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FRENCH HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING: A SITE OF MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY FORMATION, CULTURAL EXPLORATION, AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN NEW YORK CITY

Abstract

Since 2005, the French Heritage Language Program has sought to address the needs of underserved French-speaking communities throughout the United States. With the goal of "making French an asset for new Americans," the majority of whom come from West Africa and Haiti, the FHLP not only provides free French language training, it also creates a space where these students can construct their identities as multilingual speakers and learn the value of their various cultural backgrounds. By analyzing data gathered from students, teachers, and staff in the New York City branch of the FHLP program, including sociolinguistic interviews, classroom observations, and surveys, this article explores identity formation with regard to not only French but to all languages in a person's linguistic repertoire. To contextualize the participants' experiences, a first line of inquiry examines the FHLP in relation to monolingual ideologies and policies often inherent in French language education. How does the program address French as a heritage language that may be only one of many heritage languages a student possesses and that may only have a minimal presence as a home language? A second line of inquiry then focuses on individual participants' language ideologies. Given that many students come from former French colonies, what are their reasons for learning French? What are their attitudes toward French and other languages? What is their relationship with their countries of origin, with France, or with the greater Francophone world? Through these questions, this article charts multilingual identity formation, cultural exploration, and creative expression.

Introduction

I arrive at the International High School for Health Sciences in Queens, New York, and show my ID to the security guard. I then follow Laurie,[1] an intern for the French Heritage Language Program (FHLP), who deftly navigates the winding halls and formidable staircases. As we turn down the hallway leading to our destination, we are met with classical music blaring from the opposite end. Loud yet peaceful, this is the calm before the storm. Suddenly classes are dismissed and students spill out unto the hallway, yelling and laughing as they come toward us in a wave of energy. I notice multiple languages—Spanish, Chinese, Arabic— before tuning in to French and Haitian Creole emanating from one room in particular. I enter what looks like a biology classroom and find Christine, the French teacher, sitting at a table with one of her students and offering feedback on a writing assignment. She has Caribbean music playing in the background, which she turns off once class officially starts. In one corner of the room, there is a large wooden desk where the teacher whose room we are borrowing speaks in Spanish to her students as they pick up their science projects. Then Silvie, the teaching assistant, walks in and heads to a table where students are working on their writing assignments. They abruptly switch from Creole to French upon her arrival in order to brainstorm with her.

Having agreed to an interview, Silvie then stops by my table and enthusiastically tells me in English about her experience with the program. I ask her what she likes most about working with the FHLP. Donning a huge grin, she answers:

> Creating with this language. That's probably my most exciting—why I'm so interested in this program…You can get a regular French class, learn the conjugations, do all of that sort of work but it's really exciting to see kids use this language as an expressive tool. Kind of loosening up and playing with the language a little more. And you can get a mix of English with French. The Franglais comes out a little. And

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[1] All names have been replaced by pseudonyms except for those of key FHLP staff (Jane Ross, Fabrice Jaumont, Mathilde Landier).

different African languages too. So it's fun to have this multilinguistic thing happening. (Interview, April 7, 2016)

She continues to focus on the creative aspects of the program and the ownership that students claim in the materials they create. In the time I spend observing several of the New York City schools that participate in the nation-wide FHLP, the creativity and multilingual complexity that Silvie mentions are central to my understanding of what the program is all about.

Since 2005, the FHLP, a program of the non-profit French-American Cultural Exchange (FACE) Foundation that works in partnership with the French Embassy, has sought to address the needs of underserved French-speaking communities throughout New York, Florida, Maine, and Massachusetts.[2] As this article will show, the FHLP applies the designation "French-speaking communities" quite loosely, admitting any students who have recently migrated from francophone countries regardless of how much French is actually spoken at home. The self-proclaimed goal of the national FHLP is "making French an asset for new Americans," the majority of whom come from West Africa and Haiti; however, there is a wide range of French language abilities, as well as attitudes toward French and where it fits in a larger linguistic repertoire. Importantly, the FHLP not only provides free French language training, it also creates a space where these students can construct their identities as multilingual speakers and learn the value of their various cultural backgrounds.

By analyzing data gathered from students, teachers, and staff in the New York City branch of the FHLP program, including sociolinguistic interviews, classroom observations, and surveys, this article explores identity formation with regard to not only heritage languages but to all languages in a person's linguistic repertoire. Bonny Norton (1997), a prominent scholar in Second Language Acquisition, has argued that, "an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, which changes across time and space" (411). Subscribing to this post-structuralist view that sees identity as dynamic, socially constructed, and context-dependent, I investigate the attitudes that participants in my study have toward the languages they speak and the linguistic identities they cultivate. To contextualize the participants' experiences, a first line of inquiry examines the FHLP in relation to monolingual ideologies and policies often inherent in French language education. How does the program address French as a heritage language that may be only one of many heritage languages a student possesses and that may only have a minimal presence as a home language? A second

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[2] A list of the participating schools can be found on the FHLP website: http://face-foundation.org/french-heritage-language-program/

line of inquiry then focuses on individual participants' language ideologies. Given that many students come from former French colonies, what are their reasons for learning French? What are their attitudes toward French and other languages? What is their relationship with their countries of origin, with France, or with the greater Francophone world? Through these questions, this article charts multilingual identity formation, cultural exploration, and creative expression.

Heritage language learning in the United States

A heritage language may be any language that is not considered the dominant language in a particular social context. The term *heritage language* (HL) has existed since the 1960s to describe the home languages (other than English and French) of various communities in Anglophone and Francophone Canada (see Cummins 1983) and has been used to describe similar language situations in different contexts throughout the world. The term gained traction in the US in the 1990s as the English-only movement in public education threatened the bilingual initiatives that had flourished in previous decades (see García 2005). The term HL, therefore, emerged as a discursive strategy to take the focus off of the word *bilingualism*, which had fallen out of favor. Since then, different definitions of HL as well as discussions about comparable terminology have emerged. For instance, as Jennifer Leeman (2015) has noted, "different definitions are based in part on whether the primary focus is on the languages, their societal status, or individuals' linguistic proficiency" (103). Terms such as "ancestral language," "minority language," or "community language" reflect these differing perspectives and offer alternatives to the term "heritage language" (ibid).

