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# Francolouisianais in the 21st Century: Redrawing Identity Lines in a Community Experiencing Language Shift

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FRANCOLOUISIANAIS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:  
REDRAWING IDENTITY LINES IN A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCING  
LANGUAGE SHIFT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of French Studies

by

Marguerite Lynn Perkins  
B.A., Fordham University, 2009  
M.A., Louisiana State University, 2011  
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À la mémoire de mes grands-parents,  
Octave Seymour “Buck” Pierret et Lutha Marguerite Sonnier Pierret

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## ABSTRACT

The *francophonie* of south Louisiana today is characterized by a great deal of diversity - in terms of ethnicity, language practices, cultural practices, geography, and experience. The academic literature does not always reflect this diversity, however. Some ethnic groups are overshadowed by others in academic study, and the lines between them are often uncritically blurred. Discussions of language shift are regularly mired in assumptions of individuals' complete linguistic and cultural assimilation based solely on their native use of English.

In this dissertation, I seek to problematize traditional accounts of assimilation and collective ethnic identity by highlighting the ways in which local individuals' knowledge of the Louisiana francophone experience contrasts with academic representations. I created a corpus of interviews with 20 individuals who were natives of south Louisiana, who were active and influential in their communities, and who felt strong ties to their francophone heritage and culture. The participants were of various ages, hailed from various parishes, had various levels of language ability in French, and self-identified as Cajun, Creole, and Houma. By examining their responses to questions about the past, present, and future of French in Louisiana - and about their personal experiences of it - I determine that in the context of identity and ideology, Louisianians of strong francophone roots can be effectively studied together. Furthermore, considering them to be a collectivity that fluidly shifts between more restrictive and more inclusive groups may prove to be useful in attempts to reverse language shift in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

If researchers are often drawn to study anomalous situations, then it is no surprise that Louisiana attracts the attention of linguists and ethnographers. The survival of a francophone<sup>1</sup> population despite Anglo-American control of the region since 1803 is a source of curiosity for those who wish to study the language practices of isolated linguistic communities, as well as those who are interested in the factors that contribute to their continuation or decline. When one takes into account the fact that French dominion over Louisiana essentially ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris,<sup>2</sup> this linguistic continuity becomes even more impressive. Two-hundred-fifty years later, there are still native speakers of local varieties of French in Louisiana, but trends towards linguistic assimilation have resulted in a stark interruption of intergenerational transmission; these native speakers - virtually all bilingual in English - are advanced in age, and very few of their descendants speak fluent French of any variety, let alone the local vernacular.

These speakers, as well as the generations of native speakers before them, have been the center of study for a number of linguists over the years. Their dialectal forms have been analyzed on phonetic and phonological levels (Lyche 1995, Salmon 2007, Emmitte 2013), dictionaries have been made of the lexicon (Daigle 1984, Valdman et al. 2009), and formal aspects of grammar have been outlined, particularly in the context of a particular parish's or town's manner of speaking (Papen and Rottet 1997, Klingler 2003). Other research has focused on the efforts for a linguistic and cultural revival. The French immersion programs created in the public school system in the 1980s and early 1990s – programs that continue to expand today –

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will use “Francophone” and its related terms to include Louisiana Creolophones. I recognize that this choice can be seen as reductive. My intention, however, is not to erase the differences present in the linguistic landscape of south Louisiana but to include the often-marginalized Creole community in discussing of “French in Louisiana,” even when – as was the case with the Canadian study [*Le Français à la mesure d'un continent*] that forms the basis of this dissertation – Creoles and the Louisiana Creole language are not specifically mentioned in the study objectives. This practice of considering Creoles and Creolophones as Francophones is not entirely uncommon, as Picone (1997, p. 121) and Neumann (1985, p. 44) illustrate.

<sup>2</sup> The Louisiana territory was briefly retroceded – from Spain back to France – shortly before being sold to the United States in 1803; colonial French administration in this period lasted a matter of weeks (Brown 1956).

have been the subject of a number of studies, particularly studies involving attitudes towards local varieties of French (Lindner 2008, Camp 2015). The study that constitutes this dissertation, however, is a study of identity in the context of French-speaking Louisiana.

Language, culture, and identity are linked; this statement is so simple as to seem ‘common sense.’ The conflict lies in the fact that arguments that often undermine the position of minority languages present themselves as equally, if not more, ‘common sense.’ Thus, the field of minority language rights (MLR) is rife with ideological tension; one person’s ‘common sense’ clashes with another’s, and it is difficult to carry out a legitimate debate, a situation that often benefits the hegemonic system already in place.

Stephen May is a scholar who has devoted a great deal of time to examining these ‘common sense’ arguments in order to get beyond them. May openly admits that he is not the neutral arbiter of the debate over majority and minority languages. He has worked for many years in support of Maori language rights and bilingual education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. But while this might diminish his authority in the eyes of some who claim his arguments for minority language rights are influenced by his involvement in the movement, it would be virtually impossible to find a disinterested party in this debate. As May himself states in the preface to his book *Language and Minority Rights*: “Ideology is not the sole preserve of minority language proponents, although it is often painted as such” (2012, p. xiv).

I do not present myself as a disinterested party in debates around minority languages, and certainly not in debates around French in Louisiana. I am a native of south Louisiana whose maternal grandparents spoke Louisiana French as a first language. In some ways, I am a community ‘insider’: although she is a monolingual Anglophone, my mother identifies as ‘Cajun’; my parents were both born and raised in Lafayette, Louisiana; I spent the first few years

of my life in rural Acadia Parish with elderly, bilingual francophone neighbors. In other ways, I am decidedly an ‘outsider’: I never spoke French with family members (other than a handful of words my mother intersperses with English); my immediate family moved away from Acadiana<sup>3</sup> before I reached school age, and although we often returned there to visit my extended family, I completed all of my primary and secondary education in the greater New Orleans metropolitan area, an area where speakers of Louisiana French are effectively non-existent; the French I originally learned as a teenager was a referential ‘school’ French that has only in the last seven or eight years become influenced by local varieties as I have come to learn them and expose myself to them more and more frequently.

My situation may be marked by hybridity, but I will plainly state that I am an activist and that my viewpoint is influenced by this value system. This affiliation does not, however, disqualify me as a researcher in this context. As May has stated repeatedly:

All research is value-laden and, as such, a researcher must begin from a theoretical position of some description, whether this is articulated or not in the ensuing study. Accordingly, it is better to state one’s position at the start than to cloak it in the guise of apparent neutrality. (2012, p. xiv; see also, May 1994, May 1997a)

May emphasizes that the push for neutrality in discussions of minority languages - while reasonable to encourage in academic research - can itself be problematic, as it often equates “academic disinterestedness with skepticism toward and/or criticism of minority languages” (2012, p. xiv). In an attempt to look at situations of language decline with a critical eye, the discourse can skew negative, locating every weak point in an endangered language’s situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this dissertation, the term ‘Acadiana’ will be used interchangeably (by both myself and the participants) with terms like ‘south Louisiana,’ ‘French Louisiana,’ and ‘southwest Louisiana.’ Acadiana is the name commonly given to the 22-parish triangle in southern Louisiana that is traditionally French-speaking. Other parts of present-day Louisiana were founded by French settlers and have, to greater or lesser degrees, a French history (New Orleans or Natchitoches, for example). This 22-parish region, however, has been formally recognized by the state legislature for its francophone character and has a contemporary (rather than historical) francophone population, although this population is declining due to language shift. I consider the direct reference to Acadians to be problematic, because the French-speaking inhabitants of Acadiana are not exclusively Acadian/Cajun. The benefit in using this term, however, is that it is a clearly-defined region that makes use of a distinctive name rather than broad, geographical terms (‘south,’ ‘southwest’) or terms that could be confused with a historical, colonial concept of Louisiana (‘French Louisiana’).

Dominique Ryon discusses this very issue within the context of south Louisiana in her article on “Language Death Studies and Local Knowledge: The Case of Cajun French” (2005). Ryon remarks that “language death” studies often seem to create more academic fervor than “language revival” studies, and that there is a complicated relationship between language loss in Louisiana, academic discourse on this language loss, and issues of power and social control. One instance of this complicated relationship is the conflicted attitude towards what could be called the “Louisianification” of public French immersion programs. The programs are extremely popular; Pointe Coupée Parish voted to create its first program in 2016, with Evangeline Parish creating two pilot programs in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Still, the role of local varieties of French in the education of immersion students has never been clearly defined, despite their revitalization being the programs’ purported *raison d’être*. Ryon notes that despite the support of a small group of local activists, the Louisianification movement in the teaching of French in Louisiana has not made much headway in the past few decades. She then counters that “the reserved attitude of the community at large is well understandable given the lack of sustained support from ‘officially qualified speaking subjects’ as well as the overall pessimist tone over the future of the language” (2005, p. 60). This is hardly a Louisiana-specific problem. Endangered languages across the world must contend with this limited, pessimistic perspective: Why learn a dying language spoken by a minority of people?

The major discrepancy Ryon addresses in her article is the contrasting accounts of linguistic assimilation found in academic and local knowledge in Louisiana. She critiques scholarly discourses on assimilation that paint an image of language shift to English as a rational choice made to access greater opportunity or a natural progression towards the American mainstream. The error in these perspectives is two-fold; as Ryon explains, “First, it

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<sup>4</sup> See: [http://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/education/article\\_f55ea346-40a2-11e7-a0c4-5f79402d3eb0.html](http://www.theadvocate.com/acadiana/news/education/article_f55ea346-40a2-11e7-a0c4-5f79402d3eb0.html)

problematically gives the active role in the assimilation process to the ethnic community itself and not to the dominant group. Second, it also implies that they have the choice to control the degree of their assimilation” (p. 62). Once again, this issue of oversimplification is not particular to Louisiana and is common to discussions of the rise and decline of dominant and minority languages. One need not look far into the literature of language shift to see academics declaring that it is, in fact, not “language death” but “language suicide” (Denison 1977) or that linguists who support the continuation of minority languages are paternalistic idealists who seem to believe that “speakers should live for languages instead of languages being their creations intended to serve their needs or languages being survival tools like a host of others that can be discarded in favor of alternatives perceived to be more advantageous” (Mufwene 2006). Even if one disregards these more extreme declarations, the scientific impulse to classify and rationalize can have an effect on academic depictions of language shift and assimilation. Ryon cites Henry Boyer’s (1991) assertion that even the language academics use – “diglossia,” “language contact,” “bilingualism” – downplays conflict and seems to suggest a “‘peaceful coexistence’ instead of a violent, political, and conflictual process” (p. 62).

In the case of Louisiana, Ryon contrasts the sanitized version of assimilation presented in the academic literature with references made to assimilation in the contemporary francophone literature and music of Louisiana. She uses examples like Jean Arceneaux’s poem “*Schizophrénie linguistique*” and Zachary Richard’s song “*Réveille!*” that show an angrier, more militant Louisiana Francophone who resents and struggles against his assimilation. She includes lines from a 1994 poem by David Cheramie comparing America to Sarajevo, and concludes: “We are far from the analysis of language shift in terms of social necessity and economic

advancement of the ethnic community or in terms of grammatical erosion and statistical speculation” (2004, p. 65).

Ryon’s objective in this article is to document local knowledge (using literary works) of assimilation as a counterpoint to academic accounts of the same phenomenon. These glaring contrasts do not discount the critical importance of the academic knowledge acquired by numerous linguists who have documented linguistic assimilation in Louisiana by more traditional means. As Sandra Jovchelovitch states in her work on knowledge in the field of social psychology: “Understanding the heterogeneity of knowledge involves dismantling the traditional representation that sees knowledge in terms of a progressive scale where superior forms of knowing displace lower forms. Different knowledges coexist” (2007, p. 3). Rather than replacing academic knowledge as the more accurate form of knowledge, local knowledge lends more detail to these academic accounts by reintegrating the human aspect and rendering them more complex than the macro views that rely heavily on the assumptions of rational choice theory.<sup>5</sup> This is supported by May’s assertion that the gap between the macro-level principles of MLR and the micro-level situations in which minority languages exist poses a major contemporary issue for these movements. He agrees with the call for more local knowledge in academic discourse and states that the cause of MLR could greatly benefit from “a more ‘bottom-up approach’ to linguistic rights” (2005b, p. 338).

In late 2012, I was given the opportunity to work on a sub-project of a larger research initiative funded by the Canadian government called *Le Français à la mesure d’un continent*. I will go into greater detail about this project in Chapter 2, but essentially the project was to build a corpus of interviews with native Louisianians discussing the French language in Louisiana.

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<sup>5</sup> For a minority language rights’ perspective on the problematic nature of applying rational choice theory to situations of language loss, see May 2005.



While working on this corpus, I saw the potential to explore the sort of micro-level, “bottom-up approach” that May discusses.

In the following study, I seek to perform a task similar to the one Ryon undertakes. I use a corpus of interviews rather than literary sources, but the goal of documenting local knowledge and elevating it to the status and visibility of academic knowledge is the same. My aim is, as Jovchelovitch describes it, to establish a “dialogue between different forms of knowing” (2007, p. 3). My subject matter is not limited to accounts of assimilation, but instead deals with the perceptions Louisianians of strong francophone roots have of the past, present, and future of the French language and its corresponding culture in Louisiana. This attempt to fill the gaps in knowledge that do not fit the traditional academic paradigm is half of my intended goal in this study.

The other purpose of this study is more firmly grounded in my aforementioned linguistic activism. Joshua Fishman has methodically broken down the process of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) and is considered the father of the field. He states quite strongly that ideological clarification in the linguistic community is an essential and foundational aspect of RLS that ought to come before the entirety of his outlined seven stages. He affirms that “RLS involves consciousness heightening and reformation” and that RLS efforts cannot challenge the now-conventional ideas as to the diminished role of the minority language without first fully elucidating “the ideal of *Xmen* with *Xish*,” that is, the ideal of the minority group member with his minority language (1991, p. 394).

In spite of his insistence on the importance of ideological clarification, he does not always enter into as great of detail on its realization as he does on the seven stages of RLS that presumably follow it. Paul Kroskrity (2009), however, points out this shortcoming and sees

language ideology research as instrumental in addressing it. Kroskrity redefines ideological clarification as “the process of identifying issues of language ideological contestation within a heritage language community, including both beliefs and feelings that are indigenous to that community and those introduced by outsiders” (p. 73) with the understanding that such contestation can negatively impact efforts for RLS. A “community’s conception of its language,” as he calls it, is significantly influenced by political, economic, and other sociocultural factors, but it is also complicated by the “multiplicity of ideologies that routinely collide within and across communities during acts of language renewal” (p. 73). There will always be disagreement in the pursuit of collective aims. The goal, in Kroskrity’s view, is to achieve consensus on essential elements and, at the very least, understanding and tolerance of less critical differences.

I do not presume within the limited framework of this dissertation to be able to accomplish either of those tasks for speakers of French in south Louisiana and their descendants. However, given the struggles encountered by contemporary efforts toward language planning in Louisiana, I propose this research as a reference to the need for more explicit ideological clarification in this community. A better understanding of the role of the French language in the lives of contemporary Louisianians who identify as Cajun, Creole, and American Indian<sup>6</sup> – a group that includes native speakers, L2 learners, passive speakers, semi-speakers, and non-speakers alike – can help to establish consensus where it is present and to understand conflicting ideologies where they occur.

In addition to these two goals – that is, to contribute to the documentation of local knowledge in dialogue with academic knowledge and to promote the process of ideological

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<sup>6</sup> The complexity of the American Indian experience of francophone Louisiana should not be understated. Tribes like the United Houma Nation (two of whose members I interviewed for this corpus) have experienced a double language shift: first from their pre-colonial tribal language to French, and then, from French to English.

clarification – I have a tertiary objective. As will be seen in the review of literature, most research on Louisiana varieties of French and on francophone culture in Louisiana is done within traditional constructs of ethnicity; scholars carry out individual studies on the Cajuns of a particular town or the Creoles of a certain parish. Because the study involved in this dissertation was part of a broad research project displaying the diversity of the French language in North America, no specific ethnic group was mentioned as the focus of research; the corpus to be built was to be centered on “French” and the territory in question was “Louisiana.” Therefore, I spoke with people identifying as Cajun, Creole, and Houma (the most influential francophone tribe of American Indians in Louisiana) who came from across the southern, traditionally French-speaking portion of the state. My tertiary goal is to show fellow researchers that these populations do not always have to be studied separately. In some contexts (e.g., documenting specific dialectal forms) it makes sense to limit the group studied to a very limited group (e.g., the francophone Houma communities of Terrebonne Parish). In other contexts, this division is entirely unnecessary.

This tertiary goal is, in a sense, a combination of the two aforementioned issues. Efforts to reverse language shift in Louisiana have struggled. There are numerous communities of francophone heritage in the state and therefore numerous opportunities for ideological contention. It is by no means certain, but if those in academic circles - or as Ryon calls them, the “officially qualified speaking subjects” - can at least occasionally concede that these communities can be looked at within a single framework, then perhaps the members of the communities themselves will see a greater interest in working together.

## **CHAPTER 1: ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITY - THEORY AND CONTEXT**

### **1.1 Approaches to identity and ethnicity**

Identity is a broad, fundamentally human concept. Its meaning is so contextually based that any discussion of identity must begin with a clarification of which form of identity is being addressed. The term ‘identity’ can be used to refer to characteristics or processes, to an individual’s self-definition or a collective categorization, to an accepted boundary or a contested notion.

In the introduction to their exhaustive *Handbook of Identity Research*, Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx (2011) make a primary distinction between individual, relational, and collective identities. Discourse on individual or personal identity focuses not only on the contents and characteristics of identity at the individual level, but also “on individual level processes, often emphasizing the agentic role of the individual in creating or discovering his or her own identity” (p. 3). Relational or interpersonal identities, in contrast, depend on the presence and participation of others. Relational identities, like ‘daughter’ or ‘co-worker,’ are the roles an individual plays relative to other people. Similarly, they also encompass the processes of “how [these roles] are defined and interpreted by the individuals who assume them” (p. 3). The third type of identity Vignoles and his colleagues discuss is collective or social identity. Collective identities concern “people’s identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong, the meanings that they give to these social groups and categories, and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that result from identifying with them.” (p. 3)

Collective identity cannot be fully separated from personal identity. I briefly discussed conflicts between individual and collective aims as they relate to minority language planning in the introductory chapter, but Vignoles et al. (2011) present them in dialogue. They describe how

an individual may personally edit for him- or herself what it means to belong to a collective identity, and through that process may influence how that group identity is seen or constructed.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Vignoles et al. assert that the individual cannot ignore the established constructs completely, and thus, the authors conclude that “identities are inescapably both personal *and* social not only in their content, but also in the processes by which they are formed, maintained, and changed over time” (p. 5, emphasis in original).

Ethnic identity is one kind of social identity, and one very significant to my study. The complexity of ethnicity is made apparent in the variety of approaches surrounding it. As De Fina (2007) summarizes: “Scholars in sociology, psychology, and anthropology, among other disciplines, have struggled for years and still fundamentally disagree not only on the criteria that may be invoked in the definition of ethnicity, but even on the possibility of an objective definition” (p. 373). This is supported by Umana-Taylor’s (2011) assessment that “conceptualizations [of ethnic identity] have ranged from simple self-identification labels (e.g., Chinese American) to complex and multi-faceted typologies informed by one’s orientation and attachment toward one’s ethnic heritage” (p. 792).

Perhaps the confusion can partly be attributed to the relative novelty of the concept. Several scholars (Abramson 1980, Gumperz 1982, Oboler 1995) have debated whether ethnicity is, in fact, an old or a new idea. Glazer and Moynihan (1975) note that the Reuter’s *Handbook of Sociology*, published in 1941, and Mitchell’s *Dictionary of Sociology*, published in 1968, do not include a definition of ethnicity. Abramson (1980) claims, however, that while the terminology of ethnicity is new, “the idea is old” (p. 150). For Abramson, the term ‘ethnic group’ is simply an updated version of the concepts of “immigrant group, foreign stock, language group, race, and

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<sup>7</sup> This is precisely how individual choices that contradict the minority group consensus can prove problematic to achieving collective aims. What is seen as a natural dialogue in Vignoles et al. (2011) is considered a lack of consensus by those who question the goals of an MLR movement.

national background” (1980, p.150). Of course, ideas like language group, race, and national background can cover vastly different groupings of people that sometimes overlap and sometimes do not. Still, it is nonetheless worthwhile to consider whether Abramson’s concept of an old idea and a new usage is defensible. The use of the term ‘race’ in discussions of group identity does seem to muddle the question, as ‘race’ – itself a social construct and not an inherent quality – does seem to occupy a role similar to that of ethnicity in texts prior to the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Edward Sapir’s 1921 essay was entitled “Language, Race, and Culture” and explains the link between the concepts, saying: “If [a person] is an Englishman, he feels himself to be a member of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ race, the ‘genius’ of which race has fashioned the English language and the Anglo-Saxon culture of which the language is the expression” (Sapir 2003/1921, p. 29). Sapir’s use of quotation marks around ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (and thankfully, ‘genius’) suggests that he recognizes the dubious nature of considering ‘Anglo-Saxon’ a race. Nevertheless, he is explaining a commonly held belief of his time. On a fundamental level, the uncritical use of ‘race’ in previous discourse and the overemphasis on a link between race and culture make it difficult to say whether ethnicity previously existed as a concept under another label.

Gumperz (1982) distinguishes between ‘old’ and ‘new’ concepts of ethnicity. The ‘old’ idea of ethnicity was largely associated with immigration. Ethnicity was used to explain “relationships based on the linkages of similar people whose social identity was formed from influences outside the society in which they now live” (p. 5). He asserts that a newer definition of ethnicity started around the time of Glazer and Moynihan (1975) and that this version of ethnicity could be used to distinguish one indigenous group from another. In describing the practical differences between the two, Gumperz states that the ‘old’ ethnicity was easy to find in

large cities of the industrial world, where “consciousness of immigrant groups’ historical past was reinforced in the present by physical-geographic, friendship, and occupational ties” (1982, p. 5). This distinction is less the case for the ‘new’ ethnicity, however, which relies more on emphasizing key differences between one group and another. Gumperz is echoing Glazer and Moynihan’s (1975) assertion that any ‘new’ use of the term ethnicity actually reflects a fundamental shift in society’s relationship to ethnic groups. In speaking of the shift, Glazer and Moynihan (1975) claim:

Formerly seen as *survivals* from an earlier age, to be treated variously with annoyance, toleration, or mild celebration, we now have a growing sense that [ethnic groups] may be *forms* of social life that are capable of renewing and transforming themselves” (p. 4, emphasis in original).

The authors go so far as to compare the shift in concepts of ethnicity to the shift in concepts of class following the industrial revolution.

If this ‘new’ ethnicity relies on emphasizing key differences, along what lines do people differentiate themselves? In some ways, many conventional notions of what makes up ethnicity remain unchanged. Stuart Tyson Smith (2007) highlights the historical durability of one view of ethnicity, referencing texts from Ancient Egypt and Herodotus that emphasize the aspects of common ancestry, shared culture, and language. While individuals might reference very specific elements like clothes or a traditional folk practice in order to assert their ethnic identity, a more general view could be summarized by Smith’s (2007) focus on “real or perceived commonalities of culture, history, and language” (p. 218). For many, particularly the general public, this definition of ethnicity - that of categories of people with a shared culture - remains the standard.

Fredrik Barth’s 1969 essay on “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,” however, challenges this definition (or at least its importance in academic inquiry). In response to sociologists and anthropologists who focus on detailing the cultural traits of particular ethnic groups, Barth

suggests that “much can be gained by regarding this very important feature [‘the sharing of a culture’] as an implication or result rather than a primary and definitional characteristic of ethnic group organization” (p. 11). He describes the cultural factors of ethnic dichotomies as being of two orders: overt diacritical features (like language, dress, etc.) and basic value orientations (the idea that those asserting a specific ethnic identity judge themselves and invite others to judge them by the mores and social standards relevant to that identity). Yet neither of these factors is predictable in that there is no one list of cultural traits or standards to be emphasized in the expression of identity. “In other words,” Barth states, “ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems” (1969, p. 14). He asserts that outlining the history of an ethnic group is not same as outlining a single culture because compositional elements that were perhaps fundamental to earlier versions of the group may not even be present in later versions. Ethnic groups adapt via “changes in the boundary-defining cultural differentiae” (p. 38). Joane Nagel (1994) also supports this boundary-focused concept of ethnicity. According to Nagel, not only do boundaries determine who is considered part of a given ethnicity, they also “designate which ethnic categories are available for identification at a particular time and place” (p. 154). They inform both the ascription and the options.

Still, this assumes that such agency is possible. There is another academic debate based on the conflict between subjectivist and objectivist perspectives in the study of ethnicity. Barth’s approach would generally be considered subjectivist, with an emphasis on boundary construction and maintenance by people who actively identify with an ethnic group. Objectivist perspectives do not allow for as much agency and, as Eriksen (2002) summarizes, “either approach ethnicity as observable characteristics of social organization [...] or stress large-scale historical processes



and power differences inherent in the social structure as determinants of ethnicity, rather than strategic action” (p. 55). This once again brings up questions of the malleability of ethnic identity seen in Vignoles et al. (2011) as well as the dichotomy of old-new ethnicity seen in Gumperz (1982): one version being a static categorization for immigrant groups of certain backgrounds, and the other being a means of actively expressing and highlighting key differences in groups of people.

As is often the case in these juxtapositions of extremes, the ideal approach would be something in between. The subjectivist view has its merits in recognizing that boundaries are socially negotiated and maintained, but it would be difficult to ignore the influence of history and established societal forces. To reiterate Vignoles and his colleagues:

The individual may create a personalized version of what it means to be a [certain identity], and perhaps may even contribute to transforming the range of accepted meanings within his local or wider cultural environment, but he cannot simply escape these meanings entirely. (2011, p. 5)

Similarly, an ethnic group may negotiate its boundaries or reconstruct aspects of its identity, but it cannot completely avoid the influence of the groups around it and their respective perceptions.

This constructed notion of ethnicity brings up some difficult questions. If the boundaries of ethnicity are mutable and there is no standard list of cultural features that can be invoked in judging it, the possibilities for ethnic identification could become exceedingly open-ended. Herbert Gans (1979) describes the renewed interest of Americans in their ethnic identities as not a revival but a new form of ethnic identity. In this form, individuals are drawn to their ethnic identities but can achieve their identity needs – the ‘feeling’ of being Irish or Jewish, for example – through the use of symbols rather than through full participation in cultural organizations and practices. He calls this form of ethnicity “symbolic ethnicity.”

As in the previous discussions of ethnicity, Gans asserts that symbolic ethnicity can be expressed in a variety of ways; however, he distinguishes symbolic ethnicity “by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior” (p. 9). This last characteristic is crucial to the choice of ethnic symbols. Any cultural feature or pattern that is to be turned into an ethnic symbol “must be visible and clear in meaning to large numbers of third generation ethnics, [and] must be easily expressed and felt, without requiring undue interference in other aspects of life” (p. 9). He gives examples of holidays and rites of passage that do not require major time commitments and notes the rise in certain consumer goods like prepackaged ethnic foods. According to Gans, symbolic ethnicity is “an ethnicity of last resort” (p. 1) and while it can persist even to the fourth or fifth generation “[it] would be foolish to suggest that it is a permanent phenomenon” (p. 17-18).

Gans’ concept of symbolic ethnicity is compelling in its saliency. The US’s blend of individualism and consumerism would seem to lend itself easily to a commodified notion of ethnicity that people are free to put on and take off as they please, and his theories have been widely influential in discourses of ethnicity, particularly in US society. Despite all this, however, his viewpoint is somewhat oversimplified. In his description of symbolic, “last resort” ethnicity, ethnic groups have been heavily acculturated and assimilated and the ethnic features that are transformed into symbols give the impression of vestigial limbs, useless (if meaningful) remnants that will disappear as the process of Americanization completes itself. Yet, some of the very same symbols Gans cites – like the bar mitzvah in Jewish culture – show no sign of disappearing.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, associating the use of symbols in ethnic identification with processes of assimilation into the majority culture, while no doubt accurate in some cases, may

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<sup>8</sup> See Oppenheimer (2005).

unnecessarily provoke insecurity in minority groups. The use of symbols is not automatically a sign of a moribund culture. Nagel (1994) notes that cultural constructions that renovate or even sometimes create entirely new symbols (an act that some might see as indicative of a false or weak connection with ethnic identity) can in fact be useful tools for ethnic groups. She sees a “shared symbolic vocabulary” (p. 163) as an aid to fostering community and notes that cultural constructions can “promote collective mobilization when they serve as a basis for group solidarity” (p. 163).

Beyond his treatment of the symbols themselves, Gans also remains rather unspecific in his descriptions of the people participating in ethnic identification. He allows for some variation in the choice of symbols and offers the caveat that “acculturative and assimilative actions by a majority occasionally generate revivalistic reactions by a minority” (1979, p. 17). He also concedes that this minority “may not influence the behavior of the majority, but they are almost always highly visible, and will thus continue to play a role in the ethnicity of the future” (p. 17), but goes no further in specifying what kind of role that might be.

## **1.2 Language and identity**

Traditionally, language was thought to be fundamentally concerned with the representation of concepts and realities and with communication, though other functions of language (such as the phatic and the performative) have come to be recognized. Edwards (2009) restates the difference between the communicative and the symbolic aspects of language as the difference between “language as an instrumental tool, and language as an emblem of groupness, a symbol, a psychosocial rallying point” (p. 55). Joseph (2004, 2006) makes a case for integrating functional perspectives and he puts particular emphasis on identity. For Joseph, these ‘primary’ aspects of language (representation and communication) cannot be separated from the

purpose of “reading the speaker” (2004, p. 30). In his view, identity is either “fundamental to the two traditional purposes of language, or constitutes a third purpose that underlies the other two” (2004, pp. 20-21).

If language can be used to “read the speaker,” then it can also be used by the speakers themselves to express how they wish to be perceived. Ofelia Garcia (2010) feels so strongly about the agentive role of the speaker in forming and adapting a linguistic identity as to choose the verbs “linguaging” and “ethnifying” to describe “discursive and ethnic practices [used] to signify what it is [people] want to be” (p. 519). The use of language and ethnicity as verbs may suggest that Garcia is experimenting with a newfangled, unconventional idea, but she insists that linguaging and ethnifying are fundamental human practices: “The ability ‘to language’ and ‘to ethnify’ is [...] the most important signifying role of human beings – that which gives life meaning. It is through linguaging and ethnifying that people perform their identifying” (2010, p. 519).

Joshua Fishman, the major academic force behind the field of Reversing Language Shift (RLS), discusses multiple theories of the link between language and culture, echoing some of these previous arguments. One possibility he offers is that language is indexically linked to culture; this suggests that their being formed together allows for the associated language to be the best means of expressing the ideas of that culture (at least for the time when the language and culture remain together). Fishman sees some legitimacy in this argument, saying that “in the short run, the pro-RLSers are right” but that another language “could, in time, come to achieve comparable felicity of expression were they to remain associated with the culture” (1991, p. 20).

Another possibility Fishman proposes is that the language is symbolically linked to the culture. He originally comments on situations where language was connected to a cultural

identity in a negative way, namely the association of German-speaking Americans with the German enemy during both World Wars, but also shows how this can be used in a positive sense by RLS advocates:

When RLSers tell us that the language is a major (even, in their eyes, ‘the’ major) component of their (ethnocultural) identity, what they mean, feel, and believe [...] is that the language stands for being an Xman, a ‘true’ Xman, one who lives, breathes, and implements a particular Xish-enriched-Xishness, with his/her whole being.<sup>9</sup> (1991, p. 22-23)

For supporters of RLS movements, the symbolic nature of the language is thus distinctly tied to a certain sense of cultural authenticity. Fishman holds that this is true in a sense, but that in cultures where massive shifts have already taken place (which is often the case for communities interested in reversing language shift) the possibility of remaining an ‘Xman’ via ‘Yish’ (for example, a majority language that carries with it more social capital) may prove too tempting a prospect for a symbolic argument to be effective.

