

Dissertation Proposal: The relationship between ethnicity and subject pronouns in Louisiana French

Joshua McNeill

University of Georgia

6 July 2022

Data and code available at <https://osf.io/sy7uq/>.

- 1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana
- 2 Louisiana French
- 3 Methods
- 4 Impact
- 5 References

1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana

2 Louisiana French

3 Methods

4 Impact

5 References

South Louisiana



A good place to explore fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal, 2000)

Major Ethnic Groups

Era	Creoles	Cajuns
18th century	Europeans born in the New World	Descendents of Acadians
19th century	Free people of color	–
20th century	Black South Louisianians	White South Louisianians

French is still spoken by both groups

- Creole sources: Fortier (1884), Neumann (1985), and Susberry (2004)
- Cajun sources: Brown (1988), Giancarlo (2019), Johnson (1976), Neumann (1985), and Smith and Phillips (1939)

1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana

2 Louisiana French

3 Methods

4 Impact

5 References

General Characteristics

- Explicit progressive aspect expressed with *après* (Papen & Rottet, 1997)
- /ʒ/ produced as [h] (Carmichael & Gudmestad, 2019)
- [r] where most varieties have [ʀ] or [ʁ] (Blainey, 2013)

Subject Pronouns

Variable	Description	Variants
(1sg)	1st person singular	<i>je, mo, ø</i>
(2sg.T)	2nd person singular T form	<i>tu, to</i>
(2sg.V)	2nd person singular V form	<i>vous, tu, to</i>
(imp)	Impersonal pronoun	<i>on, tu, vous, to</i>
(3sg.AF)	3rd person singular animate feminine	<i>elle, li</i>
(3sg.AM)	3rd person singular animate masculine	<i>il, li</i>
(3sg.IF)	3rd person singular inanimate feminine	<i>ça, elle, li</i>
(3sg.IM)	3rd person singular inanimate masculine	<i>ça, il, li</i>
(expl)	Expletive pronoun	<i>il, ça</i>
(1pl)	1st person plural	<i>nous, nous-autres, on</i>
(2pl)	2nd person plural	<i>vous, vous-autres, zo, tu</i>
(3pl.F)	3rd person plural feminine	<i>elles, ça, eux, eux-autres, yé</i>
(3pl.M)	3rd person plural masculine	<i>ils, ça, eux, eux-autres, yé</i>

Previous Research

- (3pl) differed between Cajuns and Houma Indians (Dajko, [2009](#); Rottet, [1995](#))
- (1sg) has been examined but not for ethnic variation (Carmichael & Gudmestad, [2019](#); Gudmestad & Carmichael, [2022](#); Klingler, [2005](#))

Research Questions

- RQ1: Do subject pronouns vary in Louisiana French between Cajun and Creole speakers, and what role does race play in this variation?
- RQ2: How does the homophily or lack thereof in the ethnic make-up of personal networks among French speakers in South Louisiana relate to variation in subject pronoun usage?
- RQ3: What do Louisiana French speakers participating in this study have to say about ethnicity and race?

- 1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana
- 2 Louisiana French
- 3 Methods**
- 4 Impact
- 5 References

Sample

- Snowball sampling (Brown, 1988; Giancarlo, 2019; Rottet, 1995)
- 30 participants \times 1 hour each \rightarrow 1,750 tokens per variable on average
- Participants identify as Creole or Cajun



Social Variables

Social Variable	Levels
French Background	naturalistic, institutional, personal
Birth Year	continuous numeric
Residence	parish
Raised	parish
Profession	blue and white collar
Education	some school, high school graduate, college graduate
Race	singular White, singular Black, bor- der, protean, transcendent

RQ1 Analysis

RQ1: Do subject pronouns vary in Louisiana French between Cajun and Creole speakers, and what role does race play in this variation?

