

Spelling trouble: ideologies and practices in Giernesiei / Dgernesiais / Guernesiais / Guernésiais / Djernezié ...

Julia Sallabank (Senior Lecturer in Language Support and Revitalisation, SOAS, University of London) js72@soas.ac.uk

Yan Marquis (freelance researcher and language teacher, Guernsey) janmarquis@suremail.gg

Introduction

The indigenous language of Guernsey is not standardised, and has no official orthography. It is highly endangered, but there is a significant increase in demand for written Giernesiei. Examination of writing practices reveals a wide range of spellings, and inconsistencies between rhetoric and practices. Some speakers and learners, influenced by diglossic notions of ‘correctness’ and prestige, favour French-style spellings for Guernesiais; but most islanders are literate in English only. Language activists may focus on differentiation from dominant or related languages. Learners, meanwhile, may benefit from a systematic, transparent, practical spelling which recognises the lack of ease of typing accents on English-style keyboards.

The resolution of such tensions does not depend on impartial assessment of which orthography is the most efficient, but on community dynamics which may be fluid and not immediately obvious. Given that the future of Dgernesiais rests with learners, it is important to develop an orthography which is useful for learners and teachers, yet acceptable to the remaining native speakers.

1. Guernsey and its language – background

Guernsey is the second largest of the Channel Islands, in the Gulf of St Malo off Normandy. Each inhabited island formerly had its own variety of Norman, one of the *Langues d’Oïl* family of northern France. All the Channel Island Norman languages are now severely endangered; the authors estimate that there are currently only a couple of hundred fluent native speakers of Guernsey’s indigenous language, mostly aged 80 or over. The authors are currently aware of only six speakers under the age of 60 who are able to hold a sustained, impromptu conversation on a range of topics (as there is no full linguistic description, there are no formal tests of proficiency). All the current speakers are bilingual or dominant in English.¹

The Channel Islands are not members of the United Kingdom or the European Union. Nevertheless, British cultural influence is strong, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw almost complete language shift from the indigenous Norman languages to English. There is also a history of French as the ‘High’ language in a diglossic relationship which lasted from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries. French was used in religion, courts of law, politics and schools, and its prestige still influences

¹ One positive development is that one of the youngest adult speakers has a small child who is being raised in both English and Guernesiais.

linguistic ideologies and practices, especially in the areas of writing, teaching and performance (Marquis and Sallabank 2014).

The research in this chapter is based on semi-structured and ethnographic interviews conducted by Sallabank with over 50 speakers, 'semi-speakers', latent/post-latent speakers, and 'new speakers' or learners of Guernesiais, and on examples of writing in Giernesiei collected by both authors.

1.1 What's in a name – and its spelling

Despite the establishment of a government Language Commission in 2013,² Guernsey's language has no official recognition, and its continuing low status is reflected by the fact that it does not even have an official name. It is often known as 'Guernsey French', and also as 'the Patois'.³ In our research speakers express preference for the name /dʒɛrɛzjeɪ/, which is often spelt *Guernésiais* following the De Garis dictionary (re-issued 2012; see below), but alternative spellings in use include *Guernesiais*, *Guernesiaise* (sic.) *Dgernesiais*, *Giernesiei*, *Djernezié*. The last three examples are attempts to demonstrate the pronunciation of the name more accurately, as it is generally mispronounced by Anglophones. The following post on the Guernsey Society Facebook page (24 October 2012), discussing the publication of a children's language guide, *Warro!* (Dowding and Marquis 2012), which is supplemented by online videos,⁴ illustrates the problem:

Can I ask about the pronunciation of 'Guernesiaise'? The chap in the vid⁵ pronounces it 'jern-uh-si-ai'. I'd always thought of it as 'Gern-uh-si-ays'. Is it a matter of opinion or am I definitely wrong? Always happy to learn.

This common mispronunciation is exacerbated by the spelling *Guernésiais*, especially the initial <gu> and the acute accent on the second syllable, which seems to be interpreted as a stress marker (as in Spanish), as well as the <-s> on the end, which together lead to the pronunciation /gɜ:r.ɛziɛz/, which is used so frequently in broadcast media that it has virtually become an unofficial name for the language. Unfortunately other spellings (e.g. *Dgernesiais*) also lead to problematic pronunciations such as /dgɜ:r.ɛziɛz/. This paper will mainly use the spellings *Guernesiais* and *Giernesiei*, reflecting the authors' own preferences and the general inconsistency found in writings.

1.2 Language variation and change

There are several types of variation in Guernesiais. First, the traditional regional dialects divide into two main groups: the West, known as the *haut pas* or 'high country', and the *bas pas* or 'low country' in the North. These are distinguished chiefly by vowel diphthongisation, more 'advanced' palatalization such as /ky/ >/tʃ/, and some lexical differences. Regional variation within Guernesiais is a core value for many speakers and is seen as a source of richness (Sallabank 2010), but also as a disadvantage when it comes to writing. Iconic regional variants such as /o/ ~ /au/ are frequently cited as reasons why Giernesiei cannot be standardised, or even written, and a perceived lack of written texts is often cited as a reason why Giernesiei cannot be taught – a circular argument which

² <http://language.gg/>, accessed 13 April 2015

³ *Patois* is French for 'dialect' with connotations of inferiority and incorrectness, although Guernsey people are often unaware of these.

⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AJWnoMAZH4, accessed 22 June 2015.

⁵ Yan Marquis, co-author of both *Warro!* and this chapter.

is moreover unsupported by evidence, as there is a considerable corpus of literature in Guernesiais (see part 2).⁶

The second type of variation that is relevant to spelling is age-related. Ferguson (2013) conducted an apparent-time study with approximately 50 speakers of Giernesiei (aged 42-100), comparing the grammatical usage of older and younger speakers and their self-reported language practices during their childhood and nowadays. She commented that ongoing change poses a challenge when compiling reference materials: at what stage of development should the language be codified, and whose usage is taken as canonical? And as we point out in Marquis and Sallabank (2014), who decides?

Thirdly, there is contact-influenced change. As noted above, there has been considerable Anglicisation in Guernsey over the last two centuries (Jones 2002; Crossan 2007), and influence from English can be seen even in early 19th-century writings.

All languages change, but as we discuss in Marquis and Sallabank 2013 and 2014, this is not always accepted by speakers, and purist reactions are common, especially in language revitalisation contexts, where contact influence from majority languages is often perceived as decline and/or as pernicious. Moreover, purism in Giernesiei is often influenced by the prestige of French. The result is rejection of innovations or neologisms: 'changing the language' is equated with influence from English, while influence from French (which could be argued to be equally pernicious) goes unnoticed, ignored, or even preferred. This has implications for ideologies of 'correctness' in spelling.

1.3 The role of French

In Guernsey during the nineteenth century, French was the language of administration, education, religion and culture (Girard 1978; Crossan 2005; Métivier 1866). Given this situation, and the relatedness of Guernesiais to French, it is understandable that nineteenth-century writers who wrote in Guernesiais adopted French-style spellings. Readers would undoubtedly have been familiar with the spelling conventions of French, so armed with this and their knowledge of Dgernesiais, readers would with minimal effort have been able to read and understand the texts. It is also probable that the adoption of a French-style orthography could have been an attempt to raise the status of Giernesiei by association (Lebarbenchon 1980): this is the likely origin of the ideology which maintains that French spelling conventions should determine how Guernesiais is written. This ideology continued into the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first; however, spelling practices were (and are) not uniform, and texts often display idiosyncratic spellings (see section 3).

The first dictionary of Guernesiais was compiled by George Métivier (1870), who has been called 'Guernsey's national poet' (Girard 1980). The reference language of this dictionary was French, for the reasons stated above. Although Métivier's spelling in this dictionary, and in his poetry, is clearly influenced by French, it is also possible to discern similarities with that used in the 11th-century Anglo-Norman epic poem *La Chanson de Roland* (Bédier 1968), such as <k> for /k/ where French would use <qu>, possibly a conscious evocation of past status.

⁶ For example, poetry (e.g. by George Métivier, 1831; 1843; 1866; Denys Corbet, 1871; 1874; 1884; Lenfestey, 1875; Mahy, 1922); collections such as Pitts (1883) and Henly (1949); and unpublished work by Nico Guilbert, R. H. Tourtel, Hélier d'Rocquoine, and several others; short stories by Marjorie Ozanne (Hill 2000) and Denys Corbet, plays by Marie de Garis, Mabel Torode and others; Thomas Martin's colossal but little-known translations of the Bible, Shakespeare, etc. (Jones 2008), and in the 21st century, stories collected and written by Hazel Tomlinson (2006; 2007) as well as the Guernsey Song Project (see 2.2).

In 1967 the first edition of the *Dictiounnaire Angllais–Guernésiais* [English–Guernésiais Dictionary] (De Garis 1967) was published, which marked a milestone in the history of written Guernésiais. The *Dictiounnaire* embodies the ideology of French-style spellings as ‘correct’; however, the use of English for word definitions reflected the reality of language shift in Guernsey where English had become the dominant language.⁷ Even some native speakers feel that it includes too much French influence in both spelling and word choice. One interviewee commented:

Ya dei paraul la dau ké jé jomei wi – shé reid du fraessei⁸
[There are words in there that I’ve never heard – it’s very French] (native speaker, 80s).

