

and Revitalization: The Case of Guernesiais in the Channel Islands

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Abstract. Numerous studies have found that high-density, “traditional” social networks correlate with the use of low-status or local language varieties. Why some people maintain an ancestral language and transmit it to their children, while others abandon it, is a major issue in the study of language endangerment. This study focuses on Guernesiais, the endangered indigenous language of Guernsey, Channel Islands. Baseline data were collected using a questionnaire and semistructured interviews; ethnographic methods then shed light on ideologies, attitudes, and the processes of language shift. Availability of interlocutors correlates strongly with fluency, for both native speakers and learners, but the increasing age and linguistic isolation of many native speakers contributes to both individual and societal language loss, along with other factors. Options for supporting (or reconstituting) social networks through language planning are examined.

1. Background. Guernsey is an island in the English Channel, about eighty miles (130 kilometers) from Weymouth, the nearest British port, but only approximately twenty miles (thirty-two kilometers) from Carteret, the nearest French port. With an area of approximately twenty-five square miles (sixty-five square kilometers), it is the second largest of the Channel Islands, which are semiautonomous dependencies of the British Crown (Ogier 2005).

Each Channel Island has, or had, its own variety of Norman French, although only those of Jersey, Guernsey, and Sark are still spoken. These vernaculars have been (dis)regarded for much of their history as low-status, degraded, or corrupted *patois* or dialects of French. They do not have official status or names, but this article refers to Guernsey’s indigenous language variety as Guernesiais,¹ the name which the majority of native speakers interviewed claimed to prefer (although many still use the traditional term *patois*, being unaware of its negative connotations in French).

For much of its history, Guernesiais was in a diglossic relationship with standard French, which is still known as “the good French.” Reclaiming prestige for the local variety is an important principle. Price asserts that “These are . . . varieties of Norman French and the idea that they are a “corruption” of standard French is devoid of all foundation” (1984:208). It has therefore become a tenet of language revivalists that Guernesiais should be constructed not as a dialect of standard French, but as a separate branch of the *oïl* language family of northern France. Some see it as an offshoot of Norman, while others claim separate status on grounds of political independence. It is claimed by some

Guernsey language activists that Norman in the Channel Islands has maintained its purity and some archaic features most strongly in Guernsey; this is supported by recent research by Mari Jones and Thierry Bulot.²

Despite its low status and even denigration in its diglossic relationship with French, Guernesiais remained the primary language of country people until the early twentieth century. Its actual survival was never threatened by the use of French, which remained a language that was learned outside the home and used for religion, administration, education, etc. Guernesiais was used in the home and family, for socialization, for phatic and affective communication—the “language of the heart,” in the terms of Lösch (2000:80).

In the nineteenth century, English grew in importance due to immigration, tourism, and trade, as well as political factors. Guernsey was on the front line of Britain’s defenses against French invasion in the Napoleonic wars, which cut off official trading links with France and brought a large garrison of English-speaking soldiers. A trilingual collection of poetry by Guernsey’s “national poet,” Georges Métivier, *Fantaisie Guernesiaise* (1866), has a subtitle that illustrates the triglossic relationship between the varieties in the mid-nineteenth century:

<i>dans le langage du pays,</i>	<i>la langue de la civilisation,</i>	<i>et celle du commerce</i>
‘in the local idiom,	the language of civilization,	and that of commerce’
[Guernesiais]	[French]	[English]

Gradually French came to be replaced by English in all high domains, including religion, education, and politics. However, unlike French, English came to be used in the home as well, for reasons such as intermarriage, mass media (especially radio), and the change to English in education (Crossan 2005; Girard 1977, 1978). Language shift was accelerated in 1940 by the evacuation of half of the population (including the majority of the children) to the United Kingdom just prior to the occupation of the Channel Islands by the German army. Children had to adapt to life in a strange country where foreigners came under suspicion, many of them separated from their families, without knowing if and when they might return home.

At present, the majority of people in Guernsey speak English as their first (and in many cases, their only) language. In the 2001 census, 1,327 people reported speaking Guernesiais fluently (2.22 percent of the population), and 1,871 (3.13 percent of the population) reported understanding Guernesiais fully (States of Guernsey 2002). Of the fluent speakers, 70.4 percent (934) were over the age of 64 in 2001. The census included two questions about language, whose format was relatively useful for linguists.

Does the person speak Guernsey-Norman French?

- a. Fluently
- b. A little
- c. Not at all

Does the person understand Guernsey-Norman French?

- a. Fully
- b. A little
- c. Not at all

The second question was asked because, as with many endangered languages, there are numerous people who have a passive understanding, but who do not speak it actively (Basham and Fathman 2008). Out of the total population, 14 percent (one in seven) reported some understanding of Guernesiais (see section 4 below).

