

Mauritian Creole and Language Attitudes in the Education System of Multiethnic and Multilingual Mauritius

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Mauritius is a multilingual postcolonial island of the Indian Ocean. Although the French-lexified creole, Mauritian Creole/Kreol,¹ is the native language of 70% of the Mauritian population, it is excluded from the education system. Kreol lacks prestige because it is seen as broken French and associated with the local Creoles, a socioeconomically deprived ethnic group. Over the last decade, there has been increasing pressure on the government from linguists and pedagogues to include this low-prestige variety in the school system. The government has recently proposed the introduction of Kreol in primary schools. In this study, I analyse the attitudes of 79 Mauritians towards the introduction of Kreol into the education system. I show that there is no consensus as to whether or not Kreol should be introduced in schools. Responses also highlight the two distinct roles of Kreol: it is both a national language and an ethnic language associated with Creole identity.

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Introduction

On creole-speaking multilingual Mauritius, languages act as important markers of identity (Eriksen, 1998; Stein, 1982). In fact, most of the 12 languages present on the island are associated with specific ethnic and/or religious groups. The various languages can broadly be divided into three groups: ancestral languages (Indian and Chinese languages) whose usage is limited, colonial languages (English and French) and language of everyday interactions (Mauritian Creole/Kreol – see Note 1) (Rajah-Carrim, 2005). While most of these languages have a place in the education sector – as medium of instruction or subject – the native language of most Mauritians, Kreol, tends to be excluded from the classroom.

The teaching of languages has become a highly politicised issue in Mauritius. In 2004, the Minister of Education declared that Kreol would be officially introduced in the education system in the coming years. The new political leaders who came to power in 2005 are also committed to the promotion of Kreol. But how do the Mauritians themselves feel about the introduction of Kreol in the school system? In this paper, I discuss attitudes to the use of Kreol in the education sector based on a survey conducted in Mauritius. In the first section, I describe the demographic and linguistic situations of Mauritius. This is followed by a description of the national

education system. I then show how the language-in-education issue is not unique to Mauritius and is tied to ideologies of identity and power. In the fifth section, I discuss the questions related to the school domain in the survey. In the next two sections, I analyse responses to the survey questions. The final section consists of a brief summary and conclusion.

Mauritius: People and Languages

There is no record of any indigenous population on Mauritius at the time of its first discovery in the 12th century by Swahili seamen (Toussaint, 1972). Mauritius has been occupied successively by the Dutch, the French and the British. The country became independent in 1968 and acceded to the status of Republic in 1992. Mauritius is a multiethnic and multilingual country (for further details on the various groups on the island, see Eriksen, 1998 and Rajah-Carrim, 2005).

Ethnic identity and languages are closely related on the island. Most ethnic groups have an 'ancestral language' with which they identify. Ancestral languages are the languages that the Asian migrants spoke at the time of their arrival in Mauritius and include Bhojpuri, Hindi, Gujerati, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu (Baker, 1972: 14–18). Today, most of these languages do not function as native languages but as important markers of religious and ethnic identity (Rajah-Carrim, 2005). Bhojpuri, which is one of the few Indian languages not taught in primary school, is the one ancestral language that is still widely spoken in Mauritius.

The official language of Mauritius is English. But in the 2000 Population Census, only 0.3% of the total population claimed that English is the 'language usually or most often spoken in the home' (Rajah-Carrim, 2005: 325). For most Mauritians, English is the language acquired at school (Stein, 1997). It is mostly taught as a written, rather than a spoken, language.

Unlike English, French is used in everyday interactions by all ethnic groups. It is also the ancestral and native language of the Franco-Mauritians. So, French functions both as an ethnic language in that it is associated with the Franco-Mauritians, and a language of wider communication in that it is used by non-Franco-Mauritians as well.

Kreol is unquestionably the language most often spoken in Mauritius. In the 2000 Population Census, 69% of the population reported having Kreol as their native language (Rajah-Carrim, 2005). Kreol is a French-lexified plantation creole that evolved in the 18th century at the time of French colonisation. It is considered as a radical creole in that it emerged abruptly over a few decades (Baker & Corne, 1986). The main languages involved in the contact situation were French, West African languages and Malagasy.

Kreol is not positively viewed by all users. There are two main reasons for this: a 'linguistic' one and an 'ethnic' one. Kreol, like other creoles (Sebba, 1997), is sometimes viewed as a broken non-standard language that is only appropriate for use in informal domains. This view is expressed by some informants in the sections below. It is argued that unlike its lexifier French, Kreol has no set orthography, cannot be used in prestigious domains and has no value at international level. Another possible reason why Kreol is negatively

perceived is because of its association with the Afro-Mauritians locally known as the Creoles. Kreol is the native and also ancestral language of the Creoles, who tend to be part of the lowest classes of Mauritian society (Eriksen, 1998). This link between Kreol and the Creoles could serve to strengthen the idea that those who speak Kreol cannot perform well on the social and economic fronts. The 'ethnic' and 'linguistic' reasons therefore reinforce each other and serve to perpetuate negative attitudes towards the language.

Although Kreol is not valued as a language for use in prestigious domains, it is widely accepted as the language of national solidarity. Its status has been described as 'an "unofficial" national language' (Eriksen, 1990: 14). Because of its role as a language of solidarity, some politicians have suggested that Kreol should be officially standardised and promoted to the status of official national language.

For a long time, the government has relegated the issue and exact status of Kreol to the background. Miles (2000: 227) observed that there was a 'lack of enthusiasm for the most patently logical solution to the examination language disparity: to include Kreol on a par with other languages'. However, the beginning of 2004 saw a change in attitudes of the ruling parties. For instance, there are now plans to introduce Kreol as a medium of instruction in primary school. In the section below, we look at the education system of Mauritius.

