

LOUISIANA FRENCH: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC  
RESILIENCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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The purpose of this research is to develop a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the current status of the French language in Louisiana. French in Louisiana has been spoken for hundreds of years, and, in spite of the decline of first-language speakers of the local Louisiana variety, contemporary efforts to promote and preserve the language have developed and expanded since the 1960's. This historically disenfranchised language and culture strives to exist into the future through a variety of methods including immersion education, formal and informal community organization and growing interest in Louisiana's heritage as a Francophone region. Through literature review and the collection of qualitative data, the author explores the current diversity of efforts to promote French in Louisiana and analyzes the causes and conditions of the language's presence as of 2015. The findings suggest declining numbers of first-language speakers of the Louisiana variety but a possibility for a more significant presence of French language associated with Louisiana culture through the efforts analyzed.

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## Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION .....	1
RATIONALE.....	2
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
METHODOLOGY.....	18
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	19
PARTICIPANTS .....	20
DATA ANALYSIS.....	22
Motivations Behind Language Promotion.....	22
Language Priority.....	25
Predictions for the Future of French in Louisiana .....	28
Difficulties of French Language Promotion.....	31
Projected Outcomes.....	33
Personal Attachment .....	35
Non-Linguistic Cultural Presence.....	38
CONCLUDING COMMENTS.....	41
Introduction.....	41
Findings .....	42
Limitations.....	45
Implications of Research.....	45
Recommendations for Future Research.....	46
Final Conclusions.....	48
Appendix A.....	50
List of Terms.....	51
Bibliography.....	52

## **List of Tables**

Table 1.	Rate of change of French-speakers in North American Francophone communities from Valdman (2007).....	12
Table 2.	Participant summary table.....	20

## INTRODUCTION

During my nine years of French education, through middle school, high school and university, I have been consistently reminded of the global French language presence: French as the official United Nations language, French in the Middle East and North Africa, French in Canada, Europe, and even still in Vietnam. The strange fact is that I was never introduced to the French of Louisiana, in spite of having grown up and gone to school only two states west. As a sophomore at the University of Oregon, I was given the rare opportunity to learn about the culture and people of whom I had only approximate knowledge through a class taught by Professor Brian Barnett about the French of Louisiana. Through this class, I was introduced to an entirely new dimension of French language, and I was continually amazed and frustrated by the fact that this Francophone microcosm had never been formally introduced in my language education. To consider Louisiana's story as irrelevant in formal French education is to deny students the true story of French as it exists in different cultures, cities and countries, and tells only a partial story of the incredible diversity the French language and of the United States. Continuing to incorporate Louisiana French in my language education and prioritizing it as a part of my undergraduate thesis has been a gratifying and memorable culmination of my personal interest in the subject, but it is also a necessary part of giving the culture and the people who hope to conserve and promote their patrimony the time and attention that has been historically withheld.

## RATIONALE

While many of us may be familiar with scenes from Mardi Gras on the Rue Bourbon in New Orleans, the rich culture and history of French in Louisiana is not so easily surmised. Since the arrival of French settlers in the 17th century, and the subsequent waves of Francophone culture to the region including Francophones from Acadia, in what is now maritime Canada (from which the term “Cajuns” has developed, from “*Cadien*”), Haitians, Senegalese slaves, and direct immigration from France, the development of what most recognize as “Cajun” French has flourished into a unique and dynamic community with immense value not only in terms of their variety of French but also in terms of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the United States as a whole. For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the term “Louisiana French” to describe what is commonly known as the “Cajun” variety. The term “Cajun” serves to describe the descendants of the Francophone settlers from Acadia after their exile from their colonies by the British in the mid-18th century; the term “Louisiana French” serves to describe the wider range of French speakers in Louisiana today, taking into account the variety of geographical and cultural heritages that constitute the modern-day Francophone communities in Louisiana and is thus more inclusive. Many academics and others working to promote French in Louisiana have adopted this term in place of “Cajun” in order to more accurately describe the diversity of French in the state.

The numbers of native speakers of Louisiana French has been steadily declining in favor of the more utilitarian, and certainly more privileged English, especially given the often scorned and unsophisticated reputation of Louisiana French. However in the

past half-century, Louisiana French has experienced a sort of cultural renaissance due to a renewed enthusiasm and respect for the rapidly disappearing language. Organizations like CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, and Franco-Jeunes, a youth organization encouraging spoken French in Louisiana, have both applied their efforts to retain French in Louisiana as a linguistic and cultural reality rather than a quaint vestige-turned-tourist attraction. Needless to say, Louisiana French, though certainly not the best-known of language sub-groups in America, is undergoing dynamic transformations: against the tide of the ever-growing preeminence of the English language worldwide, the advocates of Louisiana French are fighting to ensure that this variety has its own place in the 20th century and remains relevant as a part of Louisiana's, as well as the United States' cultural, historical and linguistic heritage. Having arrived in the Southern United States in the mid-17th century, and since then having continued to exist with a variety of cultural transformations through contact with and assimilation of a variety of other cultural and linguistic groups, French in Louisiana is a testament to the vast linguistic diversity of French as a significantly distinct variety. Since the mid-17th century, a great number of influences, including waves of German, Spanish, and Haitian immigration as well as calques from English and Senegalese via the slave population in the state have transformed Louisiana French into a truly unique language. While European French is monitored and regulated by the *Académie Française* (Samuel), an organization dedicated to the standardization and preservation of the French language, Louisiana French has not known such close surveillance. With a staunchly different physical environment, even early speakers of Louisiana French began to deviate from European French: for example, the praying mantis, which is



native only to North America, is called a *cheval du diable* (literally, a devil's horse) whereas in France and Francophone Europe, this creature (later imported to Europe for pest control) is called a *mante religieuse* (a close approximation of the English) (Rottet).<sup>1</sup> Additionally, there is a discrepancy between the words developed by each variety, respectively, for newer technologies. A notable example of this discrepancy can be found in the word for car, which for Francophones in Louisiana, would be called a *char*, and in France would be called a *voiture* (Rottet). Morphologically, the common use of *nous aut'* or *vous aut'* (*nous* or *vous autres*) in Louisiana is characteristic of both this variety as well as the Québécois variety of French, which is reflective of the colonial roots both varieties share, although the differences between both modern incarnations of these varieties are significant (Cerquiglini 7). There are also striking differences between the pronunciation and accents of each variety. The French 'r,' described linguistically as a guttural r, is not used by Louisiana French speakers; instead, the 'r' sound will more likely pronounced as an alveolar trill, more similar to the Spanish pronunciation. Another important linguistic distinction is the nasalization of vowels (in the context of /ã/ and of /õ/, in which *gagner*, to win or to earn, becomes *gongner*). The palatalization of consonants (evident in the pronunciation of the previously-mentioned *cheval du diable*, in which *diable* is pronounced as /*djab*/) (Cerquiglini 7). While it is clear that other languages have had a profound effect in shaping Louisiana French, some linguists, like Albert Valdman, consider certain aspects

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Other significant lexical differences between Louisiana French and European French lie in the previously-mentioned historical contact with other cultures and languages: words like *bayou* are derived from Choctaw, *gombo* from a West African dialect meaning okra, and *maringouin*, originally from an indigenous Caribbean language, in addition to a large number of English calques (Cerquiglini 7).

of the variety to be inextricably linked to language loss and a shift from French to English. Linguistic phenomena like a loss of adjective gender distinction, a loss of number agreement for the conjugation of verbs in French (*ils parle* instead of *ils parlent*) and a loss of reflexive verbs may all be indications of language attrition, because of their analogs in English grammar (Valdman 1228).