The third proposed link, and the one that Fishman prefers, is a ‘part-whole’ link, the idea that “parts of every culture are expressed, implemented and realized via the language with which that culture has been most intimately associated” (1991, p. 24). He cites songs and folktales, jokes and curses, greetings and proverbs as just a few of the aspects of culture that are generally considered to “not have the same ‘flavor,’ the same ‘charm’” (p. 24) when rendered in another language. The effects of this part-whole link are two-fold: not only is the culture “linguistically encoded and linguistically suffused” (p. 25), the language becomes culturally-specific as well, with figures of speech and latent connotations. This part-whole connection would explain why some groups seem to have maintained ethnic distinctiveness despite major linguistic shifts; ethnic identity is retained, Fishman states, but “that identity does not really pertain to the same

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<sup>9</sup> Fishman uses terms like Xish, Xman, and Xishness as universals to denote languages, people, and cultural qualities that are associated with one another. For example, for the Irish language, the equivalents would be Irish, an Irishman and Irishness.

culture that was traditionally associated with that identity” (p. 26). It is a *partial* match to the previous culture. It is possible for *Xmen via Yish* to still be *Xmen*, but they will have undergone some consequential changes.

Fishman’s part-whole connection helps to combat criticisms of essentialism leveled against minority language movements. These critics would insist on the fluidity of the concepts of identity and in-group/out-group differentiation; in a similar way to the subjectivists in the subjective/objective debate on ethnicity, they see minority language activists as too static, as arguing for minority language rights in terms of fundamental characteristics. Stephen May (2003, 2005) believes this essentialism is tied into the discourse of language ecology, the association with which is both a boon and a burden to the MLR movement.<sup>10</sup> May admits that some activists do tend to assume – explicitly or implicitly – “an almost ineluctable connection between language and (ethnic) identity” (2003, p. 97) and that they then use this unproblematized connection to justify collective MLR claims. This assumption is a weakness in an academic environment where postmodernism has taught people to question any monolithic conceptions of identity in favor of more constructivist or situational accounts.

May agrees that language is not an essential factor for identity, but takes issue with those who extend that idea further to assume that “it cannot therefore (ever) be a significant or constitutive factor of identity” (2003, p. 105). He argues:

Indeed this position is extremely problematic, not least because of the considerable evidence ‘in the real world’ (something MLR critics frequently invoke to support their

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<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, the images a language ecology argument conjures are compelling; they effectively demonstrate the severity and time-sensitive nature of the problem, and activists can ‘piggyback’ off of the momentum and accessibility of general ecological discourse, saving endangered languages along with endangered species. The disadvantage of using an ecological argument for language maintenance – apart from its tendency towards essentialism, which May acknowledges is often a legitimate issue – is that it reinforces other criticisms of those trying to reverse language shift. The connection made between language loss and the loss of the natural environment brings with it the connotation of ‘natural’ selection. This emphasis on what is ‘natural’ leads some to see language loss as a necessary adaptation of a globalizing world, much in the same way that some people see climate change as a natural process.

own arguments) that suggests that, while language may not be a *determining* feature of ethnic identity, it remains nonetheless a *significant* one in many instances. [...] Particular languages clearly *are* for many people an important and constitutive factor of their individual, and at times, collective identities. (2003, p. 106, emphasis in original)

He maintains that even minority language speakers who are actively oppressed with concrete negative repercussions for speaking their language sometimes defy these pressures and cites the Catalans and Basques in Franco's Spain and, more recently, the Kurds in Turkey as merely a few of such examples. His distinction between language as a determining feature and language as a significant feature of ethnic identity makes use of the same ethnolinguistic 'shades of gray' seen in Fishman's argument for a part-whole relationship between language and culture.

May uses a similar approach when addressing the categorization of languages in contact as either serving instrumental or identity functions. He discusses the label of majority languages as "'vehicles' of modernity" while minority languages are "(merely) 'carriers' of identity" (2003, p. 112). Such labeling reinforces views of the majority language as dynamic and the minority language as static. Furthermore, the separation of instrumental and identity functions is a false dichotomy. All languages perform both of these functions and differ only in the degree to which they perform them, depending on contextual factors. For minority languages, it is easy to see that it is not the language that limits itself to identity functions, but the "wider *social and political processes* that have resulted in the privileging of other language varieties in the public realm" (May 2003, p. 112, emphasis mine). However, these processes are subject to change.

Conversely, the practical 'buying power' of majority languages like English can overshadow their identity functions, but the language still acts as a source of identity for its

speakers. One need only look at the rather vocal proponents of the “Official English”<sup>11</sup> movement in the contemporary United States (who are generally, and unsurprisingly, monolingual English speakers themselves) to see that the issue of emotional attachments, personal experience, and commitment to a language is not exclusively a minority language issue. When former Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich calls bilingualism a “menace to American civilization” and Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama suggests that those who oppose “Official English” are jeopardizing the “sovereignty and integrity of this nation” (Hartman 2003), one is inclined to believe, as May does, that “there is clearly something more than questions of utility, mobility and political expediency going on here” (May 2003, p. 8).

Thus the affective aspect and the identity function play a role not only for speakers of minority languages, but also for speakers of majority languages. This being said, minority language speakers in America live in a society that has wholeheartedly accepted assumptions of the universality of English and of the primacy of its instrumental functions, and these ideas easily enter into the mentality of the speakers: they may feel attached to their language on a personal level, but how can they justify its usefulness? This is a classic instance of Bourdieusian (1991) *misrecognition* – of minority speakers accepting and internalizing majority speakers’ ideologies about language. Furthermore, the situation becomes exacerbated by the backlash that emerges when minority groups try to ascribe (or in some cases, restore) instrumental functions to a minority language by promoting its use in official, public, and governmental spheres. May (2003) criticizes Brian Barry’s (2000) assertion that formalizing the use of Welsh in Wales has led to inequitable treatment of English speakers in the country. According to Barry (2000), there is an increasing trend amongst local authorities to require Welsh ability as a qualification for

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<sup>11</sup> “Official English” is an alternative name for the movement that has often been called “English Only.” Its proponents claim that “English Only” does not accurately reflect their allowance of the use of other languages in non-official capacities. See the “U.S. English” site: <https://www.usenglish.org/official-english/not-only-english/>



employment (p. 105-6) and the time devoted to the teaching of Welsh to native Anglophones in public schools could be spent learning “a major foreign language” (p. 105) which would presumably be more useful. After pointing out the inherent paradox that Welsh is somehow both too much in demand and of no practical use, May indicates what he sees as the ideology behind Barry’s claims:

Being able to speak Welsh within Wales (whether as a first or second language) is surely more immediately useful than speaking another language, particularly if Welsh is already established in the public domain. If it is deemed not to be useful, this is simply a particular value judgment about the perceived (low) status of Welsh.

When deconstructed in this manner, majority attitudes towards minority languages and their speakers’ supposedly naïve attachments to them are seen for what they are: language preferences in their own right. The range of an academic arguments like May’s in the public sphere is limited, however, and the impact that these attitudes have on the conceptualizations of language and cultural identity among minority speakers themselves cannot be overstated. This is the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991) that defines their options. In the context of language shift, speakers of minority languages and their linguistically assimilated children swim in this ‘soup.’

### **1.3 History of the francophone populations in Louisiana**

I will begin the Louisiana-focused portion of my literature review by briefly introducing the historically French-speaking populations in Louisiana. The historian Carl Brasseaux claims that the Louisiana territory (in its various historical forms and under various historical rules) has seen no fewer than 18 distinct groups of francophone immigrants: from *voyageurs* to French military personnel to Bonapartist exiles to Lebanese Christian immigrants to expatriate francophone teachers in the twentieth-century and present day bilingual education programs (Brasseaux 2005). Although these groups are distinct – and, in fact, often included numerous

sub-groups – the passage of time led to many of these groups’ losing their distinct identity and being “absorbed either by more established francophone groups or by America’s mainstream culture” (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 3). The surviving ethnic divisions could best be described as three groups (or rather, three labels): Creoles, Cajuns, and several American Indian tribes.

Creoles are perhaps the most difficult group to define. In the present day, the term is largely associated with African descent and non-Anglo colonial heritage. As Eble (2008) describes: “The current referent of Creole in Louisiana [suggests] someone of some African heritage whose family has been in the non-English parts of the Americas since at least the eighteenth century” (p. 40). Yet, historically, the definition of ‘Creole’ in Louisiana was not always linked to race. In his thorough review of historical uses of the term, Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. concludes that ‘Creole’ was generally used in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Louisiana to denote anyone native to Louisiana, regardless of race, ethnicity, or social position; among other sources, he cites an 1841 entry in *The Quadroone* that states:

“The term *creole* will be used throughout this work in its simple Louisianian acceptance, viz., as the synonym for native. It has no reference whatever to African descent, and means nothing more nor less than *native* .... The children of northern parents, if born in Louisiana, are ‘Creoles.’ The term, however, is more peculiarly appropriated by those who are of French descent.” (as cited in Tregle, 1982, p. 194).

This citation shows that the debate over the racial classification of Creoles was already in play during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

If there was a strong association of the term *creole* with African descent (at least, strong enough for someone to write something to contradict the belief), it is not the only racial association made with *creole*. In his 1935 work *Notes on Louisiana French*, George S. Lane refers to the variety of French he studies as “Negro French” though he recognizes that many people would refer to it as “Creole”; he explains this decision by claiming that to call this variety

“Creole” is “actually a misnomer (since the adjective of creole applies properly to persons of pure white race)” (p. 5). Dubois and Melançon (2000) also note that a single dictionary, Larousse, has noticeably different definitions for the word *créole* in its 1869 and 1929 editions; the former states that creole is synonymous with native, while the latter claims that the word could only accurately describe Caucasians and any use for non-Caucasian populations is secondary.

It is difficult to say if this specifically white definition of *creole* is truly rooted in the concept of race, or if this is merely an effect of a strong association between *Creole* and high social class. As Dubois and Melançon report, as early as the Spanish regime, “Creole had a strong connotation of being French (or having been assimilated into the French culture), of being wealthy, and of having higher status than other groups” (2000, p. 193). This high-class notion of *Creole* continues even today, as many racially white Louisianians will claim Creole heritage specifically to distinguish themselves from Cajuns, thought to be lower class (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 90).

Present-day studies on Creole identity show that Creoles self identify strongly with a heritage of mixed ancestry. In Andrew Jolivet’s (2007) study of Creole identity, he asked self-identifying Creoles what they thought was included in Creole heritage. In response, “97% said French, 92% said African American, 88% said Native American, and 77% said Spanish” (p. 42), leading the author to conclude that there is “a pervasive pattern of multiple self-identifications among Creoles” (p. 41) that includes these multiple ethnicities.

While Jolivet’s study focuses on the mixed heritage of self-identified Creoles, Dubois and Melançon (2000) look at three types of Creoles: White Creoles, Black Creoles, and Creoles of Color, the group of mixed European and African ancestry historically associated with the *gens*

*de couleur libres*. They find that the Louisiana Creole community has undergone serious changes due to social pressures and language stigmatization, leading to alternative definitions of Creole identity. White Creoles, the authors claim, largely gave up their Creole identity and assimilated into the Anglo-American population of the South, though they note that “there are vestiges of pride in a ‘European’ heritage among some [White Creoles] and a few still claim to be Creole” (p. 255). Meanwhile, Creoles of Color have generally been subsumed by the Black Creole population and together they have been significantly incorporated into a larger African American identity, though some of this group maintain cultural distinctiveness. From the results of their study, Dubois and Melançon conclude that there is a more or less widely accepted claim to Creole identity based “on ancestry, on having older relatives who speak Creole French, and on speaking some form of French, preferably Creole French” (p. 255).

At first glance, Cajuns may seem to be a more homogenous group than Creoles, but they, too, show a great deal of diversity. The descendants of an Acadian diaspora caused by the mid-eighteenth century expulsion of the Acadians, they arrived in Louisiana in the latter half of the 1700s in successive waves. The group was initially somewhat insular, a quality Brasseaux attributes to the trauma of being deported from their homeland and a wide-ranging network of blood relationships; this insularity was not absolute, but “although the walls [...] were occasionally damaged they were never effectively breached and the core values of the Acadian immigrants were essentially those of their Acadian descendants” (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 64).

While the Acadians may have been insular, the process by which they became ‘Cajuns,’ involved crossing cultural divides. Exogamous marriages are made evident in the number of historical and present day Cajuns who have last names like Schexnayder, Segura, McGee, and Miller. Exogamous marriage did not necessarily indicate a diluting of culture, however, as even

these present-day Schexnayders and Millers often speak with a distinctly francophone accent and participate in francophone Louisiana's cultural practices.

I use 'francophone' here because while the names listed above show a sharp contrast in ethnicity, the exogamy also happened within francophone populations, a phenomenon which begins to blur the lines between Acadian and Creole. Brasseaux notes that Acadian women were particularly likely to marry outside the community, and though they married with Anglo-Americans at times, they "demonstrated a marked preference for French-speaking Creoles [...] with Acadian-Creole marriages in the prairie parishes outnumbering Acadian-American unions three to one" (1992, p. 38-39). The children of these exogamous marriages – both those with Creoles and those with non-francophone ethnic groups - "were reared as Acadians by their mothers" (Brasseaux, 1992, p. 39) and within a generation these families were assimilated into an increasingly diverse notion of Acadian ethnicity. The assimilating force of francophone society in Louisiana is amusingly clear in the well-known quote by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century fiddler Dennis McGee, who once said, in heavily-accented English: "McGee? That's a French name. I don't know anyone named McGee that doesn't speak French" (as quoted in Bernard, 2003, p. xix).

Although assimilation into the Acadian/Cajun community was present, the 19<sup>th</sup> century also brought forces that pushed for assimilation into Anglo-American culture. In the Reconstruction period, drastic social and economic changes "accelerated the transformation of the transplanted Acadian society into the indigenous Louisiana Cajun culture" (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 72). As with Creoles, the label of Cajun became tied to an idea of social class. The label itself – an English corruption of *Acadien* – came to mark a boundary between the increasingly powerful Anglo-Americans (and the higher class Creoles and 'genteel' Acadians who had begun

to associate themselves with the values of these Americans and their high social class) and the yeoman farmer populations of *petits habitants*. Class lines became very influential as poorer Creoles “gravitated economically and politically toward their [...] French-speaking [Cajun] neighbors, with whom they shared an increasingly common lifestyle” (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 73).

While significant attention has been given to Creole and Acadian/Cajun history, far less is published on the traditionally-francophone native American Indian tribes of Louisiana. A number of tribes in Louisiana became French-speaking due to contact with European and French Canadian explorers and colonists, including the Avogel, the Chitimacha, and the Attakapa, but the present-day tribe most strongly associated with the French language is the United Houma Nation. Kniffen, Gregory and Stokes (1987) call the Houma nation of today “the most conservative of all Louisiana French speakers” (p. 126) and roughly 40% of the tribe still speaks French (Luster 2011). Nevertheless, there is a relative paucity of materials on the tribe when compared to the popular discussions of Cajuns and Creoles.

The Houma Nation is recognized by the state of Louisiana but has struggled for decades to achieve federal recognition. They generally maintain their distinctiveness from Cajuns and Creoles, with one influential member of the tribe explaining at a conference on the French language: “You have to realize that this is the old French that we learned from some of the first explorers. It's not the French that is spoken by the Cajuns” (Luster 2011). The relationship of the Houma nation to the explorers and early colonists of Louisiana was a long and intense one. The founders of Louisiana being French Canadian, they knew the importance of establishing ties with the native populations and Iberville formed a preliminary alliance with the Houma tribe in 1699 during his first ascent of the Mississippi (Brasseaux 2005). The following year, after Iberville helped to broker a peaceful resolution to a serious conflict between the Houma and

another Louisiana native tribe, the Houma agreed to two accommodations: a young boy from the Iberville's group would be allowed to live amongst them in order to learn their language and serve as an interpreter, and a Catholic chapel would be constructed in their village (Brasseaux 2005).

The colonial period was certainly not an easy one for the Houma; they suffered from disease epidemics, the competition between French and English colonial powers (which pitted the allied American Indian nations of each against each other), and the encroachment of successive waves of settlers. A significant portion of the tribe intermarried with Choctaws they had allowed into the tribe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and according to a researcher who compiled a lexicon of Houma vocabulary in 1907 “virtually all of the language was drawn from the Choctaw-based Mobilian trade dialect that was the lingua franca among the colonial-era French-allied tribes of the southeast” (Brasseaux, 2005, p. 125).

The ‘Houma language’ spoken of here is no longer used by tribe members. Contemporary use of the ‘Houma language’ refers to the Houma variety of French. The same representative who explained to the francophone conference audience that the French of the Houma Nation was different from the French of neighboring Cajuns, stated quite plainly:

I myself grew up speaking French; I never heard English until I finally was able to go to school. The language that we speak now as we call it is ‘La Langue Houma,’ and it is the French language. I look back at one of the elders, Reverend Roch Naquin, who was interviewed in the late 90’s, who said that he was punished every time he spoke French in school. It was something that was hard for a child to understand: you could speak French at home and it was all okay, but you got to school and you were punished. So something must have been wrong with this language. (Luster 2011)

This citation highlights what would become a common experience for francophone Louisianians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the stigmatization and banning of French in the school systems and the overall cultural imperative to speak English.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a nationalist fervor in American politics. Teddy Roosevelt declared in 1915: “There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism.” Writing about this trend towards Americanization, Aneta Pavlenko writes:

Responding to concerns about national unity and security in the wake of the Great Migration and World War I, the nation’s leaders ‘reimagined’ the United States as a monolingual country, positing a nation conceived not only in liberal ideals but also in language. (2002, p. 191)

Compulsory education in public (and consequently, English-speaking) schools exposed an entire generation of Louisiana Francophones to negative stigmatization of their mother tongue.

Beyond this classroom stigmatization, it became apparent that English was “the language of the future” (Ancelet, 2007, p. 1240) and before long, to quote a famous scholar and activist, “speaking French was considered not unlike picking your nose: it was something well-raised people did not do in public” (2007, p. 1240). These social stigmas, combined with the intense changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the birth of radio and television, the increased mobility of Louisianians due to better roadways, the emergence of the oil industry in Louisiana and the influx of oilmen from neighboring states, just to name a few – led to a very rapid shift in language use. The decline of French had begun in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the shift of political and economic power to Anglo-Americans (Brasseaux 1991), but the ‘perfect storm’ of 20<sup>th</sup>-century forces proved to be incomparably damaging.

This trend of language shift or loss has been a primary focus of a great deal of the current literature on Louisiana. Sexton’s “Cajun French Language Maintenance and Shift” (2000) studies the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>- century processes that led to this language shift and follows its



progression to the 1970s. Kevin Rottet's *Language Shift in the Coastal Marshes of Louisiana* (2001) similarly situates the French language in its Louisiana context (this one specific to Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes), explains the decline of the use of French, and documents attempts made to preserve and promote it. Carl Blythe's "The Sociolinguistic Situation of Cajun French" (1997) is subtitled "The Effects of Language Shift and Language Loss" and goes into great detail about the impact that language policies and language attitudes have had on language use in Louisiana in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **1.4 Blurring identity lines in francophone Louisiana**

One such effect of this language shift is the shift in conceptions of identity for French-speakers. Dubois and Melançon's 1997 article "Cajun is dead – Long Live Cajun" describes the shift from a linguistic to a cultural community. The authors find a link between French ability and Cajun identity, but do not find that a strong connection to speaking French is the only way to ground one's identity as Cajun; they conclude: "In general, respondents claim that the necessary criteria to be considered Cajun are just those criteria that they themselves satisfy" (p. 63).

Jacques Henry and Carl Bankston's "Louisiana Cajun Ethnicity: Symbolic or Structural?" (1997) also examines the possibility of a fundamental shift in ethnic identification for the Cajun community. Looking at census data, language use, marriage trends, and socioeconomic factors, the authors conclude that Cajun identity is undergoing a significant change, including linguistic assimilation and acculturation, but that the symbolic elements that are becoming associated with Cajun identity are not yet strong enough to classify it as a purely symbolic identity.

It may have become apparent by now that despite there being *at least* three ethnicities (if one condenses the various definitions of Creole to a single ethnic label and if one deems the various American Indian tribes to be 'one' ethnic category) in Louisiana, one ethnicity seems to

get considerably more attention. James Natsis' 2008 article is entitled "French in Louisiana: A Struggle for Identity" but is exclusively about Cajuns. He makes one brief mention of Creoles as being "descendants of the colonial settlers" (p.76) who were already in Louisiana when the Acadians arrived, but otherwise does not include any other ethnic groups in the "struggle for identity" in "French Louisiana." As can be seen even from the titles in this literature review, this erasure is not uncommon.

Yet, there is another phenomenon almost as common as Cajun ethnicity overwhelming all other francophone ethnicities in the literature: the conflation of Cajun and Creole. This is certainly the case in the general public, but academics can be guilty of this practice as well. Alexander Murphy is aware of the trend of blurring the lines between the francophone populations, claiming that "a certain conflation of Louisiana's French communities (migrants from France, Acadians, White Creoles, Afro-Creoles) had been going on for two centuries" (2008, p. 16), but sometimes participates in such a conflation himself. For example, he describes "initiatives aimed at bolstering interest in Cajun cuisine and music" (p. 19) before immediately giving the example of the state's first Zydeco Festival in 1981. Zydeco is widely known to be a musical style associated with the Black Creole population.

Nathalie Dajko presents a thorough picture of the complexities of ethnicity and language use in Acadiana in her article on the "Sociolinguistics of Ethnicity in Francophone Louisiana" (2012). She summarizes a preliminary discussion of the issues of absorption and conflation of Cajun and Creole thus: "By one view, there is a single French variety spoken in Louisiana that bears multiple labels, and by another, there is a simple linguistic divide that corresponds to ethnic divisions" (p. 279). Both of these assumptions being erroneous, Dajko uses both a historical and linguistic perspective to illuminate the situation. She details the demographics of

Louisiana from a historical point of view, noting the influx of different waves of immigration and their behaviors of intermarriage or internal assimilation within francophone groups as they have been recorded by historians. She also examines linguists' treatment of contemporary speakers of Louisiana varieties of French, a treatment that often separates them along problematic ethnic lines because of the language varieties supposedly associated with them. She reiterates her previous (2009) and Klingler's (2003) findings that variation within groups of speakers of the same self-identified ethnicity abound and that the differences across ethnic lines within particular parishes (between American Indians and Cajuns in Lafourche Parish for Dajko, and between Cajuns and Creoles in St. Landry and Pointe Coupée Parishes for Klingler) generally "are not important enough to merit the use of a separate language label" (Dajko 2012, p. 292).

Meanwhile, ethnic identification (regardless of language practices) is itself an intricate mixture of historical hybridity and commonly accepted associations. Dajko notes that both Cajun and Creole identity are drawn around the same kinds of boundaries (those of foodways, music, and - to varying degrees and in variable forms - religion and the French language) and hypothesizes: "That Cajuns and Creoles interact and influence each other in all these ways is possibly a reason for the stress on the social construct of race as integral to ethnic identity" (p. 280). The lines are blurred by interaction, and easy-to-define racialized labels simplify the complexity. This rearrangement of ethnic boundaries may make individuals' processes of identification simpler, but it complicates the task of researchers studying language and ethnicity in Louisiana.

It is important to note that even when the literature is successful in distinguishing between and giving attention to both Cajuns and Creoles, it routinely ignores American Indians.

The origins of these disparate treatments of Cajuns, Creoles, and francophone American Indians may partially lie in the ethnographic traditions that, in an attempt to study populations scientifically, strived to make them as internally homogenous as possible, focusing in on one very particular group at a time. Unfortunately, when this practice is combined with social and political influences and with larger societal ideas of who is most ‘worthy’ of study, some groups garner significantly more attention and develop a significantly broader corpus of literature than others. Even in Brasseaux’s (2005) thorough account of francophone Louisiana – whose title “French, Cajun, Creole, Houma” demonstrates a desire for comprehensiveness – the chapter devoted to the Houma Nation is only 13 pages, compared with the 47 pages on Cajuns and the 20 pages on Creoles.

I make mention of these trends not because I propose to correct them (that would be overly ambitious) but to explain my motivations for examining in ways that are distinct from ethnic labels. Previously the approach to studying the francophone groups in Louisiana has been to separate them. Spitzer (2003) looks at Creole language and musical styles and seeks to put the linguistic notion of creolization to use in a description of the development of Creole culture. Meanwhile, Dormon (1983) talks about the various forms of being Cajun from the “CODOFIL elite” to the “genteel Acadians” to the “plain Cajuns” to the “coonasses.” I will seek to look at the various forms of being *francolouisianais*, a label that can be alternately Cajun, Creole, or American Indian, and can include “ethnifying” and/or “linguaging” to borrow Garcia’s (2011) terms.

## CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Original context of the study

I began this study not as personal dissertation research, but as a sub-project of a larger grant project called *Le Français à la mesure d'un continent* (hereafter 'LFALMDC'). In 2011, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada approved funding for a 6-year, 2.5-million-dollar research initiative to study the French language in North America. LFALMDC is under the general direction of Dr. France Martineau at the University of Ottawa, but involves 13 co-researchers and 88 collaborators and partners at 40 universities across the globe. The project website describes its mission with the following: “[The project] examines the past, present, and future of francophone communities and places the individual and his/her language at the heart of change in francophone societies.”<sup>12</sup> The various research initiatives address the topic from a number of different angles - from studying morphosyntactic variation in colonial written correspondence, to organizing virtual and traveling museum exhibits, to building a number of written and audio-recorded corpora.

Dr. Sylvie Dubois is a co-researcher on the project and the Center for French and Francophone Studies at LSU was given direction of a number of sub-projects involving French in the United States. One of these sub-projects was to record a series of interviews with members of the Louisiana French-speaking community in order to include them in a larger corpus of interviews in francophone communities across North America.

### 2.2 Formulating the questions

When I was asked to conduct the interviews for the Louisiana community, I looked over the questions that had been used in other regions and it quickly became apparent that major changes would be needed. The linguistic situation in Louisiana is very much removed from that

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<sup>12</sup> This is my translation of the official documents.

of even the more minority Francophones of Canada. Questions about why someone chose to do business in French or English, for example, would not serve to further our knowledge of the French-speaking communities of Louisiana. Consequently, I created a set of questions that touched on some of the themes of the overall project: language use; identity; the past, present, and future of French in Louisiana, etc. With the help and feedback of Dr. Annette Boudreau and Dr. Mourad Ali-Khodja, both *LFALMDC* colleagues at the University of Moncton, Dr. Dubois and I adjusted the questionnaire and the final product was a set of interview questions divided into 6 distinct sections: 1) Personal History, 2) Language and Culture, 3) Image and Reality, 4) The “Renaissance,” 5) Looking back, and 6) Looking ahead.

The first set of questions eases the participants into their respective interviews by asking them about their personal histories, careers, and any personal experiences with French at an early age. The interviews then turn to the participants’ perspectives on the link between language and culture in Louisiana and on their own attachments to the French language and to a Louisiana identity. In the third section, I ask the participants to describe to me the images of Louisiana they see being presented and whether they feel these images are accurate or not. I then ask about their experiences of and opinions on the resurgence of French language support and cultural pride in Louisiana, often called the French “Renaissance” in Louisiana. The final two sections consist of asking about their perception of the cultural past and of francophone Louisiana history and about their views on the future of French in Louisiana.

I include the questions in Appendices A and B. The French version of the questions has not been changed from the version used with participants, despite my having learned that some of the linguistic forms I chose were not the most appropriate for speakers of Louisiana varieties of French. When the questions were established, I submitted a copy of them to the Institutional

Review Board for approval. I also submitted copies of all documents the participants would receive. This included a description of the *LFALMDC* project and personal information sheets. Once approval was granted, I began to seek out participants.

### **2.3 Selecting participants**

*LFALMDC* is a project that encompasses all of North America, and it uses the French language both as its main object of study and as its unifying theme. Therefore, I did not want to single out a specific population of Francophones in Louisiana, but attempted to speak with as diverse a group as possible. In my efforts to identify possible candidates, I described the type of participants I was looking for as being “native Louisianians of strong French roots” and “active and influential in their communities.” Being a native Louisianian myself, I used my own personal and professional networks, as well as contacting community organizations and local businesses.

Throughout the process of selecting participants, I often found it necessary to clarify the nature of my project. Because certain discourses and perspectives in Louisiana have received more publicity than others, I tried not to focus on leaders *of* the francophone community, but rather leaders *in* the francophone community. I was interested in hearing opinions beyond the activist perspective, so I looked for people of francophone heritage who were very involved in their communities, whether that involvement included a linguistic aspect or not. Furthermore, I felt that the concept of influence should not be limited to a strictly traditional sense of the word. As a result, my corpus includes political figures and celebrated artists, but also includes people with less high-profile occupations who were specifically recommended by their communities (be it a tribal community or a church community). One participant has worked at a popular

downtown business for over 50 years and has gotten to know a wide variety of community members through that context.

On a number of occasions, I had to clarify what I meant by “strong French roots.” Generally, I would explain that I meant “Louisiana French roots, like Cajun or Creole” and my interlocutor would be satisfied. I never directly asked the participants to label themselves ethnically, however, due to the dubious nature of ethnic labels in Louisiana. Nevertheless, I did seek diversity in terms of including people of color. Of my 20 interviews, 14 were with Caucasian participants, 4 were with participants of African-American descent, and 2 were with American Indians from the Houma tribe. Ideally, I would have interviewed more people in general, and particularly more people of color; nevertheless, the demographics of the corpus are roughly on par with the demographics of the 22-parish region associated with Francophones (commonly known as Acadiana). Acadiana’s population is 1,450,639 inhabitants, with 68.2% identifying as ‘White or Caucasian’ and 27.0% identifying as ‘Black or African-American.’<sup>13</sup> While only 1.0 % of the region’s population identified as ‘Native American,’ I thought it important to include at least 2 members of the Houma Nation due to the tribe’s saliency in modern day francophone Louisiana.

On occasion, the person I was seeking as a participant (or the person helping me identify possible participants) was unsure of linguistic qualifications. A number of participants suggested I interview friends of theirs instead, because they weren’t sure if their limited abilities in French (or lack of French language ability) made them a less appropriate interview subject. I made it clear that there were no ‘wrong’ answers, that I was looking for people’s opinions and experiences, and that they did not have to speak French. This often reassured the participant

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<sup>13</sup> These percentages are based off of my own analysis of the 2010 Census. Although ‘Acadiana’ is officially recognized as an intra-state region by the Louisiana legislature, I have been unable to find any official Census or demographic data treating it as a distinct entity.



enough to consent to an interview. When asked on the information form if they spoke French, five participants answered that they did not and fifteen answered that they did (though I will discuss the issue of self-reporting later on in this chapter).

Besides seeking a diversity of experiences at the ethnic and linguistic level, and in addition to interviewing people with various occupations and roles within the community, I also tried to respect diversity in terms of age, gender, and geographical origins. I spoke with participants from a number of different generations, both men and women. While a number of my participants are originally from or currently live in the Lafayette area - Lafayette being the main city at the heart of French-speaking Louisiana - I purposefully sought to balance this emphasis on Lafayette with participants from various other parishes. The end result is a corpus of interviews with 11 men and 9 women, the youngest of whom is in her 20s and the oldest of whom is in her 80s, hailing from Lafayette, Acadia, Cameron, Iberia, Lafourche, St. Landry, St. Martin, Terrebonne, and Vermilion Parishes.

#### **2.4 Interview and transcription procedures**

The interviews were recorded on an individual basis between April 2013 and February 2014. Some of the interviews were recorded in the homes of the participants, some at their places of work, and some during community events. I sat down with the participants individually in as quiet a location as possible and I explained the basics of the project. I then briefly went over the questions and explained that they had the choice to not answer a question or move back and forth between questions if they so wished. I asked casually if they spoke French and immediately explained that the interview could be conducted in English or in French, according to their choice.

After testing the recording equipment to ensure it was functioning properly, we recorded the interview, guided by the interview questions. When it was finished, I asked the participants to complete an information sheet and a consent form. The consent form included a number of different possible uses for the interview (to which they could consent or not) and I informed them that they were free to consent to as many or as few of these uses as they wished. In general, I let them fill out the forms themselves (while remaining nearby to answer any questions) but in a few instances I filled it out for them due to vision problems in older participants. The consent forms were English translations I made from the French versions written for the *LFALMDC* project. Before leaving, I ensured that the participants had my contact information and a copy of the project description, and I encouraged them to contact me if they had any further questions.

After all the interviews were completed, they were transcribed using the program Audacity to manipulate the speed and quality of the audio. The fifteen English-language interviews were transcribed by an individual hired by the Center for French and Francophone Studies; the transcriber was a native Louisianian but had only a very limited knowledge of academic French. I transcribed the five French-language interviews myself. I also worked with the transcriber of the English interviews in order to handle instances of code-switching and French-specific references. The transcriptions were made to reflect what was actually said, showing hesitations and not correcting for any errors made. They were not, however, transcribed to specifically reflect informal language or dialectal particularities. For example, if a participant had trouble pronouncing a word and used multiple pronunciations, the different pronunciations are not normalized; however, if the participant uses variants like ‘sorta’ and ‘gonna,’ they are transcribed as ‘sort of’ and ‘going to.’ Similarly, in French language interviews, minor

variations specific to local varieties of French are ignored and written as they might be found in referential French, but variants that are significantly distant from referential French are generally transcribed as they were pronounced. For example, to transcribe “eusse” as “ils” would be semantically appropriate but would render the transcription very difficult to follow given the notable difference in pronunciation and the third person singular conjugation of “eusse.”

