

# **French in the Caribbean: characterising Guadeloupean French**

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## **1. Introduction**

France has several overseas territories in the Caribbean: the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, St Barth and one half of St Martin, the other half being ruled by the Netherlands. These former plantation colonies have remained part of France and fall under French administration and jurisdiction as French departments since 1946. The department is the main territorial unit of France and there is no difference in the administrative status of these islands from any department of Hexagonal France. Despite the widespread bilingualism and the large numbers of creole native speakers in the French West Indies, French is the only official language. Creole was banned until recently from the official media and education, but it is widely used within the community and remains the preferred variety for many bilinguals. Additionally, while literary Standard French (SF) is the target language of education and literacy programs (Vasseur, 1996), as well as the one conveyed by the official media from continental France, the French spoken in the French Antilles differs from the standard variety and bears some distinctive regional characteristics. This essay examines the characteristics of the local variety of French in use in Guadeloupe. There are three co-existing linguistic varieties on the island: two French varieties, the standard and the regional variety, along with the creole with its basilectal and mesolectal subsystems.

Chaudenson (1994) coined the term ‘marginal Frenches’ to refer to several transatlantic isolates of French, such as St Barth Patois, the variety spoken in St Thomas (British Virgin Islands) and the French spoken in Old Mine in Missouri. These varieties have in common archaic features and constitute valuable and not fully explored sources towards the reconstruction of Colonial French, the variety spoken by the colonists in the New World. This essay extends the use of marginal French to the contemporary regional dialect of French spoken in the French Antilles. Antillean French ranks with other overseas varieties of French because of its affiliation to Colonial French. It is characterised by multilayered language contact in the Caribbean over three

centuries, including the current contact with the local creole. In the absence of sufficient information on the extent features differ between islands, I prefer to use the more narrow term of Guadeloupean French (GF) which should be understood as a sub-variety of Antillean French.

GF is marginal in several ways. First, it is geographically located at the margins of French territory. Secondly, it has distinct characteristics which have been fostered by its contact with Guadeloupean Creole (GC), while others capture its ties with Colonial French and pre-Columbian languages. Finally, it has been marginally examined by French linguists. Hazaël-Massieux & Hazaël-Massieux (1996) drafted some of the characteristics of GF based on teachers' notes about mistakes that children make in school (Oliel, 1979). Many of the alleged mistakes reflect the GF dialect and are based on the local way of speaking French. More recently, Pustka (2007) proposed a list of GF features based on the analysis of an interview with a native speaker. The author suggests that GF is an emerging dialect that is currently developing out of the contact with GC. In this view GF is presented as deviating from Standard French. There are several problems with this claim which is oblivious of the linguistic history of the island and thus erroneously assumes that Standard French is the base for the formation of GF.

This essay adopts a different perspective that takes into account the history of languages in the area. The relationship between French and GC is more complex and it is methodologically flawed to reduce it to a contact between Standard French and GC. While there has been an uninterrupted French presence in Guadeloupe since the seventeenth century, the variety of French spoken on the island has never been dominantly Standard French. Our model of the formation of GF needs to account for the presence of varieties other than Standard French in this region. Section two surveys the linguistic varieties that have been present in Guadeloupe since colonial times. Section three summarises the linguistic input for the development of GF, followed by the analysis of some characteristics of GF focusing on their possible linguistic origin, examples of interferences and original local developments. Given the differences between French spelling and pronunciation, the phonetic realisation of French words is provided when relevant. Because creole orthography is almost phonetic, I have not provided phonetic transcriptions for creole words. A few things that the reader needs to bear in mind about creole orthography are that *ou* stands for [u], acute accent on vowels *é*, *ó* stands for closed [e] and [o],

grave accent è, ò stands for open [ɛ] and [ɔ], a combination *Vn* is pronounced as a nasal vowel. The data cited are based on field notes that include conversations with friends and interactions overheard on the street, as well as a set of recordings of spontaneous speech. The recorded speakers are all women of retirement age, who have grown up in monolingual households. They did not have exposure to French until school age and qualify as late learners of French. Because the excerpts come from spontaneous speech, they include hesitations and autocorrections. Initials after the quoted utterances identify the speaker.

