

## TOWARD A CULTURE OF DIVERSITY

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*Chapter*

## TOWARD A CULTURE OF DIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with language practices in nurseries and pre-elementary schools of Martinique. It is focused on the account of modalities concerning everyday interactions and more precisely language distortions that may occur during interactions between adults and children in those structures. The consideration of cultural diversity generated by language distortions is suggested here to be a prerequisite for the development of a reciprocal comprehension leading to adequate mastery of language behavior and learning among young children.

This approach proposes new patterns within a didactic agreement considering adult and child differences.

**Keywords:** Interactions, Language distortions, Representation, Cultural diversity, Reciprocal comprehension

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## INTRODUCTION

To conceive the entrance of the individual to the culture, Bruner (1996) proposes the idea of an education susceptible to adapt a culture to the needs for its members and to adapt its members and their manners to teach the needs for the culture.

According to him, "our actions are guided by values, standards which, far from being "natural", are cultural and "symbolic constructions" (Bruner, on 1999). He conceives the human development as a process of collaboration between child and adult, the adult being envisaged as mediator of the culture.

Language distortions intervene however in the interactions adults-children because of an asymmetry between their respective levels of experience in the spoken language, highlighting the disparities between the intentions of these interlocutors (Miehakanda, on 2010). These disparities are in touch with cultural, social and individual diversities occurring in the transmission of the language know-how and the reciprocal comprehension which it involves.

The present reflection suggests putting in perspective the conditions of application of such an approach in Martinique. It will be introduced by a presentation of the cultural and language context into which evolve the speakers in Martinique. The socio-cultural values conveyed by the adults who supervise the children will be taken into account in an approach of positioning collectively adopted in establishments towards the sociolinguistic standard. This standard joins in a linguistic politic which it is advisable to clarify to conceive the social orientations which it infers. The cultural diversity of the places of presence of the French language is an essential element of this linguistic politic and the elaboration of a new didactic contract is imperative upon it with the prospect of a regulation of the interactions adults-children in environment French speaker / Creole speaker.

## APPROACH OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CONTEXT FROM MARTINIQUE

The Inhabitants of Martinique generally speak French and the Creole, the first idiom being the linguistic "acrolectale" shape (high language) adopted as the linguistic standard, the second corresponding to the "basilectale" shape (low language) used most of the time on the familiar exchanges and of closeness.

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Bernabé (1984) proposes on this matter a model which is situated in a continuum / discontinuum where every language (the Creole and French) is endowed with an “acrolecte” and with a “basilecte”.

The speakers of this region are confronted at the same time with the influence of the French language established as the standard and in an underlying presence at the school of the Creole language practiced in their linguistic environment today.

This sociolinguistic situation gives rise to productions which are sometimes situated at the middle path between Creole and French: we speak then about a “creolization” of French or French-frying of the Creole, the mixing code and the switching being code besides become the current linguistic practices.

Prudent (1993) draw the attention on the notion of “interlecte” which indicates the “zone of superimposing of the Creole and French” where the speakers from Martinique deceive the grammatical standard by making use of “lectes” not ranked in their language practices. The analysis of the eco-linguistic context from Martinique is of this fact made complex by the difficulty which we feel to distinguish from French-speaking speakers and from speakers Creole speakers.

It seems convenient to wonder about the modes of transmission and appropriation of know how to say to try to understand how the children learn to speak in such conditions, and to identify the language practices in the situations of communication.

One of the objectives of this reflection is to discover the opportunity of a possible consideration of the Creole language to the contact of the French language during the transmission of know how to say in the sociolinguistic environment from Martinique marked by the selective use of two vector idioms of different socio-cultural values.

To conceive the characteristics of this context, a pedagogy based on the adaptive capacities of learners and their capacities to co-build their linguistic space inside clearly identified linguistic rites can constitute a ground favorable to a rational distribution of the functions of French and Creole, as demonstrate in experiences regrettably still too marginal in the school environment (voluntary actions Of militant teachers).

The quite small in Martinique, as their peers worldwide, will they contribute one day, through spontaneous interpretations of language practices which are brought to them by the adults, in the transfer towards bigger one balance of the eco-linguistic space in which they evolve?

