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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDLE ENGLISH *ā*, *ai* and *ī* IN SURREY, KENT AND SUSSEX

By DAVID NORTH

One of the most important contributions made by linguistic geography to other branches of language study is its ability to uncover the linguistic history of a region. The spatial diversity of language often owes its existence to the juxtaposition of forms reflecting different chronological stages in the development of a single item: even within a fairly small area, localities may be distinguished by differences in the rate of adoption of innovations or, on the other hand, in the extent to which older features are retained. What appears to be a purely synchronic geographical survey often incorporates a diachronic dimension: as de Saussure suggested, "geographical diversity should be called temporal diversity".¹

The purpose of this article² is the examination, mainly from the historical point of view, of two phonological items in the speech of elderly life-long residents of thirty-one rural communities in the counties of Surrey, Kent and Sussex. The data is drawn from two sources: (i) the results of the Survey of English Dialects (SED), and (ii) the results of my own fieldwork. The majority of the informants were born in the thirty years between 1880 and 1910; almost all of them were men and most had been in agricultural employment. The localities are listed below. The county numbers - 34 (Surrey), 35 (Kent) and 40 (Sussex) - are those used by SED; the SED locality numbers are preceded by 0, and the localities visited by myself are numbered in a new series beginning at 11.

34 (Surrey)	01 Walton-on-the Hill	04 Outwood
	02 East Clandon	05 Thursley
	03 Coldharbour	11 Dunsfold
35 (Kent)	01 Stoke	07 Appledore
	02 Farningham	11 Shottenden
	03 Staple	12 Yalding
	04 Warren Street	13 Chiddingstone
	05 Denton	14 Smarden
	06 Goudhurst	15 Burmarsh
40 (Sussex)	01 Warnham	06 Firle
	02 East Harting	11 Turners Hill
	03 Sutton	12 Rotherfield
	04 Fletching	13 Robertsbridge
	05 Horam	14 Bolney

15 Poynings
16 Washington

17 Funtington

A generalized system of phonemic oppositions was constructed to serve as a framework for comparison between localities. The members of this system are termed "diaphonemes" and each presupposes the existence of regular lexical correspondences between dialects. Diaphonemes are enclosed by rounded brackets (). The diaphonemes of Surrey-Kent-Sussex English (SKSE) to be examined here are (ei) and (ai); realizations of these diaphonemes when followed by final and preconsonantal (l) have been excluded, as have examples of (ai) before (r). Stressed syllables only are considered.

SKSE (ei) continues Middle English (ME) \bar{a} and *ai* and corresponds to the /eɪ/ of RP English. The following description takes into account every example of isolative (ei) recorded in the written sources.³ The phonetic realizations of each diaphoneme are grouped into "allophonic types", since for purposes of comparison it is necessary to reduce the large number of variants recorded in the region to manageable proportions; these types are believed to be in free variation in the dialects in which they occur. The allophonic types of SKSE (ei) are the closing diphthongs [ɛɪ], [æɪ] and [ĕɪ], the long monophthong [ɛ:] and the centring diphthong [eə].⁴

The allophones of the [ɛɪ] type begin with unrounded front vowels, of which the most open is slightly more open than Cardinal 3, and move towards [ɪ], an unrounded front vowel slightly closer than Cardinal 2 and retracted, e.g.:

[gɛɪt] "gate" (40.17)

The [æɪ] allophonic type includes closing diphthongs beginning with unrounded front vowels more open than those of the [ɛɪ] type, and moving towards [ɪ], e.g.:

[gæɪt] "gate" (35.04)

All closing diphthongs beginning with unrounded centralized front or fully central vowels and moving towards [ɪ] are grouped into the [ĕɪ] type, e.g.:

[wĕɪt] "wait" (35.12)

The allophones of the [ɛ:] type are long unrounded front vowels in the half-close -- half-open range, e.g.:

[mɛ:t] "mate" (40.04)

Finally, the [eə] allophonic type comprises a series of centring diphthongs beginning with unrounded front vowels, half-open or closer, and moving towards [ə], an unrounded central vowel between half-close and half-open, e.g.:

[stɪɛət] "straight" (40.04)

The modern geographical distribution of the allophonic types of SKSE (ei) allows the probable historical development of this diaphoneme in the region to be deduced. There is no evidence that the ME distinction between \bar{a} and ai is ever maintained in modern SKSE dialects, and the sound which can most satisfactorily be taken as the point at which these two ME phonemes merged and as the basis for all subsequent developments in SKSE is [ɛ:]. According to Dobson, ME \bar{a} and ai had merged as [ɛ:] in the dialects of eastern England in the fifteenth century.⁵ Map 1 shows that the SKSE [ɛ:] allophonic type is concentrated in a small but coherent area in north-eastern Sussex. This map also shows that the [ɛə] type, which must have developed from [ɛ:], is confined to this same area. These two archaic and non-standard types, then, are retained only in a small peripheral part of the region.

Since the [ɛ:] and [ɛə] types occur relatively rarely in the region, even in the area identified above, it is possible to indicate their distribution simply by placing symbols on the map at the localities concerned. Generally, however, spatial differentiation on the phonetic level takes the form of variation in the frequencies of the allophonic types which realize a particular diaphoneme. It is necessary, therefore, to adopt a quantitative approach by calculating for each locality, on the basis of the available sample, a percentage frequency for each variant. These frequencies can be mapped by means of "isopleths", which are analogous to the contour lines on Ordnance Survey maps. Isopleths are assigned certain constant and regularly spaced values and enclose localities at which the feature under examination occurs with similar frequencies. Map 2 is constructed in this way, and shows the frequencies with which the [ɛɪ] allophonic type occurs throughout the region.

In the development of RP, [e:] < [ɛ:] < ME \bar{a} , ai was diphthongized to [eɪ] about 1800,⁶ and a similar process must be responsible for the [ɛɪ] allophonic type in SKSE. The older SKSE [ɛ:] type must have been diphthongized to [ɛɪ], a development which was probably reinforced by the corresponding [eɪ] in RP. Indeed Wright suggested that ei (= [ɛɪ]) was almost always due to the influence of RP when found in English dialects, implying that it had replaced the indigenous sounds $eə$, $iə$, \bar{e} (= [ɛə, iə, ɛ:]) in southern England.⁷

Map 2 shows that the [ɛɪ] type is now dominant over most of the region; its frequency falls below 75% in three areas, of which the first two are contiguous: the central northern part of the region along with northern and eastern Kent; central Sussex; and the extreme south-western corner of Sussex. The frequencies tend to decrease towards the central northern area. The advantage of such maps is their capacity for clarifying the historical perspective of a synchronic geographical presentation: sources of innovations and the direction and relative speed of their diffusion can be deduced from the patterns revealed.

