

NORMAN LANGUAGES OF THE CHANNEL ISLANDS:

Current situation, language maintenance and revitalisation

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Abstract

The Channel Islands have been self-governing dependencies of the British Crown since 1204, but their geographical location, indigenous languages and older cultural traditions are much closer to Normandy (north-west France). However, acculturation to English language and customs has accelerated in the last 200 years, and is now pervasive. This paper examines the situation of the indigenous languages of the islands, which are now highly endangered: practically all native speakers are aged over 70. The island varieties of Norman have traditionally had low status, which contributed to their decline, but in recent years there have been attempts to raise their status and to raise awareness of their imminent disappearance; these attempts have borne fruit with a degree of support from the islands' governments. The paper first describes some of the linguistic features of Channel Island Norman, and then discusses efforts to preserve this aspect of island culture. The outcomes of the various revitalisation measures are also considered.

Keywords

Channel Islands, indigenous languages, endangered language revitalisation, Norman French, symbolic identity

1. Background: geography, history, politics

The Channel Islands lie in the Gulf of St Malo off northern France (see Figure 1). Geographically the islands are considerably nearer to France than to the United Kingdom (henceforth UK), but politically the Channel Islands are self-governing dependencies of the British Crown (Ogier, 2005).¹ This geographical closeness to France but orientation towards Britain combines with their history and island situation to create a unique sociolinguistic situation. The Channel Islands have been inhabited since prehistoric times, and contain numerous archaeological sites (Sebire, 2005). From the 9th Century the Islands suffered from Viking raids, and were incorporated into the recently created Duchy of Normandy in 933 (Lemprière, 1980; Johnstone, 1994). Some Norse elements entered the local Romance languages; many of the Norse terms that have been retained relate to

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the sea, eg *vraic* (seaweed), *halai* (to haul), *dicq* (embankment, dyke), *banque* (low cliff, beach), *hou* (island).

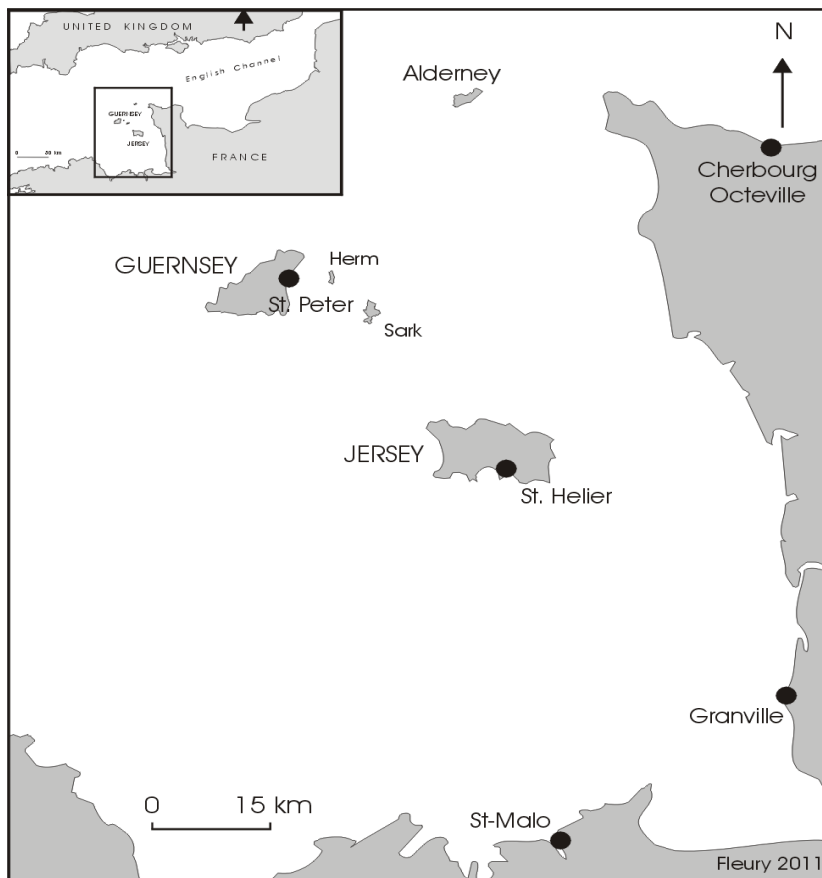


Figure 1 - Location of the Channel Islands (Christian Fleury, 2011)

In 1066 Normandy (of which the Channel Islands were now part) invaded England, and Norman became the language of culture, government, and wider communication in the Norman empire. The French monarch Philip II took control of mainland Normandy in 1204. The Channel Islands swore allegiance to the British Crown in return for privileges and protection (the origin of their current tax status; see below). 1204 is the date from which the Channel Islands count their history as independent polities (Johnstone, 1994: 35). Being closer to the French mainland, Jersey has always had more contact with Normandy and Brittany, and Jèrriais is seen as closer to French by speakers of Guernesiais. The main industries are now finance (due to the independent taxation system and low corporate taxes²) and tourism, but before and after the Second World War the mainstays of the island economies were agriculture and horticulture, together with mainly artisanal fishing. By 2005 the finance sector accounted for half of Jersey's output, and tourism accounted for one-quarter of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).³ All raw materials and fuel are imported, as well as a large

proportion of foodstuffs. The Guernsey and Jersey breeds of dairy cattle are known worldwide.

The Channel Islands are divided into two Bailiwicks (ie a territory headed by a bailiff). The Bailiwick of Jersey consists of the island of Jersey plus outlying reefs, but the Bailiwick of Guernsey includes (in order of size) Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Herm, Brecqhou, Jethou, and various small islets. The islands belong to the British Isles, but not to Great Britain or the UK (Ogier, 2005: 103). Each Bailiwick has its own parliament, which manages internal affairs (including taxes, post, telecommunications, education, health, social services, civil service); but the islands are dependent on the UK for defence. The Channel Islands are neither members nor associate members of the European Union (EU). While they are inside the common customs area and have access to EU member countries and their exports, the rest of the conditions of membership do not apply (Lösch, 2000). Lösch sees attitudes towards the EU as varying from enthusiastic *vis-à-vis* strengthening ties with Normandy (which maintains a cultural centre in Jersey⁴), to negative: an expression of the historical mistrust of France (2000: 101). Political independence from the UK and EU is highly valued and strongly defended. The two Bailiwicks are members of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which was created as part of the Northern Ireland peace process in 1998. The BIC provides a forum for consultation and the sharing of best practices between periphery areas of the British Isles on areas such as housing, environment, energy, social inclusion, and local languages.

