

Each section is equivalent to one slide; section header numbers are equivalent to slide numbers.

### 1. Title.

## The online presence of standard and non-standard Breton

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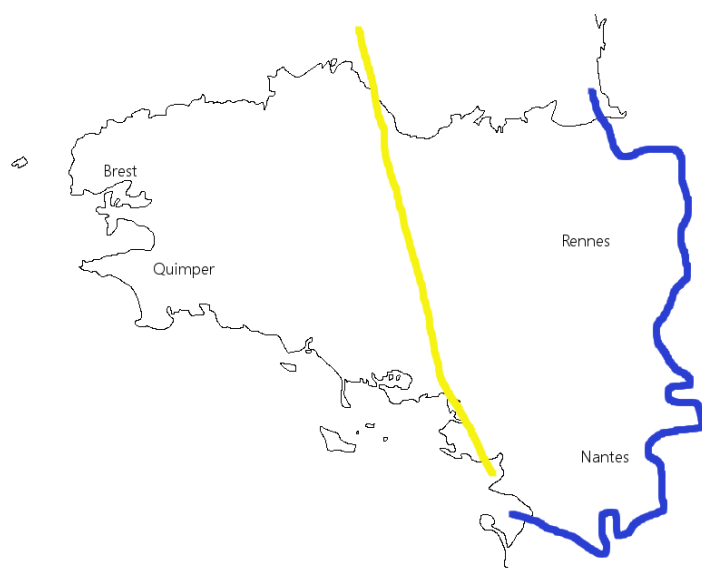
Paper presented at French Studies, University of Durham, 4<sup>th</sup> July 2017, part of the *Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies* panel.

### 2. Regional languages in France.

The opening paper in this panel recalled the situation of regional languages in France. Historically, they have been neglected and even deliberately suppressed, at least as far back as the Revolution and the publication of Grégoire's *Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française*. While decentralisation under Mitterand's presidency led to more recognition and an increasing official presence for regional languages, enabling improved availability in education and appearance in official road signage, the French state has continued to stress the superiority of the national language: article 2 of its constitution states that "la langue de la République est le français". This has formed a stumbling block for certain measures intended to consolidate the acceptance and legitimisation of regional languages.

Language planning in the case of the regional languages of France is devolved to regional governments, which in turn create or nominate additional bodies to manage the process, particularly where linguistic matters are concerned. These bodies have in many cases taken the place of the more grassroots movements that emerged during earlier stages of language revitalisation in the twentieth century, and now take charge of standardising the languages in question.

### 3. Breton.



Breton is a Celtic language spoken in the region of Brittany in the north-west; there are estimated to be around 200,000 speakers (Broudic, 2013:10). Traditionally, these speakers have been restricted to western Brittany, in the area to the west of the yellow line on this map, speaking a language that can broadly be divided into four geographically delimited dialects. However, as a sense of Breton regional identity has become particularly strong over the last century or so, the language has become a symbol of the region, and is consequently

associated with Brittany in its entirety. The blue line marks the border of the historical and cultural region of Brittany, showing the territory on which Breton is promoted.

In common with many minority languages, Breton suffered as a result of industrialisation and the development of a strong central state in the early modern period, and saw a decline in its speaker numbers which became particularly severe after the first world war. At the same time, however, a revitalisation movement was gaining traction, which engendered significant quantities of Breton speakers who had not learnt the language in the home, but instead taken a conscious decision to acquire it as adults. While a declining proportion of the population continued to transmit Breton intergenerationally, a growing second group took it up despite not being brought up in Breton-speaking families. This situation persists today, and this second group has become known in academic discourse as *new speakers*, in contrast with *traditional speakers*.

