A Tale of Two Cities: The Sociolinguistic Transformation of New York and Miami by Haitian Immigrants

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Haitian immigrants certainly constitute a very visible segment of contemporary American society. This visibility is due to the fact that they have been steadily migrating in significant numbers to the United States since the late 1950s—early 1960s, soon after François Duvalier ("Papa Doc") became president of Haiti. The political repression that characterized the Duvalier period forced large numbers of Haitians to seek safer harbor in the United States. Sustained political oppression, economic hardship, and lack of opportunity continued to drive contingents of Haitian immigrants out of their homeland all throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Zéphir 1996, 2001; Catanese 1999). In fact, Haitian immigration persists to the present day, as evidenced in the numerous reports of major news networks, such as those of CNN or the *New York Times*, about the boat people disembarking on the Florida shores as recently as October 2002.[1] The combination of push and pull factors led Haitians to cross the Caribbean Sea, by plane or by boat, legally or illegally, in order to reach the shores of America, the perceived land of opportunity, to begin new lives. An examination of the records of the Census Bureau as well as those of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) allows for reasonable inferences about the size of the legal Haitian population currently residing in the United States.[2] However, estimates provided by community leaders who offer assistance to the illegal population as well suggest that the actual number of the Haitian diaspora is higher than that recorded in government documents. In short, there is good reason to believe that the Haitian diaspora in the United States exceeds 850,000, and according to community leaders may be close to 1 million.

New York City and Miami/Dade County are the major metropolitan areas where Haitian immigrants have settled. Needless to say, the sheer presence of these large Haitian communities has forever transformed the ethnic fabric of these two cities. The borough of Brooklyn in New York, and Miami's Little Haiti provide concrete manifestations of urban changes in America brought

about by Haitian immigrants. The present paper looks at various facets of Haitian diasporic life in these two cities, and examines, in particular, how Haitian immigrants have impacted the sociolinguistic fabric of American society. By focusing on New York and Miami, the paper discusses the various ways in which Haitian immigrants have added their voices to the linguistic diversity of the United States. This diversity is explored from three important perspectives: 1. the place that the Haitian language (i. e. Haitian Creole, in particular) occupies not only within the boundary of the Haitian ethnic community itself, but also in the public domain, namely in the public schools and in the social service agencies that cater to the Haitian community; 2. the influence of English on Haitian Creole, manifest through the phenomena of code-switching, and code borrowing/code mixing; and 3. conversely, the influence of Haitian Creole on the development of a creolized variety of American English spoken by Haitian immigrants.

New York

New York City has the largest concentration of Haitians in the United States as well as the oldest established Haitian communities of the country. The conservative estimate of the legal Haitian population in the New York City Metropolitan Area, as recorded by INS is approximately 156,000. However, community leaders and directors of community centers, who come in constant contact with the illegal population, strongly believe that the actual number is closer to 400,000. This number includes the nonimmigrant (temporary visitors, students, temporary workers and trainees) and undocumented entrants, as well as the legal population who does not bother to fill out the census forms for a variety of reasons. Moreover, the New York City Haitian population represents a very heterogeneous group, reflecting the various strata of Haitian society. Members of the middle class started migrating during the U.S. occupation in the 1920s and 1930s; at the time they established their enclaves in Harlem, where they mingled with African Americans and other Caribbean immigrants who were contributing to the Harlem Renaissance. Significant waves followed exponentially during the Duvalier era that started in 1957 and ended in 1986 with the ousting of Baby Doc. These waves were more heterogeneous than previous ones, as no single class

of Haitians was immune from the Duvaliers' dictatorship. To date, cohorts of Haitians continue to come to New York, many being sent for by relatives already established in the city.

