

A practice-based approach to the documentation of a heritage language: speakers profiles and varieties of Breton

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Abstract :

This chapter develops a practice-based approach of the documentation of an endangered language in a bilingual environment. I present the different axes of documentation of the different profiles of speakers, and the methodology of their elicitation. I address the documentation of dialectal variation and emergent varieties in Breton, of which I provide an inventory of the linguistic varieties in the 21st century. The dialects include the traditional dialects, which are attached to a geographic territory (geolects), and Standard Breton, which is not. Other linguistic varieties include registers, or learners recurrent forms. All Breton speakers master another language, usually French. Some master several Breton dialects, including Standard Breton. For each variety, some speakers are native speakers, others are late learners. Native speakers of all ages show some form of lexical diglossia, with characteristics of a heritage language, i.e., a native language acquired and practised with some form of impoverishment of the input. Modern speakers vary in proficiency. They form a spectrum that spans from, on the one end, proficient everyday speakers with occasional thematic code-switching to French to, on the other end, silent speakers who understand a single Breton variety. I mention for each profile of speakers some characteristics of their linguistic productions, with reference to acquisition and attrition studies.

Index words: heritage language, Standard Breton, acquisition, nativeness, registers, neo-Breton, dialectal variation, language attrition, bilingualism, exposure to language, geolects

0.1 Introduction

This first section is an introduction to the main factors of speaker profiling, with special attention to the concepts of cognitive profile and heritage language. Section 2 inventories the so-called traditional dialects (geolects) and Standard Breton. Section 3 is a review of the different cognitive profiles of their speakers, from acquisition studies to attrition studies. Section 4 is dedicated to registers, and section 5 to the question of the Romance influence on Breton. Section 6 concludes with a call for the study of multilingualisms.

0.1.1 The cognitive profile of a speaker

I will show that Breton in the 21st century has native speakers of all ages, all multilinguals, mostly with French. This calls for a careful definition of what being native means.

In monolingual contexts, it is common to use the terms of L1 (first language) and L2 (second language, and by extension all other languages learned later in life). In these monolingual contexts, L1 speakers of a language are automatically considered natives of this language because their brain developed early in life with only one grammar. Breton is and has been the first language of a lot of speakers, but not in an increasingly bilingual context along the twentieth century. Some

contemporary Breton speakers learned French during their first schooling years, when they were about seven years old. For those speakers, we do distinguish their first language (L1, Breton) and their second languages (L2, French). Cognitively, their linguistic brain was formed primarily with Breton input. The later French input made them “late bilinguals”. The identification of an L1 and an L2 is more complicated with early bilinguals because they are cognitively natives in both their languages. Cognitively, a bilingual child receiving consistent Breton input at an early age is considered a native speaker of Breton, even if French is its dominant language. This child may or may not demonstrate the typical performance that a monolingual native would, but her cognitive profile is native nonetheless. This natives’ proficiency depends on the extent of her diglossia. This is where the concept of “heritage language” is necessary.

A heritage language is a language acquired in early youth, in which the speakers may have been native and fully proficient, but in a context of diglossic bilingualism where the quality or quantity of the language that speakers hear in their environment is deteriorated (Montrul 2011). The concept of heritage language is usually applied to immigrant communities. It does also apply to endangered languages in multilingual environments. In Breton, even speakers who have acquired Breton early in childhood, have been schooled in it and who do socialize in it, have their practices impacted at some level by some form of impoverishment of the linguistic input due to the intensely diglossic situation of Breton-speaking communities and networks. The practice of Breton thus unambiguously qualifies as that of a heritage language.

The study of heritage languages asks for careful comparisons between the language spoken in rich input environments, taken as a baseline, and the productions of individuals under deterioration of their linguistic environment. The study of heritage languages primarily developed on immigration languages. Their homeland variety provides a natural baseline for comparison. In the case of endangered languages like Breton, however, the homeland variety is missing. The documentation of older varieties once spoken by monolinguals is informative, but it provides an imperfect point of comparison for contemporary speakers. The best baseline we can aim for is the grammar of the contemporary speakers who have had contact with the language from an early age and with the best consistency of input, fewer interruptions of practice during life and the least impoverishment of their linguistic input.

This baseline opens the possibility of a comparison with contemporary early bilinguals greater diglossia. Only next can the comparison be developed with the grammars of the late bilinguals introduced to the language during middle childhood. Finally, the study of all these natives opens the way for the comparison with the productions of L2 speakers of Breton, the late learners for whom Breton is a language learned after puberty.

In summary, we saw two relevant axes on which variation in contemporary speakers of Breton operates: the consistency of the linguistic input and the age of encounter with the language (native for early and late bilinguals / non-native for L2 learners). These parameters define the cognitive profile of the speaker. We will now see how the cognitive profile of the speaker enters the picture of the other information available about the linguistic background of the speaker.