In a travelogue written in 1835, Henry Inglis prophesied the imminent demise of Guernesiais, so its survival into the twenty-first century is a testimony to the stubbornness of low-prestige vernaculars in the face of economic and ideological pressures (De Garis 1982; Ryan 1979). As seen in section 4, affective networks play a large part in maintaining a language in this situation. However, for reasons of demographic attrition, as well as the linguistic attrition discussed in section 3, the number of fluent speakers seems to have fallen considerably since the 2001 census was carried out. There may also have been over-reporting of fluency.

The data drawn on in this article come from interviews and questionnaires carried out in 2001–2006, and subsequent research that is still ongoing. Baseline data were collected using a questionnaire and semistructured interviews on the extent to which the indigenous language is being used and passed on, as well as data on how it is used—in what contexts, with whom, and how often (Fishman 1965). Ethnographic interviews and participant observation enabled these questions to be extended to “why,” and to shed light on the processes of language shift.

2. Language and social networks. Social network theory was developed by Lesley Milroy (1982, 1987, 2000, 2002; Milroy and Milroy 1997, 1999; Milroy and Margrain 1980) to account for a factor in language variation and change, on the basis of her observations of varieties of English in working-class areas of Belfast. Close-knit networks where people all know each other in more than one context are termed dense or “multiplex,” and correspond to traditional ways of interacting in close-knit societies. More loose-knit networks are termed low-density or “uniplex”; these correspond more with modern, middle-class lifestyles where people may live some distance from their extended families, commute to work, and may not know their neighbors well. This can be illustrated by my own networks: I commute to work and know many of the bus drivers by sight but not on a personal level; although I socialize with some colleagues, they rarely meet my family, local friends, or neighbors; I have friends on several continents through academic networks, which I can maintain through electronic communications.

Milroy defines social networks as “informal social mechanisms supporting language varieties specific to particular social groups” (2002:549). Milroy mea-

sured the density of her consultants' social networks and correlated them against the use of speech elements (especially phonological), and found that social network density could be correlated with the use of particular features, and could hence be used to evaluate rates of language change. She established that people are more likely to use traditional or low-status ways of speaking with people from their close social circle. This can be related to the findings of Ryan (1979), Milroy (1982), and Giles and colleagues (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977; Giles and Johnson 1981, 1987), among others, that the use of low-status language varieties tends to express social solidarity. Edwards notes that "In this connection, we should recall the bonding or solidarity function along integrity and social attractiveness dimensions. . . . This, it is proposed, may constitute a 'covert prestige' in which nonstandard speech forms possess more status than standard variants" (1982:21; see also Trudgill 1983; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Low-status language varieties are hence said to be maintained through pressure exerted by informal ties of kin and friendship (Milroy and Milroy 1999:49).

Although the correlation of social network with linguistic variation was originally developed in relation to variation in English in Belfast, more recent studies have demonstrated its validity elsewhere, e.g., with regard to dialect shift due to urbanization in Turkey (Soylemez 2004), lexical usage in Portugese-based creoles in West Africa (Graham 2001), and morphosyntactic variation in Acadian French in Canada (Beaulieu and Cichocki 2002).

Milroy (2002) extends the framework to the maintenance of endangered or minority language varieties in contact with more widespread or dominant varieties. Groups and individuals with weak uniplex ties are seen as susceptible to linguistic change or shift, as their sense of distinctiveness becomes redundant and standard or high-status speech styles may be seen as more advantageous.

Several studies have applied social network analysis to the maintenance of heritage languages in diaspora contexts (e.g., Zentella 1997; Stoessel 2002; Rocchi 2008). Wei (1994) found that the composition of an individual's social network, and especially the ethnic composition of a network, had a greater explanatory value for language choice than demographic variables such as age or gender (see also Wei, Milroy, and Chin 1992; Raschka, Wei, and Lee 2002). Dashti (2004) likewise found that the social networks of members of two Kuwaiti Ajam families in the process of shifting from Farsi to Kuwaiti Arabic proved to be more significant in language maintenance and shift than factors such as migration, religion, intermarriage, age, and gender.

Lanza and Svendsen (2007) acknowledge that social network analysis has been found to be particularly useful in explaining why speakers in bilingual communities maintain or change their language behavior. However, they found it less predictive in a multilingual community such as the Filipino community in Norway, whose members are typically competent users of Tagalog and other Filipino languages as well as English, Norwegian, and yet more languages learned through migration, plus "mixed codes" such as "Taglish" and "Tagnorsk."

Another multilingual diaspora community was studied by Govindasamy and Nambiar (2003)—the Malayalee community in multilingual Malaysia. They found that although the community has a close and dense network, and members are still interacting socially more with each other than with members of other ethnic groups, the language of interaction is increasingly shifting from Malayalam to English. Govindasamy and Nambiar hypothesize that where priority is on economic advancement, patterns of social interaction and networks are less able to act as a norm enforcement agent. Govindasamy and Nambiar also warn that Western constructs, such as social network theory, may not be explanatory in all contexts.

