



Promoting or demoting
the transmission of minority languages from past to present
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The Crescent Languages *marginalised minority languages*



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Plan

- ♦ **The Crescent area**
- ♦ Linguistic history of the Crescent
- ♦ Current sociolinguistic situation
- ♦ Awareness among speakers
- ♦ The issue of identity
- ♦ Conclusion
- ♦ References

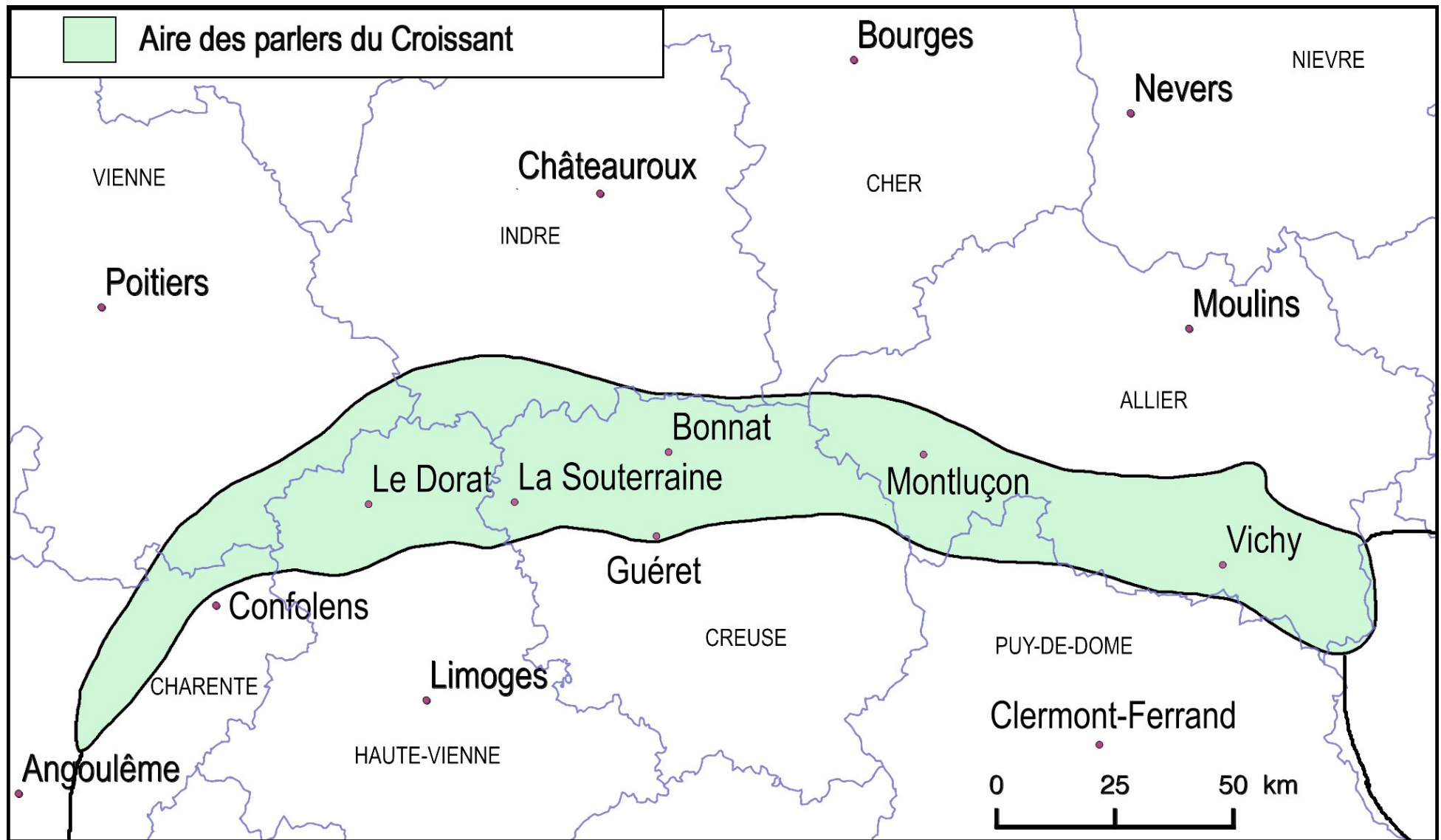
The Crescent area

- Situated on the Northern Fringe of the Massif Central (France)
- Has a form of a half moon (a 'crescent')
- The local gallo-romance dialects simultaneously display typical features of:
 - Oïl varieties (French, Poitevin-Saintongeais, Berrichon...)
 - Oc varieties (Limousin in the west and Auvergnat in the east)
- Crescent dialects are often called
 - 'Marchois' (~ 'Marchese') on the Limousin side
 - 'Bourbonnais' on the Auvergnat side

