"KOZE!," KREOL, AND COLONIALISM
Language as Archive

LESSON FOCUS
This lesson explores language, and in particular the Creole language of Mauritius, as a colonial archive. Creole, as an archive, allows students to understand the hybrid influences in its construction, the linguistic impact of colonialism, the role of science in perpetuating colonialism, and modern-day issues in perceptions of language. This is a lesson about giving legitimate “voice” to Creole (Koze! = Speak in Mauritian Kreol) and about the importance of continued resistance to dominant ideologies of language.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
What can Creole, and especially the science about its origins, teach us about colonialism?

OBJECTIVES
● To examine the impacts of colonialism on the development of Creole language in Mauritius
● To analyze the role of science (linguistics, etymology) in producing perceptions of Creoles
● To discuss Creole in the struggle for human dignity and against neocolonialism

VOCABULARY
Use this vocabulary hand-out to support a variety of learners. Encourage them to define each term as it is addressed in different parts of the lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>Colonialism is a broad system of territorial occupation and social exploitation perpetrated by European powers against many places worldwide. People who are colonized were forced to abide by colonial powers’ political, economic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and cultures. Colonial powers used various tactics such as direct rule or indirect rule (see below). Colonialism can also be said to be trade-based (occupying a territory for the purpose of a trade outpost) or settlement based (occupying a territory for the purpose of long-term social and cultural occupation).

| **Direct Rule** | “When the British and French expanded into Africa, Asia, and the Americas, they began ruling diverse populations that differed from them along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. To manage this diversity, they articulated two distinct ideologies: direct and indirect rule. Advocates of direct rule envisioned a colonial project that would modernize and transform colonial territories; proponents of indirect rule favored preserving tradition and working with local authorities”

“Advocates of direct rule defended and justified colonialism as a “civilizing” project that would modernize and transform colonial territories. The conquering state provided the model to be emulated: European bureaucracies, laws, and modes of economic exchange would be transplanted to the colonies” (Lawrence, 2016) |
| **Indirect Rule** | “Proponents of indirect rule framed the colonial project in preservationist terms. They favored working with local authorities and maintaining indigenous traditions, not replacing them with a centralized authority. Indirect rule implied limited colonial intervention” (Lawrence, 2016) and it was perceived to solve the problem of direct rule. |
| **Trade Colonialism** | During the phase of trade colonization, European established trade posts on rivers and coasts; they communicated with interpreters; new pidgins/lingua francas emerged from these encounters. Trade colonization did not create a threat to indigenous languages because of interpreters (Mufwene). |
| **Exploitation colonialism** | The exploitation model of colonialism describes the period after Berlin 1885. Europeans were not interested in sharing their languages. The French and Portuguese assimilation system was designed less for universal education than to create an elite class of colonial auxiliaries who became a buffer between the colonized and the colonizers and ultimately worked for the metropole. The settlement model affected languages greatly (Mufwene). |
| **Glottophagy** | A term coined by Calvet in 1974, glottophagy literally means “eating (phagy) the language (glotto).” It refers to the relationship of colonial languages to native languages in the colonial era, whereby colonial languages were perceived as superior and this helped justify the colonial project, with consequences that native languages were erased or transformed, and colonial languages remained dominant. |
| **Language dominance or** | When one language is perceived by the majority as having more social power in a variety of social settings. Social power means that when one person uses |
hegemony | the language as a native speaker, they accrue more social privilege and are perceived as having higher status.
---|---
Language Ideology | An ideology is a set of made-up (constructed) ideas that serve a social function. They are not necessarily true but they have an impact on society and move people and institutions to act on these ideas.
Central Language Planning | Central language planning occurs when an institution (such as a state) plans for the use of a language and establishes that use as policy or law on a population.
Linguistic Marketplace | This is a term that describes a multilingual environment where languages have more or less value based on the social status attributed to them. In the linguistic marketplace of business in Mauritius, French and English have more value.
Neocolonialism | Neocolonialism is the term used to define the continuation of colonial ideas, policies and practices after colonialism ended.

Note: Creole is purposefully not defined here, as students will be understanding its contested definitions throughout the lesson.

