

BASILECTS IN CREOLE LITERATURES: EXAMPLES FROM SRANAN, CAPEVERDIAN CRIOULO AND ANTILLEAN KRÉYOL

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Language and dialect choice are frequently thematized in creole literature, notably in Alfred Parépou's 1885 Guianese novel *Atipa*. The concept of the basilect has accordingly played an important role in creole writing, critical thinking, and polemic. Given the assimilative pressure exerted by the superstrate, writers and critics often argue that the ideal creole literary dialect should be as divergent from it as possible. During the 1980s the P.A.I.C.V. government in Cape Verde tried to promote a revolutionary literature in what was described as the deep, original dialect of Crioulo, that of the hinterland of Santiago Island. Of particular interest were the agency of the *Institutu Kauberdiannu di Livru* in Praia and the intellectual work of Manuel Veiga, especially his *Dikrison Struktural di Lingua Kabuverdianu*. Around the same time, writers in Martinique, most prominently Raphaël Confiant, embraced the vision of a literary basilect 'maximally deviant' from standard French, which Jean Bernabé defined as a 'nuclear creole.' This article concludes with an extract from one of Confiant's novels in which 'hyper-acrolectal' French is humorously contrasted with the author's figuration of deep Kréyol.

KEYWORDS: *creole literatures, basilect, diglossia, literary dialect, orthography, Sranan poetry, Capeverdean literature, Raphaël Confiant*

Introduction

What follows is at least two removes from raw linguistic data. Literary works are self-conscious discursive acts whose relation to language itself is mediated by many factors. Writing in creole languages can in addition be qualified as an exacerbated instance of literary discourse, given the special onus it bears. There are significant bodies of writing in several creole

languages, among them Capeverdean Crioulo, the French Antillean creoles, Papiamentu, and Sranan.¹ Yet to a degree unparalleled in more standardized languages, authors of literary texts in creoles still work within inchoate traditions, not only assuming the role of cultural spokesperson but virtually serving as language teacher, often a rather prescriptive one. As Maximilien Laroche observed (1987: 20): '[W]riting in creole entails a didactic effort like that shared between teacher and pupil.'² Put another way, writing in creole is inherently illocutionary; it concerns 'a relationship of commitment to the utterance' on the part of the author. 'While all illocutionary acts are 'performative' in the sense that they function as social action, [an illocutionary] declaration actually brings about the state of affairs it predicates' (Lanser, 1993: 1204–205). Although far from all creole writers have embraced the ideal of the basilect, this linguistic concept has played an important role in both polemic and scriptural practice.

Though confusion sometimes prevails whether the acrolect of any given basilect is the highest dialect of the creole itself or the lexically-related superstrate in a context of language contact, a basilect is necessarily relative to its upper and middle counterparts. Basilects have, moreover, been difficult to capture in the wild, especially in contexts of decreolization or in the realm of semi-creoles. As long ago as 1971, Bailey, discussing Jamaican creole, characterized the basilect as an 'idealized construct which lies at the core of all borrowing and interference as manifest in the continuum' (342). Mufwene went further, arguing that basilectal utterances are mere 'analytical postulates' around which data is wrapped by linguists (1986: 135). Whatever the scientific status of basilects, there is no doubt they retain what Holm calls 'heuristic value' (2002: 191). This heuristic value has been keenly felt by creole writers, though I shall be arguing that, in literature, basilects are not so much analytical postulates as stylistic postures.

¹ For a broad survey, see Lang (2000); for Crioulo, Veiga (1998); for Haitian, Lang (in press); for Papiamentu, Rutgers (1996) and Broek (1998), for Sranan, Voorhoeve & Lichtfeld (1975).

² Here and throughout, my translations.

