

Chapter 8

Creole and Education in Haiti

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Introduction

Haiti's 1987 constitution made Creole official along with French and recognized that Creole is the language that all Haitians have in common.¹ This constitution and the prior **Bernard Reform** of education, officially begun in 1979, provided the first official buttresses for the use of Creole in Haitian schools. The reform, promoting Creole as a language of instruction, was intended to produce broader educational access and pedagogical changes in line with promoting development rather than reproducing underdevelopment (Hadjadj 2000). The reform had Creole used as the language of instruction during the first four years of school; all literacy skills were to be taught using Creole. French was to be taught orally only as an object of instruction, introduced during the first year of school. Teachers were to begin teaching written French in the third year. The aim was to produce students who were balanced bilinguals by the end of the first ten years of schooling (the "fundamental cycle").

The reform was suspended by the government from 1982 to 1986, and the suspension was then extended a year until 1987. (The government had made spurious excuses for discontinuing its support for the reform.) In December 1987, the reform activities were officially begun again, under the supervision of the restructured National Pedagogical Institute (**IPN** is the French acronym). In March 1998, a government decree made official the curricula of the **Formal Basic School**, a program for modernizing education. This decree provided added legal basis for educational reform by ordering progressive implementation of the Formal Basic School program in all Haitian schools (Hadjadj 2000).

The results have been far from satisfactory, to put it mildly: reforms have been undertaken half-heartedly at best. The government has not really been behind the effort. The training of teachers and principals in the use of the new program is lacking. The principals of private schools (83 percent of the total) have dragged their feet. Additional factors in the abysmal results have been (1) the instability in the government and ministries, (2) the total absence in most schools of support institutions (libraries and laboratories) and materials, not to mention (3) inadequate staffing. Making matters even worse is that (4) the

government sabotaged educational modernization from 1975-1986 (Hadjadj 2000).

To be sure, there was a spurt of efforts from 1991 to 1995 to push the reform, with gradual but limited progress. This outcome was due to (1) the lack of resources, (2) the absence of a real national debate on modernizing schools, (3) the inertia of field agents supposed to implement the reform, and (4) the opposition of parents to the use of Creole in instruction (Hadjadj 2000).

In this chapter, my aim is to revisit some of the major issues that I have been concerned with throughout my career as a linguist. They relate to Creole as a language and its use in education. Some of these issues provide a context for understanding the fate of the Bernard Reform. (On education in Haiti, see also Dejean 2006.) I revisit these issues because many of the points, although made before, require restatement: current debates must take them into account for there to be a fully rational discussion of Creole vis-à-vis educational questions, and more generally, sociopolitical and economic ones. One section of this chapter deals with what Creole should be called; the two primary candidates are *Creole* and *Haitian*. Although not as weighty an issue sociopolitically and economically as some of the others I treat, it is, nevertheless, one that I feel strongly about and take this opportunity to air my thoughts about once again.

An American Visitor in Haiti

One Tuesday in Port-au-Prince, October 10, 2000, at around one o'clock in the afternoon, as I walked from the Paloma gas station to my residence across from Carrefour's open air marketplace, I was overwhelmed by the flow of students coming out of the area schools, particularly the Juvénat des Frères du Sacré-Coeur. That day I probably crossed paths with a thousand children and accompanying adults. Basking in this joyous immersion, I lingered at Juvénat's gates for some time and imagined a meeting between an American visitor and an English-speaking Haitian teacher. As I listened to the hum of hundreds of voices, a stream of humans with their streams of words, I imagined a dialogue between the visitor and the teacher:

A. I'd really like to know what these children are saying. Too bad they don't speak English.

T. Too bad you don't speak their language.

A. True. I do speak some French. I don't think they're speaking French though. What language are they speaking?

T. They're speaking Creole. Every Haitian speaks Creole.

A. Are the children taught in Creole?

T. No, they're taught in French.

A. Why aren't they taught in Creole? Do all these children speak French too?

T. No, they're learning French at school.

A. Do these children's parents speak French?

T. Only some of them.

A. What percentage would you say?

T. I'd say barely ten percent.

A. You mean to tell me that ninety percent of the parents of this large group of children we're looking at right now don't speak French fluently?

