

The erosion of Norman French dialect features: evidence from linguistic atlases

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Abstract

This paper will investigate the replacement of one dialectal feature characteristic of *bas normand* (i.e. western Norman) – the evolutions of C+I – as attested in the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (ALF) (Edmont and Gilliéron, 1902-9; data collected in the 1890s) and the *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique de la Normandie* (ALEN) (Brasseur, 1981, 1984, 1997; data collected in the 1970s). These atlases show a gradual erosion of the Normand palatalised forms (Cj and Cʌ) by standard French forms (CI). This process is not however a simple replacement of dialectal forms by non-dialectal forms but rather shows a “wave” of changes in which an earlier sound change ʌ > j is also involved. The process seems to involve a gradual reduction of the range of Cʌ in favour of Cj and of Cj in favour of CI, with no cases of immediate replacement of Cʌ by CI as a generalised pattern of sound change in particular local varieties. An analysis of the geographical distribution of particular words with etymological CI further shows that the dialect atlases show relics of the passage of Cʌ to Cj and Cj to CI which suggest a wider geographical distribution of each form. The analysis shows that in the context of convergent dialects, claiming a replacement of dialect features by standard language features is an oversimplification of the sound changes processes involved.

1. Introduction

Todoran (1956) established a typological distinction between types of dialects, based on the nature of the relationship between the dialect and the supralocal standard language which share the same language ecology. His distinction was a two-way relationship between dialects which were closely genetically related to the standard language and where the standard was also dialect of the same “language” (convergent dialects) and dialects which were less closely related to the standard language and where the standard was a variety of a different “language” (divergent dialects). This distinction was used as an explanation of the processes by which the relationships between the varieties would lead to language change in dialects. The process of language change for convergent dialects was described as one of gradual replacement of dialect features by those of a standard language, while for divergent dialects it was seen as resulting from language internal changes together with contact influenced changes¹. This means that the relationships between dialects and supralocal standards has been taken as an explanatory account of how language change can be expected to happen in different contexts (e.g. Dressler, 1988).

Norman French dialects provide an interesting case for examining sound change in divergent and convergent dialects as closely related dialects² are found in different relationships with the standard language: mainland Norman dialects are in a convergent relationship with Standard French, while Channel Islands dialects are in a divergent relationship with Standard English. At the macro-level, there is evidence that mainland Norman dialects are losing dialect features, especially syntactic and lexical features, to Standard French derived forms

(see for example Lechanteur, 1949; Mason, 1980), while Channel Islands dialects are showing different forms of contact induced change in phonology and lexicon as the result of contact with English (see for example Jones, 2001, 2005; Liddicoat, 1986, 1990). In mainland France it has become increasingly common for dialects to merge with standard French to create what are known as *patois francisé*, or where the merger with French is even more fully complete *français patoisé* (Charpentier, 1982). While such observations are true at the macro-level of language change, the realities at the micro-level seem to be more complex. This paper will explore a particular sound change which is widespread in western Normandy including the Channel Islands, the palatalisation of /l/ in consonant + /l/ clusters – to explore the nature of the process in both divergent and convergent contexts.

2. Sources: linguistic atlases

Much of work in French dialectology has been devoted to the production of linguistic atlases and this process has taken place in two stages at different times. The first stage is the *Atlas linguistique de la France (ALF)* (Edmont and Gilliéron, 1902-1909). The *ALF* was based on fieldwork conducted by Edmond Edmont conducted between 1897 and 1901, with the Norman data being collected towards the end of the period. The second stage was the development of the more detailed, and methodologically more rigorous, *Atlas linguistique de la France par régions* (see Taverdet, 1984 for a discussion of this project). These atlases began to appear from the 1950s, with the atlas covering the Norman region – *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique de la Normandie (ALEN)* (Brasseur, 1981, 1984, 1997) – appearing in the 1980s, although based on fieldwork conducted from the 1970s. The *ALF* and *ALEN* provide a useful resource for investigating dialect change as they give a picture of dialects at two points in time roughly 60-70 years apart.

