Public Haitian Creole: Graffiti, Advertising and Other Messages

A few thoughts on culture and Haitian Creole instruction

In this classroom and web-based homework learning sequence students take a look at the roles of graffiti and other textual messages in Haitian Creole culture. The Haitian Creole class that I teach, both in terms of my own content and the content of the textbooks I employ (*Ann pale kreyòl*, *Istwa Ayiti*, *Wòch nan solèy*, *Tonton Liben*, *Ti koze kreyòl* and others), is highly attuned to Haiti and its cultures. Haiti and its diaspora house many cultures and subcultures commonly linked by Creole. Culture is a fascinating and mind-expanding part of learning foreign languages. The culture modules presented in the first year are innumerable here, a few examples from *Ann pale kreyòl* illustrate: culinary and kitchen culture, craftspeople and their instruments, vodou terminology embedded in its Haitian use, cockfighting, getting to a funeral from deep in the mountains, etc.

Background

This activity involves an urban phenomenon in Haiti related to population growth, soil erosion, rural exodus, the consequent urban sprawl, and... the invention of spray paint. In this activity we primarily turn to the use of Haitian political graffiti messages (b-d). In order to show that sanctioned Haitian Creole messages are also extremely important and common in Haiti the activity involves studying such messaging also (a & e). The condition of women's reproductive rights is examined in (a) by means of two very different, even opposite signs. This activity always provokes a most healthy participation from female students and helps everyone in the class engage with issues of 'reproductive culture.' More conventional, sanctioned messages such as advertising are included in (e) so as to assure that students understand the prominence of normative messaging in Haiti.

The activity

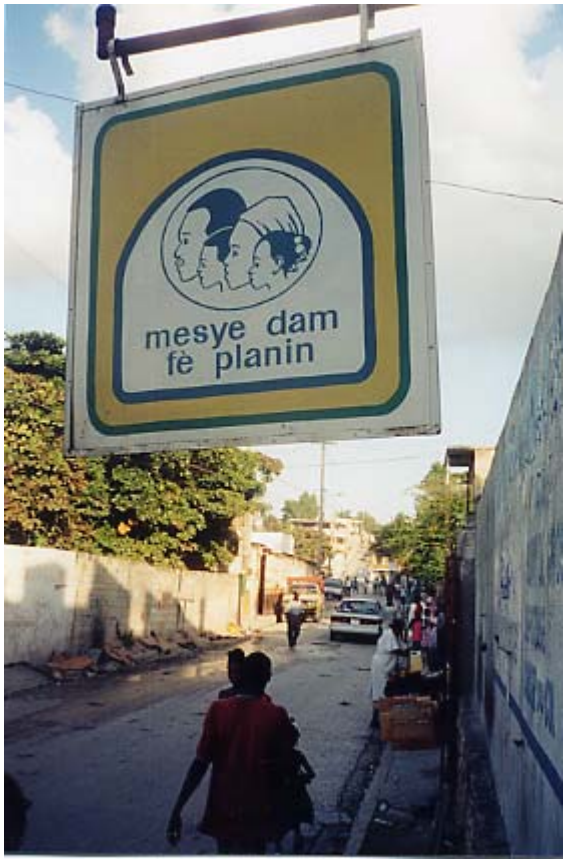
To undertake this topic the instructor needs to introduce the concept of graffiti and the displaying of text in public (advertising, promotion, propaganda, etc.). She might ask, *Sa sa ye, grafiti a*? *Poukisa yon moun ekri grafiti Ozetazini*? One poses the question about graffiti in the United States first in order to get students thinking about what they already know in their native language and culture. When asked this in class, one student mentioned that 'tagging' or spray painting a nickname on as many things as possible was common in the U.S. Another student mentioned making a statement. The tagging phenomenon does not seem common in Haiti, whereas the use of graffiti to make a statement is common on significant parts of public streets in and around Port-au-Prince. While this is a point both cultures share in common, the students soon learn that Haitian graffiti is not always easily deciphered. Correct interpretation often requires firsthand knowledge of Haitian Creole language and culture. Students needed time to grasp that *Lapè nan tèt, Lapè nan vant,* as a political slogan spray-painted all over P-au-P by Aristide's party, invokes the support of the impoverished Haitian mass (of voters). The fact that 60% of Haitians are (alarmingly) under the required caloric intake for light work (according to the United Nations), forms basic – and weary – background knowledge. This example serves to show that cultural forms are entwined with the sociological, historical and economic situations of particular languages.

I used the contents of the web pages over three separate periods. In class a student is chosen to read the graffiti from one photo (as best she can). After students supply information, the instructor might propose an interpretation or a contextualization if it helps establish deeper meaning. Next, in pairs, students take turns reading at least 2 other messages (in photographs on the overhead) and interpreting them. They take turns in pairs. For homework the students answer the 5-8

questions provided below one page. This is repeated over one or two more class periods. I reiterate that the activity needn't take more than 10 minutes per class period.
Finally, on the last day of the activity, to sum and follow up, the instructor announces that half of the class has been hired to provide a group of foreign diplomats visiting Haiti with an inside perspective on the content of Haitian graffiti. On an overhead they can see all of the messages they have studied. From the messages "the guide" chooses three and answers questions and provides explanations. They switch roles with their partner. I advise playing some Haitian urban music in the background, such as Haitian *rap* or *raga*, in order to set an appropriately charged ambiance.

