

**When a linguistic variable doesn't vary (much):**

**The subjunctive mood in a conservative variety of Acadian French and  
its relevance to the actuation problem<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

This study considers the subjunctive mood in one of the most conservative varieties of Acadian French, that spoken in the Baie Sainte-Marie region in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. A number of claims made in the literature are considered: whether the subjunctive mood is undergoing loss, whether it expresses semantic meaning, and whether it is lexically-conditioned. Unlike most spoken varieties of French where the subjunctive is argued to be a linguistic variable (i.e., it varies with other moods), the

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Gary R. Butler for granting me access to the Butler Grosses Coques Sociolinguistic Corpus. I also thank Karin Flikeid and Michelle Daveluy for granting me access to *Le corpus du français acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse*. Thanks also to Ruth King who provided extensive comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful for the comments made by the three anonymous reviewers. All errors are my own. This work was supported in part by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insight Development grant 430-2016-00939 and Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture Établissement de nouveaux professeurs-chercheurs grant 2017-NP-197234.

results for Baie Sainte-Marie show that it varies very little. The analysis reveals that the few cases of variation can be accounted for by formal theoretical approaches to the subjunctive where this mood is argued to express modality. With limited variation, the subjunctive is not showing signs of loss. These findings suggest that the subjunctive is not part of a linguistic variable and so is not subject to inherent variability. I further argue that the retention of the imperfect subjunctive in this variety along with a tense concordance effect can help us understand why the subjunctive became a linguistic variable in other varieties of French, which ultimately contributes to our understanding of the actuation problem.

## 1. Introduction

There is arguably no other grammatical feature of French which has spilled more ink than the subjunctive mood. While early French grammarians sought to prescribe rules as to which contexts can permit the subjunctive mood (while also proscribing other contexts), contemporary linguists have likewise sought to understand its role in the French language. Within the sociolinguistic variationist literature, the French subjunctive mood has also been the subject of much discussion. One recurrent theme regarding this variable has been how to precisely circumscribe the variable context, which has ranged from comparing a variety's subjunctive use against the standard to approaches which compare its use against local community norms. Beyond the different approaches to the variable context, a number of claims (some which have been debated for centuries) have also been made regarding its status in the French language more generally. One such claim is that of its ongoing loss in the French language, an argument put forth for contemporary Laurentian French (Laurier, 1989) as well as in Acadian French and Louisiana French (Neumann-Holzschuh, 2005; Neumann-Holzschuh and Mitko, 2018).<sup>2</sup> Another topic of discussion is whether the

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<sup>2</sup> Laurentian French refers to the varieties spoken in the Canadian provinces of Quebec, Ontario, in western Canadian provinces as well as in New England in the United States. These varieties are distinct from Acadian

subjunctive mood has a semantic function in the language to express modality or whether it is simply lexically conditioned and devoid of any modality-related meaning (e.g., Poplack, 1992, 1997; Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013). The present paper will consider all of these claims in turn by analyzing use of the subjunctive mood in one of the most conservative varieties of Acadian French, that spoken in the Baie Sainte-Marie region in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. While the analysis and results for the subjunctive mood will necessarily pertain to this variety, we will also consider the ways in which the analysis sheds light on the subjunctive in French more generally and with regard to the *actuation problem*. Among the five problems of language change outlined in Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog's (1968) foundational paper is what they term the *actuation problem* (1968: 102), that is, '[w]hy do changes in a structural feature take place in a particular language at a given time, but not in other languages with the same feature, or in the same language at other times?' By analyzing the subjunctive mood in a conservative variety of Acadian French, we will be able to better understand why this mood has become a linguistic variable in some, but not all, varieties of French. Previous work on the Baie Sainte-Marie variety by a number of researchers (Gesner, 1979; Flikeid, 1994)

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French, which is spoken mainly in Canada's Atlantic Provinces and in parts of eastern Quebec.

have argued that this variety's conservative nature is reflected in the fact that it preserves a number of linguistic features lost in most spoken varieties of French. The fact that it retains lost or moribund features of French allows us to examine their use in a living linguistic system.

Following an outline of contemporary variationist studies of the subjunctive mood in French in Section 2, I then outline the methodology of the present study in Section 3 followed by a presentation of the Baie Sainte-Marie results in Section 4. A discussion of the results is presented in Section 5 in order to contextualize the results more broadly. Section 6 provides concluding remarks.

## **2. The subjunctive mood in French**

Historically, the French subjunctive morphology derives from the Latin subjunctive system whereby certain functions in Latin carried over into French. Some researchers (Hahn, 1953; Jensen, 1974) consider the dual-origin hypothesis for the Latin subjunctive. According to this hypothesis, two Indo-European forms, the optative and the subjunctive, gave rise to the Latin subjunctive based on two separate functions: to express volition (the optative) and to express doubt (the subjunctive). In an analysis of the subjunctive in Old French, Jensen (1974: 33) describes the use of subjunctive morphology in expressing a volitive function as 'the strongest area of the use of the subjunctive.' Aside from the functions of the Old French subjunctive, this mood appears to have been able to occur in a

range of syntactic contexts such as main clauses, relative clauses, adverbial clauses as well as subordinate clauses, unlike Modern French, where it is largely confined to subordinate clauses.

Aside from the subjunctive's functions and distribution, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to understanding obviation effects, that is, a constraint preventing co-referentiality between the pronominal subject of the subordinate clause and the subject of the main clause. In a 1994 analysis, Martineau analyzes Older French<sup>3</sup> and finds that, unlike in Modern French where we do find obviation effects (as shown in (1a) taken from Martineau, 1994: 46), we don't find the same obviation effects in Older French (as shown in (1b) taken from Martineau, 1994: 46, *Griseldis* 135, from Jensen, 1974: 34).

- (1)      a.    \***Je<sub>i</sub>**    veux                    que    **je<sub>i</sub>**    parte  
                  1 SG    want.PRS.IND    that    1 SG    leave.PRS.SBJV  
                  demain.  
                  tomorrow  
                  'I want to leave tomorrow.'
- b.    **Je<sub>i</sub>**    vueil                    que    **je<sub>i</sub>**    soye                    batu.

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<sup>3</sup> By 'Older French', Martineau (1994: 46) refers to the Old French period, ranging from 842 C.E. to the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the Middle French period, which includes both 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

1 SG    want.PRS.IND    that    1 SG    be.PRS.SBJV    beaten

‘I want to be beaten.’

As (1b) shows, along with other examples, this apparent constraint was not operative in earlier stages of the language.

During the Classical French period, an important number of comments by grammarians and commentators (*remarqueurs*) (e.g., Maupas, 1632; Oudin, 1632; Bouhours, 1692) were devoted to explaining the various functions of the subjunctive mood which included notions of volition, desire, doubt, etc. In contemporary linguistic treatments of the French subjunctive mood, some linguists have likewise argued that this mood relates to particular functions and meanings in the language. Among the various semantic analyses, some linguists posit the existence of a realis feature (Lalair, 1998), a certain and factual feature (Lachet, 2010), or an assertion feature (Abouda, 2002). Conversely, some have argued that it has no semantic function at all and that it is simply lexically conditioned (Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013). Beyond its semantic role, another aspect of the subjunctive is regarding its status in the language in terms of change. Some work has argued that the subjunctive mood is disappearing in some varieties of French, including Ontario French (Laurier, 1989) and in Acadian and Louisiana French (Neumann-Holzschuh, 2005; Neumann-Holzschuh and Mitko, 2018), or that it is stable (i.e., not disappearing) (Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013). Since the present paper adopts a

variationist approach to the subjunctive mood, the following section will outline some of these issues in the variationist literature on the French subjunctive mood.

