University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2015

Franco-American Culture in the Northeastern United States and the New England Dialect of French

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Abstract

Today, New England is very densely populated with the descendants of Quebec immigrants who settled in the region's many small towns in the mid-19th century. Influenced by factors of geography— as these Francophone communities often resided near the French-Canadian border— and culture— by which the smallness of these communities resulted in French being spoken as a first language in a country where English was, and is, the dominant language— the type of French that has developed in New England is unlike any other French dialect in the world: A dialect known as New England French. In recent decades, these small, isolated communities have begun to disband due to economic and technological developments that no longer oblige these French-Canadian descendents to remain in their designated regions. Similarly, the necessity for subsequent generations to learn New England French is declining as communities expand. As a result, New England French is an endangered linguistic dialect that may be lost entirely in coming years. This essay explores the historical precedent for the existence of the New England dialect of French; explores how the development of this dialect has resulted in a unique cultural identity for New England Francophones; and attempts to determine a trajectory for the future of New England French and Francophone identity, and if it is a dialect and culture that can be preserved for future generations.

1. Introduction

Perhaps more than any nation in the world, the United States of America has the established reputation of being a country built upon immigrants and, more specifically, the process of immigration. Throughout this country's relatively young history, communities the world over have voyaged to the United States in search of a new beginning, and it is from these immigrant groups that the nation's citizens descend today— from the exodus of the Irish during the potato famine to the steady influx of immigrants from Italy, Sweden, Russia, and Germany throughout the 19th century, to the more recent arrival of immigrants from Mexico, China, Guatemala, and the Philippines.[1] That American identity and culture are based on this immigrant experience is undeniable, as immigration is a key component in the historical make-up of nearly every U.S. citizen. The notion that cultural assimilation is a necessary contributing factor toward the formation of that national American identity, however, is a more contentious issue.

America has often been described as a melting pot— a conglomerated mixture of different nationalities, ethnicities, and languages that together form the greater American cultural identity. Disputes have been raised over the idea of assimilation itself, however, and whether or not it is simply a couched term for "Anglo-conformity," that is, the gradual diminution of individual cultural traits, such as language and religion, for English-speaking, capitalistic secularism.[2] In recent decades, the emphasis placed on diversity and ethnicity in the United States has resulted in a lessening of the importance of assimilation in the traditional sense. Even the term "melting pot" has fallen out of vogue, having been replaced by terms such as "salad bowl" or "mosaic," metaphors that convey a

greater sense of distinction in describing this nation of immigrants. Additionally, not all immigrant groups have fallen victim to the undeniable pull of assimilation. New York's Hassidic Jewish community of Borough Park is one example of an immigrant group that has managed throughout the years to maintain a distinct, recognizable, and insular community, set far apart from mainstream American culture. It is a community that operates in terms of its own religious observances, language, and even its own tribunal system.[3] The detached quality of the Hassidic Jewish community is very much the exception rather than the rule, however. Other immigrant groups have fought against the pull of assimilation, though less successfully. One such marginally successful group is the Franco-American population of New England.

The Franco-Americans of New England, as they are known today, are the descendants of "some half a million immigrants, both French-Canadian and Acadian, who came voluntarily to find work in the industrial centers of New England and northern New York state."[4] Immigrants from Quebec were drawn to the United States because of an economic demand, in this case, for mass numbers of factory workers in the developing textile mills of various New England cities. Unlike many other immigrant groups to the U.S., (such as the Irish, Italian, and Chinese), the Québécois were distinguished by two factors. First, they did not settle in large, metropolitan areas, but instead in small, developing, and oftentimes geographically isolated towns throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Connecticut (known as "Petit Canadas"). Second their proximity to Quebec gave them the opportunity to more easily retain their cultural and linguistic ties, and to resist assimilation with the greater American culture.[5]

