



2005

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Anne-Marie Brousseau

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Recommended Citation

Brousseau, Anne-Marie (2005) "The Sociolect of 17th-18th Century French Settlers: Phonological Clues from French Creoles," *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 5. Available at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/pwpl/vol10/iss2/5>

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The Sociolect of 17th-18th Century French Settlers: Phonological Clues from French Creoles

The Sociolect of 17th-18th Century French Settlers: Phonological Clues from French Creoles[†]

Anne-Marie Brousseau

1 Introduction

Data on the varieties of French spoken in North America have proven useful for explaining the genesis of French Creoles by clarifying some features of French as spoken at the time of the formation of the Creoles (cf. for instance Chaudenson 1979, 1994, Valdman 1978, 1979). In this paper, I will show how, conversely, linguistic data on Creole languages can shed some light on the dialectal and sociolectal varieties of French that were spoken in North America in the 17th and 18th centuries. There is a widespread assumption in the literature on French Creoles (e.g. Chaudenson 1979, Lefebvre 1998) that the phonetic shape of Creole words reflects the pronunciation of the corresponding words in 17th-18th century French. There is also a consensus on the geographical origins of the settlers who emigrated to the Antilles, an origin they shared with those who colonized New France. French settlers in America were mainly from the western and central regions of France (Brasseur 1997, Chaudenson 1979, 1994, Hull 1974, 1994, Valdman 1978, 1979), Poitou-Charentes being the region which exported the highest number of settlers to New France.

There is no consensus, however, on the actual dialects and/or sociolects spoken by the French settlers, particularly when pronunciation is taken into account. It is well known that phonology, phonetics and the lexicon are the areas of the language that exhibit the most patent variation. In New France, either the settlers included an important number of *patoisant* speakers—i.e. speakers of a regional dialect of French that diverged strongly from the central norm of Paris—(Barbaud 1984, Rivard 1914) or they were for the most part speakers of French (e.g. Asselin and McLaughlin 1981, 1994, Hull 1994, Poirier 1994). Moreover, the settlers spoke either a basilectal, popular French (e.g. Brasseur 1997), or a mesolectal French (e.g. Hull 1994), a local variety of the Parisian norm, referred to as Regional Standard French (Le-

[†]The research was made possible by the financial support of SSHRC. I want thank the informants who provided the data on Creoles and to the research assistants who provided, with infinite patience, the data on French /h/ from numerous historical sources. I would like also to thank the audience at the NWAWE conference for their comments and suggestions. The usual disclaimers apply.

febvre 1998). This latter view is, as I will show, most consistent with the linguistic data on French Creoles.

Many of the studies cited above base their conclusions on demographic work. Thus, linguistic data, and especially data from French Creoles in the Americas, can shed light on the varieties of French spoken in North America.

In the following pages, I will show that some phonological properties found in French Creoles may have emerged only if corresponding phonetic cues were present in the varieties of French to which the creators of the Creoles were exposed. Within the limits of this paper, I will confine my demonstration to the phonetic realization of Creole words that correspond to French words with an initial aspirated /h/. I will first sum up the various points of view on the varieties of French spoken in New France, then present the linguistic data on aspirated /h/ in Creole languages and in the French of the 17th-18th century.

2 The French Spoken by 17th-18th Century Settlers in New France

In the literature on the varieties of French spoken in New France during the 17th century, points of view diverge on three aspects: 1) the linguistic homogeneity/heterogeneity among the settlers; 2) the diatopic aspect of the variation (regional diversity); 3) the diastratic aspect of the variation (social variation) (cf. Mougeon and Beniak 1994).¹

Regarding the first aspect, the various viewpoints on linguistic homogeneity may be placed on a continuum, with Barbaud (1984) and Asselin and McLaughlin (1981, 1994) representing the two poles. In his “clash of the patois”, Barbaud (1984) develops the idea of a heterogeneous linguistic community, consisting of three groups of speakers: *patoisant* (i.e. speakers of various patois with no competence in French), *semi-patoisant* (i.e. speakers of various patois with a passive competence in French) and *francisant* (i.e. speakers of a variety of French close to the Parisian norm). The divergent linguistic varieties at play make communication impossible within the community, and will gradually blend into a common language. In fact, Barbaud elaborates on various ideas previously put forward by scholars such as Rivard (1914) and Brunot (1966-69): that the majority of speakers are *patoisants*; that French is spoken only by settlers from the Parisian region;

¹For a current and comprehensive overview of the debate on the French spoken in New France, see the Presentation in Mougeon & Beniak (1994).

that patois and French are distinct languages; that patois and French are mutually unintelligible, as are the various patois among themselves.