0.1.2 The three factors to document in a speaker’s profile

The data we work with increases in descriptive value with every linguistic information about the source of the data. Each information will have the potential to inform another set of information. This is true of elicited data, free corpus or edited corpus. In this section, I list the three sets of differentiating but connected factors:

The first set of differentiating factors relate to the profile of the speaker themselves: the age of the speaker, the place where they grew up and their socio-economic profile. This provides approximations about their potential geolect and dialectal spectrum, as well as their brain

maturation when first exposed to significant input in the language. This first layer of information is sometimes the only one we have, and it can be overridden by individual variation.

The second set of differentiating factors involve the grammatical systems internalized by an individual speaker. Each speaker has internalized a set of different grammatical systems, more or less syntactically close to each other. There are potentially non-Celtic languages like French, English or Gallo, and there are different Breton varieties (registers, geolects, Standard Breton, see **Jouitteau and Torres-Tamarit, this volume). Speakers can easily self-report on what varieties of Breton they speak and understand. Questions can help them give you a better idea of the varieties available to them (“Do you watch Breton TV? When do you laugh in Breton? Do you pray in Breton?”, etc.). This is also testable externally. Grammatical systems are considered distinct if they cannot mix in the same sentence, with the speaker reporting ungrammaticality or tone rupture. This concerns all contact phenomena: code-switching, register effect, importation of a stylistic figure, etc. Switching between two similar varieties is sometimes unconscious, but it remains testable by precisely documenting the utterance contexts for each sentence (typical interlocutor, place, time, but also associated mood, intent and sensory associations). During an elicitation, a recall of these parameters will help distinguish between the grammatical systems (“Would you say this to Granny?”). Alternatively, if the linguist prefers to refrain from speaking, the recall of utterance parameters can be done in a silent way. This is done by pointing gestures. To illustrate with an example, in the first period of elicitation the linguist consistently points at the kitchen whenever asking details about the utterance context defined as [*grandmother in the kitchen forty years ago*], but points at the door while asking about the other utterance context [*schoolteacher of the village*]. If the spatial associations make sense enough for all parties, they can then next be evoked by simple pointing gestures. This technique will also serve to induce a pleasant mental environment if the speaker expresses unease during elicitation (“Back to Granny”).

The third layer of information is the association of each grammatical system present with a cognitive profile of acquisition. We saw that the cognitive profile is determined by (i) nativeness and (ii) consistency and quality of the input. Nativeness is determined by consistent early exposure starting before the age of 3 to 5 years old, with a gradability that ends for most individuals around puberty. Consistency of the input is measured by duration (interruptions of practice in space and time), quality (fluency), and diversity (registers, extent of diglossia, etc.). This layer of information allows for one to distinguish between early and late bilingualism, and to document the parameters leading to potential attrition. If there has been a prohibition on speaking Breton at school or inside the family, it is relevant to think to document the time span of this prohibition. Prohibitions can be powerful, but still be lifted later in life, like during retirement, depending on what or who was enforcing it.

Finally, for the researchers unfamiliar with the situation of minoritised languages, and especially minoritised languages in the French State, it is important to stress that each profile of speaker is associated with a set of cultural representations that will play on the speaker’s self reports. These social representations can be very strong and important for the members of the community, but they can occasionally oppose formal logic. They may be shared and promoted by the speakers themselves, be it for historical, sociological, psychological, or even for politeness and other cultural reasons. In particular, you may encounter some speakers that are persuaded of the non-existence of their own profile of speakers. They may even like to dissert on the lack of such profile, in order to test your reaction. This is particularly to be expected with each and all of the minority profiles inside the community of this already minoritised language, all categories of people that are supposed to not exist: young native speakers of a geolect, native speakers of Standard Breton, old traditional speakers with an academic career, use of social media or with access to Standard Breton, etc. Field linguists must understand, respect and navigate these situations. You have to hear and deeply understand what people tell you, which does not mean repeat it. What is a white lie for a person in a given social situation can be a professional mistake in a scientist’s

writing. Respecting someone's truth, someone's discourse or someone's reasons to lie does not imply for scientists to neglect the scientific tools they have for assessing speaker's profiles.

On a terminological note, *neo-Breton speaker* as used in the sociolinguistic literature ambiguously refers to *a young speaker of any variety of Breton* or to *any speaker of a historically new variety of Breton* (see **Moal, this volume). The distinction is relevant in a linguistic study, and we will carefully distinguish between novel linguistic varieties (slang, Standard, evolution of a gelect) on the one hand, and young speakers (acquisition studies) on the other.

All the elicitation data used throughout the article can be viewed in the online elicitation centre in Jouitteau 2009–2023. The page name is given between square brackets.¹

0.2 Breton varieties and their speakers

0.2.1 Three major gelectal groups

Gelects are dialects that are clearly identifiable depending on their location of practice. In Breton, a single sentence may suffice for a good approximation of the provenance of its speaker. The three major gelectal groups are organized in space around a central area, from which innovations tend to emerge (Kerne, Treger), and two more conservative peripheries, first the Leon variety in the North-East with which they form the KLT group, and second the gelects of East and West Gwenedeg in the South-East, which are more distinct and have their own Standard Gwenedeg. For a brief history of these varieties, see **Moal, this volume.

