



**LACUS
FORUM
XXXV**

**Language and Linguistics in
North America 1608–2008:
Diversity and Convergence**



**UNIVERSITÉ
LAVAL**

YOUR RIGHTS

This electronic copy is provided free of charge with no implied warranty. It is made available to you under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license version 3.0

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>)

Under this license you are free:

- **to Share** — to copy, distribute and transmit the work
- **to Remix** — to adapt the work

Under the following conditions:

- **Attribution** — You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- **Noncommercial** — You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

With the understanding that:

- **Waiver** — Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- **Other Rights** — In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:
 - Your fair dealing or fair use rights;
 - The author's moral rights;
 - Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as publicity or privacy rights.

Notice: For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to the web page cited above.

For inquiries concerning commercial use of this work, please visit
<http://www.lacus.org/volumes/republication>

Cover: The front cover of this document is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/>) and may not be altered in any fashion. The LACUS “lakes” logo and Université Laval logo on the cover are trademarks of LACUS and Université Laval respectively. The Université Laval logo is used here with permission from the trademark holder. No license for use of these trademarks outside of redistribution of this exact file is granted. These trademarks may not be included in any adaptation of this work.

LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN LOUISIANA: THE SWITCH FROM WRITTEN FRENCH TO WRITTEN ENGLISH WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

SYLVIE DUBOIS & EMILIE LEUMAS
Louisiana State University

OVER THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS we have studied intergenerational changes and social practices in French- and English-speaking communities in South Louisiana. We have often experienced an academic frustration over the lack of empirical data associated with the early stages of language change in Louisiana. Surprisingly, the research project reported here results from one recent catastrophic event: Hurricane Katrina, which flooded New Orleans at the end of August 2005. Following the devastation in New Orleans, the religious and clerical document collections of the Archdiocese of New Orleans were temporarily relocated to the Diocese of Baton Rouge. With the help of diocesan archivists, we located and surveyed this untapped collection of business-oriented records, sacramental registers, and personal letters written from 1803 to 1859 by the laity and local people of Louisiana parishes to New Orleans bishops and priests. In particular, access to the antebellum correspondence (personal letters), one of the largest holdings of its kind in North America, allowed us to collect more than 9000 letters written in French and in English. These extensive, well-maintained, and searchable archive collections of the Louisiana Catholic Church have proved to have uncommon linguistic value if carefully used in conjunction with other data.

1. INTRODUCTION. Following a brief description of the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Louisiana, we will explain why the Archdiocese of New Orleans, as the administrative base for the entire Louisiana territory, can be defined as an institutional network of communities of practice. Then we will summarize the results of our first case study: the switch from French to English using data from the sacramental registers of more than 173 Catholic churches in South Louisiana, starting in 1844 (the earliest switch) and ending in 1954 (the last switch). Examining language change in the sacramental registers is not without its inherent problems, of course, as even a cursory look at them makes evident. There is not always a clear and easily-explicable language break in the registers; there is also the problem of abrupt language changes at the beginning of new pre-printed registers that appeared in some Louisiana churches at the turn of the twentieth century. While there are language changes in the registers that can be attributed to the arrival of a new English-speaking priest, many others are initiated by new or long-time established French priests. Sometimes priests decide to switch from French to English at the beginning of a new year or when they start a new register. Many times there are simply no clues emanating from the registers to explain this change of practice.

Because of these silences in a series of records in which commentary is sparse, it became clear in our research that the Louisiana Catholic Church hierarchical structure of author-

ity, its social constraints, and the language attitudes of its membership must be taken into account if we wanted to elucidate not only the speed but the source of the language change. To do so, we turned to additional archival collections, which allowed us to flesh out these influential constraints and attitudes only implied in the registers. We will examine data collected from the Louisiana Catholic Church archival material: the archdiocesan administration business records and its antebellum correspondence, as well as the church parish records and reports about priests and parishioner membership.

Our hypothesis is that the language used in the sacramental registers was a reflection not only of its status in Louisiana parishes but also of the church's different levels of perception of its utility in the local communities. Moreover, the pattern of language switching displayed by many church records helps us to understand better the spatial diffusion of language practices within the Louisiana Catholic Church. Accordingly, its archival materials can shed light on the extent of distinct language practices over time in Louisiana.

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LOUISIANA. During the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church stood as the last vestige of French cultural dominance and the last prestigious stronghold for the written French language in Louisiana. Established in 1793, and originally known as the Diocese of Louisiana and the Floridas, the Archdiocese of New Orleans was a joint creation of the King of Spain and the Pope. The Louisiana Catholic Church consisted of a multi-ethnic population of faithful, clergy, and religious, who preserved and nurtured the faith by establishing church parishes, schools, orphanages, hospitals, and other necessary institutions. From 1809 to 1860, the demographic profile of the Louisiana population changed dramatically. More than 10,000 French-speaking refugees from Santo Domingo via Cuba settled in Louisiana. Immigrants from Germany and Ireland soon outnumbered those from France. Although the arrival of Protestants, who settled mainly in the northern part of Louisiana, created a divide within the state, south Louisiana remained a predominantly Catholic territory.