**PRESENTATION**
The slides that support this lesson can be found here: [PowerPoint](#)

**LESSON**
**Context: Geography, History, Language**

*ELP Resource Atlas of Mauritius*

1. **Geography:** Situate Mauritius as a collection of islands (boxed in red in the map above) in the Indian Ocean.
2. **A brief colonial history of Mauritius**: Situate the history of Mauritius by asking students to analyze toponymy (place names). Ask: what can one infer about the history of a place from the names it was given? Narrate the story of colonialism in Mauritius in the context of global European exploitation, the role of sugar, starting with the Dutch, French, followed by the British. For more historical background, the Mauritian archeology site offers a succinct summary or read the Truth and Justice Commission report Ch 1-3. As students to guess who first landed on Mauritius and who were the colonizing powers based on toponymy, use the opportunity to clarify the differences between French direct rule and British indirect rule administrative rule, as well as between trade and settlement.

3. **Koze! A Mini Language Lesson**: explain that today, based on the 2010 census, 85% of Mauritians speak Creole as a mother tongue. French and English are official languages. Note that French is spoken by the elite and used in business. English is the statutory language of the state, including parliament, schools and curriculum.

Introduce your students to Kreol by engaging them in a mini-language lesson. This will help students analyze the language roots later. This can be done by asking them to repeat a few sentences after you and creating a mini dialogue in small groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mauritian Creole</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonzur</td>
<td>bon-zoor</td>
<td>Bonjour</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koze</td>
<td>Ko-zay</td>
<td>Salut</td>
<td>Hi (informal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonswar</td>
<td>bon-swaar</td>
<td>Bonsoir</td>
<td>Good evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuma ou appele?</td>
<td>Koh-moha oo ap-pele?</td>
<td>Comment vous vous appelez?</td>
<td>What is your name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo appele _____</td>
<td>Mow ap-pele _____</td>
<td>Je m'appelle</td>
<td>My name is _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enchante</td>
<td>ehn-shan-tay</td>
<td>Enchante</td>
<td>Nice to meet you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sil to/ou ple</td>
<td>Sil to pleh</td>
<td>S'il te plaît</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki manyer?</td>
<td>kee-mah-nnee-air?</td>
<td>Comment ça va?</td>
<td>How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo byen</td>
<td>mow bee-en</td>
<td>Je vais bien</td>
<td>I'm fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byen merci</td>
<td>Bee-en mersy</td>
<td>Bien, merci</td>
<td>Well, thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eski to korek?</td>
<td>ess-kee tow koh-reck?</td>
<td>Est-ce que ça va?</td>
<td>Are you alright?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misye</td>
<td>mis-yeh</td>
<td>Monsieur</td>
<td>Sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madam</td>
<td>Madam</td>
<td>Madame</td>
<td>Madam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pas traka/ Pena traka</td>
<td>pah tra kah/ pay-nah tra kah</td>
<td>Ne vous en faites pas</td>
<td>No worries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu Korek</td>
<td>two koh-reck</td>
<td>Tout va bien</td>
<td>Everything is okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ki to pe fer</td>
<td>kee tow pay fair</td>
<td>Qu'est ce que vous faites?</td>
<td>What are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kifer</td>
<td>kee fair</td>
<td>Pourquoi?</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo fin</td>
<td>mow feih</td>
<td>J'ai faim</td>
<td>I am hungry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mo swaf | mow soo-aff | J’ai soif | I am thirsty
---|---|---|---
(allez) bye | ah-lay bye | Aurevoir | Goodbye
Taler | tah-lair | A tout à l’heure | Later (informal)
Mari bon | mah-ree bon | Very good/great
Mari top | mah-ree topp | Awesome (informal)

Retrieved from Basic Mauritian Creole

After the mini-language lesson, ask students “What do you notice about Mauritian Kreol language? Does it remind you of any other?” with the idea that they will notice through cognates, that it reminds them of French.

4. Who speaks Creole?
Explain that Mauritius is one of many countries which speak their own forms of Creole. Take a minute to look at the map from Atlas of Pidgins and Creole Language Structures Online

Ask students: How does the Atlas of Creoles describe the various Creoles in the legend? Students should notice that all Creoles are explained as being “based” or “derived” from another language.

5. The lens of science: Linguists’ Perspective on Creoles

Pidgin > Creole. Linguists believe that in situations of contact that require communication, the parties involved simplify their language and produce a **pidgin**, an approximation of French. The next arrivals would approximate the approximations. The next generation (children) learn the grammatical rules involved in the pidgin as native speakers and a Creole (stable language) is launched. Philip Baker, a leading linguist in Mauritius believes that by 1749, what we know as “Kreol Morisyen” was solidified as a language, even if it would undergo further changes after that. **Substrate - superstrate.** Linguists also think that most Creole languages have a French or other lexicon (vocabulary) which they refer to as a **superstrate**, and an African (or other) **substrate**, which consists of the grammar, syntax and other non-vocabulary elements.