Although French-style spelling of Guernesiais is overtly preferred by linguistic ‘purists’ (often termed ‘traditionalists’), there are a number of problems associated with its use. Firstly, Giernesiei has sounds that French does not such as diphthongs and affricates /dʒ/ and /tʃ/, which French spelling is ill-equipped to deal with. Secondly, since 1905 most Guernsey people have been educated through English and are not familiar with French spelling conventions, which leads to the kinds of problems noted in 1.1. Thirdly, French influence in writing can influence pronunciation and vocabulary. If readers are familiar with French they may converge towards French pronunciation, as can be heard on the CD *Les Travailleurs De La Mer* (Lawrence-King 2004) which sets some of Métivier’s and traditional rhymes to music. Some critics therefore see the use of French-based spelling as a threat to the autonomy of Giernesiei (e.g. Ainger 1995; see also part 2). Several interviewees commented that Métivier’s writing should not be seen as representative of modern Giernesiei as it is ‘too Frenchified’:

If you talk to somebody of my mother’s age, they’ll look at those poems and they’ll be a bit double-dutch because they’re quite – those people like Corbet and Métivier and so on they were quite erudite weren’t they ... in the Eisteddfod in the past one or two people have recited poems like that – and the reaction very often from people in the audience is ‘oh we didn’t understand a word of that, what was it?’ It’s not your common-or-garden patois as they know it, you know it’s the sort of élite almost (semi-speaker, 60s)

A further consideration concerns the use of apostrophes, e.g. in *Bian-v’nus à not’e d’meure* [‘welcome to our home’] to indicate where French would insert <e> or <r>. Such practices may support the perception/detraction that Giernesiei is a ‘corrupted’ form of French.

The importance of maintaining access to the 19th-century flowering of literature in Guernesiais is sometimes stressed by supporters of French-style orthography. However, although admittedly French influence is strong in this genre, by no means all earlier writers followed its conventions, as can be seen in *The Toad and the Donkey*, a collection of literature from Jersey and Guernsey (Jennings and Marquis 2011) and examples in section 3.

The majority of materials written and published to date have not been intended for pedagogical use, and therefore little or no attempt has been made to assist potential learners who struggle, like many speakers, when decoding the French-style spellings. We will discuss this issue further in section 4.

⁷ Revised editions were published in 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2012.

⁸ Transcriptions of oral Giernesiei quotes in this paper follow the authors’ preferred ‘Progressive Learner Spelling’ described in [part 4](#). Written quotations are spelt as in the originals.

2. Approaches to literacy and orthography

Orthodox Western language ideologies hold standardised, written languages in higher esteem than non-written ones; many minority language supporters therefore feel that a standardised written form is essential for raising the status of their language. Conversely, because the High language fulfils the functions and domains for which literacy is required, there is no context which requires literacy in the local language (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 103; Luepke 2011). Debates about orthography are therefore not only about the merits of different spelling systems, but also about which domains a language should be promoted in. It can also be argued that focusing on orthography (and by association, standardisation) is a consequence of a top-down ideology of language planning which valorises literacy and formal education (Schieffelin et al. 1998: 17) over oral language use in the community, in domains traditionally occupied by minority language varieties as prioritised by Fishman (1991; 2001).

Following the work of Street (1984) and Grenoble and Whaley (2006), we distinguish between two main approaches to literacy and orthography: an 'autonomous' approach which considers writing to be a neutral technology that can be detached from its social context, and an 'ideological' or 'social literacies' approach which takes into account speakers' purposes for reading and writing, and their contexts of use.

Linguists creating orthographies for previously unwritten languages tend to follow an autonomous model where graphemes (letters, characters etc.) are matched to a phonemic inventory of the language. 'Optimal' orthographies are considered to be ones which offer the most 'efficient' technical solutions to 'problems' such as homonyms, homophones, and regional variation. Principles of orthography which take an autonomous approach include:

- To represent the phonemic system of the spoken language
 - To reflect the structure of the language in a transparent way
 - To avoid confusion due to homonyms and homographs
 - To cater for allophones (as identified by linguists)
 - To reflect etymology
- (Fishman 1977; Vikør 1993; Ostler and Rudes 2000).

However, Hinton (2008: 140) comments that 'code-external' considerations often override the 'code-internal' factors that linguists hold dear, citing Sebba's (2007: 14) comment that orthography is not just a systematized set of letters and spelling rules but also something 'fundamentally ideological'. Principles of orthography development which take into account social factors might include:

- Reflecting the main domains of use and their history
- Widening domains of use if desired
- Taking into account oral practices
- Using a writing system that is not too unfamiliar if speakers already read and write another language
- Taking into account available technology and typefaces
- Distinguishing the language from others.

Some of these principles are, of course, contradictory, especially in the second list. We will discuss their relevance to Giernesiei in 2.2 and part 3, with reference to recent examples of writing.

2.1 Ideological factors in writing in an endangered language

Teaching a language is often a key impetus for orthography creation, revision or standardisation. However, Littlebear (2007: xi) warns that 'Teaching our languages as if they had no oral tradition is one factor which contributes to the failures of our Native American language teaching programs'. As well as ideological concerns, we have observed in lessons that focus on written form can hinder the development of oral fluency. Bearing in mind these points, as well as Schieffelin et al.'s caution about 'buying into' a standardising ideology, we can identify several reasons for writing in an endangered language such as Giernesiei.