3. Consonant + /l/ in Norman French

Consonant + /l/ (Cl) clusters occur initially, medially and finally in Norman French varieties. These clusters involve etymological voiced and voiceless bilabial and velar stops, and voiceless labiodental fricatives. In many cases, medial and final clusters in Norman French also result from vowel loss, e.g. *populum* → **poplum*. Although, these clusters occur in all positions in Norman French, intervocalic and final clusters are subject to a range of different sound change processes and present a less clear distribution of realisations than do initial consonant clusters and so the discussion in this paper will focus on word initial Cl. The relevant consonant clusters found in maps in the linguistic atlases are:

pl: *pluma, plana, plovere*
 bl: **blad, blitum*
 fl: *florem, flagellum, fluctuare*
 kl: *clarum, clausum*
 gl: *glenare, glandem, *glodium*

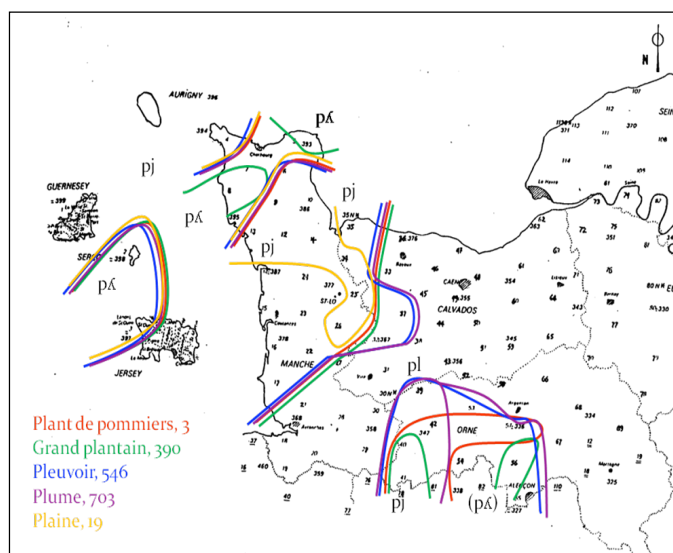
These initial clusters are involved in a process of palatalisation of the lateral consonant in a large part of western Normandy, which can be summarised as:

Cl → Cʌ (→ cluster reduction to ʌ)
 Cʌ → Cj (→ cluster reduction to j)
 Cj → palatalised C

Forms other than Cl, C λ and Cj are usually of limited range (except in the case of initial gl-) and many are found only sporadically in some words where other properties of the phonological shape of the word have influenced the result. Cl, C λ and Cj serve to distinguish a number of dialect areas in western Normandy and are hence useful for examining broader processes of language change.

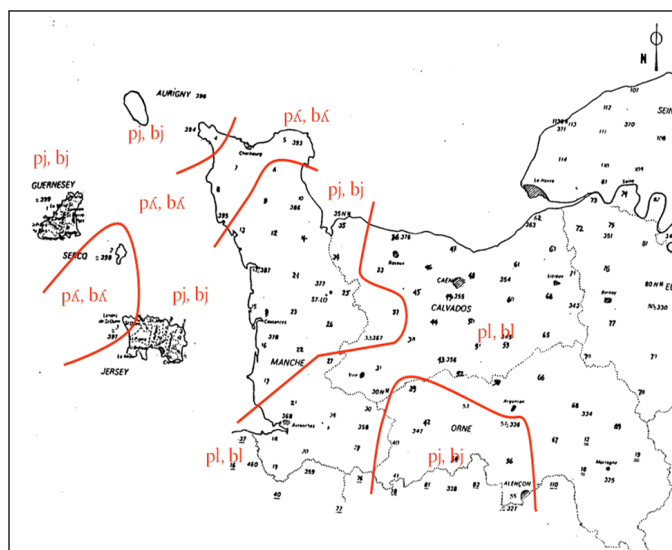
4. Regular realisations of initial C+I in ALEN

Using dialect atlases as a source for understanding sound change necessarily recalls the aphorism *chaque mot a sa propre histoire* [each word has its own history] and involves generalising the geographic distribution of sound changes over a number of words, each of which potentially represents slightly different isoglosses. Map 1 below shows the complexity of the relevant isoglosses in Normandy³.



