Language, Decoloniality, and Social Justice in the Caribbean
Language, Decoloniality, and Social Justice in the Caribbean

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As we navigate the pages of this volume on *Language, Decoloniality, and Justice in the Caribbean*, we encounter a complex and diverse sociolinguistic landscape shaped by the region’s history of colonization, slavery, and ongoing struggles for independence and social justice. Édouard Glissant, a Caribbean writer and thinker, reminds us that reality is constantly flowing and there is no pure reality or unified identity. Instead, we must recognize the multiple identities that constitute the world and reject attempts to impose a single one.

Language is a crucial aspect of identity, and the ongoing domination of European languages in the Caribbean reflects the power structures established during the colonial period. The struggle for decoloniality in the region involves rejecting the linguistic and cultural norms imposed by European colonial powers and reclaiming Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean languages and cultures. As Walter Mignolo (2011) argues, the colonial difference is the imposition of a language, culture, history, and geography, which is the foundation of the 'civilizing mission,' where the universal values are the values of Europe, and the people who resist or don't fit are the 'barbarians.' Decoloniality, therefore, is a process of confronting and addressing the ongoing impact of colonialism, recognizing its harmful effects, and working to dismantle its power structures. The legacy of colonization and its effects on language policy and education continue to be felt today in the Caribbean, revealing the ongoing power structures established during the colonial period. Although most Caribbean nations are now independent countries, they retain the knowledge structure, values, languages, and legal and political systems of their former colonial powers. Decoloniality, therefore, means overcoming the legacy, the injustices, and the social hierarchies inherited from colonialism. This struggle for decoloniality goes beyond mere independence from former colonial powers. It requires overcoming linguistic, social, and racial injustice and the frameworks, worldviews, and social models inherited from Western Europe.

The European colonizers saw the tremendous agricultural and economic potential of the Caribbean. They began the Triangular Trade, which was the beginning of modern capitalism and the genesis of two genocides: first, the physical and cultural genocide of the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean
and, second, the slave trade, which forcibly moved millions of Sub-Saharan Africans to the region where they were forced to work as enslaved people for centuries until slavery was abolished. The legacy of slavery, colonization, and exploitation is still very much alive. Decoloniality, therefore, is a process of confronting and addressing the ongoing impact of colonialism, recognizing its harmful effects, and working to dismantle its power structures.

Language is connected to power, and the domination of European languages in the Caribbean reflects the ongoing power structures established during the colonial period. This volume argues for promoting non-European languages in education, media, and politics and recognizing the value and complexity of non-European ways of knowing and being. Recognizing the importance of local languages and cultures can create more inclusive and equitable societies where diverse perspectives are valued and respected.

The chapters in this volume explore the challenges faced by the region after decolonization and how many of these new nation-states continued to mimic or copy the political, educational, and legal systems of their former colonial masters. The authors argue for a decoloniality that aims to de-link from the colonial matrix of power and imagines and engages in becoming decolonial subjects. This involves developing coherent and fair language policies, treating minorities and displaced people fairly, and redefining and re-imagining identities beyond the traditional nation-state model.

The volume delves into the fluid identities of Haitian migrant communities in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, language policy and planning in Haiti, challenges in Puerto Rico in educational policy and language planning, language policies and waves of immigration in Curaçao, and the political power of marginalized people in the public space, as exemplified by writer and performer Rita Indiana. The chapters in this volume are a multidisciplinary exploration of the complex issues of language, decoloniality, and social justice in the Caribbean. They comprehensively analyze the region’s sociolinguistic landscape, highlighting the ongoing struggles for decoloniality and social justice.

We can contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive societies through a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the Caribbean today. Decoloniality is a process of ongoing reflection and action that seeks to dismantle the structures of power established by colonialism and to promote a more just and equitable society. By recognizing the value of local languages and cultures, we can create more inclusive and equitable communities where diverse perspectives are valued and respected. The struggle for decoloniality in the Caribbean is ongoing and requires ongoing...
commitment and action. The authors in this volume provide a critical exploration of the issues surrounding language, decoloniality, and social justice in the region, providing a valuable resource for scholars, educators, policymakers, and those committed to decoloniality and social justice in the Caribbean and beyond.

The ideas presented in this volume on Language, Decoloniality, and Justice in the Caribbean underscore the complexity of the region's challenges. The Caribbean's sociolinguistic landscape reflects the region's unique history and ongoing struggles for independence and social justice, as well as the impact of global economic and political dynamics. Decolonizing the Caribbean involves rejecting the linguistic and cultural norms imposed by European colonial powers and reclaiming Indigenous and African languages and cultures. By promoting non-European languages in education, media, and politics and recognizing the value and complexity of non-European ways of knowing and being, including non-Western epistemologies, such as Indigenous knowledge systems, we can work towards a more just and equitable society.

The Caribbean also addresses urgent challenges, including social and environmental inequality, global mobility, and climate change. The region's most vulnerable and marginalized communities, including Indigenous peoples, Afro-Caribbeans, and other historically oppressed groups, are disproportionately affected by these crises. These challenges are not solely the result of European colonial powers but reflect the impact of global economic and political dynamics, the region's unique history, and ongoing struggles for independence and social justice. Climate change, in particular, poses a significant threat to the region's ecosystems, economies, and ways of life. The Caribbean is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, more frequent and intense storms and hurricanes, and the degradation of ecosystems that support critical sectors such as tourism and agriculture.