## **LINGUISTIC ORIENTATIONS AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS**

The directors of the visited day-nurseries are unanimous to recognize that the requirements relative to the exclusive use of French language emanate from no legislation and are not either a part of the specifications of their organizations of supervision. This linguistic orientation nevertheless strictly applied in the whole of establishments is, according to their own statements, firstly influenced by their representations of the languages of their environment (ex: Creole = dialect) and by the education which they received. They also indicate the implication of the expectations of the families which entrust them their children, in particular those of the parents of origin from Martinique for whom the control of French would represent a main advantage in the education of the quite small. A maternal headmistress situated in residential zone shows resistances of teachers of her establishment to use supports in Creole language provided to them within the framework of poetic expressions. One of these people confirms her refractory positioning by asserting that she would agree to use these supports only if she was forced to it, what gives pause for thought on the reports which it maintains with this idiom which is nevertheless one of hers.

It gives us in any case an overview of the educational intentions and adults' linguistic representations asked to educate the children in Martinique.

The positioning of the Inhabitants of Martinique towards their languages seems at least ambivalent when it is a question of educating and of educating the children. It is difficult to them to use the Creole as language of the education and the instruction while they recognize speakers of two idioms, French and Creole about which they usually speak. It is thus advisable to stop on the representations of the languages by their speakers in Martinique, because as in quite other society, the social representations intervene actively in the transmission and the appropriation of the language practices.

The whole scientific community identifies the social representation "as a shape of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, having an aim has a practice and contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group" (Jodelet, on 1989, *The social representations*, the page 36). The representations that the speakers are made languages, their standards, their characteristics, or their statutes influence the procedures and the strategies which they develop and operate to learn them and use them, according to Dabène (1997).

Candelier and Hermann-Brennecke ( 1993 ) show in their approach of the motivations of choice and relinquishment of the foreign languages by the French and German students that the school contact with the language influences in a positive way the representations attached to this language.

In Martinique the school contact with the Creole is daily in spite of the omnipresence of French which is the language of the education: prohibitions and censorships of which is the object the Creole are not right of its presence, even allusive, in the speeches of the adults-educators. A consideration of the Creole at school would doubtless allow this language to benefit from the positive prejudice which mention Candelier and Hermann-Brennecke. These indeed noticed that the evolution of the representations can be distorted by the degree of relevance which the pupils assign to the language of the education, through their imagined or actual reports in their sociolinguistic context. It is then important to raise the problem under the angle of the linguistic standard established by the school which has an incidence on the social representations, in particular in terms of language conducts, and which joins within the framework of a French linguistic politics where regional languages as Creole are not still of the domain of the official practices.

## **INCIDENCES OF THE CURRENT LINGUISTIC POLITICS**

France is one of the countries the most reserved in front of the ratification of the European charter of the regional or minority languages which confers to these legitimacy relative to their presence on their territories of presence.

In its article 8, this charter stipulates in particular that the signatory parts make a commitment "to plan that a substantial part of the preschool education is insured in the concerned regional or minority languages; to plan a primary education insured in these languages".

In France, the Constitutional Council always opposed that it considers as a threat for the language of the Republic, the regional or minority languages which can compete to see devaluing the French language if we introduced them in the same way into the constitution. "The language of the Republic is French", it is stipulated in the article 2 of the Constitution, what establish themselves the reserves of the opponents of the ratification of the charter.

The resistances of these in front of the recent modification of this article are bound to the fears of a questioning of the national sovereignty of the other instruments representing, worth knowing the flag, the hymn, the slogan and French there.

The conclusions of the constitutional reform which took place in May, 2008, under the insistence of the President of the Republic indeed allow introducing the regional or minority languages into the French linguistic heritage. But this reform voted by the National Assembly was the object of an amendment of the Senate which refused to register the recognition of regional languages in the constitution.

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, the French Academy more expressed its opposition to the recognition of regional languages which it considers as "an achievement on the national identity". It has purely and simply asked the retreat of the article concerning them.

