Sociolinguistic challenges and new perspectives on determining French speakers in Creole communities: the case of Haiti

David Tézil-University of Alabama Tuscaloosa

David Tézil*

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Abstract: This study examines the sociolinguistic challenges and explores new perspectives on the evaluation of French competency in creole-speaking communities, particularly in Haiti. Due to the absence of an effective and adaptable French proficiency test in the country, the percentage of Francophones often varies between 5 % and 10 %, and as high as 42 %. This inconsistency may be the result of the assumption that schooling is an effective metric of French proficiency. In this study, I argue that while schooling creates some French speakers, it is not necessarily indicative of French proficiency for all Haitians. In other words, not all Haitians enrolled in schools can count as French speakers. I make three propositions to improve the accuracy of the proportion of French speakers in Haiti: (1) combining schooling with some proficiency instrument to determine French speakers; (2) using an adaptable proficiency test that is based on the salient features that distinguish French from Haitian Creole (Kreyòl); (3) controlling for sociolinguistic varieties such as Frenchified Kreyòl or Kreyòl swa to prevent the miscategorization of monolingual Kreyòl speakers as French speakers.

Keywords: French proficiency; francophones; Haitian Creole; Kreyòl swa; Kreyòl rèk

1 Introduction

It is commonly agreed that all Haitians speak Haitian Creole (Kreyòl), while those who are adequately proficient in French (hence bilingual) constitute a minority (Dejean 1993; DeGraff 2007; Howe 1993; Valdman 1991b). One aspect, however, that is the subject of continuing debate is the exact number of bilingual speakers. Whereas those who view Haiti as a predominately monolingual country, and therefore view French as a foreign language, often estimate the percentage of French speakers to be about 10%(Dejean 1993; Hebblethwaite 2012; Valdman 1984), those who view Haiti as a Francophone country generally estimate the number to be higher, reaching as high as 42 % (Marcoux et al. 2022). This inconsistency is acknowledged as:

> *La difficulté à dénombrer les francophones n'est pas inhérente à Haïti. Elle tient à la variabilité de la cartographie de la francophonie, la maîtrise du français étant une expérience variable. Le*

*Corresponding author: David Tézil, Department of Modern Languages and Classics, The University of Alabama, 200 B.B. Comer Hall, Tuscaloosa, USA, E-mail: dtezil@ua.edu

> *Haut Conseil de la Francophonie […] considère le dénombrement des francophones comme un exercice périlleux vu la faiblesse des statistiques et la diversité des situations ; les résultats peuvent donner l'impression tout à la fois d'un pessimisme démobilisateur, d'un optimisme béat ou d'un certain illusionnisme.*
>
> *[The difficulty in determining the number of Francophones is not inherent to Haiti. It is due to the variability of the cartography of the Francophonie, the mastery of French being a variable experience. The Haut Conseil de la Francophonie […] considers the count of francophones to be a problematic endeavor, given the weakness of statistics and the diverse situations; the results can give the impression of demobilizing pessimism, blissful optimism, or certain illusionism.]*
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> (Govain 2020: 8)

In this article, I demonstrate how some of the challenges of numerating the population of French speakers in Haiti are caused by the traditional assumption that those who attend schools automatically become proficient in French. The reality is the opposite: most Haitians speak only Kreyòl. Contact with French generally starts when they attend school. However, not all of those who attend schools develop communicative proficiency in French (Joseph 1980; Laguerre 2010). Because Haitians live in such complex socioeconomic and sociolinguistic landscapes, schooling does not necessarily equate to proficiency in French for everyone. In addition to the financial barriers Haitians face, the types of schools that many Haitian families can afford are not equipped with adequate resources and trained teachers that enable pupils to acquire sufficient competence in French and subsequently use it for the acquisition of academic content (Luzincourt and Gulbrandson 2010). In a study (Tézil 2022) conducted in two areas of Haiti (Carrefour urban, and Béraud rural) with 32 participants who had a minimum of 6 years of schooling, speakers were classified as demonstrating communicative competence in French (Bilingual) or those with no/poor proficiency (MonoE+). During the French proficiency test, the latter group frequently switched to a Frenchified Creole variety known as Kreyòl swa (Fattier-Thomas 1984) to substitute for their lack of communicative proficiency in French.

Without an evaluation of speakers' communicative competence in French, the MonoE+ would be miscategorized as French speakers simply because they have attended schools. In this article, I advocate for three propositions that one must take into account in order to effectively and accurately determine if a speaker in Haiti is a French speaker. The first proposition is to combine schooling with an adaptable proficiency test to evaluate speakers communicative competence in French. The purpose of combining schooling and an evaluative instrument to ensure that those who are categorized as French speakers can effectively communicate in spoken French. Secondly, given that the acquisition of French for many Haitians happens in contact with Kreyòl, I propose that any evaluative instrument designed to test French proficiency must include features that distinguish French from Kreyòl.

Studies on the genesis of creole languages (Bickerton 1983; Chaudenson 1992; Lefebvre 1998; Mufwene 2010; Sylvain 1936) have extensively examined the features that set the two

languages apart despite their diachronic relationship. While it is indisputable that French constitutes the lexifier language of Kreyòl, there is disagreement about the source of its grammatical structure. According to the superstratist approach (Chaudenson 1992; Mufwene 2010), the structure of Kreyòl emerged and diverged from Colonial French whereas for the substratists (Lefebvre 1998; Sylvain 1936), the structure of Kreyòl is mainly influenced by other languages, including African languages. Finally, others (e.g. Bickerton 1983) claim the bioprogram hypothesis as being responsible for the genesis of creole languages, i.e. according to which the similarity of creoles is due to their being formed from a prior pidgin by children who all share a universal human innate grammar capacity. Despite the disagreement among these different views, it is undeniable that synchronically the structure of Kreyòl is different from that of the contemporary French spoken in Haiti. Moreover, there is vast evidence suggesting the existence of shared typological features across all creole languages that are not found in any of their European lexifier languages (e.g. Bakker et al. 2011). Therefore, French competency in Haiti ought to be determined not based on the shared features across the two languages but based on the salient features that distinguish the two languages.

Finally, it is crucial to control for the *créole francisé* (Frenchified Kreyòl) also known as *Kreyòl swa* 'silky Kreyòl' (henceforth KS), a prestigious speech used by bilingual speakers. Some of the particularities of KS include the use of French front rounded vowels, /y/, /ø/, /oe/ and the phrase introduced *keu*, as exemplified by a segment of the former Haitian President Aristide: "*Eskeu m gen dè bagay keu m reugrèt? Eskeumgen dè bagay keumreugrèt? Wi!Mreugrèt…keu legliz la trayi… legliz la jusqu'à ce point-là. M reugrèt*…" 'Are there things that I regret? Yes, I regret … that the Church betrayed … the Church up to that point. I regret … ' (Valdman 2015: 353).

On the contrary, the speech of monolingual speakers is referred to as *Kreyòl rèk* (KR) 'rough Kreyòl'. Because of the prestigious status associated with KS, monolingual speakers often attempt to use it, yet, not at the same rate as bilingual speakers. Nevertheless, KS is comprehensible to monolingual speakers who use it at certain times (*cf*. Tezil 2022; Valdman 2015). Because of the presence of these Frenchified features in KS, an adaptable proficiency test ought to control for this variety of Kreyòl to avoid counting monolingual speakers of Kreyòl, who might occasionally use some of these features, as French speakers. It is commonly agreed that while KS may have some prestige associated with it, it does not elevate to the status of French (Schieffelin and Doucet 1994; Tézil 2022; Valdman 2015). I conclude this article by stressing the importance of implementing appropriate proficiency tests to enhance the accuracy of the estimation of the proportion of French speakers in Haiti. The failure to apply effective French proficiency assessments in Haiti not only contributes to provoking unproductive debates over the variability in the number of French speakers but also may have significant implications on the language policies of the country.

2 The debate over the estimation of French speakers in Haiti

It is agreed that most Haitians speak Kreyòl, with a minority of Haitians fluent in French. Nevertheless, the variability in the estimation of French speakers in Haiti has been the object of ongoing debates among scholars and Haitian officials. These heated debates have extended over

social media and discussion forums, which clearly show a divide between those who see Haiti as a French-speaking country and those who view French as a foreign language. For example, the percentage of French speakers varies between 5 and 10 % in some studies (Dejean 1993; Hebblethwaite 2012), and as high as 42 % according to the OIF report (Marcoux et al. 2022), a significant gap whose origin is often difficult to explain.