Like many low-status vernaculars, the use of Giernesiei remained largely oral until the nineteenth Century; it is still written by relatively few people. For promoters of a language with a primarily oral tradition, one debate concerns to what extent its domains can and should be extended. As illustrated by Johnson (2013), promotion of Guernesiais is often through hypertraditionalised genres: enthusiast groups tend to concentrate on folk songs and dance, poetry, 'traditional' tales, and comic plays as tangible ways of expressing their attachment to the language, which may become stereotypically 'associated with an unsophisticated, nonlearned folk culture' (Watson 1989: 49, writing about Scottish and Irish Gaelic). However, debates about domains do not necessarily follow the archetypal patterns of diglossia. Attempts to extend the use of Guernesiais to domains such as social media, which have become staples of everyday communication and thus arguably part of Low domains, are not always welcomed by traditionalists and purists, whereas extra-curricular school lessons and church services including Guernesiais are encouraged.

Recently we have observed a significant increase in demand for written Giernesiei, in a wide variety of genres: e.g. signage, slogans, tattoos, jewellery, social media, song writing, and art, as well as in language learning contexts. Increasingly these seem to reflect post-vernacular language use, in short formats, rather than the traditional genres of storytelling and plays. Indeed, few such original pieces are now being written in Guernesiais, which may reflect changing demographics, both in the loss of fluency and in changing interests. Musical expression in Giernesiei is also being pushed into new genres by the Song Project initiated by the Guernsey Language Commission to produce new songs which include some Giernesiei.⁹

Activists and language planners may wish to increase the amount of their language visible in the 'linguistic landscape' or print environment in order to increase or reclaim status for it; or to raise awareness, since some people are unaware that Guernsey has its own language. This is manifested in inclusion of Giernesiei in the branding of some local products and services, e.g. coffee, bus timetables, notices at an agricultural show.

Another ideological factor is the iconic nature of certain elements of orthography (Sebba 2007), some of which are discussed in section 4. As particular written forms and orthographical conventions can become associated with particular ideologies or groups, spelling 'can be a lightning rod for all the personal, social and political issues that wrack speech communities' (Hinton 2008: 140).

A key motivation in orthography development for a minoritised language, especially one which has frequently been seen as a dialect of a more powerful neighbour, is *Ausbau* (Kloss 1967, 1993; Trudgill 1992): establishing or demarcating a linguistic identity by emphasising features that distinguish it from a *Dachsprache* (literally 'roof language': a related, neighbouring, dominant language). Orthography can be a key tool in such strategies: for example, supporters of Gallo, a Romance variety of Eastern Brittany which is closely related to Norman, sometimes follow Breton-

⁹ For details see <http://www.guernseysongproject.org.gg/> (accessed 28 May 2015).

style spelling (Rey 2010). *Ausbau* can, of course, run counter to pragmatic use of an orthography which is familiar to community members. In Guernsey, there are two *Dachsprachen* and thus two spelling conventions to potentially avoid or converge with.

3. *Perceptions and practices*

The De Garis dictionary is currently the only Guernésiais reference work in circulation and it enjoys high prestige in Guernsey, especially among traditional speakers. It is assumed by some to represent a *de facto* ‘standard’ spelling: for example, adjudicators at the annual Eisteddfod language competition exhorted entrants in the ‘written short story’ class introduced in 2005 to use the Dictionary spelling. However, the Dictionary is by no means fully consistent, especially between the original English–Guernesiais section and the Guernesiais–English wordlist added in the 1982 edition. Table 1 shows not only how the phoneme /dʒ/ is spelt in several ways, but also inconsistency in definitions.

[TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]

The *Dictiounnaire* also gives little guidance on pronunciation (apart from indicating ‘soft g’ in some instances, which itself is confusing as it might refer to /dʒ/ or /ʒ/ and is not stated in all cases). Fluent speakers, learners, and latent speakers wishing to re-activate their Giernesiei all find this confusing:

The funny thing is it’s like you look in here [*Dictiounnaire*] – and for me it’s like – how would I say that – you know the Guernsey French – and then of course you hear it and it’s like ‘ah!’ that means something ... in terms of pronunciation like I say I actually find it quite hard but you listen to it and I can understand it. (latent speaker, 60s)

The majority of respondents who reported writing in Guernesiais claimed to use the *Dictiounnaire* spelling. Furthermore, there is a notion amongst some members of the speech community of unstated boundaries of acceptability based on the spelling conventions of French, as discussed in 1.3. Nevertheless, an examination of practices shows that writers (including self-identified ‘traditionalists’) often deviate from both French conventions and the *Dictiounnaire*. In the following poem, divergences in both spelling and French-style agreement of silent grammatical endings are underlined.

Nous vait les pus viarr
Se torchier les yiars
Dauve les manches d’leux blu corsets d’loine
l’ pense au passaï
Et n sont jaumais lassaï
D’pallaï des Regates de Rocquoise.
(Helier d’Rocquoise: *Les Regates de Rocquoise*)

[We can see the oldest men
Wiping their eyes
With the sleeves of their blue woollen jumpers
They think of the past
And never tire
Of talking about the Rocquoise Regatta.]