T. The parents don't speak French at all.

A. Then I suppose ninety percent of the kids I'm looking at right now didn't speak French at all when they entered primary school.

T. That's right.

A. Is this true only of this neighborhood, Carrefour?

T. No, it happens everywhere in Haiti. Some linguists—Yves Dejean, for example—believe that out of eight to nine million Haitians only two or three percent speak French proficiently.

A. Do these school children then become proficient in French after a few years of schooling, after, say, four or five years?

T. I've been teaching high school for fifteen years, but in all honesty I'd have to say that, even after ten years of schooling, a great majority of these students don't speak French proficiently. And that opinion is shared by most of Haiti's (certified) teachers.

A. Do they know at least how to read French?

T. In theory. Almost all of them read French at various levels.

A. So, they understand well what's written in French books, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, brochures, directions, etc.

T. I don't think so, at least not most of them.

A. But how do you define "knowing how to read"? Where I'm from, we classify as illiterate (unable to read) those who don't pass a comprehension exam based on a text written in English, if English is their first language. The text is one that all English-speaking ninth graders should understand very well after a relatively short period of silent reading.

T. By this standard, most of our students and former students wouldn't pass a French exam unless they've learned both the text and a detailed explanation by heart.

A. So why don't you give them texts written in Creole?

T. They don't know how to read Creole. I don't know how to read Creole.

A. Do you speak Creole fluently?

T. Of course. I've been speaking Creole ever since I learned to talk, just like everyone born and raised in Haiti.

A. And you can speak and read English. You can understand an article about Haiti in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Boston Globe, and the Miami Herald?

T. And whenever I have a chance I read what's published about Haiti in Le Monde, Le Monde Diplomatique, La Croix, Le Figaro, and even Paris-Match.

A. But why don't you learn to read Creole?

T. It's difficult. And there's no orthography.

A. I'm stunned. Before coming to Haiti, I checked with one of my friends who'd lived in Port-au-Prince for fifteen years. He showed me three English-Creole dictionaries published in the United States along with some other books. There was even a collection of poems by a great Haitian writer who died in Miami.

T. Felix Morisseau-Leroy, the author of Diakout [Editor's note: *diakout*, written in the Pressoir Orthography for Creole, is a large straw bag with a strap; spelled d-y-a-k-o-u-t in the official, orthography].

A. He showed me a Creole edition of the Bible, which was published, I believe in 1999. All these books were written in an orthography that my friend told me has been officially in use since 1980.

T. Ah? In any case, French is the official language of instruction here.

A. And do you get good results?

T. Unfortunately, no. The success rate for national high school exams has been a catastrophe for many years—very low, between 20 and 30 percent. Really sad.

A. Haiti's children are truly unfortunate. I don't think I would have been able to earn my high school diploma, my B.A., and my Masters in Electronics if I'd been taught in German or Spanish from childhood instead of in my own language.

T. I'm lucky to be among a select few. I speak French fluently and I can read in three major languages: French, English, and Spanish.

A. I think we have a very different understanding of instruction, education, reading comprehension and the ultimate purpose of lifelong instruction for all.

Men and women teaching in American schools enjoy by far a better economic situation than instructors in Haiti. Of course, the conditions are different. The problems are not identical. However, intelligence and brain functions for all children and adults are the same everywhere. There is no real reading without comprehension. The simple decoding of words is a mechanical and minor aspect of reading activity. All of the world's knowledgeable teachers can only agree with the basic ideas expressed by Superintendent Roger C. Cuevas, of the Miami-Dade County school system, in the *Miami Herald*, ideas presuming that texts will be read when written in a language perfectly understood and mastered by young student readers at all levels. Only those who are completely misled by an absurd school system would fail to recognize this basic fact—that any knowledge that is acquired orally or through writing is acquired through a linguistic system that one already knows.

Creole or another Name

Some writers on Creole feel the language should be called Haitian rather than Creole, for example Freeman in the preface to Freeman and Laguerre (1996,

vii). It should first be observed that *Creole* has been used for 250 years by all Creole, French, English, and Spanish speakers who have lived in the western part of the island, named Hispaniola by the first European conquerors (1492). (The country was named Saint-Domingue by the French when it was ceded to them by Spain in 1697 and renamed Haiti by the founders of the Haitian nation, after independence on January 1, 1804.)