Haitians reside in all the boroughs, but the largest communities are found in Brooklyn where the legal population is placed at approximately 88,763, and in Queens where the number of Haitians is believed to be around 40,000. Members of the community who are of working-class background tend to establish their residence in Brooklyn, primarily in the neighborhoods of Flatbush, Crown Heights, East Flatbush, and Vanderveer; they are apartment dwellers. Middle-class Haitians who choose to stay in Brooklyn own brownstone homes in the Park Slope area and single-family homes in the Midwood section. Generally speaking, Haitians themselves consider the majority of their compatriots living in Queens to be mostly middle class. Members of this group enjoy ownership of their homes or cooperative apartments in the neighborhoods of Cambria Heights, Queens Village, Springfield Gardens, and Jamaica. Less privileged Haitians settle in the working-class neighborhoods of Jackson Heights; generally members of the professional community live in the more affluent section of Holliswood, and some move to the adjacent counties of Nassau and Suffolk which are parts of Long Island. In Manhattan, a small concentration of working-class Haitians (7%) congregates on the Upper West Side and Harlem. Some reside along Cathedral Parkway and in Washington Heights. Very few Haitians (less than 1%) establish their niches in the Bronx. In this discussion, it is also important to recall that Haitians have established communities in the neighboring counties of Westchester and Rockland that are included in the Greater New York Metropolitan Statistical Area. In fact, Spring Valley in Rockland County has a relatively large segment of the New York population, estimated at close to 20,000.

The sheer number of Haitians in New York makes them a highly visible ethnic community. In their ethnic neighborhoods, Haitians have managed to visibly recreate the cultural habits of their homeland with the establishment of many ethnic businesses, such as music shops, grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, bars, beauty and barber shops, travel agencies, shipping companies, money transfer companies, and a hodgepodge of other businesses, which prominantly display their allegiances to their native country. Those are found all along Flatbush, Church, and Nostrand

Avenues, as well as along Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn; on Linden, Farmers and Francis Lewis Boulevards, and Jamaica and Hillside Avenues in Queens. They are easily recognizable since many display signs written both in English and Haitian Creole (sometimes in French), such as *Yoyo Fritaille*, *Le Manoir*, *Le Viconte*, *Haiti Parcel & Cargo Inc.*, and *Bakery Creole*. On intensely hot days, passersby strolling along these avenues and boulevards have their nostrils filled with the aromas of fried meats and plantains, and their ears with rhythms of *Sweet Micky*, *Konpa*, *Zin*, *T-Vice*, *Carimi*, *Tabou Combo*, and *Boukman Eksperyans*, to name some of the most celebrated musical groups and bands. Animated conversations in Haitian Creole can be heard, as members of the community "hang out" in those shops and businesses to discuss home politics and news, exchange gossip, find out what goes on in the community, and keep alive their various traditions, be they culinary, intellectual, literary, or artistic.

Miami

The legal population of Miami-Dade County, based on government records, is approximately 100,000. However, when one factors in the attested underrepresentation of the Census data, as well as the number of illegal immigrants, there is good reason to believe that community leaders and technocrats who work with the Haitian community are not wrong to place the County's Haitian population at over 200,000. Miami is an interesting city in that it continuously replenishes itself with Haitian immigrants, in addition to a host of other ethnic groups from the Caribbean and Latin America. On the one hand, a large contingent of Haitians is unquestionably the boat people, who have been steadily pouring onto the Southern Florida shores since the early 1970s. They have established themselves in the Edison/Little River area of Miami, which eventually came to be referred to as Little Haiti. Once they are able, some end up moving out of Little Haiti to the neighboring municipality of North Miami, where a relatively large segment of Haitian immigrants of lower middle-class background relocates. On the other hand, Miami is also experiencing another wave of Haitian immigration, this time coming from the Northeast United States (New York and Boston), the Midwest (Chicago), and Montreal, Canada. This particular group of Haitians is composed mostly of middle-class individuals who, having worked assiduously

for many years, have been able to save money and profit from the sale of their homes in order to relocate to Miami, where the cost of living is lower than that of Boston and New York and where the tropical weather and lifestyle are reminiscent of those of their native Haiti. This class of Haitians live in the middle-class sections of Miami Shores, North Miami Beach, El Portal, Miami Gardens, and the Southwest neighborhoods of Kendall and Coral Gables.