The Mauritian Education System

Primary education is compulsory in Mauritius. Children from five to eleven years of age attend primary school. At the end of six or more years in primary schools, young Mauritians take national exams and are then admitted to secondary school. For 2003, the pass rate for the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exams was 62.6% (*L'Express*, 15 December 2003).

Primary and secondary education is free in Mauritius. However, there are now many private schools – either based on the French education system or the English one – on the island.

In state primary schools, pupils study six main subjects: French, English, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography. Many pupils also opt for one of the following *oriental languages*: Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. These languages are offered as an alternative to 'religious classes' that are taught to Christian pupils. In the multiethnic Mauritian context, the choice of the oriental language is largely influenced by the ethnicity of the pupil (Moorghen & Domingue, 1982). In other words, mostly Indo-Mauritian children take the ancestral languages at school, with each ethnic group opting for the language with which it identifies itself. So far, oriental languages and religious classes have not been taken into account for the CPE ranking or grading. The inclusion of oriental languages for the CPE grade turns out to be more than a pedagogical issue (Miles, 2000). Creole and Coloured children, or at least their parents, do not identify with any of these oriental languages. And according to some pro-Creole groups such as *Front Commun* and *Mouvman Bienet Kreol Roche-Bois*, this puts them at an obvious disadvantage with respect to their Indo- and Sino-Mauritian counterparts. The oriental language issue is, therefore, charged with ethnic meaning.

From the first year in primary school till tertiary level, English is the medium of instruction. This language choice has often been held responsible for the important rates of failure at primary school level. Many teachers use French instead of English in the classroom. New concepts are usually explained in French or even in Kreol. In a typical biology class, for instance, the teacher first explains in French (or even Kreol), and then possibly dictates notes in English. Students generally ask questions to the teacher in French but in Kreol to their classmates and answer examination questions in English!

Even though proficiency in English determines academic success, use of the language is limited to formal domains only. In state schools, the language of the school-grounds is Kreol (especially in secondary schools) and/or French (especially in primary schools).

The Larger Context

The use of Kreol in the education sector is not simply a linguistic issue, but a sociopolitical one, as will be shown in the sections below. The arguments supporting the introduction of Kreol in the first years of schooling focus on the positive effects of the use of the native language at school.

According to Mauritian linguists like Tirvassen (1989) and Virahsawmy (2002), the fact that 1 in 3 pupils fail their CPE exams suggests that there is a major problem with the Mauritian education system. The use of English as medium of instruction from the first year at primary school is held largely responsible for the significant rates of failure at both primary and secondary levels (e.g. Ahnee, 2002; Rughoonundun, 1990).

But what is the problem with English? English is the language of administration and formal interactions. As such, it is hardly used as a spoken language in the local context. Mauritians tend to have limited exposure to the language. Linguists wonder how five-year-old Mauritians can start their formal education in a medium that is totally foreign to them. When they join school, young Mauritians have to perform two major tasks: they have to learn various new subjects, but most importantly, they have to learn these subjects in a language that is largely alien to them. As the locally well known editorialist Ahnee puts it, 'how can you learn the unknown through the unknown?' (personal communication, interview in September 2003).

Many pedagogues and linguists around the world insist that children cannot perform to the best of their ability in a system where the medium of instruction is foreign to them (e.g. Banda, 2000; Chaudenson, 1989; Desai, 2001; Stuart, 1993; Tirvassen, 1989; Watson-Gegeo, 1994). Some non-linguists in Mauritius have come to similar conclusions. According to the Creole priest Father Fanchette who is actively involved in the promotion of Kreol in the Church and the education system (personal communication, interview in 2003), the exclusion of the mother tongue in the school system could signal to children that their own language is improper for use in the domain of education. Their mother tongue is excluded from the very foundation of their academic training. This could create a sense of alienation between their home environment and consequently, their culture; and their educational environment.

In Mauritius, the education system goes further than simply ignoring the existence of Kreol, it actively denigrates the language. In some schools, pupils are asked not to speak Kreol and are rewarded for speaking French. Reward is associated with European languages while punishment and/or failure are linked to the mother tongue and consequently, native culture. Thus, children are alienated from their natural linguistic environment. To overcome these pedagogical and sociopsychological problems, it has been suggested that in the first few years of primary schooling, Kreol should be used as a medium of instruction with a gradual switch to English (Virahsawmy, 2003). In this way, the transition from the home setting to the school one will be smooth in that there will not be an abrupt linguistic change from home to school. In addition, new concepts will first be acquired through a known medium and children will also value their own mother tongue while realising the importance of other languages.

The discussion about the use of the native language as a medium of instruction is not unique to Mauritius but is shared with many creole-speaking and/or postcolonial nations. In fact, according to Roy-Campbell (2001: 267), 'educational language choice has been one of the most provocative issues of the 20th century and continues to be a dominant issue at the turn of the new millennium'. In creole-speaking Seychelles, for instance, the role of languages in the education system was a hotly debated issue in the 1970s and 1980s. Rates of failure were high: a number of Seychellois children would leave school illiterate (Bollée, 1993). The 'apparent inadequacy of the system' (Bollée, 1993: 88) was attributed to the use of English as medium of instruction – a parallel can here be drawn to the Mauritian situation. To remedy to this situation, Creole (*Seselwa*), the native language of most inhabitants of Seychelles, was introduced in the education system in 1982. In the first years of primary school, *Seselwa* functions mainly as a medium of instruction and English as a subject. There is a gradual shift from *Seselwa* to English as medium of instruction in the last years of primary school. French is also taught as a subject. Although the use of *Seselwa* in the education system was first opposed by members of the public, it is now generally accepted. Literacy rates and performance in other subjects have improved. The government also introduced *Seselwa* in schools in order to 'create a democratic system of education, giving equal opportunities to children of all social and linguistic backgrounds' and also, to 'promote local culture' (Bollée, 1993: 88). The promotion of *Seselwa* is therefore explicitly tied to issues of power and identity. By giving opportunities to children of various backgrounds, the government tries to ensure an equitable distribution of resources and equal access to education. When English was the medium of instruction, mostly children whose parents were part of the socioeconomic élite would succeed. Through language in the education system, the government is thus redefining the power relations. The introduction of *Seselwa* in the school system is also seen as a means of promoting a local identity. *Seselwa*, therefore, becomes an index of identity and is thus set in opposition to other non-local languages and identities.