Joshua Fishman (2006) described three main categories of heritage languages in the US context: indigenous heritage languages, such as those spoken by Native American populations; colonial heritage languages that existed before the US was a nation state and have been passed down from generation to generation (i.e., Dutch, German, French, and Spanish); and immigrant heritage languages, those languages brought to the US by more recent waves of immigrants, such as Spanish, Chinese, and Italian. Jane Ross and Fabrice Jaumont (2013) have shown how the current revitalization of French as a heritage language is due both to historical (colonial heritage) and present-day (immigrant heritage) circumstances. Referring to New England and Louisiana, they contended, "these historically French regions have preserved local vernacular varieties of the language and, despite both persecution and limited opportunities, French speakers in these areas have continued to maintain these

varieties within families and extended small communities" (24).[3] Colonial heritage communities make up a quarter of the French-speaking community in the US, while French expatriates and recent immigrants from Francophone countries comprise the other 75%.[4] In the US, French is the fifth most widely spoken language other than English, with over 1.27 million speakers according to the 2015 American Community Survey (US Census Bureau). These statistics and migratory phenomena attest to both the sheer number and impressive diversity of French heritage speakers in the US.

In recognition of this diversity, I borrow for this article Guadalupe Valdés's (2001) definition of heritage language speaker/learner as someone "who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English" (38). I find her definition inclusive enough to accurately describe the diverse group of students in the FHLP, who represent a range of linguistic proficiencies in French, English, and other languages in their linguistic repertoire as well as varying degrees of access to French in the home and community setting.[5] Building on heritage language scholarship that follows Norton's (1997) lead in privileging the role of identity in language learning and use (e.g. Leeman 2015; Abdi 2011; Blackledge et al 2008; Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani, & Martin 2006; He 2006; Hornberger & Wang 2008), I explore the myriad attitudes the students in the FHLP share about their languages, the formation of their linguistic identities, and the educational opportunities that help foster this identity formation.

In the United States, there are various educational resources that exist for speakers of languages other than English. Bilingual education and dual immersion programs, for instance, provide full-time schooling options in English and another language. However, if these

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[3] Ross & Jaumont (2013) mention the brief French settlement along the St. Croix River in 1604, Acadian and French Canadian immigration to upper New England beginning in the eighteenth century, and the French colony of Louisiana.

[4] Distinguishing between expatriates and immigrants can be problematic because of the racial and socioeconomic connotations associated with the two terms. Indeed, most of the literature on French expats refers to white professionals working for French companies overseas who can afford to send their children to bilingual schools. Meanwhile, programs geared toward immigrants, such as the FHLP, cater to people of modest means from Haiti and Francophone Africa, some of whom are refugees. See Ross and Jaumont, 2012: 234.

[5] See Valdés (2005) for a nuanced discussion of different types of heritage speakers and Leeman (2015) for a discussion of the role of linguistic proficiency and cultural connections in defining HL speakers.

programs are associated with private schools, they usually come with a hefty price tag, which restricts them mainly to expatriates and other elites. Public schools may also provide bilingual education. While these programs fell out of favor in the 1990s, there is increasing support for and presence of bilingual or dual immersion programs.[6] In the case of French instruction in the US, Ross and Jaumont (2012) identified "more than 130 institutions in 27 states and 80 cities that offer instruction in both French and English in public schools. These include French immersion bilingual programs for non-French speakers and dual language education programs for both Francophones and Anglophones" (236–237). However, not all students who are interested in bilingual education live in school districts that offer these programs.

Students with fewer means or less access to these types of programs may be able to participate in heritage language programs. HL education occurs in conjunction with schooling in English; however, unlike bilingual and dual language programs, HL programs relegate the HL to a subordinate position, usually restricted to afterschool programs. As Leeman (2015) noted, heritage language education is "a specific type of minority language instruction that happens at the margins of regular primary or secondary schooling in the national language(s), rather than all-day educational programs that use a minority language as the medium of instruction for a broad range of subjects" (104). In general, while HL programs offer students a way to leverage their multilingual backgrounds, the primary goal is to promote integration by making these students proficient English speakers.

This need to educate students in both English and their other languages is particularly crucial in a place such as New York City, where 37% of the city's 8.5 million inhabitants are foreign born.[7] According to New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) 2014–15 demographic data, 42% of the 971,857 students enrolled in NYCDOE schools spoke a language other than English. More importantly, 15.7% of students were labeled English Language Learners (ELLs) because they scored below the state-determined level for academic

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[6] The US Congress's passage of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in Lau v. Nichols paved the way for English language learners to have access to education in their first language. However, the success of proposition 227 in California in 1998 and the termination of the Bilingual Education Act in 2001 severely limited access to bilingual education (see García and Beardsmore 2009). The tide has turned again with regard to interest in bilingual education, evidenced in 2016 by California voters' passing of Proposition 58, which lifts restrictions placed on bilingual education by Proposition 227.

[7] See Semple, June 8, 2013. "City's Newest Immigrant Enclaves, From Little Guyana to Meokjagolmok." *The New York Times*.

English language proficiency.[8] While Spanish and Chinese speakers made up over 75% of ELLs, there were also a substantial number of ELLs from francophone countries. For instance, Haitian Creole, a French-based creole, was the sixth most widely spoken home language of ELLs and French ranked eighth.[9] The New York branch of the FHLP is one of the programs that have emerged to address language-learning issues in New York City's francophone community.

The Emergence of the French Heritage Language Program

The FHLP is the brainchild of Jane Ross, who has presided over this program since its inception over a decade ago. Wanting to provide French language training to francophone communities, she started visiting schools around New York to gauge interest. Her search took her to Manhattan International High School, a school where over 50 languages are spoken among the 400 students and where French is one of the most widely spoken languages. Manhattan International is part of the Internationals Network of Public Schools (INPS)[10], a network formed to address the needs of recently arrived high school-age immigrants lacking English skills. These schools specifically cater to recent immigrants who do not have a high enough level of English-language proficiency to enter the regular New York City public school system. While Manhattan International was helping with their English language needs, francophone students lamented the fact that "they were 'losing' their French or having trouble acquiring higher linguistic skills that would allow them to succeed in a French-speaking environment" (Ross & Jaumont 2013: 30). Students were essentially craving a heritage language program.

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[8] There were 152,455 ELLs enrolled in NYC public school in 2014–15.