Irrespective of the presence of middle-class Haitians, Miami is considered the city that received (and continues to receive) the largest segment of lower-class Haitians, consisting of poor peasants from *andeyò* (countryside) and urban dwellers who were roaming the streets in search of *lavi* (life). Many of these Haitians found new lives in the Edison/Little River section of Miami, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city, which the Whites deserted in the 1970s. Soon after, this area became known as Little Haiti, and is now one of the most recognizable Haitian communities in the United States. From north to south, Little Haiti extends from 84th Street to 36th Street; from west to east, it is ten blocks wide, stretching from 6th Ave, NW to 4th Ave, NE. It is crossed by two major north-south axes: Miami Avenue, and Second Avenue NE renamed Avenue Morrisseau-Leroy after the revered Haitian writer who championed the cause of Haitian Creole in literature, and who spent the later years of his life in Miami until his death in the late summer of 1998. The main thoroughfares that cross east/west are 36th, 54th, 62nd, and 79th Streets. Estimates of the population of Little Haiti vary from 40,000 to 55,000. Little Haiti is also considered one of the poorest areas of Miami-Dade County. The following figures were released by the Edison/Little River Neighborhood Planning Program (1994–96): The per capita income is $5,693, the median household income is $14,142, and close to half the population lives below poverty level. City government efforts are currently underway to revitalize the neighborhood, by creating long-term economic development, and improving housing and infrastructure. The City of Miami has established in Little Haiti a neighborhood service center (along with others throughout the metropolitan area), known as Neighborhood Enhancement Teams (NET) to address the social problems of the community

Most of the Haitian businesses in Little Haiti are found along the major arterials mentioned above; like those of New York, they are unmistakably Haitian with names such as *Bèl Fouchèt*, *Piman Bouk*, *Les Cousins*, *Libreri Mapou*, and *Cayard Market*. They include restaurants, grocery stores, dry cleaning establishments, tailor and shoe repair shops, shipping and money transfer companies, botanicas (shops that sell mostly religious/spiritual objects, including Vodou artifacts), among others. Little Haiti is the heart of the Haitian community of Miami.

Having delineated the parameters of the Haitian communities, we can begin our discussion of the sociolinguistic transformation of New York and Miami by Haitian immigrants. One such transformation is the visible presence of Haitian Creole in those cities, making it perhaps a U.S. language.

Haitian Creole as a U.S. Language

Let us recall very briefly that Haitian Creole is a French-based Creole that developed in the seventeenth century in the context of the French colonization of Saint-Domingue, more precisely the plantation phase of colonial expansion, as the recent literature on Creole genesis suggests (Chaudenson 1992, Chaudenson and Mufwene 2001, Baker 2000, and Mufwene 2001). When the colony moved from a homestead society (*société d'habitation*) to a full-scale plantation society (*société de plantation)*, masses of bossal slaves were imported from West Africa to work on these plantations. Haitian Creole is thus considered a contact language that emerged as the result of the blending of French (or approximate versions of French) with the West African languages spoken by the slaves. Most the Haitian Creole lexicon derives from French, and its syntax is based in particular on Ewe, a West African language spoken in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. In the colonial context, Haitian Creole was spoken primarily by the slaves, who were by far the most numerous segment of the population. After the revolution and when independence was won in 1804, the former slaves became the masters of the land of Haiti. This explains why Haitian Creole is still spoken today by one hundred percent of the population, and why French is spoken by a smaller segment—ranging from five to twenty-five percent, depending on which estimates one relies on. This is the small segment who has access to education. The recognition that Haitian Creole is the

only language that *all* Haitian share, irrespective of social classes, explains why it was finally included as one of the two *official* languages of the country in the most recent constitution of 1987. However, given the high rate of illiteracy that exists in Haiti, it is important to indicate that many Creole speakers do not know how to read and write in Creole. The majority of those who are literate acquired their literacy skills in French, since Creole, particulary written Creole, is not widely used in the school system in Haiti, where French is still the prevalent language.