#### **4. New versus traditional speakers.**

The language of new speakers of Breton, sometimes referred to as ‘néo-Breton’, tends to be characterised in certain ways, as summarised in the following table:

<b>New speakers</b>	<b>Traditional speakers</b>
Younger, middle-class, mobile, and well-educated	Older, working class, usually farmers
Located in larger towns and cities	Restricted to western Brittany
Acquire Breton as a second language	Acquire Breton through intergenerational transmission
Acquire Breton in formal education	
Use Breton as much as possible	Restrict use of Breton to intimate settings
Militant promotion of Breton	Speak Breton only because of linguistic ability
Proud of Breton identity	No strong sense of Breton identity
Use ‘standardised’ Breton	Use dialectal Breton
French-influenced linguistic structure	Linguistic structure not influenced by French
Celtic-derived lexicon	French-influenced lexicon

(See e.g. German, 2007; Hornsby, 2005; Jones, 1995; Timm, 2001)

The three linguistic criteria that make up the bottom three rows of the table contribute to the way the language of new speakers is characterised: as a standardised Breton that is more similar to French than traditional varieties are in its grammatical and phonetic structure, but less so in terms of its lexicon.

#### **5. The lexicon of Breton.**

Lexicon is accordingly frequently identified in academic work as a prominent distinction between the language of new and traditional speakers. The following table, adapted from Timm (2001:456), shows that ‘néo-Breton’ is perceived as having a tendency to replace lexemes derived from French, as used in traditional Breton, with new coinages on the basis of existing Breton words or other Celtic sources, or to extend the use of ‘native’ Breton lexemes at the expense of French-derived ones. *Baleadenn*, below, is coined on the word *bale* ‘to walk’ plus a nominalising suffix. *Baraerezh* comes from *baraer* ‘baker’ plus a nominalising suffix indicating a place. *Abeg* is attested in traditional Breton, but dictionaries from the early twentieth century show that it had become restricted to the highest literary registers.

French	TB	NB
<i>promenade</i>	pourmenadenn	baleadenn
<i>raison</i>	rezen	abeg
<i>boulangerie</i>	boulangerezh	baraerezh

adapted from Timm, 2001:456

For the past twenty years or so, the lexicon of standard Breton has been regulated by the *Office public de la langue bretonne*, the official body in charge of language planning for Breton, which is financed by regional and local government. In this function the *Office* supersedes a number of other structures created over the course of the twentieth century for the purpose of codifying the Breton lexicon. Like stereotypical ‘néo-Breton’, and like early figures in the Breton revitalisation movement, the *Office* tends to recommend words of Celtic origin; however, it is not as strict about this as other bodies have been on the past, and some of its recommendations are derived from French.

## **6. New versus traditional speakers (2).**

Certain factors that are said to characterise new speakers mean that the Breton attested on the internet can be seen to come overwhelmingly from new speaker sources. It is claimed that new speakers are younger, middle-class, more mobile—i.e. better connected with larger social networks—and better educated: all these factors suggest a greater likelihood of internet use among this group of speakers. Additionally, traditional speakers are said to be illiterate in Breton; as the vast majority of online content is in written form, this restricts such speakers’ access to Breton on the internet. New speakers are also characterised as being more willing to use Breton on platforms beyond intimate settings, such as the public fora available online. As the Breton used by new speakers is said to be highly standardised, it follows that standard Breton should have a far greater presence on the internet than non-standard varieties, and consequently that Celtic-derived lexical items should be more prevalent than French-derived alternatives. Part of my research focuses on investigating the validity of this supposition.

## **7/8. Breton on the internet: official representation.**

Standard Breton is easy to find online. The regional government of Brittany provides a Breton-language version of its website;<sup>1</sup> albeit one that is more limited than the French version. Its 180-page language policy, comprising French and Breton versions, is available to download from this website; unsurprisingly, the Breton used is the standard variety. The *Office public de la langue bretonne* provides a complete version of its website in Breton,<sup>2</sup> again using the standard.

Moreover, the *Office*’s website discursively insists on the value of the standard language:

N’eo ket ken bras-se an diforc’hioù ha sellet a reont dreist-holl ouzh an taol-mouezh hag an distagadur. N’eus ket nemeur a ziforc’hioù a-fet geriaoueg ha yezhadur. Peurvuiañ e c’haller kompren mat an eil egile, ha hep tamm diaezamant ebet zoken evit an dud a oar lenn ha skrivañ. ... A-nebeudoù, gant sikour an holl o deus strivet aze, ez eus bet diazezet ur yezh skoueriekaet

<sup>1</sup> <http://bretagne.bzh> (accessed 21 June 2017).

