

Preservation of Affrication in Rural Francophone Louisiana

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Abstract: This article is an ethno-cultural examination of the origins and preservation of the affrication of dental consonants in Louisiana, a well-known characteristic of Laurentian French, but unique in Louisiana French to the city of Ville Platte and its hinterland. The origins of the area's original settlers as well as later waves that may have left their mark on the local dialect are considered, as are efforts to preserve the use of French in the face of relentless Anglicization and changes in how the community sees itself. By comparing these factors with regional studies done on other linguistic traits, both in and outside of Louisiana, we seek to establish that affrication has always been characteristic of the French of Ville Platte and is not the result of subsequent dialectal or population changes.

Keywords: affrication; assibilation; stop consonant; French; Creole; Cajun; Louisiana; Ville Platte

Résumé : Cet article est un examen des origines, et de la préservation, de l'affrication des consonnes dentales en Louisiane, une caractéristique typique du français laurentien, mais qui n'est attestée en Louisiane qu'à Ville Platte et dans son arrière-pays. Les origines du premier groupe de colons dans cette région, ainsi que les vagues subséquentes qui auraient pu laisser leur empreinte sur le dialecte local, sont considérées, tout comme le sont les efforts pour la préservation de l'usage du français face à l'anglicisation incessante et la façon dont la communauté se voit. En comparant ces facteurs avec les études régionales faites sur d'autres traits linguistiques louisianais, nous cherchons à établir que l'affrication a toujours été caractéristique du français de Ville Platte et n'est pas le résultat de changements subséquents ni à la population, ni au dialecte.

Mots-clés : affrication; assibilation; consonne occlusive; français; créole; cadien; Louisiane; Ville Platte

The history of settlement in Louisiana is particularly complex when compared to the settlement of other regions of North America. Successive periods of French, Spanish and ultimately American rule have left their mark on the make-up of the modern state of Louisiana, though when considered in more detail, the actual settlement history is far more complicated than these periods suggest. Prior to Anglo immigration following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the majority of settlers were French-speaking, though there was great deal of variation in the dialects of the various colonising groups. As a consequence, and despite a general cohesion, from syntax to phonetics, the French spoken in Louisiana shows a good deal of dialectal variation in many aspects, including the pronunciation of certain phonemes. The Acadian (or *Cajun*) influence in Louisiana is well established, but the Acadians only make up a portion of Louisiana Francophones. Settlers who came directly from France, and others who came by way of Canada's Laurentian valley, have equally made their mark on the French heard in Louisiana today.

Stop consonants represent a particularly interesting case since, according to Picone and Valdman¹, the dialect of the region surrounding the town of Ville Platte is known for the affrication of dental stop consonants [t] and [d] (which become [t_s] and [d_z]) when preceding the high front vowels [i] and [y] and semi-vowels [j] and [ɥ] (i.e. *tu dis* 'you say', is pronounced [t_sy d_zi])². Dental affrication is a feature characteristic of Laurentian French, but, other than Ville Platte and its Evangeline

¹ Michael D. Picone et Albert Valdman, "La situation du français en Louisiane", In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 146.

² For a sociophonetic examination of this phenomenon in Ville Platte, see Alexander Russell, *Réalisation variable des occlusives en français louisianais : l'affrication et l'aspiration à la Ville Platte*, *Congrès mondial de linguistique française - CMLF 2010*, Paris, Institut de linguistique française, 2010, p. 1357-1368.

Parish hinterland, it is not well known in Louisiana. The isolated presence of this trait in a remote corner of Francophone Louisiana has led to a number of different proposals, but there is not yet a definitive account of why affrication is found there. The present article is an attempt to explain this presence.

We begin with an overview of the regional dialectal variation that is found in Louisiana today and continue with an examination of the historical and cultural developments that have contributed to the presence of affrication in the French spoken in Ville Platte and its surrounding area. We will look at the origins of Ville Platte's population and its "Creole" background which often seems to be forgotten in the mainstream studies on Louisiana French which tend to focus on the more well-known Cajuns. We will then attempt to sort out certain facts and figures that might contribute to an explanation of the maintenance of affrication in this area.

1. Regional Variation

Albert Valdman has described Louisiana French as a continuum, with the two poles being formed by International French and the French-based Louisiana Creole, and with Cajun French as the centre. He mentions two other endogenous varieties, one being Plantation French (spoken by elite landowners) and the other being Colonial French³. Rottet indicates that Colonial French represents the French spoken by the colonists in the early 18th century, a population that "included military officers and troops, Canadians, and French immigrants" as well as German and other European settlers who assimilated into French

³ Albert Valdman, "Normes et déminorisation du français en Louisiane", *Normes endogènes et plurilinguisme*, In Claudine Bavoux, Lambert-Félix Prudent and Sylvie Wharton (dir.), Lyon, France, ENS Éditions, 2008, p. 36.

language and culture⁴. He notes that “there are no descriptions of the speech of these early groups, but given what is known about their social origins (and those of colonists elsewhere in the same period) it must have been quite heterogeneous and non-standard⁵”. By citing the works of other researchers, Rottet declares that this dialect would have presented traits similar to those found in other varieties of French spoken in the colonial world of the age.

The dominant vernacular variety of French heard in Louisiana today is Cajun French⁶. The historian Carl Brasseaux describes contemporary Cajun French (CF) as “a linguistic hybrid including vocabulary drawn from Acadian French, Creole French, nineteenth-century Standard French and English” and states that the “dialect’s basic structure is consistent throughout the rural Francophone parishes” though there are “significant subregional variations in pronunciation⁷”. Avoyelles and Evangeline parishes (the latter of which includes Ville Platte) are examples of areas where the “distinctive pronunciation patterns introduced by eighteenth century French and Canadian pioneers” remain predominant⁸. Brasseaux notes that CF “had become the lingua franca among the lower classes in the prairie and bayou countries” of Louisiana by the beginning of the 20th century⁹. It is important to remember that the French speaking portion of the state of Louisiana is confined to the southern and south-western part of the state. The

⁴ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate Interrogatives and Settlement Patterns in Francophone Louisiana”, *French Language Studies*, 14, 2004, p. 169-170.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁷ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, Jackson, MS, University Press of Mississippi, 1992, p. 109.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

parishes with historically significant, though not necessarily dominant, Francophone populations are collectively known as Acadiana (figure 1).



Source: State of Louisiana, Concurrent Resolution Number 496, 1971

Figure 1: Map of Acadiana¹⁰

1.1. The Founding Dialects

As mentioned earlier, before the arrival of the Acadians, the Louisiana colony was composed of colonists from several Francophone communities speaking different regional French dialects. These colonists, for the most part illiterate and of modest origins, came from both Canada and France, particularly from regions in the west and northwest of

¹⁰ Source: Cécyle Trépanier, "The Cajunization of French Louisiana: Forging a Regional Identity", *The Geographic Journal*, 157.2, 1991, p. 165.

France. There was no unified language in the colony, and several factors, including isolation and Anglicization (see section 2.4), slowed down linguistic standardization. It is clear that the dialectal features of popular French in the 18th century that were present in Quebec and Acadia would also have been present in Louisiana¹¹. The make-up of the groups of settlers will be examined in more detail, but Dubois *et al.*¹² offer some sociolinguistic factors that worked in favour of the maintenance of a number of dialects at the time. This list includes the fact that those colonists from France were used to a bilingual, bi-dialectal environment and that they left France before there were any efforts towards linguistic unification. They also point out that the high mortality rate, as well as the continual movement of settlers within the colony, created a volatile linguistic situation and highlight the fact that the large number of French-Canadians in the colony spoke regional dialects that were similar to those of the other colonists in Louisiana. Finally, they mention that almost all French colonists spoke dialects that may have been different phonetically and grammatically but were nevertheless mutually intelligible. Dubois also notes that in the personal correspondence of Acadian or French authors from the end of the 18th century, one can see the graphic usage of phonetic traits originating in parishes where the usage of these traits is now absent or rare and she proposes that the most widespread dialectal forms are those that have the greatest chance of being conserved¹³.

¹¹ Sylvie Dubois, "Un siècle de français cadien parlé en Louisiane : persistance linguistique, hétérogénéité géographique et évolution", In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 301.