Languages are frequently seen as symbols of ethnic, regional or national identity. As such they are often promoted in support of struggles for political independence; as a concomitant, Adler (1977: 99) and Fishman (1991) see political autonomy or self-determination as one of the steps in safeguarding a language's vitality. As the Channel Islands are self-governing, this should, in theory, support the status and vitality of their languages. However, although the islands have been politically autonomous for over 800 years, all varieties of Channel Islands (CI) Norman are now highly endangered. It could even be possible that they have lost status due to the lack of need for language as a symbol of independence.

2. Characteristics and endangerment of Channel Islands Norman

2.1 Linguistic features

At present the majority of people in the Channel Islands speak English as their first (and in many cases their only) language. Each island has, or had, its own Norman language, although only those of Jersey (Jèrriais), Guernsey (Guernesiais), and Sark (Serquiais) are still spoken. This paper deals mainly with CI Norman varieties still spoken. For the sake of brevity I am treating Jèrriais, Guernesiais and Serquiais as if each constituted a single homogenous unit, but as with all 'languages', there is considerable dialectal variation within each. It is still possible to tell which part of an island a native speaker comes from within a mile. Such variation is typical of endangered and minority languages without a prestige standard. Although it can be perceived as a deficit, especially when it comes to official status and creating learning and teaching materials, this

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regional variation is also a core value for many speakers (Sallabank, 2010a). The fact that these are island varieties has helped to create and reinforce language boundaries, as well as acting as a unifying sociolinguistic force within each island. Guernesiais, Jèrriais and Serquiais are distinct but largely mutually intelligible (with a certain amount of difficulty). Serquiais was originally an offshoot of a north-western dialect of Jèrriais, as Sark was resettled from this region in the 16th Century after having been depopulated, but it has developed distinct features (see below).

Norman is one of the *langues d'oïl* of northern France. Channel Islands varieties of Norman (also known as Insular Norman) are thus related to Standard French, but it is a tenet of many language campaigners that they are distinct, rather than dialects of French. The status of minority language varieties is always a contentious issue. Traditionally CI Norman varieties have been seen as low-status vernaculars, only fit for illiterate peasants²; until the early 20th Century Standard French was the language of literacy, education, religion and the courts. Standard French is still referred to by many islanders as 'the good French' and the Norman varieties are still referred to by many islanders as *patois*, which in French means 'incorrect, deficient dialect'. Spence (1993: 4) notes that the fact

that many of those who habitually spoke Jèrriais themselves regarded it as a 'patois' is certainly a significant factor in its decline, in so far as it made them less committed to the survival of the vernacular, and influenced the attitude of their children.

However, in both Jersey and Guernsey the term is used by both speakers and non-speakers simply as a name for the local language, without any sense of it being incorrect. In recent years the names *Jèrriais* and *Guernesiais* have grown in use due to the efforts of language campaigners and a degree of official support. In English the terms *Guernsey-French* and *Jersey-French* are widespread.

There are significant differences between CI Norman and Standard French in vocabulary, grammar and phonology, although by and large the dominant spelling follows French conventions so it can be relatively easily read by French speakers. However, speakers of French remark on the low degree of comprehensibility with spoken CI Norman. Tomlinson (1994) played speakers of French and Guernesiais recordings of each other's varieties and found that only about 25% was mutually intelligible. Conversely, similarities with southern Romance varieties, especially Italian, are noticeable, as seen in Table 1. There are also similarities with Acadian French in Canada and Louisiana.

English	Guernesiais	Jèrriais	Italian	French
place	piache /pjaʃ/	pliaiche /pjɛʃ/	piazza	place
clear	claire /kjaie/	clai (m) /kje/	chiara (f)	claire (f)
black	ner /nɛr/	nier(m) /njɛr/	nero	noir
white	bllanc(m) /bjæ/	blianc(m) /bjæ/	bianco	blanc
hot	caou(m) /kaʊ/	caud(m) /kaʊ/	caldo	chaud
cold	fré(m) /frɛ/, /frat/	fraid(m) /frɛ/	freddo	froid

Table 1 - Comparison of CI Norman with other Romance languages

Interesting features of CI Norman include:

- *First person plural*: CI Norman, like mainland Norman, uses *j* (= French *je*, 'I') as both the first person singular and plural subject pronoun. It has no first person plural subject pronoun ('we'). In Jersey and Sark a plural meaning is conveyed by the use of a singular pronoun plus a plural first person verb, eg *j'allons* (we go). This construction is now archaic in Guernesiais and is used by very few speakers. Instead an impersonal pronoun is used with a third person singular verb: eg *nou s'en va* ('one goes'). According to the *World Atlas of Language Structures* (Daniel, 2008), the lack of a plural subject pronoun is rare in languages of the world (although it does not refer specifically to CI Norman).
- In some Western dialects of Jèrriais, intervocalic /r/ becomes /ð/ and sometimes /s/ (Tony Scott-Warren, Jersey Language Officer, p.c., 3 April 2011): eg *séthée* (evening) = *serraïe* (Guernesiais), *soirée* (French). This is not found in Eastern dialects of Jerriais, nor in Serquiais, although Sark was colonised in 1565 by settlers from Western Jersey. It would thus seem to be a relatively recent linguistic development, perhaps related to retroflex pronunciation of /r/. Some speakers of Guernesiais have also been recently observed to use this variable. (Yan Marquis, p.c. 14 July 2011).
- Jèrriais and Dgernesiais, like Italian, have a /j/ sound after consonants such as /p, b, g, t, k/, where Latin, French and Spanish have /l/ (see Table 1). Serquiais has a sound /λ/ (between /l/ and /j/), as is found (in other positions) in Spanish and Italian.
- In Jèrriais and Guernesiais, Latin /k/ followed by a front vowel is palatalised to /tʃ/, eg /tʃi/, 'who' (*qui* /ki/ in French). Serquiais preserves what is probably an older intermediate sound: somewhere between /tʃ/, /kʃ/, /kw/ and /tʃ/ in words such as the name 'Serquiais' itself, *qui* 'who', or *t(y)ikeun* 'a few', 'someone'.

All languages change over time, but endangered languages change faster (Dorian, 1989), often due to contact with a dominant language. Contact-influenced change in CI Norman can be subdivided into influence from French and from English (Jones, 2002). The islands' separation from the mainland and lack of political ties with France have lessened the effects of convergence with Standard French which is evident in mainland Norman, but there is more syntactic and lexical influence from English.

