The Value of Linguistic Variability in Louisiana French
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In this paper, I will explore some of the specific and concrete ways that applied linguistics can contribute to a linguistic community. The effort to preserve French in Louisiana is directly related to the desire to preserve our linguistic, cultural and social specificity. Early efforts were hampered by several misconceptions. First, it was felt that the only way that government could preserve French in Louisiana was through the educational system, since what was happening in the homes was much more difficult to influence and affect. Second, it was felt that the French taught in the schools must be standard, referential French, since it is the only version of the language that is sufficiently codified and institutionalized to be taught in the schools. That is, it is the only version that was found in the textbooks that would be used in the educational process. Third, it was felt that the best teachers to carry out this plan were those already trained to teach standard, referential French. And since there were virtually none of these available in Louisiana's existing educational system, they would have to be imported from other French-speaking countries, such as France, Belgium, and Canada. This was routinely done with little or no consideration of the effect such an operation would have on the indigenous French-speaking populations in Louisiana. These strategies failed to take into consideration a basic question: why *preserve* French in Louisiana? The state agency created in 1968 to address this issue was first called the Council for the Development of Louisiana French; the name of the agency was subsequently changed to the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. This reflects a profound shift in focus. Many in the local population saw standard French as essentially a foreign language; it was actually only a foreign dialect – much of the vocabulary *(la main, le doigt, la maison, le chemin…)* was essentially the same – but the differences, especially in grammatical structure *(j'ai tombé, ils estiont, vous va)* and expressive strategies *(je suis après partir, quoi il y a),* as well as some prominent vocabulary items *(asteur, char, gone, jumeaux/besson, maringouin/moustique)*, gender switches *(le guitare, la barre, la serpent)* and pronunciation features *(table, queue, moitié, rose…)* were significant enough to cause considerable stress and give the impression of great difference to people whose only competency in the language was oral. The basic question was tabled: why *preserve* French in Louisiana if not to preserve the French that already existed there and that had evolved to express the cultural and social reality of the region.

In retrospect, the stop-gap process of importing French teachers and existing standard materials and methodologies was precisely backward. The first steps toward *preserving* French in Louisiana should have included the development of strategies to make use of the linguistic resources that already existed in the region, as well as the development of materials, methods and teachers in a manner designed to preserve local French before opening the process onto the larger French-speaking world. Several evaluation teams, including those headed by André Paquette, Albert Valdman, and Jan Lobelle confirmed this, but their

recommendations on this issue were essentially ignored. Anthropologist Alan Lomax even suggested that CODOFIL may have done as much harm and good by ignoring the cultural and social implications of importing standard French (Lomax 1980). In order to address the problem, of course, we would first have to understand the nature of the French language as it is actually spoken in Louisiana. This would involve serious socio- and ethno-linguistic research in the field, as well as innovative teaching strategies that would not only tolerate but even validate and empower the local language. Eventually, things changed, and these things are now being done. It is late, but French has survived against all odds in Louisiana since Jefferson bought the territory in 1803, part of which became one of the United States of America in 1812. It has survived for over two centuries despite systematic and consistent efforts to eradicate it and Americanize its speakers. Imagine what might be possible with a little encouragement. [It's a bit like the story about the hunter running from an angry bear who prayed to God: Lord, I know I'm a sinner, so I'm not asking you to help me, but I am asking you to not help the bear either.]

On the one hand, linguists point out that Louisiana French represents a treasure, a linguistic flag, an oral genealogy. On the other, teachers can treat this language variant as a pedagogical problem, an error to be corrected, with all the best intentions, to provide the us with access to the French-speaking world. I propose that this linguistic schizophrenia is not necessary, that it is based on a false dichotomy, and that there are ways to validate variability and to integrate it into pedagogical and writing strategies that also include referential academic French. This issue need not polarize participants in this project into opposing camps of academics and popularizers. The positions need not be mutually exclusive. We have too long been isolated from the rest of the French-speaking world by external forces; we should not tear ourselves apart from the inside. It is not necessarily a choice between standard or dialectal French; they can coexist. But this requires essential changes in educational philosophy, and these changes must come from both sides. The educational system must be open to considering the possibility and the value of the vernacular and the potential richness of natural variability. This is not easy to realize because language education is generally designed to reduce vernacular variability and to discourage dialectal differences in an effort to take students toward the standard. But the universe is composed of an infinity of localities. We would do well to learn to not only tolerate them, but to celebrate them. At the same time, our regional communities must consider the importance of communication and the needs of educators to teach predictable and widely applicable concepts. Regional bickering over regional minutia and which local elements to feature can only hopelessly mire down the process and jeopardize any chance that might exist to regionalize the teaching of French in the state. And one should not think that this proposal requires a choice between a viable future and a folkloric past. We can and should slip between the horns of this dilemma. This is not about closing doors, but rather utilizing local resources to open them instead, ideally without smashing our fingers in the process.

