

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF MULTILINGUAL HAITIANS IN THE  
WASHINGTON, D.C., AREA

by

Christine Elise Bonnefil  
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## **DEDICATION**

In memory of my father, Max Bonnefil, and of my grandmother, Paula Bonnefil: the inspiration for my research, they instilled in me a love of Haitian culture and language, both French and Creole, a gift for which I will be forever grateful.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **LANGUAGE ATTITUDES OF MULTILINGUAL HAITIANS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C., AREA**

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The complex relationship between Haiti's two official languages – Creole and French – is ambiguous and, at times, conflictual. This ambiguity and conflict, stemming from a long history of colonial domination, is evident in how speakers perceive these languages and how they believe the languages should be used today. The current study investigates the language attitudes of multilingual Haitian immigrants living in the Washington, D.C., area to better understand the roles and perceived values of Creole and French in this community. Qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from ten participants: all fluent speakers of Creole, French, and English, most of whom also speak Spanish. Results from written questionnaires and focus group discussions reveal the persistent presence of sociolinguistic inequalities rooted in colonial language ideologies, as well as increasingly inclusive views of Creole in certain domains previously reserved for French.



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis studies language attitudes of multilingual Haitians living in the District of Columbia and the surrounding suburbs. Their attitudes reflect the history of language and sociolinguistic inequalities in their native Haiti, a former French colony still suffering from the effects of slavery and colonial domination. French, the colonizers' language, inherited a privileged position compared to Creole, which was excluded from formal domains of life, such as government and schools, until recently. Although both are now recognized as official languages, linguistic persecution continues in Haiti, where most citizens are denied access to education in their only native language, Creole. Those who wish to study are often forced to do so in French, a foreign language for the majority of monolingual Haitians. Bilinguals are the exception, learning to speak both Creole and French at home, often switching subconsciously between the two. This traditionally bilingual elite is now mainly multilingual with the addition of English, especially those that have immigrated to the United States, and constitute the focus of this study.

As an elite minority, however, multilingual Haitians are by no means representative of Haitians as a whole, nor are they representative of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. or in the D.C. area. With an estimated 676,000 Haitian immigrants, Shultz and Batalova (2017) claim that the United States has the largest population of Haitian migrants, followed by the Dominican Republic with 329,000. Nearly 70% of all Haitians

in the U.S. live in one of two states, Florida and New York, with Boston ranking third behind Miami and New York as the metropolitan areas with the highest Haitian populations (Shultz & Batalova, 2017). While not mentioned specifically by Shultz and Batalova (2017), an interactive map in their online article ranks the Washington area eleventh with only around 6,000 Haitian immigrants, including those in Virginia and Maryland. No data is provided regarding how many of these Haitian immigrants speak French in addition to Creole, but it is safe to estimate that no more than 10% fit that linguistic description since that is the approximate percentage of Haiti's population considered to be bilingual. The targeted group of this study, multilingual Haitians living in the Washington area represent a small fraction of Haitian immigrants overall.

During the study, ten members of this multilingual speech community in the D.C. region participated in a three-step process to gather quantitative and qualitative data: a written questionnaire, an individual interview, and a focus group discussion. They were asked questions about their language and ethnic backgrounds and given the opportunity to share their views on linguistic topics, such as the official language status of French and Creole, language in education, and social media. Their responses were used to analyze current attitudes of multilingual Haitians towards the languages they speak, especially Creole and French, in an effort to learn if they resemble or differ from those documented during similar linguistic studies of Haitians in the past, both in Haiti and in the United States. Results were mixed, showing that French has maintained its prestige despite an increasing acceptance of Creole in Haitian society.

## **BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Studying the language choices and attitudes of Haitian immigrants in the United States requires awareness of the complex and often contradictory role of languages in Haiti and their historical roots. Important issues include the coexistence of different linguistic communities in Haiti, the sociolinguistic inequalities between them, the educational implications of these inequalities, and the language ideologies that perpetuate them both in Haiti and the U.S.

### **Languages in Haiti: Past and Present**

Haiti currently has two official languages – Creole and French – but this was not always the case. French, spoken by a minority of bilingual Haitians, has been the language of power, prestige and education in Haiti since the former colony declared its independence from France in 1804, but it did not gain official status until 1918. Legalizing French at that time was a way of protecting it from English language dominance during the American occupation of Haiti. Prior to that date, the country had no official language documented in the Constitution, though French fulfilled that role unofficially in practice (Berrouët-Oriol, 2011). Estimates of Haiti's francophone minority range from 2% to 25% of the country, depending on the source cited and the level of proficiency considered, but most figures revolve around 10% of the population (Berrouët-Oriol, 2011; Dejean, 2010; Férère, 1977; Joseph, 2010; Zéphir, 1997a & 2010).

Unlike French, Creole is spoken by virtually all Haitians and is the only language spoken by the monolingual majority, approximately 90% of the population. One theory is that Creole originated from the contact of French and various African dialects as slaves from different ethnic groups communicated with each other and, to a lesser extent, with European colonizers whose primary language was French (Zéphir, 2010). The unifying quality of Creole, shared by all Haitians regardless of social class, explains its unique status as Haiti's only national language as described in the 1987 Haitian Constitution, which finally recognized Creole as an official language alongside French (DeGraff, 2017). This ambiguity is typical of the complex relationship between Haiti's two official languages and the inequalities that still exist between them today as illustrated in the next section.

### **Sociolinguistic Inequalities**

Flore Zéphir (2010) traces the use of French and Creole and the attitudes that surround them back to demographics of the island's plantation economy. According to her, the ideological reasons for denying Creole an equal role in Haitian society date back to colonial days of European domination. Just as slaves occupied an inferior position to their masters, so Creole has occupied an inferior position to French throughout Haitian history.

Benjamin Hebblethwaite (2012) confirms the colonial origins of the sociolinguistic prejudices that persist today: "The negative attitudes expressed by many members of the French-speaking Haitian minority for the monolingual Creole-speaking majority originates [sic] in colonialism, class ideology, and race-based slavery in Saint-

Domingue (a French plantation colony from 1697 until 1803)” (p. 257). He explains that slaves, valued exclusively for their labor, were denied access to literacy during the colonial period. In contrast to the French written tradition, they continued an oral tradition of sharing knowledge, stories, and the Vodou religion. According to Hebblethwaite (2012), “This legacy set up a long lasting dichotomy rooted in history, psychology, and culture: Haiti’s capitalist and neocolonial bilingual society evolved as a written civilization whereas monolingual Haitian Creole society evolved as an oral civilization...The overwhelming prestige of French was accompanied by the negation of Creole” (p. 259).

The leaders of the Haitian Revolution perpetuated this colonial dichotomy after liberating Haitians from European domination because they felt that they needed the French language to survive as a newly independent country, especially in need of international trade and financing:

The elite architects of independent Haiti extended the view that Creole is the language of underdeveloped slaves and the elements of the ex-slaves’ culture (agriculture, dress, cuisine, Vodou religion, Creole language, etc.) symbolized inferiority in their eyes. Differentiation between two value systems, cultures, and languages influenced the thought and actions of individuals on both ends of the spectrum. (Hebblethwaite, 2012, p. 259)

Hebblethwaite (2012) claims that the sociolinguistic situation and power distribution in Haiti have not changed much since colonial days: the monolingual Creole-speaking majority is still dominated by the bilingual French and Creole-speaking

minority. The colonial dichotomy described above is evident in the bilingual minority's use of French and Creole today: "In the bilingual elite's idealization of language functions, French serves in government, education, literature, and business while Creole is used by the same group for informal exchanges among close friends, family peers, servants, workers, or peasants" (Hebblethwaite, 2012, p. 260). Consistent with colonial ideals described above, Haitian bilinguals typically assign high sociolinguistic functions to French and low sociolinguistic functions to Creole depending on the situation.

However, both Hebblethwaite (2012) and Zéphir (2010) note a recent increase in the oral use of Creole in domains previously reserved for French, such as the workplace, the media, and churches. According to Michel DeGraff (2016/2017), this increase applies to Creole's written use, as well, citing examples in social media (Twitter), government (the Haitian Constitution and the Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen), and education (the development of new instructional resources in Creole). These are promising improvements, but much work remains to be done. While progress has been made in recent decades, the linguistic and class divisions continue in modern-day Haiti, where monolingual masses remain socially and economically subordinated to the bilingual bourgeoisie who have maintained power in part by requiring the use of French in educational, professional, and political domains. As a result, monolingual Creole speakers have remained illiterate, poor, and powerless to change their position in Haitian society.

Zéphir (2010) explains that the unequal status of French and Creole described above has led some linguists to categorize Haiti as a case of diglossia, a term introduced

by Charles A. Ferguson (1959) to describe a special kind of bilingualism where a “high” language (H) co-exists with a “low” language (L) across the same speech community. Learned primarily in school, H is used in more formal domains of high prestige in the public sphere, while L is learned naturally at home and is used in more informal communication with family and friends. Each language is used in different social situations with very little overlap. Those who consider Haiti to be diglossic recognize this dichotomy of high and low language functions in the language choices and attitudes of Haitians, such as the examples of Creole and French usage provided by Hebblethwaite (2012). Ferguson (1959) himself identifies Haitian Creole as one of four “defining languages” (p. 326) used to illustrate his concept of diglossia, where Creole is the informal “L”, and French is the formal “H.”

Nonetheless, others reject these diglossic labels on the basis that only a small percentage of Haitians are bilingual and able to choose which language to speak in a given situation. Dejean (2010) affirms that Haiti is not a case of diglossia, nor is it truly a bilingual country given the minimal presence of French and the fact that the vast majority of Haitians are monolinguals who use Creole in all social situations because it is the only language they speak. Agreeing with Dejean, DeGraff (2016/2017) adds that Creole should not be considered a “low” variety of “high” French because of Creole’s legal status: an official language with its own orthography, literature, and academy. Viewing all Haitians as a single speech community serves as an argument against diglossia in Haiti since so few members of the community are able to use both languages in practice.

In theory, however, it may not be necessary to speak both languages in order to experience diglossia. Zéphir (2010) claims that diglossic ideologies and practices persist in Haiti regardless of bilingual ability: "...French is still considered the more prestigious language, the High language, which is used in situations perceived as more formal or as requiring the speaker to convey elite status. The Low and less prestigious language is Creole, used when speakers are less guarded, less formal, and more intimate" (p. 61). French is a veritable vernacular for an elite group of bilingual Haitians and an inaccessible ideal for most monolingual Creole speakers. According to Zéphir (2010), the term "phantasm of diglossia" (Fleischmann 1984) best embodies the Haitian diglossic mentality, which is based more on ideology than on linguistic ability (p. 61). Hebblethwaite (2012) does not use the term "diglossia" or "diglossic" in his article but seems to support the same concept when he states: "Although the monolingual community can obviously not compartmentalize one language, it is nevertheless subject to the pressure and confinement of the elite's language compartmentalization. Language differentiation in Haiti is anchored in social class structure" (p. 260). In other words, one can speak of the effects of diglossia in Haiti even though only a miniscule minority of Haitians belong to a diglossic community.

Regardless of whether all of Haiti should be considered diglossic, there is more agreement on the diglossic practices of the bilingual elite as a separate speech community, which is the focus of the present study among Haitian immigrants in the Washington, D.C. area. Gérard Férère (1977) also focuses on that small bilingual community in Haiti, where he characterizes the relationship between French and Creole



as diglossic, comparing it to the bilingual use of Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay. Acknowledging that French is practically non-existent in rural Haiti, Férère limits his study to the bilingual urban minority, which he estimates at 5 – 7% of the population. He created a questionnaire modelled on a previous version used by Joan Rubin (1968) in her research on bilingualism in Paraguay and administered it to 50 Haitian bilingual natives. Focusing on language choice and use of French and/or Creole in several sociolinguistic contexts, Férère (1977) observed unanimous preferences for French in formal situations, especially those involving school and written language. At the time of his study, French was Haiti's only official language, and Creole had not yet been introduced in Haitian schools, which are discussed in the following section.

### **Language in Education**

Nowhere are the unequal roles of French and Creole more apparent than in Haiti's education system. Robert Berrouët-Oriol (2011), a Haitian-born linguist based in Quebec who has worked in both countries, argues for implementing better-structured and results-oriented educational policies to promote a more balanced bilingualism and literacy programs for the monolingual Creole-speaking masses in post-earthquake Haiti, where he estimates only 10 – 25% of the population speaks French. According to Berrouët-Oriol (2011), the Haitian government has yet to clearly define the role of its official languages in education, or at least has not translated such roles into enforceable laws. While recognizing the historically and culturally significant contributions of French in Haiti, the author declares that going to school and acquiring literacy in one's native language should be the linguistic right of all Haitians, and that the government is responsible for

providing quality education in Creole from primary through higher education, a responsibility in which it has failed thus far. Government campaigns to educate adults have also failed as demonstrated by a national illiteracy rate estimated at 60%. Due to limited resources, most of Haiti's schools are now private or run by NGOs and, therefore, not controlled by the Haitian government.

Robert Berrouët-Oriol and Darline Cothière (2011), a Paris-based linguist who has taught at the university in Haiti and whose research focuses on French acquisition in Creole-speaking contexts, offer a more in-depth look at a key issue in Haitian language policy and planning: the transmission of knowledge in the native language of the majority of the Haitian population, Creole, alongside French, sharing co-official status. Much of the data cited in their research comes from a document published in 2009 by a presidential commission on education in Haiti – Groupe de travail sur l'éducation et la formation (GTEF) – created in 2008. This group studied current usage of French and Creole by teachers in the classroom, as well as student success and failure in the two languages according to those teachers. Researchers found that despite the historic Bernard Reform of education passed in 1979 introducing Creole as both a language and object of instruction, French has maintained its traditional status as the dominant language in Haitian schools. Teachers regularly used French for higher-level tasks with symbolic power, such as discussing lessons with students and greeting the school principal. Creole was most often used by necessity, however, when speaking with students' parents, most of whom were monolingual.