The historical precedent for the existence of the French language in North America can be traced back to France's colonization in the 16th century of what is now known as the province of Quebec. The establishment of the territory, known at the time as New France, began with Jacques Cartier's exploration and settlement of land along the Saint Lawrence River. Subsequent French-speaking communities were established in the province and, in 1650 New France had seven hundred colonists within its borders.[6] The allures of the new territory were manifold, and the Francophone community established itself with the aid of its strong economic factors. In particular, the fur trade helped to mark the emergence of Quebec (then New France) as an important branch of France's colonial power, and, eventually, as an economic power in its own right.[7] The strength of New France's economic trade contributed to its eventual independence from France and emergence as a province of Canada.[8] Nevertheless, French influence had a lasting effect on Quebec and remains the foundation upon which its linguistic, religious, and societal culture is built. Today, Québécois, a dialect of the French language, is spoken by nearly 80% of the population, and is the official language of the province. In contrast, only 8% of the population identify English as their native language.[9] Linguistic factors aside, Quebec has always been culturally distinct from the rest of Canada, as it blends its historic French roots with its aboriginal heritage, the contributions of recent immigrants, and the influences from the English-speaking portions of North America.

The distinct culture of Quebec was also a result of its economic independence, to which it owed the richness of its natural resources. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Quebec relied increasingly on farming, fur trapping, and timber to support its rapid growth. This reliance on the land's inherent wealth was not a permanent solution, as these natural resources eventually became severely limited due to the high density of the population. Timber, which had been abundant throughout Quebec's history, was now sparse, as the majority of it had been cut down to contribute to the growing logging industry. Farmland was overworked and would no longer yield the immense amount of crops that French-Canadian farmers had come to rely on to survive, and even the business of fur-trapping had long since slowed due to overhunting of the indigenous species.[10] As a result of the combination of these factors, a mass exodus took place, whereby "almost a million people left Quebec between 1840 and 1930 and settled in New England, from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts south to Connecticut and New York state."[11] Employment opportunities were the main draw for the Quebec natives to these particular New England localities. Textiles and industrial manufacturing were developing economies in New England at this time, ones that relied almost exclusively upon mass immigrant forces. In New England, in particular, Franco workers made up the bulk of the textile work force.[12]

Small New England towns were suddenly inundated with French-speaking immigrants from Quebec. Moreover, New England itself was facing a drastic change in its demographics, which had, until the mid-19th century, been composed predominantly of Anglo-Saxon descendents who were primarily Protestant and spoke exclusively English.[13] The French-Canadian immigrant population was primarily confined to small towns and rarely spread to larger cities. A census from 1898 noted that:

> in 1890 less than a third of the French-Canadians in New England were found in places [with a population of 25,000] or over, and that, of the number so grouped, 74,465, or nearly three-fourths, were found in the seven cities of Manchester, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, and Worcester. . . [in contrast] in Boston, the French were less than 1 per cent of the foreign-born population in 1890. . . These figures seem to

> confirm the view that it is not the large cities, as such, that attract this class of foreigners, but the manufacturing centres, and particularly those mainly given over to the textile industries.[14]

This tendency to immigrate to small towns was distinct from the actions of many other massive immigrant groups, who typically settled in larger cities. Settlement in larger urban areas placed more pressure on such groups to assimilate and gave them less opportunity to retain their own culture and language.[15]

New England's geographic proximity to Quebec was also a crucial factor in the continuation of French-Canadian culture and language in the American Northeast. Though many immigrants established permanent communities in several small New England towns, their relationship to Quebec, both physically and culturally, was far from severed. For the French-Canadians, the homeland was only a few hundred miles away. In this sense, the collective cultural perception of Quebec was unique; it "was not some distant 'old world,' a memory which might be returned to once or twice in [their] lifetime, if [they] were lucky."[16] French-Canadian immigrants had the luxury of easily visiting friends or family in their native land whenever they wished, which in turn worked to "fortify their desire to resist assimilation, as well as lessen any sense of alienation from the old world."[17] Technology also later played a role in the fortification and continuation of French-Canadian language and culture, as it became possible to receive radio broadcasts (and later television transmissions) from Quebec stations; this continued into the 1960s, with such popular programs as *La Soirée Canadienne*, a Quebec, French-language variety show, gaining a cultural foothold in Francophone households in New England.[18] It also, once again, distinguished French-Canadians from other massive immigrant groups who were at the disadvantage of being overseas from their homelands. Due to such expansive geographic distances, such groups had no way of reigniting their cultural and linguistic ties and thus needed to assimilate to survive.[19] The geographic proximity of Quebec to New England was therefore crucial for French-Canadian immigrants; although the necessity of learning English certainly existed, Franco-Americans were able to speak their native language each day in their communal settings and even reaffirm their linguistic roots by visiting their homeland when they could.

