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# Time, space and politics: what overseas French varieties and French creoles can teach us about the mechanics of diatopic diffusion in a globalized world

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Venue: Komatsu University, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan  
Main theme: Interpretation of Linguistic Maps

Speaker: André Thibault

Title: Time, space and politics: what overseas French varieties and French creoles can teach us about the mechanics of diatopic diffusion in a globalized world

## 1. Introduction

French (under various social and regional forms) was exported to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the duration of the contact between new colonial varieties and European French has varied a lot from one region to another. This has had repercussions on the spreading of linguistic features, as can be seen in the study of geolinguistic material.

We will see, through a series of examples, that the French-speaking world (including French creoles) is built around a center of expansion (roughly, the northern half of France) from which innovations radiate outwards, but at different speeds and only when political ties have been strongly maintained. We will focus more precisely on the differences between French Creoles in the islands that still belong to France (Martinique and Guadeloupe) and in those that broke ties with the motherland (Dominica and St. Lucia); a strong emphasis will also be put on the parallelisms between Canada and the ex-British islands. The influence of European French on Guadeloupe/Martinique Creoles and, to a lesser extent, on Canadian French, will be exemplified and contrasted with the strong archaism that characterizes Dominica and St. Lucia Creoles.

## 2. The architecture of Gallo-Romance: primary dialects, Standard French (with its secondary dialects), expatriate varieties and French creoles

Before presenting and analyzing the geolinguistic data, we shall first have a look at the overall architecture of the Gallo-Romance world, which includes various realities that must be clearly differentiated.

### 2.1. Primary dialects<sup>1</sup>

The local evolution of regional Latin on, roughly, the territory of what was once called ‘Gaul’ has given birth to a large dialectal conglomerate known as “Gallo-Romance”, usually represented as tripartite. In the northern half we find the “Oïl” dialects; in the south, the “Oc” dialects; and in the central-eastern region, the “Francoprovençal” dialects. These so-called “primary dialects” (born out of the dialectalization of regional Latin) were spoken until the twentieth century, but in the last five hundred years they were strongly influenced by Standard French, in a typical situation of diglossia; nowadays, they are nearly extinct. The geolinguistic diversity of primary Gallo-Romance dialects has been widely displayed in the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (or ALF, see Gilliéron / Edmont 1902-1910) as well as in numerous regional atlases. In the French-speaking world, such primary dialects are usually referred to as “patois” by non-specialists.

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<sup>1</sup> On the tripartition “primary, secondary and tertiary dialects”, see Coseriu (1981).

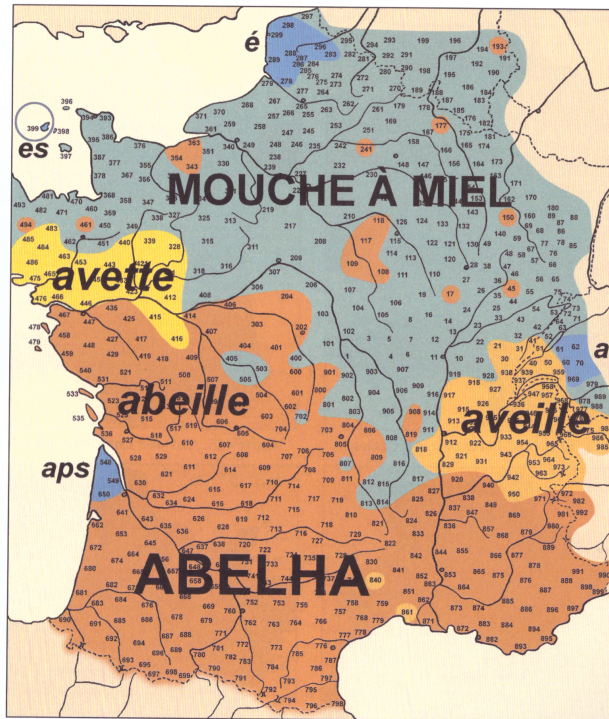
Karte 5: Die Dialekte der *langue d'oïl* und der *langue d'oc* im Mittelalter  
 (adaptiert nach Bec 1970/1971, vol. 2, Karte 1, und vol. 1, Karte 9)



Lexikon der Romanistischen Linguistik, vol. V, p. 580

Map 1: The Gallo-Romance dialect conglomerate

Lectures de l'Atlas Linguistique de la France



Carte 448. A1.F 1 Aheille - aires lexicales

Map 2: The concept “bee” in Gallo-Romance dialects (Le Dù *et al.* 2005, 300)

## 2.2. Standard French and secondary dialects

In the Middle Ages, a standard variety gradually emerged in the “oil” territories, as a sort of spontaneous written “koine” based on the most common usages among the oil dialects and was disseminated thanks to centralized institutions such as the Paris-based Royal Chancellery (see Glessgen 2017). This prestige code, the ancestor of Standard French, soon began to be used as a replacement for Latin, in literary productions as well as in texts on science, law, religion, etc. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it underwent a process of explicit standardization and, at the same time, started to conquer new social classes and territories.

Simultaneously, the very dissemination of French over new territories led to its “regionalization”—that is, to its regional differentiation (Chambon / Greub 2009). Regional varieties of Standard French are called “secondary dialects” (born out of the regional differentiation of French itself, not of Latin); among French specialists, they are also often referred to as “regiolects”. Regional particularities of twentieth- and twenty-first-century French in Europe have been described in numerous dictionaries, of which Rézeau (dir.) (2001) is the most elaborate; as far as atlases are concerned, Avanzi (2017) as well as this author’s online blog called *Français de nos régions* offer a wide variety of maps.



Map 3: The concept “pencil” in contemporary European French (Avanzi 2017, 14)



### 2.3. Expatriate varieties

French (along with Spanish, Portuguese and English) was exported by native speakers to the New World in colonial times. This phenomenon gave rise to a special kind of secondary dialects, the so-called “expatriate varieties”.

They are characterized by:

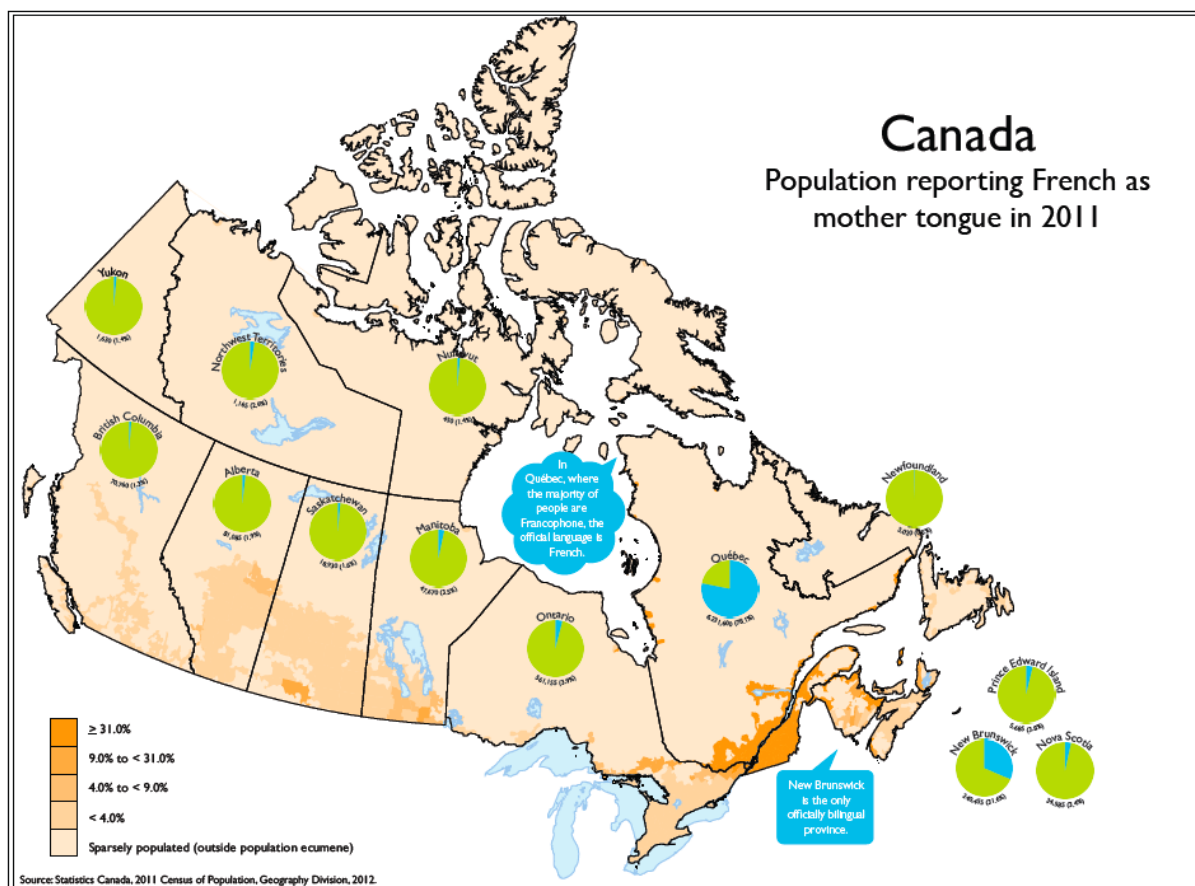
- a) an interruption in contact with the primary dialects;
- b) koineization (mixing and levelling of metropolitan regiolects, with selection and reallocation of the variants—see Britain/Trudgill 1999);
- c) an interruption (or a reduction) in contact with the metropolitan norm and its evolution;
- d) contact with other languages (for example, Canadian French has been influenced by Native American languages and, most of all, by English);
- e) eventually, the emergence of a partially divergent norm—in other words, an independent standardization (for instance, American English has particular spellings of its own, in contrast with British English: *center* vs. *centre*; this phenomenon has been termed “pluricentrism”).

The biggest variety of expatriate French, in terms of number of speakers, is found in Canada<sup>2</sup>. There are many dictionaries dedicated to the regional particularities of French in Canada, such as the DHFQ (1998); as far as atlases are concerned, Dulong / Bergeron (1980; widely known as ALEC, *Atlas Linguistique de l'Est du Canada*) is the most comprehensive one<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> There currently might be more native French speakers nowadays on the African continent, but their variety of French belongs to what Coseriu calls “tertiary dialects”—that is, varieties that were born out of the acquisition of a new language by a whole speech community, through a certain period of bilingualism. The French spoken by Creole speakers in the Antilles belongs to this category, but will not be taken into consideration in this study, due to a lack of sufficient geolinguistic data.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, though, the ALEC doesn't contain linguistic maps as such, but only linguistic material that can be used to generate maps. In this study, all the maps that exemplify traditional Canadian French were done with ALEC data by Mathieu Avanzi, whom we wish to thank for his help.



Map 4: Proportion of citizens with French as their mother tongue in Canada<sup>4</sup>

## 2.4. French Creoles

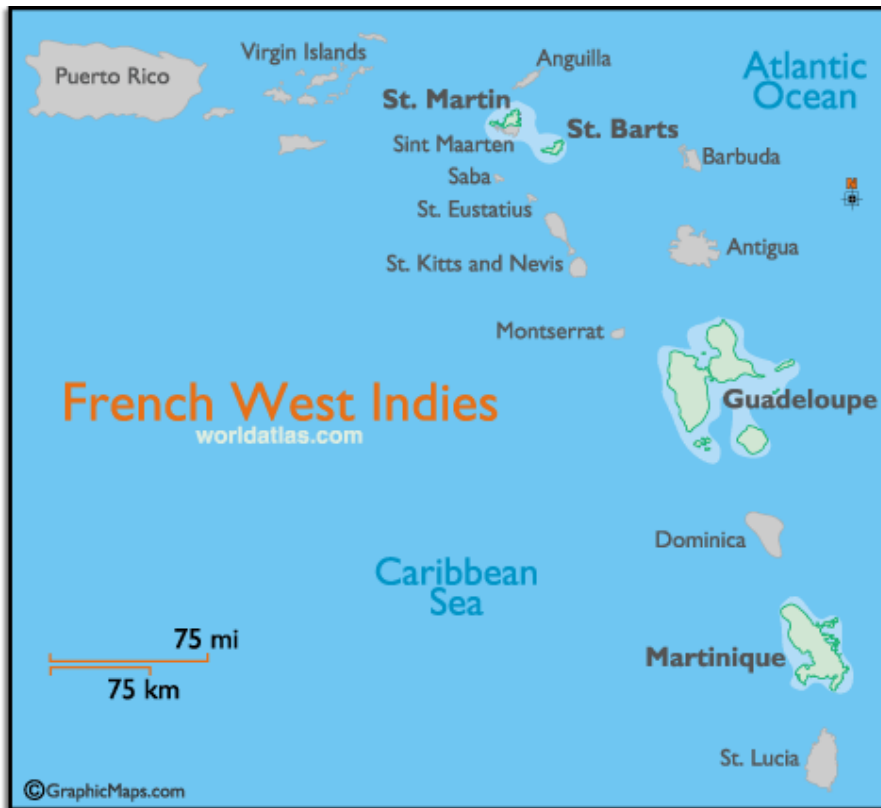
Creole languages appeared in the particular sociolinguistic context of the sugarcane plantations, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly on island territories. Relatively young speakers of African languages (numerous and not mutually intelligible) had to learn, outside of any formal setting and with insufficient exposure to the target language, the spoken French of the colonists. Creole languages were born out of this process, with variant selection and reallocation, structural reorganization and substratic influence of the mother tongues.

The contact between French creole varieties and metropolitan French can be quite significant or virtually nonexistent, depending on the local situation and the historical period. Two atlases represent the dialectal variety of French Creoles in the Caribbean: Fattier (2000) for Haiti and Le Dû / Trigaud (2011-2013) for the Lesser Antilles. In this study, we are going to limit ourselves to the latter.

<sup>4</sup> <http://continent.uottawa.ca/colloques-et-expositions/expositions/le-francais-au-canada-dun-ocean-a-lautre/le-francais-a-travers-le-canada/>



Map 5: The islands of the Caribbean<sup>5</sup>



Map 6: Close-up of the French West Indies in the Lesser Antilles<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Caribbean-political-map.htm>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/caribb/fwindies.htm>

### 3. Historical and geographical landmarks

French in France is in constant evolution and new features reach far-off territories or not depending on a series of factors. The period of contact between the motherland and its (ex-)colonies is extremely important when it comes to understanding the differences that can be observed from one region to another. The nature of the political or cultural relationship also has to be taken into account. Here are a few points that must be kept in mind when analyzing the geolinguistic data.

#### 3.1. Acadie

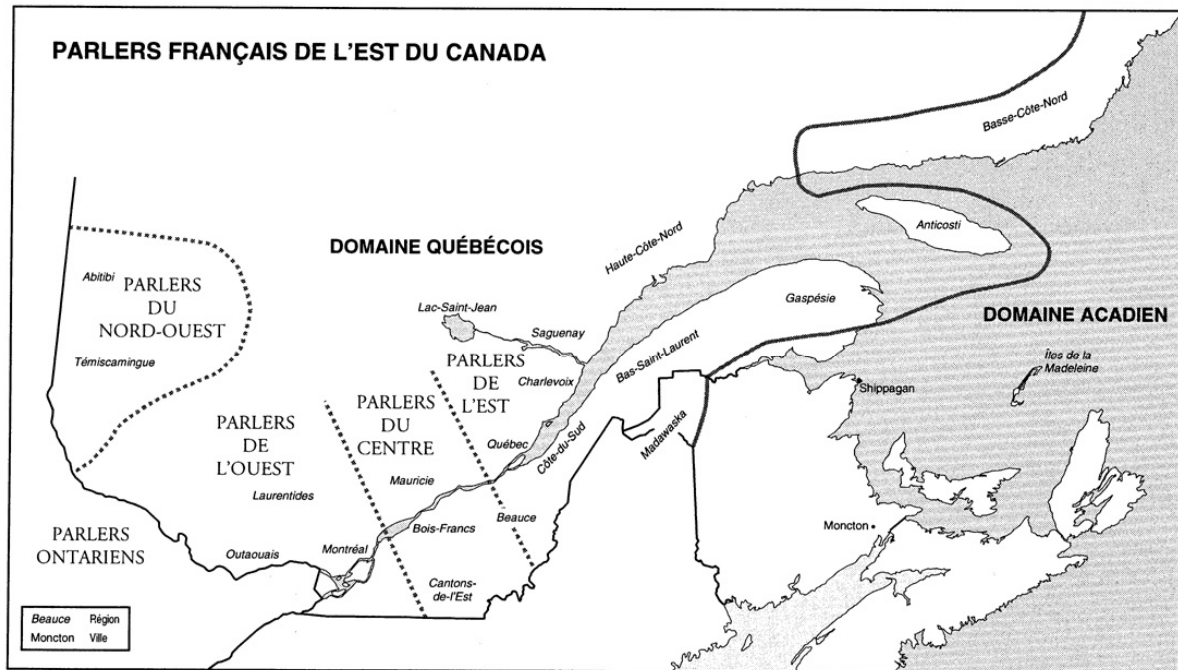
Acadie (Canada's most eastern French-speaking region) was founded by the French in 1604 and separated from the homeland in 1713 (Treaty of Utrecht). It was then totally isolated from the European norm, well into the nineteenth century, when a French-language school system could slowly start to disseminate Standard French again. But Acadian French is still very strongly influenced by English.



Map 7: Acadian French zones in Eastern Canada

#### 3.2. Québec

The rest of Nouvelle-France (roughly what is now the province of Québec in Canada; Québec City was founded in 1608) fell into British hands in 1763 (Treaty of Paris). At first, the ties with France were totally cut. In the nineteenth century, contacts with European French slowly started again, through French priests who had been “imported” from France. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, radio, television and international mobility, as well as the French-Canadian (Québécois) school system, have disseminated a passive knowledge of European French among the population. The influence of the English language, although clearly present, is weaker than in Acadie.



Carte 4

Map 8: “Québécois” and “Acadian” French in Eastern Canada (DHFQ 1998, lxv)

### 3.3. Dominica

The French gradually settled down in the island of Dominica, in the Antilles, in the middle of the seventeenth century. The island became British in 1763 (Treaty of Paris), like most other French possessions in the New World. The use of the French language was not really maintained after the British conquest, since it was replaced by English as a prestige language, but the French creole that had taken root during the French regime is still alive and well. As we will see, it has kept features of a state of language that goes back to colonial times.

