greek are limited to the first 46 pages of the grammar out of a total of 270, i.e. to French orthography and the main declinable parts of speech, especially the article, noun, and verb. This limitation is related to the fact that only the first part offers substantial discussion of grammatical rules and contrastive argumentation, whereas the remainder of the text principally presents paradigms and example phrases for undeclined parts of speech such as the preposition. The frequent usage of the term *optativus* ‘optative’, in paradigms, which a modern reader might interpret as reflecting Greek influence, is due to the fact that the ancient Latin grammatical tradition had Latinized the Greek optative mood originally termed *hē euktikē ēhklisis* (ἡ εὐκτική ἐγκλισίς). In Latin paradigms, the *optativus* was the analytical construction [*utinam* + subjunctive] and not a synthetic form as in Greek. This Latinate optative was adopted by many vernacular grammarians, who did not relate it closely to the Greek optative.

3. Hellenizing the vernacular: A linguistic backing for imagined socio-cultural ties

Pillot invoked the Greek language repeatedly when describing French grammar. Why did he try to give a Greek aura to his native vernacular? Was he unique in doing so, or did he follow sixteenth-century trends? Some of the Greek references had already become part and parcel of the French pedagogical tradition. In fact, Pierre Valence, author of the rare and poorly studied bilingual English-French manual entitled *Introductions in Frensshe* (1528 [facsimile 1967]), had already associated a French (and an English) tense with the Greek aorist:

Of this p[re]terit p[er]fect is fourmed another tens that [the] Grekes call aoriste or Indifinit. And it is vsed comynly of frensshmen & englysshmen/ & betokeneth tyme vncertayn/by the whiche can not be knowen whan/nor how long/it is/[that] is spoken of.

(Valence, 1528 [1967]: sig. C.ii.^v)

21. I am planning a paper on the fate of the Greek aorist concept in sixteenth-century French grammar, a phenomenon which has been almost entirely neglected in existing scholarship. For instance, Fournier (2007) is aware of this idiosyncrasy in early modern French grammaticography but has no discussion of its Greek origins (cf. also MacPhail, 2014: 59).

The French tense Valence had in mind was, like Pillot, the *passé simple*, as the example *aima* ‘he loved’, shows. Valence’s resort to the Greek aorist to typologize the French *passé simple* seems to be echoed in John Palsgrave’s *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* of 1530.²² These two examples may suffice to indicate that sixteenth-century French grammaticography found in the Greek aorist a concept suitable to describe tenses of their own native language, which they sensed to be different from the Latin perfect, even though the *passé simple* historically originated in that Latin tense. Pillot continued this tradition, and was perhaps even inspired by Valence or Palsgrave, directly or indirectly, even though their works were produced in an English context and not a continental one like Pillot’s (Colombat, 2003a: XIII).

It is interesting to see how a common faulty interpretation of a category in Greek, i.e. the aorist as a tense referring to an undetermined past time rather than expressing aspect, led to a new widespread interpretation of the French *passé simple* in contrast with the *passé composé*. Even in modern linguistics the *passé simple*, now a verb form typical for formal written register, has been interpreted in terms of “quantity of pastness” (cf. Section 2): it indicates an event in the remoter past, as opposed to the *passé composé*, marking an event in the more recent past (cf. Weinrich, 1973: 291–300). According to Fournier (2007: 19), Pillot played a key role in this tradition, as it appears that he was the first to suggest the so-called 24-hour rule: the *passé simple* refers to events that took place more than 24 hours ago, whereas the *passé composé* expresses events that occurred in the past day. In short, Pillot was probably building on earlier French grammaticography in establishing a link between the *passé simple* and the Greek aorist, as well as in interpreting both tenses in terms of “quantity of pastness”; by implying the 24-hour rule through his examples, he further formalized the “quantity of pastness” criterion, anchoring it deeply in the history of French grammaticography.

Another French-Greek parallel which Pillot noticed, the possession of a definite article, also had precursors in French grammaticography. Palsgrave (1530: introduction, sig. B.iii.v), for instance, had added the article as a ninth part of speech, attributing this innovation to Greek inspiration. Even though Palsgrave mentioned the article last, he started out his discussion with this part of speech, “no doubt inspired by Greek grammar books like Gaza’s, in which the article was also usually described as the first part of speech” (Van Rooy, 2020: 418). Pillot, about whose Greek education we are poorly informed, went further by not only treating the article in first place but also by mentioning the article first in the list of the French parts of speech. Pillot’s fronting of the

22. Palsgrave (1530: book 3, C.xxii^R), discussed in Van Rooy (2020: 422–425), where Palsgrave’s possible indebtedness to Valence is not mentioned.

article has thus far been poorly understood in secondary literature. Colombat (2003a:XXIV; 2003b:89–90) suggests that it was for syntagmatic reasons, because the article precedes the noun in French, but the tradition of late Byzantine grammars tailored to West-European students was no doubt of greater importance for this arrangement than syntactic considerations. I cannot agree with Neumann (1959:124) either, who oddly maintains that sixteenth-century theorizing on the French article was not at all influenced by Greek scholarship but rather relied on scholastic Latin grammar in which *ille* figured as a kind of pseudo-article in noun declensions. Pillot's repeated references to the Greeks clearly prove that the Greek framework, hyped in humanist grammar, was much more important than the medieval Latin tradition in several respects, including the definite article.

