

CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE OF ART SONG IN THE
CAJUN FRENCH (LOUISIANA FRENCH) PATOIS

using *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* for High Voice and Piano (2023) by Evan L. Snyder

Gumbo de Musique: The Cajun French Art Song Project

Mary Grace Ellerbee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	3
II.	GUMBO DE MUSIQUE: THE CAJUN FRENCH ART SONG PROJECT.....	4
III.	HISTORY OF THE CAJUN PEOPLE.....	7
	a. Cajun vs. Creole	
	b. Le Grand Dérangement	
	c. Decline (and Resurgence) of Cajun French in Louisiana	
IV.	STANDARD FRENCH VS. CAJUN FRENCH.....	15
	a. Similarities	
	b. Differences	
V.	SINGING PRONUNCIATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAJUN FRENCH.....	19
VI.	RESOURCES.....	23
VII.	GLOSSARY.....	24
VIII.	WORKS CITED.....	25

I. INTRODUCTION

This document serves as a supplemental resource for the piece *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* by Evan L. Snyder and, more broadly, for future commissions of Gumbo de Musique: The Cajun French Art Song Project. Gumbo de Musique is a commissioning project developed to contribute to the modern broader preservation and revitalization movement of the Cajun French language. Further, a mission of the project is to educate and increase exposure to the Cajun French language, as well as diversify the French art song repertoire available for singers and coaches to study and perform. This document chronicles the background of the project from inspiration to completion, with a primary focus on discussing similarities and differences between the Cajun French *patois*. Considerations for stylistic and diction adjustments when singing art song in Cajun French will also be discussed with direct examples from the *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* score. A glossary is included for all italicized Cajun French words. Resources to aid in one's preparation of Cajun French art song will be shared at the end of the document.

I want to stress that while this document will be using the term Cajun French, Cajun French falls under the broader, inclusive umbrella that linguists and historians prefer to use of Louisiana French. It is specifically referred to as Cajun here because of the heritage of the authors and myself. Cajuns are one community of several settlers that have spoken French in Louisiana.

II. GUMBO DE MUSIQUE: THE CAJUN FRENCH ART SONG PROJECT

Gumbo de Musique was born out of the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown. When all my work as a musician suddenly dropped off, I was afforded the luxury of time where I cultivated new hobbies and returned to old ones. Ancestry was one I returned to, which stemmed from growing up hearing many “Cajun-isms” from my *PawPaw* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He never spoke the language beyond the few phrases he knew, but I knew he was born in Acadiana, a region comprised of 22 parishes that has been historically known for being the Francophone center of the state. Colloquially known as “Cajun Country,” the name Acadiana is derived from the original location Cajuns were deported from: Acadia, Canada (now known as the Maritime Provinces of Canada and part of the state of Maine). Many people who were born or live in this area of Louisiana have ancestry from the original Acadia and identify as Cajun and/or Creole.

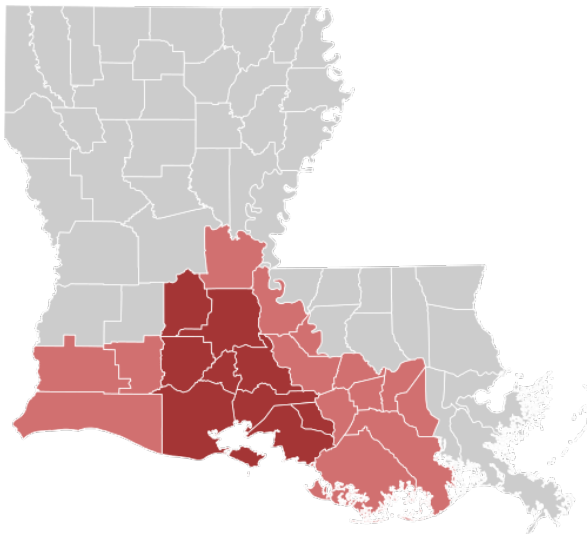


Image 1: The Acadiana region of Louisiana¹



Image 2: Flag of Acadiana, Louisiana²

¹ Map, Wikipedia, accessed on November 20, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acadiana>.

² Sara Le Menestrel, *Negotiating Difference in French Louisiana Music: Categories, Stereotypes, and Identifications*, (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2014), 23.

In my deep dive, the leaves signaling ancestral hints led me to last names on my Pawpaw's maternal side of the family like Frugé and LeJeune, and I hit one fateful location: Acadia, Canada. I did, in fact, have Cajun ancestors that were deported and eventually settled in the Acadiana region of Louisiana. While this may seem like a logical expectation, I was honestly quite shocked. In Louisiana, it is a prideful thing to be Cajun. I understood the friction that existed for some people between those that had direct ancestry from Acadia and France and those overgeneralized as Cajun because they are born and raised in Louisiana.