The French linguistic politics thus tends to congeal on former models concerning its national language and the heritage which it associates it, with the exception of the other spoken languages on its various places of presence. In this context, the Creole language is only partially introduced into schools from Martinique, in particular through the formation of certain professors in the Vocational Certificate in the Teaching profession of the Secondary education (CAPES) Creole and other teachers in the Languages and Regional Cultures (LCR), under the impulse among others of the Group of Study and Creole-speaking and French-speaking Research in Space (GEREC-F), become Interdisciplinary Research Center in Literature, Languages, Art and Human Sciences (CRILLASH).

The French language remains the only language of the education, the Creole having up to here an optional implication in the school learning registered in programs where it is more a question of teaching the regional language than to teach in regional language.

Which amounts to say that a linguistic politics really directed to a consideration of the cultural diversities of regions concerned by reports French / regional language has to set up the optimal conditions of expression of this diversity by distributing in particular the fields of intervention of every language at the same time regarding communication (social aspect) and regarding pedagogy (disciplinary aspects).

In practice, all the teachers and all the professionals of the early childhood should form in an equivalent control of French and their respective regional language in their functional dimensions (oral expression and written expression) but also as didactic tools (vehicular organ of the knowledge).

It would be a question, among others, of being capable of putting in perspective an idiom with regard to an other one (the Creole with regard to French and mutually) during the exploration of the concepts and the know-how to be transmitted in all the domains appropriate to the preschool and school learning.

Such measures have a double interest: that to organize the process of reciprocal comprehension and the inter-subjective meetings which it implies around a consideration of the socio-cultural disparities bound to the presence of both idioms in the linguistic environments of the young speakers; that to direct the language practices of the pupils from Martinique to a bilingual use (custom) of French and Creole which would be in break with the monolingual's at present practiced in the French educational space.

The adoption on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, within the framework of the Law for the Economic development of it Besides Sea (Loi pour le Développement Économique de l'Outre Mer: LODÉOM), of an amendment introducing Creole languages into French national heritage allows to hope that new administrative measures will know how to welcome new educational modalities adapted to the implementation of a harmonious practice of the Creole and French, in particular among quite small frequenting the preschool and school structures in Martinique.

## **CULTURAL DIVERSITIES AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITIES**

In most of the extra-hexagonal regions concerned by a presence of French as official language, to learn to speak in community and to the school while protecting its cultural identity requires didactic and social conditions which must be built in the contact of a common language implying the cultural and social components of the environment of every speaker in presence.

The interest of such an approach of the language practices, in Martinique for example, is bound to a diversity of the cultural expressions of a society, every language, the Creole as French, being the vector of a culture and a mode of thought different.

The Creole makes a reference to a culture sending back to a stemming oral tradition largely of a real-life experience in the colonial plantations whereas French makes a reference to a culture of the older, Western Europe, where the concepts are transcribed for a long time in written language.



It is translated by language practices today reproducing the cultural diversities of the speakers from Martinique which, following their education and the social backgrounds in which they evolve, appropriate the Creole and French through practices of their own.

Of this fact we meet not many Inhabitants of Martinique expressing himself exclusively in French or in Creole. We can so notice that these two idioms are registered, consider held (or in resentment) by conditions of diglossia still present, in the linguistic heritage of the speakers from Martinique. According to Charaudeau (2001), the language is necessary, certainly, for the constitution of a collective identity but it is advisable to separate language and culture, and to associate rather the language practices with the culture. This distinction is locatable in the linguistic rites and in the didactic contract between teachers and pupils in Martinique where the first ones make a reference to the Creole in a more or less indirect way, but also in the disparities between the language practices of the children and those of the adults in charge of their education. There are, indeed, several manners of speaking the same language if we consider on one hand the level of maturation of the speaker, on the other hand the socio-cultural environment in which it usually evolves. So, when it is about speakers brought to communicate in a language which is not their language of origin, we are in the presence of a meeting of different ways of thinking because every speaker is not only carrier of an identity built in the contact of the idiom which he uses but he is also an agent of the practices being connected with the culture of his language circle of acquaintances. The respective intentions of the people implied in the interaction are not only a function of motivations in direct link with the situations of communication and their conditions of reciprocal comprehension but also the modalities of use of the idiom which they usually use on their respective social and family backgrounds.