It is commonly agreed, however, that for most Haitians, their first contact with French happens during schooling (Luzincourt and Gulbrandson 2010; Valdman 2015). Therefore, to this day schooling remains a significant factor in determining bilingual speakers (Kreyòl and French) in Haiti. For example, in a pilot sociolinguistic study that Valdman conducted in the 80s on the use of nasalization in the postposed determiner /la/, he categorized bilingual speakers (hence French speakers) in relation to the number of years of schooling completed (see Valdman 1991a: 84). All Valdman's participants had completed at least the fourth year of secondary education (*troisième secondaire*) and categorized as bilingual and middle class. This study, however, does not assume schooling to constitute a direct indicator of proficiency in French in Haiti and hence constitutes a proxy for bilingualism. Although Valdman used schooling as a criterion to distinguish French speakers, without a proficiency test, he could not confirm whether the speakers could effectively communicate in French.

Moreover, formal education (particularly in French) is often mentioned as part of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)'s objective to increase the number of French speakers in Francophone countries. It assumes that schooling, particularly in developing countries such as Haiti, will contribute significantly to the increase of proficiency in French since many speakers learn the language when they attend school. The main issue here is that the estimations provided by OIF and ODSEF for 2018 and 2022 (Tables 1 and 2) for Haiti often mislead many policymakers, including Haitian educators who interpret the estimation as representing the percentage of speakers who have communicative competence in French in Haiti.

Another common interpretation of OIF's estimation is linked to the percentage of the number of students enrolled in the school system (Table 3). In Haiti, the

Table 1: Estimation of Francophones in Latin America and the Caribbean reported by OIF Beck et al. (2018: 4).

	Population 2018 (in thousands)	Francophones 2018 (in thousands)	Percentage of total population
Latin America and Caribbean			
Costa Rica	4,953	5	0.1 %
Dominique	74	7	10 %
Guadeloupe	449	377	84 %
French Guiana	290	180	62 %
Haiti	**11,113**	**4,667**	**42 %**
Martinique	385	312	81 %
Mexico	130,759	30	0.02 %
Dominican Republic	10,883	157	1 %
Saint Lucia	180	3	2 %
Uruguay	3,470	5	0.2

Table 2: Estimation of francophone population in Haiti in 2022.

Population totale (*N*) 2022 A	Francophones (%) 2010 B	Francophones (*N*) 2022 C = A × B
11,680,288	**42,00 %**	4,906,073

ODSEF: Marcoux et al. 2022: 130. At the bottom of the table, the authors indicated that they reused the 2010 OIF questionnaire as they do not have new data on the estimation of Francophones for year 2022: *"En l'absence de nouvelles données, nous reconduisons la proportion obtenue en 2010 via le questionnaire de l'OIF. Nous estimons que 42,0 % des Haïtiens sont francophones en 2022, soit 4,906,073 individus."*

Table 3: Number of schools and students enrolled in Haiti (2010–2015).

	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2015–2016
Total number of schools	16,072	17,116	17,412	17,828	19,505
Number of students (primary and secondary)	3,378,790	3,560,679	3,707,219	3,779,655	**4,107,074**
Fundamental level (1st and 2nd cycle)	2,210,221	2,345,851	2,441,559	2,498,706	2,548,444

Source MENFP 2018, *Données du recensement scolaire 2015–2016.*

Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports (MENJS) reported that over 4,107,074 (40 % of the Haitian population) attended schools between 2010 (the year following the earthquake) and 2015. Based on this interpretation, the number of students corresponds nearly to the number of Francophones or French speakers.

As DeGraff (2020) noted during his discussion of one of the comments made by the former French president, Francois Holland, there is often an explicit link between the proportion of Francophones and schooling in Haiti, through which the French language is promoted:

> Francophonie […] [is] a major link that the French language gives us with Haiti. We're making sure that the high schools that are being built today in Haiti offer the most teaching in French, by French teachers, when possible, otherwise by Francophones, because we do not want the disappearance of the French language, which makes Haiti's identity …
>
> (Francois Holland [translation cited in DeGraff 2020: 96]).

The paradox is that the socioeconomic issue is related to the country's dysfunctional education system, resulting in a situation where neither the Haitian educators nor the government know the exact proportion of Francophones. The Dean of *the Faculté de Linguistique Appliquée* (FLA) in Port-au-Prince, Renauld Govain, points out that there is no formal estimation of the number of Francophones in Haiti. He links this situation to the absence of accurate census data in Haiti:

> Il n'existe pas de statistique formelle sur le nombre de francophones d'Haïti : un rapport de recherche du ministère de l'éducation nationale publié en 2000 situe à 15% cette partie de la population haïtienne qui soit francophone (MENJS 2000). Un recensement réalisé en 1950 au niveau de la population de Port-au-Prince, la capitale d'Haïti, avait pu évaluer à 10% les locuteurs dont le français est la langue d'usage […]. C'est dans cette ville du pays qu'on trouve le plus grand nombre de locuteurs francophones, et elle a toujours eu une plus grande proportion d'habitants (actuellement 2 millions selon les statistiques nationales) comparativement aux autres. Depuis, il n'y a pas eu de recensement à ce niveau.
>
> [There are no formal statistics on the number of Francophones in Haiti: a research report by the Ministry of National Education published in 2000 estimates that 15% of the Haitian population is Francophone (MENJS 2000). A 1950 census of the population of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, estimated that 10% of the population used the French language […]. This is the city with the largest number of French speakers in the country, and it has always had a higher proportion of inhabitants (currently 2 million, according to national statistics) than the others. Since then, there has been no census done at this point.]
>
> (Govain 2018: 11)

As it is indicated by Govain, even the estimation of the Haitian ministry of education (*Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports*, MENJS) differs from that of other Haitian scholars. Zéphir (1997), for example, goes even further and suggests an increase in the number of Francophone speakers based on efforts to enhance access to schooling in Haiti. She argues that the proportion of bilingual speakers in Haiti may be higher among Haitians with higher levels of schooling, through which they attained a certain level a proficiency in the language. In the next section, I expand on the issue of variability when calculating the proportion of French speakers in Haiti in light of a dysfunctional education system.

3 The issue of education in Haiti

3.1 Language and education

In Haiti, it is almost impossible to discuss the issue of language, particularly with respect to competence in French, without touching on the issue of education. Although Kreyòl is the primary language spoken by most Haitians at home and in their daily lives, not only does contact with French for many Haitians begin with schooling but also French has long served as the language of instruction in the school system in Haiti, including in public schools. In 1979, however, an educational reform known as Réforme Bernard was launched to address this issue. The main goal of this reform was to implement Kreyòl as the language of instruction during the first four years of primary education and the teaching of French as a second language (Valdman 1980). The use of Kreyòl in the early years is important because of the high dropout rate of students before reaching their fifth year. Hebblethwaite (2012: 268) reports that only 46.2 % of Haitian students remain in school by the sixth grade. He also notes that the drop-out rates have decreased during the first four grade levels because Kreyòl is used as the language of instruction during those grade levels. However, the drop-out rates increase to about 30 % by grades 5th and 6th as a result of French taking over the curriculum. Despite the promising nature of this reform, it ultimately did not fully meet its objective. Not only was the Bernard reform poorly implemented (for example, lack of pedagogical material in Kreyòl and no training resources programs for teachers) but also it faced various obstacles, as well as backlash from skeptical monolingual parents and teachers who mistakenly believed that the reform would completely replace French with Kreyòl in the school system. Another major weakness of the reform was the fact that the Haitian government did not have enough control over the school system to implement the reform, considering that only 15–20% of Haitian schools are public and thus managed by the government.

Nevertheless, since 1979 there has been growing acceptance of Kreyòl's inclusion in early education. For instance, there have been standardized tests developed in Kreyòl for students in primary grade levels. Additionally, in 2014 a Kreyòl Academy (Akademi Kreyòl Arisen), was approved and officially recognized by the Haitian government as the institution in charge of regulating the language. While many linguists, education specialists, and government officials recognize the linguistic barriers created by the predominance of French in the Haitian education system, they remain divided over the role that these two languages should play in Haiti's educational system.

Some linguists (e.g. Dejean 2006, 2010; DeGraff 2010) go further than the Bernard reform and advocate for Kreyòl as the unique language of instruction and for instruction of French as a second language.