## **2.1 Variationist studies of the French subjunctive mood**

Over the past few decades, the subjunctive mood has been studied in a number of varieties of French from a variationist sociolinguistic perspective. One of the first variationist studies focuses on Ontarian French (Laurier, 1989) where subjunctive usage is described according to contexts prescribed by proponents of the standard language. This entailed that subjunctive use in Ontarian French is defined in terms of the (often arbitrary) rules set forth by grammarians and commentators rather than by the local community norms. For example, Laurier (1989: 112) considers whether the subjunctive occurs with certain verbs prescribed by the standard, such as *convaincre que* ‘to convince’. In fact, the subjunctive mood is not attested in any variety of French spoken in Canada with *convaincre que*, as pointed out in a later study by Grimm (2015: 94). Therefore, by comparing the local Ontario French vernacular against an external standard, Laurier (1989) ultimately concludes that the subjunctive mood is undergoing a change in progress, being gradually replaced by other moods such as the indicative and conditional. This envelope of variation was again taken by Neumann-Holzschuh (2005) for Louisiana and Acadian French, who likewise concludes that the subjunctive mood is gradually



being lost. Evidently, studies such as these, which compare use of the subjunctive in the local variety with the standard, can lead analysts to assume that the subjunctive is lacking in its productivity or that it is being lost since it is not found in numerous prescribed contexts, such as after *convaincre que* or after verbs of volition like *vouloir* ‘to want’, as in (2) taken from Neumann-Holzschuh (2005: 135, example 80).

- (2)    A        voulait        asteure qu’    a        **mariait**        un  
          she    want.IMP.IND   now    that    she    marry.IMP.IND a  
          homme        qui    tait                tout à fait        riche<sup>4</sup>  
          man                who    be.IMP.IND    entirely        rich

‘She now wanted her to marry a man who was very rich.’

In addition, studies which adopt a variable context based on the standard will often identify contexts which show usage of the subjunctive where the standard does not require the subjunctive, such as following *après que* ‘after’, as in (3) taken from Laurier (1989: 116, example 5).

- (3)    Après que    je        **sois**                établi                ici.  
          after    that    1SG    be.PRS.SBJV    establish.PST.PTCP    here

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<sup>4</sup> The *A* in (2) is an orthographic representation of the third-person feminine pronoun *elle* which takes into account the elision of the final /l/ as well as the lowering of the vowel from /ɛ/ to /a/, features attested in the history of the language (Lodge, 2004).

‘After I’m settled here.’

In a study of mood alternation in the French spoken in Ottawa-Hull, Canada’s national capital region, Poplack (1992) proposes that the variable context for the French subjunctive be based on local community norms rather than on the standard language. This represented a major methodological shift in analyzing the subjunctive mood in that the local variety would then be measured not against some external and arbitrary norm, but rather against the community’s own local norms. Poplack’s approach consisted of first extracting all tokens which show subjunctive verbal morphology at least once in her large Ottawa-Hull sociolinguistic corpus and then establishing a list of the main clause verbs (*falloir* ‘to be necessary’, *vouloir* ‘to want’, etc.). Following this step, all tokens, whether they involve subjunctive morphology or not, which occurred in an embedded clause following a subjunctive-selecting main clause verb were then extracted, giving us a locally-relevant picture as to how the subjunctive occurs in this variety of French.

In a more recent paper, Poplack, Lealess, and Dion (2013) present a rigorous analysis of mood variation in three corpora of contemporary Laurentian French as well as an analysis of grammarians’ commentaries on

the subjunctive mood.<sup>5</sup> Their comparison of the overall rate of subjunctive use across the three corpora show a surprising increase, not a decline (contra Laurier, 1989; Neumann-Holzschuh, 2005). They ultimately argue that the subjunctive does not function to express particular meanings, but that it occurs within a small set of main clause elements (verbal and non-verbal) and with a small set of embedded clause verbs. Thus, they conclude that ‘the overriding constraint on subjunctive selection, in Quebec French at least, is lexical’ (Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013: 170). This conclusion stands in stark opposition to centuries of attributing various semantic functions to the subjunctive mood in French. To account for this discrepancy, they argue that this is due to grammarians’ (and theoretical linguists’) goal of establishing form-function symmetry between the subjunctive morphology and its purported functions. Essentially, by forcing symmetry between a linguistic form and a function, grammarians and theoretical linguists are excluding the possibility of inherent variability (Labov, 1972). Thus, the findings for contemporary Laurentian French by Poplack and her colleagues lead them to conclude that the subjunctive

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<sup>5</sup> The three Laurentian French corpora include a collection of folktales and interviews collected in the 1940s and 1950s (Lacourcière, 1946; Roy, 1981), the 1980s Ottawa-Hull corpus analyzed by Poplack (1992), and interviews collected in 2005-2007 in Gatineau, Quebec.

ultimately does not have a semantic function. In fact, Poplack (1992: 257) states that ‘[w]e do not wish to imply that the subjunctive mood has *lost* its meaning in embedded noun clauses in Canadian French. The available evidence [...] suggests that it never had one, at least since the time of Classical Latin.’

In more recent work, Grimm (2015) considers the subjunctive mood in two corpora (collected in 1978 and in 2005) of Ontarian French spoken by adolescents in four communities: Cornwall, Hawkesbury, North Bay, and Pembroke.<sup>6</sup> While these communities differ in terms of relative proportion of francophones at the community level, Grimm (2015) also considers variation in speakers’ daily use of French, referred to as language restriction.<sup>7</sup> His results show that *falloir* is by far the most frequent subjunctive-selecting context, as was found in other spoken varieties of Laurentian French. However, he uncovers a correlation whereby the total

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<sup>6</sup> See Mougeon and Beniak (1991) for a description of the 1978 corpus and Mougeon, Nadasdi, and Rehner (2008; 2009) for the 2005 corpus.

<sup>7</sup> Language restriction refers to the degree to which francophones use French in their daily life (e.g., at home, with friends) and speakers are typically organized in three categories ranging from less to more restricted in their use of French: unrestricted, semi-restricted, and restricted. For more information on this social constraint, see Mougeon and Beniak (1991).

number of tokens of *falloir* (regardless of the mood choice in the embedded clause) decreases as the population of francophones in the community decreases. Thus, in the communities with fewer francophones, they are simply using *falloir* (the most frequent subjunctive-selector) less than in other communities. To better understand this pattern, Grimm (2015) then considers one of the main functions of *falloir*, namely to express necessity, in order to see how speakers might be expressing this function differently. He found that speakers in the communities with fewer francophones (and speakers who are more restricted in their use of French) use *devoir* ‘to have to’, a deontic modal verb which selects not a finite clause, but rather an infinitive, as a complement (e.g., *je dois manger* ‘I need to eat’), instead of *falloir*.<sup>8</sup> According to Grimm (2015), the avoidance of *falloir* by communities with fewer francophones is motivated in part by avoiding to conjugate a verb in the subjunctive, a more morphologically complex option. The use of *devoir* accomplishes this since the following verb is in its infinitival form. In his detailed analysis across communities, Grimm (2015) notes that use of *devoir* to express necessity increases (and so *falloir* conversely decreases) as the relative proportion of francophones decreases at the community level and use of *devoir* likewise increases as level of

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<sup>8</sup> See Thibault (1991) for an analysis of the semantic functions of the French verb *devoir*.

language restriction increases at the individual level. The consideration of the expression of necessity (rather than variation in mood choice) is an important methodological point to which I will return in Section 5.2.

An analysis of the expression of necessity, along with an analysis of mood choice, is also conducted by Kastronic (2016) in a comparative study between Laurentian and Hexagonal French. Regarding the mood choice variable, Kastronic (2016) reports a slightly lower overall rate of subjunctive in Hexagonal French than in Laurentian French, but finds similar patterns in terms of the lexical effects in both varieties (as found by Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013). However, one notable difference is that she finds that Hexagonal French speakers use *falloir* much less frequently than in Laurentian French, where it accounts for most of the subjunctive-selecting contexts. In a similar vein to Grimm's (2015) approach, she then analyzes how Hexagonal French speakers express necessity, but she considers a larger set of variants and finds that *falloir* followed by an infinitive (e.g., *il faut manger* 'it is necessary to eat') accounts for most of the tokens to express necessity. Regarding the mood choice variable, she ultimately concludes that subjunctive use is variable and is largely constrained by lexical effects.