Gelects have been best documented in academic monographs, mostly relying on data from speakers of the older generations with low proficiency in Standard Breton. Numerous on-line resources also exist, including a series of lexical variation maps collected around first World War (Le Roux 1924-1953, easily found online under the acronym ALBB for *Atlas Linguistique de Basse-Bretagne*, [Linguistic Atlas of Low-Brittany]). The last two descriptive Breton grammars available in French fully include dialectal information (Favereau 1997; Jouitteau 2009–2023). The latter includes a full bibliography of academic references to the dialects.

There is an important individual variation among native speakers of gelects with respect to their global dialectal flexibility, which depends on their available source of linguistic variation inputs (partners, family, commercial work, school, summer camps, theatre, radio, TV, newspapers, social media, etc.). Some native gelect speakers have no contact with Standard Breton, nor with any other Breton variety. They are socialized in the language without ever using Breton media. Their dialectal spectrum is very narrow. They vary greatly in their tolerance for variation in comprehension. Out of 31 informants in Brieg (Kerne), Noyer 2019 mentions that 4 were literate in Breton. Elicitation protocols with speakers illiterate in Breton can however rely on French translation prompts. In order to reach their best proficiency in an elicitation, the speakers who usually receive less consistent Breton input may need to re-enact the social signs of their interactions involving Breton. This may include prior interaction with someone with whom they usually communicate in Breton.

In contrast, some native gelect speakers are fully multilingual in different Breton varieties, be it other gelects or Standard. Some of them are trained linguists, as is the case of Janig Stephens, native from Buhulien (Treger). She is literate in Breton, in which she masters at least her gelect and Standard Breton. She has a 1982 UCL thesis on Breton formal syntax. She has an international teaching career, and is a published scholarly author in English. Huguette Gaudart, the speaker of

¹ This article has benefited from the kindness and patience of three native speakers of Breton, whom I am glad to thank here. Thanks also to Milan Rezac for comments on content and references, as well as the editors. Errors and shortcomings are mine.

**Jouitteau and Torres-Tamarit, this volume, is also a prolific author, bilingual in her geolect and Standard. Here is not the place to estimate the representativeness of this profile, but it is very important to keep in mind that the sociolinguistic characteristics of literacy and dialectal flexibility are in no way restricted to “new speakers”.

0.2.2 Standard Breton

Standard Breton is the only dialect that is not a geolect: it is a supra-regional variety. It may be broadly defined by a systematic avoidance of features associated with particular geolects. It shows a bias towards the Leon variety, but also for general richness in morphological paradigms, and for conservatism. Standard Breton has few original features. Jouitteau (2020a) has proposed an inventory of them, contrasted with an inventory of the original syntactic features of each of the traditional dialects. The conclusion is that if Standard Breton does differ syntactically from traditional geolects, it does less so than traditional dialects differ from each other.

Standard Breton has native speakers in all generations—Breton schooling can start before the age of three. The native speakers of Standard Breton typically have acquired the language through schooling, and those also acquiring Breton at home tend to also be schooled in the language. Those speakers schooled in the language have near monopoly on the mastery of numbers: old native speakers had mostly monolingual French schooling and typically switch to French while counting.

Some native speakers of Standard Breton are fluent in no other Breton dialect, like in the case of children whose parents practice only Standard Breton as fluent L2 speakers, and who are schooled with speakers of equally low geolect proficiency.

Another profile of speaker is interesting to study as the baseline of Standard Breton: speakers with native proficiency in one of the geolects, and that are also fluent in Standard Breton.

Huguette Gaudart (henceforth H.G.), the speaker from Jouitteau and Torres-Tamarit (**this volume), natively masters a Kerne geolectal variety, and also has L2 proficiency in Standard Breton. The family lived in Breton until she was 4 or 5 years old in the house of the paternal grandparents. Her parents then moved next door. The dominant language in this rural village was Breton. They addressed her in French in private, and she does not recall problems with French schooling (starting 5.5 years old). This makes her an early bilingual, native-speaker of the geolect of East Kerne (around Skaer and Banaleg). She then took classes in her thirties with Visant Seite, in order to be able to read and write Standard Breton, because she wanted to be able to read the *Barzaz Breiz* ([Ballads of Brittany], Breton popular songs collected by La Villemarqué 1839), especially the parts of it in the dialect of Kerne. This effort and further readings made her an L2 speaker of Standard Breton. As a speaker, she has a life-long knowledge of the distance between the two varieties. The fact that she had to gain literacy in her native Breton *via* written Standard explains some tensions between geolectal and Standard forms. In (1), she translates her native geolect oral form (a.) in a standardized version (b.). In her Standard Breton, the subject pronoun has incorporated the verb and the preposition *eget* has replaced *evit* . She comments with emotional intensity that in Standard she “has the right” to keep “her” infinitive form *bout* of the verb ‘to be’ because it is “now allowed”, besides the Leon form *bezañ* . Breton published authors are particularly conscious of the editorial Standard requirements, and the potential distance with their own variety.

