2019·2020 Louise Wambergue

Research working

IDIECRESCENT IDIIALLECTS





DECRESCENT DUALLECTS

Research work in graphic design DSAA 2019 • 2020

Under the supervision of Élisabeth Charvet & Sophie Clément

To both of you, who gave me the love of words. To my mother.

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PREFACE

The text you are about to read is about regional languages that are dramatically disappearing in France. And I think I cannot start this abstract without addressing the issue of the homogenization of languages around the world, as Global English is ubiquitous, including in this abstract, since I don't claim being able to write in Shakespeare's language.

The fact is that, even if I wanted to, I would not be able to write in any French regional dialects so, despite the responsibility the imperialism of Globish and the deadly French language policy in France, I will write this abstract in the best English I can and my thesis will be written with the best use I can do of my native language.

INTRODUCTION

As we all know, we are currently facing a global and systemic crisis touching our environment, as much as society as a whole, and societies in their diversity, around the world. It is a fact: we have to change our lifestyles but we suffer a deep lack of role models to reinvent new ways of life. My hypothesis is that we might find examples of resilience in past ways of life, and more precisely, in our regional dialects. Dialects are impregnated with the past and with our history, they are real supplies of knowledge, tools and teachings for a common behavior that would be gentler for our environment and sustainable in the long run. As a graphic designer, I am questioning how images could help us transmit languages from the past, and how these images can reveal this connection with our past, and above all, the wealth inherited from it.

In the end, for my thesis and my diploma project I chose to focus on a particular language area composed of dialects that are the transition between Oc and Oil languages in France: the Croissant. I will describe in this text the particular essence of this area.

ISSUE

So, here, I am trying to answer the question:

How can graphic design convey visually some idiomatic expressions of the Croissant's Languages and propose a journey back in time in order to revive the imaginary contained in a language?

The aim would be to make sure the paradigm contained in these dialects remains accessible, as they are likely to offer us a deeper insight and a smarter use of our environment.



THE SOONER THE BETTER

Let's start with the reasons that made me choose the Croissant's dialects as a research subject. First, we have to describe the Croissant as an area. The name is due to the shape of crescent of this linguistic region, which has no jurisdiction or legislative value. It divides the country into two main groups of tongues: Oïl in the North and Oc in the South. Its median situation provides the Croissant area with a mix of both cultures, regarding the language as well as the local laws or habits. In the perspective of my diploma project, this mixed culture would allow me to touch a larger amount of people because it can refer to both sides of the country.

Then, since I arrived in Creuse, I have discovered a fully new mindset, lifestyle and social organization, compared to my home region. I wanted to know more about it and where this very particular culture comes from. And, what better way to understand a culture than to explore its language? This is the point of view of lots of linguists and philosophers: Ludwig Wittgenstein says that "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt." ("The limits of my language mean the limits of my world", translation by David Pears and Brian McGuinness). A language is a prism that unconsciously shapes the way we see the world. My mind and my understanding cannot overcome what the language I speak can describe. This statement induces that a language is very linked to the place and the time where it is spoken. We naturally have words, syntax, verbal modes, etc. to express what is common, daily, usual in our lives. We also have to note that a language is an evolving structure that follows the mutation of the society formed by its speakers. A tongue is as shaping for our mentalities, as it is shaped by our lifestyles. This is why studying a language is a very efficient way to understand a foreign culture, a different society than ours.

Focusing on the Croissant's dialects themselves, I followed an intuition that made me think that it had to be a kind of knowledge inherited from the rural and poor way of life of this area for ages. This thought has been confirmed by examining some ethnographic and linguistic studies. The Croissant's dialects are a source of examples related to community relationships, mutual assistance, but they also testify to a deep connection with nature, labour and farm animals etc. Naturally, being next to Nature implies also that you have a completely different perception and use of time, on a daily basis and along a year. And in the end, having been faced to poverty for so many generations, people from the Croissant have developed a management of resources much more efficient than ours, nowadays, in most parts of the world.