## **2.5 Methodological issues of interviewing**

In his 2010 article ‘Qualitative Interviews in Applied Linguistics: From Research Instrument to Social Practice,’ Steven Talmy discusses some of the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the interview in linguistic research. He notes that the interview has become an increasingly central tool for investigating identities and attitudes towards phenomena, but laments the “profound inconsistency in how the interview has been and continues to be theorized” (p. 128-9). Talmy contrasts two different approaches to interviews that can be categorized as *interviews as a research instrument* and *interviews as social practice*. The former is the more traditional approach, where “interviews are theorized (often tacitly) as a resource for investigating truths, facts, experience, beliefs, attitudes, and/or feelings of respondents” (p. 131). *Interviews as social practice*, however, go beyond investigating via the interview into an investigation of the interview itself. This approach “[problematizes] the assumptions that constitute the research instrument perspective” (p. 131) by treating data as ‘accounts’ of truths rather than ‘reports.’ and recognizing the influence of the interviewer in co-constructing this data and viewpoint. In the social practice approach, the interview is “a fundamentally social encounter rather than a conduit for accessing information” (p.131). While Talmy contrasts the two approaches in detail, differentiating the research instrument’s product-oriented analytic focus from the process-oriented analysis of the interview as social practice, he does not call for

an abandonment of the former in favor of the latter. Instead, his aim is to bring “greater attention to the theories of interview that *all* qualitative applied linguistics studies adopt” (p.143) and to increase awareness of the assumptions researchers may make in blindly accepting the ideologies of what he calls “the interview society” (p. 130).

In my own research, I lean toward the *interview as a research instrument* approach, but I cannot ignore the validity of Talmy’s points regarding the *interview as social practice*. I encountered issues with self-reporting that might have been reason to distrust the data in a research instrument approach, but that provide a site for investigation in the social practice perspective. The participants were asked to fill out a form that included questions on whether they spoke, understood, read, and wrote French (these skills were addressed individually) and their language ability was also addressed both directly and indirectly in the interview itself. On multiple occasions, the participants’ reports of their language abilities differed depending on the context in which they were asked. I will go into more detail about these discrepancies in the next section when I describe the participants whose interviews make up the corpus.

Another situation that was very likely influenced by the interview process was language choice. As previously stated, it was up to the participant to decide which language to use for the interview. However, my role as the interviewer cannot be ignored. Firstly, I should note that because I was unfamiliar with the language abilities of many participants before meeting them, the default language when first contacting and speaking to a participant was English. While it is difficult to avoid in the current linguistic climate in Louisiana, it most certainly influenced the participants’ decisions. As I gained experience interviewing, I made an effort to gauge the participants’ abilities and if possible to speak more French with them prior to asking them which language they wanted to use for the interview, in order to combat any resistance against a drastic

shift from English to French. Although I made attempts to create a casual atmosphere that encouraged participants to share their experiences and opinions, the effect that my status as an ‘official’ from a large university may have had should be strongly considered.

Out of the twenty interviews, only five were conducted in French. Certainly, a number of these English interviews simply could not have been done in French due to the participants’ speaking no (or very little) French. In some instances, however, self-reported French speakers chose English only after asking me multiple times if I had a preference; in these cases, they generally cited the comparative ease of expressing themselves in English. In other instances, the participants may have listed themselves as French speakers on the form but chose English and during the interview went into more detail about the limits of their abilities. For others, the choice to use English may have been an attempt to avoid misunderstandings and dialectal differences. This would certainly be true for creolophones, as I do not speak Louisiana Creole.

The idea that participants would use English to avoid misunderstandings is supported by the fact that some participants who did choose French had comprehension issues with my French. While I am a native Louisianian, I am not a native speaker of French. I began studying French in high school, and like many young Louisianians, the French I speak is fairly easy to distinguish from the French of my grandparents. In fact, I never had the opportunity to speak French with my grandparents (the last Francophones in my family) and though I have studied the dialectal particularities of Louisiana French, my own idiolect is largely influenced by Canadian friends and French and Canadian media. Seeing as I generally met the participant only moments before the interview was recorded, it is understandable that there were comprehension issues.

Finally, my influence as the interviewer can also be a matter of familiarity with the participants. As previously stated, I am a native Louisianian and though I had not met most of

the participants prior to interviewing them, I did already know a few of them. These relationships range from that of a good personal friend and collaborator on activist projects to a family acquaintance whom I had not seen since I was a child.

Overall, I use the interview as a research tool, but in the relatively small and insular community of south Louisiana, I strive to keep in mind the influence of the process itself. As Talmy states, the analytic focus of a study using interviews “can range from the comparatively ‘micro’ [...] to the ‘macro’ [...] to more generalized orientations that engage less with the ‘how’ than with the ‘what,’ but still challenge the conception of interviews as a conduit into what people really think, know, or believe” (2010, p. 140). I see my study as having one of these more generalized orientations.

## **2.6 Technical issues**

I occasionally experienced technical issues in the recording of the interviews. The recording equipment was battery-operated and on two occasions the batteries died during the interview. Also, because I sometimes was interviewing a participant at his or her place of work, there were some participants who were interrupted by work related activities. In these cases, when the problem was resolved, we began again where we had left off and the separate files were later on fused into a single audio file.

## **2.7 Biographical overview of participants**

In this section, I will give an overview of the participants interviewed in this corpus. Rather than to simply list them alphabetically according to pseudonym, I have chosen to organize these brief descriptions into three categories of participant based on their relationships to the French language in Louisiana. These categories serve as a methodological tool for analysis in later chapters of this dissertation, but they also are introduced and used in this section

in order to talk further about the aforementioned methodological issues of the interview process. By using these categories, I can present important issues like language choice for the interview and discrepancies in self-reporting in context. These issues do not play a central role in my analysis in later chapters, but are nevertheless important results of this research. The three categories that I have developed are: Native Francophones, Francophones of Choice, and Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais.

### ***2.7.1 Native Francophones***

The Native Francophone (NF) category includes those participants who could be classified as ‘native speakers’ of French. This group is a typical object of study for linguists and anthropologists, but the label of ‘native’ can be far less self-evident than it seems.<sup>14</sup> Alan Davies (2003) turns a critical eye to the primacy of the native speaker in applied linguistics, and examines to what degree “commonsense views” of the native speaker are accurate in implying “mother tongue, first language, dominant language, home language, linguistic competence, communicative competence” (p.24). In the context of language shift in south Louisiana, these assumptions are often complicated. As previously discussed, there were discrepancies between self-reported language abilities on the interview forms and the way participants talked about their abilities during the interview. The choice of language for the interview did not always correspond with the participant’s “first language” or “native language.” I will discuss specific instances of this within the short biographical accounts of the interviews, but I first wish to qualify here that by ‘native speaker’ I mean someone whose knowledge of French owes itself exclusively (or primarily) to exposure to the language in the home as a child (as opposed to formal instruction).

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<sup>14</sup> See Coulmas (1981).

### *Herman*

Herman is a man in his 60s from Terrebonne Parish. He is an active member of the United Houma Nation. Professionally, he works in the seafood industry and as an artist. He was recommended to me by the Chief of the United Houma Nation, and our interview was conducted at an event organized by the tribe. He is fully bilingual, with French as his first language; when asked when he learned French, he laughs: “When did I start speaking French? When I was a young little guy!”<sup>15</sup> The interview was conducted in French, though at a few points Herman asked me to switch to English due to comprehension issues. In fact, this begins with the very first question of the interview. I ask the question twice in French, and then he asks (in French): “Can you repeat it in English? Because I don’t understand your French too well.”<sup>16</sup> I repeat the question in English, he understands, and the interview continues in French. Herman uses English to clarify both in instances when he does not understand me and when he suspects I do not understand him (often with regard to specific vocabulary). However, this does not lead to a great deal of English being spoken in the interview. Over the course of the 40-minute interview, the switch to English happens only a few times, and we always quickly shift back to French.

### *Amelia*

Amelia, a woman in her 70s, is also a member of the United Houma Nation from Terrebonne Parish. She is retired, having had a career in a clerical/administrative field. She was also (and remains) very involved in local educational initiatives with the youth in her community. I was put in touch with Amelia after explaining the project to the staff at the main offices of the United Houma Nation. The interview was recorded in her home. Like Herman, she is bilingual but spoke French before learning English. I made an effort to speak some French

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<sup>15</sup> Originally: “Quand j’ai commencé à parler français? <[rire] Oui!> Quand j’étais jeune petit bougre!”

<sup>16</sup> Originally: “Est-ce que tu peux le dire en anglais? Parce que je comprends pas trop ton français...”



to her before the question of which language to use in the interview was addressed. When the question did present itself, she proposed that I ask the questions in English and that she answer in French, citing comprehension issues. She has trouble remembering a few specific words in French, and occasionally she shifts into English (particularly near the end of the 55-minute interview), though it seems likely that the latter phenomenon is simply the natural inclination a bilingual person would have when her interlocutor is speaking English.

### *Claire*

Claire is also a woman in her 70s. She is Caucasian and lives in St. Landry Parish. In the interview she occasionally identifies as a Cajun (e.g., “We Cajuns, we do that!”<sup>17</sup>) but also often references an ancestor from France, appearing to give significant weight to this France French ancestry. She is easily one of the more officially ‘activistic’ participants I interviewed, being known for her collaboration in projects to promote and preserve French in Louisiana; professionally, however, she is retired from a clerical/administrative job and also runs a small business in the hospitality industry. She was suggested to me as a participant by other activists, and the interview took place in her home. She chose to do the interview in French. In the interview she explains that she did not speak English well until attending school but unlike many of her generation, she was never punished for speaking French at school (which she credits to a kind teacher who was also a Francophone). In recent years, she decided to work towards literacy in French and has taken classes in referential French. Unlike Amelia and Herman, she never has comprehension issues with my French (presumably due to this extensive previous exposure to other varieties of French). In rare moments, she codeswitches into English, but it is generally done in a way that seems natural for a bilingual person (and not a sign of a decline in language skills in French). The interview lasts roughly 26 minutes.

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<sup>17</sup> Originally: “*Les Cadiens, on fait ça, hein?*”

### *Sarah*

Sarah is also from St. Landry Parish. A woman in her 70s, she is of African-American descent and identifies strongly as Creole. She works in the cultural sector and, like Claire, is also more of an activist (in the traditional sense) than many of the other participants in the corpus. I was given her contact information by the priest at her church. She grew up speaking Creole and English in the home, and has since had some exposure to international varieties of French: she has worked with natives of France and Canadian Francophones. When I presented the choice of French or English, she suggested we might go back and forth, perhaps even discussing differences in Louisiana French and Louisiana Creole. As it happens, the interview is almost entirely in English, with no major instances of codeswitching. The beginning of the interview, however, is the discussion of this question of which language to use; with my equipment set up, it became apparent that she was already prepared to talk at length about language. I began recording before even beginning the interview questions, so as not to miss anything important she might say. The resulting interview is 58 minutes long and was recorded in her office.

### *Eric*

Eric is a man in his 50s from Acadia Parish. He is Caucasian and refers to himself as a Cajun during the interview. His profession is in the arts sector and his work is greatly influenced by francophone south Louisiana culture; he has been successful enough in his career that I had heard of him and personally sought him out for an interview. He grew up speaking French and English at home; he states, "I never remember not speaking French and English both, and not understanding French and English both." His grandparents played an active role in his childhood, and all four of them were monolingual French speakers; his parents spoke French with each other but mostly English with him. He tells the story of his older sister working on

English pronunciation with him when he reached school age, “so [he] wouldn't sound like [he] could speak French.” He chose to do the interview in English, though he often codeswitches into French for short spurts. When asked about his current French abilities, he sees the situation in a few different ways. He expresses linguistic insecurity (Labov 1972) in comparing himself with those of his generation or older who have opportunities to speak French more regularly, as well as in comparison with members of younger generations who have had schooling in French. All in all, however, he answers the question regarding his abilities with: “I can defend myself.”<sup>18</sup> He is also clear that his speaking abilities are not indicative of his abilities in written French. Many of his colleagues and friends in the international French-speaking community will write to him in French, assuming he can read the language, and he is obliged to correct this assumption. The interview, recorded at his home, lasts 49 minutes.

### *Thomas*

Thomas is a man in his 50s from Lafayette Parish. He is Caucasian, identifies as “a Cajun [first], and an American after,”<sup>19</sup> and often references the Acadians in his interview. I first met him as a family acquaintance many years ago when I interviewed him for a school project on a traditional cultural practice in which he is an expert. This was several years ago, however, and he did not remember having met me until after the interview for this corpus was completed. Today, he is better known to myself and local activists as a small business owner whose business is among the most ‘French-friendly’ of the area. He has bilingual labels on his products, actively favors individuals who can speak French in his hiring practices, and uses French in the workplace. The interview was recorded at his business and on a number of occasions, I heard him interacting with his staff in French, though this is not to say that French is the exclusive (or

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<sup>18</sup> Originally: “*Je peux me défendre.*”

<sup>19</sup> Originally: “...but *avant je suis un Cadien. Un Cadien, et un Américain après.*”

even the dominant) language of the workplace. He grew up speaking both French and English at home, and was discouraged from speaking French when he began attending school.

Language choice is an interesting factor in this interview. I went to his business to meet him in person and to ask if he would allow me to interview him. As I began describing the project and he inferred that I could speak French, he immediately began speaking to me in French. All the arrangements for the interview were made in French, and when I returned on another day to record the interview he addressed me in French from the moment of my arrival. This strong orientation towards French pre-interview made the choice of language for the interview seem a moot point, and the option was somewhat glossed over. During the interview, however, he sometimes switches into English, for individual words and short phrases, as well as for much longer stretches, and shows signs of being frustrated with his ability to express himself fully in French. He talks explicitly about feeling linguistic insecurity around teachers<sup>20</sup> and mentions an experience in college with an American professor of referential French who demeaned him and his way of speaking. His French also exhibits a number of features associated with Louisiana Creole, such as a Creole-influenced syntax (“*Laisse-moi dire toi quelque chose*”) and the dropping of *être* (“*Nous-autres pas paresseux*”). These features are not consistent, but they are recurrent. His store is located in a neighborhood that has been historically populated by Creoles and there are Creoles on his staff. The interview lasts 22 minutes.

### *Rose*

Rose is a Caucasian woman in her 80s who was born and raised in Acadia Parish, though she has now lived for over 50 years in Lafayette Parish. She identifies as Cajun and calls her French “Cajun French.” She also refers to her parents as “French people,” though it is clear that she does not mean that they came from France. She has worked in a service position at a

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<sup>20</sup> It is worthwhile to reiterate here that I approached all participants clearly stating my affiliation with LSU.

downtown business for over 50 years, making her something of a small-town ‘icon.’ She grew up speaking only French in the home and learned English at school; her older siblings who had gone to school before her helped to give her a head start on English so that she would not be punished for speaking French, and she explains that she and her siblings taught their monolingual parents some English words and phrases. She married a Francophone, but they did not raise their children in French. When I ask her if not speaking French with their children was a decision or if it “just happened,” she replies: “No, just happened, just automatically talked English.”

The automatic use of English was a factor in the interview process as well. Due to her permanence at the downtown business my family frequents, Rose has known me (as a family acquaintance) my entire life. As previously stated, I did not begin learning French until I was a teenager, so the language we have always used in the past has been English. Before beginning the interview, I explained that we could do the interview in English or French according to her choice, and I immediately repeated the same sentence in French. She seemed confused. I gently reminded her, “*Je parle français, Madame Rose.*” She still did not respond and appeared uncomfortable, so I defaulted back to English and we soon began the interview in English. Near the end of the interview, she asks me if my mother speaks French before asking me if I’m fluent. This interchange suggests to me that discovering that I spoke French made her wonder if my mother (who has only a limited passive knowledge of French) might also be a French speaker, unbeknownst to her.

Throughout the 24-minute interview, she only switches into French for one sentence: she directly quotes herself leaving a message on her brother’s answering machine. She states to me that he is one of the few people with whom she still speaks French. This information, coupled

with her reaction to my attempts to speak French with her, is indicative of a phenomenon that I have experienced as a younger Francophone in south Louisiana: a tension in interactions between younger and older French speakers, a sort of linguistic insecurity based in the habit of speaking French with only certain people, normally other members of the same generation.

### ***2.7.2 Francophones of Choice***

The second category that I use to describe a participant's relationship to language I call the "Francophone of Choice." I settled on this name after noticing a strong thread in certain interviews about a "decision" or "choice" to commit to French that happened at a "moment" or a "period" in their lives. I could have simply called these speakers 'L2 speakers' of French, but much like 'native speaker,' that concept is rather complicated in a Louisiana context. All of these speakers are in some way heritage learners of French, having been exposed to French within the family at a young age. The exact natures of their relationships to French are detailed below.

#### *Laurie*

Laurie is a woman in her 30s from Vermilion Parish, but currently living in Lafayette Parish. She works in education and has helped to lead a number of grassroots initiatives for the French language in Louisiana. I met Laurie roughly a year before the interview and have collaborated with her on numerous activist projects. She is Caucasian, and during the interview talks about both her Cajun identity and her identity as a Francolouisianaise. She was exposed to French often as a young child, surrounded by multiple French-speaking relatives, including a grandfather who was punished at school as a child for not speaking English. Young Laurie had a partial and almost entirely passive knowledge of what they were saying. As she describes it: "I

always understood the larger context [...] and I could throw out little words, but not much.”<sup>21</sup> She gained competence in French thanks to the French classes she took in high school and college, and it is during this period of her life that she made a commitment to working to improve the situation of French in Louisiana. She describes this decision as a “moment,” and when I jokingly suggest that she heard angels singing, she replies: “That was it! It was really that! Like, ‘Eureka! This is what I am doing!’”<sup>22</sup> She is the only non-native speaker who chose to do the interview in French. Throughout the 35-minute interview conducted in her home, she codeswitches constantly, but not in a way that suggests a reliance on English to circumvent limitations in her French knowledge. Her codeswitching often manifests itself in filler words and changes in thought, and she seems to be at ease with the mixing of the two languages.

### *Frank*

Frank is a Caucasian man in his 60s from Lafayette Parish. He identifies as Cajun and makes numerous references to his Acadian ancestry. Professionally, his primary employment is in the oil industry, but he is also a trained artisan and has a small business in the cultural sector. I was introduced to him by a French-speaking mutual friend who also works in the oil industry. He grew up with multiple French-speaking older relatives, most of whom were bilingual, but one of whom (his great-grandmother who lived to a very old age and died when he was in his early thirties) was monolingual in French. He explains that “out of respect - unlike it is today – everyone spoke French in the room.” He expands on the contrast with modern linguistic practices by lamenting the fact that in contemporary Louisiana the presence of one monolingual English speaker can make an otherwise bilingual group reflexively shift away from French.

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<sup>21</sup> Originally: “*J’ai toujours compris le gros contexte [...] et je pouvais échapper des petits mots, mais pas grand’chose.*”

<sup>22</sup> Originally: “*C’était ça! C’était vraiment ça!* Like ‘Eureka! This is what I’m doing!’”

Despite the ubiquity of French in his childhood home, his abilities remained passive until he was an adult: “I understood French well, but I never spoke French when I was young. But I used the ‘tapes’ or the sounds, all the language I heard when I was small.”<sup>23</sup> He used these internal “tapes” to shift from passively understanding to speaking when he was in his late 20s, simply “to try it.”<sup>24</sup> Frank explains the reaction of his grandfather the first time that he spoke French around the older man: “He was like, ‘What are you doing? You speak French?! How did you learn French?’ and I said, ‘It was always in my head!’”<sup>25</sup> Now roughly thirty years later, he feels that his skills are not what he would like them to be, but that he can “get by” in French. The interview is done mostly in English, but he codeswitches a few times, sometimes going on for several sentences in French. Frank’s interview was conducted in his home and lasts 22 minutes.

### *Vera*

Vera is an African-American woman in her 50s who identifies strongly as Creole. She was born and lives in St. Landry Parish where she runs multiple non-profit organizations, one of which is culturally based. I was introduced to Vera by her priest,<sup>26</sup> and the interview was recorded in her office. She grew up in a home where Louisiana Creole (she calls it alternately “Creole” and “French Creole”) was spoken on a daily basis. Her mother learned English from the television as well as from Vera and her siblings. While her parents consistently spoke Louisiana Creole to each other, they spoke English (in the mother’s case, presumably to the best of her abilities) with the children. She explains: “Going to school, we were only allowed to speak English so they didn’t have any reason to teach us.” Nonetheless, Vera follows this statement with: “...but I had to figure out what they were saying!” She describes herself as an

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<sup>23</sup> Originally: “*J’ai bien compris le français mais j’ai jamais parlé le français quand j’étais jeune. Et, mais j’ai « usé » les « tapes » or the sounds, all the language I heard when I was small.*”

<sup>24</sup> Originally: “*pour essayer*”

<sup>25</sup> Originally: “*et il était ‘Quoi tu fais? Tu parles français?! Comment tu as appris le français?’ Et j’ai dit ‘C’était toujours dans ma tête!’*”

<sup>26</sup> This is the same priest that introduced me to Sarah.



exceptionally curious child who listened intently to her parents' and visitors' conversations and often asked questions when she did not understand. This curiosity faded, however, and in her early adult life she thought of her Creole culture as “old stuff that was for my mother and father,” but after some dramatic life events in her late 20s, she became very interested in “reclaiming [her] roots” and began to involve herself in numerous cultural and community organizations, an involvement she continues to this day. During the 42-minute interview, she does not switch into French, but she does speak of using French while working in previous jobs. When directly asked about her current French abilities, she says:

I don't speak French well. I understand it very well. I understand Creole, I understand Parisian French well and when I go to Haiti or one of the islands I can defend myself [...] I come back and I'm speaking much better then [*laughter*], because I'm talking maybe every day, you know?

Categorizing a speaker by these kinds of anecdotes is difficult, but I have chosen to place Vera on the ‘French-speaking’ side of the linguistic continuum displayed in this corpus. This decision was largely influenced by the fact that she describes having used French on a somewhat regular basis to talk to local clients in her previous profession.

### *Albert*

Albert is a Caucasian man in his 60s from Lafayette Parish. He works as a public servant and also has a secondary career in the arts sector. I was aware of his involvement in some grassroots linguistic activism projects and acquired his contact information from a mutual friend. He never identifies as Cajun, Creole, or any other specific ethnicity during the interview, though he makes mention of “Cajun French,” comparing and contrasting it with France French. He grew up with bilingual francophone grandparents, who occasionally spoke French around him but never to him.

He depicts the community of his childhood in a similar way: French was regularly spoken around him and his siblings, both in the rural part of Lafayette Parish where they lived and on the streets of downtown Lafayette itself when they visited, but rarely was it spoken to them other than to teach them a few token words. As he describes it:

To me, basically, it was like background noise. I mean, what they were saying, I couldn't pick up any of it - when there was a third party not speaking directly to me and when they were speaking directly to me just a few words - until about eighth grade when I took French in school.

At this point, French became more than “background noise” and he became very motivated to learn, initiating conversations with his grandmother in French and pursuing academic goals that involved French classes. He now speaks it fluently, as do some of his siblings who also chose to learn French as adolescents and young adults. For over twenty years, he has been involved (to varying degrees) in grassroots activism to promote the French language in Louisiana. For the interview, however, he chose English after some hesitation. He apologized, saying that he had a busy day ahead and it would be easier to do in English. The interview lasts 18 minutes and was conducted in his office.

### *Paul*

Paul is a man in his 50s from Lafourche Parish, currently living in Lafayette Parish. He is Caucasian, and when describing his ethnic background, says that his father’s family came directly from France (a fact he discovered through genealogical research) and his mother’s family was of Acadian origin. He is a business owner in the hospitality industry and uses his business to promote cultural initiatives. It is through these cultural initiatives that I was made aware of him, and I met him for an interview at his workplace.

Paul describes his relationship with the French language in very clear terms, saying it has “defined [his] last twenty years of existence.” In his late twenties, his four grandparents – all

native French speakers – died within a few years of each other, and their deaths pushed him to examine the importance of his heritage. Though he was single and had no immediate plans to start a family, he realized at that time that it was important to him to pass the French language on to his future children. Not speaking any French himself, he decided to quit his job and spend some time in France in an immersive environment. He took classes at an Alliance Française and lived with a host family. Bolstered by his progress, he found himself extending his stay, which was originally intended last just one month but stretched to be three months long. Upon his return, he began doing consulting work for international projects and in the coming years he made several extended trips back to France and francophone Europe, sometimes to visit friends, sometimes for work.

Eventually Paul’s travels for work led him to visit francophone Canada, where he met his wife, a native French speaker. The two now have young children whom they are raising in French. The children are all bilingual, however, and are enrolled in French immersion, as there are no other options for French language education in Louisiana.

Originally, when given the option of French or English for the interview, Paul chose French. When we reviewed the questions, however, he changed his mind and said he would prefer to do it in English. He did not seem intimidated by the questions or the level of French required to answer them; quite the contrary, it seemed that he was so eager to discuss the topics at hand that he did not want to be hindered or slowed down by having to formulate his thoughts in a language that was not his first. While we spoke some French prior to beginning the recording, he does not codeswitch during the 34-minute interview, recorded at his business.

### ***2.7.3 Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais***

Of the three major categories, this was the hardest category to name. These participants had the least fluency in French but still showed a great affinity toward the language; consequently, my original instinct was to call them Francophiles, or Louisiana Francophiles to underline the fact that it is their Louisiana Francophone culture that appeals to them, more so than a gallophile, France-centric concept of ‘francophilie.’ The suffix of *-phile* gave me pause, however. As it is generally used, *-phile* has a connotation of separation: if you are Francophile, you are not French. These participants, though monolingual (or effectively monolingual), are not outsiders in the French-speaking community; they are often fully accepted within it.

My second attempt at a label was Franco-Anglophone. These participants were the most Anglophone of the three categories, but still showed other signs of what would generally be considered a francophone identity. This label proved more than a little unwieldy. The presence of both ‘franco’ and ‘anglo’ seemed to suggest bilingualism, when in fact these were the least bilingual participants. Furthermore, it seemed fraught with complications from conceptualizations of “Anglophone” and “Francophone” from other parts of the world, particularly Canada where a strong policy of bilingualism has led to a clearer, more binary division between the two identities.

In the end, I settled on Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais. Francolouisianais, while still only rarely used in Louisiana, could accurately apply to all three categories of this section; as it is used in English, word “French” in the label “French Louisiana” denotes not only linguistic realities but also historical and cultural influences. While these participants’ language practices are the result of widespread language shift, many of them maintain that the primacy of English in Louisiana has not erased the formative effects of the French language on Louisiana’s

culture. Additionally, all of these participants had exposure to the French language during their childhood. Their level of exposure varied: some of them had French-speaking parents; for others it was much older, more distant relatives. Still, it was in many cases comparable to the early experiences of the Francophones of Choice, the difference being that the FOCs showed signs of making a conscious decision to apply themselves to learning more French and achieving fluency, while the LAFs either never made such a decision or else never succeeded in achieving a broad level of French that could be described as ‘fluent.’ The complex relationships that LAFs have with the French language are described below.

### *Norris*

Norris is an African-American man in his 50s from Lafayette Parish. He strongly identifies as Creole and works for the Catholic Church. It is through the Church that I was put in contact with him. He alternatively uses “French” and “Creole” to label the language he grew up hearing in both his extended family (grandparents; great aunts and uncles; and, to a lesser extent, his parents, aunts, and uncles) and on the streets of his community. He describes the linguistic environment of his childhood in the same way that many of his generation do:

[Speaking French] was more of uh, a way when they didn't want us, the younger kids, to know what they were talking about, but I guess through years of just catching on and learning some things we, we picked up uh, phrases and sentences they were talking about and that way we could comprehend the language a little bit.

This sort of secret language – speaking French to communicate things that one did not want younger people to understand – is not uncommon in interviews with LAFs, though it is a phenomenon sometimes seen in FOCs’ interviews as well (Vera, for example). In fact, it is so ubiquitous in people’s experiences of French in south Louisiana that I feel the need to conceptualize it as a sort of *secret language diglossia*.

This partial exposure led to a level of French that is difficult to define without formal diagnostics. When asked on the form whether he spoke French, he selected ‘Yes,’ but when asked the same question in the interview itself, he says: “I do - not very well! [laughter] I can survive. I understand it pretty well, but I, I, I would probably badger up the language.” This answer is in many ways comparable to Vera’s answer to the question, and in a sense, could even be compared to Eric’s answer of “*Je peux me défendre*” [“I can defend myself”]. Linguistic insecurity in Louisiana is clearly not a rare phenomenon and self-reporting can be misleading in both directions.

I have chosen to place Norris in the LAF category based on both his interactions with me when recording the interview and his linguistic behavior as reported in his responses. Norris never switches into French during the interview and never spoke to me in French either before or after the interview. This distinguishes him quite clearly from a participant like Eric who often codeswitches in the middle of a sentence and sometimes goes for several sentences in French before returning to English. Also, Norris does not give any anecdotal evidence of being in situations where linguistic competency in French would be required. He mentions occasionally speaking French with his brothers, though it is unclear for how long and in what context. As a counterexample, Vera was required to use French to speak with clients in a previous career and has done work-related travel to French-speaking countries in her current profession, noting that she enjoys these opportunities to speak mostly in French. All in all, I feel that Norris is likely the LAF with the highest level of French competency, but I have chosen to distinguish his reports of linguistic insecurity from those of other participants based on the aforementioned factors. The interview was recorded in his office and lasts 30 minutes.

### *Danielle*

Danielle is a Caucasian woman in her 20s from St. Martin Parish who identifies as Cajun. She works in the financial sector as well as helping to manage her family's business in the cultural sector. I contacted her because of the popularity of this family business. Like Norris, she indicated that she "spoke French" on the form, but is more specific about her level in the interview itself: "I speak a little bit of French, not a lot, you know." When I ask her to elaborate on what she means by this, she explains that a year-long French class at secondary school (school-mandated, not her choice) helped her to make sense of the French that was so often spoken *around* her, though rarely ever *to* her. When asked if she has memories of people speaking French around her growing up, she says "Growing up [in this family business], that's all you have!" and notes that when she watches family videos of her childhood, the background conversations are mostly in French. Nonetheless, she also experienced this *secret language diglossia* where French was used as a tool to keep children out of the discussion. She gives an overview of her French abilities with the following:

I learned a little bit of the grammar and stuff in school, learned my prayers, and my grandfather taught me how to pray my rosary in French and today, that's the only way I pray my rosary. But just, between school classes and just kind of listening to the music and kind of focusing on the lyrics and what I know about French grammar and focusing on what I'm hearing, that's kind of about what I know as far as French speaking.

She never switches into French during the 21-minute interview, which was recorded at her family's business.

### *Geraldine*

Geraldine is an African-American woman in her 30s from Lafayette Parish. She identifies as Creole and works in the culinary industry with an emphasis on traditional southwestern Louisiana cuisine. I was introduced to her through her workplace, which is well

known both locally and to tourists. Her father spoke only Creole until he was a teenager, and never learned to read or write in English. She doesn't specify how much her mother spoke Creole but says that her parents spoke it together. Nevertheless, she was raised in English. She says that she would like to learn French and that she tries to regularly practice with her father so that one day she might be able to "pass it on to [her] kids." When asked whether she speaks French, however, she states quite plainly that she does not, and she never uses French before, during, or after the interview. Geraldine's interview was recorded in her office and her responses are slightly more formal and less conversational than those of the other participants. The interview lasts only 13 minutes, making it the shortest interview in the corpus.

### *Jacob*

Jacob is a Caucasian man in his 40s. He is originally from and currently lives in Iberia Parish, but works in the arts sector in Lafayette Parish. I was introduced to him through a mutual friend in the arts sector to whom I had described the project, and we recorded the interview in his office. He never directly identifies as Cajun, but he refers to the French his father spoke as "Cajun French." All of his grandparents spoke French; although he describes his father's French as "fluent," he suggests that his mother learned enough to get by but did not speak it fluently. In discussing his own generation, however, he explains:

There was a lot of French spoken. I never, it was never really encouraged for us to speak. It wasn't *discouraged*, but it was not like, um, we weren't in a, in situations where we were, we had to speak or think in French.