As well as being multilingual rather than bilingual, another difference between the contexts of these studies and my own is that most refer to the maintenance of a heritage language in diaspora rather than to the revitalization of an endangered indigenous language; in the former case, speakers might have a more integrative orientation to the host community (in the terms of Gardner and Lambert [1972]). It may be that conscious “acts of identity” (e.g., assimilation in the hope of economic advancement) in these contexts contrast with the conservative pressures exerted by social networks (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Graham 2001).

Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of social networks (or interaction) in maintaining language varieties in indigenous communities. Hildebrandt (2004) found that even a very small community of speakers might promote the retention of conservative linguistic features, as long as access to the native language in that community is regular and unrestricted. Nonaka (2009) utilized social network analysis to evaluate levels of use of a minority sign language.

However, in terms of research methods, caution needs to be observed when utilizing social networks to identify language users via the “friend of a friend” method (Milroy 1987), where the researcher makes contact with a small group of relevant people who then contact others. This research method has the advantage of a very low proportion of nonresponse, but as Bryman (2004:102) comments, it is unlikely that such a sample will be representative, and this is what I found in my own research. Social network contacts are by definition socially integrated, so people contacted in this way tend to be unusually proficient in the language variety under investigation, reflecting the influence of dense networks in low-status varieties. This might skew the picture of the pattern of language use if only these speakers were surveyed to evaluate levels of use of a minority language. As I discuss below, language endangerment contexts are characterized by a loosening of social networks through demographic attrition, and the fewer interlocutors speakers have the less proficient they are likely to be. In addition, primary contacts in endangered language research tend to be committed language enthusiasts.

Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977:343) claim that there are close interrelations between language, ethnicity, and intergroup relations, which have been

explored by numerous researchers into language shift (e.g., Fishman 1977, 1989; Haarmann 1986; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1982, 1985). It becomes clear from these studies that “ethnicity” is impossible to define in terms of quantifiable physiological differences. Jenkins summarizes definitions as follows: “ethnicity and its allotropes are principles of collective identification and social organization in terms of culture and history, similarity and difference” (1997: 179). This is very similar to Tajfel’s definition of social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [*sic*] knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (1981:225). There is thus very little practical difference between “ethnicity,” “culture,” and “identity,” and all may be seen as related to social networks.

Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz distinguish between an “old” type of ethnicity, based on common regional background, which “joined people through clusters of occupational, neighborhood, familial, and political ties,” and a “new” ethnicity depending “less upon geographic proximity and shared occupations and more upon the highlighting of key differences separating one group from another” (1982:5). There are clear parallels here with social network theory, as language shift often accompanies a shift from the first type of ethnicity or network to the second. This, in turn, relates to “acts of identity” whereby in less dense social networks, people may feel less constrained by conservative ethnolinguistic networks and choose to identify with one or more new groups.

However, Lanza and Svendsen warn against a simplistic interpretation of such findings. They comment that:

within SNA the main focus has been on the structures of the network, such as density, and the ethnic composition (cf. Williams 1992). By omitting the qualitative aspects of social relations, SNA might indicate a view of identity as static, quantitative, and essentialist, equating language and a specific identity of a collective and assuming that there is a “natural” or iconic link between language and ethnic identity. [2007:278]

However, as with identity, social networks do not have to be viewed in a “static, quantitative, and essentialist” way. Such a viewpoint ignores the dynamic nature of social networks, which reflects that of human relationships. One indication of this dynamic nature is the tendency for electronic communications to allow people to stay in close (virtual) contact with friends from all over the world. Virtual social networks are becoming important factors in the maintenance of small languages, especially in widely dispersed or diaspora communities.

I have discussed the role of identity in language maintenance in Guernsey elsewhere (Sallabank 2006), noting that there is no simple link between identity and language choice. Postmodern ideas on the constructed, fluid nature of identity are not well known among lay people, and many of my questionnaire respondents and interviewees expressed essentialist views and a strong

emotional link to the traditional language—which, however, had not stopped them from shifting to English or persuaded them to pass Guernesiais on to their children. Meanwhile, language planners and activists are not averse to promoting symbolic ethnicity and localness as means to promote language loyalty. Language is one of the ways in which people construct their identities, and thus may be highlighted when it seems salient. As Lanza and Svendsen suggest, “language might become important for identity when a group feels it is losing its identity due to political or social reasons” (2007:293). Jones (2008) reports that in the neighboring Channel Island of Jersey, the local language variety is currently being fostered as a quintessential part of island identity, despite the fact that according to the 2001 census it is spoken only by some 3 percent of the population.

Lanza and Svendsen (2007:293) recommend paying attention to the qualitative aspects of social relations. The present article does not focus on the quantitative correlation of social network indices with linguistic features, but rather on such aspects as the role that the maintenance of speakers’ social contacts can play in maintaining fluency, and the possibility of employing language planning measures to support or even replace traditional social networks, in order to encourage interaction and thus language maintenance.