Haitian Creole as an Ethnic Language

In the context of the Haitian diaspora in the United States, Haitian Creole is the language that really serves the linguistic needs of the community, and many Haitian immigrants willingly stress that it is their native language. The fact that this particular language is unique to them enables them to maintain their ethnicity and their sense of peoplehood. Indeed, it is the language that Haitians use in the context of their daily interactions with members of their family and in their social networks. It is the language that one hears along Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn and in the mini-buses or *jetneys* of Little Haiti. It is the language used in the various Haitian diasporic talk shows and television and radio programs. For example, in New York, there are four Haitian radio stations that operate on a twenty-four hour basis: *Radio Tropicale*, *Radio Soleil*, *Radio Lakay*, and *Radyo Pa Nou.* "Perspectives Haïtiennes,""Moment Creole," and "Radio Sanba," are among the most-listened to Haitian Creole radio programs. "Haiti Dyaspo" is a widely watched news magazine program that also uses Haitian Creole. In Miami, *Radio Carnivale* is a Haitian-owned radio station that enjoys a wide audience among the South Florida Haitian community. "Piman Bouk," "Pè Johnny," "Obri Blag" are popular radio programs. The Haitian Television Network is a station that caters to the Haitian Creole speakers; so does Island TV, formerly called Island Magazine, which now operates a low power television station. In a similar vein, Haitian Creole is the language that predominates in the Haitian community's gatherings and events. Among the most ethnic Haitian events, one can mentioned the Miami *Konpa* music festival that takes place annually in the month of May, in conjunction with the festivities of Haitian Flag Day. Centrally staged in Bayfront Park, the festival is where some 20,000 fans, listeners, bystanders and tourists get to

experience firsthand the power of Haitian music, in particular *mizik rasin* (root music) embedded in such popular groups as *Boukman Ekspeyans* or such popular artists as Wyclef Jean, and the power of Haitian Creole emanating loudly from the mouths of large numbers of Haitians assembled in a vast American public space. Smaller versions of the *Konpa* festival occur also in New York, as for example the *Kreyolfest* that took place in June 2003 at Wingate Park in Brooklyn, NY.

With regard to written Haitian Creole, it is used in the brochures and pamphlets put out by the Haitian community centers that cater to the needs of the diasporic population, in particular the newly arrived segment. Perhaps the best known of these centers in New York is the Haitian Centers Council, Inc. established in 1982 and based in Brooklyn, which maintains under its purview eight centers located throughout the New York metropolitan areas. In Miami, one can mention *Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami* (The Haitian Women Center of Miami), and *Sant La* (the Haitian Neigborhood Center), which are well known throughout the community. In a similar vein, the major diasporic newspaper, the *Haitian Times*, although written in English, allocates space to a Creole column: *Tèt Ansanm* (Heads Together) written by Woje E. Saven. This Creole column was first published in the January 5, 2000 issue. A collection of these selected columns was recently released in a single volume by the same name (2003). Additionally, one can occasionally find some Creole advertisements in that paper, as well as in the other leading diasporic paper, the *Boston Haitian Reporter*. It is also worth mentioning that the scholarly journal, the *Journal of Haitian Studies*, published at the University of California-Santa Barbara, accepts contributions in Haitian Creole (along with French and English). In a similar connection, the introduction to the special issue on Haiti published in the Summer/Fall issue 2002 by *Wadabagei*—a scholarly journal of the Caribbean and its diaspora housed at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York—was written in Creole. These facts show that Haitian immigrants in the United States have learned to read and write Haitian Creole; they are using it as a vehicular language as well (in addition to a vernacular language) in their attempt to maintain their ethnolinguistic identity, as Haitian Creole contributes to their feeling of belonging to a proud cultural and linguistic heritage.