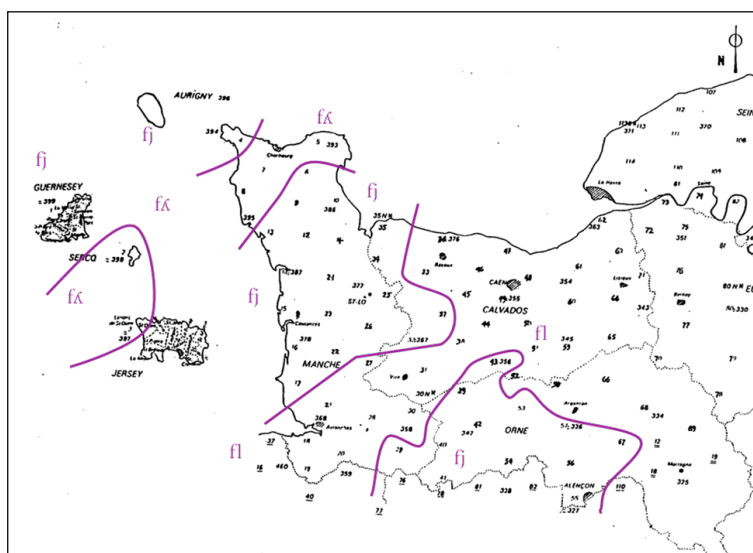
Map 1: Word initial /pl/: Principal isoglosses: ALEN

The realisations of the initial consonant cluster /pl/ for each of the five words mapped here have a different geographical distribution. The basic distribution shows a palatalisation of the /l/ to / λ / in North Western Jersey (St Ouen), Sark and parts of the extreme north of the Cotentin peninsular. In addition, the word *plume* has a palatalised / λ / at points 53-57 in the central west of the *département* of Orne. The delateralised palatal form /pj/ is found in Guernsey and most of Jersey, in the northern area of the *département* of Manche, although with a much more restricted distribution for the word *plaine* than for other words, and in western Orne, although *grande plantain* is much more restricted than the other words. *Plume* conserves the palatal lateral in parts of this region. While this diversity of treatments of the same phonemes is typical in any finely grained dialect study, this variability needs to be regularised to a certain extent in order to deal with broader issues of historical development. A more regularised set of isoglosses can be seen in Map 2.

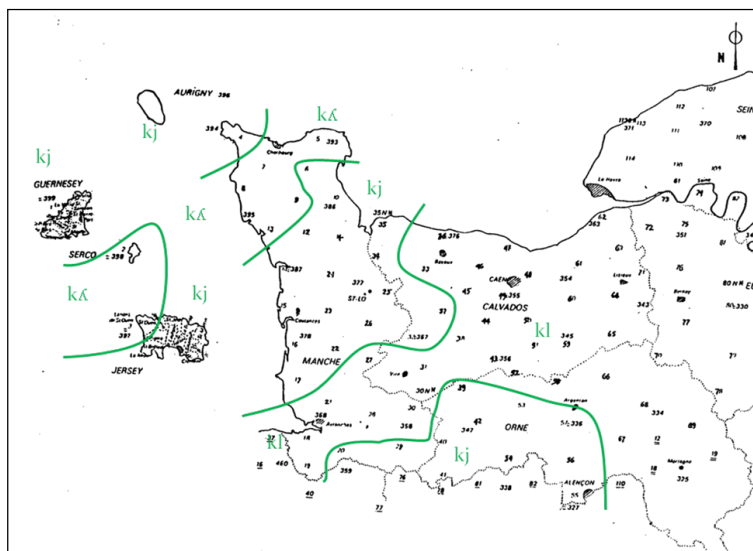


Map 2: Word initial bilabial+/l/: maximum extension of regular changes: ALEN

Map 2 shows the maximum extension of the various regular realisations of initial palatal consonants followed by /l/ in Normandy. Regular realisation here means that the majority of words in which the consonant cluster occurs have the same realisation and in this case, the isoglosses for both /pl/ and /bl/ coincide. This shows that the area with a palatalised lateral is limited to North Western Jersey, Sark and a small number of points in the northern Cotentin peninsular, with an extensive area of denaturalised palatals in the rest of northern Manche and in western Orne. These two areas are separated by a thin strip in which the standard French realisation /pl/ prevails. A similar, but slightly different distribution is found for both /fl/ and /kl/ in initial position, as Map 3 and Map 4 show.