To address these challenges, the Caribbean must recognize and celebrate its diverse perspectives and knowledge systems. This involves developing coherent and fair language policies, recognizing the value of local languages, treating minorities and displaced people fairly, and redefining and reimagining identities beyond the traditional nation-state model. By recognizing the importance of local languages and cultures and embracing diverse perspectives and knowledge systems, the Caribbean can work towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all, especially in the face of the urgent challenges posed by the current crises.

*Language, Decoloniality, and Justice in the Caribbean* provides critical insights into the region's ongoing struggles for decoloniality and social
justice. By recognizing the complexity of the region's history, the impact of global economic and political dynamics, the importance of local languages and cultures, and embracing diverse perspectives and knowledge systems, the Caribbean can create a more just and equitable future that reflects its unique sociolinguistic landscape.

—The Editors
1. The colonization of the Caribbean

The history of the Caribbean did not begin with European colonization at the end of the 16th century. The archipelago had been settled thousands of years earlier by the Arawak, Tainos, and other Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

However, the original peoples were displaced, assimilated, or exterminated by the colonial powers that took over these territories: the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. There was a smaller presence of Swedish and German colonizers; however, the French and British quickly took over their settlements. Soon after an initial period of small-scale farms and homesteads, the European colonizers saw the tremendous agricultural and economic potential of the Caribbean (Chaudenson, 2003). They began a century-long Triangular Trade between Europe, West Africa, and the Caribbean region, which included not only the Caribbean proper but also coastal regions of South America, current-day Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, and of course, the southern United States, including Louisiana. The Triangular Trade was the beginning of modern capitalism since it was based on the mass production of resources such as sugar cane, rum, cotton, and tobacco for the European market. It was also the beginning of two genocides: first, the physical and cultural genocide of the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and, second, the slave trade, which forcibly moved millions of Sub-Saharan Africans from their ancestral homelands to the Caribbean region where they were forced to work as enslaved people for centuries until slavery was abolished in the region at different points during the 19th century.
In this volume, we argue that the settlement of the Caribbean by the Europeans and its subsequent exploitation by colonial powers using slave labor laid the foundation of an ongoing colonial hierarchical system where power, money, and knowledge were concentrated in the hands of a small European elite. The consequences of this period of colonization are still felt today in the 21st century because, even though most Caribbean nations are now independent countries, the legacy of slavery, colonization and exploitation is still very much alive. For example, although many Caribbean nations are independent, they retain their former colonial powers’ knowledge structure, values, languages, legal and political systems. This is where decoloniality comes in: it goes beyond mere independence from former colonial powers. Decoloniality means overcoming the legacy, the injustices, and the social hierarchies inherited from colonialism. In a sense, it is decolonization from within since the changes have to do not only with overcoming linguistic, social, and racial injustice but also with the frameworks, worldviews, and social models of capitalism inherited from Western Europe, which are still very much alive today in the Caribbean.

As Mignolo & Walsh (2018: 16) argue, “Decoloniality has a history, herstory, and practice of more than five hundred years. From its beginnings in the Americas, decoloniality has been a component part of (trans) local struggles, movements, and actions to resist and refuse the legacies and ongoing relations and patterns of power established by external and internal colonialism.”

To make matters more complex, as is well known, many Caribbean islands were colonized successively by different European powers. For example, Hispaniola was colonized by both the French and the Spaniards; the islands of Curaçao, Bonaire, and Aruba were colonized by the Portuguese and the Spanish, and later by the Dutch; Dominica was first colonized by the French and later by the British, and currently, Puerto Rico, a former Spanish colony, remains a colony of the United States in the early 21st century. This has created a mosaic of cultures, languages, countries, and political systems in the Caribbean, as well as different and multi-layered challenges for Caribbean nations and peoples. The most vivid example of how decolonization does not always entail decoloniality is the independent nation of Haiti: this Caribbean country, a former French colony, gained its independence in 1803 through an uprising that toppled the French colonial power and created the first independent country in the Caribbean. However, the legacy of slavery and social injustice remains to this day, since for two centuries, French remained the only official language and language of education in Haiti, although clearly, most of Haiti’s citizens do not speak French. Haiti has only recently begun to reform its schools and educational
system to better reflect Haiti’s linguistic reality. This is only one example of how language, decoloniality, and social justice are intertwined. This volume will explore these main topics, considering the ethnic, linguistic, racial, political, and ideological differences between different Caribbean nations. We will look at specific situations in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Curacao to illustrate how each nation is struggling to overcome colonialism’s legacy and create new identities and new social contracts for their inhabitants.

2. The genesis of Creole languages

One fascinating legacy of the slave trade and European colonization of the Caribbean is the emergence of contact languages, namely pidgins and creoles, some of which became the native tongues of new nations and ethnic groups that survived centuries of enslavement. Using the linguistic material of their original African languages and the dominant languages of European colonizers, they created entirely new languages that cannot be considered varieties of French, English, or Spanish. There are several competing theories on the origin and genesis of creole languages. For an overview of these theories, see, e.g., Mufwene (2008) and Mather (2006; 2007).

Monogenetic theories argue that pidgin/creole languages first emerged in the ports of West Africa, where the enslaved people were first brought and sold before being sent to the Americas. Nevertheless, most linguists now believe creole languages and their pidgin predecessors emerged in various places simultaneously, with different substratum and lexifier languages. Thus, in the Caribbean, there are French and English lexifier creoles, and to a lesser extent, Spanish and Portuguese-based creoles.