Haitian Creole in American Institutions

Haitian Creole has also found its way outside of the boundaries of the Haitian community, and the American public school system perhaps provides the most compelling illustration of the use of Haitian Creole in American institutions. In New York City and Miami, there are several schools that have a large Haitian student population. Many of these Haitian students have limited proficiency in English. In order to address their needs, bilingual education programs in Haitian Creole and English have been established, some since the 1980s. In 2002, the Office of Bilingual Education of the New York City Board of Education listed Haitian Creole as the third dominant language (after Spanish and Chinese) of its bilingual programs. In the borough of Brooklyn, NY, alone, there exist a good dozen of high schools that offer bilingual education in Haitian Creole; and at least one in Queens (Springfield Gardens High School). In Little Haiti, the two major schools whose student population is predominatly Haitian, Toussaint Louverture Elementary School and Edison High School, have Haitian Creole bilingual education programs. In all these bilingual education programs, it is mandated that students receive Native Language Art Instruction in Haitian Creole. Thus, Haitian students read pieces of literature in Haitian Creole. Some of the Haitian authors they read include Félix Morisseau-Leroy, Jean-Claude Martineau, Paul Laraque, Frantz (Kiki) Wainwright, Mercedes Guignard, and Frank Etienne, among others. In this discussion it is important to mention that a very useful bilingual (Creole and English) anthology of Creole poetry was recently published in 2001 in the United States. This collection, titled *Open Gate*, seeks to preserve the richness of Haitian Creole poetry by making it accessible to younger generations, particularly those residing in the United States.

Moreover, it is now a fact that major American cities, including New York and Miami, that are home to large number of Haitian immigrants, release some of their publications in Haitian Creole. Those publications pertain to health, education, and social services. In addition, voting information can also be found in Haitian Creole in Miami, for example. In light of the increase use of Haitian Creole in the American public sphere, this language is also learned by American social service providers who deal with large segments of Haitian immigrants, be they teachers, lawyers,

social workers, nurses, counselors or psychologists. Consequently, Haitian Creole is taught in several American universities, including the colleges of the City University of New York, Florida International University, the University of Florida-Gainesville, the University of Massachusetts-Boston, and Indiana University-Bloomington, among others. In addition, it is interesting to know that there is a telecommunication network called Language Line Service—previously owned by AT&T—which provides interpretation services in Haitian Creole (along with a host of other foreign languages) to a variety of businesses, including hospitals and clinics, banks, telephone companies, police departments, district attorney offices, and many other private and government agencies. These facts clearly demonstrate that Haitian Creole is the recognized language of the Haitian community, which, thanks to its significant size, might have earned the "right" to receive some of its services in its native language. Whether it is an issue of right or practical necessity, in the context of the new America, Haitian Creole is emerging as a U.S. language in major metropolitan areas, such as New York, Miami/Dade County, and Boston as well.

English Influence on Diasporic Haitian Creole

Throughout much of the above discussion, I have described the functions and the domains of use of Haitian Creole, a language classified as a French-based Creole since most of its lexicon is derived from French. However, Haitian Creole transplanted in the United States comes in contact with American English, the language of the wider surrounding community. As a result of this contact, diasporic Haitian Creole undergoes certain changes. It is to these changes that we now turn our attention.

The influence of English can be detected in the speech of Haitian immigrants when they speak Creole. There is nothing unusual about this, and numerous studies exist that attest to the phenomena of language contact. Among the most recent studies can be mentioned those conducted with the largest contemporary immigrant communities in the United States, namely the Hispanics and the Asians (McKay and Wong 2000, Zentella 1997a and 1997b). Terms such as Spanglish (Spanish-English), Hinglish (Hindi-English), Tex-Mex (Texan-Mexican) have been introduced in

the literature to describe what has been accepted as language borrowing within a particular community (Baker 2001: 100).

It is at the level of the lexicon that the greater influence of English on Haitian Creole can be felt. The Creole spoken by Haitian immigrants in the United States contains a fairly large number of words that have been borrowed from English. Grosjean's (1982) use of the term language borrowing, to refer to "words that have passed from one language to another and have come to be used even by monolinguals," can aptly describe the influence of English on Haitian Creole. Here are some illustrative examples taken from my own interviews with Haitian immigrants:[3]

1. M a *call* ou pita pou m fè ou konnen.
   (I will *call* you later to let you know.)

2. Mwen gen yon lòt ti travay *pat time* lè wikenn.
   (I have another *part time* job on weekends.)

3. Lè m fè *ovè time*, se a dizè m rantre
   (When I work *overtime*, I come home at ten.)

4. L ap tounen toutalè, se nan *store* la la-a l rive.
   (She will be right back, she went to the *store* over there.)

5. Lè yon Aysiyen fenk vin isit, li fè tout kalite *djob*. Mwen menm, se *om attendant* mwen te konn fè.
   (When a Haitian first arrives here, he/she does all sorts of *jobs*. I used to be a *home attendant*.)