## 2. Linguistic History of Guadeloupe

Columbus discovered the Guadeloupean Archipelago in the Lesser Antilles during his second voyage in 1493, but Spain's colonial interests were in the Greater Antilles. In 1635 the first two French colonists appointed by Richelieu and representing the interests of the *Compagnie des Isles d'Amérique* arrived in Guadeloupe. In 1643 the first French Governor was sent. Ever since, there has been a continuous and uninterrupted French presence on the island. The island went several times back and forth under British authority, which lasted for periods of 6 to 15 years, but the French dominance was ultimately restored every time, until Guadeloupe became French for good in 1816. In 1946 the French government gave the status of French *département* to its Caribbean possessions, referred to as departmentalisation.

The people who migrated to the New World came from the Atlantic coast north of Bordeaux and the northwest region of France. The French language did not have at that time the level of standardisation that it has undergone in the subsequent centuries. The speech of the colonists comprised a wide variety of regional dialectal features that each brought from his native dialect. Additionally, the majority of the settlers had received limited formal education, which increases the weight of colloquial French in the formation of the overseas varieties of French. Comparative studies of overseas varieties of French and French creoles from North America, the Caribbean and the Mascarene Islands (a group of islands in the Indian Ocean comprising Réunion, Mauritius and Rodrigues) have shown that the settlers spoke a French koiné (Chaudenson, 1994, 1998, Poirier, 1994) commonly called Colonial French. The contributors to the formation of this koiné were Picard, Norman, Parisian French, and the dialectal varieties from Poitou and Saintonge. Besides the dialectal melting pot and the colloquialisms, overseas varieties of French

include nautical vocabulary to which the settlers were exposed in the port where they waited for a boat and during the crossing at sea. With the development of larger plantation colonies, when the manpower of European indentured workers became insufficient, and as the number of slaves brought from Africa grew exponentially, the local creole developed from the contact between Colonial French and the different African languages spoken by the slaves. However, through the centuries the creole was not exclusively spoken by the slaves or people of African descent. GC was also understood and spoken among the families of European descent in which home slaves and nannies transmitted creole to the children. The descendants of the original European families in Guadeloupe fall today into two groups. *Blancs-Pays* (lit. 'Local Whites') are the descendants of large plantation owners who are still members of the economic elites on the island. The *Blancs-Pays* function as an exclusive caste (Leiris, 1955). They live in a close network, and intermarry within their group (Kováts-Beaudoux, 2002). *Blancs-Matignon* ('White-Matignon', supposedly after the name of the first settler from this group in the area where the majority of them currently live), also called *Petits-Blancs* ('Small Whites'), are the descendants of smaller land owners, generally indentured workers who acquired some land after the termination of their contract. They live in a poor rural area, Les Grands Fonds, and are associated with the low income white population. These two groups have lost their ties with continental France over the centuries and are native to Guadeloupe. They speak both French and GC.

After the abolition of slavery France brought in workers from Africa and Asia. Seventy seven thousand coolies arrived from India between 1852 and 1887. Most of them came from British India by a bilateral agreement between France and Great Britain (1861). Like the indentured workers in the past they arrived on a three year contract. Because of low wages and the difficulty of saving for the home journey most of them never went back. The Guadeloupeans of Indian descent have been assimilated and have not preserved their original languages from India. They are fully incorporated in the local culture and traditions and they also speak Guadeloupean French with GC as their main language.

While Paris has over the centuries sent administrators from Paris, the presence of speakers from Hexagonal France increased after 1848 (the abolition of slavery) and took a new impetus with the departmentalisation when France poured in executives, teachers, leaders for various French companies, as well as

more police and military. Guadeloupeans have been more exposed to Hexagonal French in modern times than ever before, because of modern media, mandatory education in French and ease of travel between France and the island. Standard French is the target language of education, although many of the local teachers speak with a Guadeloupean French accent. However, they are careful in terms of structures and lexicon and speak a very ‘clean’ version of Guadeloupean French which is closer to the standard on the linguistic continuum.

The linguistic varieties that coexist in Guadeloupe today comprise GF and Hexagonal French, as well as basilectal and mesolectal GC. Hexagonal French refers to the French spoken by the temporary immigrants from continental France. It includes SF along with other dialectal varieties spoken by the migrants from France. The distinction Hexagonal French / GF captures the distinction between the local variety and the varieties of French from France. The speech varieties in Guadeloupe are interconnected and they are organised on a continuum as illustrated in Fig. 1. The overlapping areas illustrate the fact that the boundaries between two varieties are permeable. They are the locus of constant code-switching, borrowing and interferences between two neighbouring varieties. When analyzing GF, it is necessary to distinguish between features of GF coming from GC, and interferences that speakers can make. The level of command of the French language is variable among Guadeloupeans and depends on socioeconomic background, how frequently French is used, personal linguistic preferences, and the profile of speakers with whom one interacts. A late language learner whose contacts are limited to other late language learners is prone to more interferences and confusions than highly functional bilinguals.