It would be a mistake to assume that Haitian Creole, Jamaican Patois, Papiamentu, Sranan, and other creoles are merely modified varieties of their European lexifiers. Superficial similarities between creoles and European languages are limited to lexical items. Most Caribbean creoles’ phonology, morphosyntax, and semantics are typologically distinct and, in many ways, more similar to West African languages such as Gbe, Kwa, and Akan.

Theories on the genesis of creole languages differ with respect to the perceived role of the superstrate and substrate languages, the degree of restructuring that occurred, and the cognitive processes involved in restructuring or creating new languages. For example, according to Bickerton (1981, 2008), creole languages typically are creations of children who restructure their parents’ “macaronic” pidgin. This theory is referred to as the Bioprogram hypothesis and is still popular among many linguists. However, most creolists acknowledge that, in many cases, adults also
participated in restructuring French, English, and Spanish, among others. For example, scholars of French le xifier creoles like Chaudenson (2003) and Mufwene (2008) argue that creole languages emerged through a gradual restructuring process by successive generations of L2 learners of creole languages. This is based on socio-historic data indicating that in the initial stages of settlement of the Caribbean, the ratio of enslaved Africans was low compared to Europeans, so they lived in close contact. Therefore, there was little opportunity or need for a contact language. However, beginning with the sugar boom in the late 17th and early 18th century, the massive import of African enslaved people increased the proportion of Africans in these colonies up to 80%, allowing creole varieties to emerge given the strong racial and social segregation between Europeans and Africans. This hypothesis on creole as a process of second language acquisition over several generations has been adopted by many creolists and is supported by evidence and recent studies on second language acquisition.

Initially, many creolists subscribed to the Pidgin Creole Life Cycle hypothesis, put forth by Robert Hall in his seminal work *Pidgin and Creole Languages* (1966). According to this popular model, most creole languages result from the nativization of a pre-existing pidgin, which means that children, in acquiring the emergent creole, created much of its structure. However, most creolists today dispute this model since it does not account for linguistic, or sociodemographic, evidence that has been found relating to the initial stages of creole genesis in French and English plantation colonies in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean.

Whatever theory one subscribes to, the genesis of pidgin and creole languages is one of the most fascinating, albeit controversial, legacies of slavery in the Caribbean and elsewhere. As we will see in the following sections, the affirmation of creole languages as national symbols and as a rallying cry for the oppressed people of the Caribbean is essential in understanding the political and social processes of decoloniality. In many ways, the struggles of the people of the Caribbean to redefine themselves and to overcome the legacy of colonization are intimately linked with social and linguistic issues such as the ongoing diglossia between creole languages such as Jamaican Patois, Haitian Creole, and Papiamentu and the official languages of the former colonizers: English, French, Spanish, and Dutch.

3. Decolonization and the Birth of Creole Studies

The 1960s were a decade of great social and political upheaval in the Caribbean, and throughout the world. Many colonized nations in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean gained independence from European colonial powers
through armed struggle, negotiation, social movements, or combinations thereof. This does not mean that all Caribbean Island nations became independent. Still, even in the territories that did not become independent such as French, British, and Dutch overseas territories, there was an effort to decolonize these territories either by granting them a full equal status with European territories such as Guadeloupe and Martinique; or as in the case of the Dutch Caribbean, islands were given a choice and were granted greater autonomy vis-à-vis European imperial powers. As Caribbean nations gained independence or administrative autonomy, the question of language policy and planning came to the forefront. Also, in the 1960s, linguists in the United States and elsewhere began to show much greater interest in contact languages, including the pidgins and creoles of the Caribbean, realizing that they were worthy of scientific study. The founding moment of this interest in creole languages was the International Conference on Pidgins and Creole Languages at the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, in 1968 (Hymes, Ed. 1974). The reasons why creole languages were not often studied before the 1960s are twofold. First, the social prejudice against these languages meant that they were often dismissed as varieties of French, English, or Spanish. Second, pidgin and creole languages do not fit neatly in the traditional family tree of languages conceived by historical linguists in the 19th century. According to the traditional model of comparative grammar, most European languages emerged through regular, incremental phonetic and grammatical changes over millennia, and many historical linguists worked on reconstructing prior stages of related languages, establishing genetic relationships between them. Again, the pidgin and creole languages of the Caribbean did not fit into this model and remained an enigma: they were outliers, outcasts, in linguistic models and therefore were ignored for a long time. The marginalization of creole languages by scientists was merely a reflection of the marginalization of creole speakers in their own countries and communities. Redefining the role of creole languages, revising the traditional models of historical linguistics, and questioning European models of knowledge are all part of an effort at decolonizing not only territories but also knowledge and mindsets.

It is no coincidence that the renewed interest in pidgin and creole languages coincided with independence and decolonization movements in the 1960s and with the struggle for human rights and civil rights in the United States and abroad. What better way to humanize and rehabilitate the oppressed people of the Caribbean than by acknowledging that their voices, as expressed through their languages, including pidgins and creoles, are worthy of scientific study, even though they remain an enigma for
traditional models of historical linguistics. Decolonization triggered much research on the origins of pidgin and creole languages. However, as we will see in the different contributions in this volume, there is still much to be done in decoloniality, that is, in changing the frame of reference and the balance of power in the Caribbean.