Historically, Louisiana French as a language and a culture has long been regarded as socially inferior. In its constitution of 1921, the state of Louisiana effectively outlawed French in the educational system, deeming English the “sole language of instruction” (Ancelet 345). This law did little to help with the negative associations with speakers of the variety; naturally, with no formal instruction in French, many speakers never learned to read or write in French. For the collective culture of Louisiana Francophones, this ban was also psychologically damaging; not only did others regard Louisiana French as inferior, but first-language speakers were taught the same. Even today, there is a pervasive correlation between Louisiana French and illiteracy, ignorance and poverty (Ancelet 345). This surviving attitude is evident in an interview I conducted with a student of the French immersion school program, where classes are taught in European French. This student, a fifth-grader, was asked whether or not any of her classmates were Louisiana Francophones or from Louisiana Francophone families, to which she responded, “Yes, they speak French, but it’s sort of... yucky French” (Student interviews, May 2013). This prevalent social beliefs and prejudices are of utmost importance in considering the history and the climate in which the efforts to promote Louisiana French began and continue to exist within it.

As previously mentioned, up until quite recently, there has been no concerted effort to standardize the Louisiana variety of French, as well as an incredibly diverse mixture of linguistic varieties and sub-varieties in the vicinity of Southern Louisiana, there is considerable variation within the dialect (Smith-Thibodeaux 46). However, as early as the eighteenth century and through the nineteenth century, some French literature had been produced, though the majority of French speakers in Louisiana remained illiterate, thus posing a challenge to future efforts to standardize this language which existed primarily, up until quite recently, as an oral language (Ancelet 347). Ancelet further explains the reason behind the widespread illiteracy amongst speakers of Louisiana French, citing the cultural disinterest in formal education (348). Since the middle of the twentieth century, with the renewed interest in revitalizing Louisiana French, there have been efforts to standardize this language. In the early 1980's, Whatley and Jannise's *Conversational Cajun French I* illustrated this effort as one of the first formal Louisiana French textbooks. However, this effort is widely considered to have been unsuccessful due to its "uneven, incomplete... and hastily produced," as well as having contained "typographical errors and... inaccuracies stemming from the cultural and linguistic myopia of the authors..." (Ancelet 348). Indeed, the historical diversity of French speakers in Louisiana does pose a unique challenge to these attempts to catalogue this variety: at the onset of the twentieth century, there were a significant number of Francophone communities, distinguishable in region, socioeconomic status, and racial groups: the Houma tribe<sup>2</sup>, for example, which had adopted French as its first language, would certainly speak differently than the white

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2 The Houma Nation is primarily located along the southeastern coast of Louisiana.

New Orleans bourgeoisie (Cerquiglini 8). James Donald Faulk's 1997 book, *Cajun French I*, is another famous attempt at the standardization of a written Louisiana French, though was harshly criticized by CODOFIL's founder, James Domengeaux, as "worse than redneck English," "not even redneck French" (Ancelet 349). Faulk utilized English phonology in an attempt to classify Louisiana French, though his efforts represented the growing interest in the revitalization and preservation of the language. Rather more recently in 2009, the *Dictionary of Louisiana French: As Spoken in Cajun, Creole and American Indian Communities* has been more readily accepted as a successful attempt to render Louisiana French into a standard, organized language, taking many Francophone communities into account when forming a complete assemblage of the ways in which the language is used. Of course, others, like Richard Guidry (who was also an editor of the Dictionary of Louisiana French), wrote and published works in his native Louisiana French. Likewise, Mary Alice Fontenot's series of children's books were written to "depict Cajun life and language," (Dubois 276) using translated Louisiana French words and phrases in both the English and standard French editions. Such works have also played a part in the process of this written standardization. Though lacking a central language authority comparable to the *Académie Française*, Louisiana French has more or less transformed from a primarily spoken language to a written language as well, which has aided in both its standardization and preservation (Smith-Thibodeaux 47).

While the middle of the twentieth century brought about a renewed interest in Louisiana's Francophone language and culture, the challenges faced, as well as the stakes, were high. CODOFIL, or the Council for the Development of French in

Louisiana, was founded in 1968 by former congressman James Domengeaux, and was ultimately a tangible expression of this renewed pride that had been obscured and diminished in the former half of the century. Focusing primarily upon the educational situation and righting the wrongs of the prohibition of French in schools, CODOFIL's early slogan was, "*L'école a détruit le français; l'école doit le restaurer.*"<sup>3</sup> Initially, CODOFIL's efforts to restore and promote French were not primarily based in the self-identified "Cajun" community, but rather in the establishment of educational programs. Domengeaux, who himself did not speak Louisiana French as a first language, was famously disdainful of the Louisiana variety of French, having equated the idea of teaching the local variety as akin to "perpetuating illiteracy" (Ancelet 347). Still, in spite of this apparent disregard for Louisiana French and preference for European French, within CODOFIL's first decade, French education within the state of Louisiana had increased significantly, in part due to its political support. In the 1972-73 school year, 100 French teaching assistants taught 16,000 students between first and third grade throughout 88 schools in 26 parishes<sup>4</sup> (St. Hilaire 160). These numbers increased nearly twofold the following academic year. While CODOFIL's success reflected the desire to reestablish the presence of the French language and culture in Louisiana, some activists felt alienated and disillusioned by the emphasis on European French. Even today, the majority of French teachers employed by CODOFIL are from France, Belgium or Quebec; and, while Quebecois stands out as its own distinct variety, it is still highly prevalent; with over six million native speakers of the Quebecois variety, compared with Louisiana's 200,000 (Cerquiglini 6), as well as an established official

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3 School destroyed French, school must restore it.

4 Counties are called parishes in Louisiana.

language of Canada, using these French speakers as CODOFIL teachers is concurrent with their emphasis on standard French. This significant question of whether to incorporate the local dialect into the French education programs created a significant fissure, resulting in the creation The Louisiana French Movement. This movement was established to counter CODOFIL's insistence upon the preeminence of European French, feared that the new educational programs not only "ignored local Francophone culture," but actually "encouraged its extinction" (St. Hilaire 161). The Louisiana French Movement is widely regarded as a reflection of the desire for not only a revival of French language and culture in Louisiana, but the language and culture specific to Louisiana, acknowledging its status as an underprivileged and historically belittled group (St. Hilaire 161).

Since the mid-century explosion of renewed interest in Louisiana French, these efforts have taken many forms; CODOFIL continues to exist, as well as their French immersion programs, alongside a number of other programs whose mission is to protect Louisiana French from becoming a vestige of the past. The Cajun French Music Association (CFMA), is a community-minded group which offers "financial support and staff to local immersion programmes across Acadianas" (St. Hilaire 166). Unlike CODOFIL, most CFMA members are themselves first-language speakers of the Louisiana variety. Franco-Jeunes offers another rendition of a pro-French organization in Louisiana; and, unlike the generally older members of CFMA, Franco-Jeunes self-describes as "a group of young professionals" whose efforts focus upon fostering spoken French in communities through events at local businesses ("Francojeunes,"

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5 Acadiana refers to the southern parishes in Louisiana where the French language presence is strongest.