Basilects and politics

Like the term itself, the ideal of basilectal writing coincides historically with decolonization in Africa, the Caribbean and beyond. There is in fact a direct link between 'Third Worldism,' as expressed, say, in the work of Frantz Fanon, and the most systematic attempt at creating a basilectal (revolutionary) literature, that of the P.A.I.C.V. government during the *Kauberdianu* period of Capeverdian writing, about which more below.³

Alongside the *Kauberdianu* model of an institutionally prescribed basilect, one which based its claims in part upon linguistic analysis, there is a second model, one purveyed through literary polemic and stylistic innovation. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s the orthography and diction of literary writing in Sranan was successively renovated by the poets J.G.A. Koenders and Trefossa (pseudonym of Henri Frans de Ziel), each taking the language further away from the Dutchified 'Church Creole' which had become the norm for 'high' expression in Sranan.⁴ Although independence did not arrive until 1975, once autonomy of a sort was granted in 1957, Surinamese nationalism was in the air, and Sranan was widely perceived to be its natural vehicle, this despite the linguistic complexity of the country, one in which several creoles and/or creole dialects coexist. There is nothing inherently 'creole' about such conflation of nation and language. Indeed, this notion, often attributed to Herder, continues to influence nation-states around the world. A key difference resides in the fact that most literary dialects have been configured as 'high' not 'low,' whereas the opposite tends to be the case in creole literatures. This axiological inversion – placing value on what is lower or closer to the 'people' rather than the 'literary dialect' of an elite – reflects the history and perceived status and state of creoles.⁵ Creoles typically participate

³ Though both *Kabuverdianu* and *Kauberdianu* were used at different points in time, I have somewhat arbitrarily chosen *Kauberdianu* to refer to the literary dialect of Capeverdian Crioulo promoted by the *Partido Africano pela Independência de Cabo Verde* during its decade and a half of rule.

⁴ Some features of this dialect were due to the fact that Dutch-speaking missionaries had relied upon an etymological spelling of Sranan texts (Voorhoeve 1957a: 187). Detailed analysis of the poetic transformation of Sranan by Koenders and Trefossa can be found in Voorhoeve (1957b).

⁵ Note that I am using 'literary dialect' not in the sense of a particular representation of 'non-standard' speech in literature, rather as the standardized general frame of stylistic

in diglossic milieux. The vast majority, if not all creole writers have been bilingual. With or without justification, they frequently associate diglossia with sickness or disease, e.g., the *mal diglottique* of the Martinican linguist Jean Bernabé or the *malesa di semi-lingualismo* of the Curaçaoan linguist and novelist Frank Martinus Arion (1983).⁶ The bilingual literates who have access to both the acrolect and/or superstrate and the vernacular varieties of a creole are thus prone to fear of cultural assimilation, language obsolescence and death. Though far from all writers take basilects as ideal, their appeal is strong, since it is imagined that the dialects farthest from the acrolect offer the safest refuge from assimilation. Inherently metalinguistic, writing in creoles often not only enacts but overtly portrays the predicament of language and dialect choice, notably in Alfred Parépou's *Atipa* (1885), in which the Guianese hero is depicted mocking both (acrolectal) French and mesolectal Kréol.

Although writing in the etymological orthography common in creoles during the late nineteenth century, Parépou contrasted the spontaneity and vitality of *Kreol Gwiyane* with what his protagonist *Atipa* humorously describes as 'slaughtered' French. Here, the character *Atipa* is sharing a friendly absinthe with a buddy, *Bosobio*, when two other Guianese sit down nearby (1987: 9).

Dé ôte nègue entré, en meinme temps qué yé. Nègue yé la prend oune tabe, pas loin di Bosobio. Oune di yé té gain lai doctò. Li té ca palé francé, oune so. Li dit so canmarade: <<Eh bin! Qu'est-ce que tu prenez? De l'amer ou de la punch?>> <<Anmè>>, réponne canramarad la. Li doumandé donc, dé anmè yanne.

– To tendé nègue la, dit *Atipa*. A ça ca kioé mo, qué yé la. Ou pas savé oune langue, ou wlé li ou wlé fait cranne. Li pas gain quichose mo rhaï passé ça. Ou ça criole, palé donc ou langue, passé ou massacré francé.