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|--------|----------------|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| (1) a. | <i>Hiroc’h</i> | <i>’ma-yè</i> | <i>wit</i> | <i>bout</i> | <i>le’nn.</i> | <i>East Kerne</i> |
| | b. | <i>Hiroc’h</i> | <i>emaint</i> | <i> eget </i> | <i>bout</i> | <i>ledan.</i> |
| | | long.CMPV | be.3PL.PRES | than | be.INF | large |
| | | ‘They are longer than they are large.’ | | | | [H. Gaudart (09/2022b)] |

Some native speakers of geolects are fully bilingual in Standard Breton. For some others, Standard Breton has only a partial grammar, merely parasitic on their own variety (see the section on registers). Most L2 speakers of Standard Breton are natively French monolinguals, and a firm baseline on Standard Breton would be needed to study the impact of French on their Standard Breton.

0.3 Speakers' profiles

Breton input available to very young children has decreased dramatically throughout the 20th century, and this leads to ostensible differences across the generations. These effects, however, are only true statistically, meaning a minority of individuals can show a completely different pattern. There exists a minority of young native speakers of geolects, raised and socialized in this geolect, whose Breton is syntactically very similar to the traditional geolect around them. The fact that these young native speakers are a minority among Breton speakers should not prevent linguists from studying their internal grammar. This section inventories the studies of young native speakers, acquisition studies and attrition studies.

0.3.1 Young native speakers

Native speakers of geolects do exist among the younger generations, and syntactic studies are informed by them. Noyer 2019 studied the Brieg (Kerne) variety. He uses sources from native speakers mostly born before 1960, but also that of Aziliz Cornec, born in 1990, “whose Brie[g] Breton is native and spoken with an accent that older speakers of the dialect delight in hearing”.

Jouitteau 2018 tested the dialectal syntactic flexibility of an early multilingual speaker in his thirties. He had a Breton-speaking parent, a native speaker from the geolect area of Treger. He also had Breton schooling (*Diwan* immersion school). His grammatical judgements on the geolect were similar to that of the older generations with whom he interacts in everyday life. Presented with (2), a mildly standardized version of Gwenedeg (Groe, Ternes 1970: 222), he says “It is not wrong, but I would not say that”. He corrects in (2b) with two forms specific to his geolect: *zeoù* is a 3PL strong pronoun grammaticalized from the analytic demonstrative *ar re-se* [the ones-here] with a plural suffix *-où*, and a preposition *evit* ‘for’ that selects a tensed clause without a complementizer (the initial *h-* in *hint* suggests a preverbal particle is present but omitted).

- (2) a. *Int* ‘ *zo* *hiroc'h* *evit* *m'* *emaint* *ledan.*
 3PL PTCL be.3SG.PRES long.CMPV than that be.3PL.PRESP large
 b. *Zeoù* ‘ *zo* *hiroc'h* *evit* ‘ *hint* *ledan.*
 3PL PTCL be.3SG.PRES long.CMPV than PTCL be.3PL.PRES large
 ‘They are longer than they are large.’ *Treger (Prat)*
 [Brendan Corre (12/2017)]

There are converging estimations of about 10% of Breton speakers of all ages having been raised with at least one Breton-speaking parent (see Davalan 1999, Jouitteau 2019 and references therein). This includes native parents as well as L2 speakers. These estimations however have to be handled with caution and further confirmed with academic methodology, and large and open source data.

Children raised among L2 speakers have less input from native speakers, besides the above-mentioned minority of native children their age. Jouitteau 2018, 2019 presents three non-standard syntactic phenomena collected from young adults who had been raised in immersion schools with

L2 parents. In the three cases, the phenomenon is traced back to an early and rare input with a native speaker from a geolect. The data is statistically insignificant, and would call for further investigation. It suggests that, at least in syntax, children internalize better the rare input from native speakers than they do repeated input from less proficient L2 speakers.

Native children, outside their own family, also have access to some adult natives in Breton immersion schools and to some non-school-related activities in Breton (*Ubapar* vacations, family vacations in *Kamp Etrekeltieg Ar Vrezhonegerien*).

0.3.2 Acquisition studies

Studies of the processes involved in Breton acquisition were initiated by Janig Stephens in the late 90s. Most of that research concerned the acquisition of mutations (Stephens 1996) or the lexicon (Favereau, Davalan & Stephens 1999, Favereau 1996). Stephens & Davalan 1995 also study the progressive acquisition of grammatical categories, Stephens 2000 discusses syntactic bootstrapping among young speakers in nursery schools, and Davalan 1999 analyses a semi-free corpus of school children in their uses of the different forms of the verb ‘to be’. He notes an existential use of *neus* ‘there is’ under influence of French ‘il y a’, unattested in adult Breton.

Subsequent studies have provided acquisition data, especially Mermet 2006 with a good descriptive preview of early Breton productions in preschool children, and user-friendly data: each production is associated with both the age of the child and their weekly exposure to Breton at school. Material exists for older children, such as official pedagogical reports (Robin 2008, 2010), but the native-speaker status of the children is opacified by anonymisation, and more than one researcher is still waiting for official administrative permission to publish work on this data.