The Crescent area



The Crescent area



The Crescent area

- Latest studies in linguistics tend to show that they are Oc with an Oïl significant influence
(Quint 1996, 1998 ; Guérin 2017)
 - Oc features: fundamental lexicon, morphology
 - Oïl features: modern lexicon, phonology, syntax
- Crescent area = dialect continuum
 - Variation is very great
(especially on a north-south axis)
 - More than 20km → intercomprehension may be difficult

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Linguistic history of the Crescent

- Crescent = endangered languages
 - Nearly all speakers = bilingual since the 19th Century
- Poor land → agriculture was difficult
 - Men had to go into exile (in Paris, Lyon)
 - ↳ worked as stonemason (famous Stonemasons of Creuse)
 - expanded French into the rural population
- Local dialects remained the vernacular language until the middle of the 20th century

Linguistic history of the Crescent

- After WW2, “process of disappearing”
= breaking the line of generational transmission
- Causes of this process:
 - Language policy in France,
with regard to regional or minority languages
 - The role of the public school in how speakers consider
their native language (ban, punishment)
 - Industrialisation and “modernisation”
have injured the traditional social structure
 - An important acceleration of the rural exodus,
which depopulated the region
 - The development of audiovisual media in French

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Current sociolinguistic situation

- Typology of speakers:
 - > 70 yr. = native and fluent speakers
 - 40-70 yr. = terminal speakers
(some passive knowledge
and very limited productive skills)
 - < 40 yr. = French monolinguals

(Austin & Sallabank 2011)

Current sociolinguistic situation

- In Dompierre-les-Églises:

Contexte	Just after WW2	Today
Home	Local dialect	French (rarely Local Dialect)
Street	Local dialect	French (rarely Local Dialect)
Shops	Local dialect	French (rarely Local Dialect)
Fairs	Local dialect	French (rarely Local Dialect)
Agricultural work	Local dialect	French (rarely Local Dialect)
School (break)	Local Dialect (sometimes French)	French
School (class)	French	French
Church (preach)	French	French
Town hall	French	French
Post office	French	French

Current sociolinguistic situation

- Languages of oral tradition
 - No written literature (except some recent texts)
 - No literary or standard language
- Each one speak her/his own dialect
 - The few existing texts are all written in specific dialect
- These dialects are not taught in schools
 - family transmission only

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Awareness among speakers

- Speakers are welcoming with great enthusiasm initiatives for their dialects
 - as those of the project “The Linguistic Crescent” (Quint & Guérin 2017)
- Local initiatives
 - Isolated local initiatives (texts, lexicons...)
 - Local groups working on a lexicon (Luchapt, Châteauponsac)
 - Language course (Saint-Agnant-de-Versillat)
 - Sketches and songs (Parsac)

Awareness among speakers

- Meetings bringing together speakers from all Crescent area, every year in Creuse
 - Fursac, Parsac, La Celle-Dunoise, Crozant, La Souterraine...
- Despite a growing public enthusiasm, these initiatives have little broad impact
 - will not be able to stop the progressive process of disappearing

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The issue of identity

- All Crescent speakers call their local dialect “patois”
 - to identify them, they add the name of the town (ex. the patois of Dompierre)
- Several speakers describe their dialect as a “skinned patois” [patois écorché]
 - i.e. a sub-patois
- In this conception:
 - French is the “legitimate” language
 - Limousin Occitan is the “legitimate” patois
 - Local dialect is in a situation of inferiority: skinned patois

The issue of identity

- Speakers have no clear linguistic or cultural identity, beyond the town
 - clear sense of belonging to town or village
 - lot of local words to express these belongings
- They consider themselves as French or Limousin
 - but rarely claimed or emphasised
- Crescent is a continuum
 - because of important variation,
no linguistic community recognised by speakers

The issue of identity

- Crescent dialects = Occitan-based & in Occitan area
 - no Occitan identity
 - sometimes, negative feelings, especially concerning the Occitan traditional spelling
- West speakers know that their territory is composed of part of the former County of La Marche
 - awareness in the 1960-1970s → development of tourism
 - no Marchese identity historically present in this region

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Conclusion

- Disappearance of Crescent languages – or other minority languages
 - is part of a broader process of disappearance of languages (Crystal 2000 ; Austin & Sallabank 2011)
- Disappearance of Crescent languages, nowadays almost ineluctable
 - is due to several factors which have changed the local culture (Crystal 2000)
- Study of the issue of identity of local people
 - better understand the current situation of these dialects
- For several years, there are initiatives to conserve these dialects
 - too late and too few to enable to stop the progressive disappearance

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Thank you for your attention!



**Do you
have any
questions?**