

Acadieman vs l'idéologie du standard : les représentations linguistiques et les mots du chiac

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Acadieman Website Banner, Dano LeBlanc, <http://www.acadieman.com/>, Cropped, Blurred and Softened Edges

Introduction

Acadieman is the protagonist of a comic and a cartoon series of the same name created by Daniel (Dano) LeBlanc. He is a superhero (*sort of*) who expresses himself in Chiac and practices a kind of self-mockery.

Chiac is the Acadian French vernacular spoken in the Moncton region of New Brunswick by bilingual francophones. It has long been denigrated, and described as "half-French half-English." As a result, its speakers often suffer from linguistic insecurity.

The stigma has its origins in the linguistic debates prevalent in the media during the 19th and 20th centuries. What role does *Acadieman* play in destroying negative perceptions and stereotypes about Chiac?



Magnifying Glass, Dano LeBlanc, <http://www.acadieman.com/les-bd/10-magnifying-glass>, Cropped

Francophones in New Brunswick and the Chiac dialect

Having the largest proportion of francophones outside of Quebec (31.8%), New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada.

Greater Moncton is made up of three linguistically diverse cities: Riverview with an anglophone majority of 92%, Dieppe with a francophone majority of 73% and Moncton with a francophone minority of 31%. As such, contact between both languages is intense and frequent. This is the context in which Chiac was created. Chiac is described in Boudreau & Perrot (2005) as an integration, within an Acadian French matrix, of an abundance of English borrowings from many categories, be it nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or interjections usually pronounced as in English. Archaisms remain a prominent feature in the language as well as maritime words used in everyday life.

(1) Let's go, ma vieille friggin' de baratte, hale ta frame, j'ai besoin de mon café. (LeBlanc, « Acadieman vs la war des étoiles », 2006)



M'AM!, Dano LeBlanc, <http://www.acadieman.com/les-bd/11-mam>, Cropped



Chiac pour les Dummies, screenshotted and cropped from « Acadieman vs les superheros » by Dano LeBlanc

Acadieman: Le rulebreaker du français standard

Acadieman represents a mix of both old and new elements in Acadian culture. He enjoys drinking coffee and watching soap operas, but he also likes traditional Acadian food and music. More of an anti-hero than an actual hero, the spokesperson of Chiac and the pirate of the French language captivates the public through the use of humor based on references to Acadian culture and popular culture.

A skull and crossbones replace the star on the Acadian flag on his T-shirt, indicating his rebelliousness. Yet, despite his outfit and his interesting name, he turns out to be just like everyone else: he works in a call center and in his free time enjoys hanging out in cafes.

According to his creator, the only heroic aspect of Acadieman is the fact that he has "the nerve to speak in [Chiac]." (CBC News).

Due to his decision to employ Chiac in the series, LeBlanc has had to defend himself against numerous critics and protestors.



Lisa Revil (2017). Dano LeBlanc presents his new Acadieman comic book. <https://www.teleregraphjournal.com/letoile/story/100192804/acadieman-dano-leblanc>

Linguistic representations: Standard French vs vernacular ideologies

Acadians have noticed differences between their speech and those of other francophones since the mid-20th century. The speakers of Chiac hold beliefs about their vernacular that are so internalized that they take them for granted and do not think to question them.

There are two opposing sets of beliefs: the ideology of the standard and the ideology of the dialect. The former presents the French language as a rigid and unchanging system and elects this standard as the sole legitimate variety. On the other hand, the ideology of the dialect champions the validity of regional dialects by highlighting and valuing their differences from the standard.

In the context of Chiac, the ideology of the standard targets and stigmatizes it for its use of English, whereas the ideology of the dialect celebrates and accepts it as part of a linguistic identity. In *Acadieman*, there are illustrations of both ideologies. By using Chiac, Dano LeBlanc has contributed to the shift in negative perceptions and attitudes over time towards a more positive outlook on this vernacular (Comeau & King, 2011)

(2) Nous autres, (on) parle way better que ça around icitte. (LeBlanc, « Acadieman vs la guerre civile », 2006)

Conclusion

As a result of longstanding linguistic debates, Chiac has often been stereotyped as an illegitimate or bad French even among those who speak it. However, along with improved representations of the vernacular by artists, writers, and so on, increasingly positive attitudes towards Chiac have emerged in recent times.

In *Acadieman*, the creator Dano LeBlanc not only reflects this phenomenon, but also plays a part in it by actively subverting the stigma in the episodes. After overturning the dominance of the ideology of the standard and valorizing the dialect, *Acadieman* proposes a future in which diversity is both accepted and valued.

References

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