Image 3: Citizens participating in the chicken chase of *le courir de Mardi Gras*³

In Baton Rouge, I did not grow up hearing fiddle bands, learning how to Cajun dance, or participating in *le courir de Mardi Gras*. Learning that I did have Cajun ancestry surged a pride within me. I developed a strong desire to learn the Cajun French language and learn more about the history of my people. These newfound interests ultimately sparked the personal stake in forming Gumbo de Musique. As far as I knew, no art song in Cajun French existed yet. I also could not think of other art songs in a French patois that did not come from other European French-speaking countries. To me,

³ William Widmer, photograph, Garden & Gun, February 2020, <https://gardenandgun.com/feature/a-glimpse-at-courir-de-mardi-gras/>.

forming Gumbo de Musique was the best way of utilizing my abilities as a classical pianist and knowledge of language from my studies. I was commissioning a new work that would be a welcome addition to the vocal repertoire available for vocalists and collaborative pianists alike.

Gumbo de Musique ended up winning the Running Start Competition at Michigan State University with a \$1000 prize. It then became the inaugural awardee of the Everett G. Powers Fund For Creativity Award from the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge in 2023. Over the course of 2 years, I worked with Evan L. Snyder to select four poems to set; recorded the art songs and released them digitally as an EP and music video; and gave the live world premiere in Louisiana. We ultimately chose songs by 2 authors who are known advocates for the Cajun/Louisiana French language: Kirby Jambon and Jean Arceneaux. Through the award process, I gained a better understanding of Cajun history, the treatment of Cajuns by the Louisiana state government, and why the language came close to the verge of extinction.

III. HISTORY OF THE CAJUN PEOPLE

a. Cajun vs. Creole

The development of the label “Cajun” has a complex history with associations that are commonly misunderstood on an international level. For example, you can walk into a restaurant in the United States, or any Americanized restaurant in other countries, and see a food item that is described as “Cajun.” What does this mean? In this context, I believe Cajun is being associated with Louisiana-style cuisine as a whole and its emphasis on spice and seasoning unique to the region (usually including cayenne pepper), not it being a Cajun food item. In the same breath, I have heard someone say when eating “Cajun” food, “I love Creole food!” It is a common misunderstanding to interchange Cajun and Creole when referring to Louisiana-related things (especially food) or people from Louisiana. To many, they are the same thing. One is not completely wrong in making that inference; historically, Cajuns were first identified as Creoles.

Before the Civil War, the people known as Cajuns today were primarily referred to as Créole, meaning in Louisiana “from the New World.” The word was intended to distinguish Créoles as native-born descendants from immigrants vs. enslaved people from Africa. After the Louisiana Purchase, the term Creole referred specifically to those of Catholic, Latin backgrounds. This group of people were primarily based in New Orleans, which is why today Creole culture is more associated with New Orleans and Cajun culture in Acadiana.⁴ Later, military documents from the 18th century listed people as Acadians if they were born before *Le Grand Dérangement* or Creole if they were descendants of

⁴ Molly Cleaver, “What’s the difference between Cajun and Creole – or is there one?” The Historic New Orleans Collection, October 16, 2023, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-thereone#:~:text=For%20Cajuns%20were%E2%80%94and%20are,rural%20parts%20of%20South%20Louisiana>.

Acadians.⁵ Today, these “Creole” families would be considered Cajuns. For much of history, the separation between Cajuns and Creoles was largely geographical and socio-economical, not racial.

The switch from Acadians being called Cajun instead of Creole started with the Civil War. The word *Cajun* is an English pronunciation of the word *Cadien* derived from the Canadian French word *Acadien*. The first usage of the word comes from the U.S. invasion of French Louisiana in the Civil War in 1863 by Lieutenant George C. Harding. The word was intended in a condescending manner, criticizing the Cajun people for their simplistic livelihoods:

I will try and tell what a Cajun is. He is a half-savage creature, of mixed French and Indian blood, lives in swamps and subsists by cultivating small patches of corn and sweet potatoes. The wants of the Cajun are few, and his habits are simple... I cannot say that we were abused by the Cajuns.⁶

After the Civil War, Creoles in urban populations like New Orleans also began using the term Cajun to distinguish the French-speaking population, usually referring to them as peasants when Creole began to take more of a middle class and aristocratic connotation. Thus, a pattern began in the state of treating the Cajun population poorly for how they worked, how they lived, how they spoke, and where they lived. In *Acadian to Cajun, Transformation of a People*, Carl Brasseaux wrote:

Cajun was used by Anglos to refer to all persons of French descent and low economic standing, regardless of their ethnic affiliation. Hence poor Creoles of the bayou and prairie regions came to be permanently identified as Cajun. The term Cajun thus became a socioeconomic classification for the multicultural amalgam of several culturally and linguistically distinct groups.⁷

⁵ Christophe Landry, “1792 Spanish Militia, Attakapas Post,” accessed on November 8, 2023, <https://www.mylhcv.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1792-Militia.pdf>.

⁶ David C. Edmonds, *Yankee Autumn in Acadiana: A Narrative of the GREAT TEXAS OVERLAND EXPEDITION through Southwestern Louisiana October-December 1863*, (Lafayette, Louisiana: The Acadiana Press), pp. 73, 114, 233.

