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## Creole Practices as Prescriptive Guidelines for Language Didactics?

A selective overview of Glissant's thoughts  
on language and social identity.

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This article presents some of Glissant's thoughts about the status and usage of the Creole language in relation to French and the consequences for the social imaginary in Martinique and in the Caribbean. The author formulates three thematic focal points: Archipelagic thinking, creolisation and dynamic changes of language forms in a context of power and resistance and, as a third point, the right to remain 'opaque' and the distinction between language form and '*langage*'. The author argues that we may detect a descriptive and a prescriptive dimension in Glissant's thinking about language. In the following section, the author introduces different sociolinguistic studies of language practices in Martinique and the Caribbean giving a particular attention to the school system. The section ends with a brief discussion of how didactics in language teaching intersects with Glissant's thinking. The conclusion presents a proposition of how Glissant's thought may inspire sociolinguistics and didactics.

### 1. Introduction

In *Le Discours antillais* (1981) Glissant spends several pages discussing the forms, practices and the status of the Creole language as part of his description of Martinican identity. Even if his following works have been written in a more abstract and philosophical and often poetic style, the question of lan-

guage is never absent as the practices of creole have inspired what he calls the archipelagic thinking as well as his conception of creolisation. Referring to different examples from his essays, I should like to draw attention to three ways in which Glissant's work has affinities with and may inspire sociolinguistic research on the practices of Creole language but also on multilingualism and teaching and learning of foreign languages. The three points I wish to underline are:

- Archipelagic thinking and the conception of language practice as transnational, relational, socially and emotionally structured and structuring – and unpredictable.
- The occurrence and importance of creative, dynamic and non-standardized language practices that will blend and draw on different language forms depending on different social and cultural contexts. Relations of power and resistance.
- The complexity of communication and reception with the distinction between language form (*langue*) and language as social practice (*langage*). The right to be *opaque* and other implications for the subjectivity processes occurring through language practices.

Following a section in which I will explain these three points in further detail, I will discuss how they may relate to parts of sociolinguistic research. Finally, I will argue that Glissant's thoughts – via this meeting with sociolinguistics – may inspire the debates that are taking place within the didactics of language acquisition. These debates will not, however, be laid out in detail as this would go beyond the scope of a single article.

### *1.1 Glissant and archipelagic thinking*

Glissant's notion of the archipelago is marked by his conception of the Caribbean Sea as an interconnection between the Caribbean islands and parts of the continents of the Americas. In a comparison with the Mediterranean, he argues that the different cultures and peoples that are geograph-

ically situated around the latter have monotheistic religions in common. This sets a fixed and normative frame for understanding conflicts and internal migrations.

By contrast [to the Mediterranean], and in accordance with the same revolving movement of contacts and conflicts, the Caribbean Sea is the sea that “diffracts.” Since 1492, it has been a preface to the continent (in the seventeenth century, it was sometimes known as the Sea of Peru), a place of passage, of transience rather than exclusion, an archipelago-like reality, which does not imply the intense entrenchment of a self-sufficient thinking of identity, often sectarian, but of relativity, the fabric of a great expanse, the relational complicity with the new earth and sea. It does not tend toward the One, but opens out onto diversity. (Glissant, “Creolization in the Making”, 81)

This diversity, however, is marked by a violent history, that of the slave and plantation economy and the almost complete extinctions of all the native inhabitants of the Caribbean islands and the suppression of the native peoples of the continents. In the conclusion of the essay quoted above, Glissant underlines how the different groups of migrants to the Americas have had to create new cultures and lives. They had to make sense of their social practices within a conflict stricken structure of suppression and apartheid. With the exception of the powerful literate elite, this construction of a shared social imaginary was marked either by loss of or by traces of collective memories. Even so, Glissant argues, remarkable creative intellectual and artistic achievements have sprung out from the absence of a clear inherited social structure and from the fundamental quest for survival in the slave plantation economy and its aftermath.

In Glissant’s conception, creolisation is first of all to be understood as inextricably linked to the emergence of the Creole languages born out of this history (*ibid.*, 83).

But archipelagic thought is not merely a metaphor for the particularity of the Caribbean geography and peoples, the language and the transnational

and diffracted histories of the region in opposition to national histories of singular specific peoples. In *Traité du Tout-monde* (1996) as well as in Glissant's later work, it becomes a strategy of relating to other regions and languages of the world without entering into logics of hierarchical comparison. "Tout-Monde" refers to Glissant's conception of the world as a multitude of localities (*Lieux*) that are connected through processes of influence, inspiration, exchange, solidarity as well as domination, exploitation and resistance. While talking about strategic resistance in 1995, Glissant argues that archipelagic identity formation and creolisation have no political and economic power leverage as such. Still, it has spurred examples of other ways of thinking identity in relation to and solidarity with others. His examples in this context are political indeed: "It is not a coincidence that so many people in the West Indies dedicated themselves to the Other: for example, the Jamaican Marcus Garvey in the United States, or the Trinidadian Padmore in Ghana, or the Martinican Fanon in Algeria. Open and strong identity is also a strong solidarity." (Glissant, "Creolization in the Making", 87-88).

