

Abstract

Speaking atlas that takes the form of a website presenting interactive maps of France and its Overseas, with over 300 survey points on which one can click to hear speech samples and read a transcript of what is said, in indigenous languages and dialects

1. Introduction

- Great linguistic diversity in France (masked by the dominant position of the French language), increasingly threatened
- Chain of intergenerational transmission within family cells often interrupted

→ Important, even urgent, to collect recordings in regional languages and dialects



easier, a few decades ago, to find speakers



however, the Internet and means of collecting and storing large quantities of recordings less developed

2. Survey points

- Aesop's fable "The North Wind and the Sun" translated into
 - Romance languages (*Oïl*, *Oc*, Francoprovençal, Catalan, Corsican and Ligurian)
 - Germanic languages (Alsatian, Franconian, West Flemish)
 - Breton and Basque
 - Overseas languages
- Contacts of associations, immersive schools (*calandretas*, *diwan*...)
 - dozens of field surveys, with a few days per mission
 - over 300 survey points mapped (+ 100 in Italy, 50 in Belgium, 20 in Spain...)

3. Speakers

- One speaker selected per locality (only one commune within a radius of less than 15-20 km)
 - native speakers favoured, but neo-speakers not disregarded (distinction not always obvious)
 - associating a recording with a point on the map not always easy
- Rather engaged in the cultural and linguistic field, from varied socio-professional backgrounds
- Typical profile: a retired male from the farmer world (or workers' world),
- having experienced some social ascent, having worked for instance as a teacher

4. Recordings

- Extremely warm welcome, expressing the moving feeling that the *patois* was going to disappear → very enriching exchanges
- Most often at home or in a meeting room with a Zoom H4 recorder
- Associated with a signed consent for free distribution

5. Protocol

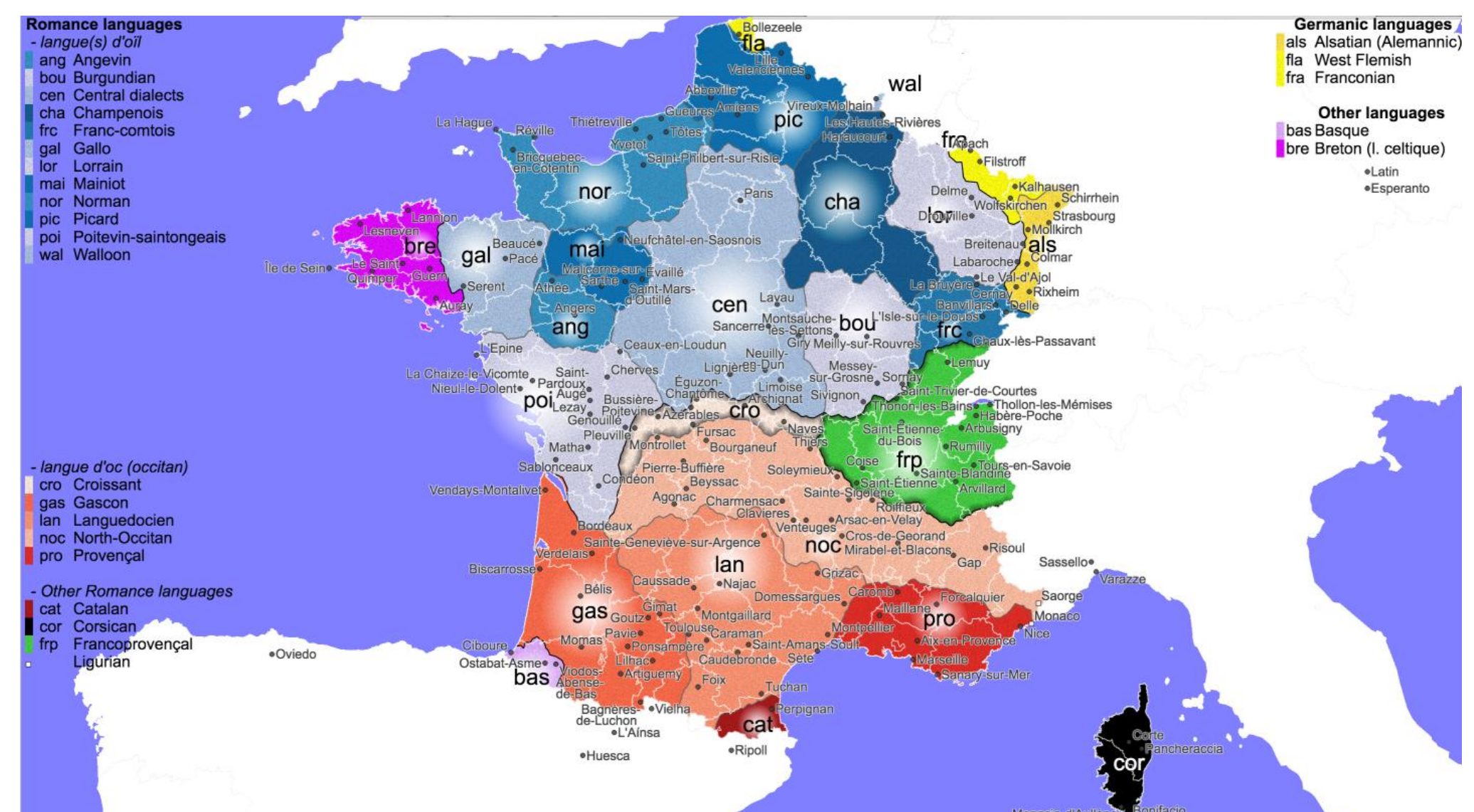
- Common protocol applied, in which the speakers were asked to translate this fable into their regional language
 - either directly with the French text in front of them
 - or from notes they had preferred to take
- Sometimes away from a literal translation to get closer to oral traditions
 - different strategies = testimony of wealth and diversity