The GTEF document notes that many teachers expressed concern that using Creole in the classroom would interfere with the students' ability to learn proper written and spoken French, which they viewed as the main goal of education. Results provided by these same teachers, however, show that students learn best in Creole and consistently make more errors in reading, writing, and speaking French under the traditional system. Creole is rarely taught in secondary schools, as national baccalaureate exams are entirely in French. As a result, most students arriving at the university have never learned to write their native language, Creole, and have poor mastery of French, which should be taught as a second language but often is not (Berrouët-Oriol & Cothière, 2011). Thus, the Haitian educational system has failed students in both of the country's official languages. The Plan national d'éducation et de formation (PNEF) was launched in 1997 to create a new framework for implementing the 1979 reforms, but they still lacked follow-through and oversight on the part of the Haitian government. Berrouët-Oriol and Cothière (2011) conclude that language and education policy and planning for Creole and French should be a priority in the post-earthquake reconstruction of Haiti.

Renowned Haitian linguist Yves Dejean (2010) echoes many of the language and education policy failures of the Haitian government identified by Berrouët-Oriol and Cothière (2011). Contrary to these two authors, however, Dejean focuses entirely on Creole as the only necessary language in Haitian education and does not call for the mandatory inclusion of French in future pedagogical projects. He goes as far as to question the status of French as an official language in the Constitution, which he says should include only Creole. While recognizing that a small bilingual community exists

among Haiti's elite (less than 10%), Dejean states that Haiti is not a bilingual country, nor is it diglossic as Fergusson (1959) and other linguists have claimed (Férère, 1977; Zéphir, 1990 & 2010). For Dejean, French is a foreign language in Haiti and should be treated as such. He debunks many common myths spread by promoters of using French in Haitian schools, such as the danger of regional isolation from Creole monolingualism and the inherent superiority of French as an international language of wider communication. It is not necessary for all Haitians to be bilingual in order for the country to develop, just as it was not necessary for all Americans or Italians to speak a language other than their own. If bilingualism is the goal, however, students must learn a second language (i.e., French) through education in their own native language (i.e., Creole). Dejean (2010) distinguishes what he calls "artificial language acquisition" of a foreign language (the case of most Haitians learning French) from "natural language acquisition" of a native speaker beginning in infancy (the case of the bilingual minority raised with both French and Creole). Interestingly, he does not seem concerned, with the right of this linguistic minority to maintain and study in both of their native languages.

The drastically different stances taken by Dejean and Berrouët-Oriol are illustrated in Dejean's (2011) detailed critique of Berrouët-Oriol's (2011) book overall and of the author's views in particular. Above all, Dejean takes issue with Berrouët-Oriol's suggestion that all Haitians should learn French in addition to their native Creole. According to Dejean, such a proposal is not realistic, but rather represents an unattainable ideal for a poor country like Haiti with a high rate of illiteracy. He points out that mandatory bilingualism is not successfully implemented in more wealthy, developed

countries, either, so why should Haitians be expected to do so? Dejean blames Berrouët-Oriol's shortcomings on a lack of feasibility-type studies that should have been done to better predict the probability of success and challenges facing Haitians learning French, given the fact that most are monolingual Creole-speakers with little or no exposure to native French speakers. How long will it take them to master the language? How many hours a week and for how many years will they have to study? How likely are they to retain the language once they have learned it? Dejean feels that such questions were not adequately addressed in Berrouët-Oriol's (2011) book and that the answers would disprove the author's theories.

Like in his 2010 work cited above, Dejean (2011) emphasizes the difference between learning French as a second language at school and acquiring it as a native language at home, a distinction he claims Berrouët-Oriol (2011) and contributing authors to his book do not appear to fully grasp or consider the importance of. For Dejean, the number of bilingual Haitians is so miniscule that Haiti is for all practical purposes a monolingual country where the only mandatory language of instruction should be Creole. Along these lines, he quotes several excerpts from Berrouët-Oriol's book that he sees as inaccurate or at least misleading readers who are unfamiliar with Haiti's linguistic situation, giving them the impression that French is spoken by more Haitians than is actually the case. Finally, Dejean (2011) does not envision French ever being as widely spoken as Creole in Haiti, regardless of the language's legal status. Rather than seeking solutions to Haiti's woes by chasing an elusive bilingual dream, Dejean proposes a three-step plan: 1) require all public officials to speak Creole, 2) teach French as a foreign

language at the end of primary school and in secondary school, and 3) teach all school subjects from primary school through university in Creole.

Contrary to views expressed by Dejean (2010 & 2011), Valerie Youssef (2002) believes bilingualism is necessary for all Creole-speakers. She even proposes a policy for trilingual education in her comparative study of bilingual education in Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago. Youssef (2002) says Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean nations share the linguistic effects of colonial oppression by Europeans. The Creoles that developed in contact with these languages have most often been perceived as lower in status and as broken forms of the European standards. Francophone Creoles, however, are more often recognized as distinct languages than are Anglophone Creoles in their respective territories. Youssef (2002) acknowledges the psychological benefits of establishing Creole languages as independent varieties and claiming them as one's own while rejecting the colonizers languages. Nonetheless, she says that today's modern world requires Creole-speakers to embrace more international languages for the purpose of global communication, implying that they should be used as languages of instruction alongside Creole in bilingual schools.

While DeGraff (2017) supports Creole-speakers eventually learning other languages, he disagrees with Youssef on how, maintaining that non-native languages are better suited as objects of instruction than as languages of instruction: "We are not arguing to exclude French (Haiti's other official language) from Haiti's classrooms. Our argument is that the optimal language to teach in is the children's mother tongue, which is Kreyòl for the vast majority in Haiti... Of course, French, as an international language,

should be taught to Haitian children—as a second language” (p. 26). DeGraff’s (2017) research in Haiti shows evidence of improved literacy for monolingual Haitian children taught to read in their native Creole compared to those who are forced to study in French, a foreign language for most of the population. Through his work as director of the MIT-Haiti Initiative, DeGraff (2016/2017) observes student gains in other subject areas, as well, including math and science, as a result of using Creole for instruction combined with interactive pedagogy and adaptive technology. DeGraff’s results in Haiti have international implications and are consistent with those in other countries where native-language instruction is lacking (UNESCO, 2016).

Youssef (2002) also acknowledges the importance of using Creole as a language of instruction in the effort to improve literacy. She sees the 1979 educational reforms in Haiti as a positive start but blames social and pedagogical factors for the plan’s failure, namely poverty inside and outside of the classroom, political instability and corruption, lack of social mobility and teacher training in proper teaching methodologies, and middle-class parents who reject Creole in schools because they see French as advantageous for their children. In addition to reversing these trends, Youssef calls for “language awareness programmes” (p. 186) for young school-aged children to address issues of power and to change negative attitudes regarding the roles of Creoles and European languages, as well as training in language awareness for teachers.

Jocelyne Trouillot-Lévy (2010) also addresses the effects of negative attitudes towards the language in her study of the role of Creole in Haitian education. More specifically, she blames ambivalence and conflicting attitudes towards the use of Creole

textbooks for low academic achievement. Although government reforms call for using Creole in the classroom, the instructional materials used have often been in French and incompatible with new curriculum. The reasons for this contradiction include the lack of available materials in Creole, the poor quality of the materials when they are available, and resistance from community members, especially parents, who do not want their children to read Creole textbooks. Negative stereotypes of Creole as being low on the social totem pole persist in Haiti, a country still socially stratified by language. Mastery of French is seen, even by teachers, as a way to climb the social ladder and show respect. Resistance is especially strong among the middle and upper-middle classes in urban areas, who see studying Creole as a threat to social mobility or the social order in general.

These negative attitudes towards Creole may be changing, however, as Trouillot-Levy (2010) claims that educational reforms have recently stimulated the creation of better quality Creole textbooks, which are now more aesthetically pleasing and culturally relevant to Haitian students' daily life. She describes the success story of a trilingual school in Haiti, where both French and Creole are the languages of instruction, and English is taught daily. When given the same textbook in French and Creole, many students prefer to use the one in Creole. Unlike traditional Haitian schools where children are forbidden from using Creole and punished when they do so, students at this private school may use whichever language they wish without repercussions. According to Trouillot-Levy (2010), the state exam at the end of the year, "*Certificat d'Études Primaires* (Certificate of Primary School)" (p. 220), assesses student literacy in both French and Creole in addition to other core subjects. While most students score higher in



Creole than in French, their results in all subjects (including French) are above average. Although less emphasis is placed on English, many graduates of the program become proficient enough to use English for professional purposes.

At first glance, Trouillot-Lévy's (2010) case study seems to support the views of authors like Berrouët-Oriol (2011) and Youssef (2002) who favor bilingual (or trilingual) education in Haitian schools, rather than those like Dejean (2010 & 2011) and DeGraff (2016/2017 & 2017) who call for 100 percent of instruction to be in Creole. A closer look, however, reveals a middle-class school in Port-au-Prince that is not representative of the Haitian population as a whole and, therefore, should not serve as a model for country-wide education policy (DeGraff, 2017, p.c.). Unlike most children in Haiti, many of the students in this school have access to Creole, French, and English at home, thereby making bilingual (or trilingual) instruction in those languages more attainable for them than for monolingual Creole speakers without comparable resources.

The above literature illustrates mixed opinions regarding the use of Creole and French in Haiti's education system, common even among researchers, and the lasting impact of negative attitudes regarding Creole. While the authors cited agree on the need to provide native-language instruction in Creole to the majority of Haitians, they disagree on whether or not instruction should be offered exclusively in Creole or combined with French in a bilingual system. One must consider whether proponents of a bilingual system take into account Haiti's linguistic reality and research supporting mother-tongue instruction, or whether they are blinded by their own negative attitudes towards Creole, rooted in colonial language ideologies.

## **Language Ideologies: A Theoretical Framework**

Notions of superiority and inferiority of one language over another can be explained by language ideologies, which offer a useful framework to analyze multilingualism in Haiti. According to Jennifer Leeman (2012):

Language ideologies consist of values and belief systems regarding language generally, specific languages or language varieties, or particular language practices and ways of using language (Kroskrity 2004; Woolard 1998). Examples of language ideologies include notions about the relative worth of different languages, what constitutes “correct” usage, how particular groups of people “should” speak in given situations, whether minority languages are compatible with citizenship, and whether one can “truly” belong to a given ethnic group without speaking the language associated with it. (p. 43)

Leeman (2012) distinguishes between the study of language attitudes and that of language ideologies, explaining that the former is focused on individual beliefs about language, while the latter emphasizes shared beliefs and their connection to questions of power. Just as Leeman (2012) recognizes an overlap between these two areas of research, so does the current study investigate individual language attitudes of participants through the lens of shared language ideologies. This section demonstrates how Leeman’s (2012) definition and examples of language ideologies provide a valid framework for studying attitudes surrounding the roles of French and Creole both in Haiti and among Haitians in the United States.

According to Leeman (2012), language ideologies are based on power relationships: “Notions about which varieties of language are ‘standard,’ ‘correct,’ or aesthetically more pleasing are not neutral or arbitrary, and they serve to legitimate the accrual of disproportionate privilege, power, and material resources to speakers of preferred varieties while rationalizing the subordination of other language varieties and the people who speak them” (p. 44 – 45). The social structure and class divides inherited from Haiti’s colonial past are clear examples of “disproportionate privilege, power, and material resources” accrued by speakers of French who have subordinated the poor and powerless monolingual majority of Creole speakers for centuries by denying them access to education and professions where formal French is required. The diglossic relationship between French and Creole spoken by the bilingual elite not only perpetuates the view of French as a more prestigious language than Creole, it also excludes people who do not speak French from prestigious domains, thereby limiting their power.

Hebblethwaite (2012) confirms the glorification of French in Haiti as a power-based language ideology by examining the denigration of Creole through the ideology of Creole exceptionalism, a term first introduced by DeGraff (2003) to describe “the variety of dualist assumptions whereby Creole languages constitute a special class of languages apart from ‘normal’/‘regular’ languages” (p. 391). According to Hebblethwaite (2012): “The Francophile elite hold to ‘creole exceptionalism’ which claims that Creole languages suffer from some deficiency and possess some quality that makes them lesser than the related European lexifier languages” (p. 262). Those who ascribe to this point of view label Creole as unfit for academia, textbooks, science, and other intellectual

pursuits. DeGraff (2005) explains the far-reaching effects of Creole exceptionalism, “It also has nonlinguistic (e.g., sociological) implications, such as the claim that Creole languages are a ‘handicap’ for their speakers, which has undermined the role that Creoles should play in the education and socioeconomic development of monolingual Creolophones” (p. 533). As described by DeGraff (2003 & 2005) and Hebblethwaite (2012), the language ideology of Creole exceptionalism is an example of a strategic sociolinguistic tool used by the bilingual elite in an effort to maintain their privileged position in Haitian society by delegitimizing Creole, the only language spoken by most of their compatriots.

The descriptions provided by Hebblethwaite (2012) and DeGraff (2005) are indicative of iconization, an ideological process commonly associated with language ideologies whereby linguistic features appear as inherent qualities of a group, and notions about speakers are transferred to their language (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Hebblethwaite (2012) ties Creole exceptionalism to “French colonial slave society and its denial of African and Creole humanity... French colonists in the French Antilles viewed European languages as superior to African and Creole languages which were judged as ‘inferior,’ ‘unready,’ or ‘degenerate’ and these ideologies have undergone no break in transmission from the days of slavery until the present” (p. 262). In the minds of many Haitians, Creole continues to represent African heritage and the negative stereotypes associated with slavery while French still symbolizes European refinement and the socioeconomic power of colonial domination.

