

The evolution of Kreol Morisien (KM) in the Mauritian classroom: From oral language to taught language.

Dr Yesha Mahadeo-Doorgakant, Lecturer, MIE

This paper emanates from data generated from a linguistic ethnographic study conducted in the Republic of Mauritius, which is located about 2000 kilometres off the southeast coast of Africa. Mauritius having been both a French and British colony, has inherited from a multilingual linguistic situation which is embedded within its double colonial heritage system. Kreol Morisien (KM)¹ is the language used by over 86.5% Mauritians (Republic of Mauritius Housing and Population Census, 2011) with French, seen as the language of prestige and most often used in social and formal spheres though it is the home language of only 4.1 % Mauritians. English is used by less than 1% Mauritians and is often considered as being a foreign language, enjoys the privileged status of being the statutory language of parliament, curriculum, as well as medium of instruction in schools. When a Mauritian learner starts his primary schooling, he/she also needs to learn French as a compulsory subject until upper secondary and is expected to opt for an additional language offered as optional languages; namely one of the ancestral languages (ALs) Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Mandarin, Hakka, or Urdu. After 44 years of independence, in 2012, the mother tongue of most Mauritians, KM which was standardised as an official language in 2011, was also offered as an optional language within the educational system at par as the other ancestral languages present in the curriculum. It is within this contextualisation of the major policy redirection with the official introduction of Kreol Morisien (KM) taught as an optional language, that this study is posited. Linguistic ethnographic data was produced over a nine-weeks period and consisted of thick observations of the KM classroom as well as informal chats with the KM teacher. The data was then analysed through comparative discourse analytical strategies emanating from the linguistic field (Blommaert, 2013; Scollon, 2001, 2004, 2008). One of the key findings of this study is that despite the official introduction of KM within the multilingual educational system of Mauritius, it remains very much marginalised by society, translated through the dissonance between the official institutional discourses and the constant negotiation and renegotiation of the space allocated to the teaching of KM, through the marginalised figure of the KM teacher, who sits on the periphery. The marginalisation of the KM teacher spatially mirrors the compartmentalisation of KM within the education system even though it has evolved from an oral language and been standardised as well as granted official status.

¹ The Mauritian Creole

Key words: evolution, Kreol Morisien (KM), Mauritian classroom, oral language, taught language

References

Blommaert, J. (2013). *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes: Chronicles of Complexity*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. (2011). *2011 POPULATION CENSUS-MAIN RESULTS*. Retrieved from

<http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/CensusandSurveys/Documents/ESI/pop2011.pdf>

Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. (2000). *2000 POPULATION CENSUS-MAIN RESULTS*. Retrieved from <http://statsmauritius.govmu.org/English/Pages/2000--POPULATION--CENSUS---MAIN--RESULTS.aspx>

Scollon, R. (2001). *Mediated Discourse Analysis: The Nexus of Practice*. London: Routledge.

Scollon, R. (2008). *Analyzing public discourse: Discourse analysis in the making of public policy*. Routledge.

Scollon, S. W. (2004). *Nexus analysis: Discourse and the emerging internet*. Routledge.