First-person plural in Prince Edward Island Acadian French:
The fate of the vernacular variant *je…ons*

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ABSTRACT

In Atlantic Canada Acadian communities, definite *on* is in competition with the traditional vernacular variant *je…ons* (e.g., *on parle* vs. *je parlons* "we speak"), with the latter variant stable only in isolated communities, but losing ground in communities in which there is substantial contact with external varieties of French. We analyze the distribution of the two variants in two Prince Edward Island communities that differ in terms of amount of such contact. The results of earlier studies of Acadian French are confirmed in that *je…ons* usage remains robust in the more isolated community but is much lower in the less isolated one. However, in the latter community, the declining variant, while accounting for less than 20% of tokens for the variable, has not faded away. Although it is not used at all by some speakers, it is actually the variant of choice for others, and for still other speakers, it has taken on a particular discourse function, that of indexing narration. Comparison with variation in the third-person plural, in which a traditional variant is also in competition with an external variant, shows that the decline of *je…ons* is linked to its greater saliency, making it a prime candidate for social reevaluation.

Studies of both Canadian (e.g., Laberge, 1977; Thibault, 1991) and European French (e.g., Coveney, 2000) show that definite *on* has almost entirely supplanted the standard first-person plural subject clitic *nous* in informal French.[1] Indeed, it has been argued that for isolated varieties of French that have had little or no contact with the standard, the *nous* variant has probably never existed as a subject clitic (see Coveney, 2000:453 for a discussion). This is most likely the case for vernacular Atlantic Canada Acadian French. Our own studies of varieties spoken

in the provinces of Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, along with those of
Flikeid (1989) for varieties in the province of Nova Scotia, reveal no instances of
subject *nous* in either formal or informal style in large sociolinguistic corpora. In
Acadian communities, *on* is in competition with the traditional vernacular vari-
ant, *je...ons*, as shown in (1).[2]

(1) a. *Je faisions* trop de tricks quasiment.
          'We used to play almost too many tricks.'
     b. *On faisait* plus des tours qui faisaient de la fun.
          'We used to play more tricks which were for fun.'

   In this article, we examine first-person plural pronominal usage in two vari-
eties of Prince Edward Island French, those of the communities Abram-Village
and Saint-Louis, to see whether or not *on* is in the process of replacing the tradi-
tional variant, thereby bringing these Acadian varieties in line with other varieties
of Canadian French. We will consider the distribution of the two variants across
social categories and also across individual speakers.

BACKGROUND

According to Brunot (1967:335), *je...ons* began to be replaced in French in the
16th century. Although it is not to our knowledge attested in (earlier) Quebec
French, the geographical distribution of *je...ons* actually remained widespread
in France up to the late 19th century. Flikeid and Péronnet (1989) reported that
the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (1902–1910) shows that most northern vari-
eties still retained *je...ons* (with *o(z)* occurring in Picardy and *on* occurring in
the northwest) at the turn of the 20th century.[3] In Atlantic Canada, recent studies
have found that *je...ons*, typically considered one of the most salient markers of
Acadian French, remains the most frequent variant only in those Acadian com-
munities that exhibit low normative pressure from external varieties, particularly,
francophone communities in the provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland
(Flikeid & Péronnet, 1989; King & Nadasdi, 1999). In some areas of Atlantic
Canada, such as northeastern New Brunswick, it has disappeared altogether (Beau-
lieu & Cichocki, 2003).
   In our survey of the literature, we noted a link between the survival of *je...ons*
and the survival of the third-person plural traditional variant *ils...ont* (e.g., *ils
parlont* "they speak" vs. the standard *ils parlent*, where the ending is phonetically
null).[4] In the most conservative Acadian communities (e.g., L'Anse-à-Canards,
Newfoundland), usage of the first- and third-person traditional variants approaches
categorality (King, 1989). However, Flikeid and Péronnet (1989) reported the
same proportion of *je...ons* and *ils...ont* in one of five Nova Scotia communi-
ties they studied, but somewhat more *ils...ont* than *je...ons* in the remaining
four communities (e.g., 72% *ils...ont*, but 56% *je...ons* in Baie Ste-Marie, Nova
Scotia). In communities where *ils...ont* is marginal, as in northeastern New Bruns-
wick (Beaulieu & Cichocki, 2003) and in French Louisiana (Dubois, King, &
Nadasdi, 2003), *je...ons* is not attested.