Holly Kennard (formerly Winterton) offers a syntactically informed analysis of the productions of school children (Winterton 2011, Kennard 2013) and compares it with the productions of older generations. Kennard & Lahiri 2017 compare the use of the progressive structure across three generations of speakers. They find that the productions that diverge in the younger speakers converge with adults’ productions after adolescence, if provided with sufficient input.

0.3.3 Attrition studies and consistency of input

Studies of the attrition of Breton, in the absence of unambiguous unattritted baseline, proceed by comparing the syntactic productions of two groups with different available input.

Mermet 2006 studies the first Breton productions of children aged 2-3 in nursery schools. He finds syntactic differences in language acquisition depending on whether the child was staying for the entire school day or not. Kennard 2014 compares the syntactic productions of middle school children, aged 8 to 15, depending on the consistency of the Breton input that was available to them. She finds that children in Breton/French bilingual classes with no Breton input outside of the classroom tend to follow the exclusive SVO word order typical of French, whereas children with further Breton input at home pattern with older Breton speakers and young adults in their use of SVO and other V2 orders. Children with immersion schooling pattern with the latter group, independently of their input outside of school.

Not all linguistic change in an endangered language is a symptom of attrition (**see also Kennard, this volume, on mutations). Some prepositions denoting movement/direction take a seemingly redundant prefix *di-* ‘from’ (e.g., *war* ‘on’ > *diwar* [from.on] ‘from’ > *a-ziwar* [from-from.on] ‘from’). Rottet 2020 proposes that semantic erosion weakens the movement/direction readings in prepositions in an ablative-locative transfer. Such prepositions are cyclically rejuvenated

by the addition of a new preposition to the first one. In East Kerne, H.G. uses *goulenñ digant* [ask from.with], ‘ask from’, whereas written Standard favours the simple preposition and enforces *goulenñ gant* [ask with] ‘ask from’. These facts do not concern attrition but rather they represent regular language change.

0.4 Registers

Registers are defined by a contrast of social associations among two linguistically close forms used by the same speaker. The linguistic forms that are motivated by a social need for differentiation are called social differentiators. They mark registers. They can be internal to a variety (like politeness addressee pronouns). They can proceed by importation of another dialect or language (like church Breton used as a high level marker).

A lack of differentiators can follow from attrition (for the lexicon, see Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter 1977). A line of pedagogical publications specifically targets L2 speakers for them to compensate a lack in idiosyncratic expressions, slang and low register expressions. However, a lack of differentiators can be completely independent from attrition, as is the case of addressee forms when they mark egalitarian attitudes.

Let us see here how dialectal variations in differentiators interact with diachronic impoverishment of them. The specific case of politeness addressee pronouns easily exemplifies the concrete everyday challenge of Breton communication in a modern multidialectal context. The addressee pronouns are clear evidence for the existence of registers in the geolectal systems. A wide central area of Brittany has no politeness addressee marker, like English, through the loss of the singular addressee form. Elsewhere, the system of address is mostly based on hierarchy and drives the *te* (SG)/*c’hwi* (PL-polite) alternations. However, in most of South Kerne, the traditional system is also gendered: even young girls are addressed in the polite (and plural form) *c’hwi*. The singular pronoun may even be restricted to denoting closeness among men (Jouitteau 2021). The system is even more complex because internally to each dialect, emotional states are regularly expressed by inversions of the addressee systems. Whatever the addressee pronoun used in a couple, sudden burst of anger may be expressed by its inversion. Hypocoristic uses may also invert markers, or find other contrasting strategies. H.G. in East Kerne has no singular addressee form. Her hypocoristic address (3) is realized by a 3SGM form, reinforced by expressive morphology (reduplications, phonomimes like *bibis* or *c’hoñc’hoñ*).

- (3) *Ya, brav ‘mañ ar bibis dim-me, setu e c’hoñc’hoñ doñ.*
Yes beautiful be.3SG.PRES DEF ca-cat to.me-me here his *foo-food* to.him
‘Yes, you are beautiful my cat, here is your food.’ *Kerne (Skaer/Banaleg)*
[H. Gaudart (09/2022b)]

Politeness systems rely entirely on successful bets of the interlocutor's system, and are therefore naturally undermined by the linguistic insecurity of speakers. The richness and complexity of these systems works directly against them in a multidialectal context. Contemporary Breton speakers across all profiles have low perception of the neighbouring addressee systems, and great linguistic insecurity whenever addressing speakers unknown to them. The author of this article is an L2 female Kerne speaker. Whenever a colleague from another dialect addresses her with a plural form, this discourse act could signal (i) hierarchical ranking, (ii) gender, (iii) geolectal proficiency recognition, (iv) a central Breton interlocutor, or finally (v) alignment with French and Standard Breton. The latter French alignment strategy poses lesser politeness risks, which favours in turn the attrition of traditional systems, and of their rich differentiation material.

