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Performing the gubernatorial persona(e): Stylistic variation in official correspondence

This paper will discuss intra-speaker variation in the official letters written by Francisco Luis Héctor, Baron de Carondelet, during his tenure as governor of Spanish Louisiana (1791–1797).¹ In this role, Carondelet corresponded in French, Spanish, and occasionally English with the leaders of neighboring districts as well as officers under his command, some of whom he also knew in a social capacity. The language of official letters is often considered more formulaic and less variable than that of private correspondence, and indeed previous work has established that there is an overwhelming uniformity in the type of construction used to issue orders, for example, in official letters from superior to inferior (King 2011). However, it is equally true that social positioning and persona are constructed in communication, with language use varying according to addressee (Hernández-Campoy & García-Vidal 2018), and that highly educated writers and multilinguals are able to shift between a repertoire of styles (Auer 2015; Nurmi & Pahta 2010).

In this paper, I focus on the ways Carondelet uses the building blocks of official communication to present himself to various interlocutors as a strict or concerned superior or as a fellow soldier in the fight for order. I first discuss the bilingual Carondelet's choice of Spanish or French, then turn to the form of and division of labor between various sociopragmatic elements (Bergs 2004) in his letters: orders, counsel, and reports/phatic elements. While there are certain standard features across his official correspondence, I show that Carondelet highlights different sides of his role as governor to different recipients, from short letters with imperative commands to information-filled missives which construct the recipient as a collaborator rather than an inferior.

References

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¹ Documents from the Louisiana Research Collection (Tulane), Bancroft library collections (UC Berkeley), Historic New Orleans Collection, and Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections (LSU).