As stated elsewhere (Britton; Forsdick; Toumson), Glissant's philosophy remains based on political concerns even if he does not believe in any global political doctrine that may resolve the social injustices emanating from colonial slave history. In *Philosophie de la Relation* (2009), Glissant develops his ideas about how aesthetic creativity carries political leverage as it may influence people's ways of thinking about the world and their own locality in relation to the world. Resistance against colonial and post-colonial oppression, Glissant argues, appears also through an imaginary that does not predict or dictate how things should be: "L'imaginaire du monde ira tout autrement. L'imaginaire pressent, devine, trouve, il ne prévoit rien en termes de rapport, il n'accompagne ni l'avoir ni le savoir. Il ne conclut à rien. Il suppose en archipel » (109).

These points are laid out rather explicitly in *Philosophie de la Relation* and *Une Nouvelle Région du monde* (2006) and have been present all along in Glissant's work.

As argued by Charles Forsdick, Glissant's concepts and poetic style must be seen as related to his numerous contributions in political debates about

the identity and status of the French overseas regions, territories and departments. Instead of accepting the notions available in French or other languages, his political intervention also, perhaps especially, occurs through his creative and innovative lexicon (Forsdick, 134).

As an example of this, we have seen how his conception “Relation” presents itself as both a dialogue with but also an original alternative to Western conceptions of history, geography and subjectivity as he inscribes the value of *errance* and exchanges between experiences situated in different localities as part of what these three concepts should mean. I have already laid these dimensions out with reference to Glissant’s *Intention poétique* (1969) and other of his philosophical works (Bojsen 2008). The present article can be seen as an exploration of the didactic potential suggested in my earlier concluding remark:

Finalement, Glissant nous rappelle qu’aucun énoncé n’est innocent, la poétique a également une intention. Une proposition de l’intention poétique innée dans la géographie de l’errance serait le désir de se mettre en Relation avec l’autre sans prétendre pouvoir tout comprendre [...]. Ce droit à l’opacité nous mènera au centre de la question : pourquoi voulons-nous connaître, comprendre, apprendre, nous mettre en Relation ? À chaque occasion où nous parlons du lien entre la terre, les hommes et les structurations sociales, nous devons nous interroger et expliciter notre *intention poétique*. (Bojsen, 47)

At a more concrete level, Forsdick’s account from 2010 provides numerous examples of how Glissant combines his poetic intention – and vocabulary – with a political engagement, as in his signing of the “*Manifeste pour les ‘produits’ de haute nécessité*,” along with eight other signatories in 2009, following the social unrest in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Picking up on arguments presented in *le Discours antillais*, Glissant is here practicing his philosophy of Relation by insisting on the necessity to bring different disciplinary parameters as well as different localities into a debate about what is ultimately a consequence of colonial practices and histories.

In *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1996), Glissant describes how writers are situated not only locally and in relation to personal experience and ambition but are also sensitive to the diversity of the entire world, sensitive to...

[p]ar exemple, la connaissance ou désir des autres cultures et des autres civilisations, qui viennent compléter les nôtres. L'importance des techniques de l'oralité, qui font intrusion dans la pratique de l'écriture. La présence des langues du monde, qui infléchissent et changent la manière dont chacun utilise sa propre langue. Un magma de possibles pour l'artiste et pour l'écrivain, où il est exaltant et difficile de choisir la voie et de maintenir l'effort créateur. (174)

At this point, we may see that archipelagic thinking has a descriptive and prescriptive dimension. The descriptive aspect concerns Glissant's narration of Caribbean history of creolisation as marked by multilingualism, slave and plantation economy and the consequent domination, hierarchies and maneuvers of resistance including dynamic language and communication strategies. The prescriptive dimension occurs as he encourages us to conceive language, culture and identity as rhizomatic dynamic processes, situated and performed locally, yet constituting and constituted by, influencing and influenced by – in varying degrees and modes – practices and people elsewhere in the world. In addition, the prescriptive dimension includes warnings against the urge for transparency in our heuristic endeavors, against rigidifying conceptions that may function as epistemic violence.

This predilection for embracing newness and non-fixed definitions of language and cultural identity may also explain why Glissant sees creative writing and aesthetics as a privileged platform for political emancipation. But where does it come from? Why is creolisation so tied up with the perception of the creole language as a social practice in Glissant's philosophy?

