

Selection 1

Istwa Tèks Kreyòl Yo

Deja nou fin di kijan lan tan koloni Sen Domeng nou jwenn kèk pwoklamasyon politik ak kèk chante ak pwezi.

Après sa, fò nou tann jous Osval Diran parèt pou li pibliye kèk tèks lan lang kreyòl tankou “Choukoun” ak yon ti kont ki rele “Lyon ak bourik”. Sa te fèt lan lane 1896 (men li te ekri “Choukoun” lan lane 1885). Après sa, Jòj Silven lan lane 1901 pibliye yon liv ki rele *Krik! Krak! Kèk ti kant Lafantèn*. Se premye liv ki te ekri lan kreyòl.

Après sa, lan lane 1928, Jan Prays Mas te mande tout moun save an Ayiti pou yo ta etidye sa yo rele “Kilti popilè a”: kont, chante, pwovèb, kwayans. Malgre sa, sa yo rele “lekòl endijenis” la pa ban nou okenn istwa ekri tankou woman ki te parèt lan peyi Giyàn, lan lane 1885, ki te rele *Atipa*. Se yon moun ki rele Alfrèd Parepou ki te ekri li.

Après sa, Madan Sizàn Silven lan lane 1936 al pase lan peyi Lafrans ekzamen inivèsité: li pibliye yon kokenn tèks sou lang kreyòl la. Menm ane a, li pibliye yon dal kont nan yon jounal ameriken. Se premye koleksyon kont nou genyen avèk sa yon lòt madanm, yon Amerikèn ki rele Elsa Klouz Pasonnz, te pibliye tou lan Etazini.

Finalman, se lan lane 1953 literati lan lang kreyòl reyisi demare. Moriso-Lewa pibliye *Antigòn* ak *Dyakout*. Frank Fouche pibliye *Edip Wa*. Après sa, tout moun sonje kijan Franketyèn lan lane 1978 fè yon pakèt bri lan Pòtoprens ak pyès teyat li a, *Pèlen Tèt*: se pa de moun ki kouri al wè pyès la. Franketyèn te pibliye tou yon woman yo rele *Dezafi* lan lane 1975; lan kesyon pwezi yon sanba tankou Jòj Kastrà Fis ap swiv ekzanp Moriso pye pou pye. Lan Nouyòk, yon kokenn jounal ki rele *SÈL* te pibliye 55 nimewo kote yo te ekzamine lang kreyòl la, tout pwoblèm ou ka imajine. Gen lòt jounal ki vin parèt tou tankou *Bon Nouvèl*, *Boukan*, *Libète*, *Jounal Fanm*, etc.

Pou nou rive la, fòk yo te jwenn yon solisyon lan yon gwo pwoblèm: kijan pou ekri lang kreyòl la? Se pa de batay ki fèt, se pa de diskisyon ki fèt. Depi pwofesè Lobak te sòti nan lane 1942 ak yon metòd ki pou ta sèvi tout moun ki vle ekri lan lang kreyòl la, batay la pran 40 lane anvan finalman, lan lane 1980, Minis Bèna kaba ak tout diskisyon lè yo pran yon lwa ki di kijan tout moun gen dwa pou ekri kreyòl la.

The History of Written Creole

We have already said how at the time of the colony of St Domingue we find some political proclamations and some songs and poems.

After that, we must wait until Oswald Durand appears to publish some texts in the Creole language such as “Choukoun”, and a short story called “The lion and the donkey”. That was done in the year 1896 (but he had written “Choukoun” in the year 1885). After that, Georges Sylvain in 1901 published a book called *Krik! Krak! Some tales of Lafontaine*. It was the first book written in Creole.

After that, in 1928, Jean Price Mars asked all the intellectuals in Haiti to study what they called “popular culture”: tales, songs, proverbs, beliefs. In spite of this, what they call the “indigents school” has given us no written stories like the novel that was published in French Guyana, in 1885, which was called *Atipa*. A person called Alfred Parépou wrote it.

Then, Suzanne Sylvain, in 1936, went to present her doctorate in France: she published an outstanding text on the Creole language. The same year, she published a collection of tales in an American journal. It is the first collection of tales we have, along with what another woman, an American called Elsa Clews Parsons, had published also in the United States.

Finally, it was in 1953 that Creole language literature succeeded in getting started. Morisseau-Leroy published *Antigon* and *Dyakout*. Franck Fouché published *Edip wa*. After that, everyone remembers how Frankétienne, in 1978, had a huge success in Port-au-Prince with his play *Pèlen Tèt*. Not a few people rushed to see the play. Frankétienne also published a novel called *Dezaf iin* 1975; as for poetry a bard-like Georges Castra Jr. followed in Morisseau’s footsteps. In New York, an outstanding journal called *SEL* published 55 issues in which they examined the Creole language (and) all the problems you can imagine. There were other journals published also like *Bon Nouvèl*, *Boukan*, *Libète*, *Jounal Fenm*, etc.

