THE LANGUAGES OF THE AUTHOR OF LAFFITE'S JOURNAL
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(Editor's note: the authenticity of the so-called The Journal of Jean Laffite is arguably the focus of the greatest debate, the subject of most controversy, for present-day Laffite researchers.

The original manuscript of the Journal, handwritten in French, is housed at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas. It has been subjected to analysis to date its ink and paper and to compare its penmanship to that of known samples from the privateer, and much effort has been - and continues to be - made to verify other items of its content.

The two opposing camps of opinion - that which believes the Journal to be authentic, and that which believes it a forgery and hoax - both count among their ranks intelligent, avid researchers who fully realize that the issue might never be resolved with certainty.

Prior to 1999, the Journal had undergone only one known translation into English, that done half a century ago by an unknown person or persons whose qualifications for such an undertaking likewise remain lost to history. Laffite's adúcionados were thus pleased and grateful when Dr. Gene Marshall, a Professor of Romance Languages at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana, agreed to perform a thorough re-translation of the work.

As this issue of The Laffite Society Chronicles goes to press, word has reached us that Dr. Marshall's re-translation has been published by the firm Xlibris as "The Memoirs of Jean Laffite by Jean Laffite." The book may be purchased over the Internet at www.xlibris.com - go to that Web site, click on the "Bookstore" menu option, and search for either the title or author as listed above (note that a search for "Marshall" as author will not yield the desired result). After the search returns, click on either the title or author to advance to a form via which an order can be placed.

Those who do not wish to purchase the re-translation over the Internet may direct inquiries to The Laffite Society, P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, TX 77553-1325, or via e-mail to mods@airmail.net.

Meanwhile, paperbound copies of the original translation continue to be available from its publisher, Don Marler of Dogwood Press, under the title The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story. Those interested may again direct inquiries to the snail- or e-mail addresses in the preceding paragraphs.)

The dispute about the authenticity of the Journal attributed to Jean Laffite has gone on since 1948, when John A. Lafllin showed the manuscript to Charles Van Ravensway in St. Louis, Missouri (see p. 148 in Jack Ramsay's Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates, referenced in Note 5 at the end of this article). This paper will not end the debate but will present an analysis of the languages known by the Journal's author.

My credentials for such an undertaking are the following: a Ph.D. in Romance Languages from the University of New Mexico; experience in teaching French and Spanish at the college level; residence and study in France and Mexico; and friendships in the United States with nationals of French- and Spanish-speaking countries. The resulting familiarity with language idiosyncrasies of multilingual people helps to recognize similar patterns in the creator of the Journal.

After transcribing and re-reading a photocopy of the French manuscript, now housed in the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas, I see evidence that the author was fluent in French and also knew English and Spanish. The body of this paper will be the justification of this conclusion through examples in the manuscript of Spanish influences, then of English effects on the writer, and finally of indications of the author's fluency in French.

Spanish influence is less evident, and takes the form of three words resembling Spanish, and Spanish words, in the manuscript. Of the three words, the first appears on manuscript page (henceforth "m.p.") 29 in "d'hommes qui traietaient de se cacher." A word resembling the Spanish tratar (Spanish for "to try") replaces the French word essayer, which should have been used. On m.p. 117 is "que j'avais ecrire" ("that I had written"), which is similar to the Spanish escribir although not too different from the correct French écrire. The French partitive des hommes is replaced on m.p. 141 by "uns hombres." The word uns recalls the Spanish unos, which is equivalent to des.

Some Spanish words appear in unaltered form. On m.p. there is "trois mes" instead of trois mois ("three months"); mes is Spanish for mois. The Spanish antes on m.p. 25 replaces the French avant in the expression antes de faire ("before making"). Only one letter separates the Spanish word for "as" on m.p. 44: "tan dègénérés" instead of the French tant dégénérés ("as degenerate [as]").

The Spanish examples are less numerous than those of English influence on the author,
and some, like the preceding example of *tan* versus *tant*, might be simple slips of the pen, but they are still evidence of the impact of Spanish on the manuscript.

English's effect can be seen in bizarre mixing of systems of measurement, the placement of the word *aussi* ("also"), use of substantives as adjectives, anglicisms, English spelling of French words, and four instances of use of English words.

In a unique mixture of metric and English measures on m.p. 42, "kilogrammes d'avoir du pois" expresses "pounds" by using the metric system's kilograms and the English avoirdupois system together. Earlier in the text, only the metric system appears.

There is English word order in using "aussi nous faisons" ("Also we do") instead of the French *Nous faisons aussi*. In French, beginning a sentence with *aussi* means "therefore" and requires subject-verb inversion.

