

ABSTRACT

Is French a Creole Language?

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Creoles are a unique clan of languages. Slaveholders needed a way to communicate with their slaves and vice-versa. In order to do this, a pidgin language developed in which only the bare essential of a language is used to communicate. Later, when the pidgin language develops native speakers, it is known as a creole. Creole languages have generally agreed upon structures that set them apart from other languages. Given these facts, I analyze similar grammatical structures and functions of French and Haitian Creole. I ultimately contend that French is not a creole language based on comparing its verbal morphology to that of Haitian Creole.

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IS FRENCH A CREOLE LANGUAGE?

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: What is a Creole?

When the average person hears of a creole language, they think of a language supposedly not as “pure” or “clean” as English or French. However, in the field of linguistics, we see that creoles are extremely complex languages with their own intricate grammars. Furthermore, French is a Romance language that evolved from Latin, via a stage called Old French, then eventually into contemporary French. Given the accepted knowledge about how creole languages evolve, it is possible to pose a hypothesis that “pure” languages such as French are themselves creole languages.

In linguistics, the first thing we must do is define the term “language”. The renowned American linguist Edward Sapir defined language as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols” (Poole 1999: 4). Another definition of language that seems to get to its core is, “a medium of communication specific to a society; it forms part of the culture of that society” (Poole 1999: 6). These two definitions are key to this thesis because both of these definitions allow for language change over time and when different cultures come together.

There are many reasons that languages change. In addition, a language may have different registers within that same language. For instance, as Joshua A. Fishman states, “Any speech community of even moderate complexity reveals several varieties of language, all of which are functionally differentiated from each other” (Fishman 1970: 1).

From this, it is easy to transition to the concept of diglossia in a community. Diglossia is a situation in which a speech community uses more than one language for different societal functions. An example of this is when a student goes to school and gets taught the “actual” or “true” language, but then goes home and speaks to his parents in the vernacular language. It is easy to understand how one could go from having one language, and then eventually a dialect becomes more widespread than the so-called “true” language. However, this line of inquiry delves more into the field of historical linguistics.

The subject of historical linguistics is language change and what factors cause it. In his *An Introduction to Linguistics*, Stuart C. Poole points out a few ways in which language can begin to change from a phonological point of view. For instance, he briefly explores the concept of metathesis, in which segments of a word are inverted. For instance, he gives an example of the word meaning cheese in Latin to the word meaning cheese in French. The Latin word *formaticum* became *fromage* in French (Poole 125). Another concept Poole briefly explores is that of assimilation in which a sound changes a neighboring sound. For instance, he gives the example of the Latin word *femina* and the French word *femme*. Here we can see that one can get from the Latin to the French by complete progressive assimilation in which the /n/ assimilates into the preceding /m/ in French (Poole 126). Yet another feature that he mentions is one which defines the development of Romance languages in general. This is the general loss of the case system of Latin in favor of prepositions and word order (Poole 1999: 128).

In addition to exploring a few ways and features of language change, Poole investigates possible causes of language change. One factor in the domain of phonology

is simply ease of articulation. Some sounds are simply easier to articulate than others, and this seemingly simple principle underlines factors such as assimilation. Another key example that will be explored throughout this thesis is that of one society's impact on another. As an example, Poole discusses the influence of Norman French on English. Society was split between the Norman masters and their Saxon subjects, but both continued to speak their respective languages. With time, as the social divisions broke down, the English language reasserted itself, however, with evident influence from Norman French especially in the areas of "administration, the law, chivalry, hunting, and so on" (Poole 1999: 133). For instance, in the fourteenth century, Chaucer wrote the words *jugement, beautee, and fairnesse* (Poole 1999: 133). This example of how one language can influence another leads to the discussion of how pidgins and creoles arise.

Among linguists and creolists, there is no consensus on exactly what defines a creole language. According to Alan Kaye and Mauro Tosco, a creole can be defined as "a pidgin which has acquired native speakers. Thus, in a sense, it is a normal language with an abnormal origin" (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 34). This seems to be a fairly accurate definition of what a creole is or could be. However this requires one first to understand the concept of what a pidgin is. Kaye and Tosco give a straightforward definition of the term pidgin: "a "reduced," usually world language, native to no one, used by people who do not share a common language" (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 16). Suzanne Romaine defines a pidgin as representing "a language which has been stripped of everything but the bare essentials necessary for communication...the emphasis is on the referential or communicative rather than the expressive function of the language" (Romaine 1988: 24). However, according to Kaye and Tosco, both of these definitions are too broad. The

definition provided by Mühlhäusler seems to give the best and most comprehensive one, “Pidgins are examples of partially targeted or non-targeted second language learning, developing from simpler to more complex systems as communicative requirements become more demanding. Pidgin languages by definition have no native speakers, they are social rather than individual solutions, and hence are characterized by norms of acceptability” (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 17). It is generally agreed that pidgins arise when some form of communication is needed between two peoples who do not share a common language. It seems the most common and prevalent development of a pidgin occurred during colonialism in which slave masters and traders needed to communicate with the slaves and vice versa, and the pidgin is largely based on the language of the colonial power (Poole 1999: 142). Another circumstance that is important is the condition that the speaker of the pidgin is denied the opportunity of learning the “good” or “pure” language, for instance, Haitian Creole which sprang from the pidgin created between the French slave masters and African slaves. This pidgin derived its vocabulary from French. However, the French slave masters spoke vernacular French and the slaves learned and pidginized words from this vernacular (Degraff 2002 : 321-326).

