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FRANCOPHONE DIMENSIONS OF NEW ENGLAND

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On April 28, 1993, a national newspaper, USA TODAY, featured a Census report on language. In that front page story¹ one could learn that in 1990, there were 1,702,175 persons in the United States who reported to the Census that they spoke French at home. They made up the second largest language grouping in the U.S. with one-tenth as many speakers as the Spanish. There were four states in which French was the leading non-English language: Louisiana, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.²

This paper will concern itself only with the Francophones of New England. The terms "French Speakers" or "French Speaking" or "Francophone" will be used to refer to persons who reported to the U.S. census in 1990 that they always or sometimes spoke French or French Creole³ at home not limited to slang or to a few expressions. This paper is about language use in the home and not the capacity to speak French. There is no census information on persons who speak French⁴ but do not speak it at home. Thus the figures used here underestimate the number of persons with the ability to speak French.

The data for this paper comes from the 1990 Summary Tape File 3A⁵ a U.S. Bureau of the Census publication on CD-ROM..

Let me begin with a brief overview. For New England as a whole in 1990, there were 360,000 home speakers of French, 3 percent of the region's population.⁶ We cannot assume that French Speakers are of French or French Canadian Ancestry.⁷ Occasionally I must use the language of ratios. Percentages refer to the relationship of a part to the whole. Ratios relate a part to a part. Thus we can say that the sex ratio of males to females in a given population is 85, meaning that there are 85 males for every 100 females. In this mode of expression I found that there was a ratio of 20 Francophones to French/French Canadian Ancestry persons of first report meaning that there were 20 French Speakers for every hundred French/French Canadian persons in New England in 1990. Also, I found a ratio

of 35 Francophones to Single French /French Canadian Ancestry persons of the region. The ancestry population of first report are those who responded either French or French Canadian ancestry or their equivalents (Quebecois, Acadian, Franco etc.) first, to the census inquiry on ancestry. The single Ancestry persons are those who only reported French or French Canadian Ancestry or their equivalents to the census question.

Looking at the numbers of French Speakers in New England, we find Massachusetts with 125,000 followed by Maine with 81,000, Connecticut with 54,000 and New Hampshire with a Francophone population of 51,000. Rhode Island had 32,000 and Vermont 17,000 Francophones (see Table 1 and Map 1). To put this another way we find that Massachusetts was home to 35 percent of the Francophones in New England, Maine 23 percent, Connecticut 15 per cent, New Hampshire 14 per cent, Rhode island 9 percent and Connecticut 5 percent (see Table 2 and Graph 1).

New Hampshire and Maine had 5 to 7 percent of their populations speaking French, Rhode Island and Vermont had 3 percent, Massachusetts and Connecticut had 2 percent of their populations speaking French at home (see Table 3 and Map 3).

As regards ancestry⁸ of first report (see Table 4 and Map 4), there was a ratio of French Speakers to French Ancestry of 29 in Maine, between 18 and 20 for New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts and 13 for Vermont (see Table 5 and Map 5). For those who listed but one ancestry Vermont had a ratio of speakers to ancestry of 23, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island had ratios of around 33, Connecticut 39 and Maine 44 (see Table 6 and Map 6).

Summary Tape File 3A only contains data for Incorporated Places and Census Designated Places with populations of 1,000 or more. If we look at these and select the Places with 1,000 or more French Speakers in 1990, we find three cities with more than 10,000 French Home Speakers, Boston, Lewiston and Manchester and four cities with between five and ten thousand French Speakers; Woonsocket, Biddeford, Nashua, and Lowell. Towns of 2500 to 5,000 include: Stamford and Bristol in Connecticut; Springfield, Chicopee, Worcester, Cambridge,

Brockton, Fall River and New Bedford in Massachusetts; Pawtucket in Rhode Island; Berlin in New Hampshire and Auburn, Augusta and Madawaska in Maine (see Table 7 and Map 7).

When we look at the percent of the population of these Places with at least 1,000 French Speakers, we find quite a different picture. There are three towns with more than 73 percent of the local population speaking French at home: Van Buren (81%), Madawaska (80%) and Fort Kent (73%). Five cities with 20-40 percent of the local population speaking French: Berlin (40%), Biddeford (35%), Lewiston (34%), Woonsocket (21%) and Sanford (20%). Nine localities with 10 to 16 percent of their populations speaking French: Auburn (16%), Augusta (15%), Saco (15%), Caribou and Waterville (14%), Manchester (12%), Somersworth and Gardner (11%) and Central Falls (10%) (see Table 7 and Map 7A).

