This newspaper is intended to give a voice to the French-speaking (francophone) population of Louisiana. How many people are we talking about? There is wide disagreement as to the exact figure, but we are more numerous than we think.

For many years Cajuns have tried to hide the fact that they speak French. The general idea was that French was not a language to be spoken in public.

It was to be used in the home and for telling jokes among friends. But French had no place in the schools, for example, or in church, or at a football game. You certainly didn’t put up any signs in French at your place of business. The result of this mentality was to give the false impression that very few people still speak French in South Louisiana.

Thus, even the francophones were surprised when the results of the 1970 U.S. Government Census were published. This figure places the total number of francophones in Louisiana at 572,262. And in the Acadiana parishes, we often make up the vast majority of the population.

In its study of General Social & Economic Characteristics for Louisiana, 1970, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the figures in the chart on page 5.

Because French has been so hidden in Louisiana, these figures may seem to be too high. However, there is good reason to believe that they are too low.

The CODOFIL elementary school French programs are evaluated each year by an independent research firm. The report is scientifically prepared for the Louisiana State Department of Education.

In seeking to evaluate the concept of elementary school French instruction, the research firm sends questionnaires to parents with children in the program. The results of these surveys indicate that not only does the majority of the total South Louisiana population speak French, but this is even true of parents with elementary school age children.

In the survey covering the 1973-74 school year, the state was divided into the statistical areas: the northern, non-francophone parishes, and the southern Acadian parishes. The Acadian region included the following parishes: Avoyelles, Evangeline, Iberia, Iberville, Livingston, St. Landry, St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, St. Martin, Terrebonne and Vermilion. It should be noted that Livingston is not a French-speaking parish.

In the area included in the Acadiana region, sixty per cent of the parents said that they used French with their children at least some of the time. This high figure is all the more surprising because the parents were 50 years old or younger in 93% of the survey families. It is common knowledge that the proportion of French-speakers is higher among those over 50 years old.

In the 1970 census, it is likely that many people denied speaking French who actually were francophones.

This newspaper is also aimed at Cajuns who have lost the ability to use French but who are still very much involved in the Cajun culture. These people make up a group of several hundred thousand more people. So the total number of Cajuns in Louisiana is at least one million.

That many people should be willing to make their voices heard.