## **Language Use and Attitudes of Haitians in the U.S.**

Previous research on language use and ideologies of Haitians in the United States has examined whether immigrants brought their language ideologies with them from Haiti, especially in the domain of education. While each of the studies mentioned here has a different focus, they all involve language attitudes and choices of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. that resemble those observed in Haiti with an important difference: English, the local language of power, has been added to the mix. The linguistic playing field has changed, as participants in these studies must now choose between Creole, English, and French depending on the circumstances, environment, and interlocutors. The role of Spanish is also considered in some cases where this fourth language is an appealing choice for Haitian immigrants for practical reasons. Thus, what was a bilingual issue in Haiti has become a multilingual one for Haitians in the U.S.

In their article “Trilingualism of the Haitian Diaspora in New York City: Current and Future Challenges,” Isabelle Barrière and Marie-Michelle Monéreau-Merry (2013) argue that the ideological debate about whether to use French or Creole as the language of instruction in Haiti also influences the language attitudes and choices of Haitian immigrants in NYC, as well as the educational programs available to them in the city. These attitudes and choices are based on the same colonial language ideologies that have maintained the diglossic mentality in Haiti, where French is viewed as superior and more appropriate for intellectual activities, and Creole is denigrated as an inferior dialect, suitable only for informal conversation. Consistent with recommendations for the use of Creole in Haiti (Berrouët-Oriol & Clothière, 2011; Dejean, 2010; DeGraff, 2016/2017 &

2017; Trouillot-Lévy, 2010), Barrière and Monéreau-Merry (2013) support the use of Creole in educating Haitians in the United States, most of whom do not speak French. They note great improvement in literacy rates over the past 60 years in Haiti as a result of education policies promoting Creole as the language of instruction, particularly after the language attained co-official status alongside French in 1987.

According to Barrière and Monéreau-Merry (2013), the 1987 recognition of Creole as an official language has spurred a greater role for Creole in the education of Haitians and Haitian-Americans in the U.S. This is as reflected in the establishment of several bilingual English-Creole schools in NY, especially in Brooklyn, although only one elementary school, one intermediate school, and one high school with such a program remain in Brooklyn today. Nonetheless, Barrière and Monéreau-Merry (2013) claim that French maintains a privileged position in education programs for Haitians in the U.S. For example, while The Hebron Seventh Day Adventist Bilingual School (also called L'École Bilingue) in Brooklyn emphasizes Haitian culture, the linguistic focus is on developing English-French bilingualism among Haitian-Americans, and the Creole language is notably absent from the curriculum. In general, more funding is provided for education in French than in Creole, and many Haitian parents prefer that their children learn French rather than Creole. Barrière and Monéreau-Merry (2013) point out that Haitian students make up almost a third of French teaching programs established by the French Embassy in New York public schools and half of the French Heritage Language Program. Barrière and Monéreau-Merry's (2013) study demonstrates how the ideologies

about French and Creole play a role in the experiences and educational choices of Haitians in the U.S.

Conflicting language ideologies within the Haitian diaspora are also demonstrated by a study of school-aged immigrants in South Florida, their parents, and teachers conducted by Buxton, Lee, and Mahotiere (2009). Interviews with these three groups of Haitians of varying levels of education and socioeconomic status revealed mixed messages regarding the use and value of French and Creole, especially in schools. While there was unanimous agreement among parents on the importance of learning English for socioeconomic advancement and of maintaining Creole to stay connected with the Haitian community and culture, some parents expressed concern about the use of Creole in school. This concern stems from the sociolinguistic inequalities in Haiti, language ideologies associated with them, and the parents' personal experiences in Haiti at a time when Creole was rarely written and French was the only option for formal education. Buxton et al. (2009) conclude that the unequal distribution of linguistic roles between French and Creole has been transplanted to the U.S. in the Haitian diaspora, except that English has replaced French as the new prestige language for upward social mobility in the United States while Creole remains the informal language spoken with family and friends:

Back in Haiti, many individuals did not become proficient in French and were largely marginalized, while those able to learn French gained social and economic advantages. Being acutely aware of this socioeconomic

impact, Haitians coming to South Florida unanimously viewed learning English as an essential part of improving their economic condition. (p. 68)

This study supports the claim that Haitians' ambiguous attitudes towards Creole and French continue even after moving to the U.S, as does the unequal distribution of linguistic roles.

Buxton et al.'s (2009) work also demonstrates the relevance of Spanish in parts of the Haitian diaspora and the value these communities might place on learning the language in certain communities. Given the predominance of Spanish-speakers in South Florida, for example, some participants in Buxton et al.'s study prioritized the learning of Spanish over the traditionally prestigious French. Interestingly, the authors report varying linguistic preferences between generations: "...there seemed to be a pattern of intergenerational difference in the value placed upon different languages, with older generations placing a greater value on French while younger generations placed a greater value on Spanish" (Buxton et al., 2009, p. 60). In conclusion, Buxton et al.'s research reveals the persistent prestige associated with European languages to the ideological detriment of Creole, particularly at school, while apparently indicating the recent decline of French relative to English and Spanish.

An earlier article by Flore Zéphir (1997a), however, shows that French is still highly valued by Haitian immigrants in the United States for the same colonial language ideologies that give it power in Haiti. Zéphir (1997a) describes the prestige traditionally attributed to French in Haiti and its use in formal domains: "In general, fluency in French is equated with higher social status, which means wealth, power, and education" (p. 396).



In contrast, "...some negative social connotations are still attached to Creole because it represents the less-privileged segments of Haitian society..." (Zéphir, 1997a, p. 396).

While recognizing that Creole is without a doubt the only language shared by all Haitians, Zéphir (1997a) reminds readers that part of this population also speaks French, including a percentage of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. She estimates that 10 – 15 % of Haiti's population and 200,000 Haitian immigrants in the U.S. speak French, including those that learn the language at home and those that learn it in school, noting that these numbers could be higher depending on the level of mastery considered. Zéphir claims that these francophone Haitians have not been included in studies of American Francophonie, prompting her to focus on this bilingual (not including English) minority and what French means to them. Zéphir (1997a) uses Bourdieu's term "linguistic capital" to describe the function and value of French for this speech community, who manipulate the language "in anticipation of social benefits, namely a higher placement on the American social scale" (p. 395).

According to Zéphir (1997a), the social privilege and power associated with French in Haiti lives on in the minds of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S.: "Haitian immigrants arrive in the United States with a definite idea that a knowledge of French connotes higher social class origin, higher level of education, and a more refined and cultivated lifestyle" (p. 397). She explains that French has symbolic value for some Haitian immigrants, especially those from bilingual communities who use their command of French to distinguish themselves from other ethnic minorities of color. White Americans often categorize Haitians as African American, a label that many bilinguals do

not identify with or appreciate because it implies a lower social status: “From being members of a privileged segment of Haitian society, they involuntarily joined the ranks of America’s most poorly-regarded groups, namely the Blacks, with whom negative attributes have been traditionally associated” (Zéphir, 1997a, p. 397). Some members of the Haitian upper class hope to maintain a superior social position similar to the one they occupied in Haiti through the maintenance of the French language in the U.S. This perceived superiority often applies to both their relationship with other minorities as well as towards fellow Haitian immigrants who do not speak French and would most likely have been of the lower class in Haiti. According to Zéphir (1997a), “...the most salient meaning of the French language for bilingual Haitian immigrants in the United States is that of a social marker. It is the building block of their social identity, which indirectly reflects their aspirations to be included in a more favorably-perceived group...” (p. 398). Since mastery of French is considered a sign of being powerful, well-educated, and cultured in Haiti, many Haitian immigrants assume the same will be true in the U.S.

After describing the value of French, Zéphir (1997a) investigates the use of the language by Haitians in the U.S. using interviews with 100 first-generation immigrants (not all bilinguals) and participant observations, revealing that: “Creole was the dominant language for interactions within the close circle of family and friends...” (p. 399). Nonetheless, Zéphir (1997a) specifies that “French is never excluded from interactions with intimates, and in fact does have a vernacular function” (p. 401), especially in the common occurrence of code-switching between Creole and French, a linguistic practice which she describes as “the norm for Haitian bilinguals” (p. 401). Thus, French is more

than just a power symbol and linguistic capital for the bilingual elite that speak it regularly; it also serves a communicative function.

The perceived social value of French, however, cannot be ignored in the language choices of Haitian immigrants in the United States. Zéphir (1997a) observes that “Bilingual parents tend to use French with their youngsters” (p. 399) in an effort to teach them the language for ideological reasons tied to race and social class:

The transmission of the French linguistic capital appears to be of the utmost importance to these parents, since it is their belief that French is necessary to improve the image of their offspring in the eyes of their school teachers, and prevent those children from being mistaken for native Black Americans, since Haitians are convinced that such an unfortunate case of mistaken identity can lead to occurrences of discrimination. (p. 399 – 400)

Bilingual Haitians also tend to use French more outside of the home and close circle of friends: “...making introductions, or initiating a conversation in Creole with Haitians of certain social standing is considered inappropriate for a variety of reasons, ranging from the desire to be evaluated positively by the interlocutor to calculated efforts not to ‘downgrade’ this individual” (Zéphir, 1997a, p. 400). As for writing, Zéphir (1997a) notes that: “...the average bilingual Haitians use French and English for written communication” (p. 402) rather than Creole, which many immigrants never learned to write because they experienced it primarily as an oral language in Haiti, where language ideologies traditionally reserved writing for French.

Finally, Zéphir (1997a) describes the influence of French and language ideologies on the variety of Creole spoken by bilinguals: "...the social value of French for bilingual Haitian immigrants can be seen not only in their actual use of the French language, but also in their use of a frenchified variety of Creole through which they mark themselves off from the monolinguals" (p. 403). This distinction is consistent with the language ideologies surrounding different varieties of Creole in Haiti. Férère (1977) describes Haiti's linguistic hierarchy as two-fold: French is viewed as a prestige language compared to Creole, which in turn is divided into categories of higher and lower prestige based on the absence or presence of the front rounded vowels /y, ø, œ/ that are also French phonemes. Research by Zéphir (1990 & 1997a), as well as that of Schieffelin and Doucet (1994) identify the same front-rounded vowels as characteristic of bilingual Haitians' frenchified Creole. After providing examples from other French-based Creoles, Schieffelin and Doucet (1994) conclude that the same ideologies apply across these languages with similar colonial histories: "...France not only left its language in its colonies, but French colonists transmitted broadly shared social and linguistic ideologies that have had similar repercussions regarding attitudes toward varieties of the languages spoken there, including the creoles" (p.181). Not surprisingly, Creole varieties closest to French are assigned more prestige than those farthest from French, which have lower social value (Férère, 1977; Schieffelin & Doucet, 1994; Zéphir, 1997a). Thus, French is viewed as a social marker among Haitians both in Haiti and in the U.S even when speaking Creole, based on how close their Creole is to the more prestigious French.

Zéphir (1997a) raises questions regarding the social value of French for Creole-French bilingual Haitians that have immigrated to the United States. Her research demonstrates that French plays a dual role for this minority group as a veritable vernacular used for authentic communication and as a marker of social class used to establish the superiority of the bilingual elite vis-à-vis African-Americans and monolingual Haitians. Zéphir traces the social value of French for Haitians in the U.S. to the linguistic situation in Haiti and its inequalities, which are rooted in language ideologies of power. The present study seeks to address similar issues twenty years later, focusing on multilingual Haitian immigrants in the Washington, D.C. area.

## **METHODOLOGY: THE STUDY**

### **Overview and Goals**

The primary motivation of this study is to examine the language attitudes of Haitians who would be considered part of the Creole-French bilingual elite in Haiti and who are now labeled as multilingual since they are also fluent in English, many speaking other languages, as well. Do younger generations of multilingual Haitians in the United States view French as a prestigious power symbol more suitable than Creole in formal situations, or do they consider Haiti's two official languages to be equally appropriate in all domains? Do these Haitian immigrants manipulate French as a linguistic capital for social gains, or do they see English as the only language for social mobility? Also of particular interest are the views of Haitian immigrants regarding the use of Creole and French in school, both in their own right and in comparison with studies that Trouillot-Levy (2010) and Youssef (2002) documented in Haiti. Participants' opinions are sought regarding 1) the official status of both Creole and French in Haiti, 2) their current usage in formal and informal domains, and 3) the role these languages should play in the future of the country.

Finally, the topic of social media is introduced in an effort to understand whether Haitians choose Creole, French, or English in this contemporary context not documented by the previous research cited above. Language ideologies in Haiti have historically

relegated Creole to informal speech while reserving the written word exclusively for the more formal French. Does the less formal nature of social media avoid this typical feature of diglossia, or do the same ideological inequalities of “high” and “low” language functions prevail online? Overall, the goal of this study is to gather current data from a younger generation of Haitian immigrants, fluent in multiple languages, to have an idea of their choices and attitudes regarding the various languages they speak and write in an effort to identify changes in the sociolinguistic landscape of the Haitian diaspora or enduring ideologies from the Haitian homeland as the case may be.

### **Study Participants**

The study consists of ten participants living in the District of Columbia and the surrounding suburbs. Primarily personal acquaintances in the Haitian-American community, they were recruited via email with a message explaining the basic purpose of this study and what volunteer participation in it would entail. One participant was found by using the snowball method, where one contact lead to another. All ten participants involved are at least trilingual, speaking fluent English, French, and Creole, though certain skill levels vary in one or more language (i.e., writing). Seven of the ten participants also speak some degree of Spanish, and two participants claim to have some knowledge of other languages in addition to those four (Malagasy for one; German, Portuguese, and Russian for the other). As far as age is concerned, six participants are in their thirties, two are in their forties, one in his twenties, and another in his fifties. Most first moved to the United States when they were in their upper teens, near or at the end of high school, but two first came before the age of ten (though they moved back to Haiti for

a while before returning permanently to the U.S.), and one arrived just a few years ago in her thirties. With the exception of this recent arrival, the other nine participants have spent 10 to 20 years each living in Haiti, and between 12 and 32 years in the United States, where they also studied at the university level. The group is equally balanced in gender and marital status, consisting of five men and five women, half of whom are single, while the other half are married to spouses of varying ethnic and linguistic backgrounds: Haitian, American, French, and Colombian.