My interest in the number and the percentage of the local populations speaking French is that I believe that the more opportunities we have to speak French, the more likely we are to speak French and thus to maintain the language and pass it on. The towns in the St. John Valley are unique in the proportion of the local population speaking French, the local community is a language community.

Ancestry or ethnic groupings foster the use of spoken French. What do we see when we look at the ratio of French Speakers to French Ancestry of first report? We find the three Valley towns of Van Buren, Madawaska, and Fort Kent with even higher ratios (92, 89 and 82) than on a simple locality basis. Obviously, the opportunity to speak French is very great in these towns. It is also high among the French Ancestry persons in the next four cities with ratios of French speaking to French Ancestry in the fifties: Berlin (58), Hartford (54), Lewiston (55) and Biddeford (55). There are evidently cultural communities in these cities which support the use of French (see Table 8 and Map 8). There are also a group of less traditional Franco-American towns such as Bridgeport (66), Somerville (68) and Norwalk (70) where there is a ratio of French Speakers to French Ancestry of first report of between 66 and 70. Then there is the phenomena of ratios greater than one in Stamford (160),

Cambridge (123) and Boston (122). The figures indicate that there are more French Speakers than persons of French and French-Canadian Ancestry. ⁹

If we look at the ratio of French Speakers to persons of single French Ancestry, we find the three towns of Fort Kent, Madawaska and Van Buren with ratios ranging up to 97, pointing to a community of French Speakers. Following is Berlin with a ratio of 70. These four towns are relatively isolated and near a border with French Canada. Then in Maine, there were Lewiston, Biddeford, Augusta, Sanford and Auburn, all with ratios of over 50. These persons who do not report any other ancestry may have more occasion to speak and maintain their French. Their families are probably more French Speaking than are the relatives of the first report French. The same is true among the French Speakers of Waltham in Massachusetts and New Britain and West Hartford in Connecticut which also have ratios of 50 and over. Hartford and New Haven have ratios in the eighties. Also in Connecticut are three towns with ratios of over one, Stamford, Norwalk and Bridgeport. Massachusetts has four cities with ratios of speakers to Single French Ancestry of over one, Cambridge, Boston, Somerville and Brockton (see table 9 and Map 9).

Taking these findings at face value, I have designated these cities as "New Francophone Communities". Here, we have a Francophone population, in part at least, of Haitian Ancestry. Other possible "new" francophones are immigrants from Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, and the former French colonies of Africa or elsewhere. Exploring the likeliest of these possibilities, the Haitian immigrants, I found no published data for cities. I did find State data in Social and Economic Characteristics (CP-2) of the 1990 Census which reported 23,690 persons of Haitian ancestry in Massachusetts, 5,000 in Connecticut, 950 in Rhode Island, 280 in New Hampshire, 160 in Maine and 80 in Vermont. If all persons of Haitian Ancestry speak French or French Creole at home and as recent immigrants this is a reasonable assumption, Haitians comprised 8.4 percent of New England Francophones in 1990.

The major finding of the data on the cities of New England is that there are what I have called "New Francophone Communities" in Stamford, Norwalk and Bridgeport in Connecticut and Somerville, Cambridge and Brockton as well as in Boston in Massachusetts. These Francophone communities are neither large in numbers of French Speakers (except for Boston) nor in percent of the city's population but they do stand out by having a substantial portion of their French Speakers who evidently did not report themselves of French or French Canadian origin. We infer that these "New Francophone Communities" are of Haitian origin in whole or in part.

If we compare French Speaking in the New England States in 1980 and 1990, we find that all states lost French Speakers. The overall decline in French Speakers in New England was 13 percent. The greatest loss was in Rhode Island where the French Speaking population decreased by 22 percent in the decade, compared to 8 and 10 percent decrease in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The French speaking population in Maine and Vermont declined by 14 percent and New Hampshire's French speaking population lost 17 per cent (see Table 10 and Map 10). This decline is the continuation of a trend which is documented, back to 1980 and may have existed prior to that time.