3.2 The effect of socioeconomic disparities between schooling and French competence

Generally, there is a traditional assumption that those who attend schools in Haiti automatically become proficient in French since many Haitians enter into contact with it when they go to school. However, it has also been observed that in present-day Haiti, schooling is not always indicative of French competence (Hebblethwaite 2012; Laguerre 2010). This is because French

competence is (indirectly) associated with socioeconomic status where the choice of school is determined by the parents' economic situation.

Haiti is a country where 80 % of the population earn less than three dollars per day and less than one-third of schools are operated by the government as reported in the 2003 Haitian Institute of Statistics and Information (Valdman 2015: 377). Many Haitian parents must send their children to poor-quality private schools that charge lower tuition. These schools tend to hire teachers with lower levels of education and training. In Haiti, education is a commodity obtained by bargaining. The country's education system is rife with this "bargaining culture". As a result, not only is the quality of the instruction received by the students attending *lekòl bòlèt* (lottery school) is poor, but their contact with French is very limited and inadequate (Joseph 1980; Laguerre 2010). Haitians with more education are generally more proficient in French than their less educated peers. However, because Haitians experience such a complex sociolinguistic landscape, education level is not always predictive of French proficiency. Based on this situation, it is worth asking whether it is plausible to categorize the Kreyòl speakers differently and/or classify them as "Francophones" without evidence of structural French acquisition.

4 An overview of the diachronic relationship between French and Kreyòl

It worth noting that as a French-based creole-speaking community, some Haitians (including monolingual Kreyòl speakers without adequate communicative competence to be categorized as French speakers) may have some passive and inherent comprehension of French not because of their contact with it but because of the diachronic relationship between the two languages. In fact, there are many converging and diverging ideas on what should be accepted, in terms of evidence, to support the genesis and emergence of creole languages. The superstratists view creole languages as non-exceptional from structural and language acquisition perspectives (Chaudenson 1992; Mufwene 2001), whereas substratists believe that linguistic features of creoles reflect structures of slaves' native languages (Lefebvre 1998; Sylvain 1936). A third theory known as the Bioprogram (Bickerton 1981) suggests that universal innate linguistic structures or principles are the generative source of creole grammar. Other linguists (e.g. McWhorter 1997) argue that creoles owe their genesis to their superstrate or lexifier languages and/or to their substrate languages, as well as other environmental influences.

Regardless of the approach adopted to account for the development of creole languages, it is indisputable that the lexifier language (i.e. the European languages) has contributed to the evolution of these young languages. For example, the data presented in Table 4 clearly shows that among the languages that have contributed to the lexicon of Kreyòl, the highest percentage of vocabulary words (92.3 %) originated from French. Although many of these words underwent semantic changes such as semantic restrictions or extension, as well as changes of word class. An example of restriction of meaning is provided by Valdman (2015: 179–180) who noted that the Kreyòl word *lestomak*, only refers to the chest, whereas in Louisiana French, and presumably in

Colonial French, it refers to the stomach as well. Moreover, he suggests that the word *blan* (from

Table 4: Origin of the Lexicon of French-based Creoles (Cited in Valdman 2015: 187).

Origin	Entries	Percentage
Contemporary French	244	60.2
Survival (dialect and old French)	67	16.5
Neologisms	63	15.6
French origin total		**92.3**
Vocubulaire des Isles	4	0.4
Spanish/Portuguese	5	1.2
English	1	0.3
Other European origin total		**1.9**
African	11	2.7
Amerindian	4	1.0
Other sources or unknown	10	2.5
Non-European origin total		**6.2**

The bold face indicates the languages as well as the total percentage of these languages that contributed to the lexicon of the French-based creole languages. For instance, the total percentage of words originated from French, (e.g. contemporary French and dialectal and old French) is 92.3%, whereas the total words originated from other European languages (e.g. Spanish, English) represents 1.9%, and non-European languages (e.g. African) is 6.2%.

the French *blanc*) no longer refers exclusively to White persons but to foreigners so that American blacks may be referred to as *blan*.

Finally, Valdman claims that the change in the word class in Kreyòl is more "fluid" than its French cognates where semantic shift enables verbs to take a nominal function, or nouns to take an adjectival function, etc. For example, the Kreyòl verb: *gade* (from French *regarder* 'to look') may be used in verbal or adjectival function: *Li gade bèf la* 'He looked at the cow', *Fò ou fè on ti gade* 'You have to have a little look'.

Kreyòl also underwent cases of phonological changes from French cognates, in particular the deletion of sounds such as the postvocalic *r: porte* 'door' *pòt, fenêtre* 'window' *fenèt*. Additionally, we see cases of agglutination where grammatical features such as definite articles, liaisons and partitive articles merge with the lexifier word during the creolization of words such as *church, school, star, and rice* which become: *legliz* (from l'église), *lekòl* (from ***l****'école*), *zetwal* (from *le**s** **é**toiles*) and *diri* from (*du riz* 'some rice'). It is worth noting that monolingual native speakers of Kreyòl today cannot naturally process elision, liaison, and partitive forms involved in these words as two morphemes unless they have a certain level of French proficiency. Even bilingual Haitians who master French never produce *egliz, *ekòl or *ri for church, school, and rice when speaking Kreyòl. This is the major difference that can be drawn according to Mufwene's perspective (2010) between creolization and L2 acquisition. That is to say, in many instances creolization simply involves structural divergence from the lexifier (e.g. French), while in L2 acquisition, learners generally try to approximate the target language. In other words, it is questionable as to whether Haitian monolingual speakers inherently acquired French structures or whether they diverged from it. Nevertheless, other questions need to be considered such as why numerous unrelated creoles spoken in different parts of the world diverged from their

European lexifier and still share structural similarities. These questions certainly provide an opportunity for other perspectives to weigh in, such as substratists and Universal Grammar.

Mufwene (2010: 362)'s superstratist perspective that "vocabulary cannot be learned without any attention to morphosyntactic structures" may not be limited exclusively to the lexifier language, French. There are various Kreyòl vocabulary words that are claimed to originate from African languages (e.g. *houngan* 'vodou priest', *mamba* 'peanut butter', *gonbo* 'okra', *koko* 'vagina') (*cf*. Valdman 2015: 184). The phonemic high nasal vowels found in Kreyòl have also been suggested to be transferred from African languages (e.g. [ĩ] and [ũ], as in *oungan* [ũgã] 'vodou priest' and *pinga* '[pĩga] 'look out, don't … ') (*cf*. Dejean 1980: 118).

For the time being, what is clear is that diachronically French and Kreyòl share similar linguistic properties as well as significant structural differences. The association made between the two languages will be used to inform further discussion on the current sociolinguistic landscape in Haiti, without adopting any theoretical framework on the genesis of creoles for two reasons. First, from a synchronic point of view, the Kreyòl and French languages currently spoken in Haiti are much different from the ones that were used on the plantations back in the 17th century and, second, the sociolinguistic situation is much more complex than is traditionally assumed, i.e. it is not simply about the relationship between French and Kreyòl, but extends to other varieties of Kreyòl, particularly those which are Frenchified Kreyòl varieties.

5 The sociolinguistic landscape in Haiti

So far, I have demonstrated how the issue of dysfunctional education in Haiti has complicated the task of identifying French speakers in Haiti, which explains the reason for combining schooling and an evaluative instrument. Furthermore, I have discussed various theoretical frameworks on the genesis of creole languages and showed how the diachronic similarities between French and Kreyòl are not necessarily indicative of French acquisition, and hence, do not constitute a good metric for counting French speakers in Haiti. In this section, I present an overview of the sociolinguistic landscape in Haiti and demonstrate the importance of using an adaptable proficiency evaluation that considers current linguistic practices of creole-speaking communities, such as diglossia, creole continuum, and codeswitching. While some of these concepts may be more useful to determine French proficiency in French, I caution against the use of creole continuum where different varieties of Kreyòl may be produced by both monolingual and bilingual speakers.

5.1 The status of French and Kreyòl

The two official languages of Haiti are French and Kreyòl. While French had already gained status as the official language of Haiti in 1918, it was not until 1987 that Kreyòl was instituted as the co-official language. The 1987 Constitution officialized both languages but recognized Kreyòl as the language shared by all Haitians (see Valdman 2015: 358). Unlike the latter, French is spoken only by a minority of the population. Even after Kreyòl became the second official language, the Constitution of 1987 promoted French to the highest status by declaring it as the *langue d'instruction* 'language of education', and Kreyòl as an *outil d'enseignement* 'a tool for instruction'.