⁷ Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of

b. Le Grand Dérangement

The settlers who inevitably became the Cajuns started as French nationals, mostly from the rural areas of Vendée where they flourished as farmers and fishers. These residents were recruited to settle in France's new Acadia colony in Canada in the 17th century, which consisted of the areas within Canada's now Maritime Provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island.



Image 3: Vendée, France⁸



Image 4: Acadia, Canada (1754)⁹

For the bulk of 150 years between 1604 and 1755, the Acadian settlers forged a strong community, “based on a shared culture, religion, and distinctive language.” They developed extended families and formed bonds with the Indigenous tribes, notably the Mi’kmaq tribe. Some settlers intermarried with Mi’kmaq members, and several Cajun lines of ancestry have ties to the Mi’kmaq tribe (including my own). When the British took control of the colony in 1713, the Acadians refused to swear allegiance to the Crown, wanting to maintain their independence. As a result, their houses were burned, and the land was given to loyal British settlers. Ultimately, the British decided to begin

Mississippi, 1992).

⁸ Photograph, HistoryNet, April 28, 2015, <https://www.historynet.com/lessons-of-the-vendee/>.

⁹ Photograph, In All Directions, November 16, 2017, <https://inalldirections.blog/2017/11/16/lacadie/>.

mass expelling the Acadians from the colony in 1755 during the process known as *Le Grand Dérangement* as part of the French and Indian War. Through this deportation, several thousand Acadians eventually migrated down south to Louisiana and settled there, creating the community that exists today.¹⁰ A famous poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline*, memorializes this part of Cajun history and became a piece of art that spread awareness about Cajuns on an international level.¹¹

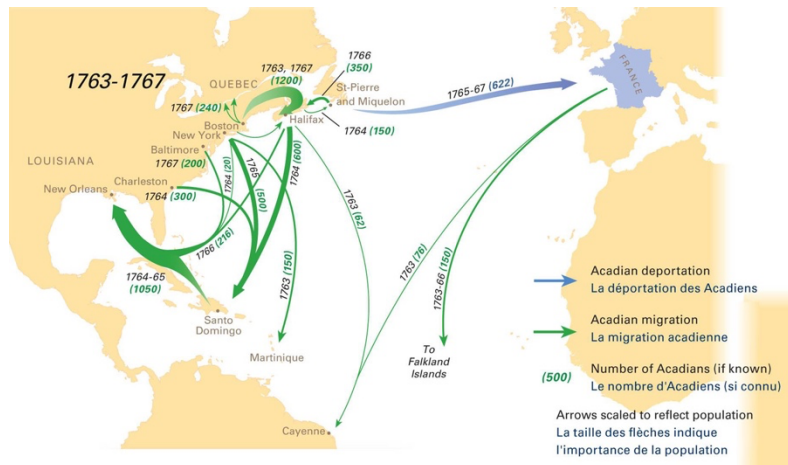


Image 5: *Le Grand Dérangement*¹²

Cajuns settled in the bayous of Louisiana and continued their livelihoods of primarily agricultural means: hunting, fishing, trapping, raising cattle and growing rice. While remaining a solid unit, they benefited from those pre-existing in Louisiana: Indigenous tribes; free people of color; enslaved Africans and their descendants; and immigrants from Europe, Asia, and South America. This melting of cultures and languages contributed to the development of pre-existing French in Louisiana into what is known today as Louisiana French – an amalgamation of words that are Indigenous, Spanish, and *Kouri-Vini* in addition to French.¹³

¹⁰ National Park Service, “From Acadian to Cajun,” accessed on November 10, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/from-acadian-to-cajun.htm>.

¹¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie,” accessed on November 11, 2023, <https://poets.org/poem/evangeline-tale-acadie>.

¹² Jean Daigle, Robert Leblanc, “Acadian Deportation and Return” in *Historical Atlas of Canada, Volume 1, From the Beginning to 1800*, edited by R. Cole Harris, plate 30, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

¹³ Jonathan Olivier, “An Introduction to Louisiana French,” *Télé-Louisiane*, March 28, 2023, <https://teledouisiane.com/journal/introduction-to-louisiana-french>.

Between the 1950s-1970s, the term Cajun became equivalent to “White French Louisianian” as assimilation and segregation efforts forced residents to identify racially for the first time as white “Cajun” or black “Creole.”¹⁴ This division has contributed to the presumption today that Cajun and Creole are defined by race, despite prior history proving otherwise. There are other cultural differences today that present themselves between Cajun and Creole, notably in cuisine. For example, a hot point of contention between Cajun and Creole cooking is hidden in gumbo: tomatoes. Including tomatoes in gumbo is categorically viewed as a mark of Creole style of gumbo, whereas Cajuns will fight you if they find a tomato in your pot!