It transpired from talking to writers, as well our own experience, that it is very laborious to check every word in the *Dictiounnaire*, especially given its internal inconsistency. One official who was asked to translate a 176-word statement for the British-Irish Council website told Sallabank that it had taken all morning since he was at pains to check each word in the dictionary.¹⁰ So writers tend only to look up words they are not sure of.

More examples of divergence include:

- /w/ may be written <w> instead of French <ou> as in *waique* ['where'] (Ozanne in Hill 2000:9);
- silent third person plural markers may be omitted, e.g.
*Par exemple*¹¹ *nos etats vianne_ d'avai des expaert_ a...*
 ['For example, our States (government) have just had some experts to ...'] (Girard in the *Island Independent* 1988: 11);
Les mouissaons qu'ôime_ iaöue... ['The birds that love the water'] rather than *ôiment* (Jehan 1999: 'Au Réservoir');
- second and third person markers on verbs may interchange, e.g.
... si nous veras des crabbes [if we will see some crabs] rather than *verra*
....Viant vais chique j'ai bâti [Come and see what I have built] instead of *Vians*
 (Les Ravigotteurs 1999: 1 & 7);
- /tʃ/ may be written using the English digraph <ch> and not the French-influenced <tch> (see previous example and the Martin extract below);
- /ʃ/ may be written using the English digraph <sh>, not the French <ch>, e.g.
Shaiqu'il tait papiste ... ['Wasn't he houseproud/meticulous ...'] (Ozanne in Hill 2000: 47)
shâre /ʃa:r/ ['share'-1/2/3S] (Grut 1927: 'Les Ormars').

Et bian tous lés coue que j'vians ishin v'la shü que j'vait, shés l'viär assis a la table a berre du thée ét fumair sa pipe. Eche que vous avai pas au-tchaöse a faire ?
 [Well, every time I come here what do I see, it's the old man sitting at the table, drinking some tea and smoking his pipe. Don't you have anything else to do?]
 (Mabel Torode: *Aen Baté* ['A Boat'], unpublished manuscript)

This extract was written for reading aloud in a theatrical performance, and the spelling is simple, mostly consistent, following De Garis' spelling in part but departing from it to make certain aspects of pronunciation clearer for non-French-speaking readers (another interviewee went out of her way to praise Mrs Torode's spelling for this). The emphasis is on pronunciation rather than on transparency of grammatical features (e.g. no silent <s> on the end of *coue* ['time'], or <z> on *avai* [have-2PL], as would be used in French). An umlaut <ü> is used for /y/, as in German, although elsewhere this diacritic is used as diaeresis similarly to French, to emphasise vowels in a diphthong.

If a text written in French-style spelling is intended to be read by the general public (both speakers and non-speakers), or read aloud for performance, a 'phonetic' (i.e. English-style) guide is often used; some teaching materials follow this practice, sometimes in addition to *Dictiounnaire*-style orthography. A problem associated with this approach is that English does not have consistent sound-spelling correspondences (although individual words are spelt consistently), so readers have a choice of ways in which to interpret the spellings. The following example is a Christmas carol transcribed for recitation at the Eisteddfod festival. Although relatively systematic, its spelling nevertheless fails to accommodate all of the sounds of Giernesie, e.g. nasals or /y/:

¹⁰ <http://www.britishirishcouncil.org/work/guernesiaais.asp>, accessed 17 August 2006 (page no longer available).

¹¹ This spelling follows French pronunciation with *-le* rather than *-lle* typical of Giernesie.

Trajy la nyay, lay jor de nway
Lay p'tee Jaysoo foo nye,
Dons en etarb, parmy lay bate,
Dong l'kwang Josaf fee son yay.
(From the collection of Doris Heaume)

The largest corpus of written Guernesiais is from the pen of Guernseyman Thomas Martin (1839 – 1921), who translated the Bible and over a hundred plays from the works of Shakespeare, Pierre and Thomas Corneille, Molière, Voltaire and Longfellow into Guernesiais. Martin's spellings are very idiosyncratic, and often diverge widely from French spelling conventions while developing over time (Jones 2008). This large corpus is generally ignored by members of the speech community despite its usefulness as a source of material for festivals. In the following extract a mixture of Martin's own orthography and French conventions (here silent plural –s) can be seen:

Auve daie douces roses muskies et auve de vertes arbres
[With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine]
Berchie dans sh'aie fyieurs la auve dans'ries et pyaiezi
[Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight]
(Martin: translation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*).

In addition to these adaptations of French and English conventions, some 'middle generation' speakers (in their 60s and 70s) have developed their own original ways of writing Giernesiei, for their own purposes (unrelated to performance). For example:

LEH WEET DE JORNVEH DEEZE-NUR SHORE NORMAT WEET JEYETAE SESATT AH
[The eighth of January nineteen hundred ninety eight I have been¹² sixty years (old).]