5.2 Diglossia

In this section, I examine the debate over diglossia in Haiti and explain how this sociolinguistic situation may provide a useful context to account for French proficiency, hence the identification of French speakers. Although the term diglossia can be traced back to ancient Greek civilization, the first association of the term with Haiti was made by Ferguson (1959) who described Haiti as a diglossic country where French is the high-status language (H) for being used in public contexts (for example, education, media, administration), while Kreyòl, the low status language (L), is used in private contexts to conduct everyday activities. The use of the term diglossia in the description of the linguistic situation in Haiti has drawn criticism, particularly from Dejean (1983; 1993), who argues that it does not accurately describe the linguistic situation in the country. Valdman (2015: 363–4) also indicates that the term diglossia cannot be used to describe the linguistic situation in a country where over 80 %of the population is monolingual. Instead, he points out that the diglossic situation is restricted to the elite bilingual Haitians: French serves as the formal register and Kreyòl as the informal one. As for the monolingual speakers, Kreyòl serves all communicative needs. The term diglossia has also been the object of debate among French Antillean scholars, notably Prudent (1981: 15) who emphasized the pejorative connotations of the term as it described the duality of codes for a single language between a literary and scholastic written variety, viewed as more prestigious, and a more vulgar and usually spoken variety, viewed as less prestigious. Others (e.g. Managan 2016) agree that the prototypical Fergusonian definition of diglossia cannot, alone, account for the current sociolinguistic situation in Martinique.

Similarly, Tézil (2022) noted that the sociolinguistic situation of Haiti is more complex, i.e., it is extended beyond the relation between French and Kreyòl to other varieties of Kreyòl, including Frenchified Kreyòl. Consequently, the task of distinguishing French speakers becomes more complicated by the existence of different varieties of Kreyòl, some of which are more of less close to the lexifier language.

5.3 Creole continuum

The post-creole continuum (or simply creole continuum) is frequently used as another adaptable approach to determine social stratification in creole-speaking communities, particularly to count speakers with communicative competence in the lexifier language. It is suggested that because Creole speakers usually remain in contact with the creole language's specific lexical donor (i.e. the superstrate or lexifier) they may replace the creole features with the superstrate ones (Holm 2000). Such processes can occur over a continuum of varieties labeled as acrolect for the variety closest to the standard, and basilect, for the variety farthest from it, with mesolect as the intermediary. The continuum model was first applied by DeCamp (1971) to the gradation of varieties between Creoles and Standard English in the Caribbean (Figure 1). The evidence put forth in support of the decreolization continuum is mainly found in the English-based creole varieties in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana. Bickerton (1975: 24) cites Allsopp (1959) to show how the following Guyanes varieties of the Standard English sentence *I told him* can exemplify various parts of the continuum based on social stratification:

(1) Variation in the post-creole continuum

a. ai tuɔld hɪm
b. ai to:ld hɪm
c. ai to:l ɪm
d. ai tɛl ɪm
e. a tɛl ɪm
f. ai tɛl i
g. a tɛl i
h. mi tɛl i
i. mi tɛl am

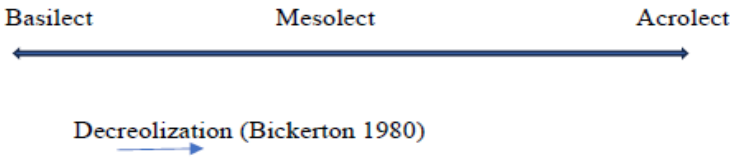

Figure 1: The Creole continuum model.

The first three varieties (1a–c) illustrate the acrolectal forms found in the speech of educated, upper-middle-class speakers, while the next four (1d–g) exemplify the mesolectal usage found among lower-middle-class and urban working-class speakers. Finally, examples (1h) and (1i) represent the basilectal forms used by rural speakers as well as those with little to no education (Bell 1976). However, the association of a form to a particular variety (i.e. mesolect, basilect, and acrolect) varies from one creole language to another. In Jamaican Creole, the overt copula forms *a* and *de* for nominatives and locative predicates are claimed to be basilectal and almost absent in Trinidadian Creole (Deuber 2014; Patrick 2004), but these forms could still be heard in the speech of "older country dwellers" (Deuber 2014: 23). A continuum requires that there be some kind of continuity among the various subgroups (Wardhaugh 2010: 78). That is, the two extreme varieties are varieties of the same language. Wardhaugh also notes that there can be no continuum if the society is highly stratified so that there is little or no contact between the groups that speak the creole and the lexifier language. Likewise, Tézil (2019) argues that because many Creole languages remain understudied, sociolinguistic variation and other linguistic developments (e.g. stylistic, borrowing, calques, codeswitching, etc.) continue to be mischaracterized as decreolization. He suggests that as Haiti's French remains more static and continues to play its symbolic role in Haiti, Kreyòl, on the contrary, continues to gain prestige as it is increasingly used in domains that used to be traditionally reserved to French (e.g. Catholic mass, media, political speeches). Even in extremely formal settings (e.g. Haitian parliament, church sermons), there has been an increased use of codeswitching where the text is read in French and commented on in Kreyòl. Based on this situation, he claims that there is a clear boundary between the two languages, as Kreyòl assumes its linguistic development (e.g. regional variation, sociolinguistic variation) apart from French.

5.4 Kreyòl swa versus Kreyòl rèk

In this section I show how without a robust control for the different varieties of Kreyòl, the continuum model may mislead inexperienced proficiency test evaluators into miscategorizing monolingual speakers as French speakers. As compared to the basilectal variety KR, the features of KS, often associated with cases of decreolization by some scholars (e.g. Bickerton 1980), may appear to make Kreyòl somewhat comprehensible to French speakers who do not have any linguistic competence in the language. The domino effect, however, is that this situation may complicate the question of who counts as French speakers in Haiti.

In fact, with respect to Haiti's Kreyòl, the continuum model is not as extended as it is in English-based creoles. In other words, there is less variation within the basilect and the acrolect in Kreyòl.[1] Valdman (2015: 351) argues that because Haiti's Kreyòl does not undergo decreolization, the labels mesolect, acrolect, and basilect are not altogether suitable. Instead, he suggests the adoption of *Kreyòl swa* (soft/silky Kreyòl), a term coined by Fattier-Thomas (1984), to characterize the Kreyòl variety spoken by the bilingual élite as opposed to *Kreyòl rèk* (rough Kreyòl), the Kreyòl variety spoken by illiterate, rural and lower-class Haitians.2 The most salient feature that characterizes *Kreyòl swa* (KS) is the presence of the front rounded vowels *èu* [oe], *eu* [ø], and *u* [y], as opposed to their unrounded counterparts *è* [ɛ], *e*[e], and *i* [i] found in Kreyòl rèk (KR), as illustrated in the differences of pronunciation of the words "rice", "sister" and "two" in KS and KR (Table 5).

In addition, speakers of KS often produce a postvocalic *r*, which alternates with zero (Ø) in monolingual Kreyòl. Finally, the complementizer equivalent to *that* may be realized as *ke* and *keu* in KS, whereas in the Kreyòl variety spoken by monolingual Haitians, it is absent. Scholars who have observed the use of KS in Haiti (Dejean 1980; Schieffelin and Doucet 1994; Valdman 2015) note that this speech has gained a relatively higher level of prestige compared to the other Kreyòl varieties spoken in Haiti because not only is KS used more frequently by bilingual speakers but also because it may reflect competence in French. For example, Valdman (2015: 75) indicates that even monolingual speakers might strive to produce them in situations that demand the most Frenchified form of Kreyòl they can muster. Dejean (1980: 124) also reported observing cases of hypercorrection among some monolingual speakers who, during a reading task, extended these features to contexts where the production of the front unrounded vowel [i] is obligatory. That is, a hypercorrection in which the word *liv* 'book' is pronounced with a lip rounding **l**u**v* [lyv]. For Dejean (1980: 124–6), these cases are a result of rudimentary schooling.

In a transcription of a recorded radio interview from 1989 between a journalist and the former president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Valdman (2015) identifies several features of KS, such as the French rounded vowels [ø] transcribed *eu* as in *reugrèt* for *regrèt* 'regret', the complementizer *keu*, and the postvocalic *-r* as in *personalite vertical for pèsonalite vètikal* 'straight-up (heroes)'.