A recent paper by King, LeBlanc, and Grimm (2018) compares subjunctive use in contexts with the main clause verb *falloir* 'to be necessary' in five varieties of Acadian French spoken in Canada's Atlantic

Provinces. Their analysis reveals that mood choice is variable across varieties, with rates of the subjunctive ranging from 73% in Abram-Village, Prince Edward Island to 90% in Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec. The one exception to this range (73-90%) is the low rate of 32% found in L'Anse-à-Canards, Newfoundland. To account for the divergent finding for L'Anse-à-Canards, they highlight that an important proportion of the community is composed of Metropolitan French speakers who had immigrated from Brittany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Based on historical sources, such as the *Atlas linguistique de la France* (Gilliéron and Edmont, 1902-1910), King, LeBlanc, and Grimm (2018) show that the areas of Brittany from where the L'Anse-à-Canards settlers originated had highly variable subjunctive usage at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This contrasts with the areas which were the main points of origin of Acadians (namely, the centre-west regions of France) where subjunctive use is categorical in the *Atlas linguistique de la France*. Therefore, they argue that dialect contact with speakers who had variable subjunctive use in the case of L'Anse-à-Canards accounts for the different patterns. Furthermore, this study shows that the subjunctive varies with the indicative mood in many varieties of Acadian French, which will provide a striking contrast once we consider the results for Baie Sainte-Marie.

### **3. Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French**

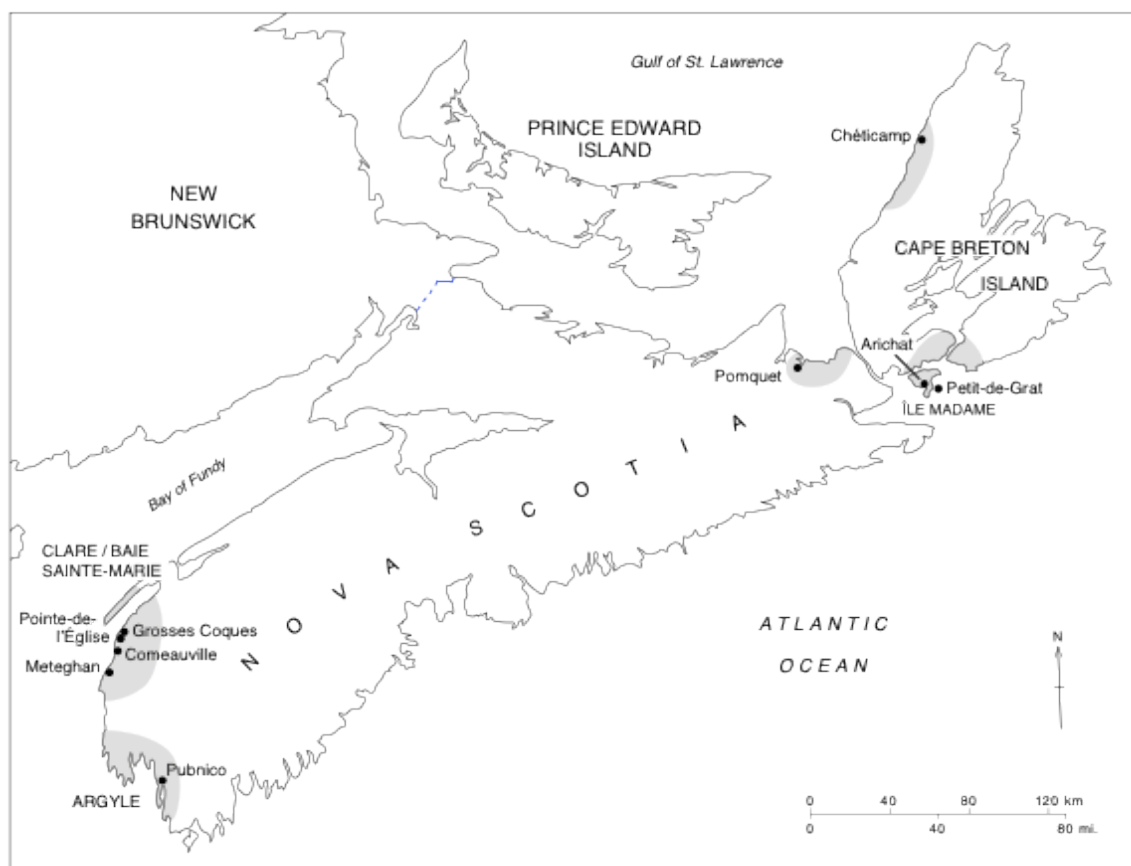
While most variationist studies of the subjunctive mood consider varieties of Laurentian French (Laurier, 1989; Poplack, 1992; Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013; Grimm, 2015), the present paper will examine its use in a conservative variety of Acadian French.

#### **3.1 The Baie Sainte-Marie community**

Acadian French refers to varieties spoken primarily in Canada's Atlantic Provinces (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) and in eastern parts of Quebec. There are two varieties of Acadian French spoken in southwestern Nova Scotia and both are highly conservative, having preserved a number of linguistic features lost in most other spoken varieties of French, including the varieties of Acadian French spoken in New Brunswick which currently has the greatest population of Acadian French speakers within the Atlantic Provinces. These two southwest Nova Scotia varieties, the Baie Sainte-Marie variety, spoken in the Municipality of Clare, and the Par-en-Bas variety, spoken in the Municipality of Argyle, retain a number of linguistic features lost in most spoken varieties of French (Flikeid, 1994). The present paper will focus on the variety spoken in the Baie Sainte-Marie region, shown in Map 1.

<INSERT MAP 1 ABOUT HERE>





Map 1. Acadian regions of Nova Scotia shown in grey.

In the case of Baie Sainte-Marie, centuries of relative isolation from external varieties of French as well as a fairly homogeneous settler population resulted in a community with very little dialect contact (Comeau, King, and LeBlanc, 2016). This sociohistorical context may account in part for the number of conservative features which have been preserved in this variety. For instance, the first-person plural form of *je...-ons* as well as the third-person plural *ils...-ont*, are shown in (4) and (5) respectively.

(4) **J' avions** resté à Toronto.<sup>9</sup>

1 have.IMP.IND.PL stay.PST.PTCP at Toronto

‘We had stayed in Toronto.’

(Carole, GC-6)<sup>10</sup>

(5) **Ils pouviont** point les payer.

3PL could.IMP.IND.PL NEG them pay.INF

‘They couldn’t pay them.’

(Marie, GC-6)

Conservative features related to the tense system involve productive use of the simple past tense (Gesner, 1979; Comeau, King, and Butler, 2012), a tense lost in most spoken varieties of French. The fact that this variety retains a richer verbal morphology than varieties of Laurentian French (and some varieties of Acadian French) has repercussions on the study of the subjunctive mood, to be discussed in greater detail below.

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<sup>9</sup> Since the first-person subject pronoun *je* is used in both singular and plural contexts in this variety, I opt to not specify the number value (i.e., singular or plural) in the interlinear gloss for this pronoun.

<sup>10</sup> Codes in parentheses refer to the participant’s pseudonym, the corpus (GC=Butler Grosses Coques Sociolinguistic Corpus, M=Meteghan speakers from *Le corpus du français acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse*), and the interview number.

The data used in this paper come from two sociolinguistic corpora both collected in the early 1990s: the Butler Grosses Coques Sociolinguistic Corpus and *Le corpus du français acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse*.<sup>11</sup> Both corpora involve audio recordings collected by native speaker community members with the goal of collecting conversational and narrative data.<sup>12</sup> The data analyzed here from the Butler Grosses Coques Sociolinguistic Corpus were collected in 1990 and are from 22 speakers from the village of Grosses Coques. While *Le corpus du français acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse* involves data for four Acadian communities in Nova Scotia (Baie Sainte-Marie, Chéticamp, Par-en-Bas, and Isle Madame), only data for Baie Sainte-Marie (11 speakers in total) are retained for analysis. Furthermore, the data from this second corpus are from speakers of the village of Meteghan, situated at some remove from Grosses Coques (approximately 20 km). Since the data came from two different villages (and since Baie Sainte-Marie Acadians are capable to linguistically distinguish speakers between villages), the data were initially analyzed separately, but were ultimately combined since no discernable differences could be observed in the two data

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<sup>11</sup> For a description of these two corpora, see Comeau (2011).

