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## The Cajun Dialect in English Language

Cajun Vernacular English is a dialect with a rich history, found in southern Louisiana. It is heavily influenced by the French language, as its original speakers were French settlers. This group originally comes from Vendee, a region of western France. Settlers from this region traveled to Acadie, which has since become Nova Scotia. When France lost control of the territory to Great Britain, its inhabitants were forced to convert to Protestantism. When the Acadians refused, they were removed from their new home and scattered across the continent. Over time, this dispersed people traveled and began to settle in southern Louisiana. As time went on, the Acadians formed a new culture in their swampy new home: Cajun. Cajun people continued to speak French until the early 20th century, when English in the education system created the original, bilingual speakers of Cajun English.

Cajun English has many markers that make it distinct from Standard English on almost every level of linguistic study. On the phonological level, Ramos identifies two main characteristics, the first of which is the elimination or modification of final consonants. End consonant deletions include the [t] in late, the [r] in together, and the [rk] in New York. Modifications of end consonant/consonant clusters include dropping the [l] in simple to make “simpuh,” the [v] in leave becoming an [f] to form “leaf.” There are still additional consonant changes besides these, however. One example is the [s] softening into a [z] for most words, with sink becoming “zink,” and gas becoming “gaz.” The [r] is often deleted when not in the beginning of a word. For example, Robert becomes “Robet,” and tired becomes “tied.” The [th] in words such as this, these, and those, becomes a [d], forming “dis,” “dese,” and “dose.” Many other consonant clusters are shortened or simplified, such as [nd] to [n] as in kind to “kine,” [nt] to [n] as in went to “wen,” [st] to [s] as in cost to “cos,” and [kt] to [k] as in act to “ak”.

The second characteristic noted by Ramos is the modification of the long vowels [i], [e], [o], and [u]. All these vowels become longer, becoming [i:], [e:], [o:], and [u:]. There are multiple other noticeable differences. The long [i] can become a short [a:], so that using the pronoun “I” sounds like “ah”. The vowel [e] is transformed into the vowel [i] in some cases. One example is in the word plane, which a Cajun might pronounce as “pleen”.

Being so closely related to the French of the Acadian settlers, it is unsurprising that Cajun English has borrowed some of its phonology. One example is the use of nasal vowels. Not usually found in English, Cajun speakers have transformed some vowels into their more familiar counterparts. Some examples are changing uncle to “oncle,” don’t to “don,” and friend to “fran.”. Another French feature is a difference in how syllables in stress. In English, stress in words and sentences can vary. In French, however, sentence stress is mostly even, and

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syllable stress is focused on the last syllable of a word. One example where this is easy to see is strawberry. Where a Standard English speaker would stress the “straw,” those with the Cajun dialect would stress “berry”.

Cajun grammar also has many differences when compared to Standard English. One thing noted by Ramos (2013) is that certain grammatical markers are the result of phonological markers. As Cajun speakers drop the suffixes -s and -ed from words, they also tend to drop the verbs “is,” “are,” and other auxiliary verbs from their sentences. An example of this would be, “we getting food tonight.” Somewhat similar to the Yooper dialect, Cajuns also use the verb “went” as a sort of auxiliary verb to show completion of a task, like “I went pick up the food”.

Another area that is modified is the use of plurals. This can include plural overgeneralization, like saying grays hairs instead of gray hair, or plural deletion, like saying strawberry when referring to multiple strawberries. Cajuns will use pronouns at end of a sentence to show emphasis. For instance, one would say, “I’m going, me,” or, “they weren’t clapping, them”. Possessives are also affected. The word your is often replaced with you, as in “you house,” and apostrophes and s’s are dropped, as in “they wash people houses”. Adverbs are not used in their normal form in this dialect. Many either of the -ly deleted from the end, like in slowly to slow, or an s is added on, like in anyway to anyways. Instead of using very when describing something, Cajuns instead will say the adjective twice. An example of this would be saying “it’s big big”. When asking questions, sentence structure is often flipped backwards, as in “I can go to the bathroom?”.

The vocabulary of Cajun English is a mix of unique English words and phrases and borrowed French words. Some of the English ones are: get down means to get out of a car, have a little pass means to stop by and visit, come see means to come over here, take of the light means to turn the light off, and caught a flat means had a flat tire. While many Cajuns speak French as a primary language, many French words are widely used by Cajuns regardless of what they speak. Examples are boudier, which means to pout, fouiller, which means to dig around in, grandmere and grandpere mean grandmother and grandfather, and a pirogue is a small boat.

One of the more interesting things that about the Cajun dialect is the differences between Cajun speakers. These differences largely exist due to the Cajun Renaissance. The Cajun dialect decreased in usage in the middle of the 20th century, with a resurgence in the 1970s. This resurgence was caused by the establishment of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana. This ruling also established French courses in Louisiana school, in an effort to keep the old Cajun culture alive. Younger people began to speak the dialect of the elders with a sense of pride. While older generations spoke almost exclusively French, these younger generations now spoke English and French. This, along with the fact that Cajun has now become a sort of attraction for tourists may account for generational differences. One specific

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generational is the use of the dental stops (th) and (dh). Older people tend to use more stops than the middle and younger ages, although younger people use more than middle aged people. This can be attributed to the Renaissance, where the youth wanted to sound more like the original Cajuns. In addition to age differences, gender can also play a part in how Cajun someone sounds. Males tend to use more stops than women and include more of what older Cajuns do in their speech. One reason for this is that along with the dialect, traditionally Cajun activities such as boating, hunting and fishing have made a resurgence, and these are stereotypically male activities.

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