As Dolan (1973:526) observes, such ethnic diversity led the Catholic Church in Louisiana, as well as elsewhere in North America, to adopt "the concept of national parish, or a congregation organized principally along the lines of language rather than territorial boundaries." From 1835 to 1860, more than 60 new church parishes were established, 20 of which were in the city of New Orleans. By contrast, the bishops and clergy of the Archdiocese of New Orleans remained predominately French. With the exception of the first bishop, who ministered during the Spanish colonial period, all bishops and archbishops were French-born until the appointment of Dutch-born Archbishop Francis Janssens in 1888. The geographical boundaries of the Archdiocese of New Orleans between 1853 and 1918 represented 35 civil parishes (counties) in South Louisiana. In 1900, the Archdiocese reported a population of 325,000 Catholics (roughly 25% of the Louisiana population), 161 churches, and 211 priests serving in South Louisiana. Today, the area is divided among five dioceses including the Dioceses of Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Houma-Thibodaux, Lake Charles, and the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

3. THE LOUISIANA CATHOLIC CHURCH COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE. According to Dulles (1978:39), the Roman Catholic Church views itself as a perfect society “that is subordinate to no other and lacks nothing required for its own institutional completeness.” Neither a democracy, nor a representative society, the Catholic Church is rooted in a hierarchical concept of authority. To perform its functions—that is, teaching, sanctifying, and governing—the Catholic Church has prescribed forms of worship, recognized ministers, responsible officers, and properly approved procedures for membership. A traditional view of the Louisiana Catholic Church would look like an authoritative pyramidal structure with, at the top, the archdiocesan administration led by an Archbishop—the liaison between the “Louisiana Province” and Rome—who might be compared to a President and CEO of a corporation. The archdiocesan administration controls and entrusts ecclesiastical functions to the priests who exercise supervision over and counsel the faithful membership.

This structural representation is problematic because it entails a total centralization of powers, a unity in decisions, and a uniform application of rules (including linguistic rules), when in fact the linguistic evolution that took place within this institution—as we will show—did not progress in this way. What other form of decision structure could better explain the sources and the diffusion of language change within the Louisiana Catholic Church?

To understand the complex nexus of interrelated constraints that governs language change, we have chosen a different approach. We describe the Louisiana Catholic Church as a network of communities of practice, a relatively new concept in the field of sociolinguistics advocated by scholars such as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), Wenger (1998), and Meyerhoff (2002). In our opinion, the structural organization of the Louisiana Catholic Church epitomizes the concept of communities of practice as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992:464). Their endeavor as an institution is spreading and maintaining the Catholic faith and its teaching among the local people.

The nucleus of Louisiana Catholic Church in the nineteenth century was the archdiocesan administration with its Archiepiscopal Council. This community of practice was comprised of high-ranking clergymen (known as the Curia) and local priests who participated in its daily administration¹. Surrounding the archdiocesan administration was a constellation of different communities of practice represented by church parishes (**Figure 1**, overleaf). They were served by appointed “secular” priests (also called “diocesan” priests) and “religious” priests, who belonged to an order (such as the Jesuits, Dominicans, Josephites, etc.) under the authority of the Archbishop or Bishop (Official Catholic Directory 2004). The faithful, or parishioners, were important members of these communities. While some participated in the parish administrative activities (council, property management, schools, etc), the social participation of most members was uncovered through written documents

¹ The Archbishop represents the Louisiana Catholic Church but has no jurisdiction over the dioceses. The Bishops act as the Louisiana Catholic Church executive officers and each presides over a diocese. They are surrounded by core members of their upper administration.

