

Navigating the pitfalls of language standardisation: The imperfect binary of *authenticity* and *anonymity* in Creole-speaking Martinique

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ABSTRACT

Standardisation is often touted as the default means to improve attitudes towards minoritised languages and prevent/reverse their obsolescence. However, standardisation can ‘tamper’ with the indexicalities of minoritised languages, potentially alienating their speakers. Two aspects of standardisation stand out as particularly problematic: the shift from ‘ideologies of authenticity’ to ‘ideologies of anonymity’ (Woolard 2016), and the resulting introduction/intensification of prescriptivism (Eckert 1983). Although much literature focuses on the irreconcilable nature of these ideologies, I show that their discursive manifestations are neither clear-cut nor always incompatible. First, I analyse a TV debate on the standardisation of Martinican Creole (MC), in which the fault-line between authenticity and anonymity is blurred and partially overcome. Next, I draw on a Martinican activist’s Instagram profile to show how various discursive strategies and a positive take on language variation can help promote MC as an ‘anonymous’ language without forgoing its ‘authenticity’ or openly stigmatising spontaneous practices. (Minoritised languages, Creoles, Martinique, maintenance, standardisation, ideologies of authenticity, anonymity, prescriptivism, purism, *Abstand*)*

INTRODUCTION

On 15 September 2018, the Martinican children’s writer and puppeteer Jeannine Lafontaine—widely known as Jala—was hauled before a court on charges of ‘robbing the Martinican people of their language’. A writer and language activist, Jala stood in the dock as a symbol of all ‘intellectuals’ involved in the codification of Martinican Creole (hereafter MC),¹ most Martinicans’ mother tongue alongside French. By codifying MC—a traditionally unwritten language—these ‘intellectuals’ had taken Martinicans’ vernacular ‘away from its people’ and transformed it into an *artificial* language.

This accusation would be strongly rejected by Jala’s camp. In their view, there was nothing artificial about standardised MC. Implicit in Jala’s defence is the belief

that, by modelling the new standard on traditional, rural varieties and striving to undo decades of Gallicisation, activists had, if anything, restored a purer, more *authentic* MC. Moreover, Jala insisted that equipping MC with a standard orthography and technical vocabulary was the only way to reverse the minoritisation process that had marginalised the language. It was these arguments that ultimately swayed the jury in Jala's favour, leading to her acquittal. Nonetheless, the trial was heated until the end, and Jala's acquittal far from predetermined.

The reader need not worry about the state of Martinican democracy, for this dystopian trial took place in a TV studio, not a courthouse. Its fictional status, however, in no way diminishes the trial's relevance for understanding social representations of MC. The show which broadcast the trial (*Le Tribunal de Nous Mêmes* 'The Tribunal of Ourselves') aims to inform the public about salient issues in Martinican life by airing and interrogating frequently encountered opinions in a mock-judicial setting. Thus, whilst Jala's trial was invented, the conflict it re-enacts offers useful insights into how the real debate around MC standardisation has been discursively configured.

When viewed through the literature on *minoritised* language standardisation,² Jala's trial resembles a classic instance of the conflict between *ideologies of authenticity* and *ideologies of anonymity*. These terms are typically used to designate alternative ideologies of language value and linguistic authority, and tend to map onto minority and standard languages, respectively. While ideologies of authenticity value languages for being geographically and socially rooted, ideologies of anonymity conceptualise them as efficient means of communication that are socially and ethnically neutral (Woolard 2016). For minoritised languages like MC, the switch—through standardisation—from authenticity to anonymity is often portrayed as the only pathway to social promotion and increased vitality. Standardisation, however, is not risk-free. Turning what are mostly spoken, informal varieties into standard languages means taking them out of their original niche(s), overhauling the way they are used and potentially alienating and stigmatising their traditional speakers (Eckert 1983). Across the minoritised language literature, authenticity and anonymity are usually presented as opposed ideologies and incompatible goals in language planning, even when it is acknowledged that they can coexist within the same communities (Weber 2016; Woolard 2016; O'Rourke & Brennan 2019). In this perspective, a minoritised language community can either accept the reality of diglossia whilst enjoying the linguistic creativity and 'covert' prestige ('solidarity') afforded by an uncoded, geographically rooted language or, alternatively, resort to standardisation to increase the status of the language, at the paradoxical risk of disenfranchising the very speakers it aims to empower.

If at first glance the conflict between unwritten and codified MC in Jala's trial appears to reproduce the authenticity/anonymity binary, this dichotomy breaks down on closer examination. What, for instance, could explain Jala's reverence for rural MC, if not nostalgia for a certain type of *LOST AUTHENTICITY*? Indeed, my analysis of Jala's trial shows how the boundaries between the two ideologies of

language value/authority can blur in discourse, as advocates of MC standardisation regularly appeal to the value of authenticity. I also show how, far from being confined to the rhetorical setting of the trial, the same ideological ambivalence can manifest itself as an abiding feature of language revival projects. By analysing the Instagram profile of the influential Martinican language activist Kofi Jicho Kopo (KJK), I argue that it is possible to promote MC as a standardised language—even one undergirded by prescriptive norms—without forgoing the values of authenticity or stigmatising spontaneous practices.

The article is divided into five sections. First, I introduce the sociolinguistic context of Martinique and explain both the activist argument for MC standardisation and why, several decades after its inception, the standardisation process is still far from concluded. I then zoom out to consider the tensions around language standardisation as represented in the literature on minoritised and creole languages (e.g. Jaffe 1999; Siegel 2005; Woolard 2016; Migge 2021). The following sections return to Martinique to explore how these wider tensions emerge and are reconciled in Jala's trial, and how they are partly overcome by KJK's adoption of new formats and indexicalities. Finally, I provide a short conclusion and problematise the role of purism in KJK's approach, laying out questions for further research.

FROM DIGLOSSIA TO THE *AUSBAU* / *ABSTAND* PARADOX

A former colony and current overseas department of France, Martinique is a site of longstanding diglossia.³ Whilst French is the language of administration, literacy, and formal education, MC has traditionally been limited to informal contexts (Prudent 1980; March 1996). Diglossia has reinforced and, in turn, been reinforced by multiple negative beliefs about MC. Like other creole languages, MC has been considered a simplified/degenerated version of its lexifier; the 'language of affection, but not of ... abstract ideas' (Aimé Césaire, quoted in Gros-Prugny 2016:21), and a hindrance in the acquisition of the standard language (March 1996), in keeping with a well-known deficiency-based view of bilingualism. Unsurprisingly, therefore, since the implementation of compulsory French-language schooling in the 1940s, Martinique has witnessed a substantial decrease in the intergenerational transmission of MC (Beck 2017). As French proficiency has spread to traditionally MC-speaking environments, many parents have chosen to pass on French to the next generation, before or instead of MC (March 1996). Nowadays, while it is commonly spoken by many older speakers, MC appears to be a more marked language for the youth, who often report using it for a more limited range of functions such as swearing and joking around (Müller 2018). Although still far from the risk of endangerment, MC's functions and domains of spontaneous usage appear to have shrunk over the decades, prompting language activists to take action against diglossic representations.

Though Martinican diglossia remains relatively entrenched, MC has made a notable breakthrough in the public domain. A pivotal moment was the introduction of MC on the radio, following the end of the French state monopoly on radio broadcasting in 1981. Forty years on, even though French is still the default media language, MC has managed to acquire considerable public visibility thanks to popular programmes conducted partly or entirely in MC (e.g. *Alabowdaj* on *Martinique la lère*).

