

# BETWEEN OÏL, OC AND FRANCOPROVENÇAL

## Lexical differences in the interference zone called “Croissant”, based on the linguistic atlases of France

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### Abstract

In Romance linguistics it is a well-known fact that there are two main geolinguistic areas in France, the so called *Oïl* and *Oc* regions. Linguists do not agree as to whether *Francoprovençal* should be considered as part of one of these regions (and if so, of which one) or as a third distinct region. The *Oïl* and *Oc* regions are traditionally not separated by a linguistic borderline, in fact, there is a large interference zone between them. In 1913 Jules Ronjat called this transition area “Croissant” (‘crescent’ – because of its shape) and this name has been used since then. The eastern part of the Croissant reaches even the Francoprovençal territories, so this part is located at the junction of the three major linguistic regions in France. Studies concerning the idioms spoken within the Croissant tend only to describe phonological differences, while works about the lexicon usually review only the specific vocabulary used in a particular geographic area, but they do not summarize the results of the observations and they do not draw conclusions about linguistic borderlines.

This dissertation has three main objectives. The first one is to outline a proposal for a coherent French terminology regarding the denominations of the different dialect levels and language variants. This is an important issue due to the fact that it is not evident what certain French terms (e.g. *patois*) stand for – as their meanings are not clearly determined and their usage can differ from linguist to linguist. Among other factors, these problems make it difficult to find out the relationship between the Romance idioms spoken in France. My aim is to establish a consistent system of the problematic terms in question pointing out that the most important thing is not the term itself used for a certain idiom, but the recognition of the exact position of a certain idiom in a theoretical dialectological hierarchy of closely related idioms (vide 1.2.1.). The second and most important objective is to describe the linguistic situation within the Croissant by studying the lexicon of the idioms spoken in the area of this interference zone, with the help of a certain corpus. My aim is to refine the linguistic borderlines between the *Oïl*, *Oc* and Francoprovençal regions

(vide Chapters 2, 3 and 4). The third objective is to give a detailed presentation and semantic analysis of some interesting linguistic data found in the French linguistic atlases during my research work, revealing parallelisms with similar structures in other European languages (vide 4.4.).

As a main source for my research I have chosen six atlases of the series *Atlas linguistiques de la France par régions*, those ones that cover a certain part of the Croissant and its adjacent areas. In my research, the most important atlas is the *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique de l'Auvergne et du Limousin* (ALAL), as the largest part of the Croissant figures in this atlas. That is why I started looking in ALAL for maps that show lexical variation within the Croissant and its surroundings, and I found 140-150 such maps of the total 1736. The semantic grouping of the concepts presented by the selected maps revealed that the most represented semantic fields were “flora” and “fauna”; that is how I created my corpus of 42 concepts belonging to these two fields.

As a next step, I delimited the exact geographic area for my research and I chose 220 inquiry points (i.e. data collection points). I created my own basic map showing the boundaries of the departments and the 220 inquiry points. Then I made 42 maps – one for each concept of the corpus – presenting the lexical areas determined by isoglosses. Thus, the main elements of the method applied in my work are as follows: I) determination of the isoglosses, II) analysis of the maps, III) summary of the descriptions of the maps, IV) drawing conclusions. (Cf. second objective.)

In 4.4., I analyse some interesting – metaphorical or folk etymological – denominations standing for 14 concepts in my corpus, comparing the data attested in the (Romance) idioms of France to similar structures found in several European (such as Finno-Ugric, Romance, Germanic, Slavic and Baltic) languages. (Cf. third objective.)

The results of my research presented in the dissertation have proved that a certain division of the Croissant is possible, just like the refinement of some parts of the linguistic borderline between Oïl and Oc – although in the case of certain territories further non-lexical analyses can be required. Relying upon the statistics one can also observe that the Francoprovençal territories (that figure in my research) mostly appear to be distinct from the two other main regions – at least, when its status can be unambiguously determined by the maps.