### *1.2 Resisting monolingualism – creole and creolized language practice*

Creole as a Caribbean language form, with its numerous Francophone, His-

panophone and Anglophone variations – not to forget the variations of West African inputs – is not the language of a nation or an established culture, and yet Glissant dares to establish some common conditions of its emergence and development as social practice. It is the language of the slave and plantation economy and as such, it is marked by forgetting, ambivalence and repression. Referring to the literature of Faulkner and Saint-John Perse as well as local folk tales and songs in Creole, Glissant names ambiguity and detour as two discursive characteristics that appeared as strategies of survival in a context where empathy and contact between different groups of people were taboo and regulated by an extreme regime of violence (Glissant, *Discours antillais*, “Creolization in the Making”).

What we have here is a form of literature that strives to express that which it is forbidden to designate, and finds, against this organic censoring, risky ways every time. The oral literature of the plantations, as a result, is akin to other subsistence – that is, survival-techniques set up by the slaves and their immediate descendants. The perpetual need to get around the rule of silence creates a literature that is not naturally continuous, but that bursts forth in fragments.

[...]

Although that is a general phenomenon throughout the system, in creolophone areas it is more obvious and easier to see. The reason is that, in addition to this necessity for circumvention, creole language contributes another, internal, necessity: that is, the obligation to remake oneself every time on the basis of a series of forgettings. Forgetting, that is to say, integration, of what the language is based upon: the multitude of African languages, on the one hand, and of European languages, on the other – the nostalgia for what is left of the Caribs. The linguistic development of creolisation has proceeded through the settling of these layered contributions, and the resulting synthesis has never been fixed in its terms, despite having asserted the durability of its structures from the beginning. In other words, the Creole language has never professed to be an authoritative edict, that one could use as a basis for tracking down a



linguistic development, where another text comes to perfect the previous one, and so forth. (Glissant, “Creolization in the Making”, 86)

The experienced necessity to forget and make detours, the absence of an explicit institutionalized fixing of the language form and practice are also central parts of archipelagic thinking. While geography and slavery-based economic structures are similar or at least comparable across the Caribbean space and the Americas, the responses and strategies of survival are dynamic and locally situated. Glissant is anticipating later theories of glocality and also emphasizing that the rhizome is not “rootless”, but has multiple roots and is constantly evolving its network.

In *Le Discours Antillais*, Glissant has given numerous examples of how Martinican language practices of Creole occur as part of what he calls a “forced poetics” – both because of the history of the language practices, but also because of the power relation and hierarchy between French and Creole. The different uses of the languages are still part of the matrix of social and economic identity markers (402-403). Despite differences in their methodological approaches, the sociolinguistic studies consulted for this article still attest to this observation.

*Créole fonctionnel, souvent rituel.*  
(Dans le rapport au Commandeur, au Gèreux, etc.)

*Créole comme réticence.*  
(Par habitude de simuler l'incompréhension de l'édit.)

*Créole « standard ».*  
(Créole des békés, le plus « normal ».)

*Créole comme paravent.*  
(La phrase précipitée, mangée, au-devant du sens.)

*Créole comme ornement.*

*(La francisation, dans le rapport aux supérieurs sociaux.)*

*Créole équivoque.*

*(Par volonté de révéler et de cacher tour à tour des significations, dans et derrière l'imagé.)*

*Créole scandale.*

*(Langue de l'auto-agression et du détour.)*

(Glissant, *Discours antillais*, 399-400 (Italics in the original))

In this quote, and in *Le Discours antillais* in general, Glissant is very much in the 'descriptive mode'. But through his later works in which he develops his own philosophical and aesthetic style, he will use this experience of social hierarchies, trauma and resistance in order to argue for the potential emancipation through multilingualism. He also brings the question of linguistic domination and resistance out beyond the boundaries of the Caribbean:

J'écris désormais en présence de toutes les langues du monde, dans la nostalgie poignante de leur devenir menacé. Je conçois qu'il est vain d'essayer d'en connaître le plus grand nombre possible ; le multilingualisme n'est pas quantitatif. C'est un des modes de l'imaginaire. Dans la langue qui me sert à exprimer, et quand même je ne me réclamerais que d'elle seule, je n'écris plus de manière monolingue. (Glissant, *Traité du Tout-monde*, 26)

His idea about multilingualism appears to be a continuation of the ever-changing dynamics of creolisation. Yet, with regards to the variations of the English language as it becomes a global lingua franca, we find a warning against "la simplification, qui facilite les échanges, les dénatures aussitôt" (27). Is Glissant falling into the epistemic tradition of defending standard-

ized norms of language practices against contamination and experimentation? Critical Glissant readers would probably think so while more sympathetic readers would argue that his warning goes against the instauration of universals, against promoting *only* abstract relation without carrying concrete reference points with local specificities into the relation. In the same paragraph he deplores the possible loss of Australian, Canadian and America particularities in a global and simplified English.

Returning to our focal point, i.e. Creole and French, the different strategic uses of the languages are interesting because they challenge the criteria used by sociolinguists to describe the various uses of Creole. This I will return to later.

