

# **A Unique Francophone Experience in the United States: Identifying Problems and Proposing Suggestions to Strengthen the Louisiana Immersion Model**

---

C. Brian Barnett, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of French | Director of First-Year Language Program  
Indiana State University

[c.brian.barnett@indstate.edu](mailto:c.brian.barnett@indstate.edu)

LTE 2015: Changes and Challenges in Language Teacher Education  
May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015



# Rationale: My research

---

## □ Why French in the Americas?

1. Diversity of francophone world (French is used by many nationalities and ethnic groups)
2. Relevance of studying French in the Americas by showcasing neighboring francophone communities
3. Contemporary and evolving nature; not only a cultural legacy
4. Motivation for students
5. Exposure to language variation by introducing non-Hexagonal varieties to avoid scorn.



# Varieties of French in Louisiana

---

## □ Colonial French

- direct from France at end of 17<sup>th</sup> century; variety of *français populaire*

## □ Acadian French

- In 1755 British forced Acadians to leave homes in present day Canadian Maritimes, some arrived in Louisiana in 1764-1785 and settled in south central Louisiana

## □ 19<sup>th</sup> Century Plantation French

- left France during first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century for political reasons; higher social class than Colonial French speakers

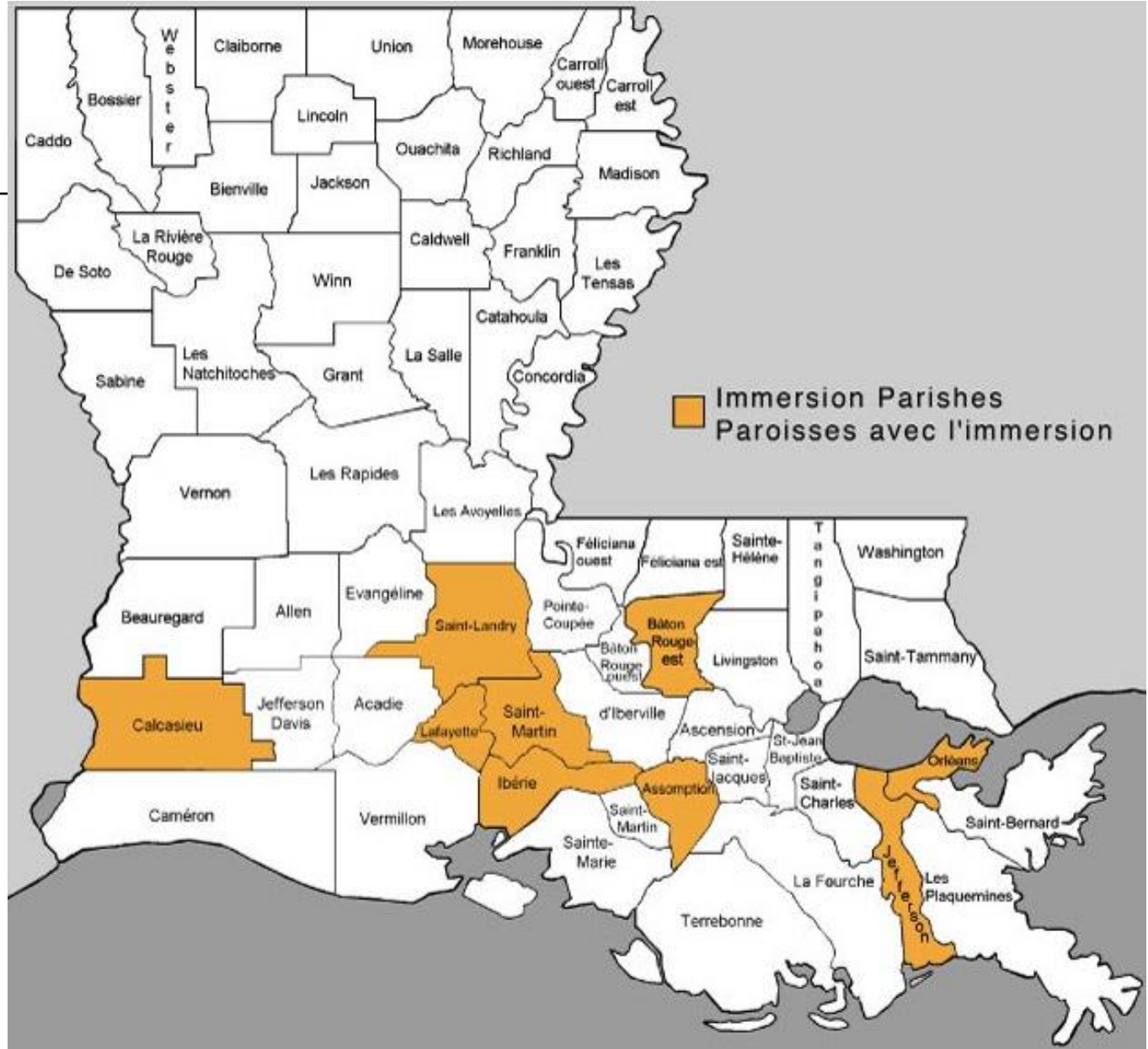
## □ Cajun French versus Louisiana French



# Bilingual Context in Louisiana

---

- ❑ 2011-2012 school year: 28 French immersion schools
- ❑ Majority were district-run public schools
- ❑ Early-partial immersion model (minimum 50% of instruction in L2) resulting in additive bilingualism
- ❑ Most PK-5 or PK-8 grade models
- ❑ Found bilingualism of student population: “*On ne naît presque plus francophone en Louisiane. On le devient par chance, par hasard ou par volonté.* (Joseph Dunn, CODOFIL<sup>7</sup> Executive Director from June 2011-January 2014)



□ Source:  
<http://www.frenchinlouisiana.com>



# Recent Louisiana State Legislation

---

- Act No. 196: effective 2014-2015 school year, school districts must establish immersion program at K or 1<sup>st</sup> grade if legal guardians of at least 25 students living within the school district boundaries submit a written request (additional stipulations)
- Act No. 99 : signed May 2014, requires schools participating in the new State Seal of Biliteracy program to place a seal of biliteracy on diplomas and transcripts to recognize students' language proficiency in English and at least one other language.



# The Present Study

---

Research questions:

- ❑ What problems do French immersion teachers face in Louisiana?
- ❑ What are possible solutions to these problems?

NOTE: This data is a derivative product of three-phase study on immersion teachers' attitudes toward Louisiana French and the integration of this variety into the classroom.



# Participants

---

- 12 immersion teachers emerged from pool of 78
- Maximal variation sampling to have a range in attitudes toward Louisiana French and the integration of this variety into the classroom
- **Selection criteria:** (1) region or country of origin, (2) years of teaching in French immersion in Louisiana, (3) attitudes toward and integration of Louisiana French, (4) parish in which the immersion school was located, and (5) gender of teacher.



<b>Attitude/ Integration of LF</b>	<b>National Origin</b>	<b>Years in Immersion in Louisiana</b>	<b>Immersion School Parish</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Positive</b>	Louisiana French/ American	3 years or more	Lafayette	M
<b>Positive</b>	Africa	3 years or more	St. Landry	F
<b>Positive</b>	Canada	1-3 years	Lafayette	M
<b>Positive</b>	France	less than one year	St. Martin	F
<b>Neutral</b>	Africa	less than one year	Iberia	F
<b>Neutral</b>	Belgium	3 years or more	Assumption	F
<b>Neutral</b>	France	less than one year	Calcasieu	M
<b>Negative</b>	Non-Louisiana French/ American	1-3 years	Calcasieu	F
<b>Negative</b>	Louisiana French/ American	3 years or more	Lafayette	F
<b>Negative</b>	Belgium	less than one year	Calcasieu	F
<b>Negative</b>	France	3 years or more	Orleans	F



# Data Collection and Analysis

---

- Hour-long semi-structured interview in either French or English
- Data used for this presentation came from timed recordings running 10-15 minutes for each participant.
- Transcripts were read and shared themes were identified using frequency analysis: Top ten list.



# Issues with the program

---


1. Availability of materials
  - level-appropriate materials for classroom in French linked to Louisiana core curriculum; libraries lacking materials in French (audio-visual and books)
2. Demanding workload
  - translate materials; preparing for lessons; promoting French in community
3. Negative interaction with non-immersion American colleagues
  - feeling of being invisible or not valued; non-immersion colleagues don't understand workload
4. Administration not completely understanding immersion education
  - do not understand benefits of bilingualism which then leads to lack of faith in immersion



# Issues with the program

---


5. Parental power and lack of French language skills
6. Lack of communication among French immersion teachers
  - unfamiliar with colleagues
7. No formal immersion training and no opportunities for immersion class observations
  - More than the Immersion 101 workshop upon arrival
  - One teacher per grade at school or common preparation period
8. Desired services provided by CODOFIL
  - made available to all teachers not only Foreign Associate Teachers
9. Not enough instruction time in French
10. Non-existent French language arts curriculum



# Teachers' recommendations to strengthen program

---

1. **Workload & materials**
  - shared materials database, textbook contract, & national immersion teacher network
2. **Common core of Louisiana French language and culture**
  - integrate into programmatic goals, Louisiana French resource kit, names of local Francophone content experts, Louisiana-themed professional development days, & asynchronous/synchronous online discussions with expert to count for CLUs, require CODOFIL teachers to produce Louisiana-themed projects with students
3. **Access to Francophone events**



# Author's recommendations to strengthen program

---

Data from larger study (additional research)

Learning how other minority language communities promote bilingualism and biculturalism can also strengthen the Louisiana immersion model

Not all recommendations are related to school context



# Efforts within the United States


---

## □ Maine French Heritage Language Program in Augusta, Maine

- offer free language classes to students (possibly parents in Louisiana) through Bureau of Recreation and French American Cultural Exchange
- organize fundraiser event to create additional connections with the local community

## □ Hawaiian

- teach local Louisiana French expressions and use daily
- encourage educators to remain indefinitely involved in the program either by classroom teaching, curriculum development, or teacher training
- promote the use of Louisiana French outside of school by non-profit organizations



# Efforts outside of the United States

---

## □ Maori in New Zealand

- Begin programs at preschool and continue until the university levels
- Integrate local culture in school clubs and learn traditional songs and dances.

## □ Welsh in Wales

- create language policies that encourage the use of Louisiana French in the workplace and in the community as a whole
- explain to expectant mothers the cognitive and social advantages of raising a bilingual children
- develop curriculum about Louisiana or her people in the following areas: place and heritage; belonging; language and literature; and creative and expressive arts.





# Limitations & Future Research

---

- Most data from participants with fewer than three years in the immersion context
- Additional qualitative research on problems with no elaboration: #3 negative interaction with non-immersion American colleagues (difference with new immersion only campus) and #6 lack of communication among French immersion teachers
- Additional research on available opportunities for students to use L2 once they have left immersion
- If integration of Louisiana French language and culture is goal, observational research to examine frequency of implicit or explicit instruction in immersion classroom



# Conclusions

---

- Recommendations to improve an immersion/language program
- One example of modern Franco-Louisianan society

**“It is great to see the French within our own backyard... that there is a French here. It is still alive. It is still kicking. It is still struggling a bit, but it is still there.”**

***Student identity:* Learning about L2 located within the United States**

Français parlé à la maison en Amérique du Nord, 2000 - 2001



Sources: U.S. Census, 2000, Statistique Canada, 2001 et INSEE France, 1999

Reproduction: Département de géographie, Université Laval.

---

“It is great to see the French within our own backyard... that there is a French here. It is still alive. It is still kicking. It is still struggling a bit but it is still there.”

(Louder & Waddell, 2008)