Asselin and McLaughlin (1981, 1994) assume instead a linguistic community that shares, from the start, a common language, the “French of the people”. This shared language will gradually undergo linguistic change, acquiring some features of the regional varieties also present. Between these two poles, Chaudenson (1994), Hull (1994), Niederehe (1987) and Valdman (1979) suppose that the settlers form a relatively homogeneous community, where diverging linguistic features do not impede communication. For instance, Poirier (1994) states that the settlers can all (or almost all) speak French, that is, popular varieties of French with regional characteristics that will be unified during the first decades.

Regarding the second aspect, the diverging linguistic features are ascribed by most to the diversity of the regions from which the settlers come. The bulk of the settlers emigrated from three main regions (in descending order of importance): western France (present-day Poitou-Charentes), Normandy (including Perche), and Paris. While Poitou-Charentes is the region which exported the highest number of settlers to New France during the entire 17th century, Parisian settlers outnumbered settlers from Normandy after 1663 (Charbonneau and Guillemette 1994a). This regional diversity may account in varying degrees for the features that distinguish French in New France from French in France. As discussed above, the distinguishing features may have been present from the start (Barbaud 1984) or they may have evolved later (Asselin and McLaughlin 1994). Furthermore, the varieties may have been so disparate (including patois) as to constitute different languages or they may have been close dialects of a same language.

Regarding the third aspect, most viewpoints converge in identifying the French spoken in New France as varieties of popular French (Asselin and McLaughlin 1981, 1994, Brasseur 1997, Chaudenson 1994, Poirier 1994). Hull (1994) takes a different standpoint, stating that the majority of settlers were speakers of mesolectal varieties of French, that is varieties that are situated halfway between the acrolect (literary French) and the basilects (patois and regionally marked popular French). These mesolectal varieties would exhibit some regional features, without being as regionally marked as basilectal varieties. On the other hand, Niederehe (1987) attributes more importance to diastratic variation than to diatopic variation, mentioning that the “good French” used by the higher classes is found in the provinces as well as in Paris. Morin (1994) shows evidence for an early and radical alignment on the central norm of France, in both cases of regional French in France and of French in New France.

In short, the more widespread assumptions concerning the varieties of French spoken in New France during the 17th century can be summed up as follows. The settlers formed a (relatively) homogeneous linguistic community, where communication was possible. They were speakers of popular French, characterized by features of regional variation. Assuming shared geographical and social origins for all French settlers of America, these assumptions would also apply to the French settlers of the Antilles.

3 Aspirated /h/ in Atlantic French Creoles

The data provided by dictionaries, lexicons and the documentation on the pronunciation of Atlantic French Creoles reveal that French words with an initial aspirated /h/ made their way into the Creoles with an initial consonant. In most Atlantic French Creoles, the initial /h/ corresponds to the velar fricative /ɣ/ (written ‘r’ in the orthography)², while in St. Lucia and Louisiana Creoles, the aspirated /h/ is realized as such, as seen in Table 1.³

<u>French</u>	<u>Haiti/French Guyana/ Martinique-Guadeloupe</u>	<u>St. Lucia/Louisiana</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
hache	rach	hach	ax
haillon	ranyon	hanyon/hayon	rags
haïr	rayi	hayi	to hate
héler	rele	hele	to hail, call

Table 1: French words with initial aspirated /h/ and their Creole equivalents

This correspondence between the French and Creoles forms can be explained straightforwardly if we assume that the aspirated /h/ was actually pronounced in the varieties of French to which the creators of the Creoles were exposed. However, as will be discussed in Section 4, this contradicts many sources on historical French, which claim that the phonetic realization of /h/ was lost in French well before the period when the Creoles were formed. Alternatively, the initial fricative of Creole forms could be explained as the result of a strategy to avoid onsetless syllables word initially, presumably because the creators of Creoles would have preferred unmarked CV syllables over more marked V-initial. Thus, the correspondences in Table 1 would be merely coincidental. At first sight, this hypothesis is attractive, as it

²Throughout the paper, the Creole examples are written following the orthographic standards in use in Haiti and St. Lucia.

