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Damien Hall

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[Charles A. Ferguson Prize for Best Student Poster] Variation Explained through Contact and History: The Regional French of Normandy

Variation Explained through Contact and History: the Regional French of Normandy

Damien Hall

1 Introduction

Dialectologists have long been interested in the question of how non-linguistic boundaries affect isoglosses. The boundaries of Scandinavian settlement of Normandy, France, in the ninth to eleventh centuries constitute a piece of counter-evidence to Carl Haag's (1898) claim that

'Extinct political boundaries will, as obstacles to the movement of a dialect, have an after-effect no longer than three hundred years; the effect of new boundaries manifests itself after thirty to forty years.'
(quoted by Roeder 1926: 292)

In parts of North-Western Normandy, our present historical knowledge does not show that the limits of Scandinavian settlement coincided with any natural boundaries which might have enforced them, and yet the limits are still in evidence through the Regional French of Normandy (RFN), after up to eleven centuries.

This paper uses data from the *Atlas Linguistique et Ethnographique Normand* (ALEN: Brasseur 1980–97) to test the hypothesis that patterns of language use can have influence on the phonetics of the vernacular hundreds of years after the original contact language has ceased to be spoken in the area in question. Such influence also indicates that, in cases of historical language contact, our understanding of present-day variation can be informed by the historical phonology of both the language studied and the language which has been in contact with it, even if the two languages are no longer in contact. In the present case, the inventory of palatalised velar consonants of Old and Middle Scandinavian is very similar to the range of palatalised reflexes of Latin /ka-/ found in one particular part of North-West Normandy which is known to have been colonised by Anglo-Danes.



Figure 1: France: location of Normandy

2 The Data

This study examines the distribution of RFN variants of the first phoneme (which can be a consonant or a consonant cluster) in the following words:

<i>Modern Standard French reflex</i>	<i>Etymon (Latin unless noted)</i>
<i>champ</i> 'field'	< <i>campum</i>
<i>charbon</i> 'coal' / 'charred wheat'	< <i>carbonem</i>
<i>charrette</i> 'cart', 'hay-wagon'	< Lat <i>carrum</i> + Fr dimin <i>-ette</i>
<i>charrue</i> 'plough'	< <i>carrucam</i>
<i>chat</i> 'cat'	< <i>cattum</i>

Table 1: /k/-palatalisation data in this study

in the Regional French of Normandy. The initial phoneme of the Latin word has palatalised to varying degrees across the Norman territory. *ALEN* distinguishes eleven degrees of palatalisation in the reflexes it records, which are summarised in Table 2.¹ The numbering of the degrees of palatalisation is

¹ It is unlikely that all eleven degrees of palatalisation are recorded for the modern reflexes of any Latin word in /ka-/, and some, including *chat* and *champ* from this data-set, show as few as two different degrees of palatalisation.

based on the distance of the modern realised phoneme forward from [k], or of the distance forward of the second or succeeding realised segments in cases where the modern realised phoneme contains more than one segment.

<i>Degree</i>	<i>IPA</i>	<i>Map legend description</i>	<i>Map colour</i>
1	k	velar (no palatalisation)	red
2	k ^j	primary velar, some palatalisation	yellow
3	kj	" " " "	"
4	k ^j t	primary velar, other secondary	blue
5	ktj	" " " "	"
6	ktʃ	" " " "	"
(7	c	palatal	brown)
(8	ç	"	") ²
9	ʃ	postalveolar (Standard French)	green
10	tc	primary articulation alveolar	white
11	tʃ	" " "	"

Table 2: Degrees of palatalisation of Latin /k-/ in RFN

3 Previous Work on Palatalisation of Latin /k-/

3.1 The *ligne Joret*

The fact that modern realisations of reflexes of Latin /ka-/ in Normandy vary, at least between [k] and [ʃ], has been well-known for over a century, since a study of the variable was included in Charles Joret's dialectological study of mainland Normandy (that is, excluding the Channel Islands, which were, however, covered by *ALEN*). In 1883 Joret conducted a survey by correspondence of eight phonological features of mainland Norman; his intention was to characterise the phonological differences between Norman and Standard French, and also to define their geographical extension (see Jones 2001). Joret found that a number of the features he examined had geographical distributions similar enough to one another that a clear isogloss bundle could be distinguished; Lechanteur (1968) named it the '*ligne Joret*'.