Freeman might have done better justifying his terminological decision by making reference to one of Saussure's principles: the linguistic sign is arbitrary (Saussure 1959, 100). Indeed his naming recommendation is arbitrary. According to Saussure's principle, there is no principled, or nonarbitrary, relationship between a series of sounds that we utter and their meaning. (Qualification: This is for the most part true, but there do exist in all languages, though, a limited number of principled sound-meaning correspondences. This phenomenon is referred to as iconicity.)

The point that I will argue is that there is no reason to change the name of the creole language spoken in Haiti, despite the fact that the language of Italy is called Italian; the language of France, French; the language of Turkey, Turkish; and so forth. Matching of the name of a country's language with the name of the country does occur in many cases but not all. The Americas are full of exceptions. The language of the U.S. is called English. Canada has two official languages, called English and French. The official, most widely spoken language of Mexico is not Mexican but Spanish. In Europe, Belgians speak Flemish and French, and the Swiss speak German, French, Italian, and other languages, none of them called Swiss. In Africa, Moroccans speak Arabic (and Berber); in Ghana, Ghanaians speak a number of languages, none of which is called Ghanaian; and so forth, all around the world.

Furthermore, *pace* Freeman, there is no consideration of "dignity" that would compel Haitians to name their language Haitian instead of Creole, and there are certainly no testimonials from Haitians claiming embarrassment or shame due to the name of their language. Moreover, the term *Creole* in no way suffers from vagueness since everybody knows what language is being referred to. There is no dysfunction or confusion, even considering other French-related creole-speaking societies where the language is called Creole—Martinique and Guadeloupe, for example. When people in these societies say *Creole*, they know what language they are referring to; and, they can certainly clarify if necessary, just as one can clarify, for example, whether one is talking about a certain kind of English—American English, British English, or Australian English. Vagueness is a nonissue. People are smarter than that.

Observe additionally that it is one thing for specialists, such as linguists and creolist linguists more specifically, to prefer to use country names for creole languages, i.e., Haitian, Martinican, Jamaican, St. Lucian, etc. Specialists typically have their own specialized terminology. It is another thing to recommend that laypeople do as specialists, or, even more importantly, that the speakers of

the language themselves, in this case Haitians, follow the lead of specialists. Specialists have their own needs and their own channels of communication, and this is typical in the sciences and also in your average nonscientific academic discipline.

Consequently, these arguments in favor of changing the name of Creole to base it on the name of the country, Haiti, fail upon closer inspection.

Who Speaks French?

To assert that Haiti is a French-speaking country is to play on the confusion created by French being an official language. (Creole was made a co-official language by Article 5 of the 1987 constitution.) French is official due to the clout of a few members of the country's elite (1918 constitution, Article 24; 1987 constitution, Article 5). This notwithstanding, Creole is the language understood and spoken by everyone born and raised in Haiti (between eight and nine million people).

The very first individual who graduated with a linguistics degree in Haiti, who was also the first Haitian woman to earn a doctorate, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain (1898-1975), made a related, unsubstantiated assertion, writing that "All Haitians are more or less bilingual" (Sylvain 1936, 7). This claim distorts reality. No doubt, though, her false claim led Ferguson (1959) in his landmark writing on diglossia, to chose Haiti as an example of a diglossic country, a classification criticized by Dejean (1979, 1983a, 1983b; see also Zéphir in this volume). (**Diglossia** refers to societies in which there is a "high", or elite, formal language, used by the major institutions such as government and the media, and learned usually during formal education. There exists also a "low" language, acquired naturally by virtually everyone in the process of acculturation, and used principally for informal communication in the company of friends and family. Each language is used in a distinct "domain," i.e., range of social situations.)

The introduction of Sylvain's book classifies Haitians into three categories of bilinguals. The first is the Haitian elite, often raised in Paris, who speak a French that is very "pure" though sometimes a bit stilted, but they also speak Creole privately. They speak Creole to joke with their spouses, their children, and their friends. They speak Creole to their servants and other employees.