He took French in college, but had a great deal of trouble learning the language in an academic environment. During the interview, he says that he "can read it fairly well," and he wrote in "some French" in the passive skills sections of the participant information form. The interview



was recorded in his office. After the 28-minute interview was over, he asked me for recommendations of alternatives to traditional academic methods of learning French.

*Jenny*

Jenny is a woman in her 20s from Lafayette Parish. She manages a community-centered non-profit organization, and it is her position in this non-profit that brought her to my attention. The organization is not strictly a cultural one, but they often collaborate on cultural projects with other organizations that are more geared towards Louisiana francophonie. Jenny is Caucasian and identifies as “Cajun French” although she makes a point of stressing the variety of ethnic influences involved in such an identity. She does not speak French, having only had roughly six months of sporadic lessons at school during the fourth grade. Her grandmother was a bilingual Francophone, but never spoke French to or around Jenny and only rarely spoke it around Jenny’s father. Jenny also mentions the use of a French to exclude younger people from the conversation, but it is her father who had this experience, not Jenny herself: “Whenever my dad was growing up, he said the only time he really heard French was whenever um, his parents would speak to each other so that the kids didn't know what they were saying.” The result of this practice is that Jenny’s father has only a very limited knowledge of French:

And so my dad um, the only real phrases that he knows in French - I mean, he knows, he could probably say more phrases than I've heard him say in French - are things like “Come here!” or “Stop that!” or things like that.

When asked how she feels about not speaking French, she says that she feels “guilty” and that someone who has as much Cajun heritage as she has “should” speak French. She describes her resolve to learn French with the following: “I want to make sure that, I start, like, taking opportunities to learn French because I sort of feel like it's a responsibility.” The interview, recorded in her home, lasts 25 minutes.

### *Christian*

Christian is a Caucasian man in his 40s who grew up splitting his time between Lafayette and St. Landry Parishes and who has now permanently settled in St. Landry Parish. He is a small business owner who is involved in grassroots activism and it is through both his business and the projects he has undertaken to support French in Louisiana that he came to my attention as a possible participant. While he identifies as a Cajun, he often groups together “Cajun and Creole culture” in his responses. French was the first language of both his parents and his grandparents; of his grandparents, he reports: “[French] was pretty much their only language.” He also notes that his grandmother could read and write in French. The members of his extended family saw each other often, and when asked about the people around him who spoke French growing up he cites his aunts and uncles as well as great aunts and great uncles. However, Christian does not consider himself in any way fluent in the language. He says “I speak a little French, and all, everyone of my generation speaks phrases, you know.” Having lived abroad for several years, he visited France as a tourist a number of times and reports that his abilities were enough to “get something to eat or find out where the bathroom is or something like that.”

He seems to see this lack of competency as partially due to a lack of effort in the past: “I didn't work on it, I mean, I took French in college, and so I think I can do okay, but I'm not fluent.” Another factor at play is the stigma attached to the French language during his youth. He did not feel this stigma was eliminated before the 1980s, and by that time he was already nearing the end of his teenage years. In contrast, he sees French as valorized in present-day Louisiana and laughs with good-natured jealousy when he describes the fluency of his nieces who are young children in the public French immersion programs. Today, he works with a

colleague (a younger man who would be considered a Francophone of Choice) and with his own parents to improve his abilities, but insists that “it’s always been, like I said, phrases.”

Despite this lack of mastery, Christian displays a strong connection to the language itself. He wrote into the bylaws of his company that their products should have French names and says of their labeling practices: “We put as much French on the box as we can.” He uses his business as a platform to promote non-profits that support language, heritage, and the environment in Louisiana, and he has been an active participant in local projects that seek to make French more accessible to language learners. The interview was recorded in his workplace and lasts 29 minutes.

#### ***2.7.4 Outliers***

After delineating the three categories of participant mentioned above, I found that two participants could not be classified as any of the three. Both of these participants were very specifically chosen to be a part of the corpus because I felt that someone in that position would have a unique and important perspective on French Louisiana, yet these positions are the very reason why they cannot be considered Native Francophones, Francophones of Choice, or Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais. They do not themselves constitute a category, having had vastly different experiences of French-speaking Louisiana. I have chosen nonetheless to label both of them as Outliers, in the sense that each of them could be treated as his own category; in fact, their perspectives are so particular that it would be worthwhile to construct corpora with large groups of people who shared these two very specific experiences of French-speaking south Louisiana.

## *Nate*

Nate is a Caucasian man in his 20s from Lafayette Parish. He works in the arts and often uses French in his career. I was already aware of him due to his success in this career, and mutual friends introduced me to him. Nate's relationship to the French language cannot be categorized as NF, FOC, or LAF because he is a graduate of Louisiana's growing French immersion programs. Enrolled in French immersion from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he speaks French fluently, but could not be said to have "chosen" to learn French. Still, he could not be said to share the experience of native speakers either, since he spoke no French before the age of 5 and the majority of French input in his childhood came in a school environment, not in the home. Although he states quite plainly that he did not choose French, he also is clear that he is pleased that he learned it: "I'm very glad that I do [speak French] you know. It wasn't really my choice to learn it, because I was very young when I first started, but I definitely feel it's a super big asset in my life."

French is not exclusively linked to school for Nate, however. His maternal grandparents speak French, and his grandmother's parents (who died when he was beginning school) did not speak English well, by his own report. He never identifies with a specific ethnic group; he says that he grew up surrounded by "local French culture." At one point of the interview he specifically refers to the French spoken in Louisiana as "Cajun French" and "Creole," but he simply uses the word "French" to refer to both his own variety and that of his grandparents.

When I gave Nate the option of doing the interview in French or in English, he hesitated. After asking me several times if I as the interviewer had a preference, he settled on English, saying that he felt a little more comfortable expressing himself in English. He never switches into French during the interview, which lasts 23 minutes and was recorded in his office.

## *Bill*

Bill is a Caucasian man in his 60s from Cameron Parish who is retired from a career in the medical field. I have classified him as an Outlier because he is ethnically Anglo-American. His daughter (who learned French as an adult and whom I know because of her involvement in linguistic activism) described him to me as a “first generation Cajun.” He is a lifelong resident of southwest Louisiana and when asked about his roots in the area, he replies: “This is me. This is where I ought to be. I don't want to be anywhere else. If someone would pay me and do all expenses to go somewhere else, I don't want to go.” He is an avid alligator hunter, a hobby he now shares with his wife who does consider herself ethnically Cajun. He speaks French, having taken two years of French in high school and three semesters in college. He served in the military during the Vietnam War and his language aptitude test results convinced his superiors to place him in a 30-day language school for Vietnamese. While in Vietnam, however, he found himself relying on French often, either socially when he did not feel his Vietnamese was sufficient, or in an official capacity as an intermediary between English-speaking Americans and some of the French-speaking Vietnamese.

Bill reports that he “really enjoyed” learning French and still enjoys trying to speak French today, despite feeling somewhat out of practice. When I ask him why he chose to study French he replies: “Because I lived here and I didn't know! [*laughter*] I didn't know! ‘Bonjour,’ and [*laughter*] that's about it. A few words!” Growing up in a family of country veterinarians, he often heard French when accompanying his grandfather, father, and uncle on veterinary visits to local ranchers, the majority of whom were francophone. He says that his father “knew enough to get along.” His father's French speaking was not done out of necessity, however; the ranchers were generally bilingual and capable of speaking with him in English. Bill says that his father

chose to learn French “because he enjoyed speaking with those people,” and that “there was nothing formal about what he learned. He just did it on his own.”

I chose to include a Louisianian who does not identify ethnically as one of the traditionally francophone groups in Louisiana after seeing the unique perspective this sort of “outsider” can hold in Dubois and Melançon (1997). Bill is both very tied to French-speaking south Louisiana and slightly detached from an identity standpoint, which provides an interesting counterpoint when analyzing responses that are often associated with a very primordial sense of ethnic identity. The interview, recorded in his home, lasts 43 minutes.

## **2.8 Data Analysis**

I did not begin this research with a clear idea of how I would analyze the data. The *FALMDC* project was a large, multi-year project, and I simply wanted to ensure Louisiana’s inclusion in the building of corpora throughout North America. The questions themselves were based on my own knowledge of the community and curiosity as a doctoral student studying French-speaking Louisiana. It was only after I had completed all the interviews that I began to see the potential for meaningful analysis. This “backwards” approach is not entirely uncommon in naturalistic social science research. Naomi Quinn is a researcher in discourse analysis and cultural anthropology, and her 2005 book *Finding Culture in Talk* was an invaluable resource to me in developing a methodology for data analysis. As Quinn explains, naturalistic approaches are forced to rely on “different standards of convincingness” (p. 36) from those involved in traditional experimental scientific methods. In experimental science, a clear description of how one will analyze the incoming results is paramount, but in more naturalistic research “one is unlikely to be able to spell out [...] how one is going to analyze the discourse one has not yet

collected and the characteristics of which one does not yet know, for research objectives of one's own" (Quinn 2005, p. 36). This was certainly the case in my own research.

After recording and transcribing all of the interviews, I originally decided to look only at answers to individual questions. This decision meant that I would not be able to examine the answers to all of the questions in the corpus, but it did help to limit the amount of data being analyzed at one time. Some questions provided responses that were more easily categorized than others, and in the end, I chose two questions based on the straightforward ways in which the questions could be answered. This was in an attempt to reflect what Quinn refers to as some of the standards of convincingness that are more appropriate to naturalistic approaches: "comprehensiveness, parsimony, and generalizability of the explanatory account" (2005, p. 36).

The first question from which I sought to analyze data, a question that I call "the roots question," is the central question in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.<sup>27</sup> The "roots question" deals with the participant's perception of personal ties to his or her "French roots" in Louisiana, but although the aspect of identity analyzed is personal, the resources and connections people use to access it and make sense of it can be personal, interpersonal, or social. Looking solely at responses to this question, I made a list of all the justifications given for identifying with French-speaking south Louisiana. I then grouped similar answers into categories like "Grandparents' language practices," "Family name/Genealogical history," and "Participation in a cultural practice." These categories were still too diverse and could not be easily compared, so I further divided them along personal, interpersonal, and social lines. Religion, for example, would constitute a social resource for establishing a personal connection to one's francophone roots, while one's parents' language practices would be categorized as interpersonal.

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<sup>27</sup> It may seem out of order to discuss the methods for analysis in Chapter 4, before discussing those used in Chapter 3, but in reality the question addressed in Chapter 4 is the first question for which I attempted to categorize responses, and it influenced my approach to the question in Chapter 3.

These categories help to lend structure to participants' responses, but they cannot be said to accurately reflect distinct separations in participants' conceptions of their identity. Quite the contrary, on many occasions a participant's use of personal resources for explaining identity blended rather fluidly into the interpersonal or social ones. Therefore, I established a structure for Chapter 4 in which I first explain the type of responses the question elicited and present the distribution of these responses. I look at the categories of response (Personal, Interpersonal, and Social) as well as the categories by which I classified participants (e.g., Gender, Generation, self-identified Ethnicity). After examining any patterns between and across response categories and participant categories, I discuss of the ways in which participants' responses render these categories of response more complex.

I employed a similar approach in analyzing the responses to the question of the image of francophone Louisiana, the central question in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. I first made a list of all responses to this question and grouped together responses that discuss the same images. For example "backwards swamp dwellers" and "ignorant country people with no shoes" seem to suggest the same image. Then I categorized each of these responses as either negative or positive. The "backwards" image is clearly a negative one, while depictions of "joie de vivre" are more positive. In Chapter 3, I illustrate all the possible responses before examining the distribution of negative and positive images in the responses. Some participants cite only negative images, some cite strictly positive ones, and some cite a mixture of the two. I look for patterns across participant categories to see if certain types of participant seem more negative or positive about Louisiana's image. As was the case with the "roots" responses, however, the most interesting aspects of the data were often found in the ways in which responses defied



categorization. Consequently, Chapter 3 also includes a discussion section where these contradictions and clarifications can be documented.

The issue of collective identity - that is, the issue discussed in Chapter 5 - required an entirely different approach. There is no question in the interview that directly asks what it means to be Cajun, Creole, or Houma, but representations of collective identity are ubiquitous in the corpus. In preparing this chapter, Quinn's (2005) example became particularly enlightening. Quinn created her own approach to analyzing interviews by using an open-ended interview format with a single topic; she asked married Americans to talk about "marriage." She noticed that participants tended to use similar kinds of metaphors to describe the positive, negative, difficult, meaningful, and functional aspects of marriage, metaphors like the first year being "a trial" or a couple "gelling." Quinn categorizes all uses of these metaphors (including some "metaphors" that might more commonly be seen not as metaphors but as heightened language or even, simply, objectification) into a distinct set of thematic classifications, then looks at participants' use of these metaphorical themes to support certain ways of reasoning about marriage. She calls this interaction of themes and reasoning a cultural "schema" of marriage in the United States.

Her concept of a schema is based in earlier work by Fillmore (1975) on the "prototype worlds" that underlie people's understanding of meanings in language; Quinn defines a schema as "a generic version of (some part of) the world built up from experience and stored in memory" (2005, p. 38). Much like Bourdieu's habitus, schemas are structuring and durable while at the same time being capable of some degree of adaptation. They may change with time, but schemas that are

built on repeated experiences of a similar sort become relatively stable, influencing our interpretation of subsequent experiences more than they are altered by them. To the

degree to which people share the same experiences, they end up sharing the same schemas - having, we would say, the same culture (or subculture). (Quinn 2005, p. 38).

In Quinn's description of cultural schemas I saw the potential for a method of drawing out shared meanings; in my case, it was not the meaning of marriage that was of interest, but the meaning of French in Louisiana.

I first set out, as Quinn did, to look for metaphors in the participants' interviews. I could not find consistent uses of metaphor in the same way that Quinn did, but what I noticed in the metaphors and heightened language I did see was a repeated concept: distinctiveness.

Repeatedly, across interviews, I remarked that participants declared that Louisiana was not like other places and that its French-speaking (or traditionally French-speaking) populations were not like other people. This concept was never something I mentioned directly in the questions that guided these conversational interviews, so its repetition seemed particularly salient. I abandoned the concept of metaphors and instead chose to focus on four keywords that indicated distinctiveness (*different, unique, special, and exotic*). The fact that I use an approach inspired by Quinn (2005) but easily differentiated from her own is not unsurprising. She states in her work that she does not advise that researchers "reify these analytic strategies as methods" (p. 36) but instead sees each data set as influencing the choice of approach.

In Chapter 5, I investigate participants' use of these four keywords to argue for the existence of a shared cultural schema. In the interest of balancing this idea of a single collectivity with the knowledge of the persistent intersubjective reality of clear-cut ethnic boundaries, I also use this chapter to explore a single participant's use of the first person plural that displays varying levels of inclusiveness. The goal is to determine who is included when Louisianians of strong French-speaking roots speak about an "us" and to illustrate how that "us" is perceived as distinct from the surrounding Anglo-American culture.

## CHAPTER 3 – IMAGES OF FRANCOPHONE SOUTH LOUISIANA

### 3.1 The image question

Processes of identification are not only internally based; they are also a result of the dialectic relationship between internal and external definitions of a group or category. Externally-created depictions of the French-speaking populations of Louisiana have spread across the world, and while they may be intended to introduce or ‘explain’ these communities to unaware outsiders, the populations themselves cannot avoid their influence. Whether confirming, internalizing, or rejecting these images of francophone Louisiana, individuals inevitably react to the discussion of ‘who they are.’

These depictions are addressed in the question, “What is the image of French Louisiana that is presented to the outside world?” and its follow-up questions, “Do you think this is an accurate depiction of the Louisiana you live in? What do you agree/disagree with?” Some participants choose to focus on the images found in Hollywood and reality television, others emphasize the images promoted by the Louisiana tourism industry, and some speak of personal encounters with outsiders and their impressions. Their answers could be categorized as positive and negative representations, though the participants often see both positive and negative aspects in the same representation.

### 3.2 Negative Images

In fourteen of the twenty interviews, participants mention a negative image of south Louisiana. One of the most common negative images is the mediated Hollywood image. In some instances, the participants go into detail about the exact nature of this image, though in others, the depiction is considered so ubiquitous and universally understood that the participant only mentions an example of it. Paul’s initial response is: “Well, uh, I mean, you know,

everybody knows *The Waterboy* [...] Hollywood has its image.” Norris qualifies the Hollywood image as “*Swamp People* and all that.” Some participants reference only one or the other, and many reference both, but these two specific depictions are mentioned in eight of the fourteen responses that feature a negative image of Louisiana.

*Swamp People* is a successful reality television series broadcast on the History Channel and centered on alligator hunting season in Louisiana. It was the specific image mentioned most often – seven times in total – in response to this question. *The Waterboy* is an older example of the entertainment industry’s fascination with Louisiana. The 1998 comedy starring Adam Sandler as a socially inept, stuttering Cajun with anger issues was a box office success in the United States. The film was specifically referenced in three participants’ responses to this question, and the longevity of its association with Louisiana is evident in the fact that Geraldine did not even use the name of the film; she refers to “the Bouchers back in the day,” Boucher being the last name of Adam Sandler’s character in the film.

In contrast to these very specific examples of Hollywood images, looser ideas of a “backward” rural culture are equally commonplace. In seven of the fourteen interviews that discuss negative portrayals of Louisiana, participants use either the word “backward” or descriptions of Louisianians’ lack of clothes or shoes; one of these seven participants, Norris, uses both of these images. Bill sees the overwhelming majority of images as negative and describes the media’s portrayal of south Louisianians as “back country people who are naive about the modern world and things of that nature.” Danielle admits that she thinks it’s only a minority of people who buy into this sort of image, but mentions “those occasional people that think we paddle around in pirogues everywhere and we don’t wear shoes.” As Eric puts it: “We’re still viewed by a lot of people as a third world country.” Thomas goes so far as to say

that there are “many people who believe we’re like alligators”;<sup>28</sup> here the depiction of the people of south Louisiana is not simply one of rural hunters, but an idea that they share something with the animals themselves.

A second set of negative images focuses on the associations of Louisiana with debauchery. This image is mentioned in three interviews. Claire laments the popularity of the depiction of the Mardi Gras runner who is “so drunk he can’t walk anymore.”<sup>29</sup> Eric also discusses the prevalence of outsiders presenting Mardi Gras as “drunks falling off horses.” While Geraldine doesn’t mention Mardi Gras specifically, she does associate images of south Louisiana with images of overindulgence: she gives the example of a *fais do-do*, where “we’re drinking a lot, we’re definitely over-eating um, you know.”

In one instance, a participant seems to blur the lines between negative images of Louisiana, and negative racial stereotypes. Sarah, an older black Creole woman, begins by speaking in terms of general misconceptions about Louisiana, while not citing any specific images. She then shifts, saying, “Things have changed uh, black people have changed, our contribution to this whole uh, tapestry of the world, of Louisiana.” She goes on to mention a number of stereotypes of the African-American population, and African-American women in particular (the character of “Aunt Jemima,” for example).

### **3.3 Positive Images**

In twelve of the twenty interviews, participants answer the question using positive images of Louisiana. Six of these twelve responses involving positive depictions cite the state tourism industry’s efforts to promote Louisiana as an ideal destination for tourists seeking an exotic, vibrant culture. When asked “What is the image of French Louisiana presented to the world?”

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<sup>28</sup> Originally: “*Il y a un tas de monde qui croit nous-autres comme euh, les alligators.*”

<sup>29</sup> Originally: “*Il est soûl qu’il peut plus marcher.*”

Rose's immediate response is: "Tourism culture." She describes "tourism culture" as "what people look for nowadays. They want to go on a vacation," before presenting a sort of binary situation in the tourism industry, where "people from Louisiana figure that they have to go out of town, and other people figure they have to come to Louisiana." When describing what tourists who come to Louisiana are looking for, she first mentions the local cuisine, and then says "and some of them look for French, you know, French culture, French-speaking people."

Amelia also specifically mentions the French language in relation to the tourism industry's positive depictions of south Louisiana. While she doesn't refer to the Department of Tourism, she does present the idea of Louisiana being "special" as an idea fostered by the state itself. She affirms: "We are proud to tell outsiders that we speak French"<sup>30</sup> and says Louisianians should continue to support this portrayal of the area, saying: "All the other states don't have that. [...] We have something we can say that no one else can say."<sup>31</sup>

Laurie talks directly about the state's Department of Tourism in her response. In her opinion, the employees of the department have "done a good marketing job."<sup>32</sup> The result of this marketing is that Louisiana is seen as something exotic both within the United States and in Europe and Canada. When she herself travels domestically or abroad, she often encounters a specific reaction when she reveals she is from Louisiana: "Oh that's so cool!" When describing the view of Louisiana displayed by other Americans, she uses the phrase "a mythical country";<sup>33</sup> when discussing the view of Europeans and Canadians, she codeswitches mid-phrase to English to express a similar idea of a "fairy tale land."

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<sup>30</sup> Originally: "*On est fier de dire à le monde en dehors qu'on parle français.*"

<sup>31</sup> Originally: "*Tous les autres, euh [états] a pas ça. [...] On a ça qu'on peut dire que personne d'autre peut dire.*"

<sup>32</sup> Originally: "*a fait un bon job de marketing*"

<sup>33</sup> Originally: "*un pays mythique*"

This positive presentation of Louisiana is done not only by state employees of the Department of Tourism, but also by people working in the tourism industry itself. Danielle works in this field and says of herself and her colleagues in the industry: “We try our best to share the things that we enjoy with people from outside of Louisiana.” While she does not go into detail about what these “things” are in her answer to this question, she does mention culture, language, and “show[ing] them a good time.”

A second positive image associated with south Louisiana is often summarized by the French phrase “*joie de vivre*.” This specific expression is mentioned in four of the interviews, though in only two of these interviews is it in direct response to the question of Louisiana’s image. Frank uses the term without going into great detail about its meaning, saying simply, “They see it [south Louisiana] as *joie de vivre*, and people are, you know, having fun all the time.” Similarly, in Jacob’s interview, he relies on the term *joie de vivre* without directly defining it, though he does reference a Hollywood film, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, in order to help give an idea of his concept of *joie de vivre*.

Jacob sees *Beasts of the Southern Wild* as a depiction of *joie de vivre*, of people who “had a hard life” but “were happy.” Released in 2012, it tells the story of a young girl who lives in a fictional bayou community called “The Bathtub.” The magical realism employed in the film influences the choice to never name any real geographical locations, but it was filmed in rural southeast Louisiana and the vast majority of the cast and crew were local. A young Cajun band features prominently on the soundtrack, and certain aspects of the storyline mimic local issues of land loss to coastal erosion. The film was very successful at the Sundance Film Festival, where it was bought by the distributor Fox Searchlight. *Beasts* was mentioned in three interviews, though it is only in Jacob’s question that it is directly linked to the idea of *joie de vivre*.

In the two interviews where participants reference *joie de vivre* in response to another question, both participants are responding to the idea of language and culture as separate in Louisiana. Thomas says it is not enough to simply learn the French language to have a Cajun “heart” and “truth,” that one needs respect for family and religion, a good conscience, and *joie de vivre*. Paul expresses the centrality of *joie de vivre* by asserting that south Louisiana would not be fully homogenized into the Anglo-American mainstream even if the French language were to disappear: “I think our, our lifestyle, our culture, our cuisine, our *joie de vivre* is strong enough to where we could distinguish ourself from any, from other communities in the country.”

Paul also hints at *joie de vivre* in the question regarding Louisiana’s image when he offers the image presented by local musicians as an example of a positive representation. After stating that Louisiana musicians who play traditional music throughout the world are an important force in promoting Louisiana culture, he describes the effect of their work as the following: “They’re out there and they’re giving it their all. They’re you know, entertaining people and people go, ‘Wow, man! What a great, you know, great spirit these folks have; I’d like to go down there and check that out.’” Similarly to the way participants treat the term *joie de vivre*, the “spirit” mentioned is not described in great detail.

Three other participants respond similarly to Paul, citing musicians as an important factor in Louisiana’s image. Frank’s description of the role of musicians is similar to Paul’s but more detailed and direct. He answers:

I think the ambassadors for this state, the real, the people that are really out there doing the work, the people that should be supported more really, um, and I never thought I'd say this quite literally, are the musicians because they're out there twenty-four seven, traveling all over the world, displaying their talents, singing, singing, you know, singing the songs that been sung for hundreds of years and bringing joy to people.



He uses the term *joie de vivre* later in his answer but the use of the word “joy” here, and its association with musicians, seems to evoke a similar concept. He continues in his answer, tying in local forms of dance and local cuisine. He explains that he took part in folk festivals across the country, where a group of Louisianans would accompany the musicians and would cook and teach festivalgoers how to dance.

Nate mentions a similar experience of taking part in large festivals nationally and internationally. He distinguishes between his experience in the US, where the focus is largely on the food, and abroad in the francophone world where people are often more interested in the language. While both Americans and foreign Francophones are listening to the music at these festivals, he recognizes that there is a subgroup of people who are “really into” traditional Louisiana music. He sees Louisiana’s musical image as an essential part of maintaining a grounded, more substantial image of Louisiana: “I think the music is one thing that really like, maybe the people go a little bit deeper than thinking that it's like a type of chicken seasoning, you know?”

Nate calls local music “the one thing” and, similarly, Jenny states plainly that in her opinion the image of Louisiana presented by the spread of its music is the “only” depiction of Louisiana available to outsiders. As she describes it:

Outside of the music, I don't think it's really, really is represented. Like I don't think people really know that there's like, a population of people in South Louisiana who speak French. And, um, so unless you like, find out, and like, are dedicated enough to travel here, um, I think the only reason, the only way you know is through the music.

During her response to this question, I repeat the idea that there may be accurate and inaccurate images of Louisiana circulating, but Jenny stands by her opinion that the music is the “only” way she sees Louisiana being represented.

### 3.4 Distribution

**Table 3.1:** Positive/negative images in response to the image question

Pseudonym	Negative	Positive
Albert	✓	
Amelia		✓
Bill	✓	
Claire	✓	
Christian	✓	✓
Danielle	✓	✓
Eric	✓	
Frank		✓
Geraldine	✓	
Herman		✓
Jacob	✓	✓
Jenny		✓
Laurie	✓	✓
Nate	✓	✓
Norris	✓	
Paul	✓	✓
Rose		✓
Sarah	✓	
Thomas	✓	
Vera	✓	✓

Overall, the participants are slightly more likely to focus on negative images in response to the question “What is the image of French Louisiana that is presented to the world?” Of the twenty participants, eight answer the question of Louisiana’s image with a negative image, five with a positive image, and seven with a mixture of negative and positive images. When examining the distribution of positive and negative answers among different subgroups, however, we find that young people tend to see fewer strongly negative images of the region. As shown in Table 3.2, the youngest generation (“C,” made up of individuals born after 1965) only includes one participant who answers with solely negative views of Louisiana’s image. The most common response in this category is a mixture of positive and negative images, but the rarity of purely negative views is noteworthy. In the other two generational categories, the

**Table 3.2:** Comparison of images mentioned and generational category

Pseudonym	Images	Generation
Albert	Negative	A
Amelia	Positive	A
Bill	Negative	A
Claire	Negative	A
Herman	Positive	A
Rose	Positive	A
Sarah	Negative	A
Christian	Mixed	B
Eric	Negative	B
Frank	Positive	B
Norris	Negative	B
Paul	Mixed	B
Thomas	Negative	B
Vera	Mixed	B
Danielle	Mixed	C
Geraldine	Negative	C
Jacob	Mixed	C
Jenny	Positive	C
Laurie	Mixed	C
Nate	Mixed	C

participants referencing purely negative views make up roughly half of the category.

The youngest generation’s relative positivity is unsurprising, since this group of individuals grew up in a time where the language revitalization movement had already established itself with some success. Christian, a member of the middle generation (“B,” born between 1950 and 1965) makes reference to the shift this movement caused when he discusses his language abilities. He expresses his disappointment that he never learned to speak his parents’ native language, and underlines that “there was a real stigma attached.” Although certain aspects of the movement to valorize the French language and francophone culture in Louisiana began in the late 1960s - the founding of CODOFIL in 1968, for example – Christian doesn’t feel that the stigma was really eliminated until the latter part of the 1970s, adding, “and by that time, we were already in high school.”

Another interesting trend in the generational breakdown of positive-to-negative responses is the polarity of the responses in the oldest generation of participants (“A,” born before 1950). These participants cite either a negative or a positive image, but never both. All seven of the participants who respond with both negative and positive images are members of the two younger generations. While it could be a generational difference at work here, it could also be a question of their relationship to the French language. When examining the responses according to the categories delineated in the methodology section (Native Francophone, Francophone of Choice, etc.) the same trend is found in the Native Francophone group.

**Table 3.3** – Responses of Native Francophones to the image question

Native Francophone	Images
Amelia	Positive
Claire	Negative
Eric	Negative
Herman	Positive
Rose	Positive
Sarah	Negative
Thomas	Negative

The NF category and the oldest generation overlap each other significantly. Nevertheless, within Generation A, Albert (a Francophone of Choice) and Bill (an Outlier) are not Native Francophones, and within the NF category, Eric and Thomas are both members of Generation B. The other generations (A and C) and the other two major linguistic categories (Francophones of Choice and Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais) all include multiple participants who see Louisiana represented with a mixture of positive and negative images.

In terms of gender, men show a slight tendency to focus on negative views, with five male participants citing negative depictions, two citing positive ones, and four citing a mixture. The nine female participants are split evenly with three participants in each category of response. When looking at ethnicity, however, a more striking difference emerges. The two participants

identifying as Houma refer to positive images of Louisiana and of the four participants identifying as Creole, three refer to negative images of Louisiana (with the fourth using both negative and positive images). In the former case, it is possible that age and not ethnicity is the influential factor; both of the Houma participants are in the oldest generation. In the latter case, however, the three Creole participants who answer with negative images span the three age categories.

In all of these examinations of the distribution of positive, negative, and mixed responses, the sample size is insufficient to make any definitive conclusions. A larger, and perhaps more survey-like study would be required to determine any significant trends in the greater population. The strength of this sort of analysis – one based in interview data and using a moderately sized corpus of 20 individuals – is in its ability to examine the qualitative and quantitative results together. It is certainly worthwhile to note that in the younger generation only one participant cites a purely negative depiction of Louisiana, but given the richness of the interview format, it would be unwise not to examine how this participant qualifies and reacts to this negative image. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the way participants accept, adapt, or reject the images of Louisiana can be more telling than the images themselves.

### **3.5 Reactions to the images**

It is human nature to want to see oneself in a positive light. Consequently, I would expect participants to overwhelmingly reject negative images of Louisiana and to accept positive ones. These two reactions did occur to a certain degree, but I was surprised by how infrequently simple ‘black and white’ rejection or acceptance occurred. Far more often, participants accepted certain aspects of the image, reframed the image in a different light, or refused to make a definitive judgment on its accuracy.

In the interviews, the negative Hollywood image of Louisianians as backward, barefoot swamp dwellers is often attributed to business motives of the entertainment industry itself. Albert refers to “movies and reality television” images, images that he sees as negative, but qualifies their negativity by saying, “They always try to play up the stuff that's going to sell or appeal to people.” Similarly, Christian uses the term “play up” in his assessment of the accuracy of reality television depictions of Louisiana: “I bet some of them, they're very nice people. I think things are played up for the camera.” Paul shares a similar point of view, saying that “anything that’s done for TV is going to be embellished or scripted” and that reality television “is not reality.”

The general impression from these particular responses is that any image presented by Hollywood is intended for entertainment purposes and should be expected to be at least somewhat distanced from reality; therefore, it should not be taken too seriously. Vera offers an example of this attitude at the end of her response: “Well we watch them in Louisiana so that we can laugh at them, so you know that’s not a norm, right? *[laughter]*” In fact, Vera laughs several times in answering the question about Louisiana’s image. After mentioning the influence of Hollywood, whose goal she feels is “to make a movie for some people to come and see,” she recounts the story of helping a friend from New York plan her stay in Louisiana. When Vera was discussing travel plans for her friend’s trip in Louisiana, the friend asked if there would be “a problem with the alligators.” Vera responded to her with humor: “And I said, ‘Well I hope not ‘cause I won’t pick you up!’ *[laughter]* Because that’s... *[laughter]* That’s the image that they have, that alligators roam the territory, you know?” Vera is from the prairie section of Acadiana and has never seen a live alligator.