TABLE 1. *Distribution of* je...ons *versus* on *by community*

Community	je...ons	on
Abram-Village	488 (18%)	2158 (82%)
Saint-Louis	1473 (76%)	453 (24%)

METHODOLOGY

Our data come from a large corpus of sociolinguistic interviews recorded in 1987 with 44 residents of two small villages in Prince Edward Island. Although French is a minority language in Prince Edward Island, there is one region, Évangéline, that constitutes a French enclave, wherein French is the majority language in a number of small villages. The French of one of those villages, Abram-Village, was chosen for study. There the situation is one of stable language maintenance, with considerable institutional support for French, with most services, such as shops, church, and the post office provided in French, along with French first-language education. The second village chosen, Saint-Louis, is located in Tignish region, where the situation is one of language shift, with French largely restricted to the speech of middle-aged and older residents, and to high-school students enrolled in "French immersion" programs aimed at second-language learners of French. In each community, local residents born and raised in the community conducted sociolinguistic interviews of at least 90 minutes' duration. For the present study, interviews for 22 individuals, representative of the age range of the larger sample and representing both sexes, were analyzed. The interview data for these 22 speakers provided 4572 tokens of first-person plural pronouns with definite reference. Following standard sociolinguistic methodology, cases of indefinite *on* (e.g., *on sait jamais ...* 'one never knows'), which do not represent instances of the variable, along with ambiguous cases with respect to the definite/indefinite distinction, were eliminated from the data set.

VARIATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNITY

Table 1 shows the distribution of the two first-person plural pronominal variants by community. We see that use of *je...ons* is limited in Abram-Village, where the vast majority of tokens contain *on*, but it has wide currency in Saint-Louis; although it must be noted that nearly a quarter of all Saint-Louis tokens do involve *on*. When we compare these results to those for a comparable number of tokens for the third-person plural variable ($n = 4892$), we find that the traditional variant (*ils...ont*) occurs with 78% frequency in Abram-Village and 83% in Saint-Louis.[5] Thus, these results are in line with those of earlier studies: *ils...ont* occurs with close to the same frequency as *je...ons* in Saint-Louis, but is far more frequent than *je...ons* in Abram-Village. We will consider why such a difference between the two traditional variants might arise.

TABLE 2. *Overall results for Abram-Village*

	je…ons	Factor Weight	Tokens
Age			
15–21	45 (11%)	.362	402
26–42	203 (20%)	.530	1015
46–61	152 (20%)	.534	750
66–81	88 (18%)	.503	480
Sex			
Female	155 (11%)	.380	1374
Male	333 (26%)	.629	1273
Language use			
French = English	0 (0%)	knockout	204
French > English	488 (20%)		2443
French education			
No French ed.	*na*	*na*	*na*
French ed., grades 1–8	305 (32%)	.709	941
French ed., grades 1–12	183 (11%)	.380	1706
Marketplace			
Least standard French	354 (27%)	.762	1292
More standard French	132 (16%)	.626	803
Most standard French	2 (0%)	.030	552

Note: na = not available.

In the quantitative analysis of the variable, a number of social factors were taken into consideration that have been shown to condition variation in both majority and minority speech communities, including age, sex, community, language use, French language education, and speakers' position in the linguistic marketplace (cf., King & Nadasdi, 1996; Mougeon & Nadasdi, 1998). Given the different status of French in the two communities, it was necessary to perform separate multivariate analyses for each community, which was achieved in a number of independent runs of GOLDVARB-2. Table 2 presents the results for Abram-Village. For this community, robust results were obtained for position in the linguistic marketplace, that is, with "how speakers' economic activity, taken in its widest sense, requires or is necessarily associated with competence in the legitimized (or standard, elite, educated, etc.) language" (Sankoff & Laberge, 1978, following Bourdieu). Those speakers with higher marketplace scores tended to use more *on* and those with lower scores used more *je…ons*.

The Saint-Louis results are somewhat different, as there is little division among speakers in terms of marketplace. Because, with very few exceptions, only students enrolled in French immersion classes can be said to be influenced by non-vernacular French, the marketplace variable was not included in the analysis of the Saint-Louis data.[6] Here, the amount of French language education emerged as significant, that is, speakers with higher levels of education used the *on* variant more frequently. These results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. *Overall results for Saint-Louis*

	je…ons	Factor Weight	Tokens
Age			
15–21	*na*	*na*	*na*
26–42	511 (96%)	.842	531
46–61	668 (73%)	.364	913
66–81	294 (61%)	.247	482
Sex			
Female	1068 (94%)	.786	1142
Male	405 (52%)	.214	784
Language use			
French = English	962 (78%)	.531	1231
French > English	511 (74%)	.469	695
French education			
No French ed.	1440 (82%)	.820	1747
French ed., grades 1–8	33 (18%)	.180	179
French ed., grades 1–12	*na*	*na*	*na*
Marketplace			
Least standard French	*na*	*na*	*na*
More standard French	*na*	*na*	*na*
Most standard French	*na*	*na*	*na*

These results are not surprising and mirror the findings of previous work on a number of other morphosyntactic variables in the two communities (cf., King & Nadasdi, 1996). The vernacular variant has much greater currency in Saint-Louis, where external varieties of French have had significantly less impact, as noted previously.