Before proceeding further, a number of points can be made about the pattern presented on Map 2. It is highly improbable that the [ɛɪ] type has evolved independently in the separate areas in which its frequency is high, but very likely that [ɛɪ] < [ɛ:] once covered the whole region and has been replaced in certain areas by

innovations having a common source in the central northern part of the region, where the frequency of [ɛɪ] is now lowest.

Map 3 shows that the source of the innovations which are tending to replace [ɛɪ] is the London area, suggesting that the features concerned are probably associated with London English. Although the frequency of these innovations tends to diminish with increasing distance from the source, this is not a uniform process: some adjacent localities, equally distant from London, are sharply differentiated in the extent to which they have retained the older [ɛɪ] type (e.g. 35.04 and 35.14, 40.01 and 40.11).

Non-linguistic factors must now be considered in order to account for this irregular patterning. A comparison of Maps 2 and 3 shows that there is a close relationship between the progressive linguistic zones - northern and eastern Kent on the one hand and central Sussex on the other - and the areas associated with the main communication routes from London to the coastal urban centres of Dover and Brighton respectively. This is a recurrent pattern in the linguistic geography of the region, and it suggests that these routes - along with the intermediate towns - have acted as channels for the diffusion of innovations from the London area. The small isolated area in south-western Sussex in which the frequency of [ɛɪ] falls below 75% probably owes its existence to the innovations jumping from London to the urban area around Portsmouth, which then acts as a subsidiary source of diffusion for its immediate rural hinterland. The development of these communication routes and the expansion of the towns which they serve began in the middle of the eighteenth century and intensified during the following hundred years.⁸

Map 4 shows the distribution of the [æɪ] allophonic type. This complements the distribution pattern of [ɛɪ] in all except the central northern part of the region. [æɪ] is concentrated in three separate areas, but the localities at which it occurs relatively infrequently are to be found in the north of the region or close to one of the areas of relatively high frequency. In view of this pattern - and bearing in mind the source of innovation suggested above - it is probable that the [æɪ] allophonic type has a common origin wherever it is found in SKSE and that this is to be sought in London English.

This prediction is confirmed by the fact that [æɪ ~ aɪ] as a realization of RP /eɪ/ is a familiar feature of popular London speech.⁹ A.J. Ellis implies that this dated from the first half of the nineteenth century,¹⁰ but it must have spread into SKSE soon afterwards, as Wright uses *ai* ([aɪ]) to symbolize the normal reflex of ME *ā* in south-eastern Kent,¹¹ and [æɪ] is now the dominant type not only here (35.04, 05) but also at 40.11 in northern Sussex.

[æɪ] has clearly been partially replaced in the central northern part of the region by a more recent innovation spreading outwards from the London area. This is the [ɛ̃ɪ] allophonic type, the distribution of which (Map 5) complements that of the [ɛɪ] type in this part of the region (cf. Map 2). Gimson notes that RP /eɪ/ may be realized by diphthongs of this type not only in

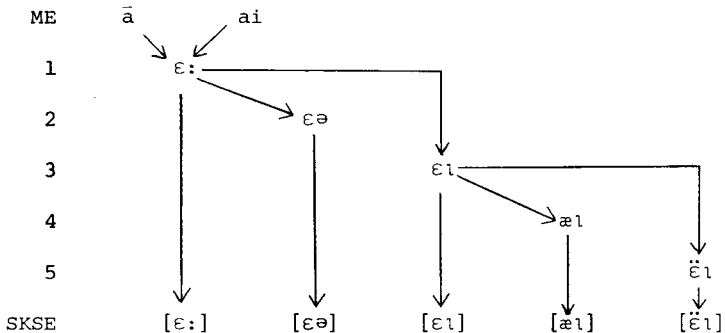
popular London speech but also in RP itself.¹² Additional evidence for the conclusion that the spread of [Ĕɪ] into SKSE from London speech was later than that of [æɪ] is provided by the fact that its geographical distribution is much more limited and that it only occurs to any appreciable extent in the area immediately adjacent to the capital.

It is hoped that this discussion has demonstrated the way in which an examination of geographical patterns can illuminate the historical development of an item by identifying the dynamics of linguistic evolution in a given region and by uncovering the successive chronological strata. As in a geological map, features representing several stages in relative time may "surface" at different places to form the linguistic "landscape" at a particular point in absolute time.

The historical development of SKSE (ei) can be summarized as follows:

1. ME \bar{a} and ai merge as [ɛ:].
2. [ɛ:] diphthongizes to [ɛə].
3. [ɛ:] diphthongizes to [ɛɪ], which becomes the dominant form throughout the region; [ɛ:] and [ɛə] recede into a small pocket in north-eastern Sussex; ([ɛ:] is retained sporadically in parts of Surrey).
4. [æɪ] spreads outwards from the London area, tending to replace [ɛɪ] in areas where the influence of London is strong.
5. [Ĕɪ] follows [æɪ] in its diffusion from the London area, tending to replace it in the central northern part of the region.

The process can be presented diagrammatically:



SKSE (ai) corresponds to RP /aɪ/ and its principal source is ME \bar{a} . At the SED localities, the data for this diaphoneme is taken from my own analysis of the sample contained in the tape-recordings obtained by the fieldworkers. This has been necessary since, as Orton and Wakelin point out, there are often inaccuracies in the

written recordings made at these localities.¹³

The allophonic types of isolative SKSE (ai) are all closing diphthongs moving towards [ɪ]: [əɪ], [aɪ], [ɑɪ], [äɪ] and [ɔɪ]. The allophones of the [əɪ] type begin with [ə], an unrounded central vowel between half-close and half-open, or unrounded and centralized front or back vowels which are half-open or slightly lowered from the half-open position, e.g.:

[xəɪt] "right" (35.07)

The [aɪ] allophonic type consists of diphthongs beginning with unrounded front vowels in the half-open -- open range, e.g.:

[laɪk] "like" (40.02)

The diphthongs included in the [ɑɪ] type begin with unrounded back vowels in the half-open -- open range, e.g.:

[faɪt] "fight" (34.11)

Diphthongs with open starting-points intermediate between [aɪ] and [ɑɪ] constitute the [äɪ] type, e.g.:

[näɪt] "night" (35.01)

Finally, all variants beginning with rounded back vowels are included in the [ɔɪ] type, e.g.:

[hɔɪtθ] "height" (40.11)

This last type is only found in localities with [ɑɪ], from which it has developed by a process of rounding.