The first examples of this effort to validate the vernacular came in quick response to CODOFIL's initial efforts. As early as the mid-1970s, activists and educators alike tried to encourage the educational system to consider the

importance of integrating Louisiana French. Each side debated the problem of graphic representation. A high school French teacher, James Donald Faulk, proposed a graphic system based on English phonetics (1977), reasoning that his students could already read that language. The way he articulated his position, "tu lis ça en anglais et ca sort en français," raised concerns among proponents as well as opponents of the concept to integrate Louisiana French into the classroom. His phonetic transcription – which started out as a pronunciation guide – produced a written version of Louisiana French that was illegible to anyone educated in French. For example, to render the expression "il est après arranger son char" (in referential French: il est en train de réparer sa voiture"), he proposed "eel a ahpra arohnja sohn shahr," which virtually no one in the Francophone world would have intuitively understood. There was a huge outcry, with the issue debated in the press, as well as in the streets.

Some, including Shirley Abshire, David Barry, Richard Guidry, Amanda LaFleur, Brenda Mounier, and Earlene Broussard, were convinced that there is a way to preserve both the specificity and the Frenchness of Louisiana French by using the French orthographic strategies to write what we say. Faulk's line would be then "il est après arranger son char," not something a French speaker from France or Québec or Belgium would say, but French nevertheless. There is at least the possibility of visual communication with some negotiation.

To develop new conventions for the writing and teaching of French in Louisiana, cultural activists and pedagogical specialists turned to the obvious source for contextual language, oral tradition. The first step was to collect a representative corpus of recorded material. The folklore collection at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette already had hundreds of hours of recorded oral tradition, spoken and sung, the result of interviews with native speakers in most cases by other native speakers. Some of the spoken material was the performance of folktales and jokes, most of the collection was oral history interviews – people just talking about growing up Cajun and Creole in South Louisiana. The second step was to standardize conventions for transcribing the recorded material so that there was consistency in the transcriptions. Some of this was done with the publication of the folktales in mind. The initial conventions were quite simple:

1. Eliminate nothing. The transcriber should include all the words of the speaker, except when the speaker is obviously editing himself or herself.
2. Add nothing. The transcriber should refrain from adding words not said by the speaker (cf. the absence of the *ne* in the negative [j'ai pas faim] and the possible absence of the relative pronoun *que* [c'est homme j'ai vu hier).
3. Avoid inventing. The transcriber should use the French orthographic system as much as possible. One should not change orthography simply to render pronunciation (*table* for [tab], *quoi* for [ko] as well as [kwa], *voir* for [war]). If a word is not in the standard dictionaries (*Robert, Larousse,* etc.), check etymological, historical and regional dictionaries. Transcribers should strive to preserve the principles and spirit of French grammar, especially when developing necessary syntactic changes (je

vas, t'as, ils alliont). Invent only in consultation with other Louisiana French research team members to insure collaborative consistency.

These initial rules, which coincided remarkably with the transcription conventions independently developed by editor and folklorist Jean-Pierre Pichette for the publication of folktales in his series Mémoires d'homme in Québec (1978), served for several test drives, including the oral histories of musicians in *The Makers of Cajun Music* (1984) and the stories in *Cajun and Creole Folktales* (1994).