Cajun identity today is more widely accepted as a label that is both inclusive and denotes region, descent, or heritage but not race. Many people from Acadiana self-identify as Cajun culturally and geographically despite lacking ancestral ties to Acadia, Canada. What once was a term of insult has become a label of pride. In the words of the National Park Service, “The Cajuns of Louisiana today are renowned for their music, their food, and their ability to hold on to tradition while making the most of the present.”¹⁵

c. Decline (And Resurgence) of Cajun French in Louisiana

The Cajuns arrived in Louisiana to a French-ceded Spanish territory that allowed for their new community to speak their language and assimilate independently. At the time of Cajun arrival, it is documented that Louisiana French had already evolved to a patois of French and Choctaw words.¹⁶ However, the process of resettlement proved difficult for the Cajuns and subsequently made the creation of schools difficult early on. Private schools were developed that had faculty who taught in French, but this proved too expensive for most Cajun families who made a minimal livelihood.

¹⁴ Nichole E. Stanford, *Good God but You Smart!: Language Prejudice and Upwardly Mobile Cajuns*, (United States of America: University Press of Colorado, 2016), 64-66.

¹⁵ National Park Service, “From Acadian to Cajun.”

¹⁶ Olivier, “An Introduction to Louisiana French.”

By the mid-1800s, the language we know today as Louisiana French was flourishing. The state constitution required all laws to be written in French and English and allowed any legislator to address the body in either language. Post-Civil War, provisions were added to the state constitution that allowed French to be taught in primary schools. In 1913, this was revised to include secondary schools as well. However, this era of “Cajun Renaissance” soon came to a screeching halt when the Louisiana Constitution of 1921 banned the teaching of French in all public schools and established English as the official language of the state.

As this transition occurred, the speaking of French came to be seen as a mark of illegitimacy and second-class. It was common for derogatory phrases to be used by English speakers, such as “Don’t speak Cajun. Speak White!” As a result, the French-speaking community viewed the teaching of English to their children as foreign intrusion and some families would refuse to send their children to school taught in English. If they were forced to enroll, they elected for parochial schools that still taught in French; however, Standard French was considered the elite form of the language, so students were not taught in their dialect. Eventually, all private and public schools were required to teach only in English. Teachers who only taught English were hired. It was common for kids to continue speaking in French at school despite this, as they could not understand their instructors. That led to the implementation of corporal punishment, where students were punished for speaking French on the school grounds.¹⁷ One of the authors featured in *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes*, Jean Arceneaux, has a poem that encapsulates this sentiment entitled *Schizophrénie linguistique*.¹⁸

Schizophrénie linguistique (excerpts)	Linguistic Schizophrenia (excerpts)
I will not speak French on the school grounds.	I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French on the school grounds.	I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French...	I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...	I will not speak French...
I will not speak French...	I will not speak French...

¹⁷ Becky Brown, “The Social Consequences of Writing Louisiana French,” *Language in Society*, 1993, 22 (1): 67–101.

¹⁸ Jean Arceneaux et al, *Cris sur le Bayou (Naissance D’une Poesie Acadienne En Louisiane)*, (Québec: Diffusion Dimedia Inc, 1980), 16-17.

<p>~</p> <p>Faut pas qu'ils aient besoin d'écrire ça Parce qu'il faut pas qu'ils parlent français du tout. Ca haisse voir qu'on est rien que des Cadiens. Don't mind us, we're just poor, coonasses. Basse classe, faut cacher ça Faut dépasser ça Faut parler anglais. Faut regarder la télévision en anglais. Faut écouter la radio en anglais. Comme de bons américains.</p> <p>~</p> <p>Mais quand on doit rire, c'est en quelle langue qu'on rit? Et pour pleurer, c'est en queile langue qu'on pleure? Et pour creir? Et chanter? Et aimer? Et vivre?</p>	<p>~</p> <p>Don't they need to write that Because they must not speak French at all.</p> <p>It hates to see that we're nothing but Cajuns. Don't mind us, we're just poor, coonasses. Low class, gotta hide that Gotta get past that Must speak English. Watch TV in English. Listen to the radio in English. Like good Americans.</p> <p>~</p> <p>But when you have to laugh, it's in which language we laugh? And to cry, it's in what language that we are crying? And to believe? And sing? And love? And live?</p>
---	---

Figure 1 (Rough translation through Google Translate)

Corporal punishment is arguably the primary contributor to the rapid decline of the Cajun French language in Louisiana. Parents became hesitant to teach their children their language as they would have a better chance at assimilation and acceptance. This was the case for my PawPaw, and it is the reason why many descendants from that point on do not know the language. Cajun French is now considered an endangered language; there were an estimated one million people who spoke the language in Louisiana in 1968, and that number has now dropped to 150,000 or less today.¹⁹ It is common for those who speak Cajun French to not be able to write it, or they write in Standard French or English only. In 1968, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was founded to promote the preservation and culture of the Louisiana French language. Since then,

¹⁹ Sean Cockerham, "Louisiana French: L'heritage at risk," The Seattle Times, July 6, 2012, <https://www.seattletimes.com/life/lifestyle/louisiana-french-lheritage-at-risk/#:~:text=It%20was%20estimated%20that%20there,are%20fighting%20an%20uphill%20battle.>

