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H'ALLONS BACK À LA BAIE! – ASPECTS OF BAIE SAINTE-MARIE ACADIAN FRENCH IN A 2011 CORPUS

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En Nouvelle-Écosse il ne reste que 1,8 % de la population qui emploie encore une variété du français parlée le plus souvent à la maison (2011). La Baie Sainte-Marie, située au sud-ouest de la Nouvelle-Écosse, est la seule région majoritairement francophone de la province. Cette contribution se veut un bref aperçu de la situation sociodémographique des régions acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse pour ensuite démontrer quelques caractéristiques de la variété acadienne parlée à la Baie Sainte-Marie. Le corpus oral a été réalisé et recueilli en 2011 parmi des jeunes âgés de 14 à 26 ans.

In Nova Scotia, only 1.8 % of the population still use a variety of French most often at home (2011). The Baie Sainte-Marie region, located in the South-West of Nova Scotia, is the only Francophone region of the province where the majority of the population is francophone. This report aims at giving a short overview of the sociodemographic situation of the Acadian regions in Nova Scotia. Furthermore, several typical features of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French will be shown. The data are taken from an oral corpus registered in 2011 among adolescents aged between 14 and 26.

The Acadian French variety spoken in Baie Sainte-Marie located in South-Western Nova Scotia is particularly known among researchers for its archaic or dialectal features. Typical characteristics of this rural variety, such as the negation built with the adverb “point” instead of “pas”, the 3rd person plural verbal ending “-ont” instead of “-ent” or the use of the 1st person plural subject pronoun “je” for “nous”, were first described more than twenty years ago (FLIKEID 1989/1991; FLIKEID/PÉRONNET 1989).

In addition to these archaic or dialectal features which are still employed by the Baie Sainte-Marie population, there has been an increase of English words and structures, especially among teenage speakers, who tend to describe their French as “franglais”, “moitié moitié”. In comparison to Standard French or other North American varieties spoken in Quebec or some parts of New Brunswick, they define it as “point AS bounne”. The pejorative self-descriptions of this variety, which reveal the speakers’ linguistic insecurity, remind us of similar statements by speakers of *chiac*, the Acadian French variety spoken in urban Moncton, in New Brunswick (BOUDREAU/DUBOIS 1991).

Even though English elements seem to be omnipresent in both *chiac* and Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, we lack current studies on the English influence on the latter variety. In the 1980s, Moshé Starets conducted an investigation into the vocabulary of primary school children in the region, also taking into account English words used by the children (STARETS: 1982/1986). Recently, Phil Comeau described the use of “back”, “about” and “tight”

(COMEAU 2007). The English influence on other Acadian French varieties, e.g. *chiac* (ROY 1979; PERROT 1995), or Prince-Edward Island French (KING 2000), has been documented more thoroughly.

Based on an oral corpus of informal speech recorded at Université Sainte-Anne and École Secondaire de Clare, among 44 adolescents aged between 14 and 26, this report gives an overview of the situation of French in Nova Scotia before describing some typical features of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, taking into account both “traditional” features and examples of English influence on the variety.

The results of this report are part of a larger doctoral project which aims at describing present-day Acadian French employed by francophone and bilingual adolescents at Baie Sainte-Marie. The study covers English-French language contact phenomena (code switching, borrowing, loan translations/calques) as well as frequent archaic or dialectal features in the adolescents’ language production.

1 - French in Nova Scotia: a demolinguistic overview

During the most recent Canadian Census in 2011¹, 31,110 people (3.4 % of the total population of Nova Scotia) reported that their “first language spoken and still understood” was a French variety. Only half of these native speakers still used a French variety as “language spoken most often at home” (15,940 people, 1.8 % of the total population). If a language is to survive, it has to be used at home among family and/or friends, because only in this manner can it be passed on to the next generation (FISHMAN: 1991: 12sqq.; BOURHIS 2001: 102sq.)