² Brown is used in the longer version of this paper for the few survey-points showing the [ç ç] reflexes of /k/. Since there are not enough brown points to justify a brown isogloss for any word studied here, brown is not used in the present article.

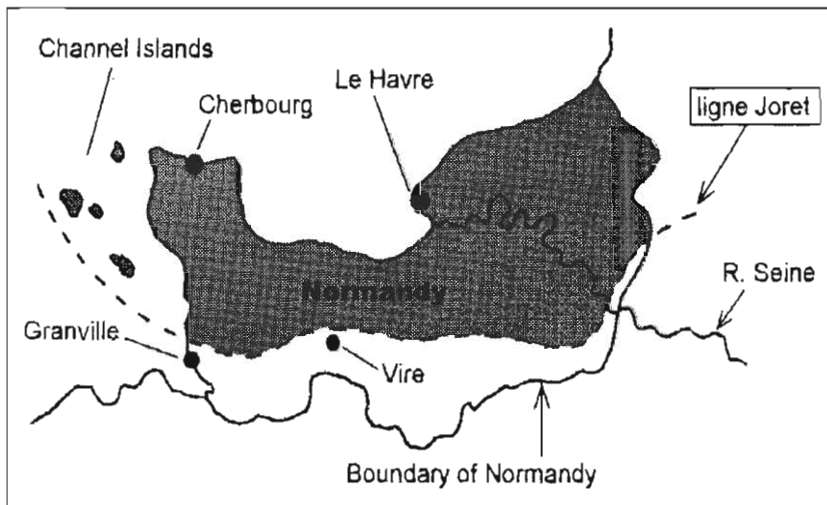


Figure 2: The *ligne Joret*

3.2 The Development of Latin Initial /ka-/

Jones (2001: 18) summarises the development of Latin initial /ka-/:

‘Before a front vowel [...] Latin [k] palatalized to [ʃ] in Central French, but no such development occurred in Norman. Hence, Latin CAMISIA > Standard French *chemise* [ʃəmiz], Mainland Norman [kmēz].’

The identity of the low front vowel which triggered the ‘second wave’ of palatalisation of velars (after the ‘first wave’ which had palatalised velars before [i e ε]) is not clear. Many authors have simply assumed that it was [a] (see, for example, Pope 1952: §§182, 283, 298–301); however, recent research has suggested that it may have been [æ] (Buckley, in press). Whatever the precise identity of the reflex, the essential point is that it was a front vowel. /a/ can, of course, be considered a front vowel if the phonological vowel-space is seen as being an inverted triangle with /a/ at the bottom corner, but Buckley (in press) points out evidence from Old French assonance classes which shows that /a/ and /æ/ were separate. This evidence implies that we cannot consider the French phonological vowel-space to be the traditional inverted triangle—it must be four-sided with at least two low vowels, /a/ perhaps central and /æ/ front—but, whether the vowel in question was

/a/ or /æ/, we can still say that palatalisation in Standard French reflexes of Latin /ka-/ was caused by a low front vowel which was a reflex of Latin /a/.