³Within the limits of this paper, I will not attempt to provide an explanation for the different realizations of the fricative (i.e. /h/ versus /ɣ/).

could also explain the presence of nouns whose form includes an agglutinated determiner (cf. the first forms in Tables 3 and 4 below). V-initial nouns of French would have made their way into the Creoles with a definite determiner in order to avoid V-initial syllables, deriving forms such as *lajan* 'money' (from French *l'argent* 'the money') or *lè* 'hour' (from French *l'heure* 'the hour').

Three sets of facts rule out this hypothesis. First, the correspondence between the French and Creole forms is too systematic to be a coincidence. A comprehensive examination of the forms in Haitian and St. Lucian (two of the Atlantic Creoles for which there is more than one extensive dictionary) reveals that the correspondence is categorical. As shown in Table 2, all the h-initial French words that made their way into these two Creoles are realized with an initial fricative, with the sole exception of *hoquet*, which begins with a vowel in St. Lucian. Similarly, save for a few words recently borrowed from English, all h-initial words of St. Lucian correspond to h-initial French words. In Haitian, all r-initial words correspond to French words with an initial consonant, either /r/ or /h/.⁴

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>St. Lucian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
hache	rach	hach	ax
hacher	rache	hache	to grind
hachett/hachotte	rachèt/rachòt	hachòt	hatchet
hachis		hachis	mincemeat
hachoir		hachwa	mincer
harde(s)	rad	had	clothes
hardi	radi	hadi	insolent
hardiesse	radyès	hadiès	insolence
halles	ral	hal/lahal	slaughterhouse
hâle	ral		sunburn
hâlé	râlè		sunburnt
haler	râlè	hale	to pull, haul
hamac	ramak	hanmak	hammock
hanche	ranch	hanch	hip
hennir	ranni	hanni	to neigh, howl

⁴The other phonological differences between the French and Creole forms are not relevant here. They are regular correspondences that do not affect in any way the realization of the aspirated /h/ (e.g. suppression of the post-vocalic /r/ of French words, rounding of /y/ before round vowel, replacement of round front vowels of French by round back vowels).

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>St. Lucian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
hennissement		hannisman	neighing
haillon	ranyon	hanyon	rags
happer	rape	hape	to snatch
hareng	raran		herring
harasser		hawaser	to harass
haïr	rayi	hayi	to hate
hâissable	rayisab		hateful
hâissement	rayisman	hayisman	hatred
héler	rele	hele	to hail, call
haine	rènn	hènn	hatred
haut	ro/wo	ho	high
hoquet	rokèt	otchèt	hiccups
homard	roma	houma	lobster
hongre	rong		gelding
honte	ront/wont	hont/honte	shame
hausse	ros		increase
hausser	rose	hose	to raise
hauteur	rotè/wotè	hotè	height
houe	rou	hou	hoe
hublot	roublo		porthole
houppe	roup		tuft
housse	rous		cover
haussement	wosman	hosman	raising

Table 2: French words with initial aspirated /h/ and their Creole equivalents

Second, given the preferred CV-syllable hypothesis, we would expect the initial fricative to appear with all kinds of V-initial words of French, either systematically or, at least, with a certain regularity. In fact, as exemplified in (3) and (4) below, French words with an initial vowel or mute (never realized phonetically) *h* never have a Creole counterpart with an initial fricative. V-initial words abound in the two Creoles, regardless of the phonological properties (nature of the vowel, number of syllables) or morphological properties (simplex or derived word, noun, verb or adjective) of the word.

Third, the preferred CV-syllable hypothesis also cannot account accurately for the agglutinated determiner. While many nouns appear in the Creoles with an agglutinated determiner, the great majority of V-initial words of French that made their way into the Creoles begin with an initial vowel (cf. Table 3). The same holds for words with an initial mute *h* in French; most of their Creole equivalents are realized with an initial vowel (cf. Table 4). For

example, Valdman (1981) lists 465 words beginning with /a/ and 16 words beginning with /la/ where /la/ corresponds to the agglutination of the determiner to an a-initial French word. Agglutination is thus found in only 3.3% of the forms in this case.