When it comes to the population’s knowledge of Canada’s two official languages, English and French, most of the Francophone population declares being bilingual: only 875 native speakers of French (0.1 % of the total population) do not speak any English in Nova Scotia. It is not surprising that the high rate of bilingualism leads to a certain influence of the dominant language, English, on the French varieties spoken in Nova Scotia, as this minority of Francophones live in an Anglo-dominated part of Canada (though New Brunswick officially promotes bilingualism in its provincial constitution, while Nova Scotia made no such policy). Acadian regions in Nova Scotia do not form a homogenous territory, as for example in New Brunswick, where the North and the South-East are mostly Acadian and the South is Anglophone.

¹ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>

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The five main Acadian regions of Nova Scotia are: Baie Sainte-Marie/Clare, Pubnico (Argyle), Chéticamp, Isle Madame and Pomquet.

The Canadian census 2006 gives the following demolinguistic data for these five regions:

Table 1: French in the Acadian Regions in Nova Scotia (2006):

Acadian Region	Baie Sainte- Marie	Pubnico (Argyle)	Chéticamp	Isle Madame	Pomquet
Total Population	8650	8595	5775	3425	6509
First Language Learned and still Understood: French / % ²	5820 67.3	4100 47.7	2480 43.0	1635 47.7	370 5.6
Language Spoken most often at Home: French / %	5535 64.0	2920 34.0	2040 35.3	1050 30.7	85 1.3
Assimilation Rate	5 %	29 %	18 %	36 %	77 %

In comparison with the other Acadian regions, the French presence seems more or less secured in Baie Sainte-Marie. It is here that we find the only French university of the province, Université Sainte-Anne, which offers access to higher education in French as well as a rich cultural life, e.g. exhibitions or concerts. Furthermore, Baie Sainte-Marie is the only Acadian region in Nova Scotia where more than half of the population is still francophone, whereas English is the dominant native language and “la langue du foyer” in the other Acadian regions. The assimilation rate indicates the percentage of people who do not speak their first language most often at home anymore, French here. Anglicization proceeds at an alarming rate in most of the Acadian regions, especially in Pomquet.

² The results include data for “First language learned and still understood: French” and “French and English”.

2 - Acadian schools in Baie Sainte-Marie

It is interesting to keep in mind that “traditional” features as described in part 5 of this report, are still being frequently used by the adolescents of my study, even though they were/are all educated in an Acadian school where the classes, apart from the English class, are taught in French. Some of them even attended and still attend Université Sainte-Anne and are thus exposed to Standard French even more.

Acadian schools, e.g. schools where all the courses are taught in French (except the English classes), have existed since the school year 2000-2001. Before this date, there was no French-only schooling available in Acadian regions. At the moment, there are 21 schools under the direction of the *CSAP (Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial)*³ which was founded in 1996. During the school year 2009-2010, 719 students attended one of the five Acadian schools (four primary schools and one secondary school) in Baie Sainte-Marie⁴

Table 2: Acadian schools in Baie Sainte-Marie (2009-2010):

School	Village/Town	Years	Number of Students
École Joseph-Dugas	Pointe-de-l'Église/ Church Point ⁵	<i>maternelle</i> to 7	154
École Jean-Marie-Gay	Saulnierville	<i>maternelle</i> to 7	109
École Stella Maris	Meteghan	<i>maternelle</i> to 7	147
École Saint-Albert	Rivière aux Saumons/ Salmon River	<i>maternelle</i> to 7	40
École Secondaire de Clare	La Butte/ Meteghan River	8-12	269

³ Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial <http://csap.ednet.ns.ca/>

⁴ Unfortunately, there is no updated information on current enrollment on the website of the Nova Scotia Directory of Public Schools (http://ns-schools.ednet.ns.ca/pdf/directory_of_public_schools_NS.pdf).

⁵ Some villages/towns in Baie Sainte-Marie have both a French and an English name. If this is the case, both are indicated in the grid.