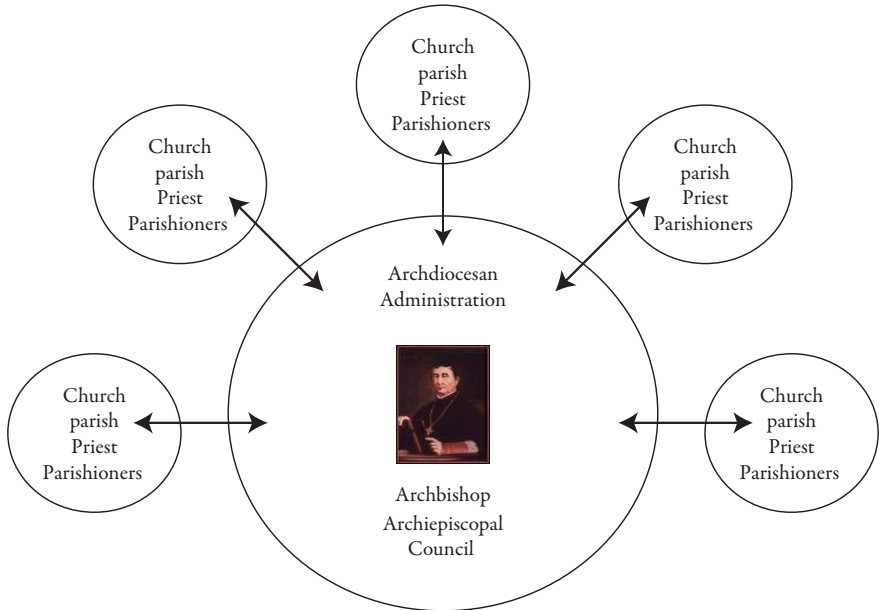


Figure 1. *Communities of practice.*

(correspondence, parish visitation reports, data collected from sacramental registers) that describe the profile of the local membership.

Wenger's four dimensions of communities of practice, that is, the participation and the reification, the designed and the emergent, the local and the global, and the identification and negotiability, are easily identified within each community of practice. For example, archival materials can be viewed as the reification of the history of participation within each church parish within the Louisiana Catholic Church. The designed and the emergent, that is, the formal and informal structures, are important characteristics of the Louisiana Catholic Church, as each church parish has its own formal rules and regulations, as well as its own informal organization emerging as gossip and innuendo from the studied correspondence. The same is true concerning the local and global concepts: church parishes are local structures, which take directives from the global administration, that is, the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which is itself a local structure under the supreme direction of the global Roman Catholic Church.

Perhaps more significant for our study are the dimensions of identification and negotiability, which allow us to identify the intricate relations between the Archdiocese community of practice and the Church Parish communities of practice, and, therefore, the source and type of social pressures that created language change. It is important to note that despite their allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, each community of practice forms a unique enterprise with its own vision and strategies, and fosters a distinct membership. The negotiations within these enterprises (their local conditions, the number and origin of

their members) and between them (who works with whom, and against whom) ultimately orchestrate the practice of the faithful. What we want to discover is how, through mutual engagement, these communities of practice negotiated both explicitly and implicitly a language shift from French to English.

4. LANGUAGE CHANGE WITHIN THE CHURCH PARISHES. The archival material that we selected for our first case study is the sacramental registers, which record the baptisms, the marriages, and the burials of individual practitioners of the church parish. These important moments in the Catholic faith are catalogued in the form of separate textual entries rather than simply as lists of names. Each entry is usually handwritten and signed by the priest and the witnesses to the event. Depending on the style and handwriting of the priest, one register volume may cover ten years of local history, while another may cover 50 years².

Table 1 (overleaf) shows the mean of language switch over time in registers according to the diocese and the parish. It makes clear that most of the language changes in registers happened at the turn of the twentieth century. Churches, which belong today to the Archdiocese of New Orleans (or are closely located around New Orleans), switched on average a decade earlier (1891) than the ones from the Diocese of Baton Rouge (1906). Churches in the diocese of Lafayette maintained French records until 1917 and the Diocese of Houma/Thibodaux switched in 1916, approximately twenty-six years after New Orleans. **Figure 2** (overleaf) is a histogram that displays language shift during that time span. Several parishes changed their language practice at the end of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth; however, the majority shifted between 1900 and 1930. In fact, 46% of churches in the Archdiocese switched between 1880 and 1920. Most southern Louisiana parishes, which switched after the 1920s, are located in the West (Iberia and St. Martin) and in the South (Lafourche and St. James).

Perhaps the most important observation to be made here is that the average date of switch in Louisiana (1906) happened much later than would be expected. By and large, scholars who described the nineteenth-century language situation in Louisiana have described the shift to English as a very sudden event at the end of the Civil War, like the abolition of slavery. It has often been claimed or implied that French-speaking people stopped writing French and switched to English almost overnight. The evidence here suggests something otherwise. No one will deny that important social changes in the wake of the Civil War conditioned the language choices local priests made. Nevertheless, even if we regard Reconstruction as the catalyst to English monolingualism, the switch to English

² Since we were looking for churches with a French-to-English switch in the registers, we eliminated from our initial analysis two kinds of churches. First, no Catholic church established after 1900 has registers written in French with the exception of four churches: two in Lafourche Parish, one in St. Landry, and one in St. Mary. We also removed from our sample the eighty-three churches with English records at the time of their foundation before 1900, leaving eighty-six churches where a switch occurred.

