

Language revitalization, race, and resistance in Creole Louisiana

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Introduction

Ideologies of language can be leveraged to (re)construct and contest discourses and hierarchies of race and ethnicity.² I intend here to scrutinize how this plays out in the context of language revitalization. Specifically, this paper interrogates the complex, contested and sometimes contradictory relationship between Louisiana Creole ethnic, racial and linguistic identities, taking as its lens the language revitalization movements which have emerged in Louisiana since the Civil Rights Act. My view of language revitalization is shaped by the understanding that ‘struggles over language actually are not centrally about language at all’³. In the context of language revitalization, as James Costa articulates,

‘although language is of course the central rallying point, the actions that we are referring to are primarily not about language but about people: people coming together to act in the world, people articulating opinions about how society should be ordered and about who should take part in that order’⁴

¹ I am grateful to Marjorie Esman, Michael Hornsby, Christophe Landry and Li Nguyen for their feedback on this paper.

² H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetta F. Ball, eds., *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³ Monica Heller, “Analysis and Stance Regarding Language and Social Justice,” in *Language Rights and Language Survival*, by Jane Freeland and Donna Patrick, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2004), 285, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760155>.

⁴ James Costa, *Revitalising Language in Provence: A Critical Approach*, Publications of the Philological Society 48 (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2017), 4.

With this in mind, and in response to this volume's focus on Louisiana Creole peoplehood, I attempt here to clarify how Creole-identified activists have established a form of Louisiana Creole *languagehood* which acts as a totem for broader social conflicts. By reifying Louisiana Creole as a language in its own right and emphasizing its distinctiveness from Louisiana French, activists seek to reclaim and rearticulate Louisiana Creole peoplehood on their own terms. This, I argue, is a form of resistance to discourses around preserving Louisiana's linguistic heritage which have overwhelmingly foregrounded 'Cajun' French, a linguistic identity which can only be claimed by Louisiana's white inhabitants. This focus on Cajun (i.e. white) linguistic identity has served to further marginalize Louisiana's communities of color, through a language-ideological process of erasure.⁵

I begin this paper by considering histories of the Cajun and Creole language revitalization movements in critical perspective. This review uncovers the ideological roots of the Cajun movement amongst white reactionary responses to Civil Rights. I then address how creolophone activists of color began to counter this whitewashing of Louisiana heritage. From this basis, I discuss the burgeoning Kouri-Vini Movement, a group of 'new speakers'⁶ of Louisiana Creole whose language revitalization activities explicitly seek to resist Cajunist discourses, and which are oriented around the symbolic usage of the Louisiana Creole language under the moniker

⁵ Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Sante Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000), 35–84.

⁶ see Bernadette O'Rourke, Joan Pujolar, and Fernando Ramallo, eds., "New Speakers of Minority Languages: The Challenging Opportunity," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2015, no. 231 (January 2015); Michael Hornsby, *Revitalizing Minority Languages: New Speakers of Breton, Yiddish and Lemko* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137498809>.

Kouri-Vini. I conclude by reviewing these attempts to establish Louisiana Creole languagehood in broad linguistic-anthropological perspective, attending to the resultant theoretical insights for studies of language revitalization, Louisiana Creole Studies and, on a more practical level, for the future of this critically-endangered language.

Whitewashing French: How Louisiana French became Cajun

‘On s’appelait des Créoles avant cette affaire de Cadjin.’
‘We called ourselves Creoles before this Cajun business.’⁷

Linguists typically identify two French-related languages in Louisiana: regional varieties of the French language (Louisiana regional French, hereafter LF) and a French-based creole known as Louisiana Creole (hereafter LC; a.k.a. *Kouri-Vini*, see below). Though each of these languages has particular linguistic features, their relationship is complex. LC is only partially intelligible to some speakers of LF, other speakers have full bilingual competence. Further, due to the sociolinguistic dynamics of regional settlement and racial segregation, dialects of LC are linguistically influenced to varying degrees by LF.⁸ Most germane to the concerns of this paper, this complexity is further compounded by what N. A. Wendte has referred to as the tendency for ‘ethnolinguistic isomorphism’.⁹ Self-identified Cajuns call their language Cajun (French), while

⁷ Anonymous interviewee in Cécyle Trépanier, “The Cajunization of French Louisiana: Forging a Regional Identity,” *The Geographical Journal* 157, no. 2 (July 1991): 167, <https://doi.org/10.2307/635273>.