3 - The 2011 corpus methodology

The data for this study are taken from an oral corpus of informal speech recorded between January and March 2011 in Baie Sainte-Marie and Pubnico (Argyle). As the study aims at describing present-day Acadian French used by adolescents aged between about 15 and 25, the interviews were recorded at Université Sainte-Anne and École Secondaire de Clare. These official institutions guaranteed that all the adolescents of Baie Sainte-Marie could be represented in the study, and not only a certain social group, e.g. friends or family of the researcher's host family. That way, the data obtained represents the entire target group. 44 adolescents aged between 14 and 26 participated in the study. The semi-directed interviews lasted 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the age of the interlocutors.

Another important aspect when conducting linguistic research in minority communities is the possible hypercorrection of the speakers when being interviewed. Stubbs indicates: “Ideally we want to know how people use language when they are not being observed. When speakers know they are being observed, their language shifts toward more formal styles [...]. So the most casual language is the most difficult to observe.” (STUBBS 1983: 224)

According to Labov, the researcher should record “[I]l discours quotidien, tel qu'il est employé dans les situations ordinaires où le langage n'est pas un objet d'attention” (LABOV 1976: 146). In order to register this “discours quotidien” described by Stubbs and Labov and to avoid hypercorrection, researchers who are not native speakers of the variety in question should never interview the participants on their own, but they must find another way to obtain authentic speech data.

The French linguist Marie-Ève Perrot, who was one of the first researchers to investigate *chiac*, employed the following method. She had two adolescents discuss a questionnaire covering questions on everyday life or future plans for instance without herself or anyone else being present during the conversation. She recorded the discussions with a voice recorder and transcribed them after the recording. (PERROT 1995: 26sqq.). On top of the advantages presented by Perrot's method, I decided to resort to it too to ensure a better comparability of my data with Perrot's. The adolescents in both studies did not know that the main interest for the researcher was their speech production, and not (only) the content of their conversations.

4 - Archaic and dialectal features

When talking about the English influence on Acadian French varieties as for example on *chiac*, it is often forgotten that these varieties are more than a simple *mix* of Standard French and English, as King writes: “It is certainly worth keeping in mind that *chiac* involves use of traditional dialect features and is not just a mix of some school variety of French with English” (KING 2008: 253). As Acadian French varieties are oral varieties, they contain numerous “traditional dialect features” described in the literature (FLIKEID 1989/1991; NEUMANN-HOLZSCHUH/WIESMATH 2006; CHAUVEAU 2009).

The participants of my study are aware of dialectal and/or archaic elements, such as lexical features or their use of the negation built with “point” instead of “pas”:

- (1) acadien/ de Clare c'est comme/ i y avont beaucoup plus vieux mots français aussi c'est comme/ c'est vraiment COOL/ comme/ j'sais pas/ « astéure »/ ou « bailler »/ ou/ « bailler »/ ((rires)) « bailler »/ (P2)
- (2) à l'école h'ai h'ai tout le temps appris que j'peux point dire/ « point »/ à la place faut j'dis juste « pas »/ mais/ non/ quand c'que tu lis des affaires que/ en France de/ XVII/ dans le XVII^e sièc' dans les seize cents/ pis c'est des « point »/ à la place des « pas » WELL/ (UC3)

I will now give an overview of the most prominent ‘traditional’ features found in the corpus.

Negation: point vs. pas

Whereas “pas” is the negator of choice in Standard French, “point” is still in use in some rural metropolitan French varieties according to Grevisse: “**Point** reste vivant dans la langue parlée de certaines régions” (GRÉVISSE 1993: 1452).

