The Evolution
from French to Creole*
(L'évolution du français au créole)

Once the regular sound changes involved in the evolution from French to creole have been understood, the etymology of any unfamiliar word can be found.

In Lesser Antillean Creole, for example, the French front rounded vowels [y], [ø], and [œ] automatically become [i], [e], and [ɛ].

The main exceptions to this rule are of a geographical or sociolinguistic nature:

- in Les Saintes, dependency islands of Guadeloupe, the pronunciation of [y], [ø], and [œ] is regular.
- it is not unusual to hear some Antilleans retaining the rounded variant through hypercorrection in order to appear either as a French-speaker or as distinguished or cultivated, for example, 'rue' [ry] becomes [lari], 'queue' [kø] becomes [ke], and 'fleur' [flœr] becomes [flɛ]

In an article in 1967, Guy Hazaël-Massieux reported this popular story from Guadeloupe which is a perfect illustration of hypercorrection:

> A certain village craftsman, in order to hoist himself above his social standing, claimed to speak only French. One day, having acquired a dinghy, he asked the local primary school teacher to suggest a name for said dinghy which was painted blue and, in view of the colour, the teacher suggested 'firmament'. On the Sunday, friends who had come to the unveiling were surprised to read 'Furent ma mère' on the side of the boat. Triumphantly, the craftsman explained that he wasn't going to be duped so easily and he was perfectly aware that one said 'furent' not 'fir' in French and that 'maman' was just a vulgar form of 'ma mère'.[1]

Articulation of 'r'

The French [r] regularly disappears at the end of a syllable in the Antilles with the latent 'r' also protecting the traditional contextual nasal vowel, hence 'corps' [kɔr] becomes [kɔ], 'terre' [tɛr] becomes [tɛ], 'coeur' [kœr] becomes [kɛ], 'porte' [pɔrt] becomes [pɔt], 'morne' [mɔrn] becomes [mɔn], and 'charme' [ʃarm] becomes [ʃam]. It also becomes modified in certain contexts, for example, the generally uvular 'r' (cf. French 'r grasseyé') moves forward to the velar point of articulation to become velar 'r' which is in fact [w]. This is why, for example, [wu] is heard for 'roue' and [wɔʃ] for 'roche'. Rounding adds to this phenomenon, thus for example *on ti bwen* is heard for 'un petit brin' and *pwan* for 'prendre'.

Contextual Nasalisation

Contextual nasalisation is also a characteristic of Lesser Antillean dialects. Any oral vowel followed by a nasal consonant becomes nasalised, for example 'maman' is

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[1] Guy Hazaël-Massieux, 'Remarques sur les créoles français des Antilles: problèmes de convergence linguistique', in *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Linguists* (Romania: Editions de l'Académie de la République socialiste de Roumanie, 1969), pp. 727-731.

pronounced in creole as *manman* and 'aimer' becomes *enmé* and this rule is valid for both Guadeloupe and Martinique. It should be mentioned that there is also a strong tendency in Martinique towards progressive nasalisation, meaning the nasalisation of any oral vowel preceded by a nasal consonant, hence, combined with the regressive nasalisation, 'aimer' readily becomes *enmen* and 'mais' (*mé* in Guadeloupe Creole) becomes *men* in Martinican Creole.

* Note
The sections in Bradley Hand ITC font have been introduced to give a deeper understanding of certain concepts.