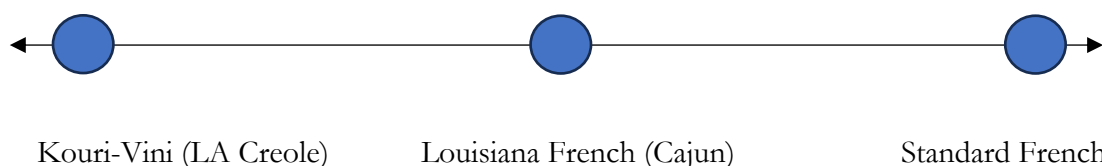
Louisiana has established increasingly good relations with its counterparts in Canada and France through grassroots organizations like the Nous Foundation and the work of advocates and artists from earlier generations, such as Jean Arceneaux and Zachary Richard (singer-songwriter, poet laureate). In 2018, Louisiana was the first U.S. state to join the Organisation Internationale de Francophonie.²⁰

²⁰ Della Hasselle, "Louisiana Joins International Organization of French-speaking Governments," NOLA.com., October 13, 2018, https://www.nola.com/news/article_302082ef-9b0e-59de-8583-4e320c5c792a.html.

IV. STANDARD FRENCH VS. CAJUN FRENCH

a. Similarities

Cajun French is by and large intelligible to Standard French. If one has an understanding of Standard French, speaking or singing, they already have a solid foundation for how to comprehend and prepare a song in Cajun French. The best way to understand how Louisiana French fits into the broader Francophone realm is Télé-Louisiane’s analogy of a continuum: “A continuum implies some sort of structure involving elements that are similar yet markedly different at the two poles.” In Louisiana, this continuum looks like this:



The concept of this continuum is that people who speak Louisiana French have the capability of interacting with those who speak Standard French or Kouri-Vini depending on their environment. However, Kouri-Vini is too different in syntax and grammar to be considered a dialect of Standard French. There are several similarities between the Louisiana French patois and Standard French that make it easy enough to comprehend one another, barring difference in accent and words. The bulk of differences are in pronunciation, word evolution and grammar; these qualities come from the environmental factors that contributed to the development of French in Louisiana specifically. Among these, there are regional dialectical differences within the state that contribute to these broader categories.

b. Differences

One of the key aspects of the Cajun French patois is the inclusion of words that come from other ethnic groups. This is largely due to the interaction between many groups of people in Louisiana. Indigenous groups like the Choctaw and Bayou Indians; enslaved Africans and free people of color;

and Spanish immigrants all spoke French after the 18th century. Words from their native tongue melded into the Louisiana French vernacular that make it up today. For example, the African word *gombo* morphed into the quintessential dish that is called *gumbo*, and the word *chaoui* comes from the Choctaw language. There are also several words in the lexicon that are older variations of words that are still used today in Standard French. One example is the Louisiana French word *chevrette* that is *crevette* in Standard French. While some argue Louisiana French is the old version of the French language due to how the Cajun community isolated itself upon settling, the language did keep up with vocabulary for modern commodities, like the word *char* which is *voiture* in Standard French. *Tac-Tac* is a uniquely Cajun/Canadian French word for popcorn for the sound that it makes when popping.

Within the Louisiana French umbrella, there are further differences that can be attributed to region of the state, age, education, and attrition. Here are a few examples for each of these broken down below:

a. Region:

1. Regions of the state (like LaFourche parish in southeast Louisiana) use an aspirated “h” when pronouncing j or g – the phrase “j’ai été” would sound like “h’ai été.”²¹
2. It is very common for the word *je* to be inverted to “ej.” i.e. Je m’appelle Mary → Ej m’appelle Mary.
3. Tu is also spelled and pronounced *Ti* and is a colloquialism often included even if the person is speaking in English. i.e. “C’mon Ti, let’s go for a ride!”²²

²¹ Olivier, “An Introduction to Louisiana French.”

²² Kirby Jambon, “BEGINNERS LOUISIANA FRENCH, Lesson 2,” YouTube, March 19, 2020, educational video, 15:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yLCjpUj8Nw&list=PLx7t2TgzBrMu_UhcmPXXVm9A1lxJR2Z30&index=5.

b. Age

1. The pronoun used for the word English word “they” goes between 5 different forms, with preference often depending on age: *ça*, *eusses*, *eux-autres*, *ils*, or *i*?. According to a study by Albert Valdman, Professor Emeritus at University of Indiana, 25% of people over 55 used the form *ils*, while 77% percent of people under 30 used *eusse*. In general, the feminine form of they, *elle*, is not used.²³

2. While *vous* is considered the formal/respectful form of *tu* in Standard French, *vous-autres* or *tu/ti* is the predominant form used, only using *vous* for the utmost respect and usually toward the elderly or highly formal events.²⁴

c. Education and Attrition

1. Younger generations who did not grow up with the language generally will have more of a standardized approach to their French speaking and use forms of words more common in Standard French. It is also a trend that those who had education in French often write in Standard French but speak more colloquially. This is similar to how American English speakers write vs. speak, and the evolution of a language’s linguistics as a whole.

