

# Dialect Contact and the Acadian French Subjunctive: A Cross-Varietal Study

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This study investigates mood choice for five Acadian French communities in Atlantic Canada which have intertwined settlement histories but which differ in terms of type and degree of dialect contact. The two communities with least contact with supralocal French preserve the highly salient imperfect subjunctive, moribund or absent from most other present-day spoken French varieties. While four communities exhibit high selection rates for the present subjunctive, in line with variationist analyses of other French varieties, one community has surprisingly low rates of such usage, along with absence of the imperfect subjunctive. This dichotomy is explained by the local prestige of the smaller of two founder groups for the community, settlers from Haute-Bretagne, France, a dialect area for which the historical record reveals low levels of subjunctive forms. The results highlight the importance not only of demographic factors but also of local identity construction in the formation of new contact varieties.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The French subjunctive has been the object of much recent research in both formal and variationist sociolinguistics, with the latter body of work focussing primarily on North American varieties, in particular Québec French and its offshoots. The present study is part of a large program of research which systematically investigates the relative effects of dialect contact on Acadian French communities in Atlantic Canada. Here we show that a broad range of historical facts related to type and degree of dialect contact and to the emergence of local prestige norms are essential to understanding variation in mood (and, to some extent, tense) which obtains across this diaspora.

The article is organized as follows. We first outline how the subjunctive mood is used in French. We then present the relevant linguistic information regarding the verbal domain in Acadian French along with an overview of the sociolinguistic histories of the five Acadian communities under investigation. The methodology of the present analysis is discussed: the data sources on which our analysis is based are presented, as are the contexts in which subjunctive vs. indicative usage is variable, and the relationship between mood choice and an intervening variable, tense parallelism, is described. We present individual results for each community and then present an account of intercommunity variation. This account emphasizes the importance of the social evaluation of language use in the formation of contact varieties, specifically in the establishment of community norms.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 *The Subjunctive Mood in French*

The French subjunctive is primarily an embedded-clause phenomenon which may express a broad spectrum of meanings related to attitudes, emotions, opinions, evidentiality, possibility, necessity, volition, non-assertion, doubt, etc. It is governed by verbal matrices such as *vouloir* 'to want', *craindre* 'to fear', *souhaiter* 'to hope' along with non-verbal matrices such as *pour que* 'so that', *sans que* 'without', *de peur que* 'for fear that'. There has been considerable debate as to whether or not the French subjunctive has a productive semantic reading (e.g. Abouda 2002; Posner 1997; Rowlett 2007; Poplack *et al* 2013); for instance, Brunot (1922) argues that the French subjunctive is simply a marker of subordination.<sup>1</sup> In fact, such debate goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when grammarians began to prescribe obligatory subjunctive selection in certain contexts (see e.g. Nyrop 1930 and Posner 1997 for discussion). We will not enter into this debate but concentrate instead on variable selection of the subjunctive (vs. the indicative) mood. While there has been a certain amount of variation in the set of subjunctive-selecting contexts throughout the recorded history of the language (Fournier 1998; Goosse 2000), some contexts are uniformly cited across time. Such is the case with the impersonal matrix verb  *falloir* 'to be necessary', the primary focus of the present study. *Falloir* has all of the semantic and structural features that promote use of the subjunctive: it has an impersonal subject, it takes a subordinate clause as complement, and it is a verb of necessity, obligation, etc. Further, polarity does not affect tense and mood selection.

Moreover, variationist studies for several varieties of Canadian French (e.g. Auger 1988, 1990; Comeau 2011;

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Poplack *et al* 2013; Grimm 2015) have shown that *falloir* is the most frequently occurring context for subjunctive selection found in sociolinguistic corpora. It is illustrated in 1 with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular present subjunctive form of *aller* 'to go' and in 2 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular present subjunctive form of *lire* 'to read':<sup>2</sup>

- 1 *Il faut que je m'en aille.* (GC-06)  
'I have to leave.'
- 2 *Il faut que tu lises la leçon.* (SL-30)  
'You had to read the lesson.'

Further, all of these studies found very high rates of the (present) subjunctive (vs. indicative) usage in this context (e.g. Gatineau, Québec, 94% n= 498/530, Poplack *et al* 2013; Hawkesbury, Ontario, 96% n=278/291, Grimm 2015), to the point of categoricity in Comeau's study of mood choice in Grosses Coques, Nova Scotia Acadian French (n=249/249). The analysis presented below will be based on results for this verbal matrix.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 Acadian French

Acadian French refers to varieties of French spoken in Canada's four Atlantic Provinces and in parts of eastern Québec (Map 1); a close relative, Cajun French, is spoken in Louisiana in the United States. The Acadian presence in North America dates from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, with settlers largely from the centre-west of France, who were mainly of rural background and members of the lower class (Massignon 1962). By contrast, settlers of New France (latterly Québec) were of more mixed origins, both geographically (Charbonneau & Guillemette 1994) and socially (Choquette 1997). Flikeid (1997) has argued that even more important than geographical origins for the distinctiveness of Acadian (vs. Québec) French are the relatively low levels of normative pressure which have obtained over the course of more than three centuries in Acadia, leading to the retention of vernacular forms moribund or entirely lost elsewhere in *la francophonie*, along with the emergence of a number of linguistic innovations (King 2013). We would add that type and degree of dialect contact since initial settlement are also important factors in explaining both the unity and diversity found across the Acadian diaspora, contact which we investigate systematically with regard to mood choice in the present study.

The example in 1 is taken from the 1990 Butler sociolinguistic corpus for the Acadian community of Grosses Coques in south-west Nova Scotia, also the source of Comeau's (2011) data. In the example in 3, taken from the same corpus, imperfect *falloir* triggers the imperfect subjunctive of *faire* 'to make / do' in the embedded clause while the simple past *fallut* triggers the past subjunctive:

- 3 *Il fallait qu'elle fit de la confession.* (GC-27)  
'She had to make a confession.'

- 4 *Fallut qu'il ait resorti dehors.*<sup>4</sup> (GC-13)  
'He had to go outside again.'