<sup>12</sup> The data from *Le corpus du français acadien de la Nouvelle-Écosse* include other types of data (a sociodemographic questionnaire as well as word lists), but these were not included in the present analysis.

sets for this linguistic feature. Data from interviews for both women and men and from a wide age range (18–84) were extracted and form the basis of the analysis presented in this paper. Taken together, the data represent the speech of 33 speakers of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.

In most varieties of Laurentian French (Poplack, 1992; Grimm, 2015), approximately half of all tokens of the subjunctive variable are excluded from the analysis due to ambiguous morphological forms (i.e., we cannot determine whether they are indicative or subjunctive mood), as shown in (6) taken from Grimm (2015: 115).

- (6) Ça me dérange pas qu’ ils **parlent**  
 it me bother.PRS.IND not that 3PL speak.PRS.IND/SBJV  
 en anglais.  
 in English

‘It doesn’t bother me that they speak in English.’

(H2-26)

For the class of *–er* verbs (e.g., *manger* ‘to eat’, *danser* ‘to dance’, *parler* ‘to speak’), only verbs conjugated with a first-person plural *nous* and second-person plural subject *vous* are morphologically distinct for mood and can be retained for analysis.<sup>13</sup> However, the Baie Sainte-Marie variety

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<sup>13</sup> However, previous studies (Blondeau, 2008; King, Martineau, and Mougeon, 2011) show that first-person plural *nous* is quite rare in

does not have the same degree of ambiguous forms, due to the retention of traditional conjugations first-person plural *je...-ons* and third-person plural *ils...-ont*, as shown in Table 1.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

<b>Pres. Ind.</b>	<b>Simple Past</b>	<b>Cond.</b>	<b>Imp. Ind.</b>	<b>Future</b>	<b>Pres. Subj.</b>	<b>Imp. Subj.</b>	<b>Past Subj.</b>
je parle	je parlis	je parlerais	je parlais	je parlerai	je parle	je parlis	j'aie parlé
tu parles	tu parlis	tu parlerais	tu parlais	tu parleras	tu parles	tu parlis	tu aies parlé
il/elle/ça parle	il/elle/ça parlit	il/elle/ça parlerait	il/elle/ça parlait	il/elle/ça parlera	il/elle/ça parle	il/elle/ça parlit	il/elle/ ç'ait parlé
je parlons	je parlèrent	je parlerions	je parlions	je parlerons	je parlions	je parlèrent	j'ayons parlé
vous parlez	vous parlèrent	vous parleriez	vous parliez	vous parlerez	vous parliez	vous parlèrent	vous ayez parlé

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contemporary spoken Laurentian French. Rather, the first-person plural *on* is used without the *-ons* suffix (*on parle* vs. *nous parlons* ‘we’re speaking’), yet another ambiguous context for mood alternation effectively reducing further the unambiguous contexts to second-person plural tokens for *-er* verbs.

ils parlont	ils parlirent	ils parleriont	ils parlions	ils parleront	ils parlions	ils parlirent	ils ayont parlé
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Table 1. Verbal tense paradigms for *-er* verbs in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.

The retention of these conjugations entails that for the class of *-er* verbs, it is only the singular forms (the cells shaded in grey in Table 1) which must be excluded due to ambiguity at the morphological level. If we compare the three plural forms below the cells shaded in grey in Table 1, we can see that the subjunctive forms are in fact distinct from the indicative ones.

Therefore, in the present study, only 24% of the data had to be excluded due to the ambiguity of forms, a much better rate of retention than reported for Laurentian French.

### 3.2 The subjunctive morphology in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French

In the spoken variety of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, the subjunctive mood can be expressed in three different tenses as shown in Table 1: the present subjunctive (7), the past subjunctive (8), and the imperfect subjunctive (9).

(7) Faut j' **alle** le voir.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Variable complementizer *que* deletion (i.e., following the main clause verb *falloir* 'to be necessary' in this example) is a feature of this variety of

be.necessary.PRS.IND 1 go.PRS.SBJV.SG him see.INF

‘I have to go see him.’

(Sam, GC-36)

- (8) Faudrait qu’ elle **ait**  
 be.necessary.PRS.COND that she have.PST.SBJV.SG  
**été** prendre garde à une tante  
 go.PST.PTCP take.INF care of a aunt  
 qu’ était malade.  
 who be.IMP.IND.SG ill

‘She had to go take care of a sick aunt.’

(Claudette, M-298)

- (9) Fallait qu’ il **fut** se  
 be.necessary.IMP.IND that he go.IMP.SBJV.SG REFL  
 coucher au grenier.  
 go.to.bed.INF in.the attic

‘He had to go to bed in the attic.’

(Amélie, GC-27)

It must first be noted that Laurentian French retains only the present subjunctive forms (Poplack, 1992), with infrequent use of the past

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French, as in many other spoken varieties of French in Canada (Martineau, 1988; Dion, 2003).

subjunctive and no tokens of the imperfect subjunctive. In fact, the imperfect subjunctive is largely lost from spoken varieties of French aside from a few notable exceptions (e.g., Guernesiais French, as reported by Jones, 2000, and in some varieties of Acadian French, as reported by King, LeBlanc, and Grimm, 2018). Table 1 shows the conjugations for these three tenses in the Baie Sainte-Marie variety. It also reveals that the present and imperfect subjunctive forms show syncretism with other tense forms found in this variety of French. However, as is the case in Laurentian French, the present subjunctive forms for singular *–er* verbs are syncretized with the present indicative forms (as shown in 10) and are excluded from further analysis.

- (10) Puis là, faut je **retourne**.  
 and then be.necessary.PRS.IND 1 return.PRS.IND./SBJV.SG  
 ‘And then, I have to go back.’

(Hector, GC-13)

However, unlike in Laurentian French and less conservative varieties of Acadian French, the use of *je...–ons* and *ils...–ont* entails that all plural forms can be retained for analysis, as shown in (11).

- (11) Well faut j’ **allions**  
 well be.necessary.PRS.IND 1 go.PRS.SBJV.1PL  
 souper then  
 eat.supper.INF then



‘Well, we should go eat supper then.’

(Carole, GC-19)

In (11), it is precisely the addition of [j] (orthographically represented with a <i>) which indicates that this token is in the subjunctive mood and not the indicative (in which case, it would be *allons*).

Another potential case of ambiguity between forms involves another conservative linguistic feature, the simple past tense. As Table 1 shows, all forms of the simple past tense show syncretism with the imperfect subjunctive forms.<sup>15</sup> Despite this syncretism, I argue that it is possible to disambiguate between the two. In a 2012 paper, Comeau, King, and Butler demonstrate that the simple past tense is highly restricted to narrative contexts in this variety, occurring rarely in conversation (i.e., non-narrative discourse). Furthermore, it has been established that the subjunctive mood is restricted to embedded clauses governed by a particular set of main clause elements (verbal and non-verbal). Therefore, it is only at the intersection of these two contexts (i.e., subjunctive-selecting tokens in a narrative) that there is potential ambiguity between the two. As such, these tokens (i.e.,

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<sup>15</sup> The syncretism of the simple past and the imperfect subjunctive is not an Acadian French innovation, but was, in fact, observed in Classical French (Brunot, 1966).

those which occur following a main clause subjunctive-selecting element *and* within a narrative discourse) were excluded from further analysis.

