Louisiana Creole French

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LCF Geography

- Geographic Distribution
  - North to city of Natchitoches
  - East as far as Pensacola, FL
  - pockets in Lacombe, Bayou Liberty, Slidell, Bayou Boeuf, Baton Rouge, TX, & Sacramento, CA

- Geographic Zones of Concentration
  1. German Coast & Acadian Coast
  2. False River
  3. Bayou Teche
LFC-speaking Parishes in LA

- LA counties called “Parishes”
- St. Martin Parish most LCF-populous
  - Also St. Landry Parish
  - Iberia Parish
  - St. Mary Parish
  - Beaux Bridge Parish
  - Point Coupée Parish
  - Ascension Parish
  - St. Charles Parish
  - St. James Parish
Les Arcs

Louisiane

Louisiana

PAROISSES CRÉOLOPHONES
Creole-speaking Parishes

Le Texas

Méchassébbie

Golfe du Mexique
Historical Background

a. Accounts of Settler Groups
b. Characterization of Type of Contact Setting
The Creole

- ISO 639-3: lou
- French based Creole
- 70,000 speakers (most speakers older than 60)
- Less than 5% monolingual
- Ethnic population: 4,000,000
- Spoken mainly in Louisiana (communities in California, Illinois and Texas)
- Type 1 Plantation Creole
• Substrate: African languages including Wolof, Malinke, Mangingo, Bambara, Foule, Mende, Vai, Twi, Fante, Ga, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, Bini, Hausa, Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Congo, Umbundo, and Kimbundo
• Superstrate: French
History of LCF

Figure 1. Diffusion of French-Based Creoles in the New World
LCF: A Plantation Creole

European colonial expansion

specific economy

plantations largely based on European markets

Years of contact between African Slaves and French colonists
Sociolinguistic Background

a. Chronology of Language
b. Sociolinguistic Variation
c. Classification of Contact Language
Chronology (French Regime)

- 1678- French gain control of territory along Mississippi
- 1698- A French expedition establishes Fort Maurepas near present-day Biloxi
- 1719 to 1731- 6,000 slaves brought to colony
- 1755- Displaced Acadians begin to arrive in Louisiana
Chronology (Spanish Regime)

- 1768- Spanish government takes control of Louisiana Territory, in a treaty with the French
Chronology (US Regime)

- 1803- US purchases Louisiana Territory from France
- 1810- Louisiana Supreme Court presumed all mixed race people to be free
- 1900s to Civil Rights Movement- former slaves faced racism, segregation and extreme poverty
Impact of History on LCF

- The African languages of slaves were not preserved despite the fact that slaves made up 90% of the population in places like Saint-Domingue
- No pidgins, so Type 1 Plantation Creole
Just for the record: LCF vs. Cajun

Linguistic Differences

- LCF = mixture of French (& to a smaller extent, Spanish) Superstrates/West African languages & Muskogean languages* Substrates
  - i.e. LCF is NOT French
- Cajun = DIALECT OF STANDARD FRENCH
  - i.e. Cajun is NOT a Creole (no language mixing).

*Mobilian Jargon is the only surviving language spoken today by the Mobilian Indians of the Central Gulf Coast, the parents of which are members of the Muskogean language family.
LCF vs. Cajun in terms of Ethnicity

- **LCF**—3 subgroups
  1. Black Creoles (BC)
  2. Creoles of Color (CC)
  3. White Creoles (WC)

- **Cajun** – (mostly) 2 subgroups
  1. Québécois settlers (and their descendants)
  2. French colonists (and their descendants)
Historical Racial Complications

1. At one time, anyone born in LA was a Creole
2. After France sold LA, Anglicization stigmatized Creole and Cajun identities
   a. Use of French proscribed—newspapers, constitution, etc.

3. RACISM
   a. Goes both ways
   b. WCs historically stigmatized by BC/CC pop
   c. BCs experience intense racism from most whites, including WCs
   d. CCs mostly forgotten by WC/BC, 1800-1970s
      —however, do a lot to promote rights of WC/BC/African Americans in general
      —educated and affluent, establish 1st chapter of NAACP
Sociolinguistic Problems in LCF/Cajun

• Many dialects of LCF and Cajun
  • Basilectal Cajun vs. Acrolectal Continuum for LCF
• Linguistic stigmatization
  • English replaced Cajun as language of scholastic instruction during intense Anglicization of 1800s
• Cajun is experiencing some resurgence
  • The Francophonie has recently invested interest into preserving existing worldwide French dialects
  • No such luck for LCF speakers
Problems with the Census