Like “true” languages, there are distinguishing characteristics of pidgin languages. In his *Introduction to Linguistics*, Poole gives a brief overview of these features. He says pidgins normally lack “grammatical order, a copula and a passive construction. They generally lack articles and have a poorly developed system of prepositions” (Poole 1999: 142). Finally, he says that pidgins have little inflectional morphology and many things are expressed by circumlocution (Poole 1999: 142). Romaine also mentions these features and explores features that other authors have

pointed out. For instance, she points out that Mühlhäusler “notes that the pronominal systems of stabilized pidgins illustrate the minimal requirements of pronoun systems in human languages” (Romaine 1988: 26). Also, Mühlhäusler notes that pidgins utilize few prepositions to show grammatical relations” (Romaine 1988: 29). In addition, Romaine says that the “pronominal systems of pidgin languages generally do not encode distinctions of gender or case” (Romaine 1988: 27), and she points out that Givón has claimed that SVO (subject verb object) word order is the most common in creoles. He thinks this is the case because it is simply the easiest word order to understand.

Now that the literature on pidgins has been explored, one can thus understand the continuum between a pidgin and a creole. As stated earlier by Poole, a creole is a pidgin that has acquired native speakers. However, like the term pidgin, there is a great debate among linguists of what characteristics define a creole. Suzanne Romaine gives the definition of DeCamp who defined a creole language as “the native language of most of its speakers. Therefore its vocabulary and syntactic devices are, like those of any native language, large enough to meet all the communicative needs of its speakers” (Romaine 1988: 38). Romaine also gives factors that one can look for as part of the process of creolization such as independent words becoming grammaticalized, agreement systems, and the possibility of developing case suffixes. Adding to this, Kaye and Tosco say that, all pidgins and creoles are “non-pro-drop” languages, which means that “a pronominal subject cannot be deleted and recovered through verbal morphology.” They also say that all creoles express “tense/mood/aspect distinction through verb modifiers (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 83-84).

Another aspect about which there is much debate is the origin of creoles. In *Pidgin and Creole Languages: A Basic Introduction*, Kaye and Tosco lay out two theories. The first is the monogenetic approach and the second is the polygenetic approach. There is much debate about these theories as well as differing variations of them among linguists. However, in an attempt to give a concise view of these, the monogenetic approach stresses similarities among all creole and downplays the role of the lexifier language. The polygenetic approach maximizes the continuity between the lexifier language and the creole, which devalues the links between different creoles (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 55). In the literature, the prevalent theories of creole genesis lean more towards the polygenetic approach. To summarize, a generally agreed upon version of creole genesis and again using Haitian creole as an example, creole languages use the vocabulary from the lexifier language such as French and the grammatical structures from the language of the non-lexified language, such as the various languages of the African slaves.

In order to show just how unresolved the debate on creole genesis is, we can look at the opinion of Dr. John McWhorter. He rejects the distinction of the term “expanded pidgin” altogether and calls them all creoles. This simplifies the criteria of being a creole into simply being used “in social domains wider and richer than that of the work or trade situation” (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 69). Given this view from Dr. McWhorter, one can see how, based on the evidence and facts behind different creoles around the world, there can be many theories of how any creole comes into existence.

Now that the general background of pidgins and creoles has been established, next we can turn towards analyzing the possibility of a “true” language like French

possibly being a creole. Kaye and Tosco have a small discussion in their book about detecting prior creolization of a language. In the very beginning of the section, they give an important context in analysis of the possible prior creolization of a language by saying that, “It is very important to note that there are no linguistic features which alone will cause a creole to be identified as a creole without appropriate sociohistorical evidence that it sprang originally from a pidgin” (Kaye and Tosco: 2001: 100). They also say that as evidence, things such as grammar reduction, the influence of the substrate, and comparisons to other recognized creoles should be employed (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 101). In addition to these criteria, we can look at the three features of grammar that only arise over time. Therefore, if a grammar is new, such as in a creole, it is distinguishable from older grammars. These features are inflectional affixation, tone, and derivational noncompositionality. In addition, creoles are unique in combining these traits. (McWhorter 2005: 10-11). It is important to look at these traits as well as others in determining if a language may be creole because, though borrowing lexical traits from a language is a factor in the beginnings of a creole, it is by no means the most important and defining factor. As McWhorter says, “Languages can borrow massive amounts of lexicon and even morphology without evidencing any traits that would suggest the label *creole* to any linguist...” (McWhorter 2005: 267). Therefore, in producing evidence of whether or not a language may be creole, adequate evidence must be given in the structure, in the comparisons with languages universally recognized to be creoles, and with the socio-historic background.

This review of the literature has provided a background on which to begin exploring the French language in terms of its possible creole origins. The conditions of a

creole provided by both McWhorter and Kaye and Tosco will be used to analyze French, as well as the language background of French and its influence from Latin. It seems wise to analyze the complete socio linguistic history of French, from the Franks first contact with the Romans. Perhaps this initial phase will be analogous to a pidgin. After this, perhaps the early and middle French phases can be likened to the development of a creole.