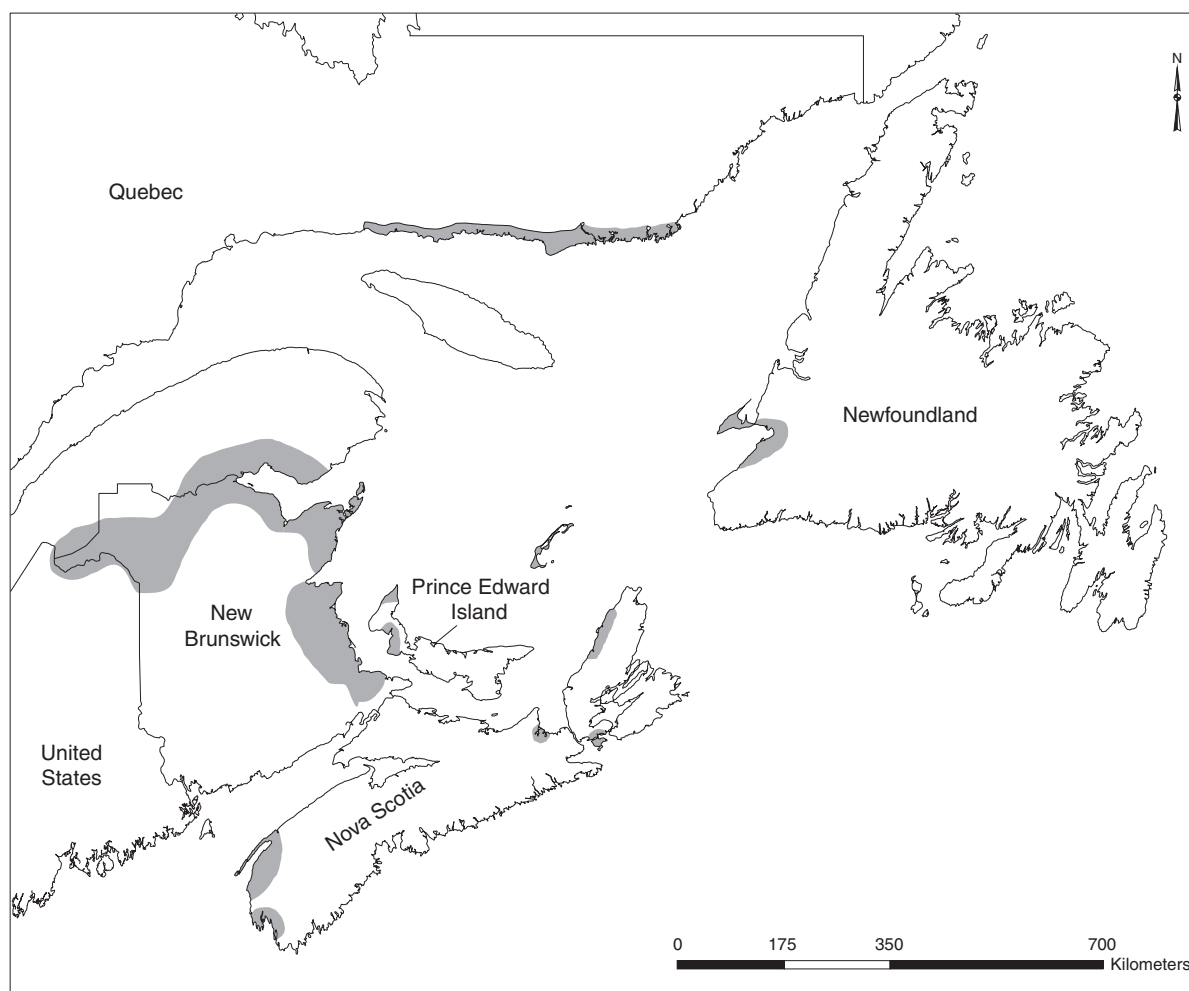
Varieties like Grosses Coques Acadian French exhibit relatively rich verbal morphology, given that they retain a number of inflectional endings now obsolete in most other contemporary spoken French varieties. For example, we see in Table 1 overt 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural marking in the form of a regularized *-ons/ont* suffix (/ɔ̃/).<sup>5</sup> The present indicative and the present subjunctive forms are distinct in 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural contexts, unlike in most other varieties of French where they are homophonous (i.e. Standard French orthographic *-ent* is phonetically null). This absence of homophony means that the amount of unambiguous mood choice data one can extract from an Acadian corpus is typically larger than would be the case for French varieties with less rich morphology. We return to Acadian verbal morphology in more detail below.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 The Communities

In line with some earlier comparative research on Acadian French, we take the south-west region of Nova Scotia, where the Acadian colony had taken hold by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a baseline variety for measuring retention of vernacular forms (e.g. Flikeid 1994; Comeau, King & LeBlanc 2016). As noted above, an important source of variation in Acadian French is degree of contact with supralocal varieties of French over the centuries, which first stemmed from the forced removal of the Acadian people from their lands during the British Expulsion of 1755-1758. The post-Expulsion dispersal of the Acadian people and subsequent years in exile involved dialect (and language) contact of various sorts, with the return from exile beginning in the 1760s and lasting for several decades. Ross & Deveau (1992) document the fact that south-west Nova Scotia saw the early return of a significant proportion of former inhabitants of the original Acadian colony at Port-Royal along with a few other pre-Expulsion settlements, making this area the most homogenous of Acadian regions to this day.

On the other hand, Acadian settlement of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, eastern Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and eastern Québec (including the Iles de la Madeleine in the Gulf of St. Lawrence), all involved complex immigration patterns and population movements. For instance, settlement of Chéticamp on Cape Breton Island (formerly known as Ile Royale) in present-day Nova Scotia involved a mix of Acadians who had been returned to France at the time of the Expulsion, others from Prince Edward Island (formerly known as Ile St-Jean), and still others who had spent time on the French islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon off the south coast of Newfoundland. While Acadian



**Map 1.** Acadian regions of Atlantic Canada (in grey).

**Table 1.** Acadian French Simple Tenses (Conservative Varieties)

Pers/Num.	Present					Present Subjunctive	Imperfect Subjunctive
	Indicative	Simple Past	Imperfect	Conditional	Simple Future		
1 sg. (je)	parle /parl/	parlis /parli/	parlais /parlɛ/	parlerais /parlɛrɛ/	parlerai /parlɛrɛ/	parle /parl/	parlis /parli/
2 sg. (tu)	parles /parl/	parlis /parli/	parlais /parlɛ/	parlerais /parlɛrɛ/	parleras /parlɛrɑ/	parles /parl/	parlis /parli/
3 sg. (il/elle/ça)	parle /parl/	parlit /parli/	parlait /parlɛ/	parlerait /parlɛrɛ/	parlera /parlɛrɑ/	parle /parl/	parlit /parli/
1 pl. (je)	parlons /parlɔ̃/	parliront /parlir/	parlions /parljɔ̃/	parlerions /parlɛrjɔ̃/	parlerons /parlɛrɔ̃/	parlions /parljɔ̃/	parliront /parlir/
2 pl. (vous)	parlez /parlɛ/	parliront /parlir/	parliez /parlje/	parleriez /parlɛrje/	parlerez /parlɛrɛ/	parliez /parlje/	parliront /parlir/
3 pl. (ils)	parlont /parlɔ̃/	parliront /parlir/	parliont /parljɔ̃/	parleriont /parlɛrjɔ̃/	parleront /parlɛrɔ̃/	parliont /parljɔ̃/	parliront /parlir/

settlement of Prince Edward Island began in earnest in 1720, involving secondary settlement on the part of Acadians from modern-day Nova Scotia, the Expulsion

resulted in some of the island’s settlers being returned to France, others escaping to what is now north-east New Brunswick and eastern Québec, and still others

exiled to present-day Louisiana. The return from exile involved the establishment of new communities, since the Acadians' original lands had become the property of English absentee landlords (Arsenault 1986).

Beginning in 1765, the previously uninhabited Iles de la Madeleine became a place of refuge for Acadians who had gone into hiding during the Expulsion. They were followed by a small group of Metropolitan French and a relatively large contingent of Acadians who had previously found refuge on the French island of Miquelon, after having been returned to France (Fortin & Larocque 2003). In the 1800s, these Iles de la Madeleine settlers were joined by other small groups of deportees who had settled in the Chéticamp and Ile-Madame areas of Nova Scotia as well as in Prince Edward Island subsequent to the Expulsion (Carbonneau 2009). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, individuals (sailors, fishermen, priests, teachers, deserters from French military service) from France and Québec also settled on the Iles de la Madeleine.