It is important to note that all participants claim to have learned both Creole and French before age 5, meaning that they most likely belonged to the bilingual minority in Haiti. The focus on this privileged group was intentional for the purpose of this study and should not be mistaken as a representative sample of Haitian immigrants in the U.S., nor should it be considered representative of Haitians overall. Schieffelin and Doucet (1994) explain that “Haiti is better described as a nation predominantly composed of two linguistic communities, the minority kreyòl/French bilingual elite... and the monolingual kreyòl urban and rural masses” (p. 178). Given the scope of research and the small size of this study, the decision was made to specifically select participants that are representative of only one of these linguistic communities: Haitian bilingual elites, now multilingual immigrants in the U.S., who are fluent in English, as well.

More importantly, focusing on multilingual Haitian immigrants provides the perspectives of participants who actually speak all of the languages they are being asked to evaluate. The perspective of Francophone Haitians is of interest since they are among those that benefit from the linguistic inequalities in Haiti and the language ideologies that



favor French over Creole in positions of prestige. Questions regarding the diglossic distribution of language functions can be answered based on these participants' experience using both languages rather than merely on the diglossic mentality of monolinguals. Finally, bilingual elites still hold much of the socioeconomic power in Haiti, and some of them currently residing in the United States could return to Haiti. A change in the diaspora's language attitudes could signify eventual change in their compatriots' attitudes in Haiti, especially if they were to enter into politics.

Unlike older generations of Haitian immigrants, the younger participants targeted in this study lived in Haiti after Creole was legitimized as an official language to be used in formal domains, such as education. They also mastered English at a younger age than earlier generations of immigrants, often before moving to the United States. Therefore, the study considers the possible effects of Creole's evolving status in Haiti and the increasing influence of English on attitudes of Haitians who immigrated more recently to the U.S.

### **Data Collection: Instruments and Procedures**

Quantitative and qualitative data regarding the language attitudes of the ten participants were collected using three different types of instruments: a written questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. (All instruments created and used during this study were reviewed and approved by the university's Internal Review Board in the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance for working with human subjects.) Each instrument focused on different aspects of often overlapping topics related to language choice and ethnic identity.

After the signing of an “Informed Consent Form,” the first step in gathering data was a written questionnaire (Appendix A) consisting of 35 questions, which all participants answered prior to the individual interviews and focus-group discussions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain background information about the participants that is relevant to the study before speaking with them in person. Straightforward facts, such as name, age, place of birth, and education were provided in writing because they do not normally require explanation or elaboration. More nuanced questions regarding identity and language use were also included and further developed during individual interviews and focus-group discussions, using responses to the written questionnaires as a starting point for future conversations. Participants were asked to identify how long they had lived in Haiti versus the United States and the years of schooling they had received in each country or elsewhere. They identified the languages they use with different people in different contexts and their current proficiency in each, as well as which languages they used most often at different ages and at what age they began to learn each one. Finally, the written questionnaire provided a visual format for questions that might be awkward when asked orally, such as those regarding race and ethnicity with long lists of categories from which the participants chose ethnic designations based on their personal preferences and experiences.

After gathering written responses from participants, the next step was interviewing them individually (Appendix B) to inquire about their choices and attitudes surrounding the languages they use to varying degrees as self-assessed in the questionnaire. In addition to questions regarding the private and public spheres in

general, participants were asked to express their opinions and share their personal experiences of language use in education in light of recent reform efforts to increase Creole instruction in Haitian schools. Sociolinguistic practices and views described by the participants segued to questions regarding their ethnic identity and what role (if any) language plays in maintaining that identity in the United States. Some of the interview's 32 questions and others used in the written questionnaire and focus-group prompts were adapted from the interview questionnaires used in Flore Zéphir's studies on the bilingual community in Haiti (1990), first-generation Haitian immigrants in New York (1996), and second-generation immigrants in New York (2001).

The final step in data gathering for this study was holding two different focus-group discussions of four participants each (two of the ten participants were unable to participate in this activity). Both equally divided between men and women, the goal of the focus groups was to expand upon some of the topics already introduced in the questionnaire and individual interviews, especially those surrounding the use of Creole in education and social media (Appendix C). Participants' opinions regarding official language policy and the changing legal status of languages in Haiti were also solicited in this interactive setting in the hope of initiating a debate on these controversial topics, undeniably relevant to Haiti's future development. The focus groups met after all of the individual interviews had taken place and all of the questionnaires had been administered, so that all of the participants were somewhat familiar with the themes before exchanging ideas with others. Moreover, their initial responses to individual interview questions and

their personal opinions were recorded before they could be influenced by those of other participants in the focus group.

Not all of the 24 questions prepared for the focus groups were addressed as originally planned due to time constraints and lively discussions that were lengthier than expected. Although both discussions lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes, one group answered 17 questions, while the other only responded to 5 of the original questions. This difference can be explained by several factors, including the varied length of participant responses to identical questions, the level of each participant's contribution to the discussion, including interactive dialogues between participants, related topics introduced spontaneously by participants within the context of the planned discussion, and the fact that one focus group requested a brief break during the discussion. Although specific questions asked and answered varied between the two focus groups, key topics were covered during both discussions since the facilitator ensured that questions were asked and answered from all three sections of the instrument: language policy and change, language attitudes and education, as well as language use and social media.

As far as recording the data retrieved during the above processes, video was used for the focus group in order to more easily decipher who was speaking, particularly given the open format of discussion, often involving many voices at once. Audio recordings were sufficient for individual interviews, however, since they only involved one participant's voice at a time in addition to the interviewer. The written questionnaire

required no further documentation beyond the data entered by participants themselves in response to the questions.

### **Language of Data Collection**

English was used for all of the study's instruments: the written background questionnaire, the individual interview questions, and the focus-group prompts. There are several reasons for this decision. To begin with, all participants are highly educated and proficient in English and, therefore, speak it fluently and write it effortlessly. They live and work in the Washington area and are used to using English on a daily basis. This was not the case for all participants in the other languages involved. It follows that the participants have varying degrees of skill mastery in French and Creole. Administering the questionnaire in French or Creole might have primed them to answer in that language, a language that they might not know how to write well. Writing can bring additional stress related to using "standard" language and correct spelling. Similarly, conducting the interviews or focus-group in a language other than English may have put participants on-the-spot to communicate in a language that they are self-conscious about speaking because of their accent or fear of making mistakes in front of other members of the Haitian community. Finally, even without fear of errors, the ambiguous and conflictual attitudes surrounding the use of Creole and French, which are the focus of this study, are in and of themselves a reason not to address participants in those languages. To have done so might have unintentionally created a bias in the discussion towards one language or another. In the end, English was the most neutral and natural choice for the instruments of this study.

That being said, participants were told that they could answer the questions in any language they wished, and all conversation during interviews and focus-group discussions were allowed to flow in whatever language the participants decided to use. As the discussion leader, the goal was to avoid imposing or favoring one language over another. Since the research was taking place in the United States, and all participants are fluent in English, using this language avoided some of the political charge and social judgements often associated with choosing between French and Creole.

In addition to using English for all research instruments, the English word was used for all languages mentioned in this document, except when quoting from sources that use different terms. Specifically, the decision was made to refer to Haitian Creole as “Creole” rather than “kreyòl”, the word written in the official Creole orthography and the term preferred by some of the authors cited above (DeGraff, 2005; Schieffelin & Doucet, 1994). This choice is not meant to carry any symbolic meaning, political agenda, or orthographical preference. It is simply a decision to keep this paper in a single language. The Creole spelling appears only when cited directly from authors that choose to use it.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis began after all of the data had been collected using the written questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus-group discussions. Data from the ten individual interviews, however, was not analyzed or incorporated in the results of the current study. Though relevant and valid, it was determined that the amount of data collected from all three instruments combined was too great for the scope of this thesis. As a result, the decision was made to include only the written answers from the

questionnaire and the video recordings of the two focus-group discussions. While not explicitly analyzed and documented, many of the key ideas from the audio recordings of the individual interviews were duplicated by data from either the questionnaire or the focus groups given the overlapping nature of the instrument questions described above.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires was analyzed first by creating a spreadsheet for each of the three sections: biographical information, language background, and ethnic background. Most but not all questions were included on the spreadsheets, focusing on those that were considered most relevant to the current study. Each question was listed in a different column and each participant in a different row. Abbreviations were used when necessary to simplify less straightforward answers and present the condensed information in such a way as to identify trends and patterns more easily. Given the relatively small size of the study and the short list of participants, this basic tool sufficed to compare and quantify data such as age, years in Haiti and in the U.S., first languages spoken and read, languages spoken at different ages and with different people, rankings of preferred ethnic designations, as well as levels, locations, and languages of formal schooling for each participant in the study. Not all data that was coded from the questionnaire is referenced in this thesis, however. Rather, it is used as supporting documentation for the topics identified during data analysis of the focus-group discussions, which are the main sources of the results reported in this paper.

The qualitative data collected from the two focus groups was the most informative and valuable to this study, largely because of its interactive nature and in part because of the controversy surrounding many of the questions asked of participants. Selective

transcriptions of the video recordings were used to analyze the data from the discussions, entering notes and quotes on the left-hand side of a two-column table while identifying recurring themes and timestamps from the videos on the right. The original themes were narrowed and combined as commonalities were sought between the two focus groups, keeping in mind key topics addressed in the previous research presented in the background section of this paper. An outline was created with these themes, which form the basic structure of the results section to follow and incorporate data from the written questionnaires that support key findings.



## **STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data analysis described above reveals the following common themes that recur during the focus group discussions and in the questionnaire responses: 1) the legitimacy of both French and Creole as Haitian languages, 2) the perceived imperfections of Haitian multilingualism, 3) ideologies of language and identity, 4) the influence of English and Spanish on the language attitudes of Haitians, and 5) issues surrounding the language of instruction in Haitian schools. While many of the discussions revolve around language use in Haiti rather than in the United States, the opinions expressed reflect the language attitudes of the Haitian immigrants that participated in this study. Pseudonyms are used in lieu of the participants' real names to protect their anonymity while reporting the findings and citing their responses. For the sake of authenticity, however, the randomly assigned pseudonyms represent names commonly found in bilingual Haitian communities.

### **Legitimacy of Haitian Languages**

Haiti's current constitution recognizes both French and Creole as official languages, granting Creole a unique status as the country's sole national language. Despite being the only language spoken by all Haitians across class lines, colonial language ideologies have historically denied Creole the label of a legitimate language, favoring French instead (Hebblethwaite, 2012; Zéphir, 2010). Today, the tables have

turned, with some Haitians calling into question the legitimacy of French as an official language given its minimal presence in Haiti (Dejean, 2010). When asked to express their opinions regarding the current status of Creole as Haiti's co-official language alongside French, participants unanimously approve of this relatively recent development in their home country, though they do so to varying degrees. According to Didier, "The majority of the population are more comfortable with Creole, so I think it would be a burden to have the majority be forced to learn a language [French] that they're not really comfortable in." He said that Creole should be used "in order to make it fair for everyone," adding, "It's a totally legitimate language." Mireille agrees that "it makes sense to have [Creole] as a co-official language" for the same reasons: "It's not really representative to only have French as an official language given the small percentage of people who actually can master the language in day-to-day life." Despite this small percentage, however, Pascale believes that Haiti's 200 years of history in French is worth preserving: "We made it our own, so I think we should continue to support French as well as the Creole."

While all participants agree that Creole deserves official status, some disagree on the role that French should play in Haiti. Most favor maintaining both official languages, but Claudette disagrees, preferring Creole as a single, unifying language: "In theory, it would just be better to have one language, and obviously, 99% of the population speaks Creole, so it would be ideally Creole, and then of course, French is sort of the second language... Let's say we could just sort of reorganize...our past in the focus of trying to make us be one again." Claudette's opinion echoes those expressed by Dejean (2010) in

the background literature. They imply that too few Haitians actually speak French to justify its status as one of Haiti's official languages and that it would be more appropriate to treat it as a foreign language. Although in favor of Creole's co-official status with French, Fabienne admits: "It's more realistic to have Creole as the main language... There's no realistic reason why French actually was the only language in Haiti when...the whole population always speaks Creole." Other participants nod in agreement as she adds, "They finally did something that's a little more realistic." The overall consensus is that granting Creole co-official status was a step in the right direction towards legitimizing it as Haiti's national language for all, without necessarily denying the legitimacy of French for some.

Study results indicate that Haitians also look outside of Haiti to legitimize their languages. When Didier calls Creole "a totally legitimate language," he explains that Haiti is not alone: other countries and territories in Africa and the Caribbean speak a Creole language, as well, implying that this fact further legitimizes Haitian Creole. Fabienne is critical of this external focus when responding to another participant's suggestion to teach more Spanish in Haiti due its geographic proximity to the Dominican Republic and the significant number of Haitians living there:

We're always going outwards. We're always learning other people's language... When are we going to actually strengthen our language, our culture, our education to become a stronger economy, to become more developed, so that people come to us instead of our going there? Let's focus on us first!... That's the problem, we're always going outside.