6. Ayisyen pito fè tout kalite *djob* pase y al nan *wèlfè*
   (Haitians would rather do all kinds of *jobs* instead of being on *welfare*.)

7. Nan travay la, se *data processing* mwen fè.
   (At work, I do data processing.)

8. Rele m sou *cell* mwen.
   (Call me on my cell.)

9. *Bilding* lan pa pi mal. Lè ou rantre ou jwenn yon *dòmann*
   (The *building* is not that bad. When you come in, there is a *doorman*.)

10. Se *just* yon *physical* m t al fè.
    (I *just* went for a *physical*.)

11. Isit la, se pa jwèt, non: Se ou k pou fè manje, se ou k pou *clean*, se ou k pou fè *londri* se ou k pou *take care* timoun yo. . .
    (Here [in this country], it [life] is not a joke: You have to cook, you have to *clean*, you have to *take care* of the children. . .)

12. Li gen tout kalite *èdek* ak mari a.
(She has a lot of *headaches* with the husband).

13. Fòk mwen fè yon *stop* nan *ATM machin* nan.
(I have to make at *stop* at the *ATM machine*).

14. Mwen gen yon *leak* nan *basement* lan pou m fè *lennlòd* la tcheke.
(I have a *leak* in the *basement* that I must have the *landlord* check).

15. Nou ta kapab *al nan lunch* ansanm.
We could *go to lunch* together [calque from English].

The list of English words used in the Creole speech of Haitian immigrants is not limited to these examples: Words like full time, bus stop, subway, token, TV, TV guide, TV dinner, beeper, computer, sidewalk, van, parking lot, microwave, toll, and innumerable others are part of the lexical inventory of Haitian immigrant Creole. Many of these words tend to be pronounced *à l'haïtienne*, in the sense they are adapted to Creole phonology. An examination of these borrowed items reveals that they are, for the most part, items that apply to everyday life in America and not necessarily to life in Haiti, or at least the life these immigrants had in Haiti before migrating. As such, it can be argued that Haitian Creole speakers may not have readily available in their linguistic repertoire equivalents of these concepts in Haitian Creole. For example, the concept of *overtime* is rather alien to the Haitian context where a great many people are more likely to experience unemployment than excess of work. The same can be said for words like subway, or TV dinner. There are no subways in Haiti, and people do not eat TV dinners which require the use of a regular of microwave oven still not available to the majority of the population. In fact, for many Haitian immigrants, the first exposure to these "things" came after arrival in the United States. Therefore, it is not suprising that words used by people familiar with these concepts, that is English words used by American speakers, came to be borrowed and are fully integrated in the Haitian Creole spoken in the United States, even by speakers who have little or no proficiency in English.

In addition to single lexical units, it is very common to find in the Creole speech of Haitians, English expressions that are used as sentence fillers, such as I mean, you see what I mean, you know, you understand what I am saying, and numerous others that have the same function. When such fixed expressions are inserted into Creole discourse, the purpose of the speaker is certainly

not to elicit a response, say to the question, "you see what I mean," but rather to establish some kind of contact with the interlocutor by decreasing the speech flow and inserting a pause filler. This particular usage of English expressions relate to Gumperz's concept of "interjections" to describe instances of conversational "switch" where those inserted foreign items "serve to mark an interjection or sentence filler (1982: 77).

Another way in which English influence on Haitian Creole is manifested is through the use of code-switching. This phenomenon can be defined loosely as the alternative use of two languages mostly at the phrase, clause, or sentence level. The following examples are illustrative of code-switching:

16. N a pale demen. *I have to run to the drugstore* anvan yo fèmen.
(We will speak tomorrow. I have to run to the drugstore before they close).

17. Ou risi jwenn mwen. *I have been out of town for the past week.*
(You finally found me. I have been out of town for the past week.)