(2) The use of Frenchified features in Kreyòl by former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Eskeu m gen dè bagay keu m reugrèt? Wi! M reugrèt…keu legliz la trayi…legliz la jusqu'à ce point là. M reugrèt…keu tèt legliz la pa bay temwanyaj deu kretyen vanyan menmjan anpil evèk

dans le temps te konn bay. M reugrèt keu nons apostolik la rive redui monsenyè nou yo tankou timoun nan men l, nou menm, yon pèup ki gen ero, ero ki genyen … deu pèrsònalite vertical dwat.

Are there things that I regret? Yes, I regret…that the Church betrayed…the Church up to that point. I regret … that the heads of the Church didn't give an example of brave Christians like many bishops used to give formerly. I regret that the apostolic nuncio was able to reduce our monsignors to the role of children he controlled, we, a people that has heroes, heroes who were upstanding.

(Valdman 2015: 353)

Table 5: Variation between KS and KR with front vowels.

KR	KS	French	Gloss
diri [diri]	*duri* [dyri]	riz (du riz)/[dyri]	'rice'
sè [sɛ]	*sèu* [sœ]	sœur [sœʁ]	'sister'
de [de]	*deu* [dø]	deux [dø]	'two'

1 In Managan (2016: 255)'s presentation of the Guadeloupean linguistic continuum, the *gwo kréyòl* also called "rough/common creole" is merged with *kréyòl grangrèk*, the standardized creole variety ("*créole recherché*": *academic Kréyol*) taught in schools and described as one end of the continuum, namely "basilectal creole". The other end of the continuum is represented as the acrolect, metropolitan French, namely our "acrolectal French", since Managan points out that "some Guadeloupeans do speak metropolitan French if they have lived in mainland France."

2 Managan also describes two lects in Guadeloupean, the *kréyòl fransizé* "Frenchified Creole" and a local variety of French influenced by Creole, "Creolized French".

In his analysis of the use of KS in the Haitian media, Tézil (2022: 27) claims that although KS has a lower status than French, it serves both monolingual and bilingual Haitians. In other words, while bilingual Haitians use KS as their L language and French as their H language, monolingual Haitians use KR as their L variety and KS as their H variety, which explains the extension of KS as the Kreyòl variety widely spoken in the media and in schools. While bilingual speakers generally master KS better and use the variety more often than monolingual speakers, who sometimes overgeneralize front-rounded vowels (e.g. *diru* for *duri* 'rice'), both groups do use the variety (to a certain extent), as monolingual speakers tend to be more likely to alternate between KR and KS. Therefore, Tézil proposes a variationist sociolinguistic model in which KS and KR are treated as variants of the same sociolinguistic variable (Labov 1972).

Haitians who speak KS and KR share similar grammar, i.e. the standard Kreyòl variety (SHC) (Figure 2). The most salient difference between KS and KR is the frequency with which the features of these two varieties alternate. For example, bilingual speakers are more likely to

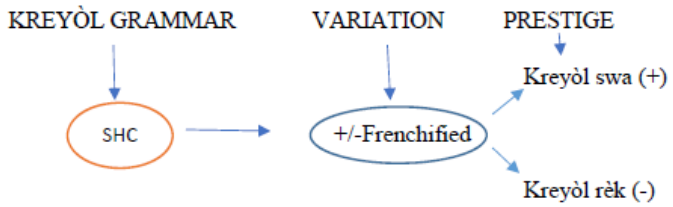

Figure 2: Representation of KR and KS (Tézil 2022: 28).

apply [+Frenchified] to front vowels when speaking Kreyòl, while monolingual speakers are more likely to use [-Frenchified] features. This model shows that while KS may have some prestige associated with it because of the integration of Frenchified features, it does not elevate the KS to the status of French. As Valdman points it out: (2015: 354):

> The most significant sociolinguistic variation is KS, the Frenchified variety of the language used by a minority of bilingual speakers, estimated at 10% of the population, who constitute the upper stratum of Haitian society. Its most salient features are the use of front-rounded vowels and the function words *de* and *ke* (instead of zero) and frequent code-switching. However, precisely because KS is associated with the economically, socially, and politically dominant group, it constitutes a target of imitation for the monolingual majority.

Valdman's claim suggests that KS has extended beyond bilingual speakers to monolingual speakers. Therefore, the assumption that Frenchified forms reflect contact with French or any level of acquisition of French is erroneous. All bilingual speakers know that the French lexical item referring to 'rice' is *riz* and neither the KS *duri* nor KR *diri*. To the contrary, monolingual speakers lexicalize the morpheme di +ri as a single morpheme. Even if they can pronounce itwith a front rounded vowel, it processed as a single agglutinated form: diri/duri. The lexicalization of the French partitive *du + ri* resulted from the genesis of creole languages where grammatical forms such as partitive articles and definite articles merged with French nouns: *diswa* from the French *du soir, legliz*, from French *l'église*. The basilectal form di + ri also results from the genesis of creoles as the front rounded vowels did not occur in the basilectal variety. When the front vowels are produced, it moves the lexical item closer to French. As Valdman's claim suggests, it also makes it easier for many bilingual speakers who are competent in French to codeswitch between French and Kreyòl by using a variety that shares some features with spoken French, as is attested in Tézil's (2019) sample in (3), illustrating codeswitching between French and *Kreyòl swa*. It is a press conference presented by Mirlande Manigat, the widow of former Haitian president Leslie F. Manigat. She is a former candidate in the 2010 presidential election and a university professor and writer. This press conference took place in 2014 following the death of her spouse. The italicized characters are Kreyòl transcriptions, and the non-italicized ones are French. The bold characters indicate cases of phonological features of KS, such as front-rounded vowels and post-vocalic *r*.

(3) Code-switching between French and KS during Manigat's press conference

> …remercier que la presse haïtienne a respecté le deuil. *Pèsòn pa mandem…pa telefonempou mande m entèrvyou…e menm lèu te gon pakèt journalis, jou Mateli te vin lakay mwen an. men …* pas d'question. Merci pour c'la. Pour cette discrétion. Deuxième raison, c'était donc pour parler des cours d'été … du RDNP. La troisième raison, mesdames, messieurs, c'est pour répondre à vos questions. *Gon jounalis ki mande m èskeu m pa ta kab bay presizyon…poukisa prezidan Maniga mouri*. *Yo di anpil bagay. Yo di l mouri deu kansèr …*, [*eureuzman*], *doulèur muskulèr yo te diminue, fò yo t ale ! Li mouri kalmeuman* dans son sommeil.
>
> […thankful that the Haitian media had respected the period of mourning. Nobody had asked me for interviews…and even though there were a lot of journalists when Martelly came over to my house; however, no questions (were asked). Thank you for that … for the discretion. The second reason is to talk about the summer training…for the RDNP (Political party). The third reason, ladies and gentlemen, is to answer your questions. There's a journalist who asked me whether I couldn't provide more precision … why (the cause) of President Manigat's death. They say a lot of things. There are rumors that he died of cancer …]
>
> (Press conference given by Mirlande Manigat on July 10, 2014, following the death of her spouse, Leslie F. Manigat).

This sample shows that bilingual Haitians such as Madame Manigat are competent in both languages, and that switches between Kreyòl and French are frequently used during public speech events. When speaking Kreyòl, Madame Manigat only uses *KS: Yo di l mouri de**u** kansè**r*** ('They said he died of cancer'). However, it is clearly seen that there are instances of intrasentential switching (see Hoffman 1991) that occur inside the same clause or sentences which contain elements of both languages: "*Donk, daprè medsen, daprè spesyalis e kòm son bagay* qui est d'intérêt publique, *m kapab di l*…" 'So, according to doctors, according to experts and since it is something that is of public interest, I can say it' Codeswitching between KS and French in the same speech event is very frequent and increasingly used during church services, at the Haitian parliament sessions, during presidential addresses, radio and television talk shows, debates, etc. It is worth noting that while the French utterances might be incomprehensible to many monolingual speakers, those that were produced in *Kreyòl swa* are perfectly comprehensible to all Haitians.

This sample also leads to the question of why Manigat (like Aristide) did not just use the Frenchified variety since it is comprehensible by all Haitians. Presumably, given that the announcement of the death of the former president was being broadcast locally and internationally, Madame Manigat felt compelled to switch between French and Kreyòl to appeal to the monolingual mass as well as the French speakers in Haiti and the Francophone world.