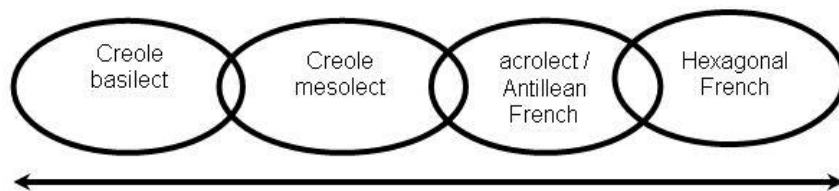


Fig. 1: Linguistic continuum in Guadeloupe

### 3. Formation of Guadeloupean French

With the growing presence of Hexagonal French and mandatory education in the French-centred education system, the rates of bilingualism have increased tremendously. In some households French is the main language. In others, GC remains the main language of communication, although people switch with ease from one language to the other. Large numbers of bilingual adults have grown up in monolingual households, and were first exposed to French in school. Bilingual Guadeloupeans can be categorised as early French learners, those who were exposed to French at birth or in their early childhood, and late French learners, who learned French in school and for whom GC remained the only language in the household. The late French learners easily transfer features from GC to French thus enhancing the GC component in the grammar of GF. Their competence in French varies greatly.

Antillean French is a multidimensional linguistic entity and its analysis needs to take into account various participants that have given or continue to give to Antillean French its characteristics. GF undoubtedly has evolved from Colonial French. It has also started receiving very early influences from GC, from bilingual speakers. These bilingual speakers comprised European settlers, freed slaves and mulattos. Colonial French occupies a central place in the development of GF. It has provided vocabulary, lexical meanings and grammatical structures directly from generation to generation in isolation from France. It also affects GF indirectly through GC that has encapsulated archaic features from French dialects that are lost in contemporary Hexagonal French.

After departmentalisation, as the number of bilinguals raised in creole speaking households increased, the number of interferences from GC also increased. Because of its prestigious status contemporary Hexagonal French also impacts upon the development of GF. Other languages that are relevant to the social and economic history of the Antilles have left, or continue to leave traces on Antillean French. They include languages spoken by the pre-Columbian societies, which are Arawak and Carib in Guadeloupe, as well as linguistic material conveyed by the main colonial actors, Spanish, Dutch and English. The different contributors to the shaping of GF are represented in Fig. 2. Because GC shares many features from Colonial French we can conceive of three types of influences from these two languages: (a) Colonial French has served as a base for the formation of contemporary GF and has provided

structures that can be traced back to French dialects or older stages of French, (b) GC has provided typical creole features to GF through language contact, and (c) some features of GF can be associated to both GC and Colonial French because they belong to the common linguistic fund shared by the two languages. The latter type of features may have been transmitted directly from Colonial French, and have remained continuously enforced by GC as the reference to Colonial French has been lost and the pressure of Hexagonal French is growing.

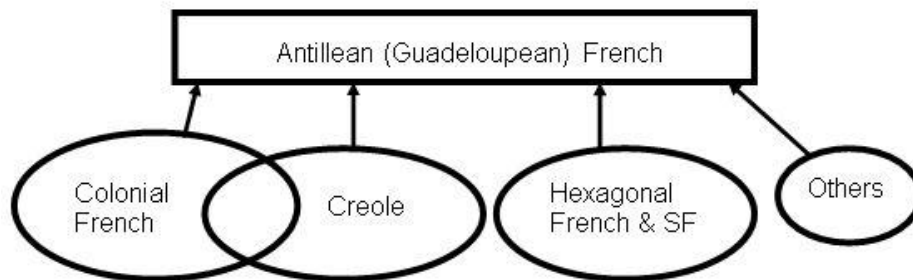


Fig. 2: Linguistic input in Guadeloupean French

The investigation of GF requires compounding data from what we know about Colonial French, features of GC which may be either from French origin or a development of the creole, as well as data from French dialects from France and the Americas where some structural characteristics may still survive. The origins of the Guadeloupean lexicon can be found in old accounts about French and creole in the colonies, French dialects and North American varieties of French, along with data from the indigenous languages, as well as Spanish, English and Dutch, as it has been shown by lexicographers of North American and Caribbean varieties of French (Rézeau et al., 2007, Rézeau, 2006, Stéhlé, 1997, Telchid, 1997, Thibault, 2008a, 2008b).