Studying culture is a fundamental part of language instruction for its role in preparing students to comprehend and interact intelligently in a foreign world.
Good luck and good teaching!

Kilti ~ sitiyasyon fanm ann Ayiti



(a) "Mesye dam fè planin," Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(b) "Ede pwoteje, respekte fanm paske fanm se zouti repwodiksyon," Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

Kesyon

1. Kontraste ak dekri de (2) mesay diferan anwo yo
2. Esplike sa “fè planin” vle di nan (a).
3. Kijan mesye dam ka fè planin?
4. Nan (b), esplike sa “zouti repwodiksyon” vle di.
5. Dapre kilti ak filozofi pa ou yo, èske ou dakò ak yonn, de oswa pyès nan 2 mesay sa yo?

Foto pa Benjamin Hebblethwaite

Kilti ~ Mesay politik nan Ayiti

(a) "Titid se ou n ap tann," Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(b) "Fòk kriminèl yo jije anvan eleksyon," Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(c) “Lapè nan tèt, [lapè] nan vant – OSA + 2001 = Titid,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

Kesyon

1. Dekri enpòtans koulè yo ki marye ak mesay nan foto (a).
2. Dekri estil lèt yo nan (a). – Poukisa prezantasyon an pwòp konsa?
3. Nan pèspèktiv istwa resan an, “kriminèl yo” nan mesay (b) se ki kalite kriminèl?
4. Kontraste estil lèt ak òtograf ant (a), (b) ak (c).
5. Ann Ayiti ki sans mesay nan (c) genyen an?
6. Ozetazini èske nou t ap jwenn yon mesay tankou (c) nan eslogan politik nou yo?
7. Dapre ou menm, kijan pou yon moun genyen lapè nan vant, lapè nan tèt?

Kilti ~ Mesay politik nan Ayiti 2

(a) "K(omisyon) E(lektoral) P(wovizwa) ban nou biwo, nou vle vote 19 mas 2000," Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(b) “Lapè se lespwa Ayiti,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(c) “21 me (2000) fini nèt MÈDRÈD,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(d) “7 FEVRIYE 2001: Lapè nan tèt, Lapè nan vant,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(e) “Nou p ap bay legen nan batay la,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

Kesyon
1. Mesay ki nan foto (a) sijere ki kalite sitiyasyon?
2. Si K.E.P. pa t ap mete ase biwo, ki rezilta sa t ap genyen?
3. Mesay nan foto (b) soutni ki kandida politik? Kijan nou konnen sa?
4. Nòt: eleksyon 21 me a te konteste. Poukisa mesay nan foto (c) sanble genyen yon atitid agresif oswa defansif?
5. Nòt: “7 Fevriye 2001” se te dat inògirasyon prezidan Aristid la. Dekri afich (d) a.
6. Foto (e) ap pale de ki kalite batay?
7. Eske egzanp grafiti nou wè anwo yo ede oswa nwi sa nou rele demokrasi?
8. Eske grafiti se yon fòm demokrasi?

Foto yo pa Benjamin Hebblethwaite

Kilti ~ Mesay politik nan Ayiti 3

(a) “Aristid, jèn Tokyo avè ou pou 2001 ka bon toutbon,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(b) “Koudeta, pa koudeta, RAMIPAC ak Titid 2001,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(c) “Wè pa wè, 2001 rèd,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(d) “Pa gen jistis san dezokipasyon peyi a – APN,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

Kesyon

1. Nòt: “Tokyo” se yon katye defavorize. Kisa jèn nan katye sa a vle montre nan (a)?
2. “Koudeta, pa koudeta” nan foto (b) se yon referans ki fè nou sonje kisa?
3. Kijan nou konnen foto (c) reprezante opinyon opozisyon Aristid la? Konpare (a) ak (c).
4. Kisa ekspresyon “wè pa wè” ak “rèd” vle di nan foto (c)?

5. “Dezokipasyon” nan foto (d) se yon referans ki fè nou sonje kisa? Eske Ayiti toujou okipe?
6. Ki rapò genyen ant “jistis” ak “dezokipasyon”?

Kilti ~ Piblisite ak lòt mesay ann Ayiti

(a) “Aksyon sivik: Ann ede timoun lekòl yo,” Pòtoprens, Ayiti, 2001

(b) “Mande Poul Ble - Magi - orijinal la,” Kenskòf, Ayiti, 2001

(c) “Nwèl Lapè,” Pòtoprens, Lali, Ayiti, 2001

(d) “Kontra latè pral fini – Bib la pale,” Pòtoprens, Kafou, Ayiti, 2001

Kesyon

1. Ki kalite sèvis gason nan foto (a) ap rann timoun yo?
2. Defini mo “sivik” la nan foto (a).
3. Dekri imaj ki sou mayo a nan foto (a).
4. Kisa ou ap mande poul ble a nan foto (b)?
5. “Magi” nan foto (b) se ki kalite pwodui?
6. Eske ou kwè Magi "orijinal" vre?
7. Ki rapò “Nwèl Lapè” genyen ak eslogan politik ki te kouran ann Ayiti lè sa a?
8. Ki kalite mesay èske nou wè nan foto (d)? Kijan èske l diferan pa rapò ak mesay nou deja gen tan wè?