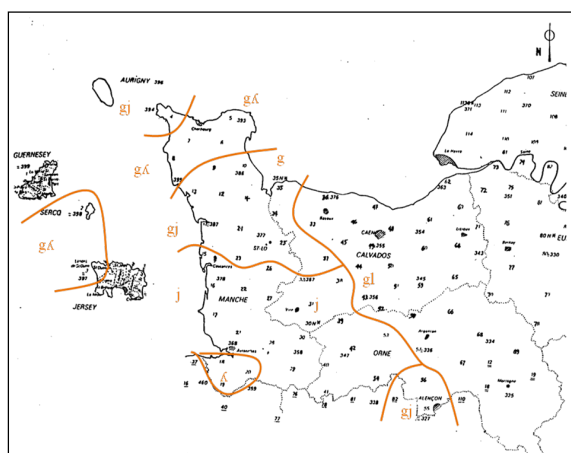
Map 3: Word initial /fl/: maximum extension of regular changes: ALEN



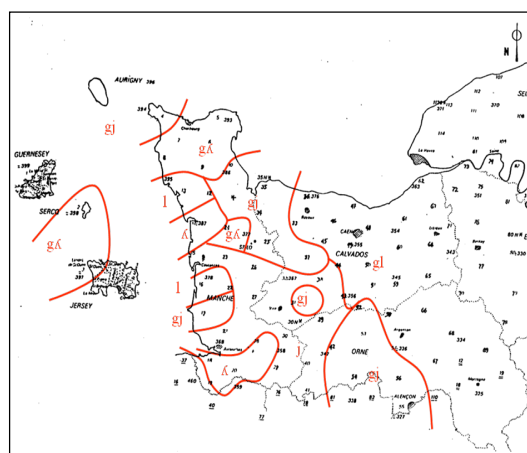
Map 4: Word initial /kl/: maximum extension of regular changes: ALEN

The isoglosses in Map 3 and Map 4 show a very similar distribution for the palatalised lateral as for the other consonant clusters considered above, although the distribution of /kʲ/ covers a larger area than other clusters being found further south at points 9 and 13 (Map 4). The southern extent of the isogloss for /fj/ and /kj/ in Manche is very similar to those for other clusters, although the isogloss for /kj/ extends slightly further to the south on the western coast. The southern region centred on the *département* of Orne is larger for both sound changes, with /fj/ reaching further north and east and for /kj/ reaching further west.

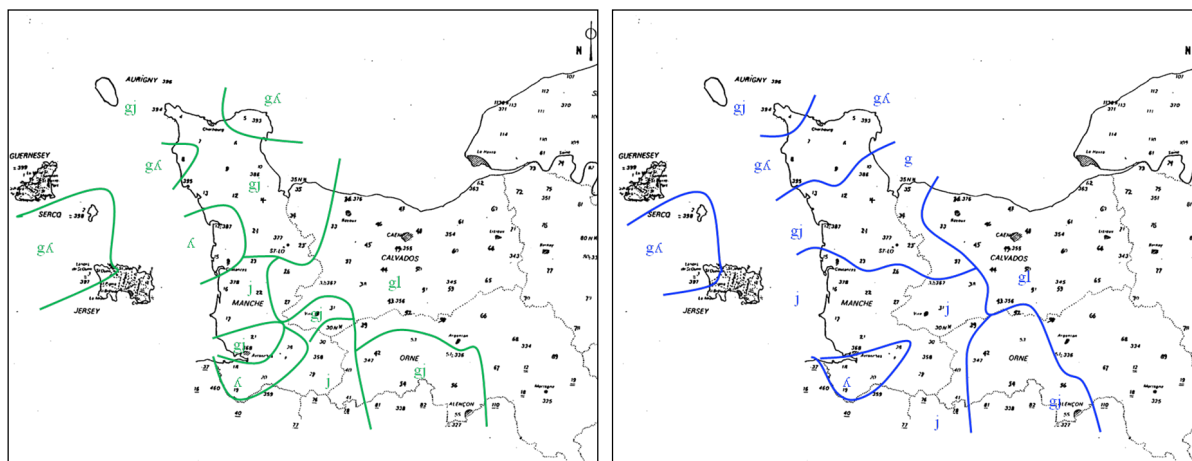
Collectively these maps show that the palatalised lateral is found in north-west Jersey, Sark and in a few villages of northern Manche. Delateralised palatal realisations are found in central Manche and into western Calvados and in western Orne, the two areas being separated by a thin strip in which non-palatal laterals are found. The picture however becomes much more complex when initial /gl/ is taken into consideration (Map 5).