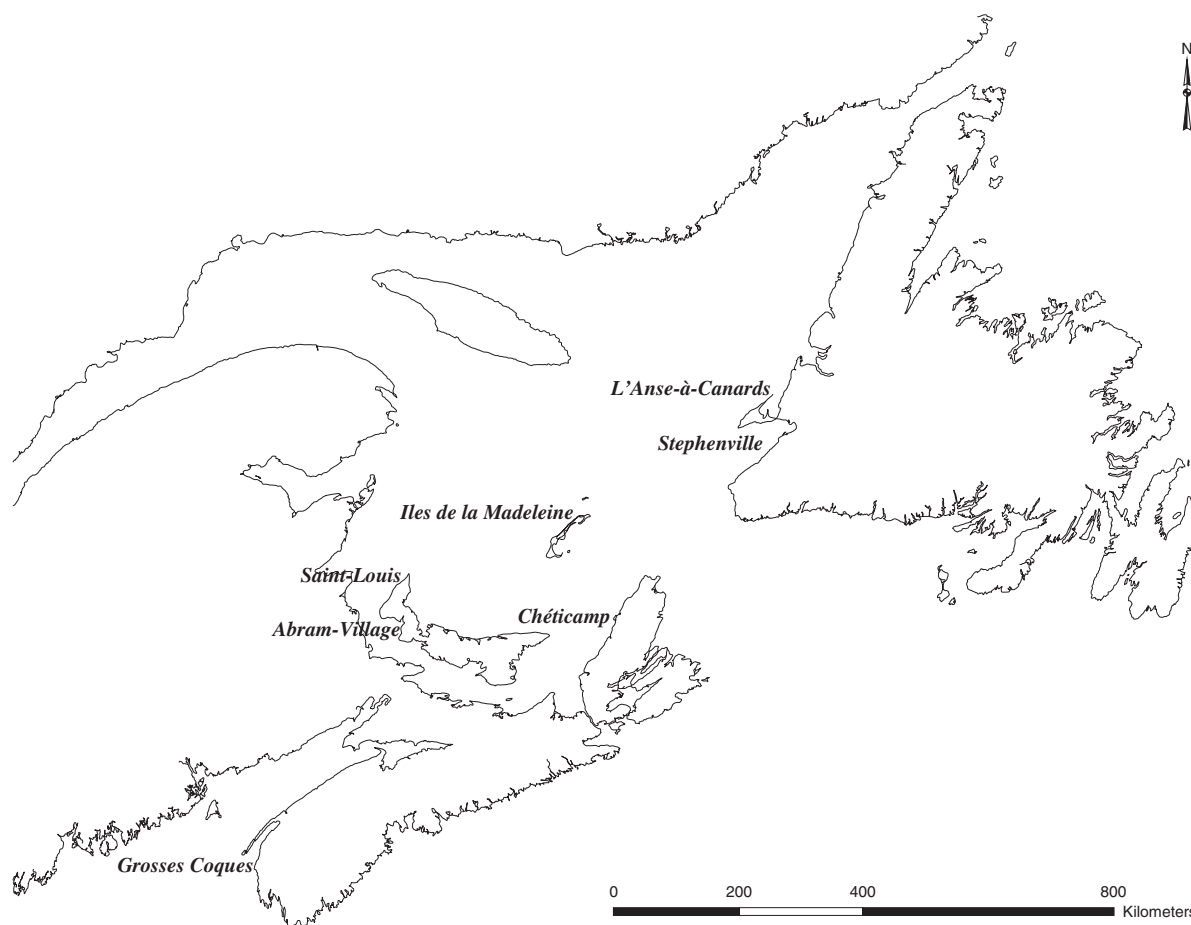
As noted above, south-west Nova Scotia has been found to better preserve traditional vernacular variants than any other Acadian variety yet studied, due to its homogeneous settlement pattern and relative isolation from supralocal varieties of French. Below we will report Comeau's (2011) results for mood choice for Baie Sainte-Marie in the south-west. The present research involves investigating mood choice in two Acadian communities in Prince Edward Island, Saint-Louis and Abram-Village. Both Saint-Louis and Abram-Village are located in French enclaves in an otherwise almost entirely anglophone province. They are distinguished by the fact that Abram-Village has had, in recent years, increased contact with supralocal varieties of French, while Saint-Louis has remained much more isolated (King 2000). For instance, Abram-Village is a franco-phone tourist destination and essential services – education, church, banking, a food co-operative – have been provided in French for several decades. By contrast, Saint-Louis has had access to French-medium education since only the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also examine mood choice for the Iles de la Madeleine, also an isolated enclave within eastern Canada, which is now part of the province of Québec. As we have just seen, from the onset of settlement, the population of the Iles de la Madeleine was diverse, comprising a majority of Acadians, but also some Québécois and some Metropolitan French settlers. In contrast to many Acadian communities, a portion of the population had had access to French language education in Miquelon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and locally from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on, provided in part by teachers and members of the clergy from France, mainland Québec and other areas of Acadia (Hubert 1926/1979; Gaudet 1979). In addition, there was substantial contact with Québec French speakers

during seasonal work in the province's lumber industry for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Acadians had also fled to the largely uninhabited Baie Saint-Georges area of western Newfoundland, with small waves of immigration from the Chéticamp area in particular continuing until the mid-1870s (Brosnan 1948; Mannion 1977). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Acadian immigration to Newfoundland included several families from the Iles de la Madeleine (Hubert 1926/1979). In addition, some parts of Baie Saint-Georges also saw significant late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement by Metropolitan French from Brittany and Normandy, creating a dialect contact situation not found elsewhere in Atlantic Canada (Biays 1952; La Morandière 1962; Butler 1994). Our final community is L'Anse-à-Canards, part of the small present-day French enclave in western Newfoundland. The community itself was settled relatively late, starting in the 1870s with Acadians who had already been established in Newfoundland for some time, having moved from Chéticamp and the Iles de la Madeleine to the Baie Saint-Georges area. The Acadian settlers were joined in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by new settlers directly from France and from France by way of the French islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon. The community's access to French language education was only at the level of the individual speaker (with some residents having been taught to read and write French by their Metropolitan French parents) until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. We will return in more detail to this community's early history below. Our research sites are indicated on Map 2.

### 3.2 The Data

The details for the corpora on which this study is based are shown in Table 2. As noted above, we will compare our own results with those of Comeau, which were based on data from the 1990 Grosses Coques corpus. Native speaker residents of the community conducted semi-structured interviews with their friends and neighbours who were between 20 and 84 years of age. At the time of corpus construction, the population of Grosses Coques numbered just over 350 residents (Comeau 2011). The King 1987-1988 Prince Edward Island corpora were constructed using the same methodology as was used for Grosses Coques. The age range for Abram-Village consultants was between 18 and 81 years and between 26 to 79 years for Saint-Louis consultants at the time of corpus construction. The populations of Abram-Village and Saint-Louis numbered 350 and 150 respectively. The L'Anse-à-Canards corpus, constructed at two points in time, 1980 and 1990, involved multiple interviews with several speakers: the age range for consultants in 1980 was between 25 and 80, many of whom participated in additional



Map 2. Acadian community research sites.

**Table 2.** Corpora breakdown by year, community, size and number of speakers

Year	Community	# of words	# of speakers
1990	Grosses Coques, NS	382,363	32
1987	Saint-Louis, PEI	308,420	19
1987	Abram-Village, PEI	477,441	24
1960-1990	Iles de la Madeleine, QC	282,179	26
1980	L'Anse-à-Canards, NL	587,828	17
1990	L'Anse-à-Canards, NL		

interviews in 1990.<sup>6</sup> The community's population was approximately 250 during the 1980s. All corpora included near equal numbers of male and female speakers. Given that no comparable sociolinguistic corpus exists for the Iles de la Madeleine, we constructed a corpus from archival recordings with older speakers recorded by Acadian folklorists either from the area or from elsewhere in Acadia. All of the Iles de la Madeleine speakers selected are descendants of the Acadians who settled in different villages on two of the islands (Ile aux Loups and Ile du Cap aux Meules). At the time of the interviews, the

population of these villages involved a minimum of 50 but fewer than 500 residents. While the age distributions across the corpora overlap considerably, it should be noted that the Iles de la Madeleine corpus has a larger portion of speakers born near the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.3 Variable Usage

In our corpora, subjunctive selection as shown in 1 (repeated as 5 below) is in variation with selection of the indicative mood, shown in 6 for the present tense:

5 *Il faut que je m'en aille.* (GC-06)

'I have to leave.'

6 *Il dit : « Faut que je le fais pour un, faut que je le fais pour deux ».* (AC-07-80)

'He says, "I have to do it for one, I have to do it for two".'

