



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

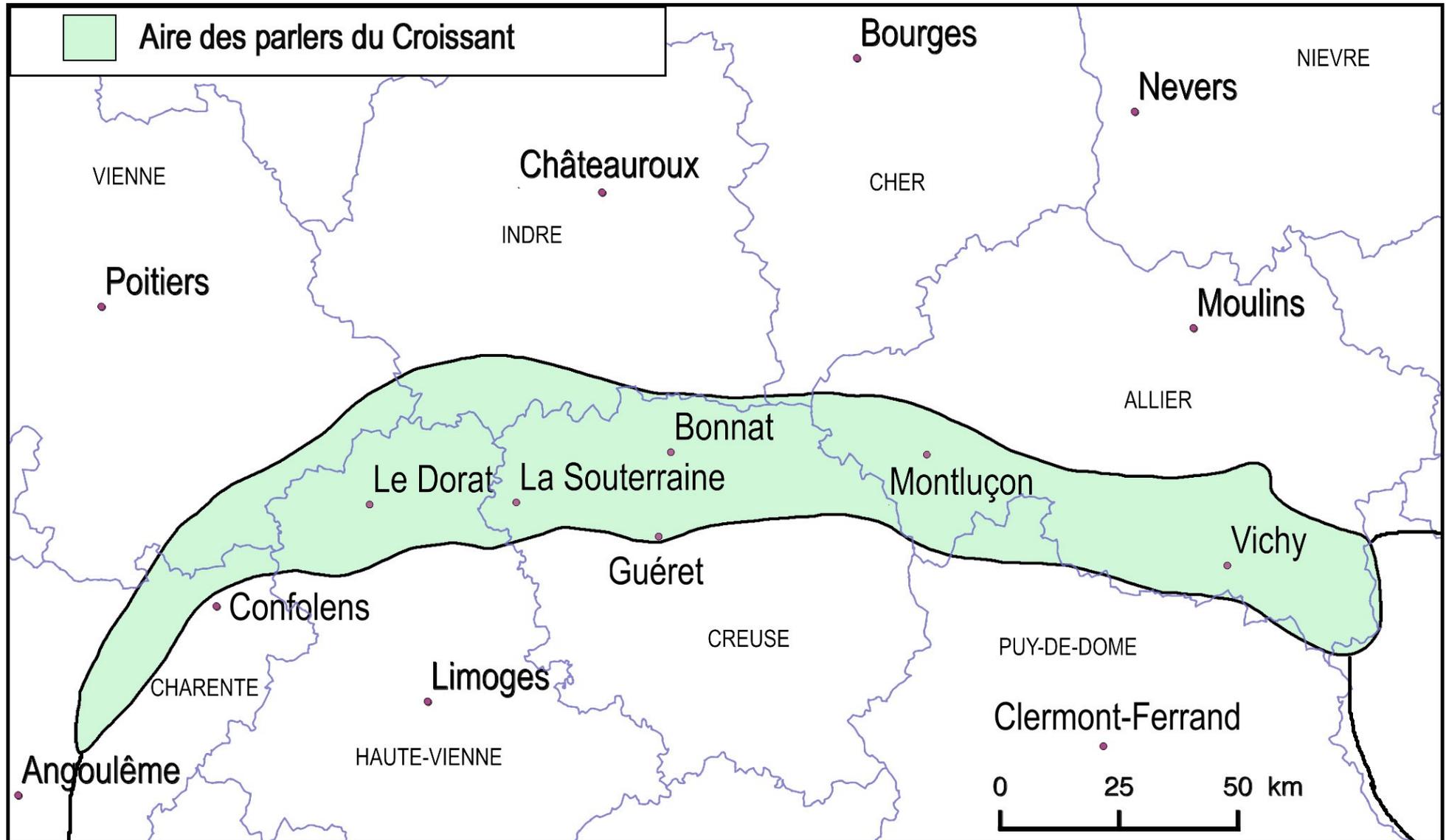
The Crescent area

- 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?**