In the current sociolinguistic situation in Haiti, bilingual and monolingual Haitians do not necessarily associate the same level of prestige with KS as they do with French. In other words, while monolingual speakers may associate a certain prestige to KS because it is spoken by the educated bilingual elite (Valdman 2015: 75) and the fact they do not have linguistic competence in French, bilingual Haitians, however, continue to associate more prestige to French which they use either to elevate the level of formality during public events or just to signal sophistication (Buchanan 1979) and class stratification. This supports Valdman's suggestion that even when both languages are used either in the same or separate speech events, KS (or the mesolectal) is

the “L” (lower prestige) language for bilingual Valdman (1991b:124) and French their “H” (higher prestige) language.

Nevertheless, while it may be easier for French speakers from non-Creole communities to associate the KS word *duri* ‘rice’ with the French *du riz* ‘some rice’, in Kreyòl, however, neither bilingual nor monolingual speakers process the first syllable *du* as a masculine partitive *de le*. One can test this assumption when *duri* then is used with the postposed Kreyòl definite article form *-a*: French: ***le*** *riz* versus KS: *duri* ***a*** ~ KR: *diri a* ‘the rice’. One can note that the morpheme *du* is part of the lexeme, just as it is in the basilectal form *di*. This also constitutes evidence that KS and KR share similar grammar, i.e. the lexicalization of the partitive *du* co-occurs with the French *riz* in both varieties of Kreyòl: *duri* ~ *diri*. The difference between the two forms is sociolinguistically motivated, i.e. speakers reintroduced some French features to create a new variety of Kreyòl, i.e. KS, that they associate with refined speech for Kreyòl. These forms are then adopted by monolingual speakers who characterize them as the speech of the educated bilingual elite. While in Creole contexts, Madame Manigat can switch between French and Kreyòl, in non-creole contexts, such as during interviews with international French-speaking media, she speaks exclusively French and never switches between the two languages.

6 Toward a new perspective for determining French speakers in Haiti

Given the complexity of the sociolinguistic situation of a creole-speaking community such as Haiti and the fact that schooling is not exclusively indicative of French proficiency in Haiti, a suitable evaluation in French is required. In this section I explore the benefits of adopting such an approach and what the mechanisms of designing an adaptable evaluation for French proficiency test to distinguish French from Kreyòl may look like.

6.1 The schooling and French proficiency approach

The idea of combining a French proficiency test with schooling in Haiti to count French speakers is a much effective way to account speaker’s communicative skills in the language. The use of a proficiency assessment can reinforce accuracy and transparency in the estimation of French speakers in Haiti. However, this test ought to be adaptable to the sociolinguistic situation of Haiti where French can be readily distinguished from KR and KS to avoid mis-categorizing monolingual speakers who use KS as French speakers.

There is a vast literature available in the field of creolistics that could be adapted into a proficiency test aiming at distinguishing Kreyòl from French. To do so, French must be distinguished from the basilect (i.e. KR), while KS (the mesolect) is being controlled. This assumes that the basilect is the variety spoken by monolingual speakers and the most distant to French, whereas KS is the variety that is mostly spoken by bilingual educated speakers, and it is more Frenchified. However, at times monolingual speakers do use KS features such as front rounded vowels in formal situations (see Tézil 2022). Based on this situation, monolingual speakers may use KS features to make themselves sound like bilingual speakers, like Aristide, without necessarily speaking French. Moreover, many monolingual speakers have a passive knowledge of basic French even if they are unable to communicate in the language. All these

situations must inform an adaptable proficiency test where all these factors are accounted for and controlled in order to accurately and effectively identify French speakers in Haiti.

6.2 Structural features that distinguish French from Kreyòl

In this section I propose that only speakers who master the major morphosyntactic features between French and Kreyòl can be categorized as French speakers, hence bilingual in Haiti. Despite the diachronic relationship between French and Kreyòl and the contribution of Colonial French to the genesis of Kreyòl, the two languages have structurally evolved apart from each other. Therefore, it would be erroneous to categorize Kreyòl speakers as French speakers simply on the basis of linguistic similarities between the two languages.

French and Kreyòl unarguably share not only lexical similarities but also structural similarities. For example, the position of adjectives is similar between Kreyòl and French: prenominal adjectives: *yon gwo chen/un gros chien* 'a big dog', but *Jan entèlijan/Jean est intelligent* 'John is intelligent' (see Mufwene 2010). However, Bickerton (1983), for example, noted that the grammatical structures of creole languages are more similar to one another than they are to the structures of any other language. In that sense there are properties that are found in Kreyòl that are structurally more similar to Krio and Jamaican than it is to French. For example, serial verb constructions such as *Jan **pote** liv la **ale*** 'John carried the book (away)' are also found among many English-based creoles where the main verb *pote* 'to carry" and the verb of directionality *ale* 'go' work together semantically and grammatically linked to the same subject 'Jan' (John **carry** the book **go**…). To express the meaning of "bring" the verb of directionality is simply switched to the verb *vini* 'come': *Jan **pote** liv la **vini** … John **carry** the book **come*** 'John brought the book (here)' (cf. Valdman 2015). While non-creole speakers who speak French, for example, may easily rely on the similarities in phonology and lexical words between the two languages, there are clear cut morphosyntactic structures that distinguish the two languages (e.g. affixes and suffixes, word orders, tense, and aspects, etc.), many of which are attributed to the influence of African languages (Sylvain 1936).

Table 6 is a comparison between French and the two varieties of Kreyòl (KR, KS) concerning gender agreement, adjective agreement, copula, and subject-verb agreement. More features of distinction are provided in the table in the Appendix.

Despite the phonological differences between the basilectal KRmesye 'sir/mister' and the mesolectal KS meusyeu, the use of the front rounded vowel eu [ø] makes the pronunciation of the latter closer to the French pronunciation (d'Ans 1968). Yet, both sociolinguistic varieties share the same word order in noun phrases (NP), i.e. the definite article follows the noun in both KR and KS: mesye a ~meusyeu a 'the man', as opposed to the French NP: le monsieur. It is worth noting that, unlike French, none of the two varieties associate gender with the lexical words. For example, the French definite article masculine le and the feminine form la alternate with the word fille 'girl' and monsieur 'man/mister'. In Haitian Kreyòl, however, both words are followed by the same definite marker: a: tifi a, mesye a. What determines the form of the marker is not gender but the preceding segment of the lexical noun: ti fi a 'the girl' but *legliz **la*** 'the

Table 6: Some structural features that distinguish French from KR and KS.

Grammatical features	KR	KS	French
1. Gender with nouns	*lakrè* ***a***, *kaye* ***a***	*lakrè* ***a***, *kaye* ***a***	**la** craie, **le** cahier
	tifi ***a***, *mesye* ***a***	*tifi* ***a***, *meusyeu* ***a***	**la** p'tite fille, **le** monsieur
2. Adjective agreement	*Mari mechan*	*Mari mechan/(t)*	Mari est méchan**te**
	Jan mechan	*Jan mechan*	Jean est méchant
3. The copula *être* with adjectives	*a. Jan* ***kontan***	*Jan* ***kontan***.	Jean **est** content.
and locatives	*b. Jan* ***la***.	*Jan* ***la***.	Jean **est** là.
4. Subject-verb-agreement	*a. Jan ekri*.	*Jan ekri*	*Jean* écri**t**
	b. Jan ak Mari ekri	*Jan ak Mari ekri*	*Jean et Marie* écri**vent**

church' (DeGraff 2007: 117; Sylvain 1936: 27). Bilingual Haitians who are competent in both languages know how to change the position of the determiner when they switch from Kreyòl to French: Kreyòl *lakrè* ***a*** > French ***la*** *craie* 'the chalk' and Kreyòl *kaye* ***a*** > French ***le*** *cahier* 'the notebook'. Nonetheless, there have been no indications of confusion or miscomprehension among monolingual speakers in regard to KS. Their major challenges are the structural differences between Kreyòl and French. Given the passive knowledge and the contact that many monolingual speakers have with bilingual speakers (e.g. a monolingual maid or custodian working for a bilingual priest or banker), the phonological features of French are not necessarily as crucial as the grammatical features when it comes to setting French apart from Kreyòl. Several of these phonological features are frequently used in KS when these two speakers' group are communicating (see example 2). The guidelines of this test must then include the most crucial and needed features to distinguish French from all Kreyòl varieties, which, as a result, will help determine whether the speaker is using structures or properties that have been creolized and that do not reflect any competence in French. For example, *legliz* could refer to a noun phrase determiner + noun in French and simply a noun in Kreyòl.