CHAPTER TWO

The Characteristics of a Creole

Among even the leading scholars, there is disagreement over what exactly constitutes a creole language. However, it seems that an adequate definition of a creole can be developed from combining the works of McWhorter and Kaye and Tosco. McWhorter says that creole languages all have three features: lacking inflectional affixation, tone, and derivational noncompositionality. Creole languages have newer grammar than so called “older languages” such as French or Spanish for example. He says that we can see evidence of a language being a creole because it does not have these features, whereas other languages will have moved on and gained these features (McWhorter 2005:10). However, this seems to imply that all languages could have originated as creoles and then moved on from that state as they gained these features. Therefore, in addition to this, I will also include features of creoles according to Kaye and Tosco. They say that creoles have features such as a reduced grammar and influences from a substrate language. In addition, they say that when asking if a language is a creole or not, it should be compared to a language that is almost universally recognized to be a creole. Finally, they say that when analyzing a language’s possible creole status, appropriate considerations must be made to its socio-historical background (Kaye and Tosco 2001: 101). One must analyze both the socio-historical background of French as well as its grammatical features by comparing them to other creoles in order to determine if French itself may be a creole.

First, the socio-historical background of French needs to be analyzed in depth. In addition, since part of the definition of a creole put forth by McWhorter is asserted here,

it is important to note that “It is HC that McWhorter regards as one of the most “creole of creoles”...(Degraff 2001: 70). By HC, McWhorter is referring to Haitian Creole.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to compare French with the case of Haitian Créole.

French, like all its Romance counterparts, is descended from the Latin spoken in the Roman Empire. However, it is important to note that there is a difference between what is called Vulgar Latin and Classical Latin. The difference is that Vulgar Latin was the form most spoken by “the Roman soldiers, colonists, merchants, administrators, as opposed to the literary language of the Classical writers of Rome”(Ewert 1993: 1). Because Gaul was invaded by Roman soldiers, any language influences that were brought there were based upon the spoken vernacular Vulgar Latin instead of the classical form. For a brief comparison, we can look at the form of French that influenced the genesis of Haitian Créole. The French language that slaves in Haiti heard was not pure Parisian French; it was a vernacular form (Degraff 2002: 321-326). Here, we see a similarity in at least the initial influences of those with power imposing their language over those who are subordinate in the society.

When the Romans invaded Gaul, which is present day France, it was occupied by tribes known as the Franks. However, despite the fact that the Franks spoke a Germanic language, modern French is a Romance language. In addition, besides the influence from Latin, French has many other influences as well, which helps to explain why it is somewhat different from other Romance languages. However, in comparison to the development of Haitian creole, it is important to note that as opposed to the French slave traders who spoke vernacular French differing in dialect from province to province in France, the Vulgar Latin language brought by Roman soldiers employed “for general

purposes a standard form of spoken Latin...”(Ewert 1993: 3). This is important to note because this seems different from what one would expect to see in the evolution of a language in two different areas. To use two modern day examples, there is a difference between the English spoken in England and the English spoken in The United States. In addition, there are differences between the French spoken in Québec and the French of France. Part of this difference is that the location into which the language is brought, for instance Québec, tends to conserve the purity of the language, whereas the location from which the language comes tends to be more liberal to language change. But contrary to this trend, “During the first centuries after the introduction of Latin into Gaul the language developed on practically the same lines as in the rest of the Empire” (Ewert 1993: 1). This seems surprising because it seems that when the same language is spoken in two different places, they will differ because of the different influences upon them. The Latin spoken in Gaul did eventually begin to differentiate itself from the Latin in Rome, but this change seemed to take place more slowly in time than one would expect. However, when this differentiation began to happen, it is known as the Gallo-Roman period. In this period, there began to be a cleavage between the French dialects of the north of France and of the South.

The Gallo-Roman period is when we begin to see a difference in comparing Haitian Créole, a generally accepted creole language, and what would ultimately become modern French. The conquest of all of Gaul led to the abandonment of the native tongue for Latin because of the advantages it brought with it such as “the advantages of Roman citizenship, the hope of advancement and material benefits generally, all of which were contingent upon the adoption of the official tongue” (Ewert 1993: 5). This is very

different from the Haitian Creole situation because of the different social aspects. The pidgin language that ultimately resulted in modern day Haitian Creole ultimately originated in response to the needs of communicating with the slave masters. Although one can say that the learning of Latin was a response to a need as well, there seems to be an intrinsic difference. The learning of Latin brought with it the benefits of affiliation with the Roman Empire whereas Haitian Creole was created for the need of directing the manner of the African slave's servitude. This is important to note because in the case of French, it shows a willingness to learn the intricacies of Latin grammar, whereas in the Haitian Creole case, a pidgin language was created for the most basic of communication needs.