4 Palatalisation of Latin /ka-/: Isoglosses in Normandy

4.1 'Lignes Joret': [k-] ~ [ʃ-]

Even the isoglosses denoting the simplest manifestation of the variable palatalisation of Latin /ka-/ in Normandy do not coincide exactly:

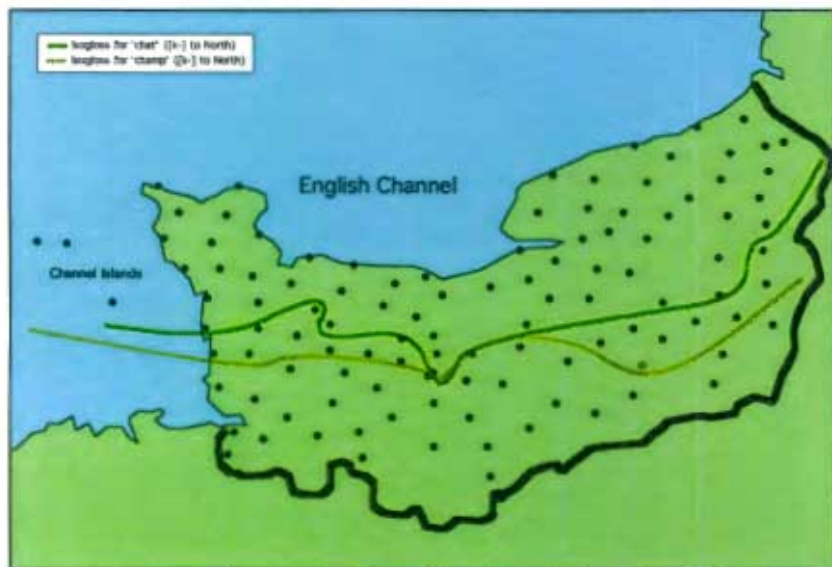


Figure 3: Isoglosses for *chat* and *champ*

The picture becomes more complicated when we add the isoglosses for the modern reflexes [k-] and [ʃ-] in the other words studied here: see Figure 4. (Figure 4 includes only the [k-] and [ʃ-] allophones of the first phoneme in the words we are investigating, though *charrette* and *charrue* also show other variants.)

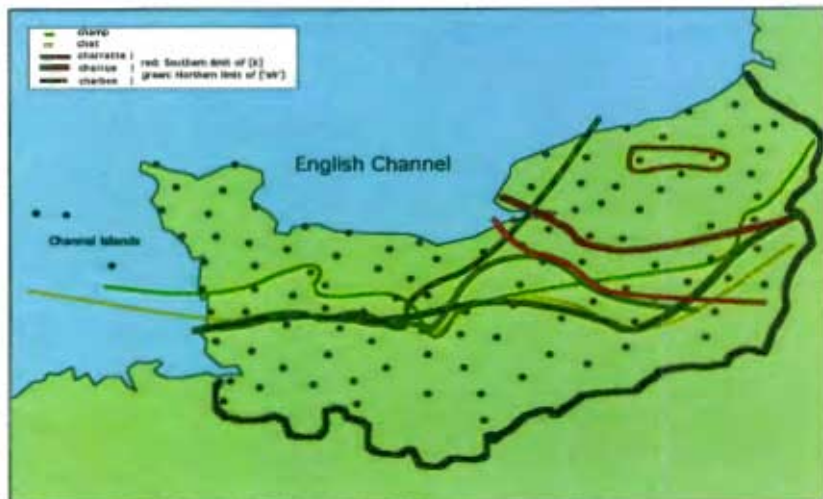


Figure 4: [k] and [ʃ] isoglosses for *champ*, *charbon*, *charrette*, *charrue*, *chat*

Though Figure 4 is generally confused, it is clear that there is a tight bundling of isoglosses representing the Northern limit of the Standard French [ʃ] realisation in *champ*, *charbon*, *charrette* and *charrue* in South-Western Normandy (green and brown isoglosses). The bundling could follow a sequence of natural watercourses; in the modern day at least there are not obvious roads along its whole length. Most tellingly, the only potential barrier between the two points in central Normandy that are separated by a bundle of isoglosses but only a kilometre or so apart (Les Loges-Saulces and Les Isles-Bardel) is a small, apparently unnamed river. Possible reasons for the positions of these isoglosses are discussed below.