This orthography is quite systematic, using conventions such as:

- English-style <EE> for /i/
- Lack of indication of nasalisation, which is reduced among many speakers: e.g. <OR> for /õ:/ > /o:/, <AT> for /ɛ̃t/ > /æt/
- <J> is used for /ʒ/, as in French
- <H> for a nasal in 'AH', /æ̃/ ('years'); this has also been noticed in other writers.

Another speaker, in his late sixties, uses horizontal brackets over two or three letters to indicate elisions and nasals. This is difficult to reproduce typographically, which contradicts one of the principles of orthographies which take into account social factors listed in 2.2: available technology and typefaces.

This is relevant given that there is increasing use of written Giernesiei in the print environment: both 'traditional' and 'new' speakers are using Giernesiei in social media, as well as what might be seen as 'symbolic' Guernesiais in non-traditional contexts such as shop signs, T-shirts, car bumper stickers, tattoos, jewellery. As with the examples above, a range of spellings can be seen. There are also sometimes unfortunate errors, some of which are due to copying by non-speakers (or to how they feel Guernesiais 'should' look); others are due to mistranslation. For example, in June 2014 the Guernsey Language Commission tweeted a photograph of a tattoo on someone's chest (literally close to the heart), reading *Caontinue à batté* ['carry on beating'] – but an accent has been added on

¹² For past actions before today, fluent speakers use the preterite rather than perfect.

the final *-e*, which should not be sounded. Guernsey Football Club commissioned tee-shirts with a translation of its slogan ‘faster, braver, smarter’, which was translated as *Pus brâve, pus fort, pus malin*. This too was discussed on social media, where in response to a request for a ‘reverse’ translation Yan Marquis pointed out that *brâve* is not a word he has heard people use in Guernesie. It can be argued that both the orthographic and lexical choices here are influenced by notions of ‘correctness’ from French.

Such examples seem to respond to a desire to express emotions through local language, perhaps as an expression of ethnolinguistic identity in a post-vernacular setting (Shandler 2006) rather than as a means of communication. As such, they do not need to be accurate, just to express the ‘the idea of Guernesiais’. They are also effective in raising awareness of the language and its endangerment, thus satisfying another of the principles of ‘social’ orthographies. In response to the post about the football club slogan, another person commented ‘How cool. We need more signs in Patois. It’s a dying language and that’s sad.’ Marquis replied that efforts were being made to revitalise it, to which the response was ‘How can we help?’.

As described earlier, the Guernsey Song Project is a recent initiative to write songs at least partly in Guernesiais. The project was also designed to encourage interaction between new/non-speakers (mainly musicians) with older, more proficient speakers: a variation on the Master-Apprentice/mentoring approach to language revitalisation. The project’s name in Guernesiais is *la sharsan* /la ʃæsæ̃n/, (‘the song’), while the pairing of musicians and speakers is called *ley bohti* /lei bɔti/ (‘the buddies’) – both written in non-traditional spellings. During the writing process lyrics were written down using the writers’ own preferred notations, probably to help them remember pronunciation: for example, *remuke teh pournais* /rmuk tei pɔːneɪ:/ (‘shake your parsnips’, i.e. ‘hurry up’), which includes a mixture of English- and French-style conventions. Finished versions may be edited for ‘correctness’ by the Guernesiais-speaking partner, but may nevertheless diverge from the *Dictiounnaire*, e.g. one includes:

maïre instead of *maïr* /maɪr/ (‘sea’)

veir instead of *veies* /veɪ:/ (‘to see’); *veir* may be influenced by French *voir*.

In his report on experiments in teaching Guernesiais, Tomlinson (1994) remarks that it is difficult for modern learners in a school situation to learn without taking notes (which is also our experience), so the lack of a consistent and practical spelling system hampers learners. We have gathered examples of the ways that adult learners write down vocabulary and phrases, as well as annotations made on learning materials. Some learners use a mixture of English- and French-inspired spellings, or alternate between the two, for example:

‘*Bailler a haut* – give up, retire’, which follows *Dictiounnaire* and French conventions, immediately followed by
‘*Souchorne*¹³ – support/hold’ (3PL).

Another learner, who does not speak French, rewrote the word *bere* /bɛ:r/ (‘to drink’) on a worksheet as <bear>. This is an example of a mnemonic strategy to aid pronunciation, but also of the tendency of English-dominant learners to prefer English-style orthographies (Hinton 2014).

¹³ This would probably be spelt <souchiannet> using *Dictiounnaire* precepts, although this verb form is not given. In Tomlinson’s (2008) ‘Descriptive grammar’ the root is given as <tiennent> - a French spelling which does not reflect Guernesiais pronunciation, which is given ‘phonetically’ as ‘i tyon’.

A further problem found through lesson observations is that learners cannot always decode or remember their own notations, especially when they include unfamiliar sounds (not found in English or French), e.g. <bahk> for /bæ:k/ ('beach') was later read back as /bɑ:k/.