Facebook.com). These efforts have manifested in other ways, too; in February of 2015, the New York Times published an article spotlighting the radio station, *La Tasse de Café*, which broadcasts out of Ville Platte, Louisiana. The article observes the trends in demographics as expressed by callers; the older listeners spoke Louisiana French easily and fluently, while the younger callers, though expressing their interest in the station and therefore in the language itself, fell short in their eloquence in Louisiana French. The station manager, Mark Layne, notes the presence of Louisiana French culture in the music and food of the region, though concedes that, indeed, the language is being lost (Fausset). While these efforts that began in the 1960's have persisted, the stakes of reestablishing French in Louisiana, as well as the struggles encountered, may be more significant than ever.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Krauss' 1991 study, it is possible that, of the six thousand languages in the world, approximately half will disappear by the year 2050 (Krauss 6). Endangered languages, according to UNESCO, are defined as "when its speakers cease to use it, use it in fewer and fewer domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and/or stop passing it on to the next generation" ("Endangered Languages,"). While this definition is not necessarily an accurate prediction of whether a language will continue to be used, it is certainly useful to consider in the context of Louisiana French. According to Valdman, Louisiana French has suffered severe language attrition due to insufficient transmission from the older generation to their children; a fact which can be attributed in part to the prohibition of spoken French in the 1920's and the social pejoration of the language prior to the renaissance of the 1960's. Trépanier's 1993 study, which surveyed 35 Louisiana communities, sought to determine which language the participants believed they spoke better between French and English. Between four age groups, grandparents, middle-aged people, young adults, and children, the study demonstrated the dramatic trends in language transmission during the 20th century. 92% of the oldest group said they spoke better French than English, compared with 84% of the middle-aged participants, 41% of young adults, and a staggering 3% of children (Valdman 1227). Even amongst other minority Francophone communities in North America, between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of at-home French speakers decreased *most* dramatically out of all the communities surveyed.



Table 1: Rate of change of French-speakers in North American Francophone communities

Table 1				
	1971	1990	2000	Changement
Canada		6 288 400	6 620 465	+5,3%
Canada outside of Quebec		636 600	641 860	+0,8%
Ontario	482 000		509 265	+2,1%
New-Brunswick	215 000		239 400	+1,1%
Louisiana		261 678	198 784	-24%
Massachusetts		124 973	128 003	+2,4%
Maine		81 012	63 694	-21,4%
Connecticut		53 586	50 803	-5,2%
<b>Florida</b>		<b>194 783</b>	<b>337 605</b>	<b>+73,3%</b>
<b>New York</b>		<b>236 099</b>	<b>295 5565</b>	<b>+25,2%</b>

Number of persons speaking French at home according to the statistics of the U.S. Census Bureau and Canada Statistics for 1990 and 2000; for 1971 and 2000 for Ontario and New Brunswick.

Source: Valdman, Albert. "Vernacular French Communities in the United States: A General Survey." *The French Review* 80.6 (2007): 1221. JSTOR. Web.

Some, like St. Hilaire, argue that, while these trends are certainly demonstrative of a language in peril, the enthusiasm and passion for the language as demonstrated by these efforts will, in the end, be able to increase the number of speakers of French in Louisiana to a critical number that will self-maintain within the state.

If current trends are indicative, while the first-language speakers of Louisiana French are passing on from old age, the language will continue to make gains among the steadily-growing numbers of English-mother-tongue young people gaining fluency through language immersion education. (170)

This interpretation of the data is optimistic, though is the foundation of the mission of the groups that aim to revitalize French in Louisiana. However, St. Hilaire's argument is

based on the acknowledgement of the disappearance of the generational transmission of Louisiana French; in this version of events, the continuation of Louisiana French is based entirely on the second-language speakers and the education they receive in the immersion programs. Louisiana French, as a distinct variety, would effectively disappear; European French would take its place as a stand-in second language in the state, paying homage to the historical significance of French in Louisiana, but perhaps not the current reality of the ways in which culture has transformed the language of Louisiana into something entirely singular. Still, for St. Hilaire, the future for French in Louisiana is bright: the parallel between Francophone Louisiana and maritime Canada is significant enough for him to make the assertion that immersion education will suffice to prevent language death in light of attrition.

In his 1980 article, Fishman offers another interpretation of the role of immersion education for minority language groups in the United States. Though his research was completed in the early days of CODOFIL's language immersion programs, he notes the inadequate number of education programs for French language in Louisiana in contrast with the number of French speakers in the state.

...certain states have far fewer ethnic community schools than one would expect on the basis of their total (or school aged) non-English background population. In this category we find, among others, Louisiana (ethnic community schools for Cajuns are still few and far between)... (Fishman 238)

With insufficient educational resources, the language programs are, to Fisherman, ineffective at establishing second-language proficiency if they exist to serve the "Cajun ethnic community." While Fishman's article does not focus on the Louisiana French phenomenon, it does examine the value and role of education in what he calls the

“ethnic mother tongue” of various language minorities in the United States. For Fishman, this second-language education for language and/or ethnic minorities is actually a means by which the young members of that minority community are systematically incorporated into the institution of Americanness. Furthermore, while this second-language education is available to students of Anglophone backgrounds, it functions as a more generalized American experience rather than one related to the experience of being a student with a non-English background.

...so attending an ethnic community mother tongue school, regardless of how little of the ethnic language is either taught or learned, is now the nonimmigrant ethnic child's unique way of being American, whether or not he is of non-English language background. Thus, the ethnic community mother tongue school moderates and modulates ethnic uniqueness at the same time that it channels Americanness via the community's own institutions. (Fishman 243)

When Fishman’s thoughts are applied to the situation of language immersion in Louisiana, formal education in French via the immersion programs seem to assume the role of these “moderators of ethnic uniqueness” that do not necessarily serve to connect students with Francophone backgrounds but rather a form of educational standardization. Of course, these French immersion programs exist throughout Louisiana, not simply in Acadiana; in that way, Fishman’s assertions are upheld, as those students outside the historically Francophone region of Louisiana are not receiving this second-language education on the basis of ethnic or language background.

For other prominent academics and activists like Ancelet, acknowledging the odds of fighting against the tides of language attrition in Louisiana, as well as the massive efforts and changes needed to do so, are central to succeeding in this endeavor.

For him, these changes cannot occur solely on the educational front, but on the social front as well.

For this to happen, the whole system must be preserved and developed: movies, literature, radio, television, music, road and business signs, etc. The standard social equation, 9 French-speakers + 1 English-speaker = 10 English-speakers, must be reversed. (Ancelet 354)

Incorporating the educational programs with other means of support and realizing the importance of efforts outside of the school systems is essential to this view.

FrancoJeune's *Piastres en Masse* program holds events at local businesses where speakers of French (the variety of which remains unspecified on their site) can utilize their French in a casual environment, as well as benefit businesses that support the promotion of French. Other examples, like the Louisiana French radio program, *La Tasse de Café*, reinforce this presence Ancelet deems of utmost importance in the fight to maintain the state as effectively bilingual, employing both varieties that are now present in the state. Finally, Ancelet declares the influence of faithfulness and determination: "The one thing those working in the Louisiana French experiment cannot afford to admit, publicly or to themselves, is that there is no hope. The only way to give the experiment a chance to succeed is to postulate that it can work" (354). Similarly, Valdman states that the educational scaffolding can only go so far in reviving and maintaining French in Louisiana. For him, the current status of the variety is "mainly emblematic of ethnic identity," and as such poses difficulties to classroom implementation. He offers an alternative to the educational system and immersion programs' insistence upon standard French, highlighting the importance of "contributing to consciousness-raising by introducing vernacular varieties in the curriculum; in the case of universities, by sponsoring research that not only describes

these varieties but investigates speaker attitudes towards them...” To incorporate a multifaceted French curriculum in both high schools and universities would, according to Valdman, lay a stronger foundation for the continued presence of French in Louisiana, without leaving out or ignoring the variety specific to the region, as well as establishing familiarity with French in the United States. French, he argues, should not be thought of as a foreign language, but rather as a dynamic and essential part of American multiculturalism, and through those attitudes and changes to the educational system as well as not relying entirely upon the immersion programs, there is reason to believe that Louisiana French could survive into future decades and generations. In his article, Cerquiglini draws a parallel between the situation in Louisiana and that of other minority language groups, notably Occitan, Breton and Basque as they exist in France. He notes that, because the variety taught in schools differs so greatly from the way the language might be spoken by a student’s grandparents or great-grandparents, and because of what he calls “*l’automépris*”<sup>6</sup> that has historically played such a significant part of the socio-cultural narrative of Louisiana French and these other minority languages, the living-language aspect has, for all intents and purposes, been destroyed already. However, in accounting for the United States as a whole and the emerging language programs, Cerquiglini is hopeful for the future of standard French, in general, as a more common aspect of the American foreign language public school education, of which programs like CODOFIL are certainly a part. However, the distinction between the survival of the Louisiana variety and the increase in education

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6 self-contempt

in standard French is an important one; for Cerquiglini, the “salvation” of the Louisiana variety is unrealistic in light of heightened globalization and language attrition.