6. Transcriptions

- Classical spelling (Alibert, 1935) for Occitan
 - sometimes drawing on what the speakers had provided
 - checked and corrected by specialists who had access to the audio, as was the case for Catalan and Corsican
- Unified spellings of Basque (*batua*) and Breton (*peurunvan*)
- Systems inspired by German for Alsatian and Franconian by the Conflans group for Francoprovençal
- Often Frenchified or individual spellings in the *Oïl* domain

7. Cartography

- Map of France indicating boundaries between linguistic areas, retaining 25 regional languages or dialects (+ particular signage for Ligurian)
- 600+ ALF survey points classified in those 25 categories, based on various regional atlases and publications
- Algorithm then designed to draw lines passing in the middle of two points of different categories, to smooth out the contours and to colour the zones so defined
- Options provided for displaying Jersey, French-speaking Switzerland and Belgium, for instance



Caribbean



Indian Ocean



Pacific (NC+WF)



Pacific (FP)



8. Reception of the project

- Linguists and teachers, but also the general public: printed and audiovisual media as well as social networks
- Over 600 000 visits since June 2017, hundreds of reactions by e-mail
 - positive (thanks, "it reminds me of my grandmother"; "what about other countries?")
 - negative (speakers don't "roll" enough 'r's; clashes especially around the so-called classical Occitan spelling for Provençal)

9. Conclusion

- Kind of colour photograph of the dialectal rainbow of France
 - an instantaneous photograph of current uses
 - a tool for teaching variation, giving it greater visibility
 - showing that the regional languages of France, though endangered, are still today a precious reality
- Does not tell much about
 - the vitality of these languages, the number of their speakers, the social dynamics that are at work
 - how rewarding the personal meetings with the informants were
- Problem of speaker representativeness (and translation?)

10. Future work

- Associating dialects with modernity
 - to revitalise our linguistic heritage, or at least
 - to give it recognition as a vehicle for creativity, for lack of being able to counteract the decline in minority language practices
- Extension to the Iberian Peninsula
- Using the web to collect new information, using a crowdsourcing methodology now very much in fashion → precautions required

11. Acknowledgements

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