Of the remaining social variables, the most interesting is the differing contributions of speaker sex in the two communities. In Abram-Village, men more so than women favor the traditional variant, but in Saint-Louis, the star tradition-bearers are women: fully 94% of their tokens involve *je…ons*. This difference is understandable when one considers the sociolinguistic structure of each community. Following Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), we interpret the sociolinguistic behavior of women (and men) within the local context, examining the roles of women in the two communities. In Abram-Village, women are employed in a variety of occupations and take part in voluntary activities in which normative French has status (e.g., school secretary, night school teacher, member of the community theatrical group, etc.). In Saint-Louis, most women do not work outside the home, and, if they do, they work at jobs that are conducted in English. Although the Saint-Louis women are clearly fluent speakers of the Acadian variety, both participant observation and self-report data indicate that they have less contact with external varieties of French than do all the other members of our sample.[7] Not surprisingly, they make almost exclusive use of the vernacular variant.

TABLE 4. *Results for Marie*

Context	Je . . . ons	On
Narrative	21 (83%)	3 (17%)
Nonnarrative	6 (4%)	156 (96%)

Although only 18% of the Abram-Village tokens contained the vernacular variant *je . . . ons*, both the overall results and the quantitative results by social category mask the fact that what seems to be a declining vernacular variant is not simply fading away. In the following section we examine variation in the usage of individual speakers in this community.

VARIATION AT THE LEVEL OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Close inspection of the interviews shows that some Abram-Village speakers have near-categorial or categorical use of *on*. For example, one resident, Elizabeth,[8] a 35-year-old secretary at the local French-medium high school, used 99% *on*, and another, Michel, a 21-year-old accountant with many contacts outside the community and outside of Évangéline, had only *on* tokens. Their avoidance of *je . . . ons* conforms to their high marketplace ranking. For them, *je . . . ons* is stigmatized. However, when we examine the data for Abram-Village speakers with mixed usage, we find that a discourse-level constraint is operative in several cases. For such speakers, *je . . . ons* predominates in narrative contexts, whereas *on* predominates in nonnarrative contexts.

To illustrate this difference, we turn to some of the Abram-Village individual interviews in detail, beginning with Marie, who was 81 at the time. Marie had gone to school up to grade seven, not atypical for her generation. In her younger days, she had cleaned other people's houses for a living; in 1987, at the time of the interview, she lived in the local seniors' home. Her interview lasted for 90 minutes and covers a wide variety of topics concerning habitual aspects of life in her community, including her family history, childhood games, school, celebration of Christmas and other calendar customs in the old days, her early years of marriage, and, finally, life at the home. The interview contains 159 *on* tokens and 27 *je . . . ons* tokens. Twenty-one, or 83%, of Marie's *je . . . ons* tokens occur in the six narratives that she recounted during the interview, five of which were quite short. The numerical results are displayed in Table 4.

Marie's wedding day narrative is reproduced next. Following Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Labov (1997), each clause is identified by structural type (i.e., abstract, orientation, complicating action, coda, or evaluation).

Marie's Wedding Day Narrative

    Orientation
1   C'était un gros frette,
    je nous avons marié le sept de février.
    Il faisait frette!
    Il y en avait [. . .] la fille-suivante puis le garçon-suivant.
5   Puis moi, je voulais faire ça en avant de l'église,
    il faisait assez frette quand *j'avons arrivé* à l'église.
    Dans ce temps-là, c'était le vieux Père Gallant.

    Complicating Action
    J'avons arrivé à l'église, il partait pour aller administrer à un vieux qui se
    mourait.

    Orientation
    Puis dans ce temps-là, fallait aller à l'église pour le matin pour la messe à
    sept heures.
10   Puis là, *j'ons été obligé* de rester là jusqu'à onze heures, avant qu'il ait été
    [. . .] – c'était à cheval – avant qu'il était rendu.
    C'était à Ro-, fallait qu'il alle à Rocky Point.

    Complicating Action
    J'ons resté à l'église,
    je faisions du feu [.?.] tout l'avant-midi.
    J'avons arrivé chez nous, il était après douze.
15   *J'avons*, *j'avons dîné* chez nous
    puis là, *j'ons été souper* su sa mère à lui.
    Puis *j'avons revenu* chez nous pour la danse après ça.

Marie's Wedding Day Narrative – Translation

    Orientation
1   It was really cold,
    we got married the seventh of February.
    It was cold!
    There was [. . .] the maid of honour and the best man.
5   And me, I wanted to do that before church [started],
    it was pretty cold when *we arrived* at the church.
    In those days it was old Father Gallant.

