

# History of English and French languages in Mauritius: A study in language and power

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is widely believed that a comparison between the British and French empires reveals a fundamental difference in their language policies. The justification for this contention seems to be that the French were more singleminded in the prosecution of their language, more conscious of a 'civilizing mission', more intolerant of the use of indigenous languages at any stage in education, and more effective in educating black men (and far fewer women) to speak the metropolitan language beautifully. Although this is a very selective over-simplification of the issues involved, the language situation in Mauritius, which was subjected both to English and French influence, shows how the overall goals of the colonial powers, which had slightly different education policies, tended to be in identical terms.

In both empires, education served the interests of the colonizing power, and large areas of social life were unaffected by colonial education and linguistic policies. Even if the French organized education exclusively through the medium of French in Africa, the proportion of the population involved was minute, and only slightly larger in British Africa. The example of Mauritius will illustrate this.

## **Introduction**

The overall goals of the colonial powers were conceived differently, the French aiming at la France outré-mer and ultimate union with metropolitan France, the British accepting the principle of trusteeship, leading ultimately to self-government and independence. Whether these variants were experienced differently by colonial subjects, or have had different major long-term effects of a structural or ideological kind is doubtful. Education served the interests of the colonizing power, or powers in the Mauritian case, and large areas of social life were unaffected by colonial education. Even if the French organized education exclusively through the medium of French in Africa, the proportion of the population involved was minute, and only slightly larger in British Africa. The history of English and French in Mauritius, an Indian Ocean island, captured by the British from the French in 1810, and remaining under British control for over 150 years, will illustrate the complex processes of colonization whereby English and French speakers positioned themselves in a relation of power with their subjects.

## **Mauritius as a multilingual society: A historical overview**

In order to gain a full understanding of the position of English and French in Mauritius, it has to be seen against the background of the very complex

situation arising from a mixture of ethnic, socio-economic and educational factors, past and present.

The island of Mauritius is one of the former colonies which were first in French possession but were lost to Britain during the Seven Years' War or during the Napoleonic Wars. Although Mauritius had been a British colony for almost two hundred years (1810-1968), it is probably the colonial territory where English influence on culture and language had the least effect. Even today, French plays an important role, second only to the omnipresent French-based Creole. In addition, there are some Indian (Bhojpuri, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Gujerati) and Chinese (Hakka, Cantonese) languages which are declining steadily, even though two thirds of the population of Mauritius are Indians and three per cent Chinese (see Table 1). Given the number of languages (at least 12) used by different ethnic groups in an island with a population which now exceeds 1.2 million people and an area of 720 square miles, Mauritius presents an extreme case of individual multilingualism. Uninhabited prior to 1721, it was under French occupation until 1810, when it passed into the hands of the British who ruled it until its accession to independence in 1968. It is significant to note that the number of people from Britain has always been too few for them to form a separate ethnic group on the island. Those members of early British administrations who remained appear to have intermarried, and a few later British settlers have even been assimilated into the Franco-Mauritian society. This situation accounts for the little change in the customs and language of the first settlers and the African slave population, who continued to speak French or the French-based Creole language which had been formed in the meantime. The introduction of English into the judicial and administrative fields was very slow. As Richardson (1963:2) points out, in spite of the British occupation, "Mauritius is in essence a French island".

Table 1: Languages usually spoken in Mauritius

	<b>Census 1983</b>	<b>Census 1990 (% in Brackets)</b>
<b>English</b>	2,028 (0.21)	2,240 (0.21)
<b>French</b>	36,048 (3.73)	34,455 (3.26)
<b>Creole</b>	521,950 (53.98)	652,193 (61.72)
<b>Non-European Languages</b>	403,849 (41.77)	367,772 (34.71)

Source: Census 1983 and Census 1990

After the abolition of slavery in 1836, indentured labourers from India, mainly Bhojpuri speakers, Tamils, Telegus and Marathis (cf. Ramyeard 1985; Rivière 1982) and Indian and Chinese tradesmen, came to Mauritius so that by 1860 the population was already made up of a number of different ethnic groups. According to the estimates of Stein (1982), almost half of the actual population are Hindus of different Indian origin (Aryans and Dravidians), about 16% are Muslim Indians, 3% are Chinese and the rest, which comprises about 28% of the inhabitants, falls into the category of what is called the "General Population", which is unofficially subdivided into "white

Franco-Mauritians", "Coloureds" (name often applied to those of partial European descent), and "Creoles", the latter being classified according to their physical characteristics into "Black River Creoles" (of African origin), "Malagasy Creoles", "Indian Creoles" and "Chinese Creoles". The Franco-Mauritians, who represent less than 3% of the total population, are by far the most influential social force in the island, and they continue to play a dominant role in the sugar, manufacturing and tourist industries. This, and the fact that their way of life, and most important, their form of speech is closest to that exemplified by the media, means that they represent an ideal for the "coloured" population, and gradually for the rest of the population, thus exerting a sociolinguistic influence beyond their numerical importance.