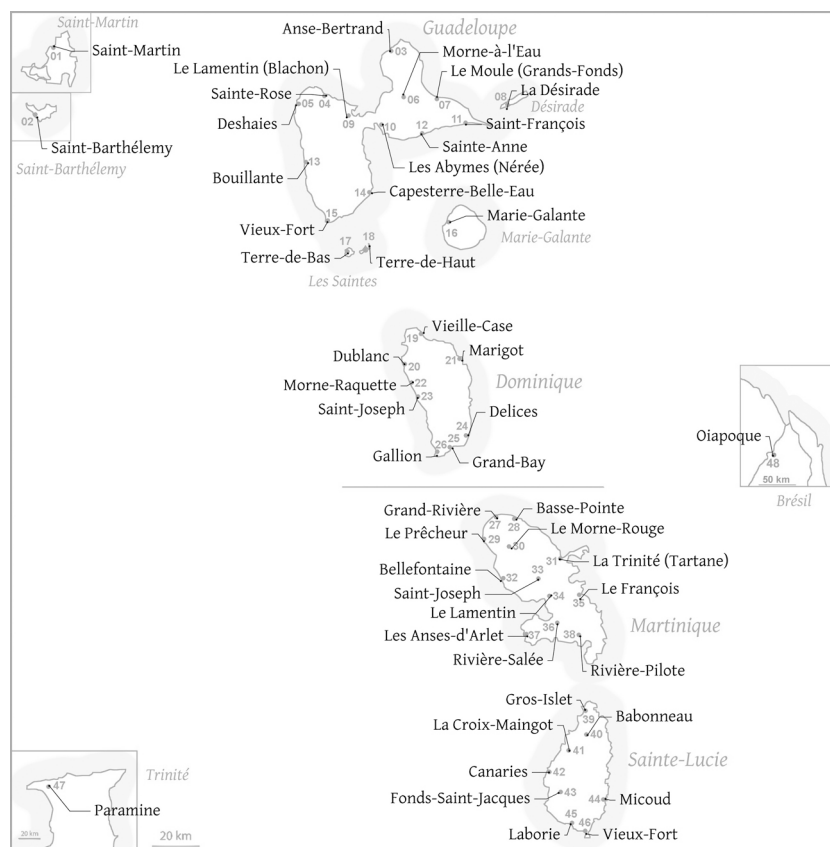
### 3.4. St. Lucia

The island of St. Lucia, also gradually occupied by the French from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, became English half a century later than Dominica, in 1814. The linguistic situation is similar in both islands, with the presence of a French creole that coexists with English as an official language, and the longtime loss of contact with Standard French.

### 3.5. The French overseas departments (Guadeloupe and Martinique)

The French overseas departments Guadeloupe and Martinique, occupied by the French since the mid-seventeenth century, still politically belong to France. Therefore, their creole varieties have always been (and still are) in close contact with metropolitan French. In recent times, they seem to have undergone a process of “Frenchification”, also called “decreolization” (similar to what the primary dialects in France have also experienced).





Map 9: Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique and St. Lucia (ALPA, vol. I, p. 19)

Territories		Timeline				
		17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	20th c.	21st c.
Canada	Acadie	1604...	...1713		...	...2018
	Québec	1608...	...1763		...	...2018
ex-British islands	Dominica	ca 1650...	...1763			
	St. Lucia	ca 1650...	...	...1814		
French overseas depts.	Guadeloupe	ca 1650...	...	...	...	...2018
	Martinique	ca 1650...	...	...	...	...2018

Fig. 1: Chronological overview of contact between France and overseas territories

#### 4. Analysis of the geolinguistic material

After this portrait of the general situation, we are going to have a look at a series of maps dedicated to features (both lexical and phonetic) that will show how political separation can affect the distribution of variants across the French-speaking world (at large). The creole of the French Departments (Guadeloupe and Martinique) will be systematically compared with the one spoken in the ex-British islands (Dominica and St. Lucia). Where data is available, parallels between Canada and the ex-British islands will be highlighted, for they are very relevant to our approach.

Here are the variants that we are going to study:

- lexicon: concepts related to clothing (“socks”, “pants”, “pair of shorts” and “clothes”)
- pronunciation features:
  - final consonants
    - final consonant restitution in standard French (*avriL*, *sourciL*, *aoûT*)
    - absence of final consonant restitution in standard French (*juilleT*, *minuiT*)
  - pronunciation of the <oi> spelling: [we] in the old norm, [wa] in the new one
  - nasalization of [l] > [n] in *caleçons* > *caneçons* (lower-class French)

##### 4.1. Lexicon: concepts related to clothing

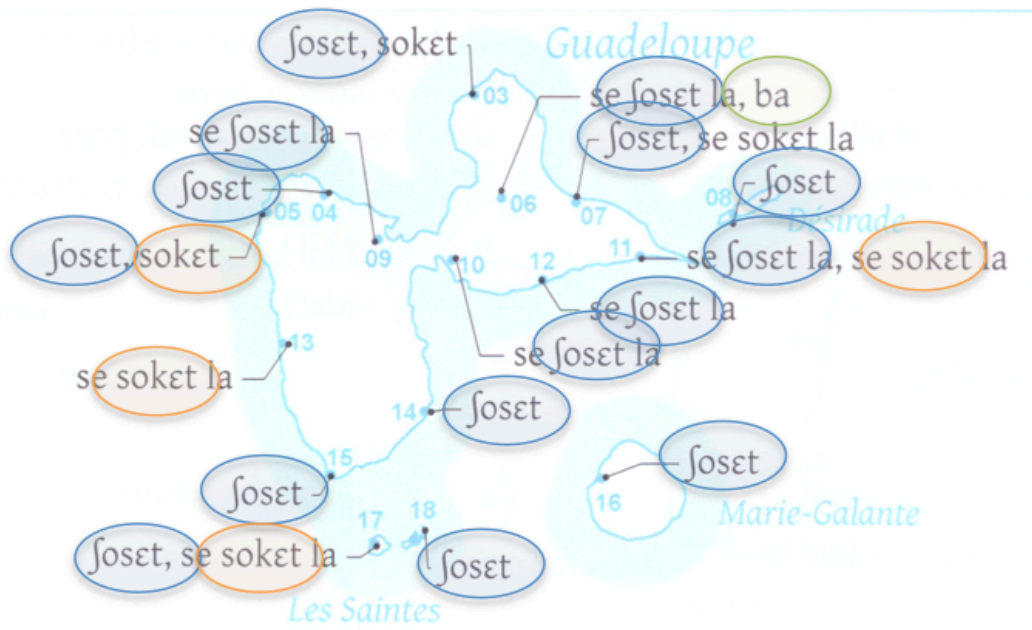
###### 4.1.1. “socks”: *bas*, *chaussons*, *chaussettes*, *socquettes*

The concept of “socks” is expressed in modern standard French with the word *chaussettes* (as well as *socquettes*, a very recent French brand name—1930, see TLFi). The word *chaussettes*, although very old (it is attested since the Middle Ages), must have been relatively rare in the speech of French colonists in the New World to refer to “socks”: in traditional Canadian French, this piece of garment is known as *bas*<sup>7</sup> (the most neutral word; see Dulong 1989) or *chausson* (less frequent; see GPFC 1930<sup>8</sup>). What do we find in the creole-speaking islands?

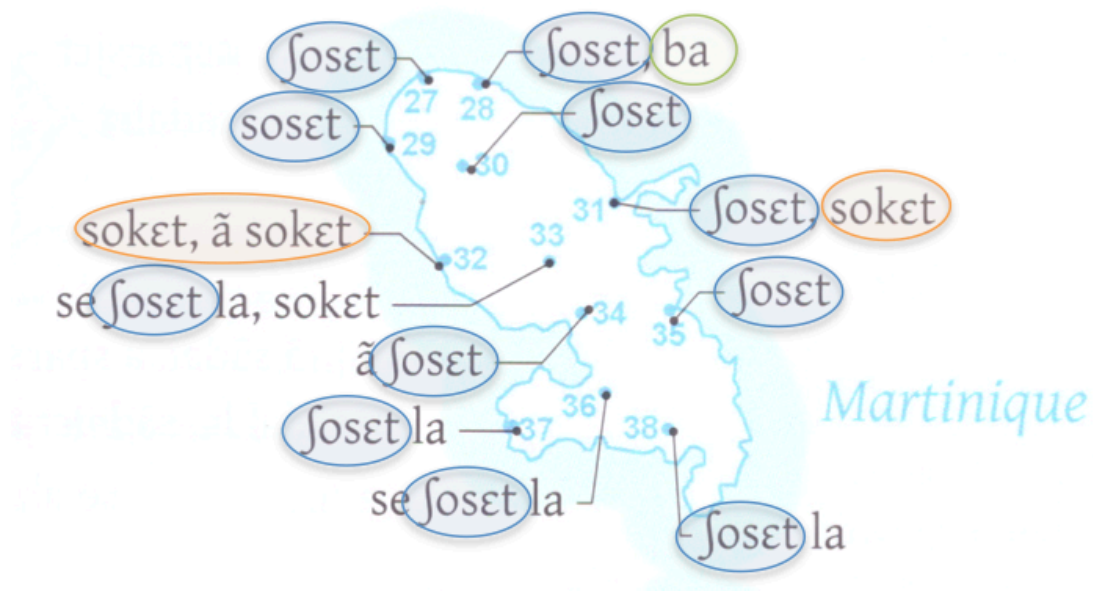
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<sup>7</sup> In France, *bas* means “stockings”.

<sup>8</sup> *Chaussettes* is actually attested in traditional Canadian French, but it designates “généralement des socquettes de laine sinon une espèce de pantoufles [...] ou des chaussons de bébé” (ALEC 1980, question n° 1942).

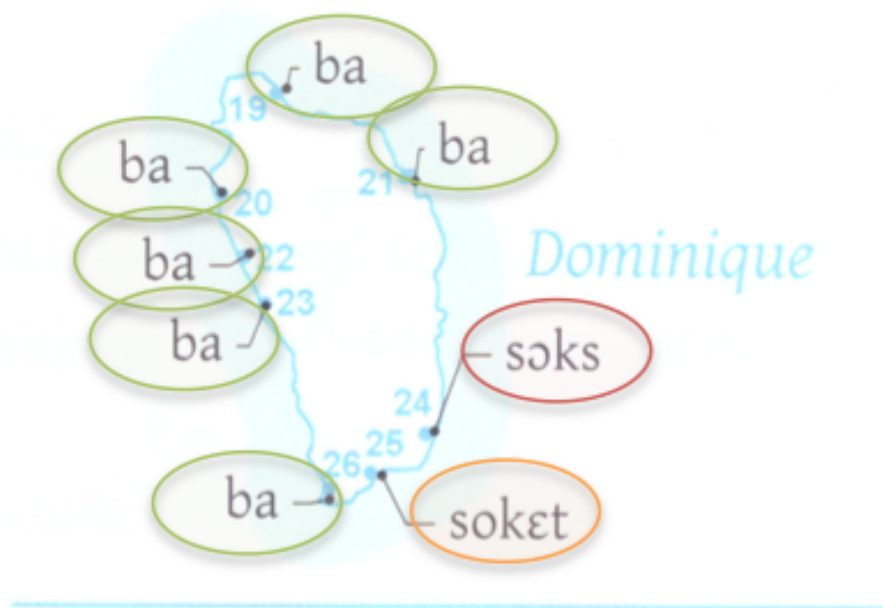


Map 10: Concept “socks” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 449)



Map 11: Concept “socks” in Martinique (ALPA, map 449)

As we can see, in the Creole spoken in the islands that are still French possessions nowadays, the most frequent lexical type is a creole adaptation of standard French *chaussettes*, or even of the more recent *socquette*; the archaism *ba* (< French *bas*) is only attested in a single point in Guadeloupe (06; see map 10) as well as in Martinique (28; see map 11)—and then again, only as a secondary variant.



Map 12: Concept “socks” in Dominica (ALPA, map 449)

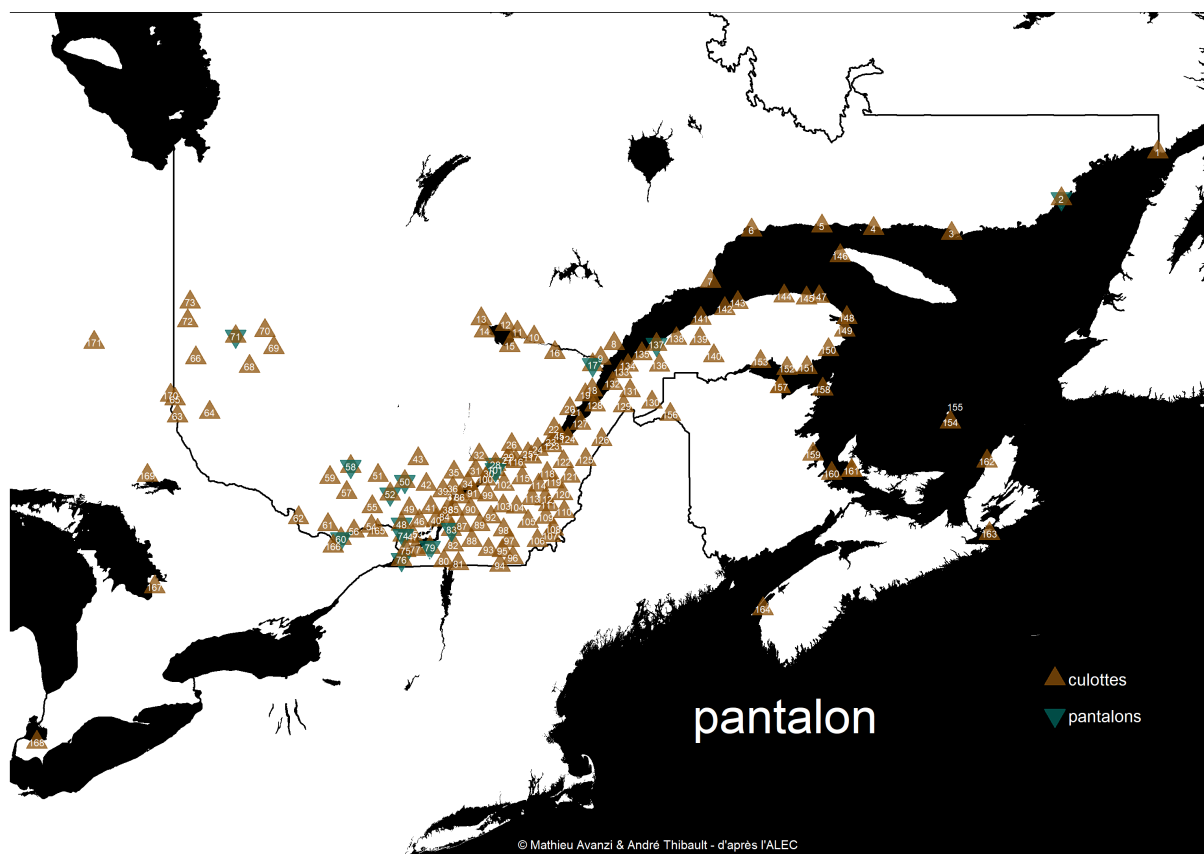


Map 13: Concept “socks” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 449)

In contrast, as can be seen on maps 12 and 13, the islands that have not been French for more than two hundred years now have either maintained the archaic lexical types *bas* or *chausson*, or use the English word *socks* (only documented in two points). There is only one attestation of *socquettes*, in southern Dominica, which most probably came directly from Martinique and obviously not straight from continental France. As far as *chaussettes* is concerned, it is **nowhere to be found**, in total contrast with the French islands. Interestingly, the situation in the ex-British islands is very similar to the one observed in Canada, in spite of the huge distance that separates the two territories and the total absence of contact between them.

#### 4.1.2. “pants”: *culotte(s)*, *pantalon(s)*<sup>9</sup>

The standard French word for “pants” is *pantalon*. It is an Italianism that first appeared in the French language in 1790 with this meaning (TLFi), many decades after the implantation of French colonies in the New World. Therefore, it will come as no surprise that overseas varieties have kept a much older word, *culottes*. Let’s first have a look at the situation in traditional Canadian French:

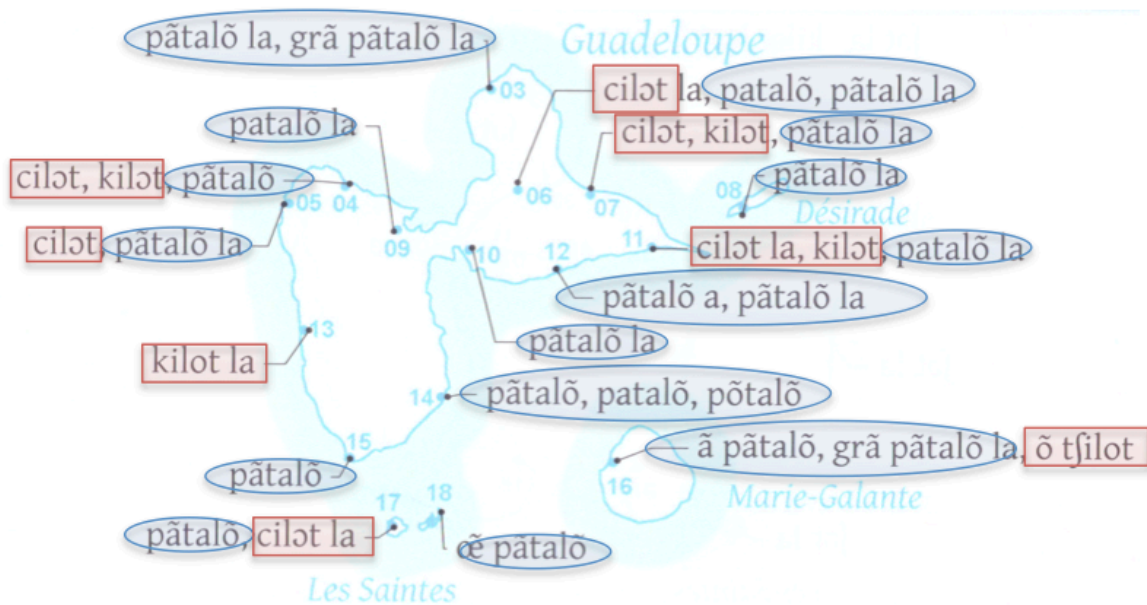


Map 14: Concept “pants” in Canada (ALEC, question 1926)

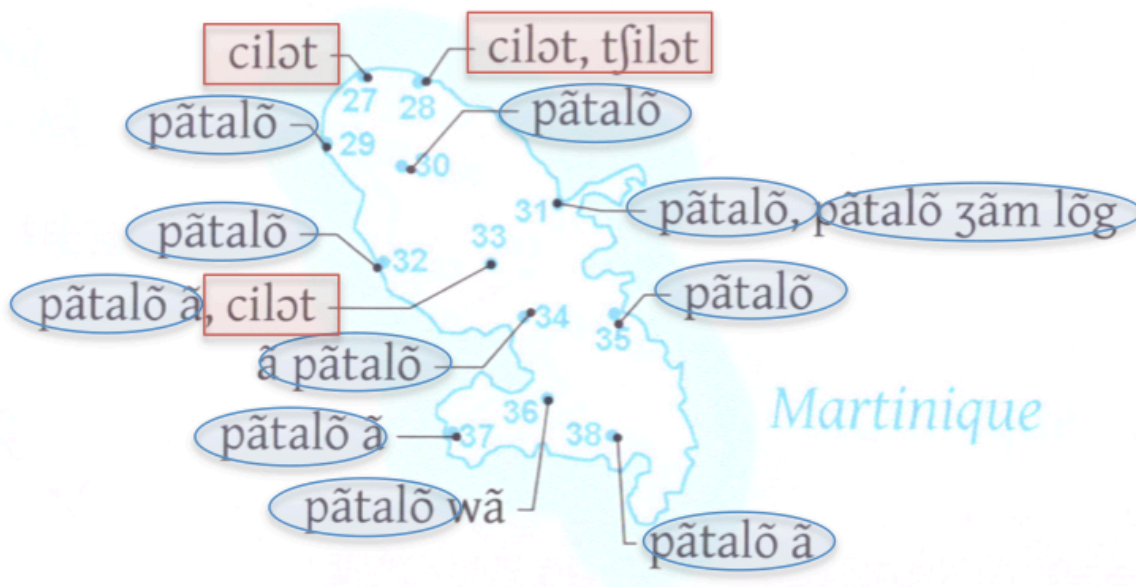
As we can see, an overwhelming majority of speakers (born at the beginning of the twentieth century) chose *culottes* (brown triangles) over *pantalons* (green triangles). A more recent survey would probably show an increase in the use of *pantalons*, felt as more refined and modern, and a decrease in the use of *culottes*, nowadays felt as more informal, vulgar or rural.