    Complicating Action
    [When] *we arrived* at the church, he went to give the last rights to an old man
    who was dying.

    Orientation
    And in those days you had to go to the church in the morning for seven
    o'clock mass.

10   And then, *we were obliged to stay* there until eleven o'clock, before he came
        [...] – it was on horseback – before he was back.
        It was at Ro-, he had to go to Rocky Point.

        Complicating Action
        We stayed at the church,
        we had a fire going all morning.
        We arrived home, it was after twelve.
15   *We had*, *we had dinner* at our house
        and then *we had supper* at his mother's.
        And *we went home* for the dance after that.

The wedding day narrative involves going to the church, finding the priest absent, waiting for hours until he returns from performing last rites, getting married at last, and then going home for the wedding meal and dance. This narrative contains ten instances of the variable, all with the *je...ons* variant; both orientation and complicating action clauses are involved. *Je...ons* is the only variant that occurs in five of Marie's six narratives. (In the sixth, there are three orientation clauses with *on*.) In contrast, when Marie is talking outside the narrative context, the vast majority of tokens contain *on* (156/162), as shown next in two other excerpts, one about dating when she was young and the other about card-playing at the home.

Extract 1 (Dating):
  Ça course jeune asteure, bien plus jeune que *je coursions*, nous-autres.
  (Ah oui?)
  On coursait pas si jeune que ça, nous-autres.
  (Quel âge que vous aviez quand que vous avez commencé à -)
  Ah bien, je devais avoir seize ans dans ce temps-là quand j'ai commencé à sortir.
  Puis euh, *on sortait* pas non plus sans aller demander à son père, puis à sa mère,
  voir si *on pouvait* sortir. Asteure, asteure, je pense qu'ils demandont pas.

Extract 1 (Dating):
  They chase after the boys young today, a lot younger than *we used to chase after them*, us.
  (Yes?)
  We used to chase around not as young as that, us.
  (How old were you when you started to –)
  Well, I must have been sixteen in those days, when I started going out. And uh *we didn't go out* without asking our father, and mother, to see if *we were allowed to go out*. Now, now, I don't think they ask.

Extract 2 (Cardplaying):
  Des fois, *on joue* à la crib. D'autres fois *on joue* aux deux cents.
  (C'est ti, c'est ti des femmes contre les hommes ou c'est ti –)
  Oui.

TABLE 5. *Results for Daniel*

Context	*Je…ons*	*On*
Narrative	25 (71)%	10 (29%)
Nonnarrative	10 (4)%	214 (96%)

(C'est les femmes qui gagnent? T'es supposée de dire oui.)
Il y a des, il y a des soirs qu' *on est* des moyennes, des moyennes bandes à jouer aux cartes là puis […] *on a* de la fun.

Extract 2 (Cardplaying):
Sometimes *we play* crib. Other times *we play* two hundreds.
(Is it, is it women against the men or is it –)
Yes.
(The women win? You're supposed to say yes.)
There are, there are evenings when *we are* good-sized, good-sized *groups* to play cards and…we have fun.

Next, we turn to Daniel, 45 years old at the time of the interview and the owner of his own construction company. He completed grade 12 at the local high school, and at the time of the interview lived with his wife, Louise, the company book-keeper, and their children in their own home. Daniel's interview likewise lasts 90 minutes and, like Marie's, covers a wide range of topics. It contains nine narratives. Quantitative results are shown in Table 5. Altogether, Daniel has 224 *on* tokens and 35 *je…ons* tokens.

Twenty-five of the *je…ons* tokens occur in narratives. In the narrative reproduced next, Daniel starts talking about the time he and his friends decided to play a trick on a neighbor one Halloween. They went to the neighbor's house around 9:30 PM, but the owners caught sight of them so they went back around two in the morning and played the trick. The next morning, the police were called and went out hunting for the culprits. Although Daniel and his friends didn't get caught, he got the scare of his life.

Daniel's Halloween Tricks Narrative

Orientation
1   Bien, la Halloween, oui.
     La Halloween, c'était moins fêté que […] que la Mi-Carême.
     La Halloween, je sais pas, *on faisait* des, des […] Jack-o-lanterns.
     Il y avait des citrouilles puis euh […]
     (Oui. Avez-vous déjà fait des, des tricks su quelqu'un?)

5   Ah oui! *Nous-autres, je faisions* trop de tricks quasiment.
(Conte-moi. Conte-moi-en.)
Hein? Hein?

Complicating Action
J'avions été su ce vieux icitte une soirée

Orientation
puis euh, c'était un gars qui, il farmait pas beaucoup bien il avait beaucoup
de machineries chez zeux.
Je sais pas quoi ce-qu'il faisait avec toute avec ça.