¹² Sylvie Dubois, Carole Salmon and Sibylle Noetzel, "La correspondance écrite en Louisiane : interprétation des variantes de l'orthographe conventionnelle 1685-1840", *Études Canadiennes*, 58, 2005, p. 149.

¹³ Sylvie Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

Therefore, according to Dubois, the use of dialectal traits, whether Acadian or not, in any of the four parishes included in her 2005 study (Avoyelles, St. Landry, Lafourche and Vermillion - see figure 1) testifies to their vigorous usage by the founding population. Though she did not study affrication specifically, it is interesting to note that she mentions that the affricates [t_s] and [d_z] have been observed in CF in every parish and every generation of speaker in her study¹⁴. The presence of these affricates, however rare, in the four aforementioned parishes does seem to indicate that this trait may have been more prominent in centuries past.

Dubois further suggests that a linguistic competition may have taken place with the arrival of large numbers of Francophone settlers representing every social group and every region of France, between 1789 and 1830. Each parish would have been affected in a different way according to the migration patterns of the newly arrived French speakers. The preservation of certain specific dialectal forms in each parish therefore depends on a complex ensemble of local effects such as the number of immigrants in a region, the similarities between their speech and that of the founding population, and whether or not the local community deems the new variety of speech to be desirable¹⁵. An example of this can be found in the Lafourche basin and in the prairie region south of present day St. Landry Parish. Brasseaux states that these are areas where intercultural marriages and communication with New Orleans were strong, leading to a large influx of Foreign French agriculturalists and, therefore, the presence of “nineteenth-century French constructions and pronunciation patterns¹⁶”.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 301-302.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302-303.

¹⁶ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

According to Dubois, the linguistic persistence of certain dialectal traits in all regions, as well as the different types of interregional isoglosses in CF, can only be explained by a “local interpretation¹⁷”. She concludes that “a complex ensemble of local effects has determined the maintenance of some, but not all, of the dialectal forms in each parish” and that each parish requires an individual analysis¹⁸. She says that her results haven’t led to the establishment of a strict division between parishes that are more or less *Acadian*, and that “there exist few categorical isoglosses compared to variable isoglosses and the use of several dialectal forms can be seen in every community¹⁹”. Rottet and Picone have, however, been able to show a link between the settlement patterns of the founding population in several regions of Louisiana and the presence of certain grammatical traits. In the following section we will look at the results of their study and attempt to show that similar comparisons are possible with phonetic traits.

1.2. The Populating of Louisiana and Geographical Variation

One must not exaggerate the importance of the variation examined by Dubois and her colleagues and it is important to mention that they noticed the uniform use of several dialectal forms throughout Acadiana²⁰. Taking into account the extent of dialect levelling that has taken place in Francophone Louisiana, Rottet examined the geographical distribution of the system of interrogative pronouns *qui* and *quoi* with non-human reference, and wondered if the use of one variant or another could be attributed to the settlement history

¹⁷ Sylvie Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303; my translation.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

of the Creole population compared to that of the Acadians²¹. Picone, who admits that in spite of a rather rich linguistic diversity inside Acadiana, there exists a fundamental unity at the phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical levels²², attributes the levelling to “a prolonged interdialectal contact, leading to the elimination of numerous dialectal particularities, while only leaving a few traces, such as the *qui/quoi* distinction²³”. However, because of certain doubts as to the importance of Acadian French (he cites the case of the French spoken in Avoyelles parish, a region which never had any significant Acadian immigration, but shares almost all of the traits of “Cajun French”), he enlarged his study to include some non-Acadian communities outside of Acadiana in order to confirm, contest or modify the levelling hypothesis²⁴. The result of these studies could have implications for the existence of certain regional phonetic variants, including the affricates of Ville Platte. In the next two subsections we will look at the use of *qui* and *quoi* both inside and outside of Acadiana.

1.2.1. Francophones inside Acadiana

In these studies on the effect of the original settlers on regional French variation, the *qui* form is linked principally to the founding Creole population and the *quoi* form is attributed to the Acadian population²⁵, though it is apparent that the distinction between these two groups is no longer very clear. A high rate of intermarriage after the Civil

²¹ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate...”, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

²² Michael D. Picone, “Le français louisianais hors de l’Acadiana”, *Revue canadienne de linguistique appliquée*, 9.2, 2006, p. 221.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 222; my translation.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

War made it such that “in most areas, the descendants of the Creoles no longer existed as a distinct group²⁶”. However, as we will see in section 2, this is not necessarily the case in parishes like Evangeline and Avoyelles where the Creole identity lived on. It is not surprising, then, that the *qui* pattern is predominant in these two parishes, as well as in the Lafourche basin (especially in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes) in southeast Acadiana. The *quoi* pattern, on the other hand, is predominant in a region that includes the southwest (Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Vermillion and Acadia parishes) and stretches east to Assumption parish. A large portion of the other parishes (St. Landry, St. Martin and Iberia) are transitional zones between the two patterns²⁷.

The fact that the geographical distribution of the interrogatives *qui* and *quoi* is so clear cut in spite of considerable dialect levelling has lead researchers to postulate many different explanations, and settlement history is just one possibility. Nevertheless, this possibility seems promising since, as Rottet argues, “the modern Acadian varieties still spoken in the Maritime Provinces [of Canada] are reasonably well documented, and they are solidly *quoi* dialects²⁸”. The *qui* pattern, however, “is completely absent from the descriptive literature on Maritime Acadian²⁹”. We will establish the Creole origins of the pioneers of Evangeline parish in section 2.1, but beforehand we will briefly examine the less homogeneous origins of those of the Lafourche basin, and will touch on those of Avoyelles, which will be examined more deeply in section 3.2.4, to explain why the residents of these other regions use the *qui* pattern.

²⁶ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate...”, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179-180.

Dubois³⁰ indicates that Avoyelles parish was settled late by new arrivals and Cajuns from other localities, but the influence of these Cajuns must have been minimal since there was never substantial Acadian immigration into the parish³¹. Brasseaux stresses that these Cajuns (220 in number) only formed 1.6% of the parish population after the Civil War³² and mentions the presence of the “distinctive pro-nunciation patterns introduced by 18th century French and Canadian pioneers” in an area that straddles Avoyelles and Evangeline parishes³³. The settlement of the Lafourche basin is a little more varied than that of the northern tip of Acadiana. The banks of Bayou Lafourche “were originally settled predominantly in and after 1785 by Acadians who had spent between 21 and 27 years in western France³⁴” and many brought French spouses with them. In 1870, however, the Francophone population (which had been 61% Acadian in 1788) was 58% Creole³⁵. The influx of Creoles, and possibly the years the Acadians spent in France, will most likely have led to the use of *qui* in Lafourche.

1.2.2. Francophones outside Acadiana

As part of his effort to confirm that the founding Creole population used *qui*, and that there was indeed a levelling of dialects in Louisiana, Picone studied the French found in certain parishes outside of the Acadiana region. Livingston parish (located to the west of Baton Rouge), which was colonised by Creoles, has proven to be quite interesting in this

³⁰ Sylvie Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

³¹ Michael D. Picone, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

³² Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁴ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate...”, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180-181.

regard. The few Francophones that Picone was able to find in this region along the Amite River considered themselves to be Cajuns, but they recognized nevertheless that their ancestors called themselves Creoles (there were only ten Acadians living in Livingston parish in 1870³⁶), and pointed out that the local museum is called “*la maison créole*”³⁷. Picone has mentioned the maintenance of *qui* in the two small communities that he visited in Livingston, which contrasts with the vestiges of the neighbouring Acadian population, in the town of Gonzales in Ascension parish, where the speakers use *quoi*³⁸. What is even more interesting in the context of the present study is the fact that, according to several master’s theses from the 1930s, the affrication one still finds today in Evangeline Parish was also present in Livingston Parish³⁹.