⁸ Oliver Mayeux, “Rethinking Decreolization: Language Contact and Change in Louisiana Creole” (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.41629>; Thomas A. Klingler, “La variation ethnolinguistique en créole louisianais au cours du XXe siècle,” in *Sprach- und Kulturkontakthänomene in der Romania – Phénomènes de contact linguistique et culturel dans la Romania Festschrift für Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh zum 65. Geburtstag.*, ed. Edith Szlezák and Klara Stephanie Szlezák (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2019), 53–68.

⁹ N.A. Wendte, “Nexus Analysis: A Natural Fit for Linguistic Ethnography” (Seminar talk given at the Cambridge Endangered Languages and Cultures Group, University of Cambridge, 2019), <https://www.academia.edu/39562369>.

self-identified Creoles call their language Creole (French). These self-reported emic labels often do not correspond to formal linguistic structures designated LC and LF by linguists. Emic language-naming practices in contemporary Louisiana therefore have everything to do with ethnic and racial identification, and very little to do with linguistic structure.¹⁰

The origins of this situation can be found in the process of Americanization of Louisiana, which imposed the English language on the LF- and LC-speaking inhabitants of the territory. Importantly, however, as Barthé discusses in this volume, it also ushered in the ‘Jim Crow’ racial binary which brought into contention existing racial and ethnic labels. As Nathalie Dajko puts it, ‘as ethnicity became polarized around race, it appears that language labels shifted as well, to match the new arrangement’.¹¹ During Americanization, Louisiana’s prosperous white families began to integrate steadily into Anglo-American society while rural, poor white families remained more isolated. They were often denigrated and marginalized by wealthy white Anglo-Americans and Americanized white Creoles alike, who used the slur ‘Cajun’, which referred to poor, rural, working-class whites and derived from *Acadien* ‘Acadian’, after the some 3,000 refugees who arrived in the late 1700s.¹² ‘A Creole mother would say to her child, “*Tu es habillé comme un Cadien; ça c’est Cadien*” [‘You are dressed like a Cajun; that’s Cajun’] and that made her point’.¹³ Nevertheless, by the 1970s, it was under that label that Louisiana was sold to the world: home of the Cajuns, speakers of ‘Cajun’ French.

¹⁰ Thomas A. Klingler, “Language Labels and Language Use among Cajuns and Creoles in Louisiana,” *U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics* 9, no. 2 (2003): 77–90.

¹¹ Nathalie Dajko, “Sociolinguistics of Ethnicity in Francophone Louisiana: Language and Ethnicity in French Louisiana,” *Language and Linguistics Compass* 6, no. 5 (May 2012): 290, <https://doi.org/10.1002/lnc3.333>.

¹² Carl A. Brasseaux, *Acadian to Cajun: Transformation of a People, 1803 - 1877* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1992), 104–5.

¹³ Thad St Martin, “Cajuns,” *Yale Review* 26 (June 1937): 861.

As Marjorie Esman argued in her important 1983 paper, the ‘Cajun’ French revitalization movement has its ideological roots in the activities of white reactionaries seeking to counteract the Civil Rights movement, who sought to construct themselves as a marginalized ethnic group via the appropriation of the ‘Cajun’ slur:

‘Spontaneous Cajun activities can also be seen as reactions to Civil Rights, attempts by the formerly poor Whites to preserve their only claim to prestige. Influenced by the rhetoric and success of Black Civil Rights, White Cajun ethnic activities were more than imitations: they represent a direct reaction against Black rights.’¹⁴

These discourses are evident in a little-known legal paper authored by the founder & director of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), Jimmy Domengeaux. Domengeaux positions Cajuns as a (white) minority group who ought to be subject to the same legal protections from discrimination as those outlined for people of color in the 1964 Civil Rights Act:

*‘Le titre VII de la loi de 1964 (Civil Rights Act of 1964) avait pour but de supprimer sur les lieux de travail toute discrimination basée sur la race et la lignée [...] un Acadien d’origine peut se prévaloir de la protection de cette loi’*¹⁵

‘Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had as its goal the abolition of all workplace discrimination based on race or descent [...] a native-born Acadian can invoke the protection of that Act.’