4.2 Other Reflexes of /k-/: *Charrette* and *Charrue*

Between *charrette* and *charrue*, almost the full range of reflexes of /k/ is found, from [k-] (no palatalisation) to [tʃ-] (the maximum attested fronting of the consonant). Maps with isoglosses appear below, together with discussion of the possible reasons for their positions.

5 Motivations for /k/-Palatalisation Isoglosses

In trying to account for the locations of *ALEN*'s /k/-palatalisation isoglosses, it is safe to assume (following the Latin origins of the words investigated

here) that the pronunciation [k] is the historical residue (now at the margins) and that [ʃ], the modern Standard French realisation, is the innovation.

Natural boundaries and former political boundaries are often cited as possible reasons for the existence of modern isoglosses in their current locations. In some areas of Normandy, these two motivations may well coincide. Particularly in Eastern and North-Eastern Normandy (the modern Haute-Normandie region), the isoglosses in this study are similar to political boundaries in Frankish and Viking Normandy. It has even been suggested that the origins of some of these isoglosses may be older than the Vikings: Lepelley (1999: 61; reference from Jones 2001: 21)³ suggests that the *Ligne Joret* may coincide with the limit of Saxon influence after the Saxons' arrival in Neustria (which would become Normandy) in the fourth or fifth century. In many cases, of course, the precise boundaries of ancient administrative districts and territorial grants are not known, but the similarly approximate nature of isoglosses (which depend on the speakers who happen to have been sampled in any given area) may mean that it is acceptable to compare the two types of boundary.

5.1 Charrette and Charrue: Lignes Joret and Administrative Districts

The *ALEN* data for *charrette* and *charrue* are a good demonstration of the linguistic effect of natural and political boundaries. Detailed comparison of Figure 5, 6 and 7 with local maps shows the following.

- 1) There are at least four candidates for the boundary defining the present [k] ~ [ʃ] isogloss bundle in Figures 4 and 5:
 - a series of watercourses, beginning with the Boscq, which flows approximately where the current isoglosses are in South-Western Normandy
 - the road from Granville (on the coast, where the isogloss probably begins) to Villedieu-les-Poêles (Figure 5)

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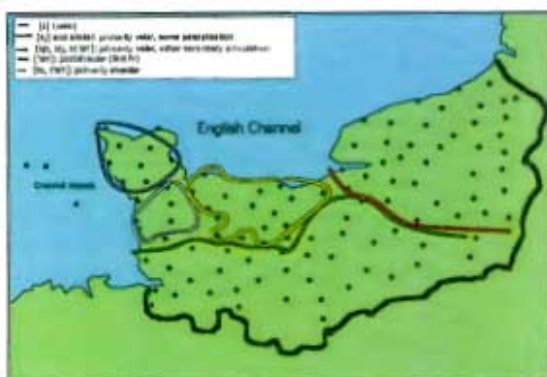
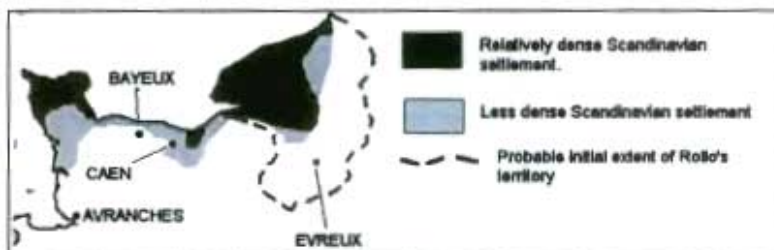
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- the (nineteenth-century) border between the Diocese of Coutances (covering approximately the territory of the Frankish Cotentin district) and the Diocese of Avranches (covering approximately the Frankish Avranchin); the dioceses were merged in 1802 (see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. *Coutances*). We know that their border ran along the (river) Thar, marked in Figure 5. If that boundary did indeed mark the isogloss in the ninth and tenth or the nineteenth centuries, the isogloss has moved slightly North in the 100–140 years between the merging of the Dioceses of Coutances and Avranches on the one hand and the upbringing of the *ALÉN* informants, which was before the Second World War in all cases, on the other. The case of St-Aubin-des-Préaux (marked in Figure 5, close to Granville) demonstrates that the isogloss may have moved. That survey-point is now in [ʃ-] territory; if the isogloss ran along the Thar, St-Aubin-des-Préaux would have been in [k-] territory, since it is North of the river. The move from [k-] to [ʃ-] would be expected, however, since it would represent the encroachment of the Standard French form on the regional variety.
- 2) A comparison of Figures 5, 6 and 7 also shows that the Northern section of the [k] isogloss for *charrette* (solid red in Figure 5) may coincide with the Western boundary of the first territory granted to Vikings, the grant to Rollo in 911 (the yellow region of Figure 7). The exact extent of that territory is unknown, but the curve around the word 'Lisieux' in Figure 7 is very similar to the curve of the *charrette* [k] isogloss in Figure 5. Both may coincide with a river, the Risle, since it is thought that the boundaries of the 911 grant were all marked by rivers; see Bates (1982).