Somewhat surprisingly, however, reactions to MC's media breakthrough amongst MC activists have been mixed (e.g. Bernabé 2011). While recognising its potential to improve attitudes towards MC, critics have blamed this media expansion for accelerating MC's convergence to French. Because radio hosts and guests are not used to speaking MC in more formal domains, they end up 'borrowing' lexicon from French, allegedly intensifying *qualitative decreolisation* (Bernabé 2011), that is, MC's supposed loss of Creole features and formal convergence to French. This interrelatedness of 'quantitative/functional expansion' (more MC in higher domains) and 'qualitative reduction' (MC's convergence to French) recalls Kloss's (1967) famous distinction between *Ausbau* ('language by development') and *Abstand* ('language by distance') and the associated paradox whereby 'when a creole grows in *Ausbau* [domain expansion], it must simultaneously shrink in *Abstand* [its distance from competing languages], since the H[igh] model is the same "target" language from which [the creole] needs to establish its independent validity' (Joseph 1987:55 on the rise of standard languages, quoted in Sebba 1998:22).

Because of MC's considerable lexical overlap with French, its lexifier, language activists have been particularly sensitive to the importance of *Abstand* for the preservation/valorisation of MC. To push back against the traditional view of MC as 'bad French' (Prudent 1980) and convince speakers of its status as an independent language (cf. Siegel 2005; Migge 2021), many activists have advocated the use of 'distanctiated Creole', a variety of MC that is most distant from French. Beginning in the 1970s, the late linguist Jean Bernabé, together with what would become the GEREC-F (*Groupe d'Études et de Recherches en Espace Créolophone et Franco-phonie*) research team, proposed a series of PHONEMIC orthographic norms to replace the mostly ETYMOLOGICAL spellings used by writers and everyday users, as well as neologisms to replace French borrowings/cognates. Simultaneously, the introduction of MC into the school curriculum was designed to disseminate and further legitimise the newly standardised MC.

Despite these concerted efforts, however, distanctiated MC is still far from constituting the norm in the MC-speaking community. Often criticised for being impractical and too far removed from actual linguistic practices (Prudent 2005; for a review of reactions in Guadeloupe, Martinique's sister island, see Managan 2008), phonemic orthographies and neologisms created for Martinican (and Guadeloupean) Creole have been slow to catch on beyond the circles of language activists and MC-language writers and readers. Non-phonemic spellings have long

remained common on internet fora and billboards (Reutner 2005; Managan 2008 for Guadeloupe), and the standardised Creole proposed by the GEREC-F has encountered some resistance (e.g. Reutner 2007). MC teaching has also been slow to take off. Although school provision in MC was boosted in the early 2000s (after the recognition of ‘Creole’ as one of France’s ‘regional languages’), the decision to classify MC as an OPTIONAL subject, forced to compete against foreign languages with more social currency, has curbed its potential uptake. In short, the promotion and dissemination of standardised MC remains a work in progress, beset by practical and ideological challenges.

THE ISSUES BEHIND LANGUAGE STANDARDISATION: FROM IDEOLOGIES OF AUTHENTICITY TO IDEOLOGIES OF ANONYMITY

Many scholars have pointed to the potential costs of language standardisation, which can make it an unpopular choice outside activist circles. To a large extent, these are due to the liminal nature of the standardisation process, situated in a zone of transition—hence, of friction—between different ideologies of language value.

Languages tend to be valued either for their *authenticity*—their association with specific speakers and traditions (as is the case for most minoritised languages)—or their alleged *anonymity*—a perceived social and ethnic neutrality that enables all people to learn and use them freely, regardless of their origin. Language standardisation is thought to entail an ideological shift from authenticity to anonymity—from ‘language-as-identity’ to ‘language-as-skill’ (Heller 2010)—in which the language’s ethnic/geographical indexicalities are at least partially erased. This process has the potential to alleviate the inferiority complex of traditional minoritised language speakers and help recruit new speakers, thereby saving variously endangered languages from obsolescence (e.g. Migge, Léglise, & Bartens 2010; Costa, de Korne, & Lane 2017; Vari & Tamburelli 2020).

However, the transition from authenticity to anonymity comes with its own set of challenges. First, standardisation is not guaranteed to win new speakers’ loyalties. With the main appeal of minoritised languages residing in their perceived authenticity, standardised MINORITISED languages can hardly compete with the anonymity and instrumental value of well-established standard languages (Jaffe 1999; O’Rourke & Ramallo 2013; Costa et al. 2017). Furthermore, the standard language ideology associated with anonymous varieties and imported into minoritised languages through standardisation can actually end up stigmatising (as opposed to empowering) these languages’ traditional speakers. Although non-standardised minority languages are not immune from prescriptivism (cf. Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity 1998)—an ideology that advocates linguistic correctness—any pre-existing prescriptivism is likely to be strengthened by the standardisation process, as language activists/policymakers elect one variety as the new standard

and engage in prescriptive discourse to promote its use (Eckert 1983; Milroy & Milroy 1985; Walsh 2016). This can lead to a *fractal recursivity* of standard language ideologies (Gal 2006)—whereby the same hierarchical division between the majority and the minoritised language is replicated within the minoritised language itself—and a double stigmatisation of those minoritised language speakers who do not speak the new ‘standard’ (Gal 2006; Costa et al. 2017). For this reason, standardisation stands to alienate speakers who are attracted to the minoritised language precisely because it offers a sense of linguistic ownership and relative freedom from the norms of standard languages (cf. Sebba 1998 and Romaine 2005 for the notion of ‘anti-standard’). In short, unless the standardisation of minoritised languages is pursued through a more participatory and less hierarchical approach—one that avoids excluding speakers from the decision-making process and erasing their spontaneous practices—any attempt to promote the minoritised language through standardisation risks, paradoxically, unleashing new stigmatisation, disenfranchisement, and language insecurity.

FRAMING AND REFRAMING MC STANDARDISATION: JALA’S TRIAL

As seen from the literature, discussions around minoritised language standardisation usually follow a well-known pattern: time and again, anonymity is framed in opposition to authenticity, with standardisation presented either as the sole pathway towards increased prestige and linguistic vitality, or as an unnecessary straitjacket. By contrast, it is less clear how opposing stances are discursively constructed and how they interact with the ‘etic’ categories of authenticity/anonymity in actual debates around standardisation. A related gap comes from the failure to represent the whole spectrum of pro- and anti-standardisation stances; even scholars who rely on data from focus group discussions (e.g. O’Rourke & Brennan 2019) often do not represent the whole spectrum of positions. In this section, both gaps are addressed through a close analysis of Jala’s mock trial. As a rhetorical duel between pro- and anti-standardisation positions, the trial offers ‘a field view’ of how conflicting stances on standardisation are rhetorically constructed. It also provides a rare window into the ‘standardisation debate’ in Martinique, where the standardisation of MC constitutes a salient, and yet remarkably understudied, sociolinguistic issue.

Jala’s trial was broadcast by the Martinican TV channel KMT (*Kanal Martinique Télévision*) as part of the popular programme *Le Tribunal de Nous Mêmes*. The show dramatises important local issues (e.g. internalised racism and colourism, police violence, pesticide poisoning) by staging mock trials in which defendants—playing either fictional characters or themselves—are accused of crimes against the Martinican people. Whilst the broadcaster has been criticised for a lack of impartiality, *Le Tribunal de Nous Mêmes* aims to give a balanced portrayal of divergent viewpoints. Through a number of ‘witnesses’ who express their unscripted views

on a range of topics, ‘it aims to be a space for free discussion’ that ‘gauge[s] the population’s pulse ... on the main issues of [Martinican] society’. Indeed, in the case of Jala’s trial, triangulation with Martinican/Caribbean online fora and anecdotal observations in the literature (e.g. Reutner 2007) confirms that the trial offers a faithful—if condensed and non-comprehensive—representation of existing stances.