Jones (2002) cites structural influence such as the use of verbs in ways that are homonyms in English but not in French, eg *run* or *make*:

L'éghise est couraïe par la paraesse
The church is run by the parish

Examples from my data include *savé*, 'to know a fact' used for 'to know a person or language' especially by 'younger' speakers (ie under about age 75) *travailyé*, 'to work' (both 'function' and 'labour'), and *Nou bougi*, 'we moved house' (Standard French uses *déménager*).

There is also direct translation of prepositions and phrasal verbs:

Nou bailli a hao

'We gave up' (translated literally: used for 'we retired')

I faut gardaï a hao lé Guernesiais

We must keep up Guernesiais

However, some grammatical features that are commonly thought to reflect English influence may originate from Norse, for example:

- word stress, which tends to be on the first syllable;
- the positioning of many adjectives (especially colours) before the noun;
- the 'continuous' form 'to be + at + infinitive', eg (*jsi à mogié* = 'I'm eating'.

This is often assumed to copy a very useful function of English which is missing in Standard French, but Jeanine Treffers-Daller (p.c., September 2000) observed that such constructions are common on Germanic-Romance linguistic borders (cf. Treffers-Daller and Willemys, 2002).⁶

There is inevitably considerable borrowing of English vocabulary. Many speakers find it easier to import an English term rather than try to think of a Norman paraphrase. In the early 20th Century, English words for newly-introduced items were often adapted and given local morphology and pronunciation: hence *lé moto* (car) and *lé baïce* or *lé bike* (bicycle, both masculine) in Guernesiais. These developed without reference to parallel terminology in Standard French, which uses *la voiture* or *l'auto* (feminine) for 'car'. (*La moto* in French is 'motorbike', while 'bicycle' is *la bicyclette* or *le vélo*.) According to Harry Tomlinson (p.c., May 2004) Guernesiais has not developed since 1945, so there are no words for 'refrigerator' or 'bathroom'; instead the English terms are used. However, another speaker maintains that some people use *lé boin* (bath) for 'bathroom'. Such conflicting claims may reflect notions of authenticity in language use (Henry Johnson, p.c., April 2011), as well as ideologies of static preservation versus language development (Marquis and Sallabank, forthcoming).

2.2 Language vitality

The 2009 UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*⁷ categorises Guernesiais and Jèrriais as 'severely endangered', defined as "the language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves".

In the 2001 Jersey Census (States of Jersey, 2002), 2874 people identified themselves as speakers of Jèrriais (3.2% of the population); however, two-thirds of these speakers were aged over 60 in 2001, and only 113 declared Jèrriais to be their usual everyday language. In the 2001 Guernsey Census (States of Guernsey, 2002), 1327 people reported speaking Guernesiais fluently (2.22% of the population), of whom 70.4% were aged 65 or over in 2001. Since 2001 numbers appear to have fallen sharply: Yan Marquis, Guernsey Language Officer from 2008 to 2011, estimates that there are now only a few hundred fully fluent

speakers, with the most fluent aged 80 and over. No census data exists for Sark, which is self-governing, although local sources estimate the resident population at around 600. In 2007 Mari Jones (p.c.) only located 12 speakers of Serquiai on the island. Twenty were identified in 2009 by Yan Marquis through local contacts, but two of these speakers have since died. It is thought that a few more Serquiai speakers live in Guernsey or the UK. There are probably no longer any speakers of Auregnais⁸, the language of Alderney. According to Price (2000: online), “a dozen or so speakers remained at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and even fewer still survived when the population, which was evacuated in 1940, returned after the war”. It can thus be seen that the age profile of speakers of CI Norman is rising inexorably. There are probably no young native speakers of any of any of the varieties, and a decreasing number of middle-aged speakers - many of whom are not fully fluent. There is thus a strong likelihood of imminent ‘tip’ (Dorian, 1981) once the eldest generation of speakers dies.

There are no figures for proficiency in other languages on the islands: the 2001 Censuses only asked about indigenous languages, but from my own observations the population includes speakers of Portuguese, Standard French, Polish, Latvian, Dutch, German, Thai, Philippine languages, and others.

For at least 500 years there has been a small community of Standard French speakers. In Jersey many came as agricultural workers (Kelleher, 1928; Monteil, 2000); others arrived in both Jersey and Guernsey as religious exiles in the late 17th and early 20th centuries. In the 17th Century religious Puritanism dominated the Channel Islands’ religious and political life, and penalties were imposed for ‘ungodly’ behaviour such as dancing, skittle-playing and gossiping on Sundays (Marr, 2001). These rules almost wiped out traditional songs and dances (although more remain in Guernsey than in Jersey). Francophone Protestant preachers were welcomed, and De Garis (1977: 260; p.c., November 2002) claimed that Standard French speakers thus gained positions of influence and introduced negative attitudes towards the indigenous vernacular.

By far the largest immigrant group is from the UK: in 2001 at least a third of the population were born in the UK and probably at least half are of British origin. British influence increased steadily from the 18th Century (Crossan, 2007) with economic migration and military garrisons, especially during the Napoleonic wars in the early 19th Century, which contributed to distanciation from France. The economic power and kudos attached to English, the ‘language of commerce’ (Métivier, 1866), became a potent influence on language ideologies: the islands’ languages came to be associated with insularity, illiteracy and poverty. Tourism also started in earnest in this period, and increased following the introduction of steamships. Travel writer Henry Inglis, writing in 1835, prophesied the imminent demise of CI Norman.

The 19th Century also saw a struggle between what Lösch (2000: 61) sees as two antagonistic patriotisms: Anglophile versus insular. Crossan (2007) notes that aspiring Anglophone politicians portrayed themselves as progressive, while political conservatives such as Boland (1885) argued that the use of (Standard) French was essential to maintain the islands’ autonomy. Until the early 20th Century, Standard French was the language of politics; its precise official status

is still argued, which impacts on efforts to have the local languages recognised officially. Some sources in the Jersey government argue that if Jèrriais is a dialect of French, and French is already an official language, there is no need to recognise Jèrriais. Nevertheless, Jèrriais is recognised as an official minority language of Jersey (Tony Scott-Warren, p.c., 3 April 2011). Yan Marquis reports that Guernsey has no ‘official’ language, but ‘languages of use’.

From 1940 to 1945 the Channel Islands were occupied by the German military. All British military personnel and many civilians were evacuated to the UK just beforehand: nearly half of the population of Guernsey, including the majority of the children, and a fifth of Jersey’s inhabitants. As mentioned above, the whole population of Alderney was evacuated and the island was turned into a heavily fortified prison camp by the Germans (Bunting, 1995; Uttley, 1966). The evacuation is commonly viewed as a major factor in the decline of CI Norman, effectively stopping intergenerational transmission. According to one interviewee:

I can think of several people who went away during the War who understand [sic] every word of it but have never spoken it, even when they came back—and their parents did, but they didn’t, and so you know I think that was what well I mean it’s not dead by any means but that was a major factor in its decrease.