Map 6 shows the distribution of the [əɪ] allophonic type. It seems that this feature, in the south and east at any rate, has tended to recede away from the centre and north of the region, and the corridor through south-eastern Kent between two areas of relatively high frequency must represent the division of a previously unified [əɪ] area. The sporadic occurrences of [əɪ] in other parts of the region and, in particular, the further area of fairly high frequency in the extreme west of Sussex, suggest that this allophonic type was once widespread throughout the region, but has subsequently retreated before the advance of more recent types.

This conclusion is consistent with the historical evidence. According to Dobson, [əɪ] was an early stage in the development of ME *I* in the Great Vowel Shift,¹⁴ and seems to have been established in the predecessor of RP in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁵ It is clearly archaic and has receded away from the communication routes and urban areas where the influence of London is strong (cf. Map 3).

In SKSE the starting-point of early Modern English [əɪ] was subsequently lowered towards the front of the mouth ([aɪ]), the back ([ɑɪ]), or the fully open central position ([äɪ]). Each of

these possibilities is represented by an allophonic type in SKSE, but their distribution patterns are complicated and it is difficult to arrive at a probable sequence of historical development. The distribution of the dominant types at each locality is incorporated into Map 7, the full significance of which will, however, be considered later on.

The discussion so far has concentrated on variation at the surface phonetic level. Weinreich, however, has drawn attention to the need to examine phonetic items in relation to the systems in which they function and to discover how they are marshalled into the system of oppositions prevailing in each dialect.¹⁶ Similar allophones may occur over a large area, but this superficial identity might conceal the fact that the same sound fits into its system in a different position and functions differently in each of the localities where it is part of the phonetic inventory. The need, then, is for a phonemic approach in which the system at each locality is analysed on its own terms.

The allophones of a particular phoneme are often found to cluster around a "norm" or "target"; quantitative data permit an analysis of this clustering and the identification of the "peak" where the frequency is highest, e.g. (ai) at 34.02 where [äɪ] has the highest frequency:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} & & & \ddot{a}\text{ɪ} & (6\%) & & \\ & & & \boxed{\ddot{a}\text{ɪ}} & (34\%) & + & \text{aɪ} & (27\%) & \text{aɪ} & (3\%) \\ \text{aɪ} & (6\%) & \ddot{a}\text{ɪ} & (24\%) & & & & & & \end{array}$$

/äɪ/ will be described as the "phonemic type" of (ai) at 34.02. There may, however, be more than one area of concentrated distribution of free variant allophones,¹⁷ in which case there is more than one phonemic type. For purposes of comparison, it is convenient to classify phonemic types by levelling them under representative labels, in the same way that allophones were grouped into allophonic types.

It is now possible to examine and compare the ways in which the opposition between two vowel diaphonemes is maintained in different localities, and the quantitative methods adopted enable theoretical probabilities to be calculated. For example, at 35.15 SKSE (ei) occurs as a single phonemic type /ɛɪ/ (its probability is therefore 1), but (ai) occurs as /äɪ/ (with a probability of 0.65) and /ɛɪ/ (0.35). Therefore, out of a total of one hundred theoretical minimal pairs distinguished by the (ei : ai) opposition, there is a probability that sixty-five will be of the /ɛɪ : äɪ/ type, and thirty-five of the /ɛɪ : ɛɪ/ type. Such an analysis can be carried out for each locality and the distribution of each type of opposition can be mapped.

From the descriptions given above, it will be clear that the diaphonemes (ei) and (ai) are generally both realized in the same portion of "phonological space"¹⁸ by closing diphthongs moving from unrounded vowels in the half-open -- open range towards [ɪ]. The necessity for maintaining an adequate "safety margin" between the allophones of (ei) and those of (ai) within the individual systems

is illustrated by the confusion that can occur between different systems; for example in my own speech, [æɪ] for SKSE (ei) has often been understood as a realization of RP /aɪ/. The ways in which this important opposition is maintained in the various local systems in SKSE will now be examined.

The phonemic types of (ei) are /ɛɪ/, /æɪ/, /ĕɪ/, /ɛə/ and /ɛ:/, and those of (ai) are /əɪ/, /aɪ/, /äɪ/, /aɪ/ and /ɒɪ/. The types of opposition found and the classification of these combinations is shown in the table below:

		(ai)				
		/əɪ/	/aɪ/	/äɪ/	/aɪ/	/ɒɪ/
(ei)	/ɛɪ/	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
	/æɪ/	B1		B3	B4	B5
	/ĕɪ/			C3	C4	C5
	/ɛə/	D1				
	/ɛ:/	E1				

It is immediately clear that the two types of opposition in which the diaphonemes would be in danger of merging, */æɪ:aɪ/ and */ĕɪ:əɪ/, are avoided altogether. Also, to introduce a diachronic perspective, the two archaic phonemic types of (ei), /ɛə/ and /ɛ:/, only combine with /əɪ/, the most archaic type of (ai); thus types D1 and E1 reflect aspects of older phonemic systems, from the period before the two diaphonemes came to be realized in the same portion of phonological space.

Only seven of the fourteen attested oppositional types are ever dominant in any locality: /ɛɪ:əɪ/, /ɛɪ:aɪ/, /ɛɪ:äɪ/, /ɛɪ:aɪ/, /æɪ:äɪ/, /æɪ:aɪ/ and /ĕɪ:äɪ/. Map 7 shows how the region can be divided on the basis of the distribution of the types dominant at each locality; the distribution of the same types when in a minority is also indicated.