As an immigrant group at the end of the 19th century, French-Canadians represented a significant portion of the population of each New England state, so much so that their language rivaled English as one of two primary languages spoken in the Northeast. The immigrant trend, as well as the existing Québécois population in New England, began to change after the turn of the century: "After 1900, a small Franco-American elite, born in the United States and educated in Quebec, began to take the place of the previous generation of Franco leaders, who had been born in Quebec."[20] As such, it is worth noting that the existing Québécois in New England are now referred to as Franco-Americans, signifying that there was a change in cultural identity between generations. The previous generation was the true Québécois immigrant population to New England, who set the foundation for the cultural group that are the focus of this study, the New England French, also known as the Canucks.

Franco-Americans are distinct in the realm of cultural groups in the United States because of the still-existing presence, however faint, of their language and culture that survives in New England today. This tenacity of language and cultural identity is owed to a few different contributing factors, the most prominent of which was the Québécois notion of *la survivance*, which played a major role in reaffirming and reasserting Francophone culture and identity, in New England throughout the 19th century. *La survivance* translates roughly to "survival." It was the "long-held belief that Franco-Americans had a divine mission to preserve their national 'race' and religion against Anglo-Saxon inroads by insuring the continuation and transmission of their native *foi* (Roman Catholicism), *langue* [language], and *mœurs* (French-Canadian customs)."[21] Truly, it wasn't just that the French-Canadians (and later, Franco-Americans) had the wherewithal to resist assimilation with the Anglo-United States but that they actively believed it was their duty to do so. This population did not simply happen to retain their native language and customs through geographic proximity and happenstance. Rather, they fought to be able to do so.

Much of French-Canadian (and later, Franco-American) *survivance* is owed to the Catholic Church. The Québécois population of the 19th and early 20th centuries had strong ties to Catholicism, due at least in part to Bishop Ignace Bourget's idea of ultramontanism, which stated that the Roman Catholic Church had the right to wield considerable control over Quebec.[22] This value, the prioritizing of the church, "the self-proclaimed protector of the French-Canadian heritage," was brought to New England by French-Canadian immigrants, and thus formed the backbone for the New England communities that grew there.[23] The influences of the Catholic Church were manifold in Franco-American daily life, both on a communal and individual level. Isolationism, for example, was encouraged by the Church, as "Franco-Americans were told again and again to avoid intermarriage outside their religion or nationality."[24] In particular, the home and the family were deemed the most crucial factor in the *survivance* struggle, particularly because the home:

> constituted a holy environment in which one acquired the character necessary to avoid the melting pot of the United States, and its supposedly attendant values of materialism, individualism, and egotism. In their place, the elite glorified *survivance* and group values, even to the point of advocating poverty, suffering, and martyrdom as the natural lot of their people.[25]

The reach of the Catholic Church in the enactment of *survivance* was so advanced that it even dictated and advocated for traditional gender roles that would supposedly strengthen the French-Canadian presence in America: "The mother was central in all this. She would bear and raise a large family, since numbers meant strength in the *survivance* battle. . . and having many children meant putting them above self and money." The emphasis that the church placed on the bearing and raising of many children was also humorously single-minded in its purpose, as "the French-Canadians called this [emphasis on reproduction] 'the revenge of the cradle': the way to fight *les Anglais* was to out-reproduce them!"[26]