Her statement could easily apply to French and English, two languages that many Haitians value for their international prestige and ability to communicate with the outside world. According to Mireille, “Haiti is also pretty outwardly oriented in terms of status...things that come from abroad are seen as a higher status... Being able to communicate with the external foreign people, being able to communicate outside of Haiti is also seen in some ways as a status symbol.” Whether it be Creole, French, English, or Spanish, the study participants indicate that multilingual Haitians tend to look outward when validating their linguistic choices.

### **Perceived Imperfections of Haitian Multilingualism**

Tied to the idea of a language’s legitimacy is its correctness and what are viewed as imperfections, another recurring theme that surfaced during the current study. Some participants expressed the view that, although multilingual Haitians speak several languages, they speak none of them perfectly or completely. According to Fabienne, “There’s not a single Haitian that can speak one single language perfectly...the average upper class Haitian, yes, you can speak French, but let’s just stay and only speak French. Let’s see how long that stays, that continues.” She also seems to imply that switching between languages is a sign of imperfection, estimating that “about 80% of the population...do not write French or speak French correctly, and even the 20% or 30% that do speak French, we don’t really speak French the whole time. We start in French, we continue in Creole, and we add a couple of words in English.” Without using the exact term, Fabienne describes code-switching as the reality of the bilingual elite in Haiti, a description which is consistent with previous research (Zéphir, 1997a). It bears

mentioning that actual use of code-switching between Creole, French, and English occurs during both focus group discussions, especially the second one. This happens most during more intense parts of the conversation, when participants appear most enthusiastic and involved in the debate. Switching between languages seems natural for these multilingual Haitian immigrants and not at all forced.

The preoccupation with the correctness of a language is logically linked to the fear of making mistakes when speaking and writing it. The participants' comments indicate that this is especially true for French more so than for Creole. Yves, for example, notes that his nephew's nanny in Haiti speaks French (not typical for Haitians in that profession, who are normally monolingual Creole speakers) but was afraid to make mistakes in the beginning, replying often in Creole. When it comes to writing, Didier credits Creole's phonemic orthography for it being "easier" than French, also blaming his distance from Haiti for his perceived limitations in French: "I don't think I have...a grasp of writing French as well as my parents for example." Fabienne and Mireille claim that Haitians of their generation often avoid French by writing in English, even the bilingual elite living in Haiti who speak French fluently. Lucien mentions the example of using English for text messages. When asked why they thought Francophone Haitians prefer English over French for writing, Lucien answers: "That language is not easy to write... A little mistake can cost you something." His remark prompts friendly laughter from the other focus group members, who seem to identify with his linguistic dilemma. Most participants affirm that they are more self-conscious about writing in French than in English. Fabienne says that it is not simply about living far from French

in D.C., as Lucien and Didier suggest, but that fear of faltering in French would still be an issue living in Haiti because of the declining quality of education. She claims that correctly speaking and writing French was more valued in the past than it is today.

Although participants' concerns over correctness mainly pertain to French, Creole is not immune to such judgements, particularly in writing. Pascale says she sees many mistakes in the use of Creole on social media, where people frequently write "purely phonetically" rather than follow the language's official orthography. Yves says that he also frequently finds Creole errors online, but to the opposite extreme, where people mistakenly write it like French, thereby causing confusion: "Me, too. Sometimes I don't understand... It's like a French Creole." He provides the example of the Creole expression "pi wo" (higher), which he has seen written as "pi haut", using the French spelling of the word "high". Yves claims to write "proper" Creole on social media and does not understand why others do not do so: "Creole is actually easier, if you ask me." He attributes his ease of writing Creole to his having studied it at school in Haiti. Jacques, on the other hand, ties written mistakes on social media to an overall lack of formality, noting that people write quickly and do not pay attention to mistakes as they would in a more formal environment. Yves is not surprised, saying that his reaction to written mistakes is totally different at work than on social media. The different value placed on incorrect language use in informal versus formal settings may explain why participants do not express the same fear of making mistakes in Creole as they do in French.

## **Ideologies of Language Choice**

### *Age and gender differences*

The critical views of Haitian multilingualism described above are likely colored by the lenses of language ideologies that paint French as superior to Creole. Participants provide several examples of how their language choices are driven by ideological stereotypes of formal French and casual Creole. Fabienne explains how gender affects the language choices of multilingual Haitians: “Especially as a woman... It’s the expectation that a proper lady speaks French...doesn’t speak that much Creole. You can mix a little bit of English, a little bit of French, but first that.” She also notes a difference in language choices between genders on social media, asking the other participants: “Isn’t it interesting that the majority of the time...when you see Creole on Facebook, it’s most of the time by a man [rather] than by a woman?” It would appear as though language ideologies hold Haitian men to different standards than Haitian woman, who are expected to be more proper and, therefore, use more French.

Age is also a factor for multilingual Haitians when deciding what language to speak and with whom. When discussing what languages she uses on social media, Mireille states: “If I’m speaking to my parents’ generation, aunts and uncles, it would be in French. If I’m speaking to people my age or younger, more likely in Creole or back and forth.” Yves shares how he was raised with French at home and did not speak Creole to his mother when he was growing up. As an adult, however, he can joke with her some in Creole today. The other focus group participants laugh and can relate to this scenario, adding that he would have been punished for speaking Creole as a child. Yves confirmed

that Creole was the cool language he spoke with his friends at school but not at home. Fabienne had a similar childhood experience: “Growing up, I didn’t speak Creole until I was 12, 13. I understood everything, but I didn’t speak it. I spoke more French and English, and when I started speaking it, I didn’t want to speak it in public because I had an accent, though I grew up all my life in Haiti.” The view of Creole as an informal, lesser language often causes elite families to forbid their children from speaking it at home. When Creole is finally allowed, it is considered a sort of coming of age, often used for lighter topics without completely replacing French.

#### *Identity, race, and ethnicity*

The diglossic dichotomy between French as a “high” language used for formal functions and Creole as a “low” language used more informally affects not only the languages that multilingual Haitians choose in a given situation, but also how they view their identity, an issue that was raised more than once in the second focus group discussion. Claudette first mentions it in reference to the co-official status of Creole and French: “I fear for our identity and for us to move forward.” Later, when discussing the prestige of French as the language of social mobility, she declares in French: “Tous les systèmes en Haïti, ça rend les gens frustrés, confusés, complexés, et on sort de là, on n’a aucune identité!” (All of the systems in Haiti make people frustrated, confused, insecure, and we come out of there with no identity!) Besides serving as a small example of code-switching (the English word “confused” is inserted in an otherwise French sentence) it was telling to see the other three focus group participants (Yves, Pascale, and Jacques) adamantly agree with Claudette’s statement while repeating the word “complexé”



(loosely translated as “insecure” or “full of hang-ups”) as if it were the key word to explain all of Haiti’s problems. Interestingly, the participants do not agree with Jacques when he claims, first in Creole, then repeating in French, “Se lang nan ki separe, ki kreye fose a. C’est la langue qui crée le fossé.” (Language is what separates, what creates the gap.) Yves says that he does not believe that language is the problem in Haiti, but rather that Haitians do not know their history, once again bringing up the issue of identity in different terms: “Moi même, je pense que c’est parce que les Haïtiens ne connaissent pas l’histoire de leur pays... l’Haïtien ne se connaît pas.” (As for me, I think it’s because Haitians don’t know the history of their country... Haitians don’t know themselves.) Whether or not participants view the ideological language divide between Creole and French as Haitians’ primary problem, they all recognize the divisive effects that it has had on their national identity.

The somewhat ambiguous identity of multilingual Haitians in the United States is also demonstrated by issues of race and ethnic labels. Because of her White phenotype, Claudette claims that she was never accepted as Haitian while growing up in Haiti, where the vast majority of people are of African descent. She made this comment during the focus group discussion, bringing up race as an example of the lack of a unified identity in Haiti caused largely by the institutionalized language ideologies: “Je suis blanche. Je suis haïtienne. Mais parce que je suis blanche, j’ai jamais été accepté. C’est qu’il n’y a aucune institution en Haïti qui rend les Haïtiens haïtiens.” (I am white. I am Haitian. But because I’m white, I’ve never been accepted. There are no institutions in Haiti that make Haitians Haitian.) Yves adds “connectés” (connected) to the end of Claudette’s sentence,

which she confirms: “Voilà, c’est ça. C’est tout le monde.” (Yes, that’s it. It’s everyone.) It is perhaps significant that the word for “white” in Creole, “blan” is also used to identify foreigners of any race in Haiti. This double meaning could be understood as equating white with being non-Haitian, a potentially problematic label for Haitians of lighter skin who consider themselves to be no less Haitian than their darker skinned compatriots.

Ethnic designations associated with race were also challenging for some of the participants when completing the written questionnaire, revealing the mismatch of typical race categories in the U.S. and their own sense of self. When asked to indicate which response they usually mark for questions pertaining to race and origin, Pascale added the comment “I don’t identify as white” rather than just leaving that option blank. Perhaps she felt the need to explain her choice given her light phenotype, which others might perceive as white and with which she does not want to be associated despite her physical appearance. Pascale hand-wrote several comments in the margins of the “Ethnic Background” section of the questionnaire, communicating her discontent with some the multiple-choice questions: “Categories are too limiting and a tad offensive to me.” She seems to struggle with categorizing herself and others ethnically, often selecting multiple designations for questions requesting a single answer and leaving several options blank when asked to rank them all by order of preference.

Like Pascale, Fabienne also commented on the questionnaire to express her frustration with the ethnic choices it provided. Contrary to Pascale, however, her main issue is with the use of the terms “Black” and “African American.” When answering the

same question where Pascale specified that she does not identify as white, Fabienne selected “other” and wrote: “Haitian Black, as most of the time Black is never put alone. It’s always Black/African American.” She also added “African American” (not included in the original question) next to the option “Black” to illustrate her point but did not select it. Fabienne seems to identify herself as Black as long as it is not associated with being African American. She selected “African American” as the term she feels least comfortable with and wrote the word “never” (rather than a number) next to the same term when asked to rank the designations that describe her from best to least. Fabienne is not alone in her rejection of this ethnic label: five out of ten participants identified “African American” as the designation they are least comfortable with, and three others ranked it second to last, even though the majority have dark skin and may be seen by others as Black. The distinction between these synonymous terms and the desire of multilingual Haitians to differentiate themselves from African Americans is consistent with the findings in Zéphir’s (1997a) study of bilingual Haitians in the United States who value French as a linguistic capital that sets them apart from non-francophone black Americans, often associated with a lower social class.

#### *French as a marker of social class*

Results from this study reaffirm the role of French as a marker of social class among multilingual Haitians both in Haiti and the U.S. Pascale, who has recently worked on development projects in Haiti, talks about the importance of speaking French in professional situations, at least in the beginning. She says that the first language one must speak when entering an office is French out of respect for others due to the social

stigmas attached to Creole: “because it assumes education, class, connection, etc., you speak French.” Pascale explains that you have to start all conversations in French even if you eventually switch to Creole. Claudette confirms the pressure to perform well on this social test: “Every time we start a conversation in Haiti, everyone is on their, like, guards. That’s the feeling until someone cracks a joke [in Creole].” Yves says he does not feel that pressure when speaking French and is equally comfortable in all languages (Creole, French, and English). Claudette and Pascale both say “I feel it.” Pascale reiterates that she always feels the pressure to speak French in particular situations, especially the business environment: “It is a sign of respect for a person to assume that that person has the same level of education as you, which creates a feeling of camaraderie...meaning that we have the same sort of background, and it becomes an equalizing opportunity in your discussions.” If the other person does not have an equal linguistic level, Pascale explains, “Then, you switch to his comfort level, but it’s a fine line.”

Mireille tells a story from her personal experience, illustrating how she failed to understand this unspoken rule of social discourse, inadvertently crossing the fine line described by Pascale in the other focus group:

I remember when I first moved back to Haiti from the States in 2009, and I would go to a public place...a grocery store or some place, and if I needed to speak to somebody, initially I thought, ‘Oh, I should speak in Creole because, you know, I’m Haitian, I’m back in Haiti...I want to assert my Haitianness.’ So I would open up the conversation in Creole...and the person, if they spoke French, they would reply to me in French. And so

initially, I was really confused by this...I took it personally...‘Do I not look Haitian enough? Am I speaking with a weird accent?’ But over time, I realized that it was more a status symbol for the person responding to me, that if they actually speak French, then they should respond in French to show that, ‘Hey, I have this level of education, I have this level of status’... In the minds of Haitian people living there in the day-to-day, French is still very much, like, the language that you need to show that you can speak a certain level of, to show that you’re a certain level of affluence or status.

Although Mireille viewed Creole with nationalistic pride after years of living in the United States, she encountered the same language ideologies favoring French over Creole upon her return to Haiti. Her story illustrates the ambiguous nature of Haiti’s language ideologies: although Creole represents national unity, French is still viewed with more prestige.

As apparent proof of education and social status, French has historically been the language of social mobility in Haiti. According to the current study’s participants, this has not changed much, despite Creole gaining legal ground and the growing popularity of English. During the first focus group discussion, Fabienne shook her head with an emphatic “No, no, no” when asked whether Creole or English could be used instead of French to climb the socio-economic ladder of success, explaining: “climbing up the ladder, it’s great to speak English...everybody speaks English, but that’s not the language of the country, so you need to speak French... It’s also kind of the social status because

you have a minimum amount of education. They sent you to school, and all school was in French.” Mireille agrees: “I would have difficulty seeing somebody who only speaks Creole being able to climb up the social ranks in Haiti.” As for the second focus group, while Claudette believes “It’s impossible,” Pascale responds “With difficulty,” pointing out a few exceptions, such as local artists, street vendors, and some businessmen. She claims that middle eastern immigrants in Haiti, for example, have historically spoken Arabic and Creole, but no French, yet many have been successful in business without it. Jacques counters Pascale’s argument, however, saying that even those who make money in Haiti without French end up sending their children to learn the language in school so that they do not live the same lifestyle as their non-Francophone parents. The language ideologies of postcolonial power persist, painting French as the language of education, social status, and economic success.