[9] More details can be found at NYCDOE (2015). While the NYCDOE does not provide information on the percentage of French speakers or French-based Creole speakers who lack academic English language proficiency, a 2003 study undertaken on language proficiency among New York City elementary and middle school students found that 23.9% of Haitian Creole speakers were limited-English-proficient (see Stiefel, Schwartz, & Conger 2003). As for French or French-based Creole usage among the general population in New York City, according to García, Zakharia & Octu (2012), around 85,000 speak French and over 105,000 speak some form of French-based Creole (see table 1.1, p. 13). Among emergent bilingual students, Haitian Creole is the fifth most spoken language other than English in New York City (see table 1.4, p. 17); however, the US Census Bureau does not distinguish the type of Creole in its data, indicating only that it is French-based.

[10] INPS is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation.

With interest from Manhattan International, Ross approached the French Embassy for possible funding. She had heard about the *nouveaux publics* (new publics) initiative, the buzzword at the time, in which the French government set aside money for the promotion of the French language throughout the world. Jaumont, the French Embassy's Education Attaché, recalls his first meeting with Ross where he quotes her as saying, "Why don't we make the INPS the *nouveau public*? Since they have so many kids from Africa and the Caribbean, why don't we work together? I'll bring some of my funds and you bring yours and we'll see if this can become a worthy, valuable initiative" (Interview, May 26, 2016). He then reflects on the immediate success they had. While they had planned to start a program at only one school in New York City, they ended up starting programs at six different schools in the first three months. Having grown outward from New York, the FHLP currently serves 535 students in primary and secondary schools in the US. In addition to the ten New York City High Schools, they provide French classes in Massachusetts, Maine, and Florida.

Both Jaumont and Mathilde Landier, the FHLP coordinator, reflect on the unusual nature and originality of this program. Landier, who spent eight years working for *Radio France Internationale* in West Africa before moving to New York, notes that there are many French-sponsored projects promoting the French language throughout West Africa. At the same time, there are robust efforts to introduce French as a foreign language in the United States. As Landier remarks, "[the French government] wants French to be spoken in America by Americans" (Interview, April 5, 2016). This project, with its focus on new/future Americans, effectively merges the two interests. Those running the FHLP have expanded and reappropriated the concept of *nouveaux publics* to include HL speakers. For instance, when I ask Jaumont about the original intentions behind the *nouveaux publics* initiative, he admits that the FHLP emerged from thinking outside of the box:

> They probably weren't thinking exactly about French-speaking immigrants. They were thinking, for example, Spanish speakers in the US and how do you make them learn French, study French, or become francophones or francophiles, or buyers of French cultural products…they wanted to get more clients and gain more markets. And that's how the *nouveaux publics* concept was born. But we sort of reshaped it, made it our own, with the population that we were working with. It resonated with some of the concepts that you find at francophone organizations. They always talk about solidarity among nations and a support network, these kinds of things. Solidarity, training, and education. Those big notions that circulate around the francophone world, at least the institutional francophone world. (Interview, May 26, 2016)

Through the vision and efforts of Ross, Jaumont, and Landier, as well as the hard work and dedication of staff and teachers, the ideals of solidarity, training, and education through the French language have firmly taken root and have aligned nicely with the goals of the French government. At the same time, what I find most illuminating is how the FHLP also diverges from the interests stated in the original *nouveau publics* concept. The specific demographics of the program create a space for identity formation in a postcolonial context.

While the program leaders depict what the national FHLP strives to do, focusing on the data from the New York City FHLP gives us a window into some of the complexities that arise in treating French as a heritage language for a group where almost all of the 150 students come from former French colonies. According to the 2015 FHLP New York survey data, the country with the largest representation is Haiti at 22%. Practically all the other countries represented are from francophone Africa. Senegal is the second most represented country at 18%. Togo and Guinea each have 14%, followed by the Ivory Coast at 11%. Burkina Faso, Mali and Congo each have less than 10%. Only one student self-identified as a French national, and even he was from the French overseas department of Guadeloupe in the French Caribbean.

While French is still the official language of the majority of former colonies, in these countries there is ambivalence toward French's dual nature as both a global language and a colonizing language. Many people value the access that knowledge of French provides with regard to jobs, education, and transnational communication, but they also balk at the tendency of French to overshadow the regional languages that people also speak at home and in their immediate communities. For many, French is the language of instruction at school but not necessarily the language spoken at home. Home languages include Haitian Creole (25%), Wolof (16%), Fulani (15%), Kotokoli (8%), and Ewe (8%).[11] Many of the Haitian students, in particular, only speak Creole at home with parents who never learned French. Pressure to learn French sometimes equates to a devaluing of other languages in the linguistic repertoire.

Since heritage language is traditionally defined as a language spoken at home, what does it mean for a French HL program to focus on members of its former colonies who may have had limited exposure to French at home and who often speak a wide range of French language varieties? As Leeman (2015) argued, a language construct, such as French, supposes a standardized norm that effaces the geographic, social, and stylistic differences found among

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[11] Malinke, Mandingo, Bambara, Mooré, Tchamba, and Lingala comprise the rest of the home languages. (FHLP 2015 New York survey data)

its speakers while failing to problematize the role that nationalism and colonialism play in conceptualizing that language.[12] HL research has also addressed discrepancies between the target language of HL programs, which often prioritize a specific national variety, and the actual varieties that students speak. For instance, Wu, Lee and Leung (2014) looked at the preference for Mandarin over other Chinese dialects in Chinese HL programs. Meanwhile, Felix (2009) and Potowski (2002) suggested that Spanish speakers of Latino heritage raised in the United States often held negative opinions of their language varieties when confronted with more prestigious varieties in Spanish language classrooms.[13] In a similar vein, this article forefronts the postcolonial repercussions tied to the French language to question what language the program actually teaches and what heritage it promotes.

With a name such as French Heritage Language Program and a sponsor such as the French government which has spent a lot of money, time, and effort securing French's position as a relevant and important language on the global stage, I assumed French was the main focus; however, Jaumont indicates a certain nuancing of the situation:

> Some of the kids speak four or five languages in different contexts and situations. That was fascinating for me. I guess it's always tricky as a representative of a French government institution to talk about French heritage, which is a colonial heritage. Because I'm a linguist and researcher I think we have to move on and not worry so much about French Heritage Language Education but focus a lot more on Heritage Language Education in general, all sorts of heritage languages. I'm happy to contribute to the promotion of the French language but that's not the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal is supporting heritage language education in general and making sure that the kids make good use of their linguistic and cultural heritage and turn it into an asset. And I think that that goes beyond the original mission and beyond the interest of the French government. (Interview, May 26, 2016)

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[12] Leeman (2015) drew attention to language constructs such as *Spanish* or *Korean* to question what it means to speak a language tied to a nation: "On one hand, such labels erase the geographic, social, and stylistic variation that they encompass. On the other, *languages* are not objectively bounded entities but ideological artifacts that are tied up with projects of nationalism and colonialism (Makoni & Pennycook 2005)" (108).