<sup>9</sup> The final -s is there as a reminder of the fact that French Canadian speakers use these two words in the plural only (as in English *pants*). In Italian, the etymon of the French word, *pantaloni*, is also a plural form.





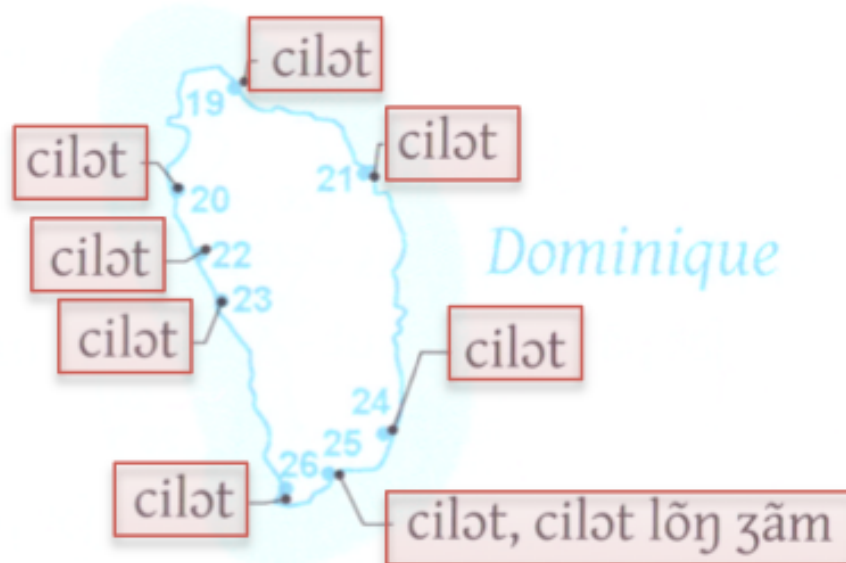
Map 15: Concept “pants” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 447)



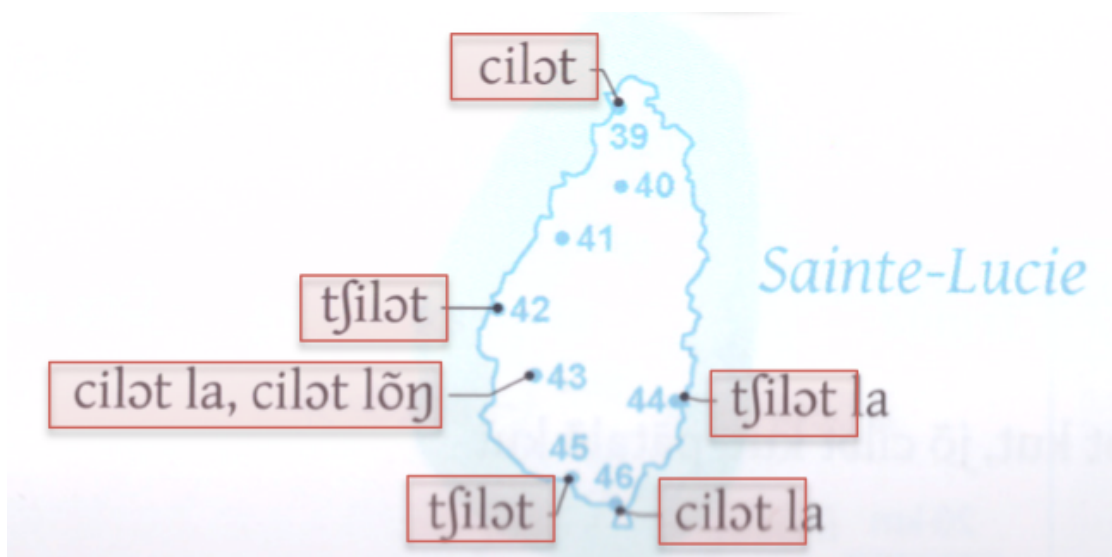
Map 16: Concept “pants” in Martinique (ALPA, map 447)

In the French departments, the lexical type *pantalon* is largely dominant. The other possible type, *culottes*, is also present but in the minority, and often coexists with the majority type.

What do we find in the ex-British islands?



Map 17: Concept “pants” in Dominica (ALPA, map 447)

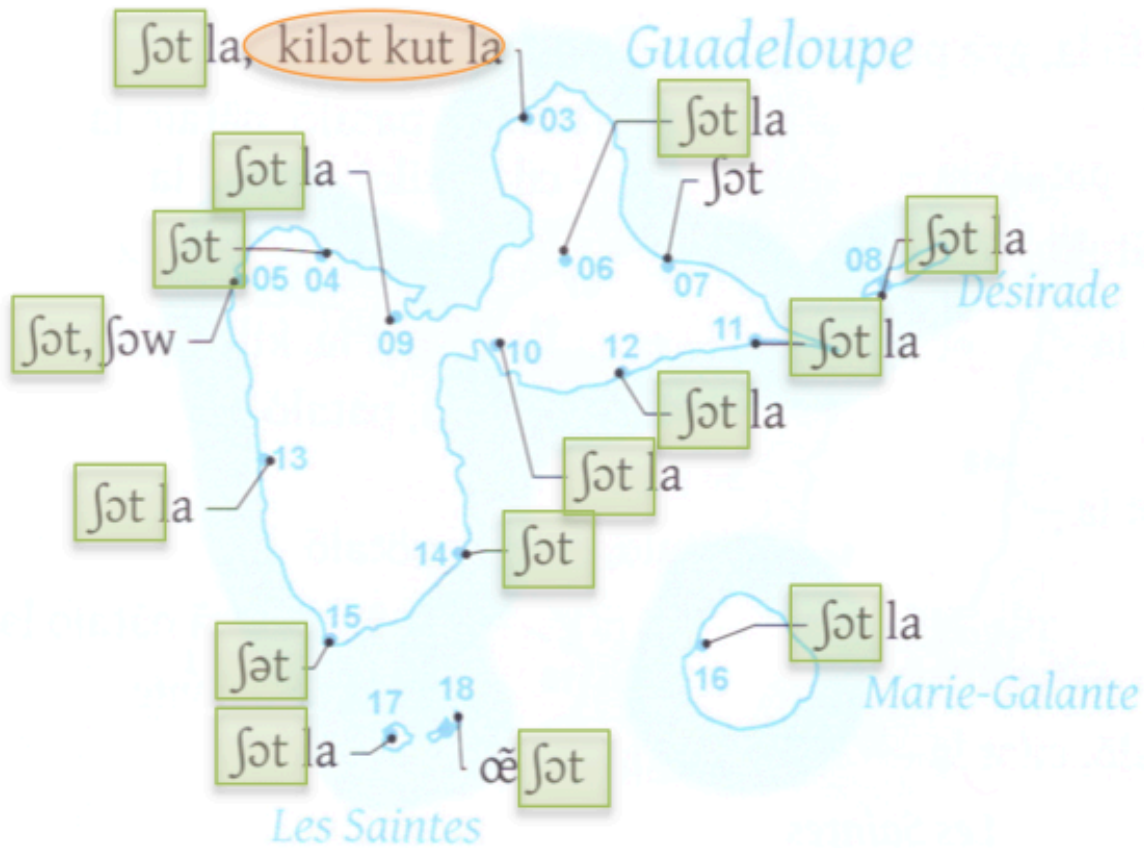


Map 18: Concept “pants” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 447)

The *pantalon* type is totally absent. It simply didn’t make it to the ex-British islands, which were no longer under French domination when this Italianism started becoming widespread in France. And contrary to Canadian French, which has been more or less influenced by European French in the last decades, the creole of Dominica and St. Lucia has remained totally untouched.

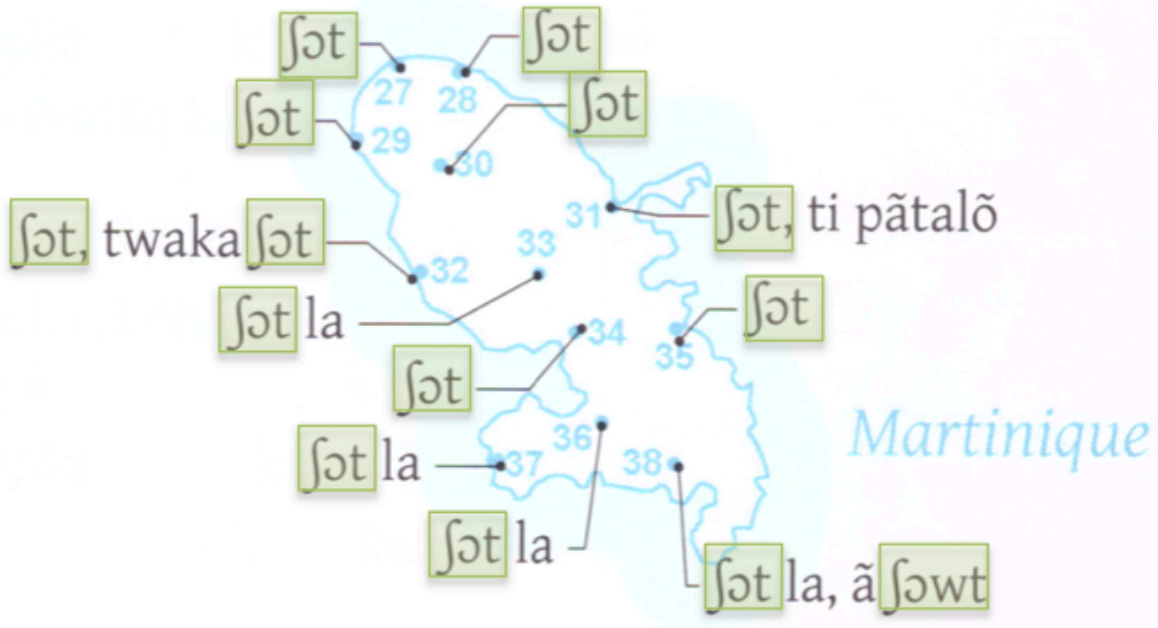
4.1.3. “pair of shorts”: *short*, *short pants*, *culottes courtes*

Paradoxically, this example shows that a recent French Anglicism (*short*<sup>10</sup>, attested since 1910 in metropolitan France) can be found in the French overseas departments, while the ex-British islands prefer an old French word, *culottes courtes* (also overwhelmingly present in traditional Canadian French, even though *shorts* is also well known; see DQA 1992).



Map 19: Concept “pair of shorts” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 448)

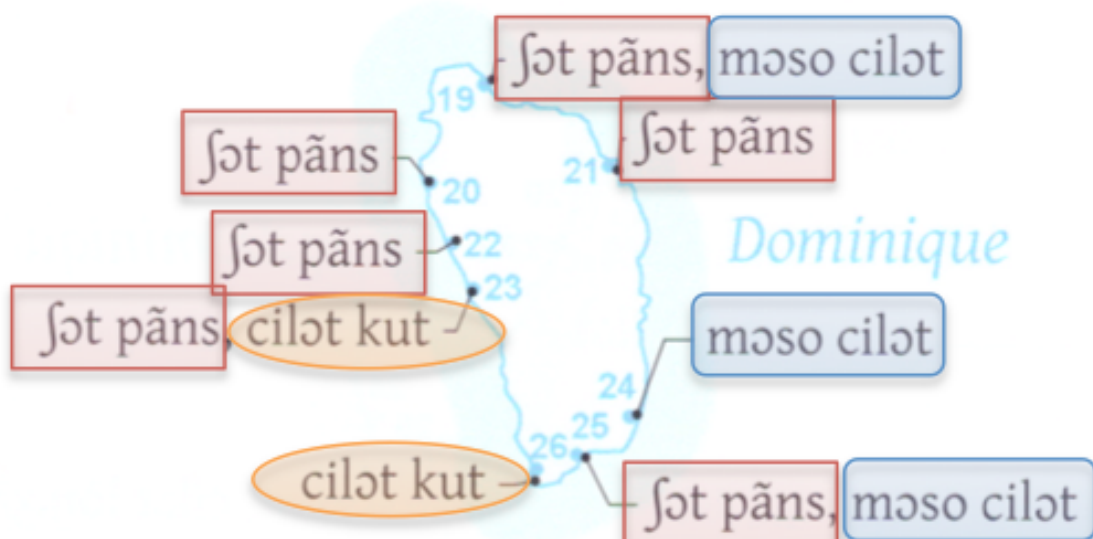
<sup>10</sup> The French use it in the singular, *un short* (contrary to English *shorts*).



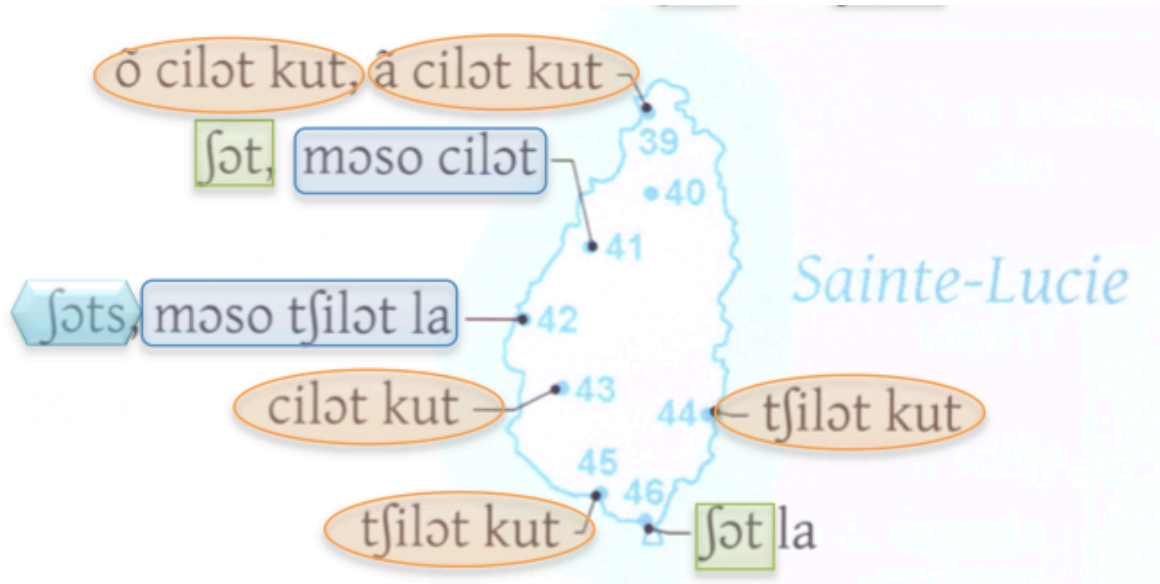
Map 20: Concept “pair of shorts” in Martinique (ALPA, map 448)

The two French islands show a hegemonic presence of the lexical type *short*, with only one point (03 in Guadeloupe) where the rival type *culottes courtes* also appears, but only as a second choice. There is also one instance of an isolated type, *(pe)tit pantalon* (point 31, Martinique).