All occurrences of the matrix verb *falloir* were extracted where mood choice in the embedded clause was unambiguous. A number of tokens were excluded from the analysis due to absence of a morphological or phonological contrast between the present indicative and present subjunctive, as in 7, along with tokens in

which *falloir* is followed by the infinitival form of the embedded verb, as in 8:<sup>7</sup>

7 *Faut que l'homme aide aussi.* (AV-05)

'The husband has to help out, too.'

8 *Elle a dit : « Faut se lever de bon matin ».* (IM-08)

'She said, "You have to get up early in the morning."'

From the data for the five communities examined, we extracted a total of 1,205 tokens with the impersonal verb of necessity *falloir*, all of which were analyzed quantitatively.

### 3.4 Tense Parallelism

When investigating mood choice in French, it is important to consider the potential inhibiting effect of tense parallelism on subjunctive selection in informal speech. The phenomenon is illustrated in 9, in which conditional *falloir* triggers a conditional rather than a subjunctive form of the verb *être* 'to be' in the embedded clause.

9 *Faudrait que ça serait dans l'automne.* (AV-17)

'It would have to be in the fall.'

Such tense parallelism is widely discussed in the relevant literature on Metropolitan French (e.g. Brunot 1922; Cohen 1965; Grevisse & Goosse 2008). It has also been attested in several studies of North American French, in the case of use of the conditional in the embedded clause instead of the subjunctive. For instance, Seutin (1975) found the phenomenon to be widespread in Ile-aux-Coudres, Québec, a small island in the St. Lawrence River roughly 100 km. east of Québec City. Reporting on matrix *falloir*, Auger (1990) noted that when this verb is in the conditional, it selects the conditional or the subjunctive at near-equal rates in Québec City French. Likewise, in Poplack's (1992) study of French in Ottawa-Hull, the subjunctive is strongly disfavoured when *falloir* is in the conditional. Tense parallelism in Acadian French has a wider distribution, such as with the imperfect indicative shown in 10, where imperfect *falloir* triggers imperfect *être* in the embedded clause.

10 *Fallait que c'était deux ou trois jours avant que j'étais née.* (AC-01-80)

'It had to be two or three days before I was born.'

In the results presented below, we consider this phenomenon and its effect on mood choice.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Intercommunity Results

We begin with the results of Comeau's (2011) examination of subjunctive use in Grosses Coques (Table 3),

**Table 3.** Results for Grosses Coques, Nova Scotia (Comeau 2011)

	Main clause tense of <i>falloir</i>				
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Conditional	Future
<b>Embedded verb</b>	N	N	N	N	N
Present subjunctive	132	3	0	9	0
Imperfect subjunctive	0	61	1	21	0
Past subjunctive	1	5	4	11	0
Present indicative	0	0	0	0	0
Imperfect indicative	0	0	0	0	0
Conditional	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	133/	69/69	5/5	41/41	0
(% subjunctive)	133 (100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	

Subjunctive selection rate: 100% (n = 248)

**Table 4.** Results for Saint-Louis, PEI

	Main clause tense of <i>falloir</i>				
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Conditional	Future
<b>Embedded verb</b>	N	N	N	N	N
Present subjunctive	90	7	1	3	2
Imperfect subjunctive	17	15	8	0	0
Past subjunctive	0	1	0	0	0
Present indicative	3	0	0	0	0
Imperfect indicative	3	0	4	0	0
Conditional	0	2	0	14	0
<b>Total</b>	107/113	23/25	9/13	3/17	2/2
(% subjunctive)	(95%)	(92%)	(69%)	(18%)	(100%)

Subjunctive selection rate: 85% (n = 144/170)

for which he reports categorical use of the subjunctive with *falloir*. Although there is tense parallelism between matrix *falloir* and the embedded verb for the present, imperfect and past tenses, in no way does this phenomenon inhibit selection of the subjunctive mood. Further, even when *falloir* is in the conditional, it still selects the subjunctive (the imperfect subjunctive for the most part) and never the conditional.

This study investigates usage for the two Prince Edward Island villages mentioned above. In Saint-Louis, the community which until quite recently had little contact with normative French or with Québec or other Acadian varieties, use of the subjunctive with *falloir* is quite high, at 85% of total occurrences (Table 4), including both the present and the imperfect subjunctive, the latter shown in 11 (as well as in 3 above).

11 *Il fallait que tu restis là des fois pour des heures.* (SL-29)

'You used to have to stay there sometimes for hours.'

However, in contrast with Grosses Coques, there is more variability in the embedded clause with regards to tense

**Table 5.** Results for Abram-Village, PEI

	Main clause tense of <i>falloir</i>				
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Conditional	Future
<b>Embedded verb</b>	N	N	N	N	N
Present subjunctive	143	85	5	5	1
Imperfect subjunctive	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Past subjunctive	1	1	0	0	0
Present indicative	15	14	0	0	0
Imperfect indicative	0	9	3	1	0
Conditional	0	4	0	41	0
<b>Total</b>	143/	85/113	5/8	6/47	1/1
(% subjunctive)	158	(75%)	(62.5%)	(13%)	(100%)
	(91%)				

Subjunctive selection rate: 73% (n = 240/327)

parallelism: Table 4 shows that matrix *falloir* selects the subjunctive, with the tense of the embedded clause matching that of the matrix clause. However, unlike in the data for Grosses Coques, tense parallelism is strong when *falloir* is in the conditional, in that the conditional rather than the subjunctive is selected in the embedded clause for 14 of the 17 tokens, illustrated in 12.

- 12 *Il faudrait que je me mettrais à penser.* (SL-33)  
'I'd have to think about it.'

As for Abram-Village, the PEI community with a history of contact with supralocal spoken French varieties as well as the standard language, use of the subjunctive with *falloir* in Table 5 is at a rate of 73%, showing more mood variability in the embedded clause than in Saint-Louis. Indeed, although the present subjunctive is selected in most instances in the embedded clause, the present or imperfect indicative may also be used. With regard to tense parallelism, this phenomenon is weakened by the absence of the imperfect subjunctive in the data for this variety, resulting in all clauses embedded under imperfect and past *falloir* defaulting to present subjunctive of *faire* 'to do', as in 13. (Note that while Standard French would have *fassent* here, *faisent* is the Acadian subjunctive form for this verb.)

- 13 *Fallait qu'ils faisaient le tour de la Point-de-l'Est.* (IM-03)  
'They had to go around East Point.'

Finally, the effect of tense parallelism when *falloir* is in the conditional is as strong as in Saint-Louis since the results show that 41 of 47 tokens in the embedded clauses are in the conditional.

With a subjunctive selection rate of 90%, the overall results for Iles de la Madeleine (Table 6) are second only to those for Grosses Coques. We see that the present subjunctive is the dominant variant in all embedded

**Table 6.** Results for Iles de la Madeleine, QC

	Main clause tense of <i>falloir</i>				
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Conditional	Future
<b>Embedded verb</b>	N	N	N	N	N
Present subjunctive	89	69	1	3	4
Imperfect subjunctive	0	5	0	0	0
Past subjunctive	1	0	1	0	0
Present indicative	3	0	1	0	0
Imperfect indicative	0	2	1	0	0
Conditional	0	3	0	11	0
<b>Total</b>	90/93	74/79	2/3	3/14	4/4
(% subjunctive)	(97%)	(95%)	(66%)	(21%)	(100%)

Subjunctive selection rate: 90% (n = 173/193)

clauses with the exception of tokens when matrix *falloir* is in the conditional. However, in contrast to Grosses Coques and Saint-Louis, there are very few occurrences of the imperfect subjunctive in the data. We must keep in mind that since the corpus from which the Iles de la Madeleine data are taken is weighted more heavily towards older speakers than are our other corpora, these results could be a reflection of older speech patterns. Therefore, we may hypothesize that a comparable corpus to those for the other communities might well show no evidence at all of the imperfect subjunctive.