The case of Haitian Creole, another French-lexified creole, further illustrates how attitudes towards creoles can act as obstacles to their promotion in the

education sector – to the detriment of young children who are monolingual in the language. In 1979 a bilingual programme was set up whereby Haitian Creole would be used as the medium of instruction for the first four years with French taught as a foreign language (Youssef, 2002: 186). From the fifth year onwards, French would function as the medium of instruction. However, such a measure proved unsuccessful for a number of social and pedagogical reasons. For instance, poverty, political instability, the prestige of French and lack of qualified teachers acted as obstacles to the successful implementation of the bilingual programme (Youssef, 2002: 186–187). Linguists are now working on measures that will ‘ensure the positive valorisation of the Creole’ (Youssef, 2002: 189). According to Youssef (2002: 191), political stability and a change in language attitudes could help promote Haitian Creole in the education system.

People’s attitudes towards their own mother tongues can therefore function as barriers against the use of these languages in formal domains. In many postcolonial African countries, social scientists and linguists have been fighting for the recognition of indigenous languages and against the hegemony of colonial languages, especially in the education sector (e.g. Phillipson, 1992). In many countries, the general public have been made to feel that their own native language is an inadequate medium of instruction. They rate the colonial language(s) more highly than their own languages. The colonial language is generally seen as the way to science, technology and knowledge (Phillipson, 1992). The native language is believed to be limited to in-group communication and, hence, a barrier to socioeconomic progress. This strong Eurocentric bias makes it difficult for linguists and pedagogues to convince laypeople of the utility of local languages in the first years of schooling.

In Mauritius, this issue takes an added significance in that the education system is presently in a period of major changes, especially at the primary level. Oriental languages and Kreol are some of the actively discussed themes in this national debate. Numerous newspaper articles supporting the introduction of Kreol as a medium of instruction have been published by the pro-Kreol group *Ledikasyon Pu Travayer* (LPT) and individual linguists like Dev Virahsawmy. These groups and individuals deplore the lack of initiative on the part of the Government. In an open letter to the Minister of Education, Alain Ah Vee and Lindsay Collen (2003: 10), two members of LPT, accuse the Government of committing the ‘linguistic genocide’ of young Mauritians²:

The State is, in fact, hindering our people in the natural expression of our languages, Bhojpuri and Kreol. It is this that makes the Government responsible, through the schools in particular, for a crime against humanity, the crime of linguistic genocide. That is what we are accusing you of, Mr Minister.

In a press article, Ah Vee (2003: 33) further argues that Unesco – to which Mauritius subscribes – clearly states that children should be taught in their mother tongue. Therefore, by allowing Kreol to function as a medium of instruction, policy-makers will only be giving children their due.

While those at the decision-making level have for a long time relegated the medium of instruction issue to the background, it is important to find out how those at the receiving end feel about the use of Kreol as a medium of instruction. That is, what are the attitudes of the general public to the use of Kreol in the classroom? In an attempt to answer this question, I asked some Mauritians their opinions regarding the introduction of Kreol in primary school. Given that the number of interviewees is small, these views cannot definitively be taken to reflect the opinions of the majority of Mauritians. But they do at least give us a flavour of the current attitudes to the use of Kreol in the education sector.

This Study

Methodology

The data come from interviews conducted in Mauritius in 2002. Interviewees were recruited through friends and acquaintances, that is, through snowballing. The use of snowballing means that some groups are over-represented in the sample, e.g. the General Population. Also, there are no Sino-Mauritians in the corpus. The three Tamils and two Marathis were regrouped under the official category *Hindu*. The purpose of this study was to get a flavour of language attitudes in Mauritius, especially at a time when the role of Kreol is being reassessed. As such, it cannot be said to mirror the attitudes of the general Mauritian population. The main variables considered were: age, ethnicity and religion, as shown in Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2.

As interviewees were from a range of age groups and social backgrounds, their level of education and exposure to city life varied considerably. While some of the interviewees had completed postgraduate studies, others had never had the opportunity to go to school or work outside their home. Figure 3 gives the breakdown of interviewees in terms of age and level of education attained.

Five percent of the interviewees were illiterate. Women showed a higher rate of illiteracy: 7% compared to only 3% for men. All the interviewees who claimed to be illiterate had not had access to education, were from a working-class background and were aged 40 and above. My interviewees fare better than the rest of the population (the 2000 Population Census shows that 14.4% of the Mauritian population are illiterate, that is, 'cannot read or write a simple sentence in any language' (Central Statistical Office, 2002)). Indeed, this group shows higher literacy rates than the average national one and is therefore not representative of the national literacy situation.

The 79 respondents were interviewed regarding their general language use and attitudes to Kreol. Included in the interviews were two questions related to the place of Kreol in the education system.

