



# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

## **M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports**

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

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# Haitian Creole

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# Haitian Creole in Rhode Island

More and more students are in Rhode Island classrooms after immigrating from Haiti. After substituting in multiple ESL classrooms in Pawtucket, I have encountered numerous students speaking only Haitian Creole. The students know little to no English, and are unable to communicate easily with their peers and teachers. I chose to research this language, because I feel the need to know how to best teach and guide these students. Much of the focus for ESL teachers had been placed on Spanish, but with the increase of Haitian Creole speakers, the focus needs to be shifted.

# Originations

- Since 1961 Haitian Creole is one of two official languages of Haiti
- It is based on the meshing of 18<sup>th</sup> century French vocabulary and Western & Central African grammar
  - It was a way for European plantation owners to communicate with their slaves
- Initially seen as a breakdown of the French language
  - Seen as a slang





- Haitian Creole is also spoken in other countries due to immigration
  - Cuba → 2<sup>nd</sup> most spoken language
  - Dominican republic
  - America (*NYC, Boston*)
  - Canada (*Montreal, Quebec*)
- Most Haitian Creole speakers are trilingual, speaking three of the following languages:
  - Haitian Creole
  - French
  - Spanish
  - English



- In 1978 Haitian Creole was given an official spelling and it became mandated that elementary schooling be taught in Haitian Creole
  - However, today French still dominates the language of instruction
- Parents trust the French text books and want their students to use only French texts
  - Controversy remains, because if the students do not comprehend French, how can they understand the text?
- Book stores carry mainly French literature even though Haitian Creole literature is available





# Communication Style

## Haitian Creole Etiquette

- Generalities
  - Direct communication → speaking their minds
  - Smooth inter-personal relations
- Reassurance
  - Haitians will reassure their conversational companion that everything is alright and on track, even though it may not be
- Eye contact
  - Keeping you eyes on the speaker is a way of showing respect and interest; it is seen as rude and disrespectful to turn your eyes away from the speaker
- Greetings
  - Initially roles must be assigned due to age, relationship, and gender to show respect; once this has been achieved the conversation is very casual
- Physical space
  - Speakers get very close to one another often fixing each others clothing, never keeping their hands in their pockets

# Communication Style

- Haitian Creole began as only a spoken language
  - Passing down traditions and literature orally is still very important to Haitian Creole speakers
  - Haitian Creole literature is minimal but is slowly growing in popularity through popular newspapers
- Speakers of Haitian Creole use a great deal of metaphors, imagery, and proverbs when speaking to one another.
  - This is slowly disappearing as the youth are refusing to use this communication style & urbanization
- *Ex) Manman pa janm mode pitit li jouk nan zo:*  
A mother never bites her child to the bone
  - Meaning: The equivalent of this proverb in the English language would be “there is nothing like a mother”. In Haiti, this proverb is used to show or recall the goodness of a mother to her children.



# Nouns & Pronouns

## Haitian Creole

Nouns that proceed a number are not pluralized

*Ex) I saw two movie.*

Difficult time distinguishing between subject & object pronouns

*Ex) He talked to I.*

## English

Nouns must be pluralized when they proceed a number greater than one.

English is tricky, because we have so many words and situations that break the so-called ruled, especially when distinguishing between I and me.

# Verbs

Haitian Creole	English
No subject-verb agreement	Subjects and verbs must agree.
No –ing verb forms <i>Ex) He likes to walk.</i>	The –ing verb form indicates something is happening in the present.
Future and present tense verbs are represented by present tense <i>Ex) You go in two days.</i>	Future tense verbs have helping verbs and present tense verbs do not. Future and present tense verbs must be distinguished between, because they change the meaning of the sentence.

# Negatives

## Haitian Creole

It is common to use double negatives

*Ex) I don't go nowhere.*

## English

English teachers in American place great emphasis on not using double negatives. Creole speakers do not see the double negatives as a problem.

# Phonemes

## Haitian Creole

10 vowels and 3 semi vowels

*Ex) /i/=meet*

*Ex) /ç/=fought*

## English

When students in America are learning how to read, teachers tell them to sound out the word. Haitian Creole speakers will often times put the Creole vowel sound in place of the English vowel sound.

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