Language in Colonial Mauritius

Formative Inputs, Language Policy, Kreol as Archive

6. What were the formative inputs of Creole?
On the basis of the two tables detailing the arrivals on Isle de France until 1768, what can you conclude about what the Creole language is “made of”? In other words, what were the formative inputs?

7. Colonial Policies: Discuss 2 key colonial policies that drove the formation of Creole in Mauritius: The Code Noir (Black Code) (1723) and Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts (1539)

The Code Noir was the legal governing document adopted under Louis XV. It was adopted in Reunion (then, Bourbon) and Mauritius in 1723. Explain that the French at the time already had working economic interests in the Compagnie des Indes since 1665. The Code Noir governed relations between Europeans and the people they enslaved, centered on the production of sugar, coffee, and tea. As a legal document, it regulated the relations and also put forth a religious dimension, an economic dimension, and of course, it was mediated by a linguistic dimension, coupled with the general policy of France to plan language centrally.

Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts (1539). Explain that France has a long history of centralized language planning, starting with the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts in 1539 which stipulated that French should be used in court documents, instead of Latin. This happened as Francis I was consolidating new lands into France, folding in new regions into itself (see Spolsky, 2018). Students read the excerpt from the Ordonnance.

Ask students: Why did territorial advancement coincide with centralized language planning? Explain that territorial domination is often coupled with linguistic and cultural domination.

The ordonnance was followed by Cardinal Richelieu imposing a standardized version of French to fight against the perceived ‘disorder’ of regional nobles, founding the Academic Française in 1637.
This centralized language planning has followed a more or less steady course, formalized in the Toubon law of 1994. It has shaped not only the franco-centric language ideology of the metropole, but also the colonies. Spolsky (2018) writes “There was thus a long tradition of French attempts at language management in the homeland, although the repetition as well as the number of committees and agencies of government that have been set up to implement it suggests the difficulty of central enforcement of language policies. The policy was to be applied not just to metropolitan France, but also to the colonies and mandated territories that formed the empire. Starting with de Gaulle’s presidency, a number of additional agencies and government committees were established to enforce the language policy, which was applied in the French colonies and became the basis for diffusion policy. Basically, the principle was established that wherever France ruled, everyone should speak only French” (p.4).

8. Experiential Activity to illustrate “glottophagy”:
   What is the effect of a dominant language constraint on your ability to speak?
   This exercise serves to simulate a challenging linguistic situation, when a new context imposes constraints on one’s ability to express themselves, and ultimately silences their native tongue. Ask students to engage in conversation in pairs or small groups of 3. Share a simple topic (e.g. what you had to eat today) in 3-5 sentences. Then, ask students to retell the same story by omitting words containing the letter e. Then, ask students to retell the same story by omitting words that contain both the letter e and t. At the conclusion of this exercise, ask students how they felt when the constraints were introduced and explain “glottophagy.”

9. Kreol as an Archive: Language and contact in the colonies
   Activity: What does the evidence tell us? Is the substrate-superstrate theory true?
   Students review these primary sources to determine whether linguists who claim that the lexicon of Creole is derived from French (superstrate theory) is entirely correct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creole word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macoutou</td>
<td>wound</td>
<td>Kikuyu (Mozambique)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mocambo</td>
<td>fight</td>
<td>Kikuyu (Mozambique)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wati-wala</td>
<td>Here and there</td>
<td>Wolof (Senegal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilinbi</td>
<td>A type of fruit</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazavarou</td>
<td>A chili paste</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fangourin</td>
<td>Sugar cane press</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ourite</td>
<td>Octopus</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambave</td>
<td>Skin disease</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapang</td>
<td>Rice stuck to the pot</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatak</td>
<td>Weeds</td>
<td>Malagasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bazar</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Persian/Indian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What do you conclude from these lists of words?