In what follows, I first present, in narrative form, the main positions that emerged from the trial. After showing that these largely recreate the opposition between authenticity and anonymity as their principal fault-line, I go on to explain how the boundary between these seemingly opposing values is discursively blurred and, in one instance, the conflict between them partially overcome.

The trial

In a courtroom full of middle-aged and elderly witnesses (the programme’s usual demographic), Jala stood accused of ‘robbing the Martinican people of its language’ and ‘identity’ by imposing—together with her fellow ‘intellectuals’—written Creole on an unwilling population.⁴

Jala’s prosecutor began his indictment by recalling an experience familiar to many Martinicans who had lived in mainland France: the use of Creole as a ‘secret’ code. Martinicans could use Creole freely in the French public space, the prosecutor argued, because ‘it was [their] language, [they] owned it’. This, however, would be rendered impossible if Creole could be learnt from books and dictionaries, because ‘the moment you start putting it into dictionaries, you are giving it to the Other’. This linguistic dispossession was presented as a slippery slope towards linguistic insecurity and identity loss. When a foreigner ‘who has learned Creole from books’ comes to Martinique and ‘speaks Creole to the stallholder’, this foreigner will be able to ‘take out the dictionary’ and prove to the stallholder that, in fact, she does NOT speak Creole. Martinicans would thereby be ‘stripped’ of their language as well as their identity. In a globalised world, the prosecutor argued, ‘we have to keep some things to ourselves ... , and Creole can be one of these’.

At this point, the prosecutor suddenly dropped his argument about linguistic ownership in order to condemn the unrealistic parochialism of Martinican language activists. ‘Let’s be honest, we speak Creole less and less’, the prosecutor observed. ‘We are 370,000 people who barely speak Creole [and] yet we have codified OUR Creole’. Instead of standardising MARTINICAN Creole, Jala and the other Martinican ‘intellectuals’ should have had the ‘humility to reach out to other French Caribbean Creole speakers’ and ‘create a shared language’—just like the French, who ‘established the *Académie Française* and ... created ONE language, French’. It can be hard to discern any consistency between the prosecutor’s earlier approach and this new line of argument: is MC the lively repository of Martinican identity, or a dwindling language that only activists care to preserve?

Finally, the prosecutor presented his own vision of MC promotion. Whilst conceding that introducing Creole in school can counteract the linguistic ‘trauma’ inflicted on generations of Martinicans, forced to abandon their mother language at the school gates, he nonetheless rejected the teaching of Creole as a school subject. To avoid this trauma, he argued, it would be enough for teachers to SPEAK to pupils in both French and Creole, so that Creole could become the unashamed, SPOKEN ‘language of emotions, lived experience and everyday life’ (but not, say, the language of trade and formal education). Failure to accept this division of labour between French and Creole was pinned on a form of cultural ALIENATION: ‘it is a [form of] complete alienation to feel diminished just because your language is not CAPABLE of being like other languages’. ‘We can have a language’, he continued, ‘even if it’s not like French, even if it’s not like English ... Our language is what it is, and IT’S NOT WRITTEN’.

Jala began her defence by repurposing the prosecutor’s argument about MC’s dwindling status as a justification for MC standardisation. ‘If it doesn’t go beyond its circle of 370,000 speakers’, she argued, ‘our Creole can die’; ‘putting Creole into books’ serves precisely to ‘keep it alive’. Just like the prosecutor, she shored up her arguments by referring to other language communities: ‘Bretons have also followed this approach’. Far from convincing her opponents, however, this seemingly harmless observation emboldened their accusations. Having previously proposed the standardisation of French as a model for a common Caribbean French Creole, now the prosecutor cast Jala’s Breton reference as evidence of her deference towards ‘the Other’, of her alienation. ‘So, you think it’s important to imitate the Bretons, don’t you?’ he sneered. ‘Since French can be written ... if we want Creole to be a language, then it has to be a perfect copy of French, then we have to imitate the Master’.

After dodging the charge of deference to the ‘Master’ by recasting her choice of model as a PRACTICAL one (‘We are not going to reinvent the wheel when we already have good models’), Jala was forced to tackle the fear that the new standard would replace the spontaneous Creole of everyday conversations. ‘So, you will get rid of the SPONTANEOUS language’, the judge probed her. Jala firmly denied this, pointing to the importance of rural (hence, traditional) Creole in the standardisation project: ‘I don’t see why spontaneous Creole would disappear, since when you go to the countryside you do hear people speaking Creole. Besides, to write the dictionary we had to visit the countryside’. Exclusively focused on rural Creole, Jala’s reply presupposed a narrow conception of MC—one in which only basilectal varieties constituted real Creole and deserved conservation, to the detriment of widely spoken urban varieties. Unsurprisingly, then, Jala’s defence speech failed to appease fears of linguistic ‘replacement’.

These fears, and the chasm between Jala and her prosecutor, grew even deeper as the discussion shifted to the use of neologisms. ‘People say *important* in French and *empowtan* in Creole ... this doesn’t make any sense’, Jala stated. ‘There is no point in taking French words [and just changing a few sounds] to say that it’s Creole’;

‘that’s why, instead of saying *empowtan*, you can say *pòtalan*’. ‘OK, but what’s the point? What are we gaining?’ the prosecutor probed her. ‘We are gaining that that’s REAL Creole’, replied Jala. This answer did not go down well. ‘Do you really think that what we need [to be doing] in the twenty-first century is INVENTING Creole?’ Once again, she promptly dismissed the implication that standardised MC is artificial: ‘we are not INVENTING Creole, we are ENRICHING it’. Confronted with Jala’s narrow focus on the language, the judge remained unconvinced as to the SOCIETAL benefits of her endeavour: ‘This can perhaps enrich Creole, but how about [the people]?’

These doubts would take centre stage in the staunchly anti-standardisation witness statement of Christian Chalu, a former trade unionist and history enthusiast, who framed MC standardisation and teaching as the utmost disservice to Martinicans. First, teaching children Creole was a ‘waste of time’ because Creole was as innate for Martinicans as breathing—something they ‘learn ... on their own’. Second, Martinican Creole offered little instrumental value: it would not help one land a job and could not even be used for trading with other Caribbean islands, given the differences between various French-lexicon Creoles. After pointing out a series of ‘false friends’ in the closely related Creoles of Martinique and Guadeloupe, Chalu concluded, in a classic instance of the narcissism of small differences, that Martinique and Guadeloupe—French departments with similar sociolinguistic histories—‘are very different countries’. In a sudden romantic twist, he suggested that Martinicans should keep their language—with their ‘secrets’ and ‘soul’—to themselves. As for the school syllabus, instead of studying Creole, pupils would benefit from more hours of ‘maths, ... science, physics, and anything that can be USEFUL to them one day’.⁵

On the opposite side, the most convincing defence of standardisation came from the playwright and drama teacher Dany Artus. Against the image of MC standardisation as a pointless, even harmful, endeavour, Artus reframed it as a source of real societal benefits for Martinicans—especially those living in the diaspora, for whom access to spoken MC is limited. Artus rejected the commonly heard innatist argument against MC teaching, according to which children learn MC even without systematic parent input or school provision. ‘Creole is innate, my foot’, she retorted to the likes of Chalu. For many Martinicans raised in ‘(mainland) France’, Artus argued, Creole books were often the only way to (re)connect with the Martinican language and culture.⁶ Moreover, the benefits of standardised Creole were not limited to the Martinican diaspora; rather, the existence of a socially valued, standardised Creole would enable all Martinicans to use ‘[their] culture’ to ‘score points in the system [they] are in’—a metaphorical allusion to the socially empowering role that standardised MC was intended to play.