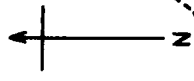
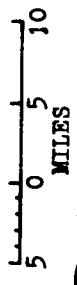
The problem of how to distinguish (ei) from (ai) has been solved in several different ways by the various dialects of SKSE, and the same methods tend to be used consistently throughout a number of well-defined areas. The location of the boundaries is obviously determined to a large extent by the diffusion of the various allophonic types, e.g. the preponderance of [əɪ] for (ai) in the A1 areas, and of [æɪ] for (ei) in the B3 and B4 areas. The fact that the two diaphonemes are strictly kept apart, however, and that the two theoretically possible oppositional types */æɪ:aɪ/

and */ $\text{ɛ}i:\text{ə}l$ / are absent, suggests that at this realizational level there must be a close and dependent relationship between their respective allophonic ranges, which in its turn may be reflected in the geographical pattern. Although the diffusion of the [æ] allophonic type of (ei) seems to have been determined to a large extent by the location of the principal communication routes from London to the South Coast urban centres and must therefore have exerted strong external pressure on the local systems, it may be that the presence of the /a/ phonemic type for (ai) in a stable system may itself have been responsible for the failure of allophones of the [æ] type to infiltrate into the system from outside to realize (ei). Again, a pre-existent / $\text{ä}i$ / or /a/ phonemic type for (ai) may have allowed the allophonic range of (ei) to be extended into the [æ] region when speakers became aware of this type. On the other hand, the entry of [æ] into a system as a realization of (ei) may have caused the allophones of (ai) to be retracted towards [a]. Such possibilities illustrate the need for systemic factors to be taken into account when examining geographical patterns, although it is often impossible to establish the probable sequence of cause and effect, which may in any case differ from one local variety to another. Much of the importance of structural dialectology, however, rests in the way in which it illustrates this complex interplay between the synchronic and diachronic and between the internal and external aspects of linguistic evolution.

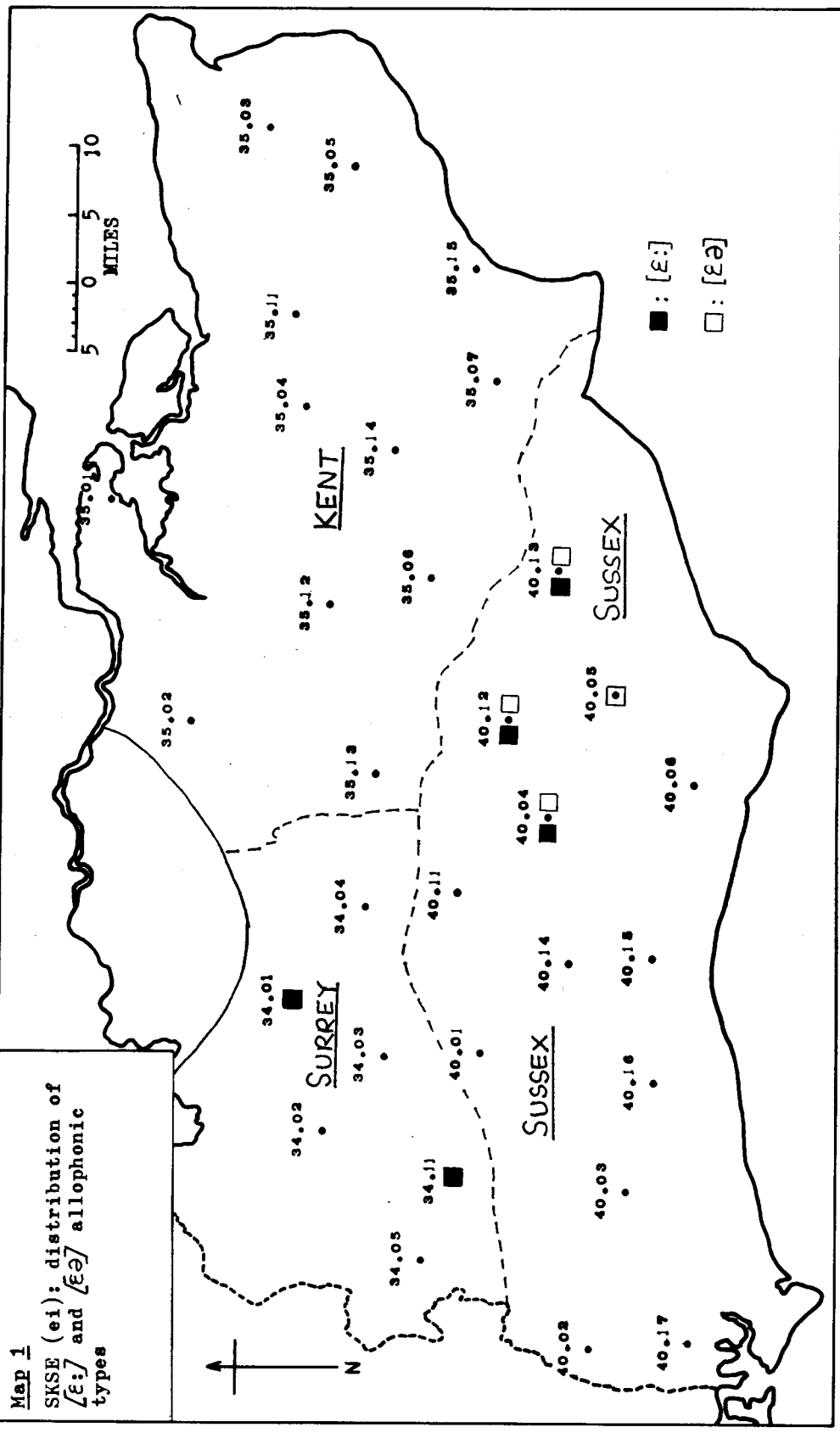
This article has been offered as a contribution to the study of English historical phonology in Surrey, Kent and Sussex. At the same time, I have tried to demonstrate the importance and usefulness of a geographical approach to such problems. An examination of the relationship between time and place permits the establishment of a sequence of development and the identification of the dynamic geographical patterns involved. A comparison of the latter with non-linguistic factors can help to explain the direction of linguistic change, but, as the concluding exercise in structural dialectology has shown, external influences are balanced by internal systemic considerations.