La survivance was not confined to simple ideological movements, however. The enactment of *survivance* in daily life is what accounted for the true continuation and longevity of Franco-American culture in the United States throughout the ensuing two centuries. The insular nature of the Franco-American communities in New England was once again key in the protection and continuation of their language and culture, as were their close ties to the Catholic Church, which encouraged the communal use of French at every opportunity:

> Except for the Mass, which was in Latin, all church activities were conducted in French. . . In some schools English had the status of a foreign language, and was taught for only an hour a day. Instruction was given in the history and traditions of Quebec, and an aura of religious conservatism pervaded the whole day. Public school was an anathema in the eyes of the Franco *survivance*-minded elite. No after-school catechism training could make up for the Americanizing influences of materialism and Protestantism which would be learned there. Only in a parochial school would there be emphasis on moral as well as intellectual training, and only in a Franco-American parochial school would French be given sufficient emphasis.[27]

This continuation of the language within academic and religious settings was an extension of the perpetuation of the language as it was spoken in private settings— between family members and across generations, from those who had immigrated themselves from Quebec to their grandchildren, who were native-born American citizens of French-Canadian descent. In this way, Franco-American culture and language was preserved throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

La survivance was effective in its preservation of the Franco-American language and culture because it oftentimes had to do with further isolating the already small community of French-speaking Canadian immigrants and descendents. While this was desirable in many ways, as it allowed the Franco-American community further freedom in the preservation of their patrimony, it also resulted in the persecution of this group by those who considered themselves to be the natives of New England— the Anglo-Saxon descendents of the region's first immigrants.[28] Threatened by what they felt was the swift disappearance of their own language and culture, as well as jobs (which were quickly being filled by Franco-American immigrant laborers), the New England natives dealt with the sudden influx of French-speaking, Catholic immigrants by oppressing them.[29] This persecution took the form of racial discrimination, whereby the Franco-Americans were deemed "the Chinese of the East"— a pejorative term meant to demonstrate their low and foreign status in the largely English-speaking United States.[30] Perhaps more damning, however, was the other derogatory title given to the French-Canadians by their Anglo-Saxon neighbors: "les nègres blancs d'Amérique" (the white negros of America).[31] A clear sentiment was meant to be expressed by this nickname, namely that "being French in America. . . [equaled] being a 'White Nigger,' a failure. . . incapable of success."[32] According to Franco-American writer Daniel Plante, "We were the White Niggers, the Canucks, the people for whom this very term was thought up. We came down from Canada, from the forests of Canada to the states to do the jobs the blacks wouldn't do. And we did the job well; we performed our duties, we never complained, and there was no bitterness in us against injustices."[33]

This equation of Quebec immigrants and Franco-Americans with other oppressed racial groups, such as the Chinese and enslaved Africans, is no doubt essentialist and problematic in its own right, as "such a comparison legitimizes the idea that there is something static and immutable about the condition of African or other oppressed peoples, and this can serve as a benchmark of another group's oppression, even into the unforeseen future."[34] Despite the falsity of the equation of these two experiences, however, this perspective has been absorbed into the cultural identity of the Franco-American people, to such an extent that it has played a large role in the gradual disappearance of the French language from the New England region. The devaluation of their cultural identity has

extended to a devaluation of their language, and an internalization of the idea that to be of French-Canadian descent and to speak a Franco-American dialect is to somehow be a less valuable member of society.[35] The imposition of the Canuck stereotype has not had a solely negative impact on the Franco-American identity, however, nor has it remained a singularly demeaning term. In more recent decades, from the 1950s onward, the Canuck nickname, once insulting, was reclaimed by groups of Franco-Americans as a cultural identifier, and later even served as a nickname for the dialect of French spoken by these Franco-Americans.