(Two other men had come in when they did and took a table next to *Bosobio*. One of them looked educated: he spoke only French. He said to his friend:

conventions which mark any particular text as 'literary' within any given literary system. While some may be tempted to call this a 'register,' the fact that novels include representations of many social registers (Bakhtin even argues that this is their very nature), argues against using this term.

⁶ Bernabé (in Mauvois, 1988: 13) distinguishes between unhealthy *diglossie*, in which the individual is schizophrenically riven within, from healthy *biglossie*, in which each language is fully constituted and enhances the individual.

'Well, what you wants [sic]? A bitter or punch?' 'A bitter', he friend replied. So they ordered two bitters.

'Did you hear that guy?' Atipa asked. 'That just drives me crazy. A guy doesn't even know a language and he uses it just to show off. There's nothing I hate worse. If you are Creole, you should speak your own tongue instead of slaughtering French'.)

This 'primal scene' or some variant of it returns almost obsessively in literary creole both in the works themselves and in the critical writing about them.

In the space that remains, I restrict myself to two more or less contemporary literary basilects, the first promoted by the P.A.I.C.V. government in Cape Verde during the 1970s and 1980s, the second prescribed in Martinique and Guadeloupe by writers associated with G.É.R.E.C. (*Groupe des Études et de Recherche en Espace Créolophone*), in particular the novelist Raphaël Confiant. Colleagues specialized in each of these creoles will recognize that both are dialectally complex, to the extent that it is difficult to determine if either indeed has a single, unified basilect.

Contemporary literary basilects I: Crioulo

As observed above, the most direct application of Fanonism to a creole culture was the Kauberdianu movement in Cape Verde, whose roots can be found in the writings of Amílcar Cabral, assassinated in 1975.⁷ When the political party of which he remained a figurehead came to power in the separate nation-states of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, *Kriyol* was declared the national language on the continent, Kauberdianu on the islands, and these roughly phonological endonyms also functioned as emblems of ethnolinguistic identity. During the years of the P.A.I.C.V. government, literature in Crioulo was administered by the quasi-official *Institutu Kauverdianu di Livru*, though works under its aegis were mostly confined to collections of poetry (for example Káká Barbosa's *Vinti Sintindu Letrádu na Kriolu*, *Twenty Poems Written in Crioulo*), the occasional free-standing Crioulo poem in cultural reviews sponsored or tolerated by the Institute (*Raízes* [Roots], *Fragmentos*

⁷ Strictly speaking, Cabral diverged from Fanon since he allowed a broader role for colonized intellectuals in the revolutionary process than the Martiniquan. According to Cabral, a nation was a heterogeneous compound of social and ethnic groups, and even *petit bourgeois* intellectuals had some degree of positive political agency in its constitution (1994: 55).

[Fragments] and *Magma*), as well as transcriptions and/adaptations of oral literature, in particular those by Tomé Varela da Silva, director of the *Departamento de Tradições Orais* (Department of Oral Traditions) during the 1980s. Varela da Silva's *Nâ Bibinâ Kabral: Bida y Obra* (1988a) is a biography *cum* study of the renowned Santiago Island singer Bibinâ Kabral. The twenty-five tales told in his *Natal y Kontus* (Birth & Tale, 1988b) are derived from but far from mere retellings of folktales. Composed in vernacular Santiago Crioulo, they are put into the orthography the *Instituto* tried to promote.