#### 4. Characteristics of Guadeloupean French and their origin

##### 4.1 Dual features

A number of features may appear to come from GC at first sight, but in-depth scrutiny reveals that they can be linked to GC as well as to Colonial French. Given that Colonial French served as a lexical and, to some extent, grammatical

base for the formation of the creole those features that are found in both languages are more likely derived from Colonial French. If a feature is shared in synchrony in GF and GC this does not mean that the feature necessarily comes from GC. The assumption in this essay is that the feature comes from Colonial French. However, in synchrony, the use of a feature or lexical item in GF is enforced by its simultaneous use in GC.

#### 4.1.1 Lexicon

Many GF lexical items have a dual origin which can be linked to both Colonial French and contemporary GC. Some terms that share the same meaning in GF and GC are *amarrer* (*mare* in GC), *cabri* (*cabrit*) and *bêtise* (*betiz*). Their Antillean meaning can be traced back to Colonial French. *Amarrer* belongs to the nautical vocabulary. Its original meaning ‘to moor’ has lost its reference to boats and has expanded to ‘to attach, fasten, tie’. Another case of semantic extension is illustrated by *cabri* which refers to a young goat in Hexagonal French, but it means a goat in general in the Antilles. By semantic extension the meaning has expanded from a particular type of goat to the whole species. The Antillean meaning was reported by an anonymous traveler as early as 1800 (Rézeau, 2006:50). The word *bêtise* (*betiz*) illustrates a situation where a dialectal meaning was preserved in the Antilles. In SF *bêtise* means ‘stupidity’, but in GF the most common meaning is ‘an insult’. *Il m’a dit un tas de bêtises* means ‘he said a bunch of insults to me’. Unless indicated by the context it is not understood as ‘a lot of nonsense’ which would be the meaning in Hexagonal French. The meaning ‘insult’ is not reported for GC in Ludwig et al. (2002), but it is attested in Haitian Creole (Valdman et al., 2007:77). In France the meaning ‘insult’ is still found in western French dialects (Thibault, 2008b:129), which suggests that the Antillean meaning came from a dialectal variety conveyed by Colonial French.

#### 4.1.2 Nasalisation

Atlantic French creoles have a nasality and place agreement rule within the syllabic rhyme. Within a branching rhyme, a nasal nucleus spreads its nasality to the voiced stop [b], [d] and [g] in coda position, which become [m], [n], and [ŋ] respectively (Valdman and Iskrova, 2003:33-34). Voiceless stops, fricatives, liquids and glides are not subject to this rule which yields agreement in nasality for consonants with a matching voice and place of articulation, as



illustrated in (1). The same rule is found in contemporary Picard (José and Auger, 2004) where nasalisation in similar conditions applies only to voiced stops, as shown in the data in

(2). The difference in the representation of nasality as / $\tilde{V}$ / in HC and / $V^n$ / in Picard is based on the phonological analysis proposed for each language.

(1) Nasal agreement in Atlantic French creoles

<i>Phonetic realisation</i>	<i>Underlying representation</i>	<i>Standard French equivalent</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
[vjãn]	/vjãd/	viande [vjãd]	‘meat’
[zãm]	/zãb/	jambe [zãb]	‘leg’
[kõpyãn]	/kõpyãnd/	comprendre [kõnpʁãdʁ]	‘to understand’
[lãŋ]	/lãg/	langue [lãg]	‘tongue, language’

(2) Nasal agreement in Picard

<i>Phonetic realisation</i>	<i>Underlying representation</i>	<i>Standard French equivalent</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>With nasalisation</i>			
[repõn]	/repo <sup>n</sup> d/	répondre [repõndʁ]	‘to answer’
[gãm]	/ga <sup>n</sup> b/	jambe [zãb]	‘leg’
<i>Without nasalisation</i>			
[bãk]	/ba <sup>n</sup> k/	banque [bãk]	‘bank’
[mẽs]	/mɛ <sup>n</sup> s/	mince [mẽs]	‘thin’

Speakers of GF have a preference for the nasalised rhymes, as exemplified in

(3). This is particularly true among late bilinguals. Nasalisation in the rhyme is a dual feature. It can be linked to a northwestern French dialect which participated in the formation of the colonial koiné. At the same time the occurrence of these words with nasal rhyme agreement in GF is likely enhanced by their concurrent presence in GC.

(3) Examples of nasalised rhymes in GC.

- a. Tu piques et tu vois que la **viande** [vjãn] est cuit. (SC)  
'You stab with a fork and see that the meat is cooked.'
- b. Il faut faire **fondre** [fõn] la poudre à colombo dans de l'eau. (MB)  
'You should dilute the *colombo* powder in some water.'