In addition, these strategies, paired with the suggested intentions and social hierarchies, that appear in the parenthesis inserted by Glissant, may resonate with some of the language practices that we detect among communities of migrants and marginalized youths around the world when they have difficulties acquiring the language forms that give access to social and economic success or the *langages* accepted and knowable to socially and economically dominant groups. It is quite striking how many of the strategies mentioned above are in fact defense strategies that emphatically do not aim at a clear and transparent communication and understanding. On the contrary, they convey intentions of hiding meaning, circumventing meaning, opposing communication or self-aggression. What is going on here?

I will try to answer this in two ways. First by concluding this section on Glissant's thought by discussing Glissant's argument in favor of the right to remain "opaque" or unknowable. Next by presenting a brief account of sociolinguist studies of the Creole languages in the Caribbean.

## 2. The complexity of communication and the right to remain 'unknowable'

Glissant's defense of the right to be unknowable is a cornerstone in his contribution to ongoing debates about transcultural communication. It is par-

ticularly crucial at a time when assessment and written documentation systems are more and more prevalent in various contexts of subjectivation. In *Traité du Tout-monde*, Glissant mentions the Martinican saying “Un nègre est un siècle”. The phrase does not intend to suggest that a “nègre” will go on for a century or will hold grudges. Rather, the saying suggests that he is “im-pénétrable et qu’on ne peut en voir le bout” (112).

This saying, used by different social groups, refers to a lived physical and emotional condition in which the subject preserves itself through opacity. But it also suggests that “*le nègre*” may be unknowable and unfathomable to himself, a condition that Glissant discusses as the loss of collective memory of the past. This loss generates an intuitive reconstitution of identity through traces of meaning, language and memory as we have described in the section on archipelagic thinking.

The right to opacity is ambivalent. On the one hand, it holds a potential means of resistance against the epistemic and authoritarian gaze of the other. It can constitute an emancipating free space to construct your identity as you go along in time and place. Yet, on the other hand, if opacity means that you are also unknowable to yourself and others, it may subject you to an existentially precarious position and make collective political efforts difficult.

As we have seen before, Glissant then moves from a descriptive approach to a prescriptive message: The right to opacity is equally a call for humility and for the renouncement of transparency – also in situations when you are *producing* meaning and not only *objectified* by meaning. Glissant’s reflections on language and plurilingualism are tied up with his efforts as a writer and the common-sense observation that all writing is a sort of translation of thoughts, emotions, ideas and spoken words interpreted and translated into prose by the writer. In the Caribbean – but also in many other parts of the world – many language forms and variations are inserted in this creative process.

*La traduction est comme un art de la fugue, c’est-à-dire, si bellement, un renoncement qui accomplit. [...]. Il faut consentir à cet échappement, et ce re-*

*noncement est la part de soi qu'en toute poétique on abandonne à l'autre.*

*L'art de traduire nous apprend la pensée de l'esquive, la pratique de la trace qui, contre les pensées de système, nous indique l'incertain, le menacé, lesquels convergent et nous renforcent. Oui, la traduction, art de l'approche et de l'effleurement, est une fréquentation de la trace.[...]*

*Traduire ne revient pas à réduire à une transparence, ni bien entendu à conjoindre deux systèmes de transparence. (Ibid. 28-29)*

Glissant is talking about writers and, at times, specifically about poets. Poets may use language forms such as French, but they also create a *langage*, a certain practice of the chosen language form. *Langage* as a concept is often subject to interesting debates in French academia. I do not intend to go into details here but Glissant's use of the term complies well with the Saussurian use of the concept in which *langage* denotes the general practice of one or more languages by a social collectivity. The term thus includes *langue*, understood as actual language form and arbitrary system, as well as *parole*, the speech act. In addition, Glissant's use of the word may also comply with Benveniste's definition in which *langage* includes, not only the manifest and non-verbal occurrence of semiotic systems, but also the *capacity* to produce meaning (Kyheng).<sup>1</sup>

According to Glissant, a poet is implicitly telling his reader in the very first lines: "Je te parle dans ta langue, et c'est dans mon langage que je t'entends" (*Traité du Tout-monde*, 122).

Indeed, the question of constituting oneself and others through the use of language forms and *langage* are concerns that mark Glissant's understanding of both concepts. He criticizes monolingualism and argues in favor of non-hierarchy receptions of multilingualism. Here he uses the metaphor of the archipelago again in order to suggest how different language forms and *langages* may interact and influence each other. And he reminds us that despite this process, language forms and *langages* also remain connected to localities (specific social places and practices) – for longer or shorter periods of time.

Par-delà ces langues, l'imaginaire (ou les imaginaires) des humanités pourrait inspirer des langages, ou des archipels de langages, qui équivaldraient à l'infinie variance de nos relations. La langue, c'est le creuset toujours bouleversé de mon unité. Le langage, ce serait le champ ouvert de ma Relation. (Ibid. 112)

Informed and inspired by Creole language practices and their strategies of resistance through opaqueness, Glissant theorizes an approach that will transform this resistance into a matrix of social and semiotic creativity. The consequence might be that the uses of either the French or Creole language forms do not necessarily mean that you are fixed in distinct social positionings if you are able to activate your *langage* and invent new relational positionings, a so-called multilingual imaginary.