Complicating Action
Puis *j'avons arrivé* là vers neuf heures et demie, dix heures
10   puis *j'avons dit*

Orientation
j'étions sept ou huit de nous-autres

Complicating Action
"*J'allons* toute prendre ces machineries
puis *j'allons* toute éparer ça partout dans la yard
puis *j'allons faire* un mess de sa maison."

Evaluation
15   Je sais pas comment ça se fait que *je faisions* ça.
C'était pas vraiment pas chrétien faire ça!

Complicating Action
Anyway, *j'arrivons là*
puis ils étiont toute debout
puis ils nous avont vu dans le jardin
20   puis nous-autres la peur nous prend
puis *j'ons toute décollé*.
J'avons dit: "Bien, je les laisserons faire.
Vers deux heures demain matin, *je viendrons les, les prendre*.
Là, *je ferons* le tour."
25   Puis *j'avons été* là
puis *j'avions fait* un tour.
J'avions toute éparé.
Le lendemain matin, ils s'avont levé
puis c'était un mess partout.
30   Ils aviont callé les polices
puis là, ils en aviont vu dans les jardins
puis là, les polices étiont dans les chemins.

Orientation
Puis je crois c'était la, la soirée […] de Mi-Carême, de Halloween

Evaluation/Coda
j'avais jamais eu si peur, je crois, parce-que [. . .]

Action (frame-out 1)
35   les polices, le lendemain matin, ils étiont dans les chemins
36   puis ils cherchiont les jeunes qu'aviont fait ça.
     ⌈(Vous avez fait prendre?)
37   ⌊But oh, je sais pas, *on faisait* [. . .]

Coda (frame-out 2)
38   Non, *j'avons pas fait prendre*.

Daniel's Halloween Tricks Narrative – Translation

Orientation
1   Well, Halloween, yes.
     Halloween, it was less celebrated than [. . .] than Mid-Lent.
     Halloween, I don't know, *we used to have* [. . .] Jack-o-lanterns.
     They had pumpkins and uh [. . .]
     (Yes. Did you ever play tricks on anyone?)
5   Oh yes! Us, *we used to play* almost too many tricks.
     (Tell me. Tell me some.)

Complicating Action
We went to this old man's house one evening

Orientation
and uh, he was a guy who, he didn't farm very much even though he had a
lot of machinery at their place.
I don't know what he did with all that.

Complicating Action
And *we arrived* there around nine-thirty, ten o'clock,
10   and *we said*

Orientation
we were seven or eight of us

Complicating Action
"*We're going to take* all your machinery
and *we're going to spread it* all around the yard
and *we're going to make* a mess of his house."

Evaluation
15   I don't know why *we did* that.
     It wasn't really Christian to do that!

Complicating Action
Anyway, *we arrive* there,

and they were all up
and they saw us in the garden.
20   And us, fear overtook us
and *we all took off.*
We said: "Well, *we'll leave* them alone.
Around two o'clock tomorrow morning *we'll come back* and take them.
Then *we'll play* the trick."
25   And *we went* there
and *we played* the trick.
We took everything apart.
The next morning, they got up
and there was a mess everywhere.
30   They had called the police
And then they looked in the gardens.
And then the police were cruising.

Orientation
And I believe it was the, the evening [. . .] of Mid-Lent, of Halloween

Evaluation / Coda
I had never been so afraid, I believe, because [. . .]

Action (frame-out 1)
35   the police, the next morning, they were cruising around,
36   and they were looking for the young people who had done it.
⌈(You got caught?)
37   ⌊but oh, I don't know, *we used to* [. . .]

Coda (frame-out 2)
38   No, *we weren't caught.*

In the first orientation section, there is a case of indefinite *on*, *on faisait*
(line 3), not an instance of the variable. Beginning with line 5, there is a series of
sixteen *je . . . ons* tokens, contained in orientation, complicating action, and eval-
uation clauses. After a second evaluation in line 34 (*J'avais jamais eu si peur*/'I
had never been so afraid'), Daniel sums up, moving out of the narrative in lines 35
(*les polices, le lendemain matin, ils étiont dans les chemins*/'the police, the next
morning, they were cruising around') and line 36 (*puis ils cherchiont les jeunes
qu'aviont fait ça*/'and they were looking for the young people who had done it').
In line 37, he says, *oh, je sais pas, on faisait . . .*/'oh, I don't know, we used to . . .'
and the interviewer overlaps with him with a question: *Vous avez fait prendre?*/
'You got caught?'. Daniel then returns to a second frame-out (cf., Galloway Young,
1987), the coda, in line 38: *J'avons pas fait prendre*/'We weren't caught'. This *on
faisait/j'avons pas fait* sequence is interpretable in terms of the interruption: the
question momentarily returns him to the narrative frame. In the text that follows,
Daniel clearly has moved on, and there are a number of *on* tokens immediately
following the narrative.