The documentation is imperfect because of the change in the census question between 1970 and 1980. In 1940 and 1970, the Census question was "What language, other than English, was spoken in this person's home when he was a child?" Note that this question did not ask if the persons could speak the language or whether they had ever learned it. I term this a 'language orientation' question rather than a 'language use' question, The U. S Census termed it a "Mother Tongue" question. In reality it reflected language use of the previous generation (the 1930's for the 1970 question and 1910's for the 1940 data). The number of French Mother Tongue persons in New England went up from 705,000 in 1940 (probably c.1915) to 907,000 in 1970 (probably c.1935). In 1980 when the census question changed to language use in the current home, the numbers declined to 411,00 French Home Speakers in 1980 and 360,00 in 1990.¹⁰

The number of French Speakers can be affected by the demographic processes of fertility, mortality and migration and by assimilation. My educated guess is that differences in mortality probably do not cause differences in the rates of French Speaking within New England. Differences in birth rates among French-Ancestry persons may have an effect on rates of French-Speaking among the New England States, for example the size of French families in the St. John Valley may well influence the higher rate of French Speaking in Maine. Migration patterns undoubtedly affect the size of French populations. One of the best known of migration patterns is that from Maine, especially from the St. John Valley to Connecticut. It is to be noted that Massachusetts and Connecticut lost a smaller percentage of their Francophone population in 1980-1990 than the other states of the region. As always, economic opportunity plays a major role in population shifts. But so too, do the new life styles of retirees. The decline in the number of French Speakers in New England has been accentuated by the migration of French Speakers to warmer climates either on a full-time basis or on a seasonal basis. Even seasonal "snowbirds" may still be in the South on the early April date of the census although they spend as many months in New England as in the South. In fact, the data indicates that Francophones of all ages have emigrated from New England. Many were undoubtedly answering the call of economic opportunity.¹¹

The explanations for the rates of change in speaking French range from lack of transmission of language to out-migration in the northern states, to in-migration in the southern states, and intermarriage. If you are French Speaking but marry someone who is not French Speaking, it is very difficult to maintain the language within the household even though you may speak it outside of the home. It is very difficult to transmit the language even with two French Speaking parents when it is not being reinforced by the community, the school or the church. Today speaking French for persons under fifty is an accomplishment not a necessity. Knowing French does provide monetary returns for persons who teach French, engage in international relations or trade or serve the elderly or the French-speaking immigrants and tourists. Knowing French provides

everyone with an entry into other cultures, whether by reading, traveling or watching TV.

In a certain sense the percentages reported on, in this paper, exaggerate the extent of French-speaking. Certainly, speaking French in my house does not mean the same thing as it meant to my maternal grandmother who never learned to speak English. To-day Franco Americans are overwhelmingly monolingual in English as our data shows. In New England only one fifth as many persons speak French as say they are of French or French Canadian Ancestry. Only a little more than one third as many persons speak French as reported a single ancestry, whether French or French Canadian. Madawaska data indicates that 20 percent of its population spoke English only, 76 percent were bilingual and 4 percent spoke French only (i.e. spoke English "not well" or "not at all). For the population age 65 and over, 13 percent of those who spoke French were monolingual in French.¹² This in a city with a very high rate of French speaking and in a census district in which there were census takers not simply self-report forms. Even French-speaking Franco-Americans may well tend toward English dominance.

This is understandable given that the last great wave of migration from French Canada was in the 1920's, more than two generations ago. The miracle is that we have kept our ancestral language for so long when we live in an English speaking world on TV, on the radio, at work, on the streets and even in Church. Not only do all National Parishes to my knowledge have Masses in English, some have no French Masses and those who attend "French" Masses in some French Churches may hear the Mass said in French but the sermon in English.¹³ Is French on the verge of becoming a ritual language for Franco-Americans, not only in Church but in public assemblies and private greetings, for example on answering machines (including mine), "hello. bonjour?" The major process affecting the numbers of French Speakers and the rates of French speaking is undoubtedly the assimilation into the greater American Society.

There was an overall decrease of 13 percent between 1980 and 1990 in the number of French Speakers in New England. However, Suffolk County, the hub of the Boston metropolitan area increased its French Speakers by 124 percent or 11,000. Plymouth County within the Boston Metropolitan area increased its Francophone population by 45 percent or 2,000. Its neighbor Barnstable County increased its Francophone population by 600 or 2 percent. Rockingham County in N.H., parts of which are in the Boston Metropolitan area, increased its Francophone population by 2 percent as did adjoining Merrimack County. Fairfield County in the New York City Metropolitan area increased its French Speaking population by 30 percent or 3,000. The small Metropolitan County of Penobscot in Maine increased its Francophone population by 1 percent (see Table 11 and Map 11). French Speaking is alive and well in these metropolitan areas and doing fairly well (i.e. decreasing by less than 10 percent) in the adjoining counties of Norfolk and Middlesex in Massachusetts, New Haven in Connecticut and in the small Metropolitan County of Cumberland in Maine. Is this predominately a Haitian phenomena? It could be, in part at least. Ninety-nine percent of the Haitian population in New England in 1990 resided in Metropolitan Areas. The publication of Haitian ancestry data for cities, towns and counties would answer this question.