2. Method

The New England dialect of French, although it shares many similarities with the Quebec dialect spoken in French Canada, is ultimately distinct from that particular language. In spite of valiant efforts to avoid assimilation with the greater English-speaking United States, a certain amount of Anglican influence was inevitable. As technology advanced in the 20th century, transportation became more readily available and Franco-Americans had the ability to travel outside of their respective communities. As a result, more English was introduced into the vocabulary of the Franco-Americans, resulting in the mixture of Quebec French and English that forms New England French, which native speakers have nicknamed Acalio or, perhaps even more representative of their cultural identity, Canuck.[36]

This dialect is representative of a cultural identity developed by an immigrant group to the United States, no different from the dialects of other immigrant groups. New England French in particular has often been criticized for not being true French— for being, instead, an inauthentic representation of the French language. Indeed, "certain persons have claimed that the French spoken in New England by people of French-Canadian origin is a corruption of French resulting from the influence of English words and speech habits."[37] This claim is in many ways an extension of the cultural oppression that New England's Anglo-Saxon population enacted upon the Franco-Americans throughout the late 19th century. By denying the legitimacy of the dialect that the Franco-Americans speak, a part of their identity is denied. This disparagement of the New England dialect of French has impacted the New England French cultural identity, as many of its speakers depreciate their language in the face of standard French. One native-speaking research participant who was interviewed for this project even deferred to the interviewer's French language skills, saying, "You're learning Parisian French, where, up here, they throw in English words, and we're raised in that environment, so it's half French, half English"— a negative quality, in the subject's opinion.[38]

Today, the New England French dialect, and the Franco-American identity, have evolved greatly from the initial culture and language that were brought over by Quebec immigrants in the mid-19th century. Subsequent generations have, despite the implementation of the *survivance* movement, become successively more Americanized; in this way, the French-Canadian identity has been left behind in the United States and the Franco-American one has grown to take its place. The New England French today are the descendents of the original French-Canadian immigrants to the New England region who, due to their forefather's *survivance* beliefs, have retained their culture and, to an extent, their language. For this project, a small number of research participants who grew up in one Franco-American community in New Hampshire in the 1950s and 1960s were interviewed. The participants were almost exclusively white males between the ages of sixty and seventy who were born and raised in northern New Hampshire and grew up speaking French. The exception is one participant, a young woman, aged thirty, who is the non-native speaking daughter of one of the native-speaking interviewed participants, also raised in New Hampshire.

3. Findings

Various conclusions on the current state of the Franco-American, or Canuck, identity can be drawn from what these research participants had to say about the existence and preservation of their Francophone heritage in New England. All five of the native French-speaking participants had various key factors of their lives in common: They were all the third-generation descendents of French-Canadian immigrants to the New England region; their ancestors all immigrated to New England to work in the burgeoning paper mill and logging industries of the 19th century; they were all raised in bilingual households and communities, where they were encouraged to speak French at home, school, and church; and they all experienced a severe decline in their opportunity (and, by extension, ability) to speak French in the past thirty years, owing to the gradual loss of Franco-American communities in the northeast.

Each of these research participants painted a very striking picture of their upbringing in Berlin, New Hampshire, a community that, even into the 1950s and 1960s, still retained its French-Canadian influences. In particular,

participants noted that the dominant factor in their lives that helped them learn to speak French as a first language during their developmental years was the Catholic Church. One participant noted that "the Catholics were very strong in Berlin. . . the nuns— that's where I learned how to speak French, and they would teach you French in the mornings and you had English in the afternoon."[39] Another participant noted that, "we went to Guardian Angel School, which was run by the Nuns of the Presentation and in the morning they taught you whatever subjects it was in French, and then the afternoon it was in English. . . So yes, we spoke French all the time. When we went to school I spoke very little English."[40] An additional dominant factor in the retention of the French language for these participants was their family life, where they were encouraged to speak French at all times. One participant noted that, "my dad was insistent that we speak French in the home, to retain our French language. And he explained it to us. . . 'you're going to be worth two people if you can speak two languages.'"[41] Another participant noted that, "the only time you spoke English was with your friends. Yeah, out in the street or at school."[42]