Geographical Scale		Switch Mean	
Louisiana (86)		1907	
Archdiocese New Orleans (23)		1891	
Diocese Baton Rouge (25)		1906	
Diocese Lafayette (26)		1917	
Diocese Houma/Thibodeaux (12)		1916	
Parishes	Switch Mean	Parishes	Switch Mean
East Baton Rouge	One church 1854	St. John the Baptist (3)	1910
Orleans (9)	1880	Terrebonne (4)	1910
Jefferson (2)	1885	St. Landry (4)	1911
Iberville (5)	1887	Lafayette (3)	1905
Ascension (2)	1887	Acadia (5)	1916
Pointe Coupée (3)	1890	Assumption (6)	1919
St. Tammany (3)	1893	Vermilion (5)	1921
St. Charles	One church 1898	Iberia (3)	1923
St. Bernard	One church 1899	St. Martin (3)	1924
Plaquemine (4)	1900	Lafourche (7)	1926
W. Baton Rouge (2)	1901	St. James (5)	1930
St. Mary (4)	1906	Livingston	One church 1934
CHURCH RANGE: 1844–1954			

Table 1. Switch mean from French to English in sacramental registers in Louisiana, by dioceses and parishes. Numbers in parenthesis represent the number of churches investigated.

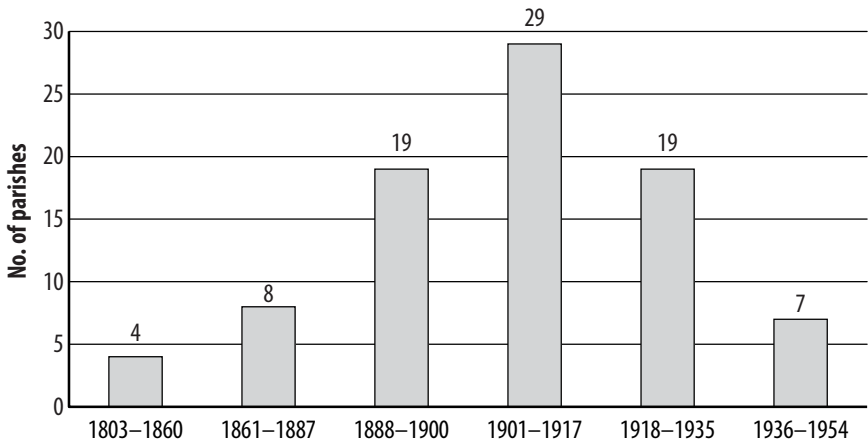


Figure 2. Sacramental registers switch dates, 1803–1954.

as the language practice by a majority of local priests took two more decades and, even in some parishes, until World War II.

Let us now examine the dates of language shift according to the geographic location of the churches. Before the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, eleven Catholic churches were established. The first Catholic church with English records from our database is Saint Patrick's, an Irish church in New Orleans established in 1833 (Nolan 2000). Writing sacramental registers in English was clearly a practice introduced by recently established Irish churches in New Orleans. From the start, all their sacramental registers were written in English. The only exception is St. Theresa of Avila, another Irish church, where the switch from French to English occurred four years after its establishment. This wave of new churches conforms to the new demographic importance of the Celtic population in Louisiana. If only by the sheer weight of numbers, the Irish became the first challengers to the French dominance of Catholicism in Louisiana. The number of English registers was subsequently increased by new English-language churches in the new towns in the northern part and the western part of south Louisiana.

From 1857–1880 there was a consolidation of the French language practice. Although the number of new churches with English records (mainly in the northern part of south Louisiana) was on the rise during the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, a total of 29 new churches used French in their sacramental registers, more than twice the number of English churches. Seven churches switch from French to English, three of them shortly after their foundation. The robust presence of French is particularly striking because it again suggests that an extensive period of bilingualism existed and was maintained even after the mass English migration was over. During this period, the Louisiana Catholic Church can be seen as truly bilingual. This result also implies that the loss of French as a prestige language or everyday language was by no means a foregone conclusion; the “triumph” of English was thus by no means a given but rather the result, at least in part, of the sociolinguistic events that happened in the next decades.

Language switch in the sacramental registers was at its peak at the end of the nineteenth century, when more than 22 church registers shifted to English. Two spatial directions can be observed: 1) more churches in New Orleans and in surrounding parishes adopt English, and 2) a movement of English registers from the northern parishes to the southern ones is discernible. English churches are also established in predominantly French areas, most of them being Josephite churches, which were maintained by a Catholic Anglophone order invited by Archbishop Janssens in 1888 specifically to serve the Black community in the Deep South (St. Augustine in New Roads in Pointe Coupée Parish, Saint Benedict the Moor in Bertrandville in Assumption Parish).