Picone’s study discovered some other interesting phonetic variants. In the speech of all elderly people in Grand Isle (in Jefferson Parish) and in all of the places visited in Plaquemines Parish, Picone noticed the dorsal articulation [R], which he classified as a probable vestige of the French of the plantation society, that is to say, of the French that evolved over the course of the 19th century in parallel with the prestigious form in France⁴⁰. Picone and Valdman associate Plantation French (PF) with the plantation society, an elite group of landowners principally made up of White Creoles, but also Creoles of Colour and Acadians which formed in New Orleans, along the shores of the Mississippi from Donaldsonville to Pointe Coupee and along the Teche and Terrebonne bayous, as well as

³⁶ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁷ Michael D. Picone, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁹ Claude Poirier, “L’assibilation des occlusives /t/ et /d/ au Québec : le point sur la question”, In Luc Baronian and France Martineau (dir.), *Le français d’un continent à l’autre*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2009, p. 390.

⁴⁰ Michael D. Picone, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

the Cannes River, over the course of the first half of the 19th century⁴¹. The sons of these elites were often sent to study in France, or were educated by tutors that had mastered the French of reference of the era. This permitted the spread in Louisiana of a variety of French closely related to that of the French elite⁴². The aforementioned regions making up the plantation society include neither the prairies surrounding Ville Platte, nor the Amite River in Livingston Parish. If certain traits (such as affrication) typical of some, or all, of the first settlers of the Creole population in New Orleans and along the Mississippi River were eliminated by contact with the French of post-revolutionary France, this is not necessarily the case in more isolated regions where the people would have had less contact with the elite.

Rottet and Picone's studies do not answer every question pertaining to the variants present in Louisiana, but they seem to support the idea that a link exists between the history of regional settlement and the presence of certain unique linguistic traits as well as the presence of a progressive dialect levelling that has made the French spoken in Louisiana more and more uniform. Rottet admits that, "given the complexities of settlement patterns and koineisation, this is a crude comparison⁴³", and therefore he looks for other types of evidence that suggest the same conclusions. His subsequent efforts to confirm the association of the inanimate *qui* with the pre-Acadian "Creole" population can, we believe, be expanded to include dental affrication. In the following section we will look at how the presence of affrication and the use of *qui* in Creole languages indicate that the Colonial French on which these Creoles were based likely included these features.

⁴¹ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 147-148.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴³ Kevin J. Rottet, "Inanimate...", *op. cit.*, p. 182.

1.3. Links between Pre-Acadian French and Louisiana Creole

The Creole language known as Louisiana Creole (LC) developed over the course of the first half of the 18th century as the vernacular of African slaves on many Louisianan plantations. This is before the arrival of Acadians⁴⁴, and before the development of the grand plantations of the “plantocratic” society. Therefore, it follows that the base language of LC was that of the colonists before 1750. Rottet believes that “it would, of course, be naïve to assume that modern LC is a pure reflection of early eighteenth century Colonial French” but “without denying subsequent contacts between Louisiana French and LC, it is reasonable to expect that some of the features of LC reflect the Colonial French speech which gave it birth⁴⁵”. We have already mentioned the possibility that certain dialectal traits are shared by the colonists in Louisiana and elsewhere in North America, and Chaudenson proposes that the comparison between the different varieties of American French and the Creoles is an element of proof, or at least a strong presumption, of the existence in the different types of French spoken by colonists of a trait common to these idioms⁴⁶.

In the context of Rottet’s study on the relationship between the settlement of Louisiana and forms of inanimate interrogatives, it is interesting to note that LC is solidly a *qui* variety⁴⁷ in which *quoi* only figures in certain fixed lexical items like *kofer* (< *quoi faire* = “*pourquoi*”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁶ Robert Chaudenson, “Français d’Amérique et créoles français : origines et structures”, In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2005, p. 509.

⁴⁷ See Albert Valdman and Thomas A. Klingler, “The Structure of Louisiana Creole”, In Albert Valdman (ed.), *French and Creole in Louisiana*, New York, Plenum, 1997, p. 135.

(why)) that also exist in Evangeline Parish⁴⁸. Rottet⁴⁹ notes the use of *qui* in other varieties of French and French-based Creoles (i.e. Reunion). This is not the only trait linking the French of Ville Platte with the varieties of French and Creoles spoken in other former French colonies, and we will see that the affrication typical of Ville Platte is not as unique as it might seem if we consider the patterns of settlement during the *Ancien Régime*.

2. History of Ville Platte and Acadiana Settlement

Europeans first arrived in the region of Ville Platte in the second half of the 18th century. Ville Platte was incorporated in 1858 and was, at the time, part of the parish of St. Landry. With the separation of the northwest section of St. Landry parish, a region which Brasseaux describes as “a prairie Creole bastion since colonial times⁵⁰”, Evangeline parish was created in 1911, increasing the importance of Ville Platte which became the parish seat. The Acadian parish name *par excellence*, “Evangeline”, chosen by the legislature of the State of Louisiana, is a good example of the general confusion regarding the identity of Francophones inhabiting the Louisiana prairies since the Acadian history generally attributed to the region is an exaggeration⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate...”, *op. cit.*, p. 178, 182.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 184-185.

⁵⁰ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁵¹ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer on Francophone Louisiana*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2005, p. 73, 104; Roland J.-L. Breton and Dean R. Louder, “La géographie linguistique de l’Acadiana, 1970”, In Dean R. Louder and Éric Waddell (dir.), *Du continent perdu à l’archipel retrouvé : le Québec et l’Amérique française*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2007, p. 223; Michael D. Picone, *op. cit.*, p. 229-230.

2.1. Prairie Creoles

Brasseaux⁵² points out that the prairie Creoles, like the genteel Creoles of New Orleans and the grand plantations on the shores of the Mississippi, are the descendants of colonists who arrived in Louisiana before the Acadians. Picone and Valdman indicate that many among these Creoles were colonists with Canadian origins (or who had spent time in Canada) who established themselves in Louisiana. They state that, since the beginning, colonial Louisiana had two homelands: France and Quebec⁵³. Trépanier describes (white) Creoles as a group including the “descendants of the first French and French Canadian colonists, early Gallicized Germans, and later political French refugees” who arrived in the 19th century⁵⁴. Brasseaux⁵⁵ also mentions the influence of Canadian pioneers on the dialect of the region. A majority of the ancestors of the prairie Creoles were soldiers “in the Fort Toulouse garrison (located near present-day Montgomery, Alabama) until the English occupied the area in 1764” who, along with a few residents of Mobile⁵⁶, migrated to settlement sites near what is now Washington, Louisiana in St. Landry parish, which was the terminus of westbound bayou traffic from New Orleans⁵⁷, before quickly migrating overland to the prairie region which includes present day Evangeline parish. They would become small farmers and ranchers as the Acadians who settled just to the south of them (in the modern-day Acadia parish which is predominantly Acadian⁵⁸).

⁵² Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103-104.

⁵³ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁵⁴ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁵⁵ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110; Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁶ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103-104.

⁵⁷ Gerald L. Gold, “The French Frontier Settlement in Louisiana: Some Observations of Culture Change in Mamou Prairie”, *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 23.59, 1979, p. 269.

⁵⁸ Kevin J. Rottet, “Inanimate...”, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

In spite of the similarities between Creoles and Acadians, there were significant differences. Brasseaux highlights certain noticeable ethnic differences between the groups which were “sometimes manifested in violent clashes, such as the Civil War raids upon Acadian communities by prairie Creole jayhawkers⁵⁹”. “Jayhawkers” were Creoles from the west and northwest of the former St. Landry parish (modern-day Evangeline parish) who organized themselves in quasi-military bands to fight off the Southern military in search of new recruits⁶⁰. These ethnic tensions lasted well into the 20th century, evident in the fights that would break out at high school football matches or in nightclubs⁶¹. However, over the course of the last 60 years, there has been a growth in the “cajunization” of Creoles, a process which began in the postbellum period following the Civil War with the imposition of a new racial order by the Northerners⁶². The implications of this “cajunization” merit a closer look.

2.2. The Cajunization of Acadiana

In the introduction of his book on Francophone Louisiana, Brasseaux notes that one of the most persistent stereotypes of Louisiana is that the French-speaking community is “a social and cultural, sometimes even a racial, monolith⁶³”. His in-depth analysis shows that this is far from the truth, however, as he is able to divide the thousands of Francophone immigrants that came to Louisiana into eighteen distinct

⁵⁹ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁶⁰ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁶¹ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁶² Éric Waddell, “La Louisiane : un poste outre-frontière de l’Amérique française ou un autre pays et une autre culture?”, In Dean R. Louder and Éric Waddell (dir.), *Du continent perdu à l’archipel retrouvé*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2007, p. 202-203.