La chasse-galerie (Stanislaus Faul, dit Tanisse, Cankton)

> La chasse-galerie, c'est un homme qui avait été à la messe dimanche matin, tu connais. Et l'église était dans la prairie. Et il y a quelqu'un avec des chiens qui les avait suit. La messe était juste bien commencée, les chiens ont sorti au ras de la porte ayoù il était assis avec un lapin, à courser un lapin. Il a sorti dehors et il a parti à la course derrière lui aussi et il est après galoper toujours.
>
> C'est ça ils ont appelé la chasse-galerie. Pendant des années, il a galopé sur la terre, mais asteur, il peut plus. Ça va dans l'air, ça. Mon père et mon beau-frère ont resté un soir un arpent avant de rentrer dans la savane à l'écouter passer. "Hou, hou, hou," ils écoutaient, comme si c'était des cloches et des chaînes. Supposé, il passe dans chaque pays tous les sept ans. (1994: 216)

It is immediately obvious that the style of expression, as well as certain vocabulary items *(ayoù, juste, asteur)* and grammar items *(il a sorti, il est après galoper)* are not referential French. It is also obvious, however, that this is nevertheless a variety of French that is not impossible to understand in written form, especially if the orthographic system is familiar to the reader.

Teaching Louisiana French requires a thorough understanding of its nature as well as its diversity. There are a number of historical descriptions, most of them from the 1930s and 1940s (Read 1931, Ditchy 1932, Phillips 1936) and few more recent ones (Guilbeau 1950, Conwell and Juilland 1963, Brown). Several contemporary graduate students have added significantly to the discussion especially the area of sociolinguistics and attitudes about language learning (e.g. Deslauriers, Tornquist, Banzar). The problems of the most recent lexical sources, Daigle (1984) and Lavaud-Grassin (1989) have been addressed. The multi-university research team currently preparing our new *Dictionary of Louisiana French* includes native Louisiana French-speakers who have been long active in the effort to revitalize French in Louisiana, as well as linguists who have long been interested and involved in the Louisiana French context. The dictionary is designed to represent the way French is actually spoken in Louisiana, based on fieldwork going back several decades, as well as on contemporary fieldwork designed to elicit contextual examples and verify the lexical and phonetic values described by Dr. Valdman in his presentation. The relative richness of the entries that he showed from the *Dictionary of Louisiana French* comes from the stories, songs and

conversations recorded among native speakers. Thus, they represent the essential elements of the French we should seek to preserve in the Louisiana context, if this French is to effectively and affectively express the cultural and social values of those who would use it. Since the words came directly from the stories and songs, one can fairly assume that they are the words that one needs to tell those stories and sing those songs in a culturally and socially appropriate way. This is of course applied linguistics with a socio-political edge. The science can be solid and still be of service to the community.

Contextual examples included in many of the entries required additional considerations to insure consistency in the transcriptions. We found that the devil is in the details. We determined, for example, that there is a distinction between *bien,* the adverb, and *bein,* the interjection; between *plus,* more, and *pus,* the negative none. We determined that predictable phonetic variation, such as the [dj] value of "di" as in *dieu* and *diable* and *cadien*, or the [tch] of initial "qu" and "cu", as in *queue* and *cul*, can be rendered with the standard orthography. We determined that there were legitimate historical linguistic reasons for variable lexical forms such as *tiendre* and *soufferre*, *cil* and *cez* or *ceuz*, *eusse* and *asteur*, and so they should be preserved. Further explorations have exposed the predictability of other variable forms such as *petit*. One hears from the same speaker [ti] or [tit] in certain positions – *un tit garçon, une tite fille* – but not in others – *combien de petits elle a?* and *donne-moi la plus petite.* So it is not that Louisiana French speakers deform or cannot produce the initial [p]; it is rather that they distinguish consistently between the two forms. So then should we.