The control of KS is necessary to avoid miscategorizing monolingual speakers based on creolized properties rather than French properties. In other words, since the two languages are in contact, French features may be integrated into mesolectal varieties of Kreyòl. The question remains whether they are being processed as acquired French properties. The recent use of adjective agreement in KS illustrates the reason for controlling for the mesolectal Frenchified varieties when assessing French proficiency in creole communities.

6.3 Controlling for Frenchified features and KS

A test that is adaptable to the sociolinguistic realities of Haiti must carefully control for features that are similar to both languages to avoid miscategorizing monolingual speakers as French speakers. When comparing the difference between French and Kreyòl in Haiti, the difference is not so much at the phonological and lexical levels but rather at the grammatical level. For example, at the phonological and lexical levels, the Kreyòl translation for the English word

“two” can be pronounced similarly to the French word deux, with a front rounded vowel: [dø] or with a front unrounded vowel: [de]. The alternation between these two phonological forms does not always constitute an indicator of a switch between French to Kreyòl and vice versa but instead indicates two forms that vary based on two sociolinguistic varieties where one pronunciation approximates the pronunciation of French which attains a certain level of prestige, hence KS, while the other one moves further to the French pronunciation, hence KR (see Valdman 2015). Similarly, in the Frenchified Kreyòl or KS, the adjective may be marked for feminine: Marie mechan/machant (French: Marie est méchante), while in non-Frenchified Kreyòl, KR, the feminine form of the adjective is generally unmarked: Mari mechan, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7: Some linguistic contrasts and similarities between French and varieties of HC.

Non-Frenchified Kreyòl (Kreyòl rèk)	Frenchified Kreyòl (Kreyòl swa)	French
a. Mari mechan	*Mari mechan/(t)*	*Mari **est** méchante*
b. Li vle de.	*Li vle **deu***	*Il/Elle en veut deux*

Although the realization of the final consonant [t] in adjectives such as *mechante* may indicate some level of proficiency similar to French, the consonant is absent when the subject is inanimate [-animate] in KS. In other words, a Kreyòl speaker is more likely to produce *ti fi a **gran/d*** ‘the girl is big (feminine)’ than *kay la **gran/ d*** (feminine) ‘the house is big’. What this suggests is that KS speakers partially associate the final consonant to animate subjects and not to inanimate subjects, a contrast that does not exist in French where feminine consonant [d] is always realized with both *fille* ‘girl’ and *maison* ‘house’ in spoken French. KS can move closer to French as adjective agreement is extended to natural gender but as a Kreyòl, it is omitted with grammatical gender.[3]

Although the features of KS appear to be closer to French, it is arguably true that its features do not elevate this Kreyòl variety to the level of French. With adjectives and locatives, it is primarily the presence of the copula verb *être* that indicates to Kreyòl speakers that someone has switched to French, because in Kreyòl the copula is always absent, including in KS.[4]

3 During one of presentations on different varieties of HC at the *Grammaires créoles* forum (*Structures formelles du language*, CNRS 2021), it was reported (from personal communication with colleagues from Martinique and Guadeloupe) that gender agreement can be tricky because when communicating in creole, speakers (bilingual or monolingual) can mark it on the adjective, particularly when the subject and the referrent are [+animate, +female].

4 In his work entitled “An Introduction to pidgins and creoles”, John Holm (2000: 200) pointed out that Atlantic creole adjectives do not follow a copula as in their European superstrates; instead, they follow the tense and aspect markers that precede verbs, as in African languages like Mandinka and Yoruba. Thus, when no such markers are needed, their absence (∅) corresponds to the position of the word for ‘be’ in European languages.

Unlike French, nouns and adjectives are not generally marked for gender in Kreyòl. Yet, in KS, gender may be marked on certain adjectives and certain occupational functions such as *dokt**è**/doktor**ès*** 'doctor/female doctor', *kiziny**è**/kiziny**èz*** 'male cook/female cook'. Finally, there is no verb inflection in Kreyòl, whereas in French verb forms vary with the subject and tense, as illustrated in Table 8. These features are among some of the most significant ones that must be included in a test that is designed to distinguish bilingual speakers from monolingual speakers in Haiti. In addition, a more extensive list of features is provided in the Appendix.

7 Discussion

Although the exact proportion of French speakers in Haiti remains the subject of an ongoing debate, there has not been any successful effort to accurately identify those who have sufficient proficiency level in the language. As the quality of schooling remains deficient and teachers are untrained, the hope for proficiency in French for every student in Haiti has faded. According to Luzincourt and Gulbrandson (2010), only 60 % of non-public schoolteachers are evaluated as appropriately trained. In fact, since the 2010 earthquake, there has been a lot of effort to revitalize the education system. With the assistance of international organizations, many more Haitians were able to enroll in schools. However, given that most Haitians speak Kreyòl and only the most advantaged speak French, in the absence of French it is Kreyòl, specifically KS, that is frequently used for instruction in many low-income and rural schools throughout Haiti. This situation underlies the variability in the estimation of Francophones in Haiti where many Haitian students have little to no contact with French despite being enrolled in schools. This reality was also captured in Tézil's field study conducted on the use of KS in which Haitian speakers' were classified into 3 categories: (1) speakers who demonstrated clear communicative proficiency in French (bilingual) and (2) those who had no proficiency in French but who had average and higher level of schooling (MonoE+) and (3) those with no proficiency in French and who never attended formal schools (MonoE-) (Figure 3).

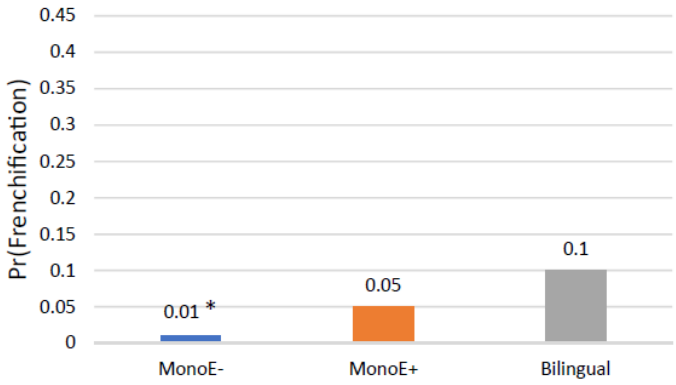

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities for the use of Frenchified Kreyòl by French competency and schooling (cited in Tezil 2022: 304). #$p < 0.05$ significantly different from Mono E+. *$p < 0.05$ significantly different form bilingual. This figure derived from appendix Table 1.

This study breaks with the traditional view that all who attend schools are automatically bilingual speakers. It also emphasizes the complexity of the linguistic situation of Haiti and demonstrates the need for adaptable methodologies.

While a proficiency test is a necessary tool to determine the percentage of French speakers is crucial, designing one to accurately measure Kreyòl speakers' proficiency in Haiti can be challenging. Perhaps, even foreign language proficiency tests that are created to test foreign learners of French may not be as adaptable given the sociolinguistic complexity in the country. Without careful adaptation, this test may create more confusion instead of helping to categorize French speakers in countries like Haiti. The diachronic relationship between of French and Kreyòl and the ongoing contact of both languages can make it difficult for foreign language guidelines to assess French acquisition and, instead, confuses inexperienced researchers and evaluators. For example, as illustrated in Figure 4, most instructors of French would identify **Marie méchant(t/e)* as evidence of French acquisition among beginners of non-creole languages such as English speakers, whereas for Haitians (including French speakers), this sentence is Kreyòl and not a French sentence. In other basilectal varieties such as KR, the same sentence generally occurs without the feminine gender marker on the adjective.

Cases such as KS can mislead inexperienced evaluators and a test that is not suitable to the sociolinguistic complexity of Haiti into miscategorizing some monolingual speakers who produce this Kreyòl variety as Francophone. To switch to French, proficient bilingual Haitians know to add the copula est and mark the feminine form on the adjective. This illustrates the need for a suitable proficiency test that is capable of dealing with the major linguistic differences between French and all varieties of Kreyòl in contact in Haiti. This case is among several other features (see Appendix) that need to be adapted to the Creole communities to accurately account for French speakers, hence bilingual in Haiti. Below in Figure 5 is an overview of the complexity of the linguistic situation of Haiti from diachronic and synchronic point of views. On the left (in diachrony) the creole genesis occurred in contact with the European languages (e.g. Colonial French) and the slave languages (African and others). In synchrony, the creole is now a full-fledged language where the structure is mostly based on the basilect variety.