Literary Kauberdiānu may be said to have gravitated around the figure of the *Badiu* or peasant from the hinterland of Santiago, symbol of the traditions upon which the autonomy of the revolutionary culture of Cape Verde was predicated, and token of the harsh dichotomies of Capeverdian history, since Badiu are synonymous with *escravos boçais*, slaves good only for brute labour. In the words of Luís Romano: 'the wisdom of our people is obvious in daily life in Cape Verde, in the philosophical idea of our already ancient Badiu, in childrens' play, in the dances and songs which are characteristic of the islands' (1988: 5). In the same vein, the poet Oswaldo Osário collected a volume of *Cantigas de trabalho* (Works Songs) in commemoration of the fifth anniversary of independence (the text comes with a 33 RPM vinyl). Osário traces these work-songs back to slavery and to labour at the *trapiche*, the sugar mill powered by slaves and afterwards by cattle. The frontispiece photographs of a slave-driven and a cattle-driven trapiche further connect the songs with a familiar character in Capeverdian folklore, the *Boi* or Bull, whose lament is known as *canto di bombâ* (*bombar*, to bellow) and whose struggles serve as an 'archetype from the depths of the colonial night, symbolizing subjugation, endurance, but also unsuspected reservoirs upon which gestures of courage and rebellion can be drawn' (1980: 42).

Alongside these sugar mill work-songs (*as cantigas de curral de trapiche*) are related songs collected by Osário – bird or scarecrow, weed-picker and fishermens' songs, as well as *rafoju*, satirical sayings – many attested in the ethnography of the twenties and thirties. For Osário these were essential components of, first, the renaissance of Capeverdian culture, and then the core of a politically committed Kauberdiānu literary system. In the words of Amílcar Cabral, 'in the process of liquidating the colonial culture and eliminating the negative aspects of our culture from our own minds and our society, we must create a new culture, yet one based on our

traditions' (in Osário 1980: 6). Associated with the conceit of the Badiu is thus a generic continuum running from work-songs, *rafoju* and folktales to studies transcribing them (such as *Cantigas de trabalho* itself), and on to works inspired by them.

Kauberddianu found its most articulate proponent in the person of Manuel Veiga, whose novel *Odju d'Agu* (Eye of Water) is composed in the orthography proposed in his own *Diskrison Strutural di Lingua Kabuverdianu* (Structural Description of the Capeverdian Language, 1982). Though the preface and introduction are in Portuguese, Veiga put the rest of his study into Crioulo, forging a technical vocabulary: 'Fonétika e un siénsa ki ta studa sons di un lingua na si aspétu físiku (o akústiku)'...; 'Kriolu e un lingua ki nase di kruzamentu di alguns lingua di Áfrika ku purtuges. Mas es kruzamentu li konkista si personalidadi, si otonomía strutural y si dignidadi linguístiku' ... (27, 35). At the time of its publication, no other creole had so studied itself, at least not to my knowledge. Something of a literary monument in its own right, *Diskrison* also documents a generational divide in the linguistic analysis of creoles, since it was cast in terms of structural linguistics, as opposed to the classical philology of the other key work on Crioulo, Baltasar Lopes da Silva's *O Dialecto Crioulo* (1984), which – I hesitate to add here – is a much richer source of information. Aware that dialectal variation of Crioulo might undermine other aspects of national unity, Veiga argued, as Minister of Culture, that 'there is a common structure in all the [Capeverdian] variants, which is why there is a relative mutual comprehensibility through the archipelago. I conclude that there does indeed exist a sole National Language [*uma única Lingua Nacional*]' (1). Though Veiga did not invoke the notion of basilect to justify his position, the national language he postulated was 'deep' in the sense both that it was attributed to hinterland (and hence uncontaminated) speakers on Santiago, what we might think of as the homeland of the Badiu, and that it was construed to be the mother dialect from which all other Crioulo varieties derived, an originary and linear genealogy which might be disputed. Similarly, the 'phonetic-phonological' orthography he proposed could, he argued, subsume the other varieties because it reflected the deep structures of Crioulo. Over two decades later, Veiga continues to

hold that the Crioulo of Santiago is 'the matrix of all others' (*a matriz de todas as outras variantes*).⁸

