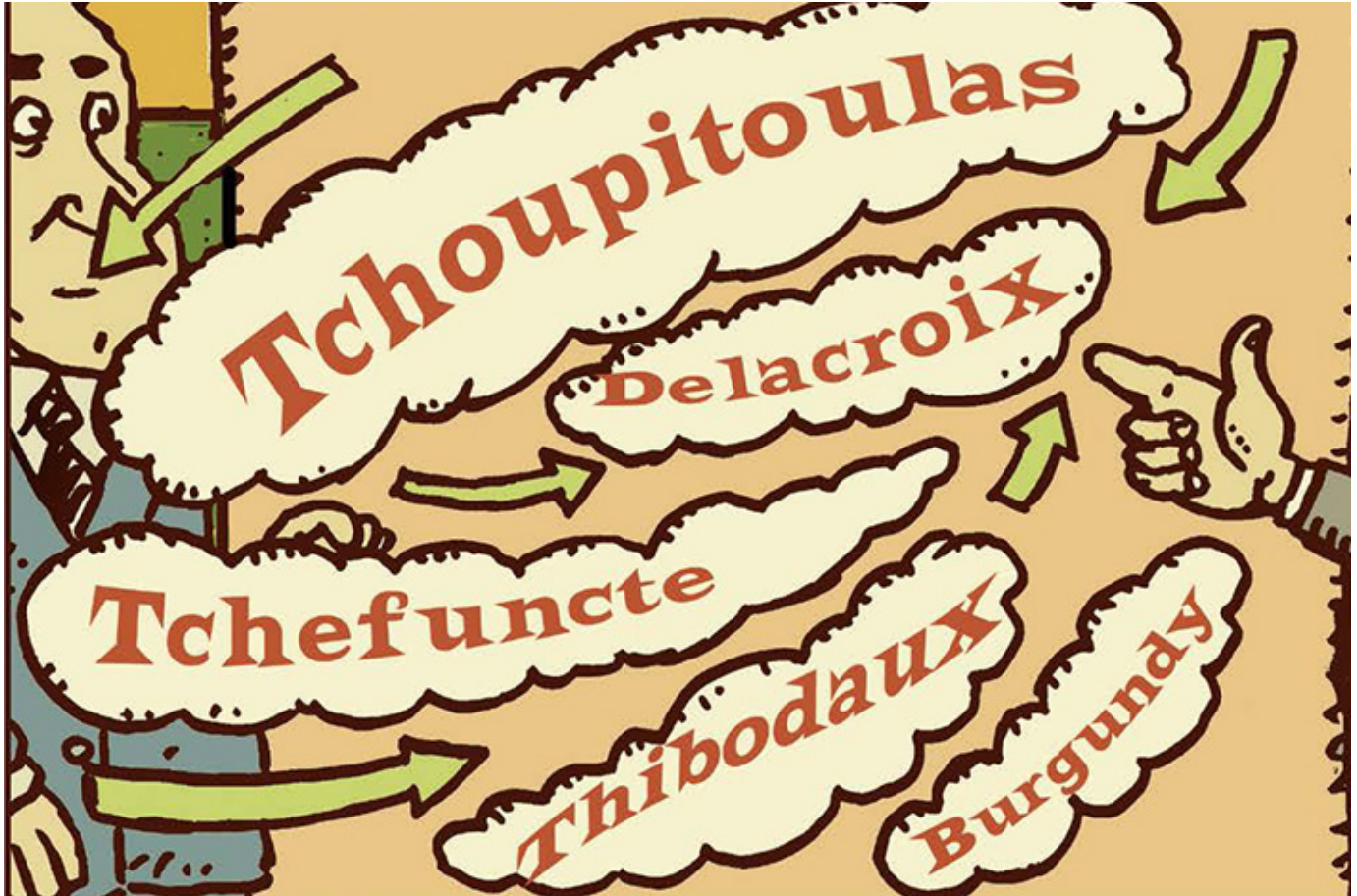


Native tongue

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The New Orleans lingo is daunting for newcomers. (Illustration by Mark Andresen)

"Twas back in early September, and the Tulane freshmen were just mastering some important campus directional issues, such as how to get to Camellia Grill. I was channel surfing, trying to settle onto a local TV news broadcast to watch.

Up popped Bob Breck, the veteran meteorologist for WVUE-TV News. After 36 years on the air, Breck is still the unpredictable and amusing Energizer Bunny of the Fox 8 weather staff. He had in tow Greg Adaline, a new morning anchor from Lansing, Michigan. It was his first day on the job.

For opportunist Breck, this was like shooting ducks in a baited field. He welcomed the Michigander, then marched the poor guy over to a whiteboard where he had written six names: Tchoupitoulas, Burgundy, Tchefuncte, Maurepas, Delacroix and Thibodaux. He asked Adaline to pronounce each one, a daunting task for anyone who hasn't spent more time here than a Mardi Gras weekend. Adaline got two right? well, sort of. At least Breck didn't tell him Tchoupitoulas is pronounced just like it's spelled.

And when Breck told Adaline that the river Tchefuncte was pronounced Che-funk-ta, he asked, "Why doesn't it end in 'a'?"

"You never ask why down here," replied Breck.

No newbie wants to fumble the ball with local names, or the viewers will jump all over him or her. I got to thinking about the geographically diverse crowd of 1,600 Green Wave freshmen (from 46 states and 18 foreign countries) who had just landed in Noo Awlins, dawlin" and faced a similar task in order to assimilate into the local scene ? how to pronounce or correctly mispronounce names of streets, cities and towns, bodies of water and parishes, not to mention deciphering local colloquialisms ("Ya want dat po-boy dressed?").

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A 1966 graduate of Tulane University, Angus Lind spent more than three decades as a columnist for The Times-Picayune.

New Orleans has its own culture, music, food, architecture and language. Language is the toughest nut to crack.