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Attitudes toward Cajun French and International French in
South Louisiana:
A Study of High School Students

In the course of the twentieth century, English has come to replace French—specifically, the variety known as *Cajun French* or *Louisiana Regional French*—as the primary language of communication in South Louisiana. In this language shift process, Cajun French has continued its steady decline in spite of French educational programs—including French immersion—established since the creation of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) in 1968 as well as a Cajun cultural revival. Today’s high school students—who are generally monolingual in English but may have contact with Cajun French in family or community contexts and contact with International (i.e., Standard) French in educational settings—will be influential in determining the fate of Cajun French in Louisiana. This study presents survey data from 586 high school students in 13 schools in five parishes (i.e., counties) in Acadiana, Louisiana’s French Triangle, to examine the extent of young people’s contact with French as well as their attitudes toward Cajun French and International French. The quantitative analysis focuses on responses to opinion items on the questionnaire, and qualitative data from short-answer questions and interviews with 36 participants is also considered. Access to French education varies: Some parishes offer French instruction, or even French immersion, from elementary through high school, but French is limited to high school in others. Positive attitudes toward Cajun French are generally in evidence, but widespread French ability has not been achieved through educational programs. Results indicate that students who self-identify as Cajun express interest in learning Cajun French, and students with the greatest amount of French education display a willingness to use French (e.g., in the workplace). Thus, more extensive French education for students who self-identify as Cajun may be the best hope for the continued existence of Cajun French in South Louisiana.