

So there's some beautiful pieces that goes, actually, it's huge.

It's six volumes, and it's called the Atlas of Haitian Creole.

It's online, so I'd be happy to share the reference with you.

I mean, actually, it has maps.

It also has recordings.

You can actually go and listen to the various dialects of Haitian creole.

And what people have found striking is the fact that, in terms of variation, it's quite restricted, so anywhere you are in Haiti, you can speak to someone who speaks Creole.

You can speak Creole.

So there are some words that are kind of-- shibboleth of seven regions, but overall there is no issue with misunderstanding.

You know, Asians understand each other when they speak creole even though, at first, it might be a bit of hesitation if you come from two different regions.

And that atlas actually documents that very well-- that you have lots of lexico idiosyncrasies across regions, but the grammar itself is pretty much similar, which one might think, it's surprising given that you have all this influx of Africans in various language groups.

You'd expect more variation, but people have also argued, given the fact that, if you look at the history of Haiti, the country was for a long time pretty isolated after independence.

In fact, that's something that we can talk about later.

The European forces and the American forces, even though Haiti helped the US in terms of its independence, getting more territory-- like, I don't know if you've heard about the Louisiana purchase which was caused because of Napoleon losing Haiti, because of Haitian Revolution.

But yet, the US quarantined Haiti very quickly, why?

Because Haitian was an example of black liberty, which was a threat to the world back then.

Haiti was unthinkable and unacceptable, so it had to be embargoed.

And that embargo, people have argued is what actually created this isolation that, in turn, gave Haitian creole pretty much its uniformity, because there was little traffic from outside to Haiti.

For a long time, Haiti was pretty much self-contained, and that helped the language gel as, you know, a pretty uniform system.

AUDIENCE: And was it always uniform over time?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, over time, the data is not so-- we don't have enough data to document that, whether over time, there was more or less variation.

Because what we have is pretty fragmentary.

We don't have lots and lots of evidence about, say, 18th century Haitian creole.

We have some archival data but not enough to be able to compare what happened in different regions of the country, but what we do have, going to the 17th, 18th century-- you know, strike us as pretty similar to the Haitian-spoken now.

So there were French scholars who were writing down what they would hear.

They were writing down a variety of Haitian creole from the 18th, 19th century, and I can still read those text.

Of course, they were written with French autography, and maybe that's another confound.

They were probably imposing their French onto the creole that they were transcribing, but if you read that creole back then, the structures are pretty similar to the creole of today, which also is striking as compared to English, which has evolved much faster.