

The Many Accents of New Orleans

Missy Trissy has a very specific New Orleans accent. The reader is introduced to her on page 6 and she speaks very differently than Zane.

More than anything I want to get back on the plane and go home, but then the old lady says something that changes my mind, at least a little bit. Standing there kind of wobbly on her canes but smiling like the sun peeking through a cloud, she goes, "Young man? Seems I been waiting all my life to meet you, though I didn't know you existed, or what yo name might be. The good Lawd has given me a great gift. Thank you Lawd! Praside be! Zane Dupree, you are welcome in my home today and always will be. Mmm, mmm, mmm." You can't be afraid of a person who says that. You just can't.

The author purposely chooses Miss Trissy to speak with a New Orleans accent to create an authentic character specific to the time and place of the story.

There are many different accents depending on where you live in New Orleans. Listen to the various accents and see if you can pick out words or phrases Miss Trissy uses.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4961257>

Here is the transcript below:

The Many Accents of New Orleans

Updated October 17, 2005 7:23 AM ET

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

In recent weeks, we've heard many voices from Louisiana, or Louisiana (pronounced loo-ziana), and you don't have to listen closely to hear that accent.

Mr. FRED JOHNSON (Activist): I'm a New Orleansian, born and raised here, and when they put me down, they're going to put me down here.

Mr. DONALD BORDELON (Resident): Got a neighbor down the street. He come in yesterday. He's camping out in his back yard.

Professor BARRY ANCELET (University of Louisiana at Lafayette): It's a curious blend.

INSKEEP: That last voice was Barry Ancelet, French and folklore at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

Prof. ANCELET: It's one of the reasons why New Orleans tastes so different and sounds - the music sounds so different and the architecture looks so different.

INSKEEP: That reason is that like other port cities New Orleans attracted large populations of immigrants. There were the French, of course, known as Creoles from

Colonial times. There were Africans who came as slaves and as immigrants from the West Indies. There were Germans, Italians and Irish.

Prof. ANCELET: It reminds one of some parts of New York City for the same reasons, some of the same influences.

INSKEEP: Except for one big difference. All those French Acadians who moved to Louisiana from eastern Canada and brought with them a language that became known as Cajun French. French usually drop the last consonant of a word.

Prof. ANCELET: One of the characteristic features of the accent of the New Orleans is sometimes called 'Y'at,' taken from the expression 'Whe y'at?' You hear a lot of dropped final consonants, 'Whe' instead of 'Where.'

Dr. CONNIE EBLE (Linguist, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill): People in New Orleans don't pronounce an R really hard.

INSKEEP: That's Dr. Connie Eble, a linguist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She was born and raised in what she calls New Orleans (pronounced new awlens).

Dr. EBLE: We would rhyme 'quarter' with 'water.' Water, W-A-T-E-R, would be water (pronounced watah), quarter (pronounced quatah), oughtta. Those three words would rhyme for us. The sound 'er' for what in other parts of the country might be said as 'oy,' so that B-O-I-L, like 'you must boil your water,' could be, in New Orleans, 'berl yer watah.' And someone could make an apperntment instead of making an appointment.

INSKEEP: In much of America, accents have begun to fade because of the influence of a mobile society and the mass media, but that's not so in New Orleans, and we can only hope that distinction did not wash away in the flood. Consider this voice that we did hear last week on this program from a woman on her roof, one of the last people remaining in her neighborhood

Mrs. COLLEEN BORDELON (Resident): Oh, but it's peaceful, and you could see the stars. We come out, we sit up on the roof. Sometimes we'll eat our dinner out here, look at the stars, look at the lights in the city. With the generator on, we have one light that shines on our American flag.

(Soundbite of jazz music)

INSKEEP: This is NPR (pronounced N-P-Ah) News.