4. The persistence of colonial language policies and practices

Of relevance and interest in the framework of this volume is the persistence of European institutions, legal systems, and educational systems in many of the recently independent nations in the Caribbean, such as Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Curaçao, and other nations. This illustrates how decolonization and independence, or autonomy, do not guarantee that the territories themselves have been decolonized on a deeper level. Many territories, including Haiti, which have been independent for over two centuries, have not overcome colonialism since they have maintained frameworks, mindsets, and discourses directly inherited from their former colonial masters. As we will see in various chapters of this book related to countries like Haiti and Curaçao, the social and racial injustices inherited from the colonial powers are still very much a reality because the same official languages are also the instruments of social and racial discrimination, and the source of alienation of the youth: it should come as no surprise that in countries like Jamaica, Haiti, and Curaçao, dropout rates in public schools remain high. In some Caribbean nations, the answer is quite clear: the school alienates children and teenagers because it does not speak or value their language(s). French is not the language of Haitian schoolchildren; Standard English is not the L1 of Jamaican schoolchildren; Dutch is not the native language of the children and teenagers of Curaçao; and even in Puerto Rico, where Spanish is the primary language of instruction, English is usually taught as a second language, when it is, in fact, a foreign language for most children.

What does this all mean from the perspective of decoloniality? For one thing, adopting a colonial language as the language of instruction and government disenfranchises most speakers of these new nations. It reproduces in the school the social and racial segregation that existed during colonial times. As we will see in different chapters, it is challenging for speakers to find their way over the many linguistic and educational hurdles they face.

Even in countries where progressive educational reforms were adopted, such as the 1979 Bernard reform in Haiti, or the educational reforms in the
Dutch Antilles where Papiamentu was given official or co-official status, these progressive policies have often failed because of resistance, not only on the part of educators, but also on the part of parents who still perceive the colonial languages like French, English, and Dutch as indispensable for social and economic success. Arguably, it should not be a question of “either/or” but instead of “how” to promote local languages while simultaneously providing educational opportunities and access to knowledge to children and young adults. However, this cannot be achieved in a diglossic system where one language is considered inferior or improper for higher purposes such as science, education, and government. If children and teenagers are made to feel that they are “less than” because of their linguistic background, then language policies and reforms have failed.

5. Decoloniality and language planning

As Mignolo and Walsh (2018: 121) point out, “decolonization originally meant freeing a colony to allow it to become self-governing or independent; to build the former colonized own nation-state.” Of course, one of the problems faced by these new nation-states is that they were mimicking or copying the political, educational, and legal systems of their former masters. However, decolonization is merely the first step in the emancipation of the peoples of the Caribbean. Our focus in this volume is to look at what the former colonies did after decolonization. As Mignolo & Walsh (2018: 125) argue, “decoloniality aims are to de-link from the colonial matrix of power (CMP) in order to imagine and engage in becoming decolonial subjects. But delinking is only the first step. What follows is living decolonially: that is assuming and engaging decolonial options.”

One of these options is developing coherent and fair language policies, including educational policies, to overcome the negative legacy of colonialism. It also means developing new ways of treating minorities, migrants and displaced people within the Caribbean. Finally, decoloniality entails redefining and re-imagining identities beyond the traditional nation-state model, which is part of the European colonial legacy.

Again, as Mignolo and Walsh (2018: 177) explain, “the basic most fundamental decolonial task is in the domain of knowledge, since it is knowledge that holds the colonial matrix of power together.” And how is knowledge conceptualized, acquired, and transmitted? Through language. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize voices that use other languages, or language varieties, to express their realities and struggles, “to intervene in the system of disciplinary management of knowledge parenthesis all the disciplines in the social sciences humanities and natural sciences as well as
professional schools” (Mignolo & Walsh 2018: 223). Suppose local languages are not included in the public discourse, in the educational system, or in the political discourse. In that case, we are perpetuating the colonial matrix of power by only recognizing the legitimacy of voices that use the languages of former European colonial power like Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

Recognizing the value of local languages means more than just officializing the use of Haitian Creole, Jamaican Patois, or Papiamentu, among other languages. It also means recognizing the importance of local, indigenized varieties of English, French, and Spanish. Schools remain very normative even in territories like Puerto Rico, where English and Spanish are co-official languages. They insist on the use of standard varieties of Spanish, and they are perpetuating normative pressures from former colonial powers like Spain. Recognizing the value and worth of local varieties of English, French, and Spanish, for example, is also part of decoloniality. Recently, educators have begun to recognize the value of translanguaging in the classroom, e.g., allowing the use of local languages or dialects to enhance students’ learning experience. Sometimes these translanguaging practices go against official policy, as in the French territories of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane. Another reality, which unfortunately is also inherited from colonial practices, is the treatment of minorities and migrant workers in countries like Cuba or the Dominican Republic, where Haitians struggle to maintain their own cultural identity. Sometimes, even with the best intentions, colonial linguistic attitudes prevail when initiatives such as the Bernard Reform in Haiti, or language policy reforms in Curacao, fail because the population has internalized value judgments on what is a legitimate language or vehicle for social and economic advancement. These internalized attitudes must be addressed before any meaningful language planning can be implemented.