Despite more than a century and a half of British rule and the imposition of English as an official language, French has maintained its position as the prestige language of Mauritius. Fluency in French is more closely linked to advancement in the social hierarchy, and happens to be indicative of intelligence and good breeding, especially in the eyes of the "General Population".

According to Barnwell and Toussaint (1949), there is considerable evidence to suggest that between 1840-1870, the British administration tried to make the inhabitants of Mauritius native speakers of the English language. But the decisions to anglicise the colony came a bit too late, since French had already established itself as a strong language with the help of the British colonisers themselves. As long as military and political control remained in the hands of the British, they were content to allow the French to remain in a dominant and privileged position. Hence, the French continued to dominate the linguistic and economic life of the island. In 1992, when Mauritius became a parliamentary republic, it remained a member both of the Commonwealth and the 'Francophonie'.

## **A history of the English and French languages in Mauritius**

The conditions necessary for the French language to live on in the new British colony of Mauritius (the island already had got this name in the 17th century from the Dutch, before the French named it Isle de France after they had taken possession of it in 1715) were laid down in the bilingual capitulation treaty of December 3rd, 1810. In article 8 it states:

Que les habitants conserveront leurs Religion, Loix et Coutumes.  
(quoted from Napal 1962: 80)

This meant that there were in fact almost no changes in the life of the predominantly French colonists and their slaves. The Catholic Church retained its leading position. The Codes Napoléoniens (with the exception of the Code pénal, which was not introduced in France until after the loss of Mauritius) have, to this day, remained the basis of the Mauritian legal system, though procedures mainly follow the English system. Finally, French was still regarded as the 'true' language of the now British colony.

After 1810, there was no real interest in settling down in Mauritius – neither among the British colonial officers (almost all of whom left the island after the end of their service), nor in the British motherland itself. Other British colonies were obviously more attractive. On the other hand, Mauritius was now out of reach for French settlers. For these reasons, the structure of the white, francophone population did not change. The few Englishmen staying in

Mauritius were soon integrated and differed from the old-established Franco-Mauriciens only in their surnames (Bathfield, Hart, Smith, Tyack, etc.).

19th-century official documents emanating from the British colonial administration and travelogues by British visitors contain many remarks on the paradoxical situation that, in a British colony, there was hardly a single person, even among the Europeans, who spoke any English or even understood it.

The earliest relevant document, mentioned by Auguste Toussaint (1969), is a dispatch from Lord Goderich, then Colonial Secretary, to the Governor of Mauritius, which says among other things:

Des documents ont été reçu dans diverses circonstances, [...] ayant rapport à des poursuites judiciaires ou à d'autres sujets d'un genre spécial, transcrits dans la langue française : il est nécessaire qu'à l'avenir toute pièce de cette nature soit accompagnée de sa traduction ; [...] Il est plus que temps que toute la correspondance officielle avec Maurice soit entretenue dans la langue de la Grande-Bretagne. (Toussaint 1969 : 400.)

In another dispatch of November 28th, 1832, Lord Goderich claims that all inhabitants and especially the officials should learn English because it would be "not convenient" if the correspondence with a British colony went on in a language other than English (cf. Toussaint 1969: 401). In the following years, it was repeatedly announced that sufficient knowledge of English was the main condition for employment in the administration. This announcement obviously remained without practical consequence: only in the Higher Courts was the use of English compulsory from July 15th, 1847 on – despite the strong protest of the francophone population. They felt particularly snubbed by the date chosen for the law to come into effect (the day after July 14th, the French national holiday). Since then there have been no changes in these regulations, which contain only a few exceptions where proper observance of the Codes Napoléoniens necessitates the use of French.

The language of edicts and government documents shows even more clearly the gradual retreat of the French language and, at the same time, the slow advance of English: until 1841 both languages were used; from February 25th, 1841 it was ruled that the English version was authoritative and the French one was to be regarded as a translation for the information of the francophone population. Up to 1865 all documents were published in both languages. From 1865 to 1914 the number of French translations continually decreased, and from 1914 on there were no more official French translations.

As an official language, English is the language of the Court and of the National Assembly. In fact, the English language is one of the basic requirements to be met if an individual is to have a seat in the National Assembly. Section 33 of the Constitution reads as follows:

Section 33 (subsection 4)

[...] a person shall be qualified to be elected as a member of the Assembly if, and shall not be qualified unless, he is able to speak and, unless incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause, to read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable him to take an active part in the proceedings of the Assembly.

In practice, French is accepted as the second language in Parliament, and is used by the present members. Furthermore, the official language of the Courts is English. This provision is made in the Courts Act, section 14.

The official language to be used in the Supreme Court of Mauritius shall be English.

In this section of the Court Act, no provision is made for any semi-official language. However, taking into consideration the fact that Mauritians, in general, have limited proficiency in the English language, Section 14 (subsection 2) has been promulgated, stating that in case a person does not have competent knowledge of the English language, he can make his statement in the language with which he is best acquainted, usually Mauritian Creole.

In the school system it was even more obvious that the English colonial administration, for a long time, had no interest in the propagation of English. The few attempts made were not successful. Though the Ecole Centrale, which was founded in 1800 and took the name Lycée de l'Isle de France et de Bourbon in 1803, was renamed Royal College in 1813, it remained "un établissement scolaire à la française" (Toussaint 1969: 402). Not until 1841 did it acquire an English principal and some English teachers from Britain, but the whole enterprise showed little sign of success at first. When Charles Bruce became the principal in 1869, he made the following statement:

Il est un point sur lequel l'échec du Royal College a été le plus manifeste, c'est précisément l'enseignement de l'anglais. Très peu d'élèves du Collège s'expriment correctement en anglais. (quoted from Toussaint 1969 : 421)

This statement is confirmed in 1859 in a travel account by Patrick Beaton, who writes in great surprise:

Is it possible that the English language is unknown to all save Englishmen, in a colony which has been in the possession of England since 1810? Is it credible that the Coolies even are taught in the barbarous jargon known as Creole, and that an Englishman, standing in an English colony, should discern no traces of the English language, of English manners, and of English civilisation? (Beaton 1859: 23)

He concludes:

Mauritius is in feeling, manners, and almost in language, as much a French colony as it was fifty years ago, and every Englishman resident in it feels himself a foreigner in a British colony. (Beaton 1859: 121)

It suits this observation well that Governor Broome had clerks from Britain come to the colony because

from the local circumstances of the country, the power of writing a good plain straightforward letter or despatch in the English language is not often to be met with. (quoted from Ramdoyal 1977: 105)

This was the case, although from about 1850 on, the colonial administration showed a stronger tendency towards "anglicising and protestantising the island" (Ramdoyal 1977: 73). This caused some tension between the administration and the Catholic Church as the supporter of the French way of life and the French language, but at first English achieved little progress in its expansion and its rivalry with French. A letter from a member of a Catholic

community of 1894 explains why this was so. The writer complains about the use of English as the medium of instruction in state-owned primary schools:

Experience shows that the great mass of children leave our primary schools with a knowledge of neither English nor French, and that they forget and abandon the English language no sooner they leave the classroom. French is the language of the people. Fifty years' efforts to supplant it by English have proved a failure. (King-Harman to Ripon, July 11th, 1894, quoted from Ramdoyal 1977: 76)

Those responsible were aware of this problem, which is confirmed by Ordinance 21 of 1857 concerning compulsory education for children of the Indian population, which never became effective. It says in Article 3:

The French language was to be the medium of instruction; but in every school English was to be taught. (quoted from Ramdoyal 1977: 83)

Instead, Indian Vernacular Schools were founded in 1876 on Governor Phayre's initiative because

[it was] a waste of time to teach the mass of children in English, a language they would never use. (quoted from Ramdoyal 1977: 86)

Nevertheless, six years later, in 1882, English was re-introduced in these schools as a supplementary subject. They were now called Anglo-Vernacular Schools.

The problem of English as the medium of instruction still existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Annual Report on Education for the year 1906 draws attention to pupils' difficulties in the entrance examinations for the Royal College:

The difficulty was furthermore increased through the candidates having to do their examinations in most cases in English, a language which was foreign to them and which in a great number of cases they had only just begun to learn. (Ramdoyal 1977: 100)

Though the problem was well known, it was laid down that English was to be –as far as possible– the only medium of instruction from the fourth class of the primary school on. The main problem of this regulation, which in its main parts is still in force, is that the vast majority of the pupils concerned know neither English nor French when they enter school, and instead speak Creole and/or, in Indian-dominated rural areas of the island, Bhojpuri, the Indian lingua franca of Mauritius. In addition, Indian children learn an Indian language, the 'language of their forefathers', from the first year in school, even if their parents do not speak it any more. As far back as 1910, the Report of the Mauritius Royal Commission called the result "a smattering of four languages and an adequate knowledge of none" (Ramdoyal 1977: 109). In the following years and decades many critics have likewise blamed languages for the high rate of school failures. As an example, only 16% out of 14,123 participants in the School Certificate/ 'O' Level Examinations in 1983 received a credit in English, i.e. a satisfactory grade (cf. Foondun 1986: 25). 42% of the candidates passed the examination in that year and 63% in 1992 (cf. Mauritius 1994: 128). This means that most of those who pass the School Certificate Examinations do so without having obtained a satisfactory grade in English.

The three following documents are worth mentioning: Ward's Report on Education in Mauritius of 1941 recommends, probably for the first time, the use of Creole as the medium of instruction in the first years of primary school; Meade's investigation into The Economic and Social Structure of Mauritius of 1961, and Ramdoyal's The Development of Education in Mauritius of 1977, which has been quoted from above.

Ward remarked in his report:

[...] although Mauritius uses both English and French for official purposes, such as Government notices, legal documents, and speeches in the Council of Government, and is sometimes spoken of as a bilingual country, [...] of the two official languages, French is a foreign language to most, and English is foreign to all. (Ward 1941: 12)

Twenty years later, Meade criticised the school system:

We do not believe that we exaggerate when we say that the greatest handicap to successful education in Mauritius is that imposed by the multiplicity of languages in use. When, however, [these arguments...] result in little children of seven and eight years of age attempting to learn three languages at the hands of teachers who are themselves masters on none of the three, the absurdity of the present system is clearly seen. Children leave the primary schools in large numbers without having acquired anything worth calling literacy in any one language, though they have spent an intolerable amount of time dabbling in all three. (Meade 1961: 208)

Another sixteen years later Ramdoyal came to a similar conclusion:

Starting three foreign languages at the same time at age five places an enormous burden on the child. For many children this has led to poor standards in oracy [!] and to functional illiteracy in English. (Ramdoyal 1977: 139)

A last quotation of 1993 concerns a newly established secondary school, Bocage High School, which differs from the existing high schools (Collèges) in proposing the exclusive use of the English language in all its activities. Before Brelu Brelu (1993) starts discussing its aims and principles, he asks a question which is relevant in the context of the entire Mauritian school system:

Comment peut-on enseigner des matières aussi diverses que les mathématiques et les sciences en anglais, alors que plusieurs élèves au BHS [Bocage High School] n'ont l'anglais ni comme langue maternelle ni comme langue seconde ? En d'autres mots, comment l'élève de 11-12 ans peut-il parler de son vécu ou de ses réalités dans une langue qu'il ne connaît point ? (Brelu Brelu 1993: 24)

These 'difficulties with the English language' show up today in many spheres of everyday life.

## **Language Policy as opposed to Practice**

Officially, the medium of instruction in primary schools is English. In practice, however, as we shall see, most education during the first few years is through the medium of Creole. As the years progress, the medium of instruction gradually moves, in general, towards French with only that amount of Creole as the teacher may feel appropriate. From the second year through to the final (sixth) year at primary school, the relative extent to

which a pupil receives his education through French and English varies considerably, but in general French predominates as the spoken medium of instruction and English as the written medium of instruction. Many teachers feel that their pupils are able to follow spoken French, because of its affinities with Creole, better than spoken English. All secondary education is aimed towards the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (S.C.) and the Higher Cambridge School Certificate (HSC.)/General Certificate of Education (GCE.). This would suggest a far greater use of English in secondary education than is found in primary schools. However, most of the schools make a very extensive use of French.

It is true that English is (at least nominally) the dominant language of school education; it plays an important role in the final examinations; it is the official language of politics, as mentioned earlier, and, therefore, is used in many official contexts, where it has evidently pushed out French. However, anyone who wants to reach a large audience will find English used much less than French. The press is mostly in French, with a certain proportion of English articles, which are often taken over from international news agencies or foreign English-language newspapers; official information and announcements or special advertisements are also in English. Even reports on the parliamentary debates going on in English are nearly always written in French. Quotations, in this case, are generally translated and are given in the original form only in a few cases. The English names of some newspapers (Mauritius Times, News on Sunday, Impact News) do not say anything about the language used in them. The few Indian and Chinese newspapers have a very restricted circulation and are of no importance to the larger public.

French plays a major role in all forms of entertainment: radio, television and cinema. The proportion of airtime allocated to French surpasses by far that of the other languages, including English. The prime time main Mauritian news bulletin is in French and is broadcast at 19:30 p.m. Almost all families possess a radio and a television set which are capable of receiving French-language programmes from 'France 2', and 'Canal-Plus' (French television channels). Only a few Mauritians can afford to pay for English Satellite television channels such as "Sky News" and "BBC World Service", and have access to the internet which is dominated by English. The public Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) tries to devote a certain amount of space to all the languages spoken on the island in its radio programmes and, to a lesser extent, also in the TV programmes. Creole and Bhojpuri were, for a long time, not regarded as fully developed languages and were, therefore, scarcely taken into account. Baker (1972: 25) found that, in March 1971, 52.5% of all radio programmes were in French, 14.6% in English, and the remaining 32.9% were shared among the various Indian and Chinese languages. For television, Baker (1972: 260) mentions 51% for English (in comparison with 41% for French). These figures are, however, out-of-date, because, according to Hookoomsing (1986: 9):

As far as the television service is concerned, most of the programmes are in French, English and Hindustani, with French getting the lion's share of the transmission time. Indeed approximately half of the total weekly transmission time, which is 60 hours, is made up of programmes in French, the other half being more or less equally shared between English and Hindustani.

According to Foley (1992), the time allocation for both English and French on a weekly basis is 77.5 hours but Hookoomsing (1986) suggests a ratio of 1:4 in favour of French. Half of the television transmission time (over 60 hours



per week) is made up of programmes in French, the other half is more or less equally shared between English and the non-European languages.

The turning away from English (and turning to French) in the cinemas is even more striking: in the mid-seventies American and English films were shown mostly in the original version, whereas Foondun (1986: 18) states for the 1980s:

French occupies an even greater place in commercial films which are shown in cinema-houses. In fact, most of the films are either in French or in Hindustani. Pictures in English are almost non-existent, since even American, Italian, and British films can be seen in French.

Twenty years later, the overall situation has remained the same in terms of the predominance of French over English on radio and television. Only recently, BBC World Service and Sky News – two English television channels - have been introduced in Mauritius, but it is too early to assess its impact on Mauritians. As regards current local book production, there is a local Littérature Mauricienne in French, but there are very few literary works in English written by Mauritian authors and published locally.

The most senior positions on sugar estates and tourist sectors are generally occupied by Franco-Mauritians, with coloureds and Creoles holding other important positions in management. These groups will normally converse in French with each other. Between the managerial staff and the agricultural workers or waiters in hotels who are mainly Indians and speak Creole among themselves, there are various intermediate posts. These are mainly occupied by people whose first language is Creole, although some of these may also have a good command of French and have opportunities for using it in their work.

As for the Civil Service and administrative jobs, although all written work is in English, the relative extent to which French, English and Creole are employed orally varies considerably from ministry to ministry. Communication, letters, publications and reports are in English. Most civil servants (government sector) must have a pass in the Cambridge School Certificate in English, ranging from high ranking workers to the messengers and since the number of workers in these sectors is significant, this will inevitably have an impact on the use of the language. In other places of employment, such as banking and insurance, the use of French is very extensive. One very clear indication to Mauritians that French, and not English, is regarded as the “langue de prestige et de culture” (the language of prestige and culture) is that imperfect English does not carry the same kind of social stigma as imperfect French (my personal observation).

### **Seldom used but indispensable: the English language in Mauritius today**

In short, the situation of English in Mauritius seems to be problematic; its existence seems to be a burden rather than a help to the population. However, the situation also has positive aspects and positive arguments can be adduced in favour of the existence of English and its various functions in the independent state (since 1968).

Mauritius was an English colony from 1810 till 1968 and since then it has been a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. English, therefore, has a

tradition and a permanent place as the official language and the language of administration, politics and the school system, which is organised on the English model. Apart from these historical facts, its neutrality distinguishes it from French inside the country. For external relations, the role of English as a world language and, above all, as one of the official languages in India is very important. It allows close contact to be kept with the lands of origin of the majority of the population, India and Pakistan – and this is done much more efficiently than would have been possible with the help of the Indian languages, which are now quite clearly declining in Mauritius.