Speakers that speak both a geolect and Standard Breton tend to use the latter as a high register differentiator, but also to assign more vivid readings to the former. The young Treger native also fluent in Standard mentioned above (Jouitteau 2018), when asked to correct the Standard sentence (4a), rejects the widely attested synthetic form *henezh* of the demonstrative and uses *'ni-mañ* [one-here] (4b), a form that is strongly ungrammatical in Standard. This first suggests that a focus effect leads him to use a geolectal form. Commenting of the differences between (4a) and (4b), he states that *'ni-mañ* is “more pejorative”, suggesting he is using Standard as a more polite and emotionally neutral variety.

- (4) a. *Henezh hag a labour mat...* *Standard*
 this.one that PTCL¹ works well
 b. *'Ni-mañ a labour mat...* *Treger (Prat)*
 this.one-here PTCL¹ works well
 ‘This one who works well...’

[Brendan Corre (12/2017)]

Perceived archaisms can function as markers of higher registers. Among speakers of geolects, Leon and Gwenedeg once favoured by the church can still serve as register differentiators. These dialects are also linguistically more conservative, a property they share with Standard Breton. In (5), the Standard *-eñ* echo form, even adapted in *-eañ* to approximate the speaker’s geolect, is felt exogenous, “more polite” and “less aggressive” than its postverbal equivalent *'nhañ*. The marker of register here, more than the pronoun only, is the geolect in which this pronoun is licit and the social practices associated with them.

- (5) *N' emañ ket(-eañ) nemet ul laer ('nhañ)!*
 NEG be.3SG.PRES not-3SG.M only INDEF thief of.him
 ‘He is nothing more but a thief!’
Kerne (Skaer/Banaleg)

[H. Gaudart (08/2022)]

A dialect can also essentially build on its syntax and modulate register by a gradual liberality in French loans. The rare academic studies on registers either consider that French borrowings into Breton mark a higher register, or a lower register. Both assumptions are true in different contexts. Borrowings perceived as French mark high register for the diglossic traditional speakers whose access to French has remained a sign of cultural capital (Le Dû 1997). In premodern literary Breton, the conventional stylistic metaphors of French literature have served as high register markers for fluent bilinguals (Calvez 2008, 2013). However, French borrowings are construed as colloquial speech markers by native speakers or L2 speakers filling register diglossic gaps. In the widely used dictionaries Favereau 1993 and Ménard 2012, they are also construed as colloquial speech markers in deliberate neologisms like *nukleel* vs. *atomik* ‘nuclear’ (Rottet 2014).

Colloquial speech and intimacy can be associated with French contact phenomena—or their absence. Some rural native speakers of geolects with low dialectal flexibility have only French as an indicator of high speech. Their Breton is entirely a mark of intimacy, and they would not use it with other Breton speakers unknown to them. In contrast, L2 speakers of Breton with academic training may fully master the lexicon of intimacy and emotions taught for literature analysis. The same speakers may still have their own emotional states associated with their native language, French. Some natives of geolects show a lack of familial positive emotional linguistic material in Breton. For them, too, expression of personal feelings includes massive French lexical borrowings (“No, we didn’t say I love you. I have said it sometimes in French”).

0.5 *The question of Romance influence on Breton*

Addressing the question of the diachronic linguistic influence by contact requires a fine mastery of the evolutions of all the languages actually in contact. This section only warns readers of the most common pitfalls.

Breton speakers tend to describe any Breton feature exogenous to their own mastered varieties as French, or due to the influence of French. This may be correct in the case of code-switching, borrowings, and sometimes for grammatically convergent structures. This is incorrect when the source of influence is another Breton variety. Methodologically, instances of the linguistic influence of French on Breton has to be evidenced by the verification that a specific linguistic phenomenon (i) does exist in French, (ii) is not documented in the synchronic range of Breton dialects in contact, and (iii) is not attested in earlier varieties of Breton. A “French-like” phenomenon could also come from another Romance variety in contact with Breton at some point in time, from Gaulish Latin to Gallo. A “French-like” phenomenon could also be present most languages in the world, in which case or may not be a contact phenomenon. Finally, contact situations where A+B are in contact can give rise to linguistic features not found in either variety A or B. In these cases, the contact phenomenon itself is a source of innovation. We now turn to plausible cases of Romance influence, including those shared with other Brittonic languages.

Breton and French both show neutral SVO orders. Middle Welsh also had a V2 stage comprising neutral SVO orders, then followed by a subsequent V1 stage in Modern Welsh (see Meelen 2020, Rezac 2020: 344-350, fn35, 38 and references therein). There is also evidence that the Romance influence on rural Brittonic varieties, including insular ones, dates back at least to the early Middle Ages, and even possibly to Latin (see Schrijver 2002). The absence of V2 stages in the Celtic Gaelic languages suggests that neutral SVO orders and V2 effects are a Brythonic feature due to significant contact with Romance in the Middle ages. Notice also that Breton dialects vary as to the liberality of uses of neutral SVO orders (see Schapansky 2000 for Gwenedeg).