Note the phrase "often raised in Paris," which largely exaggerates the number of Haitians raised in Paris. For the period 1898, when Suzanne Sylvain was born, to 1959, when Ferguson's classic diglossia article was published, it would be generous to estimate that the number of Haitians brought up in Paris or elsewhere in France was three thousand.

Sylvain continues with her second category of bilinguals, the urban masses, generally speaking Creole. She notes that, since they have attended elementary

school for many years and are constantly in contact with people speaking Creole and French, they can also express themselves in French if the occasion demands.

Up until 1941, six years after the publication of Sylvain's book, the rate of school attendance in Haiti was by far the lowest in the Americas, and the length of primary school attendance was extremely short (Dejean 1975, 11-12; Dejean 2006). A child from the masses did not have easy access to schools and did not spend much time there. Only a few were able to speak French a little, and their contact with members of the elite did not take place entirely in French—if at all.

Sylvain, completed her discussion with the third category of bilinguals, the peasant, who does not speak French, but, if a person of importance, will speak a very rudimentary French, more like Creole with French words and phrases thrown in. Most of these adults understand only a few simple French phrases having to do with business or religion. The twelve- to fourteen-year-old child who attends a rural school has only a limited academic vocabulary that s/he will later forget. For the child as well as the parents, Creole will be their sole means of communication.

Keep in mind that the peasant population of Haiti in 1935 was around 95 percent. In 1974, Georges Anglade (1974, 50) estimated at 85.7 percent the number of peasants older than fourteen. One could reasonably estimate that peasants formed about 95 percent of the total Haitian population forty years before Anglade wrote.

Sylvain's claim about peasants' understanding a few simple French phrases relating to commerce and religion was not based on personal observation or research in the Haitian countryside. Monsignor Kersuzan (1922, 5) confirmed as much in talking about teaching the catechism to poor young girls in the city of Cape Haitian. He noted that years of repetition did not involve learning. In the introduction to his *Catéchisme créole* (Kersuzan 1922, 7-8), published when Suzanne Sylvain was twenty-four years old, Kersuzan had dedicated almost an entire page to her father, Georges Sylvain, then Haiti's Minister Plenipotentiary to the French Government. Kersuzan extolled the elder Sylvain's use and love of Creole and his great eloquence in speaking it. A moment's reflection would have convinced Georges Sylvain's daughter that memorizing the formulaic elements of the catechism in French along with songs and prayers, could not convert monolingual Creole speakers into bilinguals, any more than the Latin liturgy of the Catholic church could make Latin speakers of those believers who for more than a thousand years were exposed to Latin masses.

I can be very specific and point out—simultaneously providing the reader with a brief immersion in Haitian culture—that Creole is the only language spoken and heard in the following situations:

- the fields cultivated by Haitian peasants (two third of the population)
- rural markets, big and small, in the mountains, valleys, and plains
- urban markets, including those in Petionville and Port-au-Prince, cities with relatively high numbers of bilinguals

- vodou sanctuaries and all the private homes where ceremonies are held in honor of vodou spirits (*lwa* in Creole)
- pilgrimage sites, large and small, frequented by those who serve the *lwa* (vodou spirits)
- leaving prayer meetings and religious ceremonies from all religious venues, whether Protestant or Catholic or Jehovah's Witnesses, with only a few exceptions at most
- leaving all schools at the end of the day, public and private, with very few exceptions
- all sports venues—stadiums, soccer fields, etc.
- all cockfight arenas (called *gagè* or *gadyè* in Creole)
- all homes in the countryside and most in the towns and cities, when people gather for wakes, funerals, and other related events, such as what Haitians call the *dènye priyè* (last prayer)
- parties in towns and cities to celebrate the local patrons of Catholic churches
- all transport stations
- all service stations
- all the parades with *rara* and carnival (*madigra*) bands playing
- all open-air political meetings, held at least since 1986
- all the *bank bòlèt* (locations where private lottery transactions are made)
- in all small private businesses where employees learn trades such as jewelry making, dry cleaning, butchery, baking, carpentry, barbering, shoe repair, tailoring, cooking, woodworking, metalworking, welding, clock repairing, masonry, fishing, mattress making, mechanics, midwifery, *madansara* (peddling—as done by women), and so forth

The only places in Haiti where French is the *only* language spoken are certain offices of the French embassy and the front office of the Lycée Français. When teachers and certain Catholic and Protestant ministers, and ever fewer government bureaucrats, conduct monologues in French—and monologues they are indeed—the listeners talk among themselves in Creole.