Another difference that must be accounted for is the political context in the Gallo-Roman era as opposed to the situation for Haitian Créole. For instance, as the Roman Empire's influence began to weaken, "the forces which tended to maintain a uniformity of language in the Vulgar Latin period gradually lose their strength in the Gallo-Roman period" (Ewert 1993: 6). Here is where we see a major divergence between the Latin spoken in the heart of the Roman Empire and the variant spoken in Gaul. Without the social and political cohesion that the Roman Empire had created, there began to be a difference between the dialects of Northern France and Southern France. It is the Northern French dialect of Paris that today is known as the standard French language. Continuing with the example of Haitian Creole, we see a difference in language evolution when the prevailing social and political order loses its power. As opposed to the Roman Empire's decline during the French language's formative period, the instance of Haitian Créole is completely different. By the time the Haitian slaves had rebelled and claimed

the island's independence from France, there had become an established language structure that we can still see today. French is the language of prestige whereas Haitian Creole is the language of everyday life. This diglossia, where there are different languages for different aspects of life, had already been established by the time of the slave rebellion, and this has not changed for the most part.

Now that the sociohistorical background of French has been briefly analyzed, we must turn to the grammatical features of what are said to be evidence of a creole. First, McWhorter's assertion that creoles do not have inflectional affixation, tone, derivational noncompositionality in contrast to older languages will be examined (McWhorter 2005: 10). First, let us analyze inflectional affixation in French. Dr. McWhorter says that, "Over time, one possible fate of a free morpheme is to become a piece of bound inflectional morphology, having been gradually reanalyzed as grammatical rather than lexical" (McWhorter 2005: 10). For example, let us take a very basic French sentence, *Je bois du vin*. On initial review, one would say that *je* is the subject. However, nowhere in the French language can *je* be used by itself without any verb. Therefore, one cannot say that *je* is a subject; rather it is an inflectional affix, even if it is not orthographically a bound affix, because it is needed along with the verb to understand the sentence.

The next feature that McWhorter outlines is that of tone. McWhorter says that "it is the absence or marginality of monosyllabic lexical and morpho-syntactic tonal functions in creole grammars which is significant in the delineation of a creole prototype (McWhorter 2005: 14). It is not clear that French has tone in the manner that McWhorter is talking about here. French has rising and falling tones throughout pronunciation of words throughout sentences. In addition, similar to English, the tone can distinguish

between a question and a declarative statement. However, in comparison to McWhorter describing the tone that creoles lack as “distinguishing monosyllabic lexical items as in the Chinese varieties, or encoding morphosyntactic distinctions as in Bantu”, it seems that French comes up short in this department. In addition to this, Haitian Creole as well “does not make use of tone...”(DeGraff 2001: 71). Therefore, both Haitian Creole and French lack tone as defined by McWhorter in assessing a language’s possible Creole beginnings.

The final feature that McWhorter mentions is a language lacking derivational noncompositionality. Simply put, this means that there are affixes that are attached to words that change the words meaning. It is important to note that both Haitian Creole and French have evidence of derivational noncompositionality. In French, an example of this *lire* and *délire*. *Lire* translates as “to read”. Therefore, in analyzing the elements of the word *délire*, one would expect its meaning to be something along the lines of “to unread something”. However, *délire* translates as “to be delirious” or “to be crazy”. This same phenomenon occurs in Haitian Creole as well. For example, in Haitian Creole, the verb *jete* means “to throw away”. In general, the affix *re* normally encodes repetition. However, in contrast to this information, the verb *rejete* means “to reject” (McWhorter 2005: 26). It is very interesting that Haitian Creole has examples of derivational noncompositionality because it seems to either suggest that Haitian Creole is not a creole or that McWhorter’s hypothesis is incorrect. However, McWhorter is able to account for this glaring discrepancy. McWhorter points to work by Goyette (200) that demonstrates “through painstaking historical linguistic analysis that the derivational markers in modern Haitian Creole (including the natural gender markers) cannot have been incorporated into

the creole at its birth and, in fact, were borrowed from French in later periods” (McWhorter 2005: 27). Therefore, Haitian Creole could have also borrowed instances of derivational noncompositionality with French from subsequent contact with the language. This shows evidence that Haitian Creole is showing advancements like all languages do in their natural evolutions.

In exploring whether French is a creole or not, the difference between the written and spoken language needs to be analyzed as well. The spoken language is in a state of constant change whereas the written language is more conservative. It is interesting to look at the spoken language because one can see how the concepts concerning language change can affect a language. Looking at this can also help one to understand how they can change and often become drastically different from the way they originated. For instance, in common spoken French, words often run together with each other when pronounced although they are separate, distinguished words when written. For example, we can look at the French sentence *on se fait une bonne bouffe, ce soir*. However, using the International Phonetic Alphabet, we see that this sentence is pronounced [ɔ̃sʃɛYNBɔNBʊʃwɑ̃ʁ]. The mute E's disappear in the pronunciation in both *se* and *ce*. One can see here elements of language change that perhaps over centuries could lead to words disappearing from use in French. This can also be seen in the sentence *Il y a jamais rien à la télé*. This is pronounced most frequently as [jaʒamɛʁjɛ̃alaʔele]. Here, the *il* drops completely out of the pronunciation. This fact suggests grammar reduction among common spoken uses of the language. However, there are even more drastic examples of this grammar reduction than the aforementioned. For instance, to indicate the negative in French, *ne pas* is put around the verb to negate it. However, it has become more and more