In addition to lexical differences, there are some differences in grammatical structure that exist in Cajun French from Standard French. The present-progressive form in Standard French is “être ___ de,” while Cajun French employs “être après,” i.e. “Je suis après faire quelque chose” vs. “Je suis en train de faire quelque chose” (I am doing something). To say, “to have to” in Cajun French, it is unique from Standard French and most common to use “avoir pour.” i.e. “J’ai pour manger aujourd’hui”

²³ Olivier, “An Introduction to Louisiana French.”

²⁴ Jambon, “BEGINNERS LOUISIANA FRENCH, Lesson 2,” 15:43.

(I have to eat today). Additionally, article-preposition contractions such as “du” or “des” are often avoided, saying the full “de le” instead.²⁵

Below are differences in pronouns between Standard French and Cajun French:²⁶

Standard French	Cajun French
Je	Ej
Tu	Tu, Ti, Ton, Ta, Te, Voit
Il	I, Il when preceding a vowel
Elle	A' or alle, elle
Nous	On, or “Nous-autres on” used in conjunction; Nous by itself has been replaced by On
Vous (plural)	Vous-autres, Vous only in most formal situations
Ils/Elles	Ils, ça, eux-autres, eusses, I'; Elles is never used

Figure 2

²⁵ Olivier, “An Introduction to Louisiana French.”

²⁶ Jambon, “BEGINNERS LOUISIANA FRENCH, Lesson 2,” 15:43.

VI. SINGING PRONUNCIATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR CAJUN FRENCH

When approaching how to sing songs in Cajun French, it is important to first consider the stylistic markings this language has traditionally been sung in. Cajun French has held its place historically in folk music. Cajun music includes Zydeco, Swamp Pop, and fiddle bands; it is known for its fiddles, accordions, spoons, and washboards. Cajun music evolved from French ballads to dance music played for the *fais do-dos* and *bals de maison*. A notable characteristic of this musical style is high-pitched instrumentation; words are sung to complement this feature. Being that the language is of a rural people, the timbre of the Cajun French language is overall more spread in the mouth, as opposed to the tall vowels accustomed to in Standard French *melodie*. This is a crucial element of singing that should be considered when preparing the texts for Cajun French song, as it is important to strike a balance that is both comfortable for the singer yet distinct enough for the patois to come through in performance. This can involve a slightly more emphasized nasality of existing nasal vowels, as well as considering adding a touch of nasality to the overall color of vowels. I highly recommend looking up traditional Cajun songs online as a reference for the sound style to aim for, keeping in mind it should be choices that ultimately meld into the classical singing sound. One key instance of this is with the words *un* and *une*. For these words, it is colloquial for *un* to be pronounced $\tilde{\epsilon}$ (like in the word *boudin*) and *une* to be pronounced $\tilde{\epsilon}n$ (like Anne in English). These can be substituted in the song to give the diction a more Cajun character.

When it comes to the pronunciation of pronouns, the table referenced previously is very useful. You will see standard pronouns used in writing in *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes*, and eventually other works. This can be attributed to the history of education in Louisiana for Cajuns, although some Cajun French pronouns are used in the writing, like *on* (we). While the text may not be written in the spoken way, I think it would be an informed choice to consider substituting Standard French pronouns for the Cajun ones, such as *je* and *ej* if the coach or singer believes it would aid in the

distinction of the patois from other repertoire. The easiest way to do this is through the pronoun *il*. In general, it is very common in the dialect for end consonants to be left off when speaking. This is especially true with *il*, so much so that it is listed as *i'* in Figure 2. This is definitely an adjustment that can be made in singing as well, oftentimes making it slightly easier to sing.

You will encounter some words that are archaic French or words that are not found in a standard French dictionary. It is best to attempt to look up these words in the Cajun French glossary from Louisiana State University, as often they have audio pronunciations on their website, or the Louisiana French Dictionary. *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* has poetic translations provided in the score, as Google Translate is often inaccurate beyond what is available in Standard French. Many times, a Standard French word is pronounced differently in Cajun French than Google Translate predicts.

Ultimately, Cajun French is a dialect of French. If you apply standard singing French diction knowledge to approach songs in Cajun French, you will find it is easily transferrable. If you keep these considerations in mind and find ways to incorporate Cajun qualities in the adjustment of vowels and consonants, you will capture the essence of the patois in your singing.

Included below are some of these considerations in practice, from my own coaching of the four songs in *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* by Evan L. Snyder. Diction markings are in blue, with red circles being unique Cajun words.²⁷

1. Tu fais beau

Jean Arceneaux

Evan L. Snyder

Tu fais beau

L'orage passé, tu deviens sans peur
 Une pluie chaude d'été, une pluie
 d'habitant.
 Sans vent, sans éclair, tu pleux doucement,
 Puis ton sourire ressort pour rayonner ta
 chaleur.