This outline that I have tried to sketch of Glissant's thought, – firstly, archipelagic thinking as inspired by Caribbean histories of creolisation, and secondly, the particularities of the Creole language and its language forms – is sustained by several accounts from sociolinguistics working on Creole languages. This I will try to show in the following section. These studies often deal with the meeting between Creole and French in the school system. They naturally deal with how we teach languages in educational systems and as a result, they have to take account of some of the sociolinguistic subjectivity processes and historical contexts that have marked Glissant's thought.

### *2.1 Sociolinguistic perceptions of the emergence of Creole as language form – and language?*

Speaking of the Francophone Creole, Glissant depicts a history of a language that is neither 'dialect', nor a variation of a standardized language norm, nor a 'pidgin', but a language that draws on linguistic structures and vocabulary from the West African languages and the languages of sailors from England

<sup>1</sup> Kyheng's article provides a well referenced account of how *langage* has been defined, used and discussed in French academia.

and Normandy. Glissant emphasizes that when he uses the terms 'dialect' and 'pidgin', it is without intending any socially derogatory qualification.

He may be making a subtle reference to the works of Robert Chaudenson and other scholars whose work has established that Creole in the Francophone Caribbean is just as much a language as any other even though it belongs to a group of languages that has emerged from a colonial slave plantation context. The initial resistance against qualifying Creole as a language and not 'merely' pidgin or dialect was due to a resistance against the idea that the slaves should have produced a language form that could be acknowledged linguistically as comparable with the language of the masters. And against the idea that the slave communities could have produced a proper language practice that would not be immediately transparent to the slave owners (Hazaël-Massieux).<sup>2</sup>

Sociolinguistically, it is debatable whether Ferguson's definition of diglossia is adequate when we wish to describe the relation between Creole and French. This skepticism is also relevant when we look at the period up till the 1980s when Creole was openly rejected or prohibited in public discourse and considered to be an identity marker of low social status. Still, all Martinicans born in the island, including the Békés, have continued to speak Creole and it has been used in advertisements and music. As such, it has remained a vital part of Martinican identity and of the painful racialised colonial histories shared to various extents by different social groups.

Bernabé and Confiant accept the notion of diglossia. Still, they are aware of the discontinuity and complex overlaps between the basilect of Creole and a 'frenchified' (*francisé*) Creole on the one hand and, on the other hand, a normative French and creolized French (212-213).

Glissant's portrayal of the strategic use of Creole may give us some indications of practices that confirm this distinction, but also others where an *énoncé* may situate itself ambiguously between these two categories creating an uncertainty of whether the utterance is intended as creolized French or 'frenchified' Creole. In addition, normative French speech acts in Martinique is also likely to be different than those in continental France. As speech acts in French in the Caribbean are emblems of social prestige, they are often

marked by a hyperperfectionist style that will fetish written prosody more than orality (Bernabé & Confiant, 215).

Gélinas' thesis provides us with numerous accounts of these observations, described in other sociological accounts or her own data. In some instances, these accounts seem to convey examples of code switching, on others, changes of register (many interlocutors claim that Creole is used in situations of intimacy and familiarity though not as part of amorous or sexual seduction). In other instances again, the language practice could more accurately be described as a process of creolisation, as a dynamic archipelagic identity practice because the blending of the two languages will change in time and place even within a neighborhood or a family.

Today, French is necessary in order to communicate with public administration and to achieve social and economic prestige. Yet mastering Creole is also necessary in order to interact socially at other levels of Martinican society, particularly if one wishes to understand and interact in cultural and social processes of Martinican everyday life (Gélinas, 97). Does this mean, then, that the status of Creole as an 'inferior' language form has completely vanished from the social imaginary?

An indication of the social language hierarchy can be detected by some figures published in 1999 as part of one of the rare scientifically documented studies on the social practices of the Metropolitans (French residents from continental France) residing in the French Caribbean. Surveys and interviews (carried out in the late 1990s) suggested that 86,6% of the Metropolitans felt 'integrated', yet 80% did not speak Creole and only about 43% understood a little Creole even after 10 ten years in the language area (Eustache cited in Gélinas, 82).

The fact that an exogenous professional and linguistic elite can function in the Caribbean without engaging actively in the local language has stirred up debates and conflicts. It designates an important social segregation along dividing lines of language and educational backgrounds. In 2004, numerous politically engaged Martinicans presented an overt protestation in the media

<sup>2</sup> These points are also underscored by Véronique, ("Créolisations et creoles").



against the high number of metropolitan teachers in Martinique. The tone and arguments were harsh and often referred back to colonial history and slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Eustache's study suggests that most Metropolitans are in the Caribbean for professional reasons. As for teachers, Gélinas reminds us of the French point system for school teachers which requires them to teach a number of years in specific schools such as in socially precarious suburbs or overseas territories and departments (82-83). This means that many of the metropolitan teachers may not really want to teach where they are assigned to do so, a situation that undoubtedly affects their engagement and perhaps their willingness / ability to learn Creole.