3. Language shift and social networks in Guernsey. My initial questionnaire surveyed ninety Guernsey residents and revealed a wide range of levels of use of Guernesiais, from (increasingly) isolated speakers to a small community of people in early retirement who use Guernesiais for their entire social life (e.g., card games such as whist and euchre, beetle drives, bowls). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between self-reported proficiency in Guernesiais and frequency of speaking it, while figure 2 compares proficiency with the number of interlocutors available (again based on self-reports). It is clear from these responses that proficiency correlates with how often Guernesiais is used, and with how many other speakers. The most frequent interlocutors reported by speakers were:

- parents (when they were alive): 11 out of the 40 who answered this question;
- spouse (7);
- friends (6).

This indicates a predominantly domestic, phatic domain for the use of Guernesiais. English was traditionally used for functional events, such as commercial and official transactions. Speakers reported speaking Guernesiais most often at home, closely followed by at friends’ houses, when meeting friends away from home, at cultural festivals, and at church (usually before or after the service, although one or two ecumenical services a year are now held in Guernesiais). Only two of the questionnaire respondents reported habitually speaking Guernesiais with work colleagues and two with shopkeepers. However, language planning for revitalization frequently involves taking a language out of these

traditional domestic, phatic domains into more socially prestigious roles, such as education and the media.

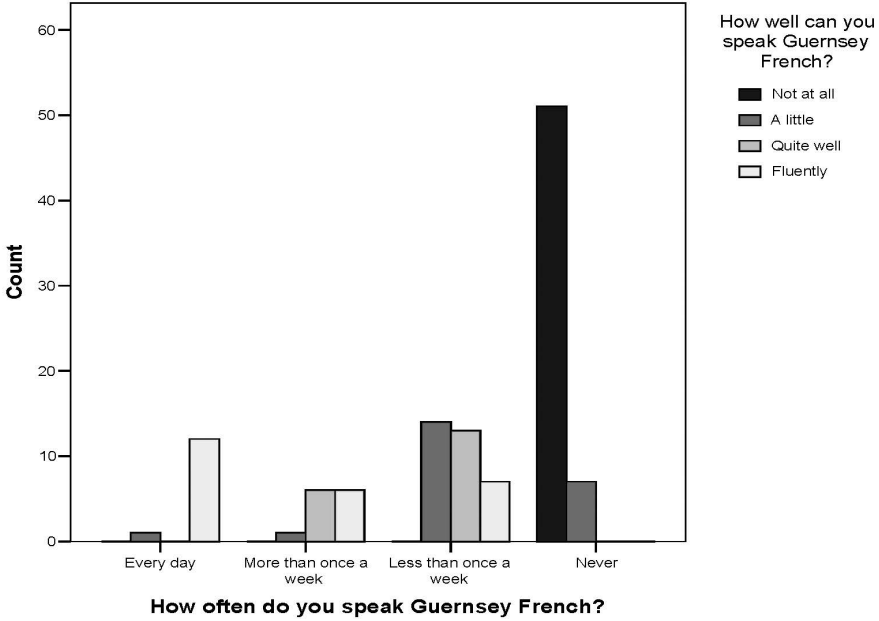


Figure 1. Frequency of speaking cross-tabulated with ability to speak Guernesiais.

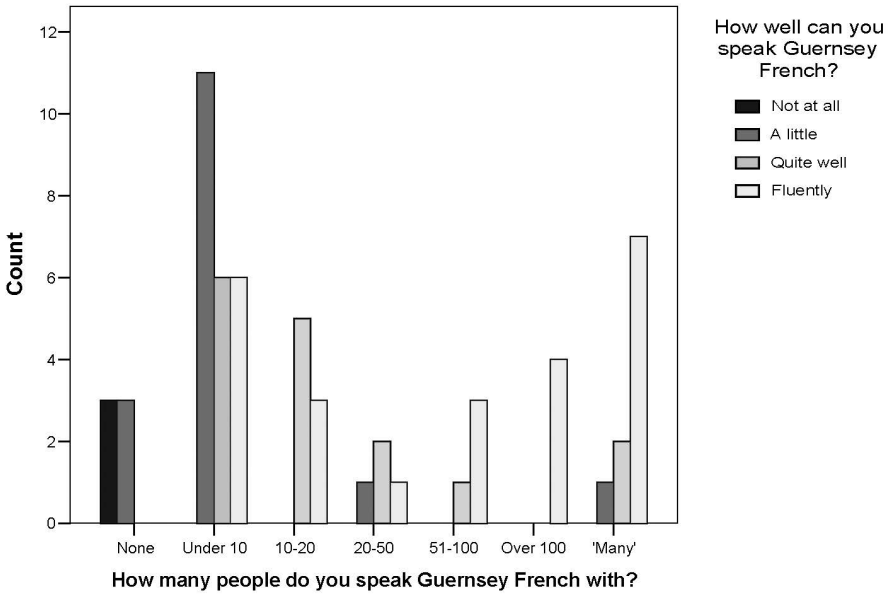


Figure 2. Number of interlocutors cross-tabulated with ability to speak Guernesiais.

Social elements of religion (such as chatting after church services) and overtly language/culture-focused festivals provide virtually the only public forums for using Guernesiais. A number of former locations for speaking and hearing Guernesiais are disappearing; for instance, it used to be heard on buses, but now people use cars more.