In the remainder of New England when one considers the rates of intermarriage, the aging of the French speaking populations, the lack of new Francophones and the Americanization of persons of French and French-Canadian Ancestry, the survival of the French language is a tribute to the tenacity and commitment of French Speakers.

Notes

1. "Census: Languages not foreign at home" USA TODAY, (April 28,1993), pp.1 and 11.

2 In all there were 31.8 million home speakers of languages other than English, 14 per cent of the total US population. Of the non-English speakers, 54 percent of the total were Spanish, 5.3

percent French, 4.9 German, 4.1 percent Italian, and 3.9 percent Chinese. There were 12 states where French was the second largest language grouping, 16 states where French was third and 7 states where French was the fourth largest language grouping. In only eleven states was French not among the first four non-English languages spoken. French was third in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island after Spanish and Portuguese or Spanish and Italian in the case of Connecticut. Rhode Island had the largest number of Portuguese speakers of any state also of Mon-Khmer, while Massachusetts was the State of residence of the largest number of Greek speakers in the US.

³ This census language category includes French, Walloon, Provençal, Patois, French Creole and Haitian Creole and Cajun.

⁴ Language data was collected on the long census form or schedule which approximately one fifth of the households in the United States received. Only household relationship, sex, race, age, marital status and hispanic origin were covered in the 100 percent short schedule or form.

⁵ 1990--Census of Population and Housing--Summary Tape File 3A.

⁶ The language data is not reliable to the last digit and probably not to the last two digits, consequently I have felt free to round figures for presentation.

⁷ "Ancestry refers to a person's ethnic origin or descent, 'roots' or heritage or the place of birth of the persons or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States." 1990 Summary Tape File 3A.

⁸ I combined the number reporting French Ancestry first and those reporting French Canadian Ancestry first to get the French-French-Canadian population of first report. I believe that you must use both French and French Canadian Ancestries. Some people would prefer to add the second report of ancestry to the first report numbers. But once you add second report to the first report and add French and French Canadian Ancestries together, you will get a double counting of some persons. The ancestries reported in the STF 3A General Profiles are a combination of first and second report of a particular ancestry. As long as you use one ancestry, such

as Italian, the total Ancestry count is correct. but when you use two ancestral identifiers, for example French and French Canadian, you are double counting some persons. Luckily, Sample Tape File 3A does provide a separate listing of first report and second report ancestries, so that we can isolate the first report data. Franco-Americans are more likely to style themselves of French Ancestry than of French-Canadian ancestry, yet there are many who say they are of French-Canadian ancestry. In 1990, in Places of more than 1,000 residents, more persons reported French-Canadian ancestry than French ancestry in: Augusta, Biddeford, Lewiston, Madawaska, Saco, Sanford, Van Buren, Waterville and Winslow in Maine; Berlin, Manchester, Nashua, and Suncook in New Hampshire; Waltham in Massachusetts; Cumberland and Woonsocket in Rhode Island.

9. These latter six cities reported less than four percent French Mother Tongue in 1970 and still have less than five percent French Speakers in each city in 1990. Only Boston reported more than 4,000 French Mother Tongue persons in 1970. That year, there were 14 cities with French Mother Populations larger than that of Boston (10,500). These larger Francophone cities in 1970 were: Lewiston and Biddeford in Maine; Manchester and Nashua in New Hampshire; Chicopee, Fall River, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield and Worcester in Massachusetts; Hartford, Connecticut; Pawtucket and Woonsocket, Rhode Island. French Mother Tongue represented more than 14 percent of each of their city populations except in the case of Springfield, Worcester and Hartford which had 7 and 8 percent of their populations with a French Mother Tongue in 1970.

¹⁰ See 1940 Census of the U.S., Mother Tongue.
1970 Census of the U.S., General Social and
Economic Characteristics, Table 49.

1980 Census of Population - as quoted in
InformACTION, janvier-fevrier, 1986.

1990 Census of Population - Summary Tape File 3A.

¹¹ New England in 1990 was home to around 21 per cent of the Francophone population of the United States, whereas it was

home to almost fifty percent of the French Mother Tongue Persons in 1940.

12 "Age By Language Spoken At Home and Ability to Speak English" -- 1990 Summary Tape File 3A. Since there were no languages other than French and English reported in Madawaska, it is possible to use the data in this way.

13 There are still National Parishes, notably SS Pierre & Paul in Lewiston, in which Liturgies, completely in French, are offered everyday of the week including Saturday and Sunday.