Map 5a: glaner (148)



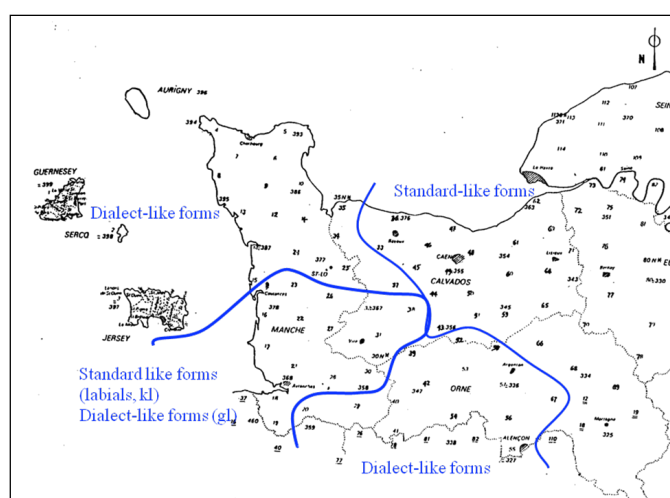
Map 5b: glui (160)

Map 5c: *glands* (444)

Map 5d: maximum extent of regular changes

Map 5: Realisations of initial *g+l*: ALEN

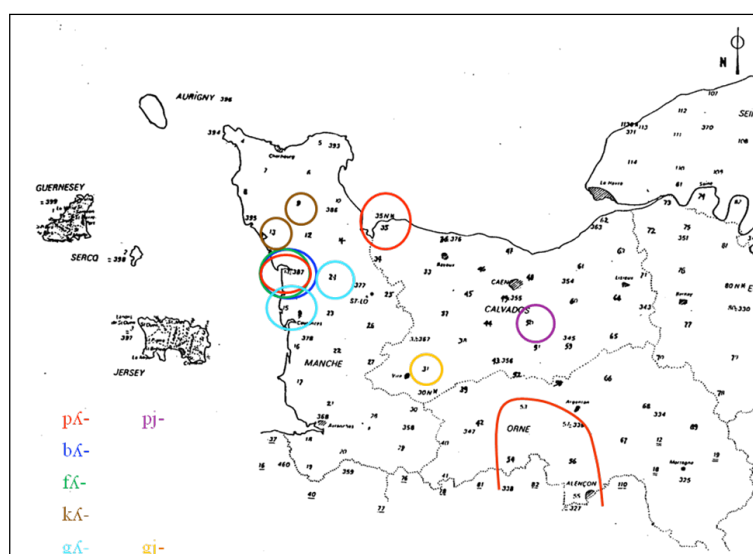
Map 5 shows that various palatalised realisations of /gl/ are found throughout western Normandy – that is, the area of palatalised sound changes is much more extensive than for other consonant clusters. There are some notable similarities between the distributions of the realisations of /gl/: /gʌ/ is limited to northwestern Jersey, Sark and northern Manche and /gj/ is found in central Manche and western Orne. This parallels quite closely the distributions for the labials and for /kl/. Palatalised laterals are also found with cluster reduction (/gl/→/gʌ/→/ʌ/) as a regular sound change at 18-20 and 28 in western Manche. There is also evidence for /gʌ/ at point 24 for *glui* (Map5b) and, with cluster reduction at points 14, 15, for *glands* (Map 5c). Similarly delateralised palatals are found in a much wider area, although with cluster reduction (/gl/→/gj/→/j/) in much of southern Manche and the neighbouring areas of Calvados and Orne. There are also sporadic instances in which the initial velar is maintained in *glui* at points 17 and 31 (Map 5b) and in *glands* at points 21 and 31 (Map 5c). The realisations of initial /gl/ therefore indicate a much wider extension for palatalisation of C+l across Normandy. This distribution is summarised in Map 6.