*A la shoppe, ouai dans mon temps ch'était tout en dgernesiais. . . . auchet'haere nennîn lé supermarket eh? [laugh] Vous pouvaïz pas vous imaginai qu'y'en a là qui saï—qui save lé dgernesiais!*³ [GF24]

'At the shop in my time it was all in Guernesiais . . . now no the supermarket eh? You can't imagine that there are any there who know Guernesiais!'

The agricultural-horticultural work sphere, which used to support speakers of Guernesiais, is now greatly reduced, but Guernesiais can still be heard at agricultural shows.

Guernesiais is no longer being passed on to children in the family; the youngest native speakers are in their forties.⁴ Inevitably, as the speaker base ages, interlocutors (relatives or friends) pass away. Speakers become house-bound and unable to visit friends, or are obliged to move to old peoples' homes. Older people are unwilling to go out after dark.

Numerous consultants have reported having few or no opportunities to speak Guernesiais nowadays.

Ch'est pas souvent que j'devise en dgernesiais pasque y'a pas grànd'ment de gen qui le devise aucht'haere, ch'est pu lei viar coum mé. [GF36]

'I don't speak in Guernesiais often because there aren't a lot of people who speak it now, it's more old people like me.'

I don't speak it as often now as when my brother who died two years ago—we spoke it—er all all the time—and now I don't have er—it's only when I meet friends who do speak it that I speak it that I speak it, because I don't actually speak it at home because my wife speaks English you see. [GF13]

One consultant commented after an elicitation session, "I've spoken more Guernesiais in the last two hours than I have in the last year" (GF45).

This can lead to lexical erosion in Guernesiais, and a furthering of language contact and code-copying effects. Some speakers report that English comes more easily now. The longer the isolation continues, the more of the language they forget, and consequently they feel less confident when an opportunity does arise. Often when people are speaking Guernesiais, if an English term comes up they continue speaking in English.

Since I started researching Guernesiais in 2000, I have witnessed a clear reduction in the fluency of several consultants, in the complexity of the constructions used in their speech, and in their ability to remember terms and to distinguish Guernesiais from French. Increasingly, they insert English terms in

their speech for which there are well-known Guernesiais equivalents.⁵ I have even had consultants asking me for words.

Attrition is recognized as a problem by consultants themselves. Seventeen of twenty-six questionnaire respondents who gave their first language as Guernesiais reported speaking it less well than when younger, plus half of the ten who stated that they had been bilingual from infancy. Only eight native speakers reported no attrition. Many interviewees reported becoming “rusty,” which several attributed to lack of interlocutors.

Because it is in my background I feel patois is more expressive but you need to use it all the time or lose it. I have very few opportunities to use it now. . . . Since my husband died I’m finding it more difficult to stay fluent. [GF27]

J’ai rombiyai aen ama d’mes maots. [GF28]

‘I’ve forgotten a lot of my words.’

I’m happy to speak it but have found that due to being married for twenty-three years to a nonspeaking wife my Guernsey French is rusty and I have to think. [GF38]

It’s difficult when you don’t speak it a lot, you’ve got to think yourself through it *pasque n’a pas l’chance de palai à autchun avec la maeme langue.*⁶ [GF20]

‘because there’s no opportunity to speak to anyone with the same language’

I’ve had nobody to speak it to since my mother died in 1995. [GF9]

Some stressed that fluency depended on that of the interlocutor:

I’m having to think of the words now, but if I was with a native speaker we’d feed off each other. [GF12]

Several consultants demonstrated awareness of the need to consciously maintain their fluency, and seek or make opportunities to interact with fellow Guernesiais speakers for this reason (e.g., playing bowls or football in Guernesiais). However, in other cases, consultants felt that language could also be a barrier to communication with nonspeakers. This might reflect an act of identity too.

I don’t make much effort to find [opportunities to speak] really apart from meeting people you know that know it—I don’t go to any societies that specifically speak in Guernsey French—I didn’t join l’Assemblaie d’Guernesiais because my wife doesn’t know it and I feel that it would be a division you know? [GF13]

The visibility and audibility of a language in the environment is an important element of ethnolinguistic vitality. Several questionnaire respondents

commented that it is not thought polite to speak Guernesiais in front of people who cannot understand what is being said.

When we were young we were told we should not speak it if there was someone in the room who didn't. [QGF33]

I can only speak for my family and my family's extended relations but that was always the case in our family—you are being very discourteous to anyone if—from our point of view—if you speak it in front of people who don't speak it. In the same way that we'd probably feel about people speaking a language in front of us that we didn't understand. [AQ112]

There has traditionally been a reluctance to speak Guernesiais with people who one is not sure speak it well enough to reply comfortably. Gal (1979) attributes this to language choice by interlocutor, but it can also be explained by linguistic insecurity (Labov 1966:489; Fishman 1991:340). Until some fifty years ago, incomers moving to country areas found it advantageous to learn Guernesiais (and even raise their children speaking it). One consultant told me that his grandparents had come from the United Kingdom to run a hotel and had had to learn Guernesiais.⁷ But as English has become more widespread, speakers are not assertive enough to demand the use of Guernesiais. The circle of active speakers thus shrinks progressively unless speakers make a deliberate commitment to speaking it as often as possible, as some activists are now doing.