[13] Felix (2009) interviewed a student who related the following: "I felt awkward studying Spanish among Anglo students because many Anglo students had an attitude that they spoke the correct form of Spanish due to the fact that they had studied Spanish in Spain. They looked down upon us because the Latinos in the class spoke Spanish that was spoken in the border" (158). Meanwhile, Potowski (2002) quoted one of her participants as stating, "'I've always been taught that the way we Puerto Ricans and Mexicans speak has too much Spanglish and it's not proper'" (37).

As Jaumont ends this last statement, he chuckles, alluding to the irony in the situation. French governing bodies since the formation of the French Republic have championed the French language at the expense of all others. During the Revolution, for example, regional languages were deemed antithetical to French nationhood—a danger to national unity and a marker of disloyalty.[14] A century later when primary education in France became free and compulsory, French was the only language tolerated in schools (see Lodge 1993). Not until the passage of the *Loi Deixonne* in 1951 could students in France learn regional languages for up to an hour each week at school.

This language hierarchy that ensured the primacy of French in mainland France played out in the French colonies as well. Part of the colonial strategy was to psychologically force its subjects into submission by establishing as obvious their inferiority in matters of language and culture. Frantz Fanon (1952), a psychiatrist and philosopher from Martinique, highlighted the historical implications of colonialism from a linguistic and cultural perspective, which includes an internalized inferiority complex that is directly related to the imposition of French language and culture at the expense of local language and culture. In Fanon's discourse, the concepts of language and culture become racialized: "the Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (18). During the push for decolonization, scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1954) began to promote African languages to combat the marginalization of African cultures and societies and to question this Eurocentric view that placed languages such as French above African languages.

Although Jaumont is France's Education Attaché to the United States and heavily invested in the propagation of the French language, he also identifies first and foremost as a linguist and a researcher. For him, any language is an asset, and more languages mean more skills and opportunities. While sensitive to the colonial question, his primary focus is to prepare these students in a world that becomes more global by the minute, a world where communication in its various forms will open doors. He, therefore, welcomes the multifaceted linguistic and cultural backgrounds of his students.[15]

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[14] No one encapsulated this idea better than Bertrand Barère who famously contended in 1794 that "Federalism and superstition speak Breton, emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German, counter-revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque" (Bell 1995: 1416).

[15] He goes on to lament the lack of focus on multilingualism in France, hoping to one day implement HL programs in his home country: "I think that in France we need some help with creating

Landier is also very thoughtful when addressing the needs of the students while also being mindful of the postcolonial implications associated with a program of this type. Her goal is to instill pride in the students by flipping the paradigm. Instead of treating them as deficient students, the program shows them the value of their backgrounds and heritage. One way to do so is by not advocating one specific variety of French. Many French language programs in the United States use standard metropolitan French as their model;[16] however, FHLP employs teachers from various countries (Haiti, France, United States, Morocco), arguing that they want to model the diversity of Frenches in the world. While having teachers from diverse geographic backgrounds does not preclude them from teaching standard metropolitan French, Landier stresses how exposure to different accents and ways of speaking is important in showing how expertise comes in many forms. She also explains how teachers value the different varieties of French that students bring to class while broadening students' range of linguistic registers. For instance, most students are not used to speaking or writing in more formal registers so they practice activities such as interviewing for jobs or writing college essays. At the same time, students work in more informal registers such as through music projects where they learn to write and perform rap music in French.

Another tactic in prioritizing student backgrounds and interests is to allow students to engage with their own cultures in class.[17] After ditching a textbook that was geared toward France, with only fleeting mentions of other French-speaking countries, Landier, who teaches as well as coordinates the curriculum, started creating activities that celebrate African cultures and the diversity of the francophone world. She reasons: "they want African subjects…I think it's quite important. One of the students was almost crying when she saw images of Africa. She's been in the US for three years, but she's very touched by everything that is related to African

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multilingual citizens, creating bilingual programs that are free and accessible. We are doing a very bad job with that" (Interview, May 26, 2016).

[16] Auger & Valdman (1999) addressed the need for being aware of and recognizing linguistic variation but that "the target for acquisition should be a neutral variant, a pedagogical norm" which "should reflect the formal usage of target native speakers—in the case of French, educated speakers from metropolitan France and, to the extent that it does not differ substantially from that norm, the speech of educated speakers from regions where French is the dominant native language" (409). They argued that "foreign learners who have invested considerable effort, time, and often money in learning a foreign language would expect a fair return on this linguistic capital in the form of mastery of the most socially prestigious variety of the target language" (409). This sentiment seems to be in line with how many FLE programs approach the French language.

[17] Webb and Miller (2000) underscored the importance of students' cultural knowledge about their home country in addition to an appreciation of the HL.

cultures… Because it makes them realize what they have in common" (Interview, April 5, 2016). She emphasizes both the pride students display in seeing their cultures acknowledged as well as the breaking down of barriers where students can share not only interests across geographic borders but through language as well. Landier has only been working with the program for a year, but one of her biggest realizations is that "the French club is also the African club or the Haitian club" (Interview, April 5, 2016). For her, the program is bigger than French language.

When I ask Landier what the program's sponsors, such as the French government, think about FHLP's particular approach to teaching French, she answers pragmatically that the French government cannot defend French without championing *la francophonie* and a francophone cultural identity. With a primary goal of expanding the use of French globally, the French government supports whatever it takes for the FHLP to motivate students to learn French. Engaging students in creative projects that expose them to African-based materials in French has been great for their motivation. Landier feels that the reason the FHLP is so successful is because of its multi-pronged approach that values multilingualism, multiculturalism, community building, and creative expression.

Formulating language ideologies and multilingual identities

In this bid to bring French to a *nouveau public*, the New York City program has been effective in working with a long overlooked demographic who see the value of preserving and improving their French speaking abilities. FHLP 2015 New York survey data show that the overwhelming majority of students come from families and communities who are supportive of sustained involvement with French. Over 87% of respondents answered on the survey that it is important to their families that they continue to speak and learn French.