2. In which ways is Kreol an African language?

3. What do these Kreol words suggest about the ideology of substrate-superstrate model? Is it valid?

**Key take-aways to wrap up the section on Kreol as an archive:**
Creole is not “French-based” or “French-derived.” It is an ideological stance (constructed idea) to claim this because it reinforces connections to the colonial language and minimizes the African inputs. Mauritian Kreol, as many other Creoles borne out of colonialism, has been constructed with multicultural influences, with a firm grounding in African (and other) languages’ grammar and syntax as well as vocabulary. Saying that “Baker (1982b) identified 1535 words of apparent non-French derivation. Given that the Baker & Hookoomsing (1987) dictionary contains entries for some 15,000 individual words (excluding compounds), that suggests that fully 10% of the lexicon is of non-French origin. However, 554 of these are from English and obviously postdate the transfer to British rule in 1812. The second largest source is Indic languages (292 words) and, while such languages were marginally represented in the 18th century, there can be no doubt that the majority of these date from 19th-century Indian immigration. Words for which no etyma have yet been identified form the third largest category (257). Together, these three categories account for 72% of the non-French lexicon. Lesser, but nonetheless important, sources include Bantu languages (collectively), Malagasy, and Tamil, each with between 60 and 100 items. Smaller sources, each accounting for fewer than 20 items, are Chinese, Manding, Portuguese, Wolof, and languages of the Benin area.” *(APICS Online)*

Another key critique to add here is that etymology itself is a problematic science. “You find what you look for” can be cause for mistakes. In other words, when one looks for direct, causal relationships between words, one fails to see that the “original” words themselves may have been constructed through multiple influences. Take the case of “tomate” (tomato) in French. This word may have come from the Spanish “tomatá” with first documented use in 1532. The word itself may have been borrowed from the nahuatl tomatl.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creole word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Possible Influence</th>
<th>Possible Other Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tomat</td>
<td>tomato</td>
<td>Tomatá (Spanish)</td>
<td>Tomatl (nahuatl)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This issue with (and critique of) etymology is summarized by Richon (2005) here: “From the observation of a phonetic similarity of the vocabulary between two languages (i.e. “these two words sound the same” comes a correlation of language A to language B. From there, analysts seem to forget one key rule of statistics whereby in no case should a correlation be taken for causality. If it is, then the analysis needs to be dismissed at best for lack of scientific grounding, at worse for simplification and falsification. The fact that there is a correlation between language A
and language B can in fact often be explained by language C, which transforms the whole relationship. Richon, 2005 p. 16)

Assessment & Connections to the Present: Today’s Continued Racism toward Creole

Given the multiple influences on Creole, why then do we say that “Creole is “French derived?” Explain that language ideology is present in science of linguistics, and has been all along, because science, like religion, has often been employed in the service of European racism against Africans. Three activities will help students engage with the present-day situation of Creole languages and synthesize some of the core concepts related to history and linguistics.

1. **Quote Critique**: Show a recent (2018) quote in the Mauritian Press: “Creole is nothing but a patois, the daughter of French” and “written créole is a plague that should be fully avoided in schools”

   What ideologies of language are present in these quotes?
   This is a good opportunity to introduce “neocolonialism” as the perpetuation of colonial ideas, methods, and practices. Ask students: In which ways are these quotes neocolonial?

2. **Order Linguists’ ideologies on Jamboard**: As an activity to illustrate neocolonialism, ask students to use the [Jamboard](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1yfaZFrh9gnQbzF95Wnxh8L4Wp-dd4-DnXA0doYZ16UO/edit?usp=sharing) to order the positions of various linguists and intellectuals on the question of Creole, from early theorizations to today. Students use “liberatory ways of viewing Creole” to “neocolonial ways of viewing Creole” as two poles on a continuum. They should position the quotes according to their interpretation of the ideologies present in Creole, on one side or the other.

   Jamboard: [Link](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1yfaZFrh9gnQbzF95Wnxh8L4Wp-dd4-DnXA0doYZ16UO/edit?usp=sharing)

3. **Policy Analysis**: Compare and contrast Creole curriculum in schools in Mauritius and in the Seychelles.

   Students read excerpts from both curriculum frameworks. Note that the curriculum framework of the Seychelles has been translated from Kreol. The curriculum of Mauritius is originally in English.

   **Text 1**: [Creole Curriculum in the Seychelles](#)

   Creole is the mother tongue and medium of communication for Seychellois people. Following our policy, Creole is one of three official national languages. It exists in harmony with and complements English and French. It is also a written language with its own linguistic system (phonetic, semantic). Creole, as a written language is developing quickly and is playing increasingly an important role in the primary and secondary curriculum. Outside of schools, there is continuous hope that Creole will continue to develop in all aspects. In the curriculum for Creole as a mother tongue, Creole helps children develop their cultural identity (creole and creolity), self-confidence and self-esteem. As a subject, it occupies different status at different levels of the curriculum. It is
the medium of instruction for all subjects from pre-school to P2 which is the end of primary school. Starting in P3, it remains a subject and a medium of instruction for certain subjects such as personal education and social education and religion. Children continue to learn Creole until P6. Creole also serves as a support language for learning subjects such as English.

(...)  