Even in areas where ethnolinguistic vitality is highest, people assume that people under fifty years old are unlikely to speak Guernesiais, and so speakers are unlikely to address them in that language. Younger learners therefore find few opportunities to practice (and may receive shocked reactions when they do speak it). Lack of interlocutors is also an obstacle to language-in-education projects and attempts to revive intergenerational transmission. One native speaker reported offering to teach Guernesiais to her granddaughter, who replied, "Who would I speak it to?"

The decrease in the amount of Guernesiais in the aural environment is a hindrance to those trying to learn it.

We've got Marie de Garis's books and stuff like that but you know, so I refer to those and it's trying to grasp some of the words but it's the fact that the language itself is—fading out—you're not exposed to it as much—and as a consequence of that you know you don't really hear as much of it so you don't pick up as much. [AQ166]

Some learners complained that speakers would not talk to them in Guernesiais; one felt that there was reluctance to share the language. This is partly due to the polite tendency to shift to English in the presence of Anglophones described above, and partly because speakers feel they are helping learners by making themselves more comprehensible—by speaking English (or

French). The notion that anyone would make efforts to learn such a low-status language variety has not been grasped by all speakers.

If people continue speaking Guernesiais when nonspeakers are present, it can both motivate learners and provide exposure. A thirty-year-old reported that when working in a local shop as a teenager he had been intrigued by conversations between his older colleagues and customers, which had motivated him to attend evening classes.

4. Language planning for social networks. As discussed above, close social networks may not necessarily be sufficient for the maintenance of minority language varieties and it would be overly simplistic to assume that they are the sole factor at play in any context. However, there are strong indications that they are necessary for language revitalization. The paradox is that the loosening of social networks may well have been a factor in language shift (whether cause or consequence), in which case, how can networks be reinforced (or rebuilt)?

Revitalization of endangered languages is frequently driven by second-language learners. Crystal notes that “this kind of reaction is common among the members of a community two generations after the one which failed to pass its language on” (2000:106). But with little input from family members and few opportunities for formal learning, how can they increase their proficiency? They have few opportunities to hear Guernesiais if they do not know speakers personally. Mass media are one way to provide language input, and many indigenous communities have lobbied for or started minority-language broadcasting. The only regular media provision in Guernesiais is five minutes a week of radio news at 8:35 a.m. on Saturdays, although from 2005 to 2008 Radio Guernsey broadcast weekly lessons which are still available on its website. Channel Television has an obligation to provide language-related coverage for thirty minutes a year. The Guernsey Language Officer (see below) is gradually increasing the amount of Guernesiais on the airwaves, incorporating short phrases into regular programming (e.g., jingles, weather sayings) in order to raise awareness and exposure, rather than confining the language to a single “ghetto” slot. A “phrase of the week” also appears in the local newspaper, with an audio version on its website.⁸

In a second questionnaire, sampled from the population as a whole, I investigated attitudes towards Guernesiais. The respondents’ demographic and linguistic profile reflected that of the general population as reported in the 2001 census, i.e., only just over 2 percent reported speaking Guernesiais fluently. Only 16 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement, “I would like to know Guernsey Norman-French” (using a five-point scale from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly”). Although this statement did not imply any action, the 30.7 percent who agreed strongly are presumably those most likely to try and learn it; if this is a true reflection of demand for learning Guernesiais, then facilities for doing so are woefully inadequate. There are currently two

beginners' evening classes in Guernesiais; lack of opportunities for progression has been identified by the island's Language Officer as a priority to address.

The appointment of a Language Officer for Guernesiais in January 2008 can be seen as a consequence of attitudes towards Guernesiais becoming steadily more positive over the last twenty or so years, which was borne out by my surveys (Sallabank 2005, 2010). Public opinion seems to be in favor of language revitalization, which the island government has responded to with this appointment.

Revitalization is difficult without linguistic documentation and learning materials. Although a dictionary and two short grammatical sketches of Guernesiais exist, there are serious gaps in its linguistic documentation and description. Very little attention has so far been paid to usage and phonology (including prosody), which are the main areas of difference from Standard French. Phonology is an area that learners have particular problems with. To date the only published course in Guernesiais has been Lukis (1981, 1985), which was withdrawn by the author and is no longer available. As mentioned above, conversation lessons are also available on the Radio Guernsey website.⁹ These are valuable because the recordings demonstrate pronunciation; but they follow a phrase-book approach rather than a learning progression.

Older native speakers are also an important source of both knowledge about the language and its oral traditions, many of which have not yet been recorded. Full corpus-based analysis of naturally occurring language is increasingly urgent, and is only just starting to be addressed.