I had the pleasure of interviewing several of the students at three of the participating New York Schools in order to hear their perspectives on why learning French is important to them. Many students highlight intrinsic properties of French language or the possibilities that speaking French creates.[18] For instance, some of the students speak about the beauty of French and the way they sound when they speak French. Michel, a 19-year-old student from Haiti, calls it "une belle langue" [a beautiful language], while his 15-year-old Haitian

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[18] He (2006) argued, "The HL learner is likely to be motivated by an identification with the intrinsic cultural, affective, and aesthetic values of the language" (2). Leeman (2007) highlighted the opportunities that a heritage language provides speakers on the job market.

classmate, Madeleine, responds, "I like French because when I'm speaking I like how I sound" (Interviews, April 6, 2016). Other students focus on the instrumental motivation for learning French, enjoying the tangible benefits that French affords. For instance, 73% of the respondents see French as valuable to a future career or job. Almost 54% study French so that they can travel to where French is spoken, while 51% want to communicate better with family and friends abroad. My conversation with James, a 17-year-old Haitian student, highlights many of these interests:

> James: Je veux apprendre plus à parler ça pour améliorer parce que partout à New York je trouve que plusieurs gens parlent français. Ils viennent des pays francophones.

> Maya: Par exemple?

> James: La France et Québec. C'est pour ça je veux plus apprendre français. Pour être solide. Pour avoir la fierté pour m'exprimer… Il y a plusieurs travaux...peut-être dans les autres pays tu peux avoir un travail comme ça...Tu ne vas pas avoir des problèmes pour trouver un travail parce que tu parles français.

> [James: I want to learn to speak it to improve because everywhere in New York I find that many people speak French. They come from francophone countries.

> Maya: For example?

> James: France and Quebec. That's why I want to learn more French. To be solid. To have pride in expressing myself ... There are many jobs ... maybe in other countries you can have a job like that ... You will not have problems finding work because you speak French.] (Interview, April 7, 2016)

James accentuates the pride he feels when he can express himself in French, an ability that opens up the world to him, both in communicating with other French-speakers and in being competitive for jobs all over the francophone world. Nevertheless, when I press him on where in particular, he only mentions France and Québec.

The focus in my data on France—and, to a lesser extent, Québec—sheds light on how various francophone spaces are situated in the cultural imaginary. The Haitian students in particular see France and Québec (the latter being an important place in the Haitian diaspora) as sites of

possible employment.[19] However, when students dream of travel, Paris is a prime destination in their collective imagination. For most of them, regardless of where they were born, Paris is the quintessential representation of French culture.

The primacy of Paris in the French-language imaginary is not necessarily surprising when considering dominant discourses that serve to center France in general and Paris in particular.[20] For instance, with regard to educational material, Ogden (1981) lamented that French textbooks portray French "not just as the language of France, but sometimes, one feels as the language of Paris alone" (1). This Eurocentric model continues to persist. A quarter century later, Schultz (2004) argued that in language classrooms, French was still synonymous with France, with textbooks vastly understating the importance of French as a world language spoken on five continents (260). Even though instructors such as Landier bring in authentic texts from African countries and other parts of the francophone world, for these students the dominance and centrality of France looms large in the global cultural imaginary.

For instance, Gregory, a 15-year-old Haitian student, wants to go to France because it is what everyone talks about: "tout le monde parle de la Tour Eiffel donc j'aimerais bien visiter la tour" ("Everyone talks of the Eiffel Tower so I'd like to visit the tower", Interview, April 6, 2016). Others respond to the prominent nature of Paris in French cultural production. Madeleine acknowledges this: "I watch movies. When people are doing movies in Paris, it looks interesting" (Interview, April 6, 2016). These students are enamored with the City of Light, which reflects a Paris-as-center ideology both as a prime destination and as the quintessential place synonymous with the French language.

My conversation with Lovelie, a 14-year-old girl from Haiti, further underscores the primacy of Paris:

> Maya: Have you thought about going to a French-speaking country to practice your French.
>
> Lovelie: Paris.

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[19] According to the 2011 National Household Surveys, there are 138,000 Haitians in Canada. Almost 120,000 of them live in Quebec, or 87% of Canada's Haitian population.

[20] Borrowing from political economy and referring to the English-speaking world, Canagarajah (1999) defined the Center as "the industrially/economically advanced communities of the West, which sustain their ideological hegemony by keeping less-developed communities in Periphery status" (79).

Maya: Why Paris?

Lovelie: Because it's so beautiful, I think.

Maya: What do you know about Paris or what have you seen about Paris?

Lovelie: Well, in the movies. Maybe I'll go to Canada because my mother's aunt lives there.

Maya: They live in Quebec?

Lovelie: Yes, they live there.

Maya: Any other places you can think of to practice?

Lovelie: I don't know.

Maya: How much did you hear French when you lived in Haiti?

Lovelie: All my life. Because in class they don't speak Creole. They speak French only.

Maya: What did you think of that?

Lovelie: That was a normal thing, isn't it?

Maya: So you can go back to Haiti and also speak French.

Lovelie: Oh yeah! I didn't think of that! When I'm talking with my friends I speak Creole. But in class, you have to ask to go to pee in French. So if you say it in Creole the teacher will say no, you have to say it in French. (Interview, April 6, 2016)

Like many of her classmates, Lovelie is drawn to Paris because of its beauty and its importance in cultural production. From the salons to the museums and café culture, from music to fashion to intellectual spaces, since the nineteenth century Paris has attracted and continues to attract people from all over the world. At the same time, Lovelie mentions visiting family in Québec, following a common movement in the Haitian diaspora. What is most telling, however, is the connection she fails to make before my prodding, that her home country of Haiti is also a francophone space. Her exclamation of "oh yeah! I didn't think of that!" shows just how far removed Haiti is from her conceptualization of francophony.

There are various reasons why Lovelie fails to recognize Haiti's status as a French-speaking nation. Her response demonstrates the oft-times imposed importance of French in Haitian institutional spaces. While the 1987 constitution recognized both French and Haitian Creole as dual official languages, as Valdman (1988) noted, only 5% of Haitians could be considered

balanced bilinguals, while 90% of the population only speaks Creole (67).[21] However, Lovelie admits to hearing French her whole life, especially in class where Creole is not permitted. It is quite possible that Lovelie subconsciously excludes Haiti from French-speaking status because of certain racialized associations she makes with the French language. For instance, Awad Ibrahim's (2011) research on continental, francophone-African high school students in Ontario explored the link between French language and whiteness by demonstrating that regardless of how fluent these students were in French, teachers often labeled them as inadequate or illegitimate French speakers because of the racialized restrictions placed on the French language. Ibrahim concluded that "Frenchness has to have the 'right ingredients' in linguistic, cultural and racial terms" where whiteness is often deemed a prerequisite (622). Haiti, generally dubbed the world's first black republic, may not always automatically register as French-speaking, even for people like Lovelie who spoke French while she was there.