In the first two years of preschool, Creole develops pre-reading and pre-writing skills. In P1 and P2, children formally begin to learn how to read and write. After these first years, learning aims at deepening usage of written Creole as well as oral competencies. Teaching and learning of Creole, as well as in the other two official languages, is centered on an interactive/communicative approach. Since Creole is the mother tongue of students, it is also a resource that allows for its maximum use in communication situations.

(...)  

Rationale: Since Creole is the mother tongue of Seychellois, it has a very important status. Creole is the life of our nation at social, economic, political, cultural levels. Creole has the status of official language. Learning Creole and learning in Creole is part of the Seychelles education policy. In the context of teaching and learning, this policy means that children have full opportunity for cognitive development, by learning their mother tongue and using it to develop basic skills. Since 1982, Creole has been used as a medium of instruction and as a subject for preschool and primary students. In secondary school, Creole is also taught as a subject and used as a support language for other subjects. Learning in Creole supports the development of language mechanism which can be transferred to the other national languages - English and French, two languages that are necessary to function as a Seychelles and global citizen.

Text 2: **Mauritius Curriculum Framework 2015**  

As a taught language, Mauritian Kreol holds a unique place in the curriculum. It is the language in which most children have a level of mastery that is directly in conformity with their overall cognitive and communicative level of development. The teaching of the language further enhances the learner’s communicative proficiency. It is a language in which children can develop literacy and be brought to understand the relationship between the oral and written structures of language.

Through Mauritian Kreol, learners discover and become conversant with the richness of local literature. Learning MK entails the formal study of its linguistic structures, in particular its grammar. The knowledge thus acquired is crucial for the development of the learner’s potential for abstract thinking, a competence that radiates to all areas of the curriculum.

The imas of the Mauritian Kreol curriculum are to ensure all learners:

- Develop a harmonious personality, grounding in the awareness of their home language and culture and in the desire to open up to other languages and cultures
- Develop language and communicative skills for a wide range of situations in the school and community
- Use the appropriate mode of communication - oral written or media based according to the situation
- Engage with and appreciate texts and works of various genres.

Preschool: Most children who join Foundation Year have a home language (L1) other than English. The L1 may be French, Mauritian Kreol, Bhojpuri or some other language. The curriculum values and promotes this linguistic diversity. The language curriculum allows children to reinforce and consolidate what they have already learnt and to continue to acquire new knowledge and skills. Thus, the first language, or mother-tongue plays a critical role as a scaffold to link the familiar and the new. The curriculum also makes ample provision for children to communicate in English and French, as this helps develop their ability to learn these two languages in later years.

Students respond:

1. What is the difference between these two policies?
2. Do both policies express a central role for Creole? What is the evidence?
3. Would you label one or both of these policies a Neocolonial policy? Why/why not?

Bibliography


FURTHER RESOURCES

This select resource list provides key links and videos on teaching about Creole and colonialism.

LECTURES

Prof. Hutchinson on Creole and French imperialism (BU African Studies Center, 2020)
Prof. Dereck Bickerton on Language & Mauritian Kreol (Lingua Mauricia, 2009)
Kreol and Bhojpuri: A Bilingual Handbook on Mother Tongue Rights
BU African Studies K-16 Outreach Program Language in Africa series (at the bottom of the page).

GRAMMAR & VOCABULARY

A few points on verbs in Mauritian Kreol and in Kreol Languages (Lalit Mauritius, Dick, Ah-Vee, Collen, Jan 25, 2011)
Accounting for Contact-Induced Changes in Mauritian Creole (Philip Baker, 2014)

PODCASTS

The Scramble for Africa a general introduction to colonialism (15 minute podcast).
The incredible story of the traveling creole: enslaved people developed a hybrid language that sailed from Africa to the Caribbean and -unbelievably- back again (Slate)

RESOURCES

Creole-Speaking Countries and their Populations (a table of “French-lexifier” creoles)
Language Policies in African Education
Survey Chapter: Seychelles Creole (Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online (APICS))
Survey Chapter: Mauritius Creole (Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online (APICS))
Unpacking Creole Languages, Part 1: An Introduction (McKeon, Medium)
Unpacking Creole Languages, Part 2: A Racist Paradigm (McKeon, Medium)
Unpacking Creole Languages, Part 3: Debunking Exceptionalism (McKeon, Medium)
Onsiong, D. *Slavery and Indenture: Replacing a System or Perpetuating It?* L'Express, 15 January 2019


**SONGS**

*Kreol Larenyon: Fonnker Papang Conteur*: A beautiful sung poem on Reunion Creole.