Perhaps it is inevitable that a new elite wielding a creole as the vehicle of a national culture enter into conflict not only with the metropolitan / superstrate powers that be, but also the masses in whose name it claims to speak. Leaving aside the scientific value of Veiga's description (not the issue here), his proposed single national tongue was, as seen from the *Barlavento* or northern islands, suspiciously close to the southern *Sotavento* dialect of Santiago, seat of government, and hence the presumed instrument of a given political agenda with as much regional as ideological content.⁹ In other words the nationalist and Marxist government of the P.A.I.C.V. was perceived to be foisting its regional agenda on a northern minority, which had a long and distinct history. In fact, the *Barlavento* dialect of São Vicente Island had been the vehicle of much writing, poetry and song, most notably in the *morna* genre (now successfully commercialized world-wide by Cesária Évora), plus a best-selling 'mesolectal' version of the Gospels (Sérgio Frusoni's *Vangêla*, Gospels). The tension between these two regional poles of legitimacy is confirmed by the fact that after the advent of the *abertura* or opening to pluralistic democracy in 1990, Manuel Veiga was replaced as Minister of Culture by a native of Mindelo, an opponent of the former regime, and has now returned as Minister of Culture under a renewed P.A.I.C.V. government, from which position he continues, under somewhat altered circumstances, to advance the cause of the Santiaguense dialect.¹⁰

Much changed in Capeverdian literary culture since the end of the P.A.I.C.V. government, notably the demise of the Kauberdianu project of a politically-committed basilectal literature engaged in self-conscious nation-building. The underlying diglossic reality of Capeverdian literary culture never disappeared during that period, ironically at a moment when Cesária Évora's *mornas* in Crioulo have become internationally prized. Crioulo remains preferred for certain themes and topics, but not others, for which Portuguese is reserved – though the former domains increasing include schools

⁸ <http://www.africanidade.com/superior/imprime.asp?noticia=1280> (accessed 19.12.03).

⁹ Devonish (1986: 53–86) discusses similar conflicts in Haiti, Suriname, and the Netherlands Antilles.

¹⁰ I am grateful to an anonymous JPCL reader for this update.

and political institutions such as the Parliament. In other words, Capeverdian literary diglossia is more or less as Manuel Ferreira described it before the P.A.I.C.V. first came to power: 'Crioulo to describe direct, humble, domestic immediate things, Portuguese to pursue the adventure of reflection, for lines of thought which might well be popular but which emerge from a vaster degree of ambition.' (1985: 134).

Contemporary literary basilects II: Antillean Kréyol

The political situation of Martinique is strikingly different from that in Cape Verde. The former has never obtained independence and remains fully integrated into the French state as a D.O.M. (*Département d'Outremer*). It is instead shared *literary* (as opposed to *linguistic*) typology which brings them together here. Writers of both languages must persevere within the powerful gravitational fields of the respective superstrates. Anecdotally: in 1989 the weekly arrival of journals and newspapers from Lisbon still marked a moment of local excitement at the Praia office of the *Institutu Kauberdianu di Livru*; by the same token, it would be superfetatory to comment on the role Paris played and continues to play among the Martiniquan literati. The Crioulo and Kréyol literary systems are both endangered by assimilation, and at two levels. Their readers are usually also literate in the superstrate and potentially tempted by it. Likewise, writers themselves can readily aspire to a more rewarding literary career in the superstrate. There is no more striking example in recent years than Raphaël Confiant's decision to emulate his friend and colleague Patrick Chamoiseau's metropolitan success (e.g. *Le prix Goncourt* in 1992 for *Texaco*) by composing his own series of novels in dazzling French.¹¹

Another difference between the Capeverdian and Martiniquan situations is that the concept of the basilect and its implications for literature had been explicitly theorized in the French creolist circles to which Confiant and his associates in G.É.R.E.C. belong. Acknowledging the artificial nature of literary basilects, Jean Bernabé coined the term 'nuclear creoles,' which he defined