However, some responses suggest that another reason not to learn Creole could be the fact that local Martinicans might perceive it as an insinuation that their French is not very good and thus as an insult. Or, the Metropolitan would be taken for a Béké, and thus suffer from other social tensions because the Békés are at times accused of keeping to themselves and not engaging properly with social and political concerns of the local communities (Gélinas).<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2. *The presence or elimination of Creole in the educational system.*

The debate about the linguistic status of Creole has always been a sensitive issue. In the Caribbean as well as in continental France the educational system has historically endorsed an ideology in which the French of the Parisian region is the only proper language practice and all other language forms and variations within France and its overseas territories are less sophisticated. At best they could be exotic and testimonies of certain folklores, but as a rule, they were considered to be unable to convey the rigorous and sophisticated representation of meaning that only French – as taught by *l'Éducation Nationale* – could convey.

It was forbidden to speak Creole in public schools until 1982 (Bernabé & Confiant) and many parents, conscious of the fact that fluency in French is necessary in order to achieve social and economic success, prefer to speak

French with their children. Earlier studies suggest that parents might even punish their children if they spoke Creole. Practices vary from one place to another, but a general tendency seems to be that in low income households, Creole is often spoken more freely than in homes of the middle class.

The debates about the status of Creole, including its insertion as a school subject following the efforts of the Research group GEREK of the *Université des Antilles et de la Guyane*, have changed this situation somewhat (Bernabé & Confiant; Gélinas).

How has this affected the social status of Creole and the pedagogical and didactic approach to the teaching of French – and Créole? According to Bernabé and Confiant, the didactic approach is changing from an approach that would teach French as a foreign language (FFL) to a didactics that will teach French as a Second language (FSL).

But the notion of a ‘second language’ is again born out of an institutional monolingual thinking that presumes that languages are learnt one at a time, one after the other. Sociolinguist studies carried out since the 1990s suggest that the first language of most Martinicans is not Creole, but both Creole *and* French used interchangeably often within the same sentence (Genelot, Negro and Pelasges; March 1996: 211, quoted in Gélinas 99). Bernabé and Confiant readily admit that the didactics of teaching FSL in the DOM schools need to be translated into the specific context of how Creole – and French – are practiced in the areas and they hope that the research of GEREK may be helpful in the process (2002). In their introduction to *Du plurilinguisme à l'école* (2008), Prudent, Tupin and Wharton equally express certain reservations with regards to the didactics of French as a foreign or second language. What might be needed is a didactics of plurilingualism.

The notion of code switching is not unknown to the teachers in the French Caribbean and at times, it is endorsed as part of the pedagogical tool box. However, some studies suggest that the notion of code switching still conveys an idea of two or more distinct and fixed language forms that the

<sup>3</sup> See the documentation provided in the form of newspaper clips by Gélinas.

<sup>4</sup> It is not clear from Gélinas' data whether these are representative or isolated opinions among the Martinican population.

children ideally should master in their pure and flawless forms separately or interchanging.

As an example, the study carried out by Genelot, Negro and Pelasges raises questions about how to measure linguistic competence when two languages are simultaneously activated. When scholars and teachers use a methodological framework that depends on a clear distinction between what is French and what is Creole on the one hand, and on the other, will translate the blending of linguistic structures from one language into another as a “lack of bilingual competence”, the creative character of Creole as a dynamic non-fixed and social practice as suggested in Glissant’s archipelagic thought is not included.

The studies by Anciaux seem to propose a methodology that may help to propose a different didactics. His account of how teachers in Guadeloupe and Haiti use French and Creole in class show that teachers will use Creole with the purpose of reaching all the “mental representations of the children’s repertoire”. His account also reveals interesting data of how Creole is more often used when teachers are only speaking to one or few students or to students from rural or low income households, thus confirming the pattern suggested in other studies. Unfortunately, we cannot tell how many of the teachers are Metropolitan or local. Finally, conversations in Creole carried out by both teachers and students are – in their own opinion – often used to express emotions and to facilitate motoric exercises and learning (38-39).

In Haiti Creole is used much more in the schools (80%) (average numbers for all conversations, including conversations between students) than in Guadeloupe (20%). This may be explained by looking into the language competences of the teachers but also by considering the historical differences, Haiti being the first slave plantation colony that managed to free itself from colonial rule in 1804. Anciaux himself points to the fact that the majority of the Haitian population only speaks Creole. Anciaux’s data also show that, at an average level, the students in both areas will speak to their teacher in French more often than what the teacher does when addressing them. This suggests that the social disciplining which encourages preference of French is at work in both Haiti and Guadeloupe. In Haiti, teachers will speak in

French in only 10% of their speech acts, yet the students respond in French in 30%. For conversations between students, the number is 20%. In Guadeloupe, the teachers will speak French in 80% of the conversations, the students responding in French 90% of the time while speaking French in 70% of the conversations between themselves (32).

Anciaux endorses the use of code switching in the classroom. His study has documented that intraphrastic code switching happens more frequently in Guadeloupe than in Haiti. The teachers state that they may use a creolized French rather than a proper Creole in order to meet the students where he / she is and bring him / her into French. Anciaux comments that...

Cette pratique, qui sur le plan pédagogique peut s'expliquer et se justifier, ne permet pas une séparation du français et du créole dans l'expression. Autrement dit, plusieurs interlectes, tels que le français créolisé ou le créole francisé, apparaissent entre ces deux langues. Les enfants ne distinguent pas les frontières entre chaque langue et ne savent plus si un mot est français, créole ou les deux. (36)

It is Lambert-Félix Prudent who has coined the notion of 'interlecte', a meta-concept that denotes the dynamic evolution and interchange between Creole and French including all the variations between the two more or less established language forms (Prudent, « Diglossie et interlecte »). This notion is now widely accepted and used among sociolinguists working on Martinican data (Romani; Véronique, "Émergence des langues creoles" & "Créolisations et créoles" among many others).

### *2.3. Plurilingualism and didactics*

My presentation of Anciaux's study has in some ways anticipated a presentation of the didactic field in which Glissant's thought inscribes itself when it comes to teaching languages in the school system. Therefore I shall now merely draw attention to ideas from the European continent that may also affect and complement Caribbean experiences and practices.

For Castelotti and Candelier the notion of didactics refers to all practices that seek to favor learning. They propose that we understand plurilingual didactics as embracing both comparative and transversal approaches. As an example, the formulation and organization of curricula, the learning processes itself, the naming of competences that are sought to be enhanced, the planned activities for the students and the available materials are all constituents of a given didactics (Candelier & Castelotti, 180-182): “Le tout devant s’effectuer, selon nous, en fonction des caractéristiques particulières des contextes sociolinguistiques considérés” (180).

But sociolinguistic contexts are vast and complex. When you choose to take some aspects into consideration in your didactic approach, you are also making a sociopolitical choice. When the two authors recommend that plurilingual didactics should encourage students to draw on all their linguistic knowledge, in any language as part of the learning process (182), it has sociopolitical implications. The ideal of speaking like an imagined native speaker is abandoned.

Castelotti and Candelier underline the importance of the Common European Framework of Reference, a transnational and plurilingual research project, started by the European Commission in the 1990s. The project amounted to a set of recommendations for teaching that would enhance “Plurilingual and pluricultural competences”.<sup>5</sup> Their 2001 publication from the European Council endorsed a definition proposed by Coste, Moore and Zarate in 1997. In this definition, the desired competences denote the ability to interact culturally and verbally in different languages, at different levels and to different degrees, the ability to get the most out of one’s own cultural and linguistic experience and “capital”: “L’option majeure est de considérer qu’il n’y a pas là superposition ou juxtaposition de compétences toujours distinctes, mais bien existence d’une compétence plurielle, complexe, voire composite et hétérogène, qui inclut des compétences singulières,

<sup>5</sup> For a recent account of this project, its effect and perspectives, see M. Byram & L. Parmenter (eds.) *The Common European Framework of Reference. The Globalisation of Language Education Policy*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2012.

voire partielles, mais qui est une en tant que répertoire disponible pour l'acteur social concerné" (quoted in Candelier & Castelotti, 189).

It appears that this understanding of plurilingualism could be seen as complementary to the creolisation processes described by Glissant and Prudent.

Yet, as noted by Candelier and Castelotti, the formulation of competence is now very individualized. It situates each individual in relation to an implicit sociolinguistic context which is the European Union and its language policy of plurilingualism. This policy will also affect practices and debates in the French Caribbean as Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana are part of the European Union.

Yet there are no tools that describe a didactics that will deal with forced poetics or self-denigrating understandings of one's language practices as those detected in the Francophone Caribbean.

### **3. Concluding remarks: Glissant's contribution to sociolinguist research and didactics of plurilingualism**

As I tried to show in the first section of this paper, Glissant's essays contain both a descriptive dimension and a prescriptive dimension in which he tries to formulate alternative ways to think and perform social and cultural identity in relation to different language practices in the Caribbean. His contribution to sociolinguistics and didactics of plurilingualism can be identified as:

- A plea for archipelagic thought in which social and cultural identities and language practices in the Caribbean are interconnected with those of the Americas. They are marked by the histories of slave economy and are thus conveying values and experiences of relating that cut across time and space. They sustain processes of remembering or deal with loss of memory, strategies of resistance and detours, local positionings while remaining open for contacts with other localities.

- A plea for plurilingualism understood not only as the acceptance of a multiplicity of language forms, but also as of a plurality of dynamic and experimental language practices. This means that instead of teaching and assessing language practice in relation to formal language standards and codes, Glissant's didactics will encourage knowledge and competence in handling and renewing the repertoire of all the language forms available in the class room in relation to specific relevant situations in a given social context. The practices of French and Creole are understood both as variations and as normative constructs that are intertwined with historical and contemporary contexts of identity formation and social politics. Such awareness could serve as a means to confront patterns of self-destructive and self-negating thinking.
- A plea for an acceptance of language practices as phenomena of translation, not only between language forms but also between different dynamic forms of *langage*. In relation to this: an acceptance of the right to opacity and an acknowledgement that there will be elements in the collective production of meaning, which are not transparent to everyone involved.

These three overall contributions complement those parts of sociolinguist studies that I have presented above. In addition, they also give some explanation to why language practice occurs in the way described by Prudent below. Finally I mean to suggest that Glissant's thought may help us to conceive a language didactics in the Caribbean in a way that will give a name to and explore the practices of a "forced poetics" that are implicit in the following observation by Prudent:

Ce qui me passionne (un aspect riche de la sociogenèse), c'est l'idée que des gens qui n'auraient a priori que des raisons de parler « bien », de se conformer aux lois du code, se mettent ensemble à construire une parole ni créole ni française, mieux encore à la fois créole et française. Comme si français et créole ne suffisaient pas à leur expression et qu'ils avaient

besoin d'en rajouter avec un parler mixte et irrégulier (Prudent, « Réponse au texte »).

The effort to teach Creole and establish the language in school curriculum is most certainly an attempt to counter the self-destructive and self-negating part of creole language strategies. The question is whether it does not merely install a new standardized language which the population will feel compelled to deviate from or that they will not relate to because oral practice will be more dynamic than written standardization allows for (Gélinas). How may we move beyond qualification of language practice as “mixte et irrégulier” in a context where the occurrences that call forth such qualifications are the norm, a useful norm, and not an exception?

Didactics does not merely touch upon what is to be taught, thus sustaining an authoritarian position of transferring canonized knowledge. It is even more so a reflection about learning. Kullberg's observation that even if Glissant appears to want to “repossess the area [the Caribbean] linguistically”, the endless number of ways to name the spatial concepts keeps the referent unstable (Kullberg, 188-189) can be seen as an example of such a didactic: His writing opens up questions about how language practice will name space and locality, yet he dictates no rigorous answer and definition as they must be invented and experienced locally and dynamically, related yet heterogeneously by the people concerned. The question of whether a language practice is ‘mixed’ or not becomes irrelevant, what matters is where it makes sense, what sense, to whom and with which “poetic intention”.

This leads me to add another and perhaps more general contribution by Glissant and that is the importance of the subjectivity process as part of language acquisition (Kramsch).

Glissant's description of the different practices of Creole and their connection with the speakers' understanding of Self and Other reminds us that it is not enough to consider subjectivity at an individual level, we must also consider how particular exercises of power and processes of silencing may impose passiveness or revolt. In fact, such exercises and processes may be the result of language policies and language didactics that will stigmatize the lan-



guage practices of children who fall outside of those language and *langage* variations that are considered prestigious and desirable in the particular society.

The distinction between language form, (the material constituents of the *énoncé*, be they oral or written, significant pauses or bodily signifiers) and the *langage* (the certain practice, socially and individually constituted) may be very useful. It may help students to conceive their own possibility (and responsibility) to create different *langages* by using the constituents of the language forms available to them.

Glissant's work reminds us about the fact that we as language learners will react differently to a group of *énoncés* and a given learning situation depending on our *langages*. Furthermore, the exemplary expressions of the target language form, written or oral, will be marked by various *langages* as well, emanating from the institution of the teaching, the nature of the text and the teacher's personal and professional *langages*. I have mentioned how the French Caribbean schooling system is affected by decisions and debates that are taking place in Europe. As a consequence, it is obvious that we ask ourselves whether we may also learn and borrow ideas from the Caribbean into European contexts and the complexities of language hierarchies on the continent.

The need to be able to interact in multilingual contexts and to understand how the global interferes with local practices is something that most learners and teachers of language practices can relate to. It supports the tendency in research of FLA didactics to break with the conception of language as a practice to be connected with a national territory and the culture (often named in the singular) ascribed to it (Kramsch; Risager).

Let me end on a suggestive prescriptive note: the language and cultural practices are evolving so fast that it may make more sense to teach young generations to maneuver in this "magma of possibilities", to make them able to identify and participate actively and consciously in the processes through which different kinds of language practice are influencing each other rather than only assessing their competences in an imagined formalized standard language practice.

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