Documentation can also help to promote interaction in an endangered language. Getting people together for recording conversational language encourages them to speak to each other; most of the people recorded so far found this a pleasurable experience. Several had no other interlocutors. A party or reception was held for consultants at the end of a field trip I organized for students of language documentation, which again provided opportunities for speakers to interact and network. One commented afterwards, "it made us feel important, and part of one big family."

Documentation can also play a more active role by providing valuable data for language teaching materials based on fluent usage (e.g., multimedia materials, accurate reflections of pronunciation and usage, traditional songs, and rhymes for use in school lessons). Christison and Hayes-Harb (2006) stress the need for endangered language documentation to focus on the development of teaching materials aimed at the community rather than solely preservation by and for linguists. Making audio or video recordings publicly accessible (subject to permissions from interviewees) also enhances the amount of the language in the public domain.

Active participation in documentation is also an excellent way for learners to make contact with native speakers (and vice versa) and to improve their fluency. An extension of this idea has been developed in the "Master (or Mentor)–

Apprentice” schemes pioneered by Native American communities in California. Fluent speakers (usually older) are paired one-to-one with learners or latent speakers (Hinton 1994, 1997; Hinton and Hale 2001; Reyhner et al. 2003). Such a scheme has a number of advantages.

- It provides practice for learners who may have had passive exposure but have little productive competence
- Apprentices may record sessions for future analysis and revision, further contributing to documentation.
- It incorporates a real-life task-based approach, which aims to preserve knowledge of traditional activities as well as language.
- It gives elders opportunities to speak their native language.
- It serves a useful social purpose in providing interlocutors for isolated older speakers or those in care homes, and keeping them active.
- It helps to rebuild social networks among speakers.
- It is easy to implement, requiring little funding or bureaucracy (although materials and a framework are, of course, useful).

Many of my informants felt that such a program would be valuable in Guernsey, but there is no organized scheme at present. However, some interviewees have implemented something similar on an individual basis—for example, one who learned Guernesiais from his grandfather, and one latent speaker who visits old ladies in nursing homes.

The maintenance of older speakers’ fluency through interaction is supported by findings from research into the care of elderly people with communication problems. Cruice, Worrall, and Hickson (2005) note that social isolation is a predictor of morbidity and mortality in older people and recommended that speech pathologists should promote older people’s involvement in everyday communicative activities. Studies in the treatment of aphasia (e.g., after strokes) indicate that increasing levels of social participation can improve conversational skills (Vickers 2009), and that complementing and supporting existing social networks can significantly improve health-related quality of life (Hilari and Northcott 2006).

The American Mentor-Apprentice schemes are frequently hailed as a success and as a model for other communities. However, I have been unable to find reports of similar schemes elsewhere, and very little in the way of evaluation of outcomes since Hinton (1997), as opposed to guidelines such as Hinton, Vera, and Steele (2002). Admittedly the processes of language revitalization remain poorly documented, but such a gap raises questions about outcomes.

As noted earlier, language and cultural festivals now constitute an important opportunity for speaking and hearing Guernesiais publicly in Guernsey, both by performers and among the audience. As well as fulfilling an increasingly vital social function for isolated speakers, they increase the public visibility and

audibility of Guernesiais and allow speakers to express pride in it, especially through media coverage, which is important for awareness-raising and prestige as well as personal confidence. However, older speakers' increasing infirmity makes it difficult for them to continue attending such events without support and transport, and in recent years fewer older speakers have attended. I was therefore pleased to see the consultant who had reported having nobody to speak Guernesiais to since his mother died in 1995 winning a major prize at a festival in 2006.

Unfortunately, however, the Guernesiais environment at such events is becoming diluted, partly due to the increase in young beginners entering and the attendance of nonspeakers in the audience (in itself a positive sign of increased interest in the language), and partly due to decreased fluency and linguistic self-confidence on the part of organizers and adjudicators.

However, the process of preparation and rehearsal for such events in itself encourages interaction among speakers and learners. For one interviewee, who had lived in England for some years, the affective and social network aspect was an important part of being involved in a revitalization group.

I decided sort of because I knew we were coming back, I thought I'll enter the Eisteddfod so I entered it before we actually came back and took part that first year just in readings and poems really—and then I got drawn into the group La Guaine du Vouest . . . It's a lot of fun—when we've been practising a play and as a group of people we gel very well together and it's very—we have a lot of laughs you know, it's really good fun. [GF39]

Affective networks can thus support language commitment among language revitalization activists. For those who are less fluent, they can also support their language development.

We've got a bit in the play where the postman's delivered letters earlier in the day and comes back later . . . and we had quite a lot of argument about which one should it be you know, and some people were saying well you know I think it ought to be that because *j'i ai dounnai* was sort of more recent than *j'i dounni* you know it sounded a long while away. [GF39]

Even more formal language-learning provision can foster language-oriented social networks (as well as increasing proficiency levels), e.g., intensive language camps such as the *ulpan* pioneered in Israel and developed with considerable success in Wales and Lithuania (Csató and Nathan 2007). Other community-based language revitalization measures are described by Lee and McLaughlin (2001:38–39) under the headings “What pairs of persons can do,” “What families can do,” and “What communities can do.”