⁶³ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

groups including voyageurs, the 1699 Canadian immigrants, former French soldiers and Acadian exiles⁶⁴. With these divisions being far too specific, Trépanier divides the French population into four major subcultures: white Creoles, black Creoles, Acadians and the French-speaking Houmas⁶⁵ (a Native American tribe that is not recognized by the federal government⁶⁶). She maintains that “the existence of different French subcultures in Louisiana is an old story that belongs more to the past than the present” by indicating that Louisiana Francophones attract national and international attention under the “Cajun” label⁶⁷, a fact that seems to support the aforementioned stereotype. What follows is an examination of the metamorphosis of the prairie Creole identity into a Cajun identity, permitting us to show that despite the fact that these Francophones might call themselves Cajun, they can still employ phonetic traits typical of their Creole ancestors.

2.2.1. The French Movement

In the wake of the African American civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties, an awakening of ethnic communities took place all over the world, and the Francophones of Louisiana are no exception. After decades of disuse and a lack of maintenance of the French language, a movement targeting the reestablishment of French’s privileged place in Louisiana was born. The aim of this movement was the preservation of Francophone heritage and the promotion of the use of French inside the state. The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created in 1968 in order to organize and lead this linguistic and cultural renaissance. With ethnic

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

⁶⁶ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

and regional diversity (the historically Creole and Cajun subregions are found in a variety of natural environments and often overlap), as well as class divisions, the establishment of “a Louisiana-wide French ethnic consciousness” has always been difficult, but is essential to the development of the French language⁶⁸. Due to the fact that there are black Creoles as well as white Creoles, Trépanier believes that CODOFIL and the French Louisiana elite wanted to assure a “white” identity for the region by choosing to unify the Francophone region under the label “Cajun”, a term that up until that point in time had been considered derogatory⁶⁹.

According to Brasseaux, by the late 1950s, “Cajun” came “to be viewed as the supreme insult to persons of French descent in Acadiana, and the use of this ‘epithet’ often produced a strongly negative, if not violent, response⁷⁰” which he sees as a rejection of the past. An inferior group identity had been imposed on a good portion of the rural French-speaking population and up until the 1970s it was not considered a good idea to call a French speaker a Cajun. Trépanier attributes the legitimization of the term to the election of Governor Edwin Edwards, a Cajun, who had run his campaign “under the Cajun label⁷¹”. Trépanier says that Edwards enlarged the definition of the word by attributing it to all Louisianans of French heritage or culture. She claims that the propaganda of CODOFIL, combined with that of Edwards, redefined the Cajun identity by diminishing the rural and backwards connotations associated with the term⁷².

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162-163.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷⁰ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

⁷¹ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

2.2.2. “New” Cajuns

The new status of the word Cajun led to changes all over French Louisiana. Many Creoles accept the “Cajun” designation for a diversity of reasons. Brasseaux attributes the adoption of a Cajun identity to an effort to attract tourist money and to the lack of an alternative label since the term “Creole” has become synonymous with Creoles of Colour⁷³. However, not everyone has adopted this “cajunization” and Trépanier cites certain Francophones who, in 1981, weren’t content with the change. Declarations typical of these respondents were, “[o]n s’appelait des Créoles avant cette affaire de Cadjin” and “[i]ls s’appellent des Cadjiens mais c’est tous des Créoles⁷⁴”. She claims that hence, “two types of Cajun came to be recognized: the ‘real’ or ‘pure’ Cajun, of Acadian descent, and the ‘new’ Cajun, that is any white Louisiana native of French culture⁷⁵”.

This cajunization doesn’t limit itself to the personal level since the definition of Cajun Country was changing as well. The results of a 1941 study shows the geography of French subcultures by mapping the distribution of Acadian and Creole surnames, and Evangeline parish falls clearly into the region dominated by Creoles⁷⁶. Several works offer lists of names that are typically prairie Creole such as Fontenot, Lafleur, Guillory, Ortego, Soileau, Vidrine and Deshotels⁷⁷. The Creole history of the region surrounding Ville Platte is reinforced by Brasseaux who shows that at the end of the Civil War in the former St. Landry parish, well

⁷³ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷⁴ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷⁷ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Gerald L. Gold, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Bill Jeanmard and Rita Jack, *History of Ville Platte: 150 Year Sesquicentennial Special Edition*, Brochure, Ville Platte LA, Cleco, 2008, p. 16.

before its division into three, Creoles represented 20% of the population (plus another 2% for people who came directly from France) against only 7% for Acadians⁷⁸. The naming of French Louisiana as “Acadiana” in 1971 imposed a Cajun identity on the entire region, including the Creole domains. In spite of long-standing antagonisms, Trépanier stresses that this identity is generally well accepted throughout the area⁷⁹. It should be noted, however, that the acceptance of a Cajun identity by non-Acadians is not necessarily an entirely new phenomenon.

2.2.3. Historical Cajunization

In the bayous of southwest Acadiana, the cajunization of Creoles took place well before it did in the western prairies and in certain communities on the shores of the Mississippi⁸⁰. Brasseaux claims that the poorest white Creoles in these bayous were absorbed by their Acadian neighbours towards the end of the 18th century⁸¹ and Waddell notes the appropriation of the word *Creole* by the Anglo-American majority as part of an effort to impose a new racial order in Louisiana in the aftermath of the Civil War⁸². Brasseaux also explains that the Northerners refused to admit an ethnic category without an explicit racial dimension and, since the term *Creole* meant to them “of mixed origin”, or non-white, the only possibility left to the white Creoles in the area was to define themselves as Cajun. In fact, the integration of the Creoles of the Lafourche Basin is so complete that many families have no idea that the arrival of their ancestors preceded that of the Acadians by more than half a century⁸³.

⁷⁸ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 167-168.

⁷⁹ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸¹ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁸² Éric Waddell, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁸³ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

For Anglophones, the word “Cajun” referred to all people of French origin with limited financial means and, consequently, all the prairie Creoles, like their cousins in the bayous, ended up becoming Cajuns. However, contrary to the Creoles of the southwest, and in spite of the fact that around 1900 the Americans had succeeded in imposing a Cajun identity to the poor Francophones in Avoyelles parish and the northwest of the former (Imperial) St. Landry parish (modern-day Evangeline parish), the prairie Creoles didn’t identify themselves as such⁸⁴. In the heart of the Creole community the distinction between Creole and Cajun was still alive.

2.2.4. The Fusion of Francophone Cultures

The beginning of the last century was an important era for the prairie Creoles. Around this time, the diminished circumstances of the Cajuns and prairie Creoles (who, because of the damages to their way of life caused by the Civil War and the liberation of the slaves, became sharecroppers in large numbers⁸⁵) forced them to interact with the neighbouring black tenant farmers. Despite pressure in favour of segregation in the southern United States, the cultural exchanges which resulted from this contact influenced the production of Cajun music, the zydeco music of the black Creoles as well as modern Cajun cuisine. These exchanges were particularly numerous around Eunice (a town located on the dividing line between the Creole region in the south of Evangeline parish, and the Cajun region located in northern Acadia parish) and have blurred the cultural divisions between Acadians and their Creole neighbours to the north, at least for those that do not live in the region. Prairie Creoles gravitated towards their Cajun

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104; Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁸⁵ Gerald L. Gold, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

neighbours both politically and economically since the two cultures shared an increasingly common lifestyle⁸⁶.

2.3. Current Francophone Identities

As a result of Cajun ascendance, if cultural differences are now only visible at a community level, it is necessary to ask how this once distinct division manifests itself today. Brasseaux points to a growth in the number of marriages between Creoles and Cajuns over the course of the last three decades and he suggests an eventual complete merger of the two groups⁸⁷. Trépanier also mentions this tendency towards amalgam, but brings attention to what she calls “a zone of resistance to the Cajun identity” indicating the importance of regional subcultures⁸⁸.