6. Overview of chapters

In Chapter Two, Luis Ortiz Lopez and Kendall Medford explore the fluid identities of Haitian migrant communities in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. In both contexts, Haitian migrants and their descendants face various degrees of marginalization and discrimination, which are part of the legacy of European-inspired nation-states. Nevertheless, Haitian Dominicans and Haitian Cubans have negotiated distinct identities within both countries, remaining loyal to their creole background and adapting to a new Spanish-speaking environment. Often, these populations are bilingual, speaking both Haitian Creole and Caribbean Spanish, or intermediate varieties such as
Haitianized Spanish. What is important and meaningful in the interviews conducted by the authors over the past three decades is that immigrant communities do not fit neatly into nation-state categories. They express a hybrid continuum of ethnic and linguistic features. This is a fascinating case of redefining fluid identities in a post-colonial Caribbean context. The Arayanos in the Dominican Republic live between two cultures, two worlds, and they reconstruct multiple identities incorporating ethnic, religious and linguistic features, despite discrimination and rejection by both nation-states, namely Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

In Chapter Three, Robert Berrouët-Oriol provides a critique of language policy and planning in Haiti. He analyzes the Bernard reform of 1979, which was supposed to introduce creole into the educational system. By analyzing the legal framework and the issues and studies relating to education in Haiti, the author explains that creole-speaking students represent the immense majority in Haitian schools. Yet their language is barely used in the classroom, where French is still largely dominant 30 years after the Bernard reform. This is partly because most schools are private and, therefore, out of reach of the Ministry of Education. Another critical factor is the colonial attitudes of educators and parents who perceive French as the language of education and social success. Berrouët-Oriol then explains the many administrative, educational, and lexicographic challenges the Haitian state faces. Even though Haiti gained its independence two hundred years ago, decoloniality is still a work in progress.

In Chapter Four, Mather describes current challenges in Puerto Rico in educational policy and language planning more broadly. Since Puerto Rico was invaded and is still occupied by the United States, attitudes toward English have been ambivalent for a long time. After attempting to impose English as the language of instruction in the early 20th century, the new colonial masters allowed local authorities to reestablish Spanish as the language of instruction and government. For this reason, Puerto Ricans have mixed feelings towards English, and one of the reasons why Puerto Ricans are not generally bilingual is this long-term ambivalence towards the United States and the language of their new colonial masters. Chapter Four also focuses on inconsistencies in language policy and planning and underscores recent changes in attitudes among the younger generation, who no longer view English as the language of the imperium, but as an instrumental language used to gain access to the global job market and better economic opportunities.

In Chapter Five, Mather and Ostaíza provide a detailed account of successive language policies and waves of immigration in Curacao. This former Dutch colony currently enjoys a status as one of the constituent
countries of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The first language of much of the population is Papiamentu, a Portuguese and Spanish lexifier creole which emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries. Since the Dutch overtook the territory, Dutch has been the official language of instruction, government, and law. Beginning in the 1970s, there have been notable attempts to standardize Papiamentu and make it a written language and the language of instruction; however, still today, all official documents are written in Dutch, even though Papiamentu is allowed in debates at the island’s national legislature. What is striking is that, with the recent economic expansion of Curaçao, Dutch has regained the status of the primary language of instruction in most schools, which is unfortunate since it is not the native language of the students. Unfortunately, these recent developments underscore the persistence of colonial power structures since local languages are used only in informal contexts. When a European language is the de facto or actual official and written language, governments are perpetuating a colonial diglossia that exists not only in Curaçao, but in other colonies and former colonies such as Guadeloupe, Martinique, Haiti, Jamaica, and other countries and territories.

A volume on language and decoloniality in the Caribbean would not be complete without a testimonial on the Caribbean diaspora in the United States and elsewhere. In Chapter Six, Morales-Rolón examines the creative practices of writer and performer Rita Indiana as a means to explore the dynamic and fluid nature of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States and beyond. In his analysis, Morales-Rolón traces the ethical and aesthetic values embedded within Indiana's audiovisual project, including the single “El castigador” [The Punisher], which calls into question the legitimacy of the politics of impoverishment that govern the Caribbean. By exploring Indiana's performance art and storytelling, Morales-Rolón demonstrates how Indiana's work embodies indiscipline, bringing into focus the ongoing processes of hegemony dislocation.

In this chapter, Morales-Rolón draws on the theoretical framework of Judith Butler's theories of performance and assembly to examine the political power of marginalized people in the public space, including virtual ones. Through a close analysis of Indiana's work, Morales-Rolón emphasizes the role of language in the ongoing processes of dislocating hegemony, particularly in how Indiana uses social and audiovisual media to venture to the limits of discourse and space. This mobilization of language underscores the fluid and mobile nature of identity, creating new possibilities for thinking and expressing identity that challenges the dominant discourses and structures of oppression in the Caribbean diaspora.
In situating Indiana's work within the broader cultural and political conversations about decoloniality and language, this chapter provides a critical and nuanced understanding of the complex and multilayered realities of the Caribbean diaspora. By interrogating the performative and discursive disruptions within Indiana's work, Morales-Rolón illuminates the transformative potential of creative practices to challenge and subvert traditional power structures.

The complex and intertwined issues of language, decoloniality, and social justice necessitate an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond traditional ethnographic and literary approaches and engages with sociolinguistic and language policy perspectives to examine the current realities of several Caribbean nations. This volume has demonstrated that the Caribbean's history of colonization, exploitation, and ongoing social hierarchies has had far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the region's languages and cultures but also its political and economic systems. Decoloniality, then, must be understood as a multifaceted process of overcoming linguistic, social, and racial injustice and challenging the frameworks, worldviews, and social models inherited from Western Europe. As the chapters in this volume show, Caribbean nations, and peoples are engaged in ongoing struggles to address the legacy of colonialism and create new identities and social contracts that reflect their unique histories and linguistic realities. By bringing together diverse disciplinary perspectives, this volume provides a nuanced and insightful exploration of the multifaceted issues of language, decoloniality, and social justice in the Caribbean and highlights the ongoing need for critical engagement with these complex issues.