In sum, Haitians as a group are not even more or less bilingual. All Haitians speak Creole as a native language, and very few also speak French—an individual's knowing a few French words or phrases does not count in assessing whether Haiti is bilingual. Consequently, the country is not bilingual in any meaningful sense. Suzanne Sylvain provided a completely inaccurate and inadequate sociolinguistic description of Haiti's language situation in 1935, paving the way for errors that have persisted until today.

The Haitian Constitution on Language

Article 5 of the 1987 Haitian constitution states curiously that all Haitians share a common language, Creole, and that Creole and French are the official languages of the republic.

The article makes three points. The first one is a sociolinguistic observation whose importance must not be underestimated. It is the public acknowledgement of an undeniable fact: the whole population of Haiti speaks Creole. Thus, all Haitians share a vehicle for language communication. This common linguistic vehicle makes possible direct and unmediated communication among individuals throughout Haiti. With Creole, any given Haitian can communicate with any other Haitian. Those of all creeds, religion, political affiliations, levels of schooling, and theoretical or practical knowledge possess in their minds the same fundamental linguistic system and its complex phonology, syntax, morphology, and semantics. Implicitly, the first sentence of Article 5 implies that French is not a means of communication available to all the sectors of the population.

The second point is implied by the fact of a common Haitian language, Creole. This point is that French, first declared the official language in Article 24 of the 1918 constitution, should not be used in the conduct of business in governmental and other important institutions. Creole, the language spoken and understood by all, should be. Everyone can understand a clear text in Creole, intelligently read by others.

In the third point irrationality emerges. It is completely unrelated to what precedes it, i.e., the important observation calling for the officialization of Creole, which acknowledges that it is, for all Haitians, a communal link that cannot be ignored. The ill-advised declaration of French as official language in the context of Article 5 is unjustified. It is not even supported by the noble considerations in the constitution's preamble, for example, its social justice objective (paragraph 2); protecting values, traditions, and the national vision (paragraph 3); establishing democracy (paragraph 4); the strengthening of "national unity and the elimination of all discrimination between city and country dwellers" (paragraph 5); and promoting the "consultation and participation of the whole population in important decisions concerning the entire nation" (paragraph 7).

To be sure, the proclamation of French as official language does have some support in the Preamble of the constitution. Paragraph 5 conceals a subtlety, whether intentional or not, that sets the course for the inclusion of French in Article 5. It states that the elimination of discrimination between urban and rural residents will take place "with the acceptance of the language communities [note the plural] and the cultural community [author's translation]." But on what basis can it be claimed that there are two language communities, one situated in the country, the other in the cities? It is by no means the case that the cities are

French-speaking and bilingual, while the countryside is Creole-speaking and monolingual.

The United Nation's Convention on Children's Rights

Common practices in Haitian schools are in flagrant violation of the United Nations' Convention of November 20, 1989, relating to children's rights. It was signed by the Haitian government on January 6, 1990, ratified by the Parliament December 23, 1994, and disseminated in the *Moniteur* (which records official actions). The convention has the force of law in the country according to Article 49, 1 of the said Convention. (See UNICEF, *Les enfants d'abord* [*Children First*] [Deschamps 1990]).

Article 19.1 of the Convention is about children's safety—in the family and in their social and educational environment. It is about their being free of physical coercion in all its forms—abuse, cruelty, assault, and battery. It is common knowledge that in K-12 everywhere there is arbitrary, unjustifiable, disproportionate, and inhumane corporal punishment.

Articles 12.1, 13.1, 14.1, 19.1, and 28.2 have the goal of protecting children's freedom of speech and thought as well as safeguarding their psychological wellbeing. Articles 17.d, 29.1.c, 30, and 40.vi protect the linguistic needs and rights of children who are members of linguistic minorities. One might ask where using Creole fits into all of these punitive measures taken against pupils.

