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CALL FOR PAPERS

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**« EPILINGUISTIC EMOTIONAL RESPONSES
AND METALINGUISTIC REASONING IN THE DISCOURSE
ON FRENCH CREOLE »**

Special issue edited by
Olivier-Serge CANDAU & Mylène LEBON-EYQUEM

TERMS OF SUBMISSION AND IMPORTANT DATES

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

One can hardly imagine approaching a history of creole languages without making heard the voices of those who understand, speak and endeavour to describe them; this applies whether we are interesting ourselves in the linguistic challenges confronted by the standardisation of a language without an actual formalised rhetorical tradition (Prudent, 2003) or in the timid responses provided by the institution in the face of the demands of the speakers of these languages (Hazaël-Massieux, 2006). With this in mind, we agree that:

- Research into Creole languages is, and always has been, based on a broader linguistic rationale on the construction and evolution of languages (Coelho, 1880; Schuchardt, 1888-1889);
- The epistemological approaches defended by every theorist point clearly to their own proposal for modelling the language (Prudent, 1980; Véronique, 2000; Chaudenson, 2004; Carpooran, 2005).

The study of French Creoles is difficult, and even contradictory (Valdman, 2002) and is approached step by step in this issue, which endeavours to retrace the important milestones in this journey. The aim is to understand the progressive course of the scholarly discourse about Creoles from the subjective experience of the language as still epilinguistic (from the end of the 17th century, Hazaël-Massieux, 1996) to the progressive construction of a reasoned discourse on the language as a true metalanguage (from the end of the 19th century to the present day, Khim, 1984; Thibault, 2015). We are therefore seeking to chart in historical terms the development of perceptions of Creoles insofar as they contribute to the construction of a knowledge object which is simultaneously linguistic (the discourses on Creoles express the sense of Creole speakers on the means of implementing the language, Romani, 2000); social (the codification of Creoles stems particularly from religious practices, Bernabé, 2013); and ideological (knowledge of Creoles is often accompanied by implications of activism, Véronique, 2010).

Beyond the simple recording of the broader trends which mark the history of creolistics, it is useful to interrogate the interactions between a complex object (the recent official recognition of Creoles has rendered the study of them even more difficult, Prudent, 2005, and this in an educational context which is sometimes hostile, Lebon-Eyquem and Robert, 2012) and the tools used to describe them (Candau, 2015). A major issue is that the procedures for analysing French Creoles are a reflection of a societal relationship that needs to be interrogated. Of particular interest is the gauging of the involvement of local Creole-speaking elites in the progressive construction of a specific study object (Creole languages) and the discourse which constructs these languages as original and complex systems (creolistics, Prudent, 1993). This also engages a debate between the orientations of creolists, whether they come from former colonisers (the first creolists) or, later, native Creole speakers from Creole-speaking eras. Clearly the inclusion of native creolists disrupts both the discourse of mainland researchers (in terms of the construction of an intellectual discourse on the language) and that of local scholars (at the intersection of the discourses on identity in Creole countries). More than any other branch of linguistics, creolistics throws new light on the delicate relationship between *émoi* (the emotional perception of the identity of these specialists engaged in the recognition of minority languages) and *reasoning* (the ability to construct the history and typology of languages while detaching themselves from any emotion). The interactions between the forms of Creole and their descriptions thus lead us to convene and interrogate, possibly through occasionally stormy

debates, the connections made between a historical period (the field of creolistics has always borrowed extensively from the current theoretical arguments, Hazaël-Massieux, 2005); the described spaces (a common colonial heritage unites these territories, if one does not delve deeply into their differences, Valdman, 2002); and the ideological forces which pervade them (through the space and degree of involvement of these theorists, Van den Avenne, 2007). This quite broad interrogation is conveyed by other more detailed questions: can creolistics eliminate the need for activism? Could creolistics provide research directions worthy of further exploration? How can creolistics rise to the challenge of standardisation?

Caught between the emotional turmoil of the activists and the coldness of the theorists, creolistics turns out to be a knowledge object which is difficult to define, and which certainly still has some way to go in empowering researchers to tackle the challenges facing the discipline.