However, the role of the evacuation in language decline is debateable given the widespread phenomenon of language endangerment—linguists estimate that at least 50% of the nearly 7000 languages in the world will disappear by 2100 (Crystal, 2000). During the occupation, CI Norman was used more among islanders who stayed as a language of solidarity and secrecy. Some speakers point out that they or relatives can still speak CI Norman fluently after considerably longer periods away (cf. Hill, 2000); but the evacuees had no idea when or if they would return, no contact with home, and Britain in 1940 was intensely paranoid and suspicious of strangers speaking an incomprehensible language with frequent /tj/ sounds. Evacuees therefore felt under strong pressure to assimilate, and several report adopting regional British accents. They also experienced a literally less insular worldview, and when they returned were felt by others to ‘give themselves airs’ and to have an ‘Anglicised twang’. This both contributed to and was exacerbated by the culture of modernity in the 1950s, which viewed the old language and culture as backward.

After the Second World War the prestige of CI Norman was at its lowest ebb (see 3.1). The islands benefited from UK economic aid, which, however, led to reliance on British expertise. The damaged condition of the islands’ infrastructures and the lack of jobs led to increased emigration to the UK, while tourism increased, accentuating the need to speak English. Mass media brought English into island homes, and influenced aspirations and lifestyle. Immediately post-war some gestures symbolising independence were introduced, eg each Bailiwick had its own stamps and money printed; but linguistic, psychological, and above all economic links with the UK intensified, eg most exports were destined for the UK (Lösch, 2000: 38-9).

The number of native speakers of CI Norman languages is decreasing rapidly. In response, language support groups have arisen in Guernsey and Jersey, and

there is now official support for preservation of this aspect of the islands' heritage (see part 3).

3. Responses to language endangerment

3.1 Attitudes

As with many other minority vernaculars, until the last 20 years or so the Channel Islands' Norman languages were associated with backwardness and poverty; they were seen as 'useless' peasant dialects that would 'hold people back'. English was seen as the route to economic advantage. One interviewee recounted how his aunt used to rebuke his mother for speaking to his sister in Guernesiais, because she would "never know English". This was a common viewpoint, as the benefits of bilingualism, especially in local vernaculars but also in Standard French, were little known (and remain so to an extent). As another interviewee reported:

That was the perception that if you learnt this language you were going to be stupid—you know you wouldn't be able to manage in English and you wouldn't be able to learn at school and so on. I mean nowadays being bilingual is something to be proud of but in those days ...

Another stated:

After the war we were thought to be 'country bumpkins' so my parents would not let me speak it.

But attitudes are changing, and respondents consistently report that attitudes 20–30 years ago were much more negative:

auchthaeire i voudraient tou lé dvisaï—mais ya les droine vingt ains ch'etaït "you come from the country you" et y'era aen ptit—mais auchthaere les jonne gens veule tou lé faire.

[now they all want to speak it—but twenty years ago it was "you come from the country you" and there's still a bit of that—but now the young people all want to do it]

I think that was the thing—that's how we started to lose it after the war er it wasn't the in thing—to speak Guernsey French and that is right that in certain company you didn't speak it—because it made you feel a bit inferior but now it's the other way round—you don't feel at all inferior if you know it, Serquiais is completely the opposite you know?

Although Serquiais is arguably the most fascinating of the varieties linguistically, there is little or no interest in language maintenance or revitalisation on Sark. It is at best seen as part of a heritage to be celebrated (as in the CD *Sark Voices* released by La Société Sercquaise in 2009), but by and large as a bygone curiosity. However, in Jersey and Guernsey there seems to have been a shift in how languages are perceived, away from Anglicisation associated with

‘modernisation’, to valorisation of the islands’ linguistic heritage. Very few people, especially public figures, are now prepared to make on-the-record statements against the islands’ languages (although some do privately): the fact that normative pressure makes such overt sentiments unacceptable indicates how far attitudes have changed.

The sociolinguistic relationship with French described in 2.1 has led to two broad tendencies:

- on the one hand, a desire to raise the prestige of CI Norman, to expand the domains in which it is used, and to celebrate each island’s linguistic distinctiveness;
- on the other hand, there is continued respect for French as ‘the language of civilisation’ (Métivier, 1866) and a desire to emulate it, especially in writing. Among semi-speakers (see 3.3) and native speakers undergoing language attrition, this can lead to increased influence from French, especially in contexts which call for ‘correct’ usage such as schools (Sallabank, 2010b).

3.2 Top-down and bottom-up language policies

Language is now seen by Channel Islands politicians as a useful marker of local distinctiveness in a globalising world; and speakers are (somewhat belatedly) now seen by some as a potential source of votes. For small island states sandwiched between two large powerful ones and within the geographical area of the EU symbols of independence are increasingly salient. Membership of the BIC has also played a role in language policy. The BIC website stresses its members’ “rich linguistic inheritance. All members are keen to reap the potential advantages of linguistic diversity by collaborating, sharing best practices, disseminating information and material and learning from each other’s experiences in a number of different areas”.⁹ The Guernsey and Jersey governments thus came under pressure to initiate policies to support their indigenous languages.

There has also been a shift in how island identity is presented to the outside world. In the 1960s and 1970s, the message to investors and tourists (and even printed on postcards) was that there was ‘no language problem’. Now the tourist board websites stress “heritage”, and many instances of Guernesiais and Jèrriais in the print environment are tourism-related (see 3.5). These trends could be seen as examples of what Bankston and Henry (2000) and Hayward (2004) term the ‘commodification of ethnic culture’ (see 3.4).

The initial response to language endangerment was from individuals and voluntary groups, rather than the islands’ governments. The oldest bodies with an interest in language are societies whose predominant focus is natural history: La Société Jersiaise¹⁰, founded in 1873,¹¹ and its counterpart in Guernsey (La Société Guernesaise, founded 1882). Both have language sections that have seen phases of activity, chiefly in the 1950s in Guernsey and since the 1990s in Jersey.