Variability in the lexicon is one thing. Variability in the grammar is quite another. Using the folklore transcription conventions as a basis, we found ourselves needing to go on to essentially describe the grammar of Louisiana French, as we found ourselves faced with the need to tease out such details as how to render the regular conjugations of verb groups and how to handle past participle agreement. We determined, for example, that Louisiana French does not generate agreement through *avoir*. In the expression, "elle est morte" (she is dead), *morte* is an adjective. "Elle a mouri" (she died) expresses the past perfect of the verb *mourir*. We hear no agreement consistently in cases where the agreement would produce an audible difference: *Ayoù la banane? Je l'ai pris.* So, we conclude that there is no reason to include it in other cases where it is not heard: *Ayoù la banane? Je l'ai mangé.* In the imparfait, Louisiana French varies regionally. One hears both *ils alliont* and *ils allaient.* The simple solution, once the older form is validated, is to write whichever is actually said.

While considering how verbs work, we also noticed that there are consistencies in pronoun variability. Some of these have been recognized for a long time: the use of *on* in the first-person plural, the variant use of *ils, ça, eux, eusse, and eux-autres* in the third person plural, the minimal use of *vous* as a formal second person singular and the general use of *vous-autres* as a second person plural (conjugated as a third person singular: *vous autres va*). A bit more problematic has been the not yet fully resolved usage of *i/il* and *a/alle* in the nominative third person singular. While *il* and *elle* can occur, one finds with significant consistency, *il* or *alle* before verbs beginning with a vowel: *il oublie, alle oublie*; and *i* or *a* before a verb

beginning with a consonant: *i mange, a mange*. The latter forms have not yet been fully resolved. Interestingly, there was considerably less resistance within our group to *i* than *a*. In an apparent temporary compromise, it was determined to use *alle* to render all occurences of this variation, but this suggests an utterance that does not actually occur in Louisiana French: *alle va* [al va]. There was also the suggestion that *alle* could be reduced to *al*, producing the elegant parallel *i/il* and *a/al;* This suggestion met with considerable resistance, mostly due to esthetic reasons; it was also pointed out that this would represent a radical departure from French orthography. The issue remains unresolved for the moment. Ultimately, I suspect, the forms *i* and *a* will eventually be integrated, given the consistency of the usage. Once again, it is not that Louisiana French speakers deform *elle* into *alle* and *a*. In fact, *elle* is consistently used in other positions, such as apposition and object: *Elle, a part demain; elle, alle a pas faim; je parle avec elle tout les jours.* Louisiana French speakers distinguish consistently between the two forms. So then should we.

Clearly there is consistency in Louisiana French; variant forms are not simple the result of error or deformation; they are often preservations of older forms or the result of consistent evolution. Only after the lexicon and the grammar have been described in this way does it become possible to consider teaching the language in its own terms. Without extensive materials and textbooks, teaching strategies must be improvised. A number of Louisiana French teachers including Richard Guidry, Amanda LaFleur, Earlene Broussard, Brenda Mounier, Kirby Jambon, and Helena Putnam have devised ingenious methods and materials to integrate the vernacular language and the culture it expresses into the classroom. Most of these involve using real people as living resources in one way or another. Some also make use of an evolving base of cultural and linguistic resources, including documentary films, stories from archival collections, and songs from commercial recordings. One example is the project my wife Caroline devised for her middle and high school students. The initial assignment was for each student to record someone in his or her affective circle (immediate or extended family, friend, neighbor…) telling a joke in French. The interview process established the existence of French in the real world of the students. Next, the students transcribed the stories in group sessions which necessarily raised lexical and grammatical issues that needed to be resolved. The students learned grammar and vocabulary, not for their own sake, but because they needed them. The ground rules for transcription were essentially the same as those used by our research team. Then Caroline assigned each student to learn the story he or she had recorded and transcribed, reproducing only the exact words, but also the inflection, rhythm, and timing of the original. And finally for French night, instead of singing Frère Jacques or performing a skit adapted from a Molière play, the students performed the jokes they had collected. The audience, members of their families including many of their resource people, heard them tell their stories in their own French. People who had been punished for speaking their native French at school now saw it validated and even celebrated in the school setting. In a related individual case, Cajun musician David Greely, who plays fiddle and sings with the popular Mamou Playboys band, learned to speak Louisiana French by listening to tape recordings of stories from the university archives while following along with the transcriptions that had been produced for publications and the

dictionary project. He has become fluent, not only in French but in the Louisiana French that expresses the sentiments of the song lyrics that he sings. Others are now following his model. Brenda Mounier and Earlene Broussard have been active in adapting such resources in their adult literacy classes where native Louisiana French speakers learn to read and eventually write what was erroneously considered only an oral language.