In her study conducted in the 1980s, Flikeid (1991: 295) found “point” in 72% of all the negated phrases in her Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French corpus; “pas” was used in 28% of the negated phrases, respectively. One could assume that Acadian schools and education in French could have contributed to a spread of standard forms such as “pas”, especially among adolescents (NEUMANN-HOLZSCHUH 2008²: 115 and 2005: 806). This is, however, not the case: In my corpus the numbers for the use of “point” and “pas” are very similar to Flikeid’s data. All the participants in my study use both negators in their respective idiolects, as in the following examples:

- (3) BUT t'aimes *point* comme ANY STUFF de même t'aimes *pas* regarder « STAR WARS » [...] / (EC11)

- (4) h'aime *pas* du SOY MILK/ [...] j'savais *point* comment prendre un EPIPEN SO moi j'RUB-e IN le EPIPEN/ (EC12)

Morphology: 3rd person plural inflectional ending “-ont” vs. “-ent”.

When it comes to inflection of verbs, a typical Acadian French feature is the use of the ending “-ont” for the 3rd person plural verbs (FLIKEID 1989: 194⁶). Irregular verbs in Standard French such as “avoir”, “faire” or “aller” may form a “regular” 3rd person plural (“avont”, “faisont”, “allont” instead of “ont”, “font” or “vont”).

In former times, lower class speakers in particular showed a tendency to replace “-ent” with “-ont” or “-ant”. “On constate dès le Moyen Âge une tendance à remplacer *-ent* par une finale toxique, surtout *-ont* et *-ant*. Les paysans parlent ainsi dans les comédies du XVII^e et du XVIII^e” (GREVISSE 1993: §769). In the Poitou region, where most of the Acadian settlers lived before emigrating to North America, “-ont” was used in the 16th century (FLIKEID/PÉRONNET 1989: 224; PÉRONNET 1995: 417; BEAULIEU/CICHOCKI 2008: 37). Today, the inflectional ending is still in use “dans une vaste région qui part du Centre-Ouest et qui se poursuit jusqu'à l'Est” (PERONNET 1989: 148).

In a study conducted in Baie Sainte-Marie in the 1980s, Flikeid and Péronnet found that “-ont” accounted for 72% of all tokens found in their corpus (FLIKEID/PERONNET 1989: 228), which is also the case for the 2011 corpus. Interestingly, as these equal numbers might suggest, French schooling does not seem to have had a huge impact in the use of Standard French inflectional endings yet. Examples of the phenomenon taken from the 2011 corpus are given below:

- (5) moi h'aimais point ça quand c'qu'i *avont* brûlé not' FLAG acadjonne cause que c'est rinque point FAIR/ (P5)

- (6) des Anglais quand c'que *zeux parlont/* avec leurs accents d'TEXAS ou WHETHER/ qu'i *parlont* avec leurs accent/ de l'Angletarre/ c'est point mieux ou mal SO moi j'crois pas que/ not' français est mieux/ ou mal/ (P17)

« Je collectif » : 1st person plural and subject pronoun « je » vs. « nous »

Another dialectal characteristic of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French is the use of the «je collectif» for the first person plural subject pronoun «nous»: «Rien n'est plus caractéristique que l'usage du *je* à la première

⁶ For *chiac* see ROY 1979: 298

personne du pluriel: *j'allions, j'venons, j'avions* ... ce qui tient lieu à la fois de *nous allions*, et de *on allait*; de *nous venons* et de *on vient*, etc. » (MASSIGON 1962: 239). Grevisse describes the use of « je » as a first person subject pronoun in the 16th and 17th century as follows: « *Je pour nous* (ou *je* suivi de la 1^{re} pers. du plur.) se trouve dans l'écrit quand les auteurs veulent reproduire la langue populaire, surtout paysanne [...]. Cet emploi apparaît au XV^e s. [...] Il se trouve au XVI^e s. dans toutes les classes sociales [...]. Par la suite, les auteurs n'attestent l'emploi que dans la bouche de gens du peuple » (GREVISSE¹³ 1993: §635).

