

BOOK REVIEW

Dajko, Nathalie and Shana Walton, eds. 2019. *Language in Louisiana: Community and Culture*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

The book *Language in Louisiana: Community and Culture*, edited by Nathalie Dajko and Shana Walton, presents an enthralling view of Louisiana's diverse linguistic heritage and its current state. Although present-day Louisiana is predominantly monolingually English, this has not always been the case. Louisiana has been home to a number of indigenous languages as well as several European and African languages, brought by European settlers and African slaves. Previous literature dealing with linguistic diversity in Louisiana mainly consists of separate studies of particular varieties (see references in the book) or of reports of specific varieties spoken in Louisiana that are presented as part of a wider linguistic collection (e.g., Dubois and Horvath 2008) or collective editions discussing Louisiana French and Creole in particular (e.g., Valdman 1997). In contrast, Dajko and Walton's book is both more specific as well as broader in scope, as it seeks to span Louisiana's linguistic diversity by taking a snapshot of the main languages and varieties present or under effort of revitalisation, and providing socio-historical and linguistic perspectives on these. The contributors to the book, each from their angle of expertise, discuss the results of fieldwork studies, introduce language revitalisation projects, present linguistic descriptions of the varieties and discuss the relationship between language and identity. The authors' intention of assembling a volume that is of interest both

to the academic audience as well as the general public has been successfully achieved – the book includes language descriptions to spark linguists' interest and also presents discussions of social and cultural issues readily accessible to wider audiences.

The book is divided into four thematic sections. The first section focusses on the history, maintenance and revitalisation of four of the indigenous languages that have been or are spoken in Louisiana – Chitimacha, Koasati, Tunica and Ishak – and that exemplify the different fates that have befallen such languages and the various stages they find themselves in. All were spoken in Louisiana before European settlement and their history and existence were greatly affected by the diseases, violent conflict and displacement policies that came with the settlers. In Chapter 1, Daniel W. Hieber sketches a brief history of Chitimacha, a linguistic isolate, discussing its contacts with other southeast indigenous languages, their influence on its grammar, earlier efforts of documentation and present revitalisation processes. The following two chapters discuss Koasati, a Muskogean language still spoken in Louisiana. In the first, Linda and Bertney Langley describe the tribe's determined efforts to preserve and revitalise their language through the Koasati Language Project. In Chapter 3, Geoffrey Kimball describes the impact that social self-isolation and a linguistically facilitated adoption of Protestantism, which in turn

led to Koasati being used to reflect Biblical stories, coupled with other political and economic factors, have had on the survival and revitalisation of the language. In Chapter 4, Patricia Anderson and Judith M. Maxwell provide a brief history of the Tunica people and a description of the main linguistic features of their language, followed by a discussion of Tunica revitalisation efforts. Chapter 5 by Jeffery Darenbourg and David Kaufman provides a glimpse of the Ishak tribe, the Ishak language and the present status of its documentation. A linguistically minded reader would have enjoyed a more detailed description of the features of Chitimacha and Koasati and some indication of those of Ishak, but considering the scope of the authors' approach, they should not be faulted for this. All chapters of the section present extremely interesting stories of the efforts of the members of the respective tribes to preserve their cultural heritage and revitalise their tribal language as a symbol of their cultural identity.

The five chapters of the second section focus on French, the colonial language that has the longest presence in Louisiana. The chapters complement one another and provide the reader with an all-round understanding of the situation and status of varieties of French in the region. Chapter 6 by Dajko examines the emergence of Louisiana Regional French and the variation it exhibits. It also discusses the variety's ties with ethnicity and with American Indian identity in particular. In his chapter, Thomas A. Klingler gives a brief overview of Louisiana Creole, an endangered language, by summarising previous literature and providing a grammatical description. He is sceptical about Creole's future and recommends that more energy and support be devoted to revitalisation efforts as younger Creoles are willing to learn the language "to reclaim this part of their cultural heritage" (p. 103). In Chapter 8 Tamara Lindner presents the