Education questions

Respondents were asked how they would feel if Kreol was introduced in school. The question regarding the introduction of Kreol in school was initially meant to be divided into two parts: (a) the teaching of Kreol as a subject and

Table 1 Interviewees by ethnicity, gender, religion, age group and place of residence

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Age groups</i>						<i>Place of residence</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i><13</i>	<i>13-19</i>	<i>20-39</i>	<i>40-59</i>	<i>>59</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>		
Indo-Mauritian Hindus (24)	Male	0	1	5	5	1	10	2	12
	Female	0	2	8	2	0	7	5	12
Indo-Mauritian Muslims (27)	Male	1	2	10	3	0	13	3	16
	Female	0	2	1	4	4	10	1	11
Afro-Mauritian (11)	Male	1	2	0	1	0	4	0	4
	Female	2	1	0	3	1	7	0	7
Franco-Mauritian (7)	Male	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	2
	Female	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	5
Coloured/mixed (10)	Male	0	2	0	1	2	5	0	5
	Female	0	1	2	1	1	4	1	5
Total	4	13	27	21	14	65	14	79	

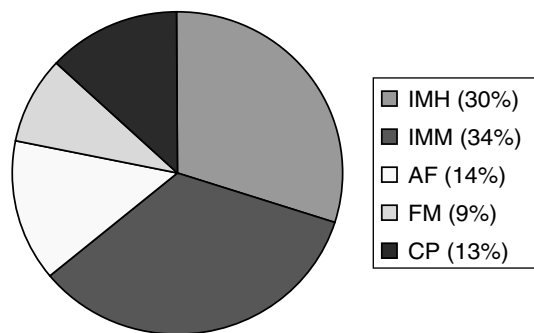


Figure 1 Percentage of interviewees by ethnic group. IMH, Indo-Mauritian Hindu; IMM, Indo-Mauritian Muslim; AF, Afro-Mauritian; FM, Franco-Mauritian; and CP, Coloured population

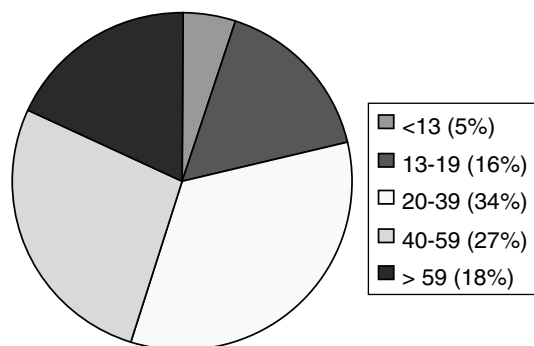


Figure 2 Percentage of interviewees by age group

(b) the use of Kreol as a medium of instruction. Although seemingly related, these two parts deal with different topics and could, therefore, potentially highlight different attitudes to Kreol. In the first case, Kreol is seen as a subject that can be taught in the same way as French or Hindi, for instance. In the second case, other subjects, like Mathematics and Geography, are taught in Kreol, i.e. Kreol takes on the role of English. However, those interviewees who were asked both parts of the question found them confusing. These two topics seemed similar and interviewees found it difficult to answer the questions coherently. Some interviewees also felt that it was absolutely inconceivable that Kreol should be used in the same way as English. That is, the question of Kreol as a medium of instruction did not even arise.

Virahsawmy (2003) also notes that many Mauritians tend to confuse the terms 'medium of instruction' (*lang mediom*) and 'language as a subject' (*lang size*). The distinction between these two terms has never been made clear in Mauritius. He believes that the introduction of Kreol as *lang size* will eventually help the language into becoming *lang mediom* for two reasons. First, students who opt for Kreol as *lang size* would perform so well that the 'pedagogical merits' of the language 'will become clearer in the mind of people' (Virahsawmy, 2003: 8 – my translation). Secondly, the introduction of Kreol in the classroom will boost its prestige and get many parents to

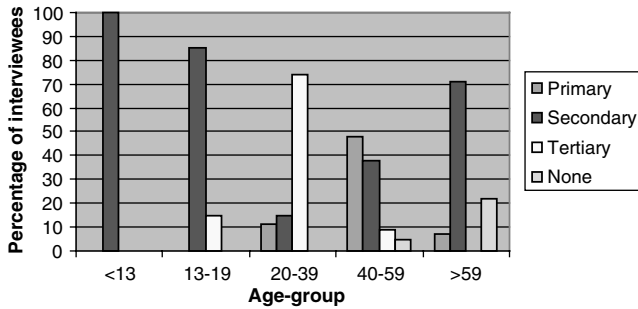


Figure 3 Percentage of interviewees by age and level of education

appreciate its importance in the development of their children. Another practical reason could be added to the above. Before Kreol can function as a medium of instruction, it has to be first established as a language that can be taught, i.e. have its own standard orthography and grammar. For all these reasons, therefore, I tended to restrict the question to the introduction of Kreol as a subject in school (the teaching of Kreol, rather than in Kreol), which seemed more conceivable to respondents. I will specifically point out responses where a difference was clearly made between Kreol as a subject and Kreol as a medium of instruction.

Findings: Should Kreol be introduced in schools?

Most respondents have definite opinions about whether or not Kreol should be taught as a subject in school. There are also some interviewees who express certain reservations although they generally support the introduction of Kreol in schools. Table 2 shows responses given by interviewees' sex.

Table 2 and Figure 4 show that respondents are generally against the introduction of Kreol in the school system. Indeed, only 23% of the interviewees are for the teaching of Kreol while 56% are against. Also, 10% approve of this measure but have some reservations. It should also be noted that 11% are undecided as to whether or not Kreol should be introduced in the education system. Though the interview question focused on Kreol as *lang size*, some interviewees incorporated the issue of Kreol as *lang mediom* in their responses. It seems that the issue of Kreol as *lang size* and Kreol as *lang mediom* cannot be completely dissociated from each other.