### **Influence of English and Spanish**

Although language ideologies seem to have preserved the prestige of French over Creole among multilingual Haitians, the analysis of their language attitudes and choices demands consideration of the linguistic context, which includes other languages: English in particular and Spanish to a lesser degree. While the influence of English is strong for obvious reasons in the Washington area, participants also note a growing use of the language in Haiti. Based on data from the written questionnaires, all participants had already learned English prior to leaving Haiti for the United States, and all but one claim to have learned the language by age twelve. The fact that the only participant who reported having learned English later in life is also the only one over fifty

years old supports the theory that the use of English is on the rise in Haiti, increasingly learned at a younger age than in previous generations. In the second focus group, Claudette mentions the common use of Anglicisms, which Pascale attributes to a global phenomenon spread by the Anglophone media. Lucien also points to the media, focusing on music and the large amount of English songs on the radio. Fabienne agrees with him: “Before our music was just in Creole, or a little bit of French and Creole...but now...English is, like, common in [Haitian] music,” even though the musicians performing it grew up in Haiti. For this younger generation of Haitian immigrants, English is more than just the language of their new host-country; it is a third (or fourth) language learned in their home country, along with Creole and French.

#### *English overlapping with French*

English coexists with Creole and French today in formerly bilingual Haitian communities without altering the sociolinguistic inequalities between the two Haitian languages. In diglossic terms, English can sometimes fulfil French’s formal functions as the prestigious “High” language while also serving in Creole’s day-to-day domain of casual conversation. According to Mireille, “French and English are both spoken in social contexts amongst those who are considered to be more affluent and more educated.” One sign of English being associated with affluence and education is the growing trend of elite families who choose to send their children to Anglophone schools rather than the traditionally prestigious francophone schools. While Lucien cites the practical reason of preparing children to eventually study in American universities, Didier counters: “I think it’s more of a status thing.” Fabienne adds: “It’s everybody from the

upper class, so you're sharing with your people.” Based on the participants' comments, English now appears to share the high esteem historically attributed to French in the domain of education.

Another reason for the overlapping roles French and English among multilingual Haitians is the international reach of these two languages, as Mireille explains in the context of education: “It makes sense to have French because it is the language that can connect us to the outside world, or English for that matter, if they really wanted to transition to English. But they would have to keep Creole, because Creole is the native language.” While Creole is identified as essential on one hand, French and English are viewed as interchangeable on the other. Pascale believes that moving Haiti to a monolingual Creole system would isolate Haitians from the rest of the Caribbean and the non-Creole-speaking world. Similarly, Jacques says that a poor country like Haiti cannot “force” others to learn Creole due to a lack of resources and economic interests. Participants value both French and English for their ability to communicate with other countries and as potential solutions to what they fear would be monolingual isolation.

Participants also identify English as a formal alternative to written French in situations where they deem Creole to be inappropriate. When speaking of the various languages they use on social media, participants say that it depends on the type of social media, the content, and the audience. According to Didier: “Facebook, I would have no issues writing something in Creole. LinkedIn, I'd rather do it in French or English.” Fabienne agrees with him: “Exactly, inappropriate to write in Creole” on LinkedIn because of its professional nature. When asked to choose between posting in French or in



Creole, she states: “If it’s professional, it’s obviously French.” Along the same lines, Mireille says, “I would find it strange if somebody did post, like, a report or something in Creole, or something scientific,” to which Fabienne responds “A résumé!” After a brief reflection, Mireille adds: “It might be impressive, actually,” implying that writing and reading such as a document in Creole would be challenging and unusual.

Fabienne and Mireille, who have both worked on international development projects in Haiti, say that they would never be asked to write in Creole at work, even though it is sometimes spoken in meetings. According to Mireille, “In the time that I worked with the [Haitian] government, I never saw a single document written in Creole... Everything that is written is in French.” Regardless of the participant’s personal experience, previously cited research shows that her statement is not accurate: despite the predominance of French in writing, the use of written Creole is on the rise in Haiti (DeGraff, 2016/2017; Trouillot-Lévy, 2010). The Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen, whose official publications are all in Kreyòl, works to promote even more writing in Haiti’s national language (DeGraff, 2017, p.c.). Fabienne doubts that Creole will ever be used for writing reports at work, an example of how the language ideologies relegating Creole to an informal, spoken language remain in the minds of multilingual Haitians living in the United States long after they leave Haiti. Though participants view English as an acceptable substitute for formal French, Creole is still not accepted by members of Haiti’s bilingual elite in professional circumstances, especially not in writing.

### *English overlapping with Creole*

In contrast to the educational and professional formalities of French, English also overlaps with what participants describe as the fun and playful informalities of Creole. When Didier observes that most social events in Haiti today “geared towards the young people,” such as DJs and clubs, are advertised in English rather than in French or Creole, Fabienne points out that they target the upper class, explaining that French is “a language of social mobility when it comes to school, when it comes to work, but not when it comes to play.” Lucien concurs: “That’s a good point, because I hear jokes in Creole and in English, but I don’t hear too many jokes in French.” Mireille agrees: “Yeah, that’s true. You don’t curse people out in French, either.” All participants laugh as Fabienne confirms: “No! You curse people out in Creole or in English. That’s it!” When asked about the importance of English, she says “It’s language of play,” a term used frequently throughout the first focus group discussion to describe both English and Creole, but notably not French. Regarding the use of Creole on social media, Fabienne repeats: “It’s for play... English and Creole are for play.” When asked when she chooses to use Creole over other languages on social media, she says: “Jokes...something that’s colorful.” The preference for telling jokes in Creole is also mentioned in the second focus group discussion, when Claudette affirms: “It’s the language of jokes.” Jacques believes that Haitians in the diaspora use mostly English on social media while those in Haiti use more Creole. Pascale disagrees, saying that her Haitian friends use English more than any other language on social media but use Creole to “make a fun point” among other Haitians. Rather than replacing French or Creole, English seems to overlap both

languages, providing an alternative choice for multilingual Haitians in certain sociolinguistic situations previously reserved for French, and in others traditionally associated with Creole.

*Spanish: crossing class, culture, and country borders*

Given that the majority of the participants in this study speak some level of Spanish in addition to being fluent in English, French, and Creole, it is worth exploring the role that this fourth language plays in the language attitudes of multilingual Haitians in the Washington area and how it affects their views of the linguistic landscape in Haiti. During the second focus group discussion, Pascale introduces the relevance of the Haitian diaspora in Spanish-speaking countries: “You cannot discount the importance of Spanish” when speaking of influential languages in Haiti. Contrary to French, however, she claims that the influence of Spanish spans across social classes since many poorer Haitians spend time working in the neighboring Dominican Republic and return to Haiti years later, bringing their newly acquired language skills with them. Claudette agrees, offering an example of how the same can be true for Haitians from towns on the Dominican border: “Oui, moi, j’avais un chauffeur qui parlait espagnol parce qu’il avait un frère qui habitait près de la frontière.” (Yes, me, I had a chauffeur who spoke Spanish because his brother lived near the border.) Pascale confirms: “C’est pas une question vraiment de classe.” (It’s not really about class.) She says that such Haitians often speak Creole and Spanish without knowledge of French or English and are, therefore, not part of the traditional bilingual elite.

In the first focus group, Lucien also refers to Haiti's geography and the same immigration trend between Haiti and the Dominican Republic as an argument for Spanish to have a greater role in Haiti, particularly in education: "I think Spanish should play a big role... Basically, you share that island with a stronger economy, a stronger country, and then you're surrounded by Spanish-speaking countries." In addition to the high number of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, which Didier estimates as one million, Lucien mentions an important Haitian community in Cuba and the fact that Haitians have a history of studying there and in other Spanish-speaking countries. He and Didier briefly talk about how Haitian music was strongly influenced by Dominican rhythms as a positive example of cultural exchange between the two countries. Nonetheless, Fabienne disagrees with Lucien's suggestion, saying that Spanish is a useful part of the curriculum but should not play a major role in schools as a foreign language that is external to Haiti, regardless of the Spanish-speaking diaspora and the geographic proximity to Spanish-speaking neighbors.

### **Languages in Haitian Schools**

#### *Questionable curriculum and inconsistent reforms*

The debate over which language or languages to use for instruction in Haiti and the role that each language should play in schools are key issues at the heart of the country's educational woes. When asked their opinions on these topics, the participants express confusion over what languages are actually being used in schools today and in what capacity. Claudette and Pascale suggest that instruction for all students should start in Creole and that French should be introduced in secondary school, to which Jacques

responds: “Mais, c’est ce qu’on fait à present.” (But that’s what they do now.) Pascale corrects him, clarifying: “Oui, c’est ce qui essaie d’être fait en ce moment. C’est différent.” (Yes, that’s what they try to do these days. It’s different.) Fabienne is also unsure of the current curriculum: “I went to, you know, a private Haitian school and back in the day, yes, obviously we had Latin, and we had Spanish... and I always thought that the public school had the same curriculum, but just at a lower level.” While aware of Creole’s recent coexistence with French, many participants are not clear about how the national language fits into the formerly French curriculum and at what level each language is introduced to students.

The uncertainty voiced by participants is understandable given the current state of education in Haiti. Consistent with previous research (Berrouët-Oriol, 2011; Berrouët-Oriol & Cothière, 2011; Dejean, 2010), Mireille notes inconsistent reforms and insufficient regulation of educational institutions in Haiti. Having collaborated with the Haitian government on education projects in Haiti, she identifies three common scenarios that coexist due to a lack of governmental oversight and a lag in policy implementation:

There’s still a set of schools in the country that operate under the *Système Réforme Bernard* in which schools were going to be taught uniquely in Creole, and then there’s a subset of schools in the old [French] system, and then there’s the schools that are not regulated at all that just do whatever they want. So, that’s how you end up with, like, English curriculum, French curriculum, not one set of curriculum. People just do what they want.

There is no clear picture to paint when it comes to the current language of instruction in Haiti as demonstrated by participant responses.

*Varying degrees of Creole and French*

Just as the participants' understanding of the current curriculum varies, so do their opinions regarding the role that French and Creole should play respectively in Haitian schools. All agree that Creole should be included in the country's standard curriculum, but there is some disagreement regarding whether it should be used as the primary language of instruction. When the second focus group is asked which language should fill that role, Yves quickly responds "French", adding "French for now." Claudette's first response was "It's difficult," though she agrees with Pascale who states: "I say start in Creole to make everybody on the same level – EVERYBODY – and then you introduce French after." She and Claudette agree that French should be introduced in secondary school. Pascale explains further: "You want to equalize people. You want to have people have the same base...a common understanding of the language...of your situation...of your history." She focuses on equality across social classes, saying that everyone must receive the same education regardless of their speech community: "If you want to improve the education of the country, you have to start with everybody, and you put everybody on the same level." Switching to French, Pascale offers a fully bilingual alternative, still based on equal access for all: "Il faut que tout le monde ait la même éducation. Ou bien vous choisissez de la faire bilingue dès le départ... Tout le monde reçoit la même éducation bilingue ou monolingue, mais la même chose." (Everyone

must have the same education. Or you choose to make it bilingual from the beginning... Everyone receives the same bilingual or monolingual education, but the same thing.)

Although Pascale's intentions seem sincere, one might challenge whether a fully bilingual curriculum would truly provide equal opportunities to monolingual students who speak only Creole at home. Also, limited resources and a lack of qualified bilingual teachers make the success of fully bilingual education unlikely. On a positive note, Pascale's ideal of equal education for all Haitians and her initial proposal to use Creole as the language of instruction, waiting until secondary school to introduce French, break with common language ideologies that preserved power for the elite by making education inaccessible to others. Rather than excluding the monolingual masses, Pascale wants to "equalize people" by standardizing the curriculum, which is a step in the right direction.

Members of the first focus group expressed similar opinions, with most participants favoring some level of Creole-French bilingualism in Haitian schools. Fabienne favors using both languages from the beginning rather than waiting to introduce French later: "You're teaching them from a young age to already be bilingual... I agree Creole is the language of the people, but...it's also important that all the paperwork still...everything is in French. So if you start in Creole, those kids are never really gonna learn French... They're gonna have a little part of it...but never really master it." The belief expressed by Fabienne that learning Creole first somehow prevents students from mastering French later is a common misconception and contrary to current research showing that children learn all subjects best in their native language, including a second or third language (DeGraff, 2016/2017 & 2017; UNESCO, 2016).

Mentioning the importance of French for written documents in Haiti, Fabienne promotes full bilingualism for all Haitians, which she does not believe to be possible when students are taught only in Creole during their primary years. She and most of the other participants do not appear to envision a future in which all writing could be done in Creole without the use of French. The question is whether monolingual Haitian students should be required to learn French in order to access part of the national education system and to be able to fill-out the “paperwork” mentioned above, an example of how language policy in Haiti is governed by a language ideology that labels Creole as unfit for writing and academia.

Mireille is also in favor of a bilingual education system in Haiti but prioritizes Creole over French and the importance of native language instruction: “They would have to keep Creole, because Creole is the native language... There’s plenty of research that shows that, at least in the beginning in schools, it makes more sense to teach in the native language of the student, and then they can add on French as a bilingual system.” Didier offers an example from his personal experience of the challenges students often face when they are forced to learn in a language that they do not speak, which is the case for many monolingual Haitians with no other choice than to attend French-language schools. As a primary school student in Haiti, Didier recalls seeing his classmates from a less privileged social class struggling with mathematical word problems in French: “They understood the math, but they couldn’t write it out.” Without the option of a curriculum taught in Creole, monolingual Haitians are placed at a significant disadvantage compared to their bilingual classmates: language becomes an obstacle to learning other content.