The last, but not least, reason of my choice has been the emergency we are facing to prevent, in some cases, the disappearance of some regional dialects. But in our case, the only solution we are left with is to record it, in order to preserve it, as a museum would do it, just to avoid as much as possible the loss of all the knowledge we are about to see dying along with the last speakers. Indeed, with the language, traditions, unique modes of thinking, a whole vision of the world, all kinds of valuable resources needed to ensure a more sustainable, harmless and healthier future, are about to be lost.

THE LINGUISTIC'S CROISSANT

The Croissant's linguistic area is located on the North part of Central Massif. The gallo-romans dialects that are traditionaly spoken in this zone (mostly used nowadays by users older than 60 years) present simultaneously caracteristics from oc and oïl languages. Because they are mainly of oral tradition, they have very few litterature or any type of writted production. Songs, stories, fairytales, myths and most of the knowledge (in particular medical) are transmitted only orally and numerous are the information that we have already lost and we are still losing while last speakers are dying or simply forgetting the language they don't use anymore,





I have explained how the Croissant's dialects are the results of a certain way of life, mostly rural, in small communities, etc. But what I have not talked about yet, is the "past" dimension of those lifestyles. In fact, if this language is dying, it is because it has not evolved with the new habits. Those old days' behaviors, however sustainable or responsible they might have been, no longer exist in this countryside. This tongue is a "nearly-dead" language and lets us hear voices from another time, with different angles on the world, and some very ancient knowledge, inherited from what may be the first and the oldest area inhabited in France¹.

To enhance the wealth and the potential of these voices, I'd like to use this abstract in English to develop a notion that has been only mentioned in the main thesis: otherness². This simple concept is a key in my quest to find role models in the Croissant's dialect. In fact, we need different points of view on something to acquire a better understanding of it, and this difference can be found in other cultures and even other languages. This is the angle of my research work: how could a past language, inherited from a former civilization, provide us with a new insight on our behaviors?

1. Archaeological researchs in France have shown that the current Limousin area was already occupied by humans since the end of Upper Palaeolithic (between 10 et 30 00 years ago). For a better understanding of the Limousin's history, refer to C'est par les femmes... La terre, la mère, les filles en Limousin's travers le temps, Marie France Houdart, 2015, Maiade ISBN: 978-2-916512-28-0 and Mémoire et Identité, Traverse ethnohistoriques en Limousin, Maurice Robert, Maison Limousine des Sciences de l'Homme, Limoges, 1991.
2. For a better introduction to the concept of Othernesse, please refer to the inaugural lesson of François Jullien "L'écart et l'entre. Ou comment penser l'altérité"

It is first linked to the vocabulary itself: words shape the way we think. Regarding how many words we know, we will be able to elaborate more or less our thinking process. This is, for example, the ultimate aim of the language rationalization and reduction operated by the government in 1984, written by Georges Orwell. Besides, our language is as much influenced by how we live as our lifestyles are modeled by our tongue. For example, depending on the relation between active and passive voices in each language, the perception of an event will not be the same³. The Croissant's dialects speakers tend to express themselves using negative constructions, like "It's not so cold today" to say "The weather is hot today" or "He is not a hard worker" to say "He is lazy"⁴. Such negative constructions show the modesty of these people regarding feelings, emotions etc. In such a tough and poor region, people are encouraged, from the construction of their sentence, to keep their feelings inside instead of complaining.

Studying another culture and/or another language is, indeed, a way to change your perspective on a topic and that is what I aim to do with the illustration of the Croissant's dialects' expressions. But as I said at the beginning of this chapter, this abstract is also a way to experience otherness through a foreign language to provide us with a new scope of thinking. In fact, we could draw a parallel between using past languages (very alike a foreign language for our understanding) so as to step back and question our habits, and using English as a way to think again, think differently, about the subject of our thesis. It may offer us new angles we have not explored and thought of yet.