The use of the allomorph “ej” and the aspiration of the 1st person singular and plural subject pronouns are typical for Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French. Both phenomena are shown in examples (7) and (8):

- (7) *ej h'inviterons tcheq' CHUM/ pis ej/ ej baranquons coumme c'est point si tant coumme/ aller CLUB-er ou/* (UC2)
- (8) *moi le seul temps que ej regarde la télévision française c'est quand ce MUM s'en voN/ et pis ej WATCH-ons/ un MOVIE/ pis qu'la WATCH-ons/ ej le mets en français pour qu'a peuve comprend'* (P13)

5 - English influence

In the transcriptions of the 2011 corpus, numerous passages reveal that the adolescents are conscious of the English influence on the French spoken in Baie Sainte-Marie:

- (9) *t-êt‘ une des raisons pour laquelle/les gens/trouvent le français/correct/difficile/c'est parce qu'i y a tellement d'influence de l'anglais/qu'on a des anglicismes absolument partout pis on se rend pas compte/jusqu'à tant quelqu'un nous dit « ah tu peux pas parler français ça c'est anglais »/ANYWAY/(EC11)*
- (10) EC11: quand je dis/« OK pense acadien » la première chouse que je pense à dire en acadien c'est moitié anglais/
EC12: YUP/ (EC11+EC12)

Furthermore, they are aware of the fact that the variety they use differs from the one used by their parents or grandparents:

- (11) P13: crois-tu que le français va FADE-r OUT par icitte ?
P14: jamais/

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P13: non/mais/même moi j'trouve nous-aut' comparés à/t-êt' nos parents/not' français est point du tout la même affaire que zeux/nous-aut' i y a s i y a beaucoup plus d'anglais/SO j'trouve que c'est en fait d'FADE-r d'une manière/ (P13+P14)

Possible reasons for the language change in the region are given in the following quotes from the corpus:

(12) la langue française est en péril à cause/dans une 'tite région comme cecitte/ehm on/on a beaucoup d'anglais qui nous entoure/et pis/ehm couumme à/à la/à/au TV ou à la radio/ou/ehm/même/i y a i y a plus et plus d'Anglophones qui restent dans not' région/SO le plus qu'on est/ehm/couumme exposé/et pis/entouré d'anglais/ej crois/que ça va changer not' langue/ (P12)

(13) h'ai hamais WATCH-é un MOVIE français aut' que quand h'étais forcée à l'école/h'ai hamais lit un livre français aut' que quand h'étais forcée à l'école/couumme ALTHOUGH j'lis pas d'liv' ANYWAYS BUT comme/ (UC3)

(14) moi h'écoute point de MUSIC française/h'ai d'la misère à comprend'/ce qu'i disont pis/I DON'T KNOW/j'dirais point qu'la MUSIC est point AS bounne/[...] j'aime plus de MUSIC anglaise c'est plus aisé à comprend'/ (P15)

One reason given by the adolescents is the dominance of the English language in Nova Scotia, and thus also the English presence in Baie Sainte-Marie. But the most important factor found in almost every interview is the use of the media, consumed almost exclusively in English. The English presence mentioned by the speakers themselves leads to language contact phenomena such as code switching, borrowing, or loan translations in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.

The following quotes taken from the corpus show English elements belonging to different parts of speech, (15)-(18) are rather “open” categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs), (19)-(20) belong to the “closed” ones (e.g. prepositions, conjunctions):

(15) ça fait/ rire que ça avait besoin d'y êt' tchequ' affare couumme bruler not' FLAG que/ que/ quelle affare couumme la fierté acadienne sortir à travars d'FACEBOOK à travars de/ la région SO/ c'est vraiment intéressant/ (UC4)

- (16) j'suis fier de pouvoir parler le français/ à cause que c'est définitivement un atout/ tu sais c'est tchequ' affare j'ves *USE-r/* coumme travars d'ma vie/ (P12)
- (17) c'était un voyage qu'était/ *AWESOME/* (UC5)
- (18) ANYWAYS pis alle l'a coumme hâlée dans son logis/ point coumme/ *AGGRESSIVELY* hâlée dans l'logis/ (UC6)
- (19) coumme i sont à AFGHANISTAN/ *BUT* c'est point pour la djarre c'est rinque pour coumme *KEEP-er THE PEACE/* (UC6)
- (20) SO i y a si tant/ coumme/ part de tous les villes/ on te met si tant de TRASH dans l'air que/ c'est vraiment/ pas/ pas une différence *UNLESS* qu'on va fare une différence coumme/ au GLOBE c'qu'/ *BROADSCALE/* (EC4)