Many of these research participants also made sure to mention that they did not grow up in a vacuum of French language and culture. In fact, many noted the dominating influence that American culture had on their lives. This most clearly manifested itself in the revelation that, outside of school, church, and the family home, the majority of these participants primarily spoke English with their friends. One participant noted that he and his friends would deliberately speak English outside of school despite also being able to speak French because, "I think with the kids, [we] felt more comfortable speaking English, really."[43] This preference for English over French in more casual settings— far from the influences of the Church and family life— was a pronounced influence on all of the participants' retention of the French language into the later years of their adolescence. One of the most notable influences concerning this eventual loss of language was the sudden cessation of a bilingual education being offered through the Catholic Church. One participant noted:

> High school was different. . . of course they [had] a curriculum to follow and if you took French, it was a course, everything was in English. So you— I won't say that you lost it but you didn't use it as much. I think [the sudden switch to a monolingual school] was because of the curriculum. I think the laws say that you have to teach this in your school, public school or private school, and these are the books you use, they're printed in English.[44]

For this participant at least, the sharp switch to a monolingual, English-language education in high school contributed the most to his eventual loss of fluency in French: "After the 8th grade [I] started losing my French. . . we more or less spoke English because that's what everybody else did."[45] Three research participants noted a similar pattern in their linguistic usage and development; two others claimed that their departure from the New England Francophone community in their young adulthood was the impetus for their loss of language: "And then as you got older. . . you were distancing yourself away from carrying on conversations in French to English, unless it was back to your parents."[46]

Although many of the research participants claimed to have severely diminished linguistic skills in French, all of them were far from incomprehensible, with two of the participants showing a marked fluency. The most notable aspect of the dialect of French that these interviewed participants displayed was its lack of purity, as well as the significant and noticeable impact that English had on their particular dialect. Below is an excerpt from a conversation held in French with one participant:

> Participant: Mon père était né en 1907 à Berlin, New Hampshire. Ma mère était née en 1919 à Berlin, New Hampshire. Ils sont mariés en 1947. Les deux ont servit dans les forces d'armes durant la seconde— la deuxième guerre.
> Interviewer: Mondial.
> P: Le— du monde. Oui. Ils avaient trois enfants, mon frère était né [en]1949, moi j'étais né [en] 1951, mon frère **la** plus jeune était 1953. On était, on vivait dans the East Side of Berlin, on était à l'école de l'Ange Gardien, ma mère était in the— in the garde malade durant la guerre et mon père, il était un— a cook.
> I: Un cuisinier?
> P: Un cuisinier in the navy, dans le— in the navy. Il a travaillé avec— he was a meat-cutter. . . Pas un bûcheron, bûcheron, je pense c'est avec les arbres. A slaughterhouse is an abattoir, et. . . a butcher. Il a travaillé avec Swifting Company pour des années, plus années. Ma mère était un stay-at-home mom, elle était. . .
> I: Elle est restée dans la maison?
> P: Oui, elle était toujours à la maison après l'école. C'était bien, on avait une belle maison. Le village— la ville de Berlin était une ville avec les factoires, c'était une factorie de papier.
> I: Les usines? De papier?

P: Les usines?
I: A factory? Les usines.
P: Je ne connais pas le mot.
I: D'accord.[47]

Throughout this excerpt, there can plainly be detected the English influences and Anglicisms that mark this participant's French; mostly notably, his frequent lapses into English, the diminishment of his vocabulary and inability to recognize or recall certain words (such as "usine"), his use of the wrong gender for "le" when speaking of his youngest brother, and his omission of the preposition "en" when speaking about the years of his and his brothers' births (despite having remembered to use it when speaking of the years of his parents' births). Part of this mixture of languages can certainly be attributed to a lack of practice on the participant's part; many participants noted that they no longer had the opportunity to speak French on a daily basis because there was no one with whom they could converse. One participant made the observation that, "I think my generation was the last one to keep their French. And the next generation, forget it. Unless they go to college and take it, deliberately, they've lost it. They never had it to lose."[48]

Another participant attributed his loss of French, as well as the loss of French in the New Hampshire area in general, to the gradual death of the previous generation, who had significantly closer ties to Franco-American culture and French Canada itself than members of Generation Y. This participant noted that:

> [Those who spoke a lot of French], these people have died away and people my age— you know, we'll speak French but it's very broken or just jokingly and— but you don't really use it anymore. And never mind trying to speak it, try to write it![49]

This loss of linguistic skill can be traced, according to these research participants, to the waning influence of the Catholic Church in Franco-American communities, the dissolution of Franco-American communities in small towns such as Berlin, New Hampshire, and the overwhelming influence of the Anglophone United States, which certainly exerted pressure on Francophones to assimilate more fully.