Most traditional speakers of endangered languages are not internet users, but for many younger people (whose age profile increases steadily) online communication is a fundamental part of their life. Might social networking become a modern version of multiplex social networks? Lanza and Svendsen note that

Through telephone calls and e-mail and SMS messages, people may in an effective manner and at relatively low prices maintain contact with family, friends, and significant others across long distances. Hence dispersed migrant populations are no longer separated from their homelands by vast oceans and political barriers. [2007:279]

Language maintenance and revitalization can be supported by virtual libraries and learning environments, Facebook pages for activists, discussion lists, blogs, etc., with online opportunities for speaking as well as writing (e.g., Skype). Although such activities as blogging and texting in an endangered language are easily dismissed by older community members (“I don’t do that in any language”), they can help to motivate younger learners and to (re)build communities of speakers.

As noted in the introduction, it is common in language shift situations for more people to understand a language than to speak it productively. While only 20.8 percent of respondents to my first questionnaire reported speaking Guernesiais fluently, 29 percent reported understanding everything. A total of 70.8 percent reported understanding some Guernesiais. Several nonnative or semi-speakers reported lacking the confidence to speak Guernesiais with their children. Only two informants had learned Guernesiais to talk to spouses, and one had a husband who was learning.

Campaigners bemoan the failure to transform understanding (“latent speaking” in the terms of Basham and Fathman [2008], or “competence” in language acquisition terminology [e.g., Scovel 1998]), into active use (“performance” in language acquisition terminology), but to do so needs careful encouragement and support. In an article in a series in a local newspaper written by members of a language activist group, *Le Cheminant* (2002) commented on the 2001 census results, which had just been published:

*J'veur faire aen pllaid es seonnes qui l'caomprend lé guernésiais ioque aen p'tit. . . . Vous counnite tous au moins qu'enne persaonne qui d'vise la langue bian. Quand vous la les veis, fait saeure qu'il vous d'vise en guernésiais. Et fait vottes mux de les repounaîr en patois étous. Vous frat des maques sans doute, mais i'y pas d'souin, vous êtes à pratichet t'chique chause qu'est importante assaîr de garder envie. Ch'est vottes héritage opres tous.*¹⁰

'I do want to make a plea, though, to those who understand the language just a little. . . . You will all know at least one person who can speak the language very well. Whenever you meet, please ask him or her to speak to you in patois and in return, please try to respond in kind. Although you are bound to make some mistakes, the main thing to remember is that you are practicing keeping a valuable treasure alive. It is your heritage after all.'

Lösch (2000:80) notes that performance is not possible without competence, and lack of opportunities for performance affect competence, which can lead to

spiritual isolation. In turn, he adds, what good is competence without opportunities for performance? (Lösch (2000:82). Interaction is thus key to language maintenance and learning at an individual level.

5. Conclusion. The availability of interlocutors correlates strongly with fluency in Guernesiais for both native speakers and learners. The increasing age and isolation of many native speakers contributes to both individual and societal language loss. Although other factors, such as acts of identity for economic advantage, migration, or ideologies of deficit contribute to language shift and need to be addressed in language planning, language revitalization cannot be achieved without rebuilding interactive networks between those who wish to maintain and revitalize a language variety.

It is still possible to maintain Guernesiais at a reasonably fluent level if measures are implemented soon, but as in most cases, language planning efforts have not yet fully succeeded in replacing traditional networks with measures designed to provide opportunities to interact with other speakers and learners. At the same time, there are increasingly positive attitudes towards the indigenous language among the population at large, with more potential speakers wanting to learn. Fostering social networks, using measures such as those suggested above, would enable more native speakers to maintain fluency and to pass the language on to others while fluent native speakers are still alive.

Notes

1. Guernesiais has no standard spelling; for example, the name is also spelled as “Dgernesiais,” “D’Guernesiais, or “Guernésiais.” Each of these is usually mispronounced in various ways by nonspeakers. Its correct pronunciation is [dʒɛrnez’jei].

2. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey/content/articles/2009/09/23/norman_french_in_guernsey_feature.shtml (accessed 30 September 2009).

3. The spelling used in this article follows (to the extent that this is possible) that proposed in De Garis’s (1982) dictionary. This spelling is French-based and does not fully reflect the phonological differences between Guernesiais and French.

4. A few cases of speakers younger than forty were reported in the 2001 census, but activists are unaware of these families.

5. As distinguished from “normal” lexical and structural borrowing from English such as *refrigerator*.

6. This speaker has replaced Guernesiais *daov* or *atou* with Standard French *avec*.

7. Until recently, its bar was a favorite haunt of male speakers.

8. See <http://www.thisisguernsey.com/lifestyle/history-heritage/donkey-dialogue/> (accessed 30 September 2009).

9. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey/people/guernsey_french/ (accessed 30 September 2009).

10. I have copied the original spelling and translation.

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