¹¹ Asked whether he would continue writing in Kreyol, Confiant replied: 'I'm just waiting for Blacks to give me money. It is fine for them to pay for Zouk, but if they want books in creole, they'll have to pay.... If anyone is upset that I am not writing in Kréyol, all they have to do is write me a check, and I'll publish twenty books for them in Kréyol' (1991: 4).

as literary constructions marked by the 'maximum of deviation' from the standard. Bernabé allowed that a nuclear creole remains 'an artifact, a theoretical object' and ought not be confused with the 'concrete and lived reality' of the basilect (1983: 128–129), though this distinction is predicated on the arguable premise that basilects themselves are more than purely 'analytical postulates' (per Mufwene above, but this too is an issue we need not take up here). Though basilects are associated with states of language proper to sectors of the population which have had the least contact with metropolitan speech, hence maximally 'deviant,' the desire for a literary nuclear creole emanates from a very different social setting. Proponents of basilectal creole tend to come from the French-educated but alienated urban middle classes whose goal is apparently to recover a sense of authentic speech, or at least such debris of deep creole as remain. It follows that nuclear creole methodically avoids loan-words from the superstrate, relying instead upon nativized morphophonemic devices to produce neologisms and turns of phrase made to appear authentic.

Here are some prescriptions for basilectal G.É.R.E.C. Kreyol from a *Bwétamo* (*coffre* [boîte] à mots, box of words, thesaurus) published in Guadeloupean cultural review, *Kabouya* in 1988.¹²

As can be seen, the principle of maximum deviation from French is relative, since the difference between 3) basilectal *potalans*, importance, and mesolectal creole *lenpòtans* turns around the deletion of the underlying definite article in French: *l'importance* vs. *importance*. *Achoukay* is no more or less 'French' than *anrasinman*, but substitutes a more native-sounding morpheme (*chouk* from *souche*, root or source) into the same pattern of prefixes and suffixes (*en-racinement*, in-rooting). *Gamn*, 'elegance', is also from French (*gamme*, scale), but has acquired a special sense in Kréyol, though the French idiom *haut de gamme* 'high on the scale' was no doubt influential in its development. Other items, 6) *fè bawouf* and 7) *an blipann* substitute everyday Kréyol into morphophonemic patterns derived from French, *man* being a productive suffix from French *-ment*. *Bouzon* and *wouchach*, reflect the phonology of spoken Kréyol, as opposed to the French-influenced spelling

¹² Cf. Hazaël-Massieux (1993: 179–180) for a similar contrast between mesolectal and basilectal forms. Another list of *pawólnèf* or neologisms is appended to the end of Confiant's 1986 novel, *Kòd yanm*, 128–30. Bernabé first sketched the principles of the G.É.R.E.C. orthography in 1976.

Table 1. *Examples of Preferred Basilectal Kreyol Vocabulary*

	<i>Nou simyé di</i> (We prefer to say)	<i>Pasé nou di</i> (We used to say)	Standard French
1.	non 'name'	prénon	<i>prénom</i>
2.	owala 'as soon as'	osito kè	<i>aussitôt que</i>
3.	potalans 'importance'	lenpòtans	<i>l'importance</i>
4.	anchoukay 'to set roots'	anrasinman	<i>enracinement</i>
5.	gamn 'elegance'	élégans	<i>élégance</i>
6.	fè bawouf 'dominate'	fè men bas	<i>faire main basse</i>
7.	an blipann 'immediately'	imédyatman	<i>immédiatement</i>
8.	bouzon 'need'	bèzwen	<i>besoin</i>
9.	wouchach 'research'	rèchèch	<i>recherche</i>
10.	bon grenn kréyol la 'good dose of Kreyol'	bon kalité kréyol la	<i>qualité</i>

of the same sounds. The distinction between *bon grenn kréyol la* and *bon kalité kréyol la* (a good dose of creole) is essentially connotative, and tends to replicate that in French between the more abstract *qualité* and the earthier *graine* 'seed.' Admittedly, the impact of the basilectal forms cannot be measured objectively with such a short sample, but the strategy underlying this thesaurus of preferred basilectal forms should be apparent.