In order for us to get this far, they had to find a solution to a big problem: how to write the Creole language? More than one battle was fought, more than one argument engaged. From the time Dr. Lauback had published in 1942 a method which could be used by everyone who wanted to write in the Creole language, the battle lasted 40 years before finally, in 1980, Minister Bernard¹ ended all argument when a law was voted which said how everyone may write Creole.

¹ The Minister of Education at the time.

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Lan rasanbleman tèks kreyòl nou fè a, nou prezante tout tèks anvan Osva Diran jan yo te parèt. Depi “Choukoun” jis jou jodia, nou mete ansanm yon mòso lan tèks ki merite tout moun li yo pou yo fè li. Malgre tout moun fin tonbe dakò sou kijan pou ekri lang kreyòl la, gen moun k ap kontinye plenyen, k ap kontinye deklare yo pa dakò. Anpil fwa, *oubyen*² ou wè moun sa yo pa janm eseye ekri lan lang kreyòl la. Yo di nenpòt ki bagay. Yo di pa gen machin pou ekri kreyòl la konsa. Yo repete san yo pa bay okenn prèv teyori ki di “K” ou “W” se yon jan pou prepare moun pou yo pale anglè. Yo di konsa fòk yo ta ekri kreyòl la menm jan ou ekri lang fransè a, konsa ou ta prepare elèv yo pou yo li ak pou ekri lang fransè a tou.

Kesyon sa yo pa merite debat: se tan n ap pèdi. Men nou ka wè kijan depi Silven jous Franketyèn chak moun ekri kreyòl jan l vle, swadizan l ap eseye ekri l jan lang fransè a ekri.

Men sa anpil pa wè, se jan y ap mete kesyon an tèt anba. Si w ap deklare fòk ou ekri kreyòl jan yo ekri lang fransè a, sa vle di fòk ou konnen lang fransè anvan ou kòmanse ekri kreyòl. Sa pa gen sans. San konte ou gen de mo ak de son lan lang kreyòl la ki pa ekziste lan lang fransè a. Kijan ou pral ekri de mo tankou “kay”, “zwezo”, “zandolit”, “saf”? Kijan ou pral ekri “pòt”, “mab”, “tab”, “zaboka”, “rele”?

Men pandan n ap diskite konsa, lang kreyòl la pa tann nou pou l fè yon pakèt pwogrè. Kounye a pa gen kote li pa antre: li sòti lan lakou yo, li sòti lan lari pou l anvayi tout kote. Tout legliz ap sèvi ak lang kreyòl, tout radyo ap pale kreyòl, ap fè piblisite lan lang kreyòl, depi 1986, tout kesyon politik, se lan lang kreyòl la yo debat.

² This *oubyen* is an ‘orphan’.

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In the collection of texts we have made, we present all texts before Oswald Durand as they first were published. From “Choukoun” up to now we have put together a passage in the texts which deserve to be read by everyone, so they can do so. Even though everyone has agreed on how to write the Creole language, there are those who still continue to complain, who still continue to declare they do not agree. (Or) often, you see these people have never tried to write in the Creole language. They don’t know what they are talking about. They say there are no machines to write Creole like that. They repeat without giving any proof the theory which says “K” or “W” is a way of preparing people to speak English. They say lightly they should write Creole the same way you write the French language, that way you would prepare the pupils to read and write the French language too.

These questions do not merit debate: we are wasting our time. But we can see how from Sylvain to Frankétienne each person has written Creole as they wished, supposedly they are trying to write it like the French language is written.

But what many do not see is how they are turning the question on its head. If you maintain you must write Creole the way they write the French language, that means you must know the French language before you start to write Creole. That does not make sense. Without taking into account you have words and sounds in the Creole language which do not exist in the French language. How are you going to write words like “kay”, “zwezo”, “zandolit”, “saf”? How are you going to write “pòt”, “mab”, “tab”, “zaboka”, “rele”?

But while we are arguing thus, the Creole language is not waiting for us to make a lot of progress. Now there is no place it has not entered: it has come out of the “lakou”³, it has come off the streets to invade everywhere. All the churches use the Creole language, all the radio stations speak Creole, doing their commercials in the Creole language; since 1986, all political questions have been debated in the Creole language.

³ cf. Lionèl Desmarattes’ poem “Patwa lakou.”