## **4. The French subjunctive in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian**

### **French**

#### **4.1 The variable context for the French subjunctive**

Since Poplack's (1992) paper on mood choice in Ottawa-Hull French, the usual approach in subsequent variationist studies of the French subjunctive has been to first extract all tokens of unambiguous subjunctive forms in order to then establish a list of subjunctive-selecting verbal and non-verbal main clause elements. Once the elements which have selected a token bearing subjunctive morphology at least once in the data have been established, then all tokens which occur within a finite embedded clause following these elements are extracted. This formal definition of the variable context provides an account as to where the subjunctive mood can occur based on community norms rather than arbitrary prescriptive norms, as detailed in Section 2.1. While I maintain that this approach has a clear advantage over the prescribed norms approach to the variable, I will argue that such an approach is inadequate to answer the question as to whether the subjunctive can function to express modality, which will be discussed in greater detail in Section 5.

#### 4.2.1 The subjunctive mood governed by main clause verbs in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French

As per the method proposed by Poplack (1992) and adopted in most subsequent variationist studies of the French subjunctive (Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013; Grimm, 2015), I first extracted all tokens of subjunctive forms in the Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French data to determine which main clause elements (verbal and non-verbal) can occur with the morphological subjunctive mood. This allowed me to establish the list of main clause subjunctive-selecting verbal elements, shown in Table 2.

< INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE >

Main clause verb
<i>aimer (que)</i> ‘to like’
<i>point croire (que)</i> ‘to not believe’ <sup>16</sup>
<i>espérer (que)</i> ‘to hope’ <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Point* is the general marker of negation in this variety of French, occurring at much higher rates than *pas* (Flikeid, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> While *espérer* ‘to hope’ can also have the meaning ‘to wait’ in other varieties of French (Neumann-Holzschuh and Mitko, 2018: 320), the Baie Sainte-Marie variety uses the verb *guetter*, as shown in Table 2, to express the notion of ‘to wait’. All tokens of *espérer* in the Baie Sainte-Marie data set are used with the meaning ‘to hope’.

<i>falloir (que)</i> ‘to be necessary’
<i>guetter (que)</i> ‘to wait’
<i>vouloir (que)</i> ‘to want’

Table 2. Main clause verbs which can select the subjunctive in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.

As Table 2 shows, there are six main clause verbs which occur with the subjunctive in the Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French data. Once these main clause verbal selectors were identified, it then became possible to extract all finite subordinate clauses which contained either a subjunctive, indicative, or conditional verb. Following this, it became possible to calculate the rate of subjunctive usage per main clause verb, shown in Table 3.

< INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE >

Main clause verb	Rate of	
	Subjunctive	Total N
<i>aimer que</i> ‘to like’	100%	11
<i>point croire que</i> ‘to not believe’	29%	28
<i>espérer que</i> ‘to hope’	100%	4
<i>falloir que</i> ‘to be necessary’	100%	248
<i>guetter que</i> ‘to wait’	100%	4
<i>vouloir que</i> ‘to want’	100%	26
<b>Total</b>	94%	308

Table 3. Distribution of subjunctive mood per verbal subjunctive-selecting elements.

As Table 3 shows, with main clause verbal elements, the overall rate of subjunctive usage is quite high at 94%. However, with the exception of one main clause verb, the negated form of the verb of opinion *croire* ‘to believe’, all main clause verbs occur with the subjunctive categorically, at a rate of 100%.

The near lack of variability is somewhat surprising when we compare with studies of other varieties of French which have adopted the same variable context. For Laurentian French, all studies report variable subjunctive usage, from 76% in Ottawa-Hull French (Poplack, 1992) to 78% in Ontarian French (Grimm, 2015).<sup>18</sup> In addition to Laurentian French, the Acadian French spoken in northeastern New Brunswick shows variable subjunctive usage (Roussel, 2016) with very low rates of the subjunctive mood (16%).<sup>19</sup> In their overview of Acadian communities in other

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<sup>18</sup> However, see Grimm (2015) for a discussion as to why the overall rate of subjunctive usage over four communities masks differences among communities as well as between the 1978 and 2005 corpora.

<sup>19</sup> This is not the only notable linguistic difference within the Acadian diaspora. In fact, the northeastern New Brunswick variety differs in many

provinces, King, LeBlanc, and Grimm (2018) report rates ranging from 73% to 90%, with the exception of the low 32% for L'Anse-à-Canards. Taken together, results from Laurentian varieties as well as some varieties of Acadian French suggest that the subjunctive mood is indeed subject to inherent variability. However, the Baie Sainte-Marie results stand in stark opposition to these patterns: the subjunctive mood isn't subject to inherent variability in most contexts in this variety of French.

With the exception of negated *croire* (discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2.1.1), the remarkable finding here is that the subjunctive is categorical in these contexts. This result has repercussions for broader claims that the subjunctive is subject to *inherent variability* in French (Poplack, Lealess, and Dion, 2013) or to those espousing claims that the subjunctive mood is being lost in certain varieties of French (Laurier, 1989; Neumann-Holzschuh, 2005). At least for the Baie Sainte-Marie variety, there is near absence of variation, an established precursor to linguistic change.

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ways (e.g., loss of *je...-ons*, lack of *point* as a negative marker) from the conservative varieties spoken in southwestern Nova Scotia.

#### 4.2.1.1 Accounting for other moods: The expression of doubt

In Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, the only context following a verbal main clause element which shows variability is with the negated main clause verb *croire* ‘to believe’ as shown in (12).

- (12) Je      *crois*                      *point*   que      ça      **seye**  
          1      believe.PRS.IND.1      NEG      that      it      be.PRS.SBJV.SG  
          grave.<sup>20</sup>  
          serious

‘I don’t think that it’s serious.’

(Carole, GC-11)

Unlike other subjunctive-selecting main clause verbs (e.g., *falloir* ‘to be necessary’, *aimer* ‘to like’, *vouloir* ‘to want’), negated *croire* is used to express doubt, which is in fact one of the original functions of the subjunctive argued to be operational in Old French (Martineau, 1994).

While other main clause verbs show a remarkable lack of embedded clause mood variation, a closer analysis of the tokens with negated *croire* suggests that the subjunctive mood is in fact not simply lexically constrained in this variety of French, but serves to express modality.

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<sup>20</sup> This variety of Acadian French has vernacular conjugations for *être* ‘to be’ in the present subjunctive mood for both singular (*je/tu/il/elle seye*) and plural (*je seyons, vous seyez, ils seyont*) forms.

A first piece of evidence to understand why subjunctive use with negated *croire* cannot be relegated to a lexical construction is the fact that it is specifically the lexical item *croire* which functions as a verb of opinion in this variety rather than the lexical item *penser*. In contrast, studies of other varieties of French (e.g., Poplack, 1992; Grimm, 2015) report that the subjunctive occurs with the negated verb of opinion *penser*. Within the Baie Sainte-Marie data, there are certainly tokens of *penser* ‘to think’ which literally means ‘to think’, as shown in (13), but they do not function to express an opinion or belief.

- (13) J’ ai **pensé** je vas arrêter  
 1 have.PST.1 think.PST.PCTP 1 go.PRS.IND stop.INF  
 voir si elle veut venir à  
 see.INF if she want.PRS.IND come.INF to  
 l’ hôpital  
 the hospital  
 ‘I thought I would stop by to see if she wanted to come to the  
 hospital.’

(Amélie, GC-27)

While there are tokens of *penser* to literally mean ‘to think’ (even negative tokens of *penser*), there are no tokens of it as a verb of opinion in this variety, which is expressed by the verb *croire* ‘to believe’, as shown in (14).

- (14) Tu **crois** que ça te radorceraît



2SG believe.PRS.IND that it you straighten.PRS.COND

les yeux ?

the eyes

‘You believe it would straighten your eyes?’