After foregrounding the societal benefits of standardised MC, Artus went on to challenge claims about its supposed artificiality and the danger it posed for more spontaneous varieties. By reframing MC standardisation as a mostly DESCRIPTIVE endeavour, Artus downplayed its more artificial and prescriptive dimensions: ‘[The

intellectuals] are not STRUCTURING the language. They are STUDYING the language'. Whilst acknowledging the introduction of 'made-up words', she denied the artificiality this might imply. 'In Creole there are certain things that we are forced to invent anyway', she argued, 'AS EVEN IN EVERYDAY LANGUAGE we invent certain things because there is no other way of saying them'. The supposed artificiality of standardised MC was, thus, assimilated to a general feature of MC: while lexical 'inventions' existed, she argued, it would be wrong to attribute them solely to the activity of language activists.

Perhaps the most interesting point in Artus's statement regarded the danger of linguistic 'replacement'. Speakers were wrong to be put off by new Creole words or to fear that these would replace their 'spontaneous' Creole, she argued. Just like French, Creole can have different 'levels': alongside 'everyday Creole' 'there can be another level', a 'higher level', where 'you need to open the dictionary and look up the words to understand'. In her own lay terms, Artus hinted at the possibility of a variety of MC REGISTERS, although the exact nature of such registers was left open to the imagination.

(Re)framing authenticity and overcoming the authenticity/anonymity binary: What is (in) MC?

If approached exclusively through the lens of the literature on language standardisation, the positions defended by Jala and her prosecutor could appear irreconcilably polarised around opposing values—anonymity and authenticity, respectively. This impression deserves to be qualified, though. As this section shows, the value divide between proponents and opponents of standardisation is actually messier, with MC's authenticity being a desideratum claimed by both sides. Both camps also invoke the same dangers for MC—the risk of its adulteration and the marginalisation of its speakers—whilst asserting that their preferred approaches are best positioned to avoid them. Where the two sides differ, therefore, is not so much in the values they ostensibly profess, as in how they choose to frame these values—which of their aspects they foreground or erase (for the notion of *erasure*, see Irvine & Gal 2000). Because of the overlaps between the two camps, some level of reconciliation is also possible. Indeed, I discuss how the pro-standardisation witness Dany Artus managed to overcome the divide between the prosecutor and Jala—between not just authenticity and anonymity but also different conceptions of authenticity—to offer a less divisive portrayal of language standardisation.

In many respects, the positions espoused by Jala and the prosecutor do map onto ideologies of anonymity and authenticity, as these have been sketched in the literature. Jala proposes an unambiguously positive account of language standardisation, where pushing the minority language into higher domains and recruiting new speakers outside of Martinique represent the only way to avoid minoritisation and looming 'death'. Like other standardisation initiatives, the project supported by Jala comes with a certain degree of prescriptiveness and purism (see Walsh 2016 for

a definition): speakers are urged to abide by the new standard orthography and abandon common French-sounding vocabulary in favour of archaisms/neologisms to better mark MC's distance from French (*Abstand*).

Jala's position is pilloried by those for whom MC represents, and should remain, the language of informal conversation and local indexicalities. To bolster their position, these critics appeal to the values of authenticity (standardised MC is artificial and erases local indexicalities) and pragmatism/utilitarianism (standardised MC is impractical/useless; see also Reutner 2007) while also foregrounding the negative sociopolitical outcomes of standardisation, such as the potential commodification of the minority language (cf. Heller 2010) and the stigmatisation of its speakers (cf. Eckert 1983; Gal 2006). 'Putting Creole into books' is condemned not only for erasing its connotations as an in-group code and identity marker but also, in line with a common criticism levelled at standardisation, for deferring to a standard and written language ideology which replicates—rather than rejecting—the oppressive influence of the European, colonial model (cf. Prudent 2005 for a similar critique).

Beyond the authenticity/anonymity divide, however, it is possible to discern some overlap between the two positions. One source of overlap resides in both sides' professed opposition to the stigmatisation of MC and its speakers. This may seem surprising at first, given that standardisers are often accused of STIGMATISING traditional speakers. However, it bears remembering that the default rationale for standardisation—in Martinique and elsewhere—is the desire to break off from the stigmatisation of nonstandard languages and their speakers. What differentiates the two sides is, thus, not so much their different acceptance of sociolinguistic stigmatisation but, rather, the specific way in which they understand such stigmatisation to take place. For Jala, the stigma which needs to be overturned is that resulting from diglossia and MC's traditionally low status. Pitted against the ideological nature of diglossia, standardisation appears to Jala as the ideologically neutral option, which simply puts MC back in line with all other languages. The prosecutor, by contrast, dissociates MC's status as a predominantly spoken, non-standardised language from the traditional stigmatisation of its speakers. One could put an end to this historical stigmatisation, he argues, without bothering to codify the language. Far from liberating MC speakers from stigmatisation, any attempt to codify MC would in fact constitute a kowtow to standard language ideology—a normative linguistic attitude foreign to the spirit of Creole. On both sides, therefore, sociolinguistic stigmatisation—whether in the form of diglossia or prescriptivism—is constructed as the danger from which MC and its speakers need to be protected. At the same time, each side presents its own approach as the unmarked (i.e. more ideology-neutral) option, either by framing standardisation as the norm or by normalising the sociolinguistic status quo.

Less predictably, the rhetorical strategies used by Jala and the prosecutor also converge in their shared appeal to the value of authenticity—in spite of the traditional association of authenticity with the anti-standardisation camp. Each side

adopts a mixed attitude towards language change, rejecting change deemed alien to MC while simultaneously condoning, or even promoting, change compatible with MC's AUTHENTIC character. What distinguishes the two sides is their actual framing of authenticity, that is, their understanding of what constitutes authentic MC and acceptable change. On the prosecutor's side, authenticity is associated with speakers' current spontaneous usages. As a result, MC standardisation is condemned as an artificial process of language change while spontaneous convergence to French is ignored or brushed off. For Jala, by contrast, authenticity is synonymous with traditional, basilectal (hence, naturally distanced) varieties of MC. Whilst convergence to French stands for language and identity loss, standardisation is construed as a way of recovering lost authenticity as much as a pathway towards legitimacy and international recognition (anonymity). In this respect, Jala's trial confirms Thomas's (1991; see Walsh 2016:19) observation about the ambivalent treatment of language change in language purism, where 'change is not necessarily viewed negatively, so long as it is seen to be the "right type" of change' (here, the creation of a 'purer', less Frenchified MC for Creole activists vs. spontaneous change for their opponents).

The *Tribunal de Nous Mêmes* courthouse is an intrinsically agonistic setting in which each side goes to great pains to persuade the audience and discredit its opponents—potentially even claiming the opponents' values for itself. For this reason, it is unclear how far the shared appeals to authenticity and rejection of stigmatisation should be read as meaningful ideological overlaps between the two camps, rather than as merely rhetorical strategies. For instance, when the prosecutor and Jala's side claim to oppose the stigmatisation of MC speakers, does this reflect a genuine concern about sociolinguistic marginalisation—be it prescriptivism- or diglossia-related—or an attempt to use social concern to 'mask a desire for aesthetically or nationalistically motivated purism (Thomas 1991:59)' (Walsh 2016:13, footnote 7)?