Map 6: Word initial *C+l*: maximum extension of regular changes: ALEN

The distribution shown in Map 6 suggests two possibilities: (1) that the initial cluster /gl/ underwent a different process of sound change from other C+l clusters in initial position and hence the different distribution is solely related to features of the /gl/ cluster, or (2) that palatalisation of /l/ following a consonant in initial position was more widespread in Normandy than is evidenced by the regular sound change data available in *ALEN*. There are two sources of evidence which can be used to determine which of these possibilities is relevant. The first of these is evidence for conservative forms in *ALEN* provided by sporadic occurrences of various realisations of C+l outside the areas of regular sound change – such changes would show whether palatalised realisations had a wider extension in Norman French dialects and have been replaced by standard French derived forms. The second source of evidence is the data from *ALF*, which was collected approximately 90 years before dialect survey for *ALEN* and which therefore provides a picture of an earlier state of the dialects.

5. Evidence from sporadic items in *ALEN*

There is evidence that palatalised realisations have been more widespread than the evidence from regular sound changes indicates (see Map 7). This evidence shows that C λ clusters extended further south at points 14, 15, 24 and 35 and were found in a wider area of Manche. This suggests that the isogloss separating C λ and Cj has moved north over time. There is also evidence that C λ has been replaced by Cj in western Orne. Such a change is unsurprising as C λ would be an intermediate stage in the evolution of Cl to Cj and shows little about the extent of palatalisation in the region. It does show, however, that the evolution of C λ to Cj is relatively recent and was still in progress in the 1970s when the *ALEN* data was collected.

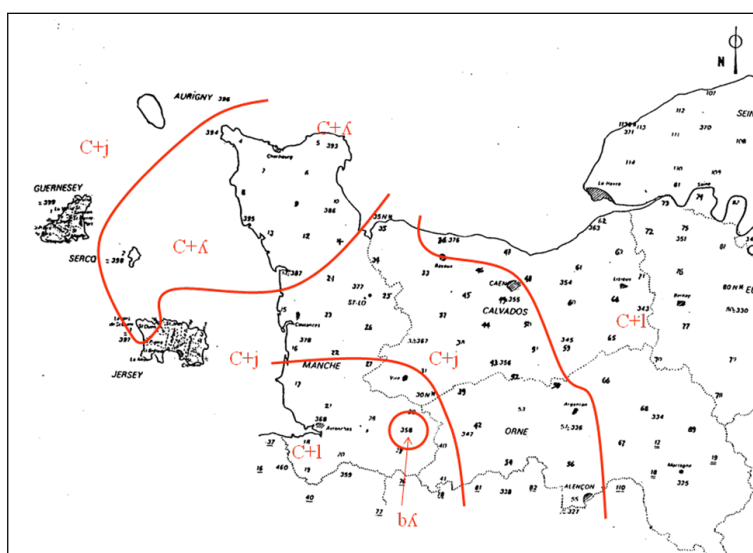


Map 7: Relic evidence in *ALEN*

There is some evidence on Map 7 for a wider extension of Cj realisations with some instances of Cj being found in areas which normally have Cl clusters; however this evidence is very limited. The presence of /gj/ at point 31 has been discussed above, but the presence of /pj/ at point 50 in Calvados (found in both *plaine* and *plume*) seems to indicate a wider eastern extent of palatalisation than is currently the case, with the implication that Cl clusters may have been introduced into parts of Normandy as an influence of standard French.