#### 4.2 Colonial French

A clear view of which features come from Colonial French is contingent on our understanding of Colonial French. There is no reference grammar of Colonial French and our present knowledge is scattered in various articles about overseas varieties of French. Most of all our understanding of Colonial French is a growing knowledge that is updated as scholars compare overseas varieties of French and dialectal varieties from France. This section contains a few examples of characteristics that can be traced to Colonial French and without any evident direct link to GC. The affiliation to Colonial French is witnessed by the feature's presence in past or present French dialects relevant to the Colonial koiné or in old stages of French.

##### 4.2.1 Lexicon

One area of the language where we can find the impact of Colonial French is in the lexicon that has preserved archaic meanings. There are lexical items in GF which are not attested in GC. This leaves Colonial French as the source, without continuity into GC. One such example is *bourg* 'town'. It refers to a small urban center as opposed to the rural surroundings on the one hand, and the big city, on the other hand. It is used by dwellers in the countryside in utterances like *Je suis descendu au bourg ce matin*. 'I went into town this morning.' The word is attested in dialects from western France (Thibault, 2008c:240-241), but it is not used in GC.

##### 4.2.2 The realisation of [h] in word initial position

Pustka (2007:265) claims that the articulation of [h] in words that orthographically start with a *h-* that is not pronounced in SF is an influence from GC. This is a misconception based on the idea that GC has word initial [h]. Words with [h] are very rare in Atlantic French creoles. There is no creole

dictionary that has more than a couple of pages of lexical entries under the letter *H*. The *Haitian Creole-English Bilingual Dictionary* (Valdman et al., 2007) has one page out of 781 pages of lexical entries. For GC, *Dictionnaire Créole Français* (Ludwig et al., 2002) has two pages out of 342 pages of lexical entries. Most lexical items with initial *h* either have more commonly used variants (*rayi/hayi* for French *hair* ‘to hate’, *wou/hou* for *houe* ‘hoe’, *wont/hont* for *honte* ‘shame’ and *rad/had* for *hardes* ‘pejorative for old clothes’), or are items of African origin that have often to do with the Voodoo tradition in HC (*houngan* ‘a Voodoo priest’, as well as *hounsa*, *hounsi*, *hounfò* which all have other phonetic variants), or are interjections and onomatopoeia which also have other variants. Word initial *h* is statistically very rare in French creoles. Two historic changes can be recorded for word initial [h]: [h] > [ɣ] (4) and [h] > [w] (5). In all the alternating words the most commonly used variant is the one with *r* or *w*, while the less common variant with *h* appears as a form that was derived directly from Colonial French. Interestingly the words with initial [h] in GF (*honte* ‘shame’, *haut* ‘high’) are also pronounced with an initial [h] in other varieties of French, such as those of West Africa. This suggests that the articulation of [h] has to do with Colonial French rather than with a local characteristic. In France, initial *h* was fully articulated in the sixteenth century. The lenition of the pronunciation of word initial *h* started towards the end of that century when number of grammarians reported what they called speakers’ negligence to pronounce initial *h* (Marchello-Nizia, 1979:89). Therefore there was variability in the pronunciation of *h* with a tendency to drop it during the formation period of the colony and of the creole. Thus pronunciations such as [h]aut, and [h]onte in GF are survivals of archaic pronunciation in Colonial French.

(4) Historic change [h] > [ʁ]

<i>French origin</i>	<i>French Creole</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
hardes <sup>1</sup>	rad / had	‘clothes’ (HC)* ‘pejorative for old clothes’ (GC)
haïr	rayi / hayi	‘to hate’
héler	rélé / hélé	‘to hail’

\*HC = Haitian Creole, GC = Guadeloupean Creole

(5) Historic change [h] > [w]

<i>French origin</i>	<i>French Creole</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
houe	wou / hou	‘hoe’
honte	wont / hont	‘shame’
hausser	wosé / hosé	‘to raise, heighten’

#### 4.2.3 Gender differences

Some words are systematically assigned a gender which is different from Hexagonal French. One example is the word for Christmas *la Noël* (fem.) instead of *le Noël* (masc.). The dictionary of Féraud (1788) indicates that the word *Noël* was treated as a feminine in the Gascon dialect in Southwestern France. Interestingly as well, the word is pronounced as [nuɛl] (instead of [noɛl]), which is an attested pronunciation from the beginning of the seventeenth century (Nicot, 1606).