Given the show's rhetorical nature and the absence of information on the individual participants,⁷ it is hard to answer such a question with certainty. Nevertheless, enough is known about the broader practices and thought of standardisation proponents to suppose that at least some of their rhetorical overlaps with the anti-standardisation camp reflect more fundamental commonalities rather than merely ad hoc rhetorical strategies. This is especially true with regards to the shared valorisation of authenticity. The importance of authenticity for standardisation advocates can be inferred from the fact that many of them have looked up to basilectal MC—associated with traditional rural life—and lamented its Frenchification. This Martinican case study thus confirms the lasting attractiveness of authenticity values for minority languages (cf. Jaffe 1999; Woolard 2016; Urla, Amorrotu, Ortega, & Goirigolzarri 2016), including within the 'anonymity camp' of standardisation advocates.

Just as it is not reducible to a perfect binary of anonymity vs. authenticity, so the conflict between standardisation proponents and opponents is not doomed to end in

an impasse. This, too, can be illustrated with evidence from Jala's trial. In particular, in her portrayal of MC standardisation, Dany Artus indicates how the pro-standardisation approach could be reconciled with anti-standardisation anxieties. This is achieved by sidestepping those aspects of the pro-standardisation approach that most alarm its opponents. In Jala's case there had been two such sticking points. First, Jala's defence of MC standardisation had foregrounded its LINGUISTIC implications more than its SOCIETAL benefits, which instead remained implicit. Second, her advocacy of linguistic prescriptiveness and distanced neologisms had confirmed, rather than dispelled, fears of authenticity loss and linguistic replacement. Dany Artus's testimony avoids both pitfalls. By foregrounding SOCIETAL benefits such as speakers' empowerment and reinforced ties with MC (culture) amongst the Martinican diaspora, she reframes MC standardisation as a useful and emancipatory activity, quite unlike the pointless, essentialist exercise ridiculed by the prosecutor. Artus also manages to overcome the apparent competition between 'spontaneous' MC and standardised, neologism-ridden MC by pointing out that, in fact, the two can coexist. In doing so, she pushes back against a commonly held view of MC and other Creoles (cf. Alleyne 2002; Hinrichs & Farquharson 2011) as INTRINSICALLY MONOSTYLISTIC varieties. Whilst originating in the diglossia that has confined MC to informal domains, and in a standard-creole continuum model that has erased change other than convergence towards the lexifier, this view can also be reinforced by language activists like Jala, who implicitly reject the possibility of MC-internal variation by portraying distanced MC as THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE MC. In contrast, by stressing MC's potential to develop a variety of registers—just like French and other fully standardised languages—Artus is able to reframe standardised MC as a complement to, rather than a replacement of 'spontaneous' MC (on the partially false dichotomy of standardisation and variation, see e.g. Romaine 2005:132; Ayres-Bennett & Bellamy 2021).

Artus's statement points to a different approach to minority language standardisation, one which can bypass the seemingly irresolvable conflict between authenticity and anonymity. What, however, could this approach look like IN PRACTICE? How can the activist disseminate a newly standardised language and create new registers for it without, simultaneously, repudiating more spontaneous practices or giving up the badge of authenticity? It is to these questions that the article now turns.

WORKING AROUND THE PITFALLS: THE CREOLE ACTIVIST KOFI JICHO KOPO

For activists seeking to standardise a minoritised language, much of the minority language literature tends to offer a discouraging picture. All too often, the transition from authenticity to anonymity is claimed to engender new forms of stigmatisation and linguistic insecurity. Recently, however, this pessimistic picture has begun to brighten. A number of new studies have drawn attention to cases in which activists have at least partially overcome the conflict between anonymity and authenticity

and, thus, the main pitfalls of standardisation. A case in point is Woolard's study of Catalonia (2016:75–79) which describes how language activists have organised public events at which everyone, regardless of their ethnic origin and linguistic proficiency, is invited to talk in Catalan. By foregrounding communication and playfulness over anonymous correctness and traditional understandings of authenticity, such initiatives have avoided—at least temporarily—both authenticity- and anonymity-related forms of stigmatisation.

Some studies have also shown that—contrary to received wisdom—anonymity need not invariably displace authenticity. According to Urla and colleagues (2016), the introduction of standard Basque has not led to the stigmatisation of non-standard regional varieties which, instead, continue to be valued for their perceived authenticity. Another example can be found in the efforts of Corsican linguists to promote a *polynomic* Corsican, that is, a language based on the notion of 'unity in diversity' (Blackwood 2011), in which geographical variation is embraced and foregrounded rather than erased and stigmatised (Jaffe 2003; Blackwood 2011).

Not all such attempts to marry anonymity with authenticity are bound to succeed. The polynomic model, for instance, does not necessarily neutralise the inherently prescriptive and purist undertones of standardisation. Whilst Corsican polynomy openly embraces GEOGRAPHICAL variation—thereby avoiding one form of anonymity-related stigmatisation—it is not equally accepting of the code-switching/mixing practices frequently encountered in diglossic contexts (Jaffe 2003); while INTRA-linguistic boundaries are loosened, INTER-linguistic boundaries continue to be policed. Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies suggest that minority language standardisation can at least partially avoid the oppressive practices associated with national standard languages.

To illustrate how anonymity-related pitfalls can be overcome in practice, this section analyses the work of Kofi Jicho Kopo (KJK), a young Martinican language activist.⁸ As a Creolistics graduate, KJK has been close to the academic activist circles at the forefront of MC standardisation. At the same time, his prolific use of social media, alongside his recent presence on the local radio station *Martinique la Ière*, gives his work visibility outside activist circles, making it particularly deserving of sociolinguistic consideration. My analysis focuses on KJK's Instagram account, which at the time of writing (May 2022) consists of 302 posts and is followed by a continually growing audience of over 44,000 followers from various French-Creole-speaking communities.

In his effort to promote (standardised) MC without putting off old and/or new speakers, here KJK juggles a range of communicative approaches. In what follows, I first show how he resists the traditional ghettoisation of Creole by promoting its usage in less traditional domains. Like the Creole media expansion initiatives mentioned earlier, here KJK's activism aims to propel Creole into traditionally French-language domains without enforcing a particular variety of Creole. However, as we saw earlier, language activists often look askance at grassroots forms of domain expansion (*Ausbauisation*), fearing they might further blur the lines between Creole

and French and, thus, hinder Creole's chances of recognition as an independent language. To avoid these dangers, KJK uses many of his posts to demarcate Creole from French (*Abstandisation*), often by promoting a standardised phonemic orthography.

This work of demarcation is inherently prescriptive and therefore requires careful handling. In the following sections, I go on to show how KJK attempts to enforce standardised/distanced Creole without openly stigmatising spontaneous practices. It is argued that, by embracing linguistic variation and deploying humour alongside other communicative strategies, KJK manages to counterbalance the prescriptive side of standardisation and, thereby, eschew the potentially stigmatising effects of anonymity.