The relative usefulness of speaking standard French as opposed to Louisiana French is hardly a question. When accounting solely for the ability to communicate with more people in speaking both English and standard French fluently, as well as the prestige of speaking standard French, education in this variety alone appears to be the most pragmatic: according to the French government, there are more than 220 million speakers of French worldwide (“The Status of French in the World”), and, in addition to being the official language of the United Nations, is certainly more applicable to international careers and communication. However, these considerations only go so far; after all, the number of Spanish speakers in the United States vastly outnumbers the French speakers. Furthermore, French is not considered to be a critical language. In a world where English, Spanish and Mandarin dominate in numbers (“Endangered Languages”), it seems that neglecting Louisiana French in French programs in Louisiana is ignoring the heritage of the state that should certainly play a part in the education the students receive. This apparent conflict of goals plays a massive role in the current state of the French movement in Louisiana.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was mainly qualitative, as participants' responses are integral to the research. Because the focus of this research is to create an informed, multifaceted understanding of the revitalization efforts in Louisiana, the opinions and input of the participants in the movement itself are essential, especially in creating a prediction for the future of French in Louisiana. According to Sahu, a qualitative research method is "concerned with the subjective assessment of the respondent" as well as effective for the generation of "research to generate insights of the subject" (4). Because the purpose of this research is to examine the goals and objectives of each organization and person involved with the promotion of French in Louisiana, qualitative research methods were used, as a clear and comprehensive picture of those efforts would not be possible without the inclusion of those "subjective assessments" and "insights." The central phenomenon is best represented by the subjectivity of the information and opinions offered by participants.

In order to develop and analyze a comprehensive picture of the current status of the efforts to maintain and promote French in Louisiana, the importance of interview data collected is significant to create as contemporary a picture as possible. In order to gain a full understanding of the reality of these efforts today, a variety of voices must be acknowledged and represented through interviews. These interviews have taken place primarily over the telephone via email. Interview questions were asked in English, though participants were given the option of responding in French if they preferred. I have recorded the responses of the participants to be condensed and presented as an inclusive and far-reaching summation of the struggles and successes of this cultural

renaissance, as well as the possible outcomes of these efforts in the long term. The aim of this condensed information as collected from the interview conducted is to be able to infer larger trends and ideas about the status of Louisiana French in order to make a prediction about the future of French in Louisiana.

Interviewing a variety of individuals can pose problems in terms of creating questions that are appropriate and relevant to each informant. I have included an interview protocol in Appendix A, though I have amended this list when interviewing individuals in order to tailor the appropriateness of the inquiry to the individual's specific profession or experiences. I am using information collected from first-language speakers of Louisiana French as well as second-language speakers of Louisiana and/or standard French. Participants represent a variety of communities and efforts, some from the educational sphere, some representative of both formal and informal organizations to promote Louisiana French, and some local residents of Acadiana in order to develop an appropriately multi-faceted understanding of the current status of French language and culture in the state.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The central phenomenon of this research is to understand the contemporary efforts to promote French in Louisiana. Two questions were written to investigate the central phenomenon of this research. Interview responses were used to formulate answers to both research questions as they are listed below.



1. What are the major differences between the various groups that work to promote French in Louisiana? How are their goals similar or different, and how these variations affect their work?
2. What are the conditions of French language in Louisiana, and what will they mean for the future of the language and culture?

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Participation in this study was voluntary. Convenience sampling was used in order to reach as a greater number of participants. Participants represented a variety of backgrounds including of self-identified Cajun and non-Cajun descent, as well as different associations with various organizations like CODOFIL or other promotional French-focused projects or programs. Some contacts were made through participants and acquaintances of my primary thesis advisor during his research, who then in turn provided the contact information of other potential participants. Some participants were contacted due to their importance or presence within the community of Louisiana French promotion. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded.

Thirteen participants were interviewed over a span of four weeks in March and April of 2015. All participants were between the ages of 27 and 76. The following table provides the participants' information, including the pseudonym used, age, formal or informal organizational affiliation, and language affiliation.

Table 2: Participant Summary Table

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Language Affiliation</b>	<b>Informal or Formal Organizational Affiliation<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>Age<sup>8</sup></b>
Marie	Louisiana French	Formal (University)	N/A
Emma	Louisiana French	Formal (educator)	67
Chloe	Second-language speaker of Louisiana French	Formal (CODOFIL)	28
Julie	Second-language speaker of Louisiana French	Formal (CODOFIL)	N/A
Clara	Louisiana French	Formal (educator, community organizer)	76
Adam	Second-language speaker of Louisiana French	Informal (online forum creator/moderator)	N/A
Tom	Louisiana French	Formal (LF radio broadcaster)	35
Anne	English	Unaffiliated (self-described Cajun)	62
Sarah	Second-language speaker of Louisiana French	Formal (employee of Vermilionville) <sup>9</sup>	27
Richard	First-language speaker of French from Maine	Informal	N/A
Nathan	First-language speaker of LF	Informal (self-described Cajun)	74
Catherine	English	Informal (self-described Cajun)	N/A

<sup>7</sup> Formal or informal organizational affiliation refers to the manner in which participants are involved in the promotion of French language. Because it is an established government organization, CODOFIL is formal, while an Internet language forum is considered informal for the purposes of this research.

<sup>8</sup> Participants who did not share their ages for the purposes of this project were categorized as N/A.

<sup>9</sup> Vermilionville Living History Museum, Inc. is a foundation whose mission statement is as follows: "Vermilionville is a living history museum, whose purpose is to preserve and interpret authentic elements of folklife cultures of the Attakapas area between 1765 and 1890. The celebration of these cultures includes language; music and dance; the performance of traditional arts and artifacts and landscaping; architecture; historic costuming; beliefs and customs; cuisine; and traditional holidays and festivals. Vermilionville seeks to enlighten visitors and youth about the history and culture of Acadiana and to help ethnic groups of this area gain a better understanding and appreciation of their own cultures and those of others in this multi-ethnic region" (Vermilionville.org).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews that took place over the phone were transcribed. Responses were then organized by question and analyzed for common themes. As data were analyzed, responses were then categorized by those themes. Because the phone interviews were recorded, I also member-checked responses as needed for thoroughness and clarification. Several sub-sections based on shared themes are presented in the following section.

### **Motivations Behind Language Promotion**

Participants were asked what they believed the primary reasons to promote any dialect of French in Louisiana. While responses varied, themes of ethnic and cultural heritage remained central to the motivation behind each participant's desire to promote French in Louisiana.