In the ex-British islands, the metropolitan French word *short* is extremely rare; instead we find a series of other denominations:



Map 21: Concept “pair of shorts” in Dominica (ALPA, map 448)



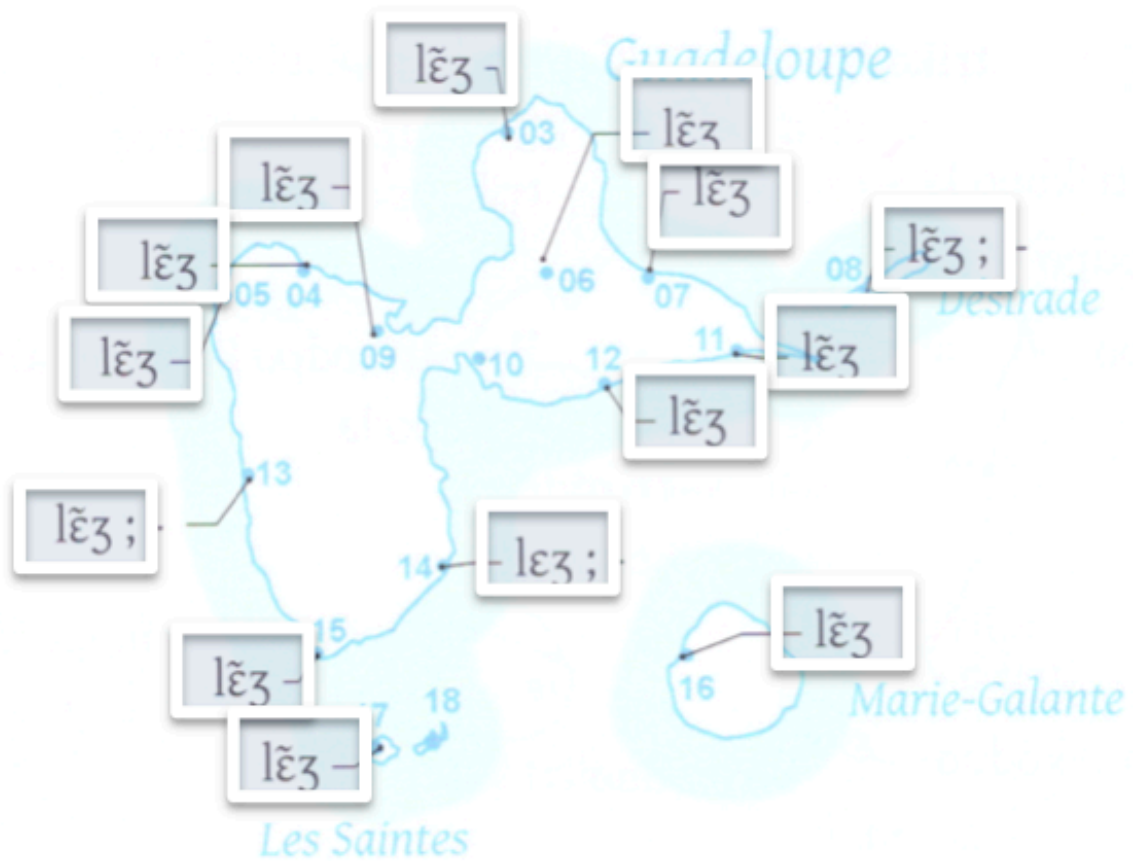
Map 22: Concept “pair of shorts” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 448)

In Dominica, we find the English type *short pants* in six points; the archaic type *culottes courtes* is present in two points, and three other points have an original coining, *morceau culotte* (literally, “a piece of pants”, since shorts are shorter than normal pants). The modern French *short* is not attested on this island. In St. Lucia, we do find it, though, in two points, but the most present type is the French archaism *culottes courtes* (present in 5 points). The creole formation *morceau culottes* is also found in two points, and the actual English word here does not appear under the form *shorts pants* (as in Dominica) but simply as *shorts* (point 42, with a final -s that reveals its English origin—for it is totally absent in the French departments).

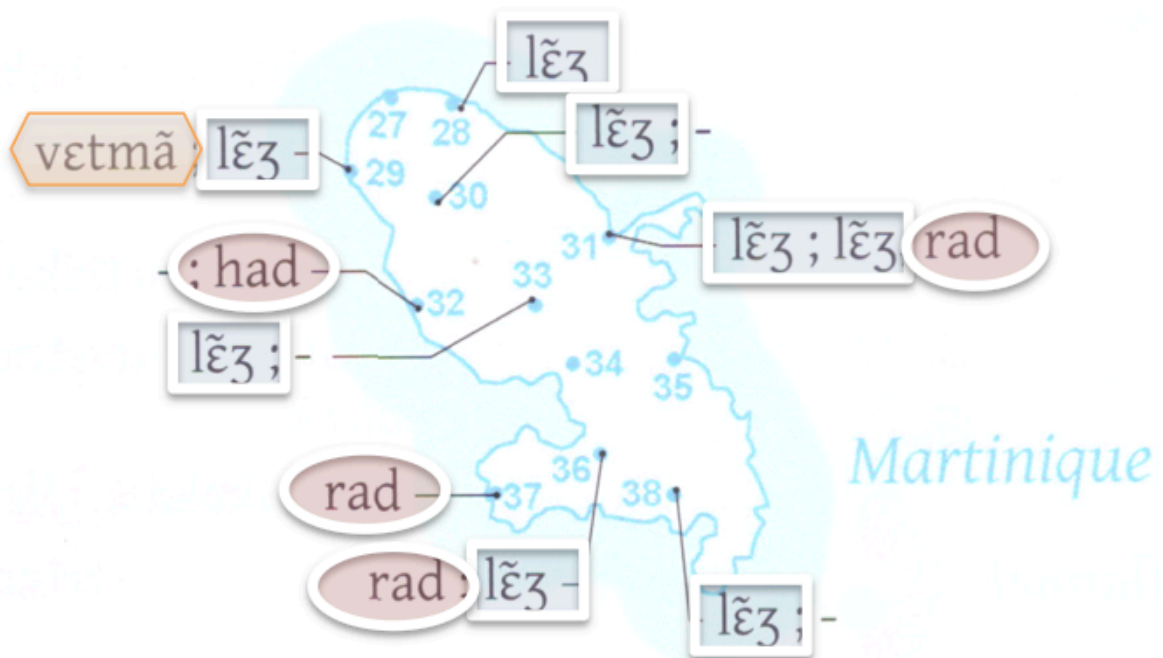
#### 4.1.4. “clothes”: *hardes*, *linge*, *vêtements*

The generic term for clothing in modern French is *vêtements*. It is rather formal, though, and in everyday life French speakers will use more colloquial terms (such as *des fringues* or *des sapes*). In Canada, the Quebec variety (see DQA 1992) prefers the slightly archaic word *linge* (which in France has a distinct meaning nowadays, see TLFi), while the Acadian regiolect in the Maritime Provinces uses a much more archaic form, *hardes* (DFA 1999). Of course, *vêtements* is also known in Canada, but it is more frequent in the written language. This actually gives us a system of three chronological layers: *des hardes* > *du linge* > *des vêtements*. What do we have in the Antilles?





Map 23: Concept “clothes” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 443)



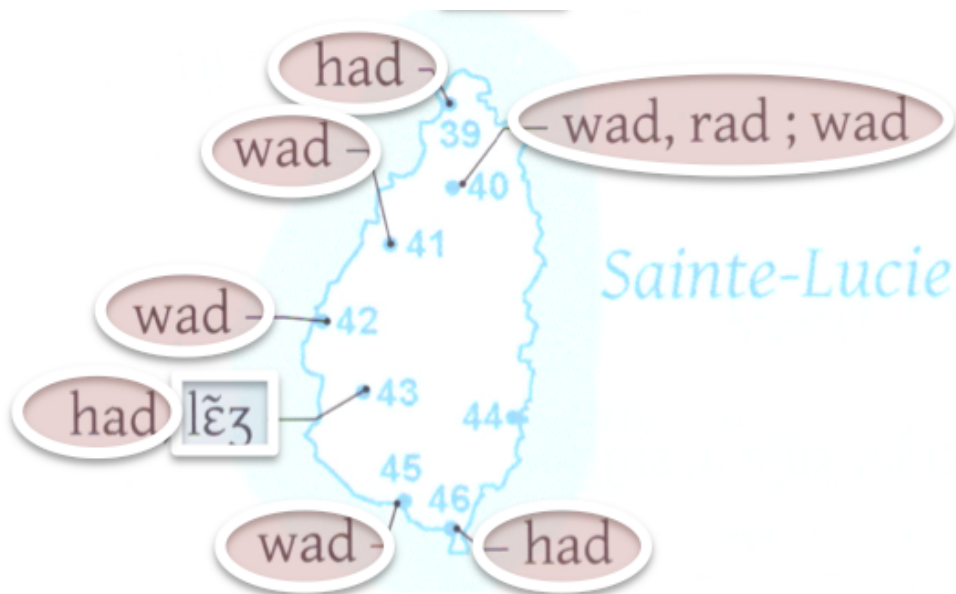
Map 24: Concept “clothes” in Martinique (ALPA, map 443)

In Guadeloupe, *linge* is the only attested type: it dominates the whole island. In Martinique, we find a much more diversified situation: *linge* is dominant, but not hegemonic, as we do

have four instances of the archaic type *hardes*, as well as a totally modern instance of the type *vêtements* (point 29). Once again, as in Canada, we have a coexistence of three chronological layers of denominations. What will we find in the ex-British islands?



Map 25: Concept “clothes” in Dominica (ALPA, map 443)



Map 26: Concept “clothes” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 443)

Here, the situation is clearly archaic: *hardes* is present in absolutely every point, and the less archaic type *linge* appears as a second choice in three points only (19, 21 and 43). Of course, the modern type *vêtements* is totally absent (which reminds us of a similar situation observed with *pantalon*).

## 4.2. Pronunciation features

In this section, we will concentrate on a series of phonetic traits that are symptomatic of very recent evolutions in European French: final consonant deletion and restitution, the pronunciation of the ⟨oi⟩ spelling, and the nasalization of [l] > [ɲ] in *caleçons* > *caneçons*.

### 4.2.1. Final consonants

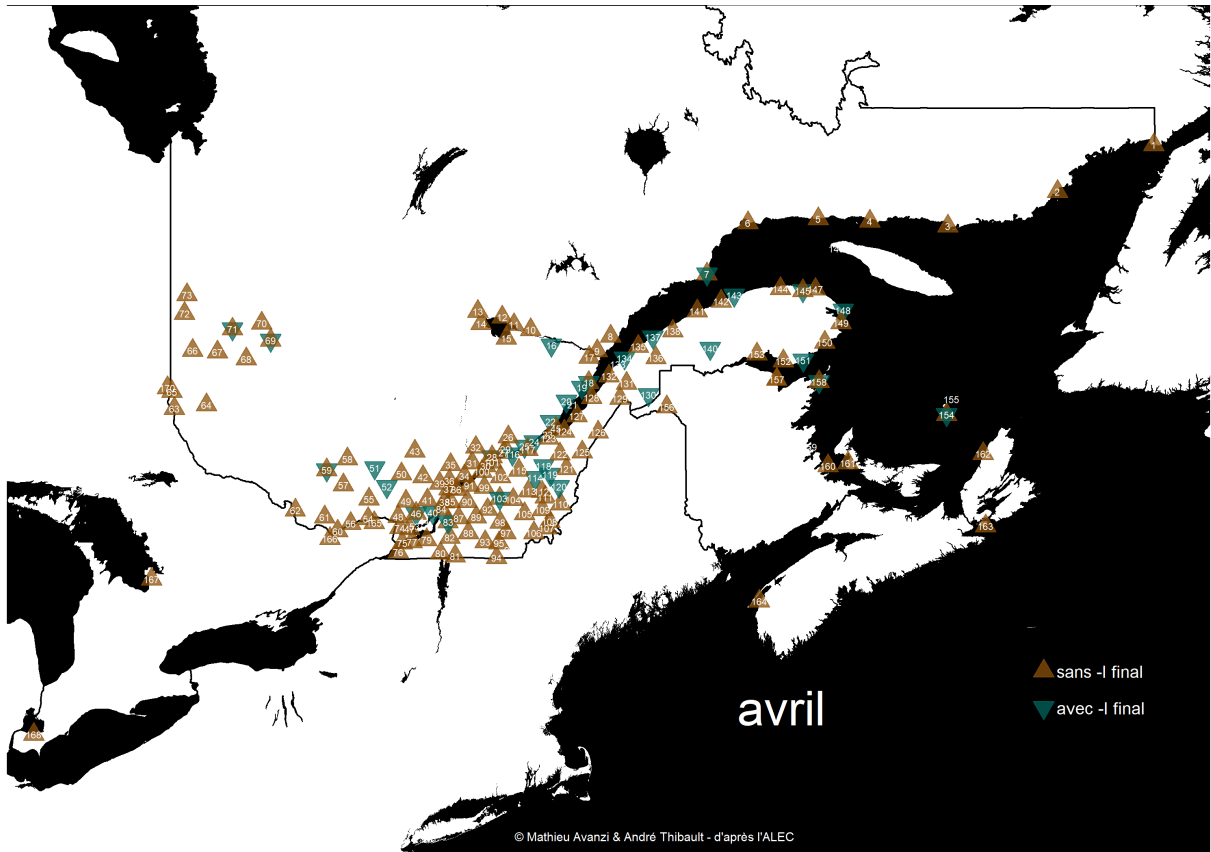
The behavior of final consonants in the history of the French language is very complex (see Thibault 2017). Some of them, although present in the written form of the word, are not pronounced, while others are. The very general tendency, if we take a broad look at the last millennium, is that final consonants were all pronounced in Old French, stopped being pronounced in Middle French, and have been (only partially) restituted in Modern French, mainly because of the very strong influence of the written language in our modern societies. This process of restitution, called the “Buben effect” (see Buben 1935), hasn’t reached all words, hence the impression of total chaos when we look at the present situation. There are differences from one century to another, even from one generation to another, but also between regions. Once again, metropolitan French seems to act as an innovative center of expansion, whose evolutions can reach or not distant territories, but always with a certain delay.

#### 4.2.1.1. Final consonant restitution in standard French (*avriL*, *sourciL*, *août*)

Some words were pronounced without their final (written) consonant until very recently in France itself (twentieth century). It will come as no surprise that more archaic varieties have kept variants that do not display a final consonant in the oral form of the word.

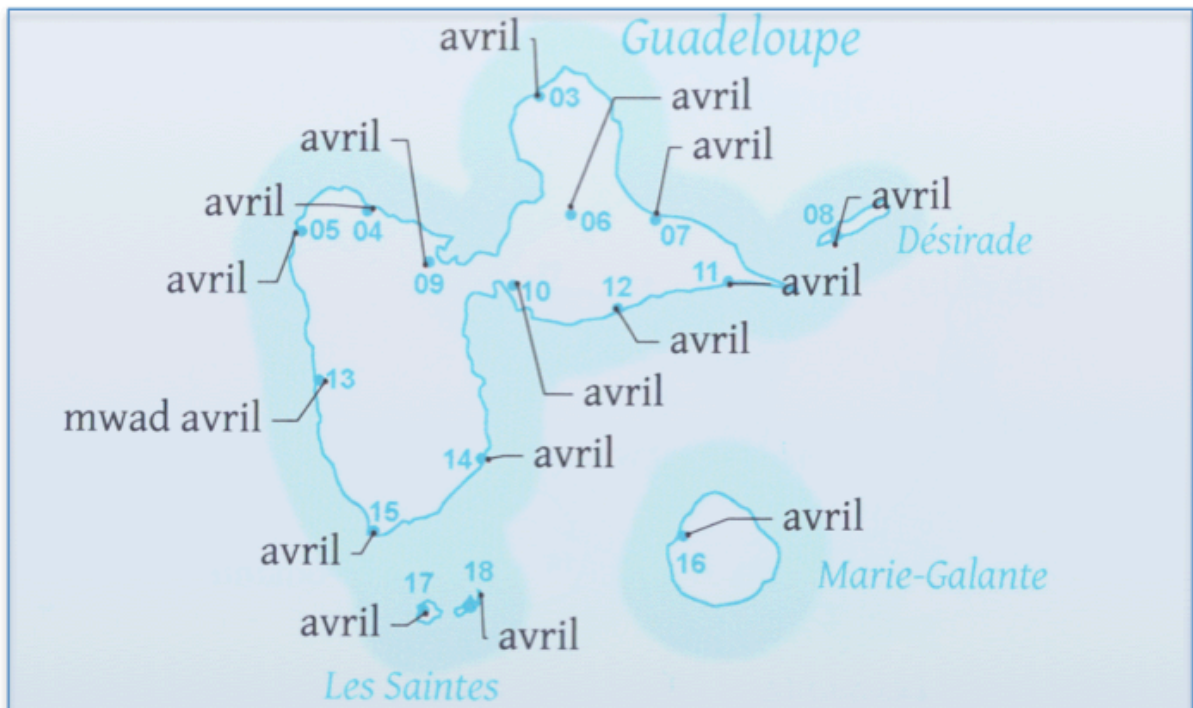
##### 4.2.1.1.1. *avriL* “April”

Let’s start with the situation in Canada. The pronunciation of *avril* without its final *-l* (well documented in France during many centuries, see TLFi) was still common among old rural speakers around 1970-1980 (according to ALEC, question 1697, brown triangles). The newer pronunciation, a recent importation from France, was attested in a few points only (green triangles). Nowadays, it has become absolutely dominant and young people do not even know that their great-grandparents used to pronounce the word without its final consonant.

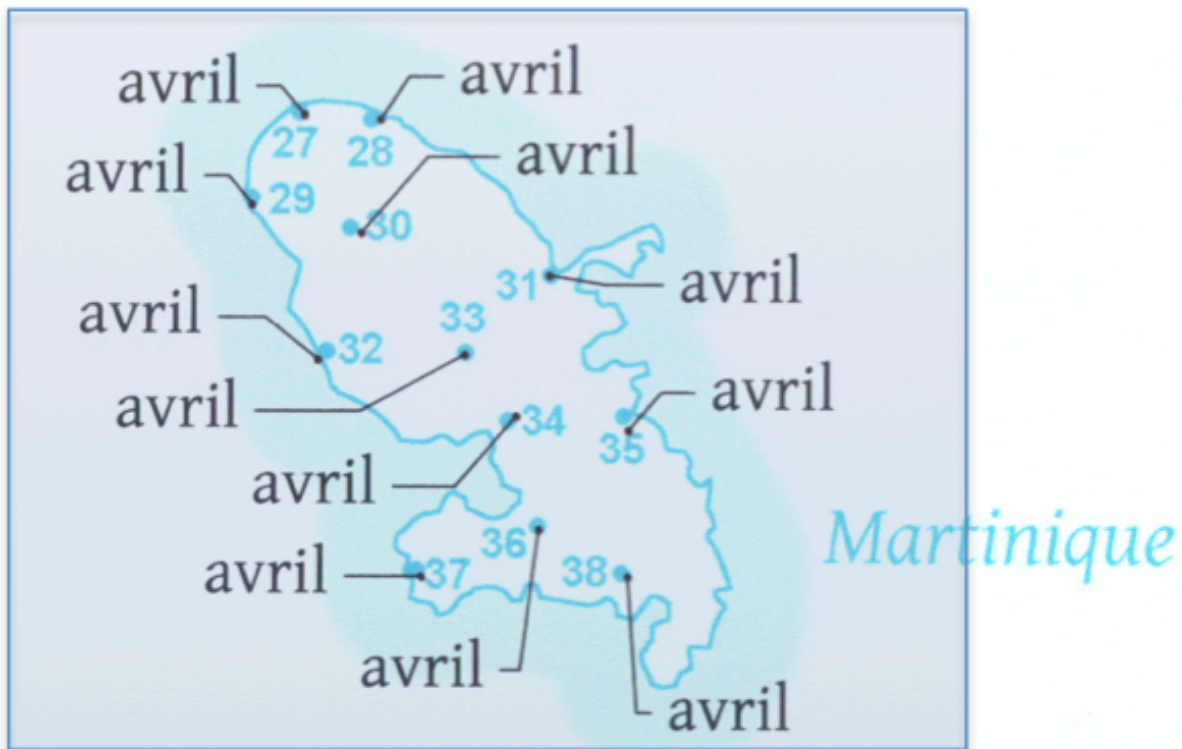


Map 27: Concept “April” in Canada (ALEC, question 1697)

Now let’s take a look at the situation in the French West Indies.