It is noticeable that most Dgernesiais writings contain considerable inconsistency, both internal and compared to each other. One 'solution' is the acceptance of variability in spelling (including a certain latitude for error). For example, the *Bulletins* of L'Assemblaie d'Guernesiais include short stories and poems, which until the late 1990s were written only in Giernesiei but which now include English translations. From the 1970s–1990s the introductory pages included the statement:

Notaai s'y vous pllait: L'Epellage dans [des] les articles du Bulletin a etaai lesi a la discretion des contri[b]uables

[Please note: spelling in the articles of the Bulletin has been left to the discretion of the contributors.]¹⁴

However, returning to the notion of acceptability, the back cover of *Histouaires Guernésiaises*, a recent publication which uses what might be described as a 'traditional' orthography, seems to suggest acceptance of alternative spellings, scope for the development of a system for learners and a move away from the perceived 'tradition': 'Guernsey-French was an unwritten language and therefore there is no "right" way of spelling words when writing it.' (Tomlinson 2009).

Although it is tempting to interpret inconsistent spelling as liberating compared to the rules that apply when writing in French or English, lack of consistency in spelling Guernesiais is due as much to lack of literacy training as to any rebelliousness against standardisation – nobody has ever been taught how to read and write in Giernesiei. However, as we discuss in section 4, readers have to be quite fluent to cope with variation in spelling. 'Free spelling' is unhelpful for language learners, who are likely to constitute an increasingly important readership when a highly endangered language is being revitalised. We discuss this further in the next section.

4. Discussion and proposals

4.1 Purposes and readership(s)

To date, the purpose of writing, and the intended readership, have been missing from discussions of how Giernesiei should be spelt. The readership of traditional genres and texts is small and dwindling, while demand for texts in new domains is growing, as is the number of people who want to learn Giernesiei as a second language. The use of 'phonetic' (i.e. English-style) pronunciation aids seems to support the argument that a revised, simplified orthography could help learners.

The majority of both 'traditional' and 'new' writing in Giernesiei seems not to be intended for communication but for symbolic purposes: for performance, identity construction, or awareness-raising. In contrast, the authors of this chapter email, text and post Facebook and Twitter messages in Giernesiei at least once a week – to our knowledge the most frequent use of written Giernesiei at the present time. Unlike most of the examples that have been mentioned, our emails have real

¹⁴Since the 1990s, especially since the advent of word-processors, this disclaimer has disappeared, and pieces published in the Bulletin seem to have undergone editing to make them converge more towards French conventions.

communicative purpose. Over the last 6-8 years we have been experimenting with spelling systems and discuss the results below.

Given that Dgernesiais is highly endangered, our efforts in the last six years have focused on documenting the speech of the last fluent speakers. Our aim is to use the data to produce learning materials, initially for adults, as we see the lack of proficient younger adults as the most urgent problem – without them there can be no children learning the language. Both transcription of recordings (to create a searchable corpus of language in use) and materials development are hampered by the lack of a systematic orthography.

Research into reading indicates that ‘deep’ orthographies, which prioritise grammatical or etymological information over phonology (e.g. French, English, Chinese), are not necessarily problematic for fluent speakers and readers of a language. But inconsistency is problematic, especially for second language learners: it makes it difficult to decode pronunciation and meaning and to develop reading fluency. A shallow orthography (i.e. with clear sound–spelling correspondences) is easier for beginning readers to process (Wallace 1992; Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 142). As shown in section 3, neither traditional nor new speakers’ spelling practices are clear or consistent. Grenoble & Whaley (2006: 142) comment that ‘It is therefore important to keep the act of learning to read and write as simple as possible, and so orthographies for communities creating revitalization programs should be designed primarily with beginning readers in mind’. A consistent, transparent and simplified orthography for Giernesiei is therefore increasingly necessary.

In 2013 two Facebook pages were set up by learners, with the aim of providing a forum for written expression without correction or criticism. Some ‘new speakers’ also started tweeting in Giernesiei. Some (but by no means all) of these social media writings use French-style spellings, e.g.

Cor chapin! I fait caoud durnant¹⁵ la niet
[‘Gosh! It’s hot in the night’]

Raide embarrasi chutte serai dans les courtils de St Pierre Very busy this evening in the fields of St. P [translation provided, with a photo of a combine harvester].¹⁶

It is likely that (despite errors) both of these writers consulted the *Dictiounnaire*, possibly for pragmatic reasons given that it is the only dictionary available, but issues of audience and purpose are also relevant. Firstly, there might be a degree of self-censorship, as a few ‘traditionalists’ also read the Facebook page. Secondly, if posts do not include a translation, supporters who do not understand Giernesiei often demand one (‘What does it mean?!’). As some of these supporters know French, it seems that some writers prioritise clarity of meaning over reflection of pronunciation through their spelling choices.