#### 4.3 The role of Guadeloupean Creole

Characteristics associated to GC without any evident link to Colonial French span from substrate lexical entries to linguistic changes that have happened within the creole.

##### 4.3.1 Lexicon

The lexical items that indisputably come from GC are those that can be connected to African origins. These items came from the languages of the slaves and have no connection either to European languages or to indigenous Amerindian lexicon. Some African words which are part of the GC vocabulary

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<sup>1</sup> In *hardes*, initial h > r, and the median r was deleted. The linguistic change goes [hard] > [had] > [rad].

have also become part of GF vocabulary. For instance, the word *akra* that refers to a typical local fritter is of West African origin. The word is attested in Ewe, Fon and Yoruba where it refers to a similar type of fritter (Thibault, 2008c:231). A whisk made of a branching piece of wood, that has at least three arms is called *lélé* or *bâton-lélé* (litt. ‘lélé stick’). This term can also be traced to its African origin.

Depending on the level of command of French some creole lexical items can be used within a GF sentence by interference. These interferences can be very robust for some speakers to the point that one can believe that this is the only lexical entry that the speaker has. In (6) speaker MB uses the creole *zépís* instead of *épices*. However she is familiar with the French term, that she uses elsewhere and it seems that *zépís* and *épices* are in competition in her vocabulary. Interestingly, she assigns to the GC *zépís* a default masculine singular (*du*) instead of the expected French feminine plural *des épices*. On the other hand, she systematically uses the creole *ansaisonner* with a nasalisation, instead of *assaisonner* used here with the meaning of ‘adding salt and pepper’. It is possible that she does not have the French lexical entry *assaisonner* in her vocabulary. The use of *ansaisonner* in French utterances was attested in other speakers as well.

- (6) Vous ne faites pas **ansaisonner** votre viande pour que la viande a le temps de prendre le goût **du zépís**. (MB)  
 You do not put salt and pepper in your meat so that the meat can take in the flavour of the spices.

#### 4.3.2 Glide insertion

Because of a strong constraint on syllable well-formedness with an onset, GC inserts a glide between two vowels. The glide agrees with the feature [back] with the first vowel. French *poète* [pɔɛt] ‘poet’ has become *powèt* [powɛt], and *théâtre* [tɛatʁ] ‘theater’ has become *tèyat* [tɛjat]. Glide insertion is common in GF, although this is not the only possible pronunciation of vowel sequences. A sociolinguistic analysis may establish a profile of GF speakers who use glide insertion as opposed to those who tend not to. Common examples of glide insertion include *guadeloupé[j]en* ‘Guadeloupean’, *cre[j]ole* ‘creole’, and *pays [pɛjɪ]* ‘country, (adj.) local’.

#### 4.3.3 Consonant cluster reduction

Consonant clusters of a stop followed by a liquid were simplified in French creoles. The French words *table* ‘table’, *mettre* ‘to put’, *meuble* ‘piece of furniture’ have become *tab*, *mèt*, *mèb* in GC. Cluster simplification is also common among GF speakers. I have reservations to derive consonant cluster reduction from GC only. In colloquial Hexagonal French realisations of the type [tʰab], [mɛtʰ], etc. are quite common. French creoles seem to have achieved a phonetic change which has been pending for French for centuries. These clusters that violate the sonority scale principle are generally difficult for foreign learners, and are prone to simplification in a general language change perspective. The creole certainly enforces cluster reduction and the number of speakers who do it is probably statistically higher in Guadeloupe than in Continental France, but the process itself may be linked to a general tendency towards cluster simplification.

#### 4.3.4 Expression of intensity

French creole uses repetition in order to express intensity. Guadeloupean speakers often use such repetitions in French. French would reduplicate an adjective or an adverb, but would rarely repeat it more than twice, whereas in GF the same word is often repeated three or four times. While reduplication is a device used to express intensity in both languages, it appears that speakers have a preference for the creole pattern which reduplicates several times.

- (7) Avant que—que le—l’eau soit trop trop trop trop chaude vous ajoutez la poudre à colombo dedans. (MB)  
 Before the water becomes *too too too too* hot, you add the colombo powder to it.

#### 4.3.5 Factitive construction

The factitive construction in GF follows the same template as in GC. The structure differs from Hexagonal French in that the latter places the agent after the object, while both GC and GF place the agent in subject position before the verb. This is illustrated in

- (8) with the sentence meaning ‘I had the children write the homework’ in the three linguistic varieties.