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>St. Lucian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
(l') argent	lajan	lajan	money
(l') école	lekòl	lekòl	school
(l') esprit	lespri	(l)espwi	mind, intelligence
(l') orage	loraj	loway	storm, thunder
accuser	akize	akize	to accuse
aller	ale	ale	to go
embêter	anbete	anbete	to bother
aider	ede	ede	to help
innocent	inosan	inosan	innocent
utile	itil	itil	useful
ordinaire	odinè	odinè	ordinary
ouvrir	ouvri	ouvè	to open

Table 3: some V-initial French words and their Creole equivalents

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>St. Lucian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
(l') heure	lè	Lè	hour
(l') hiver/(en) hiver	(l)ivè	livè/nivè	winter
(l') hôpital	lopital	lopital	hospital
(l') honneur	onè	lònnè	honour
(l') histoire	istwa	listwa	story, history
habiller	abiye	abiye	to dress
habituer	abitwe/abitye	abitwe	to accustom to
héritier	eritye	ewitye	heir, heiress
humide	imid	imid	humid, damp
hypocrite	ipokrit	ipokwit	hypocrite
honnête	onèt	onnèt	honest

Table 4: some French words with initial mute *h* and their Creole equivalents

Furthermore, the agglutinated determiner also appears in words whose French equivalents begin with a consonant (cf. Table 5), that is in contexts where the initial syllable was already of the preferred CV type. Thus, what-

ever the reason explaining the agglutination of determiners in the Creoles, it cannot be the result of a strategy to avoid V-initial syllables.⁵

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>St. Lucian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
(la) boue	labou	labou	mud
(la) charité	lacharite	lachawite	charity
(la) fumée	lafimen	lafime(n)	smoke
(la) rivière	larivyè	lawivyè	river
(la) rue	lari	lari	street
(le) créateur	kréatè	lekweatè	God
(du) feu	dife	dife	fire
(du) riz	diri	diwi	rice

Table 5: Creole words with agglutinated French determiner

Cutts (1994:161) proposes a second alternative hypothesis to explain the correspondence between Haitian /ɣ/ and French /h/. He claims, following Faine (1937), that “the Haitian French creole [sic] has such a great predilection for aspiration that this sound is very often used in words that begin with a vowel in standard French”. The only form given by Cutts (and by Faine) as an example of this predilection is *renmen* ‘to love’ (from French *aimer*). Interestingly, this is the sole clear example that can be given for the so-called widespread use of aspiration. Of all the *r*-initial words listed in Haitian dictionaries (396 in Valdman’s, 397 in Ebenezer Evangelical Missions’), only four correspond to V-initial French words (cf. Table 6). Two of these words also have a V-initial variant (*rego/egou*, *woulèt/oulèt*), two may be the result of metathesis (*rak*, *woulèt*), leaving only *renmen* as a possible case of aspiration.

⁵A more promising explanation may be found in some morphological and syntactical properties of Fongbe and other Gbe languages, which constitute the main substratum for Haitian Creole (Lefebvre 1998, Singler 1993). On the one hand, the determiners appear post-nominally in these languages. On the other hand, some nouns begin with a specific vowel (/a/, /e/ or /o/) that seems to be the remnant of a nominal class prefix. These two features may have led the creators of the Creoles to analyze the /l/ or /la/ of the French determiner as part of the noun in some cases.

<u>French</u>	<u>Haitian</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
aimer	renmen	to love
âcre	rak	acid, bitter
égoût	rego/egou	drain, sewer
ourlet	woulèt/oulèt	hem

Table 6: *r*-initial Hatian words corresponding to French V-initial words

To summarize, the presence of an initial fricative in forms like those in Tables 1 and 2 cannot be traced back to a preference for CV syllables, an hypothesis that is ruled out independently as an explanation for the agglutination of determiners. Nor can it be traced back to a general predilection for aspiration. Neither /h/ or /ɣ/ appear initially in Creole words whose source is a French word beginning with a vowel or a mute *h*. The correspondence between French aspirated /h/ and Creole initial fricative is categorical (with only one counterexample in St. Lucian). Thus, the only reasonable explanation for this systematic correspondence is the following. Forms such as those in Table 2 are realized with an initial fricative in St. Lucian and Haitian because the corresponding forms of French were realized with a fully pronounced aspirated /h/. It follows then, that the aspirated /h/ was phonetically realized in the varieties of French spoken during the period of the formation of the Creoles, that is between the mid-17th to the mid-18th century (Lefebvre 1998, Singler 1993).

4 Aspirated /h/ in 17th-18th Century French

In modern French, the contrast between mute *h* and aspirated /h/ reveals itself only at the underlying levels of syllable structure. The actual pronunciation of a fricative consonant, similar to that found in Germanic languages, began to fade away during the 13th century. However, the period in which the complete disappearance of a phonetic [h] was achieved is not clear.

