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## HISTORY OF HAITIAN-CREOLE: FROM PIDGIN TO LINGUA FRANCA AND ENGLISH INFLUENCE ON THE LANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper provides an overview of the history of the Haitian-Creole language developed by enslaved West Africans in the plantation. Linguistic research in this paper reveals that Haitian-Creole was influenced by some West African languages especially EWE and indo-European languages such as French, English, and Spanish since Haiti was colonized by France, England and Spain. Due the linguistic influence of other languages, the native language of the enslaved West Africans was developed as pidgin, lingua franca and Creole. Based on many lexicons that are close to English used by Haitians, the author feels there is a linguistic link between their native language and the one of Shakespeare.*

**Keywords:** *Linguistics, Pidgin, Lingua Franca, Creole Languages, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), English Language Learners (ELLs), English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL), English as a Second Language (ESL), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) Lingua Franca, Pidgin, Pidginization, Creole, Haitian-Creole, Applied Linguistics, Haitian Children, Limited English Proficiency (LEP).*

### INTRODUCTION

Haitian-Creole is a language spoken by 7 million people daily. It is considered the native language of Haitian people who live in the island of Kiskeyah, the name given by the natives of Haiti before Columbus. This language was under attack of people who follow the footsteps of pseudo-scientific racist theories and claim that Haitian-Creole was not considered as a language or less sophisticated than European languages. The concept of language universals (phonology, morphology, lexicon, semantics and syntax) which was developed by one the most famous linguists, Noam Chomsky, put an end to the misconception and misunderstanding of a definition of language. Since language is considered the most important cultural element, Haitian-Creole is merged with the culture of Haitian people to delete or disregard the linguistic fallacy or non-linguistic research of those who used to claim the language as primitive. There are at least 10 million idiolects of Haitian-Creole which correspond to the number of people who speak the language in our planet. The Haitian-Creole language has a myriad of regional dialects all human languages ranging from Albanian to Zulu. Regional dialects of Haitian-Creole are present in the daily speech of Haitian people from different geographical regions of Haiti and overseas. Haitian-Creole follows phonological, morphological, lexical, semantic and syntactical features provided by linguists. Modern Haitian and foreign anthropological linguists have deeply contributed to the development of the Haitian-Creole alphabet, phonology, lexicon, semantic and syntax.

## HISTORY OF THE HAITIAN-CREOLE: FROM PIDGIN TO LINGUA FRANCA

The history of the Haitian-Creole language has proven that the existence of this language is uncertain during the pre-Columbian era, because the Taino Indians who, migrated from India to Haiti (Quisqueyah), were the first inhabitants of this island. The Taino Indians had their own language, which was totally different from the Haitian-Creole, even though few Indian words such as roukou (wookoo), banbou (bamboo) mabouya (mabooya) are still being used in the language (Haitian-Creole) developed by the enslaved West African people brought to the island by European settlers during the slave trade. Haitian Creole is spoken by 7 million people daily not including other ethnic groups who learn it as a second language. The language of the inhabitants of Haiti follows the language universals components (lexicon, morphology, lexicon, semantics and syntax) like all human languages. Dialectal differences of the Haitian Creole language can be found in different regions of the island. Differences correspond to sociolinguistic aspects in different geographic areas of Haiti and follow the same linguistic concept found in every language in the world.

St-Fort (2000) argues that *"historically, it is difficult to say precisely when HC appeared... The French take charge of the operations of the slave trade and the needs to communicate between slave and masters will give rise to a new language"*(p2). Further, St-Fort (2000) points out that *"Haitian-Creole is a member of the group of French-based creoles because an important part of its lexicon or comes from directly from French. However, its syntax, its semantic and its morphology differ considerably from French"* (p2).

Most language Zephir (2008) as stated by (Chaudenson 1992, Chaudenson and Mufuwene 2001, Baker 2000, and Mufwene 2001) also reveals that Haitian Creole is French-based Creole that developed in the seventeenth century in the context of the French colonization of Saint-Domingue, more precisely the plantation phase of colonial expansion. Further, Zephir (2008) argue that Haitian Creole is thus considered as a contact language that particular Ewe, a West African spoken in Ghana, Togo and Benin.