Research focus of this issue

Articles for consideration, whether based on fundamental or experimental research, should explore one of the issues highlighted in the opening discussion.

1. Creolistics and activism

It is clear that one does not become a creolist with impunity. The purpose of this heading is to bring out some of the identification characteristics of the researcher engaged in creolistics, and is intended not so much to describe a particular type as to propose some more or less homogeneous representative forms. We will focus on an interrogation of the researcher and the milieu : this will attach as much importance to the influences affecting the construction of a creolistic researcher's identity (asserted through an intellectual authority which is explicitly claimed or implicitly felt on reading their publications) as to the reception of creolistic research by Creole speakers themselves as well as observers who are to varying extents removed from the debate. Also under interrogation, and as a matter of priority, is the genealogical relationship between research groups dedicated to the study of Creole languages (including those groupings of researchers and creolists such as GEREC (Groupe d'études et de recherches en espace créolophone) founded in 1955, the International Committee of Creole Studies in 1976, and *Bannzil Kréyol* in 1981) and the assumed ideological obedience throughout the humanities (the structuralist heritage in the genesis of Creoles, *cultural studies* and creolity). Is this ideological baggage always palpable? How can it be used to explain certain theoretical approaches? And to what extent does it produce original discourses?

2. Is creolistics still under construction as a research agenda?

The question of the relation to creolistic ideology often conflicts with issues of personal and affective judgements, which sometimes have little to do with logic or reason. Posing the question of the repercussions of *émoi* [emotional turmoil] – whether arising from personal or ideological sensitivities – is a way of admitting that the construction of a knowledge object cannot be considered without a reflection on the underlying affective discourse. In other words, there is necessarily a meeting of the discourse on geographic, historic and epistemological creolophone spaces with the space in which a sensitive and sometimes passionate discourse takes place. This observation, far from being a bitter disappointment, proves to be extremely instructive provided that we ask ourselves:

- *How does observation in the field influence the analysis of French Creoles, sometimes in terms of guiding their description?*

This first question allows us to treat the field as a living laboratory of Creole languages. In this sense we can explore two research perspectives. The first focuses on the history (the historical approach) while the second is detached from it (the ahistorical approach). The historical approach contrasts the first, very basic descriptions of Creole languages in the first writings dedicated to the creolophone eras from the end of the 17th century, to show how the first chroniclers sketched an initial portrait of Creoles by borrowing from their often rudimentary understanding of French linguistic mechanisms. The ahistorical approach aims to identify trends in the description of French Creoles in the different overseas collectivities in modern creolistics. Does creolistics offer a reasonably homogeneous vision of the French Creoles in the Antilles and the Indian Ocean, or does it require a specific characterisation for each of these territories?

- *To what extent can the field become a genuinely intellectual reality reconstructed by the theorists?*

We believe that the field is sometimes more a product of an intellectual construction by researchers than a raw dataset to be examined. To what extent can defenders of Creole (whether simple partisans or intellectuals engaged in the promotion of minority languages when they produce grammars and works of reference) construct a vision of the language which is to some extent displaced and sometimes disconnected from the real practices of its speakers? In what way is the relation between Creoles and their matrillects and the dynamic forms of contact between Creoles and the dominant languages really taken into account in sociolinguistic modelling?

3. Creolistics and standardisation

This last question endeavours to interrogate the new avenues to which present-day creolistics needs to respond. Certain discourses relating to the construction of a norm are themselves laden with identity biases, and would thus benefit from being subjected to a detailed analysis which would highlight the imprint of *émoi* in the rationale, and the necessary limits which result from this. In order to overcome the issue of these constraints which weigh heavy on the field of creolistics, several questions could usefully be asked: how can we reconcile the demands of research, of educational policy, and the reality observed in the field? To what extent can we continue to defend the accelerated standardisation of a purported first language (as French Creoles are considered to be) perceived as a facilitating language of pupils' integration without having first conducted a reflection on the sociolinguistic practices of Creole territories? How much credence should we give to a norm in the standardisation of Creole languages?

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