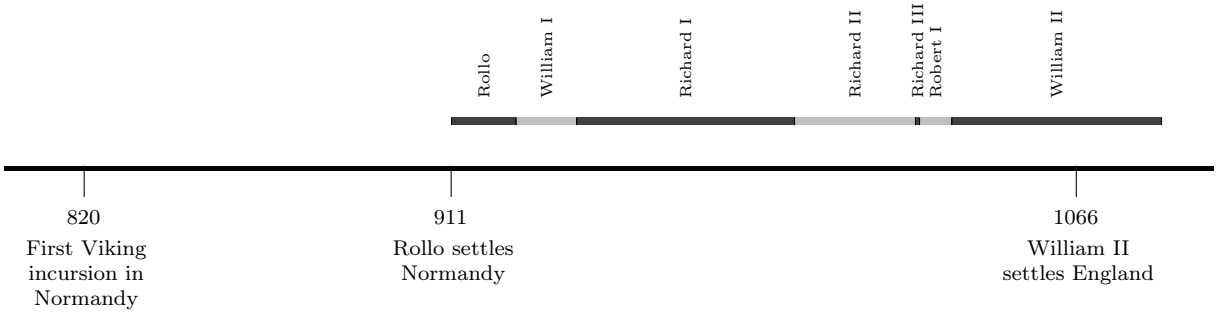
Phonological features of Norman Norse

Guillaume Enguehard (Université d'Orléans, LLL)

In 911, the French king Charles III granted a Viking chief called Rollo (Old Icelandic Hrólfr) a territory that would become the Duchy of Normandy. This event marks the culmination of decades of migration that have influenced the identity and linguistic landscape of Normandy. Although Old Norse has not survived to this day in this region, it is known to have survived at least until Rollo's grandson, Richard I (Ridel, 2002).



The objective of this presentation is to highlight the phonological specificities of Norman Norse with a systematic analysis of borrowings. The difficulty of such an analysis lies in the fact that Norman Norse, like Anglo-Norse, is supposedly heterogeneous since it mixes varieties of eastern and western Scandinavian populations. The goal is therefore not so much to categorize a single variety but to define the salient phonological properties found in the Norman linguistic heritage.

To do this, I use a database of 2822 toponyms and borrowings from reference works (de Gorog, 1958; Lepelley, 1993; Renaud, 1989, 2009) that summarize past research. Each item in the database is associated with one or more phonetic "changes", i.e. deviations with respect to Old Icelandic. For each Old Icelandic phoneme, I define the list of changes observed on the Norman territory by extracting the number of items concerned, the number of reliable items and the number of unique items. Then I calculate the percentage of each of these item types in relation to the total number of occurrences of the Old Icelandic phoneme. To avoid bias due to excessive repetition of a single item, unreliable items, or isolated items, I compute a salience index based on the average of the percentages of the three types of items. The change with the highest salience index can be considered quite representative of Norman Norse (see Table 1).

The originality of this method, in comparison with a non-systematic analysis such as that of de Gorog (1958), is that it allows us to test different contexts in which these changes could occur. Each change can be associated with a context element that allows the extraction of a context-specific salience index (see Table 2).

Among the salient changes that emerge from this study, some can be traced to the evolution of local French, but others are undeniably unique to Norman Norse. The most important ones are actually archaic features, such as **i.** the absence of diphthongation

	OCC	(%)	REL	(%)	ITE	(%)	INDICE
CHANGE	231	100	79	100	65	100	TOTAL
á > a	80	34,6	47	59,5	38	58,5	50,9
á > o	77	33,3	14	17,7	14	21,5	24,2
á > ɑ̃	55	23,8	12	15,2	5	7,7	15,6
á > e	13	5,6	3	3,8	4	6,2	5,2
á > Ø	4	1,7	3	3,8	2	3,1	2,9
á > wa	1	0,4	0	0	1	1,5	0,6
á > ɛ̃	1	0,4	0	0	1	1,5	0,6

Table 1: Index of salience (*á*)

	after j	before lC	before N.	from *an	elsewhere
á > a	0	1,3	0	7,2	42,3
á > o	2,4	6,8	0	11,7	4,3
á > ɑ̃	0	0	1,1	14,5	0
á > e	1,9	0	0	0	3,2
á > Ø	0	0	0	0	2,9
á > wa	0	0	0	0	0,6
á > ɛ̃	0	0	0	0,6	0

Table 2: Index of salience by context or origin (*á*)

of the accented *e* after consonants other than *h*, **ii.** the preservation of the diphthong *jú* (rather than *ý*), **iii.** the preservation of stress on the first element of rising diphthongs, **iv.** the preservation of contrast between oral and nasal vowels, and **v.** the preservation of [w] after consonants. These changes bring Norman Norse closer to Anglo-Norse (Gordon and Taylor, 1957), but in a less archaic form which reminds more of Old Jutlandic (Skautrup, 1944).

Some original features also seem not to be traceable to the evolution of French, such as the fact that *ý* evolves towards *i*. Even developments corresponding to those of French must be taken seriously, since they may also be those of Norman Norse in a context of language contact. Indeed, it is not known when Norse ceased to be spoken. We do know, however, that an icelandic skald was present at the court of Richard II in 1025, more than a hundred years after Rollo (Breese, 1977). And, for example, the typical French evolution from [al] to [ol] noticed in Norman onomastics is also found in a language that has been influenced by French after Norman conquer in 1066, i.e. English.

To sum up, I will present the modalities and results of a tool that allows to methodically highlight the phonological features of Norman Norse as a bundle of archaic Norse varities.

References

Breese, L. W. (1977). The Persistence of Scandinavian Connections in Normandy in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries. *Viator*, 8:47–62.

de Gorog, R. P. (1958). *The Scandinavian Element in French and Norman*. Bookman Associates, New York.

Gordon, E. V. and Taylor, A. R. (1957). *An introduction to Old Norse*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, [1981] edition.

Lepelley, R. (1993). *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de communes de Normandie*. Presses universitaires de Caen, Caen, [1996] edition.

Renaud, J. (1989). *Les Vikings et la Normandie*. Ouest-France, Rennes.

Renaud, J. (2009). *Vikings et noms de lieux de Normandie*. OREP éditions.

Ridel, E. (2002). A-t-on vraiment parlé la « langue danoise » à Bayeux vers 940 ? Une relecture de Dudon de Saint-Quentin. *Cahier des Annales de Normandie*, 32:135–143.

Skautrup, P. (1944). *Det Danske Sproghistorie*, volume 1. Gyldendal, Copenhagen, [1968] edition.