2.3.1. *The Creoles of Today*

This zone of resistance, located between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, resists, for example, the expansion of Cajun festivals, which seem to be popular throughout French Louisiana, by celebrating the Creole ethnic identity. However, this resistance was already showing signs of weakness in 1991 and Trépanier mentions “a double pattern of ethnic affiliation⁸⁹”. In certain cases, Francophones of Creole origin will identify themselves as such inside their own communities, but they will identify themselves as Cajun when speaking to people from outside their community⁹⁰. This type of double identity is not unique to this zone of resistance since the prairie Creoles in Evangeline and

⁸⁶ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁸⁸ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Avoyelles parishes may still concede their Creole origins in private⁹¹. Even in Mamou, a small town in Evangeline parish (a typically Cajun town according to Revon Reed⁹², the residents “will tell you privately ‘[we] are not really Cajuns’⁹³”.

The brochure distributed by the town of Ville Platte⁹⁴ indicates that the impression that this region was colonized by Acadians is erroneous, and that “Cajun country” is located to the south of Opelousas (in St. Landry parish). This is interesting since Trépanier says that in the regions where the people resist a Cajun identity, or have recently accepted one, they are no more culturally Cajun than they were in the past. She indicates that even those “who accept the designation ‘Cajun’ insist on cultural difference between themselves and the ‘real’ Cajuns⁹⁵”. These differences can be expressed in terms of food, music, community atmosphere, and even in the type of French spoken. As subtle as these differences may be, they do have an impact on regional character.

2.3.2. *The Modern Cajun*

If we rely on the author Revon Reed, a native of Mamou, the most Cajun parishes are Evangeline, St. Landry, Acadia and Lafayette⁹⁶. However, this opinion goes against our previous declarations pertaining to Evangeline parish, a “bastion of prairie Creoles”. The definition of Cajun offered by Reed includes all Francophones, including assimilated Anglophones (cf. his family name) and displays a certain

⁹¹ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁹³ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁹⁴ Bill Jeanmard and Rita Jack, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁹⁵ Cécyle Trépanier, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

⁹⁶ Revon Reed, *Lâche pas la patate : portrait des Acadiens de la Louisiane*, Ottawa, Éditions Parti pris, 1976, p. 17.

acceptance of the cajunization of his parish, while at the same time he doesn't deny the Creole side. His definition of Cajun includes the majority of French Louisiana (with respect to black Francophones, he mentions the similarities and the friendship between the black and white communities, but doesn't include them as Cajun⁹⁷) and is a good example of the spread of cajunization. For Reed, Cajun is a generic term that doesn't exclude linguistic differences between Francophone groups and his definition seems to be a way to distinguish Francophones from the majority in Louisiana, the Anglophones.

2.4. The Anglicization of French Louisiana

All of these cultural changes inside the Francophone community have taken place in the shadow of an even more powerful force: Anglicization. Ever since the cession of Louisiana to the United States in 1803, particularly during and following the Civil War, the preponderant influence of the English language has made itself more and more felt. Being able to speak and write English rather than French became an important political and commercial tool, and this led to the rapid transition to English among the Francophone elites which prevented Colonial French (or Plantation French) from serving as a linguistic model in Louisiana. In other words, the abandonment of French by the elites actually permitted the survival of Cajun French and slowed down the dialectal convergence between rural French varieties⁹⁸. It is its isolation and inferior status, as well as the lack of means of communication, which has allowed Cajun French to be preserved⁹⁹.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹⁸ Sylvie Dubois, Carole Salmon and Sibylle Noetzel, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁹⁹ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Barry Ancelet notes that the use of the French language amongst the rural communities was greatly diminished, particularly among the young, beginning in 1916 with mandatory English language schooling, followed by a new network of roads, improved transportation and an economic boom fuelled by the discovery of oil¹⁰⁰. Picone and Valdman indicate that the influence of English can be seen in borrowings and calques, in code-switching and in its progressive substitution to vernacular varieties in their traditional areas of use¹⁰¹. Furthermore, they highlight that Cajun French (CF) is no longer transmitted from generation to generation¹⁰². In spite of the approximately 200,000 CF speakers according to the last census, Rottet believes that, in the near future, CF will probably disappear in its traditional territory and he adds that even if it is easy to find CF speakers among the elderly, there remain very few children who learn to speak French in the home¹⁰³.

2.4.1. The Anglicization of Ville Platte

According to the studies undertaken by Breton and Louder using the 1970 census, Evangeline parish was the number two parish in terms of the percentage of the population that declares itself to have French as a mother tongue (76%), and it was one of only seven parishes where the Francophone population constituted a numerical majority¹⁰⁴. This percentage will most certainly have diminished since that time,

¹⁰⁰ Barry Jean Ancelet, "Negotiating the Mainstream: The Creoles and Cajuns in Louisiana", *The French Review*, 80.6, 2007, p. 1240-1241.

¹⁰¹ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰³ Kevin J. Rottet, "Variation et étiollement en français cadien", In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 243-244.

¹⁰⁴ Roland J.-L. Breton and Dean R. Louder, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

but Evangeline remains one of the most Francophone parishes¹⁰⁵. In his study on culture change, Gold mentions the decline in the use of French in private and familial contexts. He analysed the impact of economic and agricultural innovations, as well as the introduction of mandatory schooling, on the Francophone population of the region¹⁰⁶.

Because of the aforementioned innovations, the French speakers of the prairies, who lived for centuries as homesteaders or in small rural communities known as *coves*, left the countryside in large numbers after the Second World War in order to settle into towns like Mamou and Ville Platte¹⁰⁷. During the post-war period, education in English and the arrival of modern infrastructure (television, highways, etc.) amongst other factors, contributed to the accelerated abandonment of French¹⁰⁸. The cultural movement of the 60s and 70s slowed down the disappearance of French, but according to Gold it was the white collar workers (merchants and professionals), and not the unilingual Francophones who had left the coves, who led the struggle for the survival of French¹⁰⁹. It is in Ville Platte that Cajun musicians record their music and it is there that we find a few French-language radio programs.

2.4.2. Societal Bilingualism

Even with all of the effort against Anglicization, it is a reality and the number of speakers of French has dropped since 1970. Blyth notes

¹⁰⁵ Carl Blyth, "The Sociolinguistic Situation of Cajun French: The Effects of Language Shift and Language Loss", In Albert Valdman (ed.), *French and Creole in Louisiana*, New York, Plenum Press, 1997, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ Gerald L. Gold, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 273-275.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

the fact that linguistic change from French to English is taking place rapidly and has clouded linguistic and social lines¹¹⁰. He says that the majority of speakers seem to be unaware of the linguistic differences in their community. Societal bilingualism allows all Francophone Cajuns to express themselves in English and those Francophones who do chose to continue to speak French only do so with friends and/or family¹¹¹. It also restricts the amount of contact with Francophones outside of the speaker's social circle or region because contact with strangers is initiated in English. The restriction of the use of the French language has led to losses in the control of grammar and the lexicon which have resulted in numerous innovations and restructuration¹¹².

In the following section we will examine the regional variation that exists in Louisiana and how this variation could have allowed the existence of a variant such as affrication that is observed in Ville Platte. We have shown above how this trait could have survived all the cultural and societal changes that have taken place in recent decades; it is now necessary to demonstrate why it was likely to have been present in the French of the original settlers.

3. Affrication in Ville Platte

Concerning our analysis of affricates in Ville Platte, the similarities between the French of Ville Platte and other colonial varieties of French and French Creoles can only reinforce our proposal of the presence of affrication as a vestige of the French spoken by the first settlers because this trait, characteristic of the varieties of Laurentian

¹¹⁰ Carl Blyth, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 36-42.

French spoken in Canada¹¹³, and attested in Evangeline and Livingston Parishes in Louisiana, is also attested in the former French colonies in the Indian Ocean and in several Creole speaking areas. Poirier¹¹⁴ remarked in his analysis of the affrication (or *assibilation*, his preferred term) in Quebec, that the affrication of /t/ and /d/ before closed front vowels and palatal semi-vowels is part of the phonetic habits of the speakers of the local variety of French in Reunion and Mauritius, is clearly noticeable in the French of Seychelles, and, according to him, is widespread in French-based Creoles. Valdman and Klingler¹¹⁵ note that dental stops in Louisiana Creole are lightly palatalized: /pitʰi/ (“child”), /dʰife/ (“fire”), and Lyche maintains that affrication is generalized in Creoles, (including Haitian and Louisiana Creole) and that we also find this affrication in Cajun French¹¹⁶.