*"To gain a true understanding of Haitian culture it is necessary to also gain knowledge of Haitian Creole... the language of Creole truly portrays the soul as well as the history of the Haitian people. Creole in Haiti was the result of contact between European romance languages, namely French and Spanish, and various Central and West African languages. Because of this, Haitian Creole developed a distinctly unique grammar from the other French Creoles of the world".*

[http://i\\_zyric.tripod.com/intro.htm](http://i_zyric.tripod.com/intro.htm)

It is extremely important to have a clear understanding of the definition of a Creole language in order to fully comprehend the process of the development of Haitian-Creole. *"Creole languages are often regarded negatively because of their relation to pidgins, it is important to note that a Creole language is not just a simplified form of a given language, but a full-fledged language that is capable of serving all the intellectual, psychological, and social needs of its speakers"* (culturalorientation.net). Further, we find out that *"linguists do not agree on the origins of the various Creole languages found around the world, and this is certainly the case with Haitian Creole. Some believe that it emerged from a Romance-based pidgin (Afro-Portuguese, used by sailors, slaves, and slave traders who came in contact with the nonstandard... Others believe that Haitian Creole is derivative of a pidgin spoken by Portuguese and French sailors in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries... It is important to remember that French and Haitian Creole are two distinct languages, and not varieties of the same language. Haitian Creole grammar has*

strong characteristics of African languages, while its vocabulary is mostly of French origin, with contribution from Spanish, African languages, and much later, English." (culturalorientation.net)

Later, we find out that "a Creole language is a natural language that arises from languages in contact one with another and is directly related to a pidgin. Commonly viewed as a trade language, a pidgin is a simplification of a base language, with generous contributions from other languages, used to fulfill special, but temporary, communication needs."

### Phonetic Symbols and English Phonetic of Haitian Creole Alphabet

The Haitian Creole language is composed of 32 sounds. These sounds are based on the official standardized orthography. The phonological features come from these letters of the Haitian Creole alphabet:

a, an, b, ch, d, e, e, en, f, g, h, l, j, k, l, m, n, ng, o, o, on, ou, oun, p, r, s, t, ui, v, w, y, z.

The Haitian Creole language does have the following letters: c, q, u, and x. The sounds of letters c and q are used for letter k

A a	an	B b	Ch ch	D d	E e	en	è	F f	G g
ah	ah-en	bee	see-ahsh	dee	ay	ay en	ay grav	ehf	gay
[a]	[ã]	[b]	[ʃ]	[d]	[e]	[ẽ]	[ɛ]	[f]	[g]
I i	J j	K k	L l	M m	N n	O o	ò	on	ou
ee	zhee	ka	ell	em	en	o	ograv	owen	oo
[i]	[ʒ]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[o]	[ɔ]	[õ]	[u]
P p	R r	S s	T t	tch	V v	W w	Y y	Z z	
pee	ah-wah	ess	tah		va	doob va	eep-seelon	zed	
[p]	[w, w]	[s]	[t]	[tʃ]	[v]	[w]	[j]	[z]	

Zephir (2008) as stated by (Chaudenson 1992, Chaudenson and Mufwene 2001, Baker 2000, and Mufwene 2001) also reveals that Haitian Creole is French-based Creole that developed in the seventeenth century in the context of the French colonization of Saint-Domingue, more precisely the plantation phase of colonial expansion. Further, Zephir (2008) argue that Haitian Creole is thus considered as a contact language that emerged as the result of the blending French with the West African languages spoken by the slaves. Most the Haitian Creole lexicon derives from French and its syntax is based in particular Ewe, a West African spoken in Ghana, Togo and Benin.

In these sentences below, we can analyze the word order (syntax) in Haitian-Creole. The word order comes from Ewe, a West African language spoken by Ghanaians, Congolese, and people from Benin. One can analyze these two sentences below to identify the syntactic rules of the Haitian-Creole.

1. Ti moun yo te manje di ri ak pwa aye.
2. Elev-yo mete liv-yo sou tab-la.

### Translation from Haitian-Creole into English

1. The children ate rice and beans yesterday.
2. The students put the books on the table.

In the first sentence, « yo » is the plural form of determiner or the definite article « the ». Notice that the determiner is being placed after the noun. "te" is used a past tense. "te manje" means "ate" (past tense of the verb eat in English).

In the second sentence, there are three definite articles:

1. elev-yo ( the students)
2. liv-yo (the books)
3. tab-la (the table)

Notice that the definite articles (yo, la, and la) in the second sentence are also being placed after the noun. However, the definite article "yo" has a plural form and the article "la" has a singular form.

Previllon (1987) argue that from a linguistically point of view; therefore, the indigenous language of modern Haiti is Haitian, which is a member of the world family of languages called Creole. This observation elevates Haitian from the status of adjective (a qualifier) to that of noun (a substantive). By giving Haitian an independent status, we bring it fully into the family of official languages such as English, German, French, and Spanish.

Haitian-Creole was pidginized due to the mixture of different West African languages brought or spoken by the enslaved in the plantation of Haiti. The pidgin has not yet developed as a native language in the plantation; however, the enslaved West Africans used it for communication. Lefevre (2010) argue that the history and structure and Creole languages are characterized by the following features. First, as was pointed out by Whinnon (1971), these languages are only developed in multilingual communities. Second, communities where pidgin and Creole languages emerge generally involve several substratum languages spoken by the majority of the population and a superstratum language spoken by a relatively small but economically powerful social group. Third, in communities where Creole languages emerge, speakers of the substratum languages generally have very little access to the superstratum language (Thomason and Kaufman, 1991).