On the way to Ausbauisation: Debunking diglossic assumptions

A recurring belief across various societies holds that minority languages are inferior and vulgar. This belief has been crucial to the adoption of French as many Martinicans' L1 and, despite growing recognition of MC as a language in its own right, can still hinder its expansion into less traditional domains. Given his commitment to such expansion, it is unsurprising that KJK frequently uses his platform to challenge this belief. In this section, I analyse two representative posts in which KJK promotes Creole's domain expansion by replacing its negative associations of vulgarity and toughness with more positive indexicalities such as regional identity and romance. As shown below, a noteworthy feature of these posts is the use of specific formal choices which allow KJK to prescribe and condemn certain behaviours without appearing to impose his personal views on the Martinican/Caribbean people.

The first post features an image of two young people, perhaps on a first date (Figure 1). The focus is on the woman's conflicting beliefs about her Caribbean identity and how such beliefs affect the way she is perceived. The scene is divided into two symmetrical but contrasting parts. At first, the woman declares herself 'proud of [her] roots and [her] Caribbean identity', thereby gaining the man's approval ('Well, that's very good!'). However, their agreement proves short-lived. When the woman adds that she does not like speaking Creole 'unless it's for swearing', the man suddenly loses interest and beats a hasty retreat ('I'm off').

This image fulfils two communicative functions. First, it implies that there is an obvious link between feeling Caribbean and speaking Creole, and indirectly criticises those who hypocritically sever that link. The implication is made explicit by the author's rhetorical question *Peut-on aimer sa culture sans aimer sa langue maternelle?* 'Can you love your culture without loving your mother tongue?', to which followers overwhelmingly respond in the negative in the comments section. The second function is to persuade young women—anecdotally the demographic least likely to speak MC—that Creole constitutes a social asset rather than a



FIGURE 1. Creole, identity, and profanity.

liability. It does so without any explicit judgement on the author’s part; instead, it is the judgement of the fictional male in the image that serves to discipline young women’s relationship with Creole. By expressing his normative message ‘indirectly’, KJK gets his point across while simultaneously maintaining his distance. Instead of acting like the lecturing intellectual whose judgements rob speakers of their linguistic agency, KJK lets his critique of diglossia hide behind and gain legitimacy from a fictional community member.

A similar ‘show, don’t tell’ strategy is used to reframe Creole as the language of romance, with both pragmatic and symbolic implications. The association between romance and Creole is highly counterintuitive to Martinicans (or Guadeloupeans), given the traditional conception of Creole as a rough and vulgar language (see Müller 2018 for MC). Activists looking to promote Creole as a language of romance face, therefore, a double challenge. Changing attitudes alone is not enough: even if speakers wanted to flirt in Creole, they probably would not know how, for want of models. To promote the use of Creole in this domain, KJK has little choice but to DEMONSTRATE how to be romantic in Creole. He does so by shooting his own love declaration, a photo of which is presented below in Figure 2. Acting as a template for other wooers, KJK’s cheesy declaration (‘You’re more beautiful than a flower field’) helps not only improve attitudes towards Creole but also propel the language into new usages and genres. Aside from its pragmatic advantages, KJK’s decision to make his own love declaration, instead of simply urging followers to use Creole, also has symbolic implications.



FIGURE 2. Creole and romance.

By exposing himself, KJK shows that he is not afraid to act as a role model for other Creole speakers. This, in turn, exonerates him of the elitist hypocrisy that has, in the past, been attributed to various language activists, accused of preaching Creole usage to others without exiting the comfort zone of French themselves.

Enforcing Abstand and correctness with humour

Domain expansion is not KJK's only objective. A Creolist by training, KJK shares many of the goals and bugbears of more traditional MC activists, including a concern with orthographic norms. Many studies of minority languages have noted the symbolic significance of orthography and its resultant contentiousness amongst different stakeholders (Schieffelin & Doucet 1992; Sebba 1998; Jaffe 2003; Managan 2008). This holds true for MC as well. Because of its symbolic power to negotiate MC's distance from French, orthography is a key concern for Martinican language activists and a recurrent theme in KJK's online output. During the first Covid-19 wave of 2020, KJK extended his circle of followers by proposing online Creole dictations, and many of his videos teach spelling rules.

What sets KJK apart from his more traditional colleagues is his bite-size and humorous approach. KJK's spelling videos are very short in length and can, therefore, be consumed quickly and effortlessly. Adding to their accessibility is the fact that KJK presents his content with humour and self-irony, thereby blunting its



FIGURE 3. Etymological vs. phonemic orthography.

prescriptive edge. This stylistic camouflaging of prescriptivist content can also be observed in KJK’s memes, for instance in Figure 3, which draws on the *drakeposting* meme featuring the Canadian rapper Drake (a meme typically used to contrast positive and negative preferences). The meme is openly prescriptive, promoting specific orthographic practices (the phonemic spelling *mwen* for ‘me’) whilst rejecting others (its etymological variant *moin*; cf. French *moi*), but counterbalances this with its snappy, humorous presentation style.

It is likely not a coincidence that the most openly prescriptive posts are often the most humorous and self-ironic. At times it is prescriptiveness itself which is parodied. A case in point is Figure 4, in which KJK portrays himself as a carnival devil who punishes people for spelling mistakes, or Figure 5, where he introduces a spelling exercise with a short video—a film remake—of a class panicking in front of an aggressive-looking Creole teacher. While asserting his prescriptive role, KJK simultaneously parodies it by adopting an incongruous and self-mocking ‘harsh teacher’ persona. This allows him to inject the learning of Creole with a (fictitious) sense of risk that can thrill and motivate his followers, while avoiding the negative implications of a fully embraced prescriptive stance.

Old and new indexicalities, language variation, and the boundaries of Creole

As discussed in THE ISSUES BEHIND LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION, amongst the downsides of minority language standardisation is its tendency to delegitimise traditional



FIGURE 4. 'No spelling mistakes during *carnaval*. It's dangerous!'



FIGURE 5. 'Writing Creole is dangerous'.

varieties and erase geographical and social variation. KJK's project overall manages to circumvent this pitfall.

One reason for this success is that amongst KJK's main goals is not to promote distanced neologisms but, rather, to dust off traditional vocabulary and idioms. Tilted towards basilectal terms, KJK's language is often far removed from contemporary usage. This, however, does not necessarily diminish its aura of authenticity. On the contrary, KJK's preference for traditional expressions and proverbs clearly signals that KJK's standardised Creole, just like Jala's, does not relinquish its claim to authenticity. This approach allows KJK to capitalise on followers' interest in their cultural heritage while also alleviating any impression of artificiality caused by the occasional use of neologisms or the alienness of some of his Creole.

Just as it does not require the erasure of traditional Creole (ways of speaking), KJK's maintenance/standardisation project does not stigmatise linguistic variation. KJK is acutely aware of the challenge of navigating prescriptivism (p.c.) and many of his communication strategies are precisely targeted at finding a compromise between the need to celebrate and constrain variation. To avoid stigmatising existing practices, KJK must embrace or at least accept the existence of variation within Creole. However, his embracing of linguistic variation cannot be too extensive, or it would clash with activists' goal of promoting ONE specific variety—standardised, 'non-Frenchified' Creole. KJK finds a compromise between these two goals by marrying an acceptance of language variation with a hierarchical perspective that assigns higher status to more distanced varieties. By illustrating the tension between horizontal and more hierarchical representations of language variation, this section will draw attention to the strengths and limitations of KJK's approach and, more indirectly, to the implicit contradictions of a polynomic approach to standardisation (see CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS for a further problematisation of this point).

By presenting 'youth Creole' as a legitimate alternative to 'old people Creole', Figures 6 and 7 resist the notion that Creole is a *démodé* and rustic language, thereby contesting the French language's monopoly over modernity (for similar indexical changes, see e.g. Woolard 2016:75–79). More importantly for our discussion, these images implicitly endorse language variation in a manner consistent with the concept of polynomic language seen above: *prima facie*, KJK recognises different varieties of Creole as equally legitimate and equally 'creole'.