¹⁴ Marjorie Esman, “Internal Conflict and Ethnic Activism: The Louisiana Cajuns,” *Human Organization* 42, no. 1 (March 1983): 58, <https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.42.1.b5x121h5j5086822>.

¹⁵ James Harvey Domengeaux, “Native-Born Acadians and the Equality Ideal,” *Louisiana Law Review* 46 (1986): 1194.

Domengeaux's opinions on the end of segregation and the place of people of color in Louisiana society are well-documented. De Wolf reports the following anecdote from Civil Rights activist John Carlton James:

[Domengeaux] said 'I'll walk in blood up to my neck before Negroes vote in the city of Lafayette'. And I told him I didn't know anybody who could ever walk in blood up to his neck. They'd swim if they got that deep. For 25 years after that we didn't speak.'¹⁶

Domengeaux was also famously in favor of the adoption of Parisian French rather than the local Louisiana vernacular, which he derided as 'redneck' and 'chicken scratch'.¹⁷ This irony exposes the important role of classism in the early Cajun movement. The disdain for working-class French appropriately complicates the picture of early Cajunist activism, pointing to the appropriation of the 'Cajun' label by *la bourgeoisie louisianaise* in general and Domengeaux in particular. This is, in my view, a more accurate and realistic view of the emergence of 'Cajun-washing', alternative to the somewhat paranoid notion of all-out conspiracy amongst all early Cajun French activists. Indeed, Ducote's important thesis has shown, many of Louisiana's first generation of CODOFIL French teachers—themselves raised in rural working-class francophone homes—actively resisted Domengeaux's stance in their own activism and their classroom teaching. Teachers such as Amanda LaFleur—who has worked tirelessly to valorize the languages spoken by Louisianians of color and working-class whites alike—have today

¹⁶ Mark A. De Wolf, "In the Eye of the Storm: Lafayette and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1971" (Master's thesis, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1997). I am grateful to Marjorie Esman for pointing this quotation out to me and for her correspondence this topic.

¹⁷ Natalie Ducote, "CODOFIL's Ally: Local French Teachers in Louisiana" (Master's thesis, University of New Orleans, 2017), 28, <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2316>.

succeeded in reconstructing CODOFIL as a significantly more inclusive and well-intentioned organisation.¹⁸

Nevertheless, in looking back at the Cajun movement, it must be admitted that the choice to brand Louisiana—its food, traditions and French language—as ‘Cajun’ over ‘Creole’ can ‘only be interpreted as the desire for the French Louisiana elite to assure for the region a “white” identity’.¹⁹ The Cajun movement’s influential ‘revitalization myth’²⁰ involved constructing Louisiana’s white population as a marginalized group under the ‘Cajun’ label. For whites who consciously or unconsciously perceived Civil Rights legislation and integration as a threat to their power, the newfound status as marginalized Cajuns was an appropriate solution. In practice, the Cajun myth has been justified less by genealogy and more by the collective imaginary of Louisiana’s white population. Even in places like Avoyelles Parish, which historically had very little Acadian settlement, it is commonplace to hear whites identify themselves, their food and their language as ‘Cajun’. Likewise, ‘Cajun French’ is imagined as the continuation of the language brought by the Acadians to Louisiana. This is despite more than a century of French presence in Louisiana before the arrival of the Acadians, the fact that LF has long been spoken across racial and ethnic lines, and linguistic analyses which demonstrate that the Acadians’ dialect made a relatively small contribution to what we now know as LF.²¹ It is therefore easy to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Trépanier, “The Cajunization of French Louisiana,” 164; see also Eric Waddell, “La Louisiane française : une poste outre-frontière de l’Amérique française ou un autre pays et une autre culture?,” *Cahiers de géographie du Québec* 23, no. 59 (1979): 199, <https://doi.org/10.7202/021434ar>; Alexandra Giancarlo, “‘Don’t Call Me a Cajun!’: Race and Representation in Louisiana’s Acadiana Region,” *Journal of Cultural Geography*, July 23, 2018, 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2018.1500088>.