- (8) HF J'a fait faire le devoir aux enfants.  
lit. 'I made do the homework to the children.'
- GC An te fè se timoun la ekri devwa la.  
GF J'ai fait les enfants écrire le devoir.  
lit. 'I made the children write the homework.'

#### 4.4 The role of Hexagonal French and Standard French

The role of Hexagonal French is of course tremendous. It levels the Antillean dialect with the grammar of SF. It also provides new vocabulary and new expressions. It is the standard that educated speakers emulate.

Pustka (2007:267) has observed that Guadeloupeans tend to use a large number of optional liaisons, by which a consonant from the preceding word fills the missing onset of a vowel initial word. Thus *les îles* 'the islands' is pronounced [lezi.l]. Optional liaisons are associated with higher registers, and yet Guadeloupeans who have approximate competence in French tend to use those. This could be the effect of the fact that the target language in school is high register written language. In Guadeloupe, there is much more emphasis on teaching proper writing than in teaching verbal SF, because it is assumed that the spoken language is SF, and there is little effort to point out the differences between GF and the standard variety.

But there is another possible explanation for the preference for liaison. French creoles do not like hiatus, and have a preference for onsets (4.3.2). French liaison provides a good repair strategy to potential hiatus situations at word boundaries and thus optional liaison may be preferred to the omission of liaison. This is the reason why some French words have been introduced in GC with the liaison consonant: *zépól* 'shoulder' from *les épaules* 'the shoulders', and *zanmi* 'friend' from *les amis* 'the friends'. Likewise the French definite article has been incorporated to GC lexical entries: *lasasen* from *l'assassin* 'the assassin', *latè* from *la terre* 'the Earth', *lèjij* from *le juge* 'the judge'.

#### 4.5 Other influences

Influences from the many languages that played a role in Caribbean history and culture can be found mostly in the lexicon. Many of these lexical entries coming from languages other than GC, African substrate and archaic Colonial French, are found both in GF and GC, often times with the adequate phonetic adjustments required by the language. Except for the most recently introduced

words like those from Indian origin, many of these words were used concomitantly in GC and in Colonial French. Some of them were conveyed by French travellers beyond the limits of the French Caribbean. The legacy from Spanish includes the local term for ‘hill’ *morne*, which comes from *morna* with the same meaning in Spanish. Also the word *bosal* has preserved one of its original Spanish meanings. This term, erroneously derived from French *peau sale* (litt. ‘dirty skin’ to refer to colored people), comes from Spanish *bozal*. Before the transatlantic slave trade, when Spanish nobles were bringing in slaves to Spain from Africa this term referred to slaves who spoke Spanish poorly, by metonymy with *bozal* ‘muzzle’. By semantic extension the term came to refer to untamed newly arrived slaves who were rebellious and unwilling to accept the rules. In the context of the Atlantic slave trade *bozal/bosal* referred to newly arrived slaves as opposed to those who had spent some time in the colony. In GF *bosal* refers to an uncouth and unsociable person, someone who does not conform to the local norms and rules.

Some Indian vocabulary is commonly used and is even associated with Guadeloupean cultural symbols. By metonymy *madras*, from the city formerly known as Madras, designates a fabric with a colourful checkered print in which there is always yellow and red. This fabric is used to make the traditional Guadeloupean dress and head scarf. *Colombo* is a curry-based traditional dish named after the powder that flavours the dish. It is also likely that the term *dombré*, dough balls that cook with the sauce of a dish made with meat or shrimp is also of Indian origin. A popular etymology claims that this word came from English ‘dumb bread’ which would have been a low grade bread given to the slaves. However, *dum* is a technology used to braise bread in India, and it is more likely that the word *dombré* comes from this technology and designates the way these dough balls are cooked.

The Guadeloupean lexicon comprises some pre-Columbian words from Carib origin. These comprise *carbet*, a shelter with a pinnacle roof that is open on all sides, *coui*, a bowl made of half of a calabash that serves various purposes in cooking, and *canari*, a clay utensil used for cooking. The latter term traveled from the Antilles to Africa (Thibault, 2008c:248-250) and is today commonly used in West African French where it refers to a very large jar used for water storage.

Stéhlé (1997) suggests that the words *iguane* ‘iguana’, *maringouin* ‘mosquito’, *tamarin* ‘tamarind’, *giraumont* ‘pumpkin’, and *palétuvier* ‘man-



grove' which are of common usage in GF came from Brazil. Likely these words were brought to Guadeloupe when the Portuguese expelled the Dutch from Brazil (1656). Dutch slave owners with their slaves settled in the French Antilles at that time. The first four words come from indigenous languages from Brazil (Guarani and Tupi), but *palétuvier* comes from Maoro, a language from the Philippines, and it illustrates how the European settlers conveyed exotic vocabulary not only in the region, but from all over their possessions around the world.