18. Machè, ou ap degaje ou trè byen. *Keep up the good work.*
My dear, you are doing well. Keep up the good work.

More so than borrowing which is also present in the speech of Creole speakers with limited English proficiency, code-switching is used by bilingual speakers who have a great deal of proficiency in English. Indeed, the stretches of unmodified English presented in the above examples illustrate well-formed grammatical sentences, that could be uttered by native English speakers in a similar context. In many ways, code-switching (and borrowing) in Creole and English is a frequent occurrence among bilingual speakers, and it reflects their normal way of speaking. Any one who attends a Haitian gathering will undoubtedly be struck by the amount of English words, expressions, and entire segments that are inserted into Haitian Creole discourse.

Haitian Creole Influence on Haitian immigrant English

The English spoken by Haitian immigrants has certainly not been exempt from the native language influence. As with the Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban American communities studied respectively by Valdés (2000), Zentella (2000), and Ortheguy, García, and Roca (2000), one can assert that the English spoken by Haitian immigrants is "a micro-variety of

American English," which can sometimes be puzzling to someone who does not speak Haitian Creole. Haitian Creole loan words creep into Haitian English, which is often "peppered" by calques coming from the native language. An example of this phenomenon includes, "Haitians eat *rice and beans together*." This term refers to a particular dish made of rice and beans cooked together as one dish called *diri kole ak pwa*, which is different from *diri ak pwa an sòs*, which implies that the rice and beans are not cooked together, but separately. Only a native or an individual who has great familiarity with the Haitian language and culture would know that the English translation refers to the former dish. Another example is the use of the word *dry* to refer to cleaners as in, "I have to take my clothes to the *dry*." A non-Haitian Creole speaker might interpret this to mean dryer, washer, or laundromat. In the same connection, an American will likely be puzzled or amused to hear a Haitian say: "Don't forget to take your *kodak"* instead of "your camera." Instances of this sort of lexical creativity abound, and they are typical of Haitians who do not have a high level of competency in English.

In addition, Haitian speakers are known in the Haitian community for their literal translation of Creole idiomatic expressions. A well-known Haitian story told by an informant illustrates the point. A Haitian immigrant "fresh off the boat," who did not have medical insurance, went to see a doctor. Beforehand, he was told that medical fees in the United States were outrageously high. Therefore, according to "good old" Haitian traditions, the patient argued for more reasonable charges by saying, "Doctor, do my part. Do not kill me." Of course, any Haitian would recognize this statement to be a literal translation from Creole "*Fè pa m. Pa tiye m*," which can be used in a financial sense to convey the idea: Have some consideration for my financial means; do not destroy me." Haitians swear this story is true, and they are eager to provide many more that exemplify the infiltration of the Haitian language and culture into the English language, sometimes making the latter very opaque to its own speakers.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that Haitian immigrants have impacted the sociolinguistic fabric of urban America. Indeed, the Haitian diaspora has contributed greatly to the linguistic diversity of the

United States by bringing its language, Haitian Creole, into the American public domain. The use of Haitian Creole in the public school system, as well as in state and federal social service agencies constitutes a tangible example of the sociolinguistic transformation of American society, resulting from the presence of large immigrant groups. Moreover, as was discussed, the Haitian immigrant case demonstrate that immigrant speech can cause the emergence of new varieties of American English, which can be explained by the natural processes of language contact. All of these transformations lend credance to the notion that America is a nation of many tongues.

Notes

1. The *Haitian Times* (the leading diasporic newspaper of the Haitian community) reported that for fiscal year 2001 the U.S. Coast Guard "interdicted" 1,391 Haitians; and they stopped another 1,486 at sea between October and September 2002 (November 6–12 issue, p. 12). On October 29, 2002, another boat load of 206 people made it to the Miami shores and were picked up by the police. This particular event received extensive media coverage from all major news networks.

2. See the Immigration and Naturalization Service's 1960–2000 *Statistical Yearbooks*. The information from the U.S. 2000 census was reported in a *Haitian Times*' article, "Census Bureau Lowball Haitian Count, Experts Say" (November 27–December 3, 2002, p. 7).

3. These interviews were conducted in the context of fieldwork in the Summer of 1994, Fall 1998, and Summer 2002, respectively. Some of this information has appeared in Zéphir (1996, chapter 6).

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