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Pronoun} \sim & \text{Social Variables} + \\ & \text{Verb.Type} + \\ & \text{Network.Ethnic.Homophily} + \\ & (1|\text{Participant}) + (1|\text{Following.Verb}) \end{aligned}$$

- Binomial or multinomial logistic models based on the levels of the linguistic variable

RQ2 Analysis

RQ2: How does the homophily or lack thereof in the ethnic make-up of personal networks among French speakers in South Louisiana relate to variation in subject pronoun usage?

French.Frequency \sim Alter.Type + (1|Participant)

Stat	Stat	Test	<i>N</i>
Mean ethnic homophily of francophone alters	Mean ethnic homophily of non-francophone alters	Paired <i>t</i> -test	60
Mean ethnic homophily for Creoles	Mean ethnic homophily for Cajuns	<i>t</i> -test	30

- 1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana
- 2 Louisiana French
- 3 Methods
- 4 Impact**
- 5 References

- Better understanding fractal recursivity
- Better understanding the role of race in the general US on understanding of local social categories
- Add to the descriptive literature on heritage languages

- 1 Ethnicity in South Louisiana
- 2 Louisiana French
- 3 Methods
- 4 Impact
- 5 **References**

- Blainey, D. L. (2013). *First to come, last to go: Phonological change and resilience in Louisiana regional French* (PhD). Tulane University. New Orleans, LA.
- Brown, R. A. (1988). *Pronominal equivalence in a variable syntax* (PhD). University of Texas at Austin. Austin, TX.
- Carmichael, K., & Gudmestad, A. (2019). Language Death and Subject Expression: First-person-singular subjects in a declining dialect of Louisiana French. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 29(1), 67–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959269518000236>
- Dajko, N. (2009). *Ethnic and geographic variation in the French of the Lafourche Basin* (PhD). Tulane University. New Orleans, LA.
- Fortier, A. (1884). The French Language in Louisiana and the Negro-French Dialect. *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America*, 1, 96–111. <https://doi.org/10.2307/456001>
- Giancarlo, A. (2019). “Don’t call me a Cajun!”: Race and representation in Louisiana’s Acadiana region. *Journal of*

Cultural Geography, 36(1), 23–48.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2018.1500088>

Gudmestad, A., & Carmichael, K. (2022). A variationist analysis of first-person-singular subject expression in Louisiana French. *Language Variation and Change*, 1–25.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954394521000235>

Irvine, J., & Gal, S. (2000). Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation. In P. V. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities* (Paper edition edition, pp. 35–83). School for Advanced Research Press.

Johnson, J. (1976). The Louisiana French. *Contemporary French Civilization*, 1(1), 19–39.

<https://doi.org/10.3828/cfc.1976.1.1.003>

Klingler, T. A. (2005). Le problème de la démarcation des variétés de langues en Louisiane: Étiquettes et usages linguistiques. In A. Valdman, J. Auger, & D. Piston-Hatlen (Eds.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord: État-présent* (pp. 349–367). Presses de l'Université Laval.

- Neumann, I. (1985). *Le créole de Breaux Bridge, Louisiane: Étude morphosyntaxique, textes, vocabulaire*. Helmut Buske.
- Papen, R. A., & Rottet, K. J. (1997). A Structural Sketch of the Cajun French Spoken in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes. In A. Valdman (Ed.), *French and Creole in Louisiana* (pp. 47–70). Plenum Press.
- Rottet, K. J. (1995). *Language shift and language death in the Cajun French-speaking communities of Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, Louisiana* (PhD). University of Indiana. Bloomington, IN.
- Smith, H., & Phillips, H. (1939). The Influence of English on Louisiana ‘Cajun’ French in Evangeline Parish. *American Speech*, 14(3), 198–201. <https://doi.org/10.2307/451419>
- Susberry, T. S. (2004). *Racial identification and ethnic identity in Louisiana Creole people of color* (PhD). University of Houston. Houston, TX.

Questions and comments?