(Evelyn, GC-13)

This is a notable difference between the Baie Sainte-Marie variety and all of the Laurentian varieties studied to date.<sup>21</sup> If the subjunctive morphology were to be simply lexically conditioned with no regard to semantics, we could not account as to why the semantic equivalent of *penser* in the Baie Sainte-Marie variety, *croire*, is the subjunctive selector in this variety, but *penser* is not.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it is not simply the presence of the lexical verb *croire* that can occur with the subjunctive; it must occur in a negated context. There are tokens of affirmative *croire* in the corpus (as in 14), but none of these occur with the subjunctive (and were not retained as part of the variable context). If the selection of the subjunctive was due to mere

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<sup>21</sup> An exception is the variety of Acadian French spoken in northeastern New Brunswick. In this variety, much like Laurentian French, *penser* ‘to think’ is used as a verb of opinion when it selects the subjunctive. There are no tokens of *croire* used with the subjunctive (B. Roussel, p.c.).

<sup>22</sup> The pattern in northeastern New Brunswick mentioned in note 21 further supports this point.

lexical conditioning, we would not be able to account as to why negation is a necessary requirement for the subjunctive mood to surface in the embedded clause for this main clause verb, but not the other verbs.<sup>23</sup> The fact that it is only in negative contexts in which *croire* can express doubt further suggests that it is not the lexical item itself which selects the subjunctive, but that it is triggered by the dubitative semantic reading resulting from the negated verb of opinion. In this way, the subjunctive morphology can co-occur with negated *croire* in constituting a formal expression of modality, namely the subjunctive mood.

Another piece of evidence which supports an analysis whereby the subjunctive in the context of negated *croire* expresses doubt can be seen once we consider the tense concordance effect between the main clause and the embedded clause, as shown in Table 4.

< INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE >

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<sup>23</sup> One might further argue that *point* + *croire* constitutes a lexicalized expression in this variety and thus the subjunctive is also lexically triggered. However, it is negation as a functional head when combined with the verb of opinion which triggers the subjunctive rather than the lexical item *point*. In this variety, both *pas* and *point*, two separate lexical items which can mark sentential negation, trigger the subjunctive when used to negate a verb of opinion.

Embedded clause tense	Main clause tense			
	Present	Imperfect	Past	Present
			Conditional	Perfect
Present Subjunctive	7			
Past Subjunctive				
Imperfect Subjunctive	1			
Imperfect Indicative	1	4		1
Past Conditional			1	
Periphrastic Future	2			
Present Conditional	1			
Present Indicative	2			
Present Perfect	3	4	1	
<b>Total N</b>	17	8	2	1

Table 4. Tense concordance for negated *croire* (shown in number of tokens)

As the grey area in Table 4 shows, the subjunctive mood only occurs in contexts where the main clause verb is in the present indicative tense. When the main clause verb is in the past (either imperfect indicative, present perfect or past conditional), other forms are used in the embedded clause, such as the imperfect indicative, the present perfect, and the past conditional. This suggests that in order to express doubt using the subjunctive, the expression of doubt must pertain at the moment of speech (e.g., *je crois point que...* ‘I don’t think that...’ vs. *je croyais point que...* ‘I

didn't think that...'). To account for this tense concordance effect, I argue that the expression of doubt must be relevant at the moment of speech since in the case where negated *croire* is conjugated in the past (the final three columns in Table 4), the expression of doubt no longer pertains to the speaker at the moment of speech and, crucially, we are left with an assertion (as opposed to doubt) regarding the embedded clause event. This results in other moods being selected in the embedded clause, but not the subjunctive, and so does not constitute a potential context of variation. However, as Table 4 shows, there is still variation even when the negated *croire* is in the present tense (the first column). Within the context of present tense negated *croire* (arguably, the true variable context for negated *croire*), the subjunctive mood occurs at a rate of 47% (N = 8/17). In addition to the 8 subjunctive tokens, we are left with 9 tokens of negated present tense *croire* which occur with a mood other than the subjunctive. How might we account for these nine tokens? The formal theoretical literature on the subjunctive mood can shed light on this apparent case of variation.

While it may be tempting simply to attribute these nine tokens to inherent variability, a closer inspection of these tokens suggests otherwise. Two of these nine tokens are used in interrogatives, as shown in (15) where the embedded clause verb is in the present conditional and (16) where the embedded clause verb is in the periphrastic future.

(15) Tu crois point qu'il

2SG believe.PRS.IND.SG NEG that 3SGM

**minderait ?**

mind.PRS.COND.SG

‘You don’t think that he will mind?’

(Carole, GC-36)

- (16) So tu *crois* *point* que tu  
 so 2SG believe.PRS.IND.SG NEG that 2SG  
**vas** **rester** dans Clare pour le restant  
 go.PRS.IND.SG stay.INF in Clare for the rest  
 de ta vie ?  
 of your life

‘So you don’t think you’re going to stay in Clare for the rest of your life?’

(Anique, M-338)

While there are different theoretical analyses of mood choice, some researchers have posited that the difference between indicative and subjunctive mood is related to the speaker’s assertion of the realization of the embedded clause event. For instance, Abouda (2002) argues that such a semantic feature, assertion, can account for differences in mood choice. The fact that other moods occur in these two tokens is in line with formal theoretical accounts of the French subjunctive which argue that interrogation and negation cancel each other since they both express non-

assertion (Abouda, 2002). Evidently, it's difficult to draw clear conclusions from two tokens, but nevertheless the pattern is consistent with the formal literature on the French subjunctive and the predictions are borne out in the data. Likewise, the so-called 'polarity subjunctives' in the formal literature, such as negated verbs of opinion, are described as a context which can vary based on the intentions of the speaker.<sup>24</sup> Evidently, it is all too easy to attribute differences in mood morphology to differences in intention on the part of the speaker. From a variationist perspective, we simply cannot measure and correlate intentionality on the part of the speaker based on the presence of the subjunctive morphology. The argument is clearly circular. We leave this open question to future research.

#### **4.2.2 The subjunctive mood governed by non-verbal main clause elements in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French**

Beyond the set of subjunctive-selecting verbs, a small number of non-verbal main clause elements are also found to occur with subjunctive morphology in the Baie Sainte-Marie data set. These are outlined in Table 5.

<INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE>

Subjunctive	Total N
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<sup>24</sup> Consultations with multiple native speakers of this variety confirm the assertion expressed in these two constructions.

Main clause non-verbal element	N	%	
<i>après que</i> ‘after’	2	5%	42
<i>avant que</i> ‘before’	17	65%	26
<i>jusqu’à tant que</i> ‘until’	2	22%	9
<i>mais que</i> ‘when’	59	98%	60
<i>pour que</i> ‘in order to’	13	100%	13
infrequent (fewer than 3 tokens per type)	19	95%	20
<b>Total</b>	112	66%	170

Table 5. Distribution of subjunctive mood per non-verbal subjunctive-selecting elements.

Upon initial inspection, Table 5 shows there to be a wider range of variability with non-verbal main clause elements than was the case for main clause verbs. However, a closer inspection of the data reveals that the overall rate of 66% masks the subjunctive rates per individual non-verbal main clause elements (some are variable, others are not). There is a clear difference between the last three items in Table 5 (i.e., *mais que*, *pour que*, and the infrequent subjunctive-selectors) in that they are near categorical.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> One token involves a past token and the other token involves a more formal interview context in the sense that language and education are

It is with the first three non-verbal elements (*après que*, *avant que*, and *jusqu'à tant que*) where we do find variation in the data. However, as was the case for negated tokens of *croire*, the data in these three contexts also appear to be motivated by semantic considerations. If we first take the data with *après que*, we see that there is only a 5% rate of subjunctive use (this rate is made up of two tokens). A closer inspection of the data with *après que* reveals that all the data are situated in the past or involve generic or atemporal reference, as in (17). The only two tokens which are temporally situated following the moment of speech are the two subjunctive tokens, which occur together, as shown in (18).

- (17) Après qu' ils ont fumé  
 after that 3PL have.PRS.IND.PL smoke.PST.PTCP  
 deux joints, faut qu' ils se  
 two joints be.necessary.PRS.IND that 3PL REFL  
 prennent.  
 take.PRS.SBJV.PL

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explicitly being discussed. In the former, I argue that semantic motivations (i.e., assertion) could account for this indicative token while in the latter I argue that the speaker used the indicative (*ils sont* 'they are') in order to avoid using a non-standard conjugation (*ils seynt*). Note that there are no subjunctive tokens of the standard form *ils soient* in the data.