Most of the language-related groups founded in the 20th Century focus not purely on language but also on folkloric performances: especially singing, dance and drama. The oldest surviving such group, La Guaine du Vouest from Guernsey,¹² was founded in 1936. In the 1950s language associations were founded in both Jersey and Guernsey: L'Assemblée d'Jèrriais and L'Assemblaïe d'Guernesiais, which organise social events for speakers and supporters. A more campaigning stance was taken by Les Ravigoteurs ('the revitalisers'), a group founded in 1995 by younger speakers in Guernsey, and by La Section de la Langue Jèrriaise de la Société Jersiaise, which experienced considerable growth in the 1990s and 2000s. La Société Sercquaise¹³ was founded in 1975, and has no specific language remit, but houses an archive of old recordings of Serquiais, both spoken and sung.¹⁴ Given the limited number of individuals involved and their other commitments, membership overlaps and groups often collaborate, especially to organise major events. As a logical progression, Lé Congrès des Pâlers Nouormands et Jèrriais ('The Congress of Norman and Jersey Vernaculars', shortened to Lé Congrès Nouormand) was formed in Jersey in the 1990s as an umbrella group and to organise La Fête Nouormande festival (see 3.4). In Guernsey Lé Coumité d'la Culture Guernesiaise ('the Guernsey Cultural Committee') was formed for this same reason in 1999.

In both Jersey and Guernsey, enthusiasts have compiled dictionaries of their local languages. Attempts had first been made in the 19th Century: in Jersey by Augustus le Gros, who died before completion, and in Guernsey by George Métiavier, both prolific poets who inspired others to write in vernaculars (both in the islands and in mainland Normandy). It was not until 1967 that full dictionaries were published.¹⁵ Frank Le Maistre's *Dictionnaire Jèrriais-Français* was the first publication funded by Le Don Balleine, a charitable fund created by a bequest in 1943 to publish works on and in Jèrriais, and Marie De Garis' *Dictiounnaire Angllais-Guernésiais* (1967) was compiled with help from a committee of L'Assemblaïe d'Guernesiais and published by La Société Guernesiaise. An updated edition of the latter, with a Guernesiais-English section, was published in 1982. At the time of writing, a further revised edition was planned although the death of the editor, Marie De Garis, at the age of 100 in August 2010 and disputes over copyright may delay publication. Both dictionaries represent huge works of scholarship and dedication, but the compilers were not trained linguists or lexicographers. The only lexicon of Serquiais published to date is Liddicoat's (2001) *Lexicon of Sark Norman French*, which is not well known among islanders.

A new Jèrriais-English dictionary was published in 2004 by L'Office du Jèrriais, compiled by Language Officer Geraint Jennings. It was revised in 2008, when an English-Jèrriais volume was added. As stated on the Société Jersiaise website:

*This handy compact dictionary is the second edition of the first comprehensive dictionary of Jersey's own language to be produced for English-speakers. It is primarily intended to be useful, rather than over-scholarly, and to help as many people as possible use Jèrriais in the future as well as understand the wealth of literature written in the past.*¹⁶

It thus represents a departure from previous CI Norman dictionaries, which are aimed at native speakers rather than learners. It uses an orthography based on

that of Le Maistre (1967) which although not fully consistent, is established and has prestige. The new dictionaries were based largely on this and other earlier works, rather than on primary data from a current spoken corpus, but also include neologisms such as ‘computer’ (*compiuteu, ordinnateu*) and ‘mobile phone’ (*téléphone de pochette*). Their principle advantage is their portability and the fact that their reference language is English—now the majority language of the islands.

Official support for the indigenous languages has chiefly taken the form of appointing language officers. The appointment in Jersey can be seen as copying the policy of the Isle of Man (another semi-independent British island with an indigenous language, which appointed a Language Officer in 1992); this lead was later followed by Guernsey, although with a differing remit. In Jersey, language revitalisation has had government support since 1998; since that time L’Office du Jèrriais has expanded from one full-time officer to two full-time and one part-time. Expansion was planned from the outset, something not taken into account in Guernsey.

The activities of the Jersey language officers are principally educational, including teaching, corpus planning (compiling dictionaries, elaboration of vocabulary) and the development of teaching materials. The Office has been increasingly developing its role as coordinator of language policy, and has expanded its remit to include the promotion of Jèrriais in business and the print environment (see 3.5). In Guernsey the indigenous language has only had government support since 2007. An officer was appointed in January 2008, but for some language campaigners intervention raised fears of interference and devaluation of voluntary efforts. The initiative to promote Guernesiais was taken by the Culture and Leisure Ministry, and the Language Officer has a broad cultural remit that does not directly include schools, but does include language documentation (see 3.6).

In 2009 I administered a small-scale ‘vox pop’ questionnaire in major shopping areas in Guernsey and Jersey, in an attempt to ascertain awareness of language support efforts. Respondents were overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the islands’ languages, but ignorant of efforts by government agencies. This deserves more investigation, as the language offices in both islands place importance on raising public awareness. In both Jersey and Guernsey, grass-roots campaigning was instrumental in creating a political climate in which government support for indigenous languages became seen as desirable. However in Jersey, voluntary activism has reduced as official support grows (and former activists get older), which could be problematic if government policy changes or funding dries up.

3.3 Transmitting Channel Islands Norman

In the 1990s, islanders with an interest in language became increasingly concerned about the lack of younger speakers. But the main tactic they chose to address this was not to encourage families to speak Jèrriais, Guernesiais or Serquiais, but school lessons. Transmitting CI Norman is now thought of almost exclusively in terms of formal education: few speakers have experience of passing on these languages in any manner, and an increasing proportion find it

difficult to envisage how language transmission can be carried out without literacy and formal teaching. One interviewee in Jersey described how she taught classes to her own grandchildren, but had not considered using methods more akin to natural transmission (such as activities or games using Jèrriais).

Following a survey of parents, extra-curricular Jèrriais classes were introduced in 1999 by the newly-appointed Language Officer, Tony Scott-Warren. Even campaigners were surprised at the level of support expressed in the survey (Tony Scott-Warren, p.c., June 2000). It was decided at an early stage not to copy materials designed to teach Standard French in order to promote Jèrriais as a language in its own right (Scott-Warren, n.d.) The lessons and materials were therefore modelled on peripatetic Manx classes run in the Isle of Man, where extra-curricular lessons eventually led to Manx becoming part of the curriculum and an option in virtually all schools, followed by a fully Manx-medium school in 2001 (Gawne, 2002; Wilson, 2009). However, similar further steps have not yet materialised in the Channel Islands; neither the Jersey nor Guernsey governments have coordinated plans or a commitment to expand indigenous language provision. In the current political and economic climate there seems little prospect of either Jèrriais or Guernesiais becoming part of mainstream schools' curricula in the near future, and immersion classes are not even on the horizon of campaigners.