In popular French, the aspirated /h/ would have completely ceased to be pronounced during the 16th century (Ewert 1964, Pierret 1983, Rosset 1911, Zink 1991) or the 17th century (Ayres-Bennett 1987, Bonnard 1982, Brunot and Bruneau 1933), save for some regional varieties of French where it remained until the 20th century (Brunot and Bruneau 1933, Martinet 1945, Rousselot and Laclotte 1902). In the second half of the 16th century, for instance, Estienne (cited in Thurot 1881-83) already notes the “bad usage” of the unpronounced /h/ in the popular French of Paris.

In standard French, on the other hand, the actual pronunciation of /h/ was maintained for a longer period. For Fouché (1966), the aspiration was no

longer in use by the end of the 18th century, in both standard French and popular French. In his compendium of remarks on pronunciation made by grammarians from the beginning of the 16th century, Thurot (1881-83:392) states that aspiration is “very noticeable” during the 18th century. In fact, this is mentioned by twenty of the grammarians Thurot reports on, from Meigret and Palsgrave (first half of 16th century) to Beauzée and Demandre (second half of 18th century). Some of these grammarians note that speakers of regional varieties make the mistake of not pronouncing the /h/, which implies that it was indeed pronounced in Parisian French. Only a few of the grammarians cited in Thurot claim that the /h/ has no phonetic realization, the first being Lartigaut (1670).

Since the aspirated /h/ has the effect of blocking the elision of a preceding vowel and the *liaison*, as opposed to the mute *h*, it is not clear that grammarians are referring to the actual pronunciation of a fricative when they discuss aspiration. For instance, Féraud (1787-88) is sibylline when he remarks that the aspirated /h/ has all the properties of a consonant (including, presumably, a phonetic realization) and that vowels that are usually elided are maintained when followed by aspirated /h/ (which would have gone without saying if /h/ was pronounced). Domergue (1805 cited in Thurot) notes two kinds of aspiration, one pronounced with effort to express a “vigorous feeling” (e.g. *hair* ‘to hate’, *harceler* ‘to harass’, *haletant* ‘panting’), and one pronounced with no effort. His remark indicates that, at the beginning of the 19th century, the phonetic realization of /h/ survives only in a subset of forms and is a means of expressing emphatic meaning.

This ambiguity has led some language historians to interpret the grammarians’ remarks in a way diverging from Thurot. For Rosset (1911), the aspirated /h/ died as early as the 16th century, and all the efforts of grammarians at the time could do nothing to maintain its pronunciation. Along the same lines, Pope (1934) states that the influence of the grammarians had the effect of maintaining /h/ at the phonological level, but could not prevent the loss of actual pronunciation. Cutts (1994:154-155) concludes that the phonetic realization disappeared from standard French in the 17th century and that later mentions of the aspiration must be understood as referring to the disjunctive role of /h/, since the word *aspiration* “has undergone a dramatic semantic shift which parallels the sound shift itself”.

Yet grammars of the 18th-19th century refer to aspiration in a non-ambiguous manner, suggesting that the pronunciation of /h/ was still current, or, at least, that it was the norm recommended for standard French. Wailly (1783:418) notes that in pronouncing aspirated /h/, the sound of the following vowel comes “from the throat”. Girault-Duvivier (1818:40) talks about a “guttural articulation”, as does Landais (1852:II,5), for which “there is abso-

lutely no doubt that aspirated h is a consonant, since it adds a guttural strength to the following vowel". Lemaire, in his revision for a new edition of the grammar by Girault-Duvivier (1856:I,46), clarifies the intended meaning of the term *aspiration*: "to pronounce the *harsh h*, doesn't one have to stop a moment and take a breath, so to speak, in order to give more strength to the emission of the voice? [...] one is thus right to say that we pronounce it with *aspiration*, that it is *aspirated*".

The main French dictionaries are even clearer on the matter. Under the entry for H, Beaujean's edition of Littré's Dictionary (1885) states that "initial aspirated /h/ is pronounced and blocks the elision of a preceding vowel [...] I do not like aspirated h, it hurts the chest". In the 1694 edition, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* also distinguishes between the disjunctive role and the pronunciation of /h/: "the initial h is aspirated, and pronounced". Interestingly, the passage remains unchanged (except for some orthographic modifications) in the six subsequent editions, that is, until 1877-78. It is only in the 1935 edition of the *Dictionary* that the Académie Française tolls the knell of the pronounced /h/: "the aspirated H is a sound produced in the larynx which has gradually disappeared from French pronunciation and which is heard but rarely".