We may conclude, then, that Grosses Coques, Saint-Louis, Abram-Village, and Iles de la Madeleine all show high rates of subjunctive usage with *falloir*, in line with the results of variationist studies conducted elsewhere. With regard to tense parallelism, only in Grosses Coques does use of the conditional in the matrix clause not inhibit subjunctive selection in the embedded clause, understandable given the considerable "strength" of the subjunctive mood in this variety and the absence of variation in the embedded clause. Intercommunity differences with regard to degree of exposure to the standard language and to contact with Québec French and other spoken French varieties are correlated with low rates (Iles de la Madeleine) and absence (Abram-Village) of the imperfect subjunctive. On the other hand, the village of Saint-Louis, being both geographically isolated and lacking institutional contact with the standard, has retained much of the rich morphology found in Grosses Coques, our baseline community.

The decline of the imperfect subjunctive in some Acadian varieties may be understood in terms of its perceptual salience, which makes it a target for social evaluation in communities with more outside contact (e.g. Kerswill & Williams 2002). Unlike in Standard French, as Table 1 illustrates, the simple past and the imperfect subjunctive are homophonous in Acadian varieties, as has also been attested for a number of

European vernaculars (Dauzat 1927). In addition, the original <a> and <i> conjugations of the simple past have fallen together whereas the <u> conjugation for verbs with a *-re* infinitival ending remains intact (e.g. *il but* 'he drank'). The imperfect subjunctive is also regularized based on the <i> and <u> simple past in Acadian varieties (see e.g. Svenson 1959; Rézeau 1976; Gachignard 1983 for similarities in 20<sup>th</sup> century centre-west varieties). In Standard French, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural are morphologically distinct for all three conjugation groups, i.e. <a>, <i> and <u>.

Although the forms are homophonous in Acadian varieties, there is a difference in relative frequency between the imperfect subjunctive and the simple past since the former is found in past subjunctive selecting contexts exclusively and thus less frequently occurring than the latter, which is used to convey past temporal reference (for punctual events in particular). Flikeid & Péronnet's (1989) comparative study of the language use of older informants for five Nova Scotia Acadian communities and for south-east New Brunswick provides indirect evidence for the saliency of the dialectal forms. While both the imperfect subjunctive and the simple past tense had been lost from north-east New Brunswick Acadian varieties from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Geddes 1908: 274), these homophonous forms were still attested for the south-east by Flikeid & Péronnet in the speech of 5 of their 7 elderly consultants in subjunctive selecting contexts, evidence against an interpretation of the forms as being simple pasts. However, both the imperfect subjunctive and the simple past were found for the five Nova Scotia communities they studied.<sup>8</sup> For the Nova Scotia speakers, the authors comment that the forms of the simple past tense appeared to be avoided by the most educated members of the sample. Even if these speakers were unaware of the standard forms, they would have known that non-Acadian French varieties to which they were exposed do not use *-irent* and *-urent* forms. Other French varieties rely principally on the *passé composé* (e.g. *j'ai parlé* 'I spoke') and the imperfect (*je parlais* 'I was speaking') for past temporal reference. Although Flikeid & Péronnet do not report comparable avoidance for the imperfect subjunctive, the fact that it is homophonous with the Acadian simple past and distinct from Standard French and most spoken varieties might also have led to avoidance. The failure to find a reportable pattern for the imperfect subjunctive may be a function of the amount of data Flikeid & Péronnet analyzed, with only eight speakers for each Nova Scotia community.

The use of the Acadian imperfect subjunctive is to a certain extent reminiscent of another highly salient variant for the history of French (including that of Acadian varieties), i.e. the use of 1<sup>st</sup> person *je* used in combination with an *-ons* inflectional ending with plural reference (e.g. *je parlons* 'we are speaking'). As King, Martineau &

Mougeon (2011) show, *je + -ons* was stigmatized by European French grammarians from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on and was in rapid decline from higher class speech by the 17<sup>th</sup> century and from lower class speech by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for Acadian varieties, the situation is more complex but, in general, the greater the exposure to supralocal French, the more 1<sup>st</sup> person plural definite *on* is likely to dominate or entirely replace *je + -ons* (King 2013).<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, when asked what it meant to "speak well" (*bien parler*), Flikeid & Péronnet's Nova Scotia consultants singled out avoidance of 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun *je* to the same degree as avoidance of words of English origin. The pronominal variants *je* vs. *on* used with 1<sup>st</sup> person plural definite reference are illustrated in 14 and 15:

- 14 *Je descendions en bas à la boutique.* (AC-02-90)  
'We used to go down to the shop.'  
15 *Si tu veux venir on va y aller.* (IM-01)  
'If you want to come we'll go together.'

Our own corpora for the five communities under study show the following continuum in terms of proportion of *je + -ons* (vs 1<sup>st</sup> person plural definite *on* usage): L'Anse-à-Canards (1980 corpus: 97%, total n=470/488; 1990 corpus: 98%, total n=1499/1530), Grosses Coques (93%, total n=1216/1308), Saint-Louis (70%, total n=1541/2201), Abram-Village (34%, total n=777/2286) and Iles de la Madeleine (1%, total n=5/498). On the basis of our earlier discussion of the history of these communities, the results for the latter four are as we would expect. With regard to L'Anse-à-Canards, these results are likewise to be expected given that all of the varieties in contact at the time of the establishment of the community had *je + -ons*, including the Metropolitan contact variety (Gilliéron & Edmont 1902–1910; see relevant *Atlas linguistique de la France* maps cited by Flikeid & Péronnet 1989). In addition, it must be noted that until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century L'Anse-à-Canards had little contact with supralocal varieties (Butler 1994). All in all, where there is substantial contact with supralocal French at the level of the community or at the level of the individual (the latter typically in terms of exposure through education), the imperfect subjunctive (and the simple past) behave like the *je + -ons* variant: they undergo decline, in some cases to the point of obsolescence.<sup>10</sup>

Before presenting the findings for mood choice for L'Anse-à-Canards, we note that this particular variety had already been the object of a substantial amount of variationist research. To date, seven morphosyntactic variables and two pragmatic variables have been investigated for this community (see King & Butler 2005 and King 2013 for overviews). Previous studies have concluded that traditional vernacular patterns are strongly preserved in L'Anse-à-Canards French; in other words, the community generally aligns with the four Acadian communities discussed thus far. Indeed,



the community leads in the retention of *je + -ons* in the results shown above. Only one exception to this conservative pattern has been documented for the nine variables: L'Anse-à-Canards appears to have completely lost one variant in the expression of past temporal reference, the simple past. In this regard, the results are, at least superficially, not unlike our results for the Iles de la Madeleine, where only remnants of the simple past are attested in our corpus.

As can be seen in Table 7, in comparison to the results presented above for the four other communities, our findings for mood choice are very different for L'Anse-à-Canards. The overall rate of use of the subjunctive is startlingly low, at 32%, and the imperfect subjunctive is entirely absent. In fact, the rate of use of the subjunctive is the lowest reported in the literature for a variety of French in Canada. When *falloir* is in the present tense, the present subjunctive and present indicative are used in almost equal measure: there are 62 tokens of the present subjunctive and 65 for the present indicative, out of a total of 129 occurrences. When *falloir* is in the imperfect, the subjunctive is marginal at best as it occurs in only 24 of a total of 134 tokens, a selection rate of 18%, since the imperfect indicative is the preferred variant. There are insufficient data to evaluate the effect of tense parallelism with the conditional since there are only 6 such tokens in the 1980 and 1990 corpora combined. The hypothesis that the low rates of the subjunctive might be due to frequent use of *falloir* followed by the infinitive (as a possible avoidance strategy; see example 6) is not supported: the proportion of infinitival usage in the embedded clause is more or less equal across all five communities. For L'Anse-à-Canards, then, presence of the subjunctive is marginal with *falloir*. A preliminary inspection of other subjunctive-selecting contexts which also have a high rate of subjunctive selection in other French varieties, such as *vouloir* 'to want' and *aimer* 'to like', reveals that subjunctive

usage is quite low in this variety more generally. In order to explain this divergence from the other four communities, we turn to the sociolinguistic history of the community and its particular patterns of dialect contact.