   In another lengthy narrative, which likewise recounts events which took place when Daniel was a child, there are five *on* tokens and eleven *je . . . ons* tokens. The beginning and end of the narrative are found below. The *on* tokens occur at the beginning, in orientation clauses in lines 1 and 2 (*Moi puis mon frère, on avait été voir pour une brouette*/'Me and my brother, we went to see about a wheelbarrow'; *On avait été su mon menoncle*/'We went to my uncle's') and in a following evaluation clause in line 3 (*puis c'est pour dire comment honteux qu'on était*/ 'and it's to give you an idea of how shy we were'). These are followed by eleven *je . . . ons* tokens, contained in complicating action clauses, such as in line 28 (*puis je nous emmenons en courant par chez nous*/'and we ran home'). The final instance of *on* occurs in line 30, in an evaluation/coda (*C'est de même qu'on était, oui, on était pas mal honteux*/'That's how we were, yes, we were pretty shy'). The variable usage displayed may be interpreted in terms of Daniel's framing in and out of narrative.

Daniel's Borrowing the Wheelbarrow Narrative, Excerpt

   Orientation
1 Je m'en souviens une fois que [. . .] moi puis mon frère, *on avait été voir* pour une brouette.
   On avait été su mon menoncle.

   Evaluation
   Puis c'est pour dire comment honteux qu'*on était*.
   Bien dans ce temps là, les [. . .] surtout les jeunes, le monde était plus honteux qu'il est . . .
5 Les jeunes aujourd'hui, bien, un gars qu'arrive icitte
   puis quand même s'il le connaîtra pas, il commencera à lui parler puis euh [. . .]
   Moi, mes enfants, c'est [. . .] je m'aperçois de ça, comparé quoi-ce j'étais, moi.

   Complicating Action
   J'avions été, j'avions été voir pour une brouette.
   Je voulions une brouette su mon oncle, Léo.
10 So *j'avons été là* puis
   j'avons arrivé au pont.
   . . .
   Ça fait boum, boum, boum
   puis nous-autres, la peur nous prend
   puis *je nous emmenons* en courant par chez nous
   J'avions pas, j'avions pas emprêté la brouette.

   Evaluation / Coda
30 C'est de même qu'*on était*, oui, *on était* pas mal honteux.
   C'était manière plus gêné.

Daniel's Borrowing the Wheelbarrow Narrative, Excerpt – Translation

Orientation
1   I remember one time . . . me and my brother, *we went to see about* a wheel-
     barrow.
     We went to my uncle's.

Evaluation
     And it's to give you an idea of how shy *we were*.
     Well, in those days, the . . . especially the young people, people were shyer
     than they are . . .
5   Young people today, well, a guy comes here
     and even though they don't know him, they'll talk to him and eh . . .
     Me, my children, it's . . . I notice that, compared to how I was, me.

Complicating Action
     We went, *we went* to see about a wheelbarrow.
     We wanted [to borrow] a wheelbarrow at my Uncle Leo's.
10   So *we went* there
     And *we arrived* at the bridge.
     . . .
     It went boom, boom, boom.
     and us, fear overtook us
     and *we ran* home.
     We didn't, *we didn't* borrow the wheelbarrow.

Evaluation / Coda
30   That's how we were, yes, *we were* pretty shy.
     It was sort of more embarrassed [than anything else].

On the other hand, outside the narrative frame, Daniel uses *on* almost exclu-
sively, such as when telling of his and his wife's settling in Abram-Village, where
he'd been born and raised, after their marriage, excerpted next.[9]

Extract 3: Settling Down in Abram-Village
     Ma femme? Elle s'appelle X. *On s'a marié* dans dix-neuf cent soixante et six. Le
     trente de juillet, dix-neuf cent soixante et six.
     (Mm hmm. I see. Comment-ce-que vous avez décide de venir à Abram-Village
     dans cette maison icitte . . . pour rester, votre famille?)
     Euh, c'était . . . ça s'adonné [. . .] quand-qu'*on s'a décidé*, *on restait* à Saint-
     Chrysostome. Et puis euh, la, la famille qui restait icitte, c'était Y. Ielle, sa femme,
     ça se trouvait ma première cousine. Et puis elle était morte juste un an avant. Et
     puis, il nous a demandé de venir rester . . . de venir rester avec lui. Puis tandis
     qu'*on a venu* rester avec lui, *on s'a déci*[. . .] lui s'a décidé de déménager à
     Summerside.
     (Ah oui?)
     Et puis nous-autres, *on s'a décidé* d'acheter sa maison.

