

# LINGUISTIC LINK BETWEEN HAITIAN-CREOLE AND ENGLISH

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper provides an overview of the history of the Haitian-Creole language developed by enslaved West African in the plantation. Linguistic research in this paper reveals that the Haitian-Creole has influenced by some West African languages especially EWE and indo-European language 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 a pidgin, lingua franca and Creole. Based on many lexicons that are closed to English used by Haitians, the author feels there is a linguistic link between their native language and the one of Shakespeare.*

## 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 walked from India to Haiti (Quisqueyah) were the first inhabitants of this island. The Taino Indians had their own version of language, which is totally different from the Haitian-Creole even though few Indian words such as roukou (wookoo), banbou (bamboo) mabouya (mabooya) are still used in the language (Haitian-Creole) developed by the enslaved West African people.

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).

After the pidginization, the Haitian-Creole was a lingua franca for the enslaved West Africans in the plantation. Lefevre and Lumsden (1989) 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 languages 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 England and finally 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.

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 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)

According to Smith (1999)... "Creole can be considered the linguistic product of two or more languages that have 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 as an auxiliary or supplemental language between two mutually unintelligible speech communities" (Smith p1). 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 alteration 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 kaniste (root word: can (container)). These English words used in pidgin make the lexicon and morphology for the Haitian-Creole language.

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.

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