Once it was established that the French we speak can be written and even taught, some eventually began using it to write stories, poems, songs and plays, as well as signs and letters, in a way that preserves cultural and social specificity. For many contemporary authors if the Louisiana French literature that emerged in the late 1970s, rendering oral style in written form was an issue from the beginning. The first collection of contemporary Louisiana French poetry, *Cris sur le bayou* (1980) included the following *avertissement* to that effect:

> Les poètes acadiens représentés dans ce livre ont tous des opinions bien jonglées, mais bien différentes sur la méthode de rendre le langage en écrit. Donc, ils ont décidé entre eux que la seule juste solution pour cette première publication, c'était de respecter l'orthographe de chacun. Ces questions vont se résoudre d'une façon naturelle dans les années qui viennent. Il suffit de rappeler le temps de Rabelais pour voir que ce genre de développement est tout à fait normal. Et ne craignez pas, c'est bien du français dans le fond. (*Cris sur le bayou* 1980)

Plays written and performed by the Théâtre Cadien around the same time were often based on oral tradition. The first, *Jean l'Ours et la fille du roi,* was based on a folktale collected in Mamou. The second, *Martin Weber et les Marais Bouleurs,* was based on legendary characters from around Scott. The plays were composed by a group called simple Nous Autres, a group of actors who were interested in producing plays in the vernacular French for local audiences. The improvised lines were written down to produce a script. Emile Desmarais' *Mille misères* explored issues of identity in a manner that provoked both laughter and critical thinking.

Except from **Mille Misères** (Emile Desmarais):

> Garçon: Quoi-ce que les écrevisses ont à' oir 'vec le français cadjin?
>
> Père: Beaucoup! C'est ben simp'. Les pitits parlont pus français par rapport qu'y mangeont pu le manger cadjin. Ti prends ein Mexicain qui mange toujours des tomallies et des tacos. Quoi-ce qu'y parle? Le mexicain. Ti prends ein Italien toujours après manger des pizzas et du spaghetti. Quoi-ce qu'y parle? L'italien! Et les Amaricains alorse, y sont toujours après manger des hamburgers et des hot dogs, pis du poulet frit. Et quoi-ce qu'y parlont? L'amaricain! Voilà ça qui aide à étouffer le langage cadjin. Les pitits mangeriont jusse du boudin et des écrevisses y parleriont joliment ben le cadjin.
> On est ça qu'on mange et les hamburgers faisont des Amaricains. Mon, j'en touche pas du tout.

Inspired by Acadien author Antonine Maillet's series *La Sagouine,* Richard Guidry's monologues, including "Grandm'man's fine, and y'all?" were also based on a phonetic strategy designed to render render orality:

Except from **Hallo, Grand-m'man's fine, an' y'all?** (Richard Guidry, *C'est p'us pareil*)

> J'sus assez larguée d'a'tend' parler d'not' magnière de parler à nous-aut' que j'pourrais rej'ter. Y a la môtché du mond' qui dit qu'on devrait oublier l'français pis l'aut' môtché du mon' qu'est tout l'temps après nous dire qu'on devrait assayer d'garder not' langue. Moi j'aimerais jus' qu'i' pourreriont s'faire eine idée. J'me rappelle bien quand mes enfants alliont à l'école i'vouliont pas les laisser parler français su' l'terrain de l'école. Ça-là, j'ai trouvé ça ein peu bête. Les Amaricains sont tout l'temps après assayer d'faire accroire au mond' qu'i' sont les plus sma't! Mais moi j'vas vous dire la franche vérité: y a pas parsône dessus la terre qu'est plus bête qu'un Amaricain. T'as just' besoin d'les r'garder faire pour 'oir ça. I' travaillont tout l'temps et quo' faire? Sûr pas parce qu'il' avont pas assez pour manger ou qu'il' avont pas d'maison pour eusses rester d'dans. Non, c'est pour acheter ein gros T.V. en couleur, eine laveuse de plats, ein gros char... Mais t'en 'ois jâmais eune prend' le temps de viv'. I' faut qu'i travaillont tout l'temps, tout l'temps, tout l'temps. I' marchont vite i' mangeont vite, i' parlont vite. I' prenont jâmais l'temps d's'assir pour causer avec leurs camarades si c'est pas pour parler d'l'ouvrage ou de cômien d'argent i'pourreriont faire si i' venderiont leur huile quèques piast' plus chère le baril. À la première aparcevance il' avont couri toute leur vie pis il' avont pas pris le temps d'rire ou de 'oir rire leurs voésins ou encore pire, leur femme et leurs enfants.

