

Dissertation Proposal Draft

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Southeast Louisiana presents an interesting sociolinguistic environment for two reasons: The local ethnic categories – Cajun, Houma Indian, and Creole – have over time had American racial categories – Black and White – superimposed over them, and French is spoken as a heritage language in the area where it was the dominant language as recently as the mid 20th century. Much of the sociolinguistic work that has been done in the area has looked at pronoun variation in French and framed as a discussion of language death (Dajko, 2009; Rottet, 1995). This work has included ethnicity as a factor in pronoun variation, among other social factors, though the intersection of race with local ethnic categories has not been examined. Furthermore, as French in Louisiana has continued to decline, it is not clear whether those who continue to speak the language have had to broaden their personal social networks to be more ethnically diverse in order to find French interlocutors as this may additionally impact their pronoun choices. The present study aims to once again analyze pronoun variation in southeast Louisiana but not only to capture another time point as French continues to decline but to also give greater attention to the role of race in ethnicity and to explore what happens to the ethnic make-up of personal networks among speakers of a heritage language with the goal of shedding light on what is known about the role of ethnicity in language variation and heritage languages.

Ethnicity in south Louisiana generally has always been rather complex, perhaps owing to the state's tumultuous history in terms of territorial control as it was initially colonized by France then Spain then France again before the United States took control (Fortier, 1884; Johnson, 1976; Klingler, 2003). Additionally, Louisiana has also been the landing point for influxes of refugees from Saint-Domingue¹ (Debien and Le Gardeur, 1981, as cited in Klingler, 2003), Acadia² (Fortier, 1884; Klingler, 2003; Neumann, 1985), and even the Canary Islands (Klingler, 2003). The result has been two general south Louisiana ethnic categories, Cajun and Creole, and one ethnic category that is particular to southeast Louisiana, Houma Indian, all of which have been impacted by the introduction of the Black-White racial binary of the United States. In the case of Cajun, this ethnicity has historically been understood to include

¹Present day Haiti.

²Roughly the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in Canada.

Table 1: The subject pronoun system of Louisiana French in SE Louisiana

	Singular	Plural	Number
1st	<i>je</i> /ʒə əʒ hə əh zə əz/, <i>moi</i>	<i>nous, nous-autres, on</i>	
2nd	<i>tu, vous</i>	<i>vous, vous-autres</i>	
3rd	<i>il, elle, ça, on</i>	<i>ils, ça, eux, eux-autres, yé</i>	
Person			

descendants of Acadians from the Maritime Provinces of Canada and/or the French-speaking people of Louisiana (Brown, 1988; Smith & Phillips, 1939), but today members of this group are understood to simply be any White South Louisianians (Dajko, 2012). Creole, on the other hand, has historically been understood to include French and Spanish colonists and/or transplants from Haiti after the slave revolts (Fortier, 1884; Rottet, 1995), whereas today this label is generally applied to any Black South Louisianian (Dajko, 2012). Finally, for Indians, they have come to be understood as a sort of negative space in that they do not fit neatly into the Black-White binary and so have been particularly isolated even by the standards of rural Louisiana (Brasseaux, 2005).

Two of these ethnic categories, Cajun and Indian, have been included in quantitative analyses of pronoun variation in Louisiana French in previous studies where they were found to be predictive (Dajko, 2009; Rottet, 1995). This system is particularly rich compared to what is found in Hexagonal French and is summarized in Table 1. While the all of these linguistic variables are lexical in that completely different forms may be used, the 1st person singular pronoun also involves phonetic variation in that three different consonants may be used as well as metathesis. There is additionally a phonological process which causes devoicing of the consonant in certain linguistic contexts (Carmichael & Gudmestad, 2019).

The first goal of the present study is to replicate previous quantitative analyses of the subject pronoun system along ethnic lines with the addition of including speakers who identify as Creole. This will not only provide another time point for the system as it continues to decline but also implicate general American racial categories and how they interact with Louisiana ethnicities.

The second goal of this study is to expand the quantitative analysis to explore the ethnic make-up of speakers' personal networks. This factor has been found to be important in language variation in previous studies (Li et al., 1992/2000; Sharma, 2017), though it is not known how it interacts with heritage languages as they decline, nor has the ethnic make-up of personal networks in Louisiana been documented at all to date.

The third and final goal of this study is to explore speakers' discourse on ethnicity, race, and French to better understand their stances in relation to the results from the quantitative analyses. In particular, despite being a declining language, little is known about current attitudes towards French in Louisiana as the most recent study on the subject was not so recent (Dubois et al., 1995).

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