A third way in which Pillot followed French tradition was to stipulate a genealogical link between French and Greek. He did so by insisting on:

- their similar ways of pronouncing certain sounds;
- information provided by the ancient geographer Strabo; and
- Greek etymologies for the French words *colère* 'anger', and *très* 'very'.

As such, Pillot inscribed himself in what Demaizière (1982) has compellingly called "the fashion of Greek etymologies" in sixteenth-century French lands. This ideological backdrop was strong, promoted as it was by esteemed authors such as Guillaume Budé, Joachim du Bellay, and Henri II Estienne. However, concocting a Greek origin for French, especially its lexicon, did not mean "renouncing or abandoning Latin, but remounting further to the language and literature par excellence, the source of our culture".²³ Pillot, too, realized that French shared too many features with Latin, and therefore did not go as far as, for instance, Joachim Périon or Henri Estienne in claiming that the vernacular either descended from Greek (Périon) or that they were typologically very close (Estienne). Nonetheless, the temptation to give French a Greek aura was strong enough to imbue the first part of his grammar manual with references to this esteemed classical language, both to align and to contrast French and Greek. Pillot, in other words, represents a moderate position in French claims on the Greek heritage, an ideological current which he fleshed out mainly in practical-contrastive terms, perhaps in view of complying with the ideas of influential scholars like Budé.

The association with Greek seems to have led Pillot to Hellenize also other aspects of French grammar, for which I have not been able to identify any direct precursors. For the reduction of the number of cases, for instance, he seems to

23. Demaizière (1982: 66): "Ainsi, remonter au grec, ce n'est pas renoncer au latin ni le délaisser, mais c'est remonter, au-delà à la langue et à la littérature par excellence, à la source de notre culture".

have been responsible himself (cf. Colombat, 2003a:XXXI–XXXIII). Indeed, the very idea of reducing the number of cases in describing French seems to have been further stimulated, if not motivated, by the fact that Greek had one case fewer than Latin. If Greek had no ablative, Pillot seems to have reasoned, and this lack did not compromise the status of this language, French could surely also do without the ablative and perhaps even the accusative. In other words, the Greek situation, by providing a new point of contrast next to Latin, seems to have encouraged Pillot to adopt a flexible contrastive attitude toward existing grammatical frameworks. Indeed, Pillot nowhere blindly followed either the Latin or the Greek tradition, or earlier descriptions of the vernacular, but carefully considered his descriptive options, at one time granting a close affiliation between French and Latin but at others associating his native tongue with Greek, German, or Hebrew. What is more, his references to Greek were construed in such a way that they would have been obvious to those among his educated readers who had Greek but subtle enough not to scare readers who had no Greek.

In conclusion, Pillot's grammatical framework was Hellenized to a certain extent, thus continuing an earlier tradition. Indications for this Hellenization were, however, overall very subtle, as in the case of the article and especially the aorist. Hellenists of the time, however, would no doubt have understood these correspondences between Pillot's French grammar and humanist Greek manuals. As a result, Pillot's conceptual and terminological choices evoked with the educated reader both Latin and Greek grammar. In addition, French was connected genealogically not only to Latin, the obvious choice, but also to Greek through etymology and history. Pillot's work, therefore, suggests that a confrontation with Greek grammar and the Greek language stimulated the emancipation of the vernacular from Latin, and opened up the possibility to place French not hierarchically below the classical languages but on a par with them: comparison led to contrast, which encouraged autonomy.

4. Pillot's contrastive metalanguage

Which terms did Pillot use to contrast and compare French and Greek? His metalanguage was Latin, so his contrastive terminology was entirely drawn from this tongue. I distinguish Pillot's terminology in two categories: explicit and implicit contrastive terms, with most belonging to the former group.