Map 1

SKSE (ei): distribution of
[ɛ:] and [ɛə] allophonic
types

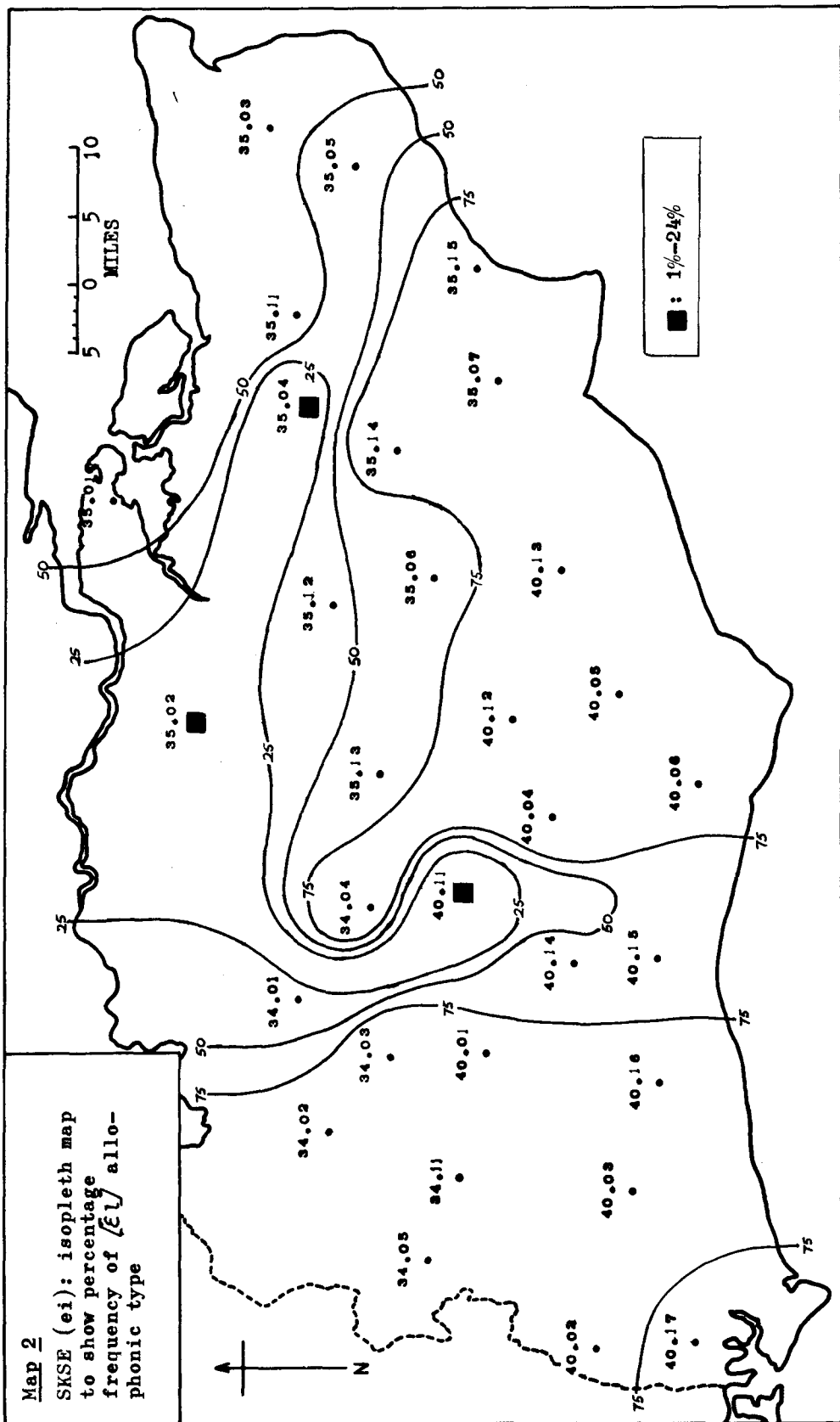


■ : [ɛ:]
□ : [ɛə]



