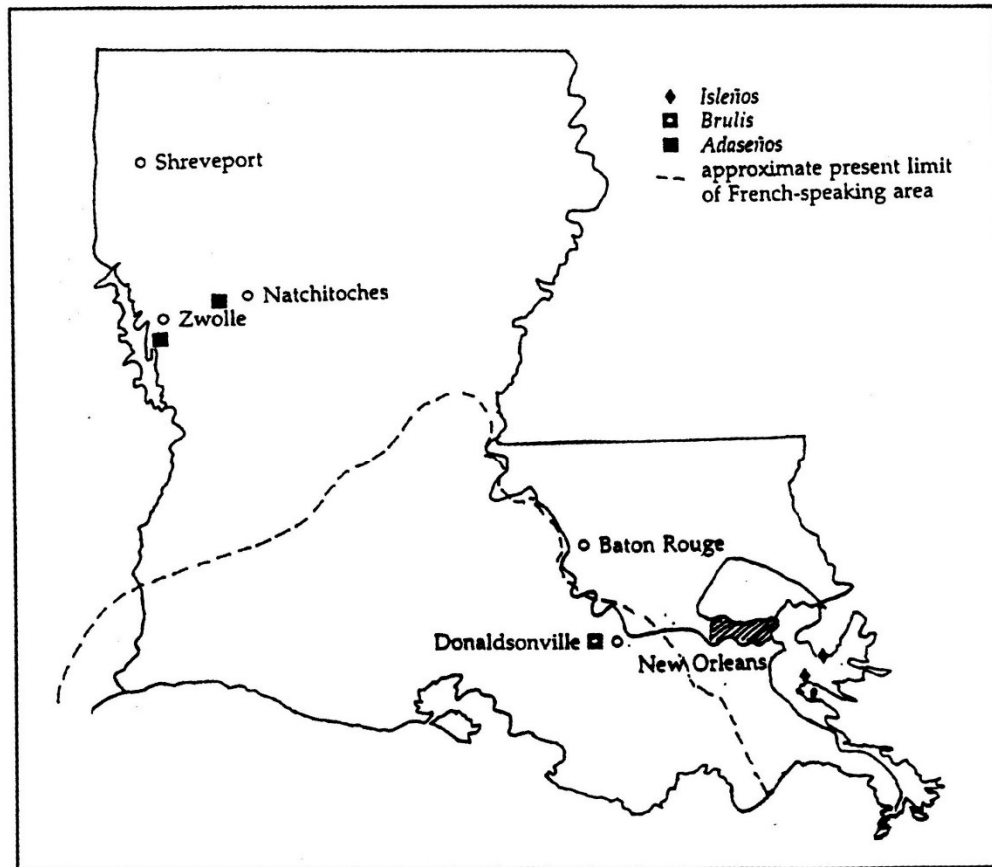


In the 1980's, while at the University of Houston, I was able to study two very different archaic Spanish dialects in Louisiana, the *Isleños*, descended from Canary Islanders who arrived in the late 1700's, and what I called the Sabine River speakers straddling the border with Texas, descended from Mexican recruits who arrived in the early 1700's.



II. Louisiana: Spanish-speaking communities

The Isleños

I had read MacCurdy's book on Louisiana Spanish, published the year I was born and based on field work in the 1940's. I found the study fascinating, but by the 1980's I assumed that this variety had faded away.

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THE SPANISH DIALECT IN
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LOUISIANA

