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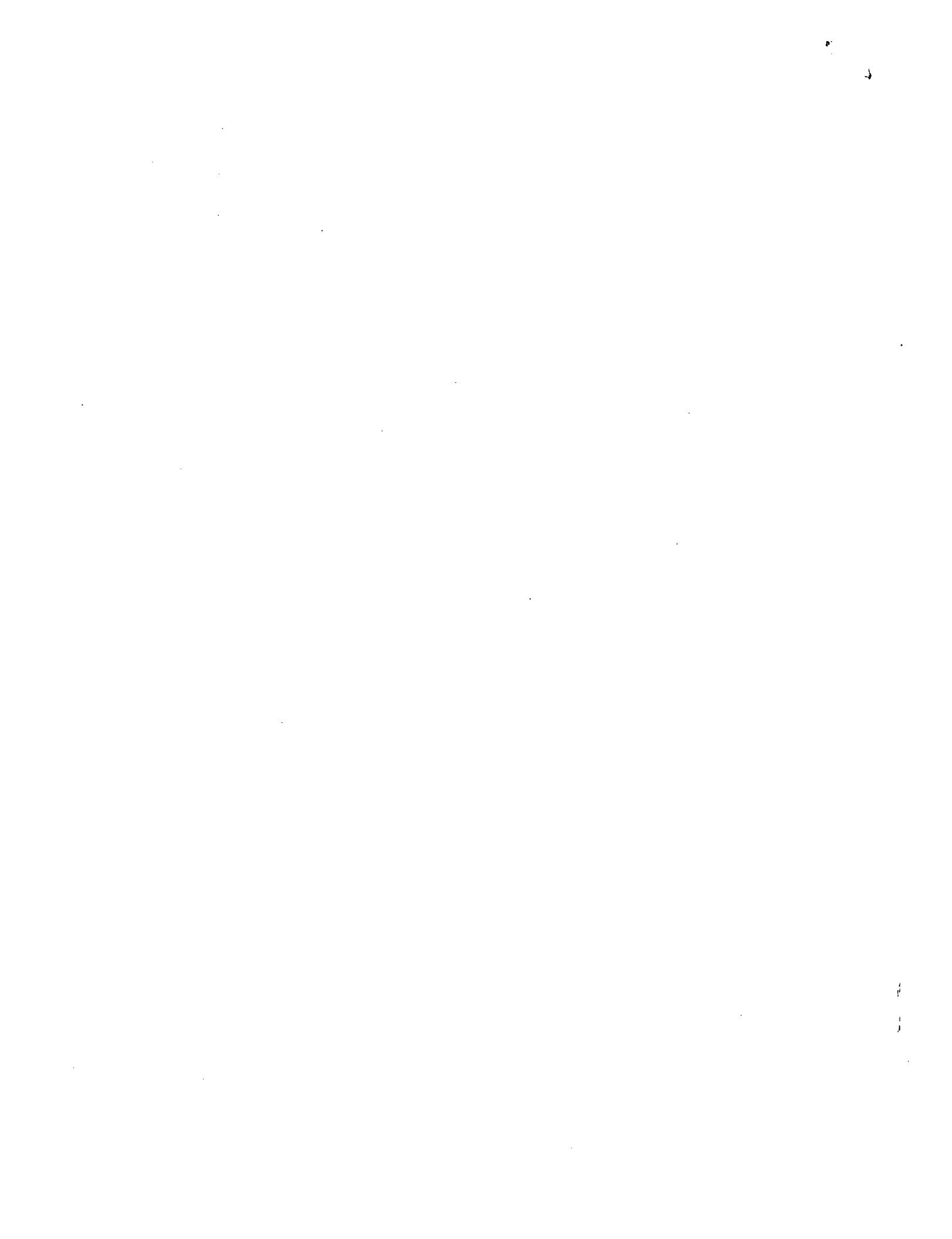
THE LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES OF
HAITIAN EDUCATIONAL RADIO

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HAITIAN EDUCATIONAL RADIO

The Haitian Government's consciousness of the need to use radio to improve education in the country dates from 1972. For the first time it was a question not merely of "educational broadcasts" but of establishing an educational broadcasting organisation which would participate actively in the production and diffusion of programmes and also in the organisation of listening and in evaluation.

Thus was born in Haiti, with the aid of UNESCO and UNICEF, the Educational Broadcasting Service. In the operations of this service particular attention had to be given to the choice of languages for broadcasting and to language teaching. For, like the majority of the countries of the Caribbean, Haiti exhibits a Creole-French pattern of bilingualism; it was therefore necessary to develop, together with any effort at improving education, better control of the language tool in the schools.