#### 4.2 Explaining the L'Anse-à-Canards Puzzle

As noted above, an Acadian presence in the Baie Saint-Georges area of western Newfoundland dates from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with small waves of immigration continuing up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, some parts of Baie Saint-Georges, especially the two other coastal francophone communities of the Port-au-Port peninsula where L'Anse-à-Canards is located (Cap Saint-Georges and La Grand'Terre), also saw significant late 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement by Metropolitan French from Brittany and Normandy. Sociodemographic data drawn from nominal censuses, cadastral maps and parish registers for L'Anse-à-Canards and for the nearby almost entirely Acadian community of Stephenville for the period around 1900 allow us to reconstruct the proportion of families by community and by settlement group, shown in Table 8. In striking contrast to Stephenville, we see that over one-quarter of L'Anse-à-Canards residents arrived direct from France, or from France by way of the islands of St-Pierre and Miquelon. The majority of French settlers of L'Anse-à-Canards were men who had deserted compulsory French military service on fishing boats along this part of Newfoundland's west coast, but also included whole families, such as the Le Roy family shown in Figure 1. The father, François Le Roy, arrived in 1901 and the mother, Marie Louise Nichol, and their two sons, arrived a year later. In the photo, taken just before the family left Plouézec in northern Brittany, the family's traditional dress identifies them as of Breton origin. Oral history tells us that the parents were bilingual in French and Breton. In fact, the historical record suggests that all of the late arrivals to L'Anse-à-Canards came from Brittany, more specifically, from the present-day departments of Côtes-d'Armor and Ille-et-Vilaine. On the basis of oral history and family genealogies, most of these families have been traced to their places of origin in Brittany, shown on Map 3 (Butler 1995; Bennett 2002).

In an excerpt from the 1980 L'Anse-à-Canards sociolinguistic interview corpus, a son tells of his Breton father's home village.

**Table 7.** Results for L'Anse-à-Canards, NL

	Main clause tense of <i>falloir</i>				
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Conditional	Future
<b>Embedded verb</b>	N	N	n/a	N	0
Present subjunctive	62	24	n/a	0	0
Imperfect subjunctive	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Past subjunctive	2	0	n/a	0	0
Present indicative	65	13	n/a	0	0
Imperfect indicative	0	108	n/a	2	0
Conditional	0	1	n/a	4	0
<b>Total</b>	62/129	24/134		0/6	0
(% subjunctive)	(48%)	(18%)		(0%)	

Subjunctive selection rate: 32% (n = 86/267)

**Table 8.** Ethnolinguistic Origins for Two Newfoundland Communities, Early 1900s

	Acadian	French	English
L'Anse-à-Canards	41 (77%)	17 (28%)	3 (5%)
Stephenville	149 (89%)	4 (2%)	15 (9%)



**Figure 1.** Metropolitan French settlers of L'Anse-à-Canards, 1900.

GB: *et vous avez dit l'autre jour que votre père  
votre père était né à =*  
and you said the other day that your father  
your father was born at

JB: *=oh il est né à Quemper-Guézennec [gllnek]  
oh he was born at Quemper-Guézennec*

GB: *Quemper-Guézennec?*

JB: *Yeah en Bretagne*

GB: *Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire « Guézennec »?*  
What does Guézennec mean?

JB: *C'est c'est le (.) c'est le nom de la de la (.) petite  
paroisse*  
It's it's it's the name of the of the little parish

GB: *ah bon*  
ok

Given such relatively late settlement from France, we turn to sources in the form of French grammars and dictionaries from the period which might inform us as to mood choice in northern Brittany. For instance, the LeCompte 1910 grammar for a village near Saint-Malo, located in Ille-et-Vilaine and a major point

of departure for the French fishing fleets, mentions that the indicative often replaces the subjunctive in this community:

*Souvent ce temps est remplacé par l'indicatif : Je veux  
qu'il va [ind] pour qu'il aille [subj] (p. 25)*

'Often this tense is replaced by the indicative...'

Similarly, the Dottin & Langouët 1899 glossary for Pléchâtel, a village also located in Ille-et-Vilaine, suggests the same:

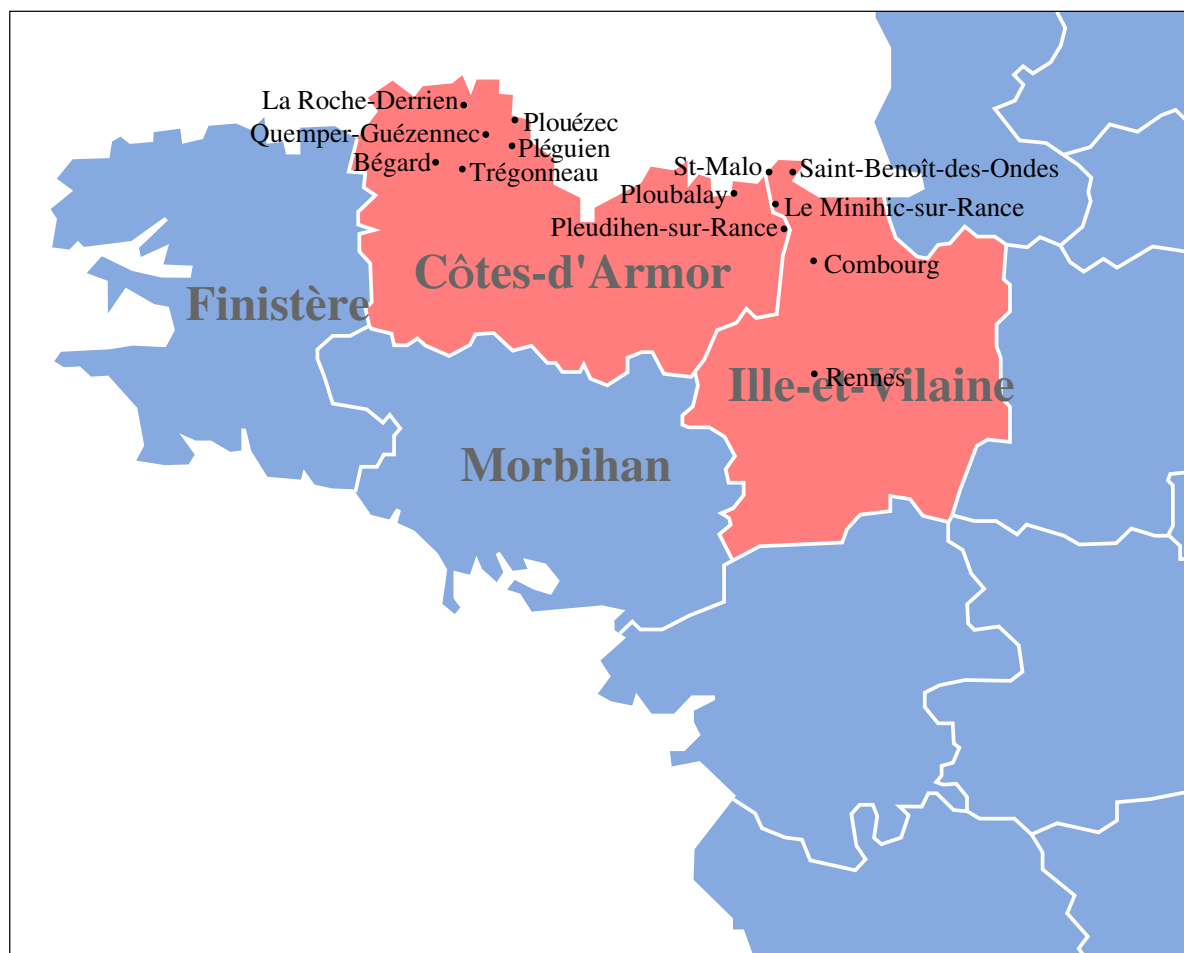
*Le présent [du subjonctif] est souvent remplacé par le  
présent de l'indicatif... (§ 221)*

'The present subjunctive is often replaced by the present indicative.'