Thomas, on the other hand, does not laugh when discussing negative depictions of Louisiana such as the one shown in *Swamp People*. He says that he used to get “fighting mad” about negative stereotypes of Louisiana but that he’s learned to live with them. Nevertheless, he does not appreciate them. “I don’t mind being the butt of the joke as long as I’m making the joke or another Cajun is making the joke,” he says, before lamenting the fact that the entertainment industry focuses on this specific negative depiction rather than other, more positive ones: “We’ve had generals that have been Cajun, senators, governors.” Thomas is one of several participants to see the Hollywood image as a form of ‘cherry picking,’ of focusing on only the negative.

Claire shares this opinion. Her initial reaction to the question about Louisiana’s image is one of disappointment: “Ah... that breaks my heart. Because it’s not always - It’s not true. It’s not pretty.”<sup>34</sup> She expresses her distaste for the emphasis on the drunken revelry of Mardi Gras courirs, although she does not mind the courirs themselves. She insists that she loves Mardi Gras and also understands its important role in the tourism economy. She takes issue with journalists who focus on the most intoxicated, most ridiculous courir runners. She admits that not all journalists act in this way, but feels that a good number of them “seem to have chosen the ugliest things to display about our culture, sometimes.”<sup>35</sup> This choice makes her upset “because we have done a lot of good things.” She names a number of local francophone activists, authors, professors, and professionals whom she saw at a recent French-related community event. In a moment of codeswitching into English, she urges the media to “focus on those people!”

Eric also discusses the negative image of the courir, but instead of contrasting the debauched Mardi Gras runner with well-respected, productive members of the community, he

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<sup>34</sup> Originally: “Ouf... ça, ça casse mon cœur. Parce que c’est pas toujours - C’est pas vrai, C’est pas beau.”

<sup>35</sup> Originally: “On dirait ils ont choisi les plus vilaines choses pour montrer de notre culture parfois. Ça me désappointe, parce que on a fait beaucoup de bonnes choses”

emphasizes the fact that Mardi Gras is a very particular event. He describes the influx of documentarians who were intrigued by the exotic traditions of the country courirs. Eric doesn't deny that courirs are full of intoxicated people doing ridiculous things – “That's what it was” – but justifies the revelry by reiterating that it was a single day of the year: “But it was that day! They were celebrating Mardi Gras! So [the filmmakers] bring it home, and they edit these films, and they presented like it was, you know, that's all we were about.”

Norris sees negative images of Louisiana as a result of cherrypicking as well. He offers *Swamp People* as an example of a negative Hollywood image, and says, “I think that's a rare one percent of what truly exists but they portray a whole culture by that or a whole people, they think all Louisianians are like that.” In his discussion of the negative images, he goes beyond stating his opinion on their accuracy and hints at the reason why inaccurate images are accepted by others. In an anecdote similar to that of Vera's friend and the alligators, Norris tells the story of his brother-in-law, a Californian whose family has Creole roots in Louisiana and who came to visit Louisiana for the first time a few years ago. His brother-in-law was surprised to find that he did not need a pirogue to visit his in-laws (who live in the urban section of Lafayette Parish where Norris grew up). He suspects his sister is guilty of intentionally misleading her husband, but maintains, “He believed it! That's the thing: he believed that!” He attributes this receptivity to backwards images of Louisiana in part to a difference in values and a sense of cultural superiority. He claims that there are “Californians that think that they're, everybody should model them and their philosophy, so he had that image and that mentality that he was going to a backwards community of people that wouldn't wear shoes.”

Bill also brings up the issue of different ways of life and questions the perspective of the viewer as much as he questions the depiction itself. He does deny the accuracy of Hollywood



images like *Swamp People*; an avid alligator hunter himself, Bill insists that “the way they do the thing on there is all made up. Yeah, they're, they're catching gators and all that, but it's all for show ‘cause it's nothing like the way you really do it.” He recognizes that a mediated image is never going to be entirely natural, but unlike the participants discussed earlier who accept (to varying degrees) that certain negative aspects will be played up, Bill actively challenges the producers’ perspectives. Assuming that Hollywood producers would have a certain respect for wealthy businessmen, he points out that Troy Landry (the star of *Swamp People*) is very successful without the help of his reality TV salary: “He's a seafood broker, and he's just doing alligator season ‘cause he's from Louisiana, and you can't do it anywhere else and he likes doing it.” Bill is frustrated by the fact that the producers seem unwilling or unable to show that “these people are really intelligent” and that the fact that they “may talk different, they may talk funny to [outsiders], and they may do things that are foreign to [outsiders]” should not be cause to dismiss them as backwards or hapless.

Geraldine also rejects the judgment involved in the negative image rather than rejecting the image itself. While explaining the image of south Louisianians as over-indulgent with regards to food and alcohol, she confirms that people do drink excessively and eat copious amounts of unhealthy fried food. “So, I guess that would be the reality as far as we do a lot of over-eating, possibly a little bit more drinking,” she says, before adding, “but it's all in good fun and um, I think we're responsible with it.” In her opinion, this tendency to overindulge does not automatically mean that Louisiana should be characterized by depictions of out-of-control bacchanalia.

The overall response to these negative depictions is a mixture of rejection and partial rejection. For some images, the rejection is firm. Evaluating the depiction in *The Waterboy*,

Laurie affirms: “That’s an image of Louisiana that is absolutely incorrect.”<sup>36</sup> However, she says this in an effort to distinguish it from *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. Questions of the latter film’s accuracy evoke more mixed feeling in Laurie:

It was mythical. But, it showed the – in the film it showed the reality of the loss of our land, like, with coastal erosion and all that. So that was a good thing, but even so it showed people who are dirty, who are poor... but that is also a reality for some people so there’s... Yes and no.<sup>37</sup>

This final sentiment, the idea that an image that is inaccurate for one’s own reality might be accurate for another’s, was expressed a number of times by different participants.

Although participants’ may want to reject the negative portrayals of their home, they admit that there are negative sides to life in south Louisiana. After claiming that many outsiders see Louisiana as a “third world country,” Eric admits: “It’s understandable to tell you the truth.” He then jokes about government corruption, an issue seen as commonplace in Louisiana. Frank also grants that some of the negative depictions of Louisiana are, in fact, accurate: “I think if we really looked at it closely, we’d be really concerned about some of the statistics, um, some of the, some of the not-so-good things that are happening here like: education, poverty, child abuse.” He then shares a joke about the lack of investment in infrastructure in Louisiana: “Like Dirk Powell once said, ‘Virginia and Louisiana have two things in common: bad roads and great music.’”

Albert views the variety of francophone experiences in Louisiana as “legitimate,” and is therefore uneager to completely deny the accuracy of certain images associated with them: “It’s all legitimate. I mean, everybody, you know, that speaks French whether you learned it from your parents and it was because of being totally sheltered and, and not worldly whereas I learned

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<sup>36</sup> Originally: “Ça c’est une image de la Louisiane qui est tout à fait incorrecte, là.”

<sup>37</sup> Originally: “C’était mythique. But il montrait la - dans le film il montrait la réalité de la perte de notre terrain, de notre terre like avec coastal erosion et tout ça. So ça c’était une bonne chose, mais quand même il montrait des gens, comme, dans un mauvais sens, avec des, des gens qui sont sales, qui sont pauvres... but ça c’est aussi une réalité des gens so il y a... Yes and no.”

French from being worldly.” He contrasts his experience as an educated person in a prestigious profession to that of a Louisianian that never completed high school, but does not see how he could claim either as the authentic image of a Louisianian. “I mean, what is ‘typical?’” he asks.

Similarly, Nate refuses to make any blanket statements about the accuracy of the *Swamp People* image. Even after I press him with follow up questions asking if *Swamp People* accurately represents “his ‘[Nate]’ culture,” he only denies the idea that he himself had that experience - “No, I didn't grow up like that at all” - before qualifying: “I think it's way more complicated than, you know. It's so many different types of people here.” Paul also brings up the diversity of experience in south Louisiana. After reminding me that he has lived in several parts of south Louisiana – southwest and southeast, rural and urban – he points out: “It’s hard to go ahead and lump everybody together and give a quote-unquote accurate description of who we are as a people.” These statements seem to be in congruence with the claims of cherry picking and “playing things up for the camera” mentioned earlier. As Nate explains:

I don't really know how much people, like, really believe that all of Louisiana's like that [...] but I think people that hunt alligators or you know, do stuff um, like, they go trapping in the swamp or something, I feel like that's a good um, exotic thing that people can put on TV.

As an alternative to downplaying or reframing negative depictions, some participants take an active role in creating their own depictions. Sarah calls for Louisianians to resist inaccurate negative portrayals of their culture: “That's something somebody else decided that we were. It's not what we said, that's what somebody else said, so you have to change that.” At an earlier point of the interview, she asserts that she has always wanted to “write [her] own story,” and that she does not need anyone else to do it for her. Years ago, she took the reins of a cultural organization and began a small business selling products that she felt were more culturally authentic. Other participants bring up media depictions that they created themselves. Some of

these depictions only lasted a limited time; one participant shares that he preferred to discontinue his show rather than cave to pressure to conform to the traditional *Swamp People* image. Others were able to avoid this issue. Eric makes his own depictions, but also calls for outsiders to include more Louisianians in their process: “You have to have enough uh, social savvy to allow insiders to speak for themselves and to get, get the consultants, get the people on board where they need to be.”

In some ways, the positive tourism depiction could be seen as a way for Louisianians to control the narrative. Two of the participants citing both negative and positive images present tourism as a positive image after having already presented negative images. Laurie and Vera present the two in contrast: that Hollywood has not necessarily done a good job of portraying Louisiana, but that the state tourism bureau has. Nevertheless, the positive tourism image is not wholly accepted as authentic, much like the negative Hollywood image is not wholly rejected as untrue.

Several participants present Louisiana as an experience that cannot be fully translated into a static image. Jenny, who feels like Cajun and zydeco music is the main image of Louisiana presented to the world, is happy with the way that image is presented, but counters that even this positive and generally accurate image is vastly different from experiencing the reality it represents:

You don't really get the whole picture of what Cajun music is until, like, you're in front of it and you realize every person around you is dancing and like, you know like it's, it's - the music is a part of this huge, like, this bigger involvement, I think. So I don't think it really can be represented accurately unless you're here.

Similarly, Danielle, who works in the tourism industry and is generally very pleased with the tourism image, also refers to Louisiana culture as something that people “get” or “don’t get.” She talks about an understanding of Louisiana culture using terms that are often associated with

learning a language. When I ask her to clarify if she thinks people have misconceptions that are corrected or if they never really understood Louisiana at all in the first place, she responds: “I think they get the ‘textbook’ description of Louisiana up until, up until they visit and then they get that immersion experience. There’s a difference what you’re going to learn between a textbook and immersion.” Despite her choice of words, she is not referring specifically to Louisiana language varieties here, but to the culture as a whole.

Nate’s experiences at folk festivals would seem to suggest that this “immersion” experience cannot be easily transported. One has to experience it in its natural setting, Louisiana. He has been to a number of festivals in the rest of the United States and abroad where Louisiana food and music played a central role. While the bands that these festivals “import” (Nate’s word, despite the fact that he is speaking about festivals in the US here) try to share their culture in an authentic way and the Louisianians present often teach festivalgoers how to dance or peel boiled crawfish, some festivals turn into what Nate calls a “Cajun party.” At this type of event, Nate and the other Louisianians get the impression that the public does not even understand why the music is being sung in French, or why Louisianians eat and dance differently than others. “You know, you show up and they have Mardi Gras beads or whatever,” he summarizes.

Christian also discusses the “experience” of tourism in Louisiana when talking about its image. He presents the stereotype-laden Hollywood image in contrast to the image visitors have after participating in a specific tour of southwest Louisiana that he takes part in with his business. This annual tour has a multi-day itinerary and visitors “stop at cultural things all through Acadiana.” After describing the activities of a typical day on this specific tour – a day that includes food, beer, bands, and dancing – he reiterates his point of view that this experience

constitutes an image of south Louisiana: “And there’s that part of our culture people know.” Still, despite originally presenting this as a second image in contrast to the Hollywood stereotype, he does not see these two images as necessarily in conflict. In fact, he sees the media as a source of publicity for Louisiana, even if the picture it presents is not always entirely accurate or complete:

People find out about it, like once they see these other shows on TV, they might click on Google and say, ‘Hey *Festivals Acadiens!* I might check that out!’ So I think they kind of work hand-in-hand. I’m not complaining about the TV stuff.

In his opinion, if the stereotypical, incomplete image of Louisiana can help to inspire people to visit Louisiana, the visit itself will help to correct the original image.

Paul shares this perspective on the interplay between negative Hollywood images and the strong tourism economy. He recognizes the inaccuracies of television images, and laments whatever negative effects they might have on Louisiana, but also sees a silver lining to the situation: “But if you go ahead from a truly, you know, pop culture standpoint, between *Swamp People* and uh, *Duck Dynasty* and uh, you know, I mean Louisiana is pretty much the hottest thing going on out there.” As someone who works in the hospitality industry, but who also devoted years of his life to achieving fluency in the language of his grandparents, he has good reason to see the popularity of Hollywood images in both a positive and a negative light.

In conclusion, the participants generally do not see the image of Louisiana in absolutes – an inaccurate negative image or an authentic positive one – but rather as a complex reality, aspects of which could be accurately portrayed or misinterpreted. I found this result somewhat surprising, expecting that the forces of commodification and the tendency to prioritize one’s own experience would lead to a more outright rejection of negative images. Similarly, I thought the emphasis on a tourism economy that has been present in south Louisiana since the 1980s would

influence native Louisianians' perception of their home; if one is trying to sell an authentic cultural experience, it is possible that the line between the experience of tourists and that of natives will become blurred. Instead, I see a slight sentiment of aloofness in participants' responses, from Thomas who shares that he doesn't get "fighting mad" about negative images anymore to the participants who refuse to extrapolate their experiences to define the experiences of other south Louisianians. The image of one's culture is important, but participants seem able to separate the personal from the public. Discussing the tourists who visit Louisiana multiple times and "still don't get it," Danielle shrugs: "That's okay: it's not for them to get. [*laughter*]"

## CHAPTER 4 - INDIVIDUAL IDENTIFICATION

### 4.1 The "roots" question

The following chapter analyzes participants' responses to the specific question: "On a personal level, what makes you feel tied to your French cultural roots?" This question is in many ways intended as a more indirect alternative to directly asking "What makes you Cajun or Creole or Houma?" I chose to address this subject indirectly, however, for reasons beyond that of wishing to avoid people's surface-level conceptions of their identity. If I were to ask the question directly, I would essentially be obligated to use a more traditional ethnic label. As shown in the biographies in the methodology section, very few participants label themselves as "francolouisianais," the unifying alternative to the more ethnically narrow (and often racially influenced) terminology. Indeed, the vast majority of participants refer to themselves with one of these traditional ethnic labels at some point in the interview, despite my reliance on terms like "French-speaking" and "south Louisiana" to replace "Cajun" or "Houma" in the interview questions. Furthermore, this question about personal identification comes relatively early on in the interview, and many of the participants who eventually do label themselves ethnically have not yet done so at the time of this question.

In addition to its lack of ethnic labels, the indirect method also helps to avoid framing the idea in terms of qualifications. Just as I seek to ease the participant into the interview itself with questions about his or her personal history – rather than more ideological questions about identity and cultural meaning – I seek to introduce the concept of personal identity by focusing on its affective aspects, on what makes him or her "feel" a part of the culture. This was particularly important given the number of participants who expressed concern over whether or not they had sufficient 'expertise' to talk about Louisiana culture (despite their all being native



Louisianians). I did not want to make the participants uncomfortable or suggest that they had to justify their self-conceptions, even if it was these very self-conceptions that interested me.

The result of framing the question of personal identity in this manner was that participants responded in nuanced, revealing ways. Rarely did their answers come in the form of lists of static qualities or clearly defined practices. Instead, many told stories or had fascinating in-the-moment reactions to the question itself. I will seek to categorize these answers below within the framework of personal, interpersonal, or social processes of identification. The focus in this is on the *processes*, however, not the product. The categories below do not correspond to personal, interpersonal, and social identities so much as they show how an individual can use personal, interpersonal, and social resources to construct a personal identity; the question is not whether or not the identity is personal, but *how* is it personal? What resources do participants use to give legitimacy to their experience of francophone Louisiana? While these resources and processes can tell us a great deal about the collective identity in which the individual is placing him- or herself, my main point of interest in this chapter is to highlight the ways that participants “ethnify” in this specific culture and in this very particular context of language shift.

#### **4.2 Personal processes of identification**

Within the overall categories of response (Personal, Interpersonal, Social), there are recurring themes. Most of these themes are seen in multiple categories, but their significance can be vastly different depending on whether they are discussed in personal, interpersonal, or social contexts. For example, language use was one such recurring theme; even so, someone who feels tied in to his roots by speaking French would likely have a different experience of francophone Louisiana than someone who feels this connection by reflecting on her French-speaking grandmother or even her distant francophone ancestors.

One theme that was discussed in terms of personal processes was that of personal participation in a cultural practice or tradition. The presence of this theme is not unsurprising given a common belief in Louisiana that despite the quantifiable loss of French speakers, the culture is comparatively vibrant. Christian evokes this mentality in his interview (though not in response to this “roots” question) by comparing Louisiana to another francophone region of North America where he feels the French language is stronger but the culture is not as easily distinguishable from anglophone North American culture: “Here, it’s the opposite: we kept on to the culture and we do things like we did for generations, but we really didn’t hold on to the language.” Whether Christian’s assessment of other francophone regions’ cultural vitality is accurate could be debated, but this statement demonstrates the importance Louisianians can attach to the traditional practices historically associated with their francophone communities.

The specific cultural practices mentioned by participants vary. When asked the question, Geraldine immediately responds with her style of cooking: not just that she cooks traditional cuisine, but also that she “put[s] a little soul in it.” Vera’s response is significantly longer than Geraldine’s, but in it she explains the personal significance of learning to dance to zydeco music. “The music was in me, but I didn’t even know how to dance!” she says of herself. She then compares her learning to participate in this cultural activity to her growing involvement in cultural and community-based organizations at the time. Sarah cites a number of sources of identity throughout her response, but at one point mentions her lifelong fascination with local forms of folk medicine, which she still practices today. Herman is rather indirect in his response to this question, but tells the story of how he “learn[ed] the water”<sup>38</sup> in his youth, which would seem to suggest that this practice of navigating Louisiana’s coast and waterways continues to give him a sense of connection to his culture.

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<sup>38</sup> Originally: “*apprendre l’eau*”

Herman still makes his living on the water, but two other participants, Rose and Christian, highlighted activities from their youth. Neither of these participants lives an agrarian lifestyle today, but both talked about the childhood chores of helping on a farm in their answers. Interestingly, these two participants come from very different generations, with Rose's childhood taking place over thirty years before Christian's. Christian worked on a family crawfish farm and Rose had a variety of tasks (picking cotton, digging up potatoes, feeding animals), but both speak of these chores as part of their daily routine during childhood.

Personal language use is also a recurring theme in participants' responses. Albert's response to the roots question is exclusively centered around language, to the point where I wonder whether he interpreted the question (and specifically the phrasing "French roots") in a fundamentally different way than the other participants. He begins his response with "It's just something I've heard" without any clear indication of what "it" is. The rest of his answer being focused on language, one can only assume that "it" here is the French language. As a Francophone of Choice, French is not his mother tongue, but he expresses an appreciation for "the challenge of communicating" and says that speaking French is "something [he] actually enjoy[s] doing."

In Albert's case, speaking French is presented as a common but not necessarily a daily activity. Paul, on the other hand, states in his response to the roots question that the French language is a part of his daily life. In fact, the connection to language is so strong for Paul that he begins his answer by saying, "Well, on a personal level it's um, I mean the whole French language has kind of um, defined my last twenty years of existence." He goes on to discuss the choice he made to learn French and the various areas of his personal and professional life that were eventually affected by that choice.

Language was even mentioned by a non-French-speaking participant. Jacob has made numerous attempts to study French but has never achieved proficiency in the language. Nonetheless, when asked the question about his connection to his roots he mentions discoveries he made about francophone culture - particularly, pragmatic aspects of the language and formal address - that he saw as parallels to customs in Louisiana. For him, the act of studying the French language gave meaning to his experience of Louisiana culture, even if he is not comfortable carrying on a conversation in the language.

Two native speakers of French also mention the language in their answers to this question, though in different ways. Eric's initial response is to explain that he still often dreams in French, despite its no longer being his dominant language. In Claire's answer, however, the connection to speaking French is much more active. Although language is not the first theme she mentions, it is the one for which she goes into the most detail. She states unambiguously that in her personal opinion, the culture that she lives in would not be the same without French. She then describes her experience with French-speaking visitors to Louisiana. For years, she has made a habit of greeting people she overhears speaking French in restaurants or other public places. She says that often these visitors have told her that she was the first person in Louisiana to speak to them in French, particularly if she happened to be in a less francophone region, like the greater New Orleans area. "I can't tell you how many times I've played that role!"<sup>39</sup> she says, before explaining how she directed the visitors to places where they might meet more French speakers. Claire has maintained this "role" of linguistic ambassador over the years, and still shows a preference for choosing French with anyone that she knows speaks French.

In some interviews, the personal connection to identity was the result of becoming more involved in one's community. Herman worked on the creation of a public symbol his

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<sup>39</sup> Originally: "*Je peux pas te dire combien de fois j'ai joué ce rôle-là! [rire]*"

community uses to represent itself. Paul became involved in managing local festivals and representing Louisiana at international events for francophone commerce. Danielle is in charge of a yearly event that celebrates traveling Louisiana's waterways by canoe. All three participants mention these contributions in response to the question of feeling connected to their roots. Sarah addresses the question quite directly, saying: "Oh yes, I'm very much rooted into my culture. That's why I took on this place. I took this place on because [...] I just want to write my own story. I don't, I don't, I don't need anybody to write my story. I want to write my own story." By "this place," she is referring to her business in the cultural sector.

For Sarah, the concept of her "story" remains fairly broad, but other participants answered this question with a specific kind of "story." This recurring narrative could be described as "leaving and returning." In a number of responses, the participants talk about connecting to their roots in the light of being previously disconnected from them. For Frank, the narrative is summarized into a comment at the end of his answer: "I started traveling more and whenever you travel a lot, you realize what you have back home." For others, however, the story of leaving and returning is more detailed. Jacob says he never considered his home different from any other place until he left it. "It takes a person to get away from the, the culture of this area to see how special it is and, and its particular um, nuances or idiosyncratic things, you know, ways," he explains.

Christian's discovery of the particularities of his own culture was born out of a more deliberate decision to leave. He tells the story of moving away from Louisiana in his late teen years:

So I'm like, 'I'm leaving Louisiana! I'm never coming back! I'm going to see the world! I don't want to ever eat crawfish again!' 'Cause we were like the 'Bubba Gump' of crawfish growing up. My parents had, like, bisque and fried crawfish and étouffée, so you get tired of it. So, I got to [Europe, and] within two years, I was like, 'I got to get

back home! I'd give a hundred bucks for a pound of crawfish right now!' So we were raised with it; we just didn't know any better.

Christian spent years away from Louisiana (abroad and in another region of the United States) for reasons related to his previous career, but he now lives in the same small town where he was raised.

The aforementioned narratives of leaving and returning cast Louisiana in a positive light, but one participant answers differently. She answers the question of connecting to her roots with a story about leaving Louisiana and returning, but in this instance, the journey gave her a better perspective on things that were undesirable about Louisiana. Amelia went away to another state for boarding school because secondary education was not available to American Indians in Louisiana at that time (the 1950s and 1960s). She found racial prejudices towards American Indians to be less severe in this other region and was disappointed to return to Louisiana to find that “it was still the same old differences, that the Indians kept their place and all that.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, rather than leave Louisiana for better prospects, she chose to stay. Her answer could also be categorized with the answers that make mention of becoming personally involved in community initiatives because she emphasizes the personal decisions she made to fight inequality in her parish. In the 1970s, she became the first Indian woman hired by the local hospital, and she continued on to work in the school system, fighting for educational equality for the Houma Nation.

She ties all of these experiences into her personal perspective by telling a story about her time working an administrative job at the hospital. When a co-worker referred to her using a racial slur, she formally complained to her boss: “I told him I knew who I was. I was an Indian and I was very proud to be an Indian and that there was no difference between the work I do and

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<sup>40</sup> Originally: “*C’était toujours la vieille différence, que les Indiens gardaient leur place, et tout ça.*”

another's."<sup>41</sup> It is a story that ends quite strangely (with her boss mistakenly thinking she was from Guam and not supporting her complaint) but it illustrates how personal experiences of adversity and discrimination can solidify ties to one's identity.

In one participant's interview, the journey described in answering this question is more internal. Vera does not move away from Louisiana to later return in a geographical sense, but she does describe an internal distancing and subsequent homecoming to her culture. As described in her short biography in the methodology section, Vera lost her childhood connection to her parents' language and culture and did not renew an interest in it until she experienced major personal losses in her twenties. As she "took inventory" of her life, she became focused on "reclaiming [her] roots [that she] didn't really want to um, claim, so to speak." This voluntary distancing and subsequent return to her upbringing echoes the more geographical version expressed in Christian's interview.

#### **4.3 Interpersonal processes of identification**

There is often a great deal of overlap between the personal, interpersonal, and social resources used to justify a participant's personal identity, but in this section I will focus on instances where participants respond to the question of their personal roots by discussing their close relationships. In this sense, the participant feels tied to his identity because he is this person's grandson or that person's spouse. As can be expected, family is a very frequently cited theme in the interpersonal category of response, but close friends and colleagues are also mentioned by a few participants.

In some of the responses where cultural practices are mentioned, the participant is continuing a tradition passed on to him or her by a family member. For example, in Herman's

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<sup>41</sup> Originally: "*Je lui ai dit que je connaissais qui j'étais. J'étais une Indienne et j'étais bien fière d'être une Indienne et il y avait pas de différence dans l'ouvrage que je fais avec quelqu'un d'autre.*"

story of “learning the water,” it is his father who taught him how to navigate a boat from the coast of Terrebonne Parish throughout the Gulf of Mexico. He explains how his father stressed the importance of this practice, particularly in the context of being Houma and therefore not having the same educational opportunities as other Louisianians. In Christian’s description of his childhood working a crawfish farm, he describes it as a family duty; his brothers were also expected to work everyday after school from the time they were old enough to complete the tasks until they graduated high school and left the family home. He also mentions near the end of his answer that his father continues to live an agrarian lifestyle to this day.

Language is another theme that is sometimes both personal and interpersonal. When Eric relates that he still sometimes dreams in French, he explains that these are often dreams in which he is talking to his parents or grandparents. He states that he has been recently contemplating his own aging, and consequently has had a number of dreams about his late family members who “are never, hardly ever speaking English.”

Albert, whose answer is very centered around language, also offers an older family member’s French as a source of identity, citing memories of his grandmother. He at first seems to say that his grandmother is his only family member with this French connection but quickly corrects himself: “I mean now I speak it with my brothers, and it’s fun, you know?” Like him, his brothers chose to learn French as adolescents and young adults, and the separation between speaking French with his grandmother as a younger man and speaking French with his brothers as an older adult would seem to suggest that there is a different quality to the two interactions.

Laurie is another participant who talks about a francophone grandparent in her response. Interestingly, although both her grandmother and grandfather spoke French, she chooses to specifically mention her grandfather to answer this question and cites his lack of ability in



English and the discrimination that he endured as a child at school. This discrimination was also brought up by Christian whose father experienced the same. He recounts: “My dad said, if, if someone wanted to get you in trouble, they accused you of it. [*laughter*] You know, ‘He spoke French in the playground!’ [*laughter*], you know? So you get in trouble just, even though you really didn't even really do it.” Although Christian shows a lighthearted attitude about these occurrences now, he immediately concludes this statement by recognizing what he sees as the legacy of that discrimination: the interruption of intergenerational transmission of the language. The presence of these stories of discrimination – not their experiences, but a family member’s – in their answers about their own personal sense of identity provides an interesting example of ways in which interpersonal relationships can carry significant weight in personal processes of identification. In the same way that Amelia’s personal experience of adversity and discrimination caused her to assert her identity as Houma, Christian and Laurie are using their loved ones’ experiences to reinforce their connection to their francophone roots.

In Paul’s answer, the interpersonal connections to the language are less centered on family history and more on his present-day family life. Family history is extremely important to Paul, and in a previous section of the interview he cites his grandparents as the reason he chose to learn French as an adult, but he does not mention them in his response to this specific question. Instead, he talks about his wife and children. He states that French is an integral part of his life now (“I speak it everyday, and because, you know, I live it”) and then explains how central his wife and children are to that francophone experience: “That’s my personal story and if I wouldn’t be married to a woman who grew up, first language French, babies born, nursing the baby in French, you know, all of that, it’s uh, then maybe it wouldn’t be that.” While his

grandparents' language practices were integral in 'discovering' his roots, his maintenance of this connection to French is strongly fueled by his wife, a native French Canadian, and their children.

In some instances, the interpersonal connection to identity is not based in shared cultural practices or in language use, but in shared values. Vera focuses less on her parents' language use or any traditional practices they may have participated in and more on the values with which she was raised. She describes her parents as "strong" and admires the way her father dealt with prejudices and adversity as an African-American Creole man in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. When describing the challenges he faced to maintain his custodial position in an environment of institutionalized racism, she admits that to some people, such efforts and such a career may not seem as impressive. For her, however, this struggle had a considerable effect: "But I saw him as this, this hero of mine, and how he would never stop until he could accomplish things, you know?" It is not difficult to see echoes of this attitude in Vera's work as an activist in her community today.

This idea of discrimination has already been discussed in the context of other interviews. Laurie and Christian mention the discrimination their respective grandfather and father faced, but both participants are Caucasian and are describing a linguistically focused ethnic discrimination. For Vera, the situation is closer to Amelia's account of discrimination, but where Amelia describes it in terms of a personal journey, Vera describes it as interpersonally shared values, values transmitted to her by her father. There are further parallels between the two women's accounts in that Amelia also signals the importance of shared values with those close to her. In discussing her work for the educational system in her community, she specifically mentions a co-worker of hers with whom she often collaborated. She describes their decision to continue in that profession in terms of a "cause": "We could have had, we could have applied for another job

in the school board, even to make more money or maybe a higher position. But it was the cause, the cause that we were working on.”<sup>42</sup> The commitment to working for the community is presented as a shared value, something regarded as more important than conventional notions of the benefits of a career.

Norris also discusses discrimination in his response and focuses extensively on a specific family member, his great-great-grandfather. On the surface level, this type of relationship might seem too distant to qualify as interpersonal, and it is unclear if the two men ever met. Still, Norris’ way of talking about him is less like the way one talks about an ancestor and more like the way one talks about a close relative. He refers to him several times throughout the interview and expresses a genuine sense of identification with the man. He recounts that his parents considered naming him after this great-great-grandfather but in the end considered the name – an old, distinctly French name – a little too uncommon and unwieldy; conversely, Norris insists he would have loved to have been given this name.

In his answer to the specific ‘roots’ question, he emphasizes the Catholic values of his grandfather, and the way in which those values combatted the closed-minded conceptions of race, ethnicity, and class at the time. He discusses his grandfather’s legacy, both in terms of its tangible effects and of the values he passed on to the younger generations of his family, before tying this back in to an idea of Creole heritage: “We were taught differently. We were taught to recognize everybody as a child of God. So, the French influence had a rich connection to the Creole influence.” Other than Catholicism, there are no obvious ties in Norris’ answer that explain the link between these values and francophone culture. Nevertheless, the two are presented as coming from the same source: Norris’ francophone relative.

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<sup>42</sup> Originally: “*Et on aurait pu avoir/ on aurait pu applied pour un autre job dans le school board même pour faire plus d’argent ou peut-être un position plus/ plus haut. Mais c’était la cause, la cause qu’on était après travailler dessus*”

#### 4.4 Social processes of identification

When discussing values, participants repeatedly bring up the concept of community. Community was part of some responses involving interpersonally shared values (as seen above), but unsurprisingly, was often brought up when discussing socially shared values. The relationship between the concepts of community and values is two-sided: on the one hand, community is created by shared values, and on the other, community *is* a shared value.

Bill's response focuses almost entirely on values. In talking about roots, he references local practices of harvesting and hunting sustainably and attitudes of self-reliance. He begins with his personal commitment to these values, but then expands to his close friends and family, saying that they also value this way of life. Next, he extrapolates it to the larger area, saying: "I feel like I'm in a blessed place, Cameron Parish, southwest Louisiana." Although he does not directly say that the people of Cameron Parish share these values, the fact that he expresses his feeling well suited to the area immediately after discussing his own and his loved ones' affinity for a certain way of life and value system would seem to suggest a certain harmony between all these viewpoints.