²⁰ Costa, *Revitalising Language in Provence*.

²¹ Ingrid Neumann-Holzschuh, “‘Carrefour Louisiane’: Aspects of Language Contact in the History of Louisiana French,” *Journal of Language Contact* 7, no. 1 (March 31, 2014): 124–53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19552629-00701006>; Thomas A. Klingler, “Beyond Cajun: Toward an Expanded View of

see why the label ‘Cajun French’ is unsuitable for academic research: not only is it linguistically inaccurate, it perpetuates the erasure of Louisiana’s thousands of francophones of color.

‘*Nousquenne naissance Creole*’: The Creole Renaissance

Tensions and changes in CODOFIL were evident in January 2017 when outgoing Director Charles Larroque established the *Comité créole*, tasked with addressing the LC component of CODOFIL’s responsibility. There was a sense among many Creole activists that this initiative was a case of too little, too late. Indeed, the *Comité* has not continued its meetings, though many Creole activists are sympathetic to the fact that CODOFIL is chronically under-funded, under-staffed and over-burdened. For many activists, then, CODOFIL’s *Comité créole* only confirmed what they already knew: the best chance for language activism and concomitant social change lay outside State organisations and, instead, at the grassroots of historically creolophone communities of color. Jolivette emphasizes the importance of the Civil Rights Movement in galvanizing language activism amongst Creoles of Color:

‘The shift from viewing Creoles simply as a subgroup within the black category, begun during the 1965-1990 period, happened because of a larger multiracial movement led by groups such as the Association for Multiethnic Americans. Since that time, Creoles have supported the formation of linguistic preservation organisations such as the Creole Institute at Indiana University, which completed the *Dictionary of Louisiana Creole*, and Creole migrants across the United States have begun reconnecting with the diaspora outside of Louisiana through state and national history conferences.’²²

Regional French in Louisiana,” in *New Perspectives on Language Variety in the South: Historical and Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Michael D. Picone and Catherine Evans Davies (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015).

²² Andrew Jolivette, *Louisiana Creoles: Cultural Recovery and Mixed-Race Native American Identity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 38.

Thus, the separate Cajun and Creole movements can be viewed as two independent responses to the Civil Rights movement. Clearly, though, these movements were in (sometimes fraught) dialogue. Opposition to the Cajun narrative is obvious in the name of Creole of Color activist group the ‘Un-Cajun Committee’. The Cajun movement, in turn, responded to the criticisms of Creoles of Color. For example, when Creoles of Color criticized the branding of the ‘Cajundome’, Barry Ancelet decried this as an example of “reverse racism”.²³ This time of ‘Creole Return’—in Jolivette’s timeline—was thus a period of ideological confrontation, as both Cajun and Creole activist groups jostled for their place at the table. It was this setting that gave rise to new ideological positions relative to LF and LC. Crucially, as discussed, Cajun activists had already laid claim to the label ‘French’, now branded ‘Cajun French’. For francophones of color, this constituted an erasure in no uncertain terms: now, the only speakers of ‘French’ in Louisiana were Cajuns, i.e. whites. Creole of Color activists could no longer lay claim to ‘French’. Instead, they concentrated their efforts on reclaiming the label ‘Creole French’. In practice, this mostly meant LC, though this was never explicitly articulated.

Recalling the long history of writers of color in Louisiana—discussed by Prud’homme-Cranford in this volume—poets such as Deborah Clifton and Sybil Kein began to explore LC as a creative medium, ushering in what Jolivette terms the ‘Creole Renaissance’ (1960s-1990s): *‘enfin nousquenne naissance créole!’* (‘finally our own Creole Renaissance’).²⁴ From its inception, activist groups such as CREOLE, Inc. incorporated a strong linguistic component, where language was situated as a core component of cultural identity. CREOLE, Inc.’s *Creole*

²³ Giancarlo, “‘Don’t Call Me a Cajun!’” 14.

