The Importance of Language to Minorities in Urban Areas: Acadian Identity in Halifax, NS
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The Acadians are a community held together by their culture, language, historical context, and shared
trauma from the 1755-1763 deportations. Today, many Acadians live in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which is
home to an English majority as well as immigrants from other provinces and all over the world. This
research explored how Acadians in Halifax Regional Municipality use the French language to index their
identity, including the importance of language in doing so. The research also explored how Acadians are
maintaining their cultural and linguistic identity here and the hurdles they face in doing so. Qualitative
semi-structured interviews were conducted with people who self-identify as Acadian while living in
Halifax Regional Municipality to examine their ideologies and attitudes towards the language and the
Acadian identity.

One such hurdle suggested by this research is that Acadian varieties of French may be at risk when
confronted with language ideologies that can lead to assimilation and pressures such as a move towards
a standard French. This can be seen in results from the interviews and in statistics such as the decline in
speakers of French as a first language, which from 1971 to 2016 went from 3.5% to 1.7% of the
province’s population (Statistics Canada 2017b). This thesis applies linguistic and anthropological
theories of identity to analyze the current situation of the Acadian community in HRM and to look at the
potential situations in the future.

This research also suggests that French can be a tool used by Acadians to preserve their distinct heritage
and identity, but it is not the only tool. Many of the participants reported having only minimal familiarity
with French, but relied upon family and heritage connections to their communities to ground their sense
of self. Finally, this thesis suggests that the Acadian identity as a whole is not at risk of being lost in the
mix of other minority and majority identities that make up the city.