*I think it's a matter of ethnic pride. And it's the pride in our culture. And that's why I like to see the French supported.* (Nathan)

*Well, it's the language of the people here in Louisiana. Especially in Acadiana. That's our identity, and it's important to keep your identity, it's familiarity whenever you're around people who are like you, it kind of makes you comfortable that you share things with your community.* (Tom)

Similarly, the significance of Louisiana's history of French-speakers was cited by other participants in conjunction with contemporary cultural and ethnic value. Many

participants cited their Francophone ancestry as a primary reason for a French presence in Louisiana.

*I believe French should be promoted in Louisiana because it was, at one time, the first language of many of the immigrants to this area. The Acadians, who are now called Cajuns, grew up speaking French first and English second. Because of our culture and our heritage, I believe this language should be promoted and preserved in this state, at least in the Acadiana Parishes.* (Anne)

*The first Acadians that came here, you know, late 1700's, this is what they spoke. They were originally from France, had left and gone to the maritime provinces of Canada, and some settled along the east coast and some settled in Louisiana, but that was their language. Those were our ancestors. It's part of who we are.* (Clara)

Participants also mentioned other sources of Francophonie in Louisiana apart from the Cajun presence, citing its prevalence amongst Louisianans as a whole.

*I believe the French should be promoted in Louisiana because it reflects the heritage of the people. Louisiana was French before it became part of the United States and French is still spoken of the local language.* (Richard)

Participants who were involved in education and grassroots promotion of French language repeatedly cited the intellectual value of general language-learning.

*I think the United States is of course painfully behind in terms of linguistic abilities, and therefore it puts us painfully behind in things like business and diplomacy that*

*we could be really good at... The second thing is understanding the heritage, and understanding the culture that the heritage is couched in, depends upon an understanding of the language that was part of the literature and the music and the traditions and beliefs for many many years. Losing that connection to the language that is part of our patrimony would be a terrible loss.* (Marie)

While the humanitarian nature of these responses were common, other participants discussed the potential economic advantage Louisiana could have if more people spoke French, and the potential for economic benefits in a bilingual community.

*I see the benefits of speaking French for me personally, from a general standpoint, having more French speakers in the state is always great just because Louisiana depends so much on its tourist industry, and so many of the international tourists who come to France... we've seen a decline over the past fifty or so years. There's this strange thing happening when we're promoting Louisiana as this French-speaking region but if we don't have French speakers to greet those French tourists when they come it's kind of like selling a product that doesn't exist.* (Sarah)

Additionally, the economic value of promoting French in Louisiana was also suggested as a means of creating professional opportunities for natives of Louisiana.

*French is such an important part of our heritage in Louisiana. One of CODOFIL's goals is to create a link for French immersion students to be able to pursue a career in French in Louisiana.* (Julie)

## **Language Priority**

Participants were asked whether they believed it was more important that Louisiana natives learn to speak standard French or Louisiana French. More participants responded that they would prefer young people learn to speak Louisiana French.

Participants who believed that it was more important that Louisiana natives should learn and speak Louisiana French over standard French mentioned that the history and heritage of French language in Louisiana as a reason for their preference for one variety over the other.

*If young people have Louisiana roots then it should be Louisiana French language to preserve our heritage.* (Catherine)

*I would say Louisiana French, because the Cajun French has suffered a lot. We left France in the late 1600's, we got here before the Mayflower did. We brought the language with us.* (Nathan)

One participant who believed that it was more important that Louisiana natives learn standard French indicated that it was not realistic to expect widespread learning of Louisiana French due to its lack of standardization and its multiple variations found throughout the state.

*Well, a lot of the die-hard Cajun French speakers here who never studied French probably wouldn't agree with me, but I and so many other people who are instrumental in starting those Facebook community groups, we know that studying standard French in school is more important. First of all, which Cajun French are*

*you going to teach? If you ask Cajuns from all across Louisiana how to say a particular thing, you might get sixty different ways to say the same thing...* (Emma)

Similarly, many participants suggested that the differences between the standard French variety and the Louisiana variety were not significant enough to have to focus on either one.

*I think it's important to expose young people to both varieties of the language. It's helpful to know two varieties of French. One for the world at the large, and the other because it reflects true Louisiana culture.* (Richard)

*I think that a healthy mixture of both is a great thing. I don't think there needs to be a huge distinction between the two because, as far as my generation is concerned, most of us can float between the two. My age group, we didn't have French immersion. Most of the people who speak French in my generation learned to speak it in high school, maybe going to a summer French immersion at Université Sainte-Anne, maybe in college. So we've got that basis in standard French and through that became interested in Louisiana French, or you know, some people have learned it through their families, or began to research it more through their families. Most of us can code-switch, though.* (Sarah)

Some participants cited the lack of resources available to establish an effective Louisiana French curriculum, regardless of whether they believed it was more important

to teach Louisiana French or standard French, but still suggested that the differences between the two varieties were not significant enough to prevent a mixed curriculum.

*We do not have enough French speakers from Louisiana to teach our children.*

*Consequently, they will never have the French that I learned as a child. They will learn the international French. Our children are being taught by people from France, Belgium, Canada, Africa. They will not have the same accent, but I love that they are learning a French. By in large they're the same thing; there are differences, of course.* (Clara)

One participant, who works as a professor, agreed that the differences between Louisiana French and standard French were not significant enough that educational systems would necessarily need to choose one over the other, and added that an emphasis on language variation in her lessons is important in incorporating both varieties.

*I grew up hearing Louisiana French but actually learned it after learning standard French, and I think there's sort of a continuum on which they both exist. I mean, any kind of French is better than no French. When I teach students in standard French classes I give them information about Louisiana French and when I teach students in my Cajun French classes I give them information about international French or Creole French. I emphasize this notion of language variation being the norm rather than an aberration.* (Marie)



Finally, one participant suggested that it is more important that students learn Louisiana French, emphasizing the ability to connect with one's own community.

*I think it's more important for them to learn to speak our language, their dialect.*

*Although, you know, the Cajun French dialect is really not so different from French French... Learning a standardized language is always very helpful, but if you're not wanting to come back in the households and accept that down here we use this word over this word, it will put a gap in between those generations and people wouldn't be able to communicate in their familial tongue. You should be able to communicate with your own people.* (Tom)

### **Predictions for the Future of French in Louisiana**

Participants were asked what they believe the status of French language in Louisiana will be in approximately fifty years, and how the Francophone demographics will have changed in that time. Only two participants believed that the Louisiana variety will have disappeared in the hypothetical future.

*I honestly do not believe there will be any French speakers in Louisiana in 50 years from now. The children of today have no interest in learning or preserving their French heritage or culture.* (Anne)

*Do I think we will ever have a dual public system in Louisiana that is part English and part French? No. I don't expect to see the language back in my lifetime. But I am very anxious to keep the culture.* (Nathan)

Of the remaining participants, the majority predicted that the French speakers in fifty years will be young people of diverse, not necessarily Francophone, descent. One participant, who is a French university educator in Louisiana, imagined the future of Louisiana Francophones as a significantly different demographic than the current one, citing the changes that immersion education could bring, and though smaller in number, more diverse.

*I think we'll have a lot of French speakers. Those who are French speakers will be literate, they will know how to read and write French unlike many of the generation of my mother... There will be a smaller number, certainly, and there will be any number of people who are not necessarily of French origin who are speaking French, because kids are getting French in the classrooms, in immersion schools, and things like that. So I believe that the group will be more diverse in terms of its racial makeup and ethnic makeup... it will be a group of people who will probably be able to function in Louisiana French and standard French, and that the language that will be spoken will be sort of a hybrid, in much the same way that language has always evolved.*

(Marie)

One younger participant mentioned the generational differences she has already perceived between the older generation of French-speakers and her own generation, and noted that she believed that the future Louisiana French demographic will have younger speakers who learned to speak Louisiana French as a second language and have a personal interest in the language and culture.