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3. Lera Boroditsky gives plainty of exemples of how much languages shapes our reality in her conference "How language shapes the way we think" published on the 2nd of may 2018, on TED's youtube channel.

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4. Le patois Creusois à Fresseline, data collected by Maurice Roy, published by his son, Jean Roy

For me, the main advantage in using English to write about the Croissant's dialects is that it avoids one of the main issues we face in French when we talk about that subject: the notion of "patois". In France, this term is used to designate all of the languages spoken in France, that are similar to French, but show regional variations regarding mainly the vocabulary, grammar etc. But, beyond the fact that considering a regional dialect as a variation of French is wrong⁵, the word "patois" connotes negative notions, because of the very old and repressive policy of the French government toward other languages in a perspective of assimilation and unification.

By using the English word "dialect", we overcome that linguistic and very cultural mindset induced by the French perception of regional languages and may focus directly on what we can benefit from them.

5. In the origins, french is a regional dialect exactly like normand, picard or auvergnat. All of them are declination of the latin spoken in Gaulle. French has not any higher linguistic status over those "patois".

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We have seen so far why it is so important for us to preserve regional languages. It is now time to explore what is done about it around the world, and to question the place of graphic design in the process.

I want to expose here that the aim of this project is not to revive the Croissant's dialects and make young generations speak them – for the reasons previously mentioned, like the fact that most of the uses linked to them are no longer accurate. The main purpose of this project is to convey, transmit and preserve the whole paradigm we are about to lose. Despite this angle, we will take a look at projects that are often dedicated to reviving languages, because they are the only use of graphic design for endangered languages that I could find. In fact, even with this aim, very few graphic designers got involved in this field.



To start, we can evoke the different graphic products usually completed to preserve languages. All around the world, associations create smartphone apps, teaching how to learn languages. They are sometimes quite effective but a graphic designer needs to be very specialized to be able to create a good one. For example, the studio Ogoki Learning Inc. dedicates a large part of its work to language learning apps, but, if we take the cases of Tlingit or Choctaw tribes in the United States, the final product is not very attractive for anyone who is not already fully committed to learning this language. The application attempts to evoke the local culture in its graphic form, but it is not very intuitive and shows very specific parts of the culture.



Preview and instruction for use of the kuriji learning app, Kurdiji 1.0, february 2019 © Kurdiji 1.0 A community app to save young indigenous lives (Steve Patrick, Dr Fiona Shand, Dr. Judith Crispin and Drew Braker)



Burlington-based Endangered Alphabets Project partnered with the Abenaki Circle of Courage, a youth group associated with the Missisquoi Abenaki Nation, to publish N⁷Dakinna: An Illustrated Abenaki Dictionary for Schools, 2019 Illustrated by Kelsi Brett, an illustrator and graphic designer of Abenaki heritage Layout and production: Burlington-based designer Alec Julien Courtesy of Endangered Languages Project Another medium, usually more efficient while being less expensive, is illustrated storybooks (for children most of the time). They are created all around the world, in the hope that children will feel like learning their parents' or grandparents' native language. Sometimes, they are commissioned to a professional illustrator or to a graphic designer. But the illustration can also be the work of the native speakers and their children.



Masahiro Yamada, associate professor of linguistics and Natsuko Nakagawa, project assistant professor, at the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics Picture book containing passages written in the local Yonaguni dialect of Okinawa Prefecture, along with its relevant translations into Japanese and English, january 2020 Photograph: ©Nobuaki Tanaka

Monash Country Lines Archive since 2011. We can take as an example Winjara Wiganhanyan (Why we all die), which is the story of the Moon in the Taungurung culture (an Australian Indigenous society). However, to me – just like for the Indian animation movie Bal Ganesh II – the quality of the animation is very poor and can't reach its target audience, mostly children and teenagers, who are all already very used to images way more realistic.