In Jersey, by 2008–2009 there were 206 children learning Jèrriais in a total of 38 classes per week (according to l'Office du Jèrriais website¹⁷). A GCSE (school leaving certificate)-equivalent qualification was introduced in 2010, which it is claimed will motivate learners by providing prestige and a goal. Teachers are reimbursed by the government and lessons are taught on school premises, but lessons are optional and most take place before or after core school hours or in lunch hours. Moreover, most learners only receive half an hour a week of tuition, which is usually their only exposure to Jèrriais. The materials and teaching methods rely heavily on the written word, and are not yet producing a new generation of fluent speakers. Many learners observed exhibited a lack of familiarity with spelling conventions and pronunciation. At an adult conversation class observed in 2009, very little actual conversation took place; most of the learners, who were considered relatively advanced, had difficulty expressing themselves orally and referred constantly to dictionaries.

The 1967 *Dictionnaire Jèrriais-Français* was criticised by Liddicoat (2000) for contributing to a sense of inadequacy among native speakers, and to the loss of regional dialects, by promoting Le Maistre's St Ouen (north-western) dialect as 'standard' or 'correct' Jèrriais. The materials currently used in Jèrriais lessons elaborate this dialect as the most distinct from Standard French. From my observations and interviews in 2009 it appears that lessons seem to be having a similar effect to that observed by Liddicoat. Some learners are lucky enough to have grandparents who are native speakers, and try to speak the Jèrriais they have learnt with them. But the grandparents often speak a different regional variety, and some reported being intimidated by the 'correctness' associated with the school.¹⁸ This may lead to abandonment of the attempt at intergenerational communication, lost opportunities for increased fluency among learners, and to loss of regional variation. Such reactions have also been observed in attempts to revitalise other minority languages in France, eg by

Hornsby (2005) regarding Breton; by Jaffe (1996) with regard to a Corsican spelling competition; and by Paulston (1987: 46), who notes that “the written standard form of Occitan is so divergent from its spoken dialects that its speakers feel as alienated from the movement’s Occitan as they do from French”.

In Guernsey, optional extra-curricular lessons have been running in some primary schools since 2004, taught by volunteers for half an hour a week. They started in three schools, and by 2011 had reached 8 out of 12 States-run primary schools. The scheme was started by a member of the island parliament (since retired from politics) but has no funding and little coordination or materials, and so now consumes nearly all the time and effort of voluntary language activists. It was intended as a pilot, but has never been evaluated. In a separate initiative, students at the sixth-form centre (approximately 17 years of age, in post-compulsory education) requested lessons from the Language Office, and then basic teacher training in order to help teach younger learners (some of the teenagers plan to go into teaching after leaving school). Adult evening classes only cover beginner level at the time of writing, although elementary-level classes are due to start in September 2011. Some Guernesiais is also taught in three private pre-schools whose teachers are taking evening classes. Apart from supporting language maintenance, these pre-schools also see the teaching of Guernesiais as a selling point to attract potential pupils (or their parents), which illustrates the sea-change in attitudes towards Guernesiais: in the 1950s some children starting school were told to “go home and come back when you can speak English”.

Apart from the sixth-form and adult evening classes, all Guernesiais lessons are taught by volunteers. Most are in early retirement, and some received little formal education themselves due to the German occupation in the Second World War; most have no teacher training. Some have admitted not having sufficient confidence in their ability to speak Guernesiais fluently in the personal domain to use it with their own children or grandchildren; in linguistic terms they are ‘semi-speakers’ (Dorian, 1977). Some cannot express themselves in Guernesiais without prior preparation. Nevertheless, they feel an emotional attachment to their heritage language and want to contribute to preserving it. For such semi-speakers, teaching in a formal environment is less challenging than an impromptu conversation. Lösch (2000: 123), observing Jèrriais lessons, suggested that what he termed “one and a half generation” speakers risk teaching an artificial and incorrect Jèrriais. This can also be observed in Guernsey currently; moreover, teachers unsure of their Guernesiais sometimes resort to Standard French, perhaps influenced by the formality of the context. Nevertheless, there is resistance to the proposal to train six-formers, as they are not seen by older volunteers as having enough proficiency in Guernesiais; moreover, their Guernesiais is not seen as ‘authentic’. Very few learners in these extra-curricular or evening classes have progressed beyond beginner level. The traditional vernaculars are thus increasingly restricted to the formal educational domain to which they are least suited, as they were traditionally used mainly in domestic and interpersonal domains. In Jersey attempts are being made by L’Office du Jèrriais to introduce new terminology. But in Guernsey, influential speakers resist development of Guernesiais; language change, especially when perceived as influenced by English, is viewed as pernicious.

The pronunciation problems observed in Jersey (see above) may be related to the French-based spelling system, as they are also common among learners of French in Britain. Guernesiais has no universally recognised or officially sanctioned standard spelling, which hampers the creation of learning materials. Learners, and some speakers and semi-speakers, find pronunciation difficult to deduce from current written materials, especially given inconsistencies in spelling practices (see Sallabank, 2002). ‘Spelling pronunciation’ is a problem for performers in the Eisteddfod festival, for example (see 3.4). In 2009 the Language Officer therefore proposed an interim ‘Progressive Learner Spelling’ which was intended both to promote the idea of Guernesiais as a language in its own right rather than as a dialect of French, and to facilitate acquisition by Anglophones. This proposal was received positively by sixth-form and adult learners, and by some speakers. But it was received negatively by leading volunteer teachers, who prefer the French-based spelling in the 1967 De Garis dictionary (although this too is inconsistent). Spelling has proved to be a symptom of deep-seated issues to do with fear of language change and the direction of language maintenance/revitalisation.

3.4 Language festivals

Festivals provide one of the few opportunities to speak and hear CI Norman languages publicly. They are attended mainly by speakers (and fulfil an important social function for isolated speakers), but also by tourists (summer festivals), friends and relatives of performers, and other interested members of the public. There are two major language-related festivals: the Jersey and Guernsey Eisteddfods and the Fête d’la Vieille Langue Normande (also known as ‘La Fête Nouormande’ or ‘La Fête des Rouaisons’¹⁹). Guernsey and Jersey each have an Eisteddfod Society, which organise annual festivals of creative and performing arts.^{20,21} The Guernesiais section was in abeyance from the Second World War until the 1980s, but since 2000 has expanded from one evening to two evenings and an afternoon. In both islands there has been a particular increase in the number of school-age children taking part: chiefly in choral groups from schools, but increasingly giving individual performances. The festivals are also an opportunity for creative writing in CI Norman, although the majority of recitations are of traditional pieces.