Thomas also sees shared values as delineating a social identity, specifically, the shared values of prioritizing family and rejecting an American 'live-to-work' mentality. He connects this on a social level to large historical events like the Grand Derangement of the Acadians; in his view, the emphasis on family is at least in part a result of the trauma of this event and the separation of families during that time. He also talks about adversity and discrimination more generally in his response to the question of his roots, saying "We had a lot of persecution because we were French and Catholic."<sup>43</sup> Unlike previously mentioned instances of

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<sup>43</sup> Originally: "*On a eu un tas de persécution, un peu, parce qu'on est français et catholiques.*"

discrimination, however, Thomas does not present it in terms of any particular person, himself or a family member. Instead, it is a collective experience.

Bill and Thomas present values as part of the formation of a common identity, but Jacob expresses community as a value in and of itself. When asked about ties to his roots he describes “the feeling of community” as one of the strongest ties. To illustrate this “feeling of community” he relates an anecdote of being in a boat on a local lake and always making some sort of contact with the other boats he encountered (waving, saying hello, etc.). “You acknowledge other people,” he summarizes, before admitting that he would have likely never thought of this as a distinctive quality had he not spent a period of his life away from Louisiana in a large northern US city.

Religion is another concept participants discuss in broad terms in response to the question of roots. Catholicism is mentioned in Thomas and Norris’ responses as is seen above, and also comes into play in Vera’s discussion of her community involvement, but religion is at times given as a direct answer to the question of “What makes you feel tied in to your roots?” Claire and Rose, both members of the older generation, cite religion early in their responses. Neither woman goes into great detail about the ways in which religion plays a role in connecting them to their identities. Religion in their answers is presented in much the same way that cultural practices like traditional cooking methods or folk medicine are presented in other responses. Because they do not go into detail about the nature of this connection, it is difficult to categorize religion as being part of either personal or social processes of identification. In the end, I have chosen to use these broad but direct mentions of the importance of religion as indicative of social processes, a shared communal practice that is not explicitly linked to the participant’s personal experience of it.

Another broad concept that plays an important role in socially based constructions of identity is the desire for cultural continuity. Frank talks about this desire for continuity in terms of the “cultural revolution in southwest Louisiana” he saw beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s: “Young people started picking up instruments, and people started respecting what the people had done before them, the language, the food.” Faced with the effects of Americanization, he saw young people turning back to the ways of the older generations and wanting to learn traditional practices as well as the French language. He calls the cultural shift a “regeneration” and feels that it had a profound effect on him.

Eric, who is roughly the same age as Frank, also feels personally committed to efforts to continue certain declining cultural practices. He has used his artistic endeavors to highlight such practices and expresses a strong attachment to them: “I have seemed to be attracted and long for those vestiges of our cultural heritage that sometimes fall by the wayside, like hand fishing, for example.” He goes on to describe the local variation on the practice of hand fishing, but this is merely an example of a larger belief in the importance of documenting and continuing these kinds of traditions.

Albert also talks about cultural continuity but focuses on the French language. Describing his decisions to learn French and join efforts to promote it, he explains: “I just felt like it was something worth preserving. Something, part of our heritage here.” His choice of words – “preserving” and “heritage” – is not uncommon for discourse on the French language and culture in Louisiana. In Christian’s response, he sees language and culture as something that is “passed on” to the next generation, saying: “They passed on everything else. They passed on the food and the music, the love of the music and the dancing. They passed all of that on. They passed on the, the lifestyle, the agrarian lifestyle [...] but the language? That was like the one

thing [... they] didn't want to pass on." He attributes this lack of desire to transmit French to younger generations to the linguistic discrimination that took place in the school system and was sanctioned by state legislation.

Nate, one of the younger participants and a product of the contemporary school system's efforts to revitalize French, answers the question of his roots exclusively with this idea of cultural continuity. His response is brief, but direct: "Well it's I feel like it's um, it's something, it's like, it's uh, it's larger than anyone, any one person that's involved in it you know. Something that's existed here for a very long time, and it's what to me makes our part of the country unique and special as opposed to the rest of America. It's one of the few places that has very, like, specific and defined local culture and identity and I think like, to keep that going is pretty cool you know?" Nate enjoys personally participating in efforts to "keep that going," but the call for cultural continuity he is describing is a collectively shared ideology.

Family also figures prominently as a social resource for identifying, but its social aspect is distinct from its interpersonal aspect. In interpersonal concepts of family, the emphasis is on the relationship between the participants and specific family members. The more social concept of family is a reified idea of heritage or genealogy. In his response, Frank claims that he is "four parts Acadian," which is to say all four of his grandparents can trace roots back to Acadie. He can list a number of family names and has traced his family tree back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Laurie also makes mention of her grandfather's family name, though to make a different point. His family name was Hispanic, although his family had long since been French-speaking; she jokes, "A Romero who was francophone – that happens in New Iberia!"<sup>44</sup> At the same time, however, she makes similar claims to those of Frank, saying: "My family is, it's been – and both sides, we've been Louisianians for 200 years. And before we were Louisianians we were

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<sup>44</sup> Originally: "*Un Romero qui était francophone! – Ça se passe à New Iberia, ça!*"

French, Spanish, [...] and Acadian.”<sup>45</sup> Earlier in her response she specifically talks about her grandfather’s personal life, but here she is referring to more social aspects of family, like name and nationality.

For Thomas, this social concept of family forms the main argument of his response. When asked the question, he begins his answer by saying: “Because I’m a Cormier, I think.”<sup>46</sup> He goes on to note that his Cormier ancestor founded a nearby town and knows exactly how many generations lie between himself and this ancestor. He also talks about being a “Son of the American Revolution” and the role that Acadians played in this conflict. His answer combines names, genealogy, and history, all of which are addressed at a social level.

Jenny, a young non-French speaking woman, also cites her last name as a source of identity. It is, in fact, the only response she gives to the question of her roots. She prefaces her reasoning by acknowledging that “this might sound silly” but feels that her name, which has a distinctly French pronunciation, is a “constant reminder” of her culture and identity. She recounts having to explain the pronunciation to people when she leaves Acadiana:

“Anywhere else in the, like, country, anybody who reads my last name will say Simon [saimən], and so it's very clear to me that it's like, ‘No, it's Simon [simɔ̃],’ and sometimes I'll take a minute and explain it to people and I'm like, ‘But no, I'm Cajun French so we say it [simɔ̃], instead of [saimən].”

This brief anecdote illustrates how elements of the French language can permeate into the daily life of a monolingual English speaker in Louisiana.

#### 4.5 Distribution

Table 4.1 displays participants’ responses to the roots question as they are categorized: Personal (P), Interpersonal (I), or Social (S). As can be seen, ten of the twenty participants use

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<sup>45</sup> Originally: “*Ma famille est, ça fait - et les deux côtés, ça fait depuis deux c- 200 ans que on est louisianais. Avant qu'on était louisianais, on était français, espagnols [...] et acadiens.*”

<sup>46</sup> Originally: “*Parce que je suis un Cormier, je crois.*”



all three kinds of resources when discussing their personal identity. At times, their responses center on a single theme and attach this theme to personal, interpersonal, and social processes.

**Table 4.1:** Use of Personal, Interpersonal, and Social resources for identification

Pseudonym	P	I	S
Albert	✓	✓	✓
Amelia	✓	✓	✓
Bill	✓	✓	✓
Claire	✓		✓
Christian	✓	✓	✓
Danielle	✓	✓	✓
Eric	✓	✓	✓
Frank	✓		✓
Geraldine	✓	✓	
Herman	✓	✓	
Jacob	✓		✓
Jenny			✓
Laurie	✓	✓	✓
Nate			✓
Norris		✓	✓
Paul	✓	✓	
Rose	✓	✓	✓
Sarah	✓	✓	✓
Thomas			✓
Vera	✓	✓	✓

In the example of Albert, the response refers strictly to language use, but he examines his personal enjoyment of speaking French; his memories of speaking French with his grandmother and his habit of speaking French with his brothers today; and his belief in a need for linguistic continuity in the French-speaking community, a need to preserve “a part of our heritage here.” Conversely, other participants focus on various themes that are alternately personal, interpersonal, or social. Christian shares a personal story of rediscovering the importance of his culture, but discusses traditional practices in an interpersonal way, emphasizing the lifestyle of his father. On a social level, he describes the community he was raised in as largely homogenous: “Everybody had the same values: [...] everybody was Catholic [...] everybody was

Cajun.” These three facets to Christian’s response are interconnected in its narrative, but they fall into three categories of identity processes: those based on personal experiences, interpersonal experiences, and social experiences, respectively.

Only three participants answer in a way that corresponds to a single category, though interestingly, all these single-category responses are social. Jenny and Nate are both in their 20s, and both give simple answers that focus on a single theme; Jenny emphasizes her name, and Nate, the overarching social movement for cultural continuity. Thomas, on the other hand, is in his 50s and responds in more depth, delving into genealogy, history, and the importance of his family name. His answer is nevertheless a purely social one and he does not discuss any personal experiences or close family relationships in response to this specific question.

Seven of the twenty participants answer in ways that reflect two of the three categories, with three responses categorized as Personal-Interpersonal, three as Personal-Social, and one as Interpersonal-Social. This last response is attributed to Norris, who tells the story of his great-great-grandfather before broadening his view to comment on the Creole community and south Louisiana culture as a whole.

When examining Table 4.1, that is to say, the data for how often a particular category of response manifests, the breakdown is as follows: responses are Personal 80% of the time (16 out of 20), 70% Interpersonal (14 out of 20), and 85% Social (17 out of 20), making Social responses the most frequent, although not by a large margin. Nevertheless, the fact that social resources are used so frequently despite the question being directly prefaced with “On a personal level,…” indicates that individuals themselves do not necessarily see their identities in terms of separate personal, interpersonal, or social processes and resources. Scholars such as Vignoles et al. (2011) state that personal identity is generally associated with personal processes of

identification, interpersonal identity with interpersonal, and so on; from an academic standpoint, these concepts can be categorized in such a way, but from the viewpoint of the individual who is examining his or her own identity, the lines are generally more fluid or entangled.

As previously stated, half of all responses use all three categories of resources, and only one individual uses the combination of interpersonal and social resources. The nine remaining responses are split evenly between the categories of Personal-Interpersonal, Personal-Social, and exclusively Social. When examining these repeated but less common responses, it is difficult to

**Table 4.2:** Common categories of response compared with social factors

Pseudonym	Response	Generation	Gender	Ethnically identifies as...	Ling. Category
Geraldine	Pers-Interp	C	F	Creole	LAF
Herman	Pers-Interp	A	M	Houma	NF
Paul	Pers-Interp	B	M	Cajun/Fr. ancestry	FOC
Claire	Pers-Soc	A	F	Cajun	NF
Frank	Pers-Soc	B	M	Cajun	FOC
Jacob	Pers-Soc	C	M	Ambiguous	LAF
Jenny	Social	C	F	Cajun	LAF
Nate	Social	C	M	Ambiguous	Outlier
Thomas	Social	B	M	Cajun	NF

make any conclusions as to what may have influenced them. As the table above shows the three participants whose responses are categorized as Personal-Interpersonal and the three whose responses are categorized as Personal-Social are categorized in very different groups when looking at social factors. Both the Personal-Interpersonal and the Personal-Social categories of response have one member from each generational category (A, B, and C). They include a mixture of men and women, and no strong tendencies with regard to the ethnic identity that participants claim or their relationship to the French language (Native Francophone, Francophone of Choice, Linguistically-Assimilated Francolouisianais, Outlier). The only finding of note is that Social responses may tend come from participants that are younger, with no one in

the oldest generation (A) giving an answer that would be categorized as strictly social. This is, however, not surprising, since older participants grew up in different circumstances, with less assimilation into American mainstream culture and a greater chance of having personal, or at least, strong interpersonal experiences of francophone culture. This is supported by the fact that when examining the responses by generational group, all participants in the oldest generation include a personal component, and five of the seven give responses that can be categorized as Personal, Interpersonal, and Social.

**Table 4.3:** Personal, Interpersonal, and Social responses of Generation A

Pseudonym	P	I	S
Albert	✓	✓	✓
Amelia	✓	✓	✓
Bill	✓	✓	✓
Claire	✓		✓
Herman	✓	✓	
Rose	✓	✓	✓
Sarah	✓	✓	✓

#### 4.6 Negotiating individual identity

The conversational style of the interview allowed participants the space to react to the questions being asked, and for some questions in particular the participants had a noticeable instinctive response to the ideas being presented and the question at hand. The question “What makes you feel tied in to your French roots?” was not the only question to elicit these kinds of reactions, but it was one of the questions that did so fairly frequently.

For example, when asked the roots question, Frank’s immediate response is: “Well– I could- I don’t know where to start with that one!” Laurie switches into English to exclaim: “Oh my god!” before returning to French to offer up the ways in which she feels francolouisianaise. Other participants are less direct, but still show signs of grappling with the concept. Jacob hesitates repeatedly, saying, “Um, um, hmmm. I don’t know,” although he proceeds to give a

very full answer, combining his perception of socially shared values to his experience of leaving and returning to Louisiana. Albert and Norris begin their answers by stating that the question is a “hard” one. Claire sighs at the beginning of her answer, before stating: “Oh, the things that have always existed...” In the rest of her answer, she describes specific aspects of her culture and her francophone experience that could be considered “things that have always existed,” but this shorthand response at the beginning hints at the essentialist ideology that is found in so many of the interviews.

This sort of reaction does not always come at the very beginning of the participant’s response. Eric first discusses his recent habit of dreaming in French; then, feeling like he has gotten off track, he asks to hear the question again. After hearing the question a second time, he has a similar response to those mentioned above: “I, it’s, it’s who I am, I mean, I, that’s who I am, and I think without it, without the understanding, and root’s a good word, by the way. It’s, it’s—” He never completes this last thought, and instead begins discussing his lifelong fascination with age-old cultural practices. At the end of his answer, he begins to question his choice to do the interview in English: “I’m carrying on and on in English, when maybe we should be talking French, but...” He then switches to French briefly, saying that he “can defend himself”<sup>47</sup> in the language but that he feels somewhat insecure about his abilities.

Just as Eric feels he is losing track of the question mid-response, Laurie also hesitates after giving a partial answer. After her initial interjection of “Oh my God!” she delves into the story of her grandfather, approaching her identity interpersonally. After a brief distraction in the room where she is being interviewed, she switches back into English to say, “What else? Um...” before exclaiming again “*Ma famille!*” this time treating the concept of family in a social, genealogical sense. Then, she appears to have trouble with the question itself: “*C’est ça*, « like »

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<sup>47</sup> Originally: “*Je peux me défendre.*”

*moi, je suis Louisianaise. ... Ça c'est... « I don't know, like... »* It is as if the basic idea behind the question is unthinkable, or at the very least unfamiliar, to her.

Another participant, Danielle, finishes her answer in a way that is less open-ended, but is still somewhat vague. In her response she talks about the love of culturally-associated practices (music, cuisine, dance, etc.) that she shares with “all” of her close friends, and she also discusses her involvement in an annual event promoting the traditional use of south Louisiana’s rivers and bayous. After explaining her involvement in this event, she returns to a more general description of her ties to her roots, concluding with: “So, I’m always - I, I feel incredibly connected to Louisiana and the French community just because of where I am all the time, you know?” In a sense, this response is quite nebulous; “where I am all the time” does not give a very clear idea of what specific influences play a part in her personal identity. Yet, looking at the statement as a whole, and paying particular attention to the very beginning of her statement (“I’m always-“) that she then reformulates, there is a certain logic to its nebulousness. For Danielle, it would seem that feeling “tied in to her roots” is not something that comes and goes; she does not have to ‘do things’ to feel connected to her culture and heritage. She feels that she lives that culture on a daily basis.

In contrast to the broad strokes of Danielle’s answer, Herman responds to the question in a very specific manner unlike that of any of the other participants. He describes how he “learned the water” but he never directly ties this in to the question. Were the questions and answers separated, it would be very difficult to identify which question of the interview he was answering. He never talks about feeling connected, or about what his roots are. He doesn’t mention pride or a heritage; he simply says that when he was young, his father taught him the water.

In the process of completing the twenty interviews that make up the corpus, I noticed unusual responses such as the ones mentioned above and, knowing that I would likely need to make sense of them across a broad template of answers, I occasionally tried to categorize the participant's response during the interview itself. While some participants accept my categorization of their response, others resist it as oversimplification. Vera provides the clearest example of this resistance. Her answer is fairly long, and near the end of it I attempt to summarize it by saying, "And so it's it's really community-based for you [...] when you, when you're touching in with your roots it's, it's, it's being with other members of the community and [...] having this sort of fellowship?" Initially, Vera responds affirmatively, but she then qualifies her acceptance of this categorization, saying:

Well the community was first and then the more I got involved with the community the more I reconnected with the fact of the cultural heritage that I had all along. And my, the strong roots of my mother that I mentioned to you that um, she was a strong, strong Creole woman, and my father was just as strong.

In these few sentences she shifts from social resources to personal ones, citing a sort of primordial identity that she "had all along," and then immediately to her parents, highlighting the interpersonal aspect. This resistance to categorization is not surprising; as I have said before, these categories are for academic purposes and it is unlikely that individuals reflecting their own personal identity think about these categories any more than they think about the syntax that underlies their language use. Yet, just as is the case with syntax, these underlying connections between the personal, interpersonal, and social aspects of identity merit attention.

Laurie's answer provides an excellent material for examining the complexity found in a single response. In terms of social resources, Laurie focuses on her family name and her genealogy. The personal processes she uses could be described as essentialism; at one point she answers the question of how she feels tied in to her roots by simply stating emphatically, "*Je suis*

*Louisianaise.*” In light of these two aspects, it might be tempting to qualify Laurie’s ethnic identification as somewhat surface-level. A general concept of ancestry and a tautological assertion of one’s origins would seem to be comparatively simplistic ways of ethnifying. However, when one remembers the details of Laurie’s biography, it is obvious that her connection to her French Louisiana culture and heritage is anything but surface-level. This is an individual who actively chose to learn French as a young adult, who has worked assiduously in local linguistic activism, and who was the only second-language speaker in this corpus to choose French as the language of the interview.

Despite the interesting juxtaposition of the personal and social aspects of her answer against what is known from her biography, the most fascinating part of Laurie’s response is the section that I categorize as interpersonal. She cites her grandfather’s inability to speak English as a child and his experience of being punished at school. This narrative (of the generation that was punished at school for speaking French) is one that appears in several of the interviews in response to different questions, but Laurie’s use of it to answer the question of her personal attachment to her roots made me examine it more closely. Why would her grandfather’s experience of linguistic discrimination be important to her own sense of identity?

Amelia’s story of ethnic (or ethnoracial) discrimination gives a fairly clear picture of how being subjected to these negative external forces can compel someone to resist negative representations and assert their identity in positive terms. Still, I have difficulty accepting that Laurie’s reference to ethnolinguistic discrimination is merely the interpersonal version of the same sentiment. Instead, I theorize that the emphasis on the linguistic discrimination experienced by older generations is a form of negotiation of linguistic identity. Laurie’s grandfather’s experience is important to her own sense of francolouisianais identity because it



explains why she was obligated to choose to learn French, as opposed to naturally learning it in the home.

This theory is supported by Christian's response in which he presents his parents' desire to speak only English to their children as a result of their being "heckled" and "punished" at school. Christian never directly states this as a reason his parents' explicitly cited for their decision to not pass on French; as he explains it in the interview, it could very easily be his own interpretation of the situation. When looking at older native speakers who did not pass the language on to their children, however, it becomes unclear whether the punishments at school were so central to this decision, or whether parents made a conscious decision at all.

Although I never directly ask Claire about it, she openly shares her regret at not having spoken French to her kids. She never gives a very clear idea of why she did not speak French to her children, but it cannot be because of her own experience of being punished because Claire states quite plainly at another part of the interview that her childhood teacher was a native Francophone who encouraged the use of English but never physically punished or shamed her students for speaking French. Rose, another of the older native francophone participants, also spoke French with her husband, but not with their children. When I directly ask her if it was a conscious choice to do this, she says "No, it just happened, you know, just automatically talked English." These insights into the experience of older Francophones make me doubt the accuracy of portrayals of their language shift as a conscious choice originating specifically from a childhood experience of shame and linguistic discrimination. More likely, it is a combination of experiences and influences that led to a misrecognition of the legitimacy of their linguistic identities. Nevertheless, if younger generations use this narrative of discrimination to negotiate

and justify their own linguistic identities, its importance to contemporary francolouisianais identity should not be overlooked.

As I have previously stated, there are a number of other questions that inspire significant reactions in the participants; the question “What does a Louisiana without French look like?” for example, could be said to inspire utter stupefaction in some participants. Nevertheless, the roots question was among the most prolific in instances of this sort of reaction. These reactions, the general trend toward using all three categories of resource for personal identification, and the underlying complexity of responses like Laurie’s paint a picture of ethnicity that is far more detailed than the one Gans (1979) describes in his work on symbolic ethnicity. While the forces of assimilation and acculturation that Gans discusses are applicable in the Louisiana context, other aspects are far more problematic. For example, the country of origin for participants is sometimes traced back to France or Acadie, but often is the ‘country’ participants still live in: south Louisiana. Gans speaks of participation in ethnic groups and organizations in a formal sense, but in Louisiana many of the cultural practices that would be promoted by these groups are part of daily life; traditional cuisine and social music are not reserved for special celebrations of ethnicity. As Danielle’s answer demonstrates, a francolouisianais ethnicity is fairly accessible - not only in feeling, but in the activities Louisianians participate in. Still, the affective aspect is prevalent in participants’ responses, and certain aspects (like family name) do take on a symbolic role. Certainly Gans’ theory resonates in its labeling contemporary concepts of ethnicity as “a matter of choice.” (1979, p. 8) He also theorizes that symbolic ethnicity can only last a few generations, but in the case of francophone south Louisiana, the validity of this theory is not yet fully tested. The presence of language – the emphasis on immersion programs, the fact that it is a common resource of multiple ethnic identities in Louisiana - may prove to be influential. In

the end, the longevity of a francophone identity in Louisiana may be a question of seeing how many choose, as Laurie and others did, to make French an essential part of their ethnifying.

## CHAPTER 5 - COLLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

### 5.1 Describing a distinct group

In the previous chapters, I have addressed answers related to two specific questions: one on the image and reality of French-speaking Louisiana, and the other on a personal sense of connection to one's roots. In exploring these questions, I have considered the ways in which collective identities are molded into stereotypical images (that are accepted or rejected, partially or fully, by the participants) as well as ways in which individuals make personal claims to a collective identity via personal, interpersonal, and social resources. In this final chapter, however, I focus on the nature of the collective identity itself (or the collective identities) in Louisiana and I have chosen to look at the interviews as a whole, focusing on certain key terms that are repeated across interviews and across questions.

Before elaborating on these specific terms, I would like to note that an ongoing debate in other academic circles significantly influenced my decision to investigate them. In recent years, historians and geographers have discussed and disputed the concept of Louisiana exceptionalism – the belief that Louisiana is (or is not) fundamentally different from the rest of the United States. Campanella (2014) warns academics against falling prey to the lure of exceptionalist discourse when studying Louisiana, noting that “Louisianians overwhelmingly lead lives that, save for some vestiges of dissimilarity such as Mardi Gras, would be immediately recognizable, if not identical, to those of other Americans” (p. 25). Cannon (2015) responds in defense of exceptionalism, maintaining that ideology is an inevitable influence on any approach, and that anti-exceptionalist scholars are simply emphasizing the mundane instead of emphasizing the exceptional. In the end, each scholar does concede – to some degree – the other's point: Campanella does not believe in casting off exceptionalism entirely, but rather in questioning it

further, and Cannon admits that there is a sort of “vulgar exceptionalism” found in inane platitudes that can make even proponents of exceptionalism – a more thoughtful, nuanced exceptionalism – roll their eyes. Nonetheless, their arguments demonstrate the opposing sides of the debate on exceptionalism in Louisiana, or rather, of *a* debate on exceptionalism in Louisiana. The two scholars reside in and focus their arguments on New Orleans, though they sometimes extrapolate them to include Acadiana or south Louisiana as a whole. In my own research, I am less concerned with making arguments for Louisiana exceptionalism, than I am in examining how this discourse is accepted, ignored, or adapted by the participants.

Despite prior exposure to the debate, I did not initially think to incorporate it into my own research. It was, in fact, the data that influenced my decision to revisit the concept. The first term that attracted my attention when looking at the interviews as a whole was the word “unique.” The adjective “unique” and its nominal form “uniqueness” were used by seven of the twenty participants, and as I read and reread the transcripts, I began to notice the repeated use of other, similar terms. None of these terms were a part of my interview questions, and yet they naturally arose in the vast majority of the interviews. I also noticed that these terms often coincided with pronominal forms of the first person plural (“We are unique,” “our unique culture”). I became interested in better understanding the real referent or referents for this “we.” In this chapter, I will examine all participants’ use of terms of distinctiveness, as well as analyzing the use of the first personal plural by one particular participant, Vera.

I decided on four terms - “unique,” “special,” “different,” and “exotic” - and reread all of the transcribed interviews looking for these terms. I recorded the number of instances of each according to the participant, and included in that number the use of derivatives (e.g. “uniqueness,” “difference”). Because I was looking for signs of a shared ideology about

Louisiana francophone culture, I only included instances where these words were used to directly distinguish south Louisiana, its people, or an aspect of its culture from the rest of the world. For example, I did not record Frank's account of his Acadian ancestors arriving "in an environment where there was a lot of disease, sickness, um, different kinds of animals, different land, wet, subtropical environment." The use of the word "different" in this story is not intended to suggest that Louisiana is distinct from any other place, but to describe the difficulty in changing from one environment to another.

I also did not include extremely personalized instances of the terms such as Eric's use of the term "special" to describe some of his friends who do activist work for the French language. In speaking of a scholar who has been at the forefront of the movement to sustain and develop Louisiana French for many decades, he says: "I just love everything about her; she's special." In this case, the specialness is attributed to a particular Louisianian and not to the people of south Louisiana in a collective sense.

Of the four terms, "different" is the most commonly used, with 27 instances across ten interviews. This is not surprising, considering that "different" is a more general, commonplace term than the other three and is likely to occur more frequently in everyday speech. The second most frequent is "unique," used 14 times by seven participants. "Special" is the third most common; five participants use it a total of 13 times. Lastly, there are seven instances of the term "exotic" across four interviews. In total, these four words are used 61 times by 14 participants. Although six participants do not ever use these specific terms, some of them do espouse similar beliefs; when appropriate, I will make note of these comparable, less quantifiable instances.

At times, the terms are used to describe the state or the Acadiana region in an overarching sense; "I never really considered this place as being different than any other place until I

**Table 5.1:** Four terms used to describe Louisiana and/or its culture

Pseudonym	UNIQUE	SPECIAL	DIFFERENT	EXOTIC
Albert				
Amelia		1	1	
Bill	1			
Claire				
Christian			9	1
Danielle		7		
Eric	1	2	2	2
Frank				
Geraldine				
Herman			1	
Jacob		1	1	3
Jenny	3		3	
Laurie	1			
Nate	2	2	1	1
Norris			5	
Paul				
Rose				
Sarah	5		1	
Thomas			3	
Vera	1			
<b><i>Instances:</i></b>	<b><i>14</i></b>	<b><i>13</i></b>	<b><i>27</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>

moved,” Jacob explains. Danielle also talks about it in this way when she describes how she sees tourists experience the area: “I think people who come and visit have a huge respect for who we are and have a huge respect for our culture and our language and how tight it is, but I think it takes them awhile, a couple visits to fully understand how special Louisiana is and how special the Cajun culture is and how special French Louisiana is.” This outsider’s perspective is echoed in Laurie’s comments that when she travels and people from other states and countries learn that she’s from Louisiana, they react as if she is from “a fairy tale land.” In instances like these, Louisiana is presented as being almost inherently infused with this quality of uniqueness; the participants do not feel the need to clarify why the region is special, but simply present its specialness as an accepted notion. This is ‘Louisiana exceptionalism’ in action.

In other instances of an exceptionalist discourse, terms like “unique” and “different” are used to describe the people who live in Louisiana. When asked about his ties to his roots, Thomas (who identifies as Cajun and shows a marked preference for referencing the Cajuns when he talks about French-speaking south Louisiana) begins to posit about “the differences between a Cajun and an American,”<sup>48</sup> citing disparate mentalities towards work as well as family. He revisits this same idea in a later question about the relationship between language and culture. He explains that he learned Spanish as a foreign language and spent some time in Central America, but that he feels that learning a language that belongs to another region of the world is not the same as speaking French in Louisiana: “People who come from a region, they have a different, uh, they have a different worldview, and it’s made of your place.” He goes on to say that someone who moves to Louisiana as an adult, might “act like a Cajun,” but that something fundamental – he references the “blood,” “heart,” and “truth” of a Cajun – would be missing, presumably because his or her worldview was not informed by growing up in Acadiana.<sup>49</sup>

Often, the particularities in question are linguistic. A number of people distinguish between international varieties of French and Louisiana varieties of French. Eric talks about his experiences traveling to other francophone regions of the world and navigating the situation linguistically. He frequently refers to terms specific to Louisiana French as “bijous”<sup>50</sup> and says of them: “But these are words that we have developed because these were unique to here. Like a *chaoui* [*raton laveur*, raccoon]. That’s not even a French word; it’s an Indian word.” Vera also talks about “the uniqueness of [Louisiana’s] language,” and “the fact that you can have just the richest conversation with a person that uh, is, you know, is not [...] dotting all the i’s, crossing all

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<sup>48</sup> Originally: “*La différence entre un Cadien et un Américain, je crois, c’est...*”

<sup>49</sup> Originally: “*faire comme un Cadien*” and “*sang*,” “*coeur*,” “*vérité*”

<sup>50</sup> Here, he is pronouncing and pluralizing a French word as if it were English: [biʒuz]



the t's, pronouncing all the vowels." While Vera focuses on the enjoyment of speaking in a linguistic environment that has a loose relationship with international norms, others present the differences between Louisiana French and international varieties of French as a source of confusion and misunderstanding. Rose says that she has trouble understanding "the real French" sometimes, though she and her interlocutor can generally make things work. On a number of occasions the standard French that Louisiana children are learning in immersion schools is presented this way. In talking about local children learning French in school, Herman states that their French is "kind of different from [his] French,"<sup>51</sup> although he then brings attention back to the interview itself, and expresses that he is happy to be speaking French with me, the interviewer (presumably despite the differences in our ways of speaking and the occasional comprehension issues that stem from them).

Other aspects of culture, apart from the French language, are described as unique. While discussing the image of Louisiana, Nate expresses that the population of Louisiana is too diverse to be accurately described by one depiction, but that the media chooses the most exotic of the available depictions:

People that hunt alligators or you know, do stuff er, like, they go trapping in the swamp or something I feel like that's a good um, exotic thing that people can put on TV and people are like, 'Oh wow! that's really like, different you know?'

While hunting and trapping are not necessarily a part of the everyday life of the majority of south Louisianians today – and certainly not in the life of Nate, a young man from urban Lafayette Parish who works in an arts field – the uniqueness of these practices makes them iconic, at the very least to outsiders.

Nate's reference to rural hunting and trapping is the only use of one the four chosen keywords in direct reference to a cultural practice in Louisiana, but the idea behind it – that

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<sup>51</sup> Originally: "*Le français qu'eusse apprend a l'école est manière différent que mon français à moi.*"

Louisiana cultural practices are unique – is fairly common. Danielle asserts the uniqueness of her culture in response to the question about what Louisiana looks like without French. After insisting that French is an integral part of Louisiana’s specialness, she begins delineating between Louisiana customs and those of neighboring Texas and Mississippi: “They don’t talk like we do; they don’t eat like we do; they don’t enjoy themselves like we do; they don’t work like we do.” Interestingly, there is a mixture here of more concrete aspects of culture (dialect, cuisine) and less concrete ones (joie de vivre, work ethic).

Ideas like joie de vivre and work ethic also come into play in discussions of cultural values, another source of “difference” according to many participants. In many cases, this discussion sounds similar to Thomas’ description of the “difference between a Cajun and an American,”<sup>52</sup> although in these instances, the participants are more direct in their treatment of the subject. In discussing values systems, these differences seem less like inherent qualities and more like choices, albeit choices that are so frequently agreed upon as to become a part of the culture. Christian gives the clearest example of this ideology:

When we go up to like the other places, we're in New York, and you meet someone, the most important thing to know about a guy is what he does for a living, you know what I'm saying? It's like, uh, oh he's a doctor or he's—and that's how, that determines your status in the community. Whereas here it's like, man, he makes the best sauce piquante. You know what I'm saying? Uh, a guy the other day was talking about, ‘Man, you got to meet this guy, he makes the best couche couche,’ and went on and on about this guy, and I'm like, ‘I don't even know what he does for a living!’ Whereas anywhere else you'd that’s the first thing you'd find out about him. [...] It's a different hierarchy of of uh, importance on everything we look at, and it's really based around the food and the culture.