5.1. *Charrette* and *Charrue*: Settlement Patterns and Palatalisation

Viking settlement patterns in Normandy also provide a clue to the location of the red isoglosses in these maps, representing the [k-] reflex of Latin /k-/. In Figure 10, the (black) region of 'relatively dense Scandinavian settlement' in North-Eastern Normandy appears to coincide well with the red isoglosses for *charrette* in Figure 8 and *charrue* in Figure 9. Explanations for the other features of Figures 8 and 9 are less clear, though we may be able to say something about the yellow isoglosses, which represent the [k^j k^j] reflexes.

Figure 8: *charrette*: all isoglossesFigure 9: *charrue*: all isoglossesFigure 10: Extent of Scandinavian settlement of Normandy, 10th-11th centuries

The common view of the development of the modern Scandinavian languages (Noreen 1913: 99–100, 150; Bethge 1900: 215) is that, at the time of the Viking invasions of Normandy, those languages had not yet begun to diverge: the language being spoken in what is now Denmark, Iceland, the Faeroe Islands, Finland and the Scandinavian peninsula (Norway and Sweden) was labelled Common Scandinavian (CSc). (See, for example, Haugen (1976); Haugen includes Finland in ‘Scandinavia’ for these purposes.) There is plentiful evidence that CSc palatalised velar consonants before /e i/:

<i>eng-e</i>	>	<i>eng-i-om</i>	‘meadow’ (dat. pl.)
<i>læ̃g-e</i>	>	<i>læ̃g-i-om</i>	‘position, situation, layer’ (dat. pl.)
<i>rik-e</i>	>	<i>rik-i-om</i>	‘empire, kingdom, realm’ (dat. pl.)

Table 3: Examples of CSc palatalisation of velar consonants before high and mid-high front vowels

When *enge* ‘meadow’, *læ̃ge* ‘position, situation, layer’ and *rike* ‘empire, kingdom, realm’ take the dative plural ending *-om*, *-i-* is epenthesised before the ending in order to preserve the palatal character of the preceding velar consonant (Noreen 1913: 99–100; translations from Noreen are my own). It does not seem likely that, at this stage, velars were palatalised before /æ/, though this development did take place later, ‘in Old Swedish [...] and in many Old Danish dialects, [...] probably in the thirteenth century—in any case not much earlier’ (Noreen 1913: 150). If velars were palatalised before /æ/ in Scandinavian languages not much earlier than the thirteenth century, the Vikings who invaded North-Eastern Normandy in the ninth and tenth centuries would have been speaking a dialect with no palatalisation in that environment; and historical research shows that the first Viking invaders of North-Eastern Normandy, in 840–911, were Anglo-Danes (Neveux 1998: 26). The lack of palatalisation of [k] before [æ] in RFN (shown by the red

<i>eng-e</i>	>	<i>eng-i-om</i>	‘meadow’ (dat. pl.)
<i>læ̃g-e</i>	>	<i>læ̃g-i-om</i>	‘position, situation, layer’ (dat. pl.)
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Normandy after that point would have been subject to the change only to a limited extent (though, of course, they had started to invade some sixty years before 900). As has been said, /k/ > [kʲ kʲ] represents the most limited extent of the palatalisation change, in those areas where initial velars underwent any palatalisation at all.