3.1. A Legacy of the First Settlers or an Independent Development?

The presence of all of these affricating varieties in far-flung former colonies raises the possibility of an independent “Maritime French” spoken in the ports of the west of France and on board ships involved in overseas commerce and from which all varieties of North American French stem¹¹⁷. Though they cannot confirm the existence of this “Maritime French”, they do help to show that there is a strong

¹¹³ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹¹⁴ Poirier, Claude, “L’assibilation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 391, 394.

¹¹⁵ Albert Valdman and Thomas A. Klingler, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹¹⁶ Chantal Lyche, “Genèse et traits caractéristiques du français cadien : un aperçu phonologique”, *Revue Romane*, 31.1, 1996, p. 36.

¹¹⁷ See Alexander Hull, “Affinités entre les variétés du français”, In Albert Valdman (dir.), *Le français hors de France*, Paris, Éditions Honoré Champion, 1979, p. 165-180; Alexander Hull, “Des origines du français dans le nouveau monde”, In Raymond Mougeon and Édouard Bénéak (dir.), *Les origines du français québécois*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1994, p. 183-198.

probability that affrication was characteristic of the speech of the first French colonists in Louisiana. This trait, therefore, will have had to be able to resist a levelling or mixing of dialects over the course of centuries in this remote corner of French Louisiana that is Ville Platte and its hinterlands.

Poirier is of the opinion that affrication is a matter of an ancient phonetic habit and, by noting the participation of Canadians in the foundation of the first settlements in Louisiana, suggests the possibility of a Laurentian origin for the phenomenon in Ville Platte. In his study of Quebec-Louisiana relations, Hero offers lists of many Canadians who settled in Louisiana in the early 1700s and became “comfortably well-off planters and merchants¹¹⁸”. Poirier states that, in his opinion, affrication would have been slowed by the decreasing proportion, to the advantage of other groups, of immigrants from the Laurentian Valley in the 18th century¹¹⁹, which is in line with Dubois’ assessment of the role of successive waves of Francophone immigration in the dialectal development of French in Acadiana. Beginning with the idea that Laurentian origins are evident in every Francophone linguistic region where affrication exists in the United States, Poirier insists, in spite of the fact that the documentation doesn’t allow us to determine with certainty that affrication in Louisiana is of Laurentian source, that all of these affricated pronunciations likely have the same origin¹²⁰. Though Laurentian settlers played a key role in the original settlement of Louisiana, it is likely that many of the settlers from France would also have affricated their dental consonants, thereby reinforcing this tendency already present in the dialect of the Canadian

¹¹⁸ Alfred Olivier Hero, *Louisiana and Quebec: Bilateral Relations and Comparative Sociopolitical Evolution, 1673-1993*, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1995, p. 33.

¹¹⁹ Claude Poirier, « Assibilation... », *op. cit.*, p. 390.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

settlers and increasing the probability that other non-affricating settlers would have adopted this trait. What follows is an examination of the French origins of affrication and of the various groups that settled Louisiana during the *Ancien Régime*.

3.2. The Origins of Affrication

By setting aside the possibility of an origin due to contact with English, or of a purely Laurentian innovation, for Poirier there is no doubt that the origins of affrication are in France. He argues that convincing evidence for this account can be found in the fact that the phenomenon can be found in several different varieties of French or French-based Creoles that were formed in a parallel manner at the same time as Laurentian French¹²¹. He expands his explanation by determining the age of the implantation of the trait and the French region in which dental affrication originated.

A comparison of affricating and non-affricating colonial populations leads Poirier to conclude that the phenomenon was imported into the colonies starting in the 1660s, a period that coincides with a “demographic boom” in the Laurentian colony as well as the colonisation of Reunion, but follows the colonisation of Acadia [in present-day Nova Scotia] (1630s) by a few decades¹²². Poirier insists that it was more than a latent tendency amongst the settlers since the trait was solidly implanted into two colonies on opposite sides of the earth, and argues that the fact that it is slightly less pronounced in Reunion than in Quebec is an indication that it hadn’t reached its peak of development in the 1660s.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 395-397.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 398-399.

The existence of certain Francophone communities where the speakers affricate with the same force as the Québécois in former colonies such as Prince Edward Island, where settlement began in the 1720s, and therefore before the arrival of displaced Acadians between 1749 and 1756¹²³, and the marked affrication on the island of Mauritius (occupied by the French beginning in 1721) suggests that the phenomenon was completed in certain geographic regions beginning in the 1720s¹²⁴. The phenomenon was therefore likely to have been in an advanced stage of development in certain regions of France well before the 1720s and the combination of a group of affricating French settlers with the group of affricating Canadian settlers, making up a majority of the colony, led to the continued development and implantation of this trait in Louisiana. Those researchers who have done studies on the origins of this trait, such as Poirier and Hull, put the origins in the west of France, though there is still some discrepancy as to the exact location of its origins. The following section will examine the French origins of dental affrication.

3.2.1. Affrication in the West of France

As mentioned by Morin¹²⁵, if the Indian Ocean colonies and the original PEI colony were established without Canadians, and both the Illinois colonies and the early Louisiana colonies with a mixture of Canadian and French settlers were established at around the same time, then it seems logical to suppose that affrication existed in several

¹²³ Ruth King and Robert Ryan, “La phonologie des parlers acadiens de l’Île-du-Prince-Édouard”, In Raymond Mougeon and Édouard Bédiak (dir.), *Le français canadien parlé hors Québec*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1989, p. 249-259.

¹²⁴ Claude Poirier, “Assibilation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

¹²⁵ Yves-Charles Morin, “Les premiers immigrants et la prononciation du français au Québec”, *Revue québécoise de linguistique*, 31, 2002, p. 63.

French regions from which it was spread to the colonies. It would be difficult to believe that the same development took place independently in different groups of people in all of these different areas at more or less the same time. It would thus appear that there had to have been a tendency towards affrication in the speech of many of those colonists who left France.

In his in-depth examination of affrication in former French colonies, Poirier offers several reasons why he believes that dental affrication has its origins in the west of France “somewhere between the Loire and the estuary of the Gironde¹²⁶”. In fact, he states that if we consider the fact that this trait wasn’t found before the second half of the 17th Century, then Normandy and Perche do not appear to be possible regions of origin because these two areas provided the bulk of the immigrants to Canada before 1660. He also excludes the provinces of the centre of France including Paris for lack of any evidence of affrication in these areas. It is the centre-west (Aunis, Saintonge, Angoumois) that provided the bulk of the settlers during the 1660s, and the settlers on Prince Edward Island that are the ancestors of those who affricate today were overwhelmingly from Aunis and its capital La Rochelle¹²⁷, indicating that this is the most likely region of origin for this phenomenon¹²⁸.

Hull’s proposal of a “Maritime French” dialect supposes that non-affricating colonists would have picked up a trait like affrication in a port city during the long wait that often preceded travel to the New World. He essentially states that in the port cities there would have been a mesolectal variety of French spoken that would have served

¹²⁶ Claude Poirier, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 400-401.

¹²⁷ Ruth King and Robert Ryan, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹²⁸ Claude Poirier, “Assibilation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 400-401.

as a common language to people of diverse geographical and social origins. The acrolect, “standard French”, would have only been useful to educated people, and he believes that basilectal varieties (the patois) would have quickly died out through lack of use¹²⁹. As for Poirier’s opinion of Hull’s hypothesis on “Maritime French”, without confirming it, he is of the opinion that ports of embarkation “must have played an important role in the genesis of American French¹³⁰”. At the end of his article on affrication, Poirier summarizes his proposals by emphasizing the fact that affrication “is a linguistic heritage from France” which established itself in Canada beginning in 1663. He adds that it has its origins in the Centre-West of France and did not impact the Acadians since the majority of Acadian settlement had already taken place by that time¹³¹.