Table 2 Interviewees by sex and attitudes to the introduction of Kreol in schools

Interviewees	Should Kreol be introduced in schools?				Total
	Yes	No	Yes, with reservations	No opinion	
Male	10	21	5	3	39
Female	8	23	3	6	40
Total	18	44	8	9	79

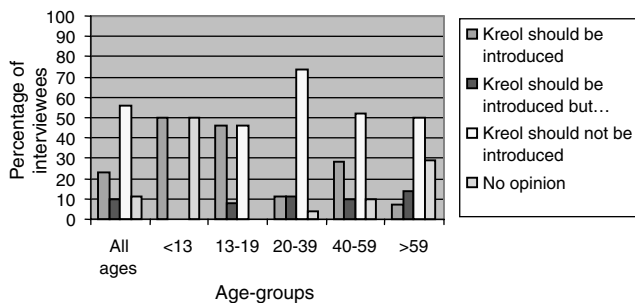


Figure 4 Percentage of interviewees by age group and attitudes to the introduction of Kreol in schools

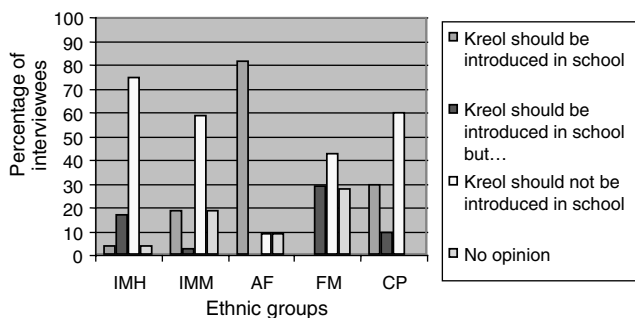


Figure 5 Percentage of respondents by ethnicity and attitudes to the introduction of Kreol in school

In Figure 5 respondents are divided in terms of responses and ethnicity and in Figure 6 in terms of responses and ‘status’. We have four categories on the basis of respondents’ occupation and family situation: Student, Parent, Grandparent and Other. The category Other regroups those people who do not fit into the first three categories and includes young people who have just joined the job market and middle-aged or older people who do not have children. As can be seen from Figure 6, most favourable attitudes can be found among ‘grandparent’, followed by ‘student’, ‘parent’ and ‘other’. Most unfavourable responses can be observed among the group ‘other’, followed by ‘parent’, ‘student’ and ‘grandparent’. As the ‘other’ group is heterogeneous, it is difficult to explain their views. The two most interesting groups are ‘parent’ and ‘student’.

Sixty-one percent of parents in this corpus are against the introduction of Kreol in school. This age group is closely involved in the education system in the sense that their children are part of the education system – especially primary school system. It is interesting to note that more than half the students in this corpus show unfavourable attitudes towards the introduction of Kreol in the education system. We explore the reasons behind these attitudes in the section below. Here, it suffices to note that those who are most directly involved in the education system show negative attitudes towards the introduction of Kreol in school.

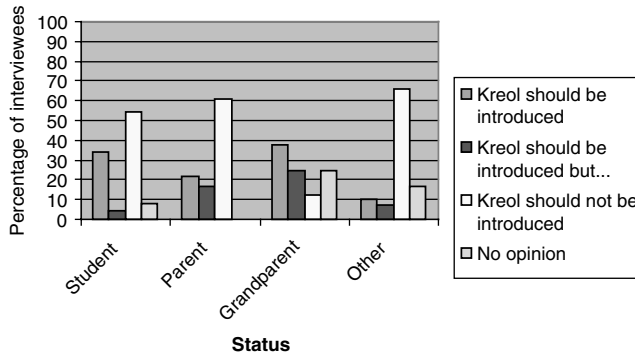


Figure 6 Percentage of interviewees by 'status' and attitudes to the introduction of Kreol in school

Why should Kreol be introduced in schools?

Only 12 of the 18 respondents who are for the teaching of Kreol go on to give reasons for their responses. For the purpose of discussion and clarity, the responses are grouped under three headings:

- (1) understanding of other subjects,
- (2) standardisation of the language, and
- (3) symbol of identity.

The first argument highlights the usefulness of Kreol as a medium of instruction. Five of the twelve respondents argue that the introduction of Kreol in school would enable young children to gain a better understanding of the subjects taught. When justifying their views, those respondents clearly do not restrict themselves to Kreol as a subject but also include Kreol as a medium of instruction. Nawshad (20–39, IMM),³ for instance, thinks that youngsters would learn 'faster' if they were taught in their mother tongue. In this case, therefore, Kreol is seen as a starting point for learning other subjects including English, which will in later years become the medium of instruction. On the whole, these five interviewees perceive the use of Kreol at school as an asset to the acquisition of knowledge by young children. In other words, through Kreol – the Known – young Mauritians would learn other subjects – the Unknown – in a more efficient manner. They clearly echo some of the arguments put forward by pedagogues and linguists quoted above.

Those who put forward argument (2) interpreted 'teaching of Kreol' at school as 'teaching Kreol as a subject' (theme (a) above) and not as 'using the language as a medium of instruction'. Four respondents believe that through the formal teaching of Kreol, it will be possible to promote a standard form of the language. At school, children will learn how to write the 'proper' form of Kreol. Individual variations in the spelling system of Kreol will, therefore, decrease and a single accepted form will be in use. Some respondents also believe that through the teaching of Kreol, a spoken standard will be adopted by the population.

Unlike these first two arguments, argument (3) has identificatory, rather than just practical, implications. As mentioned above, oriental languages, which carry ethnic and/or religious meaning, are taught in primary school. Thus, Muslims, Hindus and Sino-Mauritians have the possibility of studying their ancestral and/or religious language. But those members of the General Population who identify with Kreol or African languages do not have the same opportunity.

