

MITOCW | MIT24_908S17_Creole_Chapter_11_Birth_Certificates_300k

JOSE: A lot of the assumptions, like the emergence of Creole, have been in the last 200, 300-- I don't know how long.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: 17th century, roughly, in Haiti.

JOSE: Is there any other language that are not Creoles that we know developed in the last 500 years?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, if what I'm saying is right-- English itself-- modern English-- has developed not that long ago.

Because middle English was up to 14th, 15th, 16th century.

English was developing in the 16th century, 17th century-- English the way we know it.

So that variety of English is relatively much younger than what Chaucer spoke.

So there is a notion of that fact that we call English, English, can be an illusion.

Because there has been many English throughout the centuries.

If you focus on English as a broader umbrella, then, of course, it's old.

But if you focus on English as we speak it now, it's relatively recent.

So even back might not make the right cut between, say-- and, actually, sign languages-- did you mention sign languages?

JOSE: Yes.

Because in some sense, maybe part of the bayous could be that even the first Haitian-- at some point, we are saying that Haitian Creole is a separate language from French.

so at some point, there was a-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: There was a break.

JOSE: Yeah, like the first instance that we consider this a different language happened fairly recently.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: That's right.

JOSE: So I was wondering if could that give more evidence that this bias could be racial?

Is there any other language that we know has emerged fairly recently and we see how they treat that differently compared to Creole?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: You mentioned Spanglish, right?

One could say that Spanglish might be even younger, right?

SPEAKER 1: It's a lot younger, maybe 30, 40 years.

But the thing is, it's not considered a language.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, actually, it's changing.

I heard recently that, at some universities on the west coast-- I was told that by Professor Spadofa.

Me and Noam Chomsky were at an interview with Noam.

And she gave us the news that these universities were going to start teaching Spanglish as a language.

SPEAKER 1: You know which one?

MICHEL DEGRAFF: I have to listen to the interview again.

She did tell us.

But I don't remember which one, but it's a first.

It's the first in the history of Spanglish.

Finally, there is on university that's agreed to teach Spanglish as a language.

I think that's remarkable, right?

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, it's awesome.

But it's not what Jose is talking about, just because English and Spanish were somewhat prestigious languages in and of themselves, and the whole point of Creole is that it's not prestigious.

JOSE: So I have to think.

Because at the same time, I know there's a lot of people in Haiti who them themselves don't think Creole is a language.

So maybe I'm being like, well, Spanglish is not a language.

In some sense, it's because you know two languages.

And you purposely mix them because it's convenient.

But I feel like nobody would say that is a-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: But actually, languages have emerged like that.

In Canada, there is a language called Michif.

Michif is also a mix of French and some Algonquin language.

There is one in the Indies called Media Lengua.

In fact, even the name tells you that it's a mix of this [INAUDIBLE].

It's called Media Lengua.

What is Media Lengua?

It's a mix between Spanish and Kichwa.

You see?

And Media Lengua is the language of the community.

and actually, that case is very interesting.

Because Media Lengua was created really mid-way.

Because in the valley, you had the rich colonizers, the Spanish people.

And in the top of the mountains, you had the Kichwa speakers.

And then, in between, you had these people who were, in terms of the social class, in the midpoint between the rich Spaniards and the oppressed Kichwa speakers.

And they developed Media Lengua as a way to show that they were different, that they were not exactly like the Kichwa speakers, but they were not at the level yet of the Spanish speakers.

And they used that mixing.

So at first, one could imagine that people would say, well, it's another language.

It's just this random mix of Kichwa words and Spanish words.

But now, Media Lengua is a language spoken by a community of people who, at first, were bilingual.

But now their main language is Media Lengua.

JOSE: When you combine languages, that's how it feels.

I really only combine English and Spanish when I know the other person feels most comfortable speaking that.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: I think, Ose, you'll be interested to read about the history of Media Lengua.

Because I think what you're describing in terms of that feeling that's you know both, and that you're speaking to someone who can understand both, that's what's been described by people who've looked at-- So the key linguist here that you should look at, his name is Pieter Muysken.

So look up Pieter Muysken.

OK, so it was a beautiful work describing the origins, the structure of Media Lengua.

And then what you have to do as you read that is ask yourself, is he describing what I feel now when I speak Spanglish?

I don't know what the answer is.

But that's what comes to my mind as you describe Spanglish.

I think of Media Lengua.

JOSE: Most Mexicans don't identify too much with the use of Spanglish.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: Well, that's exactly the way this was created.

Because Media Lengua, the speakers wanted to create a new identity for them.

They didn't want to see themselves as if they were purely Kichwa speakers, nor were they Europeans.

So they wanted to create this compromise between the two identities.

And they use that mix of Kichwa and Spanish to create a new badge of identity.

Now I don't know whether that's the same thing for Spanglish.

But from what you describe, it sounds interestingly reminiscent to that story.

STUDENT 2: You may have just touched on it, but I was going to ask if-- he was talking about how Mexican's don't identify with Spanglish, and they don't speak it.

But is that how these speakers of French and Algonquin-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: Yeah, Michif.

STUDENT 2: --is that how they felt when they developed that language?

Because that could be part of the evolutionary process.

He could be describing that it's [INAUDIBLE] own way of starting its own language.

Eventually, the umbilical cord gets cut.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So I think the history of Michif has another twist, which is that there was a gender issue.

I think there was an issue of there were Algonquin women meeting with French speakers.

So there's another aspect that's not part of neither Spanglish nor Media Lengua, which is the gender part of it and with who spoke Algonquin, and who spoke French.

And it was mostly women who spoke Algonquin.

go ahead.

STUDENT 3: I feel like there's certain dialects of Spanish that, in some ways, use Spanglish legitimately, like maybe that's how it would be.

Like, "par-kare," which is not how you actually say to park the car.

But that would be considered Spanglish, wouldn't it?

[INTERPOSING VOICES] JOSE: For example, I'm from the border.

I'm from [INAUDIBLE].

And we definitely use a lot of words that have English origin, like "troka." We use "troka" instead of [INAUDIBLE]..

I didn't know that was the origin until I was 17, 18.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: So you were using troka without knowing that was was with-- JOSE: Yeah, yeah.

Because it doesn't feel like an English-- you're just-- MICHEL DEGRAFF: Troka.

JOSE: Yeah.

And do, OK.

Of course it looks like a Spanish word.

It just feels like you're borrowing words more than something independent.

I only really combine English and Spanish when I'm speaking with somebody who the bass line is English.

But I have to alternate.

I don't know.

It doesn't feel like-- I don't know.

MICHEL DEGRAFF: OK.

So that could be an interesting research project because in this case, you would be your own subject.

So I think that's a fascinating question that you could ask.