

Jennifer Betters

Immersion Education in an Endangered Language: A Linguistic Study of the Oral Production of French Immersion Students in Louisiana

In the past century, French has shifted from being the native language of many Louisianans to being an endangered dialect. Since the creation of the state agency CODOFIL (Council for the Development of French in Louisiana) in the 1960's, efforts have been made to revitalize French in Louisiana, and since the 1980's, some parishes have offered public school French immersion programs. Very little research, however, has documented the variety of French that students of these programs speak.



This dissertation adds to current knowledge by presenting a linguistic analysis of empirical research data collected through oral interviews with 8th grade French immersion subjects from Lafayette Parish and Assumption Parish, Louisiana. Subjects' oral production is analyzed for specific lexical, phonological, morphosyntactic and sociolinguistic variants to determine if the variety they speak is characteristic of Louisiana Regional French (LRF) or of Referential ("Standard") French (RF). A written word-recognition task was used to uncover any gaps between subjects' knowledge (competence) and production (performance), and a sociolinguistic questionnaire sheds light upon subjects' family language backgrounds, attitudes towards French immersion, and attitudes towards LRF.

The linguistic analysis shows that French immersion students in Louisiana speak a variety of RF characterized by learner forms and, in a few cases, by specific LRF variants. Although these LRF variants can largely be explained by individual subject motivation or by overlap with learner forms, a few of the LRF variants are limited geographically to only one of the parishes under study and/or appear to be due to the influence of LRF in the community. The study results are compared with similar studies of French immersion students in Canada; Louisiana students are shown to prefer vernacular, learner forms or English code-switches in comparison to Canadian subjects' preference for formal (non-vernacular) forms.

This study shows that, overall, French immersion education in Louisiana is not contributing to the maintenance of endangered varieties of LRF, but is instead creating a new generation of Louisiana Francophones who speak a variety of Referential French.

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Global and International Studies Building, Room 3134

If you would like to attend, please contact the departmental graduate coordinator at fritgs@indiana.edu or call 812-855-1088.

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