These participants themselves may also have contributed to the gradual loss of the French language spoken in New England society today. When asked if their own children speak French, participants with offspring replied that they had not taught their children their native language. One participant claimed that he had never even considered doing so.[50] Another participant cited his status as the income supplier in his family as being the definitive factor in his decision not to teach his children French: "I guess if I'd have been a stay-at-home father, they would have spoken French, no question. But there just wasn't. . . time. By the time I would get in at night from work, being tired, the kids being young, and that's the best time to teach them is before they hit five years old, throw it at them from zero-to-five, that's when they learn a new language."[51] Another participant noted that while his French language skills have "come in extremely handy. . . in this region still because. . . we're not far from the Canadian border," he also, when asked whether he regretted not teaching his children French, replied, "Not really because— the English language is so common now, in fact, in the U.S., Spanish is overtaking. . . even English."[52]

The daughter of one of the research participants, a thirty-year old who had been born and raised in Lincoln, New Hampshire, expressed her disappointment at not having been taught French while growing up: "I wish I did [speak French while growing up], but I did not. My father spoke French with his father, but not with us, or not with me and my siblings. . . I took a month of French [in high school] but then I switched to Spanish because the class that I was in had a ton of people."[53] Despite her desire to have learned French, however, this participant ultimately decided not to pursue it, in part because of the lack of opportunity there would have been to use it in everyday settings, even in New Hampshire. This cessation of the pursuit of the language also speaks to the waning influence of Franco-American culture, cultural beliefs, and priorities in the New England region, as the French language is no longer necessarily thought of as a unifying property in modern Franco-American communities. Additionally, some participants noted that they used French occasionally, when tourists from Quebec visited the New England area, but that for the most part, the application of their skills was restricted to friends and family who themselves spoke French— or else were not put to use at all.[54]

The gradual opening up of the Franco-American peoples' historically insular communities has certainly contributed to the disappearance of this group's culture and language. Cultural factors from within the group itself may have contributed more to the diminished presence of Franco-Americans in New England than outside pressures to assimilate. The current collective identity and culture of this particular group of people is an interesting mixture of both pride and humility. There could be detected, even within this small sampling of research participants, a sense of inferiority that has perhaps contributed to the disappearance of their language and culture. This manifested

itself most clearly in the way that many participants prioritized English over French in their daily lives and how they disparaged their own dialect. This sense of self-denigration was present in nearly every participant who was interviewed. It was manifest in the way that many spoke of and explained the composition of their language. One participant characterized the Franco-American dialect as follows: "I noticed that we. . . took the easy route. . . a lot of the time, the lazy route. You would take English words and throw it out like 'oh that looks— ça c'est bien cool!' You know what I mean? That's an English word, what's it doing in a French phrase? It shouldn't be there. . . But it was easier to grab— make sentences with both languages. And that's why the French-Canadian French is a mélange of English and French unless you get into the true Québécian culture, which purifies it a little bit."[55] Another described standard French as being "the ultimate," especially in contrast to Canuck French, which another subject described as a "butchering of the [French] language."[56] Present in these descriptions of their native language is an awareness, and even self-consciousness, of the mixed, temporal nature of their culture and language. This is, in many ways, a perpetuation of the Canuck pejorative that the Anglo-Saxon natives of New England instilled in Franco-Americans, the idea that to be of French-Canadian descent in the United States was to be "a failure. . . incapable of success."[57] This cultural sense of inferiority seems to be instilled in many of these research participants, not only in the sense that they have a legacy of cultural oppression behind them but also in a more casual, humorous way. One participant spoke of the way that the Canuck stereotype had been absorbed into his family as the basis for a way to joke about themselves and their culture:

> What I noted at a very young age was the sense of humor that a lot of my uncles had because of their difficulties in not being able to speak the English language fluently. And they were picked on, like the old joke of, "Well, you know–." When I was working the hardware store a guy came in and he says, "Well, I'm looking for a lightbulb," I said, "What kind of lightbulb?", you know we have a whole rack of them, and he says, "Well," he says, "it's a French lightbulb." And I thought he meant, like, you know like a French chandelier, a style or something, so I'm looking through the booklet and finally he says, "You know," he says, "a French lightbulb, they're not too bright." You know, jokes like that all the time. They took it as, because they could not speak English very well, they were not intelligent. Au contraire. You know what I mean? Some of these people were very bright, they just couldn't get their point across. . . and a lot of these jokes came from experiences where people— they were made fun of or whatever and they just like, let the water roll off their back like a duck.[58]

This self-deprecating sense of humor is in many ways a defense mechanism against both the further belittlement of their language and culture and a way to keep that culture alive today. The negative perception that existed of these Franco-Americans has been undeniably absorbed into their collective sense of cultural identity, but it has also been transformed into a point of pride. In this way, the Franco-Americans have reclaimed the archetype of the Canuck and made it their own.

4. Conclusion

There is an undeniable humility in many of these Franco-Americans but it is mixed with a definite, if quiet, sense of pride concerning their origins— or, as the *survivance* movement put it, "nos aieux" ["our ancestors"].[59] When asked how they chose to identify themselves in terms of their culture, almost every participant replied that they considered themselves to be French-American, or even sometimes French-Canadian American:

> Everybody is surprised to hear that I'm from the States– they call it the States– "and you speak this well in French?" And I tell them, "why is that so surprising to you? Because we're from the States we can't speak good French?" You know, when they came to this country they didn't completely wash their hands of their language, their heritage. I'm proud to be. . .– I wasn't born in Canada, I was born here, I'm an American first, but I'm very proud to be a Franco-American. You know? I'm proud of my roots.[60]

As such, the Franco-American culture, although severely diminished, is far from extinct in New England. It is impossible to deny that the New England dialect of French is quickly becoming obsolete, due in major part to the dissolution of the Franco-American communities and the decision of native speakers not to pass their linguistic skills on to their children. Because of this, the New England dialect of French is almost certainly headed towards extinction, with little chance of recovery or revival. The Franco-American culture, however, remains surprisingly intact, even today. In contrast to Dr. Richard Sorrell's assertion that "*survivance* lives in Quebec but is dead or moribund in New England," the testimonies of the small sampling of native-speaking subjects interviewed for this

project indicate otherwise.[61] *La survivance* is a cultural movement concerned with more than simply the retention and continuation of the spoken French language in Franco-American society. It also deals with the continued survival of the Franco-American culture— an awareness of one's origins as a Franco-American and the traces that French-Canadian heritage has left on one's life. The Franco-American citizens who were interviewed claimed that they still felt a very strong tie to their cultural heritage and to their identities as American citizens with dual heritages. As one participant concluded, "je me pense que moi-même comme français-américain"— "I think of myself as a French-American."[62] As such, the New England dialect of French may not survive, but the Franco-American culture can continue. The question of Franco-American *survivance* in future decades rests on the education of the ensuing generations of Franco-Americans in New England of their French-Canadian heritage. Due to the surprising relevancy of the culture in the region, this dream is feasible, if not impossible.

5. Acknowledgements

This project is indebted to Dr. Merritt Moseley, who encouraged its creation and to Dr. Cathy Pons, who ensured its successful completion. Funding was provided by the Undergraduate Research Program at the University of North Carolina Asheville (Summer 2014 Research Grant). Thanks must be given to my father who has shared with me his heritage, his language, and his love all of my life. This paper is for him.

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