²⁴ Ulysses S. Ricard Jr., “Introduction,” in *Gombo People: Poésie Créole de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, by Sybil Kein, Limited First Edition (New Orleans: Gosserand Superior Printers, 1981), 1.

Magazine included Herbert Wiltz's regular column *La Leson Kreyòl* ('The Creole Lesson') as well as an occasional *Creole Linguistics* column.²⁵ Language lessons used to be offered at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette by Deborah Clifton, in Pointe Coupée by the organization *Les Créoles de Pointe Coupée* and, in St Martinville, Velma Johnson founded *Latab Kreyol*, a club for LC-speakers which still meets regularly in Parks.

CREOLE, Inc. also encouraged regional, national and international exchanges, bringing speakers of LC into contact with creolophones from the *Kreyolofoni* — notably Martinique, Guadeloupe and Haiti. These cultural and linguistic exchanges re-invigorated linguistic and cultural reclamation efforts. In their encounter with the *Kreyolofoni*, Louisiana Creoles of Color could move beyond using the Cajunist movement as an opposing point-of-reference. With a sense of solidarity, they could instead orient themselves relative to their cultural and linguistic cousins in the Carribean, a narrative that proliferated throughout this period.

Kouri-Vini, an Indigenous language: The Creole 'E-Naissance'

As the elders at the forefront of the Creole Renaissance have retired, a younger group of activists has stepped forward. Their efforts, spearheaded by activist Christophe Landry, now center principally around a network of language activists and learners based on Facebook. Unlike the activists of the Creole Renaissance, the leaders of the 'Creole E-Naissance' are primarily 'new speakers' of the language. In the recent sociolinguistics literature, the label 'new speakers'

²⁵ Albert Valdman, "Introduction," in *French and Creole in Louisiana*, ed. Albert Valdman (New York: Plenum Press, 1997), 1–22.

describes individuals who have ‘little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual education programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners’.²⁶ As scholars of language revitalization have noted, ‘issues of authenticity, legitimacy, hierarchies and power relations are often at the heart of ‘new speakerness’’.²⁷ Social media offers an important semiotic terrain for identity construction and, for new speakers of endangered languages, a highly salient terrain for such language-ideological concerns to be represented, furthered and contested.

Here, I dub this community of language activists the Kouri-Vini Movement, in reference to one of their high-priority objectives: establishing control over language-naming practices. Contention over language naming practices is often involved in the construction of group boundaries in this way, perhaps most famously in the case of the Balkans and also in other revitalization contexts.²⁸ In 2015, the Movement led a campaign to change the official designation for LC by the International Standards Organisation and the *Ethnologue*, where LC had previously been designated ‘Louisiana Creole French’ by these organisations. The mission was to underscore LC’s status as a separate language from French, thus rejecting the Cajun-Creole binary which has long-dominated conversations of language revitalization in Louisiana.²⁹

²⁶ O’Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo, “New Speakers of Minority Languages: The Challenging Opportunity,” 1.

²⁷ Hornsby, *Revitalizing Minority Languages: New Speakers of Breton, Yiddish and Lemko*, 3.

²⁸ Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its Disintegration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); James Costa, “Patois, Gaga, Savoyard, Francoprovençal, Arpitan... Quel Nom Pour Une Langue ?,” *Langues et Cité* 18, no. 6 (2011): 6; Mari C. Jones, “Identity Planning in an Obsolescent Variety: The Case of Jersey Norman French,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 50, no. 3/4 (2008): 249–265.

²⁹ Christophe Landry et al., “Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code” (SIL International, November 17, 2014), http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/cr_files/2015-003.pdf.