Regardless of the centrality of France or the racial connotations that may be associated with the French language, students see utility in learning the French language and express pride in cultivating a French-speaking identity that goes beyond the context of France. The West African students in particular are drawn toward Africa and the opportunities for speaking French there. Fatima, a Guinean student at Health Sciences High School, explains: "En Afrique c'est le français qui marche. On a grandi avec ça. C'est bon parce qu'avec le français tu peux passer n'importe quel pays en Afrique. Même pas en Afrique, aussi. Tu peux passer beaucoup de pays avec cette langue-là" ("In Africa, it's French that works. We grew up with

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[21] The 1979 Bernard Reform replaced French with Creole as the language of instruction in schools (although the reform was suppressed in the 1980s and not reinstated until 1987). According to Dejean (2010), the reform dictated that literacy skills be taught in Creole the first four years of schooling and French be taught as a subject instead of the language of instruction. The aim of the reform was to "produce students who were balanced bilinguals by the end of the first ten years of schooling (the "fundamental cycle")" (199). Valdman (1988) provided some historical insight into the classed and raced-based associations of French and Creole: "in colonial society Creole was at the same time a dominant language *vis-à-vis* the languages of the African nations and a subordinate language *vis-à-vis* French, the reference norm of the metropolitan-oriented dominant white society. One of the many ironies of the Haitian revolution is that national independence gained by the sacrifice of Creole-speaking liberated slaves was followed by the reestablishment of the linguistic symbol of white colonial rule" (72). While there is little research on race and language in Haiti in present day, the World Factbook estimates that 95% of the population is black, while 5% is white / mixed-race, a distribution that correlates closely with Creole and French speakers, respectively. As DeGraff (2013) argued, "indeed throughout Haiti's history, French has been the *de facto* language of academic and socioeconomic success whereas the country's socio-linguistic and economic conditions have made it virtually impossible for the masses to become fluent in French." To this day, those who are more likely to have better command of French are upper class and often identify as white or mixed-race.

it. This is good because with French you can pass through any country in Africa. Even outside Africa, too. You can pass through a lot of countries with that language", Interview, April 7, 2016). The extensive use of French throughout Africa creates a transnational bridge that facilitates cross-border communication and movement.

Although students talk about what languages allow them to do, they also convey who languages allow them to be, highlighting identity formation in language learning and use. For Gregory, French has become an essential aspect of his national identity. Commenting on his experience living in the US, he reflects on the following phenomenon:

> Gregory: Quand je dis que je suis Haïtien, ils me demandent si je parle français, mais ils ne parlent pas français.[22]
>
> Maya: Le fait d'être Haïtien—
>
> Gregory: La première question: vous parlez français?
>
> Maya: Donc c'est important de parler français?
>
> Gregory: Oui. Quand on est Haïtien.
>
> [Gregory: When I say I'm Haitian, they ask me if I speak French, but they do not speak French.
>
> Maya: Being Haitian-
>
> Gregory: The first question: you speak French?
>
> Maya: So it is important to speak French?
>
> Gregory: Yes. When you are Haitian.] (Interview, April 6, 2016)

Even though the vast majority of Haitians speak Creole more fluently than French, in Gregory's experience, his arrival to the US transformed being Haitian into a French-speaking identity. As Leeman (2015) noted, from a social constructivist perspective, "people's sense of themselves and of their relationship to the world is shifting and multiple. Identities are not fixed within the individual but instead are shaped and constrained by the macro- and micro-level sociohistorical contexts, including societal ideologies, power relations, and institutional policies" (102). This American view of Haitian identity reflects the dynamism of identity formation where a specific setting changes the linguistic expectation associated with that identity. This reflection also provides a counter-example to Lovelie's minimization of a

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[22] Based on the context of the larger conversation, "ils" [they] refers to non-French-speaking Americans.

Haitian French-speaking identity, further foregrounding the possibility of multiple linguistic identity formations.

While speaking French permits Gregory to tap into a Haitian identity, it also contributes to the establishment of a multilingual identity. Students enjoy being multilingual for various reasons, and a surprising theme that emerges from my interviews is a desire to create a welcoming environment, which the very nature of the Internationals Network of Public Schools helps foster.[23] With 119 countries and over 90 languages represented across the various campuses, newly arrived students often feel lost and overwhelmed. Finding a common language is one way to ease the burden of the new arrivals. One of Gregory's driving forces in mastering French, along with English, is to create an environment of hospitality: "S'il y a un nouvel élève ici qui n'est pas Haïtien—par exemple, il y a un seul Africain à cette école. Quand il est venu, je pouvais lui parler en français. Mais les autres ne pouvaient pas lui parler parce qu'il ne parlait pas anglais" ("If there is a new student here who is not Haitian—for example, there is only one African in this school. When he arrived, I could speak to him in French. But others could not talk to him because he did not speak English", Interview, April 6, 2016). Gregory's specific mention of both Haiti and Africa show how language transcends nationality or geographic provenance, creating, in this case, both a postcolonial and a transatlantic bond. It is important for new students to feel welcome, and Gregory's status as a French speaker makes him uniquely qualified to do so.