Other prose monologues were written in a form that was designed primarily for reading instead of theatrical performance, and thus include fewer orthographic deviations.

Excerpt from "Mélanie Brasseux, Jean Arceneaux, Suite du loup (1999)

> Ouais, j'ai entendu les histoires. Comment Évangeline a perdu son Gabriel et puis elle l'a coursé à travers tout le continent jusqu'à qu'elle a perdu courage, puis là elle l'a trouvé par accident à Philadelphia, juste à temps pour qu'il crève dans ses bras. Et comment Emmeline a perdu son Louis, puis elle a suivi sa trace jusqu'à la Louisiane, mais il était déjà marié avec une autre, et elle a perdu la tête et elle est morte d'un cœur cassé en bas d'un grand chêne vert. C'est tout bien beau si t'as envie de pleurer, mais nous autres, on avait pas le temps de perdre courage, ni de perdre la tête. Il fallait se débattre pour garder corps et âme ensemble. Personne avait trop envie de mourir en bas d'un chêne vert ou n'importe ayoù. Ceux-là qui l'ont fait, c'est ceux-là qu'avaient beaucoup de courage et qui étaient entêtés. Évangeline et Emmeline? Heuh. Elles ont eu un tas de malheurs, mais quoi c'est qu'elles ont fait? Éspérer? Heuh.

The lyrics of songs composed by popular Cajun musicians were recorded as early as 1928 with Joseph Falcon's "Lafayette," but these lyrics were almost never written down, since the composers were not literate in French. In fact, the titles of songs on record labels were only as good as the producers could manage or guess. Falcon's "Lafayette" was rendered "Luafette." His "Ils ont volé mon traineau" was given as "Il la volés mon trancas." The Hackberry Ramblers' "T'es petite et t'es mignonne" was listed as "Te petite et te meon." What we now know to be "C'est pas la peine" was released as "Se pas la pan." One must know some Louisiana French to figure out that "J'vas tamey camaime" is "Je vas t'aimer quand même." Often, record producers just gave up and opted for a translation. Iry Lejeune's classic "J'ai été-z-au bal" was released as "I Went to the Dance." In subsequent well-intentioned efforts to restore the French title, several record producers, scholars and documentary filmmakers misinterpreted it as "J'étais au bal," which would translate as "I was at the dance." "La valse de quatre-vingt-dix-neuf ans" was not translated but interpreted as "The Convict Waltz." D.L. Menard's classic "La porte d'en arrière" is still at least as well known by its original release title, "The Back Door." More recently, record producers have taken to asking how to spell titles. They have also taken to having lyrics transcribed to include as part of the record packaging; this has both reinforced the language and given the consuming audience a sense of the tradition's literary value. Ann Savoy and Raymond François have also provided extensive collections of transcribed (and translated) lyrics in their books on Cajun music.

Lyrics by recent composers show the retention of Louisiana French specificity, sometimes with orthography altered to indicate pronunciation, as in Zachary Richard's anthem "Réveille."

Réveille (Zachary Richard)

Réveille, Réveille, c'est les goddams qui viennent,
brûler la récolte.
Réveille, Réveille, hommes Acadiens,
pour sauver le village.
Mon grand grand grand grand père
est v'nu de la Bretagne,
le sang de ma famille est mouillé l'Acadie
et là les maudits viennent
nous chasser comme des bêtes
détruire les saintes familles
nous jeter tous au vent.

Often, the lyrics are transcribed by educators or folklorists who are implementing the transcription conventions we have developed. Neither Wayne Toups nor Paul Marx is able to write in French. But the transcriptions of their songs that appear in print are usually consistent with the conventions because I was the one who did most of them.