We can also evoke 3D animated movies based on vernacular stories and oral traditional myths, like those produced by the

Among these techniques, we can also identify postcards, posters, often realized with or by native speakers (however, most of them are not that successful talking about forms...). There are also pedagogical videos or cards and illustrated manuals, to learn the alphabet, numbers and vocabulary.



Winjara Wiganhanyan (Why we all die), the Taungurung people's story of the Moon, produced by the Monash Country Lines Archive (MCLA), 2018 37



Debbie Loakes (leader of the project), for NAIDOC Week, Mildura, Victoria, Australia "Strengthening Language, Strengthening Community: showcasing Mildura's Aboriginal languages" project, a collaboration with the Aboriginal community, august 2019 Project run by the Research Unit for Indigenous Language at The University of Melbourne, with funding from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and the Melbourne Humanities Foundation. Posters © Chaffey Secondary College students

(L to R: Jill Vaughan, Crystal Kirby, Ada Peterson and Debbie Loakes with the posters.)



A NSW Fire truck, in the North West Slopes region of New South Wales, Australia with Indigenous artwork created by Tamworth artist Jodie Herden. Photograph for ABC News by Jennifer Ingall, jun 2018

Painting fire truck with Indigenous artwork has been a way for North West Slopes inhabitants to recreate bond between local autorities and Aborigenes. Because of past mistreatment and disagreements, the Indigenous community was not very opened to autorities such as firefighters or police, even when in emergency situations. This truck is part of a pilot Indigenous Partnership Strategy that aims to restore trust.

Speaking of graphic production, we have to mention the numerous artistic productions completed by some native speaker activists, on their own behalf. I think, particularly, of the Australian aborigines, with their very rich iconography, or the Canadian natives who are notably active in preserving their identity and languages, but also fight for their rights that have been seriously denied since colonisation. Most of the actions in countries, where the vernacular language speakers fight against a colonial culture, are dissenting and political.

To qualify my remarks about the too often graphic failure of those projects, it is essential to remember that most of them are completed by small structures, that, with very few means, are trying to make these languages thrive despite time and globalisation. Anyhow, the European Union funding for regional languages is quite high. In the past few years, Germany has spent more than €6 billion to support regional languages. In Great Britain, the government has recently changed its policy toward Welsh, that is now endowed with more than £200 million every year to support schools and Welsh medias.

For all the languages about to disappear, without anybody intending to save them, there are different organizations that are trying to store dictionaries, grammar rules, videos or recordings of native speakers etc, just as it is being done for the Croissant's Dialects. But in such projects, any fund, that might be devoted to graphic design, is spent to communicate about the project and the organisation itself, never about the language in particular.



Image d'Épinal: *Prise d'Alexandrie*, Imagerie Pellerin, Napoléon's serie, Assigned to Georgin François (engraver) after Couché (engraver) and Bovinet (engraver). Executed by PELLERIN (printer, publisher), Épinal, France, 1835 (legal deposite), Woodcut, thin paper, colored with stencil(paper: 41,8 × 63,7 cm / wood: 30,7 × 52,6 cm) After an intaglio of Couché and Bovinet, d'après Gudin (around 1816) ; reissued by Pellerin & Cie in a reprinting book: *Napoléon par l'image populaire n°* 2, 1913

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This is the gap that I would like to fill with my diploma project. Moving to my own practice regarding the question of giving another possible experience of the world, inherited from the past, I wish to work on the different perceptions we have of it. Because I wanted to make reference to the past dimension of the specific language I work on, I chose to study the well known Epinal printing system as a reference for my practice. Epinal illustrations are provincial prints, in opposition with Parisian exclusive prints. Their aim was to popularize information and knowledge, but also, to entertain children and all the family too. Even if, originally, they were objects of belief and faith, they ended up being some kind of adornment before becoming, with Napoleon's ascent, pure propaganda. The diffusion area of those prints was very large. It included city dwellers in all the eastern part of France, but also Brittany, and a huge part of the rural world. Speaking about the forms, the image had a huge importance because most of the rural inhabitants were illiterate or did not speak French.