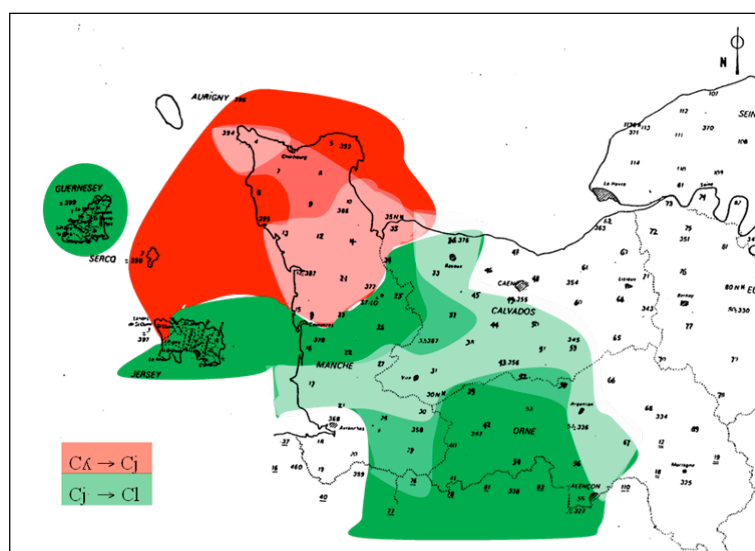
6. Evidence from ALF

The *ALF* represents a useful earlier comparison with the *ALEN*; however there are a number of problems which need to be taken into consideration in interpreting the *ALF* data. The first is a problem of granularity between the two atlases. The *ALF*, as a survey of all of France, conducted dialect surveys in fewer locations than did the regionally focused *ALEN*. For example, Edmont recorded data for only 9 points in Manche compared to the 26 points for *ALEN*, and each island of the Channel Islands is treated as only a single point in *ALF*, whereas *ALEN* records variations found on the larger islands of Jersey and Guernsey. In some cases, points in *ALF* and *ALEN* coincide⁴, however, in most cases the *ALEN* does not replicate the *ALF* survey, although most *ALF* points lie very close to *ALEN* points. There is a methodological problem inherent in the *ALF* dialect survey in that Edmont was instructed to take his respondent's first answer rather than delve further into the local dialect. This sometimes means that the data recorded may not represent general dialect use (Chaurand, 1972). For the island of Guernsey, the *ALF* is particularly problematic as Collas (1931) has pointed out that the informant was not a native of the Island, but rather was a speaker of Jersey Norman French. In using the *ALF* then, it is important to consider other early accounts of Norman dialects as a check⁵.



Map 8: Realisations of Cl- (excluding gl-) in ALF (corrected for Guernsey and Jersey)

With these caveats in mind, one can see a different distribution for initial Cl in Map 8. Here the extent of Cɛ clusters moves slightly further south and seems to confirm the relic evidence from *ALEN* shown in Map 7. It does however reveal a relic conservation of bɛ in southern Manche which is not found in the *ALEN* data. The most interesting difference is however that Cj is found in a continuous geographical area from central Manche to western Orne⁶, in contrast to the two regions separated by a thin corridor of Cl forms found in *ALEN* (see Map 6). This evidence seems to confirm that the presence of Cl clusters in *ALEN* is the result of a reintroduction of unpalatalised forms under the influence of standard French.



Map 9: Sound processes in Normandy affecting initial Cl clusters (excluding gl-)

The process of change between *ALF* and *ALEN* is summarised in Map 9. In this map, the intensity of shading represents the extent of conservation of particular forms between the 1990s and the 1970s recoverable from the linguistic atlases. Areas with dark shading are areas in which the same form is maintained in most cases (given the differences in granularity between the two). Areas of lightest shading shows where sound changes have replaced an earlier form in most, if not all words. This map shows that there has been a process of replacement of *Cλ* with *Cj* at its northern and southern limits and a replacement of *Cj* by *Cl* to the west and in the centre of the *Cj* region. The atlases therefore give evidence that dialect features have been replaced in recent history, with dialect areas retracting between the *ALF* survey and the *ALEN* survey (approximately 80 years).