While Gregory relies on French, James, who is also Haitian, goes even further into his linguistic repertoire: "Parce que dans la classe il y a beaucoup de nouveaux élèves qui parlent espagnol. Moi, j'utilise mon espagnol pour aider les gens qui ne parlent pas anglais. Par exemple, si le professeur explique quelque chose dans la classe et un étudiant ne comprend pas, je traduis pour lui en espagnol" ("Because in the class there are many new students who speak Spanish. I use my Spanish to help people who do not speak English. For example, if the teacher says something in class and a student does not understand, I translate for him in Spanish", Interview, April 7, 2016). James is not a native Spanish speaker. It was his

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[23] According to their website, "Internationals Network for Public Schools' expertise lies in its ability to design high schools and prepare educators to successfully serve English language learners (ELLs). Students in International High Schools are in the country four years or less and score in the bottom quartile on English language tests at the time of admission. In School Year 2011–12, the student body in our 17 schools is 28% Asian, 11% Black, 53% Hispanic and 8% White/Arabic/Other. Youth in our schools come from 119 countries, speak over 90 languages and their literacy skills in their native language[s] vary widely. On average, 90% receive free/reduced lunch." See http://internationalsnps.org/ for more information.

experience in New York that opened the door for him to learn Spanish. Surrounded by so many Spanish-speakers, he became motivated to learn Spanish through watching movies and relying on Spanish-speaking friends to correct him when he spoke. While Spanish is a common foreign language taught in Haiti because of its proximity to the Dominican Republic, it took a move to New York for him to understand the importance of learning it. In other words, just as Norton (1997) detailed how investment in languages and identities changes across time and space, James's investment in Spanish and in a Spanish-speaking identity emerged with his change of geographic and linguistic context. He enjoys welcoming new Spanish-speaking students the same way his Spanish-speaking friends welcomed him into their language community.

In conducting interviews with students, I always ask which languages they speak in which contexts. Very few of the students name fewer than two languages. For instance, James describes life at home: "Souvent on parle en créole et parfois on parle français et on parle anglais aussi" ("We often speak in Creole and sometimes in French and English as well", (Interview, April 7, 2016). Many of the Haitian students report similar language use at home. When I conduct a focus group with a primarily West African group of students at Union Square High School, students share similar multilingual abilities. Mamina, a 15-year-old from Senegal, constantly texts in French, English, Bambara and Wolof, while her classmate, also from Senegal, uses primarily Wolof, Bambara, and Spanish when speaking with her friends. She speaks to me, however, in French. When I ask students whether it is important to them to be able to speak so many languages, they respond collectively with a resounding yes. Their parents speak many languages; their friends speak many languages. It just makes sense to be able to communicate with so many people. Being multilingual is the norm.

However, no one boasts of more languages than Fatima, who highlights the multilingual environment in which she lived in Guinea as the catalyst for her to construct and maintain a multilingual identity:

> C'est bon de parler beaucoup de langues. Par exemple, moi, je parle six langues. Je parle maraka, français, maninka, bambara, anglais. Maraka, je parle souvent—je n'ai pas d'amis marakas mais parfois sur Facebook je vois les gens qui parlent maraka. Je parle avec eux parce que je ne veux pas oublier la langue *so* je me force à parler. *Yes*, c'est très important pour moi parce que dans ce pays c'est anglais seulement. Quand je rentre en Afrique je ne veux pas oublier ma langue.

[It's good to speak many languages. For example, I speak six languages. I speak Maraka, French, Malinke, Bambara, English. Maraka I often speak—I have no Maraka friends, but sometimes on Facebook I see people speaking Maraka. I talk with them because I do not want to forget the language *so* I force myself to speak. *Yes*, it is very important to me because in this country it's English only. When I return to Africa I do not want to forget my language.] (Interview, April 7, 2016)

Fatima underlines the positive nature of being multilingual, by proudly naming off her six languages and engaging in occasional French-English code-switching ("yes", "so") while also juxtaposing this multilingualism with the relative monolingualism of the US.[24] Although she speaks Maninka with family and French with some English among friends, she has also picked up Maraka, a language spoken mainly among the Soninke ethnic group in neighboring Mali. She dreams of returning to Africa someday and does not want to forget her language (*ma langue*). It is interesting how she singles out Maraka out of all the languages she speaks to claim ownership. It is neither the language she speaks with family nor the language that she speaks with friends but this other language, which she maintains through social media, that reminds her of life in her home country.[25] In a way, Fatima's intricate language use exemplifies Blommaert's (2013) theorization of superdiversity, where mobility, complexity, and unpredictability allow for sociolinguistic identity formation in both online and offline sites (6). Fatima's linguistic repertoire points to the multiple heritages that many of these students bring and the complex nature of their multilingual identities, where each language connects them to a different linguistic world. By showing students that they can indeed keep working on all the languages at their disposal and that all languages are valuable, the program is achieving Jaumont's goal of "supporting heritage language education in general and making sure that the kids make good use of their linguistic and cultural heritage and turn it into an asset" (Interview, May 26, 2016).

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[24] Surprisingly, Fatima portrays the US as monolingual, considering the multilingual environment of her school. However, it is true that the average American speaks nowhere close to six languages.

[25] Lam (2009) investigated a similar phenomenon in her study of instant messaging practices by Kaiyee, an adolescent Chinese girl living in the United States. Lam detailed Kaiyee's complex repertoire of standard American English, hip-hop English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, made possible by sustained transnational engagement with multiple communities all over the world. She would choose these languages depending on the context and the affiliation she wanted to mark at particular moments.

Signs of Success

FHLP is constantly brainstorming ways to engage students in French while leveraging their other assets. When I talk to Landier in April, she is excited to share with me their most recent idea: having students from Crotona IHS in the Bronx go to a predominantly white, middle-class elementary school in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, where a dual French/English program was introduced in 2007, in order to foster an exchange. She explains her vision to me:

> For the Common Core curriculum in 6th grade they have to study Africa. The idea is to get those African students to come and speak about Africa—their countries and African cultures. And the good thing about it is because it's a bilingual program they can do it in French, but they can also do it in English. For them it would be a double challenge to do it in French and in English. And it would be valuable to understand that their cultures matter and to be the big brother/sister. (Interview, April 5, 2016)

Landier sees multiple benefits of such an exchange, which prioritizes a complex view of Africa both by giving voice to actual Africans and by facilitating various images of Africa through multiple sources. She also highlights the multilingual expectation of students to share their stories in both French and English because of the bilingual environment of the dual language program.