Now, it is well known that the standard considered by the grammarians and authors of dictionaries is the norm of Paris and Central France. In some regions, the pronunciation of aspirated /h/ was maintained even longer. Beaujean (1885) mentions that many Parisian speakers do not aspirate the /h/, but that the pronunciation is clearly maintained in many provinces such as Normandy. Rousselot and Laclotte (1902) note that the aspiration has survived only in the local varieties of French found in certain provinces (Normandy, Francophone Brittany, Lorraine) and in some regions where French is influenced by other languages (Breton-speaking Brittany, Gascogne, Béarn).

Given the aforementioned testimonies, it seems reasonable to conclude with Thurot (1881-83) and Walter (1993) that the data available allow us to posit the presence of a glottal fricative in standard French during the 18th century, in Central France as well as in several specific regions. The fricative would have disappeared earlier in popular French, both central and regional. For the 19th century, the question is still open: were the grammarians successful in maintaining the pronunciation of /h/ or were their remarks mere prescriptions that were never effective in influencing the standard French actually spoken?

5 Conclusion: the French spoken in the Americas

We have seen that there is a categorical correspondence between words of Haitian and St. Lucian with an initial fricative and French words with an initial aspirated /h/. As no general linguistic mechanism can reasonably account for this correspondence (e.g. /h/ epenthesis to avoid V-initial, predilection for aspiration), the only sound explanation is that the source of these fricatives is to be found in the phonetic form of the French words. A word like *rele/hele* ‘to call’ is realized [yele/hele] simply because it was realized [hele] in French. Therefore, we have no choice but to conclude that the /h/ was actually pronounced in the varieties of French to which the creators of the Creoles were exposed.

We have seen further that, during the period of the formation of the Creoles (mid-17th to mid-18th century), the phonetic realization of the aspirated /h/ was moribund if not already dead. If the /h/ was still pronounced during this period, it must have been limited to standard French. We have also seen that the settlers in New France were believed to be speakers of popular French, a popular French characterized by the presence of some regional features. Likewise, the settlers in the Antilles would also have been speakers of popular French, considering that all French settlers were of similar social and geographical origins.

Since the French settlers in the Antilles were actually pronouncing the aspirated /h/, and since this is a feature missing from the popular French of the period and most characteristic of the Parisian norm, then the variety spoken by the settlers could not have been popular French. Rather, the settlers would have used mesolectal varieties (Hull 1994) close to standard French or varieties aligned on the central norm of France (Morin 1994).

This may come as no surprise when demographic data on the New France settlement is taken into consideration. The portrait of the settlers that emerges from the data is that of people who were more educated, more urbanized and in a higher social position than average in France. According to Charbonneau and Guillemette (1994a,b), most of the settlers were “people of trade” rather than peasants, half of them could read and write (compared to 20% in France) and 60% were of urban origin (compared to 18% in France). This portrait is coherent with Wolf’s conclusion that the linguistic level and cultural level of French settlers in New France was above the average level of instruction found in France of the period (1991).⁶

⁶Wolf bases his conclusion on the study of 30 morphological variables sociolinguistically marked in France. He notes that none of the values associated with popular French or *bas usage* in France were chosen in New France.

Alternatively, we could adopt Barbaud's idea of the clash of the patois or assume that the settlers in the Antilles, contrary to those in New France, were less educated speakers from specific regions. In both cases, the settlers would have been speakers of marked regional varieties and/or patois, which maintained the pronunciation of /h/ well into the 19th and, for some lexical items, the 20th century. Of the regions from which the settlers emigrated to the Americas, only Normandy (regional French) and western France (patois) have maintained the pronunciation of /h/. Assuming that the creators of the Creoles were exposed to western or Normandy French, we would expect other typical features of pronunciation of these varieties to have made their way into the Creoles. For instance, in the patois of Poitou and Charentes, [h] is the phonetic realization of both /h/ and / / (e.g. / ~ / pronounced [~]). However, we find no cases of /h/ in the Creoles corresponding to the French / /, nor any of the other features of pronunciation typical of this patois.

To conclude, the data on the aspirated /h/ argues against the view that French settlers in the Americas were speakers of patois or speakers of popular French. They were using a more standard variety of French, a local variety of the Parisian norm, that we can refer to as Regional Standard French.

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Department of French
University of Toronto
50 St. Joseph Street
Toronto (ON), Canada, M5S 1J4
annemarie.brousseau@utoronto.ca