The Educational Broadcasting Service developed therefore, a specific programme of language-teaching broadcasts, aimed essentially at facilitating the transition from Creole to spoken French.

But to understand correctly the place and the need of this programme, it appears to be necessary to present some details on the educational situation of the country.

I. The General Education Situation

It should be stated first of all that the need to use a medium of widespread communication such as radio for educational purposes was brought home to the education authorities by the often unsatisfactory state of the Haitian school system over the past several years, as well as by a realisation of the wide range of traditional methods which would have had to be used simply in order to cope with the high rate of population increase.

The present school enrolment of 6 to 11 year olds, for whom schooling is normally compulsory, is in fact estimated at 26.1%, and the annual rate of population increase at 1.6% to 2%.

For these reasons above and in view of the country's limited resources it is easy to see that the Haitian school system is not capable of coping with the full range of its responsibilities. Educational radio was therefore initially conceived as a means of distributing a minimum of basic learning to all the country's children.

Although 74% of children are in fact still not in school, it is also not possible to ignore the difficulties which the Haitian school system encounters on account of the inadequacy of certain of its programmes, the shortage of plants, the quantitative and qualitative shortcomings of the teaching personnel, the number of repeaters and drop-outs and also, more than anything else, the bilingual situation which makes serious teaching of any basic academic discipline impossible without prior mastery of the language of instruction.

In this connection, it must be made clear that if French is indeed the official language of the country and the language of instruction, it is in fact correctly spoken only by a minority, for even in school, and especially in rural districts, communication can take place only in Creole. Since the illiteracy rate among the population of 15 years of age and above is around 80%, the use of Creole is general throughout the entire country and that of French much more restricted.

The situation of bilingualism which prevails in Haiti is nevertheless not a unique phenomenon, and in fact many other countries find themselves in quite similar positions: the Slavic or Scandinavian countries of Europe, African or Latin American countries, etc.... indeed it might even be said that the linguistic situation in Haiti is less complex than elsewhere because of the existence of only two languages in the entire country and because of their close relationship: this is certainly not the case in Africa, for example.

Radical transformation of the Haitian education system must, therefore, involve reform of language learning pedagogy, based on the comparative and systematic study of Creole and French. It is perhaps because of too long neglect of this aspect of the problem that the Haitian school system has been so beset by difficulties and is still of such limited viability.

Serious and fundamental reform of Haitian education ought even, conceivably, to extend to the teaching of Creole itself, in the first one or two years of primary school, in order to be able to lay a solid foundation of early functional learning - that is to say reading, writing and calculation - before progressing to the disciplines designed to develop intelligence, judgement and taste.

This would not mean the complete elimination of French learning during this period of schooling but the study of that language would first take place orally, in order to develop, before the writing stage begins, certain indispensable skills of oral comprehension and expression. Furthermore, this would coincide with the views of a school of linguists and teachers which advocates just such a new approach to foreign language learning.

In addition to its clear pedagogical advantages, this transition from Creole to French in Haitian schools would permit education to be more deeply rooted in the cultural values of the nation.

While awaiting the results of the work of the commissions on teaching reform and of the Centre for Applied Linguistics, all of which are engaged in a renewal of education in Haiti, the Educational Broadcasting Service has been putting forward for the past three years a programme of language teaching based essentially on the comparative analysis of Creole and French.

II. Language teaching by radio

This language programme, developed and broadcasted by the Educational Broadcasting Service, results from a certain number of observations made in Haiti and elsewhere. It is designed to be essentially practical and is thus in contrast to the literary-oriented education traditionally furnished by the schools in the shape of interminable grammatical exercises recited by heart and with little understanding.

By way of illustration one need only refer to a recent article in the Haitian press to realise clearly the basic inadequacy of French teaching in Haiti. In fact, the author writes "while the presence of tourists from France or French-speaking countries ought normally, in a French-speaking country, please the travel agencies and the chauffeur-guides, it poses for them a problem which, believe it or not, is the French language itself. The chauffeur-guide is in as much difficulty when piloting a French-speaking tourist as he is at ease when guiding an English-speaking one. This in spite of the fact that virtually all chauffeur-guides have completed primary or even some secondary education, in certain cases right up to the threshold of the Baccalauréat. In spelling or grammar they know much more French than English. In this regard the fault lies in our teaching system; they have learned French to read or write it or as an intellectual ornament. It has been too often forgotten that French is a living language and as such is made above all for speaking." The difficulty confronting the chauffeur-guides, the writer concludes, "affects more than 90% of the pupils of the highest grades of our secondary schools, who even reach the pre-University level without really being able to speak French."^{1/}

This observation of failure in second-language teaching, taking in this instance particularly dramatic proportions, is nevertheless not peculiar to Haiti, and there is no lack of countries throughout the world where the same shortcomings are observable and the same impasses exist.