In a school in Carrefour, a "symbol" ("symbole" in Haitian high school slang) is passed on to a high school student. (A symbol is a token, often a small, square piece of cardboard.) He keeps silent resolutely and carefully, watching his fellow students to catch even the merest whisper in Creole fall from their lips, at which point he pounces on the unfortunate rule breaker and gives him the symbol. The goal is to avoid being the bearer of the symbol at the end of the week, when ten blows on the palm of the hand with a horsewhip (rigwaz in Creole) will be meted out. The result of this truly despicable practice is to cause students to spy on and denounce one another, and it is emblematic of the widespread disrespect shown toward Creole.

Ironically though, on Sunday May 27, 2001, at that same school, the principal speaks only Creole for an hour and a half at a conference with nearly a hundred parents. In doing so, he does no less than the Ministry of National Education [Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports; French acronym MENJS] in making announcements in Creole on the radio. I witnessed this, for example, from Wednesday April 18 to Friday April 27, 2001, on Radio Quisqueya, when a program called "Lekòl pou tout timoun" ("School for All Children") aired, which attempts to recruit school age children not registered in school. All of the potential recruits are monolingual Creole speakers of mono-

lingual Creole-speaking parents and communities, for a school system that will waste their intelligence without pity from kindergarten to the end of high school through idolatrous worship of the French language.

Language Acquisition

The hardcore, truly bilingual minority in Haiti, less than 10 percent, do not “learn” French, beginning as young children. They acquire French, along with Creole, from infancy. In other words, their knowledge of French and Creole is the result of **natural language acquisition**, the acquisition of a language beginning in infancy as part and parcel of the acculturation/socialization process, through routine interaction with caregivers, family, and friends. Natural language acquisition leads to one’s becoming a **native speaker**.

We can contrast this acquisition process to **artificial language acquisition** (on analogy with natural vs. artificial languages²), which hardly ever leads to native-like proficiency. Artificial acquisition occurs through instruction, usually in school, or through self-teaching. Natural acquisition bilinguals are fully at home in both French and Creole. They acquire the Haitian sociolect of French. All local varieties of French, as of other languages, differ from one another geographically; and, this is expected and most easily seen on the level of vocabulary. For example, in Haitian French one says *mango* (mango) where French speakers in France say *mangue*; in Haitian French one says *figue* (banana), in France *banane*.

As with all humans, everyone, even those with (nonsevere) cognitive handicaps acquire French (and Creole) naturally if exposed to it from infancy in the range of social contexts for natural acquisition. Natural language acquisition is spontaneous and effortless, proceeding without self-consciousness on the part of the acquirer.

Artificial learning, on the other hand, is normally tedious and does not result in full acquisition. Only a few especially talented or highly educated individuals acquire a second language with anything even approaching the mastery of a native speaker.

The failure in Haiti of teaching French and teaching in French is widely attributed to faulty methodology. The Bernard Reform stirred up false hopes, for one thing, by advocating teaching French as a foreign language, without making adequate use of pedagogical insights already gained from foreign language teaching around the world.

The supporters and implementers of the reform would have done well to consider the experiences of the Scandinavian countries and The Netherlands, where foreign language teaching has been very successful. These countries never based cognitive development and the acquisition of knowledge on the prior acquisition of a foreign language. It is understood that children will be introduced in their early education to subject matter in their native language, and

that the native language will continue to be their *primary* one throughout their lives. They are not expected to adopt a foreign, world language such as English as their primary one, but to use it as their secondary language in order to access advanced education and other resources made available by those world languages.

The fundamental flaw in the Bernard Reform, as I have pointed out previously (Dejean 2006: 237ff), is that it calls for the first four years of schooling in Creole; however, from then on Creole and French are to be *fully on the same footing* in students' learning. All students are supposed to have two languages after a few years of bilingual instruction. The position of the reform is that the country must speak French and that this will occur as a result of schools producing bilinguals. The key here is that Creole, the native language, is not intended to continue (after these first four years and the following ones during which students learn French) as the primary language and primary vehicle of instruction. The error is in believing that Haiti has the resources, educational or other, to produce on a mass level any outcome even approaching competence in French, in addition to competence in Creole.