He immediately goes on to cite music as another area where the people of south Louisiana value things differently. He feels that when he has traveled, he hasn’t seen the same fervor for live,

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<sup>52</sup> Originally: “*différence entre un Cadien et un Américain*”

local music that he sees in Acadiana. He concludes by saying: “So I think here we take an appreciation of those kind of things, um, that other places don't.”

In Christian’s example, the “different hierarchy of importance” is treated in a lighthearted, though still meaningful, way. This idea is presented in a more serious way by Norris when he talks about the legacy of his great-grandfather; he claims that in a period of divisive racial rhetoric and ideologies, “we were taught differently.” He then credits this difference to the influence of his Creole culture and to the Catholic faith that he associates with it. Whether he sees his culture and faith as the sole or even the main influences in this instance is not clear, but he plainly ties the ideas together.

## **5.2 A Louisiana without French?**

Many - though not all - of these examples come from a specific question in the interview: “What does a Louisiana without French look like?” As mentioned in a previous chapter, this question evoked strong reactions from the participants. Many of them seemed almost incapable of answering the question. Upon hearing the question, Amelia laughs and begins to codeswitch before returning to French: “Oh, « that » - ... *ça c'est un bon!*<sup>53</sup> ... *Hm....*”

Several participants gave very simplistic answers, offering up another nearby place: “Arkansas.” “Mississippi.” Others did the same with the city of Shreveport, which is in northern Louisiana. Some went on to explain these answers, but a few seemed content to leave it at that, feeling that such a direct statement needed no further explanation. Albert, for example, answers the question with one word, “Mississippi,” and after a moment of laughter, says nothing more. Presumably, places like Mississippi and Arkansas and Shreveport do not need to be ‘explained’; they are the ‘norm’ and their image can be conjured up by merely stating their names. This

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<sup>53</sup> Translation: “That’s a good one!”

indifference towards other places is perfectly displayed in Danielle's response to the question: "What does a Louisiana without French look like?" - "A boring version of everywhere else."

Following her immediate response, Danielle goes on to explain that she sees French as the source of Louisiana's uniqueness. She is not alone in this reaction; Bill expresses a similar attitude when he hears the question: "Like every other state," he answers, "I mean, we, we're, to me, we're just unique." In Christian's interview he expresses the idea that French's presence is proof of Louisiana exceptionalism by use of an anecdote:

You know, I, I saw a comedian one time say something like, "You know in the South we think we have our own country. We were our own country at one point, for a very short period of time, but still, we have that still, that whole South kind of thing, too. The South is not American; we're southerners and everybody else is something else." And then the comedian says, "But in Louisiana, they really believe it. [*laughter*] Cause they got their own language and everything."

This joke made by a non-Louisianian is not relayed during the question about a Louisiana without French, but during the question about other groups to which south Louisianians might "feel akin." He goes on to say that in some respects (attitudes towards family, towards faith, etc.) he feels like your average Southerner, but at the same time, Louisianians are "still even, even different than that." He does not continue, however, to say what those specific differences are, other than the aforementioned reference to Louisiana's "own" language in the joke he tells above.

The acknowledged link between French and Louisiana exceptionalism begs the question: "Can Louisiana still be unique without French?" Answers like Danielle's and Bill's would seem to suggest that it cannot. Similarly, participants like Claire have trouble accepting a Louisiana without the French language. Claire calls a hypothetical Louisiana without French "a foreign

country,<sup>54</sup> while insisting that Louisiana's situation turns the tables on the idea of so-called 'foreign languages' in the United States, French being anything but foreign to her.

A request for clarification brought up a very important distinction in people's conception of the relationship between the French language and Louisiana exceptionalism. Laurie's first response to the question is to ask "If French didn't exist [in Louisiana] at this moment, or if French never existed [in Louisiana]?"<sup>55</sup> I hesitate in my response, but decide to rephrase it to say "Today, we wake up: no more French!"<sup>56</sup> After explaining that she takes this to mean that French had existed in Louisiana but was no longer found there, she begins talking about what she sees as aspects of culture that are not dependent on language use. Without French, she feels, "people are going to keep doing the same things they've been doing for 200 years."<sup>57</sup> She also describes a more relaxed approach to life that she calls "our francophone reality" and "our culture."<sup>58</sup>

This statement from Laurie does not come without complications, however. She expresses a certain hesitancy to say that Louisiana can still be the unique place it is commonly conceived to be without the French language: "People are going to be mad if I say things like, like that. I mean, like, it's really treasonous to say things like that, but French – if there's no more French, the culture will exist anyway."<sup>59</sup> She is certain enough of this belief to express it on multiple occasions, but as an activist she does not relish the idea of language loss, nor does she claim that all other Louisianians and activists share her perspective on a hypothetical Louisiana that has completely lost its heritage language.

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<sup>54</sup> Originally: "*un pays étranger*"

<sup>55</sup> Originally: "*Si le français existe pas à ce moment ou si le français a jamais existé?*"

<sup>56</sup> Originally: "*Ok. Aujourd'hui, on se réveille: plus de français.*"

<sup>57</sup> Originally: "*Les gens va faire les mêmes choses qu'ils fait depuis toujours depuis 200 ans.*"

<sup>58</sup> Originally: "*notre réalité francophone [...] notre culture*"

<sup>59</sup> Originally: "*Des gens va me/ me/ vont être fâchés si je dis des choses « like » comme ça. « But, like » c'est vraiment trahissant de dire des choses comme ça, « but » le français, s'il y a plus de français la culture va exister quand même.*"

She clearly distinguishes this post-French Louisiana reality from the idea of French never being a part of Louisiana in the first place; in the latter case, she says, people would be “*américain*,” before countering: “But we’re not that. We’re entirely unique from other states.”<sup>60</sup> In this example, a historical French presence is necessary to create the unique culture, but discontinuation of the language does not doom Louisiana to a fully Americanized, culturally homogenous fate. Paul also expresses this belief quite clearly, saying: “[Without French,] I think our, our lifestyle, our culture, our cuisine, our joie de vivre is strong enough to where we could distinguish ourself from any, from other communities in the country. I don’t think we would be homogenized with someone else.” He does not use one of the four keywords I have previously discussed, but the ideology is the same: Louisiana is distinguishable from other parts of the United States. Furthermore, it will continue to be such even if French is no longer spoken there.

Conceptions of a post-French Louisiana and a Louisiana without the formative influence of French are evident in the way participants answer the question, even if they are not always as direct in their explanation as Laurie. Some state that “a Louisiana without French” is soon to be a reality, focusing on the language loss situation. Others, however, immediately interpret the question to be about French’s historical influence on Louisiana. Geraldine uses the word “different” in her response, but I did not count this usage in my analysis of keywords because she is not directly stating that Louisiana is different from other places, but that without French, it *would be* different than it currently is: “Louisiana without French. Wow. Uh, take away a lot of our um, food items it would take away a lot of our uh, ways of recreation I guess.” She mentions local styles of dancing and French-centric festivals, before summarizing: “So that that would be totally different for Louisiana without French.” As Geraldine is a monolingual anglophone who nevertheless participates in traditionally francophone cultural practices, it would be illogical to

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<sup>60</sup> Originally: “*Mais on est pas ça. On est tout à fait unique que des autres états.*”

assume that she feels these practices are in danger with impending language loss. Instead, she sees Louisiana cultural practices as being formed as a result of French's influence.

Not all participants are as clear in their delineation of which practices make up Louisiana's distinctive culture and of the role French plays or does not play in them. Regardless of whether the participants see French as a formative influence or a continued necessity for Louisiana exceptionalism, they all express regret or fear at the idea of language loss. There is no consensus, however, as to what would be lost if French is no longer spoken in Louisiana. Intermixed with discussions of a unique "way of life" and "joie de vivre," are statements like Paul's immediate follow-up to his quote above about a Louisiana that can still "distinguish" itself: "I think we'd still have some distinction but without the French we wouldn't have the, that, you know, I think, you know, there's no place in the country like South Louisiana." This quote from Paul is a perfect example of an ideology that seems ubiquitous in this corpus of interviews: the ideology that the continued use of French is important<sup>61</sup> to Louisiana's exceptionalism, but that no one can easily express why or how it is important. Paul begins to explain what would be lost if French does not continue in Louisiana, but has trouble formulating his thoughts and eventually settles on simply repeating that south Louisiana is a unique place in the US.

In addition to this reticence or inability to describe the specific role language plays in Louisiana exceptionalism, there are several instances of particularly questionable arguments for exceptionalism. Jacob, for example, explains that the special quality that he was unable to find in his life outside Louisiana was a sense of community. He describes this sense of community by commenting on the fact that even in boats on the same body of water, people where he is from have the habit of waving to each other: "It's just this really weird thing! People just wave. It's

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<sup>61</sup> Importance here is distinct from necessity. Whether or not French is absolutely *essential* is debated, as can be seen.

like you acknowledge other people, and um, and I probably never would have thought twice about that unless I lived away and came back.” This conceptualization of a different attitude in Louisiana is no doubt informed by the specific place where Jacob lived when he left Louisiana: a major metropolis in the northeastern United States. It is only natural that his experience in this large city was different than his upbringing and current lifestyle in rural Iberia Parish; what is less clear is why many Louisianians choose to attribute to south Louisiana qualities that otherwise might be considered aspects of rural Southern culture.

A combination of these two concepts – that of the difficulty of expressing why French is vital to an exceptional Louisiana and of the fluid lines between south Louisiana culture and Southern US culture – is apparent in Danielle’s response to the question of the relationship between language and culture. When asked if they are dependent on each other or if the two should be considered separately in Louisiana, she responds that they could be considered as separate, but that it is “better” to see them as one entity:

Our culture, the way we do things, um, the kind of people that we are, just the southern hospitality, I think that’s all going to exist whether we have French or not. But, I think it’s just that much better when the two meet each other because it, it just kind of brings back those, it brings back the times of the old days. It’s not like , um, it’s just it’s so much better I think.

In the first half of this quote, it seems as if she is describing her Louisiana culture as a culture of “southern hospitality.” This would run against exceptionalist discourse, since any other area of the southern United States could be seen to make similar claims. Yet, in reality, her claim is actually similar to the ideology behind the joke that Christian shares about Southerners and Louisianians. Danielle believes that without French, Louisianians will still have a form of Southern exceptionalism, but that they will be missing something else. Like Paul, she has trouble putting what would be missing into words. She first describes it in terms of keeping ties



to the past, but unsatisfied with that answer alone, tries to reformulate her thoughts and eventually settles on the idea that a Louisiana with French is “just so much better” than one without French.

### 5.3 Diversity

If the difference inherent to south Louisiana is difficult to define, it may be because of the diversity of experiences within south Louisiana. The keyword “different” is often used to describe internal differences in Louisiana, although not as often as it used to separate Louisiana from other places. I have not included this kind of usage in counting the number of times keywords were mentioned, but it is nevertheless important to see how a spectrum of difference is found in the mentalities of participants.

When asked the question about the hypothetical interdependence or separation of language and culture, Eric insists that they are intertwined. To prove his point, however, he makes a connection between dialectal differences in Louisiana and difference in culinary practices:

You go to the Waterbottom area, the Houma-Thibodeaux area: *ça parle différente que nous-autres*.<sup>62</sup> You go to, and you don't have to go far on the prairie either, sometimes going one community to the next. I'll give you an example, all comes back to cooking and... What we call *un vrai courtbouillon*<sup>63</sup> in my community, my clo- *un village* and not Eunice, I'm talking about in town, Mamou or Ville Platte, they make it different. *Un courtbouillon* to us, it's a white gravy. And, and, and, and to them is *avec des tomates*, and you would never put tomatoes in *un vrai courtbouillon* where I grew up because you would disguise the taste with tomatoes every time you taste the white.

The three communities he mentions – Eunice, Mamou, and Ville Platte – are all within a 30-mile radius of his hometown. Still, he uses them as evidence of “different subcultures, if you will.”

The existence of these subcultures, or their intermixing, is sometimes seen as what makes Louisiana unique. In describing the essence of her Cajun heritage, Jenny says: “I kind of talk

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<sup>62</sup> Translation: “They speak different than us.”

<sup>63</sup> Translation: “A real courtbouillon.” Courtbouillon is a stew like dish often made with fish..

about it as, like, just a big blend of people.” She gives a brief overview of Cajun history, mentioning their origins in France, the influence of Micmac culture, the Spanish, the Creoles, and others. While she has clearly taken an interest in Cajun history, she is not a historian and does not go into great detail about the specifics of each influence. She sees these influences as formative, however, summarizing at the end of the response with the following: “The story that I tell about what it is to be Cajun I guess has to do with, like, where we traveled from but then also, like, who we met along the way.” She also claims that non-Louisianians often do not seem to understand this heterogeneous heritage, wanting to classify her as “French” or “Spanish” or part of a specific Native American tribe. Jenny, on the other hand, relishes the fact that “Louisiana is such a diverse area,” and she believes that Cajuns are more accepting of the ambiguity involved in a diverse ethnic background.

Before the first question is even asked, Sarah begins the interview by talking about the diversity of Louisiana language and culture. Sarah’s interview is one of the longest in the corpus, and because she clearly had so much to say, I began recording while still discussing the format and structure of the interview itself, afraid that I might otherwise miss some interesting data. She begins the recorded interview, saying:

I can just uh, perhaps, in, into the uh, interview, I could uh, say some of the, the terms we say in Creole French and what is uh, um, European French, and then what's Cajun French, you know; it's three different deals we dealing with here you know, with the dialect especially.

She then goes on to refer to it as simply “French,” and to note that there are dialectal differences found in various towns: “New Iberia, St. Martinville, Arnaudville, Leonville.” She concludes her discussion of it by saying: “It's a mixture of you know, how uh—and it's unique, that's what makes it so, that's what makes it so unique.” Similarly to the direct statements linking the

existence of French in Louisiana to the source of its uniqueness, this statement is directly attributing exceptionalism to the *diversity* of French in Louisiana.

These two participants, Jenny and Sarah, have vastly different backgrounds. Jenny is a Caucasian woman in her 20s from the more urban Lafayette Parish and Sarah is an African-American woman in her 70s from rural St. Landry Parish. In the above statements, they both associate themselves with a specific ethnic identity (Cajun and Creole, respectively) while expressing an appreciation for the influence of other ethnicities. Both women also display an attitude toward that diversity which emphasizes commonality. Jenny sees commonality in terms of history, and Sarah in terms of language. Immediately after remarking that “Cajun” French and Louisiana Creole are “different deals,” she maintains: “You get together and everybody really, and whatever, communicates, everybody understands each other. There's something about that connection of, of, of being, speaking French.” Interestingly, she ends up saying that the act of speaking French is what is shared, but her original impulse is to claim that the commonality is something that Louisianians *are* (“being”).

This emphasis on both diversity and community is echoed in Vera’s interview as well. Vera, like Sarah, is an African American woman from St. Landry Parish who identifies as Creole, although she a generation younger than Sarah. When asked about whether or not she feels akin to any other communities, she cites the Cajuns. She worked very closely with customers during her tenure at a local branch of a large national corporation, and enjoyed speaking French with many of these customers: “Because I knew how to speak French Creole, um, I could communicate with the um, Cajun cultures as well in the different, in their different regions from Abbeville to uh, Breaux Bridge, to Ville Platte.” Here again, these different towns and villages - the “subcultures” that Eric mentions – are seen as disparate parts of a larger

community. Vera describes them as linguistically diverse but affirms that she is able to communicate with all of them. In her description of the linguistic situation, she chooses to use an adjective that can be very loaded in a minority language context: “broken.” While some lament the label of “broken French,” Vera’s use of the word “broken” is markedly different: “You know, actually, Creole and Cajun are not really languages,” she claims. “They are some broken patois, and the, because they are, every region put their own little flavor on it, it’s in— will they break it here, or break it there?” The choice to not classify them as “languages” would seem to suggest a devaluing of their forms, and yet, their varied forms are precisely what Vera appreciates about varieties of French in Louisiana. Being “broken,” in her view, is not a defect in language, but a natural part of language use. She insists that she “enjoys” hearing these linguistic markers of identity, and the experience seems to build a sense of community in her rather than diminish her connection to other Louisianians of different backgrounds.

#### **5.4 Use of the first person plural**

Within this discussion of uniqueness and diversity in Louisiana, another set of questions emerges: How do Louisianians of strong French-speaking roots simultaneously negotiate the differences amongst themselves as well as the difference between Louisiana and the rest of the world? Is being Cajun, Creole, or Houma the source of their uniqueness, or is it being Louisianian? As is evident in her expressed sense of kinship to Cajuns, Vera is one of the clearest examples of a participant who flexibly shifts between collective identities throughout the interview. Emphasizing or de-emphasizing a particular collective identity is an entirely banal part of life as an individual in society. Vera can and does choose to highlight various aspects of her identity: as a parishioner at her church, as a member of a certain generation, etc. What is of

interest to me in this section, however, is how she shifts between expressing her ethnic identity in terms of a Creole culture and doing so in terms of a south Louisiana culture.

I have chosen to examine this shift by looking at her use of the first personal plural (*we*, *our*, *us*, etc.). I do not include in this discussion of a flexible identity the restrictive use of the first personal plural; if it is clear that she personally knows all the other individuals she is including in her concept of “us,” then the collective identity at play is of a very different variety. I also have chosen to ignore instances where she uses a collective “we” in response to my phrasing things as such in the question. I only am interested in instances where she openly and spontaneously refers to a collective Creole or Louisiana identity with terms like “we,” “our,” or “us.”

Prior to any use (by myself or by Vera) of the first person plural, she uses the words “French Creole” and “French” to describe her mother, noting that her mother referred to herself as a “French woman, a French lady.” She describes the language that her parents spoke as “Creole, or French Creole” before saying that by listening to their conversations (and subsequent exposure to the language) she learned to speak “Creole and French.” When she describes her roots, she references her mother again, this time describing her as a “Creole woman.” All in all, for the first several minutes of the interview, she seems to favor the label “creole,” but occasionally references the idea of an identity that is “French.”

The first instance of a collective ‘we’ is found in response to the question: “Do you feel akin to any other communities?” It is here that she makes mention of the shared linguistic aspect of “Cajun” and “Creole” varieties of French, presenting them as generally mutually comprehensible in her experience. She then transitions, however, to a discussion of the evolution of the two cultures, commenting on the development of the Cajun culture: “The Cajun

culture took the negative of the, you know, exile of Acadians um, and turned it into rebranding, and it became not only positive, but a marketing the um, the entrepreneurship that followed.” Meanwhile, she asserts, the Creole culture was “left behind.” She laments this fact, saying: “I believe that those two cultures should have been developed together because of the fact we were formed together.” This first instance of a collective south Louisiana “we” has clearly defined referents, “Cajun” and “Creole,” although she goes on to describe the historical “fusions” of “Creoles,” “Acadians,” “Africans,” and “Indians,” describing them as “the cultures of southwest Louisiana.”

The next use of the first person plural is more ambiguous. Continuing her discussion of the cultural development gap between Cajuns and Creoles, she calls for action: “My determination is, well, we need—it's not a catch up, but we need to make sure that any time you come to southwest Louisiana [...] you going to talk about the Creoles, you going to talk about zydeco. [...] We going to rebrand and we going to positively let folks know - and especially Creoles - to get them to embrace and adapt that culture.” The first two uses of “we” (“we need”) have no clear referent. The next instance suggests that it is likely a strictly Creole referent; “rebrand” used without a direct object as it is in this case implies reflexivity, that the Creoles will rebrand themselves. Still, the Creole collectivity referred to in this “we” is likely a subset (though not restrictive) group of Creole activists, as evidenced by the fact that this “we” will be reaching out to the “Creoles” themselves.

Vera’s uses “we” again in the following question, but this time gives a clear referent. When asked about her abilities in the French language, she admits that she feels much more confident after she has spent time in a strictly francophone environment, like “Haiti or one of the islands.” Explaining the boost that this environment gives to her linguistic confidence, she says,

“Because I’m talking maybe every day you know; we don’t, we don’t generally do that.” While this “we” has no referent she immediately uses the pronoun again: “But we’ve started also the uh, the *Latab*<sup>64</sup> in the St. Martinville area.” She then cites other activist efforts to create and maintain French tables (that is to say, temporary exclusively francophone environments) in Acadiana before stopping mid-sentence to clarify her referent: “I think we doing, we doing some uh – I don’t mean us as an organization. I’m talking about the Louisiana as a culture.” This use of an “us” that is explicitly qualified as “Louisiana as a culture” suggests that her previous sentence – “We don’t generally do that” – could be taken to mean “[People in south Louisiana] don’t generally do that.” This reference to collective habits, as well as the activist efforts behind the numerous French tables she mentions, reveal a shared experience of Louisiana francophonie: one of being an extreme minority looking for ways to carve out a francophone space in everyday life.

In contrast to this direct naming of the referent for “we,” the next few uses of the first personal plural are far more subtle. When asked about a Louisiana without French, she jokes: “I don’t think it’s a Louisiana. I think it’s one of uh, we’d probably have to sell it off like the uh, Louisiana territory!” In the next question about the image of Louisiana, she responds that Hollywood often portrays specific things that are “part of our culture but only a glimpse of it.” The first usage is casual; she could have just as easily replaced “we” with an editorial “you” (“you’d probably have to sell it off”). The latter, however, is a clear reference to an overarching south Louisiana culture. It is evident from the remainder of her answer that she does not mean “our (Creole) culture” here, but “our (Louisiana) culture.” The images she cites juxtapose Louisianians against “people that don’t live here” and make no specific mention of Creoles. In fact, her comments about the “craze” of reality television shows almost certainly take into

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<sup>64</sup> *Latab*, or 'table' in Louisiana Creole, is the name of a local French conversation group.

account images of Cajuns as images of what she calls “our culture,” since the most popular contemporary reality television show filmed in south Louisiana (*Swamp People*) is largely centered on self-identified Cajuns.

In the remainder of her answer to the question of images, she once again shifts to using “we” in an activist sense. The following instances refer to herself and others who work in the cultural sector or for cultural tourism in Louisiana: “We’re really doing our job to sell the state when it comes to tourism, but we’ve got to continue. We don’t just stop there.” Although this “we” is more restrictive than some of the other instances of the first person plural, it still does not constitute a restrictive “we.” Vera does name specific collaborators both prior to this instance and later on in the interview, but she certainly would recognize that she does not know all of the people working to promote culture and cultural tourism in south Louisiana. Yet, to examine this semi-restrictive use of the first personal plural, it is worthwhile to examine the individuals she does reference by name.

In total, she refers to four people by name as people with whom she has collaborated in local activism. Early on in the interview, the collaborators she mentions by name are people of color: one is a local, self-described “black Creole”<sup>65</sup> and the other an African-American priest from another part of the country who was assigned to the region for many years. In her discussion of collective efforts for cultural development and cultural tourism, however, she mentions non-Creoles. Specifically, she mentions the lieutenant governor (who is Caucasian and does not have strong family ties to francophone Louisiana), and two activists in Lafayette: one, a francophone European who has lived and worked in Acadiana for many decades; and the other, a local who has shown in his activism that he feels strongly tied to the Acadian aspects of his

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<sup>65</sup> Though I do not include his name here, I have read written accounts of this individual, a prolific activist in his parish, referring to himself as a “black Creole.”



Cajun heritage. The latter two individuals she references when using a restrictive “we”: “These are good friends of mine. We worked on a lot of projects together.” While this restrictive “we” is certainly not equivalent to the semi-restrictive “we” she uses a few minutes earlier, the fact remains that she identifies specific collaborators in her efforts to promote culture, and that while these collaborators may have clear ties to French, they would not be considered Creole. She also returns to a collective “we” when summarizing the project on which she collaborated with these two non-Creoles from a neighboring parish; she asserts that the project could benefit not only “us in Louisiana” but the entire United States. Here she is building upon what she reports the European colleague saying to her when he offered his organization’s financial support to send Vera to an international conference. The colleague said that it “would be good for southwest Louisiana” if Vera went to the conference. With these two francophone but non-Creole collaborators being mentioned in between semi-restrictive (local activists) and non-restrictive references (“us in Louisiana”) to a “we,” it can be posited that Vera sees the collaboration of Creoles and non-Creoles as an essential part of developing and sustaining local communities.

In spite of her showing a preference early on for the label “Creole,” Vera generally seems to favor an open and inclusive view of Louisiana francophonie in her use of a collective “we.” Even so, there are instances of her choosing a specifically Creole collective identity in the latter part of the interview. In her response to the question of stories that tell the history of francophone Louisiana, she relays three stories she finds iconic and summarizes the series of anecdotes thus: “So we, we’ve had a lot of influence um, being influenced by a lot of greats.” There is no clear referent for “we” here except perhaps “French Louisiana” as stated in the question, but this use of the first person plural comes at the end of a lengthy response. The fact

that she only produces it a number of minutes after its use in the question makes me inclined to consider it a spontaneous instance of “we.”

Who, then, is the referent? One very strong possibility is that the referent is the Creole population. This is supported by Vera’s choice of “greats.” All three of the iconic stories that she shares focus on African-Americans and/or Creoles. That being said, the emphasis is not always on their race or their Creole identity. The first story she tells is about the “freedom fighters” in her small community, people who fought for their civil rights in the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. These individuals are more associated with an African-American ethnic identity, and not necessarily with a Creole history (although there were in all likelihood Creoles among them, given her community’s francophone heritage).

The second and third stories she recounts, however, are about Creole musicians. The first is Amédé Ardoin, the legendary accordion player who in the 1920s wrote and recorded some of the most famous songs in traditional Louisiana music. The last “great” is also a beloved Creole musician: Clifton Chenier, whom she calls “King Clifton,” as a nod to his popular title as the “King of Zydeco.” Yet, although they are Creole, they are not presented as exclusively Creole icons. Vera notes that Ardoin is widely considered “the father of Cajun [music] and zydeco.” This is not an inaccurate epithet; his songs can be commonly heard in south Louisiana dance halls and at festivals today, being interpreted by Cajun and Creole musicians alike. As for Chenier, the aspect of his story that Vera emphasizes is his tenacity in the struggle to make music. Now, he doubtlessly met resistance because of racial biases as well as anglophone cultural hegemony; this being noted, it is the cultural resistance that she specifically discusses: “He went on to win the first Grammy in that music, that didn’t even have a category for zydeco at that time, by the resilience of uh, him playing the music that he grew up to play, not switching

it for a dollar.” She goes on to suggest that people today can learn from his example by using their passion and their love of their culture to “evangelize,” borrowing a religious metaphor.

Her account of the story of Amédé Ardoin’s death includes a collective use of the first personal plural as well. Ardoin died after being severely beaten in a racial hate crime. The popular story, which Vera partially recounts here, is that he was playing at a house dance for a Caucasian family he knew well, when the daughter of the house offered him her handkerchief to wipe his brow. This gesture (and, Vera adds, his growing popularity with audiences, regardless of race) disturbed some of the Caucasian men in the audience, who attacked him afterward.

After telling the story of his death, Vera shares what she feels can be learned from it:

So, that is always the case, [people] want to stamp out what is good first. And we cannot allow those things to happen. If we do it on our own, those things can happen. If we do it as a community, and the more we get people that are actually involved to do the work, that can’t happen.

The exact nature of the “work” that needs to be done “as a community” is ambiguous. That notwithstanding, the overall thrust of her argument is to take the story of a Creole musical pioneer who crossed racial boundaries through his music and to call for greater collaboration instead of isolated community activism (“do[ing] it on our own”).

Vera’s final spontaneous use of a collective “us” is once again activist in nature. When asked where she sees things going for the future of French in Louisiana, she makes a call for a greater appreciation of the economic benefits of culture and for locals to fully recognize the value of their heritage. She phrases this in terms of what “we” need to do: “If we used our same models that other people come to study about us here [... to] fall in love with who we are all over again, and we use those same models, believe it or not, when we turn those dollars back into our own community seven times, we keep developing more and more businesses to be sustainable.” She is proposing a view of the future where Louisianians do not have to choose between

focusing their efforts on cultural development or emphasizing economic development, but instead can combine the two.

### **5.5 Ethnic boundaries, shared culture, and exceptionalism**

To explain in detail the complex nature of concepts of “us” in south Louisiana, I chose the simplicity of discussing a single participant. I chose Vera not only because she has so many instances of a collective first person plural, but also because she is representative of a trend I noticed whereby the choice to see a unifying multi-ethnic identity for Francophones in south Louisiana (even if that identity is hard to name<sup>66</sup>) was somewhat more prevalent in the four Creole participants. Shifting between an ethnically-restrictive “Cajun” or “Houma” concept of “us” and a broader “south Louisiana” concept of “us” is seen in interviews across the social categories (ethnicity, age, gender, parish of origin, etc). However, this discourse is more frequent and salient in the interviews with Creoles. The two Houma participants also talk about Cajuns and the parallels with their own culture, but not with quite as much fluidity as Vera, who darts back and forth between a Creole “we” and a south Louisiana “we” and openly shares her own beliefs about collaboration between communities.

As for Vera, I think it is likely that her level of community activism (an activism that is sometimes, but not always, cultural in nature) has strongly influenced the openness of her collective south Louisiana identity; having worked with Louisianians and French speakers of various backgrounds is no doubt influential to her conception of a south Louisiana or francolouisianais community. When looking beyond Vera’s interview to the entire corpus, however, I have considered two possible explanations for why people of color would be more

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<sup>66</sup> I choose to call this identity “francolouisianais,” but, as I have previously stated, this term is very rarely used and might possibly be incomprehensible to your average Cajun, Creole, or Houma, who would be more likely to call it “south Louisiana,” “southwest Louisiana” (to distinguish it from New Orleans’ culture in the southeast), or simply “Louisianian,” thereby completely erasing the parts of Louisiana that show a more anglophone Southern American heritage.

likely to display this habit of conceptualizing a multi-ethnic, francolouisianais “us.” The first is that the hegemony of the Caucasian-Cajun viewpoint - the *cajunization* of Louisiana as some have called it - obliges them to adapt their own viewpoint to include less restrictive boundaries for “our culture.” It is possible that ethnic minorities within French Louisiana feel obligated to align themselves with the Caucasian majority – a majority that most often calls itself Cajun, regardless of the variable strength of individual ties to Acadians – in order to ensure that their voices are heard at all.

Another possibility is the influence of the interviewer. I am Caucasian, and while I never present myself to the participants as “Cajun,” they may assume that I identify as such based on my physical appearance and ties to French in Louisiana. If this is the case, they may emphasize collaboration with other Francolouisianais from different backgrounds more readily because they are taking part in such a collaboration by doing the interview. For a person of color with strong French roots, discussing Louisiana with a Caucasian Louisianian of strong French roots could already be considered an act of finding common ground.

Vera makes overt statements about sources of common ground. When asked about the interdependence or the separation of language and culture in Louisiana, she laments the fact that they have gone through a partial separation due to the imposition of English. In addition to this separation, she also references the human separations present in the population and calls for a greater sense of community: “The common denominator for all barriers is to, to be brou—to be torn down is to enjoy yourself, to eat together, to have a good time. And music can do that, music and dancing can do that.” In this quote, she is speaking specifically about zydeco music and Louisiana festivals.

This is the combination of the two ideas presented in this chapter: (1) that culture is what separates Louisianians from other Americans, what makes south Louisianians “unique”; and (2) that culture is what unites south Louisianians to each other. This culture includes more than just musical styles and foodways; it is also shared history and hardships. Eric mentions the *Grand Dérangement* and its effect on the collective Cajun psyche today, but while stating that it has had lasting effects, he adds in the recognition that African-American Creoles have a similar historical experience: “[this aspect that] the Acadians have, *les Créoles noirs aussi*, but we have a similar DNA.” The “DNA” he is speaking of here is not genetic makeup, but a cultural legacy. Norris, a Creole, compares the experience of the Acadians to that of the Israelites in the Bible, and speaks with admiration of their ability to overcome adversity. Curtis, a Houma Indian, talks about a similar experience of language loss between Louisianians of different backgrounds: “The white people who speak French are, they’re like the Indians. They’re doing the same thing. The Indians and the white people are doing the same thing, I’ve said. They’re losing French.”<sup>67</sup>

As is seen earlier in the chapter, the participants often have a hard time describing what will be lost if the French language is ever completely separated from the culture. This difficulty in explaining what French means to their culture, the strength of Louisiana exceptionalism in their discourse, and the insistence on the language as a major formative influence on the culture – the combination of all of these factors - leads me to believe that there is a shared *affective* aspect of their individual linguistic identities that allows for the possibility of a singular francolouisianais identity. To frame this in terms of Fishman’s (1991) perspective on reversing language shift, they are individually trying to determine the exact nature of their “language-in-culture” and what it means to be an “Xman via Xish” as opposed to an “Xman via Yish.”