4.2 Orthography as process

Learners of Giernesiei frequently struggle with pronunciation and complain about lack of exposure to oral input. Although French-style spelling may be felt to clarify meaning, for Giernesiei to survive as a living, spoken language, writing also needs to clarify pronunciation. As noted by Grenoble and Whaley (2006), learners of endangered languages are more reliant on written materials than

¹⁵ A misspelling of *durant*

¹⁶ The second also shows French influence – or perhaps literal translation from English – in choice of lexis (*chutte serai* instead of *a ceisé* for ‘this evening’).

learners of languages of wider communication, as they are unlikely to have much exposure to the language outside lessons; this is the case in Guernsey. We have therefore developed what we term 'Progressive Learner Spelling' (PLS). As the name implies, this orthography is intended to aid learners, not native-speaker writers. It is flexible and responsive: for example, we have altered our proposed spelling of /ɔ:/ from <aw> to <au> accommodate learners' observed usage, where French-style spelling uses <en> (sometimes <an>), which frequently has a negative impact on pronunciation.

Other considerations we have taken into account include:

- Keeping diacritics to a minimum
- Systematic phonemic representation
- Avoiding unsounded letters
- Dialect variation (e.g. <iao> to represent /jaw/ or /jo/, 'water')
- Avoiding unnecessary multiple vowels (e.g. <iaoue>, 'water' in the *Dictiounnaire*)
- Inclusion of some 'iconic' features of 'traditional' spellings
- *Ausbau* or distanciation.

Distanciation is supported by the Guernsey Language Commission, which stresses the need to refer to 'Guernsey's language' not 'Guernsey French' (personal communication): this is partly to avoid the need to tackle the pronunciation of the name *Giernesiei*, but also to stress autonomy. The principle of *Ausbau* can, however, mean that the PLS can look 'foreign'; for this reason we feel that it is also important to retain some spellings which have become iconic features of writing in Guernesiais, e.g. <eu> for /œ/, <aon> for /æ̃/, and <ll> for palatalised l or /ʎ/ before high vowels after stop consonants (*l mouillé*, 'moistened l' in French). The PLS also includes some of the practices of earlier writers such as Métivier and Ozanne, including <k> and <sh>.

A further issue is source orthographies. One option might be to base a systematic orthography on 'traditional' (French-based) usage with inconsistencies ironed out. Another could be to base it on English phonemic representation. However, as noted above, neither fully represents all the phonemes of Guernesiais. A further option might be to look to the spelling conventions of other Romance languages which have undergone similar phonological development to *Giernesiei* with regard to Latin *bl, cl, fl, gl, pl*, e.g. Italian *bianco, chiave, fiore, ghiaccio*; the use of <ll> for palatalised l (and by extension, /j/) is a Spanish convention. A fourth alternative might be to start from scratch with a new but systematic sound-spelling correspondence. However, these suggestions need to be tempered by a reminder that the majority of adult learners are (only) familiar with English spelling conventions.

Reactions to our proposals have been mixed. Despite Holton's (2009: 252) suggestion that some learner-oriented reform is 'so radically different that it escapes puristic corrections from elders', it is perhaps inevitable that the PLS is rejected without consideration by prominent traditionalists. They are not, however, its target audience; our concern is primarily to increase the number and proficiency of new speakers, and already there are some indications that using this spelling seems to improve learners' pronunciation.

Nevertheless, many learners desire access to older writings. Despite common perceptions, by no means all of these follow French conventions, as shown in section 3; arguably the main problem in accessing these writings is their inconsistency. The key to this problem is increased fluency. Once a new speaker is familiar with the spoken forms of Guernesiais, it becomes much easier to match a

written form with a representation in the mental aural lexicon. We argue that the PLS offers significant advantages in terms of attaining fluency.

Given local language ideologies and sensitivities, it would nevertheless be advantageous to have public support or sanctioning from an official body such as the Guernsey Language Commission, which has already embraced the need to increase the number of younger adult speakers as part of its strategy. Awareness-raising and *Ausbau* seem to strike a chord with political goals to emphasise local distinctiveness and 'island branding', and so ideological factors in orthography choice may coincide with political agendas (see Sallabank 2013).

4.3 Conclusion: New speakers – new orthographies?

The future of highly endangered languages such as Guernesiais lies with 'new' speakers', who are starting to write Giernesiei in ways that suit their needs. 'Rememberers' (Grinevald and Bert 2011) and semi- or latent speakers who want to 're-activate' their Dgernesiais are important in language revitalisation; but the majority of people under the age of 50 who want to learn Giernesiei are second language speakers with little or no prior experience of the language. They are mainly monolingual and literate in English, and many have little knowledge of French and its spelling conventions.

Social media and learners' notes can provide 'crowd-sourced' spellings as an alternative to top-down standardisation, so we encourage learners and 'reactivating' latent speakers to 'have a go' at using their own spelling ideas. Admittedly, lack of language knowledge can lead to odd spellings and grammatical forms; these will either disappear with increasing fluency, or will become part of the Giernesiei of the future.

A crucial issue is whose voices are heard in the development of a language. Should spelling be a 'link to the past' or a 'bridge to the future', in the words of one of Sallabank's students? 'Hypertraditionalisation' and the valorisation of 'last speakers' are common themes in endangered language discourses, so until recently little or no allowance has been made for the needs or views of new speakers. We argue that decisions regarding language and orthography development should be taken by learners and future users.