‘After they smoke two joints, they have to fight.’

(Evelyn, GC-13)

- (18) Je        voulons                    aller    en        Europe        après  
           1        want.PRS.IND.1PL        go.INF to        Europe        after  
           que    j’        **ayons**                    **gradué**                    et  
           that    1        have.PRS.SBJV.PL        graduate.PST.PCTP        and  
           après    que    j’ **ayons**                    **fait**                    un  
           after    that    1 have.PRS.SBJV.PL        make.PST.PCTP        a  
           petit    d’        argent.  
           little    of        money

‘We want to go to Europe after we graduate and after we make a little money.’

(Trina, M-295)

Therefore, in the case of tokens with *après que*, the fact that all non-subjunctive tokens are situated prior to the moment of speech (or generic) and that the two subjunctive tokens are situated following the moment of speech lends support to a semantic interpretation of mood choice.

Variation in mood choice is also evident with the other main clause elements, *avant que* ‘before’ and *jusqu’à tant que* ‘until’. As was the case with *après que*, the data in these contexts also appear to be motivated by semantic considerations. All of the indicative tokens are within a context in

which the event has already been realized at the moment of speech, as in (19), while subjunctive tokens are unrealized, as in (20).

- (19) Elle    tenait                                école   avant   qu'    ils  
          she    hold.IMP.IND.SG            school before that    3PL  
          **aviont**                                **été**                                à           Boston.  
          have.IMP.IND.3PL    be.PST.PTCP    to           Boston

‘She worked as a schoolteacher before they went to Boston.’

(Evelyn, GC-18)

- (20) Avant que    vous    **alliez**                                à           Yarmouth  
          before that    2PL    go.PRS.SBJV.2PL            to           Yarmouth  
          faut                                que    vous    grimpez                                là  
          be.necessary.PRS.IND    that    2PL    grab.PRS.SBJV.2PL            there  
          dessus.  
          on

‘Before you go to Yarmouth, you need to hold on to this.’

(Hector, GC-13)

In (19), as in the other indicative tokens, the event expressed by the embedded clause (i.e., the act of having gone to Boston) is already realized at the moment of speech. Conversely, in (20) we see that the event of having gone to the nearby town of Yarmouth has not yet been realized at the moment of speech and we find use of the subjunctive. Thus, mood choice,

again, appears to fall out from semantic functions rather than simply inherent variability, much as we saw with negated *croire*.

## **5. Interpreting the Baie Sainte-Marie results in a broader context**

The results for the subjunctive mood in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French contrast with those for other spoken varieties of French. Whereas the alternation between subjunctive and indicative moods can be analyzed as a linguistic variable in most spoken varieties of French, the results presented for Baie Sainte-Marie in Section 4 suggests that it is not a linguistic variable in this variety. This leads to the obvious question as to why it is a linguistic variable in other varieties, but not in this one. Beyond the subjunctive's status as a linguistic variable, we might also consider its semantic role. These two issues will be explored in further detail in this section.

### **5.1 Mood choice as a linguistic variable in French**

One of the major findings of this paper is the near lack of variation with regard to mood choice. Within the context of main clause verbs, we saw that variation is restricted to only the negated verb of opinion *croire*. Within the set of non-verbal main clause elements, we do find some variation, but this variation falls out from semantic differences related to modality rather than pure inherent variability. These findings suggest that, unlike most spoken varieties of French, including other varieties of Acadian French, mood choice in this variety is simply not a linguistic variable. This

begs the question: Why did it not become a linguistic variable as it did in most spoken varieties? While we may be tempted to ascribe the subjunctive's status as a non-variable in Baie Sainte-Marie to prescriptive efforts, I would argue that it's highly unlikely that the Baie Sainte-Marie speakers were influenced by the prescriptive sources which seek to account for inherent variability. The older speakers in the sample have limited levels of education: most have a grade 8 level of education or less. In fact, historical low levels of education are a feature of Acadian communities more generally.<sup>26</sup> Thus, with limited education and limited exposure to the standard, it's highly unlikely that Baie Sainte-Marie speakers are influenced by French grammarians attempting to account for variation in mood choice. Rather, the more likely scenario is that the subjunctive simply hasn't become a linguistic variable in this variety.<sup>27</sup>

If we take as a starting point that the subjunctive in Baie Sainte-Marie never was variable, then we are left with the inverse question as to why it became a linguistic variable in other varieties (i.e., the actuation problem of Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog, 1968). To answer this question,

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<sup>26</sup> See Ross (2001) for a history of education in Nova Scotia Acadian communities from 1758 to 2000.

<sup>27</sup> There is no evidence that the subjunctive will necessarily become a linguistic variable either.

I argue that a clue may be found in some findings of other varieties of French where the subjunctive is a linguistic variable, such as in Laurentian and in other Acadian varieties of French. In the case of Laurentian French, Poplack, Lealess, and Dion (2013) report a strong tense concordance effect in 19<sup>th</sup> century Quebec French in that both imperfect and especially conditional main clause verbs highly disfavour the subjunctive mood. In fact, it was the strongest constraint operating on mood choice in that data. However, in their 20<sup>th</sup> century data (the Ottawa-Hull corpus), they report a similar effect, although it had weakened by this time. In their most recent data (21<sup>st</sup> century), the constraint was no longer statistically significant. In his analysis of four communities in Ontario French, Grimm (2015: 146) reports that the Hawkesbury 2005 corpus (for which he has more data) does not show a tense concordance effect, although he advances that ‘[i]t is likely, however, that it did once exist, as the phenomenon is reported in other Laurentian varieties’.

If we consider other varieties of Acadian French, the paper by King, LeBlanc, and Grimm (2018) lends support to the tense concordance effect being operational in Acadian French as well. While their analysis focuses only on mood choice with *falloir* (the most frequent main clause verb), they report a striking pattern across varieties: rates of the subjunctive appear to be much lower when *falloir* is in the conditional. In Saint-Louis, Prince Edward Island, while the overall rate of subjunctive use is fairly high (85%,

total N=170), rates plummet to 18% if *falloir* is in the conditional. The pattern repeats in the other varieties. In Abram-Village, also in Prince Edward Island, rates of the subjunctive (overall 73%, total N=327) drop to 13%. In Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Quebec, rates of the subjunctive (overall 90%, total N=193) drop to 21%.

By way of comparison, I show the effect of tense concordance in the Baie Sainte-Marie data in Table 6 for the verb *falloir* to ensure comparability with the results from King, LeBlanc, and Grimm (2018).

<INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE>

Main clause tense				
Embedded clause	Present	Imperfect	Conditional	Simple
tense	indicative	indicative		past
Present subjunctive	132	3	9	0
Imperfect subjunctive	0	61	21	1
Past subjunctive	1	5	11	4
Total N=248	133	69	41	5
Rate of subjunctive	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6. Tense concordance with *falloir* in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French.

Recall, that with the exception of negated *croire*, mood choice doesn't vary with main clause verbs in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French. As Table 6 shows, the rate of subjunctive is 100% across different main clause tenses,

even with the conditional. This is a striking difference between the Baie Sainte-Marie variety and the other Acadian French varieties reported in the King, LeBlanc, and Grimm study. The varieties they study show dramatically low subjunctive rates if *falloir* is in the conditional. Likewise, they report absence of the imperfect subjunctive with the exception of Saint-Louis, Prince Edward Island. Baie Sainte-Marie also retains the imperfect subjunctive and it is in fact the most frequent subjunctive tense used when *falloir* is in the conditional as shown in Table 6. However, in Saint-Louis, it is the conditional which is mainly used (14/17) in the embedded clause when *falloir* is in the conditional.<sup>28</sup> Thus, it may be that, collectively, the loss of the imperfect subjunctive and the strength of the tense concordance effect (especially for having the conditional in both main and embedded clauses) play a role in triggering the subjunctive in becoming a linguistic variable. Therefore, it may be that the concomitant loss of imperfect subjunctive with the tense concordance effect represents a weak point in the grammar, a point which can allow for the subjunctive to then vary with other moods. In this line of reasoning, Saint-Louis may then represent an intermediary stage with regard to mood choice becoming a linguistic

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<sup>28</sup> The other three Saint-Louis tokens are in the present subjunctive. None are with the imperfect subjunctive. Thus, we see the strong tense concordance effect with the conditional in Saint-Louis.

variable; an intermediary stage between, on the one hand, Baie Sainte-Marie, where mood choice is not inherently variable (i.e., not a linguistic variable), and the other varieties of French where it does display clear inherent variability.