Schuhmacher (2010) state that "*Haitian Creole is a creolized language based on a reduced or pidginized variety of French, originally spoken in the contact situation between masters and slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with considerable borrowing of morphological and syntactic features from the West African languages of the slave population*" (p. 106).

After the pidginization, the Haitian-Creole was a lingua franca for the enslaved West Africans in the plantation of Haiti. Children of the enslaved West Africans, born in the plantation of Haiti, were exposed to the lingua franca that will be creolized. Therefore, Haitian Creole has become the native language of the enslaved West Africans' progenitors in the island. Many modern linguists feel that Haitian Creole should be called Haitian instead, because the native language of Haitians has already followed the stage of pidgin, lingua franca and Creole. Lefevre and Lumsden (1989); in order to follow the footsteps of modern linguists who recommend to change Haitian Creole into Haitian only, state that "*an optimal*

*theory of Creole genesis must account for the fact that Creole languages emerge in multilingual contexts where there is a need for a lingua franca and where the speakers of the substratum languages have little access to the superstratum language. It must account for the fact that Creole tend to be isolating languages even when they emerge from contact situations involving only agglutinative languages”.*

## ENGLISH INFLUENCE ON HAITIAN-CREOLE

According to Bretons (1996) the Haitian Creole language was developed by the enslaved West Africans in order to communicate among themselves. This means that the enslaved West Africans were not able to understand the different languages (French, Spanish and English) used by slave owners, so they developed a metalinguistic feature that first generate a pidgin. Later, Bretons (1996) stated that *“Haiti was first a colony of Spain; then it was switched to England and finally to France. A misunderstood word in French, English or Spanish became a word in Creole. For example, the word “bucket” in English becomes “bokit” in Creole. This reveals the linguistic link between Haitian Creole and English can be found in semantics, morphology, phonology and lexicon.”*

According to Smith (1999)... *“Creole can be considered the linguistic product of two or more languages that were combined to form a language that enables people from different language groups to communicate.”* When Haiti was a colony of England, there was a linguistic communication between the slave owners and the enslaved West African people. The enslaved West Africans had developed *“a pidgin language that is not the native language of anyone but is used an auxiliary or supplemental language between two mutually unintelligible speech communities”* (Smith p. 1). We can conclude that the pidgin language of the enslaved West Africans in Haiti has borrowed many words from the English language or many words in the Haitian Creole language are derived from English. Words such as bokit (bucket), kanniste (can) have their roots in the English language.

Hartman (1998) argued that *“it is easy to make the mistake of thinking that Creole is a “primitive” language or a corruption of English because so many of the words sounds or look similar to related English words.”* The linguistic link between Haitian Creole and English may not be similar to the derivation of a great deal of vocabulary from French, Latin, and Greek to English; however, it embraces sociolinguistics not in terms of bilingualism between a primary and secondary group, but it encompasses the function of communication between two groups socially, racially, and linguistically diverse. We understand that multilingualism may generate code switching as a willingness of bilingualism; however, this linguistic feature cannot apply to Haitian Creole because the language did not exist before the genesis of the slave trade era. The linguistic link between Haitian Creole and English has occurred not in terms of social interaction, but as a way of communication between the linguistically diverse enslaved West Africans in Haiti since they came from different countries, tribes and regions in West Africa.

Winford (1999) revealed that *“these Creole languages are a blend of mostly European vocabulary with a grammar representing a compromise between that of the West African substrate and that of the European substrate. Creoles differ primarily in the extent of one or the other of these influences on their grammar.”* Many Haitian Creole lexicons have their roots in the language of Shakespeare; however, the syntactic features come from the West African languages mainly EWE. The Haitian Creole; furthermore, has different dialects like English. The segregation of enslaved West Africans from identical tribes by English conquerors in order to avoid communication and revolution has an impact of the English influence towards the Haitian Creole language. This generates a high degree of mixing

code between the West African languages and English to develop Haitian Creole. Later, Winford (1999) argued that *"the ability to manipulate two codes can lead to very intricate patterns of code alternation and code mixture."* This linguistic aspect presented by Winford is not present in Haitian Creole for the following reasons:

1. The language did not exist before Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
2. Enslaved West African people were linguistically diverse
3. English masters of the enslaved West Africans people did not speak or understand the different West African languages and dialects of the enslaved West Africans.