Map 28: Concept “April” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 189)



Map 29: Concept “April” in Martinique (ALPA, map 189)

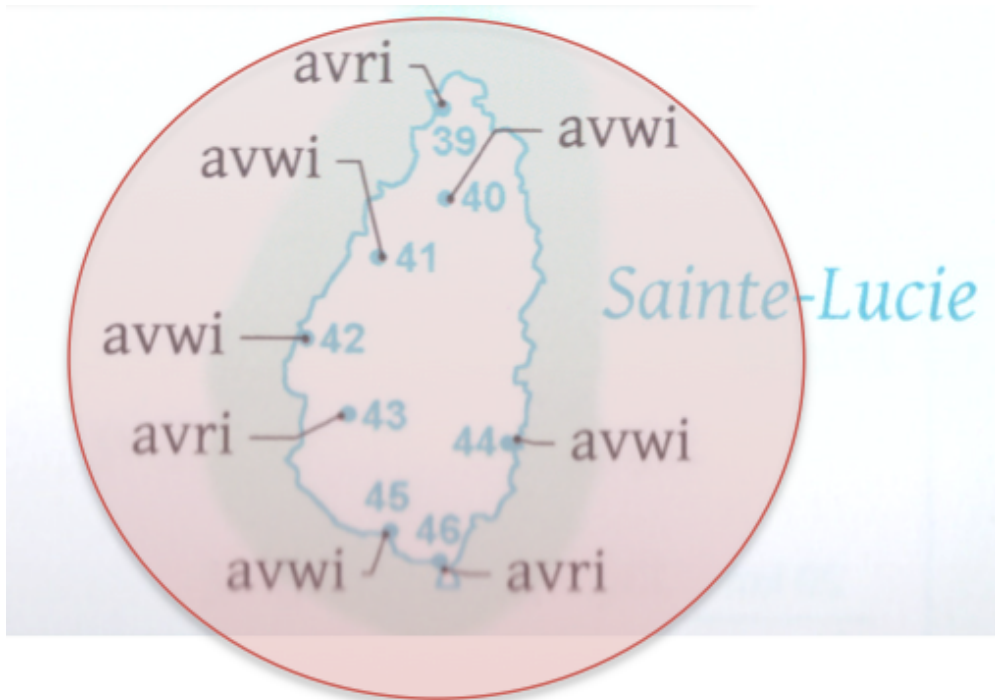
The situation is very easy to sum up: the only form attested in the French islands corresponds to the newer, metropolitan French pronunciation, the one with an audible final consonant.

Let’s contrast it with the situation in the ex-British islands:



Map 30: Concept “April” in Dominica (ALPA, map 189)



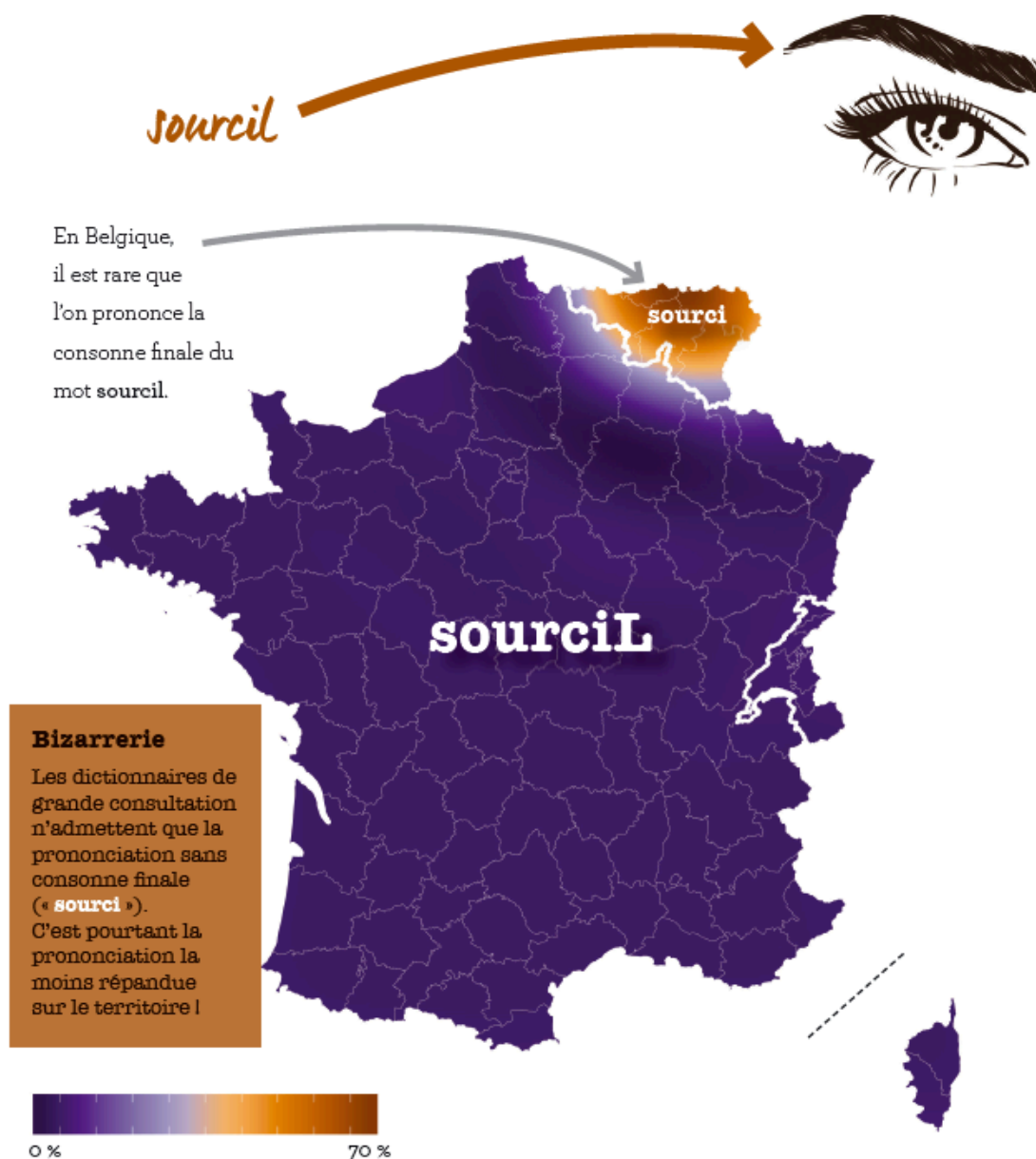


Map 31: Concept “April” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 189)

In Dominica, both pronunciations are attested but with a slight domination of the archaic one. In St. Lucia, on the other hand, the archaic pronunciation is hegemonic, in total contrast with the French islands.

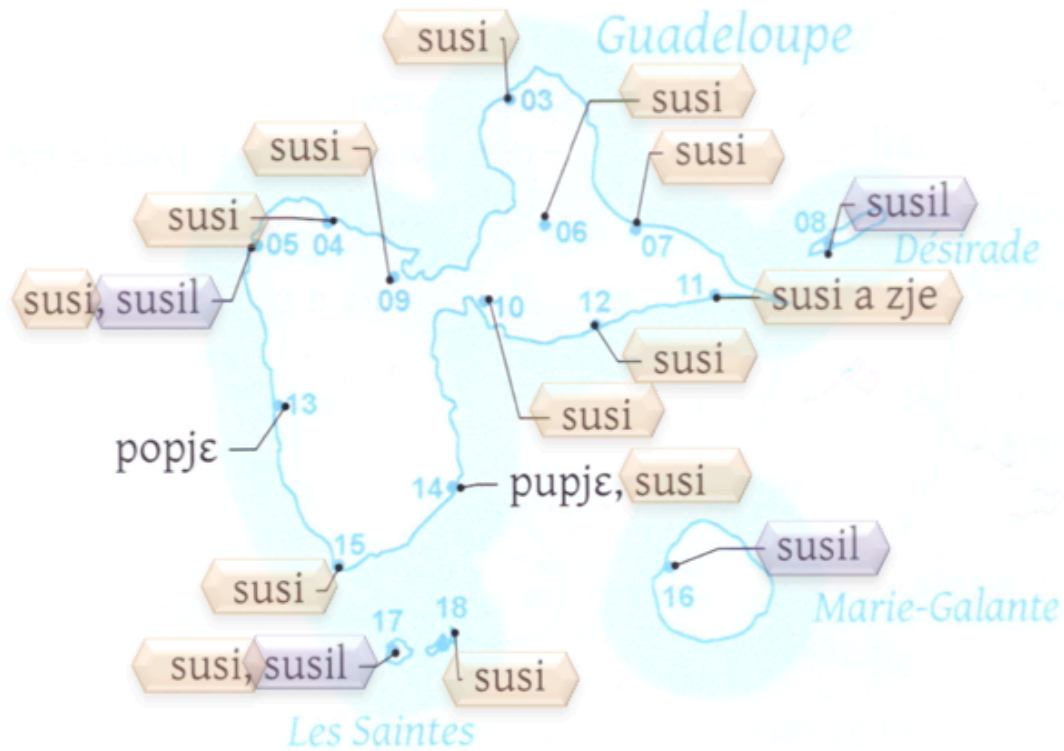
#### 4.2.1.1.2. *sourciL* “eyebrows”

The restitution of final *-l* in the pronunciation of *sourcil* (“eyebrows”) is extremely recent in France—so recent, that it still hasn’t reached most dictionaries. Nevertheless, recent surveys based on many thousands of participants have shown that a huge majority of the population, in France as well as in Switzerland, do pronounce this final consonant. Only Belgians still haven’t been affected by the phenomenon, as can be seen on this map taken from the very recent *Atlas du français de nos régions* (Avanzi 2017):

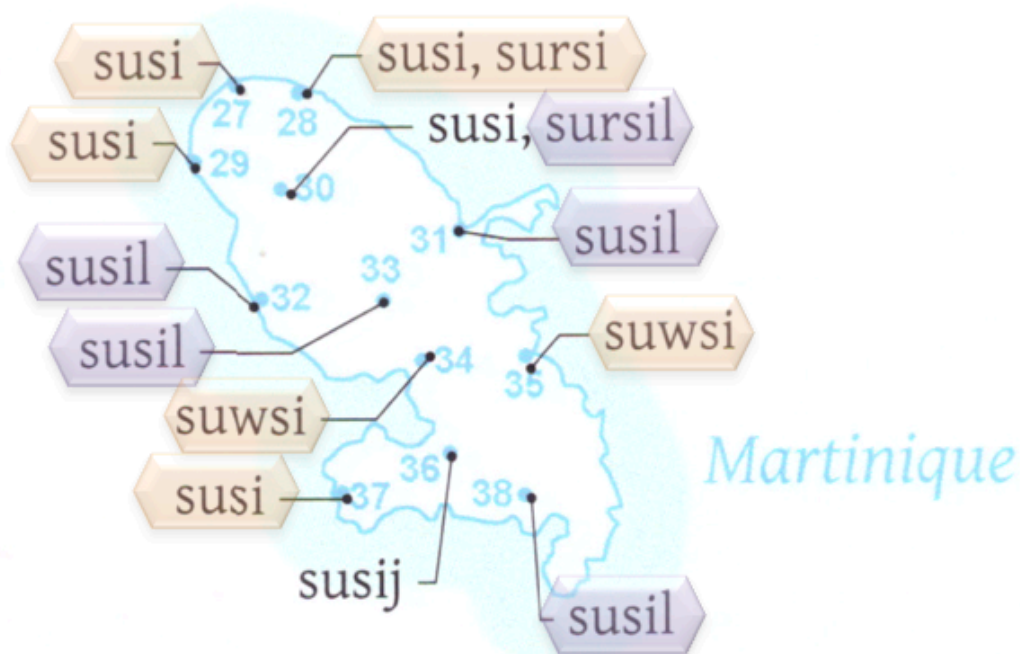


Map 32: Concept “eyebrows” in European French (Avanzi 2017, 45)

Belgium is not alone: Canadian French also rejects the restitution of the final *-l* in this word (see for instance DQA 1992). Most French-speaking Canadians are not even aware of this (very) recent pronunciation change in France and are extremely surprised to hear about it. Has this new pronunciation reached the West Indies? Let’s have a look at the material.



Map 33: Concept “eyebrows” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 333)



Map 34: Concept “eyebrows” in Martinique (ALPA, map 333)

Surprisingly enough, this very recent phenomenon has already affected the French islands: forms with an audible final *-l* have been recorded in four points on each island. This is unequivocal proof that the French creoles of Guadeloupe and Martinique are undergoing a process of “Frenchification”—which does not mean that the language is going to disappear, but simply that it tends to converge, at least in some aspects, with French (and, more

precisely, with contemporary metropolitan French). It seems to be receiving and adopting recent European changes faster than Canadian French.

The situation in the ex-British islands is totally different:



Map 35: Concept “eyebrows” in Dominica (ALPA, map 333)

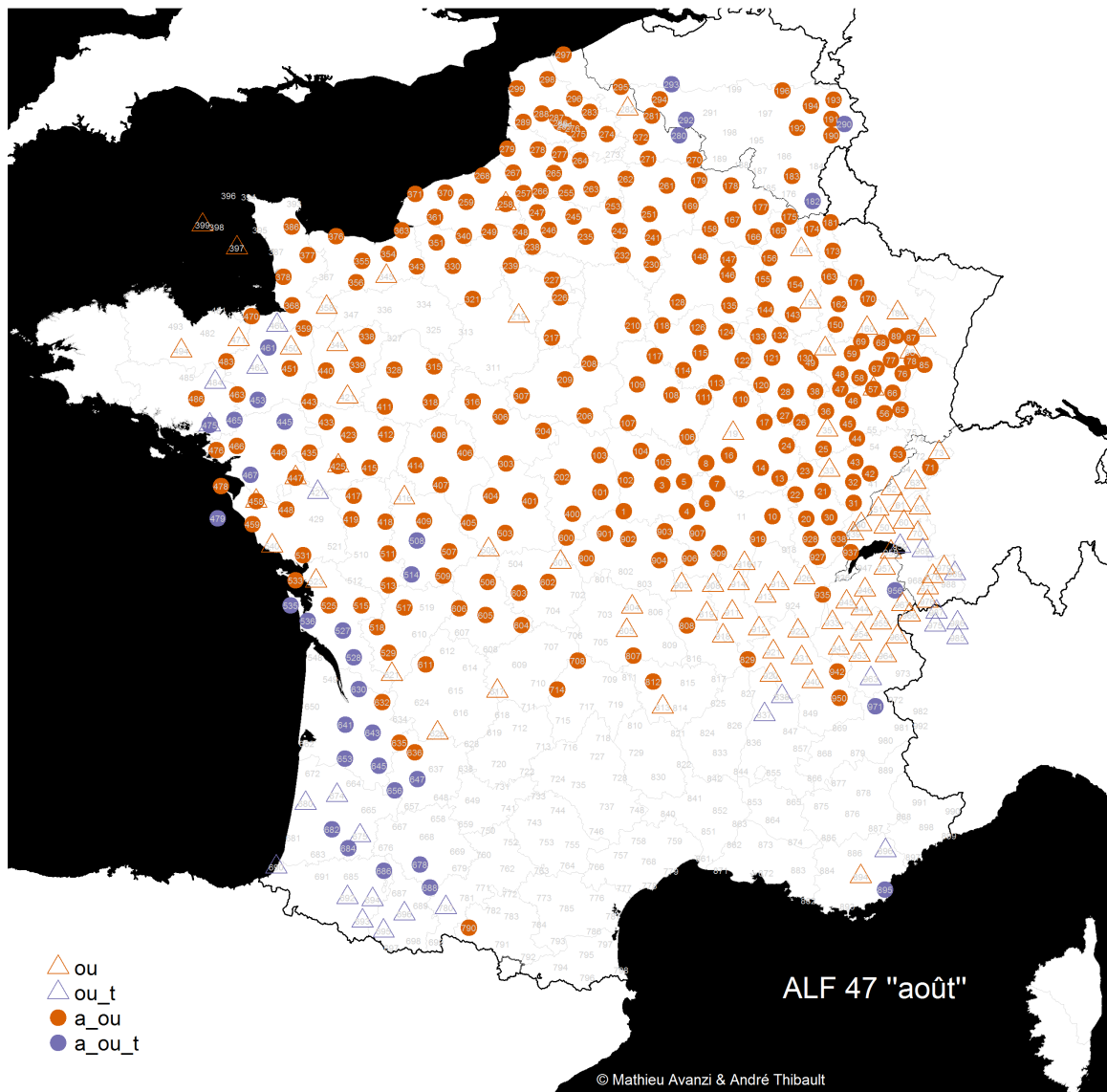


Map 36: Concept “eyebrows” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 333)

Unsurprisingly, we see that the newer form is totally absent. We either find the type *sourcils yeux* (*brows + eyes*), or original creole formations such as *poils yeux* (*hair + eyes*), *paupières yeux* (*eyelids + eyes*) and *plumes yeux* (*feathers + eyes*).