commonplace to drop the *ne* altogether and just negate the verb with *pas*. In addition to this, often in spoken French, the phenomenon of regressive assimilation evidences itself. For instance, we can take the sentence *Je ne sais pas*. Phonetically transcribed, it is pronounced most often [ʒəsɛpa], where the *ne* is completely absent. However, it can also be further shortened into simply [ʃɛpa]. Though for now this is considered a pronunciation mostly reserved for those who have less formal education, this helps demonstrate the phenomenon of regressive assimilation. Here, the [s] in *sais* has an effect on the [ʒ] in *je*, thus causing it to be pronounced [ʃɛ]. [ʃɛpa] is a far in pronunciation from *je ne sais pas* and this shows that perhaps, with time, written and spoken French could diverge to a point where they are incompatible with each other, as happened in the history of Latin. This is relevant to the concept of language change because it suggests that if this is happening now, logically it must have happened in the past also. This is important because it could suggest that some languages began as creoles, and as time went on, drastically changed. Therefore, this could be a plausible explanation of why a language that is 300 years old is different from one that is 800 years old, for example.

Another thing that is often said about creoles is that they oftentimes lack verb conjugations. In keeping with the example of Haitian Creole, this language uses verbal markers to denote tense, aspect, and mood. For example, we can take the sentence in Haitian Creole *Mari te kònnèn Jan* (Mary knew/had knew John). The marker *te* is used to indicate “past or pluperfect, depending on the aspectual class of the verb” (Lefebvre 1998:120). While this is not the case in French, often in the spoken language it is hard to tell the difference between the future and future-conditional tenses without context. For instance, both the first person singular future and first person singular conditional future

end with the same sound. The *ai* and *ais* are both pronounced [e]. In the first person future and first person conditional future conjugations of *manger*, both *je mangerai* and *je mangerais* are pronounced exactly the same. This shows that while French does have verb conjugations in both its written and spoken forms, this is not true all the time.

In analyzing French in both a grammatical and socio-historical capacity, one can see how it doesn't seem that French clearly is not a creole. If one looked at purely the definition of McWhorter, then French would not be a creole. In his thesis, he says that creole languages are the only language type to lack the three features that he gives together. However, this does not seem to be an adequate enough definition of a creole without taking the context of history into account. This, along with the fact that French, like all languages, is constantly changing, shows that an argument could be made that perhaps French is indeed a creole.

CHAPTER THREE

French vs. Haitian Creole

It seems appropriate to compare French with Haitian Creole, a language that is generally accepted to be a creole. It is important to note that because many structures in Haitian Creole and French are similar on the phonological level, this is the only similarity in comparing the actual function in the language. This element can be seen in the comparison of the verbal structure of Haitian Creole and French. One major difference between French and Haitian Creole is that the verbal structure of Haitian Creole focuses more on aspectual distinctions, whereas French focuses on tense (Valdman 1977:176). Tense refers to the time period in which the action of the verb takes place. Aspect refers to the duration of the action of the verb and to whether the action is complete or incomplete. It is important to look at the verbal structure of the two languages because verbs are crucial to communicating ideas in a language. Looking at how each language utilizes verbal structure yields information about differences in morphology and syntax.

Because Haitian Creole was greatly influenced by French, the languages have many aspects that are phonologically similar. However, this similarity is not seen on the morphological level. For instance, one can look at *c'est* in French and *se* in Haitian Creole. Phonologically, these are both similar. However, they do not serve the same purposes in the two languages. For instance, we can look to see this in the sentence in French *c'est moi* and the sentence in Haitian Creole *se mwen*. Both sentences have parallel meanings in the two languages: it's me. However, the role that *c'est* and *se* respectively play are different. In French, *c'est* "is a combination of pronoun + verb,

which functions as subject + center of predicate...” (Hall 1966:85). However, this is not the case in Haitian Creole. *Se* cannot be separated into pronoun plus verb. In addition, *se* always comes before the predicate and is a part of the subject. Therefore, *se* serves to identify anything that comes after it as being a part of the predicate (Hall 1966:86). Furthermore, in order to make a generalization, “the speakers of pidgins and creoles seem to treat their borrowings as single units, without breaking them up into separate elements” (Hall 1966: 63).

The verbal structures of French and Haitian Creole convey tense, aspect, and mood. Tense refers to the time period in which the action of the verb takes place. Aspect refers to the duration of the action of the verb. Finally, mood refers to whether the speaker is conveying emotion, such as a desire or a command. In French, tense, aspect, and mood are denoted by inflectional affixes on the verb, which simply means how the verb is conjugated along with possible auxiliary verbs. Haitian Creole has no inflectional affixes on the verb. In French, “each verb of a tensed clause must bear tense, mood, person, and number inflectional morphology” (Lefebvre 1996: 29). In Haitian Creole tense, aspect, and mood are only expressed by preverbal markers.