Substrate influence as an explanation for the blue isoglosses in Figures 8 and 9 (the [kʲt, ktʲ, ktʃ] reflexes) is a little more difficult to support. The fact that Anglo-Danes also invaded North-Western Normandy between 840 and 911 would lead us to expect the same degree of palatalisation in RFN there as in North-Eastern Normandy (ie none); instead, we find a state of palatalisation that is two degrees advanced. It has been suggested (Labov 2004, pc) that, since these reflexes all include [t], which is further forward than [ʃ], we may have to posit a separate mechanism whereby /k/ can go to [t] without passing through [ʃ]. If there were not such a mechanism, we would have to ask why the varieties with reflexes containing [t] did not stop fronting the consonant when it reached [ʃ], as the emerging standard variety did.

6 The Palatalisation of /ka/ in Normandy and Dialectology

To finish this paper, we should ask what light its findings might cast on some theoretical issues of dialectology and dialect geography, particularly the matter of how dialect boundaries are established.

In 1898, Carl Haag said that in general the effect of former boundaries on linguistic differences lasted no longer than three hundred years (see above). The evidence here indicates that this may not be entirely true for Normandy, though some isoglosses can be explained in this way.

In many instances, a combination of physical barriers of some description (probably rivers) and former boundaries of another type (political, ecclesiastical or administrative) is likely to be responsible for the position of isoglosses as drawn from *ALEN* data. The most prominent example is the coincidence of the natural boundary of the Thar and the ecclesiastical boundary of the border between the Coutances and Avranches Dioceses, which disappeared when they were merged in 1802. This was the last time the river had served as a boundary, though it may not have been the first, since boundaries are often re-used by succeeding administrations; as far as we can tell, the river may well also have been the boundary between the Frankish administrative districts of Cotentin and Avranchin. If the combination of the river and the diocesan boundary was responsible for the position of the isoglosses, the existence of the isogloss bundle drawn from *ALEN* data would confirm Haag's hypothesis. However, it is also possible that the road from

Granville to Villedieu-les-Poêles plays at least some part in the location of the isoglosses: both towns were founded under Viking rule (see the towns' official websites, *Granville: la terre du sud* and *Villedieu-les-Poêles à la Croisée de l'Art et de l'Histoire*).

Nevertheless, some limits which were never formalised appear to have survived in the form of isoglosses for up to 1100 years. This can be seen in the case of /k/ > [kʰ, ktj, ktʃ] (the blue isoglosses in Figures 8 and 9): they coincide well with areas which were relatively heavily settled by Scandinavians, particularly in the Cotentin peninsula. Those areas may never have been formally demarcated, since they were simply parts of larger areas which were granted to Viking rulers in the tenth century. Other parts of the granted areas are likely to have been mainly Romance-speaking. This can be seen by comparing the dates of grants of Norman territory to Vikings (Figure 7) with the extent of Scandinavian settlement of Normandy (Figure 10). Although most of Normandy was under Viking control by the mid-tenth century, and all of it was by the mid-eleventh century, far from all of the province was 'densely' or even 'less densely' populated by Scandinavians. Nevertheless, the 'relatively densely settled' areas can be seen, at least up to the data collected for *ALEN* some 1100 years later, in the isoglosses that can be drawn from those data. Normandy therefore constitutes a clear counter-example to Haag's principle on the longevity of boundaries preserved in regional varieties.

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Department of Linguistics
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305
halldj@babel.ling.upenn.edu