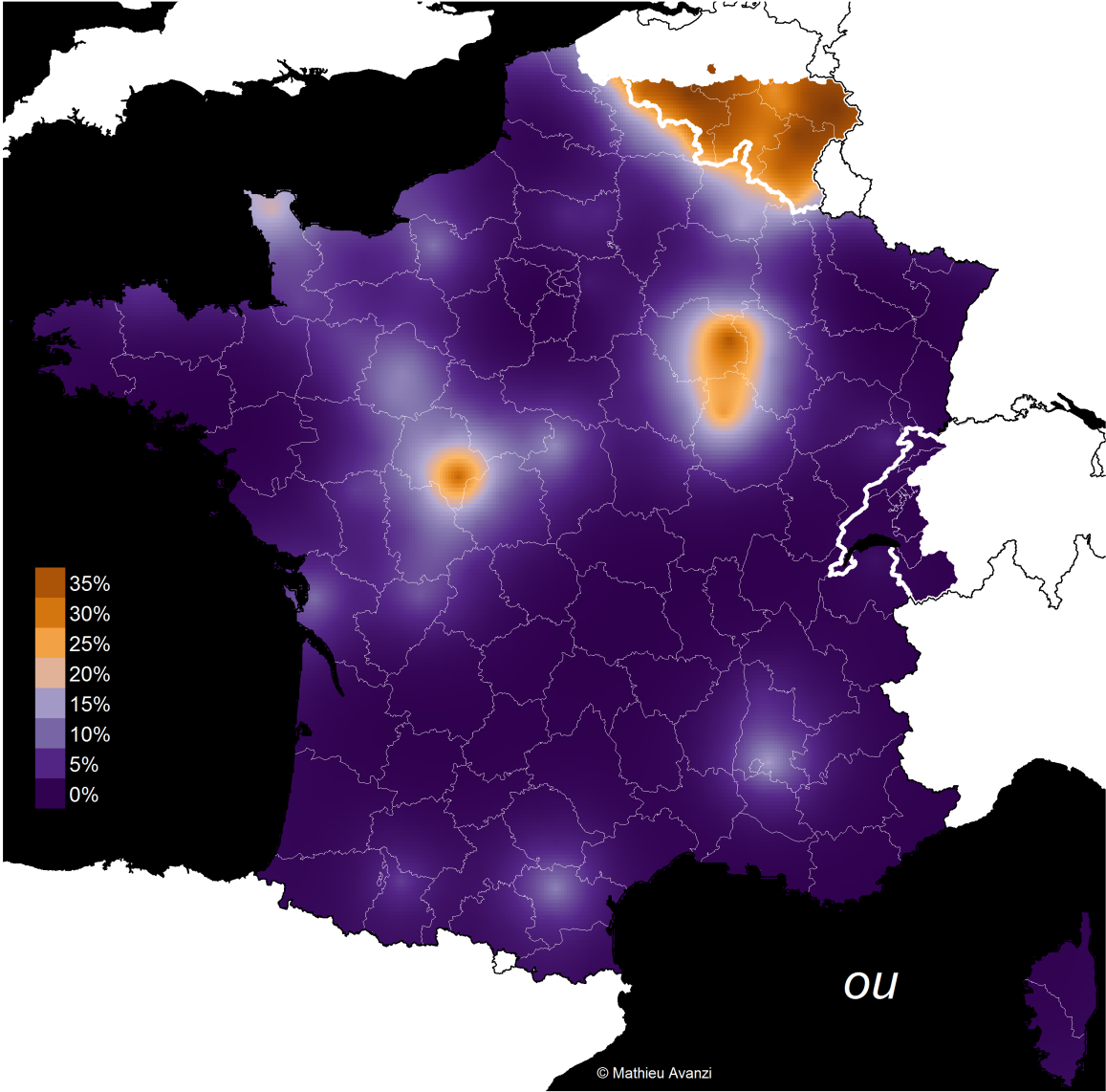
#### 4.2.1.1.3. *août* “August”

Roughly speaking, the pronunciation of this word in the last two centuries went from [au] to [u] to [ut]. The domination of [au] at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the primary Gallo-Romance dialects, can clearly be seen on this map based on ALF data, where the orange circles correspond to this pronunciation. The intermediate variant, [u], presented as standard in French dictionaries throughout the twentieth century, was relatively rare (see the orange triangles) but we see a concentration in the central-eastern region. As far as [ut] is concerned (blue triangles), it was still completely in the minority. We also notice the presence in peripheral zones of a [aut] variant (blue circles), which we will find again in the Antilles.



Map 37: Concept “August” in Gallo-Romance primary dialects (ALF, map 47)

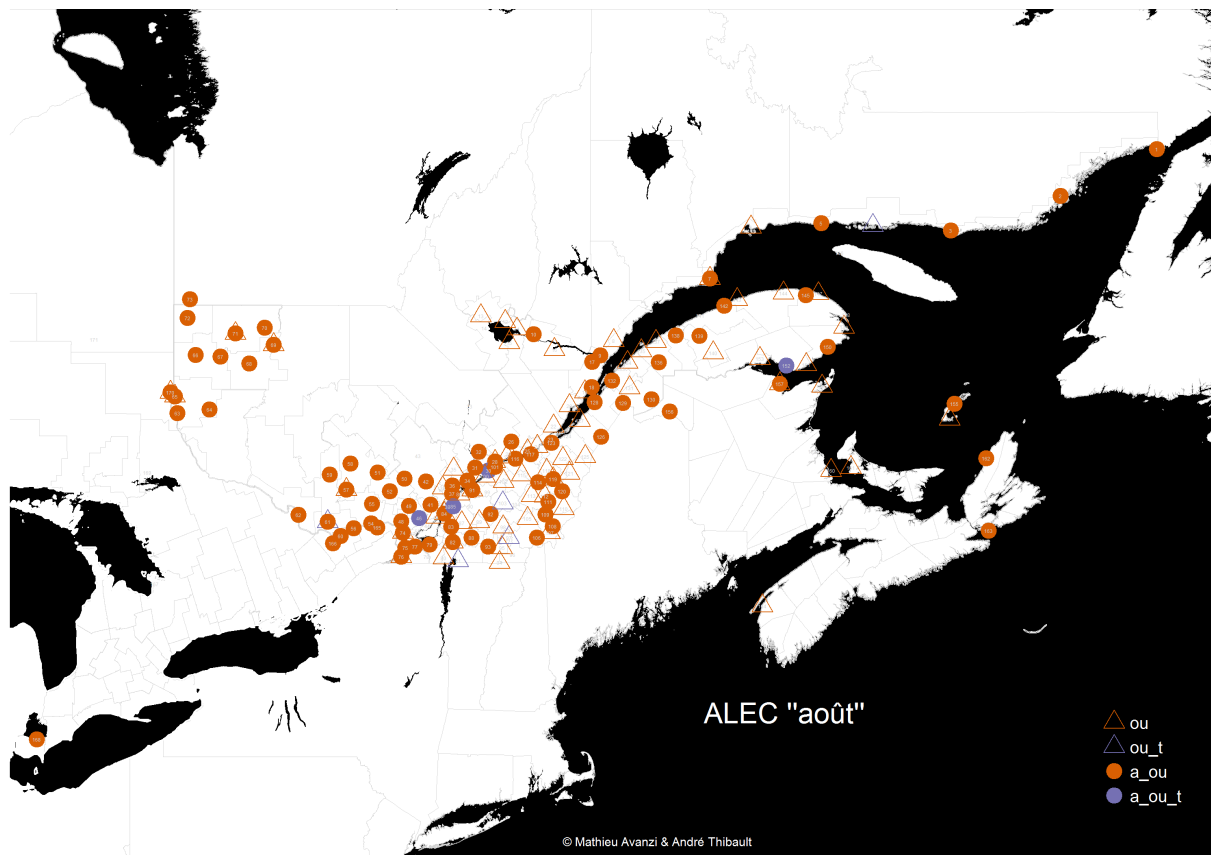
In current European French, [au] has practically disappeared and [ut] has become the most widespread variant (here in violet), but the intermediate form [u] (here in orange) still survives in Belgium, as well as in several isolated areas. But the percentages never exceed 35%: it is clearly a declining variant (even though dictionaries still give both variants without any precisions on their relative vitality, nor on their diatopic distribution).



Map 38: Concept “August” in contemporary European French (*Français de nos régions*)

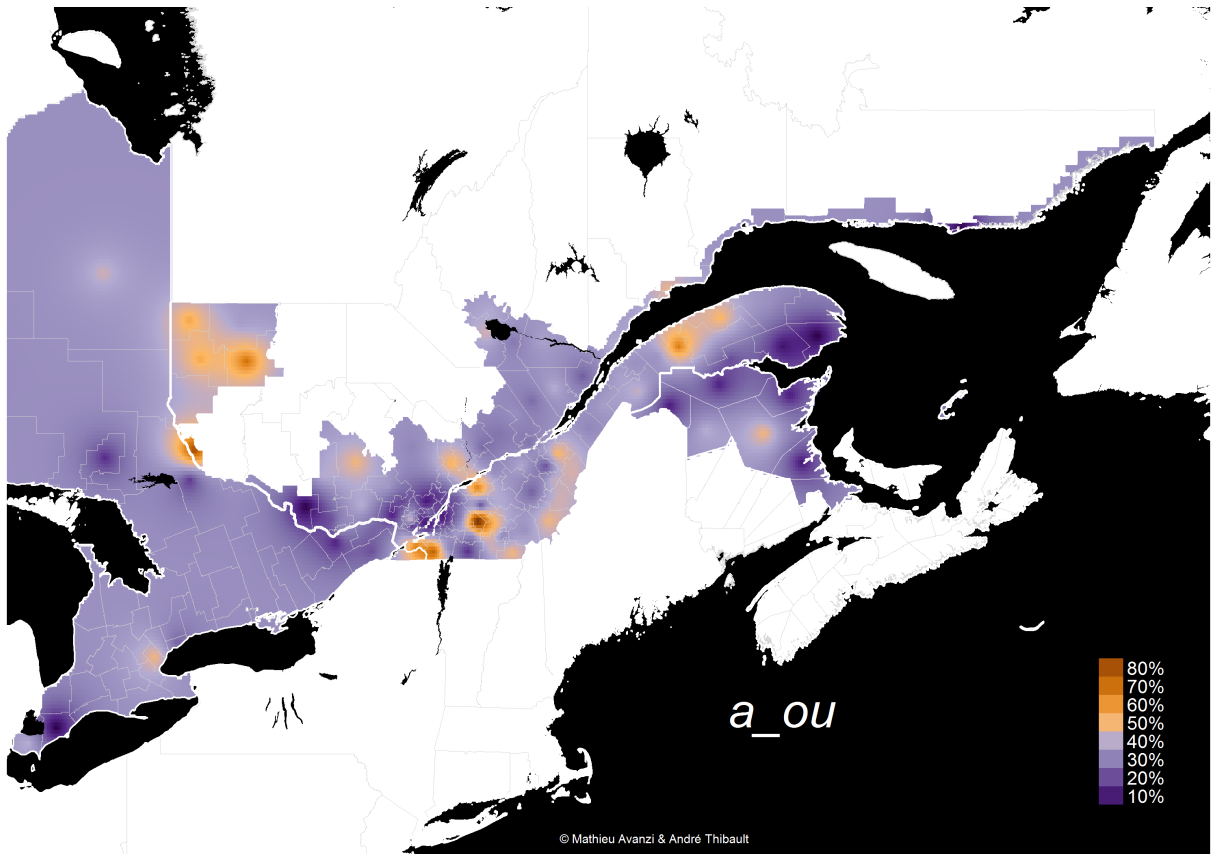


If we look at Canada now, the old rural speakers of the ALEC (1980) survey still used the most archaic form, [au] (orange circles), in a majority of points:



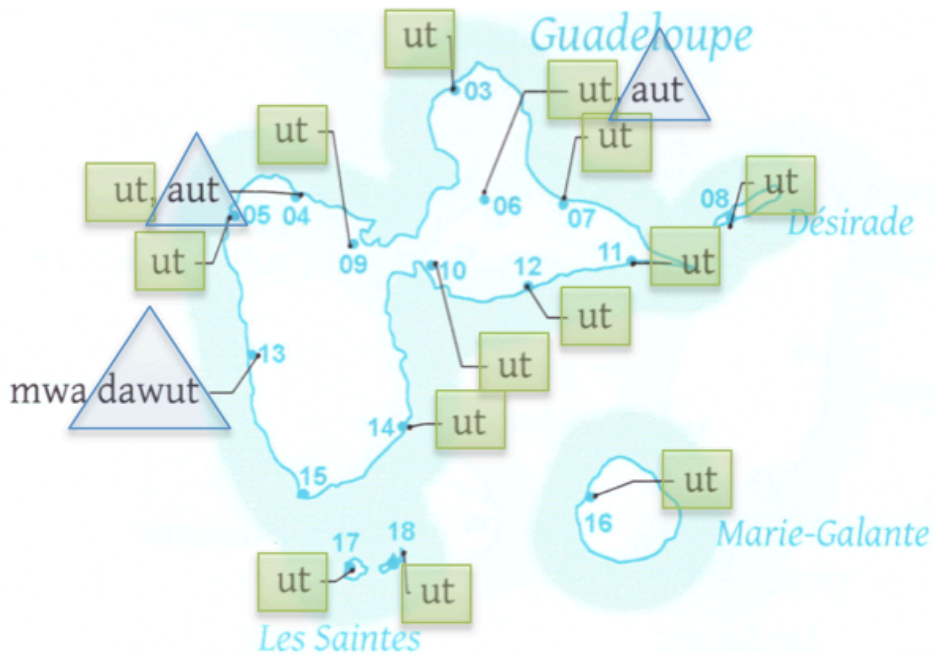
Map 39: Concept “August” in Canada (ALEC, question 1697)

Nevertheless, the intermediate form [u] (orange triangles) was already well attested. A much more recent survey shows that the situation has shifted: nowadays, [u] has become the norm (in violet), and [au] (in orange) only survives in remote communities. As far as [ut] is concerned, it is (still) virtually nonexistent in Canadian French.



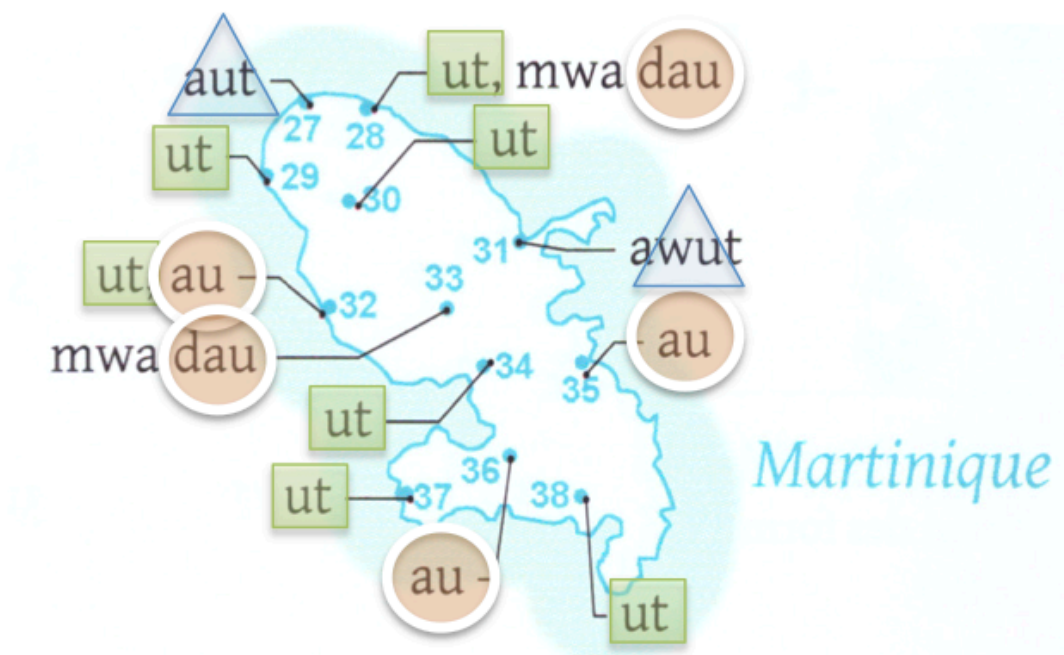
Map 40: Concept “August” in contemporary Canada (*Français de nos régions*)<sup>11</sup>

What does the situation look like in the Antilles? Let’s start with the French islands.



Map 41: Concept “August” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 192)

<sup>11</sup> <https://francaisdenosregions.com/2017/11/02/le-mois-daout-ou-comment-diable-est-ce-que-ca-se-prononce/>



Map 42: Concept “August” in Martinique (ALPA, map 192)

Once again, it is surprising to see that the most recent form, [ut], is clearly dominant. Its archaic counterpart, [au], is not attested at all in Guadeloupe, but does appear in four points in Martinique. We also find four instances of [a(w)ut], which could represent a dialectal heritage (see map 37 above), but is most probably a hybrid formation ([au] x [ut]). It is striking to see that the intermediate form [u] (as in the frequent compound [mwadu], *mois d’août*) is totally absent, even though it was the most neutral form in European French all throughout the twentieth century, and still is nowadays to a certain extent in Belgium and, most of all, in Canada.

The picture, as always, is totally different in the ex-British islands:



Map 43: Concept “August” in Dominique (ALPA, map 192)



Map 44: Concept “August” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 192)

The most archaic variant, [au], is totally dominant. There is not, once again, a single trace of [u], and [ut] only appears as a second choice, in point 39 in St. Lucia, the closest point to Martinique; the informant who gave that answer must have been in contact with Martinican creole speakers.

This particular example is extremely suggestive. When French creole languages were created, it was obviously the oldest, popular variant ([au]) that became the norm (as in traditional Canadian French, see map 39 above). It has survived until now in the ex-British islands, which are not at all under the influence of European French. In Canada, [au] has been replaced in recent times by [u], since the influence of European French on Canadian French was very strong all throughout the twentieth century, and [u] was the neutral form in Europe back then. This variant is now considered normative<sup>12</sup> in Canada, and the newer European variant [ut] still hasn’t managed to disseminate itself. In the French West Indies though, the fact that [u] is nonexistent while [ut] is very common is a clear indication that creole “Frenchification” is a relatively recent phenomenon: the intermediate step, [u], didn’t leave a trace.