By way of example, let me conclude with a passage from Raphaël Confiant's novel *Marisocé* (1987) in which 'hyper-acrolectal' French is put into a diegetic spatio-temporal universe ruled by the author's figuration of basilectal Kréyol. The first speaker in the following extract is none other than Aimé Césaire, here represented both as manipulative politician and master of French rhetoric. In the original and the translation, the creole is left un-italicized, as the 'natural' medium.

<<Et qu'il me soit permis, O mon peuple, de dénoncer avec toute l'énergie que vous m'insufflez les thuriféraires stipendiés du gouvernement!>>

<<Wé ! Wé-é-é... >>, moun té ka vréyé, anlè.

<<Oui, j'ai dit les thuriféraires stipendiés du gouvernement, les séides in-vertébrés qui hantent les salons des Békés.>>

An nègrès gwo-jibèn tonbé léta bip bò Adliz kout fwansé-a té fò. Frè-y oben mari'y vini pôté'y soukou, ka vanté'y épi an fèy jounal <<LE PROGRES-SISTE>>. Moun té ka swè gwo dlo, frissonnad té ka tòd yo akwèdi an bann djigidji. Plizyè té ka vréyé:

– Woy! Woy! Woy! Mi fwansé atè, manmay! Mi fwansé ka désann oswè-tala anlè moun! Viv Sèzè ! Viv Sèzè! (1987: 98)

(‘Allow me, o my people, to denounce with the vigor you bring to me the mercenary flatterers of the Government!’)

‘Bravo, bravo’, cried the roused crowd.

‘That’s right, I said the mercenary flatterers of the Government, the spineless henchmen who hobnob with the honkies!’

A corpulent woman passed out just beside Adelise at the very sound of such elegant French. Her brother or husband rushed to her rescue, fanning her with the latest edition of *THE PROGRESSIVE*. Everyone was sweating copiously and hopping about as if they were in a trance, some shouting out, ‘Wow! Now, that’s great French for you. Long live Aimé Césaire!’)

The humour is hard to convey in translation, but Confiant’s ploy in this passage is to conflate overblown French rhetoric with the vital idiom of basilectal Kréyol, taking Césaire to task for his well-known position that French alone is capable of high rhetoric, and implicitly raising the question if there is such a thing as ‘low rhetoric.’

To be sure, either a pure and uncontaminated basilect or even depth and authenticity in and of themselves may well be matters of lesser concern to those who speak creoles than to those who study or promote them. Nor is it necessarily the case that literary basilects resemble everyday speech, though the passage above demonstrates that they try to appear so. Indeed, practitioners of basilectal Kréyol have been taken to task for the stiltedness and even unintelligibility of their nuclear neologisms. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, the G.É.R.E.C. orthography is disliked by many in the middle class, whose own spontaneous spellings of Kréyol tend toward the etymological. Lambert-Félix Prudent, among others, has argued that the basilectal strategy may well be a ‘victim of its stubbornly held belief that a popular language necessarily needed an academic orthographic support structure and heated ideological discourses in order to live’ (1993: 142).¹³

Prudent’s critique amounts to taking basilects (or nuclear creoles) to be overwhelming ‘analytic postulates’ (again per Mufwene above). Yet while literatures are obviously the product of markets and marketing – this was in a backhanded way the premise of the Marxist Kauberdiannu project – they also partake of a different sequence of values. In the hands of a talented writer, the basilect can readily become a seductive stylistic posture, and it is

¹³ Prudent’s remark is, however, only one riposte in the ongoing quarrel between and among the adherents of the G.É.R.E.C. and their adversaries. For one particularly dramatic exchange, see Confiant (1989) and Prudent (1989), plus comments in Burton (1993).

ultimately on this 'higher' level of discursive invention and creativity that the success of a literature resides.

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