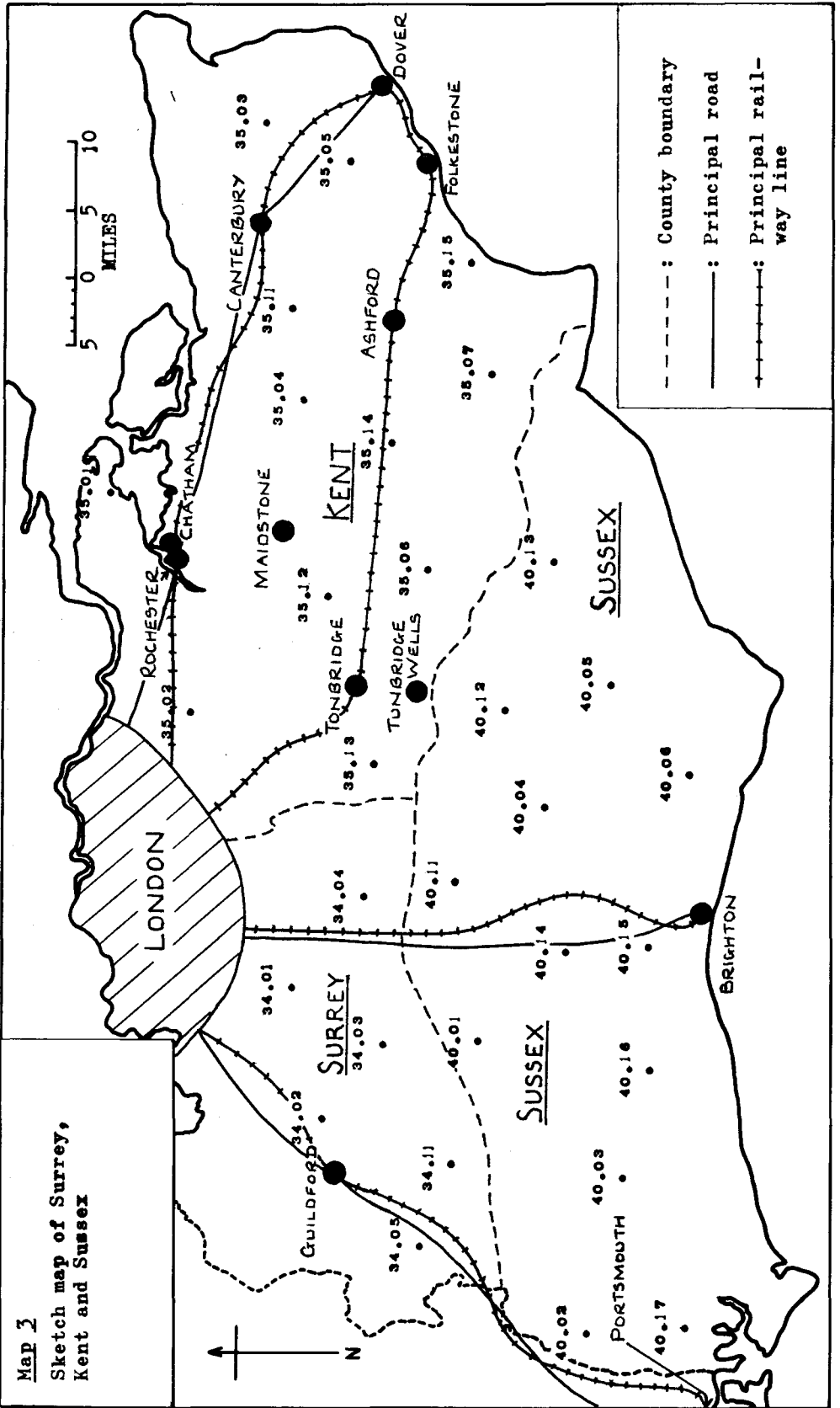
Map 2

SKSE (ei): isopleth map
to show percentage
frequency of /ɛ/ allo-
phonic type



Map 2

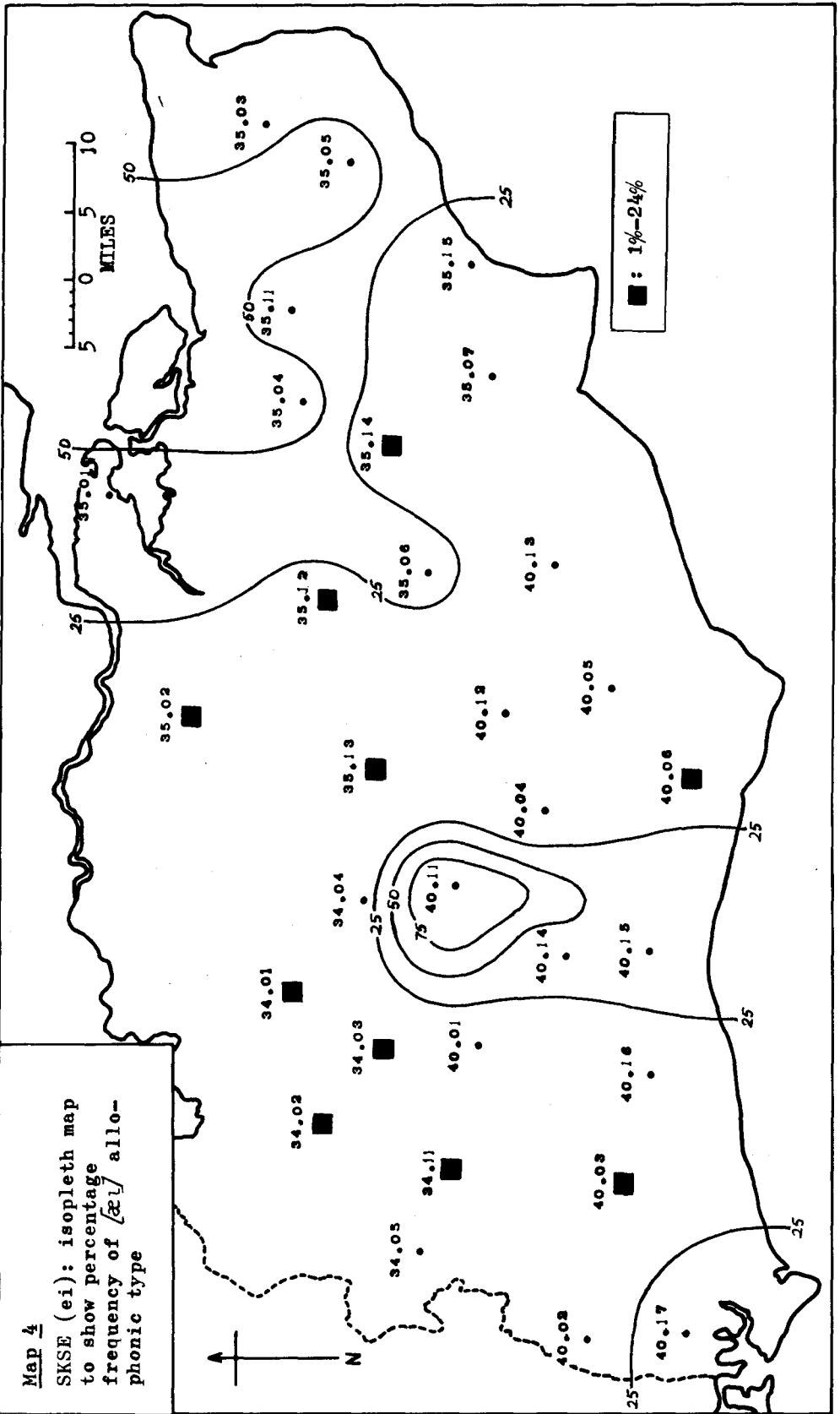
Sketch map of Surrey,
Kent and Sussex