The Acadians, who arrived relatively late in Louisiana (after the French period) following their expulsion from Nova Scotia, did not affricate, but in the case of the Francophones already there, Poirier’s hypotheses support our idea that at least certain settlers who had arrived before the Acadians affricated dental consonants as in Quebec, since many of the first colonists were from New France¹³², and many of those who did come from France were from the Centre-West and were quite likely speakers of an affricating dialect. The affrication that still exists in Louisiana would therefore be a vestige of the speech of these settlers. With respect to Ville Platte, the majority of the original settlers were Prairie Creoles whose ancestors had been soldiers at Fort Toulouse and residents of Mobile (in what is now the state of

¹²⁹ Alexander Hull, “Des origines...”, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

¹³⁰ Claude Poirier, “Assibilation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 401-402.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 390.

Alabama) before the English occupation in 1764¹³³. It is worth taking a look at the settlement of the two Alabama posts in order to determine whether or not the settlers and their descendants who would settle what is now the Louisiana Prairie, would have affricated dental consonants.

3.2.2. *The Fort Toulouse and Mobile Settlements*

As stated by Picone and Valdman, ever since its beginning, colonial Louisiana had two homelands: France and Quebec¹³⁴, though, according to Hero, “for most Americans and Europeans, French-speaking Canada’s influence on colonial Louisiana seems to have begun with the arrival of the Acadians¹³⁵”. The earliest attempts at colonisation in Louisiana took place in what are now the states of Mississippi and Alabama. Hero states that men born in New France or who had spent significant time there “were the ones to conceive, lead, and provide initially the majority, and later an influential minority, of the manpower of explorations, initial settlement, and development of Louisiana¹³⁶”.

Mobile was founded in 1702 and would soon be made up of 140 persons with Canadians making up the largest group, and also including some families, cabin boys, soldiers and artisans who were almost all natives of the Atlantic ports of France including Rochefort, LaRochelle and Saint-Martin de Ré¹³⁷, all three located within the province of Aunis, where Poirier places the origins of dental affrication. It should also be noted that, as had been true in the early days of colonisation in

¹³³ Carl A. Brasseaux, *French...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹³⁴ Michael D. Picone and Albert Valdman, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹³⁵ Alfred Olivier Hero, *op. cit.*, p. xix.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³⁷ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana: The Reign of Louis XIV, 1698-1715*, Vol. 1, Trans. by J.-C. Lambert, Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1974, p. 97.

Quebec, there was an imbalance between the sexes and in 1704 a group of 24 girls who were mostly from Paris much like the “*filles du roi*” in Quebec, were, after a lengthy stay in Rochefort, brought in to marry the Canadians and French artisans and were encouraged to settle down¹³⁸. After this influx of settlers, there were very few arrivals of women or children for a number of years and it is possible that had these women not picked up the trait in Rochefort, or en route, they very well could have developed the use of it in the colonies. The children who grew up in this small colony certainly would have affricated dental consonants as the trait would have been prominent amongst a strong majority of the colonists.

There were a few influxes of people beginning in 1714, many of whom spent time in LaRochelle or Rochefort before departing¹³⁹. For example, Giraud mentions that “[i]n May 1716 Lépinay noted that ‘workmen of all sorts’ presented themselves every day at Rochefort, ready to go to Louisiana” and that such a request was rarely refused¹⁴⁰. Women and more distant relatives started to join their husbands as well, and some indentured servants from the Centre-West of France (including Aunis) came with them¹⁴¹. It should also be noted that a number of criminals who were sent to the Louisiana colony during the era of the Company of the West of John Law between 1717 and 1719, included many “expellees from around LaRochelle and Rochefort¹⁴²”.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152-253.

¹³⁹ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana: Years of transition 1715-1717*, Vol. 2, Trans. by Brian Pearce, Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1993, p. 416-417.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 117-119.

¹⁴² Alfred Olivier Hero, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

In spite of a decrease in population in Mobile after the establishment of New Orleans, the nucleus of families did not disappear¹⁴³ and, aside from the absorption of ex-servicemen, since there was not a significant influx of population it seems unlikely that a trait such as affrication would have disappeared, especially since those who remained included a large number of Canadians who had been present at the colony's beginnings¹⁴⁴. In fact Hero states that "a large and influential minority in and around Mobile remained of Canadian backgrounds as late as 1727¹⁴⁵". It is also around this time that a number of forts were set up in the Louisiana interior to protect the fledgling French colonies from the British, the most important of which, in terms of our study, was Fort Toulouse.

Fort Toulouse was established in 1717¹⁴⁶ and, therefore, the settlement of this fort began at approximately the same time as that of two other colonies showing dental affrication, Prince Edward Island and Mauritius. The fort was supplied from Mobile and served to protect it from the British, remaining in contact with the colony throughout its existence¹⁴⁷. For example, those wishing to marry would have had to go to Mobile to do it since there were no priests at Fort Toulouse¹⁴⁸. Civilians didn't settle at the fort at first, but eventually would after 1724, and soldiers were sometimes released from service if they agreed to settle near the forts¹⁴⁹. What began as simply a garrison of 20-30

¹⁴³ Marcel Giraud, *A History of French Louisiana: The Company of the Indies, 1723-1731*, Vol. 5, trans. by Brian Pearce, Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1991, p. 351.

¹⁴⁴ Marcel Giraud, *A History...*, Vol. 2, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁵ Alfred Olivier Hero, *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel H. Thomas, *Fort Toulouse: The French Outpost at the Alabamas on the Coosa*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabam, 1989, p. 111.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xxv, 26.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

soldiers in 1717 would grow to a colony of 140 men, women and children (about 80 of whom were born there), along with a garrison of 40 soldiers, by 1755¹⁵⁰. Of these 40 soldiers, many were members of extended families descended from two soldiers of the 1721 garrison (Simon Brignac with four descendants and Pierre Fonteneau with seven)¹⁵¹ establishing a direct link to the fort's foundation.

As previously mentioned, the prairie Creoles are the descendants of settlers of the state of Alabama before 1763, most of whom had been enlisted men in the Fort Toulouse garrison¹⁵². It is known that only a small minority (possibly 280) of the approximately 1,200 to 1,300 French military men remained in the colony and, of the 819 French colonial soldiers whose birthplace is known, the Centre-West region of France contributed no more than 18%¹⁵³. It has been shown, however, that at least eleven of the forty soldiers who remained in the Fort Toulouse garrison in 1758 were born in the colony. Of those born in France, their most likely source of spouses was the Mobile colony, the other main source of prairie Creoles, which was almost certainly populated by affricating speakers, and after several generations of settlement and intermarriage between discharged soldiers and colonists and their descendants, it is likely that those who migrated to the Louisiana prairies in 1764 would nearly all have affricated dental consonants.

It is clear that the French spoken by the group of colonists that would eventually form the foundation of the Prairie Creole population was established over the course of the first half of the 18th century from

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

¹⁵² Carl A. Brasseaux, *French..., op. cit.*, p. 103-104.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

a group of people originally heavily Canadian in origin, but also including many who came directly from France with a strong significance placed on the port cities of La Rochelle and Rochefort in the affricating province of Aunis and its neighbours. Since Mobile and Fort Toulouse never received an overwhelming influx of non-affricating speakers, this trait was most likely alive and well at the time these colonists moved to present-day Evangeline Parish. In order to add support to our hypothesis that this group of French speakers was one that affricated dental consonants, it would be useful to compare them to another group of Francophones established at the same time, with similar proportions of French and Canadian settlers.

3.2.3. Settlement and Affrication in the Illinois Colonies

The notion that a comparison between colonies might shed some light on the origins of affrication was raised by Poirier¹⁵⁴ when he said that the study of different North American dialects, that of Missouri for example, would allow us to see the influences that took place in the principal colonies and maybe to be able to date certain changes. Valdman declares that the French spoken up until recently in Old Mines Missouri is a relic of the Colonial French “imported to North America in the 17th and 18th centuries¹⁵⁵”. This section is an attempt to show that a strong similarity in the founding groups of both the Louisiana colonies and the Illinois colonies seems to support the idea that the founding groups affricated dental stop consonants.