In the next time period (1902–1919), the geographical diffusion was even more accentuated; the shift around New Orleans was now completed and English registers were more numerous in southern parishes along the river as well as in the western area. Before WWI, fifteen strongholds switched, and seven remaining churches that had clung to French records during World War I, one in St. Martin Parish, one in Vermillion Parish, one in Assumption Parish, two in St. James Parish, and two in Lafourche Parish, finally gave up the French practice.

5. THE SOURCE OF LANGUAGE CHANGE WITHIN THE LOUISIANA CATHOLIC CHURCH. We would like to discuss briefly the source of language change in sacramental registers. Since the “Irish Catholics” represent the most significant origins of non-French Catholics in Louisiana, we consider them as the basic source of the language shift. In other words, the Louisiana Catholic Church is the context for the formation of an English community of practice in New Orleans, and this Irish community of practice is the locus of language change. Besides the clear implication of the numbers and distribution of English-language registers, two important historical factors emerge to support this hypothesis.

First, despite their on-going troubled history with the English language, the Irish very quickly and firmly established English as a language of power in New Orleans. Although many Irish would have learned French, the prestige language and the language of business in early nineteenth-century New Orleans, as devout Catholics they would likely have been unhappy listening to sermons in French (Niehaus 1966/2004). Second, the Irish came to New Orleans with a critical legacy which none of the previous immigrant groups possessed, including the French: a tradition of political activism. Thus when they settled in Louisiana, their political tradition was intact, Catholicism suddenly became not only tolerated but dominant, and, at last combining religion and politics openly and freely, they quickly yearned for their own church where “God spoke in English” (Niehaus 2004:429). The Irish Catholics had the aptitude, the will, and soon were numerous enough to begin affecting the Louisiana Catholic Church, which was a soft target since French Catholics in Louisiana came from cultures in which Catholicism was assumed and never seriously challenged (or not to the same extent as in Ireland).

The effect of the Irish on the Louisiana Catholic Church has at least one interesting aspect: they changed this institution from within, without significant struggles. No battle for souls was fought between the Irish and the French. However, the Irish had their own set of ethnic practices and spoke the language of the new rulers. Their aspiration was to create a separate community and they succeeded in doing so by introducing and sustaining tension with the French Catholics. They changed the Louisiana Catholic Church because they saw themselves as being more true to the Catholic religion than their slack French co-religionists and, surprisingly, the French church higher-ups agreed and took their side on important issues (Doorley 2001). In this case, religious purity trumped ethnic affiliation.

6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE ARCHDIOCESAN ADMINISTRATION. Although switching the most critical records of the Louisiana Catholic Church from French to English clearly reflected an important social change in Louisiana, no top-down language policy was apparently ever issued by the archdiocesan administration. There is no evidence from the literature about the Louisiana Catholic Church, its internal reports, or the antebellum correspondence between the bishops and the local priests that a decree, a ruling, or even a guideline about language preference ever came from the local ordinary before or after the Civil War.

Letters from Archbishop Antoine Blanc at the end of his period of influence (1830–1860) show that he was no longer interested in hiring monolingual French priests, preferring bilingual pastors, and he often proposed sending away many local priests to learn

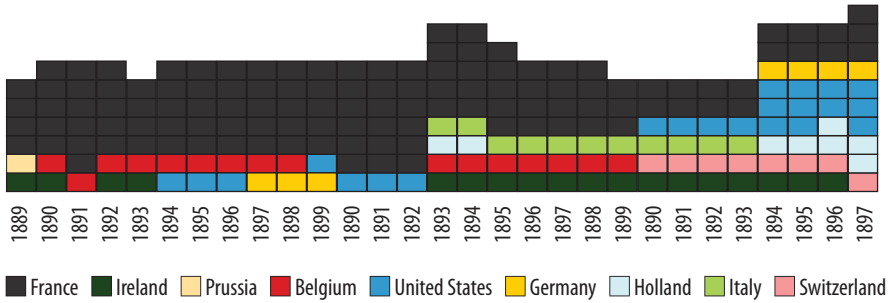


Figure 3. Composition of the Archiepiscopal Council from 1889 to 1917.

English. Even in the old French-speaking parishes, English-speaking priests were needed to better serve new, booming, English-dominant towns, as indicated by several letters from local priests.