Orthography: Awareness and Adequacy

Since Beaulieu (1939), McConnell and Swan (1945), Pressoir (1947), the nonexistence of an official Creole orthography and the presumed negative attitudes of the people toward one have been used to avoid confronting the issue of establishing Creole as the language of instruction in the schools. (On orthography, see also Dejean 1980; Schieffelin and Doucet 1998; and Faraclas and Spears in this volume.) Thus, to take one example, Valdman's discussion deals with popular thinking about orthography but does not adequately take Haitian debates into account; and, what is more, it raises some irrelevant issues. (I might note in passing that the following quotation reiterates and condenses ideas put forward by Pressoir [1947, 66] and repeated by Berry [1958, 741], Smalley [1964 15, 23], Pompilus [1973, 26], and Férère [1974, 25].)

Since Creole is a language viewed as inferior, . . . it must first be determined whether its speakers feel it is worthy of having an orthography. . . it seems that *all the members* of the community, *including monolingual Creole speakers in Haiti*, feel that any orthography used to write Creole should be aligned with the orthography of French, the prestige language and the official language. Of course, it remains to be determined whether *this position* goes against economic needs and the sociocultural and political realities of the country [author's emphasis and translation] (Valdman 1978, 110).

There are several problems with Valdman's comments, enumerated as follows:

1. Creole's inferior status implies nothing with regard to the opinions of the monolingual masses vis-à-vis whether Creole "is worthy of having an orthography" or whether "any orthography used to write Creole should be aligned with the orthography of French," if indeed they have any opinion about these particular issues.
2. Nowhere in the five thousand six hundred year history of writing is there an example of the creation of a writing system as a consequence of the masses of the population believing their language was "worthy" of being written. Beliefs of worthiness, then, are not really relevant.
3. Total illiterates, forming the vast majority of the monolingual Creole-speakers of Haiti, have not had the wherewithal to form an opinion about the value of Creole orthography, completely unknown to them, as compared to a French orthography, of which they know virtually nothing.
4. The majority of monolingual Creole speakers, those hardly educated in French-language schools and unable to speak French, do not have the background for developing sensitivity to and positions on orthographical questions.
5. The history of writing worldwide does not reveal any decision on choice of orthography made by an entire language community, through referendum or any other means.
6. There is no empirical back-up for the comments on attitudes toward orthography ascribed to users of French orthography.
7. There is no basis for making the case that even the majority of the highly educated, French-speaking minority in Haiti have the background to make intelligent decisions about orthography.
8. The majority of speakers of a language do not even worry about questions of orthography.
9. The concerns and fears about orthography on the part of the tiny number of Haitians having them (i.e., who are not language scholars) could easily be described as overwhelmingly irrational, resulting from their educational indoctrination.

Thus, the real points to be made about orthographic awareness are that (1) there is little of it—in any population, (2) nonspecialists' ideas about possible orthographies are generally based on linguistic prejudices and are, therefore, not in accord with the best technical solutions to orthographic problems, and (3) if nonspecialists' ideas about orthographies are followed—which can indeed happen for sociopolitical reasons—the results may well not be an optimally "efficient" or rational orthography. Valdman himself gives recognition to this last point.

Some might argue that, indeed, the official Haitian orthography resulting from the efforts of IPN (National Pedagogical Institute) does make a bow to-

ward French prestige by using “ou” (two letters) to represent the one sound /u/ (in *boot*) instead of just one letter, and by using “n” after a vowel to signal vowel nasalization, e.g. Creole *gason* (boy), which ends in a nasalized vowel. Nevertheless, especially in view of regional and social variation in Creole, one could argue that all decisions made in creating the official Creole orthography can be justified by phonological and dialectological principles.

Creole, International Communication, and Economic Development

An often heard objection to the exclusive or primary use of Creole as the language of instruction in Haiti in elementary and high schools (let alone colleges) is the danger of regional and international isolation stemming from continued highly limited bilingualism and near universal monolingualism. There are those who indignantly argue that we do not have the right to deprive our fellow citizens of an international language like French. This objection is naïve, to say the least. How can you deprive someone of something they never had? How can you deprive a bald-headed person of hair, or steal a million dollars from somebody who has only one hundred dollars?