Although the scope of English is limited in Mauritian society, there is a general consensus among all sectors concerned that the institutions seeking to maintain and promote English should not be dismantled. Many persons and institutions who work in favour of the promotion of the French language also approve of the fact that English is an important language for Mauritius. The editorial of Gilbert Ahnee entitled "God save English" (Le Mauricien - 15/2/93) can be quoted whereby he says, "Despite any preference for some other languages, any sensible Mauritian should be aware that a practical knowledge of English is vital. Today without a reasonable knowledge of English, success is utterly unthinkable". He also mentions the fact that even in France, a country which has for long tried to remain aloof of the international English speaking community, knowledge of English is always a prerequisite for certain highly paid jobs, specially in the commercial and marketing sectors. (Le Mauricien - 15/2/93). The language situation in Mauritius is more intimately bound up with the socio-economic realities than sociolinguistic prognostications could ever have suspected. Sugar, which was, and still is, a major source of external revenue, had its price stabilised on the world market by the Lomé Convention (1975). This allowed a financial base to be built and the establishment of the Industrial Free Zone Area - which meant that raw materials brought into Mauritius could be exported as finished products (knitwear, leather etc). The tourist industry took over as the main source of foreign exchange, although many of the hotels were still directly underpinned by money from the sugar industry. Now Mauritius is looking to new areas for expansion, including off-shore banking with the possibility of taking some of the business from Hong Kong, given the proximity to South Africa and the opening up of that economy. Geographic isolation is no longer a barrier since it is now possible to have direct flights from Europe, the Far East and Australia. Add to this contacts which have always existed with the Indian subcontinent, and one sees a growing internationalisation of the economy within the framework of a stable government. This would appear to strengthen the case for the use of international languages in Mauritius (Foley 1992).

It is almost impossible to think of giving up English. A tradition of almost 200 years cannot easily be discarded, nor are any of the languages spoken in Mauritius suitable as a substitute. The Indian and Chinese languages can be neglected, for they are group-specific with restricted extension. The consolidation of Creole has not yet progressed to the point where it could replace English. Besides, it is not (yet) regarded as a fully-fledged language by large sections of the population, and is therefore unlikely to be accepted. The one alternative left is French, the language of the francophone, white section of the population. The language of the sugar industry owned by the Franco-Mauritians remains French. Since the colonial period, this has been the trend. The senior positions in this sector are generally occupied by Franco-Mauritians, who go to great lengths to promote French. According to Benedict (1961), "Franco-Mauritians make a point of using French among themselves, only employing Creole to address servants and employees of low

status". To use Creole in the wrong context is to commit a serious blunder. Therefore, French is used by the sugar sector, both in its oral and written forms. Reports, publications and journals are published in French. However, the mass of the employees of the industry are either sugarcane-cutters or factory workers who either speak Bhojpuri or Creole (the other ethnic languages being restricted to formal classroom contexts). This will therefore decrease the influence of the French language, which remains the language of a minority group. English is, however, the written language of most banks and financial institutions while French is generally the oral medium of communication. Almost all regulations, publications and daily transactions are recorded in English. Deposit and withdrawal forms are in English. The workers may address clients in French because of its closeness to the Creole language, but nevertheless, English is used in its written form. On every bank note, cheque or coin, English is the language to be found. Even on the new coins and bank notes since independence which do not bear the royal emblem, English has not been replaced by another language. Therefore most banks have recourse to the English language, with the exception of the French bank, 'Banque Nationale de Paris Intercontinentale', which, of course, has all its daily transactions in French.

The ethnic marking of French deprives this language of the neutrality connected with English, which is distant and foreign to everyone to the same extent. In the non-francophone groups among the population, who were underprivileged in the past and often are today, and especially among the Indian majority, there are too many reservations about their former French masters and the language they spoke. Therefore, the substitution of French for English is impossible, though it would have many practical advantages because French is close to Creole, which makes it much easier to acquire. As a consequence, Mauritius is and will remain an Anglophone country for some time, although the part of the population that speaks English natively is very small and English will remain inaccessible to many Mauritians.

## **Conclusion**

It is not surprising that Mauritius has a rather complex linguistic situation since it is a multi-ethnic society. English is the official language i.e. the language used in parliament, the judiciary and for administration in schools. It is nominally the medium of instruction in all educational institutions. However, since many Mauritians have limited proficiency in English, there is a discrepancy between practice and policy. The case of Mauritius shows that the hegemony of the dominant colonial languages (English and French) was buttressed by a linguistic ideology in both empires. Both the English and the French propagated a discourse of linguistic supremacy, though the French tended to be more aggressive in their policy.

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