As regards the use of the Creole and French in Martinique, we can evoke here the situation of anchoring which makes that each of these idioms holds a place favored with regard to the other one according to social situations lived by the speakers. It is thanks to this anchoring that the speakers from Martinique appropriate on an identity mode both of these languages which constitute the cultural markings of their sociolinguistic environment.

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## **A CULTURE OF THE DIVERSITY (DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS)**

It is not thus any more for the exclusion one of other than the French language and the Creole language must be learnt in Martinique but, quite the opposite, the one In the contact of other one, in a didactic perspective favoring the mutual consideration of the cultural disparities bound to the respective use of every idiom. Prudent proposes "to establish pedagogy of French and Creole by taking into account the "interlectale" zone which is at the heart of the mother language of the Inhabitant of Martinique" (Prudent, on 2010, page 7) to take into account the pupil from Martinique and his sociolinguistic environment. This constitutes, in the field of the didactics of the languages, a big advance which allows conceiving the variety of "lectes" used on every idiom by these young speakers in situation of learning.

The relational modalities regarding linguistic acquisition are however browsed by rites which can, thanks to a strategic mediation of the teacher, question the implication of both idioms in the various situations of learning.

In day-nurseries and nursery schools, it should be translated by a posture of reception and multicultural transmission of the adult towards the children whom he supervises.

The posture of reception corresponds to an attitude of listening and observation of the spontaneous language conducts of the quite small supervised by the adults. The fruit of this approach is to be put to the advantage of a location and of a collection of the disparities of social and cultural order.

The posture of transmission corresponds to a consideration of the located disparities and to an exploitation of these during the collective construction of the know-how. The Creole and French productions are reinvested in the whole of the interactions. The didactic contract supervisor-supervised, taught teacher concentrates on the modalities implemented in situation of learning. In this context, the pupils are invited to clarify and to argue their own productions and those of their peers, the main instruction being to express himself freely in French or in Creole.

This educational plan requires, it is advisable to remind it, a common formation of the adults-referents and the teachers in regional language (oral and written) but also in didactics of the languages so as to acquire skills regarding bilingual teaching and regarding mark of the language practices.

It is also essential that these actors of the early childhood are competent in the field of the observation of the language conducts.

Eventually, it is a raising awareness and a formation of the quite small to the disparities and the cultural diversities of their language environment that are put as educational principles, in particular in the situations of learning where the know-how build themselves as well in the contact of the adults as the peers, any merged language skills.

When, for example, one of the directors of day-nursery makes the presentation of the activities of its establishment, she specifies that it is seen frequently by children among whom cultural origins turn out particularly diverse notably because of its zone of presence.

Situated in a district where residents from Martinique, French, Italian, German, Cambodian and Togolese families, this day-nursery of the periphery of Fort de France welcomes children who, in the contact of cultural disparities, have to evolve together of the section of the quite small in the section of the big. This director, to take into account the intercultural differences, organizes regularly a world tour of the cultures with, in every journey, the contribution activates of a culturally involved family.

During these meetings, the children discover the cultures from each other through recreational activities (ex: typical games of the visited countries) and by means of culinary, musical, dance and linguistic animations.

The adults referents intervene in mediators, by supplying to the children of new linguistic tools to communicate with their peers by referring to culturally diversified registers (ex: little songs of different parts of the country) within the framework of reports base established on an intercultural construction of the know-how very well welcomed by the children.

This example shows the interest of the respect for the interpersonal differences for the development of a process of reciprocal comprehension favorable to the language self-fulfillment of young speakers.

Indeed, the quite small put in situation of discovery with their peers by an adult referent concerned about this respect for the differences succeed in building the know-how which are transmitted them by implementing their own linguistic experience (intra subjective) while growing rich of those of their small companions (inter subjective experience).

While valuing and by stimulating the expression and the reception of the cultural differences among the young speakers he is responsible for educational the adult should obtain the most successful and most adapted language conducts.

Cultural diversities are to be put to the advantage of the process of reciprocal comprehension by an adult-referent who has to create the optimal conditions of exchanges among the young speakers he is responsible for. He has to for it takes into account at the same time capacities and potentialities of the children and the sociolinguistic environment where they evolve.

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