However, after the development of Haitian Creole by enslaved West Africans, there was a linguistic link between Haitian Creole and English not in terms of diglossia, but as a spoken language that generates in the beginning function words, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon morphemes and other linguistic features. The linguistic influence of English over Haitian -Creole occurs due to sociolinguistics, but in terms of power of the English masters over the enslaved West Africans as far as speaking English to the enslaved even though they had language barrier or they did not understand English. The linguistic link between Haitian Creole and is not the result of diglossia, but it generates a certain type of morphology that creates a difference in phonology like in Spanish and Portuguese. According to Blake (1999) *"....observing and analyzing several Creole features, several studies provide evidence that dispels myths about... Creole, as opposed to a linguistic descent of... English."* The Haitian Creole language developed by linguistically diverse enslaved West Africans in the plantation has a long history like the English language. First of all, the Haitian Creole was a pidgin, lingua franca and then developed as a language. The pidgin has many English words such as "bokit" (bucket) and "kanniste" (root word: can (container)). These English words used in pidgin make the lexicon and morphology for the Haitian-Creole language. Other borrowing words from English can be found in the Haitian-Creole language due to language contact. Such words are listed below:

Grosjean (1982) reveals that the term language borrowing in order to refer to words that have passed from one language to another and have come to be used even by monolinguals. This linguistic process describes the influence of English on Haitian Creole. The influence of English on Haitian occurs in lexicon due to contact with American English. Further, Zephir (2008) reveals that the influence of English can be detected in the speech of Haitian immigrants when they speak Creole. There is nothing unusual about this, and numerous studies exist that attest to the phenomena of language contact. It is at the level of the lexicon that the greater influence of English on Haitian Creole can be felt. The Creole spoken by Haitian immigrants in the United States contain a fairly large number of words that have been borrowed from English (p10-11).

In an interview conducted by Zephir in 2008 to a group of Haitian immigrants living in USA, she detected many borrowing English words in their speech. Below is a list of few sentences from Zephir's interviews with Haitian immigrants that reflect English borrowing words. Some English borrowing words address the Haitian Creole phonetic features and may spell identically or differently. However, they may be considered as homophones by listening to them in Haitian-Creole.

1. Mwen gen yon lot ti travay **pat tayim** le **wikenn**.  
(I have another **part time** job on **weekends**.)
2. Ayisyen pito tout kalite **djob** pase yal nan **welfe**.  
(Haitians would rather do all kinds of **jobs** instead of being on **welfare**).

3. Li gen tout kalite **edek** ak mari ya.  
(She has a lot of **headaches** with the husband).
4. Fok mwen fe yon **estop** nan **ATM machin** nan.  
(I have to make a **stop** at the **ATM machine**).
5. Mwen gen yon **lik** nan **besment** lan pou m **lennlod** la **tcheke**.  
(I have a **leak** in the **basement** that I must have the **landlord check**).
6. Nou ta kapab al nan **lunch** ansanm.  
(We could go to **lunch** together).

English influence on Haitian Creole is manifested is through the use of code-switching. More so than borrowing which is also present in the speech of Creole speakers with limited English proficiency, code-switching is used by bilingual speakers who have a great deal of proficiency in English. In many ways, code-switching (and borrowing) in Creole and English is a frequent occurrence among bilingual speakers, and it reflects their normal way of speaking. Anyone who attends a Haitian gathering will undoubtedly be struck by the amount of English words, expressions, and entire segments that are inserted into Haitian Creole discourse (Zephir, 2008).

Below are some examples of code-switching used by Haitians to demonstrate the English influence on Haitian Creole:

1. I **will be out of state**, map call ou lem tounen.  
(I will be out of state; I will call you when I am back).
2. Si ou rele mwen nan telefon la kay mwen, ou pa jwenn mwen, **please call me in my cell phone**.  
(If you call me home and I do not answer, please call me on my cell phone).

Zephir (2008); referring to Gumperz's concept of interjections that describes instances of conversational "switch" where those inserted foreign items "serve to mark an interjection or sentence filler", argues that in addition to single lexical units, it is very common to find in the Creole speech of Haitians, English expressions that are used as sentence fillers, such as I mean, you see what I mean, you know, you understand what I am saying, and numerous others that have the same function. When such fixed expressions are inserted into Creole discourse, the purchase of the speaker is certainly not to elicit a response, say to the question "you see what I mean," but rather to establish some kind of contact with the interlocutor by decreasing the speech flow and inserting pause filler.

The Haitian Creole language is the linguistic horizon of the Haitian people. In the past, various linguistic anthropologists felt the interest in conducting research about the Haitian Creole in order to address and relate to the language universals components of the Haitian tongue. Today, the Haitian Creole language has English phonetic rather than a French one. With this phonetic link and other linguistic features that relate Haitian Creole and English, teachers of Haitian English language learners can differentiate the phonemic awareness and identify some cognates of both languages. The awareness of linguistic link that exists between English and Haitian-Creole can effectively guide teachers of Haitian children in developing new didactic strategies that can respond to their students' academic needs and success in the learning process.