• Likely more LCF speakers than census reports
• LCF is a stigmatized form
  • LCF speakers often hesitant to admit fluency
  • LCF speakers might admit to speaking “Cajun” or “French” instead of the actual Creole
• Most speakers are >60 and are dying off
  • If a question asks “is__language spoken at home,” the answer would be NO if a spouse is deceased...even though a native speaker can still speak it fluently
Linguistic Complications: *Ethnicity vs. Language*

Problems in **Linguistic Anthropology** of LCF:

- The speech of many people who ETHNICALLY identify themselves as Cajun is actually, from a LINGUISTIC perspective, LCF
- Likewise, many people who ETHNICALLY identify themselves as LCF actually speak a variety that might as well be Cajun
- Another reason why census information is skewed
Multilingualism Today

• LFC developed in the presence of Plantation Society French
  • Plantation Society French is mostly extinct
  • Only lasting French dialect is Cajun
• Many LCF speakers also speak Cajun
  • Dialects (basilects, mesolects, acrolects) of both languages reflect that bilingualism
• Today many old LCF speakers are also fluent in English
  • LCF not extensively passed on to today’s youth
  • Young speakers today understand more than speak
  • All young speakers are either bilingual with English,
  • or speak LCF as a 2nd language (L2) to English
Classification

- Restricted monogenesis?
- Polygenesis?
- Chaudenson’s model of creolization:
  1. small farm slaves learned approximations of Colonists’ French as L2, necessary because of slaves’ disparate backgrounds and a need to communicate with dominant class
  2. mass import of slaves; ‘socialized’ by slaves in (1), who taught them their approximations of the Colonists’ French
  3. import of slaves stopped; the approximation of the approximation of the original Colonists’ French stabilized
  4. stabilized approximation of the approximation became a creole

Issues with this model:
1. significant cultural exchange between Europeans, Africans, and Indians occurred in places other than on the small farm
2. not all slaves were plantation slaves (other duties: skilled labor, supply transportation, etc.) and many had regular contact with a variety of Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans
3. ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of slaves (primarily from Senegambia)
4. freedom of travel away from plantation estates
Linguistic Structure

a. Phonology
b. Lexicon
c. Morphology and Syntax
Phonology

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)

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<th>CORONAL</th>
<th>DORSAL</th>
<th>LARYNGEAL</th>
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<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>j*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>p b</td>
<td>t d</td>
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<td>s z f</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ι*</td>
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<td>Trill</td>
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<td>approximant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Alveolar flap instead of uvulars [r] and [ɾ].
- [ɾ], [ɻ] and [ɲ] (highlighted) are uncommon. [ɻ] is primarily used in English borrowings.
- Affricate clusters [tʃ], [dʒ] and glottal fricative [h] are present.

CONSONANTS (CO-ARTICULATED)

- Voiced labialized velar approximant
- Voiced labialized palatal approximant
Nasalization:
- Non-close vowels besides [æ] and [œ] are most commonly nasalized, but any vowel may be nasalized based on context. Contextual nasalization can occur when a vowel is followed by a nasal consonant or is close to another nasalized vowel.

Phonemic Variation in Vowels:
- [e] and [ɛ], and [o] and [ɔ] are mostly interchangeable, but not always.
- [a], [ɑ] and [ɒ] constitute one phoneme.
- [ɔ̃] can replace [ɑ̃] most or all of the time.
- White speakers utilize front rounded vowels more often in place of their unrounded equivalents.

Modified, after the IPA, Ladefoged, & Maddieson 2005.
Lexicon

- Primarily derived from French
  - Some meanings are extended (e.g. LCF *moun, mounn, monn, mòn*: ‘people’ from French *monde*: ‘world’)
  - Many nouns contain part or all of the determiner of the French noun
    - *En lamen* (a hand, from French *la main*)

- English
  - Loanword Borrowing (Valdman et al., 1998)
    - *Kan li vini STIFF, THEN ye te BANG li. Mo pans se de zafè ye mennen isi dan SLAVERY.* (When it [the drum skin] had become stiff, then they banged on it. I think these are things they brought over here [from Africa] with slavery.)
    - *Ye se HANG li UP.* (They could hang him.)
  - Calques (Valdman et al., 1998)
    - *Li galòp en chòp.* (He runs a shop.)
    - Mirrors English idiom “to run a store”; LCF verb *galòpe* means “to run”

- Also African, Native American, and Spanish influence
Louisiana Creole French SYNTAX:

*Dissecting the LCF Sentence*
But first—the parent languages!
W African Substrates: A Brief Summary

- Ex. Mandinka
  - Tonal language
  - SOV
  - Extensive reduplication
  - Ns precede Adjs.
  - Pro-drop
  - Different idea of reflexivity in V system than in French
    - ex. “dángkung” (to answer)
- Limited morphology; tense markers used
  - pre-verbal AND post-verbal
Superstrate (French) Syntax, in brief

- Usually SVO
  - Can undergo transformations to become OVS?
- Non-tonal
- Ns usually precede Adjs.
- No reduplication
- Absolutely not pro-drop (except in a few idioms)
  - Complex orthographic morphology,
  - BUT most regular Vs, 4 out of 6 forms SOUND identical
NOW on to LCF itself...

- FIRST OF ALL: Subject Verb Object
- (like most creoles)

- TP → NP (Adj. P) VP (NP) (Adj. P) (PP+)
The Noun Phrase (NP)—Structure

NP \rightarrow (\text{Indef./Poss./Quant. Det.}) (\text{Adj.}) \text{ N} (\text{Def. Det.}) (\text{Adj.})

1. Pre-nominal
   - some Descriptive: “\textit{gro danbwa}” (\textit{big} swamp)
   - all Indefinite: “\textit{tout lôt frère}” (\textit{all} the other brothers)
   - all Ordinal #'s: “\textit{primyè}” (\textit{first})

2. Post-nominal
   - Vast majority of LCF Adjs.
     - ex. “\textit{chèvœ rouj}” (\textit{red} hair)
The NP—Pronouns & Determiners

Subject Forms:

Singular
1. mo, mon
2. to (informal) vou, vo, ou (formal)
3. li

Possessive Forms:

Singular
1. mokèn
2. tokèn (informal) vokèn (formal)
3. sokèn

Determiners: Definite/Indefinite
Indefinite Determiners: en (sing.) le and de (plural)
Definite Determiners: la (sing.) and ye (plural)

Determiners: Demonstrative
Always post-posed to N
Singular (“that”): sa-la, sa-l, sa
Plural (“those”): sa-ye

Nonsubject & Emphatic Forms:

Singular
1. mo, mon, mwa, mwen nou, no (rare), nouzòt
2. twa (informal) vouzòt, ouzòt, zo, zòt
3. li ye (sa)

Plural
nouzòt
vouzòt, ouzòt, zòt
vou, vo, ou (formal)
ye (sa)
The Verb Phrase—Structure

VP \rightarrow (\text{Marker}) \ V \ (\text{Adv.})

- Very limited \textbf{Inflectional Morphology},

- **BUT!** A complex series of \textbf{FREE MORPHMES} —aka Markers— (or lack thereof) express:
  - TENSE
  - MOOD
  - ASPECT
The VP—V Types

- Large % of Vs have 2 STEMS, *short vs. long*
  - + -e, -en
  - + -i
  - + -n*
- SHORT =
  - Habitual/Universal Present
  - Imperative
  - after the Impersonal Expression “it is necessary that”
- LONG = all other contexts**
  - Past Tense
  - After Preverbal Tense/Aspect Markers
- ex. “*To monj sa ek de graton.*” (You always eat with that crackling.)
  vs. “*Lapen monje tou lafer.*” (Rabbit ate everything.)

*-n Vs derive from French Vs whose infinitive form ends in a nasal vowel
**some dialectical variation on this (ex. Point Coupee speakers use either short or long after Preverbal Markers, and neither seems to be preferred).
Some Vs have just ONE form
- -e, -en (ex. “fe”—to do)
- -i (ex. “di”—to say)
- -wa (ex. “bwa”—to drink)
- -n (ex. “dòn”—to give)
- a few invariant Vs borrowed from English (exceptions)
- a few Vs ending in other vowels & other consonants

These Vs are distinguished ONLY by the presence of Markers
- **STATIVE vs. NONSTATIVE**
  1. **Stative Vs:** absence expresses Present Tense; presence expresses Past Tense
  2. **Nonstative Vs:** absence expresses either Past Tense or Habitual/Universal Present; presence expresses Past Perfect
List of Pre-Verbal Markers

- **Te** indicates Past Tense
- **E** and **Ape/Ap** indicate an action in progress
- **A** and **Sa** indicate Future
- **Se** indicates the Conditional
- **Bin** marks an action that began before & cont. up to a particular point in time, which may be before or at the moment of utterance
References