BATHURST M. MACCURDY



THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS

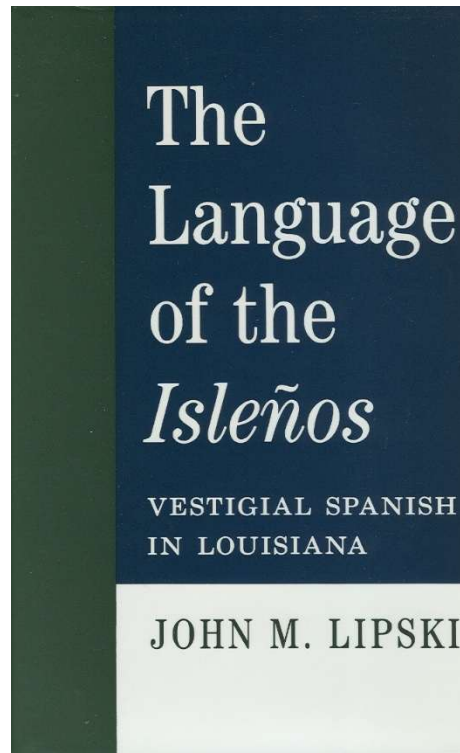
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

Then when talking at one of the conferences we routinely attended with the Cuban linguist Beatriz Varela, who taught at the University of New Orleans, she mentioned that an Isleño speaker had visited her class. She played me a recording of Isleño Spanish. He talked about growing up on Delacroix “island” (the *isle* of the Isleños), and commented on MacCurdy’s book and the early studies by Armistead. Then and there I decided to find out for myself. As soon as I could, I flew to New Orleans, rented a car, and drove east to swampy St. Bernard Parish, where I met my first Isleño friend, Antonia González (recommended by Beatriz), at a large southern-style house that had become the Isleños’ budding cultural center. We recorded a conversation in her Spanish (which after my extensive fieldwork in the Canary Islands, I could identify as very Canary-sounding), and I copied the sound tracks of several documentary VCR videos that they had made locally. During subsequent visits I met and interviewed storyteller Frank Fernández, intrepid jokester Rogelio López, and *decimista* Irvan Pérez, also renowned for making very lifelike models of water fowl (he originally started making duck decoys, but discovered his artistic talent). I have one of Irvan’s models, which I treasure to this day. Some years later Irvan’s work was featured at the Smithsonian museum.

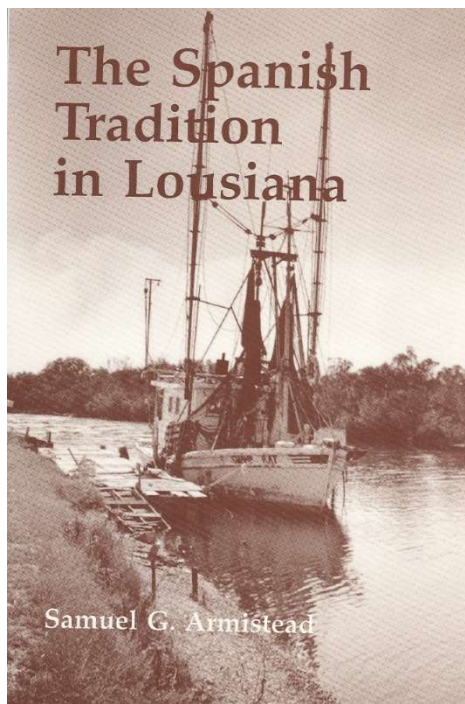
Irvan Pérez, decimista y artesano



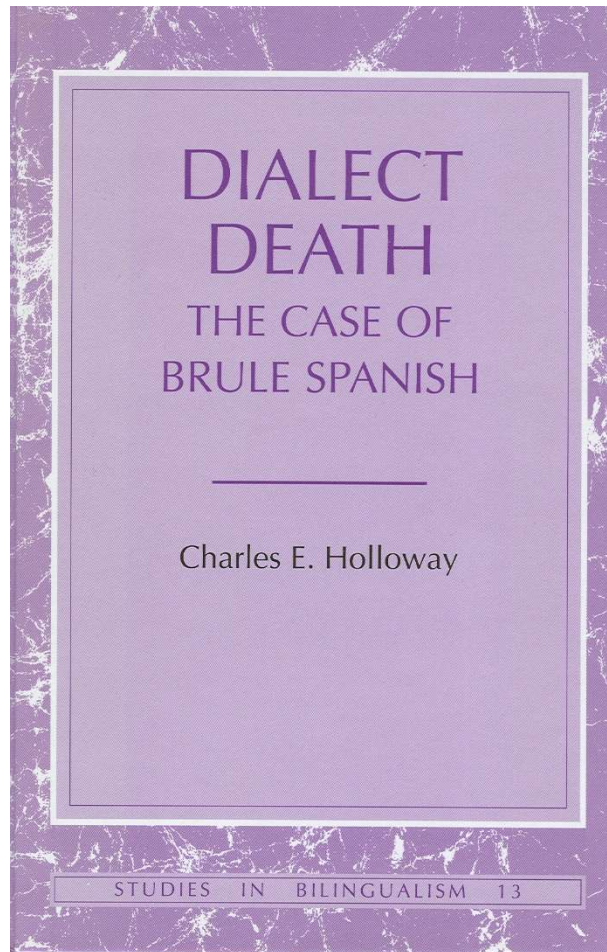
Over the course of several visits, I also participated in one of the first Isleño folk festivals and obtained enough additional data to incorporate my findings into several articles and a small monograph.



