

**Faetar is a language isolate spoken in the small village of Faeto, in the mountains of the Apulia region of Southern Italy. A lack of a written system and a declining population due to emigration has placed this linguistic rarity in jeopardy. The purpose of this project is to integrate information from a historical linguistic analysis with information obtained from a genetic genealogy study to explore the origins of Faetar and its speakers. It is hoped that by enriching the knowledge of the language and people of Faeto, we can help preserve the language both for further study and to ensure its survival.**

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## **The Language**

Faetar is a traditionally oral language found only in a small village, Faeto, high in the mountains of Foggia province in southern Italy (Nagy 2000:5), the neighbouring village of Celle St. Vito, and small expatriate communities in Canada, Switzerland, and the United States. Through a combination of oral history and historical linguistic work, Faetar is understood to be a derived dialect of Francoprovençal (FP), a language that derives from Latin and finds its origins in what is now southeastern France (Nagy 2000:56-61). As the town is essentially a linguistic island surrounded by dialects of Italian, it exhibits many Italianized features as a result of centuries of contact, including almost identical phoneme inventories (Nagy 2000:8).

For most of its history, the language has been unwritten and without a standardized orthography or official grammar guide. (Nagy (2000) partially compensates for this by providing an extensively detailed grammar that includes IPA transcribed examples, along with information about the status and history of Faetar). Italy's language laws require regional languages to have both a grammar guide and dictionary to be teachable in schools (Nagy 2000:7-8); thus, Faetani children are generally educated in the Italian language and learn Faetar orally from adults in the community.

The paucity of written material has not diminished the language amongst its speakers. The people of Faeto take great pride in their language and are acutely aware of its French origins and history, and of its uniqueness in the region (Nagy 2000:7-8).

## **History**

Historical documents indicate that Faeto as a town has existed since approximately the fourteenth century (Nagy, 1996:3). There are differing accounts of how a FP dialect came to exist in the region, the most likely of which is termed the 'Angevin Story' (Nagy 1996:57-59). As Nagy explains, the account posits that troops were drawn from what is now southern France and sent by Charles I d'Anjou to secure the region of Crepacore, a region that contains what is now Faeto. Charles I populated these conquered lands with more speakers of FP, and over time the remaining settlers came to populate only the small mountain towns. Although this story has been largely transmitted orally, with exceptionally little recorded information, it represents the most

plausible account and one that best fits with the historical linguistics data that has been collected.

### Historical Linguistic Analyses

Nagy (1996) presents a thorough historical linguistic data set looking into the possible linguistic origin of what is now Faetar. Her original analyses (combined with other authors' work) confirm that Faetar almost certainly comes from the Francoprovençal region of southeastern France. The analysis she presents includes comparisons of several phonemes from Faetar with those of historical and still-extant languages from the FP region (Provençal, Francoprovençal, and French respectively).

Examination of tonic short [a], tonic long [e], the bilabial stops /p/ and /b/, and alveopalatal stops /t/ and /d/ in a comparative study with their use in three FP region languages against that of Faetar is presented by Nagy (1996) as confirmation of the FP origin of the language. For a finer geographic discrimination, a phoneme geographic analysis examines the distribution pattern of the lateral approximant /λ/ and its allophones ([l], [j], and [λ]) presented as a data-point overlay map of the region. Faetar's isolation and the esteem in which speakers hold the language has kept it highly preserved and thus [λ] is still a dominant allophone. By comparing selected Faetar words with those taken from localities around the FP region of France, Nagy (1996) concludes that the regions with the highest probability of origin for Faetar are the valleys of Ain and Isère in modern France.

### Further Linguistic Analysis

Genetic testing is an expensive and time-consuming process, and thus I suggest further historical linguistic analysis be undertaken to determine which localities are the most likely source of Faetar's FP predecessor, and thus the most likely home of the peoples that comprised a large part of its founding population before any genetic work begins.

Using Nagy's (1996) work as a baseline, I propose examining an additional phoneme, in dialects used in localities found strictly in central Ain and Southern Isère. Two linguistic atlases, the *Glossaire des Patois Francoprovençaux (GPF)* and *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique du Jura et des Alpes du Nord (ALJA)* were examined by her to determine the localities used in the original geographic analysis, and it is suggested that they again be used to select localities in the two FP sub-regions to be examine.

Although Nagy (1996) selected 332 localities to examine for her historical linguistic analysis, given that we will examine only the much smaller sub-regions of Ain and Isère, only localities within these regions will be subjected to further linguistic analysis.

The phoneme will need to be carefully chosen to ensure it is found in allophonic variation (and/or variation in presence or absence) amongst the dialects examined, is documented in some form, and to ensure unconditioned change has not eliminated or altered the entire phoneme(s) (Lehman 1992:190-91) making documentation and full

analysis difficult or impossible. Further, the selection of the phoneme must reflect the suitability of locations chosen from the atlases and whether those localities meet the criteria for undertaking any genetic analyses.

### **Suitability of Locations for Linguistic (and subsequent genetic) Analysis**

As we wish to use the information gleaned from these localities to select for suitable genetic testing subjects, their selection for linguistic analysis must be somewhat strict. Although certain locations may be satisfactory for continued linguistic analysis, a relatively stable, isolated population that is historically documented is preferable for genetic analysis.

The most suitable locations would, ideally, be old enough to have existed with stable populations when the settlers of Faetar are believed to have left the region, and have either an orally described and/or documented continuity of population isolation relative to the surrounding townships/regions of France and Europe.

Any immigration and emigration in and out of the region from distant parts of Europe or beyond will have altered the genetic lineages of the populations and may make a discernible connection with the lineages found in Faeto difficult to obtain. Similarly, the likelihood of finding a large enough sample of willing, appropriate candidates with long, preserved family lines must be taken into account to ensure quality data for comparison. Such lines are presumably more likely in isolated locales.

### **Alternative Options**

In the event that a suspected locale/region of origin is resolved through historical linguistic analysis but genetic testing is unfeasible for some reason, there are alternative options. The French-Canadian Heritage Society of California and the Southern California Genealogical Society have launched an online French Heritage DNA project that aims to document and record the genealogical heritage of people(s) of French ancestry. As they have extensive genealogical data regarding French peoples across the world, it would be wise to compare any and all results with the database of the French Heritage DNA project. (<http://frenchna.org/>) Further, if access to peoples of the suspected regions of France is limited by financial or other constraints, the database may provide at least supplementary information about genealogical links between Faeto and France.

### **Dialect Concerns**

It is unlikely, given France's long-standing policy of strict language laws concerning the teaching of standard French, that all members of eligible groups within these localities will invariably speak with an FP style if asked to produce the words used in the phoneme analysis. This is, however, irrelevant in regards to the requirement of historical records to support long-term, local family history – that is, although the dialect spoken by any one person or population may have changed over time, it is the integrity of their family line(s) within the region that is most important to the study.

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