---: County boundary
—: Principal road
+---: Principal rail-way line

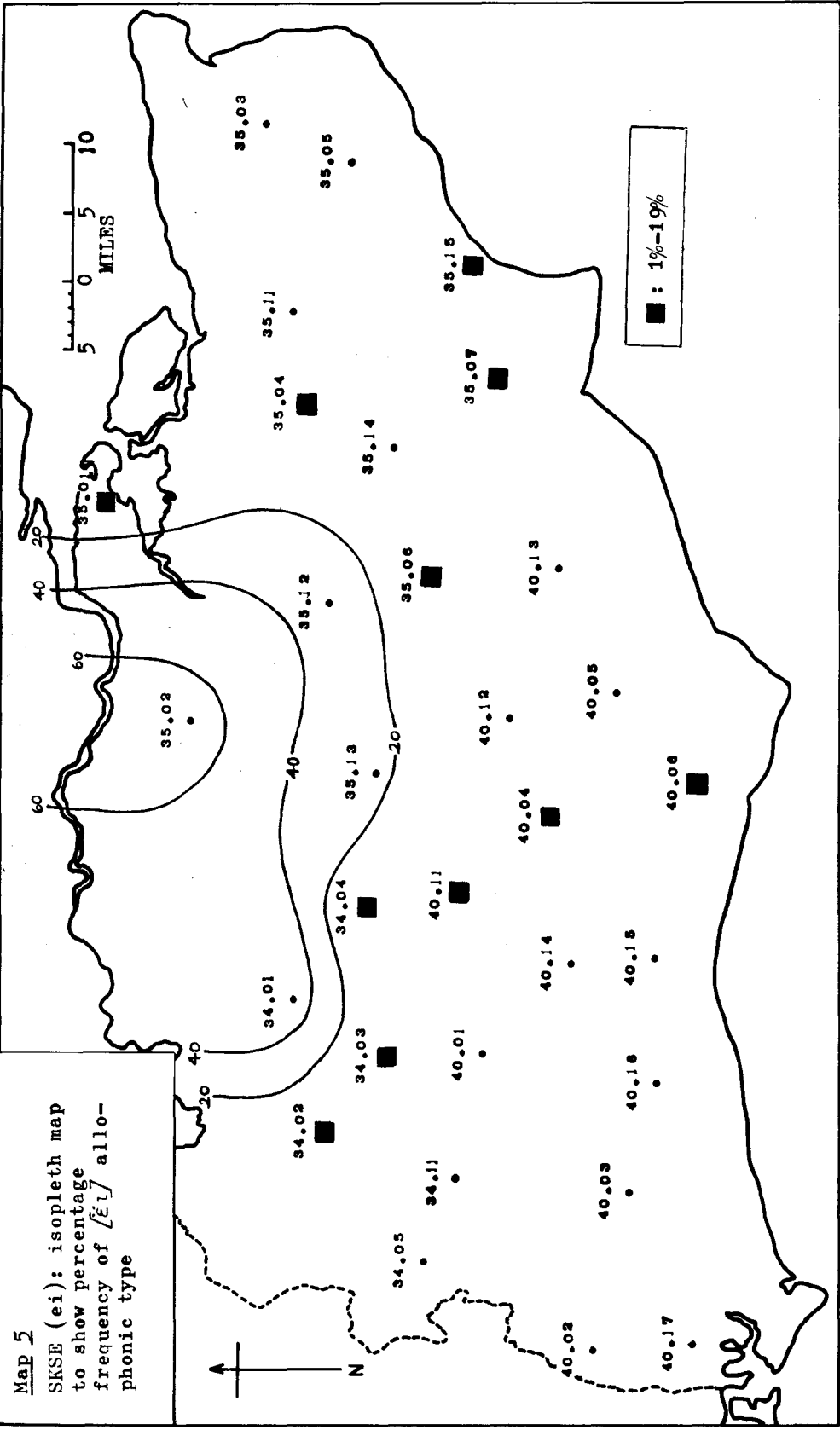
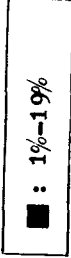
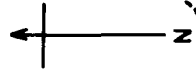
Map 4