Mon ami (Wayne Toups, *Wayne Toups ZydeCajun,* MTE 5032; Whitewing Music)

J'étais assis après jongler une journée
Ça qu'a arrivé avec mon ami longtemps passé.
Il était un musicien proche toute sa vie
Jusqu'à sa femme l'a quitté avec sa petite fille.

Il dit, "Pourquoi tu me fais ça?
Tu connais les larmes vont tomber.
Pourquoi tu reviens pas avec moi à la maison
Une autre fois, petit cœur, pour une autre chance?"

C'est pas la peine il commence à brailler
Aujourd'hui il est là après jouer sa musique
Pour la balance de sa vie.

Soigne mes enfants (Paul Marx, *Wayne Toups ZydeCajun,* MTE 5032; Whitewing Music)

Hé Joe, quitte-moi te parler.
Je vas pas prendre un tas de ton temps.
Mais j'aimerais savoir, dis-moi, s'il vous plaît,
Comment Marie et mes enfants.

Je pense Billy commence à d'être grand.
Si je me rappelle, il a proche dix ans.
Et Joe, comment ma petite Mary Lou.
O, moi, je les manque tous.

Je connais tu les as pas volés.
Je vois c'est moi qui les a donnés.
Je les quittais seuls tous les soirs,
Pour vivre la vie d'un musicien.

Recently, I received a request to verify for accuracy the lines of a Cajun character in "Twenty-Seven," Edward Morgan's play based on Faulkner's "The Old Man." The playwrite explained that he had asked a French professor/neighbor for the translations. Here are two examples that illustrate the problem of coming up with Louisiana French armed only with good intentions. My revisions are in blue.

4.You can't understand a word I'm saying, can you?
-Vous ne pigez quedal de mes mots, hein?
Vous autres comprend pas du tout ça je suis [chu] après dire, hein?

5.Still I bet you had a time, bringing that baby through this flood.

-Eh ben, vous n'avez pas rigole, a transporter le gosse.
J'imagine quand même que vous autres s'a amusé avec un bébé dans est'eau [sto] haute.

"Piger quedal" is of course from French argot for "to understand nothing," which the translator proposes to use to represent what she perceives should be non-standard; it may in a real sense be even less French than the Louisiana French equivalent. In any case, it just isn't what we would say. "Gosse" may mean child in French argot, but in Louisiana French, it means testicle.

If part of the intention of this language revitalization project, with its dictionary and its potential pedagogical revisions, with its authors and its composers, is to empower its actual users, that is language in the hands of the people, then we will get public displays of all sorts. Signage in French is a relatively recent phenomenon. Sometimes they ask for direction, and sometimes they don't.

[slides of signs]

A developer in Scott named his new subdivision "La Village." Several concerned French supporters pointed out to him that it should be "Le Village." His response was "If you sign the note, you can call it whatever you want." There have been a few acts of linguistic vigilantism in response, knocking the "a" off the sign, but he faithfully replaces it. We have a long way to go. This dictionary and the pedagogical strategies that are being developed and piloted to validate the vernacular are huge steps in the right direction. In order to have any chance of accomplishing such a difficult task, we must be willing to take chances, to think outside the proverbial box, to innovate methods that challenge the very structure of what we assume. My colleague, the musician/songwriter/poet Zachary Richard, articulated the underlying philosophy of this desire to push applied linguistics toward guerrilla linguistics in his poetic rant, "La vérité va peut-être te faire du mal:"

> …
> It's not in here, band de couillons,
> It's out there, bande de sans couilles.
> C'est pas le passé, bande de perdus,
> C'est l'avenir; c'est pas les vieux,
> Bande de couillons, c'est les jeunes.
>
> Tu dis sauver le français en salon de thé
> le petit doigt levé puant la politesse
> des coups de poings who gives a shit
> c'est pas les French teachers,
> c'est les terroristes,
> c'est pas des journalistes,
> c'est des fatras avec des allumettes… (*Faire récolte* 115-118)

Matches, indeed, as well as matched guise surveys, by any means necessary.