results of her two studies on the attitudes to French held by young adults enrolled in French courses in high schools around Acadiana and at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Interestingly, the studies show that the younger generation values Cajun heritage and supports efforts for language revitalization, with respondents who self-identified as Cajun – even if they were not fluent in Cajun French – reporting that they felt a link between the French language and their Cajun identity. The next two Chapters focus on French education in Louisiana. First, Albert Camp presents an overview of two key French education programmes: CODOFIL and *Escadrille Louisiane*. The aim of the former is to create immersion courses and that of the latter is to train Louisiana's native French teachers. His chapter shows that many of the trainees of *Escadrille* do not come from families with a history of French use. In Chapter 10, Robin White takes a closer look at French education in New Orleans. One of the problems she points out is that the French that is taught there is not Louisiana Regional French but Standard French.

The authors open the book's third section by recognising that Louisiana is becoming increasingly English-speaking. Unfortunately, the corresponding process of ongoing linguistic change as well as the languages and varieties that are on the rise or receding have not been sufficiently studied. The section's chapters fill some of the research gaps that are identified by the authors, and will hopefully be fortified when several extensive research projects mentioned in the section's introduction are realised. In Chapter 11 Katie Carmichael describes the linguistic features of Cajun English (English that was adopted by the population of Acadian Louisiana as a result of the state's assimilation policies and that reflects influences of Cajun French) and the stereotypes associated with its speakers. Carmichael sees Cajun Eng-

lish – whose French-influenced linguistic features have become a way of expressing a local Cajun identity – as playing a role in “the cultural revival of Cajunness” (p. 159). The next chapter, by Christina Schouh Casey, studies the English varieties spoken in New Orleans and provides many remarkable features of vernacular varieties, of which Yat is the principal one. She notes that local speech is being commodified as a tourist attraction and offers a critique of the practice. In Chapter 13, Lisa Abney seeks to make up for the absence of systematised research on the dialects of North Louisiana. Her study not only collected linguistic data on the dialects but also included ethnographic interviews which provide insights into cultural practices and traditions in the region. The section’s chapters paint a rich picture of the varieties of English in Louisiana, reflecting the state’s many geographic, ethnic and cultural divisions and their current use and status.

The last section of the book focusses on more recent minority communities. Although earlier varieties of Spanish in Louisiana have disappeared, there is a continuous influx of new Spanish speakers, whose number has doubled in the course of reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina (p. 227). In their chapter Rafael Orozco and Dorian Dorado provide a history of ancestral varieties of Spanish – Adaeseño, Isleño and Brule in Louisiana – as well as the main characteristics of modern-day Louisiana Spanish. They also report on two studies of speaker perceptions of Spanish. The first explored how Louisiana Hispanics and Latinos perceive changes in their Spanish and the second examined the attitudes of native English-speaking Louisianians towards different varieties of Spanish. In her chapter, Allison Truitt discusses the challenges that Vietnamese immigrants encounter in Louisiana when seeking to maintain their linguistic heritage. She shows how a politically complex history

of the country of origin can affect the meaning attributed to linguistic markers of geographical distribution of language varieties. In the final chapter of the book, Shane Lief casts a glance to smaller linguistic minorities present in New Orleans. Lief concludes that, ironically, they are prone to encounter discrimination in a city whose Choctaw name – *Balbancha* – means “the place where different languages are spoken” (p. 273).

All in all, *Language in Louisiana: Community and Culture* is a collection of essays that provides a rewarding excursion through the rich linguistic map of Louisiana. The thematic and chronological structure of the collection helps the reader to develop an understanding of the dynamics of linguistic and cultural change in this multilingual state. The authors of the book discuss issues related to language, race, ethnicity, culture and education. Not all of these issues receive the same degree of attention or are analysed in equal depth (for instance, linguistic descriptions of the indigenous languages reflected in Section 1); however, this personal preference clearly does not diminish the value of the book. The volume will surely become an invaluable source for anyone interested in linguistic and cultural contacts, influence and change.

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## References

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