Three interviewees argued that Kreol should be taught at school in the same way as the other 'ancestral' languages like Hindi, Marathi, Urdu and Mandarin. Two of these respondents state that the education system should cater to the needs of all ethnic groups. Josiane (40–59, AF), for instance, supports her arguments with the example of her own 9-year-old son, Olivier. As the initial official plan was to include oriental languages in the final CPE results as from 2004, all pupils were obliged to take an oriental language at primary level. Given that the choice of oriental language is ethnically based, Creole and Coloured pupils do not have a language that they can easily choose – that is, *their* language is not offered as an option. Thus, they have to opt for another language, one which they cannot readily identify with and are not exposed to at home or in their ethnic community. Josiane argues that those Indo- and Sino-Mauritians who take Asian languages will have an edge over Olivier. Her rationale is that these languages are part of Asian culture and thus, Indo- and Sino-Mauritians have ready exposure to the language and consequently would be more motivated to excel in the language. As none of the oriental languages have any cultural relevance to the Creole child, this plan to include oriental language results in the final CPE grades can be seen as a form of injustice towards Creoles. Therefore, for someone like Josiane, the teaching of Kreol would help in overcoming this perceived unfairness of the system by catering for the linguistic needs of all ethnic groups on the island.

While some respondents adopt an ethnic stance to this issue, Yolande (40–59, AF) approaches the question from a 'national' perspective. She states that Mauritians should promote *their* language in the education system. Although a Creole herself, Yolande sees Kreol as the language of the Mauritian nation as a whole, rather than just the Creoles (cf. Josiane's response). She argues that in other countries the national language is taught in school. She declares that Mauritians are ashamed of their language, but they have no reason for adopting this attitude. Yolande does not compare the teaching of Kreol to that of oriental languages. For her, Kreol is closely tied to Mauritian identity.

Different language ideologies and conceptions of identity are expressed here. What is clear in some of these responses is that the teaching of a language can be perceived as a sociopolitical move, rather than a pedagogical or utilitarian one. We now discuss some of the reservations that interviewees have concerning the teaching of Kreol.

Kreol should be taught, but . . .

Eight respondents support the teaching of Kreol at school while at the same time expressing certain concerns on the issue. Two respondents argue that

Kreol should be offered as an option to all students, but it should not be taught as a compulsory subject. Basically, the model endorsed here is that Kreol would not have the same status as French and English, which are compulsory till the fifth and final years of secondary school, respectively. It would share the same status as the ancestral languages like Hindi, Urdu, Tamil and Mandarin, which are currently offered as optional subjects to primary school students (similar position to that of Josiane above). Veronique (>59, FM), for instance, argues that 'it's good to learn many languages. It's definitely not bad. But I'm against imposing. People should be free to choose'. Learning Kreol at school should therefore be a matter of personal choice.

While Veronique treats Kreol as a subject only, Babajee (20–39, IMH) underlines the benefit of using Kreol as a medium of instruction. He believes that through Kreol, children would 'learn faster' (parallel with Nawshad). However, he adds that before Kreol can function as a medium of instruction, children would first have to learn the standard form of the language. This, he believes, poses a problem: the syllabus is already heavy and the introduction of Kreol at this stage would only further add to the burden of children. There are therefore practical and pedagogical obstacles to the introduction of Kreol at school. Other grounds that were cited as reasons not to use Kreol in education centre around the methods of teaching the language, its limited use outside Mauritius, the lack of a standard and the fact that all Mauritians already know the language.

Moreover, the fear that the teaching of Kreol might negatively affect performance in other languages is explicitly brought out in some responses. Raymond (40–59, FM), for instance, states that:

Ex1: It wouldn't be a bad thing. But it shouldn't be at the expense of a more important subject. Because, does the Creole when he/she learns at school, can he/she really translate all that he/she hears?

Raymond puts forward a complex argument and blurs the distinction between *lang size* and *lang mediom*. He supports the introduction of Kreol in the education system. But he argues that the introduction of Kreol in school should not be done at the expense of other 'more important' subjects. Here, Kreol seems to function as *lang size*. Raymond then goes on to suggest that Kreol would make a useful medium of instruction. He thinks that the use of Kreol in school might help some young Mauritians, especially the Creoles, improve their academic performance. Raymond's argument seems to rest on the assumption that Creole children cannot fully understand the subjects that are taught to them in English. They have to translate this knowledge into their mother tongue, Kreol, in order to understand and learn. Learning seems to involve hearing, translation and understanding. If Creole children do not understand all that they hear, they cannot translate the information into their mother tongue and process it. Therefore, the introduction of Kreol in the school system might be beneficial to the Creole child in that it removes the need for translation and hence makes comprehension easier.

The association between Kreol and Creoles is also found in the response of Gladys (>59, FM), who opposes the introduction of the language at school.

Her argument is simple: she wonders whether the 'Creoles themselves would want to learn Kreol':

Ex2: Will the Creoles themselves, will they want to learn this language? They will probably prefer learning the French language, or the English language.

In her response, Gladys does not even mention other ethnic groups. She seems to see Kreol as primarily relevant to Creole pupils. Her response is further evidence that Kreol is identified with the Creoles and, hence, any measure to promote the language will necessarily involve the Creoles (and possibly only them). According to Gladys and other interviewees, formal education provides a basis for socioeconomic advancement in later life. As English and French are international languages, they provide more opportunities for advancement. Therefore, they are appropriate in school. But in Mauritius, ancestral languages are taught alongside English and French although they do not have the same international importance as these two European languages. Ancestral languages are taught because of their cultural and emotional value. In the same way, it could be argued that Kreol, which is the ancestral language of the Creoles, has a place in the education system. This appears to be Gladys' line of reasoning. But then she goes on to question the usefulness of teaching Kreol, as the Creoles themselves will not want to learn the language. From Gladys' perspective, it seems that nobody will want to learn Kreol and therefore it is useless to teach the language at school.

Responses here highlight the position of Kreol in the local and international social and linguistic hierarchies: Kreol is at the lower end of these hierarchies. Kreol has a local and, hence, bounded quality: it is restricted to Mauritius. In contrast, other languages like English and French have a more open quality in that they are international languages. In other words, while Kreol symbolises localness, the European languages mark internationalness.

Why should Kreol not be introduced in schools?