The adolescents' idiolects also contain numerous examples of particles, such as *BACK* (21) or *OUT* (22) or discourse markers, such as *WELL* (23):

- (21) tu peux aller à la SHOP dans cinq minutes pis d'en venir *BACK* pis c'est FINE [...] / (UC4)
- (22) alle pouvait point FIGURE-r *OUT* y'où ce qu'est Halifax/ (P17)
- (23) UC2: quoi c'que/ tu veux fare après ?
- UC1: *WELL/* c'est ça/ j'suis parti à un bac en/ j'fais un bac en sociologie/ (UC1+UC2)

In addition to the English elements mentioned above, which can be clearly distinguished from the Acadian French matrix language because of their English pronunciation⁷, there are also examples of loan translations in the corpus. A small choice is given in the following quotes:

- (24) je pense si qu'ils parleront/moins vite *sur la télé francophone/* (EC1)
- (25) les/émissions anglophones *su' la télé ben/* (P5)
- (26) c'est point vraiment acceptable quand *ça vient à l'écrit/* (UC3)
- (27) pis si ça ça *travaille pas/je pourrais toujours aller dans la police RIGHT/* (P3)
- (28) OK mets coumme/du WHITE OUT/sur tes lacets/mets du xxx/xxx/HEY/*ça ça travaillerait/* (P4)

In (24) and (25), the adolescents use *sur la télé* because of the English *TO BE ON TV*. The French construction is *passer à la radio*. In (26) the English *when it comes to sth* is translated literally by speaker P1 (Standard French: *quand il faut/ quand on doit*). The use of *travailler* for *TO WORK OUT*

⁷ Most of the English elements in the corpus keep the English pronunciation. One exception is the verb *GRADUE-r* (*finir l'école/l'université; TO GRADUATE*) and the noun *GRADE* (*la classe*), which are also adapted to the Acadian matrix in *chiac* (PERROT 1995: 132).

in (27) and (28) (Standard French: *se passer bien*) has already been attested for Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French since the 1980s (STARETS 1982: 166; IBID 1986: 445).

Conclusion

This report shows that the Acadian regions of Nova Scotia are becoming more and more anglicised, in spite of an Acadian school system and a Francophone university in Baie Sainte-Marie. Baie Sainte-Marie is the only Acadian region where more than half of the population still speaks a variety of French as their first language and as the language spoken most often at home. Additionally, the report gives an overview of prominent examples of archaic and dialectal features and of English influence on Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French found in a corpus recorded in 2011.

The variety examined is both archaic and innovative at the same time: On the one hand, archaic and dialectal features such as the negator “point”, the 3rd person plural inflectional ending “-ont” or the *je collectif* prevail in the language used by Baie Sainte-Marie adolescents. On the other hand, the adolescents integrate more and more English words and structures into their idiolects. The adolescents are conscious of the increase of English structures in their speech, even though, as King (2008: 137) puts it for other Acadian French varieties, “the degree of English influence claimed is sometimes not supported by the data provided”.⁸

This exemplary piece of analysis is part of a larger doctoral project which investigates contemporary Acadian French spoken by Baie Sainte-Marie adolescents. Furthermore, the thesis aims at comparing the examined variety to *chiac*, the French variety spoken by Moncton teenagers, described by Roy (1979) and Perrot (1995). Thus, this study will be the first one to compare two Acadian French varieties spoken by teenagers, which enables us to draw conclusions about the (possible) evolution of Baie Sainte-Marie French and other Acadian varieties in the future.

⁸ Two pages later, KING (2008: 139) adds: “[T]he characterization of the extent of English influence on Acadian varieties tends to be overblown”.

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