First, let us consider a tense marker in Haitian Creole, *te*. *Te* is used to express either simple past or pluperfect meanings depending on the aspect of the verb. The three classes of verbs in Haitian Creole are dynamic, resultant, and stative. Dynamic verbs describe something that is ongoing. Resultant verbs describe “a situation which is the result of some process” (Lefebvre 1996: 11). Finally, stative verbs do not refer to a process, meaning that they do not show progression. For instance, *kònnòn* in Haitian Creole which means “to know”. When the marker *te* is used next to a dynamic verb, it is

always understood as meaning pluperfect. However, when *te* is used with either a resultant or a stative verb, whether the meaning is pluperfect or simple past depends on the context (Lefebvre 1996: 11). This ambiguity in reference to the preverbal marker is seen in mood in Haitian Creole as well.

In Haitian Creole, mood is generally agreed upon to be distinguished by two preverbal markers: *ap*, and *a-va*. *Ap* is used to show the speaker's attitude that the event referenced will take place in the future; whereas *a-va* is used to show the attitude that an event might or potentially could take place in the future (Lefebvre 1996: 12). For example, let's take the sentences in Haitian Creole *M'ap vini* and *M'a vini*. The first Haitian Creole sentence means that I will definitely come, whereas the second sentence means I will/might eventually come. Both *ap* and *a-va* denote a speaker's mood regarding an event that has not yet occurred (Lefebvre 1996: 12).

In Haitian Creole, aspect is marked by preverbal markers as well. In Haitian Creole, the two aspect markers are *ap* and *apr-al*. *Ap* denotes the imperfective aspect, meaning something that has already began but not been completed at the time of the speaker speaking the sentence. *Apr-al* is used to denote the prospective aspect, meaning an event that is about to begin at the time of speech. For instance the sentence in Haitian Creole *Mari ap manje krab la* means Mary is eating the crab or Mary is in the process of eating the crab. *Mari pr-al manje* means that Mary is about to eat. The preverbal markers here determine the context of the action in the sentence (Lefebvre 1996: 15).

It is important to note that the preverbal marker *ap* can be used to denote either tense or aspect depending on context. When *ap* is found next to a dynamic verb, it is interpreted as progressive; when it is found next to a stative or resultant verb, it is

interpreted as the future marker. Therefore, one can see the similarity between the preverbal markers *ap* and *te* in the fact that they have different meaning depending on context. *Te* always situates an event in the past and *ap* always situates an event in the future. What this shows is that Haitian Creole has no absolute tense markers; rather the preverbal markers in Haitian Creole can be understood as being relative markers, meaning that the time is related to a specific reference point instead of the moment of the speech (Lefebvre 1996: 11-12).

As opposed to Haitian Creole, French uses inflectional affixes to convey the tense, mood, or aspect function. In addition, Haitian Creole places more emphasis on aspect whereas French places more emphasis on tense. The tenses in modern day spoken French, present, imperfect, simple past, present perfect, past perfect, and future. There is some overlap as far as more than one of these tenses situates an event in the past or in the future. For instance, the difference between the imperfect and the present perfect is that the imperfect situates an event somewhere in the past, whereas, the present perfect is specific to when the event occurs. In addition, the past perfect is used to reference an action in the past that occurred before another action in the past. The difference here seems to be contrary to what happens in Haitian Creole. Whereas in Haitian Creole, verb type determines how one should interpret the preverbal marker and thereby determine the context in which the action is happening in the sentence. In French, the affix denotes how one should determine the context. For example, we can take two Haitian Creole sentences: *Mari ap manje crab la* and *Jan ap kònnòn Mari*. In the first, *ap* makes the action in the sentence understood to be ongoing because *manje* is a dynamic verb. Therefore it means that Mary is eating the crab. In the second sentence, the *ap* is

understood simply as marking the future because *kònnòn* is a stative verb. Therefore it simply means John is knowing Mary (Lefebvre 1996:16). Next, we will look at an example in French distinguishing the past from the imperfect. Let us look at these two French sentences: *j'allais en France* and *je suis allé en France*. The first is the imperfect and the second is the present perfect. In the first sentence the action is ongoing in the past and the action is not specified as complete. In the second sentence, the action began and was completed in the past. Therefore, the first sentence translates as “I was going to France” or “I used to go to France” and the second as “I went to France” or “I have gone to France. Here, we can see that the inflectional affix denotes how one should interpret the sentence, whereas in Haitian Creole the verb itself denotes how one interprets the verb marker and thereby interprets the context of the sentence. However, it is also important to note that French also has cases in which context determines how one should interpret the verb. One sees this in the French *passé composé*. The *passé composé* is primarily used to denote the simple past, however it can be used to denote present perfect as well given the correct context. This shows that though Haitian Creole and French have different verbal morphologies, the two languages have a similar characteristic of context denoting how one interprets the verb.

On the surface, it seems that an analogy could be drawn between Haitian Creole verb markers and periphrastic expressions in French. An example of a periphrastic expression is *être sur le point de* such as in the sentence *Jean est sur le point de partir*, meaning “John is about to leave” (Lefebvre 1996: 31). French periphrastic expressions are similar to Haitian Creole preverbal markers in that they occur between the subject and the verb and are phonologically similar to the markers. Haitian *a-va* is similar to French *va*,

ap to *après*, and *te* to *été* (Lefebvre 1996: 31). However, here is where the similarities end in the two languages. Recall, as stated above, the preverbal marker *ap* can denote mood, aspect, or simply an event taking place in the future. While French does have aspect, creoles in general tend to place more emphasis on aspect whereas French places most of the emphasis on tense. (Valdman 1977: 176). Because of this, whereas the *ap* in the Haitian Creole sentence *Mari ap manje krab la* denotes the aspect that Mary is in the process of eating crab, one must use a periphrastic expression in French to get this same meaning. For instance, one would say in French *Mary est en train de manger le crabe* to get the aspect that simply *ap* denotes in HC. Haitian Creole and French have many structures that are similar in regards to phonology; however these phonologically similar items serve different purposes in the two languages.