Profiles of speakers may differ with respect to their avoidance strategies of what they perceive as French. Kennard 2018 shows that L2 fluent speakers in Kerne tend to avoid SVO orders even with pronominal subjects, to the extent that they produce them even less than native speakers. This effect may result from inadequate pedagogical input, or from the speakers own linguistic insecurity. Linguistically insecure speakers are more prone to avoid what they perceive as French influence. Secure speakers are less sensitive to the avoidance of French because they rely on a larger body of long-established usages.

There is a specific subset of SVO orders in Breton that triggers great alarm in the Breton non-academic writings that are concerned with the extent of attrition due to French influence. In (8), the subject directly follows *pa* ‘when’. This structure is documented in Plaudren and Gwenran Gwenedeg (Quéré 2011; Mathelier 2017), in West-Kerne Bigouden (Favereau 1997: §359), confirmed here in elicitation in Plougerne in Leon. In other dialects, it is perceived as heavily ungrammatical. The word order is coincidental with French (*Quand les gens ont un rhume...*), and causation can not be ruled out. However, rather than a sign of accelerated attrition, Breton word order results from a specific grammaticalisation process internal to the language. The Standard complementizer *pa* ‘when’ in these geolects has an allomorph in *pa(g)*, which suggests a conflation of two complementizers, *pa* ‘when’ and *ha(g)* ‘that’. The latter is known for allowing the subject to follow.

- (8) *Pa an dud o deus ur friad,*
 when DEF people 3PL have INDEF cold
eo mat evañ ur banne gwin tomm.
 be.3SG.PRES good drink.INF INDEF glass wine hot
 ‘A glass of hot wine is good when one has a cold.’
Leon (Plougerne)
 [M-L. B. (04/2016)]

There is a historical association of Romance and French with the elite of Breton society. This does not imply that words of Romance origins in Breton are nowadays associated with elite society. Illiterate or semi-literate modern native speakers of the spoken varieties of Breton geolects use the lexicon in (6) without any association with Church Breton, literary Breton, Standard Breton, or even Romance borrowings. Comparison with the English data however shows that they are Romance borrowings: Continental Romance had lost [s] before the voiceless stops [p, t, k] by the end of the thirteenth century, showing that the Norman borrowings into English that retained the [s] date from earlier, as do the corresponding Romance borrowings into Breton in (6) (Piette 1973: 48). It is interesting to note here a contrast between contemporary English and contemporary Breton: only in the former is still felt the social associations of old Romance borrowings.

- (6) *kost, kastell, ostiz, fest, ospital, forest, hast, ostaj, eston..*
 (7) *coast, castle, host, fest, hospital, forest, haste, hostage, astonishment..*

Breton, in contrast with Welsh, has developed a verb ‘have’, and uses reflexives with the verb ‘be’ (Rezac 2021: 350). These early developments are convergent with Romance. The Middle Breton reflexive consisted of an entire paradigm reflecting features of the subject, like in French (*Je me chauffe* ‘I warm myself’, *il se chauffe* ‘he warms himself’, etc.). However, Breton later diverged from Romance in the invariability of the reflexive pronoun *en em*.

Verbal thematic structures appear as a soft spot for contact induced grammatical change. Welsh and Breton diverge due to the influence of English and French in their reflexive and reciprocal structures (Rottet 2010). Rottet 2010: 71 notes that the Romance-like reflexivisation of the experiencer (*Il se chauffe auprès du feu*) illustrated here in (9) is attested since at least Middle Breton, and is therefore incorrectly attributed only to contemporary L2 incompetent speakers. H.G. in East Kerne associates (9a) with faulty written Standard and (9b) with its desirable correction. However, in her native geolect, both are ungrammatical and to be corrected by (9c) with the contracted form of the reflexive and a shorter form of the infinitive.

- (9) a. *En em dommañ a ra ouzh an tan.*
 b. *Tommañ a ra ouzh an tan.*
 c. *Nem domm ‘ ra ouzh an tan.*
 (reflexive¹) warm.INF PTCL do.3SG.PRES at DEF fire
 ‘He warms himself by the fire.’
Kerne (Skaer/Banaleg)
 [H. Gaudart (08/2022)]

Subject relatives using the longer complementizer forms *hag a* (10), *an nep* (11), or *pehini, pere* (12) are usually perceived as induced by French, despite an unambiguous Celtic origins (Fleuriot 1985: 91–97). In the *hag a* form in (10), *hag* is homophonous to *hag* ‘that’ and to *hag* ‘and’. The following *a* is the *rannig* that has no equivalent in French. A French subject relative would be *Yann qui vit dedans*, where the *qui* form of the complementizer signals movement of the subject to the head position of the relative, as opposed to *que*. No equivalent to the *que/qui* alternation is observable in (10). In (11), the French translation of the free choice item leads to the

same word order, with *Qui veut peut*. However, the French Free choice item is built on an interrogative word like English *whoever*, whereas Breton *nep* in Breton has no interrogative use.