*A lot of people my age, I'm in my twenties, their grandparents spoke French but their parents didn't, because the grandparents didn't want that stigma for their kids. And so, a lot of young people are learning it, whether in school or taking the initiative outside of school, and I think that's the future. That generation, our grandparents' generation is dying off, so I think that will be the main demographic, just younger people who have taken the initiative or who have gone through immersion programs but have made a point of continuing to use French... So it'll be young people who are enthusiastic.* (Chloe)

Another of the younger participants mentioned the possibility for more generational language transmission that she has experienced from her own generation, as well as the success and breadth of the language immersion programs.

*I think it's going to have a natural progression, because in fifty years I'll be almost eighty, so there'll be that generation. It's hard for me to guess how many of us there are. I feel like it's a common trend of people my age who want to teach French to their kids. We also get 4000 students every year in immersion, so as long as that continues--there won't be a huge age gap like we have now. As long as we're still filtering students through French immersion you might see it through a wider range of ages.* (Sarah)

The remaining participants suggested that the demographic will remain associated with those with Francophone family heritage in Louisiana, and will continue as a result of personal and family connections to the language.

*In fifty years the French speakers will be the Cajun people who want to preserve their language.* (Catherine)

*My grandchildren, who see my passion for it, they value it, and perhaps they will urge their children to learn it...* (Clara)

### **Difficulties of French Language Promotion**

Participants were asked to describe the most significant challenges they or their organizations faced in promoting French language in Louisiana. One of the most significant and recurring issues participants discussed was the lack of funding, especially for larger organizations like the state-funded CODOFIL.

*One of the most difficult problems we've faced is that we're a state agency, so we're constantly, our continual existence is not a guarantee. This year alone we're dealing with potentially a \$300,000 cut... But the fact that we're a state agency is a challenge. It's great to be institutionalized like that, it's a very official presence, but we are dealing with a precarious existence. Back in 2012, our budget was cut entirely. I wasn't here at the time, but there was a giant fundraiser, and the reason that CODOFIL is still open is because of the public fundraiser, and kind of the way our organization exists. Even though our budget had been cut we had enough public funds to keep going. And our budget was reinstated after that.* (Chloe)

In addition to the funding issues, participants also referred to the problematic or limited representation of Louisiana French culture in popular culture, as well as the emphasis

on making money from tourists rather than focusing on effective education and promotion.

*Some of it is popular culture. The TV shows, you know--there's not a whole lot in the form of French. There's not a lot promoting that. The other, some of it is political, you know. We need the support of the state, and funding and promotion--they're too happy to take the tourist dollars that are tied to the French culture here--and it's a lot of money... They're going with the popular culture, but not necessarily our culture. So that's a part of it.* (Adam)

*Over the past 3 years that I've been working for French language agencies, I would say one of the biggest problems that we encounter is preconceived notions that come from all over the place, they're so widespread at this point, this whole huge boom of popularity for Cajun and Creole cultures, and the people who don't do their research are printing articles and making TV shows, so that's where most people get their information from. We have all sorts of myths about French in Louisiana. With all the movies and TV shows and articles, it's created some very institutionalized myths that we need to work through.* (Sarah)

Many participants discussed the lasting historical attitudes in Louisiana towards Louisiana French speakers as the largest problem in generating support for French promotion. The legacy of condemnation of the Francophone cultures in France, and the lasting stigma associated with the state-wide ban of French in schools in the 1920's

were cited as significant sources of difficulty in protecting and promoting French language today.

***Attitudes among people, that are still lingering in terms of what “good French” is and what “bad French is,” a lot of people still have trouble understanding that there’s not one monolithic French. Fighting old attitudes.*** (Marie)

Another participant noted that many Louisiana Francophones have internalized the negative attitudes towards their language and culture, and that that internalization poses a significant challenge to promoting the language and culture today.

***Acceptance by the Cajun people themselves is a huge issue. The Cajun ethnic community is identified by the language and the religion. I think that’s what’s withholding acceptance, just being used to being looked down at.*** (Nathan)

### **Projected Outcomes**

Participants were asked what the ideal outcome of their efforts to promote French in Louisiana would be if they were to be fully realized. Many participants indicated that an important part of their ideal situation of French language in Louisiana included international business and economic benefits associated with bilingualism.

***In an ideal world, not realistically, we’d be like Quebec, where we’re a fully bilingual state, with places where people predominantly speak French. More realistically, we want for businesses to recognize the value of French, and look to hire French speakers. Whether you own a restaurant and see a potential for French tourists, or you want to expand your efforts to reach that market, you want to hire Louisiana***

*students who speak French and who have been educated in French. Or you know, more globally, working to bring companies like Airbus, French companies here because we have a population that speaks French. Or, we're a huge oil state, obviously, so encouraging companies here to hire people for their French skills to work with a Francophone market in Africa, and Europe, and even parts of Southeast Asia.* (Chloe)

In addition to economic benefits, many participants also discussed their hopes for more formal language education in the state.

*Ideally, each parish would have at least one, but preferably several, French Immersion programs. Also, it would be ideal to see a variety of companies handle their business in French.* (Julie)

*Ideally education and services would be available in either language all over the state, French and English. Especially in South Louisiana.* (Richard)

One participant stated his hope that his descendants would be effectively bilingual, and that his online Louisiana French language-learning forum would expand tangibly to connect French speakers and students of French language.

*If we're successful in the things that we're doing, I would like for it to be at the store and hear people speaking in French again--young people. You'd never hear about cutting the French programs. French wouldn't just be something in the small towns... I hope one day to have an all-volunteer virtual radio Q&A type program*

*where our members can listen to a streaming broadcast and ask questions on a thread in our group. The questions would be answered live for them in real time. The idea would be that I could then take the written questions and the recorded audio put them together in a video... It is my hope that our wonderful flavor of French will not only survive, but prosper and our children and grandchildren will be completely bilingual.*

(Adam)

### **Personal Attachment**

Participants were asked whether they were personally attached to the Louisiana French language and culture as they were familiar with it, and, if applicable, how their Francophone ancestry affected that attachment. All participants replied in the affirmative, and the majority referred to their family heritage as the primary reason for their personal attachment to both the language and culture.

*I am attached to the French language, in that both my parents, grandparents, and numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins spoke it. Unfortunately, I never did. I did take two semesters of French in college and all my professor spoke was Cajun French and he knew I understood every word he said, I just couldn't speak it or write it. As for the culture, I am deep-rooted in Cajun culture and traditions and proud of it.* (Anne)

*It's who I am. It's all I know. You could beat me for 1000 years but you could never beat the Cajun out of me. There are times that I have dreams in French just as much as I have dreams in English. There's things that I say that are French sayings or Cajun sayings that I use while I'm speaking English. It's just part of who we are. The*



*culture for me, it's what I grew up with. It has made a difference in every aspect of my life.* (Tom)

Other participants also discussed the influence their French language and culture has had in their professional lives, and the opportunities that have been made available to them through their knowledge of or association with French language.

*Yes. I was born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana, an area referred to as the hub of Louisiana French....My paternal grandparents speak Cajun French. This has made me want to learn more about my family's background over the years. It makes me extremely proud to speak French and to have a career in French!* (Julie)

One participant mentioned the experiences she had as a native speaker of Louisiana French and how her interest in the language presented her with educational and professional opportunities.