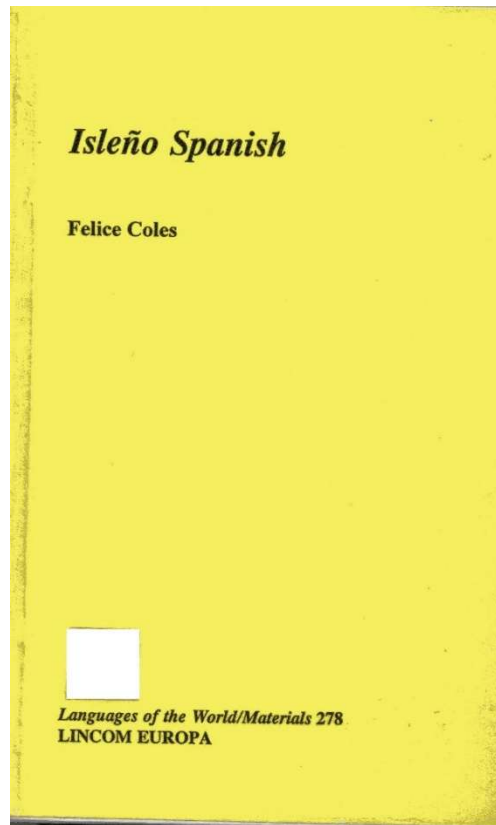
Among the other people I interviewed was José “Chelito” Campo, another excellent storyteller, who was featured in Sam Armistead’s book on the Isleños.



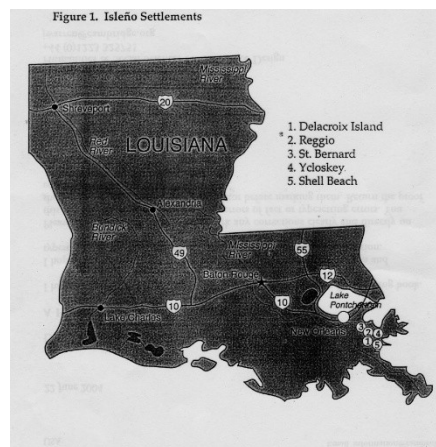
When I met up with Sam at UC Davis, we compared notes on the Isleños, and also on the Brulis, another Canary-descended group whose speakers had all but disappeared. A few years later Charles Holloway found a couple of the remaining Brulis and during many weekend visits was able to get them to reconstruct the language they had once used. Today there are no remaining Bruli speakers as far as I know, but a few years ago I got a call from a Bruli descendent who was interested in reviving the Bruli cultural traditions.