You are beautiful (like the weather)

The storm now passed, you become without fear
 A hot summer rain,
 a farmer's shower
 Without wind, without lightning, you rain softly
 And your smile reappears
 to shine your warmth.

2. À notre santé au fond d'hiver

Kirby Jambon

Evan L. Snyder

À notre santé au fond d'hiver

Le matin^{at} en se levant
on^o boit un coup...
 c'est pour penser...
 c'est pour passer le temps
 c'est pour cher^{er}cher...

On^o cherche l'agrément
 en passant la quête
 devant chaque personne
 qui traverse notre chemin
 devant chaque idée^{nessal}
 qui traverse,
 qui tracasse,
 qui soulage notre idée.

On cherche le bonheur
 en travaillant
 en dansant
 en faisant l'amour
 en faisant et en^o élevant des^o enfants
 dans la famille et dans l'amitié
 dans les grains de notre chapelet
 au fond de la bouteille
 au fin fi fond de l'âme.

On cherche d'être^{oo oo} heureux
 d'être content
 comme si
 c'est ça
 on^o est né
 pour être.

La rinçure^{nessal} on^o la boit pas!

To our health in the deep of winter

When we rise in the morning
we^o have a drink..
 in order to think..
 to pass the time...
 to seek...

We^o seek happiness
 passing the offering basket
 before each person
 who crosses our path
 before each idea
 that crosses
 that worries
 that eases our mind.

We seek happiness
 by working
 by dancing
 by making love
 by making and raising children
 in family and friendships
 in the beads of our rosaries
 at the bottom of a bottle
 at the very bottom of the soul.

We seek to be happy
 to be content
 as if
 that's what
 we're^o born
 to be.

The dregs, we^o do not drink!

3. entre mire et là-bas

Evan L. Snyder

entre mire et là-bas

pompe arrose le champ
 criquettes ça clique
 écrevisse fouille
 batit sa cheminée
 soleil se couche
 ainsi soit-il

Between Mire and over there

pump waters the field
 crickets click
 crawfish digs
 builds its chimney
 sun sets
 amen

4. Ouragan III

Jean Arceneaux

Evan L. Snyder

Ouragan III

Un enfant est arraché de son père
 Qui essayait de tenir sa petite main dans la sienne,
 Et qui lui disait que ça allait tout finir bien.

Il comprend pas tout de suite
 Qu'il va jamais le revoir encore.

Les événements le ramassent
 Et l'amènent dans le trou noir
 Derrière la raison.

Le tourbillon engendré par le vide
 Dans son milieu
 Cache tout assez longtemps
 Pour perdre le garçon.

Ca se passe si vite qu'on se demande pas
 Ayoù il a passé jusqu'à quelques moments
 Après l'arrivée de la pluie.

Debout au milieu du rien qui reste
 Avec les clous qui tombent du ciel violet.
 Le père se trouve chanceux d'être là,

De sentir la peur et le froid dans les veines,
 De sentir les narines qui essaient de haler assez d'air
 Pour fournir au cœur qui veut exploser,

À la tête qui essaie de nager à travers du vertige,
 Aux oreilles qui cherchent un son essentiel dans le silence
 Et aux yeux qui brûlent pour voir au-delà du dégat,

Et c'est là, à ce moment imprécis,
 Qu'il aperçoit l'absence.
 Et son premier regret est
 Que ses dernières paroles à son fils
 Étaient une menterie.

Hurricane III

A child is wrenched from his father
 Who was trying to hold the boy's little hand in his own
 And who was telling him that all would end well.

The man doesn't realize right away
 That he will never see his son again.

The events lift him up
 And carry him into the black hole
 Behind all reason.

The whirlwind spawned by the void
 In his world
 Hides all just long enough
 To lose track of the boy.

It happens so fast that no one wonders
 Where he went until moments
 After the arrival of the rain.

Standing in the middle of the nothing that remains
 With rain falling like nails from the purple sky.
 The father finds himself fortunate to be alive,

To feel the fear and the ice in his veins,
 To feel his nostrils trying to gasp enough air
 To furnish his heart that is about to explode,

And his head swimming through the spinning,
 And his ears listening for an essential sound in the silence
 And his burning eyes trying to see past the devastation,

And it is then, at that imprecise moment,
 That he becomes aware of the absence.
 And his first regret is
 That his last words to his son
 Were a lie.

VII. RESOURCES

Cajun French Glossary, Louisiana State University:

https://www.lsu.edu/hss/french/undergraduate_program/cajun_french/cajun_french_english_glossary.php

Dictionary of Louisiana French, As Spoken in Cajun, Creole, and American Indian Communities:

https://www.amazon.com/Dictionary-Louisiana-French-American-Communities/dp/1604734035/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1NTXO913NOQ7E&keywords=dictionary+of+louisiana+french&qid=1700085344&srefix=dictionary+of+louisiana+french%2Caps%2C208&sr=8-1.