<sup>2</sup> <http://brezhoneg.bzh> (accessed 21 June 2017).

evit gallout en em dennañ e kement degouezh a vefe hag evit bezañ gouest da vont diouzh emdroadur an teknologiezhioù er bed a vremañ.<sup>3</sup>

[The differences [among dialects] are not so great, and relate mostly to intonation and pronunciation. There are few differences in the domains of vocabulary and grammar. It is usually possible for people to understand each other, and for those who know how to read and write there can even be no difficulty at all. ... Recently, with the help of all those who have worked there [at the *Office*], a standardised language has been established, allowing it to deal with anything that may occur and to be capable of keeping up with the evolution of modern technologies.]

In claiming that there is little difference among the traditional dialects, the *Office* is able to suggest that a single unified standard Breton would remain relevant to traditional speakers. Research on traditional Breton has however resulted in contradictory findings on this subject; while some scholars agree with the *Office*'s assessment, other research has asserted that dialectal differences are so great as to render mutual intelligibility impossible. In the second part of the above quotation, the *Office* implies that the task of standardising Breton is complete, neglecting to mention that work on elaborating the lexicon is ongoing or that its *conseil scientifique* continues to refine orthographic and grammatical features.<sup>4</sup> By presenting the standardisation of Breton as a finished process, the *Office* is able to insist on the validity and legitimacy of the standard.

## **9. Breton on the internet: non-standard representation.**

Despite the supposition that non-standard Breton online should be rare, examples of it can be found. The following slides look at two websites using non-standard Breton: the first, [loeizherrieu.fr](http://loeizherrieu.fr),<sup>5</sup> uses the south-eastern Vannetais dialect,<sup>6</sup> while the second, the blog *Brezhoneg Digor* ('Open Breton'),<sup>7</sup> uses a variety spoken in the centre of the Breton-speaking area.

## **10.**

The differences from standard Breton seen on [loeizherrieu.fr](http://loeizherrieu.fr) are minor, and relate mostly to orthography. The following table gives a list of headings from the site in both French and Breton (both are presented to the viewer simultaneously), augmented by versions of the Breton headings that conform to the standard. Differences are marked in bold on the standardised Breton version. Most are orthographic, although there are two small lexical differences.

French	Breton	Standardised Breton
Accueil	Digemer mad	Degemer mat
Biographie	É vuhé	<b>E vuhez</b>
Œuvre	Obéreu	<b>Oberoù</b>
Morceaux choisis	Testenneu choéjet	Testennoù choaziet
La guerre	Er brezél	<b>Ar brezel</b>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brezhoneg.bzh/55-istor.htm> (accessed 21 June 2017).

<sup>4</sup> For a list of recent decisions made by the *conseil scientifique*, see <http://www.brezhoneg.bzh/177-divizou-hag-erbedadennoù-ar-chuzul-skiantel.htm> (accessed 12 September 2017).

<sup>5</sup> <http://loeizherrieu.fr> (accessed 21 June 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Loiez Herrieu was a Vannetais writer active in the early twentieth century.

<sup>7</sup> <http://brezhoneg-digor.blogspot.fr> (accessed 21 June 2017).

French	Breton	Standardised Breton
Chansons	Sonneneu ha gwerzenne	<b>Sonioù</b> ha <b>gwerzhioù</b>
La famille Henrio	Tud Herrieu	Tud Herrioù
Aujourd'hui	L. H. bremañ	L. H. bremañ
Tourneures vannetaises	Troeienneu é gwenedeg	<b>Troiennoù e</b> gwenedeg
Ressources documentaires	Titoureu	Titouroù

### 11/12. Central Breton.

The variety used by *Brezhoneg Digor* departs more noticeably from standard Breton. Below is the opening of the most recent post as of June 2017.