### *Challenges of Creole literacy and orthography*

While introducing Creole as the primary language of instruction has clear benefits for the majority of monolingual Haitians, it often presents challenges for the bilingual elite who attended school in French. According to Mireille, “It all links to education. If we’re going to have a system that’s fully in Creole, then people like us have to be educated in Creole because we wouldn’t be able to function as well if everything was in Creole.” Several participants claim that it takes them much longer to read in Creole than in French and English. Other participants laugh and nod their heads in agreement when Fabienne asks: “Yes, we can read Creole, but how long does it take to read a joke in Creole?” Mireille responds: “It would be like three times longer than in French,” later adding: “We would all go back to elementary level of education.” Didier says he can still read in French much faster even though he studied Creole for two years in school.

Related to difficulties reading Creole, multilingual Haitians often struggle with issues tied to its orthography and differences in pronunciation. Interestingly, participants in both focus groups identified this particular challenge of Creole literacy without being asked specifically about it, perhaps indicating its prevalence among members of the targeted speech community. While some participants say they find Creole easier to write than French due to the phonetic nature of its orthography, others point to what they see as incongruence in the system. Pascale says that the 1987 Constitution did not take into account the ongoing debate surrounding Creole orthography and grammar: “What we’re

seeing today is a push toward Creolization without standardization...of the types of...regional dialects within the Creole.”

In addition to regional variation, participants identify differences between the variety of Creole they speak as bilinguals and the Creole spoken by the majority of Haitians who are monolingual. Lucien initiates this discussion by asking Didier, “How do you feel about those words like ‘éducation’?” Lucien pronounces the word twice – once in French and once in English – asking Didier how he would pronounce “education” in Creole, spelled “edikasyon” with the official orthography. The question is controversial because the pronunciation varies between social classes: the current spelling reflects the mainstream Creole of the monolingual masses, whereas the bilingual elite usually pronounce the same word like in French with the front-rounded vowel /y/ represented by the letter “u”. Though exceptions exist, this characteristic is consistent with previous research that shows the use of front-rounded vowels as distinguishing between the two speech communities (Férère, 1977; Schieffelin & Doucet, 1994; Zéphir, 1990 & 1997a). All participants immediately understood the challenge and implications of this seemingly simple question, appearing eager to hear Didier’s response. They laughed and teased him a bit as he struggled to answer, saying he would most naturally pronounce it like French, but that it would depend on the audience. They also laughed when he demonstrated the monolingual pronunciation in comparison.

Despite these pronunciation issues, all participants say they believe that the Creole orthography is correct as it is and should not be written more like French to reflect their own speech patterns. This view indicates a change in attitude on the part of the

multilingual minority, who appear to be more accepting now of the monolingual variety of Creole than their bilingual predecessors were at the time of Férère's (1977) study, when much of the bilingual elite proposed an etymological system based on the French writing system. Férère agrees with linguists who have advocated for a phonemic orthography of Creole on the basis that it would be more accessible to monolingual Creole-speakers and, therefore, facilitate the teaching of literacy to the majority of Haitians who do not speak French. Férère (1997) declares that "An ethnophonemic orthography is the answer" (p.51), calling for an orthography based specifically on the phonemes of most monolingual speakers as opposed to those of the bilingual minority. The participants in this study agree, even though using such an orthography can be challenging for them as fluent Francophones.

#### *Awareness of language ideologies*

Another sign of the evolving attitudes among multilingual Haitians, some participants show awareness of their own bias caused by language ideologies during the focus group discussions. Mireille admits:

To me, it just shows how snobby we are as a culture, because look at how we even convert Creole to make it more like French so that we're still slightly better than the people who speak, like, Creole the way it's supposed to be spoken. Look at how we all laugh when he says 'edikasyon' versus 'éducation', because this is how we grew up in society that says you should be slightly better than that.

Mireille's observations confirm results from previous studies that identify "frenchified" varieties of Creole as having higher social prestige among bilingual Haitians in the U.S. and Haiti, as well as the continued implication that those forms are slightly better (F  r  re, 1977; Schieffelin & Doucet, 1994; Z  phir, 1997a). Along similar lines, Jacques recognizes the ideological preference that many Haitians have for French versus Creole: "French has a connotation of elitists... If you speak French, you're supposed to be better than the others." While these language ideologies still dominate Haitian society and the minds of many Haitians, the increased awareness of their effect provides hope that they will one day lose their power of the Haitian people.

*Perceived lack of terminology and written resources*

In spite of an apparent increase in awareness of ideologies, participants view Creole as less fit than French as an academic language, expressing concern for the limits of Creole vocabulary and written resources compared to those of French. According to Lucien, "At this point, they need to update the language as far as putting some technical terms in order to be able to use it on a professional level...because there are technical terms, scientific terms that you cannot actually translate into Creole." Didier responds by mentioning a similar issue in French, where the Acad  mie Fran  aise tries to limit the use of English words for technical terms by creating new ones in French. When he says that he does not believe an equivalent institution exists for Creole, the facilitator mentions Haiti's Akademi Krey  l. Didier and the other participants in the first focus group seem surprised to learn of such a governing body for the Creole language, implying that they had never heard of it. Spreading awareness of institutions that promote the use of Creole,

like the Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen, could help increase the prestige of Creole as a full-fledged language and decrease the power of language ideologies that denigrate it.

In contrast, Jacques mentions the new “Creole Academy” within the first few minutes of the second focus group discussion but expresses concern for a lack of funding, questioning its ability to properly support Creole as a written language. Yves mistakenly identifies the lack of a Constitution in Creole as one of the language’s weaknesses: “One thing I’m sure that we don’t have any constitutional document... written in Creole right now, so it’s like limiting your own government with the language.” Unaware that Haiti’s current Constitution is written in both French and Creole, he is surprised to learn this fact, which Pascale and Jacques confirm. According to Pascale, “More and more, you see documents, contracts, activities, agreements, etc. in Creole.” She claims, however, that historical books are still primarily in French. Pascale’s comments confirm the increasing use of Creole in writing and formal arenas, contradicting other participants’ claims that all professional documents are still in French.

#### *Quality of education and language of instruction*

Fabienne believes that increasing the literacy rate is more important than expanding Creole’s vocabulary: “Educate more of the population to read and write... you’re putting so much effort into using technical terms, but who’s going to use them? The same people that speak French.” Fabienne and Lucien make similar points regarding the futility of translating documents from French into Creole. Lucien says people ask themselves: “When you have a document in French, who is going to waste his time or her time trying to translate it?” Fabienne agrees, explaining that translations end

up being for people that don't need them: "It's also backward because we're not gonna use it. It's going to be a waste." She declares that people in a position to read the translations already read French and, therefore, do not require the translation. Jacques does not find the focus on translation to be useful, either: "If you don't cover the basis, you can translate all the books you want. It doesn't really matter: people have to be able to learn it." The overall message from participants seems to be to educate rather than to translate: they believe that Haitians should focus on educating more of the population before translating additional documents from French into Creole.

In order to educate people effectively, however, they must be taught in a language that they understand, which for the majority of Haitians is only Creole (DeGraff, 2016/2017; UNESCO, 2016). The belief that educating the monolingual masses in French is easier than translating documents and books for them to learn in Creole is a misconception rooted in the ideological assumption that everyone can learn in French if they have to because French has always been the language of instruction in Haitian schools. While there may be some truth to participants' claims that translations are not used because people who would read the documents already read French, this seeming contradiction can be explained by the fact that Haitians are still required to use a language other than Creole to reach a certain level of education. This could change as more curriculum and materials are developed in Creole, including translations.

Study results show that participants are more concerned with the quality of education in Haiti than with the language of instruction used in the classroom. When asked what the advantages of curriculum in French versus Creole are, Fabienne claims:

“It’s not really about the language. It’s about the quality of the education, the structure.” Mireille offers a similar response for different reasons: “I don’t think it matters. I think it’s really about the mastery of the teachers, regardless of the language.” She believes that the most important factor for success is that teachers master whatever language they teach in, which is currently not the case in Haiti. She explains that they often try to teach in French even though they do not master it, resulting in poor student mastery and results. Lucien claims that Haitian teachers’ lack of French mastery is a recent phenomenon: “Your parents, or your grandparents, they went to school, they had to study French, and they had to express themselves in French.” The consensus amongst participants is that the quality of education in Haiti has deteriorated in the last generation or two, but there is no consensus on how best to improve it.

The participants’ prioritization of the quality of education rather than language of instruction is understandable given the multiple languages in their own linguistic repertoire from which they could choose when studying. The majority of Haitians, however, have no choice: they only speak Creole and deserve quality education in their native language. Although the multilingual Haitians in this study view the choice of language as secondary to other issues, such as teacher mastery, choosing a language of instruction is critical to the success of any educational reform. In order to improve curriculum and train teachers, the language of instruction must be clear. Otherwise, what language will the curriculum and student assessments be written in? What language will teachers be trained in? If teacher mastery of the language they teach in is more important than the language itself, as some participants mentioned, then the choice is obvious:

teachers are more likely to master a language they already speak fluently, which for most Haitians is only Creole.



## CONCLUSION

The results of this study are twofold, showing both 1) the lasting effects of colonial language ideologies in the attitudes of multilingual Haitian immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area and 2) their increased acceptance of Creole compared to data reported in previous research on linguistic inequalities in Haiti and among Haitians in the U.S. On one hand, participants continue to view French as the prestigious language of high social class and education that forms the foundation of schools and government. They value Haiti's cultural and literary heritage in French and see limitations in the idea of a Creole-only system, whether it be monolingual literacy, or in the country overall. They justify these limitations with perceived inadequacies of the language compared to French and English in terms of international reach, written resources, and academic vocabulary. Such attitudes are a result of centuries of ideological indoctrination in a post-colonial society that continues to elevate French above Creole despite constitutional laws that grant Creole official status alongside French and a unique status as Haiti's only national language uniting all Haitians.

On the other hand, study participants validate Creole as an Official Language and support its use in schools to varying degrees, especially at the primary level. They note that spoken Creole is gaining ground in the work environment, and written Creole is now widely accepted in some domains, such as social media. Their comments reveal

awareness of ideologies and a critical view of injustices resulting from social stigmas, thereby showing an evolution in traditional mentalities associated with the bilingual elite. While participants are not ready to abandon French altogether, they favor bilingual programs that facilitate the learning of French through Creole, which they recognize as the only native language of the vast majority of Haitians. Overall, study results show more progress than stagnation in the attitudes of this sample of multilingual Haitians.

Certain limitations should be considered, however, when evaluating the results of the current study. First of all, the participants live in the Washington, D.C., area and are originally from a privileged bilingual class in Haiti, so results should not be generalized to apply to all Haitians in Haiti or the United States. Secondly, many participants are friends and knew each other prior to beginning the study, which might produce different results than a focus group discussion between strangers. Thirdly, data is based on the opinions, personal experiences, and reported language use of participants, which should not be confused with verified facts or the observing of actual language use. Finally, the researcher is also a multilingual Haitian living in the Washington, D.C., area. Although she left Haiti at a young age and was raised primarily in the U.S., she made frequent trips to Haiti while growing up and, therefore, may also be influenced by the language ideologies described in this thesis. Though the researcher makes every attempt to remain objective in her analyses of prior research and participant responses, she undoubtedly cannot eliminate all personal bias regarding the subject matter.

The current study raises important issues and unanswered questions surrounding language use and education in Haiti that could impact future policy-making decisions and

the development of school curriculum in Haiti, as well as heritage language programs for Haitians in the United States. The researcher also hopes that it will spark debate at the university level to delve deeper into unresolved issues and controversial questions regarding the future roles of Creole and French in Haitian communities. The instruments created and used for data collection could be adapted for similar research with monolingual Haitians that speak only Creole, or Creole-English bilinguals that do not speak French, to compare their attitudes with those of their Francophone compatriots. With proper approval, the video and audio data collected during this study could be analyzed with a different focus, such as actual rather than reported use of languages. Investigating the actual language use of multilingual Haitians today, both in Haiti and in the U.S., could be a worthwhile topic for future study, particularly the frequent and seamless code-switching that occurs between Creole, French, and English as observed during the focus group discussions. Finally, the audio recordings of individual interviews are a source of untapped data that was not used in the scope of this paper; its questions regarding race and ethnicity could be of particular interest to researchers studying the link between language and ethnic identity.

## APPENDIX A

### DEMOGRAPHICS AND BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research study for my thesis. This is the background questionnaire portion of the study. You will be asked a series of questions about your language and ethnic background. You may answer in whatever language you feel most comfortable and may skip over questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. Please respond to each question by selecting or writing the appropriate answer in the space provided, and hand me your responses when complete. The information you provide is confidential.