The category of explicit terminology covers two semantic types, denoting either similarity or contrast. The former appears, for instance, when Pillot compared the sounds of the letters <c> in French, <k> in German, and <κ> in Greek, which "agree entirely with" each other: *plane conuenire cum* (Pillot, 1561: 19). This

postclassical phrase expresses complete correspondence between the languages. Other expressions betray a contrast of linguistic features or grammatical descriptions. An important verb, harking back to classical antiquity, is *imitari* ‘to imitate’. Pillot used it to explain the Greek and Latin descriptive models and concepts he used to treat the French language (1561: 7); to explain the aspiration in certain French words following Greek or German (1561: 22); to describe the greater indebtedness to Greek than Latin for the article (1561: 34); and to the influence of Greek and Latin on the German formation of the degrees of comparison (1561: 45–46). The agency of this verb is notably differentiated, varying between the grammarian Pillot, the French language, and speakers of French and German. This diverse usage of *imitari* indicates that Pillot seems to have amalgamated two things in his conceptualization of language: on the one hand, the classical grammatical models on which he relied, and on the other, the foreign linguistic facts with which he confronted French. The usage of comparative adverbs such as *potius* ‘rather’, or *melius* ‘better’, with *imitari* suggests that for each feature Pillot systematically contrasted in his mind French to the languages most familiar to him: Latin, Greek, and German. This terminological usage no doubt encouraged his readers to do the same, thus resulting in an implicit contrastive approach to facilitate language learning.

The origin of the term *imitari* is rooted in ancient literary ideas, where it denoted the imitation of earlier authors.²⁴ During the Renaissance, this loaded verb was transferred to the grammatical description of languages, especially in works such as Pillot’s where several languages were contrasted. This transferal seems to have had intermediary steps. Pliny the Elder described how certain species of animals imitated human language.²⁵ The early medieval Latin grammarian Priscian frequently stated that Latin imitated Greek in certain respects.²⁶ In his letters, the humanist Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481) repeatedly claimed that the Romans had imitated the Doric tongue.²⁷ The definitive transferal of the idea of *imitatio* from rhetoric to grammar in the Renaissance can be explained by the

24. See Pigman III (1980) on imitation in the Renaissance.

25. *Naturalis historia* 10.119: “latiores linguae omnibus in suo cuique genere, quae sermonem imitantur humanum”.

26. E.g. Priscian (ed. Keil, 1855–1880: II, 407): “in hoc autem modo dumtaxat et infinito tempora coniuncta habent Latini praesens cum praeterito imperfecto et praeteritum perfectum cum plusquamperfecto ad imitationem Graecorum, quamvis haec quoque conati sunt quidam disiungere”. The phrase “ad imitationem Graecorum”, with the deverbative noun, occurs frequently in Priscian.

27. E.g. Filelfo (ed. De Keyser, 2015–2016: III, 1329): “At Latini linguam sunt Doricam imitati”.

goal of the Latin grammars produced in that age. Percival (1983: 312) forcefully argues that a

consequence of the emphasis on imitating ancient usage was that the ultimate goal of grammatical instruction was now not merely to train students to produce correct Latin [...] but to write Latin indistinguishable from that which had been written by the ancients themselves.

By extension, as soon as grammar came to cover languages other than Latin in humanist scholarship, especially Greek and the European vernaculars, imitation appears to have received a grammatical dimension. For new languages to gain credibility and prestige they should imitate the classical linguistic models of Latin and Greek in as many respects as possible, albeit without losing their distinctive character: comparability without losing contrast was the ultimate goal, which explains the subtle contrastive set-up of Pillot's grammar.

The limited category of implicit terminology can be treated briefly. When Pillot (1561: 46) contrasted the synthetic comparatives of Latin, Greek, and German to French analytic comparatives, he used the verb *circumscribere* 'to circumscribe', thus putting a classical Latin word to new use to describe a linguistic property unknown to the classical languages. A search in BREPOLIS' databases indeed suggests that before Pillot this verb was not yet used to describe the phenomenon of analytic comparatives.²⁸ The idea of circumscribing something, i.e. expressing it with more than one word, implies that it can be said with one word, too. In combination with the agent *Galli* 'the French' as its subject, the verb form *circumscribunt* 'they circumscribe' implies a difference between French and languages such as Greek.

In the preface, Pillot (1561: 6) evoked a similarity of French and Greek by simply stating that the Greeks "call" (*appellant*) the preterit perfect, referring to an event at an uncertain point in the past, 'aorist'. This verb choice implies that Pillot considered the French and Greek past tenses to be essentially the same in their meaning and function, and that the difference between the two was only a matter of terminology and form. Finally, Pillot (1561: 40) used the verb *contrahere* 'to reduce; to diminish', when describing the number of cases in French, which he believed to be reducible to four. This choice of verb implies a contrast with the classical models of Greek and Latin, and their greater number of cases: five and six, respectively.

Overall, Pillot's contrastive terminology was still vague and steeped in (post)classical Latin and rhetoric, although turns of phrases such as *imitari* and *circumscribere* received new meanings tailored to linguistic comparison and con-

28. Cf., however, Sylvius (1531: 91), where *circumloqui* is used to express the same idea.

trast. Further research is required to find out whether Pillot's contemporaries used similar terminology, and whether contrastive discourse involving languages other than Greek is characterized by the same turns of phrase.