## **5.2 The subjunctive mood's semantic productivity**

The other outstanding issue relating to the French subjunctive mood is its semantic role. Previous variationist research has debated whether the French subjunctive mood expresses semantic meaning or whether it is simply lexically conditioned and thus devoid of a semantic role. One of the key arguments of Poplack, Lealess, and Dion's (2013) paper in support of this interpretation is that the subjunctive is constrained not by semantic classes of verbs, but rather by a small set of main clause elements (verbal and non-verbal). While the Baie Sainte-Marie results likewise show that the subjunctive is confined to embedded clauses following particular main clause elements, there are a number of pieces of evidence which suggests that the function of the subjunctive extends beyond simply belonging to fixed lexical constructions. These pieces of evidence will be explored in turn.

One of the key issues in assessing whether the subjunctive mood expresses meaning results from how the variable context is circumscribed. While Poplack's (1992) proposal to analyze mood choice following the set of main clause elements which can select the subjunctive based on



community norms was a notable advance, I argue here that it does not allow us to consider the range of meanings expressed by the subjunctive. Namely, the finding that the subjunctive is favoured under a set of main clause elements is certainly revealing in terms of a *constraint* operating on mood choice, but this does not capture the possibility that the subjunctive could be used to express a range of meanings. By limiting the analysis to those contexts which can select the subjunctive (the main clause verbal and non-verbal elements), we do not clearly see whether these elements belong to larger semantic classes in the language or whether they are the sole members of such classes. To accurately assess the semantic aspects of these main clause elements, one would have to consider *all* main clause elements which select a finite embedded clause within a corpus. By considering whether there are other main clause verbs which fall into the same semantic classes (volition, doubt, etc.), then we might be able to see whether it is the larger semantic class of verbs which can express a similar meaning that selects the subjunctive or only a particular subset of this class (namely, those verbs which have been found to select the subjunctive).<sup>29</sup> Such an

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<sup>29</sup> Such an approach to the variable context can be seen in Thibault's (1991) analysis of the semantic fields of the French verb *devoir* and, more recently, in Edmonds, Gudmestad, and Donaldson's (2017) concept-oriented analysis of future-time reference in French.

undertaking is beyond the scope of the present paper and remains an open question in terms of the semantic role of the subjunctive. Despite this, there are other pieces of evidence which would argue for its semantic productivity.

Within the context of main clause verbal elements, the facts surrounding the negated verb of opinion *croire* suggests that it is highly unlikely that the subjunctive mood is simply lexicalized, resulting from a pairing of the subjunctive morphology with a main clause element, in this case, *croire*. It is specifically the fact that *croire* functions as a verb of opinion in the Baie Sainte-Marie variety and not *penser*, as in most other varieties of French, which suggests that it's not simply the lexical item itself which governs mood choice, but the fact that it is a verb of opinion. Furthermore, the fact that the subjunctive is only possible when the verb is negated (functioning then to express doubt) lends support to the fact that the subjunctive works, along with the main clause element, to express a specific semantic meaning (in this case, doubt). Conversely, if *croire* was simply lexically conditioning the subjunctive, this would not account as to why negation is required for this main verb, but not others (e.g.,  *falloir*, *vouloir*). Further to this, the fact that negation is expressed not with one negative marker, but two in this variety of French (i.e., *pas* and *point*), further argues against a purely lexical-based analysis.

As another example of its semantic productivity in this variety, we do find two subjunctive tokens under an English-origin main clause element, *next time*, as shown in (21).

- (21) Next time que je **voie** Trina  
 next time that I see.PRS.SBJV.SG Trina  
 faut je m' informe.  
 be.necessary.PRS.IND I REFL inform.PRS.IND/SBJV  
 'Next time I see Trina, I'll have to ask her.'
- (Carole, GC-21)

The fact that the subjunctive is possible under an English-origin governor such as *next time* suggests that it is not simply lexically conditioned by a similar set of main clause elements as found in other varieties, but that it can be productively used to express certain modalities, even if the governor is not historically part of the French language.

One other aspect of the lexical argument relies on the fact that there are few embedded verbs which can show explicit subjunctive morphology. These are reported to largely be *être* 'to be', *avoir* 'to have', *aller* 'to go', and *faire* 'to make, to do'. However, this is not surprising considering the fact that studies of Laurentian French typically have to exclude approximately half of all tokens due to ambiguous forms (e.g., within the class of *-er* verbs, only second-person plural tokens can be retained for analysis). Therefore, I argue that the association between embedded verbs

and subjunctive use should be characterized as epiphenomenal rather than as support of a lexical interpretation: by being restricted to analyze those forms which are unambiguous, it is clearly the suppletive forms (which are a large part of the unambiguous data which could be retained for analysis) which are found to favour subjunctive mood. This problem is not as serious in varieties with a richer verbal morphology, such as in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French, where only 24% of the data had to be rejected due to ambiguous forms.

Finally, it may make better sense to adopt a functional definition of the variable context (such as a concept-oriented one, as per Edmonds, Gudmestad, and Donaldson, 2017), rather than a formal one. That is, we may better assess its productivity in the language by considering its multiple uses much in the same vein as Grimm's (2015) analysis of variation between *falloir* and *devoir* in order to express necessity in Ontario French. By taking such an approach to the variable context, we may then better understand how the subjunctive mood is productive across the language in expressing modality. Poplack and her colleagues (2013) argue that a defining feature of spoken language, form-function asymmetry, is at odds with the prescriptive enterprise which seeks to impose form-function symmetry. With regard to the subjunctive mood, I argue that the subjunctive morphology *does* serve to express different meanings (e.g., doubt, necessity, and volition). By analyzing one of these at a time (e.g., how necessity is

expressed, how doubt is expressed), we would be better placed to understand the role of the subjunctive in relation to other variants in each of those systems.

## 6. Conclusion

The results presented in this paper stand in striking opposition to those reported for other spoken varieties of French, even other varieties of Acadian French, in terms of mood choice. How do these results help us understand the French subjunctive? Despite the dramatically different results obtained here, in no way am I arguing that the Baie Sainte-Marie results can be extended to other varieties of French, including other varieties of Acadian French. In fact, those authors have argued convincingly that the subjunctive mood *is* in fact displaying inherent variability in those other varieties of French. Furthermore, it may be the case that the subjunctive no longer expresses semantic functions in those other varieties of French. However, I argue here that the few contexts of variation in the Baie Sainte-Marie data can be understood if we consider a semantic-based approach.

What the subjunctive mood in Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French allows us to see is a grammatical system in which the subjunctive mood is not a linguistic variable. Furthermore, we can see how the subjunctive functions to express modality, as the arguments for a lexical explanation do not hold for the Baie Sainte-Marie data. Finally, the fact that the subjunctive mood is not a linguistic variable allows us to reflect on one of the most

fundamental problems in variationist sociolinguistics, the actuation problem. Why did the subjunctive become a linguistic variable in other (in fact, most) spoken varieties of French, but not in the Baie Sainte-Marie variety? While a detailed understanding of the actuation problem is likely to be multifactorial, involving both internal and external factors, one key factor in triggering mood choice as a linguistic variable may have been the loss of the imperfect subjunctive along with the tense concordance effect. The imperfect subjunctive's loss from the system of other varieties may have created an opportunity for other moods to insert themselves, thus triggering a variable system from what once was invariable.

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