Those who believe that Kreol should not be introduced in school form a majority group in this corpus. Sixteen interviewees object to the introduction of Kreol in school on the grounds that it is not an international language. The general belief is that students would make more efficient use of their time by learning international languages rather than Kreol. The arguments underline the limited scope for use of Kreol outside Mauritius and are put in the following ways: 'the teaching of Kreol in school would not lead us anywhere', 'it is not a passport to the world'. To support their arguments, many of these interviewees compare Kreol with languages such as French, English, Hindi or Mandarin – which are 'openings' to the world.

Prince (40–59, IMH), for instance, claims:

Ex3: It's not worth [introducing Kreol in school]. We can't go anywhere with it. If a child learns French, he/she can go to France. Or if he/she learns English, Hindi, Urdu, he/she can find his/her way in any country. Or such languages as Mandarin, Tamil, Telugu, all these. These are the

things that have to be introduced. I don't find it necessary to introduce Kreol.

His comparison with English, French, Mandarin, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi serves to emphasise the insularity of Kreol. It is interesting that he also mentions Mandarin, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Hindi. First, it shows that Kreol is not compared to English and French, or to all other international languages. Second, it suggests that even those oriental languages taught at school have 'international' value (cf. Gladys in Ex 2). Third, by mentioning Mandarin and other oriental languages alongside his own ethnic language, Hindi, Prince might be suggesting that he is adopting an overall unbiased non-ethnic, i.e. objective, approach. He does not limit himself to his own ethnic group. That is, he does not only refer to languages that he uses and identifies with. He also includes other ethnic groups' languages, thereby asserting that the introduction of Kreol in the school system will be detrimental to all groups – not just to Hindus. In some ways, his approach makes his argument stronger in that it explicitly includes all groups within the Mauritian community.

Sabah (13–19, IMM) also argues that, in this era of globalisation, it is important to teach languages that can act as openings on the world. And Kreol is not such a language.

Ex4: Kreol in itself is not the language that we're using universally. We have to take into consideration the fact that we're living into an era of globalisation. If we stay backward with our Kreol, using it as an official language or even in our education, there wouldn't be much future for our youth, the youth of tomorrow.

For Sabah, the introduction of Kreol in schools is seen as a barrier to the socioeconomic progress of Mauritians and should consequently, be opposed.

Moreover, 11 interviewees argue that Kreol should not be taught because it has no structure, no grammar and no proper vocabulary. The respondents seem to be orienting to the non-standardness issue again. Kreol is not perceived as a stable or regular system and, therefore, is not appropriate in the school domain. These arguments highlight the intrinsic 'flaws' of Kreol. Some respondents adopt an extreme form of this argument and claim that Kreol is not even a proper language.

In this case as well, some respondents put forward arguments that had ethnic and/or political undertones. For instance, Tonton (>59, CP) is clearly against the teaching of Kreol at school. For him, Kreol is a 'deformation of the French language'. He feels that the government wants to impose the language on the nation. But then he adds that the teaching of Kreol will be beneficial to the Creole child (parallel to Raymond in Ex 1).

Ex5: For the Creole population, for the population of Mauritius, this could help them. Because they speak Kreol at home (...) As for me, I am against.

He first associates Kreol with the Creole population and then the Mauritian population. Here again, we see the primary indexical link between Kreol and

the Creole ethnic group. The educational performance of Creoles, and not the other groups, might be improved by the presence of Kreol in the education system.

Some respondents view the introduction of Kreol at school with suspicion. Mona (40–59, IMH), for instance, believes that those who want to adopt this measure speak French and/or English at home. That is, they make sure that their own children have access to the prestigious languages while other children are limited to insular Kreol. She believes that Kreol hinders socioeconomic progress and even interferes with performance in other languages. She highlights the ideologies of power associated with languages. The promotion of Kreol in the education system, therefore, becomes a linguistic and, above all, political tool, to promote the interests of the dominant groups and keep the other groups away from progress. She says that the promoters want to have Kreol, the language of the disempowered, in school so that the other pupils will be less competitive than their own. Mona does not explicitly state who the promoters of Kreol are. It could be the Hindu-dominated government or even the pro-Creole groups. But the point remains that the promoters or policy-makers are serving their own interests. Indeed, their attempts can be seen as a means of subjugating the population so that they can maintain their economic and social domination of the population. She feels threatened by what she perceives to be a dominant group's linguistic policy. Because she does not have a say on linguistic matters, Mona has no choice but to abide to the powerful group's decisions.

Furthermore, many respondents argue that Mauritians grow up speaking Kreol. Therefore, there is no reason to introduce it into the education system. However, in many countries, like France, Italy and India, children are taught their mother tongue at school. They study their mother tongue as a subject despite the fact that they grow up speaking the language. Therefore, in Mauritius as well, it should theoretically be possible for young native speakers of Kreol to study their native language at school. Respondents here expose widely held views in creole-speaking communities. In many creole-speaking communities, people see 'no reason whatsoever to teach the children Creole, a language "which they already [know]" (or even a language that they did not even consider to be a language)' (Bollée, 1993: 89).

The possibility of a negative influence of Kreol on English and French is here again quoted as a reason against the introduction of Kreol at school. Some interviewees even argue that the teaching of Kreol at school would deter students from learning English and French. As Kreol is 'easier' than English and French, students would prefer focusing on the former and would be less motivated to learn the latter two languages. Clearly respondents who make this point are assuming that Kreol would be taught as an alternative to other languages rather than a medium of instruction. Five interviewees believe that the teaching of Kreol would adversely affect performance in other languages, especially French. The practical usefulness or pedagogical importance of having Kreol in the education system itself is not a consideration. On the contrary, most of these interviewees believe that no benefit can be gained from introducing Kreol at school.

