GUYANESE: A FRENCH CREOLE

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Guyanese is one of the languages spoken in French Guiana, a for-
mer French colony[1] in South America. French Guiana belongs to the
equatorial basin of the Amazon River and has natural borders with
Surinam and Brazil.[2] (See map, p. 28.) French Guiana occupies
91,000 square kilometers, approximately the size of Portugal. How-
ever, this French territory is almost uninhabited, its total population
not exceeding 50,000 people. Most of the population can be found on
the Atlantic coast from Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni on the western side
of Guiana, near the Surinam border to Saint-Georges-de-l'Oyapock
on the eastern side, near the Brasilian border. More than one-third
of the total population of French Guiana lives in Cayenne, the most
important city on the coast.[3] A jungle type of vegetation covers most
of the interior and makes this part of the country, called the Inini
region, almost impenetrable. The only town of some importance in
this region is Maripassoula with 2,000 inhabitants.

The population in French Guiana does not represent a homogeneous
entity. One can mention the following ethnic groups, by order of
numerical importance: Creoles, Europeans, Africans, Chinese,
Indonesians, and Indians.[4] A similar variety can be found on the lin-
guistic level: each ethnic group has preserved its own language.
However, French is the official language, and on Cayenne Island,
most of the population is bilingual. Outside Cayenne Island, where
the influence of French is less noticeable, Guyanese becomes the
most important means of communication among the various groups.
The total number of Guyanese speakers represents more than two-
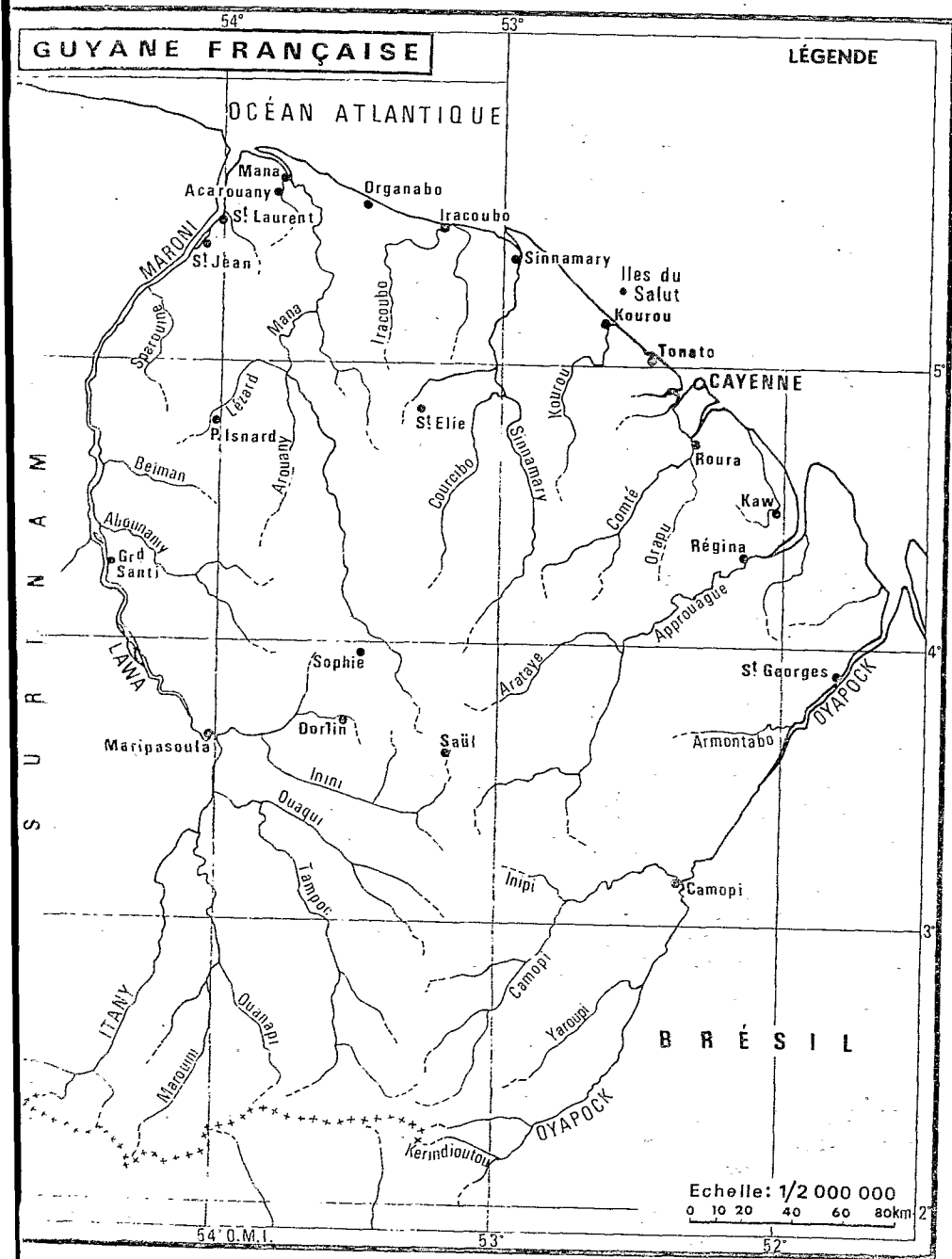thirds of the population.

GUYANE FRANÇAISE

LÉGENDE

OCÉAN ATLANTIQUE

Mana
Acarouany
St Laurent
St Jean
Organabo
Iracoubo
Sinnamary
Iles du Salut
Kourou
Tonato
CAYENNE
St Elie
P. Isnard
Roura
Kaw
Régina
Sophie
St Georges
Dorlin
Saül
Armontabo
Maripasoula
Camopi
Kerindiouto

MARONI
LAWA
ITANY
Sparouine
Mana
Iracoubo
Lézard
Arouany
Beiman
Abounamy
Grd Santi
Courcibo
Sinnamary
Kourou
Comté
Orapu
Approuague
Arataye
Inini
Ouaqui
Tampoc
Camopi
Inipi
Yaroupi
Marouini
Ouanari

OYAPOCK
OYAPOCK
BRÉSIL

Echelle: 1/2 000 000
0 10 20 40 60 80km

54° O.M.I.

French is considered the prestige language, highly necessary for work and promotion. As a result of this, Creole has acquired the sociolinguistic connotation of a 'second-class language'. In other words, to speak Guyanese is equivalent to using a 'patois' or 'jargon', and the monolingual Creole speaker betrays his lack of education and low social status. The 'elite' despise Creole, arguing that it does not fulfill the requirements of a 'civilized' language. For these people Creole will be restricted to informal speech situations. It is interesting to note that the Guianans will shift from French to Creole when they do not want to be understood by Europeans. In these situations, Creole is then used as the secret language of a community. Creole is not taught at school nor are students allowed to use it in the classroom. At home, parents will make every effort not to speak Creole with their children, fearing that the use of the 'patois' might interfere with their learning of French. The linguistic question is a very sensitive one, particularly among educated Creoles. A bilingual Guianan could very well be insulted if addressed in Creole by a French speaker. Consequently, the use of Creole is slowly disappearing from the speech of educated people. One then can wonder about the future of Creole in French Guiana. It is true that the larger portion of the Guyanese population is still using the Creole language in most of their daily occupations. However, it is the author's hypothesis that Guyanese might very well disappear in a generation or two if no effort is made to rehabilitate the social and national value of Creole as a means of communication, most particularly in the opinion of the elite group. Recently, some young people concerned with the revival of their culture and history have taken the Creole language as the symbol of their action.

There is no recognized writing system for Creole and consequently Guianans are very puzzled when they are asked to write down a few words in their language. Most of the time they will try to imitate French orthography, for example: /nous aut'/ [nuzot] 'we'. There is no journal or newspaper printed in Creole. The daily newspaper published in Cayenne, La presse de Guyane, is published in French. From time to time, in the weekend edition, the text of a legend or a doló (a Guyanese proverb) will be printed in Guyanese.

One has to go back to the nineteenth century to find the first text written in Guyanese. In 1848, a proclamation in Creole appeared in Cayenne announcing the abolition of slavery (reproduced in Horth 1949:95-100). Forty years later, in 1885, the first literary work of importance in Guyanese was published, Atipa, written by Parépou, probably a pseudonym for A. de Saint-Quentin (Parépou 1885). It is worth noting that Atipa is considered as the only novel ever written in a French Creole. The main purpose of this novel is to discuss the value of Creole and the organization of the Guyanese society against

the background of daily life in French Guiana at the time of the gold rush. One should also mention the adaptation in Guyanese of La Fontaine's fables by Alfred de Saint-Quentin (1872) and by Michel Lohier (1960).

There are few linguistic descriptions of Guyanese. The first one was published by Auguste de Saint-Quentin (1872) as an appendix to Alfred de Saint-Quentin's (1872) history of Cayenne. His Notice grammaticale presents a concise and valuable description of the Creole spoken in French Guiana at the end of the last century. This work is generally considered more serious than the grammar published by Auguste Horth (1949) some eighty years later. Horth's Patois guyanais is an 'essai de systématisation' of Guyanese, but his treatment lacks the linguistic approach of his predecessor. Horth cannot free his description from the French grammar he takes as a model. Nevertheless, one appreciates finding in this book the first and only Guyanese vocabulary ever compiled and a good selection of dolô. This book is still useful to trace the evolution of Guyanese because it represents a more recent stage of Creole than Saint-Quentin's analysis. For instance, Horth gives the two forms of the tense–aspect particle for future: kê 'forme usuelle' and wa 'forme archaïque'. One can also find some mention of Guyanese in Maurice Goodman's Comparative Study of Creole French Dialects (1964), but his treatment lacks detailed information and he restricts himself to forms comparable to other French Creoles.

The Guyanese language is not a homogeneous linguistic reality throughout French Guiana. Due to the lack of roads and the generally poor communication among various villages, regional forms of Guyanese Creole have developed. One can distinguish three main dialects. The first and most important is the dialect spoken on Cayenne Island.[5] The Cayenne dialect has been very receptive to French influence, as seen for instance, in lexical loans from French which added new sounds to the Guyanese phonetic inventory: [y] as in /syr/ < Fr. sûr 'sure'; [œ] as in /œr/ < Fr. heure 'hour'; [ö] as in /fö/ < Fr. feu 'fire'. The second dialect,[6] used in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, Mana, and Iracoubo is characterized by its numerous borrowings from the Creoles of Guadeloupe and Martinique. It is well known that immigration from these two countries into this region of French Guiana took place during the second half of the nineteenth century. To the east of Cayenne, in a region still inaccessible by road, one can find a third dialect presenting several archaic features which are not present in the other two dialects, for instance wa, the tense-aspect particle for future. This dialect is spoken mostly in Regina, Kaw, and Saint-Georges-de-l'Oyapock in the Approuague-Oyapock circle.

Guyanese belongs to the group of languages known as French Creole languages: Mauritian, Haitian, Louisiana Creole, Antillean, etc. Within this typological family, Guyanese is more closely related to the Antillean Creoles spoken in most of the West Indian islands, from Guadeloupe southwards. They all share various phonological, grammatical, and lexical affinities, and it has been suggested by Maurice Goodman (1964:17) that they be grouped under the common denominator of 'ka dialects' from the use they make of that particular tense-aspect particle.[7]

To remain within the scope of this article, only brief indications and outlines concerning various aspects of the phonology, grammar, and lexicon of Guyanese will be presented.[8]

Phonology

The consonant system of Guyanese does not differ appreciably from that of French, with the exception of the important palatal set in Guyanese / ţ, ḍ, š, ž, ŋ, j /. For example, /ţ/ is found in such words as /ţô/ 'heart', /ţu/ 'ass', /paţé/ 'bundle'; /ḍ/ is found in such words as /ḍamêt/ 'prostitute', /bõḍé/ 'God', /ḍal/ 'girl'; /ŋ/ is found in such words as /peŋê/ 'to comb', /beŋê/ 'to bath', /ŋam/ 'yam'; /j/ is found in such words as /pèj/ 'wages', /tapuj/ 'boat', /jêjê/ 'mosquito'.

On the other hand, the vocalic system shows greater simplicity than the French system. There are seven oral vowels / i, u, é, è, ô, ò, a /. One can note the absence of the front rounded vowels / y, œ, ö /. These sounds do appear from time to time in a very small number of recent borrowings from French like /syk/ 'sugar', /œr/ 'hour', /fö/ 'type of punch', but they are not yet part of the Guyanese vocalic system. In the past, French borrowings were adapted to the Guyanese phonological system and pronounced with vowels in the native system. For instance, French [y] was pronounced either [i] or [u]: Fr. juge > /žiž/ 'judge', Fr. mur > /mir/ 'wall', Fr. tortue > /toti/ 'turtle', Fr. mesure > /mizu/ 'measure', French [œ] was pronounced [è] or [ò]: Fr. couleur > /kulô/ 'color', Fr. beurre > /dibé/ 'butter', Fr. peur > /pé/ 'fear'. French [o] was pronounced either [é] or [ô]: Fr. monsieur > mušé/ 'sir', Fr. feu > /difé/ 'fire', Fr. queue > /laţô/ 'tail'. There are only three nasal vowels /ã, õ, ê/, as in /disã/ 'blood', /gãgã/ 'ancestors', /ôgwé/ 'Guyanese dish', /bõ/ 'good', /lamê/ 'hand', /zêzê/ 'spell'.

The most common phoneme combination follows the CV pattern. Very few Guyanese words begin with a vowel and this explains the absence of phonetic liaison between words. Guyanese makes a particular use of the repetition of two identical syllables, for instance

/tululu/ 'mask', /lélé/ 'stick', /wiši–wiši/ 'to mutter', /kikivi/ 'bird'.

Grammar

On the grammatical level, it is important to note that there is no morphology per se in Guyanese. This Creole has developed entirely outside the influence of French morphological rules and has followed 'natural' linguistic laws[9] of simplification and reduction of all irregularities. This means that Creole presents no system of inflexions as found in modern French morphology. In Guyanese, therefore, one cannot find categories of words distinguishing, for example, verbs from nouns. It is striking to see how a word which in French is a verb can easily become a noun or vice versa in Guyanese: /li flaské/ 'she ironed', but /só flaské fini/ 'her ironing is finished'. It is only from the context or the intonation that one can decide on the function of a particular word: /mó fam/ 'I am a woman' or 'my woman'. The predicative function is realized here by a pause between /mó/ and /fam/ and with a rising intonation on /mó/ and a falling one on /fam/. On the contrary, the meaning 'my woman' is realized with no interruption between /mó/ and /fam/ and the intonation is kept on a high level on /fam/ to show that the utterance is not complete. This absence of word categories or, from another point of view, the sliding from one category to another, as in /kóté só sò/ 'at his sister's place' and /asu kóté/ 'on his side' is one of the characteristics which Guyanese shares with several other French Creole dialects and which has been said to be one of the principles of 'popular French'.[10]

The aspectual verbal system is the most interesting part of the Guyanese grammar. The aspectual differences are expressed by means of particles which are presented in Table 1. When those tense-aspect particles are not sufficient to express all aspectual nuances, Guyanese makes use of auxiliary verbs like /fini/:/sóti/ 'just finished', /mó fini flaské/ 'I have just finished ironing', /tó sóti mãžé/ 'you have just finished eating'; or /ka alé/ 'going to', /li ka alé lašaš/ 'He is going to hunt'; or /té pu/ 'preparing to', /nu té pu pati/ 'we were just going to leave'.

In Guyanese, the copulative function can be either expressed by a formal element, as in /li sa móvé/ 'he is naughty', or implied from the context, as in /tó lwẽ/ 'you are far away'. Therefore, in Guyanese, the copula is very often absent in utterances where French and English would require its presence.[12] Thus, the following examples /li tifi/ 'she is a little girl' and /makak laró bwa/ 'the monkey is on the top of the tree' are clearly predicative utterances without a formal marker for the copula. However, Guyanese has ways of formally expressing the predicative function when the need is felt for more precision or

TABLE 1. Aspectual Verbal System.

perfective aspect	in the present	= particle zero
		/li pati/ 'he is gone'
		/li pa la/ 'he is out'
	in the past	= particle /té/
		/jé té vini/ 'they came'
		/mó té malad/ 'I was ill'
non-perfective aspect	in the present	= particle /ka/[11]
		/mó ka blãši/ 'I am washing'
	in the past	= particle /té ka/
		/nu té ka mãžé/ 'we were eating'
	in the future	
	(a) future	= particle /ké/
		/zòt ké ruvini/ 'you will come back'
	(b) conditional	= particle /té ké/
		/mó té ké žiž/ 'I would be a judge'

emphasis. For instance, the particle /sa/, which is in fact the demonstrative pronoun, fulfills the copulative function. In the utterance /sa fam-a/ 'that woman there', /sa/ is the demonstrative, however in /mó sa fam/ 'I am a woman', /sa/ plays the role of a copula. This particular function of a pronoun has already been recognized by Emile Benveniste (1966:190): 'La valorisation syntaxique du pronom en fonction de copule est un phénomène de portée générale'. It must be noted that the use of a formal marker, like /sa/, to express the copulative function in cases where more precision is needed, is restricted to utterances in the present perfective aspect. In all other aspects, the presence of a tense-aspect particle will automatically remove the possible ambiguity due to the absence of the copula, for instance /li té mó zami/ can only mean 'he was my friend' because of the presence of the aspectual particle /té/. The negative marker /pa/ prevents also the ambiguity in such utterances as /tó pa tifi/ 'you are not a little girl'.

In Guyanese, nouns do not have to be accompanied by a determinant like the definite article for French and therefore may occur in the utterance without any determination, for instance /zozó šãté/ 'birds sang'. In the absence of any determinant, the noun standing alone expresses a generic concept or an undetermined plurality and it corresponds to French des. However, when a determinant is used, it will have a greater precision than in French le, la; French la femme could mean either 'any women' or 'a certain woman'; in Guyanese /fam-a/ always points to a specific woman 'the one about whom I speak'. Therefore, /a/ in Guyanese stands between the definite

article and the demonstrative. Then, when /sa/ accompanies /a/ as in /sa fam-a/, it conveys a more forceful demonstration and could be considered an intensifier. The morphemes /a/ and /sa/ can be used either together as in /sa fam-a/ 'that woman there' (where /sa/ is the intensifier of demonstration and /a/ is the singular marker) or separately. When a is used by itself, it can have four functions: (1) to indicate the singular number: /fam-a/ 'that woman' (it is opposed here to the morpheme /ja/ which conveys the plural number: /zózó-ja/ 'these birds'), (2) to express determination: /tifi-a/ 'this little girl', that is to say to reduce the generality of the concept, (3) to mark the segmentation of nominal syntagms. In that function, a follows the noun phrase and also any relative clause modifying this noun phrase: /ròb mama-a/ 'mother's dress', /lapē mó pòté-a/ 'the rabbit I brought', (4) to express the copulative function in utterances of the type /a mó/ 'it's me' (/a/ generally introduces an animate). When /sa/ is used separately, it has the function of a copula as in /mó sa fam/ 'I am a woman' or it serves to introduce an inanimate predicate as in /sa bõ/ 'it's good'. /Sa/ may also be used in relative clauses: /mó mãžé sa tó baj mó/ 'I have eaten what you gave me' or /sa ki fiñi pa ka ruvini/ 'what is gone does not come back' with the absence of the relative pronoun.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there is no passive form in Guyanese. Therefore an English sentence such as: 'the rabbit is eaten by the tiger' will automatically be translated by the active form in Guyanese, /kõpé tig mãžé kõpé lapē/. This characteristic is also found in other French Creole dialects.

Lexicon

Guyanese vocabulary is developing essentially through borrowings and it does not show any process of word derivation. It is composed of loans, mostly from French, English, Portuguese, and native languages of French Guiana. French words represent more than 85 percent of the whole lexicon. Some French words used in Guyanese have originated from regional French, for instance /tirwèt/ 'drawer', /swèf/ 'thirst', /lèrmwè/ 'sideboard' or 'clothes-press', /rwè/ 'king' can be traced back to Norman French. Other words have been borrowed from French together (a) with the definite article le/la: /lašè/ < Fr. la chair 'meat', /lamu/ < Fr. l'amour 'love', /lanẅit/ < Fr. la nuit 'night', /lègliz/ < Fr. l'église 'church', /lamó/ < Fr. la mort 'death', /léspri/ < Fr. l'esprit 'mind', (b) with the plural marker [z] which stems from the phonetic liaison between a noun with an initial vowel and a plural determinant like les, des, mes, ses, nos, leurs, or any preposed plural morpheme like an adjective beaux: /zózó/ < Fr. [lézwazó] 'birds', /zõg/ < Fr. [lézõglə] 'nails', /zépól/

< Fr. [lézépól] 'shoulders', /zòrè/ < Fr. [lézòrèj] 'ears', /zòrãž/ < Fr. [lézòrãž] 'oranges', (c) with the partitive marker du/de: /duri/ < Fr. du riz 'rice', /difé/ < Fr. du feu 'fire' /dilèt/ < Fr. du lait 'milk', /dló/ < Fr. de l'eau 'water', /dipē/ < Fr. du pain 'bread'. This agglutination is so complete that the meanings of either the definite article, the plural marker, or the partitive marker, have been entirely lost. They form one, unique meaningful entity and therefore these words will take the regular Guyanese markers for determination and number: /lašè-a/ 'that meat', /lanwit-ja/ 'these nights', /zõg-a/ 'this nail', /zépól-ja/ 'these shoulders', /dilèt-a/ 'this milk', /difé-ja/ 'these fires'.

Moreover, one can note several semantic shifts between Guyanese words and their French equivalents: /budē/ < Fr. boudin 'blood sausage' > 'belly', /bwa/ < Fr. bois 'wood' > 'tree' > 'forest', /kóté/ < Fr. côté 'side' < 'at (home)', /fós/ < Fr. fossé 'ditch' < 'grave', /tõbé/ < Fr. tomber 'fall' > 'to miscarry'.

There are few borrowings from English: /dòb/ < E. job, /swit/ < E. sweet, /dal/ E. girl, and from Portuguese: /briga/ P. brigar /to fight/, /fika/ P. ficar 'to be' (/kumã tó fika/ 'how are you?'). The remaining part of the lexicon comes from Amerindian languages (especially names for animals and plants) or from African languages through the Boni and Saramacca tribes established in the interior of French Guiana: /dãga/ 'sortilege', /zõbi/ 'spirit', /dõgwé/ 'guyanese dish', /suku/ 'pitch dark', /dòkòti/ 'to squat'. Finally, composition like /nègrès gró žibèrn/ 'matron', /pòpòt marõ/ 'convict', /vã ménē/ 'traveller', /šuval/ /bõdé/ 'ladybug' and onomatopoeia like /vumtak/ 'umbrella', /tubum/ 'to dive', /bizbõb/ 'hat', /wiši-wiši/ 'to mutter', /runu-runu/ 'protest', /vlógódó/ 'clatter' reveal the desire for greater expressivity in communication.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Guyanese is still very alive in French Guiana, but as it can be seen from the description above, this Creole is more and more influenced by French. One might be tempted therefore to predict that Guyanese will slowly be absorbed by French.

NOTES

[1]In 1947, French Guiana became a French département.

[2]The Maroni River and the Oyapock River form respectively the frontiers of French Guiana with Surinam and Brazil.

[3]Cayenne is linked to Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni by the sole road existing in French Guiana (160 miles).

[4]A sociological analysis of the various ethnic groups in French Guiana can be found in M. Saint-Jacques Fauquenoy (1967).

[5]This dialect has been described by M. Saint-Jacques Fauquenoy with a synchronic functional model (based on Martinet's theories) based on two years of resident study.

[6]This dialect has been studied on a transformational basis by C. Corne (1971:81-103). The author describes his corpus as follows: 'Lors d'un séjour à Nouméa, Nouvelle Caledonie, en décembre 1970–janvier 1971, nous avons pu faire une brève enquête sur le créole français parlé par une jeune guyanaise . . . originaire de Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni. Son père, originaire de la Martinique, et sa mère, originaire de Sainte-Lucie (Antilles anglaises) ont toujours insisté sur l'emploi du français au sein de la famille. Mme Hureau, dont le mari est d'ailleurs Parisien, a donc le français comme langue maternelle' (81).

[7]'Haitian and Antillan which have certain important features in common, will be known as the Caribbean Creoles, while the latter and French Guiana, which share other important features, will be known as the ka Creoles after a preverbal particle, which is exclusive to them. All three of them, which share a lesser but significant number of features will be known as the bay Creoles after the form of the word 'to give' shared by them exclusively' (Goodman 1964:17).

[8]For a more detailed and thorough treatment, the reader should consult M. Saint-Jacques Fauquenoy (1972a).

[9]'Le français du peuple n'est soumis qu'aux lois naturelles qui gouvernent tout système de signes' and 'Livrée à elle-même la langue tend à une simplification du système par l'élimination des formes parasitaires et, à la longue, par celle des paradigmes secondaires' (Guiraud 1965:12, 16).

[10]'La transposition grammaticale est un des caractères du français populaire' (Guiraud 1965:61).

[11]The ka particle expresses either the durative aspect 'I am washing' or the habilitative aspect 'I wash' (every day).

[12]This aspect of Guyanese syntax has been described in M. Saint-Jacques Fauquenoy (1972b).

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