¹⁵⁴ Claude Poirier, “Les causes de la variation géolinguistique du français en Amérique du Nord : l’éclairage de l’approche comparative”, In Claude Poirier et coll. (dir.), *Langue, espace, société. Les variétés du français en Amérique du Nord*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1994, p. 257.

¹⁵⁵ Albert Valdman, “Le français vernaculaire des isolats américains”, In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le Français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2005, p. 221.

Vézina¹⁵⁶ states that the founding nucleus of Creole people in the Illinois colonies formed between 1699 and 1752 (in line with Mobile and Fort Toulouse) and that at least a third of the colonists were Canadian (the others were from France or lower Louisiana). The Canadians often migrated as a family and tended to show a stronger stability and stronger roots than the other colonists. According to Hero in his book on the historical relations between Louisiana and Quebec, the Illinois area was “overwhelmingly Canadian-populated” and that majority lasted for at least the first two generations¹⁵⁷. It seems that a trickle of Canadian immigration (voyageurs and merchants) continued right up until the beginning of the 19th century, but this movement is not well known. Hero talks of a back and forth movement between the two areas, particularly with respect to bachelors looking to find wives¹⁵⁸. Vézina also notes a prolonged contact with lower Louisiana during the same time period.

Old Mines itself was first established between 1723 and 1726¹⁵⁹, at a similar time to the establishment of Fort Toulouse. It is important to note, therefore, that the affrication of dental consonants is indeed characteristic of this dialect¹⁶⁰. Vézina¹⁶¹ attributes the survival of this trait to a prolonged absence of French language educational institutions which would have limited the diffusion of this trait amongst the Francophones, coupled with the lack of cultural elite. The relative isolation of the colony would certainly have limited contact with

¹⁵⁶ Robert Vézina, “Correspondance et différenciation lexicales : le français du Missouri et le français canadien”, In Albert Valdman, Julie Auger and Deborah Piston-Hatlen (dir.), *Le français en Amérique du Nord : état présent*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005, p. 541.

¹⁵⁷ Alfred Olivier Hero, *op. cit.*, p. 24-25.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁹ Claude Poirier, “Assibilation...”, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

¹⁶¹ Robert Vézina, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

speakers of non-affricating dialects. This is comparable to the Prairie Creoles in the Ville Platte area, where there would have been very little access to French language education; the people were not in contact with the elite “Genteel Creoles”, who in fact avoided contact with their Prairie cousins¹⁶², and, as noted by Gold¹⁶³, from the original settlement to the late 19th century, most settlers lived in relative isolation on homestead land.

The affrication found in the speech of the descendants of the original settlers of the Illinois colonies would appear to reinforce our hypothesis that the ancestors of the Prairie Creoles affricated since both groups of original settlers had similar origins in Canada and France and lived comparably isolated lives up until the 20th century. It is, however, necessary that we look at the history of some others groups of French speakers with similar origins whose descendants do not affricate, at least not in large numbers¹⁶⁴, in order to determine why the trait is not more widespread in Louisiana.

3.2.4. *Why no affrication in Avoyelles Parish and the town of Mamou?*

The question remains as to why there is little or no affrication in a group that is often considered to be very similar to that of Ville Platte, the Francophones of Avoyelles parish¹⁶⁵. This is an area that was settled by Creoles (and other European peoples) beginning around 1780¹⁶⁶ and never had a significant influx of Acadians. Breton and

¹⁶² Carl A. Brasseaux, *French, Cajun, Creole...*, *op. cit.*, p. 102-103.

¹⁶³ Gerald L. Gold, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

¹⁶⁴ Sylvie Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

¹⁶⁵ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁶⁶ Corinne L. Saucier, *Histoire et géographie des Avoyelles en Louisiane*, trans. by Luc Lacourcière, Gretna, LA, Pelican Publishing Company, 1998, p. 28.

Louder¹⁶⁷ note that in both Evangeline and Avoyelles we find family names that are very different to those found elsewhere in Acadiana. Though when comparing the list of names of the founders of the Prairie Creoles in Evangeline Parish (see section 2.2.2), we noticed that among the founding family names given in Corinne Saucier's *Histoire et Géographie des Avoyelles en Louisiane*¹⁶⁸ for the founders of each town and village, there is only one name, Guillory, that can be found among those listed as the core names of the Prairie Creoles. It seems that these two areas were not founded by exactly the same groups of people, though there may indeed be a certain amount of overlap, and there is also a significant difference in the time of settlement. The founding of the Avoyelles colony comes some 20 years after the settlement of the Prairies, and, as seen in the previous section, those that made up the core of the Prairie settlement can be traced back as a group to the beginning of the 18th century.

In their examination of Acadiana, Breton and Louder show that there are a series of Anglo-dominant wards that separate the Creole populations of Evangeline and Avoyelles Parishes¹⁶⁹ creating something of a buffer zone between the two populations. This Anglo region separating the Creole populations is what leads Breton and Louder to describe Avoyelles Parish as a "Francophone Island¹⁷⁰". Saucier notes that the Avoyelles colony was established next to the Vieille River which feeds the Red River, a tributary of the Mississippi, facilitating commerce and relations with New Orleans¹⁷¹. She claims that the settlers were not as isolated as one might think at first glance since the numerous

¹⁶⁷ Roland J.-L. Breton and Dean R. Louder, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹⁶⁸ Corinne L. Saucier, *op. cit.*, p. 84-106.

¹⁶⁹ Roland J.-L. Breton and Dean R. Louder, *op. cit.*, p. 217, 225-226.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁷¹ Corinne L. Saucier, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

waterways served for both commerce and social contracts, and settlers were known to visit friends and families in other outposts as far away as the parishes of St. Martin and Natchitoches¹⁷². We know that this is in contrast to the Prairies of Evangeline Parish where settlements such as Ville Platte and Mamou are more than 20 miles west of the nearest town able to maintain contact with New Orleans by water¹⁷³.

The fact that there is neither a tendency to affricate in Mamou, nor in southern Evangeline Parish in general, is likely due to a strong contact with the non-affricating Cajuns directly to their south. As seen in section 2.3.2, Reed describes Mamou as the most Cajun of areas (even though Brasseaux notes that many of the people in the area concede their Creole background) which is a testament to the amount of fusion between the different Francophone groups in this area. Mamou is, in fact, just north of Eunice, which, in an area that separates Creole and Cajun populations, was necessarily a centre of intercultural exchange. The reduced circumstances that followed the Civil War led to the blurring of “the longstanding but rapidly decaying cultural cleavages between the Cajuns and their Prairie Creole neighbours to the north¹⁷⁴”. It was therefore natural that before long “these poor Prairie Creoles who, like the Acadians, had been abandoned by their own ethnic leadership element, gravitated culturally, economically and politically toward the Acadians south of present day Eunice, with whom they shared an increasingly common lifestyle¹⁷⁵”. The proximity of Mamou to Eunice and the Prairie Cajuns will have led to a convergence

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 38, 43.

¹⁷³ See section 2.1, and A. L. Bertrand and C. L. Beale, *The French and Non-French in Rural Louisiana: A Study of the Ethnic Factors to Rural Development*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 1965, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian...*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

of the French spoken by the two groups and affrication may have been a victim of this interdialectal contact. Were it not for the isolation of the prairies and the arrested use of French in the early 20th century, it is entirely possible that affrication would have been eliminated further north in Ville Platte.

4. Conclusion

This article is an attempt to explain the presence of affrication in one small corner of the traditional Francophone region of Louisiana. As we have seen, a diverse assortment of Francophone populations have settled in Louisiana over the centuries, and the resulting migrations and population changes have contributed to a certain degree of regional variation. The evidence examined in this report appears to indicate that affrication was most likely a trait characteristic of the French spoken by the first settlers in Ville Platte, and that a long period of relative isolation, a low influx of Francophones with non-affricating dialects, coupled with a modernization and opening up to the world that has largely taken place in English, has led to the preservation of this trait. We have also seen how perceptions of a community, both inside and out, can mask its historical identity and consequently obscure particular regional developments. By considering variations that have often been overlooked, we have shown not only how Francophones of a particular community can preserve a particular trait, but also how a seemingly similar community may not.

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