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Sylvie Dubois, Emilie Gagnet Leumas, and Malcolm Richardson, *Speaking French in Louisiana, 1720-1955: Linguistic Practices of the Catholic Church*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018. viii + 213 pp. Figures and notes. \$38.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8071-6844-8.

Review by Jeff Tennant, University of Western Ontario.

This elegantly presented volume documents, using archival sources and other hitherto unanalyzed data, the shift from French to English that took place in Louisiana over a period spanning almost two and a half centuries, with a focus on the Catholic Church viewed as a community of practice. The study is highly innovative, adopting a mixed-methods approach and using both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Combining sociolinguistic and historical perspectives, the authors show that Louisiana's transition from French to English unfolded more gradually than suggested by previous accounts based on anecdotal evidence and government records.

The introductory chapter presents the historical background, theoretical framework, and methodology. The "linguistic tipping point" at the turn of the twentieth century that anchors the narrative is represented in a quotation from Father Joseph Subileau of St. Augustine Church in New Orleans who, realizing he was unable to speak English sufficiently well to serve his congregation, "[s]tepped down to avoid losing his flock" (p. 1). While the period under study spans from 1720 to 1955, the primary focus is on describing and explaining an extended period of accommodation to the needs of French-speaking and English-speaking Catholics from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The authors offer a concise historical overview of the origins of the French colony in Louisiana, from explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle staking claim to the territory for France in 1682, to the introduction of slavery in 1729, the cession to Spain in 1763 and the period of French-Spanish bilingualism that followed until it was ended by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, then statehood in 1812. In the subsequent decades until the outbreak of the Civil War in the 1860s, many immigrants arrived. Imported along with France's colonial administration, the Catholic Church is qualified as "weak and controlled from Canada," (p. 3) although Roman Catholicism and the French language were defining features of the identity of most of Louisiana's population at the time. With a concentration of Protestants in the north and of Catholics in the south, the Louisiana Church needed to restructure along language lines.

The authors' primary objectives are "to document language change and maintenance over time in the Louisiana Catholic Church and to contextualize the switch from French to English within a broader Louisiana social and historic framework" (p. 6). The factors at play are complex, and

there has been little empirical research to counter accepted accounts, often focused on the New Orleans elite, suggesting a sudden shift from French to English. Considering the key cultural role of the Church, and the intimate link between culture and language, the authors emphasize the role of decentralized and informal language-related decisions made at both macro and local levels as the Church adapted to evolving realities. Their study uses documents, available in archives in the United States (Loyola University in Lafayette, the Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans) and in France (Centre des archives d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence, Archives nationales de France in Paris), including sacramental registers (recording baptism, marriage and burials), administrative records, pastoral records and personal correspondence (the Antebellum Correspondence, 1803-1859), church parish records, and house chronicles of Redemptorist priests. The sociolinguistic interpretive framework adopted is Etienne Wenger's "communities of practice," which is applied to examine church practices not in terms of an institutional hierarchy from the archdiocesan administration down to parish priests and parishioners, but rather as a decentralized community "guided by implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, underlying assumptions, and shared world views held in common by the Catholic faithful in south Louisiana" (p. 13).

Chapter one addresses Church, language and politics in the eighteenth-century colonial period, noting that "Louisiana remained remarkably French until statehood" (p. 20). The Church, as an institution subordinate to the crown, needing to ensure its position while accomplishing its missionary role, had to adopt an "opportunistic attitude" in the enforcement of the doctrines of the faith, in order to "make the best accommodation it could" (p. 24). The population was heterogenous in terms of ethnic origin (European, African, Native American), class (from elite to slaves), and language, with the regional language varieties of France coexisting with the Ile-de-France French of the royal court. The Spanish colonial period had no profound influence on the language situation. Outside of the arrival of refugees from the Canary Islands, no other developments led to a lasting presence of the Spanish language, while the francophone population was augmented by the arrival of Acadian refugees. Throughout the colonial period, there was concern about the irreligious conduct of the population, which could not be relied upon to support the Church financially. The Spanish authorities' decision to open the door to Irish clergy, beginning with Father Thomas Haslett, was a "harbinger of the encroachment of English speakers in New Orleans especially" (p. 29). The Irish were also seen as "much stricter Catholics than their Latin allies" and would later play a key role in the language shift (p. 33).