Some General Remarks

The above discussion shows that Kreol is constantly set in opposition to other languages. Its position or status is defined with respect to that of other varieties. This way of defining the creole variety underlines the negativity attached to the language. For instance, compared to French and English, the two main languages taught in Mauritius, Kreol is not an international language, has no set orthography, no world-recognised literature and is easily acquired. Therefore, it seems futile to allocate limited resources for the teaching of this language at school. This is the line of reasoning adopted by many interviewees. To them, it is more logical to spend the resources on English and French instead of Kreol – a language that all Mauritians automatically acquire. These attitudes serve to firmly establish creoles at the bottom of the linguistic hierarchy.

Interviewees' attitudes are, by no means, exclusive to the Mauritian context. Although responses seem objective in nature, they in fact highlight some of the Eurocentric beliefs prevalent in postcolonial nations. Phillipson (1992) shows how inhabitants in postcolonial countries have been made to believe that English is better than their own indigenous languages. Thus, the people themselves support the use of English in their school system. By so doing, they reflect colonial attitudes to their local languages. Mauritians seem conditioned to support the use of European languages in the education sector – at the expense of their own mother tongue. In fact, not only is the mother tongue seen as an obstacle to the acquisition of useful knowledge, but it is further denigrated as not even a proper language. These negative attitudes towards Kreol and positive ones towards English have effectively maintained the linguistic status quo in the education system and preserved colonial language policies.

It should be pointed out that the aim has never been to make Kreol the only medium of instruction in schools or to remove the other languages from the curriculum. In fact, the importance of other languages like English and French has never been denied by linguists and pedagogues. The plan is for English to remain the medium of instruction for the whole of secondary school and French to be taught as a subject. Some interviewees overlook this and are afraid that Mauritians will end up in a linguistic and social ghetto. It is feared that Mauritians will not be fluent in English and therefore will not be able to compete on the world scene. The attitudes of these interviewees can be understood in terms of a desire to progress, a desire for the youth to have a 'future' (Sabah in Ex 4). Like other creole-speaking and African communities, Mauritius is a small country without much power on the international level. As such, it does not have much choice but to follow global trends. To be able to participate in socioeconomic progress, inhabitants of 'non-influential' nations need to adapt and adopt the strategies of powerful and dominant nations. Power differentials, therefore, can lead to the adoption of new coping strategies – including linguistic ones, e.g. the adoption of English as the language of education.

On the world market, English has the most socioeconomic power and hence is clearly a tool of socioeconomic advancement. In contrast, Kreol, the

local creole, cannot help in promoting the socioeconomic interests of its users. Language is here seen as a commodity (Heller, 2003) that can be used for social or economic gains. Knowledge of English is a commodity that can be marketed. Through linguistic commodification, language becomes a measurable skill (Heller, 2003: 474). Interviewees like Sabah use the hegemonic language English as an instrument of social progress. This does not necessarily mean that they actively support the supremacy of English or endorse the values associated with English. It could be that they are just learning the language of upward mobility and using it to their advantage. They avoid giving any identificatory meaning to English. As such, this language might not pose any threat to their own identity. However, it could also be argued that by adopting English, inhabitants of less powerful nations are legitimising the domination of English and hence, perpetuating the ideologies of power. But all my interviewees willingly adopt English as the language of economic progress. In other words, none of my interviewees explicitly associates English with domination and oppression. They only see it as a tool of economic progress, devoid of any cultural values – much as Stein (1982) asserted.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has underlined the role of languages in the Mauritian education system. This issue is especially important because the linguistic situation in schools is currently being reassessed. Parallels can be drawn between the Mauritian education system and that of other postcolonial nations where native languages are backgrounded while colonial languages are foregrounded.

The above sections show that there is no consensus concerning the introduction of Kreol in school. Indeed, views regarding the use of the language at school are divided. But it should be noted that even in this diverse sample, the views put forward converge towards a few specific themes and parallel those expressed by speakers in other creole-speaking communities. The widespread knowledge of Kreol and its role as a marker of Creole identity act as a support to its introduction and use in school. However, its – literal – insularity and the lack of an official standard are seen as hindrances to its promotion in the education system. If users, especially those most directly involved in the education system, do not want Kreol in schools, the language cannot be imposed. Linguists, therefore, have to convince a significant section of the population of the usefulness of Kreol as a subject and a medium of instruction. Mauritians have to be reassured that Kreol will only function as a medium of instruction for the first years of formal education and will not negatively affect performance in other languages.

Finally, the claims explored above underline prevailing language ideologies in Mauritius. Some interviewees see Kreol as an index of Mauritian identity and hence the language should be promoted in all spheres, including the educational one. Others associate it with the Creole community and believe that the teaching of Kreol at school would be especially beneficial

to Creole children. The use of Kreol as a mother-tongue or the teaching of the language as a subject is sometimes seen as a way of empowering the dominated groups, thus highlighting the sociopolitical functions of languages.

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Notes

1. There are various ways of referring to the most spoken language of Mauritius. The variety is most commonly called *Kreol* or *Creole*. There are some people who refer to the variety as *Morisyen/Mauritian* or *Creole Morisyen/Mauritian Creole*. The term *Creole* also refers to an ethnic category in Mauritius. This ethnic category tends to be associated with the creole language. In this paper, I use the spelling *Kreol* to refer to the language and *Creole* to refer to the ethnic category.
2. Ah Vee and Collen also advocate the use of Bhojpuri as a medium of instruction. Their argument rests on the fact that Bhojpuri is the mother tongue of an important number of Mauritians.
3. Informants' names are followed by their age group and ethnicity. The following conventions are used:

Ethnicity		Age	
IMH	Indo-Mauritian Hindus	< 13	Less than 13
IMM	Indo-Mauritian Muslims	13–19	Aged between 13 and 19 (inclusive)
AF	Afro-Mauritians/Creoles	20–39	Aged between 20 and 39 (inclusive)
FM	Franco-Mauritians	40–59	Aged between 40 and 59 (inclusive)
CP	Coloured population	> 59	Aged 60 or above

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