But my aim is not to fully copy the Epinal Printing process. In fact, trying to reproduce past forms, fantasizing an old lifestyle to escape our present and deny the future, isn't the right way to convince our contemporaries that our reality isn't viable.



As highlighted by the classic example of William Morris' Kelmscott Press, trying to denounce an unquestioned and untamed progressivism with completely ancient forms and techniques, without any link with the present, fails to move people. You cannot convince anyone that is was "better before" in every possible way, because it was not and there are some recent achievements that we simply cannot and will not forego.

The last facet I want to address in this essay is the notion of orality that I have already talked about in my thesis, without developing the legal aspect of languages. In fact, in France, regional languages are recognized as part of the national heritage but not as actual languages to be spoken on the territory. In other parts of the world, the same lack of acknowledgment for regional or minority languages is to be regretted. It is still true for all the states in Latin America, where, although native languages are spoken, the official languages are Spanish, Portuguese, English and even French, that is to say the settlers' languages (except Mexico that recognizes its native languages, as well as Spanish, and Peru, where Aymara is also an official language). This denial is usually linked with the oral tradition of those languages. In India, only two of the 197 endangered languages spoken on the territory have an official status, because they have a writing system.

Photo de The wood beyond the world, book completed by William MORRIS, published by Kelmscott Press, 1894 (England) n°38041800870107 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

CONCLUSION

In the end, using graphic design to promote vernacular languages does seem to be possible and useful, even if it has not been tried a lot; and if it is to spark off some interest for nearly-dead, rural and not very popular languages such as the Croissant's dialects, it may be even more relevant. I guess this will be the main aim of my project: first, mobilize people from the concerned region (the Croissant but also Limousin, because it is somehow part of their culture too). Then, as mentioned in the first part, the next step would be to broaden the target, expose this research and this lifestyle incitements to people who are living further than the Croissant and people less likely to be interested in such project. For me, it is one of the few weapons vernacular cultures have against globalisation: the point is to communicate about it and show alternatives to today's fake universal way of life. Here, the past is the alternative because, if we make what is necessary to preserve it, we will keep the knowledge inherited from thousands of generations before us, which have experimented thousands of ways of life. Dozens of thousands of people who have managed to survive and thrive until nowadays. I bet that it is in their traditional, ancient and proven lifestyle that we will be able to find a way to avoid a complete collapse of our society. We are currently, at the very instant (when) I am writing these words, experiencing the consequences of our dreamed, fantasized, universal world, full of sharing, slightly erasing all notions of time, distance and any kind of limits. Never before have we needed more thoroughly to think again the conditions of our existence in this world.

So this is my statement as a graphic designer, engaged for the well-being of our society and for the future: I want to change behaviors and communicate values that can help us to be more resilient.

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First, I would like to thank all of my DSAA's mates. I would never have been able to reach this ultimate lines without them. Many thanks for their support, jokes and laughter; for their cakes, for all the trips to the bakery, for the pizza nights and for the liters of hummus prepared all along those 2 years.

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I have a very particular thought for all my literature, language, and humanities teachers who are, in a sense, at the origin of the project, as they made me love languages, words, cultures,..

I have to thank my dad and his own father, who are not innocent either in my love for vocabulary, its accuracy and its capacity to depict our reality.

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Thank you, mom. For everything.



The following bibliography was elaborated to sustain a piece of research carried out in French.

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EXPERTISE

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http://ParlersduCroissant.huma-num.fr/

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58 Guylaine Brun-Trigaud : CNRS' searcher

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SUMMARY

We are facing an endless homogenization of culture and languages around the world. But have we clearly understood what losing all those languages means? I chose to focus on the little known, and nearly dead French linguistic area, named the Croissant and its particular interest. In this abstract, written in English, I want to emphasize some parts of my research, such as otherness, but also identify and question what is done, in the Graphic design field, about disappearing languages around the world, to be able to position myself in this landscape.