When I interview Jaumont in May, he conveys the success of the event's original intent. He relates his experience witnessing the fieldtrip:

> It was great. It was beautiful to see kids traveling from the Bronx to present Mali, Senegal, Togo—their traditions—and all these white kids in Carroll Gardens, asking questions about Africa. What do you do in your country? What do you eat? …This should be done in more schools. This is more than just a French heritage program. It's putting people closer to each other and filling some of the gaps. And putting the heritage kids at the center. And they were very proud of being the teacher for that day. (Interview, May 26, 2016)

Jaumont calls attention to the centering of Africa in French heritage. Francophone Africa in this instance is no longer marginalized, as is often the case in French language textbooks, which usually mention Africa as an afterthought, as a tropical French tourist definition.[26]

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[26] Fleig-Hamm's (1998) examination of francophone representation in French as a second language textbooks decried the superficial, sometimes erroneous, and often unrealistic depictions of cultures outside France. In two decades, not a lot has changed. In my own experience teaching from various

Instead, the students get to teach about their traditions and present their own narratives from a position of authority. Additionally, the FHLP students are treated as experts. The program is essentially achieving what Leeman, Rabin & Román-Mendoza (2011) espoused in their call for critical pedagogical approaches in HL education:

> By providing HL and bilingual speakers with structured contexts outside the classroom in which they serve as "language experts," critical service-learning programs can promote student engagement and allow students to resist the subordinating ideologies that devalue their language and language experiences. (482)

As the FHLP's Summer Newsletter highlights, the students not only occupied the role of language experts, they did so in an impressively multilingual fashion: "The students boldly navigated between French, English, Fulani, Kotokoli and various languages of Western Africa to cater to English-speaking and bilingual audiences alike."[27]

The program clearly champions a multicultural, multilingual view of heritage learning; however, this emphasis in no way detracts from students' learning and use of French nor does it downplay the importance of France and its allure for many students. For instance, the program provides opportunities for them to go to France. Each year students participate in *Génération Bilingue*, a writing competition that FHLP organizes in partnership with the *Institut Français*. A jury comprised of members of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, the United Nations, the *Lycée Français de New York*, the French Embassy and the FACE Foundation select the top eight essays on the theme for that year, and the grand prize is a week-long Paris vacation with 50 students from around the world. A 9th grader from Prospect Heights IHS was the 2016 winner.

These incentivized writing competitions not only allow students access to a world that may have been out of reach, they create a space for self-expression, where students can realize their abilities and gain confidence. Teaching assistant Silvie reflects on Ousmane, last year's *Génération Bilingue* winner: "I never really heard him talk much. Then he writes this beautiful poem on the freedom of expression and gets to go to France…You get a student like him where he's participating, always there, very present, however I didn't even see the ability" (Interview, April 7, 2016). Many of the students are shy when it comes to using

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French foreign language textbooks, I have had to supplement the textbook with authentic texts from a variety of Francophone countries in order to combat problematic depictions of these spaces.

[27] To subscribe to the newsletter, contact newsletter@face-foundation.org.

French, especially because there is such a wide range of French language abilities based on the access students did or did not have to the language in their home countries. For students to experience success, especially in the written language, they must begin to believe that French is as much their language as any of the other languages they speak.

The FHLP thus focuses on teaching students to successfully express themselves in French while also validating their particular experiences and backgrounds. This phenomenon was on full display in January 2016 when the FHLP students won six of the nine awards at the Lycée Français of New York's *Première Scène* Festival for theatre. Awards included Best Actor and Best Writing for an Original Play, as well as a Grand Jury Prize for overall play-writing. This incredible feat is not lost on Landier:

> We had 6 groups and we won 6 prizes. It was crazy. And we were contesting against groups from the *Lycée Français* who had their theatre class every week, learning to perform with individual coaches and everything. Using texts from playwrights. And the French Heritage classes, all of them wrote their own texts. So it was all about visa, not getting the right visa. Or arriving in the United States and having to dress a different way… At first [the protagonists] were wearing the wax clothes.[28] But then they were mocked on the streets. Who are you, coming from Africa? You should be American. And they started changing. Then there's this small morale at the end where they realize it's much more important to maintain their African roots. It was touching… Every time there were quite strong plots, well written. (Interview, April 5, 2016)

Landier sets up the story as a classic David vs. Goliath tale where the rag-tag bunch of students from the New York City FHLP take on the well-funded, well-supported theatre program of the *Lycée Français* and other similar programs populated mainly by the children of middle-class French expats. Instead of relying on famous or contemporary playwrights, they write about their own lives and the obstacles they encounter such as immigration, visa, and integration issues. They do this while using the French language in creative and thought-provoking ways, surprising everyone in the process.

In winning so many awards, the students legitimize their claim on the French language, which is no easy task. Similarly to Ibrahim (2011), Ryuko Kubota (2009) argued that "the superiority of the native speaker is not based purely on the linguistic attributes of individual speakers…[but] is determined by a discourse that produces a certain linguistic and racialized

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[28] A type of batik cloth common to West Africa.

profile as legitimate or illegitimate speakers" (236). While Kubota was not referring specifically to heritage language speakers, notions of legitimacy still apply. My previous research on the Senegalese community in Paris (Smith 2015) supports Kubota's premise, demonstrating that just being able to speak French doesn't guarantee status as a legitimate French speaker, because other factors such as race, accent, and nationality may impede legitimacy. However, the FHLP students, through their successful theater performance, defy the odds and claim French linguistic legitimacy while also championing their diverse cultural backgrounds and different varieties of French.

Conclusion

The French Heritage Language Program provides students more than the name suggests. There is an explicit focus on the French language; however, students also learn to value multiple languages and heritages, contributing to complex identity formation. With regard to French, some students highlight their desire to learn French because of its intrinsic properties as a beautiful language. Others acknowledge an instrumental motivation, where French makes them more employable, more mobile, and more able to communicate throughout the world. Still others demonstrate intricate identity formation, such as Gregory, who foregrounds linguistic expectations tied to nationality when he equates being Haitian with speaking French, even though there are many Haitians with limited French abilities as well as many people who disassociate a French-speaking identity from Haiti. While many of the students I interview describe how important learning French is to themselves and their communities, students more readily emphasize the pride they feel in being able to speak multiple languages. They use their multilingual abilities to create welcoming environments for new students at school and for keeping in touch with a vast assortment of people in their home countries and global networks. More importantly, for many of them, being multilingual is simply expected—the norm.

While the FHLP teaches French, they leverage the students' complex multilingual backgrounds. One way they promote all facets of these students' heritages is by treating them as experts and giving them platforms to tell their stories, such as during their presentations for elementary students in the French-English dual language program in Carroll Gardens and their performances at the Lycée Français's Theatre competition. Whereas people from former colonies are often seen as peripheral, these activities center Africa and the Caribbean in French heritage. Furthermore, the students' achievements suggest a successful claim to ownership of the French language that is not always afforded to people who do not fit a

normative cultural, racial, national, or linguistic view of French speakers. Paradoxically, it is through a multilingual, multicultural approach that the FHLP provides access to the French-speaking world and allows students to engage this world on their own terms.

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