Extract 3: Settling Down in Abram-Village – Translation

My wife? Her name is X. *We got married* in 1966. The thirtieth of July, 1966.
(Mm hmm. I see. How did you decide to come to Abram-Village in this house here . . . to stay, your family?)
Eh, it was . . . when *we decided, we were staying* in Saint-Chrysostome. And eh, the, the family was living here, it was Y. Her, his wife was my first cousin. And she had died the year before. And then, he asked us to come and stay . . . to stay with him. And when *we came* to stay with him, *we decid*[. . .] he decided to move to Summerside.
(Oh yes?)
And us, *we decided* to buy his house.

We argue that Daniel and Marie's interviews reveal a pattern, whereby *je . . . ons* serves as a marker for the performance of narratives of personal experience. An objection that might be raised to this interpretation is that what we are calling narrative versus nonnarrative context might be more accurately considered as a formal versus informal contrast, recalling that in Labovian methodology, the elicitation of narratives of personal experience is a technique for getting at the interviewee's informal style. However, there are a number of arguments against this analysis of our data. First, the contrast obtains even when we consider highly reduced narratives, consisting of only three or four narrative clauses. Second, one good indicator of level of formality in the Acadian context is the frequency with which speakers use words (which they view as) of English origin. In the interviews on which this analysis is based, we detect no difference in such frequency in narrative versus nonnarrative contexts in the insider interviews that serve as our data base.

In *Verbal Art as Performance*, Bauman (1977:17) discussed the culturally conventionalized means by which members of a speech community key the performance frame. The communicative resources employed may include, among others, figurative language, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, and special codes. Special codes may involve "one or another linguistic level or features". In the present instance, use of a particular grammatical variant keys the performance of a specific verbal genre, narration. *Je . . . ons* is available for such use, as it is, in Cornips and Corrigan's (in press) terms, a low-level morphosyntactic variable, open to social (re)evaluation in a way that high-level variables (e.g., passivity) might not be. In our corpus, narration usually involves narratives of personal experience, but also includes family and community narratives.[10] Because the variable at issue involves first-person plural reference, unsurprisingly it occurs most frequently in narratives of personal experience.

What of other Abram-Village residents who show mixed usage? In terms of the presence or absence of discursive constraints, two other types of speakers emerge. First, there are speakers who use a significant number of *je . . . ons* tokens overall. This is the case of Carole, an 18-year-old high school senior, who uses the traditional variant 80% of the time. Her interview contains two narratives, both of which have *je . . . ons*, not *on*.[11] That Carole, an educated young woman, would

TABLE 6. *Results for Sylvie*

Context	Je…ons	On
Narrative	34 (59%)	24 (41%)
Nonnarrative	15 (8%)	182 (92%)

have such a high frequency of use of the vernacular variant is not surprising. As Flikeid (1992) argued, education level alone gives us an incomplete picture of Acadians' relative sensitivity to the relationship between standard and vernacular usage. It does not take into account the various ways in which one is exposed to standard varieties, for example, through contact with outsiders, through jobs that may be interpreted as low in terms of one's socioeconomic status, but that bring one into contact with, or require, use of the standard or legitimized language. We suggest that Carole's age indicates a lack of life experience needed to recognize the sociosymbolic meaning(s) of the two variants.

Second, there are speakers for whom the narrative/nonnarrative split is not as clear as in the case of Marie and Daniel, but who do tend to use *je…ons* in narrative. This is the case for Sylvie, a 42-year-old letter carrier and amateur actor, who uses this variant 23% of the time. Her interview contains eleven narratives and her use of the variable is shown in Table 6. Here we see a high proportion of *on* tokens overall, but with *je…ons* is found somewhat more frequently than *on* in narratives. However, turning to the individual narratives, we find that two of the eleven have only *on* tokens, ten such tokens in total. In the remaining nine narratives, there are fourteen *on* tokens and thirty-four *je…ons* tokens. In these narratives all but one clause containing complicating action have *je…ons*.[12] *On* is limited to orientation and evaluation clauses (sometimes evaluation and coda clauses combined) near the beginning or end of the narrative. Thus, in the majority of Sylvie's narratives, the pattern is similar to what was found for Daniel. One might ask why she is more "advanced" than Daniel, an Abram-Village resident of around the same age. More specifically, why has *on* "taken over" in two of her narratives? The answer most likely lies in Sylvie's participation in voluntary activities involving frequent contact with speakers of external varieties. As an actor in local summer theatrical productions, she has significant contact with francophone tourists, particularly tourists from Quebec, for whom *on* is the only informal variant (cf., Laberge, 1977). These results, then, show that a particular declining variant is not simply fading away. Some Abram-Village speakers have abandoned the traditional variant *je…ons*, while others continue to use it quite frequently. But for some mixed-use Abram-Village speakers, it has taken on a new function in discourse, that of indexing the performance of narratives of personal experience, a function observable in a stylistically rich database.