Most recently, online activists have begun to use the term ‘Kouri-Vini’ to refer to LC, a label sometimes encountered amongst creolophones along the Bayou Tèche (sometimes, though not always, in a derogatory fashion). The word ‘Creole’, Landry and others contend, leads to conflation with the contentious ethnic label and invites comparison with other creole languages, which have historically not been treated as fully-fledged linguistic systems.³⁰ The *Kouri-Vini Louisiana Creole Fanpage*, the public-facing Facebook page of the online movement, features a banner which reads ‘Kouri-Vini: Louisiana’s Indigenous Creole Language’.³¹ The incorporation of the Indigenous label—justified in historical-linguistic terms in the sense that creolization took place in Louisiana—emphasizes the Indigenous component of Louisiana Creole identity discussed throughout this volume. This also results in LC being positioned as an Indigenous language, which may allow access to funding and other support intended for Indigenous language reclamation. Like other endangered creole languages in post-colonial settings, LC has fallen between the cracks when it comes to language revitalization because LC has no federally-recognised, contiguous Indigenous group for whom it acts as a heritage language. Social media has provided an important forum for the invention, discussion and proliferation of such discourses.

The Kouri-Vini Movement’s other activities include the development of a distinctive orthography, especially apt in the unembodied online spaces where, instead, we are ‘typed into

³⁰ Michel DeGraff, “Linguists’ Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Creole Exceptionalism,” *Language in Society* 34, no. 04 (October 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404505050207>.

³¹ “Kouri Vini Louisiana Creole Language Fanpage,” Facebook, accessed May 10, 2019, <http://facebook.com/Kourivini>.

being'.³² Given the visual nature of spelling and how it can be manipulated to construe social meaning³³ it is of no surprise that orthography development in language revitalization may raise any number of 'social, psychological, economic, and historical issues'.³⁴ Orthography becomes the 'most obvious terrain' for language-ideological debates to be played out,³⁵ as commonly occurs in the case of minority languages.³⁶ Spelling represents a vital semiotic strategy for the representation of the Kouri-Vini Movement. The Kouri-Vini Movement's orthography was devised by Christophe Landry and underwent various permutations which culminated in the 2016 publication of the *Guide to Louisiana Creole Orthography*. The orthography is designed with the explicit intention of marking LC as a language distinct from both French and other French-based creoles, in contrast to the spellings used by activists in the Creole Renaissance.³⁷ Thus, as with the glossonym 'Kouri-Vini', the intention underlying the orthography is the establishment of LC as an autonomous linguistic system, independent from LF and other French-lexifier creoles.³⁸ These concerns were arguably secondary to activists in the Creole Renaissance movement, who used French-style spelling (e.g. Sybil Kein, Deborah Clifton, Ulysses S. Ricard Jr.) and a more Haitian-style system (e.g. in Herbert Wiltz's *Leson Kreyol*). Most recently, Herbert Wiltz, CREOLE, Inc. member and veteran language activist, has started

³² Jenny Sundén, *Material Virtualities: Approaching Online Textual Embodiment*, Digital Formations (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 4.

³³ Mark Sebba, *Spelling and Society: The Culture and Politics of Orthography Around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley, *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137.

³⁵ Costa, *Revitalising Language in Provence*, 96.

³⁶ see papers in Mari C Jones and Damien Mooney, eds., *Creating Orthographies for Endangered Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³⁷ Christophe Landry et al., "A Guide to Louisiana Creole Orthography" (Louisiana Historical and Cultural Vistas, 2016), <http://www.mylhcv.com/guide-to-louisiana-creole-orthography/>.

³⁸ Oliver Mayeux, "Writing Louisiana Creole" (Undergraduate Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, 2014); N.A. Wendte, "L'identité Allographique: Le Cas Du Créole Louisianais" (Conference Presentation, May 24, 2018), <https://www.academia.edu/36708487/>.

his own LC language classes in downtown Lafayette. He chooses the orthography of the Kouri-Vini Movement—rather than the Haitian-style orthography he had previously used—for his curriculum, testament to the growing currency of the new orthography.