SKSE (ei): isopleth map
to show percentage
frequency of [æ] allo-
phonic type



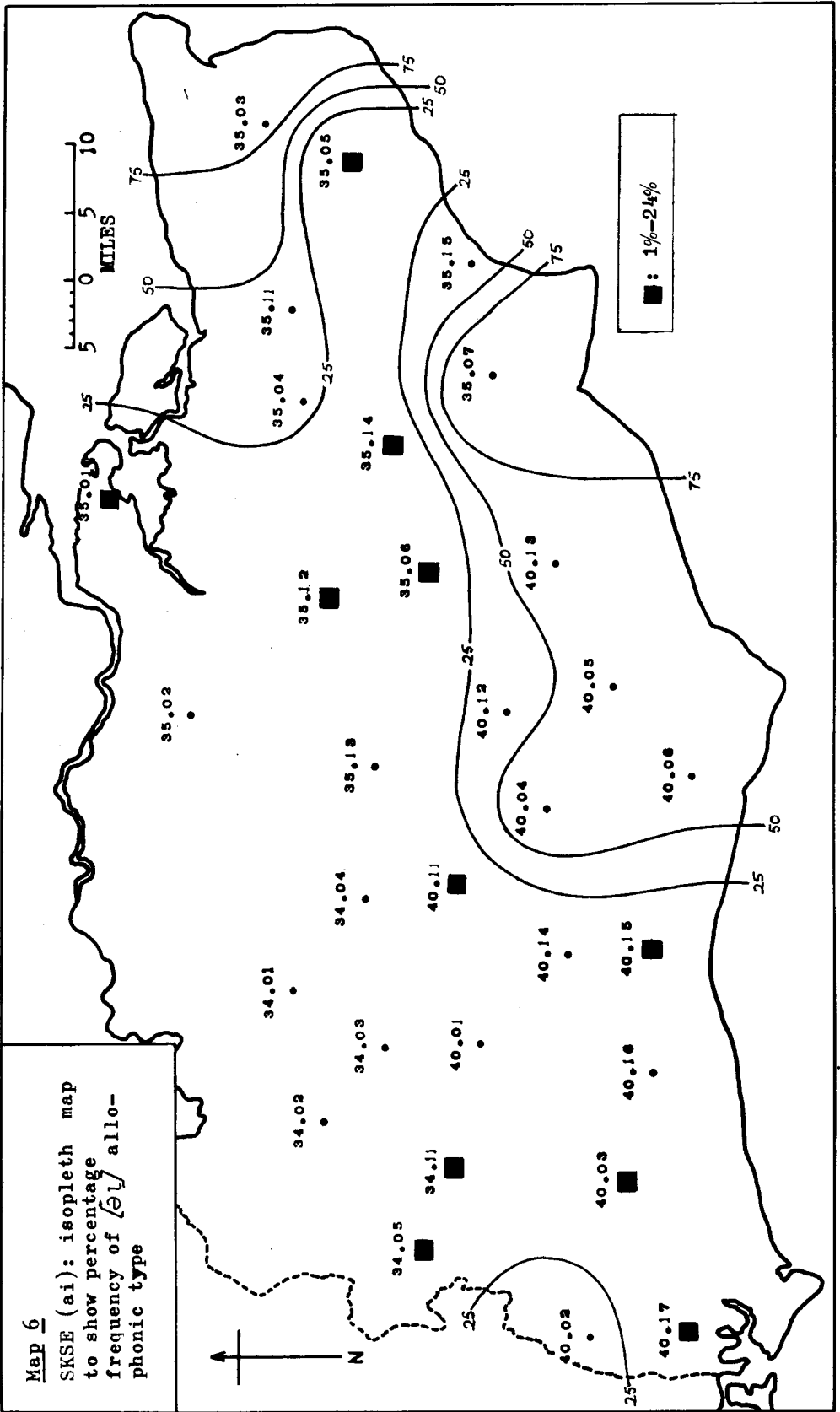
Map 5

SKSE (ei): isopleth map to show percentage frequency of [ɛ̃] allo- phonic type



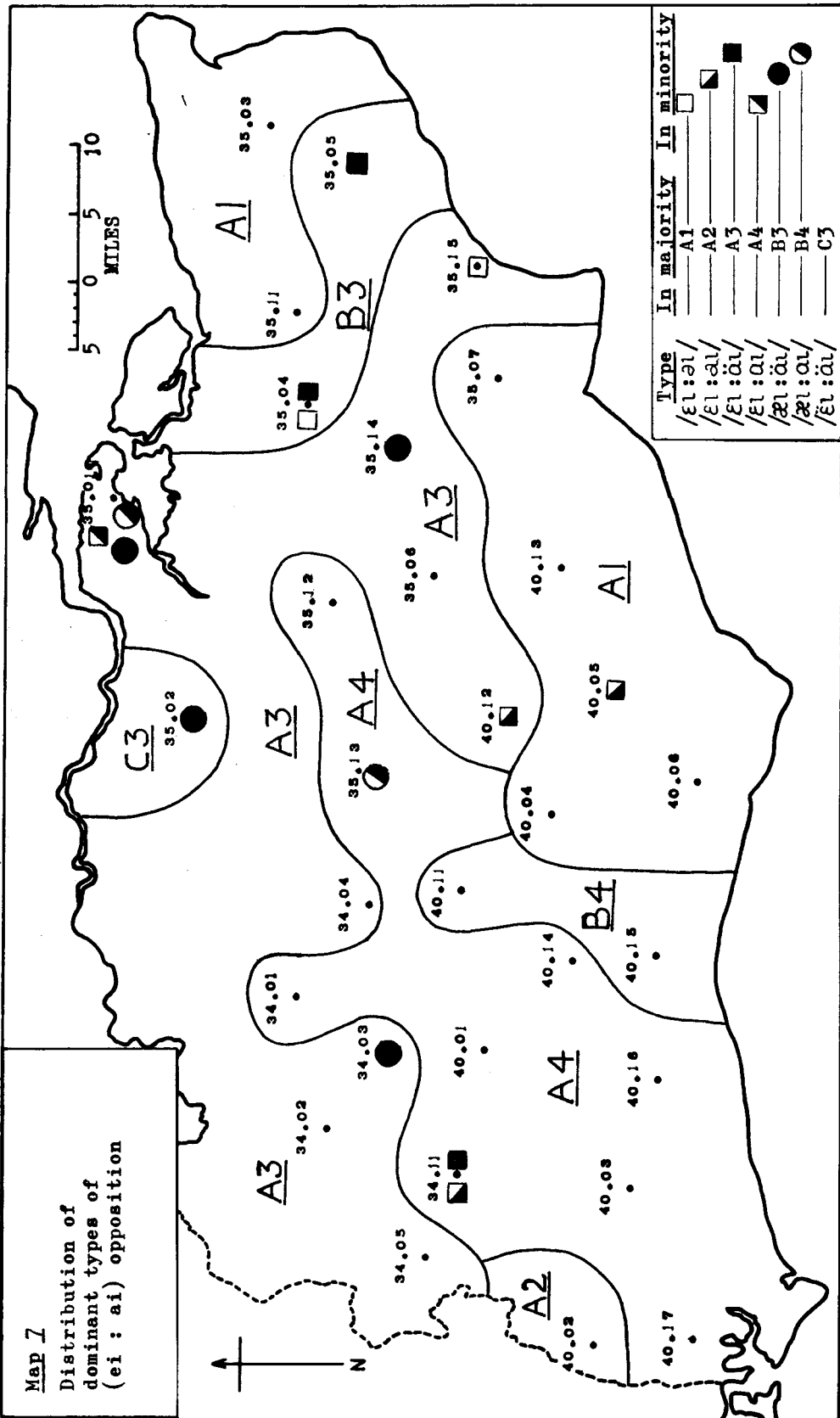
Map 6

SKSE (ai): isopleth map to show percentage frequency of [ə] allo-
phonic type



Map 7

Distribution of dominant types of (ei : ai) opposition



NOTES

- ¹ F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. C. Bally, A. Sechehaye, A. Reidlinger, trans. W. Baskin, Introduction by J. Culler (London, 1974) p.198.
- ² The material is drawn from my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "Aspects of the Phonology and Agricultural Terminology of the Rural Dialects of Surrey, Kent and Sussex" (Leeds, 1982). I am grateful to Mr S.F. Sanderson, Director of the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies in the University of Leeds, for permitting me to use material collected by the Survey of English Dialects.
- ³ For the SED localities see *Survey of English Dialects: The Basic Material - Vol. IV: The Southern Counties*, ed. H. Orton and M.F. Wakelin, 3 parts (Leeds, 1967-8).
- ⁴ A further type comprising short and half-long vowels is excluded here.
- ⁵ E.J. Dobson, *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1957) II, §98.
- ⁶ Dobson, §102.
- ⁷ J. Wright, *The English Dialect Grammar* (Oxford, 1905) §43.
- ⁸ For details of turnpike roads see C.P. Burnham, "Transport and Settlement Pattern", in *The Rural Landscape of Kent*, ed. S.G. McRae and C.P. Burnham (Wye, 1973) pp.145-63; G.J. Fuller, "The Development of Roads in the Surrey-Sussex Weald and Coastlands between 1700 and 1900", *Institute of British Geographers Transactions and Papers* (1953) pp.37-49. For the development of railways see H.P. White, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain - Vol. II: Southern England* (3rd ed., Newton Abbot, 1969) pp.30, 36, 41, 43-4, 75-6, 120. See also H.C. Prince, "England circa 1800", in *A New Historical Geography of England after 1600*, ed. H.C. Darby (Cambridge, 1976) pp.89-164.
- ⁹ A.C. Gimson, *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (3rd ed., London, 1980) p.129.
- ¹⁰ A.J. Ellis, *On Early English Pronunciation*, Part 5 (London, 1889) pp.226-34.
- ¹¹ Wright, *EDG*, §43.
- ¹² Gimson, p.129.
- ¹³ 34.01 is an exception; see *SED Basic Material IV*, pp.36-46, 67-71.
- ¹⁴ Dobson, §137.
- ¹⁵ Gimson, p.132.
- ¹⁶ U. Weinreich, "Is a Structural Dialectology Possible?", *Word* 10 (1954) pp.388-400.

- 17 Cf. G.R. Cochrane, "The Australian English Vowels as a Diasystem", *Word* 15 (1959) pp.69-88.
- 18 See W.G. Moulton, "Dialect Geography and the Concept of Phonological Space", *Word* 18 (1962) pp.23-32.