Chapter two offers an account of the Church's challenges from statehood to the Civil War, as the Catholic population diversified while suddenly finding itself part of a country where Protestantism was the dominant religion. The French-speaking elite found common cause with the English-speaking elite against a "common enemy" (p. 37), abolitionist Great Britain. As a result of immigration, and despite pandemics, the population continued to expand. Francophones remained demographically strong as the plantation economy brought prosperity to the elite, for whom "financial and social interests overrode other considerations, such as religion, language, and ethnicity" (pp. 38-39). The Church was regarded with suspicion, and priests were caricatured as being only interested in money. Following the Louisiana Purchase, many French and Spanish priests departed. Faced with the population's lax adherence to the faith, as well a strong liberal and anticlerical undercurrent following the French Revolution, Archbishop Antoine Blanc sought to build a stable Church during his twenty-five years at the helm starting in 1835. In a period of major immigration of Catholics of German, Italian, and Irish origin, Blanc recognized the need, particularly with the anglophone Irish, for "creative accommodation of the Church" (p.

47), for a strategy to “welcome the Catholic immigrants and make them feel comfortable in their new churches” (p. 47). Accommodation necessitated recruitment of English-speaking priests to counter the growth of Protestant institutions. Priests who could not speak English well enough to serve their parishioners requested transfers to solidly francophone parishes. A situation of collective bilingualism emerged, “a condition in which two languages are socially equal and the socially adept are at ease in both” (p. 52), partly fuelled by a rise in mixed francophone-anglophone marriages, especially among the elite. Bilingualism developed informally through social contact, without education or formal measures. Archbishop Blanc is seen as the “main architect of this bilingual behavior within the Church” (p. 54), and his correspondence shows great efforts to recruit English-speaking parishioners and priests, particularly priests from Ireland. The language of the Antebellum Correspondence is a useful indicator of this collective bilingualism as well, with 90 percent of letters written in French up to the Louisiana Purchase, and then a significant rise in letters written in English by English-speaking and by French-speaking writers. In short, keeping people in the pews outranked language as a priority: “[f]aced with unprecedented social and demographic changes, the Louisiana Church chose the winning of souls over the maintenance of the francophone culture with which it had always been so closely identified” (p. 63).

Chapter three analyzes sacramental registers to show that the switch to English did not happen immediately following the Civil War, but rather well after Reconstruction, demonstrating the “strong resilience” of French in Louisiana (p. 66). We observe a time span of 110 years from the first register switch to the last one, with the mean year being 1907. Church register switches began in New Orleans Irish churches and spread to the rest of the state later. Use of French continued in most originally French churches up until the Civil War, suggesting that “an extensive period of bilingualism existed and was maintained even after mass English migration was over” (p. 75). Father James Ignatius Mullon, pastor of St. Patrick’s Parish from 1835, held a firm command on his church, exemplifying the political engagement of the New Orleans Irish who, with their growing demographic strength, became a decisive force. The Irish “changed the community of practice from within” (p. 80), introducing not only use of English, but also more rigorous observance of the Catholic faith. Despite conflicts between the French and Irish, they “were forced in the end to accommodate one another to fight Protestantism, the ‘true enemy’” (p. 82). The period from 1870 to 1940 brought complex changes for French-speaking Louisiana. French was no longer associated with social and economic advantage, and became gradually replaced by English in a period of stark Black-white racial division and “English only” nationalism. Prohibition of French-language schools relegated use of the language to the home. Bilingualism declined among both Black and white francophones in urban areas, while French was maintained in rural areas. In those segregated rural areas, Black and white francophone populations remained apart, developing differentiated identities. The initially pejorative term “Cajun” would not be reclaimed by Louisiana francophones and assigned cultural prestige until decades later.