#### 4.2.1.2. Absence of final consonant restitution in standard French (*juilleT, minuiT*)

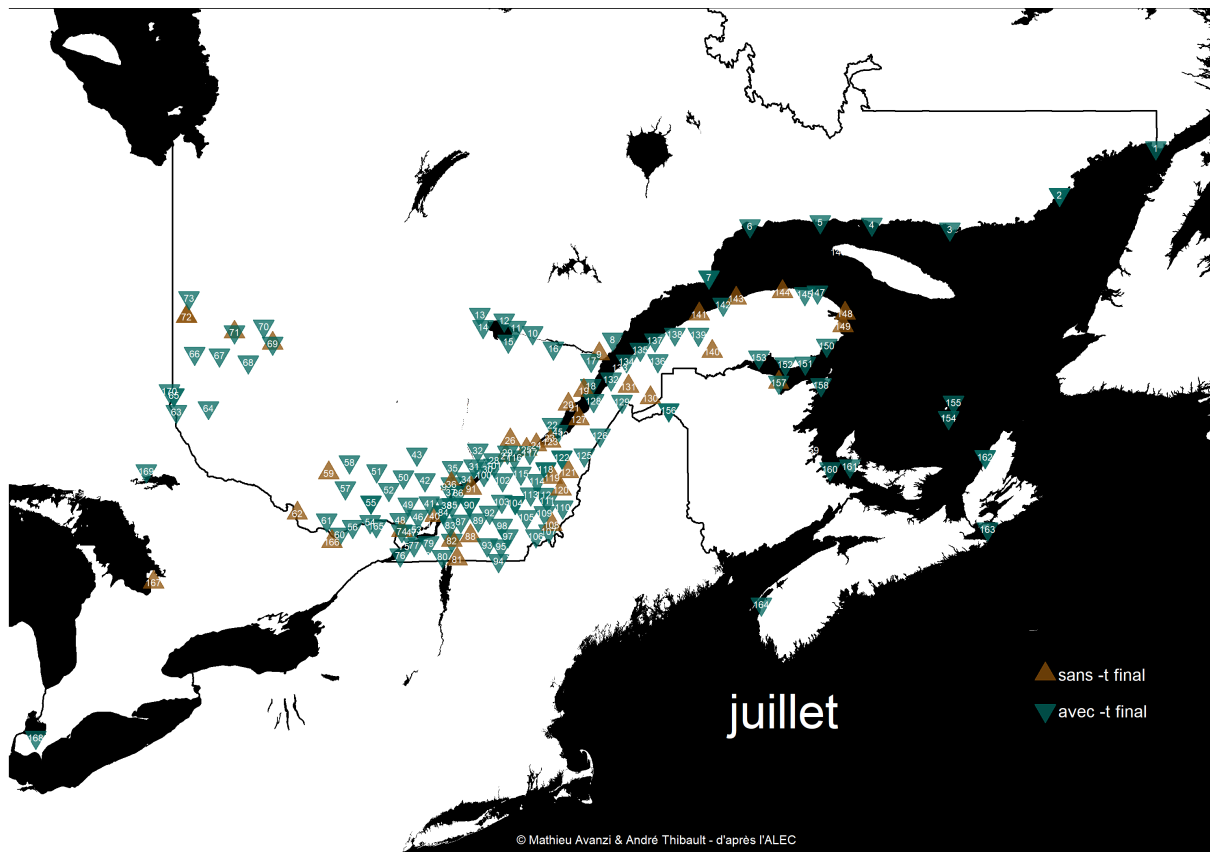
The restitution, in the pronunciation, of a written final *-t* in standard French is particularly chaotic (as we just saw with *août*; for an additional example, cf. *but* “goal”, which can be pronounced with or without its final *-t* according to all recent dictionaries). The phenomenon is actually very old and reached particular heights in central-western France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Chauveau 2009), from where it exported itself to the New World; it even triggered hypercorrections, such as *ici* > *icitte* (see Thibault 2009, 82-83). We therefore find ourselves with the ironic situation that European French sometimes seems to

<sup>12</sup> [http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit\\_bdl.asp?t1=1&id=2394](http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/gabarit_bdl.asp?t1=1&id=2394)

act in a more archaic way than the expatriate varieties. This will be illustrated with two lexical items, *juilleT* “July” and *minuiT* “midnight”.

#### 4.2.1.2.1. *juilleT* “July”

The pronunciation of the final consonant in this word is attested in a few dictionaries (Landais 1834, Martinon 1913, Michaelis / Passy 1914), but never became mainstream in French lexicography. It must have been very frequent in colonial times though, particularly in the speech of colonists from central-western France, because it is the best represented variant in traditional Canadian French, as documented in the ALEC (green triangles):



Map 45: Concept “July” in Canada (ALEC, question 1697)

Unfortunately, we do not have more recent geolinguistic data on the subject, but a dictionary such as the DQA 1992 (which is descriptive, not prescriptive) only gives the pronunciation without final [-t]. As a native speaker, I can also testify that this has become by now the normal, socially neutral pronunciation, as a result of European French influence; the variant with pronounced final [-t] sounds vulgar, rural or archaic in contrast.

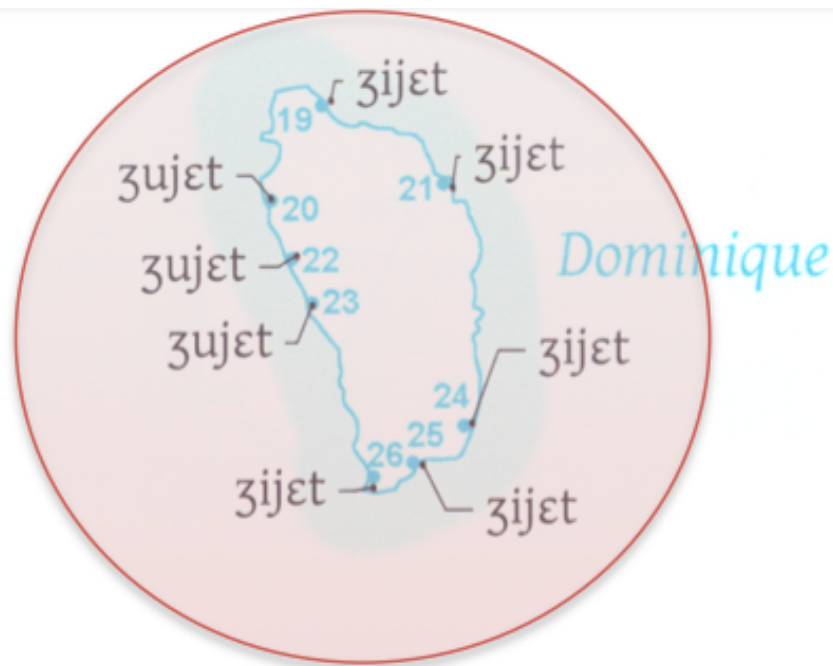
Let’s now have a look at the situation in the West Indies, starting with the French islands.



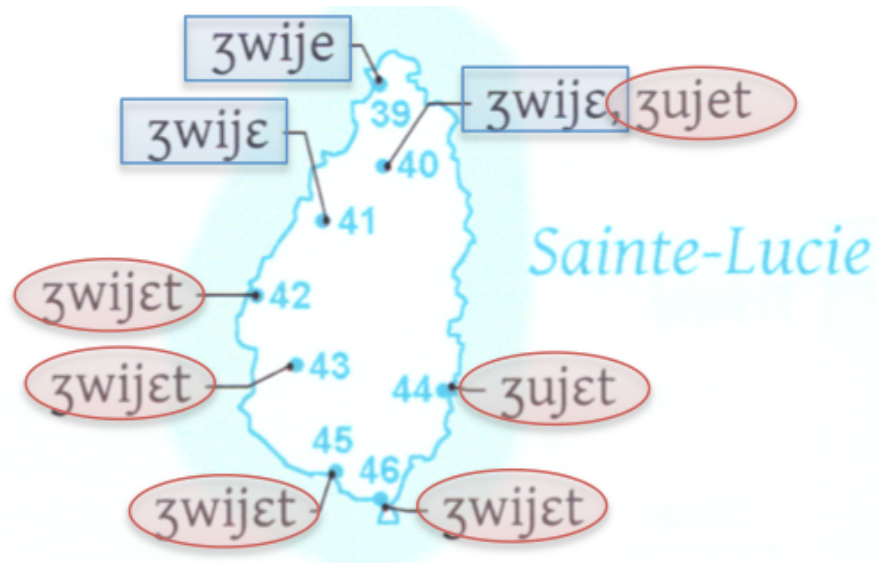




As usual, the ex-British islands behave totally differently:



Map 48: Concept “July” in Dominica (ALPA, map 191)



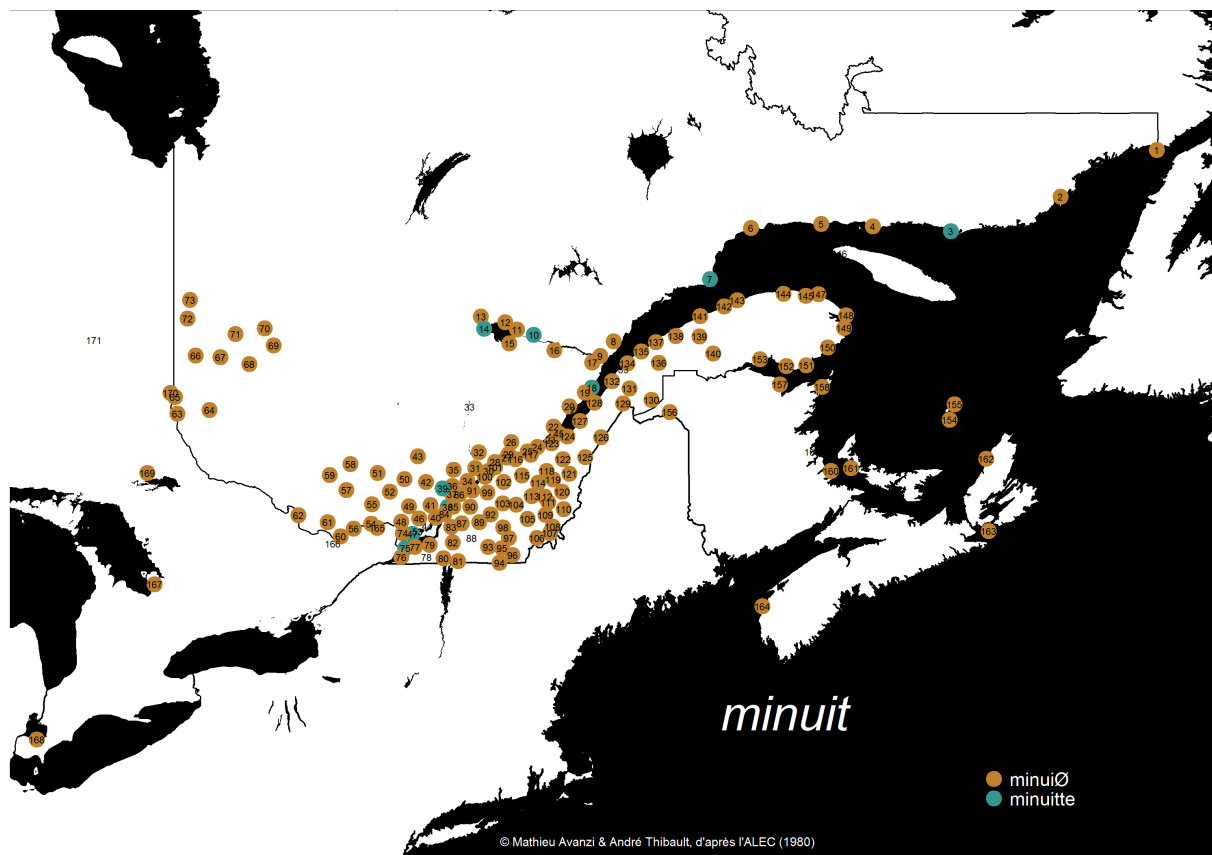
Map 49: Concept “July” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 191)

In Dominica, all the informants produced a form with a final *-t*. In St. Lucia, two thirds of the informants did the same. The variant without a final consonant was given by informants who live in the northern part of the island, which seems to be influenced by its proximity to Martinique (as we already saw with [ut], map 44, point 39). This is, once again, indirect evidence that creole in the French islands is (at least partially) converging with metropolitan French, unlike the creole spoken in the ex-British islands.

#### 4.2.1.2.2. *minuit* “midnight”

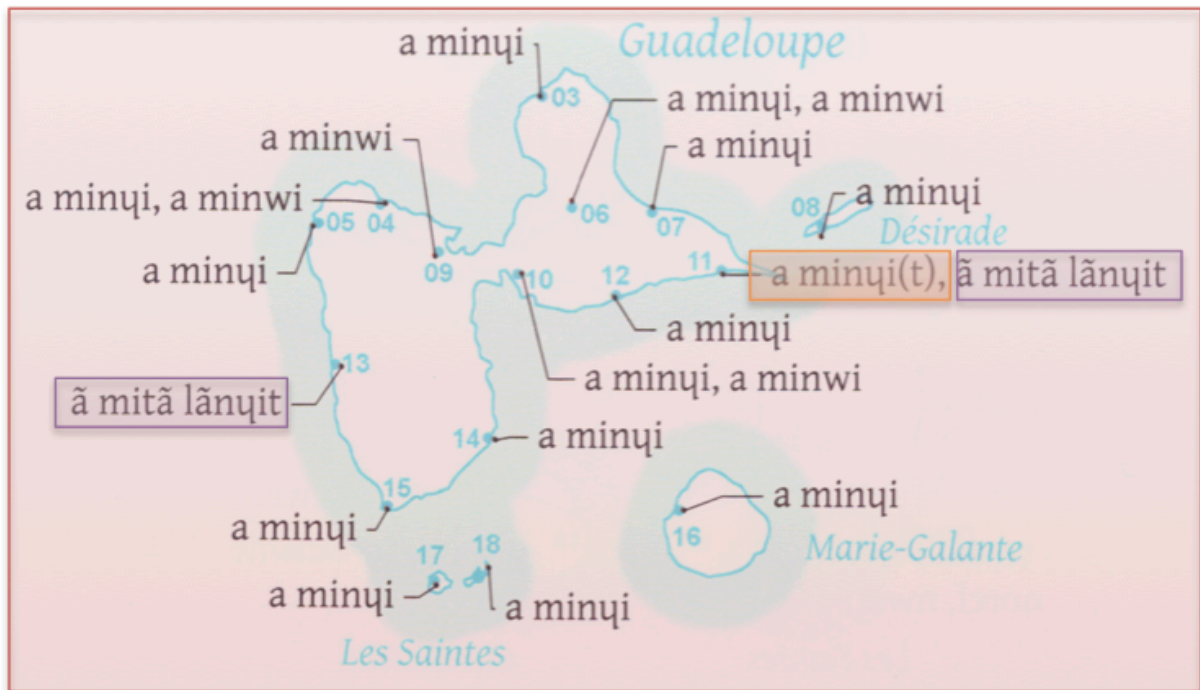
It is hard to find written evidence of the pronunciation of [-t] in this word, as far as the standard language is concerned, due to the fact that it is always written with a final *-t* anyway; but a graphic form *minuite* is attested as early as 1536 (FEW 7, 215b, NÖX) and leaves no doubt on the pronunciation of the final [-t]. A number of dialect forms, transcribed in various phonetic alphabets, also indicate that the last consonant is audible (cf. Loches *ménuite*, Saintonge *minœt*, etc.; FEW *ibid.*).

In traditional Canadian French (see map below), the pronunciation of the final consonant is attested, although with a minority status (green circles); the modern standard variant, the one without final [-t] (brown circles), was already the norm, even for elderly rural speakers back in 1980. Nowadays, its hegemony would most probably be even stronger.



Map 50: Concept “midnight” in Canada (ALEC, question 1717)

In the Antilles, once again, there is a sharp contrast between the French departments and the ex-British islands.



Map 51: Concept “midnight” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 197)



Map 52: Concept “midnight” in Martinique (ALPA, map 197)

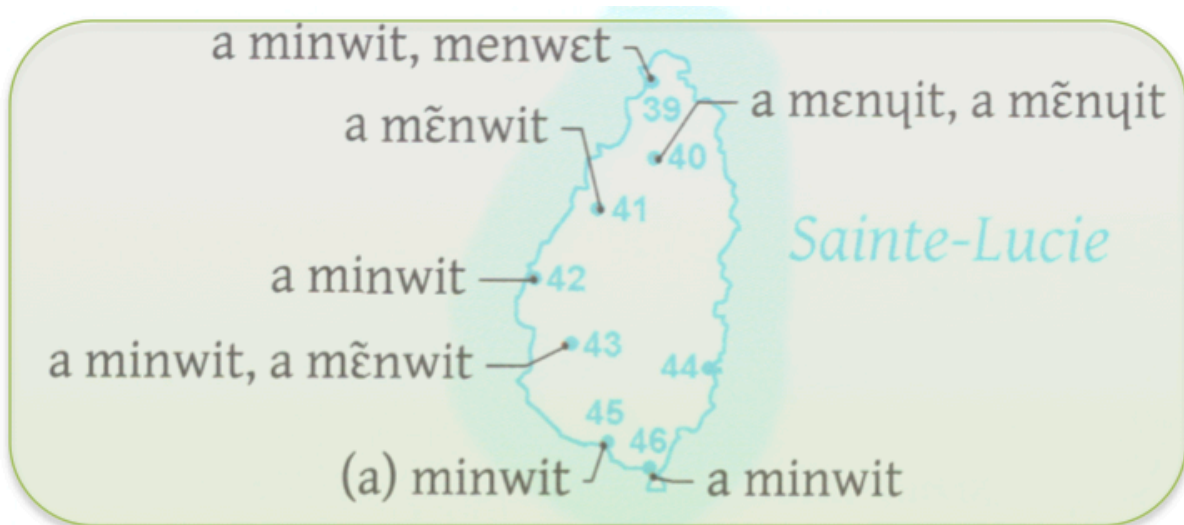
The French islands are almost unanimous in opting for the modern form without final [-t], with the exception of two points in Guadeloupe: one has a final [-t] in parentheses (it is a possible variant, but not the only one) and the two other points have a slightly different type,

*en mitan la nuit* (“in the middle of the night”), which contains the same element, *nuit* “night”, pronounced with its final [-t].