Important changes took place within the Archdiocese at the time when most of the switches occurred (1880–1920). Before his death in 1887, Archbishop Leray requested a French-born bishop in New Orleans because the majority of Catholics in the countryside were descendants of French and Spanish settlers and spoke only French, a variety that he qualified as “*plus ou moins corrompue*” (‘more or less corrupted’). However, Father Jean Baptiste Bogaerts, a Belgium-born priest, wrote several letters to the Clergy expressing the need for the Louisiana Catholic Church to become part of the mainstream of American life so that the new non-French-speaking immigrants would not seek refuge with the Protestants. Bogaerts’ wish was granted when Francis Janssens from Holland was appointed Archbishop in 1888. But after Janssens’ death nine years later, the Holy See appointed as Archbishop Placide Louis Chapelle from France (1897–1905), who was fluent in French, Spanish, and English, and the first choice of the archdiocesan clergy according to the Council Minutes. When Chapelle died of yellow fever eight years later, the Bishop of Puerto Rico, James Blenk, born in Germany but educated at Jefferson College in Convent, Louisiana (and later in France and Ireland), was called to New Orleans and became Archbishop in 1906. With the death of Archbishop Blenk in 1917, the long-established line of French-born or foreign-born bishops and archbishops ended and the Archdiocese of New Orleans received its first American-born archbishop.

Is there written evidence, during the tenures of Archbishops Janssens, Chapelle, and Blenk, that a switch from French to English occurred within the archdiocesan administration? To answer this question, we consulted three sources of materials: (1) a database created from the Catholic directories from 1880 to 1917, which includes the country of origin of all administrators serving on the Archiepiscopal Council and the position they held; (2) the Archiepiscopal Council Minutes, a 141-page ledger-style register, which began in 1858 and was concluded in 1921; and (3) the pastoral letters written from 1844 to 1913 to the Clergy and Laity.

Let us have a look at the composition of the Archiepiscopal Council as well as the language in which the Council Minutes were written. **Figure 3** shows the number and the

country of origin of the Council members who participated in its governance as Vicars General, Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Deans, etc. from 1889 to 1917. French-born officers (shown in black) were in the majority during Janssens' and Chapelle's tenures. It is true that the composition changed in 1903 when the Council expanded to nine members, with the appointments of Italian, Belgian, Dutch, and Irish-born consultors, but the number of French-born officers was still high. Metalinguistic comments from the minutes show that meetings from 1887 to 1913 were conducted only in French.

A real shift took place during Blenk's tenure, more precisely between 1908 and 1910; for the first time, the number of non-French-born officers outweighs the number of French-born. By 1914, only two out of six or nine officers are from France and the multi-ethnic composition of the Council slowly led to the use of English during meetings as the only common language. Chancellor Pierre Scotti, who was the recorder, switched from French to English in the middle of the July meeting in 1908 but kept writing the Council Minutes in French in subsequent meetings. When Louisiana-born Father Vincent replaced Chancellor Scotti as recorder in 1913, however, minutes from this date forward are only recorded in English.

The analysis of the language used in pastoral letters to the clergy and parishioners reveals that the status of the French language within the archdiocesan administration slowly changed over time. From 1844 to 1883, when Blanc, Odin, and Perché were Archbishops, pastoral letters were written in French and in English. The English version was sent to church parishes with English-speaking parishioners (Irish) or non-French-speaking parishioners (German or Italian), whereas the French version was distributed to the French-speaking church parishes.

Perhaps as an economic measure, Archbishop Leray initiated the practice of a single letter with French and English printed side-by-side on the same page (French first). Interestingly, Archbishop Janssens, who is credited with having decreased the archdiocesan debt, resumed the practice of separate letters. Archbishop Chapelle reintroduced the single pastoral letter and made a small but significant change: letters are written in both languages side-by-side but English rather than French appears first. During the Spanish-American War, Archbishop Chapelle was sent by the Holy See as Apostolic Delegate to Cuba and Puerto Rico, and Envoy Extraordinary to the Philippine Islands. During his absences, the Administrator Father Rouxel and Vicar General Laval abandoned the side-by-side format and published only one edition of pastoral letters with the entire text written first in English and then in French, a practice followed by Blenk when he was appointed Archbishop in 1906.

What we can observe from the antebellum correspondence and other archival materials is not just the need for English-speaking priests but the need for bilingualism, for fluent English as a second language. At the turn of the twentieth century, that is, when most of the switches occurred, the Archdiocese was particularly concerned with the increasing number of Protestant institutions setting up all over south Louisiana as well as the influence of these institutions over state affairs, not to mention English-speaking local practitioners. Yet this demand emphatically did not imply the suppression of the French language, at least not until World War I. Language shift within the archdiocesan administration from

bilingualism to monolingualism in English happened much later than the average date of switch in the sacramental registers. A change from standardized pre-printed registers in French to pre-printed forms first in both French and English, and then in English, no doubt only put pressure on several local priests to initiate a language shift. Nevertheless, many of them had already started to write registers in English when these standardized forms were made available to them. Language shift from bilingualism to monolingualism in English within the Archdiocese appears to be an a posteriori reaction to three social changes: 1) a population growth in urban centers; 2) the decreasing number of French-speakers requesting church services in their language; 3) the increasing number of English-speaking priests.

7. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS FOR CHANGE: HINTS FROM THE SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS AND THE PARISH VISITATION REPORTS. Although known for its conservatism, the upper ranks of the Archdiocese nevertheless understood that parish priests were more in touch with the local practitioners. Language choice in sacramental registers (as well as sermons) was a matter apparently left in the hands of the local pastors, who had a better understanding of the local congregation's needs.

The switch to English in the registers was seldom accompanied by an explanatory comment. For many churches, no clues whatsoever from the registers can shed light on the change. We collected ten of these abrupt changes for which we cannot ascertain from the registers what prompted the individual decisions. Our results show that individual bilingual priests had an important impact on the language shift in record keeping: half of the register switches (37) coincide with a change of priest. Although in a few cases a new English-speaking priest would indeed arrive and switch all registers to English, bilingual priests of both French and English origins initiated most language changes. In several instances, native French priests started using English in registers that were previously kept in French by English-speaking priests.

In addition, many priests looked for easy transition times—a register, a new calendar year, the practitioners' first language—to make the switch to English. Twenty-six switches coincide with a change of book format, predominantly during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Before the introduction of pre-printed registers in English, all handwritten entries in registers from several churches in Abbeville, Arnaudville, Breaux Bridge, New Iberia, St. Martinville, and Ville Platte from the Diocese of Lafayette were written in French. For a very short period, the priests completed English forms in French and soon after, one after another, they shifted to English.

Parish visitation reports provide other hints about language change. These reports were sent to the Archdiocese by each church parish. Early reports, such as the 1885 questionnaire, were in French or English and offered such information as the number of Catholics (white and persons of color), the number of schools and pupils, and the number of sacraments. There was also a field for denoting language, but we cannot ascertain whether the reports documented the language of the parishioners, the priest, or the language of the service. Most reports (nine out of fifteen) are from churches in New Orleans and annotations about the use of the French, English, Italian, German languages in churches are numerous. By 1912 the parish visitation reports included the nationality of Catholic parishioners and

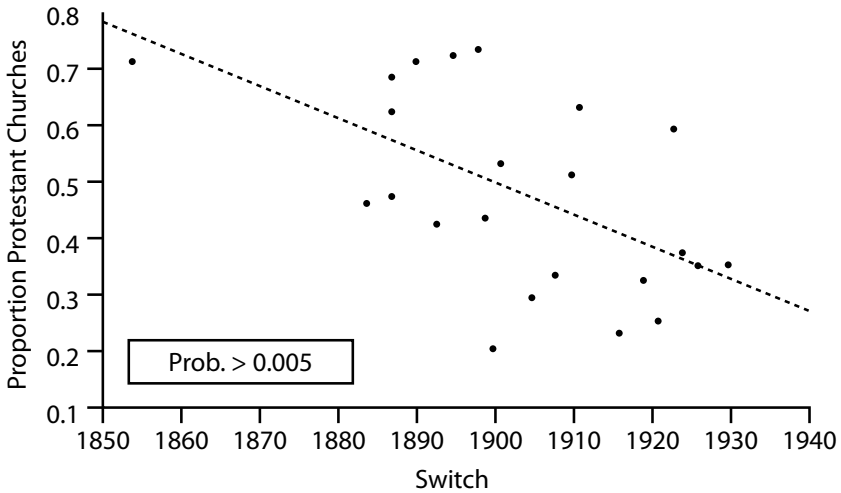


Figure 4. *Proportion of Protestant churches per parish correlated to the parish switch from French to English.*

the number who understood English. A total of 189 reports from 1912, 1915, 1934, 1948, and 1954 were found for 39 church parishes.

What emerged from the data is three language scenarios, each corresponding to an equivalent number of churches from six civil parishes. Interestingly, the locality factor and whether a switch corresponds to a priest change or a book change do not condition this categorization. In the first scenario, a switch occurs when most of the parishioners (from 80% to 100%) understand English. There is a strong correlation between the number of bilingual speakers and the priest's motivation for change. The second scenario is similar to the first one but the correlation is less robust since a switch is realized when half of parishioners (more or less 50%) understand English. In the third scenario, priests initiate changes when none or very few parishioners understand English, that is, when the local conditions did not justify a switch from French to English.