- (10) *don evel pus Yann Bon ruz hag a zo o*
 deep like well Yann cap red that PTCL¹is.3SG.PRES at⁴
vevañ ennañ
 live.INF in.3SG.M
 ‘deep like the well of Yann of the red cap who lives in it’ *Kerne (Skaer/Banaleg)*
 [H. Gaudart (07/2022)]
- (11) *Nep a venn a c'hell.*
 whoever PTCL¹want.3SG.PRES PTCL¹can.3SG.PRES
 ‘Where there's a will, there's a way.’ *Proverb*

The relative pronoun *pehini* (plural *pere*) is archaic in Modern Breton (12). Morphologically, it is composed of a *wh* element *pe-*, followed by a head noun, *hini* ‘one’ in the singular or *re* ‘ones’ in the plural. This alternation recalls the French relative pronoun *lequel, laquelle, lesquels, lesquelles*. Like in Breton, these forms have an interrogative use (of the type ‘Which one(s) ?’). There are also notable differences with Breton: the morphological building of the French paradigm takes on an article followed by a *wh* element, each of the two being a locus of agreement with the head noun of the relative. The French article marks gender alternations, absent in Breton. The Breton syntactic context for *pehini, pere* includes the modification of a vocative pronoun, which is ungrammatical for French *lesquels* (13). Widmer 2012 notes an upsurge in the use of *pehini* until Early Modern Breton, and its decline then correlated with the simple use of preverbal particle (“rannig”) *a¹*. It is possible that this change was tied to the perception of *pehini* as French-induced, but the motivation could also be language internal.

- (12) *Sellit a druez eus un den reuzeudik,*
 look.IMP from¹pity at INDEF person miserable
c'hwi pere a zo yac'h ha divac'hagn.
 you who.one.PL PTCL¹is healthy and uninjured
 ‘Have pity on the unfortunate, you who are able and healthy.’ *Treger, Al Lay (1925)*
- (13) *Prenez en pitié un misérable,*
 take.IMP in pity INDEF miserable
*vous { qui / *lesquels } êtes en bonne santé.*
 you who / the.PL.which.one.PL be.2PL.PRES in good health
 ‘Have pity on the unfortunate, you who are healthy.’ *Modern French*

0.6 Conclusion

The variety of parameters detailed in this article suggests the importance of the status of the data we work with. How was the data obtained (Corpus? Elicitation? Hearsay?). How is it characterized grammatically (geolect vs. Standard, register, etc.)? What are the other linguistic varieties known by the speaker (geolect, Standard Breton, High French, Local French, Gallo, other languages), and for each of those varieties, what is the speaker’s acquisition status (Native? Near-native? L2? Fluent but non-native speaker?). The documentation of these parameters is a necessary condition for the study of all dialects including Standard Breton, registers, borrowings, French influence, or any contact phenomena.

Excessive fixation on monolingual practices is not helpful in the study of contemporary Breton. All contemporary Breton speakers are multilinguals and live among a vast majority of non-Breton speakers.

This conclusion calls for more research on the history of multilingualism in Brittany. This history, including contemporary history, largely remains under-researched. Both Breton and French monolingualisms are relatively well documented. The former has disappeared, and the latter is now the majority. The last Breton speakers without mastery of French disappeared at the latest in the 90s (Le Berre & Le Dû 2015). The first rural generations of French monolingual children in Western Brittany emerged in the 60s (Le Berre & Le Dû 2015; Kergoat 1976). Dominant language usages since the Middle Ages can be drawn on a map: Romance is expected in the urban centres or maritime commercial/touristic areas, and spoken Breton in rural areas.

Maps however fail to represent multilingual practices, and some individuals or classes of individuals had to be bilingual. Who and where were they? In 1407, a Gascon speaker first assigned to the bishopric of Tréguier was translated to Nantes because he lacked Breton fluency (Jones 2003). Nantes is indeed an urban area where French penetration was at its earliest. However, one century after, Nantes is still not monolingual. Arnold von Harff, a Middle German speaker in 1499, lists useful sentences for travellers like him to address the locals: they are all in Middle Gwenedeg (Guyonvarc'h 1984). Later, Sébillot 1878: 241 testifies that urban centres in Western Brittany were mostly populated by bilingual speakers, Breton being dominant in the suburbs. Dumont 1888:732 testifies of internal differences between the northern island of Bréhat populated by many state employees, mostly bilingual in everyday contexts, and the Southern Fouesnant canton where he encountered Breton monolinguals of all ages and social classes who did not understand (his) French.

The local places nearing the Breton/Gallo borders are naturally trilingual (see Dréan 2017 for the contact area of La Roche-Bernard), but how monolingual were the French, Gallo and Breton practices ever? The two traditional Romance languages of Brittany, Gallo on the Breton Eastern border and French, were usually confused in pre-modern reports (for example Dubuisson-Aubenay 1898). Even in Western Brittany, “after 1400 it was unusual for any lay person to have a Latin will” (Jones 2003), and an Oil Romance variety would be used instead.

A modern history of multilingualism in Brittany should also consider the rise in the use of English in central Brittany since the 1980s (George 1986; Etrillard 2014), converging with the increased access to English among younger generations (especially those schooled in Breton).

0.7 References

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