When I started observing, and then participating in, the Guernsey-French Eisteddfod in 2002, all announcements and adjudication took place in Guernesiais. However, entrants and supporters are increasingly less fluent, so adjudicators have started using English, first for beginners and children and recently for the whole event. The same trend can also be seen in language-interest groups; as a result, it reduces the opportunities for hearing Guernesiais and Jèrriais. The Fête Normande is a relatively recent festival, started in 1998 via a twinning link between St Saviour’s, Guernsey and Montebourg, Normandy.²² It rotates annually between Jersey, Guernsey and mainland Normandy. This festival stresses cultural and linguistic links between Norman varieties, although L’Office du Jèrriais and the Guernsey Cultural Strategy focus on island languages as markers of island identity.

Festivals help to create community spirit, increase the visibility/audibility of CI Norman and allow speakers to express pride in it, both through participation and through media coverage. This is valuable for personal linguistic confidence as well as awareness-raising and prestige. However, the festivals do little to further day-to-day use of CI Norman; furthermore, they tend to focus on past culture rather than on maintaining living languages. Even people who win prizes cannot always hold a conversation in the languages. One commented by email:

Taking part in the eisteddfod is perhaps a false indication as to my capabilities because I learn it. Then, over a period of time, I have forgotten it. Shame really.

There is also a risk that such activities become an end in themselves rather than elements of a wider language strategy. They may even take the place of day-to-day use, as it is easier for learners and semi-speakers to cope with controlled, predictable language. Johnson (2008, 2010) notes that at festivals “Jèrriais is foregrounded through song as a way of maintaining and developing identity” (2008: 73).

Henry and Bankston (1999) describe the effect of increased emphasis on Acadian heritage in Louisiana as follows:

The linguistic criterion is thus removed from its objective basis, that is whether people actually know or speak the language. This conceptualization of ethnic identity allows the language to remain at the center of Cajun self-identification despite our observations of its declining use. (Henry and Bankston 1999: 241)

There are strong parallels with the Channel Islands’ situation. As the linguist Danny Long has characterised, it is an example of how local language varieties can be “the language of the island” without being “the language of the islanders” (p.c., June 2011).

3.5 Channel Islands Norman in the linguistic landscape and media

Campaigns to boost the status of a minority language frequently focus on increasing its visibility. ‘Linguistic landscape’ is a rapidly growing field of study that examines “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry and Bourhis, 1997: 25). It is often paraphrased as ‘language in the public space’, which should arguably include the media and cyberspace, especially given the increasing multimodality of communications (cf. Kress, 2009). As spoken languages are primarily oral, audibility in broadcast media as well as in public life is an essential aspect of the ‘linguistic landscape’.



Figure 2 – signage in St Helier showing place name variants

In the Channel Islands the study of 'language in the public space' is complicated by the use of Standard French on street signs, as the written form that traditionally represented insular Norman. Many street names are written in both English and French, but are not necessarily direct translations: eg Quay Street = La Rue du Pileri ('Stocks Street') (see Figure 2). The reclamation of place-names is a frequent focus of revitalisation efforts, eg in Ireland and Australia. L'Office du Jèrriais has made a concerted effort to increase the amount of Jèrriais in public signage, either bilingual Jèrriais-English or trilingual with French, eg recycling bins with Jèrriais on one side and English on the other. Smaller but highly visible components of the print environment are included in this drive: eg the latest Jersey banknotes have the denominations written in Jèrriais as well as English and French, albeit in smaller print. L'Office du Jèrriais reports that stamps using Jèrriais will appear by the end of 2011.

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In Guernsey the appointment of a Language Officer provided a contact point for language-related enquiries. This led to increased inclusion of some Guernesiais in the branding of local products and services, and to requests from local businesses and organisations for translations of slogans: eg bus timetables, notices at an agricultural show, signs at sports centres and a family centre (see Figure 3).



Figure 3 – Sign in Guernesiais at a family support centre

Increased awareness acted as a catalyst for inclusion of Guernesiais in areas unrelated to public policy, eg by a coffee-roasting company and on locally-produced cheese and beer. In Jersey too, Jèrriais slogans appear on several local food and drink products. This indicates that on both islands, firms perceive that including some of the local language will enhance their products' marketability by stressing island identity. However, the expansion of Guernesiais in the print environment is hampered by the lack of an agreed spelling system (see 3.4).

As noted by Edwards (2001), bilingual signs have both a functional and a symbolic value. In the Channel Islands, tourism is now a major consideration in regard to language visibility (see 3.2), and many bilingual or trilingual signs, in Jersey especially, seem to be aimed at tourists. There has also been an increase in the number of items aimed mainly at tourists which include some written Guernesiais, eg postcards, T-towels, children's T-shirts, bookmarks.

Unlike larger minority European languages such as Welsh and Basque, there are no public media in any CI Norman varieties. There is a small presence on local radio: five minutes of news a week on BBC Radio Guernsey, and a 'saying of the week' on a commercial radio station. On BBC Radio Jersey there is one weekly radio item. The BBC items are broadcast early in the morning at weekends, yet are listened to by a large proportion of speakers and also by many non-speakers.

Articles in Guernesiais and Jèrriais were regularly published in local newspapers in the 19th Century, 1950s and 1960s. Occasional articles with English translation still appear in the *Jersey Evening Post*, as well as a daily proverb. The *Guernsey Press* carries a weekly 'Donkey dialogue' (short phrases or proverbs in

Guernesiais). In both islands the amount of CI Norman in the media has decreased in the last few years due to a lack of people willing and able to write and recite them. On Sark, until 2009 very short pieces in Serquiais appeared in an island newsletter, but this has ceased publication. Occasional books appear in and about CI Norman languages. In Jersey such materials are sponsored by the Don Balleine Trust, which also publishes a quarterly magazine, *Les Nouvelles Chroniques du Don Balleine*; in Guernsey some materials are published by La Société Guernesiaise. La Guaine du Vouest singing group in Guernsey also publishes audio recordings and is producing a DVD.

La Section de la Langue Jèrriaise maintains a website (*Les Pages Jèrriaises*²⁴) with over 3000 pages containing a wealth of information relating to Jèrriais: publications, news articles, lessons, vocabulary etc. It also includes other CI Norman varieties. While this is a tremendous resource, it is unclear who the intended readership is, as most speakers are elderly and are not computer users, while most learners are not proficient. Nevertheless, the availability of written texts, audio and video means that learners can access them repeatedly and process them at their own speed. This is also possible with radio broadcasts which are available online, and L'Office du Jèrriais has produced a series of short videos which have been posted on YouTube.²⁵

Including CI Norman in the public space makes a statement about language validity. It is significant that it is now seen as a selling point, given the historical low status of the islands' vernaculars. But the examples mentioned here are largely symbolic, since all CI Norman speakers are now bilingual and literate in English. As discussed in 3.4, language seems to be an expression of ethnolinguistic identity rather than a means of communication.