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Se depi Legliz katolik te lanse lane 1942 sa yo rele “kanpay rejete”, yo sèvi ak kreyòl pou kantik, pou preche. Yo tradui labib ak levanjil. Yo fè katechism⁴. Pwotestan yo pibliye *Bib la*. Men, se depi Konsil Vatikan lan lane 1964, lè laten disparèt, yo te⁵ sèvi ak kreyòl pou di lamès ak pou tout sèvis legliz. Anba Divalye, se lan legliz tout moun rankontre pou yo koute mesaj libète ak solidarite la Bib t ap voye monte pou tout moun. Se lè sa tou, estasyon radyo ap pale kreyòl, kit pou fè piblisite pou tout bagay ki pou vann, kit pou yo bay nouvèl, kit ankò pou yo jwe yon pakèt chante. Se la ou wè kote lang lan se yon bagay vivan, kote anpil nèg ap envante kijan pou pase tout mesaj.

Lè sa a tou, pa gen pwoblèm ki pa diskite lan lang tout Ayisyen konprann lan. Kreyòl lan lane 1980 tounen vini lang tout kesyon politik debat. Ou mèt di se lan lang kreyòl la Ayisyen vote, se lan lang sa a li diskite tout pwoblèm li ka genyen.

Konstitisyon peyi a vote 29 mas 1987 la, se premye konstitisyon ki parèt lan de lang yo; kreyòl ak franse. Se premye konstitisyon ki rekonèt lang kreyòl tankou lang franse a. Denpi lè sa a, n ap tann pou nou wè ki kantite pwezi, pyès teyat, woman peyi a pral pwodui; men fòk ou konnen tou anpil moun save se franse a sèlman yo konn ekri. Majorite moun ki pale kreyòl pa konn li, yo pa gen mwayen achte liv. Kanpay alfabetizasyon ki pou ta aprann tout moun li, n ap tann li toujou. Yo poko deside aplike desizyon minis Bèna pou fè tout lekòl lan peyi a aprann tout timoun li lang manman yo.

Tout lwa nou genyen yo poko tradui lan lang kreyòl la. Avoka ak jij lan peyi a se fransè ke⁶ y ap pale, se fransè ke⁷ y ap ekri. Men, nou ka di, depi “Choukoun” te parèt nou fè anpil chimen. Lang kreyòl la tounen yon gwo zouti ki pou sèvi pèp ayisyen an pou li kanpe doubout tankou yon pèp ki konnen sa li ye, sa li vle. Lang kreyòl la tankou yon zouti pou pèp ayisyen an chante lavi tankou yon pèp ki granmoun, ki mèt tèt li.

Jan Klod Baje,
Poto Riko, 1983
Santo Domingo, 1994

⁴ The author falls into the trap of writing ‘à la française’: there should be no final *m*.

⁵ This *te* is not consistent with the other tenses of the passage.

⁶ The author omitted *ke* in the original text.

⁷ The author omitted *ke* in the original text.

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It is since the Catholic Church launched in 1942 what they called the “anti-superstition campaign” that they have been using Creole for the hymns and for preaching. They have translated the Bible and the Gospel. They give catechism classes. The Protestants have published *Bib la*. But it is since the Second Vatican Synod, in 1964, when Latin disappeared, that they have been using Creole to say mass and for all church services. Under Duvalier, it was at church that everyone met to listen to the message of freedom and solidarity that the Bible was proclaiming to everyone. It was then, too, the radio stations were speaking Creole, whether in their commercials, for everything that was for sale, or to give the news, or else again to play a whole lot of songs. It is there you see where the language is a living thing, where a lot of guys are inventing a way to get any message across.

At that time also, there were no problems that were not discussed in the language all Haitians understand. In 1980 Creole became the language in which all political issues were debated. You may say that it was in the Creole language a Haitian voted, it was in that language he discussed any problem he could have.

The country’s constitution was voted on 29 March 1987, it was the first constitution which was published in the two languages: Creole and French. It was the first constitution to recognize the Creole language just like the French language. Since then, we have been waiting to see how many poems, plays, novels the country is going to produce; but you must know too that many intellectuals only know how to write French. The majority of the people who speak Creole cannot read, they cannot afford to buy books. We are still waiting for the literacy campaign which should teach everyone to read. They have still not decided to apply Minister Bernard’s decision to make all schools in the country teach all the children to read their mother tongue.

All the laws we have are still not translated into the Creole language. The country’s lawyers and judges speak French, they write French. But, we can say, since “Choukoun” was published, we have come a long way. The Creole language has become an important tool which the Haitian people can use so they can stand tall like a people who know what they are, what they want. The Creole language is like a tool so that the Haitian people can praise life, as a sovereign people, who are their own masters.

Jean Claude Bajeux,
Puerto Rico, 1983
Santo Domingo, 1994