While the commentary found in such sources suggests general tendencies, more concrete evidence is found in Gilliéron & Edmont's *Atlas linguistique de la France*, published between 1902 and 1910 and based on responses to an elaborate questionnaire which included a number of grammatical variables. When we look at data for Côtes-d'Armor and for Ille-et-Vilaine, we see results such as shown in Map 4 (ALF Map 1417), where the target sentence is *Voulez-vous que j'aille?* 'Do you want me to go?' for which consultants provided an equivalent in the local *patois* (Gilliéron & Edmont's term, commonly used in French to refer to 'local variety').<sup>11</sup> Note that we are obliged to report results for a map for matrix *vouloir* 'to want', another frequent governor which normally has a high subjunctive selection rate, because the published *falloir* ALF maps do not include data for Brittany. In Map 4, we find an almost equal number of indicative (forms in [va]), indicated by red circles, and subjunctive forms (forms in [aj]) of *aller* 'to go' in the embedded clause for the Brittany survey points, indicated by green circles.

Even more interesting is the fact that Brittany is surrounded by a virtual sea of subjunctive usage in the ALF. For example, moving further south, to the *centre-ouest*, source area for Acadian settlement in North America, all of the data indicated on Map 5 are in the subjunctive for the same target sentence. We may conclude, then, that the documentation for northern Brittany at the turn of the 20th century looks quite a lot like our results for L'Anse-à-Canards in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as both display highly variable mood choice.

Why might the northern Brittany pattern have won out in L'Anse-à-Canards, despite the fact that the community had a higher proportion of Acadian than Metropolitan settlers? Dialect contact literature such as Trudgill's (1986) landmark *Dialects in Contact* would not predict such an outcome, since the group with the larger number of speakers would be expected to provide the model for dialect convergence. In other words, all other



**Map 3.** Places of origin of Metropolitan French settlers to L'Anse-à-Canards, Newfoundland in the French departments of Côtes-d'Armor and Ille-et-Vilaine in northern Brittany.

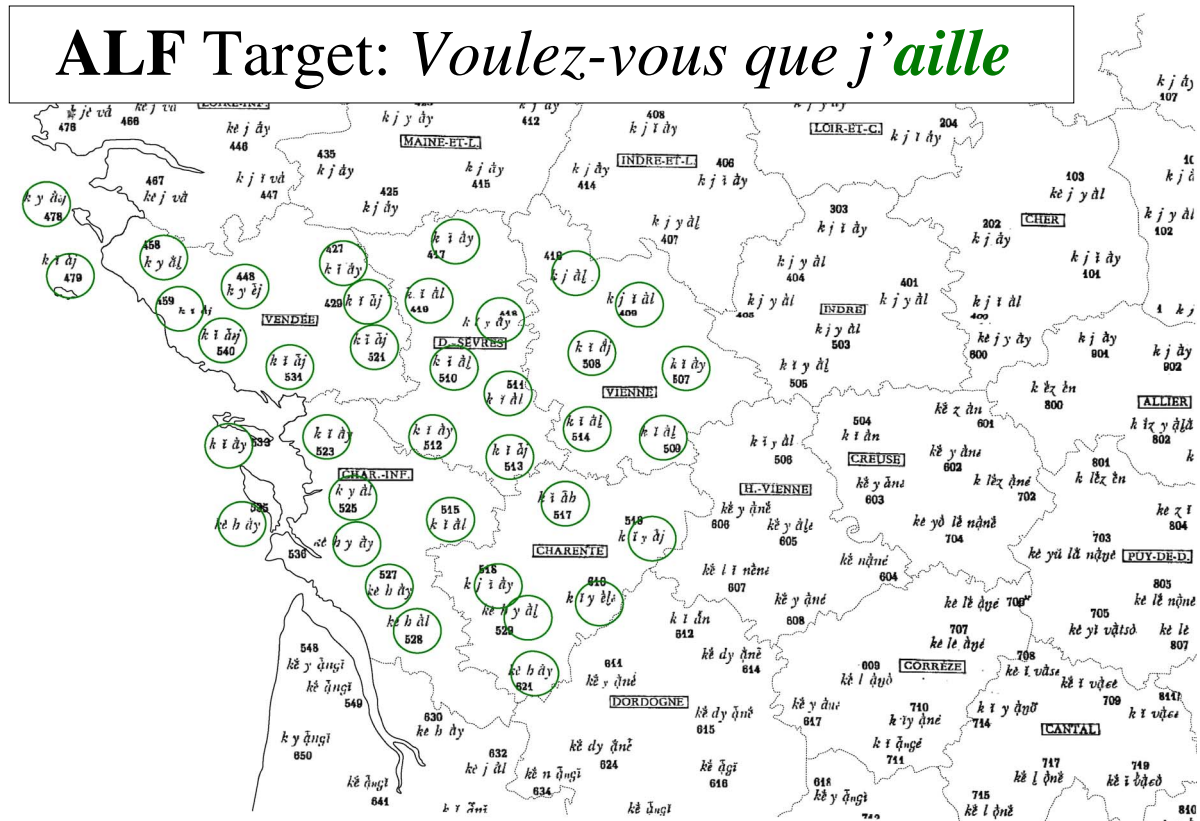
things being equal, the pattern found for the other four communities should have won out in L'Anse-à-Canards as well.

Trudgill (2008) has argued that local identity construction in face-to-face interaction does not play a critical role in the formation of (at least) colonial varieties; instead, he takes accommodation (and dialect mixture) in cases of dialect contact to be “quasi-automatic”. However, we suggest that in the present case speakers do orient their language use in the direction of particular varieties for reasons beyond the demographics of settlement patterns. We suggest that the answer to the L'Anse-à-Canards puzzle lies in the relative level of prestige attached to the Acadian and Metropolitan varieties in contact.

We base our interpretation on data from interviews conducted in the 1970s and 1980s for L'Anse-à-Canards and to some extent for the two nearby francophone communities which also saw a significant influx of Metropolitan settlers, Cap Saint-Georges and La Grand'Terre. As the folklorist Ronald Labelle (2002: 167;

see also Butler 1995) succinctly puts it, for many older residents of communities like L'Anse-à-Canards (Labelle's fieldwork was based in La Grand'Terre) “... *on se sentait encore loin de l'Acadie, loin des Maritimes et même loin du Canada*” ('...people felt far from Acadia, far from the Maritimes and even far from Canada', our translation). Similarly, Gary Butler (p.c.) notes that even the terms *Acadie* and *acadien* were rarely uttered by his L'Anse-à-Canards consultants in the 1980s: they might have occasionally spoken of some of their ancestors having come from Chéticamp in eastern Nova Scotia, but their sense of history and community culture was oriented towards their French ancestors, *les Français de France*.<sup>12</sup> Further, while Butler's (1995) overview of L'Anse-à-Canards community culture in the 1980s details traditions of daily living – fishing techniques, marriage customs, etc. – closely aligned with Acadian life in our other communities, its verbal arts – the story-telling tradition and traditional song – are vibrant echoes of the French ancestors. We suggest that this latter group, smaller in number than their





Map 5. ALF Map 1417 for the Centre-West with only subjunctive variants (green).