3.6 Language documentation

Apart from its heritage or identity value, CI Norman is of interest to historical linguists because, due to their island locations, these varieties have diverged the least from mediaeval Norman, which strongly influenced the development of English; they have also converged least with modern French. Much 'Old French' literature was effectively Norman (Posner, 1997; Chaurand, 1999: 36-8). Norman is also of interest to researchers interested in the development of New World French and creoles, as some areas of North and Central America were colonised from this region (Michaelis, 2011). As much usage remains undocumented, much of the potential contribution to historical linguistics will be lost if the varieties cease to exist without documentation.

Documentation can play a more active role than a simple record, by providing information and examples for language teaching materials based on fluent practice (eg multimedia resources with accurate reflections of pronunciation and usage, traditional songs and rhymes for use with learners). In Jersey no such documentation is being carried out, and regional varieties are in danger of disappearing. In Guernsey, Yan Marquis (former Language Officer), the author and postgraduate students have made a start at recording the remaining fluent speakers.

Conclusions

The main outcomes of all of the current schemes to promote CI Norman, whether in schools, festivals or in the 'linguistic landscape', are primarily symbolic. Valorisation of at least the idea of the islands' Norman languages is important for islanders' identity expression. But cultural and linguistic re-assertion does not necessarily lead to language use or revitalisation (Heller, 2003). Linguistic heritage is seen as an opportunity to create a distinctive unifying local identity, not exclusively for indigenous islanders. But rhetoric needs to be backed up with effective planning and policies.

Optional lessons are seen by some as a foot in the door to full official recognition, as well as encouraging children to value island identity. It should be obvious that with half an hour a week of input, learners are not going to attain fluency soon. There is, however, a worrying tendency for some islanders to assume that such classes are all that is necessary for preservation of the local languages. In Jersey, members of language associations are aging and reducing their activities. It could be argued that without the Office du Jèrriais there would be little interest from younger people, as native-speaker groups tend to focus on traditional cultural activities.

Channel Islands' Norman languages share many sociolinguistic factors with other endangered languages worldwide, although the island contexts have protected the distinctiveness and cohesion of the islands' languages compared with, for example, mainland Norman. But insularity can also lead to a tendency to assume that nothing can be learned from experiences elsewhere. A comparison of the situations of the languages of the Channel Islands with other small island contexts might reveal useful commonalities. The revival of Manx (Wilson, 2009) would not have been possible without the recordings of speakers and linguistic analysis carried out since 1909. Given that the current language lessons in Guernsey and Jersey are not producing new fluent speakers, it would seem essential to prioritise the full documentation of fluent usage while speakers are still available.

This review might seem critical, even pessimistic; however, its goal is not to gratuitously criticise well-meaning activities but to provide constructive feedback. In sociolinguistics and endangered language documentation it is increasingly an accepted principle that research should benefit and empower local communities (Cameron et al., 1993; Grinevald, 2003). This account is offered in that spirit, to share the results of research in order to contribute to the formulation of effective island language policies.

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End Notes:

¹ The islands of Chausey, between Jersey and France, will not be included in this paper as they have been under French jurisdiction since the end of the 16th Century, and their language variety has therefore converged more towards Standard French, like mainland Norman.

² For understandable reasons, the islands' governments dislike the term 'tax haven' and stress the robustness of their regulatory procedures.

³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/je.html> – accessed February 2011.

⁴ <http://www.maisondenormandie.com/specific/formats/index.jsp> – accessed July 2011.

⁵ It should be stressed that this is a misperception that persists among a large proportion of the population despite the existence of a considerable body of literature in Jèrriais and Guernesiais.

⁶ It is clearly a linguistic function that speakers of many languages find useful. It is also a feature of Occitan in southern France (James Costa, p.c., November 2010), and in Italian 'to stay or remain' is used in a similar way (Yan Marquis, p.c., July 2011).

⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/> – accessed February 2011.

⁸ Tony Scott-Warren reports hearing that there was a speaker of Auregnais living in the UK in the 1990s.

⁹ <http://www.gov.je/BritishIrishCouncil/Work/Pages/Language.aspx> – accessed April 2011.

¹⁰ Henry Johnson points out that the names of the societies are in Standard French, a reflection of language attitudes at the time of founding (p.c. April 2011) (see also note 14).

¹¹ <http://www.societe-jersiaise.org/> – accessed March 2011.

¹² Its name means 'the group from the west'—there were originally groups from other areas too.

¹³ The difference in spelling from that of Serquiai used in this paper is intentional. In the case of the Society, *Serquaise* reflects Standard French usage. The first "i" in my spelling of the language, *Serquiai*, indicates palatalisation (see 2.1).

¹⁴ <http://www.socsercq.sark.gg/resources.html> – accessed March 2011.

¹⁵ Campaigners on both islands had hoped to publish in 1966 to mark the 900th anniversary of the Norman conquest of England, but in both cases publication was delayed by one year.

¹⁶ <http://www.societe-jersiaise.org/shop/vmchk/books/le-don-balleine-books/english-jerriais-dictionary.html> – accessed March 2011.

¹⁷ <http://www.jerriais.org.je/classes.html> – accessed March 2011.

¹⁸ Tony Scott-Warren contests this interpretation, suggesting that it might be more the case in Guernsey than in Jersey; but Guernesiais lessons do not promote a standard variety, although they may converge towards Standard French.

¹⁹ Rouaisons = Rogation, part of the Christian calendar.

²⁰ <http://www.jerseyeisteddfod.org.je/> – accessed March 2011.

²¹ http://www.guernseyeisteddfod.co.uk/guernsey_eisteddfod.htm – accessed March 2011.

²² http://www.maisondenormandie.com/specific/formats/format_domaines.jsp?foilder=22&id=61&url=Notre%20r%F4le%20et%20nos%20actions – accessed March 2011.

²³ 'Donkey' is the traditional nickname for Guernsey people, used with pride at inter-island football matches. Jersey people's animal nickname is 'Toad'.

²⁴ <http://members.societe-jersiaise.org/sdllj/index.html> – accessed March 2011.

²⁵ Faithe Sèrvi Du Jèrriais D'la Publyicité:
http://wn.com/Faithe_s%C3%A8rvi_du_j%C3%A8rriais__d%27la_publyicit%C3%A9 – accessed March 2011.

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