Salud dec'h,  
Fenos vo laket un añrejistrant ma gwraet ba-ti J. barzh Skrigneg, assames oa-i ga É. deus Skrigneg 'e, deut oan assames ga Tanguy Sollicec. Trañskrivet an traou ganen-me, michañs e blijo dec'h

[Hello,  
Tonight there will be uploaded a recording done at the home of J. in Scrignac; she was there together with É, also from Scrignac. I went there together with Tanguy Sollicec. I myself transcribed what was said; I hope you will like it.]

Altering this to conform to the orthography and grammar of standard Breton, and again marking the differences in bold, we can see the ways in which the blog's usage differs from the standard. The orthography used is a closer approximation to the speech of central Brittany; this can be seen, for example, in the reduction of the consonant cluster <mb> to <m> (*asambles* in the standard orthography, *assames* on *Brezhoneg Digor*).

Salud deoc'h,  
Fenoz **e** vo lakaet un añrejistrant **graet** ba-ti J. barzh Skrigneg, **asambles** oa-**hi** gant É. deus Skrigneg **ivez**, deut oan **asambles gant** Tanguy Sollicec. Trañskrivet **e oa** an traoù ganin-me, **emichañs e** blijo deoc'h

However, as well as these differences from the standard, the passage also departs from it in lexical terms. Below is a version of the passage with the lexicon amended to conform with the vocabulary recommended by prescriptive sources.

Salud deoc'h,  
Fenoz e vo lakaet un **enrolladenn** graet **e-barzh** ti J. **e** Skrigneg, **a-gevret** oa-**hi** gant É. deus Skrigneg ivez, deut oan **a-gevret** gant Tanguy Sollicec. **Treuzskrivet** e oa an traoù ganin-me, emichañs e blijo deoc'h

With the exception of *ba* for *e-barzh* (a phonological reduction), the words used on *Brezhoneg Digor* in place of the standard recommendations derive from French, while the recommendations themselves are more Celtic or Celticised. This befits the subject matter of *Brezhoneg Digor*, which aims to share the language of traditional speakers, who, as seen above, are considered to prefer French-derived vocabulary to neo-Celtic coinages.

While the two websites so far examined show that non-standard Breton can be found on the internet, this provides no information about whether these loci of non-standard varieties are viewed or interacted with

by the wider online community of Breton users. To examine a context where inter-speaker interactions are more prevalent, we can instead turn to social media, which presents a more accurate picture of actual language use by multiple interlocutors.

### 13. Facebook e brezhoneg.

The primary space on social media for interaction between Breton speakers is the Facebook group *Facebook e brezhoneg* ('Facebook in Breton'),<sup>8</sup> which currently has over 10,000 members. Many of these members are not active participants in the group, however; those posting regularly number only several hundred. The group was originally set up to campaign to allow translation of the Facebook interface into Breton, but this was achieved in late 2014, allowing the group to become a more general space for exchanges in and about the language. As an 'open group', it allows anyone logged into Facebook to read and search its posts.

*Facebook e brezhoneg* provides a specific and unusual type of bilingual context. Competence in French is expected from its members, who, as Breton speakers, are mostly resident in Brittany and thus must use French in their everyday life. New speakers of Breton, of course, tend to have French as a native language. However, the use of French in the group is discouraged: the image displayed at the top of the group's page contains the instruction "Kasit **ho kemenadennoù e brezhoneg** mar plij [h]a chomit dereat ha doujus" (emphasis in original), and immediately below, its French equivalent: "Merci de **rédiger vos messages en breton** et de rester courtois et respectueux". Despite this instruction not to write in French, many of the posts in the group do use French, and this rarely attracts comment or criticism.

### 14. Lexical variation.

*Facebook e brezhoneg* displays a large number of words that deviate from the *Office*'s recommendations: much of this involves the use of terms borrowed from French, adapted to Breton orthography and inflectional morphology, as in the table below:

French	Attested	Advised
<i>téléphérique</i>	teleferik	fungarr
<i>sexiste</i>	seksist	revelour
<i>reptiles</i>	reptilianed	stlejviled
<i>drapeau</i>	drapo	banniel

*Drapo* is a particularly interesting case, *banniel* being itself a borrowing from Old French, its French origin presumably evident to speakers in the existence of the French cognate *bannière*.