In other contexts of language revitalization, the language of new speakers has been shown to diverge from that of ‘traditional’ speakers, leading some linguists to identify new, hybridized dialects such as Neo-Hawai‘ian³⁹ or Neo-Breton⁴⁰. Elsewhere, I have argued that, on a linguistic basis, the language used by the Kouri-Vini Movement does not diverge from contemporary LC in such a way as to justify branding it as a new or ‘non-traditional’ dialect of the language. Nevertheless, some teaching materials, and, subsequently, learners of LC use linguistic forms which emphasize the boundary between LC and LF. For example, new speakers of LC tend to use a plural definite determiner *-la-yé* which is placed after a noun, e.g. *lamézon-la-yé* ‘the houses’. This construction is similar to that used in 19th-century LC. Today, most dialects of LC tend to use a construction which resembles the LF equivalent, i.e. *les maisons* ‘the houses’. The 19th-century LC form is chosen because it is maximally distant from LF. Like the Kouri-Vini Movement’s orthography, this another strategy for enforcing the boundaries between the two languages.⁴¹

³⁹ Richard Keao‘ōpuaokalani NeSmith, “Tūtū’s Hawaiian and the Emergence of a Neo-Hawaiian Language” (Master’s thesis, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2002), https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/21194/NeSmith_2002.pdf.

⁴⁰ Mari C. Jones, “Death of a Language, Birth of an Identity: Brittany and the Bretons,” *Language Problems and Language Planning* 22, no. 2 (1998): 129–42, <https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.22.2.02jon>.

⁴¹ Oliver Mayeux, “New Speaker Language: The Morphosyntax of New Speakers of Endangered Languages” (MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2015); Mayeux, “Rethinking Decreolization,” 225ff.

Thus, unlike the generation of activists who led the Creole Renaissance, the Kouri-Vini Movement does not seek to struggle against the promotion of ‘Cajun French’ movement by championing ‘Creole French’. Instead, by constructing a linguistic identity that moves beyond these binary labels, the Kouri-Vini Movement seeks to gain control over discourses of ethnolinguistic legitimacy.

Conclusion: Louisiana Creole Peoplehood and Languagehood

I have attempted here to document the relationship between racial, ethnic and linguistic identities in Louisiana’s language revitalization movements from the 1960s to the present day, deconstructing the linguistic-ideological underpinning of these movements in sociohistorical perspective. By way of conclusion, I will take a broader linguistic-anthropological perspective in considering the implications that the growing Kouri-Vini Movement—and its claims to LC languagehood—hold for Louisiana Creole Studies in particular and studies of language revitalization in general.

As in all revitalization movements, language activists in Louisiana have been jostling ‘to define the object they strive to revitalise, and to define conditions of participation in the movement – who will be allowed to take part, and who will not, according to what criteria?’.⁴² The Cajun French movement laid claim to French, which was used by some activists to emphasize the impoverished, marginalized status of rural whites. It has been shown, however, that this claim to minority status was a response to the Civil Rights Movement led by white reactionaries with the

⁴² Costa, *Revitalising Language in Provence*, 41.

intention of preserving white hegemony. In resistance to their erasure, Louisiana Creoles of Color led the Creole Renaissance, their attempt to win back their claims to Louisiana heritage.

On a surface level, it might seem that the Kouri-Vini Movement replicates the binary opposition has emerged whereby racial and linguistic identities are conflated and essentialized: in brief, ‘Cajun French for the (white) Cajuns; Creole for Creoles (of color)’. The undertaking of the nascent Kouri-Vini Movement is, however, to effectively deconstruct this binary and, subsequently, to reconstruct a new, 21st-century relationship between LC identity, language and history. The Kouri-Vini Movement position themselves as the resistance to an Americanized, **racially-essentialized** reading of Creole identity which has been promoted by the Cajun movement. So doing, they contend that they are re-establishing historical continuity with Louisiana before Americanization, when the ethnic label ‘Creole’ was applicable to those born in Louisiana, regardless of race. The Kouri-Vini Movement moves beyond this, however, including *all* practitioners of Louisiana Creole culture, i.e. those in the diaspora, as exemplified by the remarks of Prud’homme-Cranford in this volume.