Some sociolinguists argue, for example Nadine Dutcher (1995, 6), that Creole-speaking populations need support from another language of wider communication. However, the fundamental observation to make about human communication is that it is above all an activity of individuals communicating with one another at specific points in time, limited by factors of time and space. The American people, for instance, do not talk to the Russian people. Only a few individuals in the U.S. who speak English and Russian fluently talk directly to other individuals in Russia, those who are also fluent in Russian and English.

The number of Haitians today speaking some foreign language would be sufficient to ensure communication between, not only a country twenty times larger and more populated than Haiti, but also all the nations of the world. The overwhelming majority of Americans, Saudi Arabians, Haitians, Mexicans, Italians, Japanese—name any nationality—who will live forty, fifty, or seventy years beyond the present, will have neither the need nor the ability to understand and speak a language other than their own. Thus, the idea of making all or most Haitians bilingual is not only socially and economically impractical but also unnecessary.

Smith (1999, 181), Bébel-Gisler and Hurbon (1975, 129) report, and challenge, an opinion often expressed by some Haitian, other Caribbean, and Western intellectuals that one of the reasons for Haiti’s underdevelopment is the masses’ lacking a language of wider communication, the vehicle of “social and human progress” that is French.

The basic problem with this opinion is its promotion of the idea that any people's level of development can be attributed, at least partially, to the inherent properties of the language they speak. This view implies that some languages possess in and of themselves traits that foster or produce development, with the implication that other languages do not.

This unwarranted opinion would lead us to believe that Japan had not experienced modern economic development in 1800 because the Japanese language of that time was somehow fundamentally different from the Japanese of the second half of the nineteenth century, when Japan's economic development cum industrialization was begun and realized, to the extent that Japan was able to defeat an industrialized European power in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904.

Subscribing to this false opinion would lead us to believe that if only the slaves of the Americas—in the U.S., Brazil, and elsewhere, excluding Haiti—had spoken Haitian Creole, they too would have been able to launch a permanently successful slave-led revolution.

The phenomenon of Language is, of course, essential for virtually all higher level human activities, but not the possession of a particular language. All human languages are equal in that they all possess the same expressive potential. Any language can be developed to serve adequately for any language-related task humans care to engage in. Some humans are more interested in kinship than nuclear physics, for historical and ecological reasons; and, they develop their language accordingly. Some are more interested in camels than mushrooms and develop their languages accordingly.

Conclusion

The massive failure of general education in Haiti is an unavoidable result of the failure of almost all schools (see Touillot-Lévy, this volume on an exception) to use the only language known to the overwhelming majority of the population: Creole. Without a major change in instructional language practice, as opposed to theory, the Haitian educational system remains condemned to failure. True, there are other causes of the widespread failure: the government's lack of commitment of adequate resources for education and the government's grossly insufficient commitment to educational reform itself. However, even with the elimination of the last two causes, there is no reason to expect significant improvement without the widespread use of pupil's mother tongue in instruction.

In conclusion, any discussion of Creole in Haitian education and in Haitian society generally should take for granted the following basic points:

1. Haiti is neither a French-speaking country nor a truly bilingual country in any meaningful sense: only a very small minority of Haitians could reasonably be called bilingual in Creole and French, not appreciably more than five percent.

2. Merely reciting words aloud from a text without understanding them is not reading, which assumes comprehension. Even after many years of schooling, the majority of Haitian children do not understand the meaning of the sentences they manage to read in French.
3. A language cannot by itself prevent its speakers from gaining access to knowledge. The argument that instruction in French, or any world language, is required for access to knowledge in the modern world is not based on facts.
4. Monolingual Creole-speaking Haitian children have the right to develop their cognitive skills and acquire all types of knowledge in Creole, without having to wait until they learn French, especially since the overwhelming majority of them never do learn French.
5. The spontaneous acquisition, during childhood, of one or more native languages is a fundamentally different process from learning one or more foreign languages. The creation of *mass* bilingualism through formal education in a foreign language is undocumented in human history—bilingualism yes, but not *mass* bilingualism (Dejean 1999). Consequently, it is not just by accident that education is provided in children's native language in most societies worldwide.

Notes

1. This chapter revisits and elaborates the main points of Dejean (2003).
2. Second language acquisition scholars normally speak of “guided” or “instructed acquisition” instead of artificial acquisition. I hope my analogical terms will be helpful for readers.

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