Borrowings from languages other than French, mostly English, are also found, among them *TV* (an abbreviation that tends not to be used in French, *télé* being used instead) and *organek* (French *bio*). This second example is again interesting, as a user comments on the use of *organek* with a reference to English: the first user responds with a list of languages other than English that use some form of the word *organic*, including Spanish, Catalan, and Turkish.

Dialectal variation is also found in the lexicon, although interestingly this appears to be mostly restricted to prepositions. The Vannetais prepositions *ar* 'on' and *get* 'with' are often found rather than their standard counterparts *war* and *gant*. Using this small but frequently occurring set of dialectal markers

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/334727793245979> (accessed 21 June 2017; data gathered February 2017).

perhaps ensures that the user's use of Vannetais comes across without requiring readers of the post, or indeed the user themselves, to have a developed knowledge of the Vannetais lexicon. The user can assert their alignment with Vannetais identity without compromising on the communicative function of their post, and non-users of Vannetais are able to respond. The small number of posts written completely in Vannetais, using the traditional Vannetais orthography and lexemes, by contrast, attract only Vannetais replies. This provides some evidence against the claim that dialectal diversity in Breton is disappearing, although perhaps implies that the form in which it is expressed is changing.

### **15. Some more examples.**

Thorough and systematic examination of the data has been impossible at this preliminary stage. Instead, I have looked in a little more detail at four media-related words, all of which, as twentieth-century inventions, have provoked a choice between adopting the French term or coining a Celtic one. Additionally, the word for 'thank you' was examined, the division between *mersi* and *trugarez* being a high-profile example of the perceived difference between new and traditional speaker varieties invoked in academic discourse. Stereotypical 'néo-Breton', we are informed, should use the Celtic-derived lexemes in all cases; the *Office* recommends it in all of the cases below except for *radio*, although *skingomz* is advised in certain multi-word phrases.

	< French/ International	# Tokens	#Speakers	< Celtic	# Tokens	#Speakers
'radio'	radio	4	3	skingomz	0	0
'telephone'	telefon	0	0	pellgomz	5	3
'internet'	internet	9	8	kenrouedad	2	2
'television'	tele/TV	1	1	skinwel	1	1
'thank you'	mersi	6	4	trugarez	6	6

The data reveal no overall polarisation in one direction or the other as regards the use of French- or Celtic-derived lexemes, although *radio* and *pellgomz* seem to win out over the alternatives, in accordance with the *Office*'s recommendations. *Internet* enjoys a fairly substantial level of popularity over *kenrouedad*, however, in defiance of the *Office*, and *tele/TV/skinwel* and *mersi/trugarez* are less conclusive, showing the persistence of variation. For all five items, all speakers are consistent in their own usage; none appears in both categories for a single word, but some use Celtic words in some cases and French in others, e.g. both *internet* and *trugarez*.

### **16. Preliminary conclusions.**

The results of this preliminary investigation indicate that despite the claim that new speakers use a highly standardised form of Breton, the language used on Facebook and elsewhere online shows that speakers are in fact not homogeneous in their lexicon, despite claims. Words derived from Celtic and French coexist, and dialectal words and orthographies continue to be used to a certain degree. Words borrowed from other languages, usually French but often English, can be accepted in Breton through respelling, rather than requiring the coinage of a Celtic-based synonym. In the bilingual context of the Facebook group, this ensures such words can be understood while still fitting them into an acceptable paradigm of Breton discourse.

The use of non-standard dialectal features allows specific dialectal identities to persist, but in restricting this to the orthography and prepositions rather than involving semantically heavy lexical words, speakers enable the retention of comprehensibility across dialects, an important consideration for a small language with little internet presence. The resistance to standardisation found online may perhaps indicate a desire to avoid mimicking the highly standardised nature of French; however, given that the internet is also a significant site for non-standard language in other contexts, including that of French itself, this may merely reflect the unmoderated nature of the internet and its potential to resemble speech more closely than more traditional written discourse. Regardless, it can be seen that the use of non-standard Breton is persisting in some form.

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