7. Discussion

What the atlases do show is that the convergent-divergent typology does not provide an adequate account of sound change in Norman French. In the Channel Islands, a divergent dialect area, it can be observed that there is little evidence of the replacement of dialect features with standard French features⁷. In fact, the Channel Islands appear to have undergone very little change in the realisations of Cl consonant clusters. In France, it is not simply the case that in this context standard language features have replaced dialect features and that sound change has been driven by standard language influences. Examples do exist of dialectal features being replaced by standard features but these are found primarily at boundaries between dialect areas with *Cj* and dialect areas with standard-like *Cl*. The replacement of *Cλ* by *Cl* is not a regularly attested sound change at any point, although in some cases particular words have been influenced by the standard language. What is observable is that the replacement of *Cλ* has been typically through delateralisation to *Cj* – that is, through a language-internal sound change. The observed result at the *Cλ*-*Cj* isogloss is in fact consistent with *Wellentheorie* as it shows spread of a sound change from a point of origin to more peripheral areas, a process which owes nothing in this case to the influence of the standard language. What is observable in Normandy is in fact a combination of

replacement of dialect features by standard language features and of spread of dialect innovations to new areas.

The effect of the convergent/divergent distinction seems to presuppose an immediate and equal presence of the standard in all dialect areas – that is, that the standard is in some way equally present across a dialect area. Such an assumption may not reflect actual language practices in convergent dialect areas. It is possible that some places will be more strongly connected to the standard language community than others, especially in contexts where the influence of mass media may be limited. It would appear that the amount of contact with the standard may be a partial explanation of what is occurring in Normandy. The northern part of the *département* of Manche has traditionally been a relatively isolated area, even though schooling in standard French and print media would have been features of the local language ecologies⁸. Conversely, the narrow corridor of standard-like realisations in central Manche coincides with a major arterial road connecting Caen in east and Avranches in the west, and the introduction of standard-like features here seems to represent the greater contact with external varieties typically associated with channels of communication, as had been demonstrated by Dauzat (1922).

¹ *Am putea numi aceste dialecte și altele de felul lor care nu se varsă în limbă națională, dialectele atipice (în opoziție cu cele care se dizolvă în limba națională pe care le-am numit tipice. Am mai putea întrebuința și altă terminologie dialectele convergente și dialectele divergente...In general, dialectele sunt divergente în care predomină procesul de diferențiere, convergente în ordinea în care predomină procesul de integrare. (Todoron, 1956:101) [One could call these dialects and others of the type which do not spill over into the national language atypical dialects (in opposition to those which dissolve into the national language, which one could call typical). One could also use another terminology: convergent dialects and divergent dialects... In general, dialects are divergent where a process of differentiation predominates, convergent where that of integration predominates. (Author's translation)]*

² For a discussion of the relationships between Channel Islands dialects and Mainland Norman see Brasseur (1978a, 1978b).

³ Note: the dialect of Alderney had already become extinct at the time of the survey for ALEN and so cannot be recorded in the discussion at this point

⁴ ALEN point 14 = ALF point 387, ALEN point 57 = ALF point 336, ALEN point 55 = ALF point 327, ALEN point 49 = ALF point 355.

⁵ For Guernsey, Collas (1931, 1934) and Sjögren (1964) are useful sources, and for Jersey, Collas (no date) and Spence (1960).

⁶ ALF also records Cj as the regular sound change pattern in Alderney.

⁷ This does not mean that these dialects have been entirely free of influence from standard French, see for example Liddicoat (1994, 2002) and Jones (2001).

⁸ It needs to be born in mind that informants in dialect surveys are typically older people whose language development occurred at a time considerably earlier than the moment of data collection. The language acquisition experiences of informants often represent a period 50-70 years prior to the point of data collection.

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