5. Outlook

Biville (2018) rightly points out that the seed of a contrastive-comparative approach to language in western scholarship was sown in antiquity. In this stage, scholarly interest was focused mainly on the classical languages Latin and Greek, and in the early Christian era additionally on the Semitic tongues, especially Hebrew as the main language of the Old Testament (cf. Swiggers, 2017, and the references there). There were, however, no full-fledged contrastive grammars, and contrastive remarks were sporadic at most. It was only in the Renaissance that a contrastive approach to language bore its first-fruits, eventually formalizing in the genre of contrastive grammars, especially of Latin and Greek, such as Georg Major's *Græcæ et Latinæ grammaticæ Elementa collata* (*The elements of Greek and Latin grammar compared*, 1536) and Petrus Ramus' *Grammatica Græca, quatenus á Latina differt* (*Greek grammar, in as far as it differs from the Latin*, 1560). In the Renaissance, the horizon of scholarly interest expanded to include the European vernaculars. The standard point of reference for describing these languages in full emancipation was Latin. However, Greek, since the early Middle Ages poorly known in the west of Europe but hyped in the Renaissance, also proved a welcome anchor point for grammarians of the age, often steeped in both the Latin and the Greek languages and literatures.

To educated readers, Greek steadily became a kind of *tertium comparationis* 'the third part of the comparison' in relation to the vernacular and Latin. For their emancipation, it helped that the vernaculars had features in common with the newly available Greek language but not with the omnipresent Latin tongue, knowledge of which never waned in western Europe. These shared vernacular-Greek features included most notably the article, an entire part of speech which Latin lacked. The possibility of an association with Greek stimulated the vernaculars to obtain a clearly defined status of their own, independent from the two classical languages and from each other. Pillot even seems to have presented his native vernacular as a synthesis of the two classical languages, combining elements from both but retaining its distinctive character. For Greek, he did so in a rather subtle fashion, leaving part of the contrastive work to his educated German readers.

This novel multilingual approach in grammar, which started to boom in the first half of the 1500s, paved the way for larger-scale language comparisons and contrastive studies. In grammars such as Pillot's, the exploration of linguistic

interrelationships was ad-hoc and focused on a limited number of features. These works offered the dots which language scholars were trying to connect from the second half of the sixteenth century onward, and especially after 1600, with a focus on more and more languages, even though the linguistic facts contrasted were often eclectic (Considine and Van Hal, 2010; Swiggers, 2017). Whereas the late sixteenth century has received extensive attention in recent times, the earlier stage has not yet been studied to a satisfiable extent, which holds a fortiori for the role played by the Greek language and its idiosyncratic grammar model.

Pillot's brand of contrastive study suggests that at least some grammarians tended to amalgamate particular language features, on the one hand, and the cross-linguistics concepts created to capture them, on the other. This tendency to identify a feature with the concept referring to it, inherited from the classical model of grammar based on the parts of speech, left a lasting mark on contrastive language studies. Indeed, it is only in recent decades that linguists have started to make a case for working with language-specific categories in descriptions of individual languages, sharply distinguishing them from "comparative categories" designed for contrastive analysis (see most notably Haspelmath, 2010). Cases such as Pillot's show not only the inadequacies of early modern grammar but more importantly also that sixteenth-century language studies left their mark on modern linguistics by perpetuating and intensifying the idea of a universally applicable language model at a moment in western history when grammatical description boomed and came to cover a broad range of different languages (Auroux, 1992).

Pillot foreshadows modern contrastive language studies also in another sense: he explored the possibilities of a practical form of contrastive linguistics in foreign language teaching and translation, even though he was not as concerned with theory and methodology as many modern contrastive linguists are (cf. Gast, 2012), and left much to the judgment of his educated readers. Moreover, Pillot was interested equally in the differences and the similarities between the languages, whereas modern contrastive linguists tend to focus on the former. Be that as it may, sixteenth-century grammarians devised part of the contrastive terminology still in use today, for which Pillot's *circumscribere* may stand as an example.

In sum, I hope to have illuminated by means of this modest case study that a historiographical approach to contrastive linguistics can be fruitful. Indeed, several elements of this branch of modern language studies, often perceived as a very recent invention, actually hark back to the multilingual scholarship that first flourished in the sixteenth century. Granted, the methods adopted were not as fine-grained as modern ones, and often tailored to an audience which was not only steeped in grammatical learning but also expected to do part of the contrastive work. It is, however, difficult to deny that sixteenth-century scholars like Pillot had a contrastive reflex when studying and describing language, and moreover

tried to convey this reflex on their readers. As such, the 1500s constituted a transformative period in the long history of contrastive language studies.

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