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CHAPTER TWO

HAITIAN CREOLE IN THE CARIBBEAN:
EXPLORING HAITIAN SOCIOLINGUISTIC
CONTACT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
AND CUBA

LUIS A. ORTIZ LÓPEZ
KENDALL MEDFORD

1. Introduction

The Caribbean has historically been a region of near-constant migration. The international movement of migrants of various nationalities and ethnicities has produced a wide range of linguistic contact between communities of varying degrees of bilingualism (Mintz, 1996, 1996a). In this multilingual landscape, French, English, Spanish, and creole languages are spoken and in contact with one another. In the Hispanic world, the study of language contact has focused almost exclusively on the encounters between Spanish and indigenous languages or between Spanish and English. Afro-Hispanic contact and Spanish-creole contact has been mostly overlooked. Nevertheless, the pioneering studies of Álvarez Nazario (1972) and Granda (1994) have awakened interest in studying Afro-Hispanic contact around the world, mainly in the Americas and within the Caribbean (Lipski, 2005; Megenney, 1999; Ortiz López, 1998; Schwegler, 1996; Schwegler et al., 2017; Sessarego, 2014).

Similarly, contact between Spanish and Haitian Creole has been overlooked in the manuals on language contact in the Hispanic world, even though the two languages share environments and speakers. This is the case in Hispaniola, an island of the Greater Antilles, where Haiti and the Dominican Republic have shared a territory (Figure 1) since the 16th century (Ortiz López, 2010). In the case of Cuba, large-scale Haitian migration to the island has occurred since at least the late 18th century, primarily
concentrated in the eastern region of the island in the cities of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo.

Migration across national borders often also implies migration across a linguistic border. When Haitians migrate to Cuba or the Dominican Republic, they leave a predominantly monolingual creole-speaking territory for a predominantly monolingual Spanish-speaking territory. Haitian Creole is one of the two official languages of Haiti, alongside French, and is the native language of the entire population of Haiti. While Haiti is often considered a Francophone country, less than 5% of the population is bilingual in French and Haitian Creole, and over 95% are monolingual Creole speakers (DeGraff, 2016).

Haitian Creole is considered a radical creole (Bickerton, 1984) with a French-derived lexicon and a strong African substratum, particularly from languages of the Kwa-Gbe, Akan, and Bantu language families (Singler, 1996). Haitian Creole exhibits a fixed SVO word order to signal syntactic function and is characterized by a lack of verbal inflection and grammatical gender. Instead, it employs preverbal particles to mark tense, mood, and aspect (ap, apral, a, and te) (Valdman, 2015).

On the other hand, both Dominican and Cuban Spanish varieties form part of the Caribbean Spanish zone. These varieties are partly derived from Andalusian and Canary Island varieties, which have been enriched over time with contact with indigenous and African languages, giving way to their creolization (Alba, 2004; Lipski, 1994; Vaquero, 2001). The Caribbean Spanish zone has traditionally been described as a diatopic zone that exhibits remarkable linguistic homogeneity (García Fernández, 2014; Henríquez Ureña, 1940; Navarro Tomás, 1974; Sobrino Triana, 2017), although each variety is perceived as distinct by its speakers (Maymí & Ortiz López, forthcoming; Ortiz López, Suárez & Martínez, 2021). Caribbean Spanish is characterized phonologically by the lengthening of stressed vowels and weakened final consonants. In terms of morphosyntactic features, these dialects are characterized by high usage of overt subject pronouns, and a fairly strict SVO word order, even in interrogative sentences (Ortiz-López, Dauphinais & Aponte-Alequín 2017) and in subordinate clauses with infinitive verbs (Ortiz-López & Aponte-Alequín 2018).

Dominican Spanish exhibits several unique phonological phenomena, such as a strong tendency to delete consonants in coda position (objeto → [oə he.to]), especially sibilants (dos café → [دو. ka.ˈʃe]). As a result, many speakers exhibit inserted /s/ in these environments as a form of hypercorrection, such as (nitido → [ˈnis.ti.do]). There is a wide variety of realizations of the phoneme /ɾ/, such as [l, ɾ, o] (comer → [ko.ˈmel, ko.ˈmeɾ, ko.ˈmeo.], all of which are seen throughout the country (Willis & Díaz
Campos, 2021). Speakers also sometimes extend the plural morpheme -ses to other contexts (pieses) (Alba, 2004; Barriéros, 2019; Kiisk, 2013). The dialect also employs the impersonal pronoun ello (Toribio, 2000) and double negation (Marchena, 2011; Ortiz López, 2007; Schwegler, 1991).

Cuban Spanish, on the other hand, is characterized by the variation of /ɾ/, as seen in the gemination of consonants—primarily of /ɾ/ in eastern speech (carta → [ka’.tt,a, verde → be’.dde]), as well as lateralization of /ɾ/ (carta →[kal’.ta, bel’.de]). The eastern region is also known for the deletion of coda /s/ (dos café → [doo. ka.’fé]). Cubans employ the diminutive -ico in place of -ito, as is chiquitico (little) and Albertico (little Albert). These primary features distinguish Dominican and Cuban speech within the Caribbean Spanish zone and serve as dialectal identifiers.