Instead of race and place, language has become the rallying point of the Kouri-Vini Movement. Through laying claim to LC as a language distinct from LF and, thus, independent of Cajunist discourses, the Kouri-Vini Movement are effectively ‘retelling’⁴³ who counts as a legitimate Creole (i.e. peoplehood) in Louisiana. From a Bourdieusien perspective, the Kouri-Vini Movement seeks not only to accrue their own cultural capital, rival to that of the Cajunists, it

⁴³ Costa, 41.

seeks to redefine what forms of cultural capital are considered powerful, relevant and legitimate. The Kouri-Vini Movement is actively problematizing and disrupting the field of (racial) power which runs horizontally through the field of language revitalization and its contingent fields (policymaking, education, community-building).

The continuation of these efforts will undoubtedly see the proliferation of the kind of language-centered conflicts observed in other minority language communities. First, efforts to maintain and revitalize the LC language have been spearheaded exclusively by Creoles of Color, who have acted as guardians for the language through individual and community efforts in the fields of creative expression and activism. Eschewing race from the history of the creation, maintenance and revitalization of LC would be entirely counterfactual, sorely so for a language which originated amongst enslaved peoples in a society structured around ~~where~~ racial violence. As a white speaker-learner of LC who ~~sometimes~~ has positioned that language as one of my 'heritage languages', I can only admit that the contemporary LC language revitalization movement risks (at least partially) whitewashing the language and disillusioning many native speakers if creolophones of color are not positioned at the core of language revitalization efforts. Second, it remains to be seen whether LC's recent formulation as an Indigenous language will help or hinder the revitalization movement. Since the Creole identity is multivalent (cf. Jolivet; Prud'homme-Cranford this vol.) and, for many Creoles of Color, encompasses a strong element of Indigenous identity, the equivocation of LC language revitalization and Indigenous language revitalization risks replicating some of the mistakes of early CODOFIL activism, i.e. the subtle erasure of, and ideological conflict with, Indigenous communities such as the Tunica-Biloxi,

Houma, Atakapa-Ishak, etc. who are each building their own language revitalization movements. Third, the online Kouri-Vini Movement remains largely unknown in the rural communities where LC is still spoken. It remains to be seen to what extent the online movement will continue to rely on a ‘trickle down’ (‘trickle offline’?) effect, e.g. as has been seen in the case of the adoption of the Kouri-Vini Movement’s orthography in CREOLE, Inc.’s recent LC classes (p. xxx). Perhaps the key challenge facing new speakers of LC is how they will engage with the knowledge-bearers in rural Louisiana communities who, themselves, represent the living repositories of the linguistic, cultural and oral-historical traditions that the Kouri-Vini Movement intends to valorize and reclaim. The online-offline dialogue will doubtless entail some difficult ideological confrontations. Community members in Parks have suggested to me that a language summer school, bringing together local youth and elders with language activists, would be an appropriate starting point for this dialogue and for community-(re)building in general. The success of Master-Apprentice programmes elsewhere make this a promising proposition.⁴⁴

How the contemporary LC revitalization movement will respond to these issues will be of vital importance to the future of the LC language as well as future conceptualizations of Louisiana Creole peoplehood. Jane Freeland has argued that ‘diaspora groups like [Creole peoples] are particularly ill-served by the unitary notions of peoplehood, identity and language that underpin Western state language policies and minority challenges to them’.⁴⁵ As Joliv ette has noted in the

⁴⁴ Leanne Hinton, “The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program,” in *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, ed. Leanne Hinton and Kenneth Hale (Brill, 2001), 217–26, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004261723_018.

⁴⁵ Jane Freeland, “Linguistic Rights and Language Survival in a Creole Space: Dilemmas for Nicaragua’s Caribbean Coast Creoles,” in *Language Rights and Language Survival*, by Jane Freeland and Donna Patrick, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2004), 103, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760155>.

Louisiana context, ‘by refusing to accept a monoracial identity, [Louisiana] Creoles represent an important case study on ethnic movements and revitalization’.⁴⁶ Here, I have attempted to show how Louisiana Creoles have constructed links between language and peoplehood on their own terms, beyond the Anglo-American racial binary. This case exposes the intersection of race and language revitalization, and how social movements which unite around language may mount resistance to racism and social exclusion.

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⁴⁶ Jolivette, *Louisiana Creoles*, 48.

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