However, such an enthusiastic appraisal of language variation can hardly be extended to Frenchified Creole—the traditional bugbear of language activists, for whom it evokes the threat of decreolisation. It is, therefore, in the contrast between more Frenchified and distanced varieties of Creole that KJK's 'polynomic' approach is most severely tested. Figure 8 shows that to overcome the impasse KJK opts for a compromise solution, in which Frenchified Creole is neither openly embraced nor clearly rejected. Like Figures 6 and 7, Figure 8 represents different varieties of Creole as equally creole, in an implicit endorsement of language variation. However, the choice of a hierarchical—as opposed to

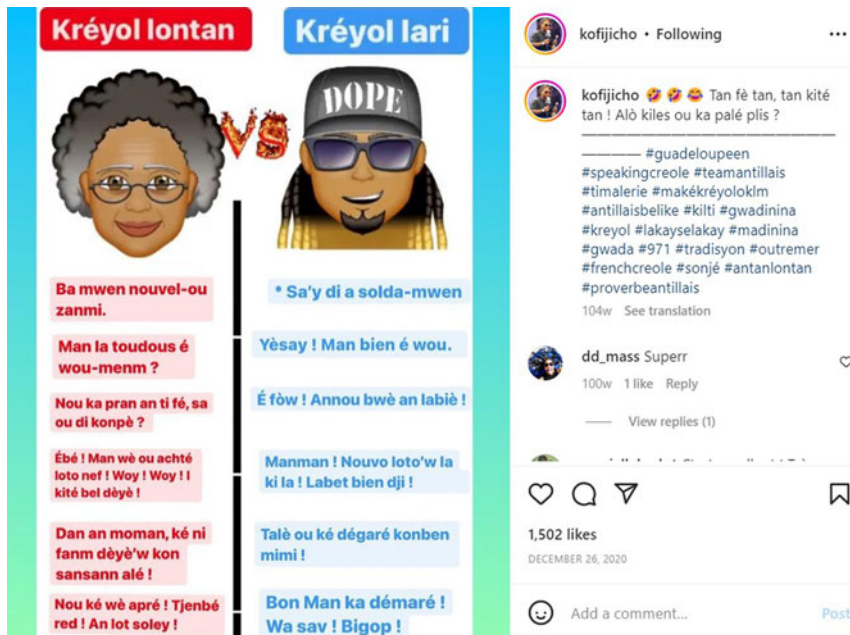


FIGURE 6. ‘Old Creole vs. street Creole’. Times have changed. Which one do you speak more?

horizontal—layout suggests that not all varieties (or registers) of Creole should enjoy the same prestige.

The post draws on the ‘Tuxedo Winnie the Pooh’ meme, where Winnie appears in different outfits, from everyday/laid-back to elegantly old-fashioned. Because the outfits vary both in age and formality, this meme is generally used to present oppositions such as young vs. old or informal/sloppy vs. formal. KJK uses this meme to contrast different ways of saying ‘because’ in Creole, namely (i) the everyday (and most French-sounding) form *paskè*, (ii) the intermediate form *pas*, (iii) the supposedly elegant form *davwa* and, finally, (iv) the allegedly even more elegant/old-fashioned *padavwa*. The meme is introduced by the following comment: ‘How to say “because” in Creole sounding posher. Introduce some *padavwa* in your life’.

This meme propels the rare form (*pa*)*davwa* (and, by association, older/less French-sounding varieties of Creole) out of the restricted circle of language activists, without openly stigmatising the more French-like variant *paskè*. Instead of rejecting French-sounding forms like *paskè* as non-Creole, like Jala and other Creole activists, KJK exploits Creole’s potential for register variation (cf. testimony by Dany Artus) to embed the promotion of distanced forms like *padavwa* in a broader reappraisal of traditional indexicalities. Once regarded as more formal by virtue of its proximity to French, Frenchified Creole (e.g. *paskè*) is now reclassified



FIGURE 7. 'Old Creole vs. Creole-English'.

as less formal, precisely for the same reason. Conversely, forms close to the erst-while basilect (e.g. *padavwa*), once stigmatised, are now revalorised in light of their rarity and, presumably, their monolingual authenticity.

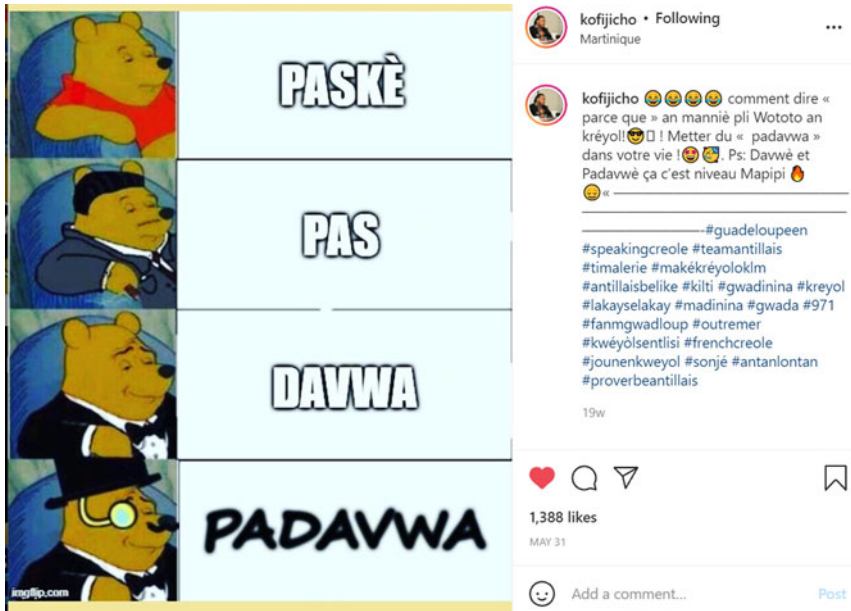


FIGURE 8. How to be ‘posh’ in Creole.

In conclusion, KJK presents French-sounding *paskè* as a less prestigious form than its more distanced counterparts, in line with activists’ goal of promoting a distanced Creole. At the same time, by framing the difference between those forms in terms of REGISTER (as opposed to LANGUAGE MEMBERSHIP), he avoids pitting one variety AGAINST the other and, thereby, dismissing more Frenchified varieties as non-Creole. This seems to be part of a coherent strategy by KJK to avoid stigmatising existing varieties and their users. Although less than positive (but still humorous) representations of Frenchified Creole can be found amongst his later posts, KJK tends to promote distanced Creole by foregrounding its appeal (expressiveness, quirkiness) rather than lampooning its Frenchified counterparts. By skipping the *pars destruens* to construct an appealing image of distanced Creole, KJK can hope to influence practices without OPENLY resorting to stigmatising, purist discourse.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The easing of diglossia in Martinique has brought about new challenges for MC speakers and language activists. How can MC be promoted to standard language status and acquire wider usage and more prestige, without surrendering the connotations of authenticity and spontaneity that give it much of its appeal? Likewise,

how can activists enforce standardised Creole—especially in the absence of extended school provision—without resorting to potentially stigmatising discourse?