However, the sociolinguistic contact between creole and Spanish goes beyond questions of structural language differences and encompasses issues of ethnicity, identity, and social conflict in a broader sense. As Fishman (1998) points out, “ethnicity” is often used to signify the macro-level belongingness of a certain culture. For many people, language is the primary signifier of someone’s ethnicity and our ethnicity, and by extension, our identity is often defined at least in part by the language we speak. The language(s) we speak also marks our group affiliation and serves to include or exclude (Tabouret-Keller, 1998). When speakers feel excluded from group membership due to language differences, this can lead to tension and resentment, and eventually to conflict between the groups in question (Nelde, 1998). Therefore, when examining linguistic contact between two or more languages, it is imperative to consider factors such as the attitudes, stereotypes, social status, and social mobility of the groups involved. These social attitudes play important roles in the daily language choices of the speakers in question.

This chapter will examine the contact between Spanish and Haitian Creole in two Caribbean countries: the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The official discourse of both nations presents them as exclusively monolingual Spanish-speaking countries. However, as this chapter will show, both nations are home to many Haitian Creole speakers and bilingual Spanish-Creole speakers. Haitian Creole is passed down intergenerationally in both places and is strategically maintained by Haitian descendants, nuancing the notion of exclusive monolingualism.

The chapter will be structured as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the socio-historical context of Haitian migration in both countries. Section 3 examines the sociolinguistic implications of this migration, including nearly two dozen testimonials from Haitians, Cubans, and Dominicans about their attitudes and feelings regarding this language
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Finally, Section 4 presents the authors’ discussion and conclusions regarding these contact situations. All interviews presented in this chapter come from firsthand fieldwork conducted by the authors in Cuba and the Dominican Republic between 1994 and 2021.

2. Historical Context

2.1. The Haitian-Dominican historical context

The island of Hispaniola is shared by the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic in the east and creole-speaking Haiti in the west. These two nations have lived culturally and linguistically intertwined as the result of the events that have shaped the history, the population, and the social, economic, and cultural development of these nations (Castor, 1987: 15). The two countries are divided by a border that is colloquially referred to as la Raya (the line).

Fig. 2-1. Map of the island of Hispaniola

Migration of various kinds between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has existed since the establishment of both nations (Dore Cabral, 1995: 126). However, in recent decades, due to the prolonged political and financial crises in Haiti, immigration on the island has proceeded in primarily one direction: from Haiti to the Dominican Republic (Wooding and Moseley-
Williams, 2004: 14). This migration has been chiefly associated with seasonal sugarcane plantation workers, but more recently has encompassed large numbers of construction workers, vendors, domestic workers, and agricultural laborers. The flow of migration is extremely diverse and includes migrants who enter and leave daily to work in binational border markets, those who enter legally for the agricultural seasons, those on student visas, and those who enter without documentation with hopes of remaining in the Dominican Republic. Today, most Haitian migrants who enter the Dominican Republic cross the border *anba fil* (“under the wire”) (Jansen, 2013).

Due to the complex nature of this migration, it is extremely difficult to get an accurate estimate of the number of Haitian migrants living in the Dominican Republic at any time. In the mid-1990s, Vega (1993: 35) proposed that there were around 400,000 Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic. More recently, scholars have estimated that upwards of two million people of Haitian origin could live in the Dominican Republic (Valdman, 2015: 369). To put these figures into perspective, this range would mean that of the Dominican Republic’s current population of 10.8 million (The World Bank, 2021), Haitians and Haitian Dominicans could make up anywhere from 2% to 20% of the total population.

Today, large numbers of Haitian migrants make their homes in the four provinces of *la Raya*: Pedernales, Independencia, Elías Piña, and Dajabón (See Figure 2-1). Besides the Haitian-Dominican border, there are also substantial numbers of Haitian migrants in the *bateyes* of the Dominican Republic. The *bateyes* are communities inside the Dominican Republic commonly thought of as primarily Haitian communities. They were originally designed and built by sugar companies as housing camps next to the sugarcane plantations so that the Haitian workers (*braceros*) had a place to live close to their work during the cutting seasons. In the off seasons, the Haitian laborers were expected to return to Haiti. However, as more and more Haitians began staying in the Dominican Republic year-round, the *bateyes* gradually became permanent settlements of Haitian immigrants and their descendants (Jansen 2013, 2021). Some have described them as “states within a state” (Wooding and Moseley-Williams, 2004: 40). Today, there are several hundred *bateyes* in the Dominican Republic in all geographic regions of the country. Linguistically, they are considered by Dominican society to be creole-speaking language islands, as they are thought to be exclaves where only Haitian people live.
This prolonged contact between Dominicans and Haitians in the Dominican Republic has been historically characterized by extreme marginalization of the migrant group, with a history of exclusionary policies and violence towards Haitian migrants on the part of the Dominican government. Haitian migrants frequently report being forced to resort to several negotiation strategies to conceal features that might identify them as Haitian in public. In addition to the phenotypic characteristics, which are difficult to hide, cultural aspects such as language, religion, eating habits, health status, and clothing, among others, become traits that differentiate Haitians from Dominicans. In these situations of contact, the construction of identity and nationality is often strongly associated with language use. As we will show in the following section, Dominicans hold varied stereotypes about creole and its speakers.

### 2.2. The Haitian-Cuban historical context

In contrast to the widespread settlement of Haitians throughout all areas of the Dominican Republic, the Haitian presence in Cuba is primarily concentrated in the eastern provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, and Camagüey. Less scholarly research has focused on these communities, and the linguistic research covering these communities is minimal (Ortiz-López, 1999, 1999a, 1999b; 2000, 2001; Figueroa, 1995).