On the contrary, the forms found in the ex-British islands unanimously have a final [-t]:



Map 53: Concept “midnight” in Dominica (ALPA, map 197)



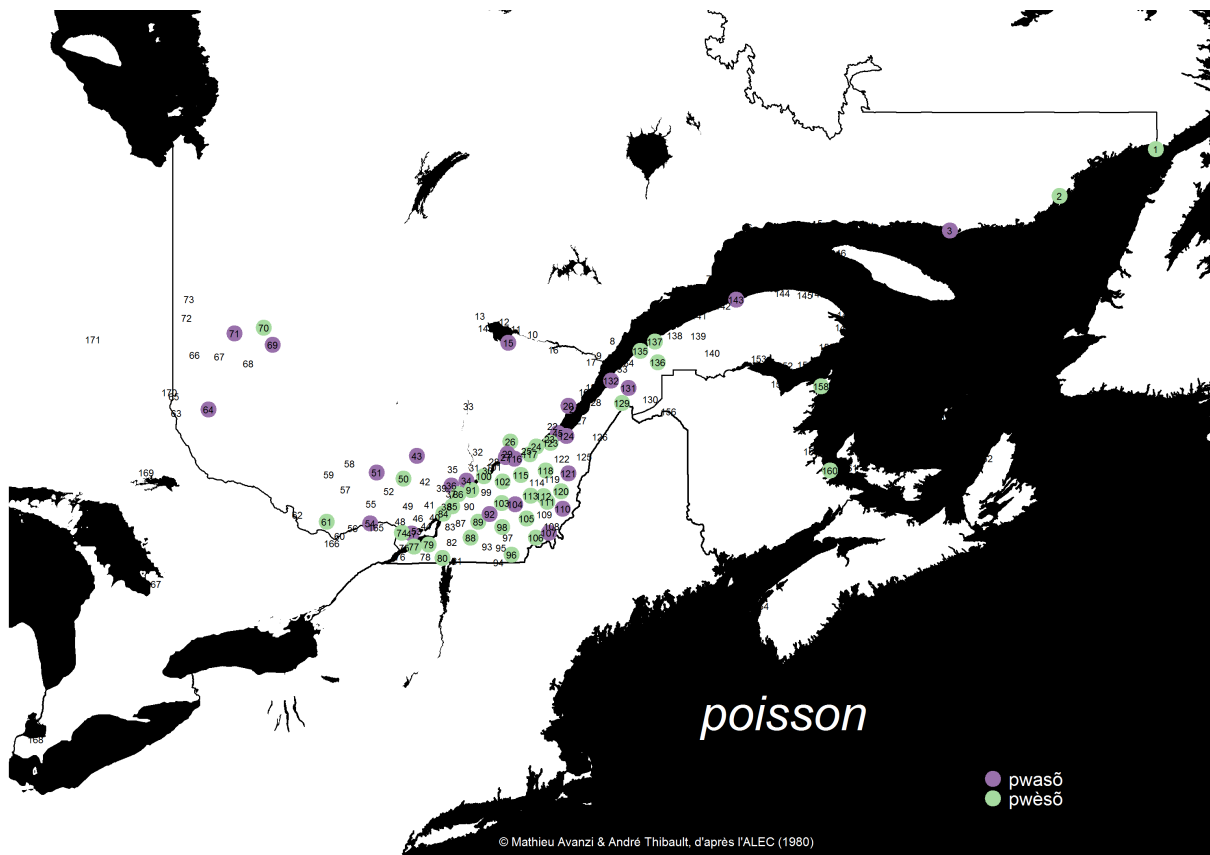
Map 54: Concept “midnight” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 197)

The creole of the ex-British islands appears to be more archaic than Canadian French, which makes sense given that French-speaking Canadians had already renewed their ties to European Francophones in the second half of the nineteenth century, whereas Dominica and St. Lucia never really reconnected with France.

#### 4.2.2. Pronunciation of the <oi> spelling: [we] in the old norm, [wa] in the new one

It is a well-known fact that the <oi> spelling in pre-Revolutionary French corresponded to [we] in the received pronunciation of the higher classes, and then switched to [wa] when the bourgeois classes took over and ousted the nobility as a consequence of the French Revolution.

Canadian French has long maintained the [we] variant in colloquial speech, and it can still currently be heard in specific words (such as the personal pronouns *moi* and *toi*, with a special pragmatic impact), even though standard [wa] has now become general and socially neutral. The above example shows the survival of archaic [we] (green circles) in the word *poisson* “fish”:

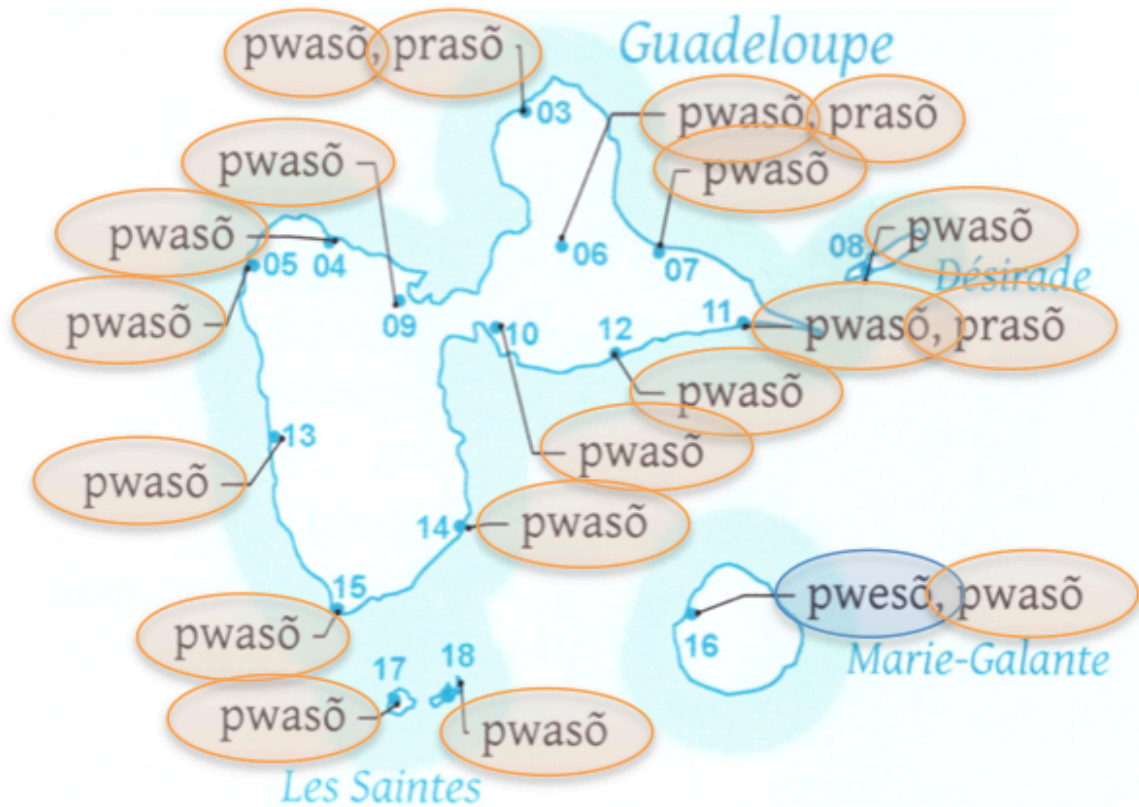


Map 55: Concept “fish” in Canada (ALEC, question 1380x)

The archaic pronunciation (green circles) was still slightly dominant back then (1970-1980) among elderly rural speakers, but the newer one ([wa], purple circles) was already very well represented; as we already mentioned, Canadian French has been thoroughly influenced by European French for over a century now.

The situation in the West Indies shows once again a stronger influence of the modern metropolitan norm in the French departments:





Map 56: Concept “fish” in Guadeloupe (ALPA, map 134)

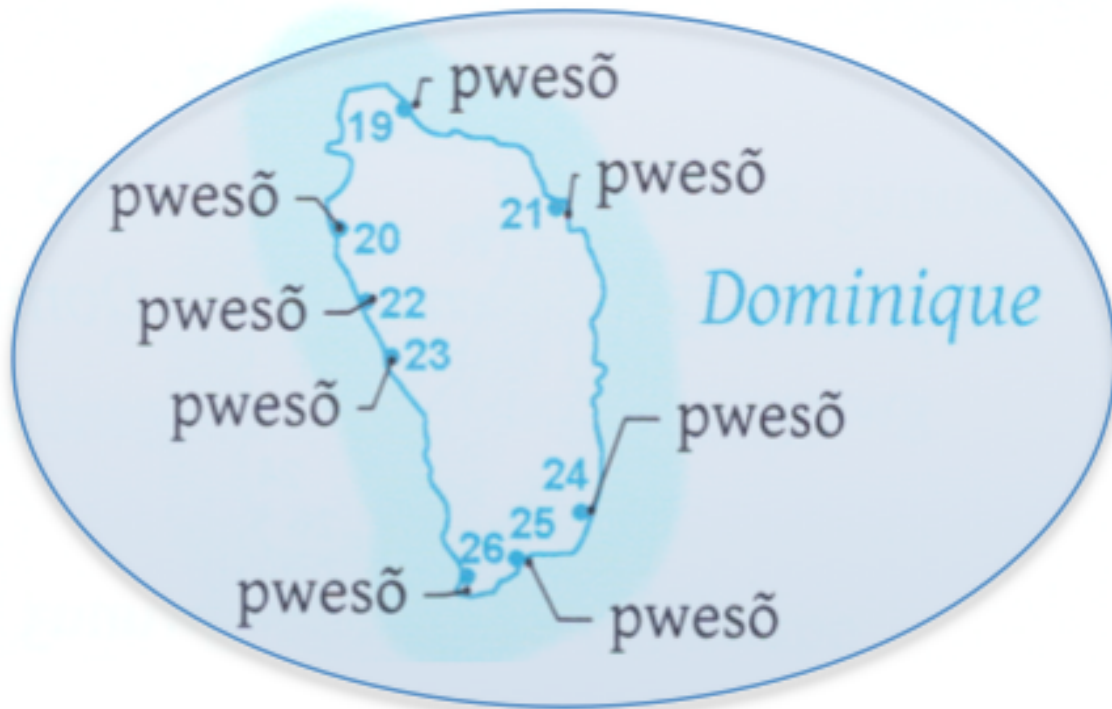


Map 57: Concept “fish” in Martinique (ALPA, map 134)

In Guadeloupe, the modern variant [wa] is hegemonic, with only one exception (point 16 in Marie-Galante, where it coexists with [we]). In Martinique, [wa] is dominant (attested in 10 points) but [we] is far from absent (attested in six points).



The ex-British islands show slightly divergent patterns this time:



Map 58: Concept “fish” in Dominica (ALPA, map 134)



Map 59: Concept “fish” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 134)

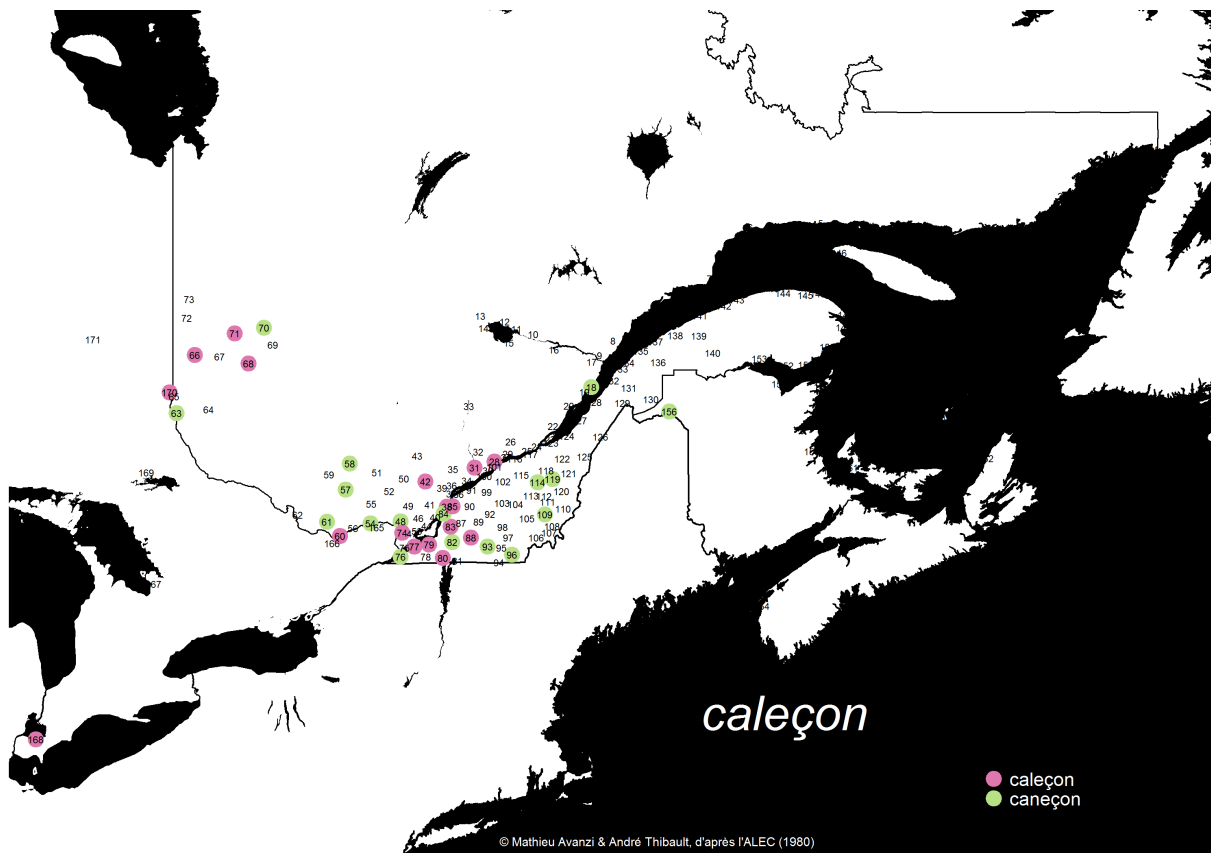
Dominica has only retained the archaic variant [we], whereas St. Lucia also shows three instances of [wa]—but only as a second choice in points 39 and 41.

The survival of [we] in six Martinican localities, as well as the presence of [wa] in three villages of St. Lucia, go against the general tendencies observed until now. This might have to do with the fact that the coexistence of [we] and [wa] is a very old phenomenon that already existed in colonial times, when creole genesis was incipient, and did not stop overnight with the French Revolution.

#### 4.2.3. Nasalization of [l] > [n] in *caleçon* > *caneçon* (lower class French)

The standard French word for “underwear, boxer shorts” is *caleçon*. The phonetic variant *caneçon* has existed for centuries, yet always limited to the speech of lower social classes. It made it into French lexicography (see for instance Furetière 1690; Littré [in 1863] calls it a “prononciation vicieuse”) but is mostly represented in old colloquial French repertoires, such as BL 1808. In Gallo-Romance primary dialects, variants where [l] was replaced by [n] are attested everywhere, without any visible regional cohesion (see FEW 2, 72b, CALCEUS). This is a typical case of what I call a “diastratism”—that is, a word whose restriction of use is diastratic (social class) instead of diatopic (regional). It seems to be obsolete nowadays in European French, as a result of normative pressure.

In traditional Canadian French, both variants coexisted, without any regional specialization (see map below). New surveys would be necessary to test their respective vitality nowadays (but *caneçon* sounds very vulgar to my ears).



Map 60: Concept “underwear, boxer shorts” in Canada (ALEC, question 1962)



In the ex-British islands, there seems to be a divergence between the two territories:



Map 63: Concept “underwear, boxer shorts” in Dominica (ALPA, map 446)



Map 64: Concept “underwear, boxer shorts” in St. Lucia (ALPA, map 446)

It is really only in Dominica that the diastratism *caneçon* dominates the scene. In St. Lucia, it is totally absent. This might have to do with the fact that St. Lucia remained French until 1814, half a century longer than Dominica.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

To conclude this overview, I would like to highlight a few points that stand out:

- a) Innovations can theoretically appear anywhere, in any speech community, but in order to achieve a wider diffusion and conquer new territories they must radiate out from a major demographic (as well as cultural and political) center; in this case study, we saw that innovations from France often ended up conquering other parts of the French-speaking world, while the reverse situation seems less likely (though not impossible, if we limit ourselves to isolated words—cf. Québec’s *courriel* “e-mail”, but this would be the subject of another talk).
- b) Nevertheless, a clean break of political ties can slow down or even stop this process, a situation that is particularly striking in the ex-British islands Dominica and St. Lucia, whose French creole is virtually untouched by recent European French innovations.
- c) However, political independence does not necessarily imply that a strong demographic center cannot disseminate its innovations beyond its political boundaries: French-speaking Canada gradually reconnected with European French in the last century, seeing it as more prestigious, and we saw in this study that the variants that are respectively attested in the French islands on the one hand and in the ex-British islands on the other often coexist in Canada but across generations—in other words, **a diatopic differentiation in the West Indies can correspond to a generational one in Canada.**
- d) As we said at the beginning (2.3.), one of the definitional elements of an expatriate variety is that it can end up building a norm of its own; that is the case in Quebec, where government institutions like the *Office québécois de la langue française* offer rich online resources to guide users, and over the years have developed a variety of “standard Québec French” that doesn’t always necessarily match European French. This might stop or slow down the European French influence, as we saw for a word like (*mois d’*)*août*, for which the [u] pronunciation is considered standard, regardless of the fact that French people now say [ut].
- e) The creole of the French islands is often viewed as more and more “Frenchified” (“francisé”); for some, it might even find itself on the slippery slope of “decreolization”. This impressionistic view might be a bit exaggerated or alarmist, but at least we now know that the use of linguistic atlases can help us to evaluate this process on the base of empirical facts, by systematically comparing Guadeloupe and Martinique with Dominica and St. Lucia.

In future works, it would be very advisable to include Haiti in the comparison. This country became independent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but unlike in Dominica and St. Lucia the French language there was never replaced by English in its prestige functions. The elites have kept on practicing an endogenous variety of regional French, very much in the minority compared to the pervasive Haitian creole, and probably less influenced by European French than is the case with Canadian French. This will be the subject of another talk.

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