Chapter four looks at language practices of the archdiocesan administration from 1861 to 1917. The Church power structure was somewhat “amorphous” (p. 90), a situation addressed by the creation of diocesan councils. Following Antoine Blanc, French-born archbishops presided during the period from 1861 to 1887, when few register switches were made. A second group of archbishops, including one born in Germany and one in Holland, led the Church in the period from 1880 to 1920, when most registers switched to English. The authors examine documents (directories, minutes, letters) to “shed light on the diminishing power of the once-dominant

French-born administration” (p. 93). Language change in the Church was, however, bottom-up rather than top-down. The Civil War and its aftermath brought financial and other difficulties, as well as pressure from anglophone priests for an English-speaking Church leader. Although Father Francis-Xavier Leray, appointed archbishop in 1883, was from France, he had been in Louisiana many years, and had a track record for imposition of English. An influential Belgian-born New Orleans priest, Father Jean Baptiste Bogaerts, gave a strong impulse to linguistic and cultural assimilation. Subsequent European-born Archbishops Janssens, Chapelle, and Blenk continued to prioritize accommodation over French language preservation, and the first American-born priest to be appointed to the role, Father John W. Shaw, became archbishop in 1918. The Archiepiscopal Council was dominated by French clergy from 1861 until 1887 and its documents (minutes, pastoral letters) showed bilingualism was the norm throughout that period. From 1888 on, however, a rapid shift to English was set in motion.

Chapter five presents the results of quantitative analyses of factors in the switch from French to English: language attitudes and agency of the parish priest, demographic and geographic factors, and presence of rival Protestant congregations. Considering the Church’s central role, and the communities of practice that priests and their parishioners formed, the priest being “the church official who most intimately dealt with language issues” (p. 111), the study of these factors in the Antebellum Correspondence database provides valuable evidence. We see a change from majority French-born clergy to more multi-ethnic clergy from 1860 to 1920, and a strong decline in French-born priests combined with a rise in American-born priests at the turn of the twentieth century. Half of the switches to English in church registers in the period corresponded to priest changes. Use of pre-printed forms also precipitated switches, and documents show priests moved easily between the two languages. The analysis of the spatial diffusion of English is masterfully presented. Following sociolinguist David Britain’s call to incorporate geographical models into the study of spatial diffusion of language change, the authors evaluate three models: the wave model (spread of changes as a factor of distance alone), the hierarchical model (changes spreading from localities of high population density to those of lower population density), and the gravity model (combining distance with population density). The hierarchical model shows a highly significant ($p > 0.0001$) difference in mean date of church register language switch along the hierarchy from urban centres to cities to towns to villages. An ANOVA analysis, however, reveals considerable variation within the latter three categories, and that only the distinction between urban centres on the one hand and localities with smaller populations on the other is significant. The authors conclude that a “locally based spatial approach...could better reveal the social constraints of language change” (p. 127), as it could take into account the strength of ties within the local population. The third section examines the hypothesis that “the increasing number of Protestant institutions in parishes once dominated by the archdiocese triggered the language change at the local level” (p. 128). Using statistical reports from 1850 to 1890, they arrive at the significant finding that “the higher the proportion of Protestant churches, the earlier the parish switch” (p. 129). Results in the chapter are clearly illustrated using data tables and graphs.

Chapter six, in addition to analyzing census data on languages used in church services, presents case studies on language use practices in six parishes based on sacramental registers and visitation reports. In the 1906 census, the language used in homilies was English in 29 percent of cases, French in 26 percent, and both in 38 percent, showing persistent bilingualism into the early twentieth century. Maps show exclusive use of French “in the regions most identified with Acadian culture” (p. 138). Case studies on six parishes add narrative thickness to the account, with detailed descriptions of language practices in individual churches, and show that “civil parish

boundaries do not present distinct patterns of register switch” (p. 159), with individual churches marking “the smallest community of practice in the Louisiana church structure” (p. 159). Some parishes switched early (St. James, Vermilion, and Iberville), while others resisted the shift to English for longer (Assumption and Lafourche). Change could happen at a local parish level or at the micro level of the individual church. Visitation reports interestingly also showed priests’ attempts to conceal the extent of French use, to conform to “Americanist ideology,” while at the same time switching pragmatically to English as competition with Protestant churches required accommodation to maintain their faithful.

Chapter seven summarizes and contextualizes the major findings, in an elegantly written ten-page chronological sweep of narration through the successive historical periods analyzed. Indeed, a reader who picked up the book and read only this chapter would get the entire story, but of course without the fascinating detailed evidence of church language practices the authors so rigorously expose in the preceding chapters. The chapter concludes speculating about whether increased use of Spanish will be the next step in the Louisiana Church’s accommodation to demographic changes.

In short, Dubois, Leumas, and Richardson offer a very significant contribution to the study of French in Louisiana, and their rigorously documented volume is a valuable resource for linguists and historians alike.

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