From the registers, we can tell that the new priests were comfortable in both languages, so they had to have an impetus for change other than language ability. The evidence suggests that the priests' overriding motivation for language change is rooted in important societal changes taking place in their locality. One important social change was the establishment of Protestant institutions in parishes once dominated by the Catholic faith. Did their increasing number of Protestant churches trigger the language change at a local level? The assumption is thus that a higher proportion of Protestant organizations in one location would have compelled local priests to shift from French to English early on, not only to lure more parishioners to the Catholic faith but also to avoid losing the ever-increasing number of English-speaking Catholics of French origin.

Using the 1890 statistical report, we calculated the proportion of Methodist, Southern Baptist, Colored Baptist, and Evangelical churches to the number of Catholic churches

in each parish (U.S. Census 1890). **Figure 4** shows the only significant correlation, that is, between the proportional number of Protestant churches and the switch date from French to English. Simply put, the higher the proportion of Protestant churches, the earlier the parish switch. Conversely, we can observe that bilingual practices in several church parishes were preserved until World War II, where the number of Protestant churches and thus the level of competition were low. What the evidence suggests is that the need to defend the faith by using the locally preferred language trumped any conservatism on the part of local priests, even native French pastors.

8. CONCLUSION. In conclusion, the source of language change in the Louisiana Catholic Church was rooted in the massive migration of the Irish Catholics, who challenged the idea of Mass, specifically the sermons, being conducted in French and sacramental registers being written in French (or Latin). This research also provides further evidence that Louisiana underwent a considerable period of bilingualism in the nineteenth century, and the stereotyped view that English “drove out” French needs to be considerably nuanced. For more than a century, the Louisiana Catholic Church adopted an unofficial policy of bilingualism, exemplified by business-oriented forms written in both French and English. This *laissez-faire* and accommodating language policy within the archdiocesan administration contrasts vividly with what happened at the state government level, where decrees about English-only language policies were issued for the legal and education domains (e.g., the 1868 and 1921 Louisiana State Constitutions).

By switching later into English and by appointing non-French-born priests to key diocesan positions, the archdiocesan administration accentuated a change already set in motion in church parishes by several socio-historical events. The fate of its bilingualism was sealed by socio-geographical, social, and attitudinal constraints at their zenith at the turn of the twentieth century, notably the major shift in population centers and the outbreak of anti-Catholicism. Two important constraints were a critical influence on the spatial diffusion of language change in sacramental registers within church parishes. For many priests, their decision to switch registers into English was prompted by an internal change within their church parish; that is, when the increasing number of English-speaking parishioners and French-speaking parishioners who could understand English could justify the shift. In other words, some priests switched registers into English when the use of the French language became an obstacle to their mandate, i.e., spreading Catholic faith. Others priests' decisions were influenced by an external factor, that is, the numerical growth of Protestant churches in the immediate area, especially the expanding Protestant organizations reaching out to both White and impoverished Black small communities, which incited them to shift to English despite serving a French-dominant membership.

By this point we believe we have presented an important piece of the complex linguistic puzzle that is nineteenth century Louisiana. Church documents do not, of course, represent the entire picture, and we are aware that the spoken language situation was quite different in important ways. Nevertheless, the strong correlation of the number of Protestant churches and the switch from French to English in the most important parish records adds

another statistically verifiable fact to our knowledge about the long and ultimately unequal tug of war between linguistic practices.



REFERENCES

- DOLAN, JAY. 1973. A critical period in American Catholicism. *The review of politics* 35:523–36.
- DOORLEY, MICHAEL. 2001. Irish Catholics and French Creoles: Ethnic struggles within the Catholic church in New Orleans, 1835–1920. *The Catholic historical review* 87a:34–54.
- DULLES, AVERY. 1978. *Models of the Church*. Garden City NY: Doubleday.
- ECKERT, PENELOPE & SALLY MCCONNELL-GINET. 1992. Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual review of anthropology* 21:461–90.
- MEYERHOFF, MIRIAM. 2002. Communities of practice. In *Handbook of language variation and change*, ed. J.K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill & Natalie Schilling-Estes, 526–48. Oxford: Blackwell.
- NIEHAUS, EARL. 2004[1966]. The Irish and their Church, 1830–1862. In *The Louisiana Purchase bicentennial series in Louisiana*, vol. 19. *Religion in Louisiana*, ed. Charles E. Nolan, 429–441. Lafayette LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. (Reprinted from *The Irish in New Orleans*, 1966, 98–111, 181–83. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.)
- NOLAN, CHARLES. 2000. *A history of the Archdiocese of New Orleans*. France: Éditions du Signe.
- The Official Catholic Directory*. 2004. New Providence NJ: P.J. Kennedy & Sons.
- United States Census. 1894. Religious bodies. Report on statistics of churches in the United States at the 11th Census, 1890, by Henry K. Carroll, Special Agent, vol. 9. <http://www.archives.gov>.
- WENGER, ETIENNE. 1998. *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