An unanswered question is why in fact (northern) Brittany might have exhibited much lower selection rates of the subjunctive than neighbouring areas. It is tempting to suggest a language contact explanation since the Breton subjunctive grammaticalized into a future marker early in the history of the language (Zair 2012). However, the historical record is insufficient to provide direct evidence for Breton's influence on the decline of the L'Anse-à-Canards subjunctive.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study of mood choice for Atlantic Canada Acadian communities which vary considerably in terms of type and degree of dialect contact shows a range of outcomes for the high-frequency subjunctive-selecting context, the matrix verb of necessity, *falloir*. Since these varieties all retain to some degree the rich morphology we associate with vernacular lower-class French spoken in Europe up until the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we find a higher proportion of unambiguous verbal forms than do quantitative studies of other North American or European varieties.

Taking Comeau's (2011) results for the highly conservative community of Grosses Coques, Nova Scotia as a baseline (subjunctive selection with *falloir* was found

to be categorical), we compared these results with our own four communities with complex patterns of dialect contact, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and, in some cases, continuing up to the present day. With regard to use of the imperfect subjunctive, which has disappeared from most spoken varieties of French, this usage is robust only in our most isolated community, Saint-Louis (along, of course, with Grosses Coques). In the case of Abram-Village and the Iles de la Madeleine, we may attribute loss or low frequency of the imperfect subjunctive to contact with speakers of Québec French, a variety with considerable overt prestige. Such prestige is also attached to the standard language, which has traditionally been supported by local institutions such as the school and the church.

With regard to use of the present subjunctive, the results for four of the communities are in line with those of prior quantitative research on non-Acadian varieties: subjunctive selection rates with *falloir* are high, even when we factor in the potential inhibiting effect of tense parallelism. This is not the case for L'Anse-à-Canards, however, which stands apart due to a low rate of usage of the present subjunctive (the imperfect subjunctive was entirely absent from the corpus). In order to explain these results, we pursued two complementary lines of research, one involving documentation regarding a late 19<sup>th</sup> century northern Brittany settler group which

figured significantly in the establishment of the village of L'Anse-à-Canards, and a second involving language use in a corpus for Stephenville, another francophone community in the same area which did not have such an influx of settlers from Brittany. We have shown that L'Anse-à-Canards language use does not align with Stephenville corpus data but rather with early 20th-century documentation for Côtes d'Armor and Ille-et-Vilaine in Northern Brittany.

Based on the results of ethnographic research and on consultants' metalinguistic commentary, we argue that the language use of the late-arriving settlers from Brittany soon became the local prestige variety in L'Anse-à-Canards, setting the stage for relatively low use of the subjunctive early in the 20th century in the community. We suggest that theories of new variety formation such as those put forward by Trudgill must at least in cases such as described here appeal to social, as well as purely demographic, factors in understanding the establishment of community norms.<sup>14</sup> Finally, this research strongly supports the necessity of taking heterogeneity as a starting point in the study of Acadian French varieties and the importance of exploring their sociolinguistic histories of dialect contact.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> While subjunctive usage is prescribed in many contexts, there are cases which admit variation. For instance, minimal pairs like *Je cherche un homme qui sait s'occuper de lui-même* 'I am looking for a man who can look after himself' vs. *Je cherche un homme qui sache s'occuper de lui-même* (Rowlett 2007: 155) are said to differ in degree of assertion: indicative *sait* 'knows' reflects the speaker's belief that

such a man exists while subjunctive *sache* 'knows' does not reflect such a belief.

- <sup>2</sup> Data are cited by community (GC = Grosses Coques; AV = Abram-Village; IM = Iles de la Madeleine; AC = L'Anse-à-Canards; SL = Saint-Louis; ST = Stephenville), speaker number, and corpus year in the case of L'Anse-à-Canards (1980; 1990).
- <sup>3</sup> An anonymous reviewer has suggested that subjunctive usage seems to be particularly prevalent with verbs of emotion or evaluation in south-east New Brunswick, such as *être bon que* 'be good that' and *être content(e) que* 'be happy that'. Unfortunately, we cannot test for the frequency of subjunctive usage in such contexts since they are entirely absent from all but our Iles de la Madeleine corpus, where we find only 4 unambiguous tokens.
- <sup>4</sup> As is the case with informal spoken French in general (Bauche 1920), the impersonal subject of  *falloir, il*, is variably present in our corpora. This fact is unrelated to mood choice.
- <sup>5</sup> Acadian varieties preserve, to varying degrees, archaic 1<sup>st</sup> person pronominal use (e.g. *je parlons* 'we are speaking') and 3rd person plural verbal morphology (e.g. *ils parlent* 'they are speaking').
- <sup>6</sup> Because these small communities are located within larger census catchment areas, Statistics Canada census dates were supplemented by door-to-door surveys on the part of the research team.
- <sup>7</sup> We also excluded the discourse marker  *falloir croire*, as in *Je pense qu'il avait du pouvoir, faut croire* 'You've got to think that he was powerful, right.'
- <sup>8</sup> Note that Flikeid & Péronnet did not undertake full-scale analyses of either mood choice or past temporal reference. Rather, they recorded intercommunity presence or absence of the imperfect subjunctive and the simple past and discussed differences between the two, among other variables. No quantitative comparisons are given.
- <sup>9</sup> King (2017) argues that by virtue of its perceptual salience and relative frequency in traditional Acadian discourse *je + -ons* is open to social re-evaluation by Acadians who may not even have this form as part of their actual verbal repertoire in face-to-face interaction. This is certainly the case with New Brunswick Acadians who may know *je + -ons* from artistic representations of Acadian French such as Antonine Maillet's celebrated 1971 play, *La Sagouine*, and/or from 21<sup>st</sup> century representations by Acadian musicians such as Radio Radio. In fact, today this form indexes a variety of social meanings ranging from 'bad French' to 'quaint' to 'cool'.
- <sup>10</sup> In response to a reviewer's question as to what we think these Acadian varieties might look like if there had been more access to formal education available in the community, we note that while it is the case that the standard language is often associated with conservatism, this is most typical of the written language. More importantly, the influence of the standard language slows linguistic changes in the spoken language (Milroy 2000; Trudgill 2009). That said, in communities with institutional support, upward mobility requires certain knowledge of the standard, knowledge which has caused a gradual erosion of the Acadian traditional forms in the case of the Iles de la Madeleine and Abram-Village.

- <sup>11</sup> While the present-day reader might expect the translation tasks to elicit formal-style responses, in general both grammar and lexical choice varies considerably from the elicitation sentence in the atlas. Whether in this case *votre patois* involved a variety of French or of Gallo, another Romance language spoken in Brittany, is uncertain. Certainly, the speech of the children of the original L'Anse-à-Canards settlers recorded in the 1970s and 1980s is clearly French. However, it is noted that documentation for Gallo based on 20<sup>th</sup> century surveys, cited by Auffrey (2012), who discussed his findings with the present authors, suggests rare use of the present subjunctive and almost nonexistent use of other forms of the subjunctive.
- <sup>12</sup> As Labelle also notes, in the intervening decades that connection has lessened and, moreover, local communities' ties with Acadian communities and cultural associations in Atlantic Canada have greatly increased.
- <sup>13</sup> Perhaps the best documented aspect of Acadian French phonology is nasal vowel variation, whereby its three nasal vowels undergo a number of phonological processes in stressed, open syllables (Massignon 1949; Landry 1985; Falkert 2010; Flikeid 1985). King & Ryan (1991: 1513) found a nasal vowel system for Stephenville which closely resembles that of Chéticamp but absence of such a system in L'Anse-à-Canards. For example, in the Chéticamp and Stephenville varieties /ɔ̃/ is realized [ã] or [ã̃] in this environment but only [ɔ̃] was found for L'Anse-à-Canards. King & Ryan report that the relevant *Atlas linguistique de la France* data (e.g. Maps 504 and 1051) have [ɔ̃] in almost all locations for northern Brittany and southern Normandy but mostly [ã̃] for the center-west provinces of Charentes, Vendée and Deux-Sèvres.
- <sup>14</sup> In this regard, the situation resembles that described by Friesner (2010) who argues for the importance of social factors in the spread of two phonological changes in Québec French.

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