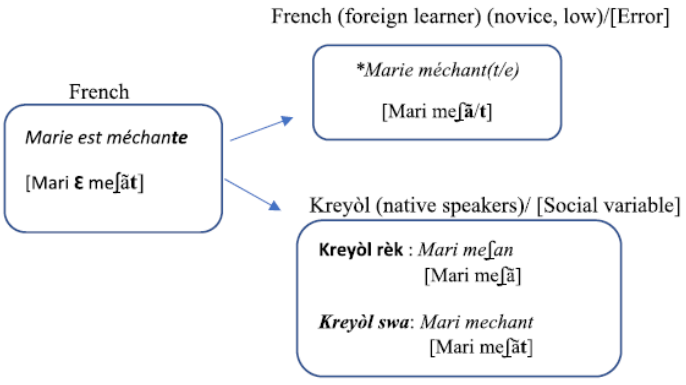

Figure 4: The contrast between French assessment for foreign speakers versus Creole speakers.

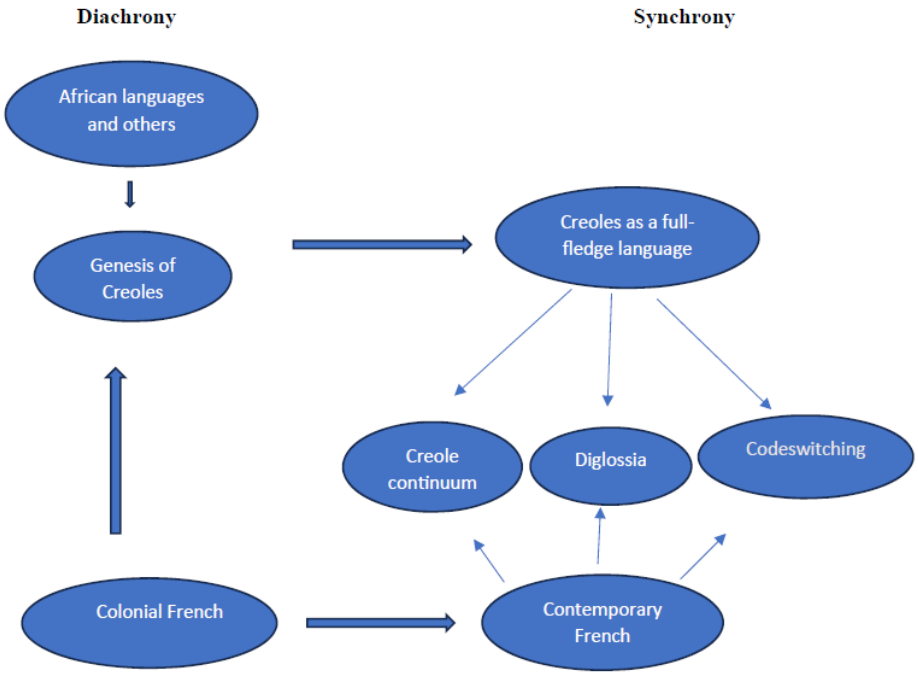

Figure 5: The complexity of the linguistic situation of Haiti.

However, the basilect remains in contact with contemporary French and is often used in diglossic or codeswitching contexts by bilingual speakers. French can be linked to the continuum as well. However, the relation is more abstract than diglossia or codeswitching in the sense that Kreyòl speakers (including monolingual speakers) integrate isolated features from French (e.g. front rounded vowels) to make their speech more or less refined whereas the French speakers do not associate as much prestige to KS, which is considered to be their "L" language. In the contrary, bilingual Haitians associate more prestige to French, which explains their use of it in formal situation (diglossic) or in along with Kreyòl (codeswitching).

8 Conclusions

There is disagreement over the identification of French speakers in Haiti, where the percentage of speakers varies between 5 % and 15 %, and as high as 42 %. One criterion that some scholars (e.g. Valdman 1991a) have used to determine bilingual speakers is by taking into account levels of schooling. The assumption was that traditionally schooling was in French and therefore implies that those who are educated are proficient in French. However, I have shown that in addition to schooling, there needs to be some clear evidence of competence in French given that schooling is not always indicative of competence in French. Moreover, the evaluation of this competence requires an adaptable instrument in which guidelines are designed based on the structural features that distinguish French from Kreyòl, in order to prevent the categorization of monolingual Haitians as French speakers.

In Tezil's study (2022), it was shown that when interaction of education and French proficiency were both taken account, not all of those who attended schools were able to demonstrate French competency. This supports the claim that although contact with French for many Haitians start with schooling, not all Haitians become fluent in the language because proficiency in French in Haiti is often linked to speakers' higher socioeconomic status, access to better pedagogical materials, well-trained teachers, and better educational resources. The amount of contact that low-income students have with French is either limited or inexistent even if they make it to the next-door school where teachers themselves have no trainings and sufficient competence to teach in the language. For this reason, these speakers were categorized as MonoE+, and consequently, they cannot be counted as French speakers or Francophones.

The creation of an adaptable assessment for French proficiency in creole communities is necessary. The failure to adopt an effective approach that reflects the linguistic reality of specific individual communities contributes not only to provoking more unproductive debates over the variability on the number of French speakers, but it also may have significant implications on the future of educational attainments in countries such as Haiti, as well as the development of the country as a whole. Regardless of the social profile of the speaker group that is being evaluated, a test that is adaptable to the complexity of the sociolinguistic and socioeconomic situations is a useful and practical direction.

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Appendix

Major distinctive features between French and Kreyòl.

	Features of distinction	French	Kreyòl	Gloss
1. Plural markers	Marking of plural for nouns by postposed written -s or -x with possible liaison[a]	with [z]: *mes amis (z) ont dit*	*Zanmi m yo di*	My friends have said …
2. Liaison and elision	Liaison and elision are crucial to determine the lexical boundaries between French and Kreyòl since elision and liaison had caused words originated from French to become agglutinated in Kreyòl. Possible error in French by some Kreyòl speakers: *une legliz* rather than *une [n] église*	les [z] étoiles l'église/église	***z**etwal yo* ***l**egliz/*egliz*	the stars the church/ church
3. Determiners	Pre-posed rather than post-posed and gender differentiation:	**le** chat **la** table **mon** chat **ma** valise **ce** livre **cette** valise	chat **la** tab **la** chat-**mwen-an** valiz-**mwen-an** liv-**sa-a** valiz-**sa-a**	the cat the table my cat this book this bag
4. Adjectives	Gender differentiation in many adjectives by the loss of the final oral consonant of the basic feminine form to produce the masculin form	grande/grand [grãd/grã]	gran/gran [grã/ grã]	big/large
5. Habitual action	Habitual action is expressed with inflected forms: the imperfect, as is the conditional	Je travaill**e** Je travaill**ais** Je travaille**rais**	M **ap** travay M **te** travay M **ta** travay	I'm working I worked I would work

(continued)

	Features of distinction	French	Kreyòl	Gloss
6. Near future	In spoken French, futurity is expressed with aller + inf. and non-habitual past with avoir + inf	Je vais travailler J'ai travaillé	Mwen **pral** travay M travay (default past)	I am going to work I have worked
7. 4. Reflexive verbs and verbs of motion	Reflexive verbs and verbs of motion take *être* as a pre-posed auxiliary. In Kreyòl, the copula does not occur.	Je suis parti Je me suis habillé	Mwen pati Mwen abiye	I have left. I have dressed up
8. With verbs, object pronouns, direct and indirect are pre-posed:		Je **les** vois. Je **leur** parle	M wè **yo** M pale ak yo	I see them. I speak to them.
9. Future simple	The inflected future simple is more formal and used in written French.	Je passe**rai** plus tard	M **va** pase pita.	I will/might come by later.
10. Subjunctive	Inflection and or morphological variation in the base form in French. In Kreyòl, the verbal form neither changes nor is inflected for the subjunctive.	Il faut que tu **viennes** Que Dieu te benis**se**	Fòk ou **vini** (Ke) Bondye be**ni** w	You must come. May God bless you.

Note that these features are based on spoken French, as written French competency deserves a different consideration. For example, in French, the plural grapheme *s* is not realized phonetically until a vowel follows. This phenomenon is known as liaison (see feature #1). In Kreyòl, however, plural is marked by default (*liv*: books) and marked with *yo* to mark a plural definite article (the books: *liv yo*). [a]Irregular plural is a special case, e.g., vieil/vieux, animal/animaux. They can be scored higher than regular plural markers.

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