*Absolutely, yes, because of my attachment to the language and the culture and the heritage, there have been so many avenues open to me that I would not have had otherwise. First of all, that year I got to spend in France at the university, all expenses paid... Then... La Compagnie Louisianaise, headed by a doctor of music from a local university, had put together a Broadway-type show, with singers and dancers, where they presented a little show on the history of French in Louisiana. They had Cajun French, Creole and standard French--and they had gotten a grant to go to Belgium to perform at a really important, popular festival there, and they needed to find someone who spoke French but who also sang and danced..they picked*

*me and I got to go to Belgium all expenses paid for two weeks. How else would that have happened if not for my French?* (Emma)

Other participants mentioned the influence the language and culture has had in their personal lives and development, especially as they relate to the participants' families. Some mentioned the role that immersion education played in forming that connection between the participant and their Francophone friends and family.

*If you come from a lineage of French speakers--my parents didn't really speak French, my great-grandparents grew up speaking only French. My husband's family all speaks French, his parents grew up hearing it and learned it as adults. It's made the language more accessible for me, for sure. Growing up with my immediate family not speaking French and I went to Université Sainte-Anne for immersion... It's very enriching to have family members or friends who speak French.* (Sarah)

One participant noted the dual nature of being a first-language speaker of both French and English, and the importance that his bilingualism has had on his identity.

*A lot Francophone people have asked me over the years which is my mother tongue, and I always tell them, 'Moi, j'ai pas de langue maternelle, j'ai deux langues jumelles.' A lot of what I do is defined by this.* (Nathan)

Another participant mentioned an experience she had while in France. She cited the connection she had made with French speakers in France because of the shared cultural

experiences they had had, in spite of having been raised in different countries and communities.

*Definitely, I'm attached to the language and culture, with all of my heart. My grandmother... would sing the old French hymns, you know, it was incredible. When I was in Brittany maybe three years ago, and I started to sing a few lines and they started singing with me, these people from Brittany knew all these old hymns. It made one gentleman from the French consulate cry. He was so touched. Here I am from Louisiana, singing a French hymn in Brittany, and they knew it, it was part of their life, too.* (Clara)

One participant who is a second-language speaker of Louisiana French cited an experience he had had that made him aware of his personal attachment with the language and culture, as well as the importance of maintaining and promoting them.

*A couple summers ago at a family reunion, I was sitting with some of my nieces and nephews and they were asking me about how to say some words, and to me it was just Cajun English--but for what those kids knew, they were saying it wrong. So that was my epiphany, I was going to learn to speak Cajun French. My mom, my mother-in-law, my wife all spoke Cajun French. I just didn't.... All of the sudden I found myself at the front lines of the language and cultural--battle lines, I guess you could say. I'm proud of it.* (Adam)

## **Non-Linguistic Cultural Presence**

Participants were asked about the ways in which the Louisiana French culture is still present in other ways besides the spoken language. The majority of participants referred to the cultural importance of Louisiana French food and music in preserving and protecting the Francophone culture.

*Our culture is still present, in that, many chefs have made our food known world-wide. People are starting to realize we have many stories to be told, delicious food, wonderful restaurants, and the best seafood in southern Louisiana....* (Anne)

One participant noted that the language and the culture are linked, but that link can also exist in music rather than spoken language.

*The language is a big part of the culture. We still do a lot of the same things--and through the music and the food, those are big areas, I mean, when I go to some reception or dance or something like that, they're always gonna be playing some zydeco.* (Adam)

Some participants mentioned that the language and the culture are not necessarily inextricably related, and that manifestations of the culture do not require a language presence.

*The food. The music, the dancing, the way of life--it encompasses every aspect of our lives, it's not just the language.* (Emma)

One participant also related the non-linguistic facets of Louisiana French culture to the ways in which they manifest in non-Francophone contexts.

*...there are local t-shirt gift companies where it's kind of trendy to have Louisiana-French themed shirts. There's also a big crop of musicians who sing in French but might not speak it. Even people who don't speak French are able to transmit the culture. I do see a lot of cooking, you know, chefs who cook Cajun food who don't speak French.* (Sarah)

Participants also mentioned the cultural connection between Francophone culture in Louisiana and Catholicism, and the ways in which that connection distinguishes Louisiana from the rest of the American South.

*... there's a little bit more of a laissez-faire attitude towards life in general. There's also a huge Catholic presence, which can also be taken as a way that French heritage is still held, because most of the South is very Protestant, and south Louisiana is very Catholic.* (Chloe)

*It's strong in attachment to Catholicism.... There's lots and lots of manifestations of Cajun culture that will continue in spite of the lessening number of speakers.* (Marie)

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

### Introduction

The main objective in conducting research in this area was to arrive at an up-to-date, comprehensive understanding of the current status of the diversity of efforts to promote French language in the state of Louisiana. Currently, those on the front lines of language promotion in the state work in a variety of roles. These roles include working for a government organization like CODOFIL, or CODOFIL's Escadrille program, which seeks to incorporate more French immersion teachers native to Louisiana rather than relying upon foreign teachers, and more grassroots organizations like radio stations seeking to enthusiasm for Louisiana's French language and culture through local music. Thus far, the data collected in speaking with individuals with experience in a wide variety of promotional efforts has been presented. In this section, the data from those interviews will be used in revisiting the two primary research questions. This research question section will be followed by a discussion of the limitations of my research, as well as recommendations for future research. The final section will be a discussion regarding the significance and implications of the answers developed through these interviews to the primary research questions, and what that could mean for the future of French in Louisiana.

## **Findings**

### **Research Question 1**

*What are the major differences between the various groups that work to promote French in Louisiana? How are their goals similar or different, and how these variations affect their work?*

Due to the span of different organizations and methods regarding the promotion of Francophone language and culture in Louisiana, an understanding of the different outcomes of each person or group was essential in answering this question. While there was not a compelling discrepancy between the number of participants who preferred that the Louisiana variety be used versus the standard variety, a very high number of participants discussed the similarities between the two varieties, and indicated that because both varieties were so closely related, it would be less a question of which variety they would prefer be used and spoken in their state and more a question of improved language education for more students so that they may learn to function in any variety of French. The differences, for most participants, between Louisiana French and standard French were insignificant, as most believed that once one could effectively use one variety of French, it would not be difficult to learn to use the other.

The variety of participants reflected the number of ways participants and their associates worked to promote French language in Louisiana. Some participants, like the facilitator of an online language-learning social media group, were committed to connecting those of Francophone descent to their heritages and creating an elective language-learning community using English as a platform to begin learning French. For

some participants, this contemporary value is majorly associated with the historical Francophone populations (though, as cited in the explanation of the use of the term *Louisiana French*, the current Francophone communities are not necessarily descended from nor associated with the Acadian immigration to Louisiana in the 18th century). Others, like the CODOFIL representatives, were concerned with creating new standard French-speakers, regardless of family history or descent. Many from both varieties of organizations, both formally- and informally-operated and founded, cited the economic potential for higher numbers of French speakers, which indicates a trend towards standard French education that would be used in international business and economic interactions with Francophone countries around the world. Most of the participants who worked in the educational field indicated their hope for their students to simply have the ability to function in a second language, and the benefits of speaking any other language, Louisiana simply presenting a historically-based reason to learn to speak standard French. For most educators, in spite of the local variety and the historical educational repression of French language, it was simply more logical to teach the standard variety of French, as it would serve students better for futures with French language outside of Louisiana.

While the methods of language promotion varied immensely from formal education to informal, initiative-based volunteer work, the respective goals of the interview participants had recurring themes. Establishing the economic incentive, tourism value and international business opportunities that come with two widely-spoken languages on a large scale, whether state-wide or even simply throughout Acadiana were significant goals recurring throughout the interviews. This theme



featured prominently regardless of the profession or field of participants. Many participants also discussed their desire for a return of generational transmission of French language as a means of preserving the language, though the majority of participants also discussed the importance of improved language education in order to re-establish a significant number of young French speakers rather than the current elder demographic.