An interesting difference between Haitian Creole and French is that in Haitian Creole, the future is more of a mood whereas in French it is a tense. The Haitian Creole markers for the future, *ap* and *a-va*, expresses the speakers mood toward the action in the sentence. For instance, let us look at two similar sentences that convey a different attitude towards the future in Haitian Creole. *Mari ap wè Jan* means that “Mary will catch site of John” whereas the sentence *Mari a-va wè Jan* means “Mary will eventually catch site of John”. From this, one can see that *ap* is used to mark the definite future and *a-va* is used to mark the indefinite future. In addition, another difference here is that *ap* denotes near futurity whereas *a-va* denotes far futurity. (Lefebvre 1996: 12-13) French has a difference in future as well, as seen in the simple future and near future tenses. For instance, the French sentence *je vais manger* and *je mangerai* translate as “I will eat”. However, *je vais manger* denotes that the action will occur soon in the near future. In contrast, *Je*

mangerai denotes the action is upcoming and will happen. From this, one can see the difference between the future in French and in Haitian Creole. In the French examples, both imply that an action will happen; whereas in Haitian Creole, the preverbal marker denotes the speaker's attitude that the action will happen or may happen at some point. In French, this can be accomplished by using the conditional mood along with the future tense.

Another significant difference between verb morphology in Haitian Creole and French is the formation of complex tenses. In Haitian Creole, a complex tense is formed by simply combining the preverbal markers. For instance, combining the preverbal markers *te*, the past marker, and *ap*, the future marker, one gets a conditional interpretation. For instance, the Haitian Creole sentence *Mari t'ap prepare pat* translates as "Mary would prepare dough or Mary would have prepared dough". Whether or not the interpretation is present conditional or past conditional depends upon the context in which the sentence was spoken (Lefebvre 1996: 20, 30). Here again, we see context determining the meaning of a sentence instead of being able to rely solely on preverbal markers. In French, the conjugation of the verb tells one the context of how to interpret a sentence. As opposed to Haitian Creole, there is a distinct difference in the verb that denotes either conditional or past conditional. For instance, let us take two similar sentences in French: *J'aimerais un lit* and *J'aurais aimé un lit*. The first sentence is conjugated in the conditional and the second is conjugated in the past conditional. The difference is that the conditional past relies upon an auxiliary verb. However, both verbs have inflectional affixes. The Haitian Creole system of complex tenses is much simpler in that preverbal markers are combined and the place in time of the action is determined by context. This is a far move from the

more complicated method in French where there are conjugations for every point in time, for instance the past, present, and future conditional.

One difference in verbal use between French and Haitian Creole is how emphasis is added. For instance, “one feature that is widely found in pidgins and creoles is the repetition of the verb to indicate continued action” (Hall 1996: 76). For instance, the repetition of the verb in the sentence in Haitian Creole *Li manje manje manje* indicates emphasis on the action as well as the fact that it continues. This type of emphasis is known to occur in other parts of speech as well. One does see this structure in French; however a pronoun is most often employed to achieve emphasis. For instance, in the French sentences *Je n'en sais rien* and *Moi, je n'en sais rien*. Both sentences essentially translate as “I don't know anything about it”. However, the pronoun in the second sentence is used to add emphasis. On the surface, it may seem that the pronoun in this case is just a repetition of the subject. However, recall that *je* is not really the subject, it is a bound inflectional affix to the verb. Therefore, one does not see the same repetition of elements when one compares the languages of French and Haitian Creole.

The verbal structures of Haitian Creole and French seem to be drastically different from each other. As far as verbal morphology, French has bound inflectional affixes that denote tense, aspect, and mood. Haitian Creole simply has verbal markers that always go in between the subject and the verb to denote tense, aspect, and mood. Through the previous analysis, it has been shown that the verbal morphology in Haitian Creole and French are different enough to show that French is not a creole language. Its verbal morphology and utilization of inflectional affixes to denote the tense, aspect, mood, and agreement in gender and number with the subject seems wholly inconsistent with the

more simplified verbal morphology one would see with any creole, and Haitian Creole in particular.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

French is thought to be a “pure” language as opposed to an “impure” creole language. What this means is that creole languages are perceived as having exceedingly simplistic grammar. However, this is simply not true; creole languages have their own complex grammars. In addition, creoles, like other languages, tend to change and add new elements as time progresses or as the language requires more grammatical features. This has led to my hypothesis that perhaps a language like French may itself be a creole. However, when French is compared to a universally accepted creole of Haitian Creole, it seems that although French demonstrates elements of language change, it is not a creole.

For the most part, all creole languages have factors that distinguish them from the other “natural” languages. These features are the lack of inflectional affixation, tone, and derivational noncompositionality (McWhorter 2005: 10). Any language, whether it be considered creole or not, that displays “the three prototypical features is a new language that emerged as a pidgin spoken by adults and was transformed into a natural language: namely, a creole” (McWhorter 2005: 24). If French is indeed a creole, the lack of these features would identify it as such even though most view it as a natural language.

The first feature that identifies a creole is a lack of inflectional affixation. From the verbal morphology of French, one can see that French does indeed have plenty examples of inflectional affixation. For instance, one can see this in the French sentence *je jouais au basket*, which translates as “I played basketball basketball”. The *ais* in *jouais* as well as the *je* are both bound inflectional affixes. What these inflectional affixes

denote is the speaker is speaking in the first person singular and in the French verb tense known as *l'imparfait* or the imperfect. This particular inflection on the verb known as the imperfect aspect describes an ongoing action in the past without a specified beginning or endpoint. In fact, all verbal tenses in French have inflectional affixation. For example, when one conjugates any verb in French, there is a conjugation for first, second, and third person singular as well as first, second, and third person plural. For example, the conjugations of the common verb *parler*, meaning “to speak”, in the present tense are: *je parle, tu parle, il/elle/on parle, nous parlons, vous parlez, and ils/elles parlent*. The *je, tu, il/elle/on, nous, vous, and ils/elles* are all bound inflectional affixes. They are not bound because of the orthography, however, they are phonologically and morphologically bound. In French, these grammatical items used by themselves have no meaning. For instance, in English one can see “I, however, do not eat snails”. However, in French, one cannot say *Je, ne mange pas des escargots*. This does not translate; rather it is *Mais moi, je ne mange pas des escargots*.

The next feature of a creole prototype is a lack of tone. What this means is that tone on the creole level is only found on the phonological level. This seems to be the case in French. French has rising and falling intonations throughout words and sentences. However, this is purely phonological. A language that evidences the type of tone that shows a language as a non-creole is Mandarin Chinese. For instance, Mandarin Chinese has four tones used to indicate the meaning of a word. For instance, the Mandarin words pronounced [mā] and [mǎ] have very different meanings. The first means “mother” and the second means “horse”. Therefore, French does not have tone in the same way that Mandarin Chinese has. According to McWhorter, “if a language is descended from a

pidgin and is young, then it will make little or no use of tone to distinguish monosyllabic lexical items or to encode morphosyntactic distinctions” (McWhorter 2005: 13). Thus, it seems that French does meet at least one criterion in considering it to be a creole.

However, one must remember that it is not one of these features individually that distinguishes a language as being a creole. Rather, in reference to the three features of a creole prototype, “it is important to realize that there is no claim that such features cannot be found individually, or even in a pair, in older languages...The claim is that creoles are unique in combining these three particular traits” (McWhorter 2005: 12).

The final element in the creole prototype hypothesis is a language lacking noncompositional derivation. What this means is that there are affixes that can change the meaning of a word. However, these affixes usually serve a general function, such as the affix “*re*” in English meaning to do something again for example. Noncompositional derivation thus means an affix that has this general function has become attached to a word to mean something wholly inconsistent in the elements that the word is derived from. A poignant example of this in French is the contrast in meanings of the words *lire* and *délire*. *Lire* translates as “to read”, whereas *délire* translates as “to be delirious”. One cannot derive the meaning of *délire* from the elements that compose the word. French has noncompositional derivation. However, this could be accounted for in the same way that the presence of this is accounted for in Haitian Creole according to McWhorter’s theory. The presence of noncompositional derivation could have simply been borrowed from the lexifier language in later periods such as postulated to have occurred in Haitian Creole (McWhorter 2005: 27).

McWhorter's theory provides an orderly method in judging if a language is a creole or not. In comparing French to this framework, it is obvious that French demonstrates creole tendencies. French does not make use of tone as mentioned above. Furthermore, it could be argued that French may have initially lacked noncompositional derivation and subsequently acquired it from its lexifier language, assuming that it is a creole. However, McWhorter's theory is contingent upon the language meeting all three of his requirements. Furthermore, even if one does not want to adopt McWhorter's theory, it is still problematic, if one is arguing that French is a creole, that it makes use of inflectional affixation. For instance, in comparison, Haitian Creole has developed a system of preverbal markers to accomplish what French does with inflectional affixation. However, these preverbal markers are affixes. One could argue that French did what Haitian Creole did in developing a system that helped in addressing further needs of the language when it moved from the pidgin to creole phase and beyond that. However, this argument seems to be lacking in the respect that in creole studies, a generalization has been drawn that creoles tend to place more emphasis on aspect (Valdman: 1977: 166). French, in contrast, places most of its emphasis on tense. It seems incongruent that if French is a creole, then it is a rare exception in which aspect was not emphasized in the way it is in most other creoles. Furthermore, the number and complexity of tenses in French seems inconsistent with other creoles in that these creoles arose from a simplified pidgin and then later developed additional grammatical items in order to further develop the language. Therefore, since creole is a category of languages having at least some consistencies that are common among all of them, and French lacks some of these commonalities, then French is not a creole. Any similarities between changes in French

and changes in a creole language do not indicate that both are creoles; rather it indicates that both languages are experiencing language change as every language evidences change over time.

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