This article shows that, despite various difficulties, language standardisation can be reconciled with an appreciation for traditional varieties and indexicalities. In part, this is possible because, as this article has argued, the dichotomy between authenticity and anonymity is not always clear-cut in the field. Indeed, pro-standardisation activists like Jala and KJK look up to rural MC and draw on it as a reservoir of lexical resources and traditional wisdom. As we saw in Jala's trial, the main difference between pro- and anti-standardisation actors lies in how each side constructs authenticity and how it perceives language change and the sociolinguistic status quo. Because value differences between pro- and anti-standardisation stances are less dramatic than the literature might lead us to expect, there is—as Dany Artus's testimony suggests—scope for reconciliation between them and their respective concerns.

Connectedly, through an analysis of KJK's language activism, this article has shown that the promotion of a standardised/distanced MC does not necessarily entail the stigmatisation and erasure of alternative, more spontaneous/French-sounding varieties. On the contrary, the celebration of internal variation is central to how KJK promotes standardised, distanced MC. Together with humour, self-irony and new methods of communication (e.g. internet memes), it enables KJK to form new appealing indexicalities (e.g. MC as a trendy language) and promote a particular type of Creole (old MC forms; more rarely neologisms) without constantly condemning the widespread use of Frenchified MC. His playful and participatory approach, where followers are invited to share their experience, is a far cry from the more vitriolic and elitist posture of contributors to activist fora such as the website *Montray Kréyol*. Here, it is not uncommon for language activists to lampoon instances of 'bad Creole' or assert linguists' authority in matters of corpus planning, to the exclusion of ordinary speakers (for the issue of 'elitism' in Creole activism, see also Managan 2008:246). By foregrounding linguistic variation and prompting followers to share their views and practices, KJK avoids stripping speakers of their linguistic agency—a well-known pitfall of minoritised language standardisation.

This article, therefore, joins Urla and colleagues (2016) in proposing a more optimistic account of minoritised language standardisation. By moving beyond the binary of anonymity vs. authenticity, both in academic work and linguistic activism, it becomes possible to discern greater discursive overlaps between rival positions on standardisation and to envisage a standardisation project relatively free of oppressive effects.

Nevertheless, this optimistic account comes with cautionary caveats, as this approach to standardisation is not immune from limitations. The first caveat concerns its ability, at the time of writing, to substantially shift linguistic practices around MC by reaching out to a wide enough audience. Although KJK's high follower count attests to his success, as in all (online) activism there is a risk of preaching to the converted. In addition, KJK's influence is mainly restricted to younger

demographics: around 88% of his followers are under forty-five years old and 63% are under thirty-five years old (p.c., December 2021). Only time will tell whether a similar initiative can sway broader societal attitudes and reconcile MC-sceptics, as well as older and less internet-savvy groups, with the use of a new standard.

The second caveat stems from the fact that, despite his clear effort to promote MC without openly stigmatising current practices, much of KJK's content is, at its core, purist (in its preference for a distanced, non-'Frenchified' Creole) and, as such, in partial conflict with the more inclusive tone he often employs. This purism is occasionally recognised and amplified by like-minded followers: some of them double down on KJK's rejection of etymologically spelt Creole—'it hurts my eyes to see "moin"' being just one such reaction to the *drakeposting* meme—or celebrate KJK's revival of old Creole as 'true Creole', thereby delegitimising contemporary varieties. There is, consequently, a risk that such residual purism may overshadow KJK's more inclusive approach to MC variation.

Perhaps this is an unavoidable cost. Amongst pro-standardisation activists and scholars in the field of Creole/minority language standardisation, it is frequently held that some level of standardisation and distancing from the lexifier/contact variety is crucial for languages to be perceived as systematic and autonomous (Mühleisen 2002; Siegel 2005; Migge 2021), hence 'worthy' of transmission. If even speakers of non-standardised minority languages orient to standard language ideology (Jaffe 2003; Sallabank 2010; Ó Murchadha 2016; Costa 2017; Costa et al. 2017) and if—as this article has shown—purism's more oppressive dimensions can be successfully blunted, then the residual purism contained in KJK's *Abstandisation* project might be a reasonable price to pay to improve attitudes towards the minoritised language—precisely by helping portray it as fully distinct from its lexifier. However, it is worth mentioning that a number of studies contest the need for purism and *Abstandisation* when promoting and reviving minoritised languages. These studies suggest that a purist standardisation programme might be not only unnecessary—given the alleged waning of standard language ideology (Coupland & Kristensen 2011) and inconclusive evidence of speakers' symbolic aspiration to *Abstand* (Deuber & Hinrichs 2007)—but also counterproductive (Dorian 1994).

More empirical work is needed to understand how far formal distinctness/autonomy from other varieties (*Abstand*) is truly indispensable to the promotion of minoritised languages. Does a language's PERCEIVED distinctness reflect OBJECTIVELY MEASURABLE differences that must be actively created and maintained or, rather, is it an IMAGINED quality that can be 'constructed' through status planning alone, with little or no deployment of purist discourse? Also, how much *Abstand* is enough *Abstand*?⁹

Until more is known about the effects of *Abstandisation* (or lack thereof) on speakers' linguistic insecurity and perceptions of linguistic 'worthiness', it is hard to tell to what extent KJK's purism is warranted. One thing is clear, however: KJK's strategies have the potential to foster new enthusiasm for MC amongst the next generation of Martinican parents—most of whom are, presently, less likely

to use Creole in their daily lives than older demographics (Beck 2017)—while also shifting long-lasting indexicalities. For this reason, KJK’s project merits further study: besides offering a testing ground for scholarly schemas such as the authenticity vs. anonymity binary, it also stands to enrich the discursive toolkit of other activists engaged in minoritised language revival, in Martinique or elsewhere.

NOTES

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¹Throughout the article, I use *MC* as the default term to refer to Martinican Creole. Nonetheless, I use *Creole* in two contexts: (i) when reporting the statements of participants in the televised trial, both in direct and reported speech—with the use of *MC* being limited to my commentary of the trial; and (ii) when analysing the work of the Martinican activist Kofi Jicho Kopo. Although most of his posts feature Martinican Creole, his target audience explicitly includes speakers of other French Caribbean Creoles (mostly Guadeloupeans).

²Following Costa, de Korne, & Lane (2017), I prefer the term *minoritised* to *minority* languages, as *minoritised* stresses the socially constructed nature of language marginalisation. This makes it better suited to a variety like MC which, as a language spoken by most Martinicans, is not a prototypical *minority* language.

³I use *diglossia* to refer to a situation in which two languages are associated with different degrees of prestige/formality and separate domains of use, without this implying a clear-cut compartmentalisation in language use; see Fasold’s (1984) concept of *leaky diglossia*.

⁴All English translations of a French original—here and in the rest of the article—are mine.

⁵Due to a lack of quantitative studies on language attitudes in Martinique, it is impossible to establish the extent of such opposition to standardisation amongst Martinicans. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence and some qualitative data (e.g. Reutner 2007 on students’ attitudes to standardisation) suggest that many of the objections raised in Jala’s trial—especially those premised on Creole innatism—might have become less common, especially amongst younger Martinicans.

⁶This question is clearly salient amongst the Caribbean diaspora, with many young speakers on internet fora lamenting their inability to fully acquire Creole and be accepted as Creole speakers—precisely because of their limited exposure to the language and perceived inauthenticity.

⁷My requests for further information have so far remained unanswered.

⁸The African name is a pseudonym, chosen to mark the activist’s investment in the Panafricanist cause.

⁹While many studies have focused on the pursuit of distinctness in writing through the use of phonemic orthographies, less attention has been paid to other *Abstandisation* strategies such as the introduction of neologisms in the spoken language.

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