One example of several will suffice to show the use of substantives as adjectives in the manuscript. On m.p. 16 "la Alexandre catastrophe" uses a noun as an adjective as is done in English. Because in French two nouns cannot normally be joined in such a way, the expression should have been *la catastrophe d'Alexandre* with *de* or *d'between them.*

Anglicisms, words looking alike in French and English but with different meanings, appear often in the manuscript. On m.p. 15 "retournait," which means "would go back," is used instead of the correct *reviendrait,* which means "would come back" and is appropriate to the context. In French one does not "run to" a place; one "goes while running to a place." But on m.p. 16 "courir au quai" is used instead of the correct *aller en courant au quai,* which is literally "go while running to the dock." *Sans injures* means "without insults," but meaning requires "without injuries," which is *sans blessures.*

Space limitations preclude detailing all the anglicisms, but they include: *a l'Espagne* (m.p. 39) for *en Espagne* ("to Spain," also like Spanish *a España,* *user* (m.p. 42) for *utiliser* ("to use"), *realiser* (m.p. 42) to say *se rendre compte de* ("to realize"), *pour 300 ans* (m.p. 44) instead of *depuis 300 ans* ("for 300 years"), *en ignori* (m.p. 70), meaning "was not known" rather than "Ignored," *cette nuit* (m.p. 104) for *cette soirée* (the part of the night during which I was awake), *visiter* (m.p. 105) instead of *aller voir* ("to visit a person"), *demanda plusieurs questions* (m.p. 189) for *passa plusieurs questions* ("asked several questions"), *est 43 ans* for *a 43 ans* ("is 43 years old"), and *rechercher les places* (m.p. 208) instead of *rechercher les endroits* ("look for the places").

There are partial or complete English spellings of words in the manuscript. On m.p. 25 there is a combination of a French infinitive and an English past tense suffix with *passer.* On m.p. 53 *"sous ordre" should be *sous ordre,* and on m.p. 103 is a similar error: *"deux danses" replaces deux danses.*

Four English words are appropriately used in the manuscript. On m.p. 87 *"but" is used instead of the French *mais,* and on m.p. 121 is the heading "Human Bondage." The use of "brig" for a type of ship appears consistently throughout the text instead of the correct *brick.* And the French word for annihilation, *anéantissement,* and the English word coexist in the text.

English influence on the writer's French appears as slips of the pen, anglicisms, or English thought patterns differing from those of the French. Observation attests to similar errors made by native speakers of French who live among English speakers. Also, English speakers with a good proficiency in French sometimes slip into similar errors; again, personal experience speaks.

What is it that justifies asserting that the author of the *Journal* is fluent in French? Unlike the specific examples of English and Spanish effect on the manuscript, proof of high level French proficiency is pervasive despite many errors attributable to inattention and typical of those found in rough drafts. The manuscript contains so much educated, sophisticated French that examples will mercifully be limited to a few from the myriad possibilities.

On m.p. 3 is an example of the correct use of the present subjunctive and pleonastic *ne in "avant que je ne puisse me la rappeler" *(before I can remember her)* followed by the simple past *"qu'elle devint une mère pour moi* *(that she became a mother for me)*, also showcasing educated French. Aside from inadvertent errors, the subjunctive appears correctly throughout the manuscript.

An example of the past anterior (m.p. 4) "Lorsque nous étions terminé nos études" *(When we had finished our studies)* illustrates a great familiarity with nuances of verb tenses, including those not used in present day conversational French.
Agreement between past participles and preceding direct objects is often a problem even for native speakers of French. On m.p. 16 "l’angoisse intense que j’ai soufferte" ("the intense anguish that I suffered") shows agreement between the feminine preceding direct object que (a pronoun replacing the word angoisse) and the past participle soufferte made feminine by the addition of the letter "e." (It should be clear now why examples of educated French will be minimal)

Two examples of how French thought patterns contrast with those of English appear on m.p. 8 and m.p. 11. In the first, "ainsi que je l’ai déjà dit Hait" ("as I already said, Haiti") contrasts with what English speakers would normally say, "ainsi que j’ai déjà dit Hait," without the extra "l" that the French use to be as specific as possible when speaking. The clause "les explication que me donnèrent l’oncle Reyné et mon frère Alexandre" contrasts with the English word order "the explanations that my Uncle Reyné and my brother Alexandre gave me," which would look like "les explications que mon oncle Reyné et mon frère Alexander me donnèrent." It is difficult for native English speakers, but not for Spanish speakers, to use the above sentence patterns, and their use shows an imbedding of French into the mind of the author.

Despite some anglicisms like those mentioned earlier, the author usually uses the correct meaning when French and English words resemble one another but have differing meanings. On m.p. 18 there is "nous sommes montés en sautant" rather than the incorrect "nous avons sauté," to say "we jumped up." Again, French "go up while jumping." The French government "ignorait" on m.p. 87 means "was unaware" rather than "ignored," and on m.p. 143 there is the correct use of "bateau à vapeur" for "steamship."

The use of past tense in French and English differs greatly, and examples make little sense because of the different structures of the two languages. Therefore, the assertion that the journal contains a correct use of the imperfect in relation to the simple and compound pasts remains unsupported by examples. There are incorrect uses of verbs in some places in the manuscript, but the whole of the narration indicates an ability to distinguish between the different French past tenses.

To conclude, these examples from the journal show an author who uses French fluently, albeit sloppily at times, in a manuscript without erasures. Slips into Spanish or English vocabulary or syntax reveal familiarity with those two languages - otherwise, the slips would not occur - but it is not clear which language is the writer’s first. From firsthand observation of French speakers living in the United States, I can state that the kind of errors in the manuscript do sneak into their speech.

Authenticity of the journal is still debatable, but the number of possible authors must be limited to someone who is at least trilingual. Was that person Jean Laffite?

Works Consulted
1. Laffite, Jean, Journal (photocopy of unpublished manuscript in French, housed at the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas).