

So the idea is that if English is more of a creole than Haitian creole, then why is the term creole to only creole languages, right?

That's a very valid question.

And nowadays in Haiti and also in Mauritius-- I don't know whether you're aware of this debate in Mauritius.

People ask, why do we call Mauritian creole, the creole?

Why don't we just call it Mauritian?

Why don't want we just call Haitian Creole Haitian?

And so, as a linguist, might take, when I'm being asked that question is that-- well, the people who speak the language, most of them call it Creole.

So who am I, as a linguist, to say, no, you won't call it Haitian.

You see, because we have a basic principle in linguistics, at least in when you consider the sense of linguistics, it's supposed to be descriptive, not supposed to prescribe-- to tell people, no, this is what you say.

You're supposed to report what we say.

And I have a little anecdote when it comes to-- because people feel that the term is negative-- that the term, creole, because it's been used to refer to lesser languages, it's best to get rid of it.

And now as someone brought up-- I don't know who asked that question.

So as someone brought up, since we know at least we can claim that we have evidence that English, in terms of its structures-- in terms of its history, might be more of a creole than Haitian Creole.

So the creole doesn't make sense if you think of Creole as a structural term, but the point here is that-- so the word creole means different things to different people.

So in Haiti, if someone called the language Creole, they don't think of Bickerton.

They don't care about Bickerton.

They didn't even know who Bickerton is.

They don't know who McWhorter is.

They don't know who, you know, [INAUDIBLE] or these other linguists who say all these ugly things about creole languages.

Like, they don't care if that's what they call the languages, and they're happy with the term.

So for them, the term has changed meaning.

The term means just, this is my language.

The same way with words like-- let's say the word neg.

OK, so this is the word that actually, you know-- in Haiti, we have this word, neg.

Now where does it come from?

It comes from the French negge.

Now, the French negge, you can probably-- so this is Haitian creole.

This is French.

Now you can tell that, well, this is connected to Negro, right?

Now in the movie that we talked about many times, I Am Not Your Negro, you can see that the term Negro can be seen as having some negative connotation.

It's not positive, right?

But guess what?

In Haiti, the term neg is positive.

You see?

Like, I can call you [HAITIAN SPEECH] you know, you might-- well, I wouldn't say it-- well, exactly, it's you're my negro, right?

But it doesn't mean there's something negative about calling someone-- like, if you were to live in Haiti yourself-- you know, you're a white person-- after a couple of years, my people might call you neg.

You see, you become neg, and here, the term neg just means person.

You know, human?

You're human.

You see?

So in Haiti, the term neg, although it derives from negge, which can be perceived as being negative, it's become just a noun that refers to human being.

In fact, we saw that-- in fact, we'll go back to that.

Dessaline, himself, said that in Haiti now, after independence, we're all neg.

We're all negroes even if you have white skin.

That was 1805, right.

Dessaline told all Haitians that legally, everyone in Haiti, we're independent.

We've established our freedom of sovereignty.

Everyone is black whether you're white, whether you're Polish, whether-- since you live in Haiti, you're black.

And that was actually quite forward, right.

He was post-modern.

He understood that race was not biological-- that race was a political concept.

From the same perspective, one could say, well, creole in Haiti means language.

It's my language, so you know?

And then there are groups like on Facebook.

There's a group called Kreyolofoni-- you know, Kreyolofoni, the claim that we can look at all Kreyolofoni, Kreyo-Lo-Fo-Ni, right.

So the root here is Kreyol, and then they use-- it's like francophonie-- you know, this French linguistic culture empire.

It's well, let's do our own and talk about Kreyolofoni, because we believe that we from Mauritius, Seychelles, from

[INAUDIBLE],, from Martinique, from Guadalupe, from Guyane, we all speak that language that we call Creole, and we share historical concerns interests in common.

So let's call create this Kreyolofoni that will make us stronger.

AUDIENCE: What is the language of the [INAUDIBLE]??

Like, what do people [INAUDIBLE]??

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Actually, interestingly, you should go to the Facebook page.

Do that, because they have interesting recordings of different-- like, people from Guadalupe, people from Martinique, Gauguin, Mauritius speaking the creole.

They even have Christian [INAUDIBLE],, which is this famous French politician know from Vienne-- a black woman race drawn very eloquent.

They recorded her speaking Guianese Creole, Gwiyan**.

You see?

And then you can understand them.

You know, I can-- when I went to Mauritius, I could speak Creole in Mauritius, and people could understand me.

I could understand Mauritians speaking Creole, so there is some evidence to Kreyolofoni-- that there is a certain-- there's some level of mutual understanding.

AUDIENCE: So that kind colonized which countries, because [INAUDIBLE] talked about the substrates?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: The [INAUDIBLE],, yeah.

Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Would that be like of our practice?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Definitely, you're right.

You're right.

But it's thanks to the French that we have this-- it's what you call solidarity, right?

But, you know, it's history.

You know, you can either use it for you or use it against you, right.

In this case, you're saying, well, we have this mutual, common interest based on our similar languages, and let's call it Kreyolofoni, and let's turn it into a political power.

It's very idealistic, but, you know, why not?

AUDIENCE: So what about like not describing it, like, people, but what about within linguists, using the term creole to classify languages that originated through a colonization process?

Like, should that space stay the same?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, no, because now in science, you can read the final terms, right?

So this is different.

So when you're doing science, it's like when, you know-- so H₂O, water, for a chemist is not water for a gardener.

So a gardener will use water to sprinkle flowers without thinking about the structure of water, but if you're a chemist, the word water has a different meaning for you, and you might want to define what you mean by water in that case.

So it's just in linguistics, I think that you can say, well, I'm going to use creole with a particular sense.

And for me, it's just so-- you know, I'm going to point to these languages with the people call who them creole, who speak them, and I'm going to use the name that they use.

But I'm not going to assume that it means something similar for all creole languages, you see?