## 5. Interference phenomena

There are certain characteristics of GF that do not constitute a coherent class, and that are subject to variability. These are better characterised as interferences with GC, notably for late learners, rather than real GF features.

### 5.1 Gender confusions and omissions

French creoles have no gender, but French has masculine and feminine. There are two things happening with gender in GF. On the one hand, some words systematically have a different gender. This is systemic and part of GF grammar (cf. 04.2.3). On the other hand, it is frequent to hear gender inconsistencies and hesitations in GF. This has to do with the fact that GC has no gender and speakers, in particular creole native speakers, are sometimes confused and may select the wrong gender in fast speech. It seems however that they have the actual gender of the word in their grammar because most often they autocorrect (9).

- (9) Vous mettez ça au [hesitation] quand **la**— **le** repas est prêt. (MB)  
You put this in [a hesitation] when the-FEM.— the-MASC. meal is ready.

Similarly, speakers forget to make gender agreement. In French, the past participle agrees with the subject after the auxiliary *être* 'to be'. Proper gender agreement requires *la viande est cuite* [kɥit] instead of *la viande est cuit* [kɥi] (10).

- (10) Et quand c'est cuit - tu piques et tu vois que la viann est **cuit** [...]. (SC)  
 When it is cooked – you stab with a fork and you see that the meat is cooked [...].

## 5.2 Number confusion

A similar situation rises with number. GC lexical entries are not marked for number. In French however, some words are marked to be plural: *les coordonnées* 'coordinates, whereabouts', *les fiançailles* 'engagement', *les archives* 'archives'. Some speakers ignore the plural of these lexical items, as illustrated in (11). In French, when listing ingredients you have to use the partitive article *de* 'some', which becomes *du* when combined with the masc. singular definite article (*\*de le*) and *des* when combined with the plural (*\*de les*). The word for 'chives' *cives* is marked for feminine plural. However speaker MB uses the masculine singular *du* instead of the plural *des*. Thus the lexical entry *cives* is singular masculine in the grammar of this speaker, who used *du* every time she referred to chives. However, for other speakers such confusion does not occur. The gender confusion comes from the speaker's command of French.

- (11) Il faut du persil, du thym et **du** cives, et euh de l'ail. (MB)  
 You need PARTITIVE parsley, PARTITIVE thyme and PARTITIVE chives, and, er, PARTITIVE garlic.

## 6. Internal changes

While many of the characteristics of GF can be associated with the contact with other languages or their archaic Colonial French origin, GF has also undergone internal changes that cannot be explained with language contact and interferences. One such example is the weakening of French rhotics. French *r* becomes [w] in word final position *la me[w]* instead of [lamɛʁ], for some words when preceding a back vowel [wɔʃ] for *roche* 'stone, pebble', and in some onset clusters [sitwõ] for *citron* 'lemon'. While these changes are reminiscent of the GC treatment of French *r* they are not quite the same. For instance, GC has completely deleted word final *r* *lanmè* for *la mer*. The substitution of *r* by [w] in particular in word final position is pervasive and affects most speakers, even some careful speakers who try to stand as close as possible to SF.

## 7. Conclusion

This brief survey of GF advances the hypothesis that GF is a complex linguistic entity that has developed at the crossroads of the different languages that have affected the French Antilles. Colonial French and Guadeloupean Creole play a dominant role. The role of Colonial French is sometimes obscured by GC. However many structures in GC are derived from Colonial French and often times what may appear to be a GC input is more accurately characterised as a Colonial French component. The role of Colonial French will become more evident as comparative studies across overseas varieties of French and French-based creoles make progress toward the description of the koiné spoken by the settlers. The proposed analysis tries to set guidelines for continuing research on the development of Antillean French dialects, in the French West-Indies. It seems paramount that research on these varieties should weigh equitably material available in French dialects, both in France and overseas, towards rebuilding the historic development of Antillean French. Antillean French is on the one hand a contact variety that has incorporated features from GC, but it is also a relative of the overseas varieties of French that developed out of Colonial French.

The use of some of the features described in this essay varies greatly from speaker to speaker. Further work on GF should concentrate on quantitative data in order to determine the profile of the users of various features and to characterise more accurately the GF continuum that unfolds from late language learners to highly functional bilinguals.

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