SECOL
Southeastern Conference on Linguistics
83rd meeting
“Linguistic Gumbo: Challenges in Multilanguage Contact”
March 28-30, 2016
New Orleans, Louisiana

Sponsored by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Thank you to our University of Louisiana at Lafayette sponsors,
the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts,
the Departments of English and Modern Languages,
and the McIlhenny Company.
New Orleans and music:
Identity and perceptions of francophone/francophile musicians post-Katrina
J. Natalie Schmitz, Tulane University & Université Rennes 2

A quote from Marcel Proust, “Music is perhaps the unique example of what could have been – if there had not been the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas – the communication of the soul”, struck a chord with me when I was deep in research for my Master's thesis, pondering how to approach the subject of New Orleans francophone musicians post-Katrina. How can contemporary scholars conduct research and fieldwork on francophones in Louisiana when the daily use of the French language is dying out along with the older generation?

New Orleans and Acadiana have always been conscious of their francophone past. Today, music is often the principal means by which young Louisianans express their francophone identity; their songs are a linguistic expression of their culture(s). This study focuses on the linguistic and cultural identity of the younger francophone and francophile generation of New Orleans to analyze the promotion and preservation of French-speaking cultures through music and language practices in Louisiana. Fieldwork was conducted in New Orleans in 2009–2010, with the goal of determining the link between music and the city’s identity as well as other symbols that were revived in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, such as the fleur de lys and the Saints. Ethnography of communication and urban identity informed the methodology, which incorporated participant observation and interviews with prominent French-speaking musicians, and discourse analysis was used to interpret the data collected. It was very broadly found that the city during this time period was experiencing a kind of “renaissance” that resonated through the musicians interviewed.

This study seeks to determine if the francophone cultures of Louisiana are in the process of evolving in the world of folklore and music. For musicians who claim and express their heritage and who have returned to New Orleans in the last few years, it is interesting to see how they identify with the city; many are open and have much to say about their city of origin or adoption. One goal is to illustrate how it may be possible to preserve these cultures in the midst of the dominant American society and the pressures sustained by the city, especially since Katrina. The pertinent question is to know if a new generation exists that will reclaim its heritage and how the so-called francophone identity will evolve.

Code-switching and dialect use in the South Louisiana workplace:
Tensions between socialization and antagonism
Charley Silvio, Louisiana State University

My project focuses on understanding how code-switching between dialects functions in a specific social environment: a university administrative office in south Louisiana. Traditionally, scholarship in this vein has focused on the way in which power structures and capitalistic culture constrain language choices of speakers. However, newer work by scholars indicates a more optimistic outlook in their suggestions that organizations should embrace the benefits of socializing aspects of free language choice. My goal was to investigate if the ideas related to such newer theories were realized in an actual workplace. South Louisiana provides an ideal location for such a study. It is a place of diverse dialects and distinct cultures, and it is also a place that has a heightened awareness of socialization. Thus, it provides a great opportunity for understanding the complex intersections of language choice and social function.
To understand dialect switching in Louisiana, I appeal to scholars like Johnstone (1998) on rural dialects in Texas. Other scholarship helps define code-switching in the workplace in regards to power structures (Li Wei, Milroy, and Pong, 1992), interculturalism of the globalized workplace (Cameron, 2000), and management's concerns over the language choices of employees (Gunnarsson, 2013), all of which constrain choices and promote a negative attitude toward switching. Newer scholarship emphasizes the role of freedom of language choice in workplace identity formation (Ho and Bauder, 2012), socialization (Mak and Chui, 2013), and the benefits of humor (Moody, 2014). I primarily investigate the tension between these negative and positive impressions.

Study respondents included a student worker, an administrative coordinator, two administrative program specialists, the associate director of the writing program, and the department chair. This variety enabled the collection of data concerning the perspectives from various levels in administrative hierarchy in order to gauge the effect—if any—that position might play in power relations related to language choice; some questions were designed specifically to investigate this phenomenon. The study used a Likert-scale questionnaire and interviews. Respondents almost unanimously suggested that cultural heritage of the region contributes to the construction of a vibrant identity that is a function of language use. Only one respondent took a more traditional position, indicating that a formalized, neutral speaking style is more appropriate for the workplace; however, her position was balanced by answers to other questions that indicated openness to self-expression and diverse identities. This respondent’s focus on formalized speech was the only significant evidence that might support the negative impressions described in some scholarship. All respondents indicated, in some form or another, the expressive power and socializing function of dialects in the workplace. Respondents recognized the value of dialect diversity and its contribution to a lively and socially coherent workplace that exists as a microcosm of a broader, cherished culture in south Louisiana. This study provides some validation for emerging notions about the positive value of language diversity and legitimate identity formation through freedom of language choice in the workplace while also revealing colorful and humorous attributes of work life in Louisiana.