THE FATE OF *JE...ONS*

In general, then, contact with other varieties leads certain Acadian French forms to be viewed as substandard. Abram-Village speakers make less frequent use of the vernacular variant, and consequently, use *on* to a greater extent. However, participating in an education system that extols the virtues of the standard variety results not in widespread use of the standard variant *nous*, but, rather, in the stigmatization of the traditional variant, *je...ons*, and rise of the colloquial French *on*. Saint-Louis speakers, on the other hand, have had little contact with other varieties; they do not appear to consider *je...ons* to be stigmatized and therefore make frequent use of this form. But stigmatization is only part of the *je...ons* story. For some Abram-Village speakers, rather than being stigmatized, *je...ons* has instead become associated with a particular discourse function, that of indexing the performance of oral narrative.

We noted previously that our results confirm a general tendency in Acadian varieties for the first-person vernacular variant *je...ons* to be less well preserved than the third-person form, *ils...ont*. It is safe to say that *ils...ont* (76% of occurrences of the third-person plural variable) has not undergone the fate of *je...ons* (18% of occurrences of the first-person plural variable) in Abram-Village. We suggest that this discrepancy occurs because the contrast between the vernacular and nonvernacular forms is more marked in the first-person plural than in the third-person plural. A comparison of the two cases shows that what differentiates the two variables is that the first-person variable involves a change in pronominal clitic along with loss of a suffix on the verb (e.g., *je parlons* vs. *on parle*), while the third-person case involves (uniquely) loss of the suffix (e.g., *ils parlont* vs. *ils parlent*). Further, the retention of the *-ont* suffix in the third-person plural may be reinforced by the occurrence in the standard variety of high-frequency irregular verbs with *-ont*, such as *aller* "to go" – *ils vont*, *être* "to be" – *ils sont*, and *avoir* "to have" – *ils ont*. The fact that the first-person plural vernacular variant is highly distinctive, providing a marked contrast with the *on* variant, seems to be the motivation for its strong association with local norms and its reevaluation, either as a performance key or as a stigmatized variant.

NOTES

1. There is variation across Acadian French varieties as to whether the subject "pronouns" constitutes syntactic subjects or verbal affixes (cf., King & Nadasdi, 1997; Balcom & Beaulieu, 1998); we ignore this issue here.

2. All data cited come from the 1987 sociolinguistic interview corpus for Prince Edward Island French constructed under the direction of Ruth King.

3. Lodge (1998:114) showed *je...ons* remained in use in pre-Revolutionary Paris; further, the data in the *Dialogues révolutionnaires* suggest that it was widely used by members of the lower classes (both cited by Coveney, 2000).

4. Like *je...ons*, *ils...ont* is an example of archaic usage surviving in Acadian, appearing in France as early as the 13th century. According to Nyrop (vol. 2, no. 61), *ils...ont* was in widespread usage in the center-west of France at the time of Acadian emigration from that area.

5. King & Nadasdi (1996) provided a full discussion of the *ils...ont* variable in Prince Edward Island Acadian, and Dubois, King, & Nadasdi (2003) provided a comparison of Atlantic Canada Acadian and Cajun usage.

6. As we have not included data for French immersion students in this analysis, there are no younger speakers (i.e., between 15 and 21 years of age) in the Saint-Louis sample used here. We have found in other research that these young Saint-Louis residents do not control vernacular variants (King, 2000).

7. These results are in line with the results of King & Nadasdi (1999), where the Saint-Louis women stood out from the rest of our consultants, in that case, as the most frequent and most innovative codeswitchers.

8. All names are pseudonyms.

9. Although this excerpt does involve the temporal sequencing of past events, it constitutes a report rather than a narrative, as no evaluation expressing the relevance of this account to the present discourse is provided (see Fleischman, 1990; Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967).

10. Butler (1991) found that these three types of narratives predominated in his corpus-based study of narratives in a Franco-Acadian community in the mid-1980s.

11. Like many younger speakers, Carole does not produce as many narratives as do older residents. However, her high frequency of *je...ons* usage across discourse genres is our primary interest.

12. The tendency toward use of *je...ons* in clauses involving complicating action suggests that such usage may involve a foregrounding strategy. Hopper (1979:213) noted that it is "a universal of narrative discourse that in any extended text an overt distinction is made between the language of the actual story line and the language of supporting material which does not itself narrate the main events," referring to the former as foreground and the latter as background. We thank Jen Smith for pointing us toward this work.

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