

THE CAJUN-TO-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

Because sometimes English needs a little translation.

A humorous guide to the words, phrases, food, family logic, and everyday expressions of the Real Louisiana.

CAJUN	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS
Mais!	Well! / Come on!	Universal Cajun punctuation. Meaning depends entirely on volume and facial expression.
Mais, cher!	Well, dear!	You poor thing. Come here and eat something.
Cher / Sha	Dear / Sweetheart	Anybody you like—and occasionally somebody whose name you forgot.
Couillon	Fool / Silly person	Your friend who just did something spectacularly stupid. Often a term of endearment.
Ça c'est bon!	That's good!	Whatever you're eating, get another plate.
Laissez les bons temps rouler!	Let the good times roll!	We're probably going to need more food.
Lagniappe	A little something extra	You bought twelve shrimp and somehow got thirteen. Civilization at its finest.
Gris-gris	Charm / folk magic	Something your grandmother warned you not to fool with.
Fais do-do	Go to sleep / Cajun dance	Somehow Louisiana turned bedtime into a party.
Pass a good time	Have fun	Perfectly good Louisiana English. The rest of America is saying it wrong.
Where y'at?	How are you?	We aren't actually asking for your GPS coordinates.
Come see	Come here	Usually followed by something you absolutely need to see right now.
Come go	Come with me	Grammatically questionable. Completely understandable.
Save the groceries	Put the groceries away	Nobody is rescuing them. Just put the milk in the refrigerator.
Make groceries	Buy groceries	We don't manufacture them. Usually.
Put it up	Put it away	And you better remember where you put it.
Get down	Get out of the car	Nobody is asking you to lie on the pavement.
I'm gonna pass by	I'm coming over	Your house has just become today's destination.
I'm fixing to...	I'm about to...	Could mean immediately. Could mean sometime after coffee.
Yeah, you right!	Absolutely!	The matter has been settled. No further discussion required.
No, yeah	Yes	Context is everything.
Yeah, no	No	See above.
Hose pipe	Garden hose	Apparently the rest of America needed two words for this.
Coulee	Drainage ditch / small waterway	Where the ball, dog, crawfish trap, and occasionally your lawn mower eventually wind up.
Bayou	Slow-moving waterway	Backyard, highway, grocery store and seafood department—all in one.
Pirogue	Small flat-bottomed boat	A Cajun kayak that doesn't need a marketing department.
Boudin	Seasoned pork-and-rice sausage	Not "boo-din." Say that and we'll know you're visiting.
Cracklins	Fried pork skin/fat	The reason the bag is mysteriously empty before you get home.
Crawfish	Crawfish	Not crayfish. Not crawdads. We're trying to run a civilized society here.

Mudbugs	Crawfish	Acceptable nickname—especially when accompanied by potatoes and corn.
Pinch the tail, suck the head	How to eat crawfish	Sounds alarming until you've been to your first boil.
The roux ain't dark enough	Keep cooking it	A sentence capable of starting a three-generation family argument.
A little seasoning	Season generously	Measurement varies according to ancestry.
Just put some in there	Add an unspecified amount	The official measurement system of Cajun grandmothers.
Till it looks right	No measurable cooking time	See previous entry.
That gumbo's thin	Serious culinary criticism	Friendships have ended over less.
Who's your mama?	Who is your mother?	Step one of determining whether we're related.
Who's your daddy?	Who is your father?	Step two.
Who are your people?	What's your family?	We have now begun the Louisiana background check.
I know your cousin	We are practically family	There is approximately an 80% chance this is true.
Down the bayou	South-ish	Distance measured in landmarks, not miles.
Up the road	Somewhere nearby	Could be 500 yards. Could be 25 miles.
Over yonder	There	Precision is overrated.
A ways	Some distance	The official Cajun unit of measurement.
The other day	At some point previously	Could mean Tuesday. Could mean 1997.
Cold enough to freeze a crawfish	Very cold	Anything below about 50°F.
It's fixing to come a flood	Heavy rain is approaching	Move the truck and check the ditch.
We got a little weather	Severe weather occurred	Trees may be missing.
You ate yet?	Hello	The traditional Louisiana wellness check.
I'm full	I've finished my first plate	Dessert remains negotiable.
Take you some home	Here's a container of food	Refusal is not among the available options.
We just having a little something	We're serving enough food for 37 people	There are nine people coming.
Don't worry about bringing nothing	Bring something	Preferably dessert.
We gonna cook	An event is about to occur	People will arrive, chairs will appear, and nobody knows when they're leaving.
He can cook	High praise	This person's character references have been verified.
He can't make a roux	Deeply concerning	Further investigation may be warranted before marriage.

A CLN-STYLE ENTRY

CAJUN: "You ate yet?"

ENGLISH: "Have you eaten?"

ACTUAL MEANING: "Hello. I love you. Sit down. There's gumbo."

CAJUN LIFE LESSON: Never answer "yes." You're getting a plate anyway.

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