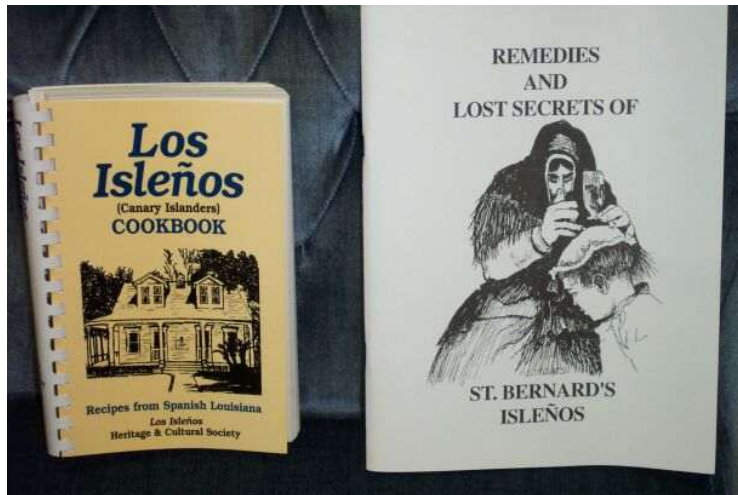


At the same time I was working with the Isleños, Felice Coles, then a graduate student at UT Austin, did her own research, which made its way into articles and a monograph.



Then when I arrived at the University of New Mexico in 1992, I was delighted to discover that emeritus professor Raymond “Tim” MacCurdy was still around, and visited the department from time to time. Tim and I had many fun chats about the Isleños he had known and my own experiences. Altogether I had the good fortune to know the key figures in the study of Isleño Spanish.

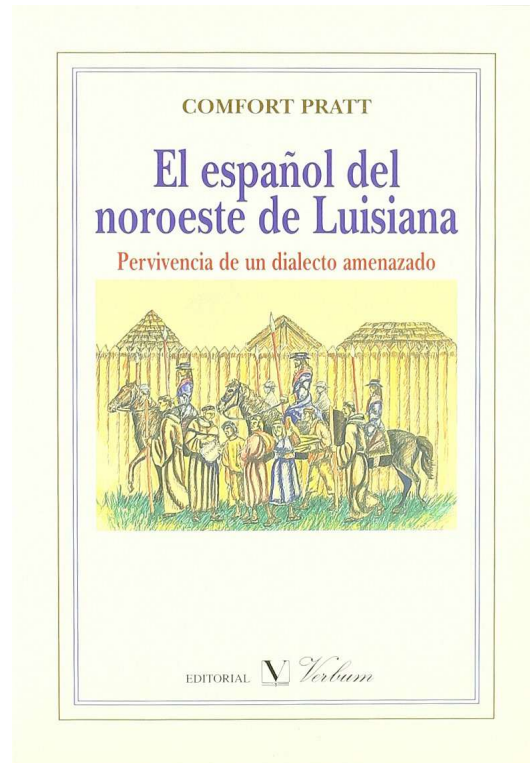




Sabine River (Adaeseño) Spanish

There was another archaic Spanish enclave in Louisiana and across the Sabine River in Texas, whose speakers descended from Mexican recruits sent to fortify the area against the French in the 1730's. In Louisiana the remaining speakers lived near Zwolle and in Texas near Nacogdoches. Although in many cases genetically related, the two groups had lost contact with each other over the centuries. I had read some accounts about what some referred to as Los Adaes (or Adaeseño) Spanish, so in the early 1980's I decided to find out for myself. I received helpful information from Hiram "Pete" Gregory and some other folks. I flew to Shreveport, rented a car and drove down to Zwolle, an old railroad town. There I was met by Mary van Rheenen, who had been a community volunteer and who introduced me to a number of traditional speakers, all of whom lived in rural areas, some in real log cabins, in unincorporated

communities such as Spanish Lake, Noble, and Ebarb (the latter named after the original Spanish leader Gil y Barbo). Thanks to Mary and the goodwill of the local residents, I was able to make a number of very interesting recordings. Today as far as I know, there are only passive memories of this unique and very archaic neo-Mexican variety, judging from a recent monograph.





On another trip, I drove from Houston to Nacogdoches, where I was helped by community member and native speaker Sam Montes, who drove me around to interview numerous speakers in the community of Moral. Many were more fluent than their counterparts in Louisiana, but it was the same archaic Mexican dialect. All of these data made their way into several articles as well as my book on Isleño Spanish.