#### Biographical Information:

1. What are your first and last name(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?        \_\_\_ M        \_\_\_ F
3. How old are you? Please pick a range:
  - a. \_\_\_ 20-29
  - b. \_\_\_ 30-39
  - c. \_\_\_ 40-49
  - d. \_\_\_ 50-59
  - e. \_\_\_ 60 or older
4. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - a. \_\_\_ High school complete
  - b. \_\_\_ Some college
  - c. \_\_\_ College degree complete
  - d. \_\_\_ Some graduate school
  - e. \_\_\_ Graduate degree complete
6. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What citizenship(s) do you currently have? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How old were you when you arrived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many total years have you lived in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How many total years did you live in Haiti? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Where was your mother born? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Where was your father born? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you attend school in the United States?      \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO  
 If YES, for how many years and at what level? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What language(s) were the classes taught in? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Did you attend school in Haiti?      \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO  
 If YES, for how many years and at what level? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What language(s) were the classes taught in? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Did you attend school in any other countries?      \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO  
 If YES, which one(s)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 For how many years and at what level? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What language(s) were the classes taught in? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Do you still travel to Haiti?      \_\_\_ YES      \_\_\_ NO  
 If YES, how often do you visit and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Language Background**

17. What language(s) did you first learn to speak as a child? \_\_\_\_\_
18. At what age did you begin to learn Creole?  
 a. \_\_\_ 0-5 years old  
 b. \_\_\_ 6-12 years old  
 c. \_\_\_ 13-18 years old  
 d. \_\_\_ 18+ years old

19. At what age did you begin to learn French?

- a. \_\_\_ 0-5 years old
- b. \_\_\_ 6-12 years old
- c. \_\_\_ 13-18 years old
- d. \_\_\_ 18+ years old

20. At what age did you begin to learn English?

- a. \_\_\_ 0-5 years old
- b. \_\_\_ 6-12 years old
- c. \_\_\_ 13-18 years old
- d. \_\_\_ 18+ years old

21. Do you speak Spanish? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

If YES, where did you learn it? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did you begin to learn Spanish?

- a. \_\_\_ 0-5 years old
- b. \_\_\_ 6-12 years old
- c. \_\_\_ 13-18 years old
- d. \_\_\_ 18+ years old

22. Do you speak any other languages? \_\_\_ YES \_\_\_ NO

If YES, which one(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did you begin to learn it/them?

- a. \_\_\_ 0-5 years old
- b. \_\_\_ 6-12 years old
- c. \_\_\_ 13-18 years old
- d. \_\_\_ 18+ years old

23. In which language(s) did you first learn to read as a child? \_\_\_\_\_

24. What language(s) did you use most during the following periods in your life:

- 0-5 years old \_\_\_\_\_
- 6-12 years old \_\_\_\_\_
- 13-18 years old \_\_\_\_\_
- 18+ years old \_\_\_\_\_

25. Currently, what language(s) do you speak **most** of the time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

26. What language(s) do you primarily speak with your **parents**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. What language(s) do you primarily speak with your **siblings**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

28. What language(s) do/did you primarily speak with your **grandparents**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

29. What language(s) do you primarily speak with your Haitian **friends**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

30. What language(s) do you primarily speak at **work**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

31. What language(s) did you primarily speak at **school**?  
\_\_\_\_\_

32. What language(s) do you use on **social media** (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)? Please rank them numerically, starting with **1** for the language you use the **most**, or **N/A** for not at all.

- a. \_\_\_ French
- b. \_\_\_ Creole
- c. \_\_\_ English
- d. \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

33. Rate your proficiency in the following languages by skill (speaking, reading, writing, listening) according to the following scale (enter the number next to each skill):

**5**                      **4**                      **3**                      **2**                      **1**                      **0**  
**Native**      **Near Native**      **Advanced**      **Intermediate**      **Low**              **None**

SKILL	CREOLE	FRENCH	ENGLISH	SPANISH	Other: _____
Speaking					
Reading					
Writing					
Listening					

**Ethnic Background**

34. When you fill out a personal data form, for the question pertaining to race and origin, which response do you usually mark?

- a. \_\_\_ White
- b. \_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino
- c. \_\_\_ Black (non-Hispanic)
- d. \_\_\_ Native American
- e. \_\_\_ Asian
- f. \_\_\_ Pacific Islander
- g. \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

35. What designation do you feel the **most** comfortable with?

- a. \_\_\_ Haitian
- b. \_\_\_ Haitian-American
- c. \_\_\_ Black
- d. \_\_\_ African American
- e. \_\_\_ American
- f. \_\_\_ West Indian
- g. \_\_\_ Caribbean
- h. \_\_\_ Franco American



36. What designation do you feel the **least** comfortable with?

- a. \_\_\_ Haitian
- b. \_\_\_ Haitian-American
- c. \_\_\_ Black
- d. \_\_\_ African American
- e. \_\_\_ American
- f. \_\_\_ West Indian
- g. \_\_\_ Caribbean
- h. \_\_\_ Franco American

37. Please rank the following racial/ethnic designations numerically, starting with **1** for the designation that you think describes you the **best**:

- a. \_\_\_ Haitian
- b. \_\_\_ Haitian-American
- c. \_\_\_ Black
- d. \_\_\_ African American
- e. \_\_\_ American
- f. \_\_\_ West Indian
- g. \_\_\_ Caribbean
- h. \_\_\_ Franco American

38. The majority of your friends and people you interact with socially are:

- a. \_\_\_ Haitians
- b. \_\_\_ West Indians
- c. \_\_\_ Hispanic/Latinos
- d. \_\_\_ African Americans
- e. \_\_\_ Africans
- f. \_\_\_ White Americans
- g. \_\_\_ Europeans
- h. \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Introduction**

*Thanks, again for participating in this study and for completing the written questionnaire about your background. I would like to revisit some of the questions in more detail and expand upon your answers if possible. Please feel free to answer in whatever language you feel most comfortable using: English, French, Creole, Spanish, or a mix. You may skip questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.*

#### **Language Use and Attitudes**

*Let's begin with the various languages you speak and your views surrounding the use of those languages in different situations.*

1. What is your native language? If you have more than one, which do you consider to be the most native? Why is that?
2. I know you speak several languages. Which one do you feel most comfortable speaking?
  - a. French
  - b. Creole
  - c. English
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. In your opinion, what language do you read and write the best in?
  - a. French
  - b. Creole
  - c. English
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. I'm interested in knowing which languages you use in different aspects of your life and with different people. What language do you use most often at a local Haitian social function when speaking with:
  - a. Haitian family and friends?
  - b. Haitians you do not know very well?

5. When communicating with other Haitians on social media,
  - a. What language do you use the **most**?
  - b. What language do you use the **least**?
  - c. Why?
  
6. How would you feel if a stranger you met for the first time in a formal situation addressed you in Creole? Why?
  
7. What contexts, if any, would you consider inappropriate for the use of Creole? Why?
  
8. What contexts, if any, would you consider inappropriate for the use of French? Why?
  
9. What language(s) did your parents speak to you growing up?
  - a. Did the language change as you aged?
  - b. Did the language change when you moved to the U.S.?
  - c. What language(s) do you speak to them today?
  
10. If you have children now or in the future,
  - a. What language(s) do/will you speak to them?
  - b. What language would you expect them to speak to...
    - i. You?
    - ii. Their grandparents and older Haitian relatives?
    - iii. Their siblings and/or cousins?
    - iv. **Your** Haitian friends?
    - v. **Their** Haitian friends?
  - c. Is it more important to you that they learn French or Creole?
  - d. What are your reasons for the above preference?
  
11. Do you think it is important for you personally to maintain your native language (French/Creole) here in the United States?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If so, what do you do in order to maintain it?
  
12. Would it bother you if people thought that you didn't speak French well?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If yes, what would you do about it?

13. Would it bother you if people thought that you didn't speak Creole well?
  - a. Why or why not?
  - b. If yes, what would you do about it?

**Race and Ethnicity**

*Now I'm going to ask you some questions about how you view race and ethnicity here in the United States and how you wish to be viewed by others.*

14. Which ethnic/racial group(s) (other than Haitians) do you identify with (if any)? Why?
15. Do you consider yourself American? Why or why not?
16. Do you consider yourself African American? Why or why not?
17. Do you consider yourself Black? Why or why not?
18. Do you consider yourself White? Why or why not?
19. Do you consider yourself Latino? Why or why not?
20. How do you think you are perceived by the aforementioned racial/ethnic groups mentioned and by Americans in general?
21. Do you feel you have a lot in common with African Americans? If so, what are some of the things you have in common?
22. What are the things that distinguish you from African Americans?
23. In your opinion, what does it mean to be Haitian in America today?
24. Does it matter to you whether or not people know that you are Haitian?
25. Would you say it's important for you to maintain a Haitian identity?
  - h. Why or why?
  - i. If so, what do you do to maintain it?

26. Do you feel like any of the languages you speak are particularly important for maintaining a Haitian identity? Why or why not?
27. In your opinion, can someone have a Haitian identity without speaking Creole or French? Why or why not?

**Language Attitudes and Education**

*Finally, I am interested in your opinions about the use of languages in school.*

28. If you had to pick one, what do you think should be the primary language of instruction in schools in Haiti? Why?
  - a. French
  - b. Creole
  - c. English
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
29. Given the recent push to use Creole in Haitian schools and the ongoing debate about how best to do so, to what extent do you think Creole should be used and in what capacity?
  - a. The only language of instruction from Pre-K through university
  - b. In elementary school, transitioning fully to French or English by high school
  - c. In conjunction with French from beginning to end
  - d. In conjunction with English from beginning to end
  - e. As an object of study rather than as the primary language of instruction
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
30. If you were to raise children in Haiti, what type of school would you prefer for them? Why?
  - a. French instruction only
  - b. Creole instruction only
  - c. English instruction only
  - d. Creole-French bilingual instruction
  - e. Creole-English bilingual instruction
  - f. French-English bilingual instruction
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

31. What type of school would you prefer for your children in the U.S.? Why?
- a. English instruction only
  - b. French-English bilingual instruction
  - c. Creole-English bilingual instruction
  - d. Spanish-English bilingual instruction
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

32. Assuming you raise children in the United States, what “foreign” language would you encourage them to study in high school? Why?
- a. French
  - b. Spanish
  - c. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### FOCUS-GROUP PROMPTS

#### **Introduction**

*Hello, everyone, and thanks again for participating in this research study. I will be facilitating our group conversation today about various language issues facing Haitians and the attitudes that surround them. This should take about an hour and a half. I am interested in hearing about everyone's experiences and ideas, so you should be honest and open when expressing your opinions. If you agree or disagree with what others have said, please speak up. Feel free to answer in the language or languages that you feel most comfortable using: English, French, Creole, Spanish, or a mix. You may skip questions that make you feel uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. As you know, you all signed the consent form and agreed to participate and be videotaped. However, you are free to stop participating at any time. Before we begin, please choose a pseudonym (e.g., fake name) that we will use to address one another throughout our conversation. Please write it on a sheet of paper and place it in front of you.*

#### **Language Policy and Change**

*Ok, let's open the discussion with the changing status of Creole and French in Haiti.*

1. As you probably know, Creole was recognized as an official language of Haiti in the 1987 Constitution, thereby sharing co-official status with French.
  - a. What are your opinions regarding this relatively new status?
  - b. Are you in favor of this change? Why or why not?
2. What do you think should be the official language(s) of Haiti and why?
3. Historically, French has been seen as the language of social mobility, opportunity, and prestige in Haiti.
  - a. Do you think this is still the case, or is English replacing French in Haiti?
  - b. Is it possible to climb the socio-economic ladder of success speaking only Creole?
4. Some people say that French is becoming obsolete in Haiti.
  - a. What do you think they mean?

- b. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. What do you think will be the future of French in Haiti?
- a. Do you think it will disappear entirely?
  - b. How would this make you feel?

### **Language Attitudes and Education**

*Now let's talk about your opinions surrounding the use of various languages in Haitian schools.*

6. What do you think should be the primary language or languages of instruction in Haitian schools? Why?
7. In your opinion, what are the best schools in Haiti?
- a. What do you believe are the main reasons for their success?
  - b. What language(s) do they use for instruction?
8. In your opinion, to what extent should Creole be used in Haitian schools?
9. What do you think are some advantages of schools in Haiti where the curriculum is taught mainly in **French**?
- a. Were there any advantages for you personally?
  - b. If so, can you share a specific example with the group?
10. What do you think are some advantages of schools in Haiti where the curriculum is taught mainly in **Creole**?
- a. Were there any advantages for you personally?
  - b. If so, can you share a specific example with the group?
11. What do you think are some advantages of schools in Haiti where the curriculum is taught mainly in **English**?
- a. Were there any advantages for you personally?
  - b. If so, can you share a specific example with the group?
12. What role, if any, should **Spanish** play in Haitian schools?
13. How important do you think it is for Haitians to learn to read and write in **French**? Why?



14. How important do you think it is for Haitians to learn to read and write in **Creole**? Why?
15. How important do you think it is for Haitians to learn **English**? Why?
16. How important do you think it is for Haitians to learn **Spanish**? Why?
17. Do you think that the geographic proximity of Spanish-speaking and Anglophone countries should be considered when establishing language and education policies in Haiti? Why or why not?

### **Language Use and Social Media**

*Finally, I am interested in your use of Creole on social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and the attitudes that surround it.*

18. In your opinion, is writing on social media in Creole different from other forms of writing in Creole? Explain.
19. Do you feel more comfortable writing in Creole on social media than writing in Creole at work or school? Why or why not?
20. Do you believe it is more appropriate or acceptable to use Creole for written communication on social media than in other contexts? Why or why not?
21. In what situations do you typically choose Creole over other languages to communicate on social media? Explain.
22. Taking English out of the equation, are you more likely to post information on social media in French or in Creole? Why?
23. How do you feel about reading other people's posts in Creole versus other languages? Do you react differently? Explain.
24. Based on your personal experiences, has the use of Creole on social media affected how you or others view the Haitian language? How so?

*Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us today. The information you have provided will be very helpful. Please respect each other's privacy by keeping the comments and discussion confidential.*

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Christine Elise Bonnefil earned her Bachelor of Arts in French, Spanish, and Latin American & Caribbean Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1997. She received High Honors in French for her undergraduate thesis entitled “La Problématique de la langue française aux Antilles créolophones: une étude comparée d’Haïti et de la Martinique.” In 2001, she earned a Master of Science in Information and Telecommunication Systems for Business from Johns Hopkins University, working as an IT consultant before becoming a language teacher. She has been teaching French and Spanish in Virginia public schools since 2005 and continues to teach while completing her Master of Arts in Foreign Languages (with a dual concentration in French and Spanish) at George Mason University in 2017.