Haitian immigration to Cuba began at the end of the 18th century during the Haitian Revolution of 1790. According to Eugene Aubin (1910; as cited by Yacou, 1994: 66), many emigrants from Saint Domingue who were expelled during the Revolution found residence in the eastern part of Cuba, deserted then. Here, a large Haitian colony was formed at the foot of the
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Sierra Maestra and in the mountainous region that borders the coast from Santiago de Cuba to beyond Guantánamo.

The Haitian migration to Cuba can be divided into four distinct periods, according to Yacou (1994: 66-71). The first period, known as the first refugees, lasted from 1790 until 1792, followed by the migrations of honor from 1792 until 1795, and the useful immigration and the migration of the anglophiles and mulattoes from 1795 until 1800. Finally, the fourth migration period occurred between 1800 and 1804 and was known as the great exodus due to the massive scale of departure from Haiti. During this time, between 3,000 and 4,000 Haitians fled the island for Cuba. In addition to these four periods, there have been subsequent waves of immigration to Cuba, particularly during the beginning decades of the 20th century and those which persisted during the past century.

The first decades of the 20th century represent the largest periods of Haitian migration to Cuba (Casey, 2017). This immigration was strongly tied to sugar production on the island, which was the most valuable component of the Cuban economy during those years. Cuba was one of the largest sugar producers in the world, so large that it was common to hear the expression, “‘Without sugar, there is no country” (Sin azúcar, no hay país). During this time, the Cuban sugar industry was supported by foreign investment and migrant workers, primarily Haitians, although there were also workers from English-speaking islands like Jamaica. It is estimated that more than 200,000 Haitians were connected to these plantations during this time.

In the 20th century, the Cuban state began to repatriate Haitian immigrants (Decree 1404 of July 20, 1921) due to the crisis of the sugar industry and overall issues of unemployment and public debt on the island. This decree, however, was resisted by these immigrant groups. Haitian migrants created organizations and associations to defend their rights and their culture. In 1927, Edmond Graig, a Haitian, started the George Sylvain Society (Sociedad George Sylvain), active until 1952. The society’s goals were to maintain the Haitian culture in Cuba while simultaneously incorporating Cuban symbols into their practices and encouraging Cuban members to join (Couto, 2012). The creation of this society proved that Haitians and their descendants in Cuba were more than just exploited workers who were isolated in rural areas. They were active participants in creating a new Cuban-Haitian culture. Many Haitians recognized both nations as their homeland since many were born in Haiti but sought sustenance in Cuba, where their children found their home.

Even today, this idea of biculturality persists among many Cuban Haitians. Many Cubans of Haitian descent consider creole part of Cuba’s linguistic heritage alongside Spanish. In Cuba, the past few decades have
seen a surge of activism by Cuban Haitians in promoting their language on a national scale. The following excerpt (1) comes from an interview with Hilario Batista Félix (personal communication), a well-known Haitian-Cuban creole language activist and founder of the NGO Bannzil Kreyòl Kiba. The NGO was founded in 1997 in La Havana, Cuba, to bring awareness that creole forms part of the country’s linguistic and cultural diversity. These recognition efforts can be seen through creole festivals, literacy drives, and language classes. The official, government-run radio broadcast, Radio Havana Cuba, also transmits daily in creole.

(1) “Los haitianos que vinieron, que emigraron a cuba (...) nuestros padres, nuestros abuelos, ya se han ido muriendo. Y entonces los que se queden son los descendientes. Son los descendientes que estamos manteniendo y conservando esa cultura. ¿Y donde nacieron los descendientes? En Cuba. Si son descendientes, es decir, son cubanos. Son cubanos, y por eso es importante que le diga que el kreyòl pertenece a Cuba y en Cuba estamos luchando para que nos reconozcan tal cual. Porque en Cuba, el 98% de las personas que hablan kreyòl en Cuba somos cubanos. Es decir, no es cuento. Somos cubanos. Nacimos aquí. Entonces el kreyòl forma parte de nuestra diversidad.”

“The Haitians that came, that migrated to Cuba (…) our parents, our grandparents, have been dying, and so what is left are the descendants. It is the descendants that are maintaining and preserving this culture. And where were the descendants born? In Cuba. If they are descendants, that means they’re Cubans. They are Cubans, and that’s why it’s important that we say that creole belongs to Cuba, and in Cuba we are fighting for it to be recognized as such. Because in Cuba, 98% of the people who speak creole in Cuba are Cubans. It’s not made up. We are Cubans. We were born here. So, creole forms part of our diversity.”

However, despite efforts by Haitians in Cuba to achieve cultural recognition, Haitian presence in Cuba has also generated resistance within the island, primarily from Cuban intellectuals including writers, journalists, and sociologists. Many of these citizens view Haitian migrants as a political, social, health, and economic threat to Cuba as they serve the interests of sugar companies and the U.S. government. The Cuban press has also contributed to this negative image of Haitian migrants and those from Jamaica and other nations who arrived in Cuba to work in sugar harvesting. This resistance reinforced the ethnic and racial prejudice against these immigrants (Couto, 2012), as happened in the Dominican Republic (Valdez, 2014).

Despite these prejudicial stereotypes, Haitians, Cubans, and Cubans of Haitian descent have created rural communities which, in the face of segregation and exclusion (Couto, 2012), have successfully preserved their