## **Research Question 2**

*What are the conditions of French language in Louisiana, and what will they mean for the future of the language and culture?*

To answer this question, participants were asked about the biggest challenges they or their organizations experienced while working to promote French language in Louisiana. The majority of participants mentioned that the old attitudes regarding Louisiana Francophones, which associated the language and culture with largely poor, illiterate and rural people, still had a negative impact on contemporary perceptions of French in Louisiana. Furthermore, participants also commonly cited the generational gap, which was partially a result of the prohibition of spoken French in schools as per the Louisiana State Constitution during the 1920's. Many participants discussed the lack of generational transmission, which resulted in part due to these restrictive educational laws that repressed French language in schools, and continues to hinder their ability to promote French effectively in their state.

For organizations like CODOFIL, funding is a constant concern. The informally-established group representatives have also cited a lack of monetary support; the unsure continuation of these state institutions may leave the efforts to promote French in

Louisiana to the grassroots, small-scale efforts, like community groups, online forums and radio stations where formal education may not be available in the future.

All but one participant believed that French in Louisiana had a significant chance of continuing to be used in fifty years' time. Most participants expected the demographics to shift in age during the theoretical coming half-century, and most participants also expected that the French speakers will no longer be those with Francophone family heritage, but rather those with enthusiasm for the language through found bilingualism. In that way, most participants believed that the French in Louisiana is shifting from an ancestral vestige to an interest-based community. The participant who did not believe that French would be a relevant aspect of Louisiana culture in fifty years cited the general lack of interest in learning French amongst youths, as well as the already sub-par school systems.

For all the participants, the importance of Louisiana French in their personal lives, whether they came from Francophone families or developed an interest independent of their family heritage, was extremely important. For participants with Louisiana French heritage, the language and culture offers a connection with their ancestors that they are able to maintain. For others, learning French and working to promote it has been a helpful opportunity and has often connected participants with community members in their towns and parishes.

### **Limitations**

The research conducted in this project was subject to important limitations. Because the interviews were conducted long-distance, the setting of the interviews was inconsistent. Because some participants responded to questions via email, and others

over the phone, those who participated via email were given more time to formulate their responses. Similar settings for each interview may have improved consistency, though was not possible in the context of this project.

Many of the participant responses to Question 7 were repetitive; the attitudes regarding the ways in which Louisiana French culture were still present were consistently related to food and music. A more nuanced question could have yielded a greater variety of responses that reflected the diversity of the participant pool.

Furthermore, because a random sampling method was administered in the interview process, and because only twelve participant responses were used for the purposes of this study, the participants did not necessarily represent the entire breadth of the efforts to promote French in Louisiana. Several notable groups like FrancoJeunes, which was mentioned in the Rationale section of this study, could not be reached for interview participation.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research might focus upon the limits of each type of organization analyzed in this study. Because participants mentioned the financial constraints of government organizations, future research regarding governmental support of language organizations like CODOFIL could expand on the politics of language education and the struggles of such organizations that rely on external funding.

Because of the participant responses regarding code-switching and the facility of employing both Louisiana French and standard French, research could also be expanded to examine the ability of the younger generation who received immersion education but also use Louisiana French, as mentioned by two participants. This research could

function to better understand the younger generation of French-speakers in Louisiana and perhaps contribute to predictions regarding the future of the Louisiana variety.

### **Implications of Research**

It is impossible to discuss the current status of this language and culture without discussing the inherent issues of minority languages, as well as issues of language education, historical erasure of a minority culture, socio-economic associations with linguistic varieties, and perhaps most importantly, the modern refusal of these groups to become obsolete and to fight for a rebirth and resurgence of their culture, knowing that the mere fact of its existence is worth fighting the overwhelming trends of language standardization. This project functions to discuss and to unravel these issues to their fullest extents, and thereby raises awareness to a concern as well as for the importance of recognizing situations like Louisiana's. The importance of this topic is not only in the multi-faceted nature of the social issues to which it is inevitably related, but also because of the importance of the culture itself in American history. While the United States is so often casually referred to as a "melting pot," the reality of American diversity, linguistic, cultural and otherwise, is a much more complicated and exquisite story of the interplay of a multitude of different peoples, and to give a more complete story of this country which is not so much a melting pot but rather an intricate puzzle of ethnologies is essential to fully understanding the depth of the modern American narrative. Louisiana is not an enigma, but rather a piece of this American puzzle that is too often trivialized or forgotten altogether. While many attenuated languages around the world become extinct every day, the topic of language preservation, so inextricably linked with cultural assimilation to the dominant group, has been increasing in

relevance on the international stage. Indeed, Rita Izsak, a United Nations official on minority issues, has deemed the protection of minority languages to be an issue of human rights (“Protection of Minority Languages”). In acting with this growing importance of language agency and the protection of these valuable elements of human diversity, this research is of modern relevance as well as historical significance. As such, this research will, first and foremost, be of academic value for a subject that is seldom studied and, comparatively to other language communities, has not been granted the attention it deserves. As a part of my experience as an academic and language major, it will reflect the importance of language education and the difficulties and successes of language immersion education programs. It will, as I have mentioned, act as a part of a greater narrative of disappearing languages and act as a part of the growing worldwide concern for the protection and, in Louisiana’s case, stimulation of these endangered languages with great linguistic and cultural value. Finally, it will be testament to why personally I have invested my research in Louisiana French and the fascinating idiosyncrasies of this particular language community.

### **Final Conclusions**

The efforts to promote French in Louisiana during the past several decades have yielded significant improvements in the presence of French language and culture in the state. CODOFIL’s immersion programs, though sometimes criticized for their focus on standard French, have also made efforts to incorporate the Louisiana variety, as demonstrated by the founding of the Escadrille program. While the data as presented in Table 1 on page 12 suggest that the Louisiana variety will likely not persist in any

significant way into future years, the depth and diversity of efforts throughout the state, both by native Louisiana Francophones and second-language speakers of French, is demonstrative of a persisting interest and passion for the unique language and culture of the state, even in spite of globalization and acculturation. These efforts may prove to be merely a symptom of the inevitability of eventual acculturation, though it is important to note that re-establishing the historical role of Francophonie in Louisiana is not a goal sought by any organization or person promoting French in Louisiana today. While the number of speakers has plummeted during the past century, the introduction of immersion programs, the increase in travel and communication to other Francophone countries, and the significant interest others have taken in Louisiana's Francophone culture may introduce an entirely different reality for French language in Louisiana. While the trends in data demonstrate a movement away from first-language speakers of Louisiana French, the desire in Louisiana to maintain and spread *any* variety of French may introduce a new generation of French-speakers, who have been formally educated in immersion programs and who have taken a special interest in the language, and who may ultimately take the place of the current, precarious number of first-language speakers of an endangered language.

## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

1. What are the primary reasons that French, in any form, should be promoted in Louisiana?
2. Is it more important that young people learn to speak international French, or Louisiana French? Why?
3. Who will the French speakers in Louisiana be in fifty years? Do you envisage a significantly different demographic than the current one of Louisiana Francophones?
4. What are the most difficult problems you or your organization have experienced while working to realize your mission?
5. What does the ideal outcome of your or your organization's work look like, if your efforts are fully realized? What would the educational system look like? What about the professional and public spheres?
6. How has coming from a lineage of French speakers affected your attachment to the Louisiana French language and culture?
7. How do you feel the culture is still present if not in the language?

## **List of Terms**

**CODOFIL** Acronym for the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana

**CFMA** Cajun French Music Association

**Louisiana French** This term is used to describe the regional variety of French spoken in Louisiana and refers to the sub-varieties in the region.

**LF** Acronym used for Louisiana French



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