

## The intergenerational pattern of attrition in Cajun French

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We examine locative prepositions in Cajun French, adding two dimensions to existing commentary on this subject. First, we replace the synchronic descriptive perspective with real-time evidence, in order to detect true language change over time and to distinguish endonorms, local Cajun French norms within the community from exonorms, standard forms coming from outside the community. Second, rather than compare the use of locative prepositions in Cajun French to that of the academic variety, the latter having no functional role in Louisiana, we focus on the evolution of usage patterns within the community. Therefore, we can avoid concluding that the Cajun French features are deviant from the norm or triggered by attrition when they are really well-established local usages within the community.

Cajun French does manifest variable use of prepositions, as do all varieties of French. Some of them coincide with the standard model (*chez ma mère*), while others are long-standing local features within the community (*aller dans le Canada, venir à la Louisiane*). Furthermore, there are changes that cannot be attributed to interference (*chez ma mère* vs. *sur ma mère*) while others are clearly due to attrition (*aller à ma mère, il travaillait sur Lafayette, il va au Moreauville*).

The goal of this paper is to determine the origins and the directions of language change within the system of locative prepositions. In order to distinguish exonorms and endonorms, we examine the speech of several generations of Cajun speakers : the monolingual ancestors (1890-1901); the French-dominant community elders (1905-1915); the bilingual elders (1907-1912); the seniors (1920-1933), the middle-aged (1935-1951) and the young speakers (1957-1977). A total of 5,441 tokens were coded; four locative contexts were included: prepositions with movement to or location of a building (*à l'école*), location at a person's dwelling or someone's place of work (*chez ma mère, au docteur*), location of cities (*à Lafayette*), and location in a country (*dans la Louisiane*)

We will present the use of local norms used by all generations of speakers as well as the new forms introduced by the restricted speakers. We also show that the locative system loses its structural integrity and that this loss is conditioned by age. Middle-aged and young fluent speakers adopt attritional changes introduced by previous generations of restricted speakers. We argue that the behavior of restricted speakers can exert a forceful impact on the speech community by the sheer weight of their numbers. We conclude with a summary scheme showing the rapid evolution of prepositional usage in the range of locative contexts over the last century.