^{1/} "The Chauffeur-Guides" Article in the newspaper "Le Nouveau Monde", by René Victor, 22 January 1978.

It must therefore be thoroughly understood that a language is in fact above all made to be heard and spoken; and the fact must also be taken into consideration that the young people of our time learn as much, if not more, from radio, cinema and television, that is, without necessarily enjoying the advantage of a written support for the learning process.

The programmes of Haitian educational radio are, therefore, fitted into this general context of bilingualism and oral orientation, and the language broadcasts in particular are designed to fill a gap in the teaching of French in the country, that is to say the introduction of pupils to the spoken language, before or concurrently with their initiation into reading and writing.

Based on the latest research in the teaching of French as a foreign language carried out by the CREDIF^{2/} and the comparative analyses of Creole and French of the Haitian linguist, Dr. Pradel Pompilus, the language programme of the Educational Broadcasting Service provides for:

- two series of 45 broadcasts for beginners in the earlier classes;
- one series of 45 perfecting broadcasts for pupils who already know French.

Since the Educational Radio Service, as far as the actual broadcasts are concerned, is conceived as an active teaching tool, maximum use is made of all the expressive resources of this medium: variety of voices, sound effects, music, etc..... Thus the language broadcasts permit a direct intervention in the learning process and the learners in the classes (and also adolescents not in school assembled around a radio set) can work directly and almost exclusively with the radio. Each broadcast comprises in fact a number of series of radio games in which are provided pauses of sufficient length for the various phases of reflection, memorisation, interrogation or correction of pronunciation.

^{2/} Elaboration du Français Fondamental, published by Didier, Paris 1964; Voix et Images de France, published by Didier, Paris 1971; the CREDIF is a Study and Research Centre for the Diffusion of French, affiliated to the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint-Cloud, in France.

Nevertheless, while aimed at pupils, the language programme permits at the same time a concrete training of teachers in the mastery of a particularly delicate, and so far quite neglected, discipline.

Supporting texts will soon be sent to the classes to permit a fuller exploitation of the radio at the place of study. But the basic idea of this language programme is to allow the radio to play as fully as possible its role of direct and massive intervention in the educational process.

III. Composition of a language broadcast

Each language broadcast normally constitutes a complete instructional unit of 20 to 25 minutes in length. It must permit on each occasion, and according to a progression based on methodical choice, the acquisition of two or three basic structures of the language. This implies in effect the teaching, as a matter of priority, not of vocabulary but of structures allowing learners to begin to express themselves and communicate in concrete situations.

An initial body of work has therefore been completed involving the choice of basic structures and vocabulary, and taking account of the requirements of methodical learning and the observed similarities and differences between Creole and French. The first 45 language broadcasts therefore reflect these choices in the framework of a certain number of central topics derived from Haitian life.

Each broadcast therefore comprises:

- (a) A sketch in French (song, proverb or story of local origin) in which the two or three structures and the vocabulary of the day's lesson are presented and illustrated by means of broadcasting techniques.
- (b) An explanation of the sketch in the form of a dialogue with the listeners.
- (c) Pronunciation exercises.
- (d) A memorisation exercise for fixing the structures.
- (e) Structural exercises by means of questions, substitution, transformation, reconstitution, exploitation, etc.....

To facilitate the correct execution of each phase of the lesson the same recorded directions reappear in every broadcast. A bell signals the point at which the learners are to intervene with answers, questions or repetitions. A metronome invites individual intervention by learners. A voice-off comes in at the end of each question to correct the students' responses; finally, the transitions between exercises are accomplished by "musical bridges" which also give the students a chance to rest.

The learners are thus active participants in the language teaching broadcasts. But teachers are also asked to supervise the correct execution of the instructions given on the air and, after a training period, to conduct the exploitation in class exercises of the structures studied in the course of each broadcast.

Naturally the Educational Broadcasting Service does not pretend to aim at solving all the current problems of Haitian education. In addition to its language programme it is responsible for other series of broadcasts in the teaching of arithmetic, science, introductory subjects, etc.... But its present contribution is particularly important in that it sets out to provide in a variety of disciplines a form of teaching that is original, innovative and above all much better adapted to the Haitian socio-economic and cultural context. It also achieves a massive penetration into all the communities, villages and schools of the country, giving daily support and assistance to the efforts of educators in the remotest areas, or even better, partially replacing them in spheres where specialised skills are still lacking.

The role at present played by the service in the improvement of oral French teaching might also be extended to the teaching of English or Spanish. Its merit to have demonstrated that the most advanced techniques of mass communication were able to become the favoured, and relatively inexpensive, tools of an important educational and pedagogical reform.



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