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<sup>67</sup> Originally: “Le monde qui est blanc qui parle français est/ c’est comme des Indiens. Ils sont après faire la même chose. Les Indiens et le monde blanc sont après faire la même chose, que j’ai dit. Ils sont après perdre le français.”

Fishman's terms are rendered more complex here. The "Xman" might be said to be Cajun, Creole, or Houma, but "Xish" and "Yish" would likely be agreed upon: French and English.<sup>68</sup>

The affective aspect, and the value of linguistic activism it promotes, helps to reframe the question of identity in Louisiana. With the impending loss of its "unique" culture (or cultures) to a culturally-homogenized Anglo-America, the Louisianians interviewed seem to see the value of maintaining an ethnolinguistic community. As Danielle states: "I think um, you know those organizations, all the organizations that promote Cajun, Cajun French, French, Creole, Zydeco, whatever, you know, it's, I think it's all going to help perpetuate the culture." This quote is iconic for two reasons. First, her inability to give a single label for the traditionally French-speaking populations of south Louisiana is a ubiquitous issue in the corpus. Second, she recognizes that what is good for one subgroup of francophone Louisiana culture is good for all.

The idea of a common francolouisianais identity is often subtle in participants' responses, but in one of the interviews, it is stated quite clearly. In the section of the recorded interview before the official interview questions begin, Sarah and I talk about the linguistic contrasts between Louisiana French and Louisiana Creole. While she asserts that there are clear differences between the varieties, she insists that those who speak them manage to negotiate their way to mutual comprehensibility and that the distance between the two is over-emphasized. She goes on to say:

They really tried to term the thing as "What's the difference between Creole and Cajun?" and all this kind of stuff. It's not a race of people. It's a culture of people. It's heritage and tradition [...] That's the main thing: love of self, love of culture, love of community, love of family - all that encompasses a culture of people, you know? So you can't just focus on one little thing and you stay on that a hundred years and in the meantime, you're losing out on a whole lot of things that we could have accomplished.

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<sup>68</sup> There would be an exception to this consensus if the individual were to insist on the linguistic distinction between Louisiana French and Louisiana Creole. In that instance, the concept of "Xman via Xish/Yish" is further complicated.

Interestingly, some of the ways in which Sarah describes culture in this quote are not that “unique” to francophone south Louisiana. Presumably, people in Mississippi or Arkansas love their families as well. Yet, echoes of this quote can be found throughout the corpus, and if I were to read this quote to the other 19 participants, it is very likely that most would agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment. The “love of family” is certainly not exclusive to the traditionally francophone communities of Louisiana, but the strong sense of Louisiana exceptionalism in this population creates an intersubjective reality where they believe that “love of family” means something different to them. It is, in fact, difficult to separate the sense of Louisiana exceptionalism from the affective aspect of francophone culture in Louisiana. Whether Louisianians of French roots feel exceptional because their heritage matters to them a great deal, or whether their heritage matters to them a great deal because it makes them feel exceptional could be debated, but the link between the two is evident.

Some of the clearest examples of this intersubjective reality can be found in discussions of the difference between Acadiana and northern, traditionally-anglophone Louisiana. When asked about the image and reality of Louisiana, Christian first begins talking about *Swamp People*. This mention of a reality television show calls to mind for him, another nationally-televised reality show that was at the height of its popularity at the time of the interviews, *Duck Dynasty*:

Or even, like, the Duck Commander, which is not French Louisiana. That's up in Ruston, right? That's as far from this culture as you can think of, but they're like, “Hey you know those guys?” I'm like, “No that's like a whole state away, a whole culture away.”

*Duck Dynasty* is set in West Monroe, Louisiana, roughly 30 miles east of Ruston, though both small cities are near universities in north Louisiana. West Monroe is a 75-mile drive from Marksville, the parish seat of Avoyelles Parish, the northernmost parish in Acadiana. When one



compares this 75-mile drive to the 122 miles between Marksville and Lafayette (the so-called “heart” of Acadiana) or the 178 miles that separate Marksville from Houma, the southernmost parish seat in Acadiana, one can see that West Monroe is certainly not geographically “a whole state away” from Acadiana. It is harder to contest, however, that it is not “a whole culture away,” particularly to individuals who have a strong idea of a south Louisiana identity.

The stars of *Duck Dynasty*, the Robertson family, are outspoken members of the Church of Christ rather than followers of a Catholic tradition. Despite marketing a few products with a “Cajun” label (notably, a line of spices) and the occasional reference by pop culture enthusiasts to the show’s “Cajun redneck” culture,<sup>69</sup> the family has never publicly made mention of any francophone roots, and they display a very Southern US identity.<sup>70</sup> Willie Robertson, the patriarch’s son, has even stated in an interview that when he met Jacob Landry of *Swamp People* fame, “he [Landry] had that thick Cajun accent and I couldn’t hardly understand what he was saying.”<sup>71</sup> He has since befriended the Landrys, citing the similarity of their experiences in reality TV.

*Duck Dynasty* may serve as an example of the lack of awareness of the cultural differences between north and south Louisiana in the minds of outsiders, but the participants in this corpus appear to be very aware of the difference. When asked to describe a Louisiana without French, Norris replies, “Well there's part of Louisiana without French, you know. You go to northern Louisiana, and I don't want to be judgmental, but there is a difference within the spirit there.” He goes on to describe this spirit as “not community, it's not family, it's not, it's not the hospitality, the warm feeling that you get when you get to southwest Louisiana.” There are

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<sup>69</sup> An instance of this language is found in Drew Magary’s 2013 article for GQ magazine, an article that is now infamous due to the inflammatory language Phil Robertson uses in it when referencing homosexuality.

<sup>70</sup> See Hernandez (2014) for a discussion of masculine Southern identity in *Duck Dynasty*.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.bestofneworleans.com/blogofneworleans/archives/2012/05/11/interview-willie-robertson-of-aandes-duck-dynasty>

echoes here of Sarah's perspective on the ties between concepts of family and south Louisiana culture, but similarly to Sarah's perspective, Norris' perspective might very well be refuted by those who would insist that *Southern* hospitality is very present in north Louisiana. Fortunately for the purposes of this analysis, Norris goes on to speak more specifically about the difference and gives a very clear link that forms the basis of his belief:

There, it's almost like an independent, each for their own [mentality...] you recognize only that little area that you live in. Here, I think even though it's, you know, you know, the, the language is kind of separated, it's still connects us even though it's no longer pre—present to us as it was before, it, you know I think we pride ourselves in that history and the accomplishments of that.

This excerpt from Norris' interview is a solid example of the belief that French formed south Louisiana as different, but he is also particularly clear in his description of a present-day south Louisiana that is actively holding on to that heritage. The difference between south and north Louisiana, according to this logic, is that south Louisiana is proud of its francophone heritage and the sense of community that comes with sharing it whereas north Louisiana cannot claim a francophone heritage. As I have previously stated, others (particularly, people from north Louisiana) might contest Norris' view of his region's exceptional status; they might claim to have a sense of community born out of a north Louisiana identity or support the idea of Southern exceptionalism, but the fact remains that they cannot use the presence (historical or contemporary) of a distinct language to do so. As the unnamed comedian that Christian mentions explains it: the South may claim that it's a "different" country, "but in Louisiana, they really believe it. 'Cause they got their own language and everything."

## CONCLUSIONS

The preceding study is not an ethnographic study of Cajun, Creole, or Houma identity, in the sense that it is not a study of what it means to be a Cajun, a Creole, or a member of the Houma Nation. On occasion, the participants may have formulated their responses in this way, making a direct statement on what these labels mean, but the overarching theme behind these interviews is the intersection of language, culture, and identity in a community that is undergoing and striving to combat language shift. The focus is on French, rather than ethnicity. This being said, it is not a comprehensive view of French-speaking Louisiana, either. It is a corpus of twenty individuals. I was compelled to choose different kinds of people because of the nature of the study, but diversity is clearly a hallmark of the experience of francophone Louisiana, and a small corpus of twenty severely limits the ability to fully investigate that diversity. Indeed, the guidelines for the corpus project under the *Le Français à la mesure d'un continent* grant were both an asset and a limitation in this way: I was free to choose any age, ethnicity, etc., but the project was specifically looking for a corpus of 20 individuals who were influential in their communities. Had I interviewed random Louisianians chosen from the street, my results would have no doubt been drastically different.

For example, this corpus includes interviews with native Louisianians only, but the influence of foreign-born Francophones in the Louisiana French-speaking community has been significant for many decades now. The first few directors of CODOFIL were foreign-born, and French-speaking governments from Québec to Belgium continue to this day to sign agreements with Louisiana to send French teachers to its vast network of immersion and 'French as a second language' programs. Many of these teachers leave after one to three years due to visa restrictions or personal preference, but some of them choose to make Louisiana their home

(particularly, in the case of those who marry locals and decide to raise families in the region). Their experience would be an interesting perspective to examine, but did not seem to be easily compatible with the current study and its questions, so I chose not to interview them.

It cannot be said to be a thorough study of any of the individual questions. The last question of the interview – “Where do you think things are headed for French in Louisiana?/To whom do we look for direction in the community?” – could easily be expanded to be a study in and of itself. Some of the participants in this corpus went on at length in response to this question, and other shied away from it. They are not experts in language planning or representatives of CODOFIL<sup>72</sup>; they are Louisianians, influential in their respective circles, but individuals nonetheless. The interview, while semi-structured, was largely conversational, and although I generally followed the same questions in the same order, I did not seek to extract neatly comparable answers from the various participants.

The study is an exercise in using qualitative research to study linguistic culture from the perspective of local knowledge. I highlight the word exercise here, because in many ways, this fieldwork was a testing ground to encourage more research that simultaneously examines the variety of ethnic groups that speak French in Louisiana. The answers to the questions in this corpus are a form of local knowledge, and the analysis is qualitative, because it seeks to deepen already established quantitative knowledge about French’s place in Louisiana. The decline of French in Louisiana can be documented demographically, and large-scale quantitative surveys can assess whether the ability to speak French (or ‘some French’) is a commonly considered a requirement for authenticity in one’s choice of ethnic label. They cannot, however, describe

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<sup>72</sup> Official perspectives on these particular questions are of interest to me as well, but the inclusion of anyone directly associated with CODOFIL would have created an imbalance in the corpus; I deemed this imbalance undesirable because of the availability of official perspectives – through media interviews, official websites, etc. Moreover, CODOFIL carries more sway as a brand in south Louisiana. Speaking from personal experience, I doubt many Louisianians - even among those who feel strong ties to their French heritage - could name the director of CODOFIL. A few of the participants in this corpus are more familiar with the individuals that make up CODOFIL’s board and office, but this is because they are themselves involved in linguistic activism.

what French means to Louisianians. My hope is that my dissertation can be used in conjunction with this kind of quantitative research, or even to adapt the specific questions and approaches of these quantitative surveys.

My objectives in this study were multiple: I sought to document local knowledge about the relationship between language and culture in francophone south Louisiana, to contribute to the dialogue of ideological clarification in this community, and to present alternatives to the classic ethnic paradigm that has often guided research on French in Louisiana. None of these objectives can be said to have been fully achieved, as they are part of ongoing processes, but the information in this corpus gives further attention to some often overlooked aspects of the situation of French in Louisiana.

In Chapter 4, I made note of a reticence on the part of participants to fully accept or reject images of Louisiana, both negative and positive ones. Language shift has certainly complicated the notion of authenticity in the region, and the approach I took did not leave me with a clearer idea of the discrete qualities that accurately describe the Cajuns, Creoles, or Houma. In order to determine these qualities, one would need to revisit a study like Dubois and Melançon's (1997) "Cajun is dead – Long Live Cajun," adapting it for the changes the community has undergone in the last twenty years.<sup>73</sup> What the findings of my research do help to elucidate, however, is the attitudes towards the categorization itself. The participants in this corpus embrace the complexity of Louisiana French identity, often resisting outsiders' attempts to classify the culture and people of the region with stereotypes. Now, this desire to challenge oversimplification may be a personality trait particular to the type of individuals I chose to study: people with wide

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<sup>73</sup> For example, the very first classes of French immersion students were beginning to graduate from high school in the late 1990s, with many major programs (such as the Lafayette Parish program) still in earlier stages. Immersion programs are discussed several times in this corpus, and the overall shift that its presence in south Louisiana has had on the francolouisianais relationship to French could be the object of extensive study. Notably, it would be worthwhile to consider the effect of immersion programs on what Heller (2010) calls "the space between language-as-skill and language-as-identity" (p. 103).

social networks and, in many cases, leadership roles in their organizations or small communities. Alternatively, it may be owed to the format of the interview; conversations allow significantly more room for complexity and ‘gray areas’ than survey forms, a difference that shows the opposing strengths of qualitative and quantitative data.

While someone may or may not agree with the way something is worded on the form, the researcher likely will not get to hear a clear explanation of the reasoning behind it, as one hears in Laurie’s interview when she talks about the reason why she doesn’t consider language and culture to be entirely one and the same. She asserts that her ability to speak French does not make her more “*Louisianaise*,” and that her cousin (who continues many cultural practices) should not feel that he is not “*assez Cadien*” (“Cajun enough”) because he cannot speak the language. Without any reference to theory, she explicitly communicates Fishman’s (1991) idea of a *part-whole relationship* between language and culture. She may have chosen to focus on the language aspect of culture, to “ethnify” by “linguaging” (Garcia 2010), but she does not wish to dictate to others that her choice is the only acceptable way to be ethnic. When looking at this phenomenon across answers in Chapter 4, I am inclined to think that French-speaking Louisianians (and their linguistically-assimilated children and grandchildren) are wary of shibboleths and firm requirements for being ethnic; having been told that the only way to be accepted as part of American society was to cast off their native language, they are less than eager to turn around and make similar demands for those wishing to consider themselves “Cajun” or “Creole” or “Houma,” particularly when many of these monolingual Anglophones are their family and friends.

This trend being mentioned, there is a great deal of insecurity around linguistic ability in Louisiana all the same. Jenny herself admits that despite her strong connection to her Cajun

identity, she feels that people who can speak French are “*real* Cajun” or “so much more Cajun than [she is].” Expressions of discomfort regarding participants’ French ability (or lack thereof) are ubiquitous in this corpus. As someone who lives in Acadiana, I have noticed this linguistic insecurity repeatedly in my interactions with Louisianians of French-speaking heritage, and its presence is hardly a major discovery of this research. However, certain responses in the interviews did fundamentally alter my perception of this insecurity.

In Chapter 5, I discuss Laurie’s choice to use her grandfather’s being punished at school as justification for her connection to her roots. As I have stated before, the story of children being punished at school during the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century is a very common one. My mother told it to me about my grandparents when I was a child, and I have heard it countless times throughout my adult life from people who find out that I study and teach French for a living. The insistence on this particular narrative began to trouble me more and more as I got older and better understood the reasons for language shift in Louisiana. Knowing that people stopped speaking French not only because of punishment at school, but also because of numerous economic, historical, technological, and geographical changes, I wondered why people always seemed to tell the same story about French in Louisiana, and why they seemed to have chosen a story that so clearly focuses on victimization. I expected to hear this narrative while creating this corpus, and was unsurprised when it cropped up in several interviews. Yet, its presence in Laurie’s interview intrigued me. Laurie is a staunch activist, who consciously chose to learn French and who consciously chose to do this interview in French; she would hardly be considered a victim of her linguistic circumstances, and yet this story makes up a significant portion of her answer to the “roots” question.

This strange juxtaposition leads me to the conclusion that linguistic insecurity in Louisiana is not as simple as previously thought. It would appear that the generations of Louisianians born into predominantly English-speaking home environments are also born into a sort of existential question: “Why don’t you speak French?” This question is openly voiced in the interviews by Jenny, who states that when she insists on the French (rather than the English) pronunciation of her last name and claims her “Cajun French” identity in front of outsiders, she is often asked the same question: “They’d be like, ‘Oh, so, you speak French?’ and I’d be like, ‘No.’ And it was just kind of, like, sad.” This kind of discomfort with one’s lack of language ability might push someone to emphasize a narrative of victimization, where speaking French is clearly not a matter of freely made choices.

Jenny expresses the question as something that outsiders ask her, but there is clearly an internalized aspect to the question. As I mentioned earlier, even a fluent French speaker like Laurie is not immune to it. In her case, the question is not “Why don’t you speak French?” but “Why isn’t French your first language?” When asked what makes her feel tied into to her French cultural roots, her answer is effectively an explanation of why she was obligated to learn French at school, rather than in the home. Those who see identity in terms of a clear-cut native language - that those who speak French first are Francophones and those who grow up speaking English are Anglophones, and that the two labels are exclusive – might not be inclined to see Laurie as a “Francophone.” Despite some early exposure to it in the home, French is her second language. What is evident in her responses, however, is that French is *not secondary to her identity*.

If, in the younger generations, this ‘eternal question’ suggests a strong sentiment that something was taken away from them without their permission, the older generations express



frustration with a lack of agency as well. Herman articulates this idea quite poetically in his interview. In the section that asks what a Louisiana without French looks like, he responds:

You'll lose something big. You'll lose something good. [...] I can see it in Isle à Jean-Charles. It was all French people there. But coastal erosion made pretty much everyone leave. It will be the, it will be the same for French [...] No one showed the others how to speak French. And, and... and it's like Isle à Jean-Charles. Isle à Jean-Charles is disappearing. And one day, people will say: "Oh, that's where Isle à Jean-Charles was, but it's not there anymore. French isn't there anymore either."<sup>74</sup>

Isle à Jean-Charles is an island off the coast of Terrebonne Parish whose population, majoritarily American Indian, is being forced to resettle due to the drastic erosion of the island's landmass.<sup>75</sup>

It is worth noting that when Herman makes this parallel, he does include a human, non-environmental factor, but speaks in very general terms. He does not say here that parents did not speak French to their children, or that the government did not support French in the state; he simply says that "no one showed the others how to speak French."

The sense of loss that accompanies Herman's discussion of language shift and coastal erosion is palpable, and although their expression of it may be less poetic, I saw evidence of the same sentiment in other older native French-speaking participants. The reactions of native speakers, L2 speakers, and non-speakers of French seen above confirm Ryon's (2005) assertion that the literature on language shift in Louisiana often misses the psychological mark. In terms of ideological clarification, these reactions tap into the "why" of RLS movements. This affective aspect of the relationship to a heritage language may be downplayed by those who see it as a mere symbol in a fading, symbolic ethnicity, but if French is going to survive in Louisiana, it

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<sup>74</sup> Originally: *Tu vas perdre de quoi de gros. Tu vas perdre de quoi de bon. [...] Je peux voir à l'Isle à Jean-Charles. C'étaient tous des Français là. Mais « coastal erosion » a fait sortir le monde proche. Ça, ça va être le – ça va être pareil pour le français. [...] Personne l'a/ personne a, a montré à les autres comment parler français. Et, et, ... et c'est comme l'Isle à Jean-Charles. L'Isle à Jean-Charles après « disappear ». Et un jour, le monde va dire : 'Ah c'est là où l'Isle à Jean-Charles était, mais il est plus là. Le français est plus là, non plus.'*

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Isle à Jean-Charles is also the geographical inspiration for the fantastical setting (only called 'The Bathtub') of the movie *Beasts of the Southern Wild* that is mentioned several times in Chapter 3. For more information on this resettlement project, and the dramatic environmental issues that have made it necessary, see [coastalresettlement.org](http://coastalresettlement.org).

will be largely due to the ties Louisianians feel to it and the role it plays in their lives. The emotional experience of language shift can be seen not only in Louisiana, but in other minority language communities that feel under threat as well. In Quebec, for example, there is a consistently expressed fear of shifting too far towards English. Interestingly enough, the example of a worst case scenario for language shift is often Louisiana; recently, *Le Journal de Montréal*'s Gilles Proulx warned Québec of the “Louisianisation” that threatens the province in an article rather pessimistically titled “Le Cajun mort-vivant” (Proulx 2016). While it is not mentioned by the participants in this corpus, Louisiana’s status as a ‘cautionary tale’ for other minority francophone societies cannot be without effect.

I am far more optimistic than Mr. Proulx about French in Louisiana, but even if the language achieves a more stable status in the region, Louisianians will be processing what Dubois quite poetically calls “the loss of a francophone universe”<sup>76</sup> (2016, p. 161). This loss, while profound, might have a silver lining in its potential to draw together people of disparate backgrounds. It is likely that the strength of individuals’ attachments to the ideology of Louisiana exceptionalism also has a role to play in the future of French in Louisiana, since it has a great deal of support both from ‘insiders’ (Louisianians) and ‘outsiders’ (those who seek to depict Louisiana).

There remains a great deal of ideological clarification that has not yet been resolved by RLS proponents in Louisiana. They must find ways to make French more instrumental and economically valued, facilitate language learning in older learners while maintaining and building upon the successes of early immersion education, ground the French being promoted in its historical Louisiana roots while negotiating intra-regional variation, and strike a balance

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<sup>76</sup> Originally: “*la perte d’un univers francophone*”

between accurately representing the diversity of Francophones in Louisiana and presenting a united movement for the language. These are not simple tasks. To speak to the last goal, however, activists and academics might do well to consider adapting concepts like Brubaker's (2002) idea of *groupness* to capitalize on opportunities for and to study unified action in such a diverse collectivity. As Brubaker describes it:

Shifting attention from groups to groupness and treating groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of—and, potentially, to account for—phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring or definitionally present. (Brubaker 2002)

In Chapter 6, I demonstrated continual shifts from a more restricted traditionally ethnic identity to a broader francolouisianais identity by analyzing one participant's (Vera) use of the first person plural. I hope that other researchers can find ways to incorporate this flexibility into their perspectives on French Louisiana. There is a great deal of meaning attached to the French language in Louisiana; ideally, leaders of and individuals involved in efforts to safeguard its future will find a way to harness the energy behind people's attachments to propel the movement forward.

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## APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

### PERSONALITIES CORPUS – Questions, Themes

#### 1. PERSONAL HISTORY

- A. Can you describe where you were born/grew up?
- B. Do you have any childhood memories of French being spoken around you?
- C. What made you decide to go into this line of work/join this organization/etc.?

#### 2. CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

- A. On a personal level,
  - a. what makes you feel tied to your French cultural roots?
  - b. do you feel akin to any other communities – French speaking regions or countries of the world? Or other communities that are in a minority language situation?
  - c. do you speak French? How do you feel about that? When/how did you start speaking French?
- B. Do you see the language and the culture of French Louisiana as two separate entities or are they dependent on each other?
- C. What does a Louisiana without French look like?

#### 3. IMAGE AND REALITY

- A. What is the image of French Louisiana that is presented to the outside world?
  - a. (whether it be the tourism industry, Hollywood, or even individual travelers)
- B. Do you think this is an accurate depiction of the Louisiana you live in? What do you agree/disagree with?

#### 4. WHAT IS ‘FRENCH REVIVAL’

- A. Many people talk about a revival of French in Louisiana. As you see it around you today, what kind of project is that revival?
  - a. Is it an *academic* project where we change the way we teach the younger generation? Is it a *social* project where we change the way we support language and culture in our communities? Is it a *personal* project, where each individual is making his or her own choices about what to pass on in their family/circle? - *In short, what is the focus of the revival movement that we are experiencing today?*
  - b. Can you give some instances of ways that you or people you know have worked toward a(n) academic/social/personal revival?

#### 5. LOOKING BACK

- A. In your mind, what are the big ideas of our history in French Louisiana? What are the stories we tell to help people understand who we are, or even to remind ourselves of who we are?

#### 6. LOOKING AHEAD

- A. Where do you think things are headed for French in Louisiana?
- B. How do you feel about the direction of things?
- C. To whom do we look for direction in our community?

## APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FRENCH)

### CORPUS PERSONNALITÉS – Questions, thèmes

#### HISTOIRE PERSONNELLE

- A. Est-ce que tu peux me décrire l'endroit où tu es né(e) – la ville, la communauté?
- B. As-tu des souvenirs de ton enfance dans lesquels les gens parlaient français ?
- C. Pourquoi as-tu choisi cette profession/cette organisation/cette activité ?

#### CULTURE ET LANGUE

- A. Pour parler de ton expérience..
  - a. qu'est-ce qui te fait sentir lié(e) à tes souches franco-louisianaises ?
  - b. est-ce que tu te sens proche à d'autres communautés – des pays ou des régions francophones - ou des communautés de langues minoritaires ?
  - c. comment est-ce que tu as commencé à parler français ? Quelle est ton attitude vers le fait que tu parles français ?
- B. Vois-tu la langue et la culture de la Louisiane comme deux choses séparées – ou est-ce que l'un dépend de l'autre ?
- C. Selon toi, qu'est-ce que c'est – la Louisiane sans le français ?

#### IMAGE ET RÉALITÉ

- A. Quelle est l'image de Louisiane qu'on présente au monde ? (celui présenté par Hollywood, par les guides touristiques, ou même par les individus quand ils voyagent)
- B. À ton avis, est-ce que cette image est correcte ? Avec quelles idées es-tu d'accord/n'es-tu pas d'accord ?

#### LA RENAISSANCE FRANCO-LOUISIANNAISE

- A. Souvent, on entend parlé d'une renaissance du français en Louisiane. Comme tu le vois autour de toi, actuellement, quel genre de projet est cette renaissance ?
  - a. Est-ce un projet *pédagogique*, où on change la manière dont on enseigne la jeune génération ? Est-ce un projet social, où on change la manière dont on soutient la langue et la culture dans la communauté ? Est-ce un projet *personnel* où chacun fait son propre choix – qu'est-ce qu'ils vont continuer dans leurs cercles/familles ? En bref, est-ce que ce projet que le peuple de la Louisiane est en train de faire, est-ce au fond un projet pédagogique, social, ou personnel - ou bien quelque chose d'autre ?
  - b. Est-ce que tu peux me donner des exemples de ta participation dans ce projet ou de la participation des gens que tu connais ?

#### REGARDANT EN ARRIÈRE

- A. Selon toi, quelles sont les grandes idées de l'histoire de la Louisiane francophone ? Quelles sont les histoires qu'on raconte pour nous expliquer au monde, ou même pour nous rappeler de notre identité ?

#### REGARDANT VERS L'AVENIR

- A. Où va-t-elle, la Louisiane francophone ?
- B. Qu'est-ce que tu penses de la direction de la Louisiane francophone ?
- C. Vers qui ou vers quoi est-ce qu'on se tourne pour la direction ?

## APPENDIX C – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION CHART

Pseudonym	Parish	Generation	Sex	Identifies as	Ling. Cat.	Interview in
Albert	Lafayette	A	M	Ambiguous	FOC	English
Amelia	Terrebonne	A	F	Houma	NF	French
Bill	Cameron	A	M	Anglo	Outlier	English
Claire	St. Landry	A	F	Cajun/France	NF	French
Christian	St. Landry	B	M	Cajun	LAF	English
Danielle	St. Martin	C	F	Cajun	LAF	English
Eric	Acadia	B	M	Cajun	NF	English
Frank	Lafayette	B	M	Cajun	FOC	English
Geraldine	Lafayette	C	F	Creole	LAF	English
Herman	Terrebonne	A	M	Houma	NF	French
Jacob	Iberia	C	M	Ambiguous	LAF	English
Jenny	Lafayette	C	F	Cajun	LAF	English
Laurie	Vermilion	C	F	Cajun/France	FOC	French
Nate	Lafayette	C	M	Ambiguous	Outlier	English
Norris	Lafayette	B	M	Creole	LAF	English
Paul	Lafourche	B	M	Cajun/France	FOC	English
Rose	Acadia/Laf	A	F	Cajun	NF	English
Sarah	St. Landry	A	F	Creole	NF	English
Thomas	Lafayette	B	M	Cajun	NF	French
Vera	St. Landry	B	F	Creole	FOC	English

Generation: A (born before 1950), B (born between 1950 and 1965), and C (born after 1965).

Identifies as: Based on how they refer to themselves in the interview. *Ambiguous* = they never refer to themselves as Cajun, Creole, etc. *Cajun/France* = they refer to themselves as Cajun but also stress the fact that they had ancestors who came directly from France.

Linguistic Category: as outlined in Chapter 2 - NF (Native Francophone), FOC (Francophone of Choice), LAF (Linguistically Assimilated Francolouisianais), and Outliers.

Interview in: The language the participant chose for the interview.

## APPENDIX D – IRB APPROVAL

### Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight



Institutional Review Board  
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
 131 David Boyd Hall  
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
 P: 225.578.8692  
 F: 225.578.5983  
 irb@lsu.edu  
 lsu.edu/irb

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

-- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://research.lsu.edu/CompliancePoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item24737.html>

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.  
 \*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator: Marguente Perkins Rank: PhD student/Research Asst.  
 Dept: French Studies Ph: 578-0452 E-mail: mpark12@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each  
 \*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

Dr. Sylvie Dubois

IRB# <u>E8273</u> LSU Proposal #
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Complete Application
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Subjects Training

3) Project Title: Personalities Interviews  
part of  
le Français à la mesure d'un continent

Study Exempted By:  
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
 Institutional Review Board  
 Louisiana State University  
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
 225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
 Exemption Expires: 4/15/2016

4) Proposal? (yes or no)  If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either  
 This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant  
 OR  
 More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students) native Louisianians

\*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature [Signature] Date 4/8/13 (no per signatures)

\*\* I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not-Exempted <input type="checkbox"/> Category/Paragraph <u>2</u>
Signed Consent Waived?: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reviewer <u>Mathews</u> Signature <u>[Signature]</u> Date <u>4/16/13</u>



*Consent Form  
Personalities' Interviews*

***Le français à la mesure d'un continent***  
**Information on the project**

Louisiana

Thanks to a grant by the *Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines* of Canada, the project *Le français à la mesure d'un continent* (Director: France Martineau) will lead a study on the community of southern Louisiana. Our objective is to study the different ways of living in French-speaking areas and the diversity of Francophonie in North America, within the context of everyday life.

As a participant in this project, you will be asked to discuss different subjects such as your life experiences, your work and daily life, how you use and/or perceive the varieties of French around you, and your point of view on the French language and culture of Louisiana's past, present, and future.

This informal discussion should last between 30 minutes and an hour and will be guided by a research assistant or a member of the community. It will be recorded (audio only) for the purposes of transcription and study. The interview will be done at home or in another quiet location of your choice.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose to not respond to a question and we will end the interview if you wish. We will keep your recording and the transcription in a secure office, and only the researchers will be allowed access. The recordings and transcriptions will be kept and made available (anonymously) to other researchers who are interested in French in Louisiana, if you allow it. If you ask us to stop using the data from your interview, we will respect your choice. If you wish it, we will destroy the recording and all accompanying documents. However, you will not be able to remove your data from analyses that have already been made.

When presenting the results of this research, we will present only pertinent results to groups of people, not to individuals. If you wish it, you will not be identified personally in presentations or publications.

Your participation doesn't carry with it particular risks or benefits. By participating, you will contribute to a better understanding of the heritage of French speakers and

to the success of a major research project on the French-speaking communities of North America.

After the interview, we will ask you if you would allow us to use extracts from your interview (anonymously) in our corpus.

If you have questions concerning your participation, please do not hesitate to contact:

Dr. Sylvie Dubois ([sdubois@lsu.edu](mailto:sdubois@lsu.edu)) (225) 578-6627

or

Marguerite Perkins ([mperk12@lsu.edu](mailto:mperk12@lsu.edu)) (225) 578-0452

Study Exempted By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Exemption Expires: 4/15/2016



## VITA

Marguerite Perkins is a native of south Louisiana. She left the region in 2005 to study at Fordham University in New York City. While at Fordham, she became increasingly more interested in the French speakers of her home state (having always had a fascination with her grandparents' native language) and decided to focus her studies in that direction, earning a B.A. in French Literature in 2009. She returned to Louisiana to pursue her M.A. in French at Louisiana State University, which she completed in 2011.

In 2012, she moved from Baton Rouge to Lafayette, the city at the heart of francophone Louisiana. While continuing her education at LSU, she began to involve herself in grassroots activism to promote the French language in the area. She has taught various levels of French at LSU, at *Université Sainte-Anne* in Nova Scotia, and in secondary school. Upon completion of her doctorate, Marguerite will continue to teach French and work towards a better future for French in Louisiana.