Louisiana French Lessons by Kirby Jambon (free, YouTube):

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLx7t2TgzB-rMu_UhcmPXVm9A1lxJR2Z30&feature=shared

“The Ultimate Guide to Cajun French (Phrases Included!),” Rosetta Stone:

<https://blog.rosettastone.com/guide-to-cajun-french-in-louisiana/>

Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL):

<https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/>

Nous Foundation:

<https://www.nous-foundation.org/>

Télé-Louisiane:

<https://telelouisiane.com/>

Evan L. Snyder’s Website (contact for sheet music purchase):

<https://www.evanlsnyder.com/>

EP -- *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes*; Spotify and launch page for other streaming services

<https://open.spotify.com/album/5XIipqz13KKPhzqRC2s54q?si=43G1LKq-TxqKqDb8dkmZlQ>

<https://hypeddit.com/mgellerbee/quatrechansonscadiennes>

Music Video (with Cajun French and English subtitles):

<https://youtu.be/ycdRYMAgsI8>

VIII. GLOSSARY

Patois – Dialect	3
PawPaw – Grandfather	4
Le courir de Mardi Gras – Cajun Mardi Gras. Literally translates to “the Mardi Gras run,”.....	5
as the tradition is to dress in handmade costumes and search house-to-house for the	
ingredients of a gumbo, ultimately leading to a chicken chase to use as the main ingredient.	
Le Grand Dérangement – The Great Expulsion.....	7
Kouri-Vini – Louisiana Creole	10
Gombo – Okra.....	16
Chaoui – Raccoon.....	16
Chevrette – Shrimp.....	16
Char – Car	16
Tac-Tac – Popcorn	16
Fais Do-Dos – Public dance halls.....	19
Bals de maison – Front porch parties	19

Bonus Vocabulary (a little bit of lagniappe!)

Lagniappe – A little bit of something extra

Sha bébé – Dear one

Gris-gris – To put a curse on someone

Comment ça s’plume? – How’s it going? *Literal translation: How’s it plucking?*

Lâche pas la patate! – Don’t give up! *Literal translation: Don’t drop the potato!*

Ça c’est bon! – Woo-ee, that’s good!

Laissez les bon temps rouler! – Let the good times roll!

IX. WORKS CITED

- Arceneaux, Jean et al. *Cris sur le Bayou (Naissance D'une Poesie Acadienne En Louisiane)*, 16-17. Québec: Diffusion Dimedia Inc, 1980.
- Brasseaux, Carl A. *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People*. Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1992.
- Brown, Becky. "The Social Consequences of Writing Louisiana French." *Language in Society*, 1993. 22 (1): 67–101.
- Cleaver, Molly. "What's the difference between Cajun and Creole – or is there one?" The Historic New Orleans Collection. October 16, 2023. <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/whats-difference-between-cajun-and-creole-or-there-one#:~:text=For%20Cajuns%20were%E2%80%94and%20are,rural%20parts%20of%20South%20Louisiana.>
- Cockerham, Sean. "Louisiana French: L'heritage at risk." The Seattle Times. July 6, 2012. <https://www.seattletimes.com/life/lifestyle/louisiana-french-lheritage-at-risk/#:~:text=It%20was%20estimated%20that%20there,are%20fighting%20an%20uphill%20battle.>
- Edmonds, David C. *Yankee Autumn in Acadiana: A Narrative of the GREAT TEXAS OVERLAND EXPEDITION through Southwestern Louisiana October-December 1863*. Lafayette, Louisiana: The Acadiana Press. 73, 114, 233.
- Jambon, Kirby. "BEGINNERS LOUISIANA FRENCH, Lesson 2." YouTube. March 19, 2020. Educational video, 15:43. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yLCjpUj8Nw&list=PLx7t2TgzB-rMu_UhcmPXVm9A1lxJR2Z30&index=5.
- Hasselle, Della. "Louisiana Joins International Organization of French-speaking Governments." NOLA.com. October 13, 2018. https://www.nola.com/news/article_302082ef-9b0e-59de-8583-4e320c5c792a.html.
- Landry, Christophe. "1792 Spanish Militia, Attakapas Post." Accessed on November 8, 2023. <https://www.mylhcv.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1792-Militia.pdf>.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. "Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie." Accessed on November 11, 2023. <https://poets.org/poem/evangeline-tale-acadie>.
- National Park Service. "From Acadian to Cajun." Accessed on November 10, 2023. <https://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/from-acadian-to-cajun.htm>.
- Olivier, Jonathan. "An Introduction to Louisiana French." Télé-Louisiane. March 28, 2023. <https://telelouisiane.com/journal/introduction-to-louisiana-french>.

Snyder, Evan L. *Quatre Chansons Cadiennes* for High Voice and Piano. 2023.

Stanford, Nichole E. *Good God but You Smart!: Language Prejudice and Upwardly Mobile Cajuns*.
United States of America: University Press of Colorado, 2016. 64-66.