ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Factors Affecting the Teaching and Learning of Haitian Creole in The Bahamas

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ABSTRACT

Lack of accurate information on many aspects of the Haitian culture and society; preconceived ideas about Haïti and its people; dated information on the linguistic status of the Haitian Creole (HC) language; and the socio-economic condition of HC speakers living in The Bahamas are some of the factors that have negative effects on the practice of teaching and learning HC as an academic subject at The College of The Bahamas (COB). This article consists of three main sections: Section one clarifies the obsolete question of HC being considered as a variety of French. It provides theoretical, practical, linguistic and socio-linguistic evidence that HC is a distinct language in its own right with its own pronunciation, spelling system, grammar, structure, and pragmatics. Section two describes the socio-linguistic situation of the HC speakers in The Bahamas as a factor influencing the use of the language in the country. Section three describes the challenges of teaching HC at COB and examines the perceptions and attitudes of students on New Providence to the HC language.

INTRODUCTION

Although Haitian Creole (HC) is not taught in elementary and high schools in The Bahamas, every year, more than 250 students enroll in introductory HC courses at the College of The Bahamas (COB) in order to fulfill their mandatory foreign language requirements. Some students even go further by continuing the study of HC at the intermediate level through new courses recently added to The College's curriculum. In addition, HC, among other languages, is offered to the general public via the College's International Languages & Cultures Institute (ILCI). Therefore, there may be more students learning HC as a foreign language at COB than at any other higher education institution in the world. What are the factors that can conceivably explain such interest in learning HC in The Bahamas? What are the factors that may influence the teaching and learning of HC in The Bahamas? What are the challenges and the implications of teaching HC in a country where there is a stigma attached to being a HC speaker? A paper dealing with teaching HC in The Bahamas

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would be incomplete without a discussion of the status and the perception of the HC language in Haiti and elsewhere. This paper thus starts with an introduction to the HC language. Then it identifies and discusses the social factors that affect the teaching and learning of HC as an academic subject at COB.

IS HAITIAN CREOLE A LANGUAGE OR A BROKEN FRENCH?

Although the question of whether HC is a language or not is now obsolete in the academic sphere, HC is often mistakenly referred to as a French dialect or as "broken French". Students on New Providence, Bahamas are no exception in considering HC as "broken French". This fact is confirmed by a socio-linguistic survey of students within public and private high schools on New Providence and at COB. 64.9**%** of the respondents from COB agree with the statement *Haitian Creole is broken French.* In the public high schools, 87**%** agree with the statement and 88**%** in private high schools also agree. In total, 80.06% of the students agree with the statement *Haitian-Creole is broken French* (see Table 1). These results show that the majority of students do not have accurate information about HC.

Table 1
Responses to the statement "Haitian-Creole is broken French"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	64.92%	28.56%	6.49%
Public High Schools (n=165)	87.27%	6.67%	6.06%
Private High Schools (n=100)	88.00%	5.00%	7.00%
Total (n=419)	80.06%	13.41%	6.53%

It is well established that HC is a distinct language in its own right with its own pronunciation, spelling, grammar, structure and pragmatics. Nevertheless, it might be useful in the Bahamian context to clarify the matter. HC is by definition a language. Many dictionaries provide several definitions of the word "language" and HC goes in concordance with all of them. "A system of communication by written or spoken words, which is used by the people of a particular country or area." (Longman dictionary, 2003, p. 1056). HC is without any doubt a system of communication with written and spoken words. And, it is used by the entire population of Haiti.

"The method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way." (Jewell & Abate, 2001, p. 957). This definition stresses the words *human, structure* and *convention*. HC is undoubtedly a means of human communication using words in a structured and conventional way. Otherwise it would be impossible for HC to be an official language used in everyday life communication by more than 8 million citizens in Haiti.

"The system of communication used by a particular community or country." (Pearsall, 1999, p. 798). The last definition emphasizes the words *community* and *country*. The Haitian community is well-known for being the first free black republic in the world. Haiti has been an independent country since 1804. In sum, HC is by definition a full language according to dictionaries.

Legally, HC is on par with other languages like English, Spanish and French. The Haitian Constitution of 1964 (1968) allowed and even recommended the use of HC “for the safeguard of the material and moral interests of these citizens who do not have a sufficient knowledge of the French language” (Article 35). In 1979, a presidential decree allowed the use of HC in schools, both as a language of instruction and as a school subject. A

revised constitution drafted in 1983 recognized French and HC as the Republic's two national languages. The current constitution, promulgated in 1987, recognizes the juridical equality of the country's two languages. In particular, it recognizes HC as the language shared by the entire population and its role as a symbol of national unity. Article 5 states: "All Haitians are united by a common language: Creole. Creole and French are the official languages of the Republic" (1987 Constitution, ch.1, art. 5). In summation, HC is a language under the law.

A small number of speakers can sometimes cause a dialect to be denied the status of language. Socially, the HC language is shared by all Haitians. It is spoken by basically the entire population of Haiti, estimated at 8.5 million inhabitants. HC is the Creole language with the largest number of speakers and it is the most widely spoken Creole language in the world. It is also spoken by members of a Diaspora estimated at more than 3 million persons who have emigrated mainly to the United States, Canada, and France, as well as many Caribbean countries, especially the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Cayman Islands, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and The Bahamas. HC is the most advanced Creole language as it has been standardised for use in education, administration and the media. There are several newspapers written in HC and a number of radio and television broadcasting in HC in Haiti as well as in cities such as Montréal, New York, Miami and Boston.

The domain of use of a dialect in a community is another important factor that may affect its linguistic status. At the school level, HC has been very dynamic in Haiti. Since 1979, HC has been taught as a target language and it is also the medium through which other subject matter, such as history, geography, mathematics and science are taught. As a matter of fact, many textbooks and pedagogical materials have been created in HC so that all children can be educated in their native language. Many other strong Haitian communities outside of Haiti are following the trend. HC is also taught in the school systems of large North American cities such as Montreal, New York, Miami, and Boston. At all levels (middle school, junior high school, and high school) there exist classes where HC is the subject of instruction and is also used as a classroom vehicle to teach subject matter like mathematics, science or social studies.

At the university level, studies on HC have developed significantly. Many serious academic works have been published on HC making it arguably the best described Creole language in the world. Many doctoral theses presented in North American and European universities have studied various linguistic aspects of HC. There exist more than a dozen bilingual dictionaries, notably: Faine (1974), Nougayrol and Bentolila (1976), Targète and Urciolo (1993), Freeman and Laguerre (1996), and Valdman and Iskrova (2007), as well as several comprehensive descriptions of the language: Comhaire-Sylvain (1936), Hall (1953), d'Ans (1968), Pompilus (1973), Dejean (1977), Valdman (1978), and Lefebvre (1998). These works are complemented by several academic papers studying the syntactic, phonological, and lexical structure of the language, for example: DeGraff (2005), Fattier (1998), Cadely (1994), and Valdman and Iskrova (2003). There also exist two descriptions of regional varieties of HC: Etienne (1974) for Northern HC and Racine (1970) for Southern HC. Descriptive data about HC also appear in major publications dealing with general issues in the field of Creole studies, particularly Lefebvre (1998) and Chaudenson (2001). However, that vast literature contrasts with the scarcity of studies dealing with the

methodology of teaching HC as a foreign language.

Despite the paucity of good HC higher education textbooks, the Haitian language, culture and literature are taught in many prestigious colleges and universities in the United States and the Caribbean. The University of Kansas has an Institute of Haitian Studies and Indiana University has a Creole Institute where HC, among other facets of Haitian culture, is studied. Additionally, the University of Massachusetts-Boston and University of Florida offer seminars and courses every year through their HC summer institutes. Other universities such as Brown University, Columbia University, York College of City University of New York, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and University of Miami offer classes in HC.

Linguistically speaking, HC differs from French in many ways. HC has distinct features that do not exist in French. While most of the HC lexicon derives directly from French, its syntax and its system of rules are very much different from the lexifier language. The main differences between French and HC can be illustrated by looking at different aspects of the HC language.

Most of the vocabulary of HC derives from French with significant changes in pronunciation and morphology. This is why HC is considered as a French-based Creole and French is called the lexifier language for HC. However, HC is not a variation of French just because most of its lexicon is derived from this language. It should be mentioned that HC has not borrowed words only from French. In HC, there are words which originated from other languages. For example, *manyòk, kasav, kanari* and *mabouya* are words of Caribbean origin–perhaps Arawak or Carib–and they mean, respectively, manioc, cassava, clay pot and hut (Breton, 1999). The word *oungan* which is a voodoo priest and *zonbi* meaning ghost are words of African origin. The Creole word *bouske* which means to search for and *sapat* meaning sandal are words of Spanish origin. HC speakers have also adopted some English words and expressions such as *tcheke* which means to check and *fè bak* meaning to move backwards.

HC is not a variety of French or any other language just because its lexicon originates from these languages. A language is more than a list of words. The words, in a sentence, have to be in a certain order to convey meaning. The order of the words, the syntax, is precisely what makes HC different from French. For instance, these two languages exhibit different syntactic behaviors in the domain of the determiner. The singular form of the definite determiner is post-posed in HC while it is pre-posed in French. And, it occurs in five different forms: *la*, *lan*, *nan*, *a*, *an* while it has three forms in French. Consider the following examples:

Table 2
Definite Determiner

Haitian Creole	French	English
pitit la	l'enfant	the child
fi a	la fille	the girl
kay la	la maison	the house
kreyon an	le crayon	the pencil
kaye a	le cahier	the notebook
machin nan	la voiture	the car
mont lan	la montre	the watch

The possessive adjective is also an area where HC displays a different behaviour from French. The HC possessive adjective is post-posed but in French it is pre-posed. The HC possessive adjective forms are: *mwen*, *ou*, *li*, *nou*, *yo.*

Table 3
Possessive adjectives

Haitian Creole	French	English
pitit mwen	mon enfant	my child
fi ou	ta fille	your girl
lajan nou	notre argent	our money
liv li	son livre	his/her book
machin yo	leur voiture	their car

The most interesting distinctive feature that HC displays is the combination of a definite article and a possessive adjective to make the noun more specific. Compare:

Table 4
Definite article and possessive adjective

Haitian Creole	French	English
manje mwen	ma nourriture	my food
manje mwen an	ma nourriture	my food/ *the food of mine [2]

In the HC sentence *manje mwen an*, there are two different determinants: a possessive *mwen* which means my and a definite article *an* which means the. It is impossible to translate this HC sentence into French or English. The translation of this sentence into French would be **la ma nourriture* and in English it would be *my the food. This HC sentence cannot be translated simply because this specific syntactic feature does not exist in either French or English.

Another good example is the emphatic construction using *se* and *ye*. HC has a unique way of using the syntax to stress various parts of speech while other languages use intonation. To emphasize a part in a HC sentence, you may use the introducer *se* with it at the beginning and add *ye* at the end of the sentence. It's impossible to create the same types of emphatic construction in French and English except by using vocal emphases, such as intonation, to render the meaning expressed in the emphatic HC sentence. Table 5 illustrated how the two neutral declarative HC sentences *Nou se kreyol* and *Li nan lakou a* can easily be translated into French and English, however, it is impossible to translate their emphatic counterparts *se kreyol nou ye* and *se nan lakou a li ye* into either French or English.

Table 5
Emphatic sentences

Haitian Creole	French	English
Nou se kreyol.	On est creole.	We are Creole.
Se kreyol nou ye.	*C'est creole qu'on est.	*It's Creole we are.
Li nan lakou a.	Il est dans la cour.	He is in the yard.
Se nan lakou a li ye.	*C'est dans la cour qu'il est.	*It's in the yard he is.

Another distinguishing feature between HC and French is the absence of inflexion in the expression of tense and person of verbs. While French uses inflexion, HC uses function words. Unlike in French and English, there is no conjugation in HC. The form of the verb in HC does not change as in French and English. The following examples show that only one form of the HC verb is used for different subject pronouns:

Table 6
Verb conjugation

Haitian Creole	French	English
Mwen manje	Je mange	I eat
Ou manje	Tu manges	You eat
Li manje	Il mange	He eats
Nou manje	Nous mangeons	We eat
Nou manje	Vous mangez	You eat
Yo manje	Ils mangent	They eat

[2]The * symbol (asterisk) is used to indicate that the sentence is incorrect.

While French uses inflexion, HC uses function words to express different aspects or tenses. Unlike French and English, the form of the verb does not change to express various tenses such as past, present and future; or various moods and aspects such as the indicative, the conditional and the progressive.

Table 7
Expression of time and aspect in the verb

Haitian Creole	French	English
Mwen manje	Je mange	I eat
Mwen ap manje	Je mange	I am eating
Mwen te manje	Je mangeai	I ate
Mwen pral manje	Je mangerai	I will eat
Mwen ta manje	Je mangerais	I would eat

All things considered, HC is a complete and autonomous linguistic system different from French or any other language. In other words, there are no valid theoretical, practical, linguistic or socio-linguistic reasons to believe that HC is a French dialect or broken French.

If, nowadays, some linguists and non linguists continue to underestimate and minimize HC by considering it as a variety of French, it has a lot more to do with racism and ignorance than linguistic analysis. According to DeGraff (2003), modern linguists are not as racist as those of earlier eras, but they adopt some ideas that connect to old prejudices against HC. Many linguists have always displayed a racist attitude towards HC mostly because of the social condition of its speakers. Due to the interconnection between language and identity, HC is still often considered as an inferior or a poor language just because of the economic status of some of the speakers of that language.

THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC STATUS OF HAITIAN CREOLE SPEAKERS IN THE BAHAMAS

One's native language or dialect reflects one's life experience. Since "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (Fanon, 1967, p. 17), the native language of any given speaker is a sign of who he or she is. Linguistic variation illustrates the interconnection between language and identity. People from different geographical places speak different languages or dialects or speak the same language or dialect differently. Even within the same small community, people might speak differently according to their age, gender, ethnicity and social or educational background.

According to various estimates, Haitian nationals make up more than 20% of the population living in The Bahamas. Many of them do not speak English fluently or speak it with an accent different from the Bahamian one. Because of the way they speak English, HC speakers can then easily be identified in The Bahamas and be labelled "Haitian" (Fielding, Ballance, Scriven, McDonald & Johnson, 2008). The question of the HC language in The Bahamas is therefore inextricably linked to the "Haitian Question" (Sears, 1994). In other words, no study can pretend to deal with the question of the HC language in The Bahamas without referring to the native speakers of that language living in The Bahamas.

Data from various sources estimate that between 40,000 to 80,000 Haitians have relocated to The Bahamas. This relatively high percentage of Haitians in The Bahamas is of great concern to Bahamians since most of the Haitians enter and settle in the country illegally. Because of "the failure of politics" (Weinstein & Segal, 1992) in Haiti and the deterioration of its economy, Haiti is considered to be the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with approximately

80% of Haitians living in absolute poverty. As a result, pressures to emigrate, usually illegally, are strong. Many Haitians choose to cross the border into the Dominican Republic to work on sugar plantations. Many more, usually identified as "boat people", risk their lives in deep waters trying to go to Florida or The Bahamas.

Given that The Bahamas is an archipelago of 700 islands with many entry points into the country, it is extremely difficult for Bahamian immigration officials and defence force officers to effectively prevent and counter illegal migration. As a result, Haitians are numerically the largest migrant group in The Bahamas. The large number of Haitians living on the islands of The Bahamas is perceived as a threat to many Bahamians. In some studies, the presence of Haitians in The Bahamas is considered to be a "problem" (Marshall, 1979). Additionally, Haitians are said to place a burden on government resources as they take advantage of the free medical care in the government-owned hospitals and clinics, as well as free education for their children who seem to make up a large number of the total student population. There is a fear among Bahamians that Haitians may "take over" one day. International Organization for Migration (2005) suggests that the Bahamian media contribute to the perpetration of the belief that Haitians are taking over The Bahamas. Their report also states that "Haitian nationals resident in The Bahamas do not have a voice in the media" (p. 5).

While some studies suggest that Haitians place a strain on certain areas of the Bahamian economy, no serious study supports the hypothesis that Haitians may take over The Bahamas. If "to take over" means "to become the powerful or the leading group", it is very unlikely for Haitians living in The Bahamas to take over when considering their legal and socio-economic conditions and because of the way they are ill-treated by the Bahamian society. According to Fielding et al. (2008):

> Haitian migrants are associated with illegal status, poor education, and poverty. Language is a barrier which prevents Haitian migrants from fully participating in society and makes them distinct from the general population. Children born in The Bahamas of migrants may face the prospect of being stateless. It is clear that the Haitian community lives in poorer circumstances than other residents in the country (p. 47).

How could such a group take over a country in which most of its members are "stateless" (Ferguson, 2003, p. 24) and "looked down upon" (Small, 2004) by the host society? How could Haitians living in The Bahamas, who have no influence on the media, with no economic or political power, be able to take over this country? Bahamian policies and attitudes toward Haitians make it practically impossible for the latter to take over. Historically, Haitian residents in The Bahamas have been the victims of a whole array of abuses by the authorities. According to the Human Rights Delegation Report (HRDR) on Haitians in The Bahamas (2004), "The Bahamian government's treatment of Haitians living in The Bahamas is a human rights emergency. Both long-term Haitian residents of The Bahamas and recent arrivals from Haiti suffer serious abuses of their fundamental human rights." (Section III, para. 1) and the report deplores the fact that: "Bahamian policies are designed to hold the Haitian population in a state of fear and poverty, and, when convenient, to force Haitians out of the country" (Sect. II, para. 8).

The work permit system and the process of granting Bahamian citizenship demonstrate how the Bahamian government discriminates against Haitians. By issuing the work permit document to the employer instead of to the

worker, the government exposes the worker to potential abuses by the employer. In fact, the name of the employer appears on the permit preventing the worker from seeking other employment if fired. Thus, the worker depends entirely on his or her employer for obtaining legal status in The Bahamas. It must be noted that a worker can be arrested and deported at any time for not having a valid work permit. The HRDR report (2004) stresses the fact that "the work permit system lies at the root of the oppressive control of Haitians in The Bahamas. It operates, in effect, as a system of indentured servitude--backed up by the threat of imprisonment and, ultimately, repatriation" (Sect. IV C, para. 1).

These systemic anti-Haitian prejudices are social factors that affect the use of HC and the practice of teaching HC in The Bahamas. Socio-linguistically speaking, a person uses language not only for communication or for expression but also to create a representation of himself or herself in relation to others with whom he or she interacts. All the social factors mentioned earlier seem to have a great impact upon the use of the HC language in The Bahamas. Because of all the discrimination against Haitians, many of them hide their Haitian characteristics by trying to represent themselves as Bahamians. As they do not want to be picked on, they avoid speaking HC in public. Some of them even deny their Haitian identity. Thus, there are good reasons to believe that the stigma attached to being Haitian in The Bahamas may also be attached to the HC language in the Bahamian context. This is not surprising when we know that Creole languages remain, in Alleyne's words, among "the most stigmatized of the world's languages" (Alleyne, 1994, p. 8). Considering the specificity of the socio-historical circumstances of its development, the socio-economic condition of its speakers and its socio-linguistic relationships with other languages, should the HC language be taught in The Bahamas with the same methodology used for teaching other foreign languages?

TEACHING HAITIAN CREOLE IN THE BAHAMAS

The Foreign Language Department at COB offers three languages: Spanish, French and HC. Students may choose one of these three languages to complete their mandatory foreign language requirement. As European languages, the status of Spanish and French is different from the status of HC which is a Creole language of a third world country. Thus, the classroom environment and the challenges are different depending on the language students choose.

There exist techniques and principles of second language teaching that apply to the instruction of any foreign language whether it is Spanish, French or HC. However, due to many factors, teaching HC in The Bahamas requires some special teaching techniques and strategies.

Tourism, emigration, study abroad, employment, linguistic interest and family heritage are usually the main reasons people learn a foreign language. In U.S. universities and at COB, students choose French or Spanish because they are most likely interested in visiting, living, studying, or working in French- or Spanish-speaking countries or with French or Spanish companies. Students in The Bahamas and elsewhere obviously do not learn HC for these same reasons. Students learn HC in U.S. universities because some of them are of Haitian descent and they want to get in touch with their roots. The majority of other Americans, who are learning HC, do so because they plan to go to Haiti with humanitarian organizations such as Save the Children, Food for the Poor, UNICEF or CARE.

In The Bahamas, some students take HC classes because their parents are Haitians but most of the students choose HC for reasons that are unusual. When asked about their motivation for choosing HC, students' responses often have something to do with controlling the large number of Haitians living in The Bahamas. Students usually say that they need to be aware of what is going on in their country. They often even say they do not feel comfortable living among so many Haitians who speak a language that they do not understand.

In fact, while there is no official second language in The Bahamas, HC is arguably the second most widely-used language in the country. Many institutions in the public and private sectors such as immigration, the defence force, police, hospital, customs, education, and business are in need of people who can communicate efficiently in HC as well as people who understand the culture and the historical background of Haitians. Many Haitian–Bahamians born and raised in The Bahamas speak Creole but they do not master the written form of the language. They cannot read or write HC. In addition, most Haitian–Bahamians do not travel to Haiti; as a result, they do not have a superior knowledge of the culture and the lifestyle of Haitians living in Haiti. In view of the fact that students do not choose HC for the same reasons they choose to learn French or Spanish, and taking into consideration the socio-economic situation of the HC speakers and the stigma attached to being Haitian in The Bahamas, teaching HC in the Bahamian context entails special foreign language teaching techniques and strategies.

To come up with objective data about the question of teaching HC in the Bahamian context, we conducted a socio-linguistic survey of a random sample of 419 students at COB and in public and private high schools on New Providence. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of Bahamian students toward the HC language (the language of the other*)* as factors influencing the practice of teaching HC in The Bahamas. Considering the interconnectedness of language and identity, we also expected to establish a correlation between the perceptions and attitudes of Bahamians toward their own vernacular (themselves) and toward the HC language (the others*)*.

The results of the study indicate that students on New Providence agree that HC should be taught in schools in The Bahamas (see Tables 8 and 9). While 60% of private school students disagree, 66.86% of COB students and 69.09% of public school students agree with the statement: "Haitian-Creole should be taught in public and private schools in The Bahamas" (see Table 8).

Table 8
Responses to the statement "Haitian-Creole should be taught in public and private high schools in The Bahamas"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	66.86%	25.99%	7.15%
Public High Schools (n=165)	69.09%	22.42%	8.48%
Private High Schools (n=100)	35.00%	60.00	5.00%
Total (n=419)	56.98%	36.13%	6.89%

To the statement: "There should be a degree programme in Haitian-Creole at COB", 72.8% of COB students and 50.91% of public school students agree while only 48% in private school disagree (see Table 9). The results of the private high school students are in stark contrast to those of the public high school students and the COB students. It is so, perhaps, because of the greater percentage of public school students who have more intimate contact with Haitians.

Table 9
Responses to the statement "There should be a degree programme in Haitian-Creole at COB"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	72.8%	19.5%	7.70%
Public High Schools (n=165)	50.91%	30.03%	18.78%
Private High Schools (n=100)	42.00%	48.00%	10.00%
Total (n=419)	55.23%	32.51%	12.26

Although private high school students are not very enthusiastic about learning HC, all results put together show that, on the whole, students on New Providence are in favour of HC being taught in the schools and also support the idea of introducing a degree programme in HC at COB. Surprisingly, while students want to learn HC, they do have negative perceptions and attitudes towards this language.

As previously mentioned, Bahamian students on New Providence believe that HC is broken French. From the sample of 419 students at COB and in public and private high schools on New Providence who responded to the survey questionnaire, more than 80% agree with the statement "Haitian-Creole is broken French" (see Table 1). There are many students learning HC at COB. What causes 64.9% of the respondents from COB to believe that HC is broken French? It may be because students do not have accurate information on many aspects of the Haitian culture and also because of dated information about Creole languages. Due to the socio-historical circumstances of their development, the status of language has always been denied to creole languages. Traditionally, HC has been considered as broken French by the colonizers and even by Haitian linguists. As discussed before, regardless of their origin, there is a stigma attached to all creole languages. There exist deep-rooted prejudices against creole languages whether Spanish-based Creole, French-based Creole or English-based creole. As a matter of fact, the same students who believe that HC is broken French also consider Bahamian dialect as bad English. Not surprisingly, 59.1% of all students agree with the statement "Bahamian Dialect is bad English" (see Table 10). As indicated in Tables 1 and 10, private high school students have negative attitudes toward both HC and Bahamian dialect. Over 88% of them believe that HC is broken French and 72% agree that: Bahamian dialect is bad English. Perhaps because both are creole languages, there exists a correlation between how students in The Bahamas perceive Bahamian dialect and how they perceive HC.

Table 10
Responses to the statement "Bahamian dialect is bad English"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	52.58%	39.45%	8.44%
Public High Schools (n=165)	52.73%	33.94%	13.33%
Private High Schools (n=100)	72.00%	16.00%	12.00%
Total (n=419)	59.10%	29.79%	11.11%

Besides considering HC as broken French, students on New Providence are against the idea of granting HC official status in The Bahamas. While 50.91% of public high school students agree, 54.5% of COB students and 66% of private high school students disagree with the statement "Haitian-Creole should be the second official language of The Bahamas after English" (see Table 11). The results show that unlike COB and private high school students, public high school students on New Providence agree that HC should be the second official language of The Bahamas. But surprisingly, 66.7% disagree with the statement "All Bahamian government and

official documents should be translated into Haitian-Creole" (see Table 12). It seems that students in public high school did not fully understand the meaning of the two correlated questions. Unlike public high school students, the response of COB and private high school students is consistent as 62% of COB and 79% of private high school students disagree with the statement: "All Bahamian government and official documents should be translated into Haitian Creole". In sum, students do not ascribe any value to HC since they consider it as broken French. In a similar vein, they do not advocate or encourage its widespread use in The Bahamas as an official language.

Table 11
Responses to the statement "Haitian Creole should be the second official language of The Bahamas after English"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	33.7%	54.5%	11.8%
Public High Schools (n=165)	50.91%	32.73%	16.36%
Private High Schools (n=100)	23.0%	66.0%	11.0%
Total (n=419)	37.9%	48.7%	13.4%

Table 12
Responses to the statement "All Bahamian government and official documents should be translated into Haitian Creole"

	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
COB (n=154)	35.0%	62.0%	3.0%
Public High Schools (n=165)	20.0%	66.7%	13.3%
Private High Schools (n=100)	18.0%	79.0%	3.0%
Total (n=419)	24.33%	69.22%	6.45%

CONCLUSION

All the data together indicate that although students are in favour of HC being taught in the schools, they have negative perceptions and attitudes toward this language. As a matter of fact, students consider HC as broken French and they do not want it to reach official status nor do they encourage its widespread use in The Bahamas. If students' reasons for learning HC are not genuine and the atmosphere in which they are taught is not relaxed then the results of the process will definitely suffer. What are the factors that can conceivably explain such attitudes? If HC is officially recognized as the second language of The Bahamas, what would be the implications?

A language can be used for many purposes in a community. One group can use it as a tool to control and oppress another group. In the colonies, language had always been used for the express purpose of establishing and perpetuating systems of dominance and hierarchies between groups. For example, in colonial societies, language had served to advance the status of the colonizers while relegating the colonised to the status of slaves. Early examples of the use of language for this purpose include the designation of Carib and Arawak languages as "primitive languages" in contrast to Spanish, French and English as "civilized languages". Are we now imposing these pressures and systems on ourselves?

Incidentally, an interesting parallel has been drawn between the perceptions and attitudes of Bahamians toward HC and Bahamian dialect. The results reveal that students also have negative perceptions and attitudes toward Bahamian dialect, their own language. One might conclude that if Bahamian dialect rises to official status this may signal a liberation of many Bahamians who have also been marginalized in their own country. Bahamian students would finally have the

official right to use their native language in the classroom. The same way that language can be used as a tool for oppression, it can also be used for liberation and self-development. If Bahamian dialect is used in the classroom, students will be more successful because research shows that students perform better in school when they are taught in their native language. Similarly, if the HC language is granted official status in The Bahamas, it would mean increased freedom and more rights for Haitian residents; it would mean greater minority rights; it would be the end of systematic exclusion and discrimination against Haitians. As stated in Fielding et al. (2008):

> ... it is in the best interest of The Bahamas to educate rather than marginalize Haitians. (p. 48). […] Rather than being considered a threat, as migrants can be, these people should be seen as a legitimate part of a multicultural society who enrich the lives of all residents (p. 49).

In conclusion, the teaching and learning of languages in The Bahamas must have a multi-faceted approach which takes into account traditional considerations as well as local factors and issues at play. It is important